



Kuala Lumpur

UGBS

Youth Empowerment Program

A Step-by-Step Handbook for Youths & Schools



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Printing

Penerbit Universiti Malaya
Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Acknowledgement

The development of this handbook and the implementation of the Kuala Lumpur Urban Green-Blue Spaces (UGBS) Youth Empowerment Program were made possible through the generous support of Yinson Holdings Berhad under the Yinson4Youth (Y4Y) 2026 Grant.

Link to The Planet Prodigy:



Link to Yinson4Youth website:



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About this Handbook



Introduction

This Kuala Lumpur Urban Green-Blue Spaces (UGBS) Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) handbook was developed by The Planet Prodigy (TPP) with support from the Universiti Malaya Sustainable Development Centre (UMSDC) through funding provided by the Yinson4Youth (Y4Y) 2026 grant.

But Why Write This Handbook Now?

Kuala Lumpur is rapidly urbanising, with more buildings, roads, traffic, and development every year. As the city grows, natural spaces such as rivers, lakes, parks, and forests are facing more pollution and pressure. Problems like flooding, urban heat, plastic waste, and biodiversity loss are also becoming more common. Therefore, this handbook is designed to help youths explore, understand, and care for the natural spaces around them through meaningful learning experiences and environmental action.

UGBS are not just places for recreation. They are spaces where youths can relax, learn, spend time with friends, and connect with nature. Through small actions such as reducing waste, joining clean-ups, participating in citizen science, and sharing awareness online, youths can help create a healthier and more sustainable Kuala Lumpur.

Who Is This Handbook For?

This handbook is designed primarily for youths because young people are increasingly recognised as key drivers of sustainability transitions, environmental stewardship, and climate action. Globally, there are approximately 1.2 billion youths aged 15–24 and nearly half of the world's population is under 30, making them one of the most influential demographic groups in shaping future environmental outcomes (United Nations, 2023).

Research by UNESCO involving more than 17,000 young people across 166 countries found that many youths are highly concerned about climate and environmental issues but feel inadequately equipped with practical sustainability knowledge and environmental education. Around 70% of respondents reported limited understanding or poor-quality climate education, while many expressed a desire for more experiential and action-oriented learning approaches (UNESCO, 2021).

In addition, organisations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) recognise youths as essential agents of change because they are more likely to shape future consumption patterns, green innovation, community participation, and sustainability leadership. Targeting youths therefore represents a strategic investment in cultivating long-term environmental values, behaviours, and stewardship capacities that can influence broader society over time (UNEP, 2021; United Nations, 2023).



The Heartware Approach

What is heartware?

Heartware refers to the internal, voluntary motivation and shared values that drive long-term community action.



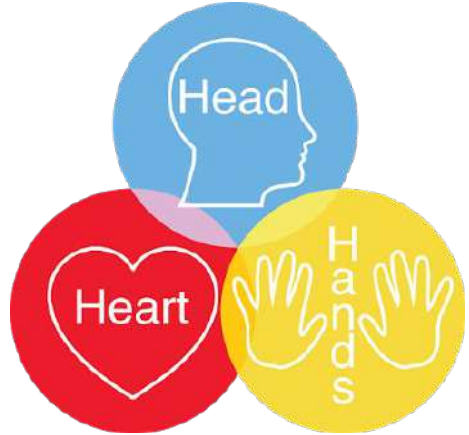
This handbook uses the **Heartware Approach for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)**, which focuses on helping youths build care, empathy, and responsibility towards people, communities, and the environment. Instead of learning only through textbooks or classrooms, youths are encouraged to learn through real experiences in places such as parks, rivers, lakes, and neighbourhoods. By exploring and taking part in activities within their own communities, sustainability learning becomes more fun, meaningful, and relatable. Through this handbook, **TPP** hopes to inspire youths to become active changemakers who help care for and protect Kuala Lumpur's UGBS for the future.



The Heartware Elicitation Process

The Heartware elicitation is inspired by the head, hands, and heart approach to learning, where youths not only gain knowledge (**head**) but also learn through actions and experiences (**hands**) while building empathy, care, and emotional connection (**heart**).

The process works by getting youths to explore, experience, reflect, and take action in their local environments. These experiences help “bring out” or elicit a stronger sense of appreciation, stewardship, and belonging towards UGBS.





