

WORLD WETLANDS DAY CELEBRATION 2011

Wetlands Adventure: An Exploration to Mangrove Forest

Kuala Gula, Perak, Malaysia

23 February 2011



Global Environment
Centre



Background

World Wetlands Day (WWD) is celebrated internationally on 2nd February each year. It marks the date of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands, also called the Ramsar Convention, in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Each year since 1997, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and groups of citizens at all levels of the community have taken advantage of the opportunity to undertake actions aimed at raising public awareness of wetland values and benefits in general and the Ramsar Convention in particular. From 1997 to 2007, the Convention's Web site has posted reports from more than 95 countries of WWD activities of all sizes and shapes, from lectures and seminars, nature walks, children's art contests, sampan races, and community clean-up days, to radio and television interviews and letters to newspapers, to the launch of new wetland policies, new Ramsar sites, and new programmes at the national level.

Every year, there is a special theme for the WWD. The theme for WWD 2011 is *Wetlands and Forests*, with the slogan *Forest for water and wetlands*. It is particularly appropriate since the United Nations has declared 2011 the International Year of Forests. The Ramsar Convention takes this opportunity to focus on a particular type of forest - those that are often or always wet, such as mangrove forests, flooded forests and peat swamp forests. Malaysia, as a country with all kinds of forested wetlands, plays an important role in promoting the concepts of WWD. In Perak state of Peninsular Malaysia, Kuala Gula is a beautiful mangrove estuary with amazing diversity of flora and fauna. It is one of the best-known bird sanctuaries in the whole of Asia. The local people mostly rely on fishery resources, which directly or indirectly benefited from the mangrove wetlands. Undoubtedly, celebration of WWD in this place brings significant meaning to the locals, especially the young generation.

Since 2007, WWD is celebrated annually in the Malay community of Kuala Gula under the organisation of Global Environment Centre (GEC). However, the event is still considered new to the local Chinese community, which has a major population of about 2,000 people. This year, for the first time, the only Chinese primary school in Kuala Gula, SJK(C) Yuk Hwa is in collaboration with GEC and Friends of Mangrove (Sahabat Hutan Bakau) to organise the

celebration of WWD 2011. It is definitely a good starting point for WWD to become a regular event in the Chinese community of Kuala Gula.

Objective

- 1) To raise awareness of the importance of wetlands among the Chinese students of Kuala Gula.
- 2) To expose the students to the local efforts of mangrove conservation as well as the knowledge of mangrove ecosystem.

Organizer

- 1) SJK(C) Yuk Hwa:
 - Lau Mei Ling (coordinator & guiding teacher)
 - Tan Guak Thor (guiding teacher)
 - Tan Hai Kuang (guiding teacher)
 - Tan Cheen Miao (guiding teacher)
- 2) Global Environment Centre: Wong Yun Yun (coordinator & mangrove educator)
- 3) Friends of Mangrove:
 - Zakaria b. Mohamed (mangrove nursery facilitator)
 - Samad b. Atan (mangrove nursery facilitator)
 - Norhasikin bt. Husin (mangrove nursery facilitator)
 - Normala bt. Mohd Nor (mangrove nursery facilitator)
 - Salmah bt. Ahmad (photographer)

Participant

Student member of the Nature Club of SJK(C) Yuk Hwa
- 19 male and 15 female = 34 participated students

Programme Schedule

Date: 23rd February 2011

- 1.20 pm – registration of attendance at school library
- 1.30 pm – opening speech by the nature club’s guiding teacher, Ms. Lau Mei Ling
- 1.40 pm – set off to Kuala Gula mangrove walkway
- 1.45 pm – visiting mangrove nursery (facilitated by Sahabat Hutan Bakau)
- 2.00 pm – nature walk guided by GEC mangrove educator, Ms. Wong Yun Yun
- 2.20 pm – back to school library
- 2.25 pm – giving certificate of attendance to the student representative
- 2.30 pm – taking group photo
- 2.35 pm - dismiss

Activity Description

For the first time, World Wetlands Day (WWD) was celebrated in the Chinese community of Kuala Gula at SJK(C) Yuk Hwa on 23rd February 2011. On that Wednesday afternoon, the student members of the Nature Club of SJK(C) Yuk Hwa were gathered at school library by 1.20 pm. The students registered their names with the teachers-in-charge for joining the outdoor activity of WWD 2011.



