

Kaeng Krachan and Kui Buri NP Thailand July 24

I travel to Thailand each summer (except during the covid years) to do field research at Khoa Yai National Park (I study gibbons). Most years I try to take short excursions to other parks in Thailand, and sometimes neighboring countries. This year I visited Kaeng Krachan National Park for a couple of days, and also spent one day at Kui Buri NP to see Gaur.

Here I will try to add some material on Kaeng Krachan that supplements or updates what has already been provided by previous trip reports. Unlike when most mammal watchers go to Thailand, I am usually there during the rainy season. Despite it not being the ideal time of year, there are still typically mammals to be seen. I visited Kaeng Krachan this year with a couple of birdwatching friends. On July 20th I picked up one of my friends in Bangkok and we drove to Baan Maka Nature Lodge just outside of the park, arriving in the evening. Mammals seen regularly at Baan Maka's restaurant during our stay included **northern tree shrews**, **Himalayan striped squirrels** and **Grey bellied squirrels**. I also saw a **rat** (unknown species).

The next morning (July 21st) we drove to the first campground in the park, Ban Krang, because I wanted to get a picture of a sun bear. I have seen them several times at Khao Yai, but those non-habituated bears always run away before I can get their picture. Not the case at each of the campgrounds of Kaeng Krachan, where the bears have been feeding on garbage and scraps around the restaurants on and off for a few years. I didn't see a bear on the first day (although one had been around before I arrived). But on that day (7/21) we did see more squirrels as well as **dusky leaf monkeys** and a pair of **white-handed gibbons** that sang a duet from trees in the campground. There was also a **Black giant squirrel** (in a previous year, also during July, I have seen a slow loris and northern red muntjac at this campsite as well).



Black giant squirrel

While on the road that goes towards the second campground, near three river crossings where stands of bamboo line the road, I followed the advice from previous trip reports and searched for pencil-tailed tree mice and Hardwicke's Woolly Bats, peering into open endings in broken bamboo shoots. I didn't see any mice or bats, but I also didn't look for that long. I did notice that my thermal imager was able to pick up heat signatures within some of the bamboo shoots, but those particular shoots did not have accessible ends to peer through. Later, one of the owners of Baan Maka (Ian) told me that one would probably have better luck with shoots that are of slightly smaller diameter (I was looking into the largest ones).

Baan Maka can arrange visits to nearby bird hides just outside of the park, so the next day (July 22nd) we chose 'Bird's hide' in part because a friend had seen a yellow-throated marten there when he visited a couple of months ago. Aside from lots of birds, there were tree shrews and the same squirrel species that we saw at Baan Maka, but also **Pallas' squirrels**, **Indochinese ground squirrels** and multiple **Lesser oriental chevrotains**. The latter was particularly rewarding to see, as they are normally so shy.



Chevrotain (great canines!)

The following day (July 23rd) we hired a guide to drive us in a 4WD vehicle up the mountain to the second campground, Phanoen Thung. This road closes on August 1st each year because of the rains, so it was already getting quite muddy. We almost got stuck, and another truck that did get stuck partially blocked the road, making it difficult to squeak past. My friends spent so much time birding on the way up that we missed a sun bear's visit to the campground that morning, but we did catch a pair of Yellow-throated Martens in a parking lot just above the campsite, which then worked their way over to behind the restaurant, where they scrounged around for scraps for about 25 minutes.



Yellow-throated marten

After a late morning rain let up, we spent most of the afternoon along the road within a few kilometers of the upper campsite. I found plenty of dusky leaf monkeys (at least 5 groups at or within a few km of the campground) but none of the banded langurs that I was looking for, and which only can be found at these higher elevations in Kaeng Krachan. I also found another group of white-handed gibbons.

