

Cambodia

December 24 -29, 2012.

By Bengt Legnell



Four White-shouldered Ibises early in the morning, Tmatboy

I had arrived a few days ahead of the rest, in order to make sure everything was in place. When it was time to pick up Patrik, wife Claire and Stig-Uno at the airport, the flight from Saigon was a few hours delayed, as usual. (unfortunately, another 2 persons had to cancel the trip just before "take-off". I sincerely pray that you are back on your feet Lars L)

There was still enough left of the day for a quick visit to Ankor Wat, only a short distance from the airport and the city. We managed to see a few of the wintering **Hainan Blue Flycatchers** in the forest surrounding the temple. The colonies of **Hill Mynas**, **Alexandrine & Red-breasted Parakeets** occupying some of the ancient trees in some of the temple compounds bade us a noisy welcome. It felt good to be back in Cambodia again! This was my fourth visit here, in as many years.



Sunrise over Tonle Sap, the biggest lake in South-East Asia.

Early the following morning we drove off to the Tonle Sap jetty about ½ hour drive outside the city. There a boat took us across the north-western side of the lake as the sun rose in the east. In the floating village Prek Toal we changed into a small boat that could bring us in to the bird-sanctuary, south of the village. This year the water level was extremely low and we barely made it in.



Everything is floating in Prek Toal, living-quarters, schools, churches, grocery-stores etc. The difference between high and low levels (rainy and dry season) in the lake can differ with up to 20 meters. During rainy season the lake receives about 75% of it's water from Mekong River and expands...during dry season the lake actually drain into Mekong. Huge dam-constructions in the Chinese part of Mekong put the lake at risk.



School-children paddeling to school



The "breakfast-boat", supplying villagers with a small meal

We made it in to one of the small observation-towers that are built in some tree-tops in the sanctuary, like a very simple – and dangerously unstable - tree-platform. From here we could scan the colonies of **Oriental Darter, Spottbilled Pelican, Openbilled Stork, Painted Stork, Lesser Adjutant Stork...**and what we really came here for...**Greater Adjutant Stork**. They stood far away to the south, only identifiable through the scope, but they were there – 5 of them! – Unfortunately we didn't find any Milky Storks this year. It was still too early in the year and they were not in their usual roost. The colonies of Storks seem to be decreasing again, after a few years with increasing numbers - the park-rangers have curbed the egg-collecting by local fishermen. The reason for the decrease is unknown.



Asian Openbilled Storks



Blue-tailed Bee-eater

The bird-sanctuary south of Prek Toal village is only a small part of the hard to access shore-line of this vast lake. There still are many "white" unsurveyed spots here. There are rumours of nesting Masked Finfoot deeper inside, where there are more trees. Saurus Cranes spend a few month around the lake during dry season...and only God knows what else can be found here.



Spotbilled Pelican



Peregrin Falcon



More Intermediate than Great here



Over-view of one of the stork-colonies.

We had an early start the next day. First a full morning in the grasslands towards Kampong Thom. The local village had been out scouting for a few days prior to our arrival and on motorbikes they escorted our caravan of two Toyota Landcruisers over the grassy plains at the north-eastern shores of Tonle Sap. After searching by foot for a while, the first **Bengal Florican** was spotted, a male. Soon another 3 were seen. A group of 7 **Saurus Cranes** flew by. The first group for the year to leave the huge forests in the north-west to find food here during the dry season. A **Greater Spotted Eagle** and 2 **Lesser Adjutants** were soaring in the sky in the distance. **Red-breasted Pipits** could be seen in numbers. Stig-Uno flushed a **Bluethroat**. When we had to leave after about 2 hours, we felt we barely had scraped the surface of this area. We saw birds in every bush – ha!

But we had to move on, so we could reach our next destination, Prey Veng, before dark...and we should not regret that decision...

I had never visited Prey Veng on my earlier visits to Cambodia and this was actually the first birding-group to visit. The area had been surveyed since 2002 and it was known to have a population of White-winged Duck as well as Giant Ibis. So, this was an exciting visit...!

After lunch at Beng Male, a huge Ancorian temple-complex, we set off for the 4 hour drive.



