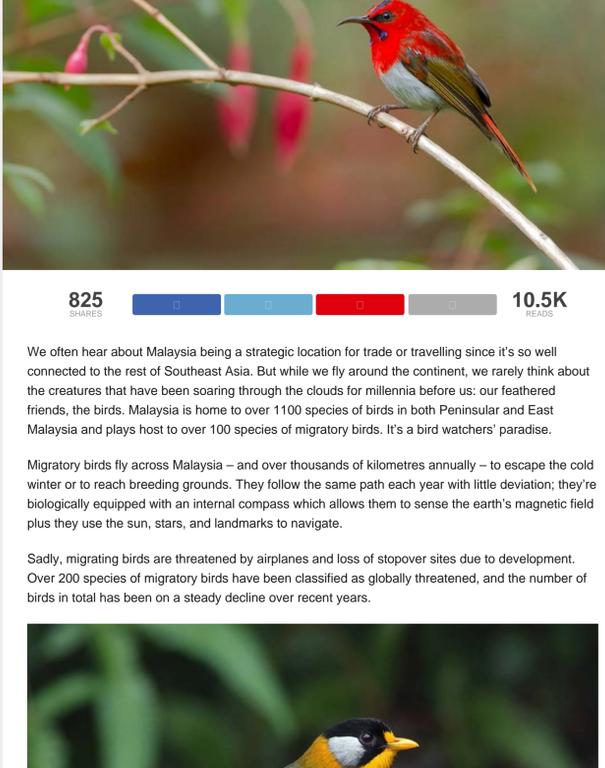


ENVIRONMENT

12 Destinations for Bird Watching in Malaysia

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We often hear about Malaysia being a strategic location for trade or travelling since it's so well connected to the rest of Southeast Asia. But while we fly around the continent, we rarely think about the creatures that have been soaring through the clouds for millennia before us: our feathered friends, the birds. Malaysia is home to over 1100 species of birds in both Peninsular and East Malaysia and plays host to over 100 species of migratory birds. It's a bird watchers' paradise.

Migratory birds fly across Malaysia – and over thousands of kilometres annually – to escape the cold winter or to reach breeding grounds. They follow the same path each year with little deviation; they're biologically equipped with an internal compass which allows them to sense the earth's magnetic field plus they use the sun, stars, and landmarks to navigate.

Sadly, migrating birds are threatened by airplanes and loss of stopover sites due to development. Over 200 species of migratory birds have been classified as globally threatened, and the number of birds in total has been on a steady decline over recent years.

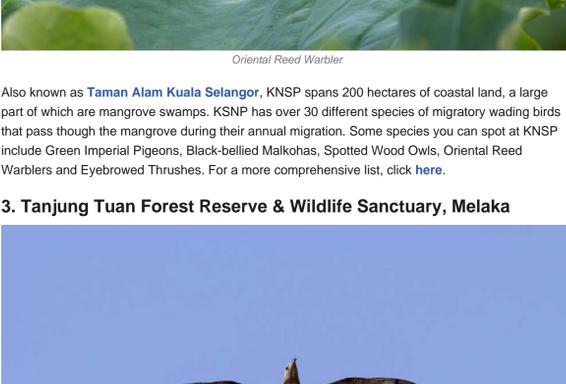


Silver-eared Mesia

In an effort to protect these birds, measures have been taken to protect their habitats and stopover sites. There are now 55 designated Important Bird Areas (IBA) in Malaysia covering a total of 5.1 million hectares of mangroves, forests, and parks. The IBAs in Malaysia protect over 700 different species, including several critically endangered species such as Silvery Pigeons, Christmas Frigatebirds, Spoon-billed Sandpipers, Red-headed Vultures, and Helmeted Hornbills.

Two of those IBAs are classified as 'in danger' – these are the Belum-Temenggor Forest and Teluk Air Tawar-Kuala Muda Coast. So, to raise awareness of the IBAs and these conservation efforts, in honour of International Migratory Birds Day (13 May), we've found the best places in Malaysia for bird watching in different states, specifically for spotting migrating birds.

