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Orange-headed Thrush at Singapore Botanic Gardens on 8 December by Lee Tiah Khee



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Bird Report

December 2009

By Lim Kim Chuah

SINGAPORE HIGHLIGHTS

Undoubtedly the highlight for Singapore birders must be the **Red-throated Flycatcher** reported from Woodlands. This is potentially the first record for Singapore if accepted by the NSS Bird Group Records Committee. Unfortunately the bird was not seen again and so cannot be followed-up on. As to be expected, wintering migrants stole the limelight with reports of **Chestnut-winged Cuckoo** and **Booted Eagle** at Seletar, a very confiding juvenile **Malayan Night Heron** at the Singapore Botanical Gardens, a **Blue-winged Pitta** at Bishan (a new location for this species), **Hooded Pitta**, **Orange-headed Thrush**, **Dark-sided Flycatcher** and **Blue-and-white Flycatcher** all at Singapore Botanical Gardens and a **Common Kestrel** at Changi. One **Glossy Swiftlet** at Dairy Farm Nature Park, an **Oriental Pied Hornbill** in Toa Payoh and a **Crested Serpent Eagle** at King's Avenue were the main noteworthy sightings for resident birds in December.

JOHOR HIGHLIGHTS

A **Rosy Starling** at Sungei Balang is not only a new state record but also potentially the first confirmed record for Malaysia if accepted by the Bird Records Committee of the Malaysian Nature Society.



Rosy Starling at Sg Balang, 12/12 by Fang Sher Chyet

SUMMARY

This report covers noteworthy bird sightings in December 2009 for Singapore and the surrounding region. In general, the report will include but are not limited to the following categories: rarities, breeding or nesting records, arrival and departure dates for migratory species, new locality records, escapees and unusual behaviour.

In addition, contributors are also advised to be as precise as possible concerning records. Please remember to include details such as how many birds were seen, the plumage, sex and age of the birds, the type of habitat in which they were observed, the food they were eating (if possible, identify the plant or animal), the weather encountered (what was the wind direction, tide conditions, etc.). Although it is not necessary to have such details for all record submissions, it is a good habit to cultivate and is normally required for very rare or unusual species.

Please send all your records of interest to Lim Kim Seng @ [ibisbill@yahoo.com](mailto:LimKimSeng@ibisbill@yahoo.com) or Lim Kim Chuah @ pittalover@yahoo.com.sg or Yong Ding Li at zoothera@yahoo.com. Alternatively you can also post your sightings at the NSS Bird Group website at <http://wildbirdsingapore.nss.org.sg> Please send your records no later than one week after the end of every month. Your contributions will be greatly appreciated and acknowledged.

Unless stated otherwise, nomenclature and systematic follow K.S. Lim's (2007) "Pocket Checklist of the birds of the Republic of Singapore (Second Edition)", K.S. Lim & K.C. Lim's (1999) "Pocket checklist of the birds of Johor, Peninsular Malaysia" for Johor, and B.L. Monroe Jr. & C.G. Sibley's (1993) "A World Checklist of Birds " for the rest of the region.

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In addition, we would like to thank Richard Erh, Fang Sher Chyet, Con Foley, Ben Lee, Lee Tiah Khee and Victor Loh for allowing us to use their photos in this report.

ABBREVIATIONS USED:

SBG Singapore Botanic Garden
BTNR Bukit Timah Nature Reserve
CCNR Central Catchment Nature Reserve

SINGAPORE

LESSER WHISTLING DUCK *Dendrocygna javanica*

1 at SBG on 6/12 (LKS).

BANDED WOODPECKER *Picus miniaceus*

3 seen at a carpark at Dairy Farm Nature Park on 20/12 (LKS).

LACED WOODPECKER *Picus vittatus*

A male seen in mangroves at Sg Tampines on 20/12 (LKS).

COMMON GOLDENBACK *Dinopium javanense*

3 at Dairy Farm Nature Park on 20/12 (LKS).

BARRED BUTTONQUAIL *Turnix suscitator*

A pair at Choa Chu Kang Christian Cemetery on 28/12 (FW).

