



# SINGAPORE AVIFAUNA

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## SINAV

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Great Knot

Great Knot and Common Redshank at Sungei Buloh wetland Reserve on 3 September 2008. Photo © David Tan Siah Hin



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## Bird Report

September 2008

By Albert Low

### Singapore Highlights

September was an exceptional month for unusual sightings of both resident and migratory species throughout the country. Thanks to the diligence of the volunteers who successfully conducted our 5<sup>th</sup> Fall Migratory Bird Census (FMBC) and contributions from various sources, the month of September, which usually played second fiddle to the peak passage period between October and November, had more than its fair share of interesting sightings this time around.



Mangrove Pitta at SBWR on 7 Sep 2008. Photo © Ron Yeo

In Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, careful scrutiny of the waders that steadily streamed in turned up rarities in the form of a single **Great Knot** as well as a lone **Black-tailed Godwit**. However, these sightings paled in comparison to an incredible encounter with a silent **Mangrove Pitta** along the Mangrove Boardwalk. This species, which is normally associated with the mature mangroves of our northern offshore islands, is an extremely rare visitor to SBWR. Another “lost-and found” denizen of this wetland reserve, the nationally rare and localised **Mangrove Whistler**, was also located during the FMBC. This species is widely believed to be nearly extirpated from the Singapore mainland and this sighting renewed hope that a tiny population continues to eke out an existence in the remnant mangroves of Singapore’s northern coast. To top it all off with a flourish, a lucky photographer had the privilege of witnessing the dramatic hunting sequence of a juvenile **Rufous-bellied Eagle** right in the carpark of the reserve.

Moving to the forests at the center of our island, the forests of Nee Soon seemed to come alive, if only for a day, with sightings of up to 8 **Blue-rumped Parrots**, a single **Blue-eared Kingfisher**, 2 **Chestnut-winged Babblers** and no less than 15 **Short-tailed Babblers**. For the aforementioned forest-dependent species, Nee Soon Swamp Forest represents their last stronghold on our rapidly developing island and to see all of them in a single day was no mean feat in itself.

Finally, in the island's south, the hidden and overlooked gem of Kent Ridge Park offered glimpses into its past as a former migrant hotspot with a casual evening stroll turning up an exceptional count of 2 flocks of **White-shouldered Starlings** estimated to be 20-30 individuals strong as well as observations of a female **Chinese Flycatcher**, a rare but seemingly annual passage migrant to our shores.

Other interesting sightings during the month included a Chestnut-winged Cuckoo at Khatib Bongsu, a new early date for the species, a probable sighting of the "resident" female **Crimson-winged Woodpecker** at BTNR, a **Ruddy Kingfisher** photographed at Chinese Garden, as well as a notable influx of male **Yellow-rumped Flycatchers** over the course of the month to various locales across the island.

## **Summary**

This report covers noteworthy bird sightings in September 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 @ [Lim Kim Seng @ ibisbill@yahoo.com](mailto:Lim Kim Seng @ ibisbill@yahoo.com) or Lim Kim Chuah @ [pittalover@yahoo.com.sg](mailto:pittalover@yahoo.com.sg) or Yong Ding Li at [zoothara@yahoo.com](mailto:zoothara@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:**

BB	Bukit Brown	BBNP	Bukit Batok Nature Park
BBW	Bukit Batok West	BS	Bishan
BTNR	Bukit Timah Nature Reserve	KB	Khatib Bongsu
KR	Kranji	KRP	Kranji Park
LH	Lorong Halus	LSD	Lower Seletar Dam
MF	Mount Faber	NS	Nee Soon
NSRCC	Nation Service Resort & Country Club	NT	Neo Tiew
PG	Punggol	PY	Poyan
SBG	Singapore Botanic Gardens	SBWR	Sungei Buloh Wetland
Reserve			
SM	Sungei Mandai	SP	Sembawang Park
SR	Sime Road	SS	Serangoon
TBHP	Telok Blangah Hill Park	UC	Ubin Central
US	Upper Seletar	UW	Ubin West
FMBC	Fall Migration Bird Census		

## SINGAPORE

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

17 counted 14/9 at BBW, UC, UW and SBWR during FMBC.

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

2 seen 7/9 at West Coast Marsh Garden (SA/LKS/LWH/LWX). 15 counted 14/9 at SBG during FMBC.

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

A probable seen 9/9 at Hindhede on (DA).

### **RUFIOUS WOODPECKER** (*Celeus brachyurus*)

3 counted 14/9 at BBNP/BTNR during FMBC. 1 seen 29/9 at Sime Forest preening itself at the Treetop walk (RB).

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

11 counted 14/9 at BB/BBNP/BBW/BTNR during FMBC. 1 seen 28/9 climbing on a large bare tree in Chinese cemetery adjacent to Kheam Hock Road (RB).

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

1 counted 14/9 at SR during FMBC.

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

4 counted 14/9 at BB/MF/SP/TBHP during FMBC. 50 seen 23/9 at Seletar Camp on a bare tree (TKH).

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

5 counted 14/9 at UC and 2 at US during FMBC. Also 3 photographed 7/9 at Queens Driving Range (EmL). Origin of this 3 birds is uncertain.

### **COMMON KINGFISHER** (*Alcedo atthis*)

3 counted 14/9 at LH/SM/SS during FMBC. 1 seen 16/9 at Jurong Lake (JS).

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

1 seen 6/9 at Nee Soon Forest (YDL).

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

1 seen and photographed 12/9 at Hindhede Park (DA). 8 counted 14/9 at BTNR/SBWR/SM/SS during FMBC. 1 heard and another seen 21/9 at Sime Forest flying low across the reservoir (DA/JaR/NeK).

**RUDDY KINGFISHER**

(*Halcyon coromanda*)

1 seen and photographed 27/9 outside Chinese Garden (CYY/MC).

**CHESTNUT-WINGED CUCKOO**

(*Clamator coromandus*)

1 counted 14/9 at KB during FMBC. This sets a new early date for this species, 16 days earlier than previously recorded.

**BANDED BAY CUCKOO**

(*Cacomantis sonnerati*)

3 counted 14/9 at BTNR/NT/US during FMBC.

**RUSTY-BREASTED CUCKOO**

(*Cacomantis sepulcralis*)

1 counted 14/9 at NT during FMBC.

**ASIAN DRONGO CUCKOO**

(*Surniculus lugubris*)

1 counted 14/9 at KR during FMBC. 1 juvenile photographed 27/9 at lakeside of Chinese Garden (En). As this species is typically associated with our forest and there were many sightings of it at the same location during the last migration season, this is mostly likely a migrant.

**CHESTNUT-BELLIED MALKOHA**

(*Phaenicophaeus sumatranus*)

3 counted 14/9 at BB/US during FMBC. 1 seen 21/9 at Sime Forest (DA/JaR/NeK). Several seen 29/9 at Sime Forest (RB).

**YELLOW-CRESTED COCKATOO**

(*Cacatua sulphurea*)

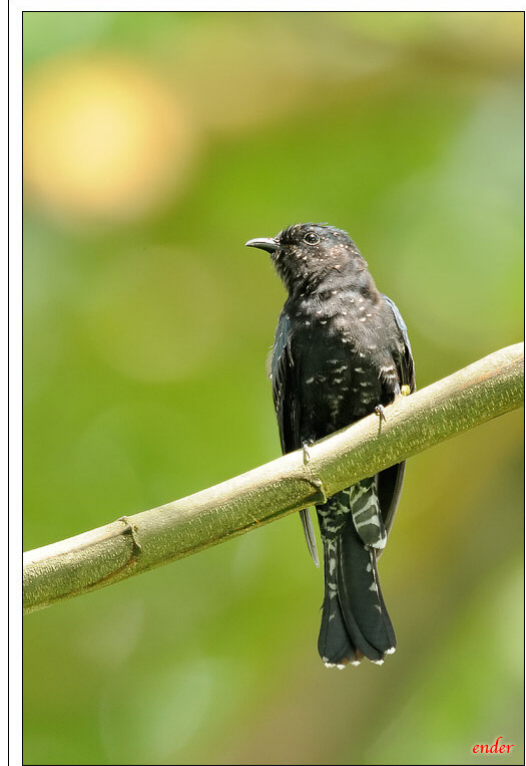
8 counted 14/9 at MF/TBHP during FMBC. The 4 seen at TBHP were seen flying in from Neighbouring MF (KK).

