

## **NATURE SOCIETY (SINGAPORE)'S RESPONSE TO THE BUKIT BROWN EXPRESSWAY PLAN**

***An updated summary of Nature Society (Singapore)'s position following the announcement by LTA on 19 March 2012 of the final alignment of the expressway through Bukit Brown.***

Nature Society (Singapore) has been monitoring the wildlife of the area for over twenty years and wishes to highlight the following points pertaining to the biodiversity of the area with an emphasis on the adverse impacts of the expressway on biodiversity and the environment:

### **The Biodiversity**

**1) The area is very rich in birdlife with 91 species (resident & migratory) recorded so far. Among them are 13 nationally threatened species listed in The Singapore Red Data Book (RDB, 2008). This constitutes 23 % of the 56 of bird species listed there, and makes it a very important wildlife habitat. A pair of the Changeable Hawk Eagles, one of the nationally threatened species, has been regularly observed to nest in the area.**

**2) The area is also very important as an extended foraging ground and habitat for forest birdlife originating from the Central Catchment Nature Reserve (i.e., the MacRitchie Forest over the other side of Lornie Road). Forty-nine of such species are recorded, which amounts to 54 % of the total bird species recorded at the Bukit Brown area.** The protection of forest species is critical in Singapore as their forest habitat has been drastically reduced by development over the decades. The fact that many forest species are dispersing to Bukit Brown as foragers or colonisers from the MacRitchie Forest indicates that the carrying capacity (population) of MacRitchie Forest for these forest species has been exceeded at some level or other. The MacRitchie Forest is relatively small and quite isolated from the main part of the forested Central Catchment Nature Reserve.

**3) The recent sighting of a Large Flying Fox (*Pteropus vampyrus*) in the area leads us to believe that there are ample opportunities for other equally exciting discoveries at Bukit Brown.** This species was at one time common in Singapore but is extremely rare now and was believed to be extinct on the main island. The fact that it is still around shows that there could be many more opportunities for interesting findings for mammals and other taxa. A thorough Environment Impact Assessment ("EIA") for the whole area needs to be conducted to identify, predict, evaluate and mitigate the biophysical, social, cultural and other relevant effects including the scenic value before any plan for development can be decided. This EIA should be made available to the public for their comments, and should also be part of the public discussions of all the other possible traffic options for alleviating the traffic congestion on Lornie Road. This way, those involved in the discussions would be aware of exactly how the expressway will significantly impact on the environment and result in the annihilation of a precious heritage.

4) The area serves also as an important stepping stone (the first launch pad) for forest/ woodland species in a series down to the remaining southern woodlands/ forests of the Southern Ridges at Mt Faber, Labrador, Telok Blangah, etc. via the other stepping stones of Malcolm Park, Botanic Gardens, Dempsey Village, Istana, and so on, as listed and illustrated in our original position paper. Pockets of remaining woodland/ forest in the south still harbor populations of woodland/ forest species that are in need of rejuvenation and the only way this is possible is from the north. Rejuvenation from the south (i.e., the Indonesian islands) is not possible, as the sea is a formidable barrier, especially for tropical woodland/ forest species.

### **Impact of the Expressway**

1) The road planned is an 8-lane expressway and approximately 2 km long. The transect of this expressway cuts across the area closer to the MacRitchie Forest. **It should be emphasised that the transect will be cut diagonally, not transversely or directly, across the only expansive valley with a flowing river in the area. There are thick woodlands along the banks/ slopes as well as the surrounding areas along both sides of the valley, and most of these will be damaged if not completely wiped out by the construction. Most of the forest species, such as Red-eyed Bulbul (RDB species), Black-headed Bulbul (RDB species), Asian Fairy Bluebird, Chestnut-bellied Malkoha etc. are regularly recorded in these parts. The rare Flying Fox was also sighted along the transect area.**

2) **From our monitoring so far, there is a concentration of forest species on both sides of the transect.** This could be due to fact that the area is closer to the MacRitchie Forest from whence they originate and is a sort of landing pad/ beach head for foraging or further dispersal/ colonisation into other parts of Bukit Brown. Most tropical forest species are not long-distance flyers. The damage/ destruction of such a landing pad (which attracts and give confidence to these species to venture farther afield) will adversely affect Bukit Brown as an extended foraging ground or habitat for the forest species. The first successful step into a new area or outside home is critical for foraging or dispersal.

### **Other Impacts**

1) The 8-lane expressway is planned to cut diagonally across a beautiful valley. It will damage this valley although the river flowing through it will be saved by having a bridge. The massive width of the bridge will however cast a shadow underneath. Due to the lack of sunlight, the plants underneath the bridge will wither and the stretch will be bare and unsightly over time, wiping out species that are adapted to grassy or shrubby habitats.

2) This valley, in its natural form, possesses scenic beauty. However, if a public park were to be set up after the expressway is built, it will result in the loss of one of its most important assets as a nature area for general visitors.

3) The expressway will not only affect the landscape charm but also damage the

enchanting and soothing service roads running on both sides of this valley. Many of the visitors-birdwatchers, photographers, tourists, locals, nearby residents- use these roads to imbibe the intrinsic values of Bukit Brown. The most frequented part of Bukit Brown will be severely damaged in terms of access, beauty and tranquility.

### **Alternatives**

The housing development at Kopi Sua/ the Police Academy area as announced by MND is only intended for development in approximately 10-15 years' time. Moreover, the current expressway planned will not serve that housing estate. At Bukit Brown proper, development will only take place 20-30 years later; hence the decision for development should be left to future generations. Until then, an interim park with natural, cultural & recreational components integrated into it would serve the needs of Singaporeans living in an increasingly built-up environment. Bukit Brown could become a 'heritage park'.

Our concern now is that the expressway, even if part of it will be a viaduct/bridge (600m), will not be serving any residential area in the immediate or even near future. It is therefore critical for the government to justify to the public the need for this expressway and to clarify the rationale behind such a short timeline. Is it truly imperative to have it completed by 2013?

**The Nature Society is not convinced that the 8-lane expressway through Bukit Brown is really necessary.**

Has the LTA explored thoroughly other options such as the one-way system (flexi-time or permanent) along Lornie Road or around the whole cemetery using the PIE, Thomson Exit and Thomson Road as part of this one-way circuit? Alternatively, a gantry at Lornie Rd during peak hours could also be considered. Lornie Road is only one of the three available routes to the south, the city and PIE; but the only one without a gantry.

Another option is to create a one-lane road through Bukit Brown, leaving Lornie Road untouched. Lornie Road is now 7-lane so the extra lane through Bukit Brown would in essence ease off the congestion. This will be less costly and damaging than an 8-lane expressway.

**Given all these considerations, we request that a moratorium be declared and more thorough studies be carried out to cover the issues pertaining to the biodiversity, transport and housing development in Bukit Brown, given that the area is of extremely high ecological, biodiversity and cultural value.**

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