



To date, 11,763 mangrove seedlings have been planted by the local communities in the Rajang-Belawai-Paloh area.



A small nursery has been set up to nurture young mangroves.



The Rajang-Belawai-Paloh delta supports both a rich biodiversity and the livelihoods of local communities.

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THE mangrove forests of the Rajang-Belawai-Paloh delta in central Sarawak not only teem with wildlife but sustain the livelihoods of local communities.

According to WWF-Malaysia, the mangrove complex where the Paloh, Rajang, and Belawai rivers meet is the largest in Sarawak.

The rich biodiversity found in these mangrove forests ranges from fish and marine mammals like the Irrawaddy dolphin and finless porpoise to proboscis monkeys, silver leaf monkeys, and many bird species, including lesser adjutant storks.

The mudflats created by the mangroves also provide crucial feeding and roosting sites for migratory birds flying south from the northern hemisphere during the winter months.

For the people living in the Rajang-Belawai-Paloh area, the mangroves are more than just trees; they are lifelines.

WWF-Malaysia's mangrove and dolphin conservation senior officer Vivien Yeo explained, "Mangroves act as nurseries and feeding grounds for fish, crabs, and prawns, supporting local fisheries and livelihoods."

"They also provide firewood used in the production of smoked prawn, a local delicacy known as 'sesar udang'."

"Additionally, mangroves play a vital role in protecting coastal areas from storm surges and erosion while helping to combat climate change by serving as carbon sinks."

Yeo noted that while mangroves are known for their resilience and capacity for self-regeneration, natural regeneration can



A local delicacy known as 'sesar udang' (smoked prawn) provides income for the local communities.

be impeded by degradation or habitat destruction.

"In such cases, active replanting efforts become essential to restore the mangrove ecosystem," she said.

WWF-Malaysia is currently working with the Sarawak government and local communities on a mangrove restoration project in the Rajang-Belawai-Paloh area.

Together with the state Forest Department, local planning authorities and other government agencies, the local communities are leading the restoration work in degraded mangrove areas to preserve ecosystems vital for their livelihoods and biodiversity.

Kampung Rajang community leader Penghulu Abu Seman Masri said the mangrove conservation project would benefit local communities.

"It can help prevent coastal and river-bank erosion, besides conserving the ecosystem. It also helps to improve the local economy."

"I hope this project can be continued not

only in this area but also in other degraded mangrove areas around the world," he said.

As secretary of the mangrove and dolphin conservation community participatory committee in Rajang-Belawai-Paloh, Abu Seman expressed gratitude to WWF-Malaysia and donors for supporting the restoration and conservation of the mangrove ecosystem in this area.

Kampung Stalon headman Maoh Bohon emphasised the project's importance for future generations.

"This project benefits the rural communities and future generations who require a sustainable environment. I hope these efforts can be continued for the benefit of all," he said.

Yeo pointed out that mangrove restoration is no walk in the park.

"It involves trudging through mud, enduring insect bites, and the risk of crocodile encounters. The challenges don't end with replanting either."

"Continuous care, monitoring, and maintenance are imperative as threats like crabs and goats feeding on mangrove shoots can hinder growth. The tireless efforts of these local communities in the restoration are truly commendable as they strive to enrich the lives of individuals and the environment," she added.

For Yeo, mangrove restoration in the Rajang-Belawai-Paloh area exemplifies the World Environment Day theme of "Land Restoration". World Environment Day, celebrated annually on June 5, promotes global awareness and action on protecting the environment.

"By planting native mangroves, we are not just rejuvenating the land; we are creating a future where both nature and people can thrive," Yeo said.