

THE BIODIVERSITY JOURNEY: BUILDING A CONSERVATION HAVEN

Sime Darby Property believes in rewilding to create biodiverse ecosystems within urban settings.



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Datuk Azmir Merican.

OUR planet is facing severe biodiversity loss, a major existential risk that can cripple future generations.

On an ominous note, Save the Children Fund had recently reported that babies born after 2020 will face up to seven times more extreme weather events than their grandparents.

While the responsibility to conserve the environment lies within every individual, the onus is unequivocally more urgent with larger organisations.

According to Boston Consulting Group, focusing on sustainability in business models and corporate governance can give businesses a lasting competitive advantage but for conscientious organisations, this is also a powerful way to mitigate imminent destruction.

Tech giants like Microsoft and Apple are walking their big talk with the former planning to remove the amount of carbon it has emitted since the organisation was founded.

Apple on the other hand, has set a goal for its entire supply chain to be carbon neutral by 2030.

This doesn't have to be a pipe-dream.

For property developer Sime Darby Property (SDP), the walk begins with the reimagining of its townships, starting with the City of Elmina.

Its group managing director Datuk Azmir Merican says that the key to progressing sustainably is for new developments to adopt landscape strategies that prioritise biodiversity conservation and restoration.

“Good biodiversity conservation work, such as creating more green spaces and bringing communities and partners into the process, is perhaps one of the best ways to solve the many human-created environmental issues,” he said.

“Biodiversity conservation must be envisioned beyond the aesthetics whereby parks can be designed as functional man-made rainforests to provide access and connection to people, and at the same time, ecologically viable for the surrounding area.”

Rewilding our path to progress

Why is biodiversity important? Ecologist and Tropical Rainforest Conservation and Research Centre executive director Dr Dzaeman Dzulkifli says that biodiversity is the effect of millions of years of evolution, encapsulating everything that is living around us including plants, microbes, animals and even ourselves.

“To be disconnected from nature is to not exist, so we need to be working in synergy with our environment and nature,” he said.

One way to be synergised with nature is to invest in nature-based solutions that encapsulate management, protection and most essentially, restoration of natural ecosystems and habitats.

The first step can begin with “rewilding” – a simple yet effective concept, which aims to restore sustainable biodiversity and ecosystem health by protecting core wild or wilderness areas.

Not-for-profit foundation Rewilding Europe mentioned that rewilding also repairs damaged ecosystems and restores degraded landscapes.

Rewilding efforts are well underway in the wellness-oriented City of Elmina.

Once a monoculture oil palm plantation, the township with a 121-hectare Central Park at the heart of its masterplan will eventually be a green city, populated with diverse species of native forest trees that originate from the adjacent Bukit Cherakah Forest Reserve.

This way, the natural biodiversity within the forest reserve is extended into the urban fabric of the township to provide a functional urban ecosystem.

Urban biodiversity in action

Sime Darby Property has developed a sustainability approach to guide environmental, social and governance (ESG) outcomes that can be translated into effective township master planning and community engagement initiatives.

These include comprehensive policies for tree planting, strategic partnerships and the establishment of the Elmina Rainforest Knowledge Centre (ERKC) to promote forestry research, conservation and education for the public (shown in the diagram).

