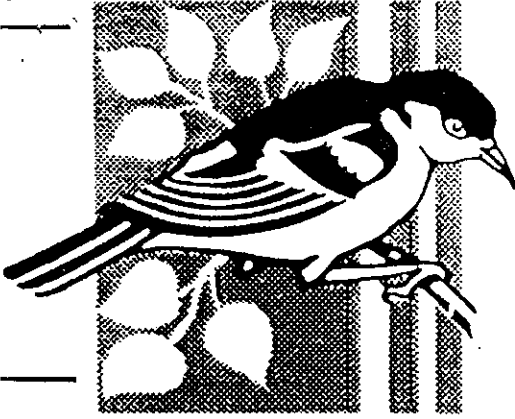


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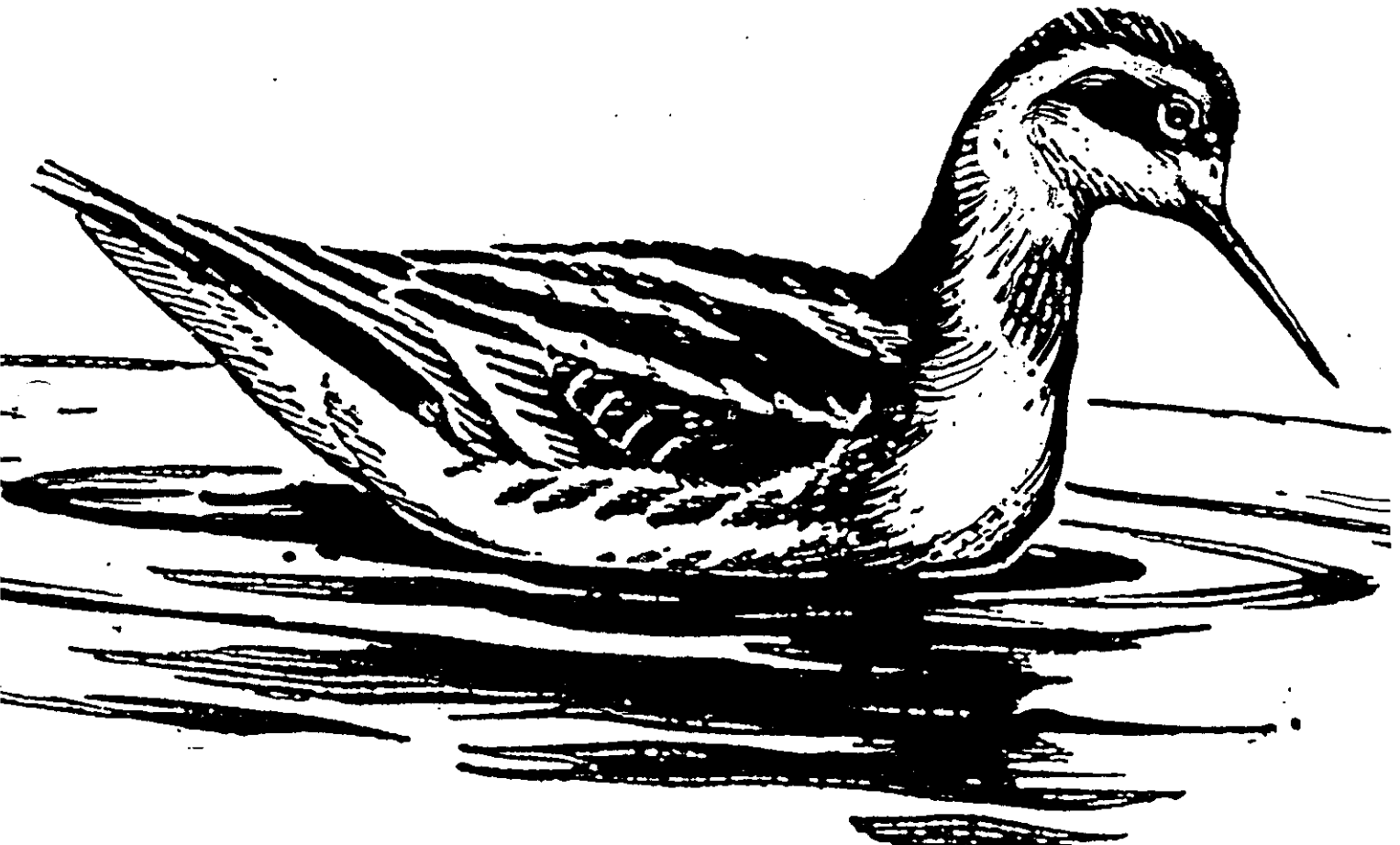
# SINGAPORE AVIFAUNA

A Quarterly bulletin of THE NATURE SOCIETY Singapore Bird Group

Oct.-Dec. 1994

Vol. 8

No: 4



RED-NECKED PHALAROPE at Tuas

CONTENTS

PAGE

RECENT REPORTS ----- 42

DELAYED REPORTS \_\_\_\_\_ 49

NOTES

The Yellow-eared Spiderhunter Sighting at Sime Road \_\_\_\_\_ 51  
 Lim Kim Seng

A Lesser Frigatebird at Changi Ferry Terminal \_\_\_\_\_ 52  
 Peter Kennerly

The Citrine Wagtail at Tuas \_\_\_\_\_ 53  
 Subaraj Rajathurai

A Eurasian Kestrel at Tuas \_\_\_\_\_ 54  
 Subaraj Rajathurai

A Blue Rock-Thrush at Bukit Timah \_\_\_\_\_ 55  
 Lim Kim Seng

A Blue Rock-Thrush at Changi Ferry Terminal \_\_\_\_\_ 56  
 Kenneth Kee

A Hooded Pitta at Marina City \_\_\_\_\_ 57  
 Ho Hua Chew

A Blue-and-White Flycatcher at Kent Ridge Park \_\_\_\_\_ 58  
 Angus Lamont

ARTICLES

The Day of the Phalarope : The Red-necked at Tuas \_\_\_\_\_ 59  
 Allan Owyong

Yellow-eared Spiderhunter at Sime Road Forest \_\_\_\_\_ 60  
 Peter Kennerly

Editor's Note: The AVIFAUNA is still using the current (Ben King's) nomenclature for species until further notice.

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## RECENT REPORTS

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## NEW RECORD

### Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*)

One sub-adult seen at Tuas Marsh swimming in the pond close to the service road on 16 November (AOY, OSL & DI). This is a first record for Singapore. The bird was seen again on 17 November (AC, SR, KK & AOY), on 18 November (AC & LKS) and on 25 November (HHC). See article by AOY in this issue for more details. The bird has a fine bill which rules out the Grey Phalarope (*P. fulicarius*), while it is too small and the bill too short for it to be a Wilson's (*P. tricolour*).

