

OFFICIAL
MAGAZINE OF
NATURE SOCIETY
SINGAPORE

NATURE WATCH

VOLUME 33
ISSUE 1
JAN-MAR 2025
S\$5.00

Championing
**Straw-headed
Bulbul**
Conservation
in Singapore



Singapore
Bird Race:
40 Years &
Going Strong

Safeguarding
Pulau Ubin's
Natural &
Cultural Heritage

Shining
a Spotlight
on Our
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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

WE ARE THRILLED to welcome you to an exciting year ahead, filled with collaborations and growth in our shared commitment to nature conservation. As we reflect on the progress made in previous years, we are energised to keep up the momentum and pursue the new opportunities that lie ahead. Together with our members and partners, we are seizing the chance to make a meaningful impact in the communities and ecosystems we serve, as well as advance our sustainability goals in line with our mission statement.

We foresee 2025 to be a pivotal year for Nature Society Singapore. With the invaluable support of our membership base, we are poised to achieve even loftier conservation outcomes. To help us get there, we have carefully crafted a roadmap that aligns our

collective ambitions, focusing on **citizen science** and **nature education** to foster greater environmental stewardship in Singaporeans and local communities. Another area of focus is **habitat restoration**. We want to drive native species

protection through the establishment of green corridors in urban landscapes that connect fragmented forest patches so as to provide safe passage for wildlife.

We are excited to continue building on our partnerships, and deeply value the trust and collaborations that have enabled us to reach this point. Importantly, our commitment to transparency, accountability, and

shared progress remains at the forefront of this year's plan.

As we embark on this journey forward, we promise to keep you updated on our shared milestones, and celebrate the positive changes that we have co-created. Thank you for being an integral part of our mission to protect the planet for future generations.

Together, we can make 2025 a landmark year for nature and sustainability!

With gratitude and anticipation,



Huang Ningxin

Director
Nature Society Singapore Secretariat

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ON THE COVER The population of the Critically Endangered Straw-headed Bulbul is estimated to be only 600 to 1,700 mature individuals in the wild. Photo: Liu Xiaodong.

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Nature Watch is printed on LumiArt paper from Stora Enso Europe with ISO 14001 Environmental Management Certification. Mainly recycled paper is used, the rest is pulp from sustainable and controlled sources in Finland, Brazil and other European countries.

MCI (P) 032/07/2024

ISSN: 0218-6853

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Championing **Straw-headed Bulbul** Conservation in Singapore

The Critically Endangered Straw-headed Bulbul has served as a flagship species for the NSS Bird Group in advocating for the preservation of its key habitats in Singapore. **Chaarumitha** delves into the bird's conservation trajectory from the 1990s onward, shedding insights on its past, present and future.

Text by **CHAARUMITHA**



The global population of the Critically Endangered Straw-headed Bulbul is estimated to be only 600 to 1,700 mature individuals in the wild, with Singapore alone hosting between 23% and 57% of the world's population.
Photo: Tan Gim Cheong.



Facing page:
The Straw-headed Bulbul is celebrated across Southeast Asia for its melodious song, sometimes sung in a duet. Photo: Lim Kim Chuah.

The saying ‘your greatest gift is also your greatest curse’ holds true for the Straw-headed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus zeylanicus*). Easily recognisable with a distinct orange crown and olive wings, this species is celebrated across Southeast Asia for its melodious song. Its enchanting voice is also the cause of its downfall. As one of the most sought-after songbirds in the world, poachers have been heavily trapping it across much of its Southeast Asian range. Coupled with habitat loss, the once-prevalent species is today Critically Endangered with a tiny estimated population of just 600 to 1,700 mature individuals worldwide.

With the dramatic plunge in numbers, forests have grown silent. The Straw-headed Bulbul is now extinct in Thailand, extirpated from most of Indonesia, and experiencing significant declines in Brunei and Malaysia. Fortunately, the bird is doing well in Singapore. Our country stands out as a critical stronghold for the species. A 2020 study led by the National University of Singapore (NUS) found that Singapore hosts between 23% and 57% of the world’s wild Straw-headed Bulbul population. More than half of the local population resides on the offshore island of Pulau Ubin, where breeding has been recorded. The bird also thrives in many forested areas across Singapore, including the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve and more. The overall numbers are stable and on the rise, underscoring Singapore’s importance as a conservation site for the species.

The Past: Population Mapping & Initial Conservation Actions

Nature Society Singapore’s Bird Group has been championing the conservation efforts for the Straw-headed Bulbul for over 20 years. In the mid-1990s, the Bird Group was already acutely aware of the widespread decline of the species, leading to its critical status being formally recognised in 1995. NSS members and conservationists Dr Ho Hua Chew and Trixie Tan spearheaded efforts to understand the magnitude of the threats faced by the bird and to mitigate them.

As the first chair of NSS’s Conservation Committee, Hua Chew has been a strong advocate for the protection of Pulau Ubin as a critical habitat for the Straw-headed Bulbul. His early efforts were pivotal in creating awareness for the preservation of our natural areas, with emphasis on the ecological role and significance of species such as the Straw-headed Bulbul. As a dedicated advocate herself, Trixie worked alongside Hua Chew and other NSS members on the same cause during those days. She focused her efforts on identifying key locations in mainland Singapore where the bird was prevalent. Aside from Pulau Ubin, Kranji Marshes was found to be another significant territory.

Together, the pair collaborated with other NSS members to conserve these hotspots and counter the threat of urbanisation encroaching on bird habitats. NSS actively pushed for stronger protection laws against wildlife trafficking and poaching through nationwide surveys and advocacy programmes. Key actions included research and awareness campaigns, scientific studies such as Trixie’s Masters dissertation on population distribution, and community advocacy programmes that engaged the public and promoted awareness of the Straw-headed Bulbul’s plight. These initiatives drew attention to unsustainable regional poaching practices that impacted the Bulbul and other species.

The pioneering efforts of the Bird Group laid the foundation for Straw-headed Bulbul-related conservation plans. However, competing priorities and limited resources in the ensuing years led to these early initiatives being overlooked by the Society. Subsequently, the Straw-headed Bulbul was uplisted from Vulnerable to Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List and included in Appendix I of

A 2020 study led by the National University of Singapore (NUS) found that Singapore hosts between 23% and 57% of the world’s wild Straw-headed Bulbul population. More than half of the local population resides on the offshore island of Pulau Ubin.

CITES, which prohibited international trade in the species.

