

Finding Nature ⁱⁿ Singapore

Our Memories



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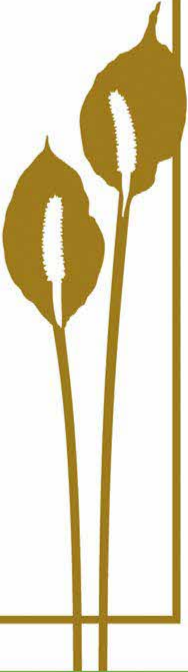
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Foreword

The National Library Board launched Nodes at Parks to bring the library's resources to public parks and gardens. The initiative comprised two parts: The Sustainability Showcase and Sustainable Benches. In the Sustainability Showcase, eco-friendly products were presented, prompting visitors to ponder larger sustainability questions and reflect on their choices for a better planet. The specially designed Sustainable Benches were made of repurposed wood, with QR codes that led to eResources (such as eBooks and videos) on sustainability.

As part of Nodes at Parks, we sought personal stories about people's encounters with nature in Singapore to encourage more Singaporeans to explore our island's natural environment and to reflect on our relationships with our local flora and fauna. These memories were collected from the different locations. Members of the public shared delightful stories of their memorable experiences with nature, past and present, in and around Singapore.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this project and we are pleased to present you with highlights from these stories. These memories range from animal sightings of otters and birds to reminiscences of various landscapes. Life in the highly built-up urban environment of Singapore doesn't presuppose a lack of nature. May you be inspired by the multi-faceted personal encounters with nature in this book!

Wan Wee Pin

Director, Planning and Development
National Library Board

Our Memories



Woodpeckers are a common sight in my neighbourhood. They are very colourful but surprisingly quiet. Every morning, I look out to catch a glimpse of them. There have always been a pair of woodpeckers on a tree just outside my house... but lately, I've only spotted one of them.

