

## **Day 1: Khao Pra Taew National Park and a Frigatebird roost**

Arrive at Phuket International Airport. We start our birding at the nearby Khao Pra Taew National Park for an introduction to the birdlife of southern Thailand. First sightings of species like Red-whiskered, Stripe-throated and Yellow-vented Bulbul, Scarlet-backed and Orange-bellied Flowerpecker and Crimson Sunbird are a delight. We visit a nesting site for the attractive Blue-eared Barbet. The call of the aptly-named Coppersmith Barbet will likely guide us to a sighting. Other potential species include the dazzling Asian Paradise Flycatcher and wintering Forest Wagtail.

After our first Thai lunch we will embark by speedboat into the spectacular limestone-crag dotted seas south of Phuket at the Phi Phi group of islands. Here, we visit a roost of large numbers of Lesser and smaller numbers of Christmas Island Frigatebirds. These roosts can turn into a Frigate extravaganza numbering thousands.

**Overnight:** Chalong Bay

## **Day 2: Phang Nga Province en route to Khao Sok**

An early departure will see us travel to Thai Muang, where an abandoned golf course and a brackish-water marsh provides for excellent open area birding. Species that we will search for here include Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Dollarbird (in the Roller family), Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker and the diminutive Vernal Hanging Parrot. We are also likely to sight a range of more common species such as Red-wattled Lapwing and Lesser Whistling Duck.

Our next stop is the Morning Glory Farm where we will search for Bitterns. Yellow, Cinnamon, and Black are all possible as is Watercock and the White-breasted Waterhen.

Our third stop en route to Khao Sok is one of southern Thailand's shorebird meccas. Terek Sandpiper is the main attraction here together with Greater and Lesser Sandplover and Great Crested and Black-naped Terns.

After soaking up the shorebirds we travel through to Khao Sok National Park river to our lodge which boasts awe-inspiring views across a valley peppered with craggy limestone rock towers. This is where our jungle birding starts in earnest. The Black-crested Bulbul is spectacular whilst the similarly coloured Black-headed Bulbul is somewhat less so. Colourful Brown-throated and Rub-cheeked Sunbirds flit about the trees together with Orange-bellied Flowerpecker.

**Overnight:** Khao Sok

## **Day 3: Sri Phang Nga National Park and Khao Sok National Park Reservoir**

A pre-dawn start will see us enjoying sunrise over the limestone crags en route to Sri Phang Nga National Park where we will spend a full morning. Sri Phang Nga is home to the prodigious Helmeted Hornbill as well as flocks of the Bushy-crested variety and the immaculate Great Hornbill. The skies above the stream that flows through Sri Phang Nga should produce the obscure Whiskered Treeswift and Silver-rumped Needletail. Chestnut-naped Forktail occurs as does the range-restricted Lesser Fish Eagle. This national park is an excellent location for both Banded Pitta, reputed to be Thailand's most dazzling, and Banded Broadbill.

Other potentials include Little and Thick-billed Spiderhunter and Purple-naped Sunbird. We shall always keep an eye to the sky and an ear open for the possible Great, Helmeted, White-crowned Hornbills that occur here. We return to our idyllic lodge for lunch before embarking on

a long tail boat trip through the exquisite scenery that is the Cheow Lan Reservoir. Between the limestone cliffs that tower hundreds of meters above we will search for White-bellied Sea Eagle, Oriental Hobby and Grey-headed Fish-Eagle. This boat-based excursion provides for excellent vistas into the jungle and provides one of our best chances of good sightings of Helmeted, Great and White-crowned Hornbill as well as Woodpeckers like Greater and Common Flameback.

In addition, jungle mammals like Dusky, Silvered and Banded Langur, the White-handed Gibbon (which howls a beautifully haunting call from the jungle canopy are likely) as well as the possibility of seeing some larger mammals such as the Gaur, wild Elephant, Red Muntjac (barking deer), Eurasian Pigs, Malayan Tapir and others.

