

Thailand Jan 2025



Thailand (Central and North)

19th January to 4th February 2025

Introduction

This is my report of the Birdfinders trip to Central and Northern Thailand in 2025. The trip was my first proper birding foray into this part of Asia and was one I was looking forward to increasingly as I spent the preceding weeks trying to learn the numerous new birds to be found. I used the Lynx Birds of Thailand guide at home (especially as it was co-written by our guide for the tour) but bought the Robson Field Guide to use whilst I was away as I tend to write in my field guides so needed something slightly more portable.

The tour itinerary was varied and promised to visit several different ecosystems from Salt Pans and Rice Fields to different forests and savannah type areas and finally the mountains and agricultural areas of the North. I will go into more depth on these areas as I go along.

The group was eight strong (Terry and Linda, Dave J, Dave H, Andy, Kal, Tim and I) and we travelled in two spacious mini buses which provided ample comfort, space and, importantly, a window seat each.

Day 1 – 20th Jan 2025

Having stayed overnight in Bangkok, I made my way to the airport to meet the group as they disembarked from the overnight flight from Heathrow. I was met by our guide for the trip, Jay Pattanakit (Wych'yanan Limparungpatthanaij to his friends!) and Mai who was the local representative who accompanied us in the second van for the whole tour. Once all the passengers had arrived and been accounted for, we were eight, and we made our way out to the vans for the first drive down towards Phetchaburi. Bangkok is a huge and busy city but we made our way through the morning traffic easily enough and 90 minutes later we pulled into the car park at the salt ponds of the Khok Kham Conservation Club. As we walked down towards the ponds in the searing heat we could see, through the shimmer, thousands

of birds. It was a remarkable sight as each shallow pond held a bustle of birdlife.



Khok Khom Conservation Club Salt Ponds

The first thing that struck me was the number of large birds. There were hundreds of Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets as well as a large flock of Painted Storks, some Javan Pond and Grey Herons, Little and Indian Cormorants sitting in a tree and a fly over Oriental Darter. On other ponds there were large flocks of waders and we settled down to scan through them where we found Black Winged Stilt, Tibetan and Greater Sand Plover, Marsh and Wood Sandpiper, Common and Spotted Greenshank and Red Necked Stint. This was a great introduction to the waders and their current plumage prior to the even more numerous flocks that we would be looking at over the next day or two. As we wandered back to the vans for a well needed drink, the birds were spooked by a Brahminy Kite and an Eastern Jungle Crow as the flew across providing a spectacular sight of thousands of waders in flight across the salt pans.

Once we had refreshed ourselves, we drove on towards our base for the next couple of days at Phetchaburi and the prolific Pak Thale Salt Pans where we

would look for one of the main targets for the trip, the Spoonbilled Sandpiper.

We had lunch and then disembarked at Pak Thale and started to walk along the salt pans, scanning as we went. The place was teeming with waders and we quickly picked out groups of new birds such as Red Necked Stint, Broadbilled, Curlew and Terek Sandpipers, Red Necked Phalarope, Brown Backed and Slender Billed Gulls, Greater and Lesser Crested Terns, Eurasian Curlew and best of all, a relatively huge flock of Nordmann's Greenshank. These are a very rare bird and to see 58 in a single flock was an incredibly fortunate and unusual sight. This was against an equally incredible backdrop of Over 200 Asian Dowicher (another very unusually large sized gathering) mixed in with good numbers of Great Knot and the odd Red Knot.

We were a very happy group as we made our way to the lovely beachside hotel for the evening, even though most of the group had been on the go since leaving home over 36 hours earlier!



Brahminy Kite



Pak Thale Salt Pans

Day 2 – 21st Jan 2025

We were up early as usual to meet the dawn back at Pak Thale. As we drove along the road to the parking spot we stopped to see Gull Billed, Whiskered and Caspian Terns in a coastal pool with more Asian Dowitchers and Broad Billed Sandpipers before continuing on to the Salt Pans. We, again, walked along the top of the bunds stopping regularly to scan the wader flocks as the sun rose in the background. There were waders everywhere with Black and Bar Tailed Godwits, huge numbers of Red Necked Stint, more Phalaropes, Whimbrel and Spotted Redshank. We were all looking through the birds when Dave J suddenly shouted that he had a Spoonbilled!! After a fractious minute of trying to find where Dave was looking we all eventually got great views of this critically endangered but beautiful little wader. There are fewer than 200 of these birds left in the wild so it was a bitter sweet moment watching it sieving about through the silt, very alone and with no concept of its delicate grasp on species survival.



Spoon Billed Sandpiper at Pak Thale

After spending a couple of hours at Pak Thale, it was time to leave the salt pans and head slightly inland to some freshwater areas around Wat Khom Naram and Laem Pak Bia where Jay knew some good areas for new birds.

The area has many small freshwater ponds where the locals farm shrimp and this attracts many birds (although the farmers actively discourage them from eating their livelihood).

