

Birdfinders Central and Northern Thailand tour report Feb – Mar 2026



Tour participants

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This was my fourth visit to this wonderful country over a span of forty years. So much has changed but so much remains the same - the friendliness of the people, the superb food and the birding is still absolutely stunning

This has been a hugely enjoyable and successful tour best summarized by 440 species of bird seen between us, a brilliant tour leader and a fantastic ground crew. In Jay (we never even tried to pronounce his formal Thai name) we benefited from his incredible identification skills together with his warm and friendly personality and his perfect English. Special mention must be made of our ground agent Mai quietly working in the background ensuring that all accommodations were swiftly processed, all meals ready and waiting and the “oh so welcome” tea and coffee readily brewed when we returned from many a hike. Our drivers, Anek and Air in the south together with Smart and Wattaya in the north were both safe and careful, friendly and respectful, always with a smile. – and of course we had a group of keen birder customers that got on so well together – essential ingredients for a successful tour.

The weather was very kind throughout. Most days were dry, sunny and very warm with just a couple of overcast cooler days on Doi Inthanon requiring donning a fleece. Flying or biting insects were rarely a problem save for one evening when literally thousands of flying termites took a liking to us

Highlights really were too numerous to mention but seeing Spoon-billed Sandpiper within the first hour of the tour together with over 150 Nordmann’s Greenshanks and at least 500 Asian Dowitchers on the coast, close-up views of adult male Siamese Firebacks (Thailand’s national bird) plus Kalij, Silver and Mrs Hume’s Pheasant males, a Rain Quail sitting up on a rock right out in the open calling, seven species of owl and four species of hornbill all seen well, finally tying down an elusive Giant Nuthatch, no less than 18 species of *Phylloscopus* warblers together with adult male Siberian Blue Robin and Siberian Rubythroat will long live in the memory – not forgetting 15 magical minutes in the company of a Sun Bear.

Days ½ Friday 20th/Saturday 21st February

We left a cold and gloomy Heathrow just before noon on Friday. Some 10 and a half hours later and just over 6,200 miles to the south-east, we landed in Bangkok around 5.30am, allowing for a seven-hour time difference. As always, the Thai Airways cabin crew were both charming and courteous, the flight smooth and we landed in 30 degrees C warmth. Whilst the Immigration queues were long, we were all through in 20 minutes, Jay and Mai were there to meet us, the two buses were quickly loaded and we were on our way across Bangkok on an elevated freeway. By 9.00am, we were at the Khok Kham salt pans – it was high tide and the tour could begin in earnest.

Normally the first morning of a tour is focused on becoming familiar with the common species of the area. However today there was a primary focus – to find a critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Currently this year only two birds have been found at Khok Kham, feeding amongst thousands of Red-necked Stints (the world population is certainly considered to be less than 1,000) and it can be a proverbial “needle in a haystack”. Jay found one, preening out in the open on a mud bund within 15 minutes allowing everyone to have relaxed telescope views of this magical rarity.

We then turned our attention to the whole host of shorebirds feeding or roosting in the first half a dozen salt pans. Familiar species to European birders included good numbers of Black-winged Stilts, Curlew Sandpipers and Black-tailed Godwits, a few Greenshank and Little Ringed Plovers together with the odd Common and Spotted Redshanks. Of greater interest were several hundred Tibetan Sand Plovers, two Great Knot plus a smattering of both Marsh and Broad-billed Sandpipers.

Overhead there was a continual fly past of both Little and Indian Cormorants, Painted Storks, a few Medium Egrets amongst many Little and Great White Egrets, our first Brahminy Kites and Asian Openbills and large flocks of Brown-headed Gulls whilst Whiskered Terns swooped low over the ponds.

By 9.15am it was becoming seriously warm with a fierce sun-glare reflective off of the water and so we decided to drive inland, making a brief stop at a small reed-fringed marsh called Phraek Nam Daeng. A hot late morning is rarely conducive to finding birds although we still managed to see a flighty pair of Grey-headed Swampheens, a couple of Purple Herons, rather distant small parties of non-breeding plumaged Streaked Weavers and a fly past Chestnut Munia whilst Edible-nest Swiftlets hawked insect low over the water.

From there, it was an hour's drive to Baan Maka Lodge, our base for the next three nights. Over lunch we were entertained first by a party of Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes whilst on the grounds surrounding the living and dining areas we saw our first Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrikes, Black-naped Oriole, Verditer Flycatcher and Grey-headed Canary-flycatchers amongst a number of common woodland passerines.

The afternoon was spent in Mr Bird's Hide where, overtime, he has managed to entice birds to both bathe in a tiny pond and feed on supplies of corn and fruit placed amongst well positioned perching branches mere meters away from the hide. Over the course of three hours, 27 species came in to both bathe and feed. Without doubt, the highlights were species normally wary of showing themselves including a covey of four Bar-backed Partridge, an adult male Kalij Pheasant, an initially reluctant Large Scimitar-babbler and best of all, the blaze of color that is Common Green Magpie.

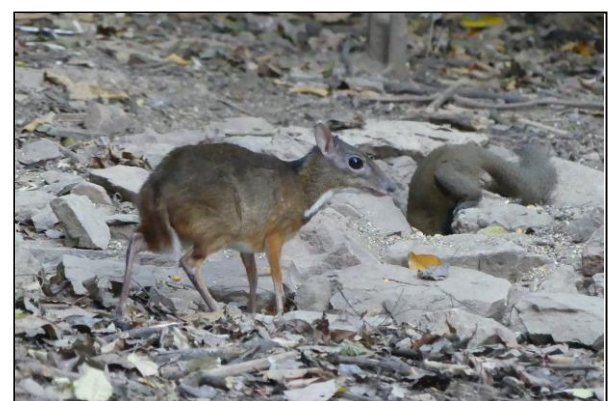
Some species put on a superb showing including Greater Yellownappe and both Common and Great Flamebacks clinging to tree-trunks right in front of us, particularly confiding White-browed Scimitar-babbler and Oriental Pied Hornbills, several Greater Necklaced Laughingthrushes and a few Pin-striped Tit-babblers.

Brown-cheeked Fulvettas, Racket-tailed Treepies, White-rumped Shamas, Stripe-throated Bulbuls and a couple of Taiga Flycatchers put in regular appearances. Towards dusk both Indochinese Blue and a female Hainan Blue Flycatcher came into drink and a pair of Puff-throated Babblers scrabbled about in the leaf-litter.

It's not just birds that are tempted in. Himalayan striped, Indochinese Ground and Northern Grey-bellied Squirrels together with Northern Tree Shrews were almost ever present scampering too and fro and we had wonderful close encounters with a couple of wary and nervous Lesser Mouse Deer.

Not a bad way to start a tour!







Day (3) Sunday 22nd February

A day which just kept on giving. The plan was to spend the whole day birding the highest elevations of Kaeng Krachan national park at an altitude of round 900 meters reaching the top by 9.00am when the “one-way” vehicle system comes into force. The same system prevented us from driving back downhill before 4.00pm.

We enjoyed dry, warm and sunny weather until around 2.00pm when it briefly clouded over with thunder rolling in the distance. Little did we know that “lower Kaeng Krachan” was to endure heavy afternoon rainfall.

We drove through the park gates and up to the 15km mark where, at the lower camp site, we swapped transport to take open-topped four-wheel drive passenger carriers up the often steep, rugged and extremely bumpy road for a further 16km briefly stopping en-route but aware that the clock was ticking.

