

# ACBeats

The Official Newsletter of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity • JULY–SEPTEMBER 2021

## ASEAN kicks off region-wide greening initiative, targets to plant 10M trees in 10 years



On 6 August, the ASEAN formally launched a region-wide programme that aims to ramp up restoration efforts and plant at least 10 million native trees in a span of 10 years. As part of the celebration of the 54th anniversary of ASEAN, the virtual launch of the ASEAN Green Initiative (AGI) was led by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) and the ASEAN Secretariat and joined by representatives of the ASEAN Member States (AMS), civil society organisations, and the private sector.

Demonstrating the strong cooperation and commitment among the 10 AMS to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration in the region, the AGI will set standards for the recognition of tree-planting activities and programmes across the region that not only regrow our forests but contribute to peoples’ well-being, livelihood improvement, and resilience-building.

“Across the ASEAN, there are ongoing commendable efforts in nature restoration. With the AGI, we hope to give recognition to the outstanding initiatives that comprehensively address the concerns of the people and the environment,” said ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim.

Lim cited various tree planting movements in the ASEAN, such as the aim of Singapore to plant a million trees over

a period of 10 years and Malaysia’s 100 million tree-planting campaign.


Along with Lim, H.E. Kung Phoak, ASEAN Deputy Secretary-General for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community and Norsham binti Abdul Latip, Senior Undersecretary for Biodiversity and Forestry Management, Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of Malaysia opened the virtual launch.

DSG Kung emphasised that among the main objectives of the AGI are to continue building and sustaining momentum for more robust collective actions in awareness-raising and enabling ownership, which can be done by “as simple as planting trees in your backyard.” UN Convention on Biological Diversity Executive Secretary Elizabeth Maruma Mrema took part in the event through a recorded video message.


In a talk show dubbed as *BiodiversiTalks*, representatives of the Communities Organized for Resource Allocation, Metro Pacific Investments Corporation, Boon Rueang Wetland Forest Conservation Group of Thailand, and the AMS exchanged insights and updates on ongoing biodiversity conservation efforts that may be aligned with the AGI.

...continued on page 7

### What's Inside?



**Webinar Spotlights**  
Value of Marine Ecosystems in Unifying ASEAN  
page 8



**Philippines' Tubbataha**  
Management Office leads ongoing underwater visual survey of sharks  
page 14

## ASEAN Green Initiative: start of region-wide tree-planting movement



Amidst environmental crises, including the emergence of diseases linked to the loss of nature, a simple tree planting, when done right, can make a huge difference.

The recently launched ASEAN Green Initiative (AGI) is expected to usher in a tree-planting movement in the region and build the momentum for more coordinated efforts that are anchored on sound scientific principles.

Formally launched on 6 August led by the ASEAN Secretariat and the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), the AGI will recognise outstanding tree planting and reforestation activities across the region.

Why 10 million?

Under this programme, the ASEAN committed to planting at least 10 million native trees across 10 ASEAN Member States in a span of 10 years. “Planting 10 million native trees and vegetation is just a start. Through the AGI, we hope to encourage and inspire people and organisations so that we can expand this target within and beyond 10 years,” said Theresa Mundita Lim, executive director of the ACB.

The AGI puts emphasis on planting native tree species as they are likely to regenerate faster in their natural environment and are

more sustainable in the long term. Native trees are well adapted to the climate and soil, hence they are more resilient and have a higher rate of survival. Planting and growing native trees enrich biodiversity and help revive the natural interactions between organisms and species of both flora and fauna.

ASEAN Deputy Secretary-General (DSG) for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Kung Phoak, in his opening message, noted that the AGI takes “a multi-faceted approach in addressing emerging biodiversity issues” and tackling the region’s post-pandemic recovery.

“The launch of AGI is indeed timely as it complements many national greening plans and programmes of ASEAN countries. We hope to continue to build momentum, strengthen ownership, and raise awareness,” DSG Kung said.

### Criteria and selection process

What does it take to be recognised as an AGI?

Small, medium, and large-scale tree planting and reforestation may be nominated to the AGI. Some examples are reforesting deforested areas; enrichment planting of degraded forest areas, coastal and

mangrove habitats; and urban tree planting, which includes planting in parks and along streets.

All nominated projects will be evaluated and recognised based on a set of criteria that target to assess possible environmental, societal, and economic trade-offs and impacts on the health, resilience and well-being of both nature and the people. These criteria are ecological soundness, socio-economic impact, sustainability, and compliance with governance and institutional mechanisms.

Lim emphasised that all interventions in restoring and conserving the ecosystem should not harm the environment and have meaningful participation from the people and communities so that the conservation outcomes are able to adequately benefit people’s health, livelihood and overall well-being. Tree planting and reforestation efforts should have long-term impacts, along with compliance to national environmental policies and contributions to national reforestation programmes, as well as international commitments such as the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The AGI evaluation process may affect how organisations, governments, companies, local and grassroots communities plan, implement, and innovate existing and future projects and programmes related to biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration.