Anonymous, 2022

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
Gardens by the Bay*

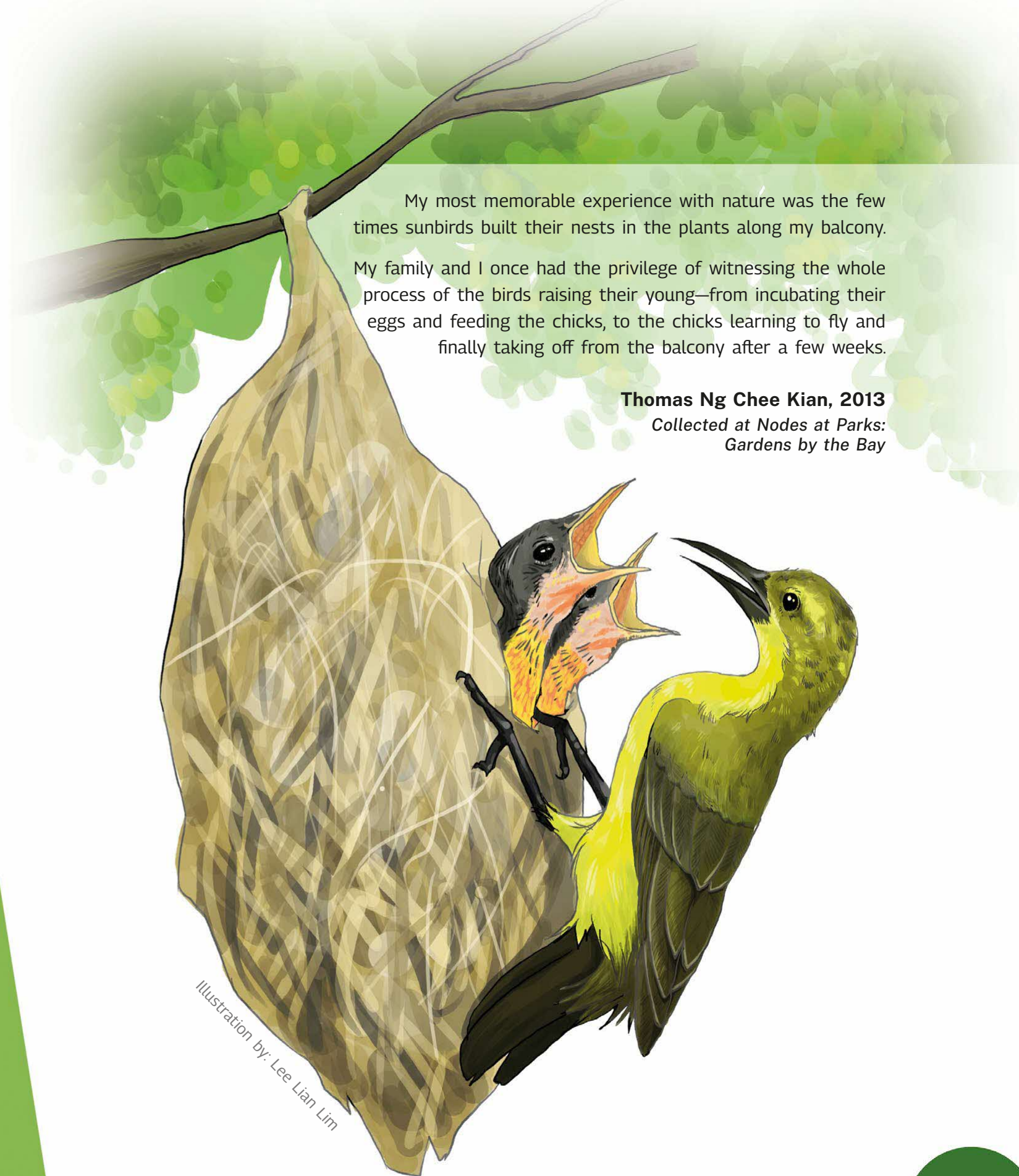


Illustration by: Lee Lian Lim

I stay at Hindhede Walk, so naturally, living with nature is something I've gotten quite used to. My personal experience with nature includes a mischievous macaque climbing into my home to take a banana from my kitchen, then watching it peel the banana and dump the skin on the floor while exiting my home—still enjoying the banana. I've also had a close encounter with the *Sunda colugo* (also known as the Malayan flying lemur) when it once rested on a tree facing my home balcony. It is a joy to wake up every morning to the beautiful euphony of songs from different species of birds in the Bukit Timah forest!

Dr Joel Lee, 2022

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
Gardens by the Bay*

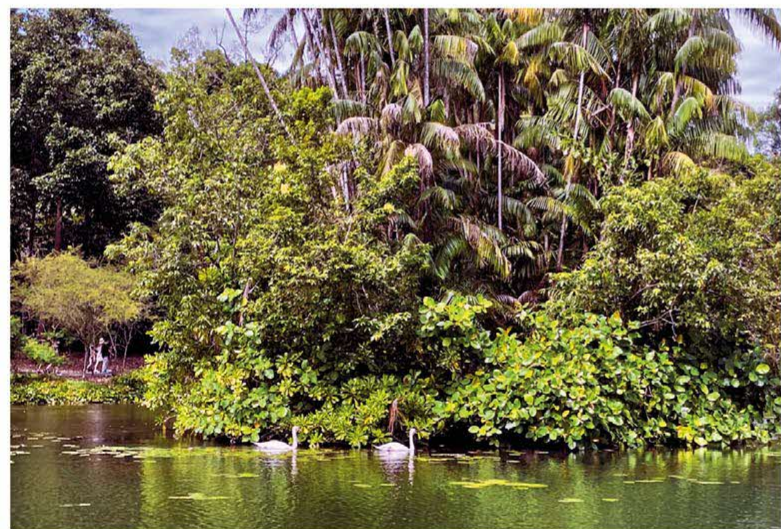


My most memorable experience with nature was the few times sunbirds built their nests in the plants along my balcony. My family and I once had the privilege of witnessing the whole process of the birds raising their young—from incubating their eggs and feeding the chicks, to the chicks learning to fly and finally taking off from the balcony after a few weeks.

