

ACB at 15: responding to biodiversity challenges post-2020



The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) celebrated its 15th founding anniversary on 30 September 2020, taking stock of its milestones and challenges in the past years as the regional response to biodiversity loss.

Under the theme *ACB@15: One ASEAN for Biodiversity, 2020 and beyond*, the ACB has slated a series of virtual events during its anniversary month, which culminated with the announcement of the finalists of the ASEAN-wide photo contest *Zooming in on Biodiversity* in a ceremony broadcast live on Facebook. The online anniversary event was hosted by Ms. Katrina Kendall, Miss Earth England 2015, and protected area ambassador.

The contest aimed to celebrate the beauty and diversity of ASEAN's natural resources, including its revered ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHPs), with *Healing with Biodiversity: Building a Better Normal* as its overall theme. The announcement of the contest finalists was one of the highlights of the online anniversary celebration that took place through Facebook live.

"While as a Region we are endowed with a variety of diverse ecosystems and species, each ASEAN Member

State possesses its own unique biodiversity. We boast of a diverse cultural heritage that is truly characteristic of our Region's identity," ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim said during the Facebook live event.

The ACB, the only ASEAN centre headquartered in the Philippines, was created through an agreement signed by all the ASEAN Member States (AMS) on 27 September 2005.

Lim highlighted some of the ACB's milestones in the past 15 years, including the expansion of its network of partners within and outside ASEAN. Over the years, the ACB fortified its strategic and technological support for the ASEAN Heritage Parks, including the capacity development of AMS in law enforcement and conducting monitoring activities. She also cited the livelihood opportunities it has provided to local communities in and around protected areas.

"Protected areas form a significant part of the world's biodiversity, and provide a wide range of ecosystem services to the people of ASEAN," said Lim highlighting that through the AHP Programme, the Region's network of the best and biodiversity-rich protected areas

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and nature reserves or AHPs has significantly grown from 22 in 2005 to 49 at present.

Lim likewise announced the upcoming release of the Third Edition of the ASEAN Biodiversity Outlook (ABO3), a comprehensive report on the state of biodiversity and key strategic policy recommendations in the Region. “With the ABO3, along with the ASEAN Clearing-House Mechanism, the ACB has been creating avenues for sharing and exchange of biodiversity information and knowledge,” she added.

The 15th anniversary of the ACB also happens to mark the deadline for global targets to reduce biodiversity loss while the world is grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. In intensifying our path towards a better normal, the ACB executive director called for stronger collaboration with different sectors on integrating biodiversity consideration in the development processes.

Representatives from the AMS, including the managers of AHPs and ACB’s past seconded officers, as well as development partners, likewise

shared their appreciation of ACB’s conservation work.

Dr. Lena Chan, senior director of the International Biodiversity Conservation Division of Singapore’s National Parks Board of Singapore and a Governing Board member of the ACB, congratulated the ACB and extended gratitude to its partners, EU, the Federal Government of Germany, the Government of Japan and other international organisations, which have been strongly supporting the ACB’s activities since its inception.

She added that the global pandemic is an opportunity to advocate transformational change to achieve the vision of living in harmony with nature in the development and implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. “The ACB stands with the global community to effectively contribute to this vision,” she said.

Meanwhile, the Philippine Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Elizabeth Buensuceso in her video message described ACB as “a trusted institution in the service of the ASEAN Member States’ desire to

preserve biodiversity for generations to come—our children, their children and grandchildren will be the beneficiaries of the important work that the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity is doing.”

Other conservation leaders also participated in the online event. Ivonne Higuero, secretary-general of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), underlined the role that the AMS play as Parties to CITES in the fight against wildlife crime.

“(The AMS) are deploying considerable means to fight trafficking and to keep the use and trade of wild fauna and flora legal and sustainable. As the scale and gravity of the global biodiversity-loss crisis become increasingly clear, the work of institutions like the ACB remains crucial,” she said in her message.

Despite the mobility restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ACB, in support of the AMS and its various partners, remained active in its communication campaigns to inform, raise awareness, and mobilise support for biodiversity conservation.

If you can actively save one plant or animal species, which one would it be?

Ms. Katrina Kendall, Moderator

Species listed in the word cloud: pangolin, cow, coral reefs, sea turtle, eagle, tamaraw, gecko, tiger, spiders, sea turtles, dipterocarp trees, mangroves, tarsier, it would be.

ACB @ 15 One ASEAN for biodiversity, 2020 and beyond

ACB celebrates ASEAN's 53rd anniversary, underlines resilience and recovery

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) joined the celebrations of the 53rd founding anniversary of the ASEAN on 8 August, underscoring the robust and enduring cooperation of the Member States in building resilience and working towards recovery amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The ACB reaffirms its commitment to the Region’s principles and vision through its continued support to the AMS in advancing the Region’s biodiversity agenda in consideration of the COVID-19 pandemic and its immediate and long-term consequences,” ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim said in her statement.

Lim stressed the urgency of building more resilient health systems and economic structures and integrating biodiversity concerns into health and socio-economic programmes amid the ongoing global health crisis.

“Clearly, ensuring intersectoral cohesion will not only guarantee the sustainable use of our rich biological resources but will also redound to our well-being and survival and contribute to national and regional economic recovery, as well,” she said.

Lim shared that the ACB, through the ASEAN Heritage Parks Programme, a flagship initiative of the ASEAN, is mobilising necessary support to help maintain the quality of biodiversity attractions in AHPs during this crisis in preparation for the gradual re-opening of tourism.

The ACB executive director likewise commended Viet Nam’s leadership of the ASEAN, particularly in advancing cooperation on environmental protection and biodiversity conservation.

In July, Viet Nam, led by Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Agency and Viet Nam Environment Administration, initiated a national consultation workshop on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework to flesh out inputs and insights on realigning their national biodiversity goals with the global targets.

