

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**SPEECH BY MR S DHANABALAN, MINISTER FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE JURONG BIRDPARK CRANE PADDOCKS  
ON 11 MARCH 1989 AT 3.00 PM**

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I am happy to be here this afternoon to launch the Opening of Jurong BirdPark's latest exhibit. I would like to congratulate the BirdPark on the completion of the Crane Paddocks. Apart from being a magnificent display of a collection of cranes in their natural habitat, the exhibit has special aviaries to encourage the breeding of these beautiful endangered birds.

I understand that cranes are among the world's oldest living birds. Studies of the fossils of cranes have shown that they were contemporaries of the dinosaurs living some millions of years ago.

Since ancient times, mankind has been inspired by the crane's beauty, elaborate dances, impressive migrations and primeaval calls. They are important symbols in Egyptian, Chinese, Japanese culture and folklore. Their movements have also inspired the traditional dance ceremonies of Africans, American Indians and Australian aborigines.

Despite their long life, the world's population of cranes has been declining. The growing human population has invaded and devastated the shallow wetlands in which cranes breed. Human ignorance and greed have also contributed to their decline.

The dwindling population of cranes is made worse by the slow rate at which they reproduce. Cranes breed only once

a year and have only two eggs per clutch. It is not surprising therefore that cranes have become one of the rarest birds in the world today. I understand that there are only fifteen species of cranes left in the world, seven of which are endangered and facing imminent extinction. Without a concerted effort at conservation, these "living treasures" would soon vanish forever, like the dinosaurs.

I am therefore very happy to note that the BirdPark has taken up the challenge to protect these birds by educating the public, through its visitors, on the biology, distribution and status of these birds. The BirdPark has also embarked on a breeding programme by setting aside aviaries to encourage the cranes to breed in captivity.

The BirdPark will also develop a cooperative conservation effort with the International Crane Foundation - a world centre for the study and preservation of cranes. Together with the Zoology Department of the National University of Singapore, the BirdPark will carry out research on the breeding behaviour of these birds.

My Ministry is also concerned about birdlife and is making efforts to preserve the remaining natural habitats of birds in Singapore. We have preserved the six-hectare mangrove swamp at Pasir Ris. We have also designated approximately 85 hectares of land consisting of mudflats, mangroves and prawn ponds at Sungei Buloh to be a bird sanctuary, where some 125 bird species, mostly wetland birds, have been sighted.

In addition, the Parks & Recreation Department has created bird habitats in East Coast Park and West Coast Park by managing the vegetation in these areas. At West Coast Park a marsh garden is being constructed to attract aquatic birds. In these ways we are trying to bring birdlife back to Singapore.

In addition to providing recreation and education to local and foreign visitors, the BirdPark has taken its role of encouraging captive breeding and conservation seriously. I commend the BirdPark for its efforts in this direction.

In closing, may I wish the Jurong BirdPark success in its breeding programme in general and the crane breeding programme in particular.

It is now my pleasure to declare Jurong BirdPark's Crane Paddocks open.

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