

# ACBeats

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## DFA, ASEAN envoys plant native trees to celebrate ASEAN month



(L-R) Ms. Nurriha Ahmad, Charge d’Affaires of Malaysia to the Philippines; Mr. Khairul Hazwan Nor, Charge d’Affaires of Brunei Darussalam to the Philippines; Mr. Aung Kyaw Oo, Charge d’Affaires of Myanmar to the Philippines; H.E. Mr. Tull Traisorat, Ambassador of Thailand to the Philippines; Chancellor Jose V. Camacho, Jr., University of the Philippines Los Baños; Assistant Secretary Daniel R. Espiritu, Office of ASEAN Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs; Dr. Theresa Mundita S. Lim, Executive Director, ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity; H.E. Mr. Phan Peuv, Ambassador of Cambodia to the Philippines; H.E. Hoang Huy Chung, Ambassador of Viet Nam to the Philippines; H.E. Agus Widjojo, Ambassador of Indonesia to the Philippines; H.E. Gerard Ho Wei Hong, Ambassador of Singapore to the Philippines; H.E. Songkane Luangmunithone, Ambassador of Lao People’s Democratic Republic to the Philippines; Assistant Secretary Marcial C. Amaro, Jr, Policy, Planning and Foreign Assisted and Special Projects, Department of Environment and Natural Resources

LOS BAÑOS, LAGUNA, Philippines—Staying true to this year’s ASEAN Day theme, Stronger Together, ambassadors, executives, and officers representing the ASEAN Member States (AMS), the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB), and the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) convened for a tree planting and family day event to signify their commitment to act for ecosystems restoration as one solid community promoting a nature-positive future for the region.

In celebration of ASEAN’s 55th founding anniversary, the DFA and the ACB jointly organised the commemorative activity at the ACB headquarters and at the UPLB campus on 20 August 2022.

DFA Assistant Secretary for ASEAN Affairs Daniel Espiritu shared that the ASEAN’s priorities are no longer limited to joint political security and economic cooperation. “ASEAN has already expanded the range of its concerns to non-traditional security issues, which includes among others the environment,” he said in his keynote message. Asec. Espiritu lauded the ACB, the sole ASEAN centre hosted by the Philippines, for its continued embodiment of ASEAN’s commitment to the environment, biodiversity, and sustainable development, and encouraged the AMS to continue supporting the ACB in realising its mandate.

In her welcoming speech, ACB Executive Director Dr. Theresa Mundita Lim thanked the ASEAN leaders who continue to support the ACB as the regional hub for biodiversity in ASEAN. “We are inspired by the ASEAN leaders’ unwavering support to the ACB as expressed in the recent Joint Communiqué of the 55th ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting where the role of the Centre in mainstreaming biodiversity in development, promoting nature-based solutions to promote the region’s resilience to zoonotic diseases, addressing climate change, and facilitating ASEAN’s contributions to the post-2020 global biodiversity framework were recognised,” said Dr. Lim.

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## DFA, ASEAN envoys plant native trees to celebrate ASEAN month



### One community for a greener future

The ASEAN ambassadors and charge d'affaires, along with Asec. Espiritu, Dr. Lim, and UPLB Chancellor Jose V. Camacho, Jr., planted seven native and endemic tree species along the ACB headquarters which is located in Mount Makiling Forest Reserve, an ASEAN Heritage Park. The tree species include kalunti (*Shorea hopeifolia*), thick-leaf narig (*Vatica pachyphylla*), yakal-yamban (*Shorea falciferoides*), broad-leaf apitong (*Dipterocarpus kunstleri*), yakal-saplungan (*Hopea plagata*), malakatmon (*Dillenia luzoniensis*), and katmon (*Dillenia philippinensis*).

Dr. Lim shared that the location and the species for the tree growing event were strategically

selected to serve as a protection for two white lauan (*Shorea contorta*) trees beside the ACB headquarters. Forestry experts from UPLB and BINHI Program of the Energy Development Corporation (EDC), expressed that these trees, which are around 25 metres tall and about 50 to 60 years of age, were likely to have been planted during habitat restoration efforts on Mount Makiling that started more than half a century ago. This dipterocarp species can only be found in Southeast Asia and is endemic to the Philippines. Lauan trees are now threatened with extinction because of habitat loss particularly of lowland dipterocarp forests. "One or two trees alongside each other are not enough to protect themselves from falling down when a strong wind or storm comes. I believe

this is like ASEAN. If there are ten AMS standing together, we are stronger—strong enough to protect our region's biodiversity from challenges and threats," Dr. Lim emphasised.

This tree planting activity is in line with the ongoing flagship programme of the ASEAN, the ASEAN Green Initiative (AGI), which aims to encourage the planting of at least 10 million native trees in the 10 AMS in a span of 10 years, in response to the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration. The AGI, a recognition scheme for past and ongoing tree growing initiatives in the region, is being implemented by the ACB.

