

SINGAPORE BIRD TOUR 3-4 MARCH 2012

By Lim Kim Seng (ibisbill@yahoo.com)

Rainer Moenke is a German ornithologist who wanted to maximize two full days in transit in Singapore to bird. His friend, Robert, also came along and so a two day birding tour was arranged.

We started Day One with a walk down the muddy Rifle Range Link just after 6.00 am in semi-darkness and it took a while before we heard the first owls. I was surprised not hear any Collared Scops Owls but as we got near Jelutong Tower, we heard two Brown Hawk Owls calling, then three. A careful search managed to produce one bird perched high up a tree for great looks.

It was getting brighter as we reached the boardwalk leading to MacRitchie Reservoir. A flash of blue and white revealed a Blue-winged Pitta but it flew off into the forest. We checked the forest where it had disappeared but only succeeded in flushing a Large-tailed Nightjar.

We had the usual White-throated Kingfisher and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters at MacRitchie Reservoir and waited for the sky to get brighter. More birds came including Coppersmith Barbet, Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker, Banded Woodpecker, Long-tailed Parakeet, Lesser Green Leafbird, Daurian Starling and Orange-bellied Flowerpecker. Much later, we saw three Grey-rumped Treeswifts and a Glossy Swiftlet feeding above the reservoir with other swiftlets and Pacific Swallows. Bird activity was good and we even had an unexpected Red-crowned Barbet coming to a low cinnamon to feed on its fruits and give us fantastic looks of its many colours.

It was past 9.00 am when we decided to walk back to the forest. Midway through our walk back, we had another encounter with a second Blue-winged Pitta and this time, it hung around a stream, enabling us to get good looks.

It was breezy when we got up Jelutong Tower and we had our only Blue-throated Bee-eater of the tour perched nearby in resplendent colours, a female Blue-winged Leafbird close up, passing Common Hill Mynas, an Asian Red-eyed Bulbul, and lots of sunbirds and flowerpeckers. Again, we took our time looking for birds and enjoying the view, and it was an hour before we left it for the long walk back to Rifle Range Road.

It was a wonderful morning and we tallied an impressive total of 53 species in just over four hours.

After breakfast, we made our way to Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. We reached the park around noon and explored the main pond as well as the remoter Route 2. It was low tide when we arrived and so the main hide did not produce any shorebirds, only Little Egrets.

We took the boardwalk that cut through the mangroves on the western part of the wetland reserve and saw our only Pied Fantails of the tour. We took the opportunity to check the ponds and found Whimbrel, Common Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Pacific

Golden Plover and Lesser Sand Plover here, as well as more Little Egrets and one Yellow-billed Egret. We also found a pair of Ashy Tailorbirds making a nest in a sea hibiscus bush.



Ashy Tailorbird in mangrove at Sungei Buloh. Photo © Rainer Moenke

By the time we got back to the main bridge, it was already 2.00 pm and time for lunch. A faint scream alerted me and I was able to locate two Grey-headed Fish Eagles, one flying and the other perched on a dead tree.

Lunch was consumed in air-conditioned comfort in a food court, and we also took the opportunity to update our bird lists.

Our last stop for the day was the Singapore Botanic Gardens. We arrived at 4.45 pm and I opted to check out the Evolution Garden where a Jambu Fruit Dove had been seen only hours earlier. An hour later, we had still not found our dove and we only got sore necks for our efforts. They were however several dozen Daurian Starlings and a few Blue-crowned Hanging Parrots.

We moved later to the Symphony Lake and scanned for more birds in the encroaching dusk. The lake was quiet but we managed to flush a Yellow Bittern and scope a perched male Violet Cuckoo for a decent total of 25 species in almost two hours. At 6.30 pm, we called it a day after netting a day total of 85 species, focusing mainly on sites in western Singapore. Day Two would be spent birding in the east.

