

***That's Wild* Season 2**

Under Whose Shade We Do Not Sit | Careers in NParks

[00:00:00] **Elliott:** Hello and welcome to *That's Wild*, a podcast series brought to you by the National Parks Board. I'm Elliott, and I'll be your host for this series, where we will be talking to special guests from the nature community about topics surrounding biodiversity conservation in our City in Nature.

[00:00:20] As someone who's been very interested in nature and biodiversity from a young age, NParks really opened my eyes to the amazing world of biodiversity in Singapore. And I think through my internships in NParks, I learned that there is actually a career to be made in this space and today I have colleagues from NParks here. They're not just colleagues. They spend a lot of time in NParks, Cyrena and Jim. So do you guys mind just introducing yourselves to the podcast?

[00:00:44] **Cyrena:** Hi, I'm Cyrena. I'm from the Wildlife Management and Outreach team here in NParks. So my team primarily deals with human wildlife encounters, trying to mitigate any form of conflict that comes between a human and wildlife. And this would cover species, from, say, wild boars to snakes to monkeys, civets, bats, and even urban pest birds as well. Yeah. So we deal with people a lot on a daily basis, but we also do a lot of policy calls as well as population management measures.

[00:01:15] **Jim:** My name is Jim. I'm in charge of the Conservation division. What it primarily does is to take care of all our nature reserves, our nature parks. So we have four nature reserves in Singapore, and surrounding them, we have a bunch of nature parks which are adjacent to them.

[00:01:31] At the same time, I also am in charge of the International Biodiversity Conservation division. It's a nano-division, and we take care of the obligations that Singapore has for our United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

[00:01:48] **Elliott:** Right. So you guys have touched a bit on what you guys do individually, but how about NParks as a whole? Could we have a brief overview about what NParks does across Singapore? And maybe in the region as well, or internationally?

[00:02:00] **Jim:** Oh, wow, that's a whole other podcast of its own. NParks, surprisingly, is in charge of essentially bringing to life Singapore's City in Nature vision. And, you know, I watch a lot of YouTube, right? And YouTube, and when all these foreigners come over, it's the strangest thing, because they still associate Singapore with Garden City, when actually, that's probably like two iterations ago. Singapore's vision changed from 'Garden City' to 'City in a Garden' to 'City in Nature'. So in 2019, what was once known as the AVA, the Agri-food and Veterinary Authority of Singapore, was split into two. One half became the SFA, the Singapore Food Agency, and that joined the Ministry of Sustainability and Environment. The other half became known as the Animal & Veterinary Service, and that basically merged with National Parks Board, so that also became one of the ways where Singapore then transitioned to 'City in Nature', because we were in charge of not just plants and trees, but also animal issues, including domestic animals, like cats and dogs, as well as animal health. We now have a cohort of vets, which are very important to help us track, for example, the birds that come into Singapore, the

health of the animals that are imported into Singapore as pets, and essentially make us a healthier nation.

[00:03:25] **Elliott:** And this was quite recently, I guess. So there must have been a lot of challenges also, right, with that kind of expansion of the job scope?

[00:03:33] **Cyrena:** Correct, because I think it's a very different scenario when you encounter these animals in nature areas, as opposed to encountering them in your neighbourhood, within your residential estate. So there was a need to really, very quickly and deeply understand the situation, because we didn't have prior expertise in that. So we had to delve into the cases that were coming in hot and fast, trying to understand people's concerns when they come across this wildlife, when it really warrants us to come in to intervene, because the whole ambit of wildlife management in Singapore primarily is to serve a few causes: One is to ensure public safety.

[00:04:11] Then, as Jim mentioned, public health, to also ensure animal welfare, that they are handled and also treated correctly, humanely. And the last part is to also ensure ecosystem balance. So it was a very huge undertaking. I think it's been about six years in the making. We have made quite a few developments in our approaches to manage the encounters, manage the population, and also trying to plan for the future. Yeah, I would say the team is small. The work is great, but we are charging ahead with this mission, trying to work towards a City in Nature where everybody can appreciate the native wildlife that we have, have awareness of what to do, and also have a deeper understanding of any of the management methods that NParks is embarking on to achieve the objectives that I have mentioned.

[00:04:57] **Elliott:** I think some of the questions that we get, you know, with the expansion of this job scope that NParks has had is where's the delineation between NParks and some of the other agencies, for example, NEA? Does NParks just handle animals and does NEA handle all the rest of the environment stuff? Where's that delineation?