Our first stop was at a known active nest hole for Rusty-cheeked Hornbills. We waited patiently for about 20 minutes before the male and three attendant immatures (thought to be last year’s offspring) flew in. This is one of three species of Thai hornbills that are co-operative breeders. The male brought food in and passed to the unseen female inside the nest cavity while the young birds perched close by. Whilst waiting for the hornbills to arrive, we watched an active group of Hair-crested Drongos feeding in a flowering tree and a couple of hyper Yellow-bellied Warblers played hide and seek with us inside dense foliage.

Higher up, we lingered briefly at a Long-tailed Broadbill’s nest in the early stages of construction to no avail but did have “eye-level” views of a perched adult Crested Serpent-Eagle in a bare-branched tree.

After a tortuous bumpy 90 minute ride and having made it to the top with minutes to spare, we spent a couple of hours watching the trees bordering the summit camp site and in particular a large fig tree laden with fruit. This attracted a steady stream of visitors including both Wedge-tailed Green-pigeon and Mountain Imperial-pigeon, a magnificent Great Hornbill which crashed about feeding furiously, both Blue-winged and Orange-bellied Leafbirds, our first Flavescent Bulbuls here at the southern extreme of their range, a wintering Dark-sided Flycatcher and several Blue-throated Barbets. Both Red-throated Barbet, Greater Green Leafbird and Grey-breasted Spiderhunter came in, all at the northern most extent of their respective ranges. Birds were not the only feeders

attracted by the ripe fruit. Uncharacteristically a normally nocturnal Masked Palm Civet fed in the tree tops for at least 15 minutes.

Overhead there were regular fly pasts from Pacific Swifts and a distant soaring Oriental Honey-buzzard was joined by an even more distant smaller raptor identified by Jay as a Black Baza – but it really was a mere dot in the sky and a long way off.

Acting upon local information we drove on over the top of the mountain for a few kilometers before parking up to view an active Rufous-bellied Eagle nest with the adult tearing off tiny strips of unknown prey, presumably feeding unseen young – a trail camera affixed to a nearby tree was recording all that was happening.

Bumping our way back up the hill, we briefly paused for some of us to catch a glimpse of a Plain-tailed Warbler arriving in time for an excellent lunch sat on a wide terrace with a magnificent scenic backdrop

The early afternoon was spent scanning several fruiting trees around the other side of the camp site finding our first Green-billed Malkoha and Ashy Bulbuls, a couple of diminutive Blue-eared Barbets, a Swinhoe's (Brown-rumped) Minivet and a number of drab Olive Bulbuls, boring to look at but with a complicated history. They were formerly considered a race of Grey-eyed Bulbul, then potentially a new species in its own right called Baker's Bulbul yet their true identity is still to be confirmed. We also found a male Black-throated Sunbird and a number of Yellow-browed Warblers before our driver pointed out a day-roosting Grey Nightjar blending in quite high up on an open branch – how did he find that?

We then spent a couple of hours walking down the track almost to the Km 28 marker. The forest was initially quiet however a male Ruby-cheeked Sunbird, shortly followed by two male Chinese Blue Flycatchers brightened up proceedings. These males could be separated from Indochinese Blue Flycatchers by a narrower orange throat-wedge, more extensive orange underparts gradually merging into a pale grey belly and a brownish wash to the flanks. As we slowly walked a number of Grey-headed Canary-flycatchers perched up, a loose party of Grey-rumped Treeswifts began gliding low over the tops of the trees and Phil and I found a Martens's Warbler- so similar to the Plain-tailed seen earlier but with more pronounced black coronal bands.

The skies then clouded over, the wind picked up but the rain stayed away with the gods smiling on us as we came across a pair of Long-tailed Broadbills but also a swiftly moving feeding flock of at least 15 Sulphur-breasted Warblers together with a female Blyth's Paradise-flycatcher.

By now the 4.00pm opening of the road allowed us to drive down past the stream crossings before spending time in the bamboo and dry forest gallery where the real surprise was finding a noisy party of at least five Crested Jay-shrikes here at the absolute northern edge of their range, one of which hung upside down, right out in the open. A pair of Orange-breasted Trogons perched up and then woodpeckers started to call. We had excellent views of a male Streak-breasted Woodpecker knocking seven bells out of a gnarled tree branch, almost total silhouetted views of a high-up Buff-rumped Woodpecker and heard a Heart-spotted Woodpecker which refused to show.

The last couple of kilometers of our four-wheeled drive passed peacefully with just Grey Wagtails flitting along the road in front of us before we changed back into our designated vehicles and thought that birding was done for the day – how wrong we were. In the gathering gloom of dusk, an evening feeding frenzy including a number of Greater Racket-tailed Drongos, male Hainan Blue

Flycatcher, a number of Asian Fairy-bluebirds and, with persistence, caught up with a pair of Blue-bearded Bee-eaters.

Surely it was over – but there was one huge surprise left. There, about 30 meters from the road stood a huge adult male Gaur staring at us with total disdain. These are the largest extant bovine animal in the world, averaging 188 cm in height and, in Thailand, are responsible for more human fatalities than any other mammal other than Asian Elephants. Jay specifically instructed us that if it charged, we were to split up and run at right-angles (they don't corner very well!)

A truly fantastic day. All that was left was another excellent dinner back at Baan Maka interrupted by the largest, but thankfully placid, black scorpion, *Heterometrus minotaurus*, which appeared right next to our dining table



Day (4) Monday 23rd February

Another dry and extremely warm day. We were to spend our time birding from the road the lower elevation forest up to the Km16 marker and hit most of our targets with a few surprises thrown in. Following a relaxed breakfast, we left Baan Maka at 6.45am, headed into the park and spent the first couple of hours watching from the road between Km markers 8-9.

In all we found around 40 species with many more heard. Highlights included a distant perched Banded Bay Cuckoo, the first of at least eight Oriental Pied Hornbills to be seen during the day, our first Indochinese Rollers together with both Green-eared Barbet and Common Flameback. We had several flight views of surprisingly secretive Great Slaty Woodpeckers with just one bird seen briefly by me perched out in the open and our first sparkling and shimmering Bronzed Drongos. There were regular fly pasts by Eastern Red-rumped Swallows; several pairs of Sultan Tit, the largest member of their family in the world, together with single Radde's and Two-barred Warblers and a pair of Common Hill Mynas.

The rest of the morning was spent both driving and then walking the road crossing streams No 1 and No 2. Unfortunately only those in the first vehicle saw the pair of Green-legged Partridge saunter across the road. It was getting pretty warm and the birding could be best described as "quality rather than quantity". First to show was an exquisite male Orange-breasted Trogon perched on a thick vine, shortly before finding a second bird at eye-level too close to focus a telescope on. A little further on, Jay picked out movement in the sub-canopy directly over the road, a male Asian Emerald Cuckoo which slowly came closer and closer towards us, totally fixated on catching caterpillars.

Just before stream No 3, we watched a pair of White-bellied Epornis gathering tiny insects on the underside of leaves and taking them to an active nest. A little further on we tried our luck using playback to entice a mixed feeding flock into view with excellent results including a stunning adult male Crimson Sunbird, male Hainan Blue Flycatcher together with brief views of a skulking Rufous-fronted Babbler for those of us who had missed them yesterday.

