

# Birding Malaysia and Singapore July 2010

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## Introduction

Gail Mackiernan got in touch with me to do a three-day stopover trip to try and see some Malaysian birds and in particular, the mythical Rail Babbler, before her big trip to Sulawesi and Halmahera. Her other companions were Colin Campbell, Barry Cooper and Anthony Quinn. We spent two half days and one full day at Pantii Forest Reserve, recording 110 species and an additional 35 species elsewhere in Malaysia and Singapore.

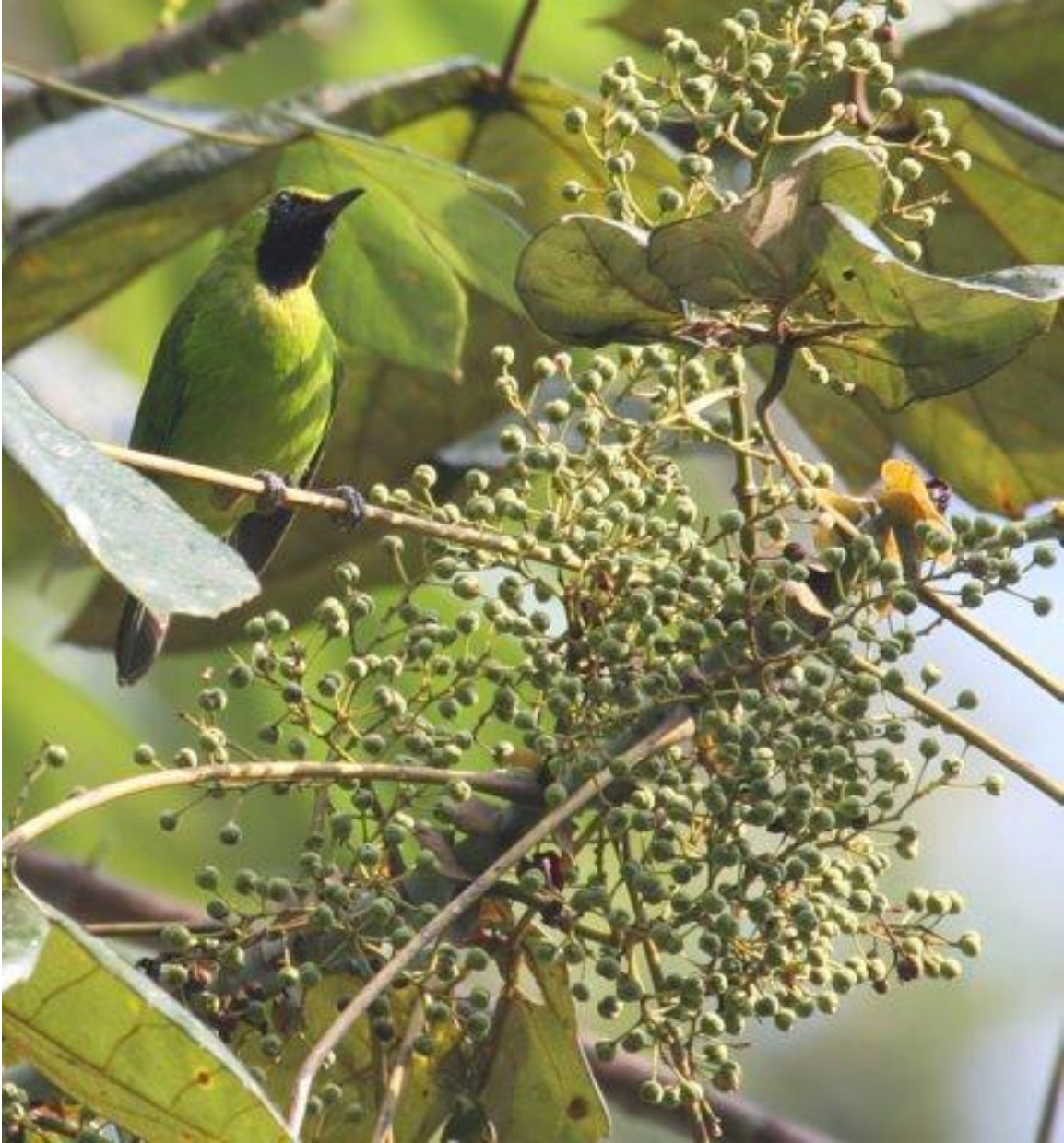
## Day One

We met at the lobby of Changi Village Hotel at around 8.30 am and while awaiting AQ's arrival, we birded the pleasant environs of coastal Changi. We saw 2 Oriental Pied Hornbills gallivanting outside the hotel and also picked up Common Goldenback, Red-breasted Parakeet, Tanimbar Corella and Olive-backed Sunbird.

AQ duly arrived at 9.30 am and we left Changi promptly for the long drive to Malaysia. We arrived at the sandy shores of Jason's Bay, just 90 minutes' drive from Kota Tinggi, on the east coast of Johor to attempt to see the Malaysian Plover.

We spent an hour from 2.00 pm and combed the beach for about 1 km but failed to see the cryptic plover. However, we saw two magnificent White-bellied Sea Eagles soaring in the sea breeze as well as Brahminy Kite, lots of Swift Tern perched on poles, Collared Kingfishers and around a stand of casuarinas, Black-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Common Iora and Greater Racket-tailed Drongo.

The high tide didn't help improve things and so we left for our major site, Pantii Forest Reserve.



Male Lesser Green Leafbird *Chloropsis cyanopogon* at Panti Forest Reserve. Photo © Colin Campbell.

