

TROPICAL BIRDING



Philippines: Island archipelago endemics

Custom Tour: 6 – 26 March 2011



Palawan Peacock-Pheasant: arguably the finest pheasant on Earth, arguably the best bird in the Philippines, but unarguably it is a magical creature.

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Tour Leader: **Keith Barnes**

Photos: Nick Athanas, Sam Woods and Keith Barnes

Introduction:

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, the largest of all the islands and where the bustling capital Manila is located; then and finally the thin tropical island strip of Palawan, that sits between the Sulu Sea to the east and the South China Sea to the west, that divides this paradise island from the huge island of Borneo further 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 20 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 121 (conservative taxonomy) and 135 (liberal taxonomy) endemics, including some of the Philippines' (and indeed southeast Asia's) top birds. Among these were 15 species of birds of prey including all the endemic raptors from the leviathan Great Philippine Eagle to the diminutive Philippine Falconet. Parrots are a huge feature of this trip and we recorded all 5 species of endemic racket-tail amongst the eight 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 nine species of nightbird recorded we had to be satisfied with looks at the fabulous Philippine Nightjar, Australasian Grass Owl, Giant Scops-Owl, Mindanao Hawk-Owl and the evil-eyed Philippine Frogmouth. Amongst the seven swiftlets we listed four endemics, and the spectacular group of kingfishers included great views of the stellar Indigo-banded, Silvery 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 three 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 both the striking Short-crested Monarch and scarce and spectacular Celestial Monarch. Slightly less spectacular, but still highly local, we saw all eight traditional species of bulbul, 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 Shammas, all of which were seen well. We did well with babblers scoring eight species, seven of which were endemics. Nine species of flowerpecker and 11 sunbirds including 13 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 2 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, spectacular Philippine Trogon, awesome Steere's (Azure-breasted) Pitta, high-altitude Mountain Shrike, 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.



The Bay-yo rice terraces near Mt Polis are part of a World Heritage site, and unsurprisingly.

Itinerary:

March 6	Arrival in Manila, Day at Candaba Marsh, ON Manila
March 7	Manila – Cagayan de Oro, MINDANAO, travel to Kitinglad
March 8-9	Full days Mt Kitinglad, MINDANAO
March 10	Drive to Bislig, MINDANAO
March 11-13	Full days PICOP, MINDANAO
March 14	Morning PICOP, PM travel; top Davao, Fly to Manila, ON Manila
March 15	Manila to Subic, LUZON
March 16	Full day Subic, LUZON
March 17	Subic to Banaue, LUZON
March 18	Mt Polis, LUZON
March 19	Banaue – Manila, LUZON
March 20	Manila – Makiling, LUZON
March 21	Full day Makiling, LUZON
March 22	Manila to Palawan, PALAWAN
March 23-25	Full days Palawan, PALAWAN
March 26	Palawan top Manila, LUZON

DAILY LOG

6th March: CANDABA MARSH (LUZON) Marshes and wetland.

The tour began with a traditional 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 to our first birding excursion. As soon as we jumped out of the car we immediately logged our first of the endemics that would be the focus of the tour - as several large rafts of Philippine Ducks were found loafing around the watery margins of the marsh. The other of the marsh's main targets took a little more digging to find, although several trip exclusive Island Collared Doves were found with a little leg work. 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, we made back towards Manila for our first night in the capital.



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

7th March: 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 the mud was insanely thick and it took us over an hour to get up there. 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 double-whammy endemic Olive-capped and White-breasted (Buzzing) Flowerpeckers. The open areas held many Tawny Grassbirds, and eventually we found what we were looking for, a flock that held Philippine Woodpecker, Pied Triller, 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 our 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 had great views of roding Bukidnon Woodcock, a bird that was only described in 1993. After dark we made our first foray for the many nightbirds in the area, and although proving a little more difficult than planned the Philippine Frogmouth eventually performed in exemplary fashion perching right over our heads. What a day! We celebrated with beers and vodka and orange that Britt had smartly brought along...