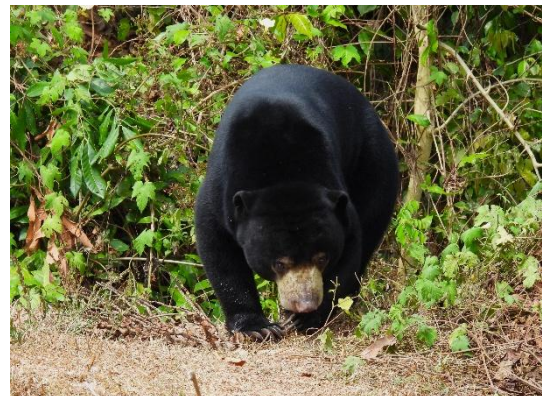
The walk back was all about just three key species. Both Black-and-yellow and Banded Broadbills sound exactly similar but react to playback differently. Our Black-and-yellow remained perched high up in the canopy but showed well through telescopes whereas our Banded Broadbill was much more inquisitive and cooperative. Not so a really secretive Chestnut-breasted Malkoha which remained deep in a vegetation tangle and for many of us only gave a silhouetted outline before skulking back out of sight. In total contrast a day-roosting White-fronted Scops Owl was well hidden but motionless, barely a meter above the ground. Initially from the road it was just a back end view but a narrow trail allowed us by either kneeling or sitting on the trail to see almost all of it – again too close to focus a telescope on.

Lunch back at the camp ground was again excellent and a post meal wander around the bordering trees produced several Taiga Flycatchers including a red-throated male, Plain, Crimson and several Ornate Sunbirds, frustratingly skittish Great Iora and Eastern Crowned Warblers before proceedings came to a sudden halt when Jay's radio burst out the news that a Sun Bear had come into feed on scraps thrown out behind the restaurant buildings. After a hasty "speed walk", we spent an enchanting 15 minutes in its company. It was an adult male nonchalantly feeding off of scraps no more than 20 meters from us. Whilst both it and we were all right out in the open, it took little notice of us before gradually slinking back down the slope into deep cover – an absolutely magical and unforgettable experience.

Our afternoon walk along the road started rather quietly before at least three Black-headed Bulbuls were found within a mixed feeding flock which also contained females of both Blyth's Paradise and Hainan Blue Flycatchers. Alan got both brownie points and a gold star by picking out a Heart-spotted Woodpecker that we had been actively searching for, and a huge fruiting fig tree attracted at least a dozen, and likely many more, Thick-billed Green-pigeons.

We made several stops whilst driving back out of the park, trying in vain to find a Black-and-red Broadbill but did find two fairly distant Golden-crested Mynas and at one final pond watched a troop of at least 20 Stump-tailed Macaques coming in to drink.

Back at Baan Maka, several of us walked out into an open area beyond the kitchen garden when as the sun was setting. Several Crested Treeswifts swirled around the fields and finally at least three Long-tailed Nightjars hawked flying insects with one adult repeated swooping low over our heads.



Day (5) Tuesday 24th February

Before breakfast, a quick walk through the property whilst it was still dark produced an Asian Barred Owl and an extremely approachable and vocal *crassirostris* yellow-billed Blue Whistling-thrush. After our omelets and toast, we spent an hour or so in the grounds and beside the lake. In addition to finding new common waterside birds, we had excellent views of three Yellow Bitterns and a Purple Heron still only half awake on top of a tree.

Walking into the farm fields we had good views of an Indochinese Bushlark alternating between sitting out in the open and “parachute” display diving, a distant Black-hooded Oriole and, with patience and perseverance, a shy and elusive Chestnut-capped Babbler. A Thick-billed Flowerpecker eventually showed itself well, whilst a Plaintive Cuckoo could not have been more obliging. The same could not be said of a Thick-billed Warbler which we all saw, some much better than others. Overhead both Oriental Honey-buzzard and Grey-faced Buzzard drifted over.

We left Baan Maka at 9.45am and watched the lake and reedy fringes from the roadside. A Bronze-winged Jacana slowly paddled across the shallow water, Ashy Woodswallows sat on overhead wires, a couple of Sooty-headed Bulbuls were atop a distant tree and a Sunda Yellow-vented Bulbul flew past.

It was then time to drive to the coast with a few birding stops along the way. Close to Tha Yang was a small island with shady trees in the middle of a lake. This is a reliable site for Indian Thick-knee. So it was for us with five birds showing well.

Heading now straight for the coast, the road passed through large areas of rice paddies and we made several stops to check the water birds feeding on them. Throughout the area we probably saw several hundred Asian Openbills amongst the Pond Herons. A word on non-breeding plumaged Pond Herons which appear to be unidentifiable in the field. Local knowledge is that all at Kaeng Krachan will be migratory Chinese whilst coastal birds are likely to be resident Javan. At the first ricefield, a couple of Asian Golden Weavers sat out in the open. Further on a pair of Plain-backed Sparrows sat on overhead wires, a few of the many Javan Pond Herons were coming into full summer plumage as was a single Eastern Cattle Egret and both Oriental Pratincole and Blue-tailed Bee-eater glided over.

Having reached the final ricefield, we found shorebirds with upwards of five Long-toed Stints, 2 Marsh Sandpipers and singles of Temminck's Stint, Ruff, Spotted Redshank and Little Ringed Plover alongside a dozen Wood Sandpipers.

We arrived at the wonderful and luxurious Fisherman's resort in time for lunch. Whilst the waitresses were putting food out on the table, we were busy watching the shoreline where a pair of Malaysian Plovers, a Greater Sand Plover and a much desired White-faced Plover were charging around. Several Little Terns sat on the sand and the occasional Whiskered Tern flew along the shoreline.

At 3.00pm we drove to Bang Kao, an area of scattered bushes, dried up lakes and heavily vegetated ponds and canals. Whilst it was initially still quite warm, it had also become extremely windy making finding small passerines quite a challenge. Nevertheless over a period of time, our patience paid off with excellent views of Black-browed Reed Warbler together with both Yellow-bellied Prinia and Common Iora coming into check us out. Sadly our attempts to entice both calling Dusky Warbler, Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler and Siberian Rubythroat into view came to nothing. We did find at least eight Asian Green Bee-eaters hawking flying insects but pride of place goes to birds of prey. Eastern Marsh Harriers are nice to see and we probably saw about six individuals hunting the fields, adult

Brahmany Kites showed well but the real icing on the cake was Pied Harrier. We had excellent views of an adult female, an immature and best of all a magnificent adult male hunting low over the fields. The day ended with an Indian Nightjar being flushed from the path to the delight of most of the group.



Day (6) Wednesday 25th February

We had expected this to be our last day on the coast of the Gulf of Thailand and our final chance to witness the wonders of shorebird migration along the East Asia – Australasia fly-way. With a very high tide scheduled for 8.00am, birds would be concentrated in certain areas of salt pans. We arrived at 7.00am looking out over the Laem Phak Bia pans, unfortunately gazing into the rising sun so viewing at certain angles was challenging. However when almost 200 Nordmann's Greenshank are preening and feeding in front of you it was a small price to pay. Amongst a huge flock of Black-tailed Godwits, there were several Slender-billed Gulls sat on the bunds, at least one with a rosy flush to its breast. A good scan through another half a dozen salt pans produced eight Pied Avocets and a distant flock of Great Knot with Greater Sand Plovers preferring more dried out pans.

There are approximately 10 km of salt pans either side along this stretch of road. We made just a couple of short stops and cumulatively must have seen several thousand Black-tailed Godwits and Tibetan Sand Plovers.

We then moved a few kilometers further on the road to the Laem Canal pans, thankfully on the landward side of the road. The sun was behind us and the light perfect. The major target here was Asiatic Dowitcher – and we counted close to 600! The supporting cast contained perhaps 200 Curlew Sandpipers, a few of which were coming into breeding plumage, at least 40 Marsh Sandpipers, a couple of Long-toed Stints, a Broad-billed Sandpiper and a male Kentish Plover. Amongst the Whiskered and Little Terns sat on the bunds, there were three Gull-billed Terns.

