

SUARA

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# ENGGANG



THE BULLETIN OF THE MALAYSIAN NATURE SOCIETY BIRD CONSERVATION COUNCIL



**Common Ringed Plover**



**Blyth's Pipit**

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## *MNS-Bird Conservation Council, Chairman's Letter - Tan Choo Eng*

**M**y apologies, especially to all contributors, for the incredibly long delay in publishing this issue of Suara Enggang. I thank them all for their patience and understanding. Despite much support and encouragement from fellow birders this prolonged delay was unavoidable.

As Chairman of the Bird Conservation Council, I have to “cover” all states and regions of Malaysia on birding matters, in addition to the commitment to our regional partners in our very large “Birdlife” family and also relevant government agencies. Sadly, I am unable to attend all branch bird and conservation functions due to work commitments, both private and MNS matters.

The help and assistance from my fellow Council members which includes all Branch Chairs, their committee members, staff and officers, heads of department and EXCO is much appreciated. The various “Bird Groups” under the MNS family have done an incredible job for bird conservation in the country.

We have another interesting issue of Suara Enggang, the sighting of a Great Frigatebird at Mantanani Island off the Sabah coast and the “Japonensis” Peregrine Falcon in Kuching, Sarawak. In West Malaysia, the presence on a Blyth's Pipit and a Common-ringed Plover sent many birders to Malim Nawar, Perak.

Life and death is part and parcel of nature, in this issue there is an article on “failed nesting” and a pictorial essay of a sad case of a Brahminy Kite falling dead off a tree. Recently established to West Malaysia, the Asian Openbill continues to maintain a permanent presence and there is an article of its interaction with our local Milky Stork.

In our International Section, an article on the threat faced by Curlews worldwide, which was defined as a tribe or genus that also includes the whimbrels and godwits. Our wetlands and mudflats play host to a number of these species, including the globally threatened Far Eastern Curlew and Asian Dowitcher and the rare to our country the Little Curlew. More articles can be accessed from the Birdlife International website.

We have a Birding Hotspot article from our neighbour, Singapore. Although nearly fully urbanised there are still surprises out in that small Island. Being at the southern terminus of the Asian continents, migratory birds may make that their last stop. The Birding Hotspot article on another island - Penang and Recent Sightings have been held over. There is a short article on backyard birding, which would be a good idea in reducing our carbon footprint.

### **Editors of Suara Enggang**

**Kanda Kumar, Vuthy Taing, Peggy Tan, Dr Abdulmaula Hamza, Choy Wai Mun, Hum Kim Choy, Ong Poh Sim, James Ooi, Tan Choo Eng.**

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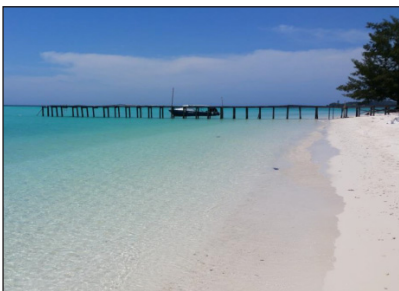
## Notes From The Field

### *A Great Frigatebird on Mantanani Island* - Chris Gibbins

I decided to have a long weekend on Mantanani Island, Sabah, where I hoped to be able to see and photograph a good number of Frigatebirds. I left KL on an evening flight and after an overnight stay in Kota Kinabalu and a transfer to Kota Belud early the next morning, found myself boarding the mid-day ferry bound for Mantanani. Great.

I had moved to Malaysia from the UK two months earlier, and so far had spent my birding time exploring areas close to my new home in Semenyih, Selangor. The birding was exciting for me and after a few weeks I was beginning to love my newly adopted Semenyih birding patch. Of course I also wanted to explore further afield, and one of the main birding attractions in Malaysia for me was the possibility of being able to see Frigatebirds regularly and build up a good collection of photographs of these impressive birds.

Frigatebirds are exceptionally rare in the UK, and sadly often turn up moribund (e.g. a Magnificent Frigatebird found far from the sea in Shropshire in 2008). However, problems of identification have confused matters somewhat. These problems are nicely exemplified by story of an immature bird picked up exhausted on the Island of Tiree off the west coast of Scotland in 1953. It was identified at the time as a Magnificent. It died and its skin was housed in the National Museum of Scotland, where it sat unquestioned for more than 50 years. As part of a review of older bird records, members of the British Birds Rarities Committee examined the skin and realised that in fact it was an Ascension Frigatebird (Walbridge et al., 2003). Other British Frigatebirds have eluded specific identification altogether (e.g. most recently a bird in NE Scotland seen during a seawatch). I was excitedly mulling over such identification issues as I sat on the ferry crossing over to Mantanani. Suddenly the boat slowed down and we were landing. The island looked idyllic and a Frigatebird circled high overhead. Wow.



View from pier @ homestay



Idyllic island - Mantanani



Great Frigatebird

I had three full days on Mantanani - hopefully this would be enough to achieve my goal. Thanks to Dave Bakewell I knew that frigates roosted on the small island of Linggisan, off the NW corner of the 'mainland' of Mantanani (Besar). I decided that for the first afternoon it was best to spend my time trying to get a sense of whether there were any predictable patterns to the movement of the birds. My homestay overlooked Linggisan and so I decided to base myself close to here for the rest of the day. I found a small wooden pier on the point a few hundred meters along the beach and sat on here for the rest of the afternoon, watching the movements of birds and trying to figure out how I might get some photos.

A few birds were drifting around far offshore and I managed just a small number of record shots. Nonetheless, it was a chance to practice separating Lesser and Christmas Island, and ageing them. As dusk approached I returned to the section of beach in front of the homestay and waited for birds to head to their roost. Some other guests from the homestay were gathering to enjoy the sunset and we stood and chatted about how lucky we were to be here. Around 6 pm birds started to stream over our heads, but by this point the light was bad and they came in very high. It was an impressive spectacle but this was not going to provide good photos. Also, rather than roosting on Linggisan, they headed over to the somewhat more distant Kecil Island. Perhaps it was going to be hard, and not at all like my experiences of Magnificent Frigatebird in the Neotropics which happily scavenge amongst fishermen.

The next morning (3 March 2017) I was waiting on the beach in front of the homestay just as the sun came up. It seemed like most birds had already left the roost, but a hundred or so were still wheeling over Kecil and every now and again a group would come my way. Suddenly there was a large group over me and I rattled off photographs of as many individuals as possible. With single birds I could identify, age and take photographs as they went over, but with groups I prioritised getting pictures of each one - assuming the photos were okay, I could sort out the identification and ageing of the birds later. As the flock came over me I moved from bird

to bird, photographing each one in turn, hardly pausing to take in their plumage details. One apparent adult male seemed all dark (see photo) it was in my camera's viewfinder for just a second or two – picture taken, I moved to the next bird. After the flock had passed I paused for breath and looked at the images on the screen on the back of my camera. This is always an exciting moment – are the images any good, or have I messed up? It turned out that I had reasonable images of all 10 or so birds, and that male did indeed seem to lack both white axillary spurs and any pale on the belly. Strange. But in the bright sunlight it was hard to be sure from the screen on my camera, so I made a mental note to check it later that evening, once the images were downloaded onto my computer.

My three days on the island passed very quickly. I spent many hours standing on the pier, as this proved to be about the best place to get images, especially in the late afternoon. I also had daily trips over to Kecil, where birds seemed to hang around all day. I asked a local family who had a boat to take me over, and they happily obliged. I had a couple of hours each day on Kecil, standing close to the radar station where the frigates congregated. Also, on the way back and forth between the Mantanani and Kecil we regularly chased around after Frigatebirds over the open water – the boatman took delight in 'hunting them down' and positioning us underneath groups of birds so that I could take photos. This tactic was a great success, and great fun.

