

Wetlands

Sungei Buloh Nature Park Newsletter. Vol.4 No.1 April 1997. MITA(P) No.280/12/96

Sungei Buloh
NATURE PARK



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Sungei Buloh Nature Park

With much exuberance, we present the first issue of 'Wetlands', our new newsletter for the year 1997.

What's new? Full-coloured cover and back page, 8 pages of information and the increased publication frequency to thrice yearly: April, August and December 1997.

In this issue, we shift our spotlight onto the breeding birds in the Park. As we bid farewell to the migratory birds, our residents are busy setting up their family. Find out also what happened at the Park for the past few months and what is coming up next.

We welcome any feedback you may have about our new newsletter. Happy reading.

Cover Photograph by
Mr Lee Tiah Khee
Picture of a Grey Heron
on its nest

BREEDING BIRDS

Johanna Tan

'Resident' birds refers to bird species found in the park throughout the year. Breeding activity varies greatly with individual species but to a large extent coincides with the peak season of the breeding of insects, which is food for most resident birds to feed their fledglings with.

The breeding season is the most stressful period for resident birds with courting, nest-building, parenting of eggs and nestling all placing a heavy demand on time and energy.

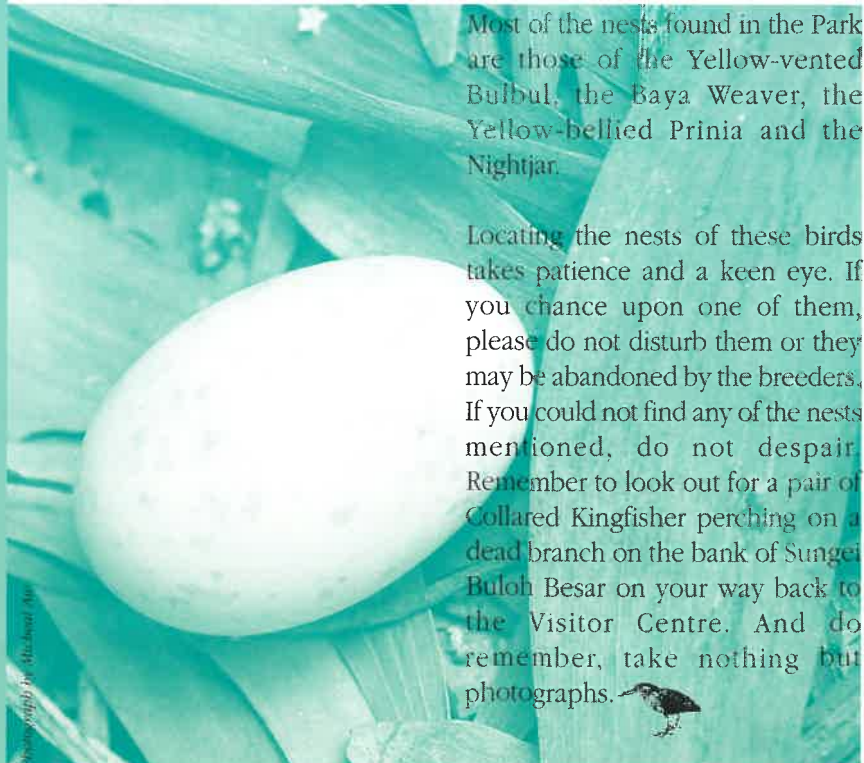
Eggs are particularly vulnerable to predators and the vagaries of the weather. Nests therefore have to provide an insulated environment whilst remaining as inconspicuous as possible. Nests in the Park tend to be either well-concealed or inaccessible. For example, the Olive-backed Sunbird decorates the exterior of its nest with a variety of items to disguise its presence.

Nests vary in shapes and sizes. Kingfishers, bee-eaters and woodpeckers use natural cavities in trees or excavate burrows to lay their eggs in. Bulbuls, flycatchers build cup-shaped nests which are often felted with moss and lichen. Prinias and munias construct small balls of dried grass with lateral openings, usually in tall grasses. Tailorbirds stitch large green leaves into tubes in which their tiny cup-shaped nests are placed. Perhaps the most skilfully constructed nest is that of the Baya Weaver, which is most often suspended from the tips of coconut palm fronds and, in the Park, even on rambutan and ficus trees.

The Large-tailed Nightjar lays its two pink eggs on the ground amongst the leaf litter, relying on its own camouflage to hide them by sitting on the nest during the day. At night, when the nightjar is feeding, the pale coloured eggs are often concealed to avoid predator detection.

Most of the nests found in the Park are those of the Yellow-vented Bulbul, the Baya Weaver, the Yellow-bellied Prinia and the Nightjar.

