

# Report on the 11<sup>th</sup> Mid-Year Bird Census

*By Lim Kim Seng*

Our 11<sup>th</sup> Mid-Year Bird Census (MYBC) was conducted on the weekend of 17-18 July 2010. Persistent and heavy pre-dawn rain that brought 165mm of rain (the average July rainfall!) in four hours caused flooding and mayhem on many sites around Singapore and saw the cancellation of the census in many places. Fortunately, Day 2 was better with mainly overcast and occasionally drizzly weather that allowed the census to be conducted although clearly the conditions were not ideal.

In all, our 11<sup>th</sup> MYBC saw the participation of 54 people, down from the 59 that counted in 2009 (Lim 2009). Due to bad weather, only 25 sites were counted as compared with the record high of 32 sites in 2009. Two sites were counted on Saturday and the remaining 23 on Sunday. Almost all regular sites were counted with the exception of Kranji Dam. There was one new site in Dairy Farm Nature Park.

MYBC2010 saw a total of 6,540 birds, a significant drop from the record tally of 10,377 birds last year and the lowest number recorded in its eleven-year history. In terms of diversity, we recorded 116 species compared with 125 species in 2009 (Lim 2009). Based on MYBC's eleven-year mean, this year's count was below average both in terms of diversity and numbers recorded (Figures 1 and 2).

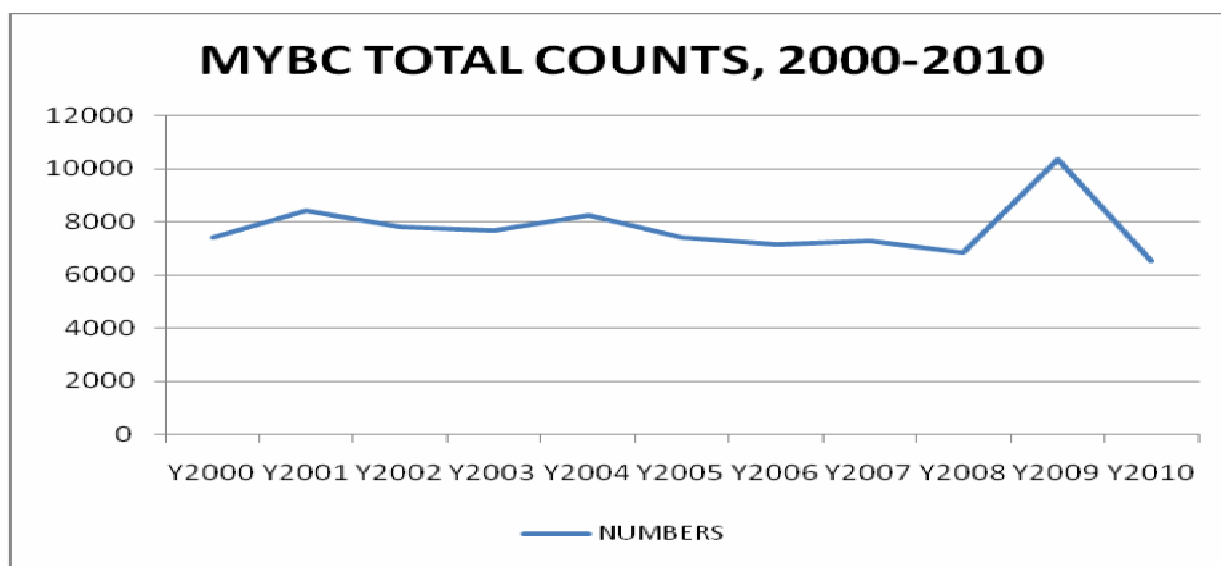


Figure 1: MYBC 2000-2010 Total Number of Birds Counted

Due to inclement weather, only six sites saw 40 species or more. The richest in terms of species diversity was Poyan with a total of 49 species, followed by Ubin West with 46 species and Neo Tiew Lane 2, with 45 species. There were nine sites with diversity of 30 species or less. The poorest in terms of overall bird diversity was Bishan Park with a total of just 19 species, followed by Mount Faber and Bukit Batok Nature Park, both with 23 species.

There were only three sites that exceeded 400 birds. The site with the most number of birds recorded was Ubin West with 592 counted. Tied for joint second were Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve Route 2 and Singapore Botanic Gardens. Both had 466 birds. In contrast, there were ten sites with less than 200 birds recorded. The site with the poorest count in terms of numbers was Dairy Farm Nature Park with just 110 birds counted, followed by Nee Soon (124 birds) and Telok Blangah Hill Park (135).

