

Report on the 23rd Annual Bird Census

By Lim Kim Seng

The 23rd Annual Bird Census (ABC) was held on 23rd March 2008 in generally cloudy weather and saw the involvement of a total of 46 people at 27 sites. 9,153 birds from 153 species were recorded compared with 7,667 birds from 145 species in 2007 and 10,366 birds from 168 species in 2006 and 9,100 birds from 156 species in 2005 (Lim K.C. 2005; Lim, K.S. 2006, 2007). The total number of birds and species counted were both better than 2007 (Lim, K.C. 2005; Lim, K.S. 2006, 2007; Figure 1).

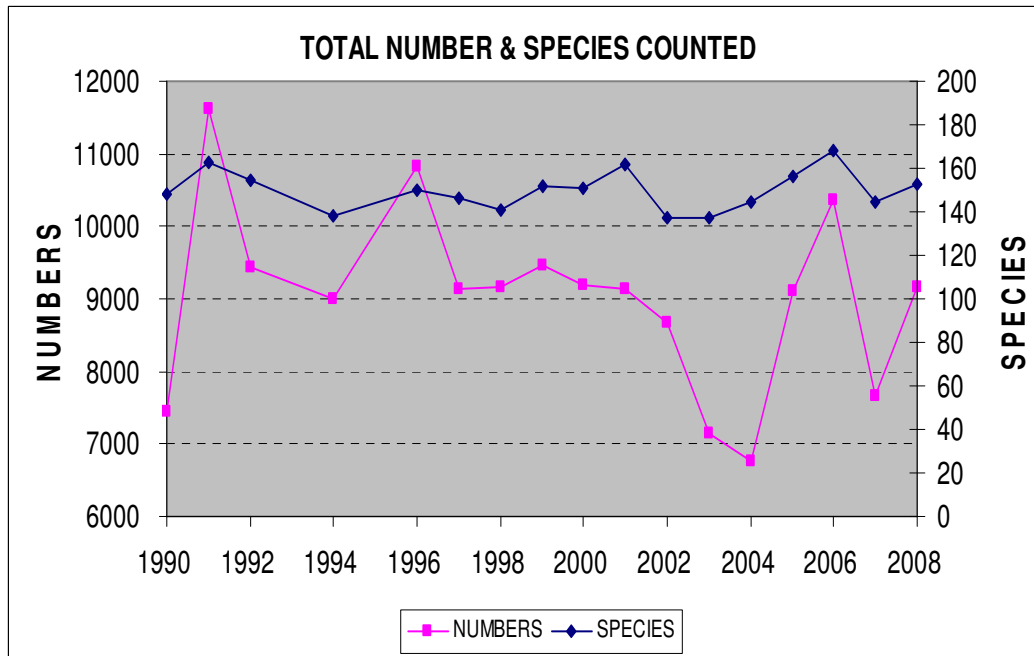


Figure 1: Total bird numbers and species of Annual Bird Census, 1990-2008

Of the 27 sites counted, Lorong Halus and Neo Tiew Lane 2 were the most diverse with 54 species each followed closely by Ubin Central with 52 species. The least diverse sites were Bukit Brown with 16 species recorded, followed by Mount Faber with 24 species and Kent Ridge Park and Marina East, both with 25 species.

The most bird populous site was, as expected, Sungei Mandai. It had 1,896 birds, up from 1,465 birds of 2007 but still below the 1,950 birds counted in 2006. Coming a distant second was Neo Tiew Lane 2 with 625 birds and third was Pasir Ris Park with 436 birds. The least populous sites were Marina East with 110 birds counted, followed by Sime Road with 133 birds and Telok Blangah Hill Park (144).

Pulau Ubin and Sungei Buloh were two megabiodiversity protected areas which had two sites each in ABC 2008 but it was Ubin which had a better overall diversity with 65 species compared to Buloh's 53. In terms of abundance, Pulau Ubin was also well ahead with 685 birds compared to Buloh's rather mediocre 534.

Because of the lack of observers and other extenuating circumstances, Bukit Batok Nature Park, Changi Beach, Kranji Dam, Sentosa, Simpang Grassland and Upper Seletar Reservoir were not covered in this year's census. On the bright side, Chinese Garden and Marina East were new sites counted for the very first time in ABC history and Pasir Ris Park returned after a prolonged absence. 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 second successive year with a score of 1,364 birds, a big increase from 979 birds in 2007 and 862 in 2006. The Pacific Golden Plover was second with a count of 1,038 an increase from 851 of 2007 but still well below 1,577 of 2006 (Table 1). Coming in third to fifth positions were the same species as in 2007 but with Asian Glossy Starling improving its numbers to take third place ahead of Yellow-vented Bulbul and Pink-necked Green Pigeon. Their numbers in 2008 were 607, 468 and 448 compared with 372, 441 and 363 respectively in 2007. All showed an increase when compared with 2007.

