

# Thailand

# South

26 January–6 February 2009

**Participants:**

Peter Basterfield

Peter Forbes

Patrick and Jennifer Grosvenor

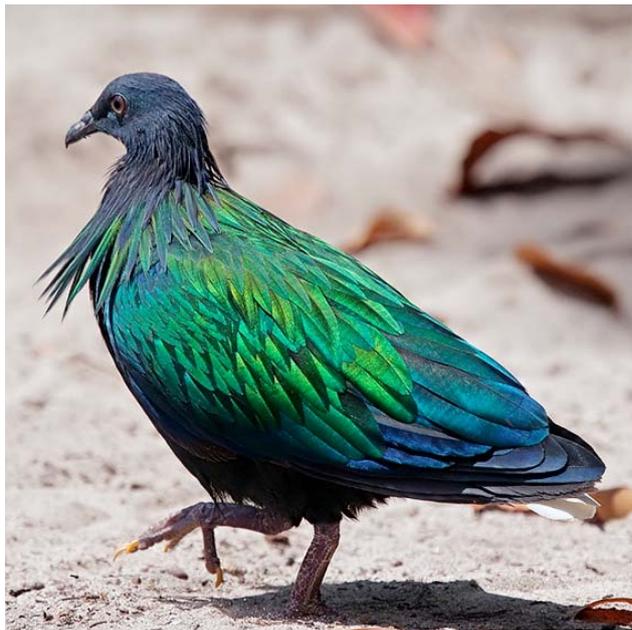
Trevor and Lynne Rackstraw

Benjamin Rackstraw

Tanya Steed

Keith Wimbush

David Wright



**Nicobar Pigeon**

**Day 1:** Ten participants gathered at Heathrow and after a flight via Abu Dhabi, we landed at Bangkok early morning to be met by our leader for the next 10 days. After a short delay, due to the car to carrying our luggage arriving late, we set off through the Bangkok traffic heading for Petchaburri. Our first roadside stop was a marsh at K80. Here we saw our first Whiskered Terns, Chinese Pond-herons, Yellow and Cinnamon Bitterns, Great and Little Egrets, Grey and Purple Herons, Little Cormorant, White-throated Kingfisher and more familiar Little Grebes. A kettle of Black Kites was the only one we were to see and Asian Open-billed Storks flew overhead. Spotted Doves and Red Collared-doves as well as Green Bee-eaters, Streak-eared Bulbuls, Black Drongos, Large-billed Crows, Tree Sparrows and of course Common Mynas were to be with us almost daily. Asian Pied Starlings were to be with us only for the first three days. A large flock of White-shouldered Starlings flew overhead. A second roadside stop produced more Bronze-winged and a single Pheasant-tailed Jacana as well as Plain Prinia, Black-capped, Common and White-throated Kingfishers and Brown Shrike, the latter to be seen most days. Then on to the hotel to drop off our luggage and head for the salt pans at Pakehale. These salt pans are winter home to thousands of waders, gulls and terns and we were not to be disappointed. We saw 500+ Brown-headed Gulls, 1000s of Little and Whiskered Terns and Kentish Plovers plus Lesser and Greater Sandpipers, Marsh, Terek and Wood Sandpipers. Great Knots in smaller flocks, plus a few Broad-billed Sandpipers and six Pintail Snipe. Amongst the thousands of Red-necked Stints were our target birds, four Spoon-billed Sandpipers. At distance at first but eventually close enough for all the party to get good views. The Pacific Golden-plovers and smaller numbers of more familiar waders finished things off nicely. It remained to call in to Laem Pak Bia Environmental Research Station on the way back to the hotel. Here we added Ruddy Crake, Slaty-breasted Rail, White-breasted Waterhen, Red-wattled Lapwing and an obliging Pied Fantail which was to be recorded most days hereafter. As dusk fell large numbers of Colugo streamed overhead. Looking like large bats they are more closely related to the squirrels. On the track in the headlights of the van we identified three Indian Nightjars. We returned to the hotel, tired but satisfied.



flock produced Purple-backed (Daurian), White-shouldered and Chestnut-tailed Starlings. On the way back to the hotel we made a slight detour to a small town to find Asian Glossy Starlings.

**Day 5:** An early morning recce from the hotel gave us Blue-eared and Coppersmith Barbets. After breakfast a short drive to Krabi mangroves. Negotiating the crumbling boardwalk we failed to find the Brown-winged Kingfisher but did have good views of a Collared Kingfisher and Dark-necked Tailorbird. After another magnificent Thai lunch we moved on to Trang Botanical Gardens with two Black Bazas overhead on the way and saw a Large Woodshrike. High in the trees three Asian Emerald and single Violet and Little Bronze Cuckoos together was very exciting. A fly past Large Hawk-cuckoo completed our cuckoos for the day. Two flying mynas turned out to be Jungle Mynas, our only record and we had our first sighting of Common Tailorbirds. We also found three Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrikes a single Puff-throated Babbler and Ruby-cheeked, Purple-throated and Plain-throated Sunbirds.

**Day 6:** This morning the Coppersmith and Blue-eared Barbets were accompanied by a single Red-throated Barbet. After breakfast we visited to Wat Tham Suea temple with Asian Koels continuing to accompany us. Two Blue-whistling Thrushes lurked in the dark corners beneath the high cliffs. Ochraceous, Hairy-backed, Stripe-throated Black-crested and Black-headed Bulbuls were located on the forest. We also found an Arctic Warbler, a female Siberian Blue Robin and Pale-legged Leaf-warbler After a return lunch at the local restaurant we again visited Krabi boardwalk and had stunning views of a Brown-winged Kingfisher, which posed in the open for us.

