

Birding Snippets

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Marathon birding in NW Thailand Part 2 : Doi Inthanon – the pinnacle of Thailand



Yellow-bellied Fantail, a denizen of the higher dois



We arrived at Doi Inthanon at 4pm+ in the afternoon. After getting the keys to our National Park bungalow, we drove the short distance to the accommodation cluster. The bungalows are set amidst coniferous trees and spaced 30-50m apart. Thus, it was rather peaceful staying in one of them. At this cool montane altitude (1200m), the hot water shower was very welcome indeed!

Last bit of daylight on Doi Inthanon

Day 1
Late Afternoon
Weather: cloudy

We spent the last remaining hour of daylight checking out Mr. Daeng's place, which was closed and getting to the KM 34.5 jeep track, exploring the first part of the track, just so we know what to expect when we came back at night. By the main road, a few **Fire-breasted Flowerpeckers** were heard and seen high up the trees. Also heard were Little Cuckoo-Dove, Streaked Spiderhunter and the melodious Oriental Magpie Robin.

Dinner was at the restaurant near the visitor's centre. Dinner was somewhat chilly in the roofed but wall-less open-air restaurant. Visiting the restroom at the back of the restaurant, we heard the call of an Asian Barred Owlet but failed to locate the bird. After dinner, we went back to the the KM 34.5 jeep track and heard a Mountain Scops Owl calling rather incessantly, but it wouldn't show.

Doi Inthanon Summit

Day 2
Early Morning
0630-0930
Weather: cold and misty

We were up early the next day pre-dawn and heard the Asian Barred Owlet when we stepped out of the bungalow! A futile search ensued. A Mountain Scops Owl was also heard near the bungalow but it appeared to be some distance away. Not wanting to miss out on the early morning bird activity, we set out for the summit.

It was cold and misty at the top – it should be so as Doi Inthanon peak is 2565m high. A **Blue Whistling Thrush** (resident ssp with yellow beak) soon showed itself near the information centre.

Blue Whistling Thrush
Myophonus caeruleus



We waited in vain for the Rufous-throated Partridge. My next lifer would be the **Silver-eared Laughingthrush** (a recent split from the Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush), foraging near the buildings. **Dark-backed Sibilias** (lifer) announced their arrival with their musical calls.

**Silver-eared
Laughingthrush**
Garrulax melanostigma



The calls of the **Golden-naped Barbet** joined in the morning chorus and a mating event was witnessed! As it got light, the endemic subspecies of the **Green-tailed Sunbird** (lifer) started to appear, and apart from visiting the flowers, 2 males were fighting for the attention of a female.

Green-tailed Sunbird
Aethopyga nipalensis
male



Green-tailed Sunbird
Aethopyga nipalensis
female
note the undertail pattern

There are actually 2 boardwalks near the summit. One leads from the summit car park to the information centre and the other – the AngKa Trail – starts from opposite the information centre and goes in a loop through the montane bog.

A pretty **Yellow-bellied Fantail** (lifer) and a few **Bar-throated Minlas** were spotted at the edge of the car park. A **Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker** (lifer) perched quietly among the trees.

A few *phylloscopus* warblers were seen, one I could tell was a **Buff-barred Warbler** (lifer) but I couldn't make out whether the other was a Blyth's or a White-tailed Leaf Warbler.

**Bar-throated Minla
(Chestnut-tailed Minla)**
Chrysominla strigula
feeding on fruits at the
summit car park



We stayed till 9:30am but it was still very cold, so we decided to bird farther down the mountain and come back to the Angka Trail another time.

First Car Park Down the Summit

Day 2
Mid Morning
Weather: sunny

We stopped at the first big car park down from the peak. There was a small food stall and toilet facilities here. Down here, the sun was out and soon it was rather warm. It was time to start reducing the layers of clothing! Such is montane birding, we have to adjust our dressing as the temperature changes.



Hill Blue Flycatcher
Cyornis banyumas
male

We heard the Large Hawk Cuckoo and saw a few **Hill Blue Flycatchers** (lifer) – both males and females were seen along the slopes. **Olive-backed Pipit** and **Flavescent Bulbul** also showed.

Farther down, we saw a small party of **Grey-chinned Minivets** with both males and females showing pretty well.



Male



Female Grey Chinned Minivet *Pericrocotus solaris*

Mr Daeng's Place

Day 2
Lunchbreak
1100-1230
Weather: sunny

We had an early breakfast and thus were quite hungry by late morning, so we made our way to Mr. Daeng's place, arriving at 11:00am for lunch stop. It was great that his place was open! After lunch, we had a good chat with the friendly man and Ben managed to buy a copy of 'Lekagul and Round' at the local price, which is substantially less! We had a rather tame female **Siberian Blue Robin** (lifer) hanging around his restaurant. Below the seating area, a **Lesser Shortwing** came back repeatedly. A Blue Whistling Thrush (resident ssp) and a male Hill Blue Flycatcher also put up an appearance.

