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Exercise Anambas

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The Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research of the National University of Singapore and the Indonesian Institute of Sciences launched Exercise Anambas, an exploratory scientific expedition to study the biodiversity of the poorly explored Indonesian islands of Anambas and Natuna in the South China Sea, on 9 March 2002.

This is the first such expedition organized and led by ASEAN and neighbouring countries. Wholly funded by ASEAN countries and China, scientists from Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam, China and Taipei China spent 10 days on board the Indonesian research vessel BARUNA VIII, gathering data on the plant and animal diversity of these islands, discovering new and rare species and in the process, promote regional scientific collaboration.

The area has not been surveyed scientifically for more than 100 years, and the biodiversity of the area is almost unknown. This is also the first time a large group of scientists from different countries are working together on a biodiversity project, and the expedition will not only contribute towards regional cooperation, but also towards the future conservation of the marine environment.

During the 10 days of exploration, the scientists aboard BARUNA JAYA VIII dived, used traps, nets as well as trawling to sample the rich diversity in three main sites on Anambas and another three on Natunas. So far, the scientists have recorded well over 200 species of marine fish species, of which several are new species and also a new species of the highly poisonous blue-ring octopus. Several new species of inland fish and crab have also been found. Many more discoveries are expected once the materials and data are carefully sorted and the samples sent to regional and international experts for detailed study.

The scientists will return to Singapore via Batam on 20 March 2002 and spend three days in Singapore to sort the specimens, catalogue and register the materials, confirm identifications and collate their results. The results of the biodiversity survey will be published in a special scientific volume for use by scientists internationally.

The proposal for this expedition was submitted by the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research of the National University of Singapore, in February 2000 to the South China Sea Workshop, at the recommendation of the Workshop on Biodiversity Assessment in May 1997. The 11th Workshop for Managing Potential Conflicts in the South China Sea adopted the proposal as a confidence building measure in Jakarta on March 2001.

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