

NEWSLETTER

SABAH WETLANDS CONSERVATION SOCIETY



Special Reports Edition by Daily Express

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COMPLETE SPECIAL REPORTS EDITION INSIDE!

WE'VE GOT IT ALL COVERED - Daily Express our own local independent international newspaper of East Malaysia featured Kota Kinabalu Wetland Ramsar Site full story in their Special Reports 'Your Local Voice' section .

SABAH WETLANDS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

A Non-Government Organization working on Conservation of Wetlands in Sabah

Established on 22 August 2005

To promote the conservation of wetlands in Sabah and the variety of plants, birds and other kinds of organisms found in them.

To raise public awareness and appreciation of wetlands and public involvement in protecting wetlands.

To manage Kota Kinabalu Wetland (KKW) as a model wetlands centre for the purpose of conservation, education, recreation, tourism and research.

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Finally, something even better than State Assembly protection

Mary Chin and James Sarda
(First of a series)

THE Ramsar status – because of its global recognition as the wetlands equivalent of a World Heritage Site – offers something which even State Assemblies and Parliaments cannot guarantee, i.e. an additional layer of protection against greedy developers who may have other plans for the site or its vicinity in the future.

In fact, the benefits are manifold, says Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS), Datuk Hj Zainie Abdul Acaas (pic above).

"Once you are accorded that type of recognition, you are in a different league altogether. It means your wetlands centre is internationally recognised as a wetlands of international importance. Hence, there will be greater attention accorded to it in terms of research and conservation."

"Secondly, it signifies a new layer of wetlands protection. At the same time, like in some other countries, it will further boost its reputation as a tourism attraction," he said.

The SWCS President since March 2008 said it is looking forward to more opportunities for funding on research and development, and that the Ramsar site status will enhance the conservation value of the site.

Though dependent very much on tourism for income, Hj Zainie is mindful of the fact that KK Wetlands is very much a conservation area but which practises 'economic wise use of this place, given its tourism potential'.

"That is why we have 24 hectares here but within which, there are certain areas that are not open to the public. These are meant solely for research purposes unlike some other wetlands which even have restaurants to generate income."

"We don't although we believe the wetlands must be visited by people," he stressed.

He said SWCS is banking on the observance of significant days like World Wetlands Day and World Environment Day to earn some revenue for management of the wetlands. Two years ago, the Society organised a 2-km Walk & Runathon, starting from the main entrance and going one round towards the nursery before planting mangrove saplings. Participation fee was RM50 per person.

"Having said that, we are mindful of the need to strike a balance between drawing tourists and visitors, and maintaining the wetlands as a recognised research centre," he said.

As KK Wetlands is being promoted as a conservation area, it has not come to a situation where they have to limit the number of visitors and tourists.

Hj Zainie said two years ago, a Sabah Darul and a group of businessmen from China approached him in the hope of extending the SWCS Office premises and building a bus terminal as well as a 24-hour restaurant.

"Apparently, the KK Wetlands was the group's first choice and they have been studying the area for a few months. Their plan was to get tourists from all over China to come, and they would extend the bus arrival time."

"They were prepared to spend millions and we could secure millions, too, so they told me."

"They said Datuk, you can get money from this project. You don't have to scratch your head thinking of how to make money, begging here and there."

"But I said, 'I am very sorry. Who doesn't want money, it will save us (SWCS) a lot of headache. But ours is a conservation area for staggered tourists. We can't put up a restaurant. No, no, no. We can't for the sake of conservation although we are struggling to get funding,' he said he told them."

The Ramsar status, more than anything, also means Sabah is again recognised as a State that is already deeply involved in conservation.

"Our Chief Minister Sri Datuk Seri Musa Aman is always campaigning for conservation. He has given a lot of attention to conservation. The fact that the personally attended the handing-over of the Ramsar site certificate speaks volumes of his concern. I was pleasantly surprised."

Since the wetlands dedication, new species of mangroves have been found. These include *Bruguiera gymnorhiza*, *Ceriops zippeliana* and *Avicennia speciosa*.

"Prof Dr Jean WH. Yong (Singapore University of Technology and Design), urged us to increase the species of mangroves during the 2016 International Symposium on Conservation and Management of Wetlands (ISCWM) held in Kota Kinabalu."

He said our area is suitable for increasing the number of mangrove species. We are doing that... in fact, we now have one of the endangered mangrove species, *Bruguiera kinnierii* (taken from one of the Tumbul Abdul Rahman islands a 15-minute boat ride off the State Capital). In the world, there are only about 200 mangrove trees of such species left."

"There is a committee to try and identify other species of mangroves found in other places for the purpose of planting them here (KK Wetlands). I was told that in Malaysia, there are over 50 species of mangroves (a combination of pure and associates). Of the figure, 32 mangrove species (or more than half) have been recorded at the KK Wetlands."



Second Ramsar Site 2017

Despite the recurrent threats of El Nino, no serious drought has been encountered at the KK Wetlands since inception. Rainwater is harvested for use during the dry spell.

Hj Zainie said there is always the risk of losing the Ramsar status in future as has happened in China and India.

This is exactly what he wished to avoid when approached with a business proposal by joint investors from China.

When a destination secures Ramsar site status, it becomes well-known and those who run the place may entertain business proposals in the hope of reaping profits. People may come with attractive offers or promises of sustainable development.

"But how do you control the busloads of tourists coming by the hundreds every day? As a result, the reality is that the place may not be properly maintained, there is littering and noise pollution, and what have you."

Having obtained the status, officials from the Ramsar world body will carry out regular inspection. "If we at KK Wetlands fail to meet the requirements, for example, losing the endangered bird species (because they are frightened away by large crowds of visitors), then we are likely to lose the status," he warned.

As at December 2016, SWCS had a total membership of 150, including eight Life Members and 88 Corporate Members.

The Rotary Club of Kota Kinabalu (RCCK) has been involved with KK Wetlands as far back as 1999 when Terigu Adila was the Club President. Three years after the wetlands was designated by the State Cabinet as the Kota Kinabalu City Bird Sanctuary.

By virtue of his position as Community Service Director, Zainie was assigned to the wetlands for one year and he was answerable to Adlin who requested him to stay on for another year after his (Zainie's) term was over.

Adlin became the Protom President of SWCS when it was formed in 2005 while Zainie was the Protom Treasurer. While serving as President of RCCK from 2006 to 2007, Zainie continued to oversee the wetlands until March 2008 when he took over as President of SWCS from Adlin, who decided to step down. Zainie has been at the helm of the Society since.

● See Page 9



Masidi with Zainie, Adlin, Omar and others at the launch of Ramsar status.



One of the magnificent mangrove species found at the KK wetlands.

Challenges in realising Ramsar status

It took eight years for KK Wetlands (KKW) to be recognised as a Ramsar site. The tedious process entailed first getting the proposal paper (prepared by SWCS) to the State Cabinet for deliberation and endorsement.

Zainie said seeking approval first from the State Cabinet was one of the challenges it faced.

"I was with my Deputy (Dr Hj Rahimatsah Amat, Honorary Secretary Omar Kadir. We were going through my speech to be delivered in conjunction with the World Wetlands Day celebration."

"Minister Datuk Masidi was invited to officially launch the celebration. Suddenly, this idea (Ramsar site) came up. The two gentlemen said, 'Eh, why don't we propose that this KKW Centre become a Ramsar site?'" he said.

When Masidi arrived, Zainie explained to him what it was all about. "In the Minister's speech, he mentioned the idea and the press picked it up. The next day, it hit the headlines."

Subsequently, Masidi brought the proposal to the State Cabinet's attention at its weekly meeting.

"That particular day, I was with Datuk Michael Emban (then Permanent Secretary to the Minister) outside the meeting room for the outcome of the discussion on the proposed Ramsar site status. After four hours, Masidi whatsapped to say we could all go home. Congratulations! Your idea has been accepted by the Cabinet."

"I'd say the key people involved in preparing the proposal paper were Omar Kadir (because he is the Honorary Secretary), and the staff. They were instrumental. Credit also goes to Rotaran Kenneth Iin (of the Rotary Club of Luyang). I got all the good people to come in and help. That's how it happened."

The next step was to present the paper to the Federal Government through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE). "The NRE took a few months to study everything after which we had to go through the process of engagement with stakeholders and the local community. That took another few months."

Zainie said representatives from various departments and agencies, including the Sabah Wildlife Department and Environmental Protection Department, came for a stakeholders' meeting.

