



Rob Jansen
photography

Bird & Mammal Trip Report
Laos & Cambodia (Feb-Mar 2024)

Introduction

About us

We are two enthusiastic nature lovers who travel the world together to search for stunning birds, fascinating mammals, and incredible nature. Our world travel started in October 2021 in South America. In January 2024 we went to Southeast Asia to continue our search for birds and mammals.

Rob Jansen is a biologist and wildlife photographer, and thus he has lots of knowledge about species and ecology. He's enthusiastic about all that's in nature, but mainly photographs birds and mammals.

Romy Jansen-Houtzager is a marketing professional. Our social media accounts, the look and feel of this report and the website are her work. In the field, she is an excellent spotter and very patient (give me some of her patience ...and hurry!).



Rob with Laotian Langurs



Romy with a Moth

Information and how to use this trip report

This trip report covers our trip to Laos & Cambodia. We travelled there from the 18th of February until the 15th of March 2024. For all photos of our Laos & Cambodia trip, comments, compliments, any specific questions, visit and/or contact us via our website. We would love to hear from you!

 www.robjansenphotography.com/laos

 www.instagram.com/robjansenphotography

 www.robjansenphotography.com/cambodia

Species are highlighted in this trip report: **blue for birds**, **red for mammals** and **green for herpetofauna**. Target species which we missed at a specific spot are written in *italic*. This gives you an idea which species to pay extra attention to. All observations made by us in Laos & Cambodia can be found on Observation.org. We observed a total of about 131 bird species and 8 mammal species in Laos. Click here for the: [bird list](#), [mammal list](#) or the [total species list](#). We observed a total of about 222 bird species and 13 mammal species in Cambodia. Click here for the: [bird list](#), [mammal list](#) or the [total species list](#).

For more trip reports see our website: www.robjansenphotography.com/trip-reports

Map and specific locations

After bird- & mammalwatching a big part of South America we went to Southeast Asia, beginning in Thailand (see previous trip reports) and then continuing through Laos & Cambodia. The map underneath shows places we visited in these two countries. You can click on the heading to go to that specific section in this trip report if you are only planning on visiting a certain part of the country during your vacation.

We made a [map in Google My Maps](#) with pointers of interesting trails and places and specific bird and mammal locations. You can view this map, download the points and add them to your own map (click on the three dots above the legend and download the KML file and drag this to your own map), or add them in the app 'Maps.me'. Maps.me has most walking trails on it and is usable offline. Route navigation by car doesn't always work great and it's better to use Google Maps for that purpose.

Laos



Cambodia



Weather and timing

We mostly timed our visit to these countries as a sequel to the other countries we had previously visited. But it seemed to coincide pretty well with the optimal times for visiting both countries. We didn't have any rains or fog impeding any wildlife watching and observed most targets. We had some interesting migrants on the mountain in Laos and the endemic mammals and bird species are present year round. Monsoon rains come around May-October in both countries. In Laos we heard from people at the Rock Viewpoint that it also becomes very hot and unbearably humid during the Monsoon season. In Cambodia, lots of areas are nearly impossible to visit (e.g., Tmatboey), and targets are difficult to find (Giant Ibis, for example), or even absent (e.g., many birds in Prek Toal). It seems that Dec-April is the best time to visit Cambodia to get the target species, with birds like Giant Ibis becoming more reliable in Feb-Mar. More detailed information in the text.

Transportation

Laos

Taxis are not very expensive and public transport is quite cheap in Laos. From the border of Thailand we paid 300THB (8.35USD) to our hotel in Vientiane. There we rented a medium SUV from Hertz for 55USD per day. Roads are generally in quite a bad state and even the new asphalt will probably have

potholes in a few years. Driving reminded us a bit of Africa; often there are no clear lanes, lots of potholes, and all kinds of slow 'vehicles' on the main highway. Bus tickets were bought at the bus station as this is cheaper than via tourist organizations. There seems to be no need to buy tickets in advance.

Cambodia

For the larger distances, we mostly used the local agencies that offer transport between the touristic locations. If you want to travel between the larger towns (or even from/to Bangkok in Thailand or Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam), we recommend the [bus company Giant Ibis](#). It's a bit pricier, but the buses departed on time, were clean, had clear communication, prioritized safety (seat belts, two drivers etc.), and a part of the profits even go to the conservation of the namesake bird!

You can book transport tickets in advance online via 12GoAsia, but expect to pay a hefty fee (tickets going 3x the local price sometimes). Once in the cities we hired bicycles or scooters/motorbikes to get around to the birding places. These can often be booked at any hotel, or otherwise, walk down the touristic streets to book it at any shop or other hotel.

Literature

- Treescuon, U. & Limparungpatthanakij, W. (2018). Birds of Thailand. Lynx & Birdlife International Field Guides. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. *After the Colombia version I was fan of the Lynx bird books. The drawings are good, although sometimes I wish for a bit more (e.g., clearer bottom and upper side of birds that are often encountered flying). I also like that they pay attention to ssp. and possible splits with clear distribution maps on the same page as the bird description; this is something that was missing in the other bird books of SE Asia.*
- Craik, R. & Minh L.Q. (2018).). Birds of Vietnam. Lynx & Birdlife International Field Guides. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. *Again a great book from Lynx, with the same kind of shortcomings as mentioned above.*
- Francis, C. (2019). Field guide to the mammals of South-east Asia. Bloomsbury Publishing. *Just an amazing mammal guide and so happy it came out just before our travel. It's available digitally as well if you are travelling lightweight. It has distribution maps and short descriptions opposite to the drawings and more extensive information in the back of the book.*
- BirdNet app for recording the bird sounds. *If you don't know all the sounds, BirdNet can give a possible ID but it doesn't work great in SE-Asia*

Equipment

Photography: Sony A9 II + 200-600mm + 1.4x converter + Sony 24-105mm, GoPro Hero 9

Binoculars and telescope: Swarovski EL 8x32 WB, Eden 8x32 XP, Swarovski 65HD + 25-50mm

Heat scope/Thermal imager: Lahoux Spotter NL 625 ([lahouxbirding.com](#)). We got to test this new and improved thermal camera from a company in The Netherlands. I owned other brands, but we

are super happy with the sharpness, modes, and light weight of this heat scope! More here: robjansenphotography.com/lahouxbirding

Spotlighting: Fenix HT18 Long Distance Flashlight (powerful, very focussed and my preferred choice for open areas), Fenix FD41 Focus Flashlight.

Money in Laos & Cambodia

We mostly paid in cash in both countries as our debit cards didn't seem to work at any store or gas station. In Vientiane (Laos) we had to search very long before we found an ATM (Phongsavanh) where we were able to withdraw money (maximum of 2 million with 40.000 ATM fee). Both USD and THB (Thai Baht) are widely accepted throughout Laos. In Cambodia it was easier to withdraw money at ATMs, and we were able to withdraw both Cambodian Riel (KHR) and USD. Most banks had high withdrawal fees. We took money out at ABA Bank ATMs, despite the fees. It was better for us to withdraw per 500 USD (5 USD fee). When withdrawing 1500 USD, the fee was as high as 25 USD!

In this report we will mention some prices in Laotian Kip (LAK) and Cambodian Riel (KHR). Exchange rates at the time of our visit were roughly 1 EUR = 22,600 LAK or 1 USD = 20,900 LAK, and 1 EUR = 4,400 KHR or 1 USD = 4,050 KHR.

Use of cell phones in Laos & Cambodia

In Laos we bought a Lao Telecom SIM-card at one of their shops in Vientiane for 10k KIP. A data package of 20GB for 30 days was 50k KIP. The SIM worked reasonably well and had reception 80% of the places we went (so most of the main roads and villages, but not on top of Phou Sam Soum mountain).