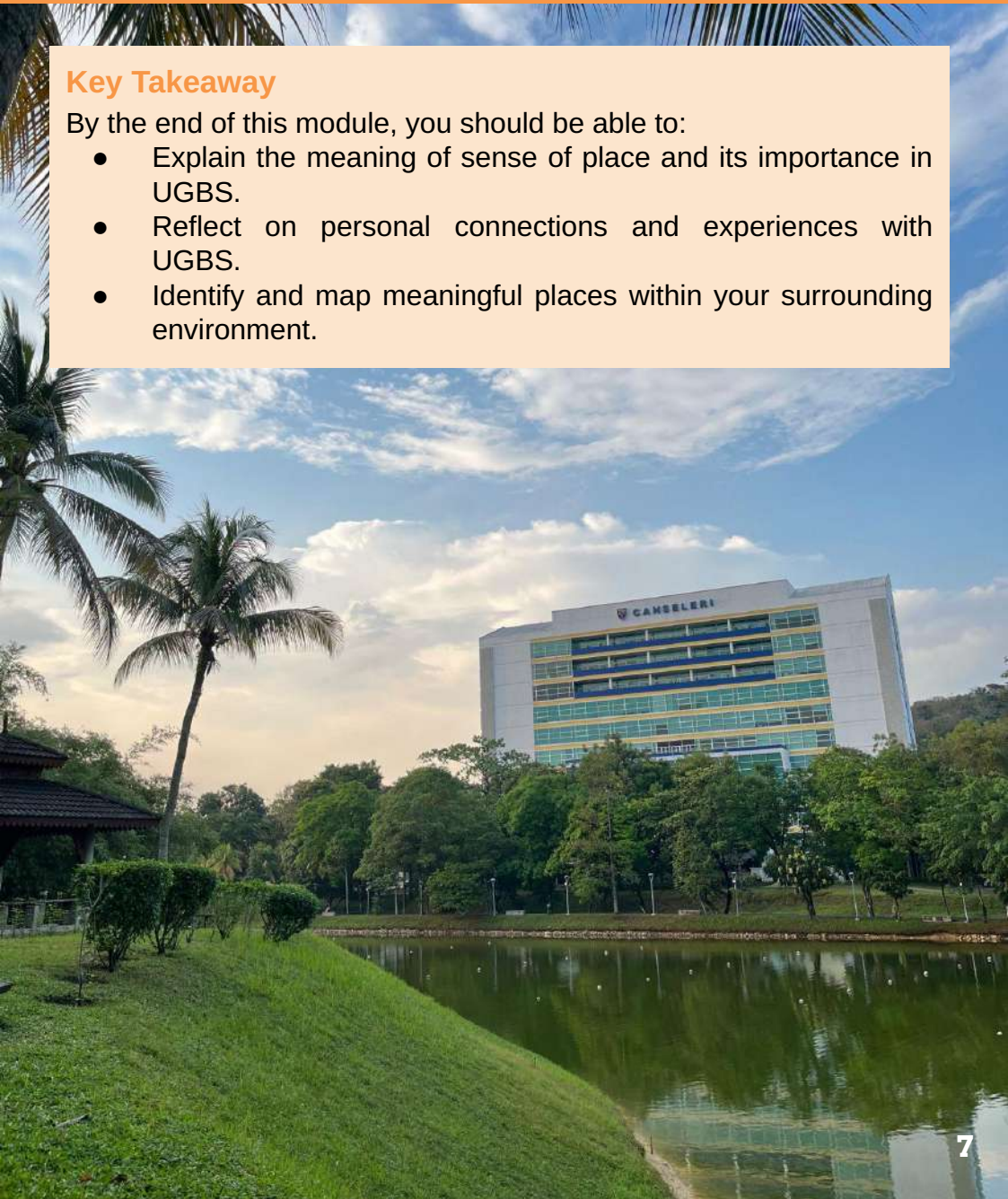
MODULE 1

Sense of Place

Key Takeaway

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of sense of place and its importance in UGBS.
- Reflect on personal connections and experiences with UGBS.
- Identify and map meaningful places within your surrounding environment.



1.1 Forming a Sense of Place

Have you ever had a spot in the city that just *feels right*, maybe a shady park bench, a lakeside path, or even a quiet corner on campus? That feeling isn't random. It's what we call a **"sense of place."**



What is a place?

A **place** is a space filled with meaning.

Place = space + meaning

lake	attachment
park	connection
garden	emotions
river	memories



What is a sense of place?

A **sense of place** refers to the emotional connection a person has with a specific place.



The building blocks of sense of place

Think back to your last visit to a park or riverside in the city. What were you doing, how did you feel, and who were you with? These small moments and experiences when put together shape your sense of place.

