

ACBeats

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First ecotourism travel mart features ASEAN’s natural heritage



2022 Miss Earth Queens visiting the ASEAN biodiversity booth of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity

Ecotourism experts, entrepreneurs, travel professionals, and environment protection advocates from 25 nations gathered at the five-day International Ecotourism Travel Mart (IETM) in Cavite, Philippines. The IETM ran from 29 March up to 2 April 2023 at the International School of Sustainable Tourism (ISST) and was open to the public.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), one of the major partners in the conduct of the IETM, showcased the rich and unique natural heritage of the ASEAN through an interactive exhibit featuring the ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHPs). The AHPs are notable protected areas in the region recognised for their unique biological and ecological diversity that best represent the region. Eighty per cent of the 55 AHPs are prime ecotourism destinations in the world; some of which are also declared as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The exhibition also features biodiversity-based products produced by local communities in some AHPs. These include eco-print tie-dye scarves made by the women of Timbang Jaya village of Indonesia, traditional snacks, Lampung coffee, Jore coffee from Gunung Leuser National Park, stingless bee pure honey, and Bandek krimer or ginger milk tea from Sumatra, Indonesia. The manufacturing of these products is supported by a joint sustainable livelihood initiative by the ACB and the German Development Bank or KfW called the ACB Small Grants Programme.

Biodiversity and tourism sectors unite

The last two years of lockdowns and quarantine due to COVID-19 has forced us to re-examine our relationship with nature. “It was like the universe pressed humanity’s pause button and gave the earth a chance to breathe and heal itself. Most of us have witnessed in person or through social media,

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The ACB showcases various knowledge materials and merchandise at the International Ecotourism Travel Mart.

how wild animals have started to reappear and thrive in areas where they haven't been seen for a long while. But then, it seems like this was centuries ago now. Vaccines and newer, less fatal COVID variants have rendered most of us immune and allowed us to physically interact once again, and increase our mobility. We are now experiencing the so-called "revenge travel," said Dr. Theresa Mundita Lim, Executive Director of the ACB.

Dr. Lim emphasised that although this is the ideal time to promote ecotourism, people need to be more mindful of how we manage our tourism and tourism-related activities to prevent irreversibly harming the main attractions—our wildlife and their natural habitats.

"Blessed with natural wonders and unique wildlife, the ASEAN countries

can indeed work together to make ecotourism one of the region's main drivers of growth. And if implemented properly, ecotourism can contribute towards reducing the rate of biodiversity loss and become one of the region's demonstrable examples of nature-positive industries, contributing immensely to achieving other benefits such as climate resiliency, health and wellness, and food and water security," Dr. Lim added.

The ACB has been initiating efforts to mainstream biodiversity in regional tourism strategies. Its support to AHPs includes promoting biodiversity-based enterprises such as ecotourism, which not only generates livelihoods but enhances environmental awareness and contributes to management effectiveness, as well. "As reflected in this year's ASEAN theme, *ASEAN Matters: the epicentrum of growth,*

the ACB stands ready to work with the tourism industry in the region in building a shared value that will transform ASEAN into a global hub for sustainable nature tourism," said Dr. Lim. With the intent of working closely with the tourism sector to promote sustainable and responsible ecotourism practices, the ACB supported the IETM.

Philippines' Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco addressed the IETM opening ceremony with a call for sharing of best practices and continued learning to achieve tourism sustainability, while the country presents its ecotourism offerings to a world that seeks out responsible travel.

The IETM is organised by the ISST and the Asian Ecotourism Network, with support from the Municipality of Silang, Cavite, the ACB, the Department

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Microplastics: Threat to ASEAN marine ecosystems



Photo by Danny Ocampo

In today's fast-moving world, plastic is undoubtedly everywhere. While its versatility and durability have benefitted human society, it has also become among our most prevalent waste. Without proper waste management, plastics end up in oceans and seas, where they break down into microplastics.

Microplastics are plastic debris that are less than five millimetres in length, roughly the size of a sesame seed, according to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Due to their small size, they pose dangers not only to marine life but also to other species and ecosystems that depend on these aquatic resources for food and survival.

These tiny debris are ubiquitous. In a study published in the journal *Environment International* in May 2022, researchers found microplastics in the blood of 77 per cent of the study's participants. Half of the blood samples contained PET plastic, which is commonly used in plastic bottles, while a third had polystyrene, which is used in food packaging.

The microplastics problem is already being felt in the ASEAN region, home to one of the most biodiverse marine ecosystems in the world.

