

Info on Panti Forest, peninsular Malaysia / Railbabbler

From June 1-3, 2009, Peter Maaskant, Hemme Batjes and I (Remco Hofland) from The Netherlands, visited Panti Forest in S Peninsular Malaysia. On the same trip we'd visited SE China and Taiwan, each for a week, of which I will post separate accounts (as well as publish tripreports) in due time. Of this trip, I have posted sev videos (and will post some pix) of interesting birds like Chinese Crested Tern, Cabot's Tragopan, Courtois's Laughingthrush, Mikado Pheasant, Yellow Tit and Rufous Piculet on surfbirds.com.

The trip was centered around SE China and Taiwan, but fortunately I managed to convince my fellow travellers to pay a visit to Panti Forest, having heard it was one of the best sites in the world for my most-wanted lifer Malaysian Railbabbler. And indeed it is – the species proved quite common and sev were seen and heard well. To our surprise, and contrary to reports of some local birders, the forest held a lot of other interesting birds – at least we were quite surprised by the number of species and individuals. Basically, it was good birding throughout the day, though obviously it was better in the morning and in late afternoon.

Thanks to

Simon Cockayne, Martin Kennewell and Ding Li from Singapore, for their advice on Panti, and to Morten Strange, Matthias Fehlow, Susan Myers, Rob Hutchinson and James Eaton who responded to my RFI re Railbabbler / Panti Forest on this [OB] list.

How to get there

Panti Forest is most easily visited from Kota Tinggi, c. 20 kms away. Kota Tinggi is a largish town, with sev hotels and restaurants and easy access to taxis in case you're not on self-drive (like us). We stayed at Hotel Seri Kota, which cost 55 ringgit for a double and 40 ringgit for a single room (c. 6 EUR each) and mostly ate at the Chinese place across the street or at PizzaHut behind the hotel.

Panti Forest is most easily reached from Singapore, either by taking the ferry from near Changi airport (1 hr) and a taxi to Kota Tinggi (1 hr); or by taxi from Singapore through Johor (apparently this also takes 2 hrs). From Kuala Lumpur Kota Tinggi is a 4-hr drive, of which 3 hrs on a good highway. The taxi from Kota Tinggi to KL International Airport cost us 350 ringgit (c. 70 EUR).

From Kota Tinggi, follow the provincial road "3" towards Mersing. At kmp 270 the Ridge Trail (a.k.a. 270-trail; we didn't bird here although it doesn't see traffic like the Bunker Trail) starts on your left. Continuing along the "3", the Bunker Trail (which is actually a driveable unsurfaced but good-quality road) starts to your left, right after two large concrete tomb-like structures on either side of the road; this is at c. kmp 267.5. Panti is signposted. After entering on the Bunker Trail, there's a visitor's centre on your right (closed during our visit) and soon after, a large pond with a wooden pagoda-like structure. We mainly started walking from here. C. 80m past the pagoda-like structure, a tiny trail starts left, which apparently is the Elephant Trail – it has a Giant Pitta that is very occasionally seen (though not by us). About 3 kms into the Bunker Trail few small streams cross underneath the road, though this is hardly visible from a moving car. All along the Bunker Trail small trails enter the forest on either side, but apart from those access to the forest is quite easy anywhere, as there is little undergrowth.

Most babblers and some specialties were seen in the forest near the streams, though many goodies (Railbabbler, Wrinkled Hornbill, Cinnamon-rumped, Diard's and Scarlet-rumped Trogon) were seen in the forest less than 500m into the Bunker Trail.

Best birds recorded

Crested Partridge - *Rollulus rouloul*: sev pairs seen, 1 pair as it whirred across the Bunker Trail [RH], with 1 pair walking nervously through the forest near a large treefall [RH](having to split my attention between them and a Railbabbler that also walked past) and UTV's of at least two pairs by PM.

Rufous Piculet - *Sasia abnormis*: 1 along the Bunker Trail, feeding on a grass stem. A video of it is placed on surfbirds.com.

White-bellied Woodpecker - *Dryocopus javensis*: 1 pair along the Bunker Trail.

Crimson-winged Woodpecker - *Picus puniceus*: common, usually 5+ seen daily.