In Cambodia we bought a Metfone SIM-card at a store in Kratié for 2USD, and bought 25GB valid for 30 days for 4USD. It worked pretty well all over Cambodia (even around Tmatboey it worked ok).

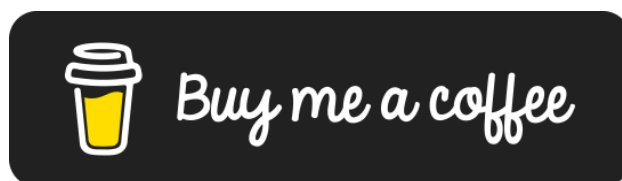
Water-to-Go

To reduce plastic usage on our travels we bought Water-to-Go water bottles. Read about our experience with Water-to-Go on our website: www.robjansenphotography.com/water-to-go. The bottle and filters are not too expensive, and you will have your investment back within one holiday. If you order with the voucher **RJANSEN15** you will get **15% discount** as well! Check the website here: www.watertogousa.com (United States of America, Canada), www.watertogo.eu (United Kingdom) or www.watertogo.shop (most countries in the EU).

Acknowledgements

A big thanks to all the people who took the effort and time to write trip reports for both www.mammalwatching.com and www.cloudbirders.com. I would also like to express gratitude to

many naturalists who I contacted via iNaturalist and other channels for specific information about species and who shared their knowledge and experiences. Amongst them is Peter Brakels, who ID-ed all the herpetofauna we found in Laos. I am grateful that Canadian/Dutch birder Ben Pap was willing to help edit this trip report!



If my trip report makes your trip more fun, time and cost efficient; think about supporting my creative journey by [buying me a coffee](#). Your generosity brings me closer to capturing impressive wildlife photos and untold stories.

Visited sites in Laos

Vientiane

[17.96581, 102.61247](#)

Dates visited: 18-19 February 2024

We only visited the Laos' capital for two nights; crossing the border from Thailand and when returning our rental car and getting the bus to our next destination. We therefore didn't do much birding here. The first night around 17.00-18.00 we visited the Starling roost along Khou Vieng street, near the crossing with Lane Xang (17.96575, 102.6125). We got the best views from a bit more west (17.96631, 102.61186). We wished we brought a telescope, as there were many birds to check, mostly **Chestnut-tailed Starlings**, **House Sparrows** and **Great Myna**. With a telescope we would have probably seen some of the other starlings that have been found here: *Daurian Starling*, *White-shoulder Starling*, and *European Starling*. We left when the light faded too much.

Phou Sam Soum mountain

[19.14842, 103.81112](#)

Dates visited: 19-22 February 2024

Logistics: We rented an intermediate SUV from Hertz for 55USD to visit this mountain. Don't trust Google Maps on the directions when driving from or to Vientiane. Instead, take the R13 to Bolikhamxai and turn north (18.39308, 103.64281). Let the navigation take you to Thasi (18.84741, 103.81297). There are restaurants and accommodations there if you have to split the drive in two. Then let the navigation take you via Xiangta (18.91768, 104.00162) to Muang Moc (19.06678, 103.9587). From there you can go all the way to Muang Ngan (19.15816, 103.69642), passing over Phou Sam Soum mountain along the way. Most of the road is tarred and doable with the intermediate SUV.



Our rental car from Hertz



Basic bathroom at Davieng Guesthouse

Accommodation: In Muang Ngan (Muang Moc on Google Maps) is one guesthouse -Davieng Guesthouse- which has about basic 10 rooms, but with WiFi and AC. We found the bed in room 10 quite comfortable and did not have many springs sticking out. The price was as low as 100k KIP (4.8USD) per night for the room and dinner for two was 60k KIP (2.87USD).

Bird-/mammalwatching:

On Route Thasi – Muang Moc ([18.97907, 103.98208](#))

Already on the way one encounters a spot which could be worth a stop. In a corner next to the road is where other birders have found **Black-tailed Crane**. We didn't observe it here, but did see many beautiful butterflies and dragonflies at this spot.

Phou Sam Soum mountain – Roadside birding east

Despite much of the mountain hillsides having been cleared, there are some interesting patches to bird along the road on the east side of the mountain. One place in particular was quite productive for us (19.14646, 103.82552). In the fields –mostly ferns– above the road is where **Jerdon's Bushchat** was singing and where we got good views of **Russet Bush Warblers**. **Rusty-capped Fulvetta** was seen after it called from the roadside shrubs. A bit down the road we found **Yellow-throated Fulvettas** this way.

At a stream near the road (19.13705, 103.84386) we again found **Yellow-throated Fulvetta**, besides some pretty butterflies and **Slaty-bellied Tesia**.

Driving with the windows open yielded a whole range of birds, including **Brown-breasted Bulbul**, **Mountain Bulbul** and **Long-tailed Sibia**.



Russet Bush Warbler

Habitat & Jerdon's Bushchat

Phou Sam Soum mountain – Summit Trail ([19.1484, 103.81118](#))

The summit trail is used by locals to access the forest to cut wood and hunt, but does allow access to some great forest and is still very interesting. The trail climbs steeply at some parts and is best not walked during or after rain as it can get slippery. Especially the first part until the stream (19.14363,

103.80878) is very interesting, and most targets were observed along this part. Quite some mixed flocks were observed, and sometimes lured in with the tape of Collared Owlet and some pishing. These mixed flocks contained an array of awesome species, often including **Blue-winged Minla**, **Whiskered Yuhina**, **Gould's Sunbird**, **Green-tailed Sunbird**, **Yellow-cheeked Tit**, **White-throated Fantail**, **Yellow-bellied Fantail** and **Black-eared Shrike-babbler** to name a few. Depending on the flock there might be something even more interesting in between like **Black-throated Bushtit**, **Chestnut-crowned Warbler**, **Red-tailed Minla**, **Bar-throated Minla**, **Indochinese Fulvetta**, **Black-faced Warbler** and **White-tailed Nuthatch**.



Yellow-bellied Fantail



Yellow-throated Fulvetta

Many of these birds were also individually encountered walking up the mountain. **Large Niltava** and **Slaty-bellied Tesia** were heard often, as well as the occasional **White-browed Shrike-babbler**.

Even though there were lots of fruits in the forest we didn't see any Thrushes until our very last morning. Locals probably hunt especially these bigger birds judging by some comments in eBird lists. However, on the last morning we heard **Green Cochoa** and eventually got great views of an individual on the first section of the trail. This is also the morning we suddenly heard a very interesting whistle and eventually observed two **Red-tailed Laughingthrushes**, part of a larger group, near the stream. There and then we connected with our last personal target of the mountain; **Stripe-throated Yuhinas** which were part of a bigger group of Whiskered Yuhinas.



Stripe-throated Yuhina



Whiskered Yuhina

At the end of the interesting forest (19.1345, 103.814) we continued a bit, but the landscape became more open, the trail more overgrown and we ended up at station to catch birds in the saddle of the mountain. The views from here were good though and we observed **Large Hawk-cuckoo** (HO), **Orange-bellied Leafbird** and **Necklaced Woodpecker** from here.

Phou Sam Soum mountain – Summit roadside birding ([19.14724, 103.80436](#))

Despite some traffic it is pretty pleasant to bird along the road as well. With easier walking and better views it is a nice break from the forest birding. Mixed flocks still brought in many species and we got great views of **Whiskered Yuhina**, **Rusty-capped Fulvetta** and **Black-throated Bushtits** along the main road.

Chestnut-bellied Rock-thrushes were observed two of the three mornings sitting on bare branches and rock outcrops. **Grey Bushchats** are easily observed along the road. Scanning the tree tops we found **Striated Bulbul** and a white-headed ssp of **Black Bulbul**, but no **Crested Finchbills** that has been seen by others.

Walking into a grassy patch north of the main road (19.14849, 103.80432) we observed **Hill Prinia** and **Buff-throated Warbler**. We also found a female **Blue-fronted Redstart** here, which was only the third record on eBird for Laos.



