

## Singapore 23-25.1 and 1.3 2018    Lars Olausson



Gardens by the Bay, a landmark hard to miss.

### **Introduction**

This tiny south-east Asian country was just visited as a stopover on our way to New Zealand (separate report). As we been here in 2013 and then visited Sungei Buloh Wetlands we avoided this reserve. It's easy to get there with a taxi, but to get back to town means both a local bus to nearest/best Metro station and then the Metro to the city center. Instead we took other options this year.

My wife had chosen the quite recently opened Gardens by the Bay as her choice and I wanted to go to Bukit Timah. Then we both agreed with the beautiful botanical garden, which is also a very good birding area.

On the visit back home we only had time for one area to explore and after +10 hours in an aircraft we both needed some exercise so we had an 3 ½ to 4 hour walk in an area called Central Catchment in the field guide, but also known as Mac Ritchie reservoir. This quite big patch of forest is connected to Bukit Timah.

### **Visited sites**

#### **Gardens by the Bay**

Actually not a recognized birding area but for a first time visitor to South-east Asia it could be a nice start in slow pace to learn the common parkland birds. The Garden has a body of water and paved trails to walk through different types of habitats.

Direction not needed, one can't miss the "Paris wheel" or the huge construction of three pillars with an on laying "boat" on the top. It's hard to miss when going from the airport to the city center.

### **Bukit Timah Nature Reserve**

In the central parts of Singapore is a quite big area of remaining rainforest and also used as a recreation area. Bukit Timah is the western part of the forest, and connected to both Hindhede Park and MacRitchie Reservoir (also called Central Catchment – see below). Bukit Timah has Singapore's highest hill – 168 m – and at the top is a huge fig tree that is a bird magnet when fruiting (not when we were there, unfortunately).

Around the Dairy farm is good chances of connecting with both Red-crowned Barbet and Straw-headed Bulbul.

Hindhede Park trail near the toilet block and "security" is not bad though it's a small patch of forest. Ask the security man after the owl and he can probably show visitors the Brown Hawk-owl on day roost. We were also shown a day roosting Malayan Colugo.

Note that the whole area is very popular as recreation so if possible avoid weekends, it can be crowded.

Opening hours (2018) is 8.30am to 6.30pm and free of charge.

### **Fort Canning Park**

Actually Singapore's first botanical garden and long time ago also called Bukit Larangan, which means the Forbidden Hill as no commoner was allowed to come up here in the early days. Now it's a botanical area of parkland type with a spice garden and other plants and trees. Easy walk on paved trails.

We just visited the park in random though it was just a 5 minute walk from our hotel.

White-bellied Sea-eagle breeds in one of the huge trees in the parks out skirts, we did see the nest from our hotel.

### **Singapore Botanical Garden (SBG)**

As named a botanical garden, most famous for the orchid house and the huge amount of hybrids.

The garden covers about 64 hectares with walkways winding through the primary forest. A new part named Learning Forest was a really good section with less people and therefor more birds. We encountered 3 species of woodpeckers in 5 minutes.

There's also a lake in the garden that of course will raise the potential number of species to be found on a visit.

There is Red-legged Crake breeding near the lake, try the Heliconia trail. The very same trail also held the Band-bellied Crake during our visit. We got the news from a local birder the day before, 2<sup>nd</sup> record for Singapore.

### **Central Catchment/HSBC Tree Top Walk**

Also called and recognized among locals as Mac Ritchie Reservoir Park. According to local birders it's the best birding area in Singapore. In this area is also the HSBC Tree Top Walk. **Note that the canopy walk is a one way walk so find out what direction is the correct one.** We didn't know about this but was lucky, been

walking 10km in the right direction. Beware of the macaques as they grab loose stuff as glasses, open bags etc.

Nice trails in primary rainforest and also partly scrub and swamp forest (good for crakes), although some parts can be slippery, it's actually a rainforest. No steep parts to deal with except when getting close to the canopy walkway. Around that area is mostly boardwalks and easy walked stairs.

Opening hours (2018) is 6.30am to 7.30pm and free of charge.



MacRitchie Reservoir.

### **Litterature**

For birds I found a small pocket friendly guide, covering only Singapore. (Bought from NHBS in England).

A Naturalist's Guide to the Birds of Singapore, Yong Ding, Lim Kim Chuah & Lee Tiah Khee, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition 2017. It's covering the most common species and also presents the best areas for birdwatching and what species to expect. As I have been in South-east Asia several times and have some knowledge of the bird fauna I think this field guide covered my needs well.

For Singapore as a destination we used the Insight Guides, Singapore City Guide, 12<sup>th</sup> edition 2011.

### **Getting around**

We used taxi except to Fort Canning Park and Gardens by the Bay to where we walked. Taxi is cheap compared with Sweden. A ride from a downtown hotel to Bukit Timah or Central Catchment did cost 12-20 Singapore dollars. (1 Singapore Dollar cost around 6.50 SEK Feb 2018)

We were told to avoid the black colored taxi cars. They are much more expensive than the others.

