

KALIKASAN

PHILIPPINE NATURE STUDY GUIDE

ONE WHOLE YEAR OF CHARLOTTE MASON
NATURE STUDY LESSONS FOR THE FAMILY

SAMPLE

WRITTEN BY

YEN CABAG

*The first complete CM nature study guide created
specifically for Filipino students*

SAMPLE

KALIKASAN

Philippine Nature Study Guide

One Whole Year of Charlotte Mason
Nature Study Lessons for the Family

Kalikasan Philippine Nature Study Guide

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WELCOME

Thank you for purchasing Kalikasan Philippine Nature Study Guide. We look forward to journeying with you into finding beauty and creating beauty through the Charlotte Mason method of homeschooling.

Our goals for producing these materials include:

- To help parents do nature study with their children using the CM method with minimal preparation work
- To have everything on-hand and ready for students to begin as soon as possible
- To raise up readers and learners for life through the use of excellent-quality materials

The Kalikasan Philippine Nature Study Guide includes a **month-by-month nature focus**, **designed to match our seasons and weather conditions as closely as possible to maximize our observation time.**

We understand that we already have lots of nature study guides available in book stores and online, but because a lot of them are written by Westerners, they also talk about flora and fauna that may not be found in the Philippines. Of course, we can still learn from the basic principles in those books, but we felt that Filipino families who are just starting out in the Charlotte Mason method can benefit greatly from a nature guide that's designed specifically for our locality. That's why we decided to create a guide specific to the Philippines, to help us cultivate an appreciation for the natural resources that the Almighty has blessed our country with.

Although we don't let rain keep us indoors (ideally!), we opted to include more accessible "nature" stuff during the rainy months, such as those in our own backyards and gardens, in order to develop the habit of observing nature no matter what the weather. We also highlight "special" finds, such as migrating birds during the cold months.

We hope that this simple guide can help jumpstart your journey into enjoying nature study not just for your children's homeschool, but as a family lifelong adventure, too!

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The Charlotte Mason method of education is unlike most of what we grew up thinking about education. Because we follow principles that the British educator-reformer researched and concluded in the 1800s, it requires a lot of unlearning and re-learning. But I assure you, the effort will be worth it, as we will no longer be tossed to and fro by the wind, and instead become equipped in a time-tested and proven way of educating children in a way that awakens their minds and their full potential.

This is why, through our resources at CharlotteMasonPhilippines.Com, we hope to help you, as the parent-teacher, to unlearn some of our old mindsets in education, and embrace new ones based on Charlotte Mason's philosophy, one little step at a time.

One of the main elements of the Charlotte Mason method is nature study. This starts off as simply taking our children outdoors, observing different things in nature, and eventually journaling our findings and observations. We will explain how to do nature study the Charlotte Mason way in the next few pages.

To help you implement nature study, we created the **Kalikasan Nature Study Guide** as a **month-by-month guide, with each month as stand-alone as possible**. We base as much of the suggested observations as close to the changing seasons in the Philippines, give or take a couple of weeks, but we believe it should be fine to follow it on a monthly basis.

This means that the book opens in the month of January. But because you might be starting your school year in August, we recommend you to flip to the recommended month. Don't worry, you will not be missing out on anything, because eventually, you will reach that month and cycle back again!

Also note that the month where we put a certain "theme" doesn't mean that you can *only* study these things during that month. Instead, see it as a suggested month to **START** studying these things in nature, and feel free to extend it over the next month or pick up on it again whenever the opportunity arises. We scheduled them on the suggested months as way to jumpstart your journey into observing and enjoying them throughout the year.

Disclaimer: Kalikasan does not claim to be a complete field guide for each nature theme. Instead, we only give you starting points, a launching pad, if you will, for further study into each nature theme. We hope this can inspire you to dig deeper!

GRADE LEVELS

We have created the Kalikasan Philippine Nature Study Guide as a family resource to be used for all ages, and it may also be reused year after year as long as it's needed. It can be used alongside our Talino Charlotte Mason Curriculum Guides, which includes a time slot once a week for nature study.

Our Talino full open-and-go guides follow the way that Charlotte Mason categorized students:

- Students between the ages of 6 to 8, and sometimes 9, are considered Form 1
- From age 9 to 12, and sometimes over 12, the students are considered Form 2.
- From the ages of 12 to 15, they are considered Form 3.

So for the Talino CM Curriculum, the rough division of grade levels can be:

Form 1 (Sets A, B, and C)

If your child is in Grades 1 to 3, pick one of these guides. We recommend starting with Set A in your first year, then move on to B and C.

If your child is in Grade 3 this year, you can do Set A, then move on to Form 2 next year.

Form 2 (Sets A, B, and C)

Form 2 is for children in Grade 4 to 6. Again, start with Set A in your first year of homeschooling in this age group.

Form 3 or High School (Sets A, B, C, and D)

Our High School guides are for Grades 7 to 10. (Technically, Form 3 refers to Grades 7 and 8, and Form 4 to Grades 9 and 10. For the sake of simplicity, we refer to Form 3 as our High School Guide.) We include suggested books to add for use by older students.

Alongside Talino or any other CM Curriculum, the Kalikasan Philippine Nature Study Guide is designed as a family guide to be used across all levels.

Why use the same nature study guide for different grade levels?

Perhaps you are wondering why we use the same Kalikasan Nature Study Guide for a student in Grade 1 and a student in Grade 6. In the Charlotte Mason method, we believe that children are born persons, and that they have the capacity to assimilate what speaks to them. This means that, even if we observe the same things, a child in Grade 1 may appreciate different things that another child in Grade 6 may find interesting.

Additionally, this allows families who have kids in different levels to enjoy outdoor time and nature study together, making for more lively discussions and shared experiences, while also maximizing the parents' time.

But, because we also understand that older children can observe more details and know more names, for example, the different parts of an insect's body or the different parts of flowers, we include Nature Journal Prompts that span different ages, with additional suggestions for older kids to include in their nature journal entries.

