



Wild about Birds

Volume 1,
Issue 1
14 July 2005

Newsletter of the Wild Bird Club of the Philippines

WBCP is two years old

The Wild Bird Club of the Philippines (WBCP) celebrates its second birthday today, 14 July, with many feathers in its cap.

It has just been declared a World Bank environmental champion. Some of its members took part in a scientific expedition that discovered the Calayan Rail, a new world bird species. Two of these members have since received a British Petroleum Conservation grant for the preservation of this species. (See stories on pages 1-2). It has just published the second of its annual database of birds seen in the Philippines; its Records and Rarities Committee ensures that this database is compiled in accordance with international scientific procedures.

Not bad for a Club that began as Birdwatch Philippines on 9 January 2003, an e-group of weekend birdwatchers. With the aim of "promoting birdwatching and the responsible enjoyment of nature", the e-group established WBCP at the Manila Zoo on 14 July 2003. The Club is registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Its founder members are Tina Alejandro, Kitty Arce, Mads Bajarias, Ricky de Castro, Carmela Española, Lu-Ann Fuentes, Drew Galano, Arne Jensen, Ned Liug, Mike Lu, James McCarthy and Jon Villasper.

The rest, as they say, is history. Since its inception, the Club has conducted 51 guided trips for the public, school groups, government bodies and private companies. It has carried out 78 birding trips for members. It has attracted widespread attention and has been the subject of several television programmes and newspaper articles.

Acknowledgement of its know-how has led to invitations from government and other bodies to participate in numerous environment-related activities. The Club now contributes regularly to the Asian Waterbird Census that takes place in Manila Bay and Candaba Swamp (among other places in the Philippines). Club officers have acted as resource persons for local governments: in Parañaque on declaring the Tambo mudflats as a bird sanctuary, in Candaba for the creation of a protected area in the marshlands, in Valenzuela City on the adoption of the Black-crowned Night-Heron as the city's flagship species.

Membership for the first half of 2005 stood at 114, compared to 117 for 2004. Most members are Filipinos from Metro Manila. Among the Club's international birder members are Philippine residents Tim Fisher, one of the authors of the premier *Guide to the Birds of the Philippines* and Arne Jensen, Danish ornithologist and impassioned conservationist; Desmond Allen, based in the United Kingdom; Steve Pryor from Italy; and founder James McCarthy, now back in his native Britain. 🐦

Inside this issue:

WBCP is two years old	1
Club bags World Bank award	1
Calayan Rail discoverers win award	2
WBCP team carries out island census	2
Bird's-eye view	2
Metro Manila birding: American War Cemetery	3
Meet the Execom	4
Highlights from the field	5
Bird gallery	8

Club bags World Bank award

On 20 June, WBCP received one of seven of the World Bank's first-ever "environmental champion" awards in the country. These were given at the launch of the Bank's *Philippine Environment Monitor 2004*, an annual report on the state of the environment.

The awards honour individuals and organizations that have demonstrated a commitment to environmental conservation and protection while relying on their own resources. Joachim von Amsberg, World Bank country director, said the Bank

recognized the awardees as role models. "The challenge," he said, "is to replicate and scale up best practices." WBCP was commended for identifying critical habitats and raising awareness of the need to protect them.

Mike Defensor, Secretary, Department of the Environment and Natural Resources, presented the awards at the Visitor's Center of the Ninoy Aquino Park in Quezon City. In his acceptance speech, Mike Lu, WBCP President, said: "I am

not sure we deserve this award. But I am sure we shall continue to birdwatch and to educate people about our country's avifauna diversity.

"We shall continue to conduct monthly guided trips for the public. We shall continue to contribute to Philippine bird records. And when we see bird habitats being destroyed and bird populations diminishing, we will take a stand. You will continue to hear from us." 🐦



Photo: Gerry de Villa

The environmental champion award.

Calayan Rail discoverers win award

Carmela Española and Carl Oliveros, members of the team that discovered the Calayan Rail, have won a first-year Silver Award from the British Petroleum Conservation Programme. The award will fund a 14-month project focusing on the endemic Philippine rail species. The WBCP team, which was among 28 chosen from a field of 400 applicants, received the award on 23 June 2005 at a ceremony at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.

Carmela and Carl then joined other awardees in a training workshop run by the Smithsonian's Monitoring and Assessment of Biodiversity Programme. The workshop covered biological monitoring and surveying techniques, conservation education and people-oriented research.