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## Linking actions for wetlands



Wetlands are wonderful ecosystems. These inland waters act as buffers against strong winds from storms and flooding from heavy rain and sea level rise. Mangroves protect our coastlines and coastal communities from storm surges and contribute significantly to local food security. Peatlands such as those found in the Agusan Marsh are excellent carbon sinks, absorbing and storing about 30 per cent of the world's land-based carbon.

The ASEAN region – composed of 10 ASEAN Member States – is blessed with close to two million square kilometres of inland waters and wetlands, making up 60 per cent and 42 per cent of the world's tropical peatlands and mangrove forests. The ASEAN list of Ramsar sites, or internationally important wetlands being conserved and sustainably used, is growing, with more than 20 new designated sites over the past decade. At the moment, the ASEAN region has 59 Ramsar

sites covering over 2.6 million hectares, and more sites for nomination.

These wetlands provide valuable ecosystem services that contribute to local and national economic development – from irrigated rice farming, water provision, energy sourcing, and tourism activities among others.

The protecting and healing roles of wetlands and inland waters were highlighted in the three-day 8th Wetlands Link International – Asia Conference in Las Piñas, Philippines on 26-29 July 2022. The conference convened the members of the Wetlands Link International (WLI) to share information on the various education efforts and discuss network activities. The Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands Inc (SCPW), a partner of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) in wetland conservation, co-organised the conference along with the Ramsar Regional

Center-East Asia (RRC-EA).

### 'Cradle of biodiversity'

Las Piñas City hosts the Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park, one of the Philippines' eight Ramsar sites. With more than 300 inland wetlands, some experts consider the whole Philippine archipelago as a wetland. As part of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway or EAAF, the wetlands in the country serve as staging grounds for more than 700 species of birds, about 250 of which are migratory waterbirds that pass by the flyway during the winter months in the northern and southern hemispheres. Various marine species such as dugongs, sharks, and marine turtles and endangered endemic species like the Philippine cockatoo, and the Philippine crocodile benefit from these vital ecosystems.

At the opening of the 19th Congress, Philippine Senator Cynthia Villar filed Senate Bill

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## Solidarity for biodiversity urged on ASEAN's 55th year



MANILA, Philippines – On its 55th founding anniversary, The ASEAN Member States (AMS) celebrate unity in exemplifying strength to build back a more robust region. The banner theme “Stronger Together” is a callback to the exemplary solidarity fostered by the region as it moves forward to bring more opportunities for all of its citizens.

During the celebration, ASEAN Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi emphasised the indispensable value of regional collaboration. “As the global linkages become more complex, new solutions are needed by committing more to regional integration and cooperation,” said the Secretary General. Lim Jock Hoi further added that our collective efforts should uphold the principles of open regionalism and unity in the face of evolving regional and global architectures.

This collective call for the region comes relevant as the global community gears for the finalisation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

In this light, two key meetings related to nature conservation and biodiversity are being held around the 55th anniversary of the ASEAN: the 9th ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHP) Committee Meeting and the 32nd

Meeting of the ASEAN Working Group on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity (AWGNBCB).

Both discussions aimed to carve pathways towards sustainability and nature-based actions in facing the current challenges of pandemic recovery and climate change.

The Ninth AHP Committee Meeting highlighted the addition of more protected areas to the growing list of ASEAN Heritage Parks in the region. To date, 50 sites have been designated as ‘creme of the crop’ protected areas, with Malaysia’s Endau-Rompin Johor National Park set to be the latest designation.

The AMS provided guidance on ways forward for regional collaborations during the 32nd AWGNBCB Meeting. Taking off from the achievements in engaging the ASEAN youth, a push to progress in strengthening their role in biodiversity was also urged.

ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) Executive Director Dr. Theresa Mundita Lim highlighted the timeliness of the two meetings. “We stand at the crossroads. With nature and biodiversity offering possible solutions to the multiple challenges we face today, the decision is upon us to ensure that we work together to protect and sustainably harness

the natural wealth of the ASEAN.” Lim further added that the region is thankful for ASEAN’s dialogue and development partners, who also heed the call to be “Stronger Together.”

“We thank our esteemed partners in the region, including the European Union, KfW and GIZ, who steadfastly support our initiatives in fortifying our work for biodiversity, along with the benefits that sustain not only the people of ASEAN but the rest of the world.”

Among the initiatives facilitated and implemented by the ACB for the ASEAN region and the AMS is the Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN (BCAMP) Project—a demonstration of the robust collaboration between the ASEAN and EU under their 45 years of partnership.

The Philippines, as the current coordinator for the ASEAN-EU partnership, will assume this role until 2024.

Long-standing partnerships such as the EU-ASEAN are vital enablers in fostering solidarity for nature conservation and ecosystem health in the ASEAN region.

## HKAN 2022: Indonesia, ACB call for collective action on nature conservation



BALI, Indonesia—Conservationists, local government officials, protected area managers and stakeholders, youth, indigenous peoples and local communities, as well as representatives from different sectors gather to commemorate Indonesia’s National Day of Nature Conservation or Hari Konservasi Alam Nasional (HKAN).