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

1 counted 14/9 at BS during FMBC.



Ruddy Kingfisher at Chinese Garden on 27 Sep 2008. Photo © YY Cheong



Asian Drongo Cuckoo at Chinese Garden on 21 Sep 2008. Photo © Ender

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

Maximum of 8 vocal individuals seen 6/9 at Nee Soon Forest (YDL).

**BLUE-CROWNED HANGING PARROT** (*Loriculus galgulus*)

8 counted 14/9 at BBNP/BBW/NS/TBHP during FMBC.

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

6 counted 14/9 at KB during FMBC. Several seen 17/9 - 26/8 at Seletar Camp (TKH).

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

50 counted 14/9 at BBNP/KB/LSD/PY/US during FMBC. Several seen 17/9 - 26/8 at Seletar Camp (TKH).

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

125 counted 14/9 at BBNP/BBW/BTNR/KB/LH/LSD/NS/NT/PG/PY/SBG/SP/SR/UC/UW during FMBC. Several seen 17/9 - 26/8 at Seletar Camp (TKH).

**FORK-TAILED SWIFT** (*Apus pacificus*)

2 seen 14/9 at Botanic Gardens over the Fern Valley (JS).

**SAVANNA NIGHTJAR** (*Caprimulgus affinis*)

1 seen and photographed at Tuas (TKH).

**RED TURTLE DOVE** (*Streptopelia tranquebarica*)

2 counted 14/9 at NT during FMBC.

**COMMON EMERALD DOVE**

(*Chalcophaps indica*)

1 male seen and photographed 13/9 at SBWR (LWT/TKH). 6 counted 14/9 at PG/PY/SBWR/UC during FMBC.

**THICK-BILLED GREEN PIGEON**

(*Treron curvirostra*)

1 heard 6/9 at Nee Soon Forest (YDL).

**RED-LEGGED CRAKE**

(*Rallina fasciata*)

2 seen 26/9 at Hindhede Park (AC).

**SLATY-BREASTED RAIL**

(*Gallirallus striatus*)

2 counted 14/9 at PY during FMBC.

**WHITE-BROWED CRAKE** (*Porzana cinerea*)

2 counted 14/9 at LH during FMBC.



Red-legged Crake at Hindhede Park on 13 Sep 2008. Photo © Cheong Boon Leong

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

2 counted 14/9 at NT during FMBC.

**COMMON MOORHEN** (*Gallinula chloropus*)

1 counted 14/9 at LH during FMBC.

**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT** (*Limosa limosa*)

1 photographed 24/9 at SBWR (DA/MeT) and sighted again 25/9 at the same location (DA/MeT). It was observed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> occasion to probe in deep water rather than the mudflats for small clams which were deftly swallowed. 1 seen 26/9 at SBWR, probably the same individual as previous sightings (LJS).



Black-tailed Godwit at SBWR on 24 Sep 2008.

Photo © Mendis Tan

**WHIMBREL** (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Several seen 13/9 (LWT/TKH) and 20/9 (LWT) at SBWR.104 counted 14/9 at KR/SBWR/SM during FMBC.

**COMMON REDSHANK** (*Tringa totanus*)

Several seen 2/9 (TGC), 13/9 (LWT/TKH), 20/9 (LWT) and 25/9 (DA/MeT) at SBWR.198 counted 14/9 at LH/SBWR/SM during FMBC

**MARSH SANDPIPER** (*Tringa stagnatilis*)

3 seen 2/9 at SBWR (TGC). Several seen 13/9 (LWT/TKH) and 25/9 at SBWR (DA/MeT). 55 counted 14/9 at SBWR during FMBC.

**COMMON GREENSHANK**

(*Tringa nebularia*)

Several seen 2/9 (TGC), 13/9 (LWT/TKH), 20/9 (LWT) and 25/9 (DA/MeT) at SBWR. 14 counted 14/9 at LH/SBWR/SM/SS during FMBC.

**WOOD SANDPIPER**

(*Tringa glareola*)

2 counted 14/9 at LH during FMBC.



Terek Sandpiper (front) at SBWR on 4 Sep 2008.

Photo © Con Foley

**TEREK SANDPIPER**

(*Tringa cinerea*)

1 photographed 4/9 at SBWR, Hide 1C (CF/LJS/LWT/MeT). 1 counted 14/9 at SM during FMBC.

**COMMON SANDPIPER** (*Tringa hypoleucos*)

Several seen 13/9 (LWT/TKH) and 25/9 (DA/MeT). 3 seen 23/9 at Seletar Camp (TKH). 62 counted 14/9 at BBW/BS/KB/KR/LH/LSD/PG/SBWR/SM/SP/SS/UC during FMBC.

**RUDDY TURNSTONE** (*Arenaria interpres*)

2 to 3 Seen 2/9 at SBWR (TGC). 2 counted 14/9 at SBWR during FMBC.



Ruddy Turnstone at SBWR on 2 Sep 2008.. Photo © Tan Gim Cheong

**GREAT KNOT** (*Calidris tenuirostris*)

1 juvenile seen and photographed 3/9 at SBWR, Hide 1C with a flock of Common Redshank (DT). 1 observed and photographed 13/9 at SBWR, Hide 1.11. It was around for at least 1 hour (LWT/TKH). 1 seen 14/9 at SBWR after the FMBC (BL/RC).

**RED-NECKED STINT** (*Calidris ruficollis*)

1 seen 6/9 at Mandai Mudflat (LWT).

**CURLEW SANDPIPER** (*Calidris ferruginea*)

7 seen 13/9 at SBWR (LWT/TKH). 1 counted 14/9 at SBWR during FMBC. More than 30 seen 20/9 (LWT) and over 100 seen 25/9 (DA/MeT) at SBWR, most in non-breeding plumage.

**PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER** (*Pluvialis fulva*)

Several seen 2/9 (TGC), 13/9 (LWT/TKH) and 25/9 at SBWR (DA/MeT). 256 counted 14/9 at LH/PG/SBWR/SM during FMBC.

**LITTLE RINGED PLOVER** (*Charadrius dubius*)

20 seen 13/9 at NSRCC (LWT/TKH).

**MALAYSIAN PLOVER** (*Charadrius peronii*)

1 male seen 18/9 and 1 pair seen a few days later and again on 25/9 at Changi area (FC).



Malaysian Plover at Changi area on 25 Sep 2008.

Photo © Frankie Cheong

**LESSER SAND PLOVER** (*Charadrius mongolus*)

Several seen 13/9 (LWT/TKH) and 25/9 (DA/MeT) at SBWR.28 counted 14/9 at SBWR/SM during FMBC.30 to 40 seen 20/9 at SBWR (LWT).

**RED-WATTLED LAPWING** (*Vanellus indicus*)

26 counted at Tuas (TKH). 6 counted 14/9 at NT/PG during FMBC.

**LESSER CRESTED TERN** (*Sterna bengalensis*)

5 counted 14/9 at KR during FMBC.

**SWIFT TERN** (*Sterna bergii*)

1 counted 14/9 at UC during FMBC.

**BLACK-NAPED TERN** (*Sterna sumatrana*)

1 counted 14/9 at UC during FMBC.

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

17 counted 14/9 at KR/LH/NT during FMBC.

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*)

1 seen 2/9 (DA/NeK/IvT/HFH) and another photographed 30/9 at Upper Pierce Reservoir (TKC).

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

1 seen 7/9 at Telok Blangah Hill Park (JS). 1 counted 14/9 at BBW during FMBC. 1 seen 28/9 at Sime Forest by the Reservoir (RB).

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

1 adult seen on 14/9 at (MT) and 15/9 (FC) at 'Little Guilin', Bukit Gombak. On the later occasion, it was observed breaking a branch off a bare tree at the top of a cliff and then carrying it away (FC).



Grey-headed Fish Eagle at Little Guilin on 15 Sep 2008. Photo © Frankie

**CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE** (*Spilornis Cheela*)

1 seen and photographed 13/9 at Chinese Garden perching only about 3m about ground (En). Alan OwYong pointed out that this could be the same individual that visits Jurong Lake at this time of the year.

