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Mangrove Pitta on 24/4/09 at Pulau Ubin by Lee Tiah Khee



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April 2009

By Chow Chong Peck and Lim Kim Seng

SINGAPORE HIGHLIGHTS



Mangrove Pitta on 24/4/09 at Pulau Ubin by Lee Tiah Khee

April is a month of increased breeding activity as resident birds become increasingly occupied by parental duties and records of nesting for 16 species below is proof of this. The migrants too are busy preparing to fatten up for their journey home. Thus we have a bountiful harvest of species for this month signposted by the beautiful picture of a **Mangrove Pitta** holding its territory on Pulau Ubin. Ubin also seems to have the bulk of nationally threatened resident sightings for the month including a high count of 14 **Red Junglefowls**, up to three **Oriental Pied Hornbills**, **Great-billed Heron**, **White-rumped Shama** and **Straw-headed Bulbul**. Resident cuckoos were also quite vocal in April and we had **Banded Bay Cuckoo**, **Rusty-breasted Cuckoo** and **Asian Drongo Cuckoo** being reported throughout the month. From our catchment forests, we also had **Blue-rumped Parrot**, a globally near-threatened parrot, while a single **Purple Swamphen** showed up in wetland at Neo Tiew. Another rare resident waterbird was the **Red-wattled Lapwing**, which turned up at Sungei Buloh and at Changi Cove.



Red-wattled Lapwings at SBWR on 23 April 2009 by Mendis Tan

Arguably the most interesting migrant of the month was a single **Black-backed Kingfisher** at Lower Peirce Reservoir which was seen on 6th, a new late date for the species. This bird has now been recorded to winter for the first time in Singapore. Another equally rare sighting was an adult **Malayan Night Heron**, unfortunately found dead at Lorong Ong Lye on 25th. Other migrants of note included **Brown Shrike** (till 16th), **Asian Brown Flycatcher** (till 19th) and **Arctic Warbler** (till 24th). Also noteworthy was a record of three **Pied Imperial Pigeons** on Pulau Hantu and a new exotic, **Greater Bird of Paradise**, to add to Singapore's ever-growing escapee list. Shorebirds remained prominent throughout the month and included **Whimbrel**, **Common Redshank**, **Common Greenshank** and **Pacific Golden Plover**.

Finally, raptors were quite visible as well and noteworthy species included **Osprey**, **Grey-headed Fish Eagle** surprisingly in open country at Neo Tiew, **Crested Serpent Eagle** at Lower Peirce, Seletar Camp and Ubin, **Japanese Sparrowhawk** (last seen on 2nd) and **Peregrine Falcon** (last seen on 16th).

JOHOR HIGHLIGHTS

The only bird of note was a presumed **Blue-banded Kingfisher**, an exceedingly scarce species in Johor, seen at Panti's Bunker Trail on 25th.

SUMMARY

This report covers noteworthy bird sightings in April 2009 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 or Lim Kim Chuah @ pittalover@yahoo.com.sg or Yong Ding Li at 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:

BBNP	Bukit Batok Nature Park	CCNR	Central Catchment Nature Reserve
BTNR	Bukit Timah Nature Reserve	SBWR	Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve

SINGAPORE

RED JUNGLEFOWL *Gallus gallus*

On Pulau Ubin, 10 birds were seen and 4 heard on 5/4 (LC/MC/LKS), at least 2 heard on 24/4 at Pulau Ubin (CCP/LTK/LKC) and 1 seen and a few heard on 26/4 (AnC/LoWH/WCC).

RUFIOUS WOODPECKER *Celeus brachyurus*

1 seen on 5/4 at MacRitchie Reservoir (LC/MC/LKS) and 2 on 16/4 at Neo Tiew Lane 2 (DA/LKS). 2 seen on 21/4 at Sime Forest (CCP/RoS), picking off ants from the trunk of a Fan Palm. 1 seen on 29/4 at Bukit Batok East Ave 4 (CCP), feeding on the trunk of a wayside tree.

