



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***MEGACHIROPTERAN DIVERSITY PATTERNS AND PROCESSES IN OIL  
PALM PRODUCTION LANDSCAPE***

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PALM PRODUCTION LANDSCAPE**

**By**

**MUHAMAD SYAFIQ BIN CHE SHAFFINE**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
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Science**

**May 2017**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science

## **MEGACHIROPTERAN DIVERSITY PATTERNS AND PROCESSES IN OIL PALM PRODUCTION LANDSCAPE**

By

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**May 2017**

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Oil palm industry is one of the main economic drivers in Southeast Asia. It has caused tropical deforestation on a massive scale in producing countries. Forest conversion to commercial oil palm agriculture has decimated habitats of countless native flora and fauna species. Large-scale plantations and smallholdings are two distinctive oil palm production systems. Smallholdings would host a greater biodiversity than large-scale plantations. Habitat complexity in smallholdings is influenced by multiple farming practices (i.e. polyculture and monoculture). However, little is known on the effects of such farming practices in oil palm smallholdings on mammal biodiversity, particularly megachiropteran bats. This study aimed to find the best farming practice to reconcile oil palm production and biodiversity conservation. Mist-nets were used to trap frugivorous bats at 120 smallholdings in Peninsular Malaysia. The species richness and abundance of frugivorous bats between monoculture and polyculture smallholdings were compared and their relationships with vegetation structure characteristics were investigated. The results revealed that species richness (total megachiropteran bat species) and abundance (total individual from each species of megachiropteran bat) were significantly greater in polyculture smallholdings than monoculture smallholdings. The result also found that 28.21% of the model variations in species richness were explained by the habitat characteristics measured including the number of dead standing oil palms and immature oil palms, non-grass cover, height of non-grass cover, and farming practice. This shows greater habitat complexity is required for the maintenance of frugivorous bats. Therefore, in order to conserve farmland biodiversity in oil palm production landscapes, either smallholding or plantation, commercial growers should implement polyculture rather than monoculture farming.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

## **PROSES DAN CORAK KEPELBAGAIAN MEGACHIROPTERA DI DALAM LANDSKAP PENGELUARAN HASIL KEBUN KECIL KELAPA SAWIT**

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Industri kelapa sawit merupakan salah satu daripada pemacu utama ekonomi di Asia Tenggara. Industri ini telah menyumbang kepada kemerosotan hutan tropika secara drastik dalam negara pengeluar kelapa sawit. Penukaran tanah hutan kepada kawasan pertanian kelapa sawit telah menyebabkan kemusnahan habitat flora dan fauna. Ladang kelapa sawit berskala besar dan kebun kecil merupakan dua sistem pengamalan penanaman kelapa sawit yang berbeza. Kebun-kebud kecil kelapa sawit dapat menampung kepelbagaian biodiversiti yang lebih tinggi berbanding ladang-ladang kelapa sawit yang berskala besar. Amalan pertanian yang pelbagai seperti monokultur dan polikultur yang diamalkan di dalam kawasan kebun kecil menyumbang kepada kewujudan habitat yang lebih kompleks di dalam kawasan ini. Walaubagaimanapun, tidak banyak maklumat yang dapat dikenalpasti daripada kesan amalan pertanian yang pelbagai di dalam kawasan kebun kecil ini terhadap biodiversiti mamalia terutamanya kelawar pemakan buah. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti amalan pertanian yang terbaik yang dapat memaksimumkan pengeluaran kelapa sawit dan dalam masa yang sama membantu dalam pemuliharaan biodiversiti. Jaring kabut digunakan untuk menangkap kelawar pemakan buah di dalam 120 kawasan pekebun kecil kelapa sawit di Semenanjung Malaysia. Kekayaan spesis dan kelimpahan kelawar pemakan buah di antara kebun kecil monokultur dan polikultur dibandingkan dan perkaitan antara kekayaan spesis dan kelimpahan kelawar pemakan buah ini dengan ciri-ciri vegetasi dikaji. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa kekayaan spesis (bilangan spesis kelawar pemakan buah) dan kelimpahan kelawar pemakan buah (bilangan individu dari setiap spesis kelawar pemakan buah) adalah jauh lebih tinggi dalam kebun kecil polikultur berbanding kebun kecil monokultur. Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa 28.21% daripada variasi model dalam kekayaan spesis

