



An orangutan crossing Sungai Pin in Kinabatangan using one of the bridges built by the Sawit Kinabalu Conservation and Biodiversity Unit. BERNAMA PIC

NOT JUST A TOURIST ATTRACTION

CANOPY BRIDGES A LIFELINE FOR WILDLIFE

Orangutan bridges in Sungai Pin act as safe links between plantation blocks

SANDAKAN

NESTLED in the Sungai Pin Conservation Area (SPnCA), orangutan bridges stand as more than a tourist attraction, quietly playing a crucial role in reconnecting wildlife habitats within the protected landscape.

Built by the Sawit Kinabalu Conservation and Biodiversity Unit, the bridges serve as the only safe link for wildlife to cross between two plantation blocks within the 2,632-hectare SPnCA, allowing animals to move freely while reducing the risks associated with habitat fragmentation.

Sawit Kinabalu senior executive (conservation and biodiversity) Rashidah Maqbool Rehman said the construction of the bridges reflects the government-linked company's commitment to conserving biodiversity in the Kinabatangan area.

"So far, three bridges have been built to facilitate orangutans

crossing Sungai Pin. Usage has been encouraging, based on recordings from camera traps installed on the first and second bridges, which have also helped reduce conflict between wildlife and plantation workers," she said.

She said monitoring data indicated that around 50 orangutans were recorded by the camera traps, although the figure does not represent the actual population, as the same animals may have been captured more than once, necessitating further detailed analysis of the data.

Rashidah added that the construction of the bridges was part of Sawit Kinabalu's ongoing conservation initiatives, complementing long-term tree replanting efforts along the 27-km Sungai Pin riverbank as a riparian buffer zone.

The programme, which began in the early 2000s, is carried out in collaboration with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Sabah Forestry Department.

She said that apart from orangutans, the bridges also benefited other wildlife such as long-tailed macaques, underscoring their effectiveness as safe passageways linking fragmented habitats.

The modest structure has be-

come more than just a bridge, standing as a symbol of balance between development and nature conservation, and demonstrating that the plantation industry and biodiversity protection can move in tandem when planned responsibly.

Beyond serving as a study and research site for local and international university students, including those from Japan, the SPnCA also creates economic opportunities for the local community through the development of ecotourism activities along Sungai Pin.

She said Sawit Kinabalu was currently developing small-scale ecotourism initiatives that would allow visitors to experience walks along Sungai Pin and observe elephants in their natural habitat at the Borneo Elephant Sanctuary in the Kinabatangan area.

"Most areas along the banks of Sungai Pin remain unexplored forest, making them highly suitable for the development of nature-based tourism," she said.

"To ensure the success of this initiative, we have partnered with Koperasi Pelancangan Mukim Batu Puteh Kinabatangan so that the local community benefits directly, while also creating job opportunities for residents." **Bernama**