



Awesome flanged male Orangutan eating fig in Lower Kinabatangan.



Rhinoceros hornbill flying over an oxbow lake in Kinabatangan.



From left: Clouded leopard seen at Nature Lodge, Sukau; a massive crocodile and the Storm stork.



Storm stork.

Kan Yaw Chong

I have visited wildlife sanctuary but destination Lower Kinabatangan is still not threat-free.

A bigger vision and strategy tactics for Sandakan are needed to ensure the future of this world-renowned wildlife treasure trove.

The vision and plan would be based on the Green Fingers concept which recognises that far-flung wildlife forms the heart of Sandakan's future.

Green fingers is a strategy that connects urban centres with their city's own remote periphery wilderness thereby linking the urban to the rural landscape in a continuous fashion to get a "Thinking Big Think Small" outcome. It never ceases loss of this naturalistic natural gold mine to either private developers or an overzealous established power.

Reason behind this story

The idea is newly-inspired. I'll say why. After a personal field witness to a rising success rate on the part of the local restoration work collectively between Sawit Kinabalu and Pongo Alliance in Sungai Pin, Kinabatangan, and running a four-page feature Report series detailing every detail of the project, it gives me great of a conservation hit, to be behold, Alex Yee, Executive Director of Walai Malaysia Conservation Park called me from Pulau Libaran.

"Hi Kan, for the first time in nine years, we have a record of continuous turtle landings for four consecutive nights Oct 4, 5, 6 and 7 - here's the proof."

"At least this gladdens my heart when everything else is working against Sabah," Yee concluded.

When the chips are down

True, ordinary Sabahan need a lot of good news now to relieve their mental and physical load.

One of these is a guarantee that when the chips are down, they can still fall back to Mother Nature, to this incredible arsenal of ecological resources. Another means that lays the golden egg for comfort, for sustenance, excitement when the power of death from pestilence strike them down with a single blow. Rehabilitation, loss of jobs, livelihood and even lives, like what the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse depict.

Never before have we seen a killer disease that has taken away our normal livelihood and economics so much with such unprecedented speed that downs and lock-downs, plus traumatic political upheavals that has taken the daylight out of everybody.

Sabahans need to be assured that while pestilence and politics go on the rampage, they will always have a natural habitat that best reserve of natural wealth to regain their strength and sanity.

Bright notes amidst gloom and doom

The principal point I am saying here is in the midst of gloom and doom, I saw bright notes from the wildnesses.

That's what I witnessed in Sandakan over the last few weeks, in came exciting good stories about the Orangutan, sea turtles, turtle islands, pygmy elephants, proboscis monkeys, hornbills, macaques, horseshoe crabs, storm storks, clouded leopards etc shooting in all directions.

Sandakan is full of life, and is decidedly different.

Without a shadow of a doubt, Sandakan is a top dog wildlife treasure trove over and above anywhere else in Sabah, Malaysia and



Incredible herd of elephants marks a return to Kinabatangan is usually the climax to ecotourists who come to the park for the first day of Sepilok. One night in Selinger and the next night in these nights here where the elephants are star attraction. People can see a bridge and highway across Sukau will greatly disturb the natural life of these elephants (Pic: Cede Prudente)

'Green Fingers' to keep K'batangan from mega threat



Turtle trails all over a magnetic beach in Pulau Selinger. (Inset) Turtle connection in Libaran.



Heart-winning misty morning in Sepilok, Lower Kinabatangan.

maybe the world, packed with a huge range of charismatic mega wildlife.

Let that point sink in and be repeated so that everybody is allowed to go and drool.

A clear case in favour of keeping world reputation

So there is a clear case to measure a human

dakian. For a long time, Sandakan touted as a premier wildlife destination.

But what is this? A resource and high value wildlife found?

Yes, the 4,500-hectare or 430 km² Kinabatangan Rehabilitation Centre in Kalimantan Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre in Kinabatangan is an eye opener – a classic example preserved and conserved as a counterpart to a jammied and crammed urban home town.

Generally Sepilok is treated as an appetiser by orangutan bulls for a short visit but the case to the feathers is to see it to the wild. That's what happened to Kinabatangan.

