



BIRD TOURISM REPORTS 9/2014

LUZON, THE PHILIPPINES, IN JUNE 2014

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Fig. 1. JAL flight to Manila, about to board a gate at Narita.

In summer 2014, I visited the island of Luzon, the Philippines, for three and half hectic days, between 27th and 30th June. I flew in from Narita, Tokyo, by a direct JAL flight. The first afternoon after arrival in Manila was spent in driving to Los Baños, university campus, and observing birds there. The second day was spent at Mt. Banahaw, at Bangkong Kahoy Valley. The third day started at the Los Baños campus, with a transit to Subic Bay via Manila, and late afternoon birding in Subic Bay. On the fourth day, I continued birding in Subic Bay area, with an after sunset drive to Manila, for an early morning Cathay Pacific flight to Hong Kong.

The Philippines is a challenging destination for a globetrotting birder, mainly because of its inadequate infrastructure and catastrophic state of natural habitats. It is a nation with major overpopulation and problems in regard to access to the remaining wildlife. The roads are congested and transportation slow. It is not possible to completely bypass cities but one has to drive through, oftentimes in a maze of one-way streets. Personally, I had already visited Luzon in 1990, as a four day stopover between Australia and

Finland. Things had changed, to say the least, especially in regard to Metropolitan Manila, which had grown in a significant way. On the other hand, the society was calmer now, if compared to the late Marcos years. In the 1990s, various private armies existed in Luzon, with significant presence in Manila, too.

In the absence of a proper bypass route, driving through Manila, twice(!) probably was the number one challenge for me in 2014. Arriving at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, it is not possible to avoid this, wherever the destinations on the island may happen to be. In 1990, it was still possible to just follow Edsa, the main thoroughfare, and ask for advice on the way, or to follow long-distance buses with signs stating 'Baguio', for example, to get out of the city. Today, the Metropolitan Manila has mushroomed and become too congested and complicated for that. One needs a navigator, which could fortunately be rented for an affordable fee of €7 per day (Garmin Nüvi). Confusing situations did nevertheless occur, as even the main streets occasionally were closed by a variety of obstacles. In those cases, it was necessary to look for alternative routes, which were rather time-consuming.



Fig. 2. A navigator is a necessity on the streets of Manila and is also handy on the new toll highways.

At the international airport, the immigration and customs procedures were efficient, without long lines or overzealous security check-outs. On arrival, the lady in charge at the customs understood and accepted my explanations on imported food items, e.g. canned pork for Guadalcanal, and I did not need to open the suitcase. In regard to departure, I was surprised that we had to pay a P550 (€9.50) exit tax. Currency exchanges were already closed at midnight, but after some consultation, I exchanged my remaining pesos to US dollars with a member of airport security personnel. Having recently had training in the field in Finland, it was interesting to talk with the Filipino security officers. Unfortunately, there was no restaurant in the boarding area at the time of my departure. One had to wait for a Cathay Pacific breakfast.

Also the car rental (Europcar; in front of the T2 arrivals building) was reasonably efficient. The Toyota Vios was in good shape and had the requested navigator. The car rental was P9.500 (€164) for four days,

including a CDW but without a PAI (I did not need one). In other words; the cost was €41 per day. Expect to pay a couple hundred pesos (= few euros) for road tolls, money well spent considering the alternative.



Fig. 3. My new Toyota Vios, parked in front of the Bangkong Kahoy Restaurant, Mt. Banahaw. There is a nice forested valley just behind the building, and an observation platform on top of it.

The navigator helped in finding the way but did not solve the continuous traffic jams, characteristic of Manila and Los Baños, and mostly caused by numerous jeepneys which kept on stopping at awkward places, creating obstacles to the traffic flow. On regular highways, slow tricycles, frequently cursed by the local drivers, were the main problem. It was a long way from the airport to the southern toll road, and this part of the drive took about two hours to complete. In comparison, the drive from Los Baños to Subic Bay, predominantly on toll roads but also on a number of streets in central Manila, and with a rather slow last section in the end, was only three-and-half hours. Respectively, I spent full four hours driving from Subic Bay to Ninoy Aquino in the last evening, the navigator route being cut four times by fences or construction projects in Metropolitan Manila.

