

Headline	Malaysia wins gold award at biodiversity meet		
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# Malaysia wins gold award at biodiversity meet

By WONG LI ZA

star2green@thestar.com.my

WE have lost four species of plants for good, and almost 37% are at risk of being extinct for now.

Malaysia is one of 17 mega biodiverse countries in the world, along with countries like Brazil, Indonesia, India and China.

There are over 8,800 vascular plant species (including tree and non-tree species) in Peninsular Malaysia; 15,000 in Malaysia.

Over a period of seven years beginning 2006, the Forest Research Institute Malaysia's (FRIM) biodiversity team assessed 1,132 species of vascular plants in Peninsular Malaysia and discovered the above statistics of the threatened plants.

The four species gone forever in Peninsular Malaysia are the herbaceous plant known as asam batu (scientific name: *Begonia eiromischa*); the timber species called damar hitam (*Shorea kuantanensis*) and the ferns *Oreogrammitis crispula* and *Oreogrammitis kunkstleri*.

"There are two main reasons for extinction: one, a species is endemic to the area and once it's gone, it's gone forever; two, the species is only found in small quantities," said FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod. He was speaking at a recent press conference to announce Malaysia's winning of the Gold Award under the new CHM (Clearing-House Mechanism) category at COP13 (the 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity) held in Cancun, Mexico.

Abd Latif added that another problem is when land is cleared for plantations, there is no check done to find out what species grow there.

Among the conservation actions taken by FRIM to-date are the setting up of a Botanical Research and Herbarium Management System, and the publication of a book, *Malaysia Plant Red List (2010)*, which lists out the threatened

Dipterocarpaceae plant species in the country from the 1,132 species analysed so far.

"That's just the beginning; the work is ongoing as FRIM needs to list out and go through all the 15,000 species," said FRIM Forest Biodiversity Division director Dr Lillian Chua, who was also present at the press conference.

In 2008, FRIM also launched its Malaysia Biological Diversity Clearing House Mechanism

(MyCHM) website, which evolved from FRIM's earlier initiative to establish a website focusing on flora information.

In 2010, MyCHM was enhanced to facilitate easier public access to biodiversity data, in line with the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry's aspiration of turning the website into a one-stop repository for Malaysia's biodiversity information.

The newer version incorporated, among other things, smart search features.

With the increase in biodiversity data and the need to introduce data analysis, a new MyCHM website was developed in 2014 and rebranded as the Malaysia Biodiversity Information System (MyBIS).

In December last year, Malaysia beat 104 countries to win the Gold Award under the new CHM category at COP13.

The award was accorded to Malaysia for making the most progress in the development of its national biodiversity CHM.

(A Clearing-House Mechanism serves to promote and facilitate technical and scientific cooperation within and between countries and act as a global mechanism for exchanging and integrating information on biodiversity).

"MyBIS is driven by the collection of specimens and by research. It is not a static system but a dynamic one. The amount of data will keep increasing with more partners being involved," said Chua.

To date, the database records information on nearly 39,000

species of flora and fauna. It includes over 2,500 pictures, conservation status of 1,062 plants, 480 biodiversity experts, and 1,069 publications.

"The latest version of the website allows for data analysis which is very important to us to assist in decision-making. It's useful for the public too, as they can find out, for example, what species (of plants and also animals) are endemic to say, Pahang," said Chua.

The development of the current system is in line with Malaysia's National Policy on Biological Diversity. It is also part of the country's commitments under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity to facilitate reporting and the transfer of biodiversity and conservation-related information both nationally and internationally.

**MyBIS is accessible at [www.mybis.gov.my](http://www.mybis.gov.my)**



Keruing layang, or *Dipterocarpus sarawakensis*, another critically endangered species, is endemic to Permanent Forest Reserves in Jerangau, Terengganu, and Sarawak. — FRIM

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*Hopea subalata* (Merawan kanching) is critically endangered and endemic to the Kanching Forest Reserve, Selangor. — FRIM



White Meranti trees forming a canopy at the Forest Research Institute Malaysia. — Filepic

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Asam batu or *Begonia herveyana*, a critically endangered species currently found only in Malacca and Johor. — FRIM



Abd Latif and Chua with the Gold Award that FRIM won for its MyBIS website at COP13 in Cancun, Mexico. — MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI/The Star