

**Sabah Wetlands
Conservation Society
(SWCS)**

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

**Established on
22 August 2005**

OBJECTIVES

- ◆ 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 Wetlands (KKW) as a model wetlands centre for the purpose of conservation, education, recreation, tourism and research.

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8.00am–6.00pm

ASIAN WATERBIRD CENSUS

Migratory waterbirds are waterbirds which migrate from Southern or Northern part of the world to during winter season in their respective region to warmer region. The Northern migration period is between October to April every year.

Since 1980s, the population of certain migratory waterbird species has dropped significantly and few species are recognized as endangered species under IUCN Redlist, including the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (Vulnerable) and Black Faced Spoonbill (Endangered). The Asian Waterbird Census is an annual census of waterbirds. It is one of the efforts in conservation of waterbirds, especially migratory waterbird. The purpose of this census is to monitor any changes in population size and distribution of migratory waterbirds in Asian wetlands during migratory seasons.

This year, 3 representatives from SWCS participated in the census. SWCS has done the census in Tempasuk Plain (Paddy Field) in Kota Belud on 22nd January 2017, while in KK Wetlands and Likas Lagoon, waterbirds counting was done by volunteers and Malaysian Nature Society members on 21st January 2017.



General view at counting site in Tempasuk Plain, Kota Belud.



Wetland Areas and Ancient Civilisation

By **Johann Kassim**

As moderns, we regard wetlands as wastelands. We gawk at the potential these lands hold for economic development. We care only for monetary worth disregarding the greener predicaments in question. We preserve wetlands hoping to do our bit for the environment. But, do you know that wetland areas were once cherished for many things? This article will explore the hidden gems and wonders of the wetlands in ancient times.

The Ancient Attitude Towards Wetlands

Before the industrial revolution, people saw wetland areas as a valued resource. They cherished the rich, abundant ecology. They appreciated the inter-connectedness between man and his environment. Wetlands were places where life interacted on an equal scale. The ancients saw the importance and functionality of the wetland areas.

Why did they think this way? For one, they did not have the spoiling of modernity with its improving technology. They did not have the ability at plundering the wetlands. Nor, were they able to see commercial potential. In other words, they were innocent and respected their environment. They valued its capacity to provide them with a sustainable life. Moreover, they depended on the wetlands area for sustenance.

The Mesopotamian Marshlands

At one time, the Mesopotamian Marshlands covered about 20,000 square kilometres. It was one of the largest wetland areas on the planet. The two major rivers that fed this wetland area was the Tigris and Euphrates. It also included the Nile river in ancient Egypt.

It is in these marshlands that paleontologists found remains of pollen grains. These grains show that man had cultivated these lands for farming as early as 10,000 years ago. This is evident in the establishment of man's first city, Gobekli Tepe in modern day Turkey. This was man's first attempt at living together in a city of sorts. This was possible due to the farming of wheat in the wetland areas of the Tigris-Euphrates river. For the first time in history, man grouped together to support each other in the production of this crop. An interesting fact about man's first city is that it had no roads. Everyone

would travel from one house to another via the rooftop!

In ancient Egypt, an area within the scope of this ancient wetland; papyrus, a wetlands plant species, grew along the banks of the Nile. The papyrus laid the basis for paper production and ancient literacy. Hence, the wetlands had a role to play in creating the written word!

The wetlands were so important and vital to the livelihood of these ancients. They showed this in their religions. For example, in Egypt, Isis, the goddess of fertility had the title of "Lady of the Marshes". It was because she provided nourishment for the land and helped to grow the crops. Also in ancient Egypt, Thoth, the god of knowledge, comes in the image of an "Ibis" or waterfowl. Hence, the ancients revered and worshipped the wetlands. It's because these lands provided them with plenty nourishment for life.

Mayan Cultivation of Wetland Areas

The Mayan civilisation grew 3,000 years ago in Mesoamerica. The height of their civilisation was between 2,400 to 1,100 years ago. The Mayans experienced a lot of drought and rising sea levels. In spite of all these challenges, it was an archaeological riddle how they were able to feed their people.

The answer to that question lay in their cultivation of wetland areas. The answer to that question lay in their cultivation of wetland areas. A study performed by the George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, showed proof. It showed that Mayans had been growing avocados, maize, and grass species. The Mayans had also constructed canals to connect various wetland areas. It was to divert water into new farmland areas.



Aerial view of Mesopotamian Marshlands.
© RAMSAR

It goes to show that the Mayans valued Wetlands and made use of its resources. Such appreciation enabled them to develop their farming for the betterment of society. Hence, it goes to show that valuing our wetland areas is for our own good. They looked for "green" opportunities to aid the growth of their people.

Rice Cultivation and Ancient Asian Wetlands

The domestication of rice occurred 7,000 years ago in Asian wetland areas. It may have originated in the wetlands of southeast Asia around that time. Thereafter, it developed as a crop to feed huge populations along the Yangtze and Ganges.



Modern rice field at Longji Rice Terraces, Longsheng, China.

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We all know how important a staple rice is for Asians. Well, without wetlands to care for the crop, there would be no rice cultivation. Like grain in the west, rice became the basis for growing Asian civilizations.

Ancient Asian wetlands were also places where the sea meets the land. Here, many people made villages and settlements. They depended on the fishes of wetland areas to survive. They also used the wood in wetland forests to make their own homes. Wetland dwellers also took to hunting the local wildlife.

