

Birding East Java

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Yann Muzika (yannmuzika@mac.com)

At the end of the monsoon season i visited 4 locations in eastern Java : Baluran NP, Ijen Nature reserve, Alas Purwo NP and Meru Betiri NP.

The first two locations are rather well known and regular features of birdwatching tours by Birdquest and others. Independent birders also visit the area, and i have used the information kindly provided in their reports by *John Gregory* and *Gregory Smith*. Alas Purwo, at the south-eastern tip of Java, is less visited (*Greg Smith's* report is the only i found about this location), and Meru Betiri, about 30km further west on the South coast, seems completely off the birding map, although some information is provided in the *Birding Indonesia guidebook* by *P. Jepson*.

Monsoon is an unusual time to visit those places as weather conditions are reputedly rather unfavorable to birding, but this was also an opportunity to look for winter visitors that are absent at the dry season. On the whole i was rather lucky, with only a few light showers, mostly at night, and generally clear skies. Heat at coastal locations was very bearable at night, and only mosquitoes (especially around Bama camp in Baluran NP) and a few leeches at Ijen were filling the annoyance column, in addition to bed bugs at Alas Purwo (but this seems to be a year-round condition).

This period is also well advanced into the breeding season, and birds seemed pretty busy attending to their nests, with some feeding frenzy around fruiting trees.

Playback was generally rather ineffective, and night birds were almost completely silent. Nevertheless most of the target birds were found with the notable exception of the White-faced partridge at Ijen. This location was teeming with flycatchers, some of them visiting for the winter, including a rare (first in Java?) Narcissus Flycatcher. A good surprise was the number of sightings of Javan Hawk-eagle in Ijen (3 sightings), Alas Purwo and Meru Betiri, an indication that this endangered raptor does rather well in the area.

For upcoming visitors on a tighter schedule allowing only 2 locations, i would advise to pick Ijen and Alas Purwo, both easily accessible from Ketapang/Bali. With more time in hand i would definitely recommend to explore Meru Betiri as well.

Logistics, etc...

I made things very simple in asking a local bird guide, Hery Kusamanagera who is based in Gilimanuk and works at Bali Barat NP, to arrange transport and accommodations for me. The price per day for a 4WD with driver came at 550 kIDR, including petrol and also park entrance fees, using Sekarayu Tours (harisekarayu@yahoo.com +62333417197). There are several other tour companies based in Ketapang/Banyuwangi that can be contacted by Internet beforehand, or simply by turning up at Ketapang and asking for transport around the ferry pier.

Basic accommodations (as well as food) are available inside Baluran, Alas Purwo and Meru Betiri NP, from 100 kIDR to 250 kIDR for the "deluxe/VIP" rooms. For Ijen you can either stay at Banyuwangi where options are plentiful, or on the other side of the volcano at Arabica homestay (150kIDR-250kIDR per night, with WIFI internet!). More basic homestays are usually available around Pos Paltuding, at the start of the Crater trail, but they were closed (as well as the trail) during my visit due to high volcanic activity.

One can of course do without but I do recommend hiring a local guide such as Hery (and I recommend him in particular!), who will not only be of great help finding the target species, but also will help arrange all the travel details for you.

Baluran NP

Baluran NP is located at the North-east end of Java, facing Bali Barat NP across the Bali strait. The entrance of the park is only 1h drive away from Ketapang on the Surabaya road, then an unsealed road inside the park will take you first to the Bekol grasslands after 12km, then to Bama on the coast after a further 4km where we spent the 2 nights. Birding around Bekol, a mostly savannah/grassland area, easily yields **Green Peafowl** and **Junglefowl**, together with a number of open country birds. We saw a pair of **Black-winged Starling**, a formerly common species on its way to complete extirpation by bird trappers (no more than 8 birds remain in Baluran now). Other notable sightings in the area included several **Changeable Hawk-eagles** and **Crested Serpent-eagles**, **Sunda Cuckooshrike**, **Slender-billed Crow**, a **Rhinoceros Hornbill** and a pair of **Red-breasted Parakeets**, another major target of bird trappers. At night hundreds of **Savannah Nightjars** hunt for insects, and we also found a **Barn Owl**.

