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wetlands



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"Man shapes himself through decisions that shapes his environment"

Rene Dubos, American Environmentalist

Celebrate nature

Wetlands Vol 10:6



EDITORIAL

As the end of the year approaches and the festive season rolls in, there is certainly an anticipated air of celebration. Right here at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, there is so much of Nature to celebrate. Nature knows no geographical boundaries! (You will know what I mean when you read about the special 'visitor' in this edition). Put Nature, students, creativity and imaginary skills together and you get a powerhouse of posters made from collages and recycled materials. These put across strong messages that challenges one to think of the intricate relationship between humans and the environment. There is so much Nature has and does that is worth celebrating – the joy, awe, exhilaration, tranquility and even surprise that one gets from being in tune with her. Come, make a visit to the Wetland Reserve, and celebrate with us....

– Jeanne Tan



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PROTECTING OUR LIVING RESOURCES

'Wetlands' is sponsored by HSBC under its Care-for-Nature programme.

HSBC's Care-for-Nature programme is dedicated to help conserve and protect our living resources in our natural environment and at the same time generate awareness among the public to do likewise.

The sponsorship of 'Wetlands' is one such effort to help promote a better understanding and appreciation of wetland ecology such as Sungei Buloh and its importance to our natural landscape.

Please call 6530 1845 if you wish to know more about HSBC's Care-for-Nature Programme.

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"Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*)" by Tay Soon Lian
Sungei Buloh Besar, Nikon D100, Nikon 600mm F/4D, 1/2000sec-F6.7



EDITOR: Jeanne Tan CONTRIBUTORS: Ng Sock Ling, Jeanne Tan, Tay Soon Lian, Jeremy Ang, Ramakrishnan Kolandavelu, Andrew Tan, Keith Hillier, Halilah Ahmad, Chan Su Hooi. DESIGN: Amphibios Creative PHOTOS CREDITS: Tay Soon Lian, Jeremy Ang, Jacqueline Lau, Chan Soon Chye, Andy Teng Teck Boon.

Did you know?

Surprise visit by a VIP

(Very Important Pelican)
to Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve (SBWR)

Tay Soon Lian, Conservation Officer

Not too long ago on a quiet evening, I was at one of my favourite haunts in SBWR, Platform 2. With its promised warm sunsets and many raptor sightings, the evening's still air seems to slow down everything, anticipating the end of another day. As I stood there "one with nature", the stillness was broken by a lone silhouette in the dusky evening sky. Its slow rhythmic flight towards Johor Bahru over Pulau Buloh was somewhat unusual. With the aid of my "magnified eyes", I realised it was a pelican. A pelican? What is a pelican doing here, in our air space?!



There are 8 species of pelican in the world, with two species found in South East Asia - the Great-white Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotatus*) and the Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*). The pelican spotted was indeed the Spot-billed Pelican. They prefer lakes, lagoons, large rivers, estuaries,

con't pg 4

*"Oh, a wondrous bird is the
pelican!*


*His bill holds more than his
belican.*

*He can take in his beak, enough
food for a week.*

*But I'm damned if I know how
the helican"*

*Dixon Lanier Merritt
(1879-1972)*

mudflats and forests. These pelicans are also found in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Indochina, Peninsula Malaysia (formerly common), Java and the Philippines. For many weeks this solitary pelican was sighted feeding within Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, they feed mainly on fish and were even bold enough to come close to the SBWR's Main Bridge. Speculations were made that this specimen is an escapee from the Singapore Zoological Gardens or the Jurong BirdPark.

Weeks after this solitary pelican made its appearance in SBWR, three juveniles and a Great-white pelican were sighted at Kranji Reservoir. Like all big birds, the four pelicans with the Great-white pelican entertained us with their précised formation aerial displays. Escapee or not, they are still wild birds flying freely and making SBWR and its vicinity its refuelling stations. At the same time, they constantly provide some excitement for visitors and staff alike. Population of these two pelicans are diminishing, due to the destruction of their natural habitats, especially for the Spot-billed pelican which is placed under "Vulnerable" on the IUCN Red List 2004. Their dramatic take-offs and graceful aerial displays will be remembered for a long time...