“Tree planting and restoration activities are just initial steps to a comprehensive and holistic approach to renewing ecosystems, minimising environmental pressures while securing the socio-economic

condition of the people and the state,” Lim said.

### Stories from the ground

The virtual launch was brimming with inspiring stories on how governments, private sectors, local communities, and ordinary citizens are making meaningful change towards a more resilient and more sustainable future. People and groups at every level are leading the way in planting seeds that hopefully will not only grow into trees, but seeds that will pave the way for new ways for living, working, and growing together.

One of the highlights of the launch is the kick-off of the BiodiversiTalks, a moderated panel discussion that features subject matter experts on biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration in the region. On its pilot episode, representatives from the ASEAN Member States (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand); Metro Pacific Investments Corporation, representing the private sector; Communities Organized for Resource Allocation, a non-profit organisation focusing on addressing hunger, poverty, inequality, and the environment; and 2020 UNDP Equator Prize winner, Boon Rueang Wetland Forest Conservation Group, a community-based organisation in Thailand; shared their ongoing tree planting and reforestation efforts as part of their contributions to the ecosystem restoration movement.

Two of the voices of the ACB’s #WeAreASEANBiodiversity campaign – UN Environment Programme Goodwill Ambassador Antoinette Taus, singer, actor, environmental advocate, and Singapore-based actor, host, and environmental advocate Paul Foster – moderated the discussion and shared their involvement with various environmental protection activities and programmes.

As many efforts across the ASEAN to restore degraded forest ecosystems

are already ongoing and more are pipelined, these are significant progress that need to be expanded, particularly in light of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

Ongoing tree planting initiatives in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Viet Nam, impressively surpass the target of at least 10 million trees in the region, with over 1.2 billion trees already in the pipeline. The challenge now is to ensure that these trees grow and reach their full potential. This requires shared long-term commitment and collective action to ensure that efforts foster both nature and people.

DSG Kung acknowledged how different stakeholders across sectors and levels support and take part in the AGI, including national and local governments, business sector, civil society, and global partners. He also highlighted the importance of recognising local and grassroots efforts to support regional biodiversity policies and programmes. “We believe that everyone in ASEAN is part of the solution,” he said.

### Contribution to ecosystem restoration

In her recorded video message, Executive Secretary Elizabeth Maruma Mrema of the Convention on Biological Diversity remarked that the AGI is “an incredible contribution to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, as well as the step towards achieving the 2050 Vision of Life in Harmony with Nature.

“The AGI, a recognition programme and mobilisation for action, including in urban areas, is a way to both advance restoration, as well as raise awareness amongst many stakeholders,” she said, noting that the AGI joins other activities around the world, such as the Forest Ecosystem Restoration Initiative, and the Great Green Wall Initiative in Africa.

With the continuous land degradation and biodiversity loss at dangerous rates, and our health and well-being threatened at a tremendous cost, Ms. Mrema declared, “This must be a decade of action and transformation in support of ecosystem restoration.”

This was echoed by the EU Ambassador to the ASEAN Igor Driesmans, mentioning that the “unprecedented decline in global biodiversity requires a renewed sense of urgency.”

“We also know that biodiversity and forest-related challenges are inherently global and we are witnessing a continued and deeply worrying decline in biodiversity and forest globally. And hence, international cooperation is the only way to stop this decline. We need global action and we need it now,” he said.

Chargé d’affaires of the Embassy of Germany in Jakarta, Indonesia, Thomas Graf, urged everyone to “act together” and “act fast” in the face of global challenges.

The AGI is supported by the EU and the German development agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH through the Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN Project, and the Institutional Strengthening of Biodiversity Sector in the ASEAN II Project, respectively.

Both the EU and the German government expressed their commitment to continue to support and be the ASEAN partner in building the region’s new green agenda.

The timing of the AGI launch surfaced a more inherent and aggressive need for individuals, communities, societies to work collaboratively across boundaries to explore and implement integrated – whole-of-society – solutions as we are becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent.



## “From reflection to action”: Finance sector called for greening economy



The financial sector has a huge role to play in greening the economy and driving positive change, particularly in resource allocation and influencing business and policy decisions, the fourth session of the webinar series Economics of Biodiversity emphasised.

“Money is at the very heart of the issue on [sic] biodiversity. The financial system determines resource allocation and decides which investment ideas get funded and which ones do not. This makes it a powerful force. It can be a destructive force or it can be a driver of positive change,” the EU Ambassador to the ASEAN Igor Driesmans said in his opening remarks.

Ambassador Driesmans and ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim opened the webinar series’ fourth and last installment titled Transforming Budget and Financial Institutions: Learning from Existing Work and Sharing Future Plans, which was attended by representatives of various sectors in the ASEAN, including economic planning, finance, and budget agencies.

