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# LIFE & TIMES

NEW STRAITS TIMES LIVE IT UP ON SATURDAY



## Call of the wild

Recycling old phones a way to save sea turtles  
→ pages 10&11

LESSONS ON LAKSA

→ LIVING PAGES 2&3



THE BRO CODE

→ MEN PAGE 8

BROWSER



Jewel Kilsner shines in Ring of Fire

→ SHOWBIZ PAGE 15

# Connect to Conserve

Saving turtles by recycling unwanted phones? **Aneeta Sundararaj** finds out more



Lim Siz Siz (right) with her student sitting next to a robot made from recycled phones during the Save the Turtle campaign by TAR College.

**T**ired of your old phones? Don't throw them away. Recycle the phones instead. Thirty-two, Tunku Abdul Rahman University College (TAR UC) students recently collaborated with Nokia's Sustainability Division (SEAP) to run a campaign recycling mobile phones.

This three-day campaign held last month was in support of WWF-Malaysia's efforts to conserve sea turtles. For each phone recycled, the division will donate US\$1 (RM3) to WWF-Malaysia for its conservation work.

"Here at TAR UC, we support the students' efforts because our aim is to produce well-rounded graduates," says Lee Hwee Chui, 48, Dean of Faculty of Social Science, Arts and Humanities. "They can't just sit in a class and learn things. They need to put into practice what they've learnt. That's the reason why we collaborate with companies like Nokia on projects like these. I mean, if they get tongue-tied now, how are they going to cope later with their bosses?" he asks.

**PEOPLE POWER**

Nokia has been sponsoring the programme for the past three years to encourage the public to save the environment by recycling old phones. There was something different this year, though. "We found that if we told people that they could also help save the environment, the response was much better," says project manager Marilyn Lee, 21.

The campaign that Marilyn and her fellow students in Year 1, Advanced Diploma in Mass Communication (Public Relations) came up with was called Connect 2 Conserve. There were three elements to this campaign: Connecting People (Nokia's role), Educate (students' role) and Conserve (WWF-Malaysia's role).

The concept of the campaign was that the advent of technology, while of enormous benefit to humans, has resulted in people who are not concerned about proper waste management. The resulting environmental pollution has caused the iconic sea turtles of Malaysia to become an endangered species on the brink of extinction.

With the movie *Nemo* playing on a large white screen in the background, visitors to the main hall in the TAR UC campus learnt about sea turtles. Of all the exhibits, one that caused many to respond with, "Oh, I didn't know that", was the one about the difference between a tortoise and a turtle.

"The difference," explains WWF-Malaysia communications officer Ummi Nadiah Rosli, 29, "is that tortoises remain in the ocean, turtles come onto land to lay eggs. Turtles tend to have shells that are flat and streamlined while a tortoise's shell is shaped like a large dome. A tortoise has short and sturdy feet while turtles tend to have front legs that are like flippers. While most tortoises are herbivores, turtles feed on jellyfish, seaweed,



WWF Communications officer Ummi Nadiah is the plight of the

shrimp, algae and small molluscs."

To add some drama to their campaign the students crafted a story titled *Under The Sea* which featured Poseidon, the Lord of the Sea. Poseidon, played by Nigel Christie Samuel, 25, is worried about the welfare of the sea creatures and the future of his kingdom. In addition, he is no longer as strong as he used to be as his trident has lost its power.

Other than building a new trident using recycled phones, he also recruits his Sea Armies (i.e. the student committee set up to run this campaign) to inform humans about the dangers of pollution and its effect on the sea; he asks that they help conserve the environment and save the turtles by giving up their phones.

**IMPORTANT CYCLES**

On a more serious note, in another display, Tan Wek Keong, 24, explains the six steps that a phone will undergo in a recycling factory. They range from the collection of phones, dismantling them into their various components and separating these bits using an electromagnet to heating precious metals like gold and silver then reusing them in new phones.

Nadiah was pleased that WWF-Malaysia was part of this campaign. In highlighting the problems conservationists face, she says: "Sea turtles are not preyed upon like fish. In fact, the biggest threat to sea turtles is man — turtle egg consumption and uncontrolled tourism. When people play loud music and hold bonfire parties by the beach, turtles get scared and will not come up to the beach to lay their eggs. Instead, they lay their eggs in the sea. These eggs will not hatch in sea water."

Turtles are particularly important for Malaysians in three ways:

The first is that they help to maintain healthy coral reefs and sea grass beds. "They also help our economy," she says. "Leatherbacks eat jellyfish. If there are too many jellyfish, they will eat other fish. When the fish population drops, fishermen's livelihood will be affected and we'll have no fish to eat."

"Also, we all know that the sea turtle plays a part in the folklore in Terengganu and

in places like Malacca."

In the 16th century, Manuel Godinho de Eredia wrote *The Description Of Malacca* ([www.mbras.org.my/reprint14.html](http://www.mbras.org.my/reprint14.html)). Manuel Godinho was a cartographer of Bugis and Portuguese descent. Eredia recounted his life in Malacca and wrote about the Hawksbills Turtles. It was most likely that turtles were traded as commodities back then, which implies that they had more of an impact on Malacca's history than we know.

