

Birding Singapore – 15th & 16th August 2015

Text & Photos by Lim Kim Seng (ibisbill@yahoo.com)



A family of Smooth-coated Otters coming ashore at MacRitchie Reservoir. Photo © Lim Kim Seng

I met Tad Simons and his daughter, Claire, and we were soon standing at the boundary of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, Singapore's largest protected area and home to her last surviving rainforest biodiversity. It was slow going as the trail was undulating and rocky, and one wrong step could mean a painful twisted ankle. It was dark as it was just a few days after new moon and we heard a few Sunda Scops Owls. They were unfortunately distant and we moved on to the edge of MacRitchie Reservoir where we saw quite a few Large-tailed Nightjars hawking for insects. We reached the reservoir at 7.00 am and waited for the dawn chorus to commence. The bats began to dwindle and after some time, we saw our first swiftlets. One of the first birds we saw were Pacific Swallows on feeding flights low over the lake. Soon, we saw flocks of Pink-necked Green Pigeons to be followed by Long-tailed Parakeets and Asian Glossy Starlings. Birds nearer the ground included the colourful White-throated Kingfisher, Olive-

winged and Yellow-vented Bulbuls, Dark-necked and Ashy Tailorbirds, Brown-throated Sunbird and a female Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker. An adult Brahminy Kite also graced our presence with a flypast over lake but there was no sign of Grey-headed Fish Eagle or Changeable Hawk Eagle, two raptors that were regulars. More excitement followed in the form of a group of Smooth-coated Otters that emerged from the lake to try and cross to the golf course. Perhaps intimidated by the presence of runners, the group turned around and ran back to the safety of the lake. They disappeared in a matter of seconds!

We had time, so we walked eastwards along the edge of the reservoir to a clump of fig trees. It was gloomy and the trees were full of green pigeons, starling and mynas. A few rounds of scanning soon produced Lineated and Coppersmith Barbets and a few of the cracking Asian Fairy-bluebirds.

At 8.15 am, we decided to walk back to the forest and were soon at the upper deck of Jelutong Tower. It was full of noisy kids and it was a full ten minutes, when they left, before something resembling serenity returned to the forest of green all around us. The sun was up but the birds were few and far between other than the green pigeons, parakeets, hanging parrots, mynas and starling. A Blue-throated Bee-eater posed for us before we found two of the morning's highlights, Chestnut-bellied Malkoha, flying in.

The walk out was quiet as expected but we did well in getting close up views of a flock of Pin-striped Tit-babbler and a pair of Chestnut-winged Babblers.

The four hour walk in the rainforest produced 41 species and we stopped by a coffee shop for some rest and breakfast.

At 11.00 am, we were birding again, this time in the hilly area around Bukit Batok Nature Park. This was a hill that had been converted into a rubber plantation and granite quarry a century ago but, thankfully, these activities had stopped and it has been set aside as a nature park. Its claim to fame is as a place for four birds that are tricky to see in Singapore including the globally vulnerable Straw-headed Bulbul. We did well in seeing four bulbuls as well as Glossy Swiftlet and White-crested Laughingthrush. The only bird we missed was the Lineated Barbet but we had already seen that at MacRitchie Reservoir.

A half hour drive got us to the northern coast of Singapore and Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. It was warm and humid, and we got our gear and explored the carpark and visitor centre. Both were quiet except for the water monitors guarding the ponds. We moved on to the bridge overlooking the river that gave the reserve its name. It was high tide and there was very little action in the mangroves. We did however spot a Stork-billed Kingfisher and two Common Sandpipers. Fortunately, there was some exposed mud in the main pond and we saw Intermediate and Little Egrets feeding with three Milky Storks (from the Zoo). There were also quite a few Common Redshanks and Common Greenshanks, a Marsh Sandpiper and a Pacific Golden Plover. We decided to walk around the main pond and see if there was anything else of interest. Unfortunately, we did not see anything new except for some Grey and Striated Herons at the coast.

Back at the visitor centre, we decided to explore the mangrove boardwalk and one of the first birds we saw was a family of Oriental Pied Hornbills, sitting low and preening in plain sight. At the mangroves, we

also located a pair of Copper-throated Sunbirds, more Collared Kingfishers and a basking Estuarine Crocodile. We left the reserve soon after.

After a late lunch at a nearby cafe, we decided to call it a day.



An Oriental Pied Hornbill at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. Photo © Lim Kim Seng

Day Two started in a more relaxed fashion as we headed for the sleepy village at Changi on the eastern tip of Singapore. We got out of our car and were happy to see three birds almost immediately in a sea almond tree – Pink-necked Green Pigeon, Spotted Dove and Rufous Woodpecker, the last being a new addition to our trip list. Walking towards the hawker centre, we had to cross a narrow concrete bridge over the Sungei Changi and we were happy to add two more new birds – Tanimbar Corella and Red-breasted Parakeet.

After a delicious breakfast of hot drinks and *roti prata*, we waited at the jetty for the boat ride to Pulau Ubin, a rustic island popular with locals and tourists alike. We were lucky as the boatman motioned us to follow him after just five minutes.



