

Northern Thailand 25th Dec-2nd of Jan 2017

Tour leader and guide: Peter Ericsson

Participants: Steve, Peilin and Sierra Glassman from California

I was very pleased that the Glassmans wanted to do another trip in Thailand after last year's trip in the central parts. See <http://www.pbase.com/peterericsson/centralthailand201526>

Their daughter, Sierra, now 11, is a sharp and keen young girl with an aptitude for learning and just great to be in the field with.

Both parents enjoy seeing natural wonders as well as taking pictures howbeit without the pressure of long lists etc. Sierra however keeps record of sightings and had an amazing memory for all the things we saw or heard throughout the trip. She often taking charge doing the checklist.

The timing of the trip was probably worst possible in terms of encountering crowds on some popular destinations. Still, there was plenty for us to enjoy and that kept our attention.

Both Steve and Peilin enjoy spicy Thai food very much so it was a real pleasure to serve sumptuous meals though in the end the result showed when I stood on the weight scale once back home.

Day 1. Early pick up in Chiang Mai. I had flown up the night before and picked up a large spacious Toyota Commuter van. We drove straight to the summit of Doi Inthanon where most of the 'good birds are'. Well, as you can imagine there were hundreds and hundreds of people doing the same. Finding a parking lot was no small feature.

The mountain is a bit of a Mecca for the Thai people as it is not only scenic and tall but also plays historical role in the Kingdom. Either way, we spent the better part of the morning at the summit though some birds didn't show as usual we did see some real good ones with Green-tailed and Mrs. Gould's Sunbird leading the way in terms of color. Bar-throated Minlas in small busy flocks as well as Buff-barred, Ashy-throated and Blyth's Leaf Warblers kept us entertained. Silver-eared Laughingthrushes were as obvious as usual and Dark-backed Sibilias similarly so.

Some of the more cryptic birds simply didn't show. I think they were intimidated by the cheer volume of people with accompanied noise. The bog never the less gave good views of some things and Rufous-winged Fulvettas did their best to charm keen observers.

We managed to get a table at an eatery by the trail head to Kiew Maephan. The food is so delicious in this cool setting and everyone enjoyed the sticky rice, barbecued chicken and the papaya salad.

Wherever we had a chance we took a little time for 'cultural visits'. The local fresh market run by the hill tribes had a lot of produce for sale. Some locally produced and other things from China.

I picked up some avocados which is becoming more popular here now though not available year around.

We did a little birding here and there and added some more regular things. To my great surprise we were not able to get on to Slaty-bellied Tesias as they were simply not vocalizing. That was a bit of a disappointment for me.

The night was spent at Mr. Doings Homestay since we didn't want to do the long drive down and then back up again the next day.

Day 2. Up early and starting all over at the top again. The hot coffee at the summit is probably the best in the country so we headed for the coffee shop right away.

It was a bit colder this morning and we found some frost that thrilled the hearts of many locals plus Sierra.



Sierra



Sierra and Peter

The main highlight was a striking Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker feeding in a flowering tree. This is a rather rare bird and often difficult to find. So half a minute of show time was good and gave us great opportunity for picture taking.

In the bog we also had great views of Rufous-throated Partridges and brief views of a male White-browed Shortwing but most of the morning was repeats from the day before.

After lunch we descended Doi Inthanon and set our sails towards Doi Chiang Dao about an hour or so North of Chiang Mai city. A total drive of 3 hours. We stopped at some fields along the way where many common lowland birds were present.

Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker



Hume's Treecreeper



Dinner was at a restaurant that had IPAs (craft beer) on the menu. Big surprise and oh so nice!

Day 3. After a night at a rather plush resort we quickly went to the temple area of Doi Chiang Dao. Some nice birds around but generally not as birdy as I had hoped. We did walk all the way up to take in the view from the temple looking down into the gully. There are good numbers of tourists in this area as it is scenic and nestled with picturesque settings. A good place for anyone interested in a few days of chilling out.

We then set out towards Doi Angkhang, choosing the scenic route that gently takes one along a mountain ridge. Best bird along the way was an obliging Rufous-winged Buzzard perched on a pole.

The Commuter is amazingly strong and scaling the hilly terrain was a breeze. Some stops for coffee and roadside birds added to a pleasant journey.

Doi Angkhang is another flagship of Thai mountains. Years back some of Chiangkaichuck's generals fled Mao Tse Tung and ended up here. When the Thai King found out about their opium crops fruit and vegetable orchards along with flower plantations were introduced instead. The Royal Project at DAK is simply a must as it shows off its many yields. The restaurant is also another must with many

authentic local dishes on the menu. Just be mindful that the restaurant is only open 10am-1 pm and then again at 5 pm during this busy time of year.

I didn't really mind that too much as I knew a great place in the village.

We checked out the regular stake out and did see White-tailed Robin, Black-breasted Thrush, Rufous-bellied Niltava and Hill Blue Flycatcher but it was definitely on the quiet side.