### Yellow-eared Spiderhunter (*Arachnothera chrysogenys*)

One bird was spotted in the Sime Road Forest near the Bukit Kalang clearing on 19 October by SR who at first mistook it for a Thick-billed Spiderhunter. This bird was sighted and subsequently identified as the Yellow-eared Spiderhunter the next day by PK. This was confirmed by LKS on 22 October. See PK's as well LKS's notes in this issue for more details. The last record of the Yellow-eared in Singapore was in 1894 (Gibson-Hill 1950) ---- a hundred years ago! This is a new record in relation to our current checklist.

## UNUSUAL OCCURENCES

### Lesser Frigatebird (*Fregata ariel*)

One bird was seen on 1 October at Changi-Johore Ferry Terminal flying north along the coast in the direction of Pulau Ubin (EL, PK & RFO). See PK's notes in this issue for more details.

### Plumed Egret (*Egretta intermedia*)

One seen at Lorong Halus pond at Serangoon Estuary on 6 November (HHC & SBS).

### Chinese Egret (*Egretta eulophotes*).

One bird seen at the dam area of the Sungei Seletar Estuary on 24 September (AOY & KK).

**Lesser Treeduck** (*Dendrocygna javanica*)

10 birds seen at Lorong Halus Pond , Serangoon Estuary, on 6 November (HHC & SBS).

**Garganey** (*Anas querquedula*)

2 birds seen at Tuas Marsh on 25 November (HHC).

**Osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*)

One seen at Sungei Buloh on 2 November (FW & OEE).

**Black Baza** (*Aviceda leuphotes*)

5 birds seen at Senoko on 6 November (HHC, LKS & SBS). Another 4 seen at Mandai Track 15 , Seletar Reservoir, on 13 November (HHC & SBS). One also seen at Senoko on 26 December (FW & OEE).

**Crested Serpent Eagle** (*Spilornis cheela*)

One seen at Mandai Track 15, Seletar Reservoir, on 9 October (HHC & SBS).

**Changeable Hawk-Eagle** (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*)

One in pale morph. seen at Mandai Track 15 , Seletar Reservoir, on 13 November (HHC & SBS)..

**Eastern Marsh Harrier** (*Circus spilonotus*)

One female seen at Tuas Marsh on 25 November and one male on 24 November (HHC).

**Grey-headed Fish-Eagle** (*Ichthyopaga ichthyaeus*)

One pair seen flying above the Nee Soon Swamp Forest on 13 November in the company of a pair of White-bellied Sea-Eagle (AC, AOW, HHC, OKW , SBS & SY).

**Eurasian Kestrel** (*Falco tinnunculus*)

One , either a female or immature, seen on 6 November at Tuas grasslands (PK & RFO). Possibly the same bird was seen again at the same locality on 9 November by SR who identified it as a female. See SR's notes in this issue for description. The bird was seen again at the same locality on 17 November (AC, AOY, KK & SR) . On 24 November two birds were seen together at the same locality but the sexes were not

determined (PK). Then on 27 November only one bird, a female, was seen again (NBC & KKS).

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

One bird was seen mauled by a dog in the garden of a house at Katong on 3 December (OKS). The specimen, badly damaged, was thrown away by OKS after taking some photos. This is the sixth specimen to be recovered in Singapore so far --- the last being in 1993, (see notes by HHC in the last issue on this species). The appearance of this bird in a densely populated suburban area where there is a paucity of woods and wastelands is most surprising.

**Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*)**

One female watercock found injured at Taman Seras near the Botanic Gardens AOY, KK & YPL) The bird was later given to the Bird Park.

**Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Limicola falcinellus*)**

4 seen at Sungei Buloh on 6 October (AC, AOY & KK).

**Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)**

4 birds were reported seen at the dam area of Seletar Estuary on 24 September (AOY & KK). The report of this sighting is under review by the Records Committee.

**Grey-tailed Tattler (*Heteroscelus brevipes*)**

There is a report of a sighting of this species feeding at the granite sea-wall of the Changi Ferry terminal on 9 October (KK). The bird was reported to be there for the next 10 days (AOY & KK). The report of this sighting is under review by the Records Committee.

**Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*)**

One pair seen at Sungei Buloh on 6 October (AC, AOY & KK).

**Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)**

One juvenile seen at Seletar Farmway 1, Punggol, on 6 November (AC, AOY, KK & SY).

**Oriental Pratincole (*Glareola maldivarum*)**

Two large flocks seen flying over Seranoon estuary on 23 October. The first flock consists of 38 birds while the other 40 birds, making a total of 78 (AC, HHC & SBS). Another flock of 30 birds was seen again on 6 November (HHC & SBS).

**Whiskered Tern** (*Chlidonias hybrida*)

2 birds seen flying above the Lorong Halus Pond, Serangoon Estuary, on 6 November (HHC & SBS).

**Gull-billed Tern** (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)

One seen at Sungei Buloh on 8 October (AC, AOY & KK).

**Cinnamon-headed Pigeon** (*Treron fulvicollis*)

Two pairs seen on top of a durian tree at Kg. Melayu, Pulau Ubin, on 23 October (AC, HHC & SBS).

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

3 birds seen at the Bukit Timah summit on 3 December (AOY).

**Oriental Scops Owl** (*Otus sunia*)

One bird seen and photographed at Mount Faber on 13 November (GCH). This is the second record for this rare migrant species in Singapore. See the article by GCH in the next issue for more details.

**Blue-eared Kingfisher** (*Alcedo meninting*)

One seen at Sime Road on 2 October (HHC, JL, NBC, SBS).

**Southern Pied Hornbill** (*Anthracoceros convexus*)

One seen at Kg. Melayu, P. Ubin. on 23 October (AC, HHC & SBS).

**Hooded Pitta** (*Pitta sordida*)

One dead specimen was found in a goldfish pond at Lynwood Grove, a suburban area, in November (NV). Photos were taken by VN and submitted to the Records Committee. Another bird was found caught in a construction net at the Pan Pacific Hotel, near Raffles City, on 3 December by an office worker. The bird was brought by Mr. Fauzee Md. Yusof, a member, to the NSS office and was later photographed and released at the Bukit Timah Forest Reserve. See the notes by HHC in this issue.

**Sand Martin** (*Riparia riparia*)

3 birds seen flying above Tuas Marsh on 25 November (HHC). One was also seen flying at Sungei Buloh on 10 December (AOY & OSL).