1. Fraser's Hill, Pahang

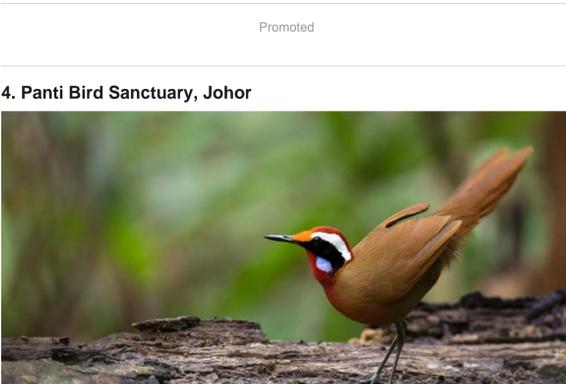


Scops Owl

The highland resort destination in the Titiwangsa mountain range boasts a wide variety of birds including Tufted Ducks, Silver-eared Mesias, Malaysian Eared Nightjars, Indian Cuckoos, Black Eagle, and Reddish Scops Owls. For a more comprehensive list of birds that can be spotted at Fraser's Hill, click [here](#).

This former tin mining hill station also plays host to the annual **Fraser's Hill International Bird Race** which brings together avid birdwatchers from around the world to spot, identify, and record as many different species of birds as they can. It's a fun event for bird and nature lovers – and a great day out for the family.

2. Kuala Selangor Nature Park, Selangor (KNSP)



Oriental Reed Warbler

Also known as **Taman Alam Kuala Selangor**, KNSP spans 200 hectares of coastal land, a large part of which are mangrove swamps. KNSP has over 30 different species of migratory wading birds that pass through the mangrove during their annual migration. Some species you can spot at KNSP include Green Imperial Pigeons, Black-bellied Malkohas, Spotted Wood Owls, Oriental Reed Warblers and Eyebrowed Thrushes. For a more comprehensive list, click [here](#).

3. Tanjung Tuan Forest Reserve & Wildlife Sanctuary, Melaka



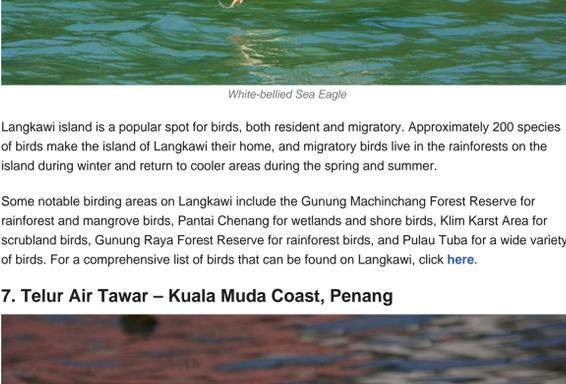
Oriental Honey Buzzard

Tanjung Tuan, formerly known as Cape Rachado, is a popular location for sighting migrating raptors. Birds like the Oriental Honey Buzzards, Ospreys, Black Staps, Japanese Sparrowhawks, Great Spotted Eagles, and Chinese Goshawks all take a pit stop at Tanjung Tuan as they head south to escape the northern winter and then head back north again for spring.

You can usually spot these birds of prey between September and November or March to May. The Malaysian Nature Society also organises and annual raptor watch at Cape Rachado in March to celebrate the return of these migratory raptors to their northern breeding grounds. The event usually includes guided walks, games, bird spotting. For a more comprehensive list of birds to spot at Tanjung Tuan, click [here](#).

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4. Pantii Bird Sanctuary, Johor



Rail-Babbler

The Pantii Bird Sanctuary in Kota Tinggi, Johor is a hotspot for birders in Malaysia as well as Singapore. The sanctuary is easily accessed by car and is home to over 200 resident species and over 30 migratory species. One species that the Pantii Forest is known for is the Rail-Babbler, which is easily spotted there. There are also plenty of colourful birds that will be a treat for nature photographers: kingfishers, woodpeckers, pittas, and broadbills.

