

Report on the 25th Annual Bird Census

By Lim Kim Seng

The Nature Society (Singapore)'s Bird Group conducted its 25th Annual Bird Census (ABC) on 21st March 2010 in rather fair and warm conditions. It saw the involvement of a total of 60 people at 26 sites, an improvement from 40 observers and 23 sites in 2009 (Lim 2009). The totals in species and numbers were also a great improvement from the tally of 7,135 birds from 144 species last year (Lim 2009). We recorded for this 25th edition of the ABC, 8,665 birds from 161 species.

Of the 26 sites counted, Neo Tiew Lane 2 was the most diverse with 57 species, followed by Ubin Central with 56 species, and Halus and Poyan, both with 53 species. The least diverse sites were Telok Blangah Hill Park with 23 species recorded, followed by Mount Faber with 27 species and Tuas, with 28 species.

The most bird populous site was, as expected, Sungei Mandai. It had 1,335 birds, a significant recovery from the disastrous showing in 2009 of just 665 birds, but still some way from 1,896 birds of 2008. In second place was Neo Tiew Lane 2 with 696 birds, an increase from 590 birds last year and third was Sungei Buloh Route 1 with 648 birds. These top three sites were also coincidentally in the north-west sector of Singapore and highlight the importance of this part of Singapore for bird conservation. The least populous sites were Telok Blangah Hill Park with 100 birds counted, a drop from 180 birds of last year, followed by Sime Road with 104 birds and Nee Soon with 133 birds.

Pulau Ubin and Sungei Buloh were two megabiodiversity protected areas which had two sites each in ABC 2010 but it was Pulau Ubin which had a better overall diversity this round with 70 species compared to Sungei Buloh's 58. However, in terms of numbers, Sungei Buloh was just ahead with 915 birds compared to Ubin's 825.

Because of the lack of observers and other unforeseen circumstances, Bukit Batok Nature Park, Kranji Dam, Pasir Ris Park, Sentosa and Simpang Grassland were not covered in this year's census. A former site, Punggol Grassland, has been lost to housing development and could not be counted. 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. On the bright side, we had two new sites in this year's census: Lower Peirce Reservoir and Tuas.

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 fourth successive year with a score of 1,001 birds. Its total is again below that of the two previous years. Second was Asian Glossy Starling with 884 birds, almost double that of the 481 birds of 2009. Coming in third to fifth positions were Pacific Golden Plover (711), Whimbrel (387) and Pink-necked Green Pigeon (386). Except for the green pigeon, all the birds in the top five positions scored more when compared with 2009 (Lim 2009).

The remaining top ten birds were Yellow-vented Bulbul, in sixth place with 385 birds, up slightly from 382 in 2009, Lesser Sand Plover (258), Barn Swallow (219), Little Egret (211) and Black-naped Oriole (199).

After missing the top ten positions for 2009, waders made a comeback with three species featuring strongly this round with third, fourth and seventh positions.

The top 21 birds of 2010 are listed below (Table 1) together with comparative numbers and rankings from 2009:

#	SPECIES	ABC 2010	ABC 2009
1	WHITE-VENTED MYNA	1001	1161 (1)
2	ASIAN GLOSSY STARLING	884	481 (2)
3	PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER*	711	136 (13)
4	WHIMBREL*	387	106 (19)
5	PINK-NECKED GREEN PIGEON	386	389 (3)
6	YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL	385	382 (4)
7	LESSER SAND PLOVER*	258	48 (37)
8	BARN SWALLOW*	219	82 (22)
9	LITTLE EGRET*	211	150 (9)
10	BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE	199	190 (5)
11	SPOTTED DOVE	191	188 (7)
12	COMMON PIGEON	179	143 (10)
13	COMMON IORA	159	120 (17)
14	COLLARED KINGFISHER	146	131 (14)
15	PACIFIC SWALLOW	141	190 (6)
16	GREY HERON	132	98 (21)
17	LONG-TAILED PARAKEET	130	72 (25)
18	HOUSE CROW	130	141 (11)
19	COMMON REDSHANK*	124	80 (24)
20	COMMON GREENSHANK*	117	137 (12)
21	OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD	117	124 (15)

Table 1: Top 20 Most Numerous Birds in ABC 2010

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

The total number of migrant species recorded was 42 species or 26% of the total of 161 species counted. 118 species were resident and one, a non-breeding visitor.

Of the 56 nationally threatened species, 24 species or 43% were recorded. The most abundant nationally threatened species was the Grey Heron with a count of 132 birds, up from 98 birds and rising to 16th position overall. The only globally threatened species encountered in this year's census was Straw-headed Bulbul of which 48 birds were recorded, down from 55 in 2009 and putting it in 38th 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 36 birds, an improvement from 31 birds in 2009.

The best birds of the day were undoubtedly two Himalayan Vultures seen at Sungei Buloh Route 2. Other exciting birds observed during ABC 2010 were a Ruddy Kingfisher at Lower Peirce Reservoir, Blue-rumped Parrot (Bukit Timah), Broad-billed Sandpiper (Mandai), Javan Pond Heron (Halus and Mandai), Black Bittern (Sungei Buloh), Mangrove Pitta (Pulau Ubin), Mugimaki Flycatcher (Malcolm Park) and Eastern Crowned Warbler (Nee Soon).

The following people led or assisted in ABC 2010 and made it a success:

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Thanks once again to all who helped ensure the success of this 25th edition of the ABC. I hope you had fun and see you again in 2011!

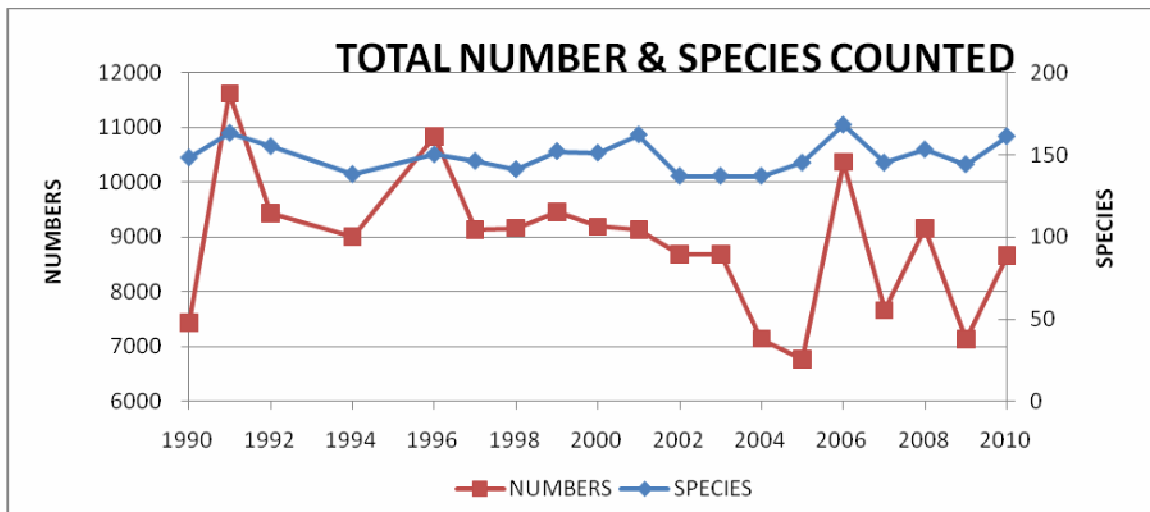


Figure 1: Total bird numbers and species of Annual Bird Census, 1990-2010

References

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