

Vibrant Vietnam: Birding & Nature from North to South

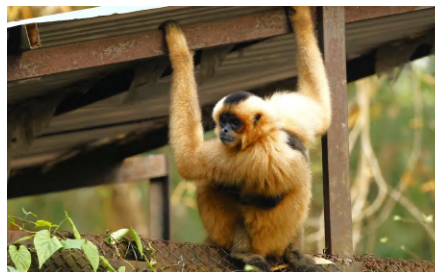
March 28 – April 10, 2025

Mekong Delta River Cruise Post-Tour Extension | April 10 – 12, 2025

Trip Report by Peg Abbott

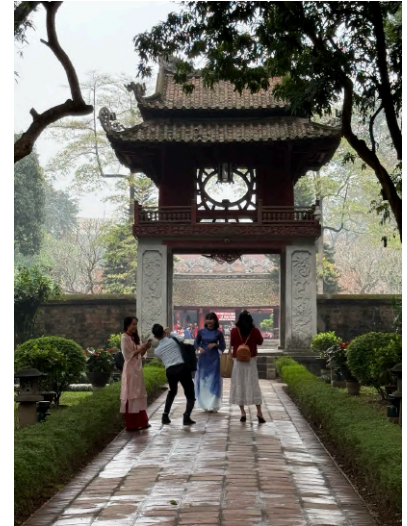


Guide and local expert Lê Quý Minh of Vietnam Birding, guide and host Peg Abbott of Naturalist Journeys and 11 participants: Clyde, Joelle, Bob, Debbie, Cathy, Tom, Barbara, Mike, Janice, Steve, and Judy



Early Arrivals to Hanoi

Our hotel in Hanoi was lovely - just the perfect place to land after long flights - with spacious rooms and nice décor. Most of the group came in early to rest up or explore. Mike enjoyed an overnight boat trip in Hạ Long Bay



on the Victory Star as a great way to kick off the trip. We were all met at the airport, regardless of when we came in, and the city location of our well-appointed hotel let us explore with ease.

Fri, March 28: Optional City Tour | Welcome Dinner

Many of us had the full day available, so our in-country host arranged an optional city tour designed to sample a few historic highlights. We visited the Temple of Literature (built in 1070), Hoh Chi Minh's Mausoleum which sits across from the House of Parliament, the French Quarter, and the Ngọc Sơn Temple near Hoàn Kiếm Lake. It was a beautiful sunny day and people were out at all sights, including big groups of students, making people-watching great fun. We admired carvings of lotus flowers, dragons and turtles, pagoda buildings and gardens, patios with bonsai trees, and rich color and ornamentation within the temple. We found our first birds,

Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Spotted Dove, White-throated Fantail, Yellow-browed and Eastern Crowned Warblers, Common Tailorbird, Swinhoe's White-eye, Pallas's Squirrel and a skink. Vendors sold fruit and candy, hats, colorful fish sandals, and intricate paper creations of peacocks and trees. Caged birds sang from street corners; Oriental Magpie-Robins and White-rumped Shamas. We threaded through thousands of motorcycles, snapped a lot of photos, then headed home to rest. Some of us did a bit of shopping, tried the local Pho, and organized for our days ahead.

We met our guide, Lê Quý Minh, in the lobby and walked to a nearby restaurant, entering through a charming tunnel of lights into a semi-open patio room which was quiet enough for us to have introductions and learn more about our newly assembled flock. He ordered a mix of dishes with shrimp, beef, pork and vegetables, and a chicken dish unique to Hanoi, prepared at the table. We were off to a great start!

Sat., March 29: Morning of Travel | Cuc Phuong National Park

We left the city early, navigating traffic until it let up at the city outskirts, where we drove the rough rice fields. As we approached the park, it got quite scenic with electric-green rice fields in the foreground of rugged limestone monoliths. This would be a fun place to explore!