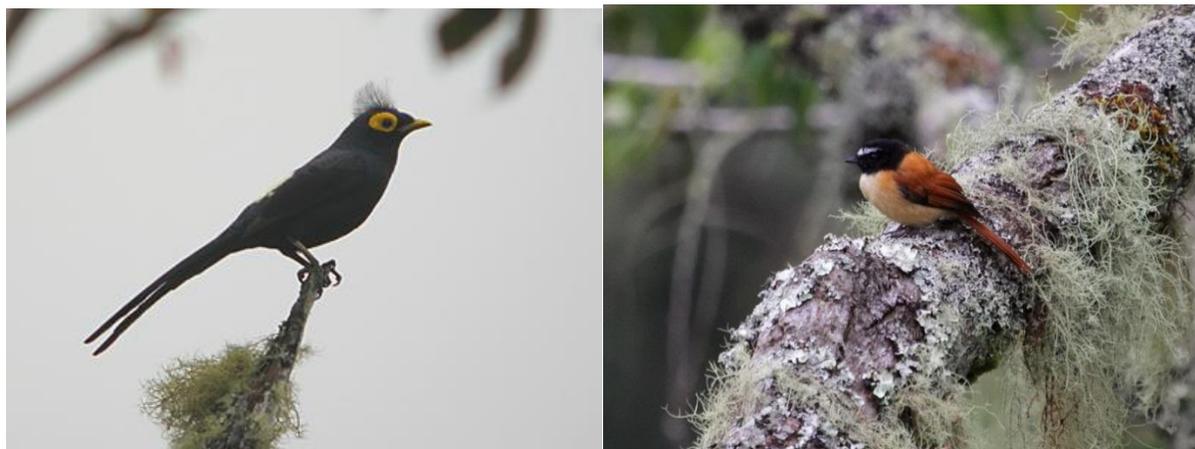


Mountain White-eye is a common flock following species in the Philippine highlands.

8-9th March: 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. But we stuck it out, and as is often the case in birding, patience yields rewards when the shout went up, "eagle on the left"! Despite the enormous size of this bird it is amazing how it can blend into the forested background and it took a while to get everyone on the bird, but soon enough it soared over to a giant snag and perched. YES! We were able to watch it for over 20 minutes and we soaked it's enormity in. 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 scoring a Philippine Hawk-Eagle on the way, a trio of large endemic raptors for the day is always a delight!

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. Then we settled in for lunch. The group decided at that stage to forfeit the Apo Sunbird rather than climb up more, so we turned around at this juncture. Over the next couple of days we added some other great birds to our Kitinglad lists including Philippine Cuckoo-Dove, Yellow-breasted Fruit-Dove, Philippine Hanging-Parrot, Philippine Swiftlet, Whiskered Treeswift, the neat Black-and-Cinnamon Fantail and the cracking Rufous-headed Tailorbird, Little Pied Flycatcher, Brown Tit-Babbler, Grey-hooded Sunbird, and leader only Red-cheeked Parrotfinch and Giant Scops-Owl.



The bizarre punk-crested Apo Myna (left) and delicate Black-and-cinnamon Fantail (right) are both only likely on Mt Kitanglad on this itinerary.



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!

10th March: 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, 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!

11-13th March: PICOP (MINDANAO) Lowland forest.

PICOP is potentially one of the most depressing places to bird in the Philippines, as the lowland forests here are 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. 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. 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 (Tarictic) Hornbills. We got lucky with several calling Red-bellied Pitta. 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.

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, as rain was heaviest in the morning, but things picked up later as the rain moved off 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 we had to creep along until eventually we were crouched down looking at 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, clearly the sexiest of this pair, proved more challenging as it appeared they may have reached the end of their calling season. However in one of the last flocks of the morning, as we neared the van again, we heard its distinctive call, although it was a good 10 minutes or so before we not only found one, but were able to scope it up complete with the flashy celestial headdress that gives the bird its name. Both Monarchs and both Pittas in the first two days. 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, Bicolored Flowerpecker, 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

