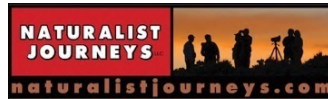


Thailand Birding & Nature | Feb. 18 – Mar. 8, 2025

Trip Report by Carlos Sanchez



**With guides Nick Upton, Carlos Sanchez and 10 participants:
Mason, Jordan, Adrienne, Peter, Cassie, Peter, Jill, Claudia, Darren, Erica**



Tues., Feb. 18 - Wed., Feb. 19 Mae Taeng Irrigation Project | Doi Lang (W)

The journey begins! We enjoyed a sumptuous dinner together near the beautiful Buri Striping Resort on our first evening, with explanations on activities and travels over the following several days.

We started to make our way eastward towards Doi Lang (West) in the early morning, having a continental-style breakfast out in the field with freshly baked pain au chocolat, fruit, coffee, and tea. Our first stop was the Mae Taeng Irrigation Project, the group got an excellent introduction to the wide variety of birds that inhabit rice fields and agricultural areas of Thailand such as Greater Coucal, Red-wattled Lapwing, and Asian Green Bee-eater. We also had great views of some of the less common species such as Lesser Coucal, Small Pratincole, Black-faced Bunting, and Long-billed Plover – most of these we would not see again on the tour. Afterwards, we headed to Tangerine Villa where we checked in for the next five nights before making our first visit to the famous Doi Lang (West) birding site in the mountains. Here, right within view of Myanmar, the montane forest yielded views of several charismatic species such as Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Rufous-bellied Niltava, Hume's Treecreeper, and Black-backed Sibia. On the way down, we stopped at a town where we had a couple Crested Treeswift sitting on the wires.



Thurs., Feb. 20 Doi Ang Khang

We spent the day birding Doi Ang Khang today. This mountain is part of the Daen Lao Range that straddles the border between Myanmar and Thailand, and we would see Myanmar several times during our exploration of this area. Biogeographically, it is an extension of the Himalayas. Much like the Andes of South America, these mountains and foothills are home to some of the most diverse assemblages of birds in the world – bulbuls, babblers, laughingthrushes, nuthatches, sunbirds, and more. We started our exploration of this mountain in the early morning hours at a campsite, where the cool mountain air was quite refreshing compared to the lowland agricultural areas. Spot-winged Grosbeak, Silver-eared Mesia, Olive-backed Pipit, and White-browed Shrike-Babbler all showed well on our walk. Afterwards, we visited the agricultural research station ('king's project') which provided us with some opportunities to enjoy the beautiful gardens. A blooming Australian bottlebrush tree was full of sunbirds and a few white-eyes, and we got excellent studies of Mrs. Gould's Sunbird. Blooming red *Erythrina* sp. attracted Blue-throated Barbet, Gray-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, and Black-backed Sibia.

We then headed to a rustic Buddhist temple which puts out rice for the birds. Here, we saw three species of migratory thrush (Black-breasted, Gray-sided, Eye-browed), Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush, and Daurian Redstart. The rock-thrush and redstart were especially beautiful, and we would not see them again on this tour. After lunch at Chinese village, we visited the Thai-Myanmar border where some got to purchase some lovely local textiles. We also got to see a few Burmese Shrike and the scarce Black-headed Greenfinch.

Fri., Feb. 21 – Sun., Feb. 23 Doi Lang and Mae Fang | Tha Ton Rice Paddies

The following morning, we headed up Doi Lang (W) pre-dawn to try for Mrs. Hume's Pheasant. After what seemed like a long wait, we were successful in seeing both male and female birds feeding on corn on the roadside. Asian pheasants are always such a special treat to see due to their elusive nature and brilliant colors. The following morning, we went up Doi Lang (E) with hired 4-wheel drive vehicles. This was a special treat, as our tours have not been able to access this area since 2019. Some of the jewels we got to enjoy during our time here include Black-eared Shrike-Babbler, Whiskered Yuhina, Aberrant Bush Warbler, and Chestnut-headed Tesia. We had not seen all of these on our Thailand tours since 2019! We enjoyed lunch in the field, before heading downslope. We explored along the river that runs through Tha Ton in the early afternoon, observing Temminck's Stint, Asian Green Bee-eater, Pacific Golden-Plover, and close views of Small Pratincole.