“This initiative is valuable as the ASEAN lends a strong voice to the development of the landmark biodiversity framework so that it may reflect the context and challenges that the ASEAN is facing in reversing biodiversity loss, tackling outbreaks such as COVID-19,

and responding to the climate emergency,” she said.

An online celebration was held to commemorate ASEAN’s foundation. Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, and Viet Nam’s Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh graced the ceremony organised by the ASEAN Secretariat.

In the Philippines where the ACB is headquartered, the Department of Foreign Affairs held a virtual ASEAN flag-raising ceremony. Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin, Jr. talked about the ASEAN’s response in building back through support for micro, small and medium enterprises, which account for most jobs in the Region.

“Commemorations invite reflection and reconsideration. Here’s a chance to recalibrate programs and activities in the face of new threats and challenges, and the extreme likelihood of their regionally destructive recurrence,” Secretary Locsin said.



Support for Protected Areas in focus at joint webinar of ACB, Indonesia's environment ministry

webinar
ASEAN Heritage Parks and COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts, Responses, and Recovery
 11 September 2020, 14:30 (GMT+7) / 15:30 (GMT+8)

Dr. Theresa Mundita S. Lim Executive Director ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity	Ir. Wiratno, M.Sc. Director General of Conservation on Natural Resources and Ecosystem Ministry of Environment and Forestry Indonesia	Ms. Indra Exploitasia, DVM Director of Biodiversity Conservation Directorate General of Conservation on Natural Resources and Ecosystem Ministry of Environment and Forestry Indonesia	Ms. Angelique Songco Protected Area Superintendent Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park Philippines	Mr. Nguyen Thanh Tam Deputy Head of Planning and Finance Hoang Lien National Park Viet Nam	Mrs. Badiah Achmad Said Head Kepulauan Seribu National Park Indonesia	Mr. Abdul Jalil Abd Rahman Exco Member Bird Group Taman Negara Malaysia	Moderator Prof. Dr. Ani Mardiasuti M.Sc. Department of Forest Resources Conservation and Ecotourism Faculty of Forestry Bogor Agricultural University, Indonesia

Biodiversity experts and ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHPs) managers and representatives engaged in a lively discussion in the webinar titled *ASEAN Heritage Parks and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts, Recovery, and Responses* held 11 September 2020 via Zoom and on the ACB's Facebook page.

The need to further support protected areas amid the ongoing health crisis and towards building the new post-COVID-19 normal was brought into sharp focus in the webinar jointly organised by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) and the Directorate General of Conservation on Natural Resources and Ecosystem (KSDAE) of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) Indonesia.

Among the speakers in the panel were Ir. Wiratno, M.Sc., director-general of KSDAE-MoEF; Indra Exploitasia, DVM, director of Biodiversity Conservation of KSDAE-MoEF; Dr. Theresa Mundita Lim, executive director of the ACB; and managers of protected areas namely, Badiah Achmad Said, of Kepulauan Seribu National Park

of Indonesia; Angelique Songco of Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in the Philippines; and Nguyen Thanh Tam of Hoang Lien Sa Pa National Park in Viet Nam; and representative of the community in Taman Negara National Park in Malaysia, Abdul Jalil Abd Rahman.

Tourism revenues, livelihood

In a discussion moderated by Dr. Ani Mardiasuti M.Sc. of Indonesia's Bogor Agricultural University, park managers shared how the COVID-19 lockdowns have resulted in tourism revenue losses and limited park operations.

Songco said Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park received 139 visitors from March to June this year, a sharp decline from 3,400 visitors in the same period in 2019.

"We are expecting a revenue of USD 21,000 over the total amount that we got last year. We lost this revenue because of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the opportunity to educate and inspire people to support the conservation

of Tubbataha and other marine ecosystems," Songco said.

Taman Negara National Park, which received 86,000 tourists in 2019, was also hit by the pandemic. Fortunately, members of the communities who have lost their livelihood have been receiving aid from the government, said Rahman.

Tam Tanh Nguyen of Hoang Lien Sa Pa National Park also lamented the impacts of COVID-19 on tourism. "Although we were not affected by the virus, it was still difficult for the park management because the lack of tourists means no income," he said.

In her message, ACB Executive Director Lim shared the results of the preliminary online survey conducted by the ACB from 26 April to 16 June. Around 77 per cent of the surveyed park officials of the AHPs said that their protected areas had been closed to tourists and visitors because of the pandemic, while 62 per cent said their protected areas incurred tourism income losses due to the closure of protected areas.



Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park
Photo by Eric Madeja

Lim noted that the enforcement activities of the AHPs have also been affected as field personnel tasked to patrol protected areas experienced limitations due to the lockdowns.

More than 50 per cent of the respondents in the survey said their enforcement activities were affected, while around 48 per cent said they were not affected by the lockdowns.

Mobilising communities

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, park authorities have continued to perform their functions and conduct law enforcement activities.

In Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, marine park rangers have been rotated and deployed on time, while the scheduled management trips and research activities pushed through.

The management of Kepulauan Seribu National Park, on the other hand, tapped the locals to patrol and conduct monitoring in the park as the mobility of its staff was affected by the suspension of public transportation.

"After losing their income from tourism, many locals returned to fishing. As our response, we asked

members of the communities to participate in the patrol and monitoring activities together with staff living on the island," said Badiah Achmad Said.

In return, the locals involved received payment in the form of money and food.

Protected areas as solutions

"Despite grappling with these difficulties, the communities remain protective of their environment and have stepped up to take active roles in monitoring and surveillance activities," Lim said stressing the importance of engaging the indigenous peoples and local communities in preparing for the 'new normal' in ecotourism activities.

