



# SINGAPORE AVIFAUNA

A monthly bulletin of the Nature Society (Singapore) Bird Group

**Volume 22  
Number 5**

Published by Nature Society (Singapore) Bird Group, 510 Geylang Road, #02-05, The Sunflower, Singapore 389466.

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MICA(P) 239/11/2005

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*By Lee Tiah Khee*

*Little Grebe at Lorong Halus on 24 May 2008, Photo © Lee Tiah Khee*



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## Bird Report

May 2008

By Albert Low

### Highlights

#### Singapore

The month of May, although comparatively quiet in light of the exciting sightings of recent months, still provided much for observers who braved the sweltering heat & slightly lower species diversity to talk about.

The highlight of the month must be the sighting of a probable **Wedge-tailed Shearwater** in the waters just off Marina South. This record is pending review and if accepted will be the first confirmed record of this pelagic species in Singapore.

Another locale thrust into the limelight this month was the environs around Poyan Reservoir in the Western Catchment. Following the Jerdon's Baza sightings earlier this year, the area continued to divulge interesting species which included a probable **Rufous-backed Kingfisher** & the rare **Blue-eared Kingfisher** feeding early one morning in one of the many remote ponds that litter this area.

Elsewhere around the island, notable sightings include the surprise find of a **Jambu Fruit-Dove** feeding on the figs of a Banyan Tree at Alexandra Hospital, a new locale for the species, a single **White-rumped Munia** at Tagore Lane, a very good record of this resident that is hardly seen on the mainland anymore as well as several **Purple Swamphens** showing well around the remaining marshes at Kranji, 1 of their last strongholds here in Singapore.

Interestingly, there were still migrants observed during this period. These included a single **Whimbrel** at the Chek Jawa coastline, 2 **Watercocks** and a single **White-winged Tern** moulting into summer plumage at Neo Tiew Lane 2 and an adult **Tiger Shrike** at Telok Blangah Heights.



*White-winged Tern at Kranji on 18 May 2008*  
Photo © Lee Tiah Kee

## Johor

It was a comparatively busy month in Panti Forest Reserve, as various observers responded to the sighting of the mythical **Giant Pitta** last month by making the pre-dawn drive up in the hopes of connecting with this elusive forest jewel. Nevertheless, only 1 group managed to hear it, albeit very briefly.

Nevertheless, observers who made the trip up north did not all leave empty-handed. The locally rare **Bat Hawk** put in an appearance for some, in spite of the surprisingly late hour of 8am for this normally crepuscular species. Not to be out-done, the “signature” bird of PFR, the **Malaysian Rail-Babbler** performed relatively well for the cameras on more than 1 occasion this month with scintillating views that would have made any birder’s day.



*Malaysian Rail-babbler at Bunker Trail, PFR on 30 May 2008*

*Photo © Lim Kim Chuah*

Some other notable records from the month of May included the ever-elusive **Short-toed Coucal** which although heard very close on several occasions remained frustratingly out of sight. The globally near-threatened **Finsch’s Bulbul** was also recorded, along with the unobtrusive **Grey-chested Jungle-Flycatcher**. In addition, both the globally near-threatened **Rufous-tailed Shama** & **Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker** were recorded this month as well.

## **Summary**

This report covers noteworthy bird sightings in April 2008 for Singapore and the surrounding region. In general, the report will include but are not limited to the following categories: rarities, breeding or nesting records, arrival and departure dates for migratory species, new locality records, escapees and unusual behaviour.

In addition, contributors are also advised to be as precise as possible concerning records. Please remember to include details such as how many birds were seen, the plumage, sex and age of the birds, the type of habitat in which they were observed, the food they were eating (if possible, identify the plant or animal), the weather encountered (what was the wind direction, tide conditions, etc.). Although it is not necessary to have such details for all record submissions, it is a good habit to cultivate and is normally required for very rare or unusual species.

Please send all your records of interest to Lim Kim Seng @ [denislim@starhub.net.sg](mailto:denislim@starhub.net.sg) or Lim Kim Chuah @ [pittalover@yahoo.com.sg](mailto:pittalover@yahoo.com.sg) or Yong Ding Li at [zoothera@yahoo.com](mailto:zoothera@yahoo.com). Alternatively you can also post your sightings at the NSS Bird Group website at <http://wildbirdsingapore.nss.org.sg> Please send your records no later than one week after the end of every month. Your contributions will be greatly appreciated and acknowledged.