Around Bama, several trails allow you to explore good birding habitat, although most of them were badly overgrown by Lantana and other shrubs. The "mangrove trail" starts from the road just before the camp and leads to the sea through a dense mangrove forest habitat. There we easily found **Grey-cheeked Tit-babbler** and **Horsfield's Babbler**, as well as a pair of **Hill Blue Flycatchers** and a flock of **Olive-winged Bulbuls**. We heard several woodpeckers but only **Greater Flameback** and **Sunda Woodpecker** came into view. **Asian Pied Hornbills** are also abundant around Bama. At night we looked for Buffy Fish-owl, only to find a roosting **Crested Serpent-eagle**.

But the best sighting in Baluran was in the mammal category, with a pack of 10 **Asiatic Wild Dogs** (*Cuon alpinus*) in the early morning on the road 300m from the camp. Leopards (*Panthera pardus*) are also present in Baluran, and apparently a Surabaya based photographer could get a rare picture of the big cat a few months before.

From Bekol it is possible to trek the dormant Mt Baluran and explore the nice primary forest habitat there, but it's said to be a strenuous full day hike through dense jungle. Javan Hawk-eagle does occur on the slopes of the volcano.

Birding Baluran was relaxed and pleasant, and during the monsoon the grasslands are a nice lush green. But the overall number of species is rather limited compared to more forested locations visited afterwards.



East Africa ?
No ! East Java !
Bekol savannah



Green
Peafowl



Green
Junglefowl



Horsfield's
Babbler



Asiatic Wild Dogs

Ijen Nature Reserve

Mt Ijen, an active volcano, rises just above the far-east Java hub of Banyuwangi, and is quickly accessed by a road that first meanders through farmland and plantation before reaching the start of the montane forest at elevation 1000m (pos 1). Going higher into the forest the road condition deteriorates considerably, and it does take a 4 WD vehicle to reach Pos Paltuding, the highest point of the road at elevation 1800m, and the start of the trail that goes to the edge of the crater. Due to high volcanic activity, including possible emission of poisonous gases, the crater trail was forbidden to access. The bad part of it is that we couldn't get to the higher area where Scaly Thrush is usually found, and despite spending a couple of hours looking for it at Pos Paltuding we missed the bird. The good part is that the road was unusually quiet, as the sulphur mining activity that takes place inside the crater was also shut down.

Besides the thrush, our main target was the endemic and range restricted White-faced Partridge which is mostly found around 1300-1400m elevation. Yet another miss, despite hearing several birds calling, some very close to us, and spending over 8 hours trying all sorts of strategies to get the bird into view... Now the good news : we had 3 sightings of the endangered **Javan Hawk-eagle**, a pair soaring over the forest at around 1600m, a perched adult bird at 1150m and a juvenile on a low branch just at the edge of the forest, 50m from the road at Pos 1. In all birds we noticed that the rufous color of the underparts described in guidebooks, probably found on Central Java birds, was replaced by medium brown for the adults, and very pale cream for the juvenile bird. Other raptors included **Black Eagle** seen twice below Pos Paltuding, and a rather interesting "flock" of over 20 **Oriental Honey Buzzards**, both dark and pale phases mixed together, soaring over the forest after sunrise. Most probably a pre-migration gathering.

Rather common species included **Dark-backed Imperial Pigeon**, **Sunda and Orange-spotted Bulbuls**, **Sunda and Russet Bush-Warblers** (both common below Pos Paltuding but the latter is a true skulker), **Indigo**, **Pale Blue**, **Grey-headed**, **Asian pied and Snowy-browed Flycatchers**, **White-bellied Fantail** (mostly above 1300m), **Horsfield's**, **Crescent-chested and Chestnut-backed Scimitar Babblers** (all elevations), **Lesser Shortwing** (another skulker, heard at all elevations but seen once only), **White-flanked Sunbird** (above 1300m).

Other notable sightings included good looks at a pair of **Checker-throated Woodpeckers**, a bird that until recently was not supposed to occur in East Java, a pair of

Orange-breasted Trogons, White-crowned Forktail, Sunda Whistling-thrush and Striated Grassbird at Pos Paltuding, **Mountain and Olive-backed Tailorbird**, winter visitors **Mugimaki** and, unexpectedly, a fine 1st winter **Narcissus Flycatcher** (nominate form) which possibly is a first record for Java. Like in almost all other locations, night birds were nowhere to be seen nor heard.