LACED WOODPECKER *Picus vittatus*

1 seen 21/4 at SBWR (AC), drumming on a bamboo tree.

COMMON GOLDENBACK

Dinopium javanense

1 seen on 3/4 at Kranji Nature Trail (LKS). A dead female seen on 17/4 at Bidadari Cemetery in an unusual position, high up a Casuarina tree (TKC). 1 female was seen on 18/4 extricating maggots off the dead female till the carcass fell to the ground. Another male subsequently went to inspect the holes made by the dead female (TKC). It is unclear what could have caused the female to die in that position.

LINEATED BARBET *Megalaima lineata*

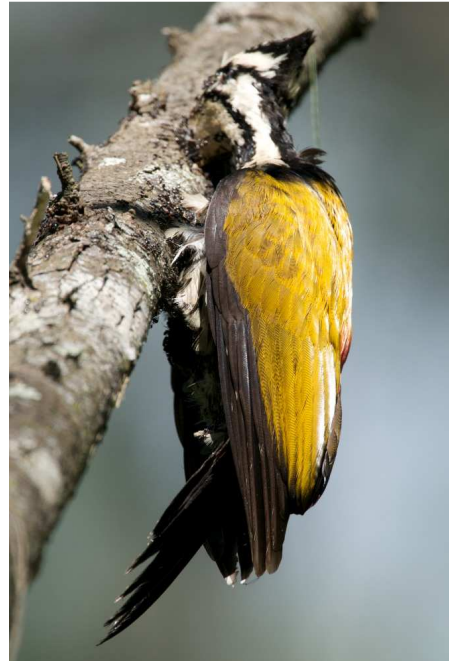
3 seen on 25/4 at BTNR (SY).

RED-CROWNED BARBET *Megalaima rafflesii*

1 heard on 5/4 at Sime Road (LC/MC/LKS). At least 1 heard on 18/4 at Sime Forest (LoWH/WWC).

ORIENTAL PIED HORNBILL *Anthracoceros albirostris*

3 birds seen on 5/4 at Pulau Ubin (LC/MC/LKS). One of the birds seen near town was seen to probe under coconut leaves to extract beetle larvae, its large bill notwithstanding. In addition, nesting was observed on 12/4 at Changi Village (SA/LKS/LWH/LWX). See Nesting Report for details. 16 seen on 26/4 at Pulau Ubin (AnC/LWH/WCC).



A dead female **Common Goldenback** at Bidadari Cemetery on 17/4 by KC Tsang

BLACK-BACKED KINGFISHER *Ceyx erithacus*

1 seen on 6/4 at Lower Peirce forest (LKS) sets a new late date for Singapore.

STORK-BILLED KINGFISHER *Pelargopsis capensis*

1 seen on 26/4 at Pulau Ubin (AnC/LoWH/WCC). 4 seen 30/4 at SBWR (TGC).

BLUE-THROATED BEE-EATER *Merops viridis*

4 seen on 18/4 at Sime Forest (LoWH/WWC). 2 seen on 19/4 at Sime Forest (SY). 1 seen on 26/4 at Pulau Ubin (AnC/LoWH/WCC).

BANDED BAY CUCKOO *Cacomantis sonnerati*

1 heard on 3/4 (LKS) and 16/4 (DA/LKS) at Neo Tiew Lane 2. 1 heard on 21/4 at Sime Forest (CCP/RoS). At least 1 heard on 24/4 at Pulau Ubin (CCP/LTK/LKC). 1 heard on 25/4 at BTNR (SY).

RUSTY-BREASTED CUCKOO *Cacomantis sepulcralis*

2 heard on 3/4 at Neo Tiew Lane 2 (LKS) and 1 heard on 22/4 at SBWR (LKS).

ASIAN DRONGO CUCKOO *Surniculus lugubris*

1 heard on 4/4 at Toh Tuck area (DA). 1 heard on 5/4 at Lower Peirce Reservoir (KK/AOY/YPL). 1 heard on 6/4 at Lower Peirce Reservoir (DA/LKS). 1 heard on 12/4 at a forest patch next to Sembawang Shopping Centre (AOY). At least 1 heard on 18/4 (LoWH/WWC), 19/4 (SY) and 21/4 (CCP/RoS) at Sime Forest.