As we walked along a lane between ponds Jay picked out Long Toed and Temmink's Stint through the scope as Asian Green and Blue Tailed Bee-eaters swooped around. As we continued our walk, we flushed a Greater Painted Snipe and a Green Billed Malkoha hopped around in the branches of a nearby tree. There was a marshy ditch running up the side of the road and as we sat beneath a shady tree we saw Black Browed and Oriental Reed Warblers, some Yellow Vented Bulbul, a Ruddy Breasted Crake and a Yellow Bittern trying to hide amongst the reeds. As we wandered back to the vans we spotted a Brown Shrike in some low scrub which was soon followed by excellent views of an Indo-Chinese Bushlark. A short drive later and we stopped at some grassland where we immediately heard and saw Oriental Skylarks and a Little Ringed Plover. As we watched them a raptor floated low across the field which turned out to be a female Pied Harrier.



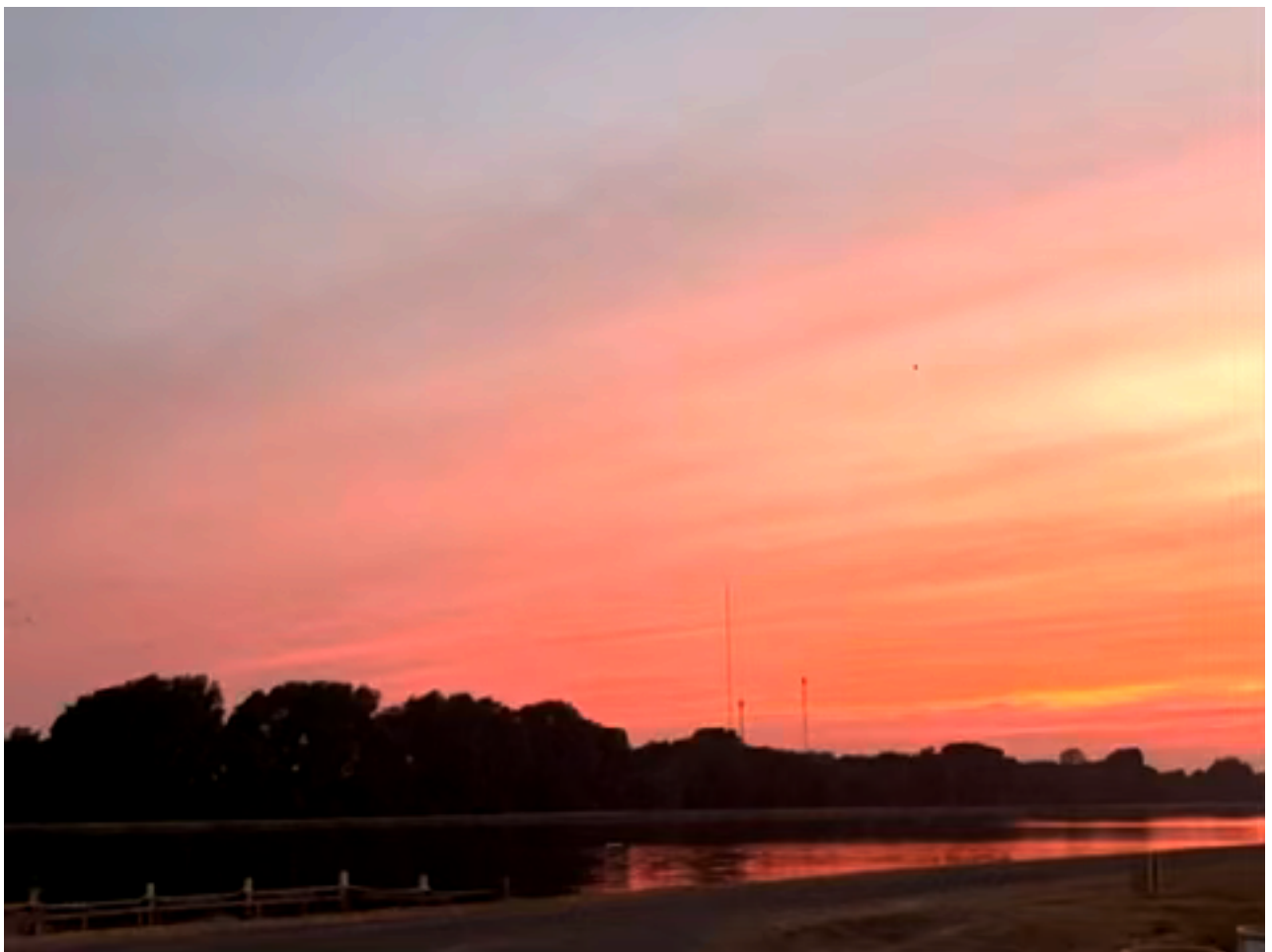
Indo-Chinese Bushlark



Malaysian Plover.

In the afternoon we made our way to a local village where we boarded small boats and made our way out to a sand spit just up the coast. On arrival, we walked down the beach and found our target bird, the Malaysian Plover. Also on the spit, in the bushes, were Great Iora, Golden Bellied Gerygone and Collared Kingfishers.

