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NTU taking measures to reduce human-wildlife conflict



With more development projects in the works, the chances of human encounters with wildlife - and conflicts - increase. PHOTO: EARTHLINK NTU



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SINGAPORE - Nicknamed "Pulau NTU", Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) green campus attracts a huge variety of wildlife, and the university is taking a slew of measures to reduce human-wildlife conflict and make the environment more conducive for students and fauna.

The measures range from monkey-proof bins to monkey guarding workshops for university employees that teach a method to guide the animals away from an area.

"We aim to become a City in Nature, by weaving nature more deliberately and intensely into our urban fabric, so that nature thrives within our city," said Minister for National Development Desmond Lee at a seminar with students on Monday evening (March 14).

Hosted by the NTU environmental club, the 1½-hour Zoom webinar on human-wildlife coexistence also featured a panel of speakers: Dr Shawn Lum, president of Singapore's Nature Society; Dr Vilma D'Rozario, director of the Singapore Wildcat Action Group; Professor Kwok Kian Woon, associate vice-president of well-being in NTU; and Associate Professor Valerie Du Toit-Low, deputy associate provost of residential education at NTU.

With more development projects in the works, the chances of human encounters with wildlife - and conflicts - increase.

NTU, which is located next to forests in the western catchment area, is more aware of this than most schools. To guard against macaques foraging through rubbish bins, for instance, it has installed more than 1,200 monkey-proof bins around campus.

Having had to relocate monkeys on campus to their natural habitat with the help of the National Parks Board (NParks), the school conducts workshops for staff such as security personnel on monkey guarding, a method that herds and conditions monkeys away from an area.

The school is also making efforts to educate students about the school's rich biodiversity and wildlife etiquette, during induction of new students, and through a handbook being put together by the NTU Earthlink club on what to do when encountering wild animals on campus.

The webinar on Monday kick-starts NTU environmental club Earthlink's Biodiversity Week 2022, which has a line-up of webinars and activities aimed at raising awareness of the school's rich biodiversity and wildlife.

Apart from monkeys, birds, butterflies and snakes, NTU has had visits from rare and endangered species, such as the sunda pangolin, oriental pied hornbill and the buffy fish owl.

NTU offers grants and awards for students who come up with projects on sustainability and environmental responsibility.

The university is also exploring ways to improve its students' appreciation of nature, through nature walks and an edible gardening programme, where student gardeners get to seed, fertilise and harvest plants.



Some of the wildlife spotted at NTU are rare and endangered species such as the oriental pied hornbills. PHOTO: EARTHLINK NTU

On the national front, the Ministry of National Development (MND) is speaking to building owners about using bird strike-proof windows made from a different type of glass, as taller buildings pose a safety threat to birds, particularly migratory birds.

MND is studying this threat carefully, Mr Lee said.

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Speaking about the Government's approach towards wildlife conservation, Mr Lee highlighted the importance and pressures of having to strike a balance between maximising land use and preserving biodiversity as a small country with a high population density.

Pressure on housing is only set to grow, with demand increasing, for instance, for Housing Board (HDB) flats as households get smaller.

There were about three people in each HDB household last year, compared with more than four in 1990. Singapore now has more than one million HDB flats and 400,000 private homes.

To achieve a balance, Mr Lee said, the Government uses a science-based approach to identify core biodiversity areas to conserve, connect these areas by setting up nature corridors, and develop brownfield sites such as golf courses and old schools, among other strategies.

"Collectively, these strategies will allow us to steward our scarce land resources - for today's use, and for future generations."

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