The Economics of Biodiversity webinar series was supported by

the EU, German Development Bank (KfW), and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH through the Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN Project, Small Grants Programme (SGP), and the Institutional Strengthening of Biodiversity Sector in the ASEAN II Project, respectively.

Lim noted that discussions on the crucial role of the financial sector in protecting nature are timely with the release of the report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change showing that the global temperature is expected to reach or exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius. “This change in the climate is unprecedented and will likely cause grave consequences to each and everyone of us, disrupting lives, communities, and economies. Protecting nature to stop the catastrophic consequences of climate change needs to be dealt with urgency and earnest collaboration of various sectors,” Lim said.

The past sessions of the webinar series tackled ideas and experiences relating to the broad transitions to sustainable paths laid out in the Dasgupta Review, a groundbreaking analysis on the Economics of

Biodiversity led by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta.

### Increasing global investments

In his presentation, Dr. Andrew Seidl, senior technical advisor of the UN Development Programme Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN), shared the components of a biodiversity finance plan, which includes the review of policies and actors that influence biodiversity finance, and assessments of biodiversity expenditure and finance needs.

“In the biodiversity finance plan, we identify mechanisms that will help us bridge the gap (in biodiversity expenditures and needs) in the private and public sectors in a prioritised and systematic manner,” Seidl said.

He stressed that 26 countries in the world have completed the Biodiversity Expenditure Review, and four of which are ASEAN Member States.

Based on the cross-analysis done by BIOFIN, global public biodiversity investments have increased to an average of USD 121 billion annually, or 0.19-0.25 per cent of the global GDP.

## “BIODIVERSITY IS THE FABRIC THAT HOLDS NATURE TOGETHER.”

**FIVE DIRECT DRIVERS OF NATURE LOSS**

- LAND AND SEA USE CHANGE
- POLLUTION
- UNSUSTAINABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
- INVASIVE SPECIES
- CLIMATE CHANGE

**BIODIVERSITY FINANCING (BIOFIN) DEMONSTRATES HOW NATURE POSITIVE ECONOMIES CAN WORK FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE PLANET.**

**BIOFIN PLANS INCREASE RESOURCES THROUGH:**

- GENERATING REVENUE
- REALIGNING EXPENDITURES

**IT ALSO REDUCES NEEDS THROUGH:**

- AVOIDING FUTURE EXPENDITURES
- DELIVERING BETTER RESOURCES

**BER CROSS COUNTRY ANALYSIS**

**RESULTS SUGGEST:**

- COUNTRIES WITH MORE PROTECTED AREAS AND MORE THREATENED SPECIES INVEST MORE IN BIODIVERSITY
- LARGER ECONOMIES INVEST MORE IN BIODIVERSITY IN GROSS MAGNITUDE AND OF NATIONAL BUDGETS
- FUNDS ALLOCATED TO BIODIVERSITY REDUCES THE NUMBER OF THREATENED SPECIES

**REFLECTIONS ON COUNTRY FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS**

**ADDRESSING FUNDING GAPS**

- BUDGET ALLOCATION FOR BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION
- INCENTIVES ON LOCAL-BASED INITIATIVES

**INITIATIVES FOR FINANCING SITUATIONS AND INSTRUMENTS**

- MOBILISATION OF FUNDS FROM THE GOVERNMENT
- SUPPORT FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
- SUSTAINABLE BIODIVERSITY PROGRAMMES
- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS CRUCIAL IN A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT. WE MUST PUT A PREMIUM ON NATURAL CAPITAL!

**HOW PROTECTED AREAS CAN IMPACT COMMUNITIES**

- PROMOTES SUSTAINABLE PROTECTED AREA TOURISM
- HELPS TO CONTRIBUTE TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION
- BY ENACTING POLICIES, GIVING INTERVENTIONS AND PUTTING IN INVESTMENTS
- DOING COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENTS OF BENEFITS OF PROTECTED AREA TOURISM

**THE WORLD CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE ECOSYSTEM SERVICES.**

**NATURE-SMART POLICIES CAN REDUCE SYSTEMIC RISKS AND ECONOMIC GAINS.**

**NATURE-SMART TRANSITION NEEDS TO BE INCLUSIVE AND FAIR.**

Countries with biodiversity hotspots, more protected areas, and more threatened and endangered species should invest more in biodiversity protection.

Likewise, he said investing in biodiversity matters as funds allocated to biodiversity are associated with a reduction in the number of threatened species and the rate of biodiversity loss of about one per cent per year. He added that every USD 1 billion invested in biodiversity results in 0.57 per cent reduction in the proportion of threatened to total species.

### ‘Means good business’

“Investing in protected areas means good business for local economies,” Dr. Giovanni Ruta, lead environmental economist of the World Bank, stressed in his keynote presentation.

Ruta shared some of the highlights in the country case studies on the economics of protected areas and

the study Global Deal for Nature. The country case studies in Nepal, Fiji, Brazil, and Zambia show the effect of tourists spending a dollar in protected areas—being a “multiplier” that provides significant returns.

