



Article

Mandai Orchard Gardens

by Alex YAP

Category: Places

Situated a mere 2 minutes drive from the Singapore Zoological Gardens, Mandai Orchard Gardens have been the "secret" location of many local veteran photographers as the place to practice macro photography. A side bonus of this location, with its abundance of flowering plants is the number of local birds. Crimson and Olive back sunbirds, bulbul's, etc aplenty.

Being the first outing for the year 2001 that the NPS(S) organized, we weren't too sure of the numbers that would turn up, but much to our delight, we had nearly 30 participants!! So much so, small groups needed to be defined, mostly into 2 main groups of macro and birding photographers.

The (mostly) overcast day gave our macro shooters reasons to smile all day, with the nice diffuse lighting casting evenly on their subjects, with the occasional rays of sun light casting on the flowers, I would call the conditions ideal. For those of us hoping to get birds, the lighting resulted in low shutter speeds, and perhaps due to larger human presence, the birds shied away most of the morning, however a small green snake drew us towards the heliconia flower which is like a watering hole for the small birds. The sighting of a beautiful crimson sunbird drew us in like moths to a flame, and immediately, all lenses were drawn towards the plants.



Minutes pass quickly amongst our camaraderie, and alas noon descended with harsh lighting. We decided to end the day on a high note chatting at the drinks dispensing machines (Did I mention, Mandai Orchard Gardens comes with full amenities?).

Things that I have observed that may be helpful for those of you who want to do more bird photography.

- (1) Go in small groups of up to three. Birds can and do get intimidated by large human presence. Also early morning is ideal with nice lighting coming from the east to light up the heliconia and ginger plants.
- (2) Patience. Find yourself a nice spot (near flowering

- plants where nectar is available for the birds to feed), and wait. Try to keep as silent as possible, with little movement.
- (3) Hiding. Camouflage yourself or camera/lens if possible, breaking the humanoid outline helps bring the birds closer. Humans haven't been the kindest creatures to birds, and they do fear our presence. By camouflaging ourselves, we put the birds more at ease.
- (4) Long lenses are not essential, but that being said, you do need up to 300mm to get decent sized images of the smaller birds. Lenses such as a 75-300 or 100-300 or even 100-400mm lenses are ideal for such applications.
- (5) Tripod. It can be tiring holding up the camera to your eye for hours. Use a tripod. Not only does it allow you to rest your arms whilst waiting, it actually contributes to a more stable shot, especially when the shutter speeds fall below 1/300.

I do hope that our participants enjoyed themselves (I certainly did). However if you have any questions or queries, regardless of techniques or equipment, please do not hesitate to contact us, and we will try to answer within the best of our knowledge.



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