We would like to thank the following contributors:

Doreen Ang (DA), Safizah Abdullah (SA), Alfred Chia (AC), Chow Chong Peck Andrew (CCP), Mark Chua (MC), Ho Hua Chew (HHC), Joe Lim (JL), Kenneth Kee (KK), Lau Weng Thor (LWT), Ben Lee (BL), Pauline Lee (PL), Lee Tiah Khee, Lim Kim Chuah (LKC), Lim Kim Seng (LKS), Lim Wen Hui (LWH), Lim Wen Xiu (LWX), Low Bing Wen (LBW), Alan Owyong (AOY), Peng Ah Huay (PAH), Tan Gim Cheong (TGC), Tan Kok Hui (TKH), KC Tsang (TKC), Yang Pah Liang (YPL), Simon Cockayne (SC), Con Foley (CF), Piet Opstaele (PO), Richard Carden (RC) and all those who contributed by posting their sightings in the wildbirdsingapore E-group.

In addition, we would like to thank Mark Chua, Con Foley, Lau Weng Thor Danny, Pauline Lee, Lee Tiah Khee and Lim Kim Chuah for allowing us to use their photos in this report.

Unless stated otherwise, nomenclature and systematic follow K.S. Lim's (2007) "Pocket Checklist of the birds of the Republic of Singapore (Second Edition)", K.S. Lim & K.C. Lim's (1999) "Pocket checklist of the birds of Johor, Peninsular Malaysia" for Johor, and B.L. Monroe Jr. & C.G. Sibley's (1993) "A World Checklist of Birds " for the rest of the region.

### **Abbreviations Used:**

CCNR: Central Catchment Nature Reserve  
NTL 2: Neo Tiew Lane 2  
PFR: Pantl Forest Reserve  
SBG: NSS Bird Group Official Outing  
SBWR: Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve

## SINGAPORE

### **RED JUNGLEFOWL** (*Gallus gallus*)

1 pair observed at Malcolm Road 6/5 (PO). The provenance of these birds is questionable. On Pulau Ubin, 1 was heard at Kg Melayu (SA/LKS/LWH/LWX) and a male and a juvenile seen near Sg Mamam (SA/LWH) on 25/5.

### **LESSER WHISTLING DUCK** (*Dendrocygna javanica*)

3 photographed at Lorong Halus 24/5 (TKH).

### **WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER** (*Puffinus pacificus*)

1 probable observed in the waters off Marina South 4/5 (SC) would if accepted be only the 2<sup>nd</sup> Singapore record of this pelagic seabird family.

### **BARRED BUTTONQUAIL** (*Turnix suscitator*)

1 pair seen at Lorong Halus, 23/5 (LKC)

### **RUFOUS WOODPECKER** (*Celeus brachyurus*)

A pair observed foraging within the Alexandra Hospital compound 26/5 (HHC)

### **COMMON GOLDENBACK** (*Dinopium javanense*)

A pair observed foraging on Angsana trees at Toa Payoh Lor 4 (JL).

### **RED-CROWNED BARBET** (*Megalaima rafflesii*)

1 at Rifle Range Road, 4/5 (LKC)

### **ORIENTAL PIED HORNBILL** (*Anthracoceros albirostris*)

2 seen at Ubin Town and a few heard near the headman's 25/5 (SA/LKS/LWH/LWX).

### **ORIENTAL DOLLARBIRD** (*Eurystomus orientalis*)

1 juvenile observed calling and an adult seen in the vicinity at Sentosa 21/5 (TGC)

### **BLUE-EARED KINGFISHER** (*Alcedo meninting*)

1 observed at a pond in the environs of Poyan Reservoir 1/5 (LWT) is a good record of this rare resident outside the CCNR.

### **RUFOUS-BACKED KINGFISHER** (*Ceyx rufidorsa*)

An unconfirmed record of this bird in the same pond as the fore mentioned species 1/5 (LWT) continues to highlight the potential of the large unexplored Western Catchment.

