



# SINGAPORE AVIFAUNA

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Tel : 67412036, Fax : 67410871, Email : [nss@nss.org.sg](mailto:nss@nss.org.sg), Website : <http://www.nss.org.sg>

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## NSS Bird Group

### Chairman

Lim Kim Keang

([kklimsq@singnet.com.sg](mailto:kklimsq@singnet.com.sg))

### Vice-Chairman

Ho Hua Chew

([hohc@starhub.net.sg](mailto:hohc@starhub.net.sg))

### Secretary

Willie Foo

([willie.foo@kbr.com](mailto:willie.foo@kbr.com))

## SINAV

### Editorial Committee

Lim Kim Chuah, Lim Kim Seng, Yong Ding Li, Andrew Chow, Albert Low



Grey-headed Fish Eagle at 'Little Guilin' by Lau Weng Thor



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# Bird Report

July 2008

By Albert Low

## Highlights

### Singapore

July is generally considered a quiet month in Singapore's avian calendar, lodged in the birding no-man's land between the end of the breeding season and the patient waiting on the part of birders and photographers for the year's arrivals from the North to stream in. Thankfully, there was enough to keep both parties occupied this year.

Of particular interest was the slew of **Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo** sightings early in the month. This species, 1 of the few austral migrants which winters in warmer climates during Australia's winter months, turned up at Changi and Kranji within a week during mid-July. These sightings add a certain degree of intrigue to the poorly-understood movements of this bird to or even between their wintering grounds, especially in light of the fact that Australia's winter this year is generally considered to be the coldest ever recorded in recent years.

Equally intriguing was the presence of 2 highly vocal **Blue-winged Pittas** at Kranji Nature Trail during the same week before they vanished without a trace. Blue-winged Pittas are generally considered to be passage migrants to Singapore and they are seldom heard during these stopovers, usually only calling at dawn or dusk. The presence of 2 highly vocal individuals in July, 3 months in advance of October when they usually start being observed, and hundreds of miles from their nearest known breeding site in Taman Negara, is certainly a mystery in itself.

Interesting residents recorded this month included the return of the Keppel Marina **Great-billed Heron** after a 2 year absence, a roosting **Spotted Wood-Owl** at the Singapore Botanical Gardens, a **Ruddy-breasted Crake** at Pulau Punggol and a rare record of a **Chestnut-bellied Malkoha** along the Southern Ridges, outside of its Central Catchment stronghold.

Special mention of nesting activity this month goes to the well-documented nesting of **Grey-headed Fish-Eagles** and the subsequent development of the lone fledging at Little Guilin. The event, which seemingly left an imprint on even regular non-birdwatching park users, is the first time this nationally and globally threatened species has been observed breeding outside its traditional Central Catchment haunts and having its breeding habits documented in such great detail illustrates how increasing cooperation and collaboration between the local birdwatching and avian photography communities is helping to develop a greater understanding and appreciation for Singapore's avifauna amongst both nature lovers and the general public.

## Johor



Rufous-collared Kingfisher at Bunker Trail, Panti Forest Reserve on 6 Jul 2008 by Mark Chua

July was a good month for Panti. Wiping off the stereotypical image of low bird density and species counts as the breeding season draws to a close, PFR turned on some style this month and treated observers and visiting birders who made the trip up north with some notable records.

2 in particular, stood out over the rest. A probable **Blue-banded Kingfisher** around the environs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> stream is an exciting and unusual record from Panti. A species that is usually associated with pristine riverine forests and forest streamlets, it has not been reliably recorded in Panti for many years now. The possible presence of a remnant population within the ever-shrinking fragmented forest patches of the PFR further illustrates the need to survey the bird populations within these fragments and how they interact with environmental changes as their habitat is increasingly encroached upon by oil palm plantations and quarrying activities. **Lesser Fish-Eagle**, another species associated with well-forested banks along large rivers, also put in an unusual appearance over the PFR this month.

Other notable records this month include observations of 5 **Wrinkled Hornbills**, a species that appears to be locally not uncommon here, a single **Rufous-collared Kingfisher** which posed for the cameras, as well as sightings of the locally uncommon Black-throated Babbler and a pair of **Green Broadbills**.

