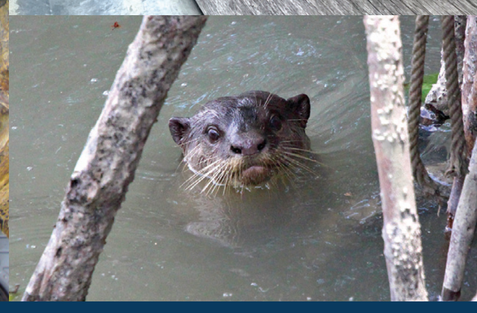
Kelab Alami

MUKIM TANJUNG KUPANG ENDANGERED SPECIES



Initially launched in 2008 under the Tatana Roots umbrella, Kelab Alami was officially registered as an environmental education club in Mukim Tanjung Kupang, Johor, Malaysia in 2009. Under the programme, fishing village youth were trained as habitat experts; scientifically monitoring seagrass and mangrove habitats and working as ecotourism guides for visitors to the area. In 2014 unavoidable development arrived. With some of the original youth members working as full-time staff, Kelab Alami now focuses on enabling the community to earn alternative livelihoods, participate in, and benefit from the development around them. At the same time, we continue to document the natural and cultural heritage of the area before it is completely lost. Our dream is to set up, manage and maintain a Nature & Heritage Centre to showcase the flora, fauna and fishing heritage of this unique region.

The natural habitats of Mukim Tanjung Kupang are home to a number of endangered species. These animals depend on the local seagrass meadows, mangrove forests and river systems to live, breed and feed. Here's an introduction to some of the species that we have in our backyards.

SEAHORSES
Hippocampus kuda is our local seahorse species. These seahorses used to be easily found in our seagrass meadows where they like to twine their tails around the long *Enhalus* sp. seagrass. Seahorses are monogamous fish, which means they are often found with their partner. The male of the species is the one who gets 'pregnant' and hatches 1000 tiny live seahorses at a time. Usually only 1 survives to adulthood. Seahorses feed on tiny crustaceans that they inhale through their long snouts. They usually move within a 5m radius and swim upright. Seahorses' biggest predators are humans. People collect seahorses as souvenirs, for lucky charms and for aquariums. Our scientist-advisor Jun Chin is the only person in Malaysia to have successfully bred this species of seahorse and released them back into the wild.

DUGONGS
Dugong dugon is part of the family Sirenia which also includes sea cows (now extinct) and manatees (found in the Americas). Dugongs are marine mammals that are highly endangered due to habitat damage and accidental drowning from being trapped in nets, and also because they take a long time to reproduce and have babies. Dugongs need to surface to breathe and feed mainly on 2 species of seagrass: *Halophila ovalis* and *Halodule* sp. Fishermen out at dawn or dusk sometimes see dugongs as they move towards the seagrass meadows to feed. Kelab Alami has documented dugong feeding trails and will soon begin a proper study with Dr Jillian Ooi to map, measure and monitor these feeding trails.

TURTLES
Chelonia mydas (green sea turtles) and ***Eretmochelys imbricata*** (hawksbill sea turtles) are often spotted in our waters. While we often see them surfacing for air near our seagrass meadows, we also unfortunately also find them when they are dead or caught in a fishing net. Sea turtles are marine reptiles that lay their eggs on the beach. We suspect that the hawksbills in our area breed in Melaka where there is a known nesting area. We have found green turtles with tags from Terengganu. While some people catch turtles to make soup and souvenirs, the local community here do not do that and fishermen always try to release any that gets stuck in their nets.

OTTERS
No research has been done on otters in our part of Malaysia, but Kelab Alami has begun identifying and mapping otter populations in our coastal mangroves with Affendi Yang Amri. Local fishermen report that there are at least 3 families of otters in our waters. They have been seen in Sungai Pendas, in Sungai Che Manan near Jeti Pak Ngah and near the mangrove forests next to the Port of Tanjung Pelepas. The family in Sungai Che Manan is most commonly seen and from an otter couple they are now a family of eight. Otters are not hunted by humans but they often prey on fish in the fish farms and in fishermen's nets.

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