

THAILAND JANUARY 5 – 18, 2013  
By Robbie Fischer

Joe Morlan, I and our friends Linda and Randy arrived in Bangkok about midnight on Jan. 4. We stayed at the Mariya Boutique Hotel. We spent the 5<sup>th</sup> close to the hotel recovering from the long flight. On the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup>, we met our guide, Sukanya (End) Thanombuddha in the lobby. She planned to take us south to the coast to look for shorebirds, in particular Spoon-billed Sandpiper. It is speculated that there may be under 300 individuals left in the world. They winter in salt pans and the best place to see Spoon-billed Sandpiper in Thailand is Lam Pak Thale near the Gulf of Thailand.



Black-winged Stilts and Black-tailed Godwits are plentiful. Spotted and Common Redshanks, Marsh Sandpipers, Great Knots and Greater Sandplovers were easily viewed through the scope. After about 45 minutes, End noticed a Spoon-bill feeding in the shallow water. Success! We spent the next hour watching the bird feed while Joe and another photographer attempted to get closer shots. Common, Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns joined the Brown-headed Gulls flying overhead.

After a great lunch in one of the many open air roadside restaurants, we headed to a canal to board a small boat for a ride through the mangroves to a sand spit. The tide was low and along the route we saw at least five Water Monitors, a large lizard, including one that was more than 4 feet long. We encountered Black-capped and Common Kingfishers, Great Crested, Little and Caspian Terns and soon after we jumped over the side of the

boat into the shallow water, we saw a lovely, cinnamon-capped Malaysian Plover. On our return trip the boatman pointed out a Chinese Egret along the banks. Mudskippers were feeding and defending their territories.



On the 7<sup>th</sup> we toured some drier habitats off the Rama II Road with End. Some of the birds we saw included Plain Prinia skylarking, Yellow-vented and Streak-eared Bulbuls, a cooperative Brown Shrike, along with Baya and Streaked Weavers. Marshy areas and ponds yielded Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, a Purple Heron, Yellow Bittern and a few Little Grebes. We moved on to a side road and were rewarded with a male Coppersmith Barbet perched on a wire “singing”. A Green-billed Malkhoa flew across the road while Common Tailorbirds and Pied Fantails fed in the shrubs.

In the afternoon we visited the Mahachi Mangrove Forest Preserve and spied a Golden-bellied Gerygone, which sounds to me like a Golden-crowned Sparrow. In the mud flats were flocks of Lesser Sandpipers, a few Whimbrels, Great and Little Egrets. Chinese or Java Pond-herons were seen daily. Apparently they are virtually impossible to distinguish in their winter plumage. Pacific Golden Plovers outnumbered the Black-bellied. We counted four Bar-tailed Godwits among the abundant Black-tailed before the flocks were scattered by a Peregrine Falcon.

On our way back to the hotel, End stopped at Wat Chong Lom Temple and we were excited to see the nesting Germain’s Swiftlets. These birds used to be lumped with

Edible-nest Swiftlets. The ones that fall from the nest are fed mealworms. It was a lovely finish to the day.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> Joe went to a local park with End while Linda, Randy and I took a cab to the airport and caught the Airtrain into downtown Bangkok. We then took a cab to the Grand Palace.



Construction here began in 1782 by King Rama I and it consists of the Royal Palace, administrative offices and many gorgeous embellished temples and statues. We had a wonderful morning visiting the grounds and seeing the Emerald Buddha. I highly recommend this amazing cultural experience. In the evening we met our Sunrise Birding tour group for dinner. Nick Upton, our local leader, and Kevin Karlson introduced themselves and the other five participants.

At 5AM the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> we arranged ourselves in the two vans. One was driven by Nick and the other had a Thai driver. Our first stop was at the Wat Pra Puttabaht Noi, an ancient temple to look for Limestone Wren-babbler, which we heard and then saw. A Blue Whistling Thrush searched for food on the ground while Asian Brown and Taiga Flycatchers shared the insects with White-rumped Shama. Long-tailed Macaques roamed the temple grounds. On the way to the Balios Resort Hotel we stopped to view a flock of Red-breasted Parakeets, including a female in a nest hole.

After lunch we drove into Khao Yai National Park. A troop of Pig-tailed Macaques foraged along the entrance road. We also saw Sambar and Muntjac Deer. A Great Hornbill flew just over our heads with surprisingly loud wing sounds. Some of the beautiful birds included both Blue and White-throated rock-thrushes, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Scarlet Minivet and Long-tailed Broadbill. At dusk we waited near a pond watching Brown-backed Needletails drinking on the wing. Eventually Nick spotted a Great Eared Nightjar and we counted four in all. We drove to a roadside restaurant for dinner and did not return to the Balios Hotel until after 8PM, a very long day.