Birds of Wetland Project II

Ramakrishnan Kolandavelu, Assistant Conservation Officer


"Birds of Wetland Project" which was spearheaded by The British Council back in 2002 had 13 schools participating in the first phase. The partners in this collaboration included the Ministry of Education (MOE), Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, Nature Society of Singapore and London Wetlands Centre. This year, a total of six partner schools were involved in the second phase of this programme.

This was my first experience collaborating with other organizations and working with students and teachers on such a specialized topic. A power point presentation was done at the start of this programme (in August 2005) which saw the SBWR's theatre fully packed with enthusiastic students and teachers. I certainly gained a whole new world of experience and joy from my interactions with the young students. Their endless list of witty and creative questions during the bird census sessions make these training sessions more interesting. I strongly believe that through such a programme, many of these students would have acquired some basic knowledge on environmental awareness and learnt what communication, quiet observation, teamwork and analytical skill were all about.



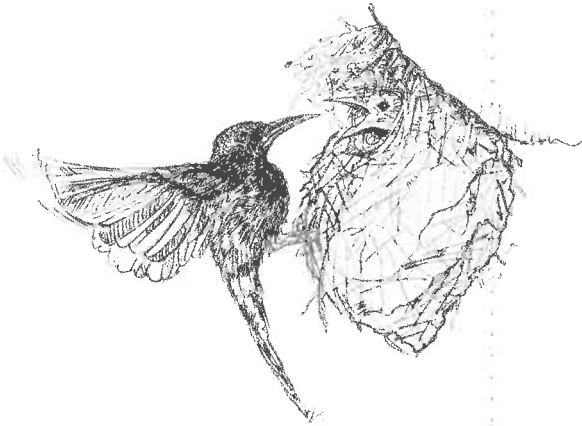
The objective of this project was to increase the students' awareness on climate change and bird conservation.

The activities that were conducted at SBWR included bird banding, sentinel and shorebird census. These activities equipped the students with the different skills needed to learn bird identification and helped them increase their awareness in bird conservation issues. Bird banding sessions required the students to spend three hours at SBWR, of which some time was also allocated to learning how to sketch birds. Such an activity gave them a firsthand experience looking at the birds and learning about the bird's features such as shape of the bill, body, legs and plumage.

Regardless of it being a sentinel or wader census, it was always an eye-opener for the students. At times, walking about the Reserve for a sentinel census for two to three hours may give the students more than they bargain for, as they may come across other types of interesting wildlife. During a shorebird census, the students move together with a staff through the whole Reserve, stopping at selected 'hides' where they learn the 'art' of counting and identifying the shorebirds, within a limited time range. The six schools that participated in this year's project were Loyang Primary School, Naval Base Primary School, Boon Lay Primary School and Peixin Primary School. 

Art in the Wetlands

Ng Sock Ling, Assistant Director



Rachel Wong, 13, was doing something different today. Holding a shoe box in one hand, with her hair dappled in sunlight, she was meticulously sifting through fallen leaves, seeds and gravel near the Main Bridge at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserves. She was preoccupied with an environmental concern – the hole in Earth's ozone layer – and was looking for items to add to her collage piece to highlight this concern.

Rachel was part of a group of 21 art lovers who participated in Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve's 'Art for the Environment' workshop on 18 and 25 June 2005. Targeted at secondary school students, the workshop was sponsored by the Singapore Press Holdings Foundation (SPH Foundation), with the aim of enabling students to gain a better appreciation of nature through art.

The art workshop attracted students from six schools, namely Crescent Girls School, Haig Girls School, Hillgrove Secondary School, Sembawang Secondary School, Tanjong Katong Girls School and Yishun Town Secondary School. They learnt about the art of collage making from SBWR Volunteer and resident artists, Mr Tham Pui San. More importantly, Pui San reminded them through newspaper clippings, the environmental concerns facing our planet and how they can make a difference.

