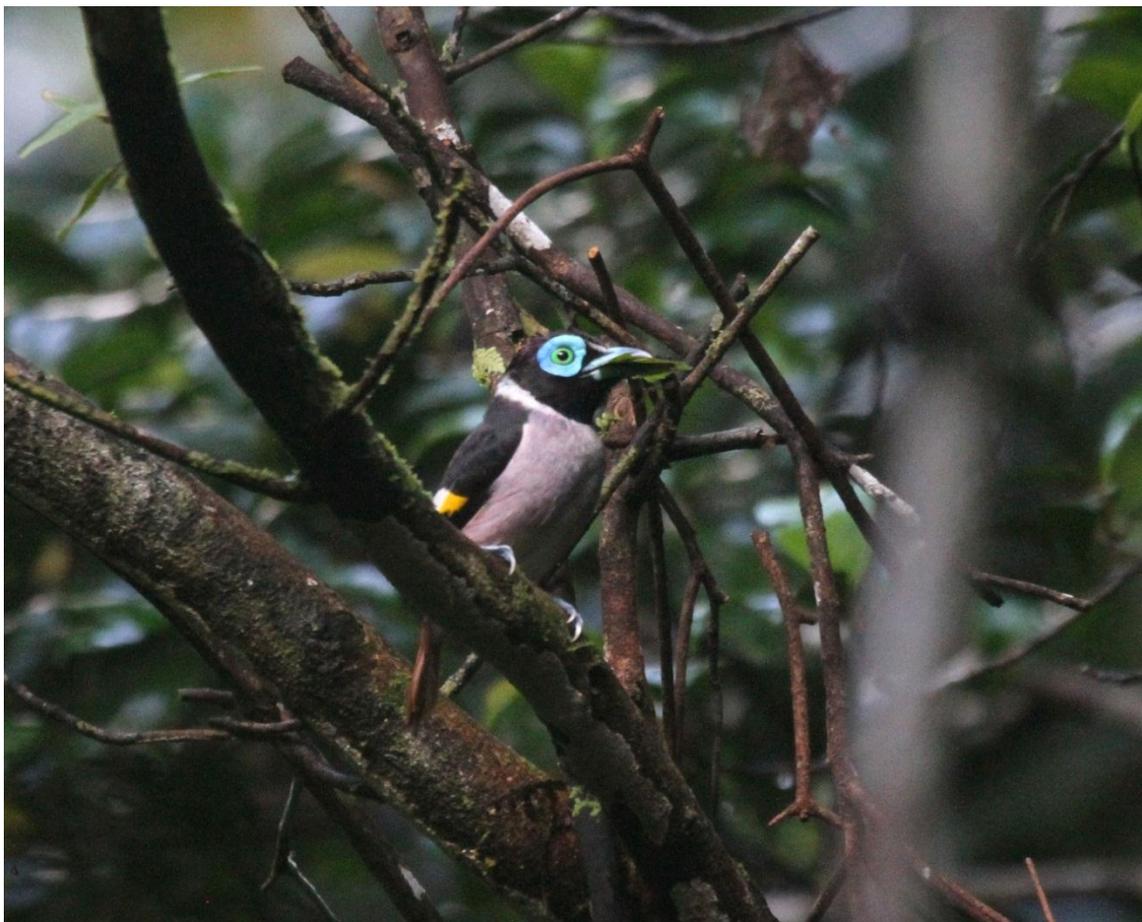


# TROPICAL BIRDING



**Philippines: Island archipelago endemics**  
(including Sierra Madre expedition). Custom Tour: 8 – 30 April 2012



*Mindanao Wattled Broadbill. Birds, anywhere in the world, don't come much finer than this.*

## Tour Leaders: **Keith Barnes and Mark Villa**

Photos: Nick Athanas, Sam Woods and Keith Barnes

### **Introduction:**

With our Asian office in neighbouring Taiwan, the Philippines is becoming an increasingly popular destination for Tropical Birding and we ran two different custom tours to the islands in March and April 2012, this trip report covers one of these tours. This tour took the form of three distinct stages, concentrating on the three most accessible, endemic rich islands in the sprawling Philippine archipelago, that encompasses more than 7,000 islands in total. We began first on Mindanao, the second largest and most southerly of the main islands, that is especially noteworthy for birders as the last stronghold of the Philippine National Bird, the magnificent Philippine Eagle; we then hit the 'main' island of Luzon and managed a special expedition to the tough to reach forests of the Sierra Madre mountains. Luzon is the largest of all the islands and where the bustling capital Manila is located; finally we ventured to the thin tropical island strip of Palawan, that sits between the Sulu Sea to the east and the South China Sea to the west, dividing this paradise island from the huge island of Borneo farther west. Biogeographically Palawan is very interesting, sharing more in common with the typically southeast Asian avifauna of Borneo to the west than the other Philippine islands to the east. However, despite this, there are almost 25 endemics on this lush forested island that is bordered with pristine white sandy beaches that make it an idyllic holiday retreat for birders, snorkelers and backpackers alike. We ensured we spent time in both montane and lowland areas on both Luzon and Mindanao to target the endemics particular to those elevations, before finishing on the idyllic beach-covered island of Palawan, for some of the Philippines' easiest and most satisfying birding.

Any bird tour to the Philippines inevitably focuses on endemics, as these islands are packed with hundreds of spectacular birds found nowhere else on Earth. However, endemism is a relative thing these days, with some taxonomies being far more liberal than others in their applications. This tour was no exception where we recorded somewhere between 131 (conservative taxonomy) and 146 (liberal taxonomy) endemics, including some of the Philippines' (and indeed southeast Asia's) top birds. The Sierra Madre section was of course the highlight of this trip, and although getting there required some serious effort, the magical and intact forests here produced many seldom-seen gems of the archipelago, including stellar views of the bulky Whiskered Pitta (we finished the trip with great looks at all four of the Philippines pittas), an amazing Luzon Bleeding-Heart, Cream-breasted Fruit-Dove, the cute and very seldomly-seen Philippine Dwarf Kingfisher and Furtive Flycatcher, the high-pitched Rabor's Wren-Babbler, Golden-crowned Babbler, Bicolored and Buzzing Flowerpeckers, Black-and-White Triller, White-lored Oriole and Philippine Fairy Bluebird. Another of the trip's major highlights was finding the increasingly rare Mindanao Wattled Broadbill (in fact we had a nest which seems to have never been formally described) and day-roosting Philippine Eagle-Owl (another serious rarity). However, we also did amazing well at the other birding sites racking up a great selection of Philippine endemics. Among these were 12 species of birds of prey including the leviathan Great Philippine Eagle, Luzon Hawk-Eagle, Steere's Honey-Buzzard and the diminutive Philippine Falconet. Parrots are a huge feature of this trip and we recorded all 4 species of endemic racquet-tail amongst the



seven parrots. An incredible collection of endemic cuckoos were a major feature of this trip, and despite having to put in hard work to see them, we eventually scored great looks at Philippine Drongo-cuckoo, the startling Red-crested Malkoha, elegant Scale-feathered Malkoha, the bizarre and gregarious ‘giant-babbler-like’ Rufous Coucal, incredibly pretty Black-faced Coucal and widespread and common Philippine Coucal. We spent considerable time out night-birding and amongst the twelve species of nightbird recorded we had to be satisfied with looks at Philippine Nightjar, the fabulous and very scarce Philippine Eagle Owl, Philippine ‘Everett’s’ Scops-Owl, Giant Scops-Owl, Chocolate Boobook, Philippine Hawk-Owl, Mindanao Hawk-Owl and the evil-eyed Philippine Frogmouth. Amongst the seven swiftlets we listed four endemics, and we saw all seven endemic species of Filipino Kingfisher including great views of the stellar Indigo-banded, Silvery and both Blue-capped and Spotted Wood Kingfishers. All five possible endemic hornbills were seen including the immense and gorgeous Rufous and scarce Writhed Hornbills, and we also did very well for woodpeckers including all six possible species, and great views of both traditional endemics Sooty and Philippine Woodpecker, as well as the two additional endemic and distinctive Flameback taxa! The fantail and flycatcher groups were another where we maximized the endemic possibilities, including the cute Black-and-cinnamon Fantail, bizarre Blue Paradise-Flycatcher, and the striking Short-crested Monarch. Slightly less spectacular, but still highly local, we saw all eight traditional species of bulbul (six endemic), and five species of endemic tailorbird including the spectacular Rufous-headed and White-browed Tailorbirds. The forest understory was enlivened by the songs of the gorgeous Palawan Blue-Flycatcher, White-browed and White-vented Shamas, all of which were seen well. We did well with babblers scoring ten species, nine of which were endemics. Nine species of flowerpecker and 12 sunbirds including 14 endemics was a major haul of this colorful and playful group of birds. We also saw both species of expected Rhabdornis and Leafbird, as well as the two odd endemic starlings, the Apo Myna and Coletto, not to mention several local white-eyes including the Cinnamon Ibon which is increasingly recognized as another endemic Filipino family. The incredible, fairly-recently described Bukidnon Woodcock, and very rare Philippine Cockatoo, seldom-seen Ashy Thrush, stunning Red-eared Parrotfinch, good views of the rapidly vanishing Pink-bellied Imperial Pigeon, White-cheeked Bullfinch, spectacular Philippine Trogon, and awesome Steere’s (Azure-breasted) Pitta, and ever active Sulphur-billed Nuthatch were all added to the burgeoning endemics list. Added to the endemic-haul we also had great views of many scarce if slightly more widespread species like Malaysian Plover and Blue-breasted Quail. However, amongst these simply amazing bird species we were also struck by the beauty of the limestone forests of Palawan, and the fragile nature of much of the remaining fragments of forest at PICOP and on Mt Kitinglad. The Philippines undoubtedly holds some of the finest birds in Asia, and by extension, the world, and chances to see these disappearing jewels are unfortunately rapidly ebbing away.