"Meeting after meeting, besides a consultant meeting with the relevant people. We also had to engage with the local community (affected parties) as that is one of the requirements towards Ramsar site status."

That also posed a challenge. There were a lot of what we call town hall meetings. I chaired the meet-

ings and people raised many questions."

Finally, the consultant prepared a management blueprint for KK Wetlands (KKW) to be made a Ramsar site, with input from the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS). It cost about RM200,000 which was delayed by the State Government. This blueprint has since become the KKW Management Plan.

Landowners, in particular, were worried that if the wetlands became a Ramsar site, they would not be able to develop their land in the vicinity.

"We said, 'Very sorry but you have value for your land. Few of them supported the prospect of Ramsar and dropped the idea of developing their land. However, there were others who said they bought land there with a view to developing a 30-storey condominium."

"That's where *Daily Express* (fought for us) came in and became the champion for us. I went to see the Chief Editor (James Sarda) who highlighted the issue in the paper every week," said Zainie.

Some 10,000 signatures were collected by the Society and these were submitted to the State Government through the Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment, Datuk Masidi Manjun, to put a stop to the proposed condo project.

In the meantime, SWCS was called by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) to attend meetings for discussion on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report submitted by a company interested in building a condominium in the surroundings.

"We were analysing the report for objections to be raised."

But suddenly, we were not called anymore because obviously, they did not want us to be there to object. We did object. Before we knew it, the report was accepted and the green light given for the proposed high-rise condominium."

SWCS then convened a meeting to discuss the next course of action. The only option left, according to its lawyer George Ngui, was to challenge the EIA report.

"So with that, we decided to go for judicial review. For a year, we had a ding-dong battle in the court. We were the 'sitting judge' and we lost eventually."

"So what next? We returned to this meeting room (at the KK Wetlands Centre) and discussed our options – either we accept or appeal. We decided to take the fight to the Court of Appeal on August 13, 2012 and we won. Thank God. So much for our challenges," he recalled.

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Some of the new mangrove species found at the KK Wetlands.

Massive replanting after squatters were forced out

Mary Chin and James Sarda
(Second of a series)

FOLLOWING encroachment into the KK Wetlands (KKW) by almost 200 illegal squatters, there was massive replanting by schools and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to fill the vacuum left by the "intruders".

"Melin managed to persuade the government to move the squatters out. By then, parts of the wetlands had become barrens. There were a lot of degraded areas as a result of the cutting down of mangrove trees by the squatters."

"At the rate we were going (planting) over the years, the place had become 'overloaded', and we (Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS)) could not plant here anymore. You can see the difference before and now. So we do not encourage any more planting in KKW."

"We decided to look for new places for planting mangroves such as the Sulaman Lake Forest Reserve (SLFR) in Tuaran. We applied to the Sabah Forestry Department for land. Its Director Datuk Sam Mannan was very happy and approved an area of 7.41 hectares for our planting exercise," said Zainie.

On Sept 8, 2009, Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Sabah Forestry Department (SFD) during the Heart of Borneo (HoB) Conference at the Magellan Suter Hotel. It was witnessed by then Prime Minister Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Since then, the Society has been submitting annual reports to the department on the progress of mangrove planting. Zainie was one of the five signatories, the others representing other organisations. "Overall, the Director is pleased with our performance."

According to him, Forestry conservator Datuk Sam Mannan wants SWCS to continue with the MOU, prompting the



Second Ramsar Site 2017

some 24,200 trees.

"We can't plant more because certain sites are too deep for planting," he said, adding the success rate has been worth it.

In its continued commitment towards mangrove conservation, The Forestry Department designated another 3.1ha within the Sulaman Lake Forest Reserve (SLFR) for the Society to plant another 11,000 mangrove saplings over five years (2016-2021). "About 40pc of the area has been utilised for the purpose, so we can continue planting until the end of the year. Our last project was with CMB Foundation."

Recently, it wrote to Sam again to consider allocating more land for mangrove planting. "The Sabah Forestry Department proposed a site at Kg. Tanimbawan (Kota Belud). Our people visited the place and it is still in the discussion stage."

Apart from locals and those from the peninsula, there have been university stu-



Flashback to Sept 8, 2009: The signing ceremony between SWCS and Sabah Forestry Department. In the centre is the Director Sam.

Society to seek for an extension of land because the area concerned is almost full.

"For the 7.41 hectares of mangrove degraded area, we were supposed to replant 25,000 mangrove trees within five years, but the place could only accommodate

dents from Singapore, Japan and Korea who participated in planting mangroves at the Sulaman Lake Forest Reserve.

■ More next week



A view of the planting site at Sulaman Lake Forest Reserve, Tuaran.



Students of SM La Salle planting mangrove saplings at the Sulaman Lake Forest Reserve, Tuaran.



A guide for visitors at the site.

Measures to prevent encroachment

SEVERAL preventive measures have been undertaken to prevent encroachment by illegal squatters such as regular patrolling to ensure no trespassing, installation of perimeter fencing, and appointment of honorary wildlife wardens (on completion of a three-day training course).

An allocation of RM500,000 was provided by the State Tourism Ministry of Culture and Environment for the preventive measures.

"Besides barbed wire and chain-link fencing to act as a deterrent, we wrote to the Sabah Wildlife Department in quest of extra power to act against encroachers. Previously, KKW was under the Land Ordinance which does not provide for enforcement."

"Now the power has been passed to the Wildlife Department for the necessary action whereby police will have the power to arrest anyone trying to encroach into the wetlands area," he explained.

"We have to protect the wetlands under whatever arm of the law. In this regard, the authority concerned is preparing a paper for submission to the Cabinet."

SWCS hosted the venue for the training course for potential honorary wildlife wardens. "Of the 60 participants, only 18 passed the examination (oral and written) to qualify as wildlife wardens. Our Manager (Rita Ignatius) is one of the wardens who do patrolling twice a day."

KK Wetlands as popular tourist spot

WHERE tourism is concerned, SWCS is in favour of controlled tourist entry, and not mass tourism which may bring about negative effects.

Society President Datuk Hj Zainie Abdul Aucasa, said it is keen to create a Wikipedia on the KK Wetlands as one way to promote the area as a popular tourist spot.

"Enhancing our website is an ongoing effort through various media, including social media. Right now, we have a JICA volunteer from Japan, an IT man (Yuichiro Watanabe), who is helping us to do it. Our Facebook is very strong," he said.

Another means is the outreach programme to schools, universities and the shopping complexes targeted at children and the public.

"We give out brochures (printed by SWCS) to the public, and organise a hands-on activity to create awareness and educate the children about wet-

lands," he said. A monthly newsletter is published.

The Society is also working closely with the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH), Sabah Branch, Sabah Tourist Guides Association and Sabah Association of Tour and Travel Agents (Satta) and taxis to bring tourists to KK Wetlands. "Collaboration is ongoing...we started last year. We have tourists from Japan, China, Taiwan and Korea, and free independent travellers (FIT) from Europe," said SWCS Manager cum Executive Secretary, Rita Ignatius.

Based on feedback from tourists and visitors, they love the scenery and tranquility, and the flora and fauna of KK Wetlands. "To them, it is unique being the last remaining patch in the centre of the city, and the staff are friendly."

"Perhaps it is a good place to de-stress or unwind. It is a good therapy to those who may be depressed," said Hj Zainie.



The Bird Hide: A spot for visitors to view birds.

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YOUR LOCAL VOICE | SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2017

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Wetlands nearly drained out during Usno era

● Third of a series
Mary Chin and James Sarda
THE then Usno State Government nearly succeeded in its plan to develop 2,000 acres for physical recreation (sports complex), mental recreation (Yayasan Sabah) and outdoor recreation in Likas, prior to its fall from grace in mid-70s.

The site of the present gazetted wetland is where the sports complex was supposed to be located over 300 acres.

"The challenges were there," said founder President of the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS), Tengku Zainal Adlin, who became Chairman of the Protean Committee when SWCS was approved by the Registrar of Societies (ROS) on August 22, 2005.

At the Society's inaugural AGM in March 2006, he was elected as the President of the SWCS Management Committee for a two-year term (March 2006-March 2008).

Tengku Adlin considers himself to be very fortunate to be involved in the development of the whole area (Likas) in the sevenies in his capacity as Project Development Manager of the Sabah Foundation Group.

The then State Government wanted to implement two projects there: As Chief Operating Officer



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Tengku Adlin.