We arrived at Panti Forest Reserve at 3.30 pm and drove past the deserted sentry post. There was a slight drizzle but some subdued bird activity. I stopped by the swamp to be greeted by a trio of swifts – the odd-shaped Silver-rumped Spinetail, and Grey-rumped and Whiskered Treeswifts. There were many stuff of interest at the swamp. We scoped a fine male Cinnamon-headed Green Pigeon to add to the many Little Green Pigeons we had already seen. We were awed by a male Wrinkled Hornbill that flew in to perch for some time in a tall dead tree and a Banded Broadbill.



Male Scarlet-rumped Trogon *Harpactes duvaucelii* at Panti Forest Reserve. Photo © Colin Campbell.

Moving past the swamp to the shrine, we found a superb male Jambu Fruit Dove, four Grey-and-buff Woodpeckers, a stunning male Scarlet-rumped Trogon, White-crowned Forktail and more bulbuls.

Eventually, we reached the first stream where we were greeted by calls of Great Argus and Indian Cuckoo. We also saw a fly-by Wreathed Hornbill and Raffles's and Chestnut-breasted Malkohas as well as a Black-and-yellow Broadbill.

A side trip to the temple trail, where good tall trees abound, failed to elicit any birds of interest except for another Scarlet-rumped Trogon and so we decided to call it a day at 6.00 pm.

We ended Day One with 81 species from three sites – Changi, Jason's Bay and Panti.

## **Day Two**

After a quick breakfast at the newly opened MacDonald's in Kota Tinggi, we headed for Panti and were ready by 6.00 am. We moved all the way to the first stream and then worked our way out, including another foray into the temple trail.

We managed to connect well with three different Red-bearded Bee-eaters and a perched Rufous-collared Kingfisher, and had good looks at White-bellied, Banded, Crimson-winged and Checker-throated Woodpeckers. The Great Argus was heard again and we also saw two Black Hornbills, our fourth hornbill of the trip.

After lunch and a short siesta, we were again back at Panti at 3.30 pm. This time, we birded the temple trail, and beyond the first stream until just before the second stream some 8 km in.

