

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS ASIA-PACIFIC LUMINARY AWARDS 2019



PROF. LEO TAN WEE HIN

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At Manila 2017, Prof Tan receiving the ASEAN BIODIVERSITY AWARD
Image courtesy Department of Biological Science, National University of Singapore

A marine biologist by training, passionate teacher at heart and champion of numerous green causes in a career that spans fifty years, Professor Leo Tan Wee Hin dedicated his life to science, education and the environment. He served the cause of Singapore on several fronts. His contributions helped increase the environmental consciousness and science literacy among the populace especially the young and raised the standing of teacher education in Singapore and abroad.

He was instrumental in many conservation initiatives in Singapore, championing and advocating the protection of the invaluable natural resources and their vast biodiversity. For example, he pleaded the protection of the last rocky beach at Labrador Park when green causes were perceived negatively in Singapore. For more than four decades, he sought the support of the public and authorities to gazette the park on the south of the island and this was realized when Labrador obtained Nature Reserve status in 2001. As Chairman of the National Parks Board (NParks) from 1998 to 2007, he helped NParks grow from a green infrastructure (Garden City) to be a provider of exciting lifestyle, recreational and learning experiences (City in A Garden). The island-wide Park Connector Network (PCN) was initiated during his term of office, as was the iconic Gardens By The Bay. Another major project that has helped raised the profile of the local landscape industry is the biennial Singapore Garden Festival (2006-).

Prof Tan guided NParks in building greater public awareness and appreciation for biodiversity and nature conservation through its educational and outreach programmes. As Chairman of the Garden City Fund(2006 to present), he helped to increase the reach of NParks to everyone in Singapore through fundraising for major projects and educational/public outreach programmes such as the new Learning Forest at the Tyresall Road extension of the Singapore Botanic Gardens, the Gallop Road extension(to be opened end of this year), a larger and more exciting Cool House at the National Orchid Gardens, the new Jurong Lake Gardens in the west of the island, Regional Parks, Wellness and Therapeutic Gardens that are located where they are most needed etc All these developments also help Singapore to grow its landscape professionals and industry.

One of the more significant environmental projects Prof Tan undertook with a colleague was to advise (1994 to 2006) on the mangrove regeneration of the Singapore's first marine landfill in the southern islands. Thirteen hectares of mangrove were going to make way for the Semakau landfill and the authorities were persuaded to replant an equivalent area as part of restitution as well as serve as biological indicators of pollution (from possible leaching of the landfill contents). On the research front, he was an early marine science pioneer in the ecology of mussels for aquaculture. He also undertook survey studies at Semakau (2008 to 2012) on the flora and fauna of the mangroves and shores. He was also involved in the comprehensive Marine Biodiversity of Singapore's coastal environment (2010 to 2015) where more than 100 new/unrecorded species were identified.

On the educational front, Prof Tan started as a Lecturer at the then University of Singapore (now NUS) in 1974, moved to the Singapore Science Centre in 1982 as its CEO and Director and again to Nanyang Technological University/National Institute of Education first as Founding Dean of Science (1991 to 2000) and then as Director of NIE (1994 to 2006). He retired as Director but stayed on as Professor till 2008 when he returned to NUS to steer the establishment of a multidisciplinary Bachelor of Environmental Studies that has placed NUS on the map for environmental and sustainability education both locally and internationally. He also chaired the Advisory Committee for the first joint Australian National University - NUS Master of Science (Science Communication) Programme which is well sought after. A third initiative he started at NUS was the resurrection of the Raffles Museum of Natural History which Sir Stamford Raffles conceived and the British finally built it in the 1870s. Singapore turned the Museum into the National Museum in the 70s and the collection of largely animals came to the NUS for research and teaching. Prof Tan thought it was time (2009) to let the public too, appreciate the beauty and wonders of nature and he and his colleague Prof Peter Ng went on a hair-raising fund-raising journey over just six months to build a new concept museum that will educate future generations on the importance of natural history in their lives.

Other educational contributions were the building of the OMNIMAX and PLANETARIUM at the Science Centre to broaden the horizons of the school-going population in particular and the publication of authoritative guide/reference books on the local flora and fauna. There are more than 45 titles in the Natural History of Singapore series and some three quarter of a million copies have been sold here and abroad. At NIE, he established many new teacher training and education initiatives including the flagship "Leaders in Education" fulltime (for Singapore school leaders) and short-term Executive (for internationals) programmes. All in all, his mission has been to inculcate a sense of the wonderment of nature among all Singaporeans and to protect the natural ecosystem so that it continues to provide human beings with clean air, clean water and clean food to enable them to healthily live, work, play and learn as they journey towards a "City in Nature".

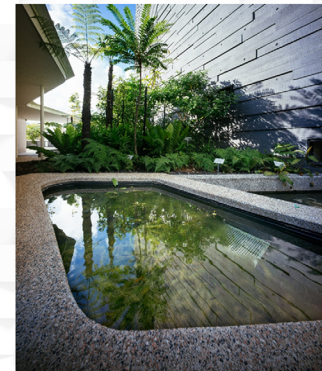
For his contributions to society, he has received many awards including the Meritorious Service Award from the Singapore government, the President's Award for the Environment from the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources; the Science & Technology Medal from the Agency for Science and Technology and Research; Honorary Doctorate in Science from Loughborough University (UK); National Order of Merit (Officer) from the French government; National University of Singapore Outstanding Service Award. NUS also established a Professorship in Biodiversity Science in his name.



Green wall facade at LKC Natural History Museum, Singapore depicting the native cliff landscapes along the coasts
Image courtesy Tierra Design



Prof. Leo Tan at LKC Natural History Museum with the Sperm Whale that beached in Singapore in the Jubilee year in July 2015. The whale was named Ms. Jubi Lee.
Image courtesy Prof. Leo Tan



The mangrove ponds courtyard as part of Singapore's native landscape exhibit at LKC Natural History Museum, Singapore
Image courtesy Tierra Design