

GREENSPEAK

by Ibu Kat

A FLOCK OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

When John Duffield and his partner Rachel moved to Bali from Hong Kong last year, they inherited a derelict aviary in the garden of their home in the heart of Ubud. Learning about the bird rescue and rehabilitation programs of the Friends of the National Parks Foundation (FNPF) office on Jalan Bisma, John offered the NGO the use of the aviary. But FNPF Director Dr Bayu Wirayudha and his Australian volunteer Alan El Kadhi suggested that John actively participate in a project instead of just being a donor. "It never crossed my mind that after 25 years in the financial services industry I could be responsible for a colony of endangered birds," John told me. "I was way out of my comfort zone, but it made me think about how I could help personally rather than just throwing some money at it. To have given FNPF the aviary would have made me feel good, but actually engaging my time and energy brings the project to life and connects me directly." And brings him much pleasure.



Java Sparrows © Jennifer Baxter

Together with Dr Bayu, John rescued over 100 young Java Sparrows from the Denpasar bird market in October 2010 and moved them into the newly repaired aviary. As the months went by, these starving bundles of feathers turned into plump little parsons in their distinctive black jackets. In May they were transferred to interim aviaries on Nusa Penida to learn to forage for themselves. On July 10 they were released into the wild under the protection of all the island's villages. The Java Sparrows join a thriving colony of Bali Starlings (*Leucopsar rothschildi*) released on Nusa Penida by FNPF over the past five years.

"I have been wanting to build a wild population of Java Sparrows (*Padda oryza*) on Nusa Penida," explained Bayu. "Java Sparrows were once common all over Bali, especially in the rice fields. But despite only being classified by IUCN as 'vulnerable', in reality they are now very rare in Bali because they are a popular cage bird and because of the widespread use of pesticide in the rice fields. Many of the young birds are poached from their nests and sold. I'm concerned that the Java Sparrow will be threatened with extinction before they become classified as endangered, so FNPF has started a project to build a backup wild population on Nusa Penida. This population can then be used for relocation to other areas of Bali in the future." Sort of like having a savings account with wings.

Java Sparrows are flock birds. They survive by living and flying in large numbers to support the occasional loss of the weak and the slow, so at least 100 birds are required to build a viable population. "FNPF could not have proceeded with this project without the help of John and Rachel, and we're extremely grateful to them for making this possible," says Bayu.

John was enchanted by his new charges and would sit in the aviary with the birds every morning while he read his newspaper. Caring for the Java Sparrows spawned a broader interest in FNPF's other projects – orang utans, reforestation and sea turtle conservation. The project has also made him very thoughtful about the role foreign settlers can play in helping to protect Bali's environment. "I'm not an environmental warrior, but this initiative has made a huge difference to the viability of the Java Sparrow population on Bali. Anybody with a small budget and any spatial resource

can contribute to reducing the commercial activity of bird markets, pet trade, ignorance, habitat protection and rehabilitation even on a small island like Bali. The power of the collective is so enormous -- if everyone told five other people about this, it would have a huge impact. Small pockets of awareness contribute to the new age of enlightenment that is shining here. We can't save the world but everyone can participate in a small way in our own towns and cities. We don't have to do anything spectacular or full-time. Just engage ourselves however we can – pick up a plastic bag from a stream, show compassion for beggars on the street, support a wildlife project.

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"Environmentally, we live in traumatic times. I read a dreadful headline about orangutans in Borneo – a mother and baby were captured and the mother was drowned in front of her baby. That had a profound effect on me. Working with FNPF I feel now like I'm part of a team that can make a difference, and raising awareness and education will make the team bigger and enable people to do what they are capable of on whatever scale they can."

John and Rachel are now rearing another flock of juvenile Java Sparrows, and are aligning with other small groups of thoughtful individuals involved in animal protection, wildlife and habitat protection projects. His latest project, in association with Janice Girardi and her team at BAWA along with other carefully chosen partner foundations like Dr Bayu's FNPF, will focus heavily on innovative ways to raise funds to promote conservation, education and community development across the region.

John and Rachel join the ranks of a growing number of foreigners who have settled in Bali and are actively contributing skills and resources to their new home. "People need to make social contracts," points out John. "We're grateful to live in Bali, particularly in Ubud, but gratitude without action is nothing more than a pleasant feeling. Everyone needs to examine the status of their social contracts. Take a good look around at your immediate surroundings and you'll find something worthwhile, engaging and really socially beneficial without having to look very far from home."

Nusa Penida, Bali's first unofficial bird sanctuary, may soon be joined by a second. High on the flanks of Mount Batu Karu is a magical temple. Pura Besi Kulang is embraced by high rice terraces and groves of trees. At its heart is an ancient sanctuary, a sacred place made of stones stacked high, and on top of this mossy wall a row of small stone gods stands guard.

The temple committee heard about the FNPF-initiated bird sanctuary project in Nusa Penida and discussed it with surrounding communities. Several villages in Penebel decided to approach Bayu to start a similar project.

When it comes to wildlife protection, community-based resource management is the only model that really works.

A decade ago Batu Karu temple held a rare Warna Kerti purification ceremony for the protection of nature. Recently a new ceremony was held with Bayu after which 15 birds were released under the temple 'awig awig' (traditional community regulation) for wildlife protection. The goal is to have similar 'awig awig' throughout the five villages that support the temple, comprising about 800 households. Non-migrating birds have a small territory and the villages have pledged to protect an area of about 50 square kilometres. In a quiet way, history is being made on this remote Balinese mountainside. Never before has a local community volunteered its land to become a bird sanctuary.

As on Nusa Penida, in return for this community-based commitment to conservation, FNPF will run a variety of

projects to help the communities. The goal is to develop and promote the region's rich culture and beautiful environment.

We visited the temple on a clear morning and prayed in the shade of towering old trees, incense curling up around us to dissolve in the cool mountain air – air that was alive with birdsong. Afterwards I sat with Pak Mangku sipping sweet black coffee while he told me about plans to work with FNPF to create a community-conceived bird sanctuary here.



This community has a history of nature conservation. In the past villagers would capture Java Sparrows for themselves, but there is no culture here of poaching wild birds for sale as there is in so many other communities. So the bird population in this area is largely undisturbed. I have never heard so many birds anywhere else in Bali. Bayu and Farquhar identified over 20 species including thrushes, doves, barbets, bulbuls, spider hunters, flower peckers, sunbirds, black eagles, magpie robins, prinias, fantails, munias and kingfishers. Villagers say there are also storks and eagles. The elders tell me that all birds are fewer now, probably due to the chemicals used in the rice fields which affect all the creatures in the food chain.

FNPF is inviting volunteers to assist with the Batukaru project. To start, FNPF wants to train a number of the locals to act as tour guides for the area. Volunteers will be asked to provide conversational English language lessons as they accompany the guides on the proposed walking tours. Over time, FNPF will develop programmes to help the local warungs to cater for birders and eco-tourists. Please contact FNPF at info@fnfp.com for more information.

When it comes to wildlife protection, community-based resource management is the only model that really works. Supporting organizations like FNPF with our time, funds or other resources helps preserve Bali's natural heritage for its children's children.



A collection of Ibu Kat's stories, previously published as 'Dragons in the Bath', is now in its third printing under the title 'Bali Daze -- Freefall off the Tourist Trail'. Available from Ganesha Books in Ubud and Seminyak or directly from Kat at bali_cat7@yahoo.com

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