Lim said while the local government and the communities have been able to pitch in support for their protected areas, financial support for protected areas remains crucial.

Wiratno, in his remarks, underscored the need to improve monitoring wildlife and emerging zoonotic diseases, along with strengthening the "One Health" strategy, which requires the involvement of all sectors.

"One health" is a collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary approach, which recognises the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment.

"Living in harmony with nature is easy to say. But how to implement this and make it happen is challenging... Forests and other ecosystems are not only sources of recreation. It also provides solutions to our problems," noting Indonesia's bioprospecting efforts, its search for plant and animal species that have medicinal values.

Exploitasia, on the other hand, emphasised biodiversity conservation within and outside protected areas as an important measure in controlling the spread of zoonotic diseases and building a better normal.

The Indonesian official also pointed out the need to alleviate economic pressure on communities around conservation areas to address the increase of illegal activities in protected areas.



Mangrove Arboretum at Kepulauan Seribu National Park
Photo by Claudia Binondo



Hoang Lien National Park
Photo from the Park Management

ASEAN youth launch interactive webinar series on overcoming COVID-19 challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted the world. The crisis's magnitude is intensely felt in all ASEAN Member States, posing significant risks among the youth not just in terms of health but also in the economic and social aspects of their lives. However, the youth play a critical role in curbing the pandemic's impact, specifically in addressing fundamental issues towards building back a better ASEAN.

Organised by the ASEAN Secretariat, the ASEAN Foundation, the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), a four-part webinar series highlighting the ASEAN youth and COVID-19 was officially launched on 27 July 2020.

The interactive webinar series is part of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) COVID-19 Webinar Series with the overarching theme *The Impact of COVID-19 on ASCC Sectors and Post COVID-19 Strategies*, co-led by the Senior Officials Committee for the ASCC (SOCA) Viet Nam and the ASEAN Secretariat.

ASEAN Youth at the Frontlines

With the theme *#ASEANYouth at the Forefront of COVID-19 Response*, the first episode presented ASEAN youths' contributions to COVID-19 response at the community level.

The first part of the 27 July episode featured four young frontliners' challenges and insightful experiences while serving their communities: Marlon Palarion, Dwi Riyan, Nattasuang Phakkawan, and Phan Van Quyen. Angga Dwi Martha from the ASEAN Youth Interface with ASEAN Leaders at the 36th ASEAN Summit, and who is also involved in the Indonesian Task Force on the Acceleration of COVID-19 Response, moderated the webinar.



Dwi Riyan, an environmental educator and the 2020 ASEAN Youth Biodiversity Leader from Indonesia, emphasised that protecting ecosystems would be the best vaccine for the future. "The combination of shrinking habitats and increased unmanaged contact between humans and animals contributes to the emergence of an outbreak," he added.

In Viet Nam, Phan set up a virtual platform for "online vacations" to support ethnic groups affected by the declining tourism industry. Through this initiative, individuals who are currently unable to travel can still learn about Vietnamese local culture and purchase the local products made by the country's various ethnic groups.

Present in the webinar as commentators were: Dr. Ha Thi Minh Duc from Viet Nam's Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs Ministry representing the SOCA Chair; Mr. Somkiao Kingsada of Lao Youth Union and Chair of the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY); and Dr. Mohamed Maliki Mohamed Rapiee from Malaysia's Youth and Sports Ministry representing the Vice-Chair of SOMY.

"Youth nowadays have global mindsets, are more knowledgeable, and passionate to serve the community—a very good combination. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community always values the contribution of youth in realising a people-centred and people-oriented community," stated Dr. Duc.

Resilience of both ASEAN Youth and the Wise

On 24 August 2020, the second instalment of the interactive webinar series was held, with the theme *The #ASEANYouth and the Wise on Resilience in Adversity*.

Youth representatives in the intergenerational discussion were: Nur Diyana Nasriah binti Suhaili, Project EduSparks Leader, eMpowering Youth Across ASEAN programme 2019; Jaryll Pao Sng Ong, Asia Pacific Region Volunteering Officer of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; and Channimol Ky, 2019 ASEAN Youth Biodiversity Leader for Cambodia.

The wise resource persons, on the other hand, were: Dr. Shanti Divaharan, Associate Professor at the

Nanyang Technological University in Singapore; Suhana Sidik, National Executive Board Member of the Malaysian Red Crescent Society; and Dr. Sivananthan Elagupillay, honorary member of Global Tiger Forum of Malaysia and retired division director of Malaysia's Department of Wildlife and National Parks.

"While the COVID-19 has unsettled us in so many ways, it has pressed us forward in looking for what is possible". Dr. Divaharan, who has been an educator for 20 years now, emphasised the need to take stock of the available technology, not necessarily chasing after new ones and building the new infrastructure. She added that with the majority of students with mobile devices at their disposal, teachers could reach out to students even using social networking tools.

Jaryll Pao Sng Ong, who began his volunteering journey when he was 13, said the landscape of volunteerism has changed over the years to respond to modern-day scenarios: the changing nature of work, the global climate, and now the ongoing pandemic.

"We have to relook [at] the ways by which we approach volunteering. There are many innovative things in the way we mobilise people. We have to engage with different partners and develop systems for the people to volunteer online, and we can tap digital skills like designing, data analysis, programming, and development of applications," Ong said.

Speaking about the value of nature conservation, Channimol Ky, a young official of the General Directorate of Administration for Nature Conservation and Protection of the Ministry of Environment in Cambodia, called for a strong action plan that takes a new perspective and considers scenarios over the next 10 years. "We need to think about what will happen in the next 10 years if we use up all our resources. We need to think of innovative ways to reduce

our impacts on the environment," she said.

Dr. Elagupillay, who has devoted most of his life in tiger research, said the pandemic calls a re-examination of our relationship with nature.

