

Report on the 9th Mid-Year Bird Census

By Lim Kim Seng

Our 9th Mid-Year Bird Census (MYBC) was conducted on the weekend of 5-6 July 2008 and saw the participation of 44 people, a decline from 48 in 2007. A total of 27 sites were covered, two more than last year. Nine sites were counted on Saturday and the remaining eighteen on Sunday. King's Avenue, Kranji Dam and Pasir Ris returned after being missed last year but Gambas Avenue and Upper Seletar were left out due to lack of volunteers, and Simpang Grassland and Khatib Bongsu due to problem with access. Sentosa and Marina City Park were omitted because of on-going construction work.

MYBC2008 saw a tally of 6,864 birds comprising 116 species compared to 7,280 birds from 116 species last year and 7,158 birds from 124 species in 2006. In short, numbers are down (by 416 birds) but diversity is unchanged. Looking at the overall data over the last eight years, the species diversity of MYBC 2007 was slightly below the nine-year mean of 117 while species abundance was significantly below the nine-year mean of 7,788.

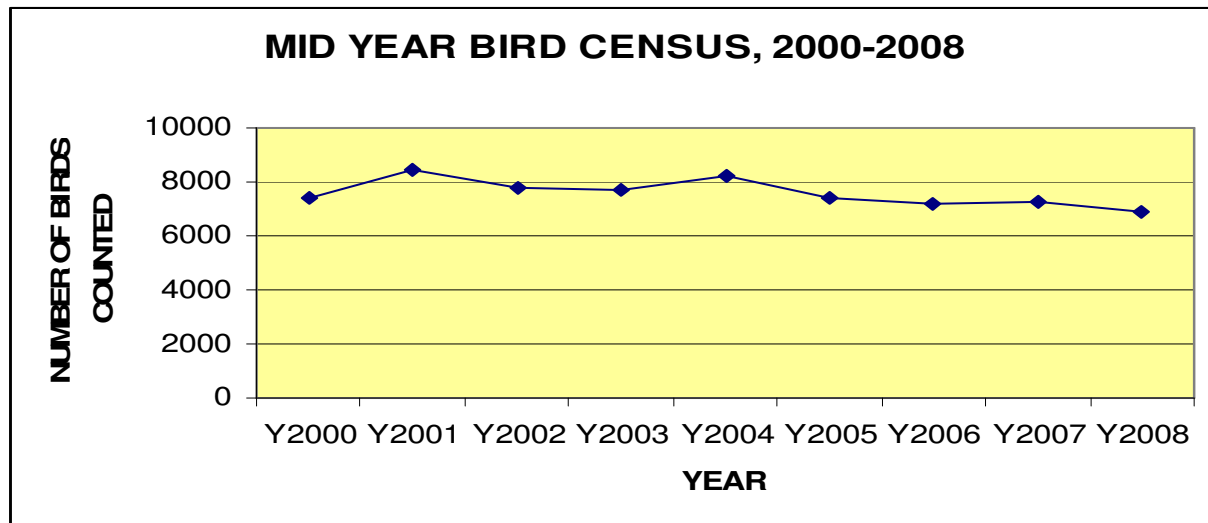


Figure 1: MYBC 2000-2008 Total Number of Birds Counted

Site-wise, the richest in terms of both numbers and diversity was Ubin Central (same as the last two years) with 749 birds and 53 species, both metrics being better than last year. Following closely behind in species richness was Neo Tiew Lane 2 with 47 species and Pasir Ris with 41 species. Sites with the lowest bird diversity included Bukit Brown with a paltry 18 species, followed by Kent Ridge Park (24), Bishan Park (25), Mount Faber (25) and Telok Blangah Hill Park (25).

In terms of numbers of birds, the richest sites after Ubin Central were Neo Tiew Lane 2 (454 birds), Pasir Ris (373) and Botanic Gardens (372 birds). In contrast, the site with the poorest count in terms of numbers was King's Avenue with just 82 birds tallied. Other sites with low bird numbers included Nee Soon (99 birds) and Mount Faber (114 birds).

Of the 116 species recorded, 2 were migrants and included both Little and Yellow-billed Egrets. Surprisingly, there were no migrant shorebirds, terns or passerines. The rest were resident.

