



Frustration and Fulfilment

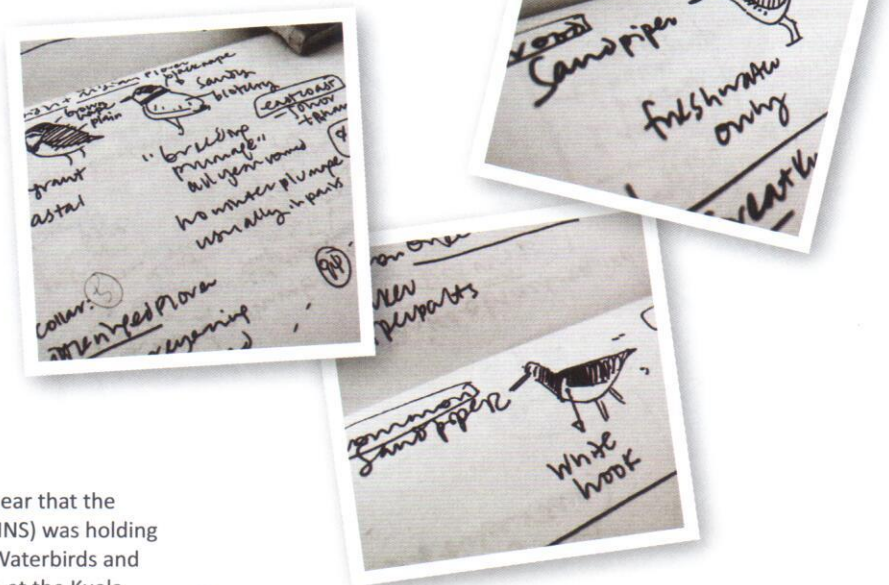
LIM SEIK NI TALKS ABOUT GAINING AN APPRECIATION FOR WADERS AT THE MNS INTRODUCTION TO COASTAL WATERBIRDS AND WETLANDS TRAINING WORKSHOP

HAVING BEEN leisure birding for about eight years, I have learnt that part of being a birdwatcher is getting to know things such as birding frustration, or the term flushing the birds. I guess other birders would know these and more : A big wave of birds has come but you haven't enough time to respond and appreciate all the birds in it? Heard the calls but can't spot the bird? Encounters that last mere seconds, or having no luck with a bird that others have spotted? These are all part and parcel of the love of spotting these flighty creatures.

Then there's the frustration of scoping out a big group of birds and not being able to identify them confidently. This happens a lot when it comes to waders - the birds that travel to our shores and hang around the wetlands and mudflats during their off-breeding-season migration from October to April. Many species of waders look alike, except for slight beak, plumage or leg colour differences, and when they congregate in the hundreds, if not thousands, it's tough to tell them apart. Even one of Malaysia's ardent waterbird watchers, Ang Teck Hin, confessed that he almost gave up in his early attempts at wader birding.

Above:
Birding on the coastline can be frustrating because of the large congregation of waders and the slight differences between the species
(Credit: Sze Ming Hui)

The Introduction to Coastal Waterbirds and Wetlands Training Workshop included theory classes, during which participant Chin Pik Wun took these intricate notes and, below, practical field sessions along the coast (Credit: Chin Pik Wun and MNS)



That's why I was excited to hear that the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) was holding the Introduction to Coastal Waterbirds and Wetlands Training Workshop at the Kuala Selangor Nature Park (KSNP), especially since this area is part of a very important flyway, making birding opportunities abundant all along the coast. Presented by Ang and also another very experienced birder, Khoo Swee Seng, the two-day workshop was such an informative and useful experience.

With indoor theory classes and the highly anticipated practical sessions in the field, participants were enlightened about shorebirds, including the physical and feeding characteristics of different waders and where they can be found, namely wetlands, coastal beaches, mudflats and paddy fields.

And yes, since the session I attended last November, I have managed to reduce some of the frustrations of wader birding thanks to these guides. Thus my advice for readers: Check the local tide schedule ahead of time; set the hide before the birds arrive to enable closer proximity; if you are not sure of the species, take photos and ask the experts; and lastly, pray hard that no raptors show up (especially in the middle of a waterbird count!).



Other topics covered were the importance of conserving coastal wetlands and the campaign to nominate KSNP as a Ramsar site and as part of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership. It is very important for all nature lovers, especially wader birders, to be aware of and support these campaigns, since the outcome will determine the destiny of the waders in their future visits.

Each year, there are thousands of waders that don't make it to our shores for various reasons, plus species that are facing imminent extinction, such as the tiny spoon-billed sandpiper now numbering in the low hundreds worldwide. Every single bird plays an important part in the ecosystem, and the continued loss of these waders will not only be heart-breaking but also detrimental to nature. Let's hope that in our lifetime, the spoon-billed sandpiper will not go the way of the dodo.

Want to learn about waterbirds?

Sign up now!

For 2015, MNS is holding only one session of its Asian Waterbirds Census Training Workshop, which will take place during Pesta Sayap 2015 at Kuala Selangor Nature Park. Places are limited to the first 40 MNS members who sign up, so check out www.mnswetland.weebly.com or www.mns.my for details and application form.

**Asian Waterbirds Census
Training Workshop**

Venue: Kuala Selangor Nature Park

Date: 15-17 October 2015

Fee: RM100 per person