### **BANDED BAY CUCKOO** (*Cacomantis sonnerati*)

1 heard at Lorong Halus, 23/5 (LKC)

### **PLAINTIVE CUCKOO** (*Cacomantis merulinus*)

1 heard at Lorong Halus, 10/5 (LKC)

### **RUSTY-BREADED CUCKOO**

(*Cacomantis sepulcralis*)

3 heard at NTL 2 1/5 (KK/AOY). 1 photographed at Lorong Halus 24/5 (TKH). 1 heard at Lorong Halus, 23/5(LKC)



*Rusty-breasted Cuckoo*  
Photo © Danny Lau

**VIOLET CUCKOO** (*Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus*)

1 over NTL 2 1/5 (KK/AOY). 1 heard at Punggol Marina, a new locale for this species, 3/5 (LKC) and another at Rifle Range Road, 4/5 (LKC). Also heard at Lorong Sesuai, 23/5 (LKC)

**ASIAN DRONGO-CUCKOO** (*Surniculus lugubris*)

At BTNR, 1 heard on 4/5 and 2 on 8/5 (LKC)

**TANIMBAR CORELLA** (*Cacatua goffini*)

3 observed 12/5 feeding on fruits of the casuarina trees at Toa Payoh stadium (JL).

**ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET** (*Psittacula krameri*)

A group of 5 observed and photographed at Pasir Ris Park 31/5 (LWT). 1 flying over Admiralty Park on 17/5 (LKS).

**RED-BREASTED PARAKEET** (*Psittacula alexandri*)

1 pair and a juvenile observed within the environs of Poyan Reservoir 1/5 (LWT).

**LONG-TAILED PARAKEET** (*Psittacula longicauda*)

10 over Admiralty Park on 17/5 (LKS).

**JAMBU FRUIT-DOVE** (*Ptilinopus jambu*)

1 seen feeding on the figs of a Banyan Tree at Alexandra Hospital 26/5 (HHC). This is a new locale for this species whose movements within and around Singapore are not properly understood.

**SLATY-BREASTED RAIL** (*Rallus striatus*)

1 heard among the grasses, Lorong Halus 10/5 (LKC)

**WATERCOCK** (*Gallicrex cinerea*)

2 flushed at NTL 2 1/5 (KK/AOY) is a surprising record of this normally uncommon winter visitor deep into the breeding season.

**PURPLE SWAMPHEN** (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)

3 at Kranji Marshes 1/5 (BL); 3 at NTL 2 1/5 (KK/AOY) and 2 photographed at NTL 2 18/5 (LWT) are good signs that this localised species is still hanging on in its stronghold at Kranji.



Purple Swamphen at Neo Tiew Lane 2 on 18 May 2008  
Photo © Danny Lau

**WHIMBREL** (*Numenius phaeopus*)

1 still present on the mudflats at Chek Jawa 23/5 (TKH).

**GREATER PAINTED SNIPE** (*Rostratula benghalensis*)

1 pair at Kranji Marshes 1/5 (BL)

**LITTLE TERN** (*Sterna albifrons*)

2 observed at Chek Jawa, Pulau Ubin and 8 near Changi Jetty 25/5 (SA/LKS/LWH/LWX).

**WHITE-WINGED TERN** (*Chlidonias hybridus*)

1 observed and photographed 15/5 at Kranji (LTK). 1 moulting into summer plumage observed associating with Little Terns at NTL 2 18/5 (LWT).



*White-winged Tern at Kranji Reservoir, on 15 May 2008*  
Photo © Lee Tiah Khee

**GREY-HEADED FISH EAGLE** (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*)

1 observed 19/5 resting on a mangrove tree at SBWR (JL). 1 observed & photographed at MacRitchie Reservoir, CCNR 24/5 (PL).



*Grey-headed Fish Eagle at CCNR on 24 May 2008*  
Photo © Pauline Lee

**CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE** (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*)

1 observed at NTL 2 1/5 (KK/AOY). 2 observed at Mount Faber 17/5 (PAH)

**LITTLE GREBE** (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

2 adults & 2 chicks observed at Lorong Halus 10/5 (LKC) and 24/5 (TKH) are indications of the tenacity of the family that have made this pond home for several years now.