Thomas Ng Chee Kian, 2013

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
Gardens by the Bay*

Illustration by: Lee Lian Lim



I've brought my family to the Singapore Botanic Gardens several times throughout the years, and every visit has given us a different experience. The swans are popular with the kids—the young ones can stare at them for hours. Otters are a new addition to the Eco-Lake and they bring more life to the Gardens.

Anonymous, 2022

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
Gardens by the Bay*



When I was younger, I always had trouble waking up in the morning. Sometimes, it could take me as long as an hour to get out of bed. However, after moving to our new home recently, I haven't had any problems waking up in the morning. This is because there is a macaw in a tree right outside my window that caws away every morning at precisely 7.30 a.m. This cawing is so loud that I immediately wake up upon hearing it. You could say that it is irritating, or you could say I got myself a natural alarm clock!

Andy, 2019

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
Jurong Lake Gardens*

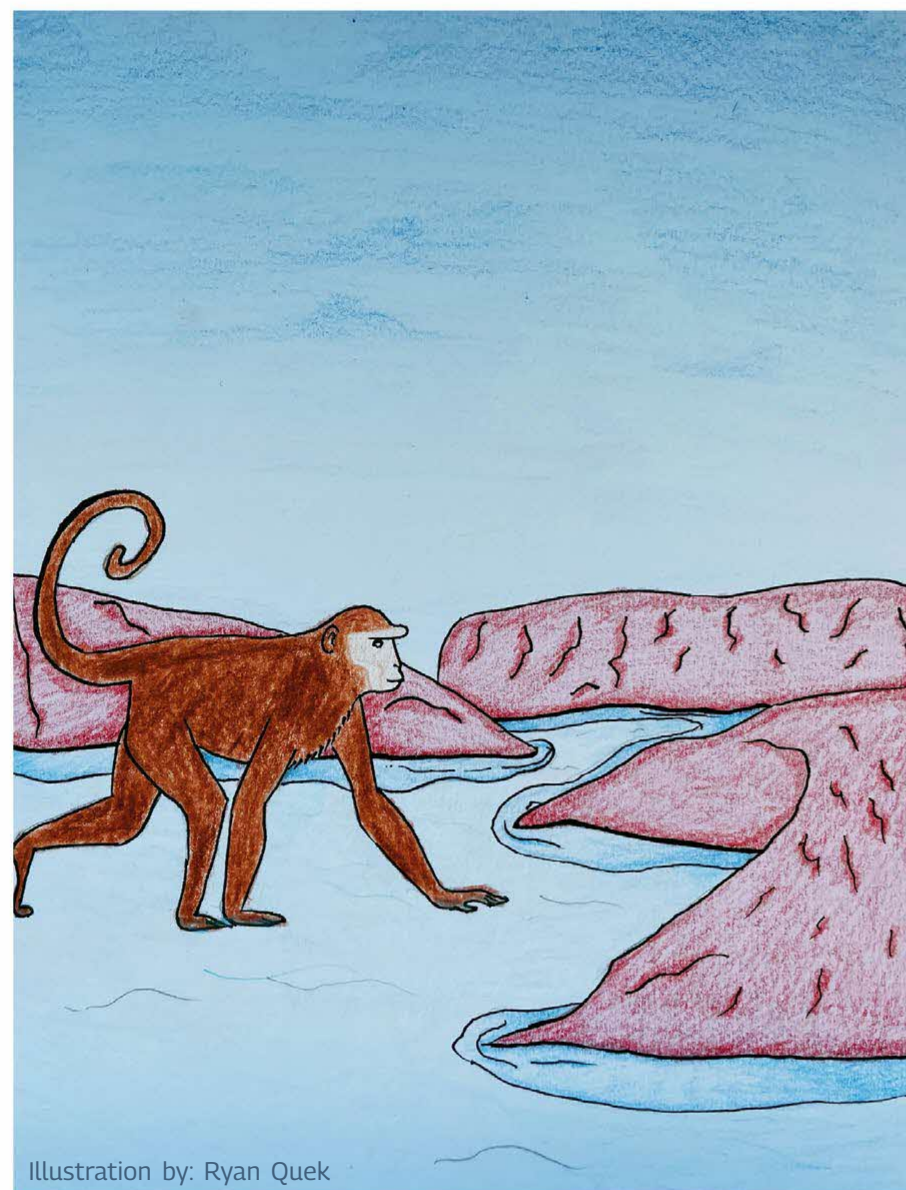


Illustration by: Ryan Quek

When my children were playing in the Jurong Lake Gardens swimming pool, a wild monkey came into the pool. Everyone else left in fear. It was just the monkey and us. That was a memorable experience.