Ijen Nature reserve, which might soon become a National Park according to Hery, proved to be a worthwhile location to visit, with many mountain species that are otherwise hard to find in this part of Java.



Adult Javan Hawk-eagle



Narcissus
Flycatcher
1st Winter



Orange-breasted Trogon



Sunda Bush Warbler



Indigo Flycatcher

Alas Purwo NP

It is located at the South-eastern tip of Java, a 3h drive from Ketapang. The park is surrounded by a large Teak plantation, acting as a buffer against encroaching farmers. The lowland forest there has been logged in the past, but in some patches, especially around Sadengan feeding ground, a good number of large trees have remained. The peninsula at the south-east is rather inaccessible, and in the west the park is bordered by a large river estuary surrounded by mangrove.

From the park entrance, the main road will take you to Triangulasi camp, where accommodation is generally available, but this time it was swarmed by over 100 school kids on a field trip, so the only option left was the ranger camp at Sadengan, 3km from Triangulasi, where we found the best accessible birding habitat. From the entrance, there is another road heading west toward the Bedul camp, but the forest there has almost no large trees remaining, hence birding is not as good.

Sadengan feeding ground is a large grassland patch that has been cleared to allow the local race of wild cattle, the **Banteng** (*Bos javanicus*), to come and graze in full view, with a supporting cast of **Timor Deers**. The watchtower near the ranger station is an excellent viewpoint to the grassland and the backdrop of hilly primary forest. **Green Peafowls** are plentiful, **Javan Mynas** and a good number of **Black-winged Starlings** (we counted up to 20) hang around the grazers, and other notable birds included up to 3 **White-bellied Sea-eagles**, a lone **Lesser Adjutant**, and a noisy flock of **Rhinoceros Hornbills** in the distant ficus trees.

Forest birding is easily done following the road from the Sadengan station to the junction with the Triangulasi road (around 1km), or following the birdwatching trail that starts halfway to the left coming from the station. The trail goes through fairly dense forest with a number of clearings allowing good views of the many large ficus trees in the area. After about 2.5 km it rejoins a secondary road near to the sea, and you can either retrace back or follow the road back to Triangulasi road, then fork again toward Sadengan (total around 5km).

Birding was generally excellent, and probably almost all East Java lowland forest birds can be found in that area. There we got **Banded Pitta** (the density for this bird is as high as it gets, but seeing it remains a challenge), **Fulvous-breasted**, **White-bellied**, **Grey-and-buff** and **Laced Woodpeckers**, **Black-banded**, **Blue-eared** and **Coppersmith Barbets** (all abundant), **Red-billed Malkoha**, **Racket-tailed Treepie**, **Javan**, **Rufous-backed** and **Collared Kingfishers**, **Yellow-throated Hanging-parrot**, **Dollarbird** (a winter visitor), **Blue-winged Leafbird** (still common despite becoming a major target of bird trappers), **Black-headed**, **Black-crested**, **Olive-winged** and **Cream-vented Bulbuls**, **Temminck's**, **Horsfield's** and **Crescent-chested Babblers**, **Grey-cheeked Tit-babbler**, **Eye-browed Wren-babbler**, **Yellow-bellied Warbler**, **Hill Blue Flycatcher**.

But the best sighting was stunning views of a juvenile **Javan Hawk-eagle**, perched on a low branch, then flying toward us to sit right above for a while, sending surrounding squirrels into panic mode. Night birds however were desperately silent, barring a sporadically calling **Collared Scops-owl**.

On the mammal side of things, besides Banteng and Timor deers we saw or heard quite a few **Muntjacks** (barking deers, or kijiang in Indonesian) and a pair of **Javan Mouse Deers**. **Long-tailed macaques** and **Black leaf monkeys** were abundant, as in all four locations.

Alas Purwo turned out to be a fairly productive location, and probably a better alternative than Baluran for lowland forest birds in the region.



