

SINGAPORE BIRD TOUR 27-28 APRIL 2012

By Lim Kim Seng (ibisbill@yahoo.com)

Martin Cracknell was from London and wanted to have a two-day birding tour of Singapore. We started with a hotel pick up at 5.45 am and were soon out of the city. We reached the end of Rifle Range Road at 6.15 am and after getting our gear, started birding proper in the Central Catchment Nature Reserve. It took us about half an hour before we heard our first owls. Brown Hawk Owls were calling loudly when we reached the highest point of the trail. Unfortunately, the birds didn't show themselves and we moved on. At the start of Golf Link, we heard a close Collared Scops Owl but it retreated into the foliage in light of the encroaching dawn. We also had a Short-tailed Babbler calling very close but it was too shy and the light too bad.

It was already past 7.15 am and so we rushed to the boardwalk that link the forest to MacRitchie Reservoir. Along the way, we heard a calling Blue-winged Pitta but it was too dark to see it. At the reservoir, we got the usual birds – Purple Heron, White-throated and Collared Kingfishers, Blue-throated Bee-eater, Long-tailed Parakeet and Asian Fairy-bluebird. We also found a fig tree full of both Pink-necked and Thick-billed Green Pigeons plus a Lineated Barbet and a couple of Coppersmith Barbets. A shy Crested Honey Buzzard that flew over the golf course was the highlight here.

Jelutong Tower was warm and boring with the sole highlights being six Common Hill Mynas and the colourful Purple-throated and Crimson Sunbirds.

On the way back, we got a surprise in the form of a flying Blue-eared Kingfisher along Rifle Range Link. Our morning in the catchment forest ended at 9.45 am with a haul of 41 species.

Next was breakfast at a café at Rail Mall which was quickly consumed before we headed for the second forest site, Bukit Timah Nature Reserve. We got here at 10.30 am and spent some time checking the Brown Hawk Owl roost site. Pity, the owls were not there. We decided to check out the quarry pond at the nearby Hindhede Nature Park and located a flying Plaintive Cuckoo and three cooperative Straw-headed Bulbuls at the pond. A Glossy Swiftlet at the pond was another nice find and as was a family of Greater Racket-tailed Drongos, which we observed as dad (or was it mum) came back with caterpillars for the hungry juniors. We also found one friendly White-crested Laughingthrush.

After lunch, we proceeded to visit our third nature reserve of the day – Sungei Buloh. We arrived at noon and were soon scanning the river, now at mid tide. A Stork-billed Kingfisher was showing well at the river as were the smaller and more common Collared Kingfishers.

Our next spot at Sungei Buloh was the main hide and we spent some time picking up the few remaining waders – Whimbrel and Common Redshank – as well as the heron tribe – Grey and Striated Herons, Little and Great Egrets – before moving on to complete one loop around the biggest pond. We managed

to see all the mangrove birds here – Pied Fantail, Common Iora, Ashy Tailorbird and Copper-throated Sunbird – plus a bonus – a pair of Straw-headed Bulbuls.

We ended our time at Sungei Buloh with a walk around the Mangrove Boardwalk. We had spent almost two hours here and seen 33 species.

Our last stop for the day was also the most productive. Kranji Marsh is just a ten minute drive from Sungei Buloh and we birded here till 6.00 pm. Aside from a good selection of woodland and grassland species, Kranji Marsh also offers the opportunity to see some marshland species.

It was very warm and we were tiring after a day's exertions. However, we got close to 4 Black-backed Swamphens including a barely fledged chick, 2 Common Moorhens, a single Common Sandpiper, Purple and Striated herons, and a Yellow Bittern. We also saw four raptors here – a lone Osprey, 2 Brahminy Kites, 2 White-bellied Sea Eagles and a Changeable Hawk Eagle. We recorded 49 species in just 2 hours and 15 minutes!

Day One was phenomenally successful and we recorded 93 species overall despite the very warm and humid weather.

Day Two saw a slightly later start and we reached Changi Village in time for a good South Indian breakfast followed by some early morning birding by the road. We saw two Tanimbar Corellas, countless Red-breasted Parakeets and a Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker. The best sighting was a pair of Oriental Pied Hornbills that flew and landed in the thick foliage of a fig tree.

Eventually we left Changi Village for a brief wait at Changi Point Ferry Terminal for our trip to Pulau Ubin. We arrived at 8.30 am and started off by scoping for Black-naped Terns from Ubin Jetty. Next, we got on the minibus and were soon on our way to the eastern shore of Pulau Ubin – Tanjong Chek Jawa and its wetlands. En-route, near Kampong Melayu, we saw a male and two female Red Junglefowls.

We arrived at the rubber plantation at 9.00 am, flushed a White-rumped Shama, and were soon exploring the Mangrove and Coastal Boardwalks. The mangrove was unusually silent and we could not get a response from the hoped for Mangrove Blue Flycatcher. Our luck changed once we got out to the coast. We saw a dozen Whimbrel, a Bar-tailed Godwit and a few Grey Plovers. Scanning the mudflats carefully yielded our first Great-billed Heron. It was soon joined by another. We also saw over twenty Little Terns and 2 Straw-headed Bulbul, and up to four Wild Boars.

At 11.00 am we were back at the main town and we continued our Ubin tour by taking the sensory trail. Despite the late hour, we heard calls of Abbott's Babbler and White-rumped Shama. It took us half an hour but we got great views of both. We continued our walk to the ponds, turned left just before the headman's house and spent the last 20 minutes scanning the quarry pond. The best birds along this stretch included a pair of Rusty-breasted Cuckoos that perched low and close, and attempted mating, a male Laced Woodpecker, a Grey-headed Fish Eagle, a Peregrine Falcon, up to a dozen Oriental Pied Hornbills and a Rufous-tailed Tailorbird.