[00:05:14] **Cyrena:** I think they look after the environment in the form of public hygiene and health, for some of the food centres, some of the drainage points. If you're looking at weather, climate, that's under NEA as well.

[00:05:25] **Jim:** And in fact, so we're talking about mosquitoes, and we're talking about cockroaches, we're talking about rats, those primarily fall under their ambit. Anything that affects the environment, including environmental health, and that's the way you see it, anything that can spread disease would come under the ambit of NEA.

[00:05:42] And I think the cool thing is that, you know, Singapore's journey towards greenery and being natural and living with nature has started. And I like to tell foreign visitors this, right, it had started even before Singapore became a republic. That very iconic photo of Lee Kuan Yew planting that Empat tree in Holland Circus, that was in 1963. That photo predated our own independence as a Republic by two years, right? And we've walked this journey all throughout 60 years. And right now, I think we do

take pride in our identity as a City in Nature.

[00:06:15] And the most important thing to remember is we are still a city, which means high infrastructure, tons of people. Which means that if you do want to co-exist with nature, there will always be instances whereby there will be humans interacting with animals, in particular, in the urban space. And I think Singapore is top of the world now in the experience of managing how people encounter and deal with animals in a respectful way. So for example, when you talk about jobs in NParks, and I think Cyrena did allude to it – a lot of what we do, many people's expectations, especially young people who want to join NParks, they think that we deal with animals, we deal with greenery a lot. But 75% to 90% of the time we are actually dealing with people. So when you're talking about us dealing with people, what does it mean? Feedback, right? Feedback. People call us, they say, oh, well, there's a monkey in my void deck. What do we do about that? We get tons of that.

[00:07:18] **Cyrena:** Yeah, I would also say the reporting channels have been much better publicised? Nowadays Singaporeans and residents would know where to go if they have something to report. I think the apps and the phone calls make it very easy, so that, I also think, have contributed to the feedback coming into us.

[00:07:35] **Elliott:** Right, yeah. And you guys were talking about a lot of people coming in with the idea that, you get to work with animals, you get to be outdoors all the time, but that's not necessarily true, right? And if you're dealing with people, you need a whole different type of skill set. So it's not just people interested in conservation or have a background in environmental studies or something like that. So what other backgrounds do NParks staff have across the board?

[00:07:57] **Cyrena:** I have team members with me that doesn't have any science background. I think they have majored in literature, some in philosophy and physics. They do come onto the job with fresh perspectives on how to deal with certain scenarios, because sometimes we look at things in a certain way because of our background, and we've always dealt with it this way. So hence, this shall be the way to go. But somebody new from a different background can say, "Hey, how about we try it this way?" We tackle the perspective, instead of like, the tangible animal, or like, the issue at hand. So that has been quite helpful.

[00:08:29] I think most of the time, at least for my department, we do have a lot of learning on the job, we support each other in terms of the different scenarios, because for animals, they are not static, like trees or bushes where they're in one place, they move a lot. And then they can also evolve and adapt in terms of the behaviour in response to what we do. Like, for example, if we want to exclude animals from a certain place, so we'll block this up. We'll have this at this height. But then subsequently, for example, in the case of otters, we thought that, okay, maybe, like, a height of 0.5 m would be good enough to stop them from climbing. And then we subsequently have to raise that to 1 m, 1.2 m. And the gaps that they can squeeze through, at first we thought, okay, maybe about 10 cm gap, that's fine. And then we have to also gradually reduce it to, like, say, about 5 cm. So these are the exclusion measures that we would recommend to premise owners and managers who want to exclude otters safely from their ponds

where they have pet fish. Yeah, so there's a lot of learning on the job that you can't get from your course, maybe in university, or from the textbooks. So I would say that if you come in with a background that is beyond science, something else, as long as you have the attitude and the aptitude to learn, I think that there are a lot of learning points that you can have in NParks, and you can also meaningfully contribute.

