

THAILAND

IN SEARCH OF SPOON-BILLED SANDPIPER AND GURNEY'S PITTA



Gurney's Pitta
(Somkiat Y Phanich)

Monday January 9th – Saturday January 21st 2012

Leaders: Chris Bradshaw and local guides

Group Size: 8

Species: 330 - 370

Thailand has a long-established reputation for providing some of the best birding in south-east Asia. An excellent network of protected areas covers all the major habitats and a rich cultural heritage provides added interest for the visiting birder. Our tour of this wonderful country begins with a quest to find the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper, small numbers of which regularly winter within easy reach of Bangkok. The magnificent forests of Khao Yai and Kaeng Krachan are great places to search for a comprehensive selection of south-east Asian forest species, whilst our visit to the southernmost reaches of the country targets the endangered Gurney's Pitta (a jewel of the forest floor), the bizarre Rail-babbler and a wide range of species typical of the Thai-Malay peninsula.

Join us to in our search for some very rare birds and experience some of the finest birding south-east Asia has to offer.

Chris Bradshaw has travelled extensively in south-east Asia and has made four previous visits to Thailand.

Day 1: Fly from London to Bangkok, arriving the next morning.

Day 2: On arrival in Bangkok, we drive to Kok Kham, situated near Phetchaburi, where if time permits we'll begin our Thai birding experience.

Day 3: The Kok Kham area is dominated by extensive salt-pans and shrimp ponds, many of which teem with large numbers of feeding and roosting waders. Commoner species include Red-necked Stint, Marsh, Curlew and Broad-billed Sandpipers, Greenshank, and Greater and Lesser Sandplovers. However, the area has become famous in recent years for being a regular wintering site for small numbers of the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the search for this species will be a prime focus of our visit. We have an excellent chance of seeing this sought after species. Other rarer species here include Great Knot and we also have a good chance of seeing the rare Nordmann's Greenshank. The poorly known White-faced Plover has also been seen in this area and, with luck, we may encounter this enigmatic bird. Additional possibilities include Caspian, Little and Common Terns and Brown-headed Gull,

whilst a sewage treatment works allows further close encounters with waders with Pintail Snipe and Long-toed Stint likely. This area is also favoured by Ruddy-breasted Crake, White-breasted Waterhen and Painted Stork. In the late afternoon we travel to Kaeng Krachan where we begin a three night-stay.

Day 4-5: Situated on the eastern side of the remote Tenasserim mountain range near the Burmese border, Kaeng Krachan is Thailand's largest National Park with an excellent range of forest habitats supporting a rich avifauna. Some of the more difficult species we hope to find include Grey Peacock-pheasant, Ferruginous Partridge, Large Scimitar-babbler, Kalij Pheasant, Yellow-vented Green Pigeon and Ratchet-tailed Treepie. Amongst a variety of woodpeckers we might see are the magnificent Great Slaty and the delightful Heart-spotted. Calls from the canopy betray the presence of the stunningly coloured Broadbills, and Dusky, Banded, Black-and-yellow and Silver-breasted are all possible, with our 2009 visit even recording Green, a species infrequently encountered this far north in Thailand. Bee-eaters might include the forest dwelling Chestnut-headed and

Red-bearded. A rich diversity of Barbets is present with Great, Golden-throated, Blue-throated, Red-throated, Green-eared and Blue-eared all possible. White-browed Scimitar-babbler and White-hooded Babbler are among the more striking members of the Babbler family. Other birds we will hope to find include Green-billed and Chestnut-breasted Malkohas, Sultan Tit, the elusive Crested Jay, Green Magpie, Moustached Cuckoo, Striated and White-bellied Yuhinas, White-rumped Shama, Common and Great Ioras, Black-naped Monarch, Asian Paradise Flycatcher and many more.

Day 6: Today we leave Kaeng Krachan in order to head for Khao Yai where we have a two-night stay. We'll make birding stops on the way, one of which will be at a small temple surrounded by limestone hills where we look for Limestone Wren-babbler.

Day 7: We spend our time exploring the network of trails of Khao Yai. The semi-evergreen forest is home to many birds. Species such as Scaly-breasted Partridge, Silver Pheasant, Siamese Fireback, Banded Kingfisher, Blue Pitta and the elusive Coral-billed Ground Cuckoo are

always special birds and we have a good chance of finding some or all of these. Grassy areas hold Thick-billed Warbler, Rufescent Prinia and Bright-capped Cisticolas, while streams and waterfalls are home to Slaty-backed and White-crowned Forktails. Khao Yai is also a good place to see pigeons and doves, with Thick-billed Green Pigeon, Emerald Dove, Barred Cuckoo-dove and Mountain Imperial Pigeon all likely. Blue-bearded Bee-eaters frequent areas of bamboo, whilst we should see a variety of hornbills, with Great, Wreathed and Oriental Pied all present. Dazzling Scarlet and Brown-rumped Minivets form flocks in the canopy while Moustached and Green-eared Barbets utter their monotonous calls. Feeding flocks feature Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Black-winged Cuckooshrike and Long-tailed Broadbill. Bulbuls comprise Black-crested, Black-headed, Stripe-throated, Ashy, Puff-throated and Grey-eyed. Orange-breasted and Red-headed Trogons sit quietly in the middle storey. Winter visitors from the Siberian forests include Radde's, Arctic, Pale-legged Leaf Warblers and the skulking Siberian Blue Robin. In the evening, we search for night birds such as Collared Scops Owl, Brown Hawk Owl and Asian Barred Owllet. Khao Yai is a good place for mammals; Sambar Deer, Indian Muntjac, Pig-tailed Macaque, White-handed Gibbon and Black Giant Squirrel. If we are lucky we will come across Indian Elephant or even Tiger. Overnight in Juldis Hotel.

Day 8: After a final morning spent birding at Khao Yai, we drive to Bangkok where we catch a flight to Krabi for a three night-stay.

Days 9-10: We spend two days at Khao Noi Chuchi a site famous for being home to the marvellous Gurney's Pitta. This elusive jewel of the forest floor can reliably be found here but it will take some luck



Spoon-billed Sandpiper (Nuwat Phunsuwan)

and persistence to catch a glimpse of this magical bird. It is likely that we may have to spend some hours waiting in small hides situated close to known territories in order to have a chance of seeing this species. There are of course other birds here, although the birding can be slow at times. The wonderful Banded Pitta is a possibility, whilst Red-crowned Barbet, Great Iora, Fulvous-chested Jungle-flycatcher are among other notable species here. Additional species we may encounter include Scarlet-rumped Trogon, Rufous-collared Kingfisher, Green and Black-and-yellow Broadbill, Rufous-winged Philentoma, Rufous-tailed Tailorbird and babbler species such as Moustached, Scaly-crowned, Chestnut-winged.

Day 11: Today we travel to Krung Ching, part of the Khao Luang National Park, where we explore forest trails in search of more forest birds. One of the specialities of the area is the bizarre Rail-babbler, a truly unique bird that inhabits the forest floor and we will make a special effort to try and locate this strange bird. The forests here are home to a wide range of other forest species typical of the Thai-

Malay peninsula and among the many possibilities are a wide variety of bulbuls, Raffle's, Black-bellied and Chestnut-breasted Malkoha, Crested Jay, Wreathed and White-crowned Hornbill, Wallace's Hawk-eagle, Red-bearded Bee-eater, Grey-headed Babbler, Yellow-breasted Flowerpecker and much more besides.

Day 12: After another morning birding at Krung Ching, we return to Krabi for an overnight stay.

Day 13: Our last morning is spent on a boat trip through the mangroves at Krabi. As we cruise past magnificent limestone outcrops and along the sheltered creeks, we should encounter the impressive Brown-winged Kingfisher and we will search for the often elusive Ruddy Kingfisher. White-bellied Sea-eagles are often to be seen drifting overhead, whilst we make a particular effort to look for a number of mangrove specialists including Mangrove Whistler, Mangrove Blue Flycatcher and the colourful Mangrove Pitta. In the afternoon we take a flight back to Bangkok where we connect with our flight back to the UK. Arrival is the next morning.

Ground Price: £2695

Single room: £275

Air fare: £700

Total Tour Price: £3395

Tour Price Bangkok/Bangkok: £2695

Deposit: £350

*please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights on pages 5 and 71

This holiday is fully inclusive of flights, accommodation and meals, transport, boat trips, entrance and permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, camera fees at national parks, insurance and items of a personal nature.

Good accommodation throughout. Food is typically Thai with a variety of fish and meat dishes with rice and noodles.

Transport by mini bus, although a jeep/4x4 will be used at Kaeng Krachan. Short to medium walks, often in forests where the trails may be narrow and surfaces may be slippery and wet.