

MYCAT tracks

Highlights of the implementation of the
National Tiger Conservation Action Plan
in 2008 and 2009



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Prologue

In 2010, the lunar Year of the Tiger, we are standing at the crossroads. One path will lead us to securing the future of the Malayan tiger in the wild, while the other will lead us to losing it from our forests forever.

Tigers have been threatened by many factors for years, but 2010 represents hope for concerted intervention, hope that right actions will lead the tiger away from the path to extinction, and instead, to recovery.

Saving this apex charismatic species requires all of us to work together to get the job done. And this means cooperation and collaboration backed by political will and public support. It can no longer be business as usual for all of us – and that includes you, members of society, as well as the conservation community.

We made this decision in 2003 and so the Malaysian Conservation Alliance for Tigers (MYCAT) was created.

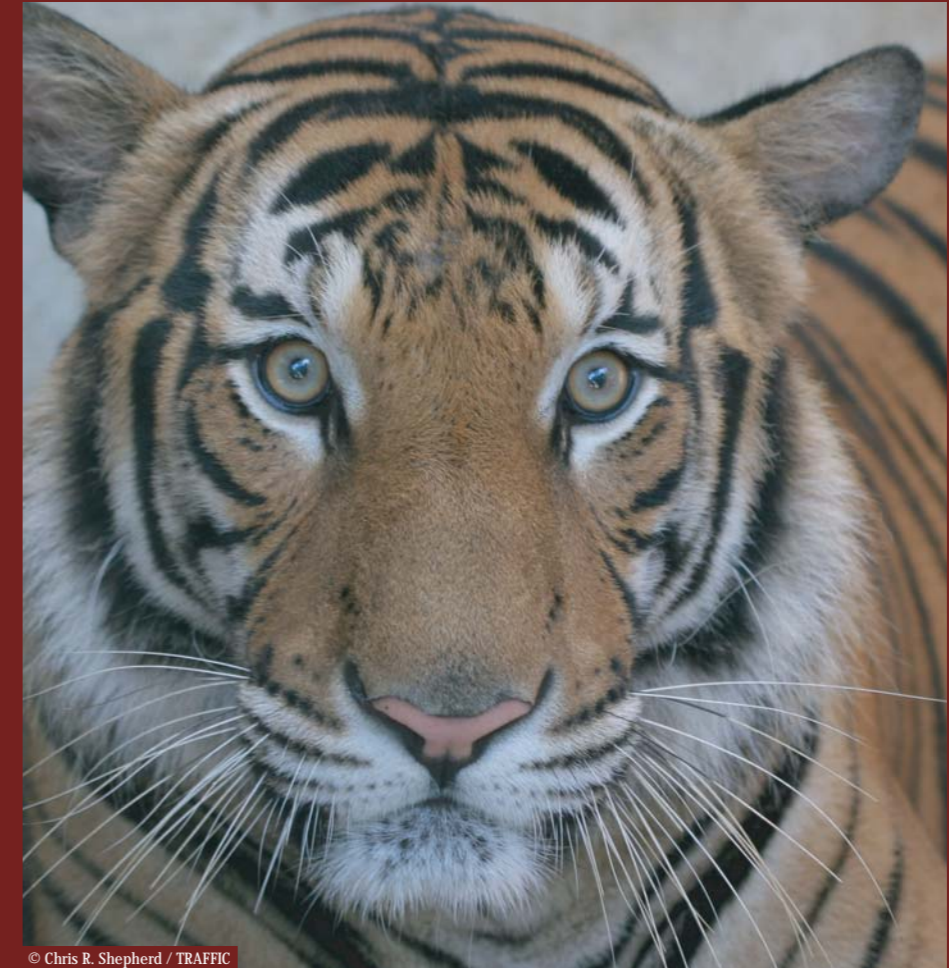
MYCAT is a joint programme of the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), TRAFFIC Southeast Asia (TRAFFIC), Wildlife Conservation Society - Malaysia Programme (WCS) and WWF-Malaysia (WWF), supported by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia (DWNP). United by a common vision of a Malaysia where wild tigers thrive in the 22nd Century and beyond, MYCAT provides an excellent platform for communication, collaboration and resource consolidation on tiger conservation issues.

