

Tips & Tools to Aid Birdwatching & Bird Photography Series: Birdcall Mnemonics in Malaysia

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When it comes to learning about the birds around us, it can seem like a daunting task, especially for new birdwatchers. There's a variety of body shapes and colours to become familiar with, as well as all sorts of different calls. The latter can get even more overwhelming in the depths of the Malaysian jungle, where you can barely see anything but hear a cacophony of birdsong. Sorting through the layers of sound and knowing which bird is calling can be incredibly rewarding, and means that you don't have to necessarily see the bird to confirm your ID.

Mnemonics can be a useful way to memorise birdcalls. This is when words are assigned to the rhythm of the call, like lyrics to a song. Some notable examples include the Barred Owl's *Strix varia* "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?" and the Yellowhammer's *Emberiza citrinella* "a little bit of bread and no cheese". Similarly, some birds are named after the sound of their calls, like the Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*, whose drawn-out vocalisation sounds just like "ko-el", and the Coppersmith Barbet *Psilopogon haemacephalus*, whose monotonous call sounds like a coppersmith hammering on metal. Below are some illustrated mnemonics for birds that can be found in Malaysia. Links to their calls are also provided, so you can compare the mnemonic to the actual sound. These mnemonics are widely used among the birdwatching community, but there are many different mnemonics unique to individual birdwatchers. Feel free to invent your own; the creativity of coming up with mnemonics is one of the joys of birdwatching.



White-necked Babbler
Stachyris leucotis

<https://xeno-canto.org/827282>



Indian Cuckoo
Cuculus micropterus

<https://xeno-canto.org/982884>



Malaysian Eared-Nightjar
Lyncornis temminckii
<https://xeno-canto.org/503213>



Bold-striped Tit-Babbler
Mixornis bornensis
<https://xeno-canto.org/422388>



Red-wattled Lapwing
Vanellus indicus
<https://xeno-canto.org/1030950>



Brown-throated Sunbird
Anthreptes malacensis
<https://xeno-canto.org/956219>

Abbott's Babbler
Malacocincla abbotti
<https://xeno-canto.org/877854>



Lesser Coucal
Centropus bengalensis
<https://xeno-canto.org/956692>

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