

**Belum: A Rainforest in Malaysia**, by G.W.H. Davison. Malaysian Nature Society, Kuala Lumpur (1995). 200 pp.

**The Belum Expedition, Temengor, 1993–1994.** *The Malayan Nature Journal* Vol. 48 (3 & 4), February–May 1995.

The area known as Belum is shared between the Belum, Grik and Temengor Forest Reserves in the state of Perak, in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia and forms the catchment of the upper reaches of the Sungei Perak. Belum was proposed as a national park in 1968, but in spite of the fact that it now constitutes part of the largest remaining block of forest in peninsular Malaysia, still languishes in a kind of “conservation no-man’s land”. The Belum Expedition was set up in order to collect scientific data on the flora and fauna, habitats and hydrology of the area in order to underpin the national park proposal. It received support from GTZ—the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, as well as through the fund-raising efforts of the members of the Malaysian Nature Society. Each of these publications reports on the expedition’s spectacular success: the first (“the Belum book”) in a lavishly illustrated format and the second with a series of detailed scientific papers.

Among the expedition’s achievements were the discovery of three new and apparently endemic flowering plants, and a great many invertebrates new to science; many new distribution records of plants and animals; significant populations of large mammals and birds (including one of the largest concentrations of hornbills ever found—a roosting concentration of over 2,000 birds). The expedition also appears to have been successful in attracting the interest of the “Great and the Good” in Malaysian society, which can only further the conservation prospects for Belum. It was officially launched on 24 May 1993 by the then King, His Majesty the Yang Di-Pertuan Agong, Sultan Azlan Shah, who also contributed a foreword to the Belum book.

The Belum book has what must be some of the most beautiful and striking pictures ever taken in a South-east Asian rainforest. There are so many to capture the reader’s attention: besides the obligatory close-ups of strikingly coloured flowers and insects, there are some crisp shots of mammals and birds, mostly taken in the wild (in welcome contrast to some other recent supposed wildlife books). Among my own favourites was the sequence of shots of a tiger swimming across a lake. Geoffrey Davison’s text is a fitting complement to these excellent illustrations, combining both scientific accuracy and readability to give the reader a thorough overview. The penultimate chapter is devoted to the history of man in the Belum area, and the last chapter summarises the area’s conservation attributes, and provides an eloquent plea for its conservation.

The second publication is a special issue of the *Malayan Nature Journal* entirely devoted to the expedition’s scientific results, with ten papers on flora; nine on invertebrates, eleven on aquatic and terrestrial vertebrates and four on socio-economic aspects. Because of the great similarity and the contiguity of the Belum forests with those of the Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary on the Thai side of the border, in Yala and Narathiwat Provinces, these papers will be an important reference for specialists working in Thailand on those taxonomic groups covered. Many of the new species found in Belum should be searched for on Thai

territory.

Both these publications should also be of interest to Thai readers because of the parallel conservation issues on both sides of the border. While the Belum forest hasn't suffered as badly as its Thai counterparts, it has many problems in common. The extreme valley-bottom lowlands have already been lost to hydro-dams, while the fragmentation of forests by roads looms large on the horizon. The area is also still being logged.

Thai conservationists should join their Malaysian counterparts in trumpeting the values of trans-border protected areas for wildlife conservation, and for improved regional cooperation, so as to prevent the encroachment of military roads, border fences, grandiose settlement schemes, and so on, into these important forest remnants. The loss of either Hala-Bala or Belum would in the end cause the irrevocable impoverishment of both areas, and, indeed, both nations. Let us wish the people of Malaysia every success in their aspirations for a Belum National Park.

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