That evening we left the hotel after tea (as a fine pair of Black Baza flew over) and drove to a government owned sewage works (far nicer than you could imagine) and walked along the side of the huge settling ponds as the sun went down. As dusk fell Jay called in several Indian Nightjars which sat in full view for excellent views near the path. As we walked back to the vans we were treated an amazing spectacle of thousands of Lyle's Flying Foxes (fruit bats) leaving their roosts against the red sunset.



Not a bad sunset across the sewage ponds !!

Day 3 – 22nd Jan 2025

We checked out early and began our 90 minute drive towards Kaeng Karchan National Park. On the way we were stopping at a large area of rice fields to bird along the edges.

As we stepped out of the van a Black Winged Kite flew over and a Lanceolated Warbler sang loudly and unseen from a nearby bush. Within minutes we had seen all 3 of the weaver species (Baya, Streaked and Asian Golden) available in Thailand as well as Indo-Chinese Roller and numerous Plaintive Cuckoo. Out in the fields were Zitting Cisticola, Richard's Pipits, Scaley Breasted Munia and a Brown Throated Sunbird buzzed about in a banana tree. I spotted a very large bird sat on the ground which we identified through the scope as a Greater Spotted Eagle and above us on the walk we saw other raptors such as Black Kites, Eastern Marsh Harrier, more Spotted Eagles and a (rare for Thailand) immature Steppe Eagle. Finally, just as we were considering turning around, we found our target bird for the day, the Yellow Breasted Bunting. Once easy to see in huge flocks this bird has suffered terribly from habitat loss and over hunting in China and is now classed as critically endangered and becoming more difficult to see each year.



Yellow Breasted Bunting



Immature Steppe Eagle

After a quick coffee, prepared by Mai (just the best hostess) we drove on towards our hotel for the next 3 nights in Kaeng Kerchan NP. After checking in, we were booked into a hide for the afternoon to see some very special

forest birds. The owner of the hide was called Mr Bird, which was a good omen, and we settled down to wait with binoculars and cameras on a hot and humid afternoon. It was not long before the birds arrived at the small pond with Greater and Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes, Abbott's Babbler, a Common Flameback, Bronzed and Greater Racket Tailed Drongo, Racket Tailed Treepie, Puff Throated Babbler and Large Scimitar Babbler all showing well. The stars of the show today, however, were the ground birds. First to arrive were the Red Junglefowl, closely followed by a small covey of Bar Backed Partridge. Shortly after another of the partridge species arrived, this time the superb Ferruginous Partridge. Two males displayed their incredible plumage as they called to each other and scuffled over a female in full view. As all of this was going on, a secretive Scaley Breasted Partridge skulked around in the background completing trio of partridge species we were hoping to see. As time got on and the light began to fall, we were treated to one final bird as a Blue Pitta was tempted out of the undergrowth into view by a few strategically placed mealworm. The iridescent colouring almost shone in the dark as the bird hopped around before disappearing as we packed up and made our way back for dinner.



Ferruginous Partridge (above) and Blue Pitta (below)



Day 4 – 23rd Jan 2025

Today was planned to be spent in Kaeng Kerchan at mid and high elevation which meant taking 4 wheel drives up to the Panoenthung Camp to look for some of the high forest specialities. First stop was at a fruiting fig tree on the approach road where we saw a selection of Barbets and Bulbuls, a couple of Asian Fairy Bluebirds and a pair of Wreathed Hornbill flew low over the top of us. An Asian Barred Owlet sat in an open bush near the van as we returned to continue our short drive to the park.



Asian Barred Owlet



Kaeng Kerchan NP

It was cold in the back of the open topped vehicles as we drove up the mountain but the views were superb through breaks in the trees. We stopped on the journey to see a roosting White Browed Scops Owl and heard Grey Peacock Pheasants calling back in the forest but they never came into view.

At the end of the drive, we arrived at the camp where the sun was shining so we started to walk the grounds and saw several new birds. First was a Mountain Imperial Pigeon and then, a normally difficult bird, the Red Bearded Bee-eater sat up in a nearby tree giving fantastic views of its pink, red and green plumage. A small flock of White Rumped Munia contained a lone Pin Tailed Parrotfinch and a Red Billed Malkoha sat in the same tree. As we

walked through the camp, Jay placed a speaker in a bush (behind the toilet block!) Which attracted a mixed flock containing Hill Blue and Pale Blue Flycatchers, Yellow Browed, Two Barred, Radde's, Yellow Bellied and Claudia's Leaf Warblers, Blyth's (White Browed) Shrike Babbler and a Black Naped Monarch amongst others.

The camp area was alive with birds and we saw Little, Streaked and Grey Chested Spiderhunters, Slender Billed Oriole, Asian Emerald Cuckoo, Square Tailed Drongo Cuckoo, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Oriental Pied and Great Hornbill, our first Chestnut Headed Bee-eater of the trip, Speckled and White Browed Piculets, a Black Winged Cuckoo Shrike, Ashy and Mountain Bulbuls and Greater Green and Blue Winged Leafbirds.



Red Bearded Bee-Eater



Grey Breasted Spiderhunter

Day 5 – 24th Jan 2025

After a day of high elevation birding, today we were again in Keang Kerchan NP but this time in the low forest. First stop, similar to yesterday, was a large fruiting fig tree. The first birds we saw were a group of Thick Billed Green Pigeon whilst opposite in a taller tree a Greater Flameback fed in the sun. Off in the distance Jay picked out a Slaty Grey Woodpecker which was quickly

joined by a couple more and eventually a group of 7 of these large woodpecker flew noisily over our heads.