Male Bengal Florican flying over grasslands that soon may be gone due to agricultural landspeculation

Bengal Florican is a critically Endangered Bird. The population in Nepal – 28-36 individuals - and North-East India is small and decreasing. The biggest population is around Tonle Sap – 666-1004 individuals and was until recently increasing due to protection. The survey last year indicated a decrease here also. The breeding-grounds closer to the lake are protected, but when these areas are flooded during rainy season they move to areas that now are prospected for acricultural use...or landgrabbing by speculators...!

Photo (right) Christer Sundsröm



When we got closer to Prey Veng the road disappeared and the last 15-20 km's we drove on narrow ox-cart trails or deep, dry river-beds, only a few centimeters wider than our veichels. The branches and bushes sticking out took a heavy toll on the car-paint. Often the cars are covered with a thick plastic sheet, fastened with heavy tape in order to somehow spare the paint. And even if the car-speed on these trails are the same as an old ox-cart, about 5-10 km/hour..., it surley was a lot more comfortable inside, with gas-filled shocks and aircon! When we entered the target area, a family of 4 **Saurus Cranes** welcomed us, only 10 meters away from the car. We also had **Chinese Francolins** & a group of **Barred Buttonquails** just in front of us on the road. What a welcome. Oh, I forgot to mentioned that we stopped on the way for a short break...and 2 **White-rumped Falcons** happened to sit in a tree just there!



A family of 4 Saurus Cranes wishing us welcome.



A female White-rumped Pigmy Falcon.

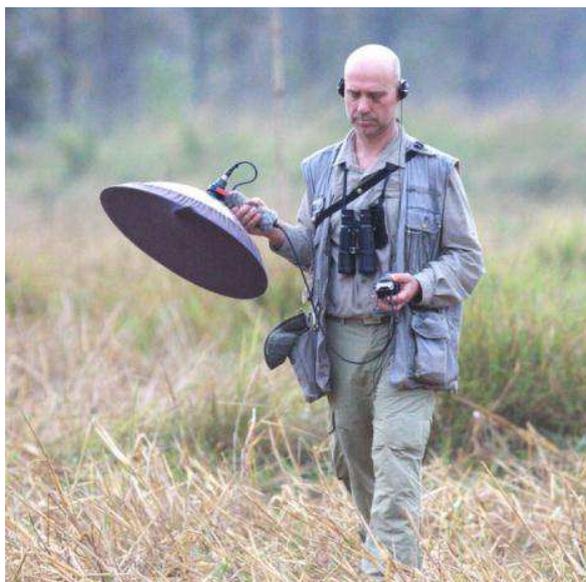
We then arrived at our camp, the two tents already put up by people from the nearby village. There was even a toilet tent and a shower tent! Solar cells gave us light during dinner and evening bird-logging. Small camping-beds in the tents gave extra comfort.

We had little time to indulge in all this, however...the main reason for our visit was waiting...and we needed to get there before dark...! So, into the cars again...and away on narrow trails & dry riverbeds...!

The goal was a marsh where **White-winged Duck** had a night roost. We placed ourselves in a small hide made of cut bamboo and waited...and waited. Darkness came and we were about to give up when we suddenly heard the characteristic sound of the duck when it approach the roost. It settled in a tree right above our heads...and then it was quiet! All over...one of the strangest bird-observations in my life! It later proved the duck was very hard to get. Villagers from surrounding area had moved in to collect reeds for roofing in the mashes...and all of them brought these small, very efficient hunting-dogs with them...a team (Christer Sundström) who went there a month later did not see them at all...so these Ducks are not easy to get here...!



The following morning we set out to try to find the night-roost of **Giant Ibis**. After having searched a few potential spots together with a local villager, we found 3 of these ancient giants, sitting in a tree. For the first time I got to hear their absolutely incredible praise to the morning sun! For a few minutes they heralded the coming of a new day (not even Craig Robson seemed to manage to describe their song to the sun in his book!) with a loud call that could be heard far away. Patrik recorded their song...I managed to make a noicy move when the Ibises reached their crescendo...and almost lost my head – sorry Patrik, hope you can forgive me? We got to share this magic movement together after all!...I still really want a recording of this from you! –



Patrik with “big Ear”. Our guide was in awe when he secretly listened to the conversation of our drivers more than 50 meters away. –ha!



