

Thailand-India Blog

Thailand

February 18-20: Flying to Bangkok

We had a strange flight plan to get to Thailand. We flew from Houston to Singapore, with a re-fueling stop in Moscow, then made the short hop to Bangkok. It was a tedious 26 hours of flying, which is the reason this first entry covers three days.

We left the condo in Houston at 1:30 in the afternoon, arriving at the airport the recommended 2 hours ahead of time. For once, this amount of time was actually needed: security was a mess, taking over an hour to clear. I never did see what the problem was and attributed it to normal TSA inefficiency. Then, while waiting at the gate, we found out that we couldn't take Linda's bag aboard. They even argued that our day packs counted as carry-on luggage, but I talked them out of that. Still, it was with some trepidation that we consigned her bag to Singapore airlines.

The plane was half empty on the first leg of the trip, so most people commandeered several seats and slept. Linda and I tried to study the Thailand birds, working thru the list from last year's trip. The plane was a fairly new Boeing 777, with power outlets built into the armrest of the seat. That meant that I could plug in the netbook without worrying about running down the battery. That helped, as we were able to check on several birds to see whether we had seen them before. There were more of these than I suspected. Still, we should have no trouble getting to our targets: 4000 life birds and 600+ in Asia.

After eleven hours and two meals, we landed in Moscow, where the temperature outside was -18C. We had to leave the plane and return thru the "transit" check-in, a process that meant standing in a queue for the entire time. We did manage to see some birds at the airport, Hooded Crows, which became our first lifer of the trip, and the only bird on our Russia list.

Many Muscovites apparently decided to escape the cold for the warmer climate in Singapore, so the flight was completely full for the next leg of the trip. The poor slob who sat between Linda and me for the next twelve hours was astonished that anyone would travel that far "just to look at birds." He was returning to Singapore from Houston, following two days of meetings. I thought it was ridiculous to spend that much time flying for two days of meetings, but he said the meetings had been worth the trouble.

In Singapore, we had a long hike to the gate for the flight to Bangkok. We almost flew over Bangkok on the way to Singapore, and the flight back was only 90 minutes, which seemed like nothing. It gave us the chance to eat yet another airline meal, a cheese omelet for our second breakfast of the morning. Actually, the food lived up to Singapore airline's reputation; it was not bad.

After clearing immigration, we found Linda's bag waiting for us on the carousel and walked to the airport hotel, a nice 4-star Novotel. After a quick shower and some birding from the window of our room (no lifers, but three birds for our Thailand list) we took a short nap that turned into a real sleep until the alarm woke us up to go to dinner and meet the rest of the group.

Now, as I write this, it is about 7:30 in Houston, and my body doesn't think sleep is the right thing to be doing. We are supposed to meet for brekkie at 5:30 tomorrow to leave at 6:15 for our first real birding of the trip.

February 21, 2011: Bangkok to Khao Yai via Muan Boran, various Wats, Ayuthya

Traditionally, the first day of a birding trip is a bit laid back, an introduction to the common birds of the area, a chance to get over jet lag, etc. Not this time! We rose at at 4:30 to give us time to repack everything before breakfast at 5:30. We departed at 6:00 for a full day of birding.

Our first stop was Muan Boran Fish Ponds. If you buy frozen tilapia from Thailand, we can now tell you where the fish may have come from. We spent several hours walking along the dikes around the ponds checking out the reeds and mud flats, logging some new birds and consuming 2 bottles of water. We had gone to considerable effort to make sure we had warm clothes for the trip, but we sure didn't need them today. It was a humid 32C, or on the temperature scale we are used to, a "double 90" day. It was just like being in Houston, but without the air conditioning.

We had two comfortable vans for the drive, each holding 4 birders, so that part of the trip was quite pleasant. The A/C in the vans was puny compared to our cars back home, but finally reduced the temperature to something cool enough that we switched it off the HIGH setting.

After Muan Boran, we stopped at Bang Pu, a beach resort, where we saw hundreds of Brown-headed Gulls and two Black-headed Gulls. These are tricky to separate when you see them independently, but fairly easy to tell apart when you have them side by side. The guides were excited to see 8-10 Painted Storks, which are rare in Thailand, but which we have seen before.