Wetlands and the Future: A Troubling Concern

The necessity to care for our wetland areas cannot be overemphasize. In 1972, as a result of wetland depletion due to developments of port cities like Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Stockholm, and Boston; an international agreement to preserve the world's wetland areas was signed at Ramsar, Iran. A direct result of Ramsar, is the preservation of wetland areas in the world. Our wetlands center, here in Kota Kinabalu, is

still being considered to be a notable Ramsar site in the state after the Lower Kinabatangan-Segama Wetlands area in the East Coast. We are happy we can do our best to preserve a part of a necessary resource. We moderns ought to emulate the ancient appreciation of wetlands, and strive to preserve this most scarce resource.



WETLANDS AND WILDLIFE: Proboscis Monkey

Borneo is blessed with endemic species and one of it is the Proboscis Monkey which commonly known as 'Monyet Belanda' or 'Monyet Bayau'. This creature is special because of its own uniqueness which has a very distinctive feature such as its long nose that can attract females. The male's nose is larger compared to females which also a form of sexual selection towards females. In fact, their nose can be up to 7 inches long. Besides that, they are the species that consume leaves, seeds, fruits and sometimes insects. Monkey can be found only on the island of Borneo in Southeast Asia, but these species is commonly distributed at Klias and Sukau. They live on the forest canopy in mangrove forest and tend to avoid human placement. Other than its long and fleshy nose, it has an obvious large pot bellies. They has a special digestive system comprises of cellulose digesting bacteria where they are able to consume leaves as their main foods. Their stomach fillings make up to one quarter of their body weight which makes them look permanently pregnant. Thus, their weight can be reach up to 50 pounds (23 Kilogram).

The Proboscis Monkey inhabits unique habitats. This species are usually associated with riverine and coastal habitat which include mangroves, peat swamp and freshwater swamp forest as this places providing good sources of food. Furthermore, Proboscis Monkey mostly consumed unripened non fleshy fruit and young leaves. This species more prefer folivorous and frugivorous. They are the largest mammals which can be found inhabiting the higher level of canopy within the wetland area. It rarely ranges far from its local habitat's waterway.

The increase of palm oil plantation all the way down to the river edge and continuously in deforestation will give impact of the declining population of Proboscis Monkey. The major threat of Proboscis Monkey are habitat loss because this creature occupy to mangrove forest and riverine environment which preferred by human for activities or settlement.

Other issue such as human hunting for food and Proboscis Monkey value as a commodity in trade industry has led to the declining of this creature. Proboscis monkey's intestines secrete bezoar stones, a valuable ingredient in Chinese Medicine and there is a greater demand for them as exotic pets from collectors (Meijaard & Nijman, 2000). Another issue is natural disasters such as forest fires that will destroy the habitat of the Proboscis Monkey.



The importance of conserving various wildlife is essential that can give advantage to economic development and ecotourism. The proboscis monkey is listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). It was threatened as endangered and are prohibit from any commercial international trade.

© www.monkeyworlds.com/proboscis-monkey/

Proboscis Monkey is listed as an endangered species under the IUCN Red List. Furthermore, this species also listed under CITES Appendix I. Appendix I involves the list of most endangered species among the Cites-listed plants and animals. Therefore, it is prohibited from all international trade. This species does occur in some protected areas in Sabah, such as Klias National Park, Kulamba Wildlife Sanctuary, Ulu Segama Reserve and Lower Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary.

The Proboscis Monkey population is more vulnerable to habitat destruction such as cultivation, jetty building, logging and oil palm plantations. In addition, this species also threatened and prone to poaching activity as it have a lethargic behaviour and hunted for its meat. Unlike Orang utan, Proboscis Monkey are frequently unseen, where the population has decline by more than 50% within 35-40 years ago. So, the future existence of this species is mainly depends on awareness effort and attention to its current situation.

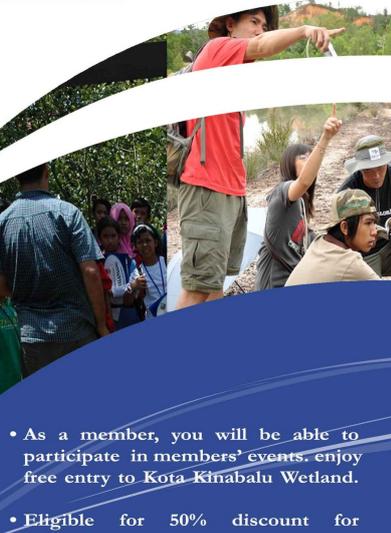
SUPPORT OUR EFFORTS AS MEMBER!

Kota Kinabalu Wetlands

This is a 24-hectare mangrove forest reserve right in the heart of the city of Kota Kinabalu that has been designated as a State Cultural Heritage site since 1998. It is managed by SABAH WETLANDS CONSERVATION SOCIETY.

This environmental education centre on the site has been in operation since 2000. It has an administrative building with an exhibition hall, a 1.5 km boardwalk, a bird hide, observation tower and outdoor class room.

Benefits of Being Our Member



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

*Subject to change without further notice

What Can You do to Help?

- Be a member
- Be a volunteer
- Perform Environmental Voluntary Work
- Carry out Corporate Social Responsibility

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We welcome article/writing contributions from public in our monthly newsletter! Write something related to wetlands, and email to

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**Public contributions are subjected to editing by SWCS and credited to the author.*