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Shinrin-Yoku

Marcyn Del Clements

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Shinrin-Yoku

Velvet-fronted nuthatches,
a matched pair, hang upside down
on the guy wire stretching along
the bridge between the towers,
Belalong Canopy Walkway,

Ulu Ulu, Brunei, where five
towers rise above the forest floor.
In the breeze the bridge sways
ever so slightly. The nuthatches
make whisper songs, as they pick

the smallest ants I've ever seen
off the cables. Then the birds
fly east, up the Temburong River
where only a few researchers
and scientists are allowed to visit.

The sun floats westward, while
helmeted hornbills call far off.
We untie our picnic bag, pull out
deep-fried walking catfish, rice,
spicy beef, one hundred fifty feet

above green tree snakes and ferns.
From the canopy nearest the first
tower, golden mistletoe clumps
among the healthy leaves,
a commensalism that attracts

one of the rarest birds in Brunei,
the spectacled flowerpecker
that feeds on mistletoe berries,
seen just three times here
since first discovered in 2009.

Only one way up here, this far,
far place, beyond any village—
up eight hundred and fifty-seven
steps to the foot of the five towers.
Gibbons call, pre-dark, settling

onto their sleeping branches,
the nuthatches nestle together,
and wreathed hornbills court,
their bonding cries echoing
across the Ulu Ulu cloud forest.

*18 March 2019
Marcyn Del Clements*

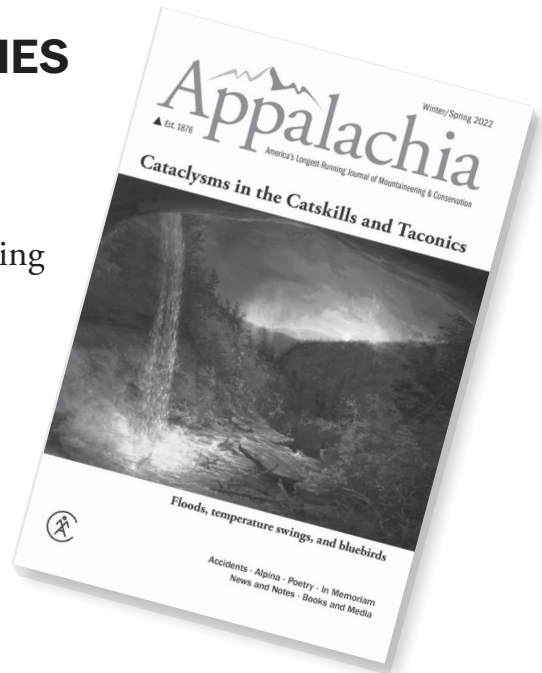
MARCYN DEL CLEMENTS has been a contributor to *Appalachia* for almost 30 years. In 2013 she traveled to Borneo on a birding trip, and again in 2019, this time to explore Kinabalu National Park for its endemic species. While on the island of Borneo, she also visited the tiny nation of Brunei. This poem's title is from the Japanese, meaning "forest bathing," in essence.

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