## **Summary**

This report covers noteworthy bird sightings in July 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.

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.

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### **Abbreviations Used:**

BTNR: Bukit Timah Nature Reserve  
BBNP: Bukit Batok Nature Park  
PFR: Panti Forest Reserve  
SBWR: Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve  
SBG: Singapore Bird Group Outing  
Sev obs: Several Observers

## SINGAPORE

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

2 individuals at Punggol Marina, 12/7 (LKC)

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

1 heard at Kranji Nature Trail on 20/7 (LKS). 1 observed 20/7 at Jalan Asas (FW).

**LINEATED BARBET** (*Megalaima lineata*)

3 observed 6/7 during the MYBC at BBNP (CCP). Few heard 19/7 at "Little Guilin", Bukit Gombak and 1 observed 20/7 at Jalan Asas (FW).

**COPPERSMITH BARBET** (*Megalaima haemacephala*)

1 observed 13/7 at Tagore Lane (SBG).

**STORK-BILLED KINGFISHER** (*Pelargopsis capensis*)

1 observed and photographed 19/7 at Kranji Nature Trail, SBWR (DA/PAH)

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

1 observed and photographed 30/7 at Pulau Ubin at noon (TKC).

**LITTLE BRONZE-CUCKOO** (*Chrysococcyx minutillus*)

1 seen at Sime Road on 6/7 (LKS) and another 19/7 at Kranji Trail (FW).

**HORSFIELD'S BRONZE CUCKOO** (*Chrysococcyx basalis*)

1 observed 13/7 at Changi Ferry Terminal area (DA/LKC/NK/PAH). 1 adult seen in a patch of cleared Acacia/Casuarina woods at Changi Beach Park on 15/7 (DA/LKS). 1 photographed in flight 18/7 at Kranji (LTK). These are the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> sighting of this rare summer visitor for this year.



Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo at Changi on 13 Jul 2008 by *Lim Kim Chuah*

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

2 observed 13/7 at Tagore Lane during a NSS bird watching trip (SBG).

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

2 seen at Sime Road on 6/7 (JOC/LKS) and 1 seen 20/7 at Jalan Asas (FW).

**CHESTNUT-BELLIED MALKOHA** (*Phaenicophaeus sumatranus*)

1 observed 6/7 between Telok Blangah Hill and Alexandra Arch (LWT). 2 at Sime Road on 6/7 (JOC/LKS).

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

3 observed 13/7 at Tagore Lane (SBG).

**COLLARED SCOPS OWL** (*Otus lempiji*)

2 young 2/7 along Upper Bukit Timah Road perched low on a mango tree (LKC/LTK) and 3 on 3/7 at same location (LKC/SC/RC).

**SPOTTED WOOD OWL** (*Strix seloputo*)

1 observed on 17/7 around noon at the Singapore Botanic Gardens roosting in a relatively open branch about 4 metres above ground (LTK/LKC). The bird did not seem bothered by the noise generated by the grass cutter below the tree.

**COMMON EMERALD DOVE** (*Chalcophaps indica*)

1 male flushed and subsequently perched on a casuarina tree at Punggol Marina, 12/7 (LKC)

**RUDDY-BREASTED CRAKE** (*Porzana fusca*)

1 observed at Pulau Punggol 26/7 (LWT/TKH).

**CRESTED HONEY-BUZZARD** (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*)

1 observed and photographed 20/7 at "Little Guilin", Bukit Gombak being first chased by 2 Brahminy Kites then subsequently by a House Crow (JT/TGC).

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

1 observed 6/7 at Lower Seletar Dam skimming the reservoir (DA/NK/PAH). 8 birds at Kranji Bund on 26/7 (Sev obs).

**WHITE-BELLIED SEA EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)

3 observed 6/7 at Lower Seletar Dam performing "aerial acrobatics" display with 2 seen engaging each other in a downward spin (DA/NK/PAH)

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

1 observed 13/7 at Tagore Lane (SBG) and 1 heard 20/7 at Jalan Asas (FW).

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

2 observed 6/7 at Singapore Quarry, BTNR (DA/PAH). 3 observed 6/7 (LKC/LTK) & 8/7 at Singapore Quarry, BTNR (RC). 2 pairs observed 20/7 at Singapore Quarry (FW) with 1 pair seen flipping some vegetation onto the water (FW).