Using this platform, the National Tiger Conservation Action Plan for Malaysia (hereafter referred to as the Action Plan) was developed by DWNP, MYCAT and other relevant government agencies in line with existing development plans and policies.

MYCAT TRACKS is the newsletter produced by the MYCAT Secretariat's Office based on inputs by the partner organisations. It is published once every two years to highlight collective accomplishments for tiger conservation in Malaysia.



The Malayan Tiger



© Chris R. Shepherd / TRAFFIC

Globally, having lost 93% of its habitat to humans in the past century, the tiger is on the verge of extinction across 13 range countries.

Malaysia is home to the Malayan tiger, a sub-species unique to the Malay Peninsula. The tiger is a totally protected species under the Protection of Wild Life Act 1972 and commercial trade is prohibited by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Yet, the wild Malayan tiger population has declined from 3,000 to 500 in the last 50 years due to habitat loss, forest fragmentation, poaching, illegal trade of tiger parts and derivatives, depletion of prey species and conflict with people. Targeted poaching is one of the main threats that need to be addressed urgently. Tigers are sought after for their meat, which is served as a delicacy in wild-meat restaurants and for other body parts such as the teeth, claws and skin, which allegedly having curative or 'magical' powers.

National Tiger Conservation Action Plan for Malaysia

As a national policy that guides various efforts by many parties to save our tigers in the wild, the Action Plan was endorsed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) in 2008.

MYCAT is not only involved in developing and implementing the Action Plan, but also helps monitor and usher the progress of its implementation.

In July 2009, NRE hosted the *Forum on Mainstreaming Biodiversity with a focus on the National Tiger Action Plan* to seek deeper stakeholder engagement towards obtaining the endorsement of the Malaysian Cabinet. It was attended by 125 representatives from the Federal and state governments, NGOs, and the public.

Then in November 2009, the Action Plan was adopted officially by the highest ranks of government, as announced by Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin at the National Biodiversity-Biotechnology Council, which he chairs.

The existing protected area system and the National Physical Plan provide the spatial framework for planning conservation actions and priorities (Figure 1).

The three core priority areas are the Belum-Temengor Complex, Taman Negara and the Endau-Rompin Complex, which will be connected by the Central Forest Spine (CFS) with ecological corridors at critical linkage areas (Figure 2).

