

NSS Bird Group Report – March 2020

By Geoff Lim & Isabelle Lee.
and Tan Gim Cheong (ed.)

March continued to see the reporting of spectacular species – the 3rd record of the Asian Emerald Cuckoo, a male, at Ghim Moh; the continued presence of the 3rd recorded Chinese Blue Flycatcher; and visitation by the globally threatened Chinese Egrets at Pulau Ubin.

Chinese Egret



A Chinese (left) and Intermediate Egret at Chek Jawa, Pulau Ubin on 21 March 2020 by Vincent Ng

On 16 March 2020, Richard White and Francis Yap was at Chek Jawa, Pulau Ubin at low tide when Richard spotted a **Chinese Egret**, *Egretta eulophotes*, a rare visitor, on the intertidal zone. The egret continued to frequent the tidal flats on subsequent days, giving many birders a chance to see this globally threatened species in Singapore. T. Ramesh was delighted to spot the egret on 20 March 2020 just before the low afternoon tide and recorded some videos of its active feeding behaviour. On 31 March 2020, Vincent Ng recorded three individuals feeding together. The species was previously reported with a fair degree of regularity at Pulau Tekong only.

According to Dr. Yong Ding Li, “the egret can be tricky to ID, especially if in the non-breeding plumage, and seen from a great distance. But a [nicely written article](#) by Nial Moores shows that foraging behaviour can be a great clue towards its identification – especially its more erratic and ‘*kancheong*’ movements!” This was also observed by T. Ramesh in his [short notes and video](#).

Asian Emerald Cuckoo



The Asian Emerald Cuckoo at Ghim Moh, photographed on 23 March 2020 by Kelvin Ng Cheng Kwan.

Singapore's third record of the **Asian Emerald Cuckoo**, *Chrysococcyx maculatus*, came in the form of a splendid male. The two earlier records were at Upper Seletar Reservoir Park in May 2006, when an immature and a female appeared, and at Sentosa between late December 2017 and January 2018, when two females appeared. Social media reports indicated that the bird was first discovered on 23 March 2020 along the park connector at Ghim Moh. This bird continued to stay at the location until the end of the month, feeding on the abundant caterpillars that flourished in the trees.

The species is regarded as being of Least Concern and can be found from the Himalayas, through Nepal and Bhutan, NE India, Bangladesh and S China, through Myanmar, NW Thailand, N Laos and N and central Vietnam. During winter, it flies to S India, Sri Lanka, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Indochina and Malaysia, with small numbers arriving at Sumatra (Payne, 2020). First reports of the bird arriving at the Penang Botanical Gardens were posted on social media around 16 December 2019 (Kelvin Low), and 19 December 2019 (Chan Kai Soon). Hence, it is possible that the bird encountered in March 2020, may well be a returnee heading back to its northern breeding grounds.

Central Catchment Nature Reserve (CCNR) and Fringe Parks



The Chinese Blue Flycatcher at CCNR, photographed on 11 March 2020 by Angela Yeo.

The core CCNR continued to support interesting forest species. These included a **Sakhalin Leaf Warbler**, *Phylloscopus borealoides*, which was spotted on 4 March 2020 at Mandai Track 15 by Choong YT, a non-breeding visitor in the form of a **Cinereous Bulbul**, *Hemixos cinereus*, at Bukit Timah Nature Reserve on 8 March 2020, as seen by Lim Kim Chuah, the gem of an **Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher**, *Ceyx erithaca*, on 12 March 2020 along Rifle Range Link by Choong YT, and a **Mugimaki Flycatcher**, *Ficedula mugimaki*, on 14 March 2020 by John Ascher. Birders and photographers alike continued to be delighted to find the very rare **Chinese Blue Flycatcher**, *Cyornis glaucicomans*, from 1 March 2020, through to 14 March 2020, as seen by Norhafiani A Majid, and by Geoff Lim on 16 March 2020 (the same individual was first recorded on 25 February 2020). This presents the possibility that the species may be over-wintering in Singapore, albeit undetected. Up to two **Green-backed Flycatcher**, *Ficedula elisae*, were also seen by Geoff Lim and Norman Wu on 16 March 2020.

