

CENTRAL THAILAND 2012

5th January to 15th January 2012

HIGHLIGHTS

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

- Spoon-billed Sandpiper
- Nordmann's Greenshank
- Long-toed Stint
- White-fronted Plover
- Grey-headed Lapwing
- Bar-backed Partridge
- Scaly-breasted Partridge
- Kalij Pheasant
- Chinese Egret
- Collared Owlet
- Red-headed Trogon
- Orange-headed Trogon
- Black-and-red Broadbill
- Violet Cuckoo
- Black-headed Woodpecker
- Laced Woodpecker
- Siberian Blue Robin
- Mugimaki Flycatcher
- White-throated Rock-thrush
- Black-throated Laughingthrush
- Maroon-breasted Philentoma
- Brown-backed Needletail
- Large Scimitar-babbler
- Limestone Wren-babbler
- Crested Jay
- Asian Golden Weaver
- Great Hornbill

Leader: Nick Bray

SUMMARY:

This was the first of three back-to-back tours we ran this month and this one concentrated on the central region of Thailand producing a mouth-watering selection of south-east Asian birds. Thailand is a perfect destination to visit during the winter months, with an extremely rich and varied resident population augmented by an influx of migrants from the Himalayas and northern Asia. We began our visit at the wader watchers mecca of Petchaburi saltpans, famous for its wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers. It also hosts a multitude of other sought-after waders such as Nordmann's Greenshank, Malaysian Plover, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Great Knot and Long-toed Stint. From here we visited the magic forest of Kaeng Krachen where there often seems an endless stream of possibilities! This year we found Bar-backed Partridge, Black-and-red Broadbill, Crested Jay, and Ratchet-tailed Treepie amongst others. The famous Khao Yai was our next port of call with its Siamese Firebacks before finishing up at a superb marsh near Bangkok teeming with countless birds. Thailand again proved what a fabulous destination it is with good food, decent roads and fabulous birding.

Days 1 - 2 5th - 6th January 2012

Following an overnight direct flight from London we arrived in Bangkok in the late afternoon of Day 2 and spent a relatively comfortable night at a nearby hotel.



Thailand always produces great birds and Scaly-breasted Partridge is usually hard to find. This one was frequenting a waterhole near Kaeng Krachen.



Bar-backed Partridge is a true skulker of dense forest but this one came right out into the open at the same site. Absolutely amazing!

Day 3 Saturday 7th January

An early departure meant we reached the fabled salt pans of Petchaburi at around 7.30am, and we parked up at the famous site of Pak Thale full of anticipation. This is home to the Holy Grail for wader enthusiasts the world over, the Critically Endangered **Spoon-billed Sandpiper**. Upon arrival we walked around the nearest saltpan and viewed a bunch of waders congregated along a narrow area of raised mud. Most of these were **Red-necked Stints**, but **Curlew Sandpiper** and **Kentish Plover** were also present. After a few minutes of scanning Annette picked up our first "spoonie" and we then spent the next half an hour scoping it and thoroughly soaking up the views. It spent some time with its head tucked out of sight which meant locating it quite tricky although the slightly larger size and pot-bellied profile were quite noticeable - but towards the end of our vigil we were able to fully appreciate its spatulate bill when it preened and began feeding. With so much activity from other salt pans close by we inevitably began building an awesome wader list, with plenty of **Greater Sandpipers** amongst the **Lesser Sandpipers**, a few **Marsh Sandpipers**, **Long-toed Stint**, 20+ **Broad-billed Sandpipers** and a few groups of **Spotted Redshanks**. A huge flock of **Eurasian Curlews** were present distantly and we also saw **Brown-headed Gull** swimming near them. Terns were also well represented with **Gull-billed**, **Little**, **Common** and **Whiskered** all showing nicely. We then checked out another area of salt pans and found the flock of **Nordmann's Greenshanks** which totalled at least 40 individuals, along with our first **Great Knot** and **Caspian Terns**. Leaving here we drove around some other areas and had great looks at more waders which remained extremely close beside our vehicle including several confiding **Long-toed Stints** and our only **Temminck's Stint** of the tour. After lunch we visited the Royal Project where a **Golden-bellied Gerygone** came in to a whistled imitation of its call. The raised embankment here gave us a great vantage point and we were able to study **Pintail Snipe**, **Ruff** and **Wood Sandpiper** amongst others. Then we drove to the nearby small fishing village where we boarded a couple of small boats to take us out to the famous sandspit at Laem Pak Bia where a pair of **White-faced Plovers**, several **Malaysian Plovers** and a trio of **Chinese Egrets** were found. We ended the day back at the Royal Project where **Slaty-breasted Rail** and **Ruddy-breasted Crakes** skulked in the shadows of the mangroves and we finished a fantastic day with several **Indian Nightjars** performing in the darkness.

