



From Borneo to the Bronx:  
Saving Species with WCS



**POSTCARDS**

FROM THE

**FIELD**

**GALA 2020**



Hello! I'm Liz Bennett, Vice President, Species Conservation!



As a kid, I visited the London Zoo as often as my Mum would take me (and yes, I fed the elephants).



The primates were my favorites; meet Guy the Gorilla.



I thought that if I could be any other species, it would be a gibbon!







PHOTO: ELB



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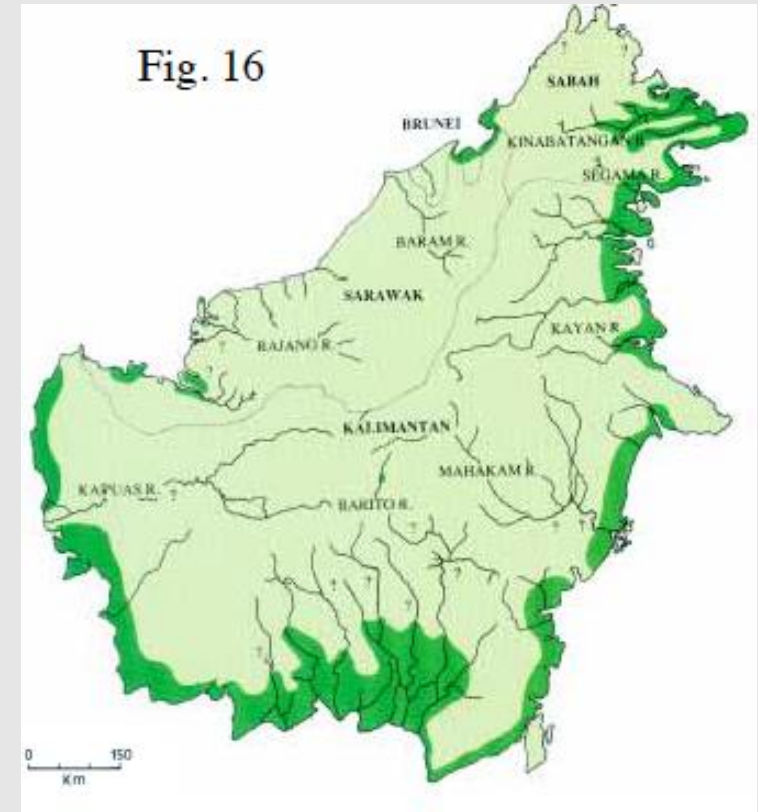
1984: My first grant from WCS, to study proboscis monkeys in the wild—off to Borneo, in Southeast Asia, the only place where they occur!







PHOTO: J. ROBINSON



They are only found in coastal swamp and riverine forests. So I learned to drive boats...And spent much time in swamps!



# Social Organization and Ecology of Proboscis Monkeys (*Nasalis larvatus*) in Mixed Coastal Forest in Sarawak

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Received November 11, 1987; revised May 11, 1988

Data are presented from a 16-month study of proboscis monkeys in a mixed coastal forest in Sarawak. The population density, social organization, and feeding and ranging behavior are described in detail. Results are compared with those from other primates in an attempt to understand why females of certain species (including proboscis monkeys) transfer between social groups. The scarcity of available food and reasons for the limited habitat preference of proboscis monkeys are also discussed.

**KEY WORDS:** proboscis monkey; colobine; social organization; female transfer; ecology; mangrove; swamp forest; Borneo.

## INTRODUCTION

Proboscis monkeys (*Nasalis larvatus*) are large, sexually dimorphic colobines. Females weigh an average of 10 kg, whereas males average 20 kg and are known to reach 24 kg (Allen and Coolidge, 1940; Schultz, 1942). They are endemic to Borneo in Southeast Asia (Fig. 1), where they are commonly found in mangrove, riverine, and peat swamp forests of the coastal lowlands (Davis, 1962; Jeffrey, 1982; Payne *et al.*, 1985). Small populations are