By the time I came off the island I had photos of a few hundred individuals. Most were Lesser Frigatebirds, with approximately 10% being Christmas Island. While I saw numerous adult male Lesser Frigatebirds, I did not see a single adult male Christmas island – all were immatures or adult females. Occasional distractions from the frigates came in the form of an Eye-browed Thrush that hung around the trees close to the pier. I left the island very satisfied.

I arrived home and over the next day or two started properly processing my Frigatebird images, identifying and ageing all the birds. That dark bird still bugged me. It was a male – either a full adult or an older immature. It lacked the white axillary spurs of male Lesser and the white spurs and belly patch of Christmas Island. It did, however, have some subtle buffy-brown fringes to the axillaries. If it was an adult then these fringes would have to make it a Great, but I was cautious. My caution was because of my limited experience with frigates in SE Asia, their age-related and individual variation, and because it seemed unlikely that I would stumble on to the scarcest of Malaysia's three species on my first Frigatebird adventure. I sent a picture of the bird to Dave Bakewell, asking for his opinion on my 'candidate Great'. He came back with the view that it looked very good indeed, and suggested that I sent images to David James, the author of what remains the key paper on Frigatebird ID. I did so, and David came back promptly with a simple and clear message – yes, an adult male and a Great. Great indeed.

Great Frigate bird is a vagrant to Peninsula Malaysia, with just three records to date. On Borneo records are confined to Sabah, with none from Sarawak, Kalimantan or Brunei. E-bird lists and maps Great Frigatebird records totalling around 18 birds, some records involving multiple birds, but assessment of its true status is constrained by limited observer coverage.

#### Acknowledgments

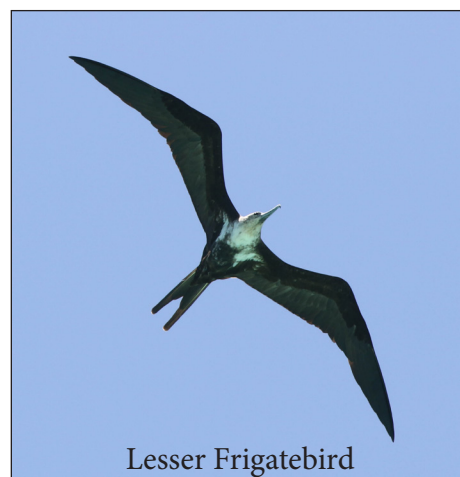
Many thanks to Dave Bakewell who suggested Mantanani, provided all the contacts necessary for me to plan the trip, and helped resolve the identification. Also my sincere thanks to David James for sharing his expert views on the bird.

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#### More images of my trip

Eye-browed Thrush



## *Chestnut-winged Babbler failed nest - Amar Singh*

Location: *Kledang-Sayong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia*

Habitat: *Trail in primary jungle*

Equipment: *Nikon D500 SLR with Tamron SP 150-600mm f/5-6.3 Di VC USD, handheld*

Date: *30th April 2017*

I was walking along a trail in primary jungle when this babbler hopped into the nest about 5 meters in front of me. I stopped and dropped to the ground, and the birds continued to build the nest despite being aware of my presence. I decided to remain there and watch. I did not go back for a tripod/video equipment as I felt it would disturb the birds. The nest was being built about 2.5 meters above the ground in a bamboo thicket. The birds were using a large dead leaf that had fallen and lodged on the bamboo. The leaf belonged to a Giant Macaranga tree. The nesting material they were using was predominantly dead bamboo leaves and occasional leaf skeletons/spines of leaves. Nesting material was often collected some distance from the nest site. Building was a fast activity and the frequency of visits was 2 per minute, with often one bird waiting for the other to clear the nest before going in. As far as I could ascertain there were only 2 birds involved in the nest building and the work was fairly equally shared. No calls were made while nest building. The nest was still at the early stages of development.

I was concerned with their choice of nesting site for two reasons. One it was on a fairly busy trail for walkers and the birds could easily be spotted when moving (the nest itself could not be easily spotted). More importantly their choice of nesting leaf was poor as I could see the nesting material falling out occasionally, even as the put more in. I expect the nest to fail.

I watched for ~15 minutes and then decided to leave so as to give the birds the space needed. Before leaving I attempted a short handheld video using a rock as support for the lens. Not easy as I was already lying on the ground, but I managed some nesting episodes (hard to focus, so not that clear; fortunately for tilt screens on the newer DSLRs). The video was taken when the nest was already looking like it would fail and the birds were becoming aware of this.

<https://youtu.be/0hBGQhp9TGg>

Update: I returned 1 week later and as expected the site is abandoned and this nest has failed. Looking for a new nest is quite a tall order in a wet jungle with extensive leaf litter.



© Amar-Singh HSS

Chestnut-winged Babbler © Amar Singh

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## *A Delightfully Sad Journey @ Taman Rimba Kiara - Roselyn Chuah*

Recalling my journey of sighting of the Brahminy kites - parents and then its young!



First saw in 2013 and then found nest. Saw one with its chicken prey.



Suspect a chick as parents returned regularly with one always nearby. Can hear them calling each other. Nest too high to see anything inside. Always a thrill to encounter them with their preening antics..





Parents often seen peering into nest. Then came one unforgettable day. One was foaming and hanging upside down for 15 minutes before being swept down to the ground by its mate. 20 minutes later I buried it.



Strange. On the very next day, after one of parent died, I saw for the first time the sub-adult. It brought wonderful feeling of HOPE! It played near its nest with lone parent nearby and then it vanished.



Finally spotted it flying over the park one day, but it never returned to its nest. Must have been raided by the Crested Goshawk. I am happy to see it flying and perching in the area, knowing that all is WELL!

## *Interference competition between Milky Stork and Asian Openbill - which is the top bird in the pecking order? - Chew, MY*

### **Background and birding details**

The 'pecking order', a term commonly used in corporate finance and social hierarchy, has a humble origin referring to the expression of dominance in farm chickens. I remember watching the neighbourhood ayam kampung (village chicken) from my childhood days fighting over the top bird position. The winning champions always strode around with upright stances and lustrous plumage; while the scrawny bottom chickens on the receiving end of daily abuses, warily scurried about with their heads low, showing the scruffy cranial patches often with too many missing feathers. Sometimes juvenile pet birds like guinea fowls, which were of lesser size than the commanding roosters, suffered the same fate if they ventured too close to the activity centre such as the feeding tray.

Intraspecific and interspecific territory fights with high speed aerial pursuits were occasionally witnessed among nectarivory birds after a few sips too many of the high-energy floral liquid. However, pecking it out for social stratification, I had not witnessed this again until the weekend, while birding at Kerian district of the state of Perak, Peninsular Malaysia on 21 January 2016, guided by a retired ranger of the Department of Wildlife and National Park (PERHILITAN), Mr. Hamzah Saad.

### **Observation anecdote**

The main adversaries involved in this pecking episode, although belonging to the same family (Ciconiidae), are so starkly different in status that, until a few years ago, it was inconceivable to sight both species together in the field in Peninsular Malaysia. The slightly bulkier Opponent One, the Milky Stork (*Mycteria cinerea*), is a rare and localised residence, while Opponent Two, the Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) was a vagrant that has only recently established breeding colonies in the peninsula (MNS-Bird Conservation Council 2010). The former, with a restricted range in the Sundaic region, is an Endangered species for Malaysia as well as globally, while the latter has a Least Concern IUCN Red List status (MNS Bird Conservation Council 2015).

