

SINGAPORE BIRD TOUR 17 FEBRUARY 2012

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This was the trip that demonstrated how flexible birding tour itineraries were. They were not only subject to the mercies of the weather and traffic but also news of rarities. Barnaby Briggs (UK) had the customary start in the Central Catchment Nature Reserve but a text message from a birder and the desire to see an elusive visitor – Rosy Starling - made us change the itinerary for the rest of the day. In the end, it worked out well even we missed the starling and we had the luxury of adding a fifth site as well.

We started the trek down the pipeline trail guided by our torches in the semi-darkness of the forests in the Central Catchment Nature Reserve. We heard at least four Collared Scops Owls but they were deep in the forest and we decided to focus on finding the Brown Hawk Owl. We found one after locating its silhouette high up on a bare branch. After getting good looks, we moved on to the edge of the golf course to look for Large-tailed Nightjar. We found one perched on a pole and another 3-4 birds flying around. The other bird of interest here was a calling Blue-winged Pitta.

It got brighter and we decided to head for MacRitchie Reservoir. It was gloomy sky but the glorious sunrise made for a surreal start to our dawn birding. At the edge of the reservoir, we located a White-throated Kingfisher, a few Blue-tailed Bee-eaters and Olive-winged Bulbuls. Around us, we located several Long-tailed Parakeets, Oriental Dollarbirds and a male Common Goldenback on a tall dead tree. Asian Fairy-bluebirds, Greater Racket-tailed Drongos and a Crow-billed Drongo were spied flying to trees on the edge of the golf course as we walked towards Sime Road. We found plenty of Pink-necked Green Pigeons but could not locate any Thick-billed Green Pigeons as the usual trees where they haunt were devoid of figs. Moving back to the forest, we were fortunate to locate at the top of a tall casuarina tree, two Common Ioras, a Yellow-vented Bulbul and, best of all, a Black-headed Bulbul, one of Singapore's rarest bulbuls. An unidentified raptor, likely a fish eagle, swooping into the golf course ended our morning at the reservoir as we headed back to the forest.

At Jelutong Tower, we checked for birds of the canopy and were constantly besieged by screaming Long-tailed Parakeets, as well as fantastic close views of a male Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot, two Oriental White-eyes, three singing male Purple-throated Sunbirds, a male Crimson Sunbird and a male Orange-bellied Flowerpecker. We also enjoyed seeing two Common Flying Lizards glide across the tower to a tree trunk with unerring accuracy. The regular cool morning breezes were heaven sent as it helped to cool us down with humidity in the high nineties.

Walking back, we heard a calling Buffy Fish Owl which remained unseen, and a calling Red-crowned Barbet. The entire morning walk had taken us four-and-a-half hours and we had seen and heard a total of 50 species, a great start to the day's birding.

We had a quick breakfast of Char Siew Noodles at a café before dashing to the east. I had gotten a call from a fellow birder of a possible Rosy Starling at Halus Wetland, located in the north-east of the island. Barnaby was interested at the possibility of seeing a new bird at the edge of its range and so we moved east.

We reached Lorong Halus at noon, and Barnaby spotted a small bird on a big dead tree that turned out to be a Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker. Moving on to a nearby canal, we took out the scope and scanned for birds. We quickly found Little Egret, Grey Heron, a Javan Pond Heron coming into breeding plumage, several winter pond herons, Black-capped Kingfisher and a few waders – Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper and Pacific Golden Plover.

Moving on to the Wetland Centre, we saw two Yellow Bitterns in a ditch along the road. From there, we walked towards the Barrage on the eastern bank of the Serangoon River. Our first birds were two Sooty-headed Bulbuls and we followed that up with a couple of Paddyfield Pipits, a Little Grebe on its nest in a secluded pond, two Black-headed Munias and lots of Grey Heron at the Barrage itself. We scanned around and found lots of mynas but no Rosy Starling. Barnaby did find two White-shouldered Starlings flying past. A grassland patch also provided us three weavers: Baya, Streaked and Asian Golden. The last of the lot is an exotic that seems to hang around the native weaver flocks.

Our next stop was the coastal park called Pasir Ris Park. It was a good place to see small stuff in the heat of the day and so it proved. As soon as we arrived, we heard a singing Golden-bellied Gerygone in front of the bike-and-skate shop, and we found it hopping near the top of a casuarina. The park was surprising quiet and even the regular Spotted Wood Owls were missing. Undaunted, we explored the mangroves to see what we could find. The hoped for Mangrove Pitta was nowhere to be seen or heard, and the mangroves were largely quiet as well except for a lot of noise generated by a pair of Brown-throated Sunbirds and another pair of Olive-backed Sunbirds. Perhaps a snake was nearby. We did fairly well for raptors however. A Brahminy Kite was seen mobbing a White-bellied Sea Eagle at the park while over the mangroves, we saw two Black Bazas.