[00:09:50] **Jim:** And I think there's also a lot of expectation from young people that, you know, they want to follow their dream, and NParks sometimes is their dream. But you know, they've always been sensitised to these sort of outdoor green jobs as being, "Oh, I want to be a marine biologist. I want to be a biologist and go into the jungle and chase animals. I want to be a vet!". We all want to be a vet. Childhood dream, right? But at the same time, let's not forget that the bread and butter of NParks, when you look outside, the jobs that we do is about, again, 75% taking care of trees, right? Our streetscape managers, those are practically our elite, the people who take care of the greenery, the trees; parks managers, people who manage our Botanic Gardens, right? Those are 'plant-y' people. Now again, you don't really need a degree in botany to do so. We have people who studied tourism. We have people who were school teachers before they joined us. And then we train you both in the form of certificates. For example, the vast majority of our streetscape managers all have arboriculture certificates, that one you learn when you join us, right? So let's not forget that a lot of the bread and butter of what NParks does, literally, is inspecting trees, taking care of trees, managing the urban forest that we call home.

[00:11:10] **Elliott:** How much effort does it take to upkeep all these trees in Singapore? Everyone looks at it and it's beautiful, but they're also thinking, you know, how much effort goes into maintaining all this?

[00:11:19] **Jim:** Yeah, it's a great amount of effort.

[00:11:23] **Elliott:** So apart from the things that are done domestically or locally in terms of international outreach or international events. How does NParks participate in global events?

[00:11:33] **Jim:** Oh, wow. NParks basically goes for a lot of international things. First of all, we are the government liaison for the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, UNCBD. We go for the UNCBD CoP. That's once every two years where we bring a small delegation. And what we do is represent Singapore's interests there and make sure that we are a responsible global player. And in fact, we are doing so well, punching so well above our weight, that actually we have one instrument that is written into the UN right, and that's our Singapore Index on Cities' Biodiversity, or Singapore index, as they call it. So Singapore got together with a bunch of other cities and created this index whereby the city can score its own biodiversity, the benefits the biodiversity brings to the city, and how it's taking care of the biodiversity. And it's really cool, right? Because so tiny, one of the smallest countries in the world could come up with an instrument which is written into the UN documents, basically to help cities.

[00:12:35] So at the same time, AVS has one very large part, which is important for Singapore to participate in internationally, and that's the Convention on the International Trade on Endangered Species. That's because Singapore is a huge hub, and animals sometimes get transported through the

hubs, not just animals, but animal products, plant products as well, including endangered wood. So Singapore also has a very huge role to play, again, punching well above its weight in the CITES circuit.

[00:13:06] **Cyrena:** We have colleagues in the Wildlife Trade team that regularly represent Singapore at the CITES committee meetings in order to ensure that we are allowed to trade legally for certain animal species. There are CITES listed, and that is very important for the merchants in Singapore, how they import and export the animal products or animal parts in order to service, say, their trade. This is something that we work very closely with the other international partners as well to ensure that there is enforcement, there is supervision in things that are illegal and they are moving smoothly.

[00:13:40] I think I also want to bring up that for the AVS side of the house, we also do have representation at the World Organization for Animal Health. It's attended by our vets and our Director General of animal health and wildlife management to ensure that we are also kept on top of things when it comes to animal health, animal products as well as disease surveillance. So these are some of the very important international platforms that we do participate in to ensure that we are aware of what is happening internationally and how that can be relevant to us, and how we can also continue to be relevant globally as well.

[00:14:18] **Elliott:** In talking about international roles, right, the international roles that NParks has. You guys also touched on research and enforcement. So these are some areas that I think are very interesting for people to know more about. So do you mind touching a bit more on these?

[00:14:31] **Jim:** Oh, yeah, absolutely. I think one of the pillars behind our conservation is that Singapore has a Nature Conservation Master Plan, and it's predicated on four prongs. The first prong is the conservation of our natural habitats, and that's where our nature reserves come in. The second prong is habitat restoration, enhancement, connectivity as well as species recovery. The third prong, and that's where we are coming in, is that everything we do is all built on a very strong evidence- and science-based foundation. The fourth prong is community. Essentially, we can't do this on our own, because we only have a small bunch of people. We also have to activate and engage the community around us, plant the trees for us, to help us volunteer to do some research, because the experts are not all in NParks, right?

[00:15:19] So for the research portion, right, there is tons of research. There's taxonomic research. Again, our Singapore Botanic Gardens has a whole bunch of researchers, basically that does research in the taxonomy of plants, not just in Singapore, but across the region as well. There's a lot of surveys that we do in the jungles.

[00:15:36] And I think the cool thing about joining NParks, as opposed to any other job in Singapore, is that there is always an opportunity, right, to learn something new. The spirit of discovery is still very strong within NParks. Now you can still discover new stuff. Even though Singapore is like 710-720 square kilometers, densely populated, they are still finding species which are either new to Singapore or new to science, right?