LINEATED BARBET *Megalaima lineata*

1 heard at Old Choa Chu Kang Road, 8/12 (TGC). 1 pair at Fairway Drive (off Eng Neo Ave) on 16/12 (MiP). Also heard at SBG on 11/12, 14/12, 28/12 and seen on 30/12 (all TGC). 1 heard at SBG on 15/12 (LKS) and 2 seen at Dairy Farm Nature Park on 20/12 (AM/LC/FHC/GF/JLe/LKS/RO).

ORIENTAL DOLLARBIRD *Eurystomus orientalis*

1 at Dairy Farm Nature Park on 20/12 (LKS).

ORIENTAL PIED HORNBILL *Anthracoceros albirostris*

1 at Toa Payoh, 15/12 (GS).

COMMON KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*

1 at Singapore Quarry on 20/12 (AM/LC/FHC/GF/JLe/LKS/RO).

BLACK-CAPPED KINGFISHER *Halcyon pileata*

1 at Singapore Quarry, 28/12 (DA/PAH). 1 seen at Singapore Quarry on 20/12 (AM/LC/FHC/GF/JLe/LKS/RO).

GREY NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus indicus*

1 was present at Bidadari on 6/12 (RE).



Grey Nightjar at Bidadari, 6/12 by Richard Erh

CHESTNUT-WINGED CUCKOO *Clamator coromandus*

1 at Seletar on 6/12 (CF/LJS/LWT/TKH).

HODGSON'S HAWK-CUCKOO *Hierococcyx nisicolor*

1 at SBG on 24/12 (FW).

RAINBOW LORIKEET *Trichoglossus haematodus*

2 at SBG, 18/12 (WCC). 3 at SBG on 15/12 (LKS).

BLUE-CROWNED HANGING PARROT *Loriculus galgulus*

6 at SBG on 6/12 (LKS). 1 was heard over Alexandra Hospital on 27/12 (LKS) and another heard at Bukit Batok Secondary School on 30/12 (LKS).

GLOSSY SWIFTLET *Collocalia esculenta*

1 seen well at Dairy Farm Nature Park on 20/12 (LKS).

RED-LEGGED CRAKE *Rallina fasciata*

1 dead bird (probably a road kill victim) was found at Tyersall Road, 9/12 (TGC). 1 seen at SBG on 11/12, 30/12 (TGC)

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*

35 counted at SBWR, 27/12 (BL). 7 at Pasir Ris Park on 20/12 (LKS).

COMMON REDSHANK *Tringa totanus*

50-70 counted at SBWR, 27/12 (BL)

MARSH SANDPIPER *Tringa stagnatilis*

10-15 counted at SBWR, 27/12 (BL)

COMMON GREENSHANK *Tringa nebularia*

20-30 counted at SBWR, 27/12 (BL)

TEREK SANDPIPER *Tringa cinerea*

1 at SBWR, 27/12 (BL)



Terek Sandpiper at SBWR, 27/12 by Ben Lee

COMMON SANDPIPER *Tringa hypoleucos*

3 at SBWR, 27/12 (BL). 1 seen at Singapore Quarry on 20/12 (LKS).

PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis fulva*

150-200 counted at SBWR, 27/12 (BL)

BLACK BAZA *Aviceda leuphotes*

7 at Changi Cove and 1 at Seletar on 6/12 (CF/LJS/LWT/TKH). 2 at SBG, 18/12 (WCC) and 28/12 (TGC). 1 at Singapore Quarry, 28/12 (DA/PAH). 1 on a dead tree at Dairy Farm Nature Park on 20/12 (AM/LC/FHC/GF/JLe/LKS/RO).

CRESTED HONEY-BUZZARD *Pernis ptilorhyncus*

1 at Chinese Garden, 19/12 (PJ). 1 flying high at Dairy Farm Nature Park on 20/12 (LKS). Another seen well resting on the roof-top of a multi-storey car-park at Woodlands Street 82 on 26/12 (LKS) was assumed to be a female of subspecies *orientalis* based on the non-existent crest and yellow iris.

