

Birding in Bukit Fraser, Malaysia, 21.6-26.6.2001

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Introduction

Being very accessible and offering some great birds Bukit Fraser is one of the very best spots for birdwatching in South-east Asia. For everybody passing by Kuala Lumpur with a few days to spare this is a real “must”! Located in the southernmost mountain range in South-east Asia it is the last outpost for some Himalayan birds like Pygmy Wren-babbler and Brown Bullfinch. It is also the best place for the three birds endemic to Peninsular Malaysia. With some luck you could see both Malaysian Whistling-thrush and Malaysian Hill-partridge. The forest surrounding the Gap just seven kilometres downhill from Bukit Fraser adds some nice medium level rainforest birds as well.

I visited the area during the summer of 2001 on the way home from a fantastic birding trip to Borneo, which included some never-to-be-forgotten birds like Blue-headed Pitta, Bornean Bristlehead and Everett’s Thrush. The possibility to make a quick stopover in Bukit Fraser and see some more great birds at a low cost was too tempting for me, therefore I prolonged my trip for five days and ended up having a great time in the hills of southern Malaysia.

Getting there

Accessing the area from Kuala Lumpur is readily done by either bus or chartering a cab. A cab from KLIA is approximately 40 USD and you probably could get one downtown at 30 USD. If you choose to take the bus it only involves one change of lines being in Kuala Kohu Bahur and is as cheap as 2-3 USD. You should however be aware that there might be some trouble; I waited for my bus at the main bus station (a very crowded place, full of gas-fumes) for two hours without any bus showing up. I then got tired of waiting and got a cab. Note that (as of June 2001) you had to leave KL no later than 11 pm to ensure your connection in KKB. My plan was to take a bus to KKB and then get a cab from there since I arrived in KL at 2 pm. However it seems like cabs are much more expensive in KKB and it’s probably better to get on in KL in the first place. Getting a cab didn’t end my problems however. My driver took me to the wrong place even though I told him he was driving the wrong way. When he realized he was wrong and when he understood where he was supposed to drive he wanted to double the bill. I gave him a 33% raise and both of us seemed pleased. His wife who accompanied him seemed somewhat upset though. To go from the Gap to Bukit Fraser or vice versa you can either hitch up or wait for the bus, which stops at the guesthouse. Since I had plenty of time I walked both up and down. The walk is quite nice but I didn’t see too many birds. If you choose to walk it’s about two hours plus time for birding.

Accommodation

Since you really need one good morning in the Gap area you will have to stay down there for at least one night. The only place that offers lodging in the Gap is the Gap guesthouse, which is situated just about 100 meter west of the old road. The guesthouse is a gigantic old British building and when I got there I was the single guest. The rooms are nice, clean and huge all at a reasonable price. If you arrive on a weekend I’ve been told booking on forehand is advisable. Accommodation in Bukit Fraser is either bad and expensive or very expensive and not so bad. I stayed at a place just at the town centre and paid a hefty 12 USD for a very small room (basically just a bed) and a shower, which didn’t work. However if you are travelling on

a budget, choices are few and good ones even less! You probably will not spend much time in your room anyway.

Where to bird

The Gap: Birding in the Gap is mainly from the main road, birds are rather easy to see from here and there really aren't any tracks or trails to enter the forest on. Some nice bamboo thickets are to be found between the old and the new Bukit Fraser road. This is probably the place to see the Parrotfinch although I missed that one. The lower parts of new road had some nice rainforest birds when I was there. A really nice area is the road west of the small village. From here you have a great view into the canopies of the trees downhill and it gives a nice opportunity to get good view of birds like Tree-swifts, Barbets and there is a chance of spotting a Falconet. Just outside the Guesthouse I saw a good variety of Flowerpeckers and some Malkohas.

Bukit Fraser: It is possible to find good birds almost everywhere in the Bukit Fraser. A number of times I walked the forest for hours just to find the bird I was looking for in a roadside garden. There are a couple of trails of very different quality. Note that some of the tracks that are marked as return tracks or to exit on a main road suddenly just disappear and you find yourself in what seems like a dead-end. All you really need then is some heavy rain or just the sun to set to be in bad trouble! Some tracks like the High Pines trail have very steep parts that will be very difficult when wet. The best thing is to check with the WWF office before setting out. During my visit the Bishop's and Maxwell trails proved to be most productive. Even the Hemnant trail, which goes close to the golf course yielded some great birds like a pair of Large Scimitar Babbler. The area around the gate used to be the place to see the Malaysian Whistlingthrush but it seems like the vegetation is too dense there now and the place to see the thrush seems to be the landslide area at the start of Bishop's trail. However birding near the gate can be rewarding and there is a good chance on Slaty-backed Forktail. The High Pines is something that should not be missed. This place used to have high altitude species like Cutia and Brown Bullfinch but these seem very rare these days. I also did some birding along the old and new road, which was nice but not that special. Note that one really doesn't need to spend a lot of time in Bukit Fraser to do some great birding. The last three days in Bukit Fraser I only added about five species or so. Three days is probably enough to do both the Gap and Bukit Fraser but more days will of course increase the chance for those tricky species.

