

Birdwatching - an Opportunity to Discover Nature and Self

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The borrowed binoculars slung heavy around my neck, which quickly became sore as I craned it upwards. Soft sunlight filtered through the curtains of leaves; a disjointed symphony of chirps from birds and insects, as well as the distant shrieks of joy of families from the centre of the park. "There," my team member pointed up above. "The sounds are coming from there." I couldn't see anything. I had barely ticked 3 birds off the checklist 45 minutes in, and there were 28 on the list.

It was my first-time birdwatching at the Perdana Botanical Park. I had been invited to participate as a Malaysian Youth Delegation* member, there to observe and experience the birdwatching session conducted by Jejak Liar to see if it was suitable as a session for our upcoming Local Conference of Youth#.

"I know it sounds like an old person's hobby," one friend I had met there joked. She was actually right. The only people I had known to enjoy birdwatching was my father and uncle. So, colour me surprised when participants who joined ranged from 18 to 30 years old.

After a quick briefing, we split into 4 to 5 people per group, with the checklist in everyone's hand. We trekked up well-paved slopes, climbed stairs and strolled along the waterway that yawned into a huge lake. I saw some Ayam-Hutan Biasa (Red Junglefowl) *Gallus gallus*, dogs, tortoises, a Biawak (Malayan Water Monitor) *Varanus salvator* and some deer (see Plate 1). My team member pointed out the waterway at Taman Rusa. "There were lots of kingfishers here the last time we came." Before I could respond, someone else piped up excitedly: "I saw a Superb Starling *Lamprotornis superbus* hanging around the centre canopy!" (see Plate 2). I was impressed. Why had I never heard of this biodiversity oasis in the middle of KL?



Plate 1: Red Junglefowl) *Gallus gallus*, dogs, tortoises, a Biawak (Malayan Water Monitor) *Varanus salvator* and some deer

Listening to the enthusiastic sharing between the participants, I considered how I had never been interested in birdwatching before. Hankering after endless tasks and achievements throughout my schooling years, I had equated activities that didn't contribute towards a specific goal to idling away precious time that I could be using to complete more work. I was induced to guilt if I did anything else than what I considered work. Indeed, I realised, I had grown afraid of not only slowing down, but of trying new things.



Plate 2: Superb Starling, native to west Africa and a vagrant bird is often seen at the park.

Instead of lamenting the lost time, I focused on the present, fully immersing myself in the unique experience before me. This was an opportunity to discover a new way of appreciating nature. I soon realized that the seemingly simple task of birdwatching was, in fact, an exercise in patience, especially as the heat intensified after 10 am. Within 2 hours, I learned about various bird species, forged meaningful connections with my peers, and even enjoyed a cardio workout.

Other birds I managed to see that day include the White-throated Kingfisher (Pekaka Dada Putih) *Halcyon smyrnensis*, Asian Glossy Starling (Perling-Kilat Asia) *Aplonis panayensis*, House Crow (Gagak Rumah) *Corvus splendens*, Oriental Magpie-Robin (Murai-Kampung Biasa) *Copsychus saularis*, Common Myna (Gembala-Kerbau Rumah) *Acridotheres tristis*, Javan Myna (Gembala-Kerbau Sawah Jawa) *Acridotheres javanicus*, Rock Pigeon (Merpati Biasa) *Columba livia*, Spotted Dove (Tekukur Jerum Timur) *Streptopelia chinensis*, Zebra Dove (Merbuk Biasa) *Geopelia striata* (see Plate 3).

This outing had me reflecting on my beliefs and values. If everyone took time to observe and be with nature, I am sure more of us would come to understand the importance of protecting our earth. As an environmental advocate, I sometimes overlook the profound impact that the simplest activities - like birdwatching or a 10-minute walk - can have in raising environmental

awareness and soothing climate anxiety. Slowing down and setting aside work for a few hours wouldn't stop the world - it might even improve it.



Plate 3: Some birds seen during the outing

In fact, I returned with more than I had expected: new reflections and an opportunity to practice my writing, and more importantly, a new discussion topic to spend time with my dad and my uncle. These are the luxuries in life I have to learn to cherish more than my success on paper.

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*Established in 2015, the Malaysian Youth Delegate (MYD) is a Malaysian civil society organisation made up of young, passionate Malaysians. It provides a unique, one-of-a-kind training ground for aspiring Malaysians aged 18-35 years old to be engaged in climate policy and negotiations at local, regional and international levels. You can find them on Instagram at @mydclimate. #The Local Conference of Youth (LCOY) is the national (local) version of the International Conference of Youth, both events under the umbrella of YOUNGO, the official youth constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. All youths who are interested to learn more about climate advocacy, are welcome. For more on LCOY in Malaysia which happens annually, please check out MYD's instagram page.

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