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

1 observed at mouth of Belayer Creek 7/7 after an absence of almost 2 years (AOW/DOW). It was wading along the rocky shore at low tide waiting for fishes to swim by. The construction at Keppel Marina over the last 2 years may have disturbed a pair that is thought to be roosting on the island in the middle of Keppel Harbour.

**PURPLE HERON** (*Ardea purpurea*)

1 at Kranji Bund on 26/7 (LKS).

**CATTLE EGRET** (*Bubulcus ibis*)

1 wintering at Kranji Dam on 20/7 (LKS).

**CINNAMON BITTERN** (*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*)

1 flying across Neo Tiew Road, 26/7 (LKC)

**BLUE-WINGED PITTA** (*Pitta moluccensis*)

2 on 12/7, 13/7 and 17/7 at Kranji Nature Trail (PL). Presumably the same 2 photographed 18/7 at the same site (CF). 1 heard in secondary growth at the same site on 20/7 (DA/LKS).



Blue-winged Pitta at Kranji Nature Trail on 18 July by *Con Foley*

**LESSER GREEN LEAFBIRD** (*Chloropsis cyanopogon*)

2 at BTNR, 6/7 (LKC)

**BLUE-WINGED LEAFBIRD** (*Chloropsis cochinchinensis*)

2 at Sime Road on 6/7 (LKS). 3 at BTNR, 6/7 (LKC).

**ASIAN PARADISE FLYCATCHER** (*Terpsiphone paradisi*)

1 observed 6/7 at Earth Trail between Telok Blangah Hill and Alexandra Arch (LWT).

**COMMON HILL MYNA** (*Gracula religiosus*)

1 observed 13/7 at Tagore Lane (SBG). 1 heard 20/7 at Jalan Asas (FW).

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*)

First arrival: 1 at Kranji Dam on 20/7 (LKS).

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

3 seen and 4 others heard 6/7 during the MYBC at BBNP (CCP). 1 observed 6/7 at Dairy Farm singing on a perch while having a fruit in its beak (DA/Ne/PAH). 2 observed 13/7 at Tagore Lane (SBG). 2 seen 20/7 at Jalan Asas (FW).

**RED-WHISKERED BULBUL** (*Pycnonotus jocosus*)

1 observed 3/7 at Tuas South Ave 4. It has been frequently here seen for the past few years (FW).

**ASIAN RED-EYED BULBUL** (*Pycnonotus brunneus*)

1 at BTNR, 6/7 (LKC)

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

3 seen at Woodlands Street 81 on 5/7 (LKS).

**RUFOUS-TAILED TAILORBIRD** (*Orthotomus sericeus*)

1 seen 19/7 at Kranji Trail (FW). 1 seen 20/7 at Jalan Asas (FW).

**WHITE-CRESTED LAUGHINGTHRUSH** (*Garrulax leucolophus*)

Few heard 19/7 at "Little Guilin", Bukit Gombak (FW).

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

1 heard at Kranji Dam on 20/7 (LKS).

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

1 observed 6/7 during the MYBC at BBNP (CCP). 4 observed at Sime Road on 6/7 (JOC/LKS). 2 observed 13/7 at Tagore Lane (SBG).

## **NESTING REPORTS**

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

A male seen bringing sticks to a female in a nest 3 m up a 8m tall mahogany tree at Kranji Dam on 20/7 (DA/LKS) and 26/7 (SA/LKC/LKS).

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

1 first observed 13/7 at "Little Guilin", Bukit Gombak (UR) and subsequently a nesting pair and a juvenile seen and photograph at the same location. (See article on page 9). 2 adults seen 20/7 at "Little Guilin", Bukit Gombak (TGC).

**GOLDEN-BELLIED GERYGONE** (*Gerygone sulphurea*)

A pair seen brooding in a nest 3m up a *Swietenia macrophylla* tree at Kranji Dam on 20/7 (LKS) and 26/7 (LKC/LKS).

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

A female seen brooding in a nest 6 m up a mahogany tree at Kranji Dam on 20/7 (DA/LKS). A pair seen taking turns brooding here on 26/7 (SA/LKC/LKS/LWH/LWX)

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

A female seen bringing food to a nest 4m up a 5m tall *Syzigium* tree at Kranji Dam on 20/7 (LKS). Another pair was also seen attending to 2 juveniles here on the same day (LKS).

