



BALI IN JUNE 2011 –

SOME INFORMATION FOR VISITING BIRDERS

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In June 2011, I started another round-the-world tour with four and half days in Bali. It was a tight schedule, with around 40 new species on the target list, but everything went well, despite inadequate preparations. I arrived in Denpasar from Hong Kong with Cathay Pacific, one of the best airlines in the world. They are actually customer friendly enough to place all the entertainment controls and microphone plug on the back of the seat in front of you, instead of the stupid armrest placement.

I exchanged some cash (3.6 million Indonesian rupees, just in case...), took a prepaid taxi to Sanur (IRD 9.500, €0.75), and stayed the first night at De Abian Village, a guesthouse cum spa with massage and other services, economical, good and prepaid by Agoda. The room rate was €35.



Fig. 1. De Abian Village and my rental car, the tip of the rear bumper still attached to it.

Predawn breakfast was included, and not a problem, but dinner had to be ordered at reception to be delivered there. There is plenty of choice close by. My Daihatsu Feroza G2 4x4 waited at De Abian Village, having been delivered there by Bali Car Rentals (<http://www.balicarrentals.com/>; email info@balicarrentals.com), a very well run and reliable company with competitive rates. The rental cost me USD 25 per day, with unlimited kilometers and full insurance. The deductible was 35 USD.

Indonesia is not a place for inexperienced drivers. One needs to have considerable experience in driving in congested Asian, African or South American cities to be able to make it with minimum stress. Buy the laminated and therefore waterproof *Insight Bali FlexiMap* (Amazon.com) for orientation in Bali.

Personally, I had no problems except one. On the highway to Gilimanuk, on a bridge, I suddenly had a motorbike attached on the tip of my rear bumper! The guy without a helmet had apparently tried to overtake me on the wrong side (left) but had lost his balance on a road surface bump. I could hear damage happening to the car. The bike fell down on the bridge and he followed, hitting himself in the asphalt. With great luck, he survived with no broken bones, even though badly bruised, and was able to drag the broken bike off the lane before it was completely flattened by the rest of the traffic. My bumper was broken but neither of us reported to the police, for obvious reasons. I rather paid the small deductible than took the risk of dealing with Indonesian police, reporting to the rental agency instead. I had done nothing to cause the accident, but who knows how things might have turned around if the police was involved.

NUSA DUA SEWAGE LAGOONS

In the first morning, I spent the morning hours in the Bena Bay area, close to the airport and Sanur, and eventually decided to focus on Nusa Dua Sewage Lagoons, an easy to access place with a plenitude of wetland birds. The Mangrove Center in Sanur, the other option, opened too late (8 AM, after the morning high tide, when it is already pretty hot) and was too time-consuming (long pointless walk), and also had an entrance fee and a parking fee.

The Nusa Dua site is not easy to see from the street because of high concrete walls. On the way to Nusa Dua, turn left at the first junction (traffic lights, shops, free to turn left) to Tanjung Bena instead of going to the main Nusa Dua intersection (by Bali Country and Golf Club). Follow this street across a waterway in mangroves and look for signs with birds and 'Lagoon'. The sewage ponds are on the left. I opened the gate and went in at 6.15, apparently before office hours, and was welcome to do so, parking the car by the sewage works office and walking around from there.

Among the better species recorded, for all of which the Nusa Dua Sewage Lagoons appear to be more or less reliable, were **Sunda Teals** (9), **Small Blue Kingfishers** (12), a **Spot-breasted Woodpecker**, **Bar-winged Prinias** (3), an **Olive-backed Tailorbird**, a pair of **Pale-bellied Mynas** (fly-over) and a **Javan Munia**. Egrets, herons and terns were plentiful, including 25 **Little Terns**. **White-headed Mynias** had been seen at the De Abian Village, late in the previous afternoon.



Fig. 2. Nusa Dua Sewage Lagoons – a nice place for birdwatching with a number of endemics.



Fig. 3. A Little Blue Kingfisher at Nusa Dua, one of at least twelve individuals.

BALI TOWER

The drive to Gilimanuk followed, with a period of getting lost somewhere north of Kuta and rediscovering the western Highway 2 at Tabanan. It took me about 3 and half hours to reach Cecik, the above-mentioned accident included. At the Bali Barat National Park headquarters, a pair of **Scarlet-headed Flowerpeckers** had a territory. As there was limited time for bird observations in the afternoon, I focused on the well known Bali Tower north of Labuhan Lalang, part of the Menganjan Resort, and close to my destination, Pemuteran. In there, a glass or two of cold fruit juice (IRD24.000 with tax, €2) gets one a guest status and enables scope observations from the various platforms. They also have a luxury toilet for the customers – a treat not be missed while there.