Bull banteng and
juvenile White-
bellied Sea-eagle
at Sadengan



Black-banded
Barbet



Banded Pitta nest

Meru Betiri NP

Located on the south coast, roughly 50km west of Alas Purwo, Meru Betiri is the largest National Park in Java, with close to 500 sq km of coastal and hill forests, and is the place where the last Javan Tigers survived until the 1980s. The subspecies is now thought to be extinct, but after a few Kreteks some rangers will tell you of the pugmarks, scats and other marks they found in the very recent past...

For sure it is a remote place, and as i write these lines my back still remembers the dreadful last 30km of broken road (don't think of going without a 4WD, or a truck) before arriving at Sukamade camp, a truly beautiful spot at the bottom of forested hills, overlooking a large sandy beach where sea turtles come laying eggs at night. It all takes more than 5h from Banyuwangi. The accommodation at the camp is surprisingly decent, and meals are provided as well. Before reaching Sukamade, the road enters the park at Sarongan, then climbs up to around 250m with great sea views over "Blue cove", goes down again to reach the cultivation and plantation area of Sukamade village, fords several streams and rivers (impassable after heavy rains) before reaching the village itself, and meanders another 5km to the camp.

We birded the trail that leads to "Goa Jepang" (a WW2 souvenir), which starts just before the Blue cove viewpoint (about 2km return), the road itself from the viewpoint to the start of cultivation area (about 5km), and around Sukamade where 2 trails lead to the beach (the full loop is around 3km). Forest around the camp and the road is clearly disturbed, but many large trees and thick undergrowth provide a nice birding habitat. Not surprisingly, the bird mix is pretty similar to Alas Purwo, but it was nice to get a second chance at the many species we had missed there.

Around the camp the 3 **Hornbills** are present and the 3 lowland **Barbets** are amazingly abundant, especially blue-eared and coppersmith. **Horsfield's, Crescent-chested Babblers and Grey-cheeked Tit-babblers** are fairly easily found in the bamboo groves around the camp. Otherwise we also found **Changeable Hawk-eagle** and **Crested Serpent Eagle**, a pair of **Javan Hawk-eagles** soaring over the hills, **Besra, Black-thighed Falconet, Chestnut-bellied Malkoha** (several times), **Orange-breasted Trogon**, the full suite of East java lowland **Bulbuls, Maroon-breasted Philentoma, Long-billed and Grey-breasted Spiderhunters**.

Birding apart, we also had fun at night watching turtles come and lay their eggs, and 3 large Green turtles landed in just 2 hours. There is a hatchery at the camp, and young turtles are being released into the sea every morning, usually attracting a pair of **White-bellied Sea Eagles**...

Meru Betiri single-handedly won the prize of the most scenic location of the trip, and it is longing for more birders to come and visit. For the more intrepid, it is possible to cross the park from North to South, a 3 to 4 days trek. Who knows what can be found in the heart of the jungle there...



Meru Betiri's
"Blue Cove"



The "turtle
beach" near
Sukamade
camp

Trip Bird List

MB : Meru Betiri, AP : Alas Purwo, IJ : Ijen, BL : Baluran

When a bird has been seen in several locations and when relevant, the "best" location for this bird appears in bold character.

- | | |
|-----------------------|----|
| 1. Purple Heron | MB |
| 2. Cattle Egret | AP |
| 3. Pacific Reef Egret | MB |
| 4. Little Egret | AP |

