FIELD RESEARCHERS AT HIGH RISK FOR COVID-19 INFECTION

We have been working on the wildlife research issues in the field and laboratory for the last three decades in Malaysia. Most of the research works involve handling of wildlife, gather all morphological data and physiological measurements, collect samples and voucher specimens for future references. Rhinoceros, elephant, seladang and primates are the large animals found in the forested areas. Species of bats and rats were captured by trapping in the caves and subterranean sites around limestone forests in Malaysia. Researchers, students and laboratory assistants are directly involved from setting up traps, collecting animals and curation of samples for further analyses at wet and/or dry laboratories.

The COVID-19 disease outbreak started in December 2019 in China and first imported case in Malaysia was reported in January 2020. Only recently that UMT has published a protocol for laboratory research in the face of COVID-19 disease. In reflecting on our previous experiences, the wildlife field researchers and students are more susceptible to the exposure of potentially pathogenic vectors, fungus, bacteria and viruses during sampling sessions in the forest and caves. It would be prudent for all wildlife field researchers and students be properly protected for potential pathogens in the form of clothing, facial protective wear, vaccination and covered by insurance. A standard operating procedure for the field wildlife researchers must be developed for Malaysia as soon as possible.

The author standing near a ceiling high pile of bat guano in Gomantong Cave. The guano and bats are potential reservoir of coronavirus and other pathogens (Source: www.batcon.org; Fall 2015).
There are hundred of thousands of insect eating bats found in a cave that are potential reservoir of pathogenic coronavirus (Source: www.batcon.org; Fall 2015).

UMT research students Azuan Roslan, Nur Syahirah Wahap and Grace Pousin installing wildlife trapping instrument in Setiu Wetland without suitable safety wear and shields (Photograph by Azuan Roslan).

The author (with brown hat) and research students installing canopy traps without proper safety protections (Photograph by Azuan Roslan).

Sources: Prof. Dato’ Dr Mohd Tajuddin Abdullah, abdullahmt@gmail.com Institute of Tropical Biodiversity and Sustainable Development (BIO-D TROPIKA) UMT; Dr. Hisham Atan Edinur, edinur@usm.my, School of Health Sciences, Health Campus, USM; Azuan Roslan, azuan@ketsa.gov.my, Biodiversity and Forestry Management Division, Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources.

Related publications can be downloaded at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303960010_A_Frightful_Stairway_-_Cave_bats_in_Borneo & https://www.researchgate.net/publication/278156619_The_Large_Bat_Caves_of_Malaysian_Borneo_2007
KIMA THE THREATENED GIANTS

Giant clam or locally known as kima or kerang gergasi is one of the key attractions of coral reefs. Human activities such as harvesting the clam for food, aquarium trade and as souvenirs have adversely impacted the survival of the clams and this scenario is compounded by environmental degradations. Currently it is listed in Appendix II of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) where international trade is only possible with appropriate export permits. In Malaysia, the giant clams are protected under Fisheries Act 1985 and Fisheries Regulations (Control of Endangered Species of Fish 1999 (Amendment) 2008).

Giant clam is from family Tridacninae and in Malaysian waters, both genus of giant clams (Tridacna and Hippopus) can be found. The clams can be easily identified by its colourful mantle (flesh) including green, blue, purple, brown and orange. The colourful mantle is due to unique photosynthetic symbiotic zooxanthellae algae (Symbiodinium sp.) that provided food to the clam and allow it to grow to such a large sizes.

Currently, Institute of Tropical Aquaculture and Fisheries (AKUATROP), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) is looking into the genetic connectivity and species distribution of the giant clams in Marine Park and non-Marine Park islands across Peninsular Malaysia. Breeding efforts for giant clams were carried out in AKUATROP hatchery and more detail study will be taken under the giant clam project. Further project to breed the giant clams from Pulau Bidong (UMT research station) for conservation and restocking purposes will be carried out together with Centre of Research and Field Service, UMT.