The Present: Working Group Drives Conservation Outcomes

This grim state of affairs in the Bulbul’s status prompted renewed action by local conservation groups. The turning point came in 2017 when NSS, recognising the seriousness of the situation, published a paper on the importance of conserving the species entitled ‘*Significance of the globally threatened Straw-headed Bulbul Pycnonotus zeylanicus populations in Singapore: a last straw for the species?*’ Co-authored by Dr Yong Ding Li, Hua Chew, Trixie, and other Society members, the paper garnered nationwide attention. NSS received inquiries from news outlets such as *The Straits Times* and *Today*.

Alarmed by the escalating threat of species extinction, NSS undertook targeted surveys in 2017 to study the Straw-headed Bulbul across several transects in Pulau Ubin. The surveys provided valuable insights into the bird’s population

dynamics and chosen habitat types. In particular, we observed its preference for forest edges, mangroves, and trees near rivers.

In 2018, NSS collaborated with NParks on a broader survey of Pulau Ubin’s diverse fauna groups. The partnership highlighted our shared commitment to understanding and conserving the island as a core habitat for biodiversity. Home to around 260 bird species, Pulau Ubin continues to be a vital stronghold for the Straw-headed Bulbul. Likewise, Singapore is the only place in the world where the bird continues to thrive in notable numbers and exhibit its natural flocking behavior.

On 4 May 2019, NSS jointly organised a pivotal workshop with BirdLife International and Oriental Bird Club on *Developing A Conservation Roadmap For Singapore*. Over 60 local and international conservationists, researchers, and stakeholders convened to reassess the situation and develop a comprehensive five-year action plan to protect the Straw-headed Bulbul. This workshop led to the formation



Poachers have decimated the Straw-headed Bulbul’s population across much of its Southeast Asian range, making it Critically Endangered with just 600 to 1,700 breeding adults worldwide. Photo: Daryl Yeo.

of the Straw-headed Bulbul Working Group (SHBWG) in 2021 to guide conservation actions for the bird.

Co-chaired by NParks and NSS, SHBWG members come from a range of backgrounds and affiliations including NUS, BirdLife International, Mandai Wildlife Group and its conservation arm Mandai Nature. Subsequently, the SHBWG Species Action Plan (SAP) was formulated using the document plan created in the 2019 workshop as a foundation, to secure the continuation of the species in Singapore. The SAP has four key objectives. These objectives were further broken down into four sub-groups, each with their priorities and actions for the next five years (see Figure 1).

“The first time I encountered the Straw-headed Bulbul was in Kampong Panchor along the Johor River in April 1979. I remember learning that it was common there but this is no longer so. My hope is that through the work of the Straw-headed Bulbul Working Group, we can reintroduce the bird one day and hear its distinctive song emanating from the mangrove forest of Johor River once again,” said Lim Kim Chuah, former Chair and current member of the Bird Group. Kim Chuah’s sentiment reflects the regional aspirations of conservationists who view Singapore’s success with the species as a blueprint for reintroducing the Straw-headed Bulbul across Southeast Asia.

The 2019 workshop and subsequently the SHBWG set the stage for coordinated efforts between NSS and NParks. As the government authority, NParks has taken the lead in implementation and enforcement of the measures to protect core habitats such as Pulau Ubin. Leveraging grassroots reach and experience, NSS’s focus is on community outreach, education and citizen science initiatives. Both organisations continue to work hand-in-hand to implement the action plan.

This division of roles is strategic. While NParks ensures a robust legal and habitat protection framework, NSS is better able to raise public awareness, advocate

Singapore is the only place in the world where the Bulbul continues to thrive in notable numbers and exhibit its natural flocking behavior.

FIGURE 1



Dr Ho Hua Chew served as the first chair of NSS's Conservation Committee. He continues to be a strong advocate for the protection of Pulau Ubin as a critical habitat for the Straw-headed Bulbul. Photo: Humanist Society Singapore – Darwin Day 2019.



In 2019, NSS together with BirdLife International and Oriental Bird Club organised a workshop where over 60 conservationists, researchers, and stakeholders jointly created a comprehensive five-year action plan to protect the Straw-headed Bulbul.



The pivotal 2019 workshop eventually led to the formation of the Straw-headed Bulbul Working Group in 2021 to guide conservation actions for the species.

for long-term conservation policies, and engage local communities. On top of these, we have been actively involved in habitat protection work such as undertaking population surveys and devising conservation strategies with NParks. Taken as a whole, these cohesive efforts have supported the Species Action Plan in achieving its key objectives.

The Future: Securing the Survival of the Species

Looking ahead, the conservation community’s primary goal is to secure the long-term future of the Straw-headed Bulbul involving:

- 1. Expanding Protected Areas:** Increasing safeguarded habitats for the bird in Singapore and the region.
- 2. Promoting Citizen Science:** Encouraging locals to participate in monitoring and conservation activities, as well as speak out against poaching.
- 3. Strengthening Partnerships:** Deepening collaborations between NSS, NParks and other stakeholders.
- 4. Advancing Research:** Continuing ongoing studies on the bird’s ecology and exploring innovative conservation strategies.

NSS aims to designate more protected areas including nature reserves for the Straw-headed Bulbul and other species. With Pulau Ubin serving as a key example of a successful conservation project, such protected areas would

greatly contribute towards biodiversity preservation. At the forefront of our conservation strategy is the focus on research. Along with NParks and other partners, NSS plans to delve deeper into the ecological needs of the species by studying its breeding habits, dietary preferences, and genetic health. This knowledge will help in maintaining stable wild populations, guiding breeding programmes under human care, and preserving genetic diversity.

Additionally, the Society envisions greater public involvement in our conservation work and increased institutional collaborations. Various citizen science initiatives have been instrumental in determining the bird’s population size and preferred habitats. By expanding these efforts, NSS hopes to instill a sense of local ownership and pride towards protecting this unique species. Please see the box story on how you can contribute to this important cause.

