

# THAILAND: 24 DECEMBER 2006 - 1 JANUARY 2007.

## Introduction

Having spent relatively little time in SE Asia a short trip to Thailand to get away from Christmas in the UK & to increase the mammal list seemed like a good idea, especially when added to a twitch for Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Having hoped for 20+ lifers it was slightly disappointing to only end up with 15 but to a large extent this was due to the fact that the evening spotlighting sessions were poor due to the strong half moon. By contrast the morning sessions were moon-free & more productive but unfortunately I was limited to two pre-dawn sessions.

## Logistics

Normally I would travel alone but on Jon Hall's advice I decided to work with guides from Wild Bird Eco-Tour Thailand [www.wildbirdeco.net](http://www.wildbirdeco.net) as Jon had found them particularly good in the past. This eliminated the hassle of booking accommodation over the Christmas holiday period myself, meant that I had a driver the whole time & made it easier to spotlight from the vehicle as I was not having to drive at the same time. It also enabled me to obtain access to parts of Kaeng Krachan that are normally off-limits to visitors. I would certainly recommend them for organising future trips.

However in hindsight in Pang Sida I actually believe that I would have had more success on my own as the guide, Ard, did not seem to know the park particularly well, did not know the mammals that well & was not particularly effective with the spotlight. In addition he & the driver twice arrived late after I had gone out before dawn & was waiting for them to pick me up. On the first occasion they were 45 minutes late & on the second occasion 90 minutes late. On both occasions they then wanted to have breakfast although I had told them to have breakfast while I was in the field. It appears that Ard is more a bird guide than a mammal guide but even when we went to look for the Spoon-billed Sandpipers he had to use a local guide to find the site.

By contrast Tom & his team at Kaeng Krachan were excellent & can be highly recommended.

## Sites

### 1. Pang Sida National Park

Pang Sida is a superb national park, to the east of Khao Yai, about 3 hours drive from Bangkok International Airport. I visited Pang Sida as although Khao Yai is richer for mammals it was likely to be far too disturbed over the holiday period to see much. Based on my experience at Kaeng Krachan this is probably true. Jon Hall had also recommended Pang Sida.

Pang Sida is a superb forest with an excellent road which winds up from the park entrance to a viewpoint 25 kms in to the park. I spent hours along this road & hardly saw another person or vehicle although I suspect that it would have been busier over the New Year weekend. There is a ranger station 20 km along the road & some people were camping there but most people camp near the park entrance or stay in one of the excellent rest houses near the entrance. We rented a rest house (with electricity, showers etc) which sleeps up to 6 for 4 nights. The rest house was set in a nice clearing near a stream & there was a 2-km trail 200 metres from the rest house. We cooked ourselves but there is a restaurant near the visitor centre. There is also an excellent guide to the mammals of the park.

Most of the time in the park was spent along the main road although I did spend time on the trail near the rest house & on another 1-km trail near the upper ranger station. We did four 2-3

hour night drives park along the road plus one pre-dawn spotlighting session & a second shorter pre-dawn session on foot. The birding was excellent although mammals were hard to come by during the day. White morph Variable Squirrels were common & we also saw Indian (Red) Muntjac, Northern Treeshrew, Indochinese Ground Squirrel & Grey-bellied Squirrel.

No mammals were seen on the road itself on the night drives apart from an unidentified civet although roadside trees produced Red Giant Flying Squirrels, Indian Giant Flying Squirrels & Bengal Slow Loris. The pre-dawn session produced Leopard Cat & an unidentified Palm Civet. We did hear 'Indochinese' Tiger four times near the scenic viewpoint at the top of the road & the rangers had found fresh tracks a few days before our visit.

The clear skies, strong moon & dry conditions probably impacted on what we saw. Others have seen numerous civets & Malayan Porcupine on night drives & Yellow-throated Marten & Gaur during the day. At least 3 troops of Pileated Gibbon also occur in the park.

We also visited some bat caves c.40 km from the park itself & saw numerous Wrinkle-lipped Freetail Bats, 100+ Long-tailed Macaques & a couple of red morph Variable Squirrels. Others have seen several species of bats at caves in this area.

## **2. Wat Pho Temple, Bangkok**

Easily visited on route to Pang Sida & an excellent site for Lyle's Flying Foxes.

