

Celebrating Pulau Ubin Interview with N. Sivasothi



Mr N. Sivasothi is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Biological Sciences, National University of Singapore (NUS), and has been a Friends of Ubin Network (FUN) member since it was founded in 2014. Siva was involved in Ubin projects such as the FUN Workgroups on Habitat Enhancement, Species Recovery and Shoreline Restoration, and was part of the team that formulated the 'Ubin Way' code of conduct for visitors to Ubin. He is also the national coordinator for activities under the International Coastal Cleanup Singapore programme, which includes Pulau Ubin as one of the sites designated for clean-up every September.

1. What sparked your interest in advocating biodiversity conservation research and education on Pulau Ubin?

I was introduced to Pulau Ubin, the adventure island, by Outward Bound School in secondary school. As a biology undergraduate in the '80s, I learnt about nature and soaked in the atmosphere. Then, in 1998, canoeing friends who were organising the People's Association's Ubin Challenge recruited me to organise the cycling and hiking components.

I roped in friends and, despite misdirected meals and storms, Ubin charmed us all! The intense planning and training led to the Pedal Ubin activity by NUS Toddlers! In 1999, and we still lead rides today as proud members of Pesta Ubin. In 2009, we ensured that all undergraduates reading ecology in NUS would visit and study the island's ecosystems each semester.

2. How has Pulau Ubin changed over the years?

It was June 2001 when we were confronted by the grim scene of flattened kampungs in the eastern part of the island. The anguish of impending reclamation was upon us. We threw ourselves into rapid surveys of the marine fauna at Chek Jawa and invited the public to 'Last Chance to See' walks. Public interest was unprecedented, and even unnerving! As we queued with hundreds for our bumboat back to Changi, Subaraj Rajathurai was beaming—he felt invigorated! This was no lone cry from the nature community.

Later, as research students examined the island's fauna, the Greater Mousedeer surprised us: It was not lost and we saw, too, that Ubin was a refuge to civets, macaques

and wild boars. With more than 3,000 reproductive Fishtail Palms lining the roads that we sampled, food was not wanting. NParks replanted as many areas as they could, and it was exciting to witness Ubin become greener and host more diversity. But that 10-year deferment hung over our heads, and at a dialogue at the Urban Redevelopment Authority in 2013, we shared that we were still dreading those shelved plans for reclamation from 2002.

That would very cautiously be transformed into relief, as it became clear that the nature, environment, heritage and people of Ubin were part of Singapore's future. To this end, FUN was formed, leading several initiatives to preserve Ubin's cultural and natural heritage since 2014.

3. With reference to The Ubin Project vision, what advice would you give to future generations of Singaporeans regarding biodiversity conservation on Ubin?

On 22 August 2020, my students who grew up in an urbanised Singapore examined the various ecosystems in scattered groups of five. They were immersed in the calls of Oriental Pied Hornbills, Straw-headed Bulbuls, Oriental Magpie-robins, kingfishers and Red Junglefowls during what was, for most, only their first or second time on the island.

Little would they realise that this was the simple wish we had for all of them when they were born 20 years ago. With a common vision guiding us, they can be stewards of Pulau Ubin too.

And, now we celebrate.

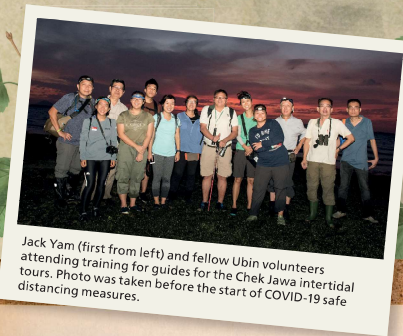
UbinTides



Be an Ubin Volunteer!

Are you passionate about nature conservation?
If so, why not volunteer with NParks at Ubin?

The Ubin Volunteer Programme offers opportunities for you to share your knowledge, skills and time to care for our natural heritage. As an Ubin volunteer, you will start your journey with an orientation course to gain a better understanding of Ubin and how you can contribute. The skills learnt as an Ubin volunteer can equip you to be a nature guide, wildlife researcher, photographer and more.



Jack Yam (first from left) and fellow Ubin volunteers attending training for guides for the Chek Jawa intertidal tours. Photo was taken before the start of COVID-19 safe distancing measures.

Different Strokes for Different Folks

The programme offers a wide range of volunteer opportunities. Each one is an adventure and there will always be something new to discover. You will gain knowledge and insights from NParks staff and fellow volunteers, making your volunteer experience enriching and fulfilling.

Volunteer opportunities at Ubin include:

Bird Ringing Set-up

The bird ringing programme provides important information on the diversity of birds, where they are distributed and their movement patterns, as well as data on their breeding periods and habitat preferences. As a volunteer, you will help to set up of mist nets for the programme and assist in data collection.