DAK is a magnet for flocks of Bulbuls and we did see loads of Red-whiskered, Brown-breasted, Sooty-headed and White-headed Bulbuls, the favorite. Also Mountain, Black and Black-crested.

Loads of Chestnut-flanked and Japanese White-eyes were all over the place.

An obliging Siberian Rubythroat put on a show next to a pair of Hill Prinias.

The road down from DAK towards Fang is perhaps the steepest in Thailand. With lots of traffic one had to be extra cautious. I mean the many camping areas were jam packed with season revelers.

In Fang we stayed at a quaint resort adequate for our needs.

Day 4. Up to DAK again to greet the morning. Just lovely to hear the sound of birds, feel the breeze and though it was misty get that feeling of pristine wilderness.

We checked out the border station to Myanmar which is open to tourists. Here there are bunkers and great views of the Burmese army outpost on the other side. To get there we passed through some hill tribe villages where people still dress in traditional clothing.

With all the people around and the weather being misty birding was a bit slow going but as usual there are always a few things here and there. Daurian Redstart being the best.

This time we didn't miss the opening hours of the restaurant but promptly parked ourselves in the best possible place with views of the adjacent trees. Quite nice to dine while viewing Blue-winged Minlas, Bulbuls and White-eyes all over the place.

Day 5. Two days were set aside for Doi Lang. Doi Lang is proving to be a precious pearl in Northern Thailand birding. The road is still not open for a full loop drive (which prevents tourists going through, on the flipside of things) and besides a few locals, army and bird photographers not many people are around.

The mountain has a lot of attractive target birds. Sierra and her mom enjoyed photography a lot so we spent a fair amount of time at a number of stake outs. The beauty of tailored tours is that the clients can have a say so in the daily activities and as for me I am happy as long as they are happy!

Black-breasted Thrush



Chestnut-flanked Thrush



Some great birds photographed: Spot-breasted Parrotbill, Slaty-blue Flycatcher, Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher, Eye-browed Laughingthrushes, Ultra-marine Flycatcher, Rusty-naped Scimitar Babbler, Siberian Rubythroat, Yellow-bellied Leafbird, Spectacled Barwing, Crested Buntings and more.

Spot-breasted Parrotbill



Siberian Rubythroat



A pair of Hume's Pheasants was being photographed extensively in the early morning but no spot for us available so we carried on. We did spend 2 hours waiting for them to show in the afternoon but to no avail. We did see our only Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher while waiting which was nice.

Day 6. Best bird for the morning undoubtedly was Giant Nuthatch. A must see bird! Mountain Bamboo Partridges also showed on the road and we picked up things like Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Long-tailed Minivets, Mountain Tailorbird, Crested Finchbill, Rufous-backed Sibia and Grey-backed Shrike. Some other good ones seen: Bay Woodpecker, Stripe-breasted Woodpecker and Grey-capped Woodpecker.



Crested Finchbill

White-headed Bulbul

Crested Bunting

Ultramarine Flycatcher

Day 7. Today we set out to visit the lowlands of Tha Torn. These fields are just lovely in the early morning and in spite of being very misty we had good views of Yellow-breasted Buntings, a bird in rapid decline.

Some culture was on the schedule and after we arrived in Mae Sai the Glassman's crossed the bridge into Myanmar where they spend a few hours looking around and shopping. I stayed back looking after the vehicle and our belongings.

We stayed the night in a nice resort at Mae Chan close to the Golden Triangle.

Day 8. Greeting the morning at Chiang Saan lake is something I always enjoy. The air fills with calling Whistling Ducks, while Moorhens, Swamphens, Egrets and Herons let themselves known in the lakeside vegetation. Reed warblers chuck in the reedbeds and sunbirds are heard from the trees.

Best birds were a lone Ferruginous Duck, Spot-billed Ducks, Gray-headed Lapwings, Pin-tailed Snipe and many Chestnut-tailed Starlings.

A sumptuous lunch smack in the middle of the Golden Triangle followed and the afternoon held another Glassman visit across the border.

The night spent back in Fang.

Day 9. The last day was to be decided and the vote fell for another try at the stakeout at Doi Angkhang. Everyone really wanted to see Rusty-naped Pitta but , alas, it was not to be! Birds will be birds and often if they show or not is entirely in their own making.

Lunch back down in Fang at my favorite Issarn restaurant (Northeastern food).....Everyone that has been with me here knows what I am talking about!

Afternoon followed with a long drive to the airport in Chiang Mai where I boarded my plane to Bangkok and Steve, Peilin and Sierra theirs to Beijing and on to California.

It had been a great trip somewhat hindered by the huge crowds and the rather unusual change in weather. But it never affected the mood of the Glassman's who enjoyed every bit of it.

Hopefully we will meet again somewhere. Time will tell!