5. Lesser Adjutant	AP
6. Oriental Honey Buzzard	IJ/AP
7. White-bellied Sea Eagle	AP (3 around Sadengan)
8. Besra	MB
9. Crested Serpent Eagle	MB/AP/ BL (seen in various parts of BL)
10. Black Eagle	IJ (2 birds, maybe same, seen before PP)
11. Changeable Hawk Eagle	MB/ BL (several ind. dark morph + juv)
12. Javan Hawk Eagle	MB/AP/IJ (3 sightings in Ijen)
13. Black-thighed Falconet	MB (good views of a bird atop a dead tree)
14. Spotted Kestrel	MB
15. <i>White-faced Partridge</i>	IJ (heard, heard and heard again)
16. Blue-breasted Quail	AP
17. Green Peafowl	BL (most around Bekol)/AP (Sadengan)
18. Red Junglefowl	MB/ AP /IJ
19. Green Junglefowl	MB/AP/IJ/ BL
20. Rufous Woodcock	IJ (1 at dawn near PP)
21. Pomarine Skua (?)	Ferry (2 skuas seen afar)
22. Black-naped Tern	Ferry
23. Bridled Tern	Ferry (1)
24. Lesser Crested Tern	Ferry (large flocks)
25. Grey-cheeked Green Pigeon	MB /AP
26. Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	BL (1 flock flying across)
27. Green Imperial Pigeon	AP/ BL (several large flocks)
28. Dark-backed Imperial Pigeon	IJ (common)
29. Barred Cuckoo-dove	IJ (1 flying overhead)
30. Ruddy Cuckoo-dove	IJ (1 perched, often heard)
31. <i>Little Cuckoo-dove</i>	IJ (heard only)
32. Island Collared Dove	AP/ BL (common in BL)
33. Spotted Dove	MB/AP/ BL
34. Zebra Dove	BL (common)
35. Emerald Dove	MB/AP
36. Red-breasted Parakeet	BL (a pair found near Bama)
37. Yellow-throated Hanging Parrot	MB/ AP /IJ (seen flying, often heard)
38. <i>Oriental(Sunda) Cuckoo</i>	IJ (commonly heard)
39. <i>Plaintive Cuckoo</i>	MB/ BL (heard only)
40. <i>Little Bronzed Cuckoo</i>	IJ (heard just above Pos 1)
41. Chestnut-bellied Malkoha	MB
42. Red-billed Malkoha	AP
43. <i>Greater Coucal</i>	MB (heard only)
44. Lesser Coucal	AP/ BL (common on grassland)
45. Barn Owl	BL (1 in Bekol savannah)
46. <i>Collared Scops-Owl</i>	AP (heard)
47. Savanna Nightjar	AP/ BL (100s in Bekol)
48. Edible-nest Swiftlet	MB/ BL (common in Bekol)
49. Cave Swiftlet	MB/AP/IJ/ BL (common everywhere)
50. Fork-tailed Swift	MB (at Green Bay viewpoint)
51. Grey-rumped Treeswift	MB/AP
52. Orange-breasted Trogon	MB/IJ (good views of 1 pair @1350m in IJ)
53. Small Blue Kingfisher	BL (1 in Bama)
54. Rufous-backed Kingfisher	MB/AP
55. Javan Kingfisher	MB/AP
56. Collared Kingfisher	MB/AP/ BL (common)

57. Chestnut-headed Bee Eater	MB/AP/BL (common)
58. Dollarbird	MB/AP
59. Wreathed Hornbill	MB (common around Sukamade camp/IJ)
60. Oriental-pied Hornbill	MB/AP/BL (common in 3 locations)
61. Rhinoceros Hornbill	MB/ AP /BL
62. Black-banded Barbet	MB/ AP (common)/IJ (heard only)
63. Orange-fronted Barbet	IJ (1 seen, often heard at lower alt)
64. Blue-eared Barbet	MB/AP (common)/IJ
65. Coppersmith Barbet	MB/AP/BL (common)
66. White-bellied Woodpecker	AP (1 pair seen)
67. Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker	MB/AP
68. Sunda Woodpecker	MB/BL
69. Grey-and-buff Woodpecker	AP
70. Laced Woodpecker	AP (1 sighting)
71. Checker-throated Woodpecker	IJ (1 pair)
72. Greater Flameback	BL (1 near Bama)
73. Banded Pitta	MB/ AP (nest found with 3 eggs)
74. Barn Swallow	MB/AP/ BL
75. Pacific Swallow	MB/AP/BL
76. Black-winged Flycatcher Shrike	MB/AP/IJ (common in 3 locations)
77. Large Woodshrike	AP
78. Sunda Cuckooshrike	IJ (common)/BL (1 near Bekol)
79. Lesser Cuckooshrike	MB
80. Pied Triller	MB (1 female)
81. White-shouldered Triller	BL (a pair near Bama)
82. Small Minivet	BL (common)
83. Sunda Minivet	IJ (several flocks)/BL
84. Scarlet Minivet	MB/AP
85. Common Iora	MB/AP/BL (common)
86. Blue-winged Leafbird	AP/IJ (3 seen in mixed bird flock @1100m)
87. Black-headed Bulbul	MB/AP
88. Black-crested Bulbul	MB/ AP (common)
89. Sooty-headed Bulbul	MB/ BL (a few seen in Bekol savanna)
90. Yellow-vented Bulbul	MB/AP/BL (common)
91. Orange-spotted Bulbul	IJ (few flocks at higher elevation)
92. Olive-winged Bulbul	MB/AP/BL (Bama mangrove trail)
93. Cream-vented Bulbul	MB/AP
94. Sunda Bulbul	IJ (common)
95. Black Drongo	MB/AP/IJ/BL (common)
96. Ashy Drongo	IJ/BL (near Bama)
97. Hair-crested Drongo	MB/AP
98. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	MB/AP/IJ (common)
99. Crested Jay	MB
100. Racket-tailed Treepie	AP
101. Slender-billed Crow	AP/BL (1 seen chasing Chang. HE)
102. Great Tit	AP/ BL (common)
103. Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	MB/AP
104. Blue Nuthatch	IJ (common)
105. Lesser Shortwing	IJ (common at all elevations)
106. Temminck's Babbler	MB/AP
107. Horsfield's Babbler	MB/AP/BL (1 flock in Bama)
108. Chestnut-backed Scimitar Babbler	IJ (common at all elevations)