Both ways, the alternative routes took me to some less attractive caverns of the big city. Among the scenes observed, the most heart-breaking were a group of four 'bar girls', immaculately attractive in their make-up, high heels and mini-skirts, but desperately hungry, too. In the midday heat, they searched for food in a large pile of plastic rubbish bags. The rubbish was infested with cockroaches and had been 'cooking' there in the +30C heat and humidity. I regretted the fact that I had no food to give away. For a wealthy tourist such as myself snacks and drinks had been readily available at 7-11s and other similar establishment with a variety of unhealthy 'high-carb' junk snacks. For proper food, one needed to visit a restaurant or buy fruit at roadside marketplaces.

In regard to accommodation, I had reserved a room at SEARCA Rest House in Los Baños (bsra@agri.searca.org; Ms. Sabine R. Bernisse), a hotel primarily designed for visiting academics but also available for birders. It took a while to locate the establishment in the confusing University of Los Baños campus, but I was happy with the four star double for P1.660 (€35) per night (only cash peso or USD were accepted). The room was very comfortable, secure and peaceful. There is a restaurant/bakery down left the same street, right next to the hotel, where dinners could be had for about €3.50 and fresh cakes of muffins bought for the next morning. There are small supermarkets close to the campus entrance gate.

In Subic Bay, the one night was spent at Sheaven's Beachside Resort, at Baloy Beach (W Subic Bay). The room was reserved by Agoda. The double room cost €58 – somewhat overpriced considering the situation. The hotel was, after all, under renovation. Fortunately, the construction work did not disturb me much, because I stayed there only at night. In regard to meals, I relied on groceries bought at supermarkets, and some roast chicken which was obtained close by. Initially, I almost gave up in the latter case, because the man in charge declined my request for half-a-chicken. They only sold whole ones, and a one kilo roasted chicken clearly was too much for one person. As a solution, I suggested buying one (€4) and leaving half of it to the man. Gladly, he accepted...

For the last night, I went to the airport, to wait for a Cathay Pacific departure to Hong Kong at 5.20. In there, a short nap was disturbed by the gate personnel. There were not enough seats for all the passengers and we therefore had to sit straight. It had not made sense to pay for a hotel room, because I could only have slept there for three hours. It would have taken some time to reach the airport, for a check in at 2.30. In July 2014, the Ninoy Aquino International Airport was surrounded by various road construction projects, detours and road blocks. I also preferred to save money, after the expensive Subic accommodation.

The weather remained sunny, hot and humid throughout the stay, with afternoon temperatures around +30C. Only in the very end, at the start of the Boton Falls Track in Subic Bay, a shower of rain occurred, forcing a downhill withdrawal to 'Sleepless Mart Village', which had hornbills and other birds in tall hillside trees. For some reason, it always was damp and a bit foggy around the Boton Falls Track entrance. The likely explanation is altitude. It is a high ridge, and not far away from the sea.

Mammals were scarce in Luzon, as expected, excluding the domestic animals and rats. Los Baños had two unidentified species of medium size insectivorous bats and Subic Bay had about 2.000 **Giant Golden-crowned Fruit-Bats** and three **Long-tailed Macaques**. Otherwise, no wild animals were recorded. There simply is no space for them. Not many nations on Earth are as crowded by people as the Philippines, as a result of a self-destructive interpretation of Catholic principles on reproduction. Between my visits, the population (currently 100 million) had grown by 60%. At the same time, 12 million Filipinos had already left the country.

Special thanks to Paul Bourdin for his advice on several practical matters and on Mt. Banahaw! He moved to USA in June 2014 and does not update his Internet blog (birdmakiling.blogspot.com) anymore, but for the time being, the blog still remains a useful source of information and inspiration for any birdwatching visitor to the Philippines. There is not much available in the Internet, probably because so many birders visit the Philippines with a guide, and therefore pay little attention to the practicalities of travel and access to birdwatching sites.

LOS BAÑOS

My timetable and the long initial search for the SEARCA Rest House did not leave much time for birding at the Los Baños University campus area. The few hours were mostly spent at the 'Buttonquail Trail' (BT). First, I could spend the last hour of sunlight there. Second, I went there for another hour just after sunrise in the morning of departure to Subic Bay. In both cases, the time was spent walking on the open section of the trail, with a few short side walks into the grassland. The trail is located along Valentino G. Argaños Street, opposite a Dairy Education establishment with a convenient street-side parking lot. The DE building is on the left soon after passing Joseph C. Madamba Street on the right. See Google Maps.