Siberian Blue Robin
Luscinia cyane
female



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Checkpoint 2 Jeep Track

Day 2 After lunch, we took a walk along the checkpoint 2
Early Afternoon jeep track. It is not possible to drive along this
1300-1500 track due to treefall. We had good views of a male
Weather: good **Short-billed Minivet** (lifer) at the beginning.



**Brown-throated
Treecreeper**
Certhia discolor

Walking in, we found the trees very tall and it was difficult picking out birds from the upper storey. This made locating calling birds well nigh impossible! Still we persevered.

Small parties of **Grey-cheeked Fulvettas** (lifer) skulked in the lower storey. A **Brown-throated Treecreeper** (lifer) provided some excitement as it went about its business, vertically up a tree trunk. Then a bird that looked very much like the Black-eared Shrike-Babbler showed up and it was to be my next lifer – a **Chestnut-fronted Shrike-Babbler**. A cartoonish looking **Long-tailed Broadbill** put in an appearance. Maroon Oriole was heard and Ben found an Arctic Warbler.

Watchiratan Falls

Day 2 We spent half an hour at the falls and located a
1530-1600 **Grey Wagtail** and a Blue Whistling Thrush
Weather: good (resident ssp). We also heard Striped Tit-Babbler and Common Tailorbird.



Grey Wagtail
Motacilla cinerea

KM13

Day 2 We spent half an hour here looking for Black-backed Forktail but there were absolutely no birds whatsoever. And the little stream was completely dry, perhaps that's why the forktail was a no show.
1615-1645
Weather: good

Camp Grounds

Day 2 We went to a swampy stake-out near the camp grounds, opposite bungalow 102 where there's a purpose built hide. I only managed poor views of a **Black-tailed Crake** (lifer) as it flew from one swampy area to the next. Over here, we also had **Large-billed Crow** in flight.
1715-1750
Weather: partly cloudy

To the Summit then down to KM37.5

Day 3 Again, we made an early start for the summit which was fogged out! And again we staked out the partridge which again was a no show!
Morning
Weather: foggy at summit, clear at km 37.5
0630-0830



Flavescent Bulbul
Pycnonotus flavescens

Spectacled Barwing
Actinodura ramsayi



We drove down and came to a promising stretch of road about 500m above checkpoint 2. We heard the Large Hawk Cuckoo and saw some birds flying, so we stopped. The Large Hawk Cuckoo called for quite some time but could not be located. A small flock of Short-billed Minivets seemed to check us out from a roadside tree. A beautiful **Spectacled Bar-wing** (lifer) showed up across the road.



Verditer Flycatcher
Eumyias thalassina

A **Lesser Yellownape** perched high up. Ben saw and photographed a **Bay Woodpecker**. Flavescent Bulbuls appeared to be rather common. Another lifer came in the form of a **Striated Bulbul**. Conspicuously, **Lesser Racket-tailed Drongos** were actively flying about, so were the resident **Ashy Drongos** (black colour). **Mountain Imperial Pigeon** flew by, a **Verditer Flycatcher** came by the roadside and quick moving Dark-backed Sibias foraged in the foliage.

Checkpoint 2 to Mae Cham Road

This time round, we decided to visit a waterfall on the other side of the mountain. We stopped briefly at checkpoint 2 and had a small flock of Grey-cheeked Fulvettas by the roadside. Moving onto the Mae Cham Road, we recorded male and female **Scarlet Minivets** and a male **White-browed Shrike-Babbler**.

Mae Pan Waterfall Road

Day 3
Morning
0930-1030
Weather: good

We left Mae Cham Road and turned into the Mae Pan Waterfall Road. Some 1.6km into this road, we noticed bird activity and stopped the vehicle. A **Grey-capped Woodpecker** (lifer) hopped about on the tree trunks. 2 pretty **Black Bulbuls** (lifer) perched right on the tree tops. Good thing the land sloped downwards and the birds were just slightly above eye level.



Black Bulbul
Hypsipetes leucocephalus

Grey-capped Woodpecker
Dendrocopos canicapillus



A single female **Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush** (lifer) perched quietly on a bare branch at mid level. With noisy squawks, an **Eurasian Jay** (lifer) put in an appearance in the upper storey. This stretch seemed to be my "lifer-road" as **Black-winged Cuckoo-Shrike** (lifer) and handsome **Chestnut-headed Bee-eater** (lifer) were also sighted.

Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush
Monticola rufiventris
female



Black-winged Cuckoo-Shrike

Coracina melaschistos



Other birds seen included the delightful **Velvet-fronted Nuthatch**, **Common Iora**, **Black-crested Bulbul**, and more Sooty-headed Bulbuls, Lesser Racket-tailed and Ashy Drongos.