While challenges persist, the story of the Straw-headed Bulbul is one of resilience and hope. NSS’s steadfast dedication, combined with the collective efforts of conservationists, government agencies, and the public, have made significant strides in reversing the species’ decline. The journey is far from over. With the shared vision and the numerous measures outlined above, there is a real chance of restoring the Straw-headed Bulbul’s song to its full glory across Southeast Asia. Its song may be its greatest gift, but only through human compassion and action can this gift endure for generations to come. 🌿



How You Can Help

- Join Citizen Science Initiatives:** Participate in NSS-led monitoring programmes and surveys.
- Attend Outreach Events:** Join birdwatching tours, workshops and talks to learn more about the Bulbul and related conservation efforts.
- Advocate for Habitat Preservation:** Support campaigns for sustainable development and habitat protection by signing petitions and spreading awareness on social media.
- Get involved in NSS Conservation Programmes:** Join NSS programmes like Nature Ambassadors and Nature Stewards, or take part in other volunteer opportunities. Nature Ambassadors help raise awareness, while Nature Stewards engage in hands-on conservation work including habitat restoration and wildlife monitoring.
- Report Poaching Activities:** Stay vigilant against poaching. If you notice cages or nets set up in or near nature reserves, or hear distressed bird calls, please contact NParks Animal Response Centre at Tel: 1800-4761600.



TO FIND OUT MORE about Straw-headed Bulbul Conservation, please scan the QR code or visit:

nss.org.sg/strawheadedbulbul



hunched over her laptop, you can find her strolling through parks, lost in a book, or curating the perfect Spotify playlist for her friends.

Chaarumitha is an outreach intern at Nature Society Singapore, where she supports awareness campaigns for the Society’s projects and initiatives. When she is not



40 YEARS & GOING STRONG

By TAN GIM CHEONG

The pièce de résistance of the Singapore birding calendar is the annual Singapore Bird Race. In 2024, NSS's Bird Group pulled off the 40th edition, marking the biggest Race to date with over 400 participants. **Tan Gim Cheong** traces the history of the Race from its humble beginnings in 1984 to its latest incarnation, noting the numerous iterations in the intervening years.

Minister of State Gan Siow Huang (in green) and Senior Parliamentary Secretary Baey Yam Keng (looking through the scope) with their team mates at the 40th Singapore Bird Race.

2024 marked a significant milestone in local birdwatching history as the 40th anniversary of the Singapore Bird Race. What started in 1984 with just two teams of four participants each has blossomed into the most anticipated birding event in the country. Back then, the birdwatching community was tiny. Our inaugural Great Bird Race doubled up as a fund raiser, contributing \$1,500 towards the creation of the Checklist of Singapore Birds.

“I was part of the very first Race on 28 October 1984. It lasted a gruelling 20 hours. Led by Hugh Buck, Team A won with 118 species. My team finished close behind, recording 111 species under the lead of David Bradford. Team A even managed to arrange for a speedboat to the Southern Islands for a few precious ticks, scoring birds like the Black-winged Myna,” reminisced veteran birder Lim Kim Chuah.



The 40th Singapore Bird Race held in November 2024 attracted a record 400 plus participants, a triumphant milestone for birdwatching in Singapore.



Nature Watch article (Q4 1997 issue) featuring the Celebrity Bird Race of 1997 where various TV personalities, S-League footballers, and writers teamed up with experienced birders to find as many avian species as possible in a given time.

Early Years of Growth

The Singapore Bird Race grew quickly in the early years. At its second outing, we tripled the number of participants. The winning team recorded an impressive 117 species, while the aggregated total for all teams was 152 species.

By April 1997, things became more exciting when we held a Celebrity Bird Race which garnered \$135,000 for the NSS building fund. Then President of Singapore Dr Wee Kim Wee was our guest-of-honour. Amongst our sponsors were 21 companies. A good number of TV personalities, S-League footballers, and writers teamed up with experienced birdwatchers for the event. They included celebrities like Ann Kok, Terence Cao, Darryl David and Jamie Lee from the then Television Corporation of Singapore. Many of these famous names were first timers and the Race was an eye-opener for them. Newscaster Duncan Watt reflected that the event gave him a deeper understanding of nature

“It isn’t so much about winning, but sharing the fun of birdwatching,”

Ashley Ng

BIRDER

and how we could all contribute to its conservation. “It was amazing. I never expected to see so many birds,” enthused actress Jamie Lee.

Evolving with The Times

By 2007, digital cameras had entered the scene, while birdwatching and bird photography kept increasing in popularity. The Race evolved in tandem to include multiple categories

and longer durations with the introduction of the 24-hour Advanced category and the 20-hour Novice category. Seven groups participated, with the winning team recording 112 species. The aggregate total was 146 species, a significant drop from 187 species achieved in 2006 and 205 species chalked up in 2005. Despite the contraction in figures, participants enjoyed the friendly competition. “It isn’t so much about winning, but sharing the fun of birdwatching,” said Ashley Ng.

Seasoned birder Lim Kim Seng revealed some winning tips, “It’s important to plan your route. You don’t want to go around Singapore three times. You have to design it such that you get to see the maximum number of species with the least amount of travelling.”

In October 2009, the Race adopted the Going Green theme. Participants had the option of racing on foot, using self-powered vehicles such as bicycles and roller blades, or public transport like buses, trains

and ferries. All forms of motorised travel including cars, taxis and buggies were not allowed. In all, the event attracted 10 teams for the Full Race (24-hour) and Day Race (10-hour). We rounded off the event with a buffet dinner, slide show and prize presentation ceremony at Dairy Farm Adventure Centre. The winners had gamely cycled around the country, visiting Bukit Timah, Sungei Buloh, Mandai, Botanic Gardens and even Orchard Road to finish with 106 species.



“It’s important to plan your route. You don’t want to go around Singapore three times. You have to design it such that you get to see the maximum number of species with the least amount of travelling.”

Lim Kim Seng
SEASONED BIRDER

The following year in October 2010, the Race was confined to the offshore island of Pulau Ubin. We ditched the 24-hour Marathon in favour of a Day Race. Participants moved about on foot or on bicycles. The event drew 11 teams in two categories – Advanced and Novice. The winning team scored 74 species over a nine-hour period.

Innovating with New Formats & Themes

In the last 10 years, we have been experimenting with the race format to entice more participants. For 2016, we held a five-hour morning Race. Apart from the usual Advanced and Novice categories, we added the Photographer category. These tweaks resulted in 100 bird enthusiasts joining in the fun.

In 2017, the 24-hour race format was reinstated due to popular



The Race has evolved with the times such as the addition of the Family category in 2020. For the 40th Race, 16 families competed in this segment.



