



**SOUTHERN THAILAND:
JEWELS OF THE SOUTH**

1 – 14 MARCH 2020



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Scarlet-rumped Trogon is one of our targets on this trip.

The peninsula of southern Thailand, part of geological Sundaland, is a birders' and naturalists' paradise. Bounded by the Gulf of Thailand to the east and the Andaman Sea to the west, this lush tropical region boasts a maritime climate and a unique combination of terrestrial and marine attractions that rank among the best globally. Our tour is designed to incorporate the most spectacular of the region's unique karst limestone scenery in searching for the region's diversity of specials.

The region's star attraction is the **Rail-babbler**, one of the few birds in the world in a family of its own. Also, there are resident pittas in the area. Although Gurney's Pitta is now probably extirpated from Thailand, there is a chance to see **Malayan Banded** and **Mangrove Pittas**. Pittas aside, the rainforests we visit teem with flamboyancy in their birdlife – five potential hornbills, **Great, Helmeted, and White-crowned Hornbills** among others, ten species of tropical kingfishers, five species of trogons, and more.

We visit a range of national parks to find these specials, picking up scores of ornately-colored woodpeckers, unique jungle-living babblers, attractive leafbirds, and more along the way. Our itinerary includes an outing for the tricky **Nordmann's Greenshank** and **Chinese Egret**. While birding, we may encounter intriguing jungle mammals including Dusky Leaf Monkey, Southern Pig-tailed Macaque, the aptly named Black Giant Squirrel, the beautiful Lar (White-handed) Gibbon, and, with luck, the nocturnal Greater Slow Loris. We will also visit the stunning reservoir at Khao Sok National Park, surrounded by one of the oldest primary forests in Southeast Asia.

This tropical birding adventure, set amidst extraordinary karst limestone landscapes and rich tropical seas, is one not to be missed!

Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

Day 1. Khao Phra Taew National Park and to Phang Nga

Arrival at Phuket International Airport. We start our birding at the nearby Khao Phra Taew National Park for an introduction to the birdlife of southern Thailand. First sightings of species like **Red-whiskered, Stripe-throated, and Yellow-vented Bulbuls, Scarlet-backed and Orange-bellied Flowerpeckers, and Crimson Sunbird** are a delight. We visit a nesting site for the attractive **Blue-eared Barbet**. The call of the aptly-named **Coppersmith Barbet** will likely guide us to a sighting. Other potential species include the dazzling **Blyth's Paradise Flycatcher** and wintering **Forest Wagtail**.

After our first Thai lunch we will travel towards Phang Nga, situated on the idyllic Phang Nga Bay, where we will check into the Manora Garden resort. After lunch we will visit the local mangroves to look for specials such as **Brown-winged Kingfisher** and **Mangrove Pitta**.

Overnight: Manora Garden, Phang Nga

Day 2. Phang-Nga Province

An early departure will see us travel inland a little to the Ton Pariwat Wildlife Sanctuary. Here we will have an easy morning strolling the road, looking for exotic birds such as malkohas and broadbills.

After lunch we will move to Thai Muang, where we may find day-roosting **Spotted Wood Owl**. Species that we will search for here include **Blue-tailed Bee-eater**, **Oriental Dollarbird** (in the roller family), **Gray-capped Pygmy Woodpecker**, and the diminutive **Vernal Hanging Parrot**. We are also likely to see a range of more common species such as **Red-wattled Lapwing** and **Lesser Whistling Duck**.

Our next stop is the Morning Glory Farm, where we will search for **Bitterns** – **Yellow**, **Cinnamon**, and **Black** are all possible, as is **Watercock** and **White-breasted Waterhen**. Our third stop en route to Khao Sok is one of southern Thailand's shorebird meccas. **Terek Sandpiper** is the main attraction here, together with **Greater** and **Lesser Sand Plovers** and **Great Crested** and **Black-naped Terns**. At the end of the day we will move north to the Kuraburi Greenview Resort.