Day Two started an hour later and first on the agenda was breakfast at Chang Village at 7.00 am. We had thosai and prata with coffee and tea, and were soon checking out the birds around us. We awoke the neighbourhood gang of cockatoos and easily found both Tanimbar Corella and Yellow-crested Cockatoo. Also easy were the noisy Red-breasted Parakeets, Red Turtle Doves and best of all, a pair of Oriental Pied Hornbill. They flew off and we followed them to a fruiting fig beside a Sikh Temple. Scanning the tree, we found that it was full of Asian Glossy Starlings and a few Coppersmith Barbets.



Tanimbar Corella inspecting a tree cavity at Changi Village. Photo © Rainer Moenke

Our next stop was Changi Cove. It was bright and cloudy when we drove through the rhu forest looking for birds at 8.30 am. It was real birdy with many birds calling. We found in quick succession, Lesser Coucal, Brown Shrike, Spotted, Red Turtle and Zebra Doves, and White-breasted Waterhen as we moved deeper into the rhu forest. About 1 km in, I spotted a raptor with a long wispy crest perched on a tall rhu. Jerdon's Baza! I motioned to my clients to have a look at my scope as we waited and found altogether seven bazas. We had them in view for a full ten minutes before they got nervous and moved north.

At another trail, we checked for more birds and found Baya Weaver and mixed flocks of munias comprising Scaly-breasted, White-headed and Black-headed. We also saw lots of Paddyfield Pipits, three Brahminy Kites and four Black Bazas on the move.

It was a good stop and we clocked 40 species in 90 minutes including the bazas.



One of seven Jerdon's Baza that we saw at Changi Cove. Photo © Rainer Moenke

It was already 10.00 am and a short detour brought us to Changi South, where we were keen to see more raptors. We were in luck! A short round of scanning from the roadside produced a fly-by from a handsome male Eastern Marsh Harrier and then a more distant female. About half an hour later, both Rainer and I had also spotted a male Pied Harrier flying close but low a number of times. Unfortunately, it did not reappear.

Our next stop was the rock off Loyang called Batu Putih or Squance Rock. We were able to get close from a bungalow and saw a maximum of 40 Black-naped Terns, some on rocks and others following ships. Another sought-after bird off the list!

At 11.15 am, we were at Pasir Ris Park and managed to find a cooperative pair of Red Junglefowl as well as an interacting pair of Asian Koel. We did not find the hoped for Spotted Wood Owls but a walk through the mangroves produced our bird of the day – Mangrove Pitta. It was very approachable and fed without fear while we watched.



The stunning Mangrove Pitta at Pasir Ris Park. Photo © Rainer Moenke

Around 1.00pm, we were at Halus Barrage in really hot conditions. It must have been around 35 degrees and we were wilting rapidly as we scanned for birds. Few were about in the heat but we did find a Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker but the hoped for Rosy Starling was missing. Our attempts to check the coastal breakwater was thwarted as the workers were around, so we miss our chance at Malaysian Plover. The only good birds we got were at the Halus canal where we found a breeding Javan Pond Heron, a few shorebirds and a Long-tailed Shrike. We decided to break for lunch after an hour of slogging in the heat at Halus for a paltry total of just 32 species.

After lunch, we headed for Sengkang Floating Wetland, situated at Punggol Reservoir. Our target this time was the reed warblers. We spent an hour searching the reeds and sedges in this artificial wetland and were rewarded with good views of Black-browed and Oriental Reed Warblers. We heard but did not see the Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler. Other good birds seen here included 2 Yellow Bitterns, a Purple Heron and a subadult Black-crowned Night-heron.



Black-browed Reed Warbler in reeds at Sengkang Wetland. Photo © Rainer Moenke

Our last stop of the tour was the famed Bidadari Cemetery. We arrived at 3.45 pm and found some birders staring at an old strangling fig across the road. We joined them and managed to get views of both Large and Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoos but they were shy and didn't stay. We also got good looks at a Sacrelet-backed Flowerpecker. A quick check at the cemetery grounds produced 10 Black Bazas but very little else.

Eventually, we decided to call it a day at 6.30 pm as it was getting very dark and there was very little bird movement.

