

SRI PHANG NGA, LAEM PAKARANG AND THAI MUANG GOLF COURSE -11/12/09

-by Ike Suriwong

It was good to finally get a day out to do some birding. I haven't been free to do a trip to Phang Nga since March, so as you can imagine, I was more than eager to go. My birding partner for the day would be Mr. Steve Potter from Australia. It was his first time to Thailand so everything was new. –This made finding lifers for him an easy job for me!

The road to the national park was quiet but Greater Racket tailed Drongo and Dollarbird were two quality species which we picked up before entering the protected zone.

We started out the day at Sri Phang Nga National Park, where the weather was cool and windy. The cool weather meant most of the birds were restricted to the treetops where the early morning sun could warm their feathers before they took to flight. Few birds ventured into the middlestory and fewer birds were singing. We had few birds along the track to the campsite, with Crimson Sunbird being a highlight. Steve missed on a male Mugimaki Flycatcher and we hoped to find him another one at the campsite.

Our first bird of the day was a pair of Wreathed Hornbill at a distance in flight. A single Great Barbet was also seen and heard, assumed to be an escaped specimen.

The campsite was truly in full splendor that day with plenty of activity in the trees. The height of the trees give you a definite sore neck from staring straight up and I'm sure Steve would have loved a good massage after a morning of birding here! A single fruiting tree across from the dam was a beehive of activity but a little too far away and too shady to correctly ID many of the species making use of the fruits.

Highlights of the area included:

- A pair of Lesser Fish Eagles parked themselves about 120 feet from where we stood giving us stunning views. Later they took to the skies where they were joined by a third bird, making it three Lesser Fish Eagles.
- Two Golden Crested Mynas flew into the treetop to sunbathe, giving me my first lifer for the year.
- My first southern Velvet Fronted Nuthatch was seen in a large tree in the clearing. They are common in the north, but in the south ...
- A pair of Long billed Spiderhunter attacked a spiders web in a high tree, their ridiculously long bills a marvel to behold.
- A pair of Great Hornbill were observed in flight, and a flash of red in a tree on the hill crest resembled Helmeted Hornbill, although we never got a second look at it.
- A family of five Spectacled Leaf Monkeys were observed in a tree in the clearing, one mother bearing an infant in her arms.

The morning was relatively tame with only one species of woodpecker and no calling broadbills. Only one species of Barbet (Blue eared) was heard calling.

A trip down the two trails revealed nothing special, and hopes for a sighting of Banded Pitta was dashed when rangers decided to go ahead of us to perform clean-up duties.

At Thamnang Waterfall, while attempting to retrieve my camera for a photo, I slipped on a moist rock and smashed my forearm, elbow, hips and binoculars on a large boulder. Thankfully I did not seriously injure myself, but I did knock my bins out of calibration and my brand new laser pointer was rendered useless. A quick whack against a hard surface brought the bins back into useable focus. –Olympus may be cheap but at least they are repairable!

By 11 AM the heat was on and the birds were silent. Lunch was eaten at the cafeteria where the friendly rangers insisted we survey the northern waterfalls on our next trip. I doubt any birders have been there, so I will definitely make an effort to check it out in the future.

A total of 49 species were recorded at Sri Phang Nga; not bad for a 7-11 morning.

An hour long drive brought us to our next stop, the Phang Nga river. Focus of the stop was for River Lapwing, which we found very easily. Other good birds included Black browed Reed Warbler, Stripe throated Bulbul, Chestnut capped Bee Eater, Grey capped Woodpecker and Pacific Golden Plovers.

By the early afternoon we made it to Laem Pakarang. The tide was very far out, making birding quite difficult. However we did encounter some very good species:

- A close examination of the available stints revealed a single Grey tailed Tattler, a lifer for me.
- A white morph Pacific Reef Egret was observed feeding in the tidal waters, 200 meters from a dark morph.
- A single Chinese Egret was seen in the company of three Little Egrets. We nearly missed out on the important bird due to the habit of dismissing common species while in search of a rare or more exciting species.
- A single and VERY pale Sanderling was seen feeding in the coral.

Of the many species of terns which are often seen in this area, only one was encountered, Little Tern. The surprise was less than satisfying for a tern lover and I do hope next time they will be hanging around.

No Brahminy Kite or White bellied Sea Eagle were seen and the normally bold Collared Kingfisher seemed to be on vacation that day as well.

A stopover in Khao Lak National Park revealed a large number of caged bulbuls, some definitely taken from the wild, but no "free" wild birds were seen. A Great Squirrel was seen foraging, and watching an animal the size of a large Persian Cat scaling a tree is amazing.

A planned stopover at Lamru Waterfall for Pin Tailed Parrotfinch was canceled due to the waning light.

