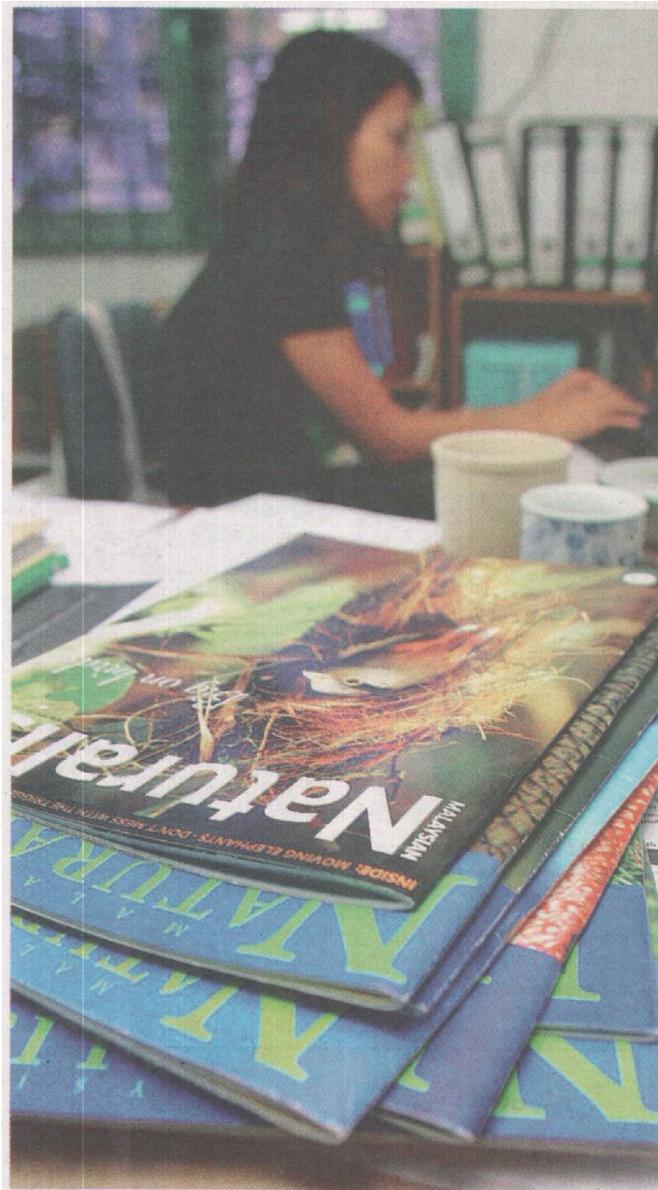


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**Interesting read:** The Malaysian Naturalist is a non-technical magazine full of colourful photos of nature and insightful articles on a variety of topics.

# Educating people to protect nature

MNS was formed in 1940 by a few Britons who were fascinated by the rich flora and fauna here



THO XIN YI

**W**E MUST protect nature, because nature will, in turn, protect us.

This was the idea presented by Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) head of communications Andrew J. Sebastian.

"Nature provides climate control and flood control, among others. If we do not protect it, we will face many catastrophes," he said.

Formed in 1940 by a handful of British who were deeply fascinated by the rich flora and fauna in this country, the society has expanded through the years and now has about 4,500 members.

MNS educates people to protect nature by raising awareness through its activities.

There are special interest groups in which MNS members can take part, such as Marine, Photo Group, Caving, Bird Watching, Flora, Urban Green Living, which conduct activities and organise trips that bring people close to nature.

"Our activities are diverse. We have special programmes for members — holiday camps, photography camps, snorkelling trips, talks and seminars, among others.

"People won't appreciate some-



**Caring for wildlife:** MNS member Ooi Chin Hock feeding a house swift that was found and given to Sebastian in Port Dickson.

thing if they don't understand it, so we need to spark their interest before they will appreciate nature," Andrew said.

A total of 383 primary and secondary schools nationwide are affiliated to MNS through the Kelab Pencinta Alam (School Nature Clubs) programme, and preschoolers are not left out either.

Field trips and workshops are conducted for children aged between two and six at the Nature Centre of the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) in Kepong or Rimba Ilmu at Universiti Malaya, to expose them to nature.

"The nature centre in FRIM is sponsored by Shell. Our education team holds camps, weekend outings and nature programmes to teach the kids things like how to make kites and identify the creatures in the stream, and most

# Field trips conducted for preschoolers

> FROM PAGE 12

importantly, to be adventurous and love nature," Sebastian said.