The three-day celebration organised by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) opened on 31 August 2022 carrying the theme Restoring Nature for Prosperous Communities.

Opening the event was MoEF Secretary General, Ir. Bambang Hendroyono, who called strongly for an active and whole-of-society response to nature conservation and ecosystem restoration.

The ongoing HKAN 2022 festivities serve as a prelude to Indonesia’s hosting of the upcoming intergovernmental forum of the largest economies in the world, the G20 Summit.

“The commemoration of HKAN 2022 sets the momentum for the upcoming G20 Summit which will be held in Bali in November. Indonesia’s G20 presidency carries the theme,

Recover Together, Recover Stronger. This resonates with the ASEAN’s call for solidarity in facing challenges as it celebrates its 55th founding anniversary in August with the theme Stronger Together,” said Dr. Theresa Mundita Lim, executive director of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) in her video message.

Indonesia’s G20 presidency will focus on three priority areas: strengthening of global health architecture; digital transformation for economic growth; and energy transition for a sustainable future and to address climate change.

Dr. Lim thanked the KKH for its continued cooperation and support to the region’s conservation efforts. “HKAN 2022’s theme, Restoring Nature for Prosperous Communities is best exemplified by the ongoing regional programme for biodiversity conservation and livelihood improvement under the ACB’s Small Grants Programme supported by the Federal Government of Germany, through the KfW.

### Indonesia’s rich biodiversity regional leadership

Known as one of the 17 megadiverse countries in the world, Indonesia

boasts of diverse ecosystems that support various plant and animal species, such as the Sumatran tiger, elephants, orangutans, and rhinoceros among others. Seven out of 51 ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHP) can be found in Indonesia, namely, Bantimurung Bulusaraung National Park, Gunung Leuser National Park, Kepulauan Seribu National Park, Kerinci Seblat National Park, Lorentz National Park, Wakatobi National Park, and Way Kambas National Park.

Through its mandate, the ACB works with the ASEAN Member States such as Indonesia in protecting and sustainably managing the region’s rich biodiversity. The ACB, in cooperation with the Government of Indonesia, is making significant progress in conserving biodiversity while uplifting the lives of communities in key protected areas through the AHP Programme.

The AHP Programme is a flagship initiative of the ASEAN that is largely supported by the European Union and the Federal Government of Germany through the ACB.

Two of the ASEAN Heritage Parks supported by the programme in Indonesia are Gunung Leuser National Park and Way Kambas National Park. Lim stressed that the

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Start 'em young. Children of ambassadors of the AMS to the Philippines listening to biodiversity stories

**Youth as conservation partners**

The tree growing activity was held simultaneously with fun learning activities on biodiversity designed for the families of the attending ASEAN executives and dignitaries. ASEAN Secretary-General Dato Lim Jock Hoi acknowledged the value of raising awareness among the families and youth of the ASEAN on the value of the sustainable use and conservation of the region's natural resources. "I am pleased that today's event is being celebrated with our families and youths. As agents of change who will play a crucial role in our post-pandemic

recovery, ASEAN should expand opportunities for young people to participate and contribute to policy-making and community development," he said in a pre-recorded video message. Dr. Lim backed this statement by emphasising the importance of empowering the youth as champions of biodiversity. "Steering the ASEAN towards a future where we all live in harmony with nature entails an intergenerational exchange of wisdom, experience and innovation. Through the ASEAN Youth Biodiversity Programme (AYBP), the ACB is contributing

to this call of developing and empowering the young minds of the region to take a bigger and more meaningful part in our conservation work," said Dr. Lim. Some of the highlights of the learning event were biodiversity storytelling, interactive games, and science experiments. The event was participated in by the heads and representatives of the embassies of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam in the Philippines.

**Stories worth telling: ASEAN youth's voices for biodiversity**



The YAS programme is supported by the European Union, through the Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in Asean Project (BCAMP); and the Asean-Germany Cooperation in Biodiversity through the Second Phase of the Institutional Strengthening of the Biodiversity Sector in the Asean Project (ISB II) and the Small Grants Programme (SGP).

Today, the global community is celebrating International Youth Day, which serves as a reminder of the vital role of the ASEAN youth in building a better tomorrow. In the region, the youth comprise one-third of the total population, with over 213 million people aged between 15 to 34 years old.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) recognises the pivotal role of the youth in effecting transformative change. With this in mind, the Centre is spearheading the Young ASEAN Storytellers (YAS) programme, where 20 creative young ASEAN citizens will showcase their skills and talents in storytelling through innovative forms while shedding light on the importance of the innate connection between ASEAN's people and biodiversity.

"I've also been realising just the sheer power that young people have in mobilising, in gathering, [and] in influencing people towards a certain cause," said Mika Tan, coordinator of the YAS programme.

Tan also shares that the youth are a vital part of the solution in biodiversity conservation and have a unique quality of using technology

to break barriers and inspire and connect with communities.

