



CENTRAL THAILAND: SHOREBIRD SPECTACLE AND JUNGLE BIRDING

3 – 12 FEBRUARY 2021



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Spoon-billed Sandpiper is one of our targets on this trip.

This short tour forms a circuit around central Thailand starting and ending in Bangkok. The tour can also easily be combined with our northern Thailand tour, which runs immediately after this one finishes (**Northern Thailand: Spectacular Resident and Migrant Birds**, 13th – 23rd February 2021 – think **Rusty-naped Pitta**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Spot-breasted Parrotbill**, **Mrs. Hume's Pheasant**, **Baer's Pochard**, and an amazing **Pied Harrier** roost, etc., for that tour!). These tours have been designed to focus on the amazing birding that Thailand has to offer during the northern winter, set in a beautiful country with incredibly welcoming people and some of the best food in the world too.

After arrival in Bangkok we head south to the shores of the Bay of Bangkok and the vast areas of saltpans that form the vital overwintering habitat for hundreds of thousands of shorebirds, where one of the most highly sought of these birds on the planet, **Spoon-billed Sandpiper**, can be found during the non-breeding season. We will be putting all of our effort into finding this sought-after bird, along with many other species. In fact, over 40 species of shorebirds can be found here in a couple of days! It really is quite staggering witnessing the huge numbers of birds and the species diversity. Other key birds on our radar here include **Great Knot**, **Nordmann's Greenshank**, **Asian Dowitcher**, **Far Eastern Curlew**, **Malaysian Plover**, and '**White-faced Plover** (a very distinctive subspecies of **Kentish Plover** and a bit of a taxonomic mystery). There are of course many other potential highlights to search for during our time here, and **Chinese Egret** will be high on that list.

After our time at the coast we will venture into some farmland (rice paddies), where we will look for impressive eagles such as **Greater Spotted** and **Eastern Imperial Eagles**, and with luck we will find the spectacular **Pied Harrier**, possibly one of the best-looking harriers on the planet. There will also be a long list of typical farmland birds of the region, such as weavers, shrikes, and a wide range of interesting passerines.

We will then dive into about a week of forest birding across two phenomenal reserves: Kaeng Krachan and Khao Yai National Parks. The potential list of species of birds and other wildlife across these two locations is massive (see the detailed itinerary below for extra details). Some of the most interesting and exciting birds we might find here could include **Blue** and **Eared Pittas**, **Great**, **Wreathed**, **Tickell's Brown**, **Austen's Brown**, and **Oriental Pied Hornbills**, **Black-and-red**, **Banded**, **Black-and-yellow**, **Dusky**, **Silver-breasted**, and **Long-tailed Broadbills**, **Banded Kingfisher**, **Kalij** and **Silver Pheasants**, **Red Junglefowl**, **Siamese Fireback**, **White-fronted Scops Owl**, **Oriental Bay Owl**, **Coral-billed Ground Cuckoo**, **Red-bearded** and **Blue-bearded Bee-eaters**, **Common Green Magpie**, **Ratchet-tailed Treepie**, **Red-headed** and **Orange-breasted Trogons**, **Orange-headed Thrush**, and **Bamboo**, **Heart-spotted**, and **Great Slaty Woodpeckers**. Non-avian highlights could include **Lar** (White-handed) and **Pileated Gibbons**, **Asian Elephant**, the Indochinese subspecies of **Leopard** (*Panthera pardus delacouri*), which may include the melanistic form that occurs here, also known as the "Black Panther", **Sloth Bear**, and **Siamese Crocodiles** among the commoner monkeys, squirrels, and deer.

This tour visits some stunning forest, and we will also sample some of Thailand's famed, delicious food during our journey. Some of the temples that we will drive past or neat birds are absolutely spectacular and worth spending time to appreciate in their own right. Several sites visited also offer very good photographic opportunities for those with an interest.

Itinerary (10 days/9 nights)

Day 1: Arrival in Bangkok

After your afternoon arrival at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok you will take the short transfer to our nearby hotel for the night with the rest of the day at leisure. We will have a group evening meal together.

Overnight: Bangkok Airport area

Day 2: Pak Thale and Laem Pak Bia

After an early breakfast we will depart our hotel, drive straight to the coast, and start a few days birding along the edge of the Bay of Bangkok, one of the most important overwintering areas for shorebirds in the whole of Southeast Asia. We will spend the late-morning and, after checking in to our nearby hotel and having lunch, the remainder of the afternoon birding in this incredible area. We will be searching through thousands of shorebirds made up of flocks of **Great Knot**, **Common Greenshank**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Spotted Redshank**, **Black-winged Stilt**, and **Red-necked Stint**, but among them we will also try to find one of the most unique and Critically Endangered (IUCN) shorebirds of them all, the incredible **Spoon-billed Sandpiper**. Other high-value targets will be **Nordmann's Greenshank**, **Far Eastern Curlew**, and **Asian Dowitcher**. The number of birds here can be mesmerizing.