The other top five birds were Black-naped Oriole, which improved from eighth position with a score of 243, followed by Whimbrel (232), Spotted Dove (210), Common Greenshank (202) and House Crow (191).

The top 20 birds of 2008 are listed below (Table 1) together with comparative numbers and rankings from 2007:

#	SPECIES	ABC 2008	ABC 2007
1	WHITE-VENTED MYNA	1364	979 (1)
2	PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER	1038	851 (2)
3	ASIAN GLOSSY STARLING	607	372 (4)
4	YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL	468	441 (3)
5	PINK-NECKED GREEN PIGEON	448	363 (5)
6	BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE	243	213 (8)
7	WHIMBREL	232	165 (13)
8	SPOTTED DOVE	210	186 (9)
9	COMMON GREENSHANK	202	121 (15)
10	HOUSE CROW	191	182 (10)
11	LITTLE EGRET	190	276 (7)
12	COLLARED KINGFISHER	165	168 (12)
13	PACIFIC SWALLOW	162	181 (11)
14	BARN SWALLOW	152	337 (6)
15	COMMON IORA	132	111 (18)
16	ASHY MINIVET	128	50 (32)
17	OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD	127	100 (19)
18	GREY HERON	115	128 (14)
19	WHITE-BREASTED WATERHEN	113	87 (22)
20	COMMON PIGEON	112	80 (23)

Table 1: Top 20 Most Numerous Birds in ABC 2008

Of the 56 nationally threatened species, 21 species (up from 19 in 2007) or 37.5% were recorded. The most abundant nationally threatened species was Grey Heron with 115 birds, down from 128 birds in 2007 and falling to 18th position overall. The only globally threatened species encountered in this year's census was Straw-headed Bulbul of which 51 birds were recorded, up slightly from 50 in 2007 and putting it in 41st position.

The most exciting birds observed during ABC 2008 were two Ruddy Kingfishers at Khatib Bongsu and Nee Soon, a Chestnut-winged Cuckoo at Poyan, a Jambu Fruit-dove at Chinese Garden, two summer-plumaged Javan Pond Herons at Sungei Mandai and Lorong Halus, a Blue-winged Pitta at Sime Road, a Mangrove Pitta at Ubin West, an Asian Paradise-flycatcher at Nee Soon and a male Yellow-rumped Flycatcher at Lorong Halus.

The following people led or assisted in ABC 2008 and made it a success:

Ali Jaafar, Doreen Ang, D Chan, Chan Kim Cheng, Chan Mei Yee, Alfred Chia, Avian Chia, Geoffrey Davison, Willie Foo, Goh Si Guim, Margie Hall, James Heng, Keith Hillier, Ho Hua Chew, Kenneth Kee, Nessie Khoo, Maurice Kwan, Danny Lau, Lee Ee Ling, Karen Lim, Lim Kim Chuah, Lim Kim Keang, Lim Kim Seng, Lin Yang Chen, Low Bing Wen, Lyn Ng, Harry Ong, Kim Ong, Alan Owyong, Peng Ah Huay, Phang Seng Khai, Timothy Pwee, Rehan Yusoff, Jane Rogers, Gloria Seow, Soon Tze Chien, Tan Kok Hui, Tan Siew Kwang, Tan Soon Im, Teh Kiam Poh, Wee Sau Cheng, Wing Chong, Wong Chung Cheong, Yang Pah Liang and Sunny Yeo.



Jambu Fruit-dove (Male) outside Japanese Garden taken on 25 Dec 2007
Photo © Tan Gim Cheong

As both ABC coordinator and compiler, I would like to applaud the response of the 2008 leaders. All but two of the 27 site leaders returned their forms within a week, most on the day itself. It is hoped that all leaders will attempt to return their forms within the day itself in future. 89% of the leaders also used the designated forms which greatly reduced both transcribing errors and collating time. For example, it takes less than 10 seconds to upload a prescribed form into a master spreadsheet but more than 10 minutes to transfer data from a list in email, Microsoft Word or other formats, and another few minutes to check for errors. It is hoped that the 2009 edition of the ABC will see 100% usage of the official forms. If this happens and forms are received within hours after completion of the census, it may even be possible to send out a report on the day itself! How's that for efficiency?

Thanks once again to all who helped ensure the success of this 23rd edition of the ABC. Hope you had fun and see you again in 2009! Bring your friends and family along too!

Thanks to Tan Gim Cheong for allowing us to use his photo for this report.

References

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