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Ants (Hymenoptera : Formicidae) as a good tourism product

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Abstract

With the increasing awareness of environmental problems created by deforestation, Malaysia had been looking into other means of generating income to finance its socio-economic development. One such industry is tourism. Being ranked the third and sometimes the second most active industry, tourism had also been listed as one of the twelve National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) of Malaysia. It has also been listed as the sixth National Key Research Areas (NKRA) having several strategies, the third being to the research into diversification of tourism products. Preliminary studies in Sabah (a Malaysian State on the island of Borneo) as well as in Johor (Peninsular Malaysia) showed that insects are potentially a good tourism draw-card and at the moment are being promoted as 'Entomotourism'. Focusing on the insect group, ants were found to be most reliable in terms of their presence and ability to be sighted. In this paper, factors supporting why ants should be promoted as a novel tourism product ('Antourism') are discussed. These factors are: reliability of sighting, safety, uniqueness in morphology and behaviour, endemism, rarity, link to local culture, and importance to people. This paper will end with a description on an endeavor carried out at UTHM to develop insects, including ants as tourism product, one which involve three parties, the universities, the national park management agencies and the state agency for tourism.

Key words: Oesthetic value of ants, ant endemism, ecotourism

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