(COO), I was tasked to look into the Likas Sports Complex and the Yayasan Sabah Building and after that, to also link Tanjung Lipat to Yayasan Sabah. The wetlands was not in the Town Plan. It was put in as a recreational leisure belt whereby roughly about

2,000 acres of land and sea were earmarked for this belt. We were to reclaim the coast way (roadway) along what is known as Jalan Tebedu today.

"That was in 1974. Based on the three-entity plan, the recreational leisure belt was for informal outdoor recreation, the sports complex (300 acres) was for physical recreation while the Yayasan Sabah Building was meant for mental recreation since it has facilities like the research library, concert hall and the auditorium.

"The 300-acre site is where the wetlands is (not very much) and we had a lot of coconut trees there too," Tengku Adlin recalled, adding the wetlands was supposed to have been reclaimed as part and parcel of the overall development plan.

When Adlin came into the picture, he looked at the plan in its entirety and realised that half of the proposed Likas Sports Complex would be the Turf Club, as agreed upon by the State Government. The Turf Club holding pony races since the chartered company days was in Ig Aru but has since relocated to Tuaran.

"I said to myself, 'Oh my God, the Turf Club should not be there as it would encroach into the wetlands and what have you.' That (wetlands) would have been part of the proposed Turf Club. However, all had been agreed upon by then Chief Minister Tun Mustapha.

Adlin's intention was to put the botanical park there together (before the bird sanctuary). "Of course, Mustapha agreed to take the turf club out of the development plan. Then the turf club people went back to him and it was reinstated. However, I too went to see Mustapha and I said, 'No, Sir', and the proposal was taken out again."

When he (Adlin) was involved in the massive reclamation, he straightaway reserved 60 acres for the wetlands where the mangroves are today.

"Sixty acres of good mangroves. The rest were all coconut trees and less healthy mangroves. I insisted that we conserve the 60 acres just as a wetland (not yet a bird sanctuary)."

That was in 1974-1975. (The bird sanctuary came later). Mustapha agreed to the wetlands together with the Likas Bay Coastal Road. It was not in the Town Plan, and he also agreed to that as an integrated whole. I would credit Tun for the fruitful development."

"The area in question was recognised as a wetland, a conservation area in 1986.

As far as the bird sanctuary is concerned, Adlin gives credit to Datuk Yong Teck Lee, saying there were a lot of challenges.

"He was the Chief Minister then (1996-1998). Yong supported me all the way. If not for him, I would have faced a lot of difficulty in efforts to conserve the area as well as to designate it as a Likas Bird Sanctuary."

Prior to that, he was Chairman of WWF Malaysia Board of Trustees and Deputy Director of Yayasan Sabah, so he was pushing for conservation of the wetlands in these two capacities.

"On top of it, I had direct access to the then Chief Minister (Yong) who was also Chairman of the Sabah Foundation Board of Trustees."

■ More Next Week



A 'bakau minyak' tree.

Ramsar status important due to world recognition

"It is very rare that you have a Ramsar site next to the centre of a business district. The site itself is a fine example of healthy mangroves thriving right in the heart of the city. This conservation of mangroves is important for education because there are 16 primary and secondary schools around there."

"After all, what is conservation for? It must be for research, science and most importantly, education for the young," he said, adding the status means a great thing for Sabah (being the second such site the state after the Kinabatangan Wetlands where the rainforests are rated as among the richest in the world).

Secondly, Adlin pointed out, again that it is so important because Sabah in terms of marine biodiversity is in the epicentre for the entire world of the Coral Triangle (at the apex of the Coral Triangle in the Sulu Sea of Sabah).

"These wetlands form part and parcel of the total entity, with the mangroves serving as the breeding ground of the fish and other aquatic resources."

He doesn't foresee the possibility of KK Wetlands losing its Ramsar site status in the future, saying he is very glad that the present SWCS Committee (headed by HJ Zainie) is made up of

concerned citizens.

"We have committed people who are passionate about conservation. I must congratulate the Committee for their commitment, passion and perseverance in making the Ramsar site status a reality, and conserving it for perpetuity."

"With this status in place, it would be difficult for people (who are interested in developing the wetlands) to do something to the area for (commercial) development. No way, not on a Ramsar site," he asserted.

"It is now under Unesco. The United Nations is involved and not just the State and Federal governments."

Adlin also paid tribute to government departments and agencies for the success in conserving KK Wetlands. "It is not due to my vision or foresight. We have a very good committee...we have got Wildlife Department people there, the Kota Kinabalu City Hall (DBKK), Environmental Protection Department, and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment was very much involved in this (conservation)."

According to him, there was no decline in terms of flora during his term as there were a lot of replanting programmes with the students almost every month. "It's ongoing so plant life

is increasing. Apart from all the others, I managed to get key conservation officials from the United Nations to come and plant some mangrove trees."

And efforts to replenish the species of plants from other sources were successful, too, thanks to the Sabah Forestry Department. "It's ongoing. The department gave us seedlings for the Sulaman Lake Forest Reserve."

He described the success rate of planting mangrove seedlings by schools and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as very good, "simply because we have a good management team, and also the area is not very big, about 60 acres."

To another question, he said for now, the only threat is from the effluent discharge coming from the Damai, Luyang area, apart from other sources of pollution. "Basically, I think DBKK is doing a good job, and before that also."

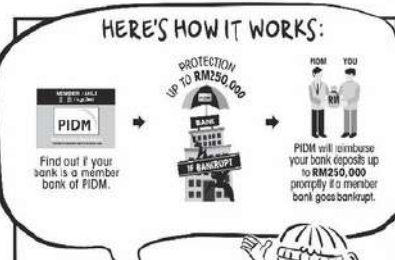
He cited the main drainage reserve in Luyang as a contributory factor. "There are no two ways about it. In fact there are two drains - one flowing into the Likas Lagoon and the other into this side. That is the only way for the water to come out. So it is up to the civic-minded people in Luyang not to throw rubbish right into the drains there."



KK Wetlands in 1996.



KK Wetlands in 2009.



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Bruguiera hainesii on one of the Park's islands. Inset: *Bruguiera hainesii* in the KK Wetlands. The tallest is over 90cm while the lowest is about 44cm.

Sabah has one of world's rarest mangrove species

James Sarda and Mary Chin

THE Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS) is working with Sabah Parks to rehabilitate endangered mangrove species called *Bruguiera hainesii*, of which there are only about 200 known to exist worldwide.

Thanks to the efforts, KK wetlands is now home to 18 of the saplings.

Manager of SWCS, Rita Ignatius said the species has a total known population of approximately 200 trees in the world (source: IUCN Redlist of Threatened Species). IUCN stands for International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Interestingly, the figure includes only two known trees existing in Sabah and these are located in one of the Tunku Abdul Rahman Park's islands, 15 minutes by boat from the State Capital.

According to Rita, SWCS began the first rehabilitation effort after receiving a total of 27 propagules of *B. hainesii* from Sabah Parks on August 8, 2014. However, only one seedling survived from the batch.

"The Society continued the exercise by collecting a new batch of propagules from one of the islands with the help of Sabah Parks. A total of 56 propagules were collected on May 25, 2015. However,

only eight seedlings are thriving in the KK Wetlands," she said.

The last batch of seedlings collection, totaling 25 propagules, took place on May 23, 2016. Of the number, also only eight seedlings survived.

As of August 2017, KK Wetlands had 18 surviving seedlings of *B. hainesii* out of the 108 propagules collected. "All were planted at various locations within the protected area which has a regular water flow. Monitoring is done once a month to measure the growth of each plant," Rita added.

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Bid to revive fireflies in Kota Kinabalu Wetlands

EFFORTS are also ongoing to revive the family of fireflies in the Kota Kinabalu Wetlands (KKW) which are a major tourism draw in many parts of the world having a wetlands habitat.

President of the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS), Datuk Hj Zainie Abdul Aulasa (pic) said, during a trip to Kawang (in Papar), he and his team learned that the survival of fireflies depend to a large extent on their habitat.

"Unfortunately, the habitat required is lack-

ing here (KKW)," he lamented. "We were told that it boils down to availability of plants and water quality."

They are awaiting findings of a study on the matter by Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). Fireflies whose bodies emit a glow are a spectacular sight in their thousands, making tall trees flicker as if adorned with Christmas lights. Tourist awed by the spectacle are known to travel to different parts of the world to witness the phenomena.

Many firefly habitats in the peninsula have

been reduced due to logging and other developments that disturbed the ecosystem. Observing fireflies is one of the night-time activities for tourist along the Kinabatangan in Sabah.

