

PASSAGE

Friends of the Museums Singapore

July / August 2021



art
history
culture
people



President's Letter

Dear Friends,

Just when we thought things were getting better, Singapore was hit by another wave of community cases of Covid-19 and safety measures had to be tightened. FOM's council once again made the tough decision to pause all in-person activities for May and June. Fortunately, with the decrease in new cases and easing of restrictions, docent-led tours will resume from 1 July. We are thankful to our partner organisations for their understanding and support of these decisions.

After weeks of intense research and virtual presentations, FOM docents are looking forward to guiding visitors through the various special exhibitions such as *Life in Edo/Russel Wong in Kyoto* at the Asian Civilisations Museum, *Sikhs in Singapore – A Story Untold* at the Indian Heritage Centre, or the Singapore Art Museum's latest exhibition titled *Wikicliki*, at the National Gallery Singapore. I do hope you make time for these exceptional exhibitions before they close.

FOM's council has been working hard to come up with new offerings for our members. In July and August, we are launching a new virtual tour series, *Museums Around the World with FOM*. Docents and friends currently overseas will take us on tours of museums in their cities. Look for more information and register via the FOM website for this Members Only series.

Have you ever visited Fort Siloso on Pulau Blakang Mati, now known as Sentosa? FOM has recently partnered with Fort Siloso, the only restored coastal gun battery in Singapore and a military museum, to provide guiding services. Congratulations to the first cohort of 19 Fort Siloso docents on successfully completing the pilot docent training programme.

In April, FOM volunteers were treated to a special Volunteer Appreciation Event titled *William Farquhar's Academy of Magick* held over three days to accommodate the more than 150 volunteers who signed up to attend. My sincere thanks to Christine Zeng and her wonderful team of volunteers, especially Hilary White, Simone Lee, Charlotte Dawson and Jyoti Ramesh, for decorating multiple spaces and creating an enchanting atmosphere. Thanks also to our photographers Gisella Harrold, Angela Echanove and Joyce Le Mesurier for capturing the special moments. FOM volunteers attended the event resplendent in creative outfits in keeping with the magical theme. While the plan was to award one individual as best dressed, the high quality of creativity compelled us to award three best dressed team awards. In a year that has been tough on many fronts it was great to see our volunteers have some fun. A special word of gratitude to our colleagues at the National Museum of Singapore for their generosity and support, which made it possible to host this event.

Did you know that Singapore has more than 350 parks and four nature reserves? See if you can spot the creatures featured in this nature themed issue of *PASSAGE* magazine when you take a walk in Singapore's many green spaces. For indoor fun, head to the National Library of Singapore to borrow books from their vast collection and view the *Nature: Environmental Histories of Singapore* exhibition. Or visit the National Museum of Singapore to explore *A Voyage of Love and Longing* exhibition which combines natural history drawings from the William Farquhar Collection with Malay poetry to ask the question *What if we let nature 'speak' our emotions to our loved ones when we are far away from them?*

FOM volunteers hail from many different countries. With the current pandemic, many have not been able to visit their parents, siblings, and even children. I pray that all your loved ones are safe wherever they are and want you to know that you are not alone. We are all in this together. I am sure one day soon we will put this pandemic behind us. While spoken in a different context, Mr Nelson Mandela's words seem apt here: "It seems impossible until it's done." Meanwhile, you continue to give back by volunteering for Singapore's museums, art and heritage centres where you can, both in person and online. I commend you for your contributions.

Best wishes for Singapore's upcoming National Day.



Garima G Lalwani
FOM President 2021



Sim Chong Teck was awarded the Salome de Decker Award for 2021. Chong Teck has volunteered for many committees over the years, including FOM's Hospitality and Welcoming Committee. He is always willing to lend a hand and embodies the spirit of service. Chong Teck also received his 10-year service pin this year.



PASSAGE

A publication of
Friends of the Museums Singapore

Managing Editor

Andra Leo
passage@fom.sg

Commissioning Editor

Patricia Bjaaland Welch

News Editor

Durriya Dohadwala

Photography

Gisella Harrold

Editors/Contributors

Jemima Barton
Carla Forbes-Kelly
Amanda Jaffe

Advertising Manager

Michelle Foo
advertising@fom.sg

Printed and Designed by

Xpress Print Pte Ltd
61 Tai Seng Avenue
Print Media Hub @ Paya Lebar iPark, #03-03
Singapore 534167
sales@xpress.sg

MCI (P) 050/12/2020
ISSN 1793-8619
UEN: T04SS0218E

Supported by



The views expressed here are solely those of the authors in their private capacity and do not in any way represent the views of the National Heritage Board and/or any government agencies.

Welcome PASSAGE

President's Letter

i

Features

Sketchbook: Singapore's Natural World <i>by Yusoff Abdul Latiff</i>	2
ArteFact: Nature in Clay <i>by Wang Li-Ching</i>	4
Museum Watch: The National Library Board (Singapore) <i>by Patricia Bjaaland Welch</i>	5
Photographing Birds in Singapore: A Noob's Perspective <i>by Joyce Le Mesurier</i>	6
The Original Ancestor Chicken <i>by Jo Groarke</i>	8
Dragonflies and Damselflies in Singapore <i>by Jo Wright</i>	9
ACM's Jewellery Gallery <i>by Darlene D Kasten</i>	10
A Journey Through Farquhar's Drawings <i>by Jyoti Ramesh and Hilary White</i>	12
Singapore as a Southeast Asian Garden <i>by John N Miksic</i>	14
A Renoir in the Attic <i>by Paul Spencer Sochaczewski</i>	16
Plants That Colour Our World <i>by Kim Jane Saunders</i>	20
Nature and Art at STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery <i>by Roopa Dewan</i>	22
Red Gems among Brown and Green <i>by Uta Weigelt</i>	24
"Eek, a snake!" <i>by Tim Clark</i>	26
The Crimson Sunbird <i>by Rob Arnold</i>	28
Island Notes <i>by Darly Furlong</i>	29
Chihuly at Gardens by the Bay	30

FOM Member Activities

Japanese Docents	31
Explore Singapore!	31

Museum Information and Exhibitions

Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM)	32
Gillman Barracks (GB)	32
NTU CCA	32
Indian Heritage Centre (IHC)	32
Malay Heritage Centre (MHC)	32
National Museum of Singapore (NMS)	32
NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts	33
Peranakan Museum (TPM)	33
Singapore Art Museum (SAM)	33
STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery	33
Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall (SYSNMH)	33

On the Cover: A selection of wildlife native to Singapore (from top left to right, clockwise): Tawny Coster (butterfly), Brown Anole (lizard), Crested Serpent Eagle, Golden Orb Web Spider, Jungle Fowl with chicks, Violet tree-climbing crab (*Episesarma versicolor*), Reticulated python, a Plaine Squirrel, and in the centre, a Common Kingfisher. Photos courtesy of FOM photographers Rob Arnold, Joyce Le Mesurier, Jo Wright and Isaac Sim.

FOM is a volunteer, non-profit society dedicated to providing volunteer guides and financial support to Singapore's museums and cultural institutions and to delivering programmes to enhance the community's knowledge of Asia's history, culture and art.

FOM is an Associate Member of the World Federation of Friends of the Museums.

FOM member privileges include free admission to NHB museums (excluding special exhibitions); access to FOM programmes including docent training, lectures, study tours, volunteer opportunities; a subscription to the FOM magazine, *PASSAGE*, and discounts at selected retail outlets, theatres and restaurants. Membership in FOM ranges from \$30 (senior) - \$120 (family) depending on category of membership.

For more information about FOM, visit our website www.fom.sg or contact the FOM office.

FOM Office

Friends of the Museums (Singapore)
No.61 Stamford Road,
#02-06 Stamford Court
178892 Singapore: (tel: +65 6337 3685)
Website: www.fom.sg

Administration: Katherine Lim

Office Hours: Monday-Friday
9:30 am – 2:30 pm

FOM COUNCIL

President Garima G Lalwani

Vice President Susan Fong

Hon Secretary Kwan Min Yee

Hon Treasurer Yasmin Javeri Krishan

Council Representatives

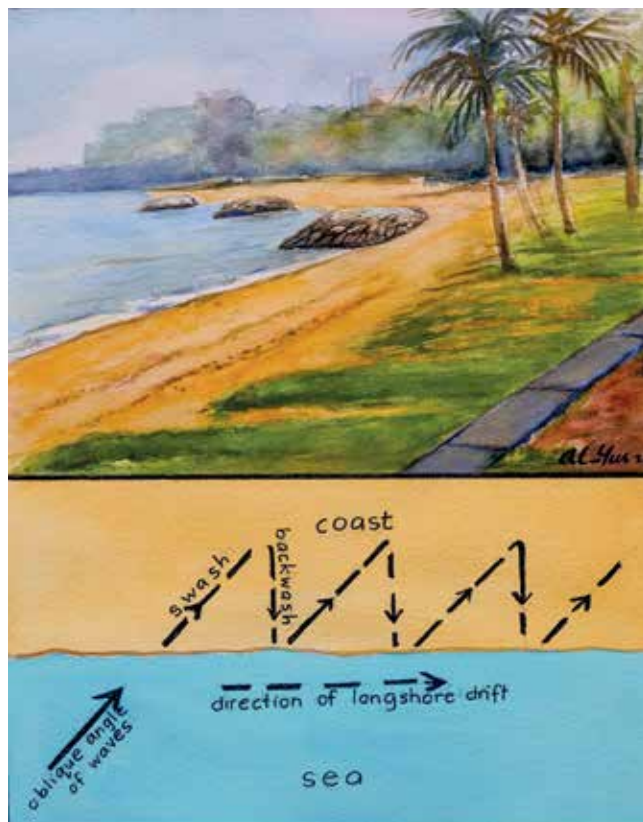
Kimberly Arnold
Charlotte Dawson
Michelle Foo
Irina Grishaeva
Gisella Harrold
Laura Socha
Christine Zeng

Unless otherwise stated, the abbreviation FOM used in this newsletter refers to Friends of the Museums Singapore.

FOM is not responsible for statements expressed in the signed articles and interviews.

Singapore's Natural World

By Yusoff Abdul Latiff



Because of land reclamation along the East Coast in the mid-1960s, we lost the entire stretch of sandy beach from Tanjong Rhu, almost to Changi Point. Earth from hills in Bedok and Tampines was used as infilling material between the old shoreline and the retaining wall that became the new coastline. However, nature was kind to us. In less than a decade, a new, naturally sloping sandy beach was formed. While out walking one day, the late Mr David Marshall, Singapore's first Chief Minister, noticed the gradual built-up of the beach and called the press to show them this phenomenon.

Strong undersea currents had brought sandy material from the seabed to the retaining wall's base, forming a slope that was visible at low tide. Thereafter, longshore drift came into action. Waves coming at an oblique angle to the coastline caused the breaking waves (the swash) to deposit sand up the slope. The returning water, the backwash, took the same material straight back into the sea because of the pull of gravity. However, with the swash stronger than the backwash, more material was deposited up the slope than was taken back into the sea. This continuous swash and backwash gradually built up a sandy slope all along the retaining wall.

As this was happening, there were some adaptations; granite boulders encased in wire mesh were placed at intervals (as seen in the sketch), interrupting the longshore drift and creating mini lagoons in between. At some points far from the coast, where drains emptied dirty water into the open sea through concrete cylinders, a groyne (a barrier perpendicular to the shore) was formed. This prevented the sandy material from migrating farther and created a wider beach. After the initial deposits at one or two places, the backwash became greater than the swash, eroding what had been deposited earlier. Anyone walking along the beach can see that the concrete retaining wall is now flush with the dark brown infilling material and on the seaward side is the newly formed sandy beach. If the new sandy beach had not formed, East Coast Park would not be the attractive recreational and resort-like area that it is today. Perhaps an information board telling the story of this stretch of beach could be erected.



Photo courtesy of Jo Wright

As Singapore evolves from a City-in-a-Garden to a City-in-Nature, more wild animal species are making their presence felt. The most frequently seen are the otter families (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) frolicking in our parks and ponds and feasting on carp and koi, but there are more.

In Malay folklore, the lesser mousedeer (*Tragulid kanchil*) fondly known as *Sang Kancil* (the respected small one) was cunning and smart enough to outwit larger animals such as crocodiles. They are thriving in the Mandai Nature Reserve. Sadly, while dashing across Bukit Timah Expressway, unaware of the land bridge built for them, two Samba deer (*Rusa unicolor*) have been killed by vehicles. There is also a colony of palm civet cats (*Oxurus hermaphroditus*), among the fruit trees at the old Muslim cemetery in Siglap. They used to raid the fruit in our garden and also killed pigeons, leaving the carcasses in our ceiling.

Lately wild boars (*Sus scrofa*) have made forays into HDB estates such as Punggol, injuring people. One morning a few years ago, while searching for fallen durians in Pulau Ubin, we were beaten to them by boars who had left their hoofmarks and empty husks behind. Creatures such as the Raffles banded langur, the long-tailed macaque, the Malayan colugo, pied oriental hornbill, Sunda pangolin, slow loris and a range of others have also been observed. We may meet more of these creatures when Tengah New Town, touted as a Town-in-a-Forest, is completed.



Photo courtesy of Joyce Le Mesurier

Singapore's very own mini-Jurassic Park is the Evolution Garden in the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Imagine that in the age of dinosaurs the ferns here were food for these gigantic creatures. Ferns are among the most primitive plants on earth, starting life more than 300 million years ago. While dinosaurs appeared 250 million years ago and became extinct 65 million years ago, ferns have survived to the present. In our garden, we have the Boston fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata*), maidenhair fern (*Adiantum*), staghorn fern (*Platycerium*) and bird's-nest fern (*Asplenium nidus*) as well as tree ferns (*Cyathea* and *Dicksoniaceae*) which can grow to a height of 15 metres and live 100 years or more. The tree fern derived its name from the trunk-like stem that supports the fronds. The three vertical woody trunks are petrified trees, with the trunks sedimented and preserved by volcanic ash or earth movements and their organic matter replaced by inorganic minerals such as silica. While there, do search for the 'dinosaur' footprints.

Yusoff Abdul Latiff is a retired teacher who now indulges in painting watercolours with a focus on intricate Peranakan houses, colourful landscapes and detailed portraits.

Nature in Clay

By Wang Li-Ching

Teapots made in Yixing are highly treasured by aficionados of Chinese tea around the world. Yixing, the pottery capital of China, is situated in a fertile and scenic area near Lake Tai in the Yangtze Delta and is well known for its *zisha* wares. *Zisha* literally means purple sand, which highlights the two distinctive characteristics of the local clay – its purplish colour and sandy body. Though excavating stones may seem like a straightforward task, processing *zisha* clay requires far more artifice and human effort than other clays. Traditionally, experienced Yixing potters find their stones, pound them into fine powder, then sieve and ‘nurse’ them for a year or two.

There are several types of clay in Yixing and their three basic colours are purplish brown, red and creamy white. Potters may use a specific original colour and mix different types of clay or add mineral pigments to achieve the desired tones. The embedded iron, mica, quartz and kaolin give *zisha* clay its rich colour and fine grains as well as a remarkable malleability and hardness. The high-fired Yixing ware (at around 1200°C) fashions its natural silken sheen even when fired unglazed.

Yixing has a long history of producing utilitarian vessels. However, it wasn’t until the 16th century that *zisha* teapots won their prestigious status. Instead of whisking tea in a cup (as in the Song dynasty style), steeping rolled tea leaves in a pot became popular in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644 CE). Taking centre stage in tea preparation, teapots developed a recognisable form that remains popular today.