OUTLINE OF MONTHLY GUIDE

Here we outline the contents of each Month of lessons:

Invitation to the Outdoors

At the start of each Month, we have prepared a short invitation, to ponder on Charlotte Mason's principles related to nature study and outdoor time, or to inspire you to spend more time outside with your children. This might include direct quotes from CM or practical tips that are applicable for our specific context as homeschoolers living in the Philippines.

Disclaimer

Although this guide includes monthly readings for parents, this is not a substitute for the parents' continual learning about the Charlotte Mason method, whether through personal research or attending trainings conducted particularly by CM homeschool providers. We encourage you to continue learning and getting involved with other CM families for training and support.

Parent Preparation

The Month will start with a description (and some personal anecdotes and stories) of what we will be studying. We include a suggested list of things you need to prepare.

Lessons

The guide includes 4 suggested lessons per month, with at least one lesson per week. Of course, if you can do them more than once a week, that would be great!

This means that, over 12 months, the entire book will give you 48 weeks' worth of lessons, which is more than the 36 weeks of lessons in one school year. That's perfectly fine, because you can just start on whatever month your school year starts, and end when it ends—or opt to continue the nature study lessons over the summer break. It's entirely your choice!

If you intend to go through this guide as throughout one school year, we have laid out each lesson with space for you to write the Date. This is purely optional, and you may also skip writing down the date and just note it on your other homeschool records. This way, the book becomes less of a consumable and you can reuse it over several years or for several children.

Observation Questions

Each lesson comes with a list of questions to help you and your children go into more detail of observing your object at hand. This will also help you initiate a discussion with your children.

We also offer tips on identifying the creature you're observing. Of course, there's always Google, but we encourage you to help build up your child's scientific thinking skills by making detailed observations, theorizing what kind of animal or plant it could be, before relying on Google.

Nature Journal Prompts

For older kids, the observations you made through the questions may be written down into their nature journal entry. We also include other nature journal ideas that you may use.

For younger kids, simply writing down the name and where it was observed is enough for a start.

HOW TO DO NATURE STUDY

All Things Bright and Beautiful

*All things bright and beautiful
All creatures great and small
All things wise and wonderful
The Lord God made them all*

*Each little flower that opens
Each little bird that sings
God made their glowing colors
And made their tiny wings*

*The purple-headed mountains
The river running by
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky*

*The cold wind in the winter
The pleasant summer sun
The ripe fruits in the garden
God made them every one*

*He gave us eyes to see them
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty
Who has made all things well*

~ Cecil Alexander

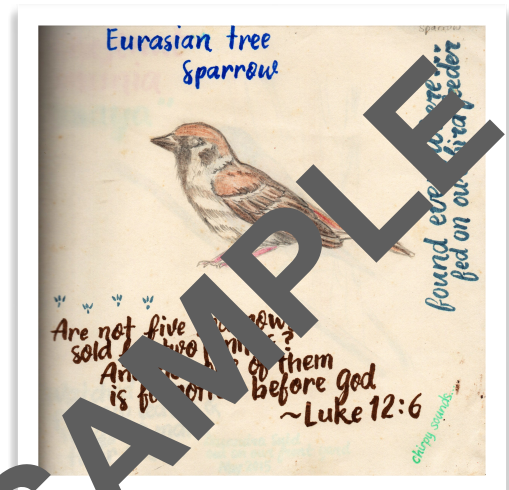
“What do you mean by nature-study, love for the out-of-doors, anyway!”

I do not mean a sixteen weeks' course in zoology, or botany, or in Wordsworth. I mean, rather, a gentle life course in getting acquainted with the toads and stars that sing together, for most of us, just within and above our own dooryards. It is a long life course in the deep and beautiful things of living nature—the nature we know so well as a corpse.

~from Chapter 1, *The Lay of the Land* by Dallas Lore Sharp

First, nature study is not about memorizing the parts of animals or things like that, although of course that can have a good place in our children's education. Perhaps a more delightful way of viewing nature study is in the following passage:

How did the boy along the starlit lake come by it—a companionship so real and intimate that the very cliffs knew him, that the owls answered him, that even the silences spoke to him, and the imagery of his rocks and skies became a part of the inner world in which he dwelt? Simply by living along Winander and hallooing so often to the owls that they learned to halloo in reply. You may need to be born again before you can talk the language of the owls; but if there is in you any hankering for the soil, then all you need for companionship with nature is a Winander of your own, a range, a haunt, that you can visit, walk around, and get home from in a day's time. If this region can be the pastures, woodlots, and meadows that make your own door-yard, then that is good; especially if you buy the land and live on it, for then Nature knows that you are not making believe. She will accept you as she does the peas you plant, and she will cherish you as she does them. This farm, or haunt, or range, you will come to know intimately: its flowers, birds, walls, streams, trees—its features large and small, as they appear in June, and as they look in July and in January.



From Yen's nature journal

~from Chapter 2, *The Lay of the Land* by Dallas Lore Sharp

Isn't that an amazing way to live—to have such intimacy with the out-of-doors that the cliffs know us and the owls answer us?

Perhaps one reason why we don't do much nature study is that we don't know what to do once we're outdoors. Let's see what Miss Mason has to say:

Supposing we have got them, what is to be done with these golden hours, so that every one shall be delightful? They must be spent with some method, or the mother will be taxed and the children bored. There is a great deal to be accomplished in this large fraction of the children's day. They must be kept in a joyous temper all the time, or they will miss some of the strengthening and refreshing held in charge for them by the blessed air. They must be let alone, left to themselves a great deal, to take in what they can of the beauty of earth and heavens; for of the evils of modern education few are worse than this—that the perpetual cackle of his elders leaves the poor child not a moment of time, nor an inch of space, wherein to wonder—and grow.
(vol 1 pg 44)

Here we can see that we don't need to feel pressured about lecturing or knowing everything. In fact, the first thing we need to know is how to let our children alone or left to themselves!

