

Volume 3/2026, Sept 2026

Malaysian
Bird Report



Malaysian Bird Report Volume 3/2026, September 2026

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Common Hoopoe (Hudhud Biasa) *Upupa epops*, Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, May 2026 © Beng-Wah Yoong

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Editorial

Threatened Bird Species in Malaysia

Kim-Chye Lim

Malaysia's complex ecosystem of tropical lowland rainforests, montane zones, and coastal mangrove fringes hosts over 700 native avian species (Puan et al 2020; MNS Bird Conservation Council 2021). However, anthropogenic pressures, such as rapid land conversion, selective logging, and the rampant regional illegal cage-bird trade, have significantly compromised this avian diversity (Symes et al 2018).

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) categorises the extinction risk of bird species based on five quantitative criteria: population size reduction, geographic range size, small and declining population size, very small or restricted population and quantitative analysis. The IUCN Extinction Risk categories are:

- Extinct (EX): The last individual has died
- Extinct in the wild (EW): Survive only in captivity or as naturalised population outside its past range
- Critically Endangered (CR): Facing extremely high risk of extinction in the wild
- Endangered (EN): Facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild
- Vulnerable (VU): Facing a high risk of extinction in the wild
- Near Threatened (NT): Likely to qualify for a threatened category in the near future
- Least Concern (LC): Evaluated and found to have low risk of extinction
- Data Deficient (DD): Inadequate information for assessment of its extinction risk
- Not Evaluated (NE): Not assessed yet against the criteria

To support local biodiversity mapping, corporate social responsibility frameworks, and regulatory legal structures, this report highlights Malaysia's endangered bird species as categorized by the globally recognized IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and BirdLife International Data Zone metrics.

List of Critically Endangered and Endangered bird species in Malaysia.

Critically Endangered (CR) Bird Species

Common & Scientific Name	Status & Distribution in Malaysia	Primary Conservation Threats
Malay Crestless Fireback <i>Lophura erythrophthalma</i>	Rare Peninsula resident in extreme lowland forest.	Habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation due to extensive forest clearance for oil palm and logging.
Silvery Pigeon <i>Columba argentina</i>	Uncertain status on off shore Sarawak islands.	Habitat loss due to settlement and deforestation, disturbance, hunting and introduction of mammalian predators.

Helmeted Hornbill <i>Rhinoplax vigil</i>	Uncommon resident in mostly primary lowland forest.	Severe poaching for its solid keratin 'ivory' casque used in ornamental carvings, compounded by lowland forest logging.
Straw-headed Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus zeylanicus</i>	Rare resident in riverine habitats in lowland forest.	Relentless trapping to supply the Southeast Asian commercial cage-bird and songbird trade, leading to range-wide population collapses.
Chinese Crested Tern <i>Thalasseus bernsteini</i>	Rare winter visitor to Borneo coastal areas.	Population suffering from egg collection and development-driven coastal reclamation.
Spoon-billed Sandpiper <i>Calidris pygmaea</i>	Rare winter visitor to Peninsula coastal sandy tidal mudflats.	Habitat loss due to coastal reclamation in its migratory and winter ranges that has reduced its feeding and roosting sites.
Masked Finfoot <i>Heliopais personatus</i>	Rare visitor to mangroves, flooded forests, rivers and dams.	Population declining due to river siltation, hunting, and wetland clearance.
Yellow-breasted Bunting <i>Emberiza aureola</i>	Rare winter visitor to cultivation, ricefields and grasslands.	Main threat is trapping of flocks that feed and roost in its wintering sites.



Plate 1: Some Critically Endangered (CR) bird species. Clockwise from top right: Helmeted Hornbill, Straw-headed Bulbul, Masked Finfoot, Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Used with kind permission.

Endangered (EN) bird species

Common & Scientific Name	Status & Distribution in Malaysia	Primary Conservation Threats
Malayan Peacock-Pheasant <i>Polyplectron malacense</i>	Uncommon resident in extreme lowland forest. Peninsula	Habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation due to opening of plantations, mainly for oil palm and to a lesser extent rubber, timber and fruit.
Bornean Peacock-Pheasant <i>Polyplectron schleiermacheri</i>	Rare Borneo endemic in mostly lowland forest.	Forest specialist experiencing rapid population declines due to lowland forest loss and logging fire risks.
Bornean Crestless Fireback <i>Lophura pyronota</i>	Scarce Borneo resident in peat swamp and riverine forest.	Population thought to be declining rapidly due to habitat loss, compounded by habitat fragmentation and hunting.
Milky Stork <i>Mycteria cinerea</i>	Status uncertain in Peninsula (but has introduced population in Perak).	Coastal mangrove conversion for aquaculture, coastal developments, and human disturbance at its remaining Peninsula strongholds.
Storm's Stork <i>Ciconia stormi</i>	Scarce resident in lowland forest freshwater habitats	Population severely affected by mainly loss of habitat resulting from large scale agricultural conversions of forest to oil palm plantations.
Siberian Sand Plover <i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	Migrant and winter visitor in small numbers to coastal areas in Borneo.	Multiple threats, especially during passage and in wintering areas, including coastal land reclamation, loss and degradation of feeding areas due to tidal action and disturbance by fishermen.
Nordmann's Greenshank <i>Tringa guttifer</i>	Winter visitor in small numbers to mudflats, estuaries and lowland swamps.	Multiple threats in its breeding, passage and wintering areas where conversion of coastal areas for agriculture has resulted in loss and degradation of its wetlands habitat
Great Knot <i>Calidris tenuirostris</i>	Winter visitor and migrant in moderate numbers along coastal habitats.	Population threatened by habitat loss and degradation on its staging grounds such as the regional reclamation of Yellow Sea mudflats.
Far Eastern Curlew <i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	Rare winter visitor and migrant to Peninsula; moderate in numbers to Borneo coastal areas.	Main threats occur along its migration route where coastal reclamation has resulted in habitat loss and degradation and where trapping also occurs.
Steppe Eagle <i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	Rare winter visitor in Peninsula paddylands.	Habitat loss from conversion of steppes to agricultural lands, collision with power lines, direct persecution and pesticide poisoning.



White-crowned Hornbill <i>Berenicornis comatus</i>	Uncommon resident in mainly lowland forest.	Population suspected to be declining due to habitat loss and degradation caused by agricultural expansion, logging and hunting.
Wrinkled Hornbill <i>Rhabdotorrhinus corrugatus</i>	Uncommon resident in lowland forest.	Strict lowland primary forest dependent, highly sensitive to logging and widespread commercial agriculture conversion.
Chestnut-capped Thrush <i>Geokichla interpres</i>	Rare resident in mainly primary lowland forest.	Main threats are habitat loss and illegal trapping for the cage-bird trade.
Rufous-headed Robin <i>Larvivora ruficeps</i>	Very rare winter visitor to upper montane areas in Peninsula.	One of the world's least known songbird, consisting of a very small population in a restricted range.
Greater Green Leafbird <i>Chloropsis sonnerati</i>	Uncommon resident mainly in lowland forest.	Main threats are illegal trapping for the cage-bird trade and deforestation which leads to increased access for trappers.

Conclusion

The species accounts compiled here, eight Critically Endangered and fifteen Endangered birds recorded in Malaysia, illustrate a consistent pattern across taxa and habitats: lowland primary forest specialists (hornbills, pheasants, the Straw-headed Bulbul) are being squeezed out by logging and agricultural conversion, while coastal and wetland species (storks, shorebirds, the Masked Finfoot) face parallel pressure from reclamation and habitat fragmentation along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway. Several species, like the Helmeted Hornbill, Straw-headed Bulbul and Masked Finfoot, additionally face the compounding threat of targeted trapping and trade, a driver that IUCN assessments increasingly treat as inseparable from habitat loss (Symes et al 2018). Sustaining Malaysia's status as a stronghold for regional avifauna will depend on continued habitat protection in remaining lowland and coastal strongholds, stronger enforcement against illegal trapping, and sustained monitoring, including citizen-science records such as the 2025 Chinese Crested Tern sighting, to keep national threat assessments current as IUCN categories are revised.

Useful Data Sources with Official Links

Data extraction and taxonomic structures were verified via the following conservation data repositories:

1. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species: <https://www.iucnredlist.org> (version 2026-1 accessed 19 Aug 2026)
2. BirdLife International Data Zone (Avian Taxonomy & Status Authority): <https://datazone.birdlife.org> (accessed 19 Aug 2026)
3. MNS-BCC Records Committee: <https://sites.google.com/site/mnsbccrecordscommittee/>

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Field Notes

A 'Festival' of Gulls along the North Selangor Coast

Chris Gibbins, David Awcock, Choong-Liung Chin, Caroline Ho, Swee-Seng Khoo & Kang-Woei Ong

Introduction

Gulls are uncommon in Malaysia, with only Brown-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus* and Black-headed Gull *C. ridibundus* reported regularly. However, following concerted efforts during January and February 2026 we were fortunate in recording five taxa and one hybrid together in the same location. In this note we present images of some of the birds and discuss the identification of the two larger gulls that were present. Identification of the larger ones is challenging, so we go into considerable detail about them. We provide a short summary at the end of the note for those readers less interested in all the detail. We make the case that one of the two large gulls fits all currently accepted criteria for Steppe Gull *Larus (fuscus) barabensis*, so potentially represents a new taxon for Malaysia.

Gulling trips

Previous reports of Brown-headed Gulls along the North Selangor coastline suggested that this area might attract something more interesting, so we agreed to schedule regular checks of the area in 2026 to look for gulls.

At sunrise on 12 January 2026, we set off in a small boat on an exploratory gulling trip. After approximately one hour we reached an area where lots of herons, egrets and terns were attracted to fishing activity. We slowed the boat and spotted one or two Brown-headed Gulls. Suddenly one of our team noticed a large gull standing on a post, and we soon realised there was an even closer one on the water nearby. Before we had a good look at them, they took off and headed to join the flock of Brown-headed Gulls that was building up on the exposed mud.

Due to shallow water we could not get very close to the flock, but both of the large gulls were present. One remained largely hidden behind other birds, but we were able to get unobscured views of the one we had initially seen on the water. As we were on a boat it was not possible to scope the birds so we were not able to see fine feather detail, but from what we could see the bird we had seen most clearly appeared to be a Heuglin's Gull *Larus (fuscus) heuglini*. It was a first cycle bird, largely still in juvenile plumage (i.e. no clear signs of any post-juvenile [preformative] moult).

Over the coming weeks various subsets of the authors visited the area another four times, occasionally joined by one or two other birders. On the second trip (15 January 2026) two large gulls were again present. CG recognised one as being the same Heuglin's from the first trip but this time the second bird gave slightly closer views. These views strongly suggested that it might be a Steppe Gull *Larus (fuscus) barabensis*. He left with images that were tantalising but not quite ideal for resolving its identification. We organised a return trip as soon as possible to try to establish this bird's identity.

The team returned on 17 January 2026 and we were rewarded with a real once-in-a-lifetime experience, at least within the Malaysian context. We were treated to frame-filling views of both large gulls, as well as a lovely close Slender-billed Gull *C. genei* and a hybrid Brown x Black-headed Gull. Brown- and Black-headed were also present, so with a bit of manoeuvring it was possible to see five gull taxa in the same field of view. As we headed back to the harbour that evening, the overwhelming feeling was that we had been treated to a 'festival' of gulls (Plates 1-7).

Two subsequent trips in February (02 and 18 February 2026) were less successful, with no large gulls present and dwindling numbers of Brown- and Black-headed.



Plate 1: Part of the gull flock that welcomed us on 17 January 2026. A first cycle Slender-billed Gull is in the foreground, just left of centre, and stands out clearly from the more robust Brown-headed Gulls. Both large gulls are also here, resulting in a rare Malaysian image that includes four gull taxa.



Plate 2: Adult Brown-headed Gull in non-breeding (basic) plumage. 17 January 2026.



Plate 3: Adult Brown-headed Gull in non-breeding (basic) plumage. 17 January 2026.



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Plate 4: First cycle Black-headed Gull (formative plumage), 25 January 2026.



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Plate 5: First cycle Brown-headed Gull (formative plumage), 25 January 2026.



Plate 6: First cycle Slender-billed Gull (formative plumage), 17 January 2026.



Plate 7: Hybrid Gull (left) with Brown-headed Gull (right), both adults in non-breeding (basic) plumage. Compared to the Brown-headed the presumed hybrid Black x Brown-headed is smaller with a somewhat more slender bill. It's eye is not as pale as typical adult Brown-headed, but paler than Black-headed (which in the field appears uniformly dark). It has much more white and much less black in the wingtip than Brown-headed: the white mirrors (white spots) on the outer two primaries (primaries 10 and 9) are larger, and it has a long white tongue on primary 8 (third from outermost feather) extending into the black part of the feather. In Brown-headed the distal part of P8 is normally all black, or only occasionally with a small white mirror. Thus, everything about the bird looks intermediate between Brown-headed and Black-headed Gull. 17 January 2026.

Identification of the two large gulls.

Both large gulls had dark, unpatterned inner primaries and broad tail bands, which helped rule out Mongolian Gull *L. mongolicus* which could potentially occur in Malaysia. It is clear that the Heuglin's Gull was seen on each of the first three trips – detailed inspection of feather detail confirmed this. However, we are less sure about the second bird – the Steppe candidate. Probability suggests that the same two individuals were present each time, but because of poor views on the first trip we are not entirely sure about this. The Steppe candidate was, however, certainly present on both the second and third trips.

Although the records are yet to be assessed, for the sake of clarity in the text which follows we will simply refer to the first bird as the Heuglin's and the second as the Steppe. The two differed in size, structure and moult (Plate 8). The Heuglin's was larger. It had a longer, more evenly tapered bill, a more sloping forehead and flatter crown, and its body was more elongated and slender-looking. The Steppe had a shorter bill with a more marked gonys, a smaller and more evenly rounded head, and a less elongated, more evenly proportioned body. Its eye looked larger on the head than the Heuglin's, which made it look more placid.



Plate 8: Candidate Heuglin's (left) and Steppe (right) Gulls, Selangor, Malaysia, 17 January 2026. Both are first cycle birds, defined on the basis of still having their first generation primaries. However, although they are the same age class their appearance differs markedly. The Steppe appears more grey, as a result of the presence of many new second generation feathers with a different colour tone to the first generation ones they have replaced. Contrast between the first and second generation feathers is most evident by comparing the old, brown, worn tertials with the adjacent inner greater coverts which are new, fresh and have distinctly grey tones. Note also the differences in size and structure of the two birds.

The thing that first drew attention to the second bird as a potential Steppe Gull was the extent of its post-juvenile (preformative) moult. With the exception of one or two new, second generation median coverts, the Heuglin's was in fully juvenile (first basic) plumage (Plate 9). Its plumage overall was therefore rather faded and somewhat worn, as would be expected for feathers that, by mid-January, were around 8 or 9 months old. In contrast, the Steppe Gull (Plate 10) had many second generation feathers, so clearly had undertaken an extensive post-juvenile (preformative) moult. Its mantle and scapulars were all second generation feathers; around 60% of its lesser and median coverts were second generation and it had several new inner greater coverts. Many of its outer greater coverts were missing so, unlike the Heuglin's, it was in active moult.

It is worth commenting on the extent of head and neck streaking on the two birds, as this differs too. As they age, juvenile (first generation) head, neck and body feathers that are initially streaked become worn and faded, so look paler over time. Thus, by mid-January a bird that has not moulted can be expected to look whiter headed and bodied than when it first attained its juvenile feathers 8 or 9 months earlier. However, any new fresh second generation head, neck or body feathers will have some streaking. Thus, a bird that has undertaken a post-juvenile (preformative) moult can look more streaked on the head and neck than a worn, faded one that has not moulted. This explains why the Heuglin's looks rather whiter than the Steppe – as well as moult in the mantle, scapulars and coverts, the Steppe has moulted in new head and body feathers and because they have not yet worn or become faded, the head and neck look streaked.

Together with the structural differences, the different moult pointed strongly to one bird being a Heuglin's and one being a Steppe. We elaborate on this in the following sections.



Plate 9: Heuglin's Gull, North Selangor, Malaysia, 17 January 2026. Note the broad tail band (covering most of the areas of the tail) and dark inner primaries with no complex patterning; there is a slight contrast in tone between the outer and inner webs but there are no pale patches or dark subterminal marks on these feathers. The tail and inner primary features help rule out Mongolian Gull.



Plate 10: Steppe Gull, North Selangor, Malaysia, 17 January 2026. A rather more compact bird than the Heuglin's. Note the numerous missing feathers in the wing – more than half of the greater coverts are missing. This means it is in active moult. Also note the many grey feathers across its mantle, scapulars and forewing – these are second generation feathers moulted in during the post-juvenile (preformative) moult.

Moult of Heuglin's and Steppe Gulls

The Theory

For many years birders visiting the core wintering areas of Steppe and Heuglin's Gulls have noticed that the mixed flocks contain first cycle birds with very different moults – essentially some with little or no post-juvenile (preformative) moult and some with extensive moult. This led to the idea that the different moult types correspond to the two taxa. This idea made sense because Heuglin's and Steppe Gulls breed in different geographic areas (Heuglin's in Arctic Russia, Steppe in Central Asia (Southern Russia and Northern Kazakhstan)), where the climate results in Steppe breeding earlier than Heuglin's. The flow of argument was that earlier breeding Steppe Gulls have young that fledge appreciably earlier than Heuglin's and so by the time juvenile Steppe Gulls reach the wintering areas (around October) their feathers are already several months old and worn. In turn, this leads to the idea that they therefore need to replace these feathers, to cope with the sun's bleaching effects over the coming months. In contrast, Heuglin's don't fledge until a month or two later, so when they arrive on the wintering grounds their feathers do not yet need replacing; they consequently retain their first generation feathers until the moult the following year.

These logical arguments have underpinned identification of first cycle Steppe and Heuglin's Gull for many years. Originally they gained traction on online discussion forums in the early 2000s and, as there was no evidence to the contrary, moult was adopted routinely to identify birds on the wintering grounds (Plates 11 and 12). Today it is invariably used to propose an

identification when an image of a mystery Steppe / Heuglin's is posted online. The use of moult for separating these two gulls has become such standard practice that it has been incorporated into the latest generation of specialist gull identification guides.

The problem is that no one has ever properly assessed how reliable or clear-cut this use of moult might be. The logic is very clear and the rationale for labelling birds with extensive moult as Steppe and little or no moult as Heuglin's appears compelling, but without ringed birds of proven origin it is not possible to be sure this is what they really are. Moreover, while no one doubts that there are some birds with no moult and some with extensive moult, some birds are intermediate. This raises the question of whether there is a clear dividing line or whether there is a continuous spectrum of moult between the extremes. No one has assessed moult systematically on a sample of birds, so to date we have not had an answer to this question.



Plate 11: First cycle Steppe Gulls, United Arab Emirates, 31 December 2018 - 3 January 2019. Birds chosen to illustrate the range of moult of birds in the core wintering area. All four birds illustrated here have many new scapulars and at least some new wing coverts. Note that remaining juvenile (first generation) feathers in the wing coverts and tertials are worn by this date. The lower right bird has replaced almost all juvenile scapulars, coverts and tertials (only a few juvenile outer greater coverts remain).



Plate 12: First cycle Heuglin's Gulls, United Arab Emirates, 31 Dec 2018. Note that almost all feathers are still juvenile (first generation). In general, these birds look more fresh and crisp than the Steppe Gulls, with fringes on the juvenile feathers hardly worn.

Testing the Theory

To help resolve the identification of the two Selangor birds we assessed the moult of gulls from the core wintering grounds using all available images. No judgment was made about which taxon an individual might belong too – instead all birds were simply scored based on moult and then we looked to see whether they grouped into two types that might be consistent with the hypothesis that they represent two distinct 'populations' (i.e. from different breeding grounds and with different breeding timings).

We used images primarily from CGs own collection, taken on four different trips to UAE in the period of late December to early January (in various years between 2009 and 2019). These were supplemented by images available on eBird and iNaturalist. The eBird and iNaturalist images included birds from UAE, Jordan, Iran, India, Israel, Bahrain, Oman, Kazakhstan, Bangladesh, and Saudia Arabia, all locations within the accepted winter range. To improve sample size, online images taken between mid-December and mid-January were used. Only images good enough to allow feathers to be counted were included. Other similar large gulls present in these areas (e.g. Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*, Baltic Gull *L. fuscus fuscus*) were discounted on the basis of accepted structural and plumage difference from the two target taxa (Gibbins 2004; Gibbins et al. 2010; Gibbins et al. 2011). The two Selangor birds were not included in the sample.

On each bird, the number of new feathers visible in each of four feather tracts was counted: (i) mantle and scapulars, (ii) lesser and median coverts, (iii) greater coverts, and (iv) tertials. For each bird, the number of new feathers in each tract was expressed as a percentage of the total number of feathers in that tract. Tertials are normally not visible on flying birds so only standing birds were used for this tract. Some flying birds were used for assessment of moult in the other tracts.

Frequency plots were produced for each feather tract to show general patterns. Principal Components Analysis (PCA) was used to integrate across all tracts simultaneously. This analysis allows visualisation of the similarity of individual birds based not on each tract separately but all tracts together. On a PCA plot, birds positioned close together are very similar (i.e. in this case, they have similar moult), while those far apart are very different (have different moult). A clustering technique (Hierarchical Clustering on Principal Components, HCPC) was also applied to the moult data to establish whether there were distinct, statistically supported groups of birds and, if so, how many groups there were. These groups were then overlain on the PCA to help visualise patterns of similarity in moult among the sample birds.

The simple goal of the analysis was to understand whether a random selection of first cycle gulls from mixed flocks on the wintering grounds clustered into distinct types based on differences in moult. Results are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Samples size (number of birds, n) are shown for each feather tract; all sample sizes are > 100 birds.

What the Data Tell Us

The most obvious point is that none of the tracts show a normal (bell-shaped) curve (Figure 1). Such curves are frequent (hence 'normal') in ecological data sets and indicate that average values occur most frequently, with values further and further either side of the average occurring with lower and lower frequencies. In the case of gull moult, a normal curve would indicate that most birds have a moderate level of moult, with birds with either very little or lots of moult much less frequent. Clearly the data do not show this, with birds at either end of the distribution frequent for almost all the feather tracts.

The lesser and median coverts show a rather flat distribution, but with the two extremes of moult being most frequent. The majority of birds (63%) already had a full set of new scapulars (i.e. 100% new), with just a small percentage of birds having less than 80% new feathers. Nevertheless, some birds had no or very few (<10%) new scapulars. Most birds had few new greater coverts or tertials, but some had replaced all feathers in these tracts (15% of birds had replaced all of their tertials, while 11% had replaced all visible greater coverts).

These patterns are interesting and suggest that there is something more complex than a single predominant moult type, but from the frequency plots alone it is difficult to see whether there might be distinct groups of birds. The PCA, however, provides a very clear picture (Figure 2). The clustering technique separated birds into three groups, based on the extent of moult in all four feather tracts. The groups represent two extreme sets of birds [one group with very extensive moult (light green) and another with very little or no moult (orange)] and a third group that is essentially made of up birds that have rather intermediate moult (blue).

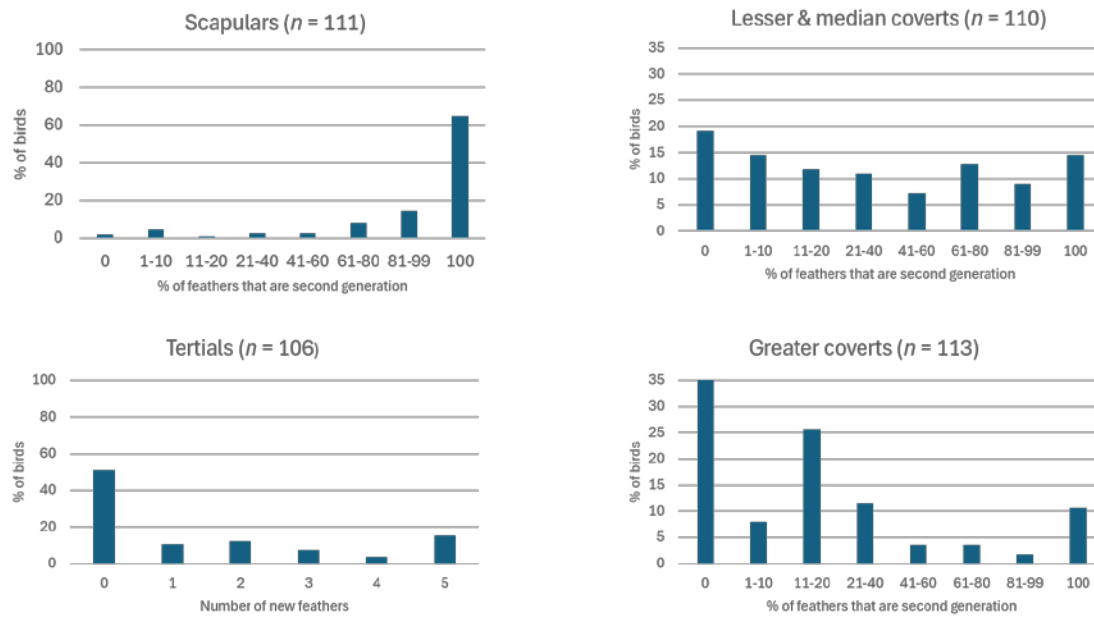


Figure 1: Frequencies of new feathers in different tracts of Heuglin's and Steppe Gulls in mid-winter. Samples sizes (n) are given

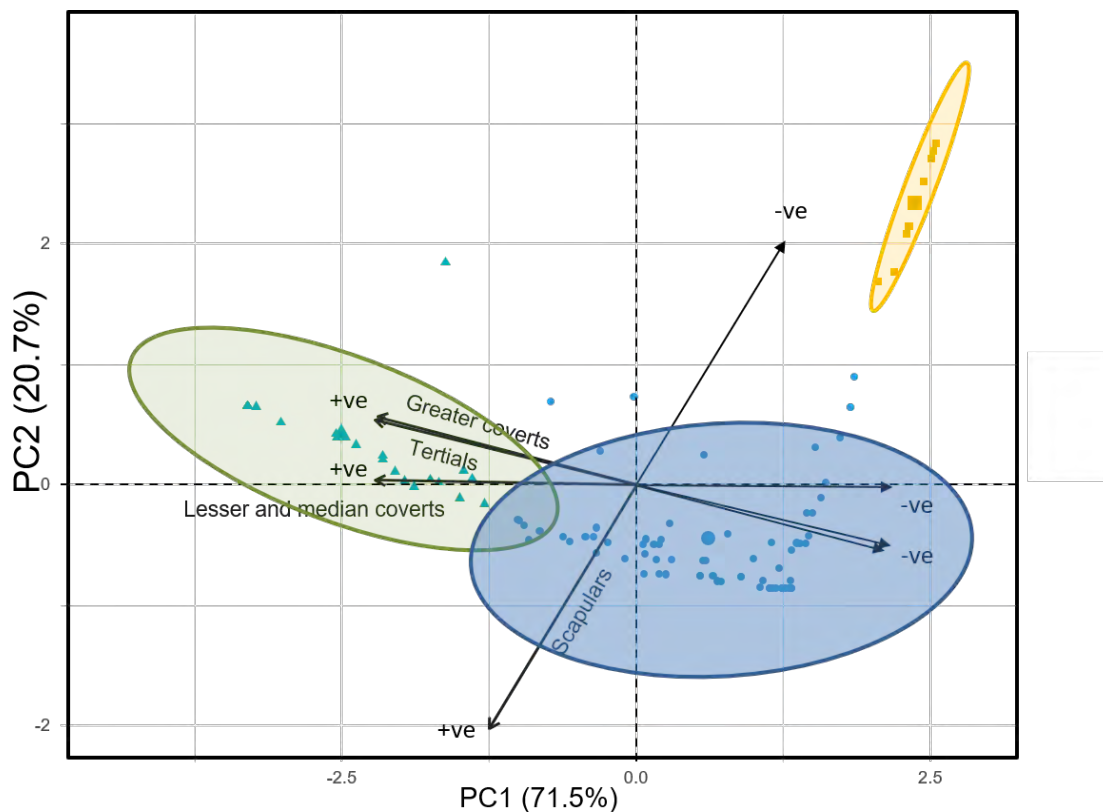


Figure 2: Principal Components Analysis of a sample of Heuglin's and Steppe Gulls from their wintering grounds in mid-winter. Each sample bird is a dot, colour coded according to the group it is classified as being part of (based on Hierarchical Clustering on Principal Components). Ellipses show the 95% confidence intervals for each group, with birds outside of these ellipses considered outliers. The arrows show the direction of change for each feather tract; a positive sign ('+ve') means that as you move across the plot in this direction, birds have more new feathers for this tract, while a negative sign ('-ve') means that birds have fewer new feathers.

The PCA and cluster analysis support the theory that there are indeed distinct 'populations' of large gulls that, in January on their wintering grounds, can be grouped according to differences in moult. However, it shows that the most meaningful way to treat the patterns of moult is to recognise three groups rather than two. In fact, the majority of birds (at least in this sample) fit into an intermediate moult group. Birds in the intermediate group typically have renewed all or most of their scapulars but have lower than average numbers or no new coverts and tertials

Birds in the limited moult group have zero or very few new feathers in any tract, while those in the extensive moult group have all new scapulars, and at least some new tertials and coverts; the most extreme birds in this group have replaced all visible scapulars, wing coverts and tertials. On its own, having all new scapulars is not enough for a bird to fit into the extensive moult group – some new coverts are needed too.

How can we interpret these results overall and what do they tell us about the two Selangor birds? The most obvious interpretation is that differences are not clear cut, with continuous variation in the extent of moult between the two extremes. Nevertheless, birds at or close to the extreme endpoints are very different – there is a group of birds with all visible feathers in their scapulars, coverts and tertials already replaced by mid-December, and a group of birds with no feather replacement whatsoever or just one or two new feathers. The two end-groups correspond with expectations based on differences in breeding location and timing so, in turn, match Heuglin's and Steppe. However, there are many birds with intermediate moult that are hard to assign to either taxon.

The two Selangor birds are superimposed onto Figure 3 based on their moult values for each feather tract. One bird clearly fits neatly into one end-group and the other into the opposite end-group. They do not quite sit quite at the extreme ends of respective groups. This is because even the Heuglin's has two new wing coverts, and the Steppe, while having all new scapulars and many new coverts, still has its first generation tertials and a few first generation coverts remaining. The two birds are therefore not extreme endpoints but rather typical examples of each of the two end-groups.

Large gull taxonomy and occurrence in Malaysia

Any large gull in Malaysia is a rare sight, so we were extremely fortunate to see two birds together. We cannot say for certain that one is a Heuglin's and the other is a Steppe, but we can say that they represent very typical examples of two, non-overlapping end-groups that have been defined based on moult; such differences in moult align with a more northerly, late-breeding population and a more southerly, earlier-breeding one. Differences in the extent of their post-juvenile (preformative) moult are complemented by the structural differences highlighted earlier. In our opinion, if these birds were seen within their normal wintering range, they would be identified routinely as a Heuglin's Gull and a Steppe Gull.

