

Online database captures S'pore's rich biodiversity

Users can click on an animal to find how the flora and fauna interact

By **AUDREY TAN**

A NEW online database has been launched compiling research on how Singapore's flora and fauna interact with each other.

Called Animals and Plants of Singapore, it is managed by Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum and went live on the museum's website this month.

Users can click on an animal and find links to information on the plants or animals it feeds on – though work on the site is ongoing and not all species have

links in place yet.

The database provides a name and a photograph of each species. For further information, users must click on the links to external sources, such as pages created by the National University of Singapore's life sciences classes, or the museum's Singapore Biodiversity Records – an online collection of “flora and fauna in Singapore, including sightings of uncommon or rare species”.

Professor Rudolf Meier, deputy head of the museum, said the goal is to understand how different

species interact to sustain Singapore's green spaces.

“Animals and Plants of Singapore will track these interdependencies by linking species pages of prey and predators, or plants and pollinators,” he said.

“If we had a dedicated person or team doing the research, it would be as time-consuming as writing an academic paper for each species. But by tapping already-published research and observations, the site can be updated more frequently.”

Prof Meier hopes the site will make it easier for people to appreciate Singapore's diverse ecosystem and give them a reliable source of information.

Data is cross-referenced with

the museum's stable of experts before being uploaded, and the site lists the names of the experts who identified the species.

The database now records more than 1,000 species of plants and animals, but Prof Meier hopes to more than double this figure by the end of the year. He estimates that there could be between 50,000 and 100,000 multicellular plant and animal species here.

Studies are under way to establish this, such as Singapore's first comprehensive marine biodiversity survey, led by the National Parks Board (NParks). It began five years ago and is expected to be completed by May this year.

Dr Lena Chan, director of



Dr Ang Yuchen (left), a post-doctoral candidate helping the new site, with Professor Rudolf Meier. PHOTO: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

NParks' National Biodiversity Centre, said: “Biodiversity databases are very important as they are historical records of plants and animals. These databases can be set up only if long-term monitoring surveys are carried out.”

She said the museum's new database will complement NParks' records, including its online Biodiversity and Environment Data-

base System, which was started in 2011 and records 5,000 species of flora and 750 species of fauna.

“Together, we can generate greater awareness and appreciation of the rich biodiversity that we have,” she said.

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Animals and Plants of Singapore, designed for desktop browsing, is at <http://lkcnhm.nus.edu.sg/APS>