

Obituary

Remembering Cheaw Hon Ming

Swee-Yian Lim, Kon-Fah Leow, Yen-Loong Lean, Amar-Singh HSS

Cheaw Hon Ming left us peacefully but suddenly on 23 March 2024. His death was unexpected to his bird watching colleagues and this is a brief attempt to remember his life.

Hon Ming's father passed away when he was around 4 years of age, leaving his poor mother to raise 3 sons single-handedly. Living through a deprived childhood left him with strong values of resilience, fortitude, hard work, thriftiness and importance of family ties.

After completing Sixth Form in Anderson Secondary School, he trained as a teacher in Malayan Teachers College in KL. He started his teaching career in Jan 1969 in Methodist Secondary School in Sungei Siput. Taking a break from teaching, he furthered his education in University of Malaya where he graduated with the Bachelor of Economics (Business Administration). After another four years teaching in Teluk Intan, he joined Politeknik Ungku Omar, Ipoh. There he taught courses in Commerce, Management and Banking until his retirement.



Silver-breasted Broadbill
(*Serilophus lunaticus*)
©Cheaw Hon Ming 22.04.2016
Fraser Hill, Malaysia

Cheaw Hon Ming joined the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) in 1991. He was elected as chairperson of the Perak MNS Branch in 2006, and held the post for four years. He was an active birder and participated in most of the birding outings. He also served on the Board of Trustees for the Perak MNS from 2014 to 2024.

All his life he had an intense love for mother nature and the conservation of the earth's natural heritage. This has led him to develop a lifelong interest in flora and fauna since his teenage years. He pursued photography as a hobby to record the beauty of nature he saw around him. During the years he served as Chairman of MNS Perak branch he found much fulfilment in contributing to the appreciation and conservation of nature. Although he made much sacrifice in terms of his time and energy, he never complained because he wanted to do his bit for

nature. Being a teacher at heart, he was always ready to share whatever he knew of the plants and animals around him. His congenial easy-going and helpful personality has made him many friends especially among those who are also nature lovers like him.

Hon Ming was a keen birder and a generous individual, sharing bird locations and knowledge freely. Swee Yian says *"I remember him with great fondness. The branch trips with him were always a learning experience as he shared his wide knowledge on plants, especially his favourite group, the Gesneriad family."*

As MNS branch chairman he left behind a legacy. The funds we now have in the Tan Kean Cheong fund (TKCF) was a result of his advocacy at MNS HQ that the money from the late Tan Kean Cheong should be managed by the branch. Over the years, the TKCF has assisted several individuals and organizations in carrying out various bird conservation projects and publication, including the Malaysian Garden Birds Survey, the Birds of Perak book, the Directory of Important Bird Areas in Malaysia and financed many field studies on birds.

His other great contribution was Ulu Geroh where he managed to persuade MNS HQ to carry out a survey of the area where *Rafflesia* and the Rajah Brooke's Birdwing *Trogonoptera brookiana* were constants. The Orang Asli community in the area benefited as MNS HQ sent a full-time officer there to work with them and made them aware that they can benefit from ecotourism.

He has also published in the Malaysian Bird Report and one of his recent contributions was on "Shared Nesting Tree Site for Gold-whiskered and Red-throated Barbets" ([link](#)).

During his retirement years he enjoyed a lifestyle of travel all over the world enjoying nature and widening his outlook into the culture of foreign lands. He also spent much time watching birds and photographing them.





November 2013 at Doi Inthanon, Chiangmai, Thailand. L to R: Deang, Cheaw Hon Ming, Poon Kuan Yaow, Mrs Deang, Wong Koon Yoke

Along the way, he built a loving family, raising two sons who are now hard working and useful members of society. As a doting grandpa, he promised his two-year old granddaughter that she can go birding with her grandparents when she gets older.

No discussion on Hon Ming is complete without mentioning Poon Kuan Yaow, his wife and stalwart companion on bird watching trips. Kuan Yaow is also an astute bird watcher and we send much love and peace in this time of bereavement. As Kuan Yaow spoke at the time of his passing "*He has had a happy life with no regrets and was blessed with a good death*".

Although Hon Ming went through a poor childhood, he has led a simple happy life and died a peaceful death surrounded by his family. A filial son, loving husband, father, and grandfather, he lived a life without regrets. He leaves behind a loving family who misses him deeply. A blessing indeed.



A recent image of Cheaw Hon Ming (right) and Poon Kuan Yaow