We drove up to the visitor centre and from there, walked some of the trails through the forest. The day was warming up and the birds were active. In trees near a small stream we saw our first trogon of the trip. The Orange Breasted Trogon sat obligingly on a low branch, as did a Great Iora and a Heart Spotted Woodpecker was heard (and eventually found) nearby. As we walked along the trail we heard Silver Breasted, Dusky and Banded Broadbills but frustratingly they would not come out into view no matter what we tried. We did get our eyes on a Bar Winged Flycatcher Shrike, Ochraceous and Olive Bulbuls, Thick Billed and Pale Legged Leaf Warblers, Dark Sided and Hainan Blue Flycatchers, Scarlet Backed Flowerpecker and Crimson and Ruby Cheeked Sunbirds.

Back at the visitor centre, after we had eaten a hearty lunch, we walked through the camp site and had excellent views (and photo opportunities) of a large black and yellow Sultan Tit. Dusky Leaf Monkeys were sat in the trees as we watched Common Tailorbirds and Rufous Fronted Babblers in a bush on our way down to the stream. Here we saw Grey Wagtails and a Blue Whistling Thrush (but none of our target forktails) and on the walk back picked up Verditer and Taiga Flycatchers.



Orange Breasted Trogon



Collared Scops Owl

Our day ended after dinner with Jay locating a Collared Scops Owl in the hotel grounds which sat patiently for all to see before we turned in for the night.

Day 6 – 25th Jan 2025

Today was a travelling day from Kaeng Kerchan to Khao Yai where we would spend the next 3 nights. We would, however, stop in a few spots on the way to bird some different environments.

First stop was a service station where we saw Chestnut Tailed Starlings sitting on a lamp-post, an unexpected new bird!! Then on to some freshwater ponds and small lakes at Phraek Nam Daeng where the local shrimp farmers have placed bird friendly netting over many of the ponds, but not all of them thankfully. Here at the first pond, in addition to the usual egrets and waders, we saw White Breasted Waterhen, Grey Headed Swampfen, Ruddy Breasted Crake, a Eurasian Moorhen and a Little Ringed Plover. We moved onto a slightly larger and more marshy pond where we quickly found Pheasant Tailed and Bronze Winged Jacana, Yellow Bittern, White Browed Crake, Whiskered Terns and a fly over Greater Spotted Eagle before moving again to the largest of the ponds. This was a small lake with deeper water where we saw our only ducks of the trip. In one corner was a group of diminutive Pygmy Cotton Geese feeding and interacting with some Garganey and a Little Grebe. In the distance a couple of Glossy Ibis flew past and Germain's (Edible Nest) Swiftlets flew across the water with House and Asian Palm Swifts.



White Browed Crake



Pygmy Cotton Goose

We moved on as we had a fair distance still to cover, stopping for lunch in a lovely riverside restaurant built on a huge barge. Later in the afternoon we pulled into the Buddhist Monastery at Saraburi which is nestled up against a huge limestone outcrop and home to a very rare bird which, according to Jay,

can be difficult to locate. As we stepped from the van though, there they were, jumping around feeding in the rocks were 3 Rufous Limestone Babblers. This bird is endemic to these limestone hills in central Thailand so we were all very happy to see it (and so easily!).

The final stop of the day was a government owned building very close to our hotel in Khao Yai. The gardens of the building were home to Red Breasted Parakeets and there were plenty of them squawking and squealing in the tree tops for us to see.



Rufous Limestone Babbler



Saraburi Buddhist Monastery

Day 7 – 26th Jan 2025

Our first day in Khao Yai NP was to be spent at the higher elevation and we set off after an early breakfast, through the park gates and up into the forest. First stop was at a site that Jay knew of where a Buffy Fish Owl had been reported to be roosting. As we walked along the trail in the morning mist, the haunting calls of Pileated Gibbons filled the air creating a lovely atmosphere. We saw Common and White Throated Kingfishers on the stream and a small flock of White Rumped Munia, with the usual Pin Tailed Parrotfinch amongst them, before we spotted the owl sitting in full view on a branch above the water. The owl was huge with buff plumage and a menacing stare. We watched in the open for a good while before moving on. As the sun hit the bushes, they came alive with smaller birds and we got good views of Thick Billed Flowerpecker, Rufescent Prinia, Hume's White Eye, Eastern Crowned and Thick Billed Warblers, Puff Throated and Grey Eyed Bulbul, Vernal Hanging Parrot and a flashing pair of Scarlet Minivet.



Khao Yai NP



Buffy Fish Owl

Following this great start (and after a coffee at the van) we moved on to an open grassland area higher up in the park where we stopped and birded along the side of the track. First off we saw Samba Deer and a Northern Red Barking Deer in the grass plus a Rufous Winged Buzzard sat in a nearby tree. As we walked along the road a Cattle Egret fed alongside the deer and a Paddyfield Pipit hopped close to us and soon after a Dollarbird flew low into a roadside tree. Asian House Martins and Himalayan Swiftlets flew overhead and then a spectacular Brown Backed Needletail flashed past and flew low, very close to us, over the fields. This huge swift is truly majestic and was one of my unexpected favourite birds of the trip.