**BAYA WEAVER** (*Ploceus philippinus*)

More than 20 nests counted at Punggol Marina, 12/7. Majority of the nests were built on casuarina trees and many were occupied. (LKC).



## JOHOR

**BLACK HORNBILL** (*Anthracoceros malayanus*)  
3 at Bunker Track, 27/7 (LKC).

**WRINKLED HORNBILL** (*Aceros corrugatus*)  
5 observed 1/7 flying low over Bunker Trail, PFR. (IW/SaC).

**RED-NAPED TROGON** (*Harpactes kasumba*)  
1 heard at Bunker Trail, 27/7 (LKC/HS/YDL)

**DIARD'S TROGON** (*Harpactes diardii*)  
1 heard at Bunker Trail, 27/7 (LKC/HS/YDL)

**BLUE-BANDED Kingfisher** (*Alcedo euryzona*)  
1 probable male 1/7 at Bunker Trail, PFR (IW) flying over the road.

**RUFIOUS-COLLARED KINGFISHER** (*Actenoides concretus*)  
1 observed and photographed 6/7 at Bunker Trail, PFR near the 2<sup>nd</sup> stream (MC).

**JAMBU FRUIT DOVE** (*Ptilinopus jambu*)  
1 female observed 1/7 perched at mid level at Bunker Trail, PFR (IW/SaC)

**LESSER FISH EAGLE** (*Ichthyophaga humilis*)  
1 observed 1/7 perch and flying next to the main road a few KM before Bunker Trail, PFR. (IW/SaC)

**BLYTH'S HAWK EAGLE** (*Spizaetus alboniger*)  
1 observed and photographed 1/7 at Bunker Trail. (IW/SaC)

**GREEN BROADBILL** (*Calyptomena viridis*)  
1 male and 1 female feeding on some black berries on the tree top at Bunker Trail, 27/7 (LKC/HS/YDL). This is a rather atypical of this bird which prefers the lower and mid-storey of the forest.

**MALAYSIAN RAIL-BABBLER** (*Eupetes macrocerus*)  
1 heard briefly at Bunker Trail, 27/7 (LKC/HS/YDL)

**WHITE-CROWNED FORKTAIL**  
(*Enicurus leschenaulti*)  
1 at Bunker Trail, 27/7 (LKC)

**SPECTACLED BULBUL**  
(*Pycnonotus erythrophthalmos*)  
1 observed 1/7 at Bunker Trail (IW/Sac)

**BLACK-THROATED BABBLER** (*Stachyris nigricollis*)  
1 calling furiously on a small tree at Bunker Trail, 27/7 (LKC/HS/YDL).

**SPECTACLED SPIDERHUNTER** (*Arachnothera flavigaster*)  
1 observed 1/7 at Bunker Trail (IW/Sac)



Blyth's Hawk Eagle at Bunker Trail, on 6 Jul 2008 by *Sandy Chian*

## Grey-headed Eagle at “Little Guilin”

By Ulf Remahl  
13 Jul 2008

As usual when I am back in Singapore I regularly jog or walk in my neighbourhood. On a whim I decided this morning just after six to head for Little Guilin in Bukit Batok instead of BBNP or BTNR. That turned out to be a very fortunate decision.

On my arrival to Little Guilin I could see silhouetted against the vanishing night sky an Eagle in a tree growing on the cliff-face at the far side of this former quarry. I dismissed it as a White-Bellied Sea-Eagle.

When I wasn't watching the bird took off. In the improving light I then spotted a 2-foot Monitor Lizard swimming towards the opening between the high rocky peninsula jutting out from my side and the cliff on the other side. Coming around the peninsula on the inside of the high rock I expected to see the lizard approaching the opening where the water surface expands. There was nothing.

In the far end of the quarry towards the now closed Bukit Gombak Trail I then spotted the Eagle again. In the rapidly improving light I suddenly realized that it was an adult Grey-Headed Fish-Eagle. To get a better vantage point I continued to the grassy slope at the end of the quarry near the sports stadium.

