



CENTRAL THAILAND 2 TOUR REPORT

26th Jan to 5th Feb 2014

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

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

- Bar-backed Partridge
- Siamese Fireback
- Silver Pheasant
- Kalij Pheasant
- Black-headed Woodpecker
- Great Slaty Woodpecker
- Red-throated Barbet
- Austen's Brown Hornbill
- Southern Brown Hornbill
- Banded Kingfisher
- Coral-billed Ground-Cuckoo
- Blue-bearded Bee-eater
- Collared Scops-Owl
- Great Eared Nightjar
- Slaty-legged Crake
- Asian Dowitcher
- Nordmann's Greenshank
- Spoon-billed Sandpiper
- White-faced Plover
- Collared Pratincole
- Grey-tailed Tattler
- Chinese Egret
- Blue Pitta
- Silver-breasted Broadbill
- Black-and-red Broadbill
- Long-tailed Broadbill
- Black-and-yellow Broadbill
- Lesser Cuckooshrike
- Brown-rumped Minivet
- White-throated Rock-thrush
- Orange-headed Thrush
- Mugimaki Flycatcher
- Rufous-browed Flycatcher
- Siberian Blue Robin
- Golden-crested Myna
- White-shouldered Starling
- Sultan Tit
- Everett's White-eye
- Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler
- Thick-billed Warbler
- Alstrom's Warbler
- Radde's Warbler
- Black-throated Laughingthrush
- Large Scimitar-babbler
- Limestone Wren-babbler
- Van Hasselt's Sunbird
- Forest Wagtail
- Asian Golden Weaver
- Asian Elephant
- Asiatic Black Bear

SUMMARY:

The second ZOOTHERA tour of the year to bird-rich Central Thailand once again provided an awesome mix of much-wanted birds and great views as well. Amongst the 306 species seen in just 8 days we managed mind-blowing views of a Blue Pitta feeding out in the open 4 metres away, a Coral-billed Ground-Cuckoo performing right out in the open as well, male Silver Pheasant, a displaying pair of Great Slaty Woodpeckers and Austen's Brown Hornbill was seen for the first time on this tour. Add to this the usual mix of brightly-coloured broadbills, numerous intriguing warblers, some great raptors, multitudes of waders at Petchaburi, a boat trip for White-faced Plover, and a whole afternoon at a secluded hide in Kaeng Krachen where we could watch numerous shy forest birds coming to drink and bathe. And there was an added bonus when an Asiatic Brown Bear strolled across a quiet forest road right in front of us – which certainly got our pulses racing! This is why we love Thailand!

Days 1 - 2 26th – 27th January

Following a direct overnight flight, Mike, Julie and Chris arrived in Bangkok where they took a taxi to the Amari Don Muang Hotel located in the north-east of this huge city. At 8pm they met up with myself, Keith, Lynne & Anthony for the start of our Central Thailand tour.

Day 3 Tuesday 28th January

It's great to be here in Thailand and our enthusiastic group set off with Nick Upton on the drive to the famous site of Wat Praphuttabaht Noi, home of **Limestone Wren-babbler**. Along the way we stopped for breakfast and enjoyed scope views of a flock of **Chestnut-tailed Starlings**. It is a nice little spot with a Buddhist temple surrounded by tall limestone crags and within a matter of just a few minutes we were watching a pair of wren-babblers clambering around the boulders at the base of the cliffs. After enjoying these localised birds we had a little walk around the site and turned up a **Peregrine**, **Black-naped Oriole**, an inquisitive pair of **Scarlet-backed Flowerpeckers**, both **Coppersmith** and **Lineated Barbets**, *philippensis* **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Blue Whistling-thrush**, and a confiding **Radde's Warbler**.

So leaving here we drove on for another couple of hours to Khao Yai, seeing a group of **Red-breasted Parakeets** on the way, as well as an **Asian Barred Owlet**. Once inside the park we headed straight to a stake-out where a male **Mugimaki Flycatcher** was present. There was no sign of the usual **White-throated Rock-thrush** but we also saw a close **White-rumped Shama**, **Black-crested Bulbul** and a pair of **White-bellied Erpornis** before having lunch. Whilst waiting for our food to arrive we enjoyed nice views of a **Blue-eared Barbet** right next to the restaurant. After lunch we decided to have a quick look for the **White-throated Rock-thrush** again and this time found it at its new location, and we also had a flyover **Rufous-bellied Eagle** and a pair of **Blue-bearded Bee-eaters**.



Limestone Wren-Babbler

Driving deeper into the park, we found a **Rufous-winged Buzzard**, **Shikra**, and a **Grey-backed Shrike** before driving further into the park. A walk along the road was quite productive as we saw a **Silver Pheasant** feeding in the forest, although it wasn't such a good time for 'smaller' birds, so then decided to drive to a different spot. There was much more activity here and immediately upon arrival several **Siamese Firebacks** appeared at the side of the road about a 100m away. Several cars passed by without really disturbing the birds so we walked closer and had better views. Whilst doing this a flock of **Long-tailed Broadbills** appeared and there must have been over 30 birds present giving great views to an appreciative audience. Returning to the minibus we saw a few **White-crested Laughingthrushes** and 2 **Black-throated Laughingthrushes**, as well as a superb male **Red-headed Trogon** that put in an appearance.

We ended the day watching a couple of **Brown-backed Needletails** zooming around a pond and coming in for a swift drink, followed by an amazing show from at least 4 **Great Eared Nightjars** flying around the car park for half an hour, plus a couple of **Large-tailed Nightjars**.

Day 4 Wednesday 29th January

Drove back into Khao Yai at 6am and went right the way across the park and headed up to the Army checkpoint, seeing a few **Siamese Firebacks** along the way. Once again, the **Black-throated Laughingthrushes** were present immediately upon arrival and we had great views of them feeding on the road right in front of us. There was also **Black-winged Cuckooshrike**, **Ashy Bulbul**, **Moustached Barbet**, and eventually we found a perched **Barred Cuckoo-dove** after only getting several flybys. We then drove back down and birded along a quiet road, and amazingly as we got out of the minibus an **Asian Black Bear** ran across the road ahead of us! Wow! And when I say quiet, it was really quiet here with an almost absence of singing birds. However, we did manage to find a **Blue Pitta** in a relatively open area of forest that allowed everyone some pretty good views. We also saw **Sulphur-breasted Warbler**, **Claudia's Leaf-warbler**, and had good views of **White-handed Gibbon**. However, our sighting of a group of **Austen's Brown Hornbills** noisily crossing the road above us will live long in the memory.

So we drove to the restaurant for lunch and met up with a friend of mine who gave us some tantalising info, which we would act upon later in the day. The early afternoon period was spent around one of the campsites and it was quite hot, consequently bird activity was very slow. We did



Coral-billed Ground-Cuckoo at Khao Yai

see **Swinhoe's Minivet**, **Blue-bearded Bee-eater**, **Taiga Flycatcher**, **Fire-breasted Flowerpecker**, and some others. On checking out a quiet little corner, we discovered a feeding station had been set up and by joining a couple of photographers managed to get outstandingly close views of a **Blue Pitta**. What a bird! There was also a pair of **Large Scimitar-babblers**, **Hainan Blue Flycatcher**, **Puff-throated** and **Abbott's Babblers**, **White-rumped Shama**, **Orange-headed Thrush** and a male **Siberian Blue Robin**.

By 4pm we were done and drove to a location advised by my friend earlier, continuing our run of other animal sightings with a large bull **Asian Elephant** feeding in one of the open grasslands. If that wasn't enough then what followed certainly is. Upon reaching a specific site, the unbelievable happened when what is probably the Holy Grail of Khao Yai birds ran across the road in front of us – a **Coral-billed Ground-Cuckoo**. In fact we had two decent views of this enigmatic bird as it walked along the edge of the forest, pausing for some time to look around and then darting across the road once again and eventually disappearing back into the trees.

Happy with this (to say the least) we decided to push our luck and walk the 'Pitta Trail' where an **Eared Pitta** was heard, but it did produce a female **Orange-breasted Trogon** to round the day off nicely.

Day 5 Thursday 30th January

Back into Khao Yai for a few hours this morning and we had our picnic breakfast watching some large trees where **Asian Fairy Bluebirds**, **Black-naped Oriole** and a **Dollarbird** were seen. Then we headed to the 'Pitta Trail' where an **Eared Pitta** called very close, but our search was disrupted when hundreds of noisy school kids appeared on the trail, so we drove back to the site of our close encounter with yesterday's **Blue Pitta** and saw it once again out in the open, this time for longer and a little closer. Also present was a **Hainan Blue Flycatcher**, 2 male **Siberian Blue Robins**, 2 **Orange-headed Thrushes**, **Pale-legged Leaf-**



Blue Pitta at Khao Yai – just one of a number of incredibly close encounters during this years Thailand tours.

warbler and a **Puff-throated Babbler**. So leaving here we headed out of the park, stopping for **Van Hasselt's** and **Crimson Sunbirds** along the way before driving 4 hours to Petchaburi ricefields.