For lunch, we stopped at the visitor centre restaurant where we could see the small river going through the park. As we sat, we saw a large Water Monitor swimming past and I noticed a big (6 ft long) Indo-Chinese Rat Snake also swim across the river and out the other side. On our way back to the van we noticed several raptors floating past. There was a Mountain Hawk Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Jerdon's Baza and a distant Shikra soaring on the thermals above the park giving us great views in the perfect light. We also picked out a Cambodian Flowerpecker feeding in a low tree.

After lunch, we stopped at a steep boardwalk which took us down to a very high outcrop with superb views of the valley below. On the way down we saw Red Headed Trogon close to the trail and even better views of Brown Backed Needle tails flying below us in the sunlight. From the outcrop we saw

Moustached, Green Eared and Blue Eared Barbets before making the short climb back up to the van.



Khao Yai Highlands

We next stopped near a small shrine, used to give offerings, thanks and protection to nature, where we slowly walked along the road birding as we went. We heard and eventually found a diminutive Collared Owlet sitting in a tree and at a roadside pond, Red Wattled Lapwings, a Grey Sided Shrike and Red Whiskered Bulbul.

As we drove towards our final stop of the day, an Asian Elephant crossed the road just ahead of us providing a glimpse of this huge animal for those of us lucky enough to see it before it disappeared into the bush. For our final birding, we stopped near a gravel covered area used as a helipad and waited for the sun to drop. As it began to get dark, Great Eared Nightjars began to hawk for insects over the area. We saw 4 or 5 of these large nightjars with Jay ably highlighting a couple of close birds with his powerful torch. We had not finished quite yet though as a couple of Brown Boobook began calling and it was not long until one came close and sat in a tree where, again, Jay caught it in the torchlight and we all got excellent views of this strange and elusive bird.



Day 8 – 27th Jan 2025

Today we were back in Khao Yai NP but this time at lower elevation. We started at a camp area where we walked through the mown grass and saw a flock of small birds in the trees which turned out to be a mix of Chestnut Flanked and Swinhoe's White Eyes. As we watched 3 White Crested Laughingthrush flew into a nearby bush looking spotless with their clean white crowns. On a nearby stream we heard but didn't see a Slaty Backed Forktail but did see Blue Rock Thrush, White Rumped Sharma and a Grey Wagtail. Walking back to the van, a bird flashed past and landed in the open where all got great views of a Forest Wagtail, a great bird and one I was hoping we would get on this trip.

We moved on to another area where we stopped at a small platform overlooking the stream. A couple of the group immediately saw what they thought may be a silhouetted Striated Heron but once the scope was set up it proved to be a much rarer Black Bittern. We then walked along the stream for a while, hearing more than we saw which was frustrating but part of forest birding at times. Through the afternoon, we continued our roadside forest birding and managed plenty of birds such as Yellow Vented and Plain Flowerpickers, Van Hassel's (Maroon Bellied) Sunbirds, Common Hill Myna, Greater Coucal, Dark Necked Tailorbird, Eastern Jungle Crow, Brown Rumped and Rosy Minivets, Ashy, Hair Crested, Bronzed and Greater Racket Tailed Drongo, Grey Capped (Pygmy), Heart Spotted and (a heard only) Laced Woodpecker and finally, at a riverside spot, a Blue Bearded Bee-Eater, a fly over pair of Wreathed Hornbill and a pair of Banded Kingfisher.



Blue Bearded Bee-Eater



Collared Owlet

Day 9 – 28th Jan 2025

Today we were getting the short internal flight from Bangkok to Chang Rai for the start of the northerly and mountainous part of our trip. A few of us birded the hotel gardens at dawn, seeing the increasingly scarce Plain Backed Sparrow, Golden Fronted Leafbird, Ornate (Olive Backed) Sunbird, Great Myna and a noisy flock of Red Breasted Parakeet before boarding the buses and making our way to Bangkok Airport. The flight was on time and straightforward and it was early afternoon when we landed at Chang Rai and collected our luggage. Jay insisted that we had a walk around the airport grounds before we got into the vans as there were new birds to be seen here. It was not long before we saw a Black Collared Starling and then very good views of Burmese Shrike (the airport speciality!). Only then did we move out and made our way towards the town of Fang, our base 3 nights. On the way, we stopped in Mai Ai where we spent a couple of hours birding in the rice fields.

The rice paddys were large shallow ponds where various birds could be found depending on the depth of the water and the growth of the rice. The first pool had Ashy Woodswallows flying over it and on the bunds were several wagtails. A close look identified most if them as White Wagtail (of the subspecies leucosis) but with them was a Grey Wagtail and a lovely Citrine Wagtail. We walked further on alongside some reedbeds where we saw a huge flock of Baya Weavers in the distance and a flyby group of Common Starling (rare in Thailand). Sitting up on the reeds was a Striated Grassbird and an Oriental Reed Warbler popped up into view.



