

Birding Singapore 13-15 October 2013

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Mark Finn, owner of Birdwatching Breaks, contacted me about a stopover tour in Singapore for his group and so we plan a three-day break in October, the best month for seeing migrants. There were four in his party and all were eagerly looking forward to birding in a different continent after spending weeks in western Australia.

We started the tour on Day One with a relaxed breakfast cum birding session at Changi Village sipping coffee and enjoying the antics of awakening Tanimbar Corellas and a single Yellow-crested Cockatoo. The walk to the ferry terminal produced two Sunda Pygmy Woodpeckers and a few Red-rumped Swallows. At 7.45 am, we landed on Pulau Ubin and were duly greeted by the ever reliable Peregrine Falcon at the jetty. Adding to the cheer was a pair of Oriental Pied Hornbills as we boarded the minivan for the short ride to Chek Jawa. We were greeted on arrival at Chek Jawa by a herd of Wild Pigs and once past the kiosk and the old cemetery, saw our first flycatcher of the day – a shy Brown-chested Jungle-flycatcher, a globally threatened visitor from southern China.

Walking on the mangrove boardwalk, we were greeted by the melodious song of a few Straw-headed Bulbuls which some of us saw. Further along the boardwalk we had good looks at a Laced Woodpecker on a coconut tree before another stretch produced Arctic Warbler, a male White-rumped Shama, a pair of Oriental magpie-robins and a family of Ashy Tailorbirds for great views. As the boardwalk emerges from the mangrove into the exposed coast, we began to look for the Great-billed Heron that was supposed to frequent this bit of coast. We added Common Sandpiper and Striated Heron before finding a lone adult Great-billed Heron fishing about 100 metres away.

We finished the walk quickly as it was getting really warm despite the sea breeze. After a quick toilet break, we made our way to the viewing jetty to scope the waders roosting on the rocky island of Pulau Sekudu. We found three Bar-tailed Godwits, a Ruddy Turnstone, some Whimbrel, Common Sandpiper, a number of Grey Plovers, and Lesser Crested, Swift and Little Terns.

Despite missing on the junglefowl, we pronounced the morning on the island a great success, scoring 40 species in four hours, and after some really refreshing coconuts to quench our thirst, we left the island at noon. After lunch at a nice north Indian restaurant in Changi Village, blessed with a heavy downpour, we moved on to Pasir Ris Park, a small coastal park 15 minutes' drive away.

Pasir Ris Park was crowded with bikers and campers when we got there. Our first bird was our third woodpecker, a Common Goldenback, in a Yellow Flame tree. Next, we heard and then saw the tiny Golden-bellied Gerygone as it tested our patience by flitting around before posing briefly. The real surprise of the day came as I found two Spotted Wood Owls roosting in a tall tree. Not to be outdone,

we added a Buffy Fish Owl later and a Stork-billed Kingfisher to make the Pasir Ris stopover truly memorable.

Our last stop for the first day was Lorong Halus Wetland. The weather proved to be a challenge as it remained warm and humid. Our walk around the reedbeds was largely uneventful although we did see more Long-tailed Shrikes and a Yellow Bittern.

At the red bridge overlooking Serangoon Reservoir, we scanned for birds and found White-winged Terns feeding in numbers together with low flying swiftlets and swallows. Mark found a Sand Martin amongst these and then we moved over to the Sunrise Bridge on the Punggol side. Here we rested on a bench as we took turns scanning around for birds in the evening heat. We found a particularly lively dead tree that had at different times, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Black-naped Oriole, the usual mynas and starlings, several Daurian and two of the rare White-shouldered Starlings, and several Baya Weavers. Scanning the grassland around the dead tree proved to be fruitful as well and we added Lesser Coucal and Sooty-headed Bulbul to our growing lists.

At 5.00 pm, we decided to call it a day. We ended the day with 61 species seen and the wood owl clearly the winner of Bird of the Day.

We had an early start on Day Two and were already walking in the dark uneven trails of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve by 5.30 am. We heard six Collared Scops Owls and two Brown Hawk Owls but they were deep inside the forest and we could not lure them out. As it got brighter, we arrived at the edge of the golf course near MacRitchie Reservoir and located two Large-tailed Nightjars. As we made our way to the edge of the reservoir, the rain came and we took shelter in a golfer's shed. The foul weather proved to be challenging as the birds were very, very quiet and birding was quite challenging due to the poor light and rain getting into the eyecups of our binoculars.