Various VIPs graced the 40th Singapore Bird Race including Minister for National Development Desmond Lee (in blue), Mapletree Chairman Edmund Cheng (fourth from left) as well as esteemed guests and NSS representatives (from left to right): Senior Parliamentary Secretary Baey Yam Keng, Chair of the Bird Group Veronica Foo, BirdLife International Regional Director Vinayagan Dharmarajah, Minister of State Gan Siow Huang, NParks CEO Hwang Yu-Ning, Mapletree Group Chief Corporate Officer Wan Kwong Weng and NSS President Dr Yeo Seng Beng.

request. For 2018, we introduced the School category which attracted nine teams from four schools, on top of the usual Birder and Photographer categories. The following year 2019 saw the participation of 17 school teams – eight from primary schools and nine from secondary schools.

For our 36th Race in 2020, we created two new categories – Family and Youth. There were nearly 250 participants from 79 teams across six categories. We started a points system for race scoring, awarding more points for sightings of threatened species. Participants had to strategise



For the 2024 Race, aligning with the theme of Migratory Land Birds, our Race mascots were the Yellow-rumped Flycatcher, Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher and Blue-winged Pitta which were made into pins.



The 40th Race attracted over 100 participants who were aged 18 and below.

their race routes carefully to spot as many threatened birds as possible.

To keep things fresh, the Singapore Bird Race is always innovating. Each season has seen the adoption of new focus areas or themes relating to local birdlife including the globally Critically Endangered Straw-headed Bulbul (2019), Threatened Birds of Singapore (2020), Migratory Raptors (2021), Crimson Sunbird – the unofficial National Bird by popular vote (2022), Garden Birds (2023) and Migratory Landbirds (2024).

40th Singapore Bird Race: A Record Turnout

The solid growth of the Race over the years reflects a burgeoning interest in the birds and biodiversity of Singapore. More people are going outdoors to appreciate and enjoy nature. Since 2019, Mapletree Investments has come onboard as the Race’s main sponsor. In their first year of funding, the event engaged a record 43 teams with over 130 participants.

At the 40th Singapore Bird Race, Minister for National Development Desmond Lee (in blue) teamed up with NSS President Dr Yeo Seng Beng (left) and Alfred Chia (right).



Race-goers ended the 40th Race at Mapletree Business City where they enjoyed a buffet lunch, a talk on potential new bird species for Singapore, and a mini bird fair.



In the last 10 years, we have been experimenting with the race format to entice more participants. For 2016, we held a five-hour morning Race. Apart from the usual Advanced and Novice categories, we added the Photographer category. These tweaks resulted in 100 bird enthusiasts joining in the fun.



Team Singapore Stringers beat seven other teams to emerge as Champions of the Marathon category. They received their medals from Mapletree Chairman Edmund Cheng.



Out of 10 teams contending in the Student (Primary) category, Team Capybara finished as Champions, seen here with Chair of the Bird Group Veronica Foo.



The Youth category attracted 17 teams, with Team Chunky Monkey coming up tops, photographed here with Chair of the Bird Group Veronica Foo.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NSS is privileged to have Mapletree as our main sponsor for the sixth consecutive year. Their generous funding has allowed us to scale up the Race and enable more young people and students to enrol. We thank the following VIPs for gracing the occasion of our 40th Race: Minister for National Development Desmond Lee, Minister of State for Education and Manpower Gan Siow Huang, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and the Environment/Baey Yam Keng, Mapletree Investments Chairman Edmund Cheng, NParks CEO Hwang Yu-ning, Mapletree Investments Group Chief Corporate Officer Wan Kwong Weng, BirdLife International Regional Director (Asia) Vinayagan Dharmarajah and NSS President Dr Yeo Seng Beng.

We are grateful to our event partners and sponsors including Mapletree Business City, BirdLife International, NParks, eBird and Pansing. We also thank our digital marketing agent and event manager Presence Marketing, as well as the Organising Committee, arbitrators, volunteers and participants for making the 40th Race a resounding success.

Sprint (25 teams), Photographer (24 teams) and Novice (24 teams).

Aligning with the theme of Migratory Land Birds, our Race mascots were the Yellow-rumped Flycatcher, Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher and Blue-winged Pitta. We highlighted the challenges faced by these birds on their journey south to escape the cold winters up north and their dependence on forests, parks and gardens along the way for food and shelter.

During the weekend of the Race, participants spotted various migratory land birds including the Ashy Minivet, Brown Shrike and Asian Brown Flycatcher. Over at Bidadari Park which had opened in time for the occasion, race-goers found a number of migrants such as the Yellow-rumped Flycatcher and Ruddy Kingfisher. In terms of threatened species, categorised by IUCN as Vulnerable, Endangered or Critically Endangered, birders and bird photographers recorded the Lesser Adjutant, Straw-headed Bulbul and Malaysian Plover.

Thanks to avian-rich Sungei Buloh, the champions in the two-hour Student (Primary) and Youth categories logged 37 and 43 species respectively. For the five-hour Novice, Family, Photographer, and Sprint categories, all winning teams came in with around 70 species each. In the 24-hour Marathon category, the team in pole position returned 122 species. Race-goers ended the event at Mapletree Business City where they enjoyed a buffet lunch, a talk on potential new bird species for Singapore, and a mini bird fair. 🌿



To find out more about the Singapore Bird Race, please scan the QR code or visit nss.org.sg/nss-bird-race/.



Tan Gim Cheong has been an NSS member for over 20 years. A former chairperson of the Bird Group, he continues to help in various aspects of this Special Interest Group's work.

Safeguarding Pulau Ubin's Natural & Cultural Heritage

Lindsey Tan explores the natural and cultural offerings of Pulau Ubin and outlines its past and present conservation efforts. She shows how corporates can do their bit for nature and receive much more in return.

Text & Photos by **LINDSEY TAN**

Nestled off Singapore's north-east coast, the offshore island of Pulau Ubin is not only a tranquil getaway, but also a biodiversity hotspot, a throwback to the past, and a delicate balance between humans and nature.

Conservation Efforts Through the Years

Following the release of Singapore's 1991 Concept Plan, efforts were made to highlight and preserve Ubin's biodiversity. NSS launched several initiatives in conjunction, including a recycling project in 1993 that educated the public on restoring Ubin's clean and green environment. Unfortunately, the effort was aborted due to contractor issues. Later, the National Youth Achievement Award Council and the National Council on the Environment took over the project.

Concurrently, the Society conducted surveys to document the island's flora and fauna. In 1994, we organised a treasure hunt that raised funds to convert the former Bin Kiang School into a centre for environmental education and cul-

tural history. By 1995, the Parks and Recreation Board announced development plans for Ubin, emphasising a sensitive approach to preserve the island's blend of natural and man-made habitats. While NSS supported the plans, we raised concerns about the future phases of development and the absence of a formal conservation designation for Pulau Ubin.