Conservation efforts including establishment of marine protected areas together with the study on population connectivity and genetic diversity of these threatened animals will provide much needed information to properly manage them.

Source: Norainy Mohd Husin norainyhusin@umt.edu.my INSTITUTE OF TROPICAL AQUACULTURE AND FISHERIES (AKUATROP); & Yusri Yusuf yusriyusuf@umt.edu.my FACULTY OF SCIENCE & MARINE ENVIRONMENT
BUY MALAYSIAN MADE PRODUCTS, SUPPORT LOCAL ECONOMY - LECTURER

KUALA TERENGGANU, April 28 -- Malaysians should spend prudently by buying locally made products during and after the Movement Control Order (MCO) to help stimulate the domestic economy, said an academician.

Senior lecturer at the Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Development at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Dr Hazman Samsudin said in this way, the people would be able to save the country from an economic crisis.

He said spending the ‘Bantuan Prihatin Nasional’ (BPN) money wisely not only meant spending without wastage, but doing so could also have a multiplier effect on the domestic economy.

Buying Malaysian-made goods, will provide employment to Malaysians. For this purpose, government departments, agencies and related parties such as relevant marketing agencies are encouraged to carry out campaigns to buy local products on a large scale.

“There are such campaigns, but it is not enough. The logo on items is very small, few billboard advertisements on roadsides, campaigns on television are very limited and campaigns on online platforms are very difficult to find. It should be done clearly with the right message,” he told Bernama today.

On March 27, the government announced the one-off BPN economic stimulus package, providing nearly RM10 billion to the lower-income B40 and middle-income M40 groups, and subsequently the Pakej Prihatin Tambah

to ensure the continuity of businesses and the workforce. Hazman said what was worrying was the risk of leakages through the purchase of goods not made in Malaysia because during the MCO many people were more likely to purchase goods online.

“Most of the online items in demand are imported goods... this will cause the injected money to flow out of the domestic economy and make the BPN goal less effective.

“Therefore, be Malaysians who are proud of Malaysian goods because our main goal is to boost the domestic economy,” he said. He added that the industries most affected by the MCO to curb the spread of COVID-19 were the manufacturing sector including transportation, construction, tourism and its network.

“When the pandemic crisis is over, spend on these sectors and travel with your families in Malaysia. There are definitely many interesting places that have not been visited.

“Give economic opportunities to small entrepreneurs like Makcik Kiah who runs a restaurant, Pak Samad who runs a homestay business, Mr Wong an entrepreneur in the field of electronics, Mr Anand a renovation contractor and Encik Jamal who works as a daily paid tour guide,” he said.

The red claw crayfish Cherax quadricarinatus is a crayfish species originally native to freshwater habitats of northern Australia and Papua New Guinea. Cherax quadricarinatus is locally known as freshwater lobster and was declared as invasive alien species because government is concern due to their potential ability to compete with and displace native species such as giant freshwater prawn. Besides, the introduced species also potentially introduced associated undesirable parasites and diseases.

Recently, red claw aquaculture increasing in numbers and become interest for local people because of the good market price. However, we have lack information about the crayfish especially the diseases. Thus, a research team from Aquatic Organism Health Program, Institute of Tropical Aquaculture and Fisheries (AKUATROP) led by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Hassan have conducted a study on red claw crayfish in Peninsular Malaysia by focusing on red claw diseases and genetic from cultured and wild population. We survey the population of red claw on January 2020 and found that the red claw population have conquered our rivers, canal and recreation lake. Hundreds of crayfish were caught with the used of fish meal as bait to lure the crayfish out into shallow water and scoop with fishing net in just a few hours sampling.

Source: Farizan Abdullah, farizan@umt.edu.my, & Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marina Hassan, marina@umt.edu.my; Institute of Tropical Aquaculture and Fisheries (AKUATROP)
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Contact Person: Dr. Noor Fadhiha Mokhtar
Tel: +609 668 4231
E-mail: noorfadhiha@umt.edu.my

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marhana Mohamed Anuar
Tel: +609 668 4197
E-mail: marhana@umt.edu.my