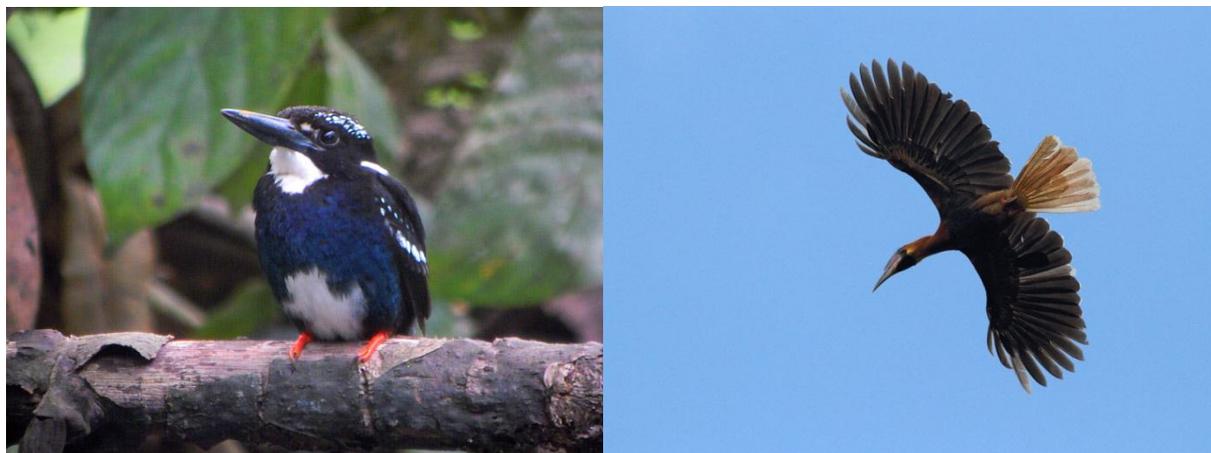
of the Blue-crowned Racquet-tail and although it took considerable patience and much persistence, we eventually looked up to see one of these impressive endemics fly in, and land conveniently on an open snag above the clearing we were standing in, where we could admire the needle-fine racquets in full 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! From our vantage point on top of our jeepney we scanned the marshes as dusk approached for our main quarry, but dark came and they had not showed. Fortunately right on dark we did see a distant Australian Grass-Owl quartering the marshes; fortunately we had close looks at them after dark when we were looking for Philippine Nightjars which we also saw after a pair 'chonking' away were watched flying around the runway.



Two really good pittas were seen at PICOP amongst a memorable group of special endemics. The Red-bellied Pitta (left) and Azure-breasted Pitta (right), were both spectacular, and seen well, at this site that is losing trees by the minute.

However, the most adrenalin-raising event we had was once birding was over on the 11th! We casually returned to our hotel in Bislig, and noticed the reception ladies carrying most of their office materials upstairs. I asked, what is going on, and one casually said “big Tsunami is coming from Japan”. I said, what do you mean, and she said, “watch CNN”. We turned on the news to hear and see the devastating and tragic events in Japan. It was pretty scary as we were on a coastal site in the Philippines theoretically in the face of where the waves would be coming from. News stations had no idea where and how the Tsunami would hit the Philippines, or what it's affect would be. I immediately chatted to clients and we moved to the highest storey of our building. We were already a little way back from the coast and above sea-level, and given that everywhere around us was lower, we felt we were in the best possible place.

However, I never felt entirely comforted as we were at best 20 m a.s.l. I called my sister-in-law in Taiwan to make sure that she was somewhere safe with my Son, then I got a bottle of Vodka and climbed on the roof, which was a good 5 m higher than the rooms. Having seen the footage of how buildings moved in Japan, that might not have been enough had we felt the full impact of that devastating natural phenomenon. But I was relieved when 9 pm came and went and nothing happened. I climbed down with an empty bottle of vodka and a considerable headache! The massive scale of the disaster in Japan, and ensuing images of what happened there, only became apparent over the next few days as the media begun broadcasting them. Natural disasters of that scale are terrifying, and we felt incredibly lucky that we did not come close to experiencing anything like that, and shocked and saddened by the misery and fallout of the events in Japan.



Something small and something large. The snazziest kingfisher in the Philippines is to my mind the startling Silver Kingfisher (left); while PICOP also holds the incredible giant Rufous Hornbill, a massive and impressive bird.

14th March: Bislig – Manila (LUZON)

Given the scale of events and tensions yesterday we took it reasonably easy today, with a late breakfast. We then had much travel to do, so we jumped in the van and headed for Davao, which took us several hours, enjoying a good packed lunch en-route. Once in Davao, we checked in at the airport and had a good early dinner before flying to Manila where we made it to our comfortable city hotel.