The majestic praise to a new day, as the sun rose up. An unforgettable moment! There were 3 Giant Ibises at this night-roost.



Rufous Woodpecker



Stripe-breasted Woodpecker



Black-headed Woodpecker

There were lots of Woodpeckers in the forest...a promising sign, indicating a fairly healthy

forest. We saw **Grey-capped (4), Stripe-breasted (1), Rufous (2), White-bellied (3), Black-headed (7), Common Flameback (6), Great Flameback (5) & Great Slaty Woodpecker (at least 3)** during our 2-day visit to Prey Veng.



The Black-necked Stork is dwarfing the Crested Serpent-Eagle in the background.

Our camp in Prey Veng proved to be a good spot for birds. 2 **Black-Necked Storks** flew over and settled beside the pond behind our tents. Later Christer Sundström had 3 Giant Ibises at the edge of the camp. White-winged Ducks are seen in the pond. We heard **Brown Fish-Owl** here.





2 (of 3) Giant Ibises flying over the camp

Photo: Christer Sundström

I would definitely recommend anyone visiting Tmatbouy, to also visit Prey Veng...Exciting place!



White-bellied Woodpecker, Prey Veng



Lesser Adjutant, Prey Veng

After the visit to Prey Veng, we started the 3-4 hour long drive to Tmatboey in the northern part of Preah Vihear province, not very far from the Thai border.

As we drove, I could not help to compare these two areas, Prey Veng & Tmatboey, with similar Biotops; rich deciduous forest, in other parts of South East Asia (the few places there is any such forest left) The forest Storks, the Ibises, Woodpeckers & Parakeets are common here. In neighbouring countries, they are extinct! This truly is a unique environment.

When we got closer to our destination our guide brought us to the nesting-site of a **White-shouldered Ibis**, just by the way-side. As we stood on the road, watching the Ibis, that obviously layed on eggs, we heard a roaring thunder coming closer – a forest-fire was approaching the nesting-tree – Just as the fire reached the tree, the Ibis left through the smoke. It all ended well, the bird later returned . The nest is just above the green tree-branch sticking up on the right-hand side.



It felt good to be back in Tmatboey again. This camp is more “luxureous” than Pray Veng. It is a lodge with about 6 twin-bed rooms. Fans and hot water in each. There also is a comfy dining area...all powered by solar power...

After packing up, we set off to try to see one of the Wood-Owls in the area...we got both **Brown & Spotted Wood-Owl** after a bit of work during the visit here...

Just before dawn we went to one of the night-roosts frequented by some of the aprox. 30 – 40 **White-shouldered Ibises** around the Tmatboey community forest, a number that steadily has increased since the Eco-tourism community program was initiated in the village. (no more Ibis-hunting) The village now has a new school and well that provide fresh water to all households, financed by this project.

It is a bit of magic, to see these special Ibises carefully approaching the roosting tree; one by one, or in small groups. Only 10 came this evening. Sometimes there are 15-20.



White-shouldered Ibis at their night-roost



There were more sightings of Ibises this year.

Other good birds we saw here were **Grey-headed Fish-Eagle, Changeable Hawk-Eagle,**

Collared Falconet, Violet Cuckoo, Brown Fish-Owl, Brown Hawk-Owl (Brown Boobook), Great-eared, Large-tailed & Savanna Nightjar & Stork-billed Kingfisher, to mention a few...



Even though the Ibis in the area are protected, the forest is not! Logging is an increasing problem here...and it is the old, tall trees that goes down...the very trees Ibises & Storks need as nesting trees. The village in Tmatboey has no say in this. Local influential police & military officials decide on the logging! It is general election this summer and it seems everyone want to harvest "while the sun is shining"! This sight met us often in the forest. So sad and shortsighted.

Please feel free to contact me if you want more information about these areas, or if you like to visit. I plan to organize at least two trips here next winter and maybe you can come along...

Contact; Bengt Legnell, kontakt@orientbirding.com

Birdlist.

Ducks & Grebes.

