

Getting To Know Our Professors

Dr Norman Lim



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is currently a field ecologist and a lecturer with the Natural Sciences & Science Education (NSSE) Academic Group.

What research area(s) do you specialise in? How does it impact your work at NIE?

I conduct research on the ecology and conservation of vertebrates, particularly understudied mammals, in Singapore and the Southeast Asian region. Prime examples include the Sunda colugo (or flying lemur) and pangolin (or scaly anteater), both of which are found in Singapore's forests. In many ecology textbooks, examples are derived from studies conducted in temperate countries that possess very different climates and biodiversities. One of the drawbacks of this is that students may find it harder to appreciate the relevance of such research data for our context. Therefore, I incorporate the findings of my local research in my teaching so that students can better appreciate the real-world relevance of ecological theory and research, and better retain the knowledge presented.

How did your interest in the research area(s) come about?

My interest in the conservation of vertebrates developed during my undergraduate days, when I was cognisant of the threats to terrestrial habitats and their wildlife in our geographical region. Additionally, there is a huge knowledge gap on the habitat requirements of many vertebrate species, and without which, evidence-based conservation policies cannot be formulated and implemented. Therefore, I resolve to address this knowledge gap by focusing on the conservation and ecology of vertebrates.

Could you share with us some interesting facets of your research area?

As a field ecologist, I get to spend many hours in the forests, particularly during the night because many vertebrates are nocturnal (i.e., active at night). So I see myself as someone with an exciting nightlife, albeit in an unconventional sense of the phrase. Over the past 15 years of field research, I am very privileged to have visited many national parks and seen unique wildlife; but in the course of conducting research, I also have to overcome challenges/inconveniences like harsh terrain and blood-sucking leeches.

What does NIE offer to higher degree students that is unique?

NIE is a close-knit community; higher degree students have numerous opportunities to interact with fellow students and faculty members from other disciplines on a regular basis. This strongly promotes an innovative and interdisciplinary approach towards addressing today's complex issues in society.

What have you learned from your students?

I have learned to embrace the diversity in my students and be flexible in the ways in which I interact with them. Having students from different walks of life also meant that I benefit intellectually from such interactions because of their alternative viewpoints and the need to re-examine assumptions.

What advice would you give to those who would like to pursue a higher degree programme?

For those pursuing research studies, the candidate has to find a line of research that is Interesting, Important, and Realistic. Interesting because the candidate will be working on it for a number of years and has to be able to find joy in it; Important because there is limited funding and resources available for research and thus the research has to be able to impact the society; and Realistic in the sense that the research must be possible with the current available technology and within the candidature duration.

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