

A Close Look at Nature

Excerpts from the speech given by Senior Minister of State (Health & Education), Dr Aline Wong on 6 November 1995 during the Clean and Green Week Schools' Event.

There is so much in Sungei Buloh which offers us a chance to take a good close look- the flocks of migratory birds stopping over at the Park; the mangrove plants flourishing at the water's edge; the myriad crabs, shells, fish and other creatures thriving in this habitat. Sungei Buloh is home to about 500 species of plants and animals.

Sungei Buloh is an excellent place to educate the young about nature. The park is designed to bring us close to nature, yet minimise disturbance to it. Sungei Buloh is like a window on our natural heritage.

have adopted some of the water courses in Singapore, and are monitoring the water quality and documenting the aquatic life.

Clean and Green Week is an annual event for Singaporeans to reaffirm our commitment to the environment. The schools, governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as the business community are all involved.

I am pleased to see the volunteers from the Biotechnology Department of the Ngee Ann Polytechnic helping out in the event. It is only fitting that we should work together closely to care for the environment and our natural heritage.

Individually, we can do our bit through simple, daily actions. For example, we can sell our newspapers to the rag-and-bone man, write on both sides of paper, recycle our drink cans, buy environmentally-friendly products, or even simply by not littering.

It is said that young children are able to make out the details of a hawk's plumage from a distance with their naked eyes. Let you who are young take a close look at nature and see how wonderful and intricate it is. Care for it and keep it, so that in time to come, your children's children will still be able to enjoy it as you have today.

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Mr Alex Teo Leng Hui
Mr Amos Teo Leng Yuan
Ms Wang Luan Keng

Illustrations

Ms Halilah Ahmad

Honorary Photographer

Mr Michael Aw

Design & Production

Design Fusion Pte Ltd

Publisher

Parks and Recreation
Department

In this bumper issue (6 instead of the usual 4 pages), we carry a special report on the Clean and Green Week (1995) Schools' Event. Find out what's been happening in Sungei Buloh these past few months, and what's on for the June school holidays.



Dr Aline Wong taking a closer look

The Park stands at the mouth of a river. If we do not look after the river upstream, rubbish and debris would flow into the Park and disturb the ecosystem. A lot of effort, time and money has been spent in cleaning up our water courses in Singapore. Aquatic life has returned to waterways which were once so polluted that the water in them was black and smelly. Through the "Our Waterways" programme, schools



Volunteers enjoying a quiet moment

Events for the Day

Morning

Spot-Art competition (primary schools) and Treasure Hunt (secondary schools and junior colleges) were organised with the help of volunteers. In spite of the rain, response for the morning was very good: 184 students from 46 schools turned up. Spirits were high and participants took the wet conditions and schedule changes in their stride.

Afternoon

After lunch, students toured the Motorola Green Bus. Prize-giving for the morning's winners and presentation of plaques to the participants of "Our Waterways" programme followed shortly after.



The Green Bus: all things bright and beautiful

Students from Alexandra Hill Primary School performed an eco-skit set to dramatic music. This occasion, graced by Senior Minister of State (Health and Education), Dr Aline Wong, ended with a tour of the Park for all guests. After this, the Resource Recycling Package, developed by the Public Education Department (Ministry of the Environment), was distributed to school representatives.

Congratulations to the Winners !!

Spot-Art Competition

1st place:
Miss Joanne Khoo Puay Yin
(age: 9)
Singapore Chinese Girl School

2nd place:
Miss Wong May Ee
(age: 7)
Juying Primary School

3rd place:
Miss Liu Lilin
(age: 11)
Yu Neng Primary School



A picture of quiet concentration

Looking for Gems...

by Amos Teo, one of the members of the Treasure Hunt Team, Raffles Institution

It was raining cats and dogs when we three fellow students and two enthusiastic teachers arrived at Sungei Buloh Nature Park on that gloomy Monday morning. Most people hate Mondays (Monday mornings, especially), but it was different for us as we knew we were going to enjoy ourselves, win or lose.

We had to attend a briefing so that participants were made aware of the Treasure Hunt procedure and rules. This was the first time I have seen the place packed full of students, teachers and volunteers.

We were given time to look through the clues before we were officially flagged off. The rain had subsided by then, but the trails were very muddy and there were many puddles of water to avoid. It was quite funny, looking around and realising that the other teams were also walking gingerly, trying to avoid stepping into the puddles.