An additional dollar spent by visitors raises local incomes in the local economy by USD 1.5 to 1.9 across the five parks. Consistent multipliers also show that a healthy tourism sector provides similar income gains to local households.

The Lao PDR deputy minister said that in financing the operations in biodiversity, the government supports the mobilisation of domestic and foreign fund sources. Private sectors are also encouraged to be involved in environmental conservation through investments in ecotourism, local communities’ participation during environmental protection activities, among others.

For Indonesia, Lestari noted that it has mainstreamed biodiversity considerations into the country’s

budgeting systems in order to allocate financing for environmental and climate actions.

The estimated allocation per year for biodiversity conservation activities is around 0.87 per cent of total government budget, and 4.1 per cent of the total budget on the average for activities.

To augment the financing for biodiversity and close the funding gap, the Indonesian government partnered with organisations to identify and mobilise financing sources.

Under the programme Green Sukuk, Indonesia, since 2018, has managed to mobilise around USD 3.5 billion to finance green projects, including biodiversity conservation.

The entire recorded livestream of the webinar can be accessed on the ACB’s Facebook page. It was moderated by Dr. Bruce Tolentino, member of the monetary board of the Philippines’ central bank.



## ACB welcomes first draft of post-2020 global biodiversity framework

## Filipino scientist named new BIM director of ACB



He was a recipient of the 2008 NAST Philippines Outstanding Young Scientist Award and the 2015 Achievement Award from the National Research Council of the Philippines. He serves as the Philippines' representative in the Amphibian Specialist Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and a member of the Animals Committee for Asia of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora of the United Nations.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) named Dr. Arvin Diesmos, a multi-awarded Filipino scientist, as the new director of its Biodiversity Information Management (BIM) unit.

On 1 September 2021, Diesmos assumed his new role at the ACB, replacing Dr. Sheila Vergara, who started her retirement this month after serving the ACB for 11 years.

Diesmos has been recently elected as a member of the Philippines' National Academy of Science and Technology, the highest recognition and scientific advisory body under the Department of Science and Technology.

A career scientist of the Philippines, Diesmos previously worked as a researcher at the Zoology Division of the National Museum of the Philippines. He received his Bachelor of Science in Biology and Master of Science in Wildlife Studies degrees from the University of the Philippines and completed his Ph.D. in Biology at the National University of Singapore.

He has co-authored over 170 scientific papers and has co-discovered over 80 species of frogs, lizards, snakes, insect arthropods, and bird species. In his honour, a new species of frog discovered in

2007 at Malinao Volcano in the Bicol region, has been named after him, *Platymantis diesmosi* or the Mt. Malinao Cliff Frog, including a lizard *Parvosцинus arvindiesmosi* and also an earthworm, *Pheretima diesmosi*.

"I am pleased to be given this opportunity to work with the dedicated team of the ACB, alongside our partners from the ASEAN Member States. I hope to continue enhancing the capability of the Centre's BIM unit in providing timely and crucial information, particularly in matters relevant to the protection and conservation of the region's rich and unique biodiversity, climate change resilience, and human health and welfare," Diesmos said.

The BIM unit of ACB spearheads the development and implementation of a framework mechanism for sharing information, experiences, best practices, and lessons learned on key biodiversity concerns in the region. The unit supports knowledge and science-based decision-making of ASEAN governments and policymakers through biodiversity information.



The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) welcomes the first official draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), saying the upcoming negotiations to finalise the framework at the global level are opportunities for the ASEAN region to make its collective voice heard.

"The CBD released today the first official draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework after several months of negotiations, in which the ASEAN Member States as parties have actively participated. The draft, which has considered more than 2,000 comments from the science community, policy leaders, indigenous peoples, and civil society, is a product of robust multilateralism

across the world," ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim said at the ASEAN Seminar on Multilateralism hosted online on 13 July by Brunei Darussalam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Brunei Darussalam is the current chair of the 10-member regional bloc. Lim said the framework is crucial to the ASEAN and the world as it will serve as the blueprint to bring about a transformation in society's relationship with biodiversity and to ensure that, by 2050, the shared vision of living in harmony with nature is achieved.

"There will be tough and drawn-out discussions leading up to the framework's finalisation and adoption at the UN Biodiversity Conference in Kunming, China.. These are opportunities for the region to harness multilateralism and let its collective voice be heard to influence the outcome of the framework in a manner that promotes the common interests of the region," she said.

The ASEAN Member States actively participated in several meetings and discussions as part of the preparation of the first draft. At the Third ASEAN Conference on Biodiversity held in July, officials and representatives of the member states shared their perspectives on the framework.

Some member states expressed hope for an ambitious but realistic framework that can be translated into concrete actions especially as they face difficult challenges in recovering from the pandemic, highlighting the importance of integrating biodiversity into key development sectors and nature-based solutions as part of strategic planning processes.

