

PRESS RELEASE

Over 200 Malaysians Sculpt Sand Turtles to Raise Awareness for Conservation Efforts

The #BringOurTurtlesBack Campaign Aims to Raise RM150,000 for Hatchery Research, Education Programmes, and Habitat Monitoring

KUALA TERENGGANU, 22 July 2022 – Against the backdrop of calm seas and overcast skies, more than 200 Malaysians gathered at Pantai Batu Buruk in solidarity for one purpose: to construct the most creative and compelling turtle sand sculpture to raise awareness for these endangered sea creatures.

The sand sculpting competition was the launchpad for the **#BringOurTurtlesBack** campaign, which was organised collaboratively by The International SeaKeepers Society, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), and Kapas Turtles, whilst supported by agencies Pinang Films and VoxEureka, to raise RM150,000 for turtle conservation efforts in the East Coast.



#BringOurTurtlesBack community event @ Pantai Batu Buruk, Kuala Terengganu

The competition received 30 entries across three categories from individuals, families, groups, and six schools – with some travelling from as far as Singapore to show their support.

The event also featured a beautiful sand sculpture showcase by Malaysian visual artist [Ikhwan Saloot](#), depicting the journey of three leatherback turtles: the past, present, and future – and the critical role we play in preserving these sea creatures that are part and parcel of Malaysia's heritage.



Main turtle sand sculpture showcase by Malaysian visual artist, Ikhwan Saloot

Key corporate partners for the campaign include luxury timekeeper BALL Watch, Malaysia Rail Link, Star Vista Education, Aculife, and Primula Beach Hotel. Individual sponsors who contributed to the cause include Brenda Yeo Christensen, Chase Tann, Diederik Brinkman, as well as Erica and Sandor Kelemen.

[A petition with community partner Change.org](#) is also taking signatures to urge YB Datuk Seri Dr. Ronald Kiandee (Minister of Agriculture and Food Industries) to conduct thorough and scientific fact-based investigations to ascertain the causes of stranded turtle deaths by means of autopsy, bacterial swabs and conducted with the help of ocean modelling. To date, over 3,600 have signed the petition.



Gail Tay, Director of Operations & Programmes, The International SeaKeepers Society Asia

“We are truly blown away by the sheer number of turtle lovers who travelled here and expressed their desire to preserve these beautiful sea creatures. To me, all the sand sculptures were captivating as they each reflected the teams’ unique stories and imagination. I am especially grateful to our corporate and personal sponsors for without whom, this campaign could not have taken place,” said Gail Tay, Director of Operations & Programmes, The International SeaKeepers Society Asia.

Facing a bleak future for survival

Sea turtles have graced earth’s oceans for well over 100 million years, covering vast distances and playing a vital role in maintaining the balance of marine habitats. They are among the gentlest and

most beautiful creatures on the planet, with the leatherback turtle even acting as the state icon of Terengganu, one of Malaysia's hottest tourism spots.

However, turtle sightings and beach nestings have dwindled considerably over the years. The once-iconic leatherback turtle is virtually non-existent to natives of Terengganu and the rest of Malaysia. Moreover, the overall number of sea turtles continue to dive to critically low numbers.

Through this campaign, the team behind #BringOurTurtlesBack aims to raise RM150,000 that will go towards these three objectives:

1. Hatchery Research:

A designated research assistant will be able to collect and analyze valuable data pertaining to turtle breeding and release, which will empower more informed strategies toward conservation efforts for the long run.

2. Educational programmes in 10 schools

Organise outreach and awareness programmes to a minimum of 10 secondary schools in Terengganu, facilitated by UMT lecturers on the importance of turtles and the marine ecosystem to the environment as well as the economy.

3. Habitat monitoring

Funds raised will be used to monitor and collect information on the health status of coral reefs and marine habitats around the islands. Surveys will also be conducted periodically to monitor benthic community abundances and other environmental parameters, particularly on coral reefs as they serve as a crucial feeding source and habitat for turtles and many more marine organisms.

"The turtle as long been an icon for Malaysia and its tourism industry. To see the number of sea turtles drop every year is heart-breaking, which is why we need to act now before they are beyond saving. We dream to return to the glory days when turtles would nest on Malaysian shores every other day. I implore all Malaysians to chip in towards this dream – let's bring our turtles back," urged Tay.

Education the key to preservation

The team behind #BringOurTurtlesBack recognises that protecting turtles is a long-term journey, beginning with the community in the East Coast. Hence, the campaign launched with an on-ground community event the past weekend to engage visitors and the local communities of Kuala Terengganu.



A community beach clean-up took place on Pantai Batu Buruk prior to the main event on Saturday

The programme began on Thursday, 14th July 2022 with a community beach clean-up, followed by the turtle sand sculpture contest and sand sculpture showcase on Saturday, 16th July 2022. There were educational booths set up by Universiti Malaysia Terengganu and community group Kapas Turtles that illustrated the importance of turtles to the marine ecosystem as well as the plight they faced from both plastic pollution and poaching.



Locals, students, and foreigners participated in the sand sculpting contest, capturing the essence of the importance of preserving our sea turtles

Many of the turtle sand sculptures captured the essence of this narrative, which served as important education for the many young participants that included children in primary and secondary schools.

According to the participants, the weekend helped them recognise the dire situation of the turtles and hope to join the chorus in raising awareness among Malaysians.

“Many people know that the turtle is the icon of Terengganu. But in terms turtle conservation, awareness and efforts are very low,” said schoolteacher Zaidi Abdul Rahim.

“I can say that my students don’t know much about sea turtles. Hopefully, this campaign can help more sea turtles come back to our beaches to nest and lay eggs. If the students can see the turtles

themselves, I hope the experience can open their eyes and from then, they'd be more conscious about keeping our beaches and our environment clean," said schoolteacher Aiman Afiq Osman.

With this community event completed, the #BringOurTurtlesBack team fully intends to continue its fight for the survival of our sea turtles.

To find out more about how you can help, visit www.bringourturtlesback.com.

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About #BringOurTurtlesBack

Sea turtles are one of the gentlest creatures to grace our oceans; the leatherback turtle unquestionably being a tourism icon of the state of Terengganu, Malaysia in the past. Over the years, the number of turtle sightings and nestings have begun to dwindle, aggravated by the illegal poaching of eggs driven by demand. Today, the once iconic leatherback turtle is virtually non-existent.

#BringOurTurtlesBack is a collaborative campaign organised by International SeaKeepers Society, Asia Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Kapas Turtles, and supported by agencies Pinang Films and VoxEureka to raise RM150,000 towards hatchery research, education programmes, and habitat monitoring in hopes of saving these majestic sea creatures and bringing them back to nest on Malaysian shores.

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