Additionally, I did some owling around the botanical garden area, after sunset on the first day, and also visited the Botanical Garden (BG) itself, between 7.30 and 8.45 on the last day, to see the **Indigo-banded Kingfisher** and sunbirds, the latter in vain. In fact, I did not see a single sunbird in any of the three visited sites! The garden opens at 8.00 and closes at 16.00, but it was possible to get in at 7.30, after a special request to the friendly gatekeeper. There is a small entrance fee.

Overall, the 'Buttonquail Trail' was a frustrating experience, because of the many people walking on it both at sunset and sunrise. As an example, a group of six children returned from school and happened to start a loud fight among themselves, running back and forth, crying and yelling around a foreigner who hoped to see some shy buttonquails on the very same track! Venturing off the track was not productive, either, but could potentially be. I did not visit the Mt. Makiling trails at all, after drawing a conclusion that Mt. Banahaw was a more productive choice for a short visit. This proved to be true.



Fig. 4. A **Stripe-headed Rhabdornis**, a common representative of an endemic three-species bird family.

The following list includes all the species recorded at the Los Baños University campus, in the very limited time. Philippine endemics or near-endemics have been marked with an asterisk.

- ***Luzon Hawk-Owl**: One calling at BT, and another at BG.
- ***Philippine Scops Owl**: One calling above BG.
- ***Plain Bush-hen**: One calling at BT.
- ***Barred Rail**: A total of six by the track at BT, early in the morning.



Fig. 5. Barred Rails were common at the Los Baños 'Buttonquail Trail'.

- ***Philippine Nightjar**: Single bird at dusk at BT, calling.
- ***Indigo-banded Kingfisher**: One bird at the usual stake-out, the first bridge at BG, downhill along a stream.
- Rock Dove**: About 10 on the way to Los Baños.
- ***Philippine Cuckoo-Dove**: Great views of a single calling bird at BT, and another calling at BG.
- ***White-eared Brown Dove**: A few at BT and BG.
- ***Philippine Coucal**: Three at BT.
- Lesser Coucal**: About 5 at BT; including a flavistic individual.
- Glossy Swiftlet**: About 10 at BT.
- ***Ameline Swiftlet**: About 10 at BG.
- ***Pygmy Swiftlet**: Single bird at BT.
- Asian Palm Swift**: Common.
- Blue-tailed Bee-eater**: A party of six roosted at BT.
- Coppersmith Barbet**: Common at BT.
- ***Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker**: One male at BT.
- ***Philippine Hanging Parrot**: One at BT.
- Paddyfield Pipit**: Three at BT.
- Barn Swallow**: Single bird at BT.
- Striated Swallow**: Four at BT.
- White-breasted Woodswallow**: A party of six at BT.
- Black-naped Oriole**: Two birds by the Dairy Education building.
- ***Balicassiao**: One at BG.
- Yellow-vented Bulbul**: Very common at BT.
- ***Yellow-wattled Bulbul**: Four at BT, one at BG.
- ***Philippine Bulbul**: Six at BT.

Tawny Grassbird: Four at BT.

Golden-headed Cisticola: One at BT.

***Stripe-headed Rhabdornis:** A group of five at BT.

***Lowland White-eye:** Two at BG.

Scaly-breasted Munia: A party of 8 at BT.

Tree Sparrow: Common at Los Baños.

MT. BANAHA

Mt. Banahaw, recommended to me by Paul Bourdain, is a large forested mountain on the border of Laguna and Quezon provinces. It takes about 1 h 15 minutes to drive there from Los Baños. In the end of June, sunrise was around 5.30, necessitating a 4.15 departure. First, one drove to San Pablo and beyond, turning left to Dolores (see Google Maps) and driving forward beyond the small town, until a large sign to Bangkong Kahoy Valley appeared on the left. The final track (gravel) was good for a sedan in June 2014. The Garmin Nüvi was completely reliable driving in, even though it once took me against traffic on one-way streets on return, in San Pablo. I had to reverse in a congested crossing to find another way! Checking the map, there was not even any need to enter San Pablo, but the navigator had different ideas.



