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FRIM project brings people, birds closer

KUALA LUMPUR: The cool morning breeze and the sounds of birds and crickets lifted the spirits of 12 nature lovers who were birdwatching at Paya Burung, Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM).

They were part of a citizen science project organised by FRIM's Ecotourism Division on Feb 28 between 7am and 8.30am, when birds are most active. The project had been put on hiatus for two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The participants hoped to catch a glimpse of the red-wattled lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*), a protected bird species on the brink of extinction.

Paya Burung is an 8ha bird sanctuary situated within the FRIM campus in Kepong here. It is a natural habitat and a rest stop for more than 90 bird species.

University student Amira Nor Sabrina Ambran, 21, said her first time birdwatching was fun.

"Each time we heard a bird chirping, we tried to find where the sound came from, then used our binoculars to get a better look at the bird and figure out its species."

Shukri Mohd Yusof, 31, a van driver from Selayang Baru, said he found birdwatching calming and soothing.

"The wild birds here are so colourful. We were lucky to be able to see a species of

migratory birds catching fish with their long bills."

FRIM's Ecotourism and Urban Forestry Programme head Ahmad Azaruddin Mohd Noor said the citizen science project aimed to bring people closer to nature to raise awareness on the importance of biodiversity conservation.

He said Paya Burung had 86 bird species, including four new ones identified on Feb 28 by the birdwatching group.

He said the diversity and abundance of food sources, greenery and humid environment made Paya Burung an ideal habitat for birds.

He said with the help of reference books and the eBird mobile application, the participants were able to identify birds' gender, characteristics, markings and habitat, then they tagged the birds' locations and added the information to the app.

FRIM Ecotourism and Urban Forestry Programme researcher Norsham Yaakob said birdwatching was not an activity only nature lovers could enjoy as families could join in, too.

"A lot of people think birdwatching is a boring and geeky activity. It's actually a rewarding activity that combines a sense of adventure and discovery and the joy of visiting fascinating landscapes." **Bernama**