

Trip Wildlife Report: Christmas in Thailand

December 21 through January 11, 2009-01-23

Wildlife Locations Visited: Lumpini Park Bangkok, Chao Praya River Ayudthaya, Khao Yai National Park, Bueng Boraphet Wetlands, Wat Umon National Wildlife Reserve & Non-hunting Area, Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, Koh Lanta National Park

Trip Overview:

“Christmas in Thailand” was actually a group expedition we hosted that primarily introduced our guests (The Bruening’s – Janet and Bernie, and the Clark family – Jeff, Helen, Forrest and Liam) to the rich culture, food and natural beauty of Thailand. Our foci for the trip were many ranging from the nightlife and beautiful architecture of Bangkok to the ancient ruins of Ayudthaya, Sukhothai and Sri Satchanalai to the amazing history and scenery of Chiang Mai and the hill tribe regions of the north. We also incorporated a fairly intensive wildlife aspect of the trip which included Khao Yai National Park and Bueng Boraphet wetlands and non-hunting area where we were fortunate to see at least 17 species of mammals and over 100 species of birds. My family and I added an additional week when a couple days were spent wildlife watching in southern Thailand at Khao Sam Roi Yot and Koh Lanta national parks. Considering the relatively short amount of time birding or mammaling, the trip was amazingly productive.

Below is a location-by-location breakdown of the highpoints:

Lumpini Park (2-3 hours on two different days – morning and afternoon)

Situated in the heart of Bangkok, Suan Lumpini offers nature lovers a respite from the hectic cosmopolitan chaos of the city. During the two partial-day trips to the park while in BKK, we were able to see numerous birds and reptile species that seem oddly out of place in the city. The strikingly large Malayan water monitor lizards fearlessly wandering the park are surreal. Some are larger than many we have seen in the wild! Red-eared terrapin turtles are common in the ponds. Asian pied starlings were common this time of year as were Chinese pond herons, which was not the case earlier this year during the summer months. I was also able to get great sightings of brown shrikes and Bocourt subspecies of the variable squirrel (*Callosciurus finlaysonii bocourti*).

Chao Praya River near Ayudthaya (1 hour mid afternoon – warm and sunny)

On day three of our expedition we headed north to the Chao Praya cruise boat launch to see the Asian openbill stork rookery. Unfortunately we were unable to see the active rookery as we arrived too late in the day and most of the birds had departed to feast in the surrounding rice fields. But we did stop at a particularly good corner in the region that allowed us to view several perched storks as well as great and intermediate egrets as well as a glorious black-capped and common kingfisher pair fishing in the ephemeral pond. We witnessed another Bocourt’s variable squirrel in the brush nearby as well.

Khao Yai National Park (Three nights and two full days – good weather – cool)

As its position as a World Heritage site would dictate, Khao Yai rarely disappoints. We had two full days of fantastic wildlife watching while in the area. It was a major treat for me to share this wonderful place with my guests. I think they enjoyed it as well! While

in Khao Yai, we were able to see several species of mammals which included small Indian civets, variable squirrels, giant black squirrels, northern tree-shrews, northern pig-tailed macaques, white-handed gibbons, sambar deer, red muntjacs, Malayan porcupines, Pallas's squirrels, Asiatic golden jackels, slow loris (probable based on eye glare pattern). One of the high points was the time spent watching a very large bull elephant that was in musk munching liana on the main road near the north entrance of the park. We did fairly well with the birds as well with good sightings of oriental pied hornbills, hill mynas, sunbirds, and nice vocalizations of great and brown hornbills. The spectacular red-headed trogon and Hainan blue flycatcher were avian high points!

Bueng Boraphet Wetlands (two-half days – overcast and cool)

One of the premier birding destinations in Southeast Asia, Bueng Boraphet was spectacular during the winter months – and boasted a very different species list than the rainy season seen in previous trips. Along with the huge Asian open-billed stork rookeries seen, we also caught glimpses of several resident spot-billed pelicans that seem to be making a dramatic come-back in the region. One of the highpoints was when “Lung” called in with voice and *Tenebrio* larvae a spectacular male Siberian rubythroat on the north end of the lake. Plain prinias and stonechats were seen in good numbers as well. A small terrapin turtle was seen along the southern shores on day one. Long-tailed shrikes were seen in good numbers as well. One of the lifers for me was a bronze-winged jacana seen briefly. But it was equally interesting to see the pheasant-tailed jacanas in their non-breeding plumage. The high point of the day was the vast numbers of lesser whistling ducks that were near their peak during the migration. I can only imagine what their numbers must have been like prior to humans! We also had the fortune to witness two sparring peregrine falcons near the north shore of the lake.

Wat Umon Wildlife Reserve and Non-hunting Area (cool and overcast)

While the rest of the group enjoyed their free day near the end of the expedition, my son and I ventured out to the forest monastery of Wat Umon. A short hike of a couple km brings one to a national wildlife reserve that is the last stand for two interesting species of cervids – the Eld's deer and hog deer. We were fortunate enough to see both species well represented in these “semi” wild conditions. I was able to photograph two nice stags of Eld's deer with a small herd of females. Several female hog deer were seen deeper in the forest as were two velveted males. We also caught glimpses of the wild banteng in the area – got good images of a nice brown bull and a golden orange female that were for some reason separate from the main herd.

