

**Report on the Training on Coral Taxonomy
4 - 8 December 2010
USM, Penang, Malaysia**

Background and Rationale

Decision IX/22 during the 9th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP9) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted a programme of work with deliverable outcomes for the Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI). The decision urged Parties to the CBD to promote/carry-out the programme of work for the GTI through coordination of its implementation with existing national, regional, sub-regional and global initiatives, partnerships and institutions; designation of national GTI focal points; provision of updated information about legal requirements for exchange of genetic/biological specimens, current legislation and rules for GTI-related access and benefit-sharing; and initiatives in setting-up of national and regional networks to aid the Parties in their taxonomic needs in implementing the CBD.

To push the GTI programme of work, a series of GTI workshops were conducted in various venues: Central America and Africa in 2001, Asia in 2002, Asia-Oceania in 2004. The latest in the series of activities was the ASEAN+3 Regional Workshop on GTI: Needs Assessment and Networking held in the Philippines in May 2009. The Workshop came up with a GTI Regional Action Plan for Southeast Asia.

The dynamic growth of ASEAN + 3 countries (China, Japan and Korea) in recent years has increased the pressure on their natural resources. Human activities, the driving force behind the regional growth, threaten the biological resources. Lack of scientific information on biodiversity in this region is a crucial issue in the assessment and prediction of biodiversity changes, caused mainly by the lack of taxonomic capacity in data collection and analysis. The lack of trained human resources and inadequate capacities on taxonomy is a major the obstacle in the implementation of CBD commitments, especially in the ASEAN region.

In this context, the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund approved in July 2010 a project entitled "*Taxonomic Capacity Building and Governance for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity*" as proposed by ASEAN Center for Biodiversity (ACB). A similar taxonomic capacity building project was also planned by the Biodiversity Center of Japan, Ministry of the Environment, Japan. These two projects were offshoots of the ASEAN+3 Regional Workshop on GTI held in May 2009 and were adopted as activities in the 2010-2011 Work Plan of the East Asia and Southeast Asia Biodiversity Information Initiative (ESABII). An Inception Meeting/ Workshop was conducted in Manila, Philippines on 31 August – 1 September 2010 to provide direction and work out the details of how to jointly organize these two projects. The meeting identified three training topics; one of them is the taxonomy of corals. Thus, the training was held in December 2010.

Objectives

The training workshop capacitated the participants in the taxonomy of corals. Specifically, the training workshop:

1. introduced the participants to the reef-building corals, specifically the Phylum Cnidaria, Class Anthozoa, Order Scleractinia;
2. Familiarized the participants with the general biology of these reef-building corals;
3. Upgraded the taxonomic skills of the participants on methods of morphological observation; sample collection, processing and managing; and photography of corals for taxonomic purposes;
4. Introduced the participants to advanced taxonomic methodologies such as molecular techniques, photo-identification, and use of internet; and
5. Provided hands-on experience on museum collections management, cataloguing and storage.

Outputs

The training workshop upgraded the skills of the participants in corals taxonomy; introduced them to advanced taxonomic methodologies introduced; and provided the participants with hands-on experience in collections management, cataloguing and storage.

Organization and Participation

The training course was organized by the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, the Ministry of the Environment of Japan/Japan Wildlife Research Center, and the Universiti Sains Malaysia, and was held in the Marine Science Laboratory, USM School of Biological Sciences, Pulau Penang, Malaysia.

There were 30 participants from the ten ASEAN Member States: Brunei Darussalam (3), Cambodia (4), Indonesia (4), Lao PDR (4), Malaysia (3), Philippines (3), Singapore (4), Thailand (4), and Viet Nam (1); 10 observers from Indonesia (1), Japan (2), Malaysia (2), and USM (5); five resource speakers: Japan (2), Thailand (1), and USM (2); three staff from ACB and one from JWRC.

The complete list of participants, resource persons, observers and the logistical support staff are found in Appendix 1.

The Training Course

The training course was subdivided into ten lecture sessions and ten laboratory and hands-on sessions. The topics of the 10 lecture sessions were general taxonomy of animals; basic taxonomy of corals; families and genera of corals; problems in coral taxonomy; sample collections, processing and managing; sample processing for advanced techniques; general biology of reef building corals; advanced taxonomic methods (molecular techniques); and museum collection management, cataloguing and storage.

At the end of the course, the participants presented their taxonomy assignments and feedback on their impressions about the course. Most of the participants identified their assigned coral species. Some were commented on by the expert panel

composed of the trainers/resource persons, pointing out the errors in identifying the coral specimen.

Most of the feedback centered on the relevance of the course to the participants' work. Many of the participants admitted they attended the course with little knowledge in coral taxonomy and were grateful for the enhanced skills resulting from the workshop.

The workshop was capped with a farewell dinner which further strengthened the bonding among the participants.

Appendix 1. List of Participants

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