



Mary Ann Mendis –
former beauty queen,
business woman,
mother and hostess
extraordinaire

THE SEVEN WONDERS OF *Singapore*

EVERY COUNTRY HAS ITS ICONS. AS SINGAPORE REDEFINES ITSELF, **ALEXANDRA KOHUT-COLE** CHRONICLES SEVEN MODERN-DAY MARVELS WORTHY OF ICONIC STATUS

WONDER OF SINGAPORE #1: Singapore Girls - Mary Ann Mendis

TALL, ELEGANT, BEAUTIFUL, sophisticated and smart as a tack: how many accolades can one girl gather? As many as it takes, in the case of Mary Ann Mendis. Former Miss Singapore and one of Singapore's most gracious and awarded hostesses, Mendis, now 37, married at 34 and has a one-year-old daughter, yet she still has the appearance of an 18-year-old.

Mendis runs her own business teaching etiquette and international business protocol, but finds looking after the home is a full-time job. Awarded by *Singapore Tatler* for her outstanding cooking and entertaining prowess, she has both a dry and wet kitchen and two huge ovens.

Supporting her charity of choice, the SPCA, Mendis has four dogs: a Bull Mastiff, a Labrador, a Toy Poodle, and a King Charles Spaniel named Kemi after her favourite Formula One driver.

On combining motherhood and a career, she maintains, "There's no ideal set up – it's what you make of it." A former model, she chose not to continue her career, explaining, "What would I do when I reached an older age? I don't want to be someone who just smiles and poses. And I love food so there is no way I could be perpetually on a diet."

With an MBA and a degree in psychology and philosophy, Mendis claims that all the education in the world doesn't prepare you for a child. "Even if I had a Phd, nothing prepares you. But Lauren brings a lot of joy to our lives."

VITAL STATISTICS

While at university Mendis took up running to off-set her studies. She built up enough stamina to run marathons then completed a full 42 km marathon in Perth in 4.5 hours

STYLING: PATRICIA CADDY; HAIR & MAKEUP: TEO TIN CHUAN; LOCATION: CHINA CLUB;
GOWN: SHANGHAI TANG; JEWELLERY: TIFFANY & CO

WONDER OF SINGAPORE # 2: The Singapore Sailing Team

CURRENTLY RIDING HIGH INTERNATIONALLY, the fortunes of Singapore sailors are on the rise. Andrew Sanders, executive director of the Singapore Sailing Club, explains how such success has been achieved: "It's been over seven years in the making,"

he says. "We started by getting as many young people into the sport as possible in the late 1990s and in 2002 we commenced a directed high performance programme to nurture our rising talent."

Low Teo Ping, president of Singapore Sailing Club agrees, confirming, "Sailing is the most successful sport in Singapore. We are now gearing up for the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games, with 14 sailors selected to be part of Project 0812, a Singapore National Olympic Council initiative to pursue Singapore's Olympic dreams."

"Currently we have over a hundred in the national squad, 95 percent below the age of 18," says Low. The best are selected to train in the talented athlete programme and in the Olympic squad. Currently there are 20 athletes in the top programme who will represent Singapore at the SEA games and Olympics.

"Following our success at regional and international competitions, the profile of the sport has risen tremendously and we have many schools joining our programmes. The number of participants at every year's National Inter-School Sailing Championships is on an upward trend, with around 400 in 2006," says Low.

Sanders believes a winning team is a unified team, "The sailors are generally young but have grown up with each other and get on well," he says. "We commenced serious team building in early 2005 and it helped us achieve our record seven gold medals at the 2005 SEA games."

The team's training programme is rigorous. In the national squad they train for three to five hour sessions five times a week, plus two gym sessions. The Olympic sailing squad is currently in full-time training for the Olympics and has been since January in Australia and Europe.

The team will train next for the Youth World championships in July in Canada, the Optimist World Championships in July in Italy, then the Olympic qualifiers. In July they will be in Portugal, then will compete at the SEA Games in Thailand in December.

Asian Games keelboat sailors



IMAGE: SINGAPORE SPORTS COUNCIL

WONDER OF SINGAPORE # 3: The Fragrant Orchid

IN THE SECRET LIFE OF ORCHIDS, THERE AREN'T MANY SECRETS. Unless, that is, you're one of the chosen ones – a fragrant orchid – in which case you are about to be feted worldwide. Inside the Orchid House at the Singapore Botanic Gardens is one of the most beautiful plants known to humankind, traditionally bred for beauty, now being bred for its scent.

Chin See Chung, director of Singapore's Botanic Gardens, explains that those orchids selected for breeding for fragrance are the varieties: Vanda Dearei; Vanda Luzonica; and Vanda Tessellata. "It's possible to achieve here due to a donation by a Californian man who declared the donation was to be used for an orchid display," he says. It was the late US Colonel AC Griffin, who, impressed by his first and only visit to the Singapore Botanic Gardens, left a donation in his will to support its work. The sum of US\$10,000 was received from

BELOW: Vanda Wong Poh Nee

his family's trust upon his death in June 2001.

