

Central Thailand 27 Feb–6 Mar, 2017

Tour company: Kon-Tiki

Tour leader: Tero Linjama

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Day 1

This was to be my first tour ever with a group of Finns.

Plane arrived a bit late and it wasn't until 11 o'clock that we were able to start driving towards Khao Yai in our two nice Toyota Commuter vans.

Of course there were a few birds seen from the car as we whisked through Bangkok on smooth surfaced highways but it wasn't until we stopped at a temple North of Saraburi that we actually did any birding. The temple holds thousands of Flying Foxes, a type of bats, which was an amazing sight in the middle of the day. A few birds were around as well which included Coppersmith Barbet, Green-billed Malkoha, Purple-throated, Brown-throated and Olive-backed Sunbirds, Pied Fantail and Lineated Barbet.

Everyone were tired so we drove to our comfortable hotel where clothes could be changed and luggage dropped off. A couple of hours of birding in the late afternoon gave a gentle introduction into the birdlife here: White-throated Kingfisher, Ashy Wood Swallow, Plain-backed Sparrow, tons of Red-breasted Parakeets and Asian Brown Flycatcher being some of the more interesting ones.

Right before supper a huge swarm of small bats came out of their cave and we got to watch a spectacle again. Like one guy said: 'In one minute I have seen more bats then I have in my whole life!'

Authentic North-eastern styled food ended our 1st day.

Day 2

At the gate of Khao Yai by 6:30. The look out after the fire station was our first stop. This is a great place to greet the morning. Our plan was to do general birding as many in the group of 10 had never been to SEA before. Of course the birds started to show but the remarkable thing was that we had both Pied and Great Hornbill on our list within minutes. Both species gave great views. Many other things such as Gold-fronted and Blue-winged Leafbirds, Swinhoe's Minivet, Black-winged Cuckoo Shrike, Peregrine Falcon, Black-crested Bulbuls, Green-eared Barbet and Hair-crested Drongos.

Next stop was at a nest of a Great Hornbill where the male was feeding the female for the longest of times. He would regurgitate a fig at a time and sweetly pass it on to the female that was nicely secured by a blocked entrance.

Then off to some open grasslands where we continued with Red-whiskered Bulbul, Vernal Hanging Parrots, Wreathed Hornbills, Hill Mynas and Mountain Imperial Pigeon.

A walk along the nature trail produced a few more common things with Claudia's Warbler and Sulphur-breasted Warbler leading the way. White-crested Laughingthrushes and Abbott's Babbler were also seen.

After lunch we headed to a field where several Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters were feeding and a Moustached Barbet showed. In the air about the field there was a good assortment of arboreal feeders: House Swift, Red-rumped and Barn swallow, Asian House Martin, Asian Palm Swifts and a Cook's Swift.

From there we headed to PaKloayMai campsite. We quickly got on to a fruiting tree that was loaded with birds: Yellow-vented, Thick-billed and Buff-bellied Flowerpeckers, Green-eared Barbet, Grey-eyed and Black-crested Bulbuls, Blue-winged Leafbird, Asian Fairy Bluebird etc.

Late in the afternoon we made our way up to Khao Kaew where we scanned the horizons and checked the immediate vegetation. A very obliging Black-throated Sunbird was a nice treat as was distant views of a Rufous-bellied Eagle and a Blue Rock Thrush. But the best was reserved for last. As we started our way down we quickly got on to 2 male Silver Pheasants crossing the road. Spectacular!

We ended the day's birding with an hour at a lake where we had about 50 Needle tails drinking and bathing. 3 of these were Silver-backed and the rest Brown-backed. Once dusk hit a couple of Great Eared Nightjars entertained us with good views and vocals.

87 species for the day was a good count for Khao Yai forest birding.

Day 3

An early drive straight to the temple North of Saraburi province where the endemic race/species of Limestone Wren Babbler occur. It now has been raised to species level by Birdlife International and been given the name Rufous Limestone Babbler.

We got on to the birds immediately as we pulled in to the temple area. The birds are very active in the early morning and the place is filled with their songs. We ended up seeing 6 birds.

A long drive followed and we arrived at the town of Petchaburi where we had lunch at our hotel of choice.

A boat trip was next on the agenda and so the lifers started coming for most folks.

A couple of Chinese Egrets kept the interest as they were viewed from the boat and other more common stuff was about. Once at the spit we put up our scopes and soon got on to Malaysian Plovers, Great Crested, Common, White-winged, Caspian and Little Tern plus a surprise in the form of a slick Black-naped Tern. Loads of Brown-headed Gulls and one Pallas's Gull in full breeding plumage. What a beauty that is!

Unfortunately there were no signs of White-faced Plovers but then again, it gives reason to come back.

We still had a couple of hours in the afternoon. It so happened that the low tide wasn't all that low so loads of waders were still on the pans.

We started out with a stop that yielded 27 Nordmann's Greenshanks in great light. The birds plumages are now starting to look darker as the breeding period is approaching.

On to Paktaley and in search of Spoon-billed Sandpiper. It took quite some time but finally we got some cracking views of one for at least 15 minutes.

Everyone were very happy but it didn't stop with that. We stopped one more time and scoped a flock of Curlews. There were 3 Far Eastern Curlews in the flock. Hard to see on the deck but easy once in the air.

29 wader species for the relatively short afternoon...

