

# Birding Panti Forest, 12-14 June 2015

## (The Rail Babbler Tour)

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Rail Babbler walking into the open at Panti. Photo © Lim Kim Seng

Howard Winer is a retired cardiologist from San Francisco, California, USA who was into bird families and so we made arrangements to see some of his targets at the world famous Panti Forest Reserve in Johor, Malaysia. His main target was the monotypic Malaysian Rail Babbler, better known as simply Rail Babbler, and he called the specially arranged trip the Rail Babbler Tour. I was bemused. Yes, Panti is the best place in the world to see the highly sought after Rail Babbler but it is not an easy bird to see. It is a skulker that does not call regularly and wanders a lot, and it can take days of trying before any bird is heard. Of course, there are occasionally lucky encounters when one will cross your path when you least expect it but these moments are becoming rare.

So, early on the morning of Day One (June 12<sup>th</sup>), I picked up Howard and his wife, Diane, and we crossed the border into Malaysia without any hassle. Traffic at this time of the day was light and we were at Panti by 7.30 am. It was quiet at the headquarters, so we moved on till we reached the shrine.



A Crested Serpent Eagle perched high up above Bunker Trail. Photo © Lim Kim Seng

One of the first birds we saw here was an adult Crested Serpent Eagle. It was shy and flew off as we approached. We birded here for an hour adding the rarely seen Rufous Piculet and the beautiful Rufous-chested Flycatcher but could not find any evidence of Rail Babbler. We also explored the first stream for a while before moving on all the way to the 8 km stream. As it was quiet, we retraced our steps and finished our birding by 11.30 am.

We came back again at 4.00 pm but it was even quieter than the morning. We did however add Red-billed Malkoha, Dusky Broadbill and Grey-bellied Bulbul. There was no sign of the Rail Babbler.

We made an early start for Day Two, reaching Panti by 5.45 am. We did not find any calling frogmouths but we did see three Large-tailed Nightjars, and hear a Malaysian Eared Nightjar and a Brown Hawk Owl. As dawn broke, we took the opportunity to explore the scrubby area at the 8 km mark, adding Black-naped Oriole, Yellow-vented Bulbul, Hill Myna and Paddyfield Pipit. After a short while, we were back in



the forest once again and we began the process of listening for Rail Babbler, stopping at the 5 km stream, the shrine and the headquarters. We finished our birding by 11.00 am.



Female Red-naped Trogon at the 5 km stream area, Panti. Photo © Lim Kim Seng

We came back again at 4.00 pm and took our time to explore the temple trail and the 5 km stream. After two hours, we gave up and even though we had fun chasing a flock of White-bellied Woodpeckers, we did not see them as they moved on quickly. Sadly, we still had not heard any calling Rail Babblers and Howard was getting worried on missing this big one.

On our last day, we opted for a late start and only reached Panti at 6.50 am. It was do or die day, so we made another attempt to find the Rail Babbler at the shrine and 5km stream but once again, the Rail Babbler was silent. Then, our luck improved. We found a group of birders, including my brother, just 500 metres from the 5 km stream. They had heard the Rail Babbler. We joined in the search but didn't see it even though it called once or twice.

We drove on all the way to the 8 km stream but once again, there was no sign of the elusive one. Then, it happened! Shortly after we passed the temple trail, I heard it! We were out of the car in a flash and stood at the bottom of a slope with a pool in front of us. It took just five minutes and we had the bird in view for almost ten minutes. What a climax! Howard had his most wanted bird at last and I was able to

get photos and a video of the lone bird. Mission accomplished, we returned to the hotel, checked out and drove back to Singapore in a much lighter mood than the last couple of days.

Over two-and-a-half days, we had recorded 119 species of birds including the prized Rail Babbler. We also saw eleven species of mammals which included all five possible lowland primates.



A pair of Checker-throated Woodpeckers engaged in courtship feeding or is it kissing? Photo © Lim Kim Seng

### **A Checklist of the Birds Recorded at Panti Forest Reserve on 12-14 June 2015**

Sequence, taxonomy and nomenclature follow IOC. Species highlighted in yellow indicate those heard only while species marked with an asterisk denote those that were recorded outside Panti's boundaries.

#	English Name	Scientific Name
1	Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
2	Black-winged Kite*	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
3	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
4	Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
5	White-bellied Sea Eagle*	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
6	Rock Dove*	<i>Columba livia</i>
7	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
8	Common Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
9	Zebra Dove	<i>Geopelia striata</i>
10	Little Green Pigeon	<i>Treron olax</i>
11	Pink-necked Green Pigeon	<i>Treron vernans</i>
12	Raffles's Malkoha	<i>Rhinortha chlorophaea</i>
13	Red-billed Malkoha	<i>Zanlostomus javanicus</i>
14	Chestnut-breasted Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus curvirostris</i>
15	Chestnut-bellied Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus sumatranus</i>
16	Asian Koel*	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
17	Violet Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus</i>
18	Banded Bay Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sonneratii</i>
19	Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis merulinus</i>
20	Rusty-breasted Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sepulcralis</i>
21	Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo	<i>Surniculus lugubris</i>
22	Indian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>
23	Brown Hawk-Owl	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>
24	Malaysian Eared Nightjar	<i>Lyncornis temminckii</i>
25	Large-tailed Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus macrurus</i>
26	Grey-rumped Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne longipennis</i>
27	Whiskered Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne comata</i>
28	Glossy Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>
29	Brown-backed Needletail	<i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>
30	House Swift*	<i>Apus nipalensis</i>
31	Red-naped Trogon	<i>Harpactes kasumba</i>
32	Scarlet-rumped Trogon	<i>Harpactes duvaucelii</i>
33	Banded Kingfisher	<i>Lacedo pulchella</i>
34	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
35	Collared Kingfisher*	<i>Todiramphus chloris</i>
36	Blue-eared Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo meninting</i>
37	Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher	<i>Ceyx erithaca</i>
38	Red-bearded Bee-eater	<i>Nyctyornis amictus</i>
39	Blue-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops viridis</i>
40	Oriental Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>

