

Thailand

5–20 December 2004

Participants:

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Leader: Kamol Komolphalin

Picture: Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Day 1: Overnight flight to Bangkok.

Day 2: We departed Bangkok Airport in the early morning destined for the extensive Khao Yai National Park north-east of the capital. En route, a stop at Wang Noi ricefields provided us with our only views of several waterbirds including Black Rail, Asian Openbill Storks (over 200), Cotton Pygmy-goose, Grey-headed Lapwing, Oriental Pratincole, Lesser Coucal, fine looks at Asian Pied Starling, Red-wattled Lapwing, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Plaintive Cuckoo, Long-tailed Shrike and Eastern Marsh-harrier. After lunch, birding close to our hotel, the Juldis Resort, gave us great views of a male Siberian Rubythroat, Verditer Flycatcher, a Red-breasted Parakeet roost, Crested Serpent-eagle, Lineated Barbet, Arctic Warbler, Olive-backed Sunbird, Black-naped Oriole and Scaly-breasted Munia, plus many mynas and drongos, whilst some local elephants and their mahouts trundled by us on one of the trails. As dusk approached, we drove the short distance to a roadside stop where we were awed by an incredible exodus of over 500,000 Wrinkled-lipped Bats from their hillside caves. A Black-shouldered Kite patrolled the area and three Great-eared Nightjars flew across our path.

Day 3: Early morning, after a filling buffet breakfast, we entered the wonderful Khao Yai National Park where well-vegetated hillsides and a good road system throughout the park made for excellent birding. Our guide, renowned ornithologist and artist, Kamol Komophalin, called in many birds as we varied our locations from overlooks to roadside stops to marked trails. Great and Oriental Pied Hornbills, Collared Owlet, Red-headed Trogon, Blue-bearded and Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, Green-eared and Moustached Barbets, Greater Flameback, Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike, Rosy, Ashy and Scarlet Minivets, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Puff-throated and Grey-eyed Bulbuls, Blue-winged and Golden-fronted Leafbirds, Radde's Warbler, Pale-legged Leaf Warbler, Hainan Blue and Hill Blue Flycatchers, Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher, White-rumped Shama, beautiful Black-throated and Crimson Sunbirds, Black-naped Monarch, Striped Tit-babbler, White-bellied Yuhina, Little Spiderhunter, Buff-bellied Flowerpecker, Slender-billed Oriole, 20 Asian Fairy-bluebirds, Green Magpie, Racket-tailed Treepie, the list seemed endless! A morning coffee stop and packed lunch at a picnic site provided great opportunities for photography of many birds whilst even an afternoon toilet break allowed us full-

frame views of two rarities in the waterlogged cesspool behind the building with Orange-headed Thrush and White-throated Rock-thrush. This was probably the most productive day of the trip, an amazing day all-round with many great birds, butterflies, lovely scenery, and several mammals at dusk including Samba and Barking Deer, East Asian Porcupine, Pig-tailed Macaques and White-handed Gibbons.

Day 4: Khao Yai again beginning with a slow but unsuccessful drive searching for Silver Pheasant and Red Junglefowl near the Radar Station. A Black Eagle site gave spectacular scenic views but no eagle but we were well compensated however, when two Wreathed Hornbills flew by at eye level. We ate our packed lunch at the Visitor Centre where a walk along an adjacent trail was interrupted by a group of noisy but friendly Thai students on a fieldtrip. This in no way deterred the foraging of a flock of White-crested Laughingthrushes along with four Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes and a White-browed Scimitar-babbler. Afternoon trail hikes resulted in Blue-eared Kingfisher, Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Purple-throated Sunbird, Banded Broadbill, Yellow-vented, Scarlet-backed and Plain Flowerpeckers, Blyth's Leaf Warbler, Plain-tailed Warbler, Puff-throated and Abbott's Babblers, a skulking Blue Pitta and fleeting views of a White-crowned Forktail along the stream. To our great surprise, as we exited the park, two Red Junglefowl were spotted foraging in a field.

Day 5: This morning before breakfast, we birded the extensive hotel grounds with good results. New species were Red Junglefowl for those who missed them yesterday, Chestnut-tailed Starling, Japanese White-eye, Two-barred Warbler, White Wagtail and Asian Barred Owlet. After breakfast, we drove back to Bangkok, where we boarded a plane for the 50-minute flight to Chiang Mai in northern Thailand. Here we birded two spots close to the main highway: Huay Teung Tao army post and fields on the outskirts. Some were fortunate to spot two Wire-tailed Swallows but the expected numbers of birds were low due to construction work on the canal. Other new birds seen were two Rufous-winged Buzzards, Green Bee-eater, Olive-backed and Paddyfield Pipits, Black-headed, Sooty-headed and Red-whiskered Bulbuls, Grey-breasted Prinia, Asian Stubtail, and Burmese Shrike.

Day 6: The morning was spent at the Chiang Mai University grounds. The birding was not easy but we managed to see several new birds such as Red Avadavat, Shikra, Greater Coucal, Large Hawk-cuckoo, Eurasian Wryneck, Striated Swallow, two Bright-capped (Golden-headed) Cisticolas, Common Tailorbird, Dusky Warbler, and White-rumped Munia. Then on to nearby Wat Umong Temple and gardens, where we found two new deer species (Hog and Eld's), as well as six Greater Necklaced Laughingthrushes. We lunched at our lovely new location in the mountainous Doi Chiang Dao reserve. While eating, the ever-vigilant Dave Holman discovered a perched Collared Falconet and six Pacific Swifts overhead. After lunch, at the Chiang Dao Wildlife Sanctuary, birding was slow, but we had prolonged views of Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Black Bulbul, Streaked Spiderhunter, Blue-throated Barbet and Tickell's Blue Flycatcher.

Day 7: Today, we used two four-wheel drive jeeps to access the limestone massif of Doi Chiang Dao Mountain, at 2,220 metres. After a 2-hour drive to a seemingly wilderness location, we were surprised to find a tented camp of Thai birders at the summit! Birding here was well worth the drive however, the pine forest yielded many new species including three Giant Nuthatches, Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, Greater and Lesser Yellownappe, Bay and Stripe-breasted Woodpeckers, White-necked Laughingthrush, Wedge-tailed Pigeon, Himalayan Swiftlet, Great Barbet, Gould's Sunbird, Large Cuckoo-shrike, Long-tailed and Grey-chinned Minivets, Mountain, Striated and Flavescent Bulbuls, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Rufescent Prinia, Buff-barred and Bianchi's Warblers, Rufous-gorgeted, Sapphire and Little Pied Flycatchers, Red-flanked Bluetail, White-browed Shrike-babbler, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Maroon Oriole, Large Woodshrike, Bronzed and Lesser Racket-tailed Drongos. A great day ended with the sighting of our only snake species, a poisonous Banded Krait, on the way down the mountain.

Day 8: We left at dawn for our Doi Angkhang hotel, a beautiful lodging close to the Burmese border, and en route we found 12 Crested Buntings. As we unpacked, many bulbuls fed in the fruiting trees outside our rooms including Ashy and Brown-breasted Bulbuls plus Crested Finchbills. Afterwards, we birded a nearby track, finding Grey-faced Buzzard, Indochinese Cuckoo-shrike, Chestnut-flanked White-eye, Buff-throated and White-

tailed Leaf Warblers, Rufous-bellied Niltava, Rufous-fronted Babbler and our first Spectacled Barwing whilst along the road, we encountered a flock of 18 Grey-headed Parrotbills. We also visited a hill tribe at an outpost on the Burmese border.

Day 9: Today we worked the close-by Doi Angkhang Birding Trail where we found five Red-faced Liocichla, two Spot-breasted Parrotbills, Short-billed Minivet, Mountain Tailorbird, Slaty-backed Flycatcher, Black-backed Sibia, White-bellied Redstart and Yellow-cheeked Tit. After lunch, the Watershed Station yielded a group of Silver-eared Mesia, Golden Babbler and Vivid Niltava. Our final stop of the day near Baan Luang Village gave us Daurian Redstart and Blue Whistling-thrush.

Day 10: We left early today for Tha Ton and its rice paddies. One paddy produced Citrine Wagtail, Temminck's Stint and Pied Harrier whilst the surrounding fields harboured Striated Grassbird, Oriental Skylark, Yellow-bellied Prinia and Yellow-eyed Babbler. At the River Maekok, we searched successfully for Little Bunting and Jerdon's Bushchat. After lunch at a nice restaurant along the river, we drove south to Doi Inthanon, reaching our beautiful hotel grounds at dusk.