It was great to be out in this open habitat where many of the birds were new for this tour and we began with a mixed flock of **Asian Golden**, **Baya** and **Streaked Weavers** congregating in a small reedbed. Driving along we stopped at various wet marshy areas and over the course of the next couple of hours saw many good species that makes birding this habitat so exciting: **Bronze-winged** and **Pheasant-tailed Jacanas**, **Yellow**, **Black** and **Cinnamon Bitterns**, **Purple Heron**, **Ruddy-breasted Crake**, **Cotton Pygmy-Goose**, **Black-eared** and **Brahminy Kites**, **Steppe Eagle**, **Black-capped** and **Stork-billed Kingfishers**, **Little Green** and **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters**, **Germain's Swiftlet**, **Pink-necked Green-pigeon**, **Temminck's Stint**, **Grey-headed Lapwing**, **Yellow-bellied Prinia** and **Plain-backed Sparrow**. Once we had finished birding we drove a short distance to a nearby hotel where we would be spending the next two nights.

Day 6 Friday 31st January

This is always an exciting day, as we begin the hunt for one of the few overwintering **Spoon-billed Sandpipers** to be found along the Gulf of Thailand. On entering the famous site of Pak Thale it was obvious that conditions were much calmer than our last visit a few weeks previous. So we set up our scopes and within two minutes Anthony had located a spoonie feeding in the saltpan right in front of us! Everyone got onto it straight away and were able to enjoy the bird for quite a while before the flock of **Red-necked Stints** it was associating with suddenly took flight. What a great start and we were then able to enjoy the multitudes of other waders present such as flocks of **Curlew**, **Broad-billed** and **Marsh Sandpipers**, as well as a

small gathering of **Red-necked Phalaropes** spinning around in circles after food. Walking along the bank we tried to get closer to the **Eurasian Curlew** flock in order to find a **Far Eastern Curlew** but the flock were flushed by some other birders and flew over our heads and out along the shoreline and out of view. However, we did get great looks at over 30 **Terek Sandpipers**, and even better was a rather surprising find of a **Grey-tailed Tattler**, whilst a **Chinese Egret** was also much appreciated.



Broad-billed Sandpiper



Curlew Sandpipers



Lesser Sandplover



Pacific Golden Plover



Long-toed Stint



Spotted Redshank

Leaving here we drove to some fields where an **Oriental Skylark** was song-flighting and a **Plaintive Cuckoo** was perched up in the open. Several **Painted Storks** were flying around and we also got quite close to some **Asian Openbills** feeding in a drainage ditch. Just down the road from here was another special area of saltpans and the regular flock of **Nordmann's Greenshank**, and this time we had much better views than usual. Amongst a roosting flock of **Brown-headed Gulls** and **Caspian Terns** was a first-winter **Black-tailed Gull** – another nice surprise. Then we drove to a nearby site where a **Bay-backed Shrike** had been found some days previously, and we had a great view of this second record for Thailand! Continuing our great run of rare and unusual birds seen throughout our three tours here this year. Leaving here we checked out an area where some **Asian Dowitchers** usually hang out but they weren't present, although another flock of phalaropes were quite nice. We also had fine views of more **Broad-billed Sandpipers**, **Long-toed** and **Temminck's Stints**, a huge flock of **Great Knots** and loads more shorebirds.



Chinese Egret with an Eastern Great Egret

Lunch was taken at Mr Daengs before boarding a couple small boats to take us down to the sandspit at Laem Pak Bia. The sea was flat calm and it didn't take us long to get to the sandspit where we quickly located a **White-faced Plover** and a few **Malaysian Plovers**. The gull roost had a couple of **Heuglin's Gulls**, and as we scoped them a 1st year **Pallas's Gull** flew in and joined them, followed by the same **Black-tailed Gull** we had seen inland a few hours earlier. There was also several **Great Crested Terns**, and both **Common** and **Little Terns**, with some **Gull-billed Terns** flying around as well. We saw another **Chinese Egret**, along with **Striated Heron** and **Pacific Reef Egret** out on the rocks.