The following morning, we went up Doi Lang (W) for a full day of birding. We made it all the way to the end of the road in the early morning, where we managed to observe some staked out Scarlet Finch (like a Scarlet Tanager in



a finch's body). There was a lot of bird activity along the road that day, and we steadily picked up the following species in mixed feeding flocks or otherwise: Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Mountain Imperial-Pigeon, Scarlet Minivet, Crested Finchbill, White-spectacled Warbler, Himalayan Cutia, and Giant Nuthatch. We had some nice afternoon birding in the Mae Ai rice paddies, where we saw Bluethroat, Striated Grassbird, and the critically endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting.

Mon., Feb. 24 Fang Hot Springs to Inthanon Touchstar Resort

We visited Fang Hot Springs in the early morning hours, putting us at a good time to enjoy the park before the heat and crowds of tourists. Although the hot springs themselves are naturally heated by geologic forces deep underneath the ground, the geysers are a human-made attraction. It also offers some easygoing birding with some highly localized species. As we walked around the grounds, our careful watch on the various flowering coral trees rewarded us with sightings of Asian Barred Owlet, Great Barbet, and Pin-tailed Green Pigeon. We watched a close flock of Chestnut-tailed Starling in a small flowering tree, and Nick managed to spot a Daurian Starling amongst the crowd. A pair of Black Baza also gave us amazing views – a very striking raptor! Several *Dendrobium* orchids were in full bloom in the trees, with their lovely cascading pink blooms. Afterwards, we headed to Doi Inthanon's Touchstar Resort where we settled in for the next few nights.

Tues., Feb. 25 – Fri., Feb. 28 Doi Inthanon National Park

At about 8,400 feet, Doi Inthanon is the highest mountain in Thailand and part of a mountain system called the Shan Hills. Lush tropical montane forests blanket the upper slopes of this mountain, turning into a more temperate forest near the top complete with a small bog. On our first morning here, we visited the Mae Ouam trail (more a dirt road) where we saw Hodgson's Frogmouth and Green Cochoa. Afterwards, we took some time at a feeding station where we observed several normally shy species such as Pygmy Cupwing, Himalayan Shortwing, and Slaty-bellied Tesia. Around lunch time, Slaty-backed Forktail offered nice views in a nearby mountain stream. We also saw a pair of Velvet-fronted Nuthatches locked in combat land on the floor in front of us! In the afternoon, we headed up to the top of the mountain where it was noticeably cooler. Our first walk around the Ang Ka Summit Trail yielded Yellow-browed Tit, Green-tailed Sunbird, Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker, and a female Himalayan Bluetail.

We would pay another visit to the Ang Ka Summit Trail the following morning. Epiphytic orchids of two species, as well as rhododendrons, were in full bloom much to the delight of the resident Green-tailed Sunbird. We also caught up with Snowy-browed Flycatcher and Rufous-throated Partridge in the dim understory, as well as both Speckled and Ashy Wood-Pigeon in the tree canopy. In the afternoon, we enjoyed some easy birding at a hide



where Asian Emerald Dove, Puff-throated Bulbul, Gray-throated Babbler, Siberian Blue Robin, and Streaked Spiderhunter all dazzled us. We ended this very active day at a bridge in the lower elevations of the park, where we had distant views of Collared Falconet in the dry dipterocarp forest. The following morning, we visited many of the same sites again, adding Rosy Minivet, Indian White-eye, and Golden Babbler. The Doi Noi Scrublands at the base of the national park had several Savanna Nightjar, Eurasian Wryneck, Yellow-eyed Babbler, and Richard's Pipit.

On our last morning before our domestic flight, we visited the Parakeet Conservation Area where we got to learn about the plight of the Blossom-headed Parakeet. We saw several parakeets in the surrounding forest from the miniature tower, as well as Green Peafowl, Red-billed Blue-Magpie, Brown-throated Sunbird, and Plain Flowerpecker. The flight to Bangkok was smooth and uneventful, and we had a relaxed night in the big city.