Fig. 6. Mt. Banahaw; a largely inaccessible haven of endemic forest birds.

The Bangkong Kahoy Valley is a development project guided by Mr. Dion Pullan. Formerly, there were some interesting trails up to the (in principle) protected Mt. Banahaw, including an ATV Trail. These have, however, been overgrown as a result of recent neglect, and one needed a local guide. As soon as the

current situation had been charted, I restricted my activities to the Bangkong Kahoy compound, scanning the forest edges, a forested ravine below the buildings, and the higher slopes of Mt. Banahaw by a scope. On the way out, two birdwatching stops were also made along the gravel access road.

The first two-and-half hours were busy with mixed bird parties, bird songs and calls. After 9.30, bird activity decreased in a significant way, before another productive period in the late afternoon. I had a three-course lunch at 11.00, at the expensive Bangkong Kahoy cafeteria (P900; €15), and a discussion with Mr. Pullan on the development plans in the area. The developments above the buildings, on land currently cleared but not occupied, may restrict birdwatching activities there in the future. Alternatives do, however, exist.



Fig. 7. Accessible forest edge at Bangkong Kahoy valley, above the service buildings.

Afterwards, most of the remaining time was spent at an observation platform on top of the Bangkong Kahoy restaurant, above a forested ravine. In there, I unfortunately forgot my Leki trekking pole, worth of €100. The following list includes all the species recorded at Mt. Banahaw. Philippine endemics or near-endemics have been marked with an asterisk.

Rufous-bellied Hawk-Eagle: One juvenile circling above Mt. Banahaw, together with the following species.

Peregrine Falcon: One juvenile *ernesti*.

***Plain Bush-hen:** Two adults, together on the Bangkong Kahoy access track.

White-breasted Waterhen: One adult also on the access track, early in the morning.

***Philippine Cuckoo-Dove:** Only one calling bird.

***White-eared Brown Dove:** Very common in the valley.

***Amethyst Brown Dove:** A total of five birds, one of them seen.

***Yellow-breasted Fruit Dove:** Four calling birds.

***Flame-breasted Fruit Dove:** One calling, high on the slope; an impressive call!

Green Imperial Pigeon: Single bird sat on top of a dead tree, in the left hand forested slope close to the compound.

***Philippine Drongo-Cuckoo:** Two birds, calling.

***Philippine Coucal:** Common.

Lesser Coucal: Rather common.

***Purple Needletail:** About 15 circling over the valley.

Glossy Swiftlet: Common.

***Ameline Swiftlet:** Relatively common.

Asian Palm Swift: Common.

***Philippine Trogon:** One individual, on the left hand forest slope.

White-throated Kingfisher: One pair down in the ravine.

***Spotted Wood Kingfisher:** Single bird flew across the access road, following a dry stream bed, few hundred meters below the compound. It was heard calling close by, but I was nevertheless unable to spot the 'ghost bird'.

