

MYCAT INTERIM REPORT TO 21ST CENTURY TIGER

Project Information

Project Title: CAT Walk – Citizen Action for Tigers

Project Description: Supporting anti-poaching efforts together 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 2015 – 31 December 2015

Reporting period: 1 March 2015 – 31 August 2015

Prepared by: MYCAT Secretariat's Office



The Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers (MYCAT) is an alliance of the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, Wildlife Conservation Society-Malaysia Programme and WWF-Malaysia, supported by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia for joint implementation of the National Tiger Conservation Action Plan for Malaysia.

Executive Summary

The Citizen Action for Tigers (CAT) programme involves citizen conservationists in the protection of an important tiger habitat, the Yu River Wildlife Corridor. Volunteers go on hikes called CAT Walks, and deter poaching with their mere presence in poaching hotspots, save wildlife by deactivating snares, and support law enforcement by becoming the “eyes and ears” of the authorities. Information on threats to wildlife found during CAT Walks are immediately sent to the 24-hour MYCAT Wildlife Crime Hotline. MYCAT then relays the information to the authorities and follows up on actions taken.

The ultimate goal of CAT is to secure the priority wildlife corridor – a critical linkage connecting the two largest tiger landscapes in Malaysia – for tigers and other wildlife. Despite its importance, the Department of Wildlife and National Park (DWNP) Peninsular Malaysia rangers do not patrol the area regularly enough to protect wildlife from poachers due to resource limitation, especially shortage of manpower.

The immediate objectives of this project are to: 1) deter poaching activity and encroachment into Taman Negara National Park through CAT; 2) elicit reliable information on crimes against wildlife from the public to aid law enforcement through the Wildlife Crime Hotline; and 3) cultivate wildlife stewardship among the Malaysian public and business community.

This interim report presents the achievements of CAT within the period of March to August 2015, and discusses the future plans of this project. With the support from 21st Century Tiger, a total of 40 CAT Walks were conducted with the protection effort of 304 man-days, covering 235km in the Corridor. Altogether, 11 incidences of threats against wildlife were recorded by volunteers and nine were reported to the Wildlife Crime Hotline. There is a steady reduction in the number of threats to wildlife encountered. This supports the project’s basic premise that the presence and intervention of volunteer conservationists at poaching hotspots can suppress poaching activity to levels where wildlife have an opportunity to recover.

Within this period, MYCAT has also engaged with a number of corporations to encourage them to sponsor their members to participate in CAT. Corporate volunteers joined 19 out of 40 CAT Walks conducted between March and August, contributing to 47% of the total protection effort. Long-term collaboration between some corporations and MYCAT has resulted in the welcomed emergence of internal “wildlife champions” supporting our cause.

Despite the lack of camera trap images of tigers in the Corridor, we have seen the return of other threatened species to the Corridor, as a result of the increased protection effort. 21st Century Tiger’s support for the CAT programme has enabled MYCAT to continue engaging the Malaysian public, the local community as well as the business community to protect this critical wildlife corridor. The decreasing signs of poaching and strong support from the public for CAT fuels our hope for the recovery of the Malayan tiger population in the area.

Introduction

The Malayan tiger (*Panthera tigris jacksoni*), one of the five remaining tiger subspecies found in the wild, was recently [listed as Critically Endangered](#) in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. A multitude of threats are driving these majestic animals to the verge of extinction, including habitat loss and fragmentation, depletion of prey, and human retaliation killings. However, the most important driver of the rapid population deterioration is poaching of tigers for profit. Population recovery of tigers in Malaysia now depends mainly on putting an end to poaching activity before the declining numbers are pushed beyond the brink of extinction.

A benchmark study conducted in 2001 in Taman Negara National Park (4,343 km²), the largest protected area in Malaysia, found that the park hosted the largest single tiger population in Southeast Asia (Kawanishi and Sunquist 2004). This situation, however, was not the case during MYCAT's subsequent research in the western part of the park, which found that the tiger population has drastically declined. The study also identified locations of poaching hotspots and illegal access routes into the western part of the park through an adjacent wildlife corridor. Despite it being a priority area for tiger conservation, park rangers cannot patrol the area regularly enough to protect the wildlife from poachers due to a lack of resources, especially manpower.