Day 4 Sunday 8th January

We left the hotel at the reasonable time of 6.30am and drove a short distance to a dry Dipterocarp forest where upon arrival we found a fruiting tree with stacks of **Coppersmith Barbets** and



Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Pak Thale. Still [THE](#) place to see this very special bird. Listed as Critically Endangered By BirdLife International with under 200 breeding pairs estimated in the world. Now is definitely the time to see it!



Long-toed Stint is a key species for many visiting birders and is easily seen around the salt pans of Petchaburi where you can get great close views.

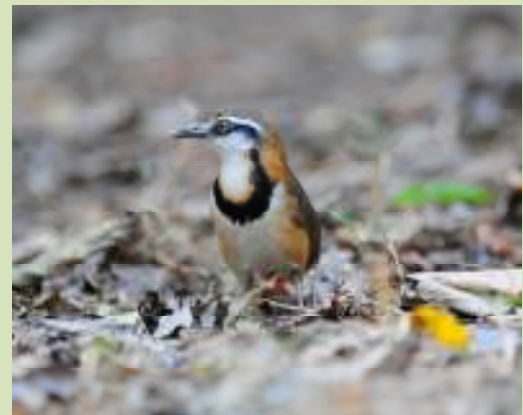


Up to 3 Chinese Egrets were present during the boat ride from Laem Pak Bia. Another of the key target species on this tour due to its declining world population and the fact you have to be somewhere good to see one!

the much larger **Lineated Barbet** as well. In the surrounding trees an **Spotted Owlet**, **Asian Brown Flycatcher** and **Black-naped Oriole** were present, whilst overhead **Red-rumped Swallows** and **Asian Palm-swifts** were seen. Further along the secluded road was a large lake where a **Pied Kingfisher** hovered over the shallow water in search of breakfast and some distant roosting **Ashy Woodswallows** were present. In the trees behind us **Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker** and **Olive-backed Sunbird** performed nicely and a **Taiga Flycatcher** worked its way along the small bushes beside the water. Walking into the forest turned out to be a good move as we scored with the major find of a pair of **Black-headed Woodpeckers** that were spending their time hunting for grubs just a few feet off the ground. Also there was also a confiding **Asian Barred Owlet**, **Red-breasted Parakeet**, **Green-billed Malkoha**, **Purple Sunbird**, **Greater Racket-tailed** and a flyover **Hair-crested Drongo**, **Forest Wagtail** and a flock of **Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes**. So with all of our target species found early we could move on towards the wonderful Kaeng Krachen National Park and we began our birding here in a small orchard literally teeming with bulbuls. There were **Black-crested**, **Black-headed**, **Sooty-headed**, **Stripe-throated** and the abundant **Streak-eared Bulbuls** vying for our attention. Our main target was **Vernal Hanging-parrot** and a couple of these flew in to feed on the fruiting trees, and we also had **Thick-billed Flowerpecker** here as well. Leaving here we drove on to a very special site where several hides have been constructed at the edge of the forest and the owners have constructed some drinking pools and by regularly putting out seed have attracted some of the forests shyer and more retiring denizens. We arrived by late morning and had an hour in the hides before lunch and what a taster we were treated to with both **Greater** and **Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes** giving point blank views, along with a superb **Grey-faced Woodpecker** and an **Abbott's Babbler** which were all totally overshadowed by a pair of **Scaly-breasted Partridges** that came in to feed. At lunch a **Green-eared Barbet** and pair of **Golden-fronted Leafbirds** came in to a feeder beside the dining area and an incredibly confiding **Puff-throated Babbler** also appeared. We then spent the next five hours at the viewing area and were treated to repeated views of the pair of **Scaly-breasted Partridges**, along with **Red Junglefowl** and the odd-looking **Kalij Pheasants** that have begun to appear here. New species kept on appearing at regular intervals and we enjoyed such fantastic views of numerous **Brown-cheeked Fulvettas**, 3 **Siberian Blue Robins**, **White-rumped Shama**, **Black-naped Monarch**, **Tickell's Blue**, **Taiga** and **Chinese Blue Flycatchers**, **Dark-necked Tailorbird**, brief **Pale-legged Leaf-warbler**, **Pin-striped Tit-babbler** and **Racket-tailed Treepie**. The undoubted star attraction of the afternoon was the pair of intricately plumaged **Bar-backed Partridges** that at



From a conveniently situated hide at Kaeng Krachen we had amazing views of many species. The Kalij Pheasants here are unlike any other race and I am assured by resident experts this is what they are!



Several Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes were present with their larger cousins.



3 Siberian Blue Robins were present including this beautiful adult male.

first seemed rather shy and stayed in the shadows before giving in to temptation and feeding right out in the open. What an excellent day and we rounded proceedings off nicely with a few cold beers later in the evening.

Day 5 Monday 9th January

We spent the day birding around the lower levels of Kaeng Krachen and turned up a number of very good species. We kicked off just a few kilometres into the park with a random stop to scan a good looking area and had a pair of **Common Flamebacks** fly over and land in a tall tree on the hill above us. Then a **Large Scimitar-babbler** began to call and we spent the next half an hour trying to find it and this turned out to be a successful hunt as a pair were lured in and gave superb views for this usually hard-to see species. A couple of **Thick-billed Pigeons** were also perched nearby and our first **Great Iora** was much appreciated. A little further along the road a **Thick-billed Warbler** showed very well, as did **Greater Flameback**, **Blue-winged Leafbird** and **White-browed Piculet**. We moved on up to the campground and disturbed an **Emerald Dove** which was feeding on the grass and then an **Orange-breasted Trogon** began calling and after a bit of a search we tracked it down. As we watched this a pair of **Black-and-red Broadbills** were spotted and we spent a bit of time watching these beautiful birds through the scope and the large tree they were inhabiting also held a **Large Woodshrike** and several **Sultan Tits**. Then we checked out the campsite and scoped a **Blue-eared Barbet** and **Banded Bay Cuckoo** in the tall trees, whilst **Green-billed Malkoha**, **Radde's Warbler**, **Buff-vented Bulbul**, **Asian Paradise-flycatcher** and **Hainan Blue Flycatcher** kept to the shadows. As we returned to the minibus a squadron of **Brown-backed Needletails** sped across the clear blue sky in company with a few **Asian House Martins**. The area between the three streams is a famous birding site here and we easily picked up **Laced Woodpecker**, and came across a flock of **Greater Necklaced Laughingthrushes** which also held 3 **Common Green Magpies** and a pair of **White-browed Scimitar-babblers**. Other species seen before lunch included **Brown-rumped Minivet**, **Spangled Drongo**, **Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher**, **Ochraceous Bulbul**, and both **Asian Brown** and **Taiga Flycatchers**. The afternoon session began quietly although a **Scaly-breasted Partridge** would have been a crippler if we hadn't had such good views yesterday. A **Grey Peacock-pheasant** called from across a small stream and we walked into the forest and tried to lure it in without success. Then we found a few **Asian Fairy Bluebirds**, **Black-winged Cuckooshrike**, a pair of **Scarlet Minivets**, **Blue-throated Flycatcher** and an extremely confiding **Pale-legged Leaf-warbler** but the undoubted highlight was the pair of **Crested Jays** that gave repeated views in the leafy canopy beside the road. A great way to end the day.



Grey-headed Woodpecker came in to drink at the small pool near Kaeng Krachen.



Chinese Blue Flycatcher was seen several times at Kaeng Krachen. Formerly lumped within Blue-throated Flycatcher it is now a species in its own right.



A pair of Black-and-red Broadbills showed well at Kaeng Krachen.