A review of current literature on marine microplastics in the region, published in the journal *Environmental Pollution* in 2021, showed that the "presence of fishing harbours, aquaculture farms and tourism" has led to an increased abundance of microplastics in ASEAN waters. The illegal and improper waste disposal from village settlements and factories has also contributed to the high presence of microplastics, researchers said.

In the Philippines, a study by the Ecosystems Research and Development Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources last year found traces of plastic debris in at least 10 marine sites in the country, with the highest concentration in fisheries-rich Tañon Strait in the Visayas.

A report in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* highlighted the struggle of fisherfolk in Tañon Strait against plastic waste. Plastic bags, sachets and bottles end up along the shores or on the seafloor, where marine

animals might mistake them for food. Plastic waste gets entangled in their nets, and now there are fears that the fish they catch might be contaminated with microplastics as well.

The problem also persists in other marine areas in the region. A study conducted from August to November 2017 found that nearly 67 per cent of the fish caught in the Gulf of Thailand had plastic debris in their stomachs, mostly net fibres.

Microplastics were also observed in the digestive tracts of anchovies, a valuable commercial fish, netted from 14 harbours in the Indonesia Sea. Researchers said the most prevalent type of tiny plastics in their guts were polyamide and high-density polyethylene, which could have been from nets and traps, and milk and juice jugs, respectively.

While the impact of microplastics on human health is yet to be established, it is evident that the challenge of curbing marine plastic pollution in the ASEAN is more urgent than ever. The region boasts several protected marine sanctuaries

Microplastics: Threat to ASEAN marine ecosystems

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Photo by Wikimedia

and ASEAN Heritage Parks, which host a teeming biodiversity that supports life both in water and on land.

In 2021, the ASEAN has crafted a Regional Action Plan for Combating Marine Debris in the next five years. Its goal is to enhance coordination at both regional and international levels to achieve sustainable management of coastal and marine environments.

The report highlights that in 2016 alone, at least 31.7 million tonnes of plastic waste were estimated to have

been generated in just six ASEAN Member States.

Under the action plan, 14 regional actions were identified under four framework components: policy



Photo by Christine Bangero

support and planning; private sector engagement; research, innovation and capacity building, and public awareness, education and outreach.

ASEAN exec says alarming illegal trade of endemic wild species needs urgent action



Photo by Renz Nathaniel B. Luyao

in such illegal activity, everyone can contribute to the fight against illegal wildlife trade," she added.

"I am appalled because these bird species are rare and hard to find even in their native habitats, and despite this, poachers still find a way to capture these elusive bird species in the wild. It is very alarming that there seems to be a growing market for rare and endemic wildlife species. It seems that we have not learned our lesson from the pandemic — that disturbing nature can trigger the emergence of previously unknown diseases," Dr. Lim stressed.

The ACB, together with the AMS, adopts a three-way approach to prevent poaching of wildlife from its source — protected areas. These involve supporting the AMS in strengthening their law enforcement capacities through training initiatives and provision of state-of-the-art equipment to improve protected area protection systems, promoting sustainable livelihood and community-based enterprise, and awareness raising on the value of conserving the region's wildlife. Providing more sustainable economic opportunities for the communities living in the buffer zones of protected areas discourages them from engaging in illegal and unsustainable activities.

Some regional programmes and projects supporting the protection and conservation of wildlife include the ASEAN Heritage Parks Programme, the EU-supported *Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN (BCAMP) Project*, and the *Small Grants Programme* supported by the German Development Bank or KfW. All these regional efforts are in accordance with the Chiang Mai Statement of ASEAN Ministers Responsible for CITES and Wildlife Enforcement on Illegal Wildlife Trade.

A recent report revealed that a number of native species of birds and primates that are only found in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea were recovered in India. A total of 13 wild species of birds and four species of monkeys, believed to be smuggled from these Southeast Asian countries and shipped through Myanmar, were seized in a random check by Khawzawl police. The seizure that took place in March 2023 happened in an area near the India-Myanmar border.

According to TRAFFIC, some of the rare species that were being trafficked include the Mindanao Tarictic Hornbill (*Penelopides affinis*), Southern Philippine Rufous Hornbill (*Buceros mindanensis*), Mindanao Writhed Hornbill (*Rhabdotorrhinus leucocephalus*), and Flame Bowerbirds (*Sericulus ardens*). The three hornbill species live only in lowland dipterocarp forest habitats and are endemic to the Philippines, and the colourful bowerbird is only found in the forests of Papua province in Indonesia and neighbouring Papua New Guinea.