Lesser Wisteling Teal.....about 200 in Prey Veng

White-winged Duck.....One in Prey Veng.

Indian Spot-billed Duck.....3 in Prek Toal, 20 in Prey Veng.

Little Grebe.....3 in Prek Toal

Partridges, Quails & Pheasants.

Chinese Francolin.....Seen and/or heard daily in Prey Veng & Tmatboey.

Red Junglefowl.....Heard in Prey Veng & Tmatboey

Green Peafowl.....Heard in Prey Veng.

Storks.

Asian Openbill.....about 500 in Prek Toal, a few at Kampong Thom.
Wolly-necked Stork.....2 at Prey Veng, about 15 in Tmatboey.
11Black-necked Stork.....2 at Prey Veng
Lesser Adjutant.....about 10 in Prek Toal, 4 in Prey Veng & 2 in Tmatboey
Greater Adjutant.....5 in Prek Toal
Painted Stork.....about 150 in Prek Toal, 20 in Kampong Thom.

Cormorants.

Indian Cormorant.....common in Prek Toal, a few in Kampong Thum
Great Cormorant.....**about 30 in Prek Toal.**
Little Cormorant.....a few in Prek Toal, 3 in Prey Veng.
Oriental Darter.....common in Prek Toal, about 10 in Prey Veng.

Pelicans, Herons & Ibises.

Spot-billed Pelican.....30-40 in Prek Toal, 2 in Kampong Thom.
Grey Heron.....5 in Prek Toal, 3 in Kambong Thom.
Purple Heron.....10 in Prek Toal, common in Kampong Thom.
Great Egret.....5 in Prek Toal, 5 in Kampong Thom.
Intermediate Egret.....common in Prek Toal & Kampong Thom.
Little Egret.....common everywhere (no record in Prek Toal?)
Cattle Egret.....only recorded in Tmatboey. Overlooked??
Chinese Pond Heron.....We assume at least some must have been these. Common.
Striated Heron.....2 in Prek Toal.
Black-crowned Night-Heron.....1 juv. in Prek Toal.
Black-headed Ibis.....20 in Prek Toal.
White-shouldered Ibis.....about 20 (difficult to tell) in Tmatboey.
Giant Ibis.....3 in Prey Veng & 3 in Tmatboey.

Cranes, Bustards, Crakes, Waders etc.

Saurus Crane.....8 in Kampong Thom, 4 in Prey Veng
Bengal Florican.....3 in Kampong Thom. (2 males, 1 female)
White-breasted Waterhen.....1 in Prek Toal
Euro-asian Moorhen.....1 in Prek Toal
Red-wattled Lapwing.....a few in Prey Veng, fairly common in Tmatboey
Bronzed-winged Jacana.....4 in Prey Veng
Wood Sandpiper.....1 in Kampong Thom.
Common Snipe.....2 in Kampong Thom
Painted Snipe.....1 male in Kampong Thom

Raptors.

Osprey.....1 in Prey Veng.
Black Baza.....1 in Tmatboey
Oriental Honey Buzzard.....1 in Prey Veng.
Brahminy Kite.....3 in Prek Toal

Grey-headed Fish-Eagle.....1 in Prek Toal, 2 in Prey Veng, 1 in Tmatboey.
Short-toed Eagle.....1 in Tmatboey
Crested Serpant-Eagle.....5-10 in Prey Veng, about the same in Tmatboey
Eastern March-Harrier.....3 in Kampong Thom.
Shikra.....a few in Prey Veng, 2-3 in Tmatboey.
Rufous-winged Buzzard.....about 5 in Prey Veng, maybe twice that in Tmatboey.
Greater Spotted Eagle.....1 in Kampong Thom.
Changeable Hawk-Eagle.....1-2 in Tmatboey
White-rumped Falcon.....3 on the way to Prey Veng, 2 on the way from Tmatboey.
Collared Falconet.....1 in Prey Veng.
Peregrine Falcon.....1 male in Prek Toal

Terns.