"The discovery of the Calayan Rail is a wonderful demonstration that the world still has much to reveal to us." — Nigel Collar, Birdlife International

The award, amounting to US\$12,500, will be used for baseline research on the population and distribution of the Calayan Rail, to assess threats to its survival, and to formulate a conservation action plan in collaboration with local government, NGOs and other institutions. The project envisions an environmental education campaign in schools and forest communities. 🐦

WBCP team carries out island census

By Mads Bajarias

Wildlife biologist Carmela Española recently led a team of conservationists on a month-and-a-half survey of the Calayan Rail. The survey took place from 27 March to 11 May 2005 on Calayan Island, the species' sole known habitat.

The ground-dwelling rail inhabits a forest growing on coralline limestone in central Calayan. (It was first recorded for science in 2004 and Carmela is credited with having been the first to see it during that scientific expedition.) Prior to the survey, almost nothing else was known about its life cycle, habitat requirements, and the threats to its survival as a species.

Playback: a surveying tool

The team used the playback method to detect the rail's presence. This entailed obtaining a recording of the rail's call and playing the recording at specified intervals in pinpointed areas around the island. The number and behaviour of the birds attracted to the recording, along with type of vegetation and other pertinent information, were then noted by the census-takers. The census points were determined from interviews conducted by team members with key informants, mainly subsistence hunters in the forests of Calayan.

Survey objective

The survey aimed to ascertain the rail's population and distribution. It also sought to identify future courses of action for conservationists and local stakeholders. The team networked with local government officers, notably the Governor, Mayor and barangay leaders. They discussed ways of balancing the island's human population with long-term biodiversity conservation.

Pressing concern

A pressing concern that came up during the informal discussions was the prevalence of slash-and-burn activities in the dry season. The census team documented instances of this unsustainable agricultural practice during their stay.

Team members

Team members were Carl Oliveros, Mads Bajarias (both WBCP members), forester Baby Jhane Clemeno and expedition cook Nancy Dian. Various local guides, who also acted as porters, translators and spotters, provided invaluable assistance. Mads gives a vivid account of the expedition's experiences (and encounters with mosquitoes and the local soap-munching madman) on the WBCP website. 🐦

Bird's-eye view

By Ipat Luna

"Great Egret"? That's what you call us? I think I prefer 'Oh Great Egret'." Sheepishly, I said there was a Little Egret and an Intermediate Egret. He just happened to be bigger than they were. He was no deity.

"You live here? Like all the time?" I was flabbergasted. Here I was doing my best to keep this habitat for the birds and they think it's worth shit. This was supposed to be a simple request, but it was quickly turning out to be a prosecution of the way I live. I could not summon my defensive responses, not when both the bird and I were being assailed by the stench of my species.

"Not to say we can't find what we need here on the way through, you see. You're here all the time but you've given up this place. Only Boracay for the tourists need to be *E. coli*-free. I used to know the guys who lived here." He pointed his beak to the vast expanse of dead water we call Manila Bay.

I wanted to get to the point. Colleagues in Japan went to a bird park and made a plaster cast of a bird's footprint in the mud. They used it to sign a petition for the birds to keep the habitat. I thought the tactic was clever but was missing the actual consent of the petitioner. I had a tough time arranging this interview, but it seemed this bird was even more interested in why we do what we do to ourselves.

Continued on page 3



Cartoon: Peter Sutcliffe

Metro Manila birding: American War Cemetery

By Ned Liuag

Not far from the hubbub of the Makati Central Business District is the American War Cemetery, a rare oasis of tranquility. The largest outside the United States, the Cemetery holds the remains of more than 17,000 American, Filipino and Allied servicemen killed in the Philippines and New Guinea during the World War II.

This sprawling 61.5-hectare plateau overlooking Laguna de Bay, the biggest freshwater body in the Philippines, is also a haven for resident and migrant birds and other wildlife.

With freshly tended lawns, abundant

greenery and towering trees, the American War Cemetery is the best place to view raptors and migrant passerines in Metro Manila. Gray-faced Buzzard, Chinese Goshawk, Japanese Sparrowhawk and Eurasian Kestrel have been known to favour the Cemetery.

During winter migration, Yellow and Gray Wagtails frequent the lawns on both sides of the road at the bottom of the slope east of the War Memorial. Flocks of Chestnut-cheeked Starlings have been seen wheeling by the Memorial colonnade.

The concentric rows of white headstones south and east of the War Memorial are territory of resident pairs of Pied Bushchat. Occasionally, White-Collared Kingfishers which are among the most vocal and colourful birds in this place, will sit on the headstones scanning the ground for prey.

The hedge and trees in the south-eastern corner of the Cemetery harbour aggressive Pied Fantails and the common Yellow-Vented Bulbuls. With some patience the endemic Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker can be spotted tapping at a snack in this place. If you are lucky, a Colasisi will make its presence known by its whistle and flash past in a blur of

green deep feathers.

