

Birding Singapore – 20th and 21st January 2017

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Black-headed Bulbuls enjoying a treetop view at Jelutong Tower. Photo © Birding Singapore/Lim Kim Seng

It was 6.00 am when Neil Hughes and wife Carol, keen birders from the UK, were ready to start the walk into the Central Catchment Nature Reserve. The overnight rain had made the trails muddy and wet and added to the challenge posed by the rocky and undulating terrain. We heard a distant Sunda Scops Owl and an even further Brown Hawk Owl as we stumbled in the semi-darkness. At one spot, we managed to get close to two calling Brown Hawk Owls and eventually saw one perched high on a snag. Almost at the same time, we saw a Large-tailed Nightjar skim the treetops. Our first birds and it was still not yet dawn!

We climbed Jelutong Tower and then waited for dawn. The dimly lit forest was alive with bird calls. We spent over two hours scanning for birds and were rewarded with close up views of bulbuls, leafbirds, flowerpeckers and sunbirds as well as fly-by parakeets, green pigeons and swiftlets. We finished the

morning with 44 bird species as well as other fascinating wildlife such as Long-tailed Macaque, Slender and Plantain Squirrels, Asian Toad and Malesian Frog.

Next, we headed for traditional Singapore breakfast of kaya butter toast with hot coffee and tea at a coffee shop. The humidity was rising and it was good to rest in the air-conditioned place. Dairy Farm Nature Park was next and we spent a quick half hour searching for more birds. However, it was depressingly quiet and we decided to cut short our visit.

News of the presence of a Band-bellied Crake at the Singapore Botanic Gardens had the local birders going crazy and we decided to try for it. The Band-bellied Crake is a vagrant in Singapore and this would only be the second record. Furthermore, it was scarce throughout its range and would stir even the laziest birder into action.

We got there in 20 minutes and were soon standing with the crowd of mostly bird photographers waiting impatiently for the crake to show. It was hiding in one stand of heliconias and was determined not to come out despite being surrounded. We waited an hour and managed to get tickable views of the lone bird. On our way out, we bumped into a family of Red-legged Crakes. Unlike the Band-bellied Crake, these birds were unafraid of people and everyone in the vicinity got good looks and photographs.

It was 1.30 pm when we decided to stop for a quick lunch and then a trip to Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. This was our last stop and we spent quite a bit of time exploring the mangroves and ponds. Waders such as Whimbrel, Common Redshank, Common Redshank and Common Sandpiper were present in the exposed ponds together with egrets and some escaped storks. At the river, we also saw water monitors, some roosting Common Fruit Bats and a small Estuarine Crocodile. Raptors included White-bellied Sea Eagle, Brahminy Kite and a Western Osprey.

We ended our first day of birding in Singapore with 67 species.



Red-legged Crake foraging at the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Photo © Birding Singapore/Lim Kim Seng

Day 2 started with breakfast in a dumpling shop in Changi Village amidst an awakening dawn chorus. We saw Tanimbar Corella, Red-breasted Parakeet, Collared Kingfisher and Oriental Pied Hornbills before our first sip of coffee!

At 8.00 am, we boarded the ferry to Pulau Ubin only to encounter a period of light rain. Luckily the rain stopped and we were able to get to the eastern coast of the island for more birding. It was very cloudy when we got to the Chek Jawa Wetlands. One of our first birds was the globally endangered Straw-headed Bulbul. We heard its melodious song and were able to see a pair easily at the mangrove boardwalk. After being treated to this spectacle, we walked to the Coastal Boardwalk where our next target, Great-billed Heron, was feeding in the rapidly rising waters. Raptors were also evident and we saw Brahminy Kite, White-bellied Sea Eagle and a pale morph Changeable Hawk Eagle in the blue sky above us. We also saw some roosting Whimbrel and Greater Crested Tern, Common Kingfisher and Red-rumped Swallow. On the way out, we spotted a female White-rumped Shama and the “friendly” Wild Pig.

At 12.30 pm, we said goodbye to Pulau Ubin, having recorded 40 species of birds in all.

We had a relaxed lunch at Changi Village and then we headed for Pasir Ris Park. Our main targets here were the two big owls but I was careful not to raise hopes in case they were not at their roosts. Luck was on our side and we were successful in seeing both Spotted Wood Owl and Buffy Fish Owl. The former took some neck breaking scans of the tall mahogany trees while the latter required some skill in seeing through low vegetation in the mangroves. We also had the bonus of seeing the exotic Chestnut-winged Cuckoo as it flitted through some open vegetation.

