



**NORTHERN THAILAND:
SPECTACULAR RESIDENT
AND MIGRANT BIRDS**

16 – 26 JANUARY 2020



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Silver-breasted Broadbill is one of our targets on this trip.

This short tour forms a circuit around Northern Thailand starting and ending in the northern capital city of Chiang Mai. This tour can also easily be combined with our Central Thailand tour which runs immediately before this one starts (**Central Thailand: Shorebird Spectacle and Jungle Birding** 6th – 15th January 2020 – think **Spoon-billed Sandpiper**, **Nordmann's Greenshank**, **Chinese Egret**, **Blue Pitta**, **Coral-billed Ground Cuckoo**, **Silver Pheasant**, and **Siamese Fireback** 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.

We will commence our experience of Northern Thailand birding with a visit to Doi Inthanon, the country's highest mountain. The unique set of habitats here offer us some excellent birds as well as letting us come to grips with some of the commoner northern species. Special birds here may include **Rufous-throated Partridge**, **Mountain Bamboo Partridge**, **Black-tailed Crake**, **Spectacled Barwing**, **Himalayan Bluetail**, **White-browed Shortwing**, **Dark-sided Thrush**, **White-crowned**, **Slaty-backed**, and **Black-backed Forktails**, and **Red-headed Trogon**. The dry, lowland forest at the foot of the mountain can be full of woodpeckers, and the stunning **Black-headed Woodpecker**, huge **Great Slaty Woodpecker**, and tiny **Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker** can all be found, along with **White-rumped Falcon**, **Red-billed Blue Magpie**, **Blossom** and **Grey-headed Parakeets**, and **Burmese Nuthatch**.

After our exploration of areas to the south of Chiang Mai we will head back north and spend the next few days birding at several mountain sites close to, and sometimes along the Thai-Myanmar border (e.g. Doi Chiang Dao, Doi Ang Khang, and Doi Lang). These mountains support huge numbers of overwintering migrants from China, such as numerous warblers, flycatcher, chats, thrushes, finches, and buntings, and also some very highly-sought resident species like **Hodgson's Frogmouth**, **Rusty-naped Pitta**, **Himalayan Cutia**, **Scarlet-faced Liocichla**, **Silver-eared Mesia**, **Silver-breasted** and **Long-tailed Broadbills**, and **Giant Nuthatch**. Between the mountains here much of the land is farmed for rice, and these rice paddies often also hold exceptional numbers of migrants and a few interesting residents, and we will look for **Greater Painted-snipe**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Yellow-breasted Bunting**, and **Wire-tailed Swallow**.

Our final stop of this exciting trip will see us visiting the famous Mekong River along the Thai-Myanmar-Laos border, in addition to the nearby Chiang Saen Lake. During our time in this area we will hope to find the pretty **River Lapwing**, **Small Pratincole**, and, with luck, the Critically Endangered (IUCN) **Baer's Pochard** that sometimes overwinters on the vast waterbody of Chiang Saen Lake. Plenty of other overwintering wildfowl species are possible too, and there is usually something unexpected floating about on the lake, such as **Baikal Teal** or **Falcated Duck**! The evening here is pretty spectacular too, and we end the tour with a visit to a harrier roost, where hundreds of **Pied** and **Eastern Marsh Harriers** come in to roost, giving fantastic views as they drop in overhead as the sun disappears.

This tour visits some stunning scenery and incredibly rich forests, and we will sample some of northern Thailand's famed, delicious food during our journey. Furthermore, some of the temples that we will drive past or near bird 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 (11 days/10 nights)

Day 1: Arrival into Chiang Mai

After your afternoon arrival into Chiang Mai 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. Those who are continuing from the central Thailand tour will take their flight from Bangkok to Chiang Mai and meet up with the other tour participants.

Overnight: Chiang Mai

Days 2 - 3: Two full days of birding Doi Inthanon National Park

We will have an early breakfast in our hotel in Chiang Mai before leaving the city and heading straight to Doi Inthanon National Park for what is sure to be an excellent introduction into birdwatching in Northern Thailand; there are an awful lot of birds to look for here! Doi means mountain in Thai, and Doi Inthanon is Thailand's highest mountain (at 2,565 meters) and supports some unique habitat in the country. As a result it is a 'must-visit' birding spot, as it holds several species that are not found elsewhere in the country. In addition to the amazing birds and forests here the views are incredibly impressive, and on a clear day you can see for miles, and sometimes you can even be up above the clouds! There are several different roads (including one right to the top, so minimal effort is required!), trails, and access points at various elevations, which will allow us to thoroughly explore the different types of forests, the unique bog habitat at the summit of the mountain, and the many rivers heading down the mountainside which are also worth a check.