Rusty-capped Fulvetta

Black-throated Bushtit

Phou Sam Soum mountain – Summit Trail west ([19.14378, 103.78030](#))

There are a bunch of trails leading onto the mountain which can be birded. On eBird there is one called 'summit trail west', which we took one morning. It seems more cutting has taken place here as the trail is more open, but it is also a little more flat and easier walking.

Flocks contained some of the same birds as at the other trail. One cool new bird for our trip was **Streak-breasted Scimitar-babbler**, which was very challenging to get even glimpses off. As we heard chainsaws and had multiple locals with shotguns passing by we decided to turn around and bird the other trail again.

Phou Sam Soum mountain – Roadside birding west

Birding the roadside just down from the western summit trail yielded another target: **Black-headed Greenfinches** which we saw twice here. Some spotlighting yielded **Grey Nightjars** as well as two very cool Frog species; **Fea's Flying Tree Frog (*Zhangixalus feae*)** and **Phou Samsoum Tree Frog (*Zhangixalus melanoleucus*)**.

Further down the road we only birded from our car when driving up the mountain in the morning. All three mornings we encountered **Brown-breasted Bulbuls**, **Grey Bushchats** and **Olive-backed Pipits**. The last morning seemed particularly birdy, as we encountered at least 3 groups of **White-browed Laughingthrushes**, as well as **Blue-billed Magpies**, **Japanese Tits**, **Blue-throated Barbet** and **Grey-headed Woodpecker**.

Phou Sam Soum mountain – Peatland ([19.16183, 103.72892](#))

Even though there was very little water in the peatland and cattle trampled most of the habitat we heard 2 **Black-tailed Crakes** here around 18.00. We only observed them with our Lahoux Spotter NL 625, but couldn't find them with our flashlights. After dark we heard **Grey Nightjar** and **Mountain Scops-owl**.

Muang Ngan - Davieng Guesthouse ([19.15816, 103.69642](#))

Just below the guesthouse is a little creek ending in a stream. Along there **Black-tailed Crake** was heard (19.15808, 103.6969), as it was by others the previous year. Judging by the eBird lists the area is more interesting when the rice fields are inundated.

Na Hin – The Rock Viewpoint [18.1782, 104.48388](#)

Dates visited: 23-27 February 2024

Logistics: To save on money and because/since we would continue to Cambodia overland we decided to bring back the rental car and go with public transport. To do the same, get to the Southern Bus Station north of Vientiane (18.0306, 102.65825) and take the bus at 06.00/07.00 or 08.00 (sometimes also at 10.00) towards Laksao/Lak20 or Kong Lor cave. These buses will pass by the Rock Viewpoint after 5-6 hours. For us it took 8 hours due to the bus breaking down twice and us having to change to another bus. Price was 160k KIP p.p. (7.66USD).

During a normal vacation it would of course be way easier to go with a rental car and combine this location with Phou Sam Soum mountain and places further north like Nam Et-Phou Leui NP (overnight safari) and Nam Ha National Bio-Diversity Conservation Area (Gibbon experience). One

could even consider combining this location with Thailand, by crossing the border at Thakhek, only a 2.5h drive from the Rock Viewpoint.

Getting back was a bit more unclear, as nobody in the lodge really seemed to know the answer or wanted to help us. There should be buses going back regularly to Vientiane from Lak20 that pass the lodge. There should also be 2 songtraews (local pickups with benches in the back) early in the morning from Gonglor Cave to Thakhek, which pass by the lodge around 08.00 and 09.00. However, even though we had someone calling the bus station, nobody could tell us if the songtraews actually went that morning. So we ended up hitchhiking to the main road and then taking a local bus to Thakhek (60k KIP p.p.).



Broken down bus



Local Songtraew

Accommodation: The Rock Viewpoint has accommodation, ranging from small cute capsules (Hobbit style) to treehouses. We were glad we booked the capsule with shared bathrooms (luxurious camping style bathrooms), as the showers in other capsules were so low I couldn't even stand underneath one. Ask for Capsule 1 for the best views of the limestone mountains, as the higher the number the less view they have. We paid 40USD per night for a capsule for 2 people, including WiFi, AC and small buffet breakfast. Being a guest also allows free access day and night to the boardwalk (otherwise 50k KIP/2.4USD p.p.). This was one of the most fun stays we had during our travels so far! It all looks very cosy and modern, western-style but with local cuisine available. Guest management lacked a bit in our opinion, with few people speaking English and nobody really feeling responsible to help you if you had questions (don't know, not my job mentality).



Accommodation at night



Capsule NR01 view

Bird-/mammalwatching: We were dropped off with the bus at the viewpoint (18.1782, 104.48388). As we had spent hours in the bus and arrived quite late we decided to check the view right away before checking in at the Rock Lodge 200m down the road. Right when we walked up to the viewing platform an activity guide said; “Look Sir, monkeys”. Looking down the valley we could see a group of 10+ **Laotian Langurs** (*Trachypithecus laotum*) going through the trees. By getting onto the boardwalk we were able to get close by, with some going through the trees just 3m above our head! The next morning we were on the boardwalk again and when watching some birds we heard lots of loud stomping. We thought some kids were running towards us, but it turned out to be Langurs. They came pretty close by and just sat on the railing, licking it (I guess for the salt from all the sweaty hands). On our last night we saw them right in front of the restaurant, and eventually they came down to the boardwalk again. There they just seemed to chill on the rocks until sunset, after which one after the other disappeared into one of the many crevices. The next morning I waited there from 06.30 on but didn't see them again, they probably left their sleeping place before that. We ended up seeing them every day, mostly early morning on the rock outcrops or bare trees on the karst mountains. With the telescope we had one from our cabin balcony, and one morning at 06.30 even one from my bed.



Laotian Langur

Laotian Langur

The boardwalk is also the place to get the other limestone targets. The endemic **Bare-faced Bulbul** was seen daily, with multiple small groups hanging out in trees and on top of the rocks. **Sooty Babblers** were even more abundant, and groups were foraging among the rocks and encountered regularly. **Limestone Wren-babbler** needed some encouragement, but was encountered twice. Other nice birds encountered were **Green-backed Tit**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Blue-eared Barbet** and **Indochinese Cuckooshrike**.

Besides the Langurs we had quite some mammals on the boardwalk. **Inornate Squirrel** was seen once, but **Finlayson's Squirrel** was dead common on the rocks and in the trees. **Red-cheeked Ground-squirrel** was sometimes seen on the forest floor and **Eastern Striped Squirrel** high in the trees. The only mammal we observed eating the fig fruits (especially between the viewpoint and the lodge) was a **Northern Treeshrew**.

**Bare-faced Bulbul****Sooty Babbler**

If you are tired of walking the many steps on the boardwalk, there is a nice 2km trail in the forest. It starts in the back behind the camping area (18.17799, 104.48755). The trail descends a bit and is certainly not flat. Halfway there is a T-intersection, and this is a loop. The forest is the place to try for **Red-collared Woodpecker** if you want to have a very small chance for that one. As expected we didn't find it, but did see **Greater Flameback**, **Buff-breasted Babbler**, **Purple-naped Spiderhunter**, **Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher** and **Orange-breasted Trogon** (HO). Herpetofauna found in the forest include **Oriental Garden Lizard** (*Calotes versicolor*), **Spotted Flying Dragon** (*Draco maculatus*) and the very awesome-looking and well-camouflaged **Laotian Gliding Gecko** (*Gekko kabkaebin*). The area around the cabins is also quite nice and we observed **Pallas's Squirrel**, **Scarlet Minivet** and some other more common species here.