**COMMON BUZZARD** (*Buteo buteo*)

One photographed over Tampines on 19/9 (DT).

**RUFIOUS-BELLIED EAGLE** (*Hieraaetus kienerii*)

A juvenile seen attacking and catching a female Pink-necked Green Pigeon *Treron vernans* at the carpark at SBWR on 7/9 (TKC). 1 probable seen 21/9 at Sime Forest soaring in the sky (DA/JaR/NeK).



Rufous-bellied Eagle at SBWR on 7 Sep 2008.

Photo © K C Tsang

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

1 dark morph observed 11/9 at Hindhede Park, calling in flight (DA). 10 counted 14/9 at BBNP/KB/LSD/NS/ PY/SR/TBHP during FMBC. 1 dark morph observed 14/9 at Seletar Airbase, mobbed by crows (AT/KCT). 1 juvenile pale morph seen 23/9 and 26/9 at Seletar Camp (THK). On the second occasion, it was feeding on a bird and later with a changeable lizard that it swallowed in one gulp. Another pale morph adult 26/9 seen on perch (THK).

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

3 counted 14/9 at LH during FMBC.

**LITTLE EGRET** (*Egretta garzetta*)

159 counted 14/9 at BS/KR/LH/LSD/NT/SBWR/SM/SS/UC during FMBC of which 101 was counted at SBWR route1 (LKS/RC). About 100 seen 20/9 (LWT) and several seen 25/9 (DA/MeT) at SBWR.

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

3 observed 14/9 at Seletar Airbase, in flight (AT/KTC). 167 counted 14/9 at KB/KR/LH/LSD/PG/ SBWR/SM/SP/SS/UC/US/UW during FMBC.

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

13 counted 14/9 at BS/KB/LH/LSD/NT/SBWR/US during FMBC. 1 seen 21/9 at Sime Forest (DA/JaR/NeK). 1 seen 29/9 at Sime Forest by the MacRitchie reservoir (RB).

**GREAT EGRET** (*Casmerodius albus*)

5 counted 14/9 at LH/SM during FMBC.

**YELLOW-BILLED EGRET** (*Egretta intermedia*)

1 counted 14/9 at US during FMBC. 1 seen 14/9 at Kranji Dam (LKS).

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

51 counted 14/9 at BBW/LH/NT/SBWR/US during FMBC.

**CHINESE POND HERON** (*Ardeola bacchus*)

1 seen 20/9 at Lorong Halus (LWT).

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

3 counted 14/9 at SBWR during FMBC.

**YELLOW BITTERN** (*Ixobrychus sinensis*)

2 counted 14/9 at LH during FMBC.

**MANGROVE PITTA** (*Pitta megarhyncha*)

1 observed and photographed 7/9 at SBWR.



Mangrove Pitta at SBWR on 7 Sep 2008. Photo © Ron Yeo

**ASIAN FAIRY BLUEBIRD** (*Irena puella*)

2 male seen 6/9 at Nee Soon Forest (YDL). 1 male and 1 female seen 21/9 at Sime Forest (DA/JaR/NeK).

**GREATER GREEN LEAFBIRD** (*Chloropsis sonnerati*)

1 heard 6/9 at Nee Soon Forest (YDL). 1 counted 14/9 at NS during FMBC. 1 male and 2 female seen 21/9 at Sime Forest (DA/JaR/NeK).

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

6 counted 14/9 at BTNR/NS during FMBC.

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

6 seen 7/9 between Kranji Nature Trail and SBWR (MgY). One was seen eating an unidentified lizard. 1 seen 7/9 at Earth Trail, Southern Ridges (LWT), 8/9 at Jurong Lake Park (DA), 9/9 at Bidadari Cemetery (TKC), 9/9 at Petai Trail (DA/NeK/IvT/HFH), 11/9 at Hindhede Park (DA), 16/9 at Jurong Lake Park (JS), 21/9 at Sime Forest (DA/JaR/NeK) and 23/9 at Tuas area (FW), apparently dazed after clashing into a glass panel. It flew off after Felix helped to turn it around. 6 counted 14/9 at BB/BBNP/BTNR/SR/UC during FMBC. All observed were immatures.



Tiger Shrike at Bidadari. Photo © K C Tsang

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

8 counted 14/9 at BBW/KR/LH/NT/SS during FMBC. 1 seen and photographed 29/9 at outside Chinese Garden (MC).

**LONG-TAILED SHRIKE** (*Lanius schach*)

5 counted 14/9 at PG/NT during FMBC. 2 seen 20/9 at Lorong Halus (LWT).

**MANGROVE WHISTLER** (*Pachycephala grisola*)

1 counted 14/9 at SBWR during FMBC.

**PIED FANTAIL** (*Rhipidura javanica*)

1 observed 13/9 at SBWR whacking a moth to remove its wings and then swallowing the morsel (LWT/TKH). 32 counted 14/9 at BBNP/BTNR/KB/KR/LH/PG/SBWR/SS/UC/UW during FMBC.

**CROW-BILLED DRONGO** (*Dicrurus annectans*)

1 counted 14/9 at BBW during FMBC. 1 first winter observed and photographed 29/9 at SBWR (MeT), feeding on an insect.



Crow-billed Drongo at SBWR on 29 Sep 2008. Photo © Mendis Tan

**GREATER RACKET-TAILED DRONGO**

(*Dicrurus paradiseus*)

6 seen 21/9 at Sime Forest in a flock with one without racket, one with short rackets and another with white spots on its underparts. They were calling noisily as they flew to and fro. 2 seen quivering their feathers when perched together (DA/JaR/NeK).

**ASIAN PARADISE FLYCATCHER**

(*Terpsiphone paradisi*)

1 seen 8/9 at Jurong Lake Park (DA). and 1 photographed 11/9 at Botanic Gardens, fluttering over the water surface (LYC). 1 counted 14/9 at SR during FMBC. 1 seen 15/9 at Pierce (BL). 2 white morph seen 27/9 (JL/SA/ABJ/AC) at Lower Pierce boardwalk along Hevea Trail near the stream. 1 photographed 28/9 at SBWR (BC). Several seen 29/9 at Sime Forest including 1 white morph at Petaling Hut (RB).



Asian Paradise Flycatcher at SBWR on 28 Sep 2008. Photo © Brandon Chia

**ASIAN BROWN FLYCATCHER** (*Muscicapa dauurica*)

1 seen and photographed 2/9 at Upper Peirce Reservoir (DA/NeK/IvT/HFH). 2 counted 14/9 at BTNR/MF during FMBC.

**YELLOW-RUMPED FLYCATCHER** (*Ficedula Zanthopygia*)

First reported sighting for the month was a female 6/9 at West Coast Park (AOY) and 2 females seen 6/9 at Kranji Nature Trail (MgY). There were several subsequent sightings and photos of both male and female from various parts of Singapore. 1 female was seen 9/9 at Bidadari Cemetery (TKC) and 14/9 at Kent Ridge Park (JS). 2 female seen 21/9 at Sime Forest (DA/JaR/NeK) and 2 seen 28/9 at Lower Pierce Boardwalk (AC). 1 male was seen 13/9 at SBWR (LWT/TKH) and 27/9 at Chinese Garden (En). At Hindhede Park, 1 female was seen 9/9, 10/9, 11/9, 12/9 (DA) and 21/9 (LKC). On 10/9 and 21/9, a male was also seen. On some occasions, they were observed seemingly feeding on tiny berries of a *Macaranga javanica*. 7 counted 14/9 at KRP/LH/ NS/SBWR/SR during FMBC.



Yellow-rumped Flycatcher male at Chinese Garden on 27 Sep 2008.

Photo © Ender

**CHINESE FLYCATCHER** (*Ficedula elisae*)

1 female 27/9 seen at Kent Ridge Park near the pond at Normanton Park exit (HF).

**SIBERIAN BLUE ROBIN** (*Luscinia cyane*)

1 counted 14/9 at US during FMBC. This sets a new early date for this species, 11 days earlier than previously recorded.

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

22 counted 14/9 at KRP/SBG/SBWR/UC/UW during FMBC. A sub-adult seen 18/9 at Jacob Balas Garden (LKS/SA). 1 seen 22/9 at Seletar Camp (TKH).