"We have to look at involving the youth and the public in appreciating our wildlife. By understanding our nature, we will be better prepared for future pandemics", he said, stressing the importance of real systematic monitoring of wildlife for eventual outbreaks of diseases.

Positivity through the pandemic

"Crisis is the best time to transform challenges into opportunity", shared Louise Mabulo to hundreds of youth participating in the third episode of the interactive webinar series. The third instalment to the webinar series held on 28 September 2020 focused on *#ASEANYouth and COVID-19: Success Stories and the Way Forward*.

The series of online polls during the webinar showed that most of the youth from the 10 ASEAN countries, 46 per cent of whom are students, enjoy studying and interacting with people through the digital platform, while acknowledging that the new normal is challenging and they are most concerned about health.

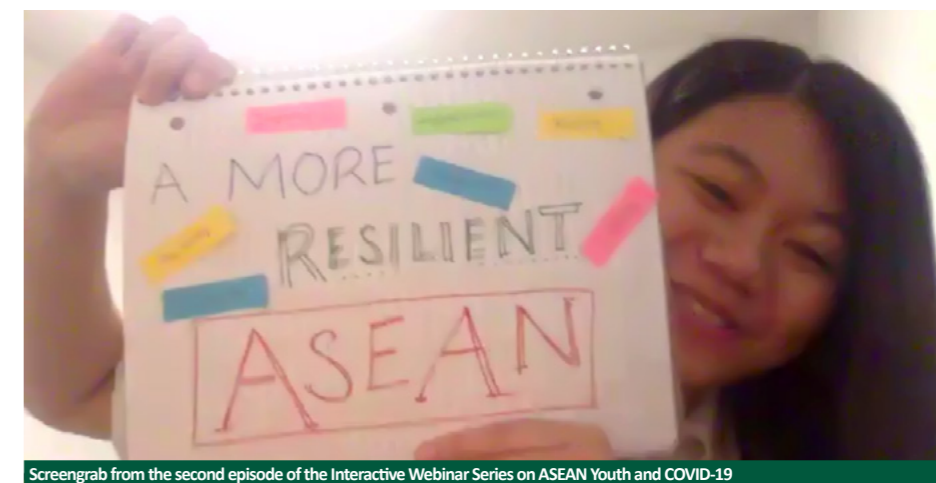
When asked where they want to work in the future, almost half of the audiences responded that they want to set up their

own business. In particular, they aspire to be a successful "socio-preneur" and work in a start-up or social enterprise that will enable them to create more jobs in their community. However, the audience also shared that the lack of funding support, guidance from a mentor, and confidence in their business ideas, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, are major factors that prevent them from fulfilling their entrepreneurial dreams.

Kaelyn Hui Ling Liew, a co-founder of Reef Stakes® Malaysia, advised the youth to sustain their optimism during the new normal to achieve their goals. Kaelyn is an advocate of integrating creativity and fun in empowering individuals to take an active role in environmental conservation.

As one of the facilitators of the webinar, Mika Tan, coordinator of the ASEAN Youth Biodiversity Programme funded by the EU, said the webinar showed the resilience and ability of the youth to effect real change for a better society and environment. Mika added, "in building back better post-COVID-19, the youth have a large role to play as we are resourceful, digitally adept, and natural collaborators wanting to work across silos to achieve a vision of living in harmony with nature".

The concluding episode of the interactive webinar series is expected to take place before the end of the year.



Screengrab from the second episode of the Interactive Webinar Series on ASEAN Youth and COVID-19

Winning photos of nature amid pandemic in ASEAN-wide competition announced

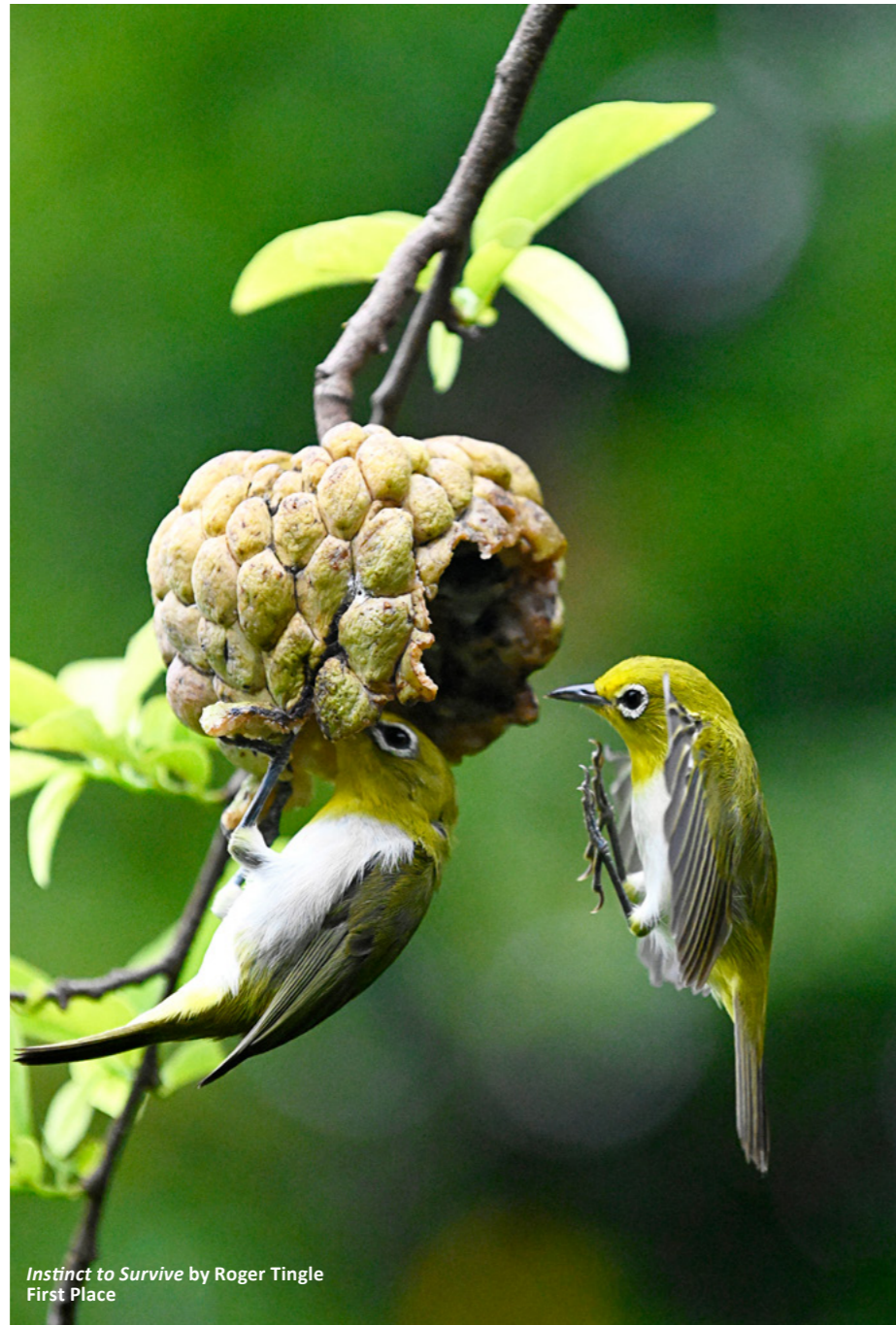
The winning entries of this year's ASEAN-wide photo competition *Zooming in on Biodiversity* showcase the Region's rich biological diversity amid lockdowns and mobility restrictions under the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) announced the winners of the competition after careful evaluation of 20 finalists from the 600 photo entries coming from 10 ASEAN Member States.

