

## Birding Singapore 23 November 2010

By Lim Kim Seng ([ibisbill@yahoo.com](mailto:ibisbill@yahoo.com))

I met my clients, Shimada-san and Kodama-san from Tokyo, Japan, at the hotel lobby shortly before 5.30 am and we were in the forests of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve within half an hour.

The full moon meant that finding owls would be a problem and so it proved. Near the highest point of the path leading to Upper Peirce Reservoir, we heard a **Collared Scops Owl** calling. It was too far inside the forests so we moved on. At an open area with tall terentang trees, we found three calling **Brown Hawk-owls**. Despite waiting for some time, we only got a glimpse of one flying into foliage. The tall trees foiled our attempts to get better looks at the sky brightened almost immediately.



Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus* at Central Catchment Nature Reserve.  
Photo © Kodama-san

The **Greater Racket-tailed Drongo** was one of our first birds we saw well in the semi-darkness and it was followed by the plaintive calls of **Ashy Bulbuls**. They were coming from the treetops and we saw three birds as they moved on. We also decided to move on as we wanted to catch the richer habitat nearer Jelutong Tower.

At the old pumphouse, we found a lone **Oriental Dollarbird** perched on top of a dead tree and also heard at least two skulking **Siberian Blue Robins**. A bonus find here was a passing **Oriental Pratincole**, winging its way over the forest. It was also near here that we caught a glimpse of the generally uncooperative **Short-tailed Babbler**. At least four pairs were heard but we only succeeded in seeing one bird!

The sun was quite high in the sky when we reached the end of the boardwalk and peered around the misty environs of MacRitchie Reservoir. Scanning with our binoculars, we found a few **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters**, several **Pacific Swallows**, one **White-throated Kingfisher** and a sky full of feeding swiftlets.

We moved on to the fig trees just on the edge of the golf course that had been fruiting ten days earlier but found few fruits, hence fewer birds. **Pink-necked Green Pigeons** and **Asian Glossy Starlings** were easy to find as well as **Yellow-vented Bulbul**. Straining our necks, we checked the foliage and were rewarded with close views of a **Coppersmith Barbet**, several **Asian Red-eyed** and **Cream-vented Bulbuls** feeding on the remaining figs, **Black-naped Oriole**, a female **Asian Fairy-bluebird**, a few **Common Ioras**, an active **Arctic Warbler**, and a stunning male **Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker**. However, the Jambu Fruit Doves seen here last week appeared to have moved on.

The *Dillenia* bushes below the fig trees also provided us close views of a pair of **Oriental Magpie-robins** and a foraging male **Brown-throated Sunbird** despite the menacing presence of buzzing Black Carpenter Bees.

We also saw a blooming Pigeon Orchid on one of the old trees by the reservoir, with their white and yellow flowers exuding a sweet scent as we walked past.



Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus brunneus* at a *Dillenia* bush at MacRitchie Reservoir. Photo © Kodama-san

We lingered until around 10 am before deciding to head back. More birds were picked up along the way including an obliging **Banded Woodpecker**, a close-up **Chestnut-winged Babbler** and two **Crimson Sunbirds** at the tapioca patch.

It was a pleasant if warm morning in the forest and we had recorded 39 species. A good start indeed!

To celebrate our success in the forest, we indulged in a breakfast of Yong Tau Foo and fruit juice at a local food court before arriving at our second site, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve.

After paying our tickets at the counter, we proceeded straight to the bridge to find a river that was swollen by the tide and threatening to flood it. The tide was 3 metres and as a result, birds were scarce. All of them were on the taller trees. We found 30 **Little Egrets** in one tree and five **Common Redshanks** on a high branch.

Scanning the river yielded some rewards. We located a **Black-capped Kingfisher** perching quietly in the mangrove by the bridge and a male **Common Goldenback** on a dead tree to add to a **Common Sandpiper** and a lone **Collared Kingfisher** that we had found earlier.