Thursday, Jan 10 we enjoyed a buffet breakfast at the hotel and then left for another day birding Khao Yai. It was a good day for woodpeckers as we saw Heart-spotted and Laced as well as an aptly named Greater Flameback. My other favorite sightings included Blue-winged Leafbirds, Sultan Tits and a striking Silver-breasted Broadbill with its chestnut rump and powder blue patches on the wings. A pair Of Large Scimitar-babblers kept circling the group as Nick played the recording of their calls. Before lunch we visited the low marshy area behind the campground toilets and found the staked out Orange-headed Thrush, amazingly cooperative for photos. A mother, father and baby White-headed Gibbon family sat in trees near the road allowing close observation. That evening we visited the site of a Wrinkle-lipped Bat cave and watched thousands of them fly out at dusk. A couple Shikra (an accipiter) grabbed bats on the wing for an easy dinner.

We spent the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> back at Khao Yai. Two Red-headed Trogons in the scope were beautiful. We had Himalayan Swiftlets and Asian Palm-Swifts flying overhead. Colorful birds included Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Sulfur-breasted Warbler, Hainan Blue Flycatcher and White-throated Kingfisher. We headed south towards Bangkok and stopped in a small town for a Pad Thai lunch.

In the afternoon we explored wetlands in an industrial area. White-browed and Ruddy-breasted Crakes were cooperative. We had a distant view of a Plaintive Cuckoo and heard Asian Koel, a bird easy to hear daily but difficult to see. Striated Grassbird was not on our trip checklist so everyone was pleased to see it. Most of the common water birds were here, like Little Grebe, both jacanas, egrets and Whiskered Terns. A few Red-rumped Swallows joined the ubiquitous Barn Swallows. Traffic was horrific getting into Bangkok and we all wondered why it was necessary to stay downtown. We didn't arrive at our hotel until after 7PM.

We left Bangkok at 5AM on Saturday, Jan 12 and drove south east to Lam Pak Thale and environs. We had visited this area with End so were prepared for the hot, humid, sunny weather. It's a wonderful place for shorebirds and we saw many of the same species. The group had good looks at Broad-billed and Wood Sandpipers, Terek Sandpiper and Long-toed and Red-necked Stints. We searched for Spoon-billed Sandpiper for a couple of hours and finally had very distant looks at one feeding. We also spotted a Brahminy Kite and a Common Kestrel. Just before lunch we explored some salt ponds nearby and found 10 Nordmann's Greenshank and 2 Asian Dowitchers. After lunch at the Sun Hotel, we repeated the boat ride through the mangroves to the sand spit. We saw the same species



as we had on the 6<sup>th</sup> plus Striated Heron, a heuglini subspecies of Lesser Black-backed Gull and had good looks at the white-faced subspecies of Kentish Plover.

That evening we went to Laem Pak Bia, where research is undertaken on environmentally sustainable ways of treating wastewater and solid waste. I saw my first Pin-tailed Snipe, species number 2000 for me in the world. We also encountered a Ruff, 4 White-winged Terns, Little Ringed Plover, White-breasted Waterhens and Red-wattled Lapwings. Around sunset hundreds of Black Drongos and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters flew overhead going to roost. They were joined by about 100 Lyle's Flying Foxes, huge bats. As we slowly drove out on a dirt road, we were treated to 3 Indian Nightjars in the headlights.

Jan 13<sup>th</sup> we returned early to Lam Pak Thale hoping for closer looks at Spoon-billed Sandpiper but the only one we saw was still quite a distance, even for a 65 power scope. We did see a Black-legged Kittiwake, a rare bird for Thailand. Later in the morning we drove along the berms dividing the salt pans and spotted a Temminck's Stint and some Curlew Sandpipers. 17 Asian Dowitchers were sleeping in the shallow water. We enjoyed Richard's Pipits, a Brown Shrike and a perched Osprey. Joe's favorite sightings of the day were a few Oriental Skylarks skulking in the grass and then displaying while singing high overhead. One of my favorites was a perched Long-tailed Shrike with its chestnut scapulars and flanks contrasting with a long black tail and mask.

The next morning we drove south east through banana plantations to a wildlife rescue center surrounded by a dry forest. Our target here was Black-headed Woodpecker but, despite a couple hours scouring the area, we did not see them. A Rufous Treepie, Asian Barred Owlet and Purple Sunbird in the scope were consolation. Before noon we arrived at Ban Maaka Chalet, our lodging for the next four nights. It was a joy to realize we would be able to eat our meals at the lodge and rest for an hour or two midday. The pace of the tour in the relentless heat had left me with swollen ankles. Being near Kaeng Krachan National Park, the temperature had dropped just enough to give most of us new life.