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

4 counted 14/9 at SR/UC/UW during FMBC.

**DAURIAN STARLING** (*Sturnus sturninus*)

151 counted 14/9 at LH/LSD/PG/SP during FMBC. Several seen 21/9 at Punggol Park (En) together with Asian Glossy Starling (mostly juvenile). Total flock size is above 200. About 100 seen 28/9 at Sime Forest near the golf course feeding on fruiting trees.



Daurian Starling at Punggol Park on 21 Sep 2008.

Photo © Ender

**WHITE-SHOULDERED STARLING** (*Sturnus sinensis*)

Exceptional encounter of 2 large flocks (estimated 20-30 individuals each) of this uncommon Starling were had at Kent Ridge Park 27/9 (HF).

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

22 counted 14/9 at BTNR/KB/MF/SBG/SR/UC/US/UW during FMBC. 3 seen 22/9 at Seletar Camp (TKH). 1 seen 28/9 at Sime Forest calling in a tree alongside the boardwalk running parallel to Sime Golf course (RB).

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

119 counted 14/9 at BS/KB/LH/KR/LSD/NT/SBWR/SM/SS/UC/US/UW during FMBC.

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

1 seen and photographed 3/9 at Pulau Ubin (MT). 57 counted 14/9 at BBNP/BTNR/KB/KRP/MF/PY/TBHP/UC/UW during FMBC.



Straw-headed Bulbul at Pulau Ubin on 3 Sep 2008. Photo © Myron Tay

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

1 counted 14/9 at SP during FMBC.

**CREAM-VENTED BULBUL** (*Pycnonotus simplex*)

1 heard 6/9 at Nee Soon Forest (YDL). 4 counted 14/9 at BTNR/NS during FMBC. 1 seen 21/9 at Sime Forest near the reservoir (DA/JaR/NeK). 2 seen 29/9 at Sime Forest Jelutong Tower and 3 or more at Treetop walk (RB).

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

1 counted 14/9 at NS during FMBC.

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

3 seen 10/9 at Hindhede Nature Park (DA).

**ORIENTAL REED WARBLER** (*Acrocephalus orientalis*)

3 counted 14/9 at NT during FMBC.

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

15 counted 14/9 at BBNP/BTNR/KB/SBWR/UC during FMBC.

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

2 counted 14/9 at BS/US during FMBC. 1 seen 21/9 at Sime Forest with grub in its bill (DA/JaR/NeK). Several seen 29/9 at Sime Forest (RB).

**EASTERN CROWNED WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus coronatus*)

1 seen 8/9 at Chinese Garden (DA). 1 probable seen 21/9 at Sime Forest (DA/JaR/NeK). Doreen and Jane had a glimpse of its yellow vent. 1 seen 29/9 among a small some Arctic Warblers (RB).

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

38 counted 14/9 at BBNP/BBW/BTNR/KRP/MF/NT/PY/TBHP/SBG during FMBC.

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

3 counted 14/9 at BTNR/UC during FMBC.

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

15 to 20 seen or heard 6/9 at Nee Soon Forest (YDL). 6 counted 14/9 at NS/SR during FMBC. 1 seen and photographed 21/9, 5:30pm at Lower Peirce boardwalk foraging on the ground (CN).



Short-tailed Babbler foraging on the ground at Lower Peirce boardwalk on 21 Sep 2008. Photo © Cedric Ng

**CHESTNUT-WINGED BABBLER** (*Stachyris erythroptera*)

2 seen within touching distance 6/9 at Nee soon Forest (YDL). 3 counted 14/9 at NS/SR during FMBC.

**ORANGE-BELLIED FLOWERPECKER** (*Dicaeum trigonostigma*)

2 counted 14/9 at NS during FMBC. 1 male and female 29/9 at Sime Forest Jelutong Tower. The male was calling noisily (RB).

**COPPER-THROATED SUNBIRD** (*Nectarinia calcostetha*)

7 counted 14/9 at SBWR during FMBC.

**LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER** (*Arachnothera longirostris*)

2 seen 11/9 at Hindhede Park (DA). 3 counted 14/9 at BBNP/NS during FMBC.

**FOREST WAGTAIL** (*Dendronanthus indicus*)

3 seen 6/9 at Nee soon Forest (YDL). 3 counted 14/9 at NS during FMBC.

**YELLOW WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla flava*)

1 counted 14/9 at LH during FMBC.

**GREY WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla cinerea*)

20 seen 13/9 at NSRCC (LWT/TKH). 3 counted 14/9 at BBW/BS during FMBC.

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

20 counted 14/9 at BBW/LH/NT during FMBC.

**JAVAN MUNIA** (*Lonchura leucogastroides*)

6 counted 14/9 at SS during FMBC.

**ESCAPEES**

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

An immature male at Turut Track on 14/9 (TKC) was probably an escapee.

**Black Swan** (*Cygnus atratus*)

3 counted 14/9 at SBG during FMBC.

**Mute Swan** (*Cygnus olor*)

2 counted 14/9 at SBG during FMBC.

**GREAT COMMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

2 seen 14/9 at Mandai Mudflat (TKC)

**PAINTED STORK** (*Mycteria leucocephala*)

1 counted 14/9 at SBWR during FMBC.

**RHINOCEROS HORNBILL** (*Buceros rhinoceros*)

1 female seen 12/9 at Hindhede Park (DA). 1 counted 14/9 at BTNR during FMBC.

**JAPANESE WHITE-EYE** (*Zosterops japonicus*)

14 counted 14/9 at BS during FMBC.

**BREEDING / NESTING REPORTS**

**RED-LEGGED CRAKE** (*Rallina fasciata*)

2 adults with 2 juveniles seen 13/9 at Hindhede Nature Park (CBL).

**BRAHMINY KITE** (*Haliastur indus*)

1 pair observed 7/9 at Clementi Wood Park, building a nest on a tree above the children's playground. More than half of the nest had been completed (AOW/QJK/BQ).

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

About 50 nest observed 26/9 (TKH) at Seletar Camp on a single tree beside the coast, a more secure location compared to those 15 nests counted last year by the side of the road. This is a good indication that they are recovering well.

**COMMON MYNA** (*Acridotheres tristis*)

1 seen 8/9 nesting at Chinese Garden (DA).

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

1 adult observed feeding a young 11/9 at Hindhede Park. The young is almost as big as the adult but have a pale golden head, buff edged wing-coverts and lacking a full moustache (DA).

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

A juvenile chasing an adult female at West Coast Park on 6/9 (AOY).

## JOHOR

**GREATER GOLDENBACK** (*Chrysocolaptes lucidus*)

1 male and 1 female seen and photographed 27/9 at Tanjong Piai (FSC/CF/TKH/LJS/LWT).

**GREATER SAND PLOVER** (*Charadrius leschenaultii*)

More than 5 seen 27/9 at Pontian (FSC/CF/TKH/ LJS/LWT).

**GULL-BILLED TERN** (*Sterna nilotica*)

1 seen 27/9 at Pontian (FSC/CF/TKH/LJS/LWT).

**LESSER ADJUTANT** (*Leptoptilos javanicus*)

3 seen at Pontian and 1 at Tanjong Piai 27/9 (FSC/CF/TKH/LJS/LWT).



Gull-billed Tern at Pontian on 27 Sep 2008. Photo © Con Foley

## Report on the 5<sup>th</sup> Fall Migration Bird Census

**By Lim Kim Seng**

Our fifth Fall Migration Bird Census (FMBC) held on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2008, was marked by generally cloudy weather and a fast rising tide. 48 people participated at 26 selected sites island-wide. In all, 7,343 birds of 142 species were recorded, an increase from 7,159 birds of 134 of 2007 (Lim 2007).

Of the 26 sites counted, Lorong Halus was yet again the most bird diverse with 57 species counted followed by Neo Tiew Lane 2 with 51 species and Buloh Route 2 with 46 species. The least diverse sites were Bukit Brown with 23 species, followed by Sime Road with 23 species and Mount Faber with 24 species respectively.

The most bird populous site was Buloh Route 1 which had 568 birds. Coming in second was Punggol with 446 birds and third was Botanic Gardens with 439 birds. The least populous sites were Nee Soon with 67 birds followed by Mount Faber (93 birds) and Bukit Brown (115).