**GREY HERON** (*Ardea cinerea*)

1 seen flying towards Changi Jetty on 25/5 (SA/LKS/LWH/LWX).

**GREAT-BILLED HERON** (*Ardea sumatrana*)

1 observed on Pulau Semakau 20/5 (TKH). The southern islands continue to remain the stronghold of this threatened species.

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

1 adult & 1 juvenile observed at Pasir Ris Park 24/5 (TKH)

**BROWN SHRIKE** (*Lanius cristatus*)

1 at Chinese Garden, 17/5 (AOY)

**TIGER SHRIKE** (*Lanius tigrinus*)

1 adult photographed at Telok Blangah Heights 3/5 (TKC) was just a week shy of the late date of 10 May back in 1986 for this species.

**PIED TRILLER** (*Lalage nigra*)

1 pair at Lorong Halus, 23/5 (LKC)

**ORIENTAL MAGPIE-ROBIN** (*Copsychus saularis*)

1 pair at Lorong Halus 10/5 (LKC) and a male on Jurong Island 21/5 (LKC). It was subsequently seen on several other occasions.

**WHITE-RUMPED SHAMA** (*Copsychus malabaricus*)

2 observed near Kg Melayu, Pulau Ubin on 25/5 (LKS).

**STRAW-HEADED BULBUL** (*Pycnonotus zeylanicus*)

1 heard at Tg Chek Jawa, Pulau Ubin on 25/5 (LKS).

**SOOTY-HEADED BULBUL** (*Pycnonotus aurigaster*)

2 adults feeding 3 fledglings on an acacia tree, Lorong Halus 10/5 (LKC).

**ORIENTAL WHITE-EYE** (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)

1 at Admiralty Park and 2 seen coming to roost at Woodlands Avenue 9, both on 17/5 (LKS). 3 were also seen at Woodlands Street 81 on 31/5 (LKS). It would appear that this species is rapidly establishing itself in suburban Singapore.

**PALLAS'S GRASSHOPPER WARBLER** (*Locustella certhiola*)

1 heard at NTL 2 1/5 (KK/AOY). This species has been observed at this site even in the month of June.

**ARCTIC WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus borealis*)

1 heard at Rifle Range Road, 4/5 (LKC)

**ABBOTT'S BABBLER** (*Malacocincla abbotti*)

1 heard in secondary scrub at Tg Chek Jawa, Pulau Ubin on 25/5 (SA/LKS/LWH/LWX).



**SHORT-TAILED BABBLER** (*Malacocincla malaccensis*)

2 vocal birds at Rifle Range Road, 4/5 (LKC)

**PURPLE-THROATED SUNBIRD** (*Nectarinia sperata*)

1 male observed in the forests around Chek Jawa 23/5 (TKH).

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*)

1 male in the presence of 3 juveniles on Jurong Island, 20/5 (LKC)

**WHITE-RUMPED MUNIA** (*Lonchura striata*)

1 observed at Tagore Lane 25/5 (SBG) is a very good record of a rare resident that is hardly recorded on the mainland.

**WHITE-HEADED MUNIA** (*Lonchura maja*)

1 seen feeding on *Panicum* seeds at the pond at Admiralty Park, 17/5 (LKS).

## **ESCAPEES**

**GREAT CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

1 flying above the Johor Causeway towards Sungei Buloh on 5/5 (LKS).

**RED AVADAVAT** (*Amandava amandava*)

5 including 1 male photographed at Punggol Grasslands 25/5 (TKC) are most likely escapees from the cage bird trade

## **NESTING RECORDS**

**PINK-NECKED GREEN PIGEON** (*Treron vernans*)

1 male seen with nesting material at Woodlands Checkpoint on 5/5 (LKS).

**CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE** (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*)

One (dark morph) seen on a nest and another (pale morph) flew in and landed on a branch to the left at Mount Faber on 17/5 (PAH).

**COMMON IORA** (*Aegithina tiphia*)

1 female and 1 male observed nesting at Forest Walk, Mount Faber 17/5 (PAH). The female was seen arranging her nest after placing in some cotton she collected while the Male were singing nearby.