There were frequent episodes of mass hysteria when a female Pied Harrier and a couple of Brahminy Kites flew over causing swirling flying masses of waders before they all returned to the same pans. They took no notice however of a trio of Grey-headed Lapwings that cruised over – but we did!

Our next stop was to look out over the scrubby fields either side of the Kom Naram temple. Here a pair of Oriental Pratincoles were sat in the same field as I had seen them in 2018. We had frustratingly brief glimpses of an Oriental Skylark whilst back in the car park, while Mai was setting up her tea and coffee stand, two Blue-tailed Bee-eaters glided passed.

Our final birding of the morning was to walk the boardwalk beside the Laem Phak canal with both Blue-spotted and Giant Mudskippers for company. It was pretty hot by now and late morning but we still managed excellent views of two specialist passerines of the area, Mangrove Whistler and Golden-bellied Gerygone. Oriental Darters and a few House Swifts flew over and a pair of Collared Kingfishers squawked and shouted at each other.

We then returned to "Fishermens" for an early lunch, as our boatman for this afternoon's session was very watchful of the falling tide. So it was that around 1.00pm, we boarded two rather ramshackle but functional boats to chug down the Laem Phak canal and out onto the estuary, getting fleeting glimpses of a Black-capped Kingfisher along the way. We squeezed into a gap on the mangrove wall to see several huge Lyle's Flying Foxes hanging upside down and swearing at either us or each other. We knew that we had been riding our luck so far today and there was always going to come a point/reality check – and this afternoon it was missing Chinese Egret.

Navigating our way out on an extremely low tide along ever narrowing channels either side of mud banks meant we simply could not get as close to the roosting shorebirds and seabirds as we would have liked; but we still did pretty well. Our first real challenge was a short-legged egret feeding quite furiously along the muddy fringes. Bill shape immediately eliminated Little Egret, it had no nape

plumes and its legs were covered in mud. It was a white morph Pacific Reef Heron (we were to see a straightforward dark morph on the return journey). On one sandbank a lone White-faced Plover scampered about (this was the first time that Jay has ever seen this species twice on a tour).

Then it was all about a very restless flock of terns wheeling about then sitting out on the mud. Most numerous were Little Terns, many already in breeding dress followed by around 30 Common Terns. Of far greater interest were smaller numbers of both Great-crested and Lesser-crested Terns and just one rather elusive White-winged Tern that seemed to appear, then disappear at will.

With the tide now really low, disembarking at Mr Daeng's "jetty" was a challenging and rather undignified affair but we all managed to scramble up to his house and the waiting snack of mango and sticky rice was most welcome.

Our final birding for the day was some 45 minute's drive away. A dark morph Booted Eagle drifted across the road and then we arrived on site where we spent a couple of hours in both dry and wet fields at Ton Maphsrao. This is now a critically important safe haven for wintering Yellow-breasted Buntings. Accurately assessing how many we saw is difficult as they were feeding with a flock of non-breeding plumaged Baya Weavers. There may well have been up to 200 in the area.

We found several species new for the tour – a number of Red-throated Pipits, some with a slight pinkish flush to the throat; a couple of Zitting Cisticolas, plenty of *macronyx* Eastern Yellow Wagtails and a female Plaintive Cuckoo. A considerable amount of time was spent playing hide and seek with single Dusky and Oriental Reed Warblers. We won both matches but the views were brief... and the finale once again was an adult male Pied Harrier quartering the fields. It had been really hot today but successful and most enjoyable.



Day (7) Thursday 26th February

Today was meant to be a travelling day for our stay at Khao Yai. However, thanks to some up to date local knowledge we could have one last stab at “salt pans birding” at Pak Thale and we hit the jackpot. Jay pick out a breeding plumaged Chinese Egret, in loose association with a mixed egret flock within no more than 20 minutes of our arrival. Whilst it was quite distant, through a ‘scope you could clearly see a wholly yellow bill and “Snowy Egret like” nape plumes. We also had a single Spot-billed Pelican fly over. Spurred on by our good fortune, we found a gathering of about 120 Terek Sandpipers roosting on a mud bund. We had effectively “cleaned up” on the shorebirds available and retraced our steps back to the vehicles. It’s hard to convey the sheer numbers of waders at this important wetland. A good example was the flock of perhaps 1,000 Great Knot which flew over our heads to land on the opposite side joining at least as many others. By 8.00am, we left the coast and began our drive northwards.

A few kilometers into the journey, we had to stop once more. Some roadside fields alternately prepared for both rice and tiny shrimp cultivation held a huge feeding group of Great, Medium and Little Egrets accompanied by a hundred or so Painted Storks and, more importantly, 17 Black-headed Ibis. There was also a single stork keeping very much to itself, that was likely to be a Painted x Milky hybrid. The cast was made complete with over 30 Spotted Redshanks and 30-40 Whiskered Terns all wheeling around over the surface of the water.

Navigating our way through the Bangkok and environs multi-lane highway system with dense, fast-moving traffic is not for the faint-hearted yet Anek and Air did us proud. This was made even more chaotic because of a huge and extensive construction project of yet another elevated freeway scheduled, when completed to assist the commute from north-east to central Thailand.

Lunch was taken at a restaurant overlooking a lake and was interrupted first by a pair of Small Minivets flitting around the trees by the entrance and then by a soaring Shikra. We then drove onto Wat Pra Phuttabaht Noi, (which translated simply means “the temple of the Buddha’s footprint”), the best known site to find Thailand’s endemic Rufous Limestone-babbler. A hot and sunny afternoon is not ideal but with an effort one bird showed, searching for insects from rock cavities and the shadier areas beneath them on the ground. The supporting act consisted of a Spotted Owlet sat right out on an open branch and two new mammals for the tour; the tiny cream-coloured Variable Squirrel and a couple of Long-tailed Macaques.

An hour later, we arrived at the Isaan resort in Khao Yai. It not often that the undoubted highlight of a birding day takes place in a Municipal Corporation compound. The trees bordering these buildings have long been the roosting place for Red-breasted Parakeets – we probably saw 12-15 birds; males with red bills and females with black. Close by Great Hornbills have made their nest in a tree cavity. We watched the male fly in, regurgitate small fruits and then pass them to the unseen female sat on a nest. Overhead many tens of thousands of Wrinkle-lipped Bats screamed across the darkening sky.

But then the real star of the show took centre stage. In a tree mere meters from the hornbill nest, a pair of huge Spot-bellied Eagle-owls have produced a fluffy white chick which, from time to time, bobbed his/her head out looking for the parent birds. The female was sat fairly close by, partially concealed by foliage, high up in a tree waiting for the male to join her. It was getting pretty dark when the male flew in, they clicked beaks, brushed against each other and then, by now in total silhouette, the male flew off presumably to hunt. Just before we left, a Great Eared Nightjar was seen distantly perched atop a tree and calling.



Day (8) Friday 27th February

Khao Yai really makes you work for its birds but with persistence at times when the forest seems dead and silent, patience really pays off. The day began overcast and decidedly cool but by late morning the sun had broken through and we enjoyed perfect birding conditions with a temperature of about 25 C.

