



## Thailand Trip Report Jan 2025

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### Day One, 9th January

Thailand is a truly wonderful birding destination. The birds are plentiful, often not too shy, and the diversity is high. At this time of year, the forest gamebirds, hornbills and babblers are joined by overwintering warblers, flycatchers and shorebirds from the north, and our route was to cover the best birding areas of central and northern Thailand. From the great national parks of Khao Yai and Kaeng Krachan, and the coastal flats at the head of the Gulf of Thailand, we would move on to the hills of the north, birding Doi Pha Hom Pok and Doi Inthanon National Parks, with their more Himalayan-influenced avifauna. By the time the guides arrived, most of the group were already settled in and making their first explorations of the commoner species; anticipation levels were high at our welcome dinner!

### Day two, 10th January

The first “official” birding was close to our hotel at Lat Krabang, where there was a somewhat overwhelming deluge of new birds for everyone! The open paddyfields and fishponds of Lat Krabang paddyfields and fishponds are home to a wide diversity of birds; large numbers of storks, herons and egrets were everywhere, colourful Blue-tailed Bee-eaters and Pink-necked Green-pigeons perched in the open; searching through large flocks of seed-eating passerines produced the rare Asian Golden Weaver; and on more vegetated pools Yellow Bittern, White-browed Crakes, and Bronze-winged Jacanas gave superb views.



*Our group at Wat Phra Phutthabat Noi*

Crossing Bangkok, we reached Wat Chaloem Phrakiat Worawiharn, a temple surrounded by large trees which are home to Spotted Owlet and Red-breasted Parakeets. The birding continued at our lunch stop, where smart Pied Kingfishers hunted the river behind the restaurant, before we continued northeast. A late afternoon hunt around the cliffs at Wat Phra Phuttabat Noi turned up Rufous Limestone Babblers, endemic to the karstic rock outcrops of this part of the country. After such an intensive introduction to the birds of Thailand, we were pleased to get to our hotel in the ever-expanding resort town of Khao Yai.

### **Days three and four, 11th-12th January**

Two days exploring the hill forest of one of Thailand's foremost national parks did present some challenges this year. Record cold weather (by local standards, at least...) reduced bird activity in the higher-altitude areas, and the number of visitors these days has to be seen to be believed. Some areas looked more like a festival campsite than a nature reserve, but it is impossible to visit Khao Yai without seeing lots and lots of good birds. Even around the busy headquarters, we had brilliant views of Buffy Fish-Owls by day, along with colourful Pin-tailed Parotfinches. These nomadic birds are almost impossible to find in some years, before appearing as if by magic in years of landscape-scale flowering and seeding events in giant bamboo. Even more exotic were the Blue-bearded Bee-eaters, both Orange-breasted and Red-headed Trogons, Asian Emerald Cuckoo and Banded Broadbills that posed for us; Blue-eared, Moustached and Green-eared Barbets were uncommonly obliging in fruiting trees; and on the ridge, we watched Black-throated Laughingthrush and Common Green-Magpie. Impressive Wreathed Hornbills gave us the runaround, unlike their commoner Oriental Pied cousins!



*Gray Nightjar © Mike Hoit*



*Buffy Fish-Owl © Mike Hoit*



*Asian Emerald Cuckoo © Mike Hoit*



*Yellow-vented Flowerpecker © Mike Hoit*

### **Day five, 13th January**

Although this was essentially a travel day as we headed to our next national park, a number of birding stops made sure it was anything but boring! After watching nesting Red-breasted Parakeets close to the hotel, we travelled back southwest, stopping to pick up delicious supplies of fruit in

northern Bangkok - a location which also had an abundance of both Java Sparrows, and berry-munching Coppersmith Barbets at almost touching distance. A banquet lunch by the mouth of the Tha Chin river while Whiskered Terns and Brahminy Kites flew by was followed by a visit to a temple complete with White-nest Swiftlets and the nests of bird's-nest soup fame! Birding some mangrove areas, our eagle-eyed driver spotted a roosting Gray Nightjar, before we sought out Mangrove Whistler and Golden-bellied Gerygones, before an evening stop in paddyfields saw us surrounded by waterbirds and Eastern Yellow Wagtails, the latter with some Red-throated Pipits in attendance. Eventually we rolled into the somewhat eccentric hotel, with some chalets shaped like boats(!) on the shores of Kaeng Krachan reservoir - home for four nights.