Overnight: Kuraburi Greenview Resort

Day 3. Ko Phra Thong

Our destination for the day is Ko Phra Thong, one of Phang Nga province's most exclusive and beautiful islands. With over 15km of isolated, white, sandy beaches, the island is a real paradise. The birds are rather special too, which is of course why we are visiting. The species we will search for here include the enigmatically-ugly **Lesser Adjutant** and a wide range of birds of prey: **White-bellied Sea Eagle**, **Gray-headed Fish Eagle**, **Gray-faced Buzzard**, the exquisite **Black Baza**, **Changeable Hawk-Eagle**, **Pied Harrier**, and the striking **Brahminy Kite**, among others.

After a long day's birding we will return to the mainland and our rooms at the Kuraburi Greenview.

Overnight: Kuraburi Greenview Resort

Day 4. Sri Phang Nga National Park and Khao Sok National Park

A pre-dawn start will see us enjoying the sunrise over the limestone crags en route to Sri Phang Nga National Park, where we will spend a full morning. Sri Phang Nga is home to the prodigious **Helmeted Hornbill** as well as flocks of the **Bushy-crested** variety and the immaculate **Great Hornbill**. The skies above the stream that flows through Sri Phang Nga should produce the obscure **Whiskered Treeswift** and **Silver-rumped Spinetail**. **Chestnut-naped Forktail** occurs, as does the range-restricted **Lesser Fish Eagle**. This national park is an excellent location for both **Malayan Banded Pitta**, reputed to be Thailand's most dazzling, and **Banded Broadbill**.

Other potential species include **Little** and **Thick-billed Spiderhunters** and **Purple-naped Sunbird**. We will always keep an eye to the sky and an ear open for the possible **Great**, **Helmeted**, and **White-crowned Hornbills** that occur here.

After lunch we will go and look for the most beautiful of birds in the forest, the **Malayan Banded Pitta**. In recent years this bird has been staked out by photographers, and we hope this year will be the same. Also coming in at the same spot has been the rare **Large Blue Flycatcher**. En route to our rooms at the Morning Mist Resort at the Khao Sok Headquarters area we will stop at Kapong Bridge to look for the gorgeous **River Lapwing**.

Overnight: Morning Mist Resort, Khao Sok

Day 5. Khao Sok National Park

We will spend a full morning session birding the river section of Khao Sok National Park. Here we search for the elusive **Rufous-collared** and **Blue-banded Kingfishers**. The dense jungle here

is also a good spot to get to grips with a range of babblers, including **Striped Tit-Babbler**, **Chestnut-winged Babbler**, **Black-capped Babbler**, and **Spot-necked Babbler**. A range of woodpeckers occurs, including the flashy **Maroon** and **Bamboo Woodpeckers**, as well as other forest birds like **Gray-breasted Spiderhunter**. This is one of the sites where we will search for the gaudy **Chestnut-naped Forktail** as well as for **Black-and-red Broadbill**.

We return to our idyllic lodge for lunch before embarking on a long-tail boat trip through the exquisite scenery that is the Ratchaphracha Dam. Between the limestone cliffs that tower hundreds of meters above us we will search for **White-bellied Sea Eagle**, **Oriental Hobby**, and **Gray-headed Fish Eagle**. This boat-based excursion provides for excellent vistas into the jungle and gives us one of our best chances of good sightings of **Helmeted**, **Great**, and **White-crowned Hornbills** as well as woodpeckers like **Greater** and **Common Flamebacks**. In addition, jungle mammals like Dusky Leaf Monkey and Lar (White-handed) Gibbon, which utters a beautifully haunting call from the jungle canopy, are likely. This is possibly the most scenic spot in Thailand.

We will overnight in bamboo huts on a floating raft at the edge of the lake. Here the accommodation is very basic, but the food is excellent, and your time here will probably be your fondest memory of the whole trip. After dinner we will go out in the boat to look for **Buffy Fish Owl** and other night birds. We sometimes also see large mammals like Asian Elephant, Gaur, and Sambar.

