



birdtour **ASIA**
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Philippines **Short custom tour to Luzon**

14-18th April 2008

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Participant: Flemming Jensen



Spotted Kingfisher, Mount Makiling © Rob Hutchinson / Birdtour Asia

This five day custom tour concentrated on three sites within striking distance of Manila – Mount Makiling, Subic Bay and Candaba Marsh with an emphasis on enjoying good views of some of the special birds of the Philippines at a relaxed birding pace. This was very successful and the 47 endemics or near-endemics seen ranged from the skulking White-browed Shama spectacular such as Scale-feathered Malkoha and Spotted Wood-Kingfisher to great views of more elusive Philippine Hawk-Cuckoo and Plain-bush Hen and even a brief view of the elusive Luzon Bleeding-heart.

We also enjoyed other great birds including wonderful views of Oriental Pratincoles, Barred Rail, Hooded and Red-bellied Pitta and great views of a rare Streaked Reed-Warbler.

The weather at this time was particularly not with near record temperatures in the Manila area so we made full use of the early mornings and afternoons when activity was greatest. Each morning was spent on the main track up the mountain, twice on the lower slopes and once higher by taking a rough jeep ride pre-dawn. These forest walks gave us some great birds including our main targets namely several excellent views of both male and female Spotted Wood-Kingfisher, the spectacular Scale-feather Malkoha, Black-chinned Fruit-Dove and Luzon Hornbill. We also saw more elusive species such as the striking White-browed Shama giving its beautiful, melodic song from the undergrowth and a stunning Red-bellied Pitta which quite fortuitously popped up onto a branch in the valley far below in absolutely while Rob was stood in absolutely the only spot from where it was visible! A short side trip of the nearby Botanical Gardens found a flowering tree with attendant group of Stripe-headed Rhabdornis, the commonest member of this endemic family.



Scale-feathered Malkoha, Mount Makiling, Luzon © Rob Hutchinson / Birdtour Asia

Other endemics in the forest were Elegant Tit, Flaming Sunbird, Striped, Red-keeled and Buzzing Flowerpeckers, Grey-backed Tailorbird, White-eared Brown-Dove, the ubiquitous Philippine Bulbul, Yellow-wattled Bulbul, Luzon Balicassiao, Guaiabero, Colasisi, Red-crested Malkoha, a brief Philippine Boobook and Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker.

Our afternoons were split between a productive stretch of river on the nearby campus, a nice grassland area and an area of rice fields which added a great variety of habitat and new species.

A stretch of river on the nearby campus is home to a pair of Indigo-banded Kingfishers which showed well with both the male sporting his double breast-band and female (single band) seen well, and also here the nearby trees attracted our only Lowland White-eyes of the trip together with very close views of White-throated Kingfisher, differing from birds elsewhere in Asia which show a full white bib. Both Barred Rail and Plain Bush-hen were seen on the river, the rail very well but the bush-hen quite briefly. A nearby area of carefully managed grassland was deserving of two visits; the first on a wet afternoon was the most productive as many birds fed on an open track to avoid the wet grass. This meant very prolonged views of endemic Spotted Buttonquail together with Barred Buttonquail, Barred Rail and extremely good views of a pair of Plain Bush-hens defying their usually elusive nature to parade in the open along a fallen tree trunk. Also here were many excellent open country species; Long-tailed Shrike, large numbers of glorious Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, Golden-headed Cisticola and a rare opportunity to study Tawny and Striated Grassbirds side by side. Our second visit in better weather produced briefer views of the buttonquails but great scope views of a multicoloured Hooded Pitta where a tour highlight. The skies in these open areas were always full of birds and alongside the hundreds of Blue-tailed Bee-eaters were a group of Oriental Pratincoles, Island and Glossy Swiftlets, House Swift, Asian Palm Swift and Striated Swallow.