15th – 16th March: Subic Bay (LUZON) Lowland Forest

Having begun in Manila, we had an early breakfast and struck out from there, heading for 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. Arriving in the late afternoon we did not expect to find much, but quickly stumbled upon some of the key endemics of the area, that included a handsome pair of Sooty Woodpeckers, that showed for us on all of our 3 visits to Subic, 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 would feature heavily on the tour, like Coletos, and Guiabero. We also got great perched views of Colasisi or Philippine Hanging-parrot, playfully hanging upside down while feeding on a scarlet treetop blossom. 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. We retreated to our delightful accommodation which was pretty-close-to-plush and we enjoyed fine Chilean red wine for dinner which was a real treat after the tougher Mindanao part of the trip was over. Dawn found us on the US naval base at Subic, searching for more of Luzon's specialist lowland species. Endemics came thick and fast with White-eared (Brown) Doves. 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, passing by only briefly on this occasion. 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. And what is more we were delighted to find a flock of no less than eight of them that we watched for a good 10 minutes cavorting around in the mid-storey! 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 Balicassiao, a Philippine Tailorbird found skulking in a dense thicket of bamboo, and some Luzon (Tarctic) Hornbills.



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.

17th March: Subic Bay early am and **Mount Polis (LUZON)** High-altitude forest, PM.
We managed a bit of casual birding at Subic this morning, but before long we had to start the long trip north to Banuae, which we managed to get to in the late evening after driving through the deforested lowlands of central Luzon for most of the day.

18th March: MOUNT POLIS (LUZON) Montane Forest
Our day on Polis began with our bleary-eyed group making the chilly pre-dawn start under cover of darkness. As we started up the hill it began drizzling. The rain would not stop for most of the day, and at times, perhaps the first time in my life, the winds would blow the rain upwards and you would have to

point your umbrella towards the ground to prevent yourself from getting wetter! We got wet, very wet. But with persistence we slowly nailed almost all the key birds when our binos were dry enough to look through, and we joked and laughed all day long to keep spirits up and ended up having a massively fun time despite the miserable weather. Soon after dawn we were surrounded by calling Philippine (Luzon) Bush-Warblers as we would be throughout our time on Polis as this is a very commonly heard sound in Luzon's high mountains, and we managed to get some several close views during the morning. However the Long-tailed (-Ground) Bush-Warblers were far less cooperative taunting from every roadside bush it seemed, but eventually at an opening we coaxed one across the path at lightning speed. On the road a short time after dawn we found a few Island Thrushes feeding actively in the post dawn mist. Overhead, among the more common Glossy Swiftlets, we found some of the larger endemic Philippine Swiftlets, another high montane target at Polis. Other non-endemic mountain species that were fairly common on Polis included Mountain Tailorbird, and most flocks held a Mountain White-eye or two, Mountain Leaf-Warblers and some of these also contained the inconspicuous Luzon montane endemic, Green-backed Whistler. Flocks revealed Elegant Tits and the more local Chestnut-faced Babblers, an endemic species to Luzon's high mountains, in addition to the very handsome and more widespread endemic, Metallic-winged Sunbird (the first of six endemic sunbirds recorded on the tour). A few of the flocks also contained lone Blue-headed Fantails. By searching some dead snags at the forest edge near the pass we came across another cool montane endemic that Polis gave us our best shot at, with superb views of Mountain (Gray-capped) Shrike. Towards the end of the day, Britt got really lucky when she saw a fantastic Flame-breasted Fruit-dove that flew across the road and disappeared into the thick brush not to emerge again. We had to dodge a mudslide so that we could get to the stake-out for Luzon Water-Redstart, which was found feeding in their traditional spot on a rushing mountain stream in the small mountain village of Bay-yu on the far side of the pass at Polis. A localized montane endemic that is increasingly under threat from rising levels of water pollution. Aside from the birds we also passed by some of the best examples of the spectacular and famous mud-walled rice terraces in the area, some of which date back 2,000 years when the most feared headhunters of the cordillera at the time, the Ifugao, built them. These have aided in Banaue being long considered the number one tourist destination in the Philippines. On our way back to Banaue, the wet weather and puddles on the roadside attracted great car-side views of one of the most elusive of all the Philippine endemics - a pair of Plain Bush-Hens that was a massive relief to 'get out the way'.





Two of Polis' great specialties, the Mountain Shrike (above) and Chestnut-faced Babbler (below).



The spectacular, World Heritage listed, mud-walled terraced wet rice paddies near Banaue. Understandably, the number one tourist attraction in the Philippines.

