

*Taking Flight* is a personal look at some of the diverse species of birds we have in Singapore by 82-year-old James Yong, who only picked up his first digital camera at the age of 78. From dainty kingfishers to soaring eagles, this collection of over 250 photographs leads you on a journey not just through green reserves like Sungei Buloh but also takes a look at those feathered friends with homes closer to our own urban dwellings.

“In life it is never too late to reinvent yourself and find new purpose and meaning. With this book, James Yong and his devoted son Melvin prove this. In spite of his advanced age and using only public transport, James Yong has travelled all over Singapore and captured the country’s birdlife using the latest digital technology.

“The thrill of photographing birds is stimulating and addictive. Fleeting moments of action are captured with a split-second combination of time and light, rewarding the photographer’s hours of preparation and waiting.

“Right now, nothing is more important for us than to protect the Earth’s natural capital, including the wonderful diversity of our avifauna. Books like this contribute to this by showcasing the beauty of nature and the freedom of birds taking flight.”

— Morten Strange,  
author of *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia*

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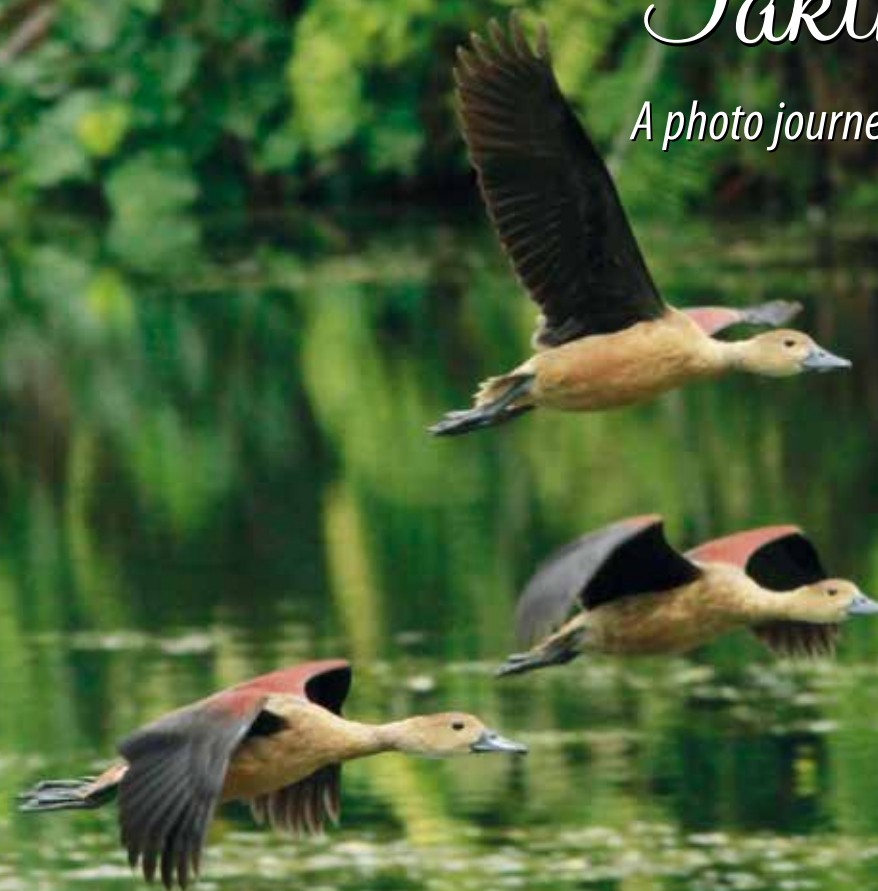
*Taking Flight* A photo journey of birds across Singapore

Marshall Cavendish Editions

Photographs by **James Yong**  
Text by Melvin Yong

# *Taking Flight*

*A photo journey of birds across Singapore*



For Review only





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Published in 2016 by Marshall Cavendish Editions  
An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International  
1 New Industrial Road, Singapore 536196

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Other Marshall Cavendish Offices:

Marshall Cavendish Corporation. 99 White Plains Road, Tarrytown NY 10591–9001, USA • Marshall Cavendish International (Thailand) Co Ltd. 253 Asoke, 12th Flr, Sukhumvit 21 Road, Klongtoey Nua, Wattana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand • Marshall Cavendish (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, Times Subang, Lot 46, Subang Hi-Tech Industrial Park, Batu Tiga, 40000 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.

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National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data

Names: Yong, James, photographer. | Yong, Melvin, author.

Title: Taking flight : a photo journey of birds across Singapore / photographs by James Yong ; text by Melvin Yong.

Description: Singapore : Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2016.

Identifiers: OCN 955006100 | 978-981-47-7107-8 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Birds–Singapore–Pictorial works. | Photography of birds–Singapore.