Locating the nests of these birds takes patience and a keen eye. If you chance upon one of them, please do not disturb them or they may be abandoned by the breeders. If you could not find any of the nests mentioned, do not despair. Remember to look out for a pair of Collared Kingfisher perching on a dead branch on the bank of Sungei Buloh Besar on your way back to the Visitor Centre. And do remember, take nothing but photographs.



Photograph by Mr. Lee Tiah Khee



WHAT HAPPENED

BirdWatch 1996

Ong Chui Leng

Special activities were organised during the last migratory season to welcome our feathered friends from afar. BirdWatch 1996 (17 November - 1 December 1996) was one such event to promote birdwatching among Singaporeans. Free guided tours were available for the first 100 visitors signing up for each 0900h and 1500h sessions each day during the period. Groups of 20 or less were brought around route 1 by volunteers and staff, with one telescope per group, to watch waders on the scope. Four telescopes, with volunteers manning them, were set up at the mainhide for visitors who could not make the guided walks or who prefer to go around on their own.

The event was a great success as all involved, visitors, volunteers and staff, had enjoyed the walks tremendously. The opportunities for the sharing of experiences had also helped promote environmental awareness and nature appreciation as the wonders of migration filled us with awe.

In view of the success and the good response we have had of the BirdWatch 1996 event, the Park will be organising BirdWatch as an annual event for the years to come.

So do watch out for BirdWatch 1997. When? November.



Luncheon Meet for Volunteers

Linda Gob



Photograph by James Gan

Presentation of certificates of appreciation to the volunteers.

For two weeks during the BirdWatch 1996, our volunteers had been a wonderful support group for the Park. 30 volunteers were recruited to enrich the experience of the visitors during BirdWatch 1996, the aim of which is to promote birdwatching among our fellow Singaporeans, by the provision of the ever-popular guided walks.

The volunteers had to go through a day of training at the Park before undertaking the responsibilities of being volunteer guides. During the two weeks, the trained guides brought groups of 20 visitors around route 1 to help them learn more about migration and the migratory birds. They also took turns to station themselves at the main hide to assist visitors to see and identify migratory birds.

A luncheon was held on 14 December 1996, in recognition of the time and effort these volunteers had contributed in support of the Park's programme.

The buffet lunch cum recognition ceremony was graced by Mr S.K. Ganesan, Senior Manager from the National Parks Board and Dr Wong Hon Mun, Executive Director from Jurong Birdpark. The volunteers were treated to a buffet spread of Muslim food before Mr Ganesan delivered a word of thanks and presented certificates of appreciation to the volunteers.

The luncheon meeting had created a conducive environment for the volunteers to interact among themselves, and with the staff of the Park, in the midst of savouring the delicious spread and merry making. We had decided to make it an annual event.

The visitors whom the volunteers had brought around benefited greatly from the expertise and enthusiasm of these nature lovers. Cheers to the volunteers who had made our programme a success!





The NESTING

You may miss the herons when they stand still among the tall grasses, or stealthily on the trees. But once spotted, identifying the birds is an easy task. Herons are birds of the wetlands with distinctive features. Generally large in size, they are relatively easy to observe. They have long, pointed bills, small heads, long snake-like necks and long legs and toes.

Fifteen species of birds classified under the heron family (*Ardeidae*) are recorded in the Sungei Buloh Nature Park. Of the fifteen species, the Grey Heron and the Purple Heron are breeding in the Park.

One of the largest species of birds to occur in Singapore, the Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) stands at about 92 centimetres high. Adult male birds are about 1.5 kilograms in weight. The female birds are slightly lighter. Wingspans for both males and females could reach up to two metres. It is mostly black, white and grey and has a conspicuous black eyestripe-cum-nuchal crest. The sexes are similar but the plumes of the female birds are shorter.

With not more than 250 individual birds throughout Singapore, the Grey Heron is a vulnerable species here. It is found mainly along the northern coastline and has established a heronry in the Sungei Buloh Nature Park within the past two years. This is believed to be the only nesting site for the Grey Heron in Singapore.

The Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) is another heron species known conclusively to breed in the Park. About 76 centimetres in length, it is slightly smaller compared to the Grey Heron. The Purple Heron looks darker than the Grey



Photograph by Lee Tiab Khoo

HERONS

of Sungei Buloh

James Gan



A pair of Purple Herons with their fledgling.

Heron, is more rufous (reddish-brown) than grey and has a black line down the neck. The neck also has a prominent kink which is absent in the Grey Heron. Both sexes are similar in plumage.

In the Park, both the Grey and the Purple Heron can be seen in many of the brackish water ponds. Perhaps one of the best places in the Park to see the herons is from the visitor trail along route 2, near the Mangrove Arboretum. Here, visitors can spot the many herons' nests among the mangrove trees.

