

New records of birds for the Gigantes Islands, Iloilo Province, Philippines

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From December 2009 to May 2010 we visited the Gigantes Islands, Philippines, and associated islets to conduct a thorough survey of the vertebrates including the avifauna. Of the 77 bird species thus far known in the Gigantes, 52 are residents (seven Philippine endemics) and 25 are migrants. Seventy-two bird species were recorded during our visits, 42 of which are new records for the Gigantes.

INTRODUCTION

The Gigantes Islands off north-eastern Panay in the western Visayan Sea primarily consist of karst islands formed by volcanic activities, and serve as a land-bridge between the Pleistocene islands of Panay, Cebu, Negros and Masbate (Brown & Alcala 2000).

Early collections and studies primarily focused on the amphibians and reptiles (Brown & Alcala 1970, 1978, 1980, Brown & Alcala 2000, Ferner *et al.* 2000, Alcala & Alcala 2005). Birds have been mainly collected by Silliman University biologists (specimens deposited in Silliman University–Rodolfo B. Gonzales Museum of Natural History in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental). Among the earliest accounts known to us are Rabor (1938) and Alcala & Sanguila (1969), and the information in them was incorporated in Dickinson *et al.* (1991) and Kennedy *et al.* (2000). Other groups, including birdwatchers, may have visited the islands but reports are either unavailable or not published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g. FFI 2006). Thus we relied on Kennedy *et al.* (2000) as a baseline.

Gigante Sur (481 ha; population 6,096) is composed primarily of karst forests on the east with patches of ipil-ipil *Leucaena leucocephala*. The rest of the island is cogonal with a few areas of scrub and agricultural areas planted with fruit trees and coconuts. In the north is an extensive fishpond, a large portion of which used to be an extensive mangrove forest. This island was visited on the following dates: 13–19 December 2009; 13–20 January 2010; 21–28 February 2010; 14 April 2010; and 15 May 2010.

Islets associated with Gigante Sur were also visited on the dates indicated below: Bantigui (2 ha; population 5–10) on 15 January 2010; Cabugao Dako (10 ha; transient population c. 5) and Cabugao Gamay (c. 7–8 ha) on 16 January 2010; Balabagon (5–6 ha; transient population c. 15) and Pulupandan on 15–16 January 2010.

Gigante Norte (599 ha; population 6,919) was visited on the following dates: 16–21 December 2009; 21–24 February 2010; 1 March 2010; and 13–16 May 2010. The islets of Gigantillo (< 1 ha) and Gigantuna (< 1 ha), located about 0.7 km east of Asluman, Gigante Norte, and north of Bulubadiang islet (c. 1.5 ha; transient population c. 10) and Uay Dahon Islet (2 ha; population c. 5, resort workers) were visited on 17 January 2010.

Birds were identified and counted with the aid of binoculars and Kennedy *et al.* (2000). Online databases such as those of the Oriental Bird Club (www.orientalbirdimages.org) and the Internet Bird Collection (ibc.lynxeds.com) were also visited for further confirmation.

Mist-nets (6×4 m and 6×12 m) were also used to capture birds during our first survey in December 2009. However, mist-netting in small, degraded forests was not found to be productive, and was also risky in steep karst terrain, so we decided to focus on direct observations. Netted birds that are new island records are indicated in the species list.

Most of our records are based on sightings, supplemented with photographs where possible. In addition, audio recordings were

made using digital and tape recorders to document some species. However, a detailed analysis of vocalisations cannot be presented at this time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thus far, a total of 77 species of bird are known in the Gigantes and associated islets. During our surveys in 2009 and 2010, 72 species of bird were recorded, 42 of which are new records for the Gigantes, while 35 species were listed earlier by Kennedy *et al.* (2000). We did not encounter five species listed by Kennedy *et al.* (2000) for the Gigantes, namely: Blue-breasted Quail *Coturnix chinensis*, Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopus maculatus*, Mangrove Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis rufigaster*, White-vented Whistler *Pachycephala homeyeri* and Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*.

The remaining forests of the Gigantes are found on karst and are partly degraded owing to harvesting of firewood and charcoal production, especially in accessible areas. Scrub habitats in non-karst areas are now converted to agriculture. It is therefore desirable to take conservation measures in this group of islands, which are the home not just of the birds listed here but also of the endemic and globally Vulnerable Gigante Narrow-disked Gecko *Gekko gigante* and the Critically Endangered Island Forest Frog *Platymantis insulatus* (Alcala & Alcala 2005; IUCN 2010).

In the following accounts, GN = Gigante Norte, GS = Gigante Sur.