We made good time and arrived in time for lunch and were able to check into our rooms. Peg had described them as simple, yet they were much nicer than people imagined. Clean and spacious, they would certainly do for our time here. Best of all, this hotel was right at the entry to the park, and from our rooms we could regularly hear the calls of Plaintive Cuckoo and Green-eared Barbet. Ornate Sunbirds visited the bright orange blooms of Dipterocarpus trees. Khanh, our driver, was always prompt and ready by 2:30 PM and off we went to explore. We drove into a tunnel of lowland evergreen monsoon forest growing on limestone rock. The park had been logged, but never bombed during the war, so the infrastructure was good with habitats needed for finding some of the elusive species. This afternoon was tough birding due to weather as an unseasonably cold front had blown in off the Tibetan Plateau. We added another clothing layer, but as the moisture was more mist than rain, it did not slow us down.

Birding was challenging, keeping optics dry and looking up against gray in a mass of leaves. However, in a few hours we found 24 species, by sight or sound. Some of the highlights were bright colored Scarlet Minivet, noisy scolding Puff-throated Bulbuls, tiny Fork-tailed Sunbirds, Scarlet-backed Flowerpeckers, and getting good looks at Streaked Spiderhunter. We found two species of tailorbird - Dark-necked and Common - and with work at several locations found one of the endemics, the Annam Limestone Babbler.

Meals here were served family style, much like a research station, with a typical meal of cooked vegetables, a tofu and meat dish, with fruit for dessert. We started our tally of species and headed off to get some rest. A Collared Owlet called in the night.

Sun. and Mon., March 30 and 31: Two Days at Cuc Phuong NP | Van Long Nature Reserve

We had ample time to explore Cuc Phuong, but the days passed quickly with so much to see and experience. We went out morning and afternoon, taking a break mid-day to return for lunch and a short rest. Mornings, we headed out early, just at dawn, when activity was promising to find the more difficult species. Partway into the



park, there was a second tourism facility - more basic than ours at headquarters - but they were well set up to serve us a simple breakfast (sesame pancakes and coffee, fruit) with good strong Vietnamese coffee.

We had to work around the weather, but maintained our rhythm of going out early in the morning, taking a break for breakfast, and walking for several hours after that at a birders pace. We left at dawn to the call of Red Junglefowl (wild) and soon saw an Asian Emerald Dove and several species of thrushes on the road. The thrushes are a specialty here and with time we got good looks at four named thrushes: White's, Black-breasted, Gray-backed, and Japanese, as well as their cousin, the Chinese Blackbird. We caught up with a few small flocks, sorting out Little Spiderhunter, Pin-striped Babbler, Ashy and Bronzed Drongos, Swinhoe's White-eye, Blue-and-white Flycatcher, and a favorite for many, the Rufous-throated Fulvetta. One morning we had a couple of Malayan Night Herons jump up from edges of the road.

Minh had such a deep understanding of where and when to find species, we walked from spot to spot, encountering more and more species. Asian birding comes in smaller doses than many locations; a typical outing having 25-40 species rather than the 80-100 one often has in other locations, but the mix is wonderful and in time the experience builds. Joelle had really wanted to see Tonkin Partridge, the local variety of Scaly-breasted Partridge, and Minh knew where to listen and then how to position ourselves for seeing it cross the road. He had a good spot with a fruiting tree to find Red-vented Barbet, an Indochine specialty, and we got particularly good looks on our second day in the scopes. We eventually found Hainan Blue Flycatcher, Purple-naped Spiderhunter, and Great Iora. We missed a few we'd hoped to find, as the cold front and wet weather dampened their responding, but with special effort the last morning, we made up for one we really wanted to see - the very loud, but elusive, Large Scimitar-Babbler.

One afternoon, we toured the Endangered Primate Research Center and found it to be well-run and inspiring. Their statistics on returning injured or orphaned primates to the wild successfully was good, about 60%. It is an extensive system that included a year in a large, semi-wild area fenced off within the park. We could visit some of the facility and were able to see a one-month-old baby Cat Ba Langur, one of the most endangered primates on the planet. This frisky, red-furred youngster looked like it had what it would take to someday be free; it was



precious to watch it move confidently through vegetation threaded into the enclosure. We saw a two-day-old baby Red-shanked Douc Langur - a primate known for its beauty - sporting red pant legs. From our rooms early and late, we could hear the haunting calls of Yellow-cheeked Gibbons in the facility. They are doing important work at this facility, and it was great to see it in action.