We left our hotel shortly after 7.00am with both Lineated Barbets and Ashy Woodswallows in the car park. Within just a minute or two, we had entered Khao Yai National Park and just inside the gates watched Pig-tailed Macaques trying to vandalize the entrance staff cars. Our first stop, overlooking an area of open grassland, produced a male Cambodian Flowerpecker, hardly glamorous to look at but with a restricted world range being found only in Thailand and Cambodia. A non-breeding plumaged Golden-headed Cisticola showed well as did two Paddyfield Pipits walking across the grass in front of us. A little further on, three gaudy Long-tailed Broadbills sat up beside the road, perched on utility wires. We then found our first Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters hawking flying insects close to the Park HQ together with our first Samba and Northern Red Muntjak deer. In a small forest clearing on the other side of the road, a pair of magnificent Wreathed Hornbills flew in and landed on a couple of bare-branched trees.

We spent quite a while checking out the forest beside the Huew Suwat waterfall car park finding a male "philippensis" Blue Rock-thrush and our first Puff-throated Bulbuls before eventually tracking down a perched Collared Owlet and a pair of Banded Broadbills flew in low and showed themselves extremely well. Then our patience was really tested. A small corner of this patch of forest is a known area to look for Banded Kingfisher and we stood in vain for some while looking hard. Full credit goes to Jay who insisted that we return for a second vigil (the first drawing a complete blank). After a further 15 minutes I saw an adult male fly in and it perched right out in the open in full view almost above our heads

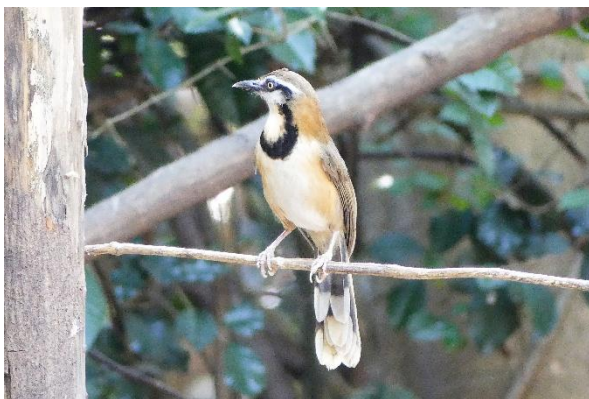
A short walk along the river bank behind the HQ restaurant was quiet save for our first Grey-eyed Bulbul, perched Common Kingfisher and fly past Oriental Pied Hornbills. After lunch we drove up high, right up to the barriers marking the boundary of the Thai Air Force base, a very popular scenic lookout spot. Birding is permitted along the forested road for a further two hundred meters, beyond which is a restricted area. We walked the entire stretch, frequently stopping and listening but neither saw nor heard a single bird. So we sat on a raised platform back at the lookout being frustrated by fast moving, restless Chestnut-flanked White-eyes groups that never settled in view for more than a second. Jay remained convinced that we should walk back up the road once more. After a few minutes, I noticed a Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush fly low across the road. They often appear to be the front-runners of lower-storey mixed species feeding flocks with others tagging along behind.

It was immediately followed by several more and, more importantly, accompanied by three Black-throated Laughingthrushes, a couple of Common Green Magpies and a White-browed Scimitar-babbler. This was the feeding flock that we had been waiting for. We watched them criss-cross the road several times, feeding in the wooded roadside edge for some while and one or two of our group managed to briefly see a couple of White-crested Laughingthrushes joining in. It couldn't get any better could it? Phil for some reason turned around to glance back down the hill at the very moment an adult male Silver Pheasant nonchalantly walked across the road no more than 20 meters below us.

By now it was 4.00pm and we slowly drove back down the hill stopping at some forest beside a Buddhist shrine. Another mixed laughingthrush flock was calling but mostly remained out of sight. A Radde's Warbler flitted around the low vegetation on both sides of the road; a pair of Great Hornbills flew over right in front of us and a Heart-spotted Woodpecker flew in and perched up on a bare tree trunk. 5.00pm – time for needletails!

A fair distance lower down the road we parked up beside Lake Nong Khing where swifts habitually come into drink in the late afternoons. Over the course of the next 45 minutes we enjoyed a mixed swirling group of 17 Brown-backed Needletails together with at least three slightly smaller Silver-backed Needletails and a couple of House Swifts repeatedly circling the lake and occasionally touching the surface to drink. As a finale and not content with this spectacle, Jan found the only Dollarbird of the tour which perched up in the late afternoon sun for all to enjoy.

PS always bring your binoculars to dinner. A Brown Boobook sat up high outside our restaurant – our thanks to Jay for bringing both his binoculars and his torch!





Day (9) Saturday 28th February

The day dawned overcast with a temperature of 23 C, however down in the lowlands reached later in the day, it was a “normal Thai mid 30’s”. Weekends can be extremely busy with day-trippers inside Khao Yai. And so, after a failed attempt to find a Red-headed Trogon and with only Yellow-browed Warblers to trouble the notebook, we decided to move down to some lower elevation forest.

We birded the Namtok Heo Narok trail and adjacent car park immediately finding a Laced Woodpecker which showed perfectly together with a Two-barred Warbler. Initially the trail was quiet however we soon found a Pale-legged Leaf Warbler (identified on vocals as opposed to Sakhalin Leaf Warbler), a stunning male Van Hasselt’s Sunbird and a Blue bearded Bee-eater. A Little Spiderhunter played hard to get but eventually gave up and perched above us. However the star bird of the walk was a Black-and-buff Woodpecker which flew into a bare tree with a similarly shaped Heart-spotted Woodpecker briefly for company.

With rolling thunder in the distance and the threat of rain, we returned to the car park where Mai made ready with tea, coffee and biscuits. Here, whilst standing on a raised platform we enjoyed finding a mixed feeding flock. The headline was an uncharacteristically confiding Hume’s White-eye; the supporting cast included both Hainan and Hill Blue Flycatchers, Little Spiderhunter, both Claudia’s and Two-barred Warblers.

With both trail and car park becoming busy with local visitors, it was time to leave Khao Yai and we took a leisurely drive into the lowlands avoiding birding in the midday sun and had a relaxing lunch. Birding was’nt over by a long way, we had one target species firmly in our minds. On the way towards our final birding location, we briefly looked over a reed-fringed lake finding five Cotton Pygmy-Geese and then it was on to spend the rest of daylight birding the dry forest at the Sakaert Research Station

Our target here was Thailand’s national bird – Siamese Fireback. and we knew that late afternoon was our best chance. What we had’nt expected was that no less than two adult males and three attendant females would be scratching the forest floor almost as soon as we had climbed up to the known viewing area. They remained for at least 15 minutes fully aware of our presence but ignored us even though we stood no more than 15 meters away. We seemed to have earned a reputation on this tour for having our best birding highlights towards the end of the day. Also on the forest slope we had close encounters with both Burmese Shrike and Claudia’s Leaf Warbler.

The entrance road to the Research Station passed through a large area of “managed burn” forest without tree foliage which makes finding birds in the area so much easier, For the final half hour’s birding we found a Rufous Treepie, adult male Purple Sunbird, at least three Grey-breasted Prinias and had several Red-breasted Parakeets fly over. A few of the group added Oriental Cuckooshrike and a very distant Red-billed Blue Magpie before we commenced the nearly two-hour drive back to the hotel.

At 1.00am, while we were all peacefully sleeping, an Asian Elephant wandered through into the hotel car park, heading towards Reception but without a reservation. It was “coerced” back out.

This was the end of the Central Thailand portion of our tour and between us we had amassed a species total of 342



Day (10) Sunday 1st March

Today was all about flying north to Chaing Rai. Being a Sunday, the highway to Suvarnabhumi airport was relatively free of traffic and we made the journey in just over two hours. Check-in, baggage drop and security were perfectly straightforward and we caught the lunchtime flight, landing just before 2.00pm. Our new drivers, Smart and Wattaya were waiting and we completed the two-hour journey to Fang, checked into our new hotel and were back out birding by 5.00pm.