An art competition was held as part of the workshop to encourage the students to deliver an environmental message to their peers using their artistic skills. Working in teams, the students put their hearts and minds into producing collages with an environmental message of their choice. The winning work, entitled "Green Cities in the Eyes of a Child", was created by the Sembawang Secondary School team. It will be produced into a poster calendar for 2006 and be distributed to all schools. The art pieces done by the workshop participants will also be exhibited at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve from November to December 2005.

Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve is grateful to its sponsor the Singapore Press Holdings Foundation, SBWR Volunteers Pui San and Deborah, and the participants in making possible the 'Art for the Environment' workshop. 



Green Cities in the Eyes of a Child, by Sembawang Secondary School



Mirror Image, by Sembawang Secondary School



Enjoy Nature in Garden City, by Hillgrove Secondary School

Celebrate Nature!


Chan Su Hooi, Outreach Officer

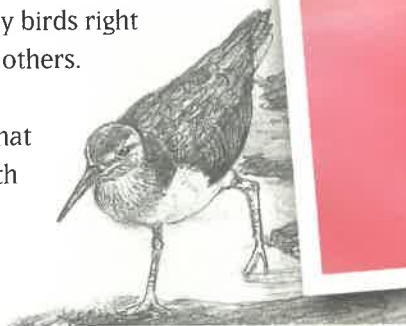
Have you ever wondered what is there to experience at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve? Have you walked the trails, thinking there was nothing except mud and greenery?

Here's a peek into what you can expect. These photographs were taken at the Reserve by Sungei Buloh staff, volunteers and visitors.

"One of the joys in visiting Sungei Buloh is to see a monitor lizard basking in the sun in the middle of a path - big or little ones, they are all fascinating, especially when seen close up. Or to creep quietly into one of the hides and see literally hundreds of migratory birds right in front of you. It's great to share this experience with others.

Unfortunately, if there are too many of us, our chatter scares the lizards away. So, I usually tell the children that God gave us two ears and two eyes, but only one mouth - they usually get the point without further elaboration. From time to time, they will be reminded that successful sightings come with quiet patience and a bit of luck", says Keith Hillier, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve volunteer.

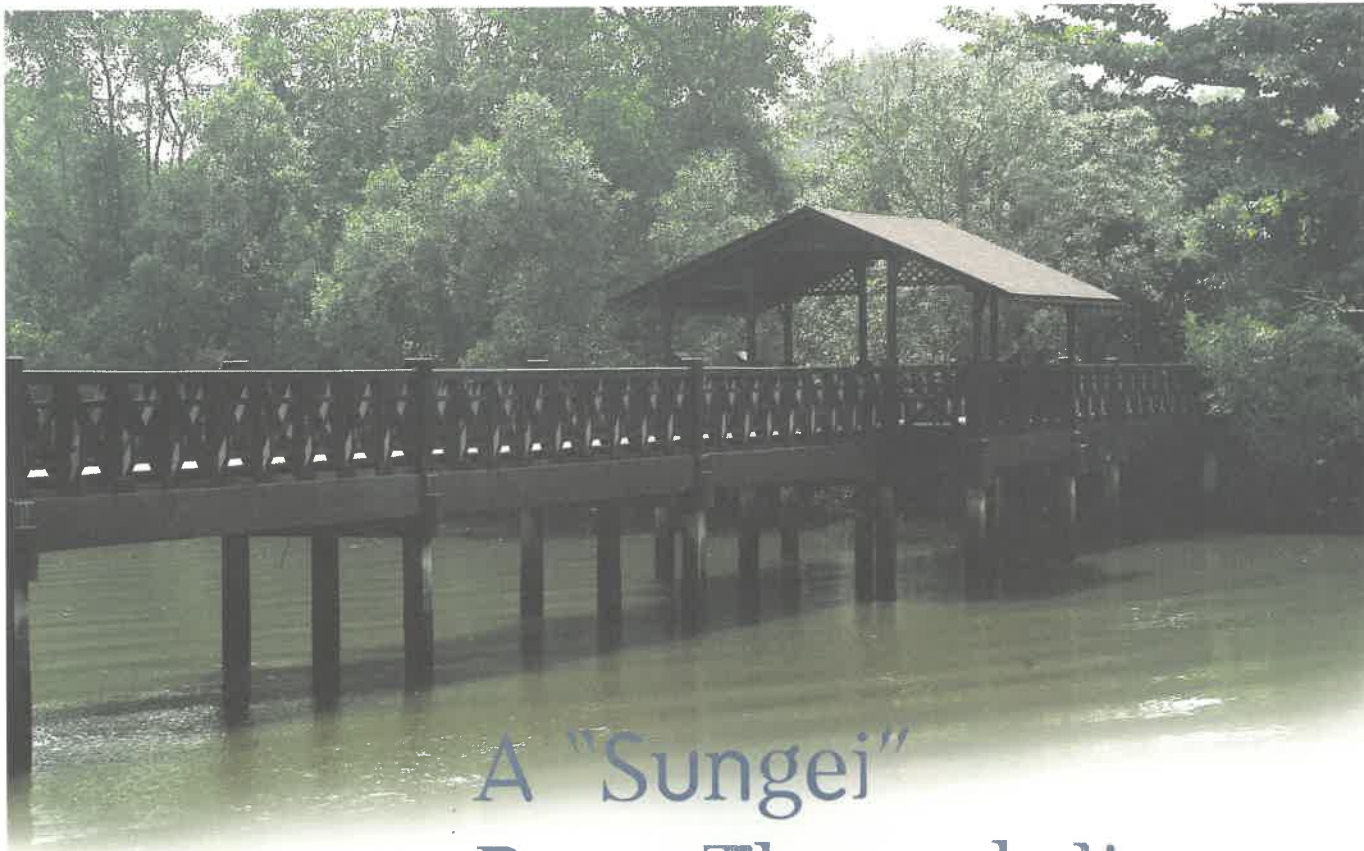
So go ahead, take an unhurried walk through the Wetland Reserve and be prepared for new experiences. 





Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve:
where mangroves and wetland wildlife thrive.





A "Sungei" Runs Through It

Andrew Tan, Visitor Services Officer



Hey, what were you thinking of? Singapore River? Or the movie from Hollywood? I am referring to the river that connects the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve Visitor Centre to the Reserve, which is Sungei Buloh Besar.

I chose this title simply because I have come across feedback from local visitors lamenting that there is nothing to see here at the Reserve. Some have even asked if there are playgrounds here! Whatever the question may be, my point of view and answer is simple. If you are a nature lover and have the passion and time to explore the Reserve, please do so. By all means, come in the early morning and take a stroll here to enjoy and appreciate Mother Nature. You do not have to go too far. Just get comfortably seated at the main bridge and enjoy the tranquility that awaits you! I love having lunch breaks at the main bridge. Ten minutes or thirty minutes, high tide or low tide, there is always something happening along this river.


During low tide, if chance may have it, I would be lucky enough to spot the crocodile, whom I have affectionately come to know as "Bob the Croc". It will be basking itself along the mudflats under the mid-day strong sun. There will be times when you may even find it submerged in the water near the sluice gate just next to the main hide.

Other common sights that await you would be our two-legged feathered friends such as a family of white-breasted water hens having a drink by the water edge. Camouflaged well amongst their habitat, a striated heron would be perching on the tree branch trying to catch its next meal. A dozen egrets, milky stocks and sometimes one or two grey herons would be waiting patiently for a good catch along the mudflats. Recently, a solitude pelican has

made an unannounced appearance, much to the delight of our staff who had the opportunity to see it.

One might be able to catch different schools of fish playing around and swimming past the bridge. If you looked down the bridge, you certainly would not miss the archerfish, half-beaks, milk fish and green chromides, to name a few. If luck is on your side, our resident otters may swim by with their curious gazes. Sometimes, you may even see a Malayan Water Monitor propelling itself across the river.