Some of the group returned to the Pangolin and Carnivore facility in the evening when animals were thought to be more active. This portion of the facility mainly works to take in orphan and injured pangolins and we were able to see one of the ambassadors that was injured in a trip, so never releasable. It was amazing to be close to these animals. The ambassador was a Javan Pangolin and it sniffed the wire cage walls to sense us. This is the world's first dedicated semi-wild area to provide more experience to individuals before they are released; they have put close to 2500 individuals back into the wild.

The second afternoon was easy birding in a wetland setting which was most welcomed after the difficulty of dense forest birding - a real highlight for all of us. We had a grand time being paddled by a crew of women (two to a boat called a sampan) in a storybook landscape of limestone monoliths with steep cliff walls and lush vegetation. Our boat ride is a community conservation project, providing work for locals who, in turn, help protect the resource. In the marshy areas, we found Yellow, Black, and a few Cinnamon Bitterns, Purple Heron, various egrets and many Asian Openbills. Up on the cliffs, we found wild Delacour's Langurs (jet black with a wide white bum), a Peregrine, and male and female Blue Rock Thrushes. We had seen Delacour's at the primate center, but it was most meaningful to see them in the wild knowing there are probably less than 300 remaining in the wild, although this number slowly increasing. We also saw Lesser Whistling Ducks, had good views of a Green-billed Malkoha, and saw many Gray-headed Swamphens. There were several White-throated Kingfishers, a few Chinese Pond Herons, and several smaller bird species including Amur Stonechat.

Tues., April 1: Cuc Phuong NP | Flight to Dalat

Our early morning outing was optional and focused on just a few species we'd been missing. We tried for Blue-rumped Pitta which we heard, but did not find as we walked a trail back into the forest. The now familiar repetitive call of Green-eared Barbet sounded off above us and, back on the road, we caught up to a mixed flock



Bob had been working on with Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Scarlet Minivet, a colorful White-browed Piculet, views of Large Scimitar-Babbler and Streaked Spiderhunter. We had about a four-hour drive back to Hanoi, allowing for traffic, and our flight was scheduled for 1:30pm. We checked in only to find out it was a hurry up and wait situation with a delayed departure time of 3pm. We hung out at the Bamboo Café, ordered a mix of Pho dishes and burgers, fresh juices and coffees until it was our time to go. The eleven species of our morning jaunt and a few around the lodgings turned out to be our only birds marked for the day, given the flight delays.

At the airport, we met Sang, our new driver, who had a very comfortable and clean, medium-sized bus waiting for us. We checked into the Dreams Hotel and went to an artsy restaurant nearby where we had a semi-private room and table with a nice atmosphere in which to enjoy each other's company, catch up on our list and learn about plans for the following day. We discovered the local wine from Dalat was not bad and had fun with the presentation of it being poured from four different decorative carafes. Meal options included fish, pork, veggies and chicken in a variety of dishes and flavors.

Wed., April 2: Dalat Area | Ta Nung Valley Walk | Tuyền Lâm Lake

The Dreams Hotel was bustling early at 5:30 with birders from four different groups; a couple of them were there for photography and others (European) for birding. The owner had breakfast down to a science, loading up plates with fresh fruit which we loved, especially the mixed colors of dragon fruit and mango. Their small bananas were so flavorful and just a perfect size. We could have eggs or peanut butter and jam with our fresh baguettes and strong coffee. Most importantly, we were quickly out the door as the birds were calling!

It makes a huge difference in Vietnam to be out early for that first burst of activity and today we started by 6:30am. We headed over for a full-morning walk in the Ta Nung Valley, but saw as much in the first hour as we did the rest of the day. A strong smell of pine greeted us as we got off the bus and high in the canopy were our first Vietnamese Greenfinches, an endemic species. A Verditer Flycatcher stopped us in our tracks with its vibrant color. The male was bringing food into the nest, so we did not linger long, but wow! We saw forest flocks with Rufous-backed Sibia (Dalat), White-cheeked Laughingthrush, Little Pied Flycatcher and very cute Black-throated



Tits - the local Gray-crowned form. Mountain Tailorbirds called, a pair of Large Niltava (Dalat) courted each other calling and flying perch to perch, and in a clearing, we picked up Silver-eared Mesia, a colorful beauty. Looks at these and a few Gray-crowned Crociases were quick, but thankfully with the crociases, we'd see them again in following days.

