

# Thailand's Most Colorful Birds

## With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



April 18 – May 3, 2021

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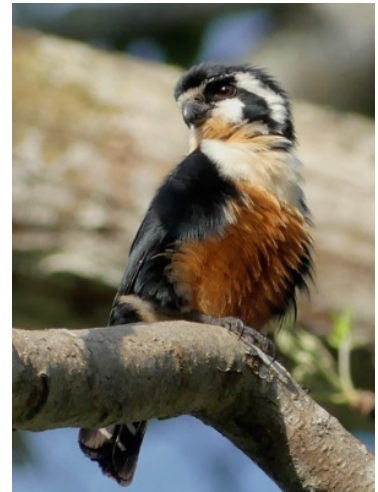
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## Tour Summary

16-Day / 15-Night Thailand & Vietnam Bird Photography Tour with Nick Upton  
\$4390, from Ho Chi Minh City, departing Bangkok  
Arrival airport is Tan Son Nhat International (SGN), departure airport is Suvarnabhumi (BKK)

## Tour Highlights

- Spend three days exploring Cat Tien National Park in Vietnam for Bar-bellied and Blue-rumped Pittas, as well as an assortment of other key birds of the lowland forest
- Bird the Petchaburi rice fields Asian Golden, Streaked, and Baya Weaver, as well as Javan Pond Heron in full breeding plumage
- Explore Kaeng Krachan National Park for four days looking for pittas and broadbills and mammals like White-handed Gibbon, too
- Fly to Phuket to spend time in Sri Phang Nga National Park to see bulbuls, hornbills, and pittas—the geography here is stunning with limestone karst rising sharply out of the turquoise water
- Spend time at Sri Phang Nga and the stunning Phang Nga Bay overlooking the mangroves and sparkling sea
- Discover the mangroves and watch for Mangrove Pitta and other range-restricted specialties

Join Naturalist Journeys on this exciting trip to Asia to enjoy photo friendly birding in Vietnam and Thailand. A four day visit at the start of the trip to nearby Southern Vietnam starts us off in tropical forest, giving us a high probability of successfully seeing two wonderful species of Pitta: Blue-rumped and Bar-bellied. These species are regularly seen at Cat Tien National Park where a mixture of primary and secondary forest, along with open grasslands, give a good chance of finding regional specialties including Germain's Peacock Pheasant. This trip presents a unique opportunity to visit two of Southeast Asia's most interesting countries and see many of the region's most spectacular and colorful birds.

Thailand is frequently visited by birders and with very good reason: its abundance of highly sought-after birds, ease of travel, friendly people, excellent cuisine, and good accommodations make it a great destination. On this trip we visit Thailand at a time when many members of the iconic Pitta family are breeding, giving us a high chance of success of finding Blue, Hooded, Blue-winged, Mangrove, and Malayan Banded Pittas. This is also a good time of year to see other stunning forest birds including broadbills and kingfishers as well as many other breeding birds. From Bangkok, we head to the bird-filled rice fields, where colonies of colorful, garrulous Weavers are busy building their nests, before a five night stay close to the wonderful Kaeng Krachan National Park. Here we search for Blue Pitta and Hooded and Blue-winged Pittas, as well as a whole host of colorful broadbills, woodpeckers, hornbills, and many other species. The forests here are exactly what you expect from Southeast Asia with huge trees, spreading canopies, and an abundance of life.





Along with a wide variety of birds if we are lucky we could enjoy some good mammal sightings: White-handed Gibbon, Dusky Langur, perhaps Asian Elephant, Malayan Porcupine, or even Leopard. And, at this time of year the congregations of butterflies can be truly spectacular.

A short flight takes us from Bangkok to the island of Phuket where we visit Sri Phang Nga National Park, one of the best places to see the stunning Malayan Banded Pitta; the rich forest here holds many other possibilities too. From here we move on to the mangroves and limestone karst of Phang Nga Bay for Mangrove Pitta and Brown-winged Kingfisher, superb birds set against a very photogenic backdrop.

This is an excellent trip led by guide and photographer Nick Upton.