Mai Ai Rice Fields

We continued our walk along the edge of the fields and a lovely male Pied Bushchat stood on a fencepost with an Oriental Magpie Robin in the background. On the drier rice field we saw Common and Wood Sandpiper and Common Snipe plus Red Throated and Richards Pipit, Amur Stonechat, Striated Swallows, a Long Tailed Shrike and a large flock of Grey Headed Lapwing. On the walk back to the van, Scaled Breasted Munia flitted along in front of us and back at the reedbed more birds were singing. We heard (but didn't see) a Baikal Bush (Grasshopper) Warbler but did see Thick Billed Warbler and a Siberian Rubythroat before the light failed completely and we made our way to the hotel to check in and grab some Dinner.

Day 10 – 29th Jan 2025

We were up early today for a full day at Doi Sanju on the western slopes of Doi Lang. Most of the day would be spent birding the lanes high in the mountain forest but our first stop (and the reason we were up so early) was at a regular haunt of Hume's Pheasant. As we arrived there were already a couple of vans parked and the instruction was to wait in the vehicle until the pheasants showed and then we could slowly get out and see them as they tended to relax if they were left untroubled for a few moments. The temperature was cold at this altitude and the wait seemed interminable as we watched other birds from the van window such as Grey Bushchat, Olive Backed Pipit, Cinereous Tit and Chestnut Vented Nuthatch. After about 90 minutes, I was beginning to fear the worst but then the pheasants appeared. First a single female and then another female and the male Hume's Pheasant all feeding on some strategically placed grain for all to see. They were joined by a small flock of Oriental Turtle Dove and a Rufous Gorgeted Flycatcher but all eyes (and cameras) were on the 3 birds that are becoming so difficult to see nowadays that this is one of only 2 regular sighting spots in the world.



It was a privilege to see these and the hushed silence from the increasingly large gathering of birders meant that the birds stayed around for long enough for everyone to see at relatively close quarters.

When they finally walked back into the forest and disappeared, we had a coffee, to warm our hands as much anything, and then drove a short distance before stopping and walking down the mountain road, birding on the way. It was becoming warmer now and Cook's Swifts were searching the blue skies above us when a Yellow Throated Martin ran across the road in front of us, stopping to stare at us and then carry on his way. We were starting to see new warblers in this new environment with Buff Throated, Davidson's Leaf, Marten's, Chinese Leaf, Pallas' Leaf, Greenish and Hume's Leaf Warblers all being heard first and then located for good views in the trees and bushes. We continued our walk up to a border crossing into Myanmar where we had to stop and come back but not before we spent 10 minutes watching a half dozen spectacularly colourful Mr's Goulds Sunbirds feeding in some bamboo.

On the walk back down towards the van (where we would have lunch) we heard and eventually found Aberrant Bush Warbler and then got superb views of a Siberian Rubythroat at the bottom of a bush.



Siberian Rubythroat



Doi Lang Western Slope

After lunch we spent several hours in a heavily wooded section of mountainside and the birds kept coming if you were patient. Through the afternoon we saw Orange Bellied Leafbird, Fire Breasted Flowerpecker, Large and Rufous Bellied Niltava, the black billed sub-species of the Blue Whistling Thrush, Sapphire and Slaty Blue Flycatchers, Yunan Fullvetta, Spectacled Barwing, Indian White Eye, Red Eyed Scimitar Babbler, Flavescent and Ashy Bulbul, Grey Treepie, Hume's Treecreeper, Oriental Cuckooshrike and Eurasian Jay (of a sub-species that is surely up for splitting soon, so different was it to

the Jay we see in Europe). We had been listening and watching all day for the next bird to show; a pair of Giant Nuthatch flew into a bare tree just above us and we watched them for 10 minutes. This is another critically endangered bird that is reducing in numbers throughout its range and so was a privilege to see.

On the walk back to the van we still saw more new birds with Stripe Breasted Woodpecker, Golden Throated Barbet and finally a Lesser Yellownappe finishing our day.

It was a tired but very happy group that drove back to the hotel for a lovely street food dinner in Fang that night. I for one slept with a smile on my face.



Giant Nuthatch



Dinner 'Fang' Style

Day 11 – 30th Jan 2025

Today we were spending the day in the Doi Angkhang area birding lower elevations and looking for some of the birds that we had not found yesterday in the high forests.

We began the day at the Mon Sone Viewpoint Camp Site where we began having better views of some of the birds we had seen previously as well as a couple of new species. Black Backed and Rufous Backed Sibia were feeding in roadside bushes with a Blue Winged Minla and some White Rumped Sharma. A little further up the hill, a Long Tailed Shrike sat on a branch and a small flock of Yunan Fulvettas hopped about in the foliage. As we walked through the campsite, Striated Bulbuls were seen bathing and another Burmese Shrike was hunting near the viewpoint.

We moved on to a new area at a small orchard and immediately began to see birds feeding in the trees. The very first bird we saw was the sought after White Headed Bulbul sitting high above the road and further on a Brown Breasted Bulbul was feeding with Flavescent, Black Crested and Grey Eyed Bulbuls.

