



World Wetlands Day 2005 -- Malaysia

29 March 2005

Malaysia

"WONDERS OF WETLAND: BEAUTIFUL MANGROVE" EVENT IN KOTA KINABALU CITY BIRD SANCTUARY

Mangroves ecosystems are depicted in many unflattering perspectives which notably it was viewed as unproductive and mosquito infested swamp area that is the least beneficial to mankind. Mangroves were mostly demolished and were land filled to be made into development areas for housing project, factories and even dump sites. Contrary to these views, mangroves are in fact undeniable unique ecosystems that successfully thriving on hostile environment with alternating water conditions that constantly changes on a daily basis.

Mangroves are resilient forests that face the change of tides near coastal areas with the instability of the mangrove mud and lack of oxygen within its soil. Being a unique ecosystem itself, the mangroves also have unique wildlife and vegetations with special adaptations enabling their survival within the mangroves condition. One of the functions of the mangroves contributes abundantly to coastal land protection against erosion caused by wave pressure and ultimately as a protective barrier for coastal communities living near the mangrove forest as it did during the tsunami catastrophe for some parts of Thailand and Sumatra. Despite of all these features, as it is most are still in the dark when it comes to mangroves ecosystems and its usefulness to man. Therefore a pressing urgency was raised in the need to revamp the negative mindset of all and to bring about knowledge and appreciation on mangroves as a whole before all mangroves on earth may face extinction due to man's ignorance and greed.

Kota Kinabalu City Bird Sanctuary, formerly known as the Likas Wetland Sanctuary is currently undertaking the role of promoting the awareness on wetland in particular mangrove ecosystem in Sabah, Malaysia. The Bird Sanctuary was primarily initiated to restore and conserve a 24 hectare of deteriorated mangrove patch and now functions as an environmental education centre strives to increase the public awareness on wetland ecosystem emphasizing on mangrove ecosystem. With the centre located within a mangrove patch which is adjacent about 4 km to the city, the Bird Sanctuary fully utilized this advantage of close proximity with the urban communities to spread out the awareness of the importance of the mangrove forest and aims to educate the public on the importance of wetlands and in particular the mangrove.

Bird Sanctuary had recently held a public awareness event called the "Wonders of Wetland: Beautiful Mangroves" in conjunction with World Wetland Day on the 5th March 2005. World Wetland Day is an annual event celebrated in the Bird Sanctuary to foster deeper appreciation for the wetlands as a whole. This event also coincided with the 5th Anniversary of Kota Kinabalu City Day and was the last concluding event for the overall 2 month celebration for Kota Kinabalu. Bird Sanctuary took this opportunity to include the participation of other government and non government agencies in this event to foster spirit of unity and comradeship in spreading relevant environmental awareness. Assistant Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister, Datuk Hj Karim Hj Bujang officiated the event had maintained the government's support for the preservation of mangroves in line with its beneficial good for the future generation. The event itself attracted about 400 attendees which included school students and the public. The event had showcased the importance of mangrove ecosystem and its conservation for the next generation with the officiating of the new interpretative signage funded by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment of Sabah followed by secondary student performances from All Saints Secondary School, Bahang Secondary School and St Francis Convent Secondary School. Supporting activities were the Mangrove Race, a perfect learning experience for the adventurous through a fast paced search for clues within a limited time frame in the mangrove of Bird Sanctuary while an extensive environmental exhibition by participating agencies catered more for the benefit of the laid back learners during the event. This event was supported by Toyota Motors Corporation Japan as one of the activities under the "Joining Hands Across Water: Borneo Wetland Centre", a 3 year project carried out by the Bird Sanctuary since 2003. The Bird Sanctuary is currently active in conducting environmental education programme and environmental related events in order to spread the message on being aware of the importance of the mangroves as well as changing attitudes and

viewpoints on the lesser known mangrove ecosystem.

The total number of visitors to the Bird Sanctuary was 47,000 visitors up till February this year from both local and international since its initial opening in 2000. The Bird Sanctuary is modestly facilitated with a main office cum environmental education centre, laboratory for children, an upcoming exhibition hall and the outdoor interpretative trail within the mangrove forest in the centre.

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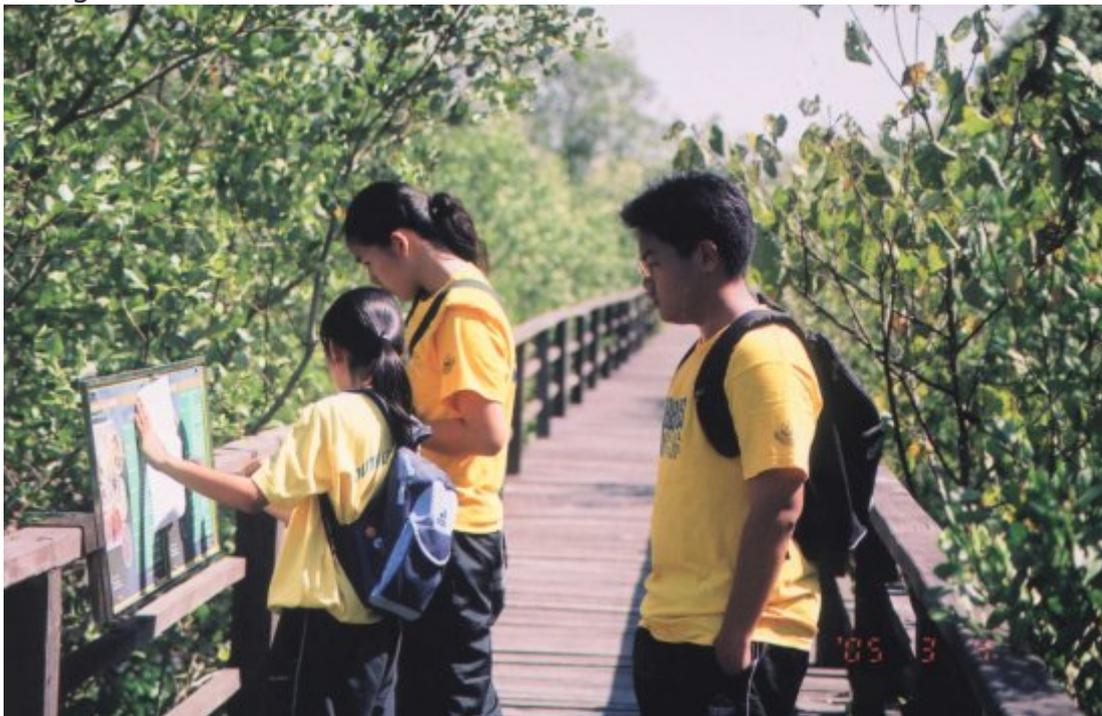
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Mayor of Kota Kinabalu City, Datuk Illiyas Ibrahim (on the left) presented a momento of appreciation to Datuk Hj Karim Hj Bujang, Deputy Minister of the State Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment (on the right)



Mangrove sketch by All Saints Secondary School during "Wonders of Wetland: Beautiful Mangrove" event



Students finding the answers from given clues on new interpretative signages during the Mangrove Race

"There's wealth in wetland diversity
- don't lose it!"

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