Because of the lack of volunteers, Changi Coast, Pasir Ris Park and Tampines were left out of this year's census. Two other sites, Marina City Park and Sentosa, were left out because of large scale construction activities.

What then was Singapore's most abundant bird this round? The champion bird of 2007 retained its crown with a total of 929 birds, an decrease from 1,071 birds counted last year. Second was Asian Glossy Starling with a score of 817 birds. Jumping to third was Pink-necked Green Pigeon with 347 birds, up from 170 birds previously.

Coming in fourth to tenth positions were Pacific Swallow (335 birds), Yellow-vented Bulbul (300), Pacific Golden Plover (256), Spotted Dove (206), House Crow (204), Black-naped Oriole (203) and Common Redshank (198).

Making up the eleventh to twentieth positions were two herons, a parakeet, a pigeon, a shorebird and the rest, passerines, including one each of starling, swallow, babbler, sunbird and munia. Of the top twenty species, fourteen (70%) were resident as compared to 90% in 2007 (see Table 1).

The top 20 birds of FMBC 2008 are listed below (Table 1).

#	SPECIES	TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
1	WHITE-VENTED MYNA	929	12.65
2	ASIAN GLOSSY STARLING	817	11.13
3	PINK-NECKED GREEN PIGEON	347	4.73
4	PACIFIC SWALLOW	335	4.56

5	YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL	300	4.09
6	PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER*	256	3.49
7	SPOTTED DOVE	206	2.81
8	HOUSE CROW	204	2.78
9	BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE	203	2.76
10	COMMON REDSHANK*	198	2.70
11	GREY HERON	167	2.27
12	LITTLE EGRET*	159	2.17
13	COMMON PIGEON	152	2.07
14	DAURIAN STARLING*	151	2.06
15	SCALY-BREASTED MUNIA	141	1.92
16	LONG-TAILED PARAKEET*	125	1.70
17	BARN SWALLOW*	119	1.62
18	STRIPED TIT-BABBLER	112	1.53
19	OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD	105	1.43
20	WHIMBREL*	104	1.42

Note: An asterisk (\*) denotes a migrant.

Table 1: Top 20 Most Abundant Birds in FMBC 2008

Of the 56 nationally threatened species, 20 or 45% were recorded. This is well below 45% recorded in 2007. The most numerous threatened species was Grey Heron, 11<sup>th</sup> overall, with a spectacular count of 167 birds, down from 319 birds in 2007. Also showing well were Straw-headed Bulbul, with 57 birds, an increase from 46 birds of last year, Oriental Magpie-robin (22), Red Junglefowl (17) and Little Tern (17).

The only globally threatened species recorded was the Straw-headed Bulbul which was present at 9 sites, up from 7 sites in 2007 and 5 in 2006. The following globally near-threatened species were also recorded: Red-crowned Barbet (1), Chestnut-bellied Malkoha (3), Long-tailed Parakeet (125), Mangrove Whistler (1) and Short-tailed Babbler (6).

34 (24%) of 142 were true migrants as compared with 15% in 2007, 18% in 2006, 21% in 2005 and 24% in 2004. Of these 34, six were among the top twenty birds counted. The other 28 species (in order of decreasing abundance) included Common Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Cattle Egret, Lesser Sand Plover, Common Greenshank, Brown Shrike, Yellow-rumped Flycatcher, Tiger Shrike, Lesser Crested Tern, Great Egret, Common Kingfisher, Oriental Reed Warbler, Forest Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Wood Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Arctic Warbler, Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Terek Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Swift Tern, Crested Honey Buzzard, Yellow-billed Egret, Crow-billed Drongo, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Siberian Blue Robin and Yellow Wagtail. It is also worth noting that new early dates were set for two species – Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, located at Khatib Bongsu, by 16 days and Siberian Blue Robin, by 11 days.

Unlike in the past two years, one migrant raptor was recorded.

In addition to the 142 species recorded, there was also an additional 7 (4 in 2007, 5 in 2006 and 2005, and 7 species in 2004) of exotics recorded comprising 24 birds (8 in 2007, 20 in 2006, 10 in 2005 and 41 birds in 2004). These included 3 Black Swans, 2 Mute Swans, 2 feral Oriental Pied Hornbills, 1 Rhinoceros Hornbill, 1 Red Junglefowl, 1 Painted Stork and a flock of 14 Japanese White-eyes.

A total of 359 unidentified birds (431 in 2007 and 411 in 2006) were recorded in addition to the 7,343 birds counted. 294 (82%) were swiftlets.

The following fantastic people led or assisted in FMBC 2008:

Doreen Ang, Richard Carden, Chan Kim Cheng, Chew Leong Hai, Chew Min Soong, Alfred Chia, Andrew Chow, Geoffrey Davison, Willie Foo, Goh Si Guim, Margie Hall, James Heng, Ho Hua Chew, Ali Jaafar, Kenneth Kee, Nessie Khoo, Khuan Jia Hui, Susan Knight, Koh Ai Kiak, Maurice Kwan, Danny Lau, Beng Lee, Lee Ee Ling, Jimmy Lee, Lim Kim Chuah, Lim Kim Keang, Lim Kim Seng, Cyril Ng, Peng Ah Huay, Quek Joo Kwang, Jane Rogers, Seow Boon Quey, Gloria Seow, John Spencer, Liana Knight Spencer, Tan Kok Hui, Tan Siew Kwang, Tan Soon Im, Wee Sau Cheng, Wing Chong, Wong Chung Cheong, Wong Yoke Suey, Yang Pah Liang, Sunny Yeo, Yong Ding Li, Mel and Tom Yuan, 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 2009!

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## Early Autumn Raptor's report 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008

### **Crested (Oriental) Honey-buzzard**

As early as 24<sup>th</sup> August, I observed a single **Crested Honey-buzzard** flying at Mandai Gardens. On 27<sup>th</sup> August, Ding Li sent me his record of 4 Honey-buzzards soaring at the NTU. John Spencer reported a single buzzard at Telok Blangah Hill on 7<sup>th</sup> Sept. During our FMBC census on 14<sup>th</sup> Sept, Wing Chong noted one at Bukit Batok West. Another individual was photographed by Philip Tang just outside the Japanese Gardens on 20<sup>th</sup> Sept.

### **Rufous-bellied Eagle**

On 7<sup>th</sup> Sept, KC Tsang reported the dramatic encounter of a juvenile **Rufous-bellied Eagle** taking and eating a pigeon at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve.

Kim Seng had recorded an early arrival of this eagle on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2002 at Bukit Kallang but thinks that these may be dispersants rather than migrants.

Interestingly Doreen, Nessie and Jane Rogers may have seen a **Rufous-bellied Eagle** on the 21<sup>st</sup> Sept flying across Sime Forest.

### **Resident Raptors**

I took advantage of the Fall Migration Bird Census on the 14<sup>th</sup> Sept to collect and compiled records of raptors in Singapore to see what kind of numbers of migrating raptors and species before the main migration.

The surprised finding: only one raptor migrant, the Honey-buzzard was recorded by the counters over 12 sites across the island. However there were healthy reports of our resident raptor species.

The **White-bellied Sea Eagle** came up tops with 16 birds counted. The largest number of 4 was from Neo Tiew Lane 2 by Nessie and Jane Rogers.

The **Brahminy Kite** came in next at 15 birds with 3 reported by Kim Seng and Richard Carden at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve.

The **Changeable Hawk-eagle** is doing well with a total of 9 counted with 4 at its stronghold at Khatib Bongsu reported by Hua Chew, Cyril and Ee Lin.

There were 5 **Black-winged Kites** reported from Lorong Halus and Neo Tiew Lane although there is a small population at Changi Cove.

The **Grey-headed Fish Eagle** is still foraging at Little Guilin with Myron Tay's report on 14<sup>th</sup> Sept. The next day Frankie sent in a photo of a parent bird bringing back nesting material.

It seems that the **Crested Serpent Eagle** that visits the Jurong Lake area at this time of the year is back with a reported sighting by Ender on 13<sup>th</sup> Sept at the Chinese Gardens.