### **Itinerary:**

April 7	Arrival in Manila, Afternoon outing in Manila area
April 8	Manila – Cagayan de Oro, MINDANAO, travel to Kitinglad
April 9-10	Full days Mt Kitinglad, MINDANAO
April 11	Drive to Bislig, MINDANAO
April 12-14	Full days PICOP, MINDANAO



April 15	Morning PICOP, PM travel; to Davao, ON Davao, MINDANAO
April 16	Morning outing to Montfort Bat Colony SAMAL, pm fly to Manila LUZON
April 17	Manila – Tuguegarao: PM Walk to Sawa Camp, Sierra Madre Mts, LUZON
April 18-19	Sierra Madre Mts, LUZON
April 20	Sierra Madre Mts to Tuguegarao, ON Tuguegarao, LUZON
April 21	Tuguegarao to Manila, ON Manila, LUZON
April 22	AM: Candaba Marsh, PM Subic Bay, ON Subic, LUZON
April 23	Subic to Makiling, LUZON
April 24	Full day Makiling, LUZON
April 25	La Mesa Geopark, LUZON
April 26	Manila to Palawan, PALAWAN
April 27	Full day St Paul's, PALWAN
April 28	AM: Sabang, PM: Pandan Island, PALAWAN
April 29	Iwahig Penal Colony, PALAWAN
April 30	Palawan to Manila, and International departure

## DAILY LOG

### 7th April: Manila (LUZON)

Although today was just scheduled to be an arrival day (catch up with 12 hours of jetlag!!), news filtering out of the grapevine was that there was a family of Philippine Eagle-Owl still present at a day roost on the outskirts of Manila changed the whole picture. This is a very scarce bird, and it has been seldom seen in the last 10 years, it was also a lifer for me. Everyone was keen to try and get this mega, and after all, sleep can be caught up on when you get home, so we headed out to the site almost immediately after lunch. The surrounding scrub did not offer much except a few grassbirds. On arrival we were asked by a guard if we were here to see the big birds. We said yes, and not long after were looking at an incredible, awake Philippine Eagle Owl. The surrounding scrub also produced our first Red-sided Flowerpecker and a very cooperative Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker. A short walk around some waterside vegetation afterwards got us our first Barred Rail, which is a quite a stellar creature. Soon, we were thinking about our very long day tomorrow, and with little to be gained by staying out we returned to Manila for our last night in civilization before we headed to the wilds of Mindanao.



*They don't come much finer than the immaculate broad-headed, long-billed and huge-footed Philippine Eagle-Owl!*

### **8th April: Manila - Mount Kitanglad (MINDANAO)**

After an early wake up we were soon winging our way to the southern island of Mindanao. A neat breakfast at the coast in Cagayan de Oro was a great way to start the day off. We then headed for the base of the impressive Mt Kitinglad where we transferred into a heavy duty truck that took us along muddy farm roads until we came to a halt. It was a short 1 km walk up to the camp area, but no sooner had we started the walk and we lucked onto an incredible Long-tailed Bush Warbler that behaved uncharacteristically by climbing onto a stalk and singing for all to see. And that was even without any

playback...remarkable start indeed. Although the camp (del Monte lodge) at Kitinglad is basic, Carlito and his family do a fabulous job of looking after birders here and even bring up ice to keep the beers and cooldrinks cold. After a great and filling lunch we got down to birding in earnest! We were delighted as we started picking up some of the more common endemics including White-eared Dove, and clambering Philippine Coucal. Philippine Bulbuls gave up easily, but they are not nearly as bold as their cousins in other parts of the old world. A flowering tree quickly brought us a burst of nectarivores including the Fire-breasted and the endemic Olive-capped Flowerpecker. The open areas held many Tawny Grassbirds, and eventually we found what we were looking for, a flock that held Philippine Woodpecker, Sulphur-billed Nuthatch, Yellow-bellied Whistler, Elegant Tit, Mountain Leaf-warbler, Island Flycatcher, Mountain White-eye, Cinnamon Ibon (which resembles a New World furniaarid) and a bunch of Short-tailed Starlings. It is simply awesome when half the members of a flock are endemic lifers, and this is almost always what your first flock in the Philippines will involve for tour participants. It was starting to get late, so we made our way down the hillslope, but the excitement wasn't over yet as we encountered a Stripe-breasted Rhabdornis perched up in the distance and were able to get prolonged scope views! At dusk we positioned ourselves at the clearing behind Del Monte and unfortunately only heard roding Bukidnon Woodcock (views would have to wait till tomorrow night), a bird that was only described in 1993. After dark we made our first foray for the many nightbirds in the area, and the Philippine Frogmouth performed in exemplary fashion perching right over our heads. What a day!



*Today was fabulous for the flock birds of Kitinglad, with Olive-capped Flowerpecker (left) and Cinnamon Ibon (right) two of the several endemics that we got to see.*

## **9-10th April: Mount Kitanglad (MINDANAO)**

Over the next couple of days it was our goal to hunt down the immense Philippine Great Eagle, also known as the Philippine Monkey-eating Eagle. It is one of the largest eagles in the world and it has a forbidding reputation. Seeing one is no disappointment. One the first day we awoke to stars. That is a really good sign as it means the clouds are not above you, and you should have a decent chance to see this beast soaring overhead. After breakfast, with dawn breaking, we pretty much hauled ourselves up to the lookout site as quickly as we could. For the first hour we saw little other than Oriental Honey-buzzard, and then we got our first stroke of luck when a Philippine Serpent Eagle soared over, but the big one just wasn't cooperating early on. Eventually a Great Eagle started to call it's low monkey-like call. The excitement mounted but try as we may we could not find the bird. We decided to climb a little higher, and eventually Carlito found the bird perched in the open calling away. The looks were distant, but still fabulous and we watched the bird perch hunt and fly around a little bit and call for the next 30 minutes. Having experienced Steller's and Harpy Eagles before, that are equally impressive in their huge bulk, and

perhaps more so in terms of their formidable claws that are close to the size of a bears, these others simply cannot match the Great Philippine for the huge bill that gives the impression that it is a much more formidable raptor. It always is going to be one of the main reasons to visit the Philippines and we were delighted that the main “pressure bird” was out of the way early on, and also that it was seen pretty well! So after a snack we started heading further up the hill. We climbed up higher and higher in an attempt to see the Apo birds and soon enough we had a group of the bizarre Apo Myna, that are unlike any other myna in southeast Asia what with their weird Mohican hairstyles, formed by their unique crest of fine black filaments, and bold yellow patch of bare facial skin around the eye. We then hiked into the mossy highlands and located the Apo Sunbird at a nest and then we settled in for lunch. Our walk back down scored a bevy of great birds including superb views at the large Mindanao White-eye and MacGregor’s Cuckooshrike. Over the next couple of days we added some other great birds to our Kitinglad lists including superb views of both Red-eared Parrotfinch and superb White-cheeked Bullfinch, as well as Philippine Cuckoo-Dove, Yellow-breasted Fruit-Dove, Philippine Hanging-Parrot, Mindanao Racket-tail, Philippine Swiftlet, Whiskered Treeswift, the neat Black-and-Cinnamon Fantail and the cracking Rufous-headed Tailorbird, Little Pied Flycatcher, Brown Tit-Babbler, and Grey-hooded Sunbird. We also caught up with great views of Bukidnon Woodcock, and superb views of nesting Philippine Nightjar and hawk-sized Great Eared Nightjar.