There are a number of examples of these amazing terraced paddies in the area around Banaue, this one was near the Luzon Water-Redstart site at Bay-yu. Some of these were first built by the Ifugao people almost 2,000 years ago.

19th March: Mount Polis (LUZON) High-altitude forest, AM to Manila.

After some more light birding around Banue this morning we headed back to Manila for another night in the capital before setting off for Mt Makiling, our final stop on the island of Luzon.

20th March: Manila to Mount Makiling (LUZON) Mid-altitude forest, PM.

After another early breakfast at our hotel in Manila, it was then off south to the chilled out Makiling university campus, near to the town of Los Banos that has numerous resorts for visiting Filipinos, wanting to explore the many natural hot springs in the area. We saved the forested mountain of Makiling for the next few days, as our afternoon 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 while we initially found only a few of the non-endemic Banded Buttonquail, we eventually picked up the bolder markings of the distinctly larger Spotted Buttonquail, and in the end enjoyed repeated views of both species, scuttling on and off the track to feed in the waning sunlight. Our first welcome encounter with Philippine Coucal also occurred on campus, after they had earlier frustrated us around Subic.

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PHILIPPINE CUCKOO-DOVE



YELLOW-BREASTED FRUIT-DOVE

One of the most beautiful of the many colorful endemic pigeons and doves in the Philippines and also thankfully widespread.

21st March: Mount Makiling (LUZON) Mid-altitude forest.

Dawn saw us once again on the hunt for endemic nightbirds. Right at the base of the mountain we were soon hearing a number of our targets - Philippine Scops-Owl (that frustrated throughout the tour). Other new birds, some special to Makiling, for the tour 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

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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. 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. Other birds seen included more Philippine Pygmy-Woodpeckers, that were a regularly recorded endemic on the tour, and a lone male Black-naped Monarch and a flock of Purple Needletails that zoomed swiftly overhead. Stripe-sided Rhabdornis was seen again and there are a whole host of endemic nectarivores on the Philippines and Makiling provided several new ones on our morning walk alone, with a male Flaming Sunbird (another Luzon endemic), Red-striped Flowerpecker (that was to be our first 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.

22nd March: Mount Makiling (LUZON) - Puerto Princesa to Underground River National Park, 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. Aside from this haul of endemics, we also heard our third target pitta species of the trip, when a Hooded Pitta called closeby. 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.





Palawan has a slew of endemic species, including the amazing Lovely Sunbird (upper) and melancholic White-tailed Shama (bottom).

23rd March: 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. Paul's 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

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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 site 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. We decided to indulge in the spectacular journey through the underground river cave system, which was magical in it's own right, with caves, limestone shapes and many bats being the highlights. On the return journey we found our sixth and 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. 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. At about 5 pm we got lucky when a pair of birds came in off the coast and circled over us before landing on the ridgeline. We scoped them for some time, and then they flew a little more and landed again. 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. A little later we were treated to the sight of a fantastic Oriental Hobby hunting low over the road.



More Palawan endemic species include the Palawan Blue Flycatcher (top left) and Palawan Leafbird (bottom) with the specialized, although non-endemic Malaysian Plover (top right) also being found easily.

24th March: Sabang and Garceliano Beach, Puerto Princesa (PALAWAN) Tidal mudflats and mangroves.

We had seen the Blue-crowned Racket-tail, but only very poorly, so our objective this morning was to walk a patch of forest that is good for that species. We failed with the racket-tail but did turn up some of

the other goodies we had been seeing more regularly. Then, before long, we had to head for Puerto Princesa, where we had lunch. After lunch we made for a trail north of the city. Here we had a great afternoon seeing both Palawan Flycatcher and Blue-crowned Racket-tail surprisingly well, narrowing our list for the morning down to a single species. We headed back to the city where we had a spectacular seafood dinner.

25th March: 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 historically (although very rarely in recent years), also Palawan Flycatcher. We all eventually made it and to my relief 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 more of the same things, soaking up the remainder of our time with the Palawan specialties. With a spectacular meal this evening our time in Palawan, and the Philippines drew to a close.

26th March: Puerto Princesa and departure back to Manila.

Keith returned to Manila early this morning while Steve and Britt made their way towards Miniloc for time at the fabulous snorkeling and dive resort there.