Walking downhill towards a small lake, we found a Kloss's Leaf Warbler building a nest, watched Sooty-headed Bulbuls (the local Brown-backed form), Yellow-browed and Gray-cheeked Warblers, Chestnut-vented Nuthatch and two species of absolutely gorgeous sunbirds (the Black-throated Dalat form), and Mrs. Gould's Sunbird (the local Purple-rumped form). Clearly, these mountains are isolated and speciation has long been at work. It was great to see so many of the area specialties. By the lake, a Lesser Shortwing (another local variant) called and called, but it was across the water and not coming out. A Slaty-backed Forktail flew the length of the pond, showing off its long, banded tail. We did have to climb back up the hill, so people all took it at their own pace and, with good footing on a road, we could still look around and net a few more species. There were various themed park statues and, as we went up and down, Joelle climbed into a giant bird nest and posed as if she'd just popped out of the shell. Our group stood out on the hand of the Buddha overlooking a stunning mountain view. We tallied fifty species this morning; one of our best birding days.

Lunch today was great fun as Minh shared a local restaurant, Nem Nung at the Ba Hung. Outside, a young man had pressed pork skewers on the grill and brought them to our table with big rice wraps and a host of vegetables, crispy rice rolls and sauces to assemble at the table. Minh gave us a demo and no one was shy – this was great fun and delicious! The veggies were grown on site in a raised hydroponic garden.

We left again at 3pm with the intention of picking up a few species in the afternoon and then staying out for night birds on the far shore of Tuyen Lam Lake after dusk. First, we stopped in a residential area and, in a clearing, saw Taiga Flycatcher, Oriental Cuckooshrike, both Black and Flavescent Bulbuls, White-throated Fantail, Indochinese Barbet, Indian White-eye, and good looks again at the sunbirds. We walked into a forest area and enjoyed pink blooms of Malabar Melastome. A Gray Bushchat kept us company as we waited for dark. We



positioned ourselves in a good spot at the bend of a quiet road and, as night fell, had super looks at flying and perched Gray and Large-tailed Nightjars. We also heard Oriental Scops-Owl up the ravine behind us.

We tried another restaurant this evening and enjoyed some different dishes. The Dreams Hotel was right in a bustling city, so everything was close. It was amazingly quiet once we tucked in and our hostess was gracious and ready with our clean laundry - always a tour luxury.

Thurs., April 3: Lang Biang Mountain Hike | Colorful Dalat Market

We had our usual early breakfast, but today other groups had moved on and it was quieter. We were still enjoying all the fruits laid out like a morning rainbow and our hostess's energetic smile in the early morning. We made a quick stop at a convenience store to pick up custom-made sandwiches for our picnic lunch today and then we were off to a beautiful mountain area. The road was too steep for the bus and private cars were not allowed, so we got into smaller jeeps to be dropped off at a trailhead in the pines. These stately pines stretched up 100 feet or more! Right out of the bus, the noisy White-faced (Eurasian) Jays greeted us.

The trail was wide where we headed out to find some local specialty birds. We saw Hume's Treecreeper (very similar to our Brown Creeper back home), a Gray-headed Woodpecker (good scope views), Necklaced Barbet (what a chorus!), Long-tailed Minivets (a local form), White-browed Shrike-Babbler (Dalat form), tiny White-bellied Erpornis, Ashy Drongo, Mountain Bulbuls, Green-backed Tits (local form), Mountain Fulvetta and another endemic, the Vietnamese Cutia. We had good looks at its intricate pattern and learned to recognize its distinctive call. But, for many, the most stunning bird of the day was undisputed - a pair of Collared Laughingthrushes singing and interacting! This species is heavily hit by the caged bird trade and we cringed to think it is threatened.

