

World Wildlife Day Regional Youth Symposium 2022

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Introduction & Objectives

The inaugural World Wildlife Day Regional Youth Symposium was held online on 3 March 2022. The event was organised by 5 youth volunteers under the Youth Stewards for Nature Programme of Singapore's National Parks Board (NParks), with support from NParks. The symposium featured 22 expert speakers and guests-of-honour from diverse fields, and over 40 volunteer moderators and facilitators from the nature community in the region. More than 200 participants attended, representing 13 different nationalities and affiliations with over 80 environmental groups, government organisations, and academic institutions.

In conjunction with World Wildlife Day, the symposium was themed 'Recovering Key Species for Ecosystem Restoration in Southeast Asia'. The event drew attention to Southeast Asia as one of the most threatened biodiversity hotspots globally, highlighted the most critically endangered species in the region, and drove discussions towards imagining and implementing solutions to conserve them.

Event Summary

The symposium first began with a casual virtual lunch social where our participants, facilitators and speakers had the chance to network and get to know one another. After which, the opening ceremony of the symposium featured remarks from Mr Desmond Lee (Minister for National Development, Singapore), Ms Ivonne Higuero (CITES Secretary-General) and Dr Theresa Mundita S. Lim (Executive Director, ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity), followed by keynote address from Dr Madhu Rao (Chair of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas, Senior Advisor at the Wildlife Conservation Society, and Adjunct Associate Professor at the National University of Singapore). Dr Rao highlighted key issues and solutions surrounding the topics of Wildlife Trade, Species Recovery and Ecosystem Restoration.

Participants were allowed to choose one of three thematic tracks which aimed to raise awareness on **(1) Wildlife Trade**, **(2) Species Recovery**, and **(3) Ecosystem Restoration**. Each track featured six speakers which shared about their experiences across two sessions, A and B which featured three speakers per session followed by panel discussions in each session. Following the sharing, participants split into breakout rooms for small group discussions facilitated by volunteer youth facilitators from the region and then reconvened for a large group sharing and voice their aspirations for the conservation of the region's biodiversity.

Before, during and after the event, participants were engaged through an [Instagram page](#). Zoom session recordings of the event can be found at this [NParks YouTube playlist](#). A post-symposium

report and certificates of participation were also awarded to all participants who attended the full duration of the event. Additionally, a [regional chat group](#) has been set up for more opportunities related to the areas of conservation, biodiversity and nature.

Team Reflections

- **Li Si:** Every aspect of the symposium was specially curated. Bringing together prominent speakers and experts from over ten countries, this symposium might just be the most ambitious crossover in the regional nature scene.
- **Anusha:** I am immensely inspired by my teammates who showed their strengths as we worked tirelessly to make this event a reality. I hope that this event can be the steppingstone to further collaborations between Southeast Asian youths.
- **Sean:** Seeing individuals from around the region, sharing their opinions and ideas was very encouraging and heart warming. Learning from the various speakers and participants was an amazing experience and made all the work put into the symposium extremely worth it.
- **Janelle:** It was extremely fulfilling to see our project come to fruition and the hard work put in was definitely worth every bit of it. During the process, I've learnt so much from my peers, the advisors, and the speakers.
- **Wai Kit:** I've learnt so much working with my team and listening to over 20 invited speakers from the region. I'm also glad that when we challenged the status quo with new ideas such as the refreshing graphic design, it was embraced with open arms.

Future Plans

The World Wildlife Day Regional Youth Symposium was a celebration of the conservation work conducted across the Southeast Asian region and the event was pivotal in bringing together youths and experts from the region, to promote cross-border collaborations and networking opportunities. The team would like to propose the following for future iterations of the symposium:

1. The event be held annually and executed by Singapore for a few more years so as to be well established before co-organizing with OR rotating to other nations.
2. Establish a regional youth secretariat to inform the direction of the symposium.
3. Continue collaboration with the speakers that we have worked with and continue to spotlight speakers from diverse backgrounds and fields for future iterations of the symposium. Potential to explore hybrid format.
4. Selection of the next planning team via YSN as soon as possible to ensure sufficient lead time to plan and execute event.