***Rufous Hornbill:** Two habituated juveniles, begging food from people.

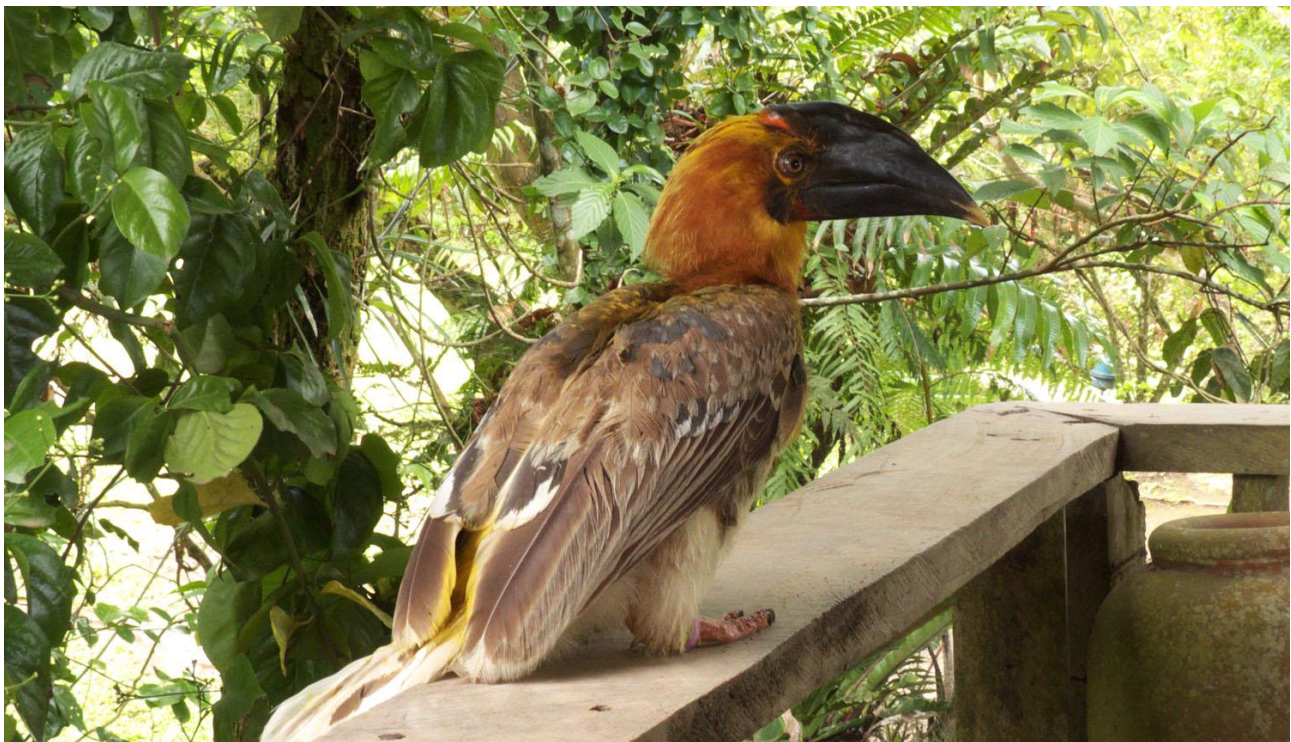


Fig. 8. One of the habituated **Rufous Hornbills** at the cafeteria, waiting for handouts.

Paddyfield Pipit: One bird.

Coppersmith Barbet: Four birds.

Common Iora: Single bird.

***Green-backed Whistler:** One heard and another one seen.

***Balicassiao:** Single bird.

***Blue-headed Fantail:** Three birds in mixed species bird parties.

Barn Swallow: Four birds.

***Citrine Canary-flycatcher:** Single male was seen and heard singing, and another seen, down in the forested ravine, behind the restaurant building. I was told that this was their favorite area, and the birds had been seen on daily basis, early in the morning and late in the afternoon. Bring your scope!

***Elegant Tit:** Common.

***Sulphur-billed Nuthatch:** a total of eight birds in mixed species bird parties.

Yellow-vented Bulbul: Common.

***Philippine Bulbul:** Common.

***Negros Leaf Warbler:** A total of seven in mixed bird parties.

Mountain Tailorbird: Two territories with singing males at the left hand forest edge.

***Yellowish White-eye:** Very common; more than 200.

Mountain White-eye: A total of ten were seen.

***Stripe-headed Rhabdornis:** Only one recorded.

***Bicolored Flowerpecker:** Five individuals at forest edge and roadside scrub.

***Buzzing Flowerpecker:** Very close views of a pair low in roadside scrub and two lone individuals. Easily attracted by a mp3 recording.

Tree Sparrow: About 20 on the way to Mt. Banahaw, in villages.

White-bellied Munia: Single bird with excellent views, in the roadside scrub just above the restaurant.

Slender-billed Crow: A pair; my first ones in the Philippines.

SUBIC BAY



Fig. 9. Health information on the way to Subic Bay: Eat Century tuna and drink lots of liquid sugar (Royal Crown Cola), in order to get a 'hot superbod'! The Luzon three-lane toll highways were in a good shape.

There are extensive guidelines for birding in the Subic Bay at www.birding2asia.com (thank you, Stijn De Win). Most of the information on the page remains valid, but not everything. Things keep on changing. As an example, there is no tourist office next to Subic International Hotel anymore. I had expected to collect my Hill 394 permit there. The permit is needed to enter the prime birdwatching forest trail in Subic Bay. The office had, however, been closed some years ago.

