

Report on the 24th Annual Bird Census

By Lim Kim Seng

The Nature Society (Singapore)'s very active Bird Group conducted its 24th Annual Bird Census (ABC) on 15th March 2008 in generally fair weather. It saw the involvement of a total of 38 people at 23 sites, down from 46 observers and 27 sites in 2008. In all, 7,135 birds from 144 species were recorded, the lowest since 2005.

Of the 23 sites counted, Ubin West and Neo Tiew Lane 2 were the most diverse with 57 species each followed by Buloh 2 with 53 species. The least diverse sites were Telok Blangah Hill Park with 27 species recorded, followed by Sime Road with 30 species and Sembawang Park, with 31 species.

The most bird populous site was, as expected, Sungei Mandai. It had 665 birds, a tremendous drop from 1,896 birds of 2008. Whether this drastic drop is a one-off occurrence will depend on future census results but this is the first time in recent years that numbers had dropped below 1,000 birds for this site. In second place was Neo Tiew Lane 2 with 590 birds and third was Botanic Gardens with 433 birds. The least populous sites were Telok Blangah Hill Park with 180 birds counted, followed by Mount Faber with 205 birds and Bukit Timah Nature Reserve (213).

Pulau Ubin and Sungei Buloh were two megabiodiversity protected areas which had two sites each in ABC 2009 but it was Sungei Buloh which had a better overall diversity this round with 71 species compared to Pulau Ubin's 67. In terms of abundance, Pulau Ubin was well ahead with 766 birds compared to Buloh's rather poor 489.

Because of the lack of observers and other extenuating circumstances, Bukit Batok Nature Park, Kranji Dam, Marina East, Nee Soon, Pasir Ris Park, Simpang Grassland and Upper Seletar Reservoir were not covered in this year's census. It is hoped that the pool of leaders can be increased in the years ahead, with the involvement of more people from the birding community.

What then was Singapore's most numerous bird? Well, it was none other than our ubiquitous sturnid yet again. The White-vented Myna retained its pole position for the third successive year with a score of 1,161 birds down from 1,364 birds of 2008. Second was Asian Glossy Starling with 481 birds, a decrease from the 607 birds last year. Coming in third to fifth positions were Pink-necked Green Pigeon (389), Yellow-vented Bulbul (382) and Black-naped Oriole (190). All the birds in the top five positions scored less when compared with 2008 (Lim, K.S. 2008).

The remaining top ten birds were Pacific Swallow, in sixth place with 190 birds, up from 162 in 20-08, Spotted Dove (188), Daurian Starling (188), Little Egret (150) and Common Pigeon (143).

Perhaps the most dramatic fall of all was that of the Pacific Golden Plover. This year, it scored 136 birds to hold 13th position. It was runners-up last year with 1,038 birds. Its decline is also reflected in the other waterbirds. Only the Little Egret and not a single wader is in the Top Ten this year. Whether this is just a blip or the start of a decline is unknown.

The most dramatic rise was shown by the White-headed Munia. No birds were counted in 2008 but 120 birds were counted this year, enabling it to rise to 18th position. Also noteworthy was the rise of the migrant sturnid, Daurian Starling, which scored 188 birds to rise to 9th place, a remarkable performance considering that only 5 birds were present in 2008.

The top 20 birds of 2009 are listed below (Table 1) together with comparative numbers and rankings from 2008:

#	SPECIES	ABC 2009	ABC 2008
1	WHITE-VENTED MYNA	1161	1364 (1)
2	ASIAN GLOSSY STARLING	481	607 (3)
3	PINK-NECKED GREEN PIGEON	389	448 (5)
4	YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL	382	468 (4)
5	BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE	190	243 (6)
6	PACIFIC SWALLOW	190	162 (13)
7	SPOTTED DOVE	188	210 (8)
8	DAURIAN STARLING*	188	5 (107)
9	LITTLE EGRET*	150	190 (11)
10	COMMON PIGEON	143	112 (20)
11	HOUSE CROW	141	191 (10)
12	COMMON GREENSHANK*	137	202 (9)
13	PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER*	136	1038 (2)
14	COLLARED KINGFISHER	131	165 (12)
15	OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD	124	127 (17)
16	ASHY MINIVET*	123	128 (16)
17	COMMON IORA	120	132 (15)
18	WHITE-HEADED MUNIA	120	0 (unplaced)
19	WHIMBREL*	106	232 (7)
20	ASIAN KOEL	102	100 (22)

Table 1: Top 20 Most Numerous Birds in ABC 2009

(Note: Species marked with an asterisk indicate migrants.)

