

Ubin Tides

A message from Chairman, Friends of Ubin Network

Dear friends,

I'm happy to share the re-launch of the Ubin newsletter, *Ubin Tides*. The name, "Ubin Tides", reflects the ebb and flow of life on Ubin, just as we hope that the newsletter celebrates the island's heritage and highlights worthwhile new initiatives.

The last issue of *Ubin Tides* was published almost 15 years ago. A lot has changed since then, but Ubin's charm remains the same. The Ubin Project was conceived in 2014, representing our commitment to keep Ubin a familiar and rustic getaway - a place to reminisce the past and celebrate the present, and to protect for the future. With the Friends of Ubin Network's recent focus on resident engagement and its proposals to enhance the island's community, heritage and history, we thought it was timely to revive *Ubin Tides*. This way, residents and visitors alike can be updated about the latest news and ongoing programmes on the island.

This issue of *Ubin Tides* features projects targeted at enhancing residents' quality of life and NParks' work in waste disposal and infrastructural maintenance (pg. 3). In February, NParks and Kawan Ubin also worked together to throw the first *Balik Kampung* party for residents past and present (pg. 3). We look forward to working with you to enhance and protect this special island for years to come.

As always, we welcome any new ideas that you may have for Ubin. In the meantime, may you find *Ubin Tides* an enjoyable read, and I hope to see you (on Ubin) soon.

Yours sincerely,
Desmond Lee
Minister for Social and Family Development &
Second Minister for National Development



The Ubin Project

Launched in 2014, The Ubin Project seeks to build on existing efforts with the community to sensitively enhance the natural environment of Ubin and keep its heritage and rustic charm alive for future generations of Singaporeans. To help achieve this, the Friends of Ubin Network (FUN) was formed, comprising youths, residents, researchers, volunteers, residents and members from the heritage and nature communities. Together, this network of friends leads initiatives of The Ubin Project, which has five key foci. We take a look at the various efforts made so far.

Community, Heritage and History

The Ubin Project encourages community groups to actively organise and lead initiatives that help to make a difference on the island. Key community efforts include the annual open house festival Pesta Ubin, Balik Kampung Party, and the restoration of kampung structures. One refurbished traditional house is Teck Seng's Place, an authentic Chinese kampung house that is open for the public to learn about Pulau Ubin's cultural heritage. Many photographs and display items in it were contributed by the local Ubin community.



Balik Kampung Party was organised by Kawan Ubin on 24 February 2018. A reunion of close to 140 current and former Ubin residents and their families, the celebration aimed to be the first in a series of community get-togethers. The Balik Kampung Party included games, dinner, a documentary screening and even a "lohei" session. Photo credit: Geoffrey Benjamin

Education and Research

As an integrated facility for field studies, education and community outreach, the Ubin Living Lab (ULL) has hosted a variety of educational and outreach programmes, research activities, as well as outdoor camps since its opening in February 2016. ULL also houses the mangrove arboretum which showcases mangrove species found in Singapore.

Volunteers are also contributing to the ongoing two-year Comprehensive Ubin Biodiversity Survey (CUBS). The data collected from CUBS will aid in the management of our natural heritage, habitat enhancement and species recovery projects, and planning of future research.



Volunteers at a training session for the Comprehensive Ubin Biodiversity Survey (CUBS). Photo credit: Vilma D'Rozario

Nature-based Recreation

Visitors can now enjoy Pulau Ubin's nature offerings further, thanks to various contributions by the community, such as new tours around the island, and photographs at the newly refurbished Chek Jawa Visitor Centre and Nature Gallery. Butterfly enthusiasts from ButterflyCircle also provided write-ups and photographs for new interpretive plaques at Butterfly Hill. At Ubin Fruit Orchard, Ngee Ann Polytechnic students planted over 30 species of local fruit trees, while Nanyang Girls' High School students created educational signs based on the species planted.



Volunteers help to conduct the Kampung Tour and Rustic Reflections Tour, bringing participants around Ubin to experience and learn more about the island's cultural and natural heritage.

Sustainable Design and Practices

Introduced in 2017, the Ubin Way is a code of conduct to encourage visitors to adopt ecologically and socially responsible behaviour when on the island, and to learn more about the villagers and Ubin through friendly conversation. Initiated and collectively endorsed through FUN, it is promoted across the island through signs, a video and online. Find out more about the Ubin Way at www.ubin.sg.

Biodiversity Conservation

With inputs from FUN, efforts to conserve and reintroduce native biodiversity were initiated via habitat enhancement and species recovery programmes. NParks has engaged various partners to restore forest, freshwater wetlands, mangrove and shoreline habitats, and look at ways to increase the natural populations of rare plants and animals. Students from schools such as ITE College (East) also assist in the monitoring of bat houses, boxes, otter holts and nesting sites of Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*), Blue-throated Bee-eater (*Merops viridis*) and Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*). Lesser False Vampire (*Megaderma spasma*) bats are residing in two bat houses set up in 2016.

