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# Accommodating Nature in Singapore

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Singaporeans are as dependent on nature's services as are citizens of any other country. We need clean air, water, food, and a stable climate as much as anyone else. However, nature and biodiversity confined within Singapore's borders will not determine whether the city-state survives or not, at least not in terms of our immediate, physical subsistence. Singapore's land area and its natural habitats are far too small to provide all of the air, water, and other services for our large population.

This is not to say, however, that nature in Singapore is unimportant. Nature and greenery are synonymous with Singapore, giving the country its distinctive and pleasant ambience, and making the city attractive to visitors and to the thousands of skilled professionals who choose to live here. Nature in Singapore is not a luxury; it is a strategic element that directly contributes to the country's success.

What makes Singapore such a biodiverse city? The island's many parks and nature areas, its generous roadside landscaping, its commitment to tree planting, and its rapidly expanding skyline and vertical greenery are factors. They are no accident. They are testament to meticulous planning, investment in manpower and maintenance, and thoughtful policy. Good fortune plays a role too.

Singapore is in the wet tropics, a region with nature so exuberant that if enough space is set aside, many kinds of plants, birds, insects, and other wildlife will flourish. Villages, plantations and other human settlements that were cleared a generation ago and set aside as land banks for future development have not been sitting idle. They have been colonised by plants and wildlife. Examples include the species rich former Bidadari Muslim Cemetery and the Bukit Brown Cemetery.

Singapore is able to support its human population by importing food and materials produced elsewhere. Our land area is a bit larger than 700 km<sup>2</sup>, but our land requirements are many times that, if one considers Singapore's total resource needs. In a similar way, our enviable biodiversity is made possible in large part by greenery that is outside the formally designated nature reserves/parks/streetscapes system. When "idle" State Land is gradually turned over in the years ahead for development, Singapore's biodiversity will be subject to a simple law of ecology—all else being equal,

less land area will translate to lower species diversity. Wildlife thrives wherever there is greenery, and Singapore will have less undeveloped greenery in the future.

A commitment to biodiversity will have to be underpinned by human ingenuity and empathy. We can continue to harbour rich, sustainable natural heritage if we apply ecological principles in a systematic way across the Singapore landscape. For example, we can set aside zones of varying access and recreational use, from wildlife-only areas to ones that are readily accessible. Such zoning should be acceptable to and respected by everyone. If nature becomes part of our way of life, we will cherish it and we will find that it thrives.