

Birding Singapore 3 December 2010

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The dawn was breaking when we arrived at Rifle Range Road. As it was still dim, I gave a torch to Meera and Ross, and quickly got on the trail to MacRitchie Reservoir. We heard a **Brown Hawk Owl** on the way to Jelutong Tower and as the forest got brighter, we heard drongos and hill mynas waking up. About 100 metres before Jelutong Tower, we saw a female **Common Emerald Dove**, cloaked in its brown and emerald hues, walking nonchalantly on the trail. Satisfied as seeing a forest jewel so early in the day, we proceeded on to MacRitchie Reservoir.

The first bird we saw when we reached MacRitchie Reservoir was a lone **Grey-headed Fish Eagle** perched just 50 metres away from us! It provided us great views through the spotting scope. We also saw **Blue-tailed Bee-eater** and **Pacific Swallow** using the same dead tree as a look out post for flying insects. Interestingly, a **Blue-winged Pitta** called once near the reservoir pumphouse but I could not find it.

Moving towards the fig trees, we found little activity. The big birds were not there. Instead, we found **Yellow-vented**, **Olive-winged** and **Asian Red-eyed Bulbuls** feeding on the remaining fruits with **Black-naped Orioles** and **Common Ioras**. We also saw **Long-tailed Parakeets** and **Common Hill Mynas**.

At one corner of the golf course, we scanned for more birds. The first joggers and golfers were already active and so were the birds. We found a male **Asian Koel** followed by a female and two **Collared Kingfishers** on the greens.

We retreated to the forest at around 8.30 am and climbed up Jelutong Tower. Here, we were thrilled to find a pair of **Chestnut-bellied Malkohas** moving clumsily below us. They didn't stay very long. We also saw an **Oriental Dollarbird** on a palm frond, a male **Purple-throated Sunbird** on another even more distant palm leaf and a close-up male **Orange-bellied Flowerpecker**.

At the junction leading to Rifle Range Road, we found a pair of **Short-tailed Babblers**. They were cooperative and allowed good, close views.

The last half an hour in the forest was unusually productive. We found two separate **Forest Wagtails** foraging on the leaf litter and had close encounters with the brilliantly coloured **Crimson Sunbirds** at a tapioca patch.

It was a good morning by any standards and we ended our rainforest watch with 41 species.

We had a quick breakfast at a coffee shop sampling South Indian cuisine of *roti prata* with coffee.

Our next stop was Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. It was high tide when we reached the river. We scanned here and found several **Collared Kingfishers**. The main hide was birdless so we went to the exposed mud near the sluice gates. Here we found most of the waterbirds ranging from **Little Egrets** to **Whimbrels**. We also found a **Yellow Bittern** vying with **Striated Herons** for territory.

We spent quite a bit of time looking at the waterbirds and then moved on to check the rest of the route round the main pond at Sungei Buloh. We got good views of a **Brahminy Kite** and a **White-bellied Sea Eagle** in the cloudy skies above. Other birds we saw here included a **Common Kingfisher** at Pulau Buloh, **Oriental Magpie-robin**, **Asian Brown Flycatcher** and **Common Tailorbird**.

On our way out, we flushed another **Yellow Bittern** at a freshwater pond and a male **Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker** at the cherry tree next to the ticketing counter. We had spent two hours at Buloh and got 40 species. Not bad at all!

Our next site was the open country of Kranji Marsh, less than 15 minutes' drive from Buloh. We were greeted by very warm, humid conditions. As usual, the birds at the open woods were quiet so we focused our attention on the open country and canal to our left.

We found one **Lesser Coucal** and then had the luck to see a pale morph **Changeable Hawk Eagle** being mobbed by a **Large-billed Crow**. Wow!

Moving on, we found 2 **Brown** and 1 **Long-tailed Shrikes** as well as a **Purple Heron** by the road.

We walked past the ponds (which were lifeless in the heat of the mid-day) and took a scan of the Kranji Reservoir. Here we found 2 roosting **White-winged Terns** and then an unexpected sighting of 2 **Ashy Bulbuls** in the trees above us.

At 2.00 pm, we left Kranji Marsh having recorded 28 species.

It was good to have lunch in the air-conditioned comfort of a food court in one of the biggest shopping malls in the north.

After lunch, we headed for Bidadari Cemetery, to look for woodland birds, especially migrants. As we walked to the woodland, the dark clouds gathered. We saw a flock of 18 **Black Bazas** moving off. It was an impressive sight. Checking the trees, we found an **Indian Cuckoo** at the same tree that held an Oriental Cuckoo just a few days earlier. Any further opportunity to bird was spoiled when the dreaded afternoon downpour came crashing down minutes later. We rain back to the car and then decided to call it a day!

It was a good day despite the rain. We had recorded a total of 82 species including some surprises such as **Chestnut-bellied Malkoha**, **Grey Plover**, **Ashy Bulbul** and **Forest Wagtail**. And who can forget the awesome **Grey-headed Fish Eagle** or the spectacle of 18 **Black Bazas** filling the darkening sky at Bidadari?

Species List

Birds

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

Banded Woodpecker *Picus miniaceus**
Common Goldenback *Dinopium javanense*
Oriental Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*
Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*
Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*
Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus*
Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*
Chestnut-bellied Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus sumatranus*
Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*
Long-tailed Parakeet *Psittacula longicauda*
Brown Hawk-owl *Ninox scutulata**
Common Pigeon *Columba livia*
Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
Common Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*
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*
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*
Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes*
Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*
White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*
Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*
Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis*
Changeable hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatu*

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*
Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*
Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*
Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis**
Golden-bellied *Gerygone sulphurea**
Asian Fairy-bluebird *Irena puella**
Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*
Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*
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*
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*
Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goaivier*
Olive-winged Bulbul *Pycnonotus plumosus*
Asian Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus brunneus*
Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala*
Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis**
Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia flaviventris**
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*
Orange-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum trigonostigma*
Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum*
Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malacensis*
Purple-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia sperata*
Copper-throated Sunbird *Nectarinia calcostetha**

Olive-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*
Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*
Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus*
Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*

(An asterisk indicates heard only.)

Mammals

Long-tailed Macaque *Macaca nemestrina*
Plantain Squirrel *Callosciurus notatus*
Variable Squirrel *Callosciurus finlaysonii*
Slender Squirrel *Sundasciurus tenuis*

Reptiles

Changeable Lizard *Calotes versicolor*
Common Flying Dragon *Draco volans*
Spotted Gecko *Gehyra mutilata*
Malayan Water Monitor *Varanus salvator*