But that's not ALL that we do. Miss Mason also says that it's our chance to train our children in powers of observation:

At the same time, here is the mother's opportunity to train the seeing eye, the hearing ear, and to drop seeds of truth into the open soul of the child, which shall germinate, blossom, and bear fruit, without further help or knowledge of hers. Then, there is much to be got by perching in a tree or nestling in heather, but muscular development comes of more active ways, and an hour or two should be spent in vigorous play; and last, and truly least, a lesson or two must be got in. (vol 1 pg 44-45)

Let's take a look at how she describes a "lesson or two":

No Story-Books.—Let us suppose mother and children arrived at some breezy open wherein it seemeth always afternoon. In the first place, it is not her business to entertain the little people: there should be no story-books, no telling of tales, as little talk as possible, and that to some purpose...

Our wise mother, arrived, first sends the children to let off their spirits in a wild scamper, with cry, hallo, and hullaballo, and any extravagance that comes into their young heads...

Here we can see that we don't have to prepare a lecture—in fact, we're discouraged to do much talking! Did you catch that? She says, "as little talk as possible," but that it's not just a passive keeping quiet, it's "to some purpose."

And what is this purpose? First, we let the kids let off steam by running around and going as loud as they want to!

Let's see what happens next:

II. —Sight-Seeing

By and by the others come back to their mother, and while wits are fresh and eyes are keen, she sends them off on an exploring expedition—Who can see the most, and tell the most, about yonder hillock or brook, hedge, or copse. This is an exercise that delights children, and may be endlessly varied, carried on in the spirit of a game, and yet with the exactness and carefulness of a lesson.

Here we can see that the next part is to send the kids off to explore, expecting them to come back and tell as much as they remember about what they've seen. The following tells the details about how to do this:

***How to See.**—Find out all you can about that cottage at the foot of the hill; but do not pry about too much. Soon they are back, and there is a crowd of excited faces, and a hubbub of tongues, and random observations are shot breathlessly into the mother's ear. 'There are beehives.' 'We saw a lot of bees going into one.' 'There is a long garden.' 'Yes, and there are sunflowers in it.' 'And hen-and-chicken daisies and pansies.' 'And there's a great deal of pretty blue flower with rough leaves, mother; what do you suppose it is?' 'Borage for the bees, most likely; they are very fond of it.'...*

Do you see how the dialogue can go? Of course, this is a scene with a few kids in the mix, so most likely it will look different if you only have one or two kids. But you get the picture!

5 Steps on How to Do Nature Study

From the above passages, here we summarize nature study in 5 easy steps:

1. Bring the children to some outdoor space.

Possibilities of a Day in the Open.—I make a point, says a judicious mother, of sending my children out, weather permitting, for an hour in the winter, and two hours a day in the summer months.

That is well; but it is not enough. In the first place, do not send them; if it is anyway possible, take them; for, although the children should be left much to themselves, there is a great deal to be done and a great deal to be prevented during these long hours in the open air. And long hours they should be; not two, but four, five, or six hours they should have on every tolerably fine day, from April till October.

(From vol 1 page 43-44)

2. Let them run wild for the first few minutes.

Remember, we respect the nature of children who just desire to run and jump around and make noise, and what better place than in the outdoors?

3. Send them off to explore and then return.

The important thing is that they know what is expected of them, so that they can come back with their "treasures," perhaps not literally in their hands, but in their mind's eye.

4. Let them describe in detail things that caught their interest.

Encourage them to be as detailed as possible. We also remember that each child is born a person, so what catches one child's fancy may not be what the second or third child pays attention to.

5. Have them draw in their nature journals.

Take a look at how Miss Mason describes nature journals:

As soon as he is able to keep it himself, a nature-diary is a source of delight to a child. Every day's walk gives him something to enter: three squirrels in a larch tree, a jay flying across such a field, a caterpillar climbing up a nettle, a snail eating a cabbage leaf, a spider dropping suddenly to the ground, where he found growing ivy, how it was growing and what plants were growing with it, how bindweed or ivy manages to climb. Innumerable matters to record occur to the intelligent child. While he is quite young (five or six), he should begin to illustrate his notes freely with brush drawings; he should have a little help at first in mixing colours, in the way of principles, not directions. He should not be told to use now this and now that, but, 'we get purple by mixing so and so,' and then he should be left to himself to get the right tint. As for drawing, instruction has no doubt its time and place; but his nature diary should be left to his own initiative. A child of six will produce a dandelion, poppy, daisy, iris, with its leaves, impelled by the desire to represent what he sees, with surprising vigour and correctness.

(volume 1 page 54-55)

Here we can see that the nature journal should be the child's own possession, with his own initiative as to what he wants to draw in it--but of course, of things he finds in nature. Some of my friends' kids struggle because their child wants to draw, say, a picture of a butterfly without actually looking at a butterfly. I recommend a different notebook for free drawings; the nature journal should be kept solely for the purpose of copying our nature finds into them by direct observation.

Three Questions to Think About

To help you be more intentional about observation, some nature journal advocates encourage us to think about the following three things:

1. I notice...
2. I wonder...
3. It reminds me of...

You can use these three things to spark up conversation with your child about the object being studied. Another way is to think about them in terms of these three questions:

1. Observing: How does it look?
2. Wondering: Why is it shaped like this? What function does this serve?
3. Connecting: What does it remind me of?

These three points should be a great starting point for exploring any of your chosen subjects in as much detail as possible. This also means that children of different ages might notice and observe different things, as well as make different connections.

Benefits of Sight-Seeing Exercises

Now, let's take a look at what Miss Mason says is the benefit of such sight-seeing play:

Educational Uses of Sight-Seeing.—This is all play to the children, but the mother is doing invaluable work; she is training their powers of observation and expression, increasing their vocabulary and their range of ideas by giving them the name and the uses of an object at the right moment,—when they ask, ‘What is it?’ and ‘What is it for?’ And she is training her children in truthful habits, by making them careful to see the fact and to state it exactly, without omission or exaggeration. The child who describes, ‘A tall tree, going up into a point, with rather roundish leaves; not a pleasant tree for shade, because the branches all go up,’ deserves to learn the name of the tree, and anything her mother has to tell her about it. But the little bungler, who fails to make it clear whether he is describing an elm or a beech, should get no encouragement; not a foot should his

mother move to see his tree, no coaxing should draw her into talk about it, until, in despair, he goes off, and comes back with some more certain note—rough or smooth bark, rough or smooth leaves,—then the mother considers, pronounces, and full of glee, he carries her off to see for himself.