Of the 116 species recorded, eight were migrants and included Little, Great and Yellow-billed Egrets, Whimbrel, Common Redshank, Lesser sand Plover, Blue-winged Pitta and Barn Swallow. It is perhaps worth noting here that the pitta has been present for the third successive “summer” and the birds seen in Singapore may be the vanguard of a colonising species. There were two non-breeding visitors recorded – Malaysian Hawk Cuckoo at Sungei Buloh, perhaps the bird of the weekend, and Osprey.

There were some surprising omissions from this year’s census. Examples included Wandering Whistling Duck, Coppersmith Barbet, Asian Drongo Cuckoo, Slaty-breasted Rail, Purple Swamphen, Common Moorhen, Black-naped Tern, Black-winged Kite, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Cinnamon Bittern, Greater Green Leafbird Mangrove Pitta and Javan Munia. Missing from last year but recorded this year were Blue-eared Kingfisher, Malaysian Hawk Cuckoo, Rusty-breasted Cuckoo, Whimbrel, Common Redshank, Lesser Sand Plover, Great-billed Heron, Yellow-billed Egret and Barn Swallow.

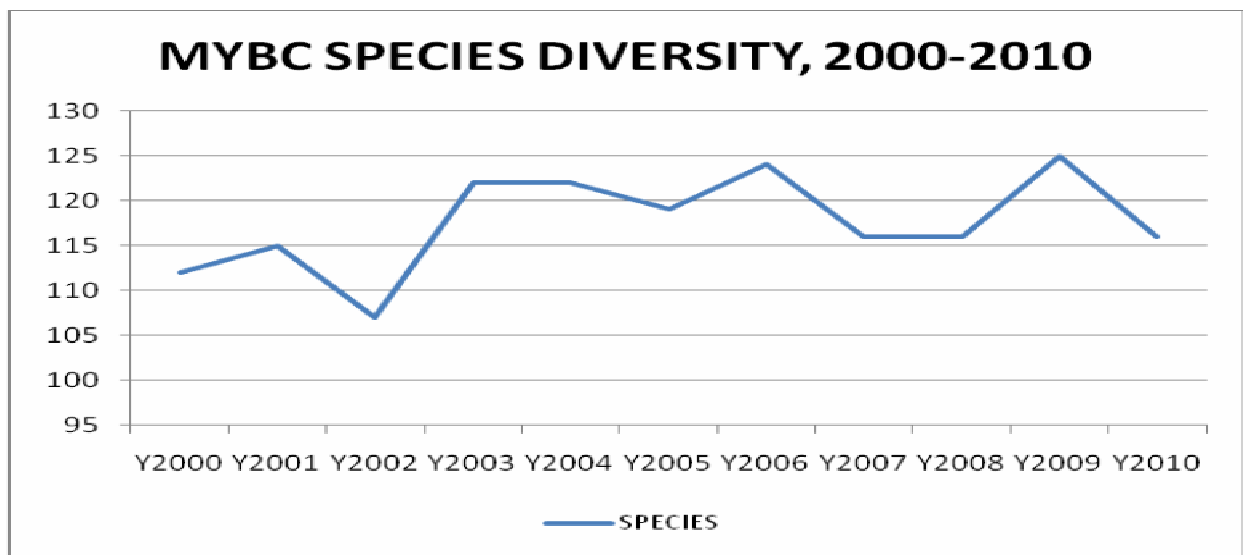


Figure 2: MYBC 2000-2010 Total Number of Species Counted

The most numerous bird counted in MYBC 2010 was White-vented Myna with a count of 988 birds, down from 1,675 in 2009. Next was Asian Glossy Starling with 754 birds and third was Yellow-vented Bulbul, with 369. Pink-necked Green Pigeon was fourth with 332 birds and Pacific Swallow fifth overall (205 birds). Occupying a very respectable sixth was the nationally threatened Grey Heron (181 birds), followed by Spotted Dove (179), Black-naped Oriole (159), Common Iora (144) and Common Pigeon (139).

The next ten included House Crow (131), Striped Tit-babbler (128), Eurasian Tree Sparrow (123), Olive-backed Sunbird (120), Collared Kingfisher (112), Scaly-breasted Munia (85), Striated Heron (81), Blue-throated Bee-eater (80), Long-tailed Parakeet (77) and Dark-necked Tailorbird (74).