"Our aim is to create the habitat first by translocating a part of the fireflies' habitat in Kawang to KKW, say half or quarter acre. We are also mindful of lights that may jeopardise the survival of these insects. For this reason, we (SWCS) are not in favour of attempts to put up condo buildings in the vicinity," he said.



From left: Dicky Harun (JPHPT), Guslia Lahasing (SWCS Conservation & Science Officer) and Dr. Suhaili Lusin (Veterinary Officer, Epidemiology Unit, JPHPT).



Rita showing visitors the out of bounds Sentinel Flock.

Sentinel Flock: Monitoring the avian flu

THE Sentinel Flock is an initiative under the Department of Veterinary Services and Animal Husbandry (JPHPT), which started in October 2006 to boost bird flu surveillance and prevention efforts in Sabah.

Twenty-five fowls will be replaced by JPHPT after a duration of 60 weeks. Monthly monitoring of the chickens is carried out by JPHPT, including taking blood samples. So far, there have been no cases related to bird flu detected.



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■ Fourth of a series

Special Report by Daily Express. 8th October 2017

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A bird's eye view of the KK Wetland Centre and the proposed development area back in 2011 (both circled).



A satellite image of the KK Wetlands.

Encroachment the biggest worry



Above: The Api Api Putih is one of the mangrove species in the KK Wetlands.

Right: The Baku Kurap is one of the mangrove species found in the KK Wetlands.



James Sarda and Mary Chin
ENCROACHMENT has been the greatest threat facing the Kota Kinabalu Wetlands (KKW) since the infant years.

Founding President of the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS), Tengku Zainal Adlin, said there were people interested in developing the area as far back as the mid-1980s.

Then there were the illegal squatters (foreigners) who "invaded" the place and cut the mangrove trees to build their houses there without any regard for law or authority.

"They would come overnight and go deep into the wetlands so as to be out of sight. At that time, we did not have an office here yet. I happened to be staying at Signal Hill and would spot them when looking down from my residence."

"We were very concerned and that was why Yong came into the picture," he said. It was not easy to deal with them (squatters) as they were reluctant to go. It took some time to get rid of them," said Adlin.

"They created trouble for me. I dared not go alone. They were threatening me. I went and asked them, 'Why is this?' They were very hostile and after that, I dare not go in anymore. They were all illegal. It took us almost two months to move them out completely."

"But by then, they had already cut down a lot of the mangrove trees. At least 5% of the healthy ones were chopped down...not much area there anyway," he said.

While acknowledging the good work of SWCS (now under the leadership of Datuk Hj Zainie Abdul Aueasa), Adlin suggested enhancement of the promotion and marketing segment to popularise KKW as a tourist spot.

"One way to link and work with the Sabah Tourism Board (STB), Matta and tour companies. More publicity is needed for major activities to be held there. It's a very nice and pleasant walk through the wetlands."

Adlin loves being among the healthy mangrove trees and so know that this is the breeding-ground for birds, fishes and other aquatic animals.



Adlin

"It's a very fine experience to walk through the boardwalk and view the birds from the look-out tower."

However, the former WWF Malaysia President was quick to point out that without WWF Malaysia, all that would not have happened. "The whole thing was initiated by WWF Malaysia. They provided technical input and management plan, among other aspects. It is our job to conserve from Day One."

A clear-cut case is that of Tunku Abdul Rahman Park, the first Marine Park in Malaysia. All the major conservation efforts in Sabah were mostly done by WWF. The entire Corridor of Wildlife in Kinabatangan was also the initiative of WWF."

Adlin also saluted the current Secretary of SWCS, Omar Kadir for his voluntary services in the Sabah Nature Club which provided environmental education to students.



Second Ramsar Site 2017

Fifth of a series • More next week.

Ideal venue for family and corporate events: Adlin

AS for funding, Adlin thinks KK wetlands cannot completely depend on the Government but generate its own funds, besides donations.

We must create a lot of environmental conservation activities because we have an ideal centre for environmental education right there. Having a lot of educational programmes for the public can help.

"More schools should visit the place... that's where we can earn some income. But more importantly, we must enhance tourism, ecotourism, in particular. How many people have really seen a mangrove tree and what thrive in the wetlands?" he said, adding that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes by the corporate sector would be a great help, such as holding their company family get-togethers there.

Adlin thanked HSBC for having donated RM300,000 for educational programmes over a few years, among other donors. "We must also credit Datuk Victor Paul for his conservation efforts (example, water treatment for KKW). The education centre there was built by him (through Timatoh). The display of exhibits was also funded by him."

He said part of the boardwalk was repaired and painted on and off by the US Navy. "I got the US Coastguards to do it when their ships were here. They wanted to do something for us."

"More publicity is needed for major activities to be held there. It's a very nice and pleasant walk through the wetlands."

— Adlin

Visitors to KK Wetlands inconsistent

THE peak years were in 2004 and 2005 when the total number of visitors to the KK Wetlands hit the 16,794 mark and 16,734 mark respectively. That was when the Environmental Education Programme (2004) and Environmental Voluntary Work (2005) were introduced by the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS), resulting in many celebratory events to mark World Wetlands Day, World Environment Day and Ninggu Alam Sitar Malaysia.

However, subsequently, there was a decline but it picked up momentum again in 2013 (11,366) and 2009 (11,452), followed by a reduction the following year (7,897). The figure shot up to 14,107 in 2012 but was reduced in 2013 (7,361). The incidence of upward incidents in Sabah has been cited as one of the factors.

ANNUAL VISITOR PROFILES				
YEAR	NO. OF VISITOR		EEP/EVV/EVENT	TOTAL
	MALAYSIAN	NON-MALAYSIAN		
2000	7144	658		7802
2001	7405	1119		8524
2002	7018	2110		9128
2003	6425	1119	1346	8890
2004	8457	4307	4030	16794
2005	8980	2454	5300	16734
2006	6558	1885	3267	11710
2007	5173	1512	2286	8971
2008	4326	1859	5111	11296
2009	2173	1517	7772	11462
2010	3527	2341	2059	7927
2011	3886	1972	3699	9557
2012	2323	2578	9206	14107
2013	2321	2764	2276	7361
2014	2659	2415	2653	7727
2015	2438	2165	3780	8386
2016	2621	2526	4139	9286
TOTAL	83434	15311	56924	175669

dailyexpress

YOUR LOCAL VOICE | SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2017

Special Report | 7

I gazetted KK Wetlands after Daily Express report

Mary Chin

THERE will be no gazetted KK Likas Wetlands as we know it today if it was not for Datuk Seri Yong Teck Lee, who was Chief Minister under the two-year rotation system of the chief ministership 1996-98.

Then known as the Likas Bird Park (or known as Likas Bird Sanctuary) it was Yong who wasted no time in starting the process towards saving it.

Realising the importance of having such an oasis within the city's perimeters, Yong's SAPP-led State Cabinet decided to designate the Likas Swamp as "Land reserved for public purposes as a Bird Sanctuary" under the Sabah Land Ordinance 1930. The decision was made in September 1996.

Today, he is still banking on the Sabah Cultural Heritage Conservation Enactment 1997 to prevent developers laying their hands on the wetlands, Padang Merdeka, Atkinson Clock Tower and Datuk Chong Thain Van Park.

Recalling the events that led to its gazettement, he said the *Daily Express* highlighted that workers at a proposed Rakan Muda sports field near the wetlands in 1997 had stumbled upon birds' nests with eggs when earthworks were about to start. However, he could not remember the species of birds.

In this regard, he credited the *Daily Express* for continuing to raise public consciousness so that green lungs and parks can be protected from encroachers.

"The matter caught media attention. The paper quoted a European naturalist (I think a Dane, who was in town). Local environmentalists and naturalists like Tengku Adlin came forward with ideas. Later, the Government cancelled the Rakan Muda Sports field project to make way for the bird park although it was an approved, ongoing project for youths. Nature lovers then came into the picture to initiate the bird sanctuary," he recalled.

The other challenge was that the then Sports Board, which is the adjoining land owner, had also proposed to build a theme park in the vicinity, which would obviously turn the whole locality into a commercial and congested area.

"That, too, after some discussions, was shelved in favour of the bird sanctuary," Yong added.

Yong chaired a highly-charged meeting between Sports Board officials (who understandably saw the benefits of their theme park proposal) with Kota Kinabalu Municipal Council (MPKK) and other government officers.

"As the then Assemblyman for the area who also happened to be CM at the time, I was in favour of a bird park instead of a commercial theme park. Simply, a theme park can be located elsewhere in the city whereas a bird park cannot be replicated or planned. A bird park is nature's gift," he said.