Do you see it? Here are the benefits:

1. It trains their powers of observation.

When was the last time you were able to describe a landscape in such detail that you could still see it in your mind's eye months later? This is the kind of power that we grant to our children when we train them in sight-seeing exercises!

2. It develops their communication skills.

When we give our children the responsibility of describing things in nature to us, we challenge their expression skills. When we help them identify the names of flora and fauna, or even parts of an insect, bird, or reptile, they also expand their vocabulary and their store of ideas.

3. It cultivates children's truthfulness by discouraging exaggeration.

In nature study, when our children come back to us saying, "There were thousands of bees!" Miss Mason recommends us to pause and ask, "Thousands? Are you sure there were that many?" It helps our children keep their imaginations in check and be as accurate as possible. As a result, it also trains them in being truthful and avoiding exaggeration.

4. It encourages children to give detailed descriptions.

As Miss Mason recommends, we don't give information the child who's haphazard in his descriptions. Instead, we encourage them to pay attention and be more detailed so that they're rewarded with the name of the object they've described.

OTHER NATURE STUDY FAQS

Before we give you the list of resources needed, may we take some time to explain a few things relating to the use of modern-day technology for nature study. Consider this a mini-FAQs before we jump into a year of nature study!

Can we take photos?

Sure!

In Charlotte Mason nature study, we include what we call nature journaling, where you draw, sketch, or paint the things you find in nature. Because we live in the digital age, it's a good idea to take pictures using our phones (or even DSLR cameras), but they do not in any way replace the actual act of using pen and paper to record our observations. We recommend you to use these digital tools as a way to record your findings especially for fast-moving creatures like birds and butterflies, or even slow-moving ones like insects and caterpillars. But after you or your child takes the photo, we recommend still going for the actual act of nature journaling. This is why we may include smartphones or cameras in our list of resources needed, but know that these can be optional.

We actually have plenty of precedents of naturalists who took photographs of the objects they're studying. One prime example is the naturalist Gene Stratton-Porter, author of several classic novels set in the out-of-doors (such as "Freckles"), who was also a photographer and illustrator of natural history books.

Can we just watch these things on YouTube?

Sorry, watching videos may be educational by all means, but it's not a replacement for actually encountering nature as Miss Mason described nature study. Feel free to supplement with nature videos, but it's a poor substitute for the true joy and learning that happens when we expose our kids (and ourselves!) to nature! Not only are they getting their science foundation down, you're also doing wonders for their mental health! :)

Do we really need field guides? We can just Google, right?

For nature study, we recommend having field guides in your arsenal. However, we understand that it's not always easy to find the different field guides for all the types of nature things we want to study. As such, we will include a list of guides that we have found useful ourselves, and we suggest you use your own discretion as to which books you will be able to buy, which ones apply to where you are in the Philippines, and which to skip for now.

Check out this quote that explains why we need field guides, especially when we're just getting started:

For the first you will need the how-to-know books—these while you are getting acquainted; but soon acquaintance grows into friendship. You are done naming things. The meaning of things now begin to come home to you. Nature is taking you slowly back to herself. Companionship has begun.

~from Chapter 2, *The Lay of the Land* by Dallas Lore Sharp

We can use the Internet, right?

We use the Internet as a helpful tool but not as a crutch nor a replacement for nature study. For example, we can (and do!) use Google to help us identify, for example, a bird or a caterpillar we find. But before we run to do a search, we encourage our children to make careful observations, for example, of the shape, color, or habits of whatever creature we're observing.

For newbie nature students, we can use Google to help us identify the creature; the more we grow in the knowledge of nature, we encourage our children to make hypotheses: for example, does this bird's beak look like the one on the kingfisher we saw last week, or does it look more like a *maya's* (or Eurasian tree sparrow's)? These kinds of questions help us identify what kind of bird it can be even before we hit Search on our phones.

Some homeschoolers use apps that can identify flora and fauna using pictures. Feel free to use them. (In our case, we preferred to be old school, so we haven't explored the world of apps. Hopefully you can find some that can identify nature finds in the Philippines.)

RESOURCES NEEDED FOR ONE YEAR OF LESSONS

Here are our suggested resources for your foray into nature study:

Field Guides

- Field guides on birds
 - A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of the Philippines by Maia Tañedo et. al.
 - Photographic Guide to the Birds of Negros, Panay & Cebu by Philippines Biodiversity Conservation Foundation, Inc
 - A Field Guide to Flight: Identifying Birds in Three School Grounds by Amado C. Bajarias Jr (available as an e-book in this link: <https://unipress.ateneo.edu/product/e-book-field-guide-flight-identifying-birds-three-school-grounds>)
- Field guides on flowering plants
- Field guides on reptiles and amphibians
- Field guides on mammals
- Field guides on marine creatures
 - Snorkeler's Guide to Marine Life of the Philippines by Lee Goldman
- Field guides on fruits, vegetables, and crops
- A book on stars and constellations

Tools

- A smartphone with camera OR camera
- Binoculars
- Magnifying lens
- Insect jars
- Butterfly net
- Terrarium for caterpillars
- A heavy book for pressing wildflowers
- Tweezers (for picking up creatures that you shouldn't touch with your bare hands, like spiky caterpillars)

Art supplies (Choose your own preferred medium)

- A sketchpad or sketch notebook for nature journaling
- Pencils
- Colored pencils
- Watercolor pencils
- Watercolor
- Oil pastels
- Brush pens (if you want to add calligraphy decorations)
- Ink pens
- A homemade viewfinder (made of cardboard with a picture-frame shape cut inside of it)

Weather-related protection

- Umbrella and hats for rain and shine
- Raincoats and boots for rainy/muddy days
- Sunblock for sunny days
- Sunglasses for sunny days on the beach, if needed
- Insect repellent during rainy days and outings in swampy or bushy places

JANUARY: BIRDS

Invitation to the Outdoors: January

Charlotte Mason is quoted as advising parents to have their kids out of doors for “not two, but four, five, or six hours they should have on every tolerably fine day.” I admit, four to six hours outdoors seems to be the norm for kids who grew up during the 1970s and 1980s, but for this generation, kids seem so much harder to push out of the door.

