

Project Update: April 2022

Despite the COVID-19 travel restrictions, our project had been progressing well. Prior to field work, we had obtained the ethics approval from the University of Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC) (UM.TNC2/UMREC - 1225). From March to June 2021, we had successfully conducted face to face interviews using a tested questionnaire with 85 fishers covering several fishing ports in Selangor and all across West Johor. Due to increased travel restrictions last year, we had been performing the interviews remotely through phone calls while working in collaboration with local fisher associations to get their permission and referrals to a network of fishers who would be willing to participate in this project. From that, we have successfully interviewed 466 local fishers from Kedah, Penang, Perak, Negeri Sembilan, South Johor, East Johor, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang.



Bycatch of seahorses (*Hippocampus trimaculatus*) (left) that were caught and dried by a fisherman in a fishing jetty in Pontian Kechil, West Johor (right).



Seahorse bycatch (*Hippocampus trimaculatus*) that was made into a keychain by a fisherman in Kelantan.

Besides that, we had carried out the traditional medicine survey across Kedah, Penang, Perak, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Negeri Sembilan, Johor, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang through interviews with a total of 92 Malay, 32 Chinese, and 10 Indian traditional medicine practitioners as well as 228 traditional Chinese medicine shop traders in the field and remotely.



Dried seahorses (*Hippocampus comes*) and capsules of seahorse extracts being sold in a traditional Chinese medicine shop in Selangor.

We have also been actively involved in promoting the online public survey as well as dissemination of information to the public and ongoing raising of awareness through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp. We had produced engaging and interactive social media content throughout the past few months.

We had also conducted several public talks, reading sessions, live sessions, and a conference presentation, covering everything from Seahorse 101 to regular updates on our project, as follows:

1. 'Seahorse Story' book reading interactive session for The Art of Conservation event organized by GMBB and Kiddoz Place at GMBB, KL, 6th Dec 2021 (In person).
2. 'Tracing Our Seahorses' sharing session for The Art of Conservation event organized by GMBB and Kiddoz Place at GMBB, KL, 6th Dec 2021 (In person).
3. 'Tracing Our Seahorses' sharing session organised by the Rotary Club of Pasir Gudang Mandarin, 26th June 2021 (Virtual).
4. 'One Ocean, One Climate, One Future' live chat session for World Oceans Day organised by FASHINFIDELITY, 8th June 2021 (Virtual).

5. 'Tracing Our Seahorses' sharing session for World Oceans Day webinar organized by STEM4ALL Makerspace and ECOHUB COMMUNITY, 8th June 2021 (Virtual).
6. 'Seahorses in Traditional Medicine and Cultural Values in Malaysia' presentation for the Syngnathid Biology International Symposium (SyngBio 2021) at Guangzhou, China, 20th May 2021 (Virtual).



Public survey launch poster

Our project has also been featured in various news platforms, radio stations, and media companies, such as:

1. 'Saving Malaysia's Seahorses From Extinction' (Free Malaysia Today), 21st March 2022 (<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/top-lifestyle/2022/03/21/saving-malaysias-seahorses-from-extinction/>).
2. 谁听到海马的呐喊？用文化唤醒装睡的人 (Sin Chew Daily), 18th Nov 2021 (<https://www.sinchew.com.my/?p=3424899>).
3. 'SOS for seahorses' (BFM 89.9 The Business Station), 13th Sept 2021 (<https://www.bfm.my/podcast/the-bigger-picture/earth-matters/sos-for-seahorses>).
4. 'To Save Seahorses, Culture Matters' in Bahasa Malaysia (Macaranga), 30th Aug 2021 (<https://www.macaranga.org/budaya-main-peranan-penting-dalam-menyelamatkan-kuda-laut/>).

5. Alam Sekitar: Selamatkan Kuda Laut - Usaha Pemulihan Alam' (Media Selangor), 27th Aug 2021 (<https://fb.watch/7EAqMcozHs/>).
6. 'To Save Seahorses, Culture Matters' (Malaysiakini), 19th Aug 2021 (<https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/587755>).
7. 'Saving the cute, little 'sharks' of the seabed' (Free Malaysia Today), 6th Aug 2021 (<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/leisure/2021/08/06/saving-the-cute-little-sharks-of-the-seabed/>).
8. 'To Save Seahorses, Culture Matters' in English (Macaranga), 24th July 2021 (<https://www.macaranga.org/to-save-seahorses-culture-matters/>).
9. 'Seahorse'on Galeri Nasional Mandarin (TV2), 26th Feb 2021 (<https://fb.watch/bmBJ8ySZdL/>).

As a result, we had gathered 640 responses in the public survey, from members of the public across Malaysia. I had also presented part of the results on the public survey data in the latest SYNGBIO 2021 international conference on 20th May 2021. An example of the results presented is summarised as below:



Seahorse consumption among Malaysians

Thus far, we have gathered comprehensive local knowledge on the usage and trade of seahorses through these surveys. From the public survey, we found that the Indian community in Malaysia also uses seahorses for medicinal and ornamental purposes, which had not been discovered previously. We also obtained some information on the potential import of seahorses all the way from Africa which could explain the huge trade in East Africa bound for Asia. Our plan for this year is to continue to conduct these surveys in Peninsular Malaysia and to expand the geographical scope of our project to include Sabah, East Malaysia, in the coming months. These efforts could inform effective and culturally relevant conservation and intervention measures in the hopes of promoting sustainable seahorse trade in Malaysia as well as look into how that relates internationally.