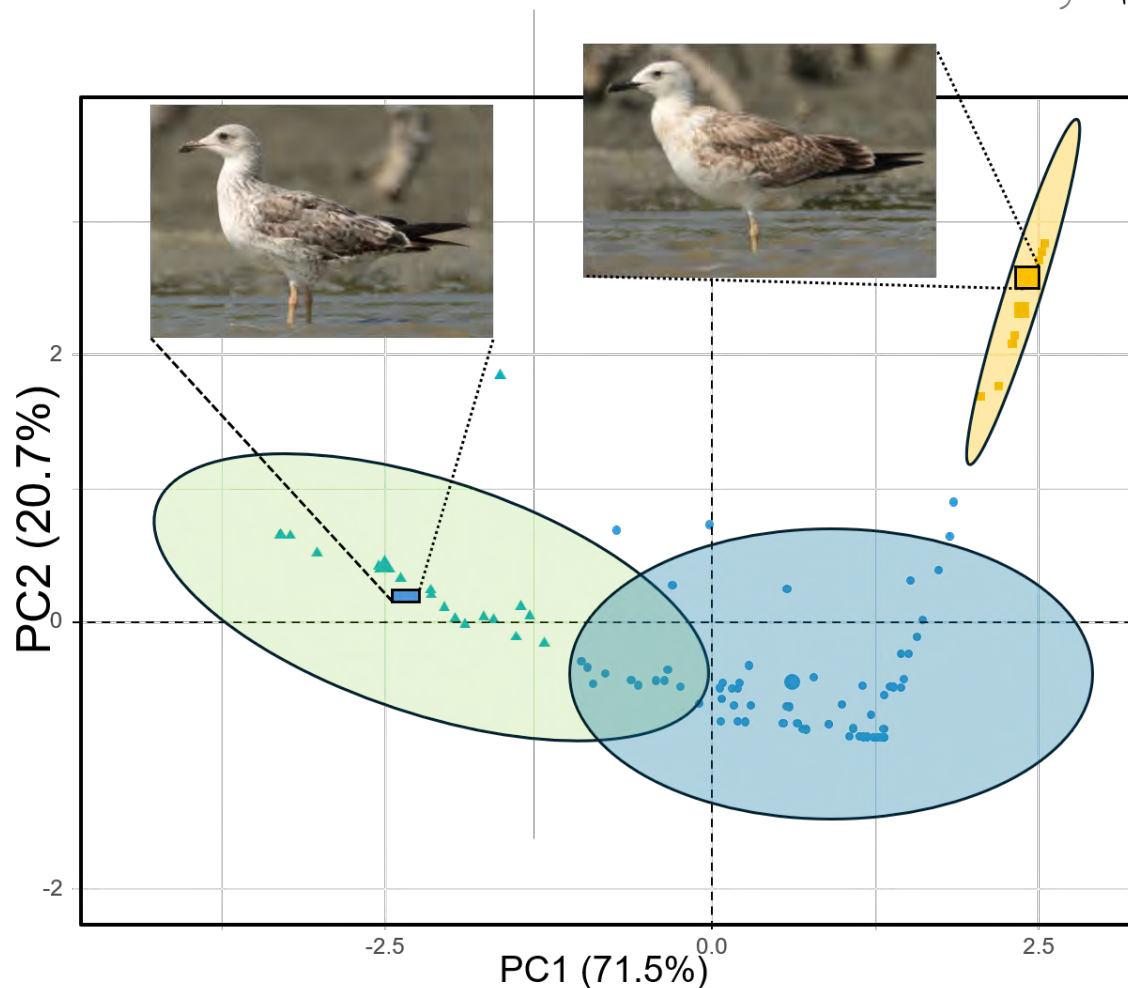


Figure 3: Schematic showing how the two Selangor birds sit within objectively defined groups of gulls. The positions of the two birds are based on their moult % values for each feather tract. To avoid clutter, the arrows for each tract have been removed. The diagram shows that the two birds are typical examples (close to the centre) of the two most different groups ('endgroups').

Heuglin's and Steppe are part of a Northern Hemisphere group of gulls whose evolution and taxonomy have been debated for many years (Crochet et al. 2002; Liebers & Helbig 2002; Liebers et al. 2001 & 2004). The underlying reason for ongoing uncertainty is that, in evolutionary terms, these gulls are 'young' and have not diverged to the extent that genetic differences between them are clear; they are very much borderline, in terms of the genetic thresholds normally used to draw species boundaries. Notably, deKniff et al. (2001) found that 76-80% of the genetic variance observed across the Eurasian large gull taxa was due to differences within the populations studied (i.e. among individuals of the same taxon), with only the remaining 20-24% attributable to differences between taxa. Therefore, while divergence in displays, behaviour and breeding biology have created near-complete reproductive isolation between some of the taxa, lineages have not been separated for sufficiently long for nuclear-DNA sequences to have diverged clearly.

Heuglin's Gull (sometimes called 'Siberian Gull') is most commonly placed within the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*L. fuscus*) complex that includes nominate *fuscus* as well as *graellsii* and *intermedius*. While Adriaens et al. (2022) adopt this treatment, they emphasise that *heuglini*



differs structurally from other members of the complex, being more elegant, with a smaller head, a more slender bill and longer legs. Malling Olsen (2018) treats *heuglini* as a full species: Heuglin's Gull *L. heuglini*, with two subspecies – *heuglini* from NW Russia and *taimyrensis* from Russia's Taimyr Peninsular. Importantly, tracking studies have shown that these two have different main wintering areas – *heuglini* flies south to winter around East Africa, the Middle-east and across to India (Panagoda et al. 2025), while *taimyrensis* flies south-eastward to winter in East Asia, mainly around Japan and Korea (van Dijk et al 2011).

Steppe Gull has been considered both a subspecies of Caspian Gull and a southern member of the Lesser Black backed Gull complex (see Malling Olsen 2018). Its old treatment as a subspecies of Caspian is nowadays largely discounted, as the two differ in many ways and are unlikely to be confused. Its mtDNA is very similar to Heuglin's Gull (Collinson et al. 2008), but most adults can be told apart based on details of their wingtip pattern, upperpart grey tones and moult; their long calls differ too (Adriaens et al. 2022).

Previous records of large gulls in Malaysia, all immature birds, appear to belong to the Lesser Black-backed complex, and have been assumed to be *heuglini/taimyrensis*. While these two are not known to be separable in immature plumages, 'Lesser Black-backed Gulls' seen for example in Thailand are assumed to be *taimyrensis* due to this taxon's more easterly wintering grounds.

To our knowledge Steppe Gull has not really been considered as a possibility here in Malaysia due to its more westerly breeding and wintering ranges. However, Steppe Gulls occur commonly in Bangladesh along with Heuglin's (e.g. many images on eBird, and personal observations by CG in Feb 2025). The recent observation of a ringed Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* (white leg flag, code 7MK) in South Selangor from a breeding colony in Northern India (Pranay Khadanga *pers. comm.*) proves that birds do move eastwards around the Bay of Bengal and down through the Andaman Sea to reach Malaysia. There is no reason to think a young Steppe Gull cannot do the same. Whatever the taxonomic rank of Steppe and Heuglin's Gull, it is interesting to us that both may occur in Malaysia. We encourage birders to take images and detailed notes of any large gulls seen in Malaysia, so that we may be able to go beyond simply labelling them all as 'Lesser Black-backed Gulls'.

An interesting discussion point is whether the two Selangor birds came from different places and 'found' each other in Malaysia, or whether they came together from the same place. We can only speculate on this, but if they came together then the Heuglin's may be a (nominate) *heuglini* rather than a *taimyrensis*.

Summary

Two first cycle large gulls were seen together on several dates in North Selangor in January 2026, in a gull flock that included Black-headed, Brown-headed and Slender-billed Gulls. The marked difference in the extent of moult of the two large gulls, together with size and structural differences, point strongly to one being a Heuglin's Gull and the other being a Steppe Gull. The Steppe was smaller, more compact and had undergone an extensive post-juvenile (performative) moult. This moult places it firmly among birds routinely labelled as Steppe Gull when seen in the normal wintering areas. Steppe Gull would be new to Malaysia.

The two birds were clearly associating with each other, and it is interesting to speculate whether they travelled together to Malaysia or came from different places and happened to converge on the same small area on the North Selangor coast.

Acknowledgements

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Food Sources of the Purple-naped Spiderhunter

Amar-Singh HSS & Robert A. Cheke

Introduction

The Purple-naped Spiderhunter *Kurochkinogramma hypogrammicum* is an atypical, large sunbird-like spiderhunter that occupies a debated taxonomic bridge between standard sunbirds (Nectariniidae) and true spiderhunters (*Arachnothera* spp.). Moyle et al. (2011) used molecular data to conclude that the species should be included in the genus *Arachnothera* with the other spiderhunters, but this was disputed by Campillo et al. (2018) who showed that it was on its own as a monospecific genus, then known as *Hypogramma*. It is treated as a spiderhunter here following AviList (2025), but some authors consider it to be a sunbird rather than a spiderhunter (Cheke 2023; Cheke & Mann 2025).

Purple-naped Spiderhunters are found in the understorey of primary and secondary lowland forests, including freshwater swamp forest and heath forest, up to at least 1,200m, in Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, south-west Yunnan, the Thai-Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Borneo (Wells 2007; Cheke & Mann 2025). The species has a large range of food items in its diet including insect prey (mosquitoes and ants), spiders, fruits, nectar and flowers (Cheke & Mann 2025). This report provides an update on the bird's diet and foraging behaviour based on a combination of personal observations and a review of photographic data variously sourced.

Material and Methods

Observations were made at various forest reserves in Perak, Malaysia, during the past 35 years (Amar-Singh HSS pers. obs.). These include the Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ulu Kinta Forest Reserve, the foothills of Bukit Larut (Maxwell's Hill) and the surrounding secondary forest of these three areas. In addition, observations were made during birdwatching trips to north Borneo. Some of these observations have previously been documented in an online plant-bird relationship database (Wee-Yeow Chin 2017).

Data were supplemented by a literature review, examination of all images in the Macaulay Library (ML) (1,178 images as of 28 June 2026) and an online image search. Care was taken to avoid duplicated images in the different databases and online postings.

Feeding information from images was accepted if the bird was represented feeding directly in the image or in any description provided by the observer. Birds feeding in captivity were not included. Possible nectar sources are also described in this report. These refer to occasions when a bird was observed next to a flowering plant species repeatedly by different observers, but with no written description of feeding behaviour. While it could be argued that birds were looking for insects in these plants, one or more additional factors suggest that the bird was feeding on nectar:

1. the repeated presence at these flowers,
2. birds having pollen-stained bills,
3. the posture next to the flowers, and/or
4. the fact that these plants are a known nectar source for other birds.

Plant identifications relied on a variety of sources including Holttum & Enoch (1991), Gardner et al. (2015, 2016, 2018), and Plants of the World Online (2026). In addition, numerous other online sources were used to assist in the verification of individual plant species.

Results

Nectar and Flower Food Sources

Nectar is an important primary food source. Birds will generally perch on the plant to feed on the nectar but will occasionally hover/flutter to access it. All nectar feeding observed was by conventional feeding and not by nectar robbing. In conventional feeding, the bill is inserted into the flower. The bi-tubular tongue has a brush-like tip which aids feeding (Cheke & Mann 2025). Uniquely, birds perch on and eat the flowers of *Poikilospermum suaveolens* possibly to get to the nectar (Plate 1) (Amar-Singh HSS & Lee-Fung Chai 2023).



Plate 1: Purple-naped Spiderhunter/Sunbird eating flowers of *Poikilospermum suaveolens* possibly to obtain nectar. Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, 08 Aug 2019.

Table 1 lists the known and new nectar and flower food sources of the Purple-naped Spiderhunter. Fifteen plants were recognised as food sources of nectar. Of the documented nectar sources, 14 are native plants and only one is an exotic species. Documented nectar sources include *Eurya acuminata*, *Dendrobium crumenatum*, *Dischidia hirsuta*, *Mezoneuron sumatranum*, unidentified mistletoes in the Loranthaceae family, *Plagiostachys* spp., *Etlingera*

elatior, *Calliandra haematocephala* (exotic), *Saraca cauliflora*, *Bauhinia* spp., *Musa* spp., *Syzygium samarangense*, *Aeschynanthus* spp., *Elaeocarpus angustifolius* and *Poikilospermum suaveolens* (flowers eaten to access the nectar) (Plate 2). Of these nine are newly identified nectar sources for this species.



Plate 2: Purple-naped Spiderhunter feeding on nectar. Left: *Eurya acuminata*, 30 Jun 2013. Right: *Dischidia hirsuta*, May 2015. Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

Table 1: Nectar Food Sources of the Purple-naped Spiderhunter

Scientific Name	Common Name	Feeding Method* & Comments	Location	Source
<i>Eurya acuminata</i>	Edible Leaf Eurya	Conventional feeding technique	Peninsular Malaysia	Amar-Singh HSS (ML659368459, ML659368458)
<i>Dendrobium crumenatum</i>	Pigeon Orchid	Conventional feeding technique	Peninsular Malaysia	Cheke & Mann 2025, Amar-Singh HSS (ML367389621)
<i>Dischidia hirsuta</i>	Ant Plant	Conventional feeding technique	Peninsular Malaysia	Cheke & Mann 2025, Amar-Singh HSS (ML378489021, ML378357111, ML378944921)
<i>Mezoneuron sumatranum</i>	A type of leguminous creeper called the Cat's Claw Liana	Conventional feeding technique; a favourite nectar source of many spiderhunters, sunbirds, leafbirds.	Sabah, Malaysia	Nathanael Poffley (ML660006218), Roger MacKertich (ML659369096), Manuel Morales (ML654703208)
Loranthaceae family mistletoe		Conventional feeding technique	Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia	Brian Stone (ML650944777), Ching Chai Liew (ML634997455)
<i>Plagiostachys</i> spp. & other unidentified	Wild ginger plants	Conventional feeding technique	Peninsular Malaysia	Cheke & Mann 2025,



Scientific Name	Common Name	Feeding Method* & Comments	Location	Source
Zingiberaceae plants				
<i>Etlingera elatior</i>	Torch Ginger, Bunga Kantan	A favourite nectar source of many spiderhunters	Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia	Manod Taengtum (ML249324611), Manod Taengtum (ML637301230), ZhongYing Koay (personal blog on Flickr)
<i>Calliandra haematocephala</i>	Red Powder Puff (exotic species)	Conventional feeding technique	Sabah, Malaysia, Yunnan, China,	Allen Lyu (ML554136581), Xiwen Chen (ML610287037), Zhen Li (ML649582353)
<i>Saraca cauliflora</i> (<i>Saraca thaipingensis</i>)	Yellow Saraca	Conventional feeding technique	Peninsular & Bornean Malaysia	Li-May Tay (ML534753281), Tom Reynolds (ML655618402)
<i>Bauhinia</i> spp.			Peninsular Malaysia	Robinson 1927
<i>Musa</i> spp.	Wild Banana			Cheke & Mann 2025
<i>Syzygium samarangense</i> cultivar with pink flowers	Water Apple, Jambu Air	Conventional feeding technique	Peninsular Malaysia	Lee Cheow Lim (ML639351361)
<i>Aeschynanthus</i> spp.		Conventional feeding technique	Thailand	Rungsrit Kanjanavanit (ML370718701, ML370718711)
<i>Elaeocarpus angustifolius</i>	Blue Marble Tree	Conventional feeding technique	Peninsular Malaysia	Redzlan A. Rahman (personal blog)
<i>Poikilospermum suaveolens</i>		Eats tiny pink flowers on globular inflorescences to access the nectar they contain	Malaysia	Cheke & Mann 2025, Amar-Singh HSS & Chai (2023), Amar-Singh HSS (ML379625981, ML379625971) David Newell (ML644205094) Lee Cheow Lim (ML641313006)

ML = Macaulay Library

Note: There were two other plant species where an identification was not made.

*Conventional Feeding: Extracting nectar through the natural floral opening, enabling pollination as the bird contacts the flower's reproductive parts. Nectar Robbing: Bypassing pollination by piercing or probing the base of the flower to take nectar without touching the reproductive parts.

Table 2 lists another 10 possible nectar food sources of the Purple-naped Spiderhunter, of which three are exotic plants.

Table 2: Possible Nectar Food Sources of the Purple-naped Spiderhunter

Scientific Name	Common Name	Comments	Location	Source
<i>Callistemon</i> sp.	Bottlebrush (exotic species)	A common food item for the Streaked Spiderhunter <i>Arachnothera magna</i> & sunbirds	Uncertain	Image by Wen-Hua Chen on DiBird.com
<i>Spathodea campanulata</i>	African Tulip Tree (exotic species)	A common food item for many Spiderhunters	Thailand	Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok (ML613024509)



Scientific Name	Common Name	Comments	Location	Source
<i>Scurrula ferruginea</i>	Rusty-leaf Mistletoe	There is a possibility the bird was feeding on the fruit. A nectar source for the Plain Sunbird <i>Anthreptes simplex</i>	Peninsular Malaysia	Nyuk Hua Chin (ML608602656, ML608602655)
<i>Cocos nucifera</i>	Coconut tree	A common food item for sunbirds	Vietnam	Tomasz Rygiel (ML649445434, ML649445433, ML649445432)
<i>Syzygium pycnanthum</i>	Kelat Jambu, Wild Rose Apple	Known to feed on other <i>Syzygium</i> spp.	Sumatera, Indonesia	Robert Maxfield (ML187165571)
<i>Prunus campanulata</i>	Taiwan Cherry	Although the plant is native to southern China, Taiwan, and Vietnam, the Houaphan region in Laos is adjacent to Vietnam	Houaphan, Laos	Jan de Groot (ML309033981, ML309033971)
<i>Prunus cerasoides</i>	Wild Himalayan Cherry		Yunnan, China	Craig Brelsford (ML56633041)
Unidentified <i>Costus</i> sp. (possibly <i>Costus woodsonii</i>)	Exotic species		Vietnam	Ngoc Sam Thuong Dang (ML321246351, ML321246341)
<i>Woodfordia fruticosa</i>	Fire Flame Bush	A food item for some sunbirds	Yunnan, China	ZF Liu (ML633321041, ML633321037)

ML = Macaulay Library

Note: There were five other plant species where an identification was not made.

Fruits are an important primary food source. Generally, the birds perch on plants to feed on the fruit but will often hover/flutter to access it (Plate 3). All of the fruits seen to be taken were small (mostly 6-11mm in size, but some up to 15mm) and swallowed whole.



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Plate 3: Purple-naped Spiderhunter eating fruit. Left: Fluttering to reach *Macaranga bancana* fruit, 11 July 2024. Right: Reaching for *Eurya acuminata* fruit, 27 Dec 2021. Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.



Table 3 lists 10 fruit and seed sources of the Purple-naped Spiderhunter, of which all are plants native to the site of observation. Of these, two are newly identified fruit sources.

Table 3: Fruit and Seed Food Sources of the Purple-naped Spiderhunter

Scientific Name	Common Name	Notes on Feeding	Location	Source
<i>Eurya acuminata</i>	Edible Leaf Eurya		Peninsular Malaysia	Amar-Singh HSS (ML402200531, ML379645071, ML379334681)
<i>Macaranga bancana</i>	Common Mahang	Will often flutter to gain access to the fruit; will feed fruits to fledged juveniles; very common food item for spiderhunters and sunbirds.	Peninsular Malaysia	Amar-Singh HSS (2013), Cheke & Mann 2025, Amar-Singh HSS (ML648981375, ML627677472, ML62136725, ML436434341, ML379399681, ML379203131)
<i>Macaranga heynei</i>	Blue Mahang	Have to flutter to reach the fruit.	Peninsular Malaysia	Cheke & Mann 2025, Amar-Singh HSS (ML659371547)
<i>Macaranga gigantea</i>	Giant Mahang	Common food item for spiderhunters	Peninsular Malaysia	Cheke & Mann 2025, Amar-Singh HSS (ML379399681), Charmain Ang (ML424321041)
<i>Macaranga triloba</i>			Thailand, Sabah, Malaysia	Cheke & Mann 2025, Nattapong Banhomglin (ML568198781), 独行虾 (ML568260021), Mark Smiles (ML491406331)
<i>Alocasia</i> spp.		A very common food item in Sabah, Malaysia	Bornean Malaysia	Cheke & Mann 2025, Gustino Lanese (ML504036371), Philip O. M. Steinhoff (ML117053051)
<i>Callicarpa longifolia</i>	Long-Leaved Beautyberry		Bornean Malaysia	Wells 2007, Cheke & Mann 2025, Butch Carter (ML174410371, ML174410301)
<i>Cheilocostus speciosus</i> (syn. <i>Costus speciosus</i>)	Crepe Ginger	Eat the fruit & help to disperse seeds	Bornean & Peninsular Malaysia	Andrew William (ML586220381, ML586220351), Joshua Stacy (ML638568277), Liew WK (ML630925341), Phillip Edwards (ML633591997)
<i>Dillenia excelsa</i>	Simpoh Ungu	Feeds on seeds	Bornean Malaysia	Wells 2007, Cheke & Mann 2025
Bambusoideae	Bamboo seeds	Possibly feeds on bamboo seeds	Peninsular Malaysia	Cheke & Mann 2025, Amar-Singh HSS (pers. obs.)

ML = Macaulay Library

Insect prey (mosquitoes and ants) and spiders are recognised in the diet of the Purple-naped Spiderhunter (Cheke & Mann 2025) but such records are often based on adult birds seen with the items in their bills (Table 4; Plate 4), thus whether such adults feed on the prey or are collecting prey to feed nestlings or juveniles is uncertain.

Table 4: Animal Food Sources of the Purple-naped Spiderhunter

Scientific Name	Common Name	Notes on Feeding	Location	Source
Unknown	Spider	Carrying a spider possibly to feed juveniles	Peninsular Malaysia	Amar-Singh HSS (ML635918868)
Unknown	Insect, possibly spider		Sabah, Malaysia	Dubi Shapiro (ML618553958)
Unknown	Spider / Insect	Taking insect prey or spider from a web	Sabah, Malaysia	Liew WK (ML640410490)

ML = Macaulay Library



Plate 4: Purple-naped Spiderhunter with spider prey, possibly for a juvenile. Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, 15 May 2025.

Foraging Behaviour

Purple-naped Spiderhunters are not uncommon participants of lowland mixed foraging parties (Wells 2007). They generally forage low down, below 5 m, but sometimes higher. Usually, they forage singly or occasionally as a pair, with exceptions for family groups with fledged juveniles. They will not uncommonly hover/flutter to access fruit and also nectar and will raid spiders' webs for spiders and trapped prey. Adults regurgitate fruits of *Macaranga*

bancana for juveniles (Plate 5). Feeding is often accompanied by loud calls (Amar-Singh HSS, pers. obs.). They are known to cast pellets (Plate 5) (Amar-Singh HSS 2025; Cheke & Mann 2025).



Plate 5: Left: Purple-naped Spiderhunter feeding juvenile with *Macaranga bancana* fruit, 31 Mar 2022. Right: Juvenile casting a pellet. 25 Jun 2024. Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

Discussion

This review has identified nine new nectar and two fruit sources with a potential additional 10 more nectar sources. It highlights the value of citizen science and image databases like the Macaulay Library. Fruit and nectar are the primary food sources with insects/animal prey possible for juveniles. Of these, personal observations over more than three decades suggest that fruits are the commonest food source in Peninsular Malaysia (Amar-Singh HSS pers. obs.).

The vast majority of nectar sources for Purple-naped Spiderhunters are native plants, but this is probably more a feature of the habitat rather than a choice as the birds are not habitually entering gardens, preferring forested environments. The high frequency of conventional feeding techniques exhibited by Purple-naped Spiderhunters and the rarity of nectar robbing by them suggests that the species is an important pollinator of native, mostly jungle, plants. In comparison, 33 of 51 (65%) nectar sources of Streaked Spiderhunters *Arachnothera magna* are exotic species, because these birds often visit highland gardens (Amar-Singh HSS 2020).

More work is required on the prey given to juveniles, which may have a greater animal component.

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Observations on Nesting Care Behaviour and Diet of the Orange-breasted Trogon

Huzairi Abd Halim & Raiandy Ramli

Introduction

The Orange-breasted Trogon *Harpactes oreskios* (Kesumba Harimau) has a wide distribution from South China, Myanmar, Indochina, Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia to parts of Borneo and Indonesia (Wells 1999; Collar & de Juana 2020). Although a detailed account of nesting behaviour has been documented from Thailand (Steward & Pierce 2011), locally only three nests have been reported with limited details (Wells 1999; Wells 2007).

We report two nesting episodes, one of which had continual, almost daily, observations, allowing us to document various aspects of the species' breeding biology, including nest-site selection, nest construction, parental role division, feeding patterns, nestling diet, and parental care behaviour until the young successfully fledged.

Disclosure on Nest Observations

After the second nest was discovered, it was observed by a number of individuals over time until the nestlings fledged. A pop-up hide was created with a screen and observers stayed at a distance of approximately 20 meters from the nest. Long lens and videography equipment was used. Close up images of the nest interior was only done by the authors and limited to a few critical images. The adults appeared to be comfortable with being observed and did not show any alarm.

Observations

Nest One

On 01 May 2026 we observed Orange-breasted Trogons excavating a nest at Bukit Ayer, Perlis, Malaysia at a fruit orchard with plants such as the Durian *Durio sp.*, Dokong *Lansium domesticum*, and Rambutan *Nephelium lappaceum*. The nest site selected was the top of a dead, broken tree trunk, approximately 15 meters high (Plate 1), which we could view from an elevated position. Nest excavation was carried out gradually, using the bill to tear and excavate softened wood. Both the male and female excavated the nest. Sadly, the dead tree trunk broke and the site was abandoned.

Nest Two

Choice of Nest Location and Structure

A second nest was discovered on 11 May 2026 with eggs already laid. The nest was located in the same fruit orchard described above. The nest site selected was a decaying tree branch, approximately 1.5 meters high and 15 cm in diameter. It is likely that the nest was made in a Rambutan tree that has died. The nest was constructed within a broken branch that lacked dense surrounding foliage or twigs (Plate 2). The nest cavity was estimated to have an entrance diameter of approximately 8-10 cm and a depth of about 8 cm.



Plate 1: Nest 1 - A male Orange-breasted Trogon in the process of constructing its nest, carefully excavating a cavity in a decaying tree stump using its bill. Perlis, Malaysia, 01 May 2026.



Plate 2: Nest 2 - Overview of nest with juvenile (left) and adult (right) in nest. Perlis, Malaysia, May-June 2026.

Timelines of Nesting Observations and Outcome

11 May 2026	Nest discovered with eggs
21 May 2026	First chick hatched
01 June 2026	Juveniles fledged

Incubation Period

When we discovered the nest, it already has three eggs so we are uncertain when incubation started. Incubation behaviour was particularly interesting. While inside the cavity, the incubating adult positioned its head facing the nest entrance, with the tail held almost vertically upward. When disturbed or alerted to a potential threat, the bird would flatten its head and bill against the front portion of the cavity, reducing its visibility from outside (Plate 3).



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Plate 3: Orange-breasted Trogon incubating postures. Left female (27 May 2026), right male (11 May 2026). Perlis, Malaysia.

During the incubation period, the male appeared to undertake the majority of daytime incubation duties, whereas the female typically assumed incubation responsibilities during the late afternoon and throughout the night. The female enters the nest to care for the chicks while waiting for the male to return. She does not stay at the nest throughout the daytime during the incubation period; only the male does. This pattern suggests a division of parental responsibilities to ensure optimal incubation conditions. We did not observe the incubating adult being fed at any time by the other adult. The incubation duration was more than 10 days.

Nestling Period

Of the three eggs only two hatched. The first chick hatched on 21 May 2026 (Plate 4). During the first nine days after hatching, the female remained almost all the time inside the nest cavity, brooding and protecting the chicks. During this period, the male was primarily responsible for finding food and bringing it to the nest, where it was passed to the female to feed the chicks (Plate 5). We also observed that food items passed by the male to the female were not always fed directly to the chicks. When there was surplus food or when the chicks were already satiated, the female would consume the remaining prey herself. On several occasions, particularly during the early nestling stage, the female was seen feeding a portion of the prey to the chicks before swallowing the left-over food. This behaviour may help maximise energy efficiency while ensuring that the nutritional needs of the growing chicks are met. This continued from day one to day nine, with the male occasionally substituting for the female, possibly giving her time to feed, bathe or rest.



Plate 4: Sequential images of Orange-breasted Trogon eggs and nestlings (11 May, 21 May, 25 May, 2026). Perlis, Malaysia.

Plate 6 shows images of nestlings. Between days ten and twelve after hatching, notable behavioural changes were observed. As the nestlings grew larger and occupied most of the cavity space, both parents ceased entering the nest regularly. Instead, food was delivered directly at the nest entrance (Plate 7). This behaviour reduced disturbance within the increasingly confined nest chamber while simultaneously encouraged the young to move closer to the entrance.

Upon approaching the nest, either the male or female carrying food will often give a few short calls, such as "tutt, tutt, tutt", likely signalling their arrival to their mate. The individual inside the nest will then emerge and leave the nest, allowing the feeding exchange and parental duty shift to take place.

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Plate 5: Male bringing food to female and female feeding nestlings. Perlis, Malaysia, 28 May 2026.

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Plate 6: Images of Orange-breasted Trogon nestlings 30 May 2026 morning, 01 June 2026 morning, 01 June 2026 evening. Perlis, Malaysia.

Both adults occasionally used a horizontal branch at a staging tree, a distance of 1 meter from the nest to wait for the partner to bring food for the nestlings. At times both adults arrived at the nest at the same time, or one adult arrived while the other was feeding. We observed the male Orange-breasted Trogon attempting to deliver food to the nestlings, but the female remained at the nest entrance. Despite calling repeatedly and circling the nest, he was forced

to wait until she moved away. This behaviour was observed several times in the days leading up to fledging.



Plate 7: Adults bringing food to older nestlings. Perlis, Malaysia, 27 May 2026.

Throughout the observation period, both adults also displayed alternating resting behaviour. Between approximately 1200 and 1430 hrs, one adult would often leave the nest area to bathe or forage for itself, while the other remained nearby as a guard. This behaviour ensured continuous nest surveillance without compromising the adults' own maintenance requirements.

During our observations, which concluded at 1700 hrs each day, the female was typically still present at the nest in the late afternoon. It is possible that she remained with the chicks throughout the night, providing protection and helping to regulate their body temperature. It is also possible, the male stayed nearby, keeping watch and helping to guard the nest territory.

Feeding Behaviour, Frequency and Food Items

Feeding frequency increased progressively as the nestlings grew. On the second day after hatching, only two to three feeding visits were recorded. By the fourth day, feeding frequency increased to six visits in the morning and three in the afternoon. On the sixth day, feeding activity rose to eight morning visits and four afternoon visits. Feeding activity peaked between day eight and ten after hatching, with nine feeding visits recorded in the morning and five in the afternoon. This increase was likely associated with the rapid growth of the nestlings and their increasing energy demands.

Table 1. Frequency of feeding Orange-breasted Trogon nestling.

Date	Days after hatching	Feeding frequency	
		Morning	Afternoon
21 May 2026	2	2-3 times	Nil
23 May 2026	4	6 times	3 times
25 May 2026	6	8 times	4 times
27 May 2026	8-10	9 times	5-6 times
01 June 2026	12 (last day in nest)	4 times	1 time (last feed in nest)

The nestling diet consisted of a variety of arthropods delivered by the adults, with spiders *Arachnida*, caterpillars *Lepidoptera*, katydids *Tettigoniidae*, grasshoppers *Caelifera*, stick insects *Phasmatodea* and mantises *Mantodea* being the most frequently observed prey items (Plate 8 & 9). The diversity of prey items suggests that the species is an opportunistic predator exploiting available food resources within its habitat. The inclusion of relatively large prey such as grasshoppers, mantises, and stick insects also indicates the adults' ability to secure high-energy food items to support nestling development. No small reptiles, other vertebrate prey or fruit were observed being delivered to the nestlings during the period of observation.



Plate 8: Composite image of some of the prey items fed to nestlings. Perlis, Malaysia, May 2026.