Perhaps it’s partly because of the allure of gadgets and screen time. Or maybe it’s also because we don’t feel as “safe” these days letting our children roam free, and for good reason.

But let’s take a look at what she says about how much time we should give our children out of doors:

How much time daily in the open air should the children have? And how is it possible to secure this for them?... And long hours they should be; not two, but four, five, or six hours they should have on every tolerably fine day, from April till October. Impossible! Says an overwrought mother who sees her way to no more for her children than a daily hour or so on the pavements of the neighbouring London squares. (Volume 1, pages 43-44)

Benefits of Outdoor Time According to Charlotte Mason

Yes, Charlotte Mason is adamant about maximizing outdoor time for our children, for very clear benefits. Look at how applicable her words are not just to her own time, but even to ours:

For we are an overwrought generation, running to nerves as a cabbage runs to seed; and every hour spent in the open is a clear gain, tending to the increase of brain power and bodily vigour, and to the lengthening of life itself. They who know what it is to have fevered skin and throbbing brain deliciously soothed by the cool touch of the air are inclined to make a new rule of life, Never be within doors when you can rightly be without. (From Vol 1. Page 42)

Charlotte Mason highly recommends outdoor time, and in fact, describes the first six years of life as a time that should mostly be spend in the fresh air!

In this time of extraordinary pressure, educational and social, perhaps a mother’s first duty to her children is to secure for them a quiet growing time, a full six years of passive receptive life, the waking part of it spent for the most part out in the fresh air. And this, not for the gain in bodily health alone—body and soul, heart and mind, are nourished with food convenient for them when the children are let alone, let to live without friction and without stimulus amongst happy influences which incline them to be good.

Do you see it? The benefits aren’t just for the physical body, but also for our children’s heart, mind, and soul!

General weather conditions this month

January is typically a cool and relatively dry month in the Philippines. It's also a great time to observe birds, because we have plenty of migrating birds when it's winter in colder countries.

Nature Focus for this Month: Birds

Do you know that the Philippines is home to one of the largest number of species of birds? At last count, we had at least 731 species of birds, 227 of which are endemic—endemic means they exist only in the given location! Perhaps this is why we get plenty of bird watching enthusiasts even from other countries!

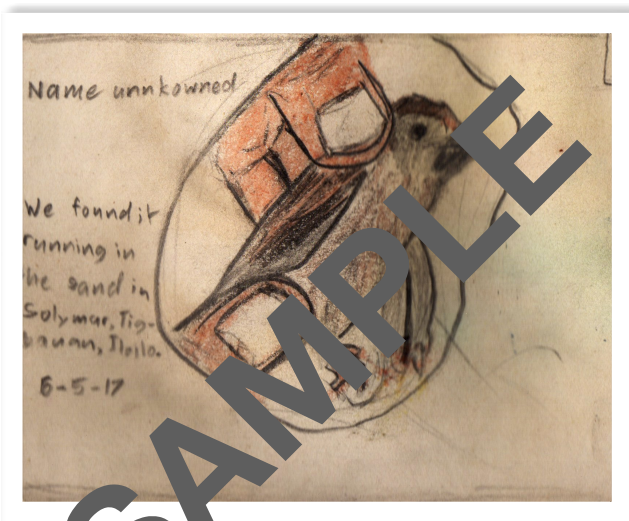
Although it varies a bit depending on where you are, even urban locations in the Philippines can have a wide array of birds. As one homeschooling parent said after our first bird watching event, "I'm surprised to learn there are so many different small birds. I thought all brown birds were *maya!*"

Our First Urban Bird Watching Experience

When we first started studying birds, we lived in the second floor of an apartment building perched right in the middle of a busy city street, with an SM Hypermart just across from us. We had a small balcony that opened to the open parking area below, which was just wide enough for one car to park. On the other side of the parking area was a tall concrete wall with

My oldest son was then around five years old, and we would kneel on our sofa right beside the sliding glass doors, our eyes intent on the lone *santol* tree sitting on our next-door neighbor's lot. Whenever we spotted a bird, my son would squeal with delight and I would mentally tick a check mark next to Nature Study. At that point, we weren't too good yet at identifying specific birds; simply spotting them and paying attention to them was a good first step.

Before long, we moved to a townhouse in



Nature journal entry by JD, male, aged 11

the suburbs. That took our birdwatching to greater heights. There we would take walks with the baby and find these loud, tiny yellow birds that had beaks shaped like a hummingbird's sipping nectar from the yellow bells. We soon learned these were olive-backed sunbirds.

Then, on our daily walks around the subdivision, we started noticing these black birds that looked like crows, with shiny feathers and bright red eyes. Using websites and blogs on urban birds, we confirmed that these were Asian glossy starlings.

By that time, we felt more confident in identifying birds, and having exhausted some of the common urban birds in blogs and images downloaded from the Internet, we invested in our first field guide, the Naturalist's Guide to Birds of the Philippines. We would spend time getting to know the birds in our subdivision, learning to identify them by sight and differentiating the shapes of their bodies, wings, and bills, as well as remembering their colors even as they flitted by.

During that time, we spent a lot of our afternoons sitting in the back of our tiny townhouse, which opened to vacant lots that we started to farm. One of our most memorable times was when we first spotted the Philippine pied fantail, which perched on a branch right in front of us, singing and dancing by wagging its little tail as if in time with its music!