At Dairy Farm Nature Park an **Orange-headed Thrush**, *Geokichla citrina*, was reported on 4 March 2020 by Steven Cheong. Two owls were reported by Choong YT on 17 March 2020, a **Barred Eagle-Owl**, *Bubo sumatranus*, (heard only), and a **Northern Boobook**, *Ninox japonica*, that was rehabilitated and released by Jurong Bird Park/NParks. About a week later, on 24 March 2020, three **Blue-winged Leafbird**, *Chloropsis cochinchinensis*, were seen and reported by Oliver Tan, while an **Abbott's Babbler**, *Malacocincla abbotti*, was reported on 28 March 2020 by Mike Hooper.

Windsor Nature Park proved to be fruitful, with a **Jambu Fruit Dove**, *Ptilinopus jambu*, seen on 14 March 2020 by Mike Hooper, a **Black-crested Bulbul**, *Pycnonotus flaviventris*, reported on 16 March 2020 by Oliver Tan, and a **Blue-rumped Parrot**, *Psittinus cyanurus*, seen and reported feeding on starfruit on 18 March 2020 by Kwok Tuck Loong.

Singapore Botanic Gardens



Greater Painted Snipe at Botanic Gardens photographed on 6 March 2020 by Herman Phua.

A **Malayan Night Heron**, *Gorsachius melanolophus*, was reported on 2 March 2020 on the Red Brick Path by Kwok Tuck Loong, while a **Greater Painted Snipe**, *Rostatrula benghalensis* was seen at the Eco-Lake of the Gardens on 5 March 2020 by Laurence Eu, and subsequently reported until 12 March 2020 (David Fur). During this period, a **Von Schrenck's Bittern**, *Ixobrychus eurhythmus*, was reported on 8 March 2020 by Mike Hooper, while a **Taiga Flycatcher**, *Ficedula albicilla*, (possibly the same individual – Singapore's first record – first seen on 30 November 2019) was reported on 14 March 2020 by Marcel Finlay and on 20 March 2019 by Myron Tay. At the end of the month, a **Hooded Pitta**, *Pitta sordida*, was reported on 30 March 2020 by Choong YT. On the fringe of the Gardens, a **Yellow-browed Warbler**, *Phylloscopus inornatus*, was reported from Cluny Road on 5 March 2020 by Sandra Chia.



Taiga Flycatcher at Singapore Botanic Gardens, taken on 20 March 2020 by Myron Tay.

Central Singapore



Eastern Barn Owl at Toa Payoh, photographed by David Fur on 16 March 2020.

Beginning on 11 March 2020, visitors to the Bishan-Ang Mo Kio Park stumbled upon a **Mangrove Pitta**, *Pitta macrorhyncha*. First reported by Steve Ang a day after, the bird continued to be reported until 30 March 2020 by Vincent Chin. This bird represents one of the few rare occurrences on mainland Singapore's non-mangrove habitats, previous records included one at Singapore Botanic Gardens and two at the Lower Peirce Reservoir boardwalk in 2014, and a recent finding at Woodlands in January 2020. During this period, visitors also reported two **Asian Palm Swift**, *Cypsiurus balasiensis*, on 11 March 2020 (Martin Kennewell). An **Eastern Crowned Warbler**, *Phylloscopus coronatus*, was also seen on 28 March 2020 by Angela Christine Chua. At Toa Payoh, an **Eastern Barn Owl**, *Tyto javanica*, was reported on 16 March 2020 by Norman Wu.

Northern Singapore

A **Black-capped Kingfisher**, *Halcyon pileata*, was reported on 8 March 2020 from 960 Woodlands Road by Geri Lim, while a **Jerdon's Baza**, *Aviceda jerdoni*, was reported on 21 March 2020 from Coney Island by Tan Kok Hui.

Eastern Singapore

An **Indian Cuckoo**, *Cuculus micropterus*, was reported from Tampines Eco Garden on 5 March 2020 by Philip Howell, while a **Malaysian Hawk-Cuckoo**, *Hierococcyx fugax*, was seen on 14 March 2020 at Changi Business Park, by T. Ramesh, who also saw a **Common Buzzard**, *Buteo buteo*, at Bedok North Street 1 on 16 March 2020, and a **Grey Plover**, *Pluvialis squatarola*, on 28 March 2020 at Tanah Merah Coastal Road.

The star attraction at Pulau Ubin beginning on 16 March 2020 to the month's end was the rarely encountered **Chinese Egret**, *Egretta eulophotes*. Also observed at Chek Jawa were a **Hodgson's Hawk-Cuckoo**, *Hierococcyx nisicolor*, on 18 March 2020 (Fadzrun A), a **Greater Crested Tern**, *Thalasseus bergii*, on 20 March 2020 (Fadzrun A), as well as two **Bar-tailed Godwit**, *Limosa lapponica*, on 21 March 2020 (Tay Kian Guan).