*Compiled by Alan OwYong from reports sent in to the WildbirdSingapore Forum.*

*Edited by Kenneth Kee.*

*Our thanks to all of you who send in your reports.*

# The Malkohas

## Colourful Cuckoos of the Asian Tropics

By Yong Ding Li



**Chestnut-breasted Malkoha** in Panti Forest, Peninsular Malaysia (Ong Kiem Sian)

One of the great joys of birdwatching in South East Asia are encounters with the gaudy Malkohas, large colourful arboreal cuckoos which clamber from tree to tree like oversized *Archaeopteryx*. While Malkohas are not particularly known for their song, their exotic tropical hues of rich browns and iridescent greens more than make up for this. One of the more striking members, the Red-crested Malkoha of the Philippines don a wacky crest-like hairdo of loose red feathers which gives the impression of a hairdressing session gone wrong! In Singapore, the only surviving species of Malkoha, the Chestnut-bellied Malkoha is not as spectacular but nevertheless still neatly hued with shades of grey, chestnut and nicely summed up with brilliant red facials and a chunky yellow bill.

### Introduction

While generally grouped with the cuckoos, Malkohas are not typical cuckoos. In fact, contrary to the habits of most of their garrulous cuckoo cousins, Malkohas are not known to practice nest parasitism. Furthermore, as described earlier on, most species of Malkohas are strikingly plumaged and richly coloured, unlike the other cuckoos which are mostly shades of grey and brown. One member, the namesake Red-faced Malkoha

*Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus* of Sri Lanka gave its local name to this group of unusual cuckoos. 'Malkoha' is actually the Sinhalese name for the Red-faced Malkoha and means 'fruit-cuckoo' in reference to its frugivorous habits.



Photo (c) Amila Salgado

**Red-faced Malkoha** with stick insect prey in the Sinharaja World Heritage Reserve, Sri Lanka (Amila Salgado)

In Tropical Asia, twelve species of Malkohas are known, out of the total of thirteen species. The last member, the Yellowbill *Ceuthmochares aereus* occurs in the tropical forests and shrubland of Africa and belongs to its own unique genus. Despite the large geographical separation, Yellowbills share many morphological and behavioral features with their Asian cousins. The tropical forests of South East Asia plays host to the greatest diversity of Malkohas and as many as

five species of Malkohas can be found in a single area of forest. In the Panti Forest Reserve, Peninsular Malaysia, five species coexist in the same habitat, namely the Chestnut-bellied Malkoha, Chestnut-breasted Malkoha, Raffles's Malkoha, Red-billed Malkoha and the uncommon Black-bellied Malkoha.

## Distribution

Malkohas are found throughout tropical Asia and the combined range of the twelve species more or less coincide with that of the Oriental region, a biogeographic province stretching from the desert wastes of Pakistan to the Moluccan islands in the east. Over this expanse, Malkohas are able to exploit a diverse range of habitats. While the large majority of the Malkohas are strictly forest birds, two species regularly occur in semi-arid areas of savanna and thorn scrub, namely the Sirkeer *Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii* and Blue-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus viridirostris* of the Indian Subcontinent.



**Blue-faced Malkoha** in scrub forest, Yala National Park, Sri Lanka (Klaus Malling Olsen)



**Sirkeer Malkoha** in the Kutch, Gujarat, India (Jugal Tiwari).

The Sirkeer Malkoha is also the westernmost occurring Malkoha and occurs in the dry scrubby areas of Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, its congener on the Indian Subcontinent, the Blue-faced Malkoha occupy similar dry scrubby habitats, but is found further south, being distributed throughout peninsular India and Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's wet zone forests surprisingly harbour one species of Malkoha, the endemic Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*.

Of the twelve species, the elegant Green-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus tristis* exhibit the widest geographical range and most general habitat preferences, being found from disturbed scrub habitats near agricultural areas to montane forests. For

instance, while it is found in the monsoon forests of the Himalayan foothills and submontane forests of Peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra, it interestingly also persists in scrub habitats and farmland over much of mainland Southeast Asia. Sundaic Southeast Asia, which consists of much of the Malay Peninsula and the whole islands of Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Bali has five restricted species of Malkohas. These include the Chestnut-bellied Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus sumatranus*, Black-bellied Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus diardi*, Raffles's Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus chlorophaeus*, Red-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus javanicus* and Chestnut-breasted Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus curvirostris*. All five species are regular forest birds though they are also known to be able to persist in plantations nearby forests and logged forests. Of these five species, the neat-looking Chestnut-bellied Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus sumatranus* is the only species of Malkoha that occur regularly in mangroves although; exceptionally it is largely a bird of inland forests in Singapore.

The last three species of Malkohas occur in Philippines islands and Sulawesi. Two species of Malkohas, the Red-crested Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus superciliosus* and Scale-



**Black-bellied Malkoha** in Ayer Keroh Forest, Peninsular Malaysia (Ang)

feathered Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus cumingi* are endemic to the large Philippine island of Luzon and some of its outlying islands. Curiously, the Visayan group of islands and Mindanao, both south of Luzon do not have any representative Malkoha species. The Chestnut-breasted Malkoha of Sundaic Southeast Asia also spills over in its range into some of the southern Philippine islands, including Palawan and could have done so due to land connections with Borneo in recent prehistory. One last member, the gaudy Yellow-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus calyborhynchus* is endemic to the large Indonesian island of Sulawesi and is closely related to the similarly coloured Chestnut-bellied Malkoha.



**Scale-feathered Malkoha** (left) and **Red-crested Malkoha taken** (right) from Mount Makiling and Subic Forests respectively, the Philippines (Romy Ocon)

### **Nomenclature and Taxonomy** (also see Appendix III)

Traditional morphological studies of the cuckoos done in the past have tended to group the Malkohas as one distinct subgroups within the family Cuculidae, which also includes the Old World parasitic cuckoos, Coucals as well as the American cuckoos, New World Ground-cuckoos and Anis. As morphological studies tended to focus on observable physical features like skeletal structure and general anatomy, mistakes could arise if different organisms share similar adaptive features arising due to convergent evolution. This, as we can see, is one problem that plagued the classification of the cuckoos and which has confused many a scientist. Furthermore, different taxonomic studies have tended to focus on different anatomical aspects and thus different, sometimes even contradicting conclusions can be drawn on inferring the family relationships amongst the cuckoos. Recent studies using the technique of DNA-DNA hybridization has shown that

the Old World parasitic cuckoos, Coucals and Malkohas are in fact quite different from their counterparts in the Americas and has thus merited a distinction into two separate groups (See Payne, 1997; Payne, 2005; Sibley and Monroe, 1990).

Within the cuckoos, Malkohas are traditionally placed in the tribe Phaenicophaeni which includes two genera. These are *Ceuthmochares* which contain one African species and *Phaenicophaeus* which contains the rest of the Asian species (e.g. Sibley and Monroe, 1990). Some authors, e.g. Payne (2005) have preferred to subdivide the Malkohas into as many as five different genera, as opposed to a single genus *Phaenicophaeus*, as suggested by several different anatomical features. These genera include *Rhopodytes*, *Rhamphococcyx*, *Dasylophus*, *Lepidogrammus* and *Rhinorta*. Meanwhile, a recent study by Hughes (2000) based on anatomical structure however suggests that the Malkohas as a group may not be as closely related as thought (paraphyletic) and the Raffles's Malkoha is actually very different from the rest. Clearly, more studies will be needed to clarify the relationships amongst the Malkohas. In the meantime many authors will continue to group them under a single genus *Phaenicophaeus* for convenience.



Sexual dimorphism in **Raffles's Malkoha**: female (left) and male (right) at the Panti Forest Reserve, Peninsular Malaysia (Ong Kiem Sian)

## Morphology

Malkohas are easily recognizable, idiosyncratic birds of medium size. All species are characterized by long bulky tails, thick strong bills and often richly coloured plumage with much brown, grey and in some species, iridescent hues of green and blue. Sexual dimorphism is almost non-existent amongst the Malkohas, the only notable exception being the Raffles's Malkoha where female and male plumages are distinctly different. Coincidentally, some of the South America cuckoos, particularly the Squirrel Cuckoo *Piaya cayana* bear an uncanny resemblance to certain Malkohas species.

