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The Andaman Islands

22nd – 28th December 2007

James Eaton, Martin Kennewell, Frank Rheindt and Rob Hutchinson



Andaman Scops Owl, Mt Harriet

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The second-leg of our Subcontinent trip was spent on the Andaman Islands where we were joined by Frank Rheindt and Martin Kennewell. The Andamans are a small island chain situated between peninsular India and Burma. We recorded a total of 125 species including an impressive clean-sweep of all 19 endemics including prolonged views of all five night-birds and the rarely-seen Andaman Crake.

We spent a full week birding mainly at the two key birding sites; Chidiya Tapu and Mount Harriet, with side excursions for some of the other specialties of the island. We started with several trips to Chidiya Tapu; a small coastal village popular with local tourists thanks to its sandy white beach and scenic surroundings. More importantly for us it has a large tract of easily accessible forest, home to the vast majority of Andaman endemics. Shortly after arriving in to the forest on our first afternoon an Andaman Crake began calling from the gully below, after some coaxing we scored in spectacular fashion as this rarely-observed bird circled us

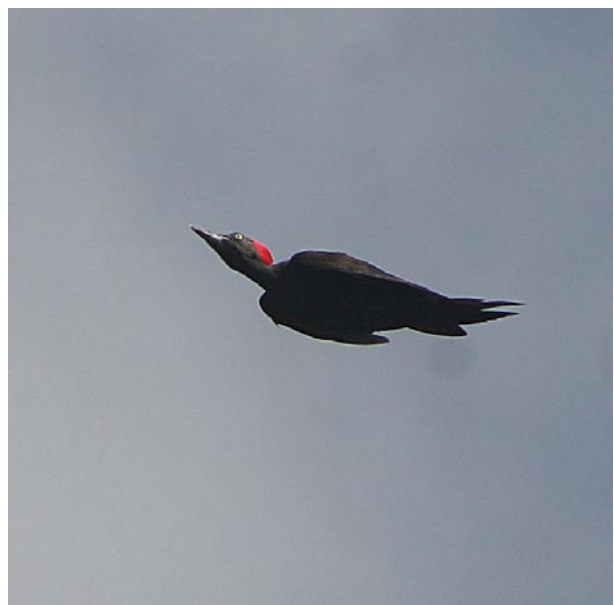
down to a radius of three metres! As dusk arrived excitement grew as the islands are home to an impressive set of five species of endemic night-bird. First to vocalise was a duetting pair of canopy-dwelling Andaman Boobook, we spotlighted these birds easily, though unfortunately they preferred to utilise the high canopy despite the extended views. Andaman Scops Owl called briefly but this would have to wait for another night though *modestus* Oriental Scops Owl was more accommodating, perching directly over the road allowing excellent views. This endemic taxon of Oriental Scops-Owl differs slightly in vocalisations from its mainland counterparts and has been mooted as a potential future split. Our final night-birding session at this site culminated in several attempts to locate the newly-split Andaman Masked Owl at various sites. Deep in the forest the eerie screech of a *tyto* were finally heard and within minutes a pair of this rarely-seen species were looking down on us from high above the road, and excellent views were had as we watched these birds for over 20 minutes often perched side-by-side.



Andaman Shama (left), Andaman Serpent Eagle (right) © Rob Hutchinson/ Birdtour Asia



Andaman Wood Pigeon © James Eaton



Andaman Woodpecker © James Eaton

Many of the more common endemics were regularly seen at Chidiya Tapu; beautiful Andaman Starlings occasionally formed large flocks as they moved slowly through the mid-canopy, clinging to the sides of

trunks as they busily fed, often with smaller numbers of Vernal Hanging-parrots. The most common component of feeding flocks was the noisy, charismatic Andaman Drongo often with the larger, sympatric Greater Racket-tailed. Our main target amongst the feeding flocks – Andaman Treepie – took some time to track down but we eventually enjoyed a quiet flock of 15 individuals feeding beside the roadside.