The scene was at a communal roosting site atop an isolated, medium-sized, c. 15 m tall petai belalang (*Leucaena leucocephala*, family Leguminosae) tree among a belukar (scrubby bush) next to a patch of resting, dry paddy field. At around 09h30, a fair-sized flock of mixed adult and juvenile Asian Openbills arrived in low-flying, whirling batches after their morning feast of snails in the nearby waterlogged fields (Fig. 1). The birds noticeably chose to land on unoccupied branches (Fig. 2), with late arrivals spilling over onto adjacent petai belalang and oil palm trees (Fig. 3). When alighting, they continued to flap their wings until gaining secure footholds on the bouncing branch tips, and sometimes jostled a little with their neighbours in the process.





Originally from Central America, petai belalang is a common, fast-growing introduced species found abundantly in all the belukar fringing the paddy fields, village dwellings and a network of tarred and dirt roads. It has been recorded as one of the four species of nest tree utilised by Milky Stork in the Kuala Gula area (Ismail and Rahman 2016). This specific petai belalang tree with rather damaged and near barren top branches was observably the preferred roost. This was evidenced by the repeated use of the same roost tree for the third consecutive year since the first sighting of the birds in the vicinity (Hamzah, S. 'verbally'). From published and annotated records, various storks species, including Asian Openbill and Milky Stork, are known to require tall, dead trees higher than the surrounding vegetation and close to the foraging area (on average within 4 km) for roosting. Destruction of roosting trees could impact the birds' spatial distribution (Chevallier et al. 2010; Wetlands International n.d.).

When the particular petai belalang canopy was approaching full 'parking' capacity, the late-comers were seen to pick a fight with those already settled in (Fig. 4 A–D). Such fights were uncommon and seemingly happened only amongst adult birds near the top branches only. Two birds were videoed in a locked-beak fight up to 20 seconds (Fig. 5), with the late-comer ousting the early settler. Otherwise, most of these brief confrontations lasted only several seconds, and the birds were seen roosting in close proximity without displaying any form of aggression towards each other (Fig. 6).



Fig. 4A



Fig. 4B



Fig. 4C

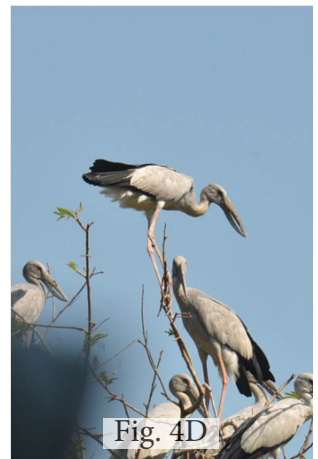


Fig. 4D



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

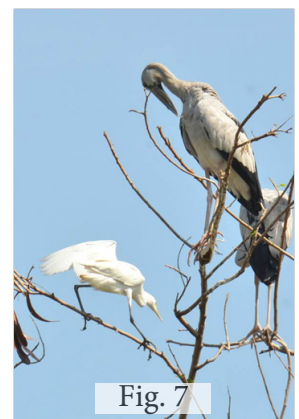


Fig. 7

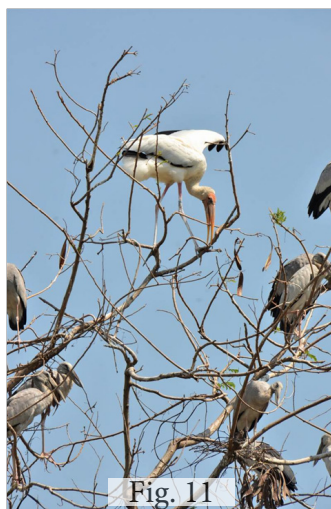
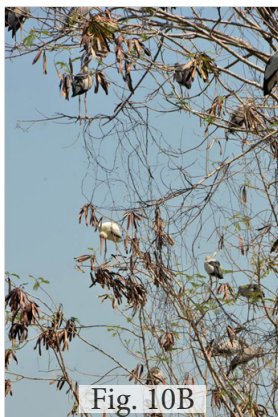
Asian Openbills are known to defend small territories on top of display and nest trees during the courtship, mating and nesting season. They would threaten and ward off rivals through open wings and outstretched necks but rarely involved in fights. Generally all species of storks try to keep other birds at a comfortable distance for much of the year, and would only accept the close proximity of another bird during the reproductive period (Hancock et al. 1992). The birds observed on the trip were wearing their non-breeding plumage, which might explain the absence of threat displays. A count of 124 Asian Openbills were recorded from the favourite roost tree after they had settled in towards noon, with an unestimated total from the neighbouring perches of which a clear view was obstructed by dense undergrowth from the observation point.

Interestingly, a lone Intermediate Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*, family Ardeidae) was not too intimidated to land on the same tree packed with Asian Openbills more than twice its size, nor the openbills seemed provoked (Fig. 7). Nonetheless, other species and individuals, e.g. Pond Herons (*Ardeola* sp., family Ardeidae) and Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*, family Ardeidae) only joined the roosting flock temporarily at the fringes (Fig. 8), except for the Milky Storks.



Two Milky Storks arrived about 11h00. They headed straight for the already occupied top branches, and instantly lunged in to frantically peck the contently roosting openbills even before they managed a secure footing. The frenzy continued until every openbill surrounding the Milky Storks moved out of their pecking range (Fig. 9), leaving two clear spaces immediately surrounding them. The rogue neighbours soon settled in, with the more aggressive, slightly larger, ringed Milky Stork on top of the tree crown, and the lesser Milky Stork lower down (Fig. 10 A–B). The ringed bird was a captive-bred, released individual of the PERHILITAN/ Zoo Negara/MNS captive breeding and reintroduction programme (Ismail et al. 2011); whereas the unringed bird was a wild-born (Hamzah, S. ‘verbally’).

Then both Milky Storks and Asian Openbills were mostly engaged in preening, in between relatively motionless roosting. There was an absence of vocalisation and only wing flaps could be heard throughout the entire observation period. The larger Milky Stork at the top, however, appeared slightly more restless and was preoccupied with breaking off the tips of its perch without a clear purpose (Fig. 11), presumably a manifestation of pre-nesting behaviour (Hamzah, S. ‘verbally’), although the scanty records of breeding months for Peninsular Malaysia is in August to December (Wells 1999), and the birds were in non-breeding plumage.





## Theory discussions

Milky Stork is recorded to be a gregarious feeder often associated with other wading birds including egrets, herons and other storks (Hancock et al. 1992). At this mixed communal roost within a paddy field, the larger-sized species was observed to attain a 'top bird position' in the pecking order. In Peninsular Malaysia, Milky Stork is reported to be a mangrove and coastal-mudflat specialist (Ismail and Rahman 2016; Li et al. 2006; Wells 1999). Amalgamated field observations between 1980s–2006 by Wetlands International (Li et al. 2006) annotated that Milky Storks were extremely wary of the presence of humans and would take flight when field survey teams approached at a distance of 100–200 m. Despite the initial aggressions between the two stork species, it is postulated that the large flock size of the openbills accorded a form of calming effect to the more sensitive Milky Storks for this observation to take place at close range at a disturbed habitat (Fig. 12).

Wandering individuals of rare species are known to join a mixed-species flock when they pass through unfamiliar areas. Mixed flocks are most frequent in the non-breeding season but may occur year round in tropical forests (Greenberg 2016). Such flocks often consist at least one nuclear species that are gregarious and conspicuous, in this case being the Asian Openbill. The greatest advantage of joining a flock is that birds can utilize the predator alarm system of other individuals. Interference competition among species in which they interact directly via aggression over access to the same roosting resource has been observed in this case. However, whether the Milky Stork exhibit heterospecific attraction behaviour towards the Asian Openbill, i.e. using the presence of individuals of another species as an indicator of the quality of a habitat patch in which to forage or breed, and whether the two species may form a novel ecological guild utilizing different niches in the same habitat, remains to be investigated.