DETAILS OF NEW ISLAND RECORDS

Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas*

A single bird was captured by a fisherman a few metres off Uay Dahon Islet, near GN on 13 December 2009 and another was seen flying between GN and GS on 20 December 2009. Distinguished from other shearwaters by a streaked head and neck, greyish-horn bill with black tip and feet flesh-pinkish in colour.

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*

Seen in mangroves near a fishpond in Gabi Bay, GS, on 13 December 2009, 24 February 2010 and 15 May 2010.

Cinnamon Bittern *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*

A male (upperparts cinnamon, lacking mottling on the scapulars) was flushed by AB and LA near a fishpond and *Rhizophora* mangroves at Gabi, GS, on 15 May 2010.

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*

Seen in the mangroves and mudflats at Gabi Bay, GS, on 13–16 December 2009, 13 January 2010, and 22–24 February, 1 March 2010 and 15 May 2010.

Pond-heron *Ardeola* sp.

A maximum of five non-breeding birds were observed and photographed by AB in a rice field at Gabi Bay, GS, on 13 December 2009, 24 February and 1 March 2010 in a fishpond at Gabi. Identification to species level was not possible due to the similarity of immatures of *A. bacchus* and *A. speciosa* in the field.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Flocks of 3–8 birds were consistently seen in the grassland and mudflats of Gabi, GS, on 13–16 December 2009, 13–16 January 2010, 14 April 2010 and 15 May 2010. Photos of both breeding and non-breeding birds were taken by AB in the grassland plain at Gabi on 15 May 2010.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Observed on both islands, usually gleaning on the mudflats on 16–20 December 2009 in Asluman, GN, and 13–15 January 2010 and 15 May 2010 in Gabi Bay, GS.

Pacific Reef Egret *Egretta sacra*

Two pairs were seen on the mudflats of Asluman, GN, on 16 and 19 December 2009, all dark morphs.

Great Frigatebird *Fregata minor*

A juvenile frigatebird was observed flying over Uay Dahon on 17 January 2010. It was distinguished by its whitish head, brownish breast-band, elliptical/egg-shaped white belly-patch, lack of axillary spurs, and narrow brown-buff alar bars, confirming identification as this species (James 2004).

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*

A single adult bird (easily distinguished by its white head, upper back, throat and upper belly but rufous lower belly, undertail and underwing-coverts) was seen over Lantangan, GS, on 13 January 2010.

Barred Rail *Gallirallus torquatus*

Recorded throughout the survey period (13–21 December 2009, 13–20 January, 21 February 2010, 1 March 2010 and 15 May 2010) in both GS and GN. It was also heard calling on Bantigui on 15 January 2010 and seen on Balabagon on 16 January 2010.

White-browed Crake *Porzana cinerea*

Seen three times among grasses on the edge of a fishpond in Gabi, GS, on 22–24 February 2010 and 15 May 2010.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Seen foraging in fishponds at Gabi Bay, GS, on 13–16 December 2009, 13 January 2010, 23–24 February 2010 and 14 April 2010.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*

A single bird was observed by AB and LTA near a fishpond at Gabi Bay, GS, on 13 January 2010.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Five non-breeding birds were seen on an exposed sand-bar near Bantigui on 15 January 2010. Another bird was observed in a dried portion of a fishpond at Gabi Bay, GS, between 22–25 February 2010. The bill was not observed in detail but appeared uniformly dark. Together with the white forehead of both birds, this suggests that they were of the subspecies *curonicus*.

Snipe *Gallinago* sp.

Seen by LA in a small stream near karst with grasses in the late afternoon of 15 December 2009 in Gabi, GS. Because views were

poor, and bearing in mind the difficulty in separating *G. hardwickii*, *G. stenura* and *G. megala* in the field, we only list the genus.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Observed on exposed intertidals and mangroves from 13–21 December 2009 and 13–20 January 2010 on both GS and Norte, and once on the small islet of Pulupandan near Balabagon on 16 January 2010.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Two birds were observed by AB on exposed sand in a fishpond in Gabi, GS, on 24 February 2010.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Three birds were seen at Asluman beach, GN, on 16 December 2009. The species was also observed on 13–15 December 2009 at Gabi Bay, GS, and on 15 January 2010 at Antonia, GS, and on Bantigui Islet.

Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes*

A single bird was photographed by AB on the side of a fishpond at Gabi Bay, GS, on 14 December 2009 and a group of four birds were feeding on a muddy intertidal adjacent to the mangroves at Asluman on 18 December 2009.