Away from the flocks, Green Imperial Pigeon were impressively common along with the recently-split endemic, Andaman Green Pigeon and we came across several flocks of these smart birds despite the shortage of fruiting tress. The seemingly scarce Andaman Woodpigeon was sighted on three occasions culminating in fine views of a perched bird of this distinctive species that is often confused with Green Imperial Pigeon. The smaller, flowering trees played host to colourful Andaman Bulbuls and Andaman Flowerpeckers both new splits from Black-headed and Plain respectively in the recently published *Birds of South Asia*. Lurking in the dense undergrowth, the distinctive Andaman Shama, yet another *Birds of South Asia* split was found singing its melodic song, noticeably different from its mainland counterpart, White-rumped Shama. The very common Andaman Coucal was regularly sighted in the thickets, even in the middle of the islands hub; Port Blair.

We regularly checked the marshes along the edge of Chidiya Tapu village and these were very productive, one area of rank vegetation played host to an array of wintering warblers, including Pallas's Grasshopper, Lanceolated, Oriental Reed, Thick-billed and even Black-browed Reed Warbler. The latter is yet to be confirmed for the Indian Subcontinent according to *Birds of South Asia* despite numerous records from the Andamans so it was pleasing to obtain several pictures of one of the two birds present. The reedy margins of a small pond got the pulses racing in the fading light as an obliging Eastern Baillon's Crake fed in the open, unconcerned, and was also seen in the company of Slaty-breasted Rail, here of the dark *obscurior* race.



Hume's Boobook © James Eaton



Andaman Boobook © Rob Hutchinson

One of the scarcest more difficult to find endemics is the Andaman Teal, once lumped with Grey and Sunda Teal from Australasia and Indonesia respectively. This species is becoming harder to find due to increasing disturbance of its favoured freshwater ponds and the destruction of several sites during the 2004 Tsunami. We travelled across much of South Andaman island in search of this species, witnessing the impact the tsunami had in this area, especially the destruction of the coastal mangroves. Despite scanning seemingly every available drop of water we failed to find the teal on our first two outings though waders numbers were impressive, including flocks of Red-necked and Long-toed Stint dotting the shoreline and larger numbers of Pacific Golden Plover and Lesser Sand Plover. Surprises were in store; Grey-headed Lapwing and Greater Painted Snipe, the latter possibly the first record for the island, were found feeding together at Sippighat. One patch of intact mangroves held a pair of Mangrove Whistler and finally a pair of Ruddy Kingfishers, a superb bird that we were able to get prolonged views of in the scope as they flashed their turquoise rumps in response to our presence. It was with much relief that we eventually came across a flock of cute Andaman Teal, up to 30 in total, feeding quietly in the corner of a well-vegetated pond on our third attempt. Driving back in the evening from our duck searching our continual scanning of the surrounding fields was rewarded with stunning views of Hume's Boobook, as we located several birds perched above rice fields

waiting for their prey. This species has been split from Brown Boobook due to its pronounced morphological differences and more subtle variations in its vocalisations. Though pride of place went to the perched Andaman Nightjar that we were able to obtain prolonged scope views of in our powerful beam close to the roadside. This species appears to be a difficult bird to come across as we only heard them briefly on one occasion despite repeated sorties at dusk and dawn.



Andaman Drongo © James Eaton



Andaman Cuckoo Dove © James Eaton



Andaman Starling © James Eaton



Andaman Barn Owl © Rob Hutchinson

To complete the Andaman endemic sweep we visited Mount Harriet on two occasions. The forest-loving Andaman Serpent Eagle gave us great looks as he perched quietly above the road, just as they did on several occasions at Chidiya Tapu. We found this site very quiet on our first visit with just an Andaman Shama and Large Cuckooshrike to show for our efforts until the evening when an Andaman Scops Owl gave walk-away views by the roadside. Our second visit was on our final morning when all we required was Andaman Cuckoo-shrike, a species appears which appears to be more regular here than Chidiya Tapu. As the morning progressed the birding began to slow, a flew-by Besra was new for the trip then a flock of Andaman Treepies appeared by the roadside, and as we attempted (unsuccessfully!) to photograph these

charismatic birds an Andaman Cuckooshrike appeared overhead, perching twice before vanishing, success! This surprisingly distinctive bird with fine barring on the underparts and red-eye has been split from its south-east Asian counterpart, Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike. With the endemics cleaned up we made our way back to Port Blair and toasted to our success and prepared for the final leg of our Christmas and New Year trip to the Subcontinent, Maharashtra and Gujarat.