Around the lower elevations we will seek **Blossom-headed Parakeet, Siberian Rubythroat, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Siberian Stonechat, Asian Barred Owllet, Spotted Owllet, Brown Hawk-Owl, Large-tailed Nightjar, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Banded Bay Cuckoo, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Striated Swallow, Collared Falconet, Eurasian Jay, Black-headed Woodpecker**, and many more. As we pass rivers, waterfalls, and damp areas we will stop and look for **White-crowned, Black-backed, and Slaty-backed Forktails, Plumbeous Redstart, White-capped Redstart, Gray Wagtail, and Blue Whistling Thrush** (both resident and migrant subspecies, a possible future split?).

Forest birding high up and around the bog is likely to get us some great birds, and as time goes by (usually once the sun gets on the trees and warms things up in the morning) things start to really happen here. We will hope to find **Rufous-throated Partridge, Mountain Bamboo Partridge, Ashy Wood Pigeon, Black-tailed Crake, Golden-throated Barbet, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Yellow-cheeked Tit, Silver-eared Laughingthrush, Spectacled Barwing, Dark-backed Sibia, Silver-eared Mesia, Blue-winged Minla, White-browed Shortwing, Scaly and Dark-sided Thrushes, Buff-barred and Ashy-throated Warblers, Slaty-backed and Snowy-browed Flycatchers, Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker, Mrs. Gould's, Black-throated, and Green-tailed Sunbirds, and Common Rosefinch**.

Some of the highlight birds in the middle elevations and working the trees here include **Red-headed Trogon, Long-tailed Broadbill, Maroon Oriole, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Stripe-breasted Woodpecker, Blyth's Shrike-babbler, Clicking Shrike-babbler, Hume's**

Treecreeper, Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, Rufous-backed Sibia, Little Pied and White-gorgeted Flycatchers, Large, Small, and Rufous-bellied Niltavas, and Rufous-winged and Yunnan Fulvettas. While, skulking on the forest floor, we will try our luck with the secretive **Pygmy and Eyebrowed Wren-Babblers, Asian Stubtail, Slaty-bellied Tesia, White-tailed Robin, Lesser Shortwing, and Siberian Blue Robin.** The mountain can also turn up some interesting migrant thrushes (e.g. **Chestnut, Grey-sided, White's, and Eyebrowed Thrushes**), chats (e.g. **Himalayan Bluetail and Blue-fronted Redstart**), and warblers (e.g. **Pallas's Warbler**), and we will certainly be looking for those.

Overnight: Doi Inthanon (two nights)

Day 4: Birding Doi Inthanon, afternoon transfer and birding at Mae Ping National Park

After a final morning in the park we continue further south into some dry forest at Mae Ping National Park, where we focus our attention on some very impressive woodpeckers such as **White-bellied Woodpecker, Black-headed Woodpecker, and Great Slaty Woodpecker.** We will also look for **White-rumped Falcon, Gray-headed Parakeet, Burmese Nuthatch, and White-crested Laughingthrush.** This usually peaceful park is a great place to spend an evening while trying to locate these special birds.

Overnight: Mae Ping

Day 5: Morning birding Mae Ping National Park, afternoon transfer to Chiang Dao

We will take a packed breakfast into Mae Ping National Park so we can be there around first light. We will again look for the birds mentioned above but will also possibly find **Great Barbet, Large Cuckooshrike, Chinese Francolin, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Greater and Lesser Yellownapes, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Eurasian Jay, Rufous Treepie, and Crested Treeswift.**

After the morning birding session we will head north, back past Chiang Mai and up to the foot of the spectacularly scenic Doi Chiang Dao, a huge mountain that bursts out of some relatively flat rice paddy farmland. If there is time we will check some rice paddies where in the past we have found **Brown-cheeked Rail, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Greater Painted-snipe, Eastern Barn Owl, Pied Harrier, Rufous-winged Buzzard, Grey-headed Lapwing, Pintail Snipe, Chinese Pond Heron, Siberian Rubythroat, Pied Bush Chat, Siberian Stonechat, Lanceolated, Pallas's Grasshopper, and Thick-billed Warblers, Long-tailed Shrike, Black-collared Starling, and Wire-tailed Swallow.** Some evening birding near our accommodation might yield **Mountain Scops Owl, Brown Hawk-Owl, Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl, or maybe even an Oriental Bay Owl** if we are really lucky.

Overnight: Chiang Dao

Day 6: High elevation birding at Doi Chiang Dao

We will spend the early morning near the top of Doi Chiang Dao, the seriously impressive massif that bursts out of the ground seemingly out of nowhere! There are numerous birds to look for here (and a lot of good ones too!), and we will time our 4x4 drive up the rough mountain road to get near the top as the sun rises. We will hope to find the gorgeous **Mrs. Hume's Pheasant** along the way, maybe even **Mountain Bamboo Partridge** too. A couple of strategic stops will see us looking for the rather large **Giant Nuthatch**, and other possibilities up here might include **Slender-billed and Maroon Orioles, Grey-headed Parrotbill, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, Himalayan Swiftlet, Grey Treepie, Japanese Tit, Black Bulbul, Hill Prinia, Japanese**

White-eye, Blue Rock Thrush, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Spot-winged Grosbeak, and Slaty-backed Forktail, along with numerous warblers and migrant flycatchers.

