KEMENTERIAN TENAGA DAN SUMBER ASLI

KERATAN SURAT KHABAR

SURAT KHABAR	:	NEW SUNDAY TIMES			
TARIKH	:	29/8/2021 (AHAD)	MUKA SURAT	:	8
JABATAN	:	JABATAN HUTAN SABAH			

MALIAU BASIN

AGARWOOD THEFT IN 'LOST WORLD'

750g of gaharu valued at RM9,000 recovered from campsite, man arrested

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MALIAU Basin, Malaysia's "Lost World" deep in the heart of Sabah, was breached for its highly valuable gaharu, or agarwood, recently.

A 37-year-old local was arrested with the recovery of some newly extracted gaharu and tools for an extended covert jungle operation on Aug 25.

The suspect was nabbed at a campsite within the 58,840ha renowned conservation area in a joint operation.

At least two others fled the scene.

The joint swoop involved the General Operation Force's Tiger Platoon, Sabah Forestry Department's Protection Unit, Yayasan Sabah and its Damai Unit (covering Danum Valley, Maliau Basin and Imbak Canyon conservation areas).

Chief conservator of forests Frederick Kugan said 750g of gaharu, estimated to be worth RM9,000, was recovered in Op Bersepadu Khazanah.

"The suspect was handed over to the Keningau police station.

"The raiding party also seized a mouse deer, freshwater fish and bullets."

Kugan said gaharu, or *Aquilaria malaccensis*, was a protected and endangered species in Sabah, listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

Anyone caught stealing gaharu can be charged under the Forest Enactment 1968, which carries a maximum fine of RM500,000 or imprisonment of up to 20 years.

Kugan said prior to this, the state Forestry Department had made a series of arrests in Tawau and Sandakan.

"It is difficult to detect the movements of such thieves as they enter the forest on foot.

"But through operations such as this, we believe we can prevent such incidents from recurring.

"Gaharu has a very high market value and the conservation value is also very high.

"If drastic measures are not taken, this species could go extinct."

A member of the joint operation, who declined to be named, said the suspect was from the Nabawan district nearby and there were at least two others involved, but they could have escaped on foot.

"We believe they have cut one or more gaharu trees in the vicinity of their campsite to extract the resin. That's the gaharu.

"We also found tools to extract, peel and pry the precious resin.

"They would normally cut the tree in sections and later extract the resin, which is what they are after."

The officer believed the culprits would have extracted more gaharu if they had stayed on.

"This is a totally protected forest reserve and they should not be doing this. Fishing and hunting are a big 'no' in Maliau Basin, even if you claim to be a native from nearby areas."

Maliau Basin is bordered by several districts in the interior, such as Nabawan, Kalabakan and Tawau in the east and even Telupid in central Sabah.

Conservation areas under Yayasan Sabah used to attract nature experts as well as local and international dignitaries.



Newly extracted gaharu and tools to extract resin were seized in 'Op Bersepadu Khazanah' in Maliau Basin, Sabah, recently. PIX COURTESY OF SABAH FORESTRY DEPARTMENT



Freshwater fish seized in the operation to nab the agarwood thieves.

DIRE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION