

Central and Northern Thailand

3-16th of February, 2017

Guide and organizer: Peter Ericsson

Tour leader: Gigi Sahlstrand

Participants: Bosse Danielsson, Lars Svantesson, Charlotte Naucler, Ingvor Kasselstrand and Britta Svensson

This was to become my 2nd year with Gigi Sahlstrand and her birding friends from Sweden.



The group this year was limited to one vehicle which meant 5 participants, 1 overseas tour leader, me and the driver of a large comfortable Commuter van.

Day 1.

Pick up at the airport where the group came through around 8:30. We immediately set off for the province of Petchaburi South West of Bangkok. Traffic was thick and it took quite some time before we could do some actual birding. Instead of rushing to the Spoon-billed Sandpiper spot we instead stopped at a couple of places with scrub and wetlands. Many common but very striking birds for 1st time visitors to Thailand. A good way to get initiated to the bird life here.

Green Bee-eater, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Common and Great Myna, Painted and Openbill Storks, Pied Starlings, Bronze-winged Jacanas, various Egrets, Germain's Swiftlets, Asian Palm Swift, Asian Koel, Asian Golden Weaver, Black-winged Kite, Oriental Honey Buzzard, White-throated and Common Kingfisher, Ashy Woodswallow and many more birds were seen.



Chinese Egret



Spoon-billed Sandpiper

We then went for our first sumptuous meal of the renowned Thai cuisine. A restaurant by the beach with the sounds of waves rolling in was very welcomed. At the seaside one has to sample the local seafood and so we did.

The tidal schedule is changing dramatically this time of year and the outgoing tide quickly went down. But first we boarded our 2 boats with local fishermen turned skilled birder and off we set for a 20 minute drive through the mangroves.

All the 3 target birds showed very well: White-faced Plover, Malaysian Plover and Chinese Egret. All very unique birds found in small numbers anywhere in their distribution range.

We were also treated to a good number of terns: Whiskered, Little, Common, Greater Crested and Caspian. With the terns also good numbers of Brown-headed Gull and then a massive adult Pallas's Gull came in to steal the show.

The ride back was dotted with sightings of monitor lizards, fruit bats (flying foxes) and exposed mudflats with huge numbers of waders.

It was 5 pm and time to go to our seaside hotel. Some folks decided to go for a swim in the ocean and others took a rest in their rooms. In the hotel garden some were rewarded with a Freckled-fronted Woodpecker, a bird found only in open areas like this.

Dinner at a nice authentic Thai restaurant, again fresh shrimps in a mild curry, chicken with cashew nuts and stir fried mixed vegetables that made sure no one was left hungry.

Day 2.

Great sumptuous buffet breakfast at our hotel by the beach and off to Paktaley for the main reason most birders visit Thailand: Spoon-billed Sandpiper!

As it was we were able to watch 3 different birds for the longest of times. Very satisfying to be able to do so with one of the most iconic birds of the birding world.

We also had great looks at the other major target bird: Nordmann's Greenshank with our first flock of about 35 birds and a 2nd with around a dozen. Loads and loads of waders in the salt pans this morning and since everyone in the group had brought a scope we were all able to view and absorb to our heart's content.

The last major target was Asian Dowitcher and it took a fair bit of work but finally we had 2 birds in view. This was good as 2 other groups of birders had been searching for the same birds but without success.

Some of our birds seen: Great Knot (thousands), Long-toed Stints, Ruff, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Eurasian and Far Eastern Curlew (4 birds), Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers, Kentish, Pacific Golden and Grey Plover, Temmincks and Red-necked Stint, Curlew, Broad-billed, Marsh, Wood and Common Sandplovers, Common and Spotted Redshanks, Red-necked Phalaropes, Common Greenshank and Little Ringed Plover.

8 Eurasian Wigeons and 1 Gadwall was a bonus as was a squadron of Painted Storks flying by.

Lunch by the sea and as good as yesterday's.

A little rest and off for afternoon birding at 15:00. This time we checked out some dry stubby grasslands where we enjoyed Oriental Skylark and Zitting Cisticola.

The remainder of the afternoon we spent at the King's Mangrove Project which in spite of undergoing a lot of constructions and being Saturday held a lot of visitors, still produced some new birds for us. The Golden-bellied Gerygones performed almost instantly which was a treat. Pied Fantail and Oriental Magpie Robins kept up their singing and antics. White-breasted Waterhen sounded off its rather diabolical noise and Greater Coucal boomed away in the background.

Dusky Warbler wanted to be part of it all as did Common Tailorbird and Brown-throated Sunbird.