**Scarlet Minivet** (*Pricocotus flammeus*)

One pair with an immature male seen near the summit of Bukit Timah on 2 October (FW). Another pair also seen at Bukit Timah on 3 December (AOY).

**Ashy Minivet** (*Pricocotus divaricatus*)

One seen at Mandai Track 15, Seletar Reservoir, on 13 November (HHC & SBS).

**Magpie Robin** (*Copsychus saularis*)

One heard calling at a small mangrove-lined river to the north of the Lorong Halus Sewage beds at Serangoon Estuary on 6 November (HHC & SBS). The river appears to be recently created.

**Siberian Thrush** (*Zoothera sibirica*)

A male seen feeding amongst dead leaves by the roadside, to be joined later by a female, near the summit of Bukit Timah on 9 December (AOY).

**Eyed-browed Thrush** (*Turdus obscurus*)

4 seen hopping on the ground at Jungle Fall Track, Bukit Timah, on 3 December (AOY). This species of thrushes is both a ground and arboreal feeder.

**Blue Rock-Thrush** (*Monticola solitarius*)

One bird was seen at the Changi Terminal on 10 October (AOY & KK). The bird has a dark reddish chest and belly. The bird was still there the next day (AL, AOY & KK). This would be the male of the rufous-bellied race. See KK's notes in this issue details. There is also another male --- but of the blue-bellied race --- seen at Bukit Timah Nature Reserve on 31 December (LKS & THC). See LKS' notes in this issue for details.

**Inornate Warbler** (*Phylloscopus inornatus*)

One seen at Sime Road Forest on 25 September (AC, AOY & KK). The bird was seen again during the Bird Race by the same people.

**Mugimaki Flycatcher** (*Ficedula mugimaki*)

One bird was seen on Kent Ridge Park on 19 November, but the sex could not be determined by the observer (PK). A female was subsequently seen at the Park near the pond on 21 November (AL, KK & AOY). The bird was first spotted by Al a week earlier.

**Yellow-rumped Flycatcher** (*Ficedula zanthopygia*)

One seen on an acacia tree at Sime Road on 21 October (HHC, JL, NBC & SBS).

**Brown-chested Flycatcher (*Rhinomyias brunneata*)**

There is a report of a sighting of this species at the Nee Soon Swamp Forest on 9 October (AC, AOY & KK). The bird was reported seen flying from the ground to a low hanging branch. Photos were taken. The report is under review by the Records Committee.

**Blue-&- White Flycatcher (*Cyanoptila cyanomelana*)**

One first winter male seen at Kent Ridge Park on 12 and 19 November (AL). See AL's notes in this issue for details. One female was seen also at Kent Ridge Park on 19 November (PK). From PK's notes: "Seen in the same tree with Mugimaki Flycatcher .... Obviously much larger than Mugimaki. No blue in plumage .... A dull greyish brown flycatcher lacking any distinguishing or distinctive features. Head brown and uniform. Mantle similar to head . No wing bars. Underparts greyish --- brown on breast, belly slightly paler, an off-white colour. Bill quite long and black on both mandibles.... No call heard ." The next day a first winter male was seen in the same Park and in the same tree (AL & PK). From PK's notes : "Closed wing bright blue, very conspicuous. Mantle also similar blue. Tail not seen from above. Head-nape deep sepia brown, no white, no markings. Breast similar but slightly less warm. Lower breast, belly, undertail coverts, white and unmarked. The demarcation between the breast and belly was very sharp and well-defined, and slightly U shaped".

**Citrine Wagtail (*Motacilla citreola*)**

One sub-adult --- with the white face-patch --- seen at Tuas Marsh on 12 December (AL). The bird was seen again on 16 December (AC, AOY & SR) and also on 19 December (PK) . This is the second record for this species in Singapore --- the first being at the Punggol Grasslands in 1989. See SR's notes in this issue for more details.

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

One seen at Mandai Track 15, Seletar Reservoir, on 9 October (HHC & SBS). Four were seen at the same location on 13 November (HHC & SBS).

**Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*)**

15 birds seen at Lorong Halus Pond at Serangoon Estuary on 6 November (HHC & SBS).

**White-headed Munia (*Lonchura maja*)**

50 birds seen at Lorong Halus Pond at Serangoon Estuary on 6 November (HHC & SBS).



## **NESTING & BREEDING**

### **Little Grebe (*Podiceps ruficollis*)**

2 adults and 4 downy young seen at Lorong Halus Pond, Serangoon Estuary on 6 November (HHC & SBS).

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

One nest of this species spotted inside the Nee Soon Firing Range near the Nee Soon Swamp Forest on 13 November (AC, AOW, HHC, OKW, SBS & SY)

### **Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*)**

A nest was located in an acacia tree near the main service road at Tuas grassland on 26 December (AOY & LKS). Two nestlings were seen and they were able to fly. The nest was abandoned a few days later.

### **Buffy Fish Owl (*Ketupa ketupu*)**

4 birds seen together at the Lower Pierce Reservoir on 26 November --- two were adults and the other two were immatures, the first record of breeding and since the species is sedentary in habits of nesting in Singapore as well (OKW).

## **ESCAPED / INTRODUCED**

### **Javan Pond Heron (*Ardeola speciosa*)**

One was seen at Sungei Buloh on 22 October (DT & WEH with Uthai Treesucon et al). The bird was in breeding plumage which is odd at the time of the sighting. From WEH's notes: "It had a cinnamon breast, buffy coloured head and neck, grey black back plumes, yellowish green feet, The upper bill was dark above but the lower mandible at base had a slight fleshy colour. It had a yellow iris and a generally white body". The bird probably had been in captivity and is likely to be an escaped or introduced bird, given the fact that it has breeding plumage at the wrong season.

### **Rose-coloured Starling (*Sturnus roseus*)**

One bird seen at Tuas Grasslands on 5 November (PK). It is a pale sandy-brown bird with a conspicuously paler rump --- a first winter juvenile. The bird was around the area until 18 December and was seen by many birdwatchers (SR, KK, NBC, etc.). The Records Committee has classified this sighting as "Escaped or Introduced".

## **DELAYED REPORTS**

### **UNCONFIRMED NEW RECORD**

#### **Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*)**

There is a report of a sighting of one bird flying over the Straits of Johore between Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong on 23 July 1994 (SR). The bird was reported to be an adult female. The species is not on our checklist. The report was reviewed and was not accepted by the Records Committee.

### **UNUSUAL OCCURENCES**

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

One seen in a garden at King's Avenue, Sembawang, on 19 February 1994 (MH). This is a new locality. There were regular sightings of the species at Senoko further south.