About an hour later, the skies cleared and we made our way to Jelutong Tower. It was an enchanting sight to see the forests shrouded in mists. Bird activity occurred in spurts and only got going when the sun emerged through the dark clouds. It was such an occasion when a dull looking bird turned up at the canopy and proved to be the elusive Lesser Cuckooshrike, a bird that has not been seen in 15 years! It did not remain long however and flew off after a brief but definite view. Other birds that showed up included two Chestnut-bellied Malkohas, a flock of Long-tailed Parakeets, four Asian Fairy-bluebirds, three Greater Green Leafbirds, Common Hill Mynas, and the usual band of bulbuls, sunbirds and flowerpeckers.

As we trudged out of the forest, we added Forest Wagtail but the Red-crowned Barbets, happily chonking away, remained unseen. We left the forest at 10.30 am thoroughly wet but with 36 species in the bag.

Breakfast was a welcome diversion after which we opted to bird Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve as the weather remained threatening with frequent thunder claps. It was mid tide at the main river and we found some Common Redshanks on some exposed mud. The main hide was quiet except for Little and Great Egrets, and we decided to walk the route around the main pond. We found the waders not far

from the main hide. These were Common Redshanks, Pacific Golden Plovers, Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers, and Curlew Sandpipers. The walk around the rest of the route was largely uneventful as we failed to locate any more waders. We did however add a pair of Oriental Pied Hornbills, a Common Emerald Dove and a Purple Heron. Back at the visitor centre, we took a short break before continuing our exploration of the reserve's mangrove boardwalk. We were lucky here as we got our quarry – a striking male Copper-throated Sunbird – within five minutes.

Our last site for the day was Kranji Marsh, a short drive away. The rain had stopped but there was little bird activity. The long walk in and out was not as productive as expected and the ponds were quite devoid of life. Luckily, we did see a Malaysian Hawk Cuckoo, a Lesser Coucal and a few Yellow-rumped Flycatchers.

We had a late lunch before calling a day. Mark told me that we had broken the 100 species mark and we were hopeful of seeing even more, weather permitting.

Day Three saw us at Bukit Batok Nature Park at 7.30 am and staring at a fruiting fig tree by the carpark. A troop of Long-tailed Macaques was present as we saw birds coming into the tree in waves. Most were Pink-necked Green Pigeons and Asian Glossy Starlings but we did pick out one Lineated Barbet.

As it got brighter, we heard sea eagles calling as we climbed down the pavement to the quarry pond below. The pond was quiet but we heard White-crested Laughingthrushes as we descended and soon saw two birds by the wayside. After taking some photos, we moved on to find the Straw-headed Bulbul as both Allison and Jean had missed them on Pulau Ubin the day before. I saw a male Red Junglefowl but it proved difficult to locate as it retreated into the woods. At length, we arrived at the quarry pond but it took almost fifteen minutes of waiting before we found four birds high up the quarry.

Back at the carpark, we were reunited with Mark and also added Glossy Swiftlet to our list.

Our next stop was Bidadari Cemetery and we got there within 20 minutes. Unfortunately, it poured when we got there and it was challenging looking for birds and trying to stay dry. The open parkland habitat was however superb with migrants seemingly dripping from every tree. We found Asian Brown Flycatcher, Yellow-rumped Flycatcher and Brown-chested Jungle-flycatchers in the dozens. We also saw Laced Woodpecker, more Lineated Barbets, Rose-ringed Parakeets, Crow-billed Drongos, Asian Paradise-flycatchers, Daurian Starlings, Arctic and Eastern Crowned Warblers. We also saw scores of bird photographers and smaller numbers of birders. We found from talking to the others that we had missed a number of the birds there that as they also reported Black-backed Kingfisher, Asian Drongo-cuckoo, Blue-winged Pitta and Siberian Blue Robin. We were all enjoying a spectacular fall of migrants that was most unlikely to repeat itself as the whole area is scheduled to be developed next year. What a tragedy!

After nearly two hours checking each tree, we moved on to a blissful lunch in the north followed by a wader watching session at Lower Seletar Dam. It had stopped raining and we were once again roasted by the afternoon sun as we scanned the mixed sandy and mud flats for birds. We were dismayed to see two anglers on the beach. It triggered fears of a washout but we stayed and scoped, and found five Common Greenshanks, a Whimbrel and several Common Sandpipers. Our main target here was the

cryptic Malaysian Plover and we had almost given up before Jean found one for us to enjoy scoped views.