Birds present in 2007 but missing this year included Ruddy-breasted and White-browed Crakes, Purple Swamphen, Greater Paintedsnipe, Osprey, Crested Honey Buzzard, Pacific Reef Heron, Great Egret, Sooty-headed Bulbul, Javan and White-headed Munias.

Conversely, birds which showed up this year but weren't recorded in 2007 included Blue-eared Kingfisher, Drongo Cuckoo, Red-legged Crake, Black-naped Tern, Yellow-billed Egret, Lesser Green Leafbird and Red-whiskered Bulbul.

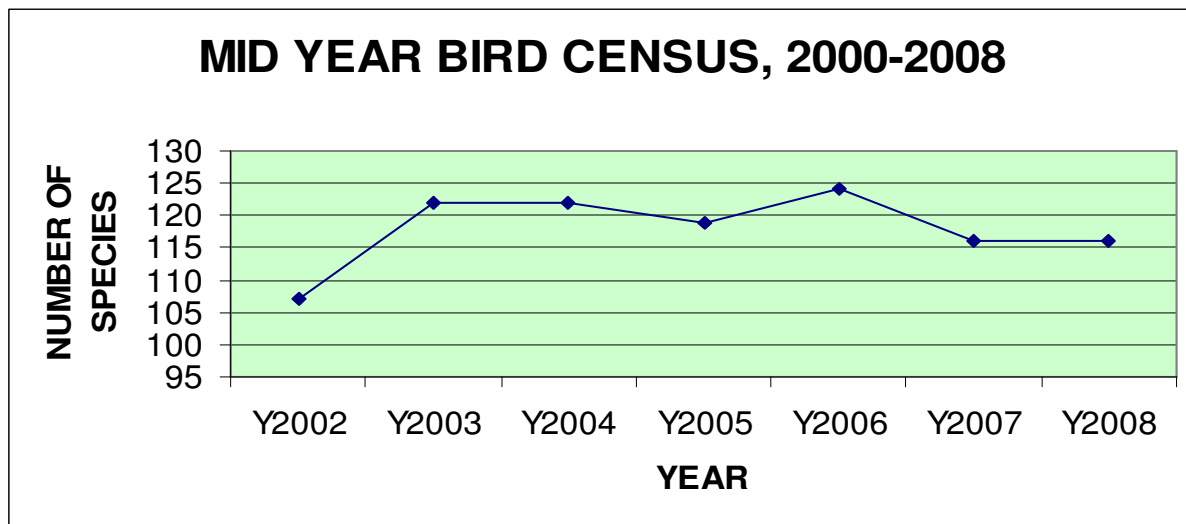


Figure 2: MYBC 2000-2008 Total Number of Species Counted

Once again, White-vented (Javan) Myna remained the most numerous resident with 1,090 birds counted. In second place and quite a distance behind was Asian Glossy Starling with 643 birds. Next in the top five were Yellow-vented Bulbul (334), Pacific Swallow (273) and Pink-necked Green-pigeon (270). House Crow was ranked sixth with a total of 187 birds, an improvement of two places as compared to 2007. Seventh was Spotted Dove with 181 birds and in eighth place, the Black-naped Oriole, which climbed one place with 173 birds. Bringing up the rest of the top ten positions were Common Iora, which climbed five spots to ninth with 165 birds, an increase of 42 birds from 2007, and Collared Kingfisher, with 155 birds, up one spot from 2007.

Except for the twelfth position, the rest of the top twenty positions were also all occupied by resident species. Most noteworthy of this group was Common Pigeon which came from 28th position in 2007 to grab 17th position with a total of 103 birds. Other than the Grey Heron, none of the nationally threatened species made it to the Top Twenty. The last of the Top Twenty Birds were shared by three species – Common Tailorbird, Dark-necked Tailorbird and Scaly-breasted Munia – all with 88 birds nation-wide. The Common Myna which occupied the 20th position last year, dropped to 33rd place with just 41 birds in all, a far cry from the 96 birds of last year.