We walked on and up to a graveyard area where the local Chinese community had built very colourful and well decorated family tombs. Here we quickly saw a Large Hawk Cuckoo sitting in the open, giving great views, and a Daurian Redstart sat on a fence post. A couple of trees held Fire Breasted Flowerpeckers and a Velvet Fronted Nuthatch.



Community Graves



White Headed Bulbul

From here we drove on to a monastery where the Buddhist monks left rice out for the birds creating a type of unofficial feeding station. As we sat watching the small woodland, birds began to come down to grab their share. First to arrive were Eyebrowed Thrushes, quickly followed by Black Breasted Thrushes and a small flock of beautiful Silver Eared Mesia. Mountain Bamboo Partridges were calling in the background as critically endangered Grey Sided Thrushes arrived to feed. As we watched the birds feeding on the ground a Chestnut Bellied Rockthrush sat high in a pine tree and a Common Rosefinch was seen nearby.

We drove on to Angkhang Royal Agricultural Gardens for a late lunch and more birding. The gardens are laid out like parkland but with many of the plants being agricultural species such as cabbages, garlic, bamboo and succulents. As we ate in the open air restaurant a Streak Breasted Woodpecker fed in a tree and Ashy Woodswallows caught insects close by.

After lunch we birded the gardens seeing Short Billed, Scarlet, Long Tailed and Grey Chinned Minivets, Yellow Bellied Warbler, Hill Prinia, Siberian Blue Robin and a resident Scaly Thrush.

Day 12 – 31st Jan 2025

Today was a travel day with us driving across the North of Thailand to it's highest mountain, Doi Inthanon. Before setting out though we would spend a few hours birding at Fang Hot Springs, an area of geothermal activity where hot water comes to the surface in a variety of ways ranging from small streams to spectacular geysers.

We started near the parking area where a flock of Pin Tailed Green Pigeons were feeding in a fig tree and just a few yards away Black Crested, Sooty Headed and the rarer Black Bulbul were also sitting in the morning sun. As we walked towards the springs we saw, in the distance, Coppersmith, Lineated and the very large Great Barbet in the trees and Barn and Striated Swallows fed on insects above the steam of the boiling waters. As we walked down through the springs there was a strong smell of sulphur in the air and people were boiling eggs in the stream. At the bottom of the hill a large geyser erupted pluming steam into the trees which strangely attracted birds feeding on the mineral deposits. Most notable was the bird we were after, the Spot Winged Grosbeak. There was a small flock of females and one large male bird, all showing well alongside the path.



Fang Hot Springs



Spot Winged Grosbeak

We left Fang and made our way to Doi Inthanon driving across the spectacular countryside of the North, skirting Chiang Mai and arriving in the mid-afternoon. On the drive we saw Oriental Honey Buzzard, Indo-Chinese Roller, Asian Green Bee-eater and at the hotel, on a small lake were Common Kingfisher and White Rumped Sharma (which coincidentally was the name of my room!).

Once we had checked in, there was still time for a little birding locally so we drove out to a small plantation where we had fleeting glimpses of Blossom Headed Parakeet and, back at the lodge a Spotted Owl sitting on an outdoor light.



Spotted Owlet

Day 13 – 1st Feb 2025

Today we were spending the morning at the highest point of the tour, which was over 8000ft on the top of Doi Inthanon, looking for some of the specialties found there.

We drove up the mountain as the sun was rising and shortly after dawn we stopped and walked up the road to some trees tall enough for the tops to be in the sun. As we watched, Yellow Cheeked Tits and a Yellow Bellied Fairy

Fantail flitted around in the morning sun. Shortly after a small group of Speckled Woodpigeon landed in the sun at the top off the tallest tree and sat warming up.

We then carried on up to the summit where the Thai RAF have a communications centre. We took a circular boardwalk which went through woodland and a small marsh. The first bird we heard was a secretive little skulker. We patiently waited and eventually were rewarded we excellent views of a Slaty Bellied Tesia. We moved on to an open clearing which was teeming with birds. There we saw highland specialities like Buff Barred and Ashy Throated Warblers, Blyth's and Davison's Leaf Warblers, Yellow Bellied Flowerpecker, Purple, Green Tailed and Mrs Gould's Sunbird. We walked on to a point where the boardwalk went over a muddy patch where, from above, we saw a Himalayan Shortwing and a Snowy Browed Flycatcher and a little further on good views of a pair of Silver Eared Laughingthrush.

There were large numbers of tourists at the summit so we quickly had a coffee and some of us visited the gift shop and then made our way to a famous waterfall to look for water birds. As it was the weekend, the Wachirathan Waterfall was quite busy but, as we walked up to the viewpoint, Jay spotted some birds. On the far side was a small group of grey morph Black Headed Bulbul and then on a rock in the spray of the waterfall we found a female Plumbeous Redstart. Further up, near the top of the trail, we spotted another bird on the rocks near the falls, this time a White Capped Redstart.