WHITE-BELLIED FISH EAGLE *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

1 seen building nest on the transmission tower at BBNP, 5/12 (SY)

CRESTED SERPENT-EAGLE *Spilornis cheela*

2 adults at King's Avenue, 11/12 (MH)

EASTERN MARSH-HARRIER *Circus spilonotus*

1 male and 1 juvenile at Tanah Merah Grassland, 6/12 (MiP). 1 sub-adult male at Changi Cove on 6/12 (CF/LJS/LWT/TKH)

CHINESE SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter soloensis*

1 adult female at Seletar on 6/12 (CF/LJS/LWT/TKH). 1 adult male at Old Choa Chu Kang Road, 8/12 (TGC)

JAPANESE SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter gularis*

1 seen flying over Singapore Quarry on 20/12 (AM/LC/FHC/GF/JLe/LKS/RO).

COMMON BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

2 at Changi Airport, 26/12 (LJS)

BOOTED EAGLE *Hieraaetus pennatus*

1 dark morph female at Seletar on 6/12 (CF/LJS/LWT/TKH)

CHANGEABLE HAWK-EAGLE *Spizaetus cirrhatus*

1 dark morph at BBNP, 5/12 (SY), 1 pale morph juvenile at Changi Cove and another at Seletar on 6/12 (CF/LJS/LWT/TKH). 2 seen at Singapore Quarry on 20/12 (AM/LC/FHC/GF/JLe/LKS/RO).

COMMON KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus*

1 female at Changi Cove on 6/12 (CF/LJS/LWT/TKH) and 12/12 (CF)

LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

6 including 2 apparent pairs at Singapore Quarry on 20/12 (AM/LC/FHC/GF/JLe/LKS/RO) and 28/12 (DA/PAH).

PURPLE HERON *Ardea purpurea*

5 at SBWR, 27/12 (BL)

GREAT EGRET *Casmerodius albus*

5 at SBWR, 27/12 (BL)

YELLOW-BILLED EGRET

Egretta intermedia

1 at SBWR, 27/12 (BL)

LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

20 at SBWR, 27/12 (BL). 7 at Pasir Ris Park on 20/12 (LKS).

MALAYAN NIGHT HERON

Gorsachius melanolophus

1 very friendly juvenile at SBG was reported by GWHD on 3/12. It was subsequently seen by numerous observers and photographers until 28/12. The bird was extremely tame and was oblivious to the presence of on-lookers and photographers when it hunted for earthworms along the ginger garden clearings.



Malayan Night Heron at SBG on 19/12 by Ben Lee

BLUE-WINGED PITTA *Pitta moluccensis*

1 at Bishan Park, 15/12 (CAS).



Blue-winged Pitta at Bishan Park on 15/12 by Chew AS

HOODED PITTA *Pitta sordida*

1 at SBG, 5/12 (FSC), 28/12 (DA/PAH), 11/12, 14/12, 16/12 & 30/12 (all TGC). Another was found dead on Jurong Island, apparently as a result of crashing into a building, 21/12 (TBC).

LONG-TAILED SHRIKE *Lanius schach*

1 at Admiralty Park on 18/12 (LKS).

TIGER SHRIKE *Lanius tigrinus*

2 juveniles seen at Singapore Quarry on 20/12 (LC/FHC/GF/JLe/LKS/RO).

HOUSE CROW *Corvus splendens*

A flock of 100 seen gathering at dusk at Pasir Ris Park on 20/12 (LKS/SA).

ASHY MINIVET *Pericrocotus divaricatus*

At Pasir Ris Park, 10 were counted on 13/12 (LKS) and 15 on 20/12 (LKS).

ORANGE-HEADED THRUSH *Zoothera citrina*

1 at SBG, 8/12 (LTK), 11/12 & 14/12 (TGC)

ASIAN BROWN FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa dauurica*

1 at Pasir Ris Park on 13/12 (LKS) and 1 at Dairy Farm Nature Park on 20/12 (LKS).

DARK-SIDED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa sibirica*

1 at SBG on 18/12 (WCC)

RED-THROATED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula parva*

1 reported off Woodlands Road (near Causeway) on 11/12 (MiP) would be, if accepted by the NSS Bird Group Records Committee, the first confirmed record of this northern species in Singapore.