We had lunch at a touristy place along the road. In this case, most of the tourists seemed to be Chinese. I found it amusing that they approached the Thai food at the buffet with the same caution and bewilderment as we did.

After lunch, we stopped at a couple of Wats, Buddhist monasteries, where we built up a reasonable list, and at Ayuthya, one of the ancient capitals of Thailand, or Siam as it was known then. These presented better photographic opportunities than birding, but we did manage to find some interesting stuff. The best sighting was a troop of Long-tailed Macaques on the rocks near one of the Wats.

We had a long drive, which gave us a chance to verify that our eyelids were still functioning before arriving at a nice resort hotel in Khao Yai National Park. We'll be here for the next two-and-half days. Tomorrow we start at 5:30 again, but at least this time we don't need to repack before breakfast, so we plan to (try to) sleep a bit longer.

February 22, 2011: Khao Yai NP: Red Jungle Fowl and Great Hornbill

We've managed to see 49 new species thus far on the trip, but today the best sighting of the day was a non-lifer and a chicken.

We had breakfast at 5:30, which is rapidly becoming our standard time. Then we boarded the vans at 6:00 and set off to see what Khao Yai National Park had to offer. We spent the entire day in the park, and plan the same for tomorrow.

We started at an overlook at the side of the road. This gave us an opportunity to look down on the tops of the trees where the birds perched. We had several nice sightings there, the best being a Golden-fronted Leafbird that was cooperative and simply sat and preened while we looked at it thru the scope. These small green birds are very colorful, but still blend into the foliage perfectly, so finding them is a real art. Our local guide, "Mike," is adept at this, a great addition to the tour.



After a couple hours of this, we set off down the road. Mike led in the first van, and we saw him stopped by the side of the road. We got out and learned that he had seen a Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*) at a nest hole in a tree. We watched the male carefully passing figs into the nest hole to feed the female who was inside, probably sitting on eggs.

Here is a picture of the male. A full size version is online in my Picassa album Thailand.

We proceeded down the road, finally arriving at the visitor's center, which was closed for remodeling. Fortunately, the rest rooms were open, as there was a sign there with a picture of a man by a tree with a big X over it. We



birded around the area extensively, throwing out some meal worms as bait. This worked well, and we had wonderful views of several rare and beautiful birds.

My favorite sighting in that area, though was the Red Jungle Fowl (*Gallus gallus*) a stunningly good-looking Cock. This bird is the source of the domestic chicken, and the male looks a lot like a rooster, but one with especially vivid plumage. See for yourself.

February 23, 2011: Khao Yai NP: Elephant Encounter



This morning after breakfast, we set out again to bird along the roads in Khao Yai National Park. During the drive, we saw this bull elephant munching his way thru the forest. He ignored us for a while, then moved into the forest and stared back at us. We were lucky that he was out when we first drove by, as he was virtually invisible once inside the forest.

We birded for a while, walking back along the road, when we saw him again. We could recognize him because his tail is missing the hairs at the end. In addition, although we didn't notice it at first, he is "in musth," that is ready to breed, as can be told by the streaks of secretions on his cheeks. The elephant started walking toward us in a threatening manner. We quickly called for the vans, not wanting to prolong the encounter. Then, we watched from the safety of the van.

As we watched, a park service truck passed us and drove toward the elephant. Suddenly, we heard the screech of brakes mixed with the trumpeting call of the elephant. We then saw the truck backing up the road at high speed.

When the elephant disappeared into the forest again, we decided that we had enough adventure for the morning and went birding in a different area.

I'm writing this during our siesta time. Tonight, we are planning to go on a night drive, and I will probably be too tired at the end of it to write anything more. This will have to do for today's entry.

There is some question whether there was one elephant, or two. Dion, our guide, maintains that there were two elephants, and that the photo does not show the "musth" secretions.

February 24, 2011: A Double 5-star day!



As I write this, we are in Chiang Mai, the main city in the northern part of Thailand. The city has been a provincial capital thru many regimes since the 15th century. Today, it seems to serve as a major place for tourists, with many bars and cafes along the main streets.

But, I'm getting ahead of the story.

We started as usual with breakfast at 5:30 and left at 6:00 for a final morning birding in the park. We returned to a camping area where we had seen some rarities yesterday, and found some new species. After about an hour, we decided to go to another location. As we drove,

Dion spotted a gibbon in a tree and we piled out for a better look.

It turned out to be a different gibbon than the common one in the park. Instead of a better view of White-handed Gibbons, we had a spectacular view of a Pileated Gibbon, a species more often seen in Cambodia. A single male called repeatedly, trying in vain to attract a female to the fruiting fig tree he had found. I took several videos of the gibbon as he called and swung from one branch of the tree to another. I don't have any video processing software on this tiny computer, so I have to wait until I get back to stitch the different pieces together into a coherent whole.

The other van had disappeared ahead of us by the time we saw the gibbon. We called them (twice) to get them to return, and they finally did. They tried to impress us with their sighting of the Ashy Minivet, but we were having none of it.

The Pileated Gibbon rated 5-stars.

Then we moved on to a site near a "river" somewhat smaller than Barton Creek. We hoped to see some otters in the river, and did. Dion heard a Barred Kingfisher calling and tried to coax him in, without success. However, while he was playing the Kingfisher's call, he heard and Eared Pitta calling and switched to playing its call.

This was an outstanding success. Everyone in the group got a great look at and exceedingly difficult bird. Dion said it was only the second time he had seen it, and a first for Thailand. Oops! Where was Linda? She had wandered off by herself. I thought she needed time alone, but when I went after her I found her happily watching a pair of otters playing. I managed to get her attention and told her what had happened.

Without much hope, Dion tried playing the Pitta's call again. Amazingly, the bird responded again and came onto the trail. It hopped up on a log for all of us, including Linda this time, to see it well. Our second 5-star sighting. Fantastic.

There was a bit of a commotion involving the



Mens Restroom at the park. Dion spotted a Tokay Gecko, which is easy to hear but hard to see. The men crowded into the room to see it. Finally, the women caught on and came in as well. We all got to see and photograph this Flat-tailed Gecko, a much more commonly seen lizard. Note the difference in the tail. It has been replaced after being lost, as you can tell from the change in the pattern. Linda spotted a great spider, which I photographed. In the photo, we noticed that the male spider is also there.



Then we drove to Bangkok, ate lunch and flew to Chiang Mai.

February 25, 2011: Around Chiang Mai: Green Peafowl, Blossum-headed Parakeet

Today was the first *dictionary day* of the tour. That is a day when *birding* comes before *breakfast*. We got up at 5:00 and headed for HHK (I forget what that actually stands for) a royal research facility that is also a preserve for the highly endangered *Green Peafowl*. This is a close cousin of the more widely known *Blue Peafowl*, the common peacock. We had to arrive at the facility before sunrise to have a chance to see the bird leave its roost.



Dion finally spotted one in a distant tree and we all had a good scope view. A few minutes later, as we birded along a road, we saw the same bird flying away from a lower roost. Dion assured us that we were very lucky to get such a view as, “the bird is easily missable.”

We then drove back to the hotel in Chiang Mai, where we freshened up and ate lunch before driving about 100km to Doi Inthanon Highland Resort, our base of operations for the next two-and-half days. We had a chance to walk around the garden of the hotel before leaving, and saw this incredible moth. We are now set up in a separate

cabin with all the requirements except an Internet connection, so I am typing this note to post later.

Doi means mountain in Thai. Doi Inthanon is the tallest peak in Thailand at 2565m above sea level.

We had an afternoon siesta, then went birding again at 4:00. At 6:00, we drove to a place where we hoped to see *Blossum-headed Parakeets* roosting before they flew away for the night. We were successful, finding at least 50 of them in a tree. Sure enough, just as the sun disappeared, the birds flew off to roost somewhere else.

Tomorrow, we have another early start. We are going to drive to the summit of Doi Inthanon, the highest mountain in Thailand. It's going to be cold in the morning for the first time, so we finally have a chance to use the warm clothing we packed. It has been about 32C every day so far, about 90F.

February 26, 2011: Pygmy Wren-babbler

Without a doubt, the bird of the day was this amazing Pygmy Wren-babbler. About the size of a ping-pong ball, this tiny bird sang his heart out, his body contracting to squeeze out each note. It turned out that this was not a lifer. I had a naked eye view in Bhutan. The notes say that Linda had an even better view.

Later in the morning, we had superb view of a Slaty-bellied Tesia, a secretive bird that came close to our group and sang repeatedly, showing its orange mouth each time. Unfortunately, it was not in a good spot for a photo. Tesias are frequently called as “eggs on legs,” an accurate description of the bird’s appearance.



Another restroom break gave Linda another chance to shine. She spotted this fabulous Nephila species spider, for our second good spider photo of the tour.

February 27, 2011: Doi Inthanon NP

Another early start to get to a viewpoint before sunrise. When we got there, we found a tour bus full of students who all photographed the sun as it peeked thru the clouds. Jim was more interested in seeing if we could detect the phase of Venus thru the telescope. That was one of the first empirical proofs that the sun was the center of the solar system. Galileo’s telescope was not up to the task, so it had to wait for Newton to come up with a reflecting telescope. Modern scopes were enough to see that the image was not a complete circle, as Venus is “waning” now.

Then we went birding. We saw a few new lifers, but for the most part we saw the same birds as yesterday on the “jeep trail” thru the forest. Linda and I even managed a brief look at the Slaty-bellied Tesia again. My notes for Bhutan say that we had “crippling views” of the bird there, so it was not a lifer. The forest is alive with the sound of cicadas. We managed to photograph one. It is much more interesting than ours back home.

February 28, 2011: Another Silver Pheasant

Got to sleep in a bit this morning, until 5:00. Linda is feeling a bit under the weather, so we welcomed the later start. Packed everything and got to the vans at 6:00. Drove to km 13 along the highway, where a road leads off the main highway and up a steep hill. Ate breakfast, spotted a Black-backed Forktail in the river from the bridge, then started a grueling uphill climb. At the top, we were rewarded with a distant scope view of a Collared Falconet, aka the Pocket Rocket. A tiny falcon perched at the top of a tree across the canyon. Fortunately, we were able to get it into the scope.



then we had a big surprise. A Silver Pheasant calmly walked out of the temple area and wandered around our group. It was quite tame, obviously very used to people and let us take quite a few pictures. Our native guide, Mike, even stroked its feathers. Since we already had the bird on our list, we didn't have the ethical dilemma of deciding whether it was a wild bird or not.

Finally, we drove to Doi Ang Khang, our home for the next day and half. We have a lovely hotel in the middle of nowhere that even has free WiFi, giving me a chance to catch up on email and send this off to the people back home.

March 1, 2011: Lifers galore, and some great photos



We made a quick trip back to the summit of Doi Inthanon to see if we could find a Eurasian Woodcock that had been reported there. No luck finding the bird, but it did give Jim a chance to buy a Doi Inthanon cap that he'd passed up on the previous trip.

Then we picked up the bags and drove back to Chiang Mai for lunch before heading Northwest toward Doi Ang Khang near the Burmese border.

Along the way, we stopped at Doi Chin Dao, a Buddhist temple area. We climbed to the top of a very long set of stairs without seeing much, but



This morning, we got to sleep in, eating breakfast in the hotel at 5:30 before leaving at 6:00. We spent most of the morning birding along the winding mountain road leading to Doi Ang Khang that we had driven up last night. We spent the drive being thrown from one side of the van to the other as we went around an interminable series of switchbacks.

Most of the birds we saw were new for the trip, thanks to our location near the Burmese border in far northwest Thailand. I won't bore you with the details. The birders will get the complete list eventually.