Mission accomplished, we left the dam at 2.00 pm for our last spot, Singapore Botanic Gardens. We tried walking the Symphony Lake area but it was not very birdy. After half an hour, we moved to the Ecolake area and our fortunes changes almost at once. We found both Wandering and Lesser Whistling Ducks, and added House Swift before finally finishing the tour at 3.30 pm.

We had done well despite the rain on two mornings, notching a decent total of 130 species, all except eight seen. There were many memorable moments, some challenging ones as well, but we did see some impressive species. Bird of the tour, hands down, was the charming Spotted Wood Owls.

List of Species Recorded on 13-15 October 2013

Species highlighted in yellow indicate those that were “heard only”.

#	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
1	RED JUNGLEFOWL	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
2	WANDERING WHISTLING-DUCK	<i>Dendrocygna arcuata</i>
3	LESSER WHISTLING-DUCK	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
4	SUNDA PYGMY WOODPECKER	<i>Dendrocopus moluccensis</i>
5	BANDED WOODPECKER	<i>Picus miniaceus</i>
6	LACED WOODPECKER	<i>Picus vittatus</i>
7	COMMON GOLDENBACK	<i>Dinopium javanense</i>
8	LINEATED BARBET	<i>Megalaima lineata</i>
9	RED-CROWNED BARBET	<i>Megalaima rafflesii</i>
10	ORIENTAL PIED HORNBILL	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>
11	ORIENTAL DOLLARBIRD	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>
12	COMMON KINGFISHER	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
13	STORK-BILLED KINGFISHER	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
14	WHITE-THROATED KINGFISHER	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
15	COLLARED KINGFISHER	<i>Todiramphus chloris</i>
16	BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
17	MALAYSIAN HAWK-CUCKOO	<i>Hierococcyx fugax</i>
18	ASIAN KOEL	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>
19	CHESTNUT-BELLIED MALKOHA	<i>Phaenicophaeus sumatranus</i>
20	LESSER COUCAL	<i>Centropus bengalensis</i>
21	YELLOW-CRESTED COCKATOO	<i>Cacatua sulphurea</i>
22	TANIMBAR CORELLA	<i>Cacatua goffiniana</i>

23	BLUE-RUMPED PARROT	<i>Psittinus cyanurus</i>
24	BLUE-CROWNED HANGING PARROT	<i>Loriculus galgulus</i>
25	ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
26	RED-BREASTED PARAKEET	<i>Psittacula alexandri</i>
27	LONG-TAILED PARAKEET	<i>Psittacula longicauda</i>
28	GLOSSY SWIFTLET	<i>Collocalia sculenta</i>
29	FORK-TAILED SWIFT	<i>Apus pacificus</i>
30	HOUSE SWIFT	<i>Apus nipalensis</i>
31	COLLARED SCOPS OWL	<i>Otus lempiji</i>
32	BUFFY FISH OWL	<i>Ketupa ketupu</i>
33	SPOTTED WOOD OWL	<i>Strix seloputo</i>
34	BROWN HAWK OWL	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>
35	LARGE-TAILED NIGHTJAR	<i>Caprimulgus macrurus</i>
36	COMMON PIGEON	<i>Columba livia</i>
37	SPOTTED DOVE	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
38	RED TURTLE DOVE	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
39	COMMON EMERALD DOVE	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
40	ZEBRA DOVE	<i>Geopelia striata</i>
41	PINK-NECKED GREEN PIGEON	<i>Treron vernans</i>
42	SLATY-BREASTED RAIL	<i>Gallirallus striatus</i>
43	WHITE-BREASTED WATERHEN	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
44	BAR-TAILED GODWIT	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
45	WHIMBREL	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
46	COMMON REDSHANK	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
47	MARSH SANDPIPER	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
48	COMMON GREENSHANK	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
49	COMMON SANDPIPER	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>
50	RUDDY TURNSTONE	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
51	CURLEW SANDPIPER	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
52	PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
53	GREY PLOVER	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
54	MALAYSIAN PLOVER	<i>Charadrius peronii</i>
55	LESSER SAND PLOVER	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
56	GREATER SAND PLOVER	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>
57	LESSER CRESTED TERN	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>
58	SWIFT TERN	<i>Sterna bergii</i>
59	LITTLE TERN	<i>Sterna abifrons</i>
60	WHITE-WINGED TERN	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
61	CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
62	BRAHMINY KITE	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
63	WHITE-BELLIED SEA EAGLE	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>