Spot-breasted Woodpecker © Rob Hutchinson



Vernal Hanging Parrot © James Eaton

Systematic List

CICONIIFORMES: Ardeidae

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|----|----------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Purple Heron | <i>Ardea purpurea</i> | |
| 2 | Great Egret | <i>Ardea alba</i> | |
| 3 | Intermediate Egret | <i>Egretta intermedia</i> | |
| 4 | Little Egret | <i>Egretta garzetta</i> | |
| 5 | Pacific Reef Heron | <i>Egretta sacra</i> | |
| 6 | Chinese Pond Heron | <i>Ardeola bacchus</i> | |
| 7 | Eastern Cattle Egret | <i>Bubulcus coromandus</i> | |
| 8 | Striated Heron | <i>Butorides striata spodiogaster</i> | |
| 9 | Yellow Bittern | <i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i> | |
| 10 | Cinnamon Bittern | <i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i> | |

ANSERIFORMES: Anatidae

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---------|
| 11 | Lesser Whistling Duck | <i>Dendrocygna javanica</i> | |
| 12 | Andaman Teal | <i>Anas albogularis</i> | endemic |

FALCONIFORMES: Pandionidae

- | | | | |
|----|--------|--------------------------|--|
| 13 | Osprey | <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> | |
|----|--------|--------------------------|--|

FALCONIFORMES: Accipitridae

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------------|--|---------|
| 14 | Brahminy Kite | <i>Haliastur indus</i> | |
| 15 | White-bellied Sea Eagle | <i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i> | |
| 16 | Crested Serpent Eagle | <i>Spilornis cheela davisoni</i> | |
| 17 | Andaman Serpent Eagle | <i>Spilornis elgini</i> | endemic |
| 18 | Besra | <i>Accipiter virgatus abdulalii</i> | |
| 19 | Changeable Hawk-Eagle | <i>Spizaetus limnaeetus andamanensis</i> | |

GALLIFORMES: Phasianidae
20 Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* introduced

GRUIFORMES: Rallidae
21 Andaman Crane *Rallina canningi* endemic
22 Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus obscurior*
23 White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus insularis*
24 Eastern Baillon's Crane *Porzana [pusilla] pusilla*
25 Ruddy-breasted Crane *Porzana fusca* heard only
26 Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

CHARADRIIFORMES: Rostratulidae
27 Greater Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*

CHARADRIIFORMES: Charadriidae
28 Grey-headed Lapwing *Vanellus cinereus*
29 Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*
30 Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
31 Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius curonicus*
32 Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*

CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae
33 Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*
34 Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*
35 Eastern' Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa [limosa] melanuroides*
36 Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*
37 Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*
38 Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*
39 Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*
40 Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
41 Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
42 Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*
43 Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
44 Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*
45 Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*
46 Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

CHARADRIIFORMES: Sternidae
47 Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*

COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae
48 Andaman Wood Pigeon *Columba palumboides* endemic
49 Red Collared Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*
50 Andaman Cuckoo Dove *Macropygia rufipennis* endemic
51 Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica maxima*
52 Andaman Green Pigeon *Treron chloropterus* endemic
53 Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea*
54 Pied Imperial Pigeon *Ducula bicolor*

PSITTACIFORMES: Psittacidae
55 Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria magnirostris*
56 Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*
57 Long-tailed Parakeet *Psittacula longicauda tytleri*
58 Vernal Hanging Parrot *Loriculus vernalis*