During the migratory season, just about when the tide is rising, you just may be able to see large groups of migratory birds flying in to feed! Some visitors have had the privilege of this wonderful sight! The migratory birds which are commonly seen would include the Whimbrels, Pacific Golden plovers, Common Sandpipers, Red Shanks and Green Shanks. From time to time, one may chance upon the resident stock-billed kingfisher perching on the tree branch, patiently waiting for the next unsuspecting fish. With the cool northeast monsoon winds blowing, sitting at the bridge can certainly make one feel relaxed and even sleepy sometimes!

So, I will state my case again - there is plenty to see at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve! Sit at the bridge along the river and "open" your ears. You will perhaps hear the resident birds' calls or the cicada hissing for its mate in the distance. Amazingly, you may also chance upon a solitude plantain squirrel attempting to cross the bridge! So, enjoy this peaceful scene of this last frontier of Singapore...



HSBC/NYAA Youth Environmental Award 2005

By Jeremy Ang, Conservation Officer

On 6th September 2005, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve (SBWR) hosted the HSBC/NYAA Youth Environmental Award 2005. The Guest of Honour for this event was Dr Amy Khor, Mayor of Southwest District and Chairperson, GPC for the Environment and Water Resources. Other VIPs included Professor Leo Tan, Chairman of National Parks Board and NYAA Council and Mr Paul Lawrence, CEO of HSBC Singapore.



On 6th September 2005, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve (SBWR) hosted the HSBC/NYAA Youth Environmental Award 2005. The Guest of Honour for this event was Dr Amy Khor, Mayor of Southwest District and Chairperson, GPC for National Development and the Environment and Water Resources. Other VIPs included Professor Leo Tan, Chairman of National Parks Board and NYAA Council and Mr Paul Lawrence, CEO of HSBC Singapore.

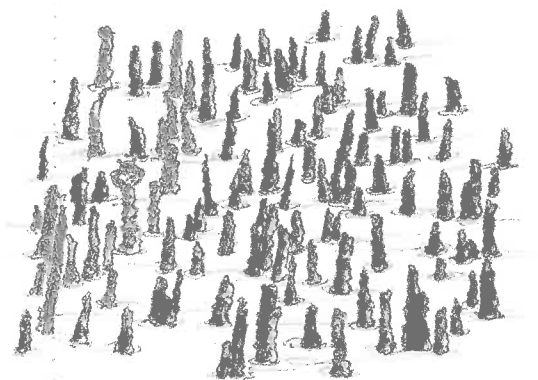
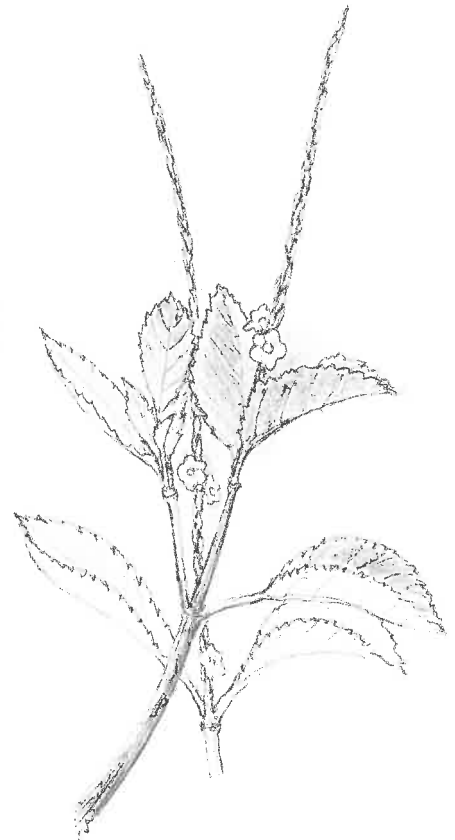
Five young environmentalists were recognized for their outstanding contribution towards environmental protection and nature conservation at this event. Most importantly, the Awards were designed to highlight the catalytic role that youths can play in raising environmental awareness and triggering environmental action. For their tireless dedication to the environmental cause on top of their exceptional leadership qualities, two young Singaporeans from National Junior College and Ngee Ann Polytechnic received the HSBC/NYAA Youth Environmental Award on that day. Three others, aged 17 to 23, received merit awards in recognition of their consistent efforts in caring for the environment.