The restricted area beyond the hedge provides refuge for Zebra and other wild doves like the endemic White-Eared Brown Dove. Large flocks of Red Turtle Doves make an occasional appearance.

Black-Naped Orioles have been noted in large numbers by Club members. Sometimes White-Breasted Wood Swallows will appear overhead from their haunts in the restricted areas of this American-administered park.

With concrete sprawl encroaching on



Birding at the Cemetery

Photo: Sean Co

its perimeter, the American War Cemetery contains most of the few remaining acacia and flame trees that until a few years ago were found in abundance in the area.

Pied Trillers, near-endemic Lowland White-Eye and the recently introduced Ring-Necked Parakeets make a home in the section close to the War Memorial parking lot.

Occasionally, visitors will also encounter another recent arrival: the North American Gray Squirrel. Its local range covers Forbes Park and Dasmariñas Village in Makati.

Just before the 5:00 pm closing time, a visitor should consider choosing a shaded spot on the western hemicycle of the Memorial. From there, one can get a clear view of the lawns and Barred Rails emerging from well-watered bushes. This is truly a good way to end an afternoon of birdwatching at the Cemetery. 🐦

Bird's-eye view

"So will you agree that we use your print to present a petition to keep this habitat here?"

"No dice." I could not believe it. The bird went on, "I can't promise I'll keep coming even after you file the petition."

"Why not? It's precisely so you could keep coming."

"Face it, human brain. If you win, will your shit go somewhere else then?"

Direct question. I realized my trash went to Pier 18, its juices into the bay and my shit doesn't go farther either. "We can at least stop them from cementing everything here." It sounded lame. As if the bird had any idea why we used so much cement to begin with.

"What do you think would make a difference?" He may as well have been Great One and not just Great Egret for me right then; on his response seemed to hinge my life's work.

"Keep your shit together."

He flew off and I still did not have a petitioner. If our shit were together, it would be fertilizing the central plains and feeding all 11 million of us. And I would be jobless. I trudged back through the grasslands towards where I parked my fossil fuel machine, thinking how we ever got so lost to begin with.

I wondered if he would ever want my thumbprint to petition the Maker to let us out of this mess for good behaviour. 🐦

How to get there

The American War Cemetery is located along Old Lawton Drive in Fort Bonifacio. It is accessible from C-5, Nichols or from McKinley Road, Forbes Park. Commuters can take a jeepney or the Fort Bus at the corner of McKinley and EDSA near the MRT-Ayala station and reach the War Cemetery gate after a short walk up the tree-lined Lawton Drive or sunny Rizal Drive from 5th Avenue. For a better appreciation of its location, please see Map 87 in the Metro Manila CITY-ATLAS.

Entrance to the park is free but an ID is required to enter the grounds, which is under U.S. Government administration. No food is allowed and a strict no-walking-on-the-grass rule is implemented. There are clean washrooms near the gate and at the parking lot behind the War Memorial.

Meet the Execom...

The brains, the brawn, and certainly the fire behind WBCP is its Executive Committee. Four officers are elected annually, and a fifth is voted in by the Execom. Members of the founding Execom are Execom members for life.

At the helm is *Michael C. Lu*. President for two terms now, Mike is without doubt the Club's dynamo. A hands-on officer, Mike initiates, guides and participates actively in Club activities. He represents the Club in dealings with the outside world. With his quiet diplomatic ways and steely businessman's acumen, he is largely responsible for the progress the Club has made in its short existence. Mike is a WBCP founding member and a permanent member of the Execom. He is also the moderator of the Club's two e-groups. When he is not working for the Club, he is Sales Manager for C.K. Lu Enterprises, a family business dealing with industrial tools. He is a member of the Haribon Foundation and a member of the El Presidente Toastmaster's Club.

Vice-President *Jonathan M. Villasper*,



Elected officers (clockwise): President Mike Lu, Vice-President Jon Villasper, Secretary Kitty Arce and Treasurer Albert Ramos.

WBCP founding member and Execom permanent member, is the scientist among the group. Jon, ex-MENSA member, is experienced in

geographical information systems (GIS) and satellite remote sensing as applied in biodiversity conservation, transportation, family planning and contraception, and urban planning. He is a faculty member at UP's Department of Geography, a GIS Consultant at the University's Natural Sciences Research Institute, and a GIS/Mapping Volunteer for Miriam-PEACE's Southern Sierra Madre Wildlife Conservation Centre. He has worked with Haribon on several GIS mapping and database development projects. He has been conferred honorary membership by the Oriental Bird Club for his work on *Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book*.

