

SAVE OUR THALE NOI PROJECT: MINIMIZING THREATS TO BIODIVERSITY IN A NATURAL WETLAND

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Thale Noi is a fresh water lake located in Phattalung and Nakhon Si Thammarat Provinces, southern Thailand. As a big natural wetland, 5 km. wide and 6 km. long, many aquatic flora and fauna are found in Thale Noi. A part of the lake is designated as the first Ramsar site in Thailand. However, the lake is surrounded by human settlements with intensive human activities. As such, biodiversity and environmental quality of the lake are threatened. One activity is a handicraft making. Bulrush is harvested from the lake and processed with chemical dyes for the handicraft production. The chemical residue from a coloring process, which contains heavy metal, is released to the lake. This residue poses threats to fish and waterfowl as well as the communities themselves. The Save Our Thale Noi project was initiated to deliver the important message to the communities via children. Many environmental education activities in this workshop were created to help the youth to learn about wetland ecosystem and its threats from the bulrush coloring process. The activities also provided a platform for them to discuss about the threats and ways to minimize these threats to biodiversity in the lake. The results showed the youth were actively engaged in these dialogues, which contributed to finding ways to reduce and manage waste from the coloring process. A simple infiltration was demonstrated as an alternative waste water treatment. The undyed bulrush were promoted to replace the dyed ones. In addition, a variety of new products were created by using the bulrush residues, which in the past were left to be rotten. After the workshop is over, the participants are expected to transfer these messages they've learned to their parents and other communities' members. Thus, the lake and its biodiversity will be taken care to return the benefits to the communities, both in this generation and the next ones.

Keywords: environmental education activities, wetland threats