

Birding Snippets

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Marathon birding in NW Thailand Part 3 : Doi Chiang Dao & diversions en route



We decided to make a brief re-visit to Mae Hia as it was on the way to Doi Chiang Dao and we had missed the Wire-tailed Swallows. It made good sense as we needed to stop somewhere for lunch anyway, and the delicious noodle lunch we had on the first day lured us back! We also made a brief detour to visit the Sri Lanna National Park before reaching Doi Chiang Dao.

Mae Hia again...

Day 4
Midday
1230-1306
Weather: sunny & hot

Green-billed Malkoha
Phaenicophaeus tristis



After entering Mae Hia, we took a grassy path by the left and picked up **Plain Prinia** in the grasses. I was quite surprised to see 2 **Green-billed Malkohas** with their distinctive and very long tails, on a tree in a rather open area. We found an active Coppersmith Barbet nest and the parent birds were bringing back food.

Coppersmith Barbet
Megalaima haemacephala
with food at nest



Plain-backed Sparrow
Passer flaveolus

A **Long-tailed Shrike** was seen in an adjacent tree. An owl flew across the road to a patch of trees and I ran after it. It was a good decision as it was the only **Spotted Owlet** (lifer) seen on the trip. In the same patch of trees lurked a **Grey-backed Shrike**.

Spotted Owlet
Athene brama



Rufous-winged Buzzard
Butastur liventer

I decided to check out the sparrows on the wire and they turned out to be **Plain-backed Sparrows**, a species new for this trip.



Burmese Shrike
Lanius colluriooides
female

A soaring raptor provided some excitement and it was indeed a lifer – a **Rufous-winged Buzzard**. Another new bird was a **Burmese Shrike**.

The other birds seen were also recorded 4 days ago, they are: Pied Bushchat, Brown Shrike, Spotted Dove, Green Bee-eater, Black Drongo, Common Stonechat, Paddyfield Pipit and Rock Pigeon.

In all, we only spent 36 minutes here as we had a tight schedule ahead (I was constantly looking at the time)!

Detour to Sri Lanna National Park

Day 4
Afternoon
1400-1500
Weather: sunny & very hot

Coming out of Mae Hia, we turned left and took the 'canal road' until it rejoined the Chiang Mai-Chiang Dao road. From there, we made a detour east to Sri Lanna. En route, we saw **Little Egret**, **Common Myna** and **White-vented Myna** (lifer) – *Acridotheres grandis* and not *A. javanicus* (Javan Myna).

The park HQ itself was set near a reservoir, quite scenic and there is a shaded foodstall overlooking the lake. We went to the visitor centre and took some photos but there was nothing birdwise. At our time of visit, this lowland area was very warm and the withered leaves of the trees showed that it had been dry for quite some time.



On to Malee's – Doi Chiang Dao

Day 4 Malee's is a popular overnight place for birders and is signposted at the northern part of Chiang Dao town/village. We went beyond Malee's to the National Park office to get our permits for Den Ya Kat (the place for Giant Nuthatch and Hume's Pheasant) as we would be making an early start the next day. The permits were quite affordable and we heard barbets calling while I had a nice cool orange juice drink.

Late Afternoon
Weather: sunny

At Malee's, we saw a **Blue Rock Thrush** (lifer) in the garden and a **Shikra** (lifer) from the rooftop of the restaurant.

Hundreds of Steps up to the Wat

Day 4 From Malee's, we walked to the nearby wat (temple). I lost count of the number of steps I had to climb to reach the top but "wise words" were signposted to encourage and help break the climb. Sooty-headed Bulbuls were quite common. A Grey-headed Flycatcher was seen at the bottom of the steps.

Late afternoon
1630-1800
Weather: sunny



White-rumped Shama
Copsychus malabaricus



Grey-headed Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*

A Puff-throated Bulbul was seen at the top. Black Bulbul and Black-throated Sunbird were also seen. A Drongo Cuckoo called but was not seen. **Vernal Hanging Parrots** flew overhead.



Blue-winged Leafbird
Chloropsis cochinchinensis
male

Back at the bottom of the steps, a male **Blue-winged Leafbird** decided to sing from the top of a medium sized tree while a **White-rumped Shama** was more shy and called from the foliage.

A **Black-crested Bulbul** feeding on fallen fruits was a welcome change from the ubiquitous Sooty-headed Bulbuls.

Black-crested Bulbul
Pycnonotus melanicterus



During dinner at Malee's, we had a nice chat with Neil, a gentlemen who is related to Malee and he gave us some good information about birding at Den Ya Kat and Doi Lang.

On the way to Den Ya Kat

Day 5
Morning
0600-0630
Weather: good

From Malee's, it's only around 30km to Den Ya Kat, but it takes at least one and a half hours to get there due to the poor condition of the road, or rather – jeep track, and that's why we rented a 4WD. Getting up pre-dawn, I heard the call of a Brown Wood Owl. We left Malee's and missed the turn to Den Ya Kat as the sign was facing south and we had come from the north! I knew we had missed the turn when we reached the southern edge of Mae Na village and made a U-turn.

A few kilometers after the turn off, the road soon became a rutted jeep track. In the dim light, we saw a **White-crowned Forktail** along the track.

