

O&G Specialist - Professor Ng Soon-Chye, was inclined to pursue a career path in marine biology. However, as a result of his father's persuasion, he chose medicine as his course of study. Professor Ng has since contributed significantly to the medical field; achieving the birth of Asia's first test-tube (IVF) baby in 1983. Nonetheless, his unceasing love for nature continues to this day. Professor Ng, who is ex-President of the Nature Society (Singapore) and ex-Chairman of the Nature Society's Bird Study Group, often ventures into natural habitats and nature reserves with his trusty Canon XL H1 camcorder, documenting birds species. DAWN sits down for a twittering chatter with this Adjunct Professor of the Dept of Obstetrics & Gynaecology, NUS, Duke-NUS GMS and the NTU School of Biological Science.



Lilac-breasted Roller



Hoatzin

What are the discomforts of filming in the wild? Leeches and mosquitoes are really nasty. There was nothing I could do to shoo away the extremely persistent mosquitoes which I encountered in the Everglades in Florida. They are the most menacing – these pests literally swarm you and their bites are terrible!

Being out in the field sounds like no joke. Has your choice of bird-watching locations changed over the years? When I was younger, I didn't think twice about going on trips that involved a lot of hiking. Now, my trips are less arduous. Usually, I stay at a base which provides relatively comfortable facilities.

Which was your most arduous trip ever? Together with Professor Pilai Poonswad who is a world-authority on Hornbills, we travelled through some difficult terrain such as the Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary in South Thailand to film Hornbills.

Where are your bird-watching haunts? I travel all over the world – Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, South America and South Africa. On my recent trip to Ecuador, I visited parts of the Amazon and the Andes Mountains, where the highlight for me was seeing the Ecuadorian Hillstar. My other recent trip to Papua New Guinea was a fruitful one as I got to see the amazing Birds of Paradise.

How close can you get to the birds? Bird-watchers usually keep a distance of three to four meters as birds are stressed out by human interference. Ensuring quietness and stillness is essential. To break the body outline so that the birds are not aware of human presence, camouflage netting is used.

What are your must-have items while out in the field? Extra batteries and film - never leave home without these.



Oriental Pied Hornbill



Pale Chanting Goshawk

Running out of such essential items would mean the end of the day. Rain protective gear for self and filming equipment is also of utmost importance.

What would you consider a good and bad day out in the field? Catching a glimpse of rare species is considered lucky. However, it can be quite dampening and disappointing when the forest is quiet and birds are not sighted.

Have you had any close shaves while out in the forests? Once, my fellow bird-watchers and I came relatively close to a wild elephant in Johor. Thankfully, we bid a hasty retreat before the elephant spotted us. Wild elephants can be very aggressive and there have been horror stories of people being trampled to death by these creatures.

Have you had any memorable birdie encounters? During my early years in medicine when I was staying at the Tan Tock

Seng Hospital houseman quarters, I once found a Blue-winged Pitta with a fractured leg. After nursing the bird back to health, I placed a Nature Society ring around its leg and released the bird. A year later, my friend found the very same bird in one of the rabbit hutches. Sadly, it had died there. My friend taxidermised it and gave it to me for keepsake.

As the Scientific Co-ordinator of the Singapore Hornbill Project, have you and your team made any interesting revelations? Our extensive research on the Oriental Pied-Hornbill has unearthed a very exciting discovery. After placing video cameras inside a tree hole which was the nesting place of a female Oriental Pied-Hornbill, we filmed throughout the duration in which the Oriental Pied-Hornbill laid her eggs till they hatched. From this

24-hour monitoring system, we observed that the mother bird killed the smallest and weakest chick and fed it to the other chicks. We extended this study to birds in captivity at the Jurong Bird Park and found out that this occurrence is relatively common.


Which bird is the most difficult to capture on film? I would say it's the very colourful and beautiful Pitta. These sulky birds usually hide in the undergrowth and are more often heard than seen.

Which do you think is your best-filmed video? I think the film I have created on the Hornbills of Peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and the island of Borneo is my most professional work. It took me two-odd years to complete and was actually screened at a Hornbill conference.

Do you prefer the filming or editing process of creating a video? Without doubt, filming! Editing and piecing the frames together can be a real pain and takes a lot of effort.

Where can we view your videos? I have contributed to the Internet Bird Collection - <http://ibc.hbw.com/ibc>. And some of my videos are uploaded on my website - www.asiabird.com. Unfortunately, my website has not been updated in quite a while.

How do you hope to affect the audience will your films? I'll be pleased as long as they learn about the fragility and the wonders of nature.

What are the rewards of bird videography? Being so close to nature has a therapeutic effect and videography is my way of archiving these habitats and species which might become lost to us in time. When I retire, I hope to convert more of my raw film footages into educational videos. 



Blue-winged Mountain Tanager



Crimson-rumped Toucanet



Malachite Kingfisher