"Poached species from the Philippines and Indonesia going through Myanmar

and out of the Southeast Asian region is a strong indication of the transboundary nature of wildlife crime and a strong collaborative action among the ASEAN Member States (AMS) is truly needed to address this serious concern," said Dr. Theresa Mundita Lim, executive director of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB).

Previous studies on trade dynamics and wildlife poaching have shown that these species, along with dozens of others such as snakes, lizards, turtles, songbirds, parrots, and pangolins, are among the highly trafficked animals from Southeast Asia. The region serves as a consumer source and trans-shipment point. Much of the wildlife trading is also being done online and the trafficking operations are getting more and more sophisticated.

"Illegal trafficking and trade of wildlife and wildlife products have gone online. These digital transactions are hard to trace—exacerbating the already serious problem faced by the region," said Dr. Lim. "To address this issue, we can also maximise the use of online tools such as social media. By reporting accounts that engage

ASEAN highlights need for youth participation in meeting new global biodiversity targets



The Young Biodiversity Leaders 2023 cohort with representatives from the 2020 and 2021 cohorts.

As the world prepares to put the recently adopted Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM GBF) into action, new opportunities have opened for young people to contribute significantly to the achievement of this ambitious yet realistic set of targets towards living in harmony in nature.

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), as the leading entity for biodiversity in the region, kicked off the year with the Youth Biodiversity Leaders (YBL) 2023 Academy held from 30 January to 4 February 2023 in Singapore, hosted by the National Parks Board (NParks) Singapore and organised in partnership with the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN), with support from Hanns Seidel Foundation.

The academy focused on preparing 22 selected ASEAN youth who are passionate about biodiversity conservation work and who can lead and initiate national and regional actions that support the achievement of the new set of global biodiversity targets.

“We see the youth, not just as beneficiaries of our conservation

efforts, but as strong allies for change,” said Dr. Theresa Mundita Lim, ACB Executive Director. “They are inquisitive and driven to know about the science behind what is happening around them; they are equipped with skills on harnessing the power of technology to make their voices heard and to make things happen. Our youth of today are the game changers that can help us inspire transformative actions for biodiversity,” she added.

The YBL is a fellowship programme under the ACB’s *ASEAN Youth Biodiversity Programme (AYBP)* that provides in-depth capacity building and mentorship to youth leaders in biodiversity and aims to increase youth participation in biodiversity governance and strengthen youth-led conservation efforts. It is supported by the European Union through the *Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN (BCAMP)* Project.

Part of a bigger picture

“The YBL Programme is a timely event in discussing the Kunming-Montreal GBF and how the youth can help implement these targets,”

Christian Schwarzer, co-founder of the GYBN, said in his welcoming message. “Biodiversity conservation is everybody’s job and the youth are core actors,” he added.

In the recently-adopted biodiversity framework, Target 22 explicitly emphasises equitable, fully inclusive, just, and gender-responsive participation in decision-making of all matters concerning biodiversity, including children and youth.

“The youth are not the leaders of tomorrow but are the leaders of today, our survival lies in your hands,” said Dr. Lena Chan, Senior Director of the International Biodiversity Conservation, NParks.

Dr. Chan also encouraged the YBLs to take the part they play in biodiversity conservation seriously and actively, especially during the revision of their country’s National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (LBSAPs).

The reference to youth in the Kunming-Montreal agreement now assures that they have the right to engage. However, this addition

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The 2023 YBLs enjoying the tree planting activity in solidarity with NParks Singapore’s OneMillionTrees Movement.

is just the beginning, according to GYBN Co-Founder Melina Sukiyama. She then urged the YBLs to ensure that their respective NBSAPs would actually deliver on the rights and equity for all, including women, indigenous peoples, and children and youth.

Learning and building life-long relationships for nature

Dr. Adrian Loo, NParks’ Group Director for Wildlife Management and Senior Director for Community Projects, shared Singapore’s experience on how the country was able to step up to the pressure of achieving a sustainable city within nature.

In Singapore’s case, their government firmly believed that nature is a social leveller, thus, NParks was put under the government’s Ministry of National Development, where infrastructure development is also lodged, to ensure that nature is a priority in its urban development agenda, and in the country’s education curriculum.

“Humans desire for a better environment and future. Thus, we need to frame our minds and

strategise in creating a better future for all,” said Dr. Loo.