The mountain trail climbs up to a peak and we ascended together to the point where the evergreen forest begins. In a nice clearing, we took a break and searched for a Collared Owlet we heard calling, and found a species of gentian in bloom. We went into the forest on a steep hillside to look for some skulkers and afterwards,



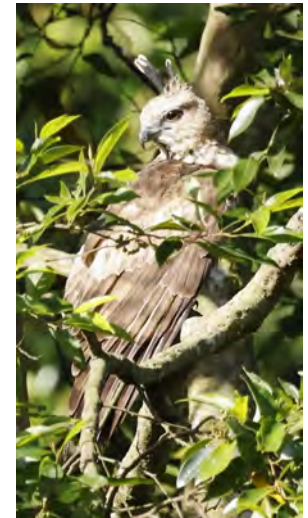
several headed down that wanted to walk at a leisurely pace. About half of the group continued on the trail and although it deteriorated in condition - going steeply down and then back up - they were rewarded with a great mixed flock with White-spectacled, Ashy-throated, and Chestnut-crowned Warblers, Gray-bellied Tesia, Rufous-capped Babbler, and Yellow-cheeked Tit.

We had a fulfilling day on the mountain and decided on a change of pace for the afternoon outing - a walk through the colorful Dalat market. It was fun to interact with the local vendors selling fruits, vegetables, hardware items, hats, meats and more. Dinner was back at our artsy private room café and we wasted no time ordering favorite dishes and wine.

Fri., April 4: Tuyền Lâm Lake Dam and Shoreline | Night Birds

We walked at a leisurely pace this morning on a road in a resort area with open hillside forests. We were able to get good looks at Indochinese Barbet, a species that calls relentlessly but can be difficult to find. Minh really wanted us to see Gray-crowned Crocias and we were indeed successful. We first spotted them fairly high with backlit conditions making their patterns hard to make out. Thankfully, they crossed the road in good light in time to watch them feeding. They were joined by Blue-winged Minla, White-cheeked Laughingthrush, Taiga Flycatcher which we got in the scope, Flavescent Bulbul, and Scarlet Minivet. Judy and Peg lagged behind trying to identify what turned out to be a Two-barred Warbler keeping company with the more common Blyth's Leaf Warbler and a bright Verditer Flycatcher. The forests were lush with a sense of spring, with every color of green imaginable woven into the mosaic of this mountain landscape.

It was nice to come back for a lunch of simple soups and Pho in a café across the street, and then to have some downtime to shower, rest, catch up on notes, and just relax. In the afternoon, we ventured out to a local Buddhist Temple, where we had time to watch people, see the beautiful gardens, observe beautiful architecture inside and out, and do some birding. There were many locals there - women were especially dressed up and taking lots of selfies and group photos. We mingled together and they must have been amused at our birding attire. A huge metal bell chimed the hour as time passed quickly. At 5pm, we settled in by one of the walls of the



property and watched two hard-to-find species come in; one working on its nest and the other a noisy and entertaining flock.

On the way home, we looked for a new restaurant to try. Minh selected a posh, elegant place on the resort side, but we had a lot of fun trying dishes and stepping up our game a bit on the ritz.

Sat., April 5: Local Hotspots | Roadside Birding | Deo Nui San Pass | Ferry to Cát Tiên National Park

Our plan was to leave the Dalat area today, descend out of the mountains, and make a few stops along the way - we still had some birds to find! Minh had a special place picked out where we got quick views of Annam Prinia in an agricultural area. Barbara noticed a tree laden with huge, ripe jack fruit right by the bus. Luckily, we got to try some later that day.

We walked for about a mile and a half on a trail in Lam Dong province, finding Jerdon's Baza - for many of us quite a prize! The forest had a lot of birds and many were easier to see than they'd been previously, such as White-throated Fantail, Green-backed Tit, Yellow-browed Warbler, Black-throated Tit, Streaked Spiderhunter and White-browed Scimitar Babbler. Dalat Bush Warbler, a signature species of the area, was a bit of a skulker, but in time we had great views.

Our lunch was at a coffee shop with Vietnamese food and ice-cream bars, yum! After lunch as we climbed a bit off our route up Deo Nui Pass to another stop situated high in the forest, giving us a second chance at the birds we had hiked to see a few days earlier on a much easier trail. On a fairly quick middle-of-the-day walk, we saw 23 species, many of the specialty birds. We saw Green-billed Malkoha, Red-vented and Indochinese Barbets, Long-tailed Broadbill, Gray-chinned Minivet, Maroon Oriole, Gray-eyed Bulbul, Black-headed Parrotbill, several thrushes and Velvet-fronted Nuthatch.