Unfortunately, problems in access did not stop there. After discussions at Subic International Hotel (helpful reception), a Tourism Authority Office was visited, with another visit to Subic Bay Law Enforcement Department (the Police). Apparently, contacting the Law Enforcement Department (Burgos Street/Sampson Rd corner) currently is the only way to proceed with the Hill 394 permit, unless one hires a guide and buys a trip package, as suggested by the tourism authorities. Unfortunately, the only person able to grant a tourist the permit, the Chief of Police, was not in the office when I arrived there. It was, after all, Sunday, and nobody else could take the responsibility. Getting the permit should not be a problem on weekdays, but it proved to be impossible in my case. Do not arrive in the weekend!

As a result, a plan B had to be invented. Well, perhaps I could do some birding at the start of the Hill 394 trail, in an area also known to be good for the Subic species...? No way, nature tourists were not welcome even there. Driving to the Bataan Peninsula, on the Corregidor Rd, I explored the inland access routes, only to discover gates and security staff well before the forests, apologetic but bound by their orders. Only at the short Water Station Track (WST) and on the Nabusan Beach road, I could enter the forest proper, for less than two hours, before sunset. In the first case, the small fenced plant was occupied by a guard, but he, even though suspicious, let me bird along the access road. I explained the man what I was doing there and also informed him that I might well revisit the site after sunset, for owls.

At sunset, I did some reconnaissance on the Boton Falls Track (BFT), on the way to George Dewey Medical Center, before owling at WST, along the Nabusan Beach Loop Road (NBLR; to Kamana Sanctuary Spa Resort), and on the Botanical Gardens (closed) road. The last site was not good for owls. On the way towards the start of the Boton Falls Track, there was a 24-hour Sleepless Mart, in the village above the Subic Bay Airfield. A roadside supper was had by the shop.



Fig. 10. One of the confusingly yellow-bellied *confusus* **White-bellied Woodpeckers**, at the 'Sleepless Mart Village'.

Overall, the atmosphere in Subic Bay was a bit strained, with so many (mostly polite) police and security around. A particularly intimidating couple of elderly security guards were posted at the southern end of the former military airfield. On my way in, they gave an evil eye to a foreigner. On the way back, they stopped me, claiming that I had not made a full stop in the crossroads. I had, even though shortly. An unpleasant exchange of arguments followed, with threats of arrest and police, and hints that giving some money would help. I did not agree, and was, after ten minutes, finally able to leave, 'with a warning'.

At the end of the day, Subic Bay could be more accommodating towards foreign visitors and ease the restrictions on birdwatching. Unfortunately, the forthcoming re-establishment of the U.S. base in Subic Bay is hardly likely to improve the situation. On the contrary, additional restrictions may well be expected.

On the second day, I spent most of my time at the Water Station Track and especially at the Nabusan Beach Loop Road, including a rarely used and therefore very peaceful connecting side road (CSR) to Ilanin Rd. On the previous day, these sites had clearly been the most productive ones. Each of them was visited two to four times. Apalin Forest Trail, on the other hand, had too many campers at the gate to be worth one's while. Again, some time was also spent on the tarmac road up to the start of the Boton Falls Track. The mosquito-ridden track itself was too muddy for walking. During the hot afternoon hours, I also had a brief look around the Subic Bay Golf Course area.

Overall, the various development projects along the Corregidor Rd. appeared to have a double-edged negative effect on birdwatching and conservation in the area. First, clearing the forest had degraded the habitats. Second, the fences and security guards did prevent access to much of the remaining forest. One may only wonder why for example Polar Marine Inc. has to have an office there in the virgin forest, in addition to their harbor office? At the same time, the general situation has improved, too. The forests were dotted by numerous ammunition dumps and other military installations, now ruined and abandoned, indicating a lot of activity which has ceased to exist, at least for the time being.

The following list includes all the species recorded at Subic Bay. Philippine endemics or near-endemics have been marked with an asterisk.

***Philippine Megapode:** I did not really expect to hear or see this rare and skulking species. To my surprise, two *dillwyni* were nevertheless seen walking across the CSR!

