

Press release

For immediate release

HKU Swire Institute of Marine Science Launches Youth Programme to Cultivate Future Ocean Stewards

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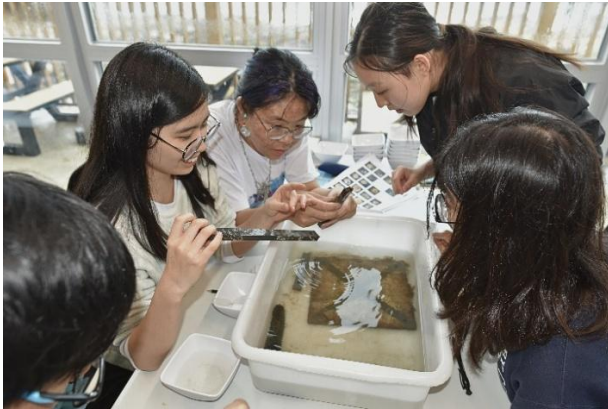


Image 1: Students examining marine organisms that have colonised an Autonomous Reef Monitoring Structure (ARMS).



Image 2: Student Lolan CHIU identifying marine species she found on an ARMS under a microscope.

The Swire Institute of Marine Science (SWIMS) at The University of Hong Kong (HKU) has launched the *Exploring Marine Biodiversity: Empowering Youth Ambassadors for Ocean Stewardship* programme. Supported by the Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF), the programme immerses local secondary school students in marine science through hands-on training, empowering them as the next generation of ocean stewards.

The programme was inaugurated at an opening ceremony on 30 January at the Rayson Huang Theatre at HKU, attended by Professor Jay SIEGEL, HKU Vice-President and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning); Professor David BAKER, Interim Director of SWIMS; Dr Eric Kam-chung CHENG, Chairman of the Environment and Conservation Fund Committee; and Dr Jim CHU, Assistant Director (Fisheries and Marine Conservation) of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD). More than 100 students and teachers from 25 secondary schools in Hong Kong attended the ceremony.

Hands-On Learning in Marine Science and Conservation

Each participating school nominates five student ambassadors to take part in a four-day immersive training programme at SWIMS' Cape D'Aguilar research facility, located adjacent to the Cape D'Aguilar Marine Reserve. The programme blends lectures, laboratory sessions, and field visits to key sites such as Hoi Ha Wan Marine Park, Telegraph Bay, and Tai Tam, covering diverse habitats including coral communities, rocky shores, and mangroves.

Students gain firsthand experience with advanced research techniques used by marine scientists, including drone mapping of restored mangroves and environmental DNA (eDNA) analysis for species detection. The programme also focuses on building leadership and advocacy skills, enabling participants to share their knowledge within their schools and wider communities.

Ms Janis MOK, Outreach and Strategic Partnerships Manager at SWIMS, explained the mission, “This programme unites Hong Kong’s schools, both local and international. We hope to achieve a cascading and multiplying effect, reaching beyond the students we teach. Already, 175 students from 39 schools have signed up, exceeding our expectations.”

Dr Jim CHU, AFCD Assistant Director (Fisheries and Marine Conservation) emphasised the programme’s broader goal: protecting Hong Kong’s marine environment, “The most important message is to teach the general public to protect our oceans, how to enjoy nature while being its guardians, not just its guests.”

Inaugural Workshop Engages Students in Biodiversity Discovery

The first workshop of the programme, *Discovering Marine Biodiversity*, took place on 28 February. Students explored Hong Kong’s rich marine ecosystems and the importance of conservation, followed by interactive activities such as identifying marine organisms collected using an Autonomous Reef Monitoring Structure (ARMS).

“The workshop was fantastic! The kids were super engaged, jumping right in, collaborating,” said Josh BLUE, Head of Education, Curriculum, Learning and Assessment Education at English Schools Foundation. He continued, “Hopefully, we will continue building on this message of sustainability, protecting marine ecosystems, and creating a better world.”

SWIMS Outreach and Education Officer Dr Phil THOMSON agreed, “Everyone was very enthusiastic! The challenge is to identify the organisms they find on the ARMS, but this is the whole point of this exercise. The number of species, or biodiversity, matters for the health of the environment. That’s the important message from the course that the students will share with their peers.”

One of the participating students, Lolan CHIU, a year 12 student at ESF Sha Tin College, said the programme gave her a glimpse into what being a real scientist means, “I want to become a marine biologist. I have already been to the Philippines to get my SCUBA diving license and Thailand to participate in CoralWatch. I was really surprised by how detail-oriented you have to be, looking at different species and carefully observing small details in their shapes and patterns! I cannot wait to share with my schoolmates what I have learned in this programme.”

The programme represents a significant step in nurturing youth engagement in marine conservation and strengthening Hong Kong’s culture of environmental stewardship.

About The Swire Institute of Marine Science (SWIMS)

Part of the Faculty of Science at The University of Hong Kong, the Swire Institute of Marine Science (SWIMS) is one of the world’s leading marine research institutions. SWIMS specialises in the study of shallow coastal seas and the interaction between humanity and the ocean. Since its foundation in 1990, SWIMS has trained hundreds of scientists from around the world who now play leading roles in marine research and conservation.



Image 3: Dr Phil Thompson and an ARMS that he just retrieved from the sea.



Image 4: Participants in the *Discovering Marine Biodiversity* workshop at SWIMS

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