After this bird blast, we settled in for travel, reaching the ferry across to Cát Tiên NP about 5pm, just in time to get settled in to our park lodgings and head over to dinner just behind our rooms at the Yellow Bamboo Café. We



enjoyed recounting the day over a variety of dishes Minh ordered for us to share - a great way to sample local foods. This turned out to be a holiday weekend and the park was buzzing. It was so nice to be staying right inside the park so we could get an early start on the day.

Sun., April 6: Cát Tiên NP | Heaven's Rapids Area | Headquarters Area | Pheasant Hide

We started early so we'd get out ahead of the three-day holiday weekenders. Minh had a plan to get us around to different key areas of the park accessible from our lodging. All sections were notably birdy and we delighted in keeping our binoculars very busy. As we left the headquarters area, in tall trees we saw three species of green pigeons, both Violet and Banded Bay Cuckoos, Coppersmith Barbet, Dollarbird, and Red-breasted Parakeet. Black-and-red Broadbill, an extraordinary species, were quite tame and sitting on wires and low limbs, some carrying nest material. Once we started walking, we were thrilled to see the elusive Orange-breasted Trogon and five species of woodpecker: Black-and-buff, Laced, White-bellied, Lesser Yellownape and Greater Flameback. We found both Green-eared and Blue-eared Barbets, Black-hooded Oriole, and babblers and bulbuls galore. In all, this morning we saw 53 species, most new for the trip as we were now in lowland forest - all new terrain.

We came back for lunch and then visited a bird hide (blind) in the afternoon. Here we got close-up views, much like bird-feeder stations, but with quite a mix of species. Highlights were Germain's Peacock-Pheasant, Greater Coucal, Racket-tailed Treepie, White-rumped Shama, and Siberian Blue Robin. The blind was inside a steamy, canvas tent in which we sat on small stools, at times having to wipe our glasses or foreheads, but it was well worth it! Driving back at dusk, we picked up a few more species including quick views of Oriental Pied Hornbill, Asian Fairy Bluebird, Blue-winged Leafbird, and Golden-crested Myna.

Tonight, we ordered off the menu at the Yellow Bamboo and took time to catch up on our species tally.



Mon., April 7 Cát Tiên NP | Forest Roads | Grassland Track

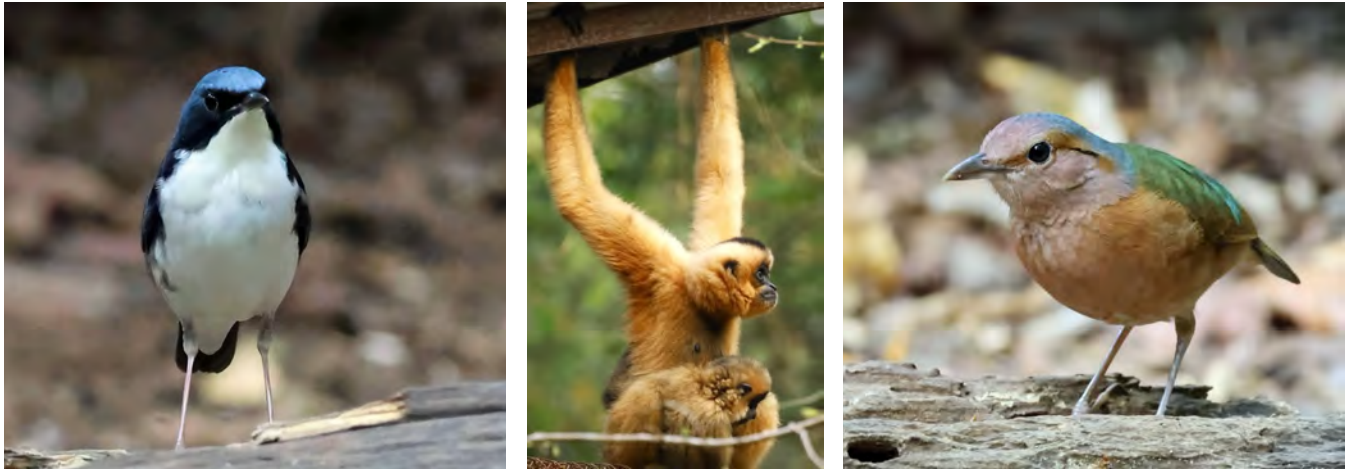
This morning, we ventured out early again, driving to a lush, forested site where we tallied almost 40 species. Germain's Peacock-Pheasant called just as we got off the vehicle, and along the way we were able to see Crested Goshawk, Blue-bearded Bee-eater (in a small park close to our lodgings), Pale-headed Woodpecker (a specialist species of bamboo), and a group of Dusky Broadbill which is a highly social species. The canopy was high and our viewing stretched our necks and limbs, but we marveled at the diversity and some of the specialties such as Van Hasselt's Sunbird. We were getting more skilled at identifying drongos and bulbuls and were pleased to find White-browed Piculet which Clyde noted had a lot of color.