We had a half an hour layover for lunch after which we moved on to our next site: Sengkang Floating Wetlands. It was an artificially built series of floating platforms containing various species of cattails, sedges and screwpines that was discovered to be a haven for warblers sometime in January by photographers. We reached the Anchorvale Bridge at 3.45 pm and spent an hour searching the reedbeds. Black-browed Reed Warblers were easy to find. They were bolder than their cousins and moved about actively. We also found Oriental Reed Warbler after a while but it took almost an hour to pinpoint one skulking in the screwpines before it obliged.

Happy with the success, we moved to our last spot – Bidadari Cemetery. En-route, at a traffic light along Upper Serangoon Road, we saw two Crested Honey Buzzards circling in the darkening sky above us, before we had to move again. When we reached the spot, it was already raining. After deciding that the rain was light enough to attempt birding and bringing along our rain-gear, we moved to the open parkland that was a famous migrant trap for local birders. The whole place was quiet and we had a time locating any birds. We did flush three Tanimbar Corellas before checking the more open area near the

MRT station. I had a tummy ache and dived behind a tree. Hold on! I saw a flash of red and followed it to a low branch. It was a Ruddy Kingfisher! Unfortunately, it had disappeared by the time I finished my “business” and I could not show the gem of a bird to Barnaby.

At 5.15 pm, we called it a day, with the rain petering down on our vehicle on our way to the city.

Overall, it was a great day of birding. The sudden change of itinerary did us a lot of good. We scored 96 species including some glorious ones such as Brown Hawk Owl, Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot, Black-capped Kingfisher, Black-headed Bulbul, those fantastic reed warblers and the incredible Black Baza.

List of Birds Recorded on 17 February 2012

Species listed with an asterisk indicates a “heard only” record. Systematics and sequence follow Lim, K.S. (2009), “The Avifauna of Singapore”.

1. Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopus moluccensis*
2. Banded Woodpecker *Picus miniaceus**
3. Common Goldenback *Dinopium javanense*
4. Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata**
5. Red-crowned Barbet *Megalaima rafflesii**
6. Coppermith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*
7. Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
8. Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
9. Ruddy Kingfisher *Halcyon coromanda*
10. White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
11. Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pileata*
12. Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*
13. Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*
14. Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonnerati**
15. Little Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus*
16. Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*
17. Tanimbar Corella *Cacatua goffiniana*
18. Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot *Loriculus galgulus*
19. Long-tailed Parakeet *Psittacula longicauda*
20. Grey-rumped Treeswift *Hemiprocne longipennis*
21. Collared Scops Owl *Otus lempiji**
22. Buffy Fish Owl *Ketupa ketupu**
23. Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata*
24. Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*
25. Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

26. Red Turtle Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*
27. Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata*
28. Pink-necked Green Pigeon *Treron vernans*
29. Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus*
30. White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*
31. Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
32. Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*
33. Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*
34. Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*
35. Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes*
36. Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus*
37. Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*
38. White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
39. Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
40. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
41. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
42. Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
43. Javan Pond Heron *Ardeola speciosa*
44. Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*
45. Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*
46. Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis**
47. Golden-bellied Gerygone *Gerygone sulphurea*
48. Asian Fairy-bluebird *Irena puella*
49. Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*
50. Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*
51. House Crow *Corvus splendens*
52. Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*
53. Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*
54. Ashy Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus**
55. Pied Fantail *Rhipidura javanica**
56. Crow-billed Drongo *Dicrurus annectans*
57. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*
58. Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*
59. Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*
60. Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis*
61. Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*
62. Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*
63. White-vented Myna *Acridotheres javanicus*
64. Common Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa*
65. Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
66. Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*
67. Black-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus atriceps*

68. Sooty-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus aurigaster*
69. Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier*
70. Olive-winged Bulbul *Pycnonotus plumosus*
71. Cream-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus simplex*
72. Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*
73. Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia flaviventris*
74. Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*
75. Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola*
76. Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*
77. Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis*
78. Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius**
79. Dark-necked Tailorbird *Orthotomus atrogularis*
80. Rufous-tailed Tailorbird *Orthotomus sericeus**
81. Ashy Tailorbird *Orthotomus ruficeps*
82. Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
83. Short-tailed Babbler *Malacocincla malaccensis**
84. Striped Tit-babbler *Macronous gularis*
85. Orange-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum trigonostigma*
86. Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum*
87. Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malaccensis*
88. Purple-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia sperata*
89. Olive-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*
90. Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*
91. Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
92. Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*
93. Streaked Weaver *Ploceus manyar*
94. Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*
95. Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*
96. Black-headed Munia *Lonchura malacca*