

Making scents of Borneo's biodiversity

Borneo is a hotbed of tropical plants with various genetic makeups, often producing a rich fragrance through their flowers, latex, bark, leaves or roots. Trekking through the jungles of Borneo, one will experience wafts of alluring and sometimes, what seem to be repelling smells.



The Bellina or Normah Orchid

For example, the *Phalaenopsis bellina* or Normah Orchid, the official State flower of Sarawak is known for its sweet, vanilla and jasmine like scent when in full bloom. The *Coelogyne asperata* meanwhile produces a sweet smelling note that ends with a hint of liquorice. On the other hand, there are orchids that may not seem as appealing in terms of how they smell, for example, the *Bulbophyllum becarii* which is said to smell like rotting meat!

The forests of Sarawak also boasts a number of trees that produce beautiful scents from their latex and barks, for example, the "Selukai" or *Goniothalamus macrophyllus* which aromatic bark is used by the local communities to repel insects. Another example of a tree widely found in our forests is the the "Medang Tija" or *Cinnamomum javanicum* which



Looks like the Durian skin has no smell!

A scented trail

A delight for your olfactory senses

is commonly known as cinnamon or "kulit manis" used widely in cooking.

This leads us to the question, wouldn't it be wonderful to trek through the forest with our nose for a change?

A scented trail

The Sarawak Biodiversity Centre recently opened up two nature trails at its premises in Semenggoh as part of its on-going efforts to reach out to the public, particularly the younger generation, on the need to appreciate, the importance to conserve, and sustainably explore biodiversity.



Delighting the olfactory senses!

The highlight of the two trails, known as the Ecology and Discovery trails is, the opportunity to sniff out and identify plants that produce different types of scents - some growing naturally, and others, planted along the way.

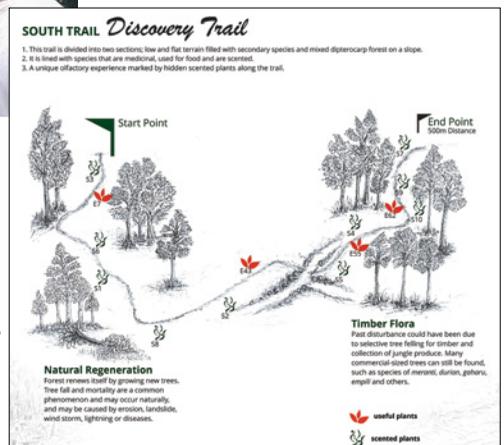
The Ecology trail passes through two distinct ecosystems in the alluvial forest and old lowland secondary forest, while the Discovery Trail passes through a lowland rainforest of Semenggoh. These

ecosystems exhibit a variety of plant species found in Sarawak.

The idea of including an olfactory or scented experience along SBC's Nature Trails was inspired by an article written by SBC's Research Officer Elaine Remi and published in the Malaysian Naturalist in 2013 (a copy of the article can be viewed at <http://www.sbc.org.my/media-centre/downloads/publication/181-making-scents-of-biodiversity-a-perfumed-garden-in-paya-maga-sarawak>).

Other than the olfactory experience, trekkers will be also "discover" useful and important plants which are found along both trails. These plants have long been used by the indigenous communities in Sarawak for various applications such as medicinal, culinary and in rituals.

Guided walks along the trails are available to groups of ten persons through appointments made with SBC. Participants have the opportunity to engage in an "olfactory hunt" where they have to "sniff out" the fragrant plants along the trail. Those who "sniff out" all fragrant plants listed will walk away with a "Wilderness Explorer" medal from the Centre.



A sketch of one of SBC's Nature Trails

For more information on outreach activities carried out by the Sarawak Biodiversity Centre, head on to www.sbc.org.my or contact the centre via email at biosar@sb.org.my.