#### **Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*)**

One seen in a garden in King's Avenue, Sembawang, on 19 February 1994 (MH).

### **NESTING & BREEDING**

#### **Slaty-breasted Rail (*Rallus striatus*)**

An immature flew into a house in King's Avenue, Sembawang, on 13 June 1994 (MH). The bird was released by MH in a nearby area where they are known to breed.

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

A pair seen nesting in a hole in a roadside Yellow Flame tree, 20 feet up, in King's Avenue, Sembawang, on 23 May 1994 (MH).

#### **Common Koel (*Eudynamys scolopacea*)**

2 Koels were seen in the low branches of a Greater Morinda tree in a garden in King's Avenue, Sembawang, on 10 April 1994 (MH). From MH's notes: "The female bird was on a branch lower than the male, calling loudly, turning her tail end to the male and flicking her tail up. Then on 16 June 1994, in the same garden, 3 Koel were making alot of noise in a Yellow Flame tree and in a patch of bananas below, where the banana trees had almost fallen over and were thus semi-horizontal. One pair of

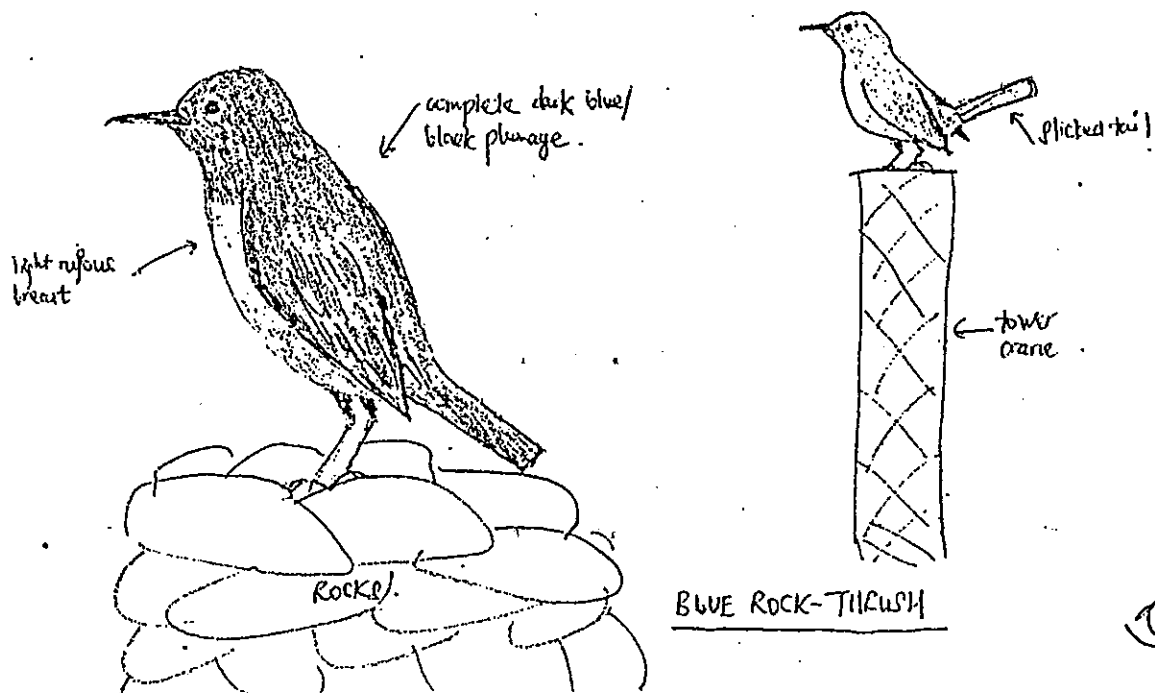
Koel twice almost succeeded in copulation, but were interrupted each time by a second female Koel making a lot of calls which disturbed the male".

**Collared Scops Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*)**

An adult and 2 immatures heard calling in gardens in King's Avenue, Sembawang, on 5 September 1994, and seen on 6 September (MH). "The parent bird roosted in an amango tree in one garden and the immatures in a thicket of camwood just across the road in another garden. The immatures were seen and heard up to 18 October 1994".

**Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*)**

2 begging immatures were observed being fed in a garden in King's Avenue, Sembawang, on 25 May 1994 (MH).



The Blue Rock-Thrush at Changi Ferry Terminal  
(Sketch by Kenneth Kee)

## NOTES

### THE YELLOW-EARED SPIDERHUNTER SIGHTING AT SIME ROAD

Species: Yellow-eared Spiderhunter (*Arachnothera chrysoagenys*)  
Location : Sime Road Forest (Next to Bukit Kalang Sub-station)  
Date : 22 October 1994  
Time : 0730 - 0739; 0743 - 0747 & 0800 - 0802.  
Observer : Lim Kim Seng  
Weather : Hazy but good visibility within 100 metres.  
Equipment : 10 x 40 Zeiss  
Distance from Observer: 10 - 40 metres.

Following reports by R Subaraj and Peter Kennerley (PK) of the presence of the above species at Sime Road, the writer got further details of the exact location from PK and got there the very next day (22 Oct). The site was a 4.5 metre tall tree near to a fence running round the sub-station and about 10 metres from the barricade that marks the beginning of the Sime road trail and transect.

#### Description

The following descriptions were taken on the spot.

Large spiderhunter about size of Blue-winged Leafbird (*Chloropsis cochinchinensis*) nearby but smaller than Javan Mynas (*Acridotheres javanicus*). Bill long and thick and roughly half length of body. Feet, fleshy orange. Bill, blackish; mandible, orange. Upperparts, olive; underparts, yellow. Eyes, black with orange eye-ring and lores. Breast, appears greyish and streaked.

The bird was perched high up on tree-top amongst foliage and was hard to see well. Appears to be aggressive towards nearby feeding leafbirds but afraid to land near mynas. Flight, undulating and high above tree-tops. Call: a rough "chit", louder than Little Spiderhunter (*A. longirostris*).

#### Discussion

Only the Yellow-eared and Spectacled Spiderhunters (*A. flavigaster*) have the orange or yellow eye-ring and ear patch. However, details of size (of leafbird) and bill length ( $\frac{1}{2}$  body) rules out the Spectacled, leaving the Yellow-eared Spiderhunter as the only candidate. The last record of the Yellow-eared Spiderhunter in Singapore was in 1894 (Gibson-Hill 1950).

**Reference :** Gibson-Hill, C A (1950). "A checklist of the birds of Singapore Island". *Bulletin of the Raffles Museum*, No. 20.