Dragonfly Watch

Join this citizen science programme under the Community in Nature (CIN) Biodiversity Watch series to learn more about our dragonflies and damselflies, including basic surveying skills to carry out the counts at various sites around Singapore.

Forest and Boat Patrols

Help us keep Ubin's biodiversity well protected! We will patrol our forests, coastline and rivers to carry out inspections and look for any illegal activities such as poaching.

Why Volunteer?

There is no better way to answer this than to hear from an Ubin volunteer! Jack Yam shares his experience as an Ubin volunteer.

"I love how we travel back in time whenever we take the bumboat to Ubin. It's almost like a time machine! I have also come to know more about the island's history!

I have learnt more about the biodiversity on Pulau Ubin. No two trips are the same. There is always something interesting to discover. On different days, I'll come across oriental whip snakes, loads of butterflies, long-tailed macaques, wild boars and a wide diversity of plants!

When I volunteer, I like to get my hands dirty and learn about what is really on the ground—the invasive species, the keystone species, et cetera. I also love telling people about what they see in nature. When I go for nature walks on my own, I make it a point to share interesting facts with people who are visiting the parks too. This way it enriches their park-visiting experience!"

Join us as volunteer today at
<https://www.nparks.gov.sg/pulau-ubin/volunteers/volunteerforus>

Island, We Learn

Pulau Ubin serves as an important hub for multidisciplinary and experiential learning. Part of the vision set by the Friends of Ubin Network (FUN) was for Ubin to be a place not just for thriving biodiversity, but also where one could reminisce about the past and celebrate the present. Ubin is thus an ideal place for the next generation to interact with the community and become stewards of Singapore's natural and cultural heritage.

Our Education Workgroup

Comprising passionate educators across various disciplines, FUN's Education Workgroup proactively engages schools and tertiary institutions through programmes on different subjects. They also work with NParks to provide facilities that are conducive for experiential learning. Pilot learning journeys have been carried out for schools and teachers, while an inaugural learning symposium will provide a platform for the teaching fraternity to exchange ideas on how students can learn more about Ubin's natural and cultural heritage.

FUN's Education Workgroup on one of their visits to Pulau Ubin. Photographs were taken prior to COVID-19.



Young Hearts for Conservation

Led by NParks conservation staff, the Young Hearts for Conservation programme aims to develop awareness and care for the conservation of biodiversity in Singapore's youth through service learning. The two-day programme includes a classroom segment for them to share about their conservation efforts, as well as hands-on activities such as reforestation, coastal clean-up and invasive-species management.



Participants of a Young Hearts for Conservation session with their Certificates of Completion. Photographs were taken prior to COVID-19.

Engagements with Schools

FUN has had the privilege of organising numerous events for our future generations. Full of energy and excitement, children and youths discover Ubin's significance for conservation and how they can contribute and play their part. These are some of the activities that schools have participated in over the years!

My First Skool

On 24th August 2019, as part of their Kindness Day's celebrations, about 300 teachers, children and their parents from My First Skool at Block 637 Pasir Ris visited Ubin. During their time on the island, they explored the village, learned about butterflies and herons at Pekan Quarry, and planted trees and shrubs at the Ubin Living Lab. This was in line with the preschool's theme of "Be Kind to the Environment", which they had chosen as their tagline for Singapore Kindness Day.

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Parents were very happy to see their children's resilience and determination in completing the planting tasks.

Mdm Hartiny Abdul Hamid
Executive Principal

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Preschoolers watering the tree that they planted at the Ubin Living Lab. Photographs were taken prior to COVID-19.

Yale-NUS College

As part of their research project on Ubin's biodiversity, a group of Yale-NUS College students used the Ubin Living Lab as their field base over a few months. They housed their field equipment there and conducted research using the microscopes in the laboratory. At the end of their project, they also organised a sharing session with NParks staff on their research findings.

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NParks has been extremely gracious and wonderful to work with. Without these facilities, we could not have conducted this research, nor provided our students with such an excellent learning opportunity in field-based ecology. So, thank you all for helping us to provide these experiences!!!

Taylor Sloey, Field Researcher,
Yale-NUS College

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Students using the laboratory facilities at the Ubin Living Lab. Photographs were taken prior to COVID-19.

Virtual Learning

Due to the restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, schools used technology to deepen their Ubin learning adventure. Through various online platforms and tools such as virtual tours and video clips, schools like Commonwealth Secondary School and Nanyang Girls' High School learnt about Ubin and engaged in group discussions.

Students from Commonwealth Secondary School taking turns to ask NParks questions during an online discussion with NParks while observing safety guidelines.