CHESTNUT-BELLIED MALKOHA *Phaenicophaeus sumatranus*

1 seen on 21/4 at Sime Forest (CCP/RoS), preening itself after morning rain by the Treetop walk.



Chestnut-bellied Malkoha at Sime Forest on 21 April 2009, drying itself after a short downpour by Chow Chong Peck (Andrew)

BLUE-RUMPED PARROT *Psittinus cyanurus*

1 seen on 5/4 at MacRitchie Reservoir (LC/MC/LKS).

BLUE-CROWNED HANGING PARROT *Loriculus galgulus*

1 seen on 5/4 over MacRitchie Reservoir (LC/MC/LKS). 3 seen in flight on 19/4 at Sime Forest (SY). 3 seen on 21/4 at Sime Forest (CCP/RoS), by the treetop walk. 1 seen in flight on 24/4 at Raffles Girl's School area (CCP/LKC).

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET *Psittacula krameri*

1 seen on 16/4 over Neo Tiew Lane 2 (DA/LKS).

LONG-TAILED PARAKEET *Psittacula longicauda*

1 male seen on 18/4 at Sime Forest (LoWH/WWC) and 3 seen in flight on 19/4 at Sime Forest (SY). 1 male seen in flight on 21/4 at Sime Forest (CCP/RoS).

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*

1 was photographed (at night) at Changi Cove, 9/4 (LTK).

COLLARED SCOPS OWL *Otus lempiji*

4 heard on 5/4 at Sime Road (LC/MC/LKS).

BROWN HAWK-OWL *Ninox scutulata*

1 seen and 3 more heard on 5/4 at Sime Road (LC/MC/LKS).

LARGE-TAILED NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus macrurus*

3 males seen on 21/4 at CCNR (TGC). They were observed to swoop around, feeding on ant-like flying insects that swarmed around the streetlamps at the edge of the forest for about 10 minutes.



Large-tailed Nightjar at Central Catchment Nature Reserve on 21 April 2009 by Tan Gim Cheong

COMMON EMERALD DOVE *Chalcophaps indica*

1 seen on 3/4 at SBWR (LKS). 1 seen on 25/4 at BTNR (SY). 3 seen on 26/4 at Pulau Ubin (AnC/LoWH/WCC).

THICK-BILLED GREEN PIGEON *Treron curvirostra*

2 male seen on 6/4 at Mousedeer Trail, CCNR (DA), on a huge bare tree.

PIED IMPERIAL PIGEON *Ducula bicolor*

3 seen 12/4 at Pulau Hantu (MN), on a sea almond tree. They were seen flying off in a westward direction shortly after.

PURPLE SWAMPHEN *Porphyrio porphyrio*

2 seen on 16/4 near a pond at Neo Tiew lane 2 (LKS).

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

30 seen on 5/4 at Tg Chek Jawa, Pulau Ubin (LC/MC/LKS) and 72 on 22/4 at SBWR (LKS).

COMMON REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*

Many seen on 11/4 at SBWR (LWT). 65 counted on 22/4 at SBWR (LKS).

COMMON GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*

20 seen on 22/4 at SBWR (LKS).

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis fulva*

39 counted on 3/4 at SBWR (LKS).

RED-WATTLED LAPWING *Vanellus indicus*

2 seen on 23/4 at SBWR (JeA/Bar/DaL/ LiP/MeT).
3 at Changi Cove, 9/4 (LTK).

BLACK-NAPED TERN *Sterna sumatrana*

1 seen on 5/4 off Pulau Ubin (LC/MC/LKS).

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*

1 seen 2/4 flying over at Lower Peirce Reservoir (SA/LKS) and 1 on 22/4 at SBWR (LKS).

GREY-HEADED FISH EAGLE

Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus

1 adult seen on 3/4 circling at Neo Tiew Lane 2 (LKS).

CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE *Spilornis Cheela*

At Lower Peirce Reservoir, 1 was heard on 2/4 (SA/LKS) and 1 seen on 6/4 (DA/LKS). 1 seen on 26/4 at Seletar Camp (TKC). 1 heard on Pulau Ubin, 24/4.



Crested Serpent Eagle at Seletar Camp on 26 April 2009 by KC Tsang

JAPANESE SPARROWHAWK

Accipiter gularis

1 seen on 2/4 at Lower Peirce Reservoir (SA/LKS).

CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE

Spizaetus cirrhatus

1 heard on 2/4 (SA/LKS) and 6/4 (DA/LKS) at Lower Peirce Reservoir. 1 heard on 24/4 at Pulau Ubin (CCP/LTK/ LKC).

PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*

1 seen on 3/4 (LKS) and 16/4 (DA/LKS) at Neo Tiew Lane 2.

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

At SBWR, 45 were counted on 3/4 (LKS) and 53 on 22/2 (LKS).

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

At SBWR, 1 was seen on 3/4 (LKS) and 5 on 22/4 (LKS). Also 15 seen on 5/4 at Pulau Ubin (LC/MC/LKS).

GREAT-BILLED HERON *Ardea sumatrana*

2 seen on 5/4 foraging in shallows at Tg Chek Jawa, Pulau Ubin (LC/MC/LKS).

PURPLE HERON *Ardea purpurea*

1 seen on 3/4 at Neo Tiew Lane 2 (LKS), 1 seen on 5/4 at MacRitchie Reservoir (LC/MC/LKS) and 1 seen on 6/4 over Upper Seletar Reservoir (SA/LKS). 1 bird seen on 22/4 at Pulau Buloh (LKS). It was seen chasing off an intruding Grey Heron.

GREAT EGRET *Casmerodius albus*

1 seen on 3/4 (LKS) and 22/4 (LKS) at SBWR.

YELLOW-BILLED EGRET

Mesophoyx intermedia

1 seen on 22/4 at SBWR (LKS).

MALAYAN NIGHT HERON

Gorsachius melanolophus

An adult was found dead on 25/4 in a carpark at Lorong Ong Lye (CKC).

YELLOW BITTERN *Ixobrychus sinensis*

1 seen on 3/4 at SBWR (LKS).

CINNAMON BITTERN *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*

1 Male seen on 30/4 at Lim Chu Kang (TGC).

MANGROVE PITTA *Pitta megarhyncha*

1 seen on 24/4 at Pulau Ubin (CCP/LTK/LKC). It was first observed along the road adjacent to some mangrove and subsequently in adjacent wooded patch.

ASIAN FAIRY BLUEBIRD *Irena puella*

1 pair seen on 19/4 at Sime Forest (SY). 1 female seen on 21/4 at Sime Forest (CCP/RoS).

BLUE-WINGED LEAFBIRD

Chloropsis cochinchinensis

At least 1 seen on 18/4 at Sime Forest (LoWH/WWC).

BROWN SHRIKE *Lanius cristatus*

At Neo Tiew Lane 2, 5 were seen on 3/4 (LKS) and 2 on 16/4 (DA/LKS). Also 1 seen on 6/4 at Lower Peirce Reservoir (DA/LKS).

LONG-TAILED SHRIKE *Lanius schach*

1 seen on 3/4 at Neo Tiew Lane 2 (LKS).

ASIAN BROWN FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa dauurica*

1 seen on 6/4 at Lower Peirce forest (DA/LKS). 2 seen on 18/4 (LoWH/WWC) and 1 seen on 19/4 (SY) at Sime Forest.

ORIENTAL MAGPIE-ROBIN *Copsychus saularis*

1 seen on 5/4 at MacRitchie Reservoir (LC/MC/LKS) and 3 seen on 22/4 at SBWR (LKS). 1 heard on 26/4 at Pulau Ubin (AnC/LoWH/WCC).