Orange-backed Woodpecker - *Reinwardtipicus validus*: 1 pair seen by PM and HB.

Buff-rumped Woodpecker - *Meiglyptes tristis*: just one [HB]

Buff-necked Woodpecker - *Meiglyptes tukki*: one associating with babblers (PM)

Black Hornbill - *Anthracoceros malayanus*: a pair with a juvenile, along the Bunker Trail not far from the first stream [RH]

Rhinoceros Hornbill - *Buceros rhinoceros*: one [HB]

Bushy-crested Hornbill - *Anorrhinus galeritus*: one flying past [HB]

Wrinkled Hornbill - *Aceros corrugatus*: one male repeatedly seen very well, on two mornings, as it flew and landed close to the roadside (= Bunker Trail), less than 1 km from the visitor's centre. One of the highlights of the trip, as it was unexpected and beautiful.

Diard's Trogon - *Harpactes diardii*: regularly heard, with single male and female seen.

Cinnamon-rumped Trogon - *Harpactes orrhophaeus*: whistled in and female seen well, male less so [RH]; two pairs in a territorial dispute (possibly triggered by taping) seen well by (PM).

Scarlet-rumped Trogon - *Harpactes duvaucelii*: 2 males seen, more heard [RH]

Red-bearded Bee-eater - *Nyctyornis amictus*: 1 male along the Bunker Trail (PM)

Rufous-backed Kingfisher - *Ceyx rufidorsa*: two and one along a trail following one of the streams (PM)

[HO] **Banded Kingfisher** - *Lacedo pulchella*: two different individuals heard. As my speaker didn't work and I couldn't reproduce the sound whistling, I unfortunately didn't see them [RH]

[HO] **Rufous-collared Kingfisher** - *Actenoides concretus*: one individual heard next to a pond along the Bunker Trail (not far from the first stream). Did respond to tape by approaching, but wouldn't fly into view.

Black-bellied Malkoha - *Phaenicophaeus diardi*: one seen (PM)

Chestnut-bellied Malkoha - *Phaenicophaeus sumatranus*: one seen at the clearing next to the first pond.

Raffles's Malkoha - *Phaenicophaeus chlorophaeus*: 1 female [HB]

Chestnut-breasted Malkoha - *Phaenicophaeus curvirostris*: 3 seen [HB]

Grey-rumped Treeswift - *Hemiprocne longipennis*: 2 hawking over the Bunker Trail [RH]

Whiskered Treeswift - *Hemiprocne comata*: 2 perched near the start of the Bunker Trail (not RH)

Buffy Fish Owl - *Ketupa ketupa*: 1 flushed from near one of the streams (PM)

Malaysian Eared-Nightjar - *Eurostopodus temminckii*: 2 in flight, more heard, near the first pond

Jambu Fruit-Dove - *Ptilinopus jambu*: 1 seen well, perched in the subcanopy of a fruiting tree along the Bunker Trail not far from the first stream. Three similar-sized small doves that flew out of the tree most probably were of the same species

Little Green Pigeon - *Treron olax*: one female perched atop a dead tree in the rain.

Blyth's Hawk-Eagle - *Spizaetus alboniger*: 1 in flight (PM)

Black-thighed Falconet - *Microhierax fringillarius*: 1 perched along the Bunker Trail (PM)

Banded Broadbill - *Eurylaimus javanicus*: 1 seen (not PM), repeatedly heard. Possibly, Black-and-yellow Broadbill was also heard.

Malaysian Rail-babbler - *Eupetes macrocerus*: quite common, as it was seen well by all, in different locations, and heard repeatedly. Remarkably, they (only) called from c. 9.30 am well into the afternoon. Responded to tape and whistling fairly well, though not always coming in close enough for viewing. My first morning (taxi late, couldn't find the forest at first, speaker didn't work) I just walked into the forest in an area that looked suitable, whistled the song and my most-wanted lifer almost immediately responded and then got quiet. Just as I was contemplating on what to do, I heard the soft contact calls barely audible on the Scharringa SE Asia DVD and when I focused on the origin, one walked into view and could be followed for c. 40 secs. A wonderful bird and equally good views! In two days at Panti, I saw two birds very well and heard another 6+. According to Simon Cockayne and Martin Kennewell from Singapore, the singing activity of the birds could have been triggered by recent rains – one of which we experienced on our second night at Panti.