The size of the prey did not appear to change significantly throughout the nesting period; however, the feeding method varied. When bringing larger prey items, such as caterpillars, the female would often feed only a portion to the chicks or extract the softer contents and fluids before offering them. Any remaining portion was usually consumed by the female. All prey

items brought to the nest could be observed clearly from the beginning of the observation. However, no fixed pattern was detected in the types of food delivered, as they varied considerably from one feeding visit to another.

During the second week after hatching, prolonged dry weather may have reduced prey availability, making food more difficult to locate. As a result, there were occasions when either the male or female took more than an hour before returning to the nest with food. This suggests that environmental conditions can have a significant influence on foraging efficiency and feeding frequency.



Plate 9: Stick insect and katydid prey fed to nestlings. Perlis, Malaysia, May 2026.

Faecal Sacs and Removal

No observations or photographic evidence were obtained to confirm whether the parents removed the chicks' faecal sacs from the nest. It is possible that the parents consumed them in the nest, a behaviour commonly observed in many bird species during the nestling stage.

Fledging Observations

On 01 June 2026, during the morning prior to fledging, feeding activity declined markedly, with only four feeding visits recorded in the morning and a single visit in the afternoon. On the same day, both adult birds were observed vocalising more frequently near the nest entrance, a behaviour that may have served to encourage the nestlings to undertake their first flight. Despite the reduction in feeding activity, the female continued to exhibit strong parental care. She was observed entering the nest cavity during rainfall, presumably to shelter and protect the nestlings from adverse weather conditions.

Behavioural changes in the nestlings on the final day before fledging were particularly noteworthy. During the morning, the nestlings appeared relatively inactive and showed little

indication that they were preparing to leave the nest. However, by the afternoon, following a period of rainfall and the final feeding visit by the male, both adults became increasingly vocal, prompting a noticeable increase in nestling activity. At approximately 1545 hrs, the first nestling successfully made its maiden flight from the nest, followed by the second nestling roughly thirty minutes later (Plate 10). The nesting period was 12 days.

Based on our observations, we believe that both fledglings were likely males. This assumption is based on the plumage characteristics observed on the back of the head and body. The orange coloration appeared brighter, while the head showed a more pronounced yellowish tone, traits commonly associated with male birds.

One day after fledging, we returned to locate the young birds and to gather additional data. We successfully found one of the fledglings, while the other was not observed. Observations were conducted for approximately one hour under heavy rain conditions. Both adult birds continued to provide parental care in a manner similar to when the chicks were still in the nest. The male was observed actively foraging for food, while the female remained near the fledgling. Upon the male's return, the female would then leave to forage, taking turns in caring for and feeding the young bird. This coordinated parental behaviour highlights the strong biparental care exhibited by the Orange-breasted Trogon even after the fledging stage.



Plate 10: Composite image of fledgling. Perlis, Malaysia, 01 June 2026.

Interaction with Other Birds and Animals

Both adults displayed highly aggressive nest-defence behaviour against potential threats. The presence of squirrels, langurs, or raptors approaching the nesting area frequently triggered an immediate response. The adults emitted alarm calls distinct from their normal vocalisations and performed direct aerial attacks on intruders that approached the nesting tree. Such

behaviour demonstrates a high degree of parental investment in safeguarding eggs and nestlings throughout the breeding period.

Discussion

In the Thailand study, out of 17 nests only 8% were successful (Steward & Pierce 2011). Hence, we were pleased that the nest episode we observed was successful. Table 1 compares our observations with those of Steward & Pierce (2011). The nesting site and structure, egg clutch size, diet for juveniles, nestling period and problem with predators are in agreement. Steward & Pierce (2011) reported food-passing to the female in only ~3% of male deliveries but we observed this more often. The breeding timing in Thailand is from January to March while ours was May–June. But Wells (1999) notes one nesting in April.

Our observations add information about incubation threat posture, entrance-delivery to older nestlings, the female eating surplus prey, fledgling sexing, and post-fledgling biparental care.

Table 1: Comparison of our observations with those of Steward & Pierce (2011).

Feature	Nests at Bukit Ayer, Perlis, 2026	Steward & Pierce, Nest at Khao Yai National Park, Thailand, 2011
Nest height	~1.5 m	Mean 2.1 m (0.7–3.5 m, n = 19)
Substrate	Decaying broken branch (likely dead rambutan, <i>Nephelium lappaceum</i>)	Rotten stumps / rotten appendages of live trees; once a broken branch
Entrance width	~8–10 cm	8–10 cm (n = 4)
Cavity depth	8 cm	Shallow, <5 cm deep; entrance-to-back ~11 cm
Excavation	Both sexes	Both sexes
Clutch / hatching	3 eggs; 2 hatched	2–3 eggs (mean 2.4); unhatched eggs documented
Incubation roles	Male by day; female late afternoon and night	Male by day; only female overnight
Incubation period	Uncertain	17–18 d (n = 2)
Brooding / food-passing	Female broods days 1–9; male frequently passes food to female	Female broods overnight; food-passing in ~3% of male deliveries at nests
Provisioning	Male-led; increases with age; entrance delivery for older chicks	Male > female; male share rises toward fledging
Diet	Araneae, Lepidoptera, Orthoptera (katydids, grasshoppers), Phasmatodea, Mantodea; large, single items	Phasmatodea, Orthoptera, Lepidoptera larvae (dominant); Mantodea, Hemiptera; large, single items; stick insect prey also documented by Wells (2007)
Nestling period	12 d	12–14 d (minimum 12)



Feature	Nests at Bukit Ayer, Perlis, 2026	Steward & Pierce, Nest at Khao Yai National Park, Thailand, 2011
Predators defended against	Squirrels, langurs, raptors	Squirrels, raptor (goshawk), macaques, snakes, conspecific
Breeding timing	May–June	Jan–Mar at Khao Yai; later in Thai-Malay Peninsula (Wells 1999)
Outcome	Successful (2 fledged)	~8% nest success

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Breeding Ecology of the Green Broadbill

Cheow-Lim Lee & Lian-Huat Tee

Introduction

The Green Broadbill *Calyptomena viridis* is a compact, round-bodied species characterised by its short bill, short tail, and a distinctive tuft of feathers on its forehead. The male is predominantly iridescent green, with a prominent black patch behind the ear-coverts, a small, obscured yellow spot in front and above the eye, and broad black bands across middle of lesser, middle and secondary wing-coverts (Lambert 2025). In contrast, the female is a duller green, lacks the black in the wing and has a black ear-covert spot, proportionately smaller than in male and comprising the basal half of otherwise green feathers; mostly hidden when plumage relaxed. It also has a less pronounced forehead tuft covering about half of the length of the bill, versus all except the tip in males and a brighter lime-green eye-ring (Lambert 2025) (Plate 1).



Plate 1: Male (left) and female (right) Green Broadbill.

This species inhabits primary and secondary rainforests, particularly mixed dipterocarp forests, where it is most commonly found in the understorey. In Peninsular Malaysia, the Green Broadbill is generally distributed in lowland and hill forests at elevations of up to 760 m above sea level (Wells 2007), although it is found at higher elevation in Borneo and Thailand (Lambert 2025). Breeding occurs from February to August (Wells 2007; Bruce 2024; Lambert 2025), often occurring after heavy rainfall or in association with the monsoon (Lambert 2025).

This report describes the observation of a single Green Broadbill nest along the Talang–Langkap Birdwatching Trail in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. It provides valuable information on the species' nesting ecology and habitat use within the study area.

Observations

A male Green Broadbill was first observed on 21 July 2024, perched on a small tree located just beside the Talang–Langkap Road, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. It was resting on a branch

approximately 3 m above the ground. The second observation was made on 28 July 2024 at the same location. When one of the authors (CL Lee) walked past the site, a male Green Broadbill, which had been concealed among the foliage, suddenly flew from a tree to higher ground. It then began emitting distress calls while dropping one wing, in an apparent injury-feigning display, a behaviour commonly associated with distraction displays (Wells 2007). The birds observed on both occasions were probably the same individual, based on the identical location and the short interval between the two sightings. This raises an intriguing question: why did the male remain in the area for such an extended period?

Discovery of the Nest

The site, where the male Green Broadbill was first observed back in July, was densely covered with bushes and tall grass. However, upon revisiting the area on 24 August 2024, CL Lee found that the vegetation had been cleared by contractors. While walking through the site, CL Lee inadvertently flushed a female Green Broadbill, which flew from a position below eye level. A closer examination of the area revealed a characteristic gourd-shaped nest suspended from the twig of a young sapling approximately 1.3 m above the ground (Plate 2). The nest was located adjacent to the tree where the male Green Broadbill had previously been observed. This discovery strongly suggests that the male had remained in the vicinity, throughout the intervening period, to guard the nesting site.



Plate 2: Location of the Green Broadbill nest and materials used in construction. Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, 24 Aug 2024.

Nest Observation Disclosure

The nest, which had previously been concealed by dense vegetation, was now fully exposed. Recognising that it was an active breeding nest, CL Lee immediately retreated and continued observations from across a road to minimise disturbance. He informed LH Tee, who did much

of the nesting observations. Observations were maintained from a distance of approximately eight meters. Further retreat was restricted by a stream running parallel to the road. To ensure the safety of the breeding pair, the exact location of the nesting site was kept strictly confidential. As Talang is a popular birding destination, several visiting photographers encountered the site during the observation period. To mitigate potential disturbance and prevent overcrowding, LH Tee maintained a consistent presence at the site, occasionally remaining overnight. Visitors were restricted from approaching the nest and were explicitly requested to withhold sharing any photographs or location data until the nesting cycle was complete. No signs of distressed was seen in the nesting birds throughout the observation period.

Nest Location and Structure

The nest was constructed primarily from strips of palm and bamboo leaves and was lined internally with dried leaves (Plate 2). It was suspended from the horizontal twig of a young sapling approximately 1.3 m above the ground. Its entrance faced the road, while the rear of the nest was sheltered by a steep earthen bank. Two nestlings were observed in the nest. They appeared to be only a few days old, as indicated by the presence of emerging pin feathers on their heads (Plate 3).



Plate 3: Appearance of the nestlings when the nest was first discovered. Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, 24 Aug 2024.

Parental Responsibilities

During the observation period from 24 August to 01 September 2024, only the female was seen feeding the nestlings, with feeding visits occurring at intervals of approximately one to two hours. While the female was away foraging, the male remained near the nest, apparently guarding it.

Feeding Behaviour, Feeding Frequency, and Food Items

The Green Broadbill is primarily a frugivorous species. The female fed the nestlings mainly with fruit. Three fruit types were recorded during the observations. These comprised an orangish

soft fig, a roundish dark berry, and a dark, oval-shaped fruit, none of which could be positively identified. The female fed the nestlings by regurgitating the whole fruit, which the nestlings swallowed whole (Plate 4). On average, three to four food items were regurgitated at each feeding session. On one occasion, a nestling was observed regurgitating a berry before swallowing it again. The same nestling was also seen expelling a seed after feeding (Plate 5).



Plate 4: Fruits fed to the nestlings. Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, 26-30 Aug 2024.



Plate 5: A nestling regurgitating an edible berry and spitting out a seed. Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, 26-30 Aug 2024.

Although fruit constituted the majority of the diet, the Green Broadbills also fed their nestlings with animal protein. On one occasion, the female returned with four spiders and regurgitated the invertebrates one at a time to feed the hungry nestlings. The spiders were identified as the *Macracantha arcuata* and *Gasteracantha sp.*, which are commonly found in tropical rainforests. (Plate 6).

Faecal Sacs and Their Removal

Before defecating, the nestlings turned their vent towards the nest entrance. Their waste was enclosed within faecal sacs - gelatinous or mucous membranes that encapsulate the excreta, making it easier for the parent to remove. The female was observed swallowing the sacs before departing (Plate 7).



Plate 6: The nestlings were fed with spiders, identified as the *Macracantha arcuata* and *Gasteracantha* sp. Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, 26-30 Aug 2024.



Plate 7: Removal of faecal sacs. Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, 30 Aug 2024.

Edited video recording of some feeding episodes and faecal sac removal and consumption can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZimDF--443s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4RtFhdkQLs>

Fledging of the Nestlings

By 30 August 2024, the nestlings had grown considerably with their plumage better developed. The female continued to feed them regularly throughout this stage of their development (Plate 8). However, shortly before the young fledged, she ceased bringing food to the nest, likely encouraging them to leave. This occurred on 31 August 2024 - one feeding session was observed at 1454 hrs where four berries were regurgitated and fed to the nestlings. The final feeding was observed at 1654 hrs where one berry was fed with subsequent removal of a faecal sac.



Plate 8: Older nestlings, close to fledging. Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, 30 Aug 2024.

Both nestlings fledged on 01 September 2024. The first nestling emerged at 0840 hrs and perched at the nest entrance, seemingly gathering confidence before its maiden flight. Moments later, it took to the air and flew off (Plate 9).

The female continued to feed the second nestling, while the male remained nearby, guarding the nest.

The second nestling fledged at 1434 hrs. After emerging, it climbed to the top of the nest, where it paused to stretch its wings and carefully survey its surroundings before taking its first flight. It landed briefly on a roadside branch (Plate 10) before taking off toward an adult calling from across the stream, successfully completing its inaugural journey away from the nest.

Although both parents were present during both fledging episodes, it remains uncertain whether the fledglings flew toward or were accompanied by the male or the female parent.



Plate 9: Fledging of the first nestling. Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, 01 Sep 2024.



Plate 10: Fledging of the second nestling. Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, 01 Sep 2024.

The fledging of the second nestling marked the successful conclusion of the nesting cycle of the Green Broadbill along the Talang–Langkap Birdwatching Trail.

Interaction with Other Birds and Animals

No interaction was observed with other birds and animals.

Discussion

These observations document a successful breeding attempt by the Green Broadbill along the Talang–Langkap Birdwatching Trail, offering valuable insights into the species' nesting ecology and parental behaviour. The male's sustained presence at the site prior to nest discovery, coupled with its distraction displays, strongly suggests a significant role in territorial and nest defence, while feeding the nestlings was exclusively by the female throughout the observation period.

The nestlings were fed primarily with fruit through regurgitation, supplemented periodically with spiders, highlighting the importance of both fruit and animal protein during early development. The female also maintained nest hygiene by removing faecal sacs, a behaviour that likely reduces predation risk and promotes nestling health.

Despite the unexpected exposure of the nest due to vegetation clearance, both nestlings fledged successfully following approximately five weeks of monitoring. This successful outcome demonstrates a degree of resilience to localised habitat alteration. These observations underscore the conservation importance of maintaining suitable forest habitats within the Talang–Langkap Birdwatching Trail.

Acknowledgements

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Commentary on the Observation:

David Wells, Frank Lambert & Amar-Singh HSS

This is good work by the observers, yielding important new data on the Green Broadbill. While female-only nest construction and incubation (Lambert 2025) are on record, uniparental care of nestlings is, to our knowledge, a new observation. The observation reported in this paper, and in literature, suggests that only females feed nestlings. However, there are a few images online of males feeding nestlings (e.g. Michael Gillam, Si Phang Nga National Park, Thailand, Apr 2013, Flickr <https://www.flickr.com/photos/26931849@N04/8596941071>)

The male's screeching and vigorous wing-flapping distraction displays are familiar, but we are unaware of any previous records of the male remaining in close proximity throughout the entire nesting cycle or any involvement in the fledging process. It may be that broods are split between the parents. It is worth noting that Green Broadbills can sit silently for hours, undetected, between feeding bouts; hence individuals could do the same near their nest.

Ultimately, much remains to be discovered about the remaining stages of the breeding cycle of the Green Broadbill, particularly male courtship display behaviour.

We reviewed the literature, images of nesting in the Macaulay Library (ML) and images online for the species in the genus *Calyptomena* (green broadbills) on nest building and parental care of nestlings. All three species make a particular form of nest suspensor not seen in other Asian broadbills. From photos available it looks as if the higher elevation species commonly start with trailing green bryophytes (not so available in Green Broadbill habitat) for suspensor and some outer framework, then infill with leaves.

Hose's Broadbill *Calyptomena hosii*

There is little information in literature (Lambert 2025) and there are very limited images of Hose's Broadbill nests available for review. Hence, the role of adults in nesting activities is uncertain.

Whitehead's Broadbill *Calyptomena whiteheadi*

It has been observed that only females build nests while both the sexes feed nestlings (Lambert 2025). A study of 52 nests over a 12-year period showed that only females incubated and brooded but both parents fed the young (Şahin Arslan et al. 2023); there was no mention about parental role in nest building. A review of images online show a fair selection of individuals carrying nest material – they are all females, in one or more instances, accompanied by males that carried nothing (e.g. Julie Edgley, Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia, Sep 2023, ML609486594).

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Egg Consumption by a Little Bronze-Cuckoo

Stanley T Shao & Amar-Singh HSS

One morning in October 2016, at a patch along the coast in Tawau, Sabah, Malaysia, Stanley was on the lookout for the migrant Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo *Chalcites basalis*. While watching, he spotted a resident female Little Bronze-Cuckoo *Chalcites minutillus* moving around some mangrove trees. It was skulking through the thick mangrove canopy, presumably looking for food. As Stanley tracked the cuckoo from a distance, it suddenly appeared in the open along the fringes. Stanley noticed it had grabbed a large, white object in its beak. His immediate thought was that this was odd-behaviour, so he quickly pointed his lens to document what was happening. To his surprise, the object was an egg (Plate 1). The cuckoo tossed and positioned it, before swallowing the egg entirely without crushing the shell.



Plate 1: Female Little Bronze-Cuckoo feeding on an egg. Tawau, Sabah, Malaysia, Oct 2016.

All the time, Stanley had not noticed any other birds nearby responding in defence or any nest in the immediate area. Hence, he was unable to determine the bird species the egg belonged to.

Discussion: Host Egg Consumption by Cuckoos

The removal of egg(s) from the nest during parasitism by some adult female cuckoos is well established (Payne 2005; Erritzøe et al. 2012). However, although a number of articles quote that cuckoos eat the eggs of the host (Wang et al. 2020), there are only a few documented accounts. Most report cuckoo species removing or damaging host eggs at the time the cuckoo is laying its own egg, with no mention of consumption (Payne 2005; Erritzøe et al. 2012).

Moksnes and colleagues (2000) describe the Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* visiting "parasitized nests to eat eggs prior to laying"; the species is also noted to prey on the eggs

and nestlings of small birds (Payne 2005; Payne et al. 2020). The Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae* has "*been observed to prey on the nest contents*" (Brooker & Brooker 1989; Payne 2005). The Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus* "*female removes and eats an egg from the host nest*" (Payne 2005). For the Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* the host egg is said to be usually removed before the cuckoo lays, and that the removed egg is sometimes eaten (Erritzøe et al. 2012). The Dideric Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* is described as taking the host egg, eating it, before returning to lay her own (Payne 2005). The Thick-billed Cuckoo *Pachycoccyx audeberti* removes host eggs from the nest and eats them (Payne 2005). Erritzøe and colleagues (2012), when reviewing the literature on the Dideric Cuckoo, state that some sources say that the female removes and eats one egg from the host nest but another source claims no host egg is eaten or removed.

For the genus *Chalcites* (bronze-cuckoos) there is limited evidence of host egg eating by the species (Brooker & Brooker 1989; Payne 2005; Erritzøe et al. 2012). Brooker and Brooker (1989) in a detailed review of cuckoo hosts in Australia only report that the Shining Bronze-Cuckoo *Chalcites lucidus* "*have twice been observed robbing a host nest and either destroying or eating the nest contents*".

There are no reports of the Little Bronze-Cuckoo feeding on eggs or on host eggs (Brooker & Brooker 1989; Johnsgard 1997; Smythies 1999; Wells 1999; Payne 2005; Wells 2007; Erritzøe et al. 2012; Kirwan & Payne 2024).

The behaviour reported here - a Little Bronze-Cuckoo manipulating and then swallowing an entire egg with the shell intact - represents an apparent instance of egg consumption by a brood-parasitic cuckoo. Two features of the observation warrant emphasis. First, the egg was swallowed whole, without the shell being punctured or crushed, indicating outright ingestion rather than the more commonly reported removal-and-discard. Second, the bird was foraging actively through the mangrove canopy when the egg was taken, and no host pair was seen defending a nearby nest, so the event cannot be confidently attributed to a parasitism (egg-laying) visit.

However, there are some features that point towards consumption of a brood-host's egg.

Firstly, the bird seen was an adult female Little Bronze-Cuckoo. Females are the ones that remove host eggs as they lay their own.

Secondly, the nature and size of the egg in the images (Plate 2) helps point to the brood-host identity. There are many brood-hosts identified for the Little Bronze-Cuckoo (Erritzøe et al. 2012; Kirwan & Payne 2024), often small passerines with enclosed nests. However, the only proven brood-hosts of Little Bronze-Cuckoo are the Golden-bellied Gerygone *Gerygone sulphurea* in Peninsular Malaysia (Wells 1999; Wells 2007; Jeyarajasingam 2012) and the Ornate Sunbird *Cinnyris ornatus* in Singapore (Erritzøe et al. 2012). In Borneo, Phillipps & Phillipps (2014) state that hosts are "*gerygones and sunbirds*". Wells (2007) describes the eggs of the Golden-bellied Gerygone as "*glossless, white to faintly pink, with small, pink brown speckles generally sparse but more concentrated over the broad end, which also shows fine blackish*

scribbles". The shape is said to be ovate and rather pointed and an average size of 15.4 × 11.0 mm (Wells 2007).

The egg in the observation was oval, pink with darker red-brown markings concentrated at the larger end. Using the bill size of the female Little Bronze-Cuckoo of 16.6-18.2 mm* (Kirwan & Payne 2024) as a guide, the egg size appears to be ~15-16 mm by 10-12 mm (Plate 2). The egg seen looks very much like that described for the Golden-bellied Gerygone, the primary brood-host for the Little Bronze-Cuckoo in the region. This view is supported by David Wells "*It is highly probable that the consumed egg was taken from a gerygone rather than a sunbird nest*" (pers. comm.).

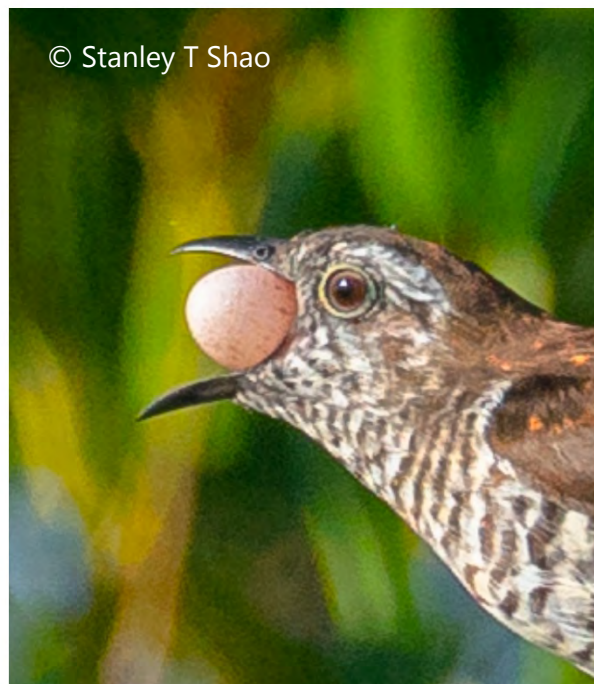
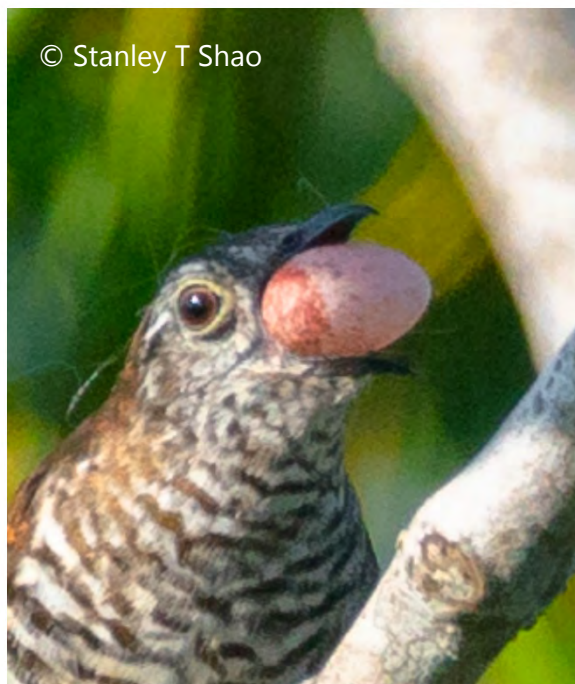


Plate 2: Female Little Bronze-Cuckoo feeding on an egg – close up images used to approximate egg dimensions. Tawau, Sabah, Malaysia, Oct 2016. *Note that nominate Australian subspecies bill length was used as approximate guide; the Bornean subspecies bill length may vary

The present observation appears to be among the first direct record of whole-egg ingestion by a Little Bronze-Cuckoo. It provides behavioural confirmation of an act, that has until now, been assumed for the species largely on the strength of six or seven species, of predominantly African and larger cuckoo species.

Several caveats apply. The egg may have belonged to a host, but it could equally have been the egg of a competing cuckoo, the selective removal of which is the very behaviour invoked to explain egg crypsis in this species (Gloag et al. 2014). Furthermore, because the bird was foraging and no active host nest was evident, the event may represent opportunistic nest predation rather than the clutch reduction that accompanies parasitism - a distinction the existing literature, framed almost entirely around egg removal at laying, does not address.

What impact would closed-over nests such as those of sunbirds and gerygones (where robbing would likely be more by cuckoo touch than sight) have on the idea that parasite mimicking of host eggs is mainly a defence against rival robbers? Surely someone has raised that?

Studies suggest that despite the closed-over nests of gerygones, there is sufficient light to see bright vs dark eggs. Bronze-cuckoos appear to lay eggs with a dark pigment (cryptic) instead of matching the host's egg (mimetic) - the data suggest cryptic eggs are often not hiding from the host bird - but rather from competing cuckoos (Gloag et al. 2014; Thorogood et al. 2017).

Additional observations, ideally with both the egg's origin and the cuckoo's breeding status determined, would help establish whether whole-egg ingestion in Little Bronze-Cuckoo is a regular component of parasitic egg removal, an opportunistic foraging behaviour, or both.

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Do Hybrids Occur Between the Black Hornbill and Oriental Pied-Hornbill?

Marlina Jamal, Zulnaidah Zamzam, Saravanan Palanisamy, Xian Lim, Kwang-Ming Teh, Janson Lee, Dave Bakewell, Mohd Rafi Kudus & Amar-Singh HSS

Introduction

Hornbill hybrids in the wild are rare but scientifically documented. The most notable example involves the interbreeding of the Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* and the Rhinoceros Hornbill *Buceros rhinoceros* (Chamutpong et al. 2013). They are recognised as sister taxa, belonging to the same genus (*Buceros*), and share highly similar genetics, physical characteristics, and overlapping habitats. This hybridisation between the Great and Rhinoceros Hornbill has also been observed in Malaysia (Plate 1).



Plate 1: Male Rhinoceros/Great Hornbill hybrid (red iris with unique casque in male) with female Great Hornbill visiting potential nesting site and courtship behaviour. Tanarimba, Janda Baik, Pahang, Malaysia, Mar 2026. See also: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S306634290>

There have been no reports of hybridisation between the Oriental Pied-Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* and the Black Hornbill *Anthracoceros malayanus*. (Kemp & Boesman 2020; Kemp et al. 2020). We report the possibility of such a hybrid occurring in the wild with an unusual darkening of the bill and casque.

Observations

Observation 1

In July 2026 Marlina Jamal observed what was possibly a hybrid, male Black/Oriental Pied-Hornbill (Plate 2). The bird had dark, black plumage across its face, neck, chest, and back, as expected of a Black Hornbill; with some glossy plumage on the wings and white tipped tail. It had the red iris typical of an adult male Black Hornbill with the right casque shape. There was no white or pale grey superciliary stripe shown in this bird. A small percentage number of black hornbills individuals do not have this feature. Hence, there are some individual variations present. However, the tips of the wing feathers were unexpectedly white. The casque and bill



coloration was charcoal-grey with lighter, mottled bone/ivory patches along the upper ridge of the casque and mandible (Plate 3 & 4).



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Plate 2: Black/Oriental Pied-Hornbill hybrid male. Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Jul 2026.



Plate 3: Black/Oriental Pied-Hornbill hybrid male with side view of its casque and the white tip of its wing feathers. Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Jul 2026.



Plate 4: Male Black Hornbill (left) compared to the male Black/Oriental Pied-Hornbill hybrid (center) and female Oriental Pied-Hornbill (right) in flight. Black/Oriental Pied-Hornbill hybrid imaged at Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Jul 2026.

The Black/Oriental Pied-Hornbill hybrid male was accompanied by what appeared to be a female Oriental Pied-Hornbill (Plate 5).



Plate 5: Female Oriental Pied-Hornbill (left) with Black/Oriental Pied-Hornbill hybrid male. Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Jul 2026

The owner of a nearby local food stall had been observing the birds at that the Bangsar location since 2020-2021, right around the time of the COVID-19 Movement Control Order (MCO). The birds were familiar with humans. It was her opinion that they had been nesting nearby on a few occasions, and produced several offspring. The whereabouts of the offspring are unknown, but the same two adults keep on returning.

The images of the birds taken in 2024 showed that the male hybrid showed less dark coloration on its casque (Plate 6), whereas the image of the bird taken in 2026 appears to show a large amount of dark coloration on its casque (plate 2)



Plate 6: Female Oriental Pied-Hornbill (left) with Black/Oriental Pied-Hornbill hybrid male. Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, circa 2024

This could suggest a number of possibilities:

1. A form of melanism from mild to advance; this is very rare and unlikely (please refer to the discussion on melanism below).
2. A likely form of hybridization from the pairing of two species genes (please see discussion on hybrids below).
3. Aging of species. There is a possibility of the bird being a young adult/sub adult. Typically, in this phase the male can retain large swaths of dark or mottled colouring on their bills for an extended period before turning completely pale yellowish-white. As birds age, their bill colour may darken over time, a possibility that is worth considering.
4. Preen gland secretions that contains natural pigments that heavily stain or discolour the hornier keratin layers of the bill and casque. Absence of this preening behaviour or variations in their diet (in an urban setting) can leave the bill looking unusually dark.
5. Environmental smudges. Feeding on sticky fruits, resins, unusual food, or wet decayed tree barks routinely coats and may darkens the porous surface of the bill.

Observation 2

In Jan 2021 at Morib, Selangor, Malaysia, Xian Lim saw a male Black Hornbill (not hybrid) offer an insect prey to a female Oriental Pied-Hornbill (Plate 7), suggesting courtship behaviour. The food was not accepted.



Plate 7: Black Hornbill male attempted courtship feeding of female Oriental Pied-Hornbill. Morib, Selangor, Malaysia, Jan 2021.

Observation 3

Janson Lee has observed a male Black Hornbill (not hybrid) socially interacting with a female Oriental Pied-Hornbill on a number of occasions from November 2025 to March 2026 at Bukit

Lagong, Selangor, Malaysia. Bukit Lagong is located at the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. He noticed the two birds following each, foraging and flying together

Discussion

Our analysis of the submitted photographs, behavioural data depicted from the photos, and field observations strongly suggests hybridization between the Black Hornbill and the Oriental Pied Hornbill.

While wild hybridization between these two species remains undocumented in peer-reviewed literature, hybridization between the Black Hornbill and the Oriental Pied Hornbill is biologically possible. Taxonomically, both species belong to the same Asiatic clade and share the same genus, *Anthracoceros*, meaning they possess the necessary genetic compatibility to interbreed. Closely related hornbill species often share similar breeding systems and courtship rituals, which facilitates cross-species mate recognition.

