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Rafflesia with 10 petals

GRIK: A 10-petalled Rafflesia, the world's largest flower, has been sighted at the Royal Belum State Park.

Researchers from the Rafflesia Division of the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) have confirmed that the discovery, made last Saturday, was the first of its kind in the world.

Park officials on a routine check at the 130-million-year-old rainforest, one of the oldest in the world, found two full-bloomed Rafflesias.

The other was of the more common five-petalled variety.

Six-petalled Rafflesias have been recorded at the Gunung Gading National Park, a two to three-hour drive from Kuching, the only other place in the country where the flowers mostly bloom.

A seven-petal Rafflesia bloomed at the Royal Belum State Park just last year. The parasitic plant is found only in Southeast Asia.

Royal Belum State Park manager Ilyia Ainuddin said the 10-petal Rafflesia was a cross between the Rafflesia cantleyi and R. azlani species.

The other rafflesia species available in the park is the Karei.

She said Rafflesias would only bloom for between five and seven days before turning black.

"This is an extremely rare and unique find in this

130 million-year-old rainforest.

"We have never come across anything like this before," she said.

"FRIM will bring back samples of the Rafflesia for further studies. We are excited to know more about this new species."

Elaborating on the 10-petal Rafflesia, Ilyia said the five big petals were from the R. azlani species, with a diameter of 46cm, while the five smaller petals were from the species R. cantleyi.

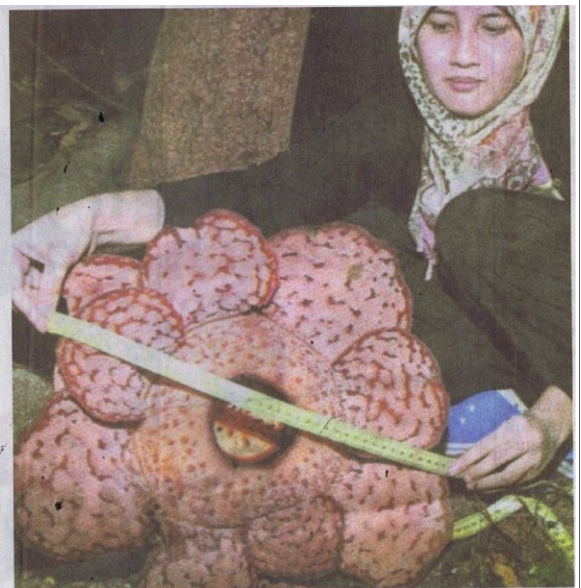
The 117,500ha rainforest was declared as Royal Belum State Park by the sultan of Perak on July 31, 2003.

There are 12 spots in the area where Rafflesias bloomed.

According to Wikipedia, R. cantleyi is a parasitic plant that can be found in Peninsular Malaysia and Pulau Tioman. It is almost identical to R. hasseltii, except for the number of warts on the perigone lobes of the two species.

Another distinctive feature of R. cantleyi is its ability to form flowers on the aerial portions of its host Tetrastigma.

Meanwhile, R. azlani is a parasitic flowering plant endemic to Peninsular Malaysia and is similar to R. cantleyi, but differs in having larger perigone blotches.



Forest Research Institute Malaysia officer measuring the bloom.