[00:16:03] The more you look, the more taxa you go into, the more types of animals and plants you get into, the more you are able to discover. And we do a ton of research to basically build our baseline. We're still finding new things. And not just discovering new species. We are also discovering, like, interactions between plants and animals, interactions between animals and animals. On the applied science part, we are discovering the behaviours of animals, so that we can then help better inform how we deal with the interactions of these animals with human beings. So Cyrena, maybe can tell a few stories about what you learn about funny things that you learn about animals?

[00:16:43] **Cyrena:** Through research? I think the part about animal behaviour is something that always like amazes and fascinates us, because we would observe them for a period of time, and we think that okay, if this troop of monkeys is taking this route, maybe we can apply some form of deterrence over here to keep them away. We want them to actually dwell in this part of the forest. And they always seem to surprise us by either taking another route that we have never expected, or like, overcoming the deterrent in a certain way that we have also not thought of. So it's kind of like a little competition, like we try something, okay, it works for a while. Hey, it doesn't work anymore. Let's try something new. So it's always like a quest to evolve as like, the behaviour of the animals evolved as well. So that's the interesting part of the work we do, I think, a lot of experimentation and trying new things.

[00:17:35] **Elliott:** So it seems like it never gets boring. And it seems like NParks is full of these people that are very curious about the natural world. Do you have any colleagues, though, that might not, you know, have a stronger passion for biodiversity and nature, or maybe came in without that passion?

[00:17:49] **Jim:** Actually, by and large, NParks attracts only one kind of person, right? People with affinity for nature, people who perhaps they were brought up by their parents to basically enjoy the outdoors, to enjoy nature. That was my case. When I was a kid, my father used to take me down to Neo Tiew road, which still exists right now, of course, and then essentially, just stop by and just hang out on the roadside. Get away from the hustle and bustle of the city just to enjoy the fresh air, just to enjoy looking at wild birds. Standing in the field to look at snakes on the fence, look at bugs and all and that builds up an affinity in me from a very young age, right? And I'm sure that everybody who joins NParks, by and large, had that same experience. They were brought up to enjoy nature, at least. Maybe, you didn't need to have such a close relationship, but at least you enjoy the outdoors. And you come in, and then suddenly it is amplified in NParks, because you are in a pool of like-minded people. And when you talk, you know what the other person is talking about, it's actually a very good vibe when you join NParks and you find yourselves in a place where everybody else thinks the same way and knows roughly the same thing that you're talking about, it's really nice.

[00:19:03] **Cyrena:** So most of our colleagues actually go on trips together to see more wildlife and nature, like outside of Singapore, I think they also share the common passion of taking photographs of animals and even plants. So they often discuss, "Oh, what cameras or lens are you getting?". So I think Jim is right, we do have a group of very like-minded people and being in nature itself, often it is the best part of our job.

[00:19:27] **Elliott:** Yeah, I think I really like that point about just growing up appreciating nature, because sometimes when people ask me, "how did you develop this interest?", then I just have a hard

time pinpointing it. But it always goes back to, like my grandpa bringing me to nature parks. He's not particularly interested in animals, but he liked to be out in the forest or near water bodies.

[00:19:47] The jobs that you guys have are quite different from the private sector, but also because you guys are from the public sector, are there any major differences from someone coming from the private sector? What's your advice to them?

[00:19:58] **Cyrena**: I've worked in the private sector. I guess Jim has been a public servant his entire life. So I guess for someone moving from the private sector to the public sector, you will already come in with the expectation that, oh, there are quite a lot of processes, SOPs in place, rightfully so, because we are dealing with public monies, we want to make sure that we are prudent in the way that we manage that. So these are the SOPs in place that you have to go through because these are put in place for good reasons, for us to be responsible to the people of Singapore. But I would also say if you're coming from the private sector, you might feel that in the government, there is a steadfast way of doing things, it's very hard to change things.

[00:20:41] But from my experience, it's encouraging to see that a lot of government services, they are doing wide levels of stakeholder engagements. So we do want to take in views from stakeholders, from members of public, and the way that we formulate our policies and the way that we do certain parts of our work, because we are, after all, serving Singaporeans. So there are avenues for change, there are avenues for ideas, and there are avenues for us to try new things together. So, I would say, if you are considering coming from the private sector into public sector, yeah, just take the plunge. It will be a new experience for you. I think there are many learning points that you can take along the way. So eventually, if you leave, or if you stay, this will stay with you.