In 2001, the Urban Redevelopment Authority released a draft Concept Plan proposing a bridge to connect Ubin with mainland Singapore and Pulau Tekong as well as the reclamation of Ubin's



Fishing lines and hooks entangled in a tree could injure wildlife like birds. By removing this and other dangers, volunteers help keep our natural spaces clean and safe.



Trash is carried in by the tides into Ubin's mangrove forest. Regular clean-ups will protect the littoral ecosystem and the many vulnerable species living there.

east coast, directly threatening the habitats of Tanjong Chek Jawa. Led by then NSS President Dr Geh Min, we strongly advocated to preserve Chek Jawa for education, life science research and ecotourism. Our public outreach efforts were widely reported in the press and supported by articles in *Nature Watch* as well as various educational activities that helped raise awareness of Ubin's ecological and cultural heritage.

Subsequently, the Society held protracted discussions with the Ministry of National Development (MND). Civil society groups, including NSS, organised a ministerial visit to Chek Jawa on 18 October 2001. In the wake of the massive engagements, Chek Jawa was eventually recognised as worthy of conservation. It marked a pivotal moment for the protection of Pulau Ubin's natural environment.

In 2014, the Friends of Ubin Network (FUN) was founded under the leadership of then Minister of State for MND Desmond Lee. FUN supported biodiversity and cultural projects on Ubin through ground-up initiatives. It brought together diverse stakeholders including nature and heritage enthusiasts, villagers, academics, and passionate individuals. NSS was represented by then NSS President Dr Shawn Lum and Marcus Chua.

In response to MND's 2014 call for ideas to protect Pulau Ubin, the Society submitted a position paper highlighting the island's ecological significance. The paper recommended measures for habitat enhancement and cultural preservation, as well as improvements to outdoor recreational spaces, while advocating to accord Ubin a higher protection status.

Today, NSS remains dedicated to promoting nature awareness and conservation on Pulau Ubin. Our endeavours include coastal and forest clean-ups, participation in events like Pesta Ubin and Ubin Day, and much more.

Restoring Ubin's Forests through Clean-Ups

NSS organises forest clean-ups at Pulau Ubin to raise awareness and foster environmental stewardship, reflecting our strong commitment to conservation. While seemingly



By participating in NSS clean-ups, corporates not only give back to society, but learn about conservation and practical ways to reduce one's carbon footprint.

In response to MND's 2014 call for ideas to protect Pulau Ubin, the Society submitted a position paper highlighting the island's ecological significance. The paper recommended measures for habitat enhancement and cultural preservation, as well as improvements to outdoor recreational spaces, while advocating to accord Ubin a higher protection status.

modest, the act of collecting trash provides insights into littering trends, identifies places that need additional bins, and removes damaging pollution. Through clean-ups, volunteers make a tangible difference that keep the delicate ecosystems humming along as havens for wildlife.

Forest clean-ups offer participants more than a chance to give back to the community. They provide a learning journey that imparts conservation knowledge to inspire lasting change. NSS's programme introduces key concepts such as the effects of invasive species and

habitat fragmentation, as well as the importance of safeguarding wildlife from illegal activities like poaching. In addition, it highlights the interdependence between humans and nature and the need to protect ecosystems and vulnerable species. Participants gain actionable insights that they can apply to their daily lives, from using natural insect repellents to planting pollinator-friendly vegetation, reducing waste and adopting sustainable habits. In short, these sessions showcase practical ways to reduce one's environmental footprint and foster coexistence with wildlife.

Ubin's Natural & Cultural Offerings



PULAU UBIN

is home to an array of habitats teeming with wildlife. The island offers sandy and rocky shores, mangroves, estuaries, secondary forests, and man-made habitats such as fish ponds and abandoned quarries. These ecosystems support countless species of plants and animals and are a vital refuge for nature. In particular, Ubin holds one of the last viable stretches of mangroves in Singapore, in light of the fact that the country has lost some 99% of its original mangrove cover.

BirdLife International has identified the Khatib-Ubin Important Bird and Biodiversity Area as one of three significant areas for biodiversity and bird conservation in Singapore. Furthermore, Ubin has been designated as a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA). This is a classification developed by the KBA partnership comprising 13 organisations including our partner BirdLife International and the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) of which NSS is a member. These recognitions highlight Ubin's critical role in local and global conservation efforts,

towards improving the health of our planet.

With a list of over 260 avian species, Pulau Ubin is host to both resident and migratory birds, many of which are rare. The island has the only viable population of Red Junglefowl in Singapore, believed to be most abundant around Bukit Tijam. It serves as a stronghold for the globally Critically Endangered Straw-headed Bulbul (see article on page 2). Other notable birds include the White-rumped Shama, Oriental Pied Hornbill and Mangrove Pitta, a Near Threatened species.

The highlight of Ubin's east coast is Tanjong Chek Jawa, which alone hosts six different ecosystems – sandy beach, rocky beach, seagrass



Pulau Ubin boasts a good variety of habitats including sandy and rocky shores, mangroves (above), estuaries, secondary forests, and man-made habitats such as fish ponds (left) and abandoned quarries.

lagoon, coral rubble, mangroves and coastal forest. Its sand flats and mudflats are habitats for plentiful marine life including horseshoe crabs, sea stars, anemones, sea cucumbers, sponges, and sand dollars.

Pulau Ubin's historical and cultural heritage add another layer of significance. As Singapore's last rural landscape marked by old-style *kampongs* (villages), the island offers a glimpse into the past. Long-time residents form a tight-knit community embodying a simpler way of life. Their customary practices, deep connections to the land, and knowledge of the ecosystems enrich Ubin's cultural fabric. Many inhabitants rely on traditional methods to sustain themselves, such as drawing water from wells and growing their own produce. By conserving Ubin's natural resources, we ensure that the time-honored ways continue to thrive, offering lessons on resilience and harmony with nature for generations to come.



Ubin's villagers still rely on traditional methods to sustain themselves including drawing water from wells and growing their own produce, offering visitors lessons on resilience and harmony with nature.