## Acknowledgement

Gratitude goes to Ms. Lim Bing Yee and Mr. Mark Ng M. Y. of Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) Selangor Branch Bird Group and Wild Bird Club of Malaysia for their invaluable comments on the draft.

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*First record of “Japonensis” Peregrine Falcon in Kuching, Sarawak - Jannie Tan*

The image of the two together on the ledge ( Posted on raptor study group Malaysia FB page) has been confirmed by Dr Chaiyan as a Japonensis (top) and Calidus (bottom).

It's puzzling that they are still around as I guess by now they should be making their way back. They are no longer seen at their usual perch at the condo. We went jogging at the City South Park and saw them there high up at the steeple/spire of the city hall building.

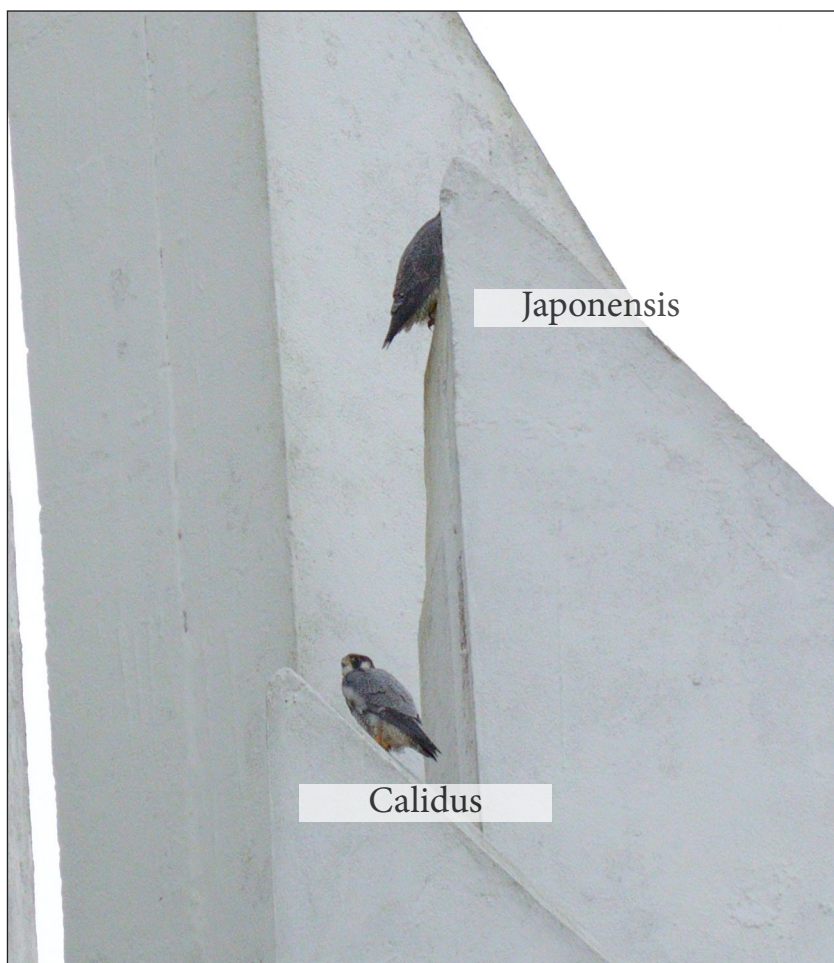
We photograph them using a small camera. Just to document the pair presence. (Park not safe and many people, and we go there to walk and jog).

Attached is an image of the two of them taken on 10/4/17.

It's funny to note that the Japonensis is always the one above the Calidus. Hierarchy? LOL.

On checking the historical record for Peregrine Falcon in Kuching with Yeo Siew Teck, only the Calidus race has been recorded.

This Japonensis will be the first record for Kuching!



## International News

### *Curlews in Crisis?* - Alex Dale

*The following information is extracted from BirdLife International publications and announcements (<http://www.birdlife.org>). MNS is the Partner of Birdlife International in Malaysia.*

New research suggests that the Numeniini - a tribe of large waders including Curlews and Godwits - could be the most endangered birds you've never heard about. Indeed, two species may already be extinct.

To the layman, the curlews are a shy, unassuming family of birds. Their mottled-brown plumage makes for effective camouflage against their marshland and mudflat feeding grounds, meaning they can go about their business unnoticed, prying out invertebrates such as ragworms with their purpose-built curved bills. But if, like the curlews, you take time to dig beneath the surface, you'll discover that they are beautiful and remarkable birds.

The Numeniini are a tribe of large waders consisting of the curlews, whimbrels, godwits and Upland Sandpiper *Bartramia longicauda*. They are some of the most widespread and far-travelling of all birds, migrating back and forth from their upland and grassland northern hemisphere breeding habitats to their wetland, often coastal, non-breeding habitats to the southern extremities of all continents except for Antarctica.

Indeed, one such member, the Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* is holder of the world record for the longest non-stop journey without feeding of any animal – satellite tagging has shown that birds from one population take eight days to fly from breeding grounds in Alaska 11,000 km to New Zealand every year.

Perhaps it's their wide range lulling us into a false sense of security that means they have been a little overlooked by conservationists until now. Or maybe it's that their camouflage is a little too effective. Whatever the reason, it's time for the curlew to be counted, because an eye-opening new study reveals that they could be one of, if not THE, most threatened group of birds on our planet.

The paper, produced in collaboration with the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the International Wader Study Group, and published in the journal *Bird Conservation International*, collated the views of over 100 wader experts from around the world, who assessed the threats faced by these species across their migratory flyways. Their conclusion: seven of 13 species – or over half – are now threatened with extinction.

Indeed, two species of curlew may already be extinct; the Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*, last spotted with confidence in 1995, which once migrated between the Mediterranean Basin and its breeding grounds in Siberia; and the Eskimo Curlew *Numenius borealis*, which once travelled between Canada and South America, and is almost certainly a goner, having not been seen with certainty since 1963 (and not in South America since 1939).

The plight of the Eskimo Curlew has strong parallels with the far-wider publicised extinction of the Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius*. The shorebird once numbered in its millions, but widescale hunting and habitat loss in its spring staging areas in the Rocky Mountains has led to, if not the total eradication of the species, then at least its decimation to the point where if it still exists, it does so as a tiny population in some uncharted corner of the Canadian wilderness.

While the hunt goes on for traces of these Critically Endangered species, the paper highlights that attention too should urgently be given to the threats faced by the species we know for sure are still among us.

The study discovers that overall probably the most serious threats to the future of curlews and their allies, is the habitat loss or degradation of the coastal wetlands they depend upon to roost and feed across their non-breeding range, including as refuel stopovers during their epic migrations.

While the Numeniini and other waterbirds are encountering this threat all across flyways in Central and Atlantic America, and the East Atlantic, this problem is particularly acute in Asia, a part of the world which is experiencing high levels of coastal development. As a result, a quarter of vital mudflat habitats in the Yellow Sea have been lost since the 1980s, and most of the remainder are badly-degraded, leaving at least 27 species of migratory waterbirds, which depend on these pitstops to break up their epic journeys, at risk of extinction. Besides the Bar-tailed Godwit (assessed as Near Threatened by BirdLife for the IUCN Red List) mentioned above, this number includes the likes of Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* and Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* (Endangered), the latter of which the largest wader in the world, and the closest to following the Eskimo and Slender-billed Curlews on the downward curve towards extinction.

