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Birds in the city



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MARCH 13, 2022



Pacific Golden Plover in Las Piñas-Parañaque Wetland Park Photos by

Have you seen a bird in your backyard lately? Or have you heard them sing when you wake up in the morning?

Even in the urban jungles like Metro Manila, birds that are left alone are known to survive—and thrive and help make the city parks or even your home garden alive.



[Jasmin Meren](#)

Not to be confused with “domesticated” birds like the homing or racing pigeons, these birds are wild as they can be shy and still elusive to humans—with who they share space occasionally.

Targeted, lost and found

Even in the city, these birds are being targeted with slingshots, or worse, with pellet or air guns.

In public markets, or even in front of elementary schools, unscrupulous vendors discreetly sell live birds offering them as “pets.” Worse, some sell bigger birds like “tikling” for exotic food or bar chow.

Birds being brought at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources’ (DENR) Wildlife Rescue Center, however, have different stories.



[Gregg Yan](#)

The white-collared kingfisher's "ka-ka-ka" calls can be heard hundreds of meters away.

"Many of the birds are actually city dwellers who were accidentally injured," Glenn Maguad, the head of the rescue center told the BusinessMirror via telephone interview on March 9.

He said falcons and birds of prey are often brought by concerned citizens after smashing glass window panes or glass walls of tall buildings.

Some herons, he said, are also among the list of rescued animals that get lost in the city.

"Sometimes, fledgling birds get lost or confused and find their way in cities," he said in Filipino. This happens at a time when the juvenile herons are still learning to fly and get soaked in the water too long, making it hard for them to fly resulting in their capture.

City dwellers

The Eurasian tree sparrow, commonly known as “maya”—that was said to be brought by Europeans in the Philippines allegedly to combat loneliness and homesickness in the 1900s—continues to thrive in Metro Manila.



Whiskered Tern on Manila Bay

The little brown birds with tiny black beaks build their nest almost everywhere and anywhere—the tree in your backyard, your ceiling or garage, abandoned house or buildings, or even under metal frames of your community’s covered basketball courts or gymnasium.

Some of the species of birds commonly found in Metropolitan Manila are the yellow-vented bulbul, pied fantail, chesnut munia, olive-backed sunbird, zebra dove, black-naped oriole, pied triller, collared kingfisher, and Philippine pygmy woodpecker.

Jasmin Meren, an expert birdwatcher and photographer, said 232 are known to exist in Metro Manila.

“Many of these birds can tolerate human disturbance. In fact some can even be found where I live in the heart of Manila,” Meren said.

She cited the endemic Philippine pied fantail “which I always find hopping on the electric wires in front of our house every morning, along with olive-backed sunbird and yellow-vented bulbul,” she added.

According to Meren, during migratory season she often see a brown shrike on her neighbor’s roof, sometimes seen eating a lizard or large insect.

But for habitat, she said nothing beats a good, old forest, which harbors more species, many of which are endemic or found only in the country.

Urban green spaces

But urban green spaces have been observed to provide home and food for wildlife, she noted.

“Birds thrive in city life, as long as there is vegetation like trees and shrubs, and some flowering and fruiting trees, which may be found in forest parks, open grassy areas and even pocket gardens,” she said.

In the case of Metro Manila, aquatic habitats also provide foraging grounds for many birds, especially to migratory species like the endangered black-faced spoonbill and far eastern Curlew.

“These habitats are found in the mudflats and fishponds of Navotas, along Pasig River, and the mangrove park in Las Piñas-Parañaque,” she said.

Via Messenger, Juan Carlos Tecson Gonzalez, an ornithologist and natural history artist, told the BusinessMirror on March 8 that it is not surprising for birds or even other wildlife to be seen or even to be dwelling in the cities, especially if the cities are near forested areas.

Subic, Baguio-La Trinidad, Puerto Princesa and Davao are examples of cities or developed areas with substantial forest cover that have outstanding biodiversity, and have many birds. Since Los Banos is a special Natural and Science City, it is included in this category too with its Mount Makiling, Tecson added.

‘Shooting birds’

Passionate bird lovers, even in Metro Manila, made it a habit of “shooting” birds for fun, without killing them through photography.

“The cities [developed by humans] are expanding, while the world’s natural habitats—the forests, wetlands and scrublands—are shrinking. But some animals have proven resilient enough to adapt to life in human communities, eking out a living in our farms, towns, and cities,” said Best Alternatives Executive Director Gregg Yan told the BusinessMirror via e-mail on March 9.

An expert wildlife photographer and explorer, Yan said an assortment of bird species flit and fly within Manila, Cebu, Davao and other urban hubs.

“We’re not just talking about the ubiquitous maya, which were introduced to the Philippines by our Spanish colonizers, or feral pigeons cooing around our parks and towns. We have incredibly colorful blue kingfishers, yellow orioles, green parrots, red munias and rainbow-hued sunbirds, most of which go unnoticed because they’re pretty good at hiding. The usual indication that they’re around is if you can hear their birdcalls, which differ per species,” he said.

Unnatural habitat

International biodiversity expert Theresa Mundita Lim, executive director of the Asean Centre for Biodiversity, in an interview with the BusinessMirror on March 7 said it is not natural for birds to dwell in cities, but some are able to adapt and become part of the human “ecosystem”

“The cities are ‘unnatural,’ so the birds are just around areas where their natural habitats or wintering grounds [for migratory birds] used to be,” Lim said via Messenger.

“Some birds are more resilient than others, so they can thrive in the remaining greeneries and replanted areas [eg. yellow-vented bulbuls, and munias, the migratory brown shrike], or even on garbage dumps [crows]. Other birds were introduced [the Eurasian tree sparrow], and have adapted to city-living, nesting in house ceilings,” she explained.

Institutional support

To make Metro Manila an ideal birding site like Singapore, Lim said the remaining green spaces should be managed and maintained as such or better, provide a policy environment that is friendly to urban biodiversity.

“A local ordinance or any form of a policy can be issued to ensure that an area is to be used primarily as ‘green space,’ maybe to designate it as a city botanical garden, a tree park, etc., critical habitats, or what can be considered other effective area-based conservation measures, and that this will not be developed for hard infrastructure,” she said.

Local government units can further identify other vacant public areas as green spaces or wetlands, and restore them using native species, as far as practicable, she added.

“If there is not enough vacant public land to use for ecosystem restoration, innovative means can also be adopted, such as vertical gardening, greening rooftops, ecological bridges for wildlife, or constructed wetlands,” she pointed out.

Image credits: [Jasmin Meren](#), [Gregg Yan](#)