Mick reports: “At first I thought it might be an Asian Brown or Dark-sided, but when it perched closer, I could see a distinct black tail with white sides. The tail was held more horizontally than a typical ABF or DSF, which tend to have their tails held downwards.

Furthermore, it kept flicking its tail in a very distinct fashion, behaviour I have not noticed on other flycatchers. The light was not so great, and it was perched about 8m away, but I could also make out a light eye-ring, maybe some pink or orange to the lower mandible, dark edge on the primaries, slight streaking to the breast, and an indistinct rufous patch on the throat.”

BLUE-AND-WHITE FLYCATCHER

Cyanoptila cyanomelana

1 female at SBG, 23/12 (VL)



Blue-and-white Flycatcher at the Singapore Botanic Gardens on 23/12 by Victor Loh

COMMON HILL MYNA *Gracula religiosa*

1 at SBG on 6/12 (LKS).

STRAW-HEADED BULBUL *Pycnonotus zeylanicus*

2 birds seen at Singapore Quarry on 20/12 (LKS).

ORIENTAL WHITE-EYE *Zosterops palpebrosus*

A flock of 10 at Dairy Farm Nature Park on 20/12 (LC/LKS).

ESCAPEES

RED JUNGLEFOWL *Gallus gallus*

A fat male seen foraging in mudflats at Sg Tampines and 2 thinner and shyer females at Sg Api-api, both on 20/12 (LKS/SA) are probably introduced birds although the possibility of birds flying from Pulau Ubin cannot be discounted.

NESTING REPORT

LINEATED BARBET *Megalaima lineata*

1 of a pair seen digging a nest hole in about 10 m up a dead albizia at Dairy Farm Nature Park on 20/12 (AM/LC/FHC/GF/JLe/LKS/RO).

HOUSE CROW *Corvus splendens*

1 seen with a twig at Pasir Ris Park on 20/12 (LKS/SA).

LATE REPORT - NOVEMBER

HODGSON'S HAWK-CUCKOO

Hierococcyx nisicolor

1 at Bidadari on 28/11 (CWL)

INDIAN CUCKOO *Cuculus micropterus*

1 at Bidadari on 23/11 (CWL)

ASIAN DRONGO CUCKOO

Surniculus lugubris

1 at Bidadari on 23/11 (CWL).

DARK-SIDED FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa sibirica*

1 at Venus Loop on 24/11 (CF)



Dark-sided Flycatcher at Venus Loop on 24/11 by Con Foley

JOHOR

BLACK KITE *Milvus milvus*

1 at Sg Balang, 12/12 (FSC)



Black Kite at Sg Balang, 12/12 by Fang Sher Chyet

ROSY STARLING *Sturnus roseus*

1 juvenile was seen feeding in the fields of Sg Balang together with White-vented Myna, 12/12 (FSC). This starling is rarely recorded in Southeast Asia, but is a familiar migrant bird in many parts of northern India where it gather in huge flocks of tens of thousands of individuals. This is potentially the first record for Malaysia if accepted by the MNS Records Committee.

Singapore Raptor Report Autumn Migration, December 2009

Compiled by Alan OwYong, Edited by Kenneth Kee

SUMMARY

November was definitely the peak month for migrating raptors over Singapore. After the 2000+ raptors that migrated through last month, the total count for December dropped to a mere 66 from 9 species. The standouts were a Common Kestrel over at Tanah Merah and a Booted Eagle over at Seletar, reported by our top raptor team on the 5th. The Eastern Marsh Harriers were well represented with both sexes, juvenile, sub-adults and adult birds wintering over at Changi. Both the Oriental Honey Buzzards and Black Bazas still made up the majority (75%) of all the migrating raptors. We had the first report of a pair of Crested Serpent Eagles seen together for the first time at King's Avenue. This pair may have come over from across the Straits but we hope that they will stay and breed here.