As the sky started to brighten, we had male **Grey Bushchats** (lifer) by the side of the track and White-rumped Shama as well.

Grey Bushchat
Saxicola ferrea
male



Den Ya Kat

Day 5
0630-1145
Weather: good

When buildings appeared at the end of the road, we knew we had reached Den Ya Kat Substation. There were small flowering plants along the last straight stretch of the road and we saw 2 chicken crossing the road. The birds then stood at the side of the road.



Buff-throated Warbler
Phylloscopus subaffinis

We dismissed them as chicken since there were people around, but as we drove on, the chicken were flushed and as they flew a short distance away, we realized that they were in fact **Mountain Bamboo Partridges** (lifer)! Darn, we should have slowed down to take a closer look at the birds before dismissing them as domestic chicken. Lesson learnt – never assume, always take a good look through the binoculars to verify!

When we got out of the car, a nice plump male Grey Bushchat greeted us. Among the bushes stood a little **Buff-throated Warbler** (lifer). As I approached, a little blue bird flew a short distance among the bushes – it was a handsome male **Slaty-backed Flycatcher**.

Slaty-backed Flycatcher
Ficedula hodgsonii
male



A handsome male **Burmese Shrike** perched in the trees and a smart looking White-browed Shrike-Babbler sang its sweet tune as it moved from tree to tree. 3 Olive-backed Pipits walked about on the short grass.

Burmese Shrike
Lanius collurioides
male



Grey Bushchat
Saxicola ferrea
female

We went to the roadside and searched the place where the partridges had flown too. We waited and soon a pair of Mountain Bamboo Partridges started duetting not far away and we could see them, male and female in our binos. Not long after the duetting, another pair was heard behind me to the right as I faced the first pair and then one more pair was heard to the forward left! Later on, at the back of the toilets we would flush 3 pairs of these partridges!

**Mountain Bamboo
Partridge**

Bambusicola fytchii
a pair duetted
from this bush

Den Ya Kat
seems to be
a good place for this
species



Near the pond, I found a **Rufous-fronted Babbler** (lifer) in the undergrowth. I remembered being advised to scan the pine trees for the nuthatch and I was able to locate a beautiful **Giant Nuthatch** (lifer) as it foraged in the trees.

Giant Nuthatch
Sitta magna

**Den Ya Kat is a good
place to find this species**



I had recorded a **Streaked Spiderhunter**, Sooty-headed Bulbul and Black-crested Bulbul when a pretty **Silver-eared Mesia** showed up. A **Great Tit** and a female Black-winged Cuckoo-Shrike were sighted. Grey-chinned Minivet and Verditer Flycatcher also showed up. Then the constant calls of a bird caught my attention and I was soon looking at a smart **White-browed Scimitar-Babbler** (lifer) with its signature de-curved beak.

**White-browed
Scimitar-Babbler**
Pomatorhinus schisticeps



Mountain Imperial Pigeon 'boomed' deeply, a Lesser Yellownape shrieked as it flew, while the Collared Owlet and Great Barbet also called. A cuckoo-like call was heard but I couldn't decide which species it was.

My Casio watch indicated an altitude of 1400m here and the cool conditions made birding rather pleasant.

Olive-backed Pipit
Anthus hodgsoni



On the Way Down

Day 2 Alas, it was time to move on. On the way down we
1230-1330 passed a guard post and 3km below this stood a
Weather: good tall tree with red-flowers. Again the tree grew from
the slope beneath us and the visiting birds were
eye-level – neck-craning not necessary!



Mountain Bulbul
Hypsipetes mcclllandii

Grey-eyed Bulbul
Iole propinqua

The nectar attracted quite a number of birds and we spent an hour here. A small party of attractive Black Bulbuls (with black head) kept returning. Barbets are usually difficult to see but thanks to this tree, we saw a **Blue-throated Barbet** (lifer). 3 attractive **Striated Yuhinas** (lifer) came by. A small flock of **Grey-eyed Bulbuls** (lifer) also joined the party.



Ashy Drongo
Dicrurus leucophaeus

Blue-bearded Bee-eater
Nyctyornis athertoni

2 **Blue-bearded Bee-eaters** (lifer) put in a surprise appearance. Even more surprisingly, they fed on the nectar! A male **Maroon Oriole** (lifer) also visited but the immature Maroon Oriole that came by was mobbed by a small bird.



Maroon Oriole
Oriolus traillii



**Chestnut-headed
Bee-eater**
Merops leschenaulti

Other new birds for the trip included **Black-headed Bulbul**, **Yellow-browed Warbler** and small parties of **Mountain Bulbuls**. Also in attendance were a pair of Blue-winged Leafbirds, several Flavescent Bulbuls, an Ashy Drongo, Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike and small parties of noisy Sooty-headed Bulbuls, Red-whiskered Bulbuls and Oriental White-eyes.

Blue-winged Leafbird
Chloropsis cochinchinensis
female



Crested Goshawk
Accipiter trivirgatus

Farther down, several Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters were seen, one of which flew out of a hole in the soil bank. A **Crested Goshawk** (lifer) flew across the valley. Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo and Grey Wagtail were also seen.

Back in Chiang Dao town, we had lunch and then made our way north to Doi Ang Khang...