**Lim Kim Seng**

## A LESSER FRIGATEBIRD AT CHANGI FERRY TERMINAL (1 October 1994)

While birdwatching near the car park at the Changi Ferry Terminal at 0705 on 1 October 1994, I identified a Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel* which flew directly over my head. The frigatebird was flying north along the coast in the direction of Pulau Ubin and passed directly overhead at a distance of @ 120 metres. Just as the bird appeared, Richard Ollington and Elizabeth Loh arrived and also managed to see the bird before it vanished over the trees. We immediately set off in pursuit and caught up with it again off Changi Point. Here, the views were more distant as the bird was @ 1 km. offshore. Although we watched it for @ 6 minutes here it did not come as close as at Changi Ferry Terminal. We were however able to confirm the features which we had seen briefly at the Ferry Terminal, thus confirming the identification as Lesser Frigatebird.

The large size, thin, angular wings, long, deeply-forked tail and long bill immediately identified it as a frigatebird. The identification as Lesser was based upon the following features.

- The belly was black
- The breast was white. This feature extended as a white spur to the sides of the breast and onto the axillaries.
- There was no breast band and the white breast patch extended to the throat.
- The chin and throat were black.

The upperparts were not seen but these do not contribute to the identification process.

By reference to Harrison (1983), a frigatebird displaying this combination of characters can only be an adult female Lesser Frigatebird.

### Discussion

In addition to Lesser Frigatebird, a further two species of frigatebird have been recorded within South-east Asia.

Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor* typically usually shows a white belly patch in all plumages except adult. Although superficially similar to Lesser, adult female Great will also show a white chin and throat. It will also lack the white spurs which extended onto the axillaries which the Changi bird clearly showed.

Although Christmas Frigatebird *Fregate andrewsi* also shows white spurs extending onto the axillaries, it invariably shows a white belly which extends down to the feet in all plumages. The Changi bird had a dark belly and therefore could not be a Christmas Frigatebird.

I have seen about 6 Lesser Frigatebirds in Hong Kong although none of these have been in adult female plumage. More recently however, I saw small numbers of Lesser Frigatebirds, including some adult females, on Christmas Island, Indian Ocean, at the end of May 1994 along with several hundred Great and Christmas Frigatebirds, both

of which were much more numerous than the Lessers. However, of all the birds which I saw and photographed there, only adult femal Lesser fits the plumage of the Changi bird.

### References

Harrison, P. 1983. **Seabirds: an Identification Guide**. Croom Helm Ltd, Beckenham, Kent.

Peter Kennerly

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### THE CITRINE WAGTAIL AT TUAS (12 December 1994)

On 12 December 1994, Angus Lamont saw a Citrine Wagtail (*Motacilla citreola*) at Tuas but didn't realise the identity of the bird until he checked the field guide on the 15th. He immediately called me that evening to inform me of what he felt was a female of the species. Thus, on 16 December, with Alan Owyong and Alfred Chia, I visited Tuas to try and locate the bird in question and confirm its identity. The wagtail was in the exact spot by the flooded pool that Angus described. We watched the bird for about 20 minutes before a passing lorry forced the bird to head down the jetty road. We drove along trying to locate the bird but to no avail. On returning to the original spot, we found the bird here once more and were able to obtain good views for another half hour and also compare it with a nearby Yellow Wagtail. During this time, Alan also sneaked in to shoot a couple of photos.

Distance: @ 10-15 metres  
Time: 0900 Hrs - 1030 hrs  
Weather: Sunny  
Conditions: Fairly good  
Habitat: Short grass along the road, in a muddy patch.  
Optics: Kowa Scope and 8 x 30 Swarovski Binoculars.

### Description

Slightly larger and bulkier than Yellow Wagtail; less streamlined and with shorter tail as well. Head - brown crown with yellow forecrown; broad white supercilium very distinct and curving down in a crescent to the breast; brownish yellow cheek patch below eye. Yellow throat; grey mantle and rump; primaries and tail brown; basal half of outer tail feathers white. Underparts whitish buff; thin greyish breast band unconnected in centre of breast; evidence of dark patch on right side of breast; yellowish vent. 2 white wing bars on wing coverts; white patch on right wing around lower scapulars. Bill dark; legs dark; eyes black.

### Discussion

This bird is without doubt a Citrine based on the size and shape, the broad supercilium curving down to breast, the brownish yellow cheek patch, yellow throat and forecrown, breast band and patch, wing patch and 2 wing bars. All the features are there.

I agree with Angus's view that it is a juvenile but I am convinced that it is a first winter male. Although it is in early moult, the presence of a yellow throat and white patch on one wing are clearly features of a male. The white supercilium, breast patch and general colouration indicates a juvenile. The bird showed a preference for the wet and muddy patch along the roadside. The call is very similar to Yellow Wagtail with a slightly deeper sound.

### Conclusion

This is a good record. It is the second for the species in Singapore. The first record was based on a sketch of a breeding-plumaged male at Ponggol by a visiting Danish birder in 1989. This bird confirms the species occurrence as a rare migrant.

**Subaraj Rajathurai**

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### A EURASIAN KESTREL AT TUAS ( 9 November 1994 )

On November 9th, 1994, I brought a British birder out to Tuas. While there, we located the Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) that had been reported earlier by Peter Kennerley. It was observed perched on a sandy patch of ground and was identified as a female of the species. We studied her for 3 minutes before leaving. My client, Roy Crosby had no difficulty identifying her while I have observed the species in India, Nepal and Hong Kong.

Distance : @ 50 metres  
Time : 1335 hrs  
Weather : Partly cloudy  
Conditions : Fairly good  
Habitat : Open grassland  
Optics : Bushnell Spacemaster 15x - 45x Zoom.

### Description

Size smaller than Black-shouldered Kite. Rich brown cap with thin but distinct streaking; face, greyish on cheeks, black eye-brow from eye back; black moustachial streak joining black patch coming down from eye. Nape brown, heavily streaked dark brown; throat whitish. Underparts, buffy with heavy dark brown streaking on breast; Wings, brown with small white spots; primaries black; bill yellow with dark tip; legs orange.

### Discussion

Although the Eurasian Kestrel is not new to the Singapore list, this is officially the first record since 1981 and thus notes are required for this rarity. There was an unconfirmed sight record in 1987 but no notes were submitted. The Kestrel may occur more regularly but could be overlooked. If perched on the ground in grassland, it is

difficult to spot. However, at the present time, the species is considered only an occasional migrant.

This female was also observed by me on 17 November with Alan OwYong, Alfred Chia and Kenneth Kee and on 27 November with Ng Bee Choo and Kieu Kim Sen.