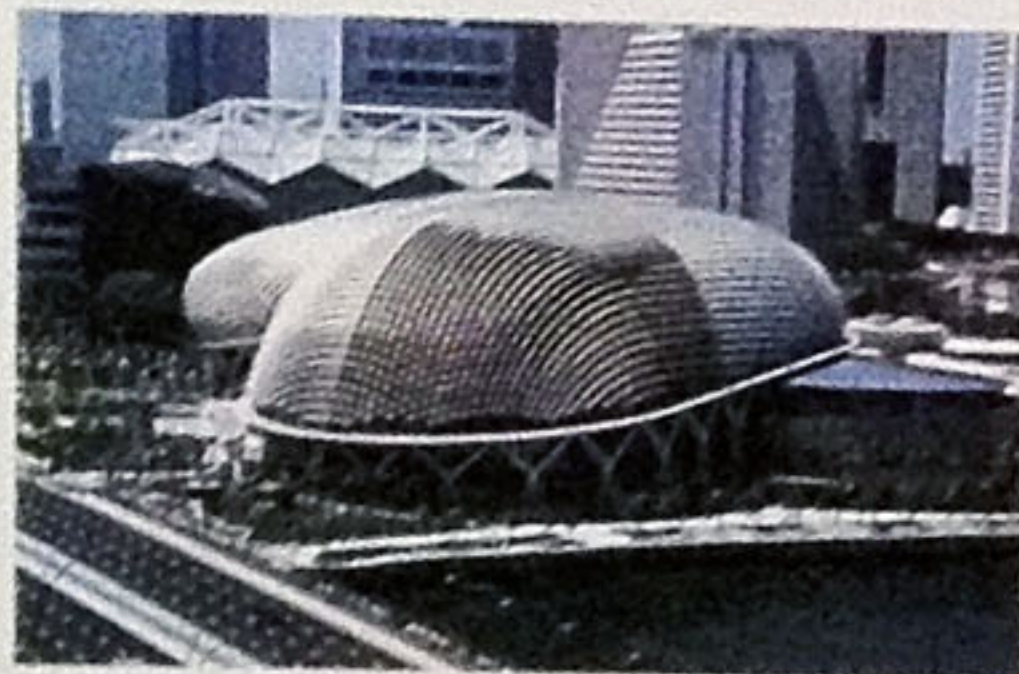
The Fragrant orchid display is located in the Tan Hoon Siang Mist House where different orchids emit their fragrances at different times of the day or night. Out of the new hybrids that are scented, Vanda Mimi Palmer is a local favourite, its distinctive tessellated flowers representing a breakthrough in Vanda breeding. Its flowers are bluish grey in colour and the scent is strong and sweet. Aranda Majula Rimau is a fragrant hybrid from the 1960s and, today, is still exported as a cut flower. It was awarded a High Commendation Certificate by the Orchid Society of Southeast Asia in October 1973.

VITAL STATISTICS

In ancient China and Japan, fragrant orchids are highly prized, with sweetly scented Cymbidiums particularly valued



IMAGE: NATIONAL PARKS BOARD



WONDER OF SINGAPORE # 4: Koh Seow Chuan

ARCHITECTURAL TEAM LEADER FOR THE ESPLANADE - Theatres on the Bay and founder of DP Architects, Koh Seow Chuan has a passion for art and architecture. Chairman of the Singapore Arts Museum Board and board member of the National Heritage Board, the pre-eminent architect says of architecture in Singapore, "It has a great future. In the last 25 years good architecture and urban design has embellished our urban landscape. Singapore architects have come into their own and now match foreign architects' designs. Singapore architects have also made their mark overseas in numerous cities."

A prominent philanthropist, Koh says, "Practising architecture enables me to afford my art collection and to enjoy art." With his wife, also an architect, he recently garnered a Singapore Heritage award after having donated over S\$1 million worth of their collection of works by Wong Keen.

VITAL STATISTICS

- Born in 1939, Koh Seow Chuan swims and plays table tennis.
- Married with four children, he lives in the western part of Singapore.
- Koh attended the Anglo-Chinese School and, subsequently, Melbourne University for his architectural studies.

Chairman of the Singapore Philatelic Museum until 2006 and the first Singaporean to sign the roll of distinguished philatelists by the British Philatelic Federation, Koh says, "Besides the visual enjoyment of the stamp through its design, philately teaches you

the when, why, and how of a stamp's design, and its usage."

Heavily involved in the Singapore Art Museum as its chairman, and the National Heritage Board as a board member, Koh divides his time between his various endeavours.

