

Birding Singapore – 21st June 2015

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A male Orange-bellied Flowerpecker singing at eye level at the top of Jelutong Tower. Photo © Lim Kim Seng

Bob Tallyn, a keen birder from California, USA, had just completed an intensive tour to Sumatra with Birdtour Asia and had a day to spend birding in Singapore, so a day was arranged to try and see some of his “missing” species from Southeast Asia. As it turned out, there were only five possible target species due to the time of the year: Red-legged Crake, Chestnut-bellied Malkoha, Spotted Wood Owl, Tanimbar Corella and Yellow-crested Cockatoo. It wasn’t entirely a twitching tour as Bob also wanted to see how Singapore has changed since he was last here in the 1980s (he was a non-birder then).

We decided on an early start and so were walking on the trails on the Central Catchment Nature Reserve before 6.00 am. It was quieter than normal and the owls weren’t very vocal. We heard three Sunda Scops Owl and two Brown Hawk Owls but none of them were close. In fact, the first bird we saw by the

beam of our torches was an already awake Greater Racket-tailed Drongo perched on a liana within touching distance! We did see a Large-tailed Nightjar make a fly-past just before dawn broke at MacRitchie Reservoir. Here, we saw the usual Stork-billed and White-throated Kingfishers, Long-tailed Parakeets and the usual accompaniment of oriole, bulbuls, flowerpeckers and sunbirds. A Grey-headed Fish Eagle called tantalizingly but remained hidden. At 7.30 am, we decided to try for our first target bird – Chestnut-bellied Malkoha – at nearby Jelutong Tower.



Can you see me? A well well hidden Chestnut-bellied Malkoha at Jelutong Tower. Photo © Lim Kim Seng

It was cloudy and still not too warm when we got to the top of the tower by 8.00 am. Greeting us at the top were the usual swiftlets, some of which came very close. We also saw Common Flameback, Blue-throated Bee-eater, a flock of Coconut Lorikeets, a male Thick-billed Green Pigeon, Common Hill Myna and a male Asian Fairy-bluebird. Small birds were present too as we got good looks at Dark-necked Tailorbird, Orange-bellied Flowerpecker and Crimson Sunbird. After waiting, we finally got the bird we had been waiting for. It was typically quiet and really difficult to photograph and Bob finally got great looks at his first lifer of the day.

We left the forest by 9.30 am and celebrated the first tick of the day with coffee and toast at a coffee shop in Bukit Timah. Then, it was off for our next target – Red-legged Crake. I chose Venus Loop, just off Venus Drive, on the north-eastern side of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve for this shy and elusive species. We were there by 10.30 am and scanned both trails for this rarely seen resident of the forest floor, an unusual habitat for a crake. Despite expending 90 minutes, we failed to see or hear any crake. Our consolation was a good look at a Common Emerald Dove.

Undaunted by our failure with the crake, we headed east to Pasir Ris Park for another target bird – Spotted Wood Owl. Thankfully, a quick one hour stop was all it needed to find it. In fact, we saw two birds roosting high up in its usual tree. We also took the time to explore the park a little bit and added Red Junglefowl, Grey and Striated Herons, Black-crowned Night-heron and Ashy Tailorbird.



Spotted Wood Owl at Pasir Ris Park. Photo © Lim Kim Seng

It was almost 2.00 pm when we stopped at the charming old Changi Village for our lunch. Noodles and watermelon juice were much welcomed as we enjoyed our meal and watched the world – and birds – go by. Corella! I saw two of them fly into a tall angšana tree and we deserted our seats, to the amusement of the people there. We saw the pair well, one of which was standing guard as its precious tree cavity.

Once we finished our meal, we explored the area to try and find the more elusive Yellow-crested Cockatoo. Unfortunately, we did not see any although we did see Oriental Dollarbird and loads of Red-breasted Parakeet.

Three targets seen, one more to go. We still had a couple of hours left and so we decided to try for Red-legged Crake again, this time at its old haunt of the Singapore Botanic Gardens.

We got there by 3.30 pm and were greeted by a Laced Woodpecker and crowds of people attending a big band performance! We explored the Jungle and saw Greater Racket-tailed Drongo and a noisy flock of White-crested Laughingthrushes but no sign of the Buffy Fish Owl that was there the previous week. We also checked the Ginger Garden area very thoroughly but alas, it was not to be.

Overall, it was a good experience for Bob, who saw the transformation in Singapore since he was last here and also got to sample its birds, including three lifers. In the end, we recorded 61 species in total. Not bad for a day out in the field!



One of two Tanimbar Corellas we saw at Changi Village. Photo © Lim Kim Seng

A Checklist of the Birds Recorded in Singapore on 21st June 2015

Sequence, taxonomy and nomenclature follow IOC. Species highlighted in yellow indicate those that were heard only.

#	English Name	Scientific Name
1	Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
2	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
3	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
4	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
5	White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
6	Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus ichhyaetus</i>
7	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
8	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
9	Common Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
10	Pink-necked Green Pigeon	<i>Treron vernans</i>
11	Thick-billed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron curvirostra</i>
12	Chestnut-bellied Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus sumatranus</i>
13	Banded Bay Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sonneratii</i>
14	Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis merulinus</i>
15	Sunda Scops Owl	<i>Otus lempiji</i>
16	Spotted Wood Owl	<i>Strix selouto</i>
17	Brown Hawk-Owl	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>
18	Large-tailed Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus macrurus</i>
19	Grey-rumped Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne longipennis</i>
20	Oriental Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>
21	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
22	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
23	Collared Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus chloris</i>
24	Blue-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops viridis</i>
25	Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus moluccensis</i>
26	Banded Woodpecker	<i>Chrysophlegma miniaceum</i>
27	Laced Woodpecker	<i>Picus vittatus</i>
28	Common Flameback	<i>Dinopium javanense</i>
29	Rufous Woodpecker	<i>Micropternus brachyurus</i>
30	Tanimbar Corella	<i>Cacatua goffiniana</i>
31	Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus galgulus</i>
32	Coconut Lorikeet	<i>Trichoglossus haematodus</i>
33	Red-breasted Parakeet	<i>Psittacula alexandri</i>
34	Long-tailed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula longicauda</i>
35	Golden-bellied Gerygone	<i>Gerygone sulphurea</i>
36	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>

37	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
38	Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>
39	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
40	Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>
41	Olive-winged Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus plumosus</i>
42	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>
43	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
44	Dark-necked Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus atrogularis</i>
45	Rufous-tailed Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sericeus</i>
46	Ashy Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus ruficeps</i>
47	Pin-striped Tit-Babbler	<i>Macronous gularis</i>
48	Abbott's Babbler	<i>Malcocincla abbotti</i>
49	Short-tailed Babbler	<i>Malcocincla malaccensis</i>
50	White-crested Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax leucolopus</i>
51	Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>
52	Asian Glossy Starling	<i>Aplonis panayensis</i>
53	Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>
54	Javan Myna	<i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>
55	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
56	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
57	Orange-bellied Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>
58	Brown-throated Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes malacensis</i>
59	Olive-backed Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>
60	Crimson Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>
61	Little Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>