We drove just a short distance out of town to view some agricultural fields and rice paddies. New for the trip were a couple of non-breeding plumaged Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, a male and two female Citrine Wagtails, a fine male *leucopsis* White Wagtail, several Red-whiskered Bulbuls and numerous Black-collared Starlings. At least three Purple Herons could be seen amongst a number of Asian Openbills and we tried, in vain, to coax in a calling Baikal Bush Warbler



Day (11) Monday 2nd March

We were to spend the whole day birding various sites on the forested mountain Doi Ang Khang which is part of the Doi Pha Hom Pok National Park. Access is via a very steep, hair-pinned ascent road before reaching the Mon Sone campground at a height of 1,700 meters where the coniferous trees were alive with birds new for the tour. First to show were confiding Stripe-breasted Woodpecker, bright and colourful male Long-tailed Minivet and a Chestnut-vented Nuthatch. A couple of Spot-winged Grosbeaks sat high in the pines but unfortunately right against the sun.

Watching the vegetation on the other side of the road was much easier with the sun behind us and we soon added Grey Bushchat, Hil Prinia, a Banded Bay Cuckoo perched right out in the open, a couple of dazzling Silver-eared Mesias and males of both Small Niltava and Little Pied Flycatcher. Jay pointed out a Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Daniel was the only one to glimpse a Scarlet-faced Liocichla before it scurried away into deep cover, our first Black-backed Sibia and we were confronted with the identification dilemma of separating brightly coloured *mandelli's* Hume's Warbler from the ever-present "Yellow-browed". On several occasions we heard Giant Nuthatch calling, but never close.

We took a side road up to a Monastery where the monks habitually put rice, corn and fruit out for the birds in a small open area. We were to spend a couple of hours watching birds coming into feed and drink with most species showing at extremely close range. Highlights included at least four Black-breasted Thrushes, half a dozen Silver-eared Mesias, several Blue-winged Minlas, perhaps the last remaining migrant female Grey-winged Blackbird, an Indian White-eye, male Daurian Redstart, a pair of Large Niltavas, brief views of a Grey-capped Woodpecker and a number of Mountain Bulbuls. All the while hordes of Red-whiskered and Sooty-headed Bulbuls were almost ever present.

Either side of lunch was spent inside the pristine Royal Agrcultural Station and Botanical Gardens. By now, it was pretty warm and the birding had inevitably slowed. Nevertheless some notable finds included at least five magnificent adult male Gould's Sunbirds, male White-tailed Robin, a pair of Crested Finchbills, our first decent look at Chestnut-flanked White-eyes and singles of both Chinese and Claudia's Leaf Warblers.

During the middle of the afternoon, we visited a look-out right up against the border where it is possible to look over into Myanmar. This border is very relaxed and quite a tourist attraction. For us, it provided both Burmese and Long-tailed Shrikes.

The final stop of the day at a rather ornate cemetery was just brilliant as we found ourselves amongst a *Phylloscopus* extravaganza where, with the aid of play-back, at least 25 and possibly many more wing-barred leaf warblers flitted frenetically around a couple of trees. Most were "Yellow-browed's" perhaps including a few Hume's. There were at least two Greenish Warblers and a calling Pallas' was seen just by Daniel. Again the best was left to last when a "Radde's type" came into see what the fuss was all about and it had a very thin bill. Fortunately it called confirming it to be a Yellow-streaked Warbler.

Also new for the tour were a couple of Brown-breasted Bulbuls together with both male and female Slaty-backed Flycatchers. As we walked back to the vehicles, a small flock of Cook's Swifts soared over, on their way to roost.



Day (12) Tuesday 3rd March

An early start was necessary this morning for a visit to Doi Lang (west). Our first target species is the normally wary and skittish Mrs Hume's Pheasant and we needed to be on site by dawn. We arrived just before 6.30am and a male was already picking up seeds from the verge. We watched initially from inside the vehicle but it quickly became apparent that provided we were quiet, we could watch from outside, using the vehicles as cover. It was joined by a Red-eyed Scimitar-babbler which is probably the most range-restricted species we were likely to see, only being found on this mountain range. Shortly after, a second, probably sub-adult, male pheasant with a shorter tail appeared briefly and a female Daurian Redstart perched up on a strategically-placed snag.

We then drove on up the hill before making a speculative stop as "Bus No 1" has seen a Rufous Turtle Dove on the track in front, which quickly disappeared. However there were several red blossomed flowering trees close by where birds were sitting out in the early morning sunshine. First to show was a Scarlet-faced Liocichla quickly followed by an adult male Common Rosefinch, Golden-throated and Great Barbets. Before long we had added Grey Treepie, Slender-billed Oriole, Eye-browed Thrush, female Spot-winged Grosbeak and Grey-capped Woodpecker all perched right out in the open. Time for Mai to work her magic with tea and coffee while overhead a couple of Oriental Cuckooshrikes flew into roadside trees and we watched both female Rufous-bellied Niltava and Slaty-backed Flycatcher plus another male Little Pied Flycatcher.

Suitably refreshed, we walked up the steep slope where a pair of Spot-breasted Parrotbills came out to scold us, a pair of Crested Finchbills perched close by and a couple of Black-winged Cuckooshrikes flew back and forth across the road. We then drove to the top as far as the military checkpoint where a tired and bored looking sentry sat staring vaguely at us. Here a "feeding station" set back slightly from the road has been a reliable site enabling "up close and personal" views of a pair of Scarlet-faced Liocichlas while on the other side of the road a frenetic Speckled Piculet took a while to pin down, we saw our first Streaked Spiderhunter and several Black Bulbuls flew across the road.

The middle part of the day was spent walking back and forth along a stretch of road locally known as "the Oasis", so wide is the diversity of species available. It started with another "feeding station" where meal worms are placed on a fallen tree trunk. After a patient wait of some 20 minutes, an adult male Siberian Rubythroat took the bait and posed for its enthralled audience. Close by, we enticed into the open not only an Aberrant Bush Warbler but also a Buff-throated Warbler both normally easy to hear but really hard to see.

A little further on an amazingly camouflaged Hodgson's Frogmouth was sat on its nest, not more than three meters off of the ground and pretty close to the road. It was obviously aware of our presence yet comfortable in its ability to "become part of the branch" upon which it sat. It has nested in the same few trees for a number of years.

Following a field lunch, we continued to walk up and down a stretch of no more than 200 meters finding a brilliant and vocal Pallas' Warbler, a rather dull Pale Blue Flycatcher, a number of Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, several pairs of Grey-chinned Minivets, a skulking Martens's Warbler, a couple of acrobatic Grey-headed Parrotbills dangling upside down in a flowering tree and our first decent look at a White-browed Shrike-babbler.

But there was one notable omission. In fairness, we had all seen a Giant Nuthatch fly across the road; one or two of us had even had silhouetted perched views yet it felt really unsatisfactory. We owe a huge "thankyou" to Jay for his patience and persistence in finally tracking down one bird

which probably spent the best part of 15 minutes hanging upside down at the very top of a pine tree, calling continuously and obviously proclaiming its territory.

By now it was mid-afternoon and we drove back and then walked almost to the top and spent an age watching one particular tree full of bright red blossom and its continual throughput of visitors including a Spectacled Barwing, both Rufous-backed, Black-backed and numerous Long-tailed Sibias, a handsome male Orange-bellied Leafbird and another Eye-browed Thrush. A Bay Woodpecker flew across the valley in front of us whilst 30 or so Cook's Swifts hurtled past

Throughout the day, we had found a good number of Chestnut-vented Nuthatches, numerous Maroon Orioles and Yunnan Fulvettas, both Flavescent and Brown-breasted Bulbuls, several Lesser Racket-tailed Drongos which seemed often to lead the bird waves and a few Scarlet Minivets. Mention just has to be made of Yellow-browed Warblers which could be heard around every corner.

