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## **Challenges for marine biodiversity research in Southeast Asia and Singapore**

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There is a general consensus that the seas of Southeast Asia hold a tremendous diversity of marine plant and animal life. The famous “Coral Triangle” which encompasses Philippines and Indonesia is believed to be the centre of the world’s marine biodiversity; with species-numbers that exceed those all other reef systems in the world. Yet, we actually know very little about this biodiversity. The number of expeditions and large-scale surveys that have been taken are few and far between, and completely insufficient for the large area covered and the complexity of the ecosystems there. Much of what we believe stems from data-mining, extrapolations or old collections. New information from recent expeditions to the central Philippines by France, Singapore and Taiwan, have shown that the diversity is nothing short of “astounding”, and our understanding of the ecosystem is still very poor. In fact, many ecosystems were not even known until a few years ago. There are also immense problems with a serious lack of expert manpower – it is far easier to get funding to run “sexy” expeditions than to find support for the taxonomists who have to do the less glamorous work of sorting, identifying and publishing on these discoveries. In the midst of trying to discover and document this diversity, Southeast Asian countries are confronted with the imminent problems posed by marine alien invasives. While the problems for terrestrial and freshwater invasives are better known and appreciated, those in the marine system are seriously under-estimated. These challenges are discussed in relation to Singapore which has the busiest port in the world.