Once we were done here we headed back to the minibus and drove back to the same site as this morning to look for the flock of **Asian Dowitchers**, which this time were present at exactly the spot they usually are and we counted 50 birds. There was also **Pacific Golden Plover**, **Zitting Cisticola** and **Richard's Pipit** seen as well. Returning to the main road a **White-shouldered Starling** was found bathing in a small pool and everyone had really nice looks at this often hard to find bird.



A roosting flock of Asiatic Dowitchers, with Marsh Sandpipers and Eastern Black-tailed Godwits.

Our last port of call was back at the Royal Project where **Ruddy-breasted Crane**, **Slaty-breasted Rail**, lots of **White-winged Terns** and a **Watercock** were the highlights. And we finished an excellent day with 6 **Indian Nightjars** flying around us.

In the evening we reflected on a great day's birding and the amazing numbers of waders seen today, a first for Thailand and the spoonie of course.

Day 7 Saturday 1st February

An early morning visit to a dry dipterocarp forest resulted in success in the shape of a pair of **Black-headed Woodpeckers** being seen. Considering we had missed them on the first tour this year made this even sweeter, and when you add the pair of **Rufous Woodpeckers** also showing well, it was a great start to the day. There was also **Rufous** and **Racket-tailed Treepies**, **Asian Barred** and **Spotted Owlets**, **Greater Racket-tailed Drongo**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Black-naped Oriole** and a **Forest Wagtail** as well.

Another hour or so drive took us to our lodge at Kaeng Krachan, where we birded the gardens for a while and were surprised to see a **Cinnamon Bittern** fly up from a small pool. There was also **Black-hooded Oriole**, **Hair-crested Drongo** and **Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike** as well. But things really 'hotted up' from the open dining room (and that's no reference to the red curry!) where the feeding station was attracting only numerous **Streak-eared Bulbuls** initially. But after a while a few **Greater** and **Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes** came in to feed, plus an **Orange-headed Thrush** as well. An **Oriental Pied Hornbill**, **Green-billed**



Great Slaty Woodpecker

Malkoha and a **Pale-legged Leaf-warbler** were also seen in the surrounding trees. And all of this was seen from our dining table!

We spent the afternoon at the top of the hill in Kaeng Krachan, some 30 kilometres from the entrance gate, which entails a very bumpy drive most of the way. In the afternoon heat bird activity was low but we still saw **Blue-throated Barbet**, **Blyth's Shrike-babbler**, **Dark-sided Flycatcher** and **Streaked Spiderhunter** from our vantage point. Once the traffic was allowed back down the hill at 4pm we descended and searched for the rare

Ratchet-tailed Treepie. This turned out to be pretty hard going and we struggled to see much at all, with only **Yellow-bellied Warbler**, brief **Collared Babbler**, **White-browed Scimitar-babbler** and a **Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo** enlivening proceedings.

Day 8 Sunday 2nd February

An excellent start to the day began with a number of good birds along the approach road to Kaeng Krachan, with **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Common Flameback**, **Sultan Tit**, lots of **Black-headed Bulbuls**, **Thick-billed** and **Radde's Warblers**, a pair of **Great Hornbills**, **Eye-browed Thrush**, and a couple of surprises in a **Lesser Cuckooshrike** and **Red-throated Barbet** - these last two species are very scarce here in Kaeng Krachan. As we scanned an open area a pair of **Great Slaty Woodpeckers** flew by and we followed them

down the road and were privileged to be able to watch them displaying from some very large trees for half an hour.

Driving further into the park we stopped beside a huge fruiting tree and found some **Thick-billed Green-Pigeons** and a flock of **Tickell's Brown Hornbills**, as well as several small flocks of **Golden-crested Mynas**. We then spent the remainder of the morning birding from Bangkrang Campsite to the second stream but found that there was not much activity due to the hot weather we were suddenly experiencing. A **Grey-capped Woodpecker**, another **Sultan Tit** and a few other commoner birds were seen, as well as an amazing number of butterflies beside one of the streams.

Our lunch at the visitor centre was enlivened by decent views of a **Banded Bay Cuckoo** and there was a **Blue-eared Barbet** excavating a nest-hole right beside the restaurant! Afterwards we drove up the hill and spent some time searching (successfully) for **Rufous-browed Flycatcher**. There was also a **Mountain Hawk-eagle**, a few **Yellow-browed Warblers**, **Yellow-bellied Warbler**, **Blyth's Shrike-babbler**, **Everett's White-eye**, **Mountain Bulbul**, and both **Blue-winged** and **Orange-bellied Leafbirds**. Moving down the hill, we couldn't locate 'the treepie' but had **Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo**, several **Long-tailed Broadbills**, **Large Woodshrike** and **Common Green Magpie**. As we left the park we added to our pecker list with good looks at **Greater Flameback** and **Greater Yellownappe**.