Fearing that subsequent officials (including politicians) might abuse their power and turn the Likas Bird Park (and other sites) into commercial development, the 1997 Enactment was passed to protect sites, according to the former CM.

"The approval of the State Assembly was thought to be required as Assembly proceedings are open to the public and media. This would act as a deterrent to any abuse by executive power behind closed doors," he shared.

Thankfully, because of Yong's personal involvement, the Cultural Heritage (Conservation) Enactment 1997 was passed by the State Assembly in June 1997 when Yong was Chief Minister (May 1996-May 1998).

In this enactment, "conservation" means the process of looking after a cultural heritage or a conservation area so as to retain its significance, and includes maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation or a combination of two or more of these. "Conservation area" means an area declared as a conservation area under Clause 4 (1) whereby the Yang di-Pertua Negeri may on the recommendation of the State Cultural Heritage Council, by notification in the Gazette, declare any area as conservation area to be preserved or conserved as a cultural heritage.

"I bring foreign visitors to the KK Wetlands. I set free a bird that was caught by a Papar farmer. It feels good to be there. A friend was given the bird by the farmer, and they did not know what to do with it. So I took it to the Doggie Pet Shop (which kept birds) at the Bormion Centre, Luyang."

"But the following day, the owner informed us that the bird was not eating. We then took it to the Aviary at the Lok Kawi Zoo. The staff there said there was no such



A view of the 1.5km boardwalk built by the State Government through the Sabah Wildlife Department in the late 1990s. The US Navy helped in doing some repairs to the boardwalk as part of their social contribution during port calls.



The Nature Activity Centre donated and built by the Rotary Club of Kota Kinabalu. Inset: Signage.



species of birds at their place. They advised us to set it free at the Likas Bird Park which we promptly did," Yong recalled.

He had no idea what type of bird it was, and there was no name to start with, so he went to the State Library to search for images of birds and compared them with the photo of the bird taken by him. "I found out it is a black and red Broadbill (*Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchos*)," he said.

Until today, Yong is still pursuing the 1997/1998 proposal to expand the Likas Bird Park into a Green Belt. "It is awaiting implementation," he said.

The Likas Green Belt was planned in 1997 to connect the Botanical Garden (adjoining the Government Printer) along Jalan Tuaran to the Likas Sports Complex greens, and the KK Wetlands to the Likas Lagoons along Jalan Tanjung Lipat. This, he pointed out, would be a major green asset to uplift the quality of life of the people of Kota Kinabalu City, given that it has become increasingly congested.

His correspondences with the President of the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS), Datuk Hj Zainie Abdul Aucasa and the Mayor of Kota Kinabalu (then and now), showed his growing concern over persistent threats from developers since the 1980s.

In a letter to Datuk Hj Zainie in February 2016, Yong cautioned the Society against a proposal to develop the wetlands and the Likas lagoons. He cited physical structures, pavilions and restaurants as being mentioned by the developer. According to Yong, what was proposed by the developer then was disguised as a corporate social responsibility (CSR) programme, and worse than what had been rejected 20 years ago.

The former CM was equally astounded by a particular individual's remark that a bird park has no place in a city like KK, and should be moved to Tuaran.

Two months later (April 2016), he also proposed that the SWCS take up the task of bringing to fruition the Likas Green Belt.

Last November, he wrote to Zainie again enquiring about the progress of the realisation of the Likas Green Belt (with a copy extended to Mayor Datuk Yeo Boon Hai).

It is understood that the 7th SWCS Management Meeting discussed the proposal last year, but the outcome is not known.

In his reply to Yong early this year, Zainie concurred with him that the proposed Likas Green Belt would strengthen efforts to protect KKW, the last remaining green lung in the city of Kota Kinabalu.



Second Ramsar Site 2017

■ Sixth of a series



Flashback: Photo of the bird taken on March 8, 2011.



A busload of tourists from Taiwan.



This 60' x 40' KK Wetlands Nursery can accommodate 10,000 seedlings at any one time. Currently, there are 6,500 seedlings ready to be planted. Four types of mangrove species are planted in the nursery - *Rhizophora mucronata*, *Rhizophora apiculata*, *Avicennia alba* and *Bruguiera cylindrica*.



Option For Tourists & Visitors: From here (where the 10th Hut is located), it is a 500-metre walk (300 metres on gravel and 200 metres boardwalk) to the KK Wetlands Main Office.



Ground worker Abraham Sadikun and UMS intern Bjorn Johansson from Tanzania, Africa, patrolling the wetlands to check out any encroachment by outsiders.

Special Report by Daily Express. 15th October 2017

dailyexpress

YOUR LOCAL VOICE | SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2017

Special Report | 7

Mary Chin & James Sarda

MANGROVES are wetlands found where the land meets the sea and there are three categories: Inland wetlands, Marine/Coastal wetlands and Human-made wetlands that include padi fields. Their destruction or removal in the name of development has been blamed for flash floods because there is no place to accept the volumes of surface run-off.

Mangrove inhabitants include the purple heron, little heron, kingfisher, red berry snail, egret, mud whelks, mud lobster, fiddler crab, horseshoe crab, mud crab, lokan cockle, mangrove snapping shrimp, crab-eating frog, monitor lizard, mangrove skink and mudskipper.

The Kota Kinabalu Wetland Centre (also known as KK Wetlands, off Jalan Bukit Bendera Upper Likas), is a 24-hectare remnant patch of a once extensive mangrove forest in the coastal city of Kota Kinabalu (formerly Jesselton until the name change in 1987).

With its mangrove inhabitants, this Wetland Centre has become a landmark nature reserve and an urban recreational area for local communities and visitors.

Its facilities include a bird watching hide, a look-out tower, a sentinel flock and a nature activity centre built and donated by the Rotary Club of Kota Kinabalu.

KK Wetlands (previously known as KK City Bird Sanctuary) was able to survive the odds until its declaration and gazettement as Sabah's second Ramsar Site on Dec 22, 2016, due largely to efforts of an environmentally-conscious group now known as Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS).

SWCS advocates environmental conservation and awareness on wetlands ecosystem found in Sabah, and indirectly other parts in Malaysia as well as to support wetlands conservation efforts internationally.



Students of SMK Datuk Peter Mojuntin, Penampang, working at the KK Wetlands Nursery.

KK's last remaining patch of mangrove

The Kota Kinabalu Wetland Centre is a project initially supported by the United Nations Development Programme-Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (UNDP GEF-SGP).

SWCS requires a yearly budget of about RM350,000 to run the centre effectively.

In the mid-nineties, a group of environmentally-passionate individuals and birding enthusiasts in the State capital

became conscious and concerned with the threat to the last remaining patch of mangrove forests known as the Likas Swamp, which to this day is a nesting area for resident and migratory birds.

Incumbent President of SWCS, Datuk Hj Zainie Abdul Aucasa said the main threat at that point in time was encroachment by squatters, mostly illegal immigrants who had started building houses in the mangrove forest. There is also a group of local Chinese who have not budged and the sewage from these settlements flowed into the wetlands.

"This concerned group of environmentalists and birders took their genuine concerns to the attention of the Sabah State Government and lobbied up to the then Chief Minister for the conservation and rehabilitation of the mangrove ecosystem in the affected area," he said.

Subsequently, it was declared as a protected area by the State Cabinet and designated as the Kota Kinabalu City Bird Sanctuary in September 1996 under Section 28 of the Land Ordinance (Cap 68).

The same year, the Likas Wetlands Sanctuary Management Committee (LWSMC) was formed to save the last remaining patch of mangrove forest along the Kota Kinabalu coastline from being "invaded" by squatters who at that time had already erected more than 200 houses there.

(Prior to the formation of SWCS, LWSMC was a multi-stakeholder committee comprising representatives of the relevant government departments and agencies, non-governmental organ-

isations (NGOs), civil societies and the Residents' Association. It was appointed by the Chief Minister's Department (JRM) to manage the site since 1996).

According to Zainie, this mangrove forest was found to have a high population of birds, both migratory and resident, which includes several globally threatened species.

Records show that on May 19, 1999, the bird sanctuary was designated as a Cultural Heritage Site under the State's Cultural Heritage (Conservation) Enactment 1997, and ultimately gazetted in December 2000 as Kota Kinabalu City Bird Sanctuary (KKCBS). "That was executed in conjunction with the declaration of Kota Kinabalu as a city," said the President.