In June 2004, HSBC and NYAA launched the HSBC/NYAA Earthwatch Study Trip. A team of NYAA youths were selected and given the opportunity to gain exposure and experience in Koala conservation work in Saint Bees Island, Queensland Australia. This year, another group of seven students from local Polytechnics and Universities were selected to participate in a conservation



project on Asiatic Black Bears at the Tang Jia He and Wanglang Nature Reserves in Chengdu, China. They will be given the opportunity to research and study the Asiatic Black Bear demographics and the habitat use and the ecology of China's nature reserves, under the supervision of Earthwatch Scientists.

Mr Paul Lawrence presented a HSBC Care-for-Nature Garden City stamp print as a token-of-appreciation to Dr Amy Khor for gracing the occasion. The guests were then invited to view the exhibition booth as well as to attend a guided walk by SBWR Volunteers. At SBWR, we also encourage NYAA youths to do their part by training them to take a proactive role in being leaders for the Young Naturalist Passport (YNP) programme. As leaders in our nature education programmes, they will be more empowered to motivate and help the younger children get a head start in caring for their environment.



Calendar of Events

compiled by Halilah Ahmad,
Outreach Officer

Free guided walks on mangroves and marine fish.

Every Saturdays

Time : 9am, 10am 3pm & 4pm (except for public holidays)

Venue : Mangrove Boardwalk (mangrove tour)
Main Bridge (marine fish tour)

Join us for a discovery adventure, getting to know the unique and beautiful flora and fauna of the Reserve. Learn about who they are and how they interlink with one another to survive the harsh conditions of the mangrove habitat. These walks are weather permitting. Please check SBWR website at <http://www.sbwr.org.sg/events/guidedtours/> for updates and specific time slots for the marine fish tour. This programme may be replaced with other interesting programmes that coincide with the respective time slots.

Admission charges apply.

PrawnWatch

Saturdays. Call 67941401 for the dates (for 2006) of this programme.

Time : 9.30am

Venue : Prawn Pond

Come and witness the interesting and educational demonstration of traditional prawn harvesting. Learn about the different types of marine prawns and other marine creatures such as fish, crabs or even jellyfish that make the prawn pond their homes. Please assemble at the Information Counter at 8.50am and a guide will take you in (approximately 25 minutes walk) to the demonstration site. This programme is weather permitting. You can also check the dates through SBWR website at <http://www.sbwr.org.sg/events/prawnwatch/> for updates. Admission charges apply.

Talks of the month @ the libraries

School holidays. Call 67941401 for dates, time and venue.

Want to know more about Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve and what lives within this beautiful mangrove wetland area? Why not join us for a series of talks for children at the community libraries. Various interesting subjects on the flora and fauna of the Reserve will be featured.

Creature Feature / Nest Builders / Wetland Craftsman

Every Saturday

Time : 11.15am to 11.45am

Ever wonder how birds build their home, why kingfishers shout at the top of their voice, what is a horseshoe crab or how a mudskipper got its name? Come and listen to these interesting talks. Have a go at building a nest, or birding around with a kingfisher mask, or learn to mould a mudskipper or a horseshoe crab using paper clay. For those who are interested to join in the fun, we could run additional session for groups of 5 to 15 people. This programme is link to Young Naturalist Passport programme. Please visit the SBWR website at <http://www.sbwr.org.sg/youngnaturalist/> for more details. Admission charges apply.

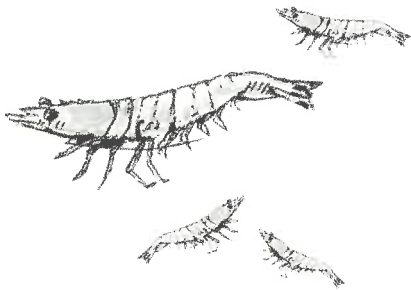
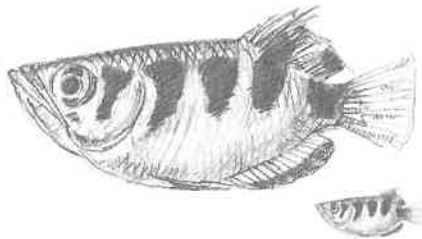
World Wetland Day

2 February 2006 (Thursday)

Venue : Visitor Centre

Time : 7.30am to 7.00pm

This day marks the signing of the Convention on Wetlands in 1971, in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Come and view an exhibition featuring subjects on the importance of wetlands.