## Day-to-Day Itinerary

### Sun., Apr. 18 Arrivals in Ho Chi Minh City

Welcome to Vietnam! Arrivals today are at your leisure; please plan on taking a shuttle to our convenient airport hotel. We do recommend arriving in enough time today (or even yesterday, additional cost) that you can settle in, get your bearings, and be ready for an early start tomorrow morning. We gather this evening for a welcome dinner to meet the group, your guide, and hear an overview of the trip to come. *If you need help booking your flight into Ho Chi Minh, please let us know.*

*Accommodations at an airport hotel in Ho Chi Minh City (D)*

### Mon., Apr. 19 – Wed., Apr. 21 Cat Tien National Park

Leaving Ho Chi Minh City in the early morning we spend the next three days exploring Cat Tien National Park. A number of the species here are the same as in the sites in Thailand, but it is always great to get extra opportunities to see these gems! However, the real reason to visit the park is for the two species of pittas that can be found here—Bar-bellied and Blue-rumped Pittas—both of which should be visiting stakeouts at this time of the year. However, these are not the only key birds to look for in this lowland forest site and a mixture of primary and secondary forest along with areas of bamboo and wet grassland mean that we have a good chance of species such as Germain's Peacock Pheasant, Orange-necked Partridge, Green Peafowl, Red-vented Barbet, Pale-headed Woodpecker, White-bellied Woodpecker, Grey-faced Tit-Babbler, Woolly-necked Stork, and Lesser Adjutant, as well as some raptors that could include Collared Falconet, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, and Lesser Fish Eagle.

*Accommodations at Cat Tien National Park (B,L,D)*

### Thurs., Apr. 22 Cat Tien National Park | Ho Chi Min City | Bangkok

We enjoy a final morning at Cat Tien National Park looking for any key species not yet seen or maybe just having another look at those stunning pittas. It's nice to have some extra time to search for them if they have played hard to get over the last few days!





In the afternoon we travel back to Ho Chi Minh City before taking a short flight to Bangkok.  
*Overnight Mariya Boutique Residence, Bangkok (B,L,D)*

### **Fri., Apr. 23 Bangkok | Petchaburi Rice Fields**

From Bangkok we drive for two hours to reach Petchaburi rice fields where, at this time of year, Asian Golden Weaver, Streaked Weaver, and Baya Weaver are in full breeding plumage building their distinctive nests. They are a wonderful spectacle for us to watch. Javan Pond Herons are looking good in their breeding attire, too. The rice fields are very green at this time of year and Watercock use this habitat to call from— with a little patience we should be able to spot one or two of this increasingly scarce species. There is usually a profusion of activity in the early mornings and late afternoons here with Yellow Bittern, Cinnamon Bittern, Black Bittern, Stork-billed Kingfisher, and Pink-necked Green Pigeon all likely, as well as other wetland species including Bronze-winged Jacana, Asian Openbill, Ruddy-breasted Crake, White-browed Crake, and we should be able to find a few Eastern Great Egrets with their distinctive blue bills and red legs in breeding condition. In nearby fish ponds we are also likely to be able to find some large water birds including Painted Stork, Spot-billed Pelican, and Black-headed Ibis.

*Accommodations at Sun Hotel, Phetchaburi (B,L,D)*

### **Sat., Apr. 24 – Tues., Apr. 27 Kaeng Krachan National Park**

We have four full days to explore the forests at Kaeng Krachan, Thailand's largest National Park, as well as nearby bird-rich waterholes. With a variety of forest types, from dry lowland secondary growth, through moist lowland tropical forest to montane tropical forest, the diversity of birds reflects this variety and there are always myriad exciting species to see and photograph. At this time of year, the breeding season is in full swing and we should be able to find the first migrant Blue-winged and Hooded Pittas, as well as the resident Blue Pitta, although the latter is never an easy bird to get onto. However, with some luck, local photographers may have staked out a bird or two for us to get the best views. Eared Pitta may be calling too and although it is a very tough bird to find we have a fighting chance of seeing this species if luck is on our side.

When not looking for pittas we aren't short of other special birds to see and this time of year is usually very successful for seeing nesting broadbills. We should be able to encounter a number of pairs of Silver-breasted Broadbills nesting near the road and who could forget the stunning Black-and-red Broadbill, which we can usually see in the lowlands. Add to that the incredible Black-and-yellow Broadbill, Banded Broadbill, and Dusky Broadbill and we have a stunning set of birds to search for. In the higher altitudes of the park we should see Long-tailed Broadbill at their regular nesting sites, too. Four days should also give us enough time to look for other stunners such as Banded and Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, Red-bearded Bee-eater, Collared



Babbler, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, and the majestic Great Hornbill. We work hard for you to take come a great photo of this iconic bird.

One of the specialties of Kaeng Krachan is the weird Ratchet-tailed Treepie. This is a good time of year to see it as it forages alongside flocks of Collared Babbler, White-crested Laughingthrush, White-browed Scimitar Babbler, and Black-breasted Laughingthrush. Woodpeckers are another feature here and it is possible to get a really good list of species with Great Slaty, Bamboo, Black-and-buff, Crimson-winged, and Buff-rumped, as well as more common species like Greater and Common Flamebacks, Grey-faced Woodpecker, Greater Yellownappe, and Streak-breasted Woodpecker.

