

Bird-watching on Semakau Landfill with Wing Chong

(2 December 2007)



Bird-watching trip report

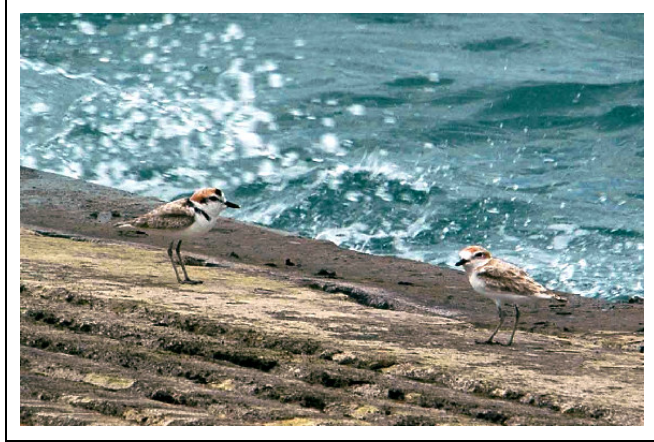
Text and photographs by Wing Chong (Trip Leader)

It was a sunny morning with clear sky as twelve of us set-off for Pulau Semakau on a launch from West Cost Pier. It was first time to the Island for most of the members. Few had very vague idea what Semakau Landfill while others fewer have no idea what Semakau Landfill is. So, at the start of the journey, just when the launch leaving the pier, I jokingly told them Semakau Landfill is just an island filled with garbage. "Don't expect to find any birds!". Well, that took the pressure off me, in case birds did not turn up for that morning.

Some members were quite interested about the location of Semakau Landfill in relation to its neighboring islands. I gave them some in-situ Geography and Economic lessons with my limited knowledge, pointing here and there, whilst on the launch. Before we could settle down to enjoy the ride, Semakau Landfill already appeared in front of us. So it was indeed 'not-so-far-away'.

A short briefing with a plan map help to give the members a better idea about the history of Pulau Sa Keng and Pulau Semakau and later the Semakau Landfill. Finally, members now had a better idea what Semakau Landfill is about.

Before we even start off our walk a pair of **Malaysian Plovers** were spotted right behind the Security House, on a sloppy concrete launch platform. They were quite aware of our presence, moving slowly towards the further side but stayed for scoping and some photo opportunities. A solo **Common Sandpiper** tried to confuse members who were new to bird-watching by appearing near the plovers. As usual **Eurasian Tree Sparrows** were plentiful around the office area.



Malaysian Plover

Photo ©Wing Chong

As we move on, shrill calls of small birds were audible but yet proved hard to spot. A pair of **Spotted Doves** took off from the short scrubs and perched on metal fence enabling an excellent sighting. Proceeding on, **Zitting Cisticolas** were heard 'zitting' here and there but very difficult to spot. **Paddyfield Pipit** sporadically does their wave-like bouncy flights while obviously annoyed at our intrusion to their quite home.

Our sharp-eyed member Christine, picked up a **Brown Shrike** that was quite a distance away. But viewing was possible through telescopes. (Thanks Marcel Finlay for sharing your excellent telescope with us!) Then, another sharp-eyed member, SK Phang, spotted a dark morph **Reef Egret** on the left side. It was well blended with the grayish granite stones, making up the slope and evening at the edge of water. This was a lifer bird to many members.

Things got a little more exciting when residence **Black Winged Kites** started to show up, soaring and circling low around the fields. Three of them graced our group where a couple perched together on a bare tree for scope viewing. A **Brahminy Kite** decided to rob our attention by approaching us from the sea and circling near us. The reddish brown body and the white front looked exceptionally handsome. Another wow spotting!

The large unused cell, partially filled with water, was unusually quiet with only a single **Marsh Sandpiper** and **Gray Heron**, on the far side of the water edge. Then, just before we shift our attention to the nearby shelter, someone spotted another black morph Reef Egret on the rocky shore. This one attempt to make itself look tall by stretching its neck to the limit and pointing almost straight up to the sky.

By now, at 10.30am, temperature had risen quite considerably. Even though it was windy at times, it was extremely hot. We rested at the shelter near the phase 2 pond to have a short break over snacks. We proceeded to the end of embankment to admire the beautiful sea at the extreme northwest corner of the island. The tide was low exposing the sea grasses. It gave us a very non-Singaporean feel. Someone said it was Sabah, some say Tioman, with others liken it to Mauritius.

We headed back to the woodland area of the old Semakau kampung. A mosquito-frenzy cause the group to rush through the woods, robbing them of any opportunity to spot any more birds at the Kampung. As the tide was low we were able to walk along the beach towards the north east of Semakau Island. **Collared Kingfisher**, **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters**, **Pacific Swallows** were spotted perching on trees. We also heard **Common Tailorbird** and **Rufous-tailed Tailorbird**.

Topping our trip, a **Great-billed Heron** was feeding nearby, wading in the shallow. He was very wary of our presence and move gracefully away from us to a safe distance to continue his feeding. This handsome fellow is absolutely gorgeous; two extended feathers juttied out behind his head. Some streaks were seen on its grayish back. It was huge!



Great-billed Heron

Photo ©Wing Chong

Our trip ended at 12.20pm. The launch that was supposed to be there at 12.45 pm was half an hour late. By the time we left West Coast Pier it was almost 2pm. While members were grateful to NSS for organizing the trip, I heard some oblivious voices saying, 'Wah...dam hungry man!' It had been a fruitful morning nonetheless.

Bird-list: (Roughly in sequence of sighting)

1. Malaysian Plover (1 Male & 1 Female behind Security House)
2. Common Sandpiper (7 at various locations)
3. Eurasian Tree Sparrow (many, near main office)
4. Spotted Dove (5)
5. Lesser Coucal (1)
6. Yellow-vented Bulbul (a few)
7. Barn Swallow (a few)
8. Pacific Swallow (many)
9. Gray Heron (3)
10. Zitting Cisticola (few but only had glimpse of 1 in flight)
11. Paddyfield Pipit (3)
12. Blue-tailed Bee-eater (5)
13. Brown Shrike (1)
14. Reef Egret (1, Dark Morph)
15. Black-winged Kite (3)
16. Brahminy Kite (1)
17. Collared Kingfisher (2)
18. Black Headed Munia (12)
19. Common Red-shank (1)
20. House Crow (3)
21. Marsh Sandpiper (1)
22. Olive-backed Sunbird (Heard)
23. Common Tailor-bird (Heard)
24. Rufous-tailed Tailor-bird (Heard)
25. Little Heron (2)
26. Great-billed Heron (1)
27. Common Myna (2, near main office)
28. Little egret (1, flew pass in front of office)

