

CENTRAL THAILAND 2012

21st January – 31st January

HIGHLIGHTS

Either for rarity value, excellent views or simply a group favourite.

- Spoon-billed Sandpiper
- Nordmann's Greenshank
- White-faced Plover
- Malaysian Plover
- Black-faced Spoonbill
- Siamese Fireback
- Scaly-breasted Partridge
- Bar-backed Partridge
- Eastern Imperial Eagle
- Black-headed Woodpecker
- Great Slaty Woodpecker
- Black Baza
- Banded Kingfisher
- Blue-bearded Bee-eater
- Wreathed Hornbill
- Blue Pitta
- Long-tailed Broadbill
- Banded Broadbill
- Black-and-yellow Broadbill
- Dusky Broadbill
- Mugimaki Flycatcher
- Black-throated Laughingthrush
- Limestone Wren-babbler
- Collared Babbler
- Golden-crested Myna
- White-shouldered Starling
- Ratchet-tailed Treepie

Leader: Nick Bray

SUMMARY:

This was the third back-to-back ZOOTHERA tour in Thailand this month and the second Central tour, which proved to be quite different from our first visit. We began at the Petchaburi saltpans with the famous Spoon-billed Sandpipers, a pair of Black-faced Spoonbills, a tree full of White-shouldered Starlings and all the accompanying waders we have come to expect. From here we moved on to the fabulous Kaeng Krachen situated along the border with Myanmar. It was noticeable how many more birds were calling and some of the big birds this site is famous for put in appearances including Black Baza, Black-and-yellow Broadbill, Blue Pitta, Collared Babbler and Ratchet-tailed Treepie. Moving on to Khao Yai both Banded and Dusky Broadbills were put in the shade by nesting Long-tailed Broadbills, whilst a road full of Siamese Firebacks was a splendid experience. A close encounter with a Banded Kingfisher and close Wreathed Hornbill were also memorable. Thailand once again proved to be a fantastic destination and continues to offer a wide range of localised, scarce and distinctly tropical specialities which are all available from well marked trails and decent roads.

Days 1 - 2 21st - 22nd January

With some of the group finishing the northern Thailand tour and others flying in from the UK we eventually all met up for an evening meal at our hotel to discuss the exciting possibilities for the tour ahead.



With up to five individuals wintering along the Gulf of Thailand, this is still the best place to find Spoon-billed Sandpiper. We had repeated views of a couple of birds at Pak Thale amidst a vast area of saltpans. This is THE site for wader enthusiasts from around the world with numerous species usually allowing amazingly close views.

Day 3 Monday 23rd January

We left Bangkok early doors and headed to the world famous wader hotspot of Pak Thale, home of what is probably the most wanted bird in the world right now – **Spoon-billed Sandpiper**. Upon arrival it was apparent the main congregation of waders was located in a different area of salt pans than on our previous visit a few weeks ago. But a quick scan from beside the minibus revealed a ‘spoonie’ almost immediately which promptly flew off, although another two birds were located just a few minutes later. Over the next twenty minutes we enjoyed amazing scope views as they fed in company with numerous **Red-necked Stints** and **Curlew Sandpipers**. The duller bodies and more dumpy size was often the most apparent feature when scanning through the stint flock, especially when the ‘spoonie’ was side on or facing away from us. A decision was then made to leave here and search for the next ‘most wanted’ wader, **Nordmann’s Greenshank**. And after driving down the road a few kilometres we found a large flock of **Great Knot** and then there they were, a loosely spread out flock of 20+ **Nordmann’s Greenshanks**. By now we had also located **Greater Sandplover**, **Red-necked Phalarope** and **Long-toed Stint** as well, so we decided to return for a second helping of the ‘spoonie’. Along the way we followed up on a hot tip-off and promptly scored with the major sighting of a pair of **Black-faced Spoonbills**. They were a little distant so we walked out across the saltpans towards them and halved the distance which produced nice views. A good selection of waders were also here including side-by-side comparisons of **Common Greenshank** and **Marsh Sandpiper**, loads of **Black-winged Stilts**, **Lesser Sandplover**, **Spotted Redshank** and lots more stints. Back at Pak Thale the **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** was still present and we also nailed a **Broad-billed Sandpiper** as well before heading to some different pools and salt pans which produced much the same assortment of waders. Lunch was taken at the riverside where we later boarded a boat and headed out to Laem Pak Bia sandspit. A few **Malaysian Plovers** were quickly located, followed by a pair of intriguing **White-faced Plovers** – this recently described species is now treated as a race of **Kentish Plover** following DNA studies which state it is a little too closely related to its cousin. However, its plumage and behaviour are both rather distinctive so this may well not be the end of the story. A flock of **Greater Crested Terns** also held a few **Lesser Crested Terns** on a nearby beach, and we also saw **Pacific Reef Egret** and **Striated Heron** here as well. On our return to the minibus we drove across the road and found a few **Indochinese Bushlarks** that required a bit of effort to see and in doing so flushed 3 **Indian Nightjars** from the scrub. We ended the day at the Royal Project where a **Watercock** was a surprising find, although **Ruddy-breasted Crake**, **Yellow Bittern** and **Pintail Snipe** were more to be expected. A couple pools were full of waders and held **Pacific Golden Plover**,



Several Malaysian Plovers were present on the famous sandspit at Laem Pak Bia.



Long-toed Stint is reasonably easy to find around the saltpans.



The Kalij Pheasants present at the photo blind at Kaeng Krachen are certainly different to nominate forms.

Wood Sandpiper and loads of stilts. We finished with thousands of **Lyle's Flying Foxes** heading out across a beautiful red sunset to end proceedings nicely.

Day 4 Tuesday 24th January

The magnificent forest of Kaeng Krachen is the largest national park in Thailand and the focus of our birding for the next three days. We began by working an area between the entrance gate and the campsite which under the hot conditions (with the temperature much hotter than two weeks ago) turned up some decent birds with the best being a pair of **Blue-bearded Bee-eaters** hawking for insects on the hill above the road. Our bird-filled morning then continued with a pair of **Dollarbirds** perched in a large dead tree beside a water hole, and the same area also held **Ruby-cheeked Sunbird**, **Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker**, **Banded Bay Cuckoo**, **Crimson Sunbird**, **Blue-winged Leafbird**, **Asian Brown** and **Taiga Flycatchers**, **Black-headed Bulbul** and **Dark-necked Tailorbird**, whilst overhead the sky was filled with **Grey-rumped Treeswift**, **Fork-tailed** and **House Swifts**, **Ashy Woodswallow**, **Red-rumped** and **Barn Swallows** and several **Brown-backed Needletails**. A large fruiting tree over the road turned out to be a goldmine as it held several **Common Hill-mynas** as well as a pair of superb **Golden-crested Mynas**, **Coppersmith**, **Blue-eared** and **Green-eared Barbets**, **Oriental Pied Hornbill**, **Thick-billed Green-pigeon**, **Asian Fairy Bluebird**, **Black-naped Oriole**, several **Sultan Tits** and **Black-winged Cuckooshrike**. We then spent the rest of the day at a special site only used by very small groups which consists of a large blind where you can view a couple small drinking pools. Almost immediately we had the strange-looking **Kalij Pheasant** and a brief view of a **Scaly-breasted Partridge**, quickly followed by a mixed group of **Greater** and **Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes**. After lunch we returned to the blind and spent the whole afternoon watching an amazing variety of shy forest dwellers from just a few metres away. The laughingthrushes were present most of the time and a **Large Scimitar-babbler** flew in and landed in the open before scooting off into the trees where it was just visible amongst the leaves for a couple of minutes. A pair of **Black-naped Monarchs** spent some time bathing, followed later by a male **Chinese Blue** and **Tickell's Blue Flycatcher** before the star of the show appeared. Walking quietly out of the dense forest to the edge of the clearing before us was a pair of **Bar-backed Partridges**, a normally extreme shy and skulking bird which has been visiting here recently. In fact they made several appearances during the course of our vigil and we had numerous photo opportunities! Also seen were **Abbott's Babbler**, **Racket-tailed Treepie**, **Greater Racket-tailed Drongo**, two **Siberian Blue Robins**, **Black-crested**, **Stripe-throated** and **Streak-eared Bulbuls**, **White-rumped Shama** and much to Frank's relief a pair of **Puff-throated Babbler**s which later came round to our



Scaly-breasted Partridge is one of the star performers at Kaeng Krachen.



A pair of superb Bar-backed Partridges performed very well in front of the hides at Kaeng Krachen.



Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush at Kaeng Krachen.

side of the blind and rooted in the leaf litter by his feet! Told you! By the time we left the rain had arrived and we headed to a nice restaurant overlooking the reservoir for dinner.

Day 5 Wednesday 25th January

A very good day around the lower elevations of Kaeng Krachen began with a pair of **Great Slaty Woodpeckers** perched in a tall dead tree close to the road. This amazingly large woodpecker with a weird small head and buffy throat remained motionless on its exposed perch for ages, allowing great views in the scope. There was also a **Greater Yellownape** and **Grey-headed Woodpecker** in the fruiting tree which were new for the tour, as well as all the same species as the day before and we spent a very enjoyable hour watching all of the activity .

Once we passed the campsite a rather fortuitous stop resulted in a pair of **Black-thighed Falconets** being spotted in a tree over the road and as we scoped them a bit of random tape playing resulted in a response from a **Blue Pitta** that called back several times from close by. So we walked quietly inside the forest and amazingly a female pitta cautiously hopped into view and walked slowly in a semi-circle past us some 30 metres away and was on view for several minutes. Wow! Our crazily good morning then reached silly heights when a **Black-and-yellow Broadbill** started calling and after a very frustrating and protracted search we tracked a pair down in a large leafless tree where they performed for a few minutes. And we ended a great morning with a brief view of a **Bay Woodpecker**. The afternoon was much quieter and we only added **Common Green Magpie** to our list but still saw a few commoner species before heading out of the park and into an open area where **Yellow-vented Bulbul** and **Lesser Coucal** were found.

Day 6 Thursday 26th January

We headed up to the top of the mountain early this morning and knew it was going to be a special day when a male **Grey Peacock-pheasant** crossed the track in front of us, before crossing back over again to delight a very happy bunch of birders. At our first planned stop a **Black Baza** flew out from a roadside tree and perched briefly in the early morning sunshine for us to admire, and was followed quickly by an inquisitive **Rufous-fronted Babbler**, **Yellow-browed Warbler**, **Grey Treepie**, **Crimson Sunbird**, **Streaked Spiderhunter**, and a cracking **Black-eared Shrike-babbler**. We then drove down towards the end of the road and almost immediately had a **Drongo Cuckoo** perched in a close tree. Better still was a beautiful **Black-and-yellow Broadbill** that was visiting the fruiting tree right beside our minibus and showing much closer than yesterday's birds. Next up was a **Dark-sided Flycatcher** as well as several other previously seen species before we left and drove back up to the summit and our lunch stop at the



This Chinese Blue Flycatcher posed nicely at Kaeng Krachen.



A female Siberian Blue Robin gave prolonged views at Kaeng Krachen.



A Black-and-yellow Broadbill was one of our best finds at Kaeng Krachen.

restaurant. A **Blue-throated Barbet** showed well here, as did a soaring **Mountain Hawk-eagle**, **Mountain Imperial-pigeon** and a singing **Orange-bellied Leafbird**. We then spent the rest of the afternoon searching for flocks and when Roberta found a pair of **Ratchet-tailed Treepies** trying to cross the road we discovered that they were being followed by a group of 7 **Collared Babblers**, 3 **Black-throated Laughingthrushes** and a **White-browed Shrike-babbler**. This was just too good an opportunity to miss and we followed the flock as they crossed back over the road and continued to feed close by. Then a **Red-headed Trogon** showed well just down the road, and another flurry of activity resulted in a showy **Chinese Blue Flycatcher**, as well as **Green-billed Malkoha**, good looks eventually of a **Great Barbet**, both **Short-billed** and **Rosy Minivets**, **Asian Paradise-flycatcher**, **Ashy Bulbul** and **Black-throated Sunbird**. Driving back downhill a female **Kalij Pheasant** crossed the track in front of us and there were lots of **Emerald Doves** feeding in the road.

Day 7 Friday 27th January

We left after a little later breakfast than usual and headed north-east across Petchaburi province, stopping in some open fields where a **Thick-billed Warbler** was found. Then at a dry Dipterocarp forest a pair of **Black-headed Woodpeckers** were seen, along with a **Forest Wagtail** found by Dan, **Rufous Treepie**, **Purple Sunbird**, **Spotted** and **Asian Barred Owlets** and **Lineated Barbet**. Moving on we had a nice raptor session with 4 **Steppe Eagles**, loads of **Black-eared** and **Brahminy Kites**, **Eastern Marsh Harrier** and best of all, an immature **Eastern Imperial Eagle** flying over. Our route then took us across Bangkok and onwards to Khao Yai, stopping en-route to pay our respects to a pair of **Limestone Wren-babblers** which inhabit some limestone outcrops. We eventually reached our hotel near the entrance gate to Khao Yai just after 7pm.