Khao Sam Roi Yod National Park (Sunny and warm – two days)

Although this is not a popular park to visit and rarely is mentioned by mammalogists, we had one of our greatest “mammal moments” during our short stay there this winter. While wildlife watchers are virtually guaranteed great sightings of dusky langurs and crab-eating macaques, Khao Sam Roi Yod is known as one of the last strong-holds of the southern serow. There is little known of the ecology and the population status of this mountain goat, and there is much debate on whether it even still exists in some of the mountain ranges in the park. While driving out of the park on day two, my father-in-law noticed a “bird” on one of the coastal mountain groups that actually ended up being a

large, mature male southern serow. After taking several images and watching it for about twenty minutes, it grazed its way to the other side of the limestone crag and was out of sight. The local researchers and rangers were very impressed and even commented that these images now verify a living serow in a mountain range where their status was doubtful. Wow! What a way to end the expedition! As a birding location, Khao Sam Roi Yod is excellent. Although we missed the peak by a couple weeks, we caught sight of some excellent species including bronze-winged and pheasant-tailed jacanas, common greenshanks, common redshanks, sand plovers, common snipes, little cormorants, ruddy-breasted crakes, Richard's pipits, etc.

Mammal List:

1. Northern Tree Shrew
2. Slow Loris
3. Pig-tailed Macaque
4. White-handed Gibbon (both color morphs)
5. Black Giant Squirrel
6. Pallas's Squirrel
7. Bocourt's Variable Squirrel
8. Malayan Porcupine
9. Asiatic Golden Jackel
10. Small Indian Civet
11. Red Muntjac
12. Sambar Deer
13. Asian Elephant
14. Grey-bellied Squirrel
15. Long-tailed or Crab-eating Macaque
16. Dusky Langur
17. Southern Serow

Bird List:

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| 1. Little Cormorant | 17. Lesser Whistling Duck |
| 2. Indian Shag | 18. Black-shouldered Kite |
| 3. Oriental Darter | 19. Peregrine Falcon |
| 4. Chinese Pond Heron | 20. White-bellied Sea Eagle |
| 5. Javan Pond Heron | 21. Brahminy Kite |
| 6. Grey Heron | 22. Osprey |
| 7. Purple Heron | 23. Green Peafowl |
| 8. Pacific Reef Heron | 24. Muscovy Duck |
| 9. Cattle Egret | 25. Cotton Pygmy Goose |
| 10. Great Egret | 26. Red Jungle-fowl |
| 11. Little Egret | 27. Ruddy-breasted Crake |
| 12. Intermediate Egret | 28. White-breasted Waterhen |
| 13. Yellow Bittern | 29. Purple Swampfen |
| 14. Asian Openbill Stork | 30. Common Moorhen |
| 15. Painted Stork | 31. Eurasian Coot |
| 16. Spot-billed Pelican | 32. Pheasant-tailed Jacana |

33. Bronze-winged Jacana
34. Pacific Golden Plover
35. Little Ringed Plover
36. Greater Sand-plover
37. Common Redshank
38. Common Greenshank
39. Marsh Sandpiper
40. Common Sandpiper
41. Long-toed Stint
42. Common Snipe
43. Red-wattled Lapwing
44. Black-winged Stilt
45. Brown-headed Gull
46. Black-naped Tern
47. Common Tern
48. Spotted Dove
49. Zebra Dove
50. Red-breasted Parakeet
51. Lesser Coucal
52. Red-headed Trogon
53. Common Kingfisher
54. Black-capped Kingfisher
55. White-throated Kingfisher
56. Ruddy Kingfisher
57. Indian Roller
58. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater
59. Green Bee-eater
60. Blue-tailed Bee-eater
61. Wreathed Hornbill
62. Great Hornbill (vocal)
63. Brown Hornbill (Vocal)
64. Oriental Pied Hornbill
65. Greater Flameback Woodpecker
66. Dusky Crag Martin
67. Asian House Martin
68. Barn Swallow
69. Richard's Pipit
70. Red-throated Pipit
71. Yellow Wagtail
72. Forest Wagtail
73. Black-crested Bulbul
74. Olive-winged Bulbul
75. Red-whiskered Bulbul
76. Grey-eyed Bulbul
77. Sooty-headed Bulbul
78. Yellow-vented Bulbul
79. Buff-vented Bulbul
80. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo
81. Black Drongo
82. Hair-crested Drongo
83. Asian Fairy-bluebird
84. Large-billed Crow
85. Plain Prinia
86. Siberian Rubythroat
87. Stonechat
88. Blue Rock-thrush
89. Brown Shrike
90. Long-tailed Shrike
91. Asian Brown Flycatcher
92. Grey-headed Flycatcher
93. Hainan Blue Flycatcher
94. Pied Fantail
95. Ashy Wood-swallow
96. Asian Pied Starling
97. Hill Myna
98. White-vented Myna
99. Common Myna
100. Olive-backed Sunbird
101. Scaly-breasted Munia
102. House Sparrow
103. Baya Weaver
104. Plain-backed Sparrow
105. Rufous-winged Bushlark