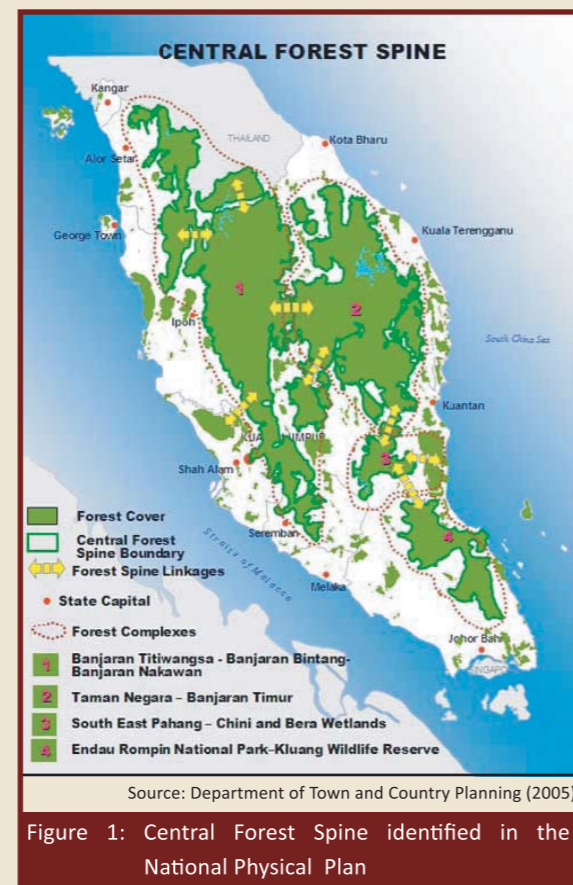


Figure 1: Central Forest Spine identified in the National Physical Plan

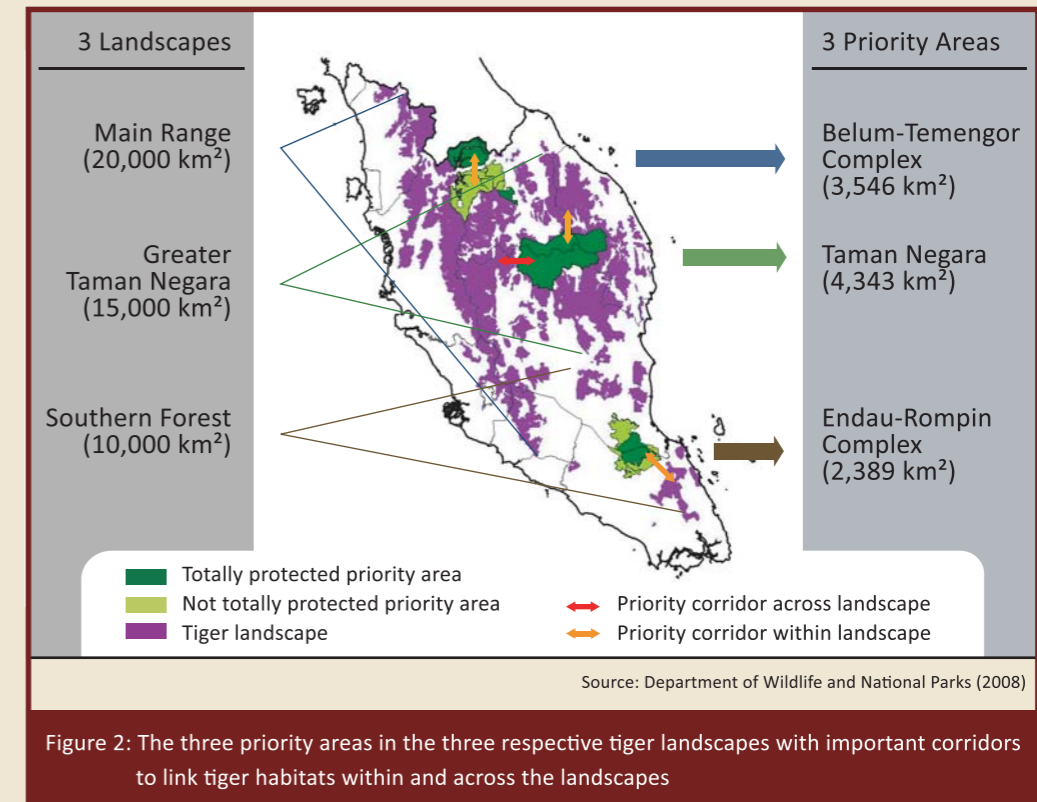


Figure 2: The three priority areas in the three respective tiger landscapes with important corridors to link tiger habitats within and across the landscapes

In order to achieve the target of 1,000 wild tigers surviving on wild prey in 51,000 km² of connected forests within the CFS by 2020, the Action Plan has laid out 80 key actions to be implemented in Phase 1 (2008-2015).

At the end of Phase 1, the Action Plan will be independently audited, and the result will form a basis for developing a work plan for Phase 2 (2016-2020).

The four main pillars supporting the overarching vision are (Figure 3):

- 1) the CFS connected with functioning corridors,
- 2) effective protection of tigers and their prey,
- 3) ecologically sound land-use, and
- 4) science in monitoring of tiger populations and efficacy of conservation actions.