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Rufous-throated Partridge

Scaly-breasted Partridge

Mountain Bamboo Partridge

Lesser Whistling Duck

Indian Spot-billed Duck

Ferruginous Duck

Little Grebe

Yellow Bittern

Cinnamon Bittern

Chinese Pond Heron

Eastern Cattle Egret

Grey Heron

Purple Heron
Great Egret
Little Egret
Little Cormorant
Oriental Honey Buzzard
Rufous-winged Buzzard
Common Buzzard
Crested Goshawk
White-breasted Waterhen
Common Moorhen
Grey-headed Lapwing
Red-wattled Lapwing
Little Ringed Plover
Pin-tailed Snipe
Green Sandpiper
Common Sandpiper
Rock Dove
Oriental Turtle Dove
Red Turtle Dove
Spotted Dove
Zebra Dove
Mountain Imperial Pigeon
Vernal Hanging Parrot
Asian Barred Owlet
Greater Coucal
Lesser Coucal
Green-billed Malkoha
Banded Bay Cuckoo
Himalayan Swiftlet
Asian Palm Swift
Pacific Swift

White-throated Kingfisher
Common Kingfisher
Green Bee-eater
Eurasian Hoopoe
Great Barbet
Green-eared Barbet
Golden-throated Barbet
Blue-throated Barbet
Blue-eared Barbet
Coppersmith Barbet
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker
Stripe-breasted Woodpecker
Bay Woodpecker
Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike
Ashy Woodswallow
Common Iora
Large Cuckooshrike
Grey-chinned Minivet
Long-tailed Minivet
Scarlet Minivet
Brown Shrike
Long-tailed Shrike
Grey-backed Shrike
Blyth's Shrike-babbler
Black-hooded Oriole
Maroon Oriole
Black Drongo
Ashy Drongo
Bronzed Drongo
Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo
Hair-crested Drongo

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo
Pied Fantail
Black-naped Monarch
Grey Treepie
Racket-tailed Treepie
Eastern Jungle Crow
Yellow-bellied Fantail
Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher
Japanese Tit
Yellow-cheeked Tit
Oriental Skylark
Crested Finchbill
Black-headed Bulbul
Black-crested Bulbul
Red-whiskered Bulbul
Brown-breasted Bulbul
Sooty-headed Bulbul
Flavescent Bulbul
Yellow-vented Bulbul
Streak-eared Bulbul
Puff-throated Bulbul
Grey-eyed Bulbul
Mountain Bulbul
Ashy Bulbul
Black Bulbul
White-headed Bulbul
Barn Swallow
Striated Swallow
Mountain Tailorbird
Bianchi's Warbler
Dusky Warbler

Buff-barred Warbler
Ashy-throated Warbler
Pallas's Leaf Warbler
Yellow-browed Warbler
Hume's Warbler
Greenish Warbler
2 barred Greenish Warbler
Blyth's Leaf Warbler
Claudia's Leaf Warbler
Davison's Leaf Warbler
Abbarrant Bush Warbler
Yellow-bellied Warbler
Black-browed Reed Warbler
Thick-billed Warbler
Hill Prinia
Plain Prinia
Common Tailorbird
Dark-necked Tailorbird
Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler
White-browed Scimitar Babbler
Buff-chested Babbler
Pin-striped Tit-Babbler
Rufous-winged Fulvetta
Brown-cheeked Fulvetta
Southern Grey-cheeked Fulvetta
Streaked Wren-Babbler
Buff-breasted Babbler
White-browed Laughingthrush
Silver-eared Laughingthrush
Blue-winged Minla
Bar-throated Minla

Spectacled Barwing
Rufous-backed Sibia
Dark-backed Sibia
Spot-breasted Parrotbill
Chestnut-flanked White-eye
Japanese White-eye
Asian Fairy Bluebird
Chestnut-vented Nuthatch
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch
Giant Nuthatch
Hume's Treecreeper
Great Myna
Common Myna
Black-collared Starling
Pied Myna
Chestnut-tailed Starling
Blue Whistling Thrush
Black-breasted Thrush
White-browed Shortwing
Siberian Rubythroat
Oriental Magpie-Robin
White-rumped Shama
Daurian Redstart
White-capped Redstart
White-tailed Robin
Northern White-crowned Forktail
Stejneger's Stonechat
Pied Bush Chat
Grey Bush Chat
Blue Rock Thrush
Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush

Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher

Taiga Flycatcher

Little Pied Flycatcher

Ultramarine Flycatcher

Slaty-blue Flycatcher

Verditer Flycatcher

Hill Blue Flycatcher

White-gorgeted Flycatcher

Rufous-bellied Niltava

Small Niltava

Golden-fronted Leafbird

Orange-bellied Leafbird

Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker

Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker

Brown-throated Sunbird

Olive-backed Sunbird

Mrs. Gould's Sunbird

Green-tailed Sunbird

Black-throated Sunbird

Little Spiderhunter

Streaked Spiderhunter

House Sparrow

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

Scaly-breasted Munia

Eastern Yellow Wagtail

Grey Wagtail

White Wagtail

Olive-backed Pipit

Common Rosefinch

Crested Bunting

Yellow-breasted Bunting