The 20 outstanding Young ASEAN Storytellers are Jang Elroy Anak Ramantan from Brunei Darussalam; Seng Roatha from Cambodia; Abex, Uki Wardoyo, and Ameliya Rosita Santoso from Indonesia; SomVang Norlintha and Souksavanh Phommahaxai from Lao PDR; Ahmad Amir Isqandar Bin Mohd Zawawi, Ler Wei Rong, and Lavinya Kalai Chelvan from Malaysia; Mg Htet from Myanmar; Celine Murillo, Althea Jane Roa, and Briikko Iyanev Martillo Dumas from the Philippines; Cheyenne Alexandria Phillips and Elliot James Ong from Singapore; Nanticha Ocharoenchai and Siramon Tansiri from Thailand; and Phan Quoc Dung and Vu Hong Trang from Viet Nam.

These young creatives have reached a broad audience through their platforms online by lending their voices to environmental advocacies—whether it be utilising watercolour to create compelling stories about female scrap metal dealers, holding impressive art exhibits, or being acclaimed internationally as remarkable photographers.

Their stories will offer fresh perspectives through their chosen mediums—touching on topics such as biodiversity conservation strategies to address challenges in their respective countries, and the cultural traditions of people living around ASEAN Heritage Parks.

"The youth of today are at the forefront of advocating for nature. Not only are they skilled, but they also hold so much influence with the stories they can tell," said Earl Paulo Diaz, the ACB's Head of Communication and Public Affairs.

Diaz also pointed out that the YAS programme taps into the significant potential of the youth to contribute to the overall goal of achieving a world where society benefits equitably and lives harmoniously with nature, in line with the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

"These youth's voices on biodiversity conservation and protection are relevant now more than ever as they will help in paving the way for a better, more sustainable future for generations to come," he added.

These stories, which will be curated in an online virtual exhibit in October at the Seventh ASEAN Heritage Parks Conference in Indonesia this year, aim to inspire and mobilise their audience, regardless of age, to participate in actions towards promoting biodiversity conservation in the Region.

Just as this year's celebration of the youth holds the theme Intergenerational Solidarity: Creating a World for All Ages, the ASEAN aims to contribute to a vision of a world where no one is left behind, be it people or nature, as told by the region's creative youth.



## Protecting nature: key to breaking the zoonoses chain



The COVID-19 pandemic upended not only public health systems and economies across the world—it has also profoundly impacted people and communities at a much more personal level.

While COVID-19 may currently be the most menacing zoonotic (transmitted from animals to humans) disease known to us, it may definitely not be the last. In the face of a notable uptick in global cases of other zoonotic diseases such as monkeypox, experts cautioned that there are 1.7 million currently ‘undiscovered’ viruses that exist in mammals and birds, and up to 827,000 of these could still infect people. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), three out of four or 75 per cent of new human diseases in the last decade are zoonotic in origin.

This year’s commemoration of World Zoonoses Day is a nod to the

important work of Louis Pasteur, who, on 6 July 1885, administered the first vaccine against the zoonotic disease, rabies.

However, it is also an important occasion to bring to light the implications of this daunting possibility of more outbreaks and how it typifies the greater need to integrate biodiversity into the broader discussion of public health.

Over the past few years, the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) has expanded discussions and developed interventions that recognise the interaction between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment. In the recently concluded joint virtual workshop Biodiversity as a One Health Shield in Asia and the Pacific organised by World Organization for Animal Health and the World Wide Fund for Nature held 28 June 2022, the ACB shared opportunities for the ASEAN

as a contribution to the global discussion on the biodiversity and health interface.

Historically, the region is no stranger to zoonotic outbreaks. In the 1990s, viral diseases such as the Ebola-Reston, Nipah virus, and the H5N1 influenza severely impacted domestic animals and humans. The SARS outbreak in 2003 caused a number of deaths in the ASEAN region.

In all these instances, wildlife species have been implicated to be the primary viral sources. But viruses usually do not simply jump from wildlife species to humans. As highlighted by evidence, disease emergence is caused by the increasing human-wildlife interactions, resulting in cases of direct transmission.

But while the richness of biodiversity – including the natural virus



reservoirs – makes the region vulnerable to further zoonotic outbreaks, it also holds the solutions to preventing future pandemics. Healthy biodiversity is a vital part of the solution: in developing vaccines and pharmaceuticals, which have turned the tide against fatal pandemics such as COVID-19; in ensuring wildlife populations safe in their natural habitats, thus minimising direct contact across species and spillover of potential diseases.

With the ASEAN’s critical history and experience with pandemics, biodiversity and health have become among the key focus areas at the national and regional levels. Significant policy statements provide guidance for incorporating biodiversity in public health responses and regional development processes.

As early as 2003 during the SARS outbreak, the significance of a multi-disciplinary approach has been recognised. Two simple principles were observed that eventually contained the disease: detecting all

cases and protecting those at risk of infection from these cases.

Governments promoted the interface of animal-human health, joint surveillance, monitoring of wetlands and waterbirds, maintaining a safe distance between poultry farms and migratory bird watering areas, and facilitating stronger coordination across the countries to address wild bird and poultry smuggling.

