

## Palm oil plantation and its effect on wildlife in Malaysia

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Palm oil issue in wildlife conflict.

Stumbling far into the bush, trekking 40 to 48 kilometers and spending 16 hours each day, it is the struggle that Bornean Elephants go through in order to get food. However, as agricultural and infrastructure expansion damaged its environment, Bornean Elephant struggles turn into negative interaction between elephant and human. Particularly in Sabah Malaysia, elephant-human conflict is frequently a contentious problem, a subject that is frequently discussed. Who is to blame?

As the highest oil producing cultivated plant, palm oil production is significant for increasing the domestic availability of edible oil. Palm oil has the capacity to yield 20-25 MT of fresh fruit with adequate planting materials, irrigation and maintenance. In 2020, palm oil accounted for roughly 38% of Malaysia's agricultural output in terms of value and made up 3% of its gross domestic product. In short, there is a lot benefit of palm oil plantations including help to save the environment by creating oxygen, assisting in the absorption of carbon dioxide, boosting biomass reserves and preserving soil and water. So, why are the conflicts between humans and elephants related to oil palm?

As we know, the two countries that produce the most palm oil are Indonesia and Malaysia. Together, they produce between 85% and 90% of the entire amount of this vegetable oil. Malaysia is the world's second-largest producer of palm oil, with 4.2 million hectares (less than 13% of the total area) dedicated to the crop. What is the expected production of palm oil in 2022? According to Oil World, the four vegetable oils which is palm oil, sunflower oil, soybean oil and rapeseed oil will produce 7 million tonnes more globally in 2021-2022, marking the fastest rise in the previous four years. Not to mention the demand for palm oil on a global scale, it was predicted that the market for palm oil will be worth USD 63.6 billion in 2021 and USD 66.4 billion in 2022.

Consider this: If the need for palm oil is rising every year, shouldn't we be expanding the palm oil tree crop to meet the demand? If we look through this issue from the perspective of an environmentalist or conservationist, this palm oil industry is all about deforestation. How does deforestation result from the production of palm oil? When palm oil manufacturers seek to grow their operations but can find no more land, they start cutting down trees. In this instance, palm oil production involves extensive deforestation of rainforest.

Even though at least 18.55 million hectares, or 56.5% of the nation's total land area, remain protected as forests, national parks, and wildlife and environment reserves but the expanding of palm oil tree crop leaving the small patches for the wildlife such as Bornean Elephant to travel. Asian Elephants are being forced out of forests and into human-populated regions due to constrained habitat, which is largely being caused by the expansion of the palm oil industry. This is resulting in an increase in human-elephant confrontations and resultant elephant fatalities. Apart from Bornean Elephant, the habitat of already endangered species like the Orangutan and Malayan Tiger is being destroyed as a result of palm oil deforestation in some of the world's most biodiverse forests.

There are ways to produce palm oil more responsibly and businesses, governments and consumers can all contribute. As concerns about the effects palm oil was having on the environment and society grew, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil or RSPO, was established in 2004. The majority of the worldwide industry supports the RSPO, which includes production criteria for growers that outline best

practices for producing and obtaining palm oil. These are some of the RSPO encourage companies to do:

1. Set strict guidelines to exclude human rights violations, peatland conversion and deforestation from their supply chains.
2. Purchase and utilize RSPO-certified palm oil in all of their operations worldwide.
3. Be open and honest about how they use and where they get their palm oil, making sure they are aware of the source and the country of origin.

To conclude, palm oil may be advantageous from an economic value and environmental standpoint. But view things from different eyes and perspective. Are they good enough?

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