In the end, Lee's words underline the message that campaign participants wanted to impart:

"We must become aware that everything we throw will somehow end up in



Nigel Christie Samuel (right) pretending to be King of The Sea during Save the Turtle campaign by TAR College.

the ocean. So, we need to take care to preserve and protect our environment for our future. Or we'll start to lose a lot of what we have."

**TYPES OF TURTLES**

WWF-Malaysia communications officer Ummi Nadiah Rosli says that humans have caused sea turtle populations to decline significantly all over the world. Initially, direct fishing for sea turtles was the main reason for population declines. Today, other threats, including injury or death in commercial fisheries, habitat degradation and climate change top the list.

Four main species of marine turtles

visit the waters of Malaysia:

**Leatherback Turtle**

Its scientific name is *Dermochelys coriacea*. Known locally as *Penyu Belimbing*, these turtles are "functionally extinct". What this means is that though they aren't actually extinct, in the past two years, not a single leatherback turtle has come to the shores of the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia to lay its eggs.

This critically-endangered species of turtles has a unique shell, which is composed of a layer of thin, tough, rubbery skin, strengthened by thousands of tiny bone plates that makes

it look leathery. Its head has a deeply cut upper jaw with two cusps. It does not have claws. It weighs between 300 and 500kg and measures between 130 and 183cm in length.

**Hawksbill Turtle**

Its scientific name is *Eretmochelys imbricate*. Locals know them as *Penyu Karah* or *Penyu Sisik*. With its narrow head and hawk-like beak, it is one of the smaller sea turtles. They are typically found around coastal reefs, rocky areas, estuaries and lagoons in tropical and sub-tropical waters like the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans.

The largest population of Hawks-

bills is found in Sabah with an average of 500-600 nests each season. Malacca's sandy coastline has the second largest population of Hawksbills with 200-300 nests per season. The turtles weigh between 46 and 70kg and measure between 71 and 89cm in length.

**Green Sea Turtle**

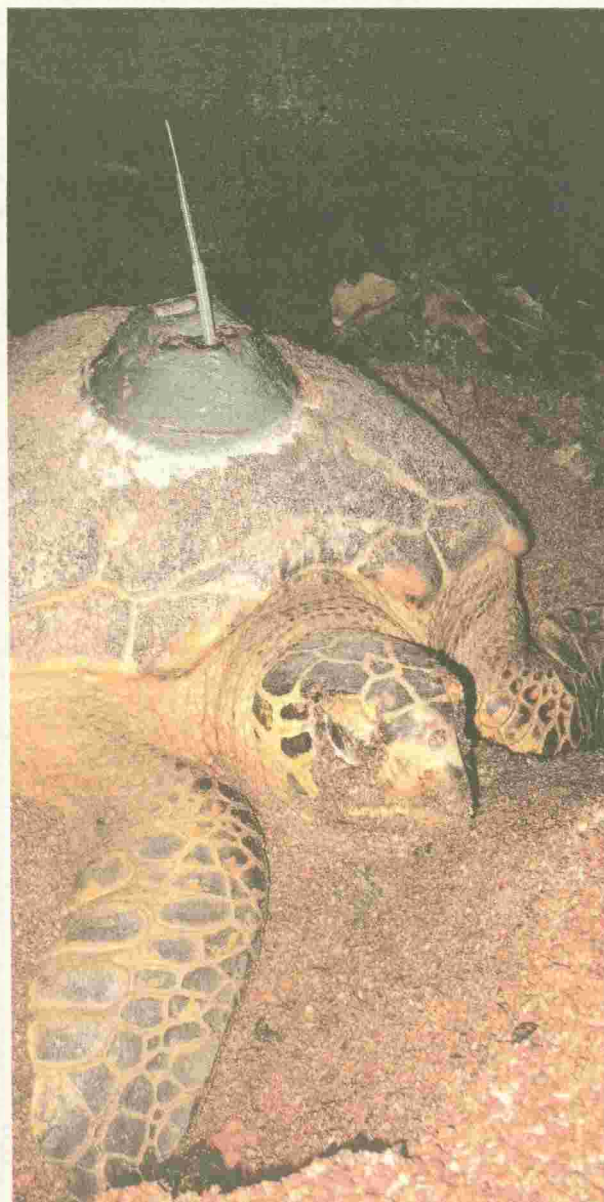
This turtle has a scientific name of *Chelonia mydas* and is known to locals as *Penyu Agar*. The green sea turtles have a single pair of prefrontal scales (scales in front of their eyes). Their head is small and blunt and they're found in temperate and tropical waters throughout the world. The most abundant species in Malaysia, it nests in great numbers on the sandy beaches and islands of Sabah, Sarawak, Terengganu, Pahang, Johor and Perak. Their body is nearly oval and flat. Adult green sea turtles are between 83 and 114cm long and weigh between 110 and 190kg. Adult green sea turtles are herbivorous.

**Olive Ridley**

Olive Ridley Turtles are named after their olive green-coloured shell. Known locally as *Penyu Lipas*, they are the smallest of all marine turtles and its scientific name is *Lepidochelys olivacea*. This turtle has flippers with visible claws. Adults measure between 62 and 70cm and weigh between 35 and 45kg. They typically forage in surface waters or dive to depths of 150m to feed on crustaceans. They inhabit tropical and subtropical waters of the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans.



Communication Officer, Nadiah is concerned about the turtles.



Hawksbill Turtle.

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