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Have you ever studied in a public library surrounded by jungle-like gardens? When your eyes are tired of the black tiny letters on the white background, or the colourful pictures from your computer screen, you could just walk down to the gardens, relax your eyes with the colour of nature, fresh your mind with every breath you take. Do you want to live your life this way? If your answer is yes, welcome to Singapore.

Singapore, a tiny dot on the world's map, despite of that, she is a beautiful city so rich in biodiversity – more than 360 species of birds, which is around 60 per cent of the 568 species listed in the whole United Kingdom or 75 per cent of the 467 species found in France, a country with 1,000 times land area of Singapore (Ng, 2008). Singapore also has over 250 species of reef-forming hard corals which take up to 30 per cent of the world's hard coral species (Tan, 2001).

However, due to urbanization, from about 82 per cent coverage of primary forests in Singapore 100 years ago, the greenish natural environment has been replaced by concrete walls and land. Today, the total primary forest area left over is pathetically 0.43 per cent of the original area (Chou, 2008). The fast development pace and limited land area has brought up a question to all of us: Can Singapore become a model for conserving its natural heritage?

Despite of the rapid urbanization, many species that believed were extinct from Singapore due to the development decades ago, will still irregularly 'rediscovered' once a blue moon. The best example would be the Dwarf Snakehead (*Channa sp.*) that was found in swamps of Nee Soon in 1989 (Chou, 2008), and the Oriental Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros albirostris*) which now establishing healthy colonies in Singapore although it was thought to be extinct years ago (Ng, 2008). The rediscovery of extinct species has greatly encouraged us, the nature lovers, not to give up on conserving our own natural heritage.

A great step by the government following the green plan brought up by the ex-Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew is to make Singapore a Garden City (Ng, 2008). It is a challenge to find space a small city-state with a land area of barely 700 square kilometers. Furthermore, the population of 4.6 million results a third highest population density in the world with 6,800 per square kilometers has made it even harder to sustain lands for natural reserve. However, with smart ideas and careful planning, Singapore's government has been able to locate 9 per cent of the total land area for parks and nature reserves.

From 1986 to 2007, the green cover in Singapore grew from 35.7 per cent to 46.5 per cent although Singapore's population shows a 68 per cent growth (Ng, 2008).

A smart idea to expand the green space in Singapore city is the park connectors. A park connector will act as green links and recreational corridors among the major parks in Singapore. It is a series of seven connecting bikeways or green paths and is designed for recreational walking, jogging and cycling activities in a closed loop form from one park to another. A first loop of park connector known as the Eastern Coastal Park Connector Network with a length of 42 kilometres was completed in December 2007 (National Parks, 2008).

Besides parks, nature reserve is also a main solution by the government to preserve Singapore's heritage. We now have four Nature Reserves – the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve which is a lowland dipterocarp forest, the Central Catchment Nature Reserve which include a freshwater swamp forest, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve a mangrove vegetation, and Labrador Nature Reserve which is a coastal hill forest (Chou, 2008). Together they covered more than 3,000 hectares or equivalently 4.5 per cent of Singapore's land space. Each of this nature reserve has their own uniqueness. For instant, the Sungei Buloh Wetland holds the distinction of being an ASEAN Heritage Park and it is also an important link as stop-over sites for migratory birds from far distance such as Siberia (Ng, 2008). Other than that, Singapore is the only one of two cities in the world other than Rio de Janeiro to have significant area of primary rainforest within the urban area, which is in the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve. Furthermore, this nature reserve itself contains more species of trees than the entire North American continent (Uniquely Singapore, 2009).

In year 2007, the Active, Beautiful and Clean (ABC) Waters Programme is held. The objective of this programme is to break down some of the harsh concrete walls and landscape them for better integration with surrounding parks and green space to complements the park connector. According to the Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, the programme can breakdown into three points. First, the residents can enjoy a wide range of water-based activities, corresponding to the word 'Active'. Then, all waterways in Singapore will be transformed into beautiful streams, rivers and lakes, corresponding to the word 'Beautiful'. And lastly, everyone is responsible to continue keep the environment litter and pollution free, corresponding to the word 'Clean' (Lee, 2007). The execution of this programme shows that Singapore's government and society has already started to appreciate the nature and working hard to preserve our natural heritage.

Finally, we are back to our question: can Singapore become a model for conserving its natural heritage? From the points given above, we know about two facts. First, Singapore has a very high biodiversity

heritage – It contains more species per unit area than any other countries, with a few own unique species that exist nowhere else on the planet other than Singapore, such as the Johnson' Freshwater Crab (*Irmengardia johnsoni*). Second, we can see that the government and publics are aware of preserving our own natural heritage. Several major measurements have carried out to save our natural habitats. Hard work is rewarded with the increase in the area of parks and nature reserves or the green space in Singapore.

So, we got plenty of resources, we are working hard to preserve them in the same time. With these two points, I would say yes that we can become a model for conserving our natural heritage.

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