*The cryptic Philippine Nightjar (top left) bizarre punk-crested Apo Myna (top right) and delicate Black-and-cinnamon Fantail (bottom).*



*The incredible Philippine Frogmouth is a must-see bird on any Philippine tour. With eyes like the Cheshire-cat in Alice in Wonderland you have to be careful not to be hypnotized, even if you are mesmerized by it!*

### **11th April: Kitanglad – Bislig (MINDANAO)**

With it mostly being a long travel day today we did some light birding at the camp after breakfast adding very little, and then made our way down the slippery track back towards the truck that would return us to “civilization”. We spend most of the day in the car, enjoy a fabulous Pizza-lunch at Batuan en route, resting up for our time in the lowland jungles of PICOP. Have to say that the cold beer and warm shower tonight were very appreciated and much deserved!

### **12-14th April: PICOP (MINDANAO) Lowland forest.**

PICOP is potentially one of the most depressing places to bird in the Philippines, as the lowland forests here were part of a large logging concession. Although “officially” logging has stopped, now hundreds, (if not thousands) of illegal settlers are also working their way to deforesting the area further. Thus every new trip to PICOP can be full of surprises due to the rapidly changing nature of the habitat there.



*Birding PICOP can be pretty depressing, but this is still one of the best, safest and most accessible places to see lowland Mindanao endemics.*

For this reason we were grateful for the services of the local guide Zardo Goring, whose up-to-the-minute information helped us concentrate our efforts on the best available forest patches. Despite all this gloom, for sure I would say any Philippine bird tour would be foolish to miss this place as it is the key site for many endemics and specifically for some very cool Mindanao lowland specialties, many of which are not possible elsewhere, and are often contenders for birds of the trip on any tour. This trip was no exception and we had three really good days birding in the area, and despite some heavy rain on two of these days,

we left little behind due to some extraordinary luck. Perhaps the finest birds of our trip were the amazing Mindanao Wattled Broadbill, that had a nest that we were able to locate and also a very co-operative Streaked Ground Babbler that paraded in front of us like a stage performer. We were also very lucky with nightbirds here and were able to locate Giant Scops Owl, Philippine 'Everett's' Scops Owl, Chocolate Boobook and Mindanao Hawk-Owl all within a single morning's owling session! Soon after it got light we started seeing some of the Mindanao lowland specialties that were our prime targets at PICOP. In the open trees along the road, we found a number of Philippine Orioles singing from the treetops, a few Rufous-fronted Tailorbirds (a recent split from Philippine Tailorbird) were feeding in some high vine tangles, while in the undergrowth another pair of key Mindanao tailorbirds - White-browed Tailorbird - were lured out with a little strategic use of playback. Coucals are another bird group that few get excited about when pouring through the field guide before coming to the Philippines, although Black-faced Coucal, with its distinctive sulphury yellow head, dusty blue tail and bold black face mask must be a contender for the world's finest coucal. It is subtle and stunning and completely different from any others out there. The artificial open nature of the forest along this road (due to the recent deforestation) can be advantageous for picking out some birds that otherwise would be tricky - like a canopy dwelling pair of Naked-faced Spiderhunters, several Yellowish Bulbuls; while the pair of inconspicuous Philippine Leafbirds chose a heavily-leaved canopy to hide in, where their green plumage matched exactly the color of the surrounding leaves making the birds incredibly hard to find, even when fully framed amongst the leaves in the scope! Overhead the distinctive silhouette of a pair of Philippine Needletails with their characteristic 'butter-knife' wings were picked out easily as they flew low over us, that even allowed us to catch a glimpse of their clean white armpits. Many new endemics were coming thick and fast, including a pair of Philippine Trogons, a stunning Silvery Kingfisher (a highly localized endemic) hanging out on its usual small, dirty roadside pool, and several noisy gangs of Mindanao (Tarctic) Hornbills. We got lucky with several calling Red-bellied Pitta and Hooded Pitta were also cooperative, hopping down clear trails in front of us. On playing the tape the bird approached until it was soon standing right in front of us brazenly where we could all conveniently soak it up for a short while before it decided to move on. We also bumped into our first Steere's (Barred) Honey-Buzzard of the tour (below)



We also concentrated our efforts on a different road - road 4/2, that in complete contrast to road 1/4 has some good continuous unbroken stretches of forest along it (largely by default, as the limestone substrate does not lend itself to farming after clearing, so that the settlers have, for now at least, left this bird-rich forest alone). We spent some time birding this deserted forest-fringed road, in between the bouts of rain. Things were a little slow initially, but things picked up later and we logged some of PICOP's very finest birds. Soon after arriving, we focused our efforts on the road itself, and found our main target - the stunning Steere's (Azure-breasted) Pitta that called from the undergrowth, and then we had it brazenly hopping down the middle of the road in front of us. One of the Philippines' most sought-after birds. Many of the birds we were hoping for on that day were flock species, and although we never really got the one big flock we had been hoping for we managed to find some small flocks along the way and pick up these key endemics in these bird parties, like Rusty-crowned Babbler, Pygmy Babbler and several superb bright orange Rufous Paradise-Flycatchers. The main flock species we were keen to get, however, was the pair of endemic Monarchs - the distinctive metallic series of notes soon had us homing in on a pair of Short-crested Monarchs, that circled us several times allowing everyone a look or two, although the divine Celestial Monarch, we heard a couple of times, but we could never intice it in despite considerable effort. PICOP's degraded state no doubt contribute to the slow disappearance of this species. We also spent quality time at another fragment of forest, along road 4. The main purpose for our visiting this area was to try and pick up some hornbills as we were missing one species that is special to these lowland Mindanao forests. We lucked out seeing a group of giant Rufous and a pair of Writhed Hornbills. Road four also delivered Blue Fantail, and another Short-crested Monarch. Zardo recommended checking out an area where the racquet-tails have nested in the not too distant past. On getting onto the trail we soon heard the distinctive high-pitched calls of the Blue-crowned Racquet-tail and although it took considerable patience and much persistence, we eventually looked up to see one of these impressive endemics fly in, and land conveniently on an open snag above the clearing we were standing in, where we could admire the needle-fine racquets in full detail. One of the afternoons we decided to bird the grasses and marshland that border Bislig airfield, that despite apparently being an active airfield clearly must have very little traffic judging by the number of locals exercising and fishing around the edges of the it! A quick kick about the grassy margins produced the hoped for Blue-breasted Quail, along with a few Paddyfield (Oriental) Pipits. While a few Wandering Whistling-Ducks and Philippine Ducks flying around the airfield betrayed the presence of some hidden pools in the area, while Clamorous Reed-Warblers sang from beside the reed fringed runway. We also scored several bittern species including Black, Yellow and Cinnamon Bitterns, not a bad bittern-afternoon! Because the clients did not need Australian Grass-Owl we did not persist and decided to head back for a bit of rest at the Paper Country Inn.





*The White-eared Brown Dove is common throughout the Philippines, but is still a great looking bird (above). The snazziest kingfisher in the Philippines is to my mind the startling Silvery Kingfisher (right); while PICOP also holds the incredible Steere's Pitta (left), we managed great looks at all seven endemic kingfishers and all four of the Philippines pitta species on our tour.*

### **15th April: Bislig – Davao (LUZON)**

We spent the morning working road 4, where a giant rain storm put paid to my camera. All in all, a not too successful day. We then had much travel to do, so after lunch we jumped in the van and headed for Davao, which took us several hours. Once in Davao, we checked into a fancy waterfront hotel and enjoyed a delightful dinner, one of the best I have ever had in the Philippines. We spent the night in Davao because as a custom tour, the clients had asked us to include the world famous Montfort Bat caves on Samal Island, hence our overnight in Davao.

