



TOP STORIES



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# Ruffled feathers at BirdPark and ZOO

Staff questioned after The New Paper gets tip-off about mass culling, rounding up of free-ranging birds

By Teh Jen Lee  
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KILL the hybrids and the painted storks.



Wing-clip or pinion (permanently remove the ability to fly) the milky storks.

'As far as possible, there should be no free-ranging birds in the park'.

The New Paper understands that such a decision was made at a top-level meeting at the Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS) on Tuesday. It was conducted by Dr Ho Yew Kee, executive director of the WRS, which runs the Zoo and BirdPark.

The points raised during that meeting were circulated in an internal e-mail sent at 8pm that same day. It came to our attention yesterday morning.

The e-mail called 'for action to be carried out immediately'. The New Paper received a copy and we sent a list of questions to public relations firm Citigate Dewe Rogerson i.Mage, which represents WRS, at 2.30pm yesterday.

Multiple sources had earlier confirmed that the culling directive had been given, but we wanted to give WRS an opportunity to respond.

At least five calls were made throughout the day to i.Mage staff, but we were told that all the key people were in a 'big meeting'.

The New Paper understands that zoo staff were questioned during a two-hour meeting between 3pm and 5pm to find out who had forwarded the controversial e-mail.

All those who had received the e-mail - not a large group - denied the deed.

Eventually, a milder version of the e-mail was released in the evening to all media.

The release said additional precautions are being taken in response to the highly pathogenic strain of bird flu (HPAI) detected in Malaysia.

The official release differed from the e-mail in a few significant ways.

For example, instead of culling free-ranging and migratory birds, the release said these will be trapped and confined.

Also, birds 'will be wing-clipped, which is a temporary disablement of flight versus pinioned which is permanent'. (See report below.)

It is not known what brought about this apparent change of heart.

In the release, Dr Ho said: 'Some may view our measures as being overly kiasu but given the potential threat, we believe it is more

## TRAGEDY STRIKES S'PORE FAMILY

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prudent to err on the side of caution.'

But one senior zoo staff member pointed out that the resident birds already keep away many migratory birds.

His frustration was obvious in these words: 'The AVA (Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority) says that vaccinated birds are okay. Why are we trying to be 'more Catholic than the pope' and decide on a more extreme policy that hurts our animals and our image and morale?'

Nature Society member Ashley Ng, who has photographed egrets and storks in the BirdPark, said: 'Egrets are everywhere. Over 1,000 of them fly around the island to feed. At night, they roost at the park. If they are talking about culling them, there will be a lot of animals involved.'

The AVA has repeatedly said Singapore is free of bird flu and that all farms here have ensured that wild birds do not come into contact with farm poultry.

Said Miss Wang Luan Keng, 35: 'I think WRS is being a bit extreme in tackling this as a health problem.'

She worries that this may snowball into the culling of birds on their annual migration.

'They have already started coming as the season begins in September. So far, no migratory birds in Singapore have been found with HPAI so if they are culled, these would be innocent victims.'

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## THE MEASURES

CHICKENS, ducks and geese at the Singapore Zoo, Night Safari and the Jurong BirdPark will be culled. Crows and mynahs will also be culled, and migratory birds will be trapped and their wings clipped temporarily.

Additional measures include restricting keepers who look after waterfowl from going into different sections within the parks. Keepers at the zoo and Night Safari who work with different birds 'will have to maintain strict disinfective measures' and 'vehicles coming in through the rear gate will have their wheels dipped in a vehicle bath'.

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