To better understand the concept of “living in harmony with nature,” the YBLs participated in a tree planting activity under NParks’ One Million Trees Project that aims to regreen Singapore by planting one million trees in the next 10 years; and in a field trip at Pulau Ubin Island, one of Singapore’s last rural communities.

The YBLs likewise underwent intensive lectures and workshops to enhance their capacities to lead and participate in more holistic biodiversity conservation actions and programmes. They learned to take a systems thinking approach, develop awareness-based systems leadership skills, and had deep discussions about the KM GBF, NBSAPs and LBSAPs, ASEAN’s biodiversity thrusts, and the youth’s role in them.

The young leaders also created their respective youth roadmaps. These roadmaps will serve as their plans of action towards their participation in the revision and updating of their country’s NBSAPs and LBSAPs, and future national biodiversity activities

for youth that they will lead and organise such as expanding the community of youth for biodiversity and setting up their country’s GYBN chapters.

Through the academy, the YBLs were also able to network and collaborate with each other and prominent biodiversity conservation leaders, including Singapore’s two ASEAN Biodiversity Heroes, Prof. Leo Tan Hee Win and Prof. Chou Loke Ming.

GYBN, recognised as the official coalition platform of the youth in the Convention on Biological Diversity, encouraged the youth through a series of discussions about inclusivity and meaningful youth engagement, tackling the global biodiversity crisis and transformative change.

To know more about the AYBP, log on to aybp.aseanbiodiversity.org.

SCAN ME



Celebrating partnerships for wildlife conservation



Photo by Myat Zaw Hein

Based on fossil records and current data, scientists have determined that we are already losing a substantial number of species within a short geological period, suggesting that we may be on the verge of a sixth mass extinction. But unlike prehistoric extinctions, the dire situation we are in now, as far as species diversity is concerned, is highly avoidable.

What brought us here can be traced to the choices we, as humanity, have made throughout our history.

Now, with the wisdom of hindsight and the benefit of modern research and science and technology, we have a better appreciation of how having a harmonious co-existence with nature and other species is vital to our survival and our way of life.

A region brimming with life

With the theme, "Partnerships for wildlife conservation," this year's World Wildlife Day is a celebration of multi-stakeholder collaborations for the protection and conservation

of the planet's plant and animal species. As a region as biodiverse as ASEAN, with over 25 per cent of the world's known plant and animal species, we really need to work together to significantly reduce the risk of extinction of these species, as they are essential to the health of ecosystems from which we derive all of our needs to survive.

The ASEAN region's high species diversity and high mean country endemic proportions emphasise the region's significance for conservation. New species members under major taxa continue to be discovered in the remaining intact natural ecosystems in the region. In fact, in 2020, a global report revealed that over 200 new species were discovered in the Greater Mekong region alone. Just last year, two new hedgehog species were discovered in Mindanao, the southern part of the Philippines.

However, the conservation of this myriad of species remains a challenge since we are still faced with enormous threats such as

poaching, illegal wildlife trade, and habitat loss.

ASEAN's response

The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), together with the ASEAN Member States, implements a number of initiatives for wildlife conservation. These include the ASEAN Flyway Network (AFN) which is being led by Singapore, a project that is designed to protect migratory birds and the wetlands that serve as their habitats.

The ACB also serves as the secretariat of the ASEAN Heritage Parks (AHP) Programme, a flagship initiative of the ASEAN that promotes effective protected area management and the conservation and preservation of both the cultural and natural heritage of this network of outstanding protected areas. To date, there are 55 AHPs in the region that have been recognised for their biological and ecological abundance and diversity. The AHPs are being supported by various partners of the ACB such as the European Union through the *Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN (BCAMP) Project*; and the *Federal Government of Germany through the KfW* by providing small and microgrants for conservation and livelihood projects for local communities within and around the AHPs. These projects support activities focusing on effective park management, law enforcement, ecotourism, habitat and species management, policy development, wildlife research and monitoring, community development, and community outreach and conservation awareness.

The ASEAN Green Initiative, a recognition programme intended to promote the restoration and conservation of habitats by planting native species of trees, is another effort of the region to keep its wild flora and fauna in their natural environment.