Treasurer *Dr Albert Ramos* is a visiting surgeon at the Capitol Medical Center, Sta Teresita General Hospital and the Pres. Diosdado Macapagal Memorial Medical. Albert became a birdwatcher by way of being a photography enthusiast. He was one of the first to sign up for WBCP's regular weekend guided bird walks.

On her second term as Secretary, *Marie Kathleen Denise Arce* is a founding member and permanent member of the Execom. She is co-founder of the MyZooVolunteer Group Foundation, an NGO that operates in zoos and wildlife rescue centers in the Philippines. It also supports the conservation programs of the Wildlife Rescue Center of the DENR-Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB) and other conservation groups. A psychology major in college, Kitty is now Personnel Manager at Selecta Feeds.

Nilo M. Arribas, Jr., voted in by his peers as fifth Execom member, has been an IT professional for more than nine years. Before he left for Cebu in 2004, Nilo was Assistant

Director for Management Information Systems at the Lyceum of the Philippines in Manila. An avid photographer, Nilo has attracted attention in his new home city both for his photography and for the activities of the WBCP Cebu Chapter, which he established soon after his arrival.

Edward Dennis P. Liug, permanent Execom member and a third-generation banker, is now senior assistant manager for communications at Planters Development Bank. A journalist for two years in his pre-banking days and a published writer of short fiction, Ned edits and manages his company's newsletters and magazines. He has made the American War Cemetery, one of Metro Manila's prime birding sites (see story on page 3), his personal birdwatching turf and nothing much happens among the birdlife there that he does not know about. He often contributes delightful and precise nature observations to the WBCP e-exchange.

James McCarthy, permanent Execom member and Treasurer in 2003-2004, is by all accounts the spur behind the establishment of WBCP. James retains his membership and officer status in WBCP although he returned to his native United Kingdom with his family last June after 16 years in the Philippines. During his residence at Ayala Westgrove Heights in Silang, Cavite, he identified 87 species of birds in the area, putting that residential development on the map as bird-rich site. James started early as a birdwatcher. At age 8 he was the youngest member of his local ornithological society. James put a scientific cast on his "obsession" by obtaining a degree in zoology at Oxford University. 🐦

Special points of interest:

- ♦ 9 January 2003. Birdwatch Philippines is launched.
- ♦ 14 July 2003. WBCP is set up.
- ♦ 11 May 2004. The Calayan Rail is discovered.
- ♦ 20 June 2005. WBCP receives World Bank environmental champion award.
- ♦ 3 July 2005. Club holds first environmental planning meeting.

Highlights from the field...

By Arne Jensen and James McCarthy

This is an abridged version of the WBCP field report for the first half of 2004. The report was compiled from the notes of Arne Jensen (AJ), Arnel Mallari (AM), Alice Villa-real (AV), the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC), Birdquest (BQ), Carmela Espanola (CE), Conservational International-Philippines (CI), Carl Oliveros (CO), Desmond Allen (DA), Genevieve Broad (GB), Jon Hornbuckle (JH), Jill Lucas (JL), James McCarthy (JM), Jonathan Rossouw (JR), Jonathan Villasper (JV), Kitty Arce (KA), King Tours (KT), Lisa Marie Paguntalan (LP), Mads Bajarias (MB), Mike Lu (ML), Mike Edgecombe (ME), Marijn Prins (MP), Mark Villa (MV), Merlijn van Weerd (MW), Nilo Arribas (NA), Ned Liuag (NL), Pia Belardo (PB), Rene Bajit (RB), Stef Saño (SS), Tim Fisher (TF), Todd Pepper (TP), William Rutchert (WR), Wouter Thijs (WT), WWF-Philippines (WWF) and Zardy Goering (ZG).

The full report highlights the most threatened species, some of the least known important bird areas (IBAs) and unusual records (new observations outside known home ranges or new or accidental records to the Philippines). It covers 167 localities, of which 103 in Luzon, 39 in the Visayas and 25 in Mindanao. Species listed as "rarity records" (RR) are marked with an asterisk. It report is available from the WBCP website, as is the database on all bird sightings in 2004.

New country records

WWF-Philippines finally documented the presence of the endangered Christmas Island Frigatebird *Fregata andrewsi** in the country: in the Sulu Sea in April, and on Cawili Island and North Islet, Tubbataha Reef in May (AJ, WWF-Philippines). A Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentiles** was seen in the Mts. Palay-Palay-Mataas na Gulod National Park, Cavite (AJ, MV) in February, the second record for the Philippines in one year. Two Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* seen in April in the foothills of the Sierra Madre, in Tanay, Rizal, (JM) were the first documented for the country.