The main hide was disappointing as the entire pond was flooded to its brim and so there were no birds. So we left and walked on the path that is Route 1. As it was near noon, bird activity was low and we were soon at Pulau Buloh. Unfortunately, it was just as birdless and the only life we found were near water – the soft-shelled crabs and nerite shells clinging to the trunk of mangroves and mudskippers, archers and halfbeaks in the murky waters below.

Near Hide 1E, we found a pair of **Common Tailorbirds** foraging actively next to a pair of **Ashy Tailorbirds**, a **Brown-throated Sunbird** and a pair of **Pied Fantails**. We also located a group of five **Oriental Magpie-robins** that was actively engaged in song, posturing and short chases in the woods.



A male Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis* singing at Sungei Buloh. Photo © Kodama-san

At Hide 1E, we found what we were looking for – the shorebirds. Seven species of the commoner ones were here – **Whimbrel** (most numerous), **Common Redshank**, **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Common Greenshank**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Curlew Sandpiper** and **Pacific Golden Plover**. There was no sign of Great Knot or Lesser Sand Plover. We spent half an hour checking the shorebirds but found nothing new. The mossies were becoming a nuisance and so we left.

The highlight of our walk at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve was an adult **Rusty-breasted Cuckoo** near the Freshwater Pond. It flew in and perch on a branch for over ten minutes, giving us very good looks.



Adult Rusty-breasted Cuckoo *Cacomantis sepulcralis* at Sungei Buloh. Photo © Kodama-san

We were back at the bridge after two hours and spent some time looking for possible otters and crocodile. We found neither but located a single **Great Egret** hiding in the foliage of mangroves.

As it was warm, we stopped by the cafeteria to have some cool drinks and recharge our batteries before heading east to Bidadari Cemetery.

Bidadari Cemetery is an old cemetery that had been reduced in size due to the construction of a train station nearby. It remained a green lung in the middle of Singapore and was known as a good spot for migrants. Unfortunately, there was light rain when we arrived and as there was no sign of it abating, we left in order not to waste time. The only birds we saw in the fifteen minutes expended here were two **Black Bazas** settling in one of the big trees there.

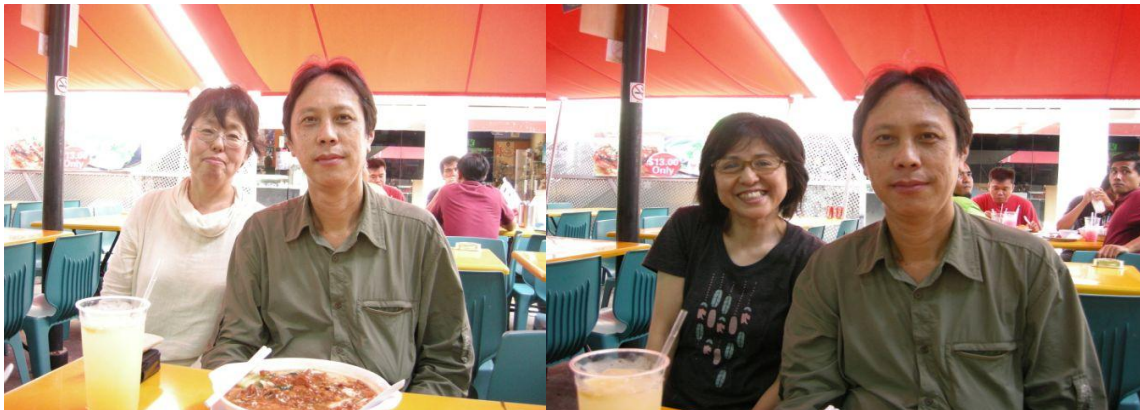
Our last spot was Lorong Halus and we arrived in good weather. The rain didn't affect the vast open country here and so we stopped by the canal at Sungei Blukar. It was a good stop. We had another **Black Baza**, a pair of **Common Goldenbacks**, and four **Sooty-headed Bulbuls**. At the canal, we found a **Common Kingfisher**, a juvenile **Striated Heron**, a **Yellow-billed Egret**, some **Little Egrets** and three **Grey Herons**.