64	GREY-HEADED FISH EAGLE	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>
65	JAPANESE SPARROWHAWK	<i>Accipiter gularis</i>
66	CHANGEABLE HAWK EAGLE	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>
67	PEREGRINE FALCON	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
68	LITTLE EGRET	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
69	GREY HERON	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
70	GREAT-BILLED HERON	<i>Ardea sumatrana</i>
71	PURPLE HERON	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
72	GREAT EGRET	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
73	STRIATED HERON	<i>Butorides striatus</i>
74	BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
75	YELLOW BITTERN	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>
76	GOLDEN-BELLIED GERYGONE	<i>Gerygone sulphurea</i>
77	ASIAN FAIRY-BLUEBIRD	<i>Irena puella</i>
78	GREATER GREEN LEAFBIRD	<i>Chloropsis sonnerati</i>
79	TIGER SHRIKE	<i>Lanius tigrinus</i>
80	LONG-TAILED SHRIKE	<i>Lanius schach</i>
81	HOUSE CROW	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
82	LARGE-BILLED CROW	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
83	BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>
84	LESSER CUCKOOSHRIKE	<i>Coracina fimbriata</i>
85	PIED TRILLER	<i>Lalage nigra</i>
86	PIED FANTAIL	<i>Rhipidura javanica</i>
87	CROW-BILLED DRONGO	<i>Dicrurus annectans</i>
88	GREATER RACKET-TAILED DRONGO	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
89	ASIAN PARADISE-FLYCATCHER	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
90	COMMON IORA	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
91	BROWN-CHESTED JUNGLE-FLYCATCHER	<i>Rhinomyias brunneata</i>
92	ASIAN BROWN FLYCATCHER	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>
93	YELLOW-RUMPED FLYCATCHER	<i>Ficedula zanthopygia</i>
94	SIBERIAN BLUE ROBIN	<i>Luscinia cyane</i>
95	ORIENTAL MAGPIE-ROBIN	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
96	WHITE-RUMPED SHAMA	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
97	ASIAN GLOSSY STARLING	<i>Aplonis panayensis</i>
98	DAURIAN STARLING	<i>Sturnus sturninus</i>
99	WHITE-SHOULDERED STARLING	<i>Sturnus sinensis</i>
100	COMMON MYNA	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
101	WHITE-VENTED MYNA	<i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>
102	COMMON HILL MYNA	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>
103	SAND MARTIN	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
104	BARN SWALLOW	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>

105	PACIFIC SWALLOW	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>
106	RED-RUMPED SWALLOW	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
107	STRAW-HEADED BULBUL	<i>Pycnonotus zeylanicus</i>
108	SOOTY-HEADED BULBUL	<i>Pycnonotus aurigaster</i>
109	YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>
110	OLIVE-WINGED BULBUL	<i>Pycnonotus plumosus</i>
111	RED-EYED BULBUL	<i>Pycnonotus brunneus</i>
112	YELLOW-BELLIED PRINIA	<i>Prinia flaviventris</i>
113	ORIENTAL WHITE-EYE	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
114	ORIENTAL REED WARBLER	<i>Acrocephalus orientalis</i>
115	COMMON TAILORBIRD	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
116	DARK-NECKED TAILORBIRD	<i>Orthotomus atrogularis</i>
117	ASHY TAILORBIRD	<i>Orthotomus ruficeps</i>
118	ARCTIC WARBLER	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>
119	EASTERN CROWNED WARBLER	<i>Phylloscopus coronatus</i>
120	WHITE-CRESTED LAUGHINGTHRUSH	<i>Garrulax leucolophus</i>
121	STRIPED TIT-BABBLER	<i>Macronous gularis</i>
122	ORANGE-BELLIED FLOWERPECKER	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>
123	SCARLET-BACKED FLOWERPECKER	<i>Dicaeum cruentatum</i>
124	BROWN-THROATED SUNBIRD	<i>Anthreptes malaccensis</i>
125	COPPER-THROATED SUNBIRD	<i>Nectarinia calcostetha</i>
126	OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD	<i>Nectarinia jugularis</i>
127	CRIMSON SUNBIRD	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>
128	EURASIAN TREE SPARROW	<i>Passer montanus</i>
129	FOREST WAGTAIL	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>
130	BAYA WEAVER	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>