The discovery of the endemic Calayan Rail *Gallirallus calayanensis* on Calayan Island in May put the Philippines back on the global ornithological map. Between 100 and 200 pairs were documented by

four WBCP members of the Babuyan Island Expedition (CE, CO, DA, GB). A Jacobin or Pied Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus** on Dalupiri Island (DA) and an Orange-flanked Bush Robin *Luscinia cyanura** on Calayan Island were recorded by the same expedition in May. Both were first records for the Philippines.

Accidental visitors and rare residents

Some 580 Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes* from 10 sites were reported by AWC in January. Cebu, Bohol and Leyte are possible main overwintering sites; several birds were also seen on Palawan's Rasa Island and White Beach in February (BQ). A Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola bacchus** was observed on Babuyan Claro Island, Cagayan in April (CO). In the fishponds of Iwahig, Puerto Princesa, 3 Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor** (first reported in December 2003) were still present up to end of May (AM, JR).

One Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* was spotted in Malasi Lakes, Isabela (WT), the first Luzon record for many years. The Grey-headed Fish-Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*, a rare raptor, was noted in the Callao Cave area, Cagayan (WT). A Philippine Eagle *Pithecophaga jefferyi* was seen in February (KT) and May (JR) in its known breeding area of Mt Kitanglad Range Natural Park, Mindanao; in February an immature bird was observed in North Cotabato (BQ). The good news included a breeding pair on Sierra Madre Mountains (CI) and 1 bird on Mt Los Dos Cuernos, Cagayan (JH). A Black Kite *Milvus migrans** in Mt Palay-Palay in May was the country's third record.

Ruddy-breasted Crake *Porzana fusca* was observed in February-March in the

Parañaque wetlands (NL, JH, AJ). The only record of Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* for many years came in from the Bonifacio Wetlands, Misamis Occidental in January (AWC).

The Grey-headed Lapwing *Vanellus cinereus**, seen in Balatubat, Camiguin Norte in April (DA), is the country's fourth record. A third country record of a Common Ringed-Plover *Charadrius hiaticula** was obtained at the Tambo Mudflats, Parañaque in January (JM, JV, TF, AJ). Two Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer** (AJ) shared the lagoon in Baluarte, Bulacan in January with Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* and Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*. Among the uncommon waders in January-March were 4 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *Calidris acuminata* in Metro Manila (AJ) and Candaba Marsh (TP); Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* in March (2 in the Parañaque wetlands and 1 [AJ] in Baluarte); 6 Broad-billed Sandpipers *Limicola falcinellus* in March (JM) in Baluarte; and 14 Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* at Tubbataha in May (AJ).

Two Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus** were seen in Manila Bay in February (TF), the sixth country record and the first since 1986 of this probably overlooked species. At least 2 Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris** were observed off Calayan Island (CO) in January. Also seen were: 1 Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* and 6 Bridled Terns *Sterna anaethetus* off Puerto Princesa in May (AJ); 1 Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* between Sta Ana and Camiguin Claro, Cagayan in April (MB, CO); and 1 Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* between Cebu City and Dumaguete City in April (WR).

The list continues: 6 Flame-breasted

Continued on page 6



The newly discovered Calayan Rail puts the Philippines back on the global ornithological map.

Left: Calayan Rail walking along the forest floor. Right: Close-up.

Highlights from the field



Photo: Romy Ocon

Garganeys and other wild birds flying over Candaba Swamp, Pampanga.

Pigeon *Ptilinopus marchei* and 20 of the increasingly rare Spotted Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula carola* in May at Mt Los Dos Cuernos (JR); a Spotted Imperial-Pigeon on Trail Hill 394, Subic, in February (TF); a Luzon Bleeding-heart *Gallicolumba luzonica* on Los Dos Cuernos in May (JR), and two of the same bird in Mt Makiling (JM, MB).

The number of Philippine Cockatoo *Cacatua haematuropygia* on Rasa Island, Palawan is said to have risen to 100, of which 11 were seen in May (JR). Records of 1 Blue-naped Parrot *Tanygnathus lucionensis* and 3 Green Racquet-tail *Prioniturus luconensis* in Subic forest in February, and 3 on Mt Palay-Palay in February and March expand the known Luzon range of these rare species. Three Blue-naped Parrot were also seen in May in the Subic forest (SS) where it is still common. Three Blue-backed Parrot *Tanygnathus sumatranus* were reported from PICOP, Surigao del Sur in February (BQ) and May (JR).