### **16th April: Davao – Samal (Montfort Bat Caves) – Manila (LUZON)**

After a leisurely breakfast, our transport took us to the ferry that escorted us to Samal Island. A short 20 minute drive and we were at the largest Fruit Bat colony in the world, holding nearly 2 million Geoffrey Rousette Fruit Bats. It was very nicely set up and a delightful young lady explained the history of the conservation efforts here. One was left to think, if they can conserve bats, surely they can conserve some of the dwindling bird habitat remaining on the archipelago. After a good lunch we made our way to the airport and flew to Manila, where the next leg of our adventure would begin.



*The Geoffrey's Fruit Bat colony was neither stinky nor disgusting. Actually it was quite a phenomenal natural history attraction.....*

### **17th April: Manila – Tuguegerao – Sierra Madre Mountains (LUZON)**

All in all, today was not the greatest of days. It started with a mass of traffic in Manila, and us cutting our flight to Tuguegerao much finer than we would have liked. The after arrival in northern Luzon, we made brief preparations to trek into the Sierra Madres and were on our way. It was blisteringly hot, and we started walking at around midday (Karen was smart enough to request a horse from the outset), and eventually the rest of us realized that the sheer heat precluded walking at the kind of pace that we required to get to where we wanted to go, so before long, we were all on horseback. The horseback riding was neither nice, nor comfortable, but was still nicer and more comfortable than walking! We arrived at our base camp in the mountains just on dusk, and as we crossed the river my faithful steed slipped and collapsed in the water. Fortunately using my Bonanza-like skills I managed to stay on, and only ended up half-wet. We were tired and hungry, but the guys set up camp and soon we were eating dinner, glad that the slog was done and we would have a couple of days to explore these amazing mountains. Just before dinner a Philippine Hawk-Owl began calling and we tracked this down with a flashlight, a great start.

### **18-19th April: Sierra Madre Mountains (LUZON)**

The Sierra Madre section was of course the highlight of this trip, and the magical and intact forests here produced many seldom-seen gems of the archipelago. After a hearty breakfast, we tracked down our first Luzon endemics including very cooperative Luzon Hornbill and Rufous-fronted Tailorbird, and Buzzing Flowerpecker for good measure. We started the stiff walk up the hills and soon encountered our first northern Luzon specialty in the form of a Rabor's Wren Babbler. The looks were not great, but we would bump into these a few more times and eventually everyone got great looks at these birds. A little farther uphill we found a very cooperative Furtive Flycatcher, and then eventually an amazingly bold pair of Black-and-white trillers that flew backwards and forwards. The Luzon race of the Rufous Hornbill was found too as was a flock of fast flying Green Racket-tail. In the early afternoon we ventured out above the camp and had a very close Whiskered Pitta calling, but unfortunately it would not emerge and then eventually it just stopped calling. We were very lucky to have two other responsive birds a little later in the day, and both gave looks, the last one in particular hopped up on a stump and called away for a short while. The afternoon also delivered Golden-crowned Babblers in good numbers and a delightfully cooperative Cream-bellied Fruit-Dove. Late in the afternoon and after much effort we connected with the brilliant Spotted Wood-kingfisher that sat completely out in the open in all its glory for us to see well. The following day we flushed a Luzon Bleeding-Heart from near the trail, but the bird of the day was the cute, dainty and scare Philippine Dwarf Kingfisher. Good looks at White-lored Oriole, Sooty Woodpecker, and Philippine Fairy Bluebird were also highly appreciated and we reencountered a few of yesterday's new species again.

### **20 + 21st April: Sierra Madre Mountains – Tuguegerao - Manila(LUZON)**

It was time to travel back to Manila, and given the heat of the day on the way up we decided to leave early and walk out in the cool. This cost us half a day's birding, but may have saved someone a trip to the hospital, as it was another scorcher, and we were lucky to get out of the mountains unscathed, and before the heat picked up. We had the afternoon to kill in downtown Tuguegerao, but we were all pretty exhausted and we enjoyed the little RnR that we had available. The following day we had problems with the flight back and ended up spending much more time at the airport than we wanted, but eventually we arrived back in Manila in time for dinner and a rest before the trip headed to Subic.

### **22nd April: Candaba Marsh – Subic Bay (LUZON).**

We made an early start to take advantage of the higher bird activity in the cooler early mornings. Shortly after dawn we arrived at Candaba Marsh, where the distinctive triangular, volcanic cone of Mount Arayat made for an impressive backdrop. As soon as we jumped out of the car we immediately logged several large rafts of Philippine Ducks were found loafing around the watery margins of the marsh. As expected this recently protected marsh was packed with waterbirds, from Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, White-browed Crakes and Barred Rails to Eastern Marsh Harriers and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, while the marsh was positively loaded with Yellow Bitterns that seemed to be perched on every available reed stem. After



loading up on these and other waterbirds, including Oriental Pratincole. In the early afternoon we made for the lowland forests around Subic Bay where we enjoyed some early afternoon birding.



*Philippine Duck (left) and Blue-throated Bee-eaters (right) were two of today's highlights.*

### **23rd April: Subic Bay - Mt Makiling (LUZON) Lowland Forest**

We only had one day at the distinctly more humid lowland forests around the naval magazine at Subic Bay, on the Bataan Peninsula. Formerly a bustling US naval base, this area has long since lost many of the naval personnel formerly residing there, leaving behind a near-deserted stretch of superb, endemic-rich lowland forest. We quickly stumbled upon some of the key endemics of the area, that included a handsome pair of Sooty Woodpeckers, in addition to several sightings of the Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker in the same general area. Best of all though was the Crimson (Greater) Flameback, surely a good species, quickly followed up by getting superb, 'on the deck' views of a Green Racquet-tail (complete with a fine pair of racquets), a key Subic species that is confined to these rare patches of Luzon lowland forest. A brief walk down a deserted road saw us enjoying great views of a colony of the exquisite Blue-throated Bee-eaters and some of the other more widespread endemic species that feature heavily on the tour, like Colecto, and Guiabero. We also got great perched views of Colasisi or Philippine Hanging-parrot. Although no one was complaining about some of the supporting cast of non-endemic species, like the showy pair of Whiskered Treeswifts, that were using the low roadside wires to hawk insects at the close of the day. Searching the dead snags around the forest pulled in several examples of the Philippines's smallest raptor, with 2 or 3 tiny Philippine Falconets found hawking insects from their high vantage points. On the passerine front, we soon found one of our main targets - Blackish Cuckoo-shrike - a vocal lowland endemic confined to Luzon. Although not especially common at Subic, Black Cuckooshrikes are easy to find largely due to the fact they hang about in very noisy parties that helpfully draw attention to themselves with their bold, far-carrying calls. One of the other lowland targets, Rufous Coucal, proved typically shy though. White-browed Shamans were heard giving their melodic, fluty calls all around, although seeing one of them proved a little more challenging: the first few point blank refused to cooperate, before finally one came straight in and perched within a few feet from us. A beautiful songster and endemic, that was much appreciated by all. Some of the more strange looking endemics in the Philippines are the two Malkohas that are confined to Luzon. The Subic specialty is the Red-crested Malkoha. Malkohas are always a popular family in southeast Asia, although this one with its distinctive red crest that begins just above the eyes, giving the impression of some seriously overgrown bright scarlet eyelashes, is hard to top. Blue-naped Parrots were also in evidence, a near-endemic that also just reaches the islands of Sulawesi and Borneo, although the Philippines remains the best place to catch up

with this handsome parrot. Other notable additions included Northern Balicassiao, a Philippine Tailorbird found skulking in a dense thicket of bamboo, and some Luzon (Tarctic) Hornbills. Then we headed to Mt Makiling.



*The Luzon-endemic scarlet-backed Crimson (Greater) Flameback (top left) is surely a good species in it's own right? The Coledo, a strange bald-headed starling is a spectacular bird that is common and easily*

seen in Subic (top right), and the Luzon Tarictic Hornbill (bottom) one of five endemic hornbills seen in the Philippines.