**Subaraj Rajathurai**

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### **A BLUE ROCK-THRUSH SIGHTING AT BUKIT TIMAH (31 December 1994)**

While birding at Bukit Timah Nature Reserve on the morning of 31st December 1994 with Tan Han Chong, the writer spotted a movement at the former Ginger Walk trail, now closed. It was a thrush-like bird perched on a branch which had fallen across the trail. The bird was observed from 0920 - 0925 hours after which it flew down to the densely overgrown undergrowth and could not be found again. The weather was fair and lighting good despite the forest canopy.

#### **Description**

A medium-to-large thrush. Head, whitish, scaled brown; bill and eye, black; bill, short. Has eye-stripe through and curving down to neck and thin moustache. Throat, buff and heavily scaled and extending to upper breast. Upperparts, dark dull blue; tail, dull blue and underparts, dull blue except for narrow white line at centre of belly. Wings, blackish-brown. Legs, orange.

Stout bird with an upright stance. Observed for about 5 minutes at 35 metres distance in shade/opening. Bird inactive, turning twice before dropping away. Unafraid. No call.

#### **Discussion**

The all blue plumage rules out all other thrushes. Sexing and aging is not so straightforward though. However, the brown head, blue body and lack of scales indicates that this is an immature male. The blue belly indicates that this is a blue-bellied race, subspecies unconfirmed, a first for Singapore and the third record of the species.

**Lim Kim Seng**



## **A BLUE ROCK-THRUSH AT CHANGI FERRY TERMINAL (10 October 1994)**

Species : Monticola solitarius  
Observer: Alan Owyong & Kenneth Kee  
Date: 10/10/94  
Time: 1815 - 1818 & 1900 - 1930  
Location: Changi Ferry Terminal  
Habitat: Rocky coastline  
Light Condition: Twilight and dusk, enhanced by street lights around ferry terminal compound.  
Distance from Observers: varies from 20m - 40m  
Bino: Leica 10 x 42, Zeiss Jena 8 x 32  
Confirmation by: Alfred Chia, Alan Owyong on 11 October morning.

### **Description (see sketch)**

Size - as in Magpie Robin but with a shorter tail. Bill, upperparts, legs - complete dark blue/black plumage with no distinct markings, pointed wings. Underparts - light and dull rufous/chestnut across lower breast and belly (not so prominent as illustrated in the book **Guide to the Birds of Thailand**).

### **Behaviour**

Stands erect, often bobs body downwards and flicked tail up. Seen initially standing on rocks and then flying about in the compound of the ferry terminal, perching on lamp-posts, sign-boards, rooftops, boothstands and on the road. Very silent with no calls.

### **General Comments**

The Blue Rock-Thrush was spotted while looking for the Grey-tailed Tattler for Alan Owyong. Initial observation that evening was a complete black bird, robin-like due to its flicking tail and pointed wings (reminiscent of the Sunda Blue Robin). Return the next morning with Alfred Chia and Alan Owyong. Bird was not in sight around ferry terminal, however the 2 Grey-tailed Tattlers were still around. Was about to give up when it was spotted across the ferry terminal, towards the beach side. Took some time to locate the bird and was finally spotted and scoped by Alfred. The bird was standing at the top of a tower-crane! (about 100 ft high). This was where we managed to observe the light rufous around the breast. At a distance without the scope the bird looked completely dark blue or blackish. Before we could get another good look, the bird flew towards the ferry terminal, where we came from! We then trek back and managed to locate the bird standing at the far end of the rocky terrain, with the back facing us. It then flew off without trace.

**Kenneth Kee**

## **A HOODED PITTA AT MARINA CITY (3 December 1994)**

**Date of Measurement:** 5 December 1994

**Date of Retrieval:** 3 December 1994

**Location:** Marina City

**Observers :** Alfred Chia, Andrew Tay, Allan Owyong, Evelyn Lim, Fauzee Mohammed Yusof & Ho Hua Chew

A live specimen was brought in a cage to the office of the Nature Society on 5 December 1994 by Mr. Fauzee Mohammed Yusof, a member. According to Fauzee, the bird was found on 3 December trapped in a net in the garden of the Pan Pacific Hotel, where some construction work was going on. Evelyn and Andrew brought the bird to the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve at about 4.30 pm. I took the opportunity to measure the bird while Allan Owyong took some photos. The plumage of the bird was surprisingly intact and unruffled. When I took out the bird from the cage, it struggled vigorously. We chose Bukit Timah as the release site because Hooded Pittas were regularly sighted here.

Subsequently, the bird was released at Boundary Path by Alfred Chia and Allan. According to Alfred and Allan, immediately upon being released, the bird went straight to an undergrowth and was not to be seen until five minutes later when it emerged. It started to peck at the ground while hopping along, despite the presence of the two observers. After awhile, it picked up a dead leaf and appeared to be sipping the water on it. It hopped away from view with the leaf still in its bill. It appeared that the bird was still healthy and strong.

**Measurement:** Weight — 46 gm ; Length — 150 mm; Tarsus Length — 35 mm; Wing — 105 mm; Gape — 20 mm; Tail — 30 mm.

**Description:** General Plumage Colour — pastel jade-green, especially the breast. Eye mask — thick and black. Eye and bill — black. Crown — dull brown. Rump — turquoise blue. Under-tailed Coverts and Vent — bright red. Leg — flesh-coloured.

The Hooded Pitta is a migrant species and is usually spotted in the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve foraging for food along the quieter paths. Their distribution ranges from India and South-west China to the Philippines and New Guinea. Their habitat is forest and mangrove. The species is extremely shy. This is the second known reported specimen to be recovered in Singapore this year — the other being from Lynwood Grove, a suburban housing estate, where one was found dead in the goldfish pond of Mr. Nicholas Vann in last November. It is probably the case that these birds were grounded in areas outside their natural habitat by stormy weather during their migratory flight to the south.

**Ho Hua Chew**

## A BLUE- AND- WHITE FLYCATCHER AT KENT RIDGE PARK (12 & 19 November 1994)

While in Kent Ridge Park on 12 and 19 November 1994 I had the good fortune to see the above mentioned species. My description is based on both observations but the second sighting was far more prolonged with much better views of the bird. This description applies to a first winter male.

Size and behaviour as per Asian Paradise Flycatcher. Sits still for long periods of time. Usually found just under the canopy where it often sits on dead leafless branches but has also been noted within 5 metres of the ground.