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*

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

MEGAPODES: Megapodiidae

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Tabon Scrubfowl *Megapodius cumingii*

PHEASANTS and PARTRIDGES: Phasianidae

Blue-breasted Quail *Coturnix chinensis*

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*

PALAWAN PEACOCK-PHEASANT *Polyplectron emphanum*

HERONS, EGRETS and BITTERNs: Ardeidae

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*

Cinnamon Bittern *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*

Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis*

Gray Heron *Ardea cinerea*

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*

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*

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

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*

Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*

Besra *Accipiter virgatus*

Gray-faced Buzzard *Butastur indicus*

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 latter taxon.

FALCONS: Falconidae

PHILIPPINE FALCONET *Microhierax erythrogenys*

Oriental Hobby *Falco severus*

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

RAILS, GALLINULES and COOTS: Rallidae

Barred Rail *Gallirallus torquatus*

PLAIN BUSH-HEN *Amauornis olivacea*

White-breasted Waterhen *Amauornis phoenicurus*

White-browed Crake *Porzana cinerea* - HO

Watercock *Gallix rex cinerea* - HO

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Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*
Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

PLOVERS and LAPWINGS: Charadriidae

Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva*
Malaysian Plover *Charadrius peronii*
Snowy Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*
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*
Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*
BUKIDNON WOODCOCK *Scolopax bukidnonensis*

BUTTONQUAIL: Turnicidae

SPOTTED BUTTONQUAIL *Turnix ocellata*
Barred Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator*

PRATINCOLES: Glareolidae

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*

GULLS & TERNS: Laridae

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

PIGEONS and DOVES: Columbidae

Island Collared-Dove *Streptopelia bitorquata* – some authorities split the *dusumieri* race as a Philippine endemic.
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* - H
WHITE-EARED DOVE *Phapitreron leucotis*
AMETHYST DOVE *Phapitreron amethystinus* - H
PHILIPPINES (Pompadour) **GREEN-PIGEON** *Treron (pompadora) axillaris* - Increasingly considered a good split from Pompadour Green Pigeon.
Thick-billed Pigeon *Treron curvirostra* - H
YELLOW-BREASTED FRUIT-DOVE *Ptilinopus occipitalis*
FLAME-BREASTED FRUIT-DOVE *Ptilinopus marchei*
BLACK-CHINNED FRUIT-DOVE *Ptilinopus leclancheri*
PINK-BELLIED IMPERIAL-PIGEON *Ducula poliocephala* - H
Green Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula aenea*

COCKATOOS: Cacatuidae

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PHILIPPINE COCKATOO *Cacatua haematuropygia*

PARROTS: Psittacidae

GUAIABERO *Bolbopsittacus lunulatus*

LUZON RACQUET-TAIL *Prioniturus montanus* - H

MINDANAO RACQUET-TAIL *Prioniturus waterstradti* - H

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*

Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus*

Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus*

Violet Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus*

Asian Drongo-Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris* - H

PHILIPPINE DRONGO-CUCKOO *Surniculus velutinus*

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*

Chestnut-breasted Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus curvirostris*

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*

BARN OWLS: Tytonidae

Australasian Grass-Owl *Tyto longimembris*

OWLS: Strigidae

PALAWAN SCOPS-OWL *Otus fuliginosus* - H

PHILIPPINE SCOPS-OWL *Otus megalotis* - H

MINDANAO EAGLE-OWL *Mimizuku gurneyi* - LO

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 the latter day roosting at PICOP.

FROGMOUTHS: Podargidae

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*

Brown-backed Needletail *Hirundapus giganteus*

Purple Needletail *Hirundapus celebensis*

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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*

Asian Palm-Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis*

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*

Black-backed Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca*

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

RUFIOUS-LORED KINGFISHER *Todirhamphus winchelli*

Collared Kingfisher *Todirhamphus chloris*

SPOTTED KINGFISHER *Actenoides lindsayi*

BEE-EATERS: Meropidae

Blue-throated Bee-eater *Merops viridis*

Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*

ROLLERS: Coraciidae

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*

HORNBILLS: Bucerotidae

PALAWAN HORNBILL *Anthracoceros marchei*

RUFIOUS HORNBILL *Buceros hydrocorax*

LUZON HORNBILL *Penelopides manillae*

MINDANAO HORNBILL *Penelopides affinis*

WRITHED HORNBILL *Aceros leucocephalus*

ASIAN BARBETS: Megalaimidae

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*

WOODPECKERS: Picidae

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.

