

Interview with Colin Koh

As a member of the Friends of Ubin Network (FUN), Colin Koh contributes towards nature-based outdoor recreation and community engagement on Pulau Ubin. We find out what drives him to promote his passion for sports and the island.



Colin at the Main Village. Colin is also a member of the Singapore Canoe Federation! (Photo credit: Greg O'Loughlin)

What sparked your interest in promoting safe sports on Pulau Ubin?

I have always been keen on adventure sports, both indoor and outdoor, but I seem to love outdoor sports more. With Southeast Asia's humidity, watersports seem to be the best choice.

My interest in sports started in Singapore and I gained much experience overseas when I lived in the USA and UK. During those years, I noticed significant differences between sports operators' mentality toward safety. Of special interest to me was the disconnect between what was being said, and the actual preparedness, or lack thereof, of the operator.

When I returned to Singapore, I resolved to bring back some of the good safety practices I had observed.

What changes have you observed on Pulau Ubin over the past years, and what would you hope to see on Pulau Ubin in the next ten years?

I started working as a teaching divemaster, running programmes off Tanjong Tajam on Pulau Ubin in the mid-1980s. Over the years, I have seen many developments on Ubin.

Ubin has experienced the gradual change from being a place for village communities, then to a space for nature and institutionalised use, and now into a place that is core to our nation's heritage.

As we turned our attention higher up the economic value chain, toward creativity, ideation and inventiveness, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had once identified Ubin as the pivot to bring the population around to a new way of thinking. And that perhaps is rooted in "The Ubin Way" (a term that FUN coined), which in my opinion means to think organically (i.e. in a circular, sustainable manner) and less synthetically. This idea was launched by PM Lee into the mainstream on our first Ubin Day on 30 November 2014.

With reference to The Ubin Project vision, what would you like to say to future generations of Singaporeans about Ubin?

Ubin means so much more to Singapore than just being a nature refuge or adventure playground. It is the sanctuary of a nation's heritage, its identity and spirit. I will say that Ubin has been, is, and should rightly continue to be the testbed for the conscience of our people, and it should continue to have a team of dedicated stewards to support its evolution in an increasingly chaotic world.

To put it simply, in my humble opinion, if Singapore is the ship, then Ubin is its anchor.



Colin (front row, second from right) with fellow FUN members and Pesta Ubin volunteers at an appreciation dinner on 19 August 2022, attended by Minister Desmond Lee

To learn more about The Ubin Way, scan the QR code below:



Ubin Tides



With a Little Help from Our Friends

COVID-19 Second Booster Vaccination Exercise



Vaccination station at the Assembly Area

For the fourth time, the National Parks Board (NParks) Community Liaison Team worked with MOH to bring the Home Vaccination Team (HVT) back to Pulau Ubin. On 23 September 2022, the HVT vaccinated 23 villagers, visiting some of them at their homes. Once again, the villagers were glad to receive their vaccination jabs comfortably within Ubin.

When the Ministry of Health (MOH) announced that the second booster jab for COVID-19 would be offered to those 50 years old and above, the villagers requested to get their booster jabs on the island since they had such a positive experience at previous vaccination exercises.



Mobile vaccination at a villager's house

Goodstock@RP

The staff and students from Republic Polytechnic (RP) brought the Goodstock event back to Ubin for the third time! Organised by RP in collaboration with NParks, Goodstock@RP encourages Ubin villagers to stay healthy and active through health activities.

Let's stretch! RP students and villagers warming up for the activity



The event, which took place on 19 November 2022, provided a service-learning opportunity for the RP team, as the students got to share health and nutrition knowledge to the villagers. Along with Singapore's national Paralympian powerlifter Aini Yasli, the RP team distributed health care-packs to the villagers and taught them simple resistant band exercises that they could do at home. It was a good break for the villagers from their daily routine on the island. Everyone left the session armed with new knowledge and feeling a little more refreshed!



