

Report on the 6th Fall Migration Bird Census

By Lim Kim Seng

The 6th Fall Migration Bird Census (FMBC) held on 6th September 2009, was affected by wet weather recalling the rainy FMBC of 2005. Nearly all sites experienced light to heavy rain. 51 people participated at 23 selected sites island-wide compared with 48 people at 26 sites last year (Lim 2008). In all, 7,381 birds of 119 species were recorded. Not surprisingly, total species diversity was drastically below 2008's 142 species although, strangely, numbers were slightly better than last year's 7,343 birds (Lim 2008).

Of the 23 sites counted, Neo Tiew Lane 2 and Poyan were the most bird diverse with 48 species counted, followed by Serangoon with 43 species. The least diverse sites were Kent Ridge Park and Bukit Batok Nature Park, both with 17 species, followed by Bukit Timah Nature Reserve with 20 species.

The most bird populous site was Mandai Mudflats which had 1,122 birds. Coming in second was Ubin West with 574 birds and third was Ubin Central with 558 birds. The least populous sites were Kent Ridge Park with 69 birds followed by Bukit Timah Nature Reserve (75 birds) and Bukit Batok Nature Park (111).

Because of the lack of volunteers, Bukit Brown, Lorong Halus and Upper Seletar were left out of this year's census. Rain and lack of access combined to exclude Punggol from this year's census. On the positive side, Admiralty Park and Chinese Garden were counted for the first time in this census.

What then was Singapore's most abundant bird this year? Well, last year's runner-up, Asian Glossy Starling, usurped top place this year with a total of 1,153 birds, up from 817 birds last year. Dropping to second place was White-vented Myna, with a total of 885 birds, a drop from 929 recorded last year. Third was a surprise migrant, Lesser Sand Plover, with a total of 805 birds, with nearly 90% coming from Mandai Mudflats alone!

Coming in fourth to tenth positions were Common Pigeon (268 birds), Yellow-vented Bulbul (255), Pink-necked Green Pigeon (247), Long-tailed Parakeet (189), Common Redshank (186), Eurasian Tree Sparrow (181) and Pacific Swallow (179).

Making up the eleventh to twentieth positions were a kingfisher, a dove, a plover, and the rest, passerines. Of the top twenty species, fifteen (75%) were resident as compared to 2008's 70% (see Table 1).

The top 20 birds of FMBC 2009 are listed below (Table 1).

Ranking	Species	Total	% of Total
1	ASIAN GLOSSY STARLING	1153	15.6
2	WHITE-VENTED MYNA	885	12.0
3	LESSER SAND PLOVER*	805	10.9
4	COMMON PIGEON	268	3.6
5	YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL	255	3.4
6	PINK-NECKED GREEN PIGEON	247	3.3
7	LONG-TAILED PARAKEET	189	2.6
8	COMMON REDSHANK*	186	2.5
9	EURASIAN TREE SPARROW	181	2.4
10	PACIFIC SWALLOW	179	2.4
11	HOUSE CROW	174	2.4
12	BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE	172	2.3
13	DAURIAN STARLING*	166	2.2
14	GREY HERON	165	2.2
15	PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER*	134	1.8
16	SPOTTED DOVE	126	1.7
17	COMMON IORA	105	1.4
18	COLLARED KINGFISHER	100	1.4
19	BARN SWALLOW*	76	1.0
20	OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD	74	1.0

Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a migrant.

Table 1: Top 20 Most Abundant Birds in FMBC 2009

Of the 56 nationally threatened species, 16 or 28% were recorded. This compares poorly with the 36% in 2008 and 45% in 2007. The most numerous threatened species was once again Grey Heron, 14th overall, with a count of 165 birds, down from 167 in 2008. Also showing well were Straw-headed Bulbul, 41st overall with 29 birds, down from 57 in 2008, Oriental Magpie-robin (22), Oriental Pied Hornbill (16) and Red Junglefowl (13).

Two globally threatened species were recorded during the rain-soaked census. The first was the Straw-headed Bulbul which was present at 5 sites, down from 9 in 2008. Arguably the bird of the day was a Masked Finfoot which miraculously appeared at Neo Tiew Lane 2. This very rare non-breeding visitor did not re-appear despite a search of the area a few days later.

18 (15%) of the 119 species were true migrants as compared with 18% in 2008. Of these 20, five were among the top twenty birds counted. The other 13 species (in order of decreasing abundance) included Little Egret, Common Sandpiper, Cattle Egret, Curlew Sandpiper, White-winged Tern, Common Kingfisher, Blue-

tailed Bee-eater, Marsh Sandpiper, Great Egret, Red-necked Stint, Yellow-billed Egret, Oriental Reed Warbler and Arctic Warbler. There were quite strangely no migrant cuckoos or flycatchers.

As in past years, migrant raptors put on a no-show and this was probably due to their generally late appearance in Singapore, as the peak season for them is in October.

In addition to the 119 species recorded, there was also an additional 4 (7 in 2008) of exotics recorded comprising 17 birds (24 in 2008). These included 9 feral Red Junglefowls, 3 Black Swans, 2 Mute Swans and 3 Great Cormorants.

A total of 1,131 unidentified birds (359 in 2008) was recorded in addition to the 7,381 birds counted. 1,052 of these (93%) were swiftlets.

The following fabulous people led or assisted in FMBC 2009:

Doreen Ang, Samantha Ang, Dennis Chan, Chan Kim Cheng, MY Chan, Angela Cheng, Andrew Chow, Geoffrey Davison, Con Foley, SC Fang, Willie Foo, Gerald Francis, Leslie Fung, Margie Hall, Han Yan You, Ho Hua Chew, Ali Jafaar, Pete Jones, Nessie Khoo, Khuan Jia Hui, Maurice Kwan, Danny Lau, Ben Lee, Jimmy Lee, Lim Kim Keang, Lim Kim Seng, Lim Poh Bee, Low Chwee Hock, Low Wai Hoe, Ng Chay Tuan, Clarisse Ng, Cyril Ng, Alan Owyong, Phang Seng Khai, Pui Cui Fen, Gloria Seow, Soh Hui Hiang, John Spencer, Tan Ju Lin, Tan Kok Hui, Tan Soon Im, KP Teh, Wee Sau Cheng, Wing Chong, Wong Chung Cheong, Yang Pah Liang, Sunny Yeo, Yong Ding Li, Yong Yik Shih, Yuet Hsin and Rehan Yusoff.

Thanks once again to everyone who helped ensure the success of this year's FMBC. Hope you had fun and see you again in 2010!

References

Lim, K.S. (2008). Report on the 5th Fall Migration Bird Census. *Singapore Avifauna* 22:9: 21-23.