The most dramatic change in the Top Twenty was the rise of Grey Heron from 11<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> with an increase of just 8 birds from last year. A real surprise was the replacement of Common Tailorbird by its dark-necked relative in the Top Twenty. Also significant was the lack of migrants in the Top Twenty. All species in the Top Twenty of 2010 showed a decline in numbers from 2009.

The top 20 birds of MYBC 2010 are provided below (Table 1):

<b>2010 RANK</b>	<b>SPECIES</b>	<b>2010 COUNT</b>	<b>2009 COUNT</b>	<b>2009 RANK</b>
1	WHITE-VENTED MYNA	988	1675	1
2	ASIAN GLOSSY STARLING	754	1419	2
3	YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL	369	448	4
4	PINK-NECKED GREEN-PIGEON	332	572	3
5	PACIFIC SWALLOW	205	317	5
6	GREY HERON	181	189	11
7	SPOTTED DOVE	179	241	8
8	BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE	159	244	6
9	COMMON IORA	144	242	7
10	COMMON PIGEON	139	170	12
11	HOUSE CROW	131	228	9
12	STRIPED TIT-BABBLER	128	144	16
13	EURASIAN TREE SPARROW	123	160	14
14	OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD	120	148	15
15	COLLARED KINGFISHER	112	164	13
16	SCALY-BREASTED MUNIA	85	119	18
17	STRIATED HERON	81	110	19
18	BLUE-THROATED BEE-EATER	80	107	20
19	LONG-TAILED PARAKEET	77	201	10
20	DARK-NECKED TAILORBIRD	74	100	23

Table 1: Top Twenty Most Numerous Birds of MYBC 2010 (with comparative figures and positions from 2009)

Of 106 residents counted, 22 species, or 20.75%, were nationally threatened species. Most numerous of threatened residents counted was Grey Heron with a count of 181 birds counted to achieve sixth position. The globally threatened Straw-headed Bulbul was the second most abundant threatened species (32<sup>nd</sup> overall), with a total of 42 birds. Likewise, the Oriental Magpie-robin was the third most numerous threatened species (37<sup>th</sup> overall) with a count of 37 birds, down slightly from 33 last year.

Of naturalised residents three species already occupy the top 20 positions. These included Common Pigeon, House Crow and White-vented Myna.

Four species of raptors were recorded. The most numerous was the Brahminy Kite, with 16 birds counted. Closely behind in second position was the White-bellied Sea Eagle with 15 birds and third was Changeable Hawk Eagle (7 birds). Also of interest were two Ospreys recorded from Mandai Mudflats.

Alien species didn't feature very well this year. In 2009, there were twelve alien species. This year, there were only four species: Milky and Painted Storks, and Mute and Black Swans.

The following participants helped either as leaders or assistants in MYBC2010:

Ali Jaafar, Anuj Jain, Azmi Mohamed, Doreen Ang, Arturo Baluyot, Vicente Baluyot, Cai Yixiong, Chan Kim Cheng, Alfred Chia, Angeline Chia, Avian Chia, Karen Chong, Andrew Chow, Geoffrey Davison, Fam Shun Deng, SC Fang, Tina Fang, Estella Flotow, Horst Flotow, Con Foley, Foong Hin Cheong, Gerard Francis, Willie Foo, Margie Hall, Ho Hua Chew, Kenneth Kee, Jolene Khoo, Nessie Khoo, Maurice Kwan, Danny Lau, Lee Ee Ling, Jimmy Lee, Janet Lim, Lim Kim Keang, Lim Kim Seng, Lim Poh Bee, Ng Chay Tuan, Alan Owyong, Peng Ah Huay, May Phua, Mick Price, Leena Rao, Rehan Yusoff, Tan Ju Lin, Tan Kok Hui, Tan Soon Im, Wee Sau Cheng, Wing Chong, Wing Ching How, Wong Loong Tat, Yang Pah Liang, Margaret Yeo, Yong Ding Li and Yong Yik Shih.

I would like to thank everyone who made it for MYBC2010 despite the weather and look forward to seeing all of you next year!

## **Reference**

Lim, K.S. (2009). Report on the 10<sup>th</sup> Mid-Year Bird Census. *Singapore Avifauna* 23:7: 14-18.