The loss of these habitats – together with illegal and unsustainable hunting - makes the East Asian-Australasian flyway one of the most dangerous routes for migratory birds in the entire world. BirdLife Australia is already supporting the



Australian government in the implementation of an intergovernmentally agreed flyway action plan for this species, under the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) and Convention on Migratory Species. Visit our campaign page to discover what else BirdLife is doing to protect these embattled species, and how you can help. (MNS is the country partner for Birdlife in Malaysia)

In Europe and North America, the problem appears to be more on the breeding grounds where land use changes, especially agriculture and forestry, and increased fox and crow predation, appear to be driving the declines, especially in the British Isles, which, along with Finland and Russia, hold the bulk of the world's breeding population of Eurasian Curlew, and the Netherlands which is the most important source of the nominate race of Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*.

Curlews travel across some of the most dangerous migratory routes in the entire world

Through the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement of the United Nations Environment Programme, intergovernmental action plans are being implemented for both of these species, coordinated via international working groups. The one for the godwit is coordinated by the Dutch Government with involvement from VBN, BirdLife in the Netherlands, whereas that for the Curlew is coordinated by the RSPB, BirdLife in the UK. The RSPB is also leading a major national recovery programme for the species.

These threats, left unchecked, and together with other identified dangers – which range from pollution to climate change to invasive species and human disturbance – could see this family of birds slip towards extinction. Indeed, for a couple of their members, it may already have happened.

“These large waders with their heart-stirring calls that are an evocation of the wild, are one of the very most threatened groups of migratory birds on earth” says Nicola Crockford, RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), and co-author of the paper. “We may already have lost two of the 13 species and we can and we must ensure that urgent, concerted action is taken to prevent any of the remainder from reaching the brink”

The paper identifies a number of actions that need to be taken to protect these birds including, besides addressing coastal wetland loss and degradation and increasing breeding success in the west; the monitoring of both breeding population trends and land-cover change across their range, and better protection of key non-breeding sites, particularly across the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

Oh, and in case you're wondering, the name Numeniini is believed to be derived from the Greek for new moon, which does describe the bill shape. Let's hope that conservation efforts are sufficient to ensure that this charismatic family of long-distance waders aren't in their twilight years.





## Features

### *Birding Hotspots: Singapore - Alan Ow Yong*

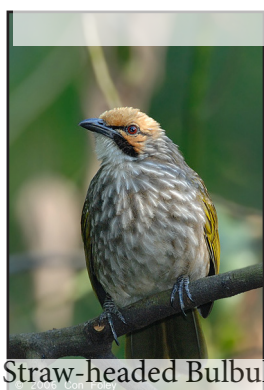
The 719 Km<sup>2</sup> island of Singapore at the southern end of continent Asia serves as a refuelling stop for many of the migrants in the East Asian and Australian Flyway. Though highly urbanised, we have managed to retain a core central catchment forest and preserved a wetland reserve amidst the many parks and gardens that have earned the country the “City in a Garden” tagline. The offshore island of Pulau Ubin remains one of our last and most diverse undeveloped landbank. The 2018 Checklist listed 403 species of birds for Singapore.

#### 1. Central Catchment Forest

This 5,446 hectares forest is the largest continuous extent of matured secondary forest on the island. It is a protected nature reserve and serves as a water catchment for our three main reservoirs. There are still pockets of primary forests with dipterocarp tree species inside but the only unlogged forest we have is the Bukit Timah Hill. It is now connected to the Central Forest by an Ecolink across the BKE Expressway. We have recorded 207 bird species here which include the Red-crowned Barbet, three species of Green Leafbirds and Chestnut-breasted Malkoha, the only malkoha species remaining in the island. It is also the most reliable place to see the Blue-rumped Parrots and the Thick-billed Pigeons. From time to time, new rediscoveries and species were encountered, like the rare Bat Hawk, Buff-rumped Woodpecker and Black and White Bulbul. But we have also lost a few iconic species in recent years. The Scarlet Minivets and the White-bellied Woodpeckers come into mind. The Plain Sunbird and the Thick-billed Spiderhunter have not been seen for a decade or so. The NParks built a tree-top canopy walkway, a bird watching tower and a visitor’s center for nature lovers to explore the forest. Easy access from the fringing nature parks like the newly open Windsor, Springleaf and Seletar Nature Parks and the end of Rifle Range Road.

#### 2. Pulau Ubin

The 1,000 hectares island at the eastern end of the Johor Straits has one of the most diverse habitats of all our birding hotspots. Matured secondary forest, woodlands, scrublands, mangroves, fresh water ponds and quarries and tidal mudflats made up most of Ubin. As such 220 bird species have been recorded here partly due to the proximity to Johor. The Oriental Pied Hornbills were rediscovered on Ubin. It is the strong hold for the Red Jungle Fowl and the globally threatened Straw-headed Bulbul. Nesting records of Mangrove Blue Flycatchers and Mangrove Pittas and just last year the first nesting of the Blue-winged Pittas were documented here. Recent rare species recorded were the Black and Red Broadbill, Mountain Imperial Pigeons, Asian Imperial Eagle and the Oriental Darter. The pride of Ubin is the coastal forest and the shore flats at Chek Jawa which was saved from reclamation due to the marine life and sea grass meadow found there. The mud flats is the favourite foraging site for the nationally threatened Great-billed Herons and the globally threatened Chinese Egrets. Access to the island is by bum boats from the Changi Point Jetty. There is a bus terminal next to the jetty. You can rent bicycles on the island or hire vans to go around. Most places are within walking distance. There are few small restaurants on the island that one can have lunch or dinner. No charges for entry to the island.



Straw-headed Bulbul



Purple Swamphen



Jambu Fruit Dove

### 3. Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve

Our first and only wetland reserve which is now a member of the East Asian and Australian Flyway Shorebirds Site Network. It is made up of 100 hectares of mangroves and mudflats with some freshwater marshes inherited from prawn and fish farms. Over 227 bird species out of which 108 are migratory species have been recorded here since 1988. Many are shorebirds stopping to refuel on their way to and from their breeding grounds in North Asia, Russia and the Arctic. We had our first record of the Masked Finfoot here. The ponds regularly host the return of Chinese Egrets, Great Knots and Bar-tailed Godwits. Recent rare visitors include the Northern Pintails, Grey-headed Lapwing and Eurasian Curlews. Passerines like the Ruddy Kingfisher, Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Black Drongo and Brown-chested Jungle Flycatcher have been recorded. There is a boardwalk loop around a mangrove arborant allowing visitors to get close to the trees and the fauna. A new extension to the reserve opened two years ago taking in the coastal forest and mudflats facing the Straits of Johor. Sungei Buloh conducts shorebird monitoring and study with on going ringing and banding programs together with bird surveys and census all year round. The nearest MRT station is Kranji where one can change to a connecting bus to the reserve. Best months to visit the reserve is from October to early April. Most shorebirds fly in to roost during high tides, so the best time to visit is a few hours before and after high tides.