Our visit to an area of rice fields added a whole new suite of species. Black-crowned Night-Herons and Cinnamon Bittern, a brief Greater Painted-snipe but prolonged scope views of a close White-browed Crake were highlights on the water-bird front, and overhead the uncommon Philippine race of Oriental Skylark was performing its display flight.

Leaving Mount Makiling behind we made an early start to be at Candaba Marsh early and our timing was impeccable as we drove through the rice fields at dawn towards Candaba we stopped to enjoy close views of three magnificent Eastern Grass Owls quartering the fields. Moving on to the marsh we met with great success when we found among the Oriental Reed-Warblers we found a Streaked Reed Warblers feeding in the open on the edge of the grasses and had nice looks at this rare species which is a wintering and passage bird in the Philippines from its unknown breeding areas in China. On the marsh we found many wildfowl still present including head numbers of cinnamon-headed Philippine Ducks and very smart breeding plumaged Shoveler and Garganey. The marsh appeared to be thronging with Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, iridescent Philippine Gallinules, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Purple Heron, Cinnamon and Yellow Bitterns and a single Black Bittern was seen well in flight. Overhead we had quite superb views of hawking Oriental Pratincoles and we spent some time admiring their elegant and graceful flight.



*Philippine Duck, Candaba Marshes, Luzon and Indigo-banded Kingfisher, Mount Makiling, Luzon
© Rob Hutchinson / Birdtour Asia*



*Oriental Pratincole (left) and Eastern Grass-Owl (right),
Candaba Marshes, Luzon © Rob Hutchinson / Birdtour Asia*

As the heat rose we headed off to enjoy breakfast then continued on our way to Subic Bay. After settling into our plush hotel we rested during the scorching midday heat before venturing into the nearby naval magazine for our afternoon birding. The roads criss-crossing the area are now more or less disused and

the open forest remnants make for great birding. In no time at all we had added Blue-naped Parrot, great views of Guaiabero, Whiskered Treeswift and one of the most hoped-for birds of the tour, the bizarre naked-headed Coledo. The rest of the afternoon continued well and in addition to the commoner Blue-throated Bee-eaters, Green Imperial-Pigeons, and Philippine Green-Pigeons we found a stunning Yellow-breasted Fruit-Dove, Philippine Falconet, Philippine Cuckoo-Dove and had some great views of Luzon Hornbills. We also did well with the real specialties of this area, which are absent from Mount Makiling; a group of Blackish Cuckoo-shrikes, Green Racquet-tails including some with full spoon-shaped tails and an obliging group of scarce Luzon White-fronted Tits which are so often difficult to located.

The next morning we visited the same areas again but with even greater bird activity. The Luzon White-fronted Tits put on a great display, singing from the treetops and a White-bellied Woodpecker feeding in the scope began proceedings. Then our walk through the forest found White-lore Oriole, two brief Sooty Woodpeckers, Philippine Tailorbird, Philippine Fairy Bluebird, a male Philippine Trogon and a surprise Luzon Bleeding-heart sitting quietly by the side of the trail which we spotted just too late to enjoy views before he flew a short distance into the forest and disappeared.

This rounded off a very successful trip with our total of 134 species including many lasting memories of these great birds.

Grebes

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Hérons, Egrets, Bitterns

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*
 Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*
 Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
 Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus (ibis) coromandus*
 Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
 Cinnamon Bittern *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*
 Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*
 Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis*

Dabbling Ducks

Philippine Duck *Anas luzonica* Philippine endemic
 Garganey *Anas querquedula*
 Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Buzzards, Kites, Eagles, Vultures, Harriers, Hawks

Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis*
 Chinese Goshawk *Accipiter soloensis*
 Philippine Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis holospilus* Philippine endemic

Falconets, Falcons

Philippine Falconet *Microhierax erythrogenys* Philippine endemic

Junglefowl, Pheasants, Partridges, Quails

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus philippensis* (H)