Dark bill and eye. The entire head is an apricot rusty colour while the nape is dull blue. The back and rump are bright cobalt blue contrasting with the dull blue. The wings are dull blue except for the secondaries and tertiaries which are ferruginous. The entire underparts are white very slightly tinged with grey. The chin is white while the throat is a pale sepia brown extending downwards on each side until it merges with the shoulders. The boundary between the brown of the throat and the white of the breast is sharp. When seen well this boundary looks like an inverted U. The white in the tail was only observed when the bird made sallies after insects and flared the tail during its aerobatics.

All pictures and descriptions that could be found are for the nominate race *cyanomelana* and show the brown extending downwards to cover the breast whereas on this bird the breast is white. This is also in line with other recorded descriptions of specimens seen in Singapore. It seems very likely that the race passing through Singapore is *cumatilis*, which lacks the dark breast band, and breeds in western China, migrates through south-east Yunnan, and overwinters in Sumatra and Java.

Angus Lamont

## ARTICLE ONE

### THE DAY OF THE PHALAROPE : THE RED-NECKED AT TUAS (16 November 1994)

The rain had pelted long and hard the night before it left the sky grim and overcast this very afternoon (16th November 1994). We were here at the Tuas grasslands to check out the sighting of a Rosy Starling by Peter Kennerley. The Rosy Starling, as reported was seen together with a flock of White-vented Mynas.

On the way back, as is customary, we stopped by the wetlands for a quick scan. It was gratifying indeed to note that the grassy plain was still flooded and the swallows were still reeling in the air above. And there amongst the reeds, barely ten metres from the roadside, was this hyper-active wader swimming round and round in circles. I know it had to be a species new to Singapore because I do not recall swimming "ducks" with pointed beaks. It looked like a Marsh Sandpiper gone "bananas". Its head kept bobbing back and forth, jerking left and right almost non-stop. I was told later that this is their characteristic feeding behaviour.

It was my daughter Sue Lin who identified this nondescript wader as the Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*). As I was busy studying every aspect of the bird, right down to its last feather, she was flipping through the **Guide to the Birds of Thailand** and pointed to the drawing of the Red-necked Phalarope in its non-breeding plumage. It is not very often that you see a drawing of a wader so accurately illustrated as to leave no doubt as to its identity. So, the reward for umpteenth early-morning birding sojourns to all the ulu parts of Singapore was a megatick and a "first" for Singapore.

My field notes read: "Black, pointed bill, straight about 3cm. White forehead, distinctive black patch from eyes to ear converts. Grey crown, longish white neck and grey down the nape. Black upperparts with white patterns. Tail sharp and pointed upwards. White underparts with light grey shoulder patch, legs black. In flight, prominent white wing bars, dark mantle and white sides on tail ... Swims like a waterbird amongst the short reeds and sometimes in open water. Constant movement to left and right, sometimes in small circles, always nodding its head. Feeds above water, picking fleas either on the water surface or the reeds. Takes flight occasionally but lands a short distance away to continue feeding. Not disturbed by the presence of people nearby. No calls heard. Does not wade.

The bird is in non-breeding winter plumage. The neck turns orangey when breeding begins in summer, hence its name. But you would have to go all the way to the Arctic Tundra to see its red neck. They migrate south over the oceans and winter in the open seas making rare stopovers inland when driven in by storms..

There are only three species of Phalarope in the world. Wilson's Phalarope (*Steganopus tricolor*) breeds in North America and winters south to the Pampas of Argentina. The Grey Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) breeds in the sub-arctic regions of both hemispheres.

The marshes at Tuas will be drained and most of the grassland will give way to new factories. If ever we were to see another Phalarope coming to our shores again, we must keep adequate freshwater wetlands to serve as its and other migrant's winter home.

Allan Owyong

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## ARTICLE TWO

### YELLOW-EARED SPIDERHUNTER AT SIME ROAD FOREST (20 OCTOBER 1994)

After hearing that a Thick-billed Spiderhunter *Arachnothera crassirostris* had been seen in the Sime Road Forest on 19 October 1994, I visited the area at dawn the following morning to look for the bird. After waiting for @ 20 minutes in the area where it had been seen the previous day, I heard a leafbird *Chloropsis sp.* calling and walked towards where the calling was coming from, which was close to the compound of the Bukit Kalang Pumping Station. I immediately found a small group of Blue-winged Leafbirds *Chloropsis cochinchinensis* feeding in a small tree by the side of the track alongside the fence of the compound and knowing that the spiderhunter and leafbirds were seen together the previous day, I waited and watched them.

After about 10 minutes during which the leafbirds were actively feeding in the upper levels of the tree which was @ 6 metres high, I noticed a spiderhunter with them. This bird remained in the tree from 0730h to 0750h and during this period gave excellent views throughout and at distances down to 10 metres. At one stage, it remained stationary and preened for approximately 5 minutes and was in full view for this period. At 0750h it called and flew to the top of a much taller adjacent tree where it remained on the uppermost bare branch for @ 30 seconds before flying off over the canopy of the trees and was lost to view. Although there were other observers in the area that morning due to an OBC field trip, I was unable to locate them when the bird appeared and I was the only observer.

#### Plumage

The following plumage details were noted.

The underparts from the chin to the undertail coverts were dull olive-green with very indistinct and subdued darker streaking. There was no trace of yellow whatsoever. It was very difficult to establish that there was any pattern to the feathering and it was probably darker shaft streaking which gave the bird this slightly streaked appearance. The underparts were seen very well for 5 minutes as the bird was stationary and preened in full view.

The head, nape, mantle were a slightly brighter shade of green than the underparts and lacked the olive cast. However they were still relatively dull. There were very

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indistinct dark mottling on the mantle and again it was difficult to establish if this was a pattern. Most probably, it was caused by marginally darker centres and paler fringes to the mantle feathering but this is not certain. The closed wing was quite uniform except for the median coverts which showed as a distinct line of dark spots due to the blackish centres to each covert feather. This dark line along the median coverts was the most distinctive plumage feature of the bird. The greater coverts and tertials were uniform and similar in colour to the mantle. The tail was the same colour as the mantle and did not show any white tips or spots. The head of the bird was quite distinctive. It showed a conspicuous pale flesh-coloured eye-ring and an indistinct pale yellowish-green patch below the eye which extended from the base of the bill to just behind the eye. At some angles this patch was clearly visible, at others it was impossible to see. It most definitely was not bright yellow.

### **Bare parts**

The bill was long, decurved and typical of that of a spiderhunter. It was not particularly deep based. The sides were a pale flesh colour, similar to the eye-ring and this was very obvious. The culmen was dark as was the lower edge of the lower mandible and the tips of both mandibles was also dark. Otherwise the bill was conspicuously pale. The legs were also pale flesh and the eye was dark.