**Finlayson's Squirrel****Green-backed Tit**

Spotlighting wasn't as exciting as we hoped it to be. The boardwalk is open 24/7 and we were allowed to spotlight there as guests. However, except for **Grey Nightjar** on one night and **Brown Wood-owl** (HO) we didn't see much. We hoped for **Laotian Rock-rat** (more on that later), but only encountered a rat that had a similar face but way different ears, which quickly retreated in a crevice without showing more than the head. We also spotlit along the main road, one night 1km towards the west and back, another night we started down the road where the forest begins and walked up. Except for the commonly heard **Mountain Scops-owl** (HO) we only got **Collared Scops-owl**, which we eventually clapped our eyes on. We thought we heard **Spot-bellied Eagle-owl** one moment quite far

down the road, but the amount of traffic and therefore the amount of noise was too much to be certain. Spotlighting the trail in the forest one night (with extra focus on the limestone area) resulted in a brownish Rat sp. and another unidentified mammal on the rocks seen through the thermal camera. It had the shape of a Laotian Rock Rat, but seemed too small and disappeared before we got good looks of it.

Notes on the Laotian Rock Rat

I consulted with a lot of people about this mammal, and every time I got referred to local meat markets (without exact locations given) where I could ask locals about the species. We asked Olaxai Saisouphan, working at the Rock Viewpoint to call local people to be our guide, but even for a decent fee they weren't willing to guide as they said they were too busy harvesting. The Laotian Rock Rat is commonly caught with snares and other traps by locals, but they could occur in any limestone area with enough preservation. They live on the lower parts of high limestone mountains in/next to limestone forest. Only when at the Rock Lodge we read the trip report from Stuart Chapman about his sighting at Kong Lo View Resort ([17.96019, 104.75444](#)), near Konglor Cave. We then saw the iNat observation from another mammalwatcher which mentioned Kosi, the owner of the aforementioned place. We called him up, but he told us to message him on WhatsApp. When he didn't respond there we decided to catch a ride with other tourists to the Konglor Cave and just try. Once there he said we need to call in advance so he can arrange a local to trap one for us. Obviously this is not how we want to watch mammals, especially if there are other ways to see this mammal (spotlighting/thermal camera). He said if you stay 2-3 nights we will have a high chance of seeing them late in the afternoon and at night (35USD per night for a room, including breakfast). He was fine with us trying for the species and staying somewhere cheaper too. As we already had our accommodation set, we only tried a short period one afternoon. We had one Laotian Langur flee quickly when we approached the cliffs, but no Rock Rats. Without our own transport and only one public bus leaving early morning we had to ride back with the other tourists and couldn't try spotlighting at night. We decided not to come back here, as his area is only 200m of facing rock which are suitable and he says he releases Rock Rats into the area. Upon asking if he buys them at markets he answered negatively, but said that he pays/gets locals to catch them and release them here. It seems to come from a good heart with the intention of creating a small reserve and saving the animal, but as an ecologist I doubt if this is the right way when there is so little known about requirements and competition/carrying capacity etc. That said, they do occur here naturally, but I also don't know if I want to check the species if I see an individual here and know that it might have been released here a week ago from another place nearby. Chances to see it here might be unnaturally high due to capture and release. Hopefully someone will find a place where they are properly protected without the abovementioned practices.

Karst mountains with **Laotian Langurs****Laotian Langur on karst**

Thakhek – Green Climbers

[17.45259, 104.91191](#)

Dates visited: 27-28 February 2024

Logistics: The Green Climbers Home is about 12km from Thakhek. Getting off the bus at the intersection (17.41134, 104.83115) there were tuktuks that asked 250k LAK to go to the place (the same price as the Green Climbers Home charges for arranging the transport). We were able to negotiate it down to 150k LAK, but decided to try and hitchhike. 20 Minutes later we still had no transport and all the local Songtaews were over packed. We ended up sharing a ride in someone's tuktuk for 100k LAK to the entrance. Getting back to Thakhek was easier as the first Songtaew passed within 5 minutes and was not yet totally full (20K LAK p.p. to the bus station).

Accommodation: There's different kinds of options at the Green Climbers Home, which can be booked via [the website](#) and email (sam@greenclimbershome.com). We opted for the two-person tent for 10USD a night. The mattress was so thin that we were happy we only stayed one night. You can bring your own tent (5USD a night) or book a cabin for a bit more comfort. There are two camps, of which we liked Camp 1 the most (the furthest up the road). A restaurant is located in both camps that serves an assortment of different meals, snacks and drinks.

As birders and non-rock climbers we did feel like the odd ones out (99% of the guests seem to be rock climbers). The place has a very relaxed, laid-back hippy/alternative kind of feel, so this might not be the place for everyone.

Bird-/mammalwatching: We mainly came here because we didn't find the Laotian Rock Rat at the Rock Viewpoint. Thanks to the swift answers to my many emails to one of the owners (Sam) I learned that they often find faeces on almost any flat area in the rocks. The forest is pretty well preserved, with steep limestone cliffs surrounding the valley. Rock climbers have made 100's of routes to climb and therefore there are many trails parallel to the cliffs and little trails going towards them. Talking to another one of the owners once there, it seemed very promising. They regularly have Flying

Squirrels (unsure which species, but from what I gathered a smaller one) jumping out of the rocks when they climb. The owners were once fed a Giant Flying Squirrel by the land owner (again, unsure which species, maybe even the Lao GFS). Besides that, they have incidental sightings of Civets and once a Binturong. Having tourists there most of the year makes it so that locals don't often come to hunt. They do put traps and mist nets up in the rainy season when most/all the staff seem to leave, so that might have a big impact on local wildlife still, despite it being only a couple of months. The staff also said that they see larger wildlife at the beginning of the season, so it seems that wildlife does move a bit out of the disturbed areas during the season.

We only went out late afternoon and spotlight about 3-4 hours after sunset. We walked a total of about 10km through the forest along the cliffs, making a big loop. Unfortunately the night was quite windy. We used flashlights and the thermal camera but ended up seeing zero mammals. On the advice of the staff we also went to a more isolated area (called 'Backstage'), but this is not recommended as the climb into this little canyon is a bit tough, especially with gear. Once on the other side there are barely any trails or open patches to properly search for mammals.

On a closing note, I don't know if I would recommend this area per se for bird- or mammalwatching. Birders might find the limestone itself very difficult to access in comparison to The Rock Viewpoint, although we did see **Sooty Babblers** once. Other cool birds seen by others seem rare and are most likely more easily seen elsewhere (like **Siamese Fireback**). Climbers reported seeing many snakes, and we did see one beautiful **Reticulated Python** (*Malayopython reticulatus*) at night. A frog we encountered turned out to be **Spot-legged Tree Frog** (*Polypedatus megacephalus*). A cool-looking Gecko we found multiple times is probably **Bonkowski's Gecko** (*Gekko Bonkowski*).

For mammalwatching it might be promising on less windy nights, and if one can get further into the valley. Maybe there are some rock climbers/mammalwatchers out there that want to explore this place for longer than one night. There must be a cliff side in this place with Laotian Rock Rats for sure seeing the habitat.

Visited sites in Cambodia

Kratié/Kracheh

[12.60605, 106.02269](#)

Dates visited: 29 February – 2 March 2024

Logistics: Many tourist agencies offer vans/buses from other touristic place. Coming from Laos you can get on a bus in Pakse (we paid 550k KIP/26USD p.p. from here) or Don Det. In Cambodia you can come from and go to Siem Reap (we paid 11USD p.p. to get there from Kratié) or Phnom Penh. Don't expect a good tourist service, as it seems like you and your luggage are just another package they transport and you get the same treatment as the local rooster, bags of grains and scooters that come on the same ride. Keep backpacks with valuables with you, as the locals just see these bags in the middle of the bus as a stepping stone to the back of the van. Once in Kratié you can hire scooters/motorbikes, tuktuks or a taxi to get to Kampi, the place to watch the Dolphins and get a boat (12.60605, 106.02269). We rented one motorbike for 5USD for the whole day from our accommodation.

