

SINGAPORE BIRD TOUR 4 APRIL 2012

By Lim Kim Seng (ibisbill@yahoo.com)

The first drops of rain came almost as soon as we left the hotel. Bob and Marcia Balestri were from the US and wanted to have a day tour to see the birds of Singapore. Bob is a keen photographer (bobbalestri@comcast.net) and is the person behind all the wonderful photographs in this report.

The rain continued even when we reached the vicinity of our first site – Central Catchment Nature Reserve – and so I suggested breakfast at a cafe. An hour later and the rain was lighter and I decided to make a run for it. Alas, it was still raining when we arrived at Rifle Range Link where we were amused by the antics of Long-tailed Macaques and a very wet Banded Woodpecker. After waiting ten minutes, we decided to opt for Plan B, which was to proceed on to Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve.

It was still raining when we arrived at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve around 8.00 am. Undaunted, we grabbed our umbrellas and tripods, and headed to the river. It was high tide. We spotted Collared Kingfishers and Common Sandpipers enjoying the rain but the hoped for Stork-billed Kingfisher could not be found. At the main hide, the low water level allowed the shorebirds to stay and we found Whimbrel, Common Greenshank, Common Redshank and Pacific Golden Plover in the hundreds. We were also entertained by the antics of three Common Goldenbacks that flew back and forth chasing each other in the rain. The best sighting here was probably an Oriental Pied Hornbill that treated us to a fly-by before vanishing.



Oriental Pied Hornbill flying in the rain at the main hide of Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. Photo © Bob Balestri

Back at the main bridge, we tried looking for Stork-billed Kingfisher after hearing its distant call but again could not locate it. Instead, we found a male Laced Woodpecker pecking an insects on the ground near the visitor centre. The next place we explored was the Mangrove Boardwalk and in spite of the inclement weather, we had great views of Copper-throated Sunbird and an Arctic Warbler giving its chattering sub-song.

At the carpark, we found a pair of Oriental Magpie-robins looking for grubs and left for our next site, Kranji Marsh.



Female Oriental Magpie-robin at the carpark of Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. Photo © Bob Balestri

The rain petered out when we reached Kranji Marsh at 10.30 am and we had ninety minutes of birding in overcast weather. The rain had flooded part of the road leading to the reservoir but the birds were out and we saw 50 species there. One of the first birds we saw were the Baya Weavers attending to their nests. These were males with their elegant bright yellow caps.

Moving through the open Albizia woods, we saw all three parakeet species – Rose-ringed, Red-breasted and Long-tailed – and a host of smaller birds including Brown Shrike, Common Iora and Asian Brown Flycatcher.

At the ponds, we got our waterbirds and they included 6 Purple Swamphens, a Common Moorhen, and a Yellow Bittern. We also watched in fascination as a hepatic morph Plaintive Cuckoo got mobbed by an irate male Olive-backed Sunbird.

On the way out, Bob and Marcia managed to connect with Slaty-breasted Rail and Ruddy-breasted Crake dashing across the road, and we also added both Greater and Lesser Coucals to our list for the day. We finished the walk at Kranji Marsh with 50 species.



An obliging Yellow Bittern at Kranji Marsh. Photo © Bob Balestri.

We took a detour to a nearby golf course to tick off Eastern Yellow Wagtail and they did not disappoint. Five birds were feeding on the green and they were all of subspecies *simillima* or what is now referred to as *tshutschensis*. Lunch was next on the agenda and we were happy that the weather had remained dry when we finished.

Our next site was Bukit Timah Nature Reserve, Singapore's oldest protected area, located in the centre of the island. We arrived around 1.00 pm and I decided to check the Brown Hawk Owl stakeout nearby. The pair had been fairly reliable and I was pleased to see that they were still present.



A pair of Brown Hawk Owls staring at us at Bukit Timah Nature Reserve. Photo © Bob Balestri

After getting the necessary photos, we moved on to nearby Hindhede Nature Park. Calls of Lineated Barbet and Straw-headed Bulbul punctuated the still air of the forest as we walked towards the quarry pond. Along the way, I spotted a Lineated Barbet high up in an albizia tree but it flew off before I could show it to Marcia. Another spectacle awaited us as we neared the pond. Loud cheeps above us were eventually revealed to be a juvenile female Violet Cuckoo. We saw the reasons for the noise as a male Olive-backed Sunbird came in and fed it!



Juvenile female Violet Cuckoo calling for lunch at Hindhede Nature Park. Photo © Bob Balestri

Eventually, we were at the quarry pond and we spent time looking for our other main quarry here – Straw-headed Bulbul. They proved to be easy as we observed a pair frantically feeding their lone youngster. Other birds seen here included Pied Fantail, a female Orange-bellied Flowerpecker and a Blue-throated Bee-eater. We saw another Banded Woodpecker flashing past but could not find our Stork-billed Kingfisher.



