

## KEBUN CINA, IT'S NOTHING LIKE ITS NAME

A jungle trekking organized by the Sabah Society-Sandakan

By Dr. Zorina Khalid

On 14 July as early as 06:50 hrs., 14 of us (Arthur, Momin, Postar, Cede, Vui Soon, Andy Chock, Lee Poh Chin, Mary, Anna, Phoebe, Mdm. Goh and son Jack, Mr. Yeo and I) gathered at the car park of Sandakan Rainforest Park to embark on a 3-hour trek through Kebun Cina. We left our cars at this car park and proceeded to the entrance of Kebun Cina trail at the Cecily Road in the forestry van and Cede's 4WD. We thought and Mr. Yeo (MPS President) remarked that the entrance needed some clearing up and a lot of beautification work.

Our first encounter after the entrance signboard was the Gaharu tree shown to us by Postar. It had been injured at its lower trunk but the tree was saved as it had not produced the precious resin. There, Mary who was the only person wearing leech socks was bitten by some ants (she should have worn ant socks!). Next, we came to a huge *Shorea* tree. Its diameter was enormous and it had a pretty canopy so high up, that it caused my osteoarthritic neck some pain looking up. In many places we were shown the many small saplings of *Shorea multiflora*. This is a dipterocarp but it bears seeds without wings, thus explaining why the saplings are growing close to each other. There were lots of 'tongkat ali' *Eurycoma longifolia* along the path, the tallest I have ever seen were here too, and two were fruiting.

We were indeed lucky to come across a maiden's veil fungus that seemed to have a yellow lacy and showy undergarment. Mr. Yeo was Cede's model to picture with this lovely fungus. Soon after this, we saw a small plant that was covered by the hundreds or maybe thousands of tiny and puny baby spiders. Our photographers took splendid pictures of that.

Along the trail, there were also a number of rattan climbers that we had to avoid and we also saw a large diameter cane (most probably it is *Plectocomia mulleri*, rotan mantang). Lianas and other climbing plants were a spectacle to see, making their way up to the canopy. There were also a few small streams along the way with plain tea-coloured water and small fishes could be seen darting back and forth. After midway through the trail, the track seemed easier to walk through. Here, we saw hashers had just had their run as the path was "littered" with shredded paper and in some plastic markers to mark their running trail. Now we wondered should they use plastic strings or these shredded paper. Whatever they used, I think they should appoint someone to collect all these markers after their run.

Along the trail, there was also a deep pit that seemed to appear out of nowhere, however, on walking further down the trek we saw that it was connected to another deep trench and one can actually walk through a cave-like tunnel to exit into the pit. Near this trench we saw a plant with pretty small purple flower and Postar said the plant belonged to the Melastomataceae/Senduduk family.

Besides the ants, fishes and spiders, we did not come across other fauna. Arthur told us that some deer had been sighted at night by the Water Department workers (the night shift staff where their standby post is near the entrance of the forest). We could see a number of termite nests on the ground and on decaying trees. We even saw some very small termites that we initially mistook for ants, but Arthur corrected us. We also saw cicada casts that looked like giant worm casts. Cicadas live most of their life in the nymphal form and they live underground (Mexican cicada are known to live its nymphal stage for as long as 17 years, while their adult life is shortlived for just a few weeks but long enough for them to mate). I asked for how long does the Malaysian cicada live as a nymph – no one knows as nobody is patient enough to wait on the cicada nymphs here.

Some distance near the exit of Kebun Cina, we came across two long and narrow trenches that were about one foot deep. We were amazed to know the story behind the trenches, i.e. they were dug out by vandals to get at steel cables that were buried by the Japanese during the war. The last part of the trek was a bonus find for us as Postar showed us three of the four types of *Nepenthes* that are known to be found here. I now proudly proclaim that I can distinguish the *N. ampullaria*, *N. gracilis* and *N. rafflesiana*.

Among our group of 14 were an entomologist, a plant researcher, a world-renowned nature photographer, and our MPS President. So, you see we learned a lot from them while trekking and talking, and examining the many interesting plants and insects. Right in the middle of the trail while sitting and resting, we were also briefed by Mr. Yeo Boon Hai on the Sandakan Harbour Square Market. We were also enlightened about the names of birds by Cede, and Mary with her book on birds. So now, I also know how to tell the difference between the dollar bird and the bee-eater bird. Terrific indeed this Kebun Cina, a rainforest just near our doorstep (especially for Mdm. Goh who lives at Taman Tshun Nyen).

Our next trekking exercise will be through the Chinese Cemetery where Mr. Yeo will show us four well-kept Japanese graves among the Chinese graves. We were also promised brunch at Mr. President's scenic residence after the walk. Now, wouldn't you want to be a Sabah Society member?



Mr Yeo admiring the maiden's veil fungus.



Dr Zorina, posing with the giant *Macaranga gigantea* leaf (Telinga Gajah) while Mary is holding the smaller *Dipterocarpus confertus* leaf (Keruing Kobis), and Anna at the back.