Great Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*

Three individuals were seen on 15 January 2010 probably in breeding plumage as the crown appeared black but not streaked with white as described by Kennedy *et al.* (2000). Other features noted include forked tail, yellow bill, white forehead and face including rest of underparts and grey upperparts except the tips of primaries, which were darker.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

About 10–20 individuals were seen off Lantangan, GS, on 13–20 January 2010.

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

Common on hillsides and areas planted with fruit trees in GS and Norte on 13–21 December 2009, and 13–20 January, 22–25 February, 1 March and 15 May 2010.

Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*

Observed three times; near Lapus-lapus cave in Asluman, GN, on 18 December 2009, on Balabagon on 15 January 2010 and on GS on 15 May 2010.

Pied Imperial-pigeon *Ducula bicolor*

Two birds were seen by LA and five more members of the team in Lantangan, GS on 16 December 2009.

Grass Owl *Tyto capensis*

A single bird was flushed by AB from cogon-dominated grassland on Lantangan, GS, on 28 February 2010.

Philippine Hawk-owl *Ninox philippensis*

Heard once near Pawikan cave on 14 April 2010 at about 20h30 hours by AB and others. The call was a series of distinctive *bo-cow-cow-cow*. An owl probably belonging to the same species was heard calling at night on two occasions (17 and 19 January 2010) from a steep karst cliff at Granada, GN. The unrecorded call was a low-toned, slightly harsh *bow-cow-cow* repeated up to 3–4 times, typical of the species.

Philippine Nightjar *Caprimulgus manillensis*

Two birds were flushed from scrub on 14 January 2010 at Lantangan, GS. Another bird was flushed at night (19h00) from the entrance

wall of Langub cave on GN on 17 January 2010. A pair was also flushed from a dry slope with ipil-ipil plantation in Antonia, Gabi, GS, on 01 March 2010 at about 09h00. While in flight, the white round spots on each tail-tip were observed.

Edible-nest Swiftlet *Collocalia fuciphaga*

Seen flying near karst in GS and GN between 13–16 December 2009 and 13–17 January 2010. A pair was also captured in a coastal cave in Antonia, Gabi, GS, on 15 January 2010. On 15 May 2010, 14 nests with one or two hatchlings each were found by AB and others in another coastal cave (Looc cave) in Lantangan, GS. This species was distinguished from Uniform Swiftlet *Collocalia vanikorensis* in having a light rump contrasting with generally dark upperparts (Kennedy *et al.* 2000).

Five abandoned nests (half-cupped) were found attached to walls in the same cave, while 14 nests with hatchlings were seen in Santosantos cave on Lantangan, GS. The nesting materials consisted of pure saliva, hardened in some abandoned nests. Those of Uniform Swiftlet consist of both saliva and soft plant materials and often remain wet.

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*

Seen at Lantangan, GS, on 24 February 2010 and 1 March 2010.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Observed in mangroves at Gabi Bay, GS, on 13–17 December 2009 and on 13 January 2010. In a fishpond at Gabi, a single bird was observed by AB feeding on cultured tilapia *Oreochromis niloticus* on 24 February 2010.

Ruddy Kingfisher *Halcyon coromanda*

Seen once by LA in a karst forest at Asluman, GN, on 19 December 2009.

Golden-bellied Flyeater *Gerygone sulphurea*

Commonly heard in mangroves (13–20 December 2009, 13–20 January 2010 and 16 May 2010) on both islands. Calls were recorded by AB in mangrove forest at Gabi Bay, GS, on 14 January 2010.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Seen twice at Lantangan, GS, on 21 February 2010 and three times at Gabi, GS, on 22–24 February 2010. Relatively larger than *H. tahitica*, with generally white underparts and a long forked tail.

Striated Swallow *Hirundo striolata*

Seen by AB and others on 15 May 2010 at Lantangan, GS.

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

Commonly seen on 13–21 December 2009, 13–20 January 2010, 24 February–1 March 2010 and 15 May 2010 on both GS and GN. A single bird was mist-netted in Gabi Bay, GS, on 15 December 2009. Calls were recorded by AB on 1 March 2010.

Pied Fantail *Rhipidura javanica*

Observed on both islands during the entire duration of the study (13–20 December 2009 and 13–20 January 2010). Seen also on Balabagon on 15 January 2010. Calls were recorded by AB on 14 December 2009 and 13 January 2010.

Bright-capped Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*

Seen by AB in the cogon-dominated grassland in Lantangan, GS, on 1 Mar 2010.

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*

Seen in mangrove forest dominated by *Avicennia marina* in Gabi Bay, GS, on 23 February 2010 and 1 March 2010.

