

Pangolins saved from traditional medicine trade released in Harapan Rainforest

Title The pangolin is a strange looking mammal; scaly, with a prehensile tail, and claws for opening termite mounds. I never thought I'd see one of these secretive animals in the wild. I got my first encounter last week in sad circumstances, and not just one but 40 of them! The government wildlife agency, BKSDA, had seized a shipment of pangolins, and asked whether they could be released into Harapan Rainforest. As no one knew where they had been caught, we were happy to provide a release site. Thousands of pangolins are traded every year, mostly to China and Vietnam, where their meat is a delicacy and their scales and blood used for traditional medicine. It was daunting when a truckload of pangolins arrived, but at least they were still active. At 10pm, project staff began releasing them at different sites throughout the forest. Most immediately climbed a tree or vanished into the undergrowth. Some took a few minutes to unroll from their protective balls; and two surprised us by stopping to eat some termites right in front of us. We arrived back in camp very tired and muddy but happy that the release had been a success. We hope the pangolins settle well in to their new home. **Vicki Powell - Research biologist**