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Tianma Mountain is a haven for unique feathered visitors

Tan Weiyun

In the lush, sprawling expanse of Songjiang District, a pair of rare feathered guests have taken up residence, transforming Tianma Mountain in Sheshan National Forest Park into a busy hive of birdwatching activity. Rarely seen in this region of the world, they have made the park their home, much to the delight of nature lovers and conservationists alike.

The park's thick canopy conceals two rare avian species: the secretive Ryukyu Minivet, typically found in Japan's distant Ryukyu Islands, and the colorful Chestnut-bellied Niltava, found in the dense forests of India, southern China and Southeast Asia.

These birds not only highlight the region's thriving biodiversity but also demonstrate Songjiang's dedication to environmental restoration and ecological balance.

Increasing wildlife population

"The likelihood of spotting rare bird species is increasing, and we're also seeing small mammals that have never been seen here before, some of which have quite high environmental requirements," said Dai Weifeng, one

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Dai Weifeng
An avid birdwatcher

of the avid birdwatchers equipped with heavy-duty camera gear capturing the new "VIPs" at the national forest park.

In 2009, the Songjiang District Forestry Station conducted a baseline survey of the area's wildlife, identifying 116 bird species from 15 orders and 34 families, including seven species under national protection, all classified as second-class protected animals.

The number of bird species in Songjiang has increased significantly over

the last decade as a result of ecological building and the creation of large wildlife habitats at the municipal level. Current records from various observation stations in the district, together with previous survey results, show that the total number of bird species in Songjiang has surpassed 280, with the inclusion of nationally protected species such as the Peregrine Falcon and the Long-eared Owl.

But it isn't just the sky-bound "friends" that are thriving. Terrestrial fauna, such as hedgehogs, weasels, South China hares, squirrels and raccoon dogs, have also seen notable increases in their populations, with squirrels and raccoon dogs emerging as "little stars" in many communities.

Since 2010, as habitats have undergone restoration and expansion, the number of raccoon dogs has steadily increased from a few dozen to an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 individuals.

Songjiang's dynamic biodiversity

Officials of the District Greening Bureau discuss forestry development and wildlife conservation during a field inspection.

scene, buzzing with visitors of various kinds, is inextricably linked to the perfection of numerous ecosystems. "In recent years, the forestry department has vigorously engaged in afforestation and extensively restored wetlands, creating numerous ideal habitats for wildlife," said Cai Feng, the District Forestry Station's deputy director.

Wildlife protection

By the end of 2023, Songjiang's forest area had grown to 117 kilometer squares, with a 19.28 percent forest coverage rate, placing second in the city.

These forests provide ample room for wildlife habitats. Furthermore,



the district has created notable animal habitats, including the Maogang Town Bird Animal Habitat, the Yexie Town Small Population Restoration and Wild Release Habitat, and the Xinbang Town Woodland River Deer Wildlife Habitat.

Third parties have managed these habitats since 2021, creating a scientific and comprehensive system that encompasses operational management, scientific research monitoring and environmental education. This system provides a suitable living environment for species in various environments.

At the same time, the local forestry department has organized dozens of online and offline wildlife conservation public education programs in honor of World Wetlands Day, World Wildlife Day and the International Day of Biological Diversity. Furthermore, the District Forestry Station uses these ecosystems to host free nature education events on a regular basis, creating natural course materials and scientific popularization brochures for a variety of target audiences, including adults, teenagers and children.

"Now, when kids in our community encounter stray cats or wild animals, they know how to deal with and treat them properly," said resident Cai Rui, a regular nature education participant.

Last September, the Songjiang District Wildlife Protection Management Station got a call from a citizen about an eagle trapped in Central Park that needed immediate rescue. When the animal protection workers arrived, they determined the eagle was a sparrowhawk, a national second-class protected species, and immediately removed it from the ropes that bound its feet.

Yue Haiying, chief of the District Forestry Station's law enforcement branch, stated that the station has carried out 442 animal rescue operations since 2010, saving a total of 488 wild creatures, including four national first-class protected animals and 137 second-class protected animals.

The district's capacity to house wild animals increased with the official establishment of the Songjiang Terrestrial

Wildlife Rescue Point last October. This project has offered a "new home" for accidentally injured species such as raccoon dogs, squirrels, spotted doves and egrets, ensuring their survival and recuperation.

This amicable relationship between Songjiang citizens and their natural cohabitants demonstrates the district's complete approach to wildlife protection and ecological education.

Such efforts reflect a greater commitment to environmental care that supports Songjiang's green activities. Beyond individual conservation efforts, the district has undertaken a wide range of initiatives to enhance green spaces, restore ecosystems and create a sustainable urban environment.

Forestry development

Songjiang has begun an ambitious initiative to advance forestry development, taking into account the district's distinctive landscape characteristics such as waterways, topography and vegetation. Initiatives aimed at restoring forests, altering landscapes and expanding recreational opportunities have transformed previously inaccessible green spaces into vibrant, walking green sanctuaries that are open to all.

Last year, the district announced the establishment of eight new open recreational forest places as part of a major green drive. These new additions, scattered among Jiuting, Maogang, Xiaokunshan, Sijing, Shihudang and Yexie towns, total an astonishing 67 hectares.

Dubbed "natural oxygen bars," these venues strive to provide inhabitants

with lush, green retreats amid the metropolitan environment. The District Forestry Station's Deputy Director, Tong Yaqin, has revealed plans to expand this effort, adding ten more open recreational forest locations by 2024.

Furthermore, the district's "green wherever possible" attitude is evident in the "pocket parks" dotting the central urban area of Songjiang. These small yet impactful parks are strategically located so that homeowners can enjoy greenery just outside their windows or doors.

"With spring's arrival, stepping outside to a world of blooming flowers is truly delightful," said Zou Yun, a resident who lives near a pocket park in the Yunjian Yiyuan community, which has fitness trails, resting pavilions, cultural sculptures and graffiti walls.

To modernize and improve efficiency, Songjiang has adopted digital management for its forestry operations.

Last year saw the full implementation of a digital platform for the Forestry Chief System, which allows for extensive monitoring and management of forest patrols and conservation initiatives.

"Through the 'Shanghai Forest Link' app integrated within the platform, we can track the forest rangers' patrol routes and workload while also allowing them to report any issues encountered during their patrols directly through the app," Lu Yueguo of the District Greening Bureau said.

"This digital approach not only streamlines the management of forest land but also enhances the responsiveness and effectiveness of Songjiang's forest conservation efforts."



Wildlife protectors rescue a bird.



A wildlife protector treats the wing of an injured bird with the help of the other.