Later in the morning, we stopped at the Royal Agricultural Research Facility near here. The place is a lovely spot, filled with fruit trees and flowers that form the bulk of the research. We skipped all that in favor of the area behind a restaurant frequented by rare thrushes. They have gotten used to food being available and we were able to see some usually shy birds out in the open where we could get good photos, such as the included one of a Scaly-breasted Thrush. Dion impressed on us how difficult it is to see this bird. We did have to ignore some rather unpleasant odors coming from the septic



system, but that is nothing to dedicated birders. Next, we moved on to a site that photographers had been frequenting. They had put out meal worms to attract White-tailed Robins, "one of the most difficult bird to see in Asia," according to Dion. "Usually, you sit in a blind waiting for a one second glimpse." As Dion distributed meal worms, the birds swarmed out of the bushes anxious to get their share. I was able to get a fabulous shot of the male as he sat on a tree branch after eating his fill.



We ate lunch in the field before returning to the hotel for a siesta, where I am now typing this note. We may go dark again tomorrow, so this may be my last email for a bit. Here's a final photo to show that we aren't fanatics about birds: we'll photo an interesting

reptile when the occasion arises, such as this Agamid lizard (otherwise unidentified) that we watched while waiting on lunch.

After our siesta, we moved to another meal worm feeding station. There we had mega views of a White-capped Water-redstart, so we wound up with yet another great bird photo.



March 2, 2011: Ang Khang to Thaton: Pied Harrier, Butterflies

We left Ang Khang today after birding the area one last time in the morning. Despite adding several new birds, we had no good photos to share in this blog. Instead, we have gone over to the Dark Side by photographing butterflies. The prettiest is this Paris Peacock, which we saw in the parking lot of the hotel as we were preparing to load up. The upperwing is green, but the underwing is black with turquoise patches, a truly lovely insect.



Linda and I had good looks at a pair of Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, which eluded the rest of the group.

We packed up at 10:30 and drove to Thaton, much lower down. After lunch and a siesta, we went into an agricultural area with rice fields interspersed with what turned out to be coriander. I was preparing to photograph a dragonfly when Dion

spotted a male Pied Harrier working the fields nearby. All thoughts of dragonflies vanished instantly as we watched one of the most beautiful hawks anywhere. The male is striking white and black. Later we saw a female, which like our Harriers at home is mostly brown with some black mottling.

We had good looks at a Bluethroat that was just starting to molt into breeding plumage. He had the beginning of the blue and red throat that gives him his name. We also saw a Wryneck, a strange woodpecker that eats ants and doesn't peck wood. The bird is quite rare in Thailand. After a long and fairly hot walk in the afternoon, we returned to our hotel, the Thaton Riverview Resort, for a meal of delicious Thai food. The food has varied from good to outstanding during the entire trip. Some of the best has been fixed in the field over a small campstove, a tribute to the ingenuity of our two cooks.

Tomorrow, we leave at 5:30 for a full day afield on Doi Lang, a mountain in the area.

March 3, 2011: All day at Doi Lang

We spent the entire day on Doi Lang, another high mountain in NW Thailand close to the border with Burma. In fact, at one point today, I may have seen into Burma. No one was really sure where the border is. But, I am getting ahead of the story.

We started as usual at 5:30 and drove about an hour into primary forest on Doi Lang. The road was built for use by the military. We passed a miserable collection of houses containing the small contingent charged with keeping Burmese smugglers out. Eventually, we came to a bridge over a canyon that, unlike the rest of the road, was wide enough for two vehicles to pass each other easily. There we had breakfast. There was no other traffic on the bridge. In fact, we saw no other vehicles all day, something that we couldn't claim about any place else we birded.

We had several birds that had Dion rejoicing. At least three were some he had never seen in Thailand, and more important, some that David Bishop, the other guide who leads Thai tours for VENT, has never seen. We walked along the road, birding as we went. The vans followed at a respectful distance, ready to pick us up when we felt we had exhausted opportunities where we were.