Early in the nesting season, you would be able to watch the herons construct their nests. The males source for and deliver the nest materials which are usually sturdy sticks while the females do the actual building and construction of the nest. Talk about a woman's touch! Look out for the nests which are bulky platforms of sticks perched on branches of the mangrove trees. If you are observant, you might even catch a glimpse of the three or four blue eggs in the nests. The period between the laying of eggs to the chicks leaving the nests is about three months for both the Grey and Purple Herons. Feeding of the young is done by both parents. The chicks beg for food by tugging at their parents' bill to stimulate regurgitation of the fish caught.

The frenzy of activity at the heronry at the Mangrove Arboretum should continue until the end of June. Since February 1997, at least 60 individual nests of the Grey and Purple Herons have been counted. So do gather your family and friends, grab your binoculars, telescopes and cameras and come and get a piece of the action before the breeding season ends.





VOLUNTEERING

AT THE PARK

Lou Ek Hee

The morning group was wonderful. We saw quite a lot during our walk around route 1 and had learnt that one needs to be patient and has to keep one's eyes open and ears peeled and Nature will reveal its wonders.

I was at the Sungei Buloh Nature Park as a volunteer guide for the first BirdWatch event, the aim of which was to promote bird-watching as a leisure activity for city-bound Singaporeans. Three months back, I learnt about the volunteer programme at the Park and attended a training course for volunteers as I had always been interested in nature and outdoor activities.

For a few months, I had almost made Sungei Buloh Nature Park my second home. After work on Saturdays, I would zip down to the Park, have a quick chat with the highly sociable human inhabitants and then trek out to one of the 3 routes with my trusty binoculars and a 20x telescope borrowed from the Park to acquaint myself with the Park's inhabitants. Route 2 and 3 are my favourite routes as there are fewer visitors but Route 1 seems to be the best for viewing the little waders. I got to know the Redshanks, Greenshanks, the Whimbrels and their relatives quite well with the help of the telescope.

I had also attended one of the wader ringing exercises as a volunteer. At dusk, mist nets were set up in the ponds surrounded by Route 1. The nets were placed such that the birds will be caught as they fly in for the night. It was very hard work walking in the mud to set up the nets. Often we would sink right up to our thighs and occasionally even deeper.

Extracting our legs from the mud takes a lot of stamina. Eventually, the nets were set up and we retired to the visitor centre to take a rest. The exercises from then on consisted of trekking back to the ponds hourly to check the nets. We caught several Whimbrels, Redshanks, Greenshanks, Pacific Golden Plovers and even one fruit-eating bat. We had to take care



Measuring a captive bird

not to stress the birds and put rings around their legs quickly. We made about 10 trips to round up the captive birds. Close to 11pm, the number of captives

dwindled to zero for 3 successive checks, so we decided to call it a day. By 12 midnight, all was done and the equipment safely tucked away. The whole ringing exercise lasted about 6 hours. The group of us, tired and muddy, washed up and settled down to our long-delayed dinner. The rest made ready for bed and a good night's rest.

The wader ringing exercise was an extremely good experience as it provided the opportunity to identify the birds on hand. There were the added bonuses of being in the Park in the evening when it is quiet, dark and peaceful, to walk in the cool of the night and to come up face to face with the occasional nocturnal wildlife.

Volunteering at the Park has been enjoyable and rewarding. There is so much to see, to experience and to learn. One will need many, many years to get acquainted with the Park and to fully enjoy the fauna and flora. Happy birding to one and all and may the wonders of nature that this Island is endowed with be with us for a long time to come!



E!

Have you ever wondered how you can share...

... the Encounters you have,
... the Experiences that enthralled you,
... an Expression of your feelings,

... with regard to the Park?

Eureka! This column of the newsletter is reserved exclusively for you to do exactly just that. So let E! be what this column of the newsletter is to represent, your experiences at the Park.

Send your E! to:

Public Relations Officer
Sungei Buloh Nature Park
1 Neo Tiew Crescent
Singapore 718925
E-mail: sbnp@pacific.net.sg

BE A VOLUNTEER!

Are you above 18?
Do you love nature and the outdoors?
Are you people oriented and would love to be of service to others?

If your answers are YES, come join us as a Volunteer of the Park.

Please contact:
Education Department
Tel: 793 7377
Fax: 793 7271
Email: sbnp@pacific.net.sg

COMING UP

Activity Stations

Ong Chui Leng

*In the end, we will conserve only what we love,
We will love only what we understand,
We will understand only what we are taught.*

Baba Dioum

With this philosophy in mind, we aim to inform and educate the visitors about the wildlife in the Park so that one will learn to appreciate and understand the value of our natural heritage.

Four Activity Stations were set up along route 1, hides 1B, 1C, 1D and 1E. The Activity Stations showcase the various habitats of the Park with themes of Mangroves, Mudflats, Freshwater Pond and Secondary Forest.