Overnight: floating raft houses, Khao Sok National Park

Day 6. Khao Sok National Park and Khao Luang (Krung Ching section) National Park

At dawn we will head out in the boat again to look for kingfishers, raptors, and hornbills, and perhaps we'll see some Lar (White-handed) Gibbons. After breakfast we will go back to the pier, pick up the car, and make our way to the relatively undiscovered Khao Luang (Krung Ching) National Park on the eastern side of the peninsula.

We will arrive in time for some late afternoon birding, during which we will scan for **Sooty Barbet**, **Red-bearded Bee-eater**, **Black-and-yellow Broadbill**, and many more.

After dinner we embark on some owling to possibly find **Brown Wood Owl** and **Brown Hawk-Owl**. The aptly-named Greater Slow Loris is also a possibility, as is **Blyth's Frogmouth**.

Overnight: Krung Ching

Days 7 – 8. Khao Luang (Krung Ching section) National Park

The **Rail-babbler** is the only species in the family Eupetidae and is suitably unique in appearance – part rail, part babbler! This is not an easy bird to find, and with the help of a local guide, Krung Ching is one location where it is regularly sighted. The Rail-babbler is the focus of our efforts on this day, but the rainforests here hold a plethora of other specials that we will be on the lookout for as well. These include **White-crowned Forktail**, the strikingly petite **Rufous Piculet**, **Crested Jay** (Shrikejay), **Green** and **Dusky Broadbills**, **Malayan Banded Pitta**, **Scarlet Minivet**, **Greater Racket-tailed Drongo**, **Golden-whiskered Barbet**, and breeding **Wallace's Hawk-Eagle**.

During our two full days here, we will spend one day on the trail, looking for the Rail-babbler and other secretive forest birds, such as **Fluffy-backed Tit-Babbler** and **Black-throated Babbler**, and the other day in the Headquarters area and on the entrance road, looking for forest edge birds and others visiting the fruiting trees.

Overnight: Krung Ching (two nights)

Day 9. Khao Luang (Krung Ching section) and the wetlands of Thale Noi

A last morning session at Krung Ching gives us the opportunity to search for any species still missing from our list, such as the subspecies *perniger* of the **Black Eagle** and **Bat Hawk**.

Our next destination is the wetlands of Thale Noi Waterfall Reserve, home to two species of extravagant jacanas, **Bronze-winged** and **Pheasant-tailed Jacanas**. In addition to the jacanas, other wetland species such as **Cotton Pygmy Goose**, **Stork-billed Kingfisher**, **Chinese Pond Heron**, **Eastern Marsh Harrier**, **Black-headed Ibis**, and **Slaty-breasted Rail** and **White-browed Crake** occur.

We will spend the afternoons cruising around the lake in a boat, looking for birds. The habitat around the wetland is home to **Yellow-bellied Prinia**, **Common** and **Dark-necked Tailorbirds**, and **White-rumped** and **Scaly-breasted Munias**. We also have a chance here of winter migrants like **Arctic** and **Yellow-browed Warblers** and cuckoos such as **Banded Bay**, **Plaintive**, and **Chestnut-winged Cuckoos**.

Overnight: near Thale Noi

Day 10. Thale Noi and Trang Peninsular Botanical Gardens

We will spend the morning looking for more wetland birds, but this time on foot. An elevated road has been built right across kilometers of marshland. From here we can get out the scope and look for such birds as **Glossy Ibis**, **Oriental Pratincole**, and **Asian Openbill**. On foot we also have a better chance of seeing the smaller reed warblers and cisticolas.

In the afternoon we will visit Trang Peninsular Botanical Gardens, which is home to a small peat swamp. Here we often see **Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher**, **Van Hasselt's Sunbird**, and **Large Hawk-Cuckoo**.