Day 4

We decided to start the day at the King's mangrove project. The place has undergone a number of changes of late and isn't as productive as it used to be but did give us some new species such as: Golden-bellied Gerygone, Common and Pin-tailed Snipe, Dusky and Black-browed Reed Warbler, Indian Shag and Eastern Yellow Wagtail.

We then ventured on to the garbage dump nearby where Rosy and Brahmy Starlings had been reported. It didn't take long to get the Rosy and we decided that was good enough.

A bit deeper inside of this area there were good numbers of waders. Our main target, Asian Dowitcher, didn't let us down with 17 individuals seen.

A change of place and we found ourselves viewing a dozen of Oriental Pratincoles with Oriental Skylarks singing in the air. All good!

Finally off to Pakhtaley and some good reviews of yesterday's waders. Even at 12 o'clock and we still managed to get on to 3 Spoon-billed Sandpipers... Joy!

Lunch at the beach and of course a full spread of fresh sea food.

A couple of hours drive and we arrived at Baan Maka, near Kaengkrachan. The last couple of hours was spent in the vicinity of the park and gave us a few new but common birds.

Again, another sumptuous Thai meal. Not sure why but the Nordic people seem to take to the Thai food better than anyone else..... (let alone the beers)

Day 5.

No matter how good birding can be there is no way of escaping that the tropical forest is where the heart of birding in Thailand lies. Thus it was with excitement and expectancy the group entered the lush forest of Kaengkrachan National Park.

With such a large group of people I find it most productive to use open areas where people can view things at easy, use their scopes and 'drift off' if the urge is such.

We enjoyed several very spectacular species during the first hour regardless of status. Black-thighed Falconets, Common and Great Flamebacks, Large Wood Shrike, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Blue-winged Leafbird, Black-naped Oriole, Pied Hornbill, Golden-crested Myna, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Dollarbird, Grey-rumped Treeswift, Great Slaty Woodpecker, Sultan's Tit, Great Iora and more.

Later on we moved towards the streams past Bahnkrahng campground. In here the possibilities are always great. Our best birds before lunch were Dusky and Banded Broadbills, Orange-breasted Trogon, Sulphur-breasted and Eastern-crowned Warbler.

Sumptuous lunch at the campground, a bit of leisure time for everyone and then back to the streams. It was rather quiet and we only saw a few common things but in the end we were greatly rewarded with good views of Violet Cuckoo and Rusty-cheeked Brown Hornbills. We also did see Crested Serpent Eagle, Scarlet Minivet and Velvet-fronted Nuthatch while we only heard Bamboo Woodpecker.

On the way out of the park we stopped to try for Black-red Broadbill again but to no avail.

In the end everyone had an amazing day in this tropical lowland forest that is so full of magic.

Day 6

An early start in order to get up to Panern Thung. We hired 2 high clearance vehicles for the occasion. 2 people opted to stay at the resort and its big wooded gardens along with some privacy.

A stop for Black-red Broadbill didn't produce anything but another stop to get eyes on a loud Green Magpie proved successful.

We spend the better part of the morning taking in the scenery and meeting our avian friends on higher levels. Great Barbet was the first one to not only loudly greet us but also show himself. In rapid succession we had Blue-throated Barbet, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, Golden Babbler, Flavescent Bulbul and White-browed Shrike Babbler added to the list.

A surprise was a Chestnut-winged Cuckoo that flew across the road.

A few of this and that which included Streaked Spiderhunter, Claudia's Warbler, 2 bar Green Warbler, and Hill Blue Flycatcher.

Lunch at the top and then down to bird along the road around km 27.

We worked the area until 4 pm and had some interesting observations with Alstrom's Warbler, Sulphur-breasted Warbler, Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Speckled Piculet, Silver-breasted Broadbill, Red-headed Trogon and Long-tailed Broadbill, the latter coming in as we were just about to head down the hill. A Rusty-naped Pitta unexpectedly called for a bit which was a treat.

Day 7

Time to change modus operandi again and this time we parked ourselves in Lung Sin waterhole/hide for the day.

It turned out to be a solid day with 21 species seen. Most noteworthy: Large and White-browed Scimitar Babbler, Emerald Dove, Kalij Pheasant, Scaly-breasted Partridges, Racket Treepie, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Tickell's Blue and Chinese Blue Flycatcher. 8 hours in the hide is long though but everyone seemed to enjoy it.

Sitting in a hide for so long can be taxing but the great views at close range make up for any discomfort.

Day 8.

Our last day. It was unanimously decided to visit wetlands for some things previously not seen.

The fields of Petchaburi have already started to buzz with nest building Asian Golden and Baya Weavers. We didn't see any Streaked but they are there.

An assortment of birds was added to the bird list: Oriental Reed Warbler, Yellow-bellied Prinia, Plain Prinia, Stejneger's Stonechat, Garganey, Pintails, Black-headed Ibis, Black-eared Kite, Black-shouldered Kite, Greater Spotted Eagle, Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacana, Yellow Bittern, White-browed Crake and Purple Swamphen.

We had a sumptuous and generous seafood meal at a well-known restaurant. I dropped off everyone at their hotel near the airport and it was time for some heartfelt goodbyes.

Around 300 species had been recorded but more than anything, some very classic birds seen: Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Nordmann's Greenshank, Asian Dowitcher,

Chinese Egret, Siamese Fireback, Silver and Khalij Pheasant, Great, Wreathed, Pied and Rusty-cheeked Hornbill, several Broadbills etc. etc. A potpourri of color and sounds!