



Armchair Birdwatcher

As I introduced myself as an armchair birdwatcher, I continue in the same state and enjoy the privilege of birds visiting me! As if birds heard me, they seem to visit my home much more than it was the case when I first wrote this article. This morning, I was trying to do some work on my desk and I was continuously visited by my friends so much so that my work was getting interrupted. I saw a number of Olive-backed Sunbirds, a Tailor Bird and number of Bulbuls just a few feet from my window.

It has been almost fifty years, since I have been enjoying bird watching, and if anything, I have grown fonder of them. The more I look at them my fascination grows stronger. Watching these avian creatures provide me with indescribable pleasure.

These days my house is buzzing with the sweet call of Olive-backed Sunbirds. They are all around the house, especially on the Garlic Vine which blooms almost every two weeks and has been doing so since last September. There are other houses with flowers in the neighborhood so the sunbirds are around all the time.

Since I published this website, some of my friends asked for pictures of these birds. I wish I had the right equipment to do close up bird photography, but I have taken the pictures from internet and I hope you will be able to enjoy admiring these birds.

Since last write up I have seen a few more new birds on my walks. Common black ringed Starling is a beautiful bird and often forages for insects after the grass by the side of canal has been cut. We have seen white breasted water hen with three chicks. Unfortunately after a couple of weeks only two could be spotted, possibly got hunted by some carnivore. I have seen Greater Racket tailed drongos chasing each other in the same spot by the canal where I have been seeing them for the last three years.

Last week we went again to Doi Inthenon to see some birds. Unfortunately it rained relentlessly and we could hardly see any birds or go for a walk. However, we did manage



to see both male and female Scarlet Minivets, which was a pleasure. We also saw Eurasian Jay, and Shrikes and bulbuls and oriental magpie robins.

The scaly breasted Munias are in abundance and they keep moving from place to place, where they would find seeds of their liking.

With paddy fields all around Cinnamon Bittens and Chinese Pond Herons are a common site on my walks, but one rarely spot them sitting. Only noticed in their flight. Greater Coucals are also a common site now in paddy fields. Black vented Mynas are also in the paddy fields looking to fetch some food.

I watch birds sitting on my desk looking through the window, on my daily walks, going to office or for shopping. I am also fortunate to have travelled to most exotic places for work and again the birds come to greet me.

From my desk, overlooking a small garden, I have seen amazing number of birds at quite close quarters. No need to use my binoculars as they are so close and me behind the pane is no threat to them. My favorite is the Olive Backed Sunbird. I know from their calls that they have arrived. A couple of them come at specific times of the day when the flowers are open. A few feet away, sucking nectar from flowers of Scarlet Spiral Flag Ginger (*Costus woodsonii*). As I write this, a beautiful Crested Bulbul perches on the same flower, perhaps to say hello to me, as it is not a bird that care for nectar from flowers. I can clearly see the red patch above white cheeks and bright red vent. Another surprising visitor that I have had in the spring is the Scaly-breasted Munia. I was wondering how come this bird in visiting my little garden as they are often seen in large numbers as flocks. Soon I realised when I noticed that the bird was trying to steal some Spanish Moss hanging from a tree, I guess for nesting. One day, to my surprise, I saw a White-breasted Waterhen, running by the side of the house, surely a lost visitor from the nearby canal or pond. Many other visitors include, Oriental Magpie-robin, Zebra and Spotted Doves, Mynas, Sparrows, Common tailor-bird, Oriental Reed Warbler.



My daily walks provide me with another opportunity to enjoy watching birds that fly past. I generally go for walk by the side of a canal. My regular walk is on the banks of this canal which connects two major roads for a distance of about five kilometers. Apart from the cool breeze and beautiful view of the mountains, there are a number of birds



Brown-headed Gulls: Near Bangkok

visiting this water at different times of the year and for diverse reasons.

Doves coming to drink water and others looking for food. When the water is low a common Sandpiper paddles

through the water looking for something to eat. When the grass is ripe with seeds several flocks of Scaly-breasted Munias feed on it.

Very often a solitary Chinese Pond-heron is looking for food and as soon as I approach, it flies off displaying its pure white underwings and belly. One often sees a Cinnamon Bitten flying out of the canal during rainy season. High up flies the Egrets on their way to settle for the night. Once a Common Kingfisher displaying brilliant turquoise back, accompanied me by the canal and demonstrated how it caught a fish on the third hop.