He has no favourite style or period of architecture. "We live in a rapidly changing world," he says. "I believe in organic evolution in style, in function, and in man living in harmony with nature. Architecture and buildings can uplift the human spirit through spatial design and organisation."

According to Koh, the Singapore landscape over the next five years will be greatly transformed via "the completion of the integrated resorts, Gardens by the Bay, sportshub and park connectors. This will be the most exciting period in Singapore's planning and architectural history."

ABOVE: Koh Seow Chuan outside the Esplanade
TOP LEFT: Landmark Esplanade - Theatres on the Bay

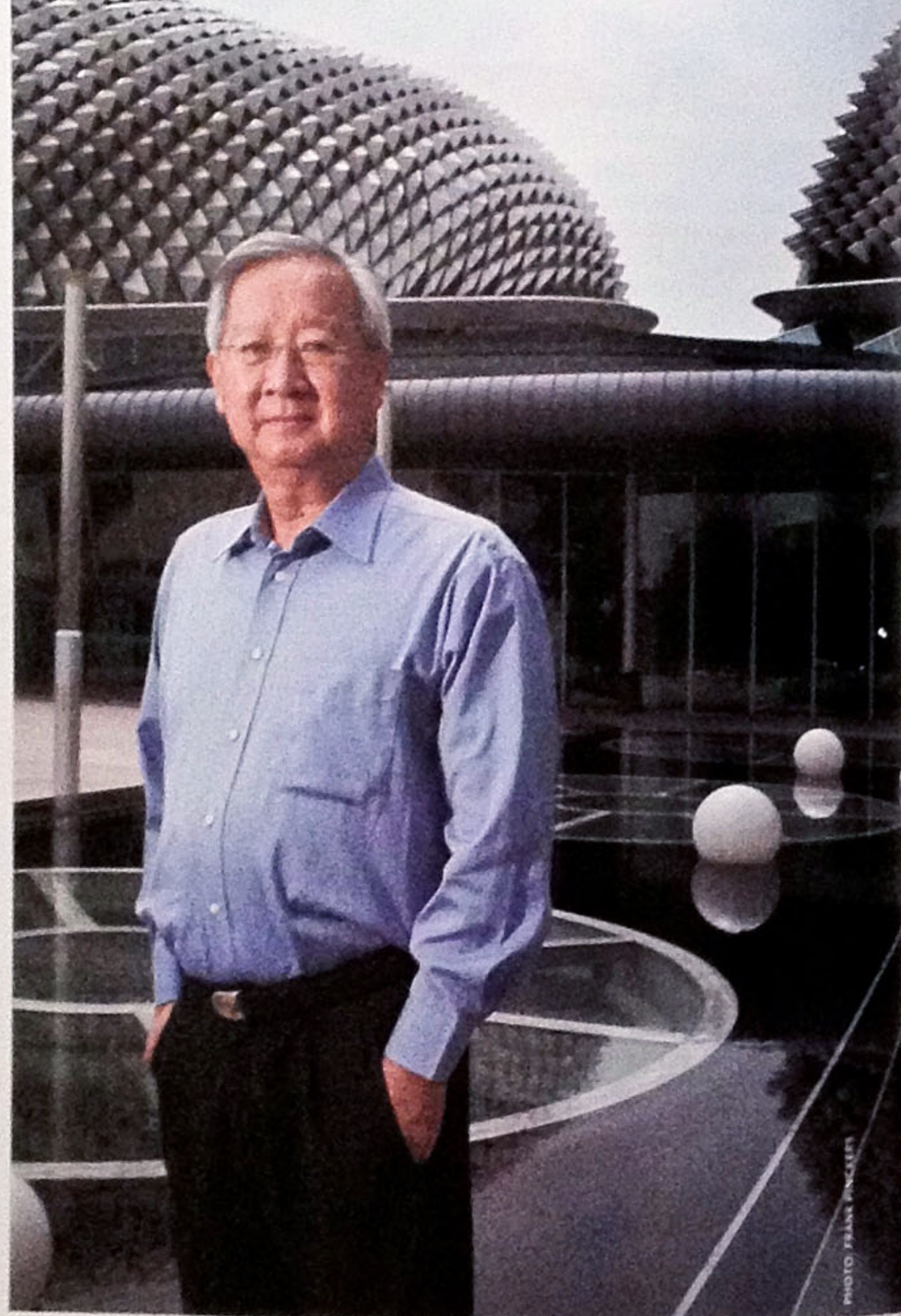


IMAGE: INDIA K. MOORE

WONDER OF SINGAPORE # 5: The Sybase Wireless Development Center

SYBASE OPENED THE WIRELESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER, a new engineering centre to develop mobile and wireless software solutions, in March 2007. The first Sybase phase in Asia was in 1998 - the opening of the Asia Development Center for integrated information management solutions. The second phase was the launch, in 2005, of the Wireless Solution Center for developers to test wireless projects in telecommunications. At the time, John Chen, chairman and CEO of Sybase Inc said, "This facility marks another significant milestone for research and development in Singapore and for the creation of intellectual property in Asia."