Day 6 Tuesday 10th January

We headed up the mountain this morning and arrived at the gate before first light having seen a few **Large-tailed Nightjars** in the headlights along the way. From here we wound our way ever upwards admiring the awesome scenery of forested ridges stretching all the way to the horizon and into Myanmar. We began our day with a **Dark-sided Flycatcher** perched over the road and a **Crested Goshawk** circling overhead before reaching a scenic watch point. A short walk revealed several **White-browed Scimitar-babblers**, a pair of sunbathing **Vernal Hanging-parrots**, **Blue Rock-thrush** and best of all, a pair of confiding **Black-throated Laughingthrushes**. From here we continued driving down the other side of the mountain and spent some time around the parking area where the road ends. Both **Fire-breasted** and **Plain Flowerpeckers** were present and a **Streaked Spiderhunter** posed well in a bare tree. We followed a trail a short way downhill to a large fruiting tree which held loads of barbets and whilst watching the general area we amazingly found a pair of **Maroon-breasted Philentomas** – a very rare species here. Returning to the top of the mountain we found a superb **Violet Cuckoo**, **White-browed Shrike-babbler** and **Blue-throated Barbet** all in quick succession, followed by a calling **Moustached Barbet** and views of a **Great Hornbill** perched in a distant tree. After lunch at the restaurant on the top ridge we slowly birded our way back down the mountain and didn't get very far before we stopped to checkout a good stretch of road where we found a **Black-throated Sunbird**. Moving on we staked out another patch of forest and soon found the much-wanted **Ratchet-tailed Treepie** perched on an exposed branch in an open area for several minutes allowing us to scope it – an excellent find of a species which is only found here and in Vietnam. Then a **Speckled Piculet** was seen, followed by an incredibly bright male **Red-headed Trogon**. A flock then moved along the slope below us which contained **Golden** and **Rufous-fronted Babblers**, as well as several **Striped Tit-babbler**. A few warblers were also tagging along at the rear of the flock and a delightful **Sulphur-breasted Warbler** was also new for us, as was a **Plain-tailed Warbler** which was found by Nick E a little further up the road. We stayed in this one spot for ages and picked up this flock again a little later but this time also saw a **Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo** as well. By late afternoon we headed down the mountain finding **Mountain Imperial-pigeon**, **Chestnut-headed Bee-eater** and **Dollarbird**. The day ended by walking along the stream area but with little activity left the park early and headed back to the lodge.

Day 7 Wednesday 11th January

We left Kaeng Krachen and headed for pastures new this morning, stopping amidst a vast area of rice paddies where we



This Pale-legged Leaf-warbler was exceptionally confiding at Kaeng Krachen.



A pair of Crested Jays performed very well at Kaeng Krachen contrary to their usually shy nature.



Ratchet-tailed Treepie has a small relict population at Kaeng Krachen. It is otherwise only found in Vietnam.

picked up several new species. **Plaintive Cuckoo** and **Black-eared Kite** were common, and we also had **Eastern Marsh Harrier**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Scaly-breasted Munia**, **Brahminy Kite**, **Plain-backed Sparrow**, **Eastern Yellow Wagtail**, **Asian Koel**, and **Siberian Stonechats**. We also had very close views of a pair of **Greater Painted Snipe**, and nice side-by-side comparisons of **Little**, **Intermediate** and **Great Egrets**, as well as several **Brown Shrikes** amongst others. A confiding **Asian Golden Weaver** was a really good find and often very tricky to locate but we were able to study it for several minutes and with plenty of **Baya Weavers** nearby the huge conical bill looked enormous. Leaving here we headed around Bangkok and on our way to Khao Yai called in to the usual site for **Limestone Wren-babbler**, a small temple set between impressive limestone crags. After an hour or so we finally located a pair moving across the hillside above us and they gave pretty reasonable views. Both **Eurasian Hoopoe** and **Blue Whistling-thrush** were also nice additions here before we left and drove to our hotel near the entrance gate to Khao Yai. We celebrated our wren-babbler success with cold beers and yet another excellent Thai dinner.

Day 8 Thursday 12th January

A really good day in Khao Yai began quietly along the entrance road where the highlight was a **Pig-tailed Macaque** jumping into our van and stealing an unopened packet of crisps! Driving further into the park it would have been hard to miss a huge **Great Hornbill** feeding in a large tree right beside the road and it certainly provided us with a veritable feast of photo opportunities. A little later 4 **Wreathed Hornbills** flew over and a pair of **Blue-bearded Bee-eaters** gave brief views. A good run of birds then followed with **Red-breasted Parakeet**, both **Blue-winged** and **Golden-fronted Leafbirds**, **Hainan Blue Flycatcher** and several confiding **Radde's Warbler**. Then we visited a stake-out where **Mugimaki Flycatcher** and **White-throated Rock-thrush** have been present for some weeks and were still there on our arrival giving outstanding views. Just before lunch we birded a campground and found it hard to tear ourselves away for lunch as there was just so much going on. We had **Green-eared** and **Blue-eared Barbets**, **Yellow-vented Flowerpecker**, **Large Hawk-cuckoo**, **Black-winged Cuckooshrike**, **Scarlet** and **Rosy Minivets**, and finished off with a great spot by Nick E of a **Collared Owlet** being mobbed by a **Grey-backed Shrike**. Nearby at a feeding station a pair of **Orange-headed Thrushes** were exceptionally confiding, **Plain-tailed Warbler**, **White-rumped Shama** and **Puff-throated Babbler**s were also very confiding and a flock of **White-bellied Erpornis** passed by. Just before lunch a small flock of **Blue-throated Bee-eaters** were found near a waterfall. In the afternoon we walked a trail and came across



This Asiatic Golden Weaver showed well in some flooded fields at Petchaburi.



