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PROTECT OUR
LAST WILDERNESS

MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 1100HRS ON 27-09-2019

Protect Our Last Wilderness – A final call to save Singapore’s priceless natural heritage

SINGAPORE, Friday 27 September 2019 – Climate change is a global emergency of an unprecedented scale, and future generations will have to live with the fallout. This fact is not lost on them, as climate rallies have recently been held both in Singapore and across the globe.

Climate change is caused by the destruction of nature. The world has lost 77 percent of its wilderness areas. We are experiencing the start of the sixth extinction due to human activities. What we do now and in the coming decade will have a profound impact on our future. But it is not too late to save our planet and ourselves if we take action now.

As Singapore commemorates its bicentennial, we reflect on its natural heritage. Despite comprising just 4% of our island, our nature reserves are also home to incredible and endangered biodiversity which is threatened by development. Our island has already lost more than 95% of its original vegetation cover and we cannot afford to lose any more. Original forest cover in our Central Catchment Nature Reserve and Bukit Timah Nature Reserve is now less than 0.3 percent.

Singapore’s ancient rainforests and their rich biodiversity are millions of years old, priceless and irreplaceable. Our last remaining rainforest fragments are the only homes left for our native, rainforest-dependent plants and animals.

They must be totally protected to ensure that they are passed on intact to future generations.

Ark for Regional Biodiversity

As a signatory of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, Singapore has agreed to protect species-rich environments such as its Nature Reserves. In fact, Singapore has the resources to act as an ark for biodiversity in this region. This role is significant as species extinctions are occurring globally at an unprecedented rate.

Within our lifetime, habitat loss has resulted in the extinction of many native species, some of which were never fully studied. Their potential as sources of new medicines or food is permanently lost, and their place in the chain of life, eradicated.

Conservation Benefits

What does conservation have to do with any of us?

1. Our CCNR is called “catchment” for a reason: it captures valuable freshwater. Rainforests are essential to absorbing, purifying, and then releasing water. The government has taken huge steps to safeguard our water supply, because water is the most limited natural resource in the world. Wars have been fought over access to water.
2. Natural ecosystems, such as rainforests, are life-support systems for humanity. The oxygen we breathe comes from forests. In order to have healthy forests, we need to keep all their component parts. This includes protecting all the species that are inter-dependent with forests.
3. We are already facing the consequences of climate change. Forests are highly efficient carbon sinks. However, forests all over the world are threatened due to climate change. Our rainforests are suffering because of the dry and erratic climate in Singapore. A weakened forest due to climate change will be more susceptible to damage from development. Deleterious consequences may only be apparent years after the damage is done. It would then be too late to reverse any negative effects.

A Global Emergency

“The dangerous impact of climate change on wildlife and species extinctions is frightening and real. The world has lost three quarters of its wilderness areas, and we are now experiencing the sixth extinction due to human impact. Rainforests in the Amazon are burning as we speak. What we do now and in the coming decade will have a profound impact on our future,” said Teresa Teo Guttensohn, Co-Founder and President of Cicada Tree Eco-Place.

She added: “Regardless of size, it is every nation’s responsibility to protect and save intact forests and their biodiversity to stop species loss. Every tree is precious and every animal counts. As Nobel Prize Winner, Professor William Nordhaus, said: ‘Humans are putting the planet in peril. But humans can undo what they are doing.’” She concluded: “This is our call for us to stop, pause and "undo" in order to save nature and ourselves.”

Prioritise Conservation

It is our responsibility to maintain the very health of our remaining rainforest and the myriad organisms that call it home. Singapore has a Forest Reserve Act in place to protect its forests, especially the forests in its Nature Reserves. We need to start prioritising the conservation of our natural heritage over urban development, starting with our response to the Cross-Island Line (CRL).

The government is evaluating two underground routes, one of which is the ‘direct alignment option’ to build the Cross Island Line through the Central Catchment Nature Reserve (CCNR). The Central Catchment Nature Reserve (CCNR) is gazetted as a Nature Reserve to be protected from development and destruction by human actions. It must remain inviolable.

About ‘Protect Our Last Wilderness’ Campaign

‘Protect Our Last Wilderness’ is a conservation awareness campaign by Cicada Tree Eco-Place, in response to the global destruction of nature. It was launched on 27 September 2019 in conjunction with ‘700natives’ Top 10 Red List.

About ‘700natives’ Top 10 Red List

The event will also mark the launch of an online ‘700natives’ Top 10 Red List, which seeks to compile 700 native species which are or have been recorded in Singapore, including those species that have gone locally extinct or are now endangered. The online compilation begins with ‘Top 10 Extinct Rainforest Birds of Singapore’ and ‘Top 10 Extinct Rainforest Mammals of Singapore’.

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 - [Nature Society Singapore Position Paper on Cross Island Line](#)
 - “Protect Our Last Wilderness” campaign (to be launched at the Press Conference)
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 - The Avifauna of Singapore, Published by Nature Society (Singapore)
 - Vanishing Birds of Singapore, Published by Nature Society (Singapore)
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ANNEX A: Top 10 Extinct Rainforest Birds of Singapore

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|----|----------------------------|---|
| 1 | White-bellied Woodpecker | <i>(Dryocopus javensis)</i> |
| 2 | Scarlet Minivet | <i>(Pericrocotus flammeus)</i> |
| 3 | Black-thighed Falconet | <i>(Microhierax fringillarius)</i> |
| 4 | Whiskered Treeswift | <i>(Hemiprocne comate)</i> |
| 5 | Red-naped Trogon | <i>(Harpactes kasumba kasumba)</i> |
| 6 | Rufous-backed Kingfisher | <i>(Ceyx erithacus rufidorsa)</i> |
| 7 | Garnet Pitta | <i>(Pitta granatina coccinea)</i> |
| 8 | Green Broadbill | <i>(Calyptomena viridis viridis)</i> |
| 9 | Rhinoceros Hornbill | <i>(Buceros rhinoceros)</i> |
| 10 | Black-and-yellow Broadbill | <i>(Eurylaimus ochromalus ochromalus)</i> |



ANNEX B: About Cicada Tree Eco-Place

Who We Are

We are a non-profit, non-governmental organisation run entirely by a group of volunteer educators and environmentalists.

Co-founded in 2006 by a group of five Singaporeans, and supported by volunteer educators, conservationists, environmentalists, eco-artists and wildlife activists, it was formally registered as a society the following year in 2007.

The society was formed in urgent response to the alarming climate change crisis and its impact on wildlife and humans. It advocates for the protection of our precious natural heritage and seeks to educate the youth and communities about eco-living to combat global warming.

To make a difference for wildlife, we have dedicated our efforts to building bridges between the public and our spectacular biodiversity. With this in mind, we champion environmentally-friendly practices that are both impactful and practical, to individuals and organisations alike.

Our Conservation Focus

Our aim is to promote biodiversity conservation and help protect our precious natural heritage for future generations.

To fight extinction, we focus on the protection of critically endangered native wildlife in Singapore and Southeast Asia, as well as threatened wildlife habitats.

Much emphasis has been placed on the loss of charismatic species globally. However, all wildlife are interdependent.

Conserving local biodiversity and maintaining intact eco-systems is therefore the best way to sustain genetic diversity that is critical for the long-term survival of all species on Earth.