[00:21:25] **Elliott**: How about yourself, Jim?

[00:21:28] **Jim**: I have nothing much to add, but I think that the main cultural difference between the private and public sector in Singapore is, as mentioned before by Cyrena, bureaucracy. The private sector is predicated on the bottom line. Whatever ways and means you can to reach your bottom line, you go ahead and do it. A few obstacles will be in your way, as long as you make the profit at the end of the day. For the public sector, we are essentially focused on social good, which means that everything has to be balanced. There has to be proper use of resources. And I think the maximum benefit that the people can get from taxpayers' money is always on the forefront of people's minds, which means that the administrative processes, the oversight, the bureaucracy, so to speak, will actually be much tighter in the public service.

[00:22:21] And I think that's the culture shock when people join any branch of the government from the private sector. Essentially, the bureaucracy will make things seem slower. But having said that, the Singapore government bureaucracy is already extremely productive and efficient. So in the world, in the world, probably in the world, okay, I've not seen bureaucracy work elsewhere, but I was a foreign service officer before. I've seen bureaucracies work in countries which are not Singapore, and it's not good, lah, right. Can't name names, but Singapore's bureaucracy is actually very productive and very efficient. Yeah. So not too bad, so to speak. But there will be a change in culture.

[00:23:05] **Elliott:** An adjustment period. Yeah. I agree with you.

[00:23:07] **Cyrena:** But I also think, like the processes also forces public servants to really think through maybe an approach or a policy from all different angles. Like, instead of saying that, “Oh, hey, this is a great idea, let's run with it.”. But there will often be people who play the devil's advocate to say, “Hey, why not we do this way? Or like, are you sure?”. And so it's very deeply and well thought out for every single policy or programme that we roll out.

[00:23:33] **Elliott:** We've had quite a few of these intense questions. So I thought maybe we can switch things up with a bit more fun kind of question. What's the wildest experience you guys have had in the field, or maybe even the office?

[00:23:42] **Jim:** I think essentially, the coolest thing that we have is when we rehab wildlife and then we release them. I think it's really such a sight to see, because Singapore is Singapore, you don't expect to see such things. You expect to see in Africa when, when they have megafauna that they rehabilitate and let go. But actually, the nicest thing that I have ever seen is when you get the injured pangolins right, and our partners at the zoo help to rehabilitate it. Then they put them in a big carrier, we drive them into the middle of the forest, and then we let them go, and we film them when they trundle away, right? And it's really amazing. Really talking about it right now already makes my hair stand up.

[00:24:24] And because you see a properly wild animal, which nobody gets to see, because it's actually not a common animal, right? And you let it go, and you see it slowly walk back into the jungle, and presumably it's happy. It's really such a great feeling. The other time also, we had the vultures fly down because they were blown off course, they had to put one of them inside our aviary while we tried to let it go. It stayed there a couple of days, and we got to witness, you know, the release of a giant bird, the size of me, right? And watch it try to take off in the hot sun. It's really a very nice experience. And I think those are the things that will stay with me right when I'm old and I'm sitting in front of a TV while decrepit, think about the things that made you happy, and looking at what in Singapore walk away, fly away, when after rehabilitation, I think that's wonderful.

[00:25:17] **Cyrena:** Yeah, I echo what Jim has shared. But for me, I think the release of animals such as pythons or like civets, are also equally like, charismatic and interesting to watch, yeah, as they slither away as well after like they have gone through health checks, either at the zoo or at NParks Centre for Wildlife Rehab, yeah, just to make sure that they are okay, microchipped, and then off they go.

Nature Nuggets (Recommendations segment)

[00:25:43] **Elliott:** It's time for Nature Nuggets! In the spirit of our podcast title *That's Wild*, we wanted to ask our guests to recommend something wild that they've come across or enjoyed and that you can check out yourself, too.

[00:25:54] **Cyrena:** Okay, so what I have with me is this book. It looks a little bit old and yellowed. I've had it for many years. It's titled 'Mean and Lowly Things'. It talks about the experience of this researcher, Kate Jackson, who was working in Congo, trying to, like, list down basically all the reptiles, like the snakes and amphibians that they have in the country, because that's not been done before. So it's a very well written adventure, I do enjoy immersing myself in such a book, imagining that this is what I would want to do, like in my younger days. I have the energy and the time, but maybe not the money. But this is really a very interesting read for anybody who wants to learn more, or at least like just experience what it's like through a book, field research, and anybody who likes reptiles or frogs.