Eastern Marsh Harrier (male) at Changi by Jonathan Cheah

Table 1

| S/N | Species | No | | S/N | Species | No |
|-----|------------------------|----|--|-----|-----------------------|----|
| 1 | Oriental Honey Buzzard | 22 | | 6 | Osprey | 1 |
| 2 | Black Baza | 27 | | 7 | Peregrine Falcon | 1 |
| 3 | Eastern Marsh Harrier | 5 | | 8 | Booted Eagle | 1 |
| 4 | Japanese Sparrowhawk | 3 | | 9 | Common Kestrel | 1 |
| 5 | Chinese Sparrowhawk | 3 | | 10 | Crested Serpent Eagle | 2 |
| | | | | | Total | 66 |

Note: The total numbers are indicative only with similar species in the same area discounted to prevent duplication

1. Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus* (22)

| Date | No. | Location and Details | Reported By |
|------|-----|--|---|
| 1 | 3 | Migrating SE over at Tuas South | Martti Siponen |
| 4 | 1 | Roof top at Woodlands Drive | Cyril Ng |
| 4 | 2 | Migrating SE over at Tuas South | Martti Siponen |
| 5 | 1 | Tanah Merah Grasslands, <i>Orientalis</i> | Jia Sheng, Con Foley, Kok Hui, Danny Lau and Rene |
| 8 | 1 | Buona Vista MRT. In flight | Alan OwYong |
| 8 | 2 | Soaring over Toa Payoh | Gloria Seow |
| 11 | 1 | Soaring over PIE near Toa Payoh | Gloria Seow |
| 12 | 2 | Migrating SE over at Tuas South | Martti Siponen |
| 16 | 2 | Soaring over Paya Lebar MRT | Gloria Seow |
| 19 | 1 | Flying SW over Chinese Gardens | Peter Jones |
| 20 | 1 | Flying over Botanic Gardens | Alan OwYong |
| 20 | 1 | Flying over Dairy Farm | Lim Kim Seng |
| 23 | 1 | Soaring over Botanic Gardens | Gim Cheong |
| 26 | 1 | Resting on top of car park Woodlands St 82, female | Lim Kim Seng |
| 31 | 2 | Perched at Bidadari Cemetery, M & F | Johnny Chew |

2. Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes* (27)

| Date | No. | Location and Details | Reported By |
|------|-----|------------------------------|---|
| 4 | 2 | Migrating SE over Tuas South | Martti Siponen |
| 5 | 7 | Tanah Merah Grasslands | Jia Sheng, Con Foley, Kok Hui, Danny Lau & Rene |
| 5 | 1 | Seletar | Jia Sheng, Con Foley, Kok Hui, Danny Lau & Rene |

| | | | |
|----|----|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 11 | 11 | Circling over Woodlands near Causeway | Mick Price |
| 12 | 1 | Holland Road seen feeding | Ulf Remahl |
| 13 | 1 | Mount Faber | Teh Chan |
| 20 | 1 | Dairy Farm N. Park | Lim Kim Seng |
| 28 | 2 | Botanic Gardens | Tan Gim Cheong |
| 28 | 1 | Circling over Singapore Quarry | Doreen Ang & Ah Huay. |

3. Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* (5)

| Date | No. | Location and Details | Reported By |
|------|-----|---|---|
| 3 | 3 | Tanah Merah Grasslands | Mick Price |
| 5 | 1 | Tanah Merah Grasslands, sub-adult male | Jia Sheng, Con Foley, Kok Hui, Danny Lau & Rene |
| 6 | 1 | Changi Cove with photo, juvenile | Lee Tiah Khee |
| 20 | 2 | Changi Cove with photo, adult M & imm F | Jonathan Cheah |

4. Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis* (3)

| Date | No. | Location and Details | Reported By |
|------|-----|---|--------------|
| 7 | 1 | Circling on thermals at Rail Mall, Upper Bukit Timah, heading south | Ulf Remahl |
| 20 | 1 | Flying over Singapore Quarry | Lim Kim Seng |
| 21 | 1 | Flying over Boon Lay in Jurong | Alan OwYong |

5. Chinese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter soloensis* (3)

| Date | No. | Location & Details | Reported By |
|------|-----|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | 1 | Woodlands Road, near Causeway | Mick Price |
| 5 | 1 | Seletar. 1 adult female | Jia Sheng, Con Foley, Kok Hui, Danny Lau & Rene |
| 8 | 1 | Old Choa Chu Kang Road, 1 adult male | Tan Gim Cheong |

6. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* (1)

Lena Chow photographed one flying over Lower Pierce Reservoir on the 5th.

7. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* (1)

Sun Chong Hong reported that the same Falcon was still flying around Bishan area on various days of the month. First reported way back in Oct'09!

8. Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (1)

Jia Sheng, Con Foley, Kok Hui, Danny Lau and Rene reported one at the Tanah Merah Grasslands on the 5th.



Common Kestrel (female) at Tanah Merah Grasslands by Con Foley

9. Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* (1)

A female dark morph was seen in Seletar by Jia Sheng and company on the 5th.

10. Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela* (2)

Margie Hall reported 2 adults sitting side by side on an Albizia's tree at King's Avenue on the 11th. A new location for this raptor and may have stray over from across the Straits, given the close proximity to Johor.

Note

The numbers in brackets besides the bird name indicates the total number seen for this month. Different reports of the same raptors from the same area are discounted to prevent duplication.

Many thanks to those who sent in their reports and especially to Jonathan Cheah & Con Foley for the use of their photos.

LAO PDR: THE BALDBUL TWITCH

1st December 2009 to 4th December 2009

By Low Bing Wen Albert

Participants: Ashley Banwell, Neil Bostock, Carlton Collier, Albert Low



Scenic View from KM 31.5 Viewpoint along Route 8

Introduction

The country of Laos means many things to many people. Some ruefully remark that it is one of the last socialist republics on Planet Earth, others rightfully point out that it is the only landlocked country in South East Asia. To scientists, it is a treasure trove of new discoveries, while others bemoan the lack of infrastructure and widespread hunting of its biodiversity. To a certain extent, all of the above is true, but in order to truly experience what this country has to offer, one has to get right into the heart of the country, and there is certainly more than meets the eye.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (pronounced **LAO**, emphasis mine) is indeed a landlocked socialist republic ruled by the communist Pathet Lao since 1975. In recent years, the lifting of various economic and social restrictions, combined with a normalisation of economic ties with the USA in 2005, have done much to increase visitor numbers into the country, most opting to visit the city of Luang Prabang, a World Heritage listed site. An increasing number of visitors have also attempted to gain access to the large tracts of natural habitat that have remained largely intact due to unexploded

ordnance from the Civil War, and the closed nature of its economy that has largely prevented exploitation from foreign companies.

For birders, Laos has been largely under the radar due to a general lack of information and perceived “large scale” hunting of biodiversity with images of lifeless forests and a low species count. All this changed however with the discovery of the Bare-faced Bulbul (*P.hualon*), a country endemic & localised resident of wooded limestone outcrops, near the accessible village of Na Hin on the eastern end of the country. Within months, blogs and reports detailing the visits of intrepid westerners graced the Internet, with more groups planned for the future.

Personally, the trip materialised as a result of an invitation from Ashley Banwell to join a birding team assembled from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. The Bulbul, ironically, was less of an attraction to me as the thought of trail-blazing a country with so little information that one would constantly be birding with the thought of expecting the unexpected around every corner, and so it was this sense of expectation and intrigue that accompanied me aboard the plane bound for Bangkok.

Itinerary

A detailed itinerary of the Laos leg of the trip is outlined below.

November 30th

Late arrival in Vientiane after an afternoon flight from Singapore to Bangkok to catch an onward flight from Bangkok to Vientiane. Overnight in the very comfortable Orchid Hotel Vientiane, tucked away in the maze of streets that characterises the country’s capital.

December 1st

A comparatively early pre-dawn start for the 5 hour drive to the outskirts of Na Hin, heading north for a bit before turning east along Route 8. Late AM birding along the stretch of road between the KM 31 & KM 35 signpost along Route 8, before travelling onwards to the Sainamhai Resort on the outskirts of Na Hin, our home for the next 3 nights, for lunch. PM spent along the woodcutter’s trail at KM 48 above Na Hin to about 680m ASL. Thereafter, a brief nocturnal foray along a logging road about 2km below the forementioned trail. Overnight in Sainamhai Resort.