Yu River Wildlife Corridor, the project site, is a priority corridor for Taman Negara and is the last linkage connecting the two largest tiger landscapes in Peninsular Malaysia – Taman Negara and the Main Range (35,000km² in total). It is one of four priority tiger corridors identified by the Malaysian Government in the [National Tiger Conservation Action Plan](#) (2008), and the first of a series of 37 forest linkages determined as important for ecological sustainability of the country in the National Physical Plan (2005). The Corridor is bisected by a highway that further increases poachers' accessibility into the park.

The Citizen Action for Tigers (CAT) programme was developed in 2010 as a response by MYCAT to suppress poaching activity in the Corridor. CAT enables citizen conservationists to be actively involved in on-the-ground protection of this important tiger habitat. Volunteers deter opportunistic poachers by their mere presence in the Corridor while enjoying recreational activities in the wilderness. Besides deterring poaching activities, volunteers also save wildlife by deactivating snares, and support law enforcement by becoming the authorities' "eyes and ears" in the forest.

Relevant information on suspected wildlife crimes are reported to the 24-hour MYCAT Wildlife Crime Hotline. MYCAT then relays the information to the authorities and follows up on actions taken. By providing an avenue for the public to get involved, CAT empowers global citizens to take action and share the responsibility of saving Malaysia's tigers.

The ultimate goal of this project is to protect and recover the tiger population in the Yu River Wildlife Corridor and Taman Negara National Park. The immediate objectives are to:

1. Deter poaching activity and encroachment into Taman Negara through CAT;
2. Elicit reliable information on crimes against wildlife from the public to aid law enforcement through the Wildlife Crime Hotline; and
3. Cultivate wildlife stewardship among the Malaysian public and business community.

Activities and Outputs

Results are presented according to the project's objectives.

Objective 1: Deter poaching activity and encroachment into Taman Negara through CAT

Thanks to the support from 21st Century Tiger, MYCAT was able to sustain the momentum of the project and maintain steady protection of the Corridor during this project period (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of achievements of Citizen Action for Tigers programme in Yu River Wildlife Corridor during the previous 6-month period and this reporting period.

No.	Activity	Period Between September 2014 – February 2015	Period between March - August 2015 (21 st Century Tiger Project)
1.	No. of CAT Walks	29	40
2.	No. of man-days	222	304
3.	Total distance covered (km)	111	235

The strong response from the public to join CAT Walks during the reporting period is very encouraging. Often, the number of applicants were higher than the number that could be accommodated, emphasising the increased interest among the public in participating in hands-on conservation programmes. Within this reporting period, a total of 40 CAT Walks were held, which translated into 304 man-days of protection on the ground, and averaged about 6.7 walks in a month.

There has been a slight increase in the number of walks conducted in this reporting period compared to the same duration prior this project, which also corresponds with the 37% increase in the number of man-days of protection in the forest. Overall, CAT volunteers have covered 235km in the Corridor and the western border of Taman Negara, more than double the distance covered previously, focusing on routes located mainly in the eastern side of the Corridor.

CAT Walks are led either by MYCAT staff or a certified CAT Walk volunteer leader. Occasionally, the Batek, the indigenous people at the project site, were also enlisted as guides to assist CAT volunteer leaders. This provided an opportunity for CAT Walkers to interact with the Batek, hear their sentiments on the on-going environmental threats and watch them in action in their home – the forest.

Since 2013, we have trained 26 potential leaders, some of whom are leading CAT Walks now while others understudy MYCAT staff before becoming certified. The capacity to ensure the volunteer's safety is the most important attribute of a certified leader.

MYCAT staff periodically met with personnel from the Department of Wildlife and National Park (DWNP) Peninsular Malaysia, the main government supporter and stakeholder of CAT, to update them on any progress, discuss issues, provide recommendations to better secure the Corridor, and follow up on the incidences of threats reported by CAT Walk volunteers.