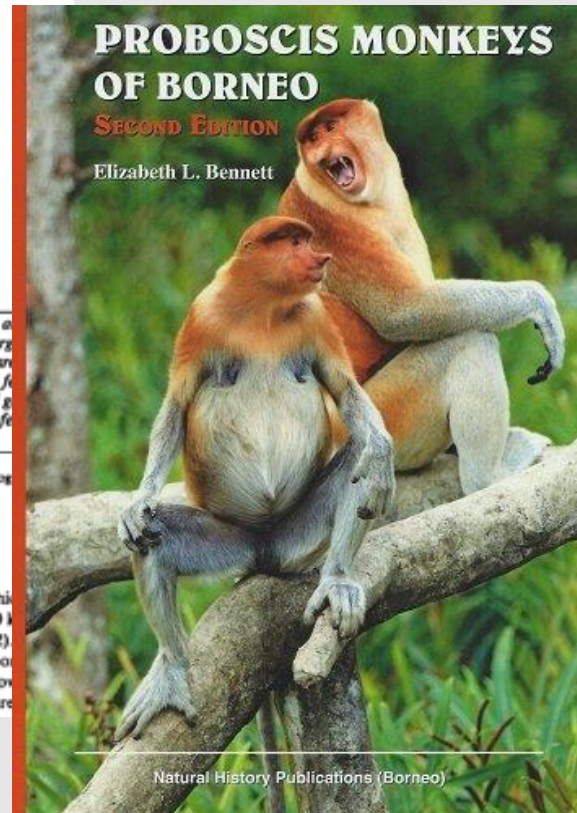


PHOTO: MALAYSIAN TIMES

## Outcomes of the research:

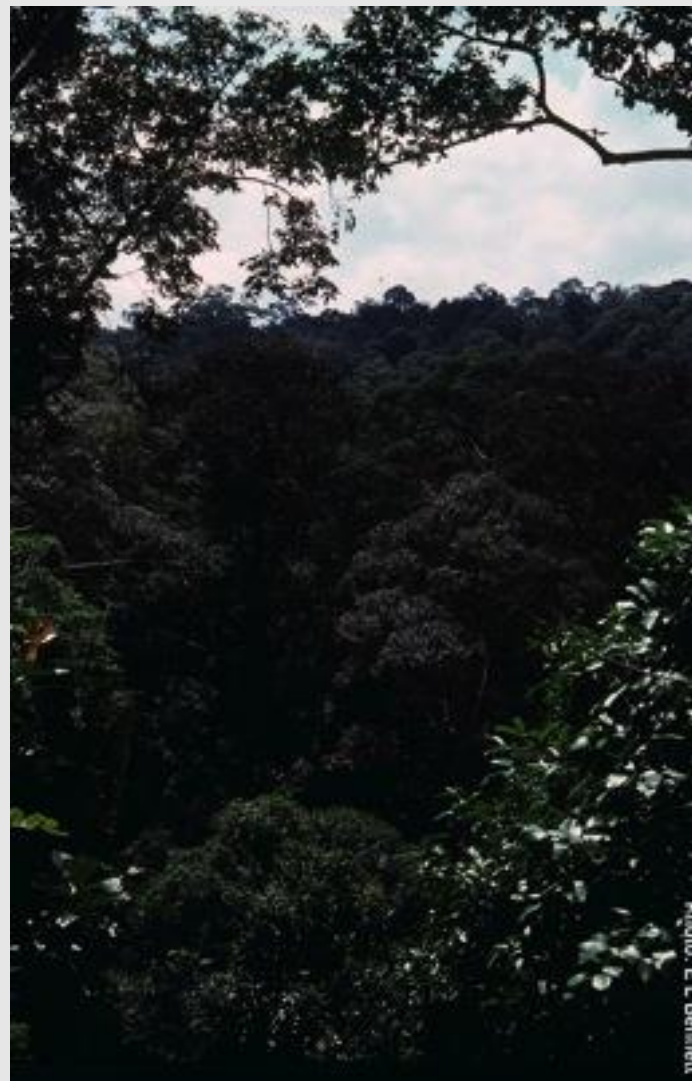
- Knowledge of the species' social system, ecology, and habitat needs
- Biggest finding: they range over large areas, including outside protected areas

This led to creation of new protected areas!





GRAPHIC: WCS



Moving inland, still in Sarawak, Borneo. A bit of background: Borneo has amongst the highest species diversity in the world.





PHOTO: ELB



Photo: Adrian Nyaoi



Photo: E L Bennett

Cultural diversity is also very high.





Traditional rural lifestyles are juxtaposed with modern urban ones.



By mid-1980s, everyone knew wildlife was disappearing – but nobody knew why.



So we studied slash and burn cultivation...



logging...