As part of the community-led Restore Ubin Mangroves (R.U.M.) initiative, a two-day workshop on mangrove restoration was organised in February 2018, where participants came up with ideas for future restoration work.



ITE College (East) students use an endoscope to monitor activity inside artificial otter dens or holts set up for the Asian Small-clawed Otter (*Aonyx cinereus*). Photo credit: Buddhima Dinushini Williams

Central management agency for Pulau Ubin

The Friends of Ubin Network (FUN) came up with the idea to have a single agency to manage Pulau Ubin and holistically address and coordinate management issues, and NParks took on the role of the central management agency for the island in mid-2016. Apart from greenery management, nature conservation, recreation management and public outreach, NParks now takes charge of additional functions such as the maintenance of roads, bridges, drains, beaches, quarry lakes and cemeteries. This management model allows NParks to have a greater oversight of Pulau Ubin, and better manage it to achieve The Ubin Project's vision.

NParks also manages Temporary Occupation Licences issued to the local community, and has extended the licence period for Pulau Ubin residents from the previous one year to three years. This means that villagers are assured of the Government's intention to allow them to stay on and contribute to the rustic charm of the island.

Based on feedback gathered from villagers, NParks has embarked on community improvement works, including the provision of waste collection and disposal services, supply of fire extinguishers, and repairs of drains and earth tracks.



The local community welcomed help to dispose of approximately 15 tonnes of bulky refuse and debris from decades of accumulation.

Improvements to drains in the Main Village alleviate flooding and public hygiene and safety issues.



Track repairs facilitate safe access to and from residents' houses.



The supplied fire extinguishers enable households and businesses to control the outbreak of small fires.



Rubbish bins and regular waste collection and disposal services encourage locals and visitors alike to help keep Ubin clean.

Interview with Ria Tan

Nature enthusiast Ria Tan runs wildsingapore.com, a website on Singapore's wildlife, and contributes to the conservation cause in Singapore. We find out more about her twin passions, conservation and Pulau Ubin.

First I am a part of Ubin Day which is an annual kampung-style Open House at Pulau Ubin. Originally a one-day event, it was renamed Pesta Ubin as it is now held over a number of weeks with Ubin Day as the "Grand Finale".

Balik Chek Jawa is something that brings a smile to my face. I don't consider it a personal accomplishment, rather it is an accomplishment of the whole community. Introduced in 2016, this annual event gathers volunteers from various groups to celebrate Chek Jawa Wetlands for a day during Pesta Ubin.



Volunteers at Ubin Day 2017

You are heavily involved with marine conservation. What sparked your interest in conservation?

I am not a scientist and did not do science after A levels. My first real taste of wild nature in Singapore was as a volunteer guide at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. Through the volunteers and people at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, I heard about Chek Jawa, about six months before it was due to be reclaimed. I visited Chek Jawa and fell under her spell. From then on, I got involved more extensively in guiding and other nature awareness programmes related to Chek Jawa. After reclamation of Chek Jawa was deferred, I helped NParks set up the volunteer guiding system there. Then I went on to explore other Singapore shores. Now, I do regular intertidal surveys: 100 days a year covering 50 sea shore locations. I've also helped train shore guides for Pulau Semakau and the Sisters Islands Marine Park.

Being a Friends of Ubin Network member, how does this help you contribute to conservation matters and projects on Ubin?

I was truly inspired by Second Minister of National Development Desmond Lee's call for ground-up and community action for Pulau Ubin under the Friends of Ubin Network. In response to his call, I have been involved in two major initiatives for the island.

The other one is the Restore Ubin Mangroves (R.U.M.) Initiative which brings together those passionate about restoring mangroves in the abandoned aquaculture ponds on the island. This includes NGOs, tertiary institutions, individual enthusiasts and commercial enterprises.



R.U.M. volunteers

Being heavily involved with conservation for many years, is there anything you were able to tick off your bucket list? What is your proudest accomplishment?

I don't really have a bucket list. I get excited just to see common creatures. Chek Jawa Wetlands and its sister-shore Pulau Sekudu are among my favourites. I have seen dugong feeding trails on Chek Jawa Wetlands on almost every trip, and it thrills me to know that they are there though we don't see them.

I am happy that this initiative brings together the community that loves Chek Jawa Wetlands, such as the Naked Hermit Crabs, TeamSeaGrass, the Toddycats, Restore Ubin Mangroves (R.U.M.) Initiative and NParks staff and volunteers.



Balik Chek Jawa in 2017

Many Singaporeans keen to help our environment and wildlife are unable to volunteer regularly due to other commitments. What sacrifices did you have to make? Any advice for nature enthusiasts interested in helping out?

“ I love working on our shores, so I don't feel it's a sacrifice. I believe anyone can do their part simply by visiting a shore and sharing the experience with their friends. By raising awareness, you can already make a difference.

I set up wildsingapore.com to help those who want to learn and do more for Singapore's wild places. As the tagline indicates, you can make a difference! Simply explore our wild places, express or share what you've seen and felt, and act for our wild places. ”