Hidden gems in KL park

Nature lovers share their sightings of endangered and rare flora and fauna in Taman Rimba Kiara, Kuala Lumpur. >2&3
Green lung buzzing with life

Rare species of primates, birds and plants make Taman Rimba Kiara their home

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THE sighting of hornbills in Taman Rimba Kiara, Kuala Lumpur, spurred much attention among the public. The fact of the matter is, hornbills are not the only hidden gems in the park.

The 10ha secondary forest also boasts of diverse flora and fauna including threatened species, which is a growing concern to surrounding residents, environment non-governmental organisations (NGO) and nature lovers.

Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) chairman Henry Goh said the park was home to White-thighed Suriils, which is classified as near-threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

“I have observed three, possibly a family of two adults and a juvenile at the park last month. I saw this species some years ago in Bukit Kiara itself and one other location. “Unlike the long-tailed macaques, it is not normal for these ‘shy’ primates to visit public parks.

“A possible reason could be a lack of food source in Bukit Kiara which made it necessary for them to venture out of the safety of the forest to an open park in search of food.”

The three were feeding, but just briefly,” he added.

Other species in Taman Rimba Kiara in the IUCN red list are two types of trees.

MNS flora group volunteer Lim Koon Hup said the Balau Laut was classified as endangered, while the Balau Sengkawang Air was listed as critically endangered.

“This means the trees which are both the native of peninsular Malaysia are only steps away from extinction.

“These trees were planted by
Forest Research Institute of Malaria and the National Landscape Department some 12 to 15 years ago, in an effort to preserve it.

“Besides that, the uncommon albino rainforest is another attraction in Taman Rimba Kiara.

“Unlike the endangered trees, I believe this is a native here.

“During the drier season, the yellow colour of the leaves becomes more distinct. Not all of these mutants can survive.

“If the albinism is high, the seedlings will eventually fall off as a result of not being able to photosynthesise due to lack of chlorophyll,” Lim explained.

“Among the highlights of the plants here is elephant yam, also known as the ‘corpse flower’ due to its stench when it begins to decay. It is the relative of the world’s tallest flower, the Amorphophallus.

“Standing at 30cm, it is still a showpiece for the locals when compared to its world record-holding relative which can reach up to 3m in height.

“There are medicinal plants to be found too, such as the black lily or bat lily which is traditionally used as a diuretic, as well as for lowering blood pressure and to treat minor burns and rash.

“The hill coconut fruit has hypolipidemic properties while the Silver Comet is used in the treatment of certain diseases,” he elaborated.

He pointed out plants that were admired purely for their beauty, like the White Cinnamon Orchid which bloomed in the cool of night until the wee hours of the morning and the Snowflake Tree or Ghost Tree which had a unique leaf shape similar to that of a footprint.

“All these make up the diverse flora found in Taman Rimba Kiara,” he said.

Taman Rimba Kiara nature blogger Roselyn Chuah updates her blog regularly with interesting sightings, as the park is practically her backyard.

One of her posts was about the sighting of Brahmmy Kites.

“I first saw a pair in 2013. I spotted their nest high up on a tree and started tracking the birds. “But it was only in 2015 that I suspected there was a chick in the nest, as the birds always stood close by as though guarding the nest and chasing away the jungle crows.

“Then on April 4 morning, I saw one of the Brahmmy Kites hanging upside down, foaming at the mouth for about 15 minutes before being swept off the branch by its mate and fell to the ground. It died after about 20 minutes.

“I saw the juvenile Brahmmy Kite the very next day and it brought a feeling of hope.

“The juvenile only played around its nest for about a month, with its parent watching from close by.

“I stopped seeing it near the nest but have spotted it flying over the park occasionally.

“A Crested Goshawk has since taken over the nest,” she noted.

Chuah has been blogging about these raptors and many other animals, insects and plants since 2014 for fear that one day it will all be gone.

“In 2014, a Firmiana Malayana or Mata Lembu tree in full bloom was chopped down for unknown reason, a day after I photographed its beauty.

“I was so affected by it that I feared one day the park will not be what it is. So I feel the need to document the flora and fauna in this park.

“I also hope that it will bring more public awareness about the beauty of nature and the need to look after it, so that it can look after us.

“I pray that the park will remain as it is for a long time to come,” she said.
The Crested Goshawk is also another raptor in Taman Rimba Kiara.  

A pair of Brahminy Kites spotted moments before one of it fell to the ground on April 4. — Photos: ROHAIZAT MD DARUS/The Star and courtesy of Henry Goh, Roselyn Chuah, Lim Koon Hup and GEC.
Other rare sightings in the urban forest, according to Goh, are the Rufous Woodpecker and Greater Racket-tailed Drongo. “The brown woodpecker builds its nest within the nests of black tree ants.”

“Meanwhile, the Drongo species here is the largest of its kind. It is readily identifiable by the distinctive tail rackets and the crest of curled feather that begin in front of the face above the beak and along the crown to varying extents according to the subspecies. “It is occasionally sighted picking flying insects from the air as they fly past,” he said.

Effects on the water body

Environment NGOs and nature lovers are worried about the effects any building development will have on the water body – Sungai Penchala is only about 150m away from the site.

Global Environment Centre River Care coordinator Dr K. Kalithasan said the sedimentation from land clearing was inevitable and soil would be washed into the river. “The source of Sungai Penchala, which is uphill of Bukit Kiara, is still categorised as Class I or pristine and will not be affected, but that will not be the case for the river downhill and the life in it. “Otters and egrets have been spotted in the river and many people fish there often, which means there is healthy aquatic life,” he said.

Taman Rimba Kiara stakeholders have formed a “Save Taman Rimba Kiara” working group to push the authorities to preserve the park.

Its member Leon Koay said that many trees were going to be felled although the authorities say that it was only the parking lot that would be affected if a proposed development came through. “The trees around the parking lot are as mature as the ones inside the fenced area. “To our knowledge, DBKL has not issued any development order,” he added.
This family of otters living in Sungai Penchala will be affected if there is development in Taman Rimba Kiara.
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The Elephant Yam or Corpse Flower plant, relative of the world's tallest flower.
Interesting flora and fauna in Taman Rimba Kiara

Endangered
- Balau Sengkawang Air
- White-thighed Surili

Rare finds
- Crested Goshawk
- Greater racket-tailed Drongo
- Brahminy Kite
- Rufous Woodpecker
- Oriental-pied Hornbills

Flora
- Albino Raintree
- White Cinnamon Orchid
- Black Lily/Bat Lily
- Elephant Yam/Corpse Flower
- Hill Coconut
- Silver Comet
- Snow Flake Tree/Ghost Tree