It was a beautiful sunny day, which Dion warned us meant the birds quit singing early. So, we made the best of the time available. We found ourselves late in the morning at a meal worm feeding station frequented by photographers. When we walked up, the birds began making a racket, announcing our presence to the neighborhood. A bold Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher flew into the cleared area even before the meal worms appeared. As soon as Dion put some down, he was there to grab them. It turned out he had a good reason. A female Orange-flanked Bush-robin (or Himalayan Bluetail to use its new name) appeared and chased the Flycatcher away. Shortly, our target bird, White-gorgetted Flycatcher appeared and grabbed his share of the booty whenever the Bush-robin left. I tried getting pictures and managed a grainy photo of the White-gorgetted Flycatcher that is adequate to prove we saw this very rare bird, but not fit for publication. Instead, we have yet another butterfly photo. After consulting the book, we think this may be a Tawny Mime, *Chilasa agestor*, which is flagged as rare, but found in the area where we were.



Near this location, Dion spotted what was initially identified as a Wedge-tailed Green-pigeon, but which on close inspection proved to be a White-bellied Green-pigeon, a much rarer bird, one Dion had not seen in Thailand. (And neither, he thinks, has David Bishop.) The pigeon sat in one spot for a long time, so everyone had a good look thru the scope.

The food truck was unable to make it up one steep incline with the required equipment, so we had to backtrack a bit to our lunch spot, a wide area labeled “Parking” in Thai and English, with actual toilets. The latter are what we have come to expect: a place to put feet without a seat. They are flushed by dipping water from a nearby container. *Functional* is the word that comes to mind. Sometimes, the bushes seem like a better alternative.

After another delicious lunch, we set off in search of the Cutia, a bird that lives up to its name. This involved a hike of about 2km into the jungle along a narrow trail that in keeping with the Law of Gravitational Perversity had far more uphill than downhill. Linda wisely opted out of the final leg of the journey and waited for our return. The five of us who continued on with Dion came back hot, tired and empty-handed. We did add Hume’s Warbler, a nondescript *Phylloscopus* species, to the list, but that was not much to show for a climb that had my pulse rate up to 140 at times. Linda says that is not really very high. However, I thought it worth waiting for it to come back down. As soon as I got to 72, I started up again, only to encounter another steep uphill bit right away.

Pamela, another birder, thanked me for waiting with her while she caught her breath. I had to confess that was not the real reason I was waiting.

Linda meanwhile, located a Collared Owlet, which she was able to show to everyone, duplicating her feat in Mexico last year. The hike out to the vans was longer than it seemed as we hiked in, but eventually we got there, drove back to the hotel for dinner and bed. Tomorrow, we will bird our way to Chiang Rei and fly to Bangkok.

March 4, 2011: Ducks and the Golden Triangle

Today was mostly a travel day, but we took our time getting to the airport in Chiang Rai to fly back to Bangkok. Our first stop was Ching Saen Lake, where we had our best chance on the tour to see a lot of ducks. Most of these were ones we had seen before, but they were new for Thailand, of course.

After that, we stopped at the Mekong River in the Golden Triangle area. We picked up a few birds on the river itself, ate lunch, and had an hour to buy kitch. Linda picked up several trinkets for the grandkids while I got hot. Unfortunately, the vans were locked so we had to find shade wherever we could and wait for the drivers to return from wherever they were hiding.

We had our picture taken in front of a big display to prove that we'd been here. Finally, we could leave and drive to Chiang Rai airport. There, we waited for our plane, which was about an hour late, and flew to Bangkok and the magnificent Novotel hotel, where everything works. After dinner, we set the alarm for a half hour early to give us time to repack, putting all the cold weather clothes in Linda's bag and what we needed in my smaller bag. This occasioned some comment by our traveling companions, who marveled at the small size. I had to agree to take photos showing how it was all packed.



