



Krabi Conservation Youth Camp Program

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Topic: Foundation



The Krabi Conservation Youth Camp Program has hit the ground running from day one. Started initially as a pilot program, with 30 students from the Muang Krabi School, it was a great success. It was organised by Sajjaporn Chansrinual and Manop Lelasuthanon from the Krabi Provincial Administration Organization. Manop is the Permanent Undersecretary and Sajjaporn is the Director of the Engineering Division. With the help of Wetlands International and Projects Abroad, it really was a collaboration of several groups. The project focuses on environmental education, and uses local excursions to encourage interest and action for the benefit of the local environment, and the education of local school children...

The first day was started with registration, including large colorful name tags and a new “green shirt” each to get everyone into the swing of things. After the formal introductions were over, the students were treated to four presentations starting with education about the great value that mangrove ecosystems hold for local communities and the wide variety of marine animals that spend all, or part of, their lives amongst them.

The importance of the Krabi Estuary for waterbirds was explained by showing the position of Krabi on the East Asian-Australasian migratory flyway. The mangrove and estuarine ecosystems are rich feeding grounds providing high energy foods and safe high tide roost areas. As Krabi has a huge area of inter-tidal sand-flats exposed during low tide, the birds can spread out across them so competition for food is lower. This is one reason why the beaches and mudflats have to

be clean. There were some very graphic slides shown of hundreds of foreign objects found in the belly of dead waterbirds including buttons, bottle tops and even cigarette lighters.

Discussions moved on from here to explain the ecological value and high biodiversity of Thailand's coral reefs, and the need for rubbish collection on the beaches and from the coral reefs. This was emphasized with underwater video footage of Projects Abroad volunteers cleaning a reef near Phi Phi. As much of the presentations were in English, translations were made in Thai by Donnapat Tamornsuwan, from Wetlands International, and Medhi Sataman from Projects Abroad. There was much interaction, with show and tell cards handed around showing pictures of birds and their foods, along with their names both in Thai and in English.



Seeds from the mangrove forests were handed around, and the volunteers from Projects Abroad even performed a short play to educate the students about the consequences of rubbish in the waterways, and the adverse affects for local fish stocks. Plenty of laughs of course, as it was entertaining, but it is a serious concern. An interesting statistic from Projects Abroad; rubbish found on an atoll, 300 miles from the nearest inhabited island, 3000 miles from the nearest continent, included 950 pieces including 171 bottles from 15 different countries. Marine debris is clearly a major problem for the ocean's sea life.

After lunch it was time for a walk in the mangrove forest. Fortunately access is relatively easy as they are generally very muddy places. There is a great boardwalk through native mangrove forest, almost in the middle of town of Krabi. Accessed by the headquarters of the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, on the Krabi River, it is an easy walk from town if you have a spare hour or so. The students were keen to take notes from the many signboard displays, and were even enthused enough to jump down from the boardwalk and retrieve foreign objects they came across, showing that the mornings education was readily absorbed.

Next it was back to school for a tree planting exercise. 80 trees were planted in only an hour or so around the grounds. There was much enthusiasm, although a few were a little tired as the digging was hard going in the heat of the day. Tasks were accomplished with a minimum of fuss. A local food vendor got quite a surprise when he drove into the grounds,



and was promptly swamped by students and teachers alike, all hungry after a little extra exercise.



The day was not done yet though, with a beach clean at Thara Park on the banks of the Krabi River next on the agenda. Much to the amusement of the many passers by, the enthusiastic team of intrepid collectors was at it again, and with gusto, collecting a massive 37 bags and 454 kg's of rubbish, again in only a matter of an hour or so. The advantages of a large team were apparent.

The next day began with a trip to Koh Klang in longtail boats for some bird watching. There are often many species to see, including the Grey Plover, the Mongolian Plover, the Chinese Egret and the colorful Kingfisher. Then it was off to the mangrove walkway again where the children completed further study projects and drew some fantastic artwork depicting mangrove ecosystems. Lunch was had all together in Thara Park, followed by some games and then everyone was split into 5 groups; each having to develop and act out short plays about what they had learnt over the weekend. The students were all well behaved and enthusiastic in all events, again showing that the educational aim of the weekend had been achieved.

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