In 2001, the UNDP GEF-SGP gave a grant of US\$49,776.00 in support of the Project of Capacity Building for Wetland Reserve Management and Education at the then Kota Kinabalu City Bird Sanctuary.

The group of pioneers in LWSMC managed the Likas Swamp-Bird Sanctuary and eventually registered with the Registrar of Societies (ROS) as SWCS on August 22, 2005.

Today, the SWCS is managed by a Management Committee comprising 13 elected members, and Ex-Officio members, and a Board of Trustees (BOT). The Executive Committee (Exco), consisting of the President, Deputy President, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer, provides higher-level decisions to guide the SWCS Secretariat and staff of KK Wetlands.

In 2011, the Society received the



Second Ramsar Site 2017

■ Seventh of a series

"Most Outstanding Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Award" at the Sabah Environmental Recognition Night 2011, officiated by Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment, Datuk Masidi Manjun.

Over the years, major donors in aid of KK Wetlands have included HSBC Bank Malaysia, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment, Mullion Co. Inc, Japan, Shell Malaysia, CIMB Foundation, Embassy of Finland, Sabah Ports Sdn Bhd, World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF-Malaysia), Japanese International Corporation Agency (Jica), iMaj: Reach Out Run - Run for a Cause, Bank Islam Berhad and Ministry of Finance, Sabah.

A Daily Express tour of the KK Wetlands before it acquired Ramsar status found a profusion of rubbish there. Zainie gave four reasons for the phenomenon which started with the squatters of yesteryear - role of the tides and floods, lack of awareness on the importance of proper rubbish disposal, root structures of mangrove trees and poor waste management.

He said the incoming tide via the waterway inlet brings in the rubbish from the coastal areas. Likewise, floods affecting Kota Kinabalu will dump lots of rubbish in the wetlands from upstream. "Unfortunately, people's habit of throwing rubbish into waterways contributes to rubbish ending up in the wetlands. Seeping of sewage into the wetlands from the squatters on Signal Hill still occurs from physical developments and the residential area surrounding the wetlands."

He said the pencil-like root of the Avicennia spp. and the stilt-like roots of the Rhizophora spp. trap a lot of rubbish. "Poor rubbish collection and low recycling efforts contribute to rubbish being blown about and later dispersing into the wetlands."

On action taken by the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS), Zainie said rubbish traps were installed at both ends of the drainage connecting the wetlands, the sea and the developments/residential area.

"We also collaborate with Kota Kinabalu City Hall (DBKK) for the cleanliness awareness campaign by supporting the Anti-Litter Campaign," he said, adding that SWCS engages with the local community in volunteer activities such as a mangrove clean-up exercise.

Wetlands have been internationally recognised as a valuable ecosystem for wildlife and utilisation by humankind. Zainie said it has become a major source of interest both to the professional and the public.

"But at times, it has been regarded as wastelands with some of the biggest abuses inflicted by humans."

"Over the years, it has been very challenging for SWCS, particularly in its conservation efforts to restore the degraded mangrove areas or to raise awareness among the public," he told Daily Express.



(Above) Kota Kinabalu Wetland Centre. Inset: Signage.



Mudskipper.

● **Flood Control:** Wetlands can store and slow down rain run-off preventing the occurrence of flash floods.

● **Groundwater replenishment:** Wetlands play a vital role in regulating the quantity and quality of groundwater which provides drinking water to one-third of the world's population.

● **Shoreline stabilisation and storm protection:** Coastal wetlands can act as a physical barrier to storms and tidal surges by reducing their intensity. Mangrove roots also bind the shoreline together, thus reducing tidal erosion.

● **Sediment and nutrient retention:** Wetlands can slow down water flow, allowing sediments to settle. Excessive nutrients (examples, nitrates, phosphates)

in water can cause pollution; wetland plants can be effective in absorbing and storing them. These actions improve water quality.

● **Water purification:** Mangrove roots trap solid waste like plastic bottles. Other wetland plants like water hyacinths have the capacity to remove heavy metal (examples, iron, copper) from agricultural and industrial waste water discharges. Wetland animals like oysters, when filtering water for food, remove chemical contaminants.

● **Act as reservoirs of biodiversity:** Wetlands are home to many unique plants and animals. Often misunderstood, coastal wetlands are some of the most biologically diverse and productive

ecosystems.

● **Wetland products:** Human depends on wetlands for the many and varied products. More than two-thirds of all fish consumed are dependent on coastal wetlands for spawning, nursery or feeding grounds. Rice, which accounts for one-fifth of the world's calorie consumption, is grown in highly-mangrove wetlands.

● **Cultural values:** Since many human civilisations have developed in and around wetlands, they play a central role in religious rites, traditional beliefs and cultural ceremonies. Adaptation means action to minimise the adverse impacts of climate change.

● **Recreation & Tourism:** The natural

beauty, diversity of animals and plant life make wetlands ideal for recreational activities like wildlife watching and water sports.

● **Climate change mitigation and adaptation:** Mitigation refers to reducing overall levels of greenhouse gases. Wetlands like peat lands and mangroves are very good for absorbing and storing carbon dioxide. Adaptation means action to minimise the adverse impacts of climate change. It is more cost-effective to retain wetlands for flood control where frequency and intensity of rainfall are predicted to increase, and for groundwater replenishments in areas where drought is predicted.



Dog-faced Snake.



Mud lobster.



Horseshoe crab.



Jellyfish.

10 benefits of wetlands

Special Report by Daily Express. 22nd October 2017

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YOUR LOCAL VOICE | SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2017

dailyexpress

Three out of nine criteria are fulfilled

KK Wetlands (KKW) fulfilled three out of nine criteria to qualify as a Ramsar site.

These are: A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities.

In this regard, KKW supports the Lesser Adjutant Stork (*Leptoptilos javanicus*) (listed in the 2010 IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List as 'Vulnerable'), and the Chinese Egret (*Egretta eulophotes*).

Listed in the 2010 IUCN Red List as 'Vulnerable' and Appendix I of the CMS (Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)).

A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.

In this respect, KKW supports 32 species of mangrove trees and a large diversity of animals, including more than 90 species of resident and migratory birds, various reptilian species like monitor lizards and mangrove skinks, piscine species, including mud skippers, archerfish, catfishes and halibut, many crustacean species such as mud lobsters, fiddler crabs and tiger prawns.

A wetland should be considered internationally important if it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.

Undoubtedly, KKW is an important spawning and nursery ground for fish, prawns and crabs. It is also an important feeding ground for water birds as well as canopy birds.

Migratory birds such as sandpipers, red shanks and snipes use the area as a rest place in their migration path.



One of the open areas in the KK Wetlands (photo taken during high tide).

A new eco-tourism destination for Sabah

Mary Chin & James Sarda

KK Wetlands is excited over the prospect of contributing to the State's tourism agenda following the recent Ramsar status recognition. "SWCS is now moving into a new phase with plans to take on a bigger role in wetlands conservation. With this recognition, the Society will further promote the wetlands to the world," said Datuk Hj Zainie Abdul Aucana, President of the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS). The Lower Kinabatangan-Segama

Wetlands in Sabah was the first Ramsar site in Sabah and the largest in Malaysia, covering three forest reserves. As the sixth Ramsar site in Malaysia, it was officially designated at the 10th Conference of Parties (COP 10) of Ramsar Convention held in South Korea in October 2008.

There is no denying that the Kinabatangan is today an eco-tourism puller. But Zainie is also aware that having earned world recognition, the biggest task ahead is living up to the Ramsar status by overcoming short and long-term challenges.

Zainie listed four key challenges faced by the Society.

● Insufficient and discontinuous sources of funding required to manage these urban wetlands as well as to carry out research which conservation and protection strategies are based upon.

● Manpower shortage is one of the most serious problems that lead to adversely affect the daily operation besides delaying even the disposal of urgent cases. "What is also a matter of concern is that it seriously restricts the scope for taking up new activities, which is not only inevitable at times, but it could also be a critical requirement to fulfil growing information needs," Zainie said.

According to him, KKW is currently operating with a minimum of six staff members who are required to do multi-tasks such as accounts, publicity, technician, security guard, daily cleaning, maintenance, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and funding.

It is, however, important to note that it is not just the mere manpower shortage that is responsible for inadequate output or inefficient service delivery

process, but the quality of personnel as well as that of the working environment is also important to improve the output."