Gong Chun (active in the early 16th century) is credited as the first *zisha* teapot master. He was a keen observer of nature and notably made a pot decorated with the patterns of ginkgo tree burls, signifying the importance of naturalistic iconography in Yixing potters’ creations. While some *zisha* collectors are attracted to simple designs, allowing them to fully appreciate the pure colour and sublime form, others favour ornamented pieces that often draw inspiration from flora and fauna, such as the bamboo motifs (below).



Teapot, early 18th century. Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum

Each *zisha* teapot represents a personal statement. Unlike most potteries that utilise a potter’s wheel and divide the labour between several workers, *zisha* artists form and sculpt their pots mainly by hand from beginning to end. Such authorship entitles

potters to sign their pieces, a tradition already

established in the Ming dynasty. Yixing wares are regarded as the world’s earliest examples of studio pottery.

Zisha artists’ fondness for clay, love of nature, and superb pottery skills are seen in the ginger-form teapot (above) exhibited in the Asian Civilisations Museum. The presence of this amazing *trompe l’oeil* object in the Ceramics gallery often bewilders viewers.

Ginger is believed to have originated in Asia and is one of the earliest spices to have found its way to Egypt, Greece and Rome. It is widely used for medicinal and culinary purposes in many ancient cultures. For example, in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), it is prescribed to treat digestive issues, dispel colds and cure other discomforts, while the aroma of the Greeks’ honey-sweetened gingerbread some 4,500 years ago has been travelling around the world for several millennia.

The segment of ginger depicted is the root of the plant. It grows in the ground or underground in a horizontal position. The craggy texture of scale leaves is so realistically rendered that they hardly betray that this is a ceramic teapot. Look carefully and you will find the lid with a small knob on the upper right and a spout on the left, nicely integrated into the design of the root buds. Nature in clay – a rustic elegance with which Yixing teapots will continue to enchant tea lovers.

Source: *The Stonewares of Yixing, from the Ming Period to the Present Day*, by K.S. Lo



Teapot in the form of ginger, late 20th century. Note the teapot’s spout at the very top left. Photo courtesy Patricia Welch

Wang Li-Ching is a docent at the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Honorary Secretary of the Southeast Asian Ceramic Society.

The National Library Board (Singapore)

By Patricia Bjaaland Welch

If you are the Director of the Botanic Gardens studying trees in Malaya and need samples of the branches and leaves at the top of a tree, how do you collect them? Mr Edred Henry Corner's solution was to buy domesticated Berok monkeys who had been trained to collect coconuts. They didn't come cheap (the monkey he bought cost 28 Straits dollars, approximately S\$375 today), but it worked. The Berok monkeys were later deployed on Bukit Timah and are credited as the collectors of some of the specimens you can see in the Botanic Gardens Herbarium today. That story, together with a specimen Berok monkey, can be seen in the current exhibition *Human Nature: Environmental Histories of Singapore*. No, the monkey wasn't run over by a steam roller; he and the other specimens in the exhibition are preserved in a prone flat position to conserve storage space in the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum; all the exhibition's specimens are on loan from there.

The exhibition, which should not be missed by children of all ages and their parents, opens with a juvenile tapir. You can read its story and see a specimen from now through 26 September, on level 10 in the Gallery of the National Library Building in Victoria Street. William Farquhar, the first Resident of Singapore, even kept one for a pet, noting that it was "as tame and familiar as any of the dogs about the house". Unfortunately, just like many dogs, he was also good at begging for table scraps and eventually died from being fed too much bread, cakes and the like.

Farquhar, as well as many of Singapore's early collectors and the naturalists you'll meet in the exhibition, were all too often amateurs who when they left, took their collections and notes with them – for example Alfred Russel Wallace, whom you'll read about elsewhere in this issue. Most of his collection left the region either before or with him. Kew Gardens in the UK owe a lot to specimens that originated in Singapore.

Not all took their discoveries with them. Some of these early, self-appointed naturalists were magnificent note-takers and collectors and on display are their valuable early records, sketches and collections of everything from brightly coloured butterflies and birds to spiders and crabs.

Many were travellers just passing through the region, but travellers with keen eyes who kept diaries, Ong Tae Hae for

example, a merchant and scholar who left China on a 10-year journey of trade and exploration between 1783-1794. Their notes and illustrations were invaluable in the pre-camera and iPhone days.

But the real experts were the region's indigenous sources and early residents. Among the highlights of the exhibition are the many short, first-person videos telling us of ancestors who could identify the fish on their line by the way they took the bait, or the two women chatting on a bench, congenially sharing the medicinal and health secrets of local plants.

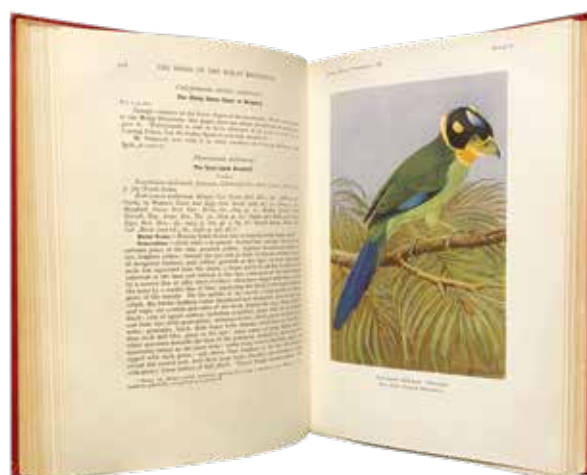
Using nature for economic development is the final section of the exhibition. Here you learn that since modern Singapore was established in 1819, we've lost more than 99 percent of our original vegetation. Awareness of that fact stimulated the idea of reversing direction, so Lee Kuan Yew launched Singapore's transformation into a "Garden City" focused on greening spaces for public recreation. Today, we've set our sights on becoming a "City in a Garden", or perhaps as you've read on page 3, even a "City in Nature". To see the city's journey, don't miss this wonderful exhibition, complete with a roaring tiger – one specimen that wasn't flattened into a pancake.



A natural specimen of a Berok monkey on loan from the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum



Tigers weren't native to Singapore but found their way across the straits to give birth to cubs and find easy meals. Cruel traps and gun-toting hunters eventually caused their demise. As you'll learn, the last tiger in Singapore was not killed under the Raffles Hotel's billiard table.



Birds of the Malay Peninsula, one of the many early records of our region's natural flora and fauna on display in the exhibition

Patricia Bjaaland Welch is one of NLB's biggest users and fans and one of their many community volunteers.

Photos courtesy of Patricia Bjaaland Welch

Photographing Birds in Singapore: A Noob's Perspective

By Joyce Le Mesurier

Learn the lingo.

"A BIF shot of the CKF, at PRP." If you are wondering what this means, welcome to my initiation into birding in Singapore last November.

I remember sheepishly asking the author of a post on the 'Bird Sightings' Facebook page to explain what the acronyms meant, since I was a noob (a newbie). It translates as "a bird in flight shot of the Common Kingfisher in Pasir Ris Park". I quickly realised that the



Common Kingfisher in flight at Pasir Ris Park

sooner I mastered the acronyms, the easier it would be to unravel the marvels of the Singapore birding scene and sound like a seasoned birder.

Is camera equipment key?

Absolutely! My interest in birding was piqued after my first encounter with Singapore's national bird, the Crimson Sunbird, at the Botanic Gardens in October 2020. I had only my mobile phone with me at the time, so returned with a bridge camera that had a longer zoom reach than my usual Canon DSLR set-up. I was thrilled to get some pretty shots of a crimson sunbird feeding on heliconia nectar. As time passed, I became frustrated by my camera's small sensor, which affected the quality of my photos. On one occasion, two photographers checked out my camera and looked rather disdainful; I did not have the 'right' birding camera gear. In January this year, I decided to commit the time and money to mastering bird photography, so purchased the Canon R5, a full frame mirrorless camera, and the RF100-500 lens, a good combination for bird and wildlife photography. Some birders have expensive, 'bazooka' prime lenses, which result in images of outstanding quality. However, the underlying principles that make a photograph good and interesting (composition, light, timing) prevail, with much still dependent on the photographer's skill and eye.

Is jungle camo needed?

Not at all! I showed up to my first bird sighting dressed in a colourful top and leggings and stuck out like a sore thumb in a sea of birders wearing full camouflage or khaki tops and bottoms with their long lenses covered by camouflage-print rain-covers. I have recently toned my attire down to more muted colours but will not be going 'full jungle camo'. I have, however, put in an order for the camo lens rain covers as that seems to be the only print they come in.

Useful resources.

I recommend the pocket guide *A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of Singapore* by Yong Ding Li and the Singapore

Birds Project website (www.singaporebirds.com) as a good starting point. I also use the Singapore-centric GoBird and NSSBirdGuide apps, and the eBird and Merlin Bird ID apps from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

How does one spot the birds?

Social media plays a key role in the bird photography scene in Singapore. Apart from posts in the Bird Sightings, Singapore Birders and Nature Society (Singapore) Facebook pages, there are Telegram group chats that provide notifications of bird sightings and their locations. These sources often spark a mad rush of birders flocking to a location to spot a 'star' bird. You may have seen photos of the fluffy white baby Barred Eagle Owl recently posted on social media; the rush to see him was totally justified. The fastest and easiest way to find the location of a star bird is to follow the tripods and long lenses.

Bird spotting requires being observant, listening for bird calls and watching for movement. A good pair of binoculars is very useful. Birding can be rewarding and yet also frustrating, especially when you return home empty-

handed after spending hours outdoors in our hot, humid climate. Birders are happy when they've spotted and shot a 'lifer' (a bird spotted for the first time in the wild). If uncertain about what bird you've spotted, the motto is "shoot first, ID later". The Nature Society (Singapore) Bird Group lists 407 recorded species in Singapore. Some species are not local residents but migrants or passage visitors. These can usually be seen in Singapore from September to April.



Barred Eagle Owllet making its maiden appearance at Rifle Range Link



This Blue-eared Kingfisher, photographed at Hindhede Quarry is an uncommon resident and one of Joyce's newest shots.

Where do birds reside?

Birds reside in specific areas and habitats depending on their food sources and nesting locations. The Mangrove Pitta is found exclusively among the mangrove swamps in Pasir Ris Park; the Buffy Fish Owl family can be spotted in Hampstead Wetlands Park; the beautiful Copper Throated Sunbird flits about in the Sungei Buloh Wetlands Reserve and a pair of Grey Headed Fish Eagles often dive for fish along the Ulu Pandan River.

Optimal times for birding.

Whoever came up with the old saying about the early bird getting the worm wasn't kidding. The optimal times are from 7:00-10:30 am or between 3:30-6:00 pm. The morning light is soft and beautiful from around 6:45-7:45 am. Raptors such as the white bellied sea eagle usually start hunting for food before 7:30 am, whereas the crested serpent eagle often catches its prey in the afternoons. However, you can never predict if or when a bird may appear or hunt for food, and birders like to snap their birds with FIM (food in mouth) shots – even better, a BIF with FIM shot. If only we could make appointments with birds to show up at specific times and save us the long hours of waiting.



A male Baya Weaver with its intricate nest

Nature is amazing.

In my relatively short time as a bird photographer, I have admired the amazing architecture and sheer complexity of nests woven from single long strands of grass by the male baya weavers performing Cirque du Soleil-esque stunts to attract a female to mate with. Did you know that once a female hornbill has made herself comfortable in a good nesting site, the male brings lumps of soil and together they build a wall of mud to seal her inside, he from the outside and she from the inside, with only a narrow slit wide enough for the male to pass food through? A female hornbill remains inside the nest for three to five months while her eggs are incubating and the chicks grow up.



Hornbill feeding its chicks in the nest at Hampstead Wetlands Reserve.

Nature can appear cruel. I was really upset when I heard of the fate of a baby woodpecker I had photographed a day before. It had fallen into the pond below and been devoured by a monitor lizard after a Javan mynah had pulled it out of the nest. However, we are just observers and cannot interfere with how nature works.



A yellow-vented Bulbul feeding its two chicks in a nest at Pasir Ris Park

Bird(er)s of a feather flock together.

One of the positive outcomes of the Covid pandemic for me has been the discovery of our open spaces, our nature parks and the interesting varieties of birds in Singapore. The birding community is a friendly and helpful one, with experienced birders happy to share tips and sightings. I have made new *kakis* (friends) and enjoy the camaraderie. I hope you too will discover some of the wonderful birdlife and make some birding *kakis* as well.

Joyce Le Mesurier is an award-winning portrait, travel and landscape photographer who enjoys telling photo stories. Her images can be viewed at www.fotojoys.com, on Instagram (@fotojoys) and her Facebook page. When not behind her camera, Joyce enjoys playing bridge, cooking, flower arranging and pottery.



All photos by the author unless otherwise noted



Male Copper-throated Sunbird at Sungei Buloh Wetlands Reserve

The Original Ancestor Chicken

By Jo Groarke

When the red junglefowl struts his stuff, he is a sight to behold, a veritable Adonis of the feathered world. Sporting brightly coloured, iridescent plumage, he has little trouble attracting females to his harem or protecting his patch from rival males. This is a bird who takes grooming seriously. He bathes regularly in dust, because he instinctively knows this will help maintain the right balance of oil in his glorious feathers. This bona fide good looker always looks his best.

Where did this alpha rooster come from? He is the domestic chicken's wild relative, the kingpin of the chicken world, the primary ancestor chicken, whose Latin name is *Gallus Gallus*. He originated in Asia and enjoys a hot climate. Unlike other wild animals, red junglefowl weren't domesticated for their meat or eggs; they roamed freely, happily going about their business until we intervened and began breeding them for cockfighting and their colourful feathers for religious ceremonies and rituals. Domestication occurred from 2,000 to more than 8,000 years ago.

It would be easy to feel sorry for his female counterpart with her bland, brown colouring, but it's an excellent camouflage for life in the wild. She's a pragmatic chick looking for a beau who can provide the most amount of food during courtship irrespective of

social standing, good looks or charm. This is an important decision for our wise hen because after courtship, she becomes a solo mum, responsible for both eggs and chicks. As expected, her Lothario partner can be found defending his territory from other males and also spreading the love around his harem of hens.



For dining, forget butter-rich cuisine. Both the male and female are excellent foragers of healthy options and enjoy pecking at a varied diet of grains, seeds, ripe fruit, insects and other tasty vegetation.

How can we be sure we are looking at an ancestor chicken and not a domestic chicken? Well, our handsome friend has some distinguishing features: a white ear patch, a white rump at the beginning of his tail, and grey legs. Unlike his domesticated relative, he is capable of flying short distances to roost in treetops – a useful attribute for a bird that is naturally skittish, especially when he senses people or predators nearby.

However, there's another way you can tell you are in the presence of *Gallus Gallus*. When he crows, his *cock-a-doodle-doo* sounds strangled and he doesn't quite finish the last note. On a positive, this abrupt end to his crowing does wonders for attracting the ladies.

Sadly, our red junglefowl was previously an endangered species, under threat from loss of habitat, poaching and interbreeding with the domestic chicken. Incredibly, a 1927 survey recorded red junglefowl as being extinct locally. Then in the 1980s, he was spotted by a keen birdwatcher on Pulau Ubin. Locals think he made the short trip over from Johor – is it possible he hitched a ride on a bumboat? Ever resourceful, the red junglefowl eventually made his reappearance on the mainland in 1993 and today can be commonly sighted across Singapore.

The next time you meet our fair-feathered friend in a national park or downtown, take some time to study his behaviour. He is striking to look at, fun to watch, and given his introverted nature around humans, you can be confident he won't take you for a walk on the wild side.

Jo Groarke is an ACM docent who enjoys running jungle-like trails and spotting wildlife. She has a particular fondness for Singapore's oldest nature park at MacRitchie Reservoir.



