

# Bali Starling guardians

Teaching wildlife conservation through interactive education can be an amazing experience for children.

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Nurturing an appreciation of nature in children will not only safeguard the environment but will make them open-minded and able to make a difference in the future.

At the Begawan Foundation in Sibang, Badung, the education program aims to give students greater knowledge and increase their appreciation for wildlife and the environment, as well as teach strategies on how to combat poaching of the island's iconic species, the Bali Starling.



**Bali Starling Monitored: A Bali Starling, bred and released by Begawan Foundation in Badung, Bali. Detail matter: Students learn about bird anatomy using a microscope.**

The year 2016 was a busy one for the foundation. Besides running education awareness

classes in the foundation's breeding and release center in Sibang and at local schools, it

also focused on the newly created after school Ambassadors Club to protect the critically endangered bird.

The foundation's main program, a 10-week education program conducted one hour a week, gives students the opportunity to learn about bird conservation. The students learn, among other things, about the important role played by birds in the ecosystem, the threat of extinction of many bird species and how the foundation works closely with the community to protect and preserve the Bali Starling.

Last year, the foundation's team either made presentations or conducted 10week courses with students from kindergarten to senior high school students at a local tourism school. The participants reached 2,000 students last year.

The foundation believes "learning by doing" is impor-

tant, and thus the students are expected to participate in all activities. This approach has worked, with students now eager to offer their own views and ideas, rather than expecting to be “spoon-fed” by the teacher.

Nest boxes, painted by students, hang in trees at SD 2 Sibang Kaja state elementary school, painted cloth bags are now used by proud parents to replace plastic bags. Meanwhile, kindergarten students created a poster featuring a flock of Bali Starlings.

The course includes a morning visit to the breeding and release site in Sibang, where students undertake a variety of activities. Divided into small groups, they observe free flying Bali Starlings, assist the bird keeper in preparing food and feed the birds in the socialization enclosure, use the microscope to look at feathers, tour the site and



**Birding: Students learn about bird watching and bird monitoring as part of the bird conservation education program at the Begawan Foundation.**

watch the activities of the birds in the large socialization enclosure.

The aim of this last activity is to create a feeling of empathy — they see that birds are like humans in their daily activities.

“We have also welcomed student groups from outside the local area. In April, 150 students from Papua undertook a

variety of activities in eight small groups of 17 students.

“Our short videos, which feature the center and also raise awareness of the threat of extinction of the Bali Starling, introduced the group to the center,” said media manager Yonita Dwi Cahyo.

In late October, the foundation also welcomed a group of high school students from Bandung, West Java, who undertook similar activities. For older students, the session also includes a group discussion.

The visits from schools outside Bali help the foundation spread the word to preserve endangered indigenous birds across Indonesia.

In August, the foundation started the Bali Starling Ambassador Program, with the aim to expand students’ knowledge about the species and to involve them personally in the foundation’s conservation efforts during after school

activities.

“We need more passionate eyes and ears in the Sibang community, especially those of the local children, because they are the future environmental stakeholders. To begin with, we targeted our ambassador program toward SD 4 Sibang Gede state elementary school students, as they were in close proximity to free flying Bali Starlings,” said Amy Dunstone, an education program volunteer.

They started with a weekly two-hour gathering called “Friday Fun” which involved activities about conservation and the opportunity to practice English skills. The program is both fun and interactive, and gives young children the opportunity to meet with fellows from different schools.

Thirty-two particularly passionate individuals quickly became eligible for their first “Bali Starling Warriors” certifi-

cate of participation in their fourth session.

This first certificate is expected to encourage other students to obtain their own certificates. There are three levels of Bali Starling Ambassadors; red, yellow and blue, with the final one obtained after attending 24 sessions.

“We hope to inspire more female ambassadors to join, as interest in birds is mainly a male-dominated hobby,” Dunstone said, adding that their ultimate goal was to create an everyday after school ambassadors program for the students.

“We would love to grow their passion and knowledge of wildlife, conservation, environmental protection and general science, many aspects which are lacking in their current school curriculum,” she said.

At the site itself, repairs and modifications of encl-

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my using microscope.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAWAN FOUNDATION



**Before and after:** Students learn about deforestation as part of the bird conservation education program.

**Before and after:** Students learn at deforestation as part of the bird conservation education program.

asures are under way for the breeding of the Mitchell's Lorikeet, extinct in the wild in Bali, with possibly a few remaining in Lombok

To improve surveillance of the released birds, the foundation has installed a new cam-

era trap and additional CCTV cameras.

Yoanita said the surveillance equipment was expected to help observe a range of activities that they would otherwise miss out on seeing.

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