adalah dipengaruhi oleh factor-faktor keadaan vegetasi iaitu bilangan pokok kelapa sawit yang mati berdiri dan bilangan kelapa sawit belum matang, peratus rumpai penutup bumi bukan rumput, ketinggian rumpai penutup bumi bukan rumput, dan amalan pertanian. Ini menunjukkan habitat yang lebih kompleks diperlukan untuk menarik perhatian kelawar pemakan buah. Oleh itu, bagi memulihara biodiversiti dalam landskap pengeluaran kelapa sawit, sama ada kebun kecil atau ladang, penanam komersial lebih digalakkan untuk melaksanakan kaedah polikultur bukannya pertanian monokultur.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 4 May 2017 to conduct the final examination of Muhamad Syafiq bin Che Shaffine on his thesis entitled "Megachiropteran Diversity Patterns and Processes in Oil Palm Production Landscape" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

%	Percent
-	Negative
+	Plus minus
o C	Degree Celsius
m	Meter
X	Multiplied
=	Equal
r	No element of set r
AIC	Akaike's Information Criterion
AICc	Akaike's Information Criterion Correction
ANOSIM	Analysis of Similarity
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
F	F- statistic
GLM	Generalized Linear Modals
l	Delta l
MPOB	Malaysia Palm Oil Board
MPOC	<i>Malaysian Palm Oil Council</i>
p	p- value
R <sup>2</sup>	R squared
S.E.	Standard Error
SIMPER	Similarity Percentage
Sp.	Species (singular)
Spp.	Species (plural)



## CHAPTER 1

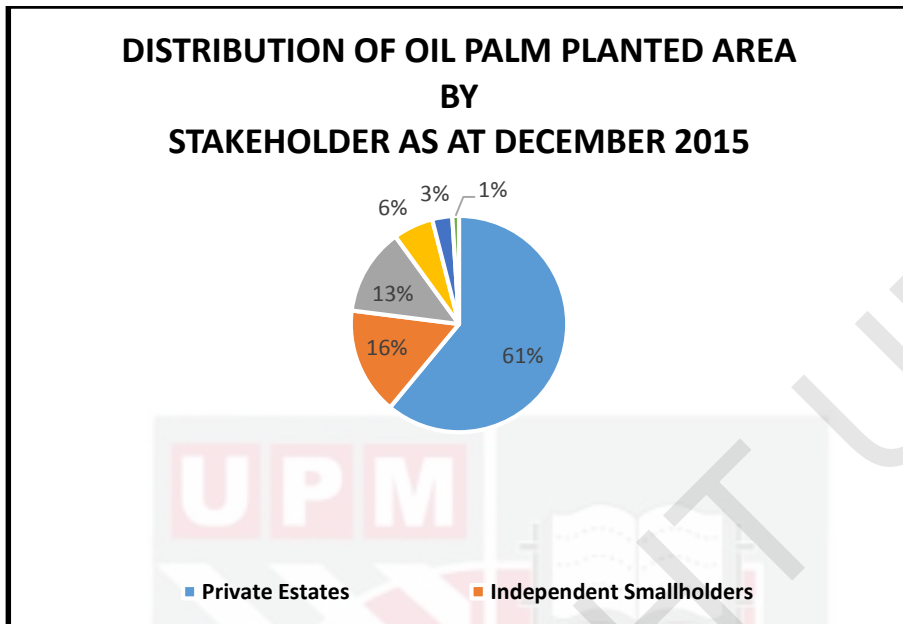
### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 General Review

Oil palm is a very important and efficient crop with the minimal production value (Carter *et al.*, 2007). It contributes almost 30% of the global's edible vegetable oil (Carter *et al.*, 2007) and biofuel product where it generates income to many producing countries in the tropics (Sargeant, 2001; Basiron, 2007). The production of palm oil has always been linked with tropical deforestation, water pollution, biodiversity loss, and manipulation of customary land right (Koh & Wilcove, 2008). In the past, Malaysia was among 14 countries with annual deforestation rates in excess of 250 000 ha per year (Wood, 1990). Even though all the damaging impacts from the uncontrolled oil palm expansion on biodiversity, (Fitzherbert *et al.*, 2008; Koh & Wilcove, 2008), the industry is still growing all over many parts of the world. To date, only a small fraction of the published research focused on the impacts of oil palm cultivation on biodiversity and the environment (Fitzherbert *et al.*, 2008). Such information is still not sufficient to reflect the serious threat of this impact and there is an urgent need to mitigate the impact of oil palm plantation had on biodiversity.

