



Paddling for a good cause

Man and technology take on Nature to raise awareness about Malaysia's marine heritage and the need to protect it

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IT MIGHT not be such an exaggeration to depict it as Man vs Nature. In its essence, one man is undertaking an expedition of epic proportions: To kayak solo around Peninsular Malaysia, from Kelantan's border with Thailand right round to Perlis' boundary with our northern neighbour, to end in the beautiful island of Langkawi.

In his quest, he will face the open – and sometimes treacherous – waters of the South China Sea and the very elements that make our tropical life what it is, namely searing sun, monsoonal rains and massive thunderstorms, covering more than 2,000 kilometres in 75 days. And where the other component comes in is this: He will be equipped with the very latest in photography and satellite technology, to raise awareness about the need to conserve our country's rich marine treasures.

This expedition, according to “partner in crime” the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), is ambitious, yes, but surely stirring in its breadth and scope, and in the willingness of

one man to do something for this precious Earth. Marine Conservation Manager Faedzul Rahman says MNS member Hari Raju, a Scuba Instructor and keen outdoorsman, came up with the expedition idea on his own, but it wasn't a difficult decision to get on board and go along for the ride, so to speak.

Forgotten treasure

“Why are we doing this?” Faedzul muses on my question as we sit on a terrace overlooking a thick patch of jungle on the grounds of MNS's KL headquarters in Jalan Kelantan. Situated right next to the busy Mahameru road, the old double-storey building that used to house civil servant families sits on a plot backing onto the lush hillside of Bukit Persekutuan.

The surroundings play beautifully into the point that he makes next. “Many Malaysians are concerned with the environment and with protecting the country's treasures and heritage. But most of these treasures are the easily visible kind,” he says. The trees

are prime examples. It's simple enough to appreciate our country's legacy via its tropical jungles, and their destruction can be documented and brought to public attention without too great a difficulty, creating awareness and impelling action.

With marine conservation, things are not so clear-cut. With most of its riches underwater, and the oceans themselves covering 75% of the Earth – a lot of it uncharted – it is difficult to bring these issues to the surface, as the public cannot see the problems for themselves, he says. “How many people do you know who scuba dive, or even snorkel? They are the ones who can appreciate this underwater world, but what percentage of the population do they make up?” Even a smaller number of them would be the ecologists or conservationists who understand what's happening to the marine environment and its impact on life.

“Malaysia is blessed with marine riches; in truth, our regional waters are No. 1 in the world when it comes to marine biodiversity. However, this heritage is being ignored. It's a forgotten treasure,” he says.

Paddling to all corners

That's where Hari comes in, with his 16.5ft custom-fitted Winner sea kayak, high-tech gizmos and the energy and desire to paddle the coastline of Peninsular

Malaysia to fire the emergency flare for the country's marine heritage.

A majestic crested serpent eagle surveys his domain near Carey Island in Selangor





How you can help

It's time for more than talking the talk, so to walk the walk, do support Paddle for Nature in these ways:

- **Join in.** Keep an eye out for announcements on public events organised around Paddle for Nature. If you're in the area, come and meet the team, participate in activities, such as nature walks, conservation talks or children's games, and get a better understanding of MNS' ambitions to save our Earth.

- **Sign up.** As a member of MNS, the oldest environmental NGO in the country, you can enjoy perks such as discounted stays at Kuala Selangor Nature Park and MNS-BOH Field Study Centre, companionship of like-minded people, regular newsletters, use of MNS library, volunteer opportunities and nature-oriented activities.

- **Donate.** Contribute your time, your money or even your FB and Twitter sharing capability, to spread the good word about this epic adventure.

The 44-year-old sports enthusiast will set a course along the coast, stopping at various bays, villages, towns and more importantly, marine and estuarine sites deemed important from a conservation standpoint.

They include the historically significant Leatherback turtle landing site along Rantau Abang in the East Coast state of Terengganu, where 20 years ago people could still see these giants in their thousands making their way "home", where they were born, to lay their eggs. Now they are no more, and that may be the destiny of other chelonians still visiting our shores as development, fishing and pollution take their toll.

Hari will also make the ocean crossing to the islands of Perhentian in Terengganu and Tioman in Pahang, two of the country's famous scuba diving destinations and part of Malaysia's reef architecture that serves to protect its inhabitants and our coastlines alike. Other drop-ins are planned at protected Marine Parks, wildlife reserves and state parks.

If you're a keen birder, you'll be familiar with some Important Bird Areas (IBA), including Tanjung Tuan in Port Dickson, where MNS's annual Raptor Watch is held, while if you've been to see the fireflies, you'll know the mangrove forest of Kuala Selangor, which is also home to a variety of animal species and economically important to nearby communities (see the ecotrek article **Beyond just tree planting** on page 22).

Then there are sites that happen to not be so much in the limelight – such as seagrass beds in Johor waters of Si Tenang fame (see the story titled **Of dugongs, seagrass and climate change** on page 43) – and those that are, especially where Hari will end his journey, the Langkawi Geopark that features amazing flora, fauna and stunning geological formations such as mammoth limestone rocks, fossils, caves, lagoons, beaches and seascapes.