Anonymous, 2022

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
Jurong Lake Gardens*

A blue-winged pitta once flew into my home in the day. Unfortunately, the window on the other side of the room was closed, and it crashed into the windowpane when it tried to fly out of the room. Dazed, it hid in a corner. At night, when I returned home, I opened the window and it flew out.

Dylan, 2022

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
Jurong Lake Gardens*

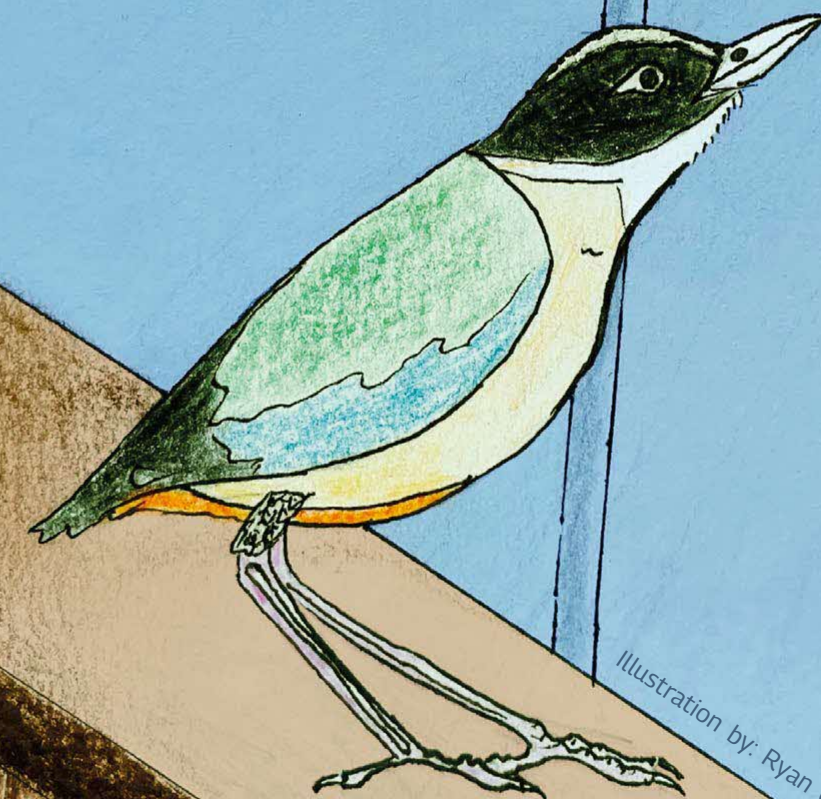


Illustration by: Ryan Quek

My most memorable experience with nature was a trip to the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve with my friend. I was there to conduct field research for my school project, and I had no intention of hiking. However, I met a group of amiable ladies and joined them for a hike. The nature reserve was calm and soothing, the air rich with the dewy petrichor of the post-rain morning. We hiked all the way up to the summit. It was memorable as we made friends along the way while experiencing nature that lovely morning.

Anonymous, 2022

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
Jurong Lake Gardens*



Living in Ang Mo Kio next to the town park, waking up daily to the sounds of koels and the smell of morning dew... To me, this is a refreshing experience that is borderline surreal.

