

# TRAINING IN BIRD IDENTIFICATION FOR MT KINABALU GUIDES

## BIRD GUIDE TRAINING COURSE (BGT)

**PHASE 3, PARTS 1 & 2      10TH FEBRUARY – 17 JUNE 2017**

**REPORT BY RTN STEPHEN SUTTON, CHAIR OF RCKK BGT COMMITTEE,  
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**T**he strong 6.0 earthquake centred on Mt Kinabalu on Thursday, 5th June 2015 changed the lives of local kampong folk forever. It caused considerable economic hardship for the first six months and shook the confidence of local villagers in terms of their safety and job security.

The Rotary Clubs of Kota Kinabalu responded generously, sending up water and food in the early crisis days. The Rotary Club of Kota Kinabalu, under then President Jack Ong, felt that longer term help was needed as well. We guessed that training mountain guides in new life skills would increase family incomes in the village. An unskilled mountain guide is self-employed, paid by the day and not very much at that. We chose to train them in bird and nature guiding and English speaking. Good learners with this training can earn a lot of money in the long term.



*Trainee's shot of Mountain Blackbird aka Island Thrush. Endemic to upper montane forests Mt Kinabalu & Trus Madi*

Accordingly nine guides from Kg Kiau were given training in the last Rotary year 2016/2017. As they have made good progress and managed 100% attendance we have continued the course this Rotary year, starting in February, with one additional trainee. Bonifatreno Jurunin joined us from Kg Kinasaraban. We took him in because he has a part-time job as a research assistant with the University of Montana, USA group studying the ecology of nesting birds on Mt Kinabalu. BGT is a good opportunity for him to broaden his knowledge of birds.

In Phase 3: Part 1, Senior Trainer Denis Degullacion was resident at Kinabalu Mountain Lodge (KML) for one month, coaching the trainees in two groups of five in bird identification in the field, conducting classroom study and giving tests. Attendance was again 100%.



*Trainees ready for field trip.*

*L to R: James, Alex, Ehing, Binker, Lerry, Jobiay, Brendon, Edwin, Senior Trainer Denis and Sapinus. Bonny was working*

Field activities included early morning outings along the trails around the Lodge and Kinabalu National Park (adjacent to KML) and an overnight outing to Kg Monggis, east of Mt K. Visiting this remote, hard-to-reach location was made possible by the kind loan of CSD Paul Foronda's 4X4 and another belonging to the Sapingga family (Binker Sapingga being one of our trainees). The team searched for birds in a forest area surrounding a small farm of hill rice, bivouacking in a small shelter (ironically, in the rice harvesting season, this is used as a base to scare birds away to save the rice crop).

Classroom study took place in the KML office, aided by a flat screen monitor provided by the KML management and a whiteboard donated by RCKK. Bird watching should perhaps be called 'bird hearing' as most often birds are first located by their calls. In the classroom the trainees were able to see digital images of the birds on the monitor and hear sound recordings at the same time.

The classroom was also used for tests e.g. of the colour patterns of the plumage of different bird species. Denis found that a good deal of repetition was needed – bird identification is challenging – but that good progress was made.

Phase 3: Part 2. Consisted of two afternoons a week of spoken English lessons given by Lawrence Liew, a professional English tutor, with some further coaching by the Senior Trainer Denis in bird identification. On three occasions a small group of Rotarians visited KML to listen to the trainees making 5 minute presentations in English. The consensus was that they have made considerable progress in spoken English.



*English lesson from Lawrence Liew at Kinabalu Mountain Lodge*

An unexpected consequence of the course has been changing attitudes towards conservation in Kg Kiau. The trainees talk to their peers and urge them to throw away their slingshots and admire birds as beautiful living things which can earn serious money for the village through boosting ecotourism. An awareness of the value of 'natural capital' – natural resources (cf financial capital and human capital) seems to be growing.