At another canal on the Pasir Ris end, we found more birds. There were two winter-plumaged **Chinese Pond Herons** foraging with a **Little Egret**, one **Pacific Golden Plover** and another **Common Kingfisher**. There was some construction work going on and it appeared as if a pavement was being built beside this bird-rich canal. The sky above produced **Red-breasted Parakeets** on passage and a **Crested Honey Buzzard** trying to fend off attacks by four **House Crows**.

The grassland was disturbed by construction work and was not as productive as before. Even then, we found a male **Asian Koel**, a **Long-tailed Shrike** and two **Scaly-breasted Munias**.

We had spent just 30 minutes at Lorong Halus and seen 26 species of birds. That's almost a bird every minute!

After birding at Lorong Halus, it was time for our late lunch and we decided to have a sumptuous one at Simpang Bedok. Steamed chicken rice, seafood *olio* and *hor fun* were some of the classic signature Singapore dishes that we sampled. To cool us off, we had hot Chinese tea and ice-cold lime juice.



A most important post-birding ritual – lunch and photos! Photo © Kodama-san (left) & Shimada-san

The tour ended at 5 pm when we said our goodbyes at the airport. Despite the mid-afternoon rainy spell and early finish, we still finished the tour with a total of 74 species. This included 4 kingfishers, 8 shorebirds, 3 raptors and 7 bulbuls.

## Species List

### Birds

Nomenclature, sequence and taxonomy follows Lim, K.S. (2009)'s "The Avifauna of Singapore".

Banded Woodpecker *Picus miniaceus*  
Common Goldenback *Dinopium javanese*  
Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*  
Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*  
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*  
White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*  
Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pileata*  
Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*  
Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*  
Rusty-breasted Cuckoo *Cacomantis sepulcralis*  
Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*  
Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*  
Long-tailed Parakeet *Psittacula longicauda*  
Collared Scops owl *Otus lempiji\**  
Brown Hawk-owl *Ninox scutulata*  
Common Pigeon *Columba livia*  
Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*  
Pink-necked Green Pigeon *Treron vernans*  
White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*  
Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*  
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*  
Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*  
Common Greenshank *Tringa neobularia*  
Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*  
Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*  
Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*  
Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*  
Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes*  
Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus*  
White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*  
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*  
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*  
Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*  
Yellow-billed Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*  
Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus*  
Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*  
Golden-bellied Gerygone *Gerygone sulphurea\**  
Asian Fairy-bluebird *Irena puella*  
Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*

House Crow *Corvus splendens*  
Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*  
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*  
Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*  
Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica\**  
Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane\**  
Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis*  
White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus\**  
Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*  
Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*  
White-vented Myna *Acridotheres javanicus*  
Common Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa*  
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*  
Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*  
Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*  
Sooty-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus aurigaster*  
Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier*  
Olive-winged Bulbul *Pycnonotus plumosus*  
Cream-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus simplex*  
Asian Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus brunneus*  
Ashy (Cinereous) Bulbul *Hemixos flavala*  
Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus\**  
Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*  
Dark-necked Tailorbird *Orthotomus atrogularis*  
Rufous-tailed Tailorbird *Orthotomus sericeus\**  
Ashy Tailorbird *Orthotomus ruficeps*  
Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*  
Short-tailed Babbler *Malacocincla malaccensis*  
Chestnut-winged Babbler *Stachyris erythroptera*  
Striped Tit-babbler *Macronous gularis*  
Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum*  
Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malacensis*  
Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*  
Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus*  
Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*

(An asterisk indicates heard only.)

## **Mammals**

Common Treeshrew *Tupaia glis*  
Long-tailed Macaque *Macaca nemestrina*  
Plantain Squirrel *Callosciurus notatus*  
Slender Squirrel *Sundasciurus tenuis*

## Reptiles

Common Sun Skink *Mabuya multifasciata*  
Malayan Water Monitor *Varanus salvator*

## Ampibians

Field Frog *Rana limnocharis*



A flock of Pink-necked Green Pigeons *Treron vernans* at MacRitchie Reservoir. Photo © Kodama-san