Our final destination was Lorong Halus Wetland and we got there at 4.00 pm. The sky was by now rather gloomy and we did not expect to see a lot. However, a flock of Sooty-headed Bulbuls and a lone Long-tailed Shrike surprised us as we explored the desolate country road near Coney Island. At the reservoir, we saw two Yellow Bitterns and a Common Sandpiper. After about an hour, we retreated but not before seeing a handsome male Chinese Sparrowhawk fly just above us. Wow!

Over the course of two days, we managed to record a respectable total of 106 species of birds plus many other interesting wildlife. The highlights were the owls of course and the shy crane that turned up in the Botanic Gardens.



A Great-billed Heron fishing at Pulau Ubin. Photo © Birding Singapore/Lim Kim Seng

A Checklist of the Birds Recorded in Singapore on 20th and 21st January 2017

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	Yellow Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>
3	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
4	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
5	Great-billed Heron	<i>Ardea sumatrana</i>
6	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
7	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
8	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
9	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
10	Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
11	Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
12	Chinese Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter soloensis</i>
13	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliaastur indus</i>
14	White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
15	Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus ichthyaetus</i>
16	Red-legged Crake	<i>Rallina fasciata</i>
17	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
18	Band-bellied Crake	<i>Porzana paykullii</i>
19	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
20	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
21	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
22	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
23	Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
24	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
25	Red Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
26	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
27	Common Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
28	Zebra Dove	<i>Geopelia striata</i>
29	Pink-necked Green Pigeon	<i>Treron vernans</i>
30	Chestnut-winged Cuckoo	<i>Clamator coromandus</i>

31	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
32	Violet Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus</i>
33	Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis merulinus</i>
34	Sunda Scops Owl	<i>Otus lempiji</i>
35	Buffy Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa ketupu</i>
36	Spotted Wood Owl	<i>Strix selouto</i>
37	Brown Hawk-Owl	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>
38	Large-tailed Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus macrurus</i>
39	Grey-rumped Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne longipennis</i>
40	Oriental Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>
41	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
42	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
43	Collared Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus chloris</i>
44	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
45	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
46	Blue-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops viridis</i>
47	Oriental Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>
48	Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus moluccensis</i>
49	Banded Woodpecker	<i>Chrysophlegma miniaceum</i>
50	Rufous Woodpecker	<i>Micropternus brachyurus</i>
51	Tanimbar Corella	<i>Cacatua goffiniana</i>
52	Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus galgulus</i>
53	Blue-rumped Parrot	<i>Psittinus cyanurus</i>
54	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
55	Red-breasted Parakeet	<i>Psittacula alexandri</i>
56	Long-tailed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula longicauda</i>
57	Blue-winged Pitta	<i>Pitta moluccensis</i>
58	Golden-bellied Gerygone	<i>Gerygone sulphurea</i>
59	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
60	Pied Triller	<i>Lalage nigra</i>
61	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
62	Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>
63	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
64	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
65	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
66	Straw-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus zeylanicus</i>
67	Black-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus atriceps</i>
68	Sooty-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus aurigaster</i>
69	Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>
70	Olive-winged Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus plumosus</i>
71	Cream-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus simplex</i>

72	Asian Red-eyed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus brunneus</i>
73	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
74	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>
75	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
76	Arctic Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>
77	Yellow-bellied Prinia	<i>Prinia flavicentris</i>
78	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
79	Dark-necked Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus atrogularis</i>
80	Ashy Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus ruficeps</i>
81	Chestnut-winged Babbler	<i>Stachyris erythroptera</i>
82	Pin-striped Tit-Babbler	<i>Macronous gularis</i>
83	Abbott's Babbler	<i>Malcocincla abbotti</i>
84	Short-tailed Babbler	<i>Malcocincla malaccensis</i>
85	Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
86	Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>
87	Asian Glossy Starling	<i>Aplonis panayensis</i>
88	Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>
89	Javan Myna	<i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>
90	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
91	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
92	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
93	Dark-sided Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa sibirica</i>
94	Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa latirostris</i>
95	Siberian Blue Robin	<i>Larvivora cyane</i>
96	Blue-winged Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>
97	Orange-bellied Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>
98	Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum cruentatum</i>
99	Brown-throated Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes malacensis</i>
100	Van Hasselt's Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma brasiliana</i>
101	Olive-backed Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>
102	Crimson Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>
103	Little Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>
104	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
105	Eastern Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla tschutschensis</i>
106	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>



A well concealed Spotted Wood Owl at Pasir Ris Park. Photo © Birding Singapore/Lim Kim Seng