Malaysia is the world's second largest oil palm production country in the world after Indonesia based on the data on year 2012 (Pakiam, 2013) that covered 5,642,943 hectares of land (MPOB, 2015) and produced 19,667,016 tonnes of crude palm oil (MPOB, 2015). Even though Indonesia is the world largest oil palm producing country, Malaysia became the world's largest palm oil exporter with the 18 million tonnes of exported palm oil products throughout the world in 2011 (May, 2012) with India, China, Netherlands, Pakistan and U.S.A. were the primary importers of Malaysian palm oil products (MPOC, 2016).

Palm oil industry sectors in Malaysia is dominated by several stakeholders such as FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority), FELCRA (Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority), RISDA (Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority), State Schemes, Smallholders, and Private Estates (Figure 1.1). Malaysia continues to increase planters' productivity and competitiveness through a state replacement of unproductive palms with high-yielding hybrids. This implementation includes cultivation on lands owned by independent smallholders who contribute 16% of the planted area under oil palm in Malaysia (MPOB, 2015).



**Figure 1.1: Distribution of oil palm planted area by stakeholder as at December 2015 with the total area 5,642,943 hectares.**  
(Source: MPOB, 2015)

Most commercial palm oil planters in Malaysia are using monoculture approach in planting palm oil tree except for independent smallholders (Basiron, 2007). In contrast to the monotonous practice of commercial palm oil planters, independent smallholders practice either monoculture or polyculture approach. There has been much debate throughout the world discussing about the effect of this planting technique had on environment and biodiversity. Smallholdings are defined as semi-traditional farming areas covering less than 50 ha each that were owned by individuals and do not belong to any plantation companies or non-governmental business entity (RSPO, 2009). Smallholdings normally consist of various-age stands (polyculture) of palm oil tree, which are intercropped with other profitable plants (e.g. banana, coconut, coffee, pineapple, tapioca etc.) and some of smallholdings are monoculture which mean only planting with single species of palm oil tree (Amoah *et al.*, 1995; Azhar *et al.*, 2014a).

Despite oil palm production system is becoming quite common in the leading oil palm producing countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia (Murphy, 2007), there are relatively insufficient number of fauna studies in the smallholdings (Azhar *et al.*, 2011, 2014a, b). Motivated by stable income opportunities and encouraging government policies, it is predicted that more small-scale farmers will be involved in self-managed and self-funded oil palm economy in the major oil-palm producing countries (Koczberski & Curry, 2005; Cramb & Curry, 2012) like Malaysia.

Understanding the ecological processes that affects the conservation of biodiversity in oil palm landscapes is critically appropriate for organisation practices (Tscharntke *et al.*, 2005). Biodiversity patterns in conventional plantations, ranging from invertebrates to vertebrate fauna estates, have been studied (Fayle *et al.*, 2010; Na'jera & Simonetti, 2010; Azhar *et al.*, 2013; Gillespie *et al.*, 2012). Most of the studies have concluded that oil palm plantations are unable to match natural forests in terms of biodiversity maintenance. On the contrary, oil palm smallholdings have not been studied thoroughly by conservation scientists in terms of their impact on biodiversity.

