

Youth engagement in botanic gardens: implications for biodiversity conservation in the Philippines

A.B. Cariño¹, E.Y. Hanquinet¹, I.M. Sequihod^{1,2,*}, C.C.C. Catan^{1,3}, C.G. Alvior⁴, and J.A.T. Utzurum^{1,4}

¹Siit Arboretum Botanical Garden, Zamboanguita, Negros Oriental, Philippines

²St. Paul University of Dumaguete, Negros Oriental, Philippines

³Dr. Benjamin T. Locsin High School, Sibulan, Negros Oriental, Philippines

⁴Silliman University Institute of Environmental and Marine Sciences, Negros Oriental, Philippines

*Corresponding author email: iseq22@gmail.com

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Experiential learning is a powerful foundational approach in various forms of learning, development, and behavioral change. This is one of the cornerstones of conservation education initiatives that has been proven effective in the conservation education campaigns at Siit Arboretum Botanical Garden, Inc. (SABGI) through youth environmental camps. By collaborating with reputable institutions and organizations, and carefully crafting engaging topics and participative activities delivered by capable lecturers and facilitators, these camps instill in participants ecosystemic approach to understanding biodiversity conservation including statuses of threatened wildlife in Negros and in the Philippines, ecosystem services, and relevant environmental issues. Within the botanical garden's diverse ecological spaces, participants encounter thriving wildlife, enriching their learning through firsthand experience. Conducting the camp at SABGI allows the participants to be immersed in direct observations of plants and animals throughout the duration of the youth camp. This provides camp participants an enriched learning experience to better grasp environmental topics. As a result, some participants became future camp organizers, facilitators, and volunteers. Additionally, camp alumni even became leaders, mentors, or influencers in their respective academic institutions, communities, and local government units. Furthermore, this collaborative effort has also proven beneficial for student organizations involved in taking the lead in implementing SABGI's education conservation initiatives. This involvement has not only honed their leadership and innovative skills but also empowered them to serve as advocates for youth environmental camps. This sustained engagement reflects the enduring impact of experiential learning model employed at SABGI's youth environmental camps.