Whiskered Tern.....Common in Prek Toal

Doves & Pigeons

Rock Pigeon.....common in Siem Reap.
Pale-capped Pigeon.....a few heard in Tmatboey
Red-collared Dove.....common in Tmatboey.
Spotted Dove.....common throughout.
Zebra Dove.....a few seen in Siem reap, as well as Prey Veng & Tmatboey
Thick-billed Pigeon.....4 in Tmatboey
Yellow-footed Pigeon.....5 in Prey Veng, common in Tmatboey
Green Imperial Pigeon.....Common in Tmatboey

Parrots & Parakeets.

Alexandrine Parakeet.....5 in Ankor, about 10 in Prey Veng and at least 2 In Tmatboey
Blossom-headed Parakeet.....at least 10 in Prey Veng
Red-breasted Parakeet.....10 in Ankor, 100's in Prey Veng & Tmatboey.
Verneal Hanging Parrot.....10 in Tmatboey

Cuckoos.

Banded Bay Cuckoo.....heard and seen in Prey Veng & Tmatboey
Violet Cuckoo.....4 in Tmatboey
Asian Koel.....A few herd in most locations.
Green-billed Malkoha.....1 seen in Ankor and Prek Toal.
Greater Coucal.....Common throughout.
Lesser Coucal.....1 seen in Ankor.

Owls.

Brown Fish-Owl.....1 in Prey Veng, 1 in Tmatboey
Asian barred Owlet.....a few herd daily in allmost all locations
Spotted Wood-Owl......1 heard in Tmatboey
Brown Wood-Owl.....1 heard in Prey Veng, 1 seen in Tmatboey.
Brown Hawk-Owl.....heard in Prey Veng and Tmatboey

Nightjars.

Great Eared Nightjar.....Heard in Prey Veng

Large-tailed Nightjar.....Heard in Prey Veng, Seen in Tmatboey
Savanna Nightjar.....1 seen in Tmatboey.

Swifts.

Germain's Swiftlet.....common, seen at all locations
Pacific Swift (Forktailed).....2 in Kampong Thom.
Asian Palm Swift.....common throughout.
Crested Tree-Swift.....about 10-20 daily in Prey Veng & Tmatboey

Kingfishers, Bee-eaters, Rollers & Hoopoes.

Common Kingfisher..... 1 in Ankor, a few in Prey Veng
Stork-billed Kingfisher..... 1 in Prek Toal, heard in Prey Veng & Tmatboey
White-troated Kingfisher..... 1 in Prek Toal, also Prey Veng & Tmatboey.
Black-capped Kingfisher.....2 in Kampong Thom, also Tmatboey.
Pied Kingfisher.....2 in Kampong Thom.
Green Bee-eater.....common in Prey Veng & Tmatboey.
Blue-tailed Bee-eater.....about 30 in Prek Toal, 10 in Kampong Thom.
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater..1 in Tmatboey
Indian Roller.....common in most locations.
Dollarbird.....1 in Prey Veng.
Hoopoe.....seen along the way & Prey Veng/Tmatboey about 10 total.

Hornbills & Barbets.

Oriental Pied Hornbill.....a few seen/heard daily in Tmatboey.
Lineated Barbet.....10-20 in fruiting tree, Tmatboey
Green-eared barbet.....some daily.
Blue-eared barbet.....a few in fruiting tree, Tmatboey.
Coppersmith Barbet.....a few in fruiting trees, Tmatboey.

Woodpeckers.

Grey-capped Woodpecker....4 in Prey Veng, about 7-8 in Tmatboey
Stripe-breasted Woodpecker.1 in Prey Veng
Rufous Woodpecker.....2 in Prey Veng
White-bellied Woodpecker....heard in Prey Veng, 2 seen in Tmatboey.
Common Flameback.....a few in Prey Veng, 5-10 in Tmatboey.
Greater Flameback.....5 in Prey Veng.
Great Slaty Woodpecker.....2 in Prey Veng

Wood-shrikes, Ioras, Cuckoo-shrikes & Minivets.

Common Wood-shrike.....common in Tmatboey.
Common Iora.....a few in Prek Toal & Tmatboey
Large Cuckoo-shrike.....2 in Prey Veng, a few daily in Tmatboey.
Brown-rumped Minivet.....2 in Tmatboey
Ashy Minivet.....2 in Tmatboey
Small Minivet.....2 in Prey Veng, 5-20 daily in Tmatboey.