[00:26:43] **Jim:** Very cool. Okay, I have a book. It is called 'The Invention of Nature'. It's a fairly recent book, 2015, about 10 years old, written by this lady called Andrea Wulf, and it is about Alexander Humboldt. And the cool thing is, when people are talking about nature and the history of nature, especially in this region, right, people talk about Darwin, they talk about Wallace, right? And the granddaddy that inspired people like Darwin and Wallace in the pursuit of knowledge of nature was actually Alexander Humboldt, one of the few Europeans in his days that essentially travelled to discover, to find out more about how plants and animals and the environment related to each other. It's a fascinating book. This book tells you about discovery, talks about the things that people needed to do to break out of a particular mindset, to learn and find out more about things.

- - -

[00:27:46] **Elliott:** Maybe a bit more of a spicier question. What is something about working in NParks that people might not expect, besides the boring stuff like maybe paperwork and things like that, are there any exciting stories that you guys have?

[00:27:57] **Cyrena:** I guess for me, one of the job scope, or rather like the duties that most people will not expect, is that we have what we call a duty phone. So it rotates amongst the different members of the team. We'll hold it for one week. So we have the usual call centre that's called the Animal Response Centre, and most of the calls that are from the public go to them, but for any emergencies or any scenarios that the call centre might not be familiar with, like, for example, wild boar running within the estate, then the call centre will call this duty phone. It might ring any time of the day, so during working hours, in the middle of the night as well, like 1am. "Sorry there's this animal that I can't really identify that the feedback provider has sent me, can you take a look and tell me what species is this?". Then you wake up from bed, just turn on like, WhatsApp, look at the photo and like, "Okay, this is a cat, you can advise the feedback provider to let it be." And then, like, go back to sleep. So this was something new when I took on this portfolio and I had to get used for that disrupted sleep for a period of one week every few months or so.

[00:29:02] **Elliott:** Yeah, lots of responsibilities as an NParks officer. So there are lots of challenges in your line of work. What are some of the weirdest or most creative solutions that you guys have had to come up with to deal with them?

[00:29:13] **Jim:** We have a very nice story, and that's the story of the Bukit Timah mountain bike circuit. The Bukit Timah mountain bike circuit was built ages ago, right? And they've been using it for very many years. And in the past two years, the monsoons have caused a section of it to be flooded, chest deep, right? And of course, the conventional way you would expect us to deal with it is to find the source of the flood and unblock it. Right?

[00:29:40]

We looked into the problem, and we found out that the blockage was very complex. It came from downstream. We had to enter private property. There was a drain that kept on catching logs because it was an open drain that led into a closed drain. And when it caught a log, basically the water goes up so high that you literally have to dive down into the water. And that's not safe.

[00:30:03]

Rather than keep on going back and resolving that problem over and over again, essentially, what we did was to take the decision to reroute that mountain bike track, and we rerouted it through a patch of waste grassland, and we also then got the mountain bike community to come in to tell us, how would you like this new stretch to be built. And then involve them in planting it. So right now, if you see the before and after photos of that new stretch, it's amazing, the change. And you look at it before, it was just grassland, and now it's literally a forest. So again, it's nothing radical, right? However, we managed to reroute something to make it better than it was before, and we involved the community in it.

[00:30:48] **Elliott:** We've talked about a lot, but good to hear some personal stories from you guys. Any particular events or programmes or cases that you guys have worked on that make you feel very proud of the outcome that was achieved?

[00:30:59] **Cyrena:** I think for my team, we have been working really hard to educate people on what to do and what not to do whenever they encounter wildlife, be it in the natural environment or within their residential estates. I'm quite proud of what they have come up with in terms of the collaterals, in terms of all the different output and messaging that we've put out to schools, to affected communities, and for people of all different ages, in the different languages as well. I think this is the way to go, in order to get people to appreciate the wildlife that we have, the nature that we have. It's to increase their awareness, increase their appreciation and sometimes even their tolerance level as well. And that would make it easier for everybody.