The **physical features** around you

Your **activities** and **experiences**

The **people** you interact with

Your sense of place is shaped by a mix of things working together. ▲

1.2 Sense of Place in UGBS

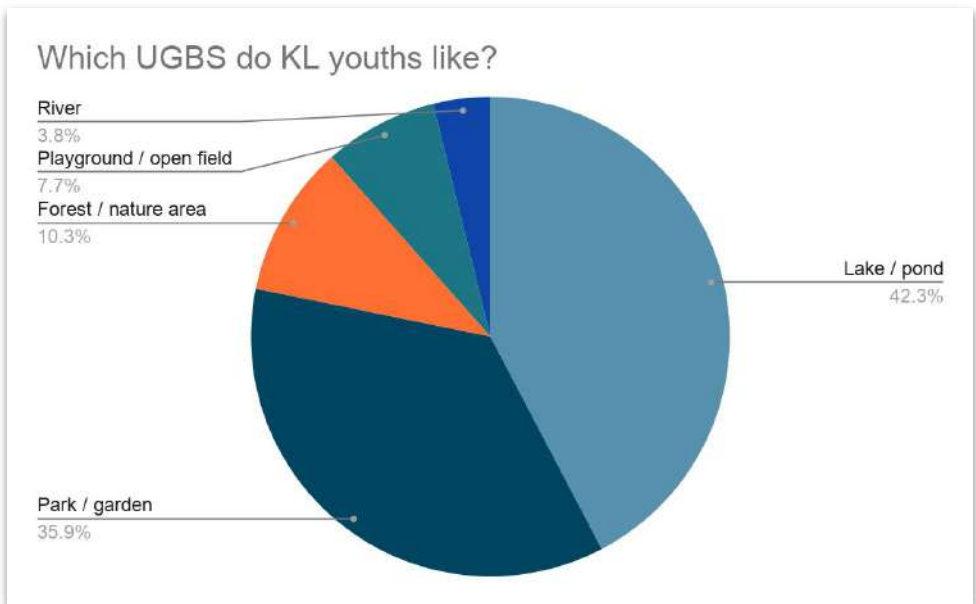
What are UGBS?

These are natural areas within urban environments such as **parks, rivers, lakes, forests, and green corridors.**

Sense of place in UGBS is about the connection youths feel with natural environments in the city. These spaces are more than just areas for recreation or scenery. They are places where youths can create memories, build friendships, relax, learn, and feel a sense of belonging.

Which UGBS do KL youths like?

Findings from a preliminary survey that we conducted with KL youths revealed that **lakes, ponds, parks, and gardens** were among the most preferred types of UGBS among the respondents.



▲ Survey results showing Kuala Lumpur youths' preferences towards UGBS (N = 78).

Understanding why UGBS matters for youths

For many youths, UGBS can become important spaces for social activities, self-expression, community action, and connecting with nature. The experiences help to shape how youths value, protect, and care for UGBS, making sense of place an important part of building a more sustainable, inclusive, and livable Kuala Lumpur.

Recent studies also show that spending time in UGBS is beneficial for physical and mental health and strengthening social well-being. These spaces:

- Provide **mental breaks** from stress and noise
- Create **inclusive spaces** where different communities meet
- Help people **reconnect with nature** in the middle of a city



Differentiating health and well-being

Health is about your body and mind functioning. **Well-being** goes beyond that, explaining **how you feel and experience life**, including happiness, comfort, purpose, and connection to others and your surroundings.

So, whether you're there to walk, jog, cycle, do outdoor exercise, or talk to someone special, it really doesn't matter as long as the activity or place matters to you.



Photo credits: Anil Kumar Kanuri

Activity 1: Photovoice



What is photovoice?

Photovoice is a way to use photos to share your thoughts and experiences about your environment or community.



- Explore a place and take 3–5 photos of it.
- Share your photos with friends and briefly explain why you took them.
- Discuss what they mean as a group, then come up with one key message to present.



▲ **f**: “There’s no one in the picture, but I took it from the KLCC Mosque; I think it’s good enough to describe how the landscape was at KLCC Park.” (Photo by Nada Amilia Nafisah).

g: A BeReal shared by Nurul Huda during her brisk walk, also at the KLCC Park.

Reflection

- What makes this place important to me?
- How do I feel when I’m here?
- What makes me want to come back?
- What changes would I like to see here?
- How could I contribute to improving this place?

1.3 Choosing your favourite UGBS

In a busy city like Kuala Lumpur, having the right UGBS to help you feel calm, connected, or inspired is more important than ever. Popular spots include KLCC Park, Perdana Botanical Gardens, KL Forest Eco Park, and Taman Tasik Titiwangsa. But UGBS isn't just about famous places. Nature can be right near you too, like your neighbourhood park (*taman*), a small stream, or even your own backyard.

How do I form my sense of place?



Think of forming your sense of place as a **cyclical process**. Think of it like piecing a puzzle together.

Each time you go through this cycle, the picture becomes clearer. What was once just a random space slowly turns into a place that feels familiar, meaningful, and even a little bit like it belongs to you.





Photo credits: Nurul Huda Jamalludin (a-c), Heng Zhe Xing (d), Fatin Adriena (e).

Activity 2: Mapping your Place

Create a simple map of your chosen place. It can be on your school campus or in your neighborhood. Your map doesn't need to be perfect or to scale, but do include key features that you observe, like:



- Nature** Where do you see plants, animals, or water?
- People** Where do people interact, gather, rest, or spend time?
- Feelings** How does this place make you feel?
- Issues** Are there any problems (pollution, litter, neglect)?