Such a pairing may be driven by extreme stress, such as localised habitat fragmentation or a low population density of their own species in the area. If an adult hornbill reaches breeding age (and readiness) but cannot locate a conspecific mate within its home range, the drive to reproduce can override species-recognition barriers. Black Hornbill used to frequent the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, in pockets of remnant forest. When much of the forest was cleared, it is possible that some of these long lived Black Hornbill joined Oriental Pied-Hornbill flocks, which are more habituated to urban environments. If so, their offspring might also be less forest-dependent.

Are hybrid hornbills sterile?

Bird hybridization can produce fertile offspring, especially between closely related species; distantly related species are often infertile. Haldane's Rule applies here (Coyne 1985). When hybrid birds do experience reduced fertility or inviability, it rarely affects both sexes equally. Haldane's rule states that, in hybrid animals, if only one sex is sterile or inviable, it is usually the heterogametic sex (the sex with two different sex chromosomes). In mammals (XY system), males are heterogametic (XY), so hybrid males are typically sterile while hybrid females may be fertile. However, in birds (ZW system), females are the heterogametic sex (ZW), while males are homogametic (ZZ). As a result of this chromosomal system, hybrid male birds are often fertile even when hybrid female birds are completely sterile.

Could this Black/Oriental Pied-Hornbill hybrid male also be melanistic?

True melanism is a genetic change causing an excess of dark pigment melanin mostly affecting feathers and skin rather than changing the light colour of the bill into a darker coloured structure. The dark or unusually marked bill is far more frequently caused by the regular biological and other factors mentioned in the report above. Typically, hornbill bills often get their colours from carotenoids or staining rather than presence of melanism.

There is one photographic record of melanism, occurring in a Malabar Grey Hornbill *Ocyroceros griseus* (Divin 2023). Apart from this, hyper-melanic mutations and other colour aberrations are not reported in hornbills (Kemp 1995; Poonswad et al. 2013). Many hornbill species naturally possess predominantly black or dark plumage driven by eumelanin (Kemp 1995).

Because black is already a major constituent of their normal plumage, identifying or distinguishing true genetic melanism in the wild is exceptionally difficult compared to species with lighter, brighter plumage.

The hybrid male Black/Oriental Pied-Hornbill in this report appears to have had a darkening of the casque and bill over a few years caused by aging and or the other factors discussed above.

Hein van Grouw (pers. comm.) was very kind to offer his insights on the hybrid male Black/Oriental Pied-Hornbill:

1. The term melanism is normally used only for heritable aberrations (mutations) that make an individual darker than the species' normal coloration. It is a genetic anomaly altering the production and deposition of melanin in skin, feather, or hair cells (van Grouw 2017).
2. Most heritable forms of melanism affect only the plumage and not the skin. Conversely, certain melanism mutations affect only the skin/bare parts and leave the plumage unaffected.
3. True genetic melanism is present from birth (hatching) and does not develop spontaneously later in life.
4. Some veterinarians and birdwatchers suggest that gradual 'melanism' occurs slowly over time in keratinized structures, such as the beak and casque. However, this is not genetic melanism, but rather melanisation - the normal physiological deposition of melanin into tissue, often driven by age, hormonal shifts, or maturation (Galván & Solano 2016).
5. Interestingly, hybrids do not always exhibit an exact 'intermediate' appearance between the parent species. Given the parentage, one would reasonably expect a lighter bill colour in this hybrid.
6. While the bill of this hybrid is not affected by genetic melanism, why it exhibits such extensive melanisation remains uncertain.

Chin-Aik Yeap (pers. comm.), project manager for the Malaysian Nature Society's Hornbill Conservation Project, commented that the pairing of the Black Hornbill and Oriental Pied Hornbill appears to be the first of its kind. To the best of his knowledge, there are no documented cases in (southern) Thailand or even in Indonesia. He agrees that the hybrid could be a consequence of habitat loss that "*catalysed closer interactions between a generally forest species (Black Hornbill) and the more semi-urban/secondary forest species (Oriental Pied Hornbill)*".

In conclusion, photographic, behavioural, and observational data strongly indicate a hybrid between the Black Hornbill and Oriental Pied Hornbill with bill and casque melanisation.

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Diet and Foraging Behaviour of the Common Hoopoe in Malaysia

Winnie Ooi

Introduction

The Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops* has a widespread distribution and has been well studied in Europe and other regions (Mlodinow & Pyle 2024). It used to be a common resident bird in the north of the Thai-Malay peninsula but became an uncommon sight in Peninsular Malaysia after the 1930s, possibly due to human activities (Wells 1999; Wells 2007).

Since 2020, the Common Hoopoe has nested annually and this has allowed for recent breeding observations. This article describes the diet and foraging behaviour in our local context.

Observations

Nesting and Environment

Common Hoopoes have nested annually at Taiping, Perak, Malaysia since February 2020. In April to September 2021, there were two nesting events at Taiping Lake Gardens with three chicks fledged at each nesting. After this they were seen occasionally in residential areas and at other nearby sites.

Between January and early September 2026, Common Hoopoes nested on a number of occasions in Taiping, Perak, Malaysia. At one roof nesting site – four nesting events were observed in 2026; we cannot be sure if it was the same pair nesting at the site on each occasion. The nesting site used was under the eaves of a house in a residential area (Plate 1). The same nesting site was used for all four broods. The nesting occurred in the months of March, May, July and September 2026. The adults raised 13 successfully fledged juveniles – four during the first nesting, five the second time, four the third time (one of the fledged juveniles was killed by a cat) and two at the fourth nesting (one chick did not fledge). At the time of writing, five to seven birds could be observed foraging together in a residential neighbourhood.

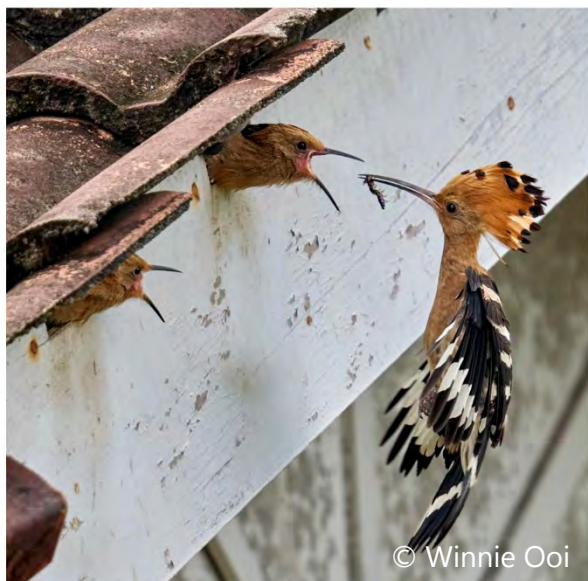
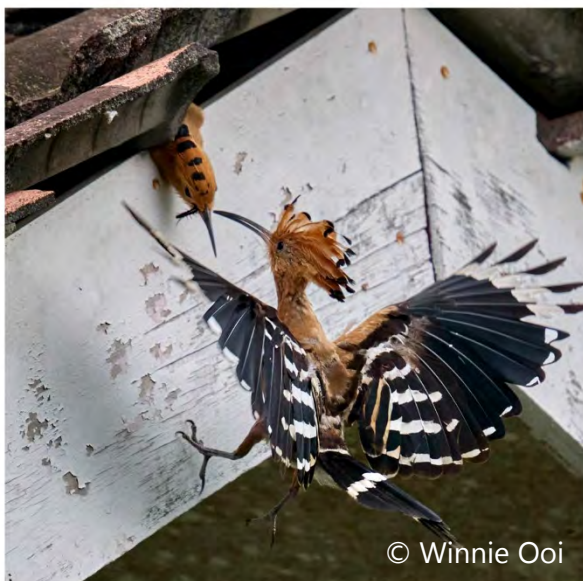


Plate 1: Adult Common Hoopoes at nesting site feeding nestlings. Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, 2026.

Common Hoopoes also nested at another site (only known to a few) but I am uncertain of the outcome or nest type used. However, one birdwatcher observed nine birds together at one time at that site.

The site where these observations were made is a residential housing area which has many large, open gardens with fruit trees that aid the feeding of the Common Hoopoe. Fruits often fall to the ground and become infested with beetles and other insects which serve as a food source.

Food Items

Food items taken by the Common Hoopoe are not easy to identify as some are small. Most prey are insects and other invertebrates. Food items identified include cockroaches (Blattodea), beetles (Coleoptera), centipedes (Chilopoda), millipedes (Diplopoda), earthworms (Oligochaeta), larvae and winged insects (Plate 2). Food brought to nestlings appeared similar to food given to fledged juveniles. Some prey (e.g. centipede) was killed by repeatedly beating them against the ground before being eaten (link to video recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMrSQGDKL1M>). But some prey, like cockroaches, were fed alive. The protective forewings, wings, and legs of insects were not removed prior to feeding or offering to fledged juveniles. There were no observations of lizards, snakes, frogs or toads in the diet of the Common Hoopoes I observed.



Plate 2: Composite image of some food items taken by the Common Hoopoe. Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, 2026.

Foraging Behaviour

The Common Hoopoes were usually seen foraging on the ground. They were observed walking around rapidly, often probing grassy areas or leaf litter, looking for prey (Plate 3). Bills were often muddy or covered in dirt from ground probing. Foraging often occurred under fruiting trees and fallen, rotten fruit was explored for prey (Plate 4). The ground under fruiting rambutan (*Nephelium lappaceum*) and mangosteen (*Garcinia mangostana*) trees was often visited as they attracted insects. They were often observed foraging together in social groups of five to seven birds. Prey was often held at the tip of the bill, tossed upwards into the air and then caught in the gaping mouth and swallowed (Plate 5).

Links to video recordings:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHFEX_u8sb8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yVrRUlmgkUQ>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pm9M8CV9V4



Plate 3: Common Hoopoe foraging methods – probing ground (left) and exploring leaf litter (right) for prey. Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, 2026.

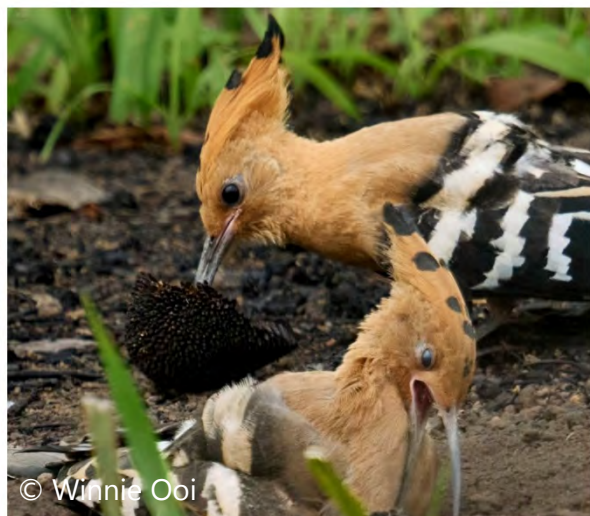


Plate 4: Common Hoopoe exploring fallen rotten fruit for prey (left mango, right jackfruit), Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, 2026.



Plate 5: Common Hoopoe displaying classical feeding style. Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, 2026.

The mother continues to brood and protect the chicks in the nest for at least 9 days. Both parents bring food to the growing chicks after the brooding phase (Plate 6). Parents bring prey to the nest on the tip of their bill and stuff it deep down a chick's throat. The presumed adult female would also enter the nest. Young birds leave the nest (fledge) within 25 to 32 days after hatching.

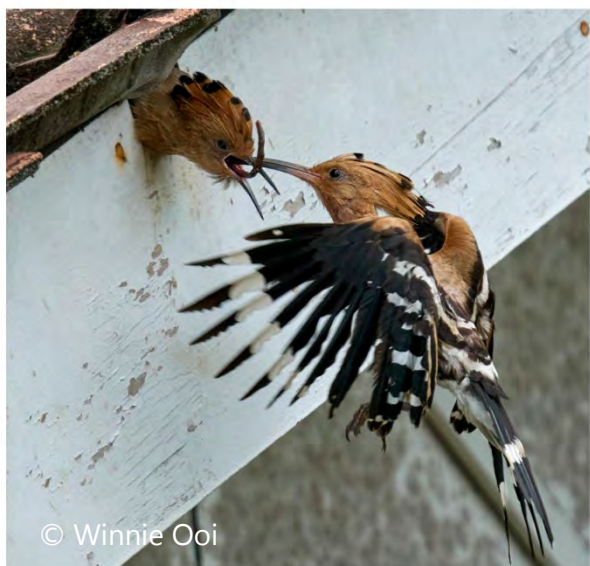


Plate 6: Adult Common Hoopoe pair feeding nestlings. Image on the right shows an earthworm prey. Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, 2026.

It was difficult to differentiate the adult sexes by plumage (Plate 7) and this judgement is made by watching the behaviour. The adult male has been observed bringing food to the female who was waiting on the roof, who then takes it to feed the nestlings.



Plate 7: Adult Common Hoopoe pair. First image male left, female right. Second image: Male right passing food to female left. Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, 2026. Courtship feeding was also observed. In literature (Mlodinow & Pyle 2024) sexual dimorphism is noted as limited but females on average have duller crest feathers, head, and breast.

Both adults continued to feed juveniles after they fledged until they were independent (Plate 8); usually two to three weeks after fledging.

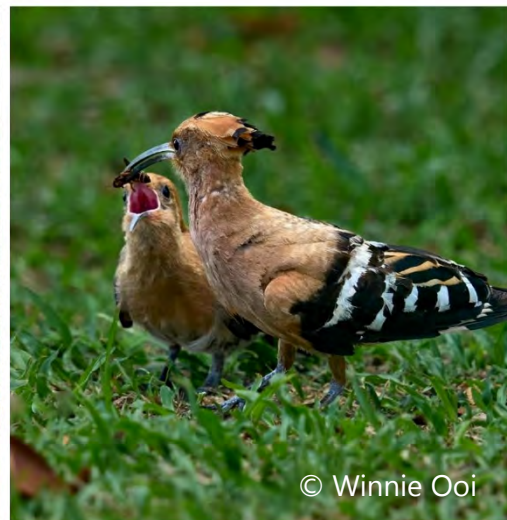


Plate 8: Adult Common Hoopoe feeding fledged juvenile. Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, 2026.

Food is held at the tip of the beak and delivered directly into the gape of the juvenile (Plate 9). At times the food is transferred from adult bill tip to juvenile bill tip, although this is more often seen in courtship feeding. Fledged juveniles are usually fed on the ground but occasionally on a tree.

Link to video recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rc1MK6Rpfk>.

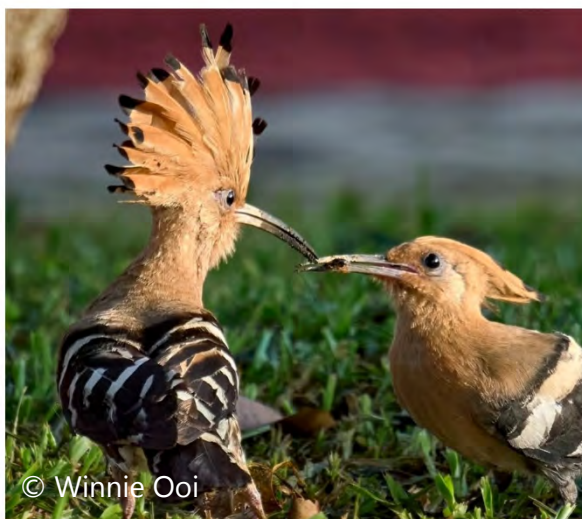


Plate 9: Feeding technique for fledged juvenile – left: delivered directly into the gape of the juvenile; right: food transferred from bill tip to bill tip. Taiping, Perak, Malaysia, 2026.

Post-fledging, once the juveniles were old enough, the adults would chase them away if they were not feeding them. Some of these young birds would stay in the residential area as a social group, feeding together. I am uncertain if any left the area or moved north.

Additional Observations from the Ongoing Fourth Nesting

Amar-Singh HSS (pers. comm.) had the opportunity to watch the fourth nesting episode on 14 September 2026. The nesting site was observed continuously from 0710 to 0935 hrs. The first feed was at 0733 hrs. There were 16 feeding episodes between 0733 and 0935 hrs; 10 of these occurred in the first hour of feeding. The mean interval was 7.7 minutes (SD 6.9, range 1–27 minutes). Both adults were observed feeding at least three nestlings. I joined him for the observation at 0845 hrs. On one occasion, we both saw what appeared to be a different, younger-looking adult female feeding the nestlings, suggesting possible cooperative breeding. Feeding frequency decreased on the day the juveniles fledged. Two chicks fledged on 16 September 2026 at 1009 and 1015 hrs, while the third did not fledge.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to Amar-Singh HSS who helped in drafting the manuscript. I would like to thank Dave Bakewell and Chong-Hock Chua for reviewing the manuscript.

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Commentary on the Observation

Amar-Singh HSS

This fascinating account offers the first description of diet and foraging behaviour of the Common Hoopoe in Malaysia. Table 1 below compares the diet and foraging observations of the Common Hoopoe reported in this local field account by Winnie Ooi with the global synthesis on the subject by Mlodinow & Pyle 2024 in *Birds of the World* (reference above). It is important to note that the Taiping, Perak, Malaysia account is based on a short-term, single-population observation of a nesting and foraging group, while the *Birds of the World* account draws on many published studies across the species' wide global range, including quantitative stomach-content data.

	Mlodinow & Pyle 2024	Winnie Ooi 2026
Foraging microhabitat	Bare or sparsely vegetated ground, favouring soft/sandy soil, lawns, mowed meadows and sandy tracks; low vegetation (mean height ~7.4 cm in one study).	Grassy areas and leaf litter in residential gardens; ground beneath fruiting trees, including fallen, rotting fruit.
Foraging method	Walks and probes soil with the bill, using rapid open-close 'gaping' motion once the bill is inserted; may run 1–2 m then probe repeatedly at one spot.	Walks rapidly, probing grassy areas and leaf litter; bills often muddy from ground probing. 'Gaping' probing action not specifically described.
Fruit-associated foraging	Not described - diet includes only trace plant material (elderberry fruit, cinquefoil, grass) and this is not linked to foraging microhabitat.	Notable feature of this account: birds forage under rambutan and mangosteen and other fruit trees, exploring fallen, insect-infested rotten fruit as a food source.
Social/group foraging	Usually forages alone or in pairs.	Frequently observed foraging in social groups of five to seven birds (up to nine reported at one site) - contrasts with the largely solitary/pair pattern in the global literature.
Hammering & excavating ground	At times hammers the ground like a woodpecker, excavating a 'large' hole; also flips stones, leaves and cow-pats aside with a sideways/upward bill flick rather than lifting and tossing them.	Not observed.
Aerial prey capture	Occasionally catches slow-flying insects (termites, adult cockchafers) in the air; rarely pries bark or forages in lichen.	Not observed.
Subduing large or tough prey	Larger prey hammered into submission or beaten against a hard surface (rock or log); reptiles killed by repeated blows to the head.	Centipede prey observed being killed by repeated beating against the ground. But some prey, like cockroaches, were fed alive.
Prey preparation before feeding	Elytra, wings and legs of insects are typically removed before consumption.	Protective forewings, wings and legs were not removed prior to feeding nestlings or fledged juveniles - a clear difference from the literature.



	Mlodinow & Pyle 2024	Winnie Ooi 2026
		Adults in images were also seen eating insects whole.
Prey-handling & swallowing technique	Prey held at the bill tip, tossed into the air with an upward flick, and caught in the gaping mouth before swallowing.	Same technique described and illustrated.
Feeding of nestlings & fledglings	Prey is carried to the nest at the parent's bill tip and stuffed deep into a begging chick's throat; usually one prey item per feeding, occasionally two or three. Youngest chicks are fed only once larger siblings are satiated. Only the male feeds the female and chicks for the first ~7 days; both parents feed the young thereafter until fledging (~day 28). Males provide roughly 50% more food by mass than females in one Swiss study. After fledging, the female leaves the family while the male alone continues feeding the young until independence (Switzerland); in South Africa, by contrast, both parents feed the chicks until independence.	Both adults were observed feeding nestlings and fledged juveniles - matching the South African (both-parents) pattern rather than the Swiss (male-only post-fledging) pattern described in the literature. Food brought to nestlings appeared similar to food given to fledged juveniles; delivered directly bill-tip-to-gape. Some prey was transferred bill-tip-to-bill-tip to older fledglings (the latter more typical of courtship feeding). Post-fledging provisioning by both adults continues for about 2–3 weeks, after which adults chase away young that are not being fed; some juveniles remain in the residential area as a social group.
Invertebrate prey groups	Orthoptera (mole crickets, field crickets, locusts), Coleoptera (esp. cockchafers/Scarabaeidae), and Lepidoptera larvae/pupae dominate across most regions; there are regional speciality prey. Also flies, dragonflies/damselflies, cockroaches, shield bugs, cicadas, antlion larvae, earwigs, ants, crane flies, blow flies, hoverflies, spiders, woodlice, centipedes/millipedes, earthworms, snails/slugs, mussels.	Cockroaches, beetles, centipedes, millipedes, earthworms, insect larvae, and winged insects. Orthoptera (crickets/grasshoppers), the dominant prey group in the world literature, not specifically recorded but noted in Wells 1999 account. Other groups, like spiders, cicadas, ants, not specifically identified.
Vertebrate prey	Lizards, snakes, frogs and toads recorded (up to 15 cm long); sand lizard predation described in detail; bird eggs also recorded.	No lizards, snakes, frogs or toads were observed in the diet during this study. This may reflect local prey availability or limited sample size rather than a true absence.
Plant material	Rarely, fruit (elderberry) and parts of cinquefoil/grass.	Fruit is used indirectly, as a substrate that attracts insect prey, rather than being eaten itself.
Cooperative breeding	Cooperative breeding has been noted at least once in South Africa, with the helper being a male.	There was one observation suggesting possible cooperative breeding; with the helper being a female.

The account by Winnie generally agrees with international data. The Malaysian account adds two features not covered: (a) routine social or group foraging (5–9 birds) and (b) foraging under fruiting trees on insect-infested fallen fruit; both of which may reflect the suburban Malaysian setting. The account also differs in how insects are handled. The narrower range of diet (no vertebrate prey or fruit) in the local observations may reflect genuine local variation in prey availability and behaviour or the limited observations. This account serves as a starting point to better document the diet and foraging behaviour of the Common Hoopoe in Malaysia.

Fruit in the Diet of the Checker-throated Woodpecker

Amar-Singh HSS

Introduction

The Checker-throated Woodpecker *Chrysophlegma mentale* has a distribution from southern Myanmar and peninsular Thailand, through peninsular Malaysia to Sumatra, Borneo and Java (Kirwan et al. 2022). BirdLife International (2024; 2025) splits the Checker-throated Woodpecker into two species and considers the one found in Peninsular Malaysia (Checker-throated Yellownappe *Chrysophlegma humii*) as Near Threatened. However, it is still observed fairly commonly in the region (Wells 1999). The eBird/Clements checklist and IOC World Bird List continues to treat it as a single polytypic species (Clements et al. 2025; Gill et al. 2026).

The diet of the Checker-throated Woodpecker is thought to be almost exclusively invertebrates with occasional berries (Winkler et al. 1995; Wells 1999; Gorman 2014; Kirwan et al. 2022). Wells (1999) does not describe any frugivory for the region.

The mention of "occasional berries" appears to have come from Short (1982) who quoted a letter written by Harrison (1958) to the Malayan Nature Journal where he mentions "green berries in its diet". This is possibly the only reference in literature to the Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on fruit, and that has been repeated in subsequent sources.

This report is to provide an update on fruit in the diet of the Checker-throated Woodpecker.

Observations

From the year 2022 to August 2026, I have observed the Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on fruit on four occasions at various parts of the Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

Macaranga gigantea, January 2022

Macaranga gigantea is a towering tree when fully grown at 15-30 metres with a spreading crown. The fruit of *Macaranga gigantea* attracts many birds and mammals. I observed a pair of Checker-throated Woodpeckers feeding extensively on *Macaranga gigantea* fruit (Amar-Singh HSS 2022) (Plate 1). Fruits are 6-8 mm wide and held on branched inflorescences. Ripe fruit were taken directly from the inflorescences or by probing deep with the tongue. In the past I have observed two other woodpecker species, the Crimson-winged Woodpecker *Picus puniceus* and the Banded Woodpecker *Chrysophlegma miniaceum*, feeding on this fruit.

Trema orientale, May 2023

I was able to document a pair of Checker-throated Woodpeckers feeding on the fruit of *Trema orientale* (sometimes called *Trema orientalis*) (Amar-Singh HSS 2023). This is a fast-growing, evergreen shrub or tree (up to 12-15 meters) with extensive branching and a spreading crown. Fruit is a small ovoid drupe measuring about 3-5 mm across, initially green, turning black or dark purple when fully ripe. It is another popular bird feeding tree. Photographic observation of Checker-throated Woodpeckers feeding was difficult as the birds sat on the bushy crown of the tree and were often obscured. Feeding was rapid with many fruits taken. One image

documentation of fruit being taken is in Plate 2. The woodpeckers also visited two fruiting *Ficus* trees (one had ripe fruit) but I was not able to observe any fruit feeding.



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Plate 1: Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on *Macaranga gigantea* fruit. Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Jan 2022.

Macaranga bancana, June 2023 and June 2026

Macaranga bancana is a small to medium sized tree with characteristic, large, three-lobed leaves. The fruit is held in 4-5-lobed capsules measuring 10–11 mm across and turns pink when ripe.

In June 2023 at a fruiting *Macaranga bancana*, I observed a single adult female Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding extensively on the fruit (Plate 3). The tree attracted many other birds and I observed intermittent conflict between the Spectacled Spiderhunters *Arachnothera flavigaster* and the Checker-throated Woodpecker (Plate 3). Spectacled Spiderhunters usually chase off the smaller birds at these fruiting trees but the woodpecker was not deterred.



Plate 2: Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on *Trema orientale* fruit. Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, May 2023.



Plate 3: Left: Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on *Macaranga bancana* fruit. Right: Conflict with Spectacled Spiderhunter. Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Jun 2023.

In June 2026 I observed a family unit of three Checker-throated Woodpeckers feeding on *Macaranga bancana* fruit (Plate 4). The adult female was collecting large volumes of the ripe

fruit to feed the fledged juvenile male. I saw two feeding episodes where the female regurgitated fruit boluses to feed the juvenile; the number of fruit (from serial images) was in the range of 15-20. Some leftover fruit during the episodes was eaten by the adult female. The adult male was also feeding on the *Macaranga bancana* fruit but I did not see it feed the juvenile (observations were made over two consecutive mornings). Ripe fruit was taken directly from the inflorescences or by probing deep with the tongue. A video recording of feeding can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/InDLXue9imA> and <https://youtu.be/ID0DdOQenu4>.



Plate 4: Left: Adult female Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding juvenile male with a bolus of *Macaranga bancana* fruit. Right: Adult male feeding on *Macaranga bancana* fruit. Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Jun 2026.

Sarcotheca monophylla, August 2026

In August 2026 I observed a pair of Checker-throated Woodpeckers take at least eight *Sarcotheca monophylla* fruit. The fruit was not easy to reach and the birds often had to fly out, an aerial sally like flycatchers, to snag a fruit and return to another perch to feed. It was hard to document but fortunately there was one occasion where fruit was in easy reach (Plate 5). *Sarcotheca monophylla* is a favourite fruit tree in the forest for many birds. It is a tall tree and can grow to a height of 30 meters. Fruits are bright red and oval measuring up to 13 mm in size.

Additional Supporting Data

A literature review did not identify any articles on frugivory by the Checker-throated Woodpecker.

An online image search for images using a Boolean search for "Checker-throated Woodpecker" and "fruit" did not reveal any images apart from my own.

A review of all images in the Macaulay Library (ML) (908 images as of 23 August 2026) did not identify any showing the woodpecker with fruit in the beak, apart from those posted by myself.



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Plate 5: Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on *Sarcotheca monophylla* fruit. Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Aug 2026.

However, the Checker-throated Woodpecker has been documented at fruiting plants/trees in the ML images (Table 1). My personal experience has been that it is hard to document the actual fruit in the beak. It is possible that the birds are feeding on insects among the fruit, but my observations suggest that fruit is taken at times.

Table 1: Macaulay Library Images showing the Checker-throated Woodpecker at fruiting trees (excluding my observations/posts).

Fruiting Plant	Location	Date	Source
<i>Macaranga gigantea</i>	Panti Recreational Forest, Johor, Malaysia	Jul 2026	Lemon Lam (ML662504831)
	Hutan Lipur Perdik, Selangor, Malaysia	Jun 2026	Yoke Kheng (ML660772791)
	Talang-Langkap Road, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia	Jul 2025	Lee Cheow Lim (ML639186778)
	Deramakot Forest Reserve, Sabah, Malaysia	Oct 2024	Chris Daniels (ML624925412)
	Panti Recreational Forest, Johor, Malaysia	Aug 2019	Chun Fai Lo (ML548597181)
	Hutan Lipur Sungai Sedim, Kedah, Malaysia	Aug 2018	Choy Wai Mun (ML109886871)



Fruiting Plant	Location	Date	Source
<i>Macaranga bancana</i>	Panti Recreational Forest, Johor, Malaysia	Sep 2006	Lip Kee Yap (ML378722891)
Ficus trees	Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia	Oct 2025	Kenneth YK Chong (ML643475955)
	Taman Negara National Park, Pahang, Malaysia	Jul 2025	Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok (ML640182323)
	Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia	Mar 2020	Neil Osborne (ML619800272)
Unidentified Tree (possibly a <i>Callicarpa</i> sp.)	Bukit Tinggi, Pahang, Malaysia	Aug 2023	Jodhan Fine (ML604518141)

Discussion

Although the Checker-throated Woodpecker primarily feeds on invertebrates and insects, this documentation of feeding on four different fruit types, supports that fruit is not uncommon in its diet. The large volume fruit feeding of juveniles is unusual. More work is required in this area.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Swee-Yian Lim for reviewing the manuscript.

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Photo-Shorts

Bamboo Seeds – A New Food Item for the Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrot

Samuel BL Ong

Introduction

The Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrot *Loriculus galgulus* (Serindit Melayu in Bahasa Malaysia) is a small green parrot (12-13 cm) found in forested lowlands in southern Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Sumatra, Java and the Borneo region of Indonesia (Collar & Boesman 2020). The parrot inhabits forests, forest edges, swamps, riverine forest, bamboo patches, mangrove, wooded gardens, coconut groves and plantations.

The diet and foraging behaviour of the Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrot in the region have recently been reviewed (Amar-Singh HSS 2024). The review highlighted the wide diet range of the Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrot, which includes fruit, nectar, seeds, flowers and pollen with limited data on animal food sources.

In this report, I share my observations of the different food items of this species I have seen over time. Most are recognised food items, but one is a new, previously undocumented source.

Observations

Bamboo Seeds

At the Gap, Fraser's Hill, Pahang, Malaysia, I observed the Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrot, on two occasions, feeding on the seeds of the bamboo flower (*Bambusa sp.*) (Plate 1). Once the seeds were fed to a fledged juvenile. Bamboo seeds are not recognised in the diet of the parrot, and this is a new food item identified.



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Plate 1: Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrot feeding on seeds of the bamboo flower. Left: Juvenile male, Aug 2025. Right: Adult male feeding juvenile, Jun 2026. Fraser's Hill, Pahang, Malaysia.

Water Jambu Fruit

At Taman Botani Negara, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia, in February 2023, I saw Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrots feeding on the fruit of *Syzygium samarangense* (Java Apple or Water Jambu). This is a known food item.



Plate 2: Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrot feeding on *Syzygium samarangense* fruit. Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia, Feb 2023.