Overnight: Marakot Resort, Khao Nor Chu Chi

Day 11. Khao Nor Chu Chi and Krabi mangroves

Sadly, Gurney's Pitta is no longer seen at Khao Nor Chu Chi (also known as Khao Pra - Bang Kram Wildlife Sanctuary), but the area is still well worth visiting, as it is the only remaining lowland forest in southern Thailand and home to a profusion of megas. During our stay here we will search for flamboyancy in the form of **Orange-breasted** and **Scarlet-rumped Trogons**, **Red-crowned Barbet**, **Chestnut-bellied** and **Raffles's Malkohas**, **Crested Jay** (Shrikejay), **Hooded**, **Blue-winged**, and **Malayan Banded Pittas**, and **Rufous-collared** and **Oriental Dwarf Kingfishers**. Less gaudy but as impressive are many species of cryptically marked babblers, including **Rufous-crowned**, **Puff-throated**, **Black-capped**, **Scaly-crowned**, and **Spot-necked Babblers**. **Buff-rumped Woodpecker** is exquisite in the subtlety of its markings. Globally there are only two species of philentoma – **Maroon-breasted** and **Rufous-winged Philentomas** – and both occur here at Khao Nor Chu Chi. **Black-naped Monarch** is common, as is the aureate, white form of **Blyth's Paradise Flycatcher**. Khao Nor Chu Chi is also one of the very few places where the enigmatically-elusive **Giant Pitta** has been sighted, but we will need extreme luck to find one of those!

Our after-dinner outing at Khao Nor Chu Chi will be in search of **Great Eared** and **Large-tailed Nightjars** as well as **Oriental Bay Owl** and **Gould's Frogmouth**.

During our stay at Khao Nor Chu Chi we will also make an outing to the nearby Krabi mangroves and shoreline. It is here that we will search for one of the trickiest of the *Tringa* genus – **Nordmann's Greenshank**. This area is also home to the range-restricted **Mangrove Pitta** and **Black-and-red Broadbill**. Both **Brown-winged** and **Ruddy Kingfishers** occur, as do **Asian Glossy Starling** and **Mangrove Whistler**.

Overnight: Morakot Resort, Khao Nor Chu Chi

Day 12. Khao Nor Chu Chi and Tiger Cave Temple

The morning will be spent in another part of Khao Nor Chu Chi, looking for **Moustached Hawk-Cuckoo**, **Scarlet-rumped Trogon**, and **Thick-billed Flowerpecker**, all lowland specials. In the afternoon we will visit the Tiger Cave Temple, where we climb some steps up and down into a patch of ancient forest surrounded on all sides by towering cliffs. The area has never been hunted, as it is part of the temple grounds. Here we hope to find rarities such as **Streaked Wren-babbler**, **Fulvous-chested Jungle Flycatcher**, **Banded Kingfisher**, and **Banded Broadbill**.

At dusk we will visit Khao Phanom Bencha National Park for night birding. The highlight here is the **Barred Eagle-Owl**.

Overnight Khao Phanom Bencha

Day 13. Baan Nai Chong and Phang Nga mangroves

On our last full day we will keep our options open. The forests of Baan Nai Chong and the mangroves at Krabi and Phang Nga are within easy reach. This gives us a chance to have another go at anything we may have missed from these sometimes-tricky habitats.

We will end the day at Queen's Park, where we will look for **Blue Whistling Thrush**, **Black-thighed Falconet**, and **Jungle Myna**.

Overnight: Khao Lak

Day 14. Return to Phuket International Airport, tour concludes

After some final morning birding at the wetland and shorebird sites near Khao Lak we return to Phuket International Airport, where the adventure began, for our departure.

Duration: 14 days

Date: 1 – 14 March 2020

Group Size: 4 – 6 participants

Start: Phuket

End: Phuket

Price: US\$4,860 per person sharing, assuming 4-6 participants

Single Supplement: US\$795

For private trips (only 2-3 people) there is a surcharge, but please ask us, since the surcharge is relatively low.

Price includes:

All accommodation

All meals (from lunch on day 1, until breakfast on day 14)

Expert bird guide

All transport on tour

All national park entry fees

Price excludes:

International airfare

Drinks

Items of a personal nature, such as gifts

Laundry

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.