Malkohas possess all the typical morphological features of the cuckoos, one of the more distinctive ones being the zygodactyl foot structure which consists of two toes directed forward and the inner and outer two toes directed backwards (Payne, 1997). Being

predominantly birds of forest and wooded areas, Malkohas have short wings that prevent them from flying long distances, but yet able to glide skillfully from tree to tree.

Interestingly, a few species of Malkohas exhibit elaborate feathers on their heads and necks. Amongst the most bizarre looking example is the Scale-feathered Malkoha of the Philippines, which as its name suggest, display highly modified feathers which gives it an appearance of wearing hundreds of shiny black shields on the head. Its compatriot which it often share habitat with; the Red-crested Malkoha has almost as eccentric a hairdo, if not more so with its loose fiery red crest of feathers. This crest of red feathers is already evident in the young birds.



**Chestnut-bellied Malkoha** at nest in Mandai Orchid Gardens, Singapore (Lim Kim Chuah)

## Vocalizations

In general, Malkohas are not known for their recognizable calls and many species often forage silently. In fact, from personal experiences, Malkohas are first spotted in the field as a result of their large size and gliding flight rather than their calls. Most of the species utter soft tuneless monotonous, chatters, croaks and mews. For instance, Payne (1997) describes the call of the Chestnut-bellied Malkoha as “tok-tok” or a thin high-pitched mew. Another species, the Sirkeer Malkoha has a call which is described as a monotonous series of “kek-kek-kek-krek”. A more idiosyncratic



Foraging **Red-billed Malkoha** in Panti Forest Reserve, Peninsular Malaysia (Ingo Waschkes)

call amongst the group is the vocalization of the Raffles’s Malkoha, which again is rather different from the rest of the Malkohas. Its call can be described as a descending series of 3-6 melancholy “tiao”, which bears a superficial resemblance to the calls of some of the

Malaysian trogon species. Both the species of endemic Philippine Malkohas have calls that are very dissimilar to the other Malkohas. For example, the Scale-feathered Malkoha is the only member of the group which utters a high pitch series of shrill piercing whistles. While the function is not well understood, it could be a consequence of the acoustic demands of thick forest vegetation.

## Behavioral Ecology

The favored habitat of most species of Malkohas is tropical forests. Indeed, the lowland and submontane evergreen (dipterocarp) forests of Peninsular Malaysia, Sumatra and Borneo are inhabited by as many as five species of Malkohas. All except two of the Malkohas can be said to be forest-dependant species, the Sirkeer and Blue-faced Malkohas, both which favour dry scrubland and open wooded areas in the Indian Subcontinent.

Most species of Malkohas exhibit largely insectivorous diets though many are able to



**Chestnut-bellied Malkoha** feeding large insects to young in Mandai Orchid Gardens, Singapore (Lim Kim Chuah)

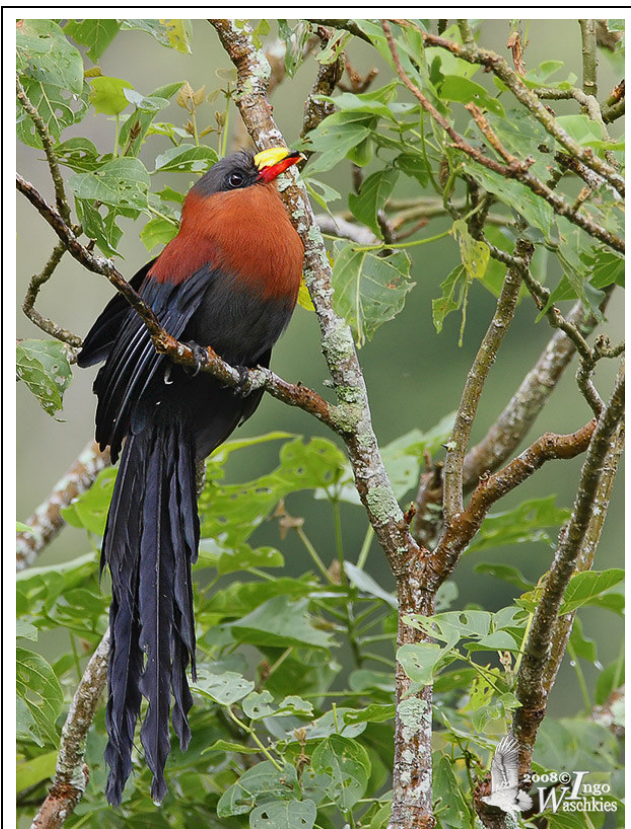
tackle small vertebrates like lizards, frogs and nestling birds if given the opportunity. One nesting Chestnut-bellied Malkoha in Singapore was observed to take flying-dragons *Draco* sp (Lok and Lee, 2008). Common prey items taken by Malkohas include orthopterans (crickets, grasshoppers and locusts), phasmids, beetles, mantids, caterpillars and sometimes even centipedes. Very exceptionally, the Red-faced Malkoha is largely a frugivore, taking mostly berries and small fruits in contrast to its congeners.

Most Malkohas are normally seen foraging in pairs. A few species are known to participate in mixed feeding flocks, the well-studied example being the Red-faced Malkoha. Participation in such flocks confers a number of ecological advantages, one of which was an increase in foraging efficiency (Kotagama and Goodale, 2004), meaning that more prey items are caught within a certain time. This could possibly be achieved when the

flock flushes insects as they move through the foliage. A recent study by Kotagama and Goodale (2004) found that the Red-faced Malkoha is present in almost half of the mixed feeding flocks in the Sinharaja World Heritage Reserve in Sri Lanka, with occurrence peaking at 54 % in the wet seasons. Likewise, McClure (1967) who studied mixed

feeding flocks in the Subang Forest Reserve in Peninsular Malaysia found that both Chestnut-breasted and Raffles's Malkohas regularly attend mixed feeding flocks, the former being present in 40 – 60% of foraging flocks. Others have also noted associations between Malkohas and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos *Dicrurus paradiseus* (Styring and Ickes, 2001).

Besides joining mixed foraging bird flocks, Malkohas have also been noted to associate with monkey species. In the Karaenta Nature Reserve, South Sulawesi, Matsumura (2001) found that pairs of Yellow-billed Malkohas studied can spent over 59% of their time in the vicinity of Moor Macaques *Macaca maurus*, with notably higher prey capture rates. This suggests that the association to some extent is at least beneficial to the Malkohas by increasing their foraging efficiency.



**Yellow-billed Malkoha** sunning itself in Boga-Nani Wartabone National Park, Sulawesi, Indonesia (Ingo Waschkies)

A remarkable diversity of breeding systems exist amongst the cuckoos as a whole and while the majority of cuckoos are known brood parasites (Aragon *et al.* 1999; Kruger and Davies, 2002), the Malkohas, together with the Couas, Asian Ground-Cuckoos and a few others in fact live in pairs and raise their own young. This means that Malkohas do not lay their eggs in the nests of other bird species; instead eggs are laid in their own nests, incubated and hatched. For the Malkohas with described nests, most of them are largely similar, being often a saucer-like platform of twigs and sticks build near the ground or in trees. The Sirkeer Malkoha is known to build its nest very close to the ground. Breeding season is highly variable in time and space among species and is probably influenced by weather conditions and prey availability. Breeding habits of some species like the Scale-feathered Malkoha of the Philippines is poorly known and no nest has been described.

## Conservation

Currently, the only species of Malkoha that is globally-threatened is the Red-faced Malkoha which is evaluated as vulnerable (Birdlife International, 2000). Two other species, both the Chestnut-bellied and Black-bellied Malkoha are listed as globally near-threatened (Birdlife International, 2000). The fact that most of the Malkohas are dependant on forest as core habitat is bad news for their conservation. At present, the state of forest conservation throughout Malaysia Indonesia and

Philippines is bleak, with the large majority of primary evergreen forest already being destroyed as a result of agriculture, logging and human settlement (Sodhi *et al.* 2004).