The finalists were judged by professional photographers and representatives of international organisations following a set of criteria: relevance to the theme, composition, creativity, and technical excellence.

Roger Tingle's photo captioned *Instinct to Survive* bagged the competition's grand prize in the general category. The winning photo captured two white-eyes pecking on a hanging sugar apple.

In the general category, photos illustrate biodiversity's role in the time of a global health crisis. The category has two sub-themes: *A Glimpse of a Better Normal*, to show life and nature in the time of lockdowns and restrictions on mobility; and *The Macro Life*, to magnify the species that can easily be found in familiar and accessible spaces such as homes and gardens.



Instinct to Survive by Roger Tingle
First Place

This category's second place went to Karl Vincent L. Dimaculangan for his photograph captioned *Spread Your Wide Wings*. After garnering 1,000 positive reactions on the ACB's Facebook page, Dimaculangan also grabbed the People's Choice Award for the General Category.

Meanwhile, Yusuf Bin Madi earned the third place for his photograph *The Strong Bonds*.

For the ASEAN Heritage Park (AHP) Category, Konyi Calisto's *Fisherman Life* won over 52 entries.

Under this category titled *Life Within and Around ASEAN Heritage Parks*, photos highlight the natural and cultural richness of ASEAN Heritage Parks, which showcase unique areas and ecosystems, high ethnobiological significance, and important areas for endangered or precious biodiversity resources. AHPs are home to the region's rich biodiversity and culture.

A couple of fishermen taken in Inlay Lake Wildlife Sanctuary in Myanmar by Hein Htet was the People's Choice for the AHP Category, at 1,000 votes.

The *Zooming In on Biodiversity* photography contest was organised by the ACB with support from the European Union in ASEAN through the *Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN* (BCAMP) Project and the German Development Bank (KfW).

In the general category, the grand prize winner will receive a prize worth USD 1700 while the second and third prize winners will get USD 1200 and USD 600, respectively. The special category winner will get USD 400.

The People's Choice awardee for the general category will receive USD 400. Cash prizes for the photo with the most number of positive reactions under the Special Category will receive USD 200.

The ACB aims to inspire people of ASEAN to appreciate the value of nature as it relates to human well-being and preventing future pandemics by capturing and sharing photos that depict the region's rich and unique biodiversity amidst this time of global health crisis," said ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita S. Lim.



Spread Your Wide Wings
by Karl Vincent L. Dimaculangan
Second Place, People's Choice Award (General Category)



The Strong Bonds by Yusuf Bin Madi
Third Place



Fisherman Life by Konyi Calisto
AHP Category Winner



A Couple of Fishermen by Hein Htet
People's Choice Award, AHP Category



A Stink Bug on a Zinnia in My Garden
by Nurpinto Hadi, Finalist



Hearts
by Kyaw Naing Lin,
Finalist



ZOOMING in on
BIODIVERSITY

ASEAN-wide Photo Contest

Outlook remains hopeful for ASEAN biodiversity targets



With a few months left before the 15th Meeting of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) of the CBD COP15 in May 2021, the ASEAN region is continuing its work to achieve some of its regional targets for biodiversity conservation. The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), as the centre for excellence and node for biodiversity conservation in the ASEAN region, is working closely with the ASEAN Member States (AMS) to advance the Region’s efforts.

“We are still optimistic that we can accomplish more in the remaining months,” ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim said at the virtual meeting Dialogue for Potential Indigenous and *Community Conserved Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures Sites* held on 10 September 2020.

The ACB joins the CBD in the intensive and final effort to address

the Aichi Target 11 implementation through a Virtual Meeting Series which will be conducted from September to November 2020. The Virtual Meeting Series on Aichi Target 11 Implementation in the ASEAN region is aimed at filling data gaps and updating the AMS’ SMART Action Plans towards achieving the regional biodiversity target.