Brown-chested Jungle Flycatcher



Northern Pintail



Eurasian Curlew

### 4. Kranji Marshes

The 56.8 hectares marshes fringing the Kranji Reservoir is the largest fresh water marshes in Singapore. It is situated at the end of Neo Tiew Lane 2 accessible by public bus from the Kranji MRT Station. About 170 species of birds have been recorded here. Besides the freshwater marshes and open ponds, good woodlands, grasslands and scrublands provide a range of habitats to add to the diversity. Visitors come to Kranji Marshes to see the Black-backed Swamphen, Common Moorhen, Red-wattled Lapwing and Slaty-breasted Crake. During the migratory season, Watercocks, Snipes, Wagtails and Terns spend their winter here. The shy Black-capped Kingfisher is a regular winter visitor. Other waterfowls like the White-browed Crake and Cinnamon Bittern will need some patience to see. Signs that the effort to attract wild ducks back to Kranji has paid off with sightings of the Cotton Pygmy Goose and Lesser Whistling Ducks recently. The tarmac road leading into the marshes is good for parakeets, munias and resident cuckoos. Changeable Hawk Eagles and Brahminy Kites nest in the Albizia forest on the right side of the road. Pay some attention to the canal on your left for Kingfishers and Pied Fantails.

### 5. Jurong Lakes Gardens

The Jurong Lake Gardens is a collective name for the Chinese and Japanese Gardens and the lakeside promenade. Its 90 hectares grounds is surrounded by the Jurong Lake on all sides. Both gardens reflect the Chinese and Japanese style garden design within a parkland setting. Most of the trees have matured giving the gardens a lush green cover. In between, fresh water marshes and ponds attract egrets, herons and bitterns to come and forage. It is a favourite wintering ground for the Common Kingfishers and Oriental Reed Warblers. The Jambu Fruit Doves and Pied Imperial Pigeons frequent the many trees when they fruit. Coppermith Barbets and Lace Woodpeckers breed here every year. A small patch of forest across the lakeside is the nesting ground for the Grey-headed Fish Eagle and Brahminy Kites. Grey Nightjar and Pin-tailed Snipe are regular winter visitors. A total of 121 species were recorded here. The East West line stops at the Chinese Gardens Station, which is a short walk to the Chinese Gardens. It is presently revamped into a larger Lake District township with new areas of floating wetlands and distinct green areas for the varies community activities.

## 6. Singapore Botanic Gardens

The oldest garden in Singapore is the most accessible birding hotspot being next to the Orchard Road shopping belt. This 82 hectares garden was granted World Heritage Site status in 2016. Some of the parkland trees are over a 100 years old. A remnant patch of primary forest is the only one outside the Central Forest. The rest of the gardens are divided into theme gardens featuring different set of plants, like the Ginger and Healing Gardens. Three lakes take centre stage in the different core areas of gardens. In turn they provide habitats for whistling ducks and water related birds like the Stork-billed Kingfisher and Buffy Fish Owl to forage. The big rain trees are favourite nesting sites for the rare Crested Goshawks. Two breeding pairs were successful in bringing up their young last year. During the migrant season, this is the best place to see the Hooded and Blue-winged Pittas and the Orange-headed Thrush. It is also a reliable place to find rare residents like the Red-legged Crakes, Large-tailed Nightjar and Sunda Scops Owl. The Heliconia groves by the Symphony Lake are often visited by the sunbirds including the Crimson Sunbird, the national bird of Singapore. Recent sighting suggest that more and more forest edge species like the Greater Coucal and Banded Woodpecker are spreading into the garden grounds. The MRT Circle Line stopped at Bukit Timah end of the garden while several public buses stopped just outside the main gate and visitor centre. This has to be the easiest birding hotspot to get to for any overseas visitors on a tight time table to get to see our local species.



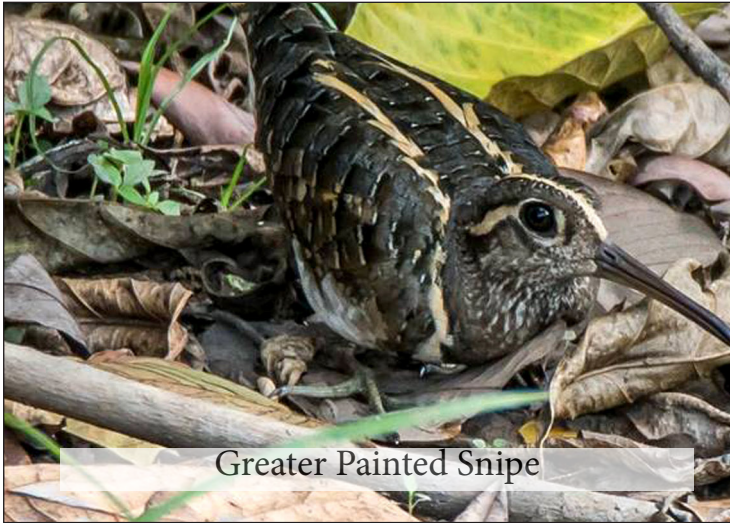
Orange-headed Thrush © Tan Ghim Cheaong



Crested Goshawk © Alan Owyang

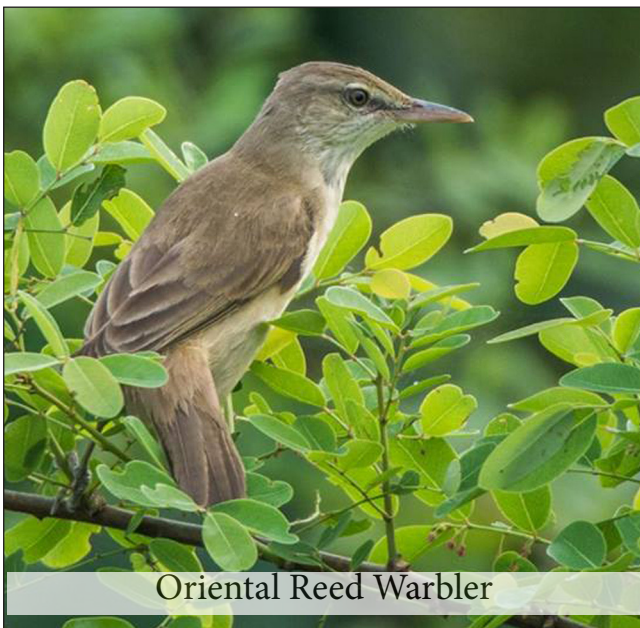


*Backyard Birding @ Megat Dewa & Sungai Korok, Kedah - Azman Ramly*



Greater Painted Snipe

I travel long distances to my work place since 2016. The route I take passes through MADA's riverside road along the railway between Megat Dewa and Sungai Korok Kedah. During January to March the river dries up and food becomes abundant. The river bank also provides good hiding places. Birds such as snipes and rails come to feed and they leave during the wet season. There are also resident birds found throughout the season and these include White-throated Kingfisher, Common Myna, Bayon Weaver, Egrets, Herons, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Stork-billed Kingfisher and Black-naped Oriole.



Oriental Reed Warbler



Slatty-breasted Rail



Ruddy-breasted Crake



Whiskered Tern



## *The 2017 Fraser's Hill International Bird Race - Ian Steedman*

**T**he 30th Fraser's Hill International Bird Race filled the highland resort with eager birders February 25th and 26th. Sponsored by Malaysian Nature Society and Tourism Malaysia, Fraser's Hill bird race is one of the oldest birding events in Malaysia and has attracted thousands from Malaysia and other countries. For one visiting birder's experience continue below!

Our minivan headlights threw beams up towering jungle hardwoods as we wound our way up Route 56 heading for Fraser's Hill. Near midnight and slouching in my squeaky seat, I wondered what surprises the jungle might offer next morning.

Birding in new places and discovering new species is a wonderful part of birding. It seems no two lifers ever reveal themselves the same way. And a famous destination like Fraser's Hill, with its nearly 3,000 hectares of forest raised my enthusiasm to find new birds. I could hardly wait!

The next morning Fraser's Hill didn't disappoint.