So at 4.15pm, we called it a day only to be stopped on the way down the hill by an army road block. Both Jay and Mai explained the reasons for us being on the mountain yet both vehicles were thoroughly searched. It has to be said that at all times the soldiers were civil and polite. Apparently they were concerned that we might be involved in the illegal picking of orchids. Once satisfied that we were doing what we said we were doing, we were politely waved on our way. A slightly dramatic end to a truly wonderful day's birding.



Day (13) Wednesday 4th March

Today we transferred from Fang to Doi Inthanon with a couple of birding stops along the way. The drive was a little tense as we were aware of extremely long queues at gas stations the previous evening due to a sharp increase in the price of fuel as a result of the military conflict in the Middle East. By this morning, diesel for our vehicles was extremely hard to find. We had full tanks but knew we needed to refill before the end of the day, when we reached Chaing Mai.

Nevertheless our first birding stop at lake Nong Khwai Tok and some agricultural fields added a number of new species for the trip but most importantly a new species for Birdfinders in Thailand. Out on the lake, we quickly added both Ferruginous Duck and Garganey with the reedy fringes providing a star in the shape of a Baikal Bush Warbler. However it was the adjacent onion and cabbage fields where most of our attention was focussed. Pipits were the early highlight with a couple of Rosy Pipits, several Red-throated and a particularly showy Richard's. As expected, this was where we added Pied Bushchat but no one would have anticipated a calling Rain Quail sat out on a rock, in full view for some while, later to be joined by a second bird with another calling further on.

After several frustrating attempts at empty gas stations, we finally managed to fill our tanks once again and everyone relaxed and enjoyed one more birding site at the base of Inthanon. We checked out Doi Noi reservoir which provided the expected but very welcomed Small Pratincoles sat out on the rocks but once again it was agricultural fields which stole the show not only with probably three different adult male Black-faced Buntings flitting along the sides of a dusty track but also with, albeit brief, views of another male Siberian Rubythroat. We then played the now well-rehearsed game of trying to glimpse a Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler with just a couple of our party getting a milli-second view. Fortunately a singing Oriental Reed Warbler was much more cooperative.

Having checked into the final accommodation of our tour, we drove a short distance to a small lake hoping for Savanna Nightjars to fly out at dusk. Sadly they were a no-show but we did see an adult male Large-tailed Nightjar and a fly past by a Red-billed Blue Magpie.



Day (14) Thursday 5th March

We spent the entire day birding the mountain starting with a walk through sub-montane evergreen forest along a road shortly after the 37 km marker. It was still early morning, passerines were high in the canopy and birding was more than a little frustrating. We did find our first Hume's Treecreeper and a male Blyth's Shrike-babbler but at best, the Mountain Tailorbirds we silhouetted dots in the tree tops. We did, however, have several dashing fly pasts through the upper storey of the forest by a very vocal Large Hawk-cuckoo. This road does have two major plus points. Firstly there is an active Clicking Shrike-babbler nest fairly close to the roadside and we were able to watch the male accessing the nest. The main reason for being here however is that it gains access to a wonderful "feeding station". The track down is pretty steep but not too long and the floor was muddy, but not excessively so. Meal worms were put out on strategically placed fallen logs and within minutes a Lesser Shortwing, shortly followed by an adult male Himalayan Shortwing looking like a diminutive male Siberian Thrush flew into the closest worm-laden log. Then came a Pygmy Cupwing which, if possible perched even closer. Not five minutes later two White-gorgeted Flycatchers, normally shy denizens of the forest, came into feed right out in the open. A pair of Large Niltavas made repeated visits as did both Silver-eared Laughingthrushes and a "black-billed" Blue Whistling-thrush. Sadly whilst we saw both Slaty-bellied Tesia and Chestnut-crowned Warbler, they never came close.

For lunch, we drove downhill to the Powerplant Restaurant. The choice was two-fold – the food was good and there was a flowing stream running behind the buildings. Whilst waiting for our meals, we enjoyed a White-capped Water-redstart, female Siberian Blue Robin, another male Clicking Shrike-babbler, female Hill Blue Flycatcher and best of all, two superb Slaty-backed Forktails all at close range either hopping onto rocks in the stream or feeding from low hanging branches. Other birds seen either side of lunch included a small party of White-rumped Munias in the overhanging tall grasses and a fly past from a female Besra.

All of the afternoon was spent at the mountain summit at a height of 2565 meters. This is the highest point in Thailand and there are basically three separate birding zones; roadside fruiting trees, quite short hill trails behind the various buildings and shrines and the summit marsh, or as it is called in Thai Angka Boardwalk. This is an extremely popular tourist stop even on a mid-week afternoon. Once down on the winding boardwalk, the temperature dropped considerably probably to no more than 9C. We found each and every one of our target species bar one – despite the noisy gaggle of Japanese tourists that laughed and almost shouted every few minutes. One species in particular gave us a real run around – Rufous-throated Partridge, but more of that later.

We quickly found three of the site specialities :- Chestnut-tailed Minla, Rufous-winged Fulvetta and Green-tailed Sunbird – the latter being a red-breasted sub-species only found on Doi Inthanon, all showing at ridiculously close range.

On the slopes above the boardwalk, at least five Grey-sided Thrushes scrambled about in the leaf litter accompanied by a couple of both Eye-browed and Chestnut Thrushes – the latter was unexpected as it is now less than annual here – indeed it has not been seen in the previous two winters

Feeding in the gloom of the wet muddy floor, we found a male Himalayan Bluetail and a pair of Snowy-browed Flycatchers. In the trees we added Blyth's Leaf Warbler and a rather non-descript Yellow-browed Tit. In the grasses behind the Air Force buildings, we had close, eye-level views of a number of Ashy-throated Warblers and, eventually Buff-barred Warbler which is so inappropriately named. Indeed it used to be called Orange-barred Leaf Warbler yet in reality the greater-coverts

wing bars are neither orange nor buff, but a lemon-yellow. The real surprise was finding a female Blue-fronted Redstart perched on a wire fence – a rare visitor to Thailand.

Then came the final attempt at tracking down Rufous-throated Partridge. We eventually found three birds, aided in no small measure by both Jays thermal imager and Julian and Michaels sharp eyesight.

The parking lot was now empty, time to drive downhill before stopping at a viewpoint on the off-chance of seeing Speckled Wood Pigeon. We didn't but Phil found a Bay Woodpecker at the top of a stunted tree trunk and Alan came to the fore with a distant (but excellent through a 'scope) perched Striated Bulbul lapping up the last of the setting sun. Some of the group walked the road from our hotel after dinner spotlighting a Collared Scops Owl which had briefly called

A fitting end to a truly magical day





Day (15) Friday 6th March

The day dawned cloudy and cool and was to remain un-seasonally overcast and chilly all morning before the sun broke through around lunchtime.

Most of the morning was spent in mid-elevation forest walking the road loop between Ban Mae Ya Noi village and the Doi Pha Thang campground. The poor visibility made birding pretty tough but John came up trumps finding us our first Grey-backed Shrike, several Gould's Sunbirds came close, a Blue-throated Barbet perched up in a dead tree together with a Eurasian Jay which looked nothing like Jays in Europe. One taxonomic body treats it as a full species in its own right named White-faced Jay, the majority believe it to be a visually distinct subspecies but with an identical call. A few of our group also managed to see both Small Niltava and Sulphur-breasted Warbler.