Share & Discuss

If you're doing this activity in a group:

- Compare your map with your friends'.
- Discuss who else uses this place and how different people might experience the same place in different ways.

Scan this QR code for examples of maps that can be drawn. □



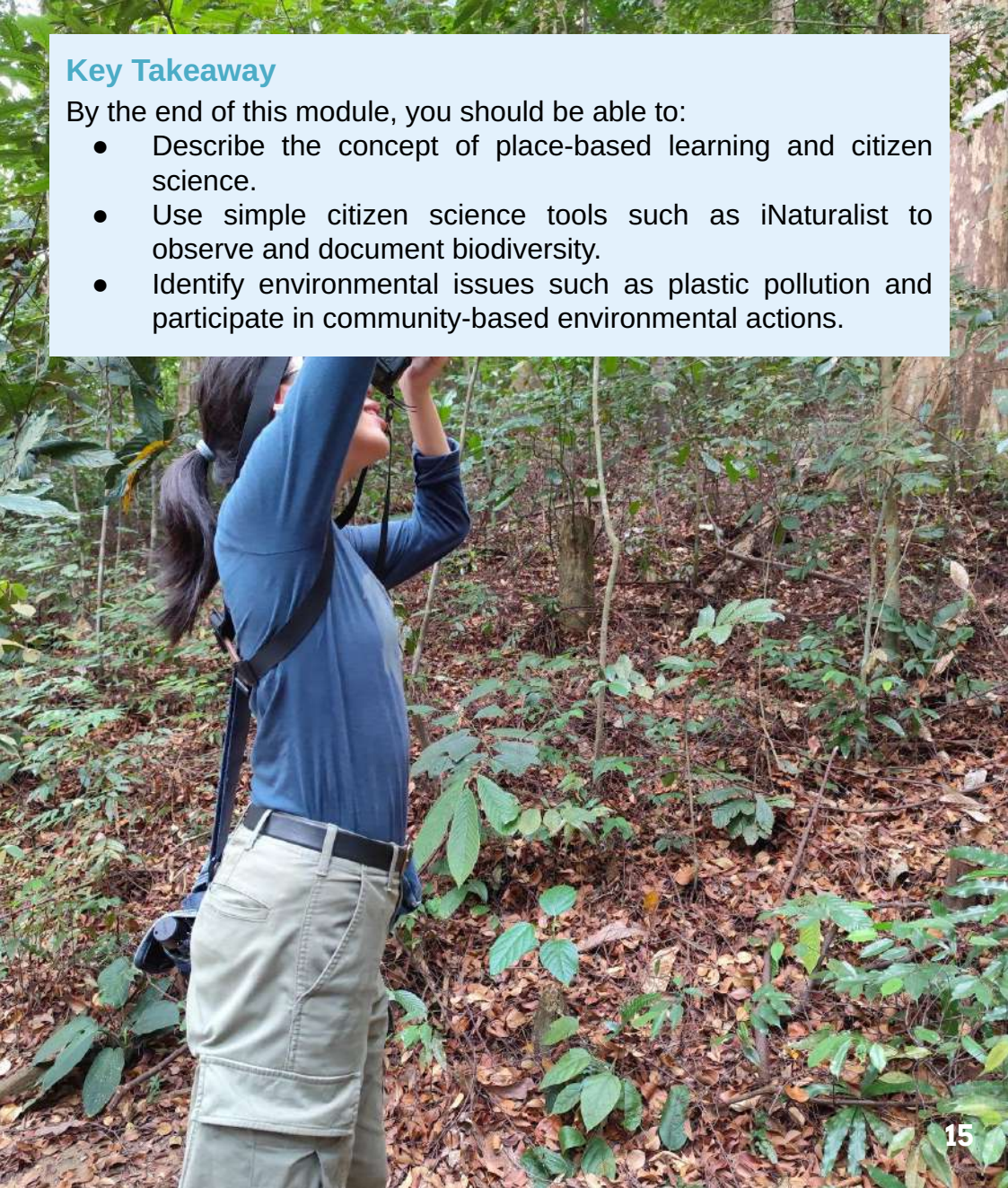
MODULE 2

Place-based Citizen Science

Key Takeaway

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Describe the concept of place-based learning and citizen science.
- Use simple citizen science tools such as iNaturalist to observe and document biodiversity.
- Identify environmental issues such as plastic pollution and participate in community-based environmental actions.



2.1 Understanding Place-based Learning

What is place-based learning?

Place-based learning is a form of learning that connects lessons and knowledge to **places, local communities, and everyday experiences.**

Instead of learning only through textbooks or classrooms, you get to learn by exploring and interacting with the environment around you. This approach, especially in UGBS, helps make learning more meaningful, practical, and relatable, while encouraging youths to better understand the places they live in.