Aichi Target 11, which aims for conserving at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water and at least 10 per cent marine and coastal areas, is one of the on-track biodiversity targets of the CBD. As of June 2020, ASEAN’s terrestrial area coverage is at 13.25 per cent, while marine area coverage is at 3.43 per cent, thereby contributing to the total global coverage, estimated at 7 per cent for marine areas and 15 per cent for terrestrial areas.

Executive Secretary of the CBD Elizabeth Mrema, at the opening of 24th virtual meeting of the

Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) and launch of the fifth edition of *Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO-5)* on 15 September, however, made a sobering announcement that all the targets identified in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020, also known as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, will not be fully met within the 2020 deadline.

“In the final reckoning, the world has not met the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, nor are we on track to reach the 2050 vision for biodiversity,” said Mrema. “Biodiversity is declining at an unprecedented rate and the pressure driving this decline is intensifying.”

The GBO-5 is the CBD’s flagship publication that serves as a “final report card” on the status and progress towards the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. The information from the report was culled from the Sixth National Reports of member

CBD countries, as well as from a wide range of ‘indicators, research studies, and assessments.’

Representatives of the AMS and the ACB participated in the four-day virtual meeting of SBSTTA.

The ACB is pinning its hope on the contribution of the indigenous and community conserved areas (ICCAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) in implementing Aichi Biodiversity Target 11. Both ICCAs and OECMs are biodiversity-rich areas such as community-managed sacred grounds, rivers, lakes and ponds and forests which can potentially augment terrestrial and marine protected area coverage in the ASEAN region.

At the same virtual meeting, Ms. Joji Cariño, senior policy advisor of the Forest Peoples’ Programme shared how indigenous and traditional practices are inherently aimed at conserving and using natural resources.

“From the vantage point of the indigenous peoples, the conservation and restoration of nature will go hand in hand with the revitalisation of our cultures. And this will be our contribution to the conservation of biodiversity in the Region.”

Dr. Retno Suratni, Senior Official from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of Indonesia, cited the government’s legal recognition of indigenous peoples’ communities, along with their customary laws and systems.

For instance, the Indonesian government is working closely with the Working Group on ICCAs (WGII) in Indonesia, a coalition of national civil society organisations working with ICCA keepers and guardians of customary forests. Dr. Suratni shared that the WGII pushed for the recognition of 2.9 million hectares of Adat (customary) forests, 500,000 hectares of which were approved by the government in the indicative map.

“In terms of Aichi Target 11, the government was able to establish more than 20 million hectares in marine protected areas, meaning it has already exceeded the 10 per cent requirement of the Aichi Target,” Dr. Suratni said. “But we need about 10 million hectares more for the terrestrial protected areas.”


Dr. Sarat Babu Gidda, Head of Biodiversity Science, Policy and Governance, and Senior Programme Management Officer of the CBD Secretariat emphasised the importance of addressing the qualitative elements as it invariably impacts also the quantitative

aspects. “Any quantitative increase will have an implication for improving the coverage of ecological representations, interconnection with other areas, and integration into wider landscape and seascape.”

Meanwhile, the ACB announced the forthcoming release of the *Third Edition of the ASEAN Biodiversity Outlook (ABO3)*, a comprehensive report on the state of the Region’s biodiversity, the evaluation of the ASEAN’s efforts, and the crucial role of subregional cooperation in achieving the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 and the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Similar to the GBO-5, the ABO3 also draws from the Sixth National Reports of the AMS, as well as from the wealth of best available scientific resources. The ABO3 provides the regional context commonly shared by the AMS, which will serve to guide in developing and improving regional strategies for biodiversity conservation.

Lim said the information and knowledge from resources such as the GBO-5 and soon, the ABO3, will add value to the development and implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.



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ASEAN delves into economics of conserving biodiversity

Biodiverse areas produce ecosystem services that are indispensable to economic and social development. Assessing them informs decision-makers better about the value and priorities for conserving natural capital.

Newly released policy briefs of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), in collaboration with the EU under the *Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN* (BCAMP) project, underscore the need to address knowledge and research gaps in ecosystems services valuation in ASEAN Member States (AMS).

The *Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Assessment and Economic Analysis for Management, Policy and Innovative Financing Applications* (BESA++) policy briefs present the results of national and site-level stock-taking activities conducted in five AMS, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, as part of the interventions of the BCAMP project. These activities assessed the existing knowledge and awareness of protected area managers and policymakers and managers, on BESA and other economic analysis applications in biodiversity conservation.

“Knowing the full and true economic value of ecosystem services will help decision-makers arrive at win-win solutions both for the economy and the environment. This knowledge provides a deeper understanding of what a nation stands to lose from activities that alter, if not destroy, natural ecosystems”, ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim said.

Consultation workshops on the results of the stocktaking activities in the five AMS were held from July to September 2019 to gather inputs from the government, academic institutions, and non-governmental organisations.

‘Wealth of research data’

In Thailand, data and information have been used to support studies addressing specific policy issues, the BESA++ brief said.

A 2019 mangrove study,^[1] for example, looked into the changes in land use and mangrove coverage using the baseline data of Thailand’s Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR). “Opportunity costs of conserving mangroves”, or the costs incurred when mangroves are not conserved, were also analysed based on the land price data from Thailand’s Department of Treasury.

Results of the study helped determine the effectiveness of preventing the conversion of mangroves to alternative uses.

While there is a wealth of data and studies, the policy brief noted that researchers and protected area managers and policymakers must closely collaborate to maximise the uptake of existing research.

“Research results can be used to inform more realistic conservation, sustainable development planning, and target setting”, the brief said.



An entry into the *Zooming in on Biodiversity*, an ASEAN-wide photo competition held by the ACB, with support from the EU. Photo by Aung Ko Oo

^[1] Nabangchang, O. and Vincent, J.R. (2019). The Economic Value of Mangroves Ecosystem in Thailand. [A study commissioned by the Thailand Research Fund].