The draft framework, which builds on the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 comprises 21 targets and 10 milestones proposed for 2030.

## ASEAN kicks off region-wide greening initiative, targets to plant 10M trees in 10 years

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Ambassador to the Mission of the EU to ASEAN H.E. Igor Driesmans and Deputy Head of Mission of Germany in Jakarta, Indonesia Thomas Graf also graced the event and delivered their messages.

The launch and implementation of the AGI are aligned with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, a global movement to accelerate restoration goals and commitments,

which commenced this year. The campaign is a rallying call on the urgent need to prevent, halt, and reverse the degradation of ecosystems worldwide to 'end poverty, combat climate change, and eliminate mass extinction.'

The region plays a vital role in this global call for ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation. At least 60 per cent of the world's tropical peatlands, 42 per cent of mangroves, and 15 per cent of tropical forests are in the ASEAN. While the region is known for its rich biodiversity, it is also vulnerable to climate-related risks and human-driven activities that drive biodiversity loss.

"Restoring the condition of our ecosystem to its healthy state will

take a whole-of-society approach. Through concerted and collaborative efforts that support this initiative, we can achieve incredible results and transform a more sustainable future for the ASEAN community," Lim said.

Moderated by UN Environment Programme's National Goodwill Ambassador Antoinette Taus, and actor and host Paul Foster, the AGI launch was also streamed on the ACB's official Facebook page [www.facebook.com/ASEANBiodiversity](http://www.facebook.com/ASEANBiodiversity).

For more information about how to participate in the ASEAN Green Initiative, visit [agi.aseanbiodiversity.org](http://agi.aseanbiodiversity.org)

...continued from page 1



The Official Quarterly Newsletter of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity

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The printing of this newsletter was made possible with the financial assistance of ASEAN-EU Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN (BCAMP) Project. The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the European Union, and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.



## Webinar Spotlights Value of Marine Ecosystems in Unifying ASEAN



The Permanent Mission of the Philippines to ASEAN and the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) held a webinar entitled, “Marine Biodiversity Conservation in ASEAN: Current State and Ways Forward” on 24 September 2021.

The webinar was conducted in line with Philippines’ Presidential Proclamation No. 316, declaring September as Maritime and Archipelagic Nation Awareness Month or MANA Mo (your inheritance). It highlighted the ASEAN region’s rich and diverse marine resources which serve as a unifying force that compels stronger regional cooperation among ASEAN Member States.

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Noel Servigon, Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the ASEAN, underscored that the Philippines shares with its ASEAN neighbours the most fertile part of the Coral Triangle which is recognised as the heart of the planet’s marine biodiversity. He drew attention to the fact that the seas in the region are also among the world’s most vulnerable, necessitating collective action among ASEAN Member States and its partners.

“Sadly, the ASEAN region’s marine ecosystem is one of the world’s most threatened in terms of coastal marine resources degradation. This has a profound impact on the planet and its inhabitants, inevitably threatening food security, local tourism, and

global warming mitigation,” Servigon said.

ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim noted that the region’s marine ecosystems not only provide for the ASEAN citizen’s socio-economic well-being and embody the ecological connectivity within and beyond the ASEAN, but also protect against the devastating impacts of climate change.

“The seas connecting the ASEAN encourage the Member States to unite and forge stronger linkages in addressing the climate crisis and the pandemic we are currently in. Thus, the protection and sustainable management of our biodiversity—our common natural heritage, serve as our compass as we set sail towards recovery,” said Lim. “Healthy mangroves, tidal flats, seagrass beds, and coral reefs act as natural barriers against strong winds and storm surges and contribute to our resilience to rising temperatures.”

ACB Director for Programme Development and Implementation Clarissa Arida discussed the networks of Marine Protected Areas in the region. She shared that marine ecoregions, large marine ecosystems, and open oceans are mostly transboundary areas, emphasising that these systems are often interlinked by a complex web of environmental, political, economic, and security issues.

“Threats to these shared resources have cumulative and synergistic environmental impacts and underscore the need for integrated and multisectoral management approaches,” Arida said. She cited marine debris pollution as an example of a transboundary issue that requires integrated regional cooperation.

“Trash is a known threat to marine protected areas as these can harm important species that inhabit the park, smother coral reefs, and destroy scenic underwater features that attract eco-tourists,” Arida said noting the commitment of ASEAN Member States to tackle this problem through the adoption of the Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in the ASEAN Region and the ASEAN Framework of Action on Marine Debris.

Desiree Maaño, Coastal and Marine Ecosystems Management Section Chief of the Philippines’ Biodiversity Management Bureau, presented to the webinar ASEAN’s approaches and strategies in building constituencies to sustain conservation efforts.

According to her, common threats to marine biodiversity are illegal wildlife trade as well as illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing by locals. “We have shared fish stock, common concerns on maritime trade and security, and even threats. Thus, we also have a shared responsibility among Member States to protect our oceans,” she emphasised.