Buttonquails

Barred Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator*
 Spotted Buttonquail *Turnix ocellatus* Philippine endemic

Rails, Crakes, Waterhens, Coots

Barred Rail *Gallirallus torquatus torquatus*
 White-browed Crake *Porzana cinerea ocularis*
 Plain Bush-hen *Amaurornis olivacea* Philippine endemic
 White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*
 Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
 Philippine Swampphen *Porphyrio pulverulentus* Philippine endemic

Painted Snipes

Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*

Curlews, Godwits, Sandpipers, SnipesWood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola***Pratincoles**Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum***Stilts, Avocets**Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus***Terns, Noddies**Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus***Doves, Pigeons**Philippine Green-Pigeon *Treron (pompadora) axillaris* Philippine endemicWhite-eared Brown-Dove *Phapitreron leucotis* Philippine endemicssp. *leucotis*Yellow-breasted Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus occipitalis* Philippine endemicBlack-chinned Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus leclancheri* Near endemicGreen Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula aenea*ssp. *aenea*Philippine Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia tenuirostris* Philippine endemicIsland Collared-Dove *Streptopelia bitorquata*Red Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata*Common Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* (H)Luzon Bleeding-heart *Gallicolumba luzonica* Philippine endemic**Lorikeets, Cockatoos, Parrots, Racquet-tails, Hanging Parrots**Guaiabero *Bolbopsittacus lunulatus* Philippine endemicBlue-naped Parrot *Tanygnathus lucionensis* Near endemicssp. *lucionensis*Green Racquet-tail *Prioniturus luconensis* Philippine endemicColasisi *Loriculus philippensis* Philippine endemicssp. *philippensis***Cuckoos, Malkohas, Coucals**Philippine Hawk-Cuckoo *Cuculus pectoralis* Philippine endemicRusty-breasted Cuckoo *Cacomantis sepucralis* (H)Philippine Drongo-Cuckoo *Surniculus velutinus* Philippine endemic (H)Common Koel *Eudynamis scolopaceus* (H)Scale-feathered Malkoha *Lepidogrammus cumingi* Philippine endemicRed-crested Malkoha *Dasylophus superciliosus* Philippine endemicLesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*Philippine Coucal *Centropus viridis* Philippine endemicRufous Coucal *Centropus unirufus* Philippine endemic**Grass Owls**Eastern Grass-Owl *Tyto capensis amauronota***Owls**Philippine Scops-Owl *Otus megalotis* Philippine endemic (H)Philippine Boobook *Ninox (philippensis) philippensis* Philippine endemic**Swifts, Needletails**Island Swiflet *Aerodramus amelis* Philippine endemicGlossy Swiflet *Collocalia esculenta*House Swift *Apus nipalensis*Asian Palm-Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis***Treeswifts**

Whiskered Treeswift

Hemiprocne comata major

Trogons

Philippine Trogon

Harpactes ardens

Philippine endemic

Rollers

Dollarbird

Eurystomus orientalis

Kingfishers

Common Kingfisher

Alcedo atthis bengalensis

Indigo-banded Kingfisher
ssp. *cyanopecta*

Alcedo cyanopectus

Philippine endemic

White-throated Kingfisher

Halcyon (smyrnensis) gularis

White-collared Kingfisher

Todirhamphus chloris

Spotted Wood-Kingfisher

Actenoides lindsayi

Philippine endemic

Bee-eaters

Blue-throated Bee-eater

Merops viridis

Blue-tailed Bee-eater

Merops philippinus

Hornbills

Luzon Hornbill

Penelopides manillae

Philippine endemic

Rufous Hornbill

Buceros hydrocorax

Philippine endemic (H)