Poring over clues

Early on, we had decided the best strategy was not to bother with too many nitty-gritty details and we also skipped the trip to the Heronry on Route 2. This helped us to save a lot of time. We filled in those sections by inferring on the answers, after which we handed in our answers to the volunteer marshalls at the Outdoor Classroom.

The highlight of the day was the speech given by Dr Aline Wong. I felt it was good to have such an important guest-of-honour attend this event. In this way, public awareness is raised.

At the end of the day, we were drained, yet satisfied. It was an enriching experience for me, and the many students who had never been to Sungei Buloh, or participated in such activities before. I hope that there will be a similar activity next year.

Nature Treasure Hunt

Secondary School category

1st place:
Raffles Institution

2nd place:
Katong Convent

3rd place:
Nan Hua Secondary School

Junior College category

1st place:
Anglo-Chinese Junior College

2nd place:
St Andrew's Junior College

Nature's Nest Architects

by Wang Luan Keng



An old French proverb says that Man can do everything except build a bird's nest. Birds build some of the most beautiful and sophisticated natural structures. The variety and complexity of nests are astonishing when you consider that birds work with the simplest of tools and materials.

Baya Weaver

To catch a glimpse of the backbreaking work that goes into

The process of weaving involves threading a strip beneath another that runs at right angles. The strip is pulled tight after each threading. The entrance passage to the nest is a long and downward tube which makes it difficult for predators (eg snakes) to plunder the nest.

Tailorbird

The tailorbirds are known for their charming appearance and tedious, repetitive songs. These small warblers are so-named because of their ability to sew one or two adjacent leaves together,

using cobwebs or plant fibres as thread. They use their bills to make holes in the leaves and to pull the thread through these holes. Plant materials and feathers are stuffed into the cavity formed. These nests may be just a few inches off the ground.

The next time you visit Sungei Buloh Nature Park, try to spot the avian



A Baya Weaver working hard to complete its nest



Spotted Dove Nestlings

nest-building, go to the freshwater ponds at the western part of Sungei Buloh Nature Park (Route 3). Here you will see small flocks of ten to twenty yellow and black Baya Weaver in constant motion around green spheres suspended from the tree branches.

These birds are adept at using their strong beaks to knot and weave: the two basic skills used in basket building. To make the first fastening, the bird ties a knot by holding a strip of grass to a branch with its foot and then, using its beak, it passes the end of the strip round the branch and threads it through the turn, pulling it tight. Once the fastening is complete, the bird starts weaving.

version of huts, townhouses, apartment buildings and castles. You can spend many hours observing the birds building their homes, raising their young and fending off intruders.

If you come across a nest, remember the pointers for minimal impact. Do keep your distance to minimise disturbance. Please resist the temptation to bring the nests or eggs home.

Come see these resident birds at their nest-building best during the month of June.



A Tailorbird nest made from a Simpoh Air leaf

Wader Ringing Programme:

What Happened One Night

by Alex Teo, volunteer



A solitary Pacific Golden Plover

The Park by night provided a completely different experience, especially for my father, brother and I, who were nocturnal visitors for the first time. We were greeted at the Visitor Centre by a large crowd of volunteers and staff from the Park, in time to witness the tagging of a Collared Kingfisher and Pacific Golden Plover.

I was really excited at this, as I had never seen these birds at such a close range. This particular ringing session was focused on waders, as it was the peak of the migratory season (September to March).

A few of us piled onto the Club Car and set off to the sites where the nets had been set up earlier. We had two experienced ringers with us: they went down into the mud to inspect the nets. I did not join them as I was not wearing boots.

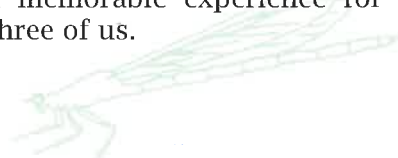
Our site yielded one bird, a Mongolian Plover. This bird had been ringed previously, so there was no need to ring it again. However, its measurements had to be taken, namely the wing,

beak, tarsus (below the thigh) and tail. Carefully, I dyed its rump and tail blue. This dyeing process is a prominent way to see which birds have already been ringed. However, the dye was not indelible and would wear off gradually after a week or so. These studies allow us to find out more about these birds (eg migratory route, arrival and departure date etc).

Earlier in the night, a Large-tailed Nightjar was also ringed; unfortunately I did not witness this and would have to wait for another opportunity to see this oft-mentioned bird.