● KKW is experiencing rapid growth and encroachment from land developers. Zainie observed that the communities are confronted with the tough issue of preserving the quality of the environment while at the same time allowing development to occur. "Needless to say, SWCS supports sustainable development with the intention to protect KKW from any form of activities or projects which are detrimental to the wetlands' ecosystem that is home to various species of mangrove trees, birds and aquatic organisms."

● The reality is that KKW is faced with a number of issues that threaten the mangrove ecosystem. Zainie revealed that one major threat that is periodically faced is the illegal harvesting of resources within the wetlands. "Such poaching of aquatic resources by local villagers occurs and this causes decimation of the resources which serve as food for the resident and migratory birds."

The good news that KK Wetlands has achieved Ramsar status was announced on July 27, this year, when the State Government welcomed the recognition of the Wetlands as the seventh Ramsar site in the country (the wetland equivalent of world heritage site) and second in Sabah after Kinabatangan.

The site is a mangrove swamp in the heart of Kota Kinabalu City and supports a range of biodiversity with 30 mangrove species and associated plants, 90 species of resident and migratory birds and five species of reptiles. It supports three globally threatened



■ Eighth of a series

species, namely the critically endangered mangrove Bruguiera bainesii and two vulnerable water birds (that is, the Chinese egret (*Egretta eulophotes*) and the lesser adjutant stork (*Leptoptilos javanicus*)).

It is also important as a nursery ground for 21 species of fish and aquatic species, including crustaceans, mollusks, horseshoe crabs and jellyfish.

On that momentous occasion (July 27, 2017), Chief Minister Tan Sri Musa Aman received the certification from the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE), Datuk Dr Hj Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar.

The presentation ceremony was witnessed by State Tourism, Culture and Environment Minister, Datuk Masidi Manjun, President of the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS), Datuk Hj Zainie Abdul Aucana and Honorary Secretary Omar Kadir.

Musa said both the Federal and State governments are placing effort on the conservation of natural ecosystems and biodiversity.

"This is reflected in the Government's commitment to various initiatives such as the Heart of Borneo (HoB) and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands," he was quoted as saying.



Staff of the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS). At right is a Jica volunteer from Japan.



Lesser Adjutant Stork



Chinese egret.

What the Ramsar Convention is all about

OFFICIALLY, the Ramsar Convention is the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat. It is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.

It was adopted and signed on February 2, 1971 in the city of Ramsar in Iran. Hence, the Convention is named after the city of Ramsar, and any wetland site for that matter (or Ramsar site).

The original emphasis of the Ramsar Convention was the conservation and wise use of wetlands primarily as habitat for waterbirds.

Over the years, however, the Convention has broadened its scope to cover all aspects of wetland conservation and wise use. This is because wetlands are extremely important for biodiversity conservation and for the well-being of human communities.

The Convention on Wetlands entered into force in 1975 and by 2010, has 60 member states throughout the world.

Malaysia ratified the Convention on March 10, 1995.

The Convention promotes the "wise use" of wetlands, which means the maintenance of their ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches within the context of sustainable development.

It is emphasised that human use on a sustainable basis is entirely compatible with Ramsar principles and wetland conservation in general, so as to ensure that wetlands can continue to deliver their vital roles in supporting maintenance of biodiversity and human well-being.

What is a Ramsar site?

Each of the member countries of Ramsar Convention is obliged to identify and designate at least one wetland site of international importance within their territory, called "Ramsar Site".

As of 2010, there are 1923 wetlands of

international importance totalling more than 187 million hectares, more than five times the size of Malaysia.

How do we benefit from Ramsar?

● For a country to show its recognition for the vital importance of wetlands and commitment to conserve and manage its wetland resources.

● A country would have the opportunity to make its voice heard in the largest global forum on the conservation and wise use of wetlands, and to promote international cooperation on wetland issues.

● Member countries can access the latest information and advice on wetland conservation and management, and support for wetland projects.

● Member countries can designate wetlands as Ramsar sites which brings increased publicity and prestige as well as economic benefits to surrounding areas from tourism, fishing and recreation.

Sabah to host 2018 symposium

ZAINIE disclosed that the 3rd International Symposium on Conservation and Management of Wetlands 2018 will be held in Sabah next year as a biennial event. Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment, Datuk Masidi Manjun is reportedly supportive of this symposium. "Once again, we will be bringing KK Wetlands to the international platform. As in the past, we will be inviting speakers of distinction," Zainie said.

Last year, Jica (Japan International Cooperation Agency) sponsored the meeting package. Photo shows Zainie (left) presenting a memento to Masidi during the 2nd ISCMW 2016. Looking on at right is the Organising Chairman Dr Hj Rahmatullah Amat.



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dailyexpress

World's second urban wetlands after Tokyo

DE: How long did it take for KKW to achieve Ramsar Status?

Zainie: Eight years since World Wetland Day Feb 2009 when the (State) Minister of Tourism, Culture & Environment, Datuk Seri Masidi Manjun, during his speech challenged the management of KKW/SWCS to get KKW nominated as a Ramsar Site meaning listed as a wetland of international importance.

DE: Why did KKW achieve Ramsar Status only many years later (beginning from the Asian Wetland Symposium (AWS) in 2012)?

Zainie: Firstly, there was a change from manual to online submission.

When we started the process of submitting the documentation for the Ramsar listing, it was still the old format of manually preparing the paperwork referred to as the KLS (Ramsar Information Sheets).

However the Ramsar Convention HQ in Gland, Switzerland, was starting to switch to an online format for data compilation. They came up with a new online RIS and we had to re-do the whole documentation in accordance to this new online format. This new format was not only applicable to new applications for Ramsar listing but also all the existing Ramsar Sites worldwide were required to migrate to this new format.

Secondly, there were technical issues such as the Ramsar HQ server was not capable of handling high volume of data traffic to their website - these caused further delay. In fact KKW staff tasked with uploading the data online were not able to get access to the HQ server even though we were given training at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) at Putrajaya and given access password by Ramsar HQ.

Thirdly, the need to attend training (by MNRE officers and later by Ramsar HQ IT officer).

Fourthly, change of officers in charge in MNRE as well as Ramsar Secretariat.

DE: What is the criterion for getting such status? (3 out of 9 criteria were met)

Zainie: Criterion 2 states that wetlands should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region; and

Criterion 8 which states that a wetland should be considered internationally important if it is an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.

DE: How much in funding does KKW get from the State Government and will the Ramsar status be grounds to seek more? Will you also seek fund from the Federal Ministry concerned since it has international status now?

Zainie: As announced by Minister of Natural Resources & Environment Malaysia during WWD 2016, the preparation to be a Ramsar site (involved):

- State Government (MITE): RM500,000 for installing perimeter fencing (already completed)

- Federal Ministry (MNRE): RM750,000 for infrastructure development: parking lot, entrance gate and signage (still pending).

- We received a grant of RM100,000 earlier from the Federal Ministry (NRE) for the preparation of the Management Plan for KKW through the Sabah Biodiversity Centre.

As for future funds, as one of the wetlands of international importance we hope to get grants for Research & Development (R&D) and other scientific researches on wetland ecosystem as well as to continue our Public Awareness and Environmental Education programmes, in particular those involving school children.

DE: Other than Japan, the KKW is said to be the only other place in the world where its location is in the city area. Is this true?

Zainie: Kota Kinabalu Wetland is the 2nd urban wetlands (mangrove type) Ramsar Site in the world after Yatsuo Higata Ramsar Site, Chiba, Japan. Official Date of Designation as a Ramsar Site for KKW was on December 22, 2016.

DE: Who are your strongest supporters?

Zainie: Federal Government through the Ministry of NRE and State Government. The relevant agencies (in particular the Natural Resources Office, the MITE and the Sabah Wildlife Dept):

- Ramsar Secretariat

FOLLOWING is the final of a nine-part series on Kota Kinabalu Wetlands being accorded Ramsar status, the second in Sabah after Kinabatangan in 2008 - the equivalent of World Heritage Site for wetlands. Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS) President, Datuk Haji Zainie Abdul Aucasa fields questions from Special Writer Mary Chin and Chief Editor James Sarda.



The Observation Tower (Bird Watching).



FLASHBACK to September 21, 2017: Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment, Datuk Masidi Manjun (2nd right) represented Chief Minister Tan Sri Musa Aman in officially launching the Kota Kinabalu Wetland Ramsar site. With him after unveiling the plaque are from left: Founder President of the Sabah Wetlands Conservation Society (SWCS), Tengku Zainal Adlin, current President of SWCS, Datuk Hj Zainie Abdul Aucasa and Deputy President of SWCS, Dr Hj Rahmatullah Amat.

