



Newsletter of Yayasan Pulau Banyak

Suara Pulau

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Sumatra's 1st sea turtle conservation programme.

Pristine beaches and forests, uninhabited islands and a rich biodiversity: In other words Pulau Banyak. The archipelago off Singkil, Southwest Aceh, provides nesting beaches to critically endangered sea turtles such as the leatherback. Green turtles nest every night on Pulau Bangkaru, and only recently the beach is being patrolled to collect the first information on this turtle population through a tagging programme and protect the eggs from poaching.

The province of Aceh is one step ahead on the rest of Sumatra in the conservation of sea turtles. Together with the support and enthusiasm of the locals of Pulau Banyak, Yayasan Pulau Banyak has been able to set up the first sea turtle monitoring programme in Sumatra.

(Continued on page 2...)

Study tours and volunteers; visiting the pristine

In collaboration with the National Park authority and the local community, study tours are offered to people visiting Pulau Banyak.

Our team in Pulau Bangkaru will lead the visitors to the beach and provide them with a hands-on experience with nesting sea turtles. They are able to learn about the biology of the animals as well as having an insight on the entire process of laying eggs.

Tours start from Pulau Balai and visitors can stay two nights on the island to be able to see the turtles nest. Accommodation is basic, but comfortable and food is prepared on-site consisting of freshly caught fish and local vegetables and rice. For people interested in experiencing a full training on monitoring the nesting beach and the conservation of sea turtles it is possible to register as a volunteer and work, alongside our patrol team, for a minimum of one month in Pulau Bangkaru.

For more information on our study tours as well as signing up as a volunteer, visit: www.acehturtleconservation.org or www.sumatraecotourism.com

Foreword

The first time I visited Pulau Bangkaru in 1994 and saw the turtles laying eggs, I could not imagine what that would lead to. I was quite ignorant about turtles and for me it was just a great adventure. However, the sight of turtles laying eggs on Pantai Amandangan was such an experience, almost spiritual. Seeing them, hearing all the sounds of the jungle behind the beach accompanied by the music of the waves breaking, changed me. I have seen this happen also to other first time visitors. We have all become turtle fanatics.

It has been a long fight since then. We have managed to protect the turtles over long periods until the year 2000. The political conflict in Aceh in those days stopped us. Now we are at it again, thanks to the support and help from friends and organisations. A special thank goes to Maggie Muurmans who took the initiative to re-establish the programme. Now she has taken a new initiative, to re-establish our news-letter; Suara Pulau (The Voice of the Islands). The first two issues were distributed in 1999.

This is just one of many steps ahead of us. Together we can save not only the turtles of Pulau Banyak, but also the dugongs, jungles, mangroves and maybe restore the reefs to former glory.

Mahmud Bangkaru
Founder



Text:
Maggie Muurmans

Photos:
Maggie Muurmans,
Mahmud Bangkaru



PADI FOUNDATION

The beach patrol team in Pulau Bangkaru.



“In collaboration with University Syiah in Banda Aceh, Sumatra, students are able to assist in data collection and gain practical experience”

Your footsteps will probably be the only ones on many of the beaches in Pulau Banyak



Helping to build careers in conservation

In collaboration with University Syiah in Banda Aceh, Sumatra, students are able to assist in the data collection of the sea turtle monitoring programme. This gives recently graduated students a step forward in gaining practical experience in the field.

Yayasan Pulau Banyak trains students in data collection, beach monitoring and camp logistics, as well as assisting thesis students to develop their individual projects. As there is a rich biodiversity on Pulau Bangkaru, students are also able to develop projects on forest ecology, ornithology or other aspects related to the biomes available.

First members join Yayasan Pulau Banyak.

The membership programme with Yayasan Pulau Banyak has recently been launched. New members receive special offers as well as membership benefits such as T-shirts, stickers, fact sheets and more. There are 3 different memberships available: Egg, Hatchling and Turtle. With the egg membership providing benefits for the smallest donation

of 10 EURO. Please visit www.acehturtleconservation.org for more information on the different benefits per membership and support our cause. Each member will receive our newsletter as well as a certificate. With the launch of the programme we have already managed to find members within the conservation world itself. Yvonne and Benjamin Kahn, Cetacean specialists, Jos Pet,

Consultant and Anne-Sophie Therry, dive shop owner Bali, are the first members of Yayasan Pulau Banyak. Thank you for your support! Donations without being attached to the membership programme are also gratefully received and will fund our efforts focussing on the conservation of critically endangered sea turtles.

Yayasan Pulau Banyak is a registered Indonesian foundation.

Teaching the next generation



There is a general lack of teaching materials in schools including creative lesson plans focussing on the region and using it as a potential outdoor classroom. Many commu-

endangered marine species which are present on their own doorstep. Together with Padi foundation and Natura Ecotours, Yayasan Pulau Banyak has started with the development of an educational programme for the local schools in Pulau Banyak.

Local teachers will be trained in teaching about the environmental issues of the region and tours will be provided to schoolchildren to learn about their "green treasures" of their backyard.