Day 8 Saturday 28th January

On heading into Khao Yai National Park we made our first stop at a viewpoint where numerous **Hair-crested Drongos** were feeding in some flowering trees and a couple of **Grey-eyed Bulbuls** were also present. More interestingly a **Blue Pitta** began calling and after a little bit of playback began coming towards us but never showed (of course)! But exciting nevertheless. Then we drove to the start of a good trail into some excellent forest where we saw 2 male **Siamese Firebacks** feeding quietly in the leaf litter. Also present here was another **Scaly-breasted Partridge** feeding in the leaf litter close to the path and a male **Hill Blue Flycatcher**. Leaving here we visited a stake-out for **Mugimaki Flycatcher** which showed promptly before we checked out one of the campgrounds and found a bunch of commoner birds along with several **Fire-breasted**



This female **Blue Pitta** from Kaeng Krachen was one of the birds of the trip.



Collared Babbler is a key species to find at the top of Kaeng Krachen.



This **Black-throated Laughingthrush** was with a flock of **Collared Babblers** at Kaeng Krachen.

(**Buff-breasted**) **Flowerpeckers** and a fine male **Hainan Blue Flycatcher**. Other birds seen in the general area included **Vernal Hanging-parrot**, **Chestnut-headed Bee-eater**, **Himalayan Swiftlet**, **Golden-fronted Leafbird**, and both **Ashy** and **Brown-rumped (Swinhoe's) Minivets**. After lunch we walked another trail and after a very slow start finally caught up with a flock of co-operative and very noisy **White-crested Laughingthrushes** and, a little later, a **Laced Woodpecker** posed nicely, plus **Slaty-backed Forktail** and **Puff-throated Bulbul** put in welcome appearances. A large mixed flock near the car park also held our first **White-bellied Erpornis**. Leaving here we checked out a large fruiting tree beside the road and there was a cracking **Wreathed Hornbill** sitting out in the open on a bare branch. In fact there were four birds present but we didn't notice the other three until they all flew out! Then we revisited one of the trails from this morning and again found the firebacks, but also spent at least ten minutes with an awesome male **Blue Pitta** that was constantly on view as it circled us amidst relatively sparse vegetation. As if that wasn't enough, a pair of **Banded Broadbills** began calling from the tall trees over the trail and eventually gave great scope views.

Day 9 Sunday 29th January

We entered the park at 6am having spotlighted a **Brown Hawk-owl** en-route and headed straight to the campground in search of **Coral-billed Ground-cuckoo**, which unfortunately failed to show. So we headed along Radar Road and found a pair of **Long-tailed Broadbills** making a nest close to the road which we watched for over an hour. We also caught up with a pair of **Moustached Barbets** as well, which were calling from the roadside trees but drew a blank on **Silver Pheasant** despite spending many hours driving up and down the road where they are meant to frequent. We finished the day at our favourite trail where a group of **Dusky Broadbills** performed admirably but high in the tops of the tall roadside trees, and inside the forest we located a calling female **Banded Kingfisher** and a **Collared Owlet** to round off a good days birding.

Day 10 Monday 30th January

Our last morning at Khao Yai began in the mist and drizzle at the top of the Radar Road and rather frustratingly there wasn't much to see or hear. So we drove back down to one of the campsites and the rain eased off a little and birds soon began to appear with **Claudia's Warbler**, **Yellow-vented Flowerpecker**, **Little Spiderhunter**, **Large Hawk-cuckoo** and a flock of **White-crested** and **Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes**, plus a pair of **Common Green Magpies** tagging along as well. An **Orange-headed Thrush** was finally nailed after giving us the slip for the past couple of days and there were plenty of other commoner birds to watch, as well as a flyby from a **Blue-bearded Bee-**



This Long-tailed Broadbill was building a nest at Khao Yai.



It took some finding but we eventually found a Banded Kingfisher at Khao Yai.



Orange-headed Thrush at Khao Yai.

eater. One final check of Radar Road gave us a group of 7 male **Siamese Firebacks** and a couple rather more demure females to give us a great send-off for the return journey to our hotel in Bangkok and the end of the tour.

Day 11 Tuesday 31st January

After a leisurely morning we took the early afternoon direct flight back to the UK and conclusion of a wonderful tour.

Nick Bray.



Siamese Firebacks at Khao Yai