A view of Hindhede Nature Park, with Bukit Timah in the background. Photo © Bob Balestri.

We left Hindhede Nature Park at 2.25 pm for Bukit Gombak Stadium. Traffic was heavy and we arrived only at 2.45 pm. We got our stuff and walked past the stadium towards Little Guilin, another park with a big quarry pond. Halfway down the path, we were amused by the sight of a car reversing out. Apparently, it was a new driver that mistook the path for a road. He was surrounded by helpful passers-by, who helped to direct him out!

At the quarry pond at Little Guilin, we found a Grey-headed Fish Eagle, one of Marcia's target birds, perched on the highest part of the rock. Later, Marcia found another bird, at the bottom. Other birds seen here included White-throated Kingfisher and Straw-headed Bulbul.



The magnificent Grey-headed Fish Eagle at Little Guilin. Photo © Bob Balestri



A vista of Bukit Gombak or Little Guilin. Photo © Bob Balestri.

Our last stop of the day was Halus Wetland, on the north-east coast of Singapore. We were caught by traffic jams caused by an accident at the PIE and only arrived at Halus at 4.30 pm. It was warm and humid, a stark contrast to the morning.



Male Olive-backed Sunbird in long grass at Sungei Serangoon. Photo © Bob Balestri

We explored the newly planted reedbeds and the eastern bank of Sungei Serangoon but the birds were largely quiet and it was hard work. The reedbeds were birdless except for a pair of White-breasted Waterhen. It was more birdy in along the river. We found Pied Fantail, Common Iora, Yellow-vented Bulbul, Olive-backed Sunbird and Scaly-breasted Munia. At the new bridge over the river, we saw a dark morph Booted Eagle circling on the Punggol side in the evening sun. It flew for a few minutes before vanishing. Other birds seen here were Grey Heron and Yellow Bittern.

Eventually, we decided to call it a day at 6.00 pm. It was a very fruitful day despite the wet weather in the morning and we succeeded in recording 90 species in total, including a rain-soaked Banded Woodpecker, Oriental Pied Hornbill, all three parakeets, Plaintive and Violet Cuckoos, Brown Hawk Owl, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, the globally vulnerable Straw-headed Bulbul and Eastern Yellow Wagtail.



A pair of Collared Kingfishers awaiting dusk at Sungei Serangoon. Photo © Bob Balestri

List of Birds Recorded on 4 April 2012

Species listed with an asterisk indicates a “heard only” record. Systematics and sequence follow Lim, K.S. (2009), “The Avifauna of Singapore”. Names in brackets refer to recent nomenclatural changes.

1. Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus**
2. Banded Woodpecker *Picus miniaceus*
3. Laced Woodpecker *Picus vittatus*
4. Common Goldenback *Dinopium javanense*
5. Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata*
6. Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*
7. Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
8. Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
9. Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis**
10. White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

11. Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*
12. Blue-throated Bee-eater *Merops viridis*
13. Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*
14. Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonneratii**
15. Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus*
16. Violet Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus*
17. Little Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus**
18. Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea**
19. Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis**
20. Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*
21. Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*
22. Long-tailed Parakeet *Psittacula longicauda*
23. Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*
24. Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata*
25. Common Pigeon *Columba livia*
26. Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
27. Red Turtle Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*
28. Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata*
29. Pink-necked Green Pigeon *Treron vernans*
30. Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus*
31. White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*
32. Ruddy-breasted Crake *Porzana fusca*
33. White-browed Crake *Porzana cinerea**
34. Watercock *Gallicrex cinerea*
35. Purple (Black-backed) Swampphen *Porphyrio porphyrio (indicus)*
36. Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
37. Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
38. Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
39. Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
40. Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*
41. Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*
42. Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*
43. White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
44. Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*
45. Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis*
46. Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus*
47. Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus*
48. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
49. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
50. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
51. Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*
52. Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*

53. Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*
54. Asian Fairy-bluebird *Irena puella**
55. Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*
56. House Crow *Corvus splendens*
57. Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*
58. Pied Triller *Lalage nigra*
59. Pied Fantail *Rhipidura javanica*
60. Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*
61. Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*
62. Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis*
63. Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*
64. Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*
65. White-vented Myna *Acridotheres javanicus*
66. Common Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa*
67. Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
68. Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*
69. Straw-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus zeylanicus*
70. Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*
71. Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier*
72. Olive-winged Bulbul *Pycnonotus plumosus*
73. Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia flaviventris*
74. Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*
75. Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola**
76. Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis*
77. Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius**
78. Dark-necked Tailorbird *Orthotomus atrogularis**
79. Ashy Tailorbird *Orthotomus ruficeps**
80. Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
81. Pin-striped Tit-babbler *Macronous gularis**
82. Orange-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum trigonostigma*
83. Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum*
84. Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malaccensis*
85. Copper-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia calcostetha*
86. Olive-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*
87. Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava (tschutschensis)*
88. Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*
89. Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*