

## MYCAT FINAL REPORT TO 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY TIGER

### Project Information

**Project Title:** Citizen Action for Tigers – Engaging people to value and protect tigers and their habitats in Malaysia

**Project Description:** Supporting anti-poaching efforts with citizen volunteers in the Yu River Wildlife Corridor and Taman Negara National Park, Malaysia

**Organisation:** Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers (MYCAT)

**Project period:** 1 March 2016 - 31 December 2016

**Prepared by:** Kae Kawanishi, MYCAT Secretariat's Office



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The Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers (MYCAT) is the alliance of the Malaysian Nature, TRAFFIC, Wildlife Conservation Society-Malaysia and WWF-Malaysia, supported by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia for recovery of wild Malayan tiger populations.

## Executive Summary

Decades of unabated poaching had extirpated tigers and their prey from the final forest linkage connecting the world's 4<sup>th</sup> largest tiger landscape at the Yu River (Sungai Yu) Wildlife Corridor in Malaysia. Since the Citizen Action for Tigers (CAT) conservation programme began in 2010, 1,377 volunteers from 33 countries have participated in CAT Walks and protected 2,518 km of the forest and removed 150 snares. In 2016, volunteers have continued to document decreasing signs of threats to wildlife and increasing signs of tiger and tiger prey. Our CAT Walks are making a difference by bringing wildlife back to the forest and people back to nature. During this reporting period, we have also embarked on a reforestation project to restore the degraded riparian forest along the Yu River with support from the royal family, a Malaysian corporate body, various government agencies, MYCAT partner NGOs, and the local community, including school children and aborigines.



## Introduction

[Listed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species](#) (Kawanishi 2015), the Malayan tiger faces numerous threats, pushing them to the verge of extinction. Habitat loss and fragmentation, poaching, depletion of prey species and retaliation killing resulting from human-tiger conflict have contributed to a population decline from an estimated 3,000 to 500 in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Currently estimated at 240-350, the most immediate threat that needs to be addressed to stave off extinction is poaching.

A benchmark study conducted in Malaysia's largest protected area, the Taman Negara National Park (4,343 km<sup>2</sup>), found that the Park had the largest known tiger population in Southeast Asia in 1999-2001 (Kawanishi and Sunquist 2004). A follow-up study by MYCAT in 2011, however, indicated that the tiger population had drastically declined in the western Taman Negara. It also highlighted the locations of poaching hotspots and illegal access routes into the Park through an adjacent forest

corridor. Continuous poaching through the decades has extirpated endangered species such as the tiger and their prey, the sambar, in this area.

The Sungai Yu Wildlife Corridor, MYCAT’s project site, is an 11 km stretch of unprotected and degraded forest flanking the Yu River. It is a critical wildlife area and the last linkage connecting the two largest tiger landscapes in Peninsular Malaysia – the Greater Taman Negara and the Main Range. If connected, they form the world’s fourth largest tiger landscape (35,000km<sup>2</sup> in total). The corridor is bisected by a highway that further increases the poachers’ accessibility into the park.

The creation of the Citizen Action for Tigers (CAT) programme in 2010 was a response by MYCAT to suppress poaching in the corridor. CAT Walks enable citizen conservationists to be actively involved in on-the-ground protection of this important tiger habitat. They effectively deter poaching, deforestation, and encroachment into the park at this conservation hotspot.

While carrying out recreational activities such as hiking and bird watching, volunteers look out for snares and traps, which are deactivated, thus saving a myriad of wildlife. They report any suspicious activity immediately to the 24-7 MYCAT Wildlife Crime Hotline; MYCAT then relays the information to the relevant enforcement agencies and follows up on the actions taken. CAT Walkers also check camera traps and share the excitement of seeing wild animals that are otherwise not observable in the rainforest. A unique programme, CAT Walks empowers the public to share the responsibility of saving Malaysia’s tigers.

The ultimate goal of CAT is to engage people to value and protect tigers and their habitats in Malaysia. Currently, CAT is in operation at the western border of Taman Negara and over the years the spatial coverage has gradually expanded. As a result we expect the tiger and tiger prey population to recover in western Taman Negara and disperse to the Main Range using the corridor.

21<sup>st</sup> Century Tiger has been supporting this programme since 2013. In 2016, we aimed to maintain the level of protection to allow continued wildlife recovery at the corridor and western Taman Negara.

## Activities and Outputs

Since 2010, a total of 1,377 volunteers from 33 countries have participated in CAT Walks and protected 2,518 km of the forest and removed 150 snares. The 2016 protection effort was similar to that of 2015 (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of conservation outcomes and outputs of CAT Walks between 2015 and 2016.