Perhaps the sweetest catch was a single Common Snipe next to a single Pin-tailed Snipe which helped our tally of waders for the day to add up to 35!

Dinner and cold beers with the daily checklist ended up a solid day of birding.

Day 3.

Another sumptuous breakfast and off to reinforce our impressions of Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

We got on to 3 individuals but not in as good light as the day before and there were a lot less waders around. You just can't bank on things being the same as 'yesterday' when you are dealing with living creatures and shifting weather along with salt farming procedures.

We did spend some time to go over the various waders and helping everyone to get more acquainted with this sometimes difficult group of birds.

We went on to another 2 areas where we had birds in better light and kept watching the same shorebirds as seen on day 2. This was good for everyone as it helped to cement impressions.

We checked out of the hotel and started our drive to Baan Maka resort, near Kaengkrachan National park. Before lunch at the hotel we did a little walk on the hotel grounds and picked up a few wood land species: Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Greater and Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush, Pied Hornbill, Taiga Flycatcher for example.

At 2 o'clock we entered Lung Sins waterhole that we had pre booked. It was hot and seemingly void of birds. Our first sign of life was a Lesser Mouse Deer which later on was joined by another 2. These shy and skittish animals are such a joy to watch at close range and for pro longed views.

Then the birds started to show one by one. So much fun to see the birds in action, their various 'tactics' in bathing, drinking water and feeding on what has been put out for them.

We sat in the hide until 5:30 and saw 17 species: Kalij Pheasant, Scaly-breasted Partridge, Orange-headed thrush, Large-billed Scimitar Babbler, Racket-tailed Treepie, Black-naped Monarch, Red Junglefowl, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Siberian Blue Robin, Pied Fantail, Black-crested, Streak-eared and Stripe-throated Bulbuls, Abbot's and Puff-throated Babbler, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta and White-rumped Shama.

Red-headed Trogon



There was still enough light to visit the roosting area of a few hundred Chestnut-tailed Starlings not far away. The main reason for doing so was to see the much rarer Spot-winged Starling which we also managed to see a few of.

Baan Maka is a lovely resort with large gardens situated in the country side. We got to enjoy our first dinner here which also gave us our first calling owl, Collared Scops Owl as well as Large-tailed Nightjar.

Day 4.

Breakfast at 6 am and off to Kaengkrachan National Park. While boarding our vehicle we did see a group of Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, our 3rd Bee-eater for the trip as well as Black Hooded and Black-naped Orioles. We then basically drove straight to a favorite spot of mine where we parked ourselves with our scopes and let the birds come to us.

New habitat meant lots of new birds. Tropical birds are often colorful and so we got to see some amazing birds. I won't describe them in detail but all of them can be looked up at www.pbase.com/peterericsson

Black-thighed Falconets (6), Green-eared and Blue-eared Barbet, Common Flameback, Black-winged Cuckoo Shrike, Pied Hornbill, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Thick-billed Pigeons, a lovely flock of 4 Eye-browed Thrushes, Crested Serpent Eagle, Ashy Drongo, Asian Barred Owlet, Hair-crested Drongo, different Bulbuls and more.



Orange-headed Thrush



Streaked Spiderhunter

Once it got too hot we went inside of the more covered forest but not until we had enjoyed our coffee break. Next to the campground there was a huge fruiting tree which was frequented by a pair of Great Hornbills, Asian Fairy Bluebirds plus barbets and bulbuls.

On our walk we got on to a nice flock of Sultan's Tit, a bird all birders want to see and rightfully so.

A nice female Orange-breasted Trogon also came real close. A Banded Broadbill called several times but did not show. A few more common birds before we went for lunch.

What a blessing it is to be able to eat nice Thai food deep inside the park without having to bring your own food or leave the park.

After lunch everyone had a little break but still some birds were added.

Since our nice abode at Baan Maka has lovely grounds we spent the afternoon between 3-5 checking the area as well as sitting in a shaded area with cold beers in the hand while viewing the local birds.

Best bird added was a pair of Green-billed Malkohas.

It had been a good day.

Day 5

A little earlier reveille and off in our comfortable van to Bahn Krahnng campsite inside of Kaengrachan National Park where our 4WD pickup truck waited for us.

The road up the mountain is graveled and a bit narrow so only allows for one way traffic during specific hours. As we ascended the mountain the serenity of the landscape slowly started to embrace us and though the drive up to Panern Thung took almost an hour it was worth it.