Spending plenty of time in the forests here gives us good opportunities to enjoy both the habitat and the birds with Tickell's Brown Hornbill usually very active at this time and Oriental Pied Hornbill being a fairly common bird—imagine! Black-thighed Falconet can usually be seen too and migrants passing through should include Crow-billed Drongo, Black Baza, Indian Cuckoo, Oriental Cuckoo, and perhaps something rarer like Green-backed Flycatcher or Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo—there should be a few surprises even if they are hard to predict. Also hard to predict are mammals, but Kaeng Krachan usually serves up some nice sightings with White-handed Gibbon being fairly common.

*Accommodations at Baan Maka Nature Lodge (B,L,D)*

### **Wed., Apr. 28 Kaeng Krachan | Bangkok | Sri Phang Nga**

It might be hard to pull ourselves away from Kaeng Krachan but this morning, but we do make a morning visit to an area of dry woodland and fields where we search for the stunning Black-headed Woodpecker. Here we can also see Spotted and Asian Barred Owlet in the daytime, as well as Rufous Treepie, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, and Red-breasted Parakeet; migrants are quite likely with Chestnut-winged Cuckoo and Forest Wagtail frequently seen here. In the nearby dry farmland, Indian Thick-knee, Indochinese Bushlark, Blue-throated Bee-eater, and Vinous-breasted Starling are all key birds that we have a good chance of seeing.

After a short flight from Bangkok to Phuket, we transfer to our comfortable accommodation at Kuraburi Greenview, close to Sri Phang Nga National Park.

*Accommodations at Kuraburi Greenview (B,L,D)*





### **Thurs., Apr. 29   Sri Phang Nga National Park**

We have breakfast in the field this morning as we wait for the birds to wake up in the campsite at Sri Phang Nga National Park. This is a great place to spot Wallace's Hawk Eagle and perhaps a flyover Great Hornbill; we would need a huge amount of luck to actually see the Helmeted Hornbill that can sometimes be heard here. If there is a fruiting tree we can expect a wide variety of bulbuls that may include the attractive Scaly-bellied Bulbul and some migrant species such as Tiger Shrike or Yellow-rumped Flycatcher. Red-throated and Gold-whiskered Barbets call from the taller trees here and Banded Woodpecker is often spotted in the early morning. Timing this trip as we have, there is another good chance of Hooded Pitta here and if they are calling we should see them quickly; we also have another chance to see Blue-winged Pitta here, too.

However, the main reason to visit this area is for Malayan Banded Pitta. This stunning bird can usually be seen at a feeding station at this time of year but if it does not show, this species is common enough here that we should be able to track one down the old-fashioned way. Another beautiful bird we look for here is Chestnut-naped Forktail, usually seen along one of the streams in the early morning or sometimes at a photo stakeout. Other possibilities include Red-bearded Bee-eater, Bushy-crested Hornbill, Rufous-collared Kingfisher, and Banded Kingfisher.

*Accommodations at Kuraburi Greenview (B,L,D)*

### **Fri., Apr. 30   Sri Phang Nga | Takua Pa Fields**

The mornings are by far the most productive at Sri Phang Nga; we base our morning explorations from our comfortable accommodations and spend the morning looking for more pittas, broadbills, woodpeckers, and kingfishers. Species such as Orange-bellied Flowerpecker and Grey-breasted Spiderhunter can even be found on flowering plants in the gardens of our lodge.

In the afternoon we can take a short drive to some cattle fields along a river near the town of Takua Pa, where we should be able to get close up views of two very smart birds: Oriental Pratincole and River Lapwing. We look for a number of other open country species as well, including Paddyfield Pipit, Pacific Swallow, and Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, all of which should present themselves for photographs.

*Accommodations at Kuraburi Greenview (B,L,D)*

### **Sat., May 1   Sri Phang Nga | Phang Nga Bay**

We spend another morning at Sri Phang Nga to ensure that we get good views of Malayan Banded Pitta and have a good chance to see many of the other top birds here. We should have time to check out a location for Green Broadbill; this location also happens to be a good site for Blue-winged Pitta. Species such as Streaked



Bulbul, Chestnut-bellied Malkoha, Chestnut-winged Babbler, Raffle's Malkoha, Whiskered Treeswift, and Black-and-yellow Broadbill are on the agenda this morning, too.

After a good morning's birding we drive a few hours towards Phang Nga Bay, the scenery getting progressively more spectacular as we get close to Phang Nga Bay Mangroves. Set among the limestone cliffs and mangroves that Southern Thailand is famous for, access on foot to an area of the forest gives us a great opportunity to find mangrove species and gain some excellent views, rather than just brief views drifting by in a boat as is so often the case. Here the main target is Mangrove Pitta and we should be able to get very good views of this bird as it defends its territory and calls from perches in the trees; they are usually very noisy at this time of year. There is plenty more to look for here too, with other birds including the impressive Brown-winged Kingfisher, a highly range-restricted species, the shy Ruddy Kingfisher, stunning Black-and-red Broadbill, and Streak-breasted Woodpecker. Ashy Tailorbird, Chestnut-bellied Malkoha, Brahminy Kite, White-chested Babbler, and Olive-winged Bulbul are all usually seen here too, as are a few of the southern birds that are adapted to open country like Asian Glossy Starling, Rufous-bellied Swallow, and Pacific Swallow.

