



Sec 3 student Stephanie Aw (left), 15, from Ang Mo Kio Secondary School, pointing out a velcro crab (*Camposcia retusa*) to President Tony Tan, at the viewing pool of Sisters' Islands Marine Park Public Gallery yesterday. The 30 sq m gallery showcases the biodiversity in Singapore waters. PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

President opens marine park gallery

Ariel Lim

The Neptune's cup sponge was thought to be extinct for over a century until it was rediscovered off Singapore's coast in 2011.

It is one of the species visitors can learn about in the new Sisters' Islands Marine Park Public Gallery on St John's Island, which was opened by President Tony Tan Keng Yam yesterday.

The 30 sq m gallery showcases the biodiversity in Singapore waters, particularly its first marine park. It features a diorama of the marine life that visitors can expect to

encounter on the two dive trails there which will open in September, including rare sponges as well as other species such as sea stars and nudibranchs.

Part showcase and part education, the gallery will also inform visitors of efforts by the National Parks Board (NParks) to protect marine biodiversity in the park, such as its work with the Tropical Marine Science Institute of the National University of Singapore to boost the population of endangered giant clams.

Guests will also soon get to see the real thing.

Viewing pools containing species that inhabit the park will be set up

by the end of next year.

Another 30 sq m or so will be set aside for a controlled mangrove ecosystem which Dr Karenne Tun, deputy director of the coastal and marine branch of NParks' National Biodiversity Centre, said could be used for research projects.

The marine park comprises 40ha of sea around Sisters' Islands and along the western reefs of St John's Island and Pulau Tekukor.

The two dive trails were planned as part of NParks' Marine Conservation Action Plan, Singapore's first official plan to protect its marine heritage. That scheme followed the Singapore Blue Plan 2009, a propos-

al by academics and civil society groups that called for a marine survey and marine nature reserves.

President Tan viewed two presentations by students from the School of Science and Technology and Ang Mo Kio Secondary School.

He said: "We have a very rich national habitat, solid range of biodiversity. This is a treasure which we have to preserve, conserve and grow, not only for present generations of Singaporeans but also for many more generations of Singaporeans to come."

The gallery is open daily.

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