Along the way Grey Peacock Pheasant suddenly let out a very loud sound next to the car. Only 2 meters from the car the bird was right at the roadside and though it quickly disappeared it was enough to catch a glimpse. Before that we had 2 male Kalij Pheasants and 1 female crossing the road. These birds seem to do well in the area. They are not of the nominate race and don't look like neither Silver nor Kalij Pheasants but are placed as such on the official Thai checklist.

We were able to greet the morning proper once up at the top. Viewing the mountain ranges along with the sea of cloud while taking in the sounds of nature is just an awesome experience. We stayed at the top until after lunch and added a good number of birds not seen from the lower levels: Mountain Hawk Eagle, Brown-backed Needletail, Pacific Swift, Asian House Martin, Grey Treepie, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, Vernal Hanging Parrot, Mountain Bulbul, Golden Babbler, Blyth's Shrike Babbler, Blue-throated Barbet, Great Barbet, Streaked Spiderhunter, Black-throated Sunbird, Hill Blue Flycatcher, Flavescent Bulbul etc.

After lunch we headed down to km 29 where we started walking downhill while the car went ahead of us waiting further down. The pace of birds up here midday is slower but some very interesting things revealed themselves: Marten's Warbler, Wreathed Hornbill, Black-throated Laughingthrush, Red-headed Trogon, Long-tailed Broadbill leading the way. Such spectacular birds with the latter also giving great photographic opportunities.

Once traffic was allowed downhill we headed out of the park towards our hotel.

Day 6

Time to leave Kaengkrachan though there is still so much more to be explored. A trip like this is designed to introduce a large area of avifauna, landscape, culture etc and so one has to find the happy balance while yet keep moving forward. Thus we left early for an area of drier forest at WatKhaolookchang an hour away from our abode.

Upon arrival we soon discovered the area was having a fair which meant a lot of noise and disturbance to the bird life. We still got our scopes out and got great views of many perched colorful Coppersmith Barbets, Green Bee-eaters and Black-naped Orioles.

The forest patch was slower than normal but at least offered a few new species with some nicely perched Red-breasted Parakeets, a pair of very vocal Rufescent Prinias and an overflying Black Baza.

We called it quits a bit early as our journey up ahead to Beung Borapet was expected to take about 6 hours. This group of Swedes have been very brave and appreciative of the Thai cuisine and for lunch they got to sample something much more local than the previous meals. They passed the test with flying color and actually enjoyed it.

We got to Beung Borapet at 16 pm. Everyone had their own scope (boy, am I ever impressed) and standing in one spot yielded an amazing amount of birds in the wetlands. Actually, too many to mention but here are some of the new ones: Striated Grassbird, Oriental Darter, Oriental Marsh Harrier, Grey-headed Lapwing, Purple Swampphen, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Oriental Reed Warbler, Black-browed Reed Warbler and a smashing Siberian Rubythroat.

Dinner at a very sumptuous Chinese/Thai restaurant with a typical Chinese round table for easy access of the food.

Day 7.

We arrived at Beung Borapet, Nakorn Sawan, at 7 am where our boatmen waited for us. Then followed 4 hours of birding on this incredible lake full of reed beds, water lilies, small islands and bodies of open water.

We were wondering why we had seen so few Openbills in the fields of Central Thailand. Well, here they were in the thousands as there were huge colonies of breeding birds. Loads of Indian Shags, Oriental Darters and Black-crowned Night Herons also shared these colonies.

No diving ducks this year but a couple of thousand Gargany with a bunch of Pin-tailed Ducks mixed in. We had good views of White-browed Crake, new for the trip. Loads of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, Common Coot, Purple Herons, Lesser Whistling Ducks, Cotton Pygmy Geese, Little Grebes etc.

The ever so impressive Striated Grassbird sang its strident song while we slowly made our way through the floating vegetation. A couple of Zitting Cisticolas sat in the open.

And a flock of 20 some Oriental Pratincoles flew by our boat.

The rest of the day was spent traveling to the small town of Li where we settled in a lovely hotel and had our most sumptuous meal of the trip so far. The was now ready for uncompromised authentic Thai food. And believe me there are no left over's.

Day 8

Our prime reason for visiting Mae Ping National Park was to see woodpeckers and Grey-headed Parakeets. The park has extensive areas of dry fairly open forest with scrub in the under storey.

As it was, it was a lot more quiet then we had hoped for and it wasn't until 10 am that we got on to the Black-headed Woodpeckers. We never got the Parakeets perched but in flight. We did see many Crested Treeswifts which was a treat. A few new small birds such as Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Yellow-streaked Warbler, Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, and 2 bar Greenish Warblers were seen but in general the morning didn't live up to our expectations.