Thailand has a combined 107,290.35 square kilometres of protected areas, equivalent to 21 per cent of the total land area of the country.

Role in establishing protected areas

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, valuation studies have been used to support the establishment of new state parks, such as the case of the establishment of the Selangor State Park, which is the third largest in Peninsular Malaysia, covering 108,000 hectares.

Established as a state park in 2007 under the National Forestry Act Enactment 2005 of Selangor, and managed by the Forestry Department of Selangor, this natural forested area protects some of Selangor’s most vital resources.

Prior to the park’s establishment, various uses of the forest areas were valued, and a trade-off analysis between protective forest reserve, particularly as water catchment functions, versus production forest reserve options, was undertaken.

While there are many studies on value estimates of ecosystem services in protected areas, few

of them have led to substantial increases in the rates for the enjoyment of these services, or the sharing of excess profits among natural resource-based producers, the government, and communities.

For instance, despite consumers’ willingness to pay higher rates, prescribed entrance fees in protected areas have not increased. Other factors, however, come into play, such as the approval process for raising fees in forest recreational areas at the state government level.

Malaysia has established networks of both terrestrial and marine protected areas with a total size of 5.87 million hectares to conserve nationally and globally significant biodiversity.

Wider scope of assessment

The policy brief on the Philippines noted that ecosystem services assessments conducted in the country are narrow in breadth and indicate a limited capacity at the protected area level.

Based on the review of 768 publications in the Philippines, studies were found to be disposed towards resource use assessment and recreation services. The published studies mostly considered a few ecosystem services instead of looking into multiple uses and assessing their trade-offs.

“Recent development of tools for ecosystem services accounting should now provide the basis for protected area managers to start accounting for these various ecosystem services”, it said.

According to the policy brief, capacity building in the use of these tools should be undertaken in collaboration with academic institutions, which are in a better position to invest in training their constituents and establish information systems.



Elephants in Nam Phoui National Protected Area
Photo by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Lao PDR

The Philippines has 526 identified protected areas, of which 240 covering 7.15 million hectares are managed by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. The rest are under different types of authority and management.

Knowledge, capacity gaps

Assessments in the five AMS showed key actors working to improve management and financing of protected areas have limited knowledge on ecosystem services valuation, economic analysis, and innovative financing mechanisms.

In the Philippines, an online survey for protected area managers, researchers, government officers, and faculty and staff of academic institutions, yielded a low response rate due to the “lack of knowledge on the topics presented”. Of the 317 potential respondents, 37 participated in the survey. The overall knowledge and skill on ecosystems valuation was found to be below that of a “novice”.

Similarly, results of a survey conducted in Cambodia showed most of the respondents are either novices (35 to 46 per cent) or have no knowledge (31 to 36 per cent) on ecosystem services measurement and accounting.

More than 50 per cent of the government officers in the

survey expressed the need to understand how to account for and value cultural, provisioning, and supporting services of ecosystems. Government officers also expressed the need for training on conservation financing, especially on regulatory instruments of financing and fiscal financing.

The researcher respondents, on the other hand, said that greater knowledge on the standardised methodologies and approaches is required.

Cambodia has a large remaining expanse of tropical forests, and its system of protected areas and corridors covers 42 per cent of the country.

According to the Lao PDR policy brief, on the other hand, insufficient knowledge and skills on assessing economic values of biodiversity and ecosystem services were “one of the most important factors accounting for the loss of forestry resources and biodiversity”.

Lao PDR has rich forest resources and biodiversity, with one of the highest proportions of forest cover in Southeast Asia.

In a similar survey, most Lao respondents indicated that they have limited knowledge and skills on BESA, including baseline inventory and species-specific, change, indicator, and resource assessment.

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ASEAN and UN CBD Secretariat in a dialogue at virtual ACB 2020



Delegations from the ASEAN Member States (AMS) and the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) met on 23 September in a virtual dialogue on the landmark post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) at the kick-off event of the *Third ASEAN Conference on Biodiversity* or ACB 2020.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) and the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (KeTSA) Malaysia launched the series of virtual sessions that will be held monthly this year in the run-up to a physical conference to be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, before the 15th meeting of the Conference of Parties to the CBD next year.

Themed *Towards 2050: Living in Harmony with Nature*, the virtual ACB 2020 sessions kicked off with the dialogue between the ASEAN and the CBD and on ACB's month-long celebration of its 15th year anniversary.

"This dialogue is intended as a platform for the ASEAN Member States' biodiversity sector policymakers to engage directly with the CBD as well as the co-chair of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) to enhance understanding on the post-2020 GBF with a focus on several priority areas including mainstreaming, resource mobilisation and nature-based solutions," Dr. Khairul Naim Adham, undersecretary of the Biodiversity Management Division of KeTSA, said in his welcome remarks.

Executive Director of the ACB Theresa Mundita Lim said the meeting was planned ahead of the United Nations Summit on Biodiversity, which will be convened by the President of the UN General Assembly at the level of heads of states and governments on 30 September 2020.

"As we move forward, the post-2020 global biodiversity framework

becomes central to our common objectives of putting biodiversity on a path to recovery through halting biodiversity loss and finding solutions in nature," Lim said noting that it is in the interest of the Region to arrive at the best agreement under the new biodiversity deal.

Also in the panel were CBD Secretariat Executive Secretary Elizabeth Maruma Mrema; Basile van Havre, co-chair of the Open Ended Working Group on the post-2020 GBF; and Ky Anh Nguyen, director of Sustainable Development Directorate of the ASEAN Secretariat's Socio-Cultural Department.

