

SINGAPORE BIRD TOUR 19 JULY 2012

By Lim Kim Seng (ibisbill@yahoo.com)

The pick up from the hotel was smooth and Neil Rankine, a birder from Scotland, and I were soon at the carpark at the end of Rifle Range Road. After gathering our stuff and torchlights, we were able to commence our trek into the Central Catchment Nature Reserve before 6.00 am. It was really dark and we had to depend on our torches to find our way. We were entertained by the weird calls of a Grey-headed Fish Eagle as we moved toward the Old Pumphouse. Near the tee-junction, we found a lone Collared Scops Owl perched just off the trail, in a bush. We were able to get good looks at it before it flew rather uncertainly into the forest. This was a surprise as we had not heard any owls until then.

At the Old Pumphouse, we stopped to check for the Buffy Fish Owl but it was nowhere in sight. Moving on, we heard more Collared Scops Owls and were soon at Jelutong Tower. As we could not find any calling Brown Hawk Owls, we decided to check the nearby golf course. Here we found our second nocturnal species – Large-tailed Nightjar. We found three birds and walked back to the forest before we heard the characteristic *hoo-ooop* calls of a Brown Hawk Owl. We doubled back and checked the place again – and found it perched near the top of a dead tree. Once again, we got superb looks at it before it flew to another tree. Excellent! Three night birds at one go!

A Banded Woodpecker had flown into the same tree as the hawk owl earlier but we could not find it. Eventually, it got brighter and we were able to scope it as it moved near the top of the tree. Since it was already getting light and the hooping of the Brown Hawk Owls faded away, we started our walk on the boardwalk leading to MacRitchie Reservoir. The walk was fairly quiet although we did see a Red-legged Crake scuttle across the forest floor and disappear into swampy ground, a Greater Racket-tailed Drongo and had a brief sighting of a Black-headed Bulbul.

It was a beautiful morning sky that greeted us at MacRitchie Reservoir and it began with the kingfishers making a noisy entrance. We found the White-throated Kingfisher easily and then a noisy Stork-billed Kingfisher that perched high up in the tall dead tree on the far side of the reservoir. Last of the kingfisher trilogy was a Collared Kingfisher at the golf course. We also saw both Barn and Pacific Swallows at the reservoir, a nice Long-tailed Parakeet scoped on a bare branch and a Blue-throated Bee-eater. There was however no sign of the Grey-headed Fish Eagle.

Moving on to the fig trees on the edge of the golf course, we picked out Pink-necked Green Pigeon, Black-naped Oriole, Oriental Magpie-robin and our second Black-headed Bulbul, feeding on the fruits of a tembusu. We also saw Lineated and Coppersmith Barbets, at least three Asian Fairy-bluebirds, Yellow-vented, Olive-winged, Red-eyed and Cream-vented Bulbuls, and Common Iora. At 9.00 am, we started walking back to the forest, adding a Common Hill Myna on the way.

It was rather hot when we were atop Jelutong Tower. Birds were definitely scarce and we only added Grey-rumped Treeswift and Brahminy Kite after half an hour, so we decided to come down. We were stopped by a male Greater Green Leafbird showing well and also a female Wagler's Pit Viper!

The walk back was uneventful except for fantastic close looks at the colourful Crimson Sunbird. It was a good four-and-a-half hours spent and we recorded 44 species.

After a quick breakfast at a coffeeshop, we headed for our next stop, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. We arrived around 11.30 am and were greeted by light rain. We got our umbrellas and birded on, intrigued by the presence of several Scarlet-backed Flowerpeckers at the visitor centre, now freshly decorated with hedges of Singapore Rhododendrons. At the same time, we also found a noisy Oriental Pied Hornbill perched on an open branch despite the rain, for great looks.

It was high tide at the main river and we did not see much other than a Little Egret and a pair of Collared Kingfishers. The main hide areas was similarly quiet except for a Striated Heron. Moving back to the bridge, we were happy to spot a 2-m long Estuarine Crocodile to add to the numerous Water Monitors seen in the reserve.

Next, we took a walk around the boardwalk and were pleased to connect with Ashy Tailorbird and a pair of Copper-throated Sunbird. Our way back to the visitor centre was marked by a flypast from four Oriental Pied Hornbills.

We left Sungei Buloh at 1.30 pm as the rain petered out, for Kranji Marsh.