ASEAN's Response	
	Develop and implement wildlife conservation laws
	Increase area and number and improve effective management of protected areas
	Prepare endangered species action plans
	Increase transboundary conservation measures
	Increase research on species at risk
	Improve communication, education, and public awareness campaigns
	Develop breeding and captive propagation programs
	Strengthen cooperation on law enforcement and illegal wildlife trade

	RED LAUAN <i>Shorea acuminata</i> Critically Endangered		PHILIPPINE EAGLE <i>Pithecophaga jefferyi</i> Critically Endangered
	SUMATRAN RHINOCEROS <i>Dicerorhinus sumatrensis</i> Critically Endangered		MALAYAN SUN BEAR <i>Helarctos malayanus</i> Vulnerable
	SIAMESE CROCODILE <i>Crocodylus siamensis</i> Critically Endangered		VIETNAMESE PAPHIOPEDILUM <i>Paphiopedilum vietnamense</i> Critically Endangered
	INDIAN BLACK VULTURE <i>Sarcogyps calvus</i> Critically Endangered		IRRAWADDY DOLPHIN <i>Orcaella brevirostris</i> Critically Endangered
	SIAMESE CROCODILE <i>Crocodylus siamensis</i> Critically Endangered		HAWKSBILL TURTLE <i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i> Critically Endangered

Some of the critically endangered and vulnerable species in the ASEAN region and ASEAN's response to the situation

Through a collaboration with Japan, the ASEAN is also enhancing the taxonomic capacity of the member states by conducting training sessions on DNA barcoding and by producing taxonomy manuals and field guides. This is the region's effort to promote the use of technology to better comprehend our biological resources and the numerous physical and intangible benefits humans may obtain from them. Taxonomic information is also useful in identifying proper conservation measures, as well as in detecting and controlling invasive alien species.

In all of these undertakings, we recognise that no single generation should have a monopoly on the benefits we derive from our wildlife resources; thus, the ASEAN considers the youth as vital partners in

meeting our biodiversity goals. In consonance with this, the ACB is institutionalising its ASEAN Youth Biodiversity Programme (AYBP), a programme that engages the youth in the region to more actively participate in biodiversity action in the region. Under AYBP are notable sub-programmes such as the Young ASEAN Storytellers, where 20 talented and skilled young leaders created powerful stories of conservation from 11 ASEAN Heritage Parks. There is also the Young Biodiversity Leaders cohort, which provides in-depth capacity building and mentorship for youth leaders in biodiversity and increases youth participation in biodiversity governance while strengthening youth-led conservation efforts.

The region is also pushing for mainstreaming biodiversity within

and across sectors such as business, tourism, agriculture, and health, among others, to ensure that conservation measures are incorporated into development processes.

Addressing illegal wildlife trade as this year's theme connotes, requires strong partnerships. For the ACB, we highlight the value of engaging as many sectors as possible in protecting our wildlife resources in their natural habitat and preventing wildlife trafficking at source.



Photo by Zaharil Dzulkafly

Lao PDR begins planning for Protected Area Ecotourism project



The workshop was participated by representatives from the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB); the Department of Forestry (DOF) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF); Provincial Agriculture and Forestry (PAFO) of Champasak and Salavan provinces; park managers; the Provincial Department of Information, Culture, and Tourism of Lao PDR; and other key stakeholders and local community representatives. Photo by the Department of Forestry

CHAMPASAK, Lao PDR – Key stakeholders of the planned Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area (PXT-NPA) Ecotourism Project participated in the workshop to review the strategy and action plan of the project on 10 February 2023 at the Phon-Ngam Training Center, Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO) in Champasak province, Lao PDR.

The five-year strategy, set to be implemented from 2023 to 2027, proposes prioritising tourism development activities in four areas of the NPA, namely, Ban Mai Singsamphan-Soula-Kham Teu, Phou Dao Chaeng, 4000 Holes, and Khongsedone district. The workshop discussion focused on the following key issues: priority areas, zoning and approval for opening areas for tourism, sustainable and

conservation incentives, and investment priorities.

The workshop was held through the *Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN* (BCAMP), a project of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, supported by the European Union.

Local stakeholders — composed of park rangers and stakeholders at the

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Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area

Protected area personnel in Myanmar trained on ecosystem valuation



Forest guards, rangers, and officers from 19 protected areas of Myanmar, together with national-level conservation staff, register to participate in the training workshop Capacity Building Training for AHP Staff in Economic Valuation of Ecosystem Services and Assessment from 6 to 10 March at the Popa Mountain Park, Kyaukpadaung, Myanmar. Photo by the Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division, Forest Department

THE POPA MOUNTAIN PARK, KYAUKPADAUNG, Myanmar — To further promote sustainable and science-based policy decision-making in environmental conservation in Myanmar, the Forest Department of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, in partnership with the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), led in capacitating protected area personnel and conservation field staff all over the country in the valuation of the ecosystem services provided by Myanmar’s rich biodiversity.