From there I had a perfect view of a Grey-Headed Fish-Eagle having an early breakfast on the previous mentioned lizard. The eagle stayed there for perhaps ten minutes or until about 07:10. Then it flew off towards the area of the Gombak Nature Park, where there has been a big landslide. Although it was a big lizard the bird didn't seem to strain at all to carry it. At that time I imagined the eagle only wanted to continue the breakfast on the just about untouched prey in a more secluded area.

About 6 - 8 minutes later on my way back home I spotted a Grey-Headed Fish-Eagle in the same high cliff-face as where I saw it first this morning. This eagle had no prey. If this was another individual I do not know but I assume that would be rather unlikely. Then in case if it was the same bird I think it is extremely unlikely that it could have eaten such a big lizard so fast. Although it might seem a bit farfetched I would like to put forward the hypothesis that the eagle might perhaps be nesting in what is now after, all those landslides, a very secluded area. This idea I am only bringing up due to the behaviour of the bird and also my total ignorance about when they nest. I am sure someone will come forward with a plausible explanation.

Have Grey-Headed Fish-Eagle been seen earlier in this location?

Did I record anything else interesting? Besides all the normal birds there was a Straw-headed Bulbul singing from some thick bushes up in the cliff-face.

**Note:** The bird(s) were gone by eight in the morning, when I saw them.

### COMMENTS:

As to the question if this bird was seen here before, Kim Chuah's answer is yes. It was reported by Doreen Ang in Feb 2008 and published in the Singapore Avifauna Vol. 22 No 2 (February).

Jonathan Cheah Weng Kwong also commented on the wildbirdSingapore that there was a great big nest in the vicinity in 2006 which photographers were documenting the nesting.

The nesting of this bird was later proven with 2 adults and 1 Juvenile observed and photographed by Lau Wing Thor (shown below on 16 July 2008) and many others.



Photo © Lau Weng Thor



Photo © Lau Weng Thor

## Report on the 9<sup>th</sup> Mid-Year Bird Census

By Lim Kim Seng

Our 9<sup>th</sup> 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.

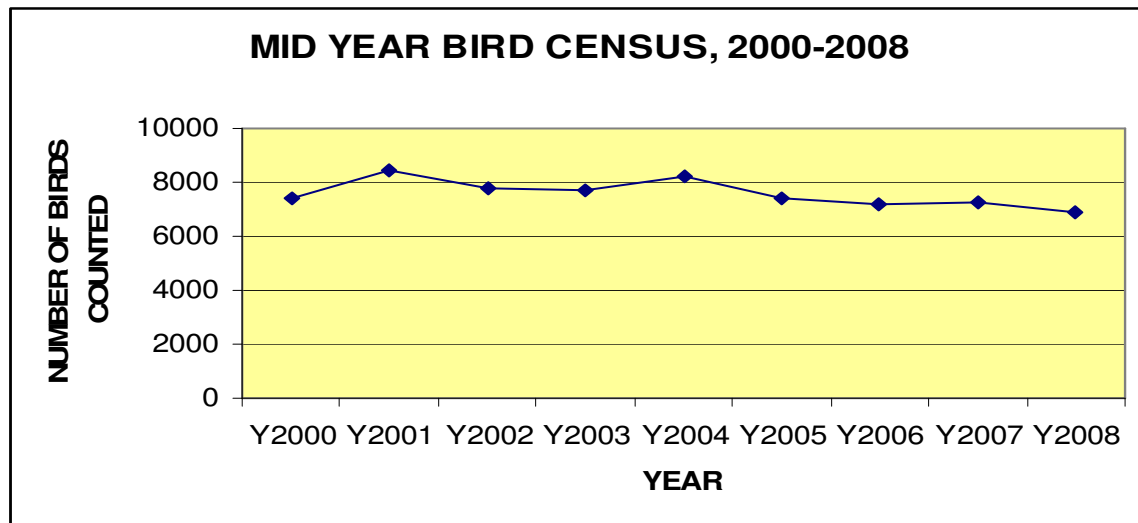


Figure 1: MYBC 2000-2008 Total Number of Birds Counted

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 Swampphen, Greater Painted-snipe, 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.