#### **24<sup>th</sup> April: Mount Makiling (LUZON) Mid-altitude forest.**

We awoke in the chilled out Makiling university campus, near to the town of Los Banos, where we only had one full day's birding, and so immediately tackled the forested slopes above the campus. New birds, some special to Makiling, included a pair of Gray-backed Tailorbirds found calling in a roadside vine tangle and after considerably effort the magical Scale-feathered Malkoha; several Yellow-bellied Whistlers; Philippine Serpent-Eagles were found calling overhead making for an interesting comparison both in plumage and call with the Crested Serpent-eagles recorded on Palawan later on the tour. Bulbuls are not a group that often gets the adrenaline flowing, although the endemic Yellow-wattled Bulbul has a subtle beauty lacking in most of this generally uneventful family, several of which were added to our trip list on Makiling. Other birds seen included more Philippine Pygmy-Woodpeckers, that were a regularly recorded endemic on the tour, and a lone male Black-naped Monarch. Stripe-sided Rhabdornis was seen again and there are a whole host of endemic nectarivores on the Philippines and Makiling provided several good ones on our morning walk alone, with a male Red-striped Flowerpecker (one of seven endemic flowerpeckers) and a single Striped (Thick-billed) Flowerpecker. In the afternoon we left the forest behind birding some open trees on the campus for another Luzon lowland specialty, the aptly named Lowland White-eye that was found soon after feeding in some large open trees and we also nailed the incredible Indigo-banded Kingfisher, a stunning stream-side Kingfisher. In the afternoon our arrival was perfectly timed to search for buttonquails that emerge from the long grass at this time of day to feed on an open track right on the campus. The bird we were after was the Luzon endemic Spotted Buttonquail, and in the end we enjoyed repeated views of the species, scuttling on and off the track to feed in the waning sunlight.

#### **25<sup>th</sup> April: La Mesa Eco Park (LUZON).**

With precious few birds left to try for we decided to head to the Eco Park on the outskirts of Manila because we knew it was holding a highly desirable and very juicy endemic indeed. Not long after we arrived we located the amazing Ashy Thrush. This seldom seen endemic had been nesting in this park this year and we enjoyed fabulous views of this amazing bird not long after arriving. Not a lot else new today, so we headed back to Manila, where we prepared to visit the paradise island of Palawan.

#### **26th March: Manila (LUZON) –Sabang (PALAWAN) Lowland, coastal limestone forest and mangroves.**

Another early start was required to take the only daily flights to the Palawan capital of Puerto Princesa. We had planned a stop for *Chinese Egrets* and shorebirds at Garceliano Beach near the capital. When we arrived it was an extremely high tide, but we were still able to find the birds we needed including the required Chinese Egret. We returned to Puerto Princessa, ate an early lunch and then boarded our vans to make the journey to Sabang that would be our base for exploring the endemic-rich coastal, limestone forests of St. Pauls (recently renamed Underground River National Park). Palawan often turns out to be most people's favorite Philippine island, due to a combination of easy endemics, some of the largest most in-tact tracts of rainforest and frankly, because much of it is an idyllic paradise island of beaches, mangroves and lush bird-rich rainforests. Between Puerto Princesa and our resort in Sabang we passed by some deserted scenic beaches with superb vistas over the South China Sea, and along the way we encountered some fabulous stretches of forest and tree-lined limestone outcrops that are good spots for some of Palawan's coolest endemics. A stop at a scenic tree-lined river, and some superb flowering trees proved a real boon for nectarivores. And so it was we made our first stop there along the way in the hope that some of the trees would still be in bloom. Thankfully they were and it did not take long to find our main target, with a stocky male Copper-throated Sunbird and Palawan's own endemic nectar specialist, with the aptly named Palawan Flowerpecker, in addition to a whole bunch of other nectar feeders including Little Spiderhunter, several stunning scarlet-breasted trochilus race Purple-throated Sunbirds, and a few Olive-backed Sunbirds. All along the way we ran into small vocal groups of the endemic



*pusillus* 'race' of Slender-billed Crow, heard giving their instantly recognizable, high-pitched and distinctly un-crow like calls, a subspecies that many believe should be given full species status, and so is frequently referred to simply as 'Palawan Crow'. We did begin seeing our first Palawan endemics with several Yellow-throated Leafbirds, high flying flocks of Palawan Swiftlets (a recent split from Island or Uniform Swiftlet), a White-vented Shama was observed giving its fluty song from a low roadside perch. A short walk further down the road and we picked up another of the Palawan specialties, when we found a pair of lemon-yellow and black Palawan Tits singing in a bare roadside tree. Only a few hours in Palawan and we were getting a real taste of some of its very best birds. The afternoon was spent scanning from the ridgetop near Sabang, hoping for the much wanted Philippine Cockatoo that has returned to this area after a long absence. Late in the afternoon we got lucky when several birds came in off the coast and circled over us. By the time they flew off over the far ridge, we were well pleased with the magical views we had managed of this highly endangered species. A short time later we picked up the gleaming ivory casques of a small party of Palawan Hornbills that we had been hoping for and can sometimes be found roosting in this area. In the evening we tried for Palawan nighbirds with little success. We headed to our resort for celebratory beers and to plan tomorrow's 'assault' on one of the most stunning birds in the Philippines - as we would be seeking the breathtaking Palawan Peacock-Pheasant.

## **27th April: Underground River (St. Paul's) National Park, Sabang (PALAWAN)**

Lowland, coastal limestone forest and mangroves. The sparsely populated sandy white beaches of Sabang on the western coast of Palawan provide a peaceful, idyllic setting and base for exploring the bird-rich coastal forests of St. Pauls National Park, that holds all but three of Palawan's 19 or so endemic species. For the most sought-after among these we would have to take a short ride in one of the many 'bancas', a typical Filipino boat that is characterized by the large 'stabilizers' on each side. A short wade out from Sabang saw us boarding the banca and heading straight to the park's star attraction - the 8km long Subterranean (or Underground) River for which the park has recently been renamed. However, although most tourists alight there to take the tranquil boat ride along this geological wonder we were tracking a very different attraction, Palawan's (and perhaps the Philippines's as a whole) undisputed top bird - the gorgeous Palawan Peacock-Pheasant. This normally shy inhabitant of the limestone 'kast' forests, such as those at St. Paul's, has been unusually easy to pick up in recent years as a tame male bird has taken up residence around a park ranger station deep within the heart of the park, that is conveniently only a stone's throw from the beach, when arriving by boat. This superb male bird hangs out near the station, often in company with Tabon Scrubfowls, feeding on food scraps that are left out by the resident rangers who now know this stunning bird very well indeed, due to the droves of birders who have visited over the past 6 years or so. The forest here lines the beach itself, so that literally within inches of entering the forest we caught sight of this truly magnificent pheasant feeding right out in the open where the iridescent blue jeweled plumage, with violet-blue 'eyes' or ocelli on its dazzlingly adorned tail, striking black-and-white crested head and 'velvety' black breast could be appreciated to the full. This is one of the undisputed avian gems of Asia, and a bird that can easily be used to persuade any doubting birder of the wonders of birding southeast Asia. With this main target nailed with absolute, and ridiculous ease we checked out some other areas around the Underground River picking up Tabon Scrubfowls, and another Palawan specialty - Sulphur-bellied Bulbul, in addition to Spot-throated (Common) Flameback. On the return journey we found our final endemic sunbird of the tour, with a fine male Handsome (Shelley's) Sunbird and later, a pair of Malaysian Plovers precariously nesting on a nearby coastal sand bar. A fantastic morning's birding. In the afternoon we were successful with our attempts to see the amazingly secretive Falacted Wren-babbler.



*The Palawan Peacock-Pheasant and White-vented Shama are two of the star residents on Palawan*



*More Palawan endemics include the Palawan Blue Flycatcher (left) and Palawan Leafbird (right).*

**28 April: Sabang and Pandan Island, Puerto Princesa (PALAWAN) Offshore Island.**

With most of the available endemics seen we decided to try and head to Pandan Island where the last Tropical Birding tour had managed to see Mantanani Scops-Owl. Unfortunately the Owl had moved off, but we did locate Thick-billed Green-Pigeon, Pygmy Flowerpecker, the Vulnerable Grey Imperial Pigeon and Great-billed Heron.

**29 April: Iwahig Penal Colony (PALAWAN)**

The Balsahan Trail, bizarrely set for a birding area within a safe correctional institution, is a key site on Palawan for a couple of endemics that are never recorded at St. Paul's - notably Melodious Babbler and Palawan Flycatcher. Soon after arriving at the key site we soon heard the Melodious Babblers calling on cue, and were soon getting to grips with a group of three-four birds perched up in a subcanopy vine tangle. With things pretty much sown up we birded leisurely for the rest of the morning and came out in the afternoon where we saw a delightful Palawan Flycatcher. With a spectacular meal this evening our time in Palawan, and the Philippines drew to a close.

**30<sup>th</sup> April : Puerto Princesa and departure back to Manila.**

The trip drew to a close and we all reflected on a superb tour of the three main islands in the Philippines. We racked up a great selection of endemics.