All photos by Rob Arnold, photographed at Bishan Park

Dragonflies and Damselflies in Singapore

By Jo Wright



An Ornate Coraltail

Dragonflies and damselflies are simply amazing creatures. Don't believe me? Well, until I signed up with FOM Members Care to take part in the biannual NParks Dragonfly Watch in March, I barely gave them a second glance – otters are far more interesting, right? But now, every time I'm out and about looking for otters or simply walking the dog next to a lake or pond, I keep a keen eye out for them – and we have so many of them to see.

Dragonflies and damselflies are part of the *Odonata* family of insects. They have been around for over 300 million years and were the first winged insects to evolve. Their name means "toothed one" in Greek and refers to their serrated teeth, perfect for their carnivorous diet. They are voracious predators of mosquitoes: in the larval stage they feed on mosquito larvae and when fully grown, a single adult dragonfly can eat from 30 to several hundred adult mosquitos a day.

Both dragonflies and damselflies have two pairs of wings, and each set can function independently, which means that they can fly in every direction, even backwards. This ability makes them fearsome hunters, enables them to eat on the wing and even mate on the wing.

You can easily tell dragonflies and damselflies apart from each other – damselflies tend to have a longer and thinner body and at rest their wings are usually folded and held up close together above their body. Dragonflies hold their wings out perpendicular to their bodies and flat when resting; it's easier to see then that their hindwings are broader than the forewings.

Singapore punches well above its size for the number of species, over 120, compared with just a shade under 150 for all of Europe. Why is counting the number of species important? Like otters, the abundance of dragonflies and damselflies and the number of species present can tell us much about water quality and how well a water body and the surrounds are being managed in terms of fauna and flora biodiversity.

My appreciation of dragonflies and damselflies was brought about by attending the NParks training in February,

in preparation for their biannual Dragonfly Watch, a citizen science survey of the most common dragonflies and damselflies. Dragonfly Watch is part of NParks' *Community in Nature* (CIN) initiative and is a national movement to connect and engage different groups in the community to conserve Singapore's natural heritage. Rather like FOM docent tours, FOM study groups or Explore Singapore walks, CIN can serve to open people's eyes to the wonders of what is around them and really think about the possibilities that can be achieved.



A Yellowbar Flutterer

If you want to see dragonflies and damselflies for yourself, then the best time to spot them is from 9:00 am onwards on a sunny day. Prime locations, according to the most recently published NParks survey, include Springleaf Nature Park, Tampines Eco Garden and Lorong Halus. But any body of still, clean, fresh water with plenty of plants growing in and around it will most likely have its share of these insects. And if it's raining, you could always consider going to Dragonfly Lake at Gardens by the Bay where you can admire the stainless steel and glass creations of Elsie Yu, "Dragonfly Riders", giant dragonfly sculptures measuring five by six metres.

If you'd like to take part in the next Dragonfly Watch or any of the Community in Nature initiatives, keep a lookout on the NParks website or the FOM Members Cares Facebook page, but do sign up quickly as the sessions are quite rightly, very popular with young and old alike!

Jo Wright has been an FOM member since 2008 and has always been fascinated by nature.

Photos by Jo Wright



A Common Scarlet

ACM's Jewellery Gallery:

A Garden of Earthly Delights

By Darlene D Kasten



Headdress, Malay Peninsula, Kedah, early 20th c, grass. Gift of Mr Edmond Chin

There's a company in Singapore that makes jewellery using the national flower, the Vanda Miss Joaquim Orchid, not just the flower's design, but the actual plant material. RISIS began in Singapore in 1976 when a young scientist discovered a way to encapsulate natural orchids in gold. According to their website, they pick the freshest orchids, preserve them with a delicate layer of copper, and then slowly plate each one in 24 karat gold, thereby immortalising these fresh blooms in sophisticated jewellery.

Inspired by the beauty of nature, its herbs, flowers and fruit, people in various parts of Asia have been using plant material for adornment for centuries. In Tang dynasty China, wedding crowns were festooned with real orange blossoms, a symbol of prosperity and fertility. As early as circa 400 CE, in his work *Meghooat*,

the Indian poet Kalidasa mentioned that for adornment, Indian women had special preference for the flowers of particular plant species in every season.

Floral wreaths and garlands are closely identified with Austronesian peoples, used as both ornamental attire and gifts representative of affection or respect. They are worn around the neck or around the head by both men and women, and commonly fashioned of flowers, leaves and vines. However, without modern preservation techniques, most floral adornments are ephemeral and not meant to last beyond the ritual or ceremonial purposes for which they were fashioned.

Greater success for longevity is found using grasses, seeds and other natural fibres, examples of which can be

found in the Asian Civilisations Museum's Jewellery Gallery. One is the early 20th century chest ornament from Luzon, Philippines. Its beads, mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell ornaments are strung together with pineapple fibre.

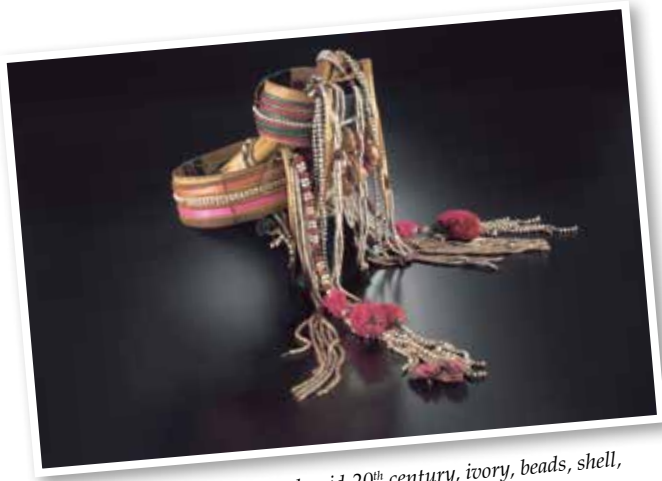
A more obvious example is an early 20th century headdress made entirely of ornamental grass, attributed to the Orang Asli people from southern Kedah, Malaysia. The Orang Asli are descendants of the earliest human inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula. They consist of at least 19 culturally and linguistically distinct subgroups and until about 1960, lived in interior forests hunting, gathering, fishing, practising swidden (shifting) horticulture and trading forest products. They used imperata grass, bamboo, rattan and other forest products to make baskets, tools and shelters. Traditional animists, the Orang Asli also used these natural fibres for adornments and musical instruments for communal rituals to ask earth spirits for permission to plant crops and grant abundant bounties of wild fruit.

The hill tribes of Northern Thailand may not have the year-round abundance of flora found in the tropical climates of peninsular Malaysia, but plant material in other forms still finds its way into an Akha woman's most cherished body adornment, her headdress. The Akha originated in Tibet, migrated to Myanmar in the 19th century and today populate a narrow range that extends from Yunnan province in China to the Golden Triangle in Myanmar, Northern Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Like the Orang Asli, the Akha traditionally practise a kind of shifting horticulture. Because of this semi-nomadic lifestyle, the women wear their family's net worth in the form of headdresses where they employ silver – actual coins or pounded into half globes called *chukhaws* – as both an embellishment and a clear symbol of wealth and status.

The headdress consists of an embroidered cap and frame made of bamboo or rattan. Along with silver, ivory, beads, shell, wool and feathers, decorations are made from Job's tears, small white seeds that are inedible but easy to string and attach along jacket hems and around headdresses. The seeds come in two shapes – round and cylindrical – and on the example in the gallery, they can also be found hanging in long strands.



Vanda Miss Joaquim earrings with orchid slider, courtesy of RISIS, <https://risis.com/>



Headdress, Northern Thailand, mid-20th century, ivory, beads, shell, Job's tears, rattan, wool, feathers



Comb, Lampung, Sumatra, late 19th or early 20th century, sheet silver repoussé

A more ephemeral use of flora can be found adorning a new mother's headdress. Soon after giving birth, the mother will mount a leaf if she bore a daughter or a sprig for a son. Natural materials find their way into a newborn's possession too. The mother's family will give a newborn son a reed bangle and present a lump of cotton to a girl, either of which is attached to the baby's cap where it remains until it's accidentally lost.

With technology, perishable materials obtained from nature were replaced by crafted flora in precious metals and gemstones. Floral designs were maintained since they were important symbols to convey meaning in rituals, to advertise status or to attract marriage proposals. Tall hair combs embossed with floral and leafy patterns were traditionally worn in South Sumatra by marriageable girls.

Sumatra was home to Indonesia's first great empire, Srivijaya, which rose to power in the seventh century, taking pre-eminence from the 11th century onwards. Srivijaya's legacy is evident in the Buddhist/Hindu motifs of the sheet silver repoussé hair comb (*lampung*) with trees, found in the gallery. *Lampung* means floating on water and is also the name of the local city. In Lampung, stylised boats often appear in ornamental design on textiles and jewellery, showing this seafaring community's view of its place in the cosmos. After converting to Islam, figures of gods were abstracted, but floral patterns were not; they were allowed to continue to grow wild.

Three unique *Pohon Hidup* Trees of Life rise from the classic ship-shaped comb decorated with repoussé vines and branches. The towering sprays feature leafy spangles, foliage and fluttering leaves, which evoke fertility. The Tree of Life unites the upper and lower realms of the cosmos and represents the unending vitality of the life force, and the fluttering adornments add a coquettish quality. Another common and characteristic motif in South Sumatran jewellery is a floral medallion representing a gemstone. The motif may derive from the flat, circular jewels seen on the inscribed Srivijaya stone from Sabokingking (686 CE) and we can find six medallions on top of the comb.

Floral motifs in jewellery further evolved in the 19th century Straits Settlements of Malacca, Penang and Singapore after Peranakans began to have increased social interaction at formal receptions with their European counterparts. Surrounded by conspicuous displays of Western jewels, the Nonya began to grow fond of these styles and the symbolism and meaning of floral elements in jewellery became overshadowed by fashion. We have two brooches in the gallery, both from the collection of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee, which reflect this updated aesthetic.

The first is a late 19th century floral spray brooch from Batavia, today's Jakarta, Indonesia. It was made by Van

Arcken & Co., a gold, silver, gem and watchmaking company in the Dutch East Indies and later Indonesia, from 1861 to 1958. The shop was nicknamed "Tiffany from the East" and supplied such esteemed customers as the governor general, the Yogyakarta and Surakarta royal families of Central Java, and members of the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand.) During its heyday, the company employed 120 people in Batavia.



Brooches, left: Van Arcken & Company, Java, Batavia, late 19th century. Gold, diamonds (brilliant cut), 13 x 8.5 cm; right: Indonesia, early 20th century. Gold, diamonds (rose-cut), 9.5 x 6.5 cm. Collection of Mr and Mrs Lee Kip Lee

The floral spray is finely crafted in 22-24 karat gold with brilliant cut diamonds, tied with a ribbon bow and featuring a large central flower *en tremblant* (trembling). Hanging from it are gold tassels in the *en papille* (fringed) style. Next to it is a smaller 20th century version 'inspired by' the Van Arcken brooch. Made in Indonesia to meet the local demand, it boasts elongated tassels with diamonds that are rose cut and likely set in pound gold, *mas paun* in Malay. Like the encapsulated natural orchid we began with, these floral masterpieces evoke the evanescence of a flower, preserved for all time in the eternal beauty of gold.

Darlene D Kasten is an FOM docent with the Asian Civilisations Museum, Malay Heritage Centre and STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery. She is bedazzled by the ACM's Jewellery Gallery.

All photos from the Collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum except where noted

A Journey Through Farquhar's Drawings

By Jyoti Ramesh and Hilary White

When Colonel William Farquhar arrived in Singapore in 1819, he brought with him a collection of 477 natural history drawings commissioned during his earlier stint in Malacca. A selection of these is on display at the Goh Seng Choo (GSC) gallery in the National Museum of Singapore (NMS), rotated every couple of years to preserve the delicate watercolours.

These drawings were born of a desire to document, record and share the new, unfamiliar and exotic, a consequence of the Age of Enlightenment during which the East India Company men lived. In the latest rotation, NMS curators have repositioned these drawings, taking them out of the scientific and colonial context. By imbuing the reframed narrative with a sentimental and lyrical perspective that embraces the rich literary, cultural and artistic heritage of the region, this rotation spotlights the precolonial importance of flora and fauna in colouring the vivid landscape of Malaya.

The theme of *belayar* (sea voyage in Malay) is used both literally and metaphorically as a lens through which to view this collection of drawings. The sea voyages in the archipelago were undertaken for many reasons: trade, kinship, politics, spiritual prowess, a rite of passage (*merantau*), exploration, or exile. The sea voyage was also a deeply transformative experience – mentally, emotionally and spiritually. In the showcase titled *A Voyage of Love and Longing*, the drawings lead us through the flora and fauna that reflect the preparations and emotions associated with these arduous voyages.

The thought and planning required for voyages into the unknown were considerable and extended to the boats used. The massive chengal tree is considered one of the sturdiest in the Southeast Asian region, making it an extremely popular choice for local communities to build boats. In fact, buildings made of chengal are known to last for more than 150 years. The selection of a suitable specimen with a straight trunk and no decayed heartwood is a crucial step. Some woodcarvers would only select a tree without dead branches, thus avoiding a tree that might house bad spirits. Chengal is presumed to be extinct in Singapore, however, you can find this species planted in the National Parks' Eco-Garden.

Boats needed to be sturdy, but they didn't have to be large because provisions were readily available along popular sea routes. Trees such as the terab, a tall deciduous native tree, grew in abundance. The tree's versatile wood could be used for boat repairs, shelter and furniture. The terab, a relative of the jackfruit, produces a delicious but unpleasant

smelling fruit. A popular product from the terab tree is the inner layer of the bark, used to make cloth or baskets. Bark cloth is still produced by some of the Orang Asli (indigenous people) communities for ceremonial garments, such as those worn by the Mah Meri tribe who now inhabit Pulau Carey in Selangor, Malaysia. Hand-woven, together with fringes of the nipa palm, the terab bark is worn for the annual *Puja*

Pantai (Sea Obeisance) ceremony, honouring the spirits of ancestors and the tribe's relationship with the sea. The terab tree can be spotted in Fort Canning Park behind NMS.

Ceremonies were also conducted before departure. The sea voyage could not commence without appeasing the sea spirits with prayers such as *sedekah laut* ceremonies conducted by the Orang Laut (sea people) and other coastal communities as a thanksgiving to the sea for protection and bounty. Talismanic carvings on the boat would protect the spirit of the boat and safeguard it from harm. Most motifs had a purpose and a meaning. The *tampuk manggis* motif, for example, depicts the cross section of the mangosteen, showing the fruit's outer skin, flesh and contents. The motif implies that inner goodness cannot be perceived or judged from the outside alone (*hitam hitam si tampuk manggis, di luar hitam di dalam manis*).



This beautiful terab, with a girth of 5.1 m, at Fort Canning Park was endorsed as a heritage tree in 2015. Photo by Jyoti Ramesh



Munshi Abdullah, renowned Malay scholar and teacher, in his writings, mentions that William Farquhar ordered a boat made of chengal wood for his trip back to England



The inscription on the drawing states that the Benua and Semang – aboriginal tribes of Peninsular Malaysia – used the bark of the Terab/terap nasi tree to cover their nudity

The 'cooling' mangosteen was part of the produce peddled by the Orang Laut to passing vessels, along with the 'heaty' durian. NMS features a mangosteen photo in the gallery Singapore, Very Old Tree, showcasing Singaporean artist Robert Zhao's work. About 25 years ago, an odd-job

labourer called Ramanathan saved a mangosteen sapling from bulldozers near Old Kallang Airport, re-planted it and often slept in its shade.

*Rendang kayu kerana daun,
terpandang Melayu kerana pantunnya.*

The tree is shady because of its foliage, the Malay is admired because of his pantuns.