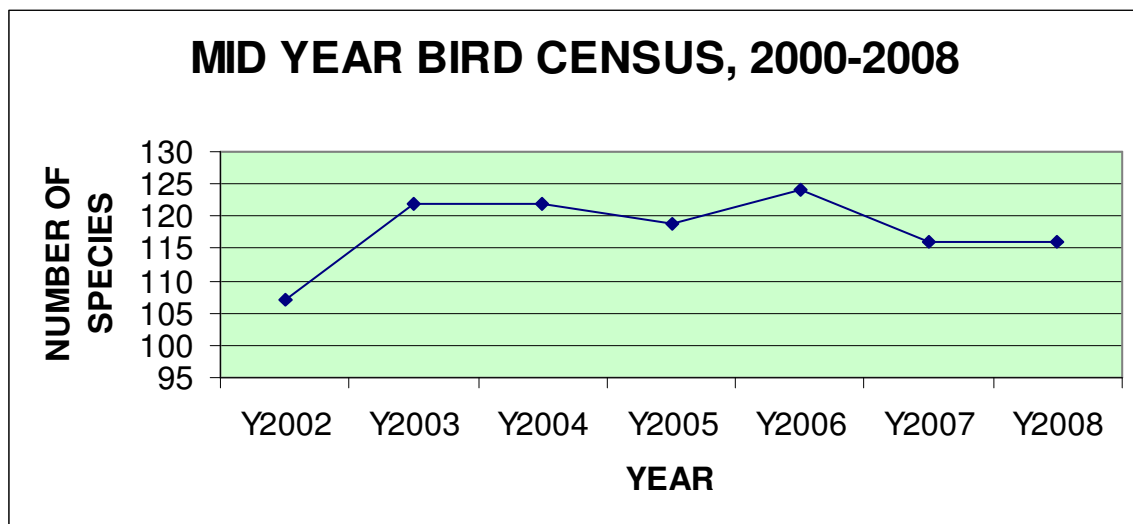


Figure 2: MYBC 2000-2008 Total Number of Species Counted

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 28<sup>th</sup> position in 2007 to grab 17<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> position last year, dropped to 33<sup>rd</sup> 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 placing is the White-crested Laughingthrush. It was placed 29<sup>th</sup> with 46 birds nation-wide, up from 37<sup>th</sup> 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 were the Grey Heron's 145 birds followed by 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!

## Notes on the Identification, Status and Distribution of Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* in Singapore

By Lim Kim Seng

### Introduction

The Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* is a scarce, somewhat enigmatic species in Singapore. Few Singapore birders have seen this bird. The picture is blurred by confusion with the commoner Little Bronze Cuckoo *C. minutillus* especially in its immature plumage. This article highlights some tips on its identification, its status and distribution in Singapore and suggestions on how to find this elusive bird during the austral winter.

### Identification

**Adult:** Dull bronze-green above edged broadly with whitish on flight feathers. Crown is dull dark brown grading to bronze-green on mantle and back. Wings are mostly bronze green. Upper tail is dull dark green with basal two-thirds of outermost tail feather rufous. Sides of head whitish showing bold dark brownish eyestripe. Supercilium is whitish and slightly indistinct in front of eye and clear behind. Has short dark moustache extending from gape. Throat, whitish streaked buff. Below, white with broad dull green bars on breast, sides and flanks. Bars are thin and joined on breast but are longest on sides and very short on flanks and under tail coverts. Centre of breast and belly unbarred. Thighs white barred dark brown. Undertail and undertail coverts, white with dark bars. Bill, black. Feet, grey. Eyes, dark brown. Eyering, grey.

**Immature:** Buffy brown to blackish brown upperparts and whitish to pale buff underparts. Underparts barring are either missing or a smudged buffy brown, very short and confined to sides and flanks. Flight feathers edged whitish. Eyestripe brown. Eyebrow whitish but indistinct. Also shows short moustachial streak behind gape. Bill, black. Feet, grey. Eye, black.

**Confusion Species:** This species is separated from adult Little Bronze Cuckoo *C. minutillus* by lack of white on forehead, duller upperparts, incomplete barring on underparts and extensive rufous on outermost tail feathers. It is distinguished from immature Little Bronze Cuckoo by its dark forehead, browner upperparts and the presence of a bold eyestripe. It also differs from females of Asian Emerald *C. maculatus* and Violet Cuckoo *C. xanthorhynchus* by the lack of rufous or chestnut on its crown and also the lack of complete barring on its underparts (Robson 2000).



