

Cambodia Recent Bird Reports, March 2010

Compiled by Tom Evans and Frederic Goes

Thanks to all contributors. In the future, please send any records you think may be of interest (for current or earlier months) to tevans@wcs.org and fredbaksey@yahoo.com.

General

The main annual coordinated count of Sarus Cranes was conducted during 27-28 March with the involvement of many agencies and NGOs. Cranes were confirmed at nine sites, four wholly in Cambodia one straddling the Cambodian/Vietnamese border and four wholly in Vietnam. The grand total was 715 birds which is similar to the 2009 March count but with a dramatically different distribution of birds. 20% were at Kien Luong in Vietnam, a site which has typically had few or no birds in previous counts at this season. Numbers for the Cambodian sites are listed by region below. It is notable that the January count produced 865 birds, so there were about 150 unaccounted for in March. We are not sure if these missing birds are flocking at an as-yet unidentified key site in the Mekong/Tonle Sap floodplain, or were scattered too thinly to count across their breeding grounds in the Northern and Eastern Plains.

South-east

In central Phnom Penh 14 **Painted Storks** were seen flying near Wat Lanka on 2 March (MP).

A **Grey-faced Buzzard** was seen over the Kirivong Hills (40 km south-east of Takeo town) on 7 February (RO).

At Boeung Prek Lapeuv the census on 28 March confirmed that no **Sarus Cranes** were present as expected (per SKH). At Koh Thom no **Sarus Cranes** were found on 27 March but access was limited by low water levels and Fishing Lot activity. There were quite convincing reports from villagers that up to 30 birds had been present in Fishing Lot #9, and the birds had reportedly also used Lots 10 and 11 and a lake near Sambok Chap village in the same district (CS per PJ).

South-west

Two **Great Hornbills** were seen in Kep National Park on 28 March (HR). Were they passing visitors or are they still hanging on as breeding residents here?

Prey Nup mangroves produced another extraordinary record, with Indochina's first **Olive-winged Bulbul** photographed on 7 March (RO).

Kampong Trach produced 134 **Sarus Cranes** for the census on 28 March (US, ED and SoV per SKH) plus 6 just over the border in Phu My (per TT). This count is well down from the unusually high January and February 2010 numbers but comparable to March counts in several recent years.

Tonle Sap

As usual during the spring passage period there were repeated sightings of **Oriental Plovers** in fallow and ploughed fields in Kampong Thom - 10 (possibly up to 17) in Chong Doung, Baray district on 17 March (RvZ), 10 on 23 March at Prolay (HN, SS, JO and SVC), 19 on 29 March at Prolay (DN and SVC) and 5 on 31 March (RvZ) in Prolay, Stoung District.

Also in the grassland belt, 10+ **Yellow-breasted Buntings** were recorded on 18 March in ploughed fields on the boundary and to the north of Chong Doung Bengal Florican Conservation Area (RvZ). As this species has now been listed as Globally Threatened by Birdlife International we would appreciate receiving all records in future, to enable its status to be better monitored. On 23 March 3 **White-shouldered Ibises** were seen in the Bak Dom area east of the main Veal Srongai grasslands (RvZ). Small

numbers are seen around this time each year in the grasslands. 15 **Comb Ducks** were found at Wat Prohoot on 23 March (HN, SS, JO and SVC) and 6 near Chi Chit's dam, in Krous Kraom on 27 March (RvZ). Only 6 **Sarus Cranes** were recorded during the late March census, 3 each in Krous Kraom and Stoung-Chikraeng. There are usually around 40.

Prek Toal produced one of the most exciting records of the past few months, with two **Masked Finfoots** seen on 6 March near Platform 4. It has been another very successful season in the breeding colonies – analysis is ongoing but eye-catching numbers among the initial results include 3667 **Spot-billed Pelican** chicks, 258 **Greater Adjutant** chicks and over 32,000 **Asian Openbill** chicks! A pair of **Black-necked Storks** visited for a few days but was not suspected to breed this year (all per SV).