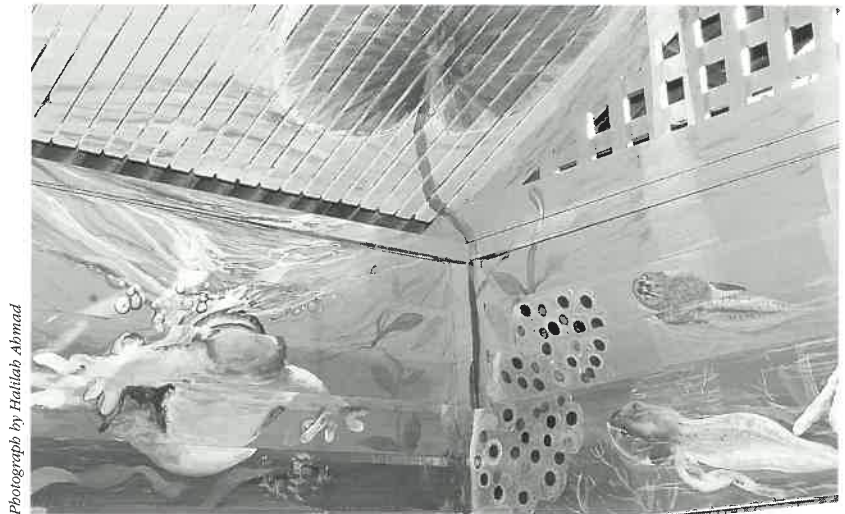
Realistic murals create the scene and the mood of the various habitats the hides depict. Visitors would be viewing the habitats from the perspective of its inhabitants.

The themes reflect the various habitats found within the Park and enable a systematic classification of common flora and fauna in the Park. Hands-on activities allow one to find out more about the flora and fauna of the Park.

Commencing in January, works on the hides were completed by the beginning of March. Visitors who came during the March

vacation and thereafter would be entering the world of the Park's inhabitants and will be finding out about the favourite food of the Atlas Moth caterpillar; where the Changeable Lizard lays its eggs; who eats what in a freshwater pond and much more.

So remember to visit the four hides, 1B, 1C, 1D and 1E, all along route 1.



Photograph by Hailiah Ahmad

Hide 1D: Freshwater Pond

The Nesting Herons of Sungei Buloh

Do you know that the largest bird in Singapore congregates together to nest in colonies?

Do you want to see a spectacular sight which takes place only once a year?

How would you like to watch a bird, expert in fishing, catch a fish to feed its young?

Nesting for the Herons of Sungei Buloh has already commenced. Come see the proud parents and their fledglings before the nesting season is over!

Park Information

Opening Hours

7.30 am to 7.00 pm on weekdays
7.00 am to 7.00 pm on weekends
and Public Holidays

Admission

\$1.00 per adult
\$0.50 per child/student/senior citizen

Audio-visual Show

Mondays to Saturdays:
9.00 am, 11.00 am, 1.00 pm,
3.00 pm, 5.00 pm
Sundays and Public Holidays:
Hourly from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm

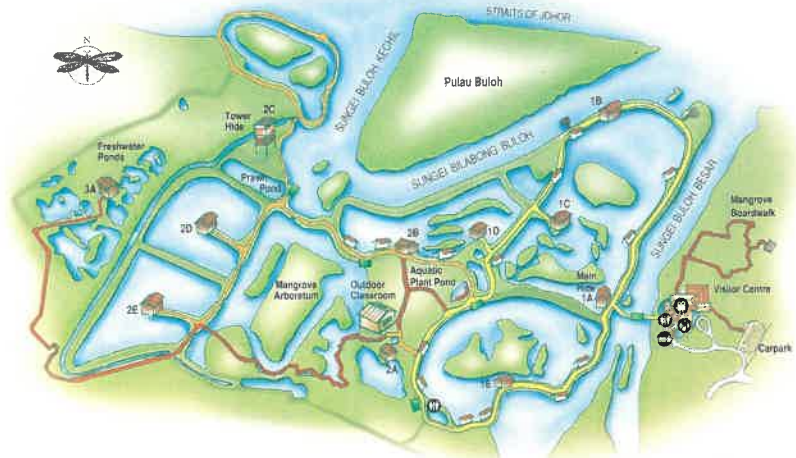
Getting to the Park

Mondays to Saturdays:
TIBS 925 from Kranji Dam carpark
(15 min walk to the Park)
Sundays and Public Holidays:
TIBS 925 to the Park's entrance

Sungei Buloh Nature Park

1 Neo Tiew Crescent
Singapore 718925
Tel: 793 7377
Fax: 793 7271
E-mail: sbnp@pacific.net.sg

Map of the Park



Map to the Park