Natura Ecotours and Yayasan Ecosystem Lestari will be designing a visitor centre to accommodate the lesson plan as well as provide visitors with more information about the flora and fauna of Pulau Banyak.

As this project is still in its starting phase, we shall report more about its proceedings in the following newsletter.



Grass root conservation efforts in Aceh

(Continued from page 1....) A team from the region, volunteers and international experts have only just started to protect the sea turtles of Pulau Bangkaru. "Yayasan Pulau Banyak has always had a lot of support from the community as we include locals in all activities of the organisation and make sure we help them with social programmes," says Mahmud Bangkaru, founder of YPB and active in the region since 1993. "Without the support of the locals, our efforts would simply not work." Through an active tagging programme, nesting sea turtles receive a metal tag in each flipper. Each tag carries a different number, so individuals can be recognised when they

return to the beach in the future. In this way it is possible to determine how much the population decreases. "That the population is less than before is already certain, as illegal egg poaching has been widespread for many years. Through the tagging programme we can tell if the population has reached critically low numbers because we are now able to count the tagged individuals that return to the nesting beach" claims Maggie Muurmans, programme manager. "This information will help us to protect the turtles better".

With the collaboration of BKSDA Andi Basrul, Yayasan Pulau Banyak will set new rules to regulate access to the island and therefore provide a better protection to Bangkaru's flora and fauna. "Pulau Banyak has a great potential for eco-tourism as all components are in place for attracting visiting tourists. Tropical beaches, coral reefs, wildlife and easy access provide a perfect destination in Aceh for national and international visitors." Explains Mahmud. "With the nesting beach already protected, tourists can learn more about saving endangered wildlife in the region."

In the light of Tsunamis and earthquakes also optimistic messages can be shared about Aceh. The province is moving forward in protecting its endangered wildlife.

Community support and activities

Other than environmental issues, Yayasan Pulau Banyak is also concerned with other kinds of local problems. Due to a shortage of teachers in the lower secondary schools of Pulau Banyak, YPB pays the salaries of several teachers to provide the children with ongoing education. Youth groups and their activities, such as the football team, are also sponsored by Yayasan Pulau Banyak. In previous years YPB played a major role in the support of women groups, local language projects and alternative livelihoods.





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For information regarding volunteering, membership programmes, or the sea turtle conservation programme:
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For more general information about the islands and how to get there: www.sumatraecotourism.com

Get Involved!

Become a member of Yayasan Pulau Banyak or donate and support our cause in protecting the fragile environment of Aceh's Pulau Banyak in conjunction with the local community.

Volunteer with beach patrolling on Pulau Bangkaru and help collecting valuable information on endangered sea turtles. Visit Pulau Bangkaru and enjoy a guided tour by Yayasan Pulau Banyak.

Sponsors

Many thanks to the following groups and individuals that are providing support:

Paneco, Switzerland; Casa tortuga, U.S.A.; Padi Foundation, U.S.A.; Natura Ecotours, Australia; Yayasan Ecosistem Lestari, Indonesia; Klimaschutz, Germany; Forestry Department, Indonesia; Tourist Department, Singkil; NOAA, U.S.A; ZCV Valkenburg, The Netherlands; All members of Yayasan Pulau Banyak.

YPB profile: Basri Emka

Every newsletter we will highlight people who are active to achieve the mission of Yayasan Pulau Banyak and let them tell their story how they got to be involved.

How did you get involved in nature conservation and Pulau Banyak?

As an agronomist from the Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh I have a high concern towards the nature and its environment. I grew up in the countryside and see nature as a part of life and not separated from it. I once worked as a Technical Advisor for Leuser Management Unit (LMU) set up by Leuser International Foundation (LIF) to manage the Leuser Eco-system. I have visited the archipelago of Pulau Banyak, off the Sumatran coast, in the Indian Ocean, many times.

How do you visualise Aceh's environment?

"Leuser is wrapped in clouds and the ocean shadowed by the rainbow", is an expression, which I often use to describe the natural phenomena of a harmonious environment and that the meaning of the nature is a gift from God that must be guarded and saved. "Philosophically the nature is a close friend of ours, full with love and affection that always shows its beauty in a new way".

How were you able to express your concern in Indonesia's environment?

As a bureaucrat, with a long career, I have held many important positions, first on regency level and later on provincial



Basri Emka.
Co-Founder of
Yayasan Pulau
Banyak

level. My last position before retirement was as Appointed Regent of Aceh Jaya. My life is coloured by many experiences.

I have travelled most of Indonesia and obtained new horizons in countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Canada and Saudi Arabia, the last when Aceh was hit by the Tsunami in 2004.

Mr. Basri Emka now lives in Banda Aceh with his beloved wife, three children and two grandchildren. He was born in 1949 in Tapaktuan.

He has summarized his life experiences and thoughts in several books and poetry collections. At the moment he is writing on his next book called "Sowing Seeds on Barren Land".