Rufous-tailed Shama - *Trichixos pyrropyga*: 1 (PM)

White-crowned Forktail - *Enicurus leschenaultia*: 1 (PM)

Hill Myna - *Gracula religiosa*: sev sightings, mostly of pairs

Black-headed Bulbul - *Pycnonotus atriceps*: fairly common

Grey-bellied Bulbul - *Pycnonotus cyaniventris*: few seen

Olive-winged Bulbul - *Pycnonotus plumosus*: fairly common

Cream-vented Bulbul - *Pycnonotus simplex*: common

Red-eyed Bulbul - *Pycnonotus brunneus*: fairly common

Spectacled Bulbul - *Pycnonotus erythrophthalmos*: few seen

Grey-cheeked Bulbul - *Alophoixus bres*: few seen

Yellow-bellied Bulbul - *Alophoixus phaeocephalus*: few seen

Hairy-backed Bulbul - *Tricholestes criniger*: fairly common

Rufous-tailed Tailorbird - *Orthotomus sericeus*: singles seen

White-chested Babbler - *Trichastoma rostratum*: few seen

Abbott's Babbler - *Malacocincla abbotti*: 1 pair (PM)

Short-tailed Babbler - *Malacocincla malaccensis*: 1 (PM)

Black-capped Babbler - *Pellorneum capistratum*: 1 (PM)

Moustached Babbler - *Malacopteron magnirostre*: singles

Sooty-capped Babbler - *Malacopteron affine*: few seen [RH]

Scaly-crowned Babbler - *Malacopteron cinereum*: [HB]

Rufous-crowned Babbler - *Malacopteron magnum*: few seen

Grey-headed Babbler - *Stachyris poliocephala*: few seen

White-necked Babbler - *Stachyris leucotis*: 1 came in upon taping Railbabbler (PM)

Chestnut-rumped Babbler - *Stachyris maculata*: fairly common

Chestnut-winged Babbler - *Stachyris erythroptera*: few seen

Striped Tit-Babbler - *Macronous gularis*: common, by voice mostly

Fluffy-backed Tit-Babbler - *Macronous ptilosus*: fairly common

Brown-throated Sunbird - *Anthreptes malacensis*: [HB]

Purple-naped Sunbird - *Hypogramma hypogrammicum*: 1 female [RH]

Purple-throated Sunbird - *Nectarinia sperata*: (PM)

Little Spiderhunter - *Arachnothera longirostris*:

[UTVs] **Spectacled Spiderhunter** - *Arachnothera flavigaster*: 1 seen well, but distant, along the Bunker Trail, was either this species or Yellow-eared Spiderhunter *A. chrysogenys*. My first impression was that of a barbet, with a thick and straight-looking bill, so I think it was Spectacled.

Grey-breasted Spiderhunter - *Arachnothera affinis*: 1 (PM)

Mammals recorded

White-handed Gibbon – *Hylobates lar*: heard many times every day; 1 small group of c. 7 seen well inside the forest.

Banded Langur – *Presbytis femoralis*: 1 small group inside Panti; one holding a baby fell down for c. 10m but managed to break the fall lower down and continued away from the Bunker Trail.

Stub-tailed Macaque – *Macaca nemestrina*: 1 small group inside Panti

Crab-eating Macaque – *Macaca fascicularis*: 1 group inside Panti, sev more roadside, along “3”

Squirrel sp: sev of a larger species seen daily

Slender Squirrel – *Sundasciurus tenuis*: 1 pair

Three-striped Ground Squirrel – *Lariscus insignis*: few seen

Binturong – *Arctictis binturong*: 1 dead, roadkill, btw Kota Tinggi and Panti Forest, along “3”.

Eurasian Wild Pig – *Sus scrofa*: presence noted by feeding marks alongside the stream trails.

Malayan Horseshoe Bat - *Rhinolophus malayanus*: See video on surfbirds.com. A pair hanging from a thin branch at eye-level. One of those things discovered when standing quietly in a forest waiting for a bird. Interestingly, only one hung from the branch, the other one hung from its mate (?).