SAP Staff Spruce Up Ubin's Forest



On 10 December 2024, 17 volunteers from SAP Asia Pte Ltd exemplified its green commitment by cleaning up Ubin's forest. They collected 301 pieces of rubbish during the session, providing valuable data for our monitoring efforts to track ongoing trends on the usage of the island. The day's litter ranged from plastic fragments to cigarette butts, foam pieces and unexpected finds like a bicycle frame and fishing lines with hooks entangled in branches.

Depending on where they are found, hooks are hazardous items that could injure wildlife like otters, fishes and birds. By removing them and other dangers, volunteers help keep our natural spaces clean and safe. Indeed, SAP staff were reminded of our collective responsibility to protect the environment.

SAP's support extends beyond this clean-up activity. The company has been participating in NSS's CSR initiatives since 2016, contributing to coastal clean-ups at various locations as well as our Horseshoe Crab Rescue and Research Programme.



Furthermore, forest clean-ups offer companies team-building and employee engagement opportunities. While working towards a shared conservation goal, team bonds are strengthened. The hands-on experience lets individuals lead by example and equips them to promote sustainable initiatives within their workplaces and communities. The ripple effect inspires action towards greater environmental sustainability and cultivates a culture of responsibility and teamwork.

Driving Corporate Impact

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a strategic approach that enables companies to create a positive impact on society while addressing key environmental and social challenges. Through CSR initiatives, corporates align their business practices with values that benefit local communities and the planet.

Integrating CSR into corporate strategies enhances the reputation of companies, strengthens stakeholder relationships, and drives lasting change in terms of environmental and social impacts. CSR empowers employees and communities to adopt sustainable practices such as reducing waste, saving energy, and participating in conservation projects. These efforts extend beyond the workplace, transforming employees into advocates for nature preservation.

By participating in NSS-organised CSR initiatives, companies can actively contribute to the protection of vital habitats like Pulau Ubin, via activities like forest clean-ups, biodiversity monitoring, and education campaigns. These efforts raise awareness of biodiversity and sustainability as well as provide opportunities for hands-on conservation work. Ultimately, CSR enhances a company's brand and boosts staff engagement. Most importantly, it safeguards natural resources towards a resilient planet. 🌱

Seeking Partnerships with Corporates



NSS welcomes new collaborations with corporates as a vital extension of our conservation work. By partnering with us, your company can engage your employees in high-impact activities like forest clean-ups and wildlife conservation programmes as outlined above. We are eager to explore long-term partnerships that align with your company's CSR goals to drive meaningful environmental change. Together, we can work towards a sustainable future. For more information on NSS's Corporate CSR Engagement, please scan the QR code or visit nss.org.sg/corporates.



Lindsey Tan is an outreach intern at Nature Society Singapore, where she supports awareness campaigns for the Society's projects and initiatives. In her free time, she enjoys the company of her friends and family.

Shining a Spotlight on Our Volunteers

Text by **MICHELLE HARRIFF**

Our volunteers are at the heart of NSS's outreach and conservation efforts, devoting much time and energy to build the nature community and safeguard our natural heritage. On behalf of NSS, **Michelle Hariff** proudly features two of our long-time nature leaders who have made significant contributions over the years.

Wing Chong | Zealous About Birds



Wing Chong leading a bird walk at Bidadari before it was developed into an HDB estate.

Meet the man whose passion for birds is inscribed in his name: Wing Chong. Driven by his deep love for nature, Wing Chong has dedicated himself to NSS work for the last 20 odd years. He was first inspired by pioneer conservationists Dr Ho Hua Chew and Leong Kwok Peng, and has since taken on numerous roles in the Society.

In the Bird Group, Wing Chong served as its programme officer for 10 years before becoming its Chair from 2012 to 2015. Today, he is still an active committee member. Amongst his many contributions, he has led bird walks and censuses, helped organise major events such as the Singapore Bird Race, done outreach on birds at Ubin Day, and worked with NParks on collaborations like the Central Catchment Nature Reserve avian survey.

Aside from birds, he initiated the NSS Horseshoe Crab Research and Rescue project with volunteers. Importantly, he is one of our Nature Mentors in the NSS Every Singaporean a Naturalist programme, training and guiding school groups on bird monitoring and related activities.



Wing Chong (left) and Lim Kim Chuah (centre) with then Minister of State for National Development Desmond Lee at the 30th Singapore Bird Race in 2014.



In 2018, Wing Chong had the honour of flagging off the 34th Singapore Bird Race for participants in the Student Category.

One of Wing Chong's most memorable incident happened in 2014, when he, as then Chair of the Bird Group, invited then Minister of State for National Development Desmond Lee to experience NSS's 30th Bird Race. It was a first for the Race to have a Minister participating. Since then, Minister Desmond Lee has become a familiar face, joining the Race four more times including the 40th edition in 2024. Wing Chong also led efforts to host the 6th Asian Bird Fair in 2015 in Singapore, bringing together 22 bird clubs and societies from across the region.

Gazing ahead, Wing Chong hopes to see more youth-led initiatives, as the young ones tend to have greater access to information and better education so as to drive change from the ground up.

Lisa Lim | Committed to Conserving Our Coasts

Committed to conserving our coastal areas, Lisa Lim has been volunteering with Nature Society Singapore since 2002. She started out as a scuba diver in love with all things marine. Her involvement in the Society was sparked by her ex-boss Leong Kwok Peng and former Chair of the Marine Conservation Group Chua Sek Chuan. They greatly inspired her to take an active role in NSS.

Lisa's 20 plus years of steadfast service has revolved around marine conservation initiatives such as NSS's Horseshoe Crab Research and Rescue programme, annual island-wide horseshoe crab surveys, mangrove kayaking tours to Sungei Jelutong in Pulau Ubin and the organisation of coastal and mangrove clean-ups. As an ardent outdoor educator, Lisa enjoys using natural spaces as outdoor classrooms to foster in her students a deeper connection to wild-life and ecosystems.



Lisa conducting a pre-survey briefing of Sungei Puaka in Pulau Ubin for volunteers in 2016.



Volunteers at a mangrove clean-up led by Lisa, concurrently celebrating the wedding of Associate Professor Daniel Freiss, one of RUM's leaders.



Weighing the trash collected at a mangrove clean-up as part of the Restore Ubin Mangroves project.

One of her fondest memories is being involved in the Restore Ubin Mangroves (RUM) project, a collaboration between NParks and NUS Mangroves Lab that started in 2014, in which NSS is a community stakeholder. Under the RUM banner, Lisa has organised and led countless mangrove clean-ups. These hands-on sessions have connected her to many like-minded people, to share the importance of mangroves and contribute to their restoration in a tangible way.