Common Mahang Fruit

In July 2019, at the Semangkuk Waterfall area, on the road from Kuala Kubu Baru to the Gap, Fraser's Hill, Pahang, Malaysia, I observed parrots feeding on fruit of the *Macaranga bancana* (Common Mahang) (Plate 3), a known food item.



Plate 3: Feeding on *Macaranga bancana* fruit, Pahang, Malaysia, Jul 2019.

Poikilospermum sp. Nectar

At the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in January 2017, I saw hanging parrots feeding on *Poikilospermum sp.* (Plate 4), possibly *Poikilospermum suaveolens*. This is a woody, climbing plant, which is known locally as Akar Kayas or Akar Janggang. Many bird species eat the flowers for the nectar they contain. At the same site and date, the birds were also seen feeding on the seeds of an unknown plant.



Plate 4: Left: Eating *Poikilospermum sp.* flowers, Right: Eating seeds of an unknown plant. FRIM Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Jan 2017.

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I would like to thank Swee-Yian Lim for reviewing the manuscript.

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Fruit in the Diet of the Chestnut-naped Forktail

Sein-Chiong Chiu

The Chestnut-naped Forktail *Enicurus ruficapillus* is well known to forage among rocks and the leaf litter at the side of streams (Wells 2007; Collar 2020). It is also often found foraging along the roads that cut into primary forest. The diet of the Chestnut-naped Forktail, including items brought to nestlings, consists mainly of small insects and invertebrates. They include beetles, winged insects, flies, woodlice, larvae, caterpillars, centipedes, crickets, ants, spiders, etc (Wells 2007; Amar-Singh HSS 2015; Collar 2020). It has also been recorded to take small fish, fish/amphibian eggs, small frogs and a small snake (Wells 2007; Amar-Singh HSS 2015; Collar 2020). Plate 1 shows some items brought to nestlings.

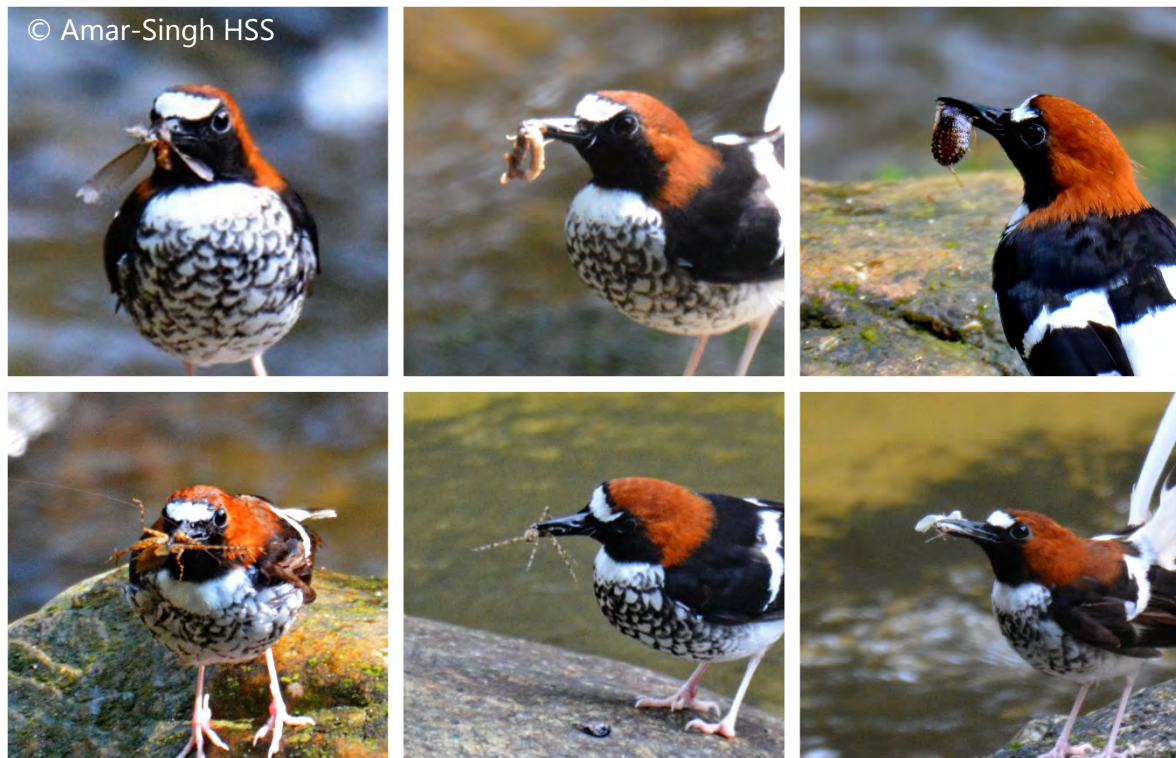


Plate 1: A selection of food items for nestlings. Clockwise from top right: alate termite, centipede, wingless cockroach (*Morphna sp.*), freshwater shrimp, spider and cricket. Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Oct 2014 (Source: Amar-Singh HSS 2015).

Fruit however, has not been described in the diet of adult Chestnut-naped Forktails or seen fed to juveniles.

On the morning of 06 July 2026, while birdwatching along a tarred track leading into the forest fringe at Taman Eko Rimba Kledang Saiong, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, an adult female Chestnut-naped Forktail suddenly flew out from an adjacent small stream onto the tarred track and walked around looking for food.

Initially, I thought that the forktail was looking for insects on the ground but, on closer observation, the forktail was seen three times picking up a fruit and eating it (Plate 2). When there was no more fruit to be found on the ground, the forktail flew back towards the stream

and did not return. One of the fruit-eating episodes was recorded on video. A link to the video is here: <https://youtu.be/EIzLzLo010Y>



Plate 2: Screen grab from a video of an adult female Chestnut-naped Forktail feeding on fruit. Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Jul 2026.

After the forktail left, I noted there were two different macaranga trees that were fruiting on the slope above the tarred track – *Macaranga gigantea* and *Macaranga bancana*. Asian Glossy Starlings *Aplonis panayensis* and Red-eyed Bulbuls *Pycnonotus brunneus* came by periodically to feed on the fruiting trees and, in the process, a few of the fruits fell onto the tarred track and rolled to the bottom of the track where the forktail was feeding. The fruit appeared to be that of *Macaranga gigantea*.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Amar-Singh HSS for support in the writing of the manuscript and for the kind use of the images in Plate 1. I thank Wai-Mun Choy for reviewing the manuscript.

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Active Anting in the Van Hasselt's Sunbird in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo

Dixon Lau

Introduction

Anting is a specialised maintenance behaviour in which birds interact with ants or other arthropods, either by allowing them to crawl through the plumage (passive anting) or by deliberately rubbing them onto the feathers (active anting) (Morozov 2015; Hendricks 2016). Recent local observations documented both passive and active anting in several Malaysian bird species, including active anting in Blue-winged Leafbird *Chloropsis moluccensis* and Pin-striped Tit-Babbler *Mixornis gularis* (Amar-Singh HSS et al. 2024). Here, I report active anting by Van Hasselt's Sunbird *Leptocoma brasiliana*.

Observation

While observing birds in a peat swamp forest near Sibul, Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, on 23 April 2026, an adult male Van Hasselt's Sunbird was observed picking up a red ant from vegetation and immediately applying it to its plumage in its first application [Plate 1(A)]. Rather than consuming the ant, it repeatedly applied the ant, using rapid rubbing movements [Plate 1(A) & 1(C)]. The ant remained held in the bill after the first application [Plate 1(B)] before being reapplied [Plate 1(C)] and subsequently discarded. The bird then briefly rubbed its bill against nearby twigs before obtaining a second red ant, which it applied once. The ant remained visible in the bill after the application [Plate 1(D)] before being discarded.



Plate 1: Active anting by an adult male. (A) First application immediately after picking up the ant. (B) Holding the ant after the first application. (C) Re-applying the same ant. (D) Holding the second ant after its application, with the juvenile visible in the same frame.

While the adult was performing its second anting episode, a juvenile became visible in the video frame [Plate 2(A) & 1(D)] and remained facing the adult for approximately two seconds before obtaining its own ant [Plate 2(B)]. It then began applying the ant to the underwing [Plate 2(C)]. During the first application, it lost its footing and dropped onto a lower branch while still holding the ant. After briefly regaining its balance, it reapplied the same ant before discarding it [Plate 2(D)]. The entire adult–juvenile sequence was observed continuously without interruption. A video recording of the complete behavioural sequence can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/9TkQOxdx0a4>.



Plate 2: Active anting by a juvenile, following the adult's second anting bout. (A) Juvenile facing the adult before obtaining its own ant. (B) Picking up the ant. (C) Applying the ant before losing its footing and dropping onto a lower branch. (D) Re-applying the same ant after regaining its footing.

Discussion

The observed behaviour is consistent with active anting, distinguished from passive anting by the deliberate application of ants to the plumage. To my knowledge, active anting has not previously been reported in Van Hasselt's Sunbird. The repeated anting bouts by the adult using different ants suggest that the behaviour was deliberate rather than incidental prey handling.

The juvenile's performance of similar behaviour immediately following the adult's second anting bout is noteworthy. Although this sequence raises the possibility of behavioural copying or other forms of social learning, a single observation cannot distinguish these from the

independent expression of an innate behaviour. Nevertheless, this observation adds to the documented behavioural repertoire of the species and highlights an aspect of its natural history that warrants further observation.

Acknowledgements

I thank the Malaysian Bird Report for encouraging the documentation of this observation. I would like to thank Wai-Mun Choy for reviewing the manuscript.

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Observation of Fruit-feeding by Sunda Scimitar-Babbler

Sathveegarajah Ragulan

Introduction

Frugivory (fruit feeding) by the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler *Pomatorhinus bornensis* is not documented in our region. Wells (2007) describes invertebrates and small vertebrates in its diet and states that "*McClure (1966) thought visitors to a canopy-cropping Ficus sumatrana were taking fruit but the greater likelihood is that they were after insects themselves attracted to the crop*".

Collar and Robson (2022a) list "*ginger seeds, flower pods, fruit, and berries*" in the diet of the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler but the entire food list is identical to that of the Javan Scimitar-Babbler *Pomatorhinus montanus* (Collar & Robson 2022b). The Sunda Scimitar-Babbler and Javan Scimitar-Babbler were split in the Clements Checklist 2022 update. The Birds of the World accounts were split accordingly but it is uncertain if the details on fruit in the diet belong to observations of the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler or the Javan Scimitar-Babbler.

I describe a fruit feeding episode by the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler.

Observation

On the morning of 04 May 2026, I was birding near the entrance of Kenyalang Loop at Gunung Mulu National Park, Sarawak, Malaysia. I observed a Sunda Scimitar-Babbler actively feeding on a hanging cluster of small green fruits, approximately the size of black peppercorns (identity of the plant uncertain). The bird repeatedly selected, plucked, and swallowed the fruits over several minutes (Plate 1). I was able to observe the full feeding sequence and saw the bird reaching for and consuming multiple fruits.



Plate 1: Fruit feeding by the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler. Gunung Mulu National Park, Sarawak, Malaysia, May 2026.

During the observation, I did not observe it searching for or feeding on insects or other invertebrates. The feeding appeared intentional, with the bird moving methodically along the fruiting vine before eventually leaving the area.

Discussion

As far as I am aware, the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler is generally described as feeding mainly on insects and other small invertebrates. This observation suggests that fruit is also consumed, at least opportunistically, although I cannot comment on how common this behaviour may be.

A review of the Macaulay Library for the Sunda Scimitar-Babbler (as of 02 August 2026) using the "foraging or eating", "feeding young" and "carrying food" tags did not show any frugivory episodes. An online image search for "Sunda Scimitar-Babbler" and "fruit" also did not reveal any fruit feeding documentation.

Corlett (2017) explicitly notes that babblers, though "*commonly described as insectivores, but every study that has looked at fecal samples or observed understory trees and shrubs has reported consistent levels of frugivory*".

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Amar-Singh HSS for help in drafting the manuscript and Kim-Chye Lim for reviewing it.

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Rarity Finders in the Field

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba/dukhunensis* - a new subspecies for Malaysia

Chris Gibbins

The two bird theory

I had domestic duties on 22 March 2026 around the Bangi area, Selangor, Malaysia. Rather than going directly home afterwards, I looked on Google Earth for anywhere nearby to spend an hour or so birding. I noticed a wetland that looked promising so decided to have a look. On arrival it immediately seemed ideal – shallow with a muddy edge, and it was rather dirty (poor water quality, with a few dead fish) so there were lots of insects. As well as herons, egrets and storks, I saw a couple of Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* and a Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*. This was great - not only was it a nice place to check before going home that day, but it was close enough to my house to be able to visit regularly. I had found a new patch.

I visited the wetland 4 or 5 times over the following week. On the morning of 29 March 2026 I pulled up, scanned over the wetland and noticed a White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*. Initially it was distant, but I worked my way closer to the bird to resolve its subspecific ID and get some photos. It was a rather lovely example of the *leucopsis* race (Plate 1), sometimes called 'Chinese Wagtail'. What a result. I was very happy – the wetland was living up to its early promise. I saw the bird again on a visit two days later.



Plate 1. White Wagtail *Motacilla alba leucopsis*, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia, 29 Mar 2026.

I kept checking. On 12 April 2026 I arrived around 0715 hrs and started to follow my now regular route around the wetland. At one of the view points I noticed 'the' White Wagtail on a muddy spit, so decided to walk across for some photos. Logically I assumed that it was the

same bird and was focused on getting photos, so was not as switched-on as I should have been. It took me a few minutes to realize that it was a different individual. The bird in March had much more extensive white in the greater coverts and tertials and more blackish in the mantle. I noticed the presence of some retained brown juvenile feathers in the wing (e.g. outer greater coverts, primaries and secondaries) so aged it as a second calendar year bird. Surely it can't be a second White Wagtail at this small inland site on only my 7th or 8th visit? I looked at my images on the back of the camera to check the detail – sure enough it was a different individual (Plate 2). 'Amazing' I thought to myself.



Plate 2. White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba/dukhunensis*, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia, Apr 2026. Left David Awcock (14 Apr 2026), right Chris Gibbins (12 Apr 2026).

Not only was it a different individual, but it was a different subspecies. The black of its breast extended up and onto the throat, and most importantly reached the bill base (seen clearly in Plate 2 left and lower right). This was most odd, since the subspecies I had seen most in Malaysia (*leucopsis*) does not show this (*leucopsis* has a dark breast 'plate' but the throat is white; Plate 3).

It was clearly one of the grey-backed taxa. This ruled out *alboides* which shares the black throat but has a black mantle and scapulars. It was not an *ocularis* either – although males of this taxon have the black throat they have a blackish eye stripe which completely changes the facial impression. Nor was it *personata* – although this subspecies is grey backed, it has a very striking white face mask (Plate 3). My initial assumption was that it must be *baicalensis* ('Transbaikalian White Wagtail'). However, the black on the breast of this taxon does not extend so extensively onto the throat – crucially, it falls short of the bill base (Plate 3). In fact, the bird looked just like the nominate *alba* that I was familiar with from Europe.

This seemed too far-fetched, given (i) the much more Westerly breeding range of *alba* (Figure 1), and (ii) if an *alba* it would mean there had been two different White Wagtail subspecies at the wetland after only a couple of weeks of checking, one of which would be new to Malaysia. Despite the odds, the visual evidence was clear – its appearance matched *alba* perfectly.

I alerted friends and David Awcock came to see it on 14th April 2026. David's was the last sighting - heavy rain on the night of 14th completely flooded the wetland and all the birds moved off. I never saw it after this date.



Plate 3. White Wagtail *M. alba* taxa. Left *leucopsis*, China, Oct 2018; Upper right *baicalensis* Mongolia, May 2015; Lower right *personata*, Mongolia May 2025.

Range, taxonomy and identification

White Wagtail is a scarce migrant and non-breeding visitor to Peninsular Malaysia. Information on which races occur is patchy – subspecific identification of young birds is challenging and photographic documentation is not always possible. Wells (2007) indicates that the subspecies *leucopsis* and *ocularis* are the two regularly occurring forms, with the former far outnumbering the latter. There are over a dozen records of the far-eastern subspecies, *lugens*, from Singapore, but perhaps surprisingly, none have been recorded in Malaysia yet.

Nominate White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba* is essentially a Western Palearctic bird (Figure 1). It breeds throughout Western Europe (except the UK), southwards to the northern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The eastern part of its range extends into Russia as far as the Yenisey river, so formally speaking it also occupies the westernmost portion of Eastern Palearctic.

Further east in Russia it is replaced by *ocularis*, while in Mongolia it is replaced by *baicalensis*. The winter ranges of the White Wagtail subspecies are generally to the south of respective breeding ranges. Nominate *alba* winters in Southern Europe and North Africa, through the Middle East and all the way eastwards to India and Bangladesh.



Eastern populations of nominate *alba* are often referred to as *dukhunensis* (Olström and Mild, 2003). The precise distribution of this taxon is unclear, though essentially it occupies the eastern and southernmost corners of the range of *alba*. There is a zone of intergradation between *alba/dukhunensis* and *ocularis* in Taimyr and along the Yenisey river, and with *personata* in southern Russia and central Asia (Olström and Mild, 2003).

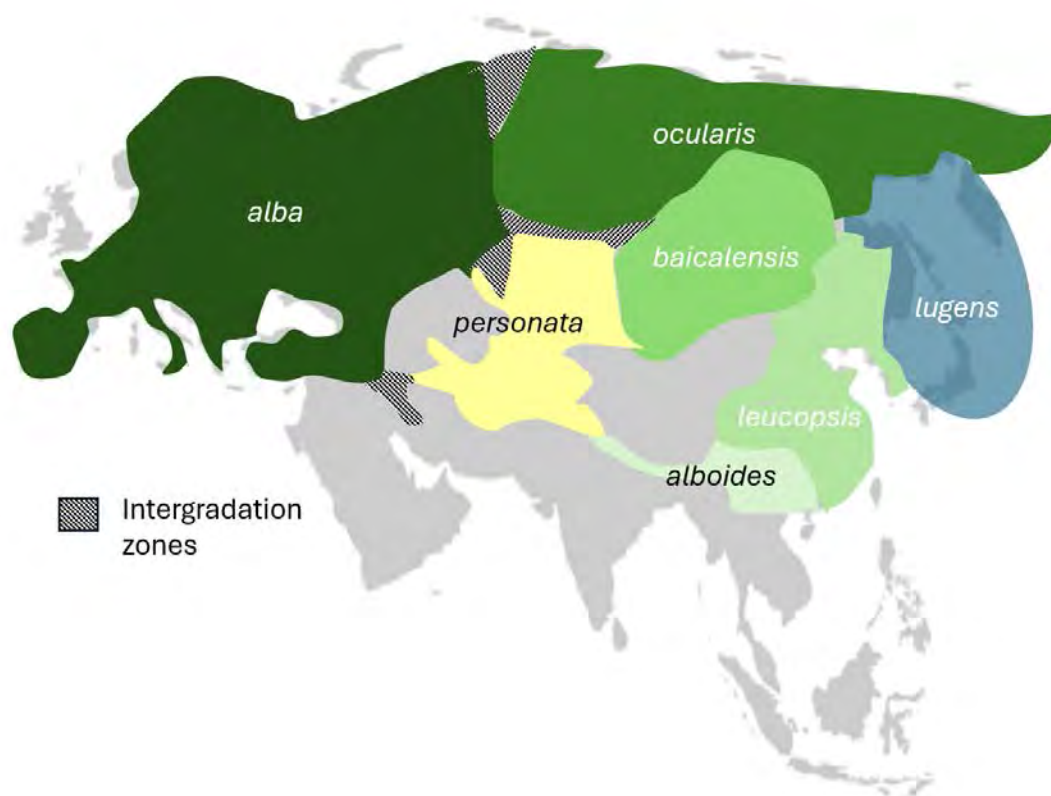


Figure 1. Approximate breeding ranges of the White Wagtail *M. alba* subspecies. The map is based on Olström and Mild (2003). Borders between subspecies and areas of intergradation are approximate.

Dukhunensis is slightly paler on the mantle and scapulars than *alba* and on average males have more extensive white in the wing coverts, sometimes forming a complete white panel on the greater coverts. Shirihaï and Svensson (2018) state that in the Caucasus these differences appear to be consistent (Plate 4) whereas other populations are more variable and grade into *alba*.

The Bangi bird was a second calendar year, and so hard to assign to either *alba* or *dukhunensis*, though on range the latter is more likely. Various genetic studies have demonstrated that the White Wagtail subspecies are all very similar, suggesting only very recent evolution and divergence. Shirihaï and Svensson (2018) recommend treating them all as a single species for the time being. As outlined by these authors, some Russian literature treats *personata* as a separate species due to sympatry with *dukhunensis* in parts of Russia and Kazakhstan, although there is extensive intergradation between these two in other areas.



Plate 4. *Motacilla alba dukhunensis*, Azerbaijan, Sep 2012. Chris Gibbins. Note the fully white wing coverts of this adult.

There is a single record of *alba* accepted for Singapore (Chia, 2020). This bird (Plate 5) looked remarkably like the Bangi bird. There are no confirmed records of *alba* from Thailand. Hopefully, once assessed, the Bangi record can become the first nominate *alba* for Malaysia.



Plate 5. White Wagtail, *M. alba alba* Singapore, 10 Feb 2020. Note the retained juvenile outer greater coverts, and visible primaries and secondaries.

Acknowledgements

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Little Egret intergrade *Egretta garzetta garzetta* x *E. g. immaculata*

Jon Lowes

In February 2013 we were staying at the De Palma Resort in Kuala Selangor, Selangor, Malaysia. On 25 February 2013, we walked along the road north of the resort in the morning before breakfast, along a road called Jalan Hakim. We saw an egret in the trees by a small river that ran alongside the road.

At the time, I struggled to identify it, and came to the conclusion that it was most likely an Intermediate Egret (now split to Medium Egret) *Ardea intermedia*, due to the all-black feet (Plate 1). More images of the bird can be viewed at this eBird link:

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S41505231>.

The bird was recently discussed by eBird reviewers, James Eaton and Dave Bakewell. They came to the conclusion that it is a Little Egret intergrade (*Egretta garzetta garzetta* x *Egretta garzetta immaculata*¹). Note that the bird has all black feet which is typical for *E. g. immaculata* but bluish loreal skin and a whitish underside of the lower mandible, which is typical for *E. g. garzetta*.



Plate 1: Little Egret *E. g. garzetta* x *immaculata*. Kuala Selangor, Selangor, Malaysia, Feb 2013.

¹ The black-footed form of Little Egret which occurs in Australasia was formerly known as *Egretta garzetta nigripes*. However, the syntypes upon which the description of *E.g.nigripes* was based were later considered to be hybrids or intergrades between *E.g.garzetta* and the black-footed Australasian population, and so *nigripes* was discarded and replaced by *immaculata* (Clements et al. 2024).

Table 1 and Plate 2 compare the *E. g. garzetta* and *E. g. immaculata* subspecies of the Little Egret.

Table 1: Geographic and morphological differences between *E. g. garzetta* and the *E. g. immaculata* (Mlodinow et al. 2024).

Characteristic	<i>Egretta garzetta garzetta</i> (Nominate Subspecies)	<i>Egretta garzetta immaculata</i> (Australasian Subspecies)
Native Range & Distribution	Widespread across Europe, Africa, the Middle East and mainland Asia.	Native to Australia, New Zealand and parts of Indonesia/Australasia.
Foot Coloration (adults)	Bright yellow to orange-yellow feet, contrasting sharply with black legs.	Mostly black to dark brownish-black feet; any yellow restricted to the soles
Loral Skin (adults)	Dull blue-grey to greenish-grey; brighter blue during the breeding period (occasionally red or pinkish).	Yellow throughout the year; brighter during the breeding period.



Plate 2: Left: *E. g. garzetta*, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Jan 2022. Right: *E. g. immaculata*, Shoalhaven, New South Wales, Australia, Dec 2023.

Eaton et al. (2021) note that there is wide intergradation zone between the two taxa, extending at least from northern Sulawesi to northern Sumatra. A perfunctory survey of photographs of Little Egrets in the Macaulay Library (<https://www.macaulaylibrary.org>) with the location filter set to 'Indonesia' confirms this. Within this region, birds conforming to the appearance of pure *garzetta* and pure *immaculata* occur alongside individuals showing a similar mix of characters to the bird which I observed.

Mlodinow and colleagues (2024) note that "*Birds in Borneo, previously attributed to subspecies nigripes, may represent intergrades between immaculata and nominate garzetta; presumed intergrades are thought to be of equal abundance with garzetta here*". Birds attributed to *nigripes* but undoubtedly representing intergrades occur along the western coast of Peninsular Malaysia to Perak (Wells 1999; Mlodinow et al. 2024). The Little Egret is well known to hybridize with closely related birds (Mlodinow et al. 2024).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank James Eaton and Dave Bakewell for helping identify the bird. Amar-Singh HSS and Dave Bakewell kindly supported the writing of the manuscript and shared useful images.

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Noteworthy Records for Oct - Dec 2025, Malaysia

Dave Bakewell

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We thank Cheng RenXing and Raymond Voo Zhong Hao for the kind use of their images.

Report

There were three new species for the country in the period, two of them simultaneously at Sungai Balang, Johor: 2 **Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola* (Plate 4), 14 December onward (SP *et al.*) and a **White-cheeked Starling** *Spodiopsar cineraceus* on 14 December only (SP), a long-awaited national first; and a **Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* (Plate 5) at Tempasuk Plain, Sabah, 7 November–14 December (JB *et al.*).



Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola*, Sungai Balang, Johor, Malaysia, 14 Dec 2025.

Three **Knob-billed Duck** *Sarkidiornis melanotos* were at Sungai Balang, 20–21 December (AD), continuing the species' upward trend. Migratory wildfowl were present in reasonable numbers, although **Garganey** *Spatula querquedula* numbers were lower than might be expected: in Peninsular Malaysia, up to 2 were at Sungai Balang, 25 October–30 November (ATH) and singles at Sungai Tembus, Pulau Pinang, 29 November (QS) and Malim Nawar, Perak, 3 December (A-SHSS); in Bornean Malaysia, 7 were at Kuala Baram Wetlands, Sarawak, 20



November onward (DB), 2 at Tempasuk Plain from 1 December (JPS), with 6 on 18 December (CKV), and 2 at Sankina Aquaculture, Tawau, Sabah, 6 December (STS). A peak of 6 **Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata* were at Tempasuk Plain, 14 December (LM), up to 5 at Penampang paddyfields, Sabah, 30 November–6 December (TG *et al.*), up to 3 at Kuala Baram Wetlands, 27 November (DB) and 1 at Sankina Aquaculture, 7 November–23 December (STS). The only **Eurasian Wigeon** *Mareca penelope* were a pair at Taman Harmoni, Sandakan, Sabah, 23 November onward (LM *et al.*) but there were good numbers of **Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*, with a high of 23 at Tempasuk Plain, 29 November (JBR) and a **Eurasian Teal** *A. crecca* there, 11 December (LM). **Large Hawk- Cuckoo** *Hierococcyx sparverioides* is a scarce migrant in Borneo, 1 at Kinabatangan, Sabah, 13 November (JJ) being the only one reported, while a **Northern Hawk-Cuckoo** *H. hyperythrus* on Pulau Mantanani Besar, Sabah, from 30 October (HSK) was noteworthy – all previous records also come from Sabah. Pulau Mantanani hosted a **Nicobar Pigeon** *Caloenas nicobarica* on 23 October (ITR-H). Single **Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra* were at 4 sites in Sabah, 30 November–18 December (many obs.). A **Band-bellied Crake** *Zapornia paykullii* at Tanjung Karang, Selangor, 16–23 November (LYH) was a great find. An **Oriental Plover** *Anarhynchus veredus* was at Sungai Balang rice-fields, Johor, 27 October (WLW) and 2 **Grey-headed Lapwing** *Vanellus cinereus* were at Penampang paddyfields, 4–6 December (CT). Another seldom-seen migrant was a **Little Whimbrel** *Numenius minutus* at Penampang, 14 December (CM). Rarer still was a first-year **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* at Sungai Balang, 8–20 November (ATH), the first confirmed record for Peninsular Malaysia. Away from regular wintering sites, **Nordmann's Greenshank** *Tringa guttifer* included up to 3 at Kuala Abai, Sabah, from 10 November (JB), 1 at Pulau Gusung Semawang, Sabah, 30 November (JB) and up to 9 at Sankina Aquaculture from 4 December (STS), including 1 with a transmitter, tagged at Tiaozini, Jiangsu, China, in September. A **Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus* at Kuala Baram Wetlands, 6 December onward (DB) was the first photographically-documented state record.



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Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, Tempasuk Plain, Sabah, Malaysia, 18 Nov 2025.

Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata* were confined to Bornean Malaysia: 2 at Kuala Baram Wetlands, 23 October–13 November (DB) and 3 at Tempasuk Plain, 7 November (CG *et al.*), while a **Dunlin** *C. alpina* was at Kuala Baram Wetlands, 1 November (DB). Two **Small Pratincole** *Glareola lactea* were at Sungai Balang, 12–14 December (WLW), overlapping with the Common Pratincoles mentioned above. A **Parasitic Jaeger/Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus* was at Teluk Labuk, Sabah, 13 December (MLB), while 23 **Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia* were at Pulau Gusung Semawang on the same date (RMM) and up to 11 at Sankina Aquaculture (STS). A satellite-tagged **Chinese Crested Tern** *Thalasseus bernsteini* was tracked to Teluk Labuk by Chinese researchers who then alerted local birders, leading to the remarkable find of at least 5, including 2 tagged and 2 untagged birds, 26 November–13 December (JB *et al.*); these were undoubtedly wintering in the area. Malaysia's first **Arctic Tern** *Sterna paradisaea* (see *BirdingASIA* 44: 93) remained at Morib, Selangor, to 12 October at least (YML *et al.*) while a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus taimyrensis* was off the North Selangor coast, 29 October (CG). A **Storm's Stork** *Ciconia stormi* on the runway of Mulu Airport, Sarawak, 13 October (HSK) was an intriguing record. At least 1 **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* was at an undisclosed site in Perak, 4 December (SCC) and single **Black-headed Ibis** *Threskiornis melanocephalus* were at two geographically distant sites, at Sungai Balang, 12–15 November (ATH *et al.*) and at Kepala Batas, Pulau Pinang, 17–22 November (AD *et al.*), suggesting that just 1 bird was involved. A male **Schrenck's Bittern** *Botaurus eurhythmus* (Plate 6) on Pulau Mantanani Besar, 29–30 October (HSK) was a good find, and a **Malayan Night Heron** *Gorsachius melanolophus* was there at the same time (HSK). Further **Malayan Night Herons** were at Trusan Sugut Forest Reserve, 8 October (JB) and Sepilok Rainforest Discovery Center from 10 November (DF), both in Sabah, while in Peninsular Malaysia singles were at Pulau Dayang Bunting, Kedah, 11 December (LN), Hutan Lipur Perdik, Selangor, 13 December (LKC), Taman Negara, Pahang, 14 December (AA) and Tanah Rata, Pahang, 20 December (NU). **Silver-backed Needletail** *Hirundapus cochinchinensis* was only recently recorded for the first time in Borneo, so 1 at Sabang, Sugut, Sabah, 9 October (JB) and another at Pulau Mantanani Besar, 30–31 October (JB *et al.*) were noteworthy. A **Besra** *Tachyspiza virgata* at Kuala Gula, Perak, 11 December (A-SHSS) was an excellent find. Two **Northern Boobook** *Ninox japonica* were on Pulau Mantanani Besar, 23 October–9 November at least (ITR-H *et al.*). **White-throated Kingfisher** *Halcyon smyrnensis* continues to establish a population in Bornean Malaysia, with birds at Sukau, Lahad Datu and Kota Belud (all in Sabah) during the period (many obs.). A first-year **Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo* took up residence on Pulau Mantanani Besar, 31 October–18 November at least (HSK *et al.*), and presumably the same bird was at Kota Belud on mainland Sabah, 14 November (CKV). **Black-hooded Oriole** *Oriolus xanthornus* was recorded at Sungai Kapur Virgin Jungle Reserve, Sabah, 31 October (RS) and at Taman Harmoni, 29 November (CC). **Crow-billed Drongo** *Dicrurus annectens*, a scarce migrant to Bornean Malaysia, were at Sg Bidut, Sarawak, 13 October (DL) and Sepilok Rainforest Discovery Center, 18 October (WG). A flock of 25 **Chestnut-cheeked Starling** *Agropsar philippensis* was in Miri, Sarawak, 2 November (DB). A **Brown-chested Jungle Flycatcher** *Cyornis brunneatus* delighted photographers at a hide in Taman Eko Rimba Bukit Ayer, Perlis, during October (A-SHSS *et al.*) and a **Taiga Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicilla* was at Royal Belum, Perak, 11–12 December (TG). A **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* was seen briefly on Pulau Mantanani Besar, 9 November (DB *et al.*) and a **Yellow-breasted Bunting** *E. aureola* was at Sungai Balang, 15 December (LYH).

