FGV Aids Rescue Mission and Provide Treatment Costs of Injured Borneo Elephant in Sabah





(From left) SWD Director, Augustine Tuunga, and FGV Regional Controller for Sabah Zone, Tn Yahaya Judin and Dr Navaneetha Roopan, SWD veterinarian posing with FGV's adopted elephant named Sahabat

KOTA KINABALU, 10 July 2020: Following the rescue of a baby Borneo elephant by plantation workers at Sahabat 54 near Tabin Reserve Forest border in April, FGV Holdings Berhad (FGV) announced that it will assist the Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD) by covering the costs of its treatment and care.

The two-year-old Borneo elephant named 'Sahabat', was found wandering around the plantation area by FGV workers and while waiting for SWD and Wildlife Rescue Unit (WRU), they built a temporary shelter for the elephant.

The workers took extra precautionary measures due to COVID-19 and assisted SWD and WRU personnel who came to examine the baby elephant. It was later found that both of its eyes suffered from severe infection, which may have affected its vision, causing Sahabat to wander away from the herd.

They then made a special holding crate to transport it for further treatment at Lok Kawi Wildlife Park in Kota Kinabalu, more than 500km away from the plantation. FGV drivers

volunteered to make the journey for Sahabat.

“We are proud of our workers who went for the extra mile to render the support needed by SWD and WRU. The rescue mission took six days and we are glad that Sahabat is in good hands. We are also pleased to adopt Sahabat and cover the costs of treatment, food, and care during the whole period of its hospitalisation,” said FGV Group Chief Executive Officer Dato’ Haris Fadzilah Hassan.

“The total estimated expenditure for the adoption programme of three to six months is around RM16,000.00, depending on Sahabat’s recovery status and readiness for release back into the wild. We view this as fulfilling our national duty to protect the endangered wildlife, and as part of our commitment to RSPO and MSPO requirements” added Haris Fadzilah.

“We are very grateful for the kind assistance by FGV in assisting SWD’s Rescue Unit in the rescue mission of this baby elephant as well as providing the funding for the treatment and care of baby Sahabat,” said Director of SWD, Augustine Tuuga.

“Our vets and rangers worked round, literally 24 hours for more than two months making sure Sahabat’s meds are given on an hourly basis. I would also like to thank Dr. Sheena Alexander and Dr. Liew On Heong from the Ophthalmology Department of Queen Elizabeth Hospital Kota Kinabalu, who gave technical advice on the treatment protocol for Sahabat” he said.

“The injury to baby Sahabat, which was a twin Bacterial and fungal infection to the conjunctiva. If left untreated in the wild, it would have most definitely led to total blindness. Thus the decision was made to rescue Sahabat and bring him to a facility that would be able to treat his condition. Sahabat has now regained 95% of his eyesight and we hope to slowly rehabilitate him back to his normal self and send him back to his herd in the wild, we do hope though that his family group will accept him back into the fold” he said.

“I would like to take this juncture to thank Malaysian Palm Oil Council and a British NGO, Orangutan Appeal UK for funding the very important work of SWD’s WRU,” added Tuuga.



Sahabat with Leo, one of the SWD rangers and Dr. Roopan, SWD veterinarian

This was not the first time that FGV workers have rescued Borneo elephants in the plantation area. In March, four Borneo elephants were trapped overnight in Sahabat 50 estate's pond, which led the workers to level down the side of the pond, allowing the elephants to escape safely into the nearby forest.

Several cases reported about the unfortunate death of Borneo elephants in palm oil plantations negatively impacted the industry at large. In November 2019, FGV, FELDA, MPOC, and SWD organised a workshop to identify and address issues related to human-elephant conflicts. 70 participants representing plantation companies in Sabah attended the workshop and discussed the role of plantation companies, public and private agencies as well as the general public on the conservation of Borneo elephants.

Borneo elephant (*elephas maximus borneensis*) is a protected wildlife under Part 1 of the Schedule 1, Section 25 (1) of the Sabah Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997 and any offense related to this species warrants a fine of up to RM250,000 and a prison sentence of not less than five years.

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