A male Red Junglefowl walking along the coast at Pulau Ubin. Photo © Lim Kim Seng

We arrived at the island at 8.15 am and took the time to explore the southern part of the island which is mainly forest and mangrove. We saw a Malaysian Pied Fantail and an Oriental Pied Hornbill but it was otherwise quiet, so we went back to Ubin town to hire a minivan. At 9.00 am, we were at the eastern tip of the island, called Tanjong Chek Jawa. This is a rich spot of both terrestrial and marine habitats, and we were promptly greeted by the resident wild boars. The walk through the mangrove boardwalk was uneventful but as we came out to the coast, we flushed (accidentally) a flock of 14 Red Junglefowls. Joining them were White-bellied Sea Eagles and Brahminy Kites but the hoped for Great-billed Heron was nowhere to be seen.

At 10.45 am, we boarded our minivan and stopped at Pekan Quarry, an abandoned granite quarry close to the main town. We spent an hour checking the pond. There were several Grey Herons, with some collecting nesting materials, a Blue-eared Kingfisher, an Oriental Dollarbird, two Brahminy Kites and an Oriental Pied Hornbill. It was very warm at this stage and we decided to retreat to the town. We bought some fresh coconuts to help us cool down and then it was time to head back to the mainland.

After lunch of *nasi ayam penyet* and *maggi goreng*, we stopped by Pasir Ris Park. We picked up three woodpeckers at this park – Sunda Pygmy, Laced and Common Flameback -, and numerous Collared Kingfishers. We also saw some tame Red Junglefowls and explored the mangroves.

Our last spot was Lorong Halus Wetland. We stopped by the reedbeds and were rewarded with sightings of a Savanna Nightjar, Long-tailed Shrike, Paddyfield Pipit and Baya Weaver. At 3.45 pm, we decided to call it a day.

It had been a rewarding and enjoyable two days. We recorded 88 species of birds and also had memorable encounters with other wildlife including Smooth-coated Otter, Long-tailed Macaque, Wild Boar, Malayan Water Monitor, Clouded Monitor, Five-banded Gliding Lizard, Estuarine Crocodile, Forest Snakehead and Giant Mudskipper.



A female Laced Woodpecker at Pasir Ris Park. Photo © Lim Kim Seng

A Checklist of the Birds Recorded in Singapore on 15th & 16th August 2015

Nomenclature, sequence and taxonomy follow IOC. Species highlighted in yellow indicate those that were “heard only”.

#	English Name	Scientific Name
1	Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
2	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
4	Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
5	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
6	Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
7	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
8	White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
9	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
10	Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
11	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
12	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
13	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
14	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
15	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
16	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
17	Red Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
18	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
19	Zebra Dove	<i>Geopelia striata</i>
20	Pink-necked Green Pigeon	<i>Treron vernans</i>
21	Chestnut-bellied Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus sumatranus</i>
22	Sunda Scops Owl	<i>Otus lempiji</i>
23	Large-tailed Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus macrurus</i>
24	Savanna Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus affinis</i>
25	Glossy Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>
26	Oriental Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>
27	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
28	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
29	Collared Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus chloris</i>
30	Blue-eared Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo meninting</i>
31	Blue-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops viridis</i>
32	Oriental Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>
33	Lineated Barbet	<i>Megalaima lineata</i>
34	Red-crowned Barbet	<i>Megalaima rafflesii</i>
35	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
36	Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus moluccensis</i>

37	Banded Woodpecker	<i>Chrysophlegma miniaceum</i>
38	Laced Woodpecker	<i>Picus vittatus</i>
39	Common Flameback	<i>Dinopium javanense</i>
40	Rufous Woodpecker	<i>Micropternus brachyurus</i>
41	Tanimbar Corella	<i>Cacatua goffiniana</i>
42	Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus galgulus</i>
43	Red-breasted Parakeet	<i>Psittacula alexandri</i>
44	Long-tailed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula longicauda</i>
45	Golden-bellied Gerygone	<i>Gerygone sulphurea</i>
46	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
47	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
48	Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>
49	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
50	Malaysian Pied Fantail	<i>Rhipidura javanica</i>
51	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
52	Straw-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus zeylanicus</i>
53	Black-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus atriceps</i>
54	Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
55	Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>
56	Olive-winged Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus plumosus</i>
57	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
58	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>
59	Yellow-bellied Prinia	<i>Prinia flavicentris</i>
60	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
61	Dark-necked Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus atrogularis</i>
62	Rufous-tailed Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sericeus</i>
63	Ashy Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus ruficeps</i>
64	Chestnut-winged Babbler	<i>Stachyris erythroptera</i>
65	Pin-striped Tit-Babbler	<i>Macronous gularis</i>
66	Abbott's Babbler	<i>Malcocincla abbotti</i>
67	Short-tailed Babbler	<i>Malcocincla malaccensis</i>
68	White-crested Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax leucolopus</i>
69	Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
70	Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>
71	Asian Glossy Starling	<i>Aplonis panayensis</i>
72	Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>
73	Javan Myna	<i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>
74	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
75	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
76	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
77	Blue-winged Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>

78	Orange-bellied Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>
79	Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum cruentatum</i>
80	Brown-throated Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes malacensis</i>
81	Copper-throated Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma calcostetha</i>
82	Olive-backed Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>
83	Crimson Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>
84	Little Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>
85	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
86	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
87	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
88	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>



Paddyfield Pipit at Lorong Halus Wetland. Photo © Lim Kim Seng