There was still some breeding activity for we found an Asian Drongo-cuckoo being fed by an Olive-winged Bulbul at the first stream and a Cream-vented Bulbul feeding its fledgling.

Our bird list was climbing steadily and we almost got our mega target just before 6.00 pm. This was near the second stream and we were about to call it a day when we heard our first Rail Babbler of the trip, just off the track. We quickly positioned ourselves and tried to lure the bird out with imitated calls. The bird moved in and got quite close. Unfortunately, this was when the heavens decided to open up and we were soon caught in a heavy downpour. All of us except CC retreated to the car. CC had an umbrella and he waited for 15 minutes in heavy rain but without avail. Eventually, he returned and we retreated to the town.

Our exciting Day Two gave us 86 species including the near-miss with the Rail Babbler. We resolved to try harder and after another excellent seafood dinner, we got to bed.

## **Day Three**

We were already at the Bunker Trail by 5.30 am and it was still quite dark when we got past the visitor centre. As this was our last day in Panti, we decided to head for the Rail Babbler site as soon as possible. A Buffy Fish Owl at the swamp proved a good early morning sighting and near the shrine, we got out of the car to investigate the bird activity.

Around 7.00 am, we got past the swamp after locating two Black Magpies and saw several Common Emerald Doves walking on the trail near the shrine. Suddenly, we heard that distinctive monotone whistle yet again just off trail, close to the shrine. Our hearts pumping furiously, we positioned ourselves. What followed was simply unbelievable! The Rail Babbler ran across the track and into the forest on the other side. We waited and then heard the bird call again. CC played a short burst from his ipod and we only had to wait a few minutes before it showed itself on an exposed branch, in clear view, just ten metres from us. It called and then proceeded to perform a courtship display, first bowing to the left and then to the right. It performed in this manner, oblivious of the excitement it was causing to the human observers, for over 15 minutes! After getting record shots, we left the Rail Babbler, still displaying, and gave each other, hi-fives. Mission accomplished!



Rail Babbler *Eupetes macrocerus* at Panti Forest Reserve - seen at last! Photo © Colin Campbell

We explored the temple trail and had good looks at a juvenile Malaysian Hawk Cuckoo. It gave a continuous low pitch call and got visits from its foster parent, a male White-rumped Shama.



Malaysian Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx fugax* at Panti Forest Reserve. Photo © Colin Campbell.

Moving deeper into the temple trail, we saw a flock of Little Green Pigeons feeding in a fruiting tree and located several juveniles. We also had good views of several Dusky Broadbills and the colourful Yellow-bellied Bulbul here.



Juvenile Little Green Pigeon *Treron olax* at Panty Forest Reserve. Photo © Colin Campbell.

Eventually, we decided to say goodbye to Panty Forest Reserve and her amazing birds at 12.30 pm and return to Singapore. Along the way, we met a couple of irate Singaporean bird photographers who were stopped by rangers asking for permits. We saw a ranger at his sentry post, gave him a friendly smile and then drove on without any incident.



Dusky Broadbill *Corydon sumatranus* at Panti Forest Reserve. Photo © Colin Campbell.

We had lunch at Kota Tinggi catching up on our notes before heading back to Singapore. We reached Singapore around 3.00 pm and arrived at Kranji Dam half an hour later.

We spent ninety minutes exploring the car park and open grassland. Our task of locating some of the more elusive common birds were not helped by a worker who was using a blower to clear the car park off freshly cut grass! Eventually, we managed to locate most of our target birds including Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker, Golden-bellied Gerygone and Pied Triller. We also located an Osprey and five Little Terns at the adjacent reservoir.

Our next stop was the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Our target was the Spotted Wood Owl. It had been roosting in a big fig tree in a car park and I was hoping to find it. Luck was



not with us however, for we found the tree in fruit with lots of Asian Glossy Starlings, Coppersmith Barbet and Pink-necked Green Pigeons but no owl.



Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis* at Botanic Gardens, Singapore. Photo © Colin Campbell

At 5.00 pm, we left the Botanic Gardens for Changi Village Hotel. We arrived just before 6.00 pm and still managed to squeeze in some birding into dusk locating a family of Oriental Pied Hornbills, scores of Red-breasted Parakeets, a Little Tern fishing at Sungei Changi and an Ashy Tailorbird before calling it quits.

We ended Day Three on 95 species, combining Panti, Kranji, Botanic Gardens and Changi Beach Park.



Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala* at Botanic Gardens, Singapore. Photo © Colin Campbell

It was a very successful trip. Three days and 145 species including our major target of Rail Babbler despite the late season and rainy weather. Other highlights included White-bellied Woodpecker, Wrinkled Hornbill, Rufous-collared Kingfisher, Scarlet-rumped trogon, Red-bearded Bee-eater, Malaysian Hawk Cuckoo, Jambu Fruit Dove, Cinnamon-headed Green Pigeon, Buffy Fish Owl, Black Magpie, Black-capped Babbler and White-bellied Erphonis.

## Species List

Great Argus *Argusianus argus*  
Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopus moluccensis*\*  
Rufous Woodpecker *Celeus brachyurus*  
White-bellied Woodpecker *Dryocopus javensis*  
Banded Woodpecker *Picus miniaceus*  
Crimson-winged Woodpecker *Picus puniceus*  
Checker-throated Woodpecker *Picus mentalis*  
Common Goldenback *Dinopium javanense*\*  
Buff-rumped Woodpecker *Meiglyptes tristis*  
Grey-and-buff Woodpecker *Hemicircus concretus*  
Red-crowned Barbet *Megalaima rafflesii*  
Yellow-crowned Barbet *Megalaima henricii*  
Blue-eared Barbet *Megalaima australis*  
Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*\*  
Brown Barbet *Calorhmapus fuliginosus*  
Oriental Pied Hornbil *Anthracoceros albirostris*\*  
Black Hornbill *Anthracoceros malayanus*  
Bushy-crested Hornbill *Anorrhinus galeritus*  
Wrinkled Hornbill *Aceros corrugatus*  
Wreathed Hornbill *Aceros undulatus*  
Scarlet-rumped Trogon *Harpactes duvaucelii*  
Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*\*  
Rufous-backed Kingfisher *Ceyx rufidorsa*  
Banded Kingfisher *Lacedo pulchella*  
White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*  
Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*\*  
Rufous-collared Kingfisher *Actenoides concretus*  
Red-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctyornis amictus*  
Malaysian Hawk-cuckoo *Hierococcyx fugax*  
Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus*  
Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus*  
Violet Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus*  
Asian Drongo-cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris*  
Raffles's Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus chlorophaeus*  
Chestnut-breasted Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus curvirostris*  
Blue-rumped Parrot *Psittinus cyanurus*  
Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot *Loriculus galgulus*  
Tanimbar Corella *Cactua goffini*\*  
Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*\*  
Long-tailed Parakeet *Psittacula longicauda*  
Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*  
Edible-nest Swiftlet *Collocalia fuciphaga*  
Silver-rumped Spinetail *Rhaphidura leucopygialis*