WHITE-RUMPED SHAMA *Copsychus malabaricus*

1 seen on 5/4 at MacRitchie Reservoir (LC/MC/LKS) and 1 male seen and 4 others heard on 5/4 at Pulau Ubin (LC/MC/LKS). At least 1 heard on 18/4 at Sime Forest (LoWH/WWC). 2 seen on 21/4 at Sime Forest (CCP/RoS). 1 seen on 24/4 at Pulau Ubin (CCP/LTK/LKC). 1 juvenile seen and 1 heard on 26/4 at Pulau Ubin (AnC/LoWH/WCC).



Mangrove Pitta on 24/4/09 at Pulau Ubin by Lim Kim Chuah



White-rumped Shama on 24 April 2009 by Lee Tiah Khee

COMMON HILL MYNA *Gracula religiosus*

At least 1 heard on 18/4 (LoWH/WWC), 1 seen on 19/4 (SY) and 5 seen on 21/4 at Sime Forest (CCP). 3 seen on 26/4 at Pulau Ubin (AnC/LoWH/WCC).

STRAW-HEADED BULBUL *Pycnonotus zeylanicus*

7 seen on 5/4 at Pulau Ubin (LC/MC/LKS). 1 seen on 25/4 at BTNR (SY). Several heard on 24/4 (CCP/LTK/LKC) and 26/4 (AnC/LoWH/WCC) at Pulau Ubin.

CREAM-VENTED BULBUL *Pycnonotus simplex*

3 seen on 18/4 (LoWH/WWC), 3 seen on 19/4 (SY) and at least 2 seen on 21/4 at Sime Forest (CCP/RoS).

ASIAN RED-EYED BULBUL *Pycnonotus brunneus*

1 seen on 18/4 (LoWH/WWC), 3 seen on 19/4 (SY) and at least 1 seen on 21/4 at Sime Forest (RoS). 2 seen on 25/4 at BTNR (SY).

RUFOUS-TAILED TAILORBIRD *Orthotomus sericeus*

3 seen on 25/4 at BTNR (SY).

ARCTIC WARBLER *Phylloscopus borealis*

1 seen 5/4 at Sime Road (LC/MC/LKS) and 1 on 6/4 at Lower Peirce Reservoir (DA/LKS). A few heard on 24/4 at Pulau Ubin (CCP/LKC).

WHITE-CRESTED LAUGHINGTHRUSH *Garrulax leucolophus*

1 seen on 29/4 at Bukit Batok East Ave 4 (CCP) perched high up an open branch of a wayside tree, calling loudly.

CHESTNUT-WINGED BABBLER *Stachyris erythroptera*

At least 1 heard on 19/4 at Sime Forest (SY).

ORANGE-BELLIED FLOWERPECKER *Dicaeum trigonostigma*

1 seen on 19/4 at Sime Forest (SY).

PURPLE-THROATED SUNBIRD *Nectarinia sperata*

1 male seen on 3/4 at Burgundy area (DA), calling on a Rose of India. This is Doreen's first sighting of this species in this area. At least 1 male seen on 24/4 (CCP/LTK/LKC) and at least 5 seen on 26/4 at Pulau Ubin (AnC/LoWH/WCC).

LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER *Arachnothera longirostris*

2 seen on 25/4 at BTNR (SY).

ESCAPEES

ORIENTAL PIED HORNBILL *Anthracoceros albirostris*

1 male seen on 6/4 at Upper Seletar Reservoir Park (SA/LKS).

PAINTED STORK

Mycteria leucocephalus

2 seen on 6/4 flying in morning thermals over Upper Seletar Reservoir (SA/LKS).

GREATER BIRD OF PARADISE

1 seen on 12/4 at East Coast Park (GS).

YELLOW-FRONTED CANARY

Serinus mozambicus

1 pair seen on 22/4 at Punggol Grassland (TKC).



Yellow-fronted Canary at Punggol Grassland on 22 April 2009 by KC Tsang

BREEDING / NESTING REPORTS

ORIENTAL PIED HORNBILL *Anthracoceros albirostris*

1 pair observed and male photographed on 4/4 and 12/4 at Changi Village (GS). A male seen on 12/4 feeding unseen female in its cavity at Changi Village (SA/LKS/LWH/LWX).



Oriental Pied Hornbill building a nest on 4/4 at Changi Village by Gloria Seow.



Oriental Pied Hornbill on 12/4 at Changi Village feeding the occupant by Gloria Seow.

BLUE-CROWNED HANGING PARROT *Loriculus galgulus*

An adult female was seen with an immature, identified by its yellow beak, on 21/4 at Sime Forest (CCP/RoS). They were seen on a dead trunk just next to the treetop walk.

LONG-TAILED PARAKEET *Psittacula longicauda*

An adult seen on 16/4 feeding a juvenile on a dead tree at Neo Tiew Lane 2 (DA/LKS).

SPOTTED DOVE *Streptopelia chinensis*

A pair reported on 20/4 nesting at Toh Tuck area (DA/MiT/ViC).

CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE *Spizaetus cirrhatus*

2 seen on 5/4 at Sengkang near TPE. One was a dark morph perched on an *Albizia* near a nest where another was seen in it (JiL). A downy chick seen on 16/4 in its nest 12 metres up an *albizia* at Neo Tiew Lane 2 (DA/LKS).

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

25 seen on 26/4 at a herony of Pulau Ubin (AnC/LoWH/WCC), many with reddish bill and legs. One was seen in flight with nesting material.

LONG-TAILED SHRIKE *Lanius schach*

1 adult seen feeding an immature on 29/4 at a park near Compassvale Primary School (LTK).

BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE *riolus chinensis*

1 pair seen on 3/4 at Toh Tuck area (DA). One of them was seen stripping the bark of a creeper on a Rose of India. They were then seen flying off together, down Burgundy Drive. 1 seen carrying dead leaves at Dairy Farm Road on 14/4 (LKS).

WHITE-VENTED MYNA

Acridotheres javanicus

1 pair seen on 8/4 at Changi Village (HoB), defending a nest there were observed to be building for several days against a pair of **Red-breasted Parakeets**. Both were introduced species here. It was reported later that they abandoned their nesting. An immature seen on 26/4 at Burgundy area (DA) begging an adult for food.



Long-tailed Shrike on 29/4/09 at a park near Compassvale Primary School by Lee Tiah Khee

GREATER RACKET-TAILED DRONGO *Dicrurus paradiseus*

1 seen sitting in its nest 10 metres up an *albizia* on 14/4 at Dairy Farm Road (LKS). It mobbed a passing Brahminy Kite which was flying overhead. The bird was still at its nest on 23/4 (LKS). Another bird was also seen on 30/4 in its nest 12 metres up another *albizia* along Old Upper Thomson Road (DA/LKS).

PACIFIC SWALLOW *Hirundo tahitica*

1 seen repeatedly coming down to the muddy beach at Tg Chek Jawa, Pulau Ubin to collect mud in its bill, on 5/4 (LKS), presumably to build its unseen nest. At least 1 seen on 24/4 at Pulau Ubin (CCP/LTK/LKC), carrying nesting material.

YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL *Pycnonotus goiavier*

1 pair seen on 9/4 building a nest on Japanese bamboo. A chick hatched on 21/4. The parents were observed to be near whenever they're not feeding and took turns incubating the other egg. There were 2 chicks by 23/4. On 25/4, the chicks were observed to be fed with spiders. It was also observed that the parents consume the waste of the chicks (Vkc/MTo/DA).

SCARLET-BACKED FLOWERPECKER

Dicaeum cruentatum

A family of 3 seen on 3/4 at Toh Tuck area (DA). The young with bright orange bill was spotted first, perched on a mango tree. The adults were seen returning to it later. 1 female seen on 27/4 at BBNP (LTK) collecting spider web, presumably for nest building.



Female Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker collecting spider web on 27/4 at BBNP by Lee Tiah Khee

OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD

Nectarinia jugularis

1 female seen on 20/4 at Toh Tuck area building a nest on a potted Bougainvillea (DA/MiT/ViC). 1 pair seen on 26/4 at Pulau Ubin (AnC/LoWH/WCC), building a nest.