Overnight: Chao Samran Beach

Day 3: Pak Thale and Laem Pak Bia

We will spend the full day birding within a few different areas of salt pans and coastal environments around the Pak Thale and Laem Pak Bia area, where we hope to find **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** along with the range of shorebirds listed above, but there will also be other birds possible due to the visits to different habitats, these may include **Malaysian Plover** and '**White-faced**' **Plover**, **Temminck's** and **Long-toed Stints**, **Grey-headed Lapwing**, **Terek Sandpiper**, **Red-necked Phalarope**, **Pied Avocet**, **Pin-tailed Snipe**, **Greater Painted-snipe**, and many more.

There will be plenty of other birds to look at while we are in this area, including a wide range of herons, egrets (including **Chinese Egret**), cormorants, storks (including the gorgeous **Painted Stork**), gulls, and terns. There are also plenty of raptors in this area (lots of food for hungry **Peregrine Falcons**), and other highlights could include **Mangrove Whistler**, **Golden-bellied Gerygone**, **Common**, **Pied**, **Collared**, and **Black-capped Kingfishers**, **Eurasian Wryneck**, **Freckle-breasted Woodpecker**, **Oriental Skylark**, **White-shouldered Starling**, **Black-browed Reed Warbler**, and **Plain-backed Sparrow**.

Overnight: Chao Samran Beach

Day 4: Nong Pla Lai Rice Paddies to Kaeng Krachan National Park

We will leave Bangkok after breakfast and bird our way away from the city. We will check out a few sites around the Nong Pla Lai area, where we will spend the majority of the morning, before continuing on to the Kaeng Krachan National Park area. We will be looking for **Greater Spotted Eagle**, **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Eastern Marsh** and **Pied Harriers**, **Gray-headed Lapwing**,

Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Green-billed Malkoha, Coppersmith Barbet, Green Bee-eater, Freckle-breasted Woodpecker, Streaked Weaver, Baya Weaver, Asian Golden Weaver, and Bluethroat.

After checking into our accommodation near Kaeng Krachan National Park we will spend the late afternoon birding from a hide in the forest, where we might find a range of babblers and bulbuls visiting, as well as, potentially, **Bar-backed or Green-legged Partridge, Large Scimitar Babbler, Common Green Magpie, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Siberian Blue Robin**, or, with extreme luck, **Eared Pitta** coming in to drink/bath at a small forest pool.

Overnight: Near Kaeng Krachan National Park

Days 5 - 6: Kaeng Krachan National Park

We will spend three full days birding within and around this exciting park. Our time will be spent at a range of elevations to connect with the associated species of these areas. At the higher elevations of the park we are restricted to birding along a few roads that cut through the park, but this still gives us some fantastic opportunities for some restricted-range species such as **Ratchet-tailed Treepie, Collared, Spot-necked, Grey-throated, Golden, and Rufous-fronted Babblers, and Black-throated Laughingthrush**. Other species on offer here include **Red-headed Trogon, Red-bearded Bee-eater, Ferruginous Partridge, Kalij Pheasant, Grey Peacock-Pheasant, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, Rufous-bellied Eagle, Mountain Hawk-Eagle, Silver-breasted and Long-tailed Broadbills, Great Hornbill, Banded Kingfisher, Great Barbet, and Bamboo Woodpecker**, along with lots of bulbuls, babblers, and warblers.

The scenery is fantastic along this part of the Thai-Myanmar border, and as we are driving up and down the mountain we will keep our eyes sharply peeled in case there is a Leopard sleeping in the road! Much more likely will be a range of monkeys, deer, and squirrels.

The middle- and lower-elevation areas give us the chance for further exploration of this wonderful park. The long entrance road provides great opportunities for stopping and checking out vantage points to look at patches of forest (often with the sound of Lar [White-handed] Gibbons echoing around), and there are several trails and roads we can walk to get closer to the birds. Some of the most exciting birds we could find here may include **Blue and Eared Pittas, White-fronted Scops Owl, Oriental Bay Owl, Brown Hawk-Owl, Vernal Hanging Parrot, Heart-spotted and Great Slaty Woodpeckers, Tickell's Brown, Wreathed, and Oriental Pied Hornbills, Black-thighed Falconet, Banded, Black-and-red, Black-and-yellow, and Dusky Broadbills, Orange-breasted Trogon, Common Green Magpie, Sultan Tit, Scarlet Minivet, Golden-crested and Common Hill Mynas, and Asian Fairy-bluebird**, along with a wide range of bulbuls, leafbirds, woodpeckers, babblers, and barbets.