**Day 7:** Today was special; a trip to the Similan Islands. On the way out we saw Greater Crested Terns, one Common and three Bridled Terns from the boat. A little bit of a panic as yours truly managed to confuse flying fish with shearwaters! They 'flew' nearly 50 yards at a time. As we waded ashore through the warm water a White-bellied Sea-eagle flew overhead. A short walk across the island saw us gazing at large gatherings of Large Island Fruit Bats hanging above the huts and tents. The first target birds to be spotted were eight Pied and five Green Imperial-pigeons but no sign of the expected Nicobar Pigeons. A little despondency set in when we learned that a large group had been present first thing but then flown off, possibly to another island. However during lunch a 'facilities' visit by Trevor located a single Nicobar Pigeon hiding around the toilets; lunch was abandoned! This remarkable bird was not so easy to photograph as it was constantly on the move, moving from light to shade, appearing dark at times then fluorescent green. This is a bird to which the field guides do not do justice. While following the pigeon, three Hill Mynas were located and showed well. Before returning a few brave souls had a swim, describing fish that could be seen easily in the clear waters. Another faux pas as a black float flag was briefly described as a skua! Not me this time but our respective excuses were that the speedboat was travelling at 25 knots and bouncing a lot!

**Day 8:** Khao Nor Cuchi. Here a Banded Pitta was seen by only three of the party before vanishing into the forest. An Orange-breasted Trogon called continuously but despite our efforts could not be seen in the forest tops. The large Crow-billed Drongo and Chestnut-rumped, Short-tailed, Scaly-crowned and Moustached Babblers were new and a few managed a brief view of Yellow-eared Spiderhunter. Success however with both Green and Black-and-yellow Broadbills and two sightings of Siberian Blue Robin, one a magnificent male sent pulses racing. We also found a Buff-rumped Woodpecker and four Spectacled Bulbuls. We then had our second of four Eastern Crowned Leaf-warblers and two Black-naped Monarchs to add to the single sighting on 30<sup>th</sup>. An exciting find today were two Rufous-winged Philentomas. Here was found our only Plain Sunbird although it was seen well building a nest. As evening approached a quick snack before two Great-eared and two Large-tailed Nightjars performed well above us. After much searching in the forest, travelling carefully to avoid any Malayan Pit Vipers on the forest floor, a Javan Frogmouth eventually responded and showed very well. But despite prolonged searching we found no owls, we didn't even hear a single call! Compensation came in the form of a Slow Loris high in the canopy in the torchlight.

**Day 9:** Khao Sok NP. The first of six White-rumped Shamas showed in the car park as we arrived as did single Orange-headed and Eye-browed Thrushes. As we crossed a stream a familiar Grey Wagtail showed briefly. The walk in the forest produced very little except for two Dark-sided Flycatchers and a Malayan Night-heron seen by only a few of us. However, on the on the return walk it all happened! Firstly a Red-bearded Bee-eater came very close and gave superb views. Soon Orange-bellied Flowerpecker, Banded Kingfisher, Yellow-bellied Warbler and Chestnut-breasted Malkoha were also located. Patrick then spotted a Wallace's Hawk-eagle sitting quietly in a tree close to the path, the first perched view for even for our leader! Sharp eyes then located two Green Ioras across the valley. Two Asian Paradise-flycatchers added to the sole record from yesterday and we found two Puff-throated Babblers and two Thick-billed Flowerpeckers. Although we had heard them on four previous days, today we had our first view of Little Spiderhunter. We then visited the beautiful temple complex at Wat Bang Riang with the cameras working overtime. Two black Giant Squirrels searched high in the trees, and a small flock of Thick-billed Green-pigeons was very approachable. A close Orange-bellied Flowerpecker had the photographers clicking away.

**Day 10:** Kao Nor Cuchi. After much trudging unsuccessfully through dense forest we settled down in an area known to our leader. Sitting quietly we were rewarded by both a female and a magnificent male Gurney's Pitta for at least ten minutes. Years ago when I saw my first Noisy Pitta it was described to me as the jewel of the forests floor. All I can say is that this eclipsed that and even the Mangrove Pitta we had seen six days before. The smiles on all our faces said it all. It seems tragic that forest destruction, all too evident every day, is endangering such a beautiful bird. While waiting for the van to pick us up nineteen Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters flew over.

**Day 11:** Krabi Resort grounds. An early morning walk before breakfast and our flight to Bangkok produced Peaceful Doves, Common Kingfisher, Yellow Bittern, two Black-naped Orioles, six Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, Coppersmith Barbets and a single Red-throated Barbet. Walking to the beach revealed a Pacific Reef-heron stalking crabs on the rocks. Then back to the hotel for breakfast and packing. The flight from Krabi to Bangkok with Asian Airways was a duplicate of our outward flight, on time and efficient. If only all airlines were like this! And so for the long flight home via Abu Dhabi to London where we landed in the early morning to snow and ice, it was cold! And I faced a broken down coach!

It only remains to thank our leader, who not only located them but also worked extremely hard to ensure that all the participants saw the birds. Also the other participants who found and shared their sightings with everyone, we were blessed with sharp eyes in the group. I must express my gratitude for those who helped me when suffering from a streaming cold when I could hardly see through my binoculars, I missed very little, thanks, you know who you are.

**Peter Basterfield**