

Tea, kids and the birds—Birding education in CSI School, Devon Estate, Koppa Taluk, Chikkamagaluru District

Growing up in the Devon tea plantation of Koppa taluk, Chikkamagaluru district, I was always fascinated with the bird diversity over here. It was my dream from a long time to get at least a few kids in the tea plantation interested in birding. So, I organized a two-day birding education from 13–14 December 2023 to the school children of CSI school, Devon Estate.



Students drawing the bird they are familiar with. © Melito Pinto.

Since the total strength of the school was 26 students, I took the sessions with everyone seated together in a single classroom. On day 1, I began first with a mini assessment of how much the kids know about birds. So, I asked them to draw any bird that they were familiar with. While most all of the kids drew the peafowl, others drew parakeets which they call as 'Ramagili'. After this, I asked them how many birds they can name, and interestingly they named around 15 species of birds.



Students enthusiastically observing birds through the binoculars. © Melito Pinto.



Students helping each other using the binoculars. © Melito Pinto.



Melito explaining the kids about the common birds of Devon tea plantation. © Mamatha Shetty.

Next, I began by asking the question on what makes a bird? They swiftly responded by saying that the birds can fly and they lay eggs. I appreciated their answer and introduced them to the other aspects of birds such as the feathery body, and nest making. When I asked them what to do they think the birds feed, majority of the answers were pertaining to grains and fruits and one of them mentioned 'other birds'. So, I followed up this and showed them the examples of frugivorous, granivorous, piscivorous, nectarivorous and carnivorous birds. Continuing with the given examples, I told them about the ecological importance of birds by asking what would happen if each bird in their feeding niche were to disappear.

With the basic concepts covered, I introduced them to birding and dos and don'ts when birding. When I asked them what they should not do when birding, they swiftly responded 'we should not disturb the birds'. This was a prompt response from their end without me giving them any kind of clue. Then I showed them equipment



Group photo with the students and their teacher Mrs. Mamatha Shetty.
© Anil Pereira.

such as the binoculars that are used during birding and also introduced them to the concept of documenting their observations through nature journalling. With the basic concepts covered, the session of day 1 came to an end. On day 2, I showed them around 40 common species of birds that can be observed in the Devon tea plantation, along with their calls. While showing them the pictures of birds such as the Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*, I introduced them to the concept of resident and migratory birds. Once the presentation ended, I showed them how to use the binocular. Then I took them to a nearby

site which consisted of arecanut plantation along with a wetland. We could see the cattle grazing with Cattle Egrets *Bulbulcus ibis* surrounding them. I gave the binocular to one of the kids and asked him to observe the egrets and pass the binocular on to others once he's done observing. This is when amazing things began happening. The moment the students got their hands on the binoculars, they not only enthusiastically started watching the birds, but also voluntarily showed the younger kids how to use the binoculars. They even spotted many birds which I failed to spot. Such was their

enthusiasm. After watching birds with them for some time, I ended the session of day 2, while asking them to keep observing the birds whenever they can and also to take care not to litter anywhere in their surrounding from here on.

The effect of introducing the students to birdwatching was evident to me on the same day of 14 December 2023, when two kids who attended the session knocked the house door in the evening asking me to come with them to watch a bird that they observed nearby.

These two days of birdwatching with the students of CSI school has made me determined to continue my birding education with all students in the different schools of Koppa. Additionally, I'm happy about the fact that now I've got new birding buddies in the tea plantation through these kids.

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Melito Pinto, Wildlife Information Liaison Development Society, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu 641006.