ssp. *hydrocorax*

Barbets

Coppersmith Barbet

Megalaima haemacephala

ssp. *haemacephala*

Woodpeckers

Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker

Dendrocopos maculatus

Philippine endemic

ssp. *validirostris* / *malulatus*

Sooty Woodpecker

Mulleripicus funebris

Philippine endemic

ssp. *fuliginosus*

White-bellied Woodpecker

Dryocopus javensis

Greater Flameback

Chrysocolaptes lucidus

ssp. *haematribon*

Pittas

Red-bellied Pitta

Pitta erythrogaster

ssp. *erythrogaster*

Hooded Pitta

Pitta sordida

ssp. *sordida*

Martins, Swallows

Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

Pacific Swallow

Hirundo tahitica

Striated Swallow

Cecropis striolata

Larks

Oriental Skylark

Alauda gulgula

Cuckoo-shrikes, Trillers, Minivets

Bar-bellied Cuckoo-shrike

Coracina striata

ssp. *striata*

Blackish Cuckoo-shrike

Coracina coerulescens

Philippine endemic

Bulbuls

Yellow-vented Bulbul

Pycnonotus goiavier

Yellow-wattled Bulbul

Pycnonotus urostictus

Philippine Bulbul

Ixos philippinus

Philippine endemic

Drongos

Luzon Balicassiao *Dicrurus (balicassius) balicassius* Philippine endemic

Orioles, Fairy-Bluebirds

White-lored Oriole *Oriolus albiloris* Philippine endemic

Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*

Philippine Fairy-Bluebird *Irena cyanogastra* Philippine endemic

Crows

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Tits

Elegant Tit *Parus elegans* Philippine endemic

ssp. *elegans*

Luzon White-fronted Tit *Parus (semilarvatus) semilarvatus* Philippine endemic

Rhabdornis (Creepers)

Stripe-headed Rhabdornis *Rhabdornis mystacalis* Philippine endemic

Robins, Shamans, Thrushes

Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis deuteronymus*

White-browed Shama *Copsychus (luzoniensis) luzoniensis* Philippine endemic

Old World Warblers

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*

Oriental Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis*

Streaked Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus sorghophilus*

Tawny Grassbird *Megalurus timoriensis*

Striated Grassbird *Megalurus palustris forbesi*

Philippine Tailorbird *Orthotomus castaneiceps* Philippine endemic

Grey-backed Tailorbird *Orthotomus derbianus* Philippine endemic

Bright-capped Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

Flycatchers

Grey-streaked Flycatcher *Muscicapa griseisticta*

Pied Fantail *Rhipidura javanica*

Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*

ssp. *azurea*

Whistlers

Yellow-bellied Whistler *Pachycephala philippinensis* Philippine endemic (H)

Wagtails, Pipits

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla simillima*

Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus lugubris*

Wood-swallows

White-breasted Wood-swallow *Artamus leucorhynchus*

Shrikes

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach nasutus*

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

Starlings

Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*

Coleto *Sarcops calvus* Philippine endemic

Crested Myna *Acridotheres cristatellus*

Sunbirds, Spiderhunters

Grey-throated Sunbird

Anthreptes griseigularis

Philippine endemic

Olive-backed Sunbird

Cinnyris jugularis

Purple-throated Sunbird

Leptocoma sperata

ssp. *sperata* / *trochilus*

Flaming Sunbird

Aethopyga flammans

Philippine endemic

Flowerpeckers

Striped Flowerpecker

Dicaeum aeruginosum

Philippine endemic

ssp. *striatissimum*

Red-keeled Flowerpecker

Dicaeum australe

Philippine endemic

Buzzing Flowerpecker

Dicaeum hypoleucum

Philippine endemic

ssp. *obscurum*

White-eyes

Lowland White-eye

Zosterops meyeri

Philippine endemic

Old World Sparrows, Weavers

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

Passer montanus

Avadavats, Parrotfinches, Munias

White-bellied Munia

Lonchura leucogastra

Scaly-breasted Munia

Lonchura punctulata

Black-headed Munia

Lonchura malacca



White-bellied Woodpecker (left) and White-fronted Tit (right), Subic Bay, Luzon
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