Noisy Crested Bulbuls and Mynas fly across the canal and perch on the wires or tree tops. Of course one cannot ignore the call of a Coppersmith Barbet and with a little effort, can be seen high up the top of a tree restlessly calling. I can often hear the hoots of the Greater Coucals but rarely see it. Sometimes, when I take a diversion through the scrub and the Longan (*Dimocarpus longan*) groves, the bird just flies across the path disappearing in the bushes, never to be traced. Loud Koel calls are heard almost daily. Pleasing whistling song of the Oriental Magpie-robin cannot go unnoticed and one finds this beautiful bird perched on top of a tree or an electricity pole.

Drongoes need a special mention. No, not the common dronges, which are frequently sighted, but the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo. For the past three years whenever I have spotted them they are in the same place, high up in the canopy of a rain tree and at times flying across the road to the opposite side to disappear in tall eucalyptus trees. It is a treat to watch them chasing one another in the tree.



As I return from my walk at sunset, noisy common brown Mynas are preparing to settle down on a particular teak tree. Near our gated community lawns one sees a number of, not so noisy, White-vented Mynas collecting last insects on the ground before settling down for the night. Nearer my house I see a number of Ashy Wood-swallows perched on the wires snuggling in groups of three or five, others flying around hunting for insects.

Recently, on a holiday in sea-side Karabi Resort, I noticed something flying over my head and perching on a palm tree trunk. Thinking it to be some kind of a small bird, I went around the tree trunk to find it and noticed a perfectly camouflaged small lizard clinging to the tree trunk. On close inspection, of course not a bird, I realized that it was a flying lizard (*Draco maculatus*), my very first sighting of the creature!

I do not recall getting bored seeing these birds every day, but to appreciate the beauty of each bird each time I see it and continue to enjoy the spectacle. I did not go looking for any of these birds but they happen to be there going around their business and I take the opportunity to admire and enjoy them.

In the same mode, I want to share my experience with some of the beautiful birds I have come across, going around my business or pleasure, in different parts of the world:

Papua (Indonesia) and Papua New Guinea: Bird watchers paradise! My favorite - *Electus roratus*, a beautiful parrot with marked difference of colour in male and female and the characteristic roar of the female parrot. Papuan or Blyth's Hornbills – if you observe them over a period of time, male and female are always together, you hear the sound of their flight before seeing them. All of a sudden you notice only one of them is flying and after a period of time you see the family flying together - the fascination of how male seals the female in tree trunk and feeds her whilst she incubates, generally two eggs, until the chicks are ready to fly. The famous birds of paradise, more often heard than seen, as it is difficult to spot them in the thick forests. In the low lands of Papua, whilst driving to work, once I had the pleasure of watching a family of Crakes cross the road. Domesticated cassowaries and southern crowned pigeons were a common sight in the villages.

Australian birds are incredible. Some of the Australian birds that have left impression on my mind are the Galahs, Kookaburras, Sulphur-crested cockatoo, Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo, Red-tailed Black-cockatoo, Crimson Rosella, Rainbow Lorikeet, various Corellas, Australian King Parrot, Red-winged Parrot. These are just a few of the



terrestrial birds and water birds are a delight and is another world altogether. There are so many birds in Australia to see and cannot be listed in one go.

Jalandhar (Punjab, India): Watching from my balcony - beautiful red-wattled Lapwings, the Red-naped ibis, Brown Indian-Chat, common Hoopoe, Black Drongo, red-vented bulbul.

On walks - Brown Crake, the Bayas (weaver bird) building incredibly complicated nests, Wire-Tailed Swallow, Bee Eaters, Cattle Egret, large pied Wagtail, spotted Munias, Indian Pond-heron, Black Francolin, Shikra, Asian Pied-myna, Crow Pheasant, white breasted Kingfisher and many other common birds.

Srinagar and Kashmir



I consider myself lucky to have observed a pair of Ibis Bill in Lider River in Pahelgam over three days.

Also to enjoy watching paradise fly catcher in Tyndale Bisco School garden in Srinagar.

Lesotho (where I often go for work): Hadedda Ibis, Southern Bald Ibis, Red-winged Starling, Little Swift, Gray Lourie (go-away-bird), Southern Red Bishop, Long Tailed Widowbird, Bald Eagle, Southern Masked Weaver, African Stonechat, Jackal Buzzard, African Paradise Flycatcher, Pied Crow, White-necked Raven to name a few.

Bird Siting Records from 2010





Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush Blue Whistling Thrush
Both in Doi Inthenon, Chiang Mai, Thailand on 3rd January 2018.