The top 20 birds of MYBC 2008 are given below (Table 1):

2008 RANK	SPECIES	2008 COUNT	2007 COUNT	2007 RANK
1	WHITE-VENTED MYNA	1090	1242	1
2	ASIAN GLOSSY STARLING	643	599	2
3	YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL	334	436	3
4	PACIFIC SWALLOW	273	241	6
5	PINK-NECKED GREEN-PIGEON	270	292	5
6	HOUSE CROW	187	183	8
7	SPOTTED DOVE	181	199	7
8	BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE	173	179	9
9	COMMON IORA	165	123	14
10	COLLARED KINGFISHER	155	149	11
11	GREY HERON	145	345	4
12	<i>LITTLE EGRET</i>	131	84	22
13	LONG-TAILED PARAKEET	124	141	12
14	OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD	122	120	16
15	BROWN-THROATED SUNBIRD	117	102	19
16	STRIPED TIT-BABBLER	112	162	10
17	COMMON PIGEON	103	67	28
18	STRIATED HERON	90	103	18
19	COMMON TAILORBIRD	88	89	21
20	DARK-NECKED TAILORBIRD	88	72	25
21	SCALY-BREASTED MUNIA	88	121	15

Table 1: Top Twenty Most Numerous Birds of MYBC 2008 (with comparative figures and positions from 2007)

Of 114 residents counted, 25 or 22%, were nationally threatened species. Some of these included Red Junglefowl, Lesser Whistling-duck, Oriental Pied Hornbill, Rusty-breasted Cuckoo, Drongo Cuckoo, Red-legged Crake, Red-wattled Lapwing, Little Grebe, Straw-headed Bulbul and Chestnut-winged Babbler. Most noteworthy perhaps were a Blue-eared Kingfisher at Nee Soon and a Mangrove Pitta on Pulau Ubin. Most numerous of threatened residents counted was Grey Heron with a record 145 birds counted, a loss of 200 birds compared to last year. The globally threatened Straw-headed Bulbul gave its best showing in three years with a total of 55 birds. Likewise, Oriental Magpie-robin numbers recovered from 33 birds last year to 36 this round. In contrast, its close cousin, the White-rumped Shama's hold in Singapore remains tenuous with just 4 birds counted, all from Pulau Ubin. Also of interest was a record of a juvenile Rusty-breasted Cuckoo begging for food from a Pied Fantail at Bukit Batok – only the second record, both of the same species and both from Singapore, of the brood host of this nationally threatened cuckoo from the Malayan region.

Of naturalised residents three species already occupy the top 20 positions. These included Common Pigeon, House Crow and White-vented Myna. A potential candidate for future Top Twenty placings is the White-crested Laughingthrush. It was placed 29th with 46 birds nation-wide, up from 37th placing in 2007.

Of the five raptor species recorded, White-bellied Sea Eagle was most numerous with 28 birds counted, down from 32 birds in 2007 but still ahead of Brahminy Kite which tallied just 16 birds nation-wide.

Of the five woodpecker species recorded, the most numerous species was Common Goldenback with 39 birds counted compared with Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker which tallied 27 birds. The Asian Koel was the most numerous of the eight cuculids recorded, totalling 40 birds country-wide. The most numerous of the heron family was the Grey Heron's 145 birds compared to the Little Egret's 131.

The following participants helped either as leaders or assistants in MYBC2008 (bold type indicating counters who did the census on both days – well done guys!):

Ali Jaafar, **Doreen Ang**, Arturo Balayut Jr, Dennis Chan, Chan Kim Cheng, Joey Chew, Serene Chong, Andrew Chow, Geoffrey Davison, Con Foley, Willie Foo, Goh Si Guim, **Margie Hall**, James Heng, Ho Hua Chew, Kenneth Kee, **Nessie Khoo**, Liana Spencer Knight, Susan Knight, Koh Ai Kiak, Maurice Kwan, Danny Lau, Lee Ee Ling, Lee Lay Tin, Lim Kim Chuah, Lim Kim Keang, Lim Kim Seng, Cyril Ng, Alan Owyong, **Peng Ah Huay**, **Rehan Yusoff**, John Spencer, Sutari Supari, Tan Kok Hui, Tan Siew Kwang, Tan Soon Im, Wee Sau Cheng, Wing Chong, Wong Chung Cheong, Yang Pah Liang, Sunny Yeo, Cecilia Yip, Yong Ding Li.

Once again, thanks to everyone for making MYBC2008 a success! We hope to see you again at our tenth census next year!