109. Eye-browed Wren-babbler	AP
110. Crescent-chested Babbler	MB/AP/IJ (common in IJ)
111. Grey-cheeked Tit Babbler	MB/AP/BL
112. White-crowned Forktail	IJ (1 flying over stream)
113. Pied Bushchat	IJ (few seen)
114. Sunda Whistling Thrush	IJ (1 seen on crater trail)
115. Sunda Warbler	IJ (common)
116. Yellow-bellied Warbler	AP (1 sighting)
117. Mountain Leaf Warbler	IJ (common)
118. Striated Grassbird	MB/IJ (Pos Paltuding)
119. Zitting Cisticola	BL (common in Bekol)
120. Sunda Bush-warbler	IJ (common around PP)
121. Russet Bush-warbler	IJ (around PP)
122. Ashy Tailorbird	AP
123. Olive-backed Tailorbird	IJ (1 seen, often heard)
124. Mountain Tailorbird	IJ (as above)
125. Yellow-bellied Prinia	IJ (few heard and seen)
126. Bar-winged Prinia	MB/BL (common)
127. Indigo Flycatcher	IJ (common)
128. Narcissus Flycatcher	IJ (1 1st winter male)
129. Mugimaki Flycatcher	IJ (1 male)
130. Snowy-browed Flycatcher	IJ (common)
131. Little Pied Flycatcher	IJ (common)
132. Grey-headed Flycatcher	IJ (common)
133. Pale Blue Flycatcher	IJ (common at lower elevation)
134. Hill Blue Flycatcher	AP/BL (1 pair on Mangrove trail)
135. White-bellied Fantail	IJ (few seen)
136. Pied Fantail	MB/AP/IJ
137. <i>Black naped Monarch</i>	AP (heard)
138. Maroon-breasted Philentoma	MB (1 pair)
139. <i>Mangrove Whistler</i>	AP (heard)
140. Long-tailed Shrike	MB/AP/BL (common in open habitat)
141. Paddyfield Pipit	BL (1 on Bekol savannah)
142. Asian Glossy Starling	AP (20 seen roosting in Sadengan)/BL (1
143. Black-winged Starling pair near Bama)	
144. Javan Myna	AP
145. Brown-throated Sunbird	BL (1 on mangrove trail)
146. Ruby-cheeked Sunbird	MB/AP
147. Olive-backed Sunbird	BL (common)
148. White-flanked Sunbird	IJ (few seen, only female)
149. Long-billed Spiderhunter	MB
150. Grey-breasted Spiderhunter	MB/AP
151. Plain Flowerpecker	MB
152. Mountain White-eye	IJ (common)
153. Javan Grey-throated White-eye	IJ (common)
154. Javan Munia	MB/AP
155. Scaly-breasted Munia	MB/BL (few near Bama)
156. White-headed Munia	MB

156 species (8 heard only) : 70 MB, 73 AP, 53 IJ, 46 BL