## **3. Samut Sakhon & Pat Thale.**

Two excellent coastal sites for shorebirds but no mammal interest other than a group of Long-tailed Macaques along a canal on route to Samut Sakhon.

## **4. Kaeng Krachan National Park.**

Kaeng Krachan is an excellent national park covering 2,915 square kilometres approximately 200 km SW of Bangkok near Pethchaburi. It has an excellent mammal list including Asian Elephant, Malayan Tapir, 'Indochinese' Tiger, Clouded Leopard, Sun & Asiatic Black Bear, Gaur & Banteng & several species of primate.

There are several hotels just outside the park & bungalows &/or camping facilities outside the park by the park headquarters at Kaeng Krachan dam, & inside the park at Bankrang Camp 15 km from the first checkpoint & at Panoenthung Camp at km 30.

The New Year is a major holiday in Thailand & the park is overrun with people but we had obtained permission to camp near a saltlick 3 km from the road. The area we camped in was stunning & the around the nearby saltlick we found fresh prints of tapir & tiger & lots of evidence of elephant. Unfortunately we failed to see any of the key species but did see White-handed Gibbon, Dusky Langur, Grey-bellied Squirrel & Burmese Ground Squirrel in the area during the day & Bengal Slow Loris at night.

The trail leading from the road to the campsite produced Black Giant Squirrel, White-handed Gibbon, several troops of Dusky Langurs & one group of Banded Langurs.

In hindsight the campsite that we used was not ideal for viewing mammals due to the amount of cover around the saltlick. In an ideal world it would have been better to concentrate on looking for mammals on or around the main road in the park. However as Par, the owner of Wild Bird Eco-Tour Thailand, had rightly said, there was so much disturbance along the road due to the number of people holidaying in the park that we probably would not have seen much more. By 0500 in the morning there was a steady procession of cars on the road (see below).

We also spent one afternoon along the road between kms 33 & 35 & found further troops of Dusky & Banded Langur & spent a morning in the vicinity of a saltlick to the south of the road at the end of the tarmac. Although White-handed Gibbons were heard an unidentified Muntjac

was the only mammal seen. We did however see Sambar & Malayan Porcupine along the tarmac road prior to 0500 one morning.

On our way out of the park we visited another area with resident Stump-tailed Macaques, a scarce & declining species in Thailand.

I can thoroughly recommend Kaeng Krachan. If you are planning to look for mammals it is worth camping in the park to give yourself a chance to spotlight along the road & to avoid a longish drive in each morning. If you decide to stay outside the park buy entry tickets dated for several days at the start of your visit to avoid having to wait for the park headquarters to open each day.

## Itinerary

- 24/12** Arrived Bangkok 2 hours late & transferred to Pang Sida arriving 1545. Late afternoon drive to viewpoint at km 25 spotlighting back to rest house.
- 25/12** First 2 km of road beyond rest house until 1100, then visit bat caves c.40 km from national park. Return to Pang Sida for late afternoon drive to viewpoint spotlighting back to rest house after hearing Tiger calling near the viewpoint.
- 26/12** First 5 km of road beyond rest house, driver & guide appeared 90 minutes late & continued along road to look for Pileated Gibbon (unsuccessfully) at km 15, km 20 & km 25.  
Returned to rest house after walking trail near upper ranger station. Late afternoon drive to viewpoint spotlighting back to rest house.
- 27/12** Up at 0400 for pre-dawn spotlighting session to viewpoint seeing Leopard Cat on route. Dawn spent unsuccessfully looking for Pileated Gibbon at km 15. Returned to rest house & walked nearby trail. Late afternoon drive to viewpoint spotlighting back to rest house.
- 28/12** Pre-dawn spotlighting walk near rest house. Left Pang Sida at 0700 for drive to Wat Pho Temple near Bangkok for Lyle's Flying Fox & then on to Samut Sakhon & Pak Thale for Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Continued to Phetchaburi & spent night at Par's Farm.
- 29/12** Departed Par's Farm at 0700 to drive to Kaeng Krachan. Drove to km 26 seeing Dusky Langur just before Bangkang Camp & then trekked in to a camp site near a saltlick 3 km from the road. Set up camp in a superb setting alongside a fast-flowing river & then spotlighted at a nearby saltlick.
- 30/12** All day in around camp & the nearby saltlick.
- 31/12** Early morning along river & around saltlick. Trekked back out to road & worked road from km 32-35 before spotlighting back down to first checkpoint where we spent the night.
- 1/1** Up at 0400 & spotlighted along road to the end of the tarmac before a steady flow of 100+ vehicles headed up the road between 0500 & 0600 eliminating all chances of seeing more along the road. Spent dawn to 1000 along stream & saltlick at end of tarmac before heading back to Par's Farm via a short stop in another area of Kaeng Krachan for Stump-tailed Macaque. Drove back to Bangkok for final night in hotel near airport.

