

Birding Singapore 30 November 2010

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This was a tour with a difference. PY actually got interested in birds and specifically in bird photography while she was stationed in Hongkong. She wanted to focus on the birds of Singapore next and so we arranged a full day tour on 30 November 2010.

We started at a leisurely pace with breakfast at a roti prata stall along Evans Road sometime after 6.30 am. When we arrived at the Botanic Gardens, it was still dark and so, we proceeded on to a high point overlooking Symphony Lake.

The sky got brighter and we began to see some bird activity. **Asian Glossy Starlings** were arriving on the palms and were accompanied by **Pink-necked Green Pigeons**. The starlings spent their time preening before moving on. The pigeons landed at a fruiting fig tree and were busy feasting on the big orange fruits. The starlings joined them. Also present at the fruiting fig were **Coppersmith Barbet**, **Yellow-vented Bulbul**, **White-vented Myna** and **Common Hill Myna**. The ground was littered with fallen or partially eaten fruits and these were consumed by mynas and **Spotted Doves**.

We also found a pair of **Common Goldenbacks** and soon had them in clear view on a nearby palm tree. Also seen were up to five **Blue-crowned Hanging Parrots** feeding on the flowers of a palm tree. We walked around the Lake to get a better look at the parrots but the backlight from the rising sun meant that the photos taken weren't ideal. Other birds that we found on the walk round Symphony Lake included **White-throated Kingfisher**, **White-breasted Waterhen**, **Yellow Bittern**, **Oriental Magpie-robin**, **Ashy Tailorbird** and **Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker**. The pavilion was crowded with **Common Pigeons** and **Eurasian Tree Sparrows**.

Our next stop was the bed of heliconias beside the open-air stage. Here we found **Brown-throated**, **Olive-backed** and **Crimson Sunbirds** feeding and posing nicely.

At 9.45 am, we left the Botanic Gardens satisfied with our efforts as more people poured into the park. PY was especially pleased with the goldenbacks, as they posed in perfect diffused light of the morning sun.

Our next site was Bukit Batok Nature Park. We arrived shortly after 10.00 am but found the place to be quiet and birdless except for two passing **Blue-crowned Hanging Parrots**. PY took a shot of the deserted nest of the **White-bellied Sea Eagle** that was clearly visible on one of the telecoms towers.

Our next major stopover was the wetlands of Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, located in the north-west corner of Singapore. We arrived near 11.00 am and walked quickly to the river. The river was low but rising. We scanned to our left and found the small Estuarine Crocodile at its usual hideout. Looking around, we also found **Great** and **Little Egrets**,

Grey Heron and **Common Sandpiper**. Moments later, another photographer shouted out to me and motioned to the river on the right. He had found a group of Smooth Otters – three of them squabbling on the bank and disappearing rapidly into the mangroves. What luck to see both crocodile and otter at the same time!

At one moment, we watched as a **Great Egret** walked towards the waiting crocodile before stopping suddenly within a couple of metres of the reptile and then changing its direction quickly.

The main hide had a few people but there was nothing to see so we left to check the sluice gates. Before we were able to reach it, we were greeted by some frantic bird activity. It was up in the mangroves where we saw in quick succession, **Little Bronze Cuckoo**, **Common Iora**, **Asian Brown Flycatcher**, **Arctic Warbler** and **Brown-throated Sunbird**. Most of these birds came close enough to allow PY to take some great shots. We also found two **Ashy Tailorbirds** here.

Eventually we left them to study the gathering of waterbirds at the sluice gates. **Little Egrets** were feeding together with a host of shorebirds, mostly **Whimbrel**, **Common Redshank**, **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Common Greenshank**, **Common Sandpiper** and **Pacific Golden Plover**. Just then, I had a familiar scream and looked up to see a circling adult **Crested Serpent Eagle**. Unfortunately, it went away soon after, before PY could squeeze off a shot. Other good birds seen here include a newly arrived **Yellow Bittern**.

Back at the bridge, we admired a **Black-naped Oriole** in all his finery and three **Collared Kingfishers** on either side of the bridge.

At the visitor centre, we found a pair of **Scarlet-backed Flowerpeckers** feeding on cherries and then found one male **Crimson Sunbird** behaving abnormally. It was staring at its reflection on a window and singing to it for what seemed like an eternity!

Satisfied with capturing more photogenic birds at Sungei Buloh, we left for lunch at an air-conditioned food court.

Our last site of the day was the peaceful woods of Bidadari Cemetery. We arrived around 3.00 pm and walked over to a narrow concrete pathway. A bird photographer was present and he motioned to us. We walked to the spot he was pointing – a big tree – and found a juvenile **Oriental Cuckoo**. Once PY obtained her photos, we moved on to explore deeper into the woods. The birdlife was understandably low but we got another surprise in the form of a juvenile **Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo**. It was perched low and stayed for a long time.

Eventually, PY decided to call it a day and we left.

For a first attempt at capturing some of Singapore's wondrous birds, we did well. We logged 61 species in all and managed to get decent shots of some wonderful birds. Some of the highlights included Common Goldenback, Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot, Little

Bronze Cuckoo, Oriental Cuckoo, Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo, Black-naped Oriole, Arctic Warbler, Ashy Tailorbird and a trio of sunbirds.

Species List

Birds

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

Banded Woodpecker *Picus miniaceus**
Laced Woodpecker *Picus vittatus**
Common Goldenback *Dinopium javanense*
Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata*
Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*
Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis**
White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*
Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx nisicolor*
Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus*
Little Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus*
Asian Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*
Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus*
Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot *Loriculus galgulus*
Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*
Long-tailed Parakeet *Psittacula longicauda*
House Swift *Apus nipalensis*
Grey-rumped Treeswift *Hemiprocne longipennis*
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 nebularia*
Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*
Curlew sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*
Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*
White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*

Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis*
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*
Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*
Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*
Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*
Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*
Ashy Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus**
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*
Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*
Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*
Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis*
Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*
White-vented Myna *Acridotheres javanicus*
Common Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa*
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*
Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*
Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier*
Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius**
Dark-necked Tailorbird *Orthotomus atrogularis**
Ashy Tailorbird *Orthotomus ruficeps*
Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum*
Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malaccensis*
Olive-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*
Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*
Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

(An asterisk indicates heard only.)

Mammals

Smooth Otter *Lutrogale perspicillata*
Plantain Squirrel *Callosciurus notatus*
Variable Squirrel *Callosciurus finlaysonii*

Reptiles

Estuarine Crocodile *Crocodylus porosus*
Changeable Lizard *Calotes versicolor*
Common Sun Skink *Mabuya multifasciata*
Malayan Water Monitor *Varanus salvator*