Contributors

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Reporting Rare Birds

MNS-Bird Conservation Council Records Committee

All birdwatchers are encouraged to report new birds seen. See details at the Records Committee Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/mnsbccrecordscommittee/>

The species that are assessed by the Records Committee (species that you should submit) include:

1. All claims of potentially new species for Malaysia.
2. All claims of potentially new species for Bornean Malaysia.
3. All claims of potentially new species for Peninsular Malaysia.
4. All claims of wild species which are currently only in Category B, C or D (for either Bornean or Peninsular Malaysia)

B: Species recorded at least once in a wild state, but not since before 1963.

C: Species believed to occur only as a result of human introduction. The population is considered self-sustaining.

D: Species believed to occur (or to have occurred) only as a result of human introduction. Continued existence in the wild is considered dependent upon repeat introductions.

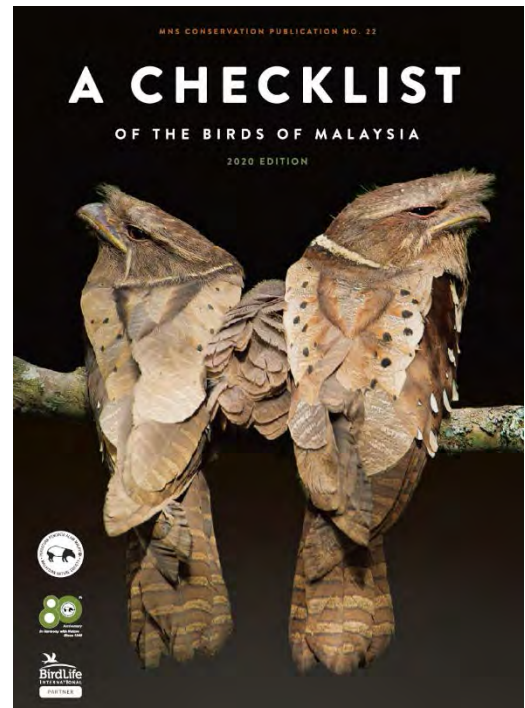
You can download the latest (2020) Malaysia Checklist of birds in pdf format at this link:

https://malaysianbird.report/wp-content/uploads/Checklist_Birds-of-Msia-2020.pdf

1. Rare & New Records submission form
2. Rare & New Records submission form (shortened version for submissions with photos attached)

<https://sites.google.com/site/mnsbccrecordscommittee/home/rare-and-new-record-submission-form?authuser=0>

The Records Committee encourages observers to submit all observations of wild birds in Malaysia to eBird. Claims of rare and scarce species will be assessed by a team of eBird reviewers on that site.



Special Reports

Guardian of the 'Mythical' Chinese Crested Tern

Xian Lim Ying Hien

In July 2025, Ashwin Kalai Chelvan and I represented the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) and travelled to Xiangshan County, Zhejiang Province, China, to participate in the [Chinese Crested Tern Conservation Volunteer Service Programme](#) and International Volunteer Service Ningbo Exchange.

During this three-day, two-night exchange program, we gained our first in-depth understanding of just how challenging the breeding process of the Chinese Crested Tern *Thalasseus bernsteini* is. We also took a boat to Jiushan Island, located about 20 kilometres from the mainland coast. This is where the volunteers live and work, and we affectionately call it our '**Living Island**'. That day, however, the winds and waves at sea were too strong, and we were ultimately unable to land on the Chinese Crested Tern breeding island, which was only about 500 meters from the 'Living Island'. We could only observe it from a distance. Although it was a little disappointing, the experience left me with a deep impression of this mysterious little island and the Chinese Crested Tern.



Plate 1: Standing on Jiushan Island, gazing toward the Chinese Crested Tern breeding island. May 2026.

I have often wondered what has caused the Chinese Crested Tern to be classified as 'Critically Endangered' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, while also being listed as a National First-class Protected Wildlife Species in China. At the same time, I have always been curious about how the 'Artificial Attraction and Population Recovery Monitoring Project' mentioned in conservation efforts is actually carried out. How are the crested terns artificially attracted to suitable breeding sites? And how does long-term monitoring help us understand and promote the recovery of the Chinese Crested Tern population?

Fortunately, in 2026, I had the opportunity to become one of the first batch of Crested Tern Guardian volunteers for the season. I was finally able to take part firsthand in the conservation, monitoring, and population recovery efforts for the Chinese Crested Tern.

The 'Living Island' and Volunteers Hut

From April to June this year, I spent a total of 46 days living on this 'Living Island'. During this time, I lived and worked alongside two other volunteers, together standing guard over these precious 'mythical birds'.

The 'Living Island' is a beautiful offshore island, and the volunteer hut on the island was the heart of our daily life and work. It served as our workspace, bedroom, and kitchen all in one. Although the living conditions were simple, it was home to me for 46 days and became one of the most unforgettable places of this experience.



Plate 2: Volunteer Hut – the solar panels on the roof and the small grass-covered slope on the right are part of the water storage system. May 2026.

Although life on the island was completely different from life in the city, our basic needs were still well provided for. Electricity mainly came from a small, independent solar photovoltaic system consisting of solar panels, an inverter, and energy storage equipment. It provided power for the artificial attraction of the Crested Terns, monitoring equipment, and our daily needs as volunteers. Our water supply mainly came from a small reservoir that collected rainwater and water from the hills. A water pump then delivered the water to the kitchen and bathroom facilities.

As a result, both electricity and water on the island were obtained largely through low-carbon, nature-based methods. For an island so far from the mainland, this way of life was simple, but it also gave me a deeper appreciation of the possibility of living in harmony with nature.



Plate 3: This photo was taken from the small grass-covered slope above the reservoir. The solar panels can be seen in the foreground, with the pier faintly visible in the upper left corner. May 2026.

Once a week, a supply boat would arrive from the mainland, bringing essential supplies for our daily lives, including household necessities, drinking water, vegetables, fruits, fresh meat, eggs, and more. Every arrival of the supply boat was something we looked forward to with great anticipation.

And our most important task every day was the conservation of the Chinese Crested Tern.

In 2025, the global population of Chinese Crested Terns was estimated to be [only around 150–200 individuals](#), making it even rarer than the Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea*. With such a tiny population, every single Chinese Crested Tern is extraordinarily precious.

Once I confirmed that I would be participating in the 'Crested Tern Guardian' volunteer programme in 2026, I was gradually added to several WeChat groups. The conservation of the Chinese Crested Tern is never something that can be accomplished by one person alone. It is a collaborative effort that requires the participation and coordination of different people and different organisations, all working together.

The Groups

Before officially arriving on the island, I joined several WeChat groups closely related to the conservation work.

1. Jiushan Monitoring Group

This group mainly consisted of a supervising instructor and volunteers involved in the monitoring work. It was the core group for our daily communication and monitoring activities. Monitoring tasks, work arrangements, and any issues that arose were discussed and communicated promptly in this group.

2. Jiushan Islands Working Group

This group involved a much wider range of people. In addition to members of the Xiangshan Jiushan Monitoring Group and volunteers, it also included the reserve management team and people responsible for various aspects of the operation, including internet connectivity, power supply, transportation, audio equipment, and supplies. Because conservation work on the island involves many different aspects, a problem in any one area could potentially affect the entire operation. Therefore, this group served more like a working link connecting the different departments and teams.

3. Protected Area Monitoring Groups

Since 2013, a total of 3 protected areas in Zhejiang Province, China, have jointly conducted a monitoring project for the Chinese Crested Tern. This group is primarily composed of the heads of the three protected areas, guiding instructors, and all volunteers, which facilitates work communication, data exchange, and experience sharing between the different monitoring zones.

In my view, even just looking at these WeChat groups, it was already possible to appreciate the enormous team effort behind the conservation of the Chinese Crested Tern.

The First Lesson Before Arriving on the Island

Before we arrived at the 'Living Island' in the Jiushan Islands, our instructors had already arranged training sessions for us. We needed to learn what we should do after arriving on the island, which items we had to bring with us, what information and data needed to be recorded, and how to carry out the daily monitoring work.

What particularly interested me was learning about the Crested Tern's diet. We needed to identify different species of fish, record the fish preyed upon by the Crested Terns, and observe and document the behavioural interactions between the fish and the Crested Terns. This knowledge was extremely important to me. In the past, most of my knowledge about birds came from birdwatching, books, online resources, and my own observations. But this time, I began to experience a more professional and detailed side of wild bird conservation.

Some knowledge simply cannot be gained by searching the internet. Much of it comes from long-term field monitoring, firsthand observation, and the years of experience accumulated by the instructors. And this time, what I was learning about was a globally Critically Endangered bird – the Chinese Crested Tern.

Preparations Before Arriving on the Island

The breeding island was originally an uninhabited island. Having been largely unmanaged for a long period of time, it had become covered with weeds and dense vegetation. About two weeks before we arrived on the island, the staff had already begun carrying out the 'preparatory work for the Artificial Attraction Programme'. Although these tasks may seem small and routine, they formed an important foundation for the smooth implementation of the entire conservation project.

The main preparations included:

1. Improving the habitat

Some of the vegetation on the island was cleared to create a more suitable environment for the Crested Terns to rest and breed.

2. Clearing and preparing suitable nesting ground

The breeding area was cleared and organised, and small stones were spread over the ground to create a suitable nesting environment for the Crested Terns.

3. Installing audio and monitoring equipment

Audio equipment required for the artificial attraction program was installed, along with a monitoring system to allow the Crested Terns' activities to be observed remotely.

4. Repairing the observation hut

The existing observation facilities were repaired and organised in preparation for the subsequent monitoring work.

5. Checking the solar power and electrical systems

The solar panels, energy storage equipment, inverter, and other components of the power supply system were inspected to ensure that all equipment on the island could operate properly.

6. Setting up remote network equipment

A remote network system was established so that staff could monitor conditions on the island in a timely manner and carry out remote management.

7. Setting up traps to control predators such as snakes and rats

Relevant trapping devices were placed around the breeding area to help control snakes, rats, and other animals that could potentially threaten the Crested Terns' breeding success.



Plate 4: Clearing and preparing suitable nesting ground on the breeding island. Apr 2026

Arriving on the Island – Officially Beginning the Conservation Work

On the morning of 20 April 2026, we volunteers, together with our instructors, staff from the relevant departments, and several journalists, boarded a boat and headed to the 'Living Island' in the Jiushan Islands. After arriving, we quickly organised our luggage and daily necessities. We then crossed over to the breeding island and officially began the final stage of this year's **Artificial Attraction Programme**.

Our first task was to organise the Crested Terns breeding grounds, divide the area into designated breeding zones, and place the tern decoys, which we casually called the 'fake birds'. Each decoy had its own identification number (see Plate 4). These numbers were very important because during subsequent monitoring, we could use the location of each decoy as a reference point to record and track the locations of Chinese Crested Terns nests.

This year, because the preparatory work for the artificial attraction programme had begun earlier than in previous years, we could clearly see that the Crested Terns were adapting to the breeding island earlier than before. For the conservation effort, this was undoubtedly a very promising start. It also meant that there was a possibility of extending the breeding season, which could ultimately help improve breeding success.

One Small Island, One Difficult Battle for Breeding

Before systematic monitoring and conservation programs were established, the Chinese Crested Tern faced numerous threats during the breeding season. These included:

- People landing on the island, including cases of illegal egg collection;
- Predators such as snakes and rats preying on eggs, or disturbing the terns and causing the entire colony to abandon the breeding site;
- Attacks by birds of prey;
- Unpredictable extreme weather events such as typhoons;
- A breeding season that is too short, which can directly affect breeding success.

After years of conservation and management efforts, most human disturbances and some of the threats posed by predators have now been effectively controlled, with birds of prey, typhoons, and other natural factors remaining beyond our control.

Once the artificial attraction work was completed, our real work was only just beginning to enter another stage.

Population Recovery Monitoring Records

The life habits, courtship behaviour, nesting, incubation, incubation-switching behaviour, and chick-rearing of the Chinese Crested Tern all require long-term, continuous, and systematic observation. Every day, we must carefully record what we observe in different monitoring forms. These records include:

1. Chinese Crested Tern Monitoring Log
2. Chinese Crested Tern Feeding Observation Record
3. Bird Banding Record
4. Chinese Crested Tern Nest Location Tracking Record
5. Raptor Disturbance Monitoring Record

6. Spring and Summer Migratory Bird Species Record

At first glance, it may seem that we are simply filling out forms over and over again. In reality, every single record becomes valuable data for future research and conservation work. Only through long-term, systematic, and scientific data collection can we gradually understand the breeding patterns of the Chinese Crested Tern and further evaluate whether the artificial attraction program and other conservation measures are effective.

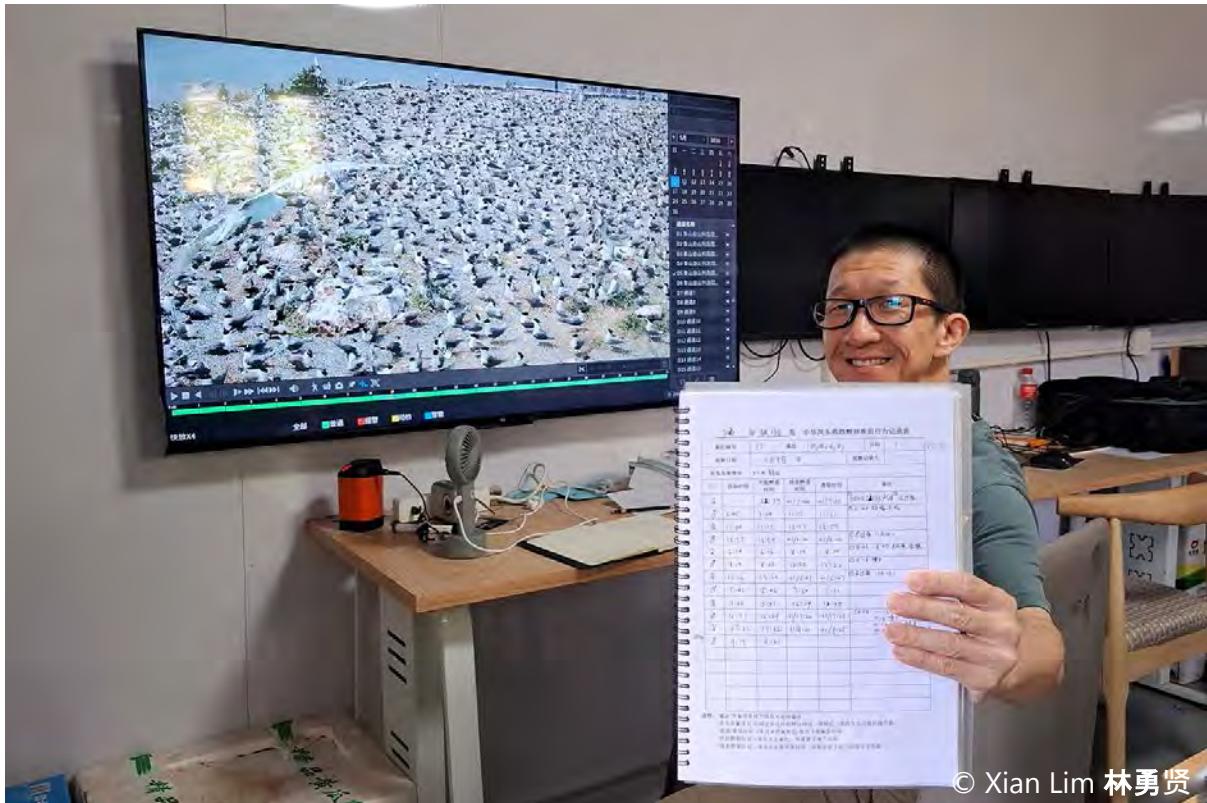


Plate 5: Daily Work – Detailed Observations. May 2026.

From Courtship to Nest Building, Life Slowly Begins

During the early stage, when the Crested Tern colony had just been attracted to the breeding island, we observed their activities every day through the monitoring equipment. During the day, we observed the Crested Terns' courtship behaviours. Some males would carry fish and present them to their potential mates. Others would fly together while calling, while some performed various movements that looked almost like a 'dance' to court their mates. As their relationships developed, they would eventually mate. At night, we recorded approximately how many Crested Terns stayed overnight on the breeding island.

In addition to remote monitoring, we would also visit the Observation Hut on the breeding island from time to time to conduct close-range observations.



Plate 6: Quietly observing the busy Crested Tern colony from the Observation Hut. May 2026.

From there, we could observe the Crested Terns mating, building nests, laying eggs, and incubating their eggs. Sometimes, we were also fortunate enough to witness some fascinating moments – for example, one Crested Tern would return carrying a fish and pass the food to its mate while the other was incubating the eggs. We could also observe the male and female taking turns incubating the eggs, a behaviour known as incubation exchange.

If these behaviours were observed only occasionally, it would be difficult to truly understand the patterns behind them. Only by staying in the field for long periods, continuously observing, recording, and comparing our observations could we gradually piece together the complete breeding process of the Chinese Crested Tern.



Plate 7: Breeding behaviour of the crested terns. May 2026.

The First Chick Is Born

On 25 May 2026, the Jiushan Islands welcomed the first Crested Tern chick of the breeding season. It was a Great Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* chick. After the first chick successfully hatched, more chicks gradually began to emerge from their eggs.

And finally, the moment we had been waiting for arrived. On 27 May 2026, the first Chinese Crested Tern chick was born. From the time the parent birds began incubating the eggs until the chick hatched, we had waited approximately 26 days. When we saw this tiny new life emerge from its eggshell, the feeling was truly difficult to put into words.

For us, this was more than simply the birth of a chick. It was also an important achievement resulting from all the artificial attraction efforts, habitat preparation, monitoring, and conservation work we had carried out during this period. At that moment, we became even more confident that this breeding season might achieve some very encouraging results.



Plate 8: Left – Chinese Crested Tern chick; right – Great Crested Tern chick. May 2026.

Expanding the Number of Breeding Sites

Since the relevant monitoring program began in 2013, three protected areas in Zhejiang Province have now been incorporated into a systematic protection network for Chinese Crested Tern breeding sites. Everyone involved in this conservation work must strictly follow the regulations and requirements of the protected areas. For the Chinese Crested Tern, having more safe breeding sites is extremely important. Expanding the number of breeding sites can reduce the risks associated with the entire population being concentrated at a single location. If one breeding site is severely affected by a typhoon, natural disaster, or other unexpected event, the other breeding sites can still provide the species with an opportunity to survive and continue its population.

Bird Banding: Important Clues to Understanding Tern Migration

In addition to breeding monitoring, bird banding is another important part of Chinese Crested Tern conservation. Through the colour ring, we can identify individual birds and, by recording where they are later resighted, gain valuable insights into their migration routes and breeding history.

Among the five Chinese Crested Terns photographed in Sabah this year, three were wearing a colour ring. Two of them were later confirmed to be parent and offspring. This has made us even more eager to find out, through long-term monitoring, whether young birds will eventually follow their fathers or mothers during migration once they become independent.

On 28 May 2026, our team banded Great Crested Terns and Chinese Crested Terns, recorded their physical characteristics, and fitted trackers to some individuals. The entire process required great care, and every step had to be carried out according to established professional procedures.

Watching a Chinese Crested Tern being banded in our hands made me appreciate even more that every colour ring, every photograph, and every record could become an important clue for future research into this endangered species.

Final Reflections

In 2026, the Chinese Crested Tern Artificial Attraction and Population Recovery Monitoring Project entered its 14th year. After many years of continuous effort, there is still no room for complacency in this work.

These 46 days not only gave me a much deeper understanding of the Chinese Crested Tern, but also helped me truly understand the meaning behind the word 'conservation'. Protecting wildlife is never an easy task. It requires time, patience, perseverance, and, above all, a group of people who are willing to dedicate themselves to protecting these species over the long term. And I feel very fortunate to have become one of them.

My sincere thanks to everyone who supported and assisted me during this period, especially 丁鹏老师, 王思宇老师, and my two fellow volunteers, 李羽涛 and 唐教清.

Acknowledgements

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Articles

Bird Identification Series:

Basic Nest Shapes of Malaysian Birds

Jia-En Ho



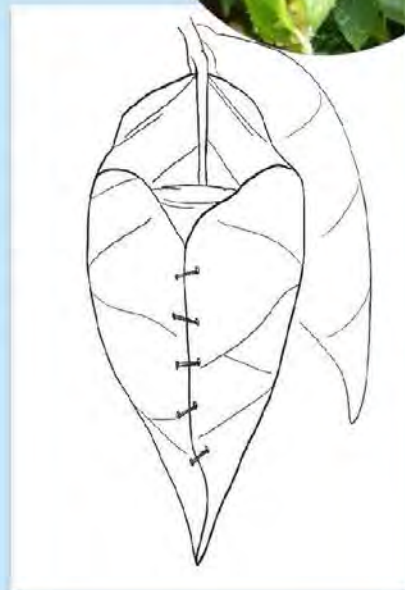
1. Cup

Built by birds such as bulbuls and flycatchers, these nests are usually made out of twigs and grass.



2. Stitched leaf nest

Constructed by tailorbird species by punching holes in the leaf and sewing them together using plant fibres or spider silk.



3. Embankment burrow

Bee-eaters and kingfishers will dig burrows into earth faces usually about a meter deep.





4. Unique bayu weaver nest

The bayu weaver weaves this impressive nest out of long, thin plant fibres. Mud or dung is also added inside to help strengthen the nest walls.



5. Tree cavity

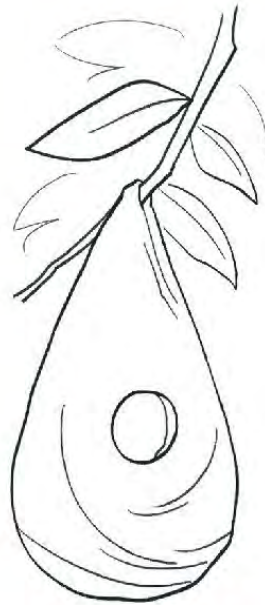
Barbets and woodpeckers nest in holes excavated in trees, using their bills to make the hole themselves.



6. Platform

Raptors and herons construct large nests out of sticks, roughly 50 cm in diameter.





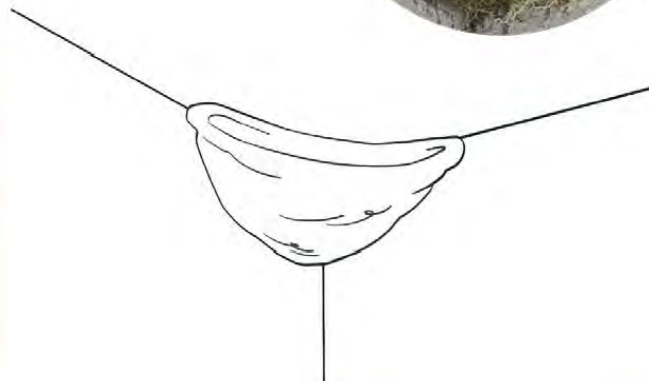
7. Hanging nest

Sunbirds and broadbills make nests like these out of fibres, twigs and dead leaves.



8. Saliva-bound nest

Swifts construct these nests out of organic material like plant fibres or feathers and bind it together with their saliva.



9. Scrape nest

Lapwings and plovers lay their eggs in small depressions in the ground, their eggs camouflaged thanks to their patterning.

I would like to thank Amar-Singh HSS for the kind use of his images.

Citation: Jia-En Ho. (2026). Basic Nest Shapes of Malaysian Birds. *Malaysian Bird Report*. Volume 3/2026, Sept 2026: pg. 119-121.

Birdwatching Hotspots Series: Congkak – The Forest I Know

Li-Li Wong

Congkak was my first forest birding site when I started out as an enthusiast bird photographer in 2021. Since then, I have returned many times, and over the years I have had plenty of memorable experiences and encounters and of course a fair share of waiting patiently for the birds.

What follows is my personal account of observations and encounters shared with some of my birding friends during our outings in Congkak.



Plate 1: Sungai Congkak Recreational Forest – one will be amazed at how the light plays in the dense forest canopy. Apr 2025.

Congkak: The Birding Hotspot

Sungai Congkak Recreational Forest (aka Hutan Lipur Sungai Congkak or popularly known among birders as Congkak, Plate 1), located in the Hulu Langat District of Selangor, Malaysia, is one of the more accessible lowland rainforest birding sites within easy reach of the Klang Valley. Situated within the Hulu Langat Forest Reserve and associated with the foothills of the Titiwangsa Range, the Forest comprises lowland dipterocarp forest, riverine vegetation, streams, secondary forest and forest edges, providing a variety of habitats for birds. It is also a popular weekend getaway for local families, spending time picnicking, playing at the clear shallow stream and camping nearby. As such, facilities like parking, overnight chalets, toilets, picnic shelters and gazebos are also available within the vicinity.

For birders, however, there is a different kind of attraction!



Plate 2: Sungai Congkak shallow river with boulders and pebbles. Jul 2026.

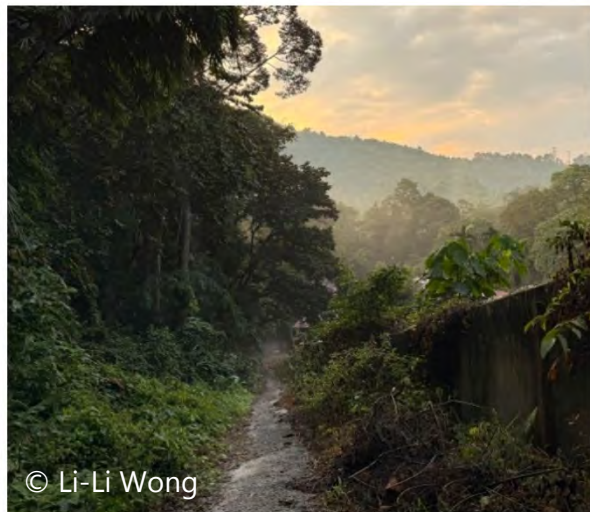


Plate 3: Left: At the entrance of Sungai Congkak Recreational Forest. Right: The upslope trail looking back to the guardhouse at dawn. Jul 2026.

Birding Routes

In general, birders usually hang out at three birding routes:

1. The **Skytrek Adventure access road** (GPS Location [Link](#)): The access road, around 1 km, passes through dense secondary forest edges, a not-too-open road-side corridor which creates a transitional zone between open road and deeper forest, with occasional small hidden streams by the road side.
2. The **Sungai Congkak** Recreational Forest paved road along the river (distance around 1.8-1.9 km; entry fees apply) (GPS Location [Link](#)): The paved road follows the meandering river and features riverine forest, boulder streams and tall, mature trees, passing through an

open Padang leading to the more upper part of the river (Plate 2). Each year, the Recreational Forest is scheduled to close between November and January during monsoon season.

3. The **upslope trail** starting near the Skytrek Guardhouse (GPS Location [Link](#)): This sloping trail leads into a quieter and more secluded part of secondary forest (Plate 3 Right);

Birding Highlights

Kingfisher Feeding Spot – The Main Attraction

Perhaps Congkak is best known among birders, both near and far, for its kingfisher feeding spot, located roughly midway along the access road to Skytrek Adventure. It is almost like a little open-air birding theatre or at least it used to be. You arrive quietly, choose a patch of shade and settle in. There is no hide, so birders and photographers sitting exposed, trying to be invisible and become part of the landscape (Plate 4). The little pond at the feeding spot has at times been stocked with live fish, providing the kingfishers with an irresistible opportunity to dive in for a meal and the same goes for photographers coveting diving shots, testing the ability of their camera and their skill.



© Li-Li Wong

Plate 4: Kingfisher feeding spot. Photographers staking out the elusive Malaysian Blue-banded Kingfisher in what looks like an 'open-air bird theatre'. Jan 2023.

Kingfishers recorded at the spot include Rufous-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher *Ceyx rufidorsa* (Plate 6 left), Malaysian Blue-banded Kingfisher *Alcedo peninsulæ* (Plate 5) and Blue-eared

Kingfisher *Alcedo meninting*. Along the access road, the Banded Kingfisher *Lacedo pulchella* has also been seen or heard and, on a rarer occasion, a pair of Rufous-collared Kingfishers visited the feeding spot (Plate 6 right).



Plate 5: Kingfisher feeding spot. Male and female (Left) Blue-banded Kingfisher foraging for fish at the feeding spot. Aug 2022.

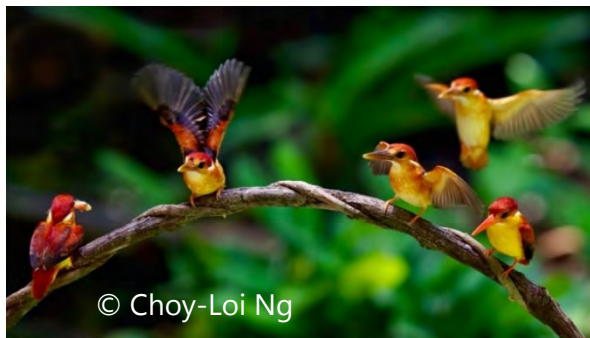


Plate 6: Left: A family of Rufous-backed Dwarf-Kingfishers were recorded at the spot before I started birding. Mar 2019. Right: An even rarer appearance of a pair of Rufous-collared Kingfisher at the feeding spot. May 2014.

Fruiting Fig Trees – When the Buffet Opens

When the fig trees around Congkak are fruiting, they become a natural bird buffet and word travels fast in the bird world, and the same can be said for birders and bird photographers (Plate 7)! Fruiting fig trees around Congkak have attracted Scaly-breasted Bulbul *Rubigula squamata*, Asian Fairy-bluebird *Irena puella*, Green Broadbill *Calyptomena viridis*, Yellow-breasted Flowerpecker *Prionochilus maculatus*, Yellow-crowned Barbet *Psilopogon henricii* and Thick-billed Green Pigeon *Treron curvirostra*, among others (Plate 7 and 8).

For birders and photographers, a fruiting fig tree can be well worth the wait as there may be unexpected discoveries ahead, and anticipation is really a part of the game in birding.



Plate 7: Left: Bird photographers waited at the fruiting fig tree. Right: Green Broadbill and succulent ripening fig fruit. Jun 2022.



Plate 8: Left: Thick-billed Green Pigeon and figs aplenty to go around. Jun 2022. Middle: Yellow-crowned Barbet spoiled for choice. Jun 2022. Right: Scaly-breasted Bulbul. May 2016.