Facilitating support

Mrema, in her message, commended the AMS' contributions to the development of the post-2020 GBF and said the CBD Secretariat "counts on the ACB" to continue its facilitating support."

"The CBD Secretariat looks forward to continue collaborating with the ACB and the ASEAN Member States in the preparation of a robust and ambitious post-2020 GBF... The ACB and the CBD Secretariat collaborate on several other issues relevant to the post-2020 GBF," Mrema added that progress has been made in the efforts to develop the long-term strategic approach to mainstreaming, which is equally linked to the post-2020 GBF.

Mrema also encouraged the AMS to strengthen their National Clearing-House Mechanisms, which provide effective information services to facilitate the implementation of the national biodiversity strategies and action plans, an important role in accelerating and coordinating efforts in biodiversity conservation.

Resource mobilisation

The meeting also brought to light key issues brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as mobilising resources for biodiversity conservation.

"The global policy responses to the pandemic are heading to a series of budgetary implications, particularly for developing countries. In light of the pandemic, mobilising additional resources for biodiversity will not be an easy task", Mrema said stressing that resource mobilisation is an integral element of the framework.

She said the panel of experts tapped by the CBD reported that significant resources must be drawn for biodiversity conservation in the next decade.

Some representatives of the AMS, however, noted possible difficulties in getting additional resources to meet the new targets under the post-2020 framework due to the realignment of funds for COVID-19 response.

Dr. Naing Zaw Htun of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation

of Myanmar pointed out that the pandemic could negatively affect resource mobilisation or international financial flow to the biodiversity conservation.

Van Havre, in his response, said that as the global economic growth depends on biodiversity, nations must invest in nature conservation as part of their economic investments.

In his presentation, the OEWG co-chair provided updates on the zero draft of the new framework and how its implementation will reduce threats to biodiversity and address the needs of the people.

ASEAN inputs

In its intervention, Singapore stressed the need to identify quantitative indicators to measure the progress in the implementation of the post-2020 framework and involve all levels of participation in the processes.

"We cannot change what we cannot measure. Relevant quantitative indicators to measure our progress should be identified", said Dr. Lena Chan, Senior Director of the International Biodiversity Conservation Division of Singapore's National Parks.


Indonesia, meanwhile, proposed expanding the focus areas of the

AMS to include saving the genetic resources of species, given that the solution to the global pandemic will be closely related to the exploration of genetic resources from wild plant and animal species in nature.

This should be done "in accordance with the effort to share a fair and equal benefit from its use to the [original] state and people, who originally own this knowledge, information and material", Nining Ngudi Purnamaningtyas, deputy director for biodiversity conservation of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of Indonesia, said.

In his closing remarks, Ky Anh Nguyen expressed hope that the voice of ASEAN would serve as an important consideration in the global negotiations for this ambitious strategy for biodiversity conservation.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has really brought our relationship with the natural world to light. As we seek to build back better, let us continue to highlight the vital role of nature-based solutions through cross-sectoral collaboration and multi-stakeholder engagement, and to ensure that action on biodiversity conservation is part of our resilient and sustainable recovery efforts," Nguyen said.



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Lao respondents have some knowledge and skills in provisioning services and the estimation of their market price, but “little” on regulating, cultural, and habitat services. They also said they possess some knowledge and skills in conservation financing. However, most lack experience in developing financing mechanisms.

Commenting on the BESA++ briefs, Enrico Strampelli, Head of Cooperation for the EU delegation in the Philippines, said: “The true value of biodiversity and ecosystem services to the wealth of a nation and to the well-being of future generations is often overlooked by decision makers, or underestimated against immediate economic interests. In the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, we know, now

more than ever, what could be the final price to pay for forest degradation and wildlife trafficking”.

Lim said the ACB will consider the recommendations from the BESA++ policy briefs in its future policy actions with the AMS.

“What is common in the reports is the need to improve the competency and skills in valuing biodiversity and ecosystem services, and effective communication of data and information to policymakers and stakeholders”, Lim said.

All the BESA++ policy briefs are available at the ACB website (https://aseanbiodiversity.org/key_programme/biodiversity-conservation-and-management-of-protected-areas-in-asean-bcamp/).



BCAMP
Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN

Read more about the project



ACB showcases biodiversity conservation work in virtual exhibit

The ASEAN region finds ways to defy limitations spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic to unite and celebrate significant strides. On 13 August, the 3rd EU-ASEAN Scholarship Day pushed through virtually, highlighting the EU’s development cooperation projects with the ASEAN and the scholarship opportunities for ASEAN youth.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) took part in the event, with its digital booth showcasing its extensive work on biodiversity



conservation. The virtual display highlighted the ASEAN Heritage Parks Programme and the Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN (BCAMP) project. Under this initiative, the ACB and the EU are working towards significantly reducing biodiversity loss in the Region through the conservation and effective management of protected areas.

EU Ambassador to the ASEAN, H.E. Igor Driesmans formally opened the event, reiterating the need for strong and meaningful cooperation between the ASEAN and the EU, especially in the time of the COVID-19 crisis.

“For EU, we have chosen the path of international cooperation to tackle this pandemic because we know that no one will be safe from the virus until the whole world is safe,” said Driesmans.

“Biodiversity provides us with various ecosystems services – food, water, air, and even socio-cultural services,” said Nheden Amiel Sarne, ACB’s BCAMP project coordinator in his presentation about the BCAMP project. “Our communities rely on nature for subsistence. Hence biodiversity conservation must be of everyone’s concern.”

“The EU and ASEAN share common goals and commitments of safeguarding the environment. As our ally, the EU has been supportive to the ASEAN Member States and the ACB in our work and programmes on biodiversity conservation,” remarked ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim.

“We congratulate the EU for the success of this event, and we look forward to our closer cooperation and an even more robust partnership in the years to come,” she said.