Place-based learning in the UGBS

UGBS become outdoor learning environments where students and youths can observe nature, learn about biodiversity, understand environmental issues, and take part in community activities. For example, students may learn about water quality by visiting a river, study urban biodiversity in a park, or reflect on sustainability issues through clean-up and conservation activities.



Benefits of place-based learning

Place-based learning in UGBS also helps young people develop a stronger connection with nature and their local community. By spending time in these spaces, youths can build environmental awareness, appreciation for urban ecosystems, and a sense of responsibility to care for their surroundings.

2.2 Becoming a Citizen Scientist

What is citizen science?

Citizen science is a voluntary activity where members of the general public participate and collaborate in scientific research.

Citizen science involves everyday people (including youths) in helping to collect, observe, record, or analyze information for scientific research. You do not need to be a professional scientist to contribute to science. Students, youths, and community members can all play an important role in helping researchers better understand the environment and solve real-world problems.



Local: Youths conduct citizen science activities in their local UGBS.

Regional: Youths around KL share their findings and collaborate through online platforms.

Global: Citizen science connects youth across the globe.

Activity 3: EcoBlitz using iNaturalist

In UGBS, youths can become citizen scientists by exploring and observing the nature around them. For example, observing birds and insects, recording plant species, or uploading biodiversity observations using mobile applications such as iNaturalist. This form of citizen science activity is known as an "**EcoBlitz**," and it can actually help researchers and policymakers better understand environmental changes and improve conservation efforts.

Step 1: Getting Ready

- Install iNaturalist on your phone.
- Create an account so your observations can be recorded and shared.
- Form small groups (3–5 people per group works best).

The iNaturalist logo looks like this. □



Step 2: Choose a site

- Choose a location like a park, river, garden, or lake.
- Visit <https://green-space-wpkl.vercel.app/> if you need help deciding on one.

Step 3: Explore

- Walk slowly and observe your surroundings
- Look closely at plants, insects, fungi, birds, and even small details like moss or lichens.



Step 4: Make Observations

- Open the app and tap "Observe."
- Take clear photos of the organism
- Try taking photos from different angles (top, side, close-up)

Watch this video for instructions on how to make observations with the iNaturalist app. ►



Scan this QR code to see observations made during the 2026 Klang Valley City Nature Challenge. ◻

Step 5: Add Details

- Species name (the app can help suggest)
- Location (auto-recorded)
- Notes (e.g., "on tree bark," "near water")
- Save and upload your observation



Reflect Together

After the activity, gather and compare your observations.

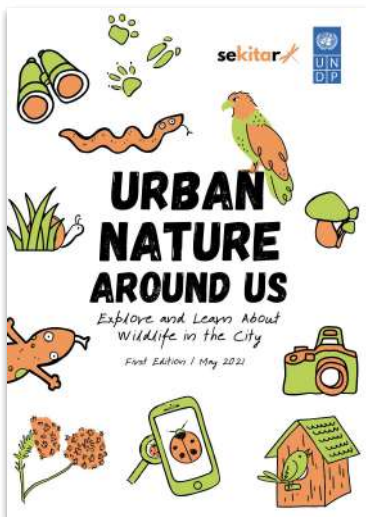
- Discuss what you've found
- Help each other identify species
- Reflect on what you gained from this activity too.



We also recommend using the 'Urban Nature Around Us' handbook developed by Sekitar Kita for this activity. □



◀ Scan this QR code to download the handbook.



sekitar ✨

About Sekitar Kita

Sekitar Kita is a university-linked social enterprise that focuses on providing nature-based environmental education and citizen science activities to the public.

▲ To learn more about Sekitar Kita, visit <https://sekitar.com.my/>

2.3 Tackling the Plastic Waste Problem

Single-use plastic (SUP) waste is one of the most common forms of pollution found in UGBS, especially in rivers, lakes, drains, parks, and public spaces. Improperly managed plastic waste can harm wildlife, pollute waterways, contribute to flooding, and affect human health and well-being.



What are single-use plastics?

These are plastic products and packaging that can only be used once or a few times before being discarded.



Most common SUP waste



▲ Preliminary surveys conducted at selected rivers and green spaces in Kuala Lumpur revealed that drinking bottles and food packaging were the most common types of SUP pollution.

Plogging (KUDAH)

Plogging is a fun activity that combines jogging or walking with picking up litter along the way. The term comes from the Swedish words "plocka upp" (meaning "to pick up") and "jog." In Malay, plogging is translated as **KUDAH**, short for "*Kutip Sampah Sambil Riadah*." This activity encourages youths to stay active while helping to keep the environment clean.



Activity 4: TrashBlitz

Plogging itself is not necessarily citizen science, but it becomes a citizen science activity when youths collect or record waste data during the cleanup process (also known as "**TrashBlitz**").