Objective 2: Elicit reliable information on crimes against wildlife from the public to aid law enforcement through the Wildlife Crime Hotline

While on CAT Walks, volunteers do not only protect tiger habitat by deactivating snares, but also record signs of possible threats to wildlife including poaching and encroachment, suspicious human

presence, illegal logging etc. Since March 2015, 11 incidences of threats against wildlife have been recorded by volunteers during CAT Walks and nine incidences were reported to the authorities, i.e. DWNP, Forestry Department Peninsular Malaysia and the Royal Malaysia Police.

As per the Hotline’s standard operating procedures, MYCAT followed up with the relevant enforcement agencies on the outcomes of those reports. The reports submitted are still under investigation by the authorities. CAT Walkers reported finding and removing three snares/traps in the Corridor in this reporting period.

Table 2. Comparison of reports received via the Wildlife Crime Hotline during the previous 6-month period and this reporting period.

No.	Activity	Period Between March – August 2014	Period between March – August 2015 (21 st Century Tiger Project)
1.	No. of reports to hotline	11	9
2.	No. actions taken by authority	8	0

The comparison in Table 2 indicates that there has been a decrease in poaching signs found in the Corridor, especially considering the fact that CAT Walkers are now covering a larger area in the Corridor. This is a good indication that illegal wildlife crimes have been effectively suppressed here, and poachers and encroachers are slowly being rooted out of the area. This also strongly supports the premise of the CAT programme that the presence of citizen conservationists engaged in recreational activities in the Corridor will deter poaching activities.

MYCAT will continue to monitor the most critical parts of the Corridor that provides access into Taman Negara, through regular CAT Walks, to ensure that poaching and encroachment are suppressed indefinitely.

Objective 3: Cultivate wildlife stewardship among the Malaysian public and business community

At the end of August 2015, the cumulative number of MYCAT volunteers since 2005 is 1,422 individuals, out of which 719 are CAT volunteers. A total of 91 new CAT volunteers, including both urban Malaysians and also those from villages near the Corridor, have participated in CAT Walks during this reporting period.

With the programme’s financial sustainability in mind, beginning January 2015, MYCAT instituted a participation fee of MYR200 per person for CAT Walks. The fee covers the cost of accommodation, permits, field costs and the stipend for volunteer leaders. Despite the introduction of the new participation fee, the response to CAT remains overwhelming and we see more and more people rallying to the cause of tiger conservation. Among the public, there is a growing awareness on conservation and desire for hands-on involvement.

MYCAT recruits volunteers for CAT through various channels, including the CAT microsite (www.citizenactionfortigers.my), MYCAT e-news, website, Facebook page, other volunteer portals and by word-of-mouth from previous volunteers. CAT is also promoted via the media (online and print) and during MYCAT outreach programmes (Appendix 1).

Apart from the general public, several corporations have also sponsored their members to participate in the CAT programme in line with their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies. Engaging corporate employees to join CAT Walks enabled them to “walk the talk” of conservation as

well as internalise the sense of wildlife stewardship within the corporation and each participating individual. Resulting from long-term collaboration with some corporations, we were pleased to see the emergence of “conservation champions” amongst those who have previously participated in CAT Walks. A few were willing to join CAT Walks on their personal basis and were even willing to encourage their employers to do more for the cause – either soliciting donations for the programme or a continuation of the collaboration with MYCAT.

From March to August 2015, corporate volunteers participated in 19 out of 40 CAT Walks (Table 3). This translated to 142 man-days of protection on the ground, which represented 47% of the total protection efforts. Despite the protection efforts of corporate volunteers being lower than public volunteers, the total distance covered in the Corridor by the former is more extensive than the latter.

Table 3. Comparison of achievements of Citizen Action for Tigers in Yu River Wildlife Corridor and the western border of Taman Negara in terms of public and corporate volunteers between March and August 2015.

No.	Activity	Public volunteers	Corporate volunteers
1.	No. of CAT trips	21	19
2.	No. of man-days (% of total efforts)	162 (53)	142 (47)
3.	Total distance covered (km)	102	133

We have also engaged the local indigenous community at the project site, the Batek people, as field guides for CAT. This has been a long-term partnership, as a MYCAT-affiliated researcher has worked with the local Batek by engaging them as field guides for research since 2009 and MYCAT continued working with them after the completion of the research project. The Batek are also contributing greatly to efforts to protect the Corridor, by participating in reconnaissance trips in new areas of the Corridor in order to establish new CAT routes with MYCAT staff.

