

27th Singapore Green Bird Race, Pulau Ubin 24th October 2010



Eleven enthusiastic teams participated in the 27th Singapore Green Bird Race 2010. This year, the geographic scope of the race was narrowed down to Pulau Ubin to allow easier travel for participants and also to generate crucial information on the bird life of Singapore's last rural frontier. There are two categories for participants, the novice category which lasted from 8am to 4pm, and the advanced category, which was slightly longer, ending at 5pm. Like the previous year, all teams had to forego the luxury of private cars and taxis, and even buses as there are none on Ubin! Instead, participants could move around on rented bicycles, or revert to the most basic transport mean, the foot!

Bird Race Results

Rankings	Team Names	No. of Species Seen
Novice		
1	Harbour Hornbills	53
2	Fledglings	44
3	Kingfishers	44
4	Rajawali	35
5	Dodo	25
Advanced		
1	Strix Juniors	74
2	Little Terns	67
3	ST Eagles	60
4	Lewin	54
5	Malay Pot-bellied Laughing-thrush	49
6	Woodpeckers	49

The winning team in the advanced category went to Strix Junior (Subaraj, Serin, Sean and Rifqi) which traversed the forests and mangroves of Pulau Ubin on bicycle and coming back with a total of 74 species, a respectable number considering the narrower habitat range and geographic scope. Coming second in line was the Little Terns (Lim Kim Keang, Alfred Chia, Tan Ju Lin), who garnered the century shield, by nailing their fiftieth species at 1114 hrs.

The winning team for the novice category, the Harbour Hornbills (Jeremy and Amanda Lewis), spotted a total of 53 species, a very good total that included some interesting records like the Great-billed Heron and Grey Plover and an instant promotion to 'Advanced' for future bird races. The "Bird of the Day" prize was awarded to the ST eagles, (Alan OwYong, Leonard, Mui Hoong and Yue Yun) for spotting the White-rumped Munia, a locally endangered species that is hardly recorded in Singapore's forests these days.

Race Highlights

A total of 108 species, which made up nearly 30% of Singapore's bird list and 60% of the Pulau Ubin list, were recorded by all teams at various spots throughout Pulau Ubin. Of these, 72 (67%) were residents, 35 (32.1%) were migratory and one (0.9%) were non-breeding visitors. Notable among these records were 16 nationally threatened species, and a further three nationally near-threatened species. Furthermore, there were two globally near-threatened species (Long-tailed Parakeet, Grey-headed Fish Eagle) and one globally threatened species, the Straw-headed Bulbul, which is also one of Ubin's flagship birds.

An inspection of the combined checklist by all 11 teams yielded a number of interesting species, either because they were uncommon or rare, threatened or the first recorded instances of occurrence for Pulau Ubin. In no particular order, these include: Red Junglefowl, Fork-tailed Swift, Spotted Wood Owl, Thick-billed Green Pigeon, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Grey Plover, Red-wattled Lapwing, Lesser Crested Tern, Black-naped Tern, Chinese Goshawk, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Great-billed Heron, Red-rumped Swallow, Straw-headed Bulbul, Ashy Bulbul, Copper-throated Sunbird and White-rumped Munia.

Observations gleaned from the race confirmed that a number of nationally-threatened birds continue to persist on Pulau Ubin's secondary forests, plantations and mangroves, highlighting its importance for bird conservation. This includes Singapore's largest resident land bird, the Great-billed Heron and two well-known songbirds, the Straw-headed Bulbul and the White-rumped Shama. An important find is the White-rumped Munia, one of the least frequently encountered of Singapore's threatened birds and indicates that these rare munias continue to cling on to survival in Ubin's woodlands. Most importantly, the race also documented a new record for the island, the Grey-headed Fish Eagle. An adult and a juvenile sighted meant that these rare eagles may have bred on Ubin. Another significant record was the Thick-billed Green Pigeon which is a familiar bird of the forests on the mainland, and could have wandered across the sea to Ubin in search of fruits, or even from neighboring Johor.

Finally, we thank Swarovski Optik and its agent Precision Optik Asia for their continued support and generous sponsorship. Thanks also go to Pulau Ubin

Seafood Restaurant for allowing the use of their premises and cooking up a tasty dinner for all. We are particularly indebted to Guest of Honour and also well-known bird book author, Dr Geoffrey Davidson for taking the time off to grace the occasion. Last but not least, we would also like to congratulate all winners, participants, and organiser Chung Cheong for meticulously planning and coordinating the first race on Pulau Ubin.

By Yong Ding Li and Kenneth Kee
Arbitrators of the Bird Race