*Binker Sapinggi with Senior Trainer Denis*

Several trainees are being coached as Junior Trainers for future courses, to do some of the teaching under Senior Trainer Denis' supervision. We feel that internalising the training by having it done by the kampong folk themselves is the way forward. We also feel that keeping the trainees together as a team for 2 years, with periods of intensive training, has helped them to develop their guiding skills. And one has just got married to a smart girl from Bundu Tuhan. Congratulations to Lerry Dominic and Farina. We like to think Lerry's advanced training helped clinch the deal!

A gratifying development is that on their own initiative the trainees have persuaded the local YB Ewon Benedict to fund a Kids Bird Festival in Kiau later this year, in collaboration with the school. 60 children are being invited. This is an example of the BGT course encouraging the development of leadership and organisational skills quite apart from guiding expertise.

We know our trainees now. They show a wide range of aptitude and experience. Only a minority are likely to make it as professional bird guides, but the rest have shown initiative in other ways and have gained valuable knowledge about birds and their place in nature. All can now converse in English, albeit slowly in some cases. They are already earning bigger tips as mountain guides.

Lerry Dominic and Bonny have already started to operate, part-time, as local bird guides around Kiau. Ehing Sakumbang has developed his homestay there, and Alexzander Bulangei is working with him as a guide and planning more involvement in village affairs. He is a good spokesperson. Binker seems to have an aptitude for IT. Developing IT expertise within the kampong context is a promising way forward for addressing the brain-drain to the cities (provision of broadband is therefore a top priority).

Sapinus Tuboh has been elected to the Committee of the Malim Gunung – the Kinabalu Mountain Guides Association - and continues to provide support for our incoming RCKK President when he is on the mountain. Jobiay now has his own taxi. With his improved English and knowledge of birds he can offer bespoke trips for visitors interested in nature. Brendon Kimpong is considering his options, while James Yasin and Edwin Moguring operate as mountain guides with English and nature knowledge (which most of the others do too, when it fits their work patterns)



*Three birdwatcher clients of Lerry's on the trail of one of Mt K's iconic endemics - Whitehead's Trogon*



*And here they are! Whitehead's Trogon. The gaudy male & his spouse. Rare shot. He surveys the scene while she waits for his next move. Taken by Lerry's party*

For all the trainees a great new opportunity will soon be available. Clearly, if expensive training of this kind is to be given, there must be good prospects of employment afterwards. It is with satisfaction, therefore, that RCKK notes that BJ Lim, part owner of the lease of KML, is completing an App for all Android and Apple based platforms. This App will allow bookings for adventure & nature holidays in SE Asia. It will also allow companies and individuals (after suitable vetting) to sign up to provide tours and guiding.

Our trainees can sign up for this as locally-based individual guides (Sabah-wide guides need licences). BJ has often discussed with BGT staff how to create better employment opportunities for BGT trainees, and this App will help fill the need.



*Trainees with Stephen Sutton, wife Rosalind and English teacher Lawrence Liew*

## **Acknowledgements**

RCKK has been very generous in funding this programme, with a donation of RM26K from Club reserves for the current Rotary year under President Jeyan Marimuttu.

CTISAD (Churches Together In Settle And District), a small NGO based in the town of Settle fringing the Yorkshire Dales National Park in the UK, has donated money to start a printed phrase-book project with each phrase in 4 languages - English, Chinese (phonetic), Malay & Dusun. This is being done in the context of the English lessons. There is common ground between Settle and Kiau in that they are both on the boundary of a National Park. The success of the Bird Guide Training course has attracted a significant grant for further training from Khazanah Nasional Bhd's offshoot Yayasan Hasanah. This 'Enhanced Corporate Responsibility' Foundation promotes sustainability and the awareness of natural capital value through the arts and education. It is doing very good work and we are honoured to have their support.

Thanks to Tommy Chaw, his staff at KML and his Green Holiday tour company for considerable help and support.