Depending on the weather on the mountain we may have lunch up here and spend a good chunk of the afternoon continuing birding here. However, if the weather deteriorates, as is fairly common here, we may drop to some middle and lower elevations. Luckily there are plenty of birds to find in this area.

Overnight: Chiang Dao

Day 7: Morning near Chiang Dao, afternoon Doi Ang Khang

Depending on the amount of time spent at the Chiang Dao rice paddies and the forest near our accommodation over the previous couple of days, we may spend some more time here in the morning (maybe looking for **Pin-tailed Green Pigeon, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Silver-breasted Broadbill, or Violet Cuckoo**) or just head straight to our next mountain stop at Doi Ang Khang. This mountain, being a little further north, offers a few different species and other potential Chinese migrants and is a great vagrant hotspot. During the afternoon we will investigate some patches of forests, gardens, and scrub, where we might find **White-tailed Robin, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Streaked Wren-babbler, Brown-breasted Bulbul, Grey Bush Chat, and Common Rosefinch**.

Overnight: Doi Ang Khang

Day 8: Full day birding Doi Ang Khang

We'll spend a full day in the forests and beautiful gardens on the mountain, where we will search for numerous Chinese migrants and vagrants (warblers, thrushes, flycatchers, and chats), along with some interesting resident species. Sometimes **Rusty-naped Pitta** may show up, and if that's the case we will be sure to try and locate it. Other birds we will try and find during our time here include **Mrs. Hume's Pheasant, Giant Nuthatch, White-browed Laughingthrush, Black-eared Shrike-babbler, Striated Bulbul, Spectacled Barwing, Scarlet-faced Liocichla, Silver-eared Mesia, Black-breasted Thrush, White-capped Redstart, Black-headed Greenfinch, Siberian Rubythroat, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Hill Blue Flycatcher, and Spot-winged Grosbeak**. There could be some great photographic opportunities for birds here too.

In the late afternoon we will descend to the town of Fang, where we will spend the next two nights at this ideal base to explore the northern mountains.

Overnight: Fang

Day 9: Full day birding Doi Lang

A really exciting day birding along the Thai-Myanmar (Burma) border is on the cards, with some great photographic opportunities too. Literally anything can, and does, turn up here, and we will be primed for Chinese migrants and vagrants, many of them coming to food provided by Thai and Chinese photographers.

Some of the possibilities for the day could include **Mrs. Hume's Pheasant, Hodgson's Frogmouth, Mountain Bamboo Partridge, Siberian Rubythroat, White-bellied Redstart, Burmese Shrike, Black-eared Shrike-babbler, Black-throated Bushtit, Crested Finchbill, Striated Bulbul, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Spot-breasted and Grey-headed Parrotbills, Whiskered Yuhina, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, White-browed Laughingthrush, Scarlet-faced Liocichla, Rufous-gorgeted, White-gorgeted, Sapphire, and Ultramarine Flycatchers, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Oriental Turtle Dove, Mountain Hawk-Eagle,**

Cook's Swift, Crested Bunting, and Himalayan Cutia. We have even had **Rusty-naped Pitta** hopping along the center of the road out in the open here in the middle of the day – totally crazy scenes!

Late in the afternoon we will drive off the mountain back to our accommodation for a well-deserved hot meal!

Overnight: Fang

Day 10: Morning birding Thaton Rice Fields, afternoon birding Chiang Saen area

We start the day as the sun rises over the Thaton rice paddies. We will spend time here and along the adjacent river looking for **River Lapwing, Small Pratincole, Grey-throated Martin, Jerdon's Bush Chat**, Chinese vagrants, and regular migrants (e.g. buntings – possibly the increasingly rare **Yellow-breasted Bunting**) before continuing on to the Chiang Saen Lake area for the afternoon, where we will look for a range of wildfowl, including **Baer's Pochard** if we are very lucky, before we end the day watching the spectacular harrier roost – made up of hundreds of **Pied Harriers** and **Eastern Marsh Harriers**.

Overnight: Chiang Saen

Day 11: Chiang Saen area, transfer to Chiang Mai where tour concludes

We have some early morning birding around the Chiang Saen and Mekong River areas, where we may find **Red Avadavat, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Chestnut-capped Babbler**, or other secretive species.

Late in the morning we will commence our drive back to the city, arriving back in Chiang Mai in the mid-afternoon, where the tour concludes in time for your evening departure. If you do not wish to depart Chiang Mai this evening we can easily arrange additional accommodation if required.

Duration: 11 days (10 nights)
Date: 16 - 26 January 2020
Start: Chiang Mai
End: Chiang Mai

Price: US\$3,850 per person sharing – based on 4-8 participants
Single Supplement: US\$522

Price includes:

Meals (from evening meal on day 1, until lunch on day 11)
 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.