Red Junglefowl: One female on the CSR, also crossing the road.

***Philippine Serpent Eagle:** One adult at middle NBLR, on the way up.

***Philippine Falconet:** One pair at middle NBLR, on the way up.

***Philippine Scops Owl:** One at lower NBLR.

***Luzon Hawk-Owl:** Four heard at lower NBLR and one heard & seen at WST.

***Chocolate Boobook:** One heard at WST.

***Barred Rail:** Relatively common roadside bird along the more peaceful routes.

***Plain Bush-hen:** One pair at BFT.

***Philippine Cuckoo-Dove:** Relatively common.

Zebra Dove: One in Subic Bay town.

***White-eared Brown Dove:** Common.



Fig. 11. The pair of **Philippine Falconets**, at the Nabusan Beach Loop Road.

***Amethyst Brown Dove**: Two birds at WST and NBLR.

***Philippine Green Pigeon**: About 30 at NBLR, two at BFT.

***Black-chinned Fruit Dove**: One at WST, another at NBLR.

Green Imperial Pigeon: Very common (around 100), especially towards the end of the WST.

***Philippine Hawk-Cuckoo**: One hyperactive bird calling in a tree at WST, at the edge of the first open stretch, by some buildings.

***Rough-crested Malkoha**: One at the WST and another by the Golf Course.

***Rufous Coucal**: Seen or heard on both days at the WST, by the station itself. The scarce endemic was among the first birds seen there in the first afternoon, with close and prolonged views of two individuals. One of the key target birds of Subic Bay.

***Philippine Coucal**: Common.

Lesser Coucal: Common.

Asian Koel: One close to Subic Bay town.

***Ameline Swift**: Very common; hundreds.

Asian Palm Swift: Very common.

***Spotted Wood Kingfisher**: One seen along the WST, in the first shady forest section! A total of four heard there, and at NBLR.

Collared Kingfisher: One *collaris* at the Subic Bay (military) airfield.

White-throated Kingfisher: One at WST and another at NBLR.

***Rufous Hornbill**: One adult at the village below BFT.

***Luzon Hornbill**: About 10 at the same tall trees as the previous species.

***Blue-naped Parrot**: A few calling at NBLR.

***Green Racket-tail**: Seen on each daytime visit to WST; two to three individuals each time. Another main target bird of Subic Bay.

***Philippine Hanging Parrot**: Up to 6 at WST.

***Guiabero**: Single bird with excellent close views, along the CSR.

Coppersmith Barbet: Common.

White-bellied Woodpecker: One *confusus* at the village below BFT, a second one at NBLR and a third one at WST.

Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike: One pair and a single bird at WST.

***Blackish Cuckooshrike:** A party of 12 at middle NBLR, together with orioles.

***Black-bibbed Cicadabird:** One pair at middle NBLR, on the way up.

Black-naped Oriole: Common at WST and NBLR.

***White-lored Oriole:** Single singing bird at the end of the WST, in the second morning.

***Philippine Bulbul:** Common NBLR and BFT.

***Balicassiao:** Relatively common, e.g. WST.

Hair-crested Drongo: Common.

White-breasted Woodswallow: Common.

***Sulphur-billed Nuthatch:** Two at BFT.

***Trilling Tailorbird:** Only one singing bird, along the main Corregidor Rd.

***White-browed Shama:** Frequently heard and attracted to mp3 recordings at NBLR and BFT, but nevertheless shy and skulking, and therefore only seen at the beginning of the BFT.

***Stripe-headed Rhabdornis:** One at BFT.

***Philippine Fairy-bluebird:** One at WST and another at NBLR.

***Coleto:** Common throughout.

Crested Myna: About 35 at the Subic Bay (military) airfield.

Tree Sparrow: Rather common around human habitations.

Large-billed Crow: Common.