Of the casual chat that started it all, Hari says he had been aware of MNS for a while, and had met Faedzul and Head of Communications Andrew J. Sebastian in Tioman, where he was teaching scuba diving.

Top left: Dusky leaf monkeys are found around Sungai Linggi, Negeri Sembilan

Centre: A Sunda pygmy woodpecker peeks out from its nest inside a bamboo jetty post in Kuala Selangor

Bottom right: Paddler Hari Raju will be on the water for an estimated 75 days



"I was very impressed with them. They were doing a very good job on some conservation work in Tioman and I could see that they were hardworking."

He told the duo he was planning an adventure, to see the coast and document the coastal life in Malaysia, and "we thought maybe we can do something together, maybe we can create awareness through this event".

Getting a 'shore view'

But where Hari initially planned on a leisurely paddle, stopping to talk to anyone he could find, and to eat, basically picking up local recipes along the way, the little chat turned into a big enterprise that will highlight MNS's causes.

"The main aim is to collate baseline data on the state of things, such as current land use, the condition of the shore and data on the water. And in this we are very fortunate to have the support of Google Malaysia, and its Street View Trekker camera system," Faedz shares of Paddle for Nature's big secret that is also a first for this form of transport.

The Trekker, which features 15 lenses, will be mounted on a custom-made bracket on the kayak behind and over Hari's head, capturing the 360° panorama for which Google Street View is famous.

Snapping pictures throughout the day, such a vast amount of data is a boon to MNS, and will also allow the authorities and stakeholders to organise and plan their conservation efforts accordingly. Plus, it is a talking point that will help raise awareness about Malaysia's marine and coastal resources among the public.



Donate a Kilometre

You can support Paddle for Nature by contributing to the Donate a Kilometre fund. With a minimum contribution of RM10 per km (individual) and RM500 per km (corporation), you will be helping each stroke Hari takes and ensure that attention will be paid to our ocean treasures for years to come.

You can join the activities arranged around the country to make a donation, or drop in at the MNS office in Jalan Kelantan and contribute. If you can't make it to either, you can still contribute directly through a dedicated Malaysian Nature Society account, HSBC 305-035099-101. For a tax-deductible receipt (for a minimum contribution of RM50), mail a copy of the banking slip/ATM receipt to MNS with your full name, identity card number, address and telephone number. You can also email a scanned copy of the receipt, with your full details, to hod.services@mns.org.my.

Celebrating the local hero

Conservation comes down to people, Faedzul admits, and Paddle for Nature not only wants Malaysians to know about the issues, but also the individuals who are making a difference in the world.

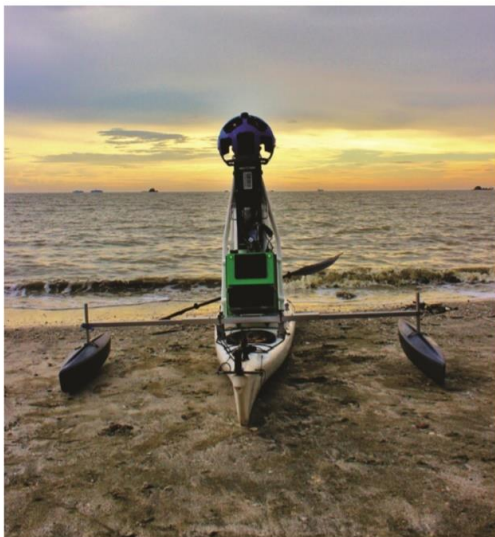
Some of the sites to be visited are run by volunteers, while some of the issues brought to national attention came about not through high-ranking committees made up of powerful people, he says, but via efforts of the ordinary man.

"We hope to highlight the conservation initiatives by coastal communities and these individuals, who are the local heroes. That is part of the thrust of Paddle for Nature, where one man, one normal member of the MNS, can make a difference, and I hope by this example, more people will be brave enough to step up to the plate."

In the same vein, Hari, who refuses to call himself a hero, wants to raise the real issues about the marine environment. "I'm quite sad that many Malaysians don't know about their own backyard, such as our beautiful rainforests, flora and fauna, coastlines, and that we have to take care of it. I'd be lying and you'd be lying too, if you said you never saw rubbish all over the beaches, by the side of the sea. My hope is education, for them to learn that a clean beach area gets a lot of tourists. These are the things I want to highlight."

Looking to the future

One important aspect of conservation is always the "ringgit and sen", and that is also the thrust of Paddle for Nature, to raise funds for future projects on marine conservation. As Hari puts it: "This event is about conservation and raising funds for MNS, which is doing a very good job,



but as any such organisation, needs funds. So through this event I hope they can raise as much funds as possible to make it easier for them to do their work."

And its work is protecting Malaysia's treasures, especially these forgotten ones. "It's a term we use, "khazanah". So when we say treasures, we look at so many other things, promoting tall buildings and stuff like that," Hari says, "but we have this treasure that's the most precious one."

"It's probably the oldest rainforest in the world, you know. So the whole issue here, is to create awareness about one, conservation, and the other, MNS, who I think is the pioneer in conservation in Malaysia."

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Top right:
The Paddle for Nature
kayak outfitted with
the Google Street View
Trekker

Bottom left:
Colourful blue-tailed bee
eaters are also part of
Carey Island's charm

