

SINGAPORE-MALAYSIA BIRD TOUR 17-18 MAY 2012

By Lim Kim Seng (ibisbill@yahoo.com)

I met my clients, Peter and Adrienne Day, who hailed from Adelaide, South Australia, at the hotel lobby at 5.30 am and we were quickly on our way. As we left the hotel for the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, the rain became heavier and we headed north in pouring rain marked by frequent thunderclaps. It was still raining when we reached Dunearn Road and so I decided to go an early breakfast at a nearby MacDonald's Restaurant. Some forty-five minutes later, we had finished our breakfast and the rain had lightened up. We reached the end of Rifle Range Road to find that it was still raining, albeit lightly. Undeterred, with umbrellas and raincoats ready, we trudged down the muddy, slippery trail that leads to the heart of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve at 6.45 am, with a gloomy dawn already visible. No night birds were heard and we were soon at Jelutong Tower. The forests all round us were cloaked in a ghostly wet mist, and we scanned from the tower, with raindrops falling all round us. The birds trickled in, bit by bit, and we had good looks at a pair of Asian Fairy-bluebirds that perched close by. Soon other birds appeared and these included a Banded Woodpecker, a Blue-throated Bee-eater, Pink-necked and Thick-billed Green Pigeons, Long-tailed Parakeet and Asian Red-eyed Bulbuls. As usual Purple-throated Sunbirds performed fantastically but the highlight of the rainy morning belonged to a Blue-rumped Parrot passing close enough for us to see its reddish underwings.

We stayed at the tower till 9.30 am when the rain stopped. The walk back to Rifle Range Road was uneventful. Due to the rain, we recorded a mere 23 species in spite of spending over three hours in the catchment forest.

Our next spot was Bukit Timah Nature Reserve. Due to the bad weather, the crowd was quieter than normal. We checked the roost at South View Path and were happy to see a pair of Brown hawk Owls huddling close together in a lofty branch. Back at Hindhede Nature Park, we saw a Lineated Barbet, a Stork-billed Kingfisher adult with its young, a pair of Pied Fantail with a newly fledged juvenile but no sign of the hoped for Straw-headed Bulbul. We also located two White-crested Laughingthrushes and at the carpark, two surprise birds in the form of fly-bys- a Blue-eared Kingfisher and a Little Spiderhunter. Superb!

Next on the agenda was Goldhill Avenue. This woodland in suburbia proved to be a magnet for parrots and so it proved. We reached Goldhill at 11.30 am and managed to see a party of parrots – Yellow-crested Cockatoo, Tanimbar Corellas, Rainbow Lorikeets and Long-tailed Parakeets. Our best bird here was a lone Crested Serpent Eagle perched on a bare tree and drying its wings. Wow!

At 12.15 pm, we headed for Changi Village for lunch and hopefully Oriental Pied Hornbills. Lunch was the local speciality, nasi lemak, and after that, we explored the roadside. We found lots of parakeets, a few corellas but no hornbills.

Our first stop after lunch was Pasir Ris Park. This coastal parkland became an overnight sensation in January 2011 when all sorts of cuckoos turned up. At 1.30 pm on a cloudy afternoon in May, this site was typically quiet. We walked past the stables and soon saw half a dozen Red Junglefowls near the mangroves of Sungei Api-api. Near the coastline, we saw Collared Kingfisher, Little Tern and Scaly-breasted Munias. There was no sign of the Spotted Wood Owl at the park so we moved towards Sungei Tampines. Here, we saw Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker, Grey Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron and a family of Smooth Otters. There was no sign of the Mangrove Pitta although a male Oriental Magpie Robin greeted us as we emerged from the boardwalk.

We took time to enjoy some cold drinks from the bike shop and also study a low hanging Golden-bellied Gerygone's nest.

Our final stop of the day was Halus Wetland and we started by exploring the main road to the wetland centre and the bridge over the reservoir. We saw a few male Baya Weavers busy adding to their nests as well as two exotics – Red-backed Munias from East Africa. At the bridge, we saw about ten Grey Herons, a single Purple Heron, a Little Tern and also heard a distant Rusty-breasted Cuckoo. Raptors also appeared and they included 2 Brahminy Kites and a lone Black-winged Kite.

Birdlife being quiet at the wetland centre, we elected to explore the barrage area. We passed two Eurasian Tree Sparrows as we approached the barrage. More Baya Weavers were seen as we moved to the coast. Scanning, we saw Lesser Coucal, Red-breasted Parakeet, Paddyfield Pipit and a surprise late Rosy Starling feeding on the fields with other mynas. The grebe pond was flooded so we could not get far but we did flush a Yellow Bittern.

We retired at 5.30 pm and returned to the hotel. Despite the early morning wet weather, we ended Day One with a respectable 82 species. Another highlight of the day was watching a family of seven Smooth Otters frolicking and hunting in the waters of Sungei Tampines.