Northwest

The census produced 313 **Sarus Cranes** on 27 March at Ang Trapeang Thmor (ATT team per NK). This is similar to the 2009 count, but these two years are the two lowest since 2001. The reasons for this are as yet unclear. An **Indian Thick-knee** with two chicks at ATT on 19-20 March is believed to be the first confirmed breeding record for Cambodia (SM and SVC).

At Kbal Spean 1-2 **Siamese Firebacks** were seen each day, 23-25 March, close to the top river carvings (MH)

North

A fine male **Narcissus Flycatcher** was seen and photographed on 21 March at O Koki in Preah Vihear Protected Forest (CL, AL, DN/SVC). We have only traced two previous records, from Kratie and Siem Pang. Less decorative was the **House Sparrow** noted in Tbeng Meanchey town on 3 March (HW). Seven **Sarus Cranes** were recorded in Kulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary during the late March census (KPWS team per HR). The vulture restaurant in Preah Vihear Protected Forest on 11 March produced five species, including two **Cinereous Vultures** and two **Himalayan Griffons** (per PB).

The Western Siem Pang vulture restaurant produced two **Himalayan Griffons** along with 41 other vultures on 10 March (MB per PB).

North-east

In Western Siem Pang an **Indian Spotted Eagle** was photographed coming to drink at Veal Kriel on 6 March, and a **Short-toed Snake-eagle** was photographed from the same hide on 8 March (JCE). This is the 4th record of the latter species already in 2010, suggesting a small invasion given that there are only a handful of previous records. Small movements of **Grey-faced Buzzards** were also noted, with 12 circling over during late afternoon on 25 March then departing north, with 7 more passing north on the morning of 26 March (HW). Two **Violet Cuckoos** were seen on 24 March, and a new, occupied **Red-headed Vulture** nest was also found (HW).

In Mondulkiri Protected Forest extensive coverage of forest pools through March produced only two widely separated records of **Sarus Cranes** - parties of 3 and 2 on 18 and 24 March respectively. One **White-shouldered Ibis** was found at Trapeang Tmat on 26 March. Nine **Red-headed Vultures** and 1 **White-rumped Vulture** were seen on a Wild Pig carcass killed by a Leopard on 26 March - an unusual sighting (for Indochina) of these birds playing their role in a natural food chain rather than relying on domestic stock (all per TNEG).

A **Mekong Wagtail** nest with chicks was found and photographed at Kampi Pool, Kratie on 11 March (MH). The nest has apparently not been described before, but food-carrying to nestlings has been noted from late April.

One **Oriental Darter** was seen at Finfoot Pond in Seima Protection Forest on 12 March (MH and LP).

Phnom Doh Kromum, in Sen Monorom town produced 2 **Common Kestrels**, 8 **Hill Mynas** and 4+ **Chestnut-tailed Starlings** on 28 March (TNEG).

Corrections

In the February digest the records and trip report by Lene Smith and Uffe Gjøl Sørensen were from 2009, not 2010 and the **Chesnut-winged Cuckoo** was seen around the observer's house in Takeo, not in the Prey Nup Mangroves. Sorry for these slips.

Observers

AL Alison Lewis
CL Chris Lewis
CS Chea Sokha
DN Doung Nara
ED Eap Don
HN Howie Nielsen
HR Hugo Rainey
HW Hugh Wright
JCE Jonathan Eames
JO Johnny (SVC Guide)
LP Lotty Packman
MB Maarten Bleeker
MH Markus Handschuh
MP Michael Poulsen
NK Ngin Kamsan
PB Pech Bunnat
PJ Priscilla Joyner
RO Rob Overtoom
RvZ Robert van Zalinge
SKH Seng Kimhout
SM Sang Mony
SoV Sok Vanna
SS Sanh Sophoan
SV Sun Visal
SVC Sam Veasna Centre tour groups
TNEG Tom Gray
US Uong Seth