**PACIFIC SWALLOW** (*Hirundo tahitica*)

Single adult was seen sitting at its nest on the sewer pipes at Woodlands Street 81 on 12/5, feeding at least 1 young on 17/5 and 3 young on 19/5. However, the nest was destroyed on 30/5 and the fate of both adult and chicks unknown (all LKS).

**YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL** (*Pycnonotus goiavier*)

2 chicks seen in a cup-shaped nest, 1.4 metres above ground in a row of bushes at Chinese Garden on 15/5 (TGC). 1 chick seen with eyes open while the other eyes close. Adults were seen to bring food to the nest. 2 chicks seen in a cup-shaped nest, 1.3 metres above ground in bushes beside a footpath at Sentosa 21/5 (TGC). Both chicks have their eye open. Adults were seen bring food to the nest which was otherwise left 'unattended'.

**BROWN-THROATED SUNBIRD** (*Anthreptes malacensis*)

A female seen collecting nest material at the Chek Jawa mangrove boardwalk on 25/5 (LKS).

## JOHOR

### **RUFOUS PICULET** (*Sasia abnormis*)

1 photographed at Bunker Trail, PFR 18/5 (MC)



*Rufous Piculet at Bunker Trail, Panti Forest Reserve on 18 May 2008*  
Photo © Mark Chua

### **CRIMSON-WINGED WOODPECKER** (*Picus puniceus*)

1 observed along Bunker Trail 31/5 (SC/PO/RC).

### **YELLOW-CROWNED BARBET** (*Megalaima henricii*)

1 heard at Bunker Trail, PFR 25/5 (LKC/CCP)

### **BLACK HORNBILL** (*Anthracoceros malayenus*)

1 male at Bunker Trail, PFR 25/5 (LKC/CCP)

### **RED-NAPED TROGON** (*Harpactes kasumba*)

1 male seen at Bunker Trail, PFR 25/5 (LKC/CCP)

### **RUFOUS-BACKED KINGFISHER** (*Ceyx rufidorsa*)

1 was seen on a patch of moss, Bunker Trail, PFR 1/5 (LKC/LBW)

### **BANDED KINGFISHER** (*Lacedo pulchella*)

2 heard at Bunker Trail, PFR 1/5 (LKC) and 1 heard on 25/5 (LKC)

**RED-BEARDED BEE-EATER** (*Nyctyornis amictus*)

1 heard at Bunker Trail, PFR 1/5 (LKC). A male on 30/5 (LKC/CCP).

**BLUE-THROATED BEE-EATER** (*Merops viridis*)

1 was seen flying to and fro a particular direction with food in its beak, PFR 30/5 (LKC/CCP), perhaps an indication that it is feeding young birds.

**BAT HAWK** (*Macheiramphus alcinus*)

Up to 3 observed, including 1 photographed, over Bunker Trail, PFR 18/5 (AC/MC/KK/AOY/YPL)



*Bat Hawk at Bunker Trail, Panti Forest Reserve on 18 May 2008*  
Photo © Mark Chua

**MALAYSIAN HAWK-CKUCKOO** (*Hierococcyx nasicolor*)

1 heard at Bunker Trail, PFR 1/5 (LKC/LBW)

**RED-BILLED MALKOHA** (*Phaenicophaeus javanicus*)

1 at Bunker Trail, PFR 1/5 (LKC/LBW/SC)

**SHORT-TOED COUCAL** (*Centropus rectunguis*)

1 heard calling intermittently at Bunker Trail, PFR 1/5 (LKC)

**BLUE-RUMPED PARROT** (*Psittinus cyanurus*)

2 flying over, Bunker Trail, PFR 25/5 (LKC/CCP)

**JAVAN FROGMOUTH** (*Batrachostomus affinis*)

1 heard at Bunker Trail, PFR 1/5 (LKC/LBW/SC)

**DUSKY BROADBILL** (*Corydon sumatranus*)

A flock of about 12 birds were seen at Bunker Trail, PFR 30/5 (LKC/CCP).

**BLACK-AND-YELLOW BROADBILL** (*Eurylaimus ochromalus*)

1-2 pairs observed at the roadside "Swamp" along Bunker Trail 31/5 (SC/PO/RC).