Nesting Season – Look, but Don't Interfere

Nesting season can provide some memorable observations, although nesting birds should always be given plenty of space and disturbance should be avoided. Some species choose relatively open or visible locations for their nests, making them difficult for observant birders to miss. Among those known records of nesting around Congkak are the White-bellied Woodpecker *Dryocopus javensis* (Plate 9), Silver-breasted Broadbill *Serilophus lunatus* (Plate 10) and Dusky Broadbill *Corydon sumatranus* (Plate 11). A senior birder, who recorded a Green Broadbill nesting along the road of Sg. Congkak Recreational Forest many years ago, shared that the nest was abandoned by the parent birds due to the presence of photographers. Fortunately, to distract unwanted intruders, the birds do not nest at the same place, especially so for sensitive birds.



Plate 9: Left: My first outing to Congkak at White-bellied Woodpecker nest; at the time birds were seen changing shift on a rainy day. Jan 2022. Right: Photographers and bazookas lined up at the road side to photograph the White-bellied Woodpecker nesting at the open corner of Skytrek access road. Feb 2022.



Plate 10: Silver-breasted Broadbill. Clockwise from top right: Nest at a tree near an open carpark; the family with helper was seen shortly after the fledglings left the nest; fledgling on a birder's chair – the chick successfully flew up to the tree to join its family; with food for its chick, nested at a fig tree. June 2022 & June 2023.



Plate 11: Dusky Broadbill delivering food to its chick, January 2024.

Birding Along the Main Routes

While Congkak is known among birders for its tall dipterocarp trees, the birds up in the canopy can often be frustratingly out of reach, even for those carrying long lenses. The **Sungai Congkak** with shallow clear water gushing over pebbles and boulders, however, offers a different birding experience. Along the river and its riverine vegetation, there is an opportunity to encounter species that favours this habitat. Chestnut-naped Forktail *Enicurus ruficapillus* and Blue-banded Kingfisher are among the birds that have been recorded here, while in August 2026 the Slaty-backed Forktail *Enicurus schistaceus* was sighted.

Along the paved road, there were occasional sightings of Buffy Fish-Owl *Ketupa ketupu* (Plate 12) and with a little luck, you may even see one actively hunting for fish near the stream soon after dawn. At times, Orange-backed Woodpeckers *Chrysocolaptes validus* and families of Dusky Broadbills can be observed moving around the tall trees (Plate 12). When mistletoe is flowering, Temminck's Sunbird *Aethopyga temminckii* can be seen actively foraging at the bloom (Plate 13). And there is no shortage of Banded Kingfishers (Plate 13) but listening to their wailing call against the backdrop of gushing water may be a challenge. On another rare occasion, a pair of Black-naped Monarchs *Hypothymis azurea* were observed at eye-level

nesting at a tree along the same route in June 2025 (Plate 13), discovered by birders who prefer venturing into the deeper end of the paved road along the river.



Plate 12: Left: Buffy Fish-Owl being flushed out during a bird walk after a drizzle. Jul 2024. Right: A family of Dusky Broadbills chilling out at the tall tree along the route. May 2024.

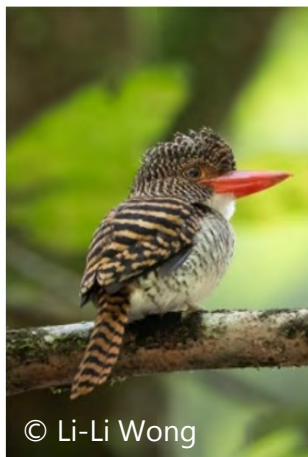


Plate 13: Left: Temminck's Sunbird actively foraging at the Honeysuckle Mistletoe (*Dendrophthoe* sp.) bloom. Feb 2024. Middle: Banded Kingfisher along the paved road of Sungai Congkak. Apr 2025. Right: Black-naped Monarch nesting at eye-level at Zone 5. Jun 2025.

Along the access road to Skytrek, at the open corner, there were sightings of White-bellied Woodpecker (once nested there at the corner), Blyth's Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone affinis*, Dark-throated Oriole *Oriolus xanthonotus*, Little Spiderhunters *Arachnothera longirostra*. A brief appearance of a migrating Black-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* was also recorded there in November 2022, among other forest birds.

Next to Skytrek Guardhouse, there is a lesser known **upslope trail** leading to a more secluded part of the forest. The habitat here is a mix of secondary forest, bushes lining the trail, with occasional clusters of bamboo on the upper slopes. Interestingly, this trail is known to connect to another birding hotspot, making it a worthwhile route for those willing to explore the road less travelled. Up on the hill, the occasional distant call of Helmeted Hornbill *Rhinoplax vigil* can be heard. There is also a fig tree located up on the hill, which, when fruiting, can become

a rather productive birding spot. Along this route, Green Broadbill, Checker-throated Woodpecker *Chrysophlegma mentale*, Buff-necked Woodpecker *Meiglyptes tukki* were seen, and a surprise encounter of a juvenile Grey-and-buff Woodpecker *Hemicircus concretus* along that trail, among others. There were once a Blyth's Frogmouth *Batrachostomus affinis* heard at a distance before dawn near the guardhouse, who knows, with a good bit of luck, one might find its day roost along this quieter trail?

Threat to the Place

Congkak's popularity is both its strength as well as its vulnerability. Increased visitor numbers, noise, litter, campfire burning, uncontrolled recreational activity and development pressure can potentially reduce the quality of habitat available to the forest-dependent birds. Keeping the forest clean, quiet and avoiding unnecessary clearing of bushes and trees is therefore important if Congkak is to remain a productive birding site for years to come.

While Congkak is a known place for recreational and birding activities, it is worth remembering that the forest is also home to an established local community. From time to time, local villagers can still be seen gathering bamboo and other forest produce for their own use. This is a reminder that, beyond general recreational activities, the forest is also part of the everyday landscape and livelihood of the people who have long lived around it.

To Sum Up

When I first started coming here, it was simply about the photographable moments and experiences, the excitement when the star bird appears at the kingfisher feeding spot, the anticipation at the fruiting fig trees, the observations of the birds nesting there.

But over the years, that enjoyment has evolved. The more I came to know the forest, the more I began wondering what else might be here. I started looking for species I had never seen before and keenly listening to calls that are not familiar.

Maybe that is what makes Congkak special to me. It is no longer simply a place to photograph birds. It has become the forest I know, taken shape by countless visits, unexpected encounters and discoveries. And yet, there is still so much I do not know about it. That is what keeps me coming back, after all these years, wanting to know the forest better, while remaining curious about what it might reveal next.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Choy-Loi Ng and TH Teoh for the kind use of their images and Amar-Singh HSS for reviewing the manuscript.

Useful References

1. Congkak Park and Resort: <https://selangor.travel/listing/chongkak-park-resort/>
2. eBird Hotspot – Sungai Congkak Recreational Forest Bird list: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L3510944/iconic-birds>

Citation: Li-Li Wong. (2026). Birdwatching Hotspots Series: Congkak – The Forest I Know. *Malaysian Bird Report*. Volume 3/2026, Sept 2026: pg. 122-130.

Moonriver Lodge – a Submontane Hideaway at Sigar Highlands

Amar-Singh HSS, Sein-Chiong Chiu & Chong-Hock Chua

Recently some of us have been watching birds at the Moonriver Lodge at the Cameron Highlands to Gua Musang road, Lojing, Kelantan, Malaysia. Moonriver Lodge is a family-owned highlands farmstay nestled in a valley of Sigar Highlands. Besides running a pesticide-free and organic vegetable farm, the owners operate a homestay and an ecotourism site, offering rafflesia flower and mossy forest treks, bird-sightings and farm tours. Over time they have nurtured about ~ 200+ acres of pristine primary forest around the farm / homestay with a vision to preserve and conserve it as a Biodiversity Park.

Moonriver Lodge is located 1.5 hours from Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia using the Simpang Pulai to Cameron Highlands route - about 15 min further up from the junction that turns into Cameron Highlands (Plate 1). Hence, it is away from the madding weekend crowds flocking to Cameron Highlands.

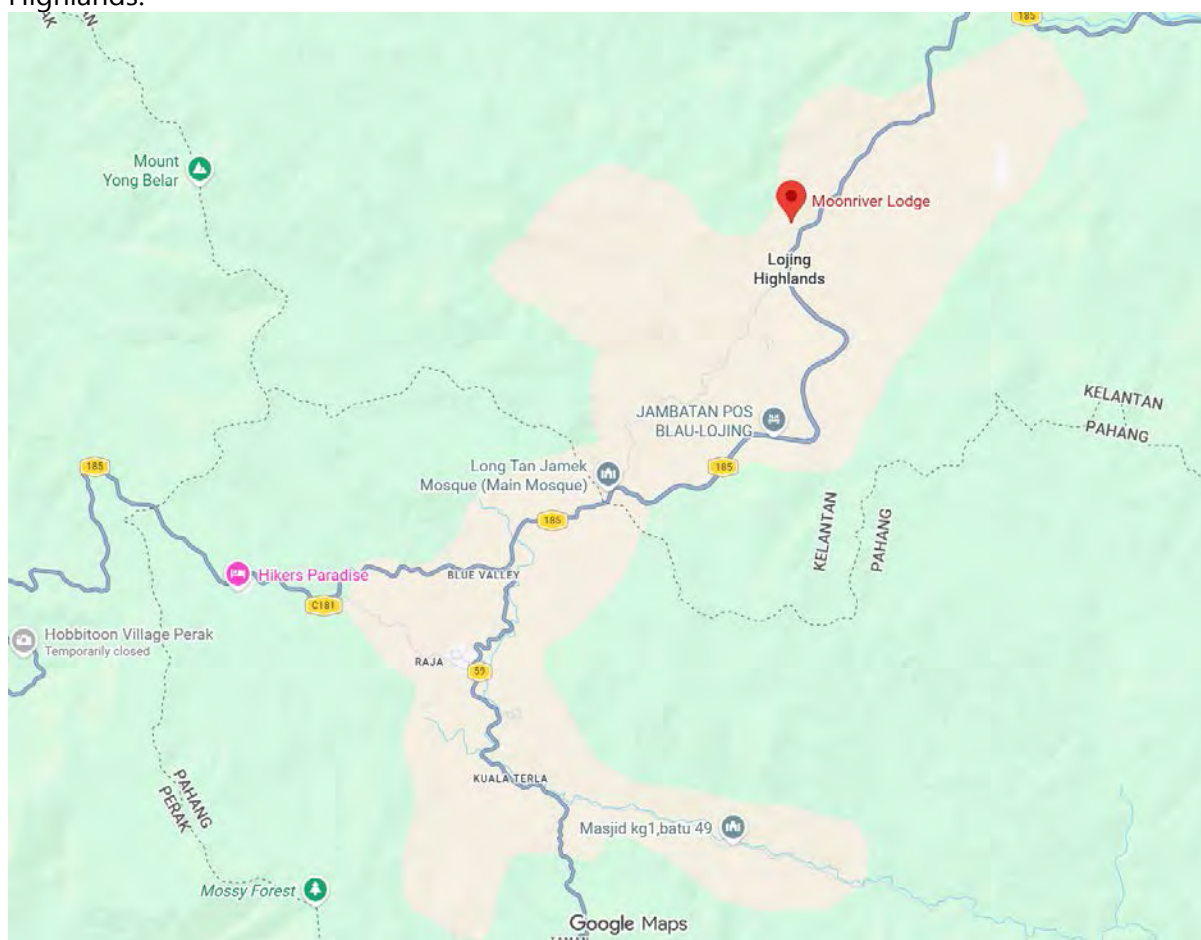


Plate 1: Location map for Moonriver Lodge based on Google Maps.

The homestay is tastefully done and has an excellent and widespread garden with many nectar sources (Plate 2). There is a lot of room to wander around or just hang out to rest and relax. The food we ate at two visits was good and wholesome (the location and food are pork free). We also bought organic vegetables to take home.



Plate 2: Moonriver Lodge homestay environment.

Although the area immediately around the homestay was previously logged, there are nearby primary forests. As the location is ~1,000 m ASL you get a good mixture of highland and lowland birds. Temperature is 18/19°C in the early morning and goes up to 26°C in the afternoon.

The 'star' birds here are (Plate 3):

1. Temminck's Sunbird *Aethopyga temminckii* – a regular in the homestay garden, coming for its daily nectar feeds, often best seen midmornings. Spiderhunters also visit the garden.
2. Bamboo Woodpecker *Gecinulus viridis* – commonly heard and seen by staff, it even visits the bamboo patch next to the larger dining area.

Other interesting birds that have been seen at the site during surveys include (Plate 4):

Little Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia ruficeps*
 Maroon Woodpecker *Blythipicus rubiginosus*
 Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* & other hornbills
 Green Broadbill *Calyptomena viridis*
 Silver-breasted Broadbill *Serilophus lunatus*
 Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*
 Sultan Tit *Melanochlora sultanea*

Streaked Bulbul *Ixos malaccensis*
 Black-throated Babbler *Stachyris nigricollis*
 Sunda Scimitar-Babbler *Pomatorhinus bornensis*
 Hill Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis whitei*
 Long-billed Spiderhunter *Arachnothera robusta*
 Pin-tailed Parrotfinch *Erythrura prasina*

See links: <https://moonriverlodge.wordpress.com/photo-ukm/>
<https://moonriverlodge.wordpress.com/photo-umk/>



Plate 3: Temminck's Sunbird male (left) and Bamboo Woodpecker (right).

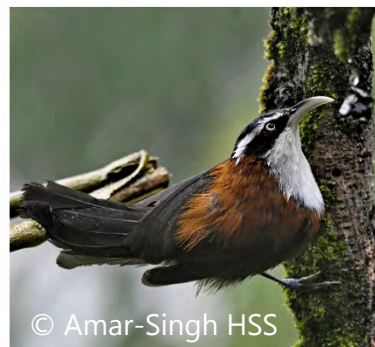
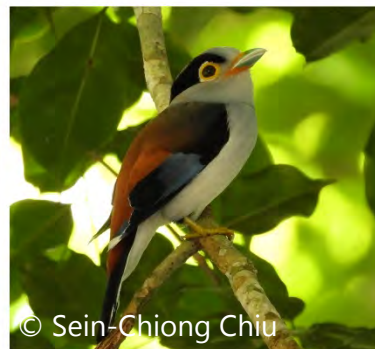


Plate 4: From top left clockwise: Maroon Woodpecker, Silver-breasted Broadbill, Sultan Tit, Black-throated Babbler, Sunda Scimitar-Babbler, Pin-tailed Parrotfinch.

Unlike many current locations, there are no hides here. The site offers you an opportunity to return to the pleasure of birdwatching; wandering around looking for birds, with the pleasure of unexpected surprises.

Another good aspect about the site is that you can bring your non-birdwatching family/partner who can enjoy the environment and many activities while you watch birds. The

site offers nature trails and mossy-forest treks, camping, visits to see Rafflesia flowers, etc. The owners also partner with the Temiar Orang Asli tribe to offer ecotourism. Also, do not miss out on the excellent night skies for astrophotography as light pollution is low.

Two non-bird rarities at the site are the Malaysian Fire Snail *Platymma tweediei* and the endangered Lar Gibbon *Hylobates lar* (also known as the White-handed Gibbon) (Plate 5).



Plate 5: Malaysian Fire Snail (left) and Lar Gibbon (right).

You can get more details by visiting their website:

<https://moonriverlodge.wordpress.com>

For birdwatching check out their self-explore day rate and tour package rates:

<https://moonriverlodge.wordpress.com/new-birdwatching-tour/>

Note that some good locations require the staff to take you by 4-wheel drive along logging trails.

To contact them:

Email: info@moonriverlodge.com / billie.b.tan@moonriverlodge.com

Telephone or WhatsApp (Office Hours : Monday – Saturday 8:30am – 6:00pm)
+6013-5881613 (Billie Tan)

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Kum-Hoi Yong for the kind use of one of his images and Swee-Yian Lim for reviewing the manuscript.

Citation: Amar-Singh HSS, Sein-Chiong Chiu & Chong-Hock Chua. (2026). Moonriver Lodge – a Submontane Hideaway at Sagar Highlands. *Malaysian Bird Report*. Volume 3/2026, Sept 2026: pg. 131-134.

Birds in Art and Culture Series:

Featuring Young Birdwatcher and Budding Bird Artist Damien Chow

Damien Chow is a 14 year old young man that we heard about recently - a budding bird artist and birdwatcher. He has currently seen more than 300 bird species. At a time when many are heavily invested in digital images of birds, it is refreshing to find someone who wants to document them in an art form. He also takes photographic images of birds. We asked him to tell us a little about his 'journey into birds'.

How and why did you become interested in birds?

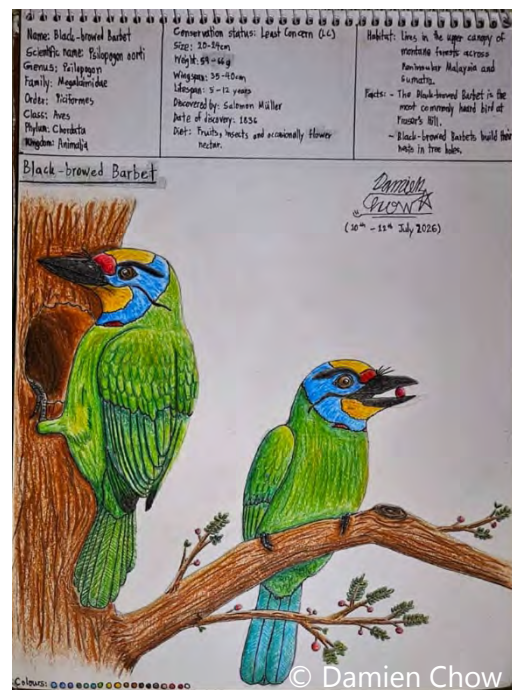
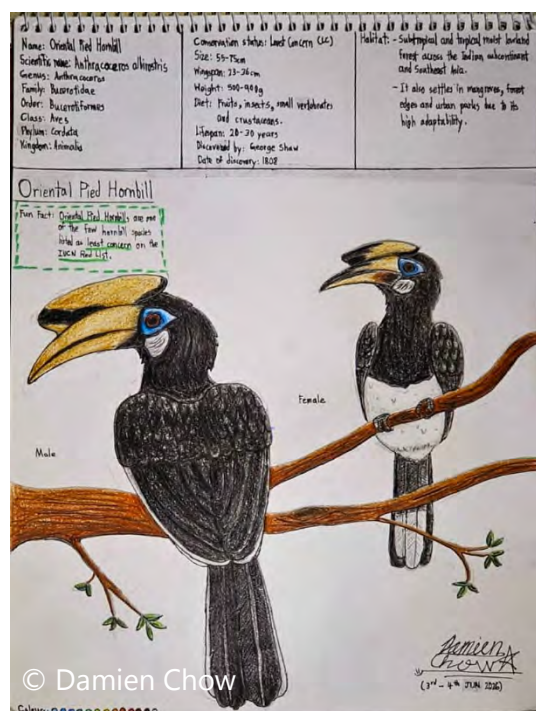
I have had an interest in birds and nature for as long as I can remember, but I started having a particular interest in birds in early 2025, when I saw a bird in my garden and photographed it. I wanted to identify it, so I searched and searched, and slowly I gained interest in birds and birdwatching.

Did anyone encourage you to watch birds?

Yes, my parents were very encouraging towards this new hobby of mine. They helped me discover helpful apps such as eBird and Merlin Bird ID. They also planned several birdwatching trips and even bought me a pair of binoculars.

Any interesting stories/experiences about your birdwatching?

I remember at the end of March 2026, I went to Taman Botani Kepong (Forest Research Institute Malaysia), Selangor for birdwatching. There I heard the Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus* for the first time. But when I tried to look for it, it was nowhere to be found. After a while I heard it again, then again and again, but I still couldn't find it. It was as if it was taunting me. But finally, after almost 3 months of searching, I finally saw it at Bukit Ekspo UPM, Selangor. You wouldn't be able to understand how much joy I felt at that time. That is a birdwatching memory that I will never ever forget.



Tell us how and why you started drawing birds?

Did you receive any formal training in drawing and art?

I started drawing birds around the same time as I started birdwatching. But my journey with art actually started much earlier. I've always had a deep interest for art since I was young. I started drawing

when I was 5 years old, under the careful guidance of Connie Ng. She is still my art teacher to this day.



A series of wetland birds imaged by Damien. From left Milky Stork *Mycteria cinerea* (juvenile), Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* and Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*. Taiping Lake Gardens, Perak, Malaysia.

What makes you choose a particular bird or species group to draw?

Where do you find your inspiration? What art mediums do you use?

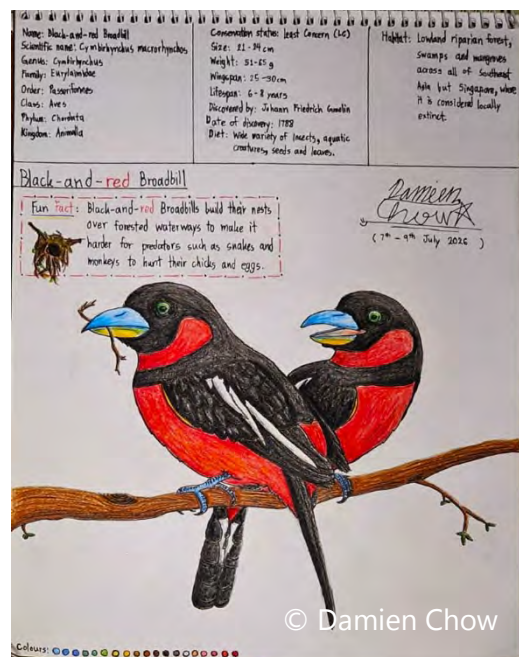
The birds that I choose to draw are most often the birds that are highlights of my birdwatching trips. I only draw the birds that I have seen before. Before I draw, I will always choose some pictures online of the bird I want to draw and its characteristics such as its head, colour and feet shape. I will then stitch all the compiled pictures together to create a piece of artwork that is completely original. When drawing, I usually use colour pencils, pencils, pens and markers.

How long does it typically take you to draw a bird species? Why do you add notes? What do they mean to you?

I typically take on average 2-3 days to draw one art work; this depends heavily on how many individuals there are in the drawing or how complex they are to draw. I add notes as a way to communicate with the people who see my art, and also to provide them with basic knowledge about the bird that is in the drawing. To me, the notes are a way to compile the research that I have done on that bird.

Any encouragement to young persons and children as to why they should become a birdwatcher or draw birds (in a world where many take pictures)?

For me, I feel that drawing is a way of expressing myself. It is also a beneficial way to fill up your free



time and a good way to relieve stress. Drawing a bird gives you more creative freedom than photographing it; the bird can be in any pose or doing anything that you want. You can also draw the birds that you saw if you missed a photographing opportunity.



© Damien Chow

Damien Chow birdwatching at Taman Botani Kepong, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Aug 2026.

My earliest recollection of my exposure to birds is in early 2023 when I saw a Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus* at my house. Birds are very unique and interesting creatures that I feel are worth our time to study. I also hope that this article can inspire its readers to start an art journey or a birdwatching journey of their own.

Citation: Birds in Art and Culture Series (2026): Featuring Young Birdwatcher and Budding Bird Artist Damien Chow. *Malaysian Bird Report*. Volume 3/2026, Sept 2026: pg. 135-137.

Bird Trees Series:

***Mezoneuron sumatranum* – an Unrecognised Important Nectar Source for Birds**

Amar-Singh HSS, Martin Shim, Ron Pudín & Raymond ZH Voo

Introduction

Mezoneuron sumatranum (syn. *Caesalpinia sumatrana*) is a woody, leguminous creeper/liana often called the Cat's Claw Liana and Siit (Philippines). It is native to the lowland wet tropical rainforests of the Thai-Malay peninsula, Borneo, Sumatra, Java, Philippines and New Guinea (POWO 2026). In traditional medicine it is considered a vermifuge and antidiabetic. Studies have suggested antioxidant, antidiabetic properties (Stuart n.d.).

It has thick, raised, recurved thorns covering its stems, which help it climb into the forest canopy, often 6–10 m high (Stuart n.d.; Hattink 1974). Leaves are compound ~30 cm long with oblong/oval leaflets 5–8 cm long and 2.5–3.5 cm wide (Stuart n.d.; Hattink 1974).

The species produces large, terminal branching panicles that may reach 30–80 cm in length (Stuart n.d.; Hattink 1974) (Plate 1). These inflorescences are loose and elongated, with many slender branches bearing clusters of bisexual flowers, which are relatively modest in appearance compared to other legumes.



Plate 1: *Mezoneuron sumatranum*, Maliau Basin Studies Centre, Sabah, Malaysia, Feb 2026.

The calyx is smooth, measuring about 1–1.3 cm long, with the upper teeth minute and the lowest tooth distinctly longer. The tube splits at the point where the smooth filaments are inserted, giving the flower a slightly open structure. The petals are reddish, permanently imbricated (overlapping like roof tiles), and shaped oblanceolate spatulate (spoon-shaped). They are only a little exserted and do not spread widely, which contributes to the subdued, greenish yellow impression of the flowers when seen in the canopy (Stuart n.d.; Hattink 1974). The stamens are exserted, with smooth filaments extending just beyond the petals. The ovary is superior and later develops into the characteristic winged pods (10–17 cm long) containing

1–8 seeds. The pods are thin and winged, ~15 cm long and 4-5.5 cm wide, containing 4-5 seeds (Stuart n.d.; Hattink 1974).

Overall, the inflorescence is structurally impressive, but the flowers themselves are not brightly ornamental - their muted coloration and partially closed form make them blend into the foliage rather than stand out.

This plant can be easily seen at the Maliau Basin Studies Centre (next to the main visitor's dining area), the Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Danum (along the canopy walk) and the Danum Valley Field Centre, Sabah, Malaysia. We are uncertain how often it flowers, but like many species in the *Caesalpinia* group it appears to bloom often. Flowers probably occur in irregular pulses rather than every branch blooming simultaneously.

Bird species observed feeding on *Mezoneuron sumatranum* (based on observation of the authors) (Plates 2-4):

1. Bornean Spiderhunter *Arachnothera everetti*
2. Thick-billed Spiderhunter *Arachnothera crassirostris*
3. Spectacled Spiderhunter *Arachnothera flavigaster*
4. Yellow-eared Spiderhunter *Arachnothera chrysogenys*
5. Little Spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostra*
6. Whitehead's Spiderhunter *Arachnothera juliae*
7. Red-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes rhodolaemus*
8. Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malacensis*
9. Plain Sunbird *Anthreptes simplex*
10. Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*
11. Bornean Leafbird *Chloropsis kinabaluensis*
12. Blue-winged Leafbird *Chloropsis moluccensis*
13. Greater Green Leafbird *Chloropsis sonnerati*
14. Lesser Green Leafbird *Chloropsis cyanopogon*
15. Unidentified Flowerpecker

As is often observed at mixed-species foraging sites, Spectacled Spiderhunters tended to try and monopolise the site and noisily attempt to chase away all other sunbirds and spiderhunters.

Plates 2-4 show a selection of spiderhunters, sunbirds and leafbirds that were observed feeding on the nectar of *Mezoneuron sumatranum*.

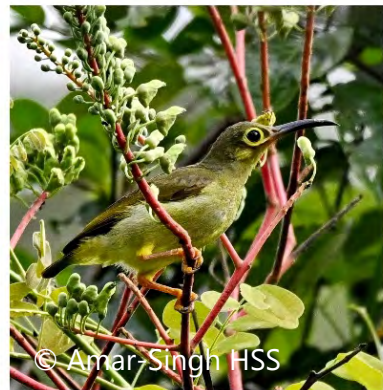


Plate 2: Birds feeding on *Mezoneuron sumatranum* nectar. Bornean, Thick-billed, Yellow-eared & Little Spiderhunters at Maliau Basin Studies Centre, Sabah, Malaysia, Feb 2026. Spectacled Spiderhunter at Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Danum, Sabah, Malaysia, Mar 2025. Whitehead's Spiderhunter at Gunung Alab, Sabah, Malaysia, Jun 2025.



Plate 3: Sunbirds feeding on *Mezoneuron sumatranum* nectar. Red-throated Sunbird at Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Danum, Sabah, Malaysia, Mar 2025. Brown-throated, Plain & Crimson Sunbirds at Maliau Basin Studies Centre, Sabah, Malaysia, Feb 2026.

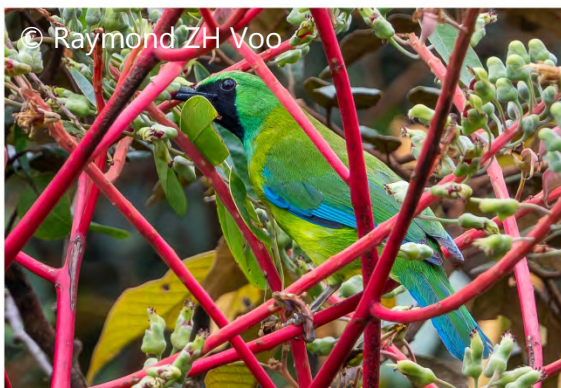


Plate 4: Leafbirds feeding on *Mezoneuron sumatranum* nectar. Blue-winged, Lesser Green & Greater Green Leafbirds at Maliau Basin Studies Centre, Sabah, Malaysia, Feb 2026. Bornean Leafbird at Gunung Alab, Sabah, Malaysia, June 2026.

An online search in Macaulay Library (not exhaustive) for other birds feeding on *Mezoneuron sumatranum* identified the following species:

1. Purple-naped Spiderhunter *Kurochkinogramma hypogrammicum* by Nathanael Poffley (ML660006218), Danum Valley Field Centre, Sabah, Malaysia, Jun 2026.
2. Long-billed Spiderhunter *Arachnothera robusta* by Robert Freckleton (ML660342739) at Danum Valley Field Centre, Sabah, Malaysia, Jun 2026.
3. Van Hasselt's Sunbird *Leptocoma brasiliana* by Nathanael Poffley (ML660348587) at Danum Valley Field Centre, Sabah, Malaysia, Jun 2026.

Note: ML = Macaulay Library

As this is a native plant with long-lasting flowers, it would be useful to cultivate it around visitor centres at forest reserves where many can enjoy good views of spiderhunters, sunbirds, leafbirds and other species. Bird guides should become alert to the plant and its flowering schedule.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank David Wells for useful comments and Allen Jeyarajasingam for reviewing the manuscript.

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Recent Publications & Research

Research/Review Articles Relevant to Malaysia

Kim-Chye Lim

Conserving the World's Specialist Riverine Birds. Ankita Sinha, Nilanjan Chatterjee & Steve J. Ormerod. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Water* Vol 13, Issue 4, Aug 10, 2026

<https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/wat2.70082>

Bird banding in Asia: Contributions, challenges, and prospects. Dongping Liu, Philip D. Round, Wenjia Chen, Tianhao Zhao, Taku Mizuta, Sergei P. Kharitonov, Dong-Won Kim, Bekzhan Berdikulov, Batmunkh Davaasuren, Chi-Yeung Choi, David Li, Anna Moulin, Lixia Chen, Guogang Zhang, Zhengwang Zhang & Hongxing Jiang. *Avian Research* Vol 17, Issue 2, June 2026.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.avrs.2026.100346>

Birds of a feather: Comprehensive plumage colour analysis for a revised subspecies classification of the Chestnut-winged Babbler (*Cyanoderma erythropterus*) species complex. Shen Han, Teo & Frank Rheindt. *Avian Research* 16, 2025.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avrs.2025.100307>

Role of Predatory Birds in Insect Pest Management in Rice Field. Hazarika, Tanbir & Saikia, Prabal & Phukan, Bithika. (2026).