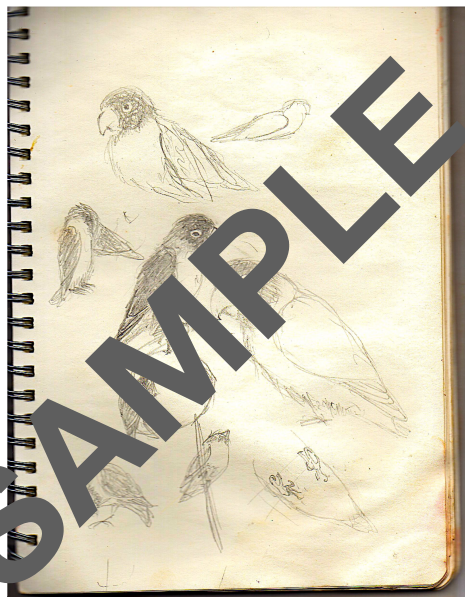
Water Birds and Migratory Birds

Then we moved again, this time to an apartment building just a few minutes' walk away from a riverside park. During that time, we had another baby, so our daily stroller walks made use of this free 2-kilometer stretch around the river. We were happy to find our sunbird friends there, too, mostly along the heliconia flowers.

The river afforded a glimpse into the lives of water birds. We watched egrets and terns hunt for fish—a couple of times, we stood transfixed as dozens of terns dove into the water again and again.

Another time, near sunset, we wondered at what seemed to be an army of swallows, hundreds and hundreds of them, it seemed, soaring just a few feet above the water, all of them heading toward the same far-off destination unknown to us. Were they all flying away at such a rate as a portent of some kind of weather disturbance, a coming storm perhaps?

Once in a while, we would find a fellow bird watcher in



Doodles of African lovebirds from JD's nature journal

complete gear, in long-sleeved suits and long pants, with a long lensed camera in tow. We made friends with one of them during our homeschool group bird watching; he happily shared with us his passion for migratory birds.

At about that time, we were also learning about migratory birds, which usually come in the country around October/November, and fly back to their homes around late January/February. So we were happy to find a like-minded comrade, and we spent a bit of time talking about the red-legged stilts and some of the other water birds that came to our country and city every year.

Migratory Birds in the Philippines

Do you know that the Philippines is a favorite destination for migratory birds? A lot of them take a “break” from the flight to warmer destinations in one of the many watersheds in the country, such as marshes, mangrove swamps, and coastal areas.

This is one reason why we chose to set birds in the month of January, because we not only get to study our endemic (refers to those that exist naturally in our locality) birds, we also have the chance of observing migratory birds. Of course, you will likely only be able to recognize them as migratory after perhaps observing a month without them, but as a kick-off, it’s enough to observe them and find them labelled as “migratory” in your field guide; then, a few months later, when the seasons change, you can look for them and NOT find them! :)

We hope this has whet your appetite enough for the start of the adventure before you and your family this month!

Drawing Birds

The challenge with drawing birds is that they fly away fairly quickly. What we usually do is that when we spot a bird, we try to identify it using our field guides so that we can then draw them based on a static image. For example, the nature journal entry to the right (mine) was drawn using colored pencils but drawing from a photograph on a field guide.

One way to up the challenge of drawing birds would be, after you've been comfortable with spotting them, identifying them, and drawing them from a static photograph would be to practice drawing them live! I wouldn't recommend it for a beginner, but my son who has been nature journaling for years has tried his hand at



Chestnut munia from Yen's nature journal, spotted then drawn from a field guide photograph

it, using his pet lovebirds as models—so at least, they're in a cage and can't easily fly away!

In any case, in this guide, we will stick with simply spotting the birds and drawing them from your field guide. That means you need to learn how to identify them quickly before they fly away! The following section discusses tips on identifying them:

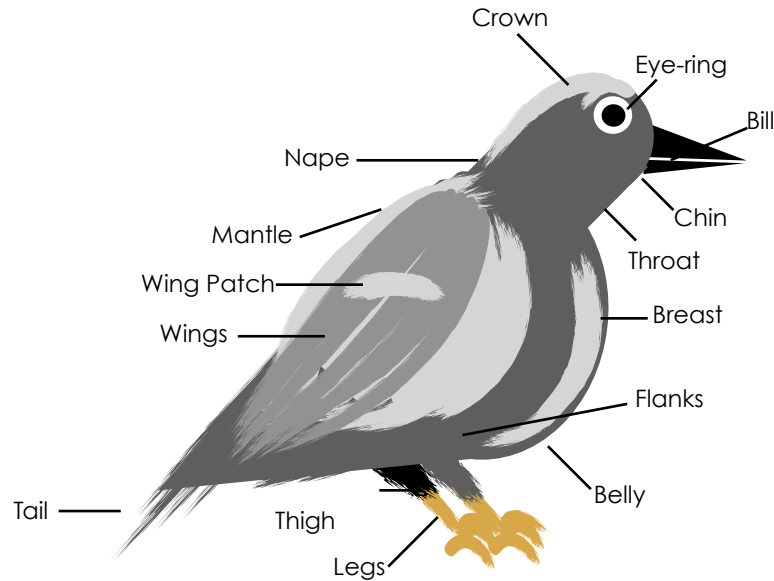
Identifying Birds

Some tips for identifying birds include:

1. Stay quiet! The quieter you are, the longer time you have for observing every detail of your subject.
2. It's best to use binoculars so you can have a closer-up look at the bird. Unless you have 20-20 vision, you may not immediately notice all the details. Many birds look alike from the distance. You need to be able to see them up close.
3. Discover what kind of bird it is based on its **feet and beak**. For example, predatory birds usually have hooked beaks and talons designed to grip their prey. Water birds tend to have thin, long, webbed feet, designed for swimming in the water.
4. Take note of the **size** and use your visual estimate to compare it to the details in your field guide. Sometimes a bird you spot flitting quickly away may look similar to the picture in your book, but when you check the size and it doesn't add up, it may very well be a different kind of bird.
5. Remember **the kind of location** where you spotted the bird, and also use that detail to check against your field guide. Most field guides indicate where a bird is most commonly seen, for example, in bushy areas, near rivers, or in the highlands, as well as which parts of the country. (Of course, this doesn't mean that you won't be able to find it where you are if your place isn't mentioned by name, but you can use it as a guide to deduce whether it's possible that you've spotted that particular bird.)
6. Sometimes, you might be able to spot and identify its general kind, for example, that it's a swallow, or a kingfisher. Then, you can go into detail by learning to remember the colors on their head, chest, a wing band if they have any, and tail. These color differences go into the specific naming of birds.