Villagers pulling hard on their resistance bands



NParks and friends from the MOH HVT



NParks and friends from RP after the event



Share your love for nature and animals at #NParksBuzz #AnimalBuzzSG

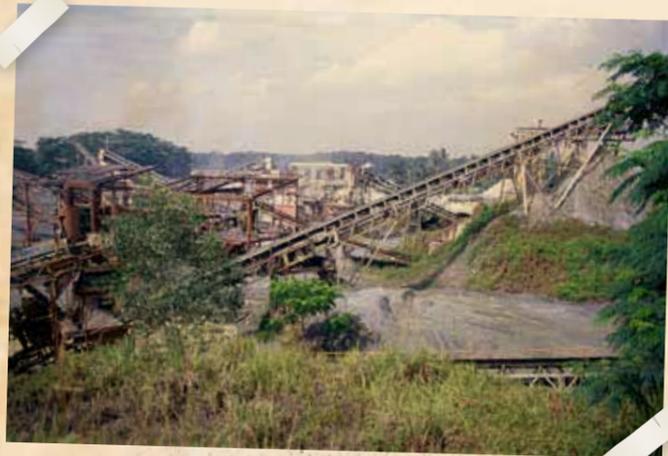


Striking colours of the Blue-throated Bee-eater

Successful Nesting of Blue-throated Bee-eaters

Thanks to NParks' species recovery efforts under The Ubin Project, we are seeing Blue-throated Bee-eaters breeding successfully on Pulau Ubin.

Ketam Quarry (previously Aik Hwa Quarry) was home to the Blue-throated Bee-eater (*Merops viridis*) before the late 1990s when the quarry was still in operation. During that period, these resident birds used to nest in granite dust piles accumulated from quarrying activities. However, after quarrying operations on Pulau Ubin ceased in 1999, there has been a loss of these granite dust piles that serve as nesting spots for the bee-eater. Elsewhere in Singapore, there have been records of bee-eaters nesting on cliff faces, golf courses, and sandy grass patches near the beach.

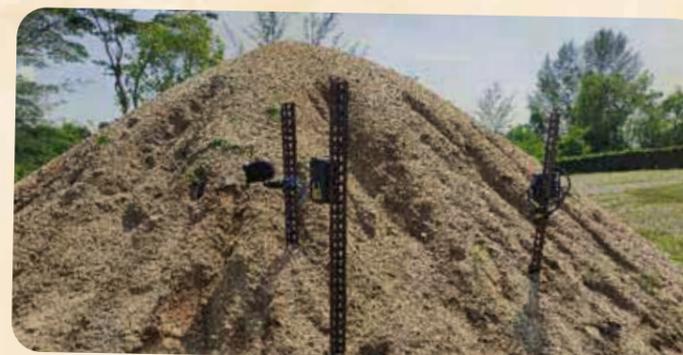


Aik Hwa Quarry in the late 1990s



Ketam Bird Species Recovery Site at Ketam Quarry

Since 2016, an area near the Ketam Quarry viewpoint was designated for the species recovery of three bird species: the Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*), Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*), and Blue-throated Bee-eater. Seven mounds of different material compositions were constructed to determine the Blue-throated Bee-eater's nesting habitat preference. For the Red-wattled Lapwing, which is a ground-nesting bird, open stony areas and grasslands were incorporated into the design of the site. Trees with droopy branches were planted to accommodate Baya Weavers that build nests that hang from tree branches.



(Clockwise from top left) Various monitoring efforts by the NParks team

NParks conducts annual monitoring with cameras and binoculars. During a routine monitoring session in 2021, the NParks team noticed that Blue-throated Bee-eaters had nested in the mounds! It was found that they favoured the granite dust and sand mounds.

The birds start their courtship and tunnel digging in March, after returning from their yearly migration, and their breeding period lasts until July. When the birds are seen frequently re-entering their nests, the endoscope and camera traps are deployed to keep a closer eye on them. It was observed that the birds dug long tunnels about 1 m deep and 6 cm wide into the mounds where eggs are laid in a small cavity located at the end of the tunnel. Upon hatching, the chicks stay in the cavity but progressively move closer to the entrance of the tunnel as they grow older and hungrier.



Blue-throated Bee-eater chick about to fledge, inside its cavity nest

As of 2022, despite predation and tunnel collapses, there were 11 recorded nests where chicks successfully fledged and flew out from their nests! Monitoring will continue for the next breeding season and hopefully we can learn more about these amazing birds.