Day Two saw us venturing across the border and into Malaysia by 6.00 am. After a quick breakfast of roti canai and coffee, we were at the famed Bunker Trail, in Panti Bird Sanctuary, by 7.40 am. The action started slowly with little bird activity although a pair of Fluffy-backed Tit-babblers did their best to hold us back. We also found 4 Thick-billed Green Pigeons on a dead tree.

Eventually, we arrived at the first stream and started birding in earnest. A Grey-breasted Spiderhunter was a good first bird and we continued birding down the trail, encountering our first Checker-throated and Crimson-winged Woodpeckers.

Then, our "moment" came. A round bird landing in a low tree near us turned out on closer inspection to be a male Rufous-collared Kingfisher! It took a while but eventually both Peter and Adrienne had gotten views of it. What luck! Near the second yellow sign, I heard clucking and quickly signaled to Peter and Adrienne to come nearer. There! A Rail Babbler walked across the forest floor just a few metres from the main track, showing its characteristic long neck. A couple of anxious moments later, we had all got good views of the bird as it disappeared into the forest. Unbelievable!

Back at the first stream, we found a very productive flowering tree that had Plain, Red-throated, Ruby-cheeked and Purple-naped Sunbirds almost at eye level. They were joined by a couple of Green Ioras, and Yellow-breasted and Orange-bellied Flowerpeckers. Further back, I saw a Black-and-yellow Broadbill but Peter and Adrienne missed it as it was high up in the canopy.

At 10.30 am, we moved towards the third stream but it had gotten quiet and we didn't see much although we did flush a Changeable Hawk eagle off the main track twice and Horsfield's Babblers were once again very vocal. We turned back and birded along the way, the best bird seen being an obliging Red-crowned Barbet feasting on a low roadside tree.

We had scored a total of 73 species from Pantí, a good day by any standard, and an additional 8 species en-route, for a Malaysian total of 80 species. After lunch in Kota Tinggi, we drove back to Singapore and were across the border by 2.30 pm.

Next was the wetland at Sungei Buloh. We arrived at 3.00 pm and were soon checking the river from the main bridge. It was low tide and we did not see much other than the usual Collared Kingfishers. Likewise, the main hide was devoid of waders and we moved on. Our walk round the main pond did produce all the desired mangrove species – Common Goldenback, Ashy Tailorbird and a displaying male Copper-throated Sunbird. As a bonus, we saw two Oriental Pied Hornbills – finally! – when we were leaving the visitor centre, plus a small Estuarine Crocodile that a ranger kindly pointed out to us, at the main river. We had recorded a modest 27 species in 90 minutes at Sungei Buloh.

Our final pit stop was the Kranji Marsh. We got here at 4.30 pm and experienced very humid, warm conditions. It was exhausting but the birding was good. We added Red Turtle Dove to the list as we walked towards the freshwater ponds some 2 km down the old country road. The vegetation had again overwhelmed the two "islands" but we did see a shy Black-backed Swamphen, a nervous Red-wattled Lapwing and a secretive Yellow Bittern. In the end, despite the short (one hour) time here, we saw recorded 42 species.

We ended Day Two with 52 species from the afternoon in Singapore to make a total of 93 species from Singapore. An additional 73 species came from our short excursion into Pantí Bird Sanctuary in the morning. In total, we recorded 145 species, including 32 heard only, in just two short days. Highlights of the trip included Oriental Pied Hornbill, Rufous-collared Kingfisher (out of six kingfishers seen on the trip), Brown Hawk owl, Crested Serpent Eagle, Asian Fairy-bluebird, Rail Babbler and Fluffy-backed Tit-babbler, not forgetting the otters and the crocodile as well.

List of Birds Recorded on 17-18 May 2012

Species listed with an asterisk indicates a "heard only" record. Systematics and sequence follow Lim, K.S. (2009), "The Avifauna of Singapore" and Lim, K.S. & Lim, K.C. (1999), "Pocket checklist of the Birds of Johor, Peninsular Malaysia".

1. Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*
2. Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopus moluccensis*
3. Rufous Woodpecker *Celeus brachyurus*
4. White-bellied Woodpecker *Dryocopus javensis**
5. Banded Woodpecker *Picus miniaceus*
6. Crimson-winged Woodpecker *Picus puniceus*
7. Checker-throated Woodpecker *Picus mentalis*
8. Laced Woodpecker *Picus vittatus*
9. Common Goldenback *Dinopium javanense*
10. Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata*
11. Red-crowned Barbet *Megalaima rafflesii*
12. Blue-eared Barbet *Megalaima australis**
13. Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*
14. Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
15. Blue-eared Kingfisher *Alcedo meninting*
16. Rufous-backed Kingfisher *Ceyx rufidorsa*
17. Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*
18. White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
19. Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*
20. Rufous-collared Kingfisher *Actenoides concretus*
21. Red-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctyornis amictus**
22. Blue-throated Bee-eater *Merops viridis*
23. Malaysian Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx fugax**
24. Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonnerati**
25. Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus**
26. Rusty-breasted Cuckoo *Cacomantis sepulcralis**
27. Violet Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus**
28. Little Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus*
29. Asian Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris**
30. Asian Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*
31. Raffles's Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus chlorophaeus*
32. Chestnut-breasted Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus curvirostris*
33. Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*
34. Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*