Mae Pan Waterfall Trail

Day 3
Morning
1100-1240
Weather: sunny

At the end of the road, we came to a small parking area with signs indicating a 500m trail to the Mae Pan Waterfalls. It was a well-marked trail and not far in, we found a **Grey-headed Flycatcher**. Near the waterfall, the trail went alongside a stream and at a small waterfall, we were elated to find a male **Plumbeous Water Redstart** (lifer), a bird I did not manage to find at Watchiratan Waterfall the day before. Later on, a female showed up to complete the sighting of this species! Ben was at the right position at the right time and managed to photograph the female as well. A Grey Wagtail also foraged along the stream. Near the waterfall, I had a small snake slither across the trail, into the grasses. It was too brief a view for photos or ID.

**Plumbeous Water
Redstart**
Rhyacornis fuliginosa
male



**Bar-winged
Flycatcher-Shrike**
Hemipus picatus

On the way back, we came across 3 **Puff-throated Bulbuls** (lifer) as they moved through the trees, a little **White-bellied Yuhina** showed up, a male **Black-throated Sunbird** stopped to preen and a **Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike** hawk for insects from a perch.

Lunch Stop at Mr. Daeng's

Day 3
Afternoon
Weather: sunny and hot

Again we had lunch at Mr. Daeng's relaxing restaurant. It was rather hot and sunny so we relaxed till 3:40pm. The Hill Blue Flycatcher, Blue Whistling Thrush and Siberian Robin were still around. A Red-whiskered Bulbul showed up among the trees.

Red-whiskered Bulbul
Pycnonotus jocosus





Hill Prinia

Prinia atrogularis

Along the roadside near Mr. Daeng's, male and female **Pied Bushchats** perched on the taller grasses of the fields. Oriental Magpie Robin and **Brown Shrike** perched on the poles in the fields. **Barn Swallows** flew overhead and a few **Fire-breasted (Buff-bellied) Flowerpeckers** foraged in the crowns of the roadside trees. In the undergrowth, a **Hill Prinia** appeared briefly and then continued its skulking ways.

**Fire-breasted
(Buff-bellied)
Flowerpecker**

Dicaeum ignipectus
male



Angka Trail

Day 2

**Late Afternoon
1600-1830**

**Wx: partly cloudy with
intermittent light drizzle**

We went back to the summit to bird the Angka Trail in the late afternoon and recorded the very active and cute little Yellow-bellied Fantail at the open area in light drizzle.

Yellow-bellied Fantail

Rhipidura hypoxantha



We also had Green-tailed Sunbirds, Blue Whistling Thrush, Silver-eared Laughingthrush and Chestnut-tailed Minlas here. An active little bird proved to be a **Blyth's Leaf Warbler** (lifer).

Blyth's Leaf Warbler
Phylloscopus reguloides



Proceeding in, a **Rufous-winged Fulvetta** (lifer) was seen busily clambering on the tree trunks. It was fantastic as it was one of my target birds.

Rufous-winged Fulvetta
Pseudominla castaneiceps



Pygmy Wren-Babbler
Pnoepyga pusilla

Then I saw movement on the forest floor and soon was rewarded with views of 2 **Chestnut Thrushes** (lifer) – mega! The calls of the **Pygmy Wren Babbler** gave away its presence and the bird was soon located in the undergrowth. A little **Yellow-browed Tit** (lifer) put up an appearance on the way out of this loop trail and nicely rounded up the Ang Ka Trail's sightings.

Chestnut Thrush
Turdus rubrocanus



Owls Calling at the Bungalow

Day 3 Back at the bungalow after dinner, we heard
Night Collared Scops Owl, Asian Barred Owlet and
Weather: good Mountain Scops Owl. We did the obligatory search
for the Asian Barred which seemed near but
expectedly failed to find the bird amongst the thick
foliage.

Last Morning on Doi Inthanon

Day 4 We started a bit later this morning and still, we
Morning had the Asian Barred Owlet calling away. We went
to the little shop at park HQ to get some snacks
and water. Here we saw an Eurasian Jay and a
Sooty-headed Bulbul in the trees above. The calls
of a Changeable Hawk Eagle were also heard.

Inthanon Highland Resort

Day 4 At the base of Doi Inthanon, we found our way to
Mid Morning the Inthanon Highland Resort, itself a popular
0930-1100 accommodation choice for visiting birders. In the
Weather: sunny sprawling grounds, we came upon not 1, not 2,
but 3 **Asian Barred Owlets** (lifer)! To think that
we had tried so hard for them up the mountain at
night and here they were in broad daylight – just
incredible!

Asian Barred Owlet
Glaucidium cuculoides



Near the lake at the back, I came upon a handsome male **Hainan Blue Flycatcher** (lifer) perching quietly on a branch and a **Red-throated Flycatcher** (lifer).

Red-throated Flycatcher
Ficedula parva



Common Buzzard
Buteo buteo
light morph

Along a path through the wooded area at the back, we recorded a Black Drongo in first winter plumage, Coppersmith Barbet, Large-billed Crow, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Sooty-headed Bulbul, Red-whiskered Bulbul and a cheery **Hoopoe**. A soaring raptor turned out to be a light morph **Common Buzzard** (lifer).

Thereafter, we set out for lunch, and then Doi Chiang Dao, visiting a few places...