On one morning we will spend some time in a hide in the forest near the national park, where we will hope to get good views of **Kalij Pheasant, Red Junglefowl, Bar-backed Partridge, Black-naped Monarch, Puff-throated Babbler, Racket-tailed Treepie, White-browed Scimitar Babbler, Greater Necklaced and Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes, White-rumped Shama**, and an assorted range of other interesting passerines.

The early morning and late-evening drives into and out of the national park are when we are most likely to see the shy mammals, and with some luck we may come across Asian Elephant or Leopard (maybe even including the rare and elusive "Black Panther") on these drives, or even a Sloth Bear!

Overnight: Near Kaeng Krachan National Park (two nights)

Day 7: Morning birding Kaeng Krachan area and transfer to Khao Yai

We will spend the early morning in a hide in the forest near Kaeng Krachan National Park, where we hope to get good views of **Kalij Pheasant**, **Red Junglefowl**, **Bar-backed Partridge**, **Black-naped Monarch**, **Puff-throated Babbler**, **Racket-tailed Treepie**, **White-browed Scimitar Babbler**, **Greater Necklaced** and **Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes**, **White-rumped Shama**, and an assorted range of other interesting passernines.

During the mid-morning we will commence our journey from the Kaeng Krachan area back around Bangkok and to the northeast. We will stop for lunch along the way and will visit a small temple to look for **Limestone Wren-babbler** along the way. Some authorities (e.g. BirdLife International) consider the sub-species occurring here to represent a separate species, they call it Rufous Limestone-babbler. We will check into our comfortable hotel late in the afternoon for the next three nights.

Overnight: Khao Yai

Days 8 - 9: Khao Yai National Park

Another two exciting, bird-filled days await, this time in the famous Khao Yai National Park. This is a very popular national park with locals due to its proximity to the capital of Bangkok, but the birds seem used to the visitors, and due to the good road network through and around the park it is usually possible to find quiet areas where we can enjoy the birds to ourselves. There are numerous places where we will stop in the park, looking for particular birds, and there are some really exciting birds among them, such as **Siamese Fireback**, **Silver Pheasant**, **Red Junglefowl**, **Coral-billed Ground Cuckoo**, **Collared Owlet**, **Great Eared Nightjar**, **Great, Wreathed**, and **Austen's Brown Hornbills**, **Blue-bearded Bee-eater**, **Red-headed** and **Orange-breasted Trogons**, **Green-eared Barbet**, **Laced** and **Streak-throated Woodpeckers**, **Greater Flameback**, **Banded Kingfisher**, **Blue Pitta**, **Eared Pitta**, **Banded** and **Long-tailed Broadbills**, **Hainan Blue Flycatcher**, **Siberian Blue Robin**, **Mugimaki Flycatcher**, **Common Hill Myna**, **Grey-backed Shrike**, **Lesser Necklaced**, **Black-throated**, and **White-crested Laughingthrushes**, **White-throated Rock-Thrush**, and **Orange-headed Thrush**. This park is usually excellent for observing Asian Elephant, and we might also find Pileated Gibbon, Sambar, Southern Red Muntjac, and other interesting animals, maybe even the rare Siamese Crocodile.

Overnight: Khao Yai (two nights)

Day 10: Khao Yai National Park area and transfer to Bangkok, where the tour concludes

A final morning birding in and around the Khao Yai National Park area, where we will look for some of the species listed above if we've still not managed to see them. **Red-breasted Parakeets** are often around our hotel so we will keep a lookout for those before we drive back to Bangkok.

Those participants not continuing on the northern Thailand tour will be dropped off at the Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok for evening departures from Thailand. Those participants continuing on the northern Thailand tour will overnight at a hotel near the airport before flying north the following morning.

Overnight: Bangkok, for participants continuing on the northern Thailand tour only

Duration: 10 days

Date: 3 -12 February 2021

Group Size: 4-8
Start: Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok
End: Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok

Price: US\$4,026 per person sharing – based on 4-8 participants
Single Supplement: US\$759

Price includes:

Meals (from evening meal on day 1 until lunch on day 10)
Accommodation
Guiding fees
Entrance fees
All transport while on tour
Tolls

Price excludes:

Flights
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts
Alcoholic drinks
Personal insurance
Gratuities

Please note that the itinerary above cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide to the one advertised due to tour scheduling.