**Overnight:** Khao Sok

#### **Day 4: Khao Sok National Park river section and travel to Khao Luang Krung Ching**

We will spend a full morning session birding the Khao Sok River National Park. Here, we search for the elusive Rufous-collared and Blue-banded Kingfishers. The dense jungle at Khao Sok is also a good spot to get to grips with a range of babblers including Striped Tit, Chestnut-winged, Black-capped and Spot-necked. A range of Woodpeckers occur including the flashy Maroon and Bamboo Woodpeckers as well as other forest birds like the Streaked Spiderhunter. This is one of the sites where we will search for the gaudy Chestnut-naped Forktail as well as the Banded Pitta.

After lunch we will make our way to the relatively undiscovered Khao Luang Krung Ching National Park on the eastern side of the Peninsula. We will arrive in time for some late afternoon birding during which we will scan for Brown Barbet, Red-bearded Bee-eater, Black and Yellow Broadbill and many more. After dinner, we embark on some owling in the form of Brown Wood Owl and Buffy Fish Owl. The aptly-named Slow Loris (an adorable doe-eyed little mammal) is a possibility as is Javan Frogmouth.

**Overnight:** Krung Ching

#### **Day 5: Khao Lang Krung Ching**

The Malaysian Rail Babbler is the only species of the family Eupetidae and is suitably unique in appearance – part Rail – part Babbler. This is not an easy bird to find and with the help of a local guide Krun Ching is one location where it is regularly sighted. The Rail Babbler is the focus of our efforts on this day, but the jungles here hold a plethora of other specials that we will be on the lookout for as well. These include White-crowned Forktail, the strikingly petite Rufous Piculet, the range-restricted Crested Jay, Green and Dusky Broadbill, Banded Pitta, Scarlet Minivet, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Gold-whiskered Barbet and breeding Wallace's Hawk Eagle. Great Argus, a very rarely seen bird is often heard vocalising here and with the help of the local experts and a creative strategy that requires participants to be dead silent we actually have a reasonable chance of a sighting this Pheasant of Pheasants.

**Overnight:** Krung Ching

#### **Day 6: Khao Lang Krun Ching and the wetlands of Thale Noi**

A last morning session at Krun Ching gives us the opportunity to search for any species still missing from our lists such as the Indian Black Eagle and Bat Hawk.

Our next destination is the wetlands of Thale Noi home to two species of extravagant Jacanas: Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed. In addition to the Jacanas other wetland species such as Cotton Pygmy Geese, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Chinese Pond Heron, Eastern Marsh Harrier and Black-headed Ibis, Slaty-breasted and White-browed Crake occur. The habitat around the wetland is home to Yellow-bellied Prinia, Common and Dark-necked Tailorbird, and White-rumped and Scaly-breasted Munia. We have a chance here of winter migrants like Arctic and Yellow-browed Warbler and Cuckoos such as Banded Bay, Plaintive and Chestnut-winged.

**Overnight:** near Thale Noi

### **Day 7: Khao Pu Khao Ya and travel to Khao Nor Chuchi**

Our morning on day 7 is spent at Khao Pu Khao Ya National Park. The park headquarters and campground contains a large cleared area where the large trees remained intact making it an excellent place to sight birds like Woodpeckers and Leafbirds. Of these, the kaleidoscopic Banded Woodpecker is one of the highlights. Blue-winged, and Greater and Lesser Green Leafbirds occur as does Brown-streaked Flycatcher.

The jungles here are a little more open making viewing easier and are home to Rufous-tailed Tailorbird and Moustached Babbler among others. Our key target species here are the splashy Banded Kingfisher and the Streaked Wren Babbler, which feeds around the bottom of the National Parks limestone cliffs. After lunch, we make our way to Khao Nor Chuchi in time for a late afternoon birding session.

**Overnight:** Khao Nor Chuchi

### **Days 8 to 9: Khao Nor Chuchi and Krabi**

Khao Nor Chuchi (also known as Khao Pra Bang Kram) is the holy grail of birding in Southern Thailand. This is so, because it is the only locality outside of Myanmar where the rare and endangered Gurney's Pitta can be found. Finding the Gurney's requires special effort and is the focus of our time and effort at Khao Nor Chuchi.