**BIRD LIST**

**Because the taxonomy of many Philippine birds is so poorly treated, and much is still unknown about the situation, we have taken the unorthodox solution of being quite liberal in designating the many distinctive forms and races of the Philippines species status based on our own experience and in discussions with others who know the Philippines avifauna intimately. The nomenclature and base structure follow Clements, J. (5th ed. Updated 2004) *Birds of the World. A Checklist*. Pica Press. However, we are more generous in recognizing that many taxa are worthy of redesignation, and the Philippines is evidently a goldmine for future splits.**

**Birds in ITALICISED UPPER CASE are PHILIPPINE ENDEMICS.**

Those marked with (H) were only HEARD on the tour.

Those that are marked with (GO) were only seen by the GUIDE ONLY.

I have written selective taxonomic notes against particular species of note (especially endemics).

**DUCKS, GEESE and SWANS: Anatidae**

Wandering Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna arcuata*

**PHILIPPINE DUCK** *Anas luzonica*

**MEGAPODES: Megapodiidae**

Tabon Scrubfowl *Megapodius cumingii*

**PHEASANTS and PARTRIDGES: Phasianidae**

Blue-breasted Quail *Coturnix chinensis*

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*

**PALAWAN PEACOCK-PHEASANT** *Polyplectron emphanum*

**GREBES: Podicepsidae**

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

**HERONS, EGRETS and BITTERNs: Ardeidae**

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*

Cinnamon Bittern *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*

Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis*

Gray Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Great-billed Heron *Ardea sumatrana*

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*

Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Pacific Reef-Heron *Egretta sacra*

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola speciosa*

Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

**OSPREY: Pandionidae**

Osprey *Pandion haliaeetus*

**HAWKS, EAGLES and KITES: Accipitridae**

**STEEER'S HONEY-BUZZARD** *Pernis (celebensis) steeri* – the taxonomic status of this beauty is unclear, but if split it is considered a Philippine endemic.

Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*

White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela*

**PHILIPPINE SERPENT-EAGLE** *Spilornis holospilus*

Eastern Marsh-Harrier *Circus spilonotus*

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*

**TROPICAL  
BIRDING**



[www.tropicalbirding.com](http://www.tropicalbirding.com)

Besra *Accipiter virgatus*

**GREAT PHILIPPINE EAGLE** *Pithecophaga jefferyi*

Rufous-bellied Eagle *Lophotriorchis kienerii*

**PHILIPPINE HAWK-EAGLE** *Nisaetus philippensis* – this species is sometimes split into two species, the northern **Luzon Hawk-Eagle** (*N. p. philippensis*) and the southern **Pinsker's Hawk-Eagle** (*N. p. philippensis*). We saw only the former taxon in the Sierra Madre mountains.

**FALCONS: Falconidae**

**PHILIPPINE FALCONET** *Microhierax erythrogenys*

**RAILS, GALLINULES and COOTS: Rallidae**

Barred Rail *Gallirallus torquatus*

**PLAIN BUSH-HEN** *Amauornis olivacea*

White-breasted Waterhen *Amauornis phoenicurus*

White-browed Crake *Porzana cinerea*

Slaty-legged Crake *Rallina euryzonoides*

Purple Swampphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

**PLOVERS and LAPWINGS: Charadriidae**

Malaysian Plover *Charadrius peronii*

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

**AVOCETS and STILTS: Recurvirostridae**

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

**JACANAS: Jacanidae**

Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*

**SANDPIPERS: Scolopacidae**

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

**BUKIDNON WOODCOCK** *Scolopax bukidnonensis*

**BUTTONQUAIL: Turnicidae**

**SPOTTED BUTTONQUAIL** *Turnix ocellata*

**PRATINCOLES: Glareolidae**

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*

**GULLS & TERNS: Laridae**

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

**PIGEONS and DOVES: Columbidae**

Red Collared-Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

**PHILIPPINE CUCKOO-DOVE** *Macropygia tenuirostris* – this species also occurs just outside the region, on Taiwan's Lanyu island, but that race may be a separate species.

Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*

Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata*

**LUZON BLEEDING-HEART** *Gallicolumba luzonica*

**WHITE-EARED DOVE** *Phapitreron leucotis*

**TROPICAL  
BIRDING**



[www.tropicalbirding.com](http://www.tropicalbirding.com)

**AMETHYST DOVE** *Phapitreron amethystinus*

**PHILIPPINES** (Pompadour) **GREEN-PIGEON** *Treron (pompadora) axillaris* - Increasingly considered a good split from Pompadour Green Pigeon.

Thick-billed Pigeon *Treron curvirostra*

**YELLOW-BREASTED FRUIT-DOVE** *Ptilinopus occipitalis*

**CREAM-BREASTED FRUIT-DOVE** *Ptilinopus merrilli*

**BLACK-CHINNED FRUIT-DOVE** *Ptilinopus leclancheri*

**PINK-BELLIED IMPERIAL-PIGEON** *Ducula poliocephala*

**Pied Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula bicolor*

**Grey Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula pickeringii*

Green Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula aenea*

#### **COCKATOOS: Cacatuidae**

**PHILIPPINE COCKATOO** *Cacatua haematuropygia*

#### **PARROTS: Psittacidae**

**GUAIABERO** *Bolbopsittacus lunulatus*

**MINDANAO RACQUET-TAIL** *Prioniturus waterstradti*

**BLUE-HEADED RACQUET-TAIL** *Prioniturus platenae*

**GREEN RACQUET-TAIL** *Prioniturus luconensis*

**BLUE-CROWNED RACQUET-TAIL** *Prioniturus discurus*

Blue-naped Parrot *Tanygnathus lucionensis*

**PHILIPPINE HANGING-PARROT** *Loriculus philippensis*

#### **CUCKOOS: Cuculidae**

**PHILIPPINE HAWK-CUCKOO** *Hierococcyx pectoralis*

Himalayan Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus*

Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonneratii* - H

Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus* - H

Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus*

Violet Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus* – we saw the endemic Mindanao race which may be split

Asian Drongo-Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris*

**PHILIPPINE DRONGO-CUCKOO** *Surniculus velutinus*

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*

**RED-CRESTED MALKOHA** *Phaenicophaeus superciliosus*

**SCALE-FEATHERED MALKOHA** *Phaenicophaeus cumingi*

**RUFOUS COUCAL** *Centropus unirufus*

**BLACK-FACED COUCAL** *Centropus melanops*

Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*

**PHILIPPINE COUCAL** *Centropus viridis*

Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*

#### **OWLS: Strigidae**

**PHILIPPINE EAGLE OWL** *Bubo philippensis*

**PALAWAN SCOPS-OWL** *Otus fuliginosus* - H

**PHILIPPINE SCOPS-OWL** *Otus megalotis* – the everetti race was seen on Mindanao

**MINDANAO EAGLE-OWL (Giant Scops-Owl)** *Mimizuku gurneyi*

**CHOCOLATE BOOBOOK** *Ninox randi*

Spotted Wood-Owl *Strix seloputo* - H

**PHILIPPINE HAWK-OWL** *Ninox philippensis* – This species is often split these days with the Luzon bird considered to be Philippine Hawk-Owl *philippensis* and the southern birds Mindanao Hawk-Owl *spilocephala*, on this trip we saw both.

