



WildWings

THAILAND

The 'Spoon-billed Pitta' Tour – Even better for 2012 and 2013!

Updated 8/12/11

At least 3 Spoon-billed Sandpipers are back! The 2012 trips are now full, waitlist only. Advance register for 2013, see below.

Client quote: “Excellent all round” D.M March 2011 “Many thanks – great experience” G.B. March 2011

Most birders will have done a double-take when they saw their first plate or photograph of a Spoon-billed Sandpiper. This enigmatic little shorebird is one of most highly desired species for many people because of its unique spatulate shaped bill. That it breeds in the far east of Siberia only adds to its mystique. Access to this remote region is very limited and expensive. It has been long known to winter in various locations in SE Asia but always in low numbers, thinly spread and with no easily accessible hotspots. The best chance for many years was to see one on spring migration in Hong Kong, but even there sightings were very hit and miss and have become more so in recent times. Then a few years ago small numbers were discovered wintering within a few hours drive of Bangkok, in a vast area of coastal salt workings. Birdlife International are now surveying these birds, and in 2007 up to 14 birds were then present in the area. Sadly, there are now thought to be less than 200-300 pairs left in the world, and numbers are still declining. In February 2007, WildWings conducted a recce crewed by Mark Andrews, John Brodie-Good and Angus Wilson. We enjoyed prolonged close views of up to seven different Spoon-billed Sands in superb (if not intense) light over two days, although not at the main ‘published’ site in the area. The birds offered excellent photographic opportunities, but note D-SLR users should plan on using a tripod. The first proper tour in 2008 enjoyed daily multiple close views of up to eight individuals, along with a large supporting cast of other Asian waders totaling 43 species, which is approximately 25% of the world’s total! All our trips scored again in 2009, 2010 and 2011 (8 birds present). Our groups also see the putative new wader species, currently being called “White-faced” Plover. We have excellent chances of seeing the also declining Nordmann’s Greenshank (up to 27 birds in 2011) and the regionally endemic Malaysian Plover, plus Grey-tailed

Tattler and Great Knot (800 in 2011). Other waders seen include Marsh, Terek and Broad-billed Sandpipers, Red-necked, Long-toed and Temminck's Stints, Pacific Golden Plover and both Greater and Lesser Sandplovers plus Painted, Pintail and Swinhoe's Snipes to name a few. The supporting cast included Pallas's, Brown-headed and Heuglin's Gulls, terns, assorted birds of prey, cormorants, herons and egrets including wintering rarities (Chinese Egrets in 2007, 2010 & 2011, Black-faced Spoonbill in 2008), Ruddy-breasted Crake, plus bee-eaters, kingfishers and various passerines. Irrawaddy Dolphin was a nice bonus for the second group in 2009.

After your time on the coast, we will spend the last night near the fabulous forest reserve of Kaeng Krachen and the last full day birding inside the park. This will add a nice selection of species (with a good chance of Blue Pitta) plus a good chance of Asian Elephant whilst even Leopard is also possible.

Our small group tour will travel in an air-conditioned minibus and explore the network of salt pools and marshy areas along this pancake flat coastline. Expect temperatures of about 90 degrees F and baking sun, but we will retire to local cafes during the worst heat of the day. One evening we will enjoy a leisurely cruise through some mangroves out to a sandy spit, an excellent site for gulls and waders with kingfishers. We will stay in the nearby resort of Cha-Am in rooms with private facilities and air-conditioning and will use our visit to enjoy the superb cuisine Thailand is famous for.

Join Mark for one of these unique short birding trips for two and more of Thailand's best birds, he will go out ahead of the groups, to recce the area again, fresh before your arrival.