Forest guards, rangers, and officers from 19 protected areas of Myanmar, together with national-level conservation staff, participated in the training workshop, Capacity Building Training for AHP Staff in Economic Valuation of Ecosystem Services and Assessment, from 6 to 10 March at the Popa Mountain Park, Kyaukpadaung, Myanmar. The activity aimed to develop the capacity of protected area staff with the principles, strategic directions, methodology, and tools of ecosystem assessment based on the priority needs of the protected areas in Myanmar.

“Conservation staff of Myanmar’s protected areas play a significant role in sustainable natural resources management in Myanmar. It is

therefore especially necessary for those to have comprehensive knowledge about ecosystem services, and enough capabilities in terms of calculating the value of these services to support better decision making.” Mr. Thant Zaw Oo, Director of Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division (NWCD) of Myanmar, said in his welcome remarks during the opening ceremony of the activity.

Ecosystem services refer to the various benefits that the natural environment provides to people. They include food, water, recreation, and socio-cultural benefits that humans gain from ecosystems. However, some protected areas in Myanmar are facing the problem of overuse and overconsumption of natural resources, owing to the public’s mindset that these resources are free of charge. Assessing and valuing the services they provide, thus, are crucial in highlighting their non-marketed values.

However, those who are able to do ecosystem services valuation are mostly natural resource economists and other experts, while the skills of field conservation personnel to do this kind of assessment are limited. The capacity-building activity will then build the individual and institutional capacities of protected areas to improve their response to

current and emerging environmental threats and challenges.

“Today’s capacity-building training will focus on teaching and discussing subjects related to valuing ecosystem services. It will not only help the implementation of conservation activities in Myanmar’s Re-establishing Natural Habitats Plan — which has been ongoing since 2019 — but will also be able to effectively improve the conservation skills of each participant/trainee who attended today. Participants will learn the core subjects that are relevant to conduct effective conservation work. I would conclude by saying that the trainees will definitely have an opportunity to learn and become excellent forest conservation staff with enhanced conservation skill sets and new perceptions,” NWCD Director Thant Zaw Oo further said.

The activity is the first of the two-part series of the training workshop in ecosystem service valuation. The next activity will be held in April at the Forest Research Institute in Nay pyi law, Myanmar. The event is organised through the *Biodiversity Conservation and Management of Protected Areas in ASEAN* Project implemented by the ACB, with the support of the European Union.

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Lao PDR begins planning for Protected Area Ecotourism project



Local stakeholders — composed of park rangers and stakeholders at the village, district, and provincial levels — raise their concerns about and give their inputs to the draft PXT-NPA Ecotourism Plan 2023–2027.

village, district, and provincial levels — raise their concerns about and give their inputs to the draft PXT-NPA Ecotourism Plan 2023–2027.

Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area is best known for its interesting rock formations, many of which have cultural and religious values,

including Hin Khong and the 4000 Holes. The landscape and views from the park’s many plateaus include the pristine forested Mekong River landscape, which passes through Phou Xieng Thong on the Lao side and Pha Taem on the Thai side; and has potential for kayaking and boating trips. The park’s iconic wildlife

also holds tourism potential, with gibbons, Douc langurs, banteng, gaur, and green peafowl topping the list of species of high potential interest to visitors. Photos by the Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area Management Office.

First ecotourism travel mart features ASEAN’s natural heritage

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Miss Earth representatives tour the exhibits at the International Ecotourism Travel Mart.

of Tourism, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Philippine Exporters Confederation, Inc., Tourism Promotions Board, and the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture.

This event had three major components, the Travel Mart, the Ecotourism Forum, and the Marketplace.

Travel Mart exhibitors consist of travel agencies and eco-friendly hotels and resorts. The Marketplace is where attendees can buy local and sustainable products. It features the livelihood component, where recycling efforts of participating companies are shown. Moreover, the DTI is bringing in all the regional groups to present their best products that are in accordance with environmental programmes.

The highlight of the event is the two-day in-depth interactive forum, chaired by the ACB, that focuses on *Embracing Authentic Ecotourism*,

where participants can expand their knowledge in sustainability and ecotourism practices. Joining the festivities are the Miss Earth 2022 queens as the newest additions to the ASEAN’s voices of biodiversity as part of the “*We Are ASEAN Biodiversity*” campaign.



Ms Earth representatives, ACB staff, and SGP beneficiaries at the ACB booth.