I did not climb up but stayed on the low platform (**Fig. 5**) which was more than high enough, with good views to the canopy down below. The place proved to be quite productive and I went back the following afternoon. On the way two Bali Tower, **Green Junglefowl** were easy to see by the track and a **Ruddy Cuckoo-Dove** was a nice find in the forest. **Moluccan Kestrels** were nowhere to be seen. The two visits to the platform produced, among others, **Black-legged Falconets**, **Cave Swiftlets** (not as common as the abundant **Glossy Swiftlet**), one **Yellow-throated Hanging-Parrot**, a calling **Javan Banded Pitta**, a **Sunda Cuckoo**, **Javan Cuckoo-Shrikes** (3) and a handsome party of seven **Black-winged Starlings**, with splendid scope views.



Fig. 4. A male **Green Junglefowl**, on the way to Bali Tower.

My accommodation in the west, on the ‘Other Side of Bali’, was in Pemuteran, a 15 to 20 minute drive from Labuhan Lalang, Bali Tower and the Terima Bay trails of the Bali Barat National Park. I stayed at the expensive Adi Assri Resort, which had excellent rooms (USD 98 = €68 by Agoda) but less than ideal restaurant services (overpriced, service deliberately delayed to sell more drinks).

Fortunately, there are several other restaurants close by. On the plus side, the Adi Assri restaurant arranged very good breakfast packages in both mornings.

There would have been several other accommodation choices in Pemuteran, but the majority of them lacked a working Internet presence and could therefore not be reserved beforehand, a necessity when one travels with a tight schedule. The national park resorts, on the other hand, are very expensive and not really good deals for somebody with more time than money and several weeks to spend on the road. At the end of the day, one only sleeps and has a shower in the room.



Fig. 5. The low platform at Bali Tower, a chance to find a shade with a view.

TELUK BRUMBUN AND PULAU MENGANJAN

Before sunrise, on Friday the 17th, I met my guide Hery Kusumanegara at Labuhan Lalang from where a boat (IDR 400.000, €32) was rented to Teluk Brumbun, the **Bali Starling** release program site. At 6.25 AM, we made a shortish walk in the shoreline bush and forest, finding three **Bali Starlings**, which were actively calling early in the morning. About 15 **Java Sparrows** visited the bird baths of the station and several **Little Blue Kingfishers**, deer and langurs were seen on the way. With no target species left, a short visit at the ancient Hindu temple of Pulau Menganjan was made. The temple had a pretty party of seven **Lemon-bellied White-eyes**.



Fig. 6. The man in the Bali Barat National Park, Hery Kusumanegara, at Teluk Brumbun.



Fig. 7. A Bali Starling, observing its territory at sunrise.

Thereafter, back to Labuhan Lalang and on to a nearby forest trail at Terima Bay, where four hours of stalking produced, largely thanks to Hery, excellent views of a **Javan Banded Pitta**, **Rufous-backed Kingfisher**, several **Little Blue Kingfishers** and a **Fulvous-breasted Jungle-Flycatcher**, but poor views of an actively calling **Crescent-chested Babbler**. The latter species is pretty difficult to see well, even with a tape. It was another hot sunny and day but in the shade of the forest with streams it was quite nice and cool.

After a *nasi goreng* lunch at Labuhan Lalang, we went to salt pans west of Bayuwedang, where a pair of the rare **Javan Plovers** was readily spotted. The access road was pretty rough, requiring a 4x4. Hery was very professional and good company as well, taking care of the permits and charging IDR 500.000 (€40) for the extended half day, including the national park entrance fee and a compulsory 'donation' to the Bali Starling project. In other words, the total price for **Bali Starling**, **Lemon-bellied White-eye** and the main island birds was IDR 900.000 (€72). Hery can be contacted at hery_kn@yahoo.co.id. He is the man in the Bali Barat National Park. There is no sense in hiring one of the less experienced bird guides available at the headquarters if you are a birder.



Fig. 8. A **Javan Plover**, one of the recent *Charadrius* discoveries of South-East Asia.

BEDUGUL BOTANICAL GARDEN

The third site I visited in Bali was Bedugul Botanical Garden in Bedugul, on the highlands of the island, where temperatures dropped to refreshing 18 to 20 C, ten degrees lower than in Bali Barat N.P. I drove there from Pemuteran, leaving well before sunrise and arriving at the entrance gate by 7 AM (entrance IDR 10.000 for the car + IDR 9.000 per person, €1.50). Turn inland at the first

big roundabout in Singaraja, I saw no signs, and turn right through a gate at Bedugul center (no signs). A full day of birding followed, till the 6 PM closing time. The next day, another shorter visit was made between 6.15 and 10.45 AM.

(Afterwards, I drove to Denpasar international airport and flew to Darwin to find an airport with no currency exchange, ATMs which only allowed small withdrawals, and people who loved to see a tourist in trouble... but that is another story. At least JetStar had improved, with the change of ownership to Qantas. This time they gave us a blanket to keep. Last time, I had to rent one!)



Fig. 9. Lake View, Bedugul Botanical Garden.