There will also be an optional opportunity for you to fly south to Krabi after our main tour, and spend three full days birding Khao Nor Chu Chi (KNC) with the top local birding guide in search of that ultimate forest gem, Gurney's Pitta. We enjoyed 25 minutes close viewing of a pair from one of Yotin's portable hides deep in the forest in 2007, as have all our tours since, a memory none of us are likely to forget! Banded Pitta are not far behind in looks it must be said, again seen superbly well in all four years. For a real taste of how stunning these birds really are please visit www.galleryofbirds.com and follow the links for Paul Gale's fantastic photos. This unique dry lowland rainforest supports a host of other superb birds and Yotin and his assistant's abilities to find and show you them is astonishing. Some of the other major highlights may include Javan Frogmouth and Gould's Frogmouth by torchlight. With the addition of swifts including needletails, kingfishers, broadbills, bee-eaters, leafbirds, drongos, flycatchers, Orange-headed Thrush, Siberian Blue Robin (with the pittas), starlings, mynas and bulbuls, tailorbirds, phylloscs, babblers, flowerpeckers and spiderhunters, the variety at KNC can be stunning. You will stay in a local inn near the park entrance in air-conditioned cabins with private facilities where simple cheap Thai meals are available to purchase. Yotin will also take you to some other local sites eg Khao Lung for Rail Babbler and Wallace's Hawk Eagle. You will travel around in Yotin's 4 x 4, and on the return journey to Krabi airport, we plan a short boat ride into the fishing nets off the town for roosting waders,

especially the regular wintering Nordmann's Greenshanks, and we have a good chance of Mangrove Pitta.

Itinerary (improved!)

Day 1: Depart UK for Bangkok (non-stop).

Day 2: Arrive Bangkok early morning, day in the field then drive to Cha-Am and check-in to hotel.

Days 3-4: Two full days birding in the saltpans area including one boat trip to sandspit. Overnights Cha-Am.

Day 5: Morning drive to Kaeng Krachen for forest birding for rest of the day. Overnight outside the park.

Day 6: Morning and early afternoon birding at Kaeng Krachen. Afternoon drive back to Bangkok airport for flights home or south to Krabi.

Day 7: Arrive UK

Southern Extension

Day 6: Evening flight down to Krabi. Guide to pick up on arrival and transfer by road to accommodation (approx 1 hour). Overnight KNC.

Days 7-9: Three full days to explore KNC and Krung Ching Waterfall and forest with your guide concentrating on pittas and other forest specialities. At least two evening spotlighting session for owls and frogmouths.

Day 10: Krabi itself for waders and the Phangnga Mangrove and if time allows, Ban Nai Chong forest. Return to Krabi airport for afternoon flight to Bangkok. Depart Bangkok

Day 11: Arrive UK.

Holiday Information

Dates:

1) 29th Jan – 4th February (24th Jan – 4th February with Krabi pre-extension) 2012

2) 5th – 11th February (5th – 15th February with Krabi extension) 2012

Leader: Mark Andrews (Yotin Meekaeo in Krabi).

Cost: The basic cost is £1799 per person sharing a twin room

Single supplement: £79 per person

Deposit: £600 per person

Group size: Maximum 6 plus the leader and local guides.

Krabi Extension c£525pp twin share (1) c£469pp twin share (2).

Price includes: Return economy class flights London to Bangkok including pre-paid taxes, ground transport by a/c minibus, accommodation in a/c rooms with private facilities with breakfast and lunches, water and soft drinks in the field, bird checklist and services of leader/s. Extension – return air travel from Bangkok to Krabi, overnight hotel Bangkok Airport for one night (Groups 1 and 3 only, single supplement £60), ground transportation, accommodation at KNC with private facilities (single supplement approx £50), Yotin and team's guiding services including night birding, boat trip, park

admissions, water, coffee, fruit in the field. The exact extension price may vary with party size.

Price excludes: Insurance, dinners, drinks and other items of a personal nature. Extension – meals and other drinks (budget £5 per person per day) and fuel (budget £15 per person).

Currently no visas or compulsory vaccinations are required for UK passport holders.

Birds: Expected number of species 125+ (main tour) 170+ (extension).

The 2008 to 2011 species lists are on our website or available from us on request.

Advance register for 2013 for £50pp. 1) 29th Jan – 4th February (24th Jan – 4th February with Krabi pre-extension) 2013, 2) 5th – 11th February (5th – 15th February with Krabi extension) 2013, 3) 10th – 16 February (5th – 16th February with Krabi pre-extension) 2013.