Anonymous, 2010

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
Jurong Lake Gardens*





Illustration by: Ren Rong Chong



I visit my neighbourhood park weekly with my grandparents and brother. About two years ago, while we were playing badminton, we were startled by loud rustling sounds coming from one of the bushes nearby. To our surprise, a family of six otters came running out from the bushes and across the park. Leading the family were two adult otters, which were followed by four baby otters. In our five years of living in the estate, this was the first time we had seen otters. All the parkgoers were excited and whipped out their phones to take photos as the otters ran off towards the large canal. We have not seen the otters since. I always wonder where they went and why they never came back.

Ryan, 2020

Collected at Nodes at Parks:
Jurong Lake Gardens



I frequently look out the window to enjoy the greenery outside my house. Once when I was looking out the window, I spotted two hawks perched on a tree. At first, I wasn't sure if they were hawks as I'd never seen one in Singapore. It was only after taking a closer look, when I was at the playground, that I realised that they were indeed hawks. Since then, I've frequently spotted the hawks on rooftops and in the trees around my neighbourhood. I'm surprised that even in an urban neighbourhood like mine, we can still find such unique birds. I hope we keep the greenery around my neighbourhood so that we will have the chance to see more unique animals.

Aden, 2022

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
Jurong Lake Gardens*



Illustration by: Averil Tan



Photograph by: Veronica

I live next to East Coast Park and love running there. There's a tree, in particular, that I love sitting under to meditate while listening to the sound of the waves and feeling the sea breeze. There, all my worries melt away!

