

Young Birders

Young People, Go Bird Watching!

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If I had a Ringgit whenever someone asked, "*Isn't birdwatching for old people?*" I would probably be RM10 richer.

So what is birdwatching?

About four months ago I signed up for Jejak Liar's Young Birders Program during an incredibly stressful assignment week. I was burnt out, and itching to see something other than the blue light of my computer screen - I needed to touch some grass.

I had the same expectations as most people when considering looking at birds. Two hours of sitting in silence waiting for a flash of a wing overhead or to identify the whistle of some unknown source. I mean, the guys giving us our talk... were old. We were not beating the "*birdwatching is for old people*," allegations.

But when we gathered on a Sunday morning outside of Muzium Negara station, bleary-eyed and staring at the drizzle there was a sense of excitement. When we stood in groups at the Perdana Botanical Garden and were handed bird count sheets (Plate 1) I thought, "*There is no way there are this many birds in this city park.*" Turns out there are, you just have to stop to look.



Plate 1: MNS bird count sheets and young birdwatching participants.

Glossy Starlings *Aplonis panayensis* shimmer in the morning sun, their red eyes sparkling as they watch us stare. Among their groups of green and grey are Mynas with their yellow beaks. A Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis* hops on a branch above, his tail black and white fan that

flutters with the tune of his song. Zebra Doves *Geopelia striata* with their pale blue faces walk up and down the pathway, unafraid, "They're too chill," explained our group leader Aidil Iman, "that makes them easy to poach." Walking along the lake, some spot Purple Herons *Ardea purpurea* gliding down to land among the bamboo on Goose Island. They crane their striped necks like beaked snakes watching, waiting. Then, a streak of blue as a kingfisher swoops past to land on a concrete post.

Black-naped Orioles *Oriolus chinensis* dance overhead. Yellow-vented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus goiavier* sing songs that bring me back to grubby Primary School days. In our groups we twirl, holding our breaths. We raised our phones high over our heads eagerly thinking, "What bird was that?"

I'll never forget when my friends came along and we spotted Banded Woodpeckers *Chrysophlegma miniaceum* (Plate 2). Standing next to them in awe, as we looked at them with their bronze feathers glowing red under the sun.

Surrounded by people from all kinds of backgrounds, brought together to experience the wonder that is our Malaysian biodiversity.

So go! Walk in your area, slow down, and look. You'll notice that with every new bird you see there will be an excitement and appreciation that can only be brought out by immersing yourself in the nature we were meant to live with.



Plate 2: Banded Woodpecker

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