#### **FROGMOUTHS: Podargidae**

**TROPICAL  
BIRDING**



[www.tropicalbirding.com](http://www.tropicalbirding.com)

**PHILIPPINE FROGMOUTH** *Batrachostomus septimus*  
**PALAWAN FROGMOUTH** *Batrachostomus javensis* - H

**NIGHTJARS: Caprimulgidae**

Great Eared-Nightjar *Eurostopodus macrotis*  
Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*  
**PHILIPPINE NIGHTJAR** *Caprimulgus manillensis*

**SWIFTS: Apodidae**

**PHILIPPINE NEEDLETAIL** *Mearnsia picina*  
Purple Needletail *Hirundapus celebensis*  
Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculental* – there is some complexity within the archipelago in this species and it is possible that more than one species may be present  
**PYGMY SWIFTLET** *Collocalia troglodytes*  
**PHILIPPINE SWIFTLET** *Aerodramus mearnsi*  
**PALAWAN SWIFTLET** *Aerodramus palawanensis*  
House Swift *Apus nipalensis*

**CRESTED TREESWIFTS: Hemiprocnidae**

Whiskered Treeswift *Hemiproctne comata*

**TROGONS: Trogonidae**

**PHILIPPINE TROGON** *Harpactes ardens*

**KINGFISHERS: Alcedinidae**

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*  
**INDIGO-BANDED KINGFISHER** *Ceyx cyanopectus*  
**SILVERY KINGFISHER** *Ceyx argentatus*  
**PHILIPPINE PYGMY KINGFISHER** *Ceyx melanurus*  
Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*  
**WHITE-THROATED KINGFISHER** *Halcyon gularis*  
**RUFOUS-LORED KINGFISHER** *Todirhamphus winchelli*  
Collared Kingfisher *Todirhamphus chloris*  
**SPOTTED WOOD KINGFISHER** *Actenoides lindsayi*  
**BLUE-CAPPED WOOD KINGFISHER** *Actenoides hombroni*

**BEE-EATERS: Meropidae**

**RUFOUS-CROWNED BEE-EATER** *Merops americanus*  
Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*

**ROLLERS: Coraciidae**

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*

**HORNBILLS: Bucerotidae**

**PALAWAN HORNBILL** *Anthracoceros marchei*  
**RUFOUS HORNBILL** *Buceros hydrocorax*  
**LUZON HORNBILL** *Penelopides manillae*  
**MINDANAO HORNBILL** *Penelopides affinis*  
**WRITHED HORNBILL** *Aceros leucocephalus*

**ASIAN BARBETS: Megalaimidae**

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*

**WOODPECKERS: Picidae**

**TROPICAL  
BIRDING**



[www.tropicalbirding.com](http://www.tropicalbirding.com)

**PHILIPPINE WOODPECKER** *Dendrocopos maculatus*. Two different and distinct races, which may be separate species (*valdirostris*, **SPOTTED PYGMY-WOODPECKER**, and *fulvifasciatus* **BAR-BACKED PYGMY-WOODPECKER**) were seen.

White-bellied Woodpecker *Dryocopus javensis*

**SPOT-THROATED** (Common) **FLAMEBACK** *Dinopium (javanense) everetti* – The taxon *everetti* on Palawan is sometimes split as spot-throated Flameback and considered a Palawan endemic.

**CRIMSON** (Greater) **FLAMEBACK** *Chrysocolaptes (lucidus) haematribon* – In theory part of the Greater Flameback complex, but this superspecies is diverse and undergoing taxonomic review. Several of the Philippines races are endemic and highly distinctive and worthy of full species status, this Luzon endemic being one of them.

**SOOTY WOODPECKER** *Mulleripicus funebris*

#### **BROADBILLS: Eurylaimidae**

**MINDANAO WATTLED BROADBILL** *Eurylaimus steerii*

#### **PITTAS: Pittidae**

**AZURE-BREASTED PITTA** *Pitta steerii*

**WHISKERED PITTA** *Pitta kochi*

Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida*

Red-bellied Pitta *Pitta erythrogaster*

#### **THORNBILLS and ALLIES: Acanthizidae**

Golden-bellied Gerygone *Gerygone sulphurea*

#### **WOODSWALLOWS: Artamidae**

White-breasted Woodswallow *Artamus leucorhynchus*

#### **IORAS: Aegithinidae**

Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*

#### **CUCKOO-SHRIKES: Campephagidae**

Bar-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina striata* – several races of this complex species were seen in our time on the archipelago including *difficilis* (Palawan) and *striata* (Luzon).

**BLACKISH CUCKOO-SHRIKE** *Coracina coerulescens*

**BLACK-BIBBED CUCKOO-SHRIKE** *Coracina mindanensis*

**MCGREGOR'S CUCKOO-SHRIKE** *Coracina mcgregori*

Black-and-white Triller *Lalage melanoleuca*

Pied Triller *Lalage nigra*

Fiery Minivet *Pericrocotus igneus*

#### **WHISTLERS: Pachycephalidae**

**YELLOW-BELLIED WHISTLER** *Pachycephala philippinensis*

#### **SHRIKES: Laniidae**

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*

#### **ORIOLES: Oriolidae**

Dark-throated Oriole *Oriolus xanthonotus*

**PHILIPPINE ORIOLE** *Oriolus steerii*

**WHITE-LORED ORIOLE** *Oriolus albilorus*

Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*

#### **DRONGOS: Dicruridae**

**TROPICAL  
BIRDING**



[www.tropicalbirding.com](http://www.tropicalbirding.com)

Sunda (Ashy) Drongo *Dicrurus l. leucophaeus*. This race of the widespread and complex Ashy Drongo superspecies may be split.

**NORTHERN BALICASSIAO** *Dicrurus balicassius balicassius* – racially complex, with some Visayan birds possibly being a separate species.

‘Spangled’ Drongo *Dicrurus bracteatus* – Talk about a mess. With six taxa represented on the Philippines it was never certain that these represented a single species, with many authors incorporating them within the superspecies of both Spangled and Hair-crested Drongos. Now there is even more suspicion that the endemic races ‘palawanensis’, ‘cuyensis’, ‘samarensis’, ‘menagei’ and ‘striatus’ may all represent Philippine endemic species! In this report we recognize two species that we saw below:

**PALAWAN DRONGO** *Dicrurus (hottentottus) palawanensis*

**MINDANAO DRONGO** *Dicrurus (bracteatus) striatus*

#### **FANTAILS: Rhipuridae**

**BLUE FANTAIL** *Rhipidura superciliaris*

**BLUE-HEADED FANTAIL** *Rhipidura cyaniceps*

**BLACK-AND-CINNAMON FANTAIL** *Rhipidura nigrocinnamomea*

Pied Fantail *Rhipidura javanica*

#### **MONARCH-FLYCATCHERS: Monarchidae**

**SHORT-CRESTED MONARCH** *Hypothymis helenae*

Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*

**CELESTIAL MONARCH** *Hypothymis coelestis* - HO

**BLUE PARADISE-FLYCATCHER** *Terpsiphone cyanescens*

**RUFOUS PARADISE-FLYCATCHER** *Terpsiphone cinnamomea*

#### **CROWS: Corvidae**

**PALAWAN** (Slender-billed) **CROW** *Corvus (enca) pusillus*

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* – sometimes split as Eastern Jungle Crow.

#### **SWALLOWS: Hirundinidae**

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*

Striated Swallow *Cecropis striolata*

#### **FAIRY-FLYCATCHERS: Stenostiridae**

Citrine Canary-Flycatcher *Cuculicapa helianthea*

#### **TITS: Paridae**

**ELEGANT TIT** *Pardaliparus elegans*

**PALAWAN TIT** *Pardaliparus amabilis*

#### **BUSH-WARBLERS: Cettidae**

**RUFOUS-HEADED TAILORBIRD** *Phyllergates sericeus*

#### **PASSERIFORMES: Sittidae**

**SULPHUR-BILLED NUTHATCH** *Sitta oenochlamys*

#### **BULBULS: Pycnonotidae**

Black-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus atriceps*

**YELLOW-WATTLED BULBUL** *Pycnonotus urostictus*

Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus goiavier*

**ASHY-FRONTED** (Olive-winged) **BULBUL** *Pycnonotus (plumosus) cinerifrons* – Often considered part of the Olive-winged Bulbul complex, but more often these days as a separate endemic species.



**PALAWAN** (Gray-cheeked) **BULBUL** *Alophoixus (bres) frater*– Often considered part of the Gray-cheeked Bulbul complex, but more often these days as a separate endemic species.

**SULPHUR-BELLIED BULBUL** *Ixos palawanensis*

**PHILIPPINE BULBUL** *Ixos philippinus*

**YELLOWISH BULBUL** *Ixos everetti*

**LEAF WARBLERS: Phylloscopidae**

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*

**LEMON-THROATED WARBLER** *Phylloscopus cebuensis*

Mountain Warbler *Phylloscopus trivirgatus*

**PHILIPPINE LEAF-WARBLER** *Phylloscopus olivaceus*

**REED WARBLERS: Acrocephalidae**

Clamorous Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*

**GRASSBIRDS: Megaluridae**

**LONG-TAILED GROUND-WARBLER** *Bradypterus caudatus*

Tawny Grassbird *Megalurus timoriensis*

Striated Grassbird *Megalurus palustris*

**CISTICOLAS: Cisticolidae**

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

**PHILIPPINE TAILORBIRD** *Orthotomus castaneiceps chloronotus*

**RUFIOUS-FRONTED TAILORBIRD** *Orthotomus castaneiceps frontalis* – Often considered conspecific with *chloronotus* above, but some authorities also consider this southern taxon a separate species.