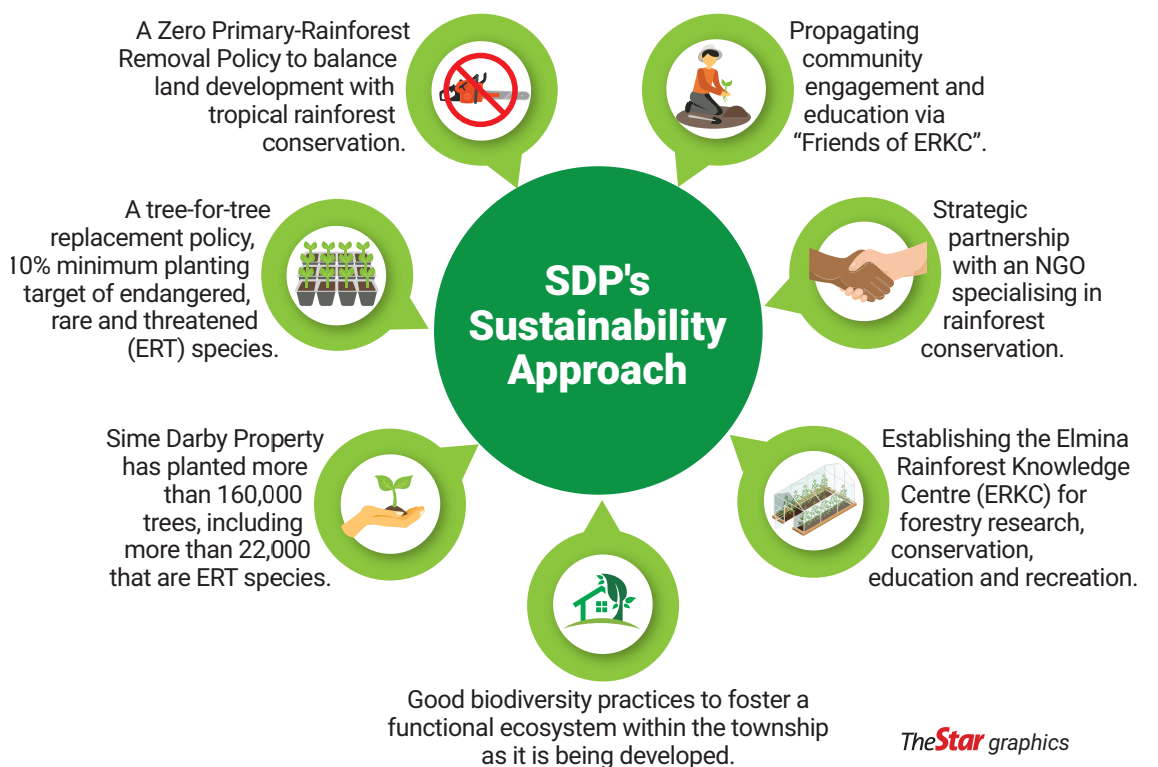
A continuous journey

SDP partnered with TRCRC, a leading non-profit and industry expert on tropical rainforest conservation and ecology to run the conservation programmes at ERKC, with funding support from Yayasan Sime Darby.

The ERKC focuses on environmental education and conservation, research and development, promotion of ecotourism and other green activities, as well as workshops and hands-on interactive classes for residents, students and the public to learn about tropical rainforests,



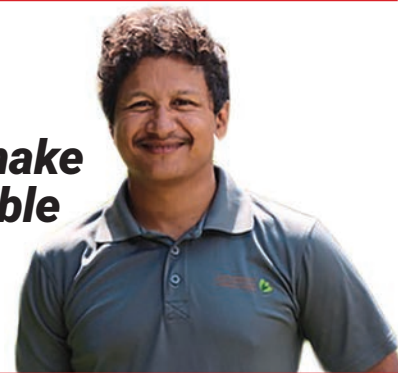
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TheStar graphics

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Dr Dzaeman Dzulkifli.



wildlife and tree planting.

“Protecting and conserving threatened, and endangered plant species is at the heart of what we do.

“Our collaboration with SDP will help raise awareness on the plight of the Malaysian rainforest, and hopefully make rainforest conservation more accessible for people to participate in,” said Dr Dzaeman.

He added: “Working collaboratively with NGOs, different partners and the community is important to build on climate resilience.

“It is my hope with the ERKC initiative that everyone who comes to visit can improve their environmental literacy and learn about the intricacies of nature and our dependence on it.”

Serving a greater purpose, the ERKC and its adjacent Elmina

Living Collection Nursery (ELCN) allows the company to have a constant supply of forest trees for planting within its townships as well as for external parties for reforestation initiatives.

Currently, TRCRC has successfully propagated 187 plant species at ELCN, including over 35,000 seeds sowed and more than 10,000 tree saplings stored.

A total of 210,000 trees – with 10% consisting of IUCN Red List of Threatened Species – are expected to be planted throughout the City of Elmina township by 2040.

Over 41,000 trees including 5,691 trees that are recognised as Endangered, Rare and Threatened (ERT) species have been planted in the township to date, adding to the already over 116,000 trees planted in all of SDPs developments over

the past decade.

“Although rewilding is a long-term process, its results are shown to be fruitful and lasting for the betterment of the environment and surrounding communities.

“We have surpassed the company’s policy commitment in planting a minimum of 10% ERT tree species throughout our developments, and we will continue this journey until a valuable impact is made,” said Datuk Azmir.

