

Editorial Team

Editor-in-chief/Director

Bridget Hedderman
bridget@ecofieldtrips.com

Managing Editor

Cheryl Fan
ecofieldtrips.admin@gmail.com

Contributors & Credits

- Helen Brunt
- Ligia Fernández Molina
- Karen Chen
- Singapore American School



www.ecofieldtrips.com.sg

UK School Trips 2007

This year will prove to be an exciting year for Ecofieldtrips. Apart from setting up our new research and educational centre on Melina Beach in Tioman, we have a huge number of UK schools booking trips with us. This year we are pleased to welcome Mary Erskine School from Scotland.

Our UK programme takes place in Tioman Island, Malaysia. Our qualified biologists teach an essential rainforest-to-reef introduction to the various ecosystems on this beautiful island. The students then go on to qualify as PADI Open Water divers with a 5* PADI dive centre at Melina Beach. Ecofieldtrips staff oversees all the training and offer marine biology dives for already qualified divers.

For more information on our fun-filled and educational trips, do visit our website at www.ecofieldtrips.com.sg!



Swiss School Heads Up to New Ecofieldtrips' Centre on Melina Beach



Swiss School on Melina Beach

As many of you may have read in our October 2006 issue, Ecofieldtrips is now co-owner at Melina Beach. This gives Ecofieldtrips the opportunity to further develop Melina Beach for school groups, particularly those schools who want to do field work/surveys as a part of their curriculum.

In March the Swiss School from Singapore did a 5 day field trip based at Melina Beach. They were delighted to be the first school group at our new centre. The children were aged 8-10 years making them the youngest students on our field trips. The children partook in everything that the older student groups do. They really were an amazing group of children and a real joy to work with.

Singapore American School Diving and ReefCheck® trip to Pulau Tiga, Sabah

In February Ecofieldtrips, together with Fieldskills Sdn. Bhd., a Sabah-based company which specialises in expeditions and adventure trips in Borneo, developed a new educational dive trip to Pulau Tiga: "Borneo Survivor Island", for the Singapore American School 2007 Interim.

Pulau Tiga is ideal for student groups as it is one of the three islands in the Pulau Tiga National Park. This island itself has only one resort which caters for tourists and divers with an interest in biology and conservation. 17 students and 2 teachers from SAS spent 5 days surveying the reefs around the island as part of a ReefCheck® Programme, as well as completing their PADI Advanced Open Water Diver Certification.



Director Bridget Hedderman with biodegradable food packaging

In an attempt to make children aware of recycling and reusing plastic bags, polystyrene boxes are no longer used for packed lunches at Melina Beach. All food is either wrapped in banana leaf or packed in reusable lunch boxes.

Pulau Tiga is known for its rich coral reefs and pristine forests, however, it is also famous for its natural Mud Volcanoes. The SAS students enjoyed an afternoon wallowing in the mud and taking advantage of its natural mineral properties.



On the necessary 'non-diving' day, the students made a visit to nearby Snake Island, a small rocky island with unique flora and fauna, including a large population of Yellow-lipped Sea Kraits (*Laticauda colubrina*). The final night of the trip was spent in the Klias Wetlands and a dusk river cruise produced sightings of the extraordinary Proboscis monkey (found only in Borneo) as well as macaques, silver langurs, water buffalo and a huge variety of birds.



Semporna Islands Darwin Project



The beautiful islands of Semporna

As well as working with Ecofieldtrips, 2 of our biologists are currently involved with a conservation project in Sabah, East Malaysia. The 'Semporna Islands Darwin Project' is a 3-year initiative designed to protect the outstanding natural features and biodiversity of the Tun Sakaran Marine Park (TSMP) while promoting sustainable use of natural resources, economic development and traditional culture. The project partners are Sabah Parks and the Marine Conservation Society UK, also supported by the Department of Fisheries Sabah, Universiti Malaysia Sabah and WWF-Malaysia.



Helen Brunt, SIDP Project Officer & EFT Biologist, with Semporna Islands children

The TSMP, gazetted in July 2004, is Malaysia's largest marine park, covering 340km² of sea and coral reefs and 10km² of land. The management challenge is to balance biodiversity conservation with sustainable use and to deal fairly with local communities who have used the area for decades.

The main activities in the Park are fishing, seaweed farming and cultivation of fruit and vegetables. Coral reefs in the TSMP are important fishing grounds for local communities, but stocks of fish, shells, sea cucumbers and other edible species are currently low, due to heavy fishing pressure and destructive fishing methods especially fish blasting.

Many of the problems stem from poverty and a heavy reliance on fishing. Under the Project, alternative

and environmentally friendly livelihoods for fishing communities are being introduced, thus reducing direct pressure on marine resources.

The SIDP team is conducting an Education and Awareness Campaign throughout the TSMP and in the wider Semporna area. This includes a traveling 'Boatshow' which visits settlements and villages on the inhabited islands in the Park, as well as *pondok-pondok* (wooden huts on stilts) on the reef top, where seaweed is farmed. Posters, leaflets and questionnaires inform adults, whilst a range of educational and interactive activities, stickers and booklets have been developed for children.

The Project is currently grant-aided by the Darwin Initiative, through funding from the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, for the period 2005-2008. Additional sources of funding are now sought to continue this work in the unique Tun Sakaran Marine Park. Ecofieldtrips would like to explore ways of making links between schools in Singapore and the island children in Semporna for their mutual benefit.

www.sempornaislandsproject.com

Exploring Karak Ecofarm



Waterfall at Karak Ecofarm

Karak Ecofarm is located 80km East of Kuala Lumpur. It shares some of its boundaries with the Lentang Permanent Forest Reserve, a magnificent piece of pre-montane forest. This property of 100 acres was originally planted with rubber and oil palm. In the last few years, its owner, Soh Swee Huat, has started introducing fruit trees and other plants, and has reduced to a minimum the use of pesticides. His objective is to use the property as a centre for environmental education, with suitable

accommodation for groups of students and nature lovers.

Ecofieldtrips will start using Karak Ecofarm in 2008, combining it with visits to Kuala Gandah Elephant Sanctuary (located some 50km from the farm) and other locations in central Peninsular Malaysia.

Ligia Fernández Returns!



Ligia on her boat, sailing the high seas

Ligia Fernández is a Costa Rican marine biologist who has worked on conservation and tourism in Central America for many years, both with the private sector and international organizations, such as the IUCN. She worked with Ecofieldtrips as a field biologist from 1997 to 1999, before departing with her husband for a six year sailing experience in their 15-metre sailboat "Quest".

Ligia has an interest in the ecology and interactions of the inhabitants of different ecosystems (mangroves, rainforests, coral reefs), but also in searching for ways for communities to make a decent living while staying next to or within protected areas. In 2006, she joined a team of consultants in Latin America to review the success of a concept known as 'Payment for Environmental Services', which identifies new, innovative schemes to promote a market-oriented approach to conservation. Ligia is now back in the region and has joined Ecofieldtrips again as a field biologist, sharing with students her wealth of knowledge on conservation and biology.



"She sells seashells on the seashore. She shouldn't sell seashells on the seashore. It's a sinful sin and a sorrowful story for the seashells sold on the seashore."

- Made by the "SeaStars" groups of Raffles Girls School, March 2007.