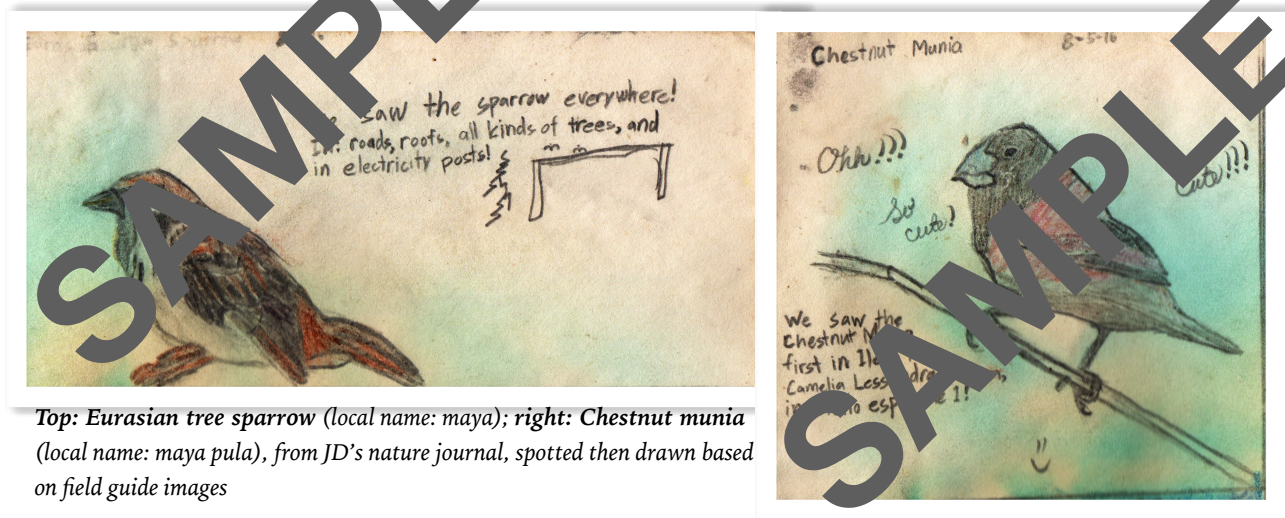
On the next page, we have created a chart below to help you identify the colors on the different parts of any bird you might spot. **IMPORTANT NOTE:** This chart is not intended to be used to quiz your child as you might remember being tested in traditional school; instead, we simply use it as a guide to help us identify the creatures we spot.

Bird Parts Chart



Some of the Most Common Birds in the Philippines

Here is just a starting list for you to start identifying birds in your neighborhood. Since I don't have high resolution, close-up photographs, I'm including illustrations from my family's nature journals just to get you a bit acquainted with these birds. Again, use this as a starting list but consult your field guide because the birds you find may not be exactly what we have here:



Top: Eurasian tree sparrow (local name: maya); right: Chestnut munia (local name: maya pula), from JD's nature journal, spotted then drawn based on field guide images



Left: Black-winged stilts or red-legged stilts (a migratory bird that frequents wetlands whenever the country); Right: Philippine pied fantail (local name in the Visayas: manok-paga), taken from JD's nature journal, spotted then drawn based on field guide images



Top: Pacific swallow, from JD's nature journal; Common Kingfisher, from Yen's nature journal, both spotted then drawn based on field guide images



Top: Barred rail (commonly hiding in bushes and shrubbery); Right: Philippine coucal, both from Yen's nature journal, both spotted then drawn based on field guide photographs

Other common birds in the Philippines include the following:

- Olive-backed sunbird
- Asian glossy starling (these are black birds that look almost like crows at first glance, but their feathers are shiny—hence the name glossy—and they have bright red eyes!)
- Cattle egret (you’ve probably seen these hanging out with cows and carabaos in the farm and rice fields?)
- Tern
- Yellow-Vented Bulbul
- Tailorbird (these have the most enchanting bird songs!)
- Golden-bellied gerygone
- Oriole
- Brahminy kite (we have these in our highland areas)

But don’t be limited to our list! Discover what pretty feathered friends are in your locality, and feel free to send us a message to share your discoveries! Follow our Facebook Page, too, facebook.com/CharlotteMasonPhilippinesWebsite where we’d love to share some of your nature journal entries!

Now, without further ado, let’s proceed with preparation and actual field work!

Preparation

- Binoculars
- A field guide: (one of the following would be good)
 - A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of the Philippines by Maia Tañedo et. al.
 - Photographic Guide to the Birds of Negros, Panay & Cebu by Philippines Biodiversity Conservation Foundation, Inc
 - (Birds in Universities)
- Nature Journal
- Art materials (pencil, colored pencils, watercolor pencils, watercolor)

Bird watching

She made special pets of the birds, locating nest after nest, and immediately projecting herself into the daily life of the occupants “No one,” she says, “ever taught me more than that the birds were useful, a gift of God for our protection from insect pests on fruit and crops; and a gift of Grace in their beauty and music, things to be rigidly protected. From this cue I evolved the idea myself that I must be extremely careful, for had not my father tied a ‘kerchief over my mouth when he lifted me for a peep into the nest of the hummingbird, and did he not walk softly and whisper when he approached the spot? So I stepped lightly, made no oise, and watched until I knew what a mother bird fed her young before I began dropping bugs, worms, crumbs, and fruit into little red mouths that opened at my tap on the nest quite as readily as at the touch of the feet of the mother bird.”

~from *At the Foot of the Rainbow* by Gene Stratton-Porter

Before you head out:

1. Think about possible places you can visit to observe your chosen subject. Options include parks or plazas with lots of trees, river walkways, farms, forests, swamps, universities with plenty of trees, beaches with mangroves, coconut trees, and other trees.
2. Schedule to be on the location either early morning or late afternoon.
3. Dress appropriately, and bring water and your nature study materials like binoculars, nature journal and art supplies.