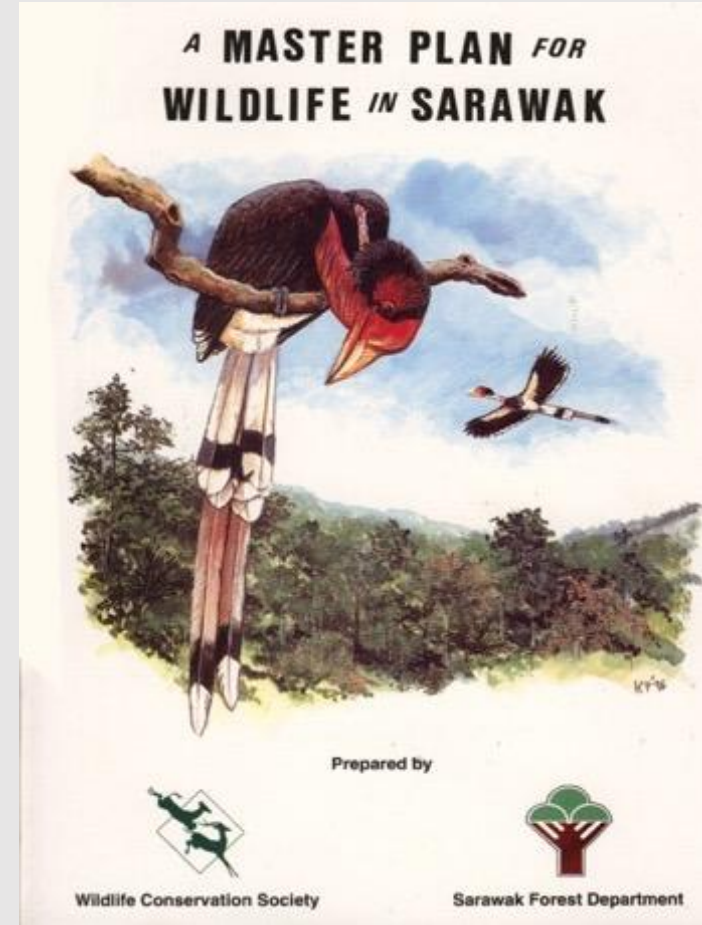
and hunting.





What did we find? The core problem: hunting, facilitated by the spread of logging. Logging brings roads, outside hunters, and access to urban markets to sell wildlife. So—much more hunting!





The Government said “Now we know what the problem is, tell us what to do about it!” They asked for a Master Plan to be comprehensive, strong, with detailed recommendations on how to save Sarawak’s wildlife.





Took two years, dialogues at all levels...



from rural indigenous hunting communities...



to topmost government officials.







Two main recommendations:

- Close wildlife trade
- Protect more forests





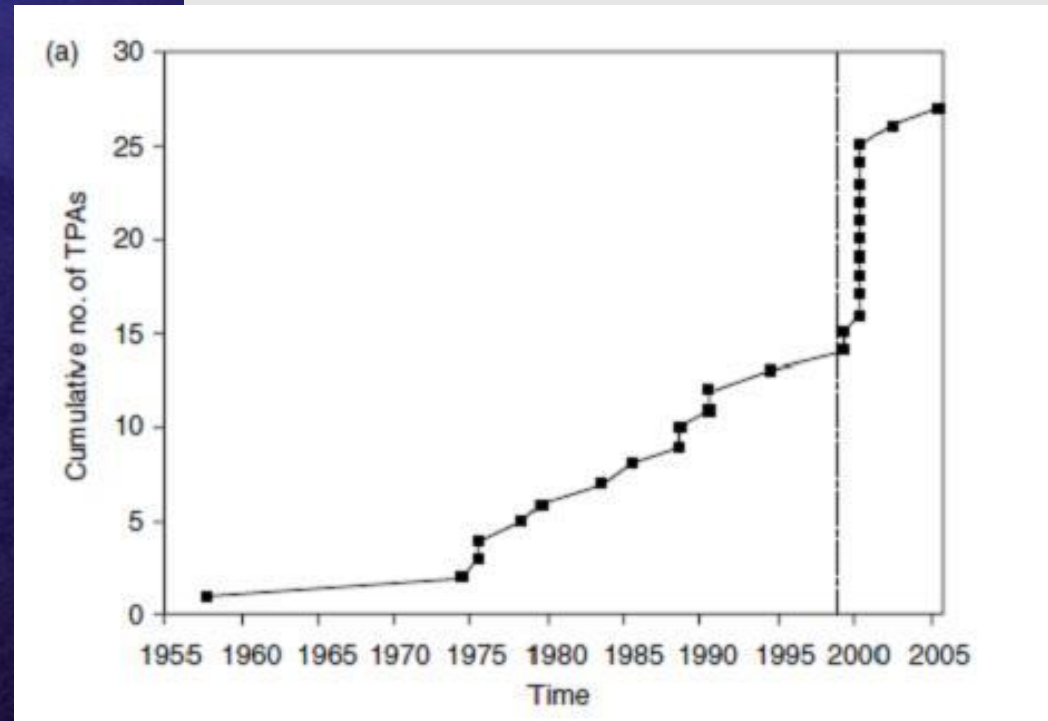


Implementation! New laws...

Key points:

- Ban on commercial wildlife trade; “You can hunt, but can’t sell”
- Easier to create protected areas





Number of new protected areas went up rapidly!





PHOTO: M. GUMAL

Major part of the work: training people to implement the plan.







PHOTO: WCS

I then moved to New York! Initially, to oversee our global work on hunting and wildlife trade, including setting up our wildlife trade programs in China and Vietnam. And now, coordinating our species conservation programs across WCS.

If that kid at the London Zoo could have imagined her perfect career, this would be it!