[00:31:40] **Jim:** Yeah, I think for me, my comment will be not so much from my experience as a Conservation officer, but essentially as an NParks officer, and that's seeing the attitudes of people towards wildlife change over the years. You probably remember this, and I'm definitely old enough to remember this. In the old days, when people see a long, thin snake on a fence, right, the first impulse would be basically, take a stick and beat it to death. And I had seen it, you know, in the 70s and the 80s, snakes were always associated as being dangerous and nasty.

[00:32:15] And nowadays, almost 100% of the time right when you see a bunch of children and they see a snake on the fence, first thing they do is, what? Take out handphone, take photo and keep a

respectful distance, because they do know that snakes, maybe you shouldn't be touching them, but they no longer are told by their parents to beat a wild animal to death anymore. It's slowly changing. And I think right now, in fact, what we are seeing is more and more activism in the youth cohort, right, with regard to things like CITES, as well as things which are related to Singapore's biodiversity.

[00:32:53] And it's a good thing, right? We have to engage them more, no doubt. But the fact that people, especially youth, are taking a greater and more intensive interest in issues related to biodiversity and nature conservation, and the fact that Singapore has to balance between being a first world economy, and at the same time, trying to conserve its biodiversity and green spaces is something that we will have to deal with. But it actually does mean that it's good for Singapore that civil society, including young people, are gravitating towards that sort of attitude. And it does throw up certain questions for us that we have to answer as a nation. But at the same time, I think I'm fairly proud that we have walked this journey over 60 years, such that there is now a total change in the attitudes of young Singaporeans towards what it means to be a City in Nature.

[00:33:49] **Elliott:** It takes a long time, but slowly and surely.

[00:33:53] **Jim:** Yeah. It's generational. It's generational and it's cool, because there's always that proverb: "It is the wisdom of old men when they plant trees which they know under whose shade they will not sit.". Yeah, and it's really cool. I think it speaks very well of essentially our governance and what we want to see as the vision of a modern day city.

[00:34:17] **Elliott:** Just to wrap things up, one last question. So any advice you guys would give to young people who are looking to have a career in wildlife and nature and looking to join NParks?

[00:34:27] **Jim:** Intern with us first!

[00:34:30] **Cyrena:** Actually, I think the youths of today, they do have quite a few platforms if they want to explore like the issues or the things that NParks handle. Think one of them is the programme, Youth Stewards for Nature. It runs on an annual basis, and there are different projects put out every year. So if you are a youth and you're keen to find out what NParks does, apart from the internships you can join us for this six to nine month long programme, choose the topic that you're interested in and then meaningfully participate and give us your ideas for the different topics. They are quite wide-ranging from community animals to disease surveillance, and I think designing parks and so forth. It's really a lot of opportunities compared to when I was a youth. I don't know about you.

[00:35:16] **Jim:** Oh, no, there was absolutely no opportunity when I was a youth. So, Cyrena is absolutely right. There are NParks' own programmes of you know, temping, interning with some of our divisions, but at the same time, there are NParks adjacent platforms now. Being a leader in a Nature Kakis programme is possibly another, another pathway where, again, you can sort of do the work that we do, and then basically it gives people a pathway to understand what it takes, basically, to bring greenery into Singapore, to manage people, to manage wildlife-human interactions. And if you're really, really into it, then there are other pathways to basically build a career with us.

[00:35:57] **Cyrena:** Yeah, because it looks very different from the outside as compared to when you're on the inside, working with us.

[00:36:02] **Jim:** And there's a lot of community engagement in those things. So literally, you get your feet into the deep end of talking to – you know, some people who may not even have an understanding of what nature means, right? Going into the heartlands, engaging the uncles and aunties. Ah, you plant this, and this will happen. You take care of this tree, this is what will happen. You have a respectful relationship with the animals that you find in your estate or vicinity. So it's very useful to basically get a grasp of how we deal with people from the grassroots end, before you even come in to basically deal with them as a government officer.

[00:36:39] **Elliott:** Yeah. I think that's a very nice ending to our podcast. Thank you, Jim and Cyrena for being here with us today. Hopefully more bright young minds will be joining NParks and progress in the work.

[00:36:49] **Jim:** Yeah, we can't have enough of bright young minds!

[00:36:51] **Elliott:** See you everyone. Bye!

[00:36:53] **Jim & Cyrena:** Bye!

[00:36:54] **Elliott:** Thank you for listening to this episode of *That's Wild*. If you'd like to hear more, please tune in for more episodes on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and YouTube, and if you like our content, don't forget to show your support by hitting the follow button and giving us a five star rating.