Antoinette Taus, founder of Communities Organized for Resource Allocation (CORA) and one of the voices of the ACB’s #WeAreASEANBiodiversity campaign, hosted the event that drew over two hundred participants from the various ASEAN Member States.

## ACB joins move to harness Asian cooperation for ecosystem restoration



Spanning 549 million hectares or 14 per cent of the total global coverage, Asia’s forests have immense ecological, social, and economic significance, providing vital ecosystem services and protection against climate impacts for 4.5 billion people living in the region. These ecosystems contribute to the spiritual, cultural, and physical well-being of the people in Asia and the Pacific.

With the mounting pressures on biodiversity in recent years, conserving vital habitats and ecosystems have become an urgent priority.

ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim said that the economic benefits arising from the sustainable use of biological resources are vital in ASEAN’s overall stability. “Disruptions in these vital ecological processes can therefore result in substantial, even grave, impacts, affecting the security, health, and well-being of people and communities.”

The ACB joined the International Symposium on Ecosystem Restoration for Green and Peace Asia, a virtual event held on 18 August 2021 that aims to develop a network among forest-related institutions in Asian region, policymakers, and international organisations. The symposium, organised by the Korean Society of Forest Science and the Institutes of Green Bio Science and Technology in Seoul National University, highlighted

the successful cases and lessons from projects or programmes on ecosystem restoration across Asia, including regional organisations such as the ACB, and the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO) who shared and discussed their respective greening strategies.

These reforestation initiatives contribute to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration—a global call to rehabilitate and restore the world’s vulnerable ecosystems.

### ASEAN Green Initiative

Among the ASEAN’s response to the global call for ecosystem restoration is the ASEAN Green Initiative (AGI), which was launched on 6 August. Led by the ACB and the ASEAN Secretariat, the AGI aims to give recognition to the best ecosystem restoration activities in the region that focus on a holistic and participatory approach in regenerating and conserving ecosystems and vital habitats for wildlife.

The initiative encourages planting of at least 10 million native tree species across the 10 ASEAN Member States in a span of 10 years – or 10.10.10 – in harmony with the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration.

“The 10.10.10 target is but a start to a collective greening movement in the region, and even beyond,” said Lim. She further emphasised that “the meaningful collaboration and cooperation among development and dialogue partners” is essential in scaling up regeneration and restoration efforts.

### Branching out across Asia

Following the symposium, the ACB and AFoCO met to discuss common areas of collaboration. Capacity development for forestry and

biodiversity conservation, mapping of degraded ecosystems, and promotion of the AGI were among steps identified during the meeting. The formation of a working group comprising representatives from the two regional organisations is in the pipeline to better flesh out the concept and plans for future partnership.

The ACB has likewise had initial talks for possible partnership with the Republic of Korea, particularly in coastal and marine conservation.

Lim said Korea’s green growth policies may be synchronised with the ACB’s efforts to mainstream biodiversity into various sectors, including business, industries, and finance. During the symposium, she underscored that nature-positive perspectives and processes in the economic and finance sectors would relieve the pressure of expansion and land use conversion that greatly impacts vast areas of forests and other vital ecosystems.

Restoring ecosystems is a massive global endeavour that would take a whole-of-society approach. Thus, cultivating these partnerships and forging sturdy cooperation within and beyond the ASEAN is vital in building back better and greener.

Aside from the ACB and AFoCO, other regional organisations such as the Center for International Forestry Research and Mekong Institute attended the international symposium, along with resource persons from Cambodia, Indonesia, South Korea, the Philippines, Mongolia, Viet Nam, and Uzbekistan who likewise shared their respective greening strategies.



## ASEAN explores possible sources to fill gaps in financing protected areas



The ASEAN Member States (AMS) are working to address their needs and gaps in funding biodiversity conservation activities in protected areas. Several sustainable mechanisms, such as carbon financing and payment for ecosystem services have been identified to bridge these gaps.

ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim said that although funding remains a challenge, sustainable finance mechanisms to address protected area needs are within the reach of the ASEAN region.

“While much progress has been achieved in addressing the challenges in funding protected areas in the ASEAN, the work ahead may require us to establish means to incorporate biodiversity considerations into the overall budgetary systems,” said Lim in her opening remarks at the third session of the webinar series on sustainable financing for ASEAN Heritage Parks held on 25 August.

The webinar series is being organised by the ACB in cooperation with the EU, German Development Bank (KfW), and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH through the Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN Project, Small Grants Programme, and the Institutional Strengthening of Biodiversity Sector in the ASEAN II Project, respectively.

Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) Assistant Director Amelita Ortiz of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in the Philippines shared that the realignment of domestic and subnational government budgets to the pandemic response and reduced revenues from tourism and other activities in the protected areas have made the sustainable financing of protected areas even more challenging.

“We need to shift our paradigm to focus not only on how much and where the money comes from but

on creating more inclusive and enabling financing conditions,” Ortiz said.

