

Nature Society (Singapore)
PRESS MATERIALS
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BUTTERFLY INTEREST GROUP

The Butterfly Trail at Orchard Project relies on the knowledge, experience, dedication and passion of the Butterfly Interest Group (BIG) of the Nature Society (Singapore) (NSS).

Where and how did the Butterfly Interest Group gain experience for this?

The Chairperson, Gan Cheong Weei, and the Vice-Chairperson, Simon Chan Kee Mun, have utilized the knowledge from their work with the **Alexandra Hospital Butterfly Trail** (see page 2) and the **Changi Airport Terminal 3 Butterfly Garden** (see page 3)

What have they had to do for the Butterfly Trail at Orchard Project?

Gan and Chan have had to walk the trail over and over again, identifying butterflies that were already there, identifying host and nectar plants already in place, noting the possibilities on different sites and identifying the overall route of The Butterfly Trail at Orchard with its various incorporated sites for the 4 km length of the trail. The process of working out whether the Orchard Trail was viable took continuous repeated walking for over a year beginning January 2009.

Gan and Chan have been involved in detailed planning of how sites will be planted up, with which butterfly host and nectar plants in order to attract specific groups of butterflies at different sections of the trail. They and other BIG and NSS members have started growing from seed those plants that are unavailable from nurseries, ready for planting when needed. They have been training students to identify butterflies on the trail so as to work later as volunteer monitors for baseline and later surveys in order to find out how successful the planting is. The volunteers will also lead walks or help maintain the sites.

For how long have the BIG been interested in increasing the number of butterflies in Orchard Road?

In 2008, Butterfly Interest Group wrote a letter to our President, Mr. Nathan requesting to use his spacious gardens to grow the *Aristolochia tagala* vine, the host plant of the Common Birdwing butterfly, so as to bring the butterfly to the Orchard Road area, but were politely and summarily dismissed by his spokesperson who replied to that effect. Thereafter they had been considering other possibilities. Shortly after a discussion in BIG about introducing the Common Birdwing to Orchard Road on 6th January, 2009, they were introduced by the President of NSS, Dr. Shawn Lum, to a volunteer Margaret Clarkson, from USA, who had, together with Dr. Lum and Mr. Howard Shaw of Singapore Environment Council, been thinking about how to have more butterflies in Singapore. Margaret Clarkson suggested the idea of a Butterfly Trail.

What is the Butterfly Interest Group (BIG)?

The BIG was set up within NSS, as one of the NSS Special Interest Groups, in 1997, building on the Project Painted Wings initiative of 1996 led by Lim Kim Keang and Steven Neo. It was originally known as Butterfly Watching and Research Group (BWRG) with a four person Committee of Chairperson Steven Neo Say Hian and his committee members, Andrea Hoffmann, Sabrina Tan Meng Chin and Gan Cheong Weei, the present Chairperson. The present Vice-Chairperson Simon Chan Kee Mun joined as a committee member in 1997, and was Chairperson from 1998 to 2009. The Group took on its present name in 1998. The other Committee Members in 2010 are Steven Chong Peng Seen and Richard Ong Lin Boon.

What does BIG generally do?

As a Special Interest Group of NSS, the BIG have always conducted butterfly walks for other members as part of the regular activities of the Society. Members of the Group also give talks and write articles for the NSS magazine Nature Watch. The group maintains a highly informative website connected to the NSS website (<http://butterfly.nss.org.sg/home/>), including a section in which the present Chairperson, Gan Cheong Weei, and the Vice-Chairperson, Simon Chan Kee Mun, as “The Butterfly Guys” answer queries from members and the general public.

What other special projects has BIG done?

The BIG has taken on various special projects over the years:

Project Painted Wings Poster Project. (1997) a poster of local butterflies was produced which was sold to the public and also given to all schools in Singapore.

Alexandra Hospital Butterfly Trail (2001 – 2008) In December 2001, the BIG had a discussion with the CEO of **Alexandra Hospital**, Mr. Liak Teng Lit, who hoped that it might be possible to attract 100 species to the hospital garden.. Gan and Chan started planting for a **Butterfly Trail** there in February 2002, at a time when a first baseline survey had only found 10 species of butterfly. Together with the dedicated work of Mrs. Rosalind Tan, Senior Executive, Operations, at the Hospital, and the generosity of the Hospital in providing butterfly cages for caterpillar rearing purposes, the Butterfly Interest Group, worked to plant host and nectar plants for a variety of species. Often the host and nectar plants were grown by themselves from seeds. Over time the number of butterflies increased and walks were organized for NSS members, as well as the Butterfly Trail in the Alexandra Hospital providing therapeutic calm and charm to patients. Particular triumphs were the not so common Common Birdwing (*Troides helena Cerberus*) butterfly, one of the largest butterflies in the world, (and the butterfly which now adorns our local postage stamp, in the SingPost stamps issue of April 2010, on which Gan and Simon collaborated.) Finally, by November 2008, 102 species of butterfly had been spotted at Alexandra Hospital.

Changi Airport Terminal 3 Butterfly Garden (2007 – 2008) In May 2007 Butterfly Interest Group / Gan and Chan started working with CAAS on the initial concept for **The Butterfly Garden at Changi Airport Terminal 3**. Subsequently they worked on evaluation and recommendation of tenders and finally on the choice of butterfly species and plants for this garden. Overall it was 15 months of work. The world's first butterfly garden in an airport, was opened in August 28th, 2008, situated in the Transit Mall and open 24 hours per day, with around 2,000 butterflies present at any time. Although only departing passengers can normally enjoy it, Gan and Chan have with official permission led five groups of NSS members to visit it.

“A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Singapore” (2006 – 2008) – a handy pocket-sized identification guide, containing 144 colour photographs of local butterflies, published Feb 2008.

Butterfly Stamps Series, issued April 2010 (2008 – 2010) Co-operated with SingPost on the Butterfly stamps issue.

“A Field Guide to the Caterpillars of Singapore” (2009 -) in preparation, a companion to “A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Singapore”, this will contain 144 colour photographs of caterpillars of local butterflies.