After lunch we drove straight to Doi Inthanon where we checked in to Daang's Home stay and then off to the summit for the afternoon. The summit is worthy of at least a morning and an afternoon as the birdlife is so rich there. The afternoon also had a lot few visitors and the boardwalk was less noisy.

Our first birds were Dark-backed Sibias, Buff-barred Warbler, Yellow-bellied Fantail and Green-tailed Sunbirds at the car park. Coffee is always lovely up here and next to the coffee shop we got our first

flock of Rufous-winged Fulvettas, an Ashy-throated Warbler, a pair of Silver-cheeked Laughingthrushes and a flock of Bar-throated Minlas.

Once down in the bog a couple of Grey-sided Thrushes caught our attention. A nice male Snowy-browed Flycatcher performed next to a Rufous-throated Partridge. We walked along the boardwalk in search for more and came upon a lovely Dark-sided Thrush, a zoothera that loves the dark and wet forest leaf litter. It stayed with us for quite some time giving insight into it's rather 'dark world'.

Day 9

Toast, eggs and coffee/tea and up the mountain again. Being a long weekend there were a lot of more people today than yesterday. Most people engaged in selfies and trying out various seldom used warm clothing. A real potpourri of people.

Naturally we got on to a lot of the same birds as yesterday but did add the little charmer: Yellow-browed Tit. I still haven't gotten an image of this quick little bird. In the bog we had brief views of a pair of White-crowned Forktails.

Down at the jeep track we were hoping to see Slaty-bellied Tesia and we ended up with quite good views. The birds have explosive songs that ring out this wonderful tropical mountainous broadleaved forest. A Hume's Treecreeper also joined in the chorus and gave good looks. Our first Grey-chinned Fulvettas also joined in as did a Large Niltava, a type of resident flycatcher found here in SEA.

Back up the mountain for lunch of papaya salad, sticky rice, barbecued chicken and local sausages.

The early afternoon we drove a fair bit down towards Huay Sai Leuang waterfall which has proven good for White-capped water Redstart and this time we quickly got on to 2 birds.

After having heard Banded Bay Cuckoo since just about day 1 it was good to finally see one as it came down at eye level to feed on some bugs.

At 4 pm the team stopped at the local farm produce and the birding part of the day was over.

Day 10

Today was sort of an in between day. We started out by checking out some lower levels at Doi Inthanon with some easier type of birding from the roadside. We actually did add a couple of new birds such as Drongo Cuckoo and Yellow-bellied Warbler but most was repeats which no one in the group seemed to mind as the birds were still not very familiar to most.

We took the scenic route to Doi Angkhang where we arrived around 3 pm. Being a Sunday there were a lot of traffic but there were still some good birds around. Lots of Brown-breasted Bulbuls and a couple of perched out White-browed Laughingthrushes along with a Siberian Stonechat immediately got our attention. We were taking in the rugged scenery on the mountain as we got our eyes and ears in gear for our avian friends.

A couple of Chestnut-vented Nuthatches and Grey-chinned Minivets plus a pair of Blue-winged Minlas were nice new birds. Over our heads Himalayan Swiftlets and Cooks Swifts were rapidly feeding in a frenzy.

We managed to reach Fang just before the local pet shop closed and we could get a few meal worms for tomorrow's adventure.

Day 11

We stayed at a quaint little hotel in Fang for the night. There was a night market nearby that some enjoyed while others had a massage and yet others settled in their rooms.

San Ju has NO tourists besides birders so we had the place to ourselves except for a few birdwatchers. The regular feeding stations (hides) delivered some real pearls and all of these birds allowed for close up photography: White-gorgetted Flycatcher, Slaty-blue Flycatcher, Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher, Siberian Rubythroat, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, Hill Prinia, White-bellied Redstart and Silver-eared Laughingthrushes. We also had a close encounter with a very handsome Ultramarine Flycatcher at its usual stake out.

On the way up we saw Oriental Turtle Doves and a pair of Mountain Bamboo Partridges but no Hume's Pheasants.

Mrs Hume's Pheasants



It was a bit quiet in general but seeing it was our first visit it was rewarding. The Spot-breasted Parrotbill performed extremely well introducing this interesting family to everyone.

A distant Giant Nuthatch gave itself away and we got some decent scope views. Spectacled Barwings moved next to the road in small parties and a Stripe-breasted Woodpecker gave scope views. Also Long-tailed and Grey-backed Shrikes brightened up our day as did a few other previously seen birds.

We settled in Tha Torn at the Garden Home Resort which is next to the river, has good food and nice rooms.