After dinner we spotlighted a **Collared Scops-owl** beside the lodge's restaurant.

Day 9 Monday 3rd February

Today we were booked to visit one of Kaeng Krachen's best kept secrets, a hide overlooking a small drinking pool – and we were all excited by this. But first we drove into the National Park on a mission – a broadbill mission. And we were not disappointed, with **Black-and-Red**,



Black-and-yellow Broadbill

Black-and-yellow and a flock of **Silver-breasted Broadbills** all found within 150 yards of each other. They seemed to be feeding on a recent emergence of some large insects and we were treated to pretty amazing views. With the temperature continuing to rise our stab at finding anything good between the streams was pretty futile, so we drove back out towards the entrance and stopped a few times to scan the area but there wasn't much doing. So an early return to our wonderful lodge seemed like a good idea and a little rest as well.

After lunch we drove to the start of the trail that leads to some small hides overlooking a water-hole and after everyone had settled down for a lengthy vigil the birds began to appear. In fact there was an almost constant activity apart from when a large snake appeared, which was probably a **King Cobra**,

and the birds disappeared for a while. However, as it was getting quite hot many birds came down to bathe and almost immediately after our arrival a **Racket-tailed Treepie** came in, along with a pair of **White-rumped Shamas** and a little later a **Greater Racket-tailed Drongo** arrived as well. As we were only 15 – 20 feet away from these birds, you could see every feather detail and it is always a major highlight of the tour to be able to watch and study birds at such close quarters. Other flurries of activity were many and on one occasion there was **Puff-throated** and **Abbott's Babblers**, **Pin-striped Tit-babbler**, **Brown-cheeked Fulvetta**, and an immature male **Siberian Blue Robin** all positioned around the waterhole. At other times there was **Stripe-throated**, **Black-crested**, and a few **Streak-eared Bulbuls** noisily congregating for a bathe. At other times several **Black-naped Monarchs**, a female



Siberian Blue Robin



Slaty-legged Crake

Blue-throated Flycatcher, and some **Tickell's Blue Flycatchers** all came in together – with a male **Chinese Blue Flycatcher** appearing infrequently as well. The stars of the show were **Bar-backed Partridge** and **Scaly-breasted Partridge** and both appeared in small groups on a number of occasions. There was also a female **Olive-backed Sunbird**, a **Little Spiderhunter**, several **Red Junglefowl**, and a mixed flock of **Greater** and **Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes**. I did say the partridges were the stars, but that was until the light had almost gone and a **Slaty-legged Crake** appeared as if by magic and proceeded to bathe, although the poor light really made photography tricky. But what a session and a real treat!

Day 10 Tuesday 4th February

After breakfast we drove back to Petchaburi in order to fill a few gaps on our list, starting at an area of rough ground with some pools. Here we found an **Eurasian Wryneck**, several **Greater Painted Snipe**, **Ruddy-breasted Crake**, **Black-browed Reed Warbler**, **Chestnut Munia** and a **Watercock**. Along the coast we had great views of **Golden-bellied Gerygone** and **Mangrove Whistler**, plus some more views of the waders such as **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Long-toed Stint** and **Broad-billed Sandpiper**. A quick stop to look for any early returning **Oriental Pratincoles** resulted in us finding a **Collared Pratincole**, the 1st record for Thailand. Turns out this was first seen a couple of weeks ago by some visiting birders, but not conclusively identified – oh well! After lunch we went to the raptor fields and managed to see **Black-eared Kite**, **Steppe Eagle** and an **Eastern Marsh Harrier**, plus several **Red-throated Pigits**.

And that was it and we had to return to Bangkok and our hotel for the night, before flying back to the UK on Day 11. Once more, a huge thanks to Nick Upton for being our guide and producing 'the goods' yet again. In just 8 days we had seen 306 species, including many of the key species and in most cases getting great views. Our Thailand tours just cannot be beaten for quality and the results prove it!



Bar-backed Partridges



Scaly-breasted Partridge



Black-naped Monarch



Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush



Moustached Barbet



Rufous-browed Flycatcher



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