Over the two days, we recorded 127 species of birds, of which 111 were seen. Highlights included both Blue-winged and Mangrove Pittas, five woodpeckers, three barbets, four kingfishers, seven cuckoos and seven parrots. Eleven raptors were also recorded including the scarce Jerdon's Baza, the spectacular Black Baza and the globally vulnerable Grey-headed Fish Eagle, and both Eastern Marsh and Pied Harriers.

List of Birds Recorded on 3-4 March 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. Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopus moluccensis*
3. Rufous Woodpecker *Celeus brachyurus**
4. Banded Woodpecker *Picus miniaceus*
5. Laced Woodpecker *Picus vittatus*
6. Common Goldenback *Dinopium javanense*
7. Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata**
8. Red-crowned Barbet *Megalaima rafflesii*
9. Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*
10. Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*
11. Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
12. Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
13. Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis**
14. White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
15. Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*
16. Blue-throated Bee-eater *Merops viridis*
17. Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*
18. Large Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx sparveriioides*
19. Hodgson’s Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx nasicolor*
20. Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus**
21. Little Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus*
22. Violet Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus*
23. Asian Drongo-cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris**
24. Asian Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*
25. Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*
26. Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus**
27. Yellow-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua sulphurea*
28. Tanimbar Corella *Cacatua goffiniana*
29. Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot *Loriculus galgulus*
30. Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*
31. Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*
32. Long-tailed Parakeet *Psittacula longicauda*
33. Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*
34. House Swift *Apus nipalensis*
35. Grey-rumped Treeswift *Hemiprocne longipennis*

36. Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata*
37. Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*
38. Common Pigeon *Columba livia*
39. Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
40. Red Turtle Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*
41. Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata*
42. Pink-necked Green Pigeon *Treron vernans*
43. White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*
44. Ruddy-breasted Crake *Porzana fusca**
45. Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
46. Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
47. Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*
48. Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
49. Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*
50. Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*
51. Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*
52. Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*
53. Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni*
54. Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes*
55. Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus**
56. Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*
57. White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
58. Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaeus*
59. Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus*
60. Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*
61. Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
62. Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus**
63. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*
64. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
65. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
66. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
67. Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*
68. Yellow-billed Egret *Mesophox intermedia*
69. (Eastern) Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis (coromandus)*
70. Javan Pond Heron *Ardeola speciosa*
71. Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*
72. Black-crowned Night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
73. Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*
74. Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis*
75. Mangrove Pitta *Pitta megarhyncha*
76. Golden-bellied Gerygone *Gerygone sulphurea**
77. Asian Fairy-bluebird *Irena puella*

78. Lesser Green Leafbird *Chloropsis cyanopogon*
79. Blue-winged Leafbird *Chloropsis cochinchinensis*
80. Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*
81. Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*
82. House Crow *Corvus splendens*
83. Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*
84. Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*
85. Pied Triller *Lalage nigra*
86. Pied Fantail *Rhipidura javanica*
87. Crow-billed Drongo *Dicrurus annectans*
88. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*
89. Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*
90. Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*
91. Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis*
92. Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*
93. Daurian Starling *Sturnus sturninus*
94. Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*
95. White-vented Myna *Acridotheres javanicus*
96. Common Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa*
97. Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
98. Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*
99. Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*
100. Sooty-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus aurigaster**
101. Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier*
102. Olive-winged Bulbul *Pycnonotus plumosus*
103. Asian Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus brunneus*
104. Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*
105. Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia flaviventris*
106. Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus**
107. Pallas's Grasshopper-warbler *Locustella certhiola**
108. Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*
109. Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis*
110. Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius**
111. Dark-necked Tailorbird *Orthotomus atrogularis**
112. Ashy Tailorbird *Orthotomus ruficeps*
113. Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis**
114. Short-tailed Babbler *Malacocincla malaccensis**
115. Pin-striped Tit-babbler *Macronous gularis*
116. Orange-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum trigonostigma*
117. Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum*
118. Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malaccensis*
119. Purple-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia sperata*

- 120. Olive-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*
- 121. Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*
- 122. Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
- 123. Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*
- 124. Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*
- 125. Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*
- 126. Black-headed Munia *Lonchura malacca*
- 127. White-headed Munia *Lonchura maja*



A Pacific Golden Plover feeding at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. Photo © Rainer Moenke