In the case of plant, we have a joint collaboration with Sabah Parks in trying to propagate in our nursery the mangrove species known by its local name as Berus Mata Buaya (its scientific name is *Bruguiera hainensis*) which is listed as critically-endangered under the IUCN Red List.

As for animals, we do get the occasional birds, monitor lizards and turtles from the public.

DE: Who are your main researchers? Is it attracting local and foreign researchers?

Zainie: Our main researchers are normally from UMS and other local IPTA/IPS. Some of the foreign researchers (to name a few) have been Masahiro Kamada, Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies, Kyoto University, Japan, Joanne Chin, Graduate School of Architecture & Design, Tasmania, Australia, UTAS and Almut Sievert, University in Hamburg, Germany.

DE: How big is the area, has it shrunk

since its inception and why? There are claims that a certain portion had to be excised for condo development. Is this true?

Zainie: It spans 24 hectares. No, the area is not shrunk since it was gazetted initially under the Land Ordinance 1950 as "Land reserved for public purposes namely as a bird sanctuary" and later under the Cultural Heritage (Conservation) Enactment 1997 as a Conservation site.

There is no truth to the claim that a certain portion had to be excised out for condo development. The condo development was planned on private titled-land by the landowner which is a company based in Klang, Selangor, as the project proponent. It is located outside the boundary of KKW but is in close proximity (within 100 meters) to KKW. However, the proposed development appears to be held in abeyance as the Approval to its original Environmental Impact Assessment had lapsed subsequent to the Court Case taken by SWCS for a Judicial Review against the granting of Approval of the EIA. This case went up to the Court of Appeal where SWCS was successful in getting the Judicial Review (Ref: Court of Appeal (Civil Appeal No. 2-01(1M)-407-12/2013; Zainie Abdul Aucasa, HJ v Yabi Yangkat Director Sabah Environment Protection Department) [2016] AMJ 0422 [2016] 4 J 518, HC.

DE: How many condo projects have sprouted in adjacent areas since the gazettement of the wetlands?

Zainie: Bayshore Condo and Manikar Townhouses Development are the closest to KKW but they do not cause any direct threat to the ecosystem at KKW.

DE: Condo projects have everything to gain by being beside the wetlands as residents have a good view of the natural scenery and birds, but how do these condos impact the wetlands? (Example, traffic flow, noise pollution, etc)

Zainie: Pollution in terms of garbage especially during construction stage more condos will mean more people living near the wetlands. Improper garbage disposal can runoff into river, gets carried by tide and get trapped in between the mangrove trees roots.

Sedimentation (more soil is put into the river) increase and causes increase in turbidity (water appears more brown and not clear). Earthwork during construction for condo projects will cause soil to be washed into the wetland. Increase in turbidity affects the role of mangrove as a nursery and breeding ground for fish and invertebrates. More turbid, lesser light penetration thus lesser productivity of primary producer (planktons) in the water. These planktons are major food source for fish.

The level of Dissolved Oxygen in the water will be affected; hence will reduce the number of organism that can survive there. Noise during construction and later by residents will definitely affect the birds especially those with nestlings.

DE: Are there any more condo proposals to be approved within the wetlands vicinity to the best of your knowledge?

Zainie: We are not privy to information on any new condo proposal that maybe submitted to the DBKK Planning Department except for the Laser Plus Condo which was the subject of our Court Case as mentioned earlier. However we are hopeful that DBKK will get the Draft Local Plan



Tourists from the Netherlands at the KK Wetlands Centre. Second right is Lynne Germain who learned about the wetlands from a SWCS brochure on display at the hotel where they were staying.



for Kota Kinabalu gazetted soonest in order to enforce the provisions it has for the Signal Hill area in the vicinity of KKW where it is zoned for Residential Special/Ridge Conservation - this area is designated for individual dwellings of not more than two storey high and not more than 10 such dwellings per hectare.

DE: How many wetlands species in flora and fauna have been discovered so far?

No. of species	No. of genus	No. of family
Flora	32	24
Fauna:		
Birds	97	74
Reptiles	6	6
Fish	21	20
Crustacean	19	17
Molluscs	13	13
Chelicerates	2	2
Insect	44	39
Cnidaria	1	1

DE: How many workers are there attending to the wetlands maintenance now? Are they local or foreigners?

Zainie: Currently it is operating with a minimum of six staff, all locals. They are required to multi-task such as publicity, technician, security guard, maintenance, administrative, account, conservation and environmental activities, daily cleaning, CSR and funding, etc.

Sometimes students from local universities will apply for internship programme. For the past eight years, SWCS received Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) from Japan International Corporation Agency.

DE: Are they salaried and is the job privatised? (If so, what is the amount for upkeep yearly?)

Zainie: The society pay the salary for the six staff. Annual amount for the upkeep and other operating expenses is approximately RM350,000 yearly.

DE: What are the legal provisions in place for those charged and convicted for encroaching into the area? Has anyone been charged so far?

Zainie: Any encroachment will be subjected to the provision of the penal codes for trespassing. If anyone is caught catching, trapping or in possession of birds or other species of flora or fauna protected under the Sabah Wildlife Ordinance, they can be charged under its provisions. So far no one has been charged.

DE: What are the other Ramsar sites in the region and is there networking among them?

Zainie: The Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention, is an international treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

Number of Contracting Parties: 169
Number of Ramsar Sites: 2,290
Total surface of designated sites: 220,453,845ha

More info at <http://www.ramsar.org/> Ramsar Sites in Malaysia:

- i. Tasik Bera in Pahang
- ii. Tanjung Piai in Johor
- iii. Pulau Kukup in Johor
- iv. Sungai Pulai in Johor
- v. Kuching Wetland in Sarawak
- vi. Lower Kinabatangan/Segama Wetlands in Sabah
- vii. Kota Kinabalu Wetlands in Sabah



The Timbalan Wetlands Education Centre. Inset: Signage.



Special Report by Daily Express. 5th November 2017



2nd - 5th October 2017. Schools engagement at Bengkoka, Pitas.

Upper left-right: SK Bawing & SK Datong. Lower left-right: SK Malubang & SMK Bongkol



7th October 2017. Environment Education Programme with Sabah Tshung Tsin Secondary School, Kota Kinabalu.



9th October 2017. Environment Education Programme with JICA Training & Dialogue Programme 2017 & IBTP, UMS.



10th October 2017. Environment Education Programme & Mangrove Tree Planting at Sulaman Lake Forest Reserve, Tuaran with Hard Rock Cafe & Amazing Borneo Tours.



22nd October 2017. Environment Education Programme with Koshi High School, Japan.



25th October 2017. Mangrove Tree Planting with Sekolah Sukan Malaysia Sabah.



31st October 2017. Environment Education Programme & Environment Voluntary Work with SMK St. Paul, Beaufort.

Guests comments

A really wonderful example of mangroves & conservation.

- Eleanor Busgess, UK

Go Green. Love from France

- Hanif Mark Anderson, France

Very nice, we saw a Monitor Lizard & Mudskippers!

- Rebecca & David, UK

White Collared Kingfisher were great.

- Mary Darren Cedric Steve, Scotland UK

Upcoming Events

Environment Education Programme

- SK Monsok Tengah, Tambunan
- SK Pekan Pitas II

Environment Voluntary Work

- Kolej Vokasional Likas
- SMK Desa Kencana

Outreach

- Community Engagement, Pitas

Other Events

- Wader World Watch
- Launching of Rotary District Tree Planting Programme

VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

01

volunteering is good for your heart

Volunteering for KK Wetland Ramsar Site can be a great fun! If you have passion for the environment or just want to gain more outdoor experiences, this is the appropriate channel. Do not miss the chance! Sign up to be a volunteer now or contact us for more information.

02

Monthly Bird Monitoring

Join our monthly birding activity on every 15th-17th day of the month

FOR
MORE
INFO

How to
REGISTER

Call us at
088-246955
or drop us an email at
swcs@sabahwetlands.org

membership

Benefits of being our member

03

- As a member, you will be able to participate in members' events and enjoy free entry to Kota Kinabalu Wetland Ramsar Site
- Eligible for 50% discount for binoculars rental*.
- Most importantly, you know you are helping this ecosystem to survive and provide essential services to it.

support us by joining our programmes

1. Environment Education Programme

- KK Wetlands Mangrove Experience Programme
- Mangrove Conservation Experience Programme
- Handcrafting from Mangrove

2 Environment Voluntary Work

- Nursery Work
- Mangrove Clean-Up

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