We arrived just before 2.00 pm and were greeted by some activity around the entrance to the country road. We spotted a male Common Goldenback climbing up an albizia. On another albizia, we saw the tiny Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker. Other birds seen here included Baya Weaver and Olive-backed Sunbird. We also saw an exotic, a Common Waxbill, on the way to the freshwater ponds.

Eventually, we reached the ponds and easily found 4 Black-backed Swampheens and 2 Common Moorhens before it rained again. It persisted for about half an hour and we were soaked to the skin despite our poncho and umbrella. Undeterred, we looked around and managed to add Red-wattled Lapwing, Little Tern and Yellow-bellied Prinia to our list before beating a hasty retreat.

Despite the rain, our stay of over an hour produced 27 species. The rain continued and we decided it was a good time to break for lunch.

After lunch, we dropped by our last site, Bukit Batok Nature Park. We were glad to see that the rain had finally ceased, and we were able to explore the park without raingear. The walk down to the quarry pond was uneventful. The whole place was quiet and we stared at the pond for signs of life for about 30 minutes before moving on. The only bird of interest was a Stork-billed Kingfisher that came in and perched very close to us. Walking out to the main entrance, we finally found a pair of Straw-headed Bulbuls and a Greater Racket-tailed Drongo. We also found two Chestnut-bellied Malkohas, normally a forest species. As we walked back to the playground, we found four bold White-crested Laughingthrushes. Our luck had changed.

Around 5.45 pm, we headed back to Lorong Sesuai to try our luck with the fruiting trees. We were hoping that the Jambu Fruit Doves that visited last week were still around but could not find any. Instead, we found two noisy Rufous Woodpeckers, at least one Glossy Swiftlet and a Red-eyed Bulbul.

At 6.20 pm, we called it a day. Overall, it was a great day of birding despite the wet weather in the middle of the day. We recorded 76 species in total, including 9 heard only. These included several great views of some great birds such as Banded Woodpecker, Common Goldenback, Coppersmith Barbet, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Collared Scops Owl, Brown Hawk Owl, Large-tailed Nightjar, Asian Fairy-bluebird, Straw-headed Bulbul, Baya Weaver and Crimson Sunbird.

List of Birds Recorded on 19 July 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. Rufous Woodpecker *Celeus brachyurus*
3. Banded Woodpecker *Picus miniaceus*
4. Laced Woodpecker *Picus vittatus**
5. Common Goldenback *Dinopium javanense*
6. Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata*
7. Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*
8. Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*
9. Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
10. Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*
11. White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
12. Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*
13. Blue-throated Bee-eater *Merops viridis*
14. Chestnut-bellied Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus sumatranus*
15. Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis**
16. Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot *Loriculus galgulus*
17. Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*
18. Long-tailed Parakeet *Psittacula longicauda*
19. Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*
20. Grey-rumped Treeswift *Hemiprocne longipennis*
21. Collared Scops Owl *Otus lempiji*
22. Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata*
23. Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*
24. Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
25. Common Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*
26. Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata**
27. Pink-necked Green Pigeon *Treron vernans*
28. Red-legged Crake *Rallina fasciata*

29. Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus**
30. White-breasted Waterhen *Amauroris phoenicurus*
31. Black-backed Swampphen *Porphyrio viridis*
32. Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
33. Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*
34. Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*
35. Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*
36. White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
37. Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus**
38. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
39. Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*
40. Asian Fairy-bluebird *Irena puella*
41. Greater Green Leafbird *Chloropsis sonnerati*
42. House Crow *Corvus splendens*
43. Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos**
44. Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*
45. Pied Fantail *Rhipidura javanica*
46. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*
47. Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*
48. Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis*
49. Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*
50. White-vented Myna *Acridotheres javanicus*
51. Common Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa*
52. Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
53. Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*
54. Straw-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus zeylanicus*
55. Black-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus atriceps*
56. Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier*
57. Olive-winged Bulbul *Pycnonotus plumosus*
58. Cream-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus simplex*
59. Asian Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus brunneus*
60. Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia flaviventris*
61. Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*
62. Dark-necked Tailorbird *Orthotomus atrogularis*
63. Ashy Tailorbird *Orthotomus ruficeps*
64. White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus*
65. Short-tailed Babbler *Malacocincla malaccensis**
66. Pin-striped Tit-babbler *Macronous gularis*
67. Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum*
68. Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malaccensis*
69. Purple-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia sperata*
70. Copper-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia calcostetha*

71. Olive-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*
72. Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*
73. Little Spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostris**
74. Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
75. Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*
76. Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata**