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Blue-eared Kingfisher *Alcedo meninting* on 27 February at Lower Pierce by Tan Gim Cheong



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Bird Report

February 2010

By Andrew Chow and Lim Kim Seng

SINGAPORE HIGHLIGHTS

This month's cover is graced by a stunning Blue-eared Kingfisher posing at Lower Peirce Reservoir, a locally threatened resident that was also recorded at Rifle Range Link. It was just one of two species of kingfishers present, the other being an equally captivating Black-backed Kingfisher, at Lower Peirce Reservoir as Singapore recorded its driest February ever.

Other residents of note included Blue-rumped Parrot at Central Catchment Nature Reserve, Glossy Swiftlet (Belukar Track – a new locality), Buffy Fish Owl (Lower Peirce Reservoir), Red-legged Crake (Botanic Gardens), a rare record of Crested Goshawk at the Singapore Zoo and another probable at One North, Crested Serpent Eagle (Bukit Batok), a record count of Little Grebe at Singapore Quarry (9 birds), Great-billed Heron (Pulau Tekong), Greater Green Leafbird (Belukar Track), Black-naped Monarch (Pulau Tekong), and Yellow-eared Spiderhunter at Pulau Tekong, a new locality record, if accepted. The first returning Blue-throated Bee-eaters were also recorded at Belukar Track on 22nd. In addition, there were also six breeding records.

Interesting migrants included a second Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo of the year at Bidadari Cemetery, Watercock (Kranji Marsh), Common Kestrel (Changi Cove), Black Bittern (Kranji Marsh), Hooded Pitta (Botanic Gardens), Blue-winged Pitta (Lower Peirce Reservoir and West Coast Park), Ashy Drongo (Mandai), Orange-headed Thrush (Venus Drive and Botanic Gardens), Blue-and-white Flycatcher (Venus Drive), Siberian Blue Robin (Lower Peirce and Central Catchment Nature Reserve), Ashy Bulbul (Singapore Quarry) and Forest Wagtail (Venus Drive and Sime Trail).

Arguably the bird of the month was a lone Whiskered Treeswift seen at Belukar Track on 21st, the first record since 1999.

JOHOR HIGHLIGHTS

Sustained birding at Panti Forest Reserve produced a crop of interesting birds that included Great Argus, Rufous Piculet, White-bellied Woodpecker, Orange-backed Woodpecker, Wrinkled Hornbill, Diard's Trogon, Rufous-backed and Rufous-collared Kingfishers, Red-bearded Bee-eater, Malaysian Hawk Cuckoo, all lowland malkohas, Silver-backed and Brown-backed Needletails, Malaysian Eared Nightjar, Crested Goshawk, Banded and Black-and-yellow Broadbills, Rail Babbler, Black Magpie, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Grey-chested Jungle-flycatcher, White-crowned Forktail, Red-rumped Swallow, Finsch's Bulbul, Ferruginous Babbler, Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker,

and Spectacled and Yellow-eared Spiderhunters. Also interesting were records of Greater Goldenback and Little Bronze Cuckoo in mangroves at Tg Piai National Park and Malaysian Plover and Pacific Reef Heron at Jason's Bay.

SUMMARY

This report covers noteworthy bird sightings in February 2010 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 @ 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 (2009) "The Avifauna of Singapore", 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	SBWR	Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve
CCNR	Central Catchment Nature Reserve	SBG	Singapore Botanic Gardens
DFNP	Dairy Farm Nature Park	Sev obs	Several observers
KM	Kranji Marsh	TPNP	Tanjong Piai National Park
NTL2	Neo Tiew Lane 2		

SINGAPORE

RED JUNGLEFOWL *Gallus gallus*

2 male were seen on 24/2 at Jalan Tapisan. They were seen on the road but scurried into the woods (AC).

RUFIOUS WOODPECKER *Celeus brachyurus*

1 at Sime Trail, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

BANDED WOODPECKER *Picus miniceus*

1 was seen feeding on ants at DFNP on 16/2 (JdH/LKS), 1 at SBG on 16/2 (JdH/LKS) and 1 at Jelutong Tower, CCNR, on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

LINEATED BARBET *Megalaima lineata*

Several were heard at Singapore Quarry on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 1 heard at SBG on 16/2 (LKS), and 1 heard at MacRitchie Reservoir on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

RED-CROWNED BARBET *Megalaima rafflesii*

1 was seen at Lower Peirce Reservoir on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 4 were heard on 16/2 at CCNR (LKC). 1 was seen at MacRitchie Reservoir on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and 1 at Sime Trail, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

COPPERSMITH BARBET *Megalaima haemacephala*

2 was seen at a fruiting Waringin at DFNP on 16/2 (JdH/LKS).

COMMON KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*

1 was seen at NTL2 on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 27/2 (LKS/LYE). 1 was also seen at SBWR on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

BLACK-BACKED KINGFISHER *Ceyx erithacus*

1 was seen on 6/2 and on 23/2 at Lower Pierce (FW).

BLUE-EARED KINGFISHER *Alcedo meninting*

2 were heard at Rifle Range Link, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS). Another at Lower Peirce on 27/2 (TGC).

STORK-BILLED KINGFISHER *Pelargopsis capensis*

At SBWR, 3 were seen on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 on 17/2 (WA/LKS). Another was heard at MacRitchie Reservoir on 27/2 (LKS).

RUDDY KINGFISHER *Halcyon coromanda*

1 seen in secondary forest at Wallace Trail, DFNP, on 16/2 (LKS). 1 was seen on 16/2 at Wallace Trail (LKS).

BLACK-CAPPED KINGFISHER *Halcyon pileata*

1 was seen on 10/2 at NTL2 and another through out the month at Singapore Quarry, DFNP (UR).

BLUE-THROATED BEE-EATER *Merops viridis*

3 were seen at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS).

BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER *Merops philipinus*

1 was seen at MacRitchie Reservoir on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and 1 at Sime Trail, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

PLAINTIVE CUCKOO *Cacomantis merulinus*

1 was heard at NTL2 on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

LITTLE BRONZE CUCKOO *Chrysococcyx minutillus*

1 was heard at SBWR on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) another heard at NTL2 on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

VIOLET CUCKOO *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus*

1 was heard at Lower Peirce Reservoir on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and another heard at Singapore Quarry on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

HODGSON'S HAWK-CUCKOO *Hierococcyx nisicolor*

1 was photographed on 4/2 at Bidadari (TKC).



Hodgson's Hawk-Cuckoo on 4 February 2010 by Tsang Kwok Choong.

BANDED BAY CUCKOO *Cacomantis sonnerati*

1 was heard on 24/2 inside Tengah Airbase (AvC).

ASIAN DRONGO-CUCKOO *Surniculus lugubris*

1 was heard on 16/2 near DFNP Carpark B (LKC).

CHESTNUT-BELLIED MALKOHA *Phaenicophaeus sumatranus*

1 was seen at MacRitchie Reservoir on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and a pair at Jelutong Tower, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

RAINBOW LORIKEET *Trichoglossus haematodus*

2 were seen flying over Jelutong Tower, CCNR, on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

BLUE-RUMPED PARROT *Psittinus cyanurus*

1 was heard on 16/2 at Sime Track (LKC).

BLUE-CROWNED HANGING PARROT *Loriculus galgulus*

4 birds were seen over Jelutong Tower, CCNR, on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

RED-BREASTED PARAKEET *Psittacula alexandri*

6 were seen at Singapore Quarry on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 2 at NTL2 on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

LONG-TAILED PARAKEET *Psittacula longicauda*

8 were seen at Lower Peirce Reservoir on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 30 at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS), 2 at MacRitchie Reservoir on 27/2 (LKS/LYE) and 1 at NTL2 on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

GLOSSY SWIFTLET *Collocalia esculenta*

2 seen at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS).

WHISKERED TREESWIFT *Hemiprocne comata*

1 female was seen at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 21/2 (RC/KC) is potentially the fourth record for Singapore. It was not seen again despite considerable observer effort.

COLLARED SCOPS-OWL *Otus lempiji*

1 was heard on 6/2 at Lower Pierce boardwalk (FW). 1 seen and another heard on 27/2 at Singapore Quarry, DFNP (UR).

BUFFY FISH OWL *Ketupa ketupu*

1 juvenile was seen on 23/2 at Lower Pierce (FW).

COMMON EMERALD DOVE *Chalcophaps indica*

1 was seen at Singapore Quarry on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

RED-LEGGED CRAKE *Rallina fasciata*

A bird seen being chased off by a **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* near a pond at Ginger Garden, SBG, on 16/2 (LKS) is a hitherto undocumented case of interspecific aggression between these rallids.

SLATY-BREASTED RAIL *Gallirallus striatus*

1 was heard at NTL2 on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

WATERCOCK *Gallicrex cinerea*

1 was seen on 21/2 at KM (WC).

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

At SBWR, 150 were counted on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 50 on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

COMMON REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*

100 were counted at SBWR on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

MARSH SANDPIPER *Tringa stagnatilis*

10 were counted at SBWR on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

COMMON GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*

At SBWR, 50 were counted on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 20 on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

COMMON SANDPIPER *Tringa hypoleucos*

4 were seen at SBWR on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 2 at Singapore Quarry on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 at NTL2 on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus*

A total of 11 were reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details.

BLACK BAZA *Aviceda leuphotes*

A total of 91 were reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details. In addition, 1 was seen on 28/2 over North Buona Vista Road flying northwards (AOY).

CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD

Pernis ptilorhyncus

A total of 20 were reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details. In addition, 1 was seen on 28/2 thermalling over North Buona Vista Road (AOY).

BLACK-WINGED KITE

Elanus caeruleus

A total of 17 were reported for this month. 1 of a pair was seen on 17/2 eating a Garden Skink on an albizia tree outside D'Kranji



A regular visitor photographed on 4 February outside his kitchen window at Simon Lane by Tsang Kwok Choong.

Resort at NTL2 (WA/LKS). Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for more details.

GREY-HEADED FISH EAGLE *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*

A total of 7 were reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details. In addition, 1 was heard at NTL2 on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and another at MacRitchie Reservoir on 27/2 (LKS).

CRESTED SERPENT-EAGLE *Spilornis cheela*

A total of 3 were reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details.

EASTERN MARSH HARRIER *Circus spilonotus*

A total of 4 were reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details.

CRESTED GOSHAWK *Accipiter trivirgatus*

1 juvenile was photographed on 16/2 at the Singapore Zoo (TTM). 1 probable was seen on 16/2 over One North (AOY). Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for more details.

CHINESE SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter soloensis*

1 was reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details.

JAPANESE SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter gularis*

A total of 3 were reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details. In addition, 1 was seen at NTL2 on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

COMMON BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

A total of 2 were reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details.

BOOTED EAGLE *Hieraaetus pennatus*

A total of 2 were reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details.

RUFIOUS-BELLIED EAGLE *Hieraaetus kienerii*

1 was reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details.

CHANGEABLE HAWK EAGLE *Spizaetus cirrhatus*

A total of 18 were reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details. In addition, 1 was heard at Lower Peirce Reservoir on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW), a pale bird was seen at NTL2 on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 1 heard at Singapore Quarry on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and a dark morph seen at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS).

COMMON KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

1 was reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details.

PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*

A total of 4 were reported for this month. Refer to the Singapore Raptor Report in the following section for details.

LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

9 were seen on 5/2 (UR) and 5 counted on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) at Singapore Quarry DFP.

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

At SBWR, 68 were seen on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 20 on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

At SBWR, 5 were seen on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

GREAT-BILLED HERON *Ardea sumatrana*

1 was seen on 13/2 at Pulau Tekong (LJS).

PURPLE HERON *Ardea purpurea*

1 was seen at Lower Peirce Reservoir on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 at KM on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

GREAT EGRET *Casmerodius albus*

4 were seen at SBWR on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

YELLOW-BILLED EGRET *Mesophoyx intermedia*

1 was seen at SBWR on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and another was seen on 21/2 at KM (WC).

YELLOW BITTERN *Ixobrychus sinensis*

3 were counted on 10/2(LKS/CW/KW). 2 on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and 2 on 21/2 at KM (WC). 1 was also seen at Singapore Quarry on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW). 1 immature was seen catching a fish on 22/2 at Rochor Cannal (DA).

BLACK BITTERN *Ixobrychus flavicollis*

1 was seen on 21/2 at KM (WC).

HOODED PITTA *Pitta sordida*

1 was seen on 16/2 at the SBG (WF/JdH/LKS/YPL)and 2 were seen on the same day at the same location (FW). 1 was on 20/2 at the same location(OEE/FW).

BLUE-WINGED PITTA *Pitta moluccensis*

1 was seen on 23/2 at Lower Pierce (FW). 1 was seen on 27/2 at West coast Park, feeding on a snail, smashing it on a log then swallowing it (OEE/FW).

ASIAN FAIRY-BLUEBIRD *Irena puella*

2 were seen at Jelutong Tower, CCNR, on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and 1 at Sime Trail, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

BLUE-WINGED LEAFBIRD *Chloropsis cochinchinensis*

4 were heard on 16/2 at CCNR (LKC).

GREATER GREEN LEAFBIRD *Chloropsis sonnerati*

A female was seen at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS).

TIGER SHRIKE *Lanius tigrinus*

2 immatures were seen at Singapore Quarry on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

BROWN SHRIKE *Lanius cristatus*

At NTL2, 5 were seen on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 1 on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and 2 on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

LONG-TAILED SHRIKE *Lanius schach*

1 was seen at NTL2 on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

ASHY MINIVET *Pericrocotus divaricatus*

4 seen at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS).

BLACK-NAPED MONARCH *Hypothymis azurea*

1 was heard on 13/2 at Pulau Tekong (LJS).

ASIAN PARADISE-FLYCATCHER *Terpsiphone paradisi*

A female at Sime Trail, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

ASHY DRONGO *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

1 was photographed on 18/2 at Mandai (LCH).



Ashy Drongo at Mandai at 18 February by Low Choon How.

ORANGE-HEADED THRUSH *Zoothera citrina*

1 was seen on 3/2 at Venus Drive (STYW). 1 was seen on 4/2 (AC) and 1 male was seen on 16/2 at the SBG (FW/WF/JdH/LKS/YPL). 1 was seen defending its territory against 2 invading White-vented Myna on 20/2 at SBG (OEE/FW).

ASIAN BROWN FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa dauurica*

1 was seen on 6/2 at Venus Drive (STYW), 2 on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW), at SBWR, 1 on 17/2 (WA/LKS) at MacRitchie Reservoir and on 22/2 at Belukar Track, BTNR (LKS).

BLUE-AND-WHITE FLYCATCHER *Cyanoptila Cyanomelana*

1 first-winter male was seen feeding frantically on 6/2 at Venus Drive (STYW).

SIBERIAN BLUE ROBIN *Luscinia cyane*

1 female was seen taking a bath on 6/2 and 1 male was seen on 16/2 at Lower Pierce boardwalk (FW). 3 were heard on 16/2 at CCNR (LKC).

ORIENTAL MAGPIE ROBIN *Copsychus saularis*

2 were seen at SBWR on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW), and 2 at MacRitchie Reservoir on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

WHITE-RUMPED SHAMA *Copsychus malabaricus*

1 was heard at Lower Peirce Reservoir on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW). At MacRitchie Reservoir, 1 was heard on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and 1 seen on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

WHITE-VENTED MYNA *Acridotheres javanicus*

1 leucistic individual was seen on 23/2 with a “normal” adult at a carpark in Bukit Batok East Ave 4 (DA). Another was seen foraging with other “normal” mynas at Choa Chu Kang Street 51 on 26/2 (LKS).



A leucistic White-vented Myna on 23 February at Bukit Batok East Ave 4 by Doreen Ang

COMMON HILL MYNA *Gracula religiosa*

2 were seen over Jelutong Tower, CCNR, on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and 27/2 (LKS/LYE). 6 were also seen at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS).

STRAW-HEADED BULBUL *Pycnonotus zeylanicus*

A few were heard on 6/2 at Venus Drive (STYW). 4 counted at Singapore Quarry on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

CREAM-VENTED BULBUL *Pycnonotus simplex*

2 were seen at Jelutong Tower, CCNR, on 17/2 (WA/LKS), 2 at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS) and 1 at Sime Trail, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

ASIAN RED-EYED BULBUL *Pycnonotus brunneus*

4 were seen at Jelutong Tower, CCNR, on 17/2 (WA/LKS), 1 at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS) and 2 at Sime Trail, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

ASHY BULBUL *Hemixos flavala*

1 was heard at Singapore Quarry on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

ORIENTAL WHITE-EYE *Zosterops palpebrosus*

1 seen at SBWR on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus* spp.

1 was seen on 21/2 at KM (WC).

ORIENTAL REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus orientalis*

1 was heard at KM on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 27/2 (LKS).

RUFIOUS-TAILED TAILORBIRD *Orthotomus sericeus*

1 was seen singing at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS) and 1 at MacRitchie Reservoir on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

ARCTIC WARBLER

Phylloscopus borealis

2 were seen on 6/2 at Venus Drive (STYW). 1 was seen at Jelutong Tower, CCNR, on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and 1 at Sime Trail, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

**WHITE-CRESTED
LAUGHINGTHRUSH**

Garrulax leucolophus

3 were photographed on 25/2 at Bukit Batok Nature Park reacting to their reflections (YH). 1 heard at NTL2 on 27/2 (LKS).



White-crested Laughingthrushes on 25 February at Bukit Batok Nature Park by Yuet Hsin.

ABBOTT'S BABBLER *Malacocincla abbotti*

1 was heard at Lower Peirce Reservoir on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and another heard at MacRitchie Reservoir on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

SHORT-TAILED BABBLER *Malacocincla malaccensis*

1 was seen on 6/2 at Lower Pierce boardwalk (FW). A pair seen defending territory at Lower Peirce Boardwalk on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

CHESTNUT-WINGED BABBLER *Stachyris erythroptera*

1 was heard on 16/2 at Sime Track (LKC).

PURPLE-THROATED SUNBIRD *Nectarinia sperata*

5 birds were seen, including 2 males fighting each other and spinning downwards momentarily, at Jelutong Tower, CCNR, on 17/2 (WA/LKS), 4 at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS) and 3-4 males at a flowering Saraca Tree at Sime Trail, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

COPPER-THROATED SUNBIRD *Nectarinia calcostetha*

At SBWR, 5 were seen on 10/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 on 17/2 (WA/LKS).

LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER *Arachnothera longirostris*

1 was heard at Sime Trail, CCNR, on 17/2 (WA/LKS) and 1 seen at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS).

YELLOW-EARED SPIDERHUNTER *Arachnothera chrysogenys*

1 reported on 13/2 at Pulau Tekong (LJS) would be, if authenticated, the first record for the island (Lim 2009).

FOREST WAGTAIL *Dendronanthus indicus*

1 was seen foraging at a track on 6/2 at Venus Drive (STYW). 1 was seen high up on a dead tree at Sime Trail, CCNR, on 27/2 (LKS/LYE).

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*

1 was seen on 21/2 at DFNP (RC). 2 seen at Belukar Track, BTNR, on 22/2 (LKS).

BREEDING / NESTING REPORTS

PINK-NECKED GREEN PIGEON *Treron vernans*

1pair of adult was seen tending to 2 chicks in a low nest on 24/2 inside Tengah Airbase (AvC).

RED-LEGGED CRAKE *Rallina fasciata*

Two well developed juveniles, sporting white spots on wings, seen following two adults at SBG on 9/2 (CW/KW) and 16/2 (FW/WF/JdH/LKS/YPL) fills a gap in their breeding season (Lim 2009). 1 adult and 1 young were seen on 20/2 at SBG (OEE/FW).

ORIENTAL WHITE-EYE *Zosterops palpebrosus*

3 chicks in a looped sided nest was seen on 4/2 in a private garden at Pavilion Circle just off Bukit Batok Road . On the 6/2, 2 chick died and the other was sent to Jurong Bird Park as it was very sick. (PCF/PSK).



Oriental White-eyes nesting at Pavilion Circle on 4 February by Pui Syn Kong.

OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD *Nectarinia jugularis*

1 pair was seen on 10/2 building a nest in the bougainvillia growing on the little ledge just outside the window of the Kopi Tiam Restaurant at City Hall Shopping Mall (IE).

LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER *Arachnothera longirostris*

1 was seen gathering nesting materials on 6/2 at Venus Drive (STYW).

SCALY-BREASTED MUNIA *Lonchura punctulata*

An adult was seen with a grass stalk at NTL2 on 17/2 (LKS).

REPORT ON ESCAPEES

RED JUNGLEFOWL *Gallus gallus*

1 was heard crowing at the playground at Lower Peirce Reservoir Park on 10/2 (LKS) may have been a recent escapee. Another was heard at NTL2 on 27/2 (LKS).

ORIENTAL PIED HORNBILL *Anthracoceros albirostris*

1 was seen on 14/2 calling from a high perched up a tree at Ang Mo Kio Town Garden West (GS).

FISCHER'S LOVEBIRD *Agapornis fischeri*

1 was seen on 23/2 at Toh Tuck area (DA). It was first seen at the same area on 18/6/2009 (DA). (SINAV Vol 23 No 6).

MILKY STORK *Mycteria cinerea*

9 were seen over Woodlands Street 81 on 4/2 (LKS/LWX/SA).

JOHOR

RED JUNGLEFOWL *Gallus gallus*

1 was heard at an oil palm plantation at Sungei Durian, Kukup, on 14/2 (JdH/LKS) and a male at TPNP on 26/2 (JC/LKS).

GREAT ARGUS *Argusianus argus*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW), and 15/2 and 16/2 (JdH/LKS). 2 were heard on 28/2 at PFR (EF/HF/MP).

RUFOUS PICULET *Sasia abnormis*

A female was seen at Bunker Track on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW). 1 was seen on 28/2 at PFR (EF/HF/MP).

RUFOUS WOODPECKER *Celeus brachyurus*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

WHITE-BELLIED WOODPECKER *Dryocopus javensis*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

BANDED WOODPECKER *Picus miniaceus*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

CRIMSON-WINGED WOODPECKER *Picus puniceus*

1 was seen on 28/2 at PFR (EF/HF/MP).

CHECKER-THROATED WOODPECKER *Picus mentalis*

At Bunker Track, 2 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 1 on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 4 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS). This appears to be the most common *Picus* woodpecker at this site.

COMMON GOLDENBACK *Dinopium javanense*

1-2 females seen at TPNP on 26/2 (JC/LKS).

GREATER GOLDENBACK *Chrysocolaptes lucidus*

A pair was seen digging a nest-hole 15m up a dead *Rhizophora* tree at TPNP on 14/2 (JdH/LKS). On 26/2 (JC/LKS), the nest hole appeared abandoned even though the pair was seen in the vicinity. It is likely that the presence of pairs of Oriental Dollarbird and White-vented Myna, both cavity nesters, affected its success.

ORANGE-BACKED WOODPECKER *Reinwardtipicus validus*

A pair was seen at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

BUFF-RUMPED WOODPECKER *Meiglyptes tristis*

At Bunker Track, 2 were seen on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 3 on 14/2 (JdH/LKS) and 3 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

GREY-AND-BUFF WOODPECKER *Hemicircus concretus*

1 at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 18/2 (WA/LKS).

RED-CROWNED BARBET *Megalaima rafflesii*

At Bunker Track, 3 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 3 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS), 1 on 16/2 (JdH/LKS) and 1 on 26/2 (JC/LKS).

BLUE-EARED BARBET *Megalaima australis*

At Bunker Track, 3 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 2 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

BROWN BARBET *Calorhamphus fuliginosus*

At Bunker Track, 1 was seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), a flock of 10 foraging in a tree on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 2 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

ORIENTAL PIED HORNBILL *Anthracoceros albirostris*

1 was seen over Kota Tinggi-Mersing Road on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 26/2 (JC/LKS). Another was seen flying over the Sedili Kechil Road on 18/2 (WA/LKS).

BLACK HORNBILL *Anthracoceros malayanus*

At Bunker Track, 4 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 1 on 14/2 (JdH/LKS), 10 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS) and 3 on 18/2 (WA/LKS). 2 were seen on 28/2 at PFR (EF/HF/MP).

RHINOCEROS HORNBILL *Buceros rhinoceros*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

BUSHY-CRESTED HORNBILL *Anorrhinus galeritus*

5 was seen near the swamp at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

WRINKLED HORNBILL *Rhyticeros corrugatus*

A few were seen on 28/2 at PFR (EF/HF/MP).

RED-NAPED TROGON *Harpactes kasumba*

A pair was seen at Bunker Track on 16/2 (JdH/LKS). 1 female was seen on 28/2 at PFR (EF/HF/MP).

DIARD'S TROGON *Harpactes diardii*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

SCARLET-RUMPED TROGON *Harpactes duvaucelii*

1 male seen at Bunker Track on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

ORIENTAL DOLLARBIRD *Eurystomus orientalis*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW). A pair seen interacting in mangrove at TPNP on 14/2 (JdH/LKS). On 26/2 (JC/LKS), at the same spot and probably involving the same pair, one was seen offering the other a large unidentified bee, which was accepted.

BLUE-EARED KINGFISHER *Alcedo meninting*

Singles heard at two streams at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

RUFIOUS-BACKED KINGFISHER *Ceyx rufidorsa*

1 at Bunker Track on 14/2 (JdH/LKS), 16/2 (JdH/LKS), 18/2 (WA/LKS) and 26/2 (JC/LKS).

BANDED KINGFISHER *Lacedo pulchella*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

RUFIOUS-COLLARED KINGFISHER *Actenoides concretus*

At Bunker Track, 3 separate birds were heard on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 2 heard on 15/2 (JdH/LKS) and 1 heard on 16/2 (LKS).

RED-BEARDED BEE-EATER *Nyctyornis amictus*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and on 14/2 (JdH/LKS). 1 was seen on 28/2 at PFR (EF/HF/MP).

BLUE-THROATED BEE-EATER *Merops viridis*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 14/2 (JdH/LKS).

MALAYSIAN HAWK-CUCKOO *Hierococcyx fugax*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

INDIAN CUCKOO *Cuculus micropterus*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

BANDED BAY CUCKOO *Cacomantis sonneratii*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 16/2 (JdH/LKS).

PLAINTIVE CUCKOO *Cacomantis merulinus*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

RUSTY-BREASTED CUCKOO *Cacomantis sepulcralis*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 14/2 (JdH/LKS).

LITTLE BRONZE CUCKOO *Chrysococcyx minutillus*

Singles were heard calling in mangrove at Sungei Durian and TPNP 14/2 (JdH/LKS).

VIOLET CUCKOO *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus*

At Bunker Track, 1 was heard on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW), and a male seen on 14/2 (JdH/LKS), 15/2 (JdH/LKS) and 26/2 (JC/LKS).

ASIAN DRONGO-CUCKOO *Surniculus lugubris*

At Bunker Track, 1 was seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 2 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

BLACK-BELLIED MALKOHA *Phaenicophaeus diardi*

1 pair was seen on 28/2 at PFR (EF/HF/MP).

CHESTNUT-BELLIED MALKOHA *Phaenicophaeus sumatranus*

At Bunker Track, 1 was seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 2 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

RAFFLES'S MALKOHA *Phaenicophaeus chlorophaeus*

At Bunker Track, 2 males were seen at the second stream on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 3 birds on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and a pair on 14/2 (JdH/LKS).

RED-BILLED MALKOHA *Phaenicophaeus javanicus*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 16/2 (JdH/LKS).

CHESTNUT-BREASTED MALKOHA *Phaenicophaeus curvirostris*

1 pair was seen on 28/2 at PFR (EF/HF/MP).

BLUE-RUMPED PARROT *Psittinus cyanurus*

2 were seen at Bunker Track on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

SILVER-RUMPED SPINETAIL *Rhaphidura leucopygialis*

At Bunker Track, 6 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 2 on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 1 on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 3 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS) and 2 on 18/2 (WA/LKS).

SILVER-BACKED NEEDLETAIL *Hirundapus cochinchinensis*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

BROWN-BACKED NEEDLETAIL *Hirundapus giganteus*

At Bunker Track, 1 was seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 4 on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

WHISKERED TREESWIFT *Hemiprocne comata*

At Bunker Track, 4 were seen on 15/2 (JdH/LKS) and 3 on 18/2 (WA/LKS).

MALAYSIAN EARED NIGHTJAR *Eurostopodus temminckii*

At Bunker Track, 1 was seen on the track in the early morning at Bunker Track on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 at dusk on 14/2 (JdH/LKS).

LITTLE GREEN PIGEON *Treron olax*

At Bunker Track, 6 were seen on 15/2 (JdH/LKS) and 3 on 16/2 (JdH/LKS).

THICK-BILLED GREEN PIGEON *Treron curvirostra*

2 at Bunker Track on 18/2 (WA/LKS).

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

9 were counted at Jason's Bay on 14/2 (JdH/LKS)

COMMON REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*

10 were counted at Sungei Durian, Kukup, 14/2 (JdH/LKS).

COMMON SANDPIPER *Tringa hypoleucos*

5 were counted at Jason's Bay on 14/2 (JdH/LKS).

MALAYSIAN PLOVER *Charadrius peronii*

A pair was seen at Jason's Bay on 14/2 (JdH/LKS)

SWIFT TERN *Sterna bergii*

At Jason's Bay, 13 were counted on 14/2 (JdH/LKS) and 10 on 18/2 (WA/LKS)

CRESTED SERPENT-EAGLE *Spilornis cheela*

1 adult was seen flying over TPNP on 14/2 (JdH/LKS). 1 was seen at Bunker Track on 16/2 (JdH/LKS) and 18/2 (WA/LKS).

CRESTED GOSHAWK *Accipiter trivirgatus*

1 was seen at the second stream at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

JAPANESE SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter gularis*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE *Spizaetus cirrhatus*

At Bunker Track, 6 birds were counted on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

2 was seen at Jason's Bay on 14/2 (JdH/LKS)

PACIFIC REEF HERON *Egretta sacra*

A white morph foraging in sand flats at Jason's Bay on 14/2 (JdH/LKS) was repeatedly harassed by a Little Egret. In flight, the contrast in jizz, especially the short legs of the reef heron, was apparent.

GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea*

1 was seen at TPNP on 14/2 (JdH/LKS).

GREAT EGRET *Casmerodius albus*

1 was seen at TPNP on 14/2 (JdH/LKS).

BANDED BROADBILL *Eurylaimus javanicus*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

BLACK-AND-YELLOW BROADBILL *Eurylaimus ochromalus*

2 was seen at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

GREATER GREEN LEAFBIRD *Chloropsis sonnerati*

At Bunker Track, 1 male was seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), and a female on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

LESSER GREEN LEAFBIRD *Chloropsis cyanopgon*

A pair was seen at Bunker Track a pair was seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and a male on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

TIGER SHRIKE *Lanius tigrinus*

1 immature at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 16/2 (JdH/LKS).

RAIL BABBLER *Eupetes macrocerus*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

BLACK MAGPIE *Platysmurus leucopterus*

2 birds were seen at Bunker Track on 14/2 (JdH/LKS)

DARK-THROATED ORIOLE *Oriolus xanthonotus*

A male was seen at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

LESSER CUCKOOSHRIKE *Coracina fimbriata*

1 male was seen at the first stream at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

ASHY MINIVET *Pericrocotus divaricatus*

At Bunker Track, 10 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 2 on 18/2 (WA/LKS).

SCARLET MINIVET *Pericrocotus flammeus*

At Bunker Track, 3 males and 1 female were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 2 males and 1 female on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 3 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

BAR-WINGED FLYCATCHER-SHRIKE *Hemipus picatus*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

BLACK-WINGED FLYCATCHER-SHRIKE *Hemipus hirundinaceus*

At Bunker Track, 2 were seen on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 1 on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW), and a pair seen sitting on a nest about 15 metres up a tree on 16/2 (JdH/LKS) and 18/2 (WA/LKS).

CROW-BILLED DRONGO *Dicrurus annectans*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 16/2 (JdH/LKS).

BLACK-NAPED MONARCH *Hypothymis azurea*

At Bunker Track, a male was seen on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 female on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

ASIAN PARADISE-FLYCATCHER *Terpsiphone paradisi*

At Bunker Track, a white morph male was seen on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW), and a female on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 18/2 (WA/LKS).

GREEN IORA *Aegithina viridissima*

1 heard at Bunker Track on 15/2 and 16/2 (LKS).

RUFIOUS-WINGED PHILENTOMA *Philentoma pyropterum*

1 was heard at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

LARGE WOODSHRIKE *Tephrodornis gularis*

At Bunker Track, about 5 birds were seen at the second stream on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 2 at the first stream on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW), and 2 at the second stream on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

GREY-CHESTED JUNGLE-FLYCATCHER *Rhinomyias umbratilis*

2 was heard at Bunker Track on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

DARK-SIDED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa sibirica*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

ASIAN BROWN FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa dauurica*

At Bunker Track, 1 was seen at Bunker Track on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 14/2 (JdH/LKS), and 2 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS). 1 was also seen in mangrove at TPNP on 26/2 (JC/LKS).

YELLOW-RUMPED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula zanthopygia*

A male was seen at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS). It was observed singing a sub-song of two short *chutt* notes followed by a high *sii* note.

WHITE-CROWNED FORKTAIL *Enicurus lescheanaulti*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 16/2 (JdH/LKS).

WHITE-VENTED MYNA *Acridotheres javanicus*

1 was seen at the second stream at Bunker Track on 16/2 (JdH/LKS) illustrates the fragmented nature of forest cover at Panti Forest Reserve.

COMMON HILL MYNA *Gracula religiosa*

At Bunker Track, 4 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 2 on 16/2 (JdH/LKS).

VELVET-FRONTED NUTHATCH *Sitta frontalis*

At Bunker Track, 1 was seen at the second stream on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 2 on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

RED-RUMPED SWALLOW *Hirundo daurica*

1 at Bunker Track on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

BLACK-HEADED BULBUL *Pycnonotus atriceps*

At Bunker Track, 5 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 2 on 16/2 (JdH/LKS) and 2 on 18/2 (WA/LKS).

GREY-BELLIED BULBUL *Pycnonotus cyaniventris*

3 were seen at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

PUFF-BACKED BULBUL *Pycnonotus eutilotus*

At Bunker Track, 3 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 1 on 18/2 (WA/LKS) and 3 on 26/2 (JC/LKS).

SPECTACLED BULBUL *Pycnonotus erythrophthalmos*

At Bunker Track, 2 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

FINSCH'S BULBUL *Alophoixus finschii*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 26/2 (LKS).

GREY-CHEEKED BULBUL *Alophoixus bres*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

YELLOW-BELLIED BULBUL *Alophoixus phaeocephalus*

2 was seen at Bunker Track on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

STREAKED BULBUL *Ixos malaccensis*

At Bunker Track, 5 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 10 on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

ASHY BULBUL *Hemixos flavala*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

EVERETT'S WHITE-EYE *Zosterops everetti*

At Bunker Track, 2 were seen on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 6 on 16/2 (JdH/LKS).

ARCTIC WARBLER *Phylloscopus borealis*

1 in worn plumage was seen in Rhizophora mangrove at TPNP on 26/2 (JC/LKS).

EASTERN CROWNED WARBLER *Phylloscopus coronatus*

1 at Bunker Track on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 in mangrove at TPNP on 26/2 (JC/LKS).

WHITE-CHESTED BABBLER *Trichastoma rostratum*

At Bunker Track, 2 were seen on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 on 16/2 (LKS).

FERRUGINOUS BABBLER *Trichastoma bicolor*

2 were seen on 28/2 at PFR (EF/HF/MP).

BLACK-CAPPED BABBLER *Pellorneum capistratum*

At Bunker Track, 2 were seen on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 10 heard on 16/2 (LKS).

SOOTY-CAPPED BABBLER *Malacopteron affine*

1 at Bunker Track on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

GREY-HEADED BABBLER *Stachyris poliocephala*

2 were seen at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

WHITE-BELLIED YUHINA *Yuhina zantholeuca*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

SCARLET-BREASTED FLOWERPECKER *Prionochilus thoracicus*

At Bunker Track, 1 male was seen on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and a pair on 15/2 (JdH/LKS).

PLAIN SUNBIRD *Anthreptes simplex*

A male was seen at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

RUBY-CHEEKED SUNBIRD *Anthreptes singalensis*

At Bunker Track, 3 were seen on 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 1 on 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

PURPLE-NAPED SUNBIRD *Hypogramma hypogrammicum*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 5/2 (LKS/CW/KW), 6/2 (LKS/CW/KW) and 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

PURPLE-THROATED SUNBIRD *Nectarinia sperata*

At Bunker Track, 3 were seen on 15/2 (JdH/LKS) and 1 on 16/2 (JdH/LKS).

SPECTACLED SPIDERHUNTER *Arachnothera flavigaster*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 18/2 (WA/LKS).

YELLOW-EARED SPIDERHUNTER *Arachnothera chrysogenys*

1 was seen at Bunker Track on 16/2 (JdH/LKS).

GREY WAGTAIL *Motacilla cinerea*

1 was seen at the first stream at Bunker Track on 6/2 (CW/KW) and 7/2 (LKS/CW/KW).

Singapore Raptor Report Spring Migration, February 2010

Compiled by Tan Gim Cheong

SUMMARY

140 raptors from 11 migrant species were reported this month. **Black Bazas** continued to be the most numerous at 91 birds and a flock of 25 was reported by Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau and Lau Jia Sheng at Changi. Separately, Ulf Remahl had been tirelessly monitoring the suspected Black Baza roost at Singapore Quarry and found 18 birds on one morning. **Oriental Honey Buzzards** came in second in terms of numbers again with a total of 20 birds. This species is usually silent when wintering but an unusually vocal pair of birds was seen circling and calling repeatedly at Lower Pierce on the 21st for around 20 minutes by Lena Chow & Jimmy Tan. The third most numerous was the **Osprey** with 11 birds. One rare migrant species was recorded for the 1st time this season and two rare resident species were reported.



A rare juvenile Crested Goshawk at Singapore Zoo on 160210. Photo by Tsen Thau Ming Note: the zoo does not keep Crested Goshawks!

HIGHLIGHTS FOR MIGRANT SPECIES

On the morning of the 15th Mick Price saw a juvenile **Rufous-bellied Eagle** at Seletar West flying towards Khatib Bongsu. This is the first record of this rare species this season. The rare **Booted Eagles** continued to be present at Seletar West, although only 2 dark morphs were reported this month compared to 3 birds last month. Kent Ridge continued to hold good birds with a rare **Common Kestrel** seen by Horst Flotow.

For the uncommon raptors, a **Common Buzzard** was at its usual haunt in Changi (reported by Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau and Lau Jia Sheng) while another was seen at Holland Village by Martti Siponen. A **Chinese Sparrowhawk** was seen by Danny Lau and Lau Jia Sheng at Seletar West. Another sighting by Mick Price at nearby Pulau Punggol might be of the same individual. A total of 4 **Eastern Marsh Harriers** were recorded – 1 seen in flight at Pasir Ris Farmway 3 by Lim Poh Bee and another 3 at Changi (Nicholas Tan; Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau and Lau Jia Sheng). Small numbers of **Japanese Sparrowhawks** and **Peregrine Falcons** were also reported.

Highlights for sedentary species:

For the sedentary species, a rare **Crested Goshawk** was seen and photographed on 16 Feb 2010 by Tsen Thau Ming at the Singapore Zoo. It was a juvenile, indicating that Crested Goshawks may be breeding in or near Singapore. On the same day, Alan OwYong saw a probable Crested Goshawk over at One North. A second rarity, the **Crested Serpent Eagle**, was seen in flight at Bukit Batok Nature Park by Wing Chong on the 7th. This species was also reported off Lentor Avenue by Alfred Chia on the 9th and at Mandai by Low Choon How on the 19th.

For the **Grey-headed Fish Eagle**, 7 individuals were reported this month. The numbers for the uncommon **Changeable Hawk-eagle** held out at 18, same as last month. Tan Kok Hui reported a large flock of **28 Brahminy Kites** at Seletar West and Mick Price saw 25 of them at the same place on another evening.



One of the two Oriental Honey Buzzards that were circling and calling for about 20 minutes at Lower Pierce. This is a male. Photo by Jimmy Tan

Table 1

S/N	Species	No.	S/N	Species	No.
1	Osprey	11			
2	Black Baza	91		Residents / Sedentary Species	
3	Oriental Honey Buzzard	20	12	Black-winged Kite	17
4	Eastern Marsh Harrier	4	13	Grey-headed Fish Eagle	7

5	Chinese Sparrowhawk	1	14	Crested Serpent Eagle	3
6	Japanese Sparrowhawk	3	15	Crested Goshawk	1
7	Common Buzzard	2	16	Changeable Hawk-eagle	18
8	Booted Eagle	2			
9	Rufous-bellied Eagle	1			
10	Common Kestrel	1		<i>Unidentified</i>	
11	Peregrine Falcon	4	17	Unidentified <i>Accipiters</i>	2
Total for Migrants		140		Grand Total	188

Note: The total numbers are indicative only with similar species in the same area discounted to prevent duplication.

1. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* (11)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
1	2	Kranji Reservoir, 2 birds flying side by side	Lee Tiah Kee
2	1	Western Part of Singapore, bird seen fishing in the late evening	Mike Tan
3	1	Singapore Quarry, morning	Ulf Remahl
6	1	Kranji bund	Sreedharan G.
10	1	Neo Tiew Lane 2, late morning, flying over the forest	Ulf Remahl
13	1	Seletar West Link, morning	Lau Jia Sheng & Danny Lau
17	1	Seletar West Link Bridge, 6.15pm	Mick Price
17	2	Pulau Punggol Timor, 6.30pm	Mick Price
18	1	Seletar West Link Bridge, 6.15pm	Mick Price
18	2	Pulau Punggol Timor	Mick Price
19	1	Sengkang Riverside Park, evening, circling above Sungei Punggol	Tan Kok Hui
20	3	Neo Tiew Lane 2, afternoon	Raj Krishnan
20	1	Seletar West, evening	Tan Kok Hui
21	2	Sungei Buloh	Martti Siponen
27	1	Kent Ridge, soaring over the top of the ridge	Horst Flotow
27	1	Neo Tiew Lane 2, afternoon	Raj Krishnan
28	1	Kranji	Henrietta Woo

2. Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes* (91)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
1	11+	Jalan Asas (access road to Singapore Quarry), 8am	Ulf Remahl
1	6+	Forest Walk, Southern Ridges, 9am, riding on rising thermals	Serene Chng, Cai Yixiong, Mirza Rifqi bin Ismail
2	2	Access road to Singapore Quarry, morning, birds flew off at 8am	Ulf Remahl
2	1	Forest Walk, Southern Ridges, 9.30am, soaring	Serene Chng, Sheryl

		above canopy	Chia, Cai Yixiong
3	2	Access road to Singapore Quarry, morning, birds flew off at around 8am	Ulf Remahl
3	5+	Hort. Park, flying towards Kent Ridge Park	Serene Chng, Geoffrey Davidson, Cai Yixiong, Eric Siah
4	6	Access road to Singapore Quarry, morning	Ulf Remahl
5	2	Singapore Quarry, midday	Martti Siponen
6	1	Sentosa	Lena Chow, Tsang Kwok Choong, Amy Tsang
6	2	Neo Tiew Lane 2	Sreedharan G.
9	5	Defu Lane	Avian Chia
10	2	Neo Tiew Lane 2, morning, circling	Ulf Remahl
11	10	Access road to Singapore Quarry, morning, birds on dead tree	Ulf Remahl
12	3	Bidadari, 12.30pm	Fang Sher Chyet
13	2	Seletar West Link, morning	Lau Jia Sheng & Danny Lau
15	5	Access road to Singapore Quarry, morning, perched	Ulf Remahl
15	1	Pulau Punggol Barat, 9am	Mick Price
16	14	Access road to Singapore Quarry, morning, perched	Ulf Remahl
17	12	Springleaf Avenue, 7.45am, seen flying towards Tagore Drive in slightly overcast weather	Leo Kum Chew
18	18	Access road to Singapore Quarry, morning <i>“This is the highest number since I started checking this roosting sight regularly.”</i>	Ulf Remahl
19	1	Admiralty Park	Tan Kok Hui
20	30	Changi, a flock of 5 and another flock of 25, morning	Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau, Lau Jia Sheng
20	1	Singapore Quarry	Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau, Lau Jia Sheng
20	2	Punggol Marina, 1 seen fighting with a crow	John Gaunt
20	1	Neo Tiew Lane 2, afternoon	Raj Krishnan
21	4	Sungei Buloh	Martti Siponen
23	9	Access road to Singapore Quarry, morning, perched	Ulf Remahl
24	10	Access road to Singapore Quarry, morning, perched	Ulf Remahl
25	1	Pulau Tekong	Lau Jia Sheng
26	1	King’s Avenue (Sembawang), foraging around a Yellow Flame tree.	Margie Hall

27	1	Khatib Bongsu	Lena Chow, Jimmy Lee & Foong Hin Cheong
27	1	Imbiah Trail, Sentosa, morning, perched on <i>Albizia</i> tree	Cyril Ng
27	5	Neo Tiew Lane 2, afternoon	Raj Krishnan
28	4-5	Tanjong Rhu	Lim Poh Bee, Jeffrey Toh, Lim Ming Huey
28	5	Access road to Singapore Quarry, morning, perched	Ulf Remahl
Feb	2-4	Science Park, Kent Ridge, groups of 2 to 4 seen on several mornings, cannot determine if they are the same individuals	Horst Flotow

3. Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus* (20)



The other Oriental Honey Buzzard (a female) at Lower Pierce. Photo by Jimmy Tan.

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
3	1	Canopy Walk, Southern Ridges, dark morph, seen flying and then perch & preened itself	Serene Chng, Geoffrey Davidson, Cai Yixiong, Eric Siah
3	1	Ang Mo Kio Ave 3, pale morph, 10am	Fang Sher Chyet
4	1	Simon Lane	Tsang Kwok Choong
6	1	Central Forest	Tan Kok Hui
9	1	Yew Tee MRT, landed on tree opposite the station, morning	Felix Wong
9	1	PIE Paya Lebar exit, pale morph, 8am	Fang Sher Chyet
10	1	Chua Chu Kang Ave 4, immature male	"vbs1979"
15	1	Lock Road, at night, coming in to roost	Peter Jones

20	1	Changi, immature pale morph	Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau, Lau Jia Sheng
20	2	Punggol Marina, 1 dark and 1 pale juvenile	John Gaunt
20	1	Jurong West Street 42, in flight	Kenneth Kee
21	1	Lower Pierce, 3.35pm, intermediate morph in flight	“GCSpyder”
21	1	Lower Pierce, 4pm, intermediate morph, circling and calling for 20 minutes	Lena Chow
21	2	Lower Pierce, 1 intermediate morph and 1 pale morph. The birds were circling and calling to each other	Jimmy Tan
27	1	Aljunied Park, evening, flying towards Bidadari and chased by 2 Black-naped Orioles	Lena Chow, Jimmy Lee & Foong Hin Cheong
27	1	Kent Ridge, soaring over the top of the ridge	Horst Flotow
27	1	Upper Thomson Road, dark morph, 4.30pm	Fang Sher Chyet
28	4	Pulau Semakau	Lee Ee Ling, Jeremy Lewis

4. Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* (4)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
13	1	Changi, juvenile, mid morning	Nicholas Tan
14	1	Pasir Ris Farmway 3, male, in flight	Lim Poh Bee
17	1	Changi, male, afternoon	Nicholas Tan
20	1	Changi, juvenile, different bird from 13 th , mid morning	Nicholas Tan
20	1	Changi, male, seen flying towards Changi Airport	Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau, Lau Jia Sheng



Eastern Marsh Harrier, 3rd year male, at Changi on 17 Feb 10. Photo by Nicholas Tan.

5. Chinese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter soloensis* (1)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
13	1	Seletar West Link, morning, adult female	Lau Jia Sheng & Danny Lau
18	1	Pulau Punggol Timor	Mick Price

6. Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis* (3)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
20	1	Changi, morning	Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau, Lau Jia Sheng
20	1	Choa Chu Kang Cemetery, male, chased by Black-naped Oriole, afternoon	Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau, Lau Jia Sheng
20	1	Singapore Quarry, afternoon	Jeremy Lewis

7. Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* (2)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
5	1	Holland Village, 5.43pm	Martti Siponen
20	1	Changi, pale morph, on lamp post	Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau, Lau Jia Sheng

8. Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* (2)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
13	2	Seletar West Link, morning, both dark morph	Lau Jia Sheng & Danny Lau
20	1	Seletar West, evening, dark morph	Tan Kok Hui

9. Rufous-bellied Eagle *Hieraaetus kienerii* (1)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
15	1	Seletar West Link Bridge, juvenile, 7.15am, seen flying towards Khatib Bongsu	Mick Price

10. Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (1)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
27	1	Kent Ridge, late morning, circling over the museum at the top of the ridge	Horst Flotow

11. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* (4)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
6	1	Neo Tiew Lane 2	Sreedharan G.
7	1	Tuas South, midday	Martti Siponen
13	1	Seletar West Link, morning	Lau Jia Sheng & Danny Lau

18	1	Seletar West Link Bridge, 6.15pm	Mick Price
20	1	Seletar West	Tan Kok Hui
20	1	Pulau Ubin Telecom Tower, 8.15am, <i>japonensis</i>	Gloria Seow, Tan Hang Chong
24	1	Tuas South, 5pm	Martti Siponen

RESIDENT RAPTORS

Note: For resident raptors, the counts for the 2 very common resident raptors – Brahminy Kite and White-bellied Sea Eagle were not tabulated.

12. Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* (17)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
1	1	Kranji Reservoir	Lee Tiah Kee
5	1	Tuas South, 4.15pm	Martti Siponen
6	2	Neo Tiew Lane 2	Sreedharan G.
7	2	Tuas South, midday	Martti Siponen
10	1	Neo Tiew Lane 2, morning, perched on transmission tower	Ulf Remahl
13	2	Seletar West Link, morning	Lau Jia Sheng & Danny Lau
17	2	D’Kranji Resort, 1 of the 2 birds seen eating a Garden Skink on top of an albizia tree outside	Lim Kim Seng
20	6+	Changi	Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau, Lau Jia Sheng
20	1	Tuas South, midday	Martti Siponen
20	1	Neo Tiew Lane 2, afternoon	Raj Krishnan
21	1	Sungei Buloh	Martti Siponen
22	1	Tuas South, 5pm	Martti Siponen
26	4	Tuas South, 4pm, all 4 birds seen at the same time	Martti Siponen
27	1	Neo Tiew Lane 2, afternoon	Raj Krishnan
28	2	Pulau Semakau	Lee Ee Ling, Jeremy Lewis
28	1	Kranji	Henrietta Woo

13. Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaeetus* (7)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
3	1	Singapore Quarry, morning “one juvenile bird, which was changing into adult plumage. The young eagle was mostly perching but spent also some time walking along the shoreline on the far side of the Quarry presumably looking for some prey.”	Ulf Remahl

6	2	Neo Tiew Lane 2, morning, adult perched on transmission tower	Ulf Remahl
6	1	Kranji bund	Sreedharan G.
6	2	Singapore Quarry, late morning <i>“two adult eagles at Little Guilin one perching in a small tree near the cliff face and the other in a tall tree. Just after 11:00am one eagle took flight and started to chase a Changeable Hawk Eagle, which was calling and circling around the former quarry. After a while the chase died down and the Grey-headed Fish Eagle return to perch in a tree.”</i>	Ulf Remahl
6	1	Central Forest	Tan Kok Hui
7	1	Mandai, nest	Yong Ding Li
11	1	Singapore Quarry, morning, appears to be the same juvenile seen on 03 Feb 10	Ulf Remahl
20	1	Singapore Quarry, afternoon	Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau, Lau Jia Sheng
21	1	Sungei Buloh, adult	Martti Siponen

14. Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela* (3)



A rare Crested Serpent Eagle at Bukit Batok Nature Park. Photo by Wing Chong.

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
7	1	Bukit Batok Nature Park, 10.12am <i>“It was seen circling briefly above the cliff and subsequently flew towards West”</i>	Wing Chong
9	1	Track 24, off Lentor Avenue, adult, seen perched in the heat of the afternoon	Alfred Chia

19	1	Mandai, perched on tree	Low Choon How
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15. Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus* (1)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
16	1	Singapore Zoo, juvenile <i>“Saw this small raptor at the zoo at the animals presentations stand. flew right over me and landed. animal show was going on and it was not spooked. I was having my lunch at the covered walkway between the elephant rides place and the splash amphitheater when I saw it. I had to walk just a little into the elephant ride to get the shot, it was straight up over head.”</i>	Tsen Thau Ming

16. Changeable Hawk-eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus* (18)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
3	1	Singapore Quarry, morning	Ulf Remahl
5	2	Singapore Quarry, mid-day, 1 dark & 1 pale morph	Martti Siponen
6	2	Central Forest	Tan Kok Hui
6	2	Little Guilin, morning, 1 soaring & 1 chased by a Grey-headed Fish Eagle <i>“The pursuit must have lasted for close to five minutes. At the same time another Changeable Hawk Eagle was soaring just above the cliff face on the other side of the lake. So there was a pair of Changeable Hawk Eagle. From what happened I got the impression that two different kinds of birds of prey were trying to establish a territory in the same area.”</i>	Ulf Remahl
7	2	Tuas South, midday, 1 dark & 1 pale morph	Martti Siponen
12	1	Tekong, heard only	Lau Jia Sheng
13	1	Seletar West Link, morning	Lau Jia Sheng & Danny Lau
15	1	Khatib Bongsu, dark morph, 10am	Mick Price
20	2	Changi, adult dark morph & juvenile pale morph, morning	Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau, Lau Jia Sheng
20	2	Singapore Quarry, afternoon	Tan Kok Hui, Danny Lau, Lau Jia Sheng
21	3	Sungei Buloh, 1 dark, 1 pale morph & 1	Martti Siponen

		immature	
22	1	Choa Chu Kang Cemetery, pale morph	Alfred Chia
23	1	Bukit Brown, dark morph	Tsang Kwok Choong
27	1	Khatib Bongsu, pale morph, juvenile	Lena Chow, Jimmy Lee & Foong Hin Cheong
27	1	Kent Ridge, calling and soaring over the ridge	Horst Flotow
27	2	Singapore Quarry, 1 dark & 1 pale morph, midday	Martti Siponen
28	1	Singapore Quarry, heard only	Ulf Remahl

17. Unidentified Accipiters (2)

Date	No.	Location and Details	Reported By
16	1	<p>One North (North Buona Vista Road)</p> <p><i>“This morning, I saw a medium size raptor flew into a huge fruiting fig tree at One North. It perched on a branch offering only views of its barred belly. Luckily it flew to another branch. I was able to see the full size of this accipiter. It is a much larger accipiter, it underside barrings and eyes are very prominent. I suspect that it was going after the smaller birds that were feeding on the figs. After a few short flights around the ficus, it flew across to the mid canopy of a nearby tree. From this short observation, I cannot be sure but the gist and behaviour suggests a probable Crested Goshawk.</i></p> <p><i>Last evening at around the same location, I witnessed a Brahminy Kite being attacked by a mid size accipiter. The Kite had to take refuge among the thick foliage of a large tree. Unfortunately I did not have my bins with me and was not able to have good looks of the accipiter.</i></p> <p><i>Could it be the same Goshawk?”</i></p>	Alan OwYong
21	1	Sungei Buloh	Martti Siponen

Note:

The numbers in brackets beside the bird names indicates the total number seen for this month. Different reports of the same raptors from the same area have been discounted to prevent duplication.

Many thanks to those who have sent in their reports and especially to Tsen Thau Ming, Jimmy Tan, Nicholas Tan and Wing Chong for the use of their photos.

N India 2009: The Crossroads where Palaearctic Migrants Meet the Orient

By Albert Low



Ibisbills along the Kosi River

Introduction

The N Indian circuit has always been high on any world birder's list of locales to visit, particularly for first-timers visiting the Oriental Faunal Region. Thanks to the wide variety of habitats able to be covered easily within a fortnight, a high trip list is always on the cards. In addition, with quality species like Indian Skimmer, Cheer Pheasant, Ibisbill & Long-billed Thrush all good possibilities, plus the added bonus of an encounter with Tiger, the world's largest "Big Cat", it isn't hard to see why this is one of Asia's most appealing birding locations.

Personally, this was a long overdue trip to a region which has been generally politically stable and easily accessible. In the past, time used to be an issue as 2 weeks was the bare minimum required to do this circuit justice. With a 3 month summer vacation to utilise and a Indian Visa on hand from the preceding trip to Gujarat, it seemed logical to carry on and experience the wealth of avifauna that calls this area their wintering grounds and home. Overall, with 350 species recorded, of which 74 were lifers, the trip was successful in quantitative terms. Unfortunately, due to abnormal weather conditions (ala Eaglenest 2006) and circumstances beyond my control, several key species were dipped. Nevertheless, the birds, combined with the fantastic montane scenery of the Western Himalayas, the lush wetlands of Keoladeo Ghana, the awe-inspiring Taj Mahal and excellent Indian food and hospitality made for a highly memorable trip overall.

Itinerary

The detailed itinerary of the trip is outlined below:

January 15th- Arrived in Delhi International Airport at 0600hrs after a dead hour shift flight from Singapore aboard Singapore Airlines. Thereafter, spent a morning in the marshes along the Okhla River before a long 7 hour drive to Sat Tal. Overnight at Sat Tal Birding Camp.

January 16th- Full day birding around Sat Tal. Overnight in Sat Tal Birding Camp.

January 17th- Departed Sat Tal at first light for the 2-3 hour drive to Pangot, passing through Nainital enroute. Arrived in Jungle Lore Birding Lodge in time for lunch. Spent the afternoon exploring the villages below Pangot with particular attention to the area around the village of Timlapani. Overnight in Jungle Lore Birding Lodge.

January 18th- First full day of birding in Pangot. An early morning start to try for Cheer Pheasant above the village of Vinayak at about 9000ft ASL. The rest of the morning was spent in the high altitude oak forest searching for the local specialties. Birded the terraces around the village of Pangot in the afternoon. Overnight in Jungle Lore Birding Lodge.

January 19th- Second full day of birding in Pangot. Yet another early morning start along the Vinayak Road for Cheer Pheasant. The rest of the morning was spent in the lower elevations around the village of Timlapani, taking advantage of good weather. The afternoon was spent around the village of Gughu Khan and the nearby “Woodpecker Point”, both locales just 2-3km above Pangot Village. Overnight in Jungle Lore Birding Lodge.

January 20th- Final Morning in Pangot. A final epic pre-dawn push for Cheer Pheasant was a case of so near yet so far. Thereafter, a relaxed drive to Jim Corbett National Park with stops enroute at Corbett Falls and a far more productive one at Ramnagar Barrage along the Kosi River. Arriving at Tiger Camp at noon, we swapped to a 4WD and entered the park via Dhangarhi Gate for a leisurely afternoon safari through the varied habitats within the park, before arriving at the Dhikala Tourist Hub in the evening. Overnight in Dhikala.

January 21th- The extremely foggy morning was spent atop an Asian Elephant in an unsuccessful search for Tiger. Thereafter, a leisurely safari around Dhikala Camp visiting areas like Sambhar Road and Khinanauli. Post-lunch, a slow drive back to Dhangarhi Gate. Evening spent along the stretch of the Kosi River just outside the park. Overnight in Tiger Camp, probably the most opulent accommodation of the whole trip with excellent food to boot.

January 22th- Early morning was spent in the teak forest bordering the Jhirna Gate. Late morning was spent on a different stretch of the Kosi River up the road from Tiger Camp searching successfully for Ibisbill. The afternoon was spent along the roadside forest of Kumeria. Overnight in Tiger Camp.

January 23th – Early Morning birding in the roadside teak forest near Dhangarhi Gate. Thereafter a long 7 hour drive back to Delhi to catch an overnight train at 2200 bound for Ranthambhore. Overnight in Class A1 Sleeper Carriage.

January 24th- Arrival at Sawai Madhopur Station at 0500. Thereafter short drive to Ranthambhore Safari Lodge, our accommodation for the next 2 nights. After breakfast, AM birding along the road to Ranthambhore Fort and in the semi-arid scrub just outside the park. PM Tiger Safari in open-air canters.

January 25th- Full day of unsuccessful tiger-tracking within the park, no thanks to the Republic Day weekend which led to the overcrowding of the park with vehicles.

January 26th- Early morning start to Keoladeo Ghana National Park, with several roadside stops and a lengthy one at Bund Baretha in the afternoon. The 5 hour straight drive took most of the day and by the time we arrived at Hotel Sunbird just outside the city of Bharatpur it was evening. Overnight in Hotel Sunbird.

January 27th- Full day of birding within Keoladeo Ghana National Park on bicycles. Overnight Hotel Sunbird.

January 28th- Another full day or so of birding primarily along the eastern, more arid end of the park on bicycles. Returned to Hotel Sunbird at 4pm for the 2 hours or so drive to Chambal River Lodge via the “landfill” that is Agra. Overnight in Chambal River Lodge.

January 29th- Morning river cruise along the Chambal River. Thereafter a brief 2 hour stop in Agra to take in the Taj Mahal and onward 7 hour drive back to Delhi Airport to connect with homeward bound flight. Uneventful end to the tour.

Logistics & Guiding

The N India circuit is arguably Asian Adventures’s signature circuit so it was only natural for me to call on Mr Mohit and his crew once again having used them to great effect during the NW India trip just a month prior. Expectedly, they pulled no stops on this one, with excellent food and accommodation yet again, combined with great local guides and drivers like Mr CB who himself is a birder.

I personally was glad to have Mr Ganesh Adhikari, a native of Nepal and one of AA’s bird guides, as our local birding guide for most of the circuit. I had been impressed with his work rate in NW India and with years of experience working in Pangot as a local guide his knowledge was vital in helping to track down some of the more difficult species that inhabited the Western Himalayas. He continued with us down to Ranthambhore where his sharp eyes and local contacts made for an extremely productive birding day in spite of the torrid Republic Day weekend crowds.

In Keoladeo Ghana National Park, that role was taken over by Mr Randhir Singh, a veteran bird guide in the park and one of the few local guides I have met in all my years of travel in the Orient with the ability to use Latin and common avian names interchangeably with ease. Most impressive! While Bharatpur is generally known as a birding area where quantity takes pride of place over quality, local knowledge nevertheless did help us connect with some of the more obscure species within the park.

Special mention should also go out to Mr Dalveer Singh, a keen naturalist and excellent birder not much older than I am. At 24 years of age, he was Chambal Safari Lodge's resident bird guide and had recorded some excellent species around the Chambal River which included 1-day wonders like an Indian Pitta.

There were no internal flights to handle during this trip (phew!) although the chaotic nature of Indian traffic meant that Good Brakes, Good Horn & Good Luck still applied. Road infrastructure was predictably better than in other areas due to the largely flat topography of the Gangetic Plain although even in the mountains the roads were in surprisingly good shape, even a good distance away from Pangot. We were fortunate to have obtained Class 1A tickets for the overnight train from Delhi to Sawai Madhopur (aka Ranthambhore) and this made the journey far more comfortable than the last train journey I had in NW India as there were only 2 to a cabin.

Environment & People:

1 of the reasons why the N India circuit is famous for a big bird list is the mosaic of habitats one gets to visit and cover within a comparatively short space of time. From the dense high altitude Oak/Coniferous forests to the mid-elevation Sal Forest and lowland deciduous forests and marshes, N India has it all, and a 2 week circuit is more than sufficient to do all of these areas justice.

Special mention has to go out to Keoladeo Ghana NP this winter, for it was the first time in almost 5 years that the Reserve enjoyed a good monsoon. Having timed the trip specifically to coincide with this bumper rainfall, I was glad to have had the chance to at least appreciate what this World Heritage Site used to look like. The word magical would be a slight understatement when used to refer to the quantity of waterfowl that were wintering and breeding at various points in the reserve.

However, as is the case in birding, things don't always go according to plan. As it were, the trip had been timed to unintentionally coincide with an unusually cold winter which hit N India. This meant that throughout the circuit most sites were a few degrees colder than normal and although the observers didn't feel the difference, it certainly seemed to affect the density and vocal behaviour of passerines, many of which were thin on the ground and largely silent, especially in the highlands. Thankfully, we were not affected by some of the negative anthropogenic effects of this abnormal weather, which had included sustained power outages in various N Indian states during our time there.

Throughout the circuit, the habitat transition appeared to be very predictable and tied in with the hope of encountering lifers. In the Western Himalayas, the mid-altitude forest around Sat Tal (aka 7 Lakes) was dominated by evergreen forest and large areas of scrub (especially brambles) and cultivation. Moving uphill towards Pangot and beyond, the habitat changed markedly to Oak/Coniferous forests with visible areas of high elevation meadows.

Descending to the sub-montane elevations of Corbett National Park, the habitat once again took a turn with extensive areas of mature Sal Forest forming a majestic and unique micro-habitat over large areas of Corbett NP. Around Dhikala, the tourist hub of Corbett

NP, the area is dominated by reedbeds and marshes concentrated around the mouth of the Ramdanga River which flows into the Ramdanga Reservoir, which is visible from the verandas of the lodges. At the nearby town of Ramnager, the iconic Kosi River and its gravelly river beds are a distinct visual landmark and a necessary birding stop. Strands of teak forest are also present in pockets around the general region.

In the lowlands of Rajasthan, apart from the iconic seasonal wetlands of Keoladeo Ghana NP, deciduous forests interspaced with rocky cliffs and dams are the order of the day. Even here, pockets of arid areas with nothing more than scrubs and acacias are readily apparent, especially around the Chambal River and in the environs of Ranthambhore. The slow-flowing Chambal River is the last major unpolluted river in India and having a chance to traverse the river in a boat admiring the waterfowl, gharials and dolphins is certainly an experience not to be missed, if nothing else because such an experience is not possible on most of India's major river systems!

In marked contrast to the people in the NW, urbanisation has definitely taken over in this part of India. Poverty; the ubiquitous slums and other representations of the income divide aside, the middle-class populace live similarly to most urban dwellers around the world. They drive flashy cars, wear branded items and have little connection with nature, speaking from first-hand experience with the throngs of holiday-makers at Ranthambhore over the Republic Day weekend. Even in the Western Himalayan villages, the advent of cell phones and Internet has taken off, with internet cafes and other amenities available in most of the bigger villages.

Acknowledgements:

Once again, a word of thanks to Mr Mohit Aggarwal and Mr Iqbal Ahmed from Asian Adventures for their prompt email replies and assistance during the tour itself. Thanks also to the multitude of fellow trip-report writers who posted their N India birding experiences on the various sites such as surfbirds.com and travellingbirder.com, of which there are too many to name. This is my way of reciprocating the favour to the online birding community at large.

Site Summaries

Summaries for each site are outlined below in chronological order as we visited them. Not all species for each site are documented with attention being given primarily to perceived target species or noteworthy sightings. Where possible, local guides and park entrance fees and other costs (accurate as of the time we are there) are given so as to assist future travellers. Asian Adventures does not include park entrances in their tour costs so I thought it would be helpful for future birders to have some idea beforehand to aid in the management of trip finances.

Okhla Barrage Bird Sanctuary:

A sense of déjà vu dominated my visit to this area, having arrived in Delhi yet again slightly jet-lagged and sleepless from a midnight shift flight from Singapore. Once again, a short 2-3 hour period was all the time I could spare for this site, with the long 6-7 hour

drive to Sat Tal ahead. Primary avian targets for me at this site were White-tailed Stonechat & Striated Babbler, with the former requiring minimal effort to connect with and the latter a complete no-show! Such is the nature of birding. Several other odds and ends provided welcome distractions along the Water Hyacinth infested swamps that border the Yamuna River on a typically foggy winter morning in Delhi.

Okhla Entrance Fee: 350 INR per pax

Highlights

White-tailed Stonechat: 1 of the signature birds of the Reserve, 2 males and a female were definitely observed walking along the trails bordering the reed beds. In addition to the distinct white uppertail coverts visible during tail flicking, individuals observed appeared to differ from illustrations by looking like non-breeding Common Stonechats but sporting a complete white neck collar and much darker rufous chest patch, especially in males.

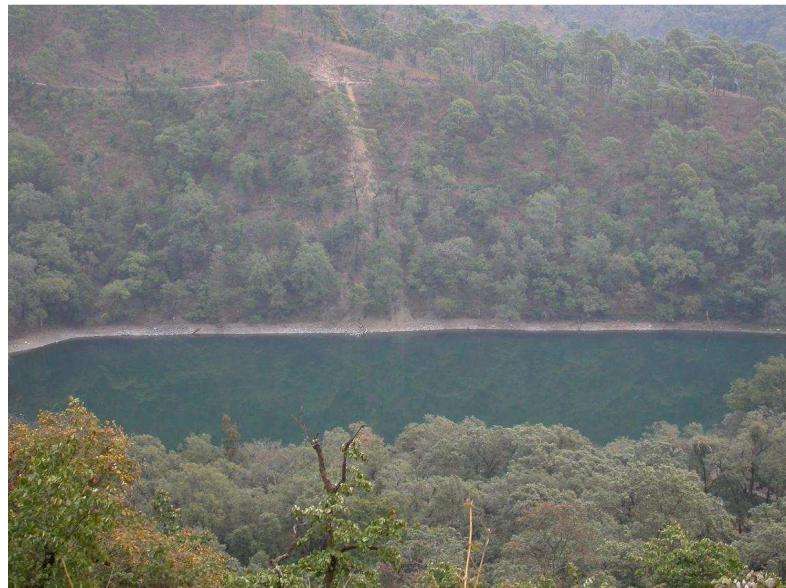
Other Notables

Eurasian Wryneck: 1 of these cryptically-plumaged birds gave good perched views in a riverside acacia thicket. Having failed to connect with this species in the Orient prior to this encounter, this was a very welcome find indeed.

Waterfowl: Noteworthy sightings on a foggy morning which hampered viewing include a single White-tailed Lapwing, the locally common Heuglin's (Yellow-legged) Gull and 15 Indian Shags alongside small numbers of Eurasian Spoonbills, Indian Black Ibis and rafts of Common Teals and Northern Shovelers on the river.

Sat Tal (7 Lakes Region)

In the past, this region was largely overlooked by visiting birders, with most opting to use it as a journey break before moving onto Pangot. With the opening of AA's Sat Tal Birding Camp, all that has changed and increased attention has been given to the excellent birding to be had in this area. Initially, I had planned to only spend half a day birding the area. However, after taking into account the cold snap which had



One of the seven lakes at Sat Tal and accompanying forest

affected the quality of birding around Pangot, opted to stay for a full day's birding instead, a decision I did not regret.

A mosaic of habitats dominates this area depending on your proximity to the township. Within the village and its environs, scrub and cultivation dominated by brambles and dormant agricultural fields dominate. As one moves away from the town, evergreen forest become increasingly dominant with small patches of Coniferous forests. All of these areas should be explored though, as surprises were the order of the day for me here. The primary areas I focused my birding around was along the road up from the Birding Camp which led to a dam and a nearby trail which led to a waterfall, as well as a large area of cultivation on the edge of the village down the road from the Birding Camp pass Green Glen Lodge. I will now summarise sightings of note along these areas.

Road towards Dam/Waterfall Parking Area:

I spent majority of my full morning here along various stretches of this road from dawn to mid-morning. Undoubtedly the highlight of the morning was excellent views of up to 4 Common Hill-Partridges foraging in roadside bramble thickets including excellent views of a male. Ganesh and I bumped into the silently foraging group and even he was visibly surprised as in all his years of birding here he had never encountered the species here before, perhaps due to the cold weather? I also got my first taste of the Western Himalayan endemics which would later prove to be common in the region including Himalayan Parakeets, Himalayan Bulbuls, Rufous Sibias and 6 cracking Black-headed Jays within the Birding Camp itself. The nuclear species within the mixed understorey flocks turned out to be the endemic Black-chinned Babbler while careful scrutiny was rewarded with sightings of handsome Black-lored Tits and unobtrusive Bar-tailed Treecreepers. A roadside gully not far from the dam held a surprise Rusty-tailed Flycatcher while persistent squeaking while positioned in the midst of bramble thickets succeeded in bringing to view several Aberrant Bush-warblers. Other random sightings of note along this road included a single male Grey-headed Woodpecker foraging along the forest floor, large flocks of 20-30 Red-billed Leiothrix in the scrub and tantalising glimpses of Rufous-chinned Laughingthrushes foraging silently within the bramble thickets, a species I would soon catch up with.

Waterfall Trail

This trail proved to be surprisingly productive even though I only reached it at 10am in the morning. Upon arrival, the raucous cries of a restless flock of Red-billed Blue Magpies soon led me to lock eyes with a magnificent Mountain Hawk-Eagle perched just below the canopy in all its glory, a totally unexpected but very welcome tick. Moving further along the trail, a small grassy field bordered by Lantana and surrounded by evergreen forest played host to a noisy flock of 25 White-throated Laughingthrushes. The 2nd surprise of the trail then materialised when casual scanning of the same field produced 3 Rufous-chinned Laughingthrushes foraging on the ground at the other end of the field. Simultaneously, harsh "chacks" from the Lantana turned out to be a cryptic pair of Grey-sided Bush-warblers which were eventually teased out. Birding was decidedly an anti-climax thereafter as the morning wore on but the raging waterfall itself held 2 Chestnut-headed Tesias in the thickets surrounding the waterfall.

Cultivation along Village Edge

The large expanses of dormant agricultural fields and bordering bramble thickets are one of the best birding sites in the Sat Tal region. Initially lured into spending time in this area primarily looking for thrushes (aka Rubythroats, Bush-Robins etc.), I managed a surprisingly good haul of lifers from this “trash” habitat even though the hoped-for species never showed.

Majority of my attention was focused on the large open area down the road from the Birding Camp just beyond the Green Glen Lodge on the edge of the village. During my first afternoon there, birding started slowly but picked up gradually as we wandered further and further into the thickets. First to fall was a long-awaited sighting of a surprisingly handsome lone male Common Rosefinch perched on a small tree in one of the plots. As we moved systematically throughout the plots in search of the wanted Himalayan Rubythroat, yet more surprises emerged, this in the shape of 2-3 Black-throated Accentors foraging on the ground together with a single Rufous-breasted Accentor. Small groups of Russet Sparrows were also a feature of the landscape. Finally, after much squeaking and thicket bashing, the first of the duo was sighted at last. A stunning male Siberian Rubythroat was observed hopping along the ground in a small damp rubbish dump bordering the row of houses at one end of the field. As dusk drew closer, a group of 3 Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-babblers, common by call but difficult to see, finally decided to put me out of my misery and briefly emerged from a dense thicket by a stream running through this agricultural area. To top off what had been an excellent afternoon’s birding, a small party of raptors soaring over the horizon included exhilarating but distant views of the majestic Lammergeier, 1 of my top 5 trip birds, alongside Himalayan Griffons, a single Eurasian Sparrowhawk and various unidentified Aquila Eagles.

The following morning, a return to the same damp rubbish dump failed to locate a Himalayan Rubythroat but did succeed in finding a single Rock Bunting in the same area, drawing birding in Sat Tal to a satisfactory close.

Enroute to Pangot

After a successful day of birding in Sat Tal, it was time to move on to the unofficial birding capital of this section of N India: Pangot. This was done via a three hour drive through Nainital (which means Lake Naini), the major settlement in this region. Even before reaching Pangot itself, various birding stops had already got the adrenaline flowing with some nice finds.

Starting at a humble temple situated on the edge of a raging river about 10km from Sat Tal, a short stint here produced the desired Spotted Forktail, the finishing touch to the world’s forktails and represented by an individual foraging in close proximity to both Little and Slaty-backed Forktails. A lone Crested Kingfisher was vocal and conspicuous here although Brown Dipper remained elusive. As the day wore on, a low-flying Upland Buzzard was the ideal finale for this site before we moved on to the landfill on the edge of Nainital.

The area around the landfill was alive with raptors and in quick succession multitudes of Steppe Eagles, 2 Himalayan Griffons and a pair of Peregrine Falcons of the local race peregrinator were observed. Much more intriguing though was the sight of large numbers (20-30) of Alpine Swifts foraging over the same airspace. This species appears to be rarely mentioned in past trip reports although they were extremely distinctive, sporting white underparts and throat separated by a brown breast band and finished off with distinct forked tails.

A quick stop at Nainital to pick up some winter gear for Ganesh and our driver was largely uneventful but persistent scanning picked up yet another distant Lammergeier soaring over the surrounding peaks. Do note that a small entrance fee needs to be paid to enter the bustling settlement.

Entrance to Nainital: 25 INR per pax

Pangot

Arguably the montane birding capital of the Western Himalayas, the otherwise unremarkable village of Pangot prides itself in harbouring a mosaic of habitat types within easy reach of the village which support an incredible diversity of avifauna. From the brambles and scrub of the villages below Pangot such as Timlapani to the dense and luxuriant evergreen oak and pine forests on its higher slopes, Pangot has something for everyone. The centrally located Jungle Lore Birding Lodge owned by Asian Adventures is the ideal base to explore this locale, and several full days are likely needed to do the site justice. The property sits on some remnant evergreen forest on an otherwise deforested mountainside and birding for most begins right on the veranda with tame Western Himalayan endemics a feature of the landscape.

Road between Nainital & Pangot

The only road to and from civilisation, the road between these two landmarks is characterised by evergreen forest intersected with numerous damp gullies, which harbour a much desired local speciality in the form of the Long-billed Thrush. We had excellent views of a single individual after some exploration of the gully below the first bridge one comes across when driving from Pangot back to Nainital (The bridge in question is about 1km out of Pangot towards Nainital). Here on our last morning, we managed to find a damp section of the large gully which had not dried out and were instantly rewarded with excellent views of a single foraging individual. It was the first time I had ever observed a *Zoothera* utilise its massive bill to turn over the pebbles lining the gully in order to expose its invertebrate prey. A quite remarkable experience really. Prior searches in other gullies along this stretch of road had been unsuccessful, perhaps due to us conducting the searches in the late morning and early afternoon but they did turn up various odds and ends including a handsome Rufous-bellied Woodpecker and several Spotted Forktails.

Pangot Village

The terraced plots of cultivation that characterise the immediate area around Jungle Lore Birding Lodge were surprisingly productive during our time here, this in spite of an ongoing cold front that meant temperatures here were lower than norm. While the lower temperatures may have accounted for the lack of any Black Francolins and Upland Pipits here (Both species appear to be irregular here in recent years), there were many other noteworthy



Pangot against the setting Sun

sightings to speak of. In particular, we found that the area around the Mountain Quail Lodge, which borders some remnant evergreen forest, was particularly productive. Notable sightings include a resident pair of Mistle Thrushes around the aforementioned lodge, a pair of Chestnut-bellied Rock-thrushes and singles of Black-throated Thrush, the handsome Blue-capped Redstart as well as Blue-fronted Redstart. Besides that, the resident Pink-browed Rosefinch performed exceptionally, with the cultivation around the village being the best place to see this jewel. The already healthy bird list of this area was topped off with a large flock of 30 Rock Buntings, an even larger flock of Himalayan Greenfinches numbering up to 60 individuals, and best of all a low-flying Lammergeier in good light which promptly became one of my top 5 trip birds.

Intriguingly, the forest within the Jungle Lore Birding Lodge appeared to support its own small community of avifauna with the birdlife strangely never venturing far from the resort grounds. A large and tame flock of 30 White-throated Laughingthrush seemed to be a permanent fixture within the resort and were often accompanied by the resident flock of Black-headed Jays numbering 7



The endemic Black-headed Jay is tame at Jungle Lore Birding Lodge, Pangot

individuals. Smaller numbers of other species were also observed and these included Streaked & Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrushes, Rufous Sibias as well as a single Grey-

headed Woodpecker foraging on the ground again, not forgetting small flocks of charming Russet Sparrows.

Bagar & Timlapani Village

The only road downhill from Pangot is plainly visible from the Lodge and passes through these two villages before ultimately becoming a footpath! Personally, there was nothing to recommend around Bagar and most of my efforts were concentrated around the environs of Timlapani.

One of the most distinct landmarks along this road is the wide mountain stream that flows across the road between Bagar and Timlapani, readily recognisable by the presence of a shrine. The scrub around this stream is well-known for being the only place around Pangot to see the globally threatened Grey-crowned Prinia. Unfortunately, despite much effort we failed to connect with this species, and similarly missed Golden Bush-Robin here as well, likely due to the unusually cold weather.

Birding around the bramble scrub and cultivation around Timlapani was more rewarding however, with an evening vigil finally coming up trumps with excellent views of a beautiful Black Francolin foraging along one of the scrub-lined terraces here. The following day, Ganesh single-handedly did some bush-whacking in the exact same area and magically produced a stunning Himalayan Rubythroat perched briefly atop a bramble, much to our delight. This was to be our only sighting of this species during the whole tour.

There was otherwise nothing particularly memorable along this stretch though, and the local guides stationed in Pangot had already openly told us activity in the area was significantly lower than normal. Most species seen here had already been recorded elsewhere. The most productive part of Pangot appeared to be the regions above the village during our time here.

Woodpecker Point & Gugu Khan Village

Included here for completeness, these are the 2 major landmarks close to Pangot along the Vinayak Road, which goes past these areas, beyond the forest guesthouse and “Cheer Pheasant Cliffs” to points unknown. There was little of note in terms of birdlife at either of these sites, but a brief description of both is attached for reference.

Woodpecker Point begins with a wide trail on the left side of the road about 2km above Pangot village. The main trail passes through some very old mixed coniferous and oak forest and eventually ends at a small viewpoint surrounded by conifers. The dead and dying trees in this area support numerous woodpecker species and local guides have seen Scaly-bellied Woodpecker here occasionally. Personally, we visited this area only once in the evening and managed 2 male Himalayan Woodpeckers. A distinct side-trail branches off from the main trail near the viewpoint proper and one can follow it back to Pangot village itself, walking through a forested ridgeline and eventually reaching the slope directly across the road from the Jungle Lore Birding Lodge.

Gugu Khan Village is the only major settlement above Pangot for a long way. (We drove quite a distance beyond the “Cheer Pheasant Cliffs” and never saw another settlement and the cliffs themselves are already a 45 min drive from Pangot). Located 6km up the road from Pangot, a muddy trail is present along the outskirts of the village which gradually descends into the valley. Remnant forest is still extant here but most has either been chopped down or uprooted by landslides. There was activity here but most species were shared with those around Pangot.

Vinayak Road- “Cheer Pheasant Cliffs” and Beyond



A section of the Cheer Cliffs shortly after dawn

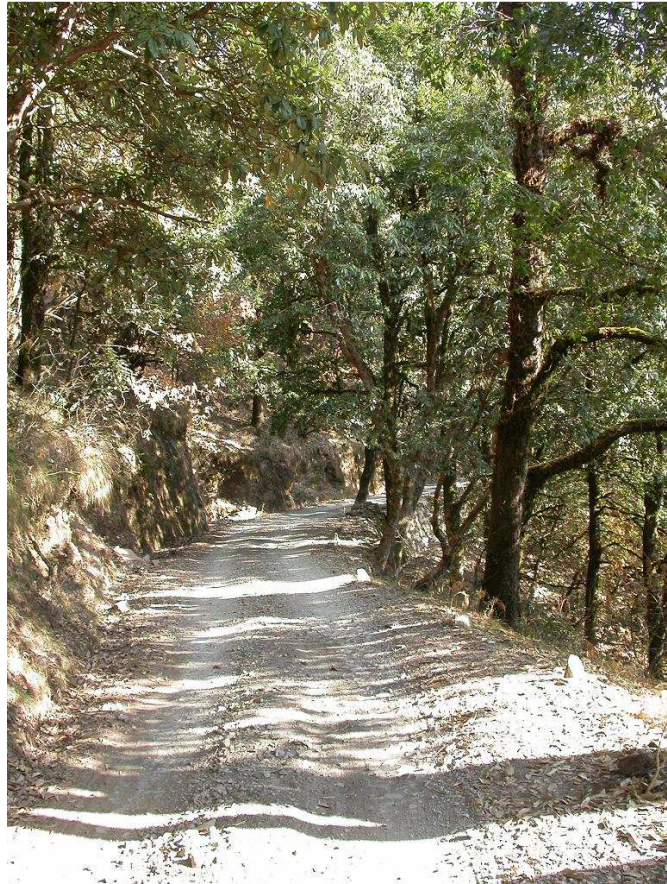
This was one of the most enjoyable birding experiences of the trip and exemplified birding in the Himalayas. Great habitat and great birds made for a thoroughly enjoyable experience. I spent 3 mornings on the Cliffs proper, agonisingly flushing a Cheer Pheasant in the dark and then being made to hear a pre-dawn duet lasting for half an hour as punishment on my last morning, but more on that later. In addition, we spent one full morning in the excellent oak forests at about 2500m ASL beyond the cliffs.

Beyond Gugu Khan, signs of civilisation gradually fade away and pristine coniferous and oak forests become a feature of the landscape. A forestry department complex about 2km before the “Cheer Pheasant Cliffs” was the only sign of human habitation along this section of the road. You know you are approaching the Cliffs when you encounter an extremely sharp hairpin bend, the only one along the entire stretch of road between Pangot and the Cliffs. This bend will always be etched in my memory because at dawn on the 2nd morning we had excellent views of a male Koklass Pheasant right at the apex of the bend which nonchalantly sauntered off the road as our car came to an abrupt stop and started calling from a roadside boulder in full view for ten minutes. Interestingly, its dawn chorus was a harsh 4-note affair not unlike the Chinese Francolins of Indochina.

The Cliffs themselves are a unique microhabitat. Along a 500m stretch of road, the forest suddenly gives way to massive granite cliffs coated in sand-coloured tufts of grass. The local guides tell me that this is only one of two sections where this habitat is accessible, the other being even further away from Pangot and likely requiring a drive of 1.5hrs at least. On most mornings, birdlife was conspicuous and vocal along this area, likely helped by clear skies and spectacular sunrises afforded to those who made the journey up. Large flocks of 60+ Altai Accentors were a permanent feature of the landscape, and only recorded along this section of habitat. Spot-winged Tits, which were common and vocal in all habitats at this elevation, moved energetically between the thickets, while a flock of 5 Mistle Thrushes flew amongst the trees bordering the cliff face on one of the mornings. Apart from the pheasants and accentors, a flock of 5 Black-throated Thrushes fed on the road as well.

As the day heated up, we managed to observe a small number of Himalayan Griffons depart from a roost site on one of the cliff faces, taking advantage of the thermals to gain altitude quickly. On one occasion they were joined by 2 Eurasian Crag-martins.

The oak forest beyond the Cliffs was just as impressive, with very high densities of mixed flock species, particularly in the early morning sunshine. Flocks were dominated by tits of various species, with Black-throated, Black-lore & Green-backed all being seen in addition to the aforementioned Spot-winged. These mixed flocks also harboured Brown-fronted Woodpeckers & White-tailed Nuthatches, two species which were only recorded above Pangot. In addition to all of these, multiple pairs of Koklass Pheasants were also flushed from roadside forests, with a pair seen briefly at noon as they scurried away. A bit of bushwhacking on my part along a slope overlooking a large gully led to an excellent encounter with a female Common Hill-Partridge, with the bird unusually choosing to crouch



Pristine high elevation oak forest along the Vinayak Road

amongst the leaf litter in the hope of throwing me off, to no avail. Other notables include 2 sightings of Long-tailed Thrushes, both of which required nothing more except for me to walk along the road only to be roused by heavy wingbeats and the unmistakable profile of a long-tailed Zoothera perched on roadside stumps. Needless to say, virtually all the Western Himalayan forest specialities were readily seen here, and had we more time and

energy to trek some of the known trails that led higher up the mountain range, we would likely have seen more.

However, what became of the Cheer Pheasant? Unfortunately, it was a case of so near yet so far. I made a push for it every morning; arriving shortly after sunrise on the first two mornings at around 0630. Despite persistent scanning and hanging around the general area for more than 2 hours; there was not a sight or sound of these elusive creatures.

On the 3rd day, we changed our tactics and left way before dawn, leaving the lodge at 5am to arrive before sunrise. You knew things would turn out very differently when you casually open your car door only to see the unmistakable dark profile of a galliform with a long tail running down the mountain slope a few metres from the road! Where was a torch when we need one? This day was clearly different from the rest. At 0545 2 Cheer Pheasants starting duetting from a scrub thicket midway down the cliff where the local guides suspected a pair roosted regularly. As punishment for my earlier mistake, they uttered their alluring calls for half an hour from the same area, barely moving an inch (or so I believed). Then, at 615am, when the first rays of the Sun peeped over the neighbouring peaks, they silenced themselves and vanished into thin air. Despite hanging around for the next hour, it was not to be. Ultimately, I know I saw a Cheer Pheasant, and I definitely heard more than one, but the views just were not up to scratch. For future challengers, I would suggest making early pushes and don't be afraid to take and use your torch! It seems that this globally threatened species could well be crepuscular, at least from personal experience!

Jim Corbett Tiger Reserve/Ramnager

Situated in the lush foothills of the Western Himalayas, Corbett Tiger Reserve is one of India's oldest national parks and arguably its most successful tiger reserve. Covering an area of 1288 square kilometres, the reserve was supporting 164 mature tigers (excluding cubs) as of January 2009 and according to the local staff was the only reserve in India where the local tiger population was on the increase.

Not surprisingly, any reserve large enough to support a viable population of the world's largest cat is likely to have a range of habitat types capable of sustaining a complex ecosystem. Corbett has this in spades. From the reedbeds and marshes around Dhikala to the Sal Forest that coat the foothills around Ramnager and the dry teak forest around Jhirna Gate at its western boundary, the reserve and its boundaries offers a birder the chance to see a wide variety of birds within a comparatively small area. Top that off with a wide range of accommodation options around Ramnager and you get one of the most famous birding destinations in India.

Birding in this area was fast and furious and there was plenty to excite even seasoned Orient birders like yours truly. Instead of a day to day account of events, I will be adopting the site by site account of key areas around the Reserve and notable sightings along these areas.

Ramnagar Township & Environs

The gateway into Corbett Tiger Reserve, Ramnager is distinctive not just because of the sky-blue dam (barrage) that greets visitors upon their arrival from Pangot but also because majority of the township is “coated” in accommodation options of all types, from dilapidated “hotels” to opulent resorts in quaint surroundings like Tiger Camp, it represents a notable change to what birders would have observed on a traditional N Indian circuit thus far.



The distinctive Ramnagar Barrage

Of greater interest to birding visitors is the distinctive landmark that is the Kosi River. Running adjacent to the bustling streets of Ramnager, it is all the more surprising that birdlife still thrives along its banks and one of its biggest attractions is the small number of wintering Ibisbills that call this river home for up to 6 months every year.

Beginning with an obligatory noon stopover at the Barrage itself after a moderate 3-4 hour drive down from Pangot, the bird list was off to a flying start as a multitude of species were observed in just half an hour. First to go was a large flock of over 150 Ruddy Shelducks roosting on a gravel island, with numerous River Lapwings on the flanks. A cursory scan of the opposite end of the barrage immediately yielded a stunning Wallcreeper foraging on the walls of the barrage itself, oblivious to the blaring horns and commotion of both vehicular and civilian traffic close by! The first of many White-browed Wagtails was picked up here as well, an abundant subcontinent endemic. At this juncture, multiple dark silhouettes over the river led me to turn my head skywards and promptly caused my heart to skip several beats as a squadron of vultures performed superbly thermalling low over the river. At the head of the pack was an awe-inspiring adult Cinereous Vulture, with its distinct wedge-shaped tail, uniformly dark profile and large size dwarfing all its smaller cousins. In close formation were its “wingman”- 3 Eurasian Griffons which stayed in close proximity and followed their leader wherever the wind took him; their white wing lining and tawny brown underparts distinctive in light of the scores of Himalayan Griffons observed in the days gone by. Last but not least a pair of White-rumped Vultures was doing their best to keep in formation. We would subsequently find out that these were likely resident here, as we passed a barren farmland plot enroute to Tiger Camp where a single massive teak tree was the scene for 2 large twig nests which each held 2 chicks in advanced stages of development; a poignant symbol of the plight of India’s vultures.

Following a full day within the park itself, we spent our second morning in this area focused on seeing the elusive Ibisbill. Having already checked the stretch of the Kosi River just outside Dhangari Gate the previous evening without success, Ganesh suggested we try another stretch of river closer to Tiger Camp. This stretch of river is reached by turning off the main road heading towards Dhangari Gate where a white signboard on the right



The section of the Kosi River where we finally saw Ibisbill!

side of the road reads “Ultimate Aerospace”. The river is reached after another kilometre or so along a rugged village track. After a gruelling 3 hour session in the mid-morning sun, which included Ganesh bravely shedding his shoes and crossing various gravel islands in search of these waders, it was through fortuitous use of the telescope that after scanning a section of the river closest to the settlement at least 3 times, it suddenly dawned on me that 2 “boulders” along an intersection were not actually boulders but 2 Ibisbills roosting in the mid-day heat. Euphoria! Ganesh gallantly came galloping back and flushed a 3rd bird on one of the adjacent islands, making for a grand total of 3 birds, the entire known wintering population for 2009, along this stretch of river. Unsurprisingly, we spent the next one hour photographing the birds of the trip. The breeding plumaged individual was morphologically distinctive, which was in sharp contrast to the 2nd bird which had a blackish red bill and only a small patch of black around the ears. The birds eventually tired of the constant attention and gradually became more active, constantly head-bobbing and making small subtle movements, obviously more wary of the numerous Eurasian Sparrowhawks thermalling over us than of us photographing them. Other notable sightings along this section of river included the only Red-headed Vulture of the trip, seen soaring low over the same stretch of river.

With Ibisbill in the bag, we promptly headed to Kumeria Forest that same afternoon for one of other big specialities in the area. Directions are scarce as the roost site has no distinctive landmarks. The small settlement of Kumeria is about an additional 30 minutes from the Dhangari Gate turnoff and the roost site is basically along a dead-end road which ends along a quiet section of the Kosi River. Within 5 minutes of getting out of the car as per Ganesh’s instruction, we promptly flushed the resident Tawny Fish-Owl from a roadside teak tree, where it stood glaring back at us from a more obscure perch before we eventually left him in peace as darkness set in. Some movement in the roadside brambles nearby got our pulses racing but a female Rufous-bellied Niltava and 3 White-throated Fantails was all we had to show for our effort. A flock of 4-5 Black-chinned Babblers and a single Bluethroat represented some of the other species present in this area.



The local Tawny Fish-Owl at Kumeria Forest

A final morning session of birding was focused on nailing a local speciality which at times can be rather elusive. The Himalayan Flameback is readily seen along the roadside forest between Tiger Camp and Dhangari Gate but it would take almost 2 hours before excellent views of a pair in the sal forests near the gate itself were finally obtained. The diagnostic black hindneck can be difficult to see but is the best way to separate it from the more common Greater Flameback, which has a white hindneck. In addition to the 2 forementioned species, this stretch of road was clearly “Woodpecker Point” with Indian Pygmy Woodpecker, Grey-capped Woodpecker, Greater and Lesser Yellownapes all being observed. There were also some diverse mixed species flocks here which the woodpeckers readily associated with. These included various species like Long-tailed & Scarlet Minivets, Chestnut-bellied & Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, Maroon Orioles & Green Magpies as well as Yellow-bellied Fantails to name a few.

To top it all off, a return to Ramnager Barrage prior to our departure from the area allowed views of a large flock of 30+ Streak-throated Swallows, an oft-overlooked subcontinent endemic.

Corbett Tiger Reserve

Entrance @ Dhangari Gate: 450 INR per Pax

Arguably the centrepiece of ecotourism in this part of India, the impressive Corbett Tiger Reserve protects 1288 square kilometres of habitat that supports everything from tigers to cobras, wren-babblers to elephants. Walking is not permitted anywhere in the park,

making for some tricky birding overall. Thankfully, we hooked up with a jeep driver from Tigerland Safaris and a friend of Ganesh. He was familiar with where the key birds in the park were likely to be found and as we had the jeep to ourselves we were able to stop whenever it was warranted, a decisive advantage here.

On the first day, we entered through Dhangari Gate and proceeded along a roundabout safari headed in the general direction of Dhikala. Directions unfortunately are non-existent as road signs were few and the jeep drivers appear to know the maze of routes by heart. Nevertheless, we followed the Ramdanga River for the most part, which eventually empties into the massive Ramdanga Reservoir just adjacent to Dhikala Tourist Hub. Due to the lower elevations and variety of habitats explored, bird diversity was high and target species began to fall pretty rapidly. First to go was the globally threatened Pallas's Fish-Eagle, observed perched near a known nest site along the Ramdanga River. The nest itself, a disproportionately massive structure of messy sticks, has apparently been reused for 5 years now, with the birds adding additional layers every year! Kalij Pheasants were also moderately common in the lantana dominated riverine scrub here. Birds were usually seen in pairs and were for the most part foraging within the thickets themselves. A short detour to a dry, gravelly riverbed bordering some secondary forest enroute revealed up to 5 roosting Pin-tailed Pigeons roosting in a low tree in the late afternoon. This species appears to be generally scarce across much of the Orient with India seemingly being the best place to connect with it.

Travelling through the Sal Forest mixed flocks were regularly encountered and here they took on a more tropical feel with nuclear species like Greater Racket-tailed Drongos & Black-crested Bulbuls contributing greatly to the general din. Other odds and ends seen on our first afternoon in the forest included 2 male Fulvous-breasted Woodpeckers, multiple Ashy Bulbuls and White-bellied Erpornis (Yuhinas), Maroon Orioles & Bronzed Drongos to name a few.

Eventually, we arrived in Dhikala tourist hub about an hour before sunset to be greeted by a layer of low mist shrouding most of Ramdanga Reservoir, a sign of things to come. The telescope was set up and after a few tense minutes the long awaited Black Stork finally materialised, a virtual certainty at this site but difficult to see elsewhere. Further scanning produced flotillas of distant ducks, 2 Great Thick-Knees, 3 River Terns, a



Ramdanga Reservoir through the clearing fog

single Osprey and an unidentified harrier as well as some of the more usual waterfowl which included Little & Great Cormorants and various wader species.

Awakening at dawn the next day, I was dismayed to find a thick layer of dense fog had descended on the entire region, not particularly surprising after what had been a very cold night. It seemed that I had once again been defeated by circumstances beyond my control, with the visibility crushing any thoughts of searching for Hodgson's Bushchats in the surrounding reedbeds. Ganesh, ever the optimist, suggested that I mount an elephant and try for Tiger instead, the only thing I wanted to see more than a globally threatened Bushchat! After an hour of waiting around and decision-making with no sign of improvement in weather, I relented and paid the fee and boarded an elephant for only the 3rd time in more than a decade.

Dhikala Elephant Ride: 250 INR per Pax

The Ride was predictably uneventful, with the fog limiting visibility to less than 10 metres in open areas. We saw plenty of signs of Tiger, although yet again no sign of the beast itself. Birdlife was poorly represented during the 2 hour or so ride with Yellow-eyed Babblers, Large Cuckooshrike and Common Stonechats some of the few species readily identifiable from the hairy, constantly moving back of an Asian Elephant!

Returning to Dhikala at 9am in the morning, the weather was still as bad as it was 3 hours ago. With little to go on, I decided to bird within the hub itself. For a casual birder, the hub itself was surprisingly rich in birds in spite of the adverse conditions. Within a short time, numerous species were observed around the grounds including numerous Red Junglefowls, Himalayan & Alexandrine Parakeets, both White-tailed & Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches, a Black-hooded Oriole, Indian Pygmy Woodpecker & a delightful Collared Falconet to name a few. The area around the reservoir now had up to 15 Great Thick-Knees vocalising actively along with greater numbers of River Terns, Black & Woolly-necked Storks and Oriental Darters.

After what seemed like an eternity, the first rays of sunlight peeked through the veil and we promptly started up the jeep. Apparently the birds had been waiting a long time for this as well because within 500m of the Dhikala Gate we made a stop to watch a legion of raptors take to the air. The airspace over Dhikala simultaneously became rather crowded with up to 4 Lesser Fish-Eagles, at least 2 Pallas's Fish-Eagles, 5 Eurasian Griffons & a single Cinereous Vulture all observed in unison thermalling low over the landscape. The latter two species arguably the same ones we saw over Ramnagar yesterday.

Our focus for the rest of the day was the stretch of road known as Sambhar Road which connects the Dhikala Tourist Hub with the nearby ranger station of Khinanauli. A stop at an old Ficus tree on the edge of the ranger settlement was successful in locating a single roosting Brown Fish-Owl, which is a regular along these parts. We made frequent detours into extensive areas of reedbeds just off Sambhar Road, but the heat was clearly having an effect on the birdlife and there were few birds about, with virtually every bird perched at the tips of the reeds being the ubiquitous Common Stonechat. It was not all gloomy though, one particular clearing which featured a grove of inundated dead trees had a

single Great Slaty Woodpecker in attendance. At another clearing, we were afforded some consolation with excellent views of a Brown Crake standing motionless along a small streamlet and scanning the airspace over the clearing finally yielded 2 Indian White-rumped Spinetails amongst dozens of Plain Martins.

Eventually, it was time to return to Ramnagar. The drive back towards Dhanghari Gate was largely uneventful and afforded plenty of time to reflect on the disappointment of dipping yet another globally threatened species along this circuit. Mixed flocks in the sal forest were still very much in evidence and 1 flock in particular contained a single Bar-tailed Treecreeper, an unusual find for a species more readily encountered in much higher elevations.

Jhirna Gate

Included here for completeness, the dry teak forest and cultivation in the vicinity of the gate itself is visited by many birders but from personal opinion there wasn't anything particularly worthy of mention during our time here. One of Jhirna's specialities according to local guides is the comparative ease with which one can see hornbills in this area. We spent one morning in this area and true to form; one of the few highlights of the morning was our best views of a male Indian Grey Hornbill throughout the whole tour. We would see several others but nothing like this one of a male perched at the top of a Ficus tree in the centre of the village here against the backdrop of the rising Sun.

The site is about an hour's drive from Ramnagar and there was not much else to recommend it by. Birdlife around the village was dominated by Brahminy Starlings and smaller numbers of Asian Pied Starlings. Moving further away from the village and into the roadside forest yielded species characteristic of such environments such as Plum-headed Parakeets, Small Minivets, Golden-fronted & Orange-bellied Leafbirds to name a few.

Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve

Having spent the better part of 1.5 weeks in the cool environs of the foothills and mountains of the Western Himalayas, it was time for a change of scenery and after a 7 hour drive back to Delhi from Ramnagar and another 7 hours spent in an overnight train, we finally entered the state of Rajasthan and the Sawai Madhopur Train Station, the gateway to the famous Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve.

Situated within a day's drive of 2 of India's major cities, namely Delhi and Jaipur, we would soon learn that this is the favoured weekend getaways of choice for the city folk in this region. Arriving on the long weekend of India's Republic Day, the area would soon be overwhelmed by buses of school children and car loads of families, which ultimately led to scuffles and verbal abuse all round due to the shortage of authorised transport to enter the reserve itself!

Thankfully, birding was extremely straightforward here as Ganesh put us in touch with Sammi, a friend of his and a jeep driver familiar with the birding stakeouts within the area. We managed to see all the target species within a single morning and spent the next

1.5 days trying to see a tiger. Unsurprisingly, with the volume of people and vehicles in the park, the big cats decidedly kept a low profile and for the most part, most of the tourists we met failed to see anything at all, although expectedly the odd truck or two did come up with sightings.

Like any proper tiger reserve, walking is a strict no-no within the park grounds and all transport is restricted to authorised park jeeps and trucks. However, as with anywhere in India, there is always an unwritten exception within the mountain of rules. In this case, that exception appears to be the road to Ranthambhore Fort. This road, while technically within the boundaries of the reserve, is usually open to traffic and there was even a constant stream of humans walking to and from the landmark itself. Elsewhere around the park, as we were focused on looking for tigers, we had opted to go on the public trucks as there didn't seem to be much of a relationship between our mode of transport and sighting successes. Birding was thus generally difficult in such an environment but the frequent stops at water holes meant that some birding could be squeezed in. Outside the park, a notable area of birding was the large area of semi-arid grassland not far up the road from the Ranthambhore Safari Lodge.

Ranthambhore Fort Road

This road was the pinnacle of birding in Ranthambhore. There was virtually no other site on this tour where we cleaned out as quickly and thoroughly as this one. The first area of the road is characterised by steep-sided granite cliffs that rise sharply on both sides. This area is a known breeding site of the Long-billed Vulture, arguably the most endangered Oriental vulture in the world. Arriving here shortly after 7am in the morning, we were greeted by



A section of Ranthambhore Fort

the sight of not 4, not 2, but just a single nest with an adult seated on it. It was undoubtedly one of the most thought-provoking images of the tour. On the one hand, as a birder I was delighted to have finally completed all the vultures of the orient, yet as a zoologist, it is hard to not empathise with the plight of the very species you watch. Even Sammi, an ordinary jeep driver, was quick to point out that when he first started taking birders around; there were dozens of nests on these cliffs. By 2009, there was just 1! It is hard to comprehend what must go through the minds of this couple, when even their survival into 2010 isn't guaranteed. Definitely food for thought... When we came back later at 10am in the morning, the spouse had returned and he was perched majestically along a crack in the cliff line before taking off shortly thereafter in search of food.

However, Ganesh wasn't quite done with the site early that morning. As I was taking in the vulture, he was quick to shout, "Sir, there is an Eagle-Owl on the rocks!" He, of all people, felt very bad when we dipped the Rock Eagle-Owl in NW India just a month ago, and now he promptly made amends by producing a stunning specimen perched not far from the vulture nest in the early morning. What an unexpected bonus! The habitat looked right but this was a species I had all but given up on after NW India 08. The paradoxes of birding!

Fired up by this success, we made a brief, albeit technically illegal stop along the dry riverbed right after the first archway. The grove of trees here is a known roost site for Dusky Eagle-Owl, but we failed to connect with it here. The subsequent road from here to the fort itself is a regular site for Painted Spurfowl, and we finally hit the jackpot on one of our circuits of this region where we had excellent views of a pair feeding on a rice pile in a roadside bramble bush which some pilgrim had the presence of mind to place there! The birds were joined by a covey of Grey Francolins and were completely oblivious to our presence, totally absorbed by the prospect of "free manna".

The fort itself had little of note bird-wise, and was structurally nowhere as impressive as the Amber Fort in Jaipur or some of the others I had visited in the past. Brown Rock-Chats, always associated with ruins and the like, were omnipresent and very tame here. Other species encountered included a shimmering Purple Sunbird & numerous Hume's Leaf-warblers.

The Roadside Desert at Ranthambhore

This was another very productive detour, even though we only started exploring it in the mid-morning heat. The birdlife in this comparative small section of "desert" was vastly different from anywhere else on this circuit and reminiscent of the birds we observed in NW India. The cream of the crop was a personal favourite- Painted Sandgrouse. Up to 10 of these beautiful birds were



flushed at various points in the area. They had a tendency to crouch low in the vicinity of thickets and acacia trees, and only took off at the last possible moment, allowing for great and close views if you knew where they were in advance.

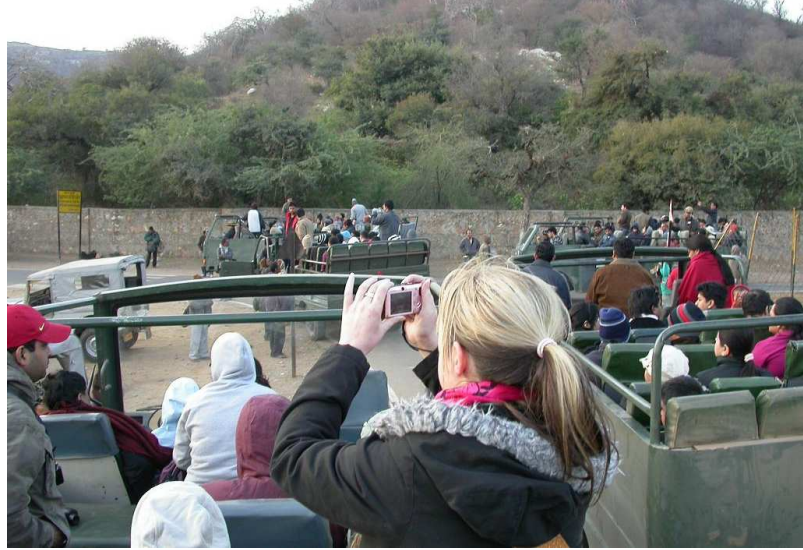
The birdlife here consisted of desert archetypes, with species like Isabelline & Desert Wheatears, Rufous-fronted Prinia, Southern Grey Shrike, Bay-backed Shrike, Indian

Bushlark & Tawny Pipit all recorded in a mere 30 minutes of brief exploration before the increasing surface temperatures prompted us to beat a retreat for cooler confines.

Ranthambhore Safaris

Most safaris, as one would have guessed, are geared towards the megafauna in the park.

The local guides readily stop to point out mammals and where possible, snakes if they are present at regular outcrops along the assigned routes. Safaris here, as mentioned by others, have a significant downtime at the beginning because drivers have to get down shortly after entry and



A small portion of the Republic Day crowds vying to be first vehicle into the Park!

participate in a lottery-style roll to determine the routes they will take for that period. Some argue that Tiger is easier along some than others, but during our time Tigers were popping up along routes traditionally not associated with them, probably due to an increase in vehicular and human traffic along well-used routes.

For a birder, like most dry forest habitats diversity and density are rather low. Even if we had our own jeep I could not see myself stopping frequently as vocalisations were erratic and activity was minimal from personal observation, even on morning safaris. The only real chance to bird an area came when the vehicles made pre-determined stops at water holes and lakes, usually in the hope that Tiger would come out for a drink or be



One of the many dams/waterholes at Ranthambhore TR

stalking the herbivores clustered around these water bodies and more often than not their prey items will give away their positions, allowing the humans to join in the frenzy! Unfortunately, none of that happened during our time, but expectedly the water bodies

were a magnet for birds as well, albeit they were virtually all widespread and common species that were of little interest to me.

A brief list of the avifauna encountered at these lakes is included below for reference. It is by no means exhaustive however.

Ducks

Ruddy Shelduck
Common Teal
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail

Waders

Bronze-winged Jacana
Temminck's Stint
Little Ringed Plover
Spotted Redshank

Black-tailed Godwit
Woolly-necked Stork
Black-headed Ibis

During the various circuits around the safari, various woodland species were also observed including roosting Indian Scops-Owls, Black-rumped Flamebacks, White-browed Fantails, Plum-headed Parakeets & White-bellied Drongos to name a few.

On the Road from Ranthambhore to Bund Baretha:

The road from Ranthambhore to the town of Bharatpur was surprisingly good for birding and we made numerous stops along the way before eventually arriving at Bund Baretha itself at noon. Two notable landmarks on the way were a lengthy bridge over a wide sandy river not far out from Ranthambhore and further along a large area of sandstone cliffs along the side of the road.

Personally the best bird of the journey was a group of 9 Jungle Bush-Quails observed sunning themselves under a shrub along the aforementioned area of cliffs. Our driver, CB was familiar with the route and had mentioned to keep a lookout for them as they were regular in this area, particularly early in the morning. Within 5 minutes of his statement the car came to a screeching halt as several blobs on a sand dune were not boulders but a family group of these subcontinent endemics. This was also the only area on the whole tour where we observed White-eared Bulbuls and 4 Ashy-crowned Sparrow-larks were also present.

There were numerous farming communities along the way and as with all agricultural areas in India you would be well-advised to spend some time looking through them all. Yellow-wattled Lapwings were common but it took some time to eventually locate 10 Indian Coursers foraging in some dry stubble. Yellow-eyed Babblers were encountered again in amongst the mustard fields while 2 Temminck's Stints were observed at close range in a roadside puddle.

The aforementioned sandy river held the usual trio of River Terns, River Lapwings & Great Thick-Knees and a large swallow flock over the bridge allowed much better looks at Streak-throated Swallows amongst hordes of Plain Martins and 2 Dusky Crag-Martins. Bund Baretha:

Arriving there in the heat of the day we wasted little time starting our exploration of the area. We started out at a small riverine patch of woodland that was fed by an outlet pipe from the reservoir itself adjacent to the dam itself. This area was designed as a park but had clearly seen better days and the whole area was a mini-marsh in itself, situated right

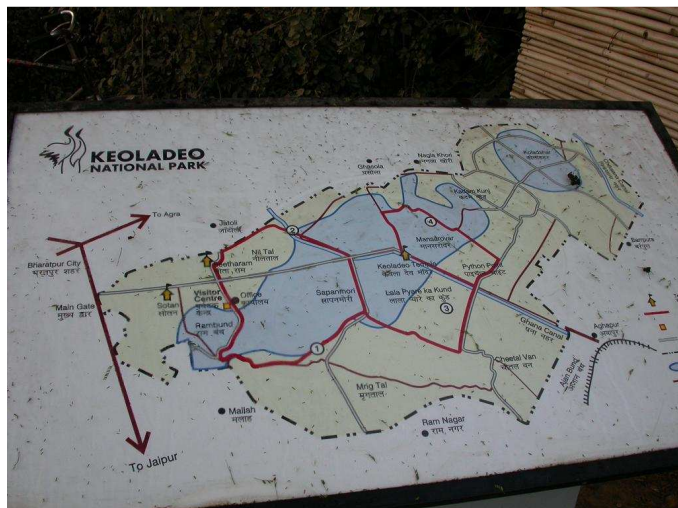
next to a water hyacinth infested pond. The area was supposedly good for thrushes but arriving as we did at noon there was little activity even in the shade. A single Blyth's Reed-warbler was active along the reedy margins of the pond, while in the overgrown park 3 Sykes's Warblers were foraging along the muddy margins of a puddle while small numbers of Grey-headed and Red-breasted Flycatchers did their best to keep the mosquito numbers in check!

Due to the glare of the mid-day Sun preventing us from scoping waterbirds on this end of the reservoir, we proceeded along the western end of the dam, entering a small village located not far from the reservoir. Here we abandoned our car and proceeded to walk towards the reservoir on foot. As the afternoon wore on, things started to get interesting. Preliminary scans of the reservoir picked out 2 pairs of the much-desired Red-crested Pochard, the males with their fiery "hairdo" blazing in the afternoon Sun. Suddenly without warning a large grey bird appeared to flush from a bramble thicket and perched briefly on a bare tree by the water's edge. Ganesh was on to it in a flash and called a female Tickell's Thrush. I was hugely relieved to get onto it within short notice because it was subsequently flushed by one of the abundant Red-vented Bulbuls in the area and promptly disappeared. Strangely enough, this was our only encounter with this supposedly common subcontinent endemic.

Moving further along, a distinctive Rosy Pipit feeding at the edge of a water-filled pothole in the middle of the trail was a very welcome find. Bluethroats were abundant along the margins of the reservoir and eventually after much manoeuvring Comb Ducks, albeit without combs were showing nicely through the scope. Little would I know that I would be kicking them over in Keoladeo Ghana NP. Unfortunately, due to the excellent monsoon over the past months, sandy islands and the associated terns and skimmers were virtually non-existent, an ominous sign in light of things to come. Ducks were extremely well-represented here however. In addition to the two mentioned above, Common Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Spot-billed Duck, Tufted Duck and Cotton Pygmy-Geese were all recorded from the area. New entries into the trip list from the surrounding scrub included Yellow-crowned Woodpeckers & Crested Larks.

Keoladeo Ghana National Park

The former pride and joy of the N Indian circuit, this world heritage site cemented its reputation as one of Asia's finest birding destinations with assertions of diversity ("100 species by lunch!") and density ("10,000 birds in 1 pond!"). Sadly, years of drought and mismanagement of the local catchment has left the reserve a shadow of its former self, neglected to the extent that the threat of removal from the



Keoladeo Ghana NP in a nutshell!

UNESCO World Heritage List is a distinct possibility.

2009 was the exception though. After almost 7 years of poor rainfall the floodgates open & an unprecedented monsoon followed. The runoff turned parched ponds into verdant marshes, seemingly dead acacia trees sprouted new leaves and the birds came flocking back in the thousands. The tourist came back in droves, and not wanting to be left out on the action, joined in the fray.

There is so much going on here in a good year that it's hard to pin down the action to specific areas. To simplify things, I have decided to split this portion of the report into sectors, attaching interesting sightings to each of them. To assist in orientation, Keoladeo Ghana NP is located on the southern entry road into the industrial city of Bharatpur. The main entrance gate into the park is located at the western end of the park. Here visitors pay a fixed entrance fee to enter the park. Bicycle and rickshaw hiring also takes place here. As a useful aside, you can hire rickshaws to enter the city itself if you wish to take in the sights of an industrial heartland at a slow and relaxed pace! The central paved road in the park travels west to east for about 6 kilometres from the main entry point to a temple cum picnic area at the centre of the 29km² park.

Starting from the main entrance gate, after travelling through a buffer zone of about 1km in length, one will find himself at another checkpoint designed to prevent vehicular entry but passable to bicycles, rickshaws and people. Here, there is the option to take a left or right turn. The left turn takes you to the nursery area, a damp wooded area traditionally known for its thrushes and assorted woodland species. A right turn takes you along the southern park trail which skirts the southern boundaries of the main marshes before looping back to the picnic area itself.

For the more intrepid, heading further east from the picnic area eventually brings you to the semi-arid, dry woodlands which characterise the eastern boundary of the park. Here, there are no marshes to be seen and most of the area is covered in dense grassland with scattered trees. There is a ranger station to be found here, a good place to catch your breath and drink some homemade tea. The area is definitely more readily accessible by bicycle, as it is a fair walk to get to this part of the park.

Outside the park, it is definitely worthwhile to spend some time in the dry stubble and scrub adjacent to the park's northern boundary. Depending on your desires, a quick trip to the canal in the centre of Bharatpur is also advised for reasons outlined below.

As mentioned earlier, I am not sure how the local guides are allocated but we were pre-booked with Mr Randhir Singh, an experienced and very knowledgeable guide with a passion for the local birdlife.

The sector-based bird list amassed after 2 full days in the park is outlined below:

Entry into Keoladeo Ghana NP: 200 INR per Pax

Bike Hire: 25 INR Each Per Day

Rickshaw to Bharatpur City Canal: 60 INR each

A. Bharatpur City

Greater Painted-snipe: Probably the easiest place to see this elusive species in India, 4 males were observed huddled together (presumably for warmth!) on a mat of water hyacinth in a filthy canal at the centre of the city.

A small selection of waders was also observed here including Ruff, Marsh, Green, Wood & Common Sandpipers.

B. Wooded Carpark Directly Opposite Main Entrance Gate

Brown Hawk-owl: A known roost site for this species, a quick detour at dawn was all that was needed at this stakeout.

C. Nursery Area

Indian Jungle Nightjar (*C.indicus*): 3 observed roosting in a young acacia in this general area.

Indian Grey Hornbill: Locally common within the park with 2 pairs seen well in the general area.

Brown-headed Barbet & Yellow-crowned Woodpecker: 1 of each observed in this area.

Tree Pipit: 2 individuals foraging in the damp environs of this area

Orange-headed Thrush: 1 observed foraging amongst a damp compost pile in the early morning.

D. Central Ponds (including Southern Trail)

Dalmatian Pelican: 3 observed on the first day and 1 on the second day at a pond adjacent to the central temple.

Oriental Darter: Significant numbers here suggestive of a major seasonal breeding site, up to 250 birds seen amongst the acacias dotting the marshland.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: Good numbers here but generally found only along the boundaries of the active stork colonies

Black Bittern: 1 in a pondside tangle near the park's centre. Likely holding territory as Randhir knew exactly where to look!

Asian Openbill: Widespread but certainly not the most numerous stork here!

Painted Stork: Thanks to excellent rains, hundreds observed including a bumper crop of juveniles in advanced stages of development. Randhir mentioned that 1000 pairs of these birds bred in the park in 2009. Considering the park is only 29km² that is some astoundingly high avian density figures we are toying with!

Woolly-necked Stork: 1 observed.

Black-headed Ibis: Another breeder benefitting from the rains, hundreds observed as well with numerous juveniles seen.

Glossy Ibis: Several flocks numbering 6-8 individuals observed.

Eurasian Spoonbill: Several small flocks of up to 3 individuals observed

Bar-headed Geese: 2 flooded fields in the park's centre held a total of 300 birds combined.

Greylag Geese: Up to 300 observed in a single pond near the park's centre.

Ruddy Shelduck: Up to 100 counted associating with the geese flocks. Other smaller flocks observed throughout the park.

Comb Duck: Locally abundant with literally dozens in every pond we came across.

Common Teal, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler: The three most dominant *Anas* here, there were so many of them that some ponds simply shimmered with various shades of colour as scores of these dabbling ducks foraged in tight flocks. When a raptor swooped low over the flocks, the entire pond would erupt in a blur of wings and loud splashes. A truly breath-taking sight. Randhir speculated that some of the flocks contained in excess of 5000 birds, and seeing them first hand, I was inclined to agree!

Garganey; Gadwall: Surprisingly unobtrusive and few in number. Possibly overlooked; numerous small flotillas of 10-12 birds observed.

Ferruginous Duck: One of the more desirable duck species within the park, a well-vegetated pond next to the temple concealed 20-30 birds which gradually flushed as we walked along the perimeter. Likely more hidden within.

Spot-billed Duck: We termed this species the anti-social residents because the flocks we observed were often located well away from the migrant species!

Indian Spotted Eagle: 2 adults observed thermalling over the park

Greater Spotted Eagle: 2 adults observed foraging on the ground, presumably the carcass of dead chicks, and another 2 distinctly marked juveniles thermalling over the park.

Eastern Imperial Eagle: One of my personal highlights within a park, a handsome adult was observed perched on a dead acacia overlooking a large pond viewable from the lookout tower in the centre of the park for over 2 hours.

White-eyed Buzzard: 1 juvenile observed perched on a stump 3km down the main road.

Long-legged Buzzard; Egyptian Vulture: 1 each observed briefly low over the ponds enroute to the park's central area.

Common Crane: 5 birds (4 adults and 1 juvenile) observed foraging in one of the few dry grass fields near the temple. Thanks to the heat waves and my post-lunch hallucinations, I envisioned one of them as a Siberian Crane!

Sarus Crane: 2 pairs of these majestic birds observed in the various ponds around the park's centre.

Bronze-winged & Pheasant-tailed Jacana: Both species were common in ponds infested with water hyacinth. Absent from the deeper and/or less vegetated ponds.

White-tailed Lapwing: Surprisingly, only one noted during our time in the park.

Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon: Locally common with flocks of 10-15 individuals often observed perching in the crowns of the acacia trees bordering the ponds.

Common Hawk-Cuckoo: A long awaited lifer and a site highlight. 2 birds observed. A vocal adult was taped in along a dry woodland section of the southern trail and seen well. Another sub-adult was encountered along one of the trails branching out from the central temple. Vocal during our time here with at least another 2 heard.

Dusky Eagle-Owl: 1 nesting pair seen very well in a large tree in the centre of a pond 4km down the main road from the entrance gate represented one of the primary targets within the park.

Indian Scops-owl: Local birds displayed an inclination to roosting at the base of mature palm fronds. Several pairs observed along the palms bordering the main road.

Large-tailed Nightjar: 1 observed roosting along the park's southern trail

Black-rumped Flameback: Several males in flight over the wetlands.

E: Semi-Arid Eastern Park Sector

Black-necked Stork: 1 observed in flight over the eastern park boundary. Randhir mentioned that there is only 1 resident pair within the park boundary.

Indian Stone-Curlew: 1 briefly in flight over the park's eastern boundary.

Crested Lark: 2 in grasslands around the eastern end of the park

Ashy-crowned Finch-Lark: 4 flushed from an area of dry stubble on the park's eastern boundary

Tree Pipit: 1 showed very well perched on some telegraph wires near the ranger station.

Red Avadavat: A small flock of 10-12 seen in this area.



A small area of grassland exists within the park boundaries.

Chambal River

Arguably one of India's most pristine river systems, the experience of a river cruise here viewing some of India's most threatened riverine birds and mammals was meant to be the ideal way to finish an excellent tour. Instead, it turned out to be the final nail in my coffin of dips, with conditions beyond my control causing me to inexplicably dip Indian Skimmer here. Of all the dips on this tour, this was the hardest to swallow, not only because I desperately



The unpolluted and tranquil Chambal River

wanted to see this member of my Orient Top 20, but also because no one seemed to have ever dipped Indian Skimmer here before, until I came along. Specifically, I was told that due to the excellent monsoon season, a major HEP dam upstream from the cruise area had been gradually releasing water held in the reservoir to prevent the dam from overflowing. The end result was that the water level in the river was the highest in years and virtually all the sand islands were inundated. Where the Skimmers went to is anyone's guess, but if you were there during late January 2009, chances are if you were lucky you would see a couple at the jetty itself or in flight during the cruise. As it were, the jetty was fogged out for one hour in the morning, causing the cruise to be delayed, and we only had one shot anyway. Tough luck =S.

While I enjoyed the experience, the Chambal River Lodge did seem a tad overpriced. While opulent in itself and situated in lush surroundings, I built up a massive bill (by Indian standards) for a one night stay in spite of having paid for the room in advance. Nevertheless, I would still wholeheartedly recommend it as the staff and service there is praiseworthy and Mr Dalveer Singh, the resident bird guide not much older than me (he was just 24) was a treasure trove of information and highly passionate about the hobby. In spite of dipping the Skimmer, he virtually showed me everything else I needed that was present on the river that morning.

Chambal River Entrance Fee: 350 INR per Pax
Chambal River Lodge Dinner: 350 INR per Pax
Chambal River Lodge Breakfast: 200 INR per Pax

The jetty along the section of the Chambal River used for cruises is basically nothing more than a river bank half an hour by car from the lodge. The lodge runs 3 hour cruises once in the morning and again in the late afternoon with the time in between used to relax and explore the woodland and cultivation around the lodge. As mentioned we only had the luxury of a morning run as we had to embark on the long 5.5 hour drive back to Delhi on top of a requested stop at the Taj Mahal for 2 hours.

The area of the Chambal River I saw was one of a large, unpolluted river bordered by sandstone cliffs and semi-arid scrub. Once again, as landmarks and directions were non-existent an overall list covering interesting sightings during the cruise itself is provided for reference.

Woolly-necked Stork: 1 observed

Indian Black Ibis: 2 observed foraging along the river bank near the landing quay.

Tufted Duck: 1 male observed associating with Gadwalls on a sand bank opposite the landing quay.

Red-crested Pochard: A large flock of 45 observed actively diving for food near the landing quay.

Common Merganser: An unexpected bonus! 3 (2 males and 1 female) in flight over the river were taken as a good sign of the river's largely pristine state as these sensitive waterfowl are intolerant of polluted water bodies.

Long-legged Buzzard: 2 observed perched in riverside thorn scrub.

Bonelli's Eagle: After 2 whole weeks of scouring high and low for this elusive raptor, 1 female was observed seated on a messy stick nest located precariously on a small ledge 25m up a sandstone cliff.

Egyptian Vulture: 1 adult observed picking at the bones of dead cattle along the river bank near the landing quay.

Brown Crake: Brief views of 1 in an amazingly small cluster of river bank reeds 500m upstream from the landing quay. How this individual survived for years in this small cluster of vegetation on an otherwise barren river bank is anyone's guess!

River Lapwing: Common along the section of the Chambal River we cruised along.

Great Black-headed (Pallas's) Gull: 1 in flight over the river.

Black-bellied Tern: Without a doubt the most beautiful and elegant *Sterna* I have ever encountered in my life, this trip highlight was represented by 3 individuals seen along the

stretch of river near the landing quay. In the absence of any skimmers, these birds effectively made my day.

River Tern: Up to 3 counted during the morning cruise.

Greater Short-toed Lark: Common here with large flocks of 25-30 birds observed foraging along the various river banks lining this sector.

Sand Lark: A site target; 2 were eventually seen probing amongst piles of manure along a sandy river bank.

Wire-tailed Swallow: 1 of this elegant *Hirunda* was observed perched on one of the ferries moored at the landing quay.

Desert & Variable Wheatear: 1 of each observed during the duration of the cruise.



The endangered Gharial is undoubtedly one of the non-avian highlights at this site.

Conclusion

In my personal view, the North Indian circuit is still a firm favourite in the list of birding circuits to visit in your lifetime. The mosaic of habitat types not only brings with it a wealth of species for the first-timer birder, but it also offers more than adequate challenge for those who prefer to run down a targeted list as well. The jewel in this particular crown was a good year at Keoladeo Ghana, and at the end of the day, for all the dips I endured, I still consider myself blessed to have been offered a window into what the World Heritage Site used to look like. It is unfortunate that given the erratic nature of the monsoons and mismanagement of the authorities, it seems unlikely that current visitors to India will have any chance to see this site in all its glory. My personal recommendation is, if you know its blooming, make a trip there as soon as possible, you will not regret it!