There are good records of the Philippine Frogmouth *Batrachostomus septimus* from Mt Talinis, Dumaguete in April (WR) and 20 Purple Needletails *Hirundapus celebensis* in January from Ateneo University, Metro Manila (MV). A male Mindoro Tarictic *Penelopides mindorensis* was seen in Casa Rora, Dumaguete (JR) and 3 Writhe Hornbill *Aceros leucocephalus* were noted in PICOP in April (MB). The record of 3 Palawan Hornbill *Anthracoceros marchei* from El Nido, Palawan in April (JL) is one of the first from this area. In April, 9 Rufous Hornbills *Buceros hydrocorax* were observed at Mt Palay-Palay; the White-

bellied Woodpecker *Dryocopus javensis* noted in March is the second record for the area (AJ).

The Wattled Broadbill *Sarcophanops steerii* was observed in May in the PICOP area (JR) although an important roost was reportedly destroyed by illegal logging (ZG). In March a pair with nest was found in the Rajah Sikatuna National Park, Bohol (JH). The first documented nest of the Whiskered Pitta *Pitta pitta kochii* was seen in May at Los Dos Cuernos; 6 birds were reported from this area (JR) and 4 from Mt Polis, Benguet (ME). Streak-breasted Bulbul *Ixos siquijorensis* of the critically rare Cebu subspecies *monticola* was recorded in Tabuan (2 in May) and in Nug-as, Alcoy, Cebu (3 in June) (LP). Another world class record is a pair of Isabela Oriole *Oriolus isabellae**, of which 1 was netted in April (MW).

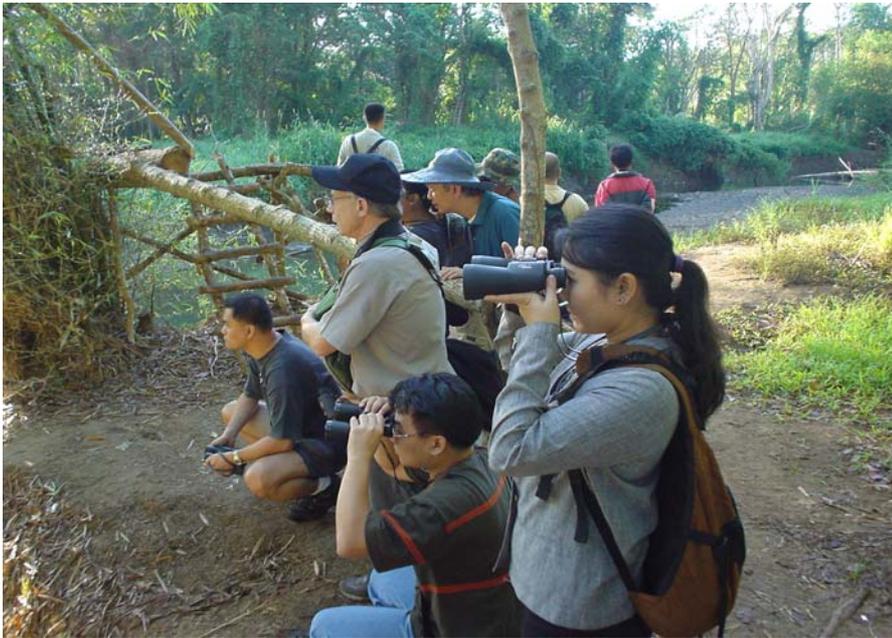
Also recorded were 3 White-fronted Tit *Parus semilarvatus* in February along the trail to Hill 394, Subic (TF) and a pair with 2 young in May on Dos Cuernos (JR); Rabor's Wren-Babbler *Napothera rabori* in May (JR), also at Dos Cuernos; 2 Flame-templed Babbler *Stachyris speciosa** on Mt Talinis (WR); 1 male Black Shama *Copsychus cebuensis* at Tabuan in May (JR) and 8 of these birds in Nug-as, Cebu in June (LP); and the elusive Ashy Ground-Thrush *Zoothera cinerea* at Mt Makiling in January (BK) and February (BQ) and in Batulao, Batangas in February (TP). The three Manila observations between February and March of White's Thrush *Zoothera aurea* at the Ateneo University are unusual (MV).

Middendorff's Grasshopper-Warbler

Locustella ochotensis in the Parañaque wetlands was reported as new to Metro Manila, with more than 4 birds in January (JV, JM) and 2 in February (AJ, JH). The other records include: a White-throated Jungle-Flycatcher *Rhinomyias albigularis** on Mt Talinis in April; a male Narcissus Flycatcher *Ficedula narcissina* in the mangrove forest near Bais Harbor, Negros Oriental (WR) in April; a Little Slaty Flycatcher *Ficedula basilanica* in the PICOP forest in May; the rare Palawan Flycatcher *Ficedula platanea* in February (BQ) and May at Zig-Zag Road, Puerto Princesa (JR); Furtive Flycatcher *Ficedula disposita* on Dos Cuernos in May (JR) and at the Talaytay Watershed Reserve, Aurora in February (BQ); 3 Celestial Monarch *Hypothymis coelestis* in Apaya, San Mariano, Isabela (ME), 2 in the Talaytay Watershed Reserve (BQ) (both in February), two in the PICOP forest in March (TP) and 1 in May (JR); and, in the same area, 8 Short-crested Monarch *Hypothymis helenae* in March (TP) and 2 in May (JR).