## Mammal List

<b>Northern Treeshrew</b>	<i>Tupaia belangeri</i>	One Pang Sida
<b>Lyle's Flying Fox</b>	<i>Pteropus lylei</i>	100s Wat Pho Temple Bangkok
<b>Wrinkle-lipped Freetail Bat</b>	<i>Chaerephon plicata</i>	10+ at bat caves near Pang Sida
<b>Bengal Slow Loris</b>	<i>Nycticebus bengalensis</i>	Pang Sida - one night drive 1, 2 night drive 4. Kaeng Krachan - one near camp in forest
<b>Stump-tailed Macaque</b>	<i>Macaca arctoides</i>	15+ Kaeng Krachan
<b>Long-tailed Macaque</b>	<i>Macaca fascicularis</i>	100+ pat caves near Pang Sida, 10+ near Samut Sakhon, 10+

near Par's Farm

<b>Banded Langur</b>	<i>Presbytis femoralis</i>	Kaeng Krachan - 5+ along the trail to the forest camp & a similar sized troop along the road at km 36
<b>Dusky Langur</b>	<i>Semnopithecus obscurus</i>	Kaeng Krachan - day 1 3 just below Bangkang Camp & 2 along trail to forest camp; day 2 four near forest cam; day 3 troops of 20+ & 4+ along trail to forest camp & 5 along road at km 35.
<b>White-handed Gibbon</b>	<i>Hylobates lar</i>	Kaeng Krachan - day 2 three near forest camp; day 3 one with Dusky Langurs along trail to forest camp.
<b>Black Giant Squirrel</b>	<i>Ratufa bicolor</i>	Kaeng Krachan - one along trail to forest camp.
<b>Variable Squirrel</b>	<i>Callosciurus finlaysoni</i>	Two red morphs near Pang Sida caves: white morphs seen on 3 days at Pang Sida, 4 individuals.
<b>Grey-bellied Squirrel</b>	<i>Callosciurus caniceps</i>	Two singles Pang Sida & one Kaeng Krachan.
<b>Burmese Striped Squirrel</b>	<i>Tamiops mccllellandi</i>	One near forest camp at Kaeng Krachan.
<b>Indochinese Ground Squirrel</b>	<i>Menetes berdmorei</i>	One Pang Sida.
<b>Red Giant Flying Squirrel</b>	<i>Petaurista petaurista</i>	Pang Sida - one on night drive 1, two on night drive 4.
<b>Indian Giant Flying Squirrel</b>	<i>Petaurista phillipensis</i>	Pang Sida - singles on the first two night drives.
<b>Malayan Porcupine</b>	<i>Hystrix brachyura</i>	One on a pre-dawn drive along the tarmac road c.5 km after the first checkpoint in Kaeng Krachan.
<b>Civet sp?</b>	<i>Viverra sp</i>	One Pang Sida on first night drive & a probable Palm Civet sp on the pre-dawn drive at Pang Sida.
<b>Leopard Cat</b>	<i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>	One on the pre-dawn drive at Pang Sida.
<b>Tiger</b>	<i>Panthera tigris</i>	Heard calling four times from the viewpoint at the end of the road at Pang Sida. Fresh tracks at Kaeng Krachan near the forest camp.
<b>Asian Elephant</b>	<i>Elaphas maximus</i>	Lots of evidence in kaeng Krachan but no sightings.
<b>Red Muntjac</b>	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>	Two singles Pang Sida.
<b>Muntjac sp?</b>	<i>Muntiacus sp?</i>	One presumably Red at Kaeng Krachan.
<b>Sambar</b>	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>	One on a pre-dawn drive along the tarmac road c.4 km after the first checkpoint in Kaeng Krachan.