As a potential pathway forward, the ACB is exploring how One Health, an integrated approach to addressing public health concerns which is hoped to open greater collaboration across sectors and stakeholders on human and environmental or ecosystem health.

The collaboration exemplified by experts, scientists, and governments in pushing back on the impacts of COVID-19 is evidence of the greater potential to break the chain. The adaptive measures put in place, as seen in the intensive efforts toward vaccine development and roll-out, have proven to contribute

concretely to its management. However, nature-based solutions are proven to be valuable components of a broader longitudinal mitigation strategy to prevent future pandemics and outbreaks.

Biodiversity is an integral part of the solution. Internalising this and translating it into positive personal and institutional actions can only be done once a deeper understanding of the linkages between biodiversity and health has been achieved.

As a regional centre facilitating actions in biodiversity, we at the ACB continue to work with the ASEAN Member States and partners in broadening the space for collaborations that not only address biodiversity loss but engage key sectors such as health as well.

We hope that with a renewed understanding of the importance of protecting biodiversity in breaking the zoonoses chain, we can better prepare ourselves to build a healthier tomorrow, both for people and nature.



## Two parks in ASEAN receive prestigious marine biodiversity award



LOS BAÑOS, LAGUNA, Philippines – The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) congratulates the recipients of the Blue Park Award by Marine Conservation Institute at the 2022 United Nations Ocean Conference in Lisbon, Portugal. Two marine parks from the ASEAN—the Apo Reef Natural Park and Raja Ampat Islands Marine Conservation Area (Kawasan Konservasi Perairan Kepulauan Raja Ampat), received the platinum and gold-level awards, respectively, at the global gathering for oceans.

ACB Executive Director Theresa Mundita Lim congratulated the parks for meeting the highest science-based standards for marine conservation. “We commend the Apo Reef Natural Park and the Raja Ampat Islands Marine Conservation Area for their designation as thriving emblems of the ASEAN region’s spectacular marine biodiversity,” Lim said in a statement.

The expanse of reefs and waters in both these areas are interconnected by the changes of the tides and flows of currents, guiding highways for many migratory species such as whales and whalesharks and pathways of the shared stocks like the small pelagics like sardines and round scads.

The Apo Reef Natural Park consists of several islands located 33 kilometres off the coast of Occidental Mindoro province in the Philippines. The biggest island in the park, Apo Reef, is the second largest contiguous coral reef in

the world, containing high coral diversity and providing habitat to around 500 types of marine species, including shoals of fishes like jacks and trevallies. Shark varieties—reef, white tip, black tip, hammerhead and grey, are also known to be abundant in its waters.

“This Blue Park Award is a testament to more than two decades of hard work of different sectors for the conservation and protection of Apo Reef Natural Park,” said Philippine Ambassador to Portugal Celia Anna M. Feria in a statement delivered during the awarding ceremony where she was joined by Apo Reef Natural Park Superintendent Krystal Villanada.

Meanwhile, Raja Ampat Islands Marine Conservation Area in West Papua, Indonesia is known to be one of the richest coral reefs on the planet, encompassing more than 40,000 square kilometres of seas and about 1,500 islands. The area is a primary source of nutrients for a diversity of life forms, being a ‘gateway’ between the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. In recent studies, Raja Ampat has been confirmed to be a key sanctuary for species like manta rays (*Mobula alfredi*).

Syafri, S.Pi, Head of the Raja Ampat Marine Protected Area Management Authority shares their pride in being part of the global network, adding that in Raja Ampat, they “want to continue to strengthen management to promote ocean health and ensure food and natural resource

sustainability for our children and generations to come.”

“The conferment of these marine protected areas is an inspiring proof of the vital importance of these precious habitats to the region. It is only fitting that the favour is returned with concrete and concerted actions among countries and partners to ensure a bluer future not just for oceans, but for us all,” Lim said.

While only nine ASEAN Member States have coastal areas, all 10 have vital river systems and waterways that drain into the sea with around 650 million people dependent on healthy coastal and marine ecosystems for food, livelihood, and culture. However, despite this commonality, these ecosystems continue to face challenges and threats.

Lim added that the common contexts of challenges in conservation and the shared responsibility of ensuring sustainability propel regional platforms such as the ACB. The rest of the ASEAN can learn from the experience of the awardees, and the ACB stands ready to upscale these learnings across the region.

The Blue Park Award recognises outstanding efforts in marine biodiversity conservation. Since its launch in 2017, the annual award has been given by the Marine Conservation Institute, an international council of marine conservation experts, to recognise governments, civil society organisations, protected areas, and local communities for their efforts in effectively protecting marine ecosystems now and for the future.

The 2022 awardees, Apo Reef Natural Park and the Raja Ampat Islands Marine Conservation Area, together with Old Providence McBean Lagoon National in Colombia, join a growing network of 24 recognised waters in 20 countries.