### **Structure**

In size it appeared very similar to a Blue-winged Leafbird.

### **Discussion**

As I have no previous experience of Thick-billed Spiderhunter I had looked at the illustrations and read the text relating to the Thick-billed and other spiderhunters the previous evening in Lekagul and Round (1991) and King (1972). I was therefore quite surprised that this spiderhunter was quite different to the illustration in Lekagul and Round. The lack of yellow on the underparts, lack of a supercilium and eye-stripe indicated that the bird was not Thick-billed. The eye-ring and faint yellow-green patch below the eye both pointed to the bird being either a Yellow-eared *A. chrysogenys* or Spectacled Spiderhunter *A. flavigaster*. The latter was eliminated on size; this bird was similar or possibly slightly smaller in size to a Blue-winged Leafbird and Spectacled Spiderhunter should appear larger.

The dull appearance of this bird combined with a pale flesh bill and eye-ring indicate the bird was still in juvenile plumage. If this is correct, this is most interesting as it indicates that Yellow-eared Spiderhunters may have been bred within the area. Passerines which breed in the tropical regions typically undertake a complete post-juvenile moult shortly after leaving the nest. They then adopt an adult type plumage which is frequently impossible to separate from an adult. Ringing studies in Hong Kong have shown that in bulbuls *Pycnonotus sp.* and Japanese White-eyes *Zosterops japonica*, this complete moult of the body, wings and tail commences within 6 - 8 weeks of the birds leaving the nest and takes @ 4 - 6 weeks to complete. The structure of the juvenile feathers are much weaker than the next generation of feathers and are of a much poorer quality. This is because the feathers grow very rapidly while the bird remains in the nest

Fairly indistinct paler area from base of bill and extending back below the eye. Not obvious.

Flesh eye-ring  
Very conspicuous dull  
Nape and crown as mantle

Mantle slightly darker but greener than underparts. Very slightly mottled darker - not uniform

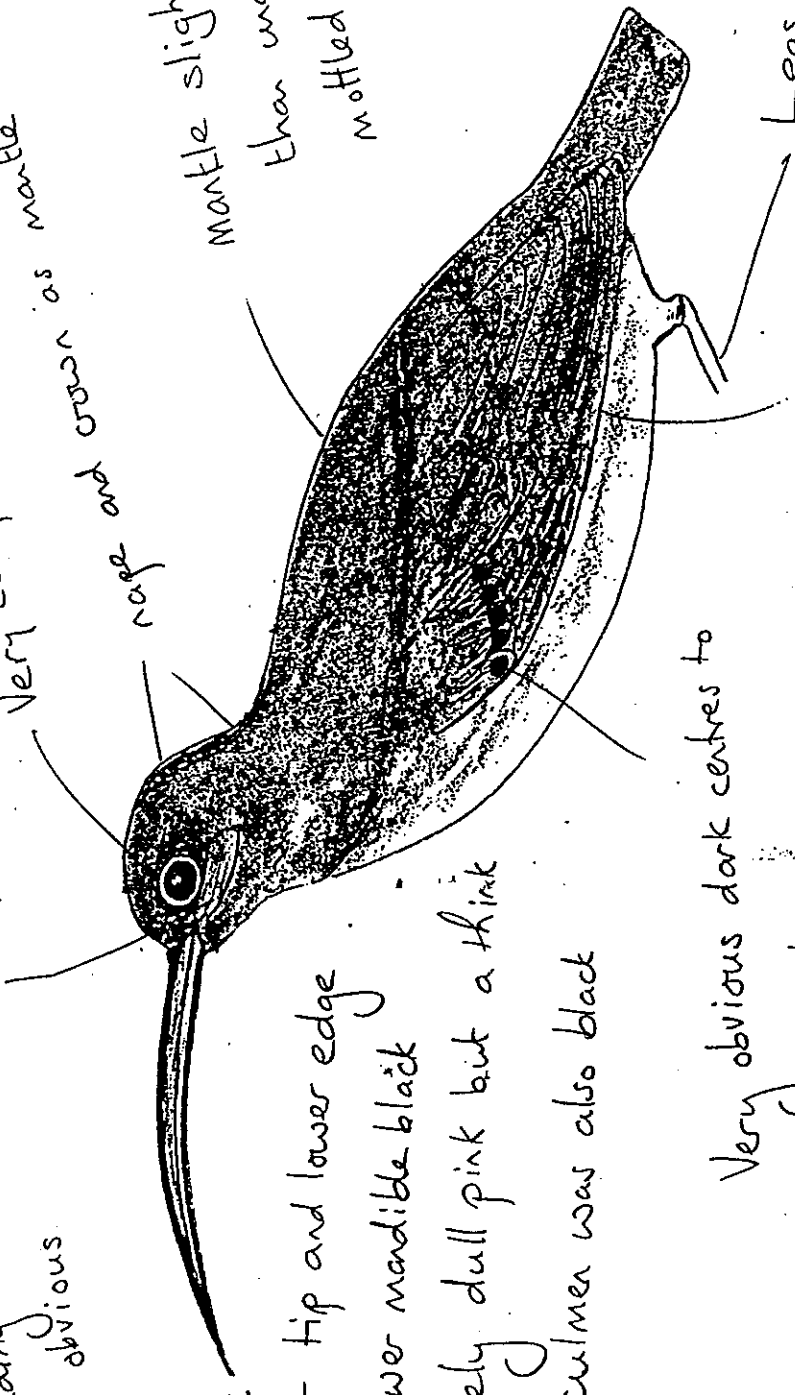
Bill - tip and lower edge of lower mandible black  
Largely dull pink but a tinge  
The culmen was also black

Very obvious dark centres to median coverts

Underparts from chin to undertail coverts dull olive green with very obvious streaking - indistinct

tail uniform, no paler tips  
Legs dull flesh  
feet dull flesh

Wing quite uniform except for median coverts.



The yellow-eared Spiderhunter at Sime Road Forest (Sketch by Peter Kennerly)

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in order that the nestling can leave the nest as soon as possible to avoid potential predators such as snakes. It is most unlikely that the bird would travel far in juvenile plumage and would be most unlikely to cross the Johore Straits from Malaysia. Most probably therefore it is a locally bred bird. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that Richard Ollington has recorded Yellow-eared Spiderhunters on a number of occasions in recent years within the Central Catchment (pers. comm), although I understand these records have not been submitted to the Records Committee for review.

**Peter R. Kennerly**



OSPREY



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