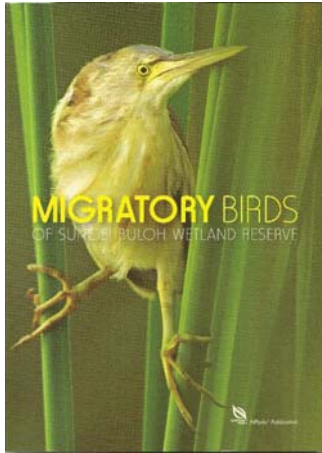


Birding Snippets - Book Review

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Book Review

by Tan Gim Cheong

Migratory Birds of Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve.

Authors: James Gan, Mendis Tan, David Li

Publisher: National Parks Board

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Dimensions: Height 21cm, Width 15cm, Depth 0.6 cm
84 pages

This book was officially launched on 10 October 2009 and is produced as a photographic, ringing and educational resource guide to the migratory birds of Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve. The book starts with a short introduction to these birds, the monitoring and conservation activities undertaken, as well as a brief history of the reserve. The main part of the book is occupied by the species guide where all 108 migratory species recorded at the reserve are covered. A checklist containing all 227 species recorded at the reserve is provided at the back, followed by a list of references for further reading, the index and acknowledgements.

Species account

The species account is standardized into four main parts: (1) Distribution, (2) Distinctive Features, (3) Status in Singapore and presence in Sungei Buloh, and (4) Ringing Records. Under (1) Distribution, the species' Global Population and Peak Sungei Buloh Population are provided and give readers an idea of the reserve's importance for the species described. Under (3) Status in Singapore and presence in Sungei Buloh, information on the species abundance is provided. This gives visitors an idea of the likelihood of encountering the species. For some of the rarer birds, the specific dates are also given.

For species that have been mist-netted and ringed at the reserve, the (4) Ringing Records portion provides much useful information. For example, retrap interval indicates a lifespan of up to 14 years for the Pacific Golden Plover. Also, bill length information reveals that the Eurasian Curlew's bill (165.8mm) is twice as long as that of a superficially similar looking species, the Whimbrel (74.5-94.3mm). As can be seen, these data may be useful for comparing similar looking species. Unfortunately, the bill length (43.5-45.6mm) and the tarsus length (9.1-11.0mm) for the Mongolian Plover are erroneous and readers are thus unable to make comparison with the very similar Greater Sand Plover. Also, the retrap interval for Common Redshank is given as 90 months (15 years 10 months) leaving the reader confused, since 90 months equates to 7.5 years.

Photographs

Since this is a photographic guide, most of the species (85 or 79%) are illustrated with colour photographs. Some of the species are illustrated with as many as four photographs. Those species without photographs are mainly the rarer ones. Generally, the pictures are of good quality and in full colour.

It would be good to label the 11 species featured in the introductory pages and the end pages as readers would most likely be interested in their identity. The photograph of the Aerie on page 10 is obviously pixellated. It should be easy to get a high resolution image of this static object. The bird shown on the cover – a Yellow Bittern – is migratory, so it qualifies to be on the cover. However, it also occurs as a resident in Singapore. Thus, another fully migratory species may be more suitable.

More importantly, four of the species accounts are accompanied with photographs of birds wrongly identified. The photograph of the 'Spotted Redshank' actually shows a Common Greenshank; the photo of 2 Purple-backed Starlings actually shows 2 White-shouldered Starlings; the photo of Barn Swallow actually shows a Red-rumped Swallow and that of the Forest Wagtail actually shows a Grey Wagtail.

Checklist

The checklist is up to date as of September 2009. Some of the birds recorded are very rare and had been seen in the reserve only once. The Rufous-bellied Eagle seen and photographed at the reserve's car park on 07 September 2008 by KC Tsang and reported on the wildbirdsingapore e-group has not been included in the checklist.

The single record of the Stilt Sandpiper is worth mentioning. The Stilt Sandpiper is an American species known only as a vagrant to Japan, Australia and Western Europe. There are no records elsewhere in Southeast Asia. It is purportedly known from one sighting but it was not corroborated by evidence, leading the authors of the two reference checklists for Singapore to reject the record. These two checklists are An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Singapore (Wang & Hails, 2007) published by the Raffles Museum of Biodiversity Research and The Avifauna of Singapore (Lim Kim Seng, 2009) published by Nature Society (Singapore).

Minor nits

The index is arranged alphabetically by scientific names and would thus be difficult for the lay person, who would be more accustomed to common names, to use. The listing of the references could be standardized, for example Craig Robson should be listed as Robson, C. and in alphabetical order, for example, Jeyarajasingam should be listed before Lim Kim Seng. There is also a typographical error – editor is spelled wrongly as *editors*. That said, these are rather minor points.

Overall impressions

This book is a commendable effort to put everything together as a photographic and educational resource guide to the migratory birds of SBWR. Much research and data extraction had been done to put all the information into the handy book. Kudos to NParks for availing the ringing data to the public. It is also welcome to know that there is a corporate partner sponsoring the publication. The sponsorship no doubt helped to make the book available at an affordable price of just \$10. The book appears to be selling well. Hopefully that would result in a reprint which would present an opportunity to correct the errors, especially those of the four species with wrong photographs, as well as the ringing data for the Mongolian Plover. It is refreshing to see a new nature book published for Singapore and this should go in no small way to sustain and renew the people's interest in our avifauna and also, our natural heritage in general.