My trip

21.6 Arrived at KL domestic airport, took the bus downtown and waited for bus to KKB for two hours and then took a cab to the Gap. Arrived at the Gap just before dusk. Did some birding and saw some Striated Swallows and a Hill Blue-Flycatcher.

22.6 Birded the Gap from 6 to 12 seeing some nice birds like Sultan Tit, Ashy Bulbul and Grey-rumped Treeswift. 12-14 Walked the old road up to Bukit Fraser without seeing too many birds. 14-19 Birded the shorter trails like Hemnant Trail and the High Pines Area. Birds seen included Black-bellied Malkoha and various of babblers

23.6 Did the Bishops and Maxwell trail 6-12 seeing some great birds like Red-headed Trogon and Malaysian Hill Partridge. 13-14 Walked Hemnant trail where I got close looks of two Large-billed Scimitar-babblers and then set off for the Jeriau Waterfall returning at 17.30 to do some evening birding at the High Pines till dusk, getting some great view of a Red-bearded Bee-eater.

24.6 Tried the gate for Malaysian Whistlingthrush without success 7-8. Then set off on Bishop's Trail 8-11.30. Birded the upper part of Old Road 12-14 and Hemnant trail 14-15. The afternoon was spent along Mager and High Pines Trail finishing off the day with some final birding at the Gate.

25.6 Did one last try for the Whistlingthrush at the gate at dawn and then did the Bishop's trail as usual 8-12. After a lunch break I set off for the long walk to Pine tree hill on High Pines trail, getting back at dusk.

26.6 Started to walk down hill at 5 to get to the Gap at dawn. Had a couple of Owls calling, most probably Collared Owlet. Birded the Gap till 11 when I took the bus to KKB and then from there back to KL doing some quick sightseeing before catching my flight from KLIA to Copenhagen. Somehow I have lost my detailed notes from this day but mainly I saw the same birds as during my first visit to the Gap

Species List

1. **Crested Serpent Eagle** single birds seen soaring over the canopy daily.
2. **Malaysian Hill Partridge** 4 birds seen at Bishop's trail 23.6 and heard High Pines trail 25.6.
3. **Little Cuckoo-dove** common in Bukit Fraser.
4. **Zebra Dove** seen KL – KKB.
5. **Mountain Imperial Pigeon** some birds seen daily Bukit Fraser.
6. **Black-bellied Malkoha** 1 High Pines 23.6.
7. **Green-billed Malkoha** 2 the gap 26.6.
8. **Little Swift** common.
9. **Glossy Swift** common.
10. **Grey-rumped Treeswift** 2 birds seen perched at the Gap.
11. **Red-headed Trogon** 3 birds along Bishop's Trail 23.6 and 1 female Bishop's Trail 25.6.
12. **Red-bearded Bee-eater** 1 bird seen and at least one more heard at the High Pines 23.6 and also heard there 24.6.
13. **Rhinoceros Hornbill** one bird seen the Gap plus more heard.
14. **Helmeted Hornbill** heard calling from the forest daily.
15. **Fire-tufted Barbet** seen in small numbers daily. Often heard in Bukit Fraser.

16. **Golden-whiskered Barbet** 1 at the Gap 23.6 otherwise heard daily.
17. **Black-browed Barbet** 1 bird seen the Gap 22.6, 1 seen along road to Jeriau Waterfall 23.6 and 1 seen High Pines 24.6 plus several heard.
18. **Speckled Piculet** 4 bird seen in different bird parties along the forest trails.
19. **Greater Yellownape** almost 10 observations of probably not that many individuals.
20. **Buff-rumped Woodpecker** 3 birds High Pines 25.6.
21. **Paddyfield Pipit** A couple at the airport 21.6.
22. **Pacific Swallow** some birds seen daily.
23. **Striated Swallow** a number of birds seen in the Gap and one bird along new road.
24. **Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike** 1 the Gap and 2-3 Maxwell trail 23.6.
25. **Large Woodshrike** 1 the Gap 22.6.
26. **Malaysian Cuckoo-shrike** totally five birds seen in Bukit Fraser.
27. **Scarlet Minivet** one male at the Gap.
28. **Grey-cheeked Minivet** fairly common.
29. **Blue-winged Leafbird** some at the Gap 22.6 and 1 Jeriau Waterfall 23.6.
30. **Orange-breasted Leafbird** a number of birds at the Gap plus 1-2 daily at High Pines.
31. **Ochraceous Bulbul** fairly common Bukit Fraser.
32. **Ashy Bulbul** single birds at the Gap 22.6 & 26.6.
33. **Black crested Bulbul** common in the Gap.
34. **Mountain Bulbul** fairly common Bukit Fraser.
35. **Lesser Racquet-tailed Drongo** some bird at the Gap.
36. **Bronzed Drongo** common Bukit Fraser.
37. **Black-and-crimson Oriole** a couple of birds seen daily in Bukit Fraser.
38. **Asian Fairy Bluebird** common the Gap.
39. **Green Magpie** only five birds seen.

