Online digital archive of plants, animals open

AN ONLINE digital archive of 700 species of plants and animals found here is now open to the public.

But the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research (RMBR) at the National University of Singapore, which set this up, has given itself another goal — to grow the archive so that it captures the tens of thousands of species — extinct or not — that have been sighted in Singapore since the early 1900s.

The Digital Nature Archive of Singapore (DNA) was launched by Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts Yaacob Ibrahim yesterday. He also launched a book on rainforests in Singapore.

The listings in the archive are sorted by classification and habitat, and include known information such as general biology, range, historical sightings and where they can be found. For example, the fever nut plant, a medicinal plant with spiny fruit, can be found only on Lazarus island, Pulau Semakau and in Punggol.

Users can also do searches by location, for example, Admiralty Park. They will learn that birds like the black-naped oriole and zebra dove can be sighted there.

The archive contains videos of species sightings, recordings of vocal calls and a trove of academic theses as well.

To grow the archive, the RMBR will need users to contribute content, as well as more funds. It has received funds from HSBC bank’s “Care-for-Nature” programme.

Professor Peter Ng, the museum’s director, said: “Officially, there are 30,000 to 50,000 species here. We believe that’s an underestimate. By exactly how much, we don’t really know. But by many more times, for sure.”

— DAVID EE