Despite facing challenges, Lisa remains driven by the joy of educating the next generation, engaging with the nature community, and working alongside a team of passionate volunteers. "We must safeguard our natural environment to ensure that we can continue to enjoy it in the years to come," she said.

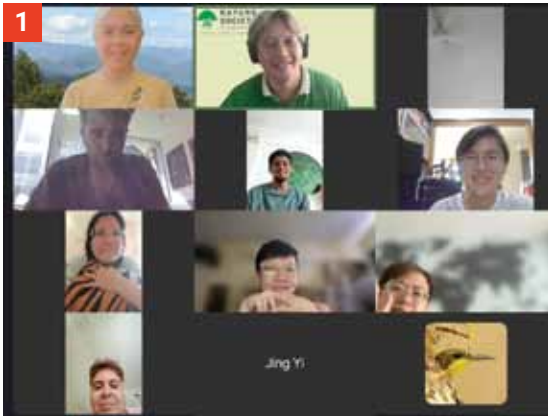
Looking forward, Lisa wishes for a future where humans and nature can coexist and thrive together. She firmly believes that inspiring the young to take on an active role in conservation is key to securing the health of our planet.

Indeed, NSS is immensely grateful for committed volunteers like Wing Chong and Lisa, who have both made a difference in protecting Singapore's invaluable natural heritage.



Snapshots of Past Events

By GLORIA SEOW



1 Online Talk: Protect Tigers Through Citizen Conservation, 6 July 2024. Eleven participants tuned in to join Dr Vilma D'Rozario as she shared about CAT (Citizen Action for Tigers) Walk Plus and how participation in this boots-on-the ground programme can help save the Malayan Tiger from extinction.



2 Birdwatching at Jurong Lake Gardens, 13 July 2024. Guided by Wing Chong, Norhafiani Majid and Lee Ee Ling, 11 birders enjoyed the park's avian life, seeing over 20 species including the Large-tailed Nightjar, Zitting Cisticola and Swinhoe's White-eye. Photo: Lee Ee Ling.



3 Discover the Biogeography and Biodiversity at Jurong Central Park and Boon Lay Nature Garden, 14 July 2024. Led by Pui Cuifen, 13 attendees explored the biogeography, history and ecology of Jurong Central Park opposite Boon Lay MRT station. They visualised walking through this former swamp forest to understand how the freshwater conditions continue to affect its design. At Boon Lay Nature Garden located within the grounds, they discovered ecological gardening practices such as composting, rain gardens, edible meadows, hedgerows, wildlife forests, and amphibian habitats. Chen Chingwei also shared on permaculture. Photo: Steven Chong.



4 Butterfly Walk at Woodlands Botanical Garden, 27 July 2024. The founder of this award-winning garden smack in the middle of Marsiling estate, Ganesh Kumar, hosted 19 butterfly enthusiasts led by Om Prakash and Steven Chong. They saw 20 butterfly species, on top of dragonflies and a Brown-throated Sunbird. Dr SK Ganesan pointed out the adult dipterocarp trees he had planted years ago on the garden's hilltop. Photo: Om Prakash.



5 Birdwatching for Beginners at Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park, 17 August 2024. Trip lead Lee Ee Ling touched on birding equipment, tools like field guides, eBird and Merlin ID app, as well as other tips to enlighten the nine beginner birdwatchers. At the park's heronry, they were excited to encounter herons in their nests – namely the Purple, Grey and Striated Herons, as well as a family of Smooth-coated Otters. Photo: Lee Ee Ling.



NSS Rewilding Project, 24 August 2024. Nearly 50 volunteers showed up to do site clearance and maintenance work at the Rail Corridor as part of NSS's rewilding efforts. Of these, 25 were students from the Singapore Chinese Girls' School, making this session one of our highest participation counts.



Online Talk: My Shark Conservation Journey, 24 August 2024. Founder of The Dorsal Effect Kathy Xu shared on her inspiring journey from starting out as a history teacher to becoming a self-proclaimed shark conservationist in her ecotourism and fishery port research work. Hosted by the Marine Conservation Group Chair Lester Tan, the talk attracted 14 viewers. Photo: Kathy Xu.



8 **Introduction to Bird Photography Workshop**, 31 August 2024. Some 47 camera enthusiasts were tutored on taking pictures of birds and wildlife as well as photography etiquette by former Bird Group Chair Alan Owyong and Canon EOS Master Bernard Seah. They tested their new skills at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, photographing 13 bird species in 45 minutes, including the Terek Sandpiper and Pacific Golden Plover. Photo: Cheryl Lao.



9 **Plant Walk at Fort Canning Park**, 31 August 2024. Heritage trees took centerstage, with 23 participants viewing the Sepetir and its spiny pods, Madras Thorn, and the rare Sea Beam housing a White-bellied Sea Eagle nest. Plant Group members Benjamin Low, Tan Beng Chiak, Angie Ng, Yap Von Bing and Tan Foong Heng also pointed out edible fruit trees such as the Nutmeg, Starfruit and Salak. Photo: Tan Beng Chiak.



10 **Dragonfly Walk at Hampstead Wetlands Park**, 7 September 2024. As a hotspot for dragonflies, this park did not disappoint. Guides Robin Ngiam and Lena Chow showed the walk's 12 participants some 14 species, including the Crenulated Spreadwing and Blue Adjutant, both new sightings for the location. Photo: Lena Chow.



11 **Marvellous Musang Night Walk**, 14 September 2024. This nocturnal walk along Old Upper Thomson Road, led by Vertebrate Study Group members Fung Tze Kwan, Ng Bee Choo and Timothy Pwee, was fruitful for the 12 participants. They sighted the Common Palm Civet (*Musang* in Malay), Sunda Colugo, Lesser Mousedeer, and Gold-ringed Cat Snake. Photo: Fung Tze Kwan.



12 **Fun with Migratory Birds at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve**, 15 September 2024. Education Committee Vice Chair Gloria Seow guided 17 nature lovers on migratory waders, pointing out the Whimbrel, Pacific Golden Plover and more. They learnt about the challenges of avian migration through the picture book *Sunny Stopovers*. Participants also encountered the Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Gerard's Water Snake, Paradise Tree Snake and Salt-water Crocodile. Photo: Gloria Seow.