CHARACTERISTICS	LITTLE	HORSFIELD'S
FOREHEAD	WHITE	DARK
CROWN	GREEN	DARK BROWN
EYESTRIPE	ABSENT OR INDISTINCT	DARK & DOWNCURVED
THROAT	WHITISH BARRED DARK	WHITISH STREAKED BUFF
WINGS	NO FRINGING ON WINGS	SHOW PROMINENT WHITISH FRINGING
UPPERPARTS	BROWN WITH BRONZE SHEEN ( DULLER IN IMMATURE)	DULL BROWN WITH GREEN GLOSS (BUFFY BROWN IN IMMATURE)
UNDERPARTS BARRING	COMPLETE OR NEAR COMPLETE (MISSING OR BROKEN IN IMMATURE)	BROKEN BARRING (MISSING OR FAINT IN IMMATURE)
OUTERTAIL	DARK GREEN	RUFOUS

Table #1: Field marks of Little and Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoos

### Status and Distribution in Southeast Asia

The Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo breeds in Australia and migrates north to New Guinea, Wallacea, Java, Borneo and South Sumatra. It has also been recorded from Christmas Island (Robson 2000, Wells 1997). In Southeast Asia, it has been recorded only in Singapore (Robson 2000) until one bird was seen in Peninsular Malaysia recently. An adult photographed in mangrove in Sitiawan, Perak in July 2005 pushes its wintering range northwards by at least 500 kilometres (Recent Reports, *Suara Enggang*, July-August 2005).

It is not considered globally threatened (BirdLife International 2000).

### Status and Distribution in Singapore

The Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo is a rare passage migrant and winter visitor in Singapore (Lim, 2007; Lim & Gardner 1997). Most birds appear to be on passage with the longest stay at any location being 7 days.

To date, there are ten acceptable records for Singapore contra del Hoyo et al (1996) which mentioned only one record. Two records came from the east, one from the north-east, one from the west, three from the south, one on an island south of Singapore, one unknown labeled "Singapore" and the last from the northwest (Figure 1). 40% of the records were of immature birds contra Robson (2000) who reported that juveniles do not occur in the region.

It is likely that the cuckoo is overlooked as the apparent influx of four different birds between June and July 2008 show.

All known records (including two listed in Wells 1999 without any details) are listed below:

- An adult female collected in Singapore on 19 July 1879 (Gibson-Hill 1950).
- An adult bird photographed at Changi Beach on 17 August 1986 (Wells 1990, 1999).
- An adult bird seen on Sentosa Island on 20 August 1990 (Recent Reports, *Singapore Avifauna* 4:3).
- A record in 1991. No other details available (Wells 1999).
- A record in 1993. No other details available (Wells 1999).
- An adult photographed at Marina City Park on 23 May 2005 (Figures 2-4; Recent Reports, *Singapore Avifauna* 19:2).
- An immature, seen and photographed at Marina City Park on 4-12 June 2005 (Recent Reports, *Singapore Avifauna* 19:2)
- An immature seen and photographed at Choa Chu Kang Cemetery on 9 July 2005 (Figure 5; Con Foley *in litt.*)
- An immature seen and photographed at Marina East on 8 June 2008 (Figures 6 & 7; Mike Hooper *in litt.*)
- An immature seen and photographed in an unnamed location in northeastern Singapore on 25 June 2008 (Figure 9, Frankie Cheong *in litt.*)
- An adult seen and photographed in Changi Beach Park on 13-15 July 2008 (Figure 9; Doreen Ang pers. comm.)
- An adult photographed in flight in coastal vegetation at Kranji on 18 July 2008 (Figure 10, TK Lee *in litt.*)

### **Habitat Preference**

Wells (1999) reported that the Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo occurs in open, sandy ground, specifically near areas of the seashore creeper, Sea Morning Glory *Ipomoea pes-caprae*, in beach scrub habitat and only once in Acacia woodland. However, del Hoyo *et al* 1996 listed its habitat as open woodland, mulga, scrub, spinifex, coastal saltmarsh in arid and semi-arid areas. Robson (2000) also listed its habitat as secondary growth, open woodland, coastal scrub, mangroves and lowlands. Recent observations in Singapore show that its habitat selection is much wider than coastal scrub and Acacia woodlands as it also frequents open parkland, second growth and open woodlands. There appears to be a preference for coastal sites with all records within a kilometer from the sea. The sole anomalous record (mangrove) came from Malaysia but Robson (2000) mentioned this as one of its habitats.