Forest Wagtail *Dendronantus indicus* were reported only from Mt Makiling in February (BQ). In March, a White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* of the subspecies *lugens* was photographed at Sta Ana, Cagayan (CO) and 1 bird was seen at Tambo, Parañaque. The latter showed characteristics similar to the subspecies *leucopsis*, which is unreported from the Philippines (MV, JV). Records have been received of 2 Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* at Musuan, Bukidnon in January; the near-extinct Cebu Flowerpecker *Dicaeum quadricolor** in May in Tabuan and 2 males at Nugas, Alcoy (LP); and an immature Java Sparrow *Lonchura*

Continued on page 7



Birdwatching at La Mesa Watershed.

oryzivora at Ateneo University (MV) and 3 adults at the American War Cemetery (ML) in June.

Large congregations and unusual numbers

Two flocks of 110 and 60 Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis* were observed in March and April in the Pampanga wetlands (MV). A group of 150 Frigatebirds *Fregata* sp were present in June at Nagtabon, Palawan (JH). Although considered uncommon, fairly high numbers of Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* were reported in January from Cavite Bay (168) and the Paranaque wetlands (110) (AJ). The largest congregations of Great Egret *Ardea alba* were found in the Puerto Rivas fishponds, Bataan (2,070) and Paltan Lake, Nueva Ecija (740) in January (AWC). Groups of over 1,000 individuals of Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* were reported by AWC in January from the Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary (4,050) and the Bonifacio Wetlands, Misamis Occidental (1,020).

A stunning 3,200 Wandering Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna arcuata* were observed at Malasi Lakes in January (AWC). These lakes are among the country's most important sites for over-wintering duck species (5,000 individuals in February) and the only site that reported Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca* (15), Garganey *Anas querquedula* (900) and Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* (150) (WT, MP). Mainit Lake, Agusan del Norte had 5,300 Tufted Ducks *Aythya fuligula* in January. Although considered vulnerable, 4,600 Philippine Duck *Anas luzonica* were

reported from 24 localities (AWC) and in May-June from five other localities. The highest numbers were from Malasi Lakes (1,420), and Magat Dam (1,060), Luzon. The wetlands of Negros held good numbers (1,095), and even Metro Manila had 12 birds resident in the Parañaque wetland (ML, NL).

Shorebirds

The most notable counts of migratory shorebirds from January 2004 (AWC) were recorded in Cebu (503 Grey Plovers *Pluvialis squatarola* in Olango Island and 248 Whimbrels *Numenius phaeopus* in the Cordoba Wetland) and Parañaque (575 Greenshanks *Tringa nebularia*, 619 Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, and 438 Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*). At least 12,600 terns (6,600 Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybridus* and 5,600 unidentified terns) were counted in January in eight sites in Manila Bay, together with 320 Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus* (AWC). A single fishpond in Pampanga's near-coastal wetlands hosted 3,000 individuals of Whiskered Terns in late March (MV).

Raptor bonanza

Seen migrating north from 7 to 10 April over the Sierra Madre Mountains at Tanay, Rizal over the Sierra Madre Mountains were Oriental Honeybuzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* (36), Chinese Goshawk *Accipiter soloensis* (12,500), Grey-faced Buzzard *Butastur indicus* (14) and Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* (2) (JM). The only other noteworthy reports on migratory raptors concern the Eastern Marsh-Harrier *Circus spilonotus* (8) and Pied

Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* (4) in February seen at Malasi Lakes (WT, MP). A concentration of 60-100 Brahminy Kites *Haliastur indus* on 24-25 May in Mt Palay-Palay is unusually high although it is this species' supreme stronghold.

Other birds

Up to 20 Spotted Wood-Kingfisher *Actenoides lindsayi* in April and 23 Tropic Hornbill *Penelopides manillae* in March, recorded in Mt Palay-Palay (AJ, JM), indicate the abundance of uncommon endemics in this protected area (JM, AJ). An impressive 800 Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla flava* were noted in March at PICOP. About 200 Chestnut-cheeked Starling *Sturnus philippensis* were roosting in the American War Cemetery on 17 April (NA); 109 were recorded in the area on 25 April (AV). A good total of 10 Naked-faced Spiderhunter *Arachnothera clarae* was noted in March at PICOP (TP).