35. Yellow-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua sulphurea*
36. Tanimbar Corella *Cacatua goffiniana*
37. Blue-rumped Parrot *Psittinus cyanurus*
38. Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot *Loriculus galgulus**
39. Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*
40. Long-tailed Parakeet *Psittacula longicauda*
41. Asian Palmswift *Cypsiurus balasiensis*
42. House Swift *Apus nipalensis*
43. Grey-rumped Treeswift *Hemiprocne longipennis*
44. Whiskered Treeswift *Hemiprocne comata*
45. Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata*
46. Common Pigeon *Columba livia*
47. Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
48. Red Turtle Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*
49. Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica**
50. Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata*
51. Little Green Pigeon *Treron olax*
52. Pink-necked Green Pigeon *Treron vernans*
53. Thick-billed Green Pigeon *Treron curvirostra*
54. Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus*
55. White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*
56. Black-backed (Purple) Swamphen *Porphyrio indicus (porphyrio)*
57. Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*
58. Little Tern *Sternula alibfrons*
59. Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*
60. Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*
61. White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
62. Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*
63. Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus*
64. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
65. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
66. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
67. Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*
68. Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
69. Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*
70. Dusky Broadbill *Corydon sumatranus**
71. Banded Broadbill *Eurylaimus javanicus**
72. Black-and-yellow Broadbill *Eurylaimus ochromalus*
73. Golden-bellied Gerygone *Gerygone sulphurea*
74. Asian Fairy-bluebird *Irena puella*
75. Blue-winged Leafbird *Chloropsis cochinchinensis*
76. Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*

77. Rail Babbler *Eupetes macrocerus*
78. House Crow *Corvus splendens*
79. Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*
80. Dark-throated Oriole *Oriolus xanthonotus**
81. Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*
82. Lesser Cuckooshrike *Coracina fimbriata**
83. Pied Triller *Lalage nigra*
84. Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*
85. Pied Fantail *Rhipidura javanica*
86. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*
87. Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea**
88. Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*
89. Green Iora *Aegithina viridissima*
90. Large Woodshrike *Tephrodornis gularis*
91. Pale Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis unicolor**
92. Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis*
93. White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*
94. Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*
95. Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus*
96. Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*
97. White-vented Myna *Acridotheres javanicus*
98. Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*
99. Straw-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus zeylanicus**
100. Black-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus atriceps**
101. Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier*
102. Olive-winged Bulbul *Pycnonotus plumosus*
103. Cream-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus simplex*
104. Asian Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus brunneus*
105. Spectacled Bulbul *Pycnonotus erythrophthalmos*
106. Hairy-backed Bulbul *Tricholestes criniger*
107. Buff-vented Bulbul *Iole olivacea**
108. Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia flaviventris*
109. Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus**
110. Everett's White-eye *Zosterops everetti**
111. Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*
112. Dark-necked Tailorbird *Orthotomus atrogularis**
113. Rufous-tailed Tailorbird *Orthotomus sericeus**
114. Ashy Tailorbird *Orthotomus ruficeps*
115. White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus*
116. White-chested Babbler *Trichastoma rostratum**
117. Horsfield's Babbler *Malacocincla separium**
118. Short-tailed Babbler *Malacocincla malaccensis*

119. Black-capped Babbler *Pellorneum capistratum**
120. Moustached Babbler *Malacopteron magnirostre**
121. Sooty-capped Babbler *Malacopteron affine**
122. Rufous-fronted Babbler *Stachyris rufifrons**
123. Chestnut-rumped Babbler *Stachyris maculata**
124. Chestnut-winged Babbler *Stachyris erythroptera**
125. Pin-striped Tit-babbler *Macronous gularis*
126. Fluffy-backed Tit-babbler *Macronous ptilosus*
127. Yellow-breasted Flowerpecker *Prionochilus maculatus*
128. Crimson-breasted Flowerpecker *Prionochilus percussus*
129. Orange-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum trigonostigma*
130. Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum*
131. Plain Sunbird *Anthreptes simplex*
132. Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malaccensis*
133. Red-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes rhodolaema*
134. Ruby-cheeked Sunbird *Anthreptes singalensis*
135. Purple-naped Sunbird *Hypogramma hypogrammicum*
136. Purple-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia sperata*
137. Copper-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia calcostetha*
138. Olive-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*
139. Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*
140. Little Spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostris*
141. Grey-breasted Spiderhunter *Arachnothera affinis*
142. Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
143. Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*
144. Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*
145. Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*