

Common Garden Bird 13: Brown-throated Sunbird (Kelicap Mayang Kelapa) *Anthreptes malacensis*

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Sunbirds are the glittering gems of our birdlife. Most of them have bright metallic plumage and are similar to the hummingbirds of the Americas, but do not hover as well. As their family name suggests (Nectariniinae) they like to feed on the nectar found in flowers. Two species are common in the lowland, urban gardens.

The Brown-throated Sunbird male is brightly coloured with a brown throat, metallic green-purple head, chestnut on the shoulders and yellow underparts. The female is olive-yellow with yellowish underparts and an incomplete yellowish eye-ring. This is one of the larger of the sunbirds and has a long, thickish beak.

The male has a habit of long periods of calling out ("*kelicap*") in early mornings, to demarcate its territory. They are very acrobatic in their search for insects in the garden. They love to feed on the Bottle Brush, Powderpuff, Coral tree and other flowering bushes. They will pierce the base of a long flower (exotics, not native to Malaysia) to get to the nectar.



They build a pendular, pear-shaped nest, hung from a branch at some height; often in a tree infested with Kerengga (Weaver) ants.

If you have these birds in your garden it is possible to cultivate a relationship by planting nectar plants that they love as well offering them wet leaves for 'leaf-bathing'. If you water the leaves of your bushes in the hot afternoon/evening they will turn up to rub or slide their bodies against the wet leaves. Some in our wild garden will even call out when they see us to ask for a shower.