Step 1: Choose a Location

Select a nearby UGBS such as a park, river, lake, playground, or roadside area for the clean-up activity.

Step 2: Prepare Basic Equipment

Bring gloves, trash bags, reusable water bottles, and tongs or litter pickers if available. Always prioritise safety during the activity.

Step 3: Collect the Litter

Work together to pick up litter found around the area. Separate recyclable items where possible.

Step 4: Record the Waste

Identify and record the types of waste collected, such as plastic bottles, food wrappers, cans, or cigarette butts. Participants can also count the number of items collected.

Step 5: Share and Raise Awareness

Share your findings with friends, schools, or community groups to help track pollution patterns. You can also share photos through social media to encourage others to care for the environment.



▲ Watch this reel to know more about what happens to your trash.



▲ Watch this reel for tips on waste sorting at home.



▲ Watch this reel to learn about using Reverse Vending Machines (RVMs) to recycle plastic waste.

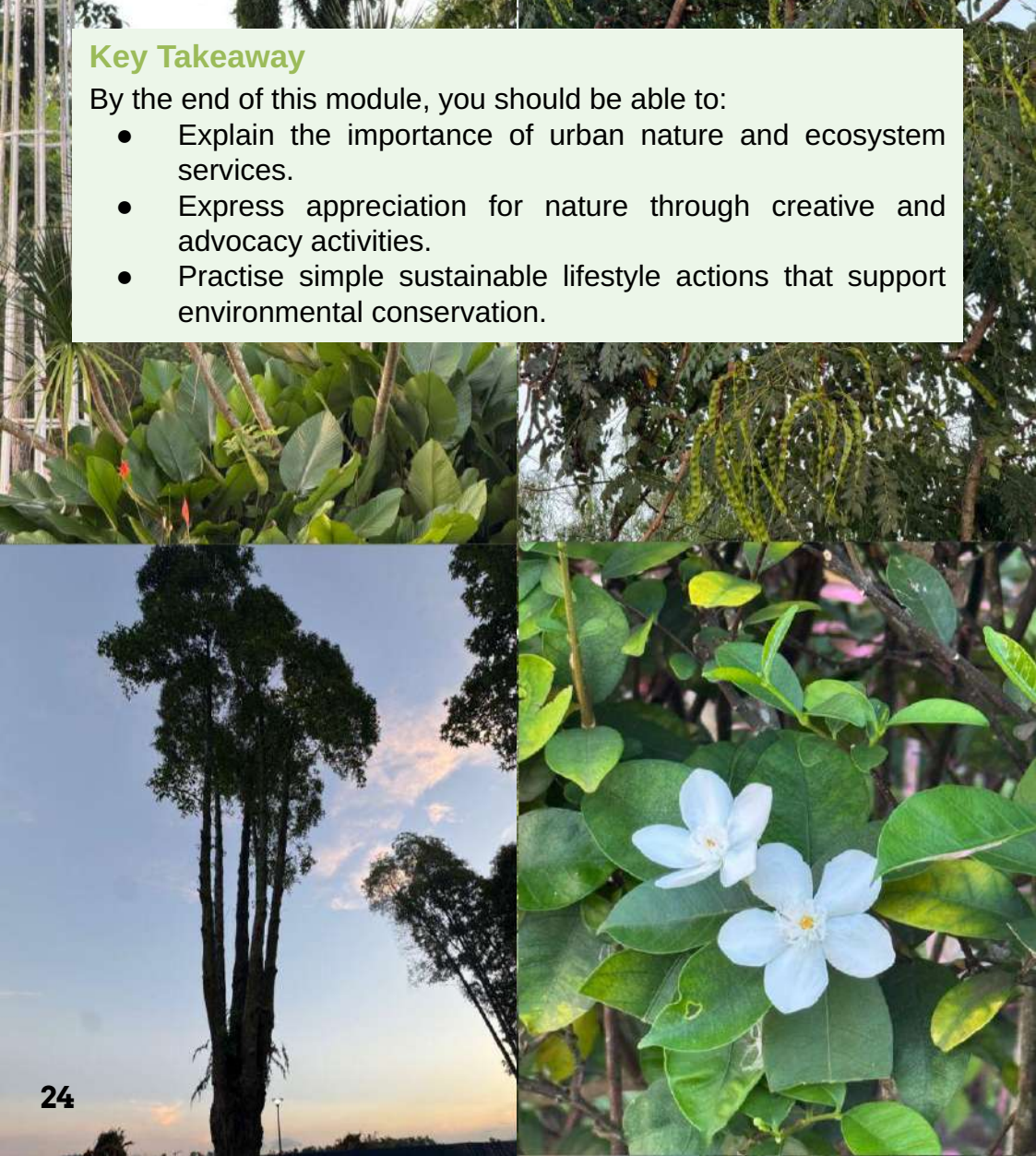
MODULE 3

Appreciating Urban Nature

Key Takeaway

By the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Explain the importance of urban nature and ecosystem services.
- Express appreciation for nature through creative and advocacy activities.
- Practise simple sustainable lifestyle actions that support environmental conservation.



