

Rare, endangered species encountered in C. Kalimantan

| A group of scientists returning from a field trip in the center of Kalimantan brought back favorable news of encounters with rare creatures, including a glowing caterpillar and hybrid gibbons. They also brought back less favorable news of imminent threats to those species.

Heart of Borneo Project director Martin Holland said around 90,000 hectares of forest in Central Kalimantan had turned out to be “very promising” for the team of 13 scientists from Europe and Indonesia.

“There were lots of species, and it’s good to know that it’s not all doom and gloom,” Holland said Friday in Jakarta.

The area that the scientists — 11 from Europe and two from Indonesia — had studied had never been the subject of scientific research before, he added.

Among the species encountered during the expedition in the Murung Raya Regency was a caterpillar that can emit light from different parts of its body in sequence, clouded leopards, sun bears and hybrid gibbons.

Hybrid gibbons, products of inter-breeding between Northern and Southern gibbons, have not been classified as a new species and are thus yet to be legally protected, Holland said.

“We found 40 mammal species, 140 bird species, 30 frog species and 35 reptile species,” expedition chief Tim van Berkel said, adding that most of the mammals in the area were threatened, as were the birds, which included the great argus (*Argusianus Argus*).

The area in which those species are found is close to logging activities, which threatens the biodiversity of the lowland forest, he said.

Holland said logging activities were occurring 20 kilometers from the research area.

Local people in nearby villages Tumbang Naan and Tumbang Tohan had welcomed the project, he said, because it helped them become more aware of the diversity of the forest they live in.

“They can differentiate between species but they don’t know what is actually there,” he said.

Holland added that residents were aware of the idea of sustainability.

“They understand that if you over-use resources then you are damaging the chances for the next generation to use that forest,” he said.

The expedition and research project lasted eight weeks. The team is planning to return to the area in September for another expedition before a longer-term project next year.