## Merging nature and finance is crucial to meet biodiversity targets



The finalisation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework is fast approaching, but for these ambitious yet realistic targets to materialise and be fully implemented in the next 10 to 30 years, massive support and commitment, most especially in the aspect of sustainable financing, are imperative. Earlier this year, the UN Environment Programme Finance Initiative underlined the importance of the “alignment of financial flows” and the pivotal role of private finance in bridging the calculated USD4.1 trillion gap.

Speaking at the Ethical Finance ASEAN 2022 Summit fireside chat on Financing Nature and Biodiversity last week, the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) Executive Director Dr Theresa Mundita Lim emphasised the significance of the “whole-of-society” approach in addressing biodiversity loss, particularly the

need to mobilise support from various stakeholders and sectors.

“The ACB believes that biodiversity is everyone’s business, thus we endeavour to forge partnerships and cooperation to scale up mainstreaming biodiversity, particularly in the business and finance sector,” said Dr Lim. She added that the rate of biodiversity loss in the ASEAN and in the rest of the world has been identified as among the major risks to the global economy and that the “business-as-usual” approach could affect food security, particularly in income-poor countries, who, ironically are the most dependent on biodiversity as natural assets.

The Ethical Finance ASEAN Summit 2022 was a virtual event co-hosted by the Global Ethical Finance Initiative (GEFI) and the Asian

Institute of Chartered Bankers (AICB), which gathered experts on sustainable and responsible finance in and around the ASEAN to discuss the various megatrends in the region, including climate change and biodiversity loss that affect the regional economy.

Tan Sri Azman Hashim, Chairman of the Asian Institute of Chartered Bankers (AICB), recognised the financial sector’s “enormous influence on the outcome of climate action” and urged the accelerated pace of adoption of responsible banking practices in the region.

“Nature loss and biodiversity risks represent a financial risk because everything is largely linked with nature—from harvesting or extraction to processing, to the end of the supply chain,” said Dr Lim. “Recognising this dependency,



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## Linking actions for wetlands



134 or the National Wetland Conservation Bill which aims to “guide all the concerned national government agencies and the local government units to adjust the policies to be consistent with wetland conservation.”

“With this bill, we hope to improve the efforts in raising awareness on the role of wetlands as the cradle of biodiversity,” said Sen. Villar, who hails from Las Piñas and a staunch advocate of wetland conservation. “In the Philippines, much work is needed to be done to give our wetlands the care and support they deserve.”

### Learning and healing with nature

According to the organisers, the conference’s theme Healing with

Nature – Wetlands and Wetland Centres in Focus highlights “the benefits of wetland ecosystems to human health and the role of wetland centres in promoting health and well-being of people.” As mobility restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic are slowly relaxing, there is an eagerness to go outdoors and reconnect with nature. As visitor numbers to nature tourism sites grow anew, there is a favourable opportunity to raise further awareness on wetlands and the pressing need to conserve biodiversity.

Speakers representing various wetland centres and environmental conservation organisations from Australia, India, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka,

Taiwan, the UK and the US shared their initiatives in educating the public in the importance of wetlands and their conservation.

Aside from the sharing of environmental education initiatives and other communication, education and public awareness (CEPA) activities, there were also presentations on wetland centres designs that show how nature is being incorporated in the architectural layout to further enhance the appreciation of the healing character of wetlands and nature as a whole.

### The power of storytelling

It is worth noting that majority of these centres focus on engaging the schoolchildren and young

people through a variety of interesting activities such as storytelling, wetland walks and colourful informational materials to pique their interest in nature and biodiversity. As one of the speakers from Sri Lanka said, conservation begins in cultivating the love and appreciation for nature at a young age.

In her keynote message, ACB Executive Director Dr. Theresa Mundita Lim shared some of the ACB’s work in conservation, which includes further enhancing the communication and education efforts in the region, through the Young ASEAN Storytellers (YAS) programme. The initiative mobilised 20 talented young content creators to explore various ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHPs) and craft stories of conservation through photos, videos, music, poetry, and other forms of media. Dr. Lim said that the ACB hopes to reach a wider public and amplify the call for conservation through this initiative.

The ACB likewise supports select wetland protected areas in the ASEAN region in terms of capacity development, livelihood support, and law enforcement through various programmes and projects such as the AHP Programme, the ASEAN Flyway Network (AFN), and various CEPA activities both online and offline. AHP and AFN sites such as Indawgyi Wetland, Inlay Lake, Meinmahla Kyun in Myanmar, and Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve in Singapore are members of WLI-Asia, and the wetland education centres in these sites play a significant role in conservation and management, capacity building, and CEPA.

“As the world continues to grapple with climate, environmental, and health crises, we all turn to nature as crucial solutions to enhancing protection and building resilience,” Lim said. “We must act decisively and with urgency if we are to reverse the impacts of these ecological challenges.”

Dr. Lim noted that the ACB’s partnership with the Ramsar Convention will provide valuable opportunities to further fortify the ASEAN’s efforts on the sustainable and wise use of wetlands, most especially in light of the upcoming 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP14) in November, and the 15th Meeting of the Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP 15).