*Red-bearded Bee-eater* © Mike Hoit



*Picnic lunch at Kaeng Krachan © Mike Hoit*

## **Day six, 14th January**

Kaeng Krachan National Park is one of the best birding areas in Asia, and it certainly didn't disappoint. Today we primarily focussed on the higher elevations of Panoen Thung, with its views of endless forested ridges. A very busy morning produced masses of birds typical of hill forest: White-browed Shrike-babbler, Collared Babbler, and a procession of drongos, leaf-warblers and bulbuls, amongst others. A more-or-less tame, absurdly colourful Red-bearded Bee-eater stole the show over breakfast, with a great supporting cast of mammals including Dusky and Robinson's Banded Langurs, White-handed Gibbon, and Yellow-throated Marten. Working our way down the one-way road a little, we came across a seriously good reward: the very rarely seen Silver Oriole! Then it was time to descend through the park for another Thai feast back at the hotel.

## **Day seven, January 15th**

On the second full day at our disposal in this wonderful national park, we targeted the birds of the lower areas. While waiting for the sun to penetrate the forests, the more open, previously logged areas were very productive. Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeons and Green-eared Barbets were seen close up, and Greater and Common Flamebacks allowed side-by-side comparisons, as did many bulbul species. Great views of Asian Barred Owlet were obtained around the lower campsite, before we were treated to superb views of a trio of roosting White-fronted Scops Owls - one of the special birds of Kaeng Krachan. Other sightings during the morning included Square-tailed Drongo Cuckoo, White-browed Piculet, Spot-necked Babbler, and Sultan Tit. Lunch was at Samarn Bird Camp, where as well as delicious food, they served up Siberian Blue Robin and Orange-headed Thrush from a hide! Back in the national park, the afternoon was predictably quieter, but a spectacular pair of Great Hornbills finished the day nicely.



*Gray Peacock-Pheasant © Mike Hoit*



*Kalij Pheasant © Mike Hoit*



*Kalij Pheasant © Maureen Phair*



*Great Hornbill © Mike Hoit*



*Green-eared Barbet* © Mike Hoit

### **Day eight, January 16th**

One feature of Kaeng Krachan is the hides set up along the fringe of the park, with feeding stations and water sources to entice forest birds into view. A rather sedate day saw us have both morning and afternoon sessions in such a set-up, where we had phenomenal views of species that are normally ghosts in the forest: Gray Peacock-Pheasant, Kalij Pheasant, Bar-backed, Ferruginous and Scaly-breasted Partridges, Blue Pitta, and Large Scimitar-babbler, among the many commoner species. Mammals were also attracted to the offerings, with close sightings of Lesser Mouse-Deer, Northern Treeshrew and Indochinese Ground Squirrel, among others. At lunchtime we had a break back at the Boathouse Paradise Resort, a White-bellied Sea-eagle flew over, and there was even an opportunity to have a dip in the pool! Nearby, an incredible wildlife sighting - although not for those of a nervous disposition - was made of a Small-banded Kukri Snake attacking a much-bigger Black-spined Toad, in order to eat the vital organs alive!

### **Day nine, January 17th**

Departing Kaeng Krachan early, we travelled to the coast, and much of the day was spent grilling the shorebirds at Ban Pak Thale. The star bird here is Spoon-billed Sandpiper, which played hard to get before (eventually!) performing brilliantly; while searching, we had great looks at other rare and declining species of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway like Great Knot, Nordmann's Greenshank, and Asian Dowitcher. Later in the day we visited Bang Tabun Ok lake, seeing Spot-billed Pelican, Oriental Darter and various ducks, before a final coastal stop turned up showy Ruddy-breasted Crake, and Black-browed Reed, Oriental Reed and Dusky Warblers.



