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Wetlands success

WITH reference to the letter titled 'Singing the same old song' (*The Malay Mail*, July 14), the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry would like to clarify certain points with regards to Paya Indah Wetlands (PIW).

The ministry, through the Wildlife and National Parks Peninsular Malaysia Department, is committed to conserve and sustainably manage the PIW, focusing on wetland education and research activities as its main thrust.

PIW has been successfully rehabilitated from a degraded wetlands to one abundant with biodiversity comprising many bird species, rich wetland flora, diverse aquatic species and terrestrial fauna through an integrated management approach by the department. Currently, PIW is home to more than 229 species of birds, 14 species of fish, 63 species of mammals, 20 species of reptiles, 10 species of amphibians and 220 species of aquatic, terrestrial plants and rare herbs.

The department has also undertaken habitat enrichment activities with the cooperation of various agencies under the ministry such as Forest Research Institute of Malaysia, Department of Irrigation and Drainage, National Hydraulic Institute of Malaysia and several local universities in providing more habitats for wildlife species in the area.

These enrichment efforts include planting of selected tree species that provides habitat and food for wildlife, especially birds. To date, 31,000 trees have been planted since the department took over the management of the wetlands.

Various government agencies, schools and private sectors were involved in this programme. AEON, for example, had been planting trees in PIW as part of their 'Bumi Hijau' programme and through this

programme, various wildlife species, including migratory

birds have made PIW as their new home.

In moving towards a richer wildlife diversity and population in PIW, the department has also introduced various wildlife species to the area.

Due to its unique ecology system, PIW has managed to attract researchers and scientists to conduct research work in the area of hydrology, botany, wetland rehabilitation, limnology, avifauna, entomology, wetland biodiversity and wetland ecology.

To date, 21 research projects have been implemented with various entities, including government agencies, local universities and research institutions.

These inputs and scientific data gathered from the projects will subsequently assist PIW and other wetlands in managing and enhancing its conservation efforts.

The department also supports local universities to utilise PIW for their outdoor classroom activities while catering to students from local universities to undergo industrial training at PIW.

PIW is fast emerging as an important environmental education hub for schools located in Selangor, Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur. Since 2008, a total of 3,400 students from 40 schools have attended awareness and environmental education programmes in PIW.

Among the activities involving school children under this programme are bird watching, jungle trekking, orienteering, kayaking, interpretive trails, conservation talks, wildlife watching and dedicated programmes on appreciation of biodiversity especially focusing on wetland ecosystem.

Existing facilities have also been upgraded since the

department took over the management of PIW. These include the upgrading of the road leading to the wetlands, chalets, seminar hall, restaurant, public restrooms, jetty, gazebos, animal enclosures and landscaping work.

Currently, PIW is divided into three zones, namely the Recreational Zone, Education Zone as well as Conservation and Research Zone exclusive for site-specific activities.

The Recreational Zone has 34 chalets surrounding the lake where visitors will be thrilled to have a close look at crocodiles, the Nile hippopotamus, mouse-deer, lesser tree duck, purple swamp hen, peacock and the great argus, just to name a few.

The park has also opened several lakes to the public for angling since May 2009 with more than 3,000 anglers to date having visited this premise for the purpose of recreational fishing.

The equestrian trail has also been upgraded and maintained regularly to provide safe ride for the riders.

PIW also caters to cyclists who wish to explore the park. Other recreational activities provided by PIW are hippo feeding, crocodile feeding, fish feeding, bird watching, angling, nature photography and jogging.

The Paya Indah Wetlands Interpretive centre is open to the public to enable them to get an insight on the biodiversity and ecosystem of the area.

Based on our records, a total of 55,101 visitors have visited the park since the day it was opened in 2008 with an average of

between 150 and 200 on weekends.

Up to June this year alone, 25,000 visitors have visited PIW and it is anticipated that

there will be a further increase once all recreational activities planned for the park are fully implemented.

This is an encouraging indicator for ecotourism and PIW will certainly emerge as an important tourist destination.

Besides that, PIW is an excellent venue for companies to organise their team building activities and family day celebrations.

It is also important to note that Paya Indah Wetlands differs from a zoological park due to the fact that wildlives species are found in their habitats and not in captivity with an exception to the Nile hippopotamus and crocodiles.

The focus here is to educate the public and create awareness on the importance of preserving wetlands and its biodiversity resources.

The department is undertaking efforts to provide more recreational activities and facilities to the visitors before promoting the park to the public next year under the 10th Malaysia Plan. There will be added attractions in PIW such as Night Safari, Boat Paddling, Gibbon Island and Rusiga Lake boat cruise for the public to enjoy.

In view of this, the ministry and the department will continue their commitment in ensuring Paya Indah Wetlands is rehabilitated, enriched with biodiversity and sustainably managed for the purposes of education, awareness and research.

Those interested can forward their feedback on PIW to us via email at pakp@wildlife.gov.my.

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Natural Resources and Environment Ministry

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