The last stop for the day was Thai Muang Golf Course. The guards let us in, having remembered me from the last time I insisted I be allowed to bird in the area without paying a fee. If there is any trouble with the security, please be reminded there is another entrance in the back.

A short visit to the shrine on the southwest side of the park was very fruitful. A fleeting glimpse of Chestnut tailed Starling gave hope that there may be a Chestnut eared Starling about but no other starlings were encountered.

Hope for Orange breasted Pigeon was initially dashed when a roosting site revealed 20-some Pink necked Pigeons. On the coast a flock of 22 Sanderlings, darker in plumage than the specimen at Laem Pakarang, were seen feeding in the surf, typical of Sanderling behavior.

On the way back to the car we revisited the roosting tree to find a large flock of at least 120 Orange breasted Pigeons, all of which took to flight after being scared off by a local on a bike. Near the car we dispatched another large flock of 40 or so birds and a last group of 80 or more passed us from the casuarinas, making it the largest gathering of Orange breasted Pigeons I've ever encountered.

No large raptors were observed in this usually raptor-infested area.

Down near the meadow we encountered more good species such as Japanese Sparrowhawk, Blue throated Bee Eater, Sand Martin and Pin tailed Snipe.

By the time we reached the marsh it was getting dark but we still managed to find Purple Swamphen and Thick billed Reed Warbler.

A local farmer, seeing our binoculars, told us local hunters have been preying on the birds in the area and shooting them with rifles. Some are killed for food, but most are killed for sport was his sad assessment. The news was truly disheartening and worrisome.

All in all it was a very good birding day and one which can be built on. Hopefully I will not have to wait too long before I get out on my next long trip.

Total species seen for the entire day was 108 species.

Birdlist

(Note: birds in the list are recorded in a first-come-first-record basis, which means some species which were seen in previous locations will not be recorded twice.)

Sri Phang Nga

Wreathed Hornbill
Greater Racket tailed Drongo
Chinese Pond Heron
Little Egret
Common Myna
Dollarbird
Crimson Sunbird
Grey headed Flycatcher
Black headed Bulbul
Mugimaki Flycatcher
Forest Wagtail
Swinhoes Minivet
Crow billed Drongo
Vernal Hanging Parrot
Thick billed Pigeon
Lesser Fish Eagle

Little Cormorant
Red throated Flycatcher
Black capped Kingfisher
Golden Crested Myna
Asian fairy Bluebird
Buff rumped Woodpecker
Ashy Drongo (both species)
Black naped Oriole
Common Woodshrike
Black Bittern
Chinese Goshawk
Ashy Minivet
Long billed Spiderhunter
Great Hornbill
Whiskered Treeswift
Greater Green Leafbird

Grey breasted Spiderhunter
Black crested Bulbul
Yellow Wagtail
Cream vented Bulbul
Spectacled Bulbul
Little Spiderhunter
Asian Brown Flycatcher
Moustached Babbler
Orchraceous Bulbul
Lesser Green Leafbird
Puff backed Bulbul
Germaine's Swiftlet
Silver rumped Needletail
Arctic Warbler
Crimson-breasted Flowerpecker

Phang Nga River

River Lapwing
Intermediate Egret
Barn Swallow
Pacific Swallow
Chestnut capped Bee Eater
Stripe throated Bulbul

Grey Capped Woodpecker
Pacific Golden Plover
Common Sandpiper
Wood Sandpiper
Scarlet breasted Flowerpecker
Spotted Dove

Brown throated Sunbird
Pacific Swift
Black Browed Reed Warbler
White throated Kingfisher
Common Tailorbird

Laem Pakarang

Brown Shrike
Eurasian Tree Sparrow
Greater Sand Plover
Lesser Sand Plover
Little Tern
Grey Plover
Whimbrel

Thai Muang Golf Course

Pink necked Pigeon
Large billed Crow
Coppersmith Barbet
Blue tailed Bee Eater
Asian Koel
Black Drongo
Paddyfield Pipit
Common Iora

Sanderling
Common Kingfisher
Bar tailed Godwit
Grey tailed Tattler
Ruddy Turnstone
Red necked Stint
Terek Snadpiper

Streak eared Bulbul
Brahminy Kite
Chestnut tailed Starling
Orange breasted Pigeon
Sand Martin
Black sholdered Kite
Red Wattled Lapwing
Purple Swamphen

Nordmanns Greenshank
Pacific Reef Egret
Chinese Egret
Indian Roller
White faced Sand Plover
Curlew Sandpiper

Blue throated Bee Eater
Japanese Sparrowhawk
Pintail Snipe
White breasted Waterhen
Greater Coucal
Lesser Coucal
Thick billed Reed Warbler
Zebra Dove