Pantun is a traditional form of oral poetry believed to go back to the 15th century. Usually a quatrain verse, the first couplet often foreshadows the meaning contained in the second couplet. Traditionally, the foreshadower employs symbolism derived from nature, providing hints of emotions, philosophies and critiques, albeit in subtle allusions and analogies.

Once the long voyage commenced, the separation from loved ones, combined with an uncertain fate at sea, tended to evoke deep emotions of *rindu dendam* (love and longing) in the voyager. In the 1930s, Tengku Amir Hamzah, an Indonesian poet and national hero, incorporated the casuarina tree in a *pantun* about missing his mother (representing both his parent and his hometown) while on a voyage to Java for his studies:

*Ibu, seruku ini laksana
pemburu
Memikat perkutut di pohon rhu
Sepantun swara laguan rindu
Menangisi kelana berhati
mutu.
Mother, my cries are like a
hunter
Enticing a zebra dove on the
casuarina tree
A quatrain of a song full of
longing
By a forlorn traveller in tears*

The casuarina or the common *rhu* he references, has fine evergreen leaves resembling the feathers of the cassowary bird, hence its name. Found in many coastal regions of Southeast Asia and Australia, it tolerates salt and poor soil and is found in the seaside parks in Singapore. While they can also be spotted in West Coast Park, the casuarina in Seletar Reservoir is one of the most photographed trees in Singapore.

It was not just in poetic *pantuns* or stirring *syairs* that nature starred. Tales of love, loss, longing, heroism, adventure, all woven around nature, journeyed down the ages, in various *hikayats* (long narrative works in prose or verse). One of the stories in the *Malay Annals* tells us that



Mangosteen Tree, Old Kallang Airport, by Robert Zhao Renhui for the Singapore, Very Old Tree exhibition at NMS, commissioned as part of the Singapore Memory Project and later exhibited as part of the nation's SG50 celebrations



The fruit and flower have inspired several motifs in Malay woodcarving art with a popular pairing of bunga manggis motif with daun sedulur (running vines)

the last Malay king of Singapore left the home of his ancestors after a military conflict. As he wandered, searching for a new settlement, he rested under a tree with his hunting dogs. A tiny mousedeer appeared and when the dogs attacked it, the mousedeer succeeded in fending them off. The king was impressed by this small creature's courage and decided this was where his journey would end. He named his new home Melaka, after the tree he was resting under. In folklore, the Melaka (Indian gooseberry) tree is highly emblematic of healing properties and new beginnings. You can find some in Pasir Ris Park's kitchen garden.

New beginnings are often contemporaneous with a journey's end. With some good fortune, the journey ends at home or *pulang*. But what is 'home'? Is it where you were born or the place where you've built a new life? Or is home simply where your loved ones are? Recent events have forced many of us to decide, or in some cases, the decision has been forced upon us.

In every village by the sea
There stands a tall and ancient tree
That shelters from the sky above
A tree of hope, a tree of love...



The Melaka tree/ Buah Melaka/ Indian Gooseberry. This is the tree from which the state of Melaka in Malaysia is said to derive its name

Dick Lee's *Bunga Sayang* drives home what unites us and keeps us going, however challenging the times. Farquhar may have commissioned his drawings as a scientific record, but they remind us today to treasure the riches nature has bestowed upon us.

Jyoti Ramesh guides at IHC and NMS and enjoys guiding the GSC gallery at NMS. **Hilary White** guides at NMS and MHC and has been a guiding support for some docents at NMS. They have chosen to highlight the drawings of trees from this gallery so you can spot them as you walk around Singapore. Tours of the GSC gallery in normal times are the first Wednesday of the month at 1:00 pm.

Unless otherwise noted, all photos courtesy of the National Museum of Singapore, National Heritage Board, Gift of Mr G K Goh



The Common rhu or casuarina or she-oak. In Singapore, Tanjong Rhu was named for the abundance of casuarinas that once grew there

Singapore as a Southeast Asian Garden

By John N Miksic



Inspiration for Forbidden Spring Garden: Jalatunda, East Java, 10th century

When Sir T S Raffles and his associates arrived in Singapore in 1819, they found numerous remains which supported Raffles' assumption that Singapore had been an ancient port. The most systematic account of these was given by John Crawfurd, later the second Resident of Singapore. In the course of a day, he walked from the mouth of the Singapore River to the foot of the Forbidden Hill (now Fort Canning), where he found an ancient orchard consisting of very old durian, *dukuh*, rambutan, and shaddock (pomelo) trees. Climbing the hill, he found the remains of brick ruins, among which the remains of life in an ancient palace were scattered.

The proximity of the orchard to the palace ruins strongly implies that this was an ancient palace garden. Gardens were necessary components of ancient Southeast Asian palaces. They are found from Vietnam to Mandalay, from Sumatra to Java, Bali, and Lombok. The Portuguese found the remains of ancient gardens on the outskirts of Melaka after they conquered it in 1511.

Fast forward to 1965, when Singapore became independent. One of the first ideals for the new city-state was to foster the development of the garden-city. Although Singapore's planners were not aware of it, they were harking back to the type of urban environment that European visitors described when they arrived in Southeast Asia. Around 1600, the port of Aceh, North Sumatra, resembled a forest of fruit trees in which were scattered "an incredible number of houses".¹ John Davis, who visited Aceh in 1599, wrote, "The citie of Aceh if it may be so called is very spacious... I thinke the towne spreadeth over the whole land." This type



Sang Nila Utama Garden, Fort Canning

of settlement contrasted with the European concept of the city as crowded, walled enceintes, sharply demarcated from agrarian surroundings.

One archaeologist claims that "low-density, agrarian-based urban communities have existed across a wide range of settlement sizes and that this is consistent with the behaviour of human beings who use and have used them in other major socio-economic ways of life."² This pattern of land use also characterised ancient Angkor and Bagan, Myanmar. It persisted into the late 20th century. According to the 1971 census of Indonesia, farming was one of the three most



Forbidden Spring Garden, Fort Canning

common occupations pursued by residents of settlements classified as urban. A geographer invented the term *desakota* to describe Southeast Asian cities, combining the Indonesian terms for village (*desa*) and city (*kota*).³

If traditional urban layouts in Southeast Asia often resembled European gardens, Southeast Asian royal gardens were even more distinctive. Southeast Asian garden traditions are no less aesthetically and philosophically profound than their counterparts in China, Japan, the Indo-Persian realm, or Europe, but no comprehensive study of them has been written. The only detailed research on the history of Southeast Asian royal gardens focuses on Java.⁴

Parks had a special place in Buddhism. Major events in Shakyamuni's life took place in gardens. The oldest known garden in Southeast Asia is described in an inscription carved on behalf of a Buddhist king in Palembang, Sumatra, in 684-685 CE. The garden was dedicated to all living beings in order to assist all creatures to attain enlightenment. The inscription lists plants in the garden, fields, and water features. At approximately the same time that the royal garden was laid out in Singapore, an inscription recording the construction of another garden was carved in highland West Sumatra by a Buddhist king named Adityavarman.

At the eighth century Ratu Boko complex in central Java, a Buddhist monastery stood on the southeast side of a royal

complex. Next to the monastery is a group of artificial pools carved into the bedrock which probably formed a garden.⁵ Gardens are depicted in reliefs at the Loro Jonggrang complex at Prambanan. A scene depicting Hanuman's visit to Sita while she is captive in Ravana's palace, depicts an artificial mountain with a cave, similar to structures such as Sunyaragi in Cirebon, found in the Javanese gardens of the Islamic period.

Pre-Islamic Javanese poetry often includes love scenes in gardens, such as the *Sutasoma* in which the hero is an incarnation of Buddha. This poetic tradition continued in Bali and Lombok up to the 19th century, for instance in *Dampati Lelangon* or 'Divisions of Husband and Wife', which describes their stroll through a huge garden. One of only two surviving examples of an ancient Javanese performing art, *wayang beber*, mainly takes place in a garden.

During Indonesia's pre-Islamic era, most gardens were meant for the public as a means of making merit. In contrast, gardens from the Islamic period were mainly restricted to royalty. Nevertheless, they retained their mystical importance as places to meditate and where romantic encounters occurred. In Aceh, a 17th century palace garden named *Darul ishki*, (abode of love) was described in a poem, *Bustan us-Salatin*, (Garden of Kings). Numerous other gardens of this period survive in Banten, Cirebon, Surakarta, Yogyakarta, Bali and Lombok. Common features include elaborate systems for flowing water and miniature mountains with caves for meditation.



Inspiration for Sang Nila Utama Garden: Sunyaragi Garden, Cirebon, West Java, 18th century

¹ Anthony R Reid, (1980) "The Structure of Cities in Southeast Asia, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries" in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 11 (1980), p. 241.

² R Fletcher, 2009: 2. "Low-density, agrarian-based urbanism: a comparative view." *Insights – Institute of Advanced Studies, Durham University*, Vol. 2 (2009), pp 1-20.

³ T G McGee, "The Emerging Desakota Regions in Asia: Expanding a Hypothesis." In N Ginsburg, B Koppel, and T G McGee, eds. *The Extended Metropolis: Settlement Transition in Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991, pp. 3-25.

⁴ Denys Lombard, «Jardins à Java» in *Arts asiatiques* IX (1969), pp, 135-184. English translation by John Miksic: *Gardens in Java*. Jakarta: Pusat Penelitian dan Pengembangan Arkeologi Nasional. 2008; École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2010.

⁵ John Miksic, Slamet Pinardi *Kraton Ratu Boko: A Javanese Site of Enigmatic Beauty*. Yogyakarta: P T (Persero) Taman Wisata Borobudur dan Prambanan, 2015.

⁶ Timothy P Barnard, *Nature's Colony: Empire, Nation and Environment in the Singapore Botanic Gardens*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2016. Pp. 258-259.

Singapore's Botanic Gardens are recognised as part of world heritage, but they are designed according to European principles.⁶ In 2019 Fort Canning Park made the first effort in Singapore to incorporate aspects of traditional Southeast Asian gardens, including architecture and water features. Perhaps these will encourage more landscape architects in Singapore to emphasise the Southeast Asian precedents for Singapore as a Southeast Asian garden.

Professor John N Miksic is recognised as the region's foremost archaeologist and historian of Southeast Asian history. He is well-known to the FOM community as a frequent speaker and also a supporter of and contributor to PASSAGE.

All photos courtesy of the author

A Renoir in the Attic

How a Victorian naturalist showed you can find biodiversity in the most unlikely settings

By Paul Spencer Sochaczewski

For many of the 50 years during which I followed in the footsteps of Victorian naturalist and collector Alfred Russel Wallace, I focused on wild and inaccessible locations: the dwindling rainforests of Sarawak, where he famously shot 17 orangutans; the cold and wet highland forests of Indonesian Papua, where Wallace sought exotic birds of paradise, and the seldom-visited islands of the Moluccas, in eastern Indonesia, where Wallace caught a butterfly so gloriously coloured that he “trembled with excitement.”

But ironically, for years I overlooked the obvious. Since I first came to Southeast Asia in 1969, Singapore has been my residence and later one of my base camps. It was a productive home base for Wallace as well. Singapore taught Wallace (and me) that extraordinary biodiversity can thrive in an urban backyard.

Alfred Russel Wallace

Alfred Russel Wallace arrived in Singapore on 20 April 1854 after a three-month voyage aboard a Peninsular and Oriental steamer. He used Singapore as a base for several of his travels during his eight years in the Malay Archipelago, making four trips to the island, a presence surpassed only by his time in Ternate, where Wallace lived for many months and where he visited five times.

During the Victorian era, Singapore was alive with commerce and society. The year Wallace arrived, so did 13,000 Chinese immigrants, many of them dangerous men — rebels and refugees from the civil war raging in southern China. The Crimean War broke out in 1854, jolting Singapore merchants out of their complacency since they felt the country’s defenseless prosperity could make her an attractive target of Russian warships.

The first telegraph line was laid between Singapore and Batavia (present-day Jakarta) in 1859, the year Singapore’s first dry dock was built. The commodity exchange listed opium (Straits \$385 per chest), ebony, and Turkey red chintz.

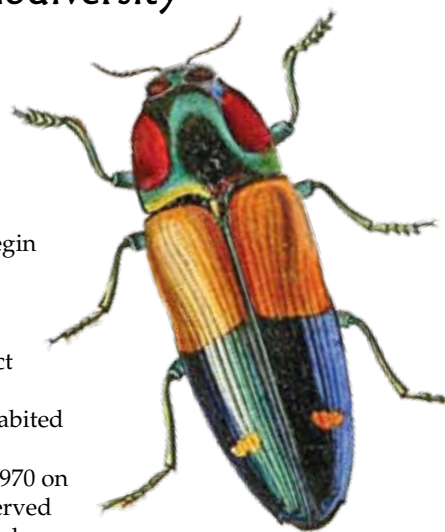
Wallace wrote, “I quite enjoy being a short time in Singapore again. The scene is at once so familiar and yet so strange. The half-naked Chinese coolies, the very neat shopkeepers, the clean, fat, old, long-tailed merchants, all as pushing and full of business as any Londoners. After two

years in the East I only now begin to understand Singapore, and to thoroughly appreciate the life and bustle, and the varied occupations of so many distinct nationalities on a spot which a short time ago was an uninhabited jungle.”

I first visited Singapore in 1970 on R&R from Sarawak, where I served in the Peace Corps. I stayed at cheap and noisy hotels in Beach Road, enjoying the bright lights and energy of Singapore after months spent living in a tiny Borneo town and travelling regularly to visit isolated longhouse schools perched on the banks of rainforest rivers. After the Peace Corps, I lived in Singapore for three years, working in advertising. Subsequently, while living in neighbouring Indonesia, I visited the country on business and pleasure perhaps a hundred times. I went to Singapore to produce my TV commercials and write catchy jingles; I went to Singapore when I got fed up with the noise and hassles and corruption and non-existent telephones of Indonesia; I went to Singapore because Jakarta at the time was a funky backwater with no supermarkets and Singapore was the place to stock up on fresh cheese and Oreos; I went to Singapore because it worked, and I needed that reassuring stability every few months and, surprisingly to my friends working in nature conservation, I went to Singapore to enjoy easy access to small chunks of intact tropical rainforest.

An Odd Place to Seek Nature

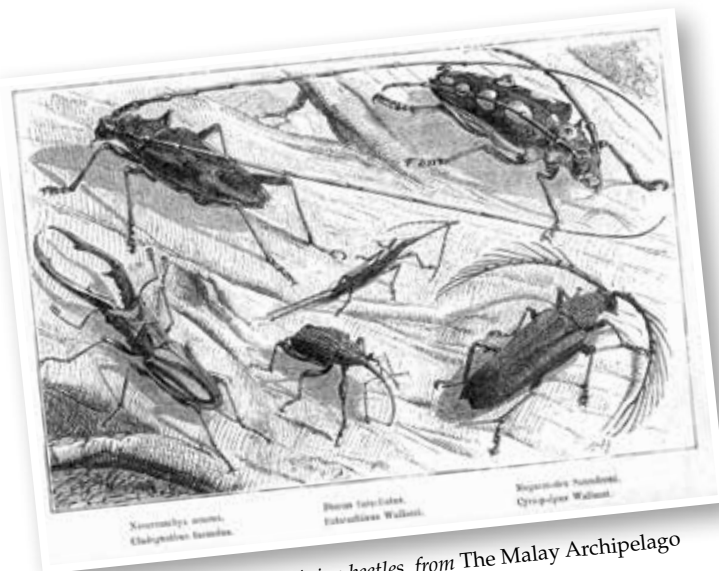
Singapore might seem to be an odd place to seek nature. In spite of being the greenest city-state in the world, Singapore’s nature is more often perceived to reside in giant airport aquariums and air-conditioned gardens in hotel



Calodema wallacii Deyrolle, 1864: 78, collected by Wallace on the island of New Guinea. Wallace called it “one of the handsomest of the Buprestidae”.



Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913)



Some of Wallace’s Southeast Asian beetles, from *The Malay Archipelago*



A butterfly from Wallace's collection acquired on the island of Flores, one of the Lesser Sunda islands in the eastern half of Indonesia



Wallace's golden birdwing butterfly (*Ornithoptera croesus*)

lobbies rather than in natural rainforests, coral reefs and mangroves. The common thinking is that most of Singapore's wildlife has been replaced by public housing and highways. That's partly true, but the reality, like most things in life, is more nuanced.

The bad news: since Stamford Raffles established modern Singapore in 1819, the country has lost more than 99 percent of its original vegetation due to the construction of housing, roads, reservoirs and military facilities. Of 183 species of birds known or presumed to be breeding in the republic since 1940, 39 have become extinct and 41 resident species are considered to be at risk. Some 60 percent of all the country's coral reefs have been seriously damaged.

The good news: Singapore is still home to more than 40,000 wild, native, non-microbial species according to Singapore Biodiversity, a comprehensive study of the country's natural resources. David Bellamy, a noted English conservationist, pointed out that the number of plant species growing in Singapore's Bukit Timah Nature Reserve is more than that in the whole of North America. New species are being found regularly.

An Inordinate Fondness for Beetles

In 1854 Wallace made his base near Bukit Timah and wrote, "I lived ... with the missionary at Bukit-tima [sic] ... where a pretty church has been built, and there are

about 300 converts. The vegetation was most luxuriant, comprising enormous forest-trees, as well as a variety of ferns, caladiums."

Wallace was, in modern terms, a freelancer – he had no government support, no military protection, no diplomatic status and, critically, no income except through the sale of unusual "natural productions" that he collected and which were sold by his 'beetle agent' Samuel Stevens in London.

Of all the critters he collected, Wallace had an inordinate fondness for beetles, and was as happy in Bukit Timah as a dung beetle in an out-house. Insects were exceedingly abundant and very interesting (in Bukit Timah), and furnished scores of new and curious forms every day. "In about two months [in Singapore] I obtained no less than 700 species of beetles, a large proportion of which were quite new. Almost all these (beetles) were collected in one patch of jungle (in Singapore), not more than a square mile in extent, and in all my subsequent travels in the East I rarely if ever met with so productive a spot."

Let us take a moment to examine Wallace's throwaway comment that a large proportion of the 700 Singapore beetles he collected "were quite new."

During his epic eight-year journey when he covered some 22,500 kilometres through territories that are now Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia, Wallace caught, skinned and pickled 125,660 specimens of "natural productions" including 212



A specimen of the *Semioptera wallacei*, courtesy of the Naturalis Biodiversity Center



Wallace's flying frog (*Rhacophorus nigropalmatus*) which Wallace found in Sarawak. Wallace described the ability of this large arboreal frog to "pass through the air like the flying lizard" thanks to its webbed fingers and toes. It can soar up to 15 meters. Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons



Crickets, photo by Rob Arnold



Pompelon marginata (day-flying moth), photographed along Singapore's Southern Ridges Walk, 10 km of trails that connect three parks. Photo by Joyce Le Mesurier

new species of birds, 900 new species of beetles and 200 new species of ants. Consider just the logistics – how could one man, on a tight budget and without organisational support, living rough in rainforests, without access to scientific colleagues or reference material, collect, identify, mount, preserve and transport 8,000 bird skins and 100,000 insects?

But Wallace survived tough conditions, and sometimes revelled at being the ‘first’ naturalist in many locations. “This exceeding productiveness (in Bukit Timah) was due in part no doubt to some favourable conditions in the soil, climate and vegetation, and to the season being very bright and sunny, with sufficient showers to keep everything fresh. But it was also in a great measure dependent, I feel sure, on the labours of the Chinese woodcutters. They had been at work here for several years, and during all that time had furnished a continual supply of dry and dead and decaying leaves and bark, together with insects and their larvae. This had led to the assemblage of a great variety of species in a limited space, and I was the first naturalist who had come to reap the harvest they had prepared.”

His exploits were sometimes accompanied by danger. While a resident in modern Singapore might fear a summons from jaywalking or smoking near an office building, Alfred Russel Wallace was fearful about being attacked by a tiger or falling into a tiger trap. “There are always a few tigers roaming about Singapore, and they kill on an average a Chinaman every day, principally those who work in the

gambir plantations.... We heard a tiger roar once or twice in the evening, and it was rather nervous work hunting for insects among the fallen trunks and old sawpits, when one of these savage animals might be lurking close by, waiting an opportunity to spring upon us.

“Here and there, too, were tiger-pits, carefully covered over with sticks and leaves, and so well concealed, that in several cases I had a narrow escape from falling into them. They are shaped like an iron furnace, wider at the bottom than the top, and are perhaps 15 or 20 feet deep [six metres], so that it would be almost impossible for a person unassisted to get out of one. Formerly a sharp stake was stuck erect in the bottom; but after an unfortunate traveller had been killed by falling on one, its use was forbidden.”

While there are conservation problems caused by land clearance and construction, I find it heartening that in recent decades more than 100 species that are completely new to science have been discovered in Singapore, including new species of moss, fungi, lichens, fishes, nematodes, spiders, mites, harvestmen, wasps, beetles, bugs, flies, shrimps, barnacles and crabs. It’s like finding a Renoir in the attic.

The Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum

If Singapore has an Alfred Russel Wallace-equivalent, it would be Peter Ng Kee Lin, professor at NUS and head of the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum. Peter has been a huge source of ideas on how unscrupulous conservationists



A Draco lizard, a flying (or gliding) lizard found in Singapore, photo by Uta Weigelt



A monitor lizard, a common sight in Singapore and throughout the greater part of Southeast Asia as its habitat is primarily lowland freshwater and brackish wetlands. Photo by Joyce Le Mesurier



Hornbills from Macassar (Makassar), Sulawesi in Wallace's collection



Wallace was meticulous in recording his finds. Birds from the Wallace collection

might combat deforestation; these helped inform my satiric novel *EarthLove*. But the discoveries he and his students have made while shuffling through the rainforests of Singapore's interior and the mangroves of the coast are the stuff of Wallace-like eureka-moment adventures.

"We've found a snapping shrimp that doesn't snap," Peter told me, describing a rare freshwater variety of crustacean. "It was sitting there for donkey years, unnoticed. One day, just by luck, we were out sampling and this popped into the net."

One of his fondest discoveries is a new freshwater prawn, *Caridina temasek*, which he found in a one-kilometre (0.6-mile) long stream that flows near the Singapore Island Country Club. The prawn's diminutive size – similar to a grain of rice – may work in its favour in food-crazy Singapore. "This prawn would probably taste great when fried with eggs," Peter said, "but since it is so small, it would take quite a number of them to make one omelette."

Peter's all-time favourite discovery came on New Year's Eve in 1990. A student, Kelvin Lim, had shown Peter a photograph of an unusual crab. "I was rather sure of myself then and dismissed it merely as a juvenile, extreme variant of a common species found there, *Parathelphusa maculata*," Peter told me. But Peter and Kelvin weren't sure and "we sacrificed our New Year's Eve to try to find an adult specimen." (One of the benefits of doing biological fieldwork in Singapore is that no matter where the study site is, the researcher can generally get home in time for dinner.)

"We finally learned how to catch them, by grabbing any clump of submerged leaves that moved. As it turned

"There are times when naming a species is a necessary but not always sufficient step towards its conservation. The Neptune's Cup sponge exemplifies this as the first animal to be described and named (scientifically) from Singapore in 1820 and yet it went extinct (possibly because everyone wanted a specimen). Nonetheless, this knowledge helped scientists to quickly recognise the species when it did make a comeback." – Martyn E. Y. Low, Research Associate, Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, National University of Singapore

out, I had been wrong. It was a separate species after all, and to beat everything, it was new to science. I named it *Parathelphusa reticulata* for its beautiful carapace pattern. Moreover, this species was endemic to Singapore. As later studies showed, it is found only in a five-hectare [12-acre] patch of swamp in Singapore and nowhere else on this planet. This is a reasonably large crab. So if something like this could have been missed for so long, heaven knows what else we are still ignorant of in the catchment area. This experience was a humbling one for me – I'll never again be complacent about biodiversity, even in Singapore."

Thanks to clear-eyed curious folks like Alfred Russel Wallace and Peter Ng, I now understand that nature's riches can be found not only in the wilderness of distant rainforests, but in our own backyards. We need both – wild-nature and urban-nature. I suggest a challenge: Go into your neighbourhood park and look closely. See what's there, maybe you'll find a natural treasure.



A *Gonophora Wallacei*, a member of the Coleoptera order of insects that includes beetles, collected by Wallace in Singapore. Image acquired with permission from the London Natural History Museum.



Note: The Alfred Russel Wallace quotes are from his classic book *The Malay Archipelago*, first published in 1869 by Macmillan, London, with many modern editions available.

Paul Spencer Sochaczewski is a well-known and much published author with a passion for protecting our wildlife and green spaces. His book on the life and work of Wallace, published as *An Inordinate Fondness for Beetles* has helped restore Wallace to his rightful place in history. Paul's most recent novel, about the war to save Borneo's rainforest, is *EarthLove*, published by Explorer's Eye Press (2020).

Plants That Colour Our World

By Kim Jane Saunders

Mother Nature decrees that our world should not be limited to shades of grey but to the colours of the rainbow and beyond. My first step into the colourful world of Southeast Asian textiles was a paper on the natural dyes in Southeast Asia prepared for a Museum Volunteers Textile Study Group in Jakarta in 1990. Personally, I love colour, colour in everything around me, so what did I learn all those years ago and have continued to learn? What is colour exactly? How is it produced and from what? How does it colour our world? I shall focus on natural colours found in Southeast Asia – natural dye sources that create colour in traditional and contemporary textiles, and traditions in the region with a cultural nod to food.

Colour is defined as “the appearance that things have that results from the way in which they reflect light” (Oxford). To see colour, you must have light. Debate continues to rage but technically, black is not defined as a colour because of the absence of light, neither is white, both are shades. The ‘mother’ of all colour palates consists of the primary colours – blue, red and yellow. From these three colours virtually every other colour and shade can be produced. Red plus yellow yields orange, blue plus yellow yields green, red and blue yield purple and so forth. Within this region, the major natural source for blue is Indigo.



Sappanwood or Caesalpinia sappan photographed in the Herbal Garden of Andhra Pradesh, India, courtesy of J M Garg



Curcuma purpurascens rhizome photographed in Java, courtesy of Benoit Blanchard



Indigo Tinctoria, courtesy: Jardin des Plantes de Paris

Blue

Blue dye has been known since the times of the Egyptians and the Romans, 2,400 BCE. Historically, Indigo pigment was shipped to China via Southeast Asia in the 13th century. *Indigofera tinctoria* is native to the tropics. It is one of over 50 species of Indigo identified. Indigo is considered to be a vat dye; it is insoluble in water but transformed into soluble compounds when soaked in an alkaline mixture. In Indonesia, the leaves from the small bush are placed in a vat or container of water and lye, a mix of lime, (powdered seashells), and wood ash with a fermenting agent such as rice wine to create a dye bath. As the material being dyed is exposed to the air, it reacts with oxygen (oxidisation), which enhances the classic indigo blue colour.

Globally, Japan is renowned for indigo production. Regionally, one of the most notable places to hand-produce indigo blue dye today is the village of Bugbug in East Bali, Indonesia. Here threads are tied and dyed to create the sacred *Kain Geringring* cloths of Balinese culture. These cloths appear to be red, white and black, the colours of the cosmos in many ancient cultures. Indigo is overdyed with red to create a black-purple colour. Indigo has long been highly prized as a colour in many cultures around the world, and it is interesting to note that synthetic indigo dye was developed in the middle of the 19th century by Adolph von Bayer.



Rubia tinctorum, photographed in the Jena Botanical Garden, Germany, courtesy of Carstor

Red

There are many natural sources of red dyes in the region. In many ancient cultures, red was considered as representing life and lifeblood. The one most frequently used is the *morinda citrifolia* tree, commonly known as *mengkudu* or *kombu*. This can be found along roadsides and in *kampong* gardens in Southeast Asia. This perennial tree is a member

*Indigo dyed ikat textile and indigo cake, Sumba.
Handspun yarn dyed with indigo, Laos*



Morinda citrifolia or Indian Mulberry, courtesy Vengolis, Kerala, India

of the *rubiceae* family and is native to Australia and tropical Asia, introduced to Southeast Asia from India. The distinctive red-orange colour is obtained from the inner bark of the root, which is pounded, soaked in water and boiled.

Red dye sources usually require a mordant to assist the fibres or cloth to accept the dye. A mordant may be an organic or inorganic substance that combines with a dye or stain, and thereby fixes it in a material, common examples are tannic acid and alum. In many Indonesian islands, candlenut is used in the mordanting process. This gives naturally mordanted dyed cloth a very distinctive aroma.

East Sumba in eastern Indonesia is just one example of islands renowned for producing ikat, tied and dyed threads used to weave cloth. Traditionally, ikat indigo cloths were worn by commoners in Sumbanese society with red dye strictly reserved for royalty, on pain of death.

Madder, *rubia tinctorum*, also known as 'Turkey Red', is another famous source of red dye native to west and central Asia. Annatto, *bixa orellana*, commonly known as the lipstick tree, is native to South America. It was probably introduced to the Philippines by the Spanish but has been commercially cultivated in India since the late 18th century. It was primarily used as a food colouring and a face paint amongst ancient cultures. Sappanwood, *biancaea sappan*, native to this region, yields a dark red plum colour but the dye is somewhat fugitive and fades easily. Mangosteen skins yield a deep red purple colour.

Sometimes the plants that colour our world do so by hosting insects that create colour, as in the case of Lac. Lac, *laccifer lacca*, is obtained from the crushed bodies of insects that nest in trees. This dye source, which yields a deep wine or maroon colour, has been known since 1500 BCE.

Yellow

Culturally, yellow is one of the most highly prized and auspicious of colours within Southeast Asian societies. The colour of royalty, power and wealth, it can be a difficult colour to create a dye with as it is often fugitive. Turmeric, known locally as kunyit, *zingiberaceae*, or *curcuma*, is a



Ikat woven textile and pre-woven tie dyed threads, dyed with sappan wood (*Caesalpinia sappan*), Singapore. Sappan wood and seed pods. The seed pods can be used in the mordant process.

rhizome related to the ginger family. It is considered a substantive dye because it dissolves in water. It is commonly used in regional cooking in such preparations as *nasi kunyit*, yellow rice. A conical mound of ceremonial yellow rice provides the centrepiece *tumpal* in a Malay or Indonesian communal feast. The *tumpal* often symbolizes a flowering bamboo shoot, new birth and prosperity. Yellow and red can be obtained from safflower, *carthamus tinctorius*, known locally as *kesumba*. This is not to be confused with saffron, *crocus sativas*, produced from the small stamens of a crocus. These precious strands are far too expensive to be used as a dye source and are also a very costly cooking ingredient. As saffron is the classic colour of monks' robes in Southeast Asia, the wood from the bark of the

jackfruit tree yields a yellow dye that can be used economically for the monks' robes. The bark of the jirak tree and pod and the flowers of the Japonica tree can also be used.