## Species List

Note: SBG = Singapore Botanical garden

### **Black-crowned Night Heron** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

1 ad Gardens by the Bay 23/1.

### **Chinese Pond Heron** (*Ardeola bacchus*)

6 seen on the walk to Gardens by the Bay 23/1.

### **Eastern Cattle Egret** (*Bubulcus coromandus*)

1 on the walk to Gardens by the Bay 23/1.

### **Purple Heron** (*Ardea purpurea*)

1 Central Catchment 1/3.

### **Little Egret** (*Egretta garzetta*)

2 on the walk to Gardens by the Bay 23/1.

### **Oriental Honey-buzzard** (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*)

1 Bukit Timah N.R 24/1.

### **Changeable Hawk-Eagle** (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*)

1 SBG 25/1.

### **Brahminy Kite** (*Haliastur indus*)

1 Gardens by the Bay 23/1.

### **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)

1 pair at an active nest Fort Canning Park 23-24/1, 1 ad SBG 25/1 and 1 Central Catchment 1/3.

### **Red-legged Crake** (*Rallina fasciata*)

3 juv SBG 25/1 and 1 ad Central Catchment 1/3.

### **White-breasted Waterhen** (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*)

2 Gardens by the Bay 23/1 and 2-3 SBG 25/1.

### **Band-bellied Crake** (*Porzana paykullii*)

1 ad SBG 25/1.

*A mega rarity in Singapore. 2nd record (I think). Thanks for the info from a local birder we met the day before in Bukit Timah.*

### **Feral Pigeon** (*Columba livia*)

Common.

### **Spotted Dove** (*Streptopelia chinensis*)

5 Gardens by the Bay 23/1 and 1 Fort Canning park 24/1. Common SBG 25/1. Noted in Central Catchment 1/3.



White-breasted Waterhen and a juvenile Red-legged Crake.

**Zebra Dove** (*Geopelia striata*)

6 Gardens by the Bay 23/1.

**Pink-necked Green Pigeon** (*Treron vernans*)

1 Fort Canning Park 24/1 and 5 SBG 25/1.

**Chestnut-bellied Malkoha** (*Phaenicophaeus sumatranus*)

1 Central Catchment 1/3.

**Asian Koel** (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*)

2 seen and heard near Fort Canning Park and 1+1 heard Gardens of the Bay 23/1.

**Brown Hawk-Owl** (*Ninox scutulata*)

1 seen on day roost Bukit Timah N.R 24/1.

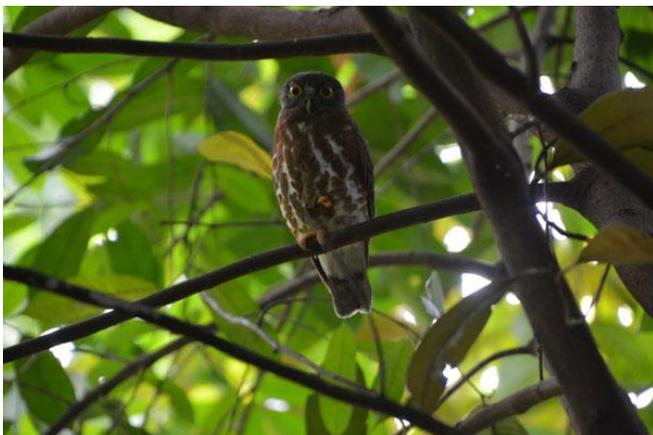
**Gray-rumped Treeswift** (*Hemiprocne longipennis*)

1 Central Catchment 1/3.

**Germain's Swiftlet/ Black-nest Swiftlet** (*Aerodroma sp*)

Common.

*Either one of these species was seen in large numbers, especially over Bukit Timah 24/1 and SBG 25/1.*



Brown Hawk-owl

**Asian Palm Swift** (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*)

2 (at least) were seen Gardens by the Bay 23/1.

**Oriental Dollarbird** (*Eurystomus orientalis*)

2 Bukit Timah N.R 24/1, 2 SBG 25/1 and 1 Central Catchment 1/3.

**White-throated Kingfisher** (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)

1 seen just outside Gardens of the Bay 23/1.

**Collared Kingfisher** (*Todiramphus chloris*)

1 Gardens by the Bay 23/1 and 2 Central Catchment 1/3.



Collard Kingfisher

**Blue-tailed Bee-eater** (*Merops philippinus*)

5 Gardens by the Bay 23/1, 1 SBG 25/1 and common Central Catchment 1/3.

**Blue-throated Bee-eater** (*Merops viridis*)

At least 10 seen Central Catchment 1/3.

**Oriental Pied-Hornbill** (*Anthracoceros albirostris*)

2 SBG 25/1.

**Lineated Barbet** (*Psilopogon lineatus*)

2 heard Bukit Timah N.R 24/1, 3 heard SBG 25/1 and 1 heard Central Catchment 1/3.