For a comprehensive list, click [here](#). The trail you'll want to take for bird watching in Pantii Forest is the Bunker Trail – it takes you through the best spots for sighting many different species of birds. Sometimes you can find a trail into the Sanctuary, so it's best to sort that out ahead of time if you want to plan a bird watching trip there. You can contact the Sanctuary office at +607-2243048.

5. Taman Rimba Ampang, Kuala Lumpur



Blue-banded Kingfisher

Not far from the KL City Centre is the Ampang Forest Park, located within the Ampang Forest Reserve. The park is a water catchment area that is situated among urban buildings. The paved road that runs from the car park into the Ampang Water Intake Compound is a favoured location among bird watchers.

Another good area for spotting feathered creatures is the small river that flows through the park. You can sometimes spot Blue-banded Kingfishers there. Other birds to look out for are Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, Whiskered Treeswifts, Red-eyed Bulbuls, Red Junglefowls, Yellow Wagtails, and Spectacled Spiderhunters. For a more comprehensive list, click [here](#).

6. Langkawi Island, Kedah

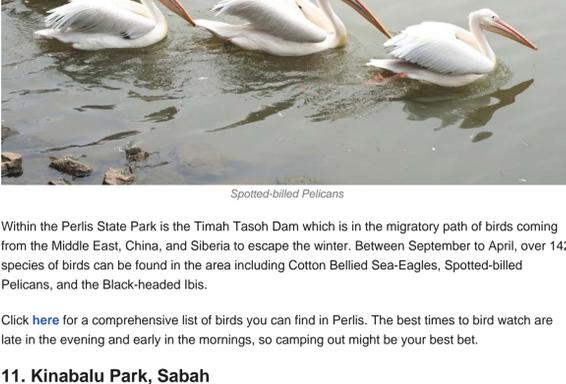


White-bellied Sea Eagle

Langkawi island is a popular spot for birds, both resident and migratory. Approximately 200 species of birds make the island of Langkawi their home, and migratory birds live in the rainforests on the island during winter and return to cooler areas during the spring and summer.

Some notable birding areas on Langkawi include the Gunung Machinchang Forest Reserve for rainforest and mangrove birds, Pantai Chenang for wetlands and shore birds, Klim Karst Area for scrubland birds, Gunung Raya Forest Reserve for rainforest birds, and Pulau Tuba for a wide variety of birds. For a comprehensive list of birds that can be found on Langkawi, click [here](#).

7. Teluk Air Tawar – Kuala Muda Coast, Penang

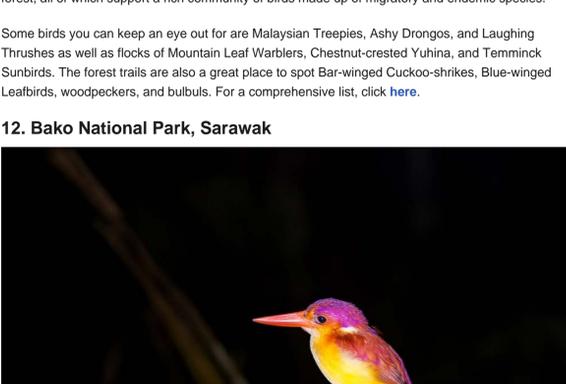


Little Egret

Many areas in **Penang are great for bird watching** with different birds spotted in different areas of the state, both on the island and the mainland. One of the best birding spots for migratory birds is the coastline between Teluk Air Tawar and Kuala Muda, which is a designated IBA. During winter, thousands of migratory waders and shorebirds use this coastline as a stopover or as feeding grounds.

Some of the birds that stopover here include globally threatened and endangered species like the Chinese Egrets and Spoon-billed Sandpipers. Other birds you can spot along the coastline are Great Herons, Far Eastern Curlews, Barn Owls, and Malaysian Pied-Fantails. Click [here](#) for a list of bird species found at Teluk Air Tawar.