After a short sleep at Puncak Inn my teammate Mark Wilkie and I, both representing Taiwan, were up early on a clear Saturday exploring. Just south of the iconic clock tower the birds appeared. Brilliant Green Magpies in a backyard, overhead a pair of huge Mountain Imperial Pigeons beat north and tiny Glossy Swiftlets spun above. Chestnut-capped Laughingthrushes and Long-tailed Sibia moved through tall trees behind Puncak Lodge. I couldn't write fast enough in my notebook!

Breakfast was 45 minutes later back at the inn. Watching from the dining room other bird race teams wandered from their hotels into the central clock tower area and waited for the official start of the bird race. Birders watched and photographed anything with feathers. Photographers zoomed in on sharp orange and yellow Scarlet Minivets. Busy Streaked Spiderhunters raced from tree to tree.

By 1 pm the bird race was official underway. Mark and I retraced our morning route and started collecting birds for our count. We then turned left on a single lane road and headed uphill. Green jungle closed around and above us. More bird species appeared. Along the road we soon met other bird race participants. We joined forces with the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines that included Tinggay Cinco, Nikdye Realubit and Willem van de Ven. Another WBCP member Gawin Chutima, representing Thailand and Dr. Yuji Arakaki from Japan completed our group.

We moved up to the hill crest scanning trees and bush. We shouted out new birds and scrambled for our field guides when we weren't sure. The birds we had studied weeks or months before filled our binoculars: Blue Nuthatch, Black and Crimson Oriole, Everett's White-Eye, Mountain Tailorbird, Silver-eared

Mesia and others. We practically fell over the lifers! At one point, while resting, Gawin spotted a Red-headed Trogon quietly perched on a branch.

On the hill crest we hurried along Jalan Richmond watching new birds fly through the backyards and flower gardens of quiet guest lodges and cottages. We stumbled across a Long-tailed Broadbill, its colours crisp and alive. By late afternoon Mark and I spotted a beautiful Mugimaki Flycatcher and a Pied Flycatcher near the Gap station gate.

We hiked other Fraser's Hill roads and trails Saturday and finished with many kilometres under our boots. By evening we were exhausted, but satisfied.

While still dark Sunday morning Mark and I returned to the Gap station gate and waited for a Malayan Whistling Thrush. We heard the station gate was a favourite whistling thrush spot. In the early light this dark blue beauty appeared and we had our first tick of the day. We continued along the roads Sunday collecting new birds: Large Niltava, White-tailed Robin, Slaty-backed Forktail, an inquisitive Streaked Wren Babbler, a Fire-tufted Barbet gobbling down fruit and others.

In all we recorded 48 species and a good chunk of them were lifers for me. We also took photos, met old friends and made new ones. And the birds of Fraser's Hill came out! They showed themselves in trees, on the wing, along the road and along streams. Sometimes you just never know how or where you'll see a lifer!



Participants of the race with Henry Goh

## *The Sarawak International Bird Race 2016 - Mary Margaret*

### **Birds Are Important!**

A flash of white flitted through the lowland forest of Kubah National Park - a pocket of wilderness- had I had a lucky break? Was that the picture perfect Asian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*)? Yes! This distinctive bird with long white tail streamers is a common resident of the lowland forests, such as those of Kubah, but I was thrilled to catch a glimpse. Similarly, I was enthralled by the brilliantly blue White-collared Kingfisher (*Todiramphus chloris*) that had perched on a garden shrub. However, I am an amateur birder!

Dedicated bird watchers with bucket lists of must see species may not be as captivated as I was by these exquisite but relatively common sighting, but Sarawak, is a birder's dream. It has large tracts of rain forests, coastlines and mountains. It has 54 of the 60 endemic birds found on Borneo. It has 22 Important Bird Areas. IBAs or Important Bird Areas earn this designation as they are home to endangered or endemic species or birds with limited ranges.

The tagline for the Sarawak International Bird Race 2016, which was organised the Ministry of Arts, Tourism and Culture (MTAC) in collaboration with Malaysian Nature Society Kuching Branch (MNSKB) on September 24 and 25, 2016, 'Birds are Important' is spot on. They are intricate components of the natural world, intertwining animal and plant life. They have captivated the hearts and minds of people across the ages and of course birders; birding is one of the fastest growing hobbies in the world.

YBhg. Datu Ik Pahon Anak Joyik, MTAC Permanent Secretary of MTAC said, 'This is part of the initiative by MTAC in developing Birding as a Niche Tourism Product in Sarawak. Birding is now a popular hobby around the world.'

#### ***The Teams***

Seven invited teams and five local teams - for a total of 36 participants - from Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, United Kingdom, Japan Hong Kong and Nepal, joined this inaugural event.

The winning team, Pipit, comprised Dolores Lim, Dominic Kelundek and Ng Jia Jia, was from Sarawak, as was the third-place team, Ladybird. This team was made up of UNIMAS Zoology students, Attiqqah Fadzilah binti Sapuan, Rahan Mohd Yakup and Khatijah binti Ismail. The second-place team, Sandakan Borneo Bird Club, Denis Degullaciaon, Ali Suffri Mohd Jaffar and Alim Biun, hailed from Sabah.

#### ***The Sites***

The end of September marks the beginning of the migration season as migrants fly from the northern summer breeding grounds in Korea, Mongolia, Russia, and China to the Southern overwintering grounds in Australia and New Zealand; some stop by and do remain in Sarawak. Thus, the Sarawak Bird Race 2016 was timed to coincide with this and took participants to three key birding sites: Buntal, Kubah National Park and Borneo Highlands Resort.

Buntal which is part of Bako-Buntal Bay, one of the chosen locations, was incorporated into the East Asian-Australian Flyway (EAAF) Network Site in 2012. The main observation point is Buntal, a small fishing village, which is a 45-minute drive from Sarawak's capital city, Kuching, and is located on the Santubong Peninsula. The nutrient rich mudflats, sand flats and mangrove forests have long been recognized as a major stopover and refuelling point for migrating birds.

More than 25,000 birds from 27 species, many of which are globally threatened have been recorded by Malaysian, Sarawakian and International bird watchers. Nordmann's Greenshank (*Tringa gunifer*) is a rare migrant shorebird species is wholly restricted to the EAAF. The Asian Dowitcher (*Limnodromus semipalmatus*) and the Far Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*). This Important Bird Area (IBA) hosts 10% of the globally Vulnerable species of the Chinese Egret (*Egretta eulophotes*). Buntal is the place to be if this bird is on your list.

The Chinese Egret was a fashion victim as in mid nineteenth century in London, the decorative Chinese Egret breeding plumes were sought after as an accessory. Breeding colonies were wiped out to meet this demand and its population does not seem to have recovered.

Bako-Buntal Bay is one of the 55 recognized IBA sites in Malaysia, of which 22 are in Sarawak. This recognition records the importance of support from government agencies to ensure that hotspots of biodiversity are maintained.

Kubah National Park, 22 kilometres west of Kuching, was established in 1989 and opened to the public in 1995. Trails crisscross this 2230-hectare lowland/low-hill rainforest National Park, enabling trekkers and bird watchers to walk to the summit of Gunung Serapi, visit waterfall fed pools and the Mixed Dipterocarp Forest. This ecologically diverse Park is well known for frogs and palms. Malaysia hosts 33 genera and 398 species with 86 species from this family found here. Within the local birding community, it is also known for its birds.

The stunning Asian Paradise Flycatcher is frequently seen here as well as endangered species which include the Banded Kingfisher (*Lacedo pulchella*) and the Blue-banded Pitta (*Pitta arquata*), and the Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker (*Prionochilus thoracicus*). The White-crowned Hornbill (*Aceros comatus*), which, despite being generally a scarce resident, is often seen here. The iconic bird for the Park is probably the Blue-banded Pitta (*Pitta arquata*).