40. **Large-billed Crow** a couple of birds seen daily.
41. **Sultan Tit** 5-7 birds at the Gap.
42. **Blue Nuthatch** a total of eight birds seen, single or in pairs, often in bird parties.
43. **Lesser Shortwing** a number of birds heard and one bird seen along Bishop's Trail.
44. **Buff-breasted Babbler** a number of birds seen daily along the forest trails.
45. **Streaked Wren-babbler** a total of 11 birds seen daily along the forest trails.
46. **Pygmy Wren-babbler** one bird along Bishop's trail 25.6.
47. **Grey-throated Babbler** not uncommon Bukit Fraser.
48. **Golden Babbler** common Bukit Fraser. Perhaps the most common bird to see in bird parties.
49. **Large Scimitar-babbler** 2 birds seen plus 2 heard Bishops trail and 2 seen Hemnant trail 23.6. Heard along Bishop's Trail 24.6.
50. **Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush** common Bukit Fraser.
51. **Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush** 3-4 birds seen daily along the forest paths.
52. **Black Laughingthrush** 1 bird seen at the Gap both 22.6 and 26.6 and 5 birds Bukit Fraser 22.6.
53. **Long-tailed Sibia** common in Bukit Fraser.
54. **Silver-eared Mesia** common Bukit Fraser. Often seen in groups around a dozen.
55. **White-browed Shrike-babbler** 1 female along High Pines trail 24.6.
56. **Black-eared Shrike-babbler** common Bukit Fraser.
57. **White-hooded Babbler** 1 the Gap 26.6.
58. **Blue-winged Minla** common Bukit Fraser.
59. **Mountain Fulvetta** common Bukit Fraser.
60. **White-bellied Yuhinia** 2 at Jeriau Waterfall 23.6.
61. **Magpie Robin** common.
62. **Slaty-backed Forktail** 1 Jeriau Waterfall 23.6 and 1 at the Gate 24 & 25.6.
63. **White-rumped Shama** 1 male at the Gap 22.6.

64. **Chestnut-crowned Warbler** small numbers seen daily.
65. **Yellow-bellied Warbler** some seen in the Gap 22.6.
66. **Mountain Leaf-warbler** 2 along High Pines Trail 25.6.
67. **Dark-necked Tailorbird** some seen at the Gap.
68. **Mountain Tailorbird** seen daily in small numbers at Bukit Fraser.
69. **Verditer Flycatcher** 1 at the Gap and 3 birds along the road to Jeriau Waterfall.
70. **Little Pied Flycatcher** a total of six bird all seen in the High Pines area.
71. **Rofous-browed Flycatcher** less than a dozen of birds seen along the trails.
72. **Hill Blue-flycatcher** 1 male at the Gap 21.6 and one female Maxwell trail 22.6.
73. **Large Niltava** 7-8 birds seen in Bukit Fraser.
74. **Grey-headed Flycatcher** 2-3 at Jeriau Waterfall.
75. **White-throated Fantail** common in Bukit Fraser.
76. **Black-throated Sunbird** fairly common in Bukit Fraser.
77. **Streaked Spiderhunter** common Bukit Fraser
78. **Little Spiderhunter** one bird on the way to Jeriau waterfall.
79. **Yellow-breasted Flowerpecker** 1 the Gap 23.6
80. **Yellow-vented Flowerpecker** 2 the Gap 23.6.
81. **Orange-bellied Flowerpecker** 3 the Gap 23.6.
82. **Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker** 2 the Gap 23.6.
83. **Buff-bellied Flowerpecker** small numbers seen daily.
84. **Everett's White-eye** small flocks at the Gap. One bird at High Pines 23.6.
85. **White-rumped Munia** two birds by upper part of old road 24.6.
86. **House Sparrow** common KL.