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the WLI-Asia and WLI-Oceania merging the two regional formations as WLI Asia-Oceania which will increase opportunities for learning, exchange, and collaboration. The WLI Conference was attended by around 70 participants from Asia, Oceania, UK, and the US.





## Merging nature and finance is crucial to meet biodiversity targets

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it is high time to put nature and biodiversity at the core of our sectoral development and business planning and consider nature as an integral part of managing business risks and strengthening accountabilities.”

### Engaging all sectors in conservation

As a region rich in biodiversity, the ASEAN is poised to harness such resources as a nature-based solution. One of the nature-based solutions being taken up and promoted by the ACB is the expansion of and effective management of protected areas and expanding the network of remarkable protected areas known as ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHP).

However, the sustainable management of these critical areas has always been hindered by a considerable financing gap, according to Amiel Sarne, AHP Programme Coordinator of the ACB, who also joined the Summit’s fireside chat. He lamented that despite existing financing mechanisms and increase in government financial support,

the massive funding gap remains unabridged.

In 2020, the ASEAN Leaders adopted the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF)—the region’s guiding principle in resilience building in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and long-term economic recovery.

An integral component of the ACRF is accelerating actions to mainstream biodiversity considerations into relevant national plans, sectors and cross-sectoral issues, such as climate change. The ACB, with its mandate to facilitate cooperation in mainstreaming biodiversity across pillars and sectors, has been working with the ASEAN Member States (AMS) and development partners in integrating biodiversity concerns into development processes, by engaging key sectors such as health, agriculture, tourism, education, in addition to the business and finance sector.

“Scaling up these ongoing mainstreaming efforts needs more cross-sectoral, cross-pillar collaboration,” said Sarne.

“Establishing more dialogues among various stakeholders would gain more support for biodiversity, particularly in harmonising and operationalising policies on the ground.”

The framework encourages the finance sector to rethink supply and value chains and ensure a workable balance between people, planet, and profit. Lim emphasised that an essential part of this paradigm shift is knowing and appreciating the worth of what we are protecting, or losing. “Given that nature underpins economic and business activities, the creation of a nature-positive economic sector that values the interlinkages of nature and ecosystem services is of utmost importance.”

Working on scaling up and broadening natural capital accounting is integral in the efforts to mainstream biodiversity considerations into development processes, most especially at this juncture when the ASEAN Member States are working together in operationalising the ACRF and the adoption of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.



## Allowing nature to help us



Super Typhoon Noru battered the Philippines with strong winds and heavy rains as it landed on 25 September. Noru, locally called Karding, is by far the strongest storm hitting the Philippines this year, hoisting sustained wind speeds of 195 kilometres per hour tagged with heavy rainfall affecting many areas of Luzon, displacing thousands and more being affected.

This occurrence only follows a series of flooding incidents that are also happening in many parts of the ASEAN region: the massive flooding affecting 16 provinces in Cambodia; the ‘surprise’ floods in Kuala Lumpur—leaving millions worth of properties destroyed, communities displaced, and scores dead. All these are haunting reminders that the ASEAN region is among the most disaster-prone areas in the world. Data from the ASEAN show that with 1,218 disasters occurring from 2012 to 2018, estimated damages of USD 15.9 billion annually, equivalent to three times the ASEAN’s collective annual gross domestic product.

We offer our deepest sympathies to the victims of these massive floods. We also commend the efforts of the government, civil

society organisations, and individuals conducting disaster relief and support to affected survivors.

While the times always demand an effective and decisive immediate response, these disasters are imminent invitations for everyone to look at the bigger picture: to see how we can further allow nature to help us.

In the Philippines, the Sierra Madre mountain acts as a resilience backbone that weakens the impact of disturbances from the East. The range, which covers the Quezon province all the way up to Cagayan, is strategically located as a breaker of strong winds originating from the Pacific. Together with the diverse ecosystems found inside it, the range absorbs large amounts of rainfall, thanks to the diversity of ecosystems found in the area.

Similarly, the Mekong River in Stung Treng Province, Cambodia, designated as a wetland of international importance, not only regulates water flow and minimises inundation, most especially during the monsoon seasons, but also helps purify water and replenish ground sources. The wetland

harbours young fish and seasonally flooded forests that provide aquatic resources for food and livelihoods for many communities in the region.