Blue Rockthrush *Monticola solitarius*

A male (distinguished by blue upperparts including throat and breast with chestnut belly and undertail-coverts) was photographed in a *Sonneratia alba* tree on 14 December 2009 at Gabi Bay, GS. At Lantangan, GS, another individual was photographed on a galvanised roof on 16 January 2010. The latter bird appeared intermediate between male and female, so was probably an immature male: it had dark shaft-streaks, especially on the breast and belly, but the lower belly appeared light chestnut. Another male was also observed at Barangay Granada, GN, on 17 January 2010 amongst rocks and cliffs.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Common in areas of human settlement and agricultural areas of the two islands on 13–20 December 2009, 13–20 January 2010, 24 February–1 March 2010, and 14–16 May 2010. This species has probably arrived via boat from adjacent islands.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Two birds were observed on a pond near a rice paddy in Gabi, GS, on 13 December 2009.

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Appendix

Checklist of bird species known from the Gigantes Islands

R = resident, M = migrant, PE = Philippine endemic (resident)

English name	Scientific name	Status	Kennedy et al. (2000)	This study
Philippine Megapode	<i>Megapodius cumingii</i>	R	X	X
Streaked Shearwater	<i>Calonectris leucomelas</i>	M		X
Yellow Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>	R		X
Cinnamon Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>	R		X
Rufous Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>	R	X	X
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>	R	X	X
Pond-heron	<i>Ardeola</i> sp.	M		X
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	R		X
Pacific Reef Egret	<i>Egretta sacra</i>	M		X
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	M		X
Great Frigatebird	<i>Fregata minor</i>	R		X
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	R		X
White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	R	X	X
Barred Rail	<i>Gallirallus torquatus</i>	R		X
White-browed Crake	<i>Porzana cinerea</i>	R		X
Blue-breasted Quail	<i>Coturnix chinensis</i>	R	X	
Barred Buttonquail	<i>Turnix suscitator</i>	R	X	X
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	M		X
Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	M		X
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	M		X
Snipe	<i>Gallinago</i> sp.	M		X
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	M		X
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	M		X
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	M		X
Grey-tailed Tattler	<i>Heteroscelus brevipes</i>	M		X
Great Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bergii</i>	M		X
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	M		X
Island Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia bitorquata</i>	R	X	X
Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	R		X
Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	R		X
Peaceful Dove	<i>Geopelia striata</i>	R	X	X
Pink-necked Green Pigeon	<i>Treron vernans</i>	R	X	X
Pied Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula bicolor</i>	R		X
Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx fugax</i>	R		X
Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>	M	X	X
Philippine Coucal	<i>Centropus viridis</i>	PE	X	X
Grass Owl	<i>Tyto capensis</i>	R		X
Philippine Hawk Owl	<i>Ninox philippensis</i>	PE		X
Philippine Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus manillensis</i>	PE		X

English name	Scientific name	Status	Kennedy <i>et al.</i> (2000)	This study
Glossy Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>	R	X	X
Pygmy Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia troglodytes</i>	PE	X	X
Uniform Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia vanikorensis</i>	R	X	X
Edible-nest Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia fuciphaga</i>	R		X
Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>	R		X
Ruddy Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon coromanda</i>	M		X
Collared Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus chloris</i>	R	X	X
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	M		X
Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos maculatus</i>	PE	X	
Golden-bellied Gerygone	<i>Gerygone sulphurea</i>	R		X
White-breasted Woodswallow	<i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>	R	X	X
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	M		X
Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	R	X	X
Striated Swallow	<i>Hirundo striolata</i>	M		X
Pied Triller	<i>Lalage nigra</i>	R	X	X
Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	M		X
Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>	R	X	X
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	R	X	X
Pied Fantail	<i>Rhipidura javanica</i>	R		X
White-vented Whistler	<i>Pachycephala homeyeri</i>	R	X	
Golden-headed Cisticola	<i>Cisticola exilis</i>	R		X
Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>	R	X	X
Philippine Bulbul	<i>Ixos philippinus</i>	PE	X	X
Tawny Grassbird	<i>Megalurus timoriensis</i>	R	X	X
Striated Grassbird	<i>Megalurus palustris</i>	R	X	X
Arctic Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	M		X
Asian Glossy Starling	<i>Aplonis panayensis</i>	R	X	X
Coledo	<i>Sarcops calvus</i>	R	X	X
Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	R	X	X
Blue Rockthrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	M		X
Mangrove Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis rufigastra</i>	R	X	
Pygmy Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum pygmaeum</i>	PE	X	X
Olive-backed Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>	R	X	X
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	R		X
Black-headed Munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>	R	X	X
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	M		X
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	M	X	
Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>	M	X	X
Total number of species		77	35	72