Accommodation: We stayed at Hueng Hueng II (12.48337, 106.01738) for 14USD per night. Quite basic, but with AC and an English-speaking owner.



Irrawaddy Dolphin



Mekong Wagtail male

Bird-/mammalwatching: After spending a full day getting from Thakhek to Pakse (Laos) and another day from Pakse to Kratié, we were ready for some bird-/mammalwatching. Early in the morning we made our way towards Kampi. Driving a motorbike was a nice way to see the daily life and to feel like a local, although the roads were quite bad and dusty. Around 07.00 we arrived at the boat place, where we were suddenly surrounded by Khmer locals, smoking and speaking loudly. We'll save you the long discussions and the annoying way they dealt with it; long story short, we paid 20USD for the Dolphins + 20USD for the Wagtail. The **Irrawaddy Dolphins** can already be seen from shore, and this is actually where we got the best photos. They seemed most active during this time, and action – especially the occasional jump – seemed to decrease inversely proportional with the rise of the sun. The distance to the Wagtail was not too far, but to see it from Mekong's shore would likely prove

hard to impossible. Once in the area we soon found a pair feeding some begging juveniles, and we observed at least 4 **Mekong Wagtails** (ne). Other nice birds observed here were **Grey-throated Martin** and **Small Pratincole**.

We could have returned easily within an hour, but as we had paid (had to pay) for the Dolphins, we watched them for the duration of the remaining time we had.

Siem Reap Day Trips

[13.36175, 103.85982](#)

Dates visited: 2-4 & 7-8 March 2024

Accommodation: There are plenty of hotels in Siem Reap and seemingly just as many ways to get to and from Siem Reap. We stayed at the Siemreap Nitnit Boutique (13.36597, 103.85335) for 15USD per night. With English-speaking staff, AC, a swimming pool, and convenient location, it made for a very decent hotel.

Angkor Wat and other temples

[13.41246, 103.86698](#)

Logistics: We rented bicycles via the hotel for 3USD per day. One can just as well rent a motorbike or arrange a tuktuk driver for the day via the hotel.



Finlayson's Squirrel



Angkor Wat Temple

Bird-/mammalwatching: Siem Reap is a very touristy city as this is the main gateway to visit Angkor Wat. We [bought the tickets online](#) and left by bike around 05.45 to arrive at Angkor Wat just before sunrise (a bit earlier would have been nice for the most beautiful colour in the clouds). While walking around and pretending to be just like any other culturally interested tourist we scanned the walls for **White-throated Rock-thrush**. We did this for all the temples we visited these days, but couldn't locate any. **Blue Rock-thrush**, the *pandoo* and *philippensis* subspecies were both observed in good numbers. We walked the forest around Angkor Wat to search for **Forest Wagtail**, but dipped on this one too. **Chestnut-winged Cuckoo** was probably the best surprise we ran into. **Finlayson's Squirrel**

(mostly red with a creamy/white ring at the base of the tail and a maroon-darker tail) was abundant in the forests. **Long-tailed Macaques** were the first primates seen in Cambodia and multiple groups were observed during the day.

After Angkor Wat we visited Banteay Kdei Temple (13.42992, 103.89867). The ruins of this temple are full of **Theobald's Tomb Bats** (*Taphozous theobaldi*). At the northern gate (13.43207, 103.89828) we found **Lesser False Vampire Bats** (*Megaderma spasma*). This is also the only place around the temple complexes that we observed **Cambodian Striped Squirrel**.



Lesser False Vampire Bat

Theobald's Tomb Bat

Ta Prohm (13.43483, 103.88921) was for us the best temple of the day and how we imagined all the temples to be (naïve us). The scenery of crumbled down temples covered with big vines was amazing! Mammal-less, but we did see **Red-breasted Parakeet** and **Alexandrine Parakeet**.

For your information, the zipline area is where **Pileated Gibbon** was reintroduced. As we had already seen that species in Thailand we didn't search for it here.



Wrinkle-lipped Free-tailed Bat

Bayon Temple

Entering the complex of Angkor Tom we arrived at the Bayon temple (13.44128, 103.8589). There we had **Brown-backed Needletail** and **Black Bazas** flying over. Inside the temple, people were collecting guano, and the bats above were loudly calling. These turned out to be **Wrinkle-lipped Free-tailed**

Bats (*Mops plicatus*). Returning to Angkor Wat we observed **Little Grebe** and **Cotton Pygmy-goose** in the moat around Angkor Tom.

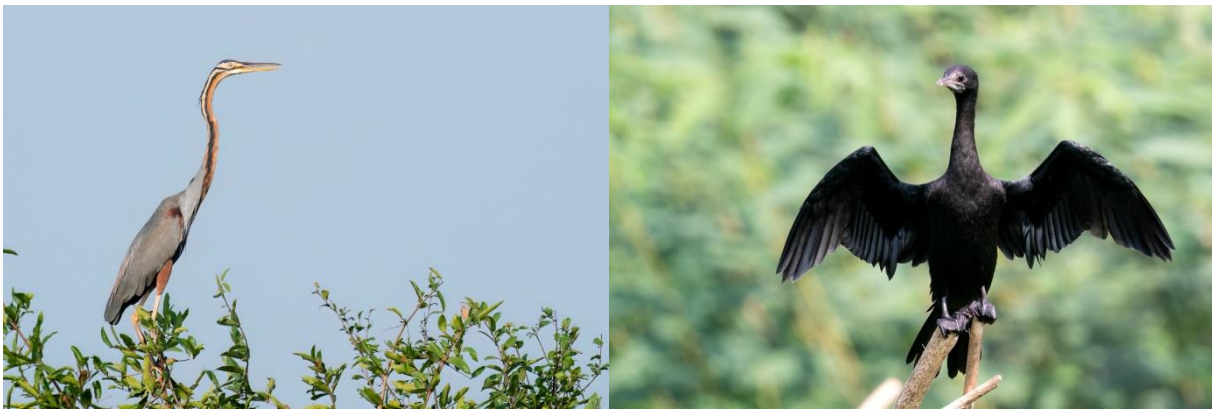
Back in Siem Reap we made a stop at the roost of 100's of **Lyle's Flying Foxes** (*Pteropus lylei*) at the Royal Independence Gardens (13.36309, 103.85877).

Tonle Sap Lake - Prek Toal Bird Sanctuary

[13.20677, 103.60706](#)

Logistics: We booked the trip to Prek Toal with [Sam Veasna Conservation Tours](#) as we switched our 4th day from Tmatboey to Prek Toal (more on that later). Ideally this would be day 1 of your trip with them if you combine it with the Florican Grasslands and Tmatboey, but you might build it in as a back-up plan like we did for the 4th day.

There are several companies offering a similar one-day birding trip, sometimes combined with an afternoon visit to the floating village. All the companies we contacted quoted anything between 300-400USD for 2 people. This normally includes pick-up from the hotel, packed breakfast and lunch, transfer to the boat, the first boat to the floating village/rangers office and then a second boat to the birdwatching tower. The cheapest quote was for 135USD p.p. for one day from Cambodia Travel Trails.



Purple Heron

Little Cormorant

If you are on a budget you might get a company to arrange it for you, but leave out a professional English-speaking bird guide and just get someone to come along and get you to the right places. If you're really adventurous you might even try it on your own. This would involve taking a tuktuk to the place where boats are leaving (we left from 13.30946, 103.684, but the boat departure depends heavily on the water level). Expect to pay 2USD tourist tax on the way in or out on this road. Once there you would have to charter or get on a boat towards the floating village (this was 60USD in total for us), where the office of the rangers is located (13.24031, 103.65959). Here you have to pay 40USD for a boat and driver + 10USD p.p. entrance fee to the sanctuary. Depending on the water

levels they will take you to one of the observation towers (we went to 13.20677, 103.60706). In April it's often not even possible to reach any of the towers.