Bird Flu

Frequently Asked Questions

Ng Sock Ling, Assistant Director

Lately, staff at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve has received a number of queries from people who are worried about catching avian influenza, or bird flu at the Reserve.

Do you have questions about bird flu? Here are answers to some frequently asked questions.

Q: What is bird flu?

A: Bird flu is a viral disease that affects poultry. It can also infect other birds, but poultry such as chickens and turkeys are the most susceptible. Of the several types of flu viruses that cause bird flu, the 'Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza' (HPAI) that affects poultry has caused the death of some species of wild birds, as well as the recent human outbreaks in Asian countries.

Q: How do people get infected with bird flu?

A: It is rare for people to get infected with bird flu. In the few instances where this has happened, the people had caught the virus through close contact with infected chickens. For example, you would need for the infected chicken to sneeze or cough directly in your face, before the virus can be transmitted to you.

Q: Is it safe to visit Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve?

A: Singapore is free from bird flu. At Sungei Buloh, you would not come into close contact with the wild birds, as visitors view the birds through binoculars and telescopes. Hence, it is safe to visit Sungei Buloh.

Q: What if bird flu is detected in Singapore? What is being done at Sungei Buloh to monitor the bird flu situation?

A: The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) and the National Parks Board (NParks) have an on-going surveillance programme for bird flu in wild birds at Sungei Buloh. Cloacal swabs are taken from wild birds for testing. To date, no bird flu viruses have been detected. Should a bird flu case be found, officers from AVA and other relevant agencies will be mobilised immediately to control the situation.

Q: What is good practice for visitors when visiting the Reserve?

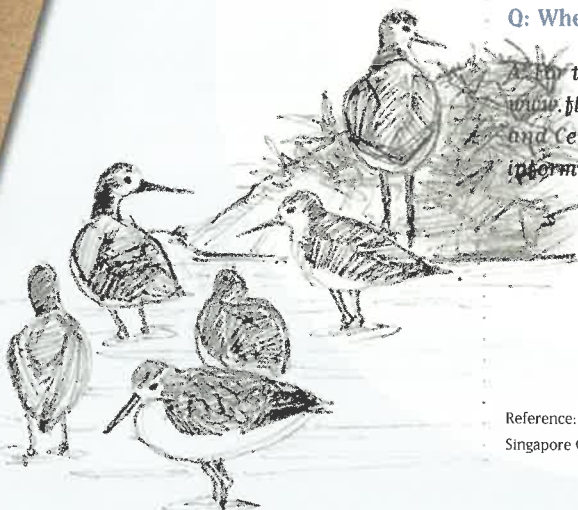
A: Visitors would not come into close contact with wild birds. However, should you chance upon any weakened or dead birds along the trails, do not touch the bird. Instead, report the location of the bird to Sungei Buloh staff, who will attend to the bird. Do practice good hygiene habits and thoroughly wash your hands with soap regularly.