Sat., Mar. 1 – Mon., Feb. 3

Pak Thale | Nong Pla Lai

The following morning, we drove in the predawn hours to Pak Thale on the shores of the Gulf of Thailand. This large, open area of mudflats, salt pans, and mangrove patches provides habitat for thousands upon thousands of wintering shorebirds and waders migrating down from East Asia. We tallied nearly thirty different species of shorebird in a morning's birding on these salt pans, including Nordmann's Greenshank and Asian Dowitcher. Spoon-billed Sandpiper, a big target and highlight for any visiting birder to the area, showed well in the scope for the entire group. We saw hundreds of large waders, including the rare and local Chinese Egret. After a nice cool off at lunch with some cold lemongrass lemonade, we took an easy afternoon boat ride to the Laem Phak Bia sandspit with Mr. Daeng in order to see Malaysian and White-faced Plover. A couple dark morph Pacific Reef-Heron also made a showing. We finished the day at some nearby salt pans where there were over a hundred stately Pied Avocet.

The following day, we continued our exploration of these hot lowlands at the Nong Pla Lai rice paddies. Right by the road in the early morning, we saw Pink-necked Pigeon and Blue-tailed Bee-eater on the wires, while Yellow Bittern and Javan Pond-Heron lurked in the taller wetland vegetation. A striking Pied Harrier patrolled over the rice paddies. Nearby, the Bang Tabun Lake featured a decent selection of wintering waterfowl, including Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, and Eurasian Wigeon. Spot-billed Pelican, Black-headed Ibis, and Golden-bellied Gerygone were also present.

By the early afternoon, we checked in at our lodge near Kaeng Krachan National Park and enjoyed some easygoing birding along the stream crossing area, where we saw White-fronted Scops-Owl and Brown Boobook on day roots. A Blue Pitta made a brief but stunning appearance crossing the road.



Tues., Mar. 4 – Fri., Mar. 7

Kaeng Krachan National Park

Kaeng Krachan National Park, straddling the border with Myanmar, is the largest national park in Thailand and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since July 2021. Over the next three days, we explored this magnificent park along the main park road from the park entrance, to the campground, and through the famous stream crossing area. Birding in the early mornings is a must, and early starts rewarded us with views of Great Slaty Woodpecker, Greater Yellownape, Great Hornbill, Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon, Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl, Chestnut-breasted Malkoha, Black Baza, Orange-breasted Trogon, Green-eared Barbet, and many more. While coming down from the upper part of the park one afternoon, an Asiatic Leopard crossed the road in front of one of the vehicles. Wow!

Broadbills are also often a major highlight for most birders, as they almost look like they are made of plastic – almost unreal! We did well with them, seeing Banded, Black-and-yellow, Silver-breasted, Black-and-red, and Long-tailed. One afternoon, we took it easy by sitting quietly at a hide where we observed Gray Peacock-Pheasant, Kalij Pheasant, Ferruginous Partridge, and both Indochinese Blue and Hainan Blue Flycatcher. There was also a decent selection of mammals, including Northern Treeshrew and Lesser Mouse Deer.

Sat., Mar. 8

Drive back to Bangkok

Today was mostly a transfer day, as we made our way out of the Kaeng Krachan area (not before getting one final bird, a Banded Kingfisher spotted by Cassie!) and back across the Nong Pla Lai rice paddies. Along the way, we made a couple successful stops for Indian Thick-knee and Cotton Pygmy-Goose. We arrived in the late afternoon in Bangkok, where the group enjoyed dinner together one last time before heading home the following day full of memories from an outstanding trip. Great Hornbill and Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl featured very highly on most people's trip lists.

Photos: Black-Backed Sibia (Erica Suppa - ES), Green Tailed Sunbird (ES), White-Throated Kingfisher (Jordan Roderick - JR), Painted Stork (JR), Blue-winged Minla (Peter Day - PD), Mrs. Gould's Sunbird (JR), Mrs. Hume's Pheasant (JR), Elephant statues (Carlos Sanchez - CS), Puff-throated Bulbul (PD), Streaked Spider-Hunter (JR), Rufous-bellied Niltava (PD), Long-Tailed Broadbill (JR), Golden-fronted Leafbird (PD), Greater Yellownap (JR), Bar-backed Partridge (PD), Racket-tailed Treepie (PD), Oriental Pied Hornbill (PD), Dusky Leaf Monkey (ES), Black Giant Squirrel (ES), Chestnut Breasted Malkoha (ES), Mrs. Gould's Sunbird (ES), Gray Peacock Pheasant (ES)