Shrikes & Flycatcher-shrikes.

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike.4 in Prey Veng.

Brown Shrike.....a few in all locations.

Orioles & Drongos.

Black-naped Oriole.....3 in Tmatboey.

Black-hooded Oriole.....a few in Prey Veng, maybe 10/day in Tmatboey

Hair-crested Drongo (**sprangeled**) a few in Tmatboey.

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo..a few daily in any forested area.

Black Drongo.....a few in Kampong Thom and around Siem Reap

Ashy Drongo.....a few in Prey Veng & Tmatboey

Fantails, Monarcs & Paradise Flycatchers.

White-browed Fantail.....a couple in Tmatboey

Pied Fantail.....1 in Siem Reap

Asian Paradise Flycatcher.....1 in Tmatboey

Monarc.....

Magpies, Tree-pies & Crows.

Blue Magpie.....2-5 seen daily in Tmatboey

Rufous Tree-pie.....5 in Prey Veng, 5-10 daily in Tmatboey

(Northern?) Jungle Crow.....3-10 daily.

Larks.

Australasian Bushlark.....About 5 in Kampong Thom.

Indochinese Bushlark.....3 in Prey Veng 2-5 daily in Tmatboey

Oriental Skylark.....1 singing at Kampong Thom.

Swallows.

Bank (Common Sand) Swallow.about 30-40 each on Tonle Sap & Kampong Thom

Barn Swallow.....common.

Red-rumped Swallow.....5-10 daily in Tmatboey

Striated Swallow.....5 at Prey Veng

Tits & Nuthatches.

Grey Tit (*Parus m. cinereus?*)....1 in Prey Veng

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch.....1 in Tmatboey

Neglected Nuthatch.....2 in Prey Veng

Bulbys.

Black-headed Bulbyl.....1 in Prey Veng

Black-crested Bulbyl.....5 in Tmatboey

Sooty-headed Bulbyl.....10-20 daily

Yellow-vented Bulbyl.....common around Siem Reap

Streak-eared Bulbyl.....common.

Warblers.

Radde's Warbler.....a few in Prey Veng & Tmatboey

Yellow-browed Warbler.....common

Two Barred Warbler.....a few in Tmatboey

Pale-legged Warbler.....4-5 daily in the forest

Davison's Leaf-Warbler.....a few in Prey Veng & Tmatboey

Reed-Warblers etc.

Black-browed Reed-Warbler.....3 in Kampong Thom

Oriental Reed-Warbler.....1 in Kampong Thom

Striated Grassbird.....5-7 in Kampong Thom

Zitting Cisticola.....common in Kampong Thom, a few in Tmatboey

Common Tailorbird.....common around Siem Reap, some in Tmatboey

Dark-necked tailorbird.....common

Brown Prinia.....5 in Prey Veng

Grey-breasted Prinia.....common in Tmatboey

Plain Prinia.....common in Kampong Thom

Babblers.

Abbot's Babbler.....1 in Tmatbiey

Puff-throated babbler.....heard in Prey Veng etc.

White-crested Laughing-Thrush....heard in Prey veng & Tmatboey

Pin-striated Tit-Babbler.....seen/heard daily

Magpie Robins & Shamas.

Oriental Magpie-Robin.....seen/heard most days

White-rumped Shama.....seen/heard most days.

Flycatchers & Robins.

Asian Brown Flycatcher.....a few in Tmatboey

Hainan Blue Flycatcher.....2 in Ankor

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher.....heard in Prey Veng & Tmatboey

Bluethroat.....1 in Kampong Thom

Taiga Flycatcher.....seen daily, common.

Chats.

Eastern Stonechat.....common in Kampong Thom

Pied Chat.....some in Kampong Thom

Grey Chat.....3 in Prey Veng

Mynas & Starlings.

Common Hill Myna.....a few in Tmatboey

White-vented Myna.....common

Common Myna.....common

Vinous-breasted Starling.....30 in Tmatboey

Black-collared Starling.....about 30 in Tmatboey

Asian Pied Starling.....10 in Kampong Thom, a few on the way to Prey Veng.