Summit of Doi Inthanon



Wachirathan Falls

After another hearty lunch we were booked into a hide for the early afternoon where we hoped to see (and photograph) some new birds. The walk through woodland to the hide was steep in places but we all made it safely. There was a small pool and some mealworm at the site which quickly drew in birds. We saw Little Spiderhunter, Siberian Blue Robin, Himalayan Bluetail, Bar Throated (Chestnut Tailed) Minla, Rufous Winged Fulvetta and Buff Breasted Babbler. Many of these being new birds for the trip.



Puff Throated Bulbul



Siberian Blue Robin

After a short afternoon break, we decided to try the small plantation again to get better views of the parakeets. As we pulled up we could hear the birds and it was not long before we had Blossom Headed Parakeets in the scope. A little further along the lane Jay spotted a group of Small Minivet and a low flying Crested Treeswift which was a lovely way to end the day (or so we thought!). On the way back, we stopped to wait for the sun to go down and then were on the lookout for nightjars. We heard and saw plenty of birds but unfortunately they were either Indian or Great Eared Nightjars, both of which we had seen earlier in the tour. Still great birds but we were hoping for Savannah Nightjars so were slightly disappointed.

Day 14 – 2nd Feb 2025

Sadly, our last full day but one we would try to make the most of. We would spend it on Doi Inthanon at middle elevation (4000 to 5000 ft) trying to clear up some of the birds we still needed.

As we walked down to breakfast in the morning we heard a flock of Lesser Whistling Duck fly over in the dark and a Siamese Hare ran across the road in front of the van, as we drove to our first stop. As we arrived, a Slaty Backed Forktail flew across but we did not see it again. We began by walking down a

road with woodland on both sides and it was not long before we heard and then had excellent sunlit views of a pair of Maroon Oriole. There were plenty of small birds in the trees and we saw an excellent selection of leaf warblers and white eyes. We had seen these before but two new birds that would ultimately remain on the 'heard only' list, Chestnut Crowned and Grey Crowned Warbler, were picked out by Jay. Off in the distance we heard a Little Pied Flycatcher and it was not long before it came closer and provided all with good views. Further along the track, whilst the others were searching for another bird, Andy managed to get the groups only view of Common Green Magpie as it flew across the road and disappeared again. We saw both Speckled and White Browed Piculet in the woodland and finally saw one of our nemesis birds the Clicking Cuckoo Shrike which we had heard several times before so were pleased to get good views of both male and female birds.

The next stop was at a lay-by near a known feeding spot for several special birds. As we walked through the woodlands towards the area, a small flock of Rufous Winged Fulvetta and Silver Eared Media were feeding in the low scrub when a Besra came crashing through and flew off with one of the unlucky birds. This was truly spectacular and a rarely seen activity. When we reached the feeding spot, we shuffled down the steep slope and managed to get seated on the ground overlooking a fallen log and small tree in the marshy ground. It was not long before we began to see movement in the bushes and a Pygmy Cupwing hopped out. Shortly after, a brightly coloured Small Niltava perched openly in the tree and a Lesser Shortwing joined them on the ground. A Himalayan Shortwing joined the party as a White Gorgeted Flycatcher showed well nearby. Seeing all these birds in one area was fantastic as most of them were incredibly difficult to see in normal circumstances.

We stopped for lunch at a trout farm with a stream and immediately heard and got flashing glimpses of White Crowned Forktail as it flew downstream and another Plumbeous Redstart as it fed mid-stream on a rock.



After lunch, we walked further through forest roads and eventually reached a lodge high in the hills with tended gardens. As we approached, we saw a raptor which landed on a treetop. Jay got the scope on it and it was a Collared Falconet. Brown Backed Needletail migrated through the valley, accompanied by Cook's Swifts as we stopped for coffee on the overlook before we returned to the lodge for our final dinner.



Collared Falconet



View of Doi Inthanon across the valley

Day 15 – 3rd Feb 2025

Our final morning was spent walking in the pine forest looking for a couple of new birds but for me, I only heard a Green Peafowl in the distance before it was time for me to bid farewell to the group and make my way to Chang Mai airport for the journey home via Bangkok.

After I had left they managed to get excellent views of the Peafowl as well as a group of Small Pratincole (both new for the trip).

The final tally was 420 birds species seen and 21 heard only making a total of 441. The full list is available on the bird guides website.

Other fauna seen were as follows:

Mammals

Grey Bellied Squirrel
Western Striped Squirrel
Indo-Chinese Ground Squirrel
Northern Tree Shrew
Lesser Mouse Deer
Long Tailed (Crab Eating) Macaque
Dusty Leaf Monkey
Black Giant Squirrel
Lyle's Flying Fox
White Handed Gibbon
Variable Squirrel
Pileated Gibbon
Asian Elephant
Malayan Crested Porcupine
Asiatic Black Bear
Samba Deer
Northern Red Muntjac
Indo-Chinese Serow
Red Cheeked Ground Squirrel
Pallas' Squirrel
Yellow Throated Martin
Phayre's Flying Squirrel
Siamese (Burmese) Hare

Reptiles

Water Monitor
Tokay Gecko
Spiny Tailed House Gecko
Flat Tailed House Gecko
Indo-Chinese Rat Snake
Oriental Garden Lizard
Malayan Sun Skink
Asian Giant Terrapin
Oldham's Leaf Turtle