Day 11: An early morning drive on a good paved road to the summit of Doi Inthanon again surprised us to find many tourists already there to watch the sunrise. Despite the very cool temperatures, birding was excellent along the boardwalk where new species recorded included Chestnut-tailed Minla, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush, Chestnut-crowned and Ashy-throated Warblers, Grey-sided Thrush and White-browed Shortwing whilst a small flock of Rufous-throated Partridge were also spotted. After coffee and group pictures, we birded along the road seeing Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker, Golden-throated Barbet, Snowy-browed Flycatcher and Large Niltava whilst more than 80 Eye-browed Thrushes graced the tree tops. The early afternoon was generally quiet with the Jeep Track covered with by very high trees which, made birding difficult. As dusk approached however, birding along the road suddenly picked up and we added Speckled Piculet, Chestnut-fronted Shrike-babbler, Rufous-backed Sibia and Green-tailed Sunbird to our lists. In the evening, we bade Kamol farewell and he graciously signed books and made sketches of birds for each of our group.

Day 12: Our new guide, Rachen, began the day at Km34 along the Doi Inthanon road but birds were scarce except for a Blue-throated Flycatcher and it was extremely cold here! The Jeep Track was much better today however, with Green Cochoa being a good find, as well as Slaty-bellied Tesia, Ashy Wood Pigeon, Pygmy Wren-babbler, Yellow-bellied Fantail, and Small Niltava. In the afternoon, we visited Huay Saa Leung Waterfall where we had good looks at Slaty-backed Forktail and a female Plumbeous Water Redstart.

Day 13: Our final morning at Doi Inthanon. We first went to a track at Km13 at an elevation of 500 metres where a flock of Blue Magpies greeted us but just as quickly as they were found they were gone! The trail over a rickety suspension bridge gave us some great new birds including Black-hooded Oriole, Common Flameback and Pygmy Grey-capped Woodpeckers before we moved on to scenic Vachiratharn Waterfall where a White-capped Water Redstart (River Chat) put on a fine display. After lunch, we returned to Chiang Mai, did some shopping, and then flew back to Bangkok where our hotel was regally situated near to the Royal Palace.

Day 14: Our new guide, "End", had staked out several good wader spots for our final two days. We began at Kok Kham Saltpans, on the Gulf of Thailand near Phetchaburi, south-west of Bangkok. Numerous waders were present including 400 Lesser Sandpipers together with Greater Sandpipers, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, Black-winged Stilts, Little Ringed, Kentish and Grey Plovers, Pacific Golden-plovers, Spotted and Common Redshanks, Broad-billed, Common, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers, Common Greenshank, Ruddy Turnstones, Red-necked and Long-toed Stints, Eurasian Curlews and even a Red-necked Phalarope. After this bonanza, we drove to Chong Com Temple where about 60 Germain's Swiftlets were nesting in the ceiling, their nests are prized by the monks for use in bird nest's soup. After lunch, we progressed to Phetchaburi and the saltpans at Leam Bok Bra where flocks of terns were roosting. Species identified were Caspian, Whiskered, Gull-billed, Common, Little and Great Crested whilst along the road, a Slaty-breasted Rail was seen walking

through the grass. Our next stop at Pak Talay saltpans brought a rich reward and the highlight of the trip for some, the near-mythical Spoon-billed Sandpiper. While photographing this incredible bird, four Brahminy Kites flew by almost unnoticed! Moving on to our final destination, we walked the ditches in an excellent area full of Eurasian Curlews, Red Knot, Heuglin's Gulls, and a superb adult Great Black-headed Gull before finally finding yet another rare species of wader, Great Knot. We were late back to the hotel but no-one minded it had been a magical day with Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Great Knot seen!

Day 15: Our final day started again at the very productive Kok Kham saltpans where we checked out a different area right on the Gulf of Thailand. One of our first sightings was a small flock of Asiatic Dowitchers but unfortunately; a marauding dog immediately flushed them. Soon afterwards, eight of the equally rare Nordmann's Greenshanks were seen in company with Common Greenshanks so that detailed comparison could be made. Digiscope photos were taken before we moved off to a series of marshy habitats on the road to Phetchaburi. Several interesting species seen here included White-browed Crake, Purple Heron, Oriental Reed-warbler, Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacanas and Yellow Bittern. The dry rice paddies at Phetchaburi were mostly unproductive so we headed back to Kok Kham for our last stop. Scanning the terns a new species was added: White-winged Black Tern, then the Asiatic Dowitchers were re-found together with another Great Knot, two Terek Sandpipers and four Eurasian Whimbrel, whilst close-by an Asian Koel was seen. At this final viewpoint, our female assistant, Ying, was startled by a giant Monitor Lizard, which crashed through the undergrowth! So ended a wonderful tour of Thailand. Our guides, hotel managers, assistants, in fact all the Thai people, were extremely courteous and friendly and made us feel very welcome in this bird-rich country.