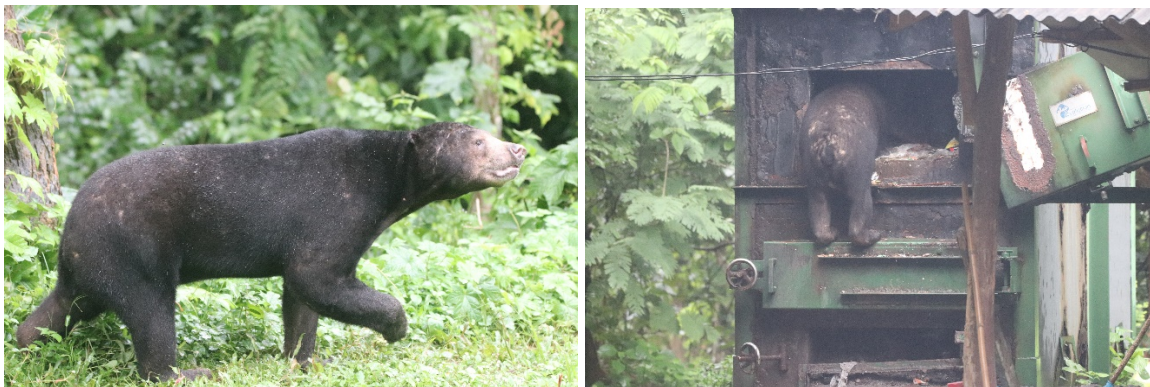
That night we checked out of Baan Maka around 7:30 and left for another friend's house in Pak Nam Pran, as we were planning to visit Kui Buri NP from there the next day. 15 minutes or so into our drive, we got a good look at a **moonrat** running across the road in front of us! We didn't get GPS coordinates, so the best I can say is that we saw it somewhere in the vicinity of Ban Huai Pladuk School on route 4006, because that is 15 mins on the way to our friend's house from Baan Maka. I later looked up moonrat sightings on iNaturalist, and it seems that we were around the northernmost part of their range, so a truly lucky sighting, and a lifer for me!

The next day (July 24th) we went to Kui Buri NP to see **Gaur**...we saw over 100 of them, as well as a group of 7 **elephants** and one **northern red muntjac**. One can't go into Kui Buri alone, but instead must pay a few hundred baht to be driven in with a guide, between around 2-6 pm. You are pretty much sure to see both gaur and elephants on one of these 'safaris' (and not much else), and we went specifically to tick off gaur, and because it was relatively close to where a friend lives. It is perhaps the easiest place in Thailand to see both elephants and gaur in large numbers, but you don't have the freedom to explore the park on your own.



Gaur everywhere!

The following day, my friend and I decided to go back to Kaeng Krachan because we had extra time, it was on the way back to Bangkok, and because I had dipped on photographing a sun bear (and my friend had dipped on a bird). When I got to the restaurant at the Ban Krang campground I was told that it would take a little longer to make breakfast because a sun bear had just gotten into the kitchen and knocked things around. Shortly after breakfast the **sun bear** came back, so I was able to get my photos! It was a little bit sad because most of the time the bear was scrounging in a dumpster. As much as I enjoyed the opportunity to get lengthy, close looks at a sun bear, it doesn't seem wise to have unsecured food sources available all the time and bears running around campgrounds where they rely on said food sources (apparently at least three different bears are currently visiting the lower campground on a regular basis, and others visit the upper campground). The bear that I saw looked old, had a lot of scars and seemed to be missing its left eye.



Sun bear approaching a dumpster, and then getting lunch

Later that day (July 25th) we hung around Kilometers 3-4 so my friend could get photos of his bird (a Malayan night heron), which was nesting by the road. We left around 4PM, and that evening discovered from other guests at Baan Maka that around that same part of the road (kilometer 4) a leopard with cubs came out at around 6pm. The other guest had good photos... it was a non-melanistic variety, but Kaeng Krachan is also known for having lots of melanistic leopards.

We went back into the park again for a couple of hours on the morning of 7/26, before leaving, and saw the same sun bear again feeding at the dumpster. We also found out

that on the previous day there was another leopard sighting on the road just before the Ban Krang campground (which is around kilometer 15), so leopard sightings at Kaeng Krachan seem to be getting even more common.