The Wireless Development Center is the third phase of Sybase's research and development investment plan in Singapore. This will include developing Bluetooth and Ultra Wideband Software Development Kits for mobile device manufacturers.

Lim Siong Guan, chairman of the Singapore Economic Development Board comments, "The EDB is pleased that Sybase has chosen Singapore for its first Wireless Development Center outside the United States. It gives Singapore a competitive edge in

emerging mobile technologies, and adds to Singapore's rapid development as a regional and global R&D centre."

The Sybase IQ analytics engine was named 2006-2007 China Business Intelligence Enterprise of the Year at the China IT Market Conference 2007, one of the most prestigious trade events.

VITAL STATISTICS

The world's most critical data in commerce, communications, finance, government and healthcare runs on Sybase and it is the largest global enterprise software company exclusively focused on managing and mobilising information from the data centre to the point of action



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Techno Park, Singapore - home of Sybase
BOTTOM LEFT: William Ho's quail with eggs



WONDER OF SINGAPORE # 6: Call of the Quail

FARMING QUAIL WAS A CALLING FROM GOD, SAYS WILLIAM HO. Wondering what career to pursue, he decided to work for his father's farm. However, he didn't know which area to specialise in. God stepped in: "I was reading the Bible where quails are mentioned. I thought - no one eats quails!" But he set about doing his research anyway, starting with a small flock, slowly building it up to 97, later opening the farm to the public.

Ho's quail farm is at Lim Chu Kang, part of an area in Singapore reserved for farming. A member of the Kranji Countryside Association, his father, Ho Heng Choon, was the first to bring Japanese quail to Singapore after the war. Choon, a strong figure in the Singapore farming industry, is a pioneer.

Two years ago the Health Promotion Board recognised quail meat as low-fat, low-cholesterol food. Ho says the farm is "bio-

secure and safe. With all those things in place I am sure we will expand to next level." He hopes this will be the Malay market, then possibly Saudi Arabia and Dubai.

VITAL STATISTICS

- A fully integrated farm of 2.7 hectares in size, it boasts 150,000 quails big and small and has its own nursery.
- Quail ecology is simple - 63 days for one cycle as opposed to 90 days for chickens.
- The cholesterol of a whole quail egg is equal to that of one chicken egg. Chinese medicine books say, "Quail is the ginseng of animals."





ABOVE:
Sand Plover
LEFT:
Sungei Buloh
Wetland Reserve



WONDER OF SINGAPORE # 7: Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve

SUNGEI BULOH IS A NATIONAL TREASURE as well as being an important migratory bird stopover point. Wong Tuan Wah, director of conservation of the National Parks Board explains, "It's popular with wildlife photographers, some of whom contribute their wildlife photographs for Sungei Buloh's publications and exhibitions."

Located on the northwestern tip of Singapore, the wetland consists of brackish freshwater ponds, mangrove mudflats, estuaries and swamps. In 1989, the wetlands were designated a nature

park and in January 2002 it officially became a nature reserve. In recognition of the rich mangrove ecosystem and important habitat for migratory birds, Sungei Buloh was nominated and subsequently designated as the only ASEAN heritage park in Singapore. Wong says, "A special aspect of the reserve is that it is a rustic green haven, full of birds and wetland wildlife in

highly urbanised Singapore. This turns out to be a pleasant surprise for visitors, even locals. Some may not be aware that the wetland reserve was an ecosystem regenerated from remnant mangrove-cum-prawn farms. The site itself was on the verge of being demarcated for intensive agro-tech farming until a group of bird watchers stumbled upon the site and witnessed the extraordinary diversity of birds there in 1986."

The biggest attraction of the reserve for visitors is the Mangrove Boardwalk. "They get close to the water at high tide and enjoy the picturesque scenery of sky and trees reflected on water," says Wong.

The Wetlands are home to over 200 species of birds, including migratory shorebirds during the September to March period. Throughout the year, it's also home to herons, egrets and kingfishers. "Sungei Buloh Besar," says Wong, "is a great place to watch fish like the archer fish, the mudskipper and schools of mullet rippling the water. If you are lucky, you might also catch a glimpse of a family of smooth otters swimming for fish or playing in the sand." ■

VITAL STATISTICS

- Mangroves are trees and shrubs growing in saline coastal habitats in the tropics
- Wetlands are areas of land where the soil is saturated with water at least some of the time. Particular species of wetland plants can adapt to these conditions and flourish
- Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve covers 130 hectares

IMAGES: NATIONAL PARKS BOARD