

#JOM!: Aquaria KLCC and UMT in coral conservation move

By Tahir Alhamzah - June 8, 2024 @ 11:30am



Coral spawning is the synchronised phenomenon typically occurring once a year and around full moon, often influenced by environmental triggers such as water temperature and lunar cycles causing corals to release eggs and sperms into water.

JAMES TAN

PULAU Bidong, located off the coast of Terengganu, is home to a diverse range of coral species.

The reefs around Pulau Bidong are crucial habitats for numerous marine organisms and play a significant role in the local marine ecosystem.

These reefs not only support marine biodiversity but also protect the shoreline from erosion, contribute to the fishing industry and attract tourists, which is vital to the local economy.



Tan led a significant coral spawning project at Pulau Bidong, releasing 600,000 coral larvae into the surrounding waters through this effort. JAMES TAN

However, these reefs faced threats from natural disasters like the Pabuk Storm in 2019 and human activities, necessitating urgent conservation efforts.

As such, restoring the coral reefs there is essential for several reasons.

Healthy coral reefs provide critical habitats for marine life, support local fisheries, and protect coastal areas from storm surges and erosion.

Additionally, they are vital for the tourism industry, which is a significant source of income for local communities.

By engaging in coral restoration, it is hoped that our efforts are enough to restore the corals while ensuring the coral reefs ecosystem continue to thrive.



Associate Professor Dr James Tan Chu Hong (right) explaining the All For One Method – Coral Restoration Process.
AQUARIA KLCC

Conservation campaign

This is where efforts such as collaboration between Aquaria KLCC and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) for coral conservation initiative is exemplary.

With an initial contribution of RM68,000 from Aquaria KLCC, UMT embarked on the Phase 1 of the groundbreaking coral conservation campaign that began in 2019.

UMT conducted essential research to identify corals that could withstand harsh weather conditions. This foundational work was crucial in developing effective coral restoration strategies.



Male and female corals release their reproductive cells, called gametes, into the water, which then combine to form larvae, which will then float until they find a hard surface to attach to and grow into new coral colonies. JAMES TAN

Last year, the campaign continued to Phase 2, with information gathered from these insights, with practical restoration efforts supported by Aquaria KLCC by funding another RM200,000.

Key activities included planting 1,000 coral nubbins in Pulau Bidong and developing innovative coral planting methods.

UMT Associate Professor Dr James Tan Chun Hong, who is also the project lead, said: "We then started to R&D the restoration method suitable for a reef that experienced acute physical damage.

He was referring to the reef at Pantai Pasir Cina that was severely damaged by Pabuk Storm.

"Hence the birth of the current 'All-For-One' metal pole that is used in this campaign up to today," he said.

"With the funding from Aquaria KLCC, it allows us to build a hatchery at UMT and a coral tank sufficient for us to control the environment that mimics the sea.



Aquawalk Group executive director Daryl Foong hammering the metal pole into the seabed. AQUARIA KLCC

Meanwhile, Aquawalk Group executive director Daryl Foong highlighted the significance of this effort.

"The collaboration with UMT is a profound milestone in our journey towards marine conservation.

"Malaysia is home to over 550 coral species, making its reefs some of the most diverse in the world.

"Protecting these delicate ecosystems is crucial, not only for biodiversity but also for the overall health of our planet," said Foong.

For generations to come

Aquaria KLCC and UMT recently announced the launch of Phase 3 of this campaign.

It marked a pivotal moment in marine conservation efforts, introducing a public coral adoption initiative to raise awareness and engage the community in protecting Malaysia's vital coral reefs.

Phase 3 aims to foster public participation and education on the importance of coral conservation through the 'Adopt A Coral' programme.

This initiative allows individuals to directly contribute to the restoration efforts, enhancing public awareness and engagement. (Details of the adoption campaign will be announced soon).

Tan emphasised the importance of public involvement.



This marked the first large-scale seeding in Malaysia, aiming to restore and enhance the local coral reef ecosystem.

JAMES TAN

"Public awareness should be created widely. The importance of coral conservation should be taught to the public from a young age.

"We hope that the success in coral spawning will be an eye-opener for the community, showing hope in the restoration of coral reefs in Malaysia and preserving their beauty," he said.

Both Aquaria KLCC and Tan hope that their latest effort will be able to empower individuals and communities to become guardians of the reef, thus fostering a deeper connection with the marine environment and a shared commitment to its protection for generations to come.

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