

Book Review

“Itin: A Bornean Elephant” by Jaswinder Kaur Kler, Benoit Goossens and Marc Ancrenaz

Reviewed by Nurzhafarina Othman

The book ‘Itin: a Bornean Elephant’ has arrived at a most significant time when hope seems to be vanishing for the Asian elephant in general and the Bornean elephant in particular. With roughly 2000 Bornean elephants left in the wild, it is time for local people to stake their claim, appreciate and protect one of the most charismatic species in Borneo. There are not many publications on the Bornean elephant and most of them are scientifically written; this book is the first of its kind. It describes the biology and ecology of the Bornean elephant in an exceptional way, through the eyes of Itin, a male Bornean elephant. The purpose of this book is to “inspire readers to better understand the plight of this endangered animal”. This book could serve as an effective introduction to readers on the issues surrounding the Bornean elephant.

All the stories by Itin are real life stories, which are experienced by the Bornean elephants especially in the Lower Kinabatangan region of Sabah. Itin starts by telling his origin and continues to reveal aspects related to biology, ecology and behavior. Facts provided in this book were gathered from interviews with different stakeholders including NGO staff, indigenous people and scientists, and from extensive reading on elephants. From my point of view, an added value of this book is that it helps to preserve and document traditional orally passed down stories, describes the experience of field staff and translate vigorous scientific work and findings into simple English. Hopefully, it will help the public to better understand the nature of elephants and the situations that they face to survive in human dominated landscapes.

Another special feature of this book is the collection of photographs; not only of the Bornean elephants in the wild but also many other animal species like the iconic orangutan, civet, Sunda clouded leopard and birds. A picture is worth a

thousand words and this book contains colorful pictures in every page! I have no doubt that the readers will feel as if they are in the Lower Kinabatangan riding on a boat while watching the elephants bathing and playing in the Sabah’s longest river! For environmental educators, this book would be another excellent resource for their educational programs, especially in attracting the interest of young people.

Former journalist Jaswinder Kaur Kler who authored the book with scientists Dr Benoit Goossens and Dr Marc Ancrenaz, captured Itin’s curiosity, excitement, sadness, anger and hopes. She carefully picked her words to describe Itin’s feelings, which unconsciously touches the heart of the readers. As a local Sabahan, she truly has the knowledge of how to attract the attention of local people. Her writing style assists materialize the objective of having this book.

Among the people who will benefit most from this book are students and people who work directly and indirectly with elephants to alleviate conflicts, such as the policy makers, estate managers, villagers and wildlife managers. This 78-page book is small enough to be a good giveaway souvenir from Borneo and at the same time will help increase the awareness of the plight of Bornean elephants, both nationally and internationally. If the French kids have Babar the elephant, the lucky Sabahan kids now have their own elephant hero, Itin. After finishing the book, the readers will better understand facts on Bornean elephants and will surely be ready to become ambassadors for the species.

Itin: A Bornean Elephant

Jaswinder Kaur Kler, Benoit Goossens
and Marc Ancrenaz (2014)

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