We left the island at 12.30 pm with a total of 49 species of birds.

Lunch was next and after that, we headed for Pasir Ris Park. We arrived at 2.30 pm and it was hot, hot, hot! We located the small birds that this park is famous for – Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker, Pied Triller and Golden-bellied Gerygone. Unfortunately, the hoped for roosting Spotted Wood Owls were nowhere to be found and our exploration of the Mangrove Boardwalk produced no Mangrove Pittas.

We left Pasir Ris Park at 4.00 pm for Halus Wetland. The heat appeared to be waning – slowly. We explored the dirt track beside the Sungei Serangoon. We saw a Pied Fantail dancing on a pool of water and then were stunned when a female Barred Buttonquail ran across it! The small freshwater pond produced 2 Little Grebes and a couple of grassland species such as Baya Weaver and Scaly-breasted Munia. We also explored the bridge and scanned the river but there was little activity except for about 15 Brahminy Kites enjoying the afternoon thermals, preening Grey Herons and a few Little Terns.

Our last stop of the trip was the tiny Sengkang Wetland, situated at Anchorvale, in the town of Sengkang East. We got here at 5.30 am and spent half an hour checking the man-made reedbeds for warblers. We saw over ten Black-browed Reed Warblers, at least two Oriental Reed Warblers and heard one Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler. We left Sengkang at 6.00 pm exhausted but happy at seeing a good selection of Singapore's birds and bird habitats in just two days.

We had recorded 123 species covering a total of ten sites over the two full days in Singapore. This included 102 seen and 21 heard only. Highlights of this tour included Red Junglefowl, Barred Buttonquail, Oriental Pied Hornbill, Blue-eared Kingfisher, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Rusty-breasted Cuckoo, Great-billed Heron, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Asian Fairy-bluebird, Straw-headed Bulbul and Abbott's Babbler.

List of Birds Recorded on 27-28 April 2012

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

1. Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*
2. Barred Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator*
3. Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopus moluccensis*
4. Rufous Woodpecker *Celeus brachyurus**
5. Banded Woodpecker *Picus miniaceus**
6. Laced Woodpecker *Picus vittatus*

7. Common Goldenback *Dinopium javanense*
8. Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata*
9. Red-crowned Barbet *Megalaima rafflesii**
10. Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*
11. Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*
12. Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
13. Blue-eared Kingfisher *Alcedo meninting*
14. Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*
15. White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
16. Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*
17. Blue-throated Bee-eater *Merops viridis*
18. Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonnerati**
19. Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus*
20. Rusty-breasted Cuckoo *Cacomantis sepulcralis*
21. Little Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus**
22. Asian Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris**
23. Asian Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea**
24. Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*
25. Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*
26. Tanimbar Corella *Cacatua goffiniana*
27. Blue-rumped Parrot *Psittinus cyanurus**
28. Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot *Loriculus galgulus**
29. Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri**
30. Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*
31. Long-tailed Parakeet *Psittacula longicauda*
32. Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*
33. House Swift *Apus nipalensis*
34. Collared Scops Owl *Otus lempiji**
35. Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata**
36. Common Pigeon *Columba livia*
37. Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
38. Red Turtle Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*
39. Common Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*
40. Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata*
41. Pink-necked Green Pigeon *Treron vernans*
42. Thick-billed Green Pigeon *Treron curvirostra*
43. Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus**
44. White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*
45. Ruddy-breasted Crake *Porzana fusca**
46. Black-backed (Purple) Swamphen *Porphyrio indicus (porphyrio)*
47. Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
48. Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

49. Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
50. Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
51. Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*
52. Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
53. Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus**
54. Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*
55. Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*
56. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
57. Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*
58. Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*
59. White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
60. Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*
61. Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus*
62. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
63. Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
64. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
65. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
66. Great-billed Heron *Ardea sumatrana*
67. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
68. Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*
69. Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*
70. Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
71. Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*
72. Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis**
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. House Crow *Corvus splendens*
78. Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*
79. Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*
80. Pied Triller *Lalage nigra*
81. Pied Fantail *Rhipidura javanica*
82. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*
83. Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*
84. Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*
85. Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis*
86. White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*
87. Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*
88. Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*
89. White-vented Myna *Acridotheres javanicus*
90. Common Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa*

91. Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*
92. Straw-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus zeylanicus*
93. Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus**
94. Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier*
95. Olive-winged Bulbul *Pycnonotus plumosus*
96. Asian Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus brunneus*
97. Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia flaviventris*
98. Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*
99. Pallas's Grasshopper-warbler *Locustella certhiola**
100. Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*
101. Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis*
102. Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*
103. Dark-necked Tailorbird *Orthotomus atrogularis*
104. Rufous-tailed Tailorbird *Orthotomus sericeus*
105. Ashy Tailorbird *Orthotomus ruficeps*
106. Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
107. White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus*
108. Abbott's Babbler *Malacocincla abbotti*
109. Short-tailed Babbler *Malacocincla malaccensis**
110. Chestnut-winged Babbler *Stachyris erythroptera**
111. Pin-striped Tit-babbler *Macronous gularis*
112. Orange-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum trigonostigma*
113. Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum*
114. Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malaccensis*
115. Purple-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia sperata*
116. Copper-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia calcostetha*
117. Olive-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*
118. Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*
119. Little Spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostris*
120. Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
121. Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*
122. Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*
123. Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*