Brown-backed Needletail *Hirundapus giganteus*  
House Swift *Apus nipalensis*  
Grey-rumped Treeswift *Hemiprocne longipennis*  
Whiskered Treeswift *Hemiprocne comata*  
Buffy Fish Owl *Ketupa ketupu*  
Common Pigeon *Columba livia*\*  
Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*\*  
Common Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*  
Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata*\*  
Cinnamon-headed Green Pigeon *Treron fulvicollis*  
Little Green Pigeon *Treron olax*  
Pink-necked Green Pigeon *Treron vernans*\*  
Jambu Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus jambu*  
Great Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*\*  
Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*\*  
Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*\*  
Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus*\*  
Brahminy Kite *Haliaeetus indus*\*  
White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*\*  
Crested Serpent-eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus*  
Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus*  
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*\*  
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*\*  
Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*\*  
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*\*  
Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*\*  
Dusky Broadbill *Corydon sumatranus*  
Banded Broadbill *Eurylaimus javanicus*  
Black-and-yellow Broadbill *Eurylaimus ochromalus*  
Green Broadbill *Calyptomena viridis*  
Golden-bellied Gerygone *Gerygone sulphurea*  
Asian Fairy-bluebird *Irena puella*  
Greater Green Leafbird *Chloropsis sonnerati*  
Lesser Green Leafbird *Chloropsis cyanopogon*  
Blue-winged Leafbird *Chloropsis cochinchinensis*  
Rail Babbler *Eupetes macrocerus*  
Black Magpie *Platysmurus leucopterus*  
House Crow *Corvus splendens*\*  
Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*  
Dark-throated Oriole *Oriolus xanthonotus*  
Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*\*  
Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike *Coracina striata*  
Pied Triller *Lalage nigra*\*  
Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus speciosus*  
Black-winged Flycatcher-shrike *Hemipus hirundinaceus*\*  
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*

Black-naped Monarch *Hypotymis azurea*  
Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*\*  
Green Iora *Aegithina viridissima*  
Rufous-winged Philentoma *Philentoma pyropterum*  
Grey-chested Jungle-flycatcher *Rhinomyias umbratilis*  
Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis*  
White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*  
White-crowned Forktail *Enicurus leschenaultii*  
Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*  
Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*\*  
White-vented Myna *Acridotheres javanicus*  
Common Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa*  
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis*  
Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*  
Black-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus atriceps*  
Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goaivier*  
Olive-winged Bulbul *Pycnonotus plumosus*  
Cream-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus simplex*  
Asian Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus brunneus*  
Spectacled Bulbul *Pycnonotus erythrophthalmos*  
Yellow-bellied Bulbul *Alophoixus phaeocephalus*  
Hairy-backed Bulbul *Tricholestes criniger*  
Buff-vented Bulbul *Iole olivacea*  
Streaked Bulbul *Ixos malaccensis*  
Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia flaviventris*\*  
Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*\*  
Everett's White-eye *Zosterops everetti*  
Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*  
Dark-necked Tailorbird *Orthotomus atrogularis*  
Rufous-tailed Tailorbird *Orthotomus sericeus*  
White-chested Babbler *Trichastoma rostratum*  
Short-tailed Babbler *Malacocincla malaccensis*  
Black-capped Babbler *Pellornerum capistratum*  
Moustached Babbler *Malacopteron magnirostre*  
Sooty-capped Babbler *Malacopteron affine*  
Rufous-fronted Babbler *Stachyris rufifrons*  
Grey-headed Babbler *Stachyris poliocephala*  
Black-throated Babbler *Stachyris nigricollis*  
Chestnut-rumped Babbler *Stachyris maculata*  
Chestnut-winged Babbler *Stachyris erythroptera*  
Striped Tit-babbler *Macronous gularis*  
White-bellied Yuhina *Yuhina zantholeuca*  
Yellow-breasted Flowerpecker *Prionochilus maculatus*  
Orange-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum trigonostigma*  
Plain Sunbird *Anthreptes simplex*  
Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malacensis*\*

Red-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes rhodolaema*  
Ruby-cheeked Sunbird *Anthreptes singalensis*  
Purple-naped Sunbird *Hypogramma hypogrammicum*  
Olive-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*\*  
Little Spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostris*  
Thick-billed Spiderhunter *Arachnothera crassirostris*  
Yellow-eared Spiderhunter *Arachnothera chrysogenys*  
Grey-breasted Spiderhunter *Arachnothera affinis*  
Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*\*  
Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*\*

(An asterisk (\*) indicates a species not recorded from Panti Forest Reserve.)