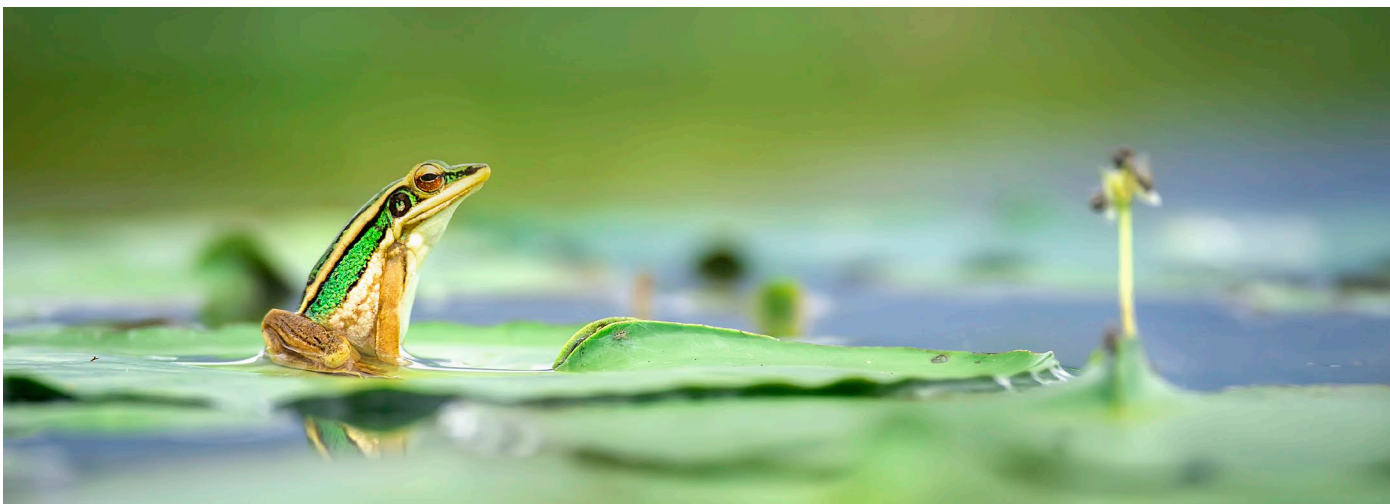
In Malaysia, the Titiwangsa Mountain Range that covers Peninsular Malaysia and adjacent areas of Thailand makes up a complex river system that regulates the water flow in several localities. Its diverse riparian vegetation and terrestrial makeup contribute to the regulation of voluminous rainwater, especially during the monsoon season.

These ecosystems are just some of the nature-based solutions that shield us from devastating hazards. Thus, our response should always integrate the protection of remaining natural ecosystems and the restoration of degraded ones. Not only are they useful as natural barriers in times of disaster, but they can also be sources of food and first aid when assistance is not immediately available because accessibility has been affected.

In the case of the Philippines, experts have zeroed in on the power of nature: contact with the eastern seaboard dulls the power of these



## Allowing nature to help us



disturbances on a regular basis. Much like the towering mountain ranges and the dense forests of Sierra Madre, a combination of the coastal mangroves in the eastern portion of Isabela and Aurora provinces, as well as the healthy mesophotic reefs of the Philippine Rise, are also key in curbing the impacts of strong typhoons. The pristine coral ecosystems of the Philippine Rise are the ‘refuge of the future,’ offering an effective buffer against strong typhoons and a potent rehabilitation area to reseed destroyed shallow coral reef areas.

For a region as rich in biodiversity as the ASEAN, the same can be said with how vital its ecosystems are in the overall discourse of

resilience-building. Being endowed with abundant natural heritage, we have a high stake in sustainably harnessing nature as our solution to current challenges. Thus, the protection of ecosystems and the diversity of flora and fauna species found within them will only yield tangible benefits for both people and nature: providing clean water, ensuring food security, facilitating natural healing, and regulating a host of diseases.

We cannot wait for another disaster to remind us how much benefit we can derive from nature. Climate change may have something to do with the extreme weather conditions we are experiencing now, and indeed new technologies can be

developed and adopted to reduce its impacts. But for the Philippines and the rest of ASEAN, the most cost-effective solution may just be right in front of us—the rich biological diversity that our region has been blessed with to help us weather the storm.

While the ASEAN region continues to work towards an efficient response in the face of crises, recovering fully and building a truly greener, better, and more resilient community entails collective actions from everyone. By building on measures that sustainably harness the power of nature as a solution, truly, we can address challenges together.

## HKAN 2022: Indonesia, ACB call for collective action on nature conservation

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progress achieved in the two parks continue to inspire the rest of the region.

HKAN 2022 features enriching discussions, festive performances, biodiversity-friendly products, and an innovative showcase of local, national, and regional efforts for people and nature.

The ACB, in collaboration with Indonesia’s MoEF-Directorate of Biodiversity Conservation of Species and Genetics (KKH) and with support

from the European Union through the Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN (BCAMP) Project, jointly set up an interactive showcase of conservation initiatives in Indonesia and the ASEAN.

Part of the joint exhibition of the KKH and the ACB is an invitation to the upcoming Seventh ASEAN Heritage Parks Conference (AHP 7) which will be held in Bogor, Indonesia from 10 to 14 October 2022. With the theme Healing

Nature and People: The Role of AHPs in Ecosystem Protection and Pandemic Recovery.

Since 2004, this regional protected area conference is held every three years to facilitate exchange of knowledge and experiences in protected area management, share challenges and lessons learned in managing their national parks and reserves, and provide an opportunity to expand their network of conservation partners.