## **Finding the Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo in Singapore**

Finding the Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo would entail a mixture, in liberal doses, of luck and effort. Based on past records, the best time to find the Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo in Singapore is between 23 May and 20 August, a period of nearly three months. Of ten records with details available, one was in May, three in June, four in July, two in August. Therefore the best time to focus finding this bird would be in June and July, with last ditch efforts in the month of August. This would not be too difficult as June-July is typically the quietest time of the year for the Singapore birder with migrant activity near non-existent.

Habitats to focus on are the extensive coastline of Singapore, in particular sandy and reclaimed shores where coastal scrub occurs. Adjacent habitats of mangroves, second growth, casuarinas and even parkland should also be explored as it seems to forage in all types of coastal vegetation. The sites listed above should be the first points of investigation but it shouldn't stop here. In all probability, it may even be an uncommon passage migrant winter visitor but lack of exploration in coastlines along Singapore means many birds remain undetected.

Attention should also be focused on the bird's feeding habits. It looks for insect prey, typically caterpillars, and tends to forage on the ground or in low vegetation (below two metres). Good luck!

## **Conclusion**

It is hoped that information provided in this article on the identification, status and occurrence of the Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo would spur observer efforts within Singapore and even nearby Peninsular Malaysia for a poorly known species, the only known austral migrant of the area.

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Figure #1 Map of Singapore showing locations of Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo Sightings



Figure #2. Adult Horsfield's Bronze-cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* feeding on a caterpillar of *Catopsilia pomona* at Marina City Park in May 2005 (© Paul Huang). The bold eyestripe, decurved eyebrow, whitish fringes to flight feathers and rufous on its outermost tail feather show well in this photo.



Figure #3 Adult Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* at Marina City Park, May 2005 (© Paul Huang). Note the dark forehead, prominent decurved eyestripe and whitish fringes on wings.



Figure #4 Adult Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* at Marina City Park, May 2005 (© Ivor Lee). Note the streaked throat, broken bars from sides to under tail coverts and pale fringes to flight feathers.



Figure #5 Immature Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* at Choa Chu Kang Cemetery, July 2005 (© Con Foley). Note the dark eyestripe and brown wash on throat and upper breast.



Figure #5 Immature Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* on the ground at Marina East, June 2008 (© Mike Hooper). Note its distinct eyestripe, pale area behind eye, indistinct whitish fringes to wings, plain brown upperparts and rufous on bases of the two outermost tail feathers.



Figure #6 Immature Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* feeding on unidentified prey at Marina East, June 2008 (© Mike Hooper). Note the clear eyestripe and eyebrow, dark eyering and rufous on outer tail.



Figure #7 Immature Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* at an unnamed spot in north-eastern Singapore, June 2008 (© Frankie Cheong). Note the rather blackish toned upperparts, dark forehead, broad whitish fringes to wings, and dark-streaked throat.



Figure #8 Adult Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* at Changi Beach Park, July 2008 (© Lim Kim Chuah). Note the rather blotched bronze and green upperparts.





Figure #9 Adult Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* at Kranji Coast, July 2008 (© Lee Tiah Khee). Note the clear eyestripe and eyebrow, black barred white wing coverts and broad white band at base of flight feathers.



Figure #10 Immature Little Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus* at Marina City Park, May 2005 (© Paul Huang). Note the lack of eyestripe and underparts barring, and the lack of pale fringes to flight feathers.



Figure #11 Adult male Little Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus* in Singapore (© Lee Tiah Khee). Note the more extensive bars on throat, across sides of head and underparts and lack of pale fringing to wings.



Figure #11 Adult male Little Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx minutillus* in Singapore (© Lee Tiah Khee). Note the more extensive bars on throat, across sides of head and underparts, whitish forehead and lack of a defined eyestripe.