

Special Reports

Malaysian Nature Society Participates in the Chinese Crested Tern Conference in Ningbo, China

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Acknowledgement

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Introduction

From 16 to 18 July 2025, I had the privilege of representing the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) at the Chinese Crested Tern Conservation Volunteer Service Program and International Volunteer Service Ningbo Exchange Conference. Held in Xiangshan County, Ningbo, China, the event was organized by the China Volunteer Service Federation and brought together NGOs and volunteer organizations from across the region to collaborate on the conservation of the critically endangered Chinese Crested Tern *Thalasseus bernsteini*.

About the Chinese Crested Tern

Once thought to be extinct by the late 1990s, the Chinese Crested Tern (CCT) was dramatically rediscovered in 2000, earning it the nickname 'Mythical Bird'. At the time, the global population was estimated at only 50 individuals. Through sustained conservation efforts, that number has now increased to approximately 200, with seven identified breeding sites. The commitment shown by Chinese authorities and conservationists has turned this once-forgotten species into a symbol of hope. Continued international cooperation aims to ensure that the CCT becomes a more common sight in the future.



Plate 1: Participants in attendance at the Chinese Crested Tern Conservation Conference, Xiangshan County, Ningbo, China, July 2025.

MNS Participation

The invitation to participate in this conference was initially extended to the Malaysian Nature Society Kuching Branch (MNSKB), who made history by recording Malaysia's first sighting of the Chinese Crested Tern in 112 years. Unfortunately, MNSKB was unable to send representatives. As a result, two representatives from the MNS Selangor Branch - Lim Ying Hien and myself were selected to attend on behalf of MNS. Special thanks to the MNS Selangor Branch Committee and Anna Wong, President of MNS, for supporting our participation.

Preparing for the Conference

In preparation for the event, I collaborated closely with MNSKB to ensure accurate and impactful information sharing. My heartfelt thanks go to Rose Au, Ng Jia Jie, and Olivia Wilbrode for generously providing insights into the Sarawak sighting.

Additionally, we worked with the event organizers for a month leading up to the conference to coordinate logistics and share relevant materials. We also received support from MNS Headquarters, who provided resources and materials for display at the conference. Their assistance was invaluable, and we are sincerely grateful.

On the Ground in Xiangshan

Upon arriving in Xiangshan County, Lim and I were warmly welcomed by the organizers. Known for its scenic beaches and thriving watersport culture, Xiangshan is also deeply invested in the conservation of the Chinese Crested Tern, so much so that the bird is now the county's official mascot. Its image is prominently featured on signage and billboards across the town, reflecting widespread public awareness and pride in the species' conservation.

On the evening of July 16th, we participated in a media interview and a networking session with representatives from NGOs across Asia, including Thailand, Taiwan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Korea. We shared MNS's ongoing conservation work, particularly our efforts to protect key migratory flyway sites.



Plate 2: The Participants from Malaysia - the author (left) with Lim Ying Hien, July 2025.

Field Visit to Jiushan Islands

A highlight of the conference was our field visit to the Jiushan Islands, one of the primary breeding sites for the CCT. After traveling by bus to the Xiangshan Sailing Centre, we embarked on a one-hour boat ride to the research station. Although we couldn't land directly on the breeding islet due to rough seas, we reached a nearby island housing a well-equipped volunteer monitoring station. There, we spoke with two dedicated volunteers who have been stationed for several months, collecting vital observational data. State-of-the-art cameras installed on the islet allowed us to confirm the presence of Chinese Crested Terns in real time. Later, we took a closer boat tour of the breeding site. Despite the challenging conditions, Lim

and I managed to spot and photograph the CCT, a rare and unforgettable encounter with one of the world's most elusive birds.



Plate 3: Chinese Crested Tern in flight, Jiushan Islands, Ningbo, China, July 2025.

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MOU Signing and Exchange Session

In the afternoon, we participated in the conference's main event: the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and an exchange session among attending delegates. The organizers thoughtfully conducted the proceedings in both English and Mandarin, ensuring inclusivity for all participants. I was honoured to sign the MOU on behalf of MNS.

During the exchange session, each delegate was given a 3-5-minute slot to share their organization's work. Representing Malaysia, I spoke about the recent CCT sighting at Bako-Buntal Bay by MNSKB, as well as MNS's ongoing efforts at three major flyway sites:

1. Bako-Buntal Bay
2. North-Central Selangor Coast (NCSC)
3. Teluk Air Tawar

I emphasized the presence of healthy Great Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* populations at all three sites, a promising sign for potential future CCT sightings. MNS remains committed to conserving key flyway habitats along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), which serve as crucial wintering grounds for numerous migratory shorebirds and seabirds, including the CCT.



Plate 4: Signing the MOU for the Chinese Crested Tern Conservation Conference, Xiangshan County, Ningbo, China, July 2025.

Looking Ahead

The conference concluded with informal networking among participants, fostering the spirit of collaboration that defined the event. We left inspired by the shared commitment to protecting this endangered species and optimistic about future international partnerships.

On behalf of MNS, I extend sincere thanks to the organisers, fellow participants, and all supporters who made this experience possible. With continued collaboration and dedication, we hope to witness the return of the Chinese Crested Tern to Malaysian shores not just as a rarity, but as a beacon of successful global conservation.

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