Mr. Tan Hai Kuang, the vice-principal of SJK(C) Yuk Hwa (second from left), gave a helping hand during the registration session. (photo by Y.Y. Wong)

After the registration, the club's advisor, Ms. Lau Mei Ling was giving an opening speech to welcome the participants as well as to introduce the WWD. She mentioned the meaning behind the celebration of WWD and shared the information regarding the importance of wetlands. Before she ended the talk, she kindly reminded the students to take extra cautions while visiting the mangrove forest.



The nature club's advisor, Ms. Lau Mei Ling (wearing brown shirt) was giving the opening speech for the WWD celebration at SJK(C) Yuk Hwa of Kuala Gula. (photo by Y.Y. Wong)



At about 1.40 pm, all teachers and students were ready to depart from school to the nearby mangrove forest. There were four teachers; each led a group of 8 or 9 students ranged from standard 3 to 6. The teachers and students took a few minutes cycling to reach the mangrove walkway. It was a hot sunny afternoon but the weather did not stop the students from getting excited with their mangrove adventure.

The students walked with smiling faces while on the way to the mangrove nursery. (photo by S. Ahmad)

The first stop was visiting the mangrove nursery managed by Friends of Manrove (SHB). The on-duty members of SHB were introducing the nursery to the students. They briefly explained the operation of this nursery as well as the characteristics of planted mangrove species. The curious students were giving much attention as most of them never or seldom make direct contact with mangrove trees.



Mr. Zakaria, the president of SHB (wearing yellow T-shirt) was explaining the characteristics of mangrove seeds to a group of students in the nursery. (photo by S. Ahmad)



The educator, Ms. Wong Yun Yun (wearing brown cap) was guiding the students to observe the stilt roots of *Rhizophora* trees, a major species in the visited mangrove wetland. (photo by S. Ahmad)

After learning the mangrove species at SHB nursery, they headed to the next stop, a viewing platform not far from the nursery. The mangrove educator, Ms. Wong Yun Yun, was guiding the students to observe the unique environment of mangrove forest. The students were asked to quietly check on the soil condition, tree roots, viviparous seeds and various animals that live around. The fast learning students were soon pointed out the mudskipper, telescope snail, tree climbing crabs, silver leaf monkey and many more.

After a short discussion on the importance of mangrove ecosystem, the students were following their teachers to go back to the school library. During the closing session, the vice-principal, Mdm. Tan Guak Thor was invited to give the certificate of attendance to the student representative, Teoh Chun Chang. Taking group photo with the newly registered “mangrove explorers” marked the end of the WWD celebration at SJK(C) Yuk Hwa, Kuala Gula.



Mdm. Tan Guak Thor (middle) handed the certificate to the student representative, Teoh Chun Chang (left). (photo by Y.Y. Wong)



Yes! We are the young mangrove explorers of Kuala Gula! (photo by Z. Mohamed)

Conclusion

In conjunction with the World Wetland Day 2011, a mangrove nature walk which aimed at exposing the primary school students to the wetlands of Kuala Gula was organised. The programme provided an opportunity to the participants to learn about the natural heritage of Kuala Gula by walking into the mangrove forest. They were brought to witness the local efforts of protecting mangroves as well as to observe the biodiversity of wetland ecosystem. Both teachers and students of SJK(C) Yuk Hwa enjoyed the field trip. Eventually, the event conducted successfully and this is a step further towards the long-term goal of creating environmental awareness among the young generation. Therefore, it should not be the end of the programme but a beginning for a series of educational activities which enhance the conservation and sustainable management of the wetland forests in Kuala Gula.

References:

http://www.ramsar.org/cda/en/ramsar-activities-/main/ramsar/1-63-78_4000_0__

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