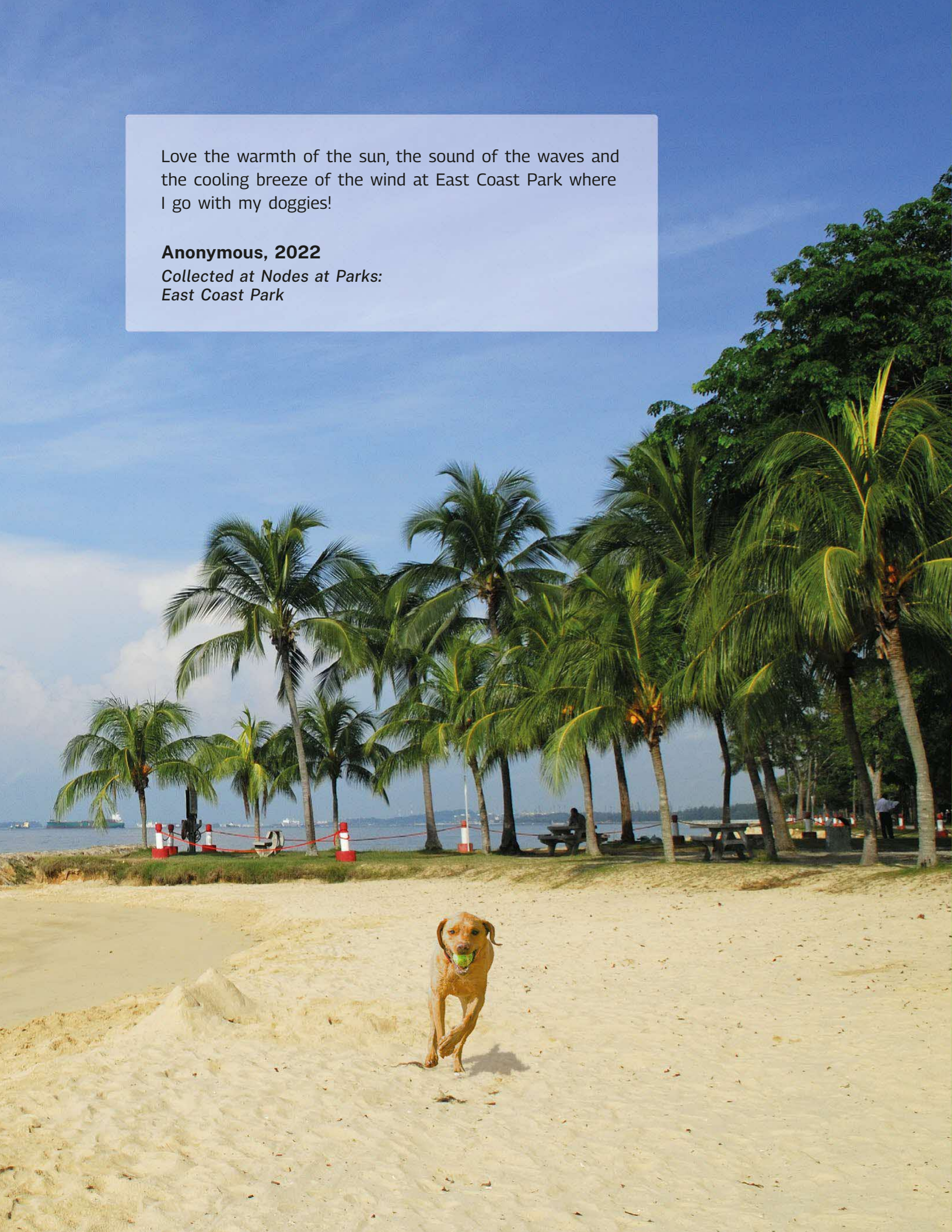
Veronica, 2022

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
East Coast Park*

Love the warmth of the sun, the sound of the waves and the cooling breeze of the wind at East Coast Park where I go with my doggies!

Anonymous, 2022

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
East Coast Park*



One memorable experience with nature in Singapore is walking along the Rail Corridor with my wife, gazing at the large expanse of greenery and the blue sky above. Another deeply personal and memorable experience is walking around Gillman Barracks in the southern part of Singapore in the early morning hours, listening to birds (both big and small) chirping away in the dense foliage and forest nearby. It's a small patch of greenery but still a tranquil sanctuary for humans and animals in our harsh urban landscape. May we cherish our remaining greenery and nature in a world turned grey.

Jimmy, 2022

*Collected at Nodes at Parks:
East Coast Park*



In the past, the Singapore River was filled with rubbish. There were many roadside hawker stalls along the Singapore River, and people would just throw their trash into the river. This polluted the Singapore River, causing oil to float on the river's surface, and the river became very smelly. Boats did not want to come near and fish did not want to swim in the Singapore River.

Seeing that this condition was getting worse and that no boats wanted to stop in Singapore, our first Prime Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, decided that something needed to be done. So, he started a campaign to clean up the Singapore River. He relocated the roadside hawker stalls and employed many people to clean up the river and remove the rubbish in it. It took a few years to clean up the Singapore River, but since then, we have had a clean Singapore River.

Cyrus, 2015

*Collected from the
Singapore Memory Project*

Many of us are familiar with the Chinese and Japanese Gardens. But what we may not know is that before parts of it became the Chinese and Japanese Gardens, Jurong Lake was just a large body of water. The picturesque landscape that is now the Chinese and Japanese Gardens was built on that body of water.

I grew up in the Jurong area in the 1960s and recall going to the lake to swim as a kid. It was walking distance from our house to the lake. On many evenings, we would walk to the lake for a swim, and then walk back. There was a nice mud bank along the lake and the water was very clean—a bluish-green colour. Sometimes, we even caught fish there. We didn't have the money to buy fishing rods, so we had to improvise by using tins and nets to catch fish. The fish that we caught were mainly small fish, such as guppies. Sometimes, if we were lucky, we would find catfish.



Photograph by: Vincent Chia

Life back then was very different from what it is now. The pace of life was much slower, and we had more time for rest and recreation. The environment was not so built-up and there was still the slight tinge of rustic beauty that remained from the *kampung* days. And there weren't so many rules and regulations. There were no signs that prohibited us from swimming in the lake so we just went

ahead. In fact, it was my uncle who brought me to the lake and taught me to swim. In the photo, you can see me as a child, playing in the lake together with my uncle and cousin. I think I was about eight years old then.