8. Kuala Gula Bird Sanctuary, Perak



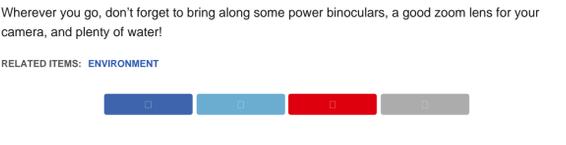
Collared Kingfisher

Kuala Gula is a haven for migratory water birds. Coming from their northern breeding grounds as early as August, some birds only stopover at Kuala Gula before continuing further south while other remain for the duration of winter before heading back up north. About two thirds of the water birds at Kuala Gula are migratory species including shorebirds like Sandpipers, Godwits and Plovers, as well as other water birds like egrets and herons.

Egrets are particularly abundant at Kuala Gula, specifically the Great Egret and Little Egret. Also common in the sanctuary are Red-necked Stints, White-winged Terns, White-bellied Sea Eagles, and Collared Kingfishers. From Kuala Gula, you can also visit the largest known breeding colony of Black-crowned Night Herons in Malaysia. For a comprehensive list of species, click [here](#).

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9. Taman Negara National Park, across Pahang, Kelantan, and Terengganu



Great Hornbill

With over 350 bird species, Taman Negara has the highest concentration of birds of any forest in Peninsular Malaysia. Taman Negara, which spans Pahang, Kelantan, and Terengganu, has a wide range of habitats from montane (mountain-based) to lowland forests. Between May and August, there will be many species of birds feeding on fruits, while June and July are ideal for spotting Pheasants. If you're in Pahang, head towards the Kuala Tahan entrance.

Tanjung Mentong in Terengganu and Kuala Koh in Pahang are perfect for birding. Some species you can find while on a trail include the Bat Hawks, Mountain Peacock Pheasants, Red-legged Crakes, Large Green Pigeons, Short-toed Coucals, and Barn Owls. Click [here](#) for a list of birds you can find in Taman Negara.

10. Perlis State Park, Perlis

Spotted-billed Pelicans

Within the Perlis State Park is the Tiberias Taseoh Dam which is in the migratory path of birds coming from the Middle East, China, and Siberia to escape the winter. Between September to April, over 142 species of birds can be found in the area including Cotton Bellied Sea-Eagles, Spotted-billed Pelicans, and the Black-headed Ibis.

Click [here](#) for a comprehensive list of birds you can find in Perlis. The best times to bird watch are late in the evening and early in the mornings, so camping out might be your best bet.

11. Kinabalu Park, Sabah

Chestnut-crested Yuhina

The Kinabalu Park is one of the most popular birding destinations in East Malaysia. The park encompasses a range of different forests from lowland rainforest to montane and lower montane forest, all of which support a rich community of birds made up of migratory and endemic species.

Some birds you can keep an eye out for are Malaysian Treepies, Ashy Drongos, and Laughing Thrushes as well as flocks of Mountain Leaf Warblers, Chestnut-crested Yuhina, and Temminck Sunbirds. The forest trails are also a great place to spot Bar-winged Cuckoo-shrikes, Blue-winged Leafbirds, woodpeckers, and bulbuls. For a comprehensive list, click [here](#).

12. Bako National Park, Sarawak

Black-backed Kingfisher

There are more than 20 IBAs in Sarawak alone, which is home to over 500 species of birds and just over 100 of those species can be found in Bako National Park, which is a hot spot for migrating birds. The Bako-Buntay Bay area, located within the park, offers the wintering spot and breeding location for many water birds including the Eurasian Curlews, Black-backed Kingfishers and Pacific Golden Plovers. Buntal is also where you can find large numbers of the globally vulnerable Chinese Egrets. September to November is the best time to visit the park if you're a birdwatcher or nature photographer.

Another great place for birding in Bako is in Teluk Assam near the Park HQ. You can also spot Hornbills, Bulbuls, Flycatchers, and on rare occasions, the critically endangered Christmas Frigatebird. For a more comprehensive list, click [here](#).

Grab your binoculars and get spotting

This list is not exhaustive – there are plenty of other great bird watching destinations in Malaysia, so you should definitely check out other national parks, especially if you're on the lookout for a specific species. Birding requires a lot of patience, but in the end, it's a rewarding hobby, especially if you manage to spot a shy species or a rare feathered friend.

Wherever you go, don't forget to bring along some power binoculars, a good zoom lens for your camera, and plenty of water!

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