So for orangutan bulls Sepilok is actually part of the same finger connected to and extended to a much larger 26,000ha Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary – a unique orangutan and wildlife habitat of which however are dedicated to serve the same supreme purpose – securing a permanent future of the rich cargo of wildlife with the Red ape as the prime species.

Strategic understanding to keep rich ecosystem wild

The Green Fingers Strategy is easy to understand and convincing.

The palm represents the city centre of Sandakan.

The five green fingers represent the raft of green spaces like Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre, its Bonar Sunbeam Park, the orangutan and Proboscis Monkey San-

ctuary.

2. The Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Reserve.

3. The famed Sabah Tortoise Island Park comprising Selinger, Gollisan, Bakkguan Kecil, to which we must now add the new Tanjung Datu Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre (ODRC) with SWD to round off the entire chain of the Sepilok turtle hatchery which had releases more than 30,000 bay turtles to sea since 2015.

Green Fingers – conceptually sound and practically real

As a concept, nobody can miss the fact that the palm (the city centre) and the fingers (green space) are one and intimately connected.

In practice, this is actually what happens for Sandakan's famous ecosystem integration.

According to Yee – KITA President, Johnny Lin – Deputy President and Amy Chin – KITA Treasurer, coming from front-line workers above all like Sepilok, Kinabatangan and Kinabatangan as one single package, typically, it's one-day, one-night for Orangutan Rehab Center, one-day, one-night to Selinger to see the turtles at night (or beaches). But the climax of it all – spend two days night in Lower Kinabatangan to enjoy the green spaces like Proboscis monkey, Hornbills, Storm stork, crocodile, clouded leopard and an ultimate star – the pygmy elephant in all their splendour.

So, the Green Fingers Strategy clearly establishes the truth that the Lower Kinabatangan

abatangan Wildlife Sanctuary is the top dog finger of the hand – the thumb, the rest being index, middle, ring, pinky-fingers being nearly always, they spend more time around the perimeter.

What if a key finger is chopped? But wait if something comes along and say they want to chop the thumb in half and eventually infections later cause an amputation altogether?

Everyone and local opposition from the tourism industry guides, die hard ecotourists led by people like naturalist supremo Sir David Attenborough, eco revolutionaries who live in their hundreds and even thousands worldwide if we include hotel employees down down.

These objections are nothing new because in their heart of hearts, it is much better for the tourism as a whole and it's based on bedrock conviction on the trans-scientific value of life on earth which once lost can never be redeemed, no matter what nice sounding arguments are for a bridge.

Pre-election marks for a Sukau bridge?

Their fear is the resurrection of a super highway like a Sulau Bridge and super highways that connect in and out will do the same to the environment of Lower Kinabatangan for good.

In the hey days of the In Government, this was almost true but in an heavens has descended the Sukau bridge movement under then Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman decided to cancel it, presumably for the same strategic reasons cited above.

But the Sukau bridge is still there, even the swimming pool of one of the eco lodges in Sukau had been crossed red, allegedly earmarked for eventual demolition under the In Government.

What that meant is not for us to speculate.

Now that there is a new government, we also don't know what their position is.

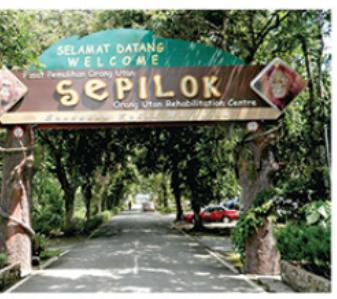
When the rich cargo of wildlife slowly vanishes

In the opinion of a lot of people it is the Sukau bridge is built, it will be like chopping off the key and most important "thumb finger" of Sandakan Division's "thumb" which is the most important treasure trove of wildlife will slowly disappear under the weight of population explosion over time, rising ground level, pollution and traffic, rising human densification.

These adverse impacts won't happen tomorrow but they will prove decimating a century or more decades later.

By that time, nobody will be accountable.

The cost will fall on future generations of the world and the world who adore Kinabatangan – the only remaining forested flood plain in Asia.



'R' (circled) marking at a resort building done in early 2019 for demolition to build Sukau bridge?