The village does have some very basic accommodation in case arranging all of this on your own takes longer. This would give the opportunity to plan the trip into the reserve for the following morning.

All in all, you can see that the base cost for just getting to the core of the reserve is already 124USD, excluding the car+driver and professional, knowledgeable bird guide.

The upper level of the tower has no shade and it gets scorching hot in March, so take sunblock and maybe an umbrella. Make sure you and/or the guide brings a telescope.



Lesser Adjutant

Spot-billed Pelican

Bird-/mammalwatching: Alright, then the fun part. The first part until the floating village is not very interesting. After we got on the second boat and entered the reserve we were able to do some proper birdwatching. Except for domestic Water Buffalo we didn't see any mammals. We dipped on the ***Germain's Langur/Indochinese Grey Langurs*** (*Trachypithecus germaini*) that can be seen inside the reserve.



Yellow Bittern

Painted Stork

Sailing into the reserve we observed many **Painted Storks**, some **Spot-billed Pelicans** and **Lesser Adjutants** and had mostly short sightings of **Yellow Bittern**, **Cinnamon Bittern** and one **Black Bittern**

flying away. The light in early morning was great and we thoroughly enjoyed seeing many common species of Heron and Egret. **Grey-headed Fish-eagle** was observed both quite close by on the way in and out. **Black-headed Ibis** and **Glossy Ibis** were both seen flying over our heads in good numbers.

Once at the birdwatching tower we found ourselves scanning for most of the day. Unfortunately the main target, Milky Stork, had chosen a difficult place to breed out of sight and towards the east. Scanning the many birds going up in the thermal columns yielded 1000's of **Painted Storks** and 100's of **Asian Openbills**. Occasionally there would be **Spot-billed Pelican** amongst them, **Lesser Adjutant** and once **Grey-headed Fish-eagle**. From the tower we could see plenty of **Yellow Bittern** amongst the vegetation down below, one **Cinnamon Bittern** and a female **Watercock**. **Black-browed Reed-warbler** and **Ruddy-breasted Crake** were heard from the surrounding vegetation. **Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker**, **Brown-throated Sunbird** and **Himalayan Cuckoo** were nice additions to the trip list. **Knob-billed Ducks** and **Spot-billed Ducks** flew by the tower once in the early morning.



Grey-headed Fish-eagle



Painted Stork

When checking a thermal column around 09.30 I finally found two **Milky Storks** with pure white upperwing panels and without a black breast band. Be careful not to confuse the Openbills for this species, as the pattern is similar (pay attention to the long beak and legs and of course the colour if the distance allows). Three more were observed during the day, but all of these seemed to be hybrids with some black spots on the panels and a partial breast band.

Our remaining target wasn't found until 13.45. Many Adjutants were seen from afar and heat haze made it impossible to make out which species they were. When more and more took flight it still sometimes seemed that the Lesser Adjutants had paler upperwings due to the reflection of the sun. Finally in the distance I was able to make out our first **Greater Adjutant**. Our guide Mardy then found another one in the same thermal column. We got decent views as it came a bit closer before it soared far out of sight again. On the way back Romy spotted another one in a thermal. We happily left the scorching hot tower and exchanged it for the boat and a nice breeze.



Likely hybrid Milky x Painted Stork

2 Milky Storks & SB Pelican (lower left)

Florican Grasslands

[12.991, 104.4836](#)

Logistics: We booked the trip to the Florican Grasslands with [Sam Veasna Conservation Tours](#). An early start is necessary to be at the Grasslands before it gets too hot (they picked us up at our hotel at 05.00). The trip is also bookable as a half-day trip.

I first figured we would be able to hire a motorcycle and visit the Florican Grasslands on our own. Boy am I glad we didn't do that. If you were to bird here on your own you would have to have good (real) motorbike -not a scooter- or a 4x4 with driver as the roads are terrible as soon as you leave the main road (13.03774, 104.47719).

Bird-/mammalwatching: We were very happy to be with Sam Veasna on a tour. They arranged it very well and already when we arrived at the grasslands around 06.00 we saw that there were local rangers in the field searching for the targets. There must have been 4-5 rangers, and they were critical in the process of finding the targets. We were quickly directed to an area where they had seen a male jumping a few days before as well as that morning. We thought they do this all the time, but apparently the birds only do it a couple of times and mostly when it's not too warm yet. One of the rangers had spotted something, but it took just over an hour before I got a glimpse of the first male **Bengal Florican** that jumped, but we weren't able to find it again. Luckily the supporting cast was a great distraction during the search; **Singing Bushlark, Oriental Pratincole, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Black-winged Kite, Red Avadavat** and more.

Luckily for us another ranger found another **Bengal Florican** walking in a field, which we got distant but good views of. While we were watching this male puff its feather 2 **Sarus Cranes** flew by. We heard a distant **Barred Buttonquail** calling while standing there.

After this we were driven to an area which was good for another target. On the way there a male **Pied Harrier** did a low fly-by. As the wind came up it was a bit harder to find our next target. Luckily, with the help of two rangers we got good views of a skulking **Manchurian Reed-warbler**. Without

wind they would have probably allowed for better views up in one of the reed stems. **Blue-breasted Quail** was heard calling once at the same spot.

Our driver then shouted and pointed to the sky, in time for us to pick up the male **Bengal Florican** that flew by. It landed in a field nearby and it was remarkably difficult to refind it, even though we thought we knew exactly where it had landed. This resulted in the bird suddenly being flushed from behind some low grass.

As we had only glimpsed **Small Buttonquail** we then went to an area and walked around, keeping distance between us. This way we eventually flushed one and were able to observe it in flight before it disappeared again in the low grass.

We checked in vain for **Oriental Plover**, a migratory species which another guide had seen a couple of days before. After ticking off **Spotted Owlet** for the trip list we continued towards Tmat Boey.



Sarus Crane

Bengal Florican male

Tmatboey

[13.96789, 104.88252](#)

Dates visited: 4-7 March 2024

Logistics: We booked the trip to Tmatboey with [Sam Veasna Conservation Tours](#). There is another company doing this trip, but after hearing less positive stories from someone travelling with them we decided to spend a little bit more money and to go with Sam Veasna Conservation Tours (SVCT). This seems practically the only realistic way of getting here (and seeing the species). Once off the main road, the dirt roads are quite bad and dusty in the dry season. In the wet season many roads are impassable. Getting anywhere from the accommodation in Tmatboey often involved 0.5-1h drive, even though distances weren't that big. If you really insist on trying it on your own you would have to rent a 4x4 with driver or a very decent motorbike. However, consider that the income from the tours is the main reason those rare bird species are protected here.

Accommodation: When booking a tour one will stay in the only accommodation in Tmatboey; Tmatboey Community Managed Ecodge (13.96789, 104.88252). Calling it a lodge is quite a word for this very basic accommodation, and even words as 'rustic' add too much romance to what it actually is. Each of the rooms has two beds with mosquito nets (ours had quite a few holes) and one fan going in circles above the beds to give you 2 seconds of a breeze after which you wait another 8 seconds for the next. There is a shower and a sitting toilet with a bucket. They should be renovating the place in the near future, with the idea of making it a tourist centre not only focused on birders.



Room at Tmatboey

Bird-/mammalwatching: The main targets here are of course the two species of Ibis. As the area is flooded for a big part of the year it's easiest to see them in the dry season (Dec-April, but best in February/March). On the first afternoon we went directly to one of the places where White-shouldered Ibis come to roost in some dead trees. On the way there we already heard **Chinese Francolin** (very common, but despite effort not seen by us) and saw **White-browed Fantail**, **Indochinese Bushlark**, **Crested Treeswifts** and a roost of **Spotted Wood-owls**. While waiting for the Ibises we heard **Black-headed Woodpeckers**. Once almost dark our guide decided to leave, as they normally don't come that late. We only later heard that locals stayed and did see two birds coming to the roost very late.