### Carbon financing

In ASEAN, Indonesia and Cambodia are leading the REDD+ or Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation “plus” conservation project of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which creates incentives for protecting, conserving, and restoring forest ecosystems in developing countries by valuing their carbon sequestration, storage, and other services.

Wildlife Works Regional Director of Asia Brian Williams in his presentation said that under the programme, Indonesia and Cambodia have sold the voluntary carbon credits with almost 30 million tonnes of emission reduction valued at USD 150 million.

In Cambodia, the carbon credits and the income generated from Kao Seima Wildlife Sanctuary and

Southern Cardamom National Park have contributed to the parks’ activities in law enforcement, local livelihood improvement, and park personnel’s capacity development, Dr. Choup Paris, Director-General of the General Directorate of Environmental Knowledge and Information of Cambodia’s Ministry of Environment, shared.

### Payment for ecosystem services

Other funding sources such as tourism fees, concessions with private partners, grants from corporations, and establishment and capitalisation of conservation trust funds, can contribute to solving the biodiversity financing conundrum. Lim stressed that involving industries, which are key players in creating a nature-positive scenario, can have significant contributions by mainstreaming biodiversity into their business processes and creating a business environment that facilitates conservation and regeneration of

biodiversity and reduces risks to sustainability.

At the webinar, representatives from the Philippines and Viet Nam shared their respective mechanisms in sustainably financing the effective management of protected areas.

The Philippine government augments the resources needed to implement its National Integrated Protected Areas System through the Integrated Protected Area Fund (IPAF), which was created to institutionalise payment for ecosystem services and ensure that revenues generated from the protected areas will be invested back to biodiversity.

Ryan Cuanan, chief of Community Management and Sustainable Financing section of BMB, said to date, 70 per cent of protected areas in the Philippines have established their own IPAF and around USD 200 million (PHP 1 billion) have been

collected since the creation of the IPAF in 1996.

In Viet Nam, Pham Hong Luong, director of Cat Tien National Park said through the Payment for Forest Environmental Services mechanism, which started in 2008, the compensation for ecosystem services coming from hydropower companies, clean water suppliers, aquaculture industry, ecotourism industry, goes back to biodiversity conservation.

Drawing the participation of the representatives from the AMS, the webinar highlighted the need to invest in biodiversity, most especially in line with the efforts of the region to build back better and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.





## Philippines' Tubbataha Management Office leads ongoing underwater visual survey of sharks



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Perceived to be scary and ferocious monsters of the sea, sharks are unfairly viewed as dangerous to humans. These apex predators, however, play a functional role in the marine ecosystem maintaining the balance of the food chain, thus serving as a sign of the ocean's good health.

The management of the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park (TRNP) wants to know more about them, given the dearth of shark-related studies conducted in the natural park.

TRNP, a designated ASEAN Heritage Park is the region's pride, covering roughly 10,000 hectares of coral reef at the heart of the Coral Triangle. This pristine site is home to a high density of marine species, including 700 species of fish, 13 species of dolphins and whales, and over 100 species of waterbirds, according to the official website of the Tubbataha Management Office (TMO).

The previous studies on sharks

recorded the presence of 23 species of sharks and rays in the park.

The studies also confirmed that sharks and rays use three diving sites in TRNP as cleaning stations and that the park is one of the few places in Southeast Asia where the probability of encountering tiger sharks is high.

Angelique Songco, protected area superintendent and head of the TMO, said that based on the movement tracking of the tiger sharks inside and outside the park, adults travel out of the park towards Mindanao at the end of the summer and return to TRNP after a few months.

### Park-led study

For the first time, with the support of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), the TMO led a shark survey following studies conducted by

Large Marine Vertebrates Research Institute Philippines (LAMAVE) from 2015 to 2017.

Songco explained that the shark survey will use the Underwater Visual Survey (UVS) method, a non-invasive and unbiased approach, in which divers swim down current for 40 minutes while identifying and counting passing sharks within an imaginary 30-meter transect strip. While the UVS has little to no effect on the behavior of sharks, the survey needs to be complemented with other techniques for a better understanding of shark ecology.

Researchers and marine park rangers will conduct the survey with assistance from World Wildlife Fund for Nature – Philippines, LAMAVE, and local volunteers.

"The objective is to establish trends over the years and detect changes in shark abundance and species distribution," Songco said.

The information generated from the study will also be used to assess the effectiveness of the park management as sharks are one of its key biophysical indicators.

### Importance in conservation

The abundance of sharks has declined over the past decades with more than half of the 39 species now threatened with extinction, according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Tubbataha is one of the last few remaining places in the Philippines where reef sharks thrive, attributed to the strict protection afforded to the park and sufficient area to support the movement of the apex predator.

Songco noted, however, that local and global stressors such as fishery-related activities and climate change

are ever-present threats to these predators.

Amid these threats, the continuous monitoring of shark abundance and species distribution, complemented by other shark studies, will help inform the park management and stakeholders on current trends and changes in the overall ecology of the sharks. Further it will help the management formulate effective shark conservation measures.

ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim said that the shark study, along with lessons learned and further research activities in the park, may feed towards larger stakeholder efforts to enhance shark conservation measures at the national and regional levels.

There are 254 species of sharks and rays in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species that can be found in the ASEAN, of which

140 are categorised as critically endangered, endangered, and vulnerable.

"We take note of the collaborative efforts among the government, non-government organisations, and academic institutions to fill the knowledge gaps on sharks and other important species in the marine protected area," she said. Lim likewise expressed solidarity with the park management and the rest of the international community in celebrating Shark Awareness Day on 14 July and raising awareness of the species' plight.

In 2019, a grant of the ACB, in partnership with the Japan ASEAN Integration Fund, under the project Improving Biodiversity Conservation in Wetlands and Migratory Waterbirds in the ASEAN Region Phase I supported the seabird monitoring in TRNP.

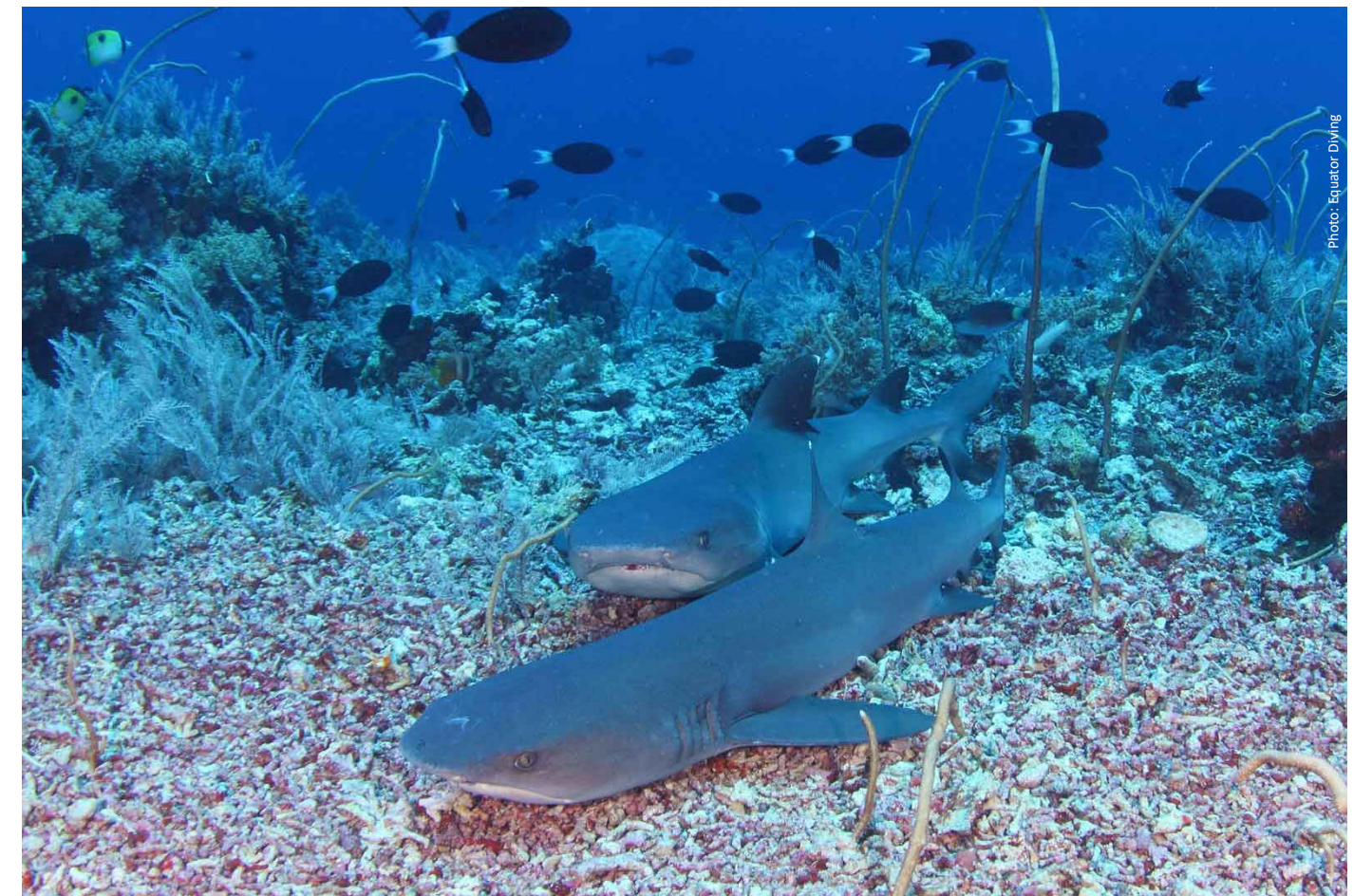


Photo: Equator Diving