**BLACK MAGPIE** (*Platysmurus leucopterus*)

1 heard at Bunker Trail, PFR 1/5 and 30/5 (LKC)

**MALAYSIAN RAIL-BABBLER** (*Eupetes macrocerus*)

At Bunker Trail, PFR 1 photographed at Bunker Trail, 1/5 (LKC/LBW), 1 heard on 25/5 (LKC/CCP). Another photographed on 30/5 (LKC). Crippling close views of 1 in a horridly boggy section of forest for a prolonged period in full display arching its back lowering its head and puffing out its blue neck pouches whilst calling at Bunker Trail 31/5 (SC/PO/RC).

**CRESTED JAY** (*Platylophus galericulatus*)

1 heard at Bunker Trail, PFR 25/5 (LKC/CCP)

**RUFOUS-WINGED PHILENTOMA**

(*Philentoma pyrhopterum*)

1 obliging individual photographed at Bunker Trail, PFR, 30/5 (CCP/LKC)

**GREY-CHESTED JUNGLE-FLYCATCHER**

(*Rhinomyias umbratilis*)

1 at Bunker Trail, PFR 25/5 and 30/5 (LKC/CCP). 1 pair seen at the "Elephant Trail" along Bunker Trail 31/5 (SC/PO/RC).

**RUFOUS-TAILED SHAMA**

(*Trichixos pyrropyga*)

1 vocal individual observed along an overgrown streamside at Bunker Trail 31/5 (SC/PO/RC).

**PUFF-BACKED BULBUL**

(*Pycnonotus eutilotus*)

2 at Bunker Trail, PFR 30/5 (CCP)

**FINSCH'S BULBUL** (*Alophoixus finschii*)

1 of this uncommon bulbul was seen at Bunker Trail PFR, 30/5 (LKC/CCP)

**STREAKED BULBUL** (*Ixos malaccensis*)

1 heard at Bunker Trail, PFR 25/5 (LKC)

**WHITE-CHESTED BABBLER**

(*Trichastoma rostratum*)

2 were seen at Bunker Trail, PFR 30/5 (LKC/CCP) 2 at streamside along Bunker Trail, PFR 31/5 (SC/PO/RC).

**FERRUGINOUS BABBLER** (*Trichastoma bicolor*)

3 heard at Bunker Trail, PFR 25/5 and 1 on 30/5 (LKC)



Rufous-winged Philentoma at Bunker Trail, PFR on 30 May 2008

Photo © Lim Kim Chuah

**BLACK-CAPPED BABBLER**

*(Pellorneum capistratum)*

1 seen and photographed at Bunker Trail, PFR 25/5 (LKC/CCP). 1 pair observed near "Elephant Trail" along Bunker Trail 31/5 (RC).



**GREY-HEADED BABBLER**

*(Stachyris poliocephala)*

1 at Bunker Trail, PFR 1/5 (LKC/LBW) 1 seen at Bunker Trail, PFR 30/5 (LKC/CCP)

**BLACK-THROATED BABBLER**

*(Stachyris nigicollis)*

1 heard at Bunker Trail, PFR 25/5 (LKC/CCP)

**WHITE-NECKED BABBLER**

*(Stachyris Leucotis)*

2 foraging deep inside one of the forest trails at Bunker Trail, PFR 5/6 (TGC)

*Black-capped Babbler at Bunker Trail, PFR on 25 May 2008*

*Photo © Lim Kim Chuah*

**CHESTNUT-RUMPED BABBLER** *(Stachyris maculate)*

A flock of 6 at Bunker Trail, PFR 1/5 (LKC)

**SCARLET-BREADED LOWERPECKER** *(Prionochilus thoracicus)*

1-2 males observed along the roadside "swamp" Bunker Trail on 31/5 (SC/PO/RC).