Classification: DDC 598.095957–dc23

Design by Lynn Chin

Printed in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

*front cover* Lesser Whistling Ducks (Botanic Gardens)

*previous page* Blue-tailed Bee-eaters (Chinese Garden)

*opposite* Stork-billed Kingfisher (Japanese Garden)

*back cover* Olive-backed Sunbird (Gardens by the Bay)

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## *Introduction*

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My 82-year-old Dad James Yong has been an avid photographer for as long as I can remember. But his last shot with his old Nikon SLR camera was over two decades ago and he has left it in his dry box ever since. It was shortly after my Mom passed away from cancer in 2011 that he decide to rekindle his hobby and picked up his first DSLR a year later at the age of 78.

Unfortunately, the Nikon DSLR he had his eye on wasn't available so he went with a Canon EOS 7D and an EF 300F4.0 LISU lens, and you can see some of the results in this book. But over the last couple of years, age started catching up with him and earlier this year, he switched to a Nikon D750 as it was lighter than the Canon camera. All the photos here were taken between 2012 and 2016.

When he started shooting around 2012, he went to popular venues like Jurong Bird Park and the Botanic Gardens – both places I remember him taking me to on weekends way back when I was kid.

After a while, he heard of locations where one could take photos of majestic eagles and other birds, in Bukit Panjang and Gardens by the Bay. So for the last four years, he has been crisscrossing the island via public transport almost every morning by himself – a white-haired retiree lugging his heavy equipment on the train and bus. Yes, I was naturally worried about an elderly man wandering all over Singapore but I knew it made him happy and I should be grateful that he could indulge in such a hobby at his age.



# For Family Only

During the notorious Haze of 2013, he still headed out to Pasir Ris to shoot a nesting colony of grey herons even as the PSI went over 300.

After every few days of shooting, Dad drops by my apartment, where I download the latest photos into my MacBook and upload selected ones to a digital gallery in his iPad Mini.

Before all this, I honestly never knew there was such a rich and fascinating array of wildlife – some local, others migratory – right in our own backyard. I hope that with this photo book more people will discover and appreciate what we already have right here.

And always remember, you are never too old to do the things you want to do.

Melvin Yong

*right* Common Kingfisher  
*previous page* Copper-throated Sunbird



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## *Sungei Buloh*

“Now the roads at least smoother. Last time so rocky.”

### Wetland wonders

The vast wetlands of Sungei Buloh is one of James’ favourite sites for capturing migrating birds such as sandpipers and egrets.

It is also the place that is perhaps the most inaccessible for him. It’s a long trek that begins with a 40-minute train journey to Kranji MRT station, followed by a shuttle bus ride to the Sungei Buloh Visitor Centre. Then it’s a one-kilometre hike on foot to near the Wetland Centre, where he’ll camp for his photos.

Fortunately the road is now properly paved instead of mud and rocks. Along the shoreline is where most of the photos in this chapter were taken. The entire journey there may be exhausting but the flocks of migratory birds gracefully circling the shore are among his proudest shots.

While the popular Aerie Tower is too tiring to climb for someone his age, James has found other spots around the nature reserve that are more inviting – comfortable or shady areas such as the car park or the bus stop where he’ll continue taking photos while waiting for the shuttle bus to take him back to the train station.









01

01 Common Redshanks 02 Common Greenshanks and Grey Heron  
03 Common Sandpiper 04 Little Egrets  
*previous page* Whimbrels



02



03



04









01

01 Milky Stork 02, 03 Stork-billed Kingfisher  
previous page Little Egrets and Milky Storks

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03





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02



03



04

01 Copper-throated Sunbird (female)  
02, 03 Copper-throated Sunbird  
04 Olive-backed Sunbird





01



02



03



04

01 Ashy Tailorbird 02 Brown-throated Sunbird (female)  
03 Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker (female) 04 Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker (male)  
05 Brown-throated Sunbird



05





01



02



03



04

- 01 Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker (female)  
02 Oriental Pied Hornbills 03 Collared Kingfisher  
04 Buffy Fish-owl



For Review only



01



02



03



04



05



06



07

01 Oriental White-eye 02 Long-tailed Finch (juveniles)  
03 Long-tailed Finch 04 European Goldfinch  
05 Red-throated Parrotfinch 06 Zebra Finch 07 Diamond Firetail

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01



02



01 Common Green Magpie 02 Collared Kingfisher  
03 Gouldian Finch 04 Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher  
05 Blue-faced Parrotfinch 06 Superb Starling  
07 Black-crested Bulbul 08 Java Sparrow

03



05



07



04



06



08





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## The Photographer

James Yong is a retiree who enjoys wildlife photography. His passion for birds has taken him around Singapore in an effort to capture their natural beauty on camera. Having picked up his first digital SLR just five years ago, he has not put it down since. When he's not exploring the island with all his photographic paraphernalia in tow, he's either watching television at home or looking for a good meal.



## The Writer

Melvin Yong has worked way too long in the media and advertising industry. He now spends his time with his family, writing short horror stories and playing lots of board games.