A Yellow Bittern was our next candidate for ringing. We were told to be careful when handling it, as it could stretch out its long neck and pierce a person's eye with its extremely sharp bill.

The session ended at about 1:30 in the morning. It was such a memorable experience for the three of us.



Education

During the school vacations, thematic activities are organised for the benefit of our visitors. Call the Education Department for more information on these activities.

What's On This June

"Facts of Life"

Find out more about the facts of life this June, *a la* mangroves. Learn how mangroves reproduce, and be fascinated by the unusual features that allow mangroves to survive in a harsh, unforgiving environment.

The Mangrove Boardwalk at the Visitor Centre will serve as the focal point of discovery. Remember, make a date with the mangroves during the June school vacation.



Vivipary in action

Shoot The Birds!!

This was what 20 photographers got to do on a sunny Sunday morning in March. Under the guidance of Mr Lee Tiah Khee (ARPS), photographer from Friday Weekly, they were brought through the essentials of nature photography.

Visitors were treated to 30 of Mr Lee's best bird photographs, which adorned the Nature Gallery during the March school holidays.



Taking aim

Each photograph was accompanied by elegant calligraphy; the phrases romantically composed and stylishly written out by Mr Chen Cheng, Chief Editor of Lianhe Wanbao.

The photographs featured a wide spectrum of birds in action:



The photographer being "shot"

from tiny sunbirds feeding their young, to winter visitors like plovers and sandpipers posing on mudflats, to majestic kites soaring on thermals and herons engaging in loveplay. Aspiring nature photographers were invited to participate in a short quiz, where questions were asked on the camera settings needed to achieve three particular shots.

If you want to "shoot" these birds at Sungei Buloh, bear in mind the following: find out about the birds, get the right equipment, cultivate lots of patience and perseverance, and diligently adhere to the rules of the Park. Happy shooting!

We wish to express our appreciation to RGB Color and Kodak for their sponsorship of the development of the photographs.

Whither the Waders?

Wader Watching at the Main Hide

2 weeks in December 1995 were set aside for wader watching at the Main Hide. With the help of volunteer guides, telescopes were set up to allow visitors to take a closer look at the birds. Most were fascinated by these tiny birds who had made a journey of about 30 000 km to escape the cold harsh northern winter. The younger visitors were the most enthusiastic about spotting the feathered visitors ("I can see! I can see!" became the catch phrase for those 2 weeks).



Curlew Sandpiper (longer bills) and Mongolian Plover on the mudflat

In addition to watching the migrants in action on the mudflats, visitors also managed to observe kingfishers, White-breasted Waterhen, larger birds like egrets, herons, bitterns and the majestic White-bellied Sea Eagle.

The restlessness of shorebirds, their kinship with the distance and swift seasons, the wistful signal of their voices down the long coastlines of the world make them, for me, the most affecting of wild creatures.

Peter Matthiessen



Photograph from Mr. Lee Tiah Khee

Purple Heron: "Falling in Love"

VIP Visits

On 1 December 1995, Datuk Law Hieng Ding, Malaysian Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment dropped by at Sungei Buloh Nature Park with Environment Minister, Rear-Admiral (NS) Teo Chee Hean. The delegation was treated to the sights and sounds of the Mangrove Boardwalk and watched the antics of the waders from the Main Hide. Datuk Law warmly congratulated the Park on the efforts made by the Park to conserve nature.



Be a Part of the Newsletter!!

If you've come to the Park before and would like to wax lyrical about the trip, here's your chance. Poem, prose or picture, we welcome contributions from visitors. You can send in your contribution(s) c/o the Education Department (please mark "Newsletter" on the top left hand corner of the envelope).

Park Information

Opening Hours

7.30 am to 7.00 pm on weekdays

7.00 am to 7.00 pm on Saturdays, Sundays and Public Holidays

Admission

\$1.00 per adult

\$0.50 per child/student/senior citizen

Audio-visual Show

Mondays to Saturdays:

9.00am, 11.00 am, 1.00 pm, 3.00 pm and 5.00 pm

Sundays and Public Holidays:

Hourly from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm

How to get to the Park

Mondays to Saturdays:

Take TIBS 925 to Kranji Dam (15 minutes' walk to the Park) from Woodlands Interchange or Kranji MRT station.

Sundays and Public Holidays:

Take TIBS 925 to the Park's entrance.

Sungei Buloh Nature Park

1 Neo Tiew Crescent
Singapore 718925

Getting to the Park



Tel : 793 7377
Fax : 793 7271

