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## Preserving Kuala Langat South Peat Swamp Forest

Stories by **STUART MICHAEL** and **CHRISTINA LOW**  
[metro@thestar.com.my](mailto:metro@thestar.com.my)

DUE to fear of losing the Kuala Langat South Peat Swamp Forest (KLSPSF) to agriculture, non-government organisations and government organisations have got together to document rare species of animals, birds, trees and plants in the area.

Their intention is to stop the state from allowing it to become an oil palm plantation and preserve one of the last remaining peat swamps in Selangor.

Recently, the Selangor government had approved a Selangor State Agricultural Corporation proposal to turn the entire 6,908ha swamp forest into an oil palm estate.

Since March 2008, the Selangor Forestry Department has banned logging in the state and has not issued any licence for the purpose.



All will be gone soon: An excavator at work at the Kuala Langat South Peat Swamp forest.

Now, the department is forced to issue logging licences and it has been receiving several calls from contractors.

Environmentalists are alarmed by news of the proposed oil palm plantation and fear many flora and fauna would disappear.

The conservation of this forest is crucial to maintaining the population of rare, threatened and endangered species of the area — some of which are not found anywhere.



Rare trees: Huge trees like these are a common sight in the forest.

The area is also the last virgin jungle reserve in a peat swamp forest south of the Klang River.

During their visit to the swamp forest few weeks ago, members from the Global Environment Centre, Wildlife Department, Malaysian Nature Society, Forest Reserve Institute of Malaysia, State Forestry Department and Universiti Putra Malaysia, documented the species of birds, animals and trees in the eco-system.

The group said the peat land was an important carbon store and played a significant role in the regulation of greenhouse gas emission and global climate.

They said the exploitation and degradation could lead to the release of carbon that would affect the environment.

Studies by these NGOs showed that the average depth in swamp forest is 3.3m, which is classified as deep.

The deeper the peat, the less suitable it is for agriculture as it involves huge capital and technical know-how to develop the peat land.

The usual method of turning the soil here for agriculture is by burning the trees so that planting could take place.

KLSPSF was gazetted as a forest reserve on May 13, 1927 under the provisions of the Federated Malay States Forest Enactment 1918.



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It was originally 12,141ha and had since been subjected to de-gazattement several times, with most of the areas used for agriculture.

The forest reserve is surrounded by towns such as Banting, Sepang, Sungai Pelek and Tanjong Sepat.

Swamp forests act as natural reservoirs, absorbing and retaining water and releasing it slowly during drier periods.

Without swamp forests, towns like Banting and other areas in Kuala Langat could easily flood during the monsoon season.

The dominant trees in the area are *stemonurus secundiflorus* *Icacinaceae* and *koompassia malaccensis* (Kempas), which are tropical rainforest species.

Some endangered species of trees like *meranti bunga* are found in huge numbers in this forest.

Another four species that are under threat are the *shorea teysmanniana*, *meranti bakau*, *mersawa paya* and *meranti paya*.

The endangered tapir and wild boar could also be found in the forest.

The other animals seen during the visit are the silver leaf monkeys and lesser short-nosed fruit bat and a lizard called *cyrtodactylus baluensis*.

The swamp is also home to birds species like the collared scops-owl, banded woodpecker, oriental dwarf kingfisher, maroon woodpecker, chestnut-winged cuckoo, green Iora and lesser racket-tailed drongo.