In addition, this last remnant patch of lowland jungle in southern Thailand is home to a profusion of megas. During our stay we will search for flamboyancy in the form of Orange-breasted and Scarlet-rumped Trogon, Red-crowned Barbet, Chestnut-bellied and Raffles Malkoha, Crested Jay, Hooded, Blue-winged and Banded Pitta and Rufous-collared and Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher. Less gaudy, but as impressive are many species of cryptically marked Babblers including Rufous-crowned, Puff-throated, Black-capped, Scaly-crowned and Spot-necked. Buff-rumped Woodpecker is exquisite in the subtlety of its markings. Globally there are only two species of Phylentoma – Maroon-breasted and Rufous-winged and both occur here at Khao Nor Chuchi. Black-naped Monarchs are common as is the aureate white form of the Asian Paradise Flycatcher. Khao Nor Chuchi is one of the very few places where the enigmatically elusive Giant Pitta has been sighted.

Our after-dinner outings at Khao Nor Chuchi will be in search of Great-eared and Large-tailed Nightjar as well as Oriental Bay Owl and Gould's Frogmouth.

During our stay at Khao Nor Chuchi we will make an outing to the nearby Krabi mangroves and shoreline. It is here that we will search for one of the trickiest of the Tringa genus – the Nordmann's Greenshank. This area is also home to the range-restricted Mangrove Pitta and Black-and-Red Broadbill. Both Brown-winged and Ruddy Kingfishers occur as does Mangrove Whistler.

**Overnight:** Morakot resort, KNC on days 7, 8 and 9

### **Day 10: Khao Nor Chuchi to Khao Lak via Phang Nga Bay**

After a last morning at Khao Nor Chuchi we make our way to the extensive mangroves of Phang Nga Bay. Here, we have another chance of southern Thailand's mangrove specials including Brown-winged, Ruddy, and Collared Kingfisher, Mangrove Whistler, Black-and-Red Broadbill and Mangrove Pitta. We will enjoy lunch at a wonderful deck restaurant overlooking the mangroves before making our way to our final stop at Khao Lak – our springboard to the Similan Islands.

**Overnight:** Khao Lak

### **Day 11: Similan Islands**

The Similan Islands are one of the few places outside of the Nicobars where the pompous Nicobar Pigeon can be found. It is a two hour boat trip on the Andaman Sea during which we will search for the elegant Black-naped and Bridled Tern as well as Great and Lesser Crested Nicobar Pigeon is not the only bird on the Similan islands, Green and Pied Imperial Pigeons also occur. The Similans are world-famous among scuba divers as one of the top dive sites in the world. The combination of a wealth of coral reefs and associated marine life and 20 meter plus water visibility on many days makes for a sublime underwater experience.

After finding the requisite Nicobar, participants will have an opportunity to get underwater with a snorkel or scuba tank if you are a diver, and marvel the marine life of this tropical paradise.

**Overnight:** Khao Lak

### **Day 12: Return to Phuket International Airport**

After some final morning birding at the wetland and shorebird sites near Khao Lak, we return to Phuket International Airport where the adventure began.

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**Your international birding guide:** Duan Biggs

Duan Biggs was born in Windhoek, Namibia and spent many of the weekends of his young days in this vast and wild country chasing down Pale Chanting Goshawks and other birds of prey his parents (both ecologists) were studying. At the age of 10 Duan moved with his family to the Kruger National Park in South Africa, where his interest in birds turned into a lifelong passion. He started guiding at the age of 17, initially in South Africa, from where he expanded to other African destinations.

Duan is currently based in Townsville, Australia where he is completing a PhD. He has led birding expeditions in the Antipodeans and started guiding in Asia in 2007. When not sharing his birding passion on birding tours, Duan spends his time writing scientific papers and popular articles and presenting talks at conferences on ecotourism, development and conservation.

**Included in tour price**

- All Accommodation
- All meals
- International guide
- Local licensed Thailand Tourism Authority Guide
- Snorkelling on the day trip to the Similan Islands
- All national park entry fees

**Excluded in tour price**

- Drinks and Alcoholic beverages
- Alcoholic beverages
- Diving costs on the trip to the Similans

Photographs are all by Ian Dougdale <http://www.phuketnaturetours.com>

Itinerary developed by Duan Biggs for exclusive use for the [Birding Ecotours](#) and [Thailandbirding.com](#) collaboration tour.