PADDYFIELD PIPIT *Anthus rufulus*

1 seen on 3/4 placing grass stalks on the grass turf with another keeping watch at Neo Tiew Lane 2 (LKS).

SCALY-BREASTED MUNIA *Lonchura punctulata*

1 seen on 3/4 carrying nest material at Neo Tiew Lane 2 (LKS).

JOHOR

BLUE-BANDED KINGFISHER *Alcedo euryzona*

1 possible female was briefly sighted on 25/4 at Bunker Trail in Pantii Forest Reserve (SiC), as it zoomed over one of the stream crossings with a fish in its beak.

Notes on the Distribution and Vocalizations of the Red-legged Crake (*Rallina fasciata*) in Singapore

By Yong Ding Li

Introduction

The Red-legged Crake *Rallina fasciata* is the only species of forest-dwelling member of the Rail family (Rallidae) in Singapore out of the eleven species known to occur locally (Lim and Gardner, 1997). Generally, most crake and rail species are more associated with waterlogged, marshy habitats rather than closed canopy forests. One other rail species, the migratory Slaty-legged Crake *Rallina eurizonoides* is superficially similar to the Red-legged Crake. While extremely



Figure 1. **Red-legged Crake** in Singapore Botanical Gardens
©Yong Ding Li

rare in Singapore, the Slaty-legged Crake can also be confused with the Red-legged Crake as it can also occur in similar habitats, as shown in a recent observation from forests at Upper Peirce Reservoir ([http://wildbirdsingapore.nss.org.sg/SINAV Vol 23 No 02 Feb 09.pdf](http://wildbirdsingapore.nss.org.sg/SINAV_Vol_23_No_02_Feb_09.pdf)).

Little is known of the Red-legged Crake in Singapore despite the fact that it occurs at a fairly large number of sites and is surprisingly easy to find at some of them (e.g. Singapore Botanical Gardens, Hindhede Park). In fact the birds occurring at the Botanic gardens are now highly sought after by visiting birdwatchers. It was formerly thought to be extremely rare, due largely to its secretive/crepuscular habitat and the general unfamiliarity with its vocalizations. However, with recent knowledge of its calls, it is now known to be more common and more widespread than formerly thought.

Red-legged Crakes are resident all-year-round in Singapore. The resident population is augmented by migrants during the winter months (October – April) (Wang and Hails, 2007). Populations originating from continental South-east Asia and eastern India probably form the bulk of these migrant birds; however no attempt have been made to differentiate migrant individuals from residents in the field and thus no estimate of migrant birds by proportion has ever been obtained. Based on observations in Peninsular Malaysia, Wells (1999) suggests that wintering birds may in fact show different habitat preferences, as indicated by observations of birds in marshes and paddy fields. This remains to be seen in Singapore.

In Singapore, the Red-legged Crake occurs in a number of sites, frequenting a diverse range of habitats ranging from gardens, old Rubber plantations, belukar to primary and old secondary forests. It is not known to occur in open grassy marshes in Singapore, unlike many of its relatives here. Surveys by the author have shown it to occur at a number of sites in Singapore (Bukit Batok Nature Park, Bukit Timah Nature Reserve, Nee Soon Swamp Forest, Sime Forest, Lower Peirce Forest, Pulau Ubin, Sembawang, Tyersall Woods, Singapore Zoo, Night Safari, and Singapore Botanical Gardens). With a current and better understanding of its distribution, the population estimate of 20 birds suggested in older literature like Lim (1992) is certainly overly conservative and probably as many as 100-150 individuals occur here in suitable habitat across the island.

