



New records for Pulau Ubin include three bat species, one of which is the black-bearded tomb bat. PHOTO: NOEL THOMAS

Go wild over 20 new animal species on Pulau Ubin

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Twenty new animal species have so far been recorded on Pulau Ubin, as part of the first comprehensive survey of biodiversity on the rustic island north-east of the mainland.

The discoveries include *Piranthus* sp., a spider species new to science, found in secondary forest near the island's coast.

Researchers also found six other animal species recorded in Singapore for the first time, as well as 13 other animals never before known to be found on Pulau Ubin.

The findings of the first Comprehensive Ubin Biodiversity Survey were announced by National Development Minister Desmond Lee yesterday, ahead of the ninth Ubin Day today.

The event, held annually since 2014, aims to celebrate the rich natural and cultural heritage of the quarry-dotted island.

Due to the Covid-19 situation this year, a series of talks on Pulau Ubin-related issues, such as the history of the island and its rich mangrove habitats, will be conducted online today. More details can be found on the National Parks Board's (NParks) YouTube page.

"The unique biodiversity found on Pulau Ubin is fascinating. This has been confirmed by the new findings from our Comprehensive Ubin Biodiversity Survey," Mr Lee said in a Facebook post. "Let us continue to preserve and treasure the rustic charm and natural beauty of Pulau Ubin," he added.

Piranthus sp. has been seen in other parts of Singapore and in Brunei before. But those sightings were wrongly classified as belonging to a different genus.

It was not until the spider was found on Pulau Ubin during the sur-



The biodiversity survey, which started in 2018, unearthed dragonflies such as the water monarch dragonfly. PHOTO: ROBIN NGIAM



Piranthus sp., a spider species new to science, was found in secondary forest near the island's coast. PHOTO: PAUL NG

veys and closely examined by researchers that it was determined to be a completely new species yet to be described in scientific literature.

Other new animal species found in Singapore for the first time during the survey include the ruby-cheeked sunbird, the swamp tiger butterfly and four other species of spiders.

Mr Khew Sin Khoon, who runs the Butterfly Circle (Singapore) citizen science blog, said the swamp tiger butterfly, in a serendipitous discovery, was found on Butterfly Hill on the island.

"The swamp tiger is pretty rare even in Malaysia, and found mainly in mangrove habitats like at Kuala Selangor. My theory is that it also exists in the mangrove areas of Johor, and was somehow able to fly over to Ubin," he said.

New records for the offshore island include three species of bats, including the black-bearded tomb bat, and birds such as the buff-rumped woodpecker, as well as species of butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies, and grasshoppers, crickets and katydids.

The survey – which involves field

surveys conducted by scientists and naturalists – started in January 2018 and is still ongoing for certain animal groups.

National University of Singapore biologist N. Sivasothi said Pulau Ubin plays a vital role for the conservation of wildlife not just in Singapore, but also in Malaysia.

He noted that because the island is located between Singapore and Malaysia, it serves as a "sink" for animals from southern Johor, which means animals from there may come to the island. Similarly, Pulau Ubin could also be a source for wildlife in Singapore, he said, pointing to how the once-extinct hornbills had dispersed to the mainland from the island.

Mr Lee yesterday also announced plans to make the island greener. As part of a One Million Trees movement – an initiative announced earlier this year which would see a million trees being planted across Singapore over the next decade – 16,000 trees from more than 70 native species will be planted at three sites on Pulau Ubin.

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