Possible **Phayre's Flying Squirrel**

Possible **Phayre's Flying Squirrel**

At night at the accommodation we heard **Brown Boobook** and **Asian Barred Owlet**. We often heard loud squeaks and these turned out to be multiple Flying Squirrels. Nobody is sure which species this

is yet, but from the photos I've taken it's not Red-cheeked FS that is said to occur in west Cambodia. It rather looks like **Phayre's Flying Squirrel** (but we're still working on the ID; any suggestions are welcome!). These squirrels were common around the lodge and seen most evenings and early mornings. Don't expect to see much other wildlife this close near the village, as we were surprised how much destruction there is still going on (fires, wood cutting etc).

The next morning we left at 04.30 and on the way tried without luck for **Oriental Scops-owl**. Normally there would be very few water pools this time of year, but due to late rains this was not the case. This matters as those are normally the places to reliably see Giant Ibis. Luckily locals had found a nest (and protected it as part of the programs SVCT has here), which now had two almost fledged chicks. We arrived behind the improvised hide well before sunrise. Our Lahoux Spotter NL 625 thermal camera already showed a white spot in the tree, but through the scope we didn't see anything yet. Only when it got lighter this turned out to be an adult **Giant Ibis** (ne) near the nest. As soon as others looked through the scope it flew, but luckily both parents showed very well for the next hours. **Brown Prinia** and **Small Minivets** were observed while waiting, and proved to be quite common throughout our time in Tmatboey.

After the first giant target we went to the next. **White-rumped Falcon** was quite common in this part of Cambodia, unfortunately there seems to be an increasing demand for raptors nowadays too and they are becoming rarer. Luckily our guides again knew a spot where they hang out for many years and it didn't take long before we observed a pair of these stunning birds. Here we also observed **Cambodian Striped Squirrel** being mocked by some Bulbuls.



Giant Ibis 'hide'



Giant Ibis

We then continued to another nest, this time of **White-shouldered Ibis**. Even when the local guide pointed towards the tree we didn't find them until the scope was on the actual nest, only visible from certain angles. It would eventually take until the evening before we observed the adults coming to roost nearby.

With our main targets already in the pocket we went to search for some remaining birds that can be seen in this habitat. A visit to some pools yielded three more **Giant Ibis**, besides some stunning dragonflies. Then the local guide searched for **Brown Wood-owl**, which eventually flew up from the roost and allowed for stunning views as it flew past us.

The afternoon was again spent going to one of the pools, reached by a dodgy road. Once near the pool we waited and another birder spotted **White-shouldered Ibis** flying in, giving us good views during a fly-by. Meanwhile one of the guides had spotted the rare **Pale-capped Pigeon**, a species seen here from March on. **White-bellied Woodpecker** (HO), **Yellow-footed Green-pigeon** and **Green Imperial-pigeons** were other nice additions to our trip list seen here. We then visited a **Brown Fish-owl** roost, which gave distant but reasonable views.



Crested Treeswifts

Distant views of Pale-capped Pigeon

The next morning we watched **White-shouldered Ibises** again at the nest and observed **Collared Owlet** mocking the Ibises. Giant Ibis was heard in the distance. We then went to the region where the local Woodpeckers can be seen. It took a while before we found the first, but luckily the supporting cast of **Red-breasted Parakeets** and **Blossom-headed Parakeets**, **Crested Treeswifts** building nests, **Burmese Shrike** on a nest, and a flushed **Savanna Nightjar** didn't make the morning boring. Even though it was already unbearably hot around 08.00, we managed to find both **Yellow-crowned Woodpecker** and **Rufous-bellied Woodpecker**. Seeing **Burmese Nuthatch** very well was another nice treat this morning. The only mammal seen this morning was **Indochinese Ground-squirrel**.



Rufous-bellied Woodpecker

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker

As we had seen all our targets we decided to go back to the lodge and spend some time in the hide. **White-crested Laughingthrush**, **Red-billed Blue-magpie** and **Northern Treeshrew** were probably the best things seen. The remaining afternoon we went to another roost of **Spotted Wood-owl** to get better views. Then we went to the Woodpecker area, where we observed **Great Slaty Woodpecker**, **Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker** and again flushed **Savanna Nightjar**. We mostly searched in vain for views of the Francolin, and waited around for dusk to try –also in vain– for **Oriental Scops-owl**.



Savanna Nightjar



Burmese Nuthatch

With no realistic remaining targets we discussed with our guide Mardy to switch the 4th day of the trip from Tmatboey to Prek Toal. Unfortunately, despite SVCT bringing all the tours and money towards the community, it all seemed quite inflexible to subtract the last night as they had booked everything already (even though we only booked 2 days before our trip). Thankfully Mardy still managed to make it work with the driver, and we left the 4th day at 02.00 at night to be in time for Prek Toal.



Spotted Wood-owl



White-rumped Falcon

Phnom Penh

[11.55641, 104.92819](#)

Dates visited: 9-10 March 2024

Accommodation & Logistics: We arrived from Siem Reap by bus with the bus company *Giant Ibis*. A 3USD tuktuk brought us to the White Corner Hotel (11.55181, 104.91483), which was quite decent with good breakfast. There we rented a motorbike with two helmets for 7USD and visited all the places below (including the Killing Fields), using 1L of fuel (\pm 1USD).

Wat Pich Mkot Temple ([11.57722, 104.96611](#))

Phnom Penh is the capital of Cambodia and also the place to see one of Cambodia's endemic bird species: Cambodian Tailorbird. Although it can be seen at The Killing Fields —and I did— it didn't feel totally right lifting my binoculars on such a heavy-history-burdened place. Luckily there is a great alternative for seeing the endemic. Crossing the river with a ferry (11.55854, 104.93889) costs 1500KHR/ \pm 0,35USD one way. Once at the temple we parked the motorbike and walked around the different temples and paths going through the patch of forest. Unfortunately there was lots of activity, clearing of forest and excavation of sand taking place. Still the **Cambodian Tailorbird** (e) was very easily found, with 10+ individuals throughout the morning. We tried for **Ashy Tailorbird** as well by playing the tape, causing the Cambodian Tailorbird to come in every time! We again tried and failed to find **Forest Wagtail** and **White-throated Rock-thrush**, both regularly found here. **Jerdon's Baza** has surprisingly many records here in eBird, but there might just have been too much disturbance all around. **Cinnamon Bittern** at a small pond of water (11.57819, 104.96518) and **Collared Kingfisher** in the forest were nice surprises. **White-throated Fantail** and **Abbott's Babbler** were very common. The only mammals seen were multiple **Pallas's Squirrels** in a fruiting tree.



Cambodian Tailorbird



Pallas's Squirrel

Angkor Boulevard ([11.60384, 104.89183](#))

As we had only heard Barred Buttonquail so far and we still had our motorbike until 08.00 in the morning, we decided to go to Angkor Boulevard. There is a trail that can be walked around the grasslands and shrubs. We were there quite early, but by playing the tape we suddenly had a **Barred**

Buttonquail running on the path in front of us, allowing for good views. 100's of **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters** probably roost nearby (or in the grass), and it was a spectacle to see and hear them in the sky. **Lanceolated Warbler** and **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** were nice additions to the Cambodia trip list. We also finally managed to get views of **Lesser Coucal** here.

A word of caution; we didn't have an extra lock to lock our motorbike to the fence and that resulted in me catching someone trying to steal it; I was just in time for him to run away.