*Chao Samran beach © Mike Hoit*



*White temple, Chiang Rai © Mike Hoit*

## **Day ten, January 18th**

This was mostly a travel day, as we swapped central Thailand for the north, but during some casual birding near our resort in Hat Chao Samran we saw, between us, Chinese Egret and Western Reef-Egrets, Malaysian Plover and Brown-throated Sunbird. After flying to Chiang Rai province, we made

a visit to the weird and wonderful White Temple, before travelling on to our hotel in Fang.

### **Day eleven, January 19th**

The first of two days in Doi Pha Hom Pok National Park started with a hide-based vigil for Mrs Hume's Pheasant, which didn't show -but all was not lost, with the newly-described Red-eyed Scimitar-babbler showing well, along with stunning Ultramarine Flycatcher. Birding the high, pine-clad ridge of Doi San Ju - almost in Myanmar at times! - for the remainder of the day was very productive, and included such specialities as Streaked Barwing and the amazing Giant Nuthatch, along with lovely Sapphire Flycatchers, Mountain Bamboo-Partridges, Yunnan Fulvettas, Stripe-breasted Woodpeckers, and a showy Siberian Rubythroat.



*Siberian Rubythroat © Mike Hoit*

### **Day twelve, January 20th**

Ascending the hills again, we covered various locations close to the national park headquarters at Doi Ang Khang, birding in pinewoods, broadleaved forest, temples and roadsides with flowering cherry trees. A steady stream of highlights included Spot-winged Grosbeaks, White-headed Bulbul, Crested Finchbill, Black-breasted Thrush, Chestnut-bellied Rock-thrush, and Rufous-backed Sibia.



*Our group at Doiangkhang © Mike Hoit*



*Bridge crossing © Mike Hoit*

## **Day thirteen, January 21st**

Today was spent in transit towards Doi Inthanon, but there was plenty of birding to be had. Beginning in the lower part of Doi Pha Hom Pok at Fang Hot Springs, we scoped the stunning Black Baza and a feeding flock of Asian Fairy Bluebirds, and saw colourful forest-dwellers such as “White-

faced" (Eurasian) Jay, and Gray-throated, Long-tailed and Rosy Minivets. After lunch (including a Rufous-winged Buzzard), we stopped at Mae Taeng for Long-billed Plover and Wire-tailed Swallow, before finishing at Ban Hong. This no-hunting area is home to a large Green Peafowl population, and - being left alone, or even celebrated, by local people, these incredible birds gave very close views.



*Green Peafowl © Mike Hoit*

### **Day fourteen, January 22nd**

Doi Inthanon is Thailand's highest mountain, and we spent both the morning and afternoon birding the boggy, mossy forests of the summit. Highlights included close views of Scaly Thrush, Himalayan Shortwing, Snowy-browed Flycatcher and Silver-eared Laughingthrush. Lower down, we saw various open country species such as Eastern Buzzard and Gray-breasted Prinia over lunch at Mae Klung, and White-capped Redstart at Huai Sai Lueaung waterfall.

### **Day fourteen, January 23rd**

The second day in Doi Inthanon was spent at lower to mid-elevations. In the dry deciduous woodlands, we found superb Black-headed Woodpeckers, before venturing into the forests, where close views of Clicking Shrike-Babbler, Lesser Shortwing, White-gorgeted Flycatcher, Pygmy Cupwing and Gray-bellied Tesia made for a fantastic morning. Post-lunch, we had our final Thai bird hide experience, featuring White-tailed Robin, Gray-throated Babbler, and both Little and Streaked Spiderhunters.



*Taiga Flycatcher © Mike Hoit*



*Wachirathan waterfall, Doi Inthanon © Mike Hoit*

### **Day fifteen, January 24th.**

The final day of a fantastic bird-filled tour, visiting a range of habitats to find some final new birds. Close to our hotel near Doi Inthanon, we saw Blossom-headed Parakeets and more Green Peafowl, with other stops for Small Pratincoles along the Ping River, improved views of Gray-headed

Lapwings in paddies, and last - but definitely not least! - a roosting Brown Boobook in Chang Mai. All that was left was an evening flight back to Bangkok, before making our way home, with memories of some very special birds among the total of 403 species.



*Brown BooBook, Chiang Mai © Mike Hoit*

[Thailand Birding Tour eBird list \(Jan 2025\)](#)