MNS also manages the Kuala Selangor Nature Park, Dark Caves in Batu Caves and the Boh-MNS Field Study Centre in Cameron Highlands.

"There are wetlands and mangrove forests in the Kuala Selangor Nature Park, which are endangered habitats.

"Their biodiversity and unique ecosystem allow us to study the wildlife, and get inspired to protect nature," Sebastian said.

The Dark Caves, on the other hand, houses bats, cave snakes and special plants that live on limestone.

"Every evening, the bats fly to Kuala Selangor. Without them, the durian trees and the firefly trees would not get pollinated," he pointed out.

MNS focuses mainly on environmental education and conservation, and among the species listed in its conservation projects are sharks, tigers and hornbills.

"When people talk about hornbills, they immediately think of Sarawak. But, there are only seven hornbill species in Sarawak, while 10 species are found at the Belum-Temenggor Forest Reserve," Sebastian said.

"To protect the hornbills, we must protect the forest. Man has taken enough of land; it's time to keep something for the wildlife," he added.

MNS also publishes the *Malayan Nature Journal* and *Malaysian Naturalist* quarterly.

The former is a scientific periodical while the latter is a non-technical magazine full of colourful photos of nature and insightful articles on a variety of topics.

For instance, the June 2008 issue featured megapodes (a kind of chicken-like bird), eco-tourism, spitting spiders, organic produce, Rafflesia and the Gunung Stong State Park in Kelantan.

It also contained book reviews, provided eco-tips for travellers and reported on the *MNS Raptor Watch Week 2008* that was held in March.

The MNS headquarters is located in Kuala Lumpur and the society has branches in most of the states in the country.

There is a 0.4km nature trail at its head office that runs through lowland forest in the city. Fig trees, ferns, damselflies, frogs, monkeys, owls, can be found in this forest.

"The trail was reopened to the

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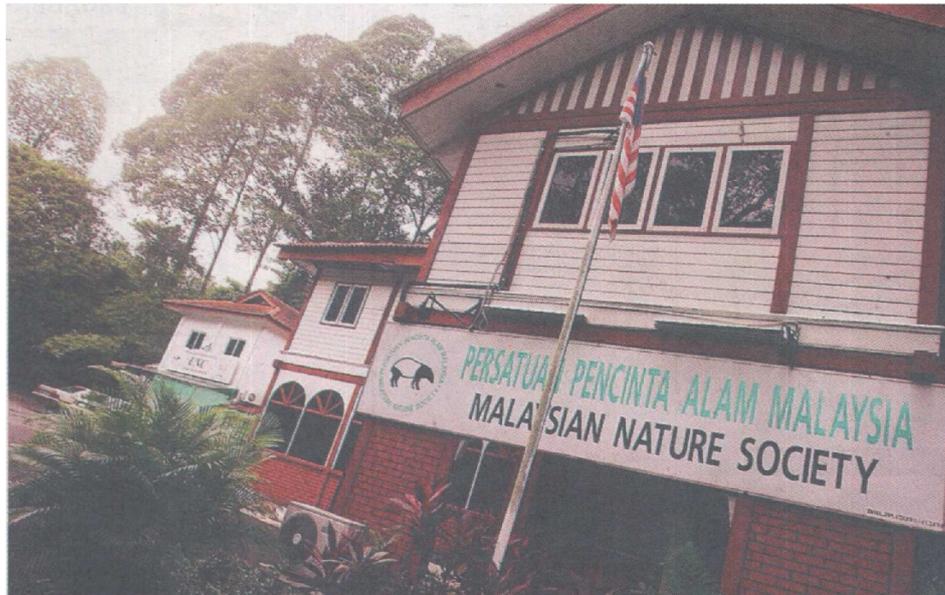
public recently in collaboration with ExxonMobil," Sebastian said.

MNS membership fees are RM70 for individuals, RM95 for families (parents and kids under 16), RM45 for students, RM120 for schools, RM270 for institutions and RM5,000 for corporations.

Members receive the *Malaysian Naturalist* free, and they can subscribe to the *Malayan Nature Journal* for an additional fee.

"Every MNS member is invited to attend our annual general meeting. Our council members are elected," Sebastian said.

Donations are welcome; all contributions are tax-exempt.



**Nerve centre:** The MNS headquarters was one of the earliest buildings built in Federal Hill; the original structure was shown in a 1929 map.



**It's never too young to start:** MNS conducts field trips and workshops for preschoolers at Rimba Ilmu in Universiti Malaya, to expose them to nature.

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**Sebastian:** If we do not protect nature, we will face many catastrophes.