Outcomes and Conclusion

A little more than a decade ago, the tiger population in the western part of Taman Negara was estimated to be seven adult tigers (Kawanishi and Sunquist 2004). Subsequent study showed that this number had, however, dwindled to only one surviving animal (MYCAT 2012). This lone tiger in the park, aptly named *Bujang* (‘bachelor’ in Malay) was previously frequently captured on camera trap, but stopped appearing in the images taken at various camera trap locations after October 2012. Over the past few years, *Bujang* has eluded our camera traps in the park while leaving signs of his presence such as tracks and kill sites.

MYCAT research between 2009 and 2011 found that large mammals vulnerable to poaching such as tigers, sambar, and gaur were all gone from the Corridor while they were still detected deep in the forests on both western and eastern sides of the Corridor. After four years of CAT Walks, late last year, MYCAT staff and Batek trackers have found fresh signs of gaur and elephant. And this year, volunteers detected tracks of sambar.

While there are still no images of a camera-trapped tiger, the return of the other threatened wildlife and smaller mammals to the Corridor (as seen from camera trap images) is encouraging and indicates that the increased protection in the area resulting from this project is beneficial to all wildlife.



The gradual reduction in signs of poaching and encroachment over the years suggest that the persistent presence of volunteers keeping watchful eyes at poaching hotspots, followed by enforcement actions by the authorities, can effectively suppress poaching and protect critical habitat for endangered wildlife. The present trend of decline in poaching signs encountered on CAT Walks will continue declining over the years as long as there is a citizen conservation programme to act as a deterrent in the Corridor. With the protection in place and the expected recovery and natural re-population of wildlife in the Corridor, we anticipate the restoration of the wildlife corridor's functionality, which allows for the dispersal of animals into adjacent forests.

MYCAT plans to continue the CAT programme in the Corridor to increase the total protection effort and to complement DWNP's efforts. Currently, we are looking at expanding the CAT programme to the southern part of the Corridor. Reconnaissance surveys will be conducted with the assistance of Batek guides to identify new CAT Walk routes, emergency evacuation routes and to conduct a thorough risk assessment of the new area. While continuing CAT Walks with members of the public and Batek guides at the Yu River Wildlife Corridor, we are also in discussion with the authorities to replicate this citizen conservation initiative at a new site elsewhere around Taman Negara.

Media Outputs

- [Article](#) in The Star, a national English daily newspaper
- [Article](#) in Sin Chew Daily, a national Chinese language daily newspaper
- [Article](#) in Cari.com.my, a Chinese language online news portal
- Article in Association of British Women in Malaysia magazine (not available)
- Article in the New Straits Times, a national English daily newspaper (not available)
- Article in Sin Chew Daily, a national Chinese language daily newspaper (not available)
- [Article](#) in The Ant Daily, a multi-lingual online news portal
- Radio interview on Traxx FM, an English radio station (not available)
- [Television interview](#) on Mobtv.my, a Malay language internet television portal

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.

Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers. 2012. MYCAT Tracks Vol. 4. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. Available at: <http://www.malayantiger.net/web/Pdf%20files/MYCAT%20Tracks%202010-2011.pdf>

Appendix 1: List of outreach and awareness programmes conducted between March and August 2015

No	Date	Programme
1.	14 Mar 15	Outreach at Raptor Watch 2015
2.	23 Mar 15	Outreach at Safety, Environment & Health (S.H.E) Week
3.	27-31 Mar 15	Outreach at AFC Football U-23 Championship Qualifiers
4.	18 Apr 15	Outreach at The Curve shopping mall
5.	7 May 15	Tiger Talk for staff of The Body Shop Malaysia
6.	8 May 15	Sharing session with University of Malaya Ecology students
7.	9 May 15	Tiger Talk in Creative Volts Artist Sharing session
8.	31 May 15	Outreach at Team Malaysia Fan Run 2015
9.	18 Jun 15	Tiger Talk for Garden International School students
10.	26 Aug 15	Tiger Talk for the Rotary Club of Kuala Lumpur DIRAJA