After lunch we made our first foray into the park. Stump-tailed Macaques scattered before us on the entrance road. We saw some great birds including 3 Red-headed Trogons, Golden and Collared Babblers and pairs of Gray-chinned and Rosy Minivets. Lesser Racket-tailed, Ashy and Hair-crested Drongos were conspicuous but the Blue-throated Barbet and Ratchet-tailed Treepie overshadowed them. As we were leaving about dusk Nick spotted a Large-tailed Nightjar sitting on the side of the road.

After breakfast at the lodge at 6AM on the 15<sup>th</sup>, we drove back to Kaeng Krachan. We stopped and birded near a water hole and the early light was wonderful on a Green-eared Barbet perched and calling – great scope views. A pair of Asian Fairy Bluebirds, 3 Blue-winged Leafbirds and a Verditer Flycatcher set the color theme. Later at the campground we added Blue-eared Barbet while Gibbons called nearby. Just past the second stream crossing, Nick led us into a grove of mixed trees and bamboo to see a pair of White-fronted Scops-owls sitting together on their day roost. We walked up the road a short

distance and were excited to see Crested Serpent-eagle circling overhead as Nick whistled its call.

After lunch we drove up to the top of the park on a washed out dirt road, lots of bumps and swerving to avoid the ruts. The view was spectacular and we were lucky to have scope views of a Blue-throated Barbet. Kevin, Joe, John, Frank and Nick all carried scopes (and did some digiscoping). They were generous in sharing and we were all impressed with their ability to get on birds in the leafy canopy. Kevin Karlson was amazingly quick with his camera also. We saw Flavescent and Gray-eyed Bulbuls, Black-winged Cuckoo Shrike, Blyth's Shrike-babbler and White-browed Scimitar-Babbler with its bright orange bill. A White-browed Piculet was a crowd favorite as it probed under the bark of a tree. We returned to the Ban Maaka Chalet in the evening and saw two Emerald Doves and two Indian Nightjars on the way.



Once again the morning of Jan 16 was bright and sunny. We drove back into the park and were awed by three Great Hornbills flying overhead. A Dollarbird perched in the sun and Common Flameback and Greater Flameback flew into the same tree. A Banded Broadbill was surprising with its chestnut belly, black and yellow wings and tail and a bright blue bill. Nick showed us the nest hole of Brown Hornbill and we watched as one brought fruit to the nest. They are co-operative breeders with a dominant breeding pair and mostly male helpers.

We ate lunch at the chalet and then we spent a couple hours in a bird blind nearby. It was wonderful to see the birds up close. Three Greater Necklaced Laughing-Thrushes were huge and spent time tossing leaves searching for insects. Male and female Black-naped Monarchs were attracted to the water hole. A flock of Brown-cheeked Fulvettas kept returning to bathe. My favorites were the Siberian Blue Robin and Chinese Blue Flycatcher. It was a wonderful day.

By the 17<sup>th</sup> Joe and I were remarking that “we’ve seen enough birds”. The diversity was remarkable. We were wishing that we would just see most of the same species we had already seen. It was sensory overload. The morning was somewhat cool and cloudy and the park was quiet. 25 Oriental Pied Hornbills flew across the sky in twos and threes. A few hours were spent looking and listening for Great Slaty Woodpecker and eventually Kevin spied one at a distance on a trunk. Success! Just before we left the park, Nick pointed out a Black and Yellow Broadbill which has a pink belly, aqua bill, yellow eyering and black on yellow wings. What a bird!

In the afternoon we went to a different blind and I had my first close look at Ashy Drongo. What a difference when you see a bird 6 feet away rather than 60 yards. A Racket-tailed Treepie posed on a bare branch and we saw 4 or 5 Mouse Deer. A couple Red Junglefowl crossed the forest in the shade but the Bar-backed Partridges were attracted to the area around the water hole close by. Just before it was time to leave, an Asian Paradise Flycatcher landed just about five feet away – gorgeous.

On our last morning we birded the chalet grounds, seeing a Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker preening in the sun. Three Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrikes moved through the canopy. We had great looks at Black-hooded Oriole and Nick identified both male and female Ruby-cheeked Sunbirds. Near the pond we saw a pair of Oriental Magpie Robins. A surprise was a Gray-rumped Treeswift overhead, looking as large as a nighthawk. All too soon it was time to board the vans for our return to Bangkok. The trip was amazing and Asian birds are a treat. Nick Upton and Kevin Karlson were terrific at spotting birds and sharing their scopes. Linda and Randy, Martha and John, Ted, Frank and Greg all added to the memorable experience.

[Photos of birds and animals will be added to this trip report once they are processed.](#)

[Robbie Fischer](#)  
[February 12, 2013](#)