Colour is considered sacred, as the Hindu festival of Holi illustrates. There are so many other plants that colour our region and our world. A particular favourite of mine is the Butterfly Pea, *clitoria ternatea*. This vine grows easily

around trees on roadsides and in gardens. The flowers yield a beautiful purple blue colour and are popular in *Nyonya* cuisine for making tea and putting the distinctive blue colour into *pulut taitai*, steamed coconut glutinous rice cake and *Nonya chang*, blue savoury rice dumplings. In Singapore, examples of many of these local plants can be found in the Spice Garden located at Fort Canning, the Singapore Zoo and also locally, growing wild. Esme Hedrick-Wong (website listed below) had the most beautiful natural dye garden when she was living in Singapore in Seletar. Mother Nature's colourful treasures are out there. Enjoy looking for them.

Further Reading and References:

Balfour-Paul, J *Indigo*, London: British Museum Press, 1998.

Butler Greenfield, A, *A Perfect Red*, London: Black Swan, 2005.

Pastoureau, M. *Black: The History of a Color*, (2014), *Green: The History of a Color*, (2017), *Red: The History of a Color*, (2018), *Blue: The History of a Color*, (2019), *Yellow: The History of a Color*, Princeton, NJ and Oxford, 2009.

Saunders, K J *Contemporary Tie and Dye textiles of Indonesia*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Travis, T, ed, *The V & A Book of Colour in Design*, London: Thames Hudson and the Victoria and Albert Museum., 2020.

Esme Hedrick-Wong <https://esmelingcolour.com/>

<https://www.nparks.gov.sg>

Textile photos by Lynelle Barrett @lynelle.of.the.looms

Kim Jane Saunders is one of the region's foremost experts on Southeast Asian textiles. She is well known to many FOM members for her many published articles and has been a popular speaker at our MMLs and Textile Enthusiast programmes.

Nature and Art at STPI Creative Workshop & Gallery

By Roopa Dewan

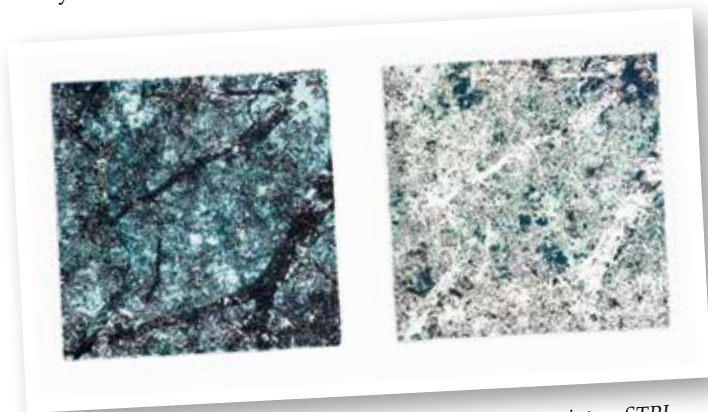
Have you ever wondered if the raintrees that provide the green canopy on our morning walks are indigenous to Singapore? Artists at STPI have pointed out that these raintrees are, like most of us, migrants.

Women artists under the Visiting Artists' Programme have harnessed the creative energy found in nature. It is used to great advantage in the the print and paper-making facilities that STPI offers. Coming from diverse art backgrounds, they recreated the natural world in novel ways, and introduced new 'ways of seeing' through the creative use of handmade paper, a cellulose fibre that comes from nature through trees or plants such as cotton, abaca, and mulberry (*kozo*).

Shirazeh Houshiary

In installation artist Shirazeh Houshiary's indigo etchings entitled *Migrants*, she uses Singapore's raintrees (*Albizia Saman*), imports from Peru and Mexico, to challenge our perceptions of the word 'migrant'. These migrants are abstracted in screen prints and etchings made on thick handmade paper. Houshiary's screen prints and etchings contain no centre and have no boundaries. An image of a world without borders is significant for her as an Iranian-British artist based in London.

Her indigo screen prints and etchings are views looking up from underneath the canopy of branches, as well as an aerial view looking down through the foliage. By printing both the positive and negative images, she imbues them with symbolic meaning. How we view the tree is similar to how we choose to view the migrant. It is all a matter of perception. Houshiary's concept is that culture is not fixed and evolves through time. Like nature, it is a fluid, constant cycle of renewal.



Shirazeh Houshiary, Migrant No. II, 2015, Etching, Screen print on STPI handmade white paper, (framed) 80 x 80cm. © Shirazeh Houshiary. Image courtesy of the artist and STPI

Isabel and Alfredo Aquilizan

Similar to Houshiary, Isabel and Alfredo Aquilizan use their work as a metaphor for communities and individuals who have been uprooted and transplanted to another place, mirroring their own personal journey of transplanting their family from the Philippines to Australia.

During their 2017 residency at STPI, Isabel and Alfredo Aquilizan created *Wood | Cut*, focusing on 10 species of



Alfredo & Isabel Aquilizan, Wood | Cut (Chainsaw), 2017. Paper Sculpture, 38 x 50 x 20 cm. © Alfredo & Isabel Aquilizan. Image courtesy of the artist and STPI

trees that are not native to Singapore. These 'Singapore trees' included the Tembusu, Rain Tree, Angsana and Yellow Flame. Drawing on the idea that even trees in Singapore are 'foreigners' but treated as locals, they write down the most distinguishing features of the trees along with a small image of them. In *Wood | Cut*, the artists have created unique prints that are cast in the shape of a circular saw blade for each of the 10 'Singapore Trees'. In addition, they created two paper sculptures of tools that cut trees down – chainsaws and the axes. The irony comes full circle. Their prints speak of adjustment, adaptation and acclimatisation to life on foreign soil.

Haegue Yang

With a child's wonder of life, artist Haegue Yang played with the fruits of nature, embedding spices in paper and embossing lotus, eggplant and okra, using decalcomania, printing them in their own juices using dancing patterns found in nature.

Yang looked into and drew on the history of exploration and globalisation and Singapore's role as the trading hub for spices from Southeast Asia to Europe. Spices were the first commercial items of luxury to be transported across Asia, northeast Africa and Europe. Eggplants came from India to England in the 17th century, tomatoes from Mexico to the Mediterranean.

During Yang's residency at STPI, the workshop became a domestic sphere with herbs common in Singapore, including white pepper, garam masala, chilli powder, turmeric, cinnamon and star anise. In her work *Spice Moon Cycle*, acquired by MOMA (Museum of Modern Art), New York, she made 160 spice prints on sandpaper, embedded with 20 different spices.



Haegue Yang, Spice Moon Cycle, 2015, Spices, 130 x 600 cm. © Haegue Yang / STPI. Image courtesy of the artist and STPI

Yang produced 100 prints in Singapore, including *Spice Sheets* (2012), *Seasoning Papers* (2013) *Spice Moons* (2013), and *Facing The Untouched* (2013), illuminating themes of mobility, transitivity and vulnerability. With an excited sense of simple wonder, ordinary materials turned into the extraordinary.



Jane Lee, *Set Me Free IV*, 2015, airbrushed acrylic paint on cast paper, hand-cut textile paper, STPI handmade cotton paper and Dibond base, 32 x 45.5 x 34 cm. © Jane Lee / STPI. Image courtesy of the artist and STPI

Jane Lee

For Singaporean artist Jane Lee, the bird symbolizes freedom and lightness. In her 2015 STPI exhibition, *Freely Freely*, birds were captured on layered paper, acrylic sheets, animation, soundboxes and video.

At the heart of this exhibition, Lee wanted to give us images of freedom to remind us of the joy of nature. Birds escape from trunk-like forms shaped from paper pulp in her *Set Me Free* series. Using Maya Angelou's poem *Caged Bird*, Lee presents a forest comprised of paper stacks through which birds fly from an illuminated path. In her *Just a Moment* series, the bird in form and flight is an unencumbered creature, even in an urban landscape. It contrasts with our urban environment where humans vie for space. A thoughtful connection is made from paper – to wood – to trees – to birds – to nature and ultimately to freedom.

Han Sai Por

Growing up close to nature with more trees than humans, Han Sai Por used to draw in the sand, with Siglap beach her playground. To this day, nature inspires all her sculptures of organic forms in marble and granite. "Nature is not just a still life object. It has energy. It has movement" says Han. At STPI, her works on paper and her relief prints show the energy of tropical rainforests. Her *Rooted and Nestles* series (2013) pulsates with life, energetic even to the edges of the frames. She mourns the loss of nature in urbanising Singapore. In *Moving Forest* (2014), Han references a renewal of seasons and



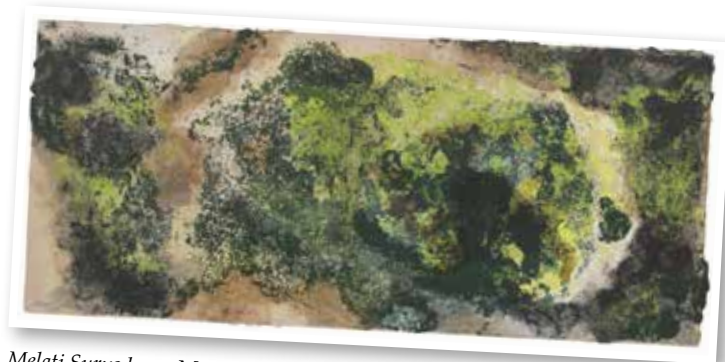
Han Sai Por, *Nestles 2*, 2013, watercolour, wood block, STPI handmade cotton paper, 102 x 127 cm. © Han Sai Por / STPI. Image courtesy of the artist and STPI

creates three-dimensional fruit and forest creations bursting with colour and movement. There is a note of hope in her minimalist landscape pieces.

Melati Suryodarmo

Finally, Melati Suryodarmo, an Indonesian performance artist, used nature as a matrix for printmaking. Harvesting moss and charcoal from the abandoned Istana Woodneuk, built for the wives of Sultan Ibrahim of Johor, she captures the psychological space of loss. In *Momento Mori* (2019-2020), Suryodarmo wanted to "develop the idea that moss is a silent witness of time... The death of periods, of an era, of a phase of life". Using pre-made paper, the team at STPI hiked into the forest, cast it on the site to absorb the hues of moss and left it to dry overnight. These moss paper pulp paintings capture memories and emotions, a deep sense of loss and the transformative power of nature. It is an earthy palette which evokes both the lush green of a tropical forest as well as its impending decay through the charcoal rubbings.

STPI's visiting artists record our changing encounter with nature, to provide aesthetic joy and insightful reflection. These artists help to revitalise our connection with the natural world while urging us to conserve it.



Melati Suryodarmo, *Moss 2*, 2018, Coloured linen pulp and lokta pulp painting, (unframed) 44x 102.5 cm. © Melati Suryodarmo. Image courtesy of the artist and STPI

References:

The River is Within Us. 2016. Exhibition Catalogue Shirazeh Houshiary. STPI.

Hubbard, Sue. *Between Text and Skin* catalogue essay in *The River is within us*.

Of Fragments and Impressions. Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan. 2017. Exhibition Catalogue. STPI.

About a box. Joyce Toh. 29 August 2017.

Freely, Freely. Jane Lee. 2016. STPI Exhibition Catalogue. STPI.

Honesty Printed on Modesty. Haegue Yang. Exhibition Catalogue. 2013. STPI.

The Material of Freedom. June Yap. 2013. In *Freely, Freely*.

Momento Mori. Melati Suryodarmo. Exhibition Catalogue. 2019-2020. STPI.

Sakti, The Goddess Within. Carla Bianpoen. Chapter II.

Of Presence and Place: Melati Suryodarmo. Adele Tan. Essay. Chapter III.

Roopa Dewan has been a docent at STPI since 2010. She loves nature, animals, humans, books and art. She also guides at the National Gallery Singapore and Gillman Barracks.

Red Gems among Brown and Green

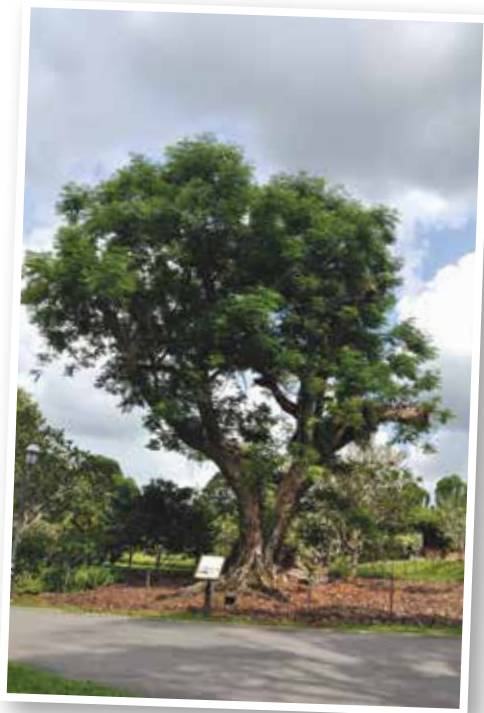
The Saga Tree and its Seeds

By Uta Weigelt

Many Europeans associate the word saga with ancient epic prose narratives from Iceland and Norway. However, in Singapore and Malaysia, saga is the common name of a tree, whose glossy red seeds tell stories of love, longing, happiness and nostalgia.

The botanical name of the saga tree is *Adenanthera pavonina*. Native to tropical South and Southeast Asia, it is also cultivated in many tropical countries in Asia and America. Therefore, it is also known under other common names such as red bead tree, red sandalwood, Circassian seed, acacia coral and coral wood. According to British botanist J H Corner (1906–1996) saga is a Malay word and can be traced to the Arabic word for goldsmith. How could a goldsmith be connected to a tree? As they are almost uniform in size and weight, with four seeds making up about one gram, saga seeds were used as a reference by goldsmiths to weigh gold, silver and diamonds.

The saga is a deciduous tree of the legume family (*Fabaceae*) that grows up to over 20 metres in height. The wide canopy with compound bipinnate leaves provides a lot of shade, but also a lot of litter in the form of leaves, twigs and pods. The star-shaped flowers of creamy white-yellow turn to dark orange and have a faint orange-like scent. The flowers give way to 15 to 20-centimetre-long, green fruit pods. The pods eventually turn



Saga heritage tree in the Singapore Botanic Gardens

dark brown, twist and split open into two twisted valves containing eight to 12 hard, glossy scarlet red seeds.

The young leaves of the saga tree can be cooked and eaten as vegetables. The seeds are toxic when eaten raw but edible when roasted or boiled and shelled.

The bark of the saga tree can be used as a soap for washing clothes and as hair shampoo. When shredded, a red dye is obtained from it, one that has been long used for dyeing clothes. The hard red wood is used for construction, cabinet making, flooring and firewood. Hindus pound the dried wood of the saga tree into powder for the sacred mark on their forehead. The wood, bark and leaves also have medicinal properties and are used to treat illnesses such as migraine, rheumatism, dysentery, diarrhoea, and tonsillitis.



Pass it on, 2013, © Nicola Anthony, courtesy of the artist

Originally used as shade trees in plantations, saga trees can nowadays be found all over Singapore, from Sembawang, the northernmost part of the island, to Sentosa in the south. They grow in parks, along waterways, between HDB blocks, in front of museums, in cemeteries such as Bukit Brown and the Japanese Cemetery, as well as in nature reserves. Many are easy to locate thanks to an online map that lists about 80 saga trees. This was created by a Singaporean father who enjoyed collecting the red seeds with his daughter.

However, there is only one saga tree in Singapore that has been given heritage status. It is found in the Singapore Botanic Gardens, near the *Lady of the Hammock* sculpture, and is well over 100 years old. Saga seeds are not only found underneath this heritage tree but also in the newly established Singapore Botanic Gardens' Gallop Extension nature playground for children. There, spring rockers in the form of giant red saga seeds dot the sandy ground.

Saga seeds also found their way into crafts, art and literature. Owing to their red colour, the seeds are often related to feelings such as nostalgia, love and happiness. Incorporated into small pendants or rings *xiangsidou* (love beans) as the saga seeds are called in Chinese, became a popular gift for Valentine's Day.