Day 12

A misty morning as we drove through the landscape of Northern Thailand towards a day of birding at Doi Angkhang. Again we started out at the Chinese cemetery area which has good vantage points for both bins and scope. This time we managed to get our eyes on our one and only Crested Finchbill for the trip. A number of repeats followed before a brief encounter with a Yellow-breasted Bunting gave us our 2nd new bird for the day.



Daurian Redstart



Silver-eared Mesia

Our 2nd spot was to be the Royal Agricultural Center at DAK. We headed straight to the feeding station where a labor camp had been set up temporarily. It didn't seem to affect the birds coming in that much as we enjoyed a flock of strikingly beautiful Silver-eared Mesias, White-tailed Robin, Hill blue Flycatcher, Rufous-bellied Niltava and a Black-breasted Thrush eagerly feeding on the meal worms we had brought.

Then it was time for a coffee break and an hour in the gardens. Lots of White-eyes, Sunbirds and Minlas around. Lunch is a must inside the Center with loads of fresh vegetables and great local food.

After lunch we paid a visit to the border outpost at Nor Lae where we not only looked at the Burmese outposts but also photographed a male Daurian Redstart and bought some local handicraft.

Last stop for the day was at Mae Pleu where we did a pleasant walk for an hour coming across a couple of huge flocks of small birds. Speckled Piculet, Bay Woodpecker, Chestnut-fronted Shrike-Babbler and Maroon Oriole were all new for the trip.

On the way back we made space for a short visit to a temple and then headed back to do our checklist while still daylight and enjoying the slow flowing waters in the river by our resort.

Day 13

The fields of Tha Torn beckoned us in the morning. It's always nice with a change of habitat and the fields kept everyone busy indeed. A flock of Yellow-breasted Buntings was a joyful sight, persecuted as they are. Good amounts of Citrine Wagtails is always special. Both Rosy, Red-throated and Richard's Pipit kept the avid bird nerds occupied. Best of all, a male Pied Harrier was seen at length both on the ground and in flight. We also got our first Rufous-winged Buzzard of the trip as well as our first Black-collared Starlings.

After lunch we headed back up to Doi Lang. It took well over an hour but we were almost instantly rewarded with great views of the incredibly attractive Black-throated Tits in an area I have never seen them before. A big surprise and unexpected!



Black-throated Tit



Siberian Rubythroat

We saw a man in his hide so we stopped and stayed in the van. Shortly we were viewing a few small birds on a log: Olive-backed Pipits, Slaty-backed Flycatcher, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Japanese Tit and Grey Bush Chat. Then suddenly at 15:50 pm a strikingly handsome male Hume's Pheasant along with 2 females appeared out of the roadside brush. The birds hung around for a few minutes and we all were on a real high having had such luck on this our last venture to a mountain.

We proceeded to visit a few more stake outs for some more photography sessions and called it a day at 17:30



Snowy-browed Flycatcher



Slaty-blue Flycatcher

It had been a very good day!

Day 14



Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler

We left Tha Torn for Chiang Saan on a misty morning with cold winds. Having a professional driver had been a blessing on the trip and we felt assured as we kept clocking the miles towards our destination.

Once at Chiang Saan Lake we all got out bringing our scopes with us and started walking around the edges of the lake. Lots of familiar birds around and a few new ones. Our main target was Indian Spot-billed Ducks which is resident at this place and immediately gave good views.

A couple of Great Cormorants were not exactly new to my Swedish friends but they were new to our trip. However a slick looking Burmese Shrike on a wire was a definite tick for everyone. With the help of the scopes we managed to make out around 10 Ruddy Shelducks very far away, another tick for the trip.

Then we got on to our 2nd target bird: Grey-headed Lapwings. 13 of these good looking birds showed at close range.

Another stop for duck viewing gave us Ferruginous Duck, Pin-tailed Duck, Garganeys, Lesser Whistling and Eurasian Wigeons. Plenty of Coot on the lake as well.

Closer to lunch we went to the Golden Triangle which historically is a special place. It is no longer good for birding as the structure of the river has changed with the recent alterations to the banks of the river on both sides.

We then did a little sightseeing and ended up with a very sumptuous and the most spicy meal of the trip right at the river sitting in Thailand and overlooking both Myanmar and Laos. The folks were now ready for this meal and though I did hear a little squealing everyone enjoyed it well.

Then we headed towards Chiang Rai where we caught a plane to Bangkok where we parted ways.

It had been a lot of fun with good company, good birding, great food, lots of culture and close interactions with locals, stunning scenery and lots of laughter.

We ended up with a list of 370 species.

Pictures from the trip.

www.pbase.com/peterericsson

