IN THE NEWS

hectares, Pangkor Island, off the coast of Lumut is considered tiny. But don't let its diminutiveness fool you: big things are happening here.

For a week recently the island had become the site of a quiet, but grand conservation experiment. The experiment isn't just about the 150-strong (and serious) researchers making their way into the island's **pristine** primary rainforest or diving into the depths of her seas to document and record her hidden natural treasures in the hopes of making a meaningful contribution to the long-term conservation of Pangkor's amazing **albeit** little-known **biodiversity**. The Pangkor Scientific Expedition 2017, organised by Ecotourism & Conservation Society Malaysia (ECOMY) and Vale Malaysia Minerals, is serious work no doubt.

While important research and discoveries are being made on an island best known for its holiday resorts and endless beaches,

the other, real conservation experiment lies among the chattering, fidgety groups

of young students armed with sun-fending caps, t-shirts and grubby notebooks, waiting under the blazing heat for directions.

These eager learners are out to have fun, namely to get acquainted with nature that's out there in their backyards.

Coming from local villages from around the island, a total of 155 students volunteered to take part in the scientific expedition, most simply attracted by the **prospect** of an adventure out in the wild.

But Dr Evelyn Lim Ai Lin, co-founder of ECOMY, environmental educationist and senior lecturer at University Putra Malaysia (UPM) isn't too concerned about their motivations. "It's all about giving young people an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to science," she says, before adding with a smile: "...while having fun, of course!"

The students' participation contributes to one of the expedition's objectives, which is to build knowledge and skills among the local community and raise social scientists.

TASK: Read the article again and summarise it in not more than 150 words.



On the field, meeting with dragonfly expert, Professor Madya Dr C.Y. Choong.

Nurturing Nature

For Lim's team, this is a life-changing experience that provides valuable knowledge and a chance to give back to their communities.

"It's probably the first time they've experienced Pangkor this way, and for most of them, this would be their first field trip," says Lim, wryly. And she's right. They may be islanders but they're not well acquainted with the side of Pangkor they don't usually come into contact with. The pristine virgin rainforest that covers Pangkor's interiors remains largely unexplored by her own residents.

The island's population forms a **diverse** kaleidoscope of people who have an **undisputed** strong attachment to their island. However, many of them don't connect that relationship to daily activities that would be best for Pangkor, such as reducing and recycling garbage, respecting wildlife and locally unique flora.

The rapid growth of population and tourism of recent decades has **accelerated** the lifestyle on the island and turned the relationship the inhabitants once had with nature, into a rush for immediate benefit.

"That's where we come in," she says looking on at the crowd of students with a smile.

"This experiential education programme aims to increase knowledge, improve attitudes and encourage positive actions of students and teachers in Pangkor."

The students **embark** on a different level of learning than what they're used to within the **confines** of their classroom. Through the course of the seven-day expedition, the older students experience first-hand how researchers carefully collect data in the forest or out in the ocean. Explains Lim: "The Form Four students are given the task of being research 'assistants' and attached to different research teams with different focuses ranging from aroids (a study of a certain flowering plant family in the wild), birds, small mammals, insects, forest ecology and dendrology (study of trees), rapid assessment and environmental education programmes."

Pointing out that this was their first exposure to the wealth of Pangkor's natural heritage, she adds: "Despite being a native to the island, they've never ventured into the North and South Pangkor Forest Reserve and Sungai Pinang Forest Reserve as they're afraid of the unfamiliar environment."

Sixteen-year-old Ellie Natasha Mohamad Jefri, a student from Sekolah Menengah Pangkor, excitedly shares with me about her role in assisting the dendrology researchers. "I got to measure trees and I learnt so much about them!" she exclaims. The fact that she bandies words like dendrology (something I had to look up — much to my embarrassment) is impressive.

"I've never been in the forest before despite having lived in Pangkor all my life!" chips in Qurratu'aini Izzati Ramli, better known as Aini, also 16. "This is the first time I've seen a snake and other small mammals," she says with a shy giggle.

They're both passionate about caring for the environment now. "We've got to protect our forest," declares Aini as Ellie nods in agreement.

Conservation. Dendrology. Ecology. Mammals. These are words which were alien to this band of students before, including Ellie and Aini. But now, these very words **pepper** their conversations. The learning has begun and the message is spreading.

"That's exactly the kind of reaction I hoped to get. Small changes, one step at a time," says Lim, smiling.

From a Life & Times article in NST dated Jul 30 by Elena Koshy



diminutiveness [dih-min-yuh-tiv] smallness

pristine [pris-tahyn] having its original purity

albeit [awl-bee-it] although; even if

biodiversity

[bahy-oh-di-vur-si-tee] the variety of life in a habitat or ecosystem

fidgety [fij-i-tee] impatient

acquainted [uh-kweyn-tid] having personal knowledge as a result of study and experience

prospect [pros-pekt]
expectation

wryty [rahy-ly] expressing humour

diverse [dih-vurs] of various kinds or forms

undisputed [dih-spyoot-ed] not to be argued or debated

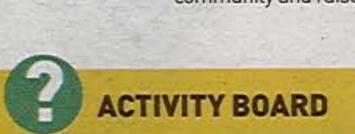
accelerated [ak-sel-uh-reyt-ed] caused faster or greater activity, development, progress, advancement

embark [em-bahrk] to venture in something

confines [kuh n-fahyn] boundary or limit

bandies [ban-dee-s] exchanges

pepper [pep-er] appear here and there



Have you ever explored

the natural environment

around where you live?

What, can you deduce,

is the condition of the

environment from your

exploration?