In the afternoon, we mixed it up and traveled a ways out to grassland habitat. This was more of a patchy grassland - mowed by the park to keep edge habitat for deer and other wildlife. In that mosaic of grass and shrubbery, we found wild Green Peafowl, both males and females - a most impressive species. We encountered Red Collared-Doves, Blossom-headed Parakeets, Common Iora, Plain Prinia, Chestnut-capped Babbler (a skulker) and a big group of Vinous-breasted Myna. Some of our group climbed up to a viewing tower and picked up some birds in a wet area in the grassland including White-breasted Waterhen, Chinese Pond-Heron, White-throated Kingfisher and a Purple Heron. We got good looks at Sambar Deer and a few Northern Red Muntjacs grazing out in the open at day's end. The air was cool as we returned home, like a delightful natural air-conditioning. As we got off the vehicle, Great-eared Nightjar were calling and just across from our rooms we got a spotlight on them. What an impressive bird!

Dinner was a mix of dishes chosen by Minh, at comfortable outdoor tables.

Tues., April 8: Cát Tiên NP | Pre-dawn Owling | Forest Roads | Headquarters Area and Pitta Hide

Minh thought we would have more luck seeing owls just before the break of day and he was correct. Right near our rooms we were able to see and photograph Asian Barred Owl, Brown Boobook, and Great-eared Nightjar. Fun!



Close to the headquarters, a former pet Southern Yellow-cheeked Gibbon is kept in an enclosure in the forest as it is too acclimated to people to be released to the wild. But every morning, a troop comes by to spend time with it and their visit is regular enough to be counted on. Just after sunrise, from our rooms and the dining area, we could hear them howling. But walking close to the headquarters, one could pick up quite a wail. The sound is very much like hearing Indri in Madagascar. Debbie walked down to spend time with them and found the experience very moving and emotional. The troop moves off after its morning visit but often returns in the afternoon to check in. We heard them every day - a magical part of staying there.

After breakfast, since the holidays were behind us, Minh was able to organize a park vehicle to drive us and then follow us as we walked short sections of a forest road, making it possible for all to participate and for us to explore another area. We again got looks at two species of Green-Pigeons - Ashy-headed and Thick-billed - as well as Green Imperial-Pigeon. Greater Coucal were quite common here and with luck a Eurasian Hoopoe flew across the road and into view. We worked very hard to see Banded Kingfisher, hearing it again and again but no clear views. We did much better with Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Banded Broadbill, Large Woodshrike, Black-crested Bulbul, Eye-browed Thrush and other species - almost 60 in total this morning. We also had good luck with primates, seeing Northern Pig-tailed Macaque, Long-tailed Macaque and Black-shanked Douc Langur.

We returned for lunch and Barbara showed us a couple of the lizards she had worked to identify. We got photos of these and a roosting Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat in the thatch of our restaurant. Always on the prowl!

In the afternoon after a break, we went to a hide for a most memorable visit with close up views of both Blue-rumped and Bar-bellied Pitta – unforgettable! Abbott’s Babbler and White-rumped Shama, another Siberian Blue Robin were also seen there, and close to dusk a White-crested Laughingthrush came in. Several of the group continued on with Minh for a walk, but a few stayed in the hide, including Peg who was the last to leave. She was thrilled with the appearance of a Mouse Deer that moved through, coming face to face with the pittas!