BUFF-SPOTTED (Greater) **FLAMEBACK** *Chrysocolaptes montanus/lucidus* – In theory part of the Greater Flamback 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 being one of them.

CRIMSON (Greater) **FLAMEBACK** *Chrysocolaptes (lucidus) haematribon* – In theory part of the Greater Flamback 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 being one of them.

SOOTY WOODPECKER *Mulleripicus funebris*

PITTAS: Pittidae

AZURE-BREASTED PITTA *Pitta steerii*

Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida* - H

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), *striata* (Luzon) and *kochi* (Mindanao).

BLACKISH CUCKOO-SHRIKE *Coracina coerulescens*

BLACK-BIBBED CUCKOO-SHRIKE *Coracina mindanensis*

McGREGOR'S CUCKOO-SHRIKE *Coracina mcgregori* - H

Pied Triller *Lalage nigra*

Ashy Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus*

Fiery Minivet *Pericrocotus igneus*

Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*

WHISTLERS: Pachycephalidae

GREEN-BACKED WHISTLER *Pachycephala albiventris*

YELLOW-BELLIED WHISTLER *Pachycephala philippinensis*

SHRIKES: Laniidae

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*

MOUNTAIN (GRAY-CAPPED) SHRIKE *Lanius validirostris*

ORIOLES: Oriolidae

Dark-throated Oriole *Oriolus xanthonotus*

PHILIPPINE ORIOLE *Oriolus steerii*

WHITE-LORED ORIOLE *Oriolus albilorus*

Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*

DRONGOS: Dicruridae

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

PALAWAN DRONGO *Dicrurus (hottentottus) palawanensis*

MINDANAO DRONGO *Dicrurus (bracheatus) 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*

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*

TITS: Paridae

ELEGANT TIT *Pardaliparus elegans*

PALAWAN TIT *Pardaliparus amabilis*

BUSH-WARBLERS: Cettidae

LUZON BUSH-WARBLER *Cettia seebohmi*

Mountain Tailorbird *Phyllergates cucullatus*

RUFOUS-HEADED TAILORBIRD *Phyllergates sericeus*

PASSERIFORMES: Sittidae

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis*

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*

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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*
Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*
Tawny Grassbird *Megalurus timoriensis*
Striated Grassbird *Megalurus palustris*

CISTICOLAS: Cisticolidae

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*
Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*

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

Chestnut-tailed Jungle-Flycatcher *Rhinomyias ruficauda*

Gray-streaked Flycatcher *Muscicapa griseisticta*

Snowy-browed Flycatcher *Ficedula hyperythra*

PALAWAN FLYCATCHER *Ficedula platenae*

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*

Island Thrush *Turdus poliocephalus*

Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*

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

LUZON WATER-REDSTART *Rhyacornis bicolor*

BABLERS: Timaliidae

ASHY-HEADED BABBLER *Malacocincla cinereiceps*

PALAWAN (MELODIOUS) BABBLER *Malacopteron palawanense*

STRIATED WREN-BABBLER *Ptilocichla mindanensis*

MINDANAO PYGMY-BABBLER *Stachyris plateni*

RUSTY-CROWNED BABBLER *Stachyris capitalis*

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CHESTNUT-FACED BABBLER *Stachyris whiteheadi*
Pin-striped Tit-Babbler *Macronous gularis*
BROWN TIT-BABBLER *Macronous striaticeps*

WHITE-EYES: Zosteropidae

LOWLAND WHITE-EYE *Zosterops meyeri*
Everett's White-eye *Zosterops everetti*
Mountain White-eye *Zosterops montanus*
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*
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-HOODED SUNBIRD *Aethopyga primigenia*
FLAMING SUNBIRD *Aethopyga flagrans*
METALLIC-WINGED SUNBIRD *Aethopyga pulcherrima*
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*

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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* - H
Nutmeg Mannikin *Lonchura punctulata*
White-bellied Munia *Lonchura leucogastra*
Chestnut Munia *Lonchura atricapilla*

MAMMALS

Northern Palawan Tree Squirrel *Sundasciurus juvencus*
Little Golden-mantled Flying Fox *Pteropus pumilus*
Large Flying Fox *Pteropus vampyrus*
Long-tailed Macaque *Macaca fascicularis*
Philippine Colugo *Cynocephalus volans*



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.