With the allegory of red seeds – though probably not the seeds from the saga tree but from a similar species – the famous Tang poet Wang Wei (699–759) in his poem *Xiangsi* (Longing) conveys the feeling of love and longing:

*Red beans grow in the south
when spring comes [they] flourish on the branches
would you gather an armful
for the fond love and remembrance they express.*

In addition, the tiny seeds are used like pearls in necklaces, rosaries, earrings and other jewellery and accessories.

For her project *Pass it on* that was part of the *Displacements* exhibition in Wilkie Terrace in 2013, British



Red gems among brown and green



Bija (Ireland), 2019, © Nicola Anthony, courtesy of the artist

contemporary artist Nicola Anthony (b. 1984) collected more than 8,000 saga seeds during her walking tours in Singapore. She painstakingly hand-numbered them one by one with white ink and catalogued them according to the location they were found. In her installation she laid them out in the shape of a winding path. Visitors could pick a seed and look up the associated story in the artist's online seed archive. Currently living in the UK, Nicola Anthony recently started an ongoing artwork/performance called *Bija Seeds* by carving messages into the saga seeds and leaving them in places around the world.

Another prominent artist to work with saga seeds is Kumari Nahappan (b. 1953), a Singapore-based sculptor and painter from Malaysia. Her works have been featured in numerous exhibitions, publications, and collections in Singapore and abroad. She is well-known for her large-scale installations, such as the *Nutmeg & Mace* sculpture at ION Orchard, and the *Pedas-pedas* for the National Museum. In 2015 she commissioned *Road to Fifty*, a collection of giant fibreglass saga seed sculptures on the Empress Place lawn just next to the Asian Civilisations Museum. Visitors of the *Once Upon a Time in Little India* exhibition

(2016/17) in the Indian Heritage Centre, will remember Nahappan's installation *Weighing Scale*, featuring thousands upon thousands of red seeds and a large weighing scale – reflecting the vanishing trade of goldsmiths in Little India – and the delightful saga seed capsule machine that dispensed bags of saga seeds after one made small a donation.



Road to Fifty, © Kumari Nahappan, 2015, courtesy of the artist

Saga seeds have been carried along as lucky charms in many pockets. As *manjadikuru*, seeds from the *manjadi*, as the tree is called in Kerala, they are made into a lucky charm with a tiny carved elephant protruding from the hollow seed like a stopper. Hidden inside the seed are 12 or more tiny elephants or plates, each granting its owner a wish.

Many Singaporeans and visitors to the island have fond memories of searching for the saga tree's shiny scarlet seeds among the pods, twigs and leaves around its base. Young children and adults alike eagerly gather the gem-like seeds. Most of them collect as many as possible, but some hope to spot a rare heart-shaped one or one with a different shade than the typical scarlet. Collectors usually store them in glass containers and bowls, others use them as pawns for local games such as five stones, or *congkak*, a game of logic.

Maybe in today's 'new normal', searching the ground for saga seeds is a way to reconnect with nature and rediscover the rewards of bygone pastimes, a hope for a brighter future as in the saying "Collect a hundred saga seeds and they will bring you happiness", or the awareness that within each tiny seed lies the potentiality of a giant tree.



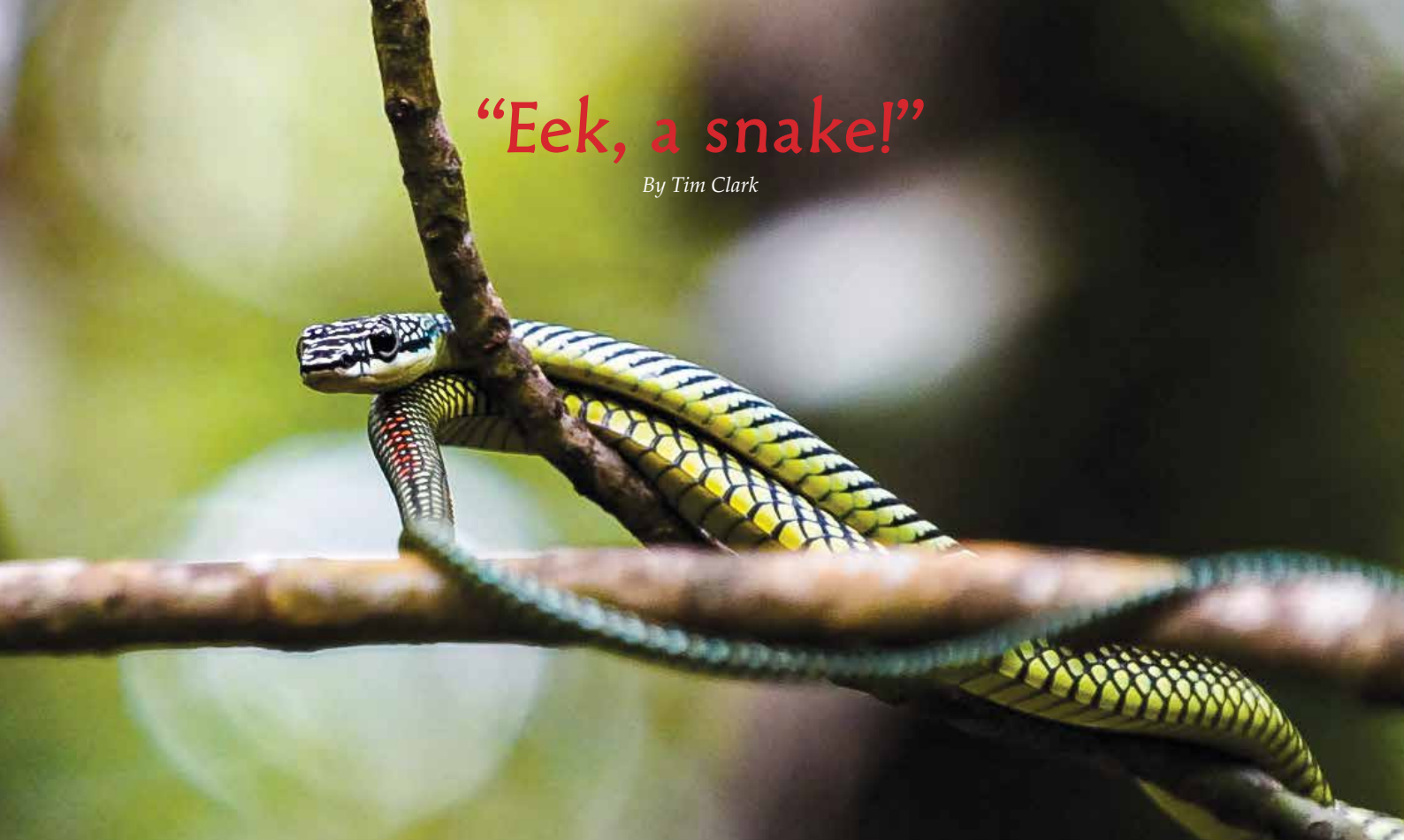
Lucky charm manjadikuru

Uta Weigelt is a docent at ACM and TPM. She loves discovering small and large wonders of nature during her long walks.

Unless stated otherwise, photos courtesy of the author

“Eek, a snake!”

By Tim Clark



Paradise Tree Snake. Photo by Isaac Sim

The instinctive reaction of most of us when confronted by a snake is horror. This is probably because primitive humans were hard-wired to fear snakes for their survival in the wilds. It is therefore a natural, rational fear and not necessarily a sign of ophidiophobia.

To be on the safe side, you would be wise to be wary of snakes. However, as a matter of fact, most species are harmless or quite inoffensive. And this applies to the majority of the well over 50 species of snakes found in Singapore. Among the six or seven potentially dangerous ones, the snake population of this small country includes the world's largest snake, the Reticulated Python, as well as the world's largest venomous snake, the King Cobra.

The python can grow to a length of 10 metres, although in Singapore very few exceed five metres. They are not venomous, but they can bite when provoked. A case in point was recorded by The Straits Times in August 1993 when the supervisor of the nine-hole Tanglin Golf Course (which used to exist across the road from the Botanic Gardens) was bitten by a 2.5-metre-long python while relieving himself in the toilet. The toilet cubicle was dark and he didn't notice the python coiled inside the bowl when he sat down. Fortunately, Gleneagles Hospital was close by to stitch up the wound to his testicles. A very similar incident is also recorded as having happened in Thailand (ST May 2016).

Pythons here eat rodents so they should be viewed as pest controllers rather than pests. Their diet tempts

them into drains and does inevitably bring them into the urban environment, where they cause alarm. And that's when they need rescuing. Elsewhere, larger pythons that dwell in the jungle can kill and swallow animals such as wild pigs, livestock and even humans. So, treat them with respect.

When I lived in a black and white house in Rochester Park, my neighbours worried about their dogs being attacked by the python that was known to visit our gardens. One night I threw a party and my first guests to leave returned breathless to exclaim that they couldn't because a snake was blocking the road. We rushed down to see the most beautiful python, illuminated by headlights, basking on the still-warm



Reticulated Python, photo by Kalai – ACRES



The Oriental Whip Snake, photo by Kalai – ACRES



Twin-Barred Tree Snake. Photo by Isaac Sim

road. His head was hidden in the long grass on one side of the road, with his tail in grass on the other side. The road was 3m wide, so the python must have been at least 4m in length. Without any prompting from us, but sensing that he was holding up traffic, he slithered slowly away.

In the bushes, we had brilliant green Oriental Whip snakes which grow to an impressive length of two metres but are quite harmless. The snakes we all dreaded, and thankfully I never saw, were the King and the Spitting Cobras. The King Cobra can grow up to six metres and rise up a metre or two before it strikes. Sightings are rare but in May last year, a four-metre-long King Cobra made a very public appearance near Marsiling MRT station and was rescued by the ACRES team.

ACRES (Animal Concerns Research & Education Society) is just one of the several agencies in Singapore that rescues wildlife when the animals come into conflict with humans. According to Mr Kalai, Co-CEO of ACRES, they receive eight to 10 calls from the public every day, leading to the rescue of several hundred snakes a year. Native species are returned to Singapore's parklands while non-native

exotic snakes, which may be escaped pets, are kept captive for their own protection. Pythons are microchipped for research purposes to track their numbers. Earlier this year ACRES rescued their biggest python yet in their experience, measuring over six metres.

Snakes never seek confrontation with humans. We should therefore not treat them as if they mean to do us harm. I recently heard about a woman who deliberately drove her car over a python and then reversed over it to make sure she had killed it. This was not only an egregious, wanton act of cruelty, but was also against the law. It is illegal to unnecessarily kill or harm any wild animal in Singapore.

If you can overcome your fear of snakes, one of nature's beauty pageants awaits you. Their scales can project brilliant colours to rival the splendour of a tropical bird's plumage. The Paradise Tree Snake (no relation to the serpent in Genesis) and the Twin-barred Tree Snake are dazzlingly decorative examples. Sometimes referred to as flying snakes, these clever tree dwellers can flatten their bodies in order to glide through the air from one tree to another.

Despite the prevalence of snakes here, the incidence of people getting bitten is rare.

A study of snake bites in Singapore over a five-year period ending in 2008, recorded 52 snake bites treated in hospitals (around 10 a year) with no fatalities. The most recent record of a fatality that I could find, occurred in 1995 when an 80-year-old man died from a cobra bite. However, a two-year study in Penang, which has a more rural population, recorded a greater incidence of snake bites. Over 50% were caused by Malayan Pit Vipers, with no fatalities, whereas of those who were bitten by cobras, 7% died.

The Banded Krait found around the coast of Singapore can be very dangerous if provoked, but statistically, a sting from the Lesser Banded Hornet is more likely to kill you. In fact, the most dangerous creature in Singapore is not a reptile, but another insect, the Aedes Mosquito, which in 2020 caused more deaths than Covid-19 (ST 19/11/20).

Next time you see a snake, don't bother it and it won't bother you. But if it does concern you, don't cry "Eek". Call ACRES.



A rare King Cobra. King Cobras are indigenous to Singapore but Equatorial Spitting Cobras are more common and can still be found in our desolated urban areas. Photo by ACRES

Tim Clark is a semi-retired lecturer who has always been a keen bird watcher. He has learned that it is wise, as well as rewarding, to keep an eye on the ground for the chance of seeing a beautiful snake.

The Crimson Sunbird

By Rob Arnold

There are 360 species of hummingbirds, none of which are found in Singapore. However, if you are a birder in Singapore, your friends may inform you that they have seen a hummingbird buzzing around a flower. They have not. What they saw was a sunbird.

Sunbirds and hummingbirds exist in opposite hemispheres: sunbirds in the Old World, and hummingbirds in the New. These two families are an example of convergent evolution, in which species evolve to fill the same niche in different geographies, resulting in a similar appearance and behaviour. In tropical latitudes, where large flowers offer deep nectar deposits, small, light birds evolved into nectar-feeders. To reach the nectar, they must be able to hover since many flowers do not provide a perch, so they must have long, slender, decurved bills with tubular tongues to reach deep into the flowers. They also have very bright metallic colours, perhaps to stand out to prospective mates who have evolved eyesight for flower-spotting, so they see not only a much broader range of colours than humans do, but also the ultraviolet spectrum.

There are 95 species of sunbirds, of which five are listed as Singapore residents, and one occasionally visits from Malaysia. The Copper-Throated Sunbird is uncommon owing to its association with Singapore's diminishing mangrove population. The other four species are common.

As they frequent gardens, parks and anywhere there are blooming, nectar-laden flowers, they can often be seen. Look out for the Van Hasselt's Sunbird on the Sacara trees next to

Bukit Batok Nature Park's car park and its toilet block.

The Olive-Backed Sunbird is one of the most frequently encountered birds in Singapore. It can be found in trees by canals, flowering bushes beside roads, and in HDB or condo gardens as well as parks. We encounter it often in our daily lives, from the bus or from a café, without making a special effort. Widely distributed, its metallic chirp can be heard as adults or families chase each other through the foliage. Also, their hanging nests, made from dried grasses, spiderwebs and other fibres, are often visible on balconies and wire fences. It has been featured on Singapore currency and stamps.

The bird that was ultimately named as Singapore's National Bird by Dr Shawn Lum, President of the Nature Society at the 6th Asian Bird Fair in 2015 was the Crimson Sunbird. Unlike many countries that feel their achievements deserve to be represented by a large raptor, Singaporeans surveyed by the Nature Society posted 400 votes for the Crimson Sunbird versus 236 for the next candidate, the White-Bellied Sea Eagle (the Olive-Backed Sunbird came fourth with 157 votes). Apparently, those who voted for the Crimson Sunbird did so on the basis that it was small, active, and red, ironically suiting the 'Little Red Dot' sobriquet coined by a past Indonesian President. Another reason could be its link with Sir Stamford Raffles, who collected and named the species, and published his findings in a journal.

The Crimson Sunbird is striking, beautiful and impossible to confuse with other species. Its colour is so intense that when you spy it, you lock on and it is hard to look away. Although common throughout Singapore, it is especially easy to see at Dairy Farm National Park, opposite the Wallace Centre, in the flowering bushes, or up the road where as many as four or five have been seen among the flowering tapioca plants. Together with Brown-Throated and Olive-Backed Sunbirds, it can be seen in the Botanic Gardens' Heliconia beds near Symphony Lake.

In my view and that of many others, it is a worthy national bird for Singapore.



Male Crimson Sunbird, Bukit Batok Nature Park



Brown-Throated Sunbird, Singapore Botanic Gardens at Heliconia Walk

Male Olive-Backed Sunbird, Lorong Halus Wetland



Rob Arnold pursues a lifelong interest in nature and is delighted to be in his ninth year in Singapore, where he is approaching the magical number of 300 bird species that he has seen.