3.1 Understanding Ecosystem Services

As we live in a tropical city where intense rainfall, heat, and rapid urbanisation intersect, UGBS acts as essential infrastructure to

- cool the city and improve air quality
- protect us from floods
- support wildlife
- provide spaces to hang out
- improve mental health



These roles performed by UGBS are called "**ecosystem services.**"

What are ecosystem services?

Ecosystem services are the benefits that nature gives us for free.

The next time you're at a nearby park, river, or lake, reflect on the ecosystem services that it provides you and others. You'll find that these services fall into one of four categories:

Provisioning services (materials we get from nature)

Regulating services (how nature protects us)

Cultural services (how nature connects with us)

Supporting services (how nature keeps everything running)

By acknowledging these services, it makes us more appreciative and respectful of the roles that UGBS play in our everyday lives to make Kuala Lumpur a thriving, livable city.

3.2 Finding Art in Nature

Nature isn't just for environmentalists or scientists. It belongs to everyone, including artists, creators, and storytellers. When you step outside, you're not just entering an ecosystem; you're entering a living gallery full of **colours, sounds, textures, rhythms, and movement**.

Look closely and you'll start to notice that art is everywhere. It's in the soft rhythm of birds chirping, the repeating patterns on a butterfly's wings, the rough textures of tree bark, and the way leaves sway and "dance" with the wind. Even the way sunlight filters through branches can feel like a carefully designed scene. Nature doesn't just support life; it inspires **expression**.

Activity 5: Nature-Inspired Batik

Turn what you observe in nature into your own batik-style design, inspired by real patterns found in plants, insects, and landscapes.



▲ Youths getting ready to paint their nature-inspired batik at Cwoks Batik Workshop, Kompleks Kraf, Kuala Lumpur.



h. Crown shyness in action — *kapur* tree (*Dryobalanops aromatica*) at Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM).

i & j. FRIM Forest Skywalk — where forest meets skyline.

k. Malayan Pied Fantail couple feeding each other insects (Photo taken by Zi Yee Lui).

Activity 6: Soundscape to Nature's Melody

What is a soundscape?

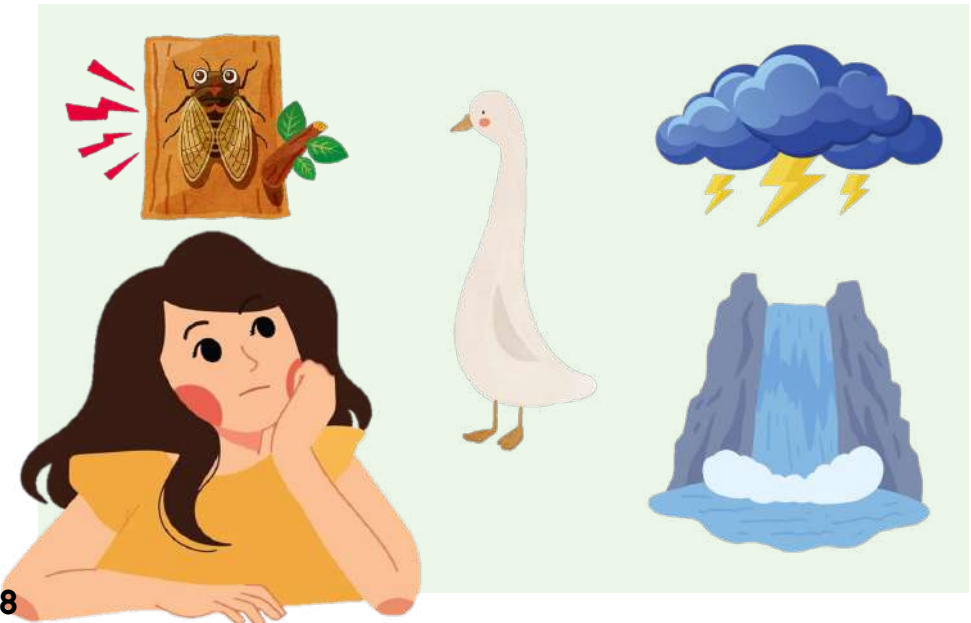
A soundscape refers to the combination of sounds from a particular environment.

These sounds can be both **natural sounds**, like birds chirping, rivers flowing, or wind rustling through leaves, and **human-made sounds**, such as traffic noise or community events.



Transform the sounds of nature (e.g., birds chirping, wind through leaves, flowing water, insects buzzing) into a creative song composition or a fun performance with friends.

When you start seeing nature this way, you realise that creativity and the environment are deeply connected. You don't need to be an expert to appreciate it. Just observe, feel, and interpret what you experience.