Observations and Description of Recording

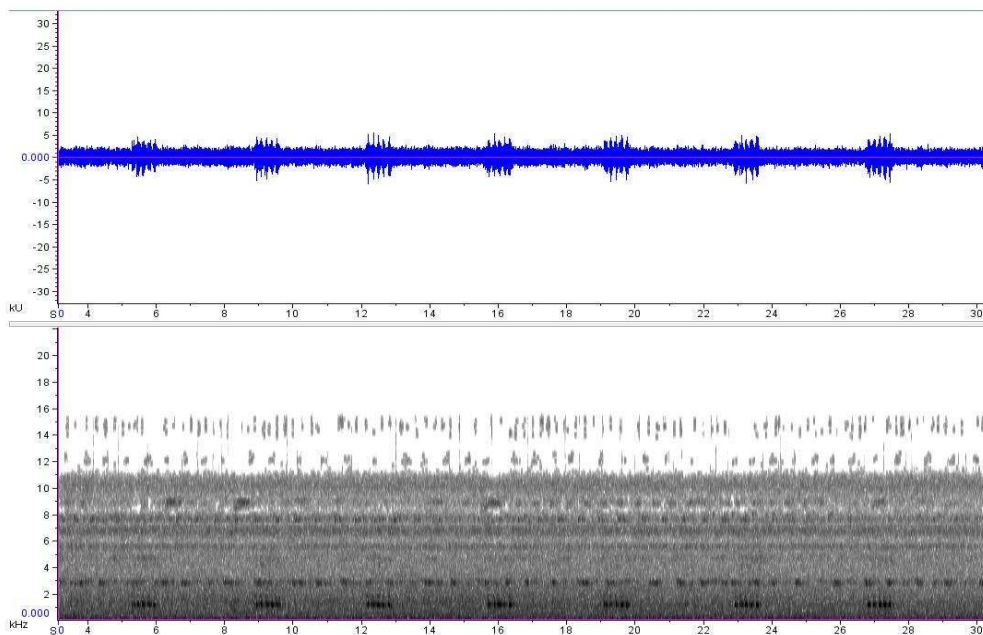


Figure 2. Sonogram of **Red-legged Crake** based on vocalizations recorded in Bukit Batok Nature Park ©Yong Ding Li

During a nocturnal field survey of amphibians in Bukit Batok Nature Park on the 14 May 2009, I was able to track down a single calling Red-legged Crake at 2015 hours. The bird was heard calling from thick shrubby undergrowth near the edge of young secondary forest interspersed with old rubber trees. The bird called continuously for almost half an hour, before breaking off and continuing again after five minutes. During the entire period when the recordings were made, the calling bird was not observed. Frequently mistaken to be insect or amphibian sounds, this monotonous vocalization is often repeated for minutes on end, with its originator well concealed in thick vegetation. The vocalization could be described as low frequency (≈ 1.0 kHz) nasal rattle consisting of a series of five-six notes ‘kok-kok-kok-kok-kok’ lasting 0.8 – 1.0 seconds and repeated at intervals of 3.0 seconds. Based on a number of previous observations, this call is often associated with night-calling birds. However, it has also heard from solitary foraging adults in the day (Pers obs).

This vocalization described here is associated with advertisement calling in territorial males (see Robson, 1999). Beside this, at least two other vocalizations are known for Red-legged Crakes in Singapore. One, which is described as a singularly uttered nasal 'kek' is frequently heard and could be used as a form of contact calling between individuals (Pers obs). Wells (1999) also describes a duetted 'sharp hiccup followed by shrill rattles reeling down the scale'. An alternative description of this call is a staccato 'kek', followed by a rapid descending trill lasting about one to two seconds. This vocalization has been heard in occupied nest territories (Wells, 1999) and is possibly used as a territorial marker by mated pairs.

Conservation

Until recently, calls of the Red-legged Crake were relatively unfamiliar to most field observers. Better understanding of vocalizations and variety of vocalizations will definitely shed more light on the species' behavioral ecology and distribution. At least for now, knowledge of the Red-legged Crake's call has revealed that it is undoubtedly more common than once thought, and that it occurs in a variety of habitats. However, its dependence on closed cover vegetation like secondary forests as well as former plantations (e.g. rubber) means that it is at risk from habitat loss as small secondary forest and plantation patches outside of the Central Catchment Forests are cleared for development. With this in mind, it is prudent to keep the species under the 'vulnerable' threat status until more information on its population trends is available.

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