Goal	Indicator	Measure	2015	2016
Protect and recover the tiger population in the Sungai Yu Wildlife Corridor and Taman Negara National Park	Patrol efforts (man-day, distance protected, No. of volunteers and No. of CAT Walks)	Using the volunteer database, the numbers are tallied monthly. The distance calculation, using track-logs from GPS units, is done quarterly.	625 man-day covering 445 km, by 254 volunteers during 73 CAT Walks	643 man-day covering 474 km by 238 volunteers during 69 CAT Walks
	Threats (No. of snares deactivated, No. of all threat incidences reported to the Wildlife Crime	Using GPS, SMART database, and Wildlife Crime Hotline database	2 snares and 10 reports	14 snares and 17 reports

	Hotline)			
	Wildlife (Signs of tiger, sambar and gaur	Signs encountered opportunistically by volunteers, reported by informants and verified by MYCAT staff and camera trapping	CONFIDENTIAL (Reported separately.)	CONFIDENTIAL (Reported separately.)

The number of snares detected increased from 2 to 14 and potentially illegal incidences reported to the authority also increased from 10 to 17. However, the new signs of threats were found mostly in the southern area inside the corridor, freshly surveyed by seasoned volunteers guided by Batek and not in the northern area frequented by CAT Walkers. After the logistic and safety assessment reconnaissance was done by MYCAT staff, this new area is now open to volunteer CAT Walkers and we hope their presence will gradually reduce the threat.

To sustain and expand CAT, we are training CAT Walkers with leadership qualities as CAT Walk volunteer leaders. They undergo the training, assessment and certification process before being certified. Certification qualifies them to lead CAT Walks in the Corridor without the presence of MYCAT staff. We have trained 34 potential volunteers to date, some of whom are independently leading CAT Walks now, while others understudy MYCAT staff before becoming certified. The ability to ensure the safety of volunteers is the most important attribute of a certified CAT Walk leader.



Volunteer CAT Walk leader training workshop.  
Suzalinur Manja Bidin/MYCAT

With the programme’s financial sustainability in mind, MYCAT instituted a CAT Walk participation fee of MYR 250 per person effective January 2016. The fee covers the cost of accommodation, permits, field costs and the stipend for volunteer leaders. Despite the fee, the response to CAT remains overwhelmingly positive.

The Realm of the Tiger, a more extensive version of the CAT programme, was introduced in 2015 as an additional means to fundraise. A five-day field education programme, it is targeted at zookeepers and docents who wish to deepen their knowledge and experience in the field conservation in one of the most threatened priority tiger conservation areas. We hosted 15 zookeepers from all over the USA in June, and the next programme is scheduled for March 2017.



Realm of the Tiger participants from the USA.  
Suzalinur Manja Bidin/MYCAT

Other than the public, numerous corporations have sponsored their staff to participate in CAT Walks as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility. Engaging corporate employees to join our programme enabled them to “walk the talk” of conservation and internalise a sense of wildlife stewardship both within each individual and the entity.

As a result of long-term collaboration with selected corporations, we have witnessed the emergence of ‘conservation champions’ amongst volunteers who participated in CAT Walks. A number of them elected to join CAT Walks again on a personal basis and undergo training to be CAT Walk leaders. They have also encouraged their employers to do more for tiger conservation by soliciting donations for the programme or lobbying for a sustained collaboration with MYCAT.

Furthermore, to enhance the functionality of the Corridor, we launched the *Rewilding Yu* reforestation project at the Sungai Yu Eco-viaduct in July with support from the Royal family, a Malaysian corporate body, various government agencies, MYCAT partner NGOs, and the local community, including school children and aborigines. The event received extensive local media coverage.

Launch of the Sungai Yu Reforestation Project

# Rewilding Yu

Global Tiger Day | 29 July 2016 | Sungai Yu Tiger Corridor, Pahang

Official sponsor: A project by: Partners:

## Outcomes and Conclusion

In 2009, MYCAT's research found that large mammals vulnerable to poaching - tigers, sambar and gaur - were absent from the corridor while still present deep in the forests on both sides of the area. This changed in late 2015 when MYCAT staff and Batek trackers found fresh signs of tiger prey. Our camera traps also indicate that the corridor is being used by a diversity of wildlife, with serow, clouded leopard, gaur and elephant to name a few. This welcoming trend has continued into 2016.

In 2009, the research team found wire snares and victims almost every week in the corridor. The gradual reduction in signs of poaching and encroachment over the years suggest that the consistent presence of CAT Walk volunteers in poaching hotspots, followed by enforcement actions by the authorities, effectively suppress poaching and protect critical habitats for tigers and other endangered wildlife. CAT's continuous presence in the corridor has also resulted in the gradual reduction of deforestation and illegal encroachment.

After six years of protection from CAT, we are witnessing amazing signs of wildlife recovery. While we are unable to disseminate the details, this underscores the importance of public participation in tiger conservation. MYCAT must therefore maintain this high level of vigilance with trained CAT Walk leaders and Batek guides to ensure the continuous recovery of tigers and other wildlife in this priority conservation area.

We plan to replicate this successful citizen conservation programme in 2017 to increase the level of wildlife protection along the southern border of the park. We also will continue to provide technical support to and lobby the government for better landuse, greater enforcement and gazettement of the corridor as a protected area.

## References

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Kawanishi, K. and M. E. Sunquist. 2004. Conservation status of tigers in a primary rainforest of Peninsular Malaysia. *Biological Conservation* 120 (3): 329-344.