

Meet Adam Lim, the seahorse whisperer



Wielding a PhD and a Certified Financial Planner in his profile, Dr Adam Lim is an expert you turn to for insurance – more specifically Life (insurance) for you and your family.

He is also the go-to guy for helpless, hapless creatures of the sea facing extinction as endangered species.

Not many, unless you are a marine biologist, will have reason to intrude into the private life of the seahorse; much less be privileged to witness the cheesy courtship moves and all the lovey-dovey romance intimacy rituals of what is after all – fish.

Lim (Adam to everyone for his disconcertingly youthful appearance; he will turn 38 on Aug 14) has built up so much intimate knowledge of the secret life of the seahorse. He is an acknowledged expert and internationally referred by his 'Dr Seahorse' nom de guerre!

The level of intimacy he has witnessed includes how a mating pair of seahorses will engage in a 'come get me; catch me if you can' dance. Someone remarked that this was not unlike a Bollywood overlong boy-meets-girl illicit meeting depicted in an elaborate song and dance routine. Would you believe it, the feisty pair will approach each other and conjure a physical union from top to toe to form the shape of a heart – draw the curtains please!

There's also time for Lim to indulge in a literary endeavour. Your grandkids might have asked you to read them "A Seahorse Story" at bedtime. In amongst all that fieldwork and professional life, Lim managed to don his author's hat and committed himself to write a children's book – on what else but the private life of the loveable seahorse.

His link to seahorses was indelibly cemented under the tutelage and mentorship of lecturer Choo Chee Kuang. He was then an undergraduate student of Marine Biology at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) back in 2006-2009.

Choo founded Save Our Seahorse (SOS) 2005 to address preservation, research, and study issues of the species that carried implications to the survival of other marine life and habitats.

Lim frequently participated in field trips that included the Pulai River estuary, which turned out to be the location of the seahorse marine life aquatic gem – the Merambong shoal seagrass meadows. He now leads SOS Malaysia, taking on the role of director from Choo, who succumbed to cancer on June 9, 2013, aged just 36, while on study leave in the United States.

The task is massive. As far back as 1995, there was a massive port development around the Pulai River Estuary which included the real estate and commercial construction to complement the growth of the Port of Tanjung Pelepas.

The developments affected large tracts of seagrass beds, home to the indigenous seahorse population. First on the agenda at SOS was a project dubbed Tracing Our Seahorses.

Subsequently, SOS embarked on the on-going HippoTag project that re-assesses the state of the local seahorse population.



A seahorse that is about to be tagged by the SOS team.

In the first initiative, the team studied the unique traits of seahorses in the marine world, with emphasis on its cultural symbolism, including its unique practices and mores.

Many ethnic communities are willing to pay premium prices to consume pounded seahorse powder in the hopes it will cure all manner of aches and pains, not to mention perceived enhancement of libido.

Adam and his team deflect this with science. He says they produce proof that similar curative or perking up properties can equally be effective using medication derived through chemistry without sacrificing the animal. The HippoTag initiative followed and is ongoing to this day.

Development and conservation seldom are compatible bedfellows, which therefore means woe for the denizens of the Merambong shoal that include the loveable dugong.

It is left therefore to SOS and its band of volunteers to stop this wanton destruction that impinges on the lives and livelihoods of both its sea creatures as well as of the indigenous population.

So long as Lim and his team of volunteers (us, included) continue to devote their time and energy, spending so much time in the sea, seahorses and marine life can continue to swim free.

SEAHORSE