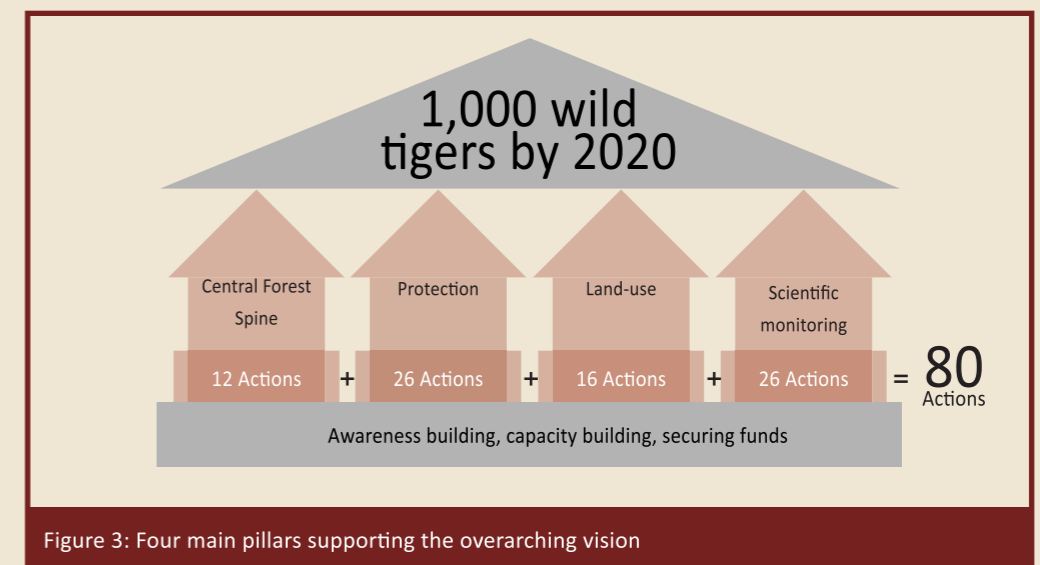


Figure 3: Four main pillars supporting the overarching vision

Objective

Secure the Central Forest Spine (51,000 km² of contiguous forests) with protected core areas linked within the greater landscape by ecological corridors

Identified by the Department of Town and Country Planning (DTCP) under the National Physical Plan in 2005, the CFS is the backbone of the environmentally sensitive forest network.

The CFS provides crucial environmental services and stability (e.g., clean air, carbon sequestration, water catchment, sediment retention, flood control) as well as a large expanse of habitat to wildlife. Its ecological integrity and wildlife populations at many sites are however threatened by forest loss and fragmentation due to road and mono-cultural developments such as oil palm and rubber latex clone plantation.

Securing the CFS for the tiger means that its priority areas are protected and inter-connected through a system of large forest blocks where ecologically sound land-use compatible with tiger conservation is practiced. Tigers need to be able to disperse within the priority areas and across CFS through tiger corridors identified in the Action Plan.

To this end, DWNP and MYCAT together with the respective state governments are involved in various efforts such as research, habitat patrol, law enforcement, community outreach, as well as drawing up and implementing management plans.

DWNP and MYCAT also provided in-depth technical input to DTCP towards developing the *Central Forest Spine: Masterplan for Ecological Linkages*. The Masterplan details guidelines for land-use planning at critical linkages and three of the priority linkages are identified to the Action Plan's priority tiger corridors.

In the Belum-Temengor primary linkage, potential wildlife corridors along the East-West highway were identified by WWF using Geographical Information System models and were validated by elephant and tiger signs recorded during surveys along the highway. These findings were incorporated into the Masterplan.

A similar exercise was done for the Endau-Rompin landscape under the Johor Wildlife Conservation Project (JWCP), a multi-agency wildlife conservation and monitoring programme in Johor. With patronage from the Johor Royal Family, JWCP is jointly executed by DWNP Johor, Johor Forestry Department, Johor National Parks Corporation, Kulim (Malaysia) Bhd, police and WCS.