The area around Jurong was eventually re-developed by the Jurong Town Council in the 1970s and my family was resettled into one of the HDB blocks in the Jurong estate. Things have changed, but I still look back on my memories of the pre-developed Jurong Lake with fondness.

Vincent Chia, 1965

*Collected from the
Singapore Memory Project*



This was the Permatang Beach on Pulau Tekong. It was once open to the public before the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) took over the island entirely for military use.

This photo was taken in 1983, shortly after our GCE O-Level examinations. A group of us—a bunch of 16-year-old boys—organised a camping trip on the island. The Permatang beach was sandy and pristine. It was an excellent location for a weekend getaway from mainland Singapore.

We pitched our makeshift tents, made of ponchos, then roamed around the island freely. Combing the areas around the beach, we were able to gather coconuts, bananas and *attap* seeds. A deserted colonial house sat on a hilltop. Known to be haunted, we camped there for a night, too. Although it was an eerie experience, we did not encounter anything paranormal.

It is a great childhood memory. Given that the island now belongs to the SAF, it seems that we will never have the chance to go back to the beach again to relive the old days.

Lim Cheng Tiong, 1983
*Collected from the
Singapore Memory Project*



Photograph by: Lim Cheng Tiong



Illustration by: Melissa Lim



In 2001, I was invited by my brother Joseph Lai to see Chek Jawa. He was a Parks Officer and nature guide, and passionate about his work. He had brought students to Pulau Ubin many times to marvel at the rich flora and fauna there. He was particularly taken by a coastal plain off Chek Jawa, a former village that stood on the northeastern coast of the island.

This Chek Jawa plain was rich in marine plants and sea life—things that many Singaporeans pay good money to see in Malaysian waters. That the place harboured such a rich marine habitat was itself astonishing. That the place was going to be reclaimed was even more so.

I couldn't believe my ears when my brother broke this news to me. So, I decided to go and see the place for myself and find out how I could help. Chek Jawa turned out to be much richer than I had imagined. It was home to some 28 species of seagrass. There were a variety of sea pens, nudibranchs, etc., and no small amount of sea stars and sand dollars. Everywhere we walked—and this was before the boardwalk was built—we could see sea anemones half buried in the tidal retreat. We saw seahorses and many coral plants, and I held a giant nodular starfish in my hands.

The whole Chek Jawa plain was a joy to walk on. When the tide was low, over 700m of exposed sand bed could be seen. I could only imagine the fun that kids would have had when the Chek Jawa *kampung* was alive and well.

The highlight of my trip was meeting Priscilla, the resident she-boar of Chek Jawa. She was tame and people-friendly; I believe she had been raised by the *kampung* folks. Patting her, I only wished I had an apple with me. I was told the fruit was a favourite of hers.

That was my first trip to Chek Jawa. On my second trip, Minister Mah Bow Tan was there. By then, my brother had gotten the attention of the authorities to consider holding off their reclamation plans and saving Chek Jawa. Priscilla was there too, and meeting her was like meeting an old friend. But she was an old friend with a scar. I found barbed wire marks around her neck, and my brother told me some construction workers had tried to capture her for meat. We were both concerned, as were other volunteers. But there was little anyone or I could do. Priscilla belonged to the wild and back then there wasn't any real management office that could keep an eye on her.

I was relieved when I heard that the reclamation plans for Chek Jawa had been deferred, but it was with much sadness that I discovered on my third trip to that marine wonderland that Priscilla had gone missing, presumably into the stomachs of some itinerant poachers. It's infuriating to know that some people just cannot leave a good-natured beast alone, one that could have lived a fuller life and brought much joy to the many children who subsequently visited the place.



Photograph by: T C Lai

T C Lai, 2003
*Collected from the
 Singapore Memory Project*







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