

*Summary of Session Theme Talk*

**Malaysian Borneo - World Class Wildlife Tourism in South East Asia**

**Newsome D.**

*Associate Professor, Environment and Conservation  
School of Veterinary and Life Sciences, Murdoch University, South St, Murdoch, Perth, Western  
Australia  
d.newsome@murdoch.edu.au*

A world renowned wildlife industry has developed along the banks of the Kinabatangan River. Wildlife that can be seen include Bornean pygmy elephant (*Elephas maximus borneensis*), bearded pig (*Sus barbatus*), four species of monkey, orang-utan, estuarine crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*) and more than 200 species of birds. Tourism operations and activities comprise guided boat tours on the main river and its tributaries and associated ox-bow lakes. However during the last 10 years there has been a proliferation of tourist lodges and today many boats operate along the Kinabatangan River taking tourists out on early morning and afternoon excursions to view wildlife. For example, during the peak tourist season there are as many as 20 boats travelling some of watercourses at the same time. Such an intensity of boat traffic searching for wildlife has the capacity to spoil visitor experience because of crowding at a wildlife sighting, boats vying for the best position for client viewing, possible noise impacts, the presence of exhaust fumes, a reduction in the benefits of tranquillity and an increased risk of disturbance to wildlife. It is possible that over the longer term negative client feedback on Tripadvisor and other tourist communication media, relating to the above problems, may have a detrimental effect on the image of the tourism industry located along the river negating good word of mouth reports and repeat visitation. Accordingly, this presentation briefly considers Sabah as an ecotourism destination, reports on how ecotourism is practiced, identifies emerging visitor experience problems and considers the influence of the wider landscape on the wildlife and other tourism resources.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Wildlife, Kinabatangan River