Europark Starling Roost ([11.51639, 104.9568](#))

As we had missed White-shouldered Starling so far during our travels we went towards the Starling roost at the Europark in front of The Pizza Company Swensen's. Around 17.45 we watched Starlings come into the bare trees on the opposite side of the street. 100's of **White-shouldered Starlings**, some of them in beautiful adult breeding plumage, made their way to the roost. In between them were at least 10 **Chestnut-tailed Starlings** and 20 **Daurian Starlings**, best made out with the use of a telescope.



Lesser Coucal



Scaly-breasted Munia

NOTE TO BIRDERS: Phnom Aural can be included from Pnhom Penh. Most birders do a 2N/3D trip, but from what I gathered one more night is preferable. One could do a trekking 'independently', by going to Srae Kan Village (2.5hrs from the capital) and hire a guide over there). A bird guide I spoke to reckoned it should cost about 200USD for 2 people for a 2N/3D trip. It would include a Cambodian moto-tractor for the first 7km (1.5hrs), a 5.5km hike to the first campsite and another 7.5km hike the next day to the higher campsite. Targets here are Cambodian Laughingthrush (e), Chestnut-headed Partridge (ne), Cambodian Streaked-wren Babbler (ne) and Cambodian White-tailed Robin (ne). As we were on a budget and chances for the White-tailed Robin are still pretty slim, we decided against visiting this location on this trip.

South Cambodia

[13.69312, 100.75106](#)

Dates visited: 9-10 March 2024

Koh Rong Sanloem

[10.5763, 103.29593](#)

Accommodation & Logistics: Our hotel in Phnom Penh booked a bus to Sihanoukville (15USD p.p.). We got picked up at the hotel and dropped off at the Autonomous Port (10.64315, 103.50144), the tourist harbour since Covid-19. We bought tickets to the island at GTVC (25USD p.p. for a return ticket), the only ferry cooperation that seems to receive decent reviews. We stayed in the Sleeping Trees on Sunset Beach, which meant we had to haul our luggage across the island.

Bird-/mammalwatching: We mainly came here to see bioluminescent plankton. Even though we timed our stay on the island around new moon (and moon setting early in the evening) we were surprised how much light pollution came from all the accommodations on the beach and the fishermen going around the bay at night. Only after 23.00/00.00 when most of the lights turned off did we properly see the plankton. Booking a tour will set you back 12USD per person for a short hour swim. It was nothing like we had seen in the pictures, and we've seen better blue glow in our own country than here. However, swimming in it was kind of amazing, having a *Life of Pi* moment. It would be better to get a really isolated accommodation somewhere else if you want to properly experience it. Snorkelling was decent with some nice fish, squid and an octopus.

Birds and mammalwise it was pretty quiet, with only one **Finalyson's Squirrel** seen on our walk towards the beach. Once in the sea we spotted **White-bellied Sea-eagle** and **Osprey** in the bay, both allowing for nice views!



Sunset Beach on Koh Rong Samloem

Kampot - Bokor Hill & Kep Thmey

[10.61064, 104.18151](#)

Logistics: From the harbour in Sihanoukville we took Kampot Transport (10USD p.p.) to Kampot. Foodwise we can highly recommend Lemongrass Bistro (10.60714, 104.18021) for cheap but

delicious and local food. There we rented a motorbike (5USD per day). 2L of fuel was enough for the whole day.

Bird-/mammalwatching:

Bokor Hill ([10.66104, 104.0549](#))

Early in the morning we left for Bokor Hill, which is reached via a perfectly paved and winding road. It seems they allow tourists to go up at first light (so plan just a bit before sunrise if you want to go early). It took about 1h15m from Kampot to reach the top, including stopping a local street vendor that was driving on the highway in the same direction for breakfast. On the way up we encountered both **Long-tailed Macaque** and **Northern Pig-tailed Macaque**.

At the top we made our way to the Popokvil Waterfall (safe parking for the motorbike) and made our way to the birding trail (starting at 10.65800, 104.05559). Following this trail we came towards a narrower part (10.66095, 104.05490), after which we entered the narrow forest trail. It was quite overgrown and seemed to be mainly used by locals (hunters?). Walking in we picked up good birds like **Blue Pitta** (HO), **Great Hornbill** (HO), **Orange-breasted Trogon** and **Silver-breasted Broadbill**. Not far in we heard the first of our targets; **Cambodian Streaked Wren-babbler** (ne). Unfortunately it couldn't be lured in. Not much later we heard our second target, but at the same time a Wren-babbler was very close to us and this one showed very well! Luckily the second target, **Chestnut-headed Partridge** (ne), responded not much later. We heard it coming from two directions (10.66702, 104.05393), coincidentally pretty close to where another birder had seen them on the trail. We decided to try and lure it in and sat down on the ground. Despite getting a response every now and then it didn't come into view. By 10.00 it was already getting warm and almost silent in the forest. The trail got so overgrown with spiky plants that we decided to turn around. Then we heard Gibbons calling in the distance, and the distinctive call made us realise we were listening to **Pileated Gibbons**! We couldn't get them into view, as the trail doesn't lead to any good viewpoints over the forest.



Cambodian Streaked Wren-babbler

Jerdon's Baza

On the way back suddenly a **Jerdon's Baza** perched right above us in a tree with a grasshopper it had just caught from a branch. All in all not a bad morning, but there must be other trails leading into good forest. Someone with more time might check different trails on Google Maps, although with the rate of destruction and deforestation going on, one might be lucky if the current trail is still there.

Kep Thmey ([10.55909](#), [104.15000](#))

In the late afternoon we went to an area that seems to be referred to as Kep Thmey on eBird. Turning off the main road (10.57013, 104.13416) and going left/east after the gate (10.56276, 104.13562) leads to a small peninsula (10.55909, 104.15000). Between the rubbish one can enjoy **Oriental Pratincole** and **Oriental Skylark**, but also some shorebirds depending on the tide and time of year. A small sandbank in the water yielded **Caspian Tern**, **Great Crested Tern**, **Little Tern** and **Chinese Egret**. **Malaysian Plovers** were showing clear distraction moves, indicating they breed here. On the shoreline we could see **White-faced Plover** (some eBird lists report very high numbers of this species here), **Lesser Sand-plover** and a **Greater Sand-plover** that was already in breeding plumage. **Brown-headed Gull** and **Grey-tailed Tattler** have been reported here too, but we didn't observe these during our visit here.

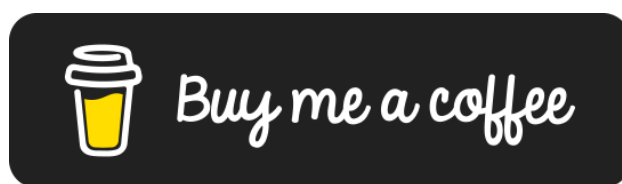


Malaysian Plover

Oriental Pratincole

You made it! Thank you for reading 😊

For all photos of our trip, comments, compliments, any specific questions, visit and/or contact us via our website. We would love to hear from you!



If my trip report makes your trip more fun, time and cost efficient; think about supporting my creative journey by [buying me a coffee](#). Your generosity brings me closer to capturing impressive wildlife photos and untold stories

 www.robjansenphotography.com/laos

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We observed a total of about 131 bird species and 8 mammal species in Laos. Click here for the: [bird list](#), [mammal list](#) or the [total species list](#). We observed a total of about 222 bird species and 13 mammal species in Cambodia. Click here for the: [bird list](#), [mammal list](#) or the [total species list](#).

Our Top 5	Birds	Mammals
1	Giant Ibis	Laotian Langurs
2	White-shouldered Ibis	Irrawaddy Dolphin
3	Bare-faced Bulbul	Phayre's Flying Squirrel
4	Red-tailed Laughingthrush	Cambodian Striped Squirrel
5	Green Cochoa	Pileated Gibbon (HO)

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Russet Percher *Neurothemis fulvia*



Bare-faced Bulbul