The total number of migrant species recorded was 37 species or 25.7% of the total of 144 species counted. 106 species were resident and one, a non-breeding visitor.

Of the 56 nationally threatened species, 20 species (down from 21 in 2008) or 35.7% were recorded. The most abundant nationally threatened species was the Grey Heron with a count of 98 birds, down from 115 birds in 2008 and falling to 21st position overall. The only globally threatened species encountered in this year's census was Straw-headed Bulbul of which 55 birds were recorded, up slightly from 51 in 2008 and 50 in 2007 and putting it in 32nd position. It was also the second most numerous nationally threatened species recorded this year. Our third most numerous nationally threatened species was the Oriental Magpie Robin, which was placed 49th with its nation-wide count of 31 birds. It was 50th in 2008 with a similar score of 34 birds.

The most exciting birds observed during ABC 2009 were a Barn Owl at Kent Ridge Park, a Grey Nightjar at Chinese Garden, a Mangrove Pitta at Ubin Central and White-shouldered Starlings at Bishan Park and Punggol and a Grey Wagtail at Bukit Batok West.

The following people led or assisted in ABC 2009 and made it a success:

Doreen Ang, Chan Kim Cheng, Chan Mei Yee, Chen Jinwen, Alfred Chia, Geoffrey Davison, SC Fang & family, Con Foley, Willie Foo, Goh Si Guim, Margie Hall, James Heng, Ho Hua Chew, Kenneth Kee, Nessie Khoo, Maurice Kwan, Danny Lau, Lee Ee Ling, Jimmy Lee, Lim Kim Chuah, Lim Kim Keang, Lim Kim Seng, Alan Owyong, Peng Ah Huay, SK Phang, Rehan Yusoff,

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Thanks once again to all who helped ensure the success of this 24th edition of the ABC. Hope you had fun and see you again in our special 25th edition in 2010!

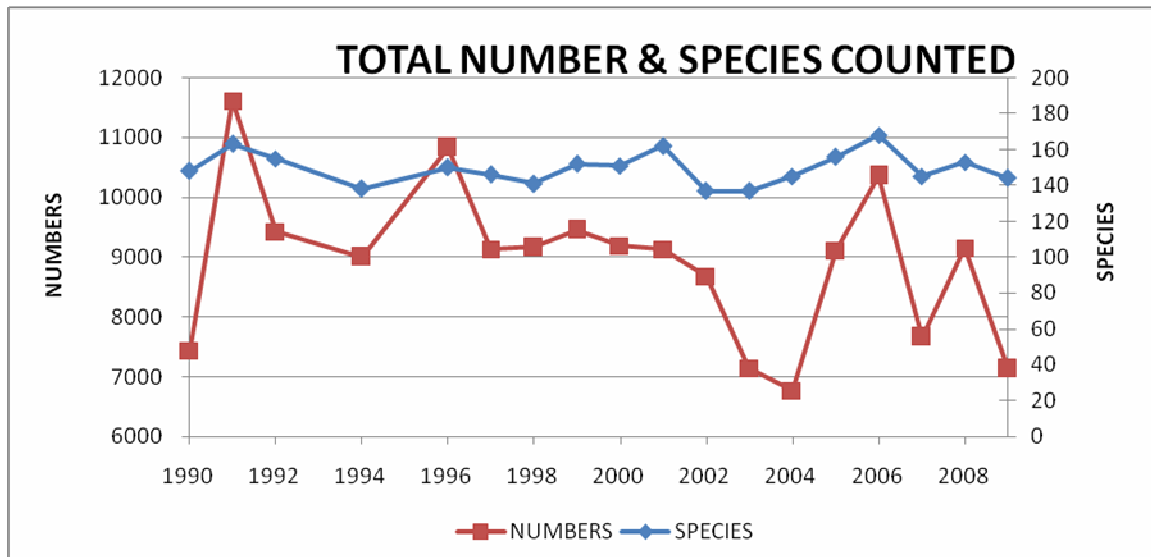


Figure 1: Total bird numbers and species of Annual Bird Census, 1990-2009

References

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