On the location:

1. **The number one rule in birdwatching is: Stay quiet!** Birds will easily fly away when you make noise.
2. Use all your senses: you might see a bird flitting from tree to tree. Other times, you may not see it, but you may hear their sound. Pay attention to the different sounds. Look into shrubs, bushes, and tree foliage.
3. If you see a baby bird fallen from its nest, don't pick it up.
4. If you see an injured wild bird, don't pick it up with your hands; stay safe from possible diseases transmitted by wild birds. If absolutely necessary, use gloves or a piece of clothing. Then, contact your nearest DENR office.

Here are some great places to look for birds:

- rice fields
- in the branches of the yellow bell flower
- among heliconia flowers
- among the branches of trees

Observation Questions

Identification

Once you spot your subject, pay attention to the following:

1. What color is it?
2. What color are the wings? The head? The belly? The tail? Its bill? Its eyes?
3. What shape is its bill? Is it short and curved? Long and thin? Long and hooked?
4. What shape is its tail? Is it short? Long? Fan-shaped? V-shaped?
5. How large is it? Fist-sized? Larger? Smaller?
6. Where did you find it? Are you in the farm? Forest? Mangrove swamp?
7. Do you think it's a male or female? Why?

Habits

1. Is it alone? In pairs? In flocks?
2. What is it doing? Does it have anything in its beak?

Nature Journal Prompt

1. Find one of the subjects you've spotted in your field guide or on Google search.
2. If you have taken a picture on your phone, you can also use that as a guide for drawing. If not, the picture in your field guide or Google search is a good starting point.
3. Draw a pencil sketch of your subject and if you were able to identify it, indicate the name. If you're not sure, leave the name blank for now. You can fill this in later.

** For older students, add a more detailed description, such as what the subject was doing when you spotted it.*

** Here is an example of a nature journal entry by an older child, just to give you ideas on what you can include to describe your subject. Note: This is not a requirement that's set in stone; instead, encourage your child to start noting down his or her observations without compulsion!*

Bird Watching Continuation

If you can go back to the same location as you did for Lesson 1, so much the better! As veteran Charlotte Mason homeschool moms have shared, it's far more enriching to get to know a nature spot really well compared to exploring new places constantly as a fleeting experience. The more familiar you become with a given place, the easier it becomes to locate certain species of flora or fauna.

If so, do all the steps mentioned in Lesson 1, and use the following observation questions. We are listing the same questions as with Lesson 1 to make sure you pay close attention, but with some more questions added to help you deepen your understanding.

If you want to try a different location, follow the same steps mentioned in Lesson 1.

Observation Questions

Identification

Once you spot your subject, pay attention to the following:

1. What color is it?
2. What color are the wings? The head? The belly? The tail? Its bill? Its eyes?
3. What shape is its bill? Is it short and curved? Long and thin? Long and hooked?
4. What shape is its tail? Is it short? Long? Fan-shaped? V-shaped?
5. How large is it? Fist-sized? Larger? Smaller?
6. Where did you find it? Are you in the farm? Forest? Mangrove swamp?
7. Specifically, where did you spot it? In what kind of tree or flower or plant?
8. Do you think it's a male or female? Why?

Habits

1. Is it alone? In pairs? In flocks?
2. What is it doing? Does it have anything in its beak?
3. Can you observe it as it's eating? What is its food?
4. Listen to its bird call: is it the same always, or do you notice a difference?

Nature Journal Prompt

1. Find one of the subjects you've spotted in your field guide or on Google search.
2. If you have taken a picture on your phone, you can also use that as a guide for drawing. If not, the picture in your field guide or Google search is a good starting point.
3. Draw a pencil sketch of your subject and if you were able to identify it, indicate the name. If you're not sure, leave the name blank for now. You can fill this in later.

** For older students:*

- * add a more detailed description, such as what the subject was doing when you spotted it.*
- * consider copying in a line or a verse from a poem about birds that spoke to you.*

Observing a Bird's Nest

Try to locate a **bird's nest** and make observations on it. You may opt to visit the same location you did for either Lesson 1 or Lesson 2.

Here are some possible locations to look in:

- Under roof eaves
- In a secluded place in your backyard
- On a tree branch
- Inside a thickly-grown bush

Remember, birds typically hide their nests away from prying eyes. That's why they may not be easy to locate.

One way of locating a nest is by observing a bird that's flying with twigs or string in its beak. This is usually a sign that it's building a nest. Follow and observe where it's bringing its stuff.

(If you can't find a bird's nest, continue observing birds as outlined in Lesson 1.)

Once you find a nest, apply the following observation questions:

Observation Questions

Identification

1. What is the nest made of? Twigs? Mud? Trash?
2. Did you see what kind of bird goes to this nest? Is it a big, medium-sized, or small bird? What color is it? What color are the wings? What shape is its bill? Is it short and curved? Long and thin? Long and hooked? What shape is its tail? Is it short? Long? Fan-shaped? V-shaped?
3. Where did you find the nest? On a tree branch? Under the roof eaves? In a bush?
4. Are there eggs in it? What size, shape, and color are the eggs?
5. Can you spot the birds that go in it? Can you identify the male and the female? How do you know?

Nature Journal Prompt

1. Draw a pencil sketch of your subject's nest and if you were able to identify it, indicate the name. If you're not sure, leave the name blank for now. You can fill this in later.

** For older students, add a description of what the nest is made of.*

Observation Questions

Identification

Once you spot your subject, pay attention to the following:

1. What color is it?
2. What color are the wings? The head? The belly? The tail? Its bill? Its eyes?
3. What shape is its bill? Is it short and curved? Long and thin? Long and hooked?
4. What shape is its tail? Is it short? Long? Fan-shaped? V-shaped?
5. How large is it? Fist-sized? Larger? Smaller?
6. Where did you find it? Are you in the farm? Forest? Mangrove swamp?
7. Specifically, where did you spot it? In what kind of tree or flower or plant?
8. Do you think it's a male or female? Why?

Habits

1. Is it alone? In pairs? In flocks?
2. What is it doing? Does it have anything in its beak?

Nature Journal Prompt

1. Find one of the subjects you've spotted in your field guide or on Google search.
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** For older students, add a more detailed description, such as what the subject was doing when you spotted it.*

Thank you for downloading this free sample!

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