**GRAY-BACKED TAILORBIRD** *Orthotomus derbianus*

Rufous-tailed Tailorbird *Orthotomus sericeus*

**WHITE-BROWED TAILORBIRD** *Orthotomus nigriceps*

**FAIRY-BLUEBIRDS: Irenidae**

Asian Fairy-bluebird *Irena puella*

**PHILIPPINE FAIRY-BLUEBIRD** *Irena cyanogastra*

**FLYCATCHERS: Muscicapidae**

Gray-streaked Flycatcher *Muscicapa griseisticta*

**PALAWAN FLYCATCHER** *Ficedula platenae*

**FURTIVE FLYCATCHER** *Ficedula disposita*

Little Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula westermanni*

Island Flycatcher *Eumyias panayensis*

**PALAWAN BLUE-FLYCATCHER** *Cyornis lemprieri*

Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*

**LUZON WHITE-BROWED SHAMA** *Copsychus l. luzoniensis*

**WHITE-VENTED SHAMA** *Copsychus niger*

Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*

**THRUSHES: Turdidae**

Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

**ASHY THRUSH** *Zoothera cinerea*

White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana* – taxonomically complex, with possibly more than one species on the islands.

**BABLERS: Timaliidae**

**ASHY-HEADED BABBLER** *Malacocincla cinereiceps*

**PALAWAN (MELODIOUS) BABBLER** *Malacopteron palawanense*

TROPICAL  
BIRDING



[www.tropicalbirding.com](http://www.tropicalbirding.com)

**STRIATED WREN-BABBLER** *Ptilocichla mindanensis*  
**FALCATED WREN-BABBLER** *Ptilocichla falcata*  
**RABOR'S WREN-BABBLER** *Napothera rabori*  
**MINDANAO PYGMY-BABBLER** *Stachyris plateni*  
**RUSTY-CROWNED BABBLER** *Stachyris capitalis*  
**GOLDEN-CROWNED BABBLER** *Stachyris dennistouni*  
Pin-striped Tit-Babbler *Macronous gularis*  
**BROWN TIT-BABBLER** *Macronous striaticeps*

**WHITE-EYES: Zosteropidae**

**LOWLAND WHITE-EYE** *Zosterops meyeri*  
**GOLDEN-GREEN WHITE-EYE** *Zosterops nigrorum*  
Everett's White-eye *Zosterops everetti*  
Mountain White-eye *Zosterops montanus*  
**MINDANAO WHITE-EYE** *Lophozosterops goodfellowi*  
**CINNAMON IBON** *Hypocryptadius cinnamomeus*

**STARLINGS : Sturnidae**

Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis*  
Short-tailed Starling *Aplonis minor*  
**APO MYNA** *Basilornis miranda*  
**COLETO** *Sarcops calvus*  
Common Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa*  
Crested Myna *Acridotheres cristatellus*

**PHILIPPINE CREEPERS: Rhabdornithidae**

**STRIPE-SIDED RHABDORNIS** *Rhabdornis mysticalis*  
**STRIPE-BREASTED RHABDORNIS** *Rhabdornis inornatus*

**LEAFBIRDS: Chloropseidae**

**PHILIPPINE LEAFBIRD** *Chloropsis flavipennis*  
**YELLOW-THROATED LEAFBIRD** *Chloropsis palawanensis*

**FLOWERPECKERS: Dicaeidae**

**OLIVE-BACKED FLOWERPECKER** *Prionochilus olivaceus*  
**PALAWAN FLOWERPECKER** *Prionochilus plateni*  
**OLIVE-CAPPED FLOWERPECKER** *Dicaeum nigrilore*  
**BICOLORED FLOWERPECKER** *Dicaeum bicolor*  
**RED-STRIPED FLOWERPECKER** *Dicaeum australe*  
Orange-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum trigonostigma*  
**WHITE-BELLIED (BUZZING) FLOWERPECKER** *Dicaeum hypoleucum*  
**PYGMY FLOWERPECKER** *Dicaeum pygmaeum*  
**STRIPED FLOWERPECKER** *Dicaeum aeruginosum*  
Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectum*

**SUNBIRDS and SPIDERHUNTERS: Nectariniidae**

Plain-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malacensis*  
Purple-throated Sunbird *Leptocoma sperata*  
Copper-throated Sunbird *Leptocoma calcostetha*  
Olive-backed Sunbird *Cynnyris jugularis*  
**GRAY-HODED SUNBIRD** *Aethopyga primigenia*  
**MT APO SUNBIRD** *Aethopyga boltoni*  
**FLAMING SUNBIRD** *Aethopyga flagrans*  
**METALLIC-WINGED SUNBIRD** *Aethopyga pulcherrima*

**TROPICAL  
BIRDING**



[www.tropicalbirding.com](http://www.tropicalbirding.com)

**LOVELY SUNBIRD** *Aethopyga shelleyi*  
**HANDSOME SUNBIRD** *Aethopyga bella*  
Little Spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostra*  
**NAKED-FACED SPIDERHUNTER** *Arachnothera clarae*

**WAGTAILS and PIPITS: Motacillidae**  
Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*  
Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla tschschensis*  
Gray Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*  
Oriental Pipit *Anthus rufulus*

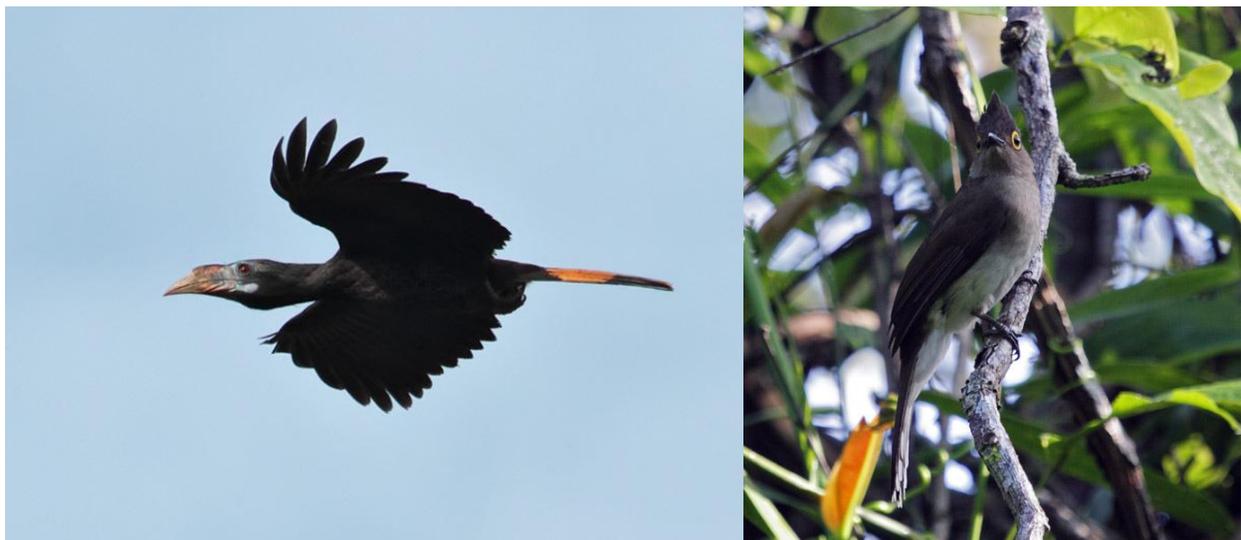
**FINCHES, SISKINS, CROSSBILLS: Fringillidae**  
**WHITE-CHEEKED BULLFINCH** *Pyrrhula leucogenis*

**SPARROWS: Passeridae**  
Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

**WAXBILLS and ALLIES: Estrildidae**  
**RED-EARED PARROTFINCH** *Erythrura coloria*  
Nutmeg Mannikin *Lonchura punctulata*  
Chestnut Munia *Lonchura atricapilla*

## MAMMALS

Northern Palawan Tree Squirrel *Sundasciurus juvencus*  
Little Golden-mantled Flying Fox *Pteropus pumilus*  
Large Flying Fox *Pteropus vampyrus*  
Geoffrey's Rousette *Rousettus amplexicaudatus*  
Long-tailed Macaque *Macaca fascicularis*



*Mindanao Tarictic Hornbill (left) and Yellow-wattled Bulbul (right) are two other Philippine endemics that make a journey to this island an absolute must for serious world birders.*