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/404375192_ROLE_OF_PREDATORY_BIRDS_IN_INSECT_PEST_MANAGEMENT_IN_RICE_FIELD

First Record of the Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* (Charadriiformes: Laridae) in Kalimantan, Indonesia, with A Review of Its Status Across Borneo. Teguh Willy Nugroho, Muhammad Rochim, Ratna Mariana, Eko Jati Sujianto, Hariyadi, Sulton Mubarak & Mika Tambing Pairunan. *Bio Palembang* 3(1): 48-54 (2026).

<https://ejournal.uigm.ac.id/index.php/biopalembanica/article/view/7106>

Risk of Secondary Extinction in the Asian Songbird Trade, as Exemplified by the Selling of Crested Jayshrikes as Master Birds. Vincent Nijman, Abdullah Abdullah, Ahmad Ardiansyah, Jessica Chavez, Katherine Hedger, Rifqi Hendrik, Abdullah Langgeng, K. Anne-Isola Nekaris, I. Nyoman Aji Duranegara Payuse, Erly Sintya, Desak Ketut Tristiana Sukmadewi & Marco Campera. *Integrative Conservation*, Vol 5, Issue 1, pp 33–45. March 2026.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/inc3.70070>

A global systematic review of studies on people's perceptions and cultural beliefs towards owl species. Lindiswa Buthelezi, Mfundo S. T. Maseko & Colleen T. Downs. *Biodiversity and Conservation* (2026) 35:74. 21 Feb 2026.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-026-03275-2>

Waders in a sea of debris: a global overview. Yada Trapletti-Lanti, Monica Exposito-Granados, Elizabeth Znidersic & Marga L. Rivas. *Biol. Rev.* (2026), pp. 000–000.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/brv.70176>

State of the World's Birds: A focus on migratory species and their flyways. BirdLife International (2026).

<https://datazone.birdlife.org/publications/state-of-the-worlds-birds-2026>

Upcoming & Recent Bird Activities

Swee-Yian Lim

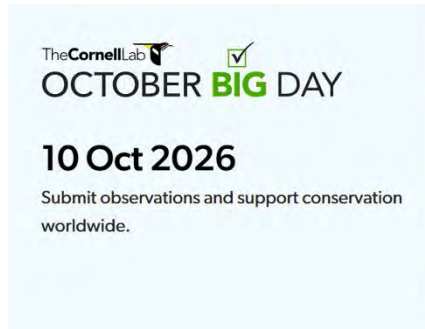
October Big Day 2026

10 October 2026

Nationwide (Individual or Group Participation)

"Jom" Malaysian birders, let's unite and make the 2026 October Big Day our strongest showing yet.

This 24-hour global birding celebration invites you to explore your favourite spots and record every species you encounter. Whether you're a seasoned birder or just beginning, your participation makes a difference.



The mission is simple: record as many bird species as possible in 24 hours. Every sighting matters, and every checklist helps scientists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology better understand bird populations and migration patterns.

Big Days are more than data—they're also about creativity and community. Around the world, birders share their experiences through sketches, photos, films, and stories. You can do the same with your local group, friends, or neighbours. Even something as simple as inviting friends along and ending the count with a "teh Tarik" at your favourite "gerai" can make the day memorable.

How to Take Part

- Submit your sightings via the eBird website or the free eBird Mobile app.
- Use Merlin Bird ID to help identify birds by sound or appearance.
- If you don't yet have an eBird account, create one now so you can share your observations on Global Big Day: <https://ebird.org/globalbigday>

Both eBird Mobile and Merlin Bird ID are available on the Google Play Store (Android) and Apple App Store (iPhone).

For more details: <https://ebird.org/octoberbigday>

Festival of Wings 2026

Venue: Kuala Selangor Nature Park, Selangor, Malaysia

Date: 10 October 2026

Organised by the Malaysian Nature Society to celebrate migratory birds and biodiversity conservation. Opportunity for families, students and nature lovers to explore and connect with nature. Has interactive exhibitions, a colouring contest, mangrove tree planting, guided nature walk and a birding walk.

For more information:

<https://www.facebook.com/MalaysianNatureSociety.Official/posts/festival-of-wings-2026-is-comingjoin-us-on-10-october-2026-at-kuala-selangor-nat/1431992239030297/>



Taiping Bird Week 2026

Dates: To be announced (Usually in October, possibly 17-18)

Location: Taiping Lake Gardens, Bukit Larut, and surrounding hotspots

Taiping, one of Malaysia's birding hotspots, invites you to join the Taiping Bird Week 2026, a vibrant celebration of birds, biodiversity, and community spirit. Taiping Bird Week is more than an event – it's a movement to inspire appreciation for Malaysia's rich avian diversity and to strengthen conservation efforts for future generations. Whether you're a seasoned birder or simply curious about the wonders of nature, this week offers something for everyone. Come for the birds, stay for the beauty of Taiping.

Highlights of the Week:

- Guided birdwatching walks led by expert naturalists
- Photography contests showcasing Taiping's feathered treasures
- Educational talks and workshops on conservation and ecology
- Family-friendly activities, art exhibitions, and cultural performances
- Optical products booths.



Borneo Bird Festival 2026

Venue: Rainforest Discovery Centre (RDC), Sepilok, Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia

Date: 7 – 8 November 2026

This is Malaysia's premier birding event, celebrating the rich avian diversity of Borneo. The festival typically features the Borneo Bird Race, bird photography workshops, and guided walks. It is the best opportunity to spot Borneo's "Big Five" endemics, including the Bornean Bristlehead and various pittas.

Registration for the bird race and workshop bookings open officially on 1st June 2026

For more information :

Email: borneobirdclub@gmail.com

Tel. no.: +6089553780

Facebook: Borneo Bird Festival Official

Instagram: @borneobirdfestival



Third Asian Ornithological Conference (AOC 2026)

Venue: National University of Singapore (NUS), Singapore

Date: 14–17 November 2026

The Asian Ornithological Alliance (AOA) has a vision to strengthen ornithology across the entire continent and create a cooperative platform that would unify researchers, promote communication across national borders, & support the advancement of ornithological science in Asia.



Key Focus Areas for the 2026 conference:

- Ecology, genomics, and speciation
- Conservation management and avian biogeography
- The Asian songbird crisis and the illegal bird trade
- Bird migration along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway

For more information: <https://www.aoc2026.sg/>

15th Asian Bird Fair – Xiamen

Venue: Xiamen, China

Date: 26 – 30 November 2026

This major regional event brings together birders, conservationists, and nature lovers to promote bird protection and ecotourism through exhibits, expert talks, and tours. The event features international exhibitors, including NGOs, eco-product vendors, and photography groups.



Highlights of the event:

- Exhibitions from bird clubs and NGOs across Asia
- Talks and panel discussions by leading ornithologists and conservationists
- Bird photography showcases and competitions
- Youth programmes and hands-on learning activities
- Cultural performances and local craft displays
- Guided birdwatching excursions to Xiamen's key hotspots

For more information: <https://asianbirdfair.org/>

9th International Galliformes Symposium

The 9th International Galliformes Symposium, originally scheduled for 20 – 30 October 2026 in Pokhara, Nepal, has been postponed. A tentative rescheduled date is now listed for October 19-21, 2027, in the same location, according to the [Galliformes Specialist Group](#).

International Waterbird Census 2027



Every year, thousands of birdwatchers, conservationists, and communities across the world unite for the International Waterbird Census (IWC) – a citizen science initiative that monitors waterbird populations and the wetlands they depend on. In 2027 the IWC returns, and your participation is vital.

Census Period

Recommended count dates: January 4–19, 2027

Full census window: December 1, 2025 – February 28, 2027

Why Join?

The IWC provides essential data that helps track waterbird populations, identify critical habitats, and guide conservation policies. Your observations contribute to protecting wetlands, designating Ramsar Sites, and strengthening international efforts to safeguard migratory flyways.

How to Participate

- Visit your local wetland, river, lake, or coastal site.
- Count and record all waterbird species you encounter.
- Submit your data through eBird and the Wetland Assessment Form.

Whether you're a seasoned birder or a newcomer, every checklist matters. Together, we can build a clearer picture of waterbird populations and the challenges they face.

Beyond Counting

The IWC is also about community and creativity. Share your experiences through photos, sketches, or stories, and inspire others to care for wetlands and wildlife.

Spread the Word

Encourage friends, schools, and local groups to join. Use #IWC2026 to share your sightings and stories online, and help grow a global movement for wetlands and waterbirds.

Would you like me to also adapt this into a shorter, flyer-style version—something crisp and visually engaging for community outreach?

9th International Hornbill Conference 2027

Date : 22 – 24 February 2027

Venue: Panaji, Goa, India

This is a once in four years conference. It is the only global platform dedicated to hornbill research and conservation. The conference brings together scientists, practitioners, students, policymakers, funders, and community representatives to exchange knowledge, set conservation priorities, and strengthen collaborations that turn research into real-world impact. Its goals are to mobilise resources, build capacity among early-career researchers, and foster partnerships that safeguard habitats while ensuring the long term survival of hornbill populations across their range.



For more information: <https://ihc2027.iucnhornbills.org/>

The 14th Asian Raptor Research & Conservation Network (ARRCN) Symposium

Venue: Pokhara, Nepal

Date: 21 – 24 November 2027

The Asian Raptor Research and Conservation Network (ARRCN) Symposium is held once every two years rotating among member countries. The next symposium, the 14th, will be held in Pokhara. It is co-organised by the Himalayan Raptors and ARRCN.

The theme is "Connecting Flyways, People and Nature: Advancing Raptor Conservation Across Asia."

The 14th ARRCN Symposium in Pokhara will serve as a vital international platform to advance raptor science and conservation by fostering knowledge exchange, strengthening research networks, and encouraging collaborative initiatives across borders. It will build capacity for students and early-career researchers while translating scientific evidence into practical conservation action, ensuring that shared expertise and lessons learned inform policies, management practices, and community-based efforts to protect Asia's threatened and migratory raptors.



For more information:

<https://www.himalayanraptors.org/14th-arrcn-symposium>

International Conference for Women Birders (IC4WB)

Venue: Honduras

Date: 4-9 May 2027



A global initiative dedicated to promoting gender equality, leadership, and community in birdwatching and avian conservation. Following its inaugural event in Uganda in 2023, the organisation hosts international gatherings to foster networking, citizen science, and sustainable avitourism. The next major conference is scheduled to take place in Honduras in 2027, bringing together women birders, researchers, and nature enthusiasts from around the world. The programme includes plenary sessions, workshops (birding, conservation, and women's involvement), poster sessions and field trips.

For more information: <https://ic4wb.com/>

Birding Festivals as Ecotourism Experiences: The Labuan Bird Fest 2026

Noralip Hassanuddin

Note: This report on the Labuan Bird Fest 2026 was originally prepared for the Sabah Birdwatchers Association (Persatuan Pemerhati Burung Sabah) and has been adapted (with permission) for a wider audience.



Ecotourism Experiences

Birdwatching events and festivals offer unique opportunities for bird enthusiasts, nature lovers, and curious individuals to immerse themselves in the fascinating world of avian observation. These gatherings celebrate the diversity of bird species, promote avitourism and conservation efforts, and foster a sense of community among birdwatchers of all experience levels.

These festivals are organised to attract certain segments of the population and are usually targeted at specific interests, such as avian conservation, the arts, exhibition and public interest in birdwatching. By attracting local and regional participants, successful festivals serve strategically not only to foster a sense of community, but also to generate income and boost local economies, thus becoming an invaluable tool for promoting tourism and placing a region on the map for prospective niche markets.

Birdwatching avitourism is a sector of ecotourism, an industry that continues to grow in popularity worldwide. A large number of birdwatchers become Avi-tourists, travelling to wildlife areas, both in their own countries and abroad, with the specific intention of increasing the number and diversity of the species they observe.

Beyond dedicated festivals, avitourism thrives through organised birding tours, seasonal competitions, and educational exhibitions.

Labuan Bird Festivals and Events

The two-day Labuan Bird Fest 2026 from 15-16 August 2026 was an ongoing effort to introduce the world of avifauna to the community. The Labuan Bird Fest attracted more than 4,000 visitors, thus exceeding the initial target of 1,000 visitors.

Labuan Bird Fest 2026 came in various forms, each offering a distinct experience for participants:

- **Birding Festival:** The two-day celebration centered around birdwatching activities, often held in locations known for their diverse bird populations. These festivals include, photography and video contests, and social events.
- **Bird Fair:** This medium-scale event featured exhibitions, podcast, and vendor booths showcasing the latest birding equipment.
- **Labuan International Bird Race:** Competitive event where teams of birdwatchers attempt to identify and record as many bird species as possible within a specified time frame and area of Labuan Island (99 km²). Bird races are exciting and challenging, encouraging participants to hone their identification skills, especially outside the migration season which only left the resident species.

Throughout the two days of the event, the excitement was felt starting with the Flag Off of the International Bird Race participants as well as various unique competitions such as fruit carving, nest box design, bird voice imitation, and bird customisation.





Pictures by the Labuan Avian Group

Obituary

A Tribute to David Hogan Jr., Founder of Birdwatching Asia

Ashwin Kalai Chelvan

On behalf of the [Birdwatching Asia](#) Team, it is with deep sadness that I announce the passing of David Hogan Jr., the founder of Birdwatching Asia. David passed away peacefully at Hospital Sungai Buloh at approximately 1.20 p.m. on 5 August 2026. His passing is a profound loss that will be deeply felt by the birdwatching community, not only in Malaysia but across Asia and beyond.

In the midst of this heartbreaking loss, I feel it is important to reflect on David's remarkable legacy and the lasting impact he made on the birdwatching community. While his contributions spanned many fields, it is his passion for birdwatching and his dedication to sharing it with others that I wish to honour in this tribute.

David was passionate about sharing his travel experiences with people from all walks of life through his websites and social media platforms. His flagship travel website, [Malaysia Asia](#), earned numerous awards and established him as one of Malaysia's leading travel content creators. However, beyond his achievements in travel journalism, David's greatest contribution, in my view, was the role he played in making birdwatching more accessible to people throughout the region.



David's fascination with birdwatching began during a trip to Sandakan in 2007. Introduced to the hobby there, he quickly developed a lifelong passion for birds and nature. By 2018, he realised that birdwatching deserved its own dedicated platform, separate from his travel website, and founded Birdwatching Asia.

David often described himself not as an expert but simply as a casual birdwatcher who loved learning and sharing his experiences. That humility became one of the defining qualities of Birdwatching Asia. His articles were written in a way that was approachable, informative and enjoyable, making them equally valuable to beginners taking their first steps into birdwatching and experienced birders looking for local insights.

Over the years, Birdwatching Asia became an important source of information on birdwatching destinations, festivals, events, bird photography and practical birding tips. Before David's initiative, much of the online birdwatching content relating to Malaysia and Asia was produced from a Western perspective, particularly by writers from the United States and the United Kingdom. Even articles about birding in our region were often written by overseas visitors. David changed that by providing a distinctly local perspective while maintaining a high

international standard of content. As a result, Birdwatching Asia earned the respect of birdwatchers both within the region and internationally.

One of David's greatest passions was Sabah, where his birdwatching journey first began. Over the years, he developed close friendships with Sabah's birdwatching community, bird tourism operators and the Sabah Tourism Board. He travelled extensively throughout the state to promote its incredible birdlife and birdwatching opportunities. He worked closely with the Sandakan Borneo Bird Club in promoting the Borneo Bird Festival, helping to bring international attention to one of the region's premier birding events.



David together with Mr Tang from WBCM and Mr Tim Appleton during the Borneo Bird Festival. David was especially elated to meet Tim at this event. Tim was one of his birdwatching heroes.

Whenever I travelled to Sabah with David, I witnessed firsthand the affection and respect that local birdwatchers had for him. He was welcomed not simply as a visitor, but as a dear friend. I know that his passing will be particularly painful for the Sabah birding community, and my deepest thoughts are with them during this difficult time.

Like everyone in the tourism industry, David faced significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Although travel came to a standstill, he continued producing content whenever possible. When restrictions were finally lifted, birdwatching experienced a remarkable surge in popularity as more people sought outdoor activities and nature-based hobbies.

It was during this period that I came to know David and Ashraf personally. All three of us were active members of the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), particularly the MNS Selangor Branch Bird Group. David and I were also members of the Wild Bird Club of Malaysia (WBCM), with Ashraf joining the club shortly afterwards.



David Hogan Jr, giving a presentation during the Borneo Bird Festival

Living in Petaling Jaya made it convenient for the three of us to travel together on birdwatching trips. Eventually, we began organising our own birding excursions outside the activities of the societies. One outing, in particular, became an unforgettable moment for all of us.

During a day trip to Old Gombak Road in Selangor, we photographed a flycatcher that none of us could confidently identify. After sharing the photographs in several birdwatching WhatsApp groups, experienced birders confirmed that we had discovered a Blue-and-white Flycatcher - a very rare migrant in Peninsular Malaysia. David immediately recognised the significance of the sighting and quickly published an article about it on Birdwatching Asia. News spread rapidly, and many birdwatchers and bird photographers travelled to the location in hopes of seeing the bird for themselves.

A few weeks later, David invited Ashraf and me to officially join the Birdwatching Asia Team to help expand the website and elevate its content. It is an opportunity for which I will always be grateful.

Working alongside David taught us countless lessons. More importantly, it created a friendship and partnership that was truly special. Each of us brought different strengths to the team, and together we helped Birdwatching Asia grow into an even more valuable resource for the regional birdwatching community. None of us worked on the website for financial reward; we did it purely out of our shared passion for birds and nature.



© Birdwatching Asia

The Bird Watching Asia Team consisting of David, myself (Ashwin) and Ashraf (from right to left) during our trip to Sabah to cover the Asian Bird Fair.

David's contributions extended well beyond birdwatching. He was also highly respected within Malaysia's photography community. Besides wildlife and bird photography - which I had the privilege of witnessing many times - he was actively involved in street photography and underwater photography. Before his health declined, David was an enthusiastic scuba diver, and many articles on Malaysia Asia reflected his passion for the underwater world. Ashraf, himself an experienced diver, worked closely with David to produce scuba diving content for the website.

David also covered countless tourism events throughout Malaysia and was a familiar face at the Kuala Lumpur Photography Festival, where he regularly exhibited his work. One presentation that remains particularly memorable to me was his talk on wildlife photography in Sulawesi. It held special meaning because I had shared that unforgettable Wild Bird Club of Malaysia expedition to Sulawesi with him in 2024.



© David Hogan

David had a great talent in Bird Photography. This was his winning photo in the WBCM Bird Photography Competition. It is a photo of the Snowy-browed Flycatcher taken in Sabah.

Throughout the years we worked together, I came to appreciate David's remarkable ability to connect with people. He had a warm personality, an infectious sense of humour and a natural talent for making everyone around him feel comfortable. He was generous with his knowledge and always willing to mentor others.

Wherever he travelled, David made a genuine effort to engage with local communities and understand their cultures and traditions. This respect for local people was reflected throughout his writing and gave his work an authenticity that readers appreciated.



David showing the humorous side of his personality. Gunung Mahawu (volcano), North Sulawesi, Indonesia with a traditional Minahasa outfit. Used with the kind permission of Andy Lee.

Perhaps the quality I admired most was his humility. Running one of the region's leading birdwatching media platforms came with great responsibility. Inaccurate information could easily spread within the community. Yet David never claimed to know everything. Whenever mistakes were pointed out, he welcomed corrections with grace and gratitude. Because of his humility, he built strong relationships with birdwatchers, researchers, guides and photographers, all of whom were happy to contribute their knowledge and support his work. It is something I deeply respected, and I will certainly miss collaborating with him on the many projects we shared.

The past year was especially difficult for David. We had been invited by one of our international partners to attend the Global Wildlife Fair in India - an event he had been eagerly anticipating

and one that would have provided an important platform for promoting Birdwatching Asia internationally. Unfortunately, complications with his health prevented him from making the journey.

Although there were periods when his condition improved, his health gradually declined. Eventually, he made the difficult decision to sell the camera lens that had accompanied him on so many birdwatching adventures. Over the last few months, Ashraf and I saw less of him as he focused on his health. During the final week of his life, his condition became critical, and on 5 August 2026, he passed away peacefully, surrounded by those who cared for him.

He will be deeply missed by his family, friends, colleagues and the countless people whose lives he touched.

Despite our sorrow, David's extraordinary contributions to birdwatching in Malaysia and across Asia will endure. Through Birdwatching Asia, he worked tirelessly with birdwatching societies, conservation organisations, tour operators, eco-lodges, bird guides, event organisers, tourism boards, photographers and optics companies throughout the region. In many ways, he became one of the driving forces behind the growth of bird tourism and bird travel in Southeast Asia.

His greatest legacy, however, is not merely the website he founded or the hundreds of articles he published. It is the community he helped build, the friendships he fostered, and the countless people he inspired to appreciate birds and the natural world.

Although David is no longer with us, his passion will continue to live on through Birdwatching Asia, through the people he mentored, and through every birder who discovers the joy of watching birds because of his work.

Thank you, David, for your friendship, your generosity and your unwavering passion. You have left an enduring mark on the birdwatching community, and your legacy will continue to inspire us for generations to come.

May you rest in peace.

Celebrating the Life of Dato Sri Gathorne Gathorne-Hardy, the 5th Earl of Cranbrook (Lord Medway) 1933 – 2026

David Wells

Gathorne, fifth Earl of Cranbrook, more widely recognised by the Peninsular Malaysian birding community as Lord Medway, originator 60+ years ago of a 'Malayan [pre- 'Malaysian'] Bird Report' (co-authored with the writer), died at his Suffolk, UK home on the 24th of August 2026. He was 93.

To the end deeply committed to wildlife, conservation and people in Malaysia, especially Sarawak, Gathorne's career in the region began in the mid-1950s. Having just graduated, he reacted to an offer thrown open on a Cambridge visit by Tom Harrisson, then curator of the Sarawak Museum, of a job for anyone qualified who could get themselves to Kuching. Once there, he was assigned to the museum's Niah Cave archaeological excavations to investigate Niah's vast swiftlet and bat colonies. To this task was soon added vertebrate palaeontology: reorganising the collecting and identification of the excavation's bone finds. All of these areas of interest would be set to last him a lifetime.



Image Copyright: Family of Gathorne Gathorne-Hardy. Used with permission.

With a PhD that incorporated some of his Niah work completed Gathorne returned to Malaya in 1961, this time to KL and a lectureship in the University of Malaya Zoology Department. A decision made on arrival was that he would need to live closer to nature than was possible in suburban (albeit still tiny) Petaling Jaya. Result, a weekend explore (with graduate student assistant, the writer, in tow), up to Fraser's Hill, an overnight camp-out in an uninhabited bungalow, then back over Genting Sempah until, at 16th mile Ulu Gombak, there was spotted the roof of an old Public Works Department (JKR) quarters poking out of the undergrowth. In cool, submontane forest and help with repairs and garden clearing from Orang Asli neighbours this became his home for a decade – shared at various times with a siamang, an otter, indigenous hunting dog, numerous visitors and, having installed a (bamboo)-piped water supply, ultimately his arriving family.

16th mile Ulu Gombak also became his writing retreat and an active and diverse research base, including for his work on flat-headed bats in, at first sight, inaccessible giant bamboo culms; his large-sample survey of forest tree phenological cycles; and long-term mark and release investigation of the lower storey forest bird community. By far the greatest of Gathorne's Gombak achievements, however, was his success in convincing the University that for both teaching and research purposes it needed a field station, and his even greater success in securing a Nuffield Foundation grant towards costs of construction, on a site just a few hundred metres upstream from his house. Now internationally known as a field research

destination (Ulu Gombak Field Studies Centre), to date it has also provided some 60 generations of Malaysian biology undergraduates with a critical educational experience.



An aerial view of the Ulu Gombak Field Studies Centre. Image is a screenshot from the State of Nature Conservation in Malaysia 2025 Symposium video from Lord Cranbrook.

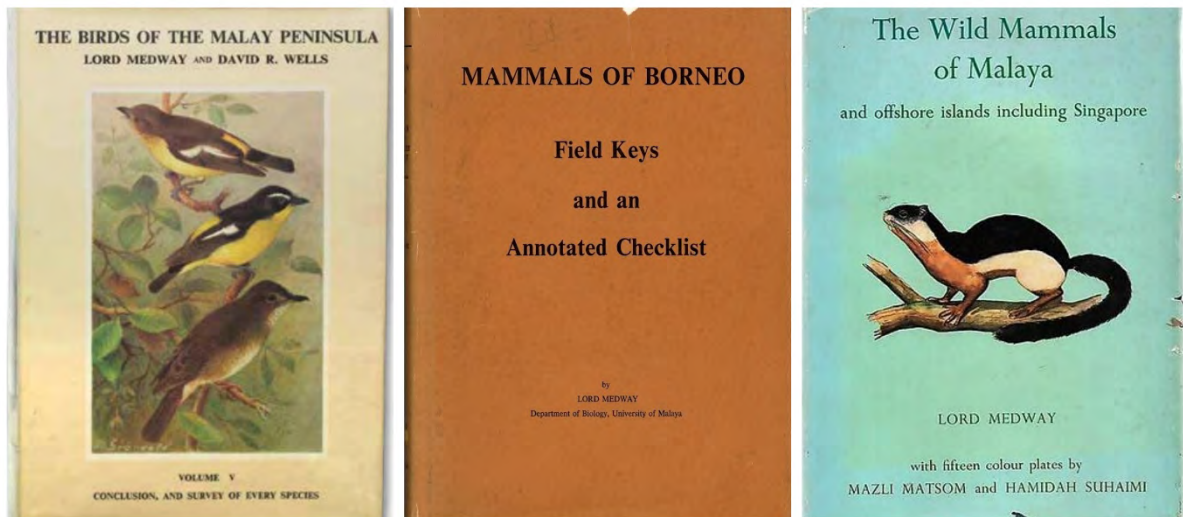
Staying with Gathorne's ornithology profile, establishing the University of Malaya Bird-ringing Project (UMBRP) with its own ring size and numbering systems, and local reporting address opened wide opportunities for fieldwork, also including: his monitoring of invading Black-crowned Night Heron numbers at their then only known local nest colony site in Perak



The first Rhinoceros Hornbill ringed in Malaya, by Lord Medway.
Image source: The Birds of the Malay Peninsula Volume V.

mangrove forest; mass ringing of Barn Swallows at urban night roosts in Perak and Pahang, with many controls reported from their North Asian breeding range; monitoring of warbler and shrike populations wintering in mining land reed-beds then surrounding KL; and, most famously, a chance discovery by Gathorne one misty night in 1966 of green pigeons being collected at a security-lit ridge-top radio pylon, leading to more than a decade's worth of mist-net sampling of the night migration stream as it crossed Fraser's Hill in autumn and spring.

During those years he also ran or participated in international expeditions, to Kinabalu, Gunung Benom and, with Natural History Museum (UK), Gunung Lawit in Ulu Terengganu. Books among his many publications from that era include the fifth volume of 'The Birds of the Malay Peninsula' (co-authored with the writer, 1976), completing the pre-WW2 Robinson and Chasen series, with illustrations by the original artist; and 'Mammals of Borneo' and 'The Wild Mammals of Malaya and Offshore Islands including Singapore', both running into updated editions.



Some of the books published by Lord Medway. He also published extensively in the research literature.

In 1970, while still only in his late thirties, Gathorne resigned his university post to return to the running of the family's UK estate. With the death of his father in 1978 he acceded to the Cranbrook title and took his place in the House of Lords where he continued his father's political work on wildlife conservation legislation. Chairing the environmental sub-committee of the House's European Community committee he ultimately introduced his own Environmental Protection Bill. Through the 1980s he also served on the UK government's Nature Conservancy Council and in 1990 was appointed first chairman of its successor organisation, English Nature. Other governmental appointments included serving on the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution; with the landfill regulator 'ENTRUST' (chaired ENTRUST from 1996 to 2002); and on the NERC Centre for Ecology and Hydrology advisory committee. At European Union level he served with the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP).

Non-governmental roles included being a trustee of the Natural History Museum (UK) and chairman of the International Trust for Zoological Nomenclature (chaired ITZN from 2001 to 2008), finding the latter a new administrative home at Singapore's Lee Kong Chian Museum.

Throughout this intensely busy part of his life, and to the very end, Malaysia was never far from Gathorne's thoughts, with visits back to friends and students especially in Sarawak that increased in frequency during 'retirement' and continued for as long as he was physically able, into his high '80s. These had involved deputy leadership of a large Royal Geographical Society-Sarawak government expedition to the then proposed Gunung Mulu National Park. They also

saw a productive surge of his interest in swiftlet taxonomy, ecology and 'house farming', with the discovery that farmed birds were being traded across Southeast Asia and the unexpected finding that nowhere are these identifiable as any one wild species but are genetically distinct. A 2002/2014 book (Swiftlets of Borneo: Builders of Edible Nests) co-authored with Dr Lim Chan Koon discusses this new regional entity, including its potential impacts on the conservation of wild species.



Lord Medway at the Niah Caves. Image Copyright: Family of Gathorne Gathorne-Hardy. Used with permission.

Recognition of an extraordinary life's achievements came with a Royal Geographical Society Founders' Medal, election as a Fellow *honoris causa* by the Linnean Society, WWF International's Duke of Edinburgh Conservation Award, and, in Malaysia, the Panglima Negara Bintang Sarawak which was awarded for contributions to the State, carrying the title of 'Dato Sri', and a Federal government Merdeka Award. Most of the latter's money value Gathorne ploughed back into student and community-led wildlife research and conservation efforts

around the region, including notably a locally run project to rescue what remains of megapode populations on the Mantanani Islands, Sabah.

In disbelief that this longtime friend of Malaysia is no longer with us, the Malaysian Bird Report community offers its sincere condolences to his wife Lady Caroline and their family.

Acknowledgements

David Wells acknowledges help from an obituary circulated by the family.

Contributions to the Malaysian Bird Report

Editorial Team, Malaysian Bird Report

The Malaysian Bird Report is intended to be an inclusive publication, one that offers a vehicle for established and young birdwatchers, and bird photographers, to share their field observations and expertise.

We welcome articles that help the birdwatching community to grow its understanding of bird behaviour, social interactions, identification, nesting, etc.

We hope to encourage all of us to go beyond capturing images and try to document and write-up our observations, especially of uncommon and unusual bird ecology, nesting behaviour, etc. The editor is committed to helping birdwatchers to write up their observations.

We welcome you to share the publication freely with all interested birdwatchers and bird photographers, as well as with the general public.

Guidelines for Submission of Articles:

1. All written contributions should be sent to the editor at: malaysianbirdreport@gmail.com using a Microsoft Word or Google Docs file. Articles submitted can be in English, Malay and Chinese. Malay and Chinese articles should contain an abstract in English.
2. Images submitted should be in JPEG (.jpg) format. As this is an electronic publication, we recommend images either 1000 pixels wide or 1000 pixels high. There should be no borders to the image. We will ensure that images submitted contain a watermark/copyright to identify the photographer; this will not obstruct the image in any way.
3. Images chosen for the cover page, back page, or other pages, to illustrate the publication, should be of higher resolution (2500 x 3500 pixels, 300dpi or higher) and not contain any watermark/copyright.
4. Copyright of images submitted will remain that of the photographer.
5. Any maps or other illustrative images should be sent as high-resolution JPEG or TIFF files.
6. Please use this reference for all bird names: MNS Bird Conservation Council. 2021. A Checklist of the Birds of Malaysia. 2020 Edition. Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Nature Society. (MNS Conservation Publication No. 22).

We encourage collaborative work and hope that birdwatchers and bird photographers will combine observations to produce reports of interest to all of us.

We would like to thank all individuals who have contributed to the Malaysian Bird Report with articles, data, reports and images.