3.3 Advocating for Urban Biodiversity

This section takes inspiration from a youth policy brief by Jejak Liar entitled "Protecting Urban Ecosystems in Kuala Lumpur." One recommendation that the policy called for was to strengthen youth advocacy in protecting urban biodiversity.

About Jejak Liar

Jejak Liar is a youth-led initiative focused on citizen science and advocacy for urban biodiversity conservation.



◀ To learn more about Jejak Liar, find them on Instagram @jejakliar.my

Read the policy brief here



Activity 7: Advocacy through Social Media

What is advocacy?

Advocacy simply means speaking up and taking action for something you care about.

Social media is a powerful platform that allows youths to share ideas, raise awareness, and inspire positive environmental action. Through platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and X, young people can become digital advocates for urban biodiversity, sustainability, and environmental protection in Kuala Lumpur.

Step 1: Choose an Environmental Topic

Pick a topic such as plastic pollution, river conservation, urban wildlife, or sustainable living.

Step 2: Create Simple and Creative Content

Make simple posts, photos, videos, or reels to educate and inspire others.

Step 3: Share Local Stories and Experiences

Highlight nearby parks, lakes, rivers, wildlife sightings, clean-up activities, or sustainability initiatives happening in the community.

Step 4: Use Positive and Inspiring Messages

Encourage others to take small environmental actions instead of only focusing on problems. Positive storytelling can motivate more people to participate in activities such as plogging, biodiversity observation, tree planting, or reducing plastic use.

Step 5: Use Hashtags and Tag Communities

Add relevant hashtags and tag your friends, schools, universities, NGOs, or local environmental groups to help the message reach a wider audience.

Step 6: Reflect on the Impact

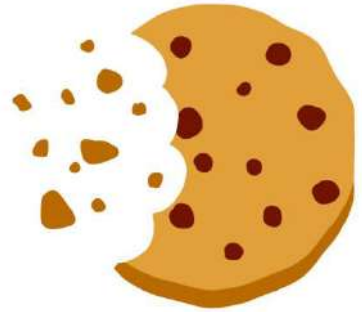
Talk about how social media can help create awareness and encourage communities to care for the environment.



▲ Some examples of simple messaging and posts from The Planet Prodigy's Instagram account (@theplanetprodigy).

3.4 Living Sustainably with Nature

Many youths are encouraged to live more sustainably, but this can sometimes feel intimidating or overwhelming. Sustainability does not have to start with big changes. Here are some simple and practical habits that youths can adopt through small everyday actions (or as we like to call it: **bite-size actions**).



Activity 8: Carbon Footprint Calculator

What is a carbon footprint?

A carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases produced through our daily actions.

Activities such as transportation, electricity use, food choices, shopping habits, and waste generation all contribute to our carbon footprint.



▲ Learn more about carbon footprint from our post.

Calculating your Carbon Footprint

1. Visit <https://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx>
2. Input your activities into the online carbon calculator.
3. Reflect on which daily habits contribute most to your carbon footprint.
4. Set simple goals such as saving electricity, reducing waste, using public transport, or bringing reusable items to help lower your environmental impact.

Activity 9: Use Public Transport

Did you know that you can enjoy up to a 50% off on all Rapid KL rides, including LRT, MRT, and buses?



When you use public transport, you're not just saving money; you're also helping to reduce traffic congestion, lowering carbon emissions, and making the city more liveable.

▲ To learn more about the *Rapid Pelajar* student concession card, visit <https://myrapid.com.my/our-products/rapidpelajar/>

Activity 10: Clean Plate Challenge

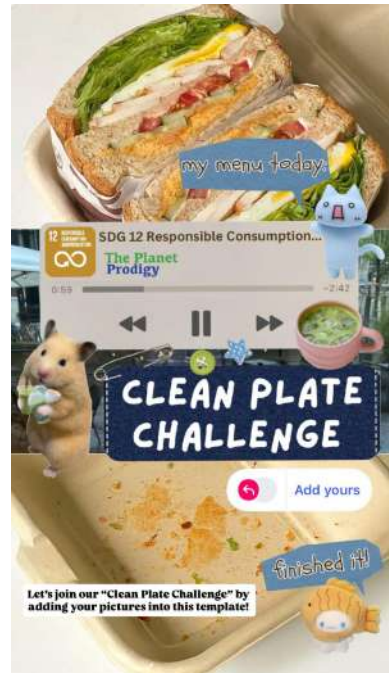
This challenge encourages youths to take only the amount of food they can finish and avoid unnecessary food waste. Although it may seem like a small everyday habit, reducing food waste can have important environmental benefits.

Your Turn!

Think about your meal habits. Do you always finish all the food? Join the Clean Plate Challenge and be responsible for what you consume.



Use our exclusive template available on Instagram: @theplanetprodigy ▶



Some inspirations for your Clean Plate Challenge



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