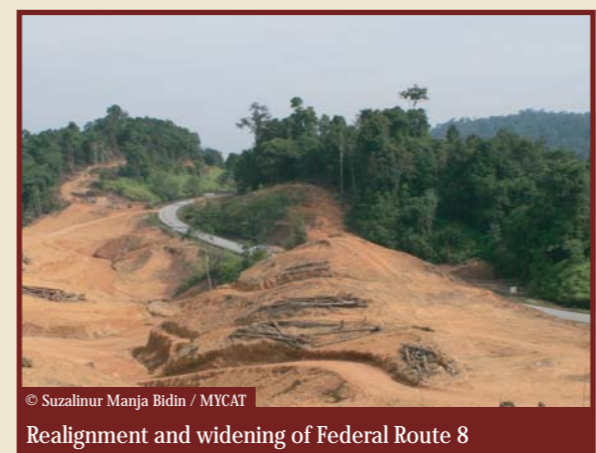
In 2009, MNS completed a study along the East-West highway to assess the proposed conversion of natural forest plans along the highway and potential impact of conversion on the integrity of the Belum-Temengor complex as a single high-conservation value forest landscape.

Based on the findings, MNS recommends that no new conversion plans for the area should be approved and all current or proposed plans should be put on hold until a further thorough impact assessment and the need for those projects are evaluated.

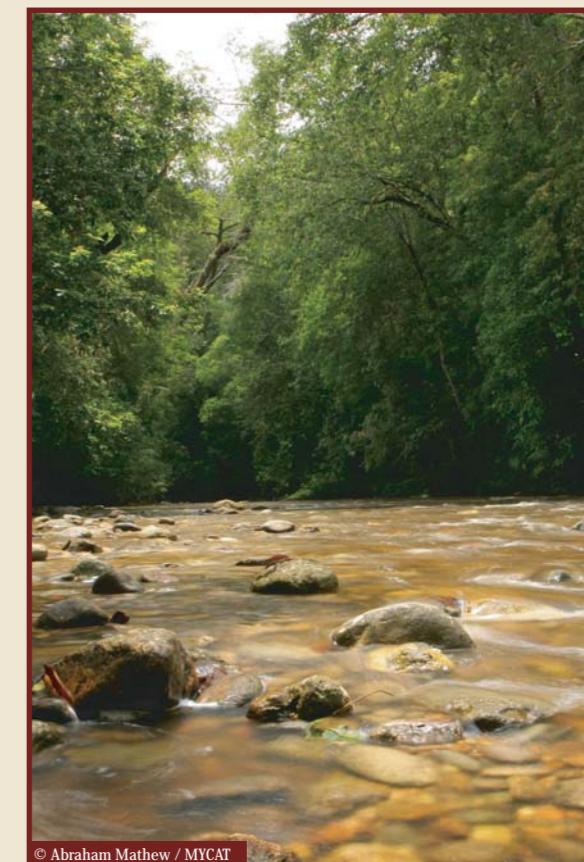
Towards improved protection of the habitat, MNS, WWF, and TRAFFIC provided input at the *Belum-Temengor Integrated Master Plan Conference* in October 2009. Amongst others, the conference agreed that the best option to safeguard Belum-Temengor is by legally protecting the entire forest landscape. Campaigns in collaboration with The Body Shop West Malaysia under MNS' Belum-Temengor Conservation Initiative called for the total protection of Belum-Temengor.

Roads, including highways and logging roads, are a major threat to tigers and their prey as they provide poachers with easy access to once remote forests. Facing the increasing pressure of development and people's demand for better roads, wildlife seems to stand little chance.

Fortunately in Malaysia, there is a rise in environmental awareness, with some engineers and developers willing to work with the conservation community to mitigate the negative impacts of roads on wildlife.



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Realignment and widening of Federal Route 8



© Abraham Mathew / MYCAT

In response to the road upgrade projects involving realignment and widening of Federal Route 8 at the critical Taman Negara – Main Range Tiger Corridor at Sungai Yu, Pahang, DWNP and MYCAT partners assisted the Department of Public Works and project engineers in designing green infrastructure and reviewing the wildlife mitigation plan. Results from the ongoing research project at the corridor site were instrumental in this process.

In October 2009, MYCAT partners met with the Ministry of Works' Highway Planning Unit to sensitize key personnel on the issues with existing and imminent highways. As a result, the partners were requested to assist in the planning process prior to projects being approved to ensure that the needs of wildlife are accounted for at the onset.