41	Red-crowned Barbet	<i>Megalaima rafflesii</i>
42	Blue-eared Barbet	<i>Megalaima australis</i>
43	Brown Barbet	<i>Caloramphus fuliginosus</i>
44	Rufous Piculet	<i>Sasia abnormis</i>
45	White-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus javensis</i>
46	Banded Woodpecker	<i>Chrysophlegma miniaceum</i>
47	Checker-throated Woodpecker	<i>Chrysophlegma mentale</i>
48	Crimson-winged Woodpecker	<i>Picus puniceus</i>
49	Orange-backed Woodpecker	<i>Reinwardtipicus validus</i>
50	Rufous Woodpecker	<i>Micropternus brachyurus</i>
51	Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus galgulus</i>
52	Blue-rumped Parrot	<i>Psittinus cyanurus</i>
53	Banded Broadbill	<i>Eurylaimus javanicus</i>
54	Black-and-yellow Broadbill	<i>Eurylaimus ochromalus</i>
55	Dusky Broadbill	<i>Corydon sumatranus</i>
56	Golden-bellied Gerygone	<i>Gerygone sulphurea</i>
57	Black-winged Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus hirundinaceus</i>
58	Large Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis virgatus</i>
59	Rufous-winged Philentoma	<i>Philentoma pyroptera</i>
60	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
61	Green Iora	<i>Aegithina viridissima</i>
62	Lesser Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina fimbriata</i>
63	Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus speciosus</i>
64	White-bellied Erpornis	<i>Erpornis zantholeuca</i>
65	Dark-throated Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthonotus</i>
66	Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>
67	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
68	Malaysian Pied Fantail	<i>Rhipidura javanica</i>
69	Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>
70	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
71	Large-billed Crow*	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
72	Rail-babbler	<i>Eupetes macrocerus</i>
73	Black-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus atriceps</i>
74	Grey-bellied Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cyaniventris</i>
75	Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>
76	Olive-winged Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus plumosus</i>
77	Cream-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus simplex</i>
78	Asian Red-eyed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus brunneus</i>
79	Spectacled Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus erythrophthalmos</i>
80	Finsch's Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus finschii</i>
81	Yellow-bellied Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus phaeocephalus</i>



82	Hairy-backed Bulbul	<i>Tricholestes criniger</i>
83	Buff-vented Bulbul	<i>Iole olivacea</i>
84	Streaked Bulbul	<i>Ixos malaccensis</i>
85	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>
86	Yellow-bellied Prinia	<i>Prinia flavicentris</i>
87	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
88	Dark-necked Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus atrogularis</i>
89	Rufous-tailed Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sericeus</i>
90	Grey-headed Babbler	<i>Stachyris poliocephala</i>
91	Chestnut-rumped Babbler	<i>Stachyris maculata</i>
92	Chestnut-winged Babbler	<i>Stachyris erythroptera</i>
93	Rufous-fronted Babbler	<i>Stachyridopsis rufifrons</i>
94	Pin-striped Tit-Babbler	<i>Macronous gularis</i>
95	Fluffy-backed Tit-Babbler	<i>Macronous ptilosus</i>
96	Horsfield's Babbler	<i>Malcocincla sepiaria</i>
97	Moustached Babbler	<i>Malacopteron magnirostre</i>
98	Sooty-capped Babbler	<i>Malacopteron affine</i>
99	White-chested Babbler	<i>Trichastoma rostratum</i>
100	Black-capped Babbler	<i>Pellorneum capistratum</i>
101	Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>
102	Asian Glossy Starling	<i>Aplonis panayensis</i>
103	Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>
104	Javan Myna	<i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>
105	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
106	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
107	White-crowned Forktail	<i>Enicurus leschenaulti</i>
108	Rufous-chested Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula dumetoria</i>
109	Blue-winged Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>
110	Yellow-breasted Flowerpecker	<i>Prionochilus maculatus</i>
111	Crimson-breasted Flowerpecker	<i>Prionochilus percussus</i>
112	Orange-bellied Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>
113	Ruby-cheeked Sunbird	<i>Chalcoparia singalensis</i>
114	Purple-naped Sunbird	<i>Hypogramma hypogrammicum</i>
115	Van Hasselt's Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma brasiliana</i>
116	Temminck's Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga temminckii</i>
117	Little Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>
118	Eurasian Tree Sparrow*	<i>Passer montanus</i>
119	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>