

# 'Borneo Jungle School' doing well to instil love for nature

## Hayati Dzul kifli

KOTA KINABALU: A yearly special programme called "The Borneo Jungle School" has been progressing well to inculcate a love for nature among the young, particularly schoolchildren.

Institute for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ITBC) of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) and the Museum of Nature and Human Activities, Hyogo in Japan have co-organised the programme since 1998 and the programme was conducted for the 12th time at Danum Valley, Lahad Datu from July 23 to 30.

A total of 28 Japanese students (aged 11 to 19) and eight students of SM Sains Lahad Datu participated in the programme and experienced the precious tropical rainforest of Borneo. The secondary school has been sending students to take part in the programme since its inception 12 years ago.

ITBC Director, Associate Prof. Dr Abdul Hamid Ahmad, said interest among students from Japan and Sabah to experience nature in the rich biodiversity of Sabah has grown as they received many applications from the students to be selected for the programme.

"It has been 12 years since the first group of Japanese students joined their Malaysian counterparts in Danum Valley. Surprisingly, what seemed to be a difficult programme to take off...and now, we are having difficulties to select candidates from many applications received as we limit the number of participants for the programme."

Dr Abdul Hamid said this at the closing of the Borneo Jungle School programme at ITBC, UMS, here, Thursday.

Even the Japanese parents, he said, are keen to bear the cost of sending their children to take part in the programme unlike before.

Meanwhile, Sekolah Menengah Sains Lahad Datu Vice Principal, Wong Vui Hang, when met, said she noted the level of awareness and appreciation for nature among their students who participated in the programme is better and much improved.

"The school has been participating in the programme for the past 12 years and since then, I realised that our students have better awareness of conserving for the environment than before and they even appreciate the State's existing nature that is blessed



Dr. Abdul Hamid



Wong

with rich biodiversity.

"Our students learned a lot about nature because there are a lot of things they take for granted and do not appreciate. But in Japan, the people very much appreciate nature because they do not have what we have (natural resources).

"When the programme ends, the students realise the invaluable asset of our beautiful and natural resources of Sabah, apart from having the opportunity of learning and understanding other people's culture," she said.

To a question, Dr Abdul Hamid said they are not forging partnerships with other countries because the programme was not developed that way.

However, he said they plan to increase participation of students from other schools in Sabah in the coming years and may consider conducting the programme twice a year.

Borneo Jungle School Programme leader, Prof. Dr Akira Takahashi said the programme has its own special appeal and that parents are more aware and now appreciate the spirit of the programme.

He said the programme aims to enable Japanese children experience and learn about the tropical rainforest in Borneo.

By experiencing the wonderful nature and friendly interaction with the local people, he said it is hoped the children will grow strong in caring for nature and the people.

"The meeting of young people of different languages, looks, culture and economic background is tied to nature. Obviously, nature is speaking to them in the same language and makes them come back every year!

"The partnership between ITBC and Hyogo Museum sees a good and growing support for the programme and we will continue to work together as the programme grow and matures.

"Both institutions are happy to give the graduates (participants) of this programme back to both societies in Malaysia and in Japan, bringing with them a lasting love for nature and friendship beyond political borders," Dr. Akira said.

He added that the long-term programme has influenced the past participants largely, leading some of them to do further study about the nature of Borneo.