*Accommodations at Phang Nga Bay (B,L,D)*

## **Sun., May 2 Phang Nga Mangroves | Bangkok**

After breakfast at our hotel we can walk straight into the mangroves to look for any species we may not have seen here the previous day. This could be Chestnut-bellied Malkoha or a secretive Ruddy Kingfisher, or it may simply be that we want more views of Mangrove Pitta; some photos perhaps?

A short drive takes us to another area of mangroves, next to an Islamic Sea Gypsy village, where Mangrove Whistler is more common and a few other species such as Oriental White-eye, Copper-throated Sunbird, Common Iora, Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Greater Flameback, and even Little Bronze Cuckoo can sometimes be seen. There should be more views of Brown-winged Kingfisher here too and Collared Kingfisher is abundant. We should also see Javan Pond Herons in breeding plumage and perhaps Pacific Reef Egret; in a nearby village Jungle Myna is present in small numbers—a bird that is in decline in Thailand. After lunch overlooking the mangrove forest and limestone karst we can make a stop for Blue-throated Bee-eater before heading back to Phuket airport for our afternoon flight back to Bangkok.

*Overnight at Mariya Boutique Residence, Bangkok (B,L,D)*

## **Mon., May 3 Departures**

Departures today are at your leisure. (B)

## Guide Nick Upton



Nick has been pursuing birds since the age of six after being shown a Dartford Warbler by his father on a family holiday. After traveling and birding in the Pacifica and Southeast Asia, Nick settled in Thailand over twenty years ago and now has over a decade of experience in leading bird tours throughout Asia. Widely recognized as the leading guide for Thailand, he can find difficult species and interpret the ecology of the bird, as well as the conservative issues many species face.

## Journey Details

### Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Please note, starting in January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

### Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat International Airport (SGN) in time for a welcome dinner on April 18; please plan on taking the convenient shuttle to our airport hotel. Please book departure flights at your leisure on May 3 from Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok (BKK). Please contact our travel agent, Pam Davis of Willamette Travel for help booking flights: [pamd@wittravel.com](mailto:pamd@wittravel.com) or 800-821-0401; she can help you get into Bangkok and then plan a short hop over to Vietnam.

### Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is **\$4390 DBL / \$4995 SGL** per person, based on double occupancy, Ho Chi Minh City, departing Bangkok. Cost includes 15 nights' accommodations; all meals as stated in the itinerary; group airport transfers; ground transportation; professional guide services; park, preserve, and other activity fees; and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour price does not include: roundtrip airfare to Ho Chi Minh City or from Bangkok, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, portorage, telephone charges, or alcoholic beverages.

Please note that the cost of the journey is based on a minimum of 6 participants, with a limit of 7 persons. With fewer than 6 participants, a small group surcharge (typically \$100 – \$300 per person) may apply, or we may request that you pick up the cost of a few additional dinners in lieu of this surcharge.

### Tour Pace

This is a standard birding tour with regular short birding walks along roads and well-marked trails with a few lengthy periods of sitting and waiting for the key birds to arrive. Expect early starts most days and most days are quite long in order to be out at the best times and give ourselves the best chance of success; generally driving to and from sites in the mornings/evenings is not lengthy and walks are not strenuous—suitable for all. The weather is generally hot at this time of year and there may be some afternoon rain storms.

*Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.*

### Photo Credits

Blue Pitta, Nick Upton (NU); Blue-winged Pitta, NU; Bar-bellied Pitta, NU; Collared Falconet, NU; Asian Golden Weaver, NU; Malayan Banded Pitta, NU; River Lapwing, NU; Ruddy Kingfisher, NU; Mangrove Pitta, NU; Oriental Pied Hornbill, Carlos Sanchez (CS); Butterflies, George Bakkan (GB); Common Green Magpie, CS; Sunset, GB; Asian Openbill, CS; Black-and-red Broadbill, CS; Long-tailed Broadbill, CS; White-handed Gibbon, CS; Baan Maka Nature Lodge, [baanmaka.com](http://baanmaka.com); Crimson Sunbird, courtesy [baanmaka.com](http://baanmaka.com); Phang Nga Bay, Diego Muñoz Suárez courtesy UnSplash; Black-and-yellow Broadbill, GB; Javan Pond-Heron, GB.