The staff was so kind at the small restaurant we frequented each day; we always felt so welcome as we gathered in the evenings. Tonight, they brought us some noodle dishes for variety, which were nice to try.



Wed., April 9: Cát Tiên NP | Travel Day Back to Saigon | Farewell Dinner

We did not have to leave quickly, so we walked around the headquarters area marveling at the sounds of the gibbons and sights of Blue-bearded Bee-eater and Eurasian Hoopoe. We found Indochinese Blue Flycatcher, Golden-fronted Leafbird, and good looks at several species we'd seen previously. By mid-morning we were packed up and we set off to take the ferry across the river and start on our journey to Saigon.

We filled the afternoon with travel, people watching and, as we got closer to this city of 20 million people, traffic. We saw several columnar buildings where swifts are encouraged to nest - then collected, post fledglings, to make soup – a delicacy and export for this region.

The Iconic Hotel in Saigon had a rooftop deck from which we could watch swifts fly. A nice place to relax upon our return.

Richard Craik, field guide co-author with Minh, met us for our final dinner, and we had a good time recounting trip highlights and visiting. We also got to have our books signed - fun! Joelle was sweet to treat us all to wine in celebration of reaching the 7000th species on our trip – the Racket-tailed Treepie, one of so many special birds encountered on this grand excursion. How special that was!

Thurs., April 10: Departures

Our most congenial flock dispersed today with flights leaving at varied times. Four of the group, Peg, Bob, Barbara and Tom, had signed on for the cultural extension on the Mekong River.



Mekong Delta River Cruise Post-tour Extension

April 10 and 11:

The day started leisurely with our driver picking us up at the hotel at 9am to avoid Saigon traffic. He whisked us away for a one-night cruise with a river boat company and returned afterwards to pick us up, giving us a city tour upon return to Saigon. The boat was comfortable, the food was wonderful, and the rooftop was great for watching the scenes go by, despite the challenge of stairs to reach the top level. This was a peopled landscape we floated through, so although not many birds were seen, we kept binoculars at the ready. We enjoyed one restful stop along the river and, while some of the other passengers debarked to explore a village, the four of us stayed on board to spend the time chatting, birding, and relaxing after our grand adventure.

Continuing on, we admired several bridges and a local market where vendors advertised their wares on boats and customers selected vegetables, meats and more.

Upon return, we enjoyed a city tour of Saigon, seeing a lot of iconic buildings and the official museum of the Vietnam war – sobering, but important to see. We saw the building near the U.S. embassy that soldiers had climbed up cables to be evacuated. It was very striking to be here in April of 2025, when flags and banners all announced the April 30th 50-year anniversary of North Vietnam winning the war and the reunification of today's Vietnam began.

What a fabulous journey!

Photos: Group (Peg Abbott - PA), Necklaced Barbet (PA), Red Junglefowl (Mike Stake - MS), Yellow-cheeked Gibbon (PA), City scenic (PA), Lunch! (PA), Cuc Phuong National Park (PA), Butterfly (MS), Yellow Bittern (PA), Janice and Steve (PA), Barbara and Tom (PA), Verditer Flycatcher (PA), Asian Openbill ((Bob Meinke – BM), Vietnamese Greenfinch BM), Green-tailed Sunbird (PA), Dalat (MS), Group birding (PA), Market photos (PA), Collared Laughing Thrush (PA), Vietnamese Cutia (PA), Mrs. Gould's Sunbird (PA), Blue-bearded Bee-eater (BM), Gray-crowned Crocias (PA), Garden Scenic (MS), Scaly-breasted Munia (PA), Jerdon's Baza (PA), Black-throated Tit (PA), Spot-legged Tree Frog (quetzal), Asian Emerald Dove (quetzal), Banded Broadbill (PA), Germain's Peacock-Pheasant (MS), Cat Tien Sunrise (MS), Black-crested Bulbul (BM), Black-and-red Broadbill (Quetzal), Racket-tailed Treepie (quetzal), Blue-rumped Pitta (quetzal), Siberian Blue Robin (quetzal), White-cheeked Gibbon (PA), Yellow-cheeked Gibbon (PA), Bar-bellied Pitta (PA), Racket-tailed Drongo (PA), Group (PA), Ho Chi Minh (MS)