BLOOMING BEAUTIES: Don’t mess with the Crinum Lily (above). It produces toxic alkaloids which are poisonous except to a moth, which utilises them for its own defence. Found in Singapore only on one of the Southern Islands, the Beach Bat Lily’s (left) long inflorescence can grow up to 2 m. The Malingay’s Dracena (below), which can grow up to 20 m, is a monocotyledon. Species falling under this grouping are typically small, just like the grasses.

Many wild plants lost

WILDL plants here are disappearing fast. About a quarter of them are already extinct.

Of the vascular plant species found in Singapore, only a precocious 10 per cent are still common, with many falling under the endangered, vulnerable or rare categories.

The Nature Society said in a recent report that although a species near extinction in Singapore may be commonly found elsewhere in the world and can be re-introduced, that is not the best solution to the conservation problem.

So it would like the Environment Ministry's Singapore Green Plan to include action plans for the preservation of threatened or declining species of flora and wildlife.

One society member, Associate Professor Hugh Tan of the National University of Singapore's Department of Biological Sciences, also noted in the latest Nature Watch — the society's official magazine — that Singapore species of any species may contain unique genes not found in those of the same species from other parts of the world.

What this means is that valuable genetic material which may hold the key to a new drug for the cure of cancer or AIDS could be lost as a result. For example, tea oil found in the Pacific voew plant is used for the treatment of ovarian cancer.

The society fears that if there is further destruction of wildlife habitat, natural species may vanish entirely from the face of the island.

To date, only 2,555 sq km (1.4 per cent) of Singapore’s land remains forested, with only a mere 2.5 sq km of primary forest remaining in the nature reserves.