**PLAIN SUNBIRD** *(Anthreptes simplex)*

1 female observed feeding a caterpillar to a recently fledged chick at Bunker Trail, PFR 10/5 (CF)



*Plain Sunbird at Bunker Trail, Panti Forest Reserve on 10 May 2008*

*Photo © Con Foley*

# First confirmed record of the White-throated Needletail (*Hirundapus caudacutus*) in Singapore

By Simon Cockayne

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Date: **5 April 2008**  
Time: **0815hrs**  
Location: **Bukit Timah Summit**  
Weather: **Fine**



White-throated Needletail. Bukit Timah (05.04.2008) © Boon Leong Chong

Saturday April the 5<sup>th</sup> 2008 saw Richard Carden and myself wandering around Hindhede Nature Park at dawn hoping vainly for the resident Red-legged Crakes to scuttle across our path. Unfortunately this just wasn't the case and the whole area seemed woefully devoid of bird activity. Nonchalantly we ambled up to the viewpoint overlooking Hindhede Quarry, disturbing the Tai Chi masters from their morning ablutions. Things picked up slightly here when we flushed a small - medium sized dark heron from below the watch point which unfortunately disappeared quickly into bank-side vegetation off to the left, this bird hinted at its identification only, and obstinate in its behaviour left us distracted by an amorous threesome of Pied Fantails singing and playing catch-me-if-you-can around the waterside vegetation. Showing us the meaning of patience a brutish Stork-billed Kingfisher brazenly sat out. The heron must have been uncomfortable in its new found roost site and lifted up to fly all across the pond from left to right. No doubt now – the black

plumage, contrasting with the yellow neck patch and dark streaks on whitish breast revealed it to be as suspected, a Black Bittern. What a surprise! This bird indicated perhaps at some overnight migration – our previous languidness blown away by this good bird. Adrenalin pointed our noses to Bukit Timah Summit with suppositions of what else we may find.

Egos sank (as did our adrenalin levels) as we grappled with this peak, old couples and small children casually strolled past us as we tried to force oxygen into our desk jobbed respiratory systems. Richard's weekly football playing put him in front and how he was able to talk whilst walking up here I'll never know. The summit though we did reach at just after 8am. Minutes of recovery got us back to a normal state as the sweat dried. From the top of this hill the day revealed itself as a beautiful morning with clear dark blue skies and a very ambient temperature reminding us both of those all too few special spring mornings back home in the UK.

The wonderful fig trees up here revealed themselves to be lacking in fruit and so attention wandered to other things. It must have been about this time I noticed something bullet like blast over the tree tops only to be lost a split second later behind trees. Then a minute later, with no time to think, the other side of the summit clearing it zoomed low past again, and again only to be lost behind trees. I looked at Richard and it was obvious he'd also clocked it. These two initial views were very brief but this bird was powerful, very fast, with long scythe shaped wings. With only views in silhouette obtained at this stage I wondered about Oriental Hobby but came to my senses and realized Needletail! It could only be a Needletail and a big one at that. I talked to Richard and he was thinking along the same lines when it blasted overhead again and revealed itself beautifully at just above the height of the trees. This was an awesome bird far bigger than nearby House Swifts and the Swiftlets looked like pesky slow flies in comparison. The lighting was excellent and we began to pick out colours and its structure. It was obviously circling around the whole upper area of Bukit Timah and we were merely catching it on each of its loops around but occasionally it would show for longer periods. With the sun being low in the sky its underparts were lit quite well revealing a very dark and rich cinnamon colour to the breast and stomach, contrasting with an amazing white vent and large gleaming white throat patch. Its wings all black, silver sheened in the sunshine and so elegantly angled against its torpedo shaped body accentuated by its very short tail hardly discernible when folded due to the long white undertail coverts. This was a bird built for power and awe! Banking, it revealed an incredible silver saddle on its mantle.



White-throated Needletail. Bukit Timah (05.04.2008) © Boon Leong Chong

No doubt now – we were onto something big. This was obviously a White-throated Needletail - an incredibly rare bird in Singapore. Richard, recently moved to Singapore and only on his third trip out wasn't quite aware of the enormity of our find. My bones told me it was a really good record

but I wasn't sure how good. Richard pulled the Singapore species list he had recently downloaded from the NSS website to check its status and .....well it wasn't there – was this a first record? Communications with various local birders over the phone revealed this to be possibly a new record for Singapore. Our adrenalin levels now at boiling point neither of us could stop grinning. Looking around for other birders, we noticed Boon Leong Chong feverishly taking pictures of this bird, in all our excitement we hadn't noticed his arrival but how lucky can you get. Here we were looking at one of Asia's most spectacular birds, which in all probability was a new record for Singapore, and in the presence of Boon and his photographic gear! We would all have the evidence we needed to get this bird officially accepted by the rarities committee. Boon continued photographing and actually produced the best photographs of White-throated Needletail I have ever seen. It's certainly not easy to photograph swifts especially ones traveling at the speed of sound!