Leafbirds & Bluebirds.

Blue-winged Leafbird.....2 in Tmatboey

Golden Fronted Leafbird.....about 4 in Tmatboey.

Asian Fairy-Bluebird.....afew in Prey Veng & Tmatboey

Flowerpeckers & Sunbirds.

Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker.....a few in Prey Veng & Tmatboey

Ruby-checked Sunbird.....2 in Tmatboey

Purple-naped Sunbird.....a few in Tmatboey

Purple Sunbird.....the commonest Sunbird in matboey, 5-10/day

Olive-backed Sunbird.....a few in Ankor

Pipits & Wagtails.

(Eastern?) Yellow Wagtail.....10 in Kampong Thom

White Wagtail.....1 in Ankor

Paddyfield Pipit.....5 in Kampong Thom, a few in Tmatboey.

Olive-backed Pipit.....about 20 in Prey Veng, a few in Tmatboey.

Red-throated Pipit.....20-30 in Kampong Thom

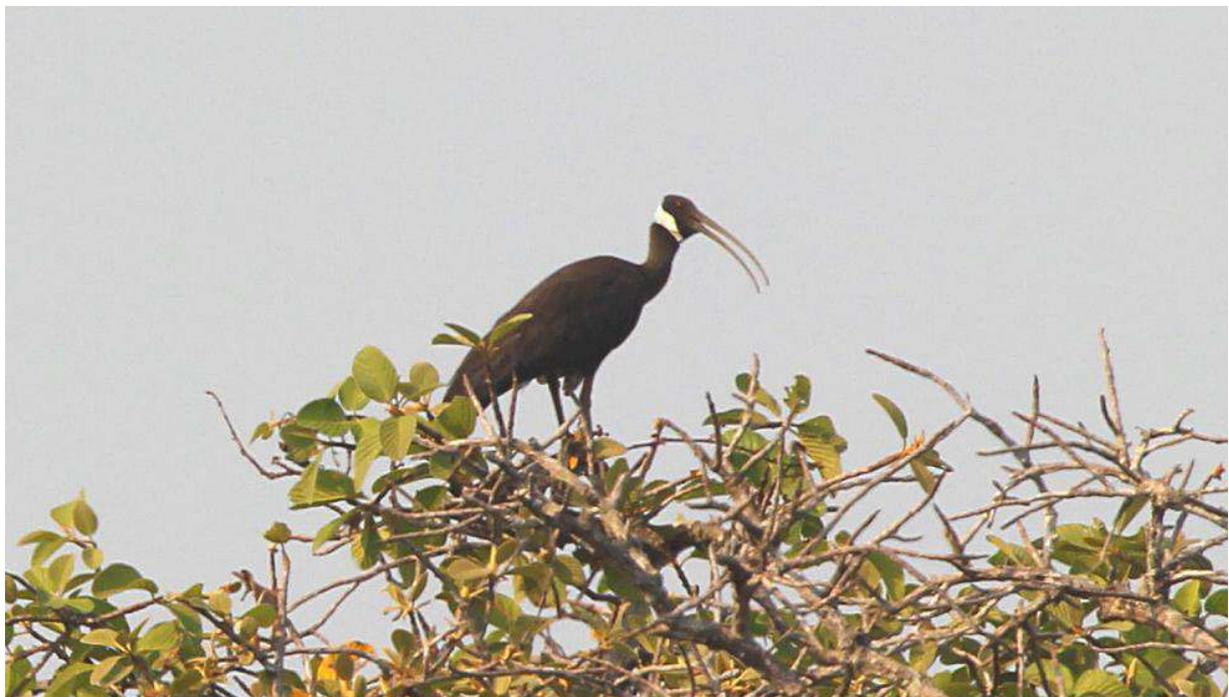
Sparrows, Avadavats & Munias.

Euro-asian Tree-Sparrow.....common

House Sparrow.....a few flocks at airport & Siem reap

Red Avadavat.....5-6 in Kampong Thom

Scaly-breasted Munia.....about 10-15 in Tmatboey.



White-shouldered Ibis

Photo: Christer Sundstöm

