

THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL FOREST VERSUS OIL PALM PLANTATION HABITATS FOR BIRD CONSERVATION



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ABSTRACT

THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL FOREST VERSUS OIL PALM PLANTATION HABITATS FOR BIRD CONSERVATION

Habitat loss and degradation, due to selective logging and plantation development, are two of the principle threats to biodiversity conservation in Sabah. Since these threats will likely persist in the foreseeable future here, there is a need to study the importance of degraded and converted habitats as potential sites for biodiversity conservation preferably in a landscape scale that includes some areas of primary forest. The present study was carried out to investigate the importance of natural forest (primary and logged forest) and oil palm plantations (pure oil palm habitats and oil palms interspersed with isolated degraded forest fragments) for bird conservation. Field data collection was carried out from April 2009 to March 2010 at Tabin Wildlife Reserve and the surrounding oil palm estates located in the districts of Lahad Datu in the east of Sabah. The objectives were to compare species richness, evenness, diversity, species composition and relative abundance of bird communities utilizing areas covered by natural forest and oil palm plantations. Searches for birds were made by walking at random within four 1km² sampling areas *i.e.*, two representing natural forest and two oil palm habitats. The sampling sites were located at the vicinity of each other. Overall, 155 species of birds from 42 families and 11 orders have been recorded. The total number of bird species present in the forest habitats (primary and logged forest) was 127. The conversion of forest habitat from a primary forest habitat to a logged forest and to oil palm plantation resulted in the loss of 62% of these species. The number of bird species observed in the primary forest and logged forest habitats was comparable with 90 species and 92 species recorded respectively. The species diversity and compositions of the bird community were also comparable for the two habitats but the relative abundances of the different bird species were different in the primary forest as compared to logged forest. The bird species that were most affected by logging in this study were *Alophoixus phaeococephalus* and *Trichastoma rostrarum*. On the contrary, species that are less common in the primary forest have increased in abundance in the logged forest such as *Gracula religiosa* and *Phaenicophaeus chrysogaster*. In general, in terms of species compositions and relative abundance, the two sampling sites in the oil palm plantations were comparable to each other. In terms of species richness, the oil palm plantation interspersed with degraded forest fragments had 55% more bird species (53 species) than the pure oil palm habitats (34 species). On the whole, the present study found that the natural forest habitats were more superior to oil palm plantations for bird conservation. Logged forest as with primary forest is equally important for bird conservation. Degraded forest fragments located in oil palm plantations may help to increase the bird species richness in the oil palm habitats. But, oil palm plantations are generally of lower value for bird conservation where the majority of the bird species composition were those of common and disturbance tolerant species. Results of the present study support the "land sparing" strategy, which promotes separation of agricultural areas from conservation areas for biodiversity conservation.

ABSTRAK

*Kehilangan dan gangguan habitat yang mana disebabkan oleh pembalakan secara terpilih dan perkembangan sektor pertanian, adalah dua daripada ancaman utama pemuliharaan biodiversiti di Sabah. Oleh kerana ancaman ini dilihat akan berterusan di masa hadapan, terdapat keperluan untuk mengkaji kepentingan habitat terganggu dan terubahsuai, sebagai lokasi yang berpotensi untuk tujuan pemuliharaan biodiversiti pada skala besar yang mana turut merangkumi beberapa kawasan hutan primer. Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji kepentingan pemuliharaan biodiversiti di habitat hutan asli (hutan primer dan terbalak) dan ladang kelapa sawit (habitat kelapa sawit asli dan ladang kelapa sawit yang terletak berhampiran serpihan hutan terganggu) untuk pemuliharaan burung. Pengumpulan data lapangan dilakukan dari bulan Mei 2009 sehingga Mac 2010 di Rezab Hidupan Liar Tabin dan di sekitar ladang kelapa sawit yang terletak di Daerah Lahad Datu di bahagian timur Sabah. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk membandingkan kekayaan spesies, kesetaraan, kepelbagaian, komposisi dan kelimpahan relatif komuniti burung. Pemerhatian burung dilakukan dengan berjalan secara rawak di setiap empat tapak persampelan berkeluasan 1km^2 setiap satu. Dua tapak persampelan mewakili hutan asli dan dua mewakili habitat ladang kelapa sawit. Tapak persampelan terletak berhampiran antara satu sama lain. Secara keseluruhannya, 155 spesies burung dari 42 famili dan 11 order telah direkodkan. Jumlah keseluruhan spesies burung di habitat hutan adalah sebanyak 127 spesies. Perubahan habitat hutan dari hutan primer ke hutan terbalak dan seterusnya kepada ladang kelapa sawit telah menyebabkan pengurangan sebanyak 68% spesies burung. Bilangan spesies burung di habitat hutan primer dan terbalak adalah tidak jauh berbeza dengan masing-masing merekodkan 90 dan 92 spesies burung. Kepelbagaian dan komposisi komuniti burung juga tidak jauh berbeza antara dua habitat tersebut. Walaubagaimanapun, kelimpahan relatif spesies burung di antara habitat hutan primer dan hutan terbalak adalah berbeza. Spesies burung yang terkesan secara negatif kerana aktiviti pembalakan dalam kajian ini adalah *Alophoixus phaeocephalus* dan *Trichastoma rostratum*. Sebaliknya, spesies yang jarang dijumpai di hutan primer telah bertambah dari segi bilangan di kawasan hutan terbalak iaitu *Gracula religiosa* dan *Phaenicophaeus chlorophaeus*. Secara umum, dari segi komposisi spesies dan kelimpahan relatif, kedua-dua tapak persampelan di ladang kelapa sawit adalah tidak jauh berbeza antara satu sama lain. Dari segi kekayaan spesies, ladang kelapa sawit yang terletak bersebelahan dengan serpihan hutan terganggu mempunyai 55% lebih banyak spesies burung (53 spesies) berbanding dengan habitat ladang kelapa sawit asli (34 spesies). Secara keseluruhannya, kajian ini mendapati bahawa habitat hutan asli adalah jauh baik berbanding habitat ladang kelapa sawit untuk tujuan pemuliharaan burung. Hutan primer dan hutan terbalak mempunyai kepentingan yang sama untuk pemuliharaan burung. Serpihan hutan yang terletak di kawasan ladang kelapa sawit dilihat mampu untuk meningkatkan kekayaan spesies burung di habitat tersebut. Walaubagaimanapun, ladang kelapa sawit mempunyai nilai pemuliharaan yang jauh lebih rendah untuk tujuan pemuliharaan burung, yang mana majoriti komposisi spesies burungnya terdiri daripada spesies yang biasa dan spesies yang menghuni habitat terganggu. Hasil daripada kajian ini menyokong strategi "pengasingan kawasan" yang mana menggalakan pengasingan kawasan pertanian daripada kawasan pemuliharaan untuk pemuliharaan biodiversiti.*