March 5, 2011: Spoonbill Sandpiper and White-faced Plover



Today, we spent the entire day watching shorebirds. We ate breakfast earlier than usual, at 5:00, so we could beat the traffic out of town. We arrived at the first spot, Kok Kahm salt works, by 6:30, just as the sky was turning pink. Our target bird was the fabled Spoonbill Sandpiper, a rapidly diminishing species. We located it quickly with the help of "Mr. T," a local bird expert. My first look at the bird, thru a scope, naturally, was as it preened, showing the strange bill it is named for. Some other tour members got some decent photos using "digiscoping," where a camera is put right up to the eyepiece of the telescope. I have never had much luck with this technique, and the bird

was too small and far away for my little camera. This was also the case for the second target bird of the trip, White-faced Plover. We had excellent views of both male and female of this rare bird thru the scope, but no photos.

So, once again, we were forced to substitute photos of another animal altogether to give this day some of the bulk it deserves. It really was a fantastic day of birding. We saw 30 species of shorebirds as well as many other kinds of birds. Many of these were new to us and new in Thailand for Dion, our guide.

Dion also had a lifer reptile today, a small lizard he spotted called a Butterfly Lizard. I managed to get a good shot of that guy, and I have included it. Linda suggested that I take pictures of the mud skippers we saw on the shore where we boarded boats to go out to look for the Plover. These strange fish flop around on the mud out of the water, somehow managing to get enough oxygen without real lungs. I have included the best of the pics I took of them.

We arrived at our hotel, a wonderful 5-star location, about 6:30 p.m., so it was a very long and hot day. Tomorrow we have the option of taking the morning off. No one in the group elected to skip even a morning of birding, so we are to meet the vans at our typical hour of 5:30 for yet another dictionary day.



March 6, 2011: Boardwalk over the Marsh

Up early to pack and get ready for checking out after lunch. Then board the vans for an hour-long drive to a great fresh water marsh with an impressive boardwalk, the latter easily matching the best in the USA. After breakfast, we walked to the end of the boardwalk looking for Reed Warblers, a group distinguished, according to Dion, “by a desire not to be seen.” We managed good views of Oriental Reed Warbler, a larger member of the family that we saw on our first day birding. Finally, we had some chance at Black-browed Reed-warbler, a much smaller, shyer, and more distant bird. We ticked it off as the only lifer to add to the list. Later, we added Chestnut Munia, a beautiful member of a decidedly drab family. My life list total now stands at 3972, so it will be a bit of a push to hit 4000 before we leave Thailand. Right now, I am back at our luxury hotel with free WiFi trying to finish up before lunch.



On to Kaeng Krachan: Monkeys and more Monkeys

After lunch, we headed to Kaeng Krachan, our last stop in Thailand. We drove to the south entrance of the park, a different plan from previous years. Our hope was to spot a few birds not available in other areas of the park, and especially give us a chance to spot Stump-tailed Macaques. When we arrived at the waterfall area where the monkeys had been reported, we found plenty of the Macaques. They accepted offerings from the humans in addition to the natural food. They have large throat pouches that they use to store food to be eaten later.



They appeared to be very healthy and well-fed. However, despite our suspicions, we were told that they did not come daily. We were lucky to get there when we did. We took many photos.

Then, the bonus: some Banded Langurs aka Banded Leaf-monkeys showed up. These are far less common than the Dusky Langurs we expected. All black except for white around their mouths and an area below the eyes. Unfortunately, they were far less cooperative than their Macaque cousins. We have no good photos of them. We did get some good shots of the more common Dusky Langurs, which are included later.

Then, we drove to our hotel for the next three days at the Kaeng Krachan Country Club. We didn't take advantage of the many offerings at the club, which even included a baseball field. We seemed to be the only people there.

March 7, 2011: Kaeng Krachan: Maybe the bird of the trip

We started early and drove to a campground in the park, where we were treated to both an incredibly beautiful day-flying moth and a bird to go on the short list for the best of the trip. We have no ID for the moth, having only a *butterfly* field guide available. Perhaps bugguide.net will be able to help. When I have a speedy net connection, I may try uploading.



We do know what the bird is: Silver-breasted Broadbill. We were treated to a small flock of these usually shy birds while walking around the campground. Jim, stupidly had left the camera in the van. After a quick trip there, he stopped off to photograph the moth, then headed to the birds. Alas, everyone was leaving, so no chance for that photo. Then, I

found out that the chip for the camera was still in the computer, so I was limited to the three pictures I could store in the built-in memory in the camera. I wasn't able to retrieve the chip until lunch. (I have taken steps to make sure this doesn't happen again.)