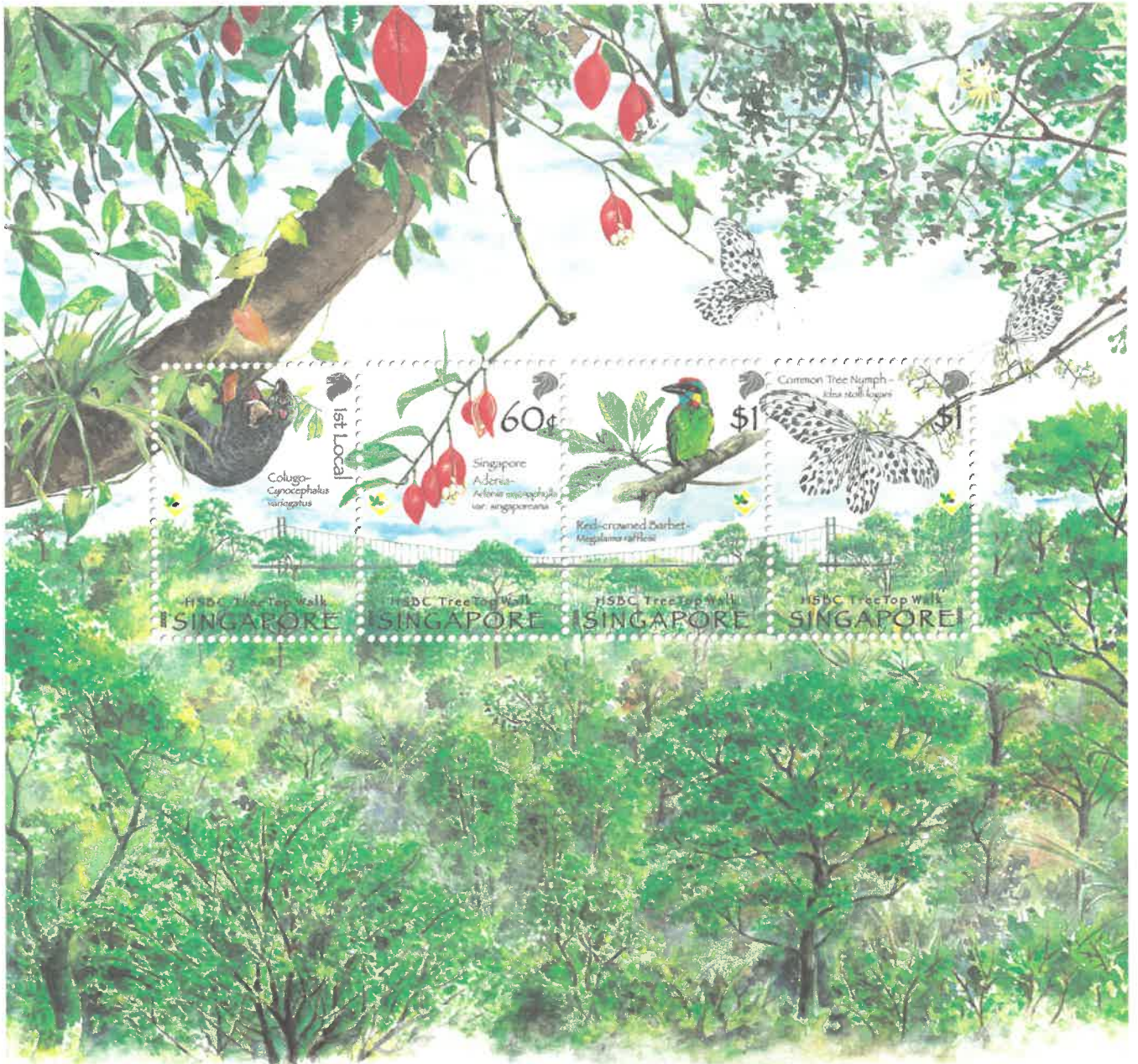
Q: Where can I find updated information on bird flu?

A: For the latest updates, check out the Singapore Government Flu Website "<http://www.flu.gov.sg>" which also provides links to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) websites. It also has useful information on hotlines to call for any enquiries.

Reference:

Singapore Government Flu Website "<http://www.flu.gov.sg>"





For nature's sake, take a piece home.

The HSBC's TreeTop Walk at the Central Catchment Nature Reserve is one of the many initiatives supported by HSBC in Singapore. A natural refuge to a rich diversity of flora and fauna, the Reserve is also home to our precious source of drinking water. It is now in our hands to help conserve what is left of this lush rainforest

and protect its inhabitants. This year's Care-for-Nature Stamp Series features the HSBC TreeTop Walk and the interesting forest residents. All proceeds for the stamp series will be donated to the Care-for-Nature Trust Fund, which in turn funds nature conservation and education initiatives.

HSBC Care-for-Nature Stamp Series



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