It took a while to find, but the wait was worth it when this Limestone Wren-babbler appeared at the base of some impressive Limestone crags.



This Great Hornbill was feeding in a large tree beside the road in Khao Yai..

two male and a female **Siamese Firebacks** quietly feeding in the leaf litter and heard 3 calling **Blue Pittas**, none of which were responsive to playback.

Day 9 Friday 13th January

We birded in the park again for the first few hours, this time heading past Radar Road seeing a flock of **Barred Cuckoo-doves** perched nearby and drove up the mountain, but in the cool of the early morning activity was pretty quiet. A **Moustached Barbet** called but would not respond to the ipod and then a flock of **Swinhoe's Minivets** and **Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrikes** passed by. On the hillside above us a pair of **Asian Fairy Bluebirds** were scoped and nearby an **Ashy Bulbul** was also present. A burst of activity then followed when a large feeding flock on another trail gave us **Laced Woodpecker**, **Greater Racket-tailed Drongo**, a couple of **Common Green Magpies**, **White-browed Scimitar-babbler**, **Greater Flameback**, **Grey-eyed Bulbul**, a pair of **Red-headed Trogons**, and a flock of **White-crested Laughingthrushes**. After lunch at a nice restaurant we added **Yellow-vented Bulbul** to the list and saw a really close pair of **Brown-throated Sunbirds**, before checking out an open area where **Black-collared Starling** and **Bronze-winged Jacana** were new for our ever growing lists. In the late afternoon we headed back to Bangkok for a two night stay.

Day 10 Saturday 14th January

We spent most of the morning at an area of marshes and fishponds near Bangkok which turned up a number of new birds and in fact the area was teeming with numerous species and it was difficult to know where to look first. There was quite a few **Yellow Bitterns** dotted around the ponds, as well as a single **Black Bittern** that showed a few times and flew from one patch of tall reeds to the next. There was also **Purple Heron**, **Intermediate Egret**, flocks of noisy **Lesser Whistling-ducks** and loads of **Whiskered Terns**. We followed a track to some more distant ponds where **Black-shouldered Kite**, **Blue-tailed Bee-eater**, **Long-tailed Shrike**, both **Black-browed** and **Oriental Reed Warblers**, plenty of **White-browed Crakes**, **Yellow-bellied Prinia**, and both **Asian Golden** and **Baya Weavers** were all seen well. A partially flooded field held **Ruddy-breasted Crake** and **Slaty-breasted Rail**, along with a **Richard's Pipit**, numerous **Eastern Yellow Wagtails**, **Long-toed Stint**, **Wood Sandpiper**, and best of all a **Grey-headed Lapwing**. We had lunch at the end of a pier along the coast where we located a recently reported rarity in the form of a **Mew Gull** amongst the numerous **Black-headed** and **Brown-headed Gulls**. Overhead 9 **Painted Storks** soared around and an **Osprey** flew by with a large fish in its talons. From a hide we watched huge numbers of **Black-tailed Godwits** fly out into the bay, and there was also **Pacific Golden Plover** and several



A White-throated Rock-thrush had taken up residence around some buildings at Khao Yai.



The call of Two-barred Greenish Warbler was heard throughout our tour and we enjoyed numerous sightings of this great little bird.



One of the bonuses of so many Thai bird photographers is the numerous feeding stations at all the main sites. This Orange-headed Thrush was taking advantage of mealworms and showed very well at Khao Yai.

Marsh Sandpipers present and a few **Golden-bellied Gerygones** gave nice views in the Mangroves to round off an exciting week's birding in Central Thailand.

Day 11 Sunday 15th January

Today was the day of departure for some of the group with international flights back to the UK. For the rest of us it was an early start as we flew to Chiang Mai in the north and the next leg of our Thailand adventure.

Nick Bray.

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