

# Rare agarwood species is back



**Lost treasure:** This '*Aquilaria rostrata*' has been found in Besut, Terengganu after missing for over a century.

## Tree was last spotted over a century ago

**PETALING JAYA:** A critically endangered species of agarwood, which has been elusive for more than 100 years, has resurfaced.

The *Aquilaria rostrata* was first discovered in 1911 and was thought to be native only to Wray's Camp in Taman Negara, Pahang.

Since then, nobody had spotted the species.

However, two Forestry Department rangers found what they suspected to be the elusive species in April last year in Besut, Terengganu, some 100km away from where it was first discovered.

Their suspicion was soon confirmed by a research team in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) led by associate professor Dr Rozi Mohamed.

"At first, we thought that it was a new species but after making comparisons with a 100-year-old specimen at Herbarium Botanic Gardens in Singapore, we discovered that it was the *Aquilaria rostrata*," she said in a statement.

Dr Rozi, who published her findings in *Blumen*, an international journal on plant taxonomy, said the tree was found among felled timber in an area of about 700m above sea level.

"It is not available anywhere else but only in peninsular Malaysia and is in danger of extinction," she said.

Some 50 of the same species were found in

the same area, ranging between 2m and 5m in height. The trees were flowering and bore fruits. They were not cut down when found.

UPM Forestry Management Department head associate professor Dr Mohd Nazre Saleh said the rediscovery of *Aquilaria rostrata* was significant to floristic records everywhere.

"More so now because the species was discovered somewhere else from where it was originally found," he told *The Star*.

Dr Mohd Nazre said this particular tree was "extremely rare" and was one of the species protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

He called for more conservation efforts to "protect and preserve" the tree from being exploited.

Dr Rozi, whose study was funded by the Higher Education Ministry's Fundamental Research Grant, also agreed that the species should be safeguarded from "unscrupulous quarters out to get hold of agarwood".

*Aquilaria rostrata* was first discovered in 1911 by H.N. Ridley, with the findings published in 1924.

The species is listed as critically endangered under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Red List and is believed to have declined due to the high demand for agarwood.