December 2nd

AM spent along the road between KM 31 & KM 35 again, with a foray into the trail at KM 35. Mid-morning birding along the “National Park” trail behind the temple at Na Hin. PM very poor birding along the busy Route 8 between KM 48 & KM 52 heading out of Na Hin. Last light spent along the logging road created by a Vietnam HEP company about 1.5-2km down the road towards Na Hin from the KM 48 woodcutter’s trail. Overnight Sainamhai Resort.

December 3rd

AM deep push into the KM 48 woodcutter's trail, reaching excellent primary hill forest before going down a steep hillside surrounded by excellent slope forest and into riverine closed forests interspaced by seasonal riverbeds at lower elevations. PM the team split up with yours truly revisiting this forest alone. Late PM owling along the "National Park" trail. Overnight Sainamhai Resort, where a big party was being thrown to celebrate the Laotian & Italian National Day. It is surprising how many Italians work around Na Hin!

December 4th

Full morning in Na Hin, returning to the excellent forest beyond KM 48. PM 5 hr drive back to Vientiane, where preparations were being made for the inaugural hosting of the South East Asian Games, due to start shortly after our departure. Overnight in Orchid Hotel Vientiane.

December 5th

A non-birding travel day. In order to reach Chiang Mai we had to take a flight from Vientiane to Luang Prabang in order to board the connecting flight across the border. We lounged around Luang Prabang for a few hours, a big tourist trap with tenacious touts, hawkers and beggars and a poor experience overall. Laotian leg ends.

Logistics & Guiding

The trip was organized via Stijin De Win of www.birding2asia.com, famous for his independent discovery of the Bulbuls at Na Hin. Stijin is an easygoing bird guide who effectively runs a one-man show utilising his own contacts on the ground in Laos. He speaks basic Lao and had recordings of all of the known specialties of Na Hin. However, as his prior visits to the area had largely been short trips, our group managed to add several species to his ever-expanding area list. For more information on the services he provides, visit the aforementioned website. Later on in the report, I will be utilising his sketch-map of the Na Hin area to point out notable birding areas. The tour cost paid was a full-board price which included the flight from Vientiane to Chiang Mai. As is the norm with my trip reports, I will not be listing the tour cost. Please direct your queries directly to Stijin.

With regard to getting into Laos, Bangkok appears to be the most popular embarkation point, rightfully serving its purpose as a gateway to Indochina. There are, however, various hubs from Cambodia & Vietnam which connect to Vientiane. For a full listing, please visit www.laoairlines.com. This is also where you can make online bookings for your plane tickets into the country. Accurate as of this trip report, Lao Airlines is the only carrier that flies into Vientiane and flights are paid for in USD. Online bookings were trouble-free and efficient and neither of us experienced any problems whatsoever while using this service.

Environment & People

Large tracts of pristine natural habitat still exist in Laos, a rarity in the rapidly modernising landscape of South East Asia. This is largely due to the closed nature of its economy and how the Vietnam War & civil war that followed devastated the country and left stockpiles of unexploded bombs. A little-known fact is that Laos was, and likely still is, the most bombed country in the World, with “American Imperialists” singled out as the main culprits. One of the most poignant impressions I had even prior to entering Laos was how the in-flight magazine on Lao Airlines, which featured an article on a museum built in honour of the Lao People’s Army, denounced America multiple times in a single article for committing genocide. Indeed, there is historical evidence to indicate that Laos was like a giant bull’s-eye for B-52 Bombers during the 1960s & 70s that basically razed large areas of the country to the ground.

Historically, most of Laos’s trade has been conducted with its neighbours-Thailand, Vietnam & China. In another little known fact, the mountainous terrain and plentiful watercourses allows the country to be one of the premier HEP exporters in the region. Even the town of Na Hin itself is built around a comparatively small scale HEP project that appears to be funded by Vietnamese. On a more serious note, this same company was observed making inroads into the pristine slope forest in the mountains surrounding Na Hin.