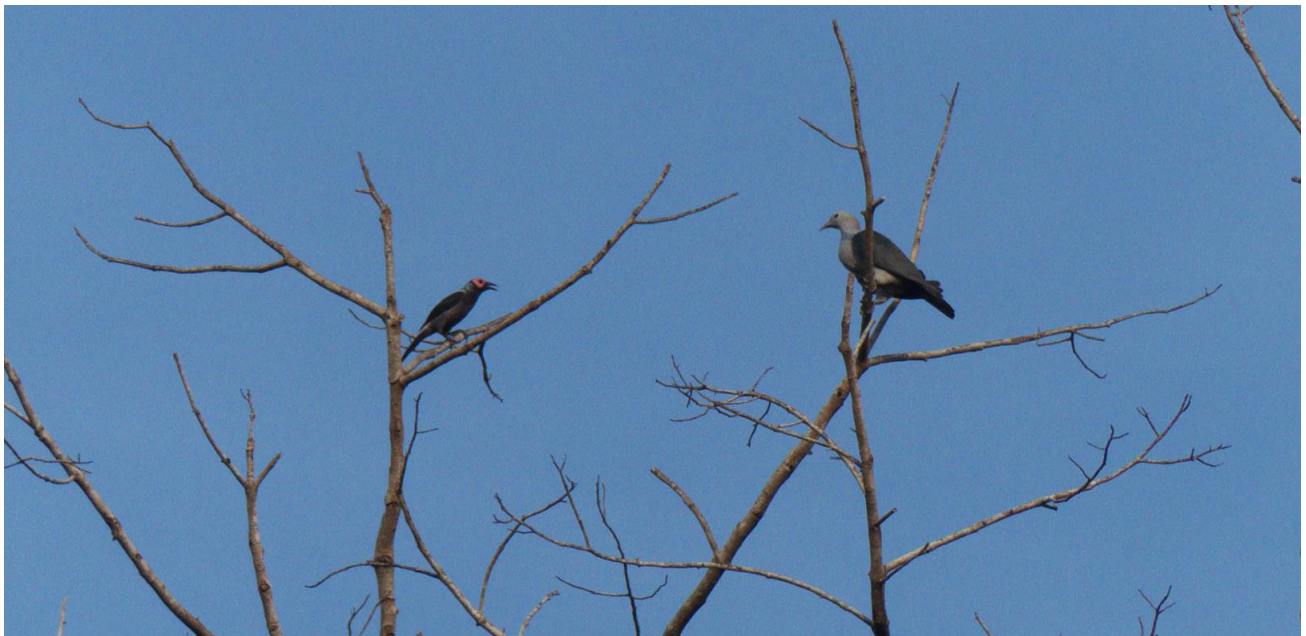


Fig. 12. Two common Subic species: A **Coledo** and a **Green Imperial Pigeon**, along the Water Station Track. The Water Station opening was particularly favored by the latter species.

CONCLUSIONS

It was a very brief and superficial visit indeed, and my first one for each location. What is more, birding was more or less restricted to forest edges and gardens at each site. The results are therefore best considered incidental. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the information included in this report will be helpful for others with plans to visit Los Baños, Mt. Banahaw and the forests of Subic Bay. There is not enough information on the Philippines in the Internet and any additions may therefore be welcome. Personally, I was mainly looking for a number of common and widespread species which had been missed in 1990, with an additional short list of scarce endemic target species. In retrospect, I got approximately what I was hoping to get.

Many visitors fear driving in the Philippines and tourists therefore often rent a car with a driver. Birders tend to hire both a guide and a driver. Driving in the Philippines is, however, not that difficult, especially if one already has some experience with the congested streets of a large city. On the plus side, a self-drive rental car provides a degree of freedom and air-conditioned comfort, and is relatively easy on one's wallet. Birdwatching at Subic Bay, for example, would really not have been possible without private transportation. It also allowed more options in terms of accommodation. Public transportation, readily available and inexpensive, was not a realistic choice for me, because of time restrictions.

Budget accommodation was readily available, too, and food was in general delicious. Moreover, people tended to be polite and accommodating, with the rare exceptions described in the report. There are many endemic birds on the islands and looking for them is a rewarding experience, despite the higher than average stress in regard to access and transportation. At the end of the day, there are good reasons to visit the Philippines now rather than later, even for a short stopover such as mine. The growing population and the advancing environmental degradation are not likely to improve the situation. Both the birds and the people struggle to survive, with rather bleak prospects for the future. Southern Luzon is the most congested area of the nation, with 800-1.200 people per km²! The average national density is 335. In Finland, the respective number is 17.