Southern Singapore



Two Malaysian Plovers at Marina East photographed on 19 March 2020 by Art Toh.

One report of a **Siberian Blue Robin**, *Larvivora cyane*, was made on 20 March 2020 by Mike Hooper, while a **White-throated Needletail**, *Hirundapus caudacutus*, was spotted on 24 March 2020 on Sentosa by Dillen Ng. The Marina East area saw reports of two **Malaysian Plover**, *Charadrius peronii*, on 19 March 2020 by Art Toh, a **Lesser Sand Plover**, *Charadrius mongolus*, on 28 March 2020 by Russell Boyman, a **Pacific Reef Heron**, *Egretta sacra*, on 29 March 2020 by Mike Hooper, who also saw two **Kentish Plover**, *Charadrius alexandrinus*, and four **Malaysian Plover** on the same day. At the top of Pinnacle @ Duxton, a juvenile/female **Blue Rock Thrush**, *Monticola soltarius*, was photographed by Angie Cheong on 7 March 2020.

Western Singapore

The Kranji Marshes-Neo Tiew Harvest Lane-Lim Chu Kang Lane 3 area continued to support a good number of species. Beginning with Kranji Marshes, we received sighting reports of eight **White-shouldered Starling**, *Sturnia sinensis*, on 7 March 2020 from Lau Jia Sheng. Also seen were two **Grey-faced Buzzard**, *Butastur indicus*, and a single **Red Avadavat**, *Amandava amandava*, on 8 March 2020 by Martti Siponen, who also spotted two **Common Moorhen**, *Gallinula chloropus*, on 21 March 2020. One **Blue-winged Pitta**, *Pitta*

moluccensis, was seen on 29 March 2020, as was an **Ashy Minivet**, *Pericrocotus divaricatus*, by Martin Kennewell.

Over at the monsoon drain running somewhat parallel to Lim Chu Kang Lane 3, one **Little Ringed Plover**, *Charadrius dubius*, and a **White Wagtail**, *Motacilla alba*, were spotted on 23 March 2020 by Raghav Narayanswamy, who also spotted a **Greater Painted-Snipe**, *Rostratula benghalensis*, on 27 March 2020. A **Ruddy Kingfisher**, *Halcyon coromanda*, which was earlier reported at the site in January and February 2020, continued to be seen on 8 March 2020 by Vincent Chang and on 29 March 2020 by Michael Leong.



Ruddy Kingfisher at Lim Chu Kang Lane 3 photographed on 8 March 2020 by Vincent S S Chang.

Along the fields at Neo Tiew Harvest Lane, a **Watercock**, *Gallicrex cinerea*, was spotted on 14 March 2020 by Martin Kennewell, while a **Long-toed Stint**, *Calidris subminuta*, was reported on 15 March 2020 by Russell Boyman. Several days later, two **Oriental Pratincole**, *Glareola maldivarum*, were reported on 27 March 2020 by Raghav Narayanswamy. At the nearby Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, a **Black Baza**, *Aviceda leuphotes*, was spotted on 28 March 2020 by Marti Siponen, while the resident **Copper-throated Sunbird**, *Leptocoma calcostetha*, was observed on 30 March 2020 by Peter Bijlmakers.



Brahminy Starling at Jurong Lake Garden on 1 March 2020, photographed by Art Toh.

The **Brahminy Starling**, *Sturnia pagodarum*, at Jurong Lake Garden continued to be seen, with a record on 1 March 2020 by Art Toh. Apart from the afore mentioned Asian Emerald Cuckoo on 23 March 2020, we also noted reports of a **Thick-billed Green Pigeon**, *Treron curvirostra* at King Albert Park by Martin Kennewell, as well as a **Greater Coucal**, *Centropus sinensis*, on the same day at Ulu Pandan Park Connector by Oliver Tan. Two days later, an **Ashy Drongo**, *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, was reported from Ulu Pandan Park Connector as well, by Sylvester Goh.

This report is compiled/written by Geoff Lim and Isabelle Lee, and edited by Tan Gim Cheong. We are grateful for the birders and photographers whose postings in various Facebook birding pages, bird forums, individual reports and extracts from eBird make up this report. This compilation is not a complete list of birds recorded for the month and not all the records were verified.

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REFERENCE

Payne, R. B. (2020). *Asian Emerald Cuckoo (Chrysococcyx maculatus)*, version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.asecuc1.01>