CUCULIFORMES: Cuculidae			
59	Indian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	heard only
60	Violet Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus</i>	
61	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>	
62	Andaman Coucal	<i>Centropus andamanensis</i>	endemic
STRIGIFORMES: Tytonidae			
63	Andaman Masked Owl	<i>Tyto deroepstorffi</i>	endemic
STRIGIFORMES: Strigidae			
64	Andaman Scops Owl	<i>Otus balli</i>	endemic
65	Oriental Scops Owl	<i>Otus sunia modestus</i>	
66	Andaman Boobook	<i>Ninox affinis</i>	endemic
67	Hume's Boobook	<i>Ninox obscura</i>	endemic
CAPRIMULGIFORMES: Caprimulgidae			
68	Andaman Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus andamanicus</i>	endemic
APODIFORMES: Apodidae			
69	Glossy Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>	
70	Edible-nest Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus fuciphagus inexpectatus</i>	
71	Brown-backed Needletail	<i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>	
CORACIIFORMES: Alcedinidae			
72	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	
73	Black-backed Kingfisher	<i>Ceyx erithaca</i>	
74	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis osmastonii</i>	
75	Ruddy Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon coromanda mizorhina</i>	
76	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis saturatior</i>	
77	Black-capped Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon pileata</i>	
78	Collared Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus chloris davisoni</i>	
CORACIIFORMES: Meropidae			
79	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>	
PICIFORMES: Picidae			
80	Spot-breasted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos analis andamanensis</i>	
81	Andaman Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus hodgei</i>	endemic
PASSERIFORMES: Hirundinidae			
82	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
83	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica javanica</i>	
84	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	
85	Asian House Martin	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Motacillidae			
86	Forest Wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>	
87	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergi</i>	
	[Eastern Yellow Wagtail]	<i>[Motacilla tschutschensis simillima]</i>	
88	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Campephagidae			
89	Large Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina macei andamana</i>	
90	Andaman Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina dobsoni</i>	endemic

91	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	
92	Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus speciosus adamanensis</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Pycnonotidae			
93	Andaman Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus fuscoflavescens</i>	
94	Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus whistleri</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae			
95	Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Zoothera citrina andamanensis</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Sylviidae			
96	Lanceolated Warbler	<i>Locustella lanceolata</i>	
97	Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella certhiola</i>	
98	Black-browed Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus bistrigiceps</i>	
99	Oriental Reed-Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus orientalis</i>	
100	Thick-billed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus aedon</i>	
101	Dusky Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>	
102	Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides trochiloides</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Muscicapidae			
103	Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	
104	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis andamanensis</i>	
105	Andaman Shama	<i>Copsychus albiventris</i>	endemic
PASSERIFORMES: Monarchidae			
106	Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea tytleri</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Pachycephalidae			
107	Mangrove Whistler	<i>Pachycephala grisola grisola</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Nectariniidae			
108	Olive-backed Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis andamanicus</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Dicaeidae			
109	Andaman Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum virescens</i>	endemic
PASSERIFORMES: Zosteropidae			
110	Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Oriolidae			
111	Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis andamanensis</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Irenidae			
112	Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella andamanica</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Laniidae			
113	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus lucionensis</i>	
PASSERIFORMES: Dicruridae			
114	Andaman Drongo	<i>Dicrurus andamanensis</i>	endemic
115	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	
116	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	

PASSERIFORMES: Corvidae

117	Andaman Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta bayleyi</i>	endemic
118	Eastern Jungle Crow	<i>Corvus leuallantii adamanensis</i>	
119	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	

PASSERIFORMES: Sturnidae

120	Asian Glossy Starling	<i>Aplonis panayensis tyleri</i>	
121	Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa andamanensis</i>	
122	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	introduced
123	Andaman Starling	<i>Sturnia erythropygia andamanensis</i>	endemic

PASSERIFORMES: Passeridae

124	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	
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PASSERIFORMES: Estrildidae

125	White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata fumigata</i>	
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MAMMALS

Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>	
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125 species recorded including all 19 endemics, 2 introduced species and 2 heard only



Andaman Teal

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