13 **Forest Bathing at Singapore Botanic Gardens**, 28 September 2024. The gardens' lush greenery contributed to the rejuvenating session, with 14 attendees learning from Cynthia Wan on how to incorporate forest bathing exercises into their self-care routine to replenish body, mind and spirit. Photo: Cynthia Wan.



14 **NSS Rewilding Project**, 28 September 2024. With 21 pairs of willing and able hands, volunteers made light work of planting 33 saplings as well as mulching and watering, to rewild the Rail Corridor. Photo: Sylvia Tan.



16 **Birdwatching at Kranji Marshes**, 6 October 2024. This freshwater habitat proved to be fertile grounds, with 49 bird species seen and heard by 10 participants guided by Yap Wee Jin and Florence Lian. The star encounters were the Grey Wagtail, Greater Coucal, Tiger Shrike, and Oriental Whip Snake. Photo: Florence Lian.



15 **Birdwatching at Satay by the Bay and Marina Barrage**, 29 September 2024. Bird Group trip leaders Veronica Foo, Cheryl Lao and Jamie Chan produced a good haul of 36 bird species for 27 participants, with highlights including the Greater Sand Plover and Malaysian Plover. Photo: Cheryl Lao.



17 **Butterfly Walk at Bukit Gombak Park**, 19 October 2024. Despite the threat of rain, the weather held up, with 11 participants led by Steven Chong spotting many denizen butterflies including the Common Mormon, Peacock Pansy and Plain Tiger. Photo: Steven Chong.



18 **NSS Rewilding Project**, 26 October 2024. To improve safe animal crossings between forest patches, the Rail Corridor is being planted up to create a continuous canopy cover. Some 14 volunteers led by Sylvia Tan took part in site clearance and maintenance work. Photo: Sylvia Tan.



19 **17th Raptor Watch**, 2 November 2024. Counts were made at seven sites spanning Singapore and two offshore islands, with numbers ranging from a high of 262 raptors to a low of 13 birds. Of the full haul of 664 raptors, 589 birds (six species) were migrants, while 39 birds (seven species) were residents. Another 36 raptors were unidentified. Full report at: <https://singaporebirdgroup.wordpress.com/2024/11/07/17th-singapore-raptor-watch-2024-report/>. Photo: Veronica Foo.



20 **Migratory Bird Walk at Kranji Marshes**, 16 November 2024. Held during the migratory season, 17 participants guided by Lee Ee Ling and Cheryl Lao were in for a treat. They spotted 41 bird species including several migrants like the Common Kingfisher, Brown Shrike and Osprey. Photo: Cheryl Lao.



21 Plant Walk at Fort Canning Park, 16 November 2024. Blessed by sunshine, 17 plant enthusiasts enjoyed their stroll through the historic grounds to learn about heritage trees and their deep ties to Singapore's botanical and cultural legacy. The walk was led by Benjamin Low, assisted by Angie Ng, Juat Beh, Dr Yap Von Bing and Dr Ngo Kang Min.



24 NSS Rewilding Project, 30 November 2024. At this monthly event, 11 participants did site clearance and maintenance to ready a small patch of the Rail Corridor for future plantings. They felt lucky to encounter raptors and hear the song of the Straw-headed Bulbul. Photo: Sylvia Tan.



NSS Rewilding Project, 14 December 2024. NSS rewilding staff Sylvia Tan closed the year with a strong showing of 20 volunteers who cheerfully did clearance and maintenance to prepare the Rail Corridor for site works and plantings in 2025. Photo: Sylvia Tan.



22 Cartoons in Conservation Communication, 20 November 2024. Twenty participants were inspired by Rohan Chakravarty, the artist behind Green Humour which is a comic series that blends art, humour, and environmental advocacy. Hosted by Dr Yong Ding Li of BirdLife International, Rohan demonstrated his cartoons telling conservation stories in a fun and engaging way. Photo: Kerry Pereira.

Forest Clean-up at Pulau Ubin, 30 November 2024. To upkeep this Key Biodiversity Area, 11 volunteers retrieved litter while learning about conservation issues and being better stewards of nature. They were guided by SUSS students Justin Oon, Edwin Teo, Emanuel Sabai, Wong Jian Loong and Jasper Oh who were in turn mentored by NSS staff Kerry Pereira. Photo: Kerry Pereira.



26 Birdwatching at Kranji Marshes, 14 December 2024. Migrant raptors like the Black Baza, Japanese Sparrowhawk and Oriental Honey Buzzard ruled the skies over the marshes that morning. Guides Dr Yong Ding Li and Jamie Chan helped 18 birders see and hear 61 bird species. Photo: Kerry Pereira.



25 Sunny Stopovers: Storytelling, Sharing & Art Jamming, 8 December 2024. Author Gloria Seow and Illustrator Kenneth Chin had a blast launching their picture book *Sunny Stopovers* published by Marshall Cavendish to 55 eager readers at Maha Yu Yi Bookstore in Bras Basah Complex. *Sunny Stopovers* introduces bird migration to children 5 to 8 years old in a fun tale. Aside from captivating sharing, Lee Jingyi gave a brilliant reading and Kenneth helped everybody sketch Sunbird and Kingfisher. Photo: Maha Yu Yi.



28 Birdwatching at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, 29 December 2024. Twenty-two birdwatchers were split into two groups, with the first batch led by Veronica Foo and Cheryl Lao while group two had Yap Wee Jin and Lim Kim Keang at the helm. In all, they recorded 31 bird species that morning. Photo: Cheryl Lao.

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VISION To be Singapore's leading advocate of biodiversity and habitats.

MISSION With our evidence-based approach and partnerships with agencies, peers, and corporates, we lead habitat and biodiversity conservation in Singapore and with partners in the region. Through engagement, education, advocacy, and research, we inspire and enable people to take action towards a sustainable and biodiverse planet.

Why Join NSS?

Nature Society Singapore or NSS is dedicated to the study, conservation and enjoyment of the biodiversity and natural heritage of Singapore, our neighbouring countries and the wider world. The Society is a non-profit, non-government organisation. Our members work with commitment and altruism to conserve Singapore's remaining nature areas such as forests, mangroves, wetlands and reefs.






NSS was formerly known as the Singapore Branch of the Malayan Nature Society (MNS), formed in 1954. In 1991, we became independent as Nature Society Singapore. Both NSS and MNS continue to maintain strong links with each other.

NSS organises guided nature walks, horseshoe crab rescues, nature surveys, clean-ups, talks, exhibitions, and overseas nature trips. Going on an NSS outing allows you to meet people from all walks of life with a common passion!

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