In Bedugul, the night was spent at the comfortable Pacung Indah, some 6+ km downhill towards Denpasar, which opened its restaurant for one customer. A soup, pepperoni pizza, pancake with ice cream and fresh orange juice cost IRD 106.000, €8.50 (Yes, I was hungry after skipping a lunch). The standard room (high standard) reservation was made and prepaid by Agoda, at the rate of IRD 260.000, €21. The place may be a bit difficult to spot in the heavy traffic, even though it is right by the road on the left. I had to ask around to find it. (Well, my eyes did not focus that well, because of short nights and intensive birding).

It was a weekend and many visitors could be expected. The park remained, nevertheless, peaceful till 10 PM, becoming crowded and noisy only afterwards. 'Noisy' is actually an understatement. The birds are, however, well habituated to the mayhem and the majority of local visitors stayed

close to the main entrance, having arrived there by bus. The great feature of Bedugul Botanical Garden is the fact that even though it is a forested area, the lower vegetation has mostly been cleared off. Consequently, one has a good chance to actually see the birds, unlike in thick natural forest which exists right next to the garden, along the left hand roads. There are also plenty of canopy birds in the tall trees (bring your scope).

Roadside birding, scoping at the open grassy hills of the 'Lake View' and walking the short 'Tropical Forest Trail' with an mp3 player were my main birding tactics. (Thank you for the recordings, Xeno Canto!) **Grey-cheeked Green-Pigeons** were plentiful (>100) and most easily observed roosting at Lake View treetops. **Black-naped Fruit-Doves** were occasionally heard, with brief flight views early in the morning by the main gate. **Black-backed Fruit-Doves** and **Dark-backed Imperial Pigeons** were heard calling a few times, but only the latter was seen, once.



Fig. 10. Tropical Forest Trail, Bedugul Botanical Garden. The best forest along the left access route is right before the trail, on the left side of the road.

Mossy-nest Swiftlets were scarce (6) among the ever present **Glossy Swiftlets**, and seen over the forest rather than the open grassy areas. **Flame-fronted Barbets** were common and gave close scope views in the canopy and occasionally lower down. **Indonesian Honeyeaters** were also common but not as easy to see as I had expected. Contrary to some other reports, **Sunda Bush Warblers** and **Horsfield's Babblers** were difficult to spot because they did not sing. Two of the former held territory and single of the latter was seen silently hopping on the ground. It probably

was not their singing season. A single **Sunda Warbler** was seen on the second visit. These perky little birds may not be conspicuous when they wander around in the middle canopy but are well worth the hunt. Just like in Bali Barat, **Crescent-chested Babbler**s were also very difficult to see, even though they responded well from the undergrowth, calling and singing. On the second morning, I finally scored.

On the other hand, **Javan Grey-throated White-eyes** were abundant in the canopy, together with **Mountain** and **Oriental White-eyes**, and the colorful **Blood-breasted Flowerpeckers**. The most conspicuous regional endemic was **Short-tailed Starling**, with hundreds of individuals all over the place, and especially at Lake View. **Sunda Whistling Thrushes** were also easy to spot, hopping on roads or along streams, early in the morning in particular. **Fulvous-chested Jungle-Flycatchers** and **Spot-breasted Woodpeckers** were equally easy in the relatively open park-like forest habitat.



Fig. 11. Even the large, colorful birds may disappear in lush vegetation – a **Javan Kingfisher**.

A male **Rusty-breasted Whistler** had a territory along the left hand road, beyond the first temple. The best find was, however, the elusive **Sunda Thrush**. I had read in the Internet that the thrush occurs uphill of the gardens, in the natural forest, where they are, however, difficult to see. My attempts to enter the forest along narrow paths at the left back corner of the park failed, the trails being too steep and muddy. To my surprise, one was however actively singing in the botanical garden, at left along the stream which crosses the Tropical Forest Trail! A lone **Slender-billed Crow** was also a nice find, albeit not a lifer for me.

Javan Kingfisher is a common species one may well miss on a short visit to Bali. I was happy to see one at Belugul Botanical Garden (another was heard), at the Cactus House pond. Certain rivers before Gilimanuk and South of Singaraja, on the way to Bedugul, are supposed to have many **Javan Kingfishers** but it is not so easy to stop and watch in the heavy traffic and narrow roads. Others are polluted and have no fish. Ask Hery for more detailed guidelines.

Many other more widespread oriental bird species were seen in the botanical garden but are not listed in this report because of time limitations.

FINAL WORDS

Was it worth my while to stop at Bali for birdwatching? Yes, it certainly was. It would, however, be a good idea to do as many others have done and visit the national parks of East Java from Bali, too, and perhaps also other interesting destinations in the Lesser Sundas. I had no time to do so. The visit was nevertheless an encouraging one. Indonesia is a very economical place to travel and the locals are very hospitable towards tourists, at least in Bali. I plan to return, if possible.



Fig. 12. Another early morning start: leaving Pacung Indah at 6 AM.