



RGS student volunteers (from left) Shi Yuexin, Vivian Feng, Beverley Mok, Zhang Xuan and Cham Zek Min with badges that they sell to raise funds. They help out with the Orchard Road butterfly trail, where the common yellow butterfly (above, left) and common rose butterfly have been seen. PHOTOS: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES, NATURE SOCIETY SINGAPORE

A vote to capture the national butterfly

THE hunt is on to find Singapore's national butterfly.

Members of the public will be asked to vote in a poll next year.

One species in the running is the common rose butterfly, which has white and red colouring reminiscent of the national flag.

The exercise is being led by the Nature Society Singapore (NSS) and students from the National University of Singapore. Students will fan out islandwide or use social media to carry out the poll early next year.

"Having a national butterfly will generate interest in insect conservation, which is often overlooked compared with other well-known symbols for conservation such as pandas or tigers," said Mr Anuj Jain, chairman of the NSS Butterfly Interest Group.

The search for a national butterfly comes alongside a large-scale butterfly project taking shape in the heart of town.

Nature lovers have been hard at work creating an urban butterfly trail among the glitzy malls of Orchard Road. Billed as the first of its kind in the world, the 4km-long trail starts at the gates of the Botanic Gardens, continues down Orchard Road and ends in Fort Canning Park.

Initiated by the NSS, the self-guided walking route will

lead people along five different trails that cut through 15 butterfly hotspots. These include tucked-away green oases between the malls, little-known rooftop and private gardens, and public green spaces.

Since the project started in 2010, three of the five walking trails have been completed. Sixty-two butterfly species, including the common rose butterfly and the common birdwing butterfly, are already attracted to the trail.

Singapore is home to about 300 butterfly species but not all can thrive in urban areas. Still, gems such as the rare black veined tiger butterfly and the cruiser butterfly - usually found in forests - have been spotted along the trail.

The project, which will cost an estimated \$400,000, is partnered by the National Parks Board and Singapore Tourism Board.

Mr Jain said volunteers from companies and the NSS had agreed to help. Students from nearby schools have also offered to pitch in.

Some 100 students from schools such as Raffles Girls' School (Secondary), the National Institute of Education and Queen'sway Secondary School have been helping to plant shrubs and bush-

es that the butterflies need for food, shelter and breeding. The students have also been counting and identifying the species.

The trail passes through two schools - the Singapore Management University and the School of the Arts - and their students have built their own gardens within the campuses. So far, about 15,000 plants have been planted along the trail.

RGS student Cham Zek Min, 15, has helped the NSS to research and identify the butterfly species attracted to different plants.

She said: "We could share what we learnt about the behaviour of the butterflies with primary school children and families through our workshops."

The students have also been conducting workshops in libraries and schools to raise awareness of urban biodiversity once a month since June.

"Few shopping districts in the world can boast of green areas so this project lets the young see for themselves that there can be biodiversity in the city," said Mr Jain.

"Hopefully, this will spur their interest in conservation."

JANICE TAI

■ For information, go to <http://nss.org.sg/project.aspx?id=1>