Effect of different oil palm smallholdings farming practices may vary on certain wildlife species. It is important to investigate the effect of these different farming practices because it may increase the survival of some wild life taxa. Megachiropteran bats (fruit eating bats) are the most common taxa that forage and inhabit these oil palm plantation area (Nur Juliani *et al.*, 2011). To maintaining their population, it is important to study and understanding the effect of different farming practices on Megachiropteran bats. This may provide better knowledge about the ecology aspect needed on these taxa to ensure the continuation of these species life on earth. Knowledge on habitat ecology characteristic can provide a method of conservation planning of endangered wild life species.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Biodiversity assessments in oil palm smallholdings may provide valuable information into biodiversity-friendly practices that can be applied throughout oil palm agriculture (Foster *et al.*, 2011). In the tropics, nearly 70 % of agriculture land is used as a combination of managed landscapes (McNeely & Scherr, 2003). In agroecosystems, studies have shown that changes in habitat organization because of different agricultural practices (Pogue & Schnell, 2001) may lead to variations in animal assemblages. This has been confirmed in studies of small mammals (Sullivan *et al.*, 1998; Michel *et al.*, 2007; Moro & Gadal, 2007; Mendenhall *et al.*, 2014; Azhar *et al.*, 2014a), fruit bats (Azhar *et al.*, 2015b), birds (Fischer *et al.*, 2011; Azhar *et al.*, 2013, 2014b, 2015b), and invertebrates (Wilson *et al.*, 1999; Ghazali *et al.*, 2016; Asmah *et al.*, 2016). In addition, changes in habitat structure leading to increased habitat complexity have been confirmed to be positively related with animal assemblage diversity by providing nest sites and shelters from predators (Tscharntke *et al.*, 2005; Lambert *et al.*, 2008).

## **1.3 Justification**

This research may provide a clarification for decision-makers on biodiversity degradation due to growing of agriculture landscapes in oil palm producing countries. Loss of biodiversity component from tropical forest conversion are difficult to mitigate (Daily, 2001; Lindenmayer & Hobbs, 2004; Brook *et al.*, 2006). This is due to high profitability, high demand and revenue this industry can generate (Smith *et al.*, 2003; Sodhi & Brook, 2006; Koh & Wilcove, 2007).

Therefore, this Megachiropteran bat study was conducted as an initiative to preserve and enhance the biodiversity in the oil palm plantation as there is no scientific study focusing on the interaction of Megachiropteran bats with different farming practices and habitat quality in oil palm production landscape.

This study was conducted in habitats that have been converted into oil palm smallholdings (e.g. monocultures and polyculture farming practice), with the aim to compare Megachiropteran bats diversity in different farming practices. Polyculture smallholdings were expected to support higher level of Megachiropteran bat richness and more diverse species assemblages than monoculture smallholdings. This was related to greater structural complexity and floristic richness in polyculture smallholdings. The second objective was to study the relationships between Megachiropteran bats species richness and local-scale habitat quality characteristics (i.e. vegetation structure). This study predicted that key structural characteristics typically associated with agricultural practices play a significant role in influencing Megachiropteran bat species richness and composition. Certainly, this study helps ecologists to understand biodiversity patterns in modern human-modified landscapes and at the same time provide recommendations to support the biodiversity especially Megachiropteran bats in oil palm smallholdings.

#### **1.4 Objective**

There is an urgent need to inform stakeholders of the value of different oil palm farming practices to improve biodiversity conservation in existing production landscapes. The research aimed to investigate the effects of two common oil palm farming practices (i.e. monoculture and polyculture) on the diversity and abundance of Megachiropteran bat species. Specifically, Megachiropteran bat species richness, abundance and composition in monoculture and polyculture farming practices in oil palm smallholdings were determined. The study also attempted to quantify species diversity between this two farming practices and examine the relations between species occurrence and the habitat quality. In this study, two types of smallholdings, monoculture and polyculture where only integrated plantation of oil palm with banana tree were selected. Within the chosen smallholdings, Megachiropteran bats were sampled and correlated with farming practices and habitat quality inside the sampling area.

The specific objectives were:

- i. To compare the effects of two different oil palm smallholding farming practices (monoculture and polyculture) on the abundance and species richness of Megachiropteran bats.
- ii. To determine the key habitat quality variables that influence Megachiropteran bats abundance and species richness in oil palm smallholdings.

### 1.5 Research Hypothesis

- i. Polyculture farming could support greater species richness, composition, and abundance compare to monoculture farming, due to the availability of multiple niches and resources.
- ii. Habitat quality characteristic will influence Megachiropteran bat species richness in oil palm smallholdings due to sensitiveness of certain species to the changes in habitat quality.



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