Initially I put this sighting down with a time of 8.30 but looking at my SMS messages regarding sending the news out and the time of Boons first picture. It looks like we first noted this bird at around 8.15 am. Amazingly at around 8.30 this bird was joined by a tight squadron of 3 Brown-backed Needletails and by 8.40 these 3 had increased to five creating an awesome spectacle blasting and looping around the summit with the White-throated. We were clearly in the midst of a Needletail migration and so great to get perfect comparisons of these two species together on our doorstep. Interestingly, whilst the White-throated Needletail was in absolute pristine fresh plumage the Brown-backed Needletails were looking very worn and ragged winged indicating a different timing of moult and breeding.



Brown-backed Needletail. Bukit Timah (05.04.2008) showing extent of wear on primaries and secondaries. Typical of all 5 birds present. © Boon Leong Chong

As we left the summit at 9.30 am we could still see all 6 birds but now with the warming air these birds appeared as dots high in the sky as they continued on their migration – thanking them for letting us have such a close and personal insight into their day we moved joyfully down and walked back to the visitor center via the pipeline clearing and mountain bike trail seeing a very obliging Little Spiderhunter, Purple-throated Sunbirds and hearing a close Blue-winged Pitta alarm calling but obstinately refusing to show – well you can't have everything can you.

*(Editor's comments: This sighting has been accepted by the Bird Records Committee as the first confirmed record for Singapore. There have been three other previous records (7/10/94, 27/12/82, 8/10/87) but these records were never substantiated and could not be accepted into the Singapore checklist)*



**First Record of Nesting  
Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike  
*Hemipus picatus*  
in Panti**

report and photographs by  
Danny Lau



Dad to be, photographed on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2008

On 29 March, Kok Hui and I discovered a nesting pair of Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike at Panti Forest Reserve. This is the first record of nesting Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike in Panti and is rather unusual given that Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike is more commonly found in the highland forest.

The nest was cup-shaped and composed of twigs and dried leaves. It was approximately 5 to 7 cm in diameter and was placed snugly on a broken part of what was once a forked branch. The nest was elevated about 60 feet above the ground. It was completely exposed without any additional camouflage. However its diminutive size and similar color to the branch enable it to blend nicely with the surrounding and hence hiding the nest and its occupants from potential predators. Both parents were seen taking turns to incubate.



The 2 chicks, photographed on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2008

On 5<sup>th</sup> April, I returned with Jia Sheng to follow up on the nest. Two chicks were found to have hatched. From the fact that the eyes of the chicks were still close, they were estimated to be 2-3 days old. Both parents were seen sallying for insects to feed the two hungry, demanding and noisy chicks. However the chicks somehow knew when to stay silent whenever passing raptors like Blyth's Hawk-eagle or Changeable Hawk-eagle flew overhead.

I returned on 12<sup>th</sup> April. The chicks were about 8-10 days old. At this age, the feathers were quite developed. The typical white tail tips were discernible and also the buffy wing patch. The chicks were growing fast and the nest seemed a wee bit too small to hold the two chicks. The chicks were observed to take turns to practice flapping in preparation for their maiden flight. In the process of flapping their wings they practically had to perch on each other to find space. From these observations, I reckoned that the birds were likely to fledge soon.



Apparently one of the chicks is growing faster and is more dominant than the other. Photographed on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2008



Mom and chicks, photographed on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2008

I checked the nest again on 19<sup>th</sup> April and found the nest empty. I assumed and hope that the two chicks have fledged and on their way to lead a new life in the hills or perhaps around the forests of Pantl.

Interestingly, on 21<sup>st</sup> June, Jia Sheng and Kok Hui saw an adult feeding a juvenile Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike within 50 feet of the old nest. The juvenile was definitely not the same individual from the nest. This sighting of a juvenile Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike been fed further confirmed the breeding of this species in the lowland forest of Pantl.