Photos by the author

Ferns – the Unsung Heroes of the Plant World

By Darly Furlong




If you have walked along some of the tree-lined paths of Singapore, you have certainly come across one of nature's phenomena, ferns nesting in trees. They are examples of a glorious symbiosis between a tree and its non-parasitic tenant.

Ferns pre-date the dinosaurs and have been on earth for 359 million years, forming a substantial percentage of our fossil fuel today. Their method of reproduction by dispersing their spores is older than seed germination. We are quite fortunate to be able to see several varieties of ferns in this tropical haven; whether it's staghorn ferns growing on raintrees, or tree ferns slowly uncoiling in the canopy. They are a sight that warms the heart and soothes the soul.




Darly Furlong is a passionate volunteer of museum-based learning for children and leads other causes in Singapore that facilitate social justice.

Shang Antique
Established Since 1984



Havajra - Angkor Wat period, 12th century. Ht. 79cm



Shang Antique Pte Ltd
296 River Valley Road, Singapore 238337
T: (65) 6388 8838 M: (65) 9616 6661
E: shangantique@singnet.com.sg
www.shangantique.com.sg



TEXTILES • HOME • FASHION
AT THE RAFFLES HOTEL ARCADE

@emgallery.sg emgallery www.em.gallery

Chihuly at Gardens by the Bay



Floating spheres sail the Dragonfly Lake

*A vibrant orange cascade of flowers is suspended above our heads
Green spikes, like an urchin's, a cactus, a coral, a creature from another world
What are those blue balloons packed in the boat in the water lily pond?
I see tropical plants, flamboyant bushes, extravagant leaves, glorious flowers*



The *Glass in Bloom* exhibition has filled Gardens by the Bay with colours and shapes that compete in beauty with the plants and flowers that surround the art pieces. Inspired by nature and displayed in nature, *Glass in Bloom*, by Dale Chihuly, is on until 1 August 2021. The sculptures can be seen in several locations within the gardens, both outdoors (a selection of which is free to view) and indoors, where there's an admission fee.

Angela Echanove is a photographer from Spain, now based in Singapore. She specialises in portraits, architecture and travel photography. Her works can be seen at www.angelaechanove.com and IG @angelaechanove



MUSEUMS AROUND THE WORLD



MUSEUMS AROUND THE WORLD

For this year's summer break, we have put together a special virtual tour series titled *Museums Around the World with FOM*. Our speakers will introduce you to their favourite museums in places as close as Indonesia and as far away as America. Fasten your seatbelts and join us as we travel around the world with this Members Only series of discovery. All lectures will be conducted online and login details will be provided after you register via the FOM website.

Japanese Docents

In life, one has many roles to play. Although I always see myself as someone who never stops learning, it is great to be back in training and be a real trainee. 13 candidates started a new enlightening journey together. Who knew it would be so tough? I plan to strive and do my very best to get my hands on the Japanese Docent badge, which I have been coveting for many years.

When I travel to a new place, I always visit the museums and the markets to understand the culture, because I strongly believe that museums teach me about the country's past while markets teach me about its current vibe. Personally, I really love to visit museums and keep going back. Museums satisfy my curiosity. Everything there has a story to tell. I can easily learn how things were done, what life looked like and even what people wore and did every day. Museums



are living histories from times gone by and help me understand myself. Museums inspire and are great for stimulating new ideas, recharging and providing new perspectives. In them, I have access to the works of great masters, inventions and objects that changed our lives. Sometimes it is the simplest things that inspire me the most. I will be proud of myself if, as a Japanese docent, I can bring smiles to visitors' faces in Singapore's museums.

I have lived here for more than a decade now. Discovering things about Singapore gives me great motivation and joy in life. I really appreciate this opportunity to be a docent and learn more about Singapore. Let's get started!

Miyuki Yoshizumi, Japanese Docent

Explore Singapore!

Owing to the heightened alert restrictions in May/June, we have postponed these tours till after the summer break. Dates will be announced on the FOM website, the monthly FOM Activities newsletter (What's Trending) and the weekly newsletter.

Painted Prayers of India: The Art of the Kolam

Fee: \$35

Through the ages, Indian women have drawn *kolams* (geometric designs) at their doorsteps or in their courtyards as a welcome sign, using rice powder mixed with water. This South Indian artform is a religious ritual, a social activity, and an ephemeral channel for a commoner's artistic expression, not meant to be permanent. It must be constantly regenerated (a *kolam* usually lasts just one day). Join Explore Singapore! to learn more about them.



Nature and Nostalgia in Labrador Park - Crossroads of Maritime, Migration and Manufacture

Fee: \$30

Labrador Park is an interesting nexus of significant activities and events in Singapore's pre-modern and modern history. For over a century it was protected by a sophisticated series of defence fortifications. Today this is the last nature reserve on Singapore's southern shoreline. Join us on a walk through this area filled with nature and nostalgia.



A Tour of Bukit Brown Cemetery

Fee: \$40

Spend a morning in a unique way, join us for a walk in Bukit Brown Cemetery. This was the first municipal Chinese cemetery in colonial Singapore and was once the largest outside China, with nearly 100,000 graves. Our guide will share the fascinating stories and history behind the various graves. Learn about the graves' different styles, *feng shui* elements and other features. Admire the art, sculptures and beautiful tiles that adorn them.



The Shuang Lin Monastery: History and Religion

Fee: \$35

The Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery (Lotus Hill Twin Grove Monastery) in Toa Payoh, is Singapore's oldest Buddhist temple. It was built in 1898 on land donated by a wealthy Chinese migrant and with support from communities in Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia. They helped by sourcing the best craftsmen from their various regions of origin. As a result, the monastery has a mix of architectural styles. During the tour, our historian guide will trace its history and tell us about its use during the Sino-Japanese War. He will also talk about the monastery's architecture and Buddhism in general.



Museum Information and Exhibitions

Please check individual museum websites for latest information on guided tours by FOM docents.

Asian Civilisations Museum

1 Empress Place, Singapore 179555
Tel: 6332 7798
www.acm.org.sg

Opening hours:
Daily 10:00 am - 7:00 pm
Fri 10:00 am - 9:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Please consult the museum's website at www.nhb.gov.sg/acm/whats-on/tours/daily-guided-tours

Understanding Asia through Singapore

The new and renovated galleries at the ACM use Singapore's history as a port city as a means of understanding the interconnections among Asian cultures and between Asia and the world.

Life in Edo | Russel Wong in Kyoto (through 17 October)

The exhibition spotlights the lifestyles and trends of Edo-period Japan through over 150 *ukiyo-e* prints and paintings, while scenes of present-day Kyoto – including a peek into the lives of the geiko community – are presented through black-and-white photographs captured by acclaimed Singaporean photographer Russel Wong, in their first-ever display.

Gillman Barracks

9 Lock Road, Singapore 108937
www.gillmanbarracks.com

A cluster of 11 contemporary art galleries and the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Gillman Barracks features an ever-changing selection of contemporary art exhibitions.

Opening hours: Tues to Sun – Refer to individual gallery pages on-line for opening hours
Closed Mondays & Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:

For the tour schedule and to register, please consult the Gillman Barracks' website at www.fom-gillman-barracks.eventbrite.com

Indian Heritage Centre

5 Campbell Lane, Singapore 209924
www.indianheritage.org.sg

Open Tuesday to Sunday & public holidays. Closed on Mondays.
Tues to Thurs 10:00 am to 7:00 pm,
Fri & Sat 10:00 am to 8:00 pm
Sundays & public holidays 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

FOM guided tours: Tues-Fri

Please consult the centre's website at <https://www.indianheritage.gov.sg/en/visit/guided-tours>

The Indian Heritage Centre (IHC) celebrates the history and heritage of the Indian diaspora in Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. From early contacts between the Indian subcontinent and this region, the culture and social history of the community after the arrival of the British, through to the early stirrings of nationalism and political identity, and the contributions of Singapore's Indian community – the five galleries take visitors on a fascinating journey through the Indian diaspora. Located in Singapore's colourful and vibrant Little India precinct, the centre opened in May 2015 and is our only purpose-built museum.



Sikhs in Singapore – A Story Untold (through 30 Sept)

Co-created by members of Singapore's Sikh community and the Indian Heritage Centre, *Sikhs in Singapore – A Story Untold* is presented in three parts – *Roots*, which tells the story of the origins of Singapore's Sikh community; *Settlement*, which brings together some exemplary narratives of Sikh migrants to Singapore; and *Contemporary Perspectives*, which offers glimpses into the experiences of some contemporary Sikhs.

Malay Heritage Centre

85 Sultan Gate, Singapore 198501
Tel: 6391 0450
www.malayheritage.org.sg

Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am – 6:00 pm
(last admission 5:30 pm), closed on Mondays

FOM guided tours:

Please consult the centre's website at www.malayheritage.gov.sg/en/visit#Free-Guided-Tours

The Malay Heritage Centre (MHC) provides wonderful cultural exposure and learning opportunities for visitors of all ages and interests. Situated amidst the Istana Kampong Gelam, Gedung Kuning and the surrounding Kampong Gelam precinct, the Centre acts as a vital heritage institution for the Malay community in Singapore. Through its exhibits, programmes and activities, the Centre hopes to honour the past while providing a means for present-day expression.

Urang Banjar: Heritage and Culture of the Banjar in Singapore (through 25 Jul)

In the fifth instalment in MHC's *Se-Nusantara* series of community co-curated exhibition and programmes on the ethnic cultural and diversity of the Malay community in Singapore, this exhibition focuses on the Banjarese community, or 'Urang Banjar', who are arguably the smallest group that make up the Malay community in Singapore. Many of them are able to trace the journeys of their ancestors from South Kalimantan to Singapore from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries, but also have a common ancestral language, material culture and a distinctive set of cultural norms and practices. The exhibition introduces the Urang Banjar as well as their culture and identity through ethnographic objects, community stories and treasured family belongings, which showcase their strong sense of kinship, industry and history.

National Museum of Singapore

93 Stamford Road, Singapore 178897
Tel: 6332 3659
www.nationalmuseum.sg

Opening hours:

Daily 10:00 am – 7:00 pm

FOM guided tours:

Please consult the Museum's website at www.nhb.gov.sg/nationalmuseum/visitor-information/nmsquicklinkretailvenue rental/guided-tour

The National Museum of Singapore is the nation's oldest museum that seeks to inspire with stories of Singapore and the world. Its history dates back to 1849, when it opened on Stamford Road as the Raffles Library and Museum.

Home, Truly: Growing Up with Singapore, 1950s to the Present (through Aug)

The National Museum of Singapore presents *Home, Truly: Growing Up With Singapore, 1950s to the Present*, in collaboration with The Straits Times, as part of the newspaper's 175th anniversary. Featuring photographs and artefacts, including those contributed by members of



Museum Information and Exhibitions

the public, as well as audio-visual footage, sounds, scents and special digital features, *Home, Truly* explores the moments and experiences in Singapore's past and present that express our identity and collective memory as a people.

NUS Museum, NUS Centre for the Arts

University Cultural Centre
50 Kent Ridge Crescent, Singapore
119279
Tel: 6516 8817
www.museum.nus.edu.sg



Free admission

Opening hours:

Tues to Sat 10:00 am – 6:00 pm, closed on Sundays and Public Holidays,
Monday: Visits by appointment for schools/faculties only.

Wishful Images: When Microhistories Take Form (through 25 Dec)

Five artists—Lucy Davis, Kao Chung-Li, Kuniyoshi Kazuo, Nguyễn Trinh Thi, and Aya Rodriguez-Izumi—whose artistic practices question the governmentality between the lived and the non-living, explore the impact of contemporary geopolitical realities recapitulated under the Asian Cold War through a re-historicisation of the past into the present.

Wishful Images resembles a collective attempt to relate lesser-known historical events through the persistent efforts of artists, recounted and re-articulated in various forms and mediums. Taking its cue from Ernst Bloch's concept of wishful images, the exhibition examines a constellation of unrealised possibilities, in which history, images and politics triangulate.

NUS Baba House

157 Neil Road, Singapore 088883
Tel: 6227 5731
www.babahouse.nus.edu.sg

For opening hours and guided tour information, please consult the Baba House website at babahouse.nus.edu.sg/plan-your-visit
For enquiries, please email babahouse@nus.edu.sg

Now conceived as a heritage house facilitating research, appreciation and reflection of Straits Chinese history and culture, the NUS Baba House was built around 1895 and was once the ancestral home of a Peranakan Chinese family. During the one-hour tour, guests will be introduced to the history and architectural features of the house, and experience visiting a Straits Chinese family home in a 1920s setting, furnished with heirlooms from its previous owners and other donors.

The Peranakan Museum

39 Armenian Street, Singapore
179941
Tel: 6332 7591
www.peranakanmuseum.sg



This intimate museum possesses one of the finest and most comprehensive collections of Peranakan objects. Galleries on three floors illustrate the cultural traditions and the distinctive visual arts of the Peranakans. The museum is currently closed to prepare for its next phase of development.

Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore
189555
Tel: 6332 3222
www.singaporeartmuseum.sg



The Singapore Art Museum focuses on international contemporary art practices, specialising in Singapore and Southeast Asia. The main building of the Singapore Art Museum (located along 71 Bras Basah Road) is currently closed to prepare it for its next phase of development.

Wikicliki: Collecting Habits on an Earth Filled with Smartphones (through 11 Jul)

Located at City Hall Wing, Level B1, The Ngee Ann Kongsi Concourse Gallery, National Gallery Singapore

The exhibition is titled after the constantly evolving work, <http://dbbd.sg/wiki>, by artist Debbie Ding. Maintained since 2008, Ding's work traces emerging issues around society's use of the internet, technology, design, architecture, linguistics and varied cultural topics. Could the museum endeavour to collect such an artwork that expands and grows with time? *Wikicliki* explores this question through a survey of six artists whose modes of working provide unique but interrelated entry points into a range of issues confronting contemporary practitioners in Singapore today.

STPI Creative Workshop and Gallery

41 Robertson Quay, Singapore 238236
Tel: 6336 3663
www.stpi.com.sg

Opening hours:

Mon to Fri: 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Sat: 9:00 am – 6:00 pm, Sun: 10:00 am – 5:00 pm

Closed Public Holidays

FOM guided tours:

For the FOM guided tour schedule, to learn more about STPI's public programmes, special evening tours, and programmes in Japanese, Korean, Mandarin and French, please visit stpi.com.sg



STPI is a dynamic creative workshop and contemporary art gallery based in Singapore. Established in 2002, STPI is a not-for-profit organisation committed to promoting artistic experimentation in the mediums of print and paper and has become one of the most cutting-edge destinations for contemporary art in Asia.

Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall

12 Tai Gin Road, Singapore 327874
Tel: 6256 7377
www.wanqingyuan.org.sg



Opening hours:

Tues to Sun 10:00 am – 5:00 pm,
Closed on Mondays

FOM guided tours:

Please consult the Memorial Hall's website at <https://www.sysnmh.org.sg/en/visit/free-guided-tours>

Built in 1902, this double-storey villa was the nerve centre of Dr Sun Yat Sen's revolutionary movement in Southeast Asia. It re-opened to the public on 9 October 2011 and the revamped Memorial Hall pays tribute to the vital role played by Singapore and Nanyang in the 1911 Revolution. Focusing on the contributions of Dr Sun Yat Sen's key supporters in Singapore, the refurbished museum sheds light on the lesser-known details of Singapore and Nanyang's involvement in the 1911 Revolution.

Free general admission to all NHB museums for FOM members and one guest.



H U M A N



N A T U R E

Environmental Histories of Singapore



Explore two centuries of
Singapore's natural history

Exhibition runs until 26 Sep 2021
Level 10, National Library Building



www.go.gov.sg/humanxnature

An exhibition by:



NLB

National Library
Singapore