**Green-billed Malkoha** in Khao Yai National Park, Thailand (Peter Ericsson)



**Yellow-billed Malkoha** in Boga-Nani Wartabone National Park, Sulawesi, Indonesia (Tan Gim Cheong)

While no clear evidence is available yet, loss of habitat is probably the single greatest threat to Malkohas and may already be causing undetected population declines. Thus, other forest dependant species like the Chestnut-breasted and Yellow-billed Malkohas may already be at risk. A few species like the Green-billed Malkoha can at least persist in human-modified habitats like farms and scrubland and are hence less vulnerable to forest loss.

## Appendix I: Localities – Good sites to find Malkohas

### **Chestnut-bellied Malkoha**

Central Catchment Nature Reserves (Singapore), Panti Forest Reserve, Taman Negara National Park, Kuala Selangor Nature Reserve (Peninsular Malaysia), Danum Valley Conservation Area (Sabah, Malaysia), Way Kambas National Park (Indonesia)

### **Black-bellied Malkoha**

Panti Forest Reserve, Taman Negara National Park, Taman Rimba Ampang, Fraser's Hill (Peninsular Malaysia), Kerinci Seblat National Park, Gunung Leuser National Park (Sumatra, Indonesia)

### **Green-billed Malkoha**

Royal Chitwan National Park (Nepal), Kaziranga National Park (Assam, India), Suitable habitat throughout Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam (e.g. Khao Yai National Park, Cat Tien Biosphere Reserve). Kerinci Seblat National Park (Indonesia), Fraser's Hill (Peninsular Malaysia)



**Black-bellied Malkoha** in Panti Forest Reserve, Peninsular Malaysia (Tan Gim Cheong)

### **Blue-faced Malkoha**

Thattekad Wildlife Sanctuary (Kerala, India), Uda Walawe National Park, Yala National Park (Sri Lanka), Suitable scrub/forest habitat throughout Peninsular India (e.g. Karnataka)

### **Sirkeer Malkoha**

Sanjay Gandhi National Park (Maharashtra, India) Ranthambore National Park, Sariska National Park, Keoladeo Ghana National Park, Desert National Park (Rajasthan, India), Yala National Park (Sri Lanka)

### **Red-billed Malkoha**

Panti Forest Reserve, Taman Negara National Park, Fraser's Hill (Peninsular Malaysia), Khao Nor Chuchi (Thailand), Gunung Halimun National Park (Java, Indonesia)

### **Raffles's Malkoha**

Panti Forest Reserve, Taman Negara National Park, Fraser's Hill (Peninsular Malaysia), Danum Valley Conservation Area, Mount Kinabalu National Park (Sabah, Malaysia), Kerinci Seblat National Park, Gunung Leuser National Park, Way Kambas National Park (Sumatra, Indonesia)

### **Chestnut-breasted Malkoha**

Panti Forest Reserve, Taman Negara National Park, Fraser's Hill (Peninsular Malaysia), Kerinci Seblat National Park, Gunung Leuser National Park, Way Kambas National Park (Sumatra, Indonesia), Gunung Gede-Pangrango National Park (Java, Indonesia)

### **Yellow-billed Malkoha**

Tangkoko DuaSudara National Park, Lore Lindu National Park, Boga-Nani Wartabone National Park, Karaenta-Bantimurung Nature Reserve (Sulawesi, Indonesia)

### **Red-crested Malkoha**

Mount Makiling Forest Reserve, Quezon National Park, Subic Bay Protected Forest (Luzon, Philippines)

### **Scale-feathered Malkoha**

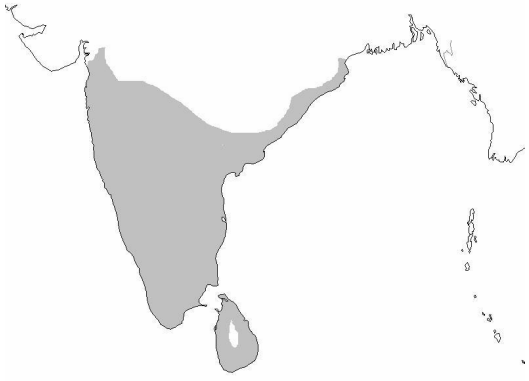
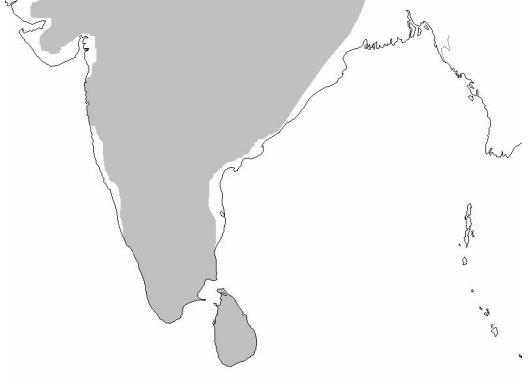

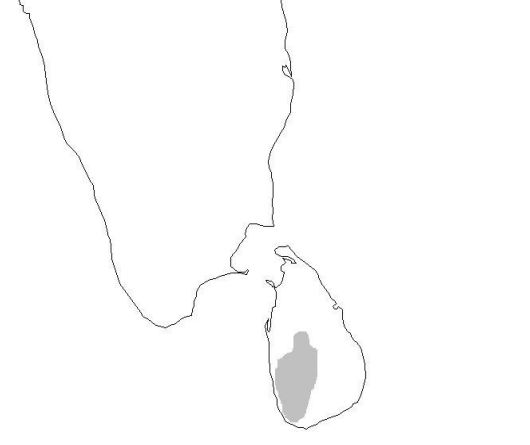


Mount Makiling Forest Reserve, Quezon National Park, Sierra Madre National Park, Subic Bay Protected Forest (Luzon, Philippines)

## **Appendix II: Distinguishing three confusing Malkohas**







<b>Character</b>	<b>Green-billed Malkoha</b>	<b>Chestnut-bellied Malkoha</b>	<b>Black-bellied Malkoha</b>
Tail	Very long tail (up to 38 cm)	Tail medium length (23 cm)	Tail medium length (23 cm)
Face	Whitish border around facial skin	No whitish rim around facial skin	No whitish rim around facial skin
Facial Skin	Bright reddish	Bright orange-red	Bright reddish
Underparts	Largely grey	Largely grey with rufous to chestnut belly	Largely grey with black belly
Throat Streaks	Blackish streaks on throat, more visible than Black-bellied	Absent	Faint streaks on throat and breast
Confusion zones	Overlaps with Black-bellied Malkoha in hilly-submontane forests in Peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra.	Overlaps with Black-bellied Malkoha in lowland forests in Peninsular Malaysia, Borneo and Sumatra.	Overlaps with Chestnut-bellied Malkoha in Peninsular Malaysia, Borneo and Sumatra in lowlands

**Table 1.** A summary of distinguishing features among three highly similar looking Malkohas. Zones of overlap for the species are also indicated.

### Appendix III: Range Maps of Malkoha Species

	
1. Blue-faced Malkoha	2. Sirkeer Malkoha
	
3. Green-billed Malkoha	4. Red-faced Malkoha
	
5. Black-bellied Malkoha	6. Chestnut-bellied Malkoha

### Appendix III: Range Maps of Malkoha Species

	
7. Raffles's Malkoha	8. Red-billed Malkoha
	
9. Chestnut-breasted Malkoha	10. Yellow-billed Malkoha
	
11. Red-crested Malkoha	12. Scale-feathered Malkoha

## Appendix IV: Taxonomy and Nomenclature

Family CUCULIDAE

Subfamily PHAENICOPHAEINAE

Tribe PHAENICOPHAEINI

Genus *Phaenicophaeus* Stephens, 1815

Black-bellied Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus (Rhopodytes) diardi*

Chestnut-bellied Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus (Rhopodytes) sumatranus*

Green-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus (Rhopodytes) tristis*

Blue-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus (Zanclostomus) viridirostris*

Sirkeer Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus (Taccocua) leschenaultii*

Raffles's Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus (Rhinortha) chlorophaeus*

Red-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus (Zanclostomus) javanicus*

Yellow-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus (Rhamphococcyx) calyrorhynchus*

Chestnut-breasted Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus (Rhamphococcyx) curvirostris*

Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*

Rough-crested Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus (Dasylophus) superciliosus*

Scale-feathered Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus (Lepidogrammus) cumingi*

Note: Taxonomy follows Payne (1997). Old genera names are given in brackets as some works may have resurrected the old genera in view of newer taxonomic evidence.

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