However, later, we found *another* pair of the broadbills along the forest path. They were building a nest near the path, so hung around the spot. I was able to get a photo of this gorgeous bird, which coincidentally appeared on the cover of a copy of *Bird* magazine we saw later. The



picture is not the best I have ever taken, but it will have to do as the light was low. Notice that the bird is carrying what we think is part of a spider web to use in building the nest.

March 8, 2011: Last full day of birding



Today, we went back to Kaeng Krachan, heading first to a fruiting tree we had noticed yesterday. Today, we found the tree full of Dusky Leaf-monkeys, whose activities in the tree send fruit raining down on the path. This made it hard to locate the birds in the tree, but eventually we tallied all the ones we were looking for. About that time, a White-handed Gibbon appeared, singing his strange, mournful calls. I have tried often to get a good photo of this interesting mammal, always without success. Today, I managed a mediocre one, the one shown here. These are really interesting apes. Watching them swing thru the trees is one of the great pleasures

of this trip. This one seems to be looking right at us, and maybe he was.

We then moved down the mountain to a lower area, where we ran into a moderately large troop of Dusky Leaf-monkeys. We finally got the photo we had been seeking, one that shows the comical face of these monkeys. It was time for lunch, which turned into an extended butterfly viewing session. Dion had an idea of creating a salt spot for the butterflies, which gather wherever this is a puddle to get salt. Usually, such places have been created by humans using the bushes instead of the regular toilet facilities. We all used the same spot, but it didn't have the desired effect. However, a bit of Nam Pla, Thai fish sauce, did create just the spot the butterflies wanted. We watched and shot



tons of photos. Then, Linda noticed some dragonflies, and we switched to them. About an hour later, she found one of the most interesting insects I have ever seen, a dragonfly with almost completely opaque red wings. [Later, we identified this as the Fulvous Forest Ranger, *Neurothemys fulvia*.] I spent so much time trying to get a good photo, that I almost “dipped” on the Spot-necked Babbler, a very difficult bird to see. I hurried back as rain began. Quickly, Dion put the playback equipment away, but he assured me that he could imitate the call well enough to lure the bird out again. I was in luck. The bird came into

view again, so I avoided the ignominy of yet another bird Linda had seen that I hadn't.

We ended the day by checking out a place called Ban Nok San, where a retired Thai school teacher has set up a blind and water drip to lure birds. She allowed us to watch from the blind for a couple of hours. What a spectacular result! We immediately saw both Greater and Lesser Necklaced Laughing-thrush, two birds that normally stay well hidden in the forest. They are quite difficult to tell apart unless seen well, which seldom happens, except at the blind, where we were able to see a side-by-side comparison. This is a picture of the Greater Necklace Laughing-thrush, based on the fact that the ear coverts are bordered in black. Aren't you glad to know that?



It got dark, and we had to leave. But we changed the schedule for tomorrow to come back to the blind first thing in the morning.

March 9, 2011: End of the Tour

We got back to Ban Nok San for breakfast, and into the blind before full light. It was slow at first. The



two Laughing-thrushes returned, giving us a chance to test our ID skills. Then, the bird we hoped to see appeared: Bar-backed Partridge. This was only the second time Dion had seen the bird. Two birds emerged from the forest ate some grain that the hostess had thoughtfully provided, and took a drink of water. It was poor light, but by trying repeatedly, we managed to get this photo. It was the final bird added to the list for the Thailand part of the trip, bringing my totals to 3991 species seen in the world, 370 species seen in Thailand, and 601 in Asia. Linda's numbers are somewhat lower, but fairly close. Somehow, I have 25 more species, but Linda suspects there is some error in

the data.

I didn't reach the target of 4000 species, but we should have no trouble when we get to India on Friday. We have one day off in Bangkok, and Linda has planned a sightseeing outing for tomorrow. Then, it is on to Delhi for three more weeks of wildlife viewing.