The Green-faced Parrotfinch *Erythrura coloria*, occurring in unusually high numbers in Luzon because of the flowering bamboo, a favorite food source, were seen at Ambakok, San Mariano, Isabela: 195 in February (ME) and 30 in March (JH) and at Hamud Camp, Mt Los Dos Cuernos: 300 in May (JR).

Important bird areas (IBAs)

The Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary, Cebu continues to be internationally important. More than 9,400 birds of 28 species were counted on the Island during the AWC in January, including Chinese Egret (11), Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* (3), Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* (23) and Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* (657).

Other important wetlands are the following: Puerto Rivas, Bataan (12,600

Continued on page 8



Execom member James McCarthy watching migrating raptors.

Bird gallery

Photos by Romy Ocon; text by Adrian Constantino based on Kennedy et al.



The **Spotted Wood-Kingfisher**, locally known as *Salaksak Gubat*, is a fairly common bird in the understory of lowland forests. This endemic bird perches motionless in dark recesses and is found in Luzon, Negros and Panay.



The country's only endemic duck, the **Philippine Duck** can be found in freshwater marshes, shallow lakes and ricefields. It can be distinguished from other ducks by its cinnamon rust head, dark brown crown and the line through its eye.



Known for its fast undulating flight, the **Colasisi** is the country's smallest parrot. Usually found feeding on flowers and nectar, this hanging parrot is found in all forest types and even in city gardens.



The **Whiskered Treeswift** usually inhabits forest edges or recent forest clearings where it flies out to catch insects in the air. Its diagnostic features are the whiskers above and below its eyes and its squeaky toy-like call.



The shy **White-breasted Waterhen** is a rail with white face and underparts. Locally known as *Tariwakwak*, this bird is common in freshwater marshes, grasslands and mangroves. It immediately runs into cover when disturbed.



Fairly common in forest edge and clearings, the **Dollarbird** is the only roller found in the Philippines. It displays with air acrobatics and noisy calls during the breeding months of April and May.



myckle@birdwatch.ph
www.birdwatch.ph

The Club:

Provides unrestricted access to the records that it publishes; maintains the integrity of its records; is interested in all wild birds, in all habitats whatever their status; assists all members of whatever experience; enables foreign birdwatchers to access information on birdwatching in the Philippines, and receives and collates their findings; assists local and foreign organizations in recording, sharing and disseminating information; assists in relevant events within its capacities; conducts activities to expose the general public to birdwatching and the need to protect birds; remains sensitive to people living within birdwatching areas.



Wild about Birds

Editor

Leni Sutcliffe

Editorial Adviser

Jon Villasper

Design and layout

Adrian Constantino

Photos

Romy Ocon

Sean Co

Gerry de Villa

Printing

Ann Lim

© All rights reserved

Highlights from the field

waterbirds), the Cavite-Bacoor Bay (5,000), Parañaque Coastal Wetland (4,700 including more than 1% of the flyway population of Common Greenshank), Tanza Coastal Wetland, Navotas (4,000, of which 17 Chinese Egret). These are just four of the wetlands in the Manila Bay area which in total are likely to host more than 100,000 waterbirds from August to May. Notable areas in the rest of the country include the Cordoba Wetlands, Cebu (3,500 waterbirds); Himamaylan, Kabangland and Ilog Wetlands, Negros Occidental (3,100); La Paz, Carmen, Davao del Norte (9,800); Lake Mainit,

Surigao del Sur (5,800); Bonifacio Wetlands, Misamis Occidental (5,200); and Agusan Marsh Wildlife Sanctuary, Agusan del Sur (5,000).

A neglected but excellent IBA is the Mt Palay-Palay Mataas Na Gulod National Park, Cavite. Just two hours' drive from Manila, it is one of the Club's favorite destinations. After one year's birding in the area, the number of species stood at 136 compared to a minimum of 150 for Mt Makiling. Among the most notable are Philippine Duck; 14 species of raptors such as Black Kite, Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* and Northern

Goshawk; 9 species of pigeons and doves including Luzon Bleeding-heart *Callicolumba luzonica*; Philippine Eagle-Owl *Bubo philippensis*; 4 species of woodpeckers; and a surprising density of endemic forest birds such as Philippine Trogon *Harpactes ardens*, Spotted Wood-kingfisher *Actenoides lindsayi* and White-browed Shama *Copsychus luzonensis*. It also one of the last breeding areas of the Rufous Hornbill *Buceros hydrocorax* on Luzon outside the Sierra Madre. 🐦