**Coppersmith Barbet** (*Psilopogon haemacephalus*)

1 heard SBG 25/1.

**Banded Woodpecker** (*Chrysophlegma miniaceum*)

1 SBG 25/1.

**Laced Woodpecker** (*Picus vittatus*)

1 SBG 25/1.



Banded and Laced Woodpecker

**Common Flameback** (*Dinopium javanense*)

1 SBG 25/1.

**Long-tailed Parakeet** (*Psittacula longicauda*)

1 juv Gardens by the Bay 23/1 and 5 seen SBG 25/1.

**Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot** (*Loriculus galgulus*)

1 Fort Canning Park 24/1 and 2 SBG 25/1.

**Golden-bellied Gerygone** (*Gerygone sulphurea*)

2 heard Bukit Timah N.R 24/1.

**Common Iora** (*Aegithina tiphia*)

1 female seen on the walk to Gardens by the Bay 23/1.

**Tiger Shrike** (*Lanius tigrinus*)

1 female colored Gardens by the Bay 23/1.

**Black-naped Oriole** (*Oriolus chinensis*)

At least 3 seen and heard Gardens by the Bay 23/1, common Bukit Timah N.R and a few seen and heard Fort Canning Park 24/1, common SBG 25/1 and a few Central Catchment 1/3.

**Greater Racket-tailed Drongo** (*Dicrurus paradiseus*)

4 Bukit Timah N.R 24/1, 3 SBG 25/1 and common Central Catchment 1/3.

**House Crow** (*Corvus splendens*)

Fairly common in urban areas.

**Yellow-vented Bulbul** (*Pycnonotus goiavier*)

2 Fort Canning Park 24/1, 1 seen SBG 25/1 and a few Central Catchment 1/3.

**Olive-winged Bulbul** (*Pycnonotus plumosus*)

A few noted Central Catchment 1/3.

**Barn Swallow** (*Hirundo rustica*)

20 seen on the walk to Gardens by the Bay 23/1.

**Pacific Swallow** (*Hirundo tahitica*)

20 seen on the walk to Gardens by the Bay 23/1 and common Central Catchment 1/3.

**Red-rumped Swallow** (*Cecropis daurica*)

5 seen from the hotel grounds 23/1.

**Arctic Warbler** (*hylloscopus borealis*)

1 Bukit Timah N.R 24/1 and 1 Central Catchment 1/3.

**Common Tailorbird** (*Orthotomus ruficeps*)

Several heard Bukit Timah N.R 24/1 and in SBG 25/1. A few noted Central Catchment 1/3.

**Dark-necked Tailorbird** (*Orthotomus atrogularis*)

1 heard SBG 25/1 and common Central Catchment 1/3.

**Pin-striped Tit-babbler** (*Mixornis gularis*)

Common Central Catchment 1/3.

**White-crested Laughingthrush** (*Garrulax leucolophus*)

3 seen SBG 25/1.



White-crested Laughingthrush

**Asian Fairy-bluebird** (*Irena puella*)

2 seen Bukit Timah N.R 24/1.

**Asian Glossy Starling** (*Aplonis panayensis*)

5 seen SBG 25/1 and common Central Catchment 1/3.

**Common Hill Myna** (*Gracula religiosa*)

4 (2 pairs) SBG 25/1.

**Javan Myna** (*Acridotheres javanicus*)

Common.

**Common Myna** (*Acridotheres tristis*)

Fairly common.

**Oriental Magpie-Robin** (*Copsychus saularis*)

1 Gardens by the Bay 23/1, 1 Fort Canning Park 24/1 and 5 Central Catchment 1/3.



Oriental Magpie-Robin and Javan Myna

**Asian Brown Flycatcher** (*Muscicapa dauurica*)

1 Fort Canning Park 24/1 and 1 Central Catchment 1/3.

**Orange-bellied Flowerpecker** (*Dicaeum trigonostigma*)

A few seen Bukit Timah N.R 24/1.

**Plain-throated Sunbird** (*Anthreptes malacensis*)

5 seen and heard Bukit Timah N.R 24/1 and noted Central Catchment 1/3.

**Olive-backed Sunbird** (*Cinnyris jugularis*)

Common.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** (*Passer montanus*)

Common in urban areas.

**Paddyfield Pipit** (*Anthus rufulus*)

1 seen on the walk to Gardens by the Bay 23/1.



Olive-backed Sunbird

## **Mammals**

### **Malayan Colugo** (*Cynocephalus variegatus*)

1 seen Bukit Timah N.R 24/1.

### **Plaintain Squirrel** (*Collosciurus notatus*)

2 seen Fort Canning Park 24/1.

### **Slender Squirrel** (*Sundasciurus tenuis*)

5 seen Bukit Timah N.R 24/1, at least 10 SBG 25/1 and a few Central Catchment 1/3.



Slender Squirrel

All photos by the author.

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