Feeling tense after a hectic work week in Bangkok, I wondered whether birdwatching might help me relax. As the day heated up, I started out for the city park of Rot Fai — a 500-acre plot of enervating rail tracks, dirty foundation, and grass that is more akin to a scrubby patch of weeds. As the day heated up, I visited the park's Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) volunteers, who run regular birdwalks in the morning. These peaceful strolls use bird watching as inspiration to help increasingly disconnected city-dwellers reconnect with nature, said BCST Chairman Dr. Boripat Siriaroonrat.

As the day heated up, we explored another scruffy bit of the park, looking for more winged creatures. Later, Dr. Boripat explained how important these untidy areas are as bird habitats. Here, they can find quiet branches, nooks and crannies to nest in. The BCST works closely with park authorities to preserve these wild places for birds. As the day heated up, I spotted a flash of brilliant blue — the telltale sign that a kingfisher had just swooped. Feeling like a novice, I set off with the group across the grass. Seconds later, everyone stopped to stare up into the trees. I had no idea what we were looking at; I could hear birds, but couldn't see them. Our eagle-eyed guide set up a telescope on a tripod and said, “Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker.” I looked down the lens and saw a tiny red and black bird, which hops around on the grass and is easy to find. A more difficult spot is the “kee maa,” or dog shit bird. This seems strange given that it is definitely easier to find dogs in Thailand than roaming pigs.

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