**B**orneo Highlands Resort, which sits at approximately 1000 metres, in the Penrissen Highlands and is an IBA site, is nestled on the Kalimantan border. The proximity of primary and secondary forests, farms and gardens, and the golf course creates a range of ecological niches. Over 200 bird species have been recorded here including the globally threatened, as well as those with restricted range or habitat. These include the endemic Bornean Barbet (*Megalaima exima*), which is easily seen at the Resort, the magnificent Blue-banded Pitta, Narcissus Flycatcher (*Ficedula narcissina*) and Pygmy White-eye (*Oculocincta squamifrons*). This tiny olive-grey bird, which travels in small flocks, is a sub-montane species. The Resort may be one of the easiest places to find this often difficult to locate species.

These close-to Kuching and easy-to-get-to sites offers much to birders. But the interior mountainous areas offer more wonders. The Black Oriole (*Oriolus hosii*) can be seen in the proposed Paya Maga (swampy highlands in the language of the people of the area) Highlands – a proposed National Park – which is an approximate three-hour drive from the northern Sarawak town of Lawas, followed by another three or four hours of trekking.



Pipit, the winning team © Hans Hazebroek



Sandakan Borneo Club, second place © Hans Hazebroek



## Conservation

### *Migration of Aves Season in Labuan Island - Mohd Aswad*

**B**ird migration is the seasonal movement, along a fixed flyway between breeding and wintering grounds. It is driven primarily by food availability and weather. Many species of bird migrate and the process carries high cost of mortality due to natural process as well as hunting by human beings.

Historically, migration has been recorded as far back as 3,000 years ago by Ancient Greek authors Homer and Aristotle. The Arctic tern holds the long-distance migration record for birds, travelling between Arctic breeding grounds and the Antarctic each year. While other birds, such as Manx shearwaters migrate 14,000 km between their northern breeding grounds and the southern ocean.

For some species of waders, including the Whimbrel, Curlew and Ruddy Turnstone, the success of migration depends on the availability of certain key food resources at stopover points along the migration route. This gives the migrants an opportunity to refuel for the next leg of the voyage. One example of an important stopover location on the West coast of North Borneo is Labuan Island with coordinates 5.324807, 115.218430. Seabirds such as Roseate, Bridled and Black-naped Terns and some gulls migrate in a similar pattern to waders.

#### *Pulau Ular, W.P. Labuan*

Our team discovered Roseate, Black-naped and Bridled terns breeding at a small rock near Labuan beach, Pulau Ular, W.P Labuan. These terns will come to the rock island from May to end of August based on our 2014 and 2015 observations. In 2016, we were excited to discover that Roseate Tern laid eggs. We hope the island will be spared of developments so the terns can continue to come.



**Pulau Ular © Noralip Hassanuddin**



Roseate terns lay eggs at Pulau Ular © Mohd Aswad

### *Sungai Labu Shoal*

Sungai Labu Shoal is made of dead corals being swept by ocean currents to one area, trapping food source for migratory birds travelling through Labuan Island. Some of the species that can be found here includes Red-necked stint, Terek sandpiper, Grey plover, Grey & Sand plovers and Sanderlings.

Residents such as Malaysian plover and Ruddy turnstone can be seen throughout the year. The uniqueness of this shoal is that when we combine both visitors and residents, we will have at least 80 species. It is one of the best and important site to observe migratory birds!



Grey plover © Mohd Aswad



Malaysian plover © Mohd Aswad



Sungai Labu Shoal © Noralip Hassanuddin Jan 2016



## *A Bird in Hand - Quek Yew Aun MYCAT Conservation Officer*

**I**t is 4am. The man awakes from his slumber. He jumps out of bed and rushes to prepare. Past experience tells him to leave before the crack of dawn - birds are more active in the wee hours. Binoculars? Check. Camo clothing, waterproof rucksack and some biscuits? Check, check and check.

Sounds familiar? That could be any one of us preparing for a birding trip.

But wait, what is that? Instead of camera or a tripod, he packs a mist net and a baited trap into his rucksack. After putting on his mud-caked Adidas kampungs, he grabs the shotgun by the door, promptly slinging it over his shoulder and disappears into the nearby forest.

The similarities between a birdwatcher and a bird poacher are uncanny. For one, both are interested in the same group of animals. Both past times require similar qualities: patience, enthusiasm and determination.

However, while one group is interested in mere observation, the other prefers to trap them either for personal or commercial purposes. As a birdwatcher, your gaze into the forest might be benign but it is important to remember that there are people out there who do not share your intentions.

Trends in the bird trade

MYCAT runs the 24-hour Wildlife Crime Hotline 019 3564194. It is our job to receive and relay information to the authorities. Through this, we have observed some worrying trends in bird trade.

Firstly, the advent of social media and messaging applications (apps) have allowed this illegal trade to move online. Apps especially Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp have enabled free flow of information at lightning pace. Transactions between a willing seller and a willing buyer can be made almost instantaneously.

The nature of social media has also allowed both parties to maintain anonymity while the trade happens in 'broad daylight' so to speak. Aside from this, many traders use alternative forms of transport that shroud their actual identity. Some use runners while other rely on express bus drivers for long distance transactions.

The trade of species listed in the Wildlife Conservation Act (WCA) 2010 might be illegal but advertising on social media is not. But this is something that the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (PERHILIT-AN) is working hard to change, and we support this fully. Until a law that disallows online advertisements is gazetted by the Parliament, we will continue to see our feathered friends being advertised online.

Secondly, more and more people are attracted to the novelty of keeping birds of prey as pets. Among the common species advertised for sale include Brahminy Kites (*Haliastur indus*), Black Winged Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*) and Changeable Hawk Eagles (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*).

This possibly stems from interest into the falconry. Although in its infancy in Malaysia, this practice is popular in North America and many Middle Eastern countries, with even UNESCO recognising falconry as a shared intangible heritage element of eleven countries. Falconry in itself is not illegal in Malaysia, but keeping birds of prey is, and there can be no falconry without birds of prey.



### Call to action!

It is no coincidence that birdwatchers such as yourselves frequent the same areas where bird poachers operate. Hence, there is a high likelihood that you might come across them or see signs of poaching activity in the forest edges, wetlands or mountainous regions where birds are aplenty.

With that, there is a potential for MYCAT and the authorities to harness your collecting power: be our eyes and ears on the ground.

Please be vigilant in the field and report any suspicious activities that could possibly be bird poaching to MYCAT's Wildlife Crime Hotline or directly to the PERHILITAN hotline 1-800-88-5151. Remember to take note of the location, date and time of the incident. Photos and further information like a car plate number could definitely help investigations but please remain calm and not confrontational when interacting with a suspected poacher.

Aside from that, birdwatchers should refrain from sharing bird sightings especially through online forums and social media. One should be as discreet as possible since poachers do monitor special interest groups for clues to their species of interest. A shared post could effectively lead them to poach the last of a rare critically endangered bird species.

Coming back to falconry, falconers need open areas to fly their birds. If you do stumble across these, please do report it in. All birds of prey are listed under the WCA 2010 hence possession of one is 100% illegal.

### Three in the bush

If there is one message to be taken away from this article, it would be that everyone, including birdwatchers have a role to play in combating illegal wildlife trade. This to ensure a future where the birds you observe today will continue to enthrall your children and your children's children.

There is an adage that goes 'A bird in hand is worth two in the bush'. But, no bird deserves to be in anyone's hands. They belong in the wild, to be enjoyed by birdwatchers and nature lovers alike.

Let's work together to keep all three in the bush, shall we?





**Thick-billed Flowerpecker by James Neoh**