There was time before lunch to temporarily put binoculars down and visit a hill tribe market. However binoculars were a must for lunch! We drove to the Royal Agriculture Station where the restaurant is in front of a very small stream with gentle but rather murky flowing water. This did not seem to bother the Dark-sided Thrush which showed itself to all of us one iota. In the rear car park we checked various flowering trees finding a very mobile flock of Chestnut-flanked White-eyes in one and a perched male Shikra in another.

We then went on to spend a superb hour or so sat in a hide at Rang Bon Doi. This is accessed by a narrow path for about 200 meters, winding and in part rather steep. Meal worms and fruit were replenished and almost immediately an adult male White-tailed Robin came in to check out the offerings. Next in was another inappropriately names species – Buff-breasted Babbler. The whole bird is coloured buff, not just the breast. At least four *haringtoniae* Brown-cheeked Fulvettas, with a much more distinct head pattern than birds at Kaeng Krachan were almost ever present as were three Puff-throated Bulbuls which had brighter yellow underparts than those seen at Khao Yai.

Then the real stars of the show put in several appearances. An immature Orange-headed Thrush was the first to really brighten up proceedings, followed by a more subtly marked, but just as attractive, Grey-throated Babbler. Both of these birds were very confiding. However an adult male Siberian Blue Robin was certainly more furtive, keeping still in the shade before rushing out to grab a worm or two and then withdrawing to consume in peace and safety. Whilst not coming in to feed, we enjoyed by far our best looks at Martens's Warbler slowing clambering up a close tree.

Our late afternoon became a quest for Plumbeous Redstart and the remote possibility of finding a Black-backed Forktail. We joined the tourist crowds at the very impressive Wachirathan waterfall for the former without success, presumably they had already begun their north-bound migration although we did find possibly two different White-capped Water-redstarts.

Our final stop was to look out over the bridge at Km 13 for a forktail, again drawing a black before returning to the hotel. Before dinner we made one final foray at dusk hoping for better luck with Savanna Nightjars. While there was still some daylight left, we found a couple of White-crested Laughingthrushes and a perched up Rufous Woodpecker a long way off but great views in a telescope.

As the sun set, flying termites emerged in their tens of thousands. They neither bit nor stung but they sure tickled. 20 minutes of discomfort with no nightjars was as much as we could take. Our last dinner as a group awaited.



Day (16) Saturday 7th March

Our final morning, initially overcast but it soon warmed up. We returned to the bridge at Km13 – same result, no sign of Black-backed Forktail, so we drove up onto the crest of the dry forested hill and spent a couple of hours scanning the trees. First to show was a distant perched Rufous-winged Buzzard, then a slightly closer Collared Falconet. Further down the hill, we had excellent close views of a pair of Collared Falconets, one eating what looked like a lizard and then found a smart-looking perched Black Baza

There was a small passerine feeding flock passing through which included both Golden-fronted and Blue-winged Leafbirds, a number of Sooty-headed Bulbuls and a female Asian Emerald Cuckoo. A couple of Grey-capped Woodpeckers showed well on bare branches and another “white faced” Eurasian Jay flew into a close tree.

It was then time to return to the resort, have a quick look in the gardens before the inevitable chore of packing suitcases for the last time. It was hot and rather quiet but we did find both Lineated and Coppersmith Barbets, a distant perched Oriental Honey-buzzard, and a male Purple Sunbird while both Red-billed Blue Magpie and several Indochinese Rollers flew over.

After lunch, having said goodbye to Jay who had to catch an earlier flight, we left Inthanon, heading for Chaing Mai airport but with a couple of birding stops along the way. It was now seriously hot, perhaps the hottest day of the tour and we sought shade wherever possible. Outside of Chom Thong, where a bridge crosses the river, we parked up and looked out over some sand bank islands. Amongst the 150 or so Black-winged Stilts were at least 15 Small Pratincoles alternately sitting around and flying in circles low over the water. Large numbers of Barn Swallows were roosting in the shade under the bridge. Jan walked to the other side finding perhaps two pairs of Wire-tailed Swallows. All the while 8-10 Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters swooped round and round catching flying insects before returning to perches below us.

Our second and final stop was for one specific target – Green Peafowl. This was at the Ban Hong No-Hunting Reserve. These birds, whilst truly wild, had become totally habituated to humans. We saw at least five adult males and one female.

All that was left was a casual drive to the airport. We had concerns about tight transfer times in Bangkok but, presumably due to amended flight paths and the deteriorating situation on both Iran and the Gulf States we all made safe connections to both London Heathrow and Frankfurt respectively bringing to an end a tour which was enjoyed by all. Again “thanks Jay”

Martyn Kenefick



Tour report photo credits

Jan Uhlenbruck

Silver-eared Mesia introduction
Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Day 2
Indochinese Blue Flycatcher, Day 2
Grey-breasted Spiderhunter, Day 3
Ruby-cheeked Sunbird, Day 3
Banded Broadbill, Day 4
Sun Bear (right), Day 4
Asian Openbill, Day 5
Dark-necked Tailorbird, Day 5
Black-naped Oriole, Day 5
Little Terns, Day 6
Red-breasted Parakeet, Day 7
Painted Stork, Day 7
Laced Woodpecker, Day 9
Siamese Fireback, Day 9
Indochinese Roller, Day 10
Small Niltava, Day 11
White-gorgeted Flycatcher, Day 14
Small Pratincole, Day 16
Collared Falconet, Day 16

(Jay) Wichyanan Limparungpatthanakij

Common Green Magpie, Day 2
Greater Flameback, Day 2
Greater Yellownape, Day 2
Kalij Pheasant, Day 2
Large Scimitar-babbler, Day 2
Great Hornbill, Day 3

Orange-breasted Trogon, Day 3
Rusty-cheeked Hornbill, Day 3
Asian Emerald Cuckoo, Day 4
Pied Harrier, Day 5
White-faced Plover, Day 5
Indian Thick-Knee, Day 5
Asiatic Dowitcher flock, Day 6
Pacific Reef-Heron, Day 6
Yellow-breasted Bunting, Day 6
Milky x Painted Stork hybrid, Day 7
Spot-bellied Eagle Owl, Day 7
Long-tailed Broadbill, Day 8
Banded Kingfisher, Day 8
Silver-backed Needletail, Day 8
White-browed Scimitar-babbler, Day 8
Brown-backed Needletail, Day 8
Wreathed Hornbill, Day 8
Crested Finchbill, Day 11
Grey-winged Blackbird, Day 11
Giant Nuthatch, Day 12
Long-tailed Sibia, Day 12
Scarlet-faced Liocichla, Day 12
Hodgson's Frogmouth, Day 12
Spot-breasted Parrotbill, Day 12
Orange-bellied Leafbird, Day 12
Siberian Rubythroat, Day 12
Spectacled Barwing, Day 12
Black-faced Bunting, Day 13
Rain Quail, Day 13

Bay Woodpecker, Day 14
Chestnut Thrush, Day 14
Green-tailed Sunbird, Day 14
Large Niltava, Day 14
Pygmy Cupwing, Day 14
Lesser Shortwing, Day 14
Orange-headed Thrush, Day 15

Alan Brimmell

Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush, Day 2
Bar-backed Partridge, Day 2
Lesser Mouse Deer, Day 2
Scorpion, Day 3
Sun Bear (left), Day 4
Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush, Day 8
Silver Pheasant, Day 8
Black-breasted Thrush, Day 11
Himalayan Shortwing, Day 14
Siberian Blue Robin, Day 15