

## **Singapore conserving biodiversity well: Expert**

Thu, Oct 22, 2009

**By Dawn Tay**

SINGAPORE is taking a unique approach to conserving its biodiversity and is doing well, an expert said yesterday.

Unlike many other countries, it makes its natural biodiversity accessible to the public through nature parks such as Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve and parks in urban areas, said Harvard physician Aaron Bernstein at the start of the inaugural Asean Conference on Biodiversity yesterday.

People then gain awareness about conservation and take pride in their country's diversity, he said.

More than 300 delegates from Asean and other parts of the world will discuss emerging trends and issues on biodiversity conservation and management at the three-day conference.

In his keynote address, Dr Bernstein highlighted that human health depended on conservation efforts regarding the planet's rapidly depleting biodiversity.

Plants and animals, such as cone shells and horseshoe crabs - which are also found in Singapore - have been found to be sources of vital drugs used to develop medicine and study human diseases.

Recent outbreaks, such as those of Influenza A (H1N1), Sars and the Nipah viruses, were partly due to human disruption of ecosystems that brought disease-carrying animals into contact with humans.

Despite its small size, Singapore is home to a third of the world's hard-coral species, more than 2,900 plant species and hundreds of birds and mammals.

A National Parks Board survey of the island that ended in 2007 turned up 30 records of previously unknown organisms here and rediscovered 11 species previously thought to be extinct.

Senior Minister of State (National Development and Education) Grace Fu reaffirmed Singapore's commitment to contributing to biodiversity conservation internationally.

She pointed out that the country is helping to develop a grading system to measure how cities worldwide are conserving their plant and animal species - the Singapore Index on Cities' Biodiversity.

Areas for further exploration, said National University of Singapore researcher Peter Ng, include improving existing ecosystems, whether Singapore should re-introduce locally extinct species and how to further promote biodiversity conservation in schools.

**dawnt@sph.com.sg**