Naturalists have often been quick to condemn the Laotian people for their instinctive desire to pillage the biodiversity from their wilderness areas. Indeed, evidence of hunting in the forest was omnipresent around Na Hin with balls of feathers and evidence of campfires a feature of most trails we visited. On one occasion, young children with catapults followed us briefly into the forest trying to shoot birds drawn in by our playback and had to be shouted at. Therein lies the paradox that plagues wildlife conservation in such countries. With almost 50% of the population living below the poverty line and a reliance on subsistence agriculture, their only source of protein lies in a forest where mammalian signs are virtually non-existent. Birds are therefore logical targets. What little livestock these people own is better off alive then dead to the locals. Ultimately, it is going to take more than education to stop the hunting and eco-tourism is still an unknown concept to locals so there is still a long-way to go. While I personally don’t encourage it, foreigners do indeed need to see for themselves the sort of conditions most of the rural population live in to understand why they do what they do.

Thankfully, a lot of habitat in Laos is largely inaccessible with the limestone karst formations at Na Hin a perfect example of being one of the few areas with a road that cuts through the boundaries of these otherwise inaccessible karst habitats. It is little wonder how this Bulbul escaped science for so long when one stands on the KM 31.5 viewpoint near Na Hin where inaccessible wooded karsts extend for as far as the eye can see.

To add to the background of Na Hin, it is situated in the Khammouan Province, one of the sixteen administrative provinces in the country and borders Central Annam (Vietnam)

to the east. The mountains of the Annamite Chain, which extend into Vietnam, feature prominently throughout the area, resulting in spectacular natural scenery at various sites.

From a birding perspective, first light in Laos is at 6am in the morning. In December, temperatures and humidity rise very quickly and by 9am the birding slows down to a crawl. As others have pointed out, the birding never picks up in the afternoon and it was often difficult to motivate one-self to head out into the field again. For best results, utilise the period between 6am-9am as effectively as possible and don't look back. Temperatures are very pleasant, almost chilly at times in Na Hin after the Sun sets and mist can be observed in the hills around Na Hin early in the morning. Dusk comes at 6pm and owls can usually be heard by 7pm. December appears to be a poor time to visit the country as resident birds are generally quiet and migrants of any sort were thin on the ground. The rainy season is between May to November and some speculate that March & April may in fact be the prime birding times. We did not encounter any leeches or other "nasties" in the forests around Na Hin although mosquitoes were present at dusk. The resort provided mosquito nets although long sleeves are recommend. Expect leeches at other times of year where rainfall occurs, as we did not encounter any rain during our time there.

Acknowledgements

A word of thanks goes out to Stijin De Win for competently leading the trip and ensuring it ran smoothly. Thanks also to Ashley, Neil & Carlton for companionship throughout the length of the tour. Finally, mention must also be made of the "barefacedbirders" John Gregory & Pete Antrobus (barefacedbirders.blogspot.com) and Dave Gandy (electricbirding.blogspot.com) for publishing their findings on these blogs which served as important background information for our trip.

Site Summaries

Summaries for each site are outlined below in chronological order as we visited them. Not all species for each site are documented with attention being given primarily to perceived target species or noteworthy sightings. For ease of reference, visit <http://www.birding2asia.com/W2W/Laos/NaHin.html> and use this trip report in tandem with the map on the aforementioned page to get the most out of the data. As a sort of baseline to gauge the success of any future trips, our foray into Laos yielded 94 species over 4 days in the area around Na Hin, of which only 4 were new for me. Admittedly the cost-lifer ratio was abysmal, probably my worst in Asia so far, but at the end of the day, it was a big twitch for a very dull bird.

N.B.: I am aware of inconsistencies between some of my landmarks, notably marker posts, and those listed on the above website. I am sticking to my field notes nevertheless and so any errors that future observers bring up will be mine alone. Most trails are pretty obvious and easily found while the "famous" viewpoint is the only one for miles around and cannot be missed if you are on the right road.

Site A: Roadside Limestone Karst Forest (KM 31-KM 35)
-Labelled [8] on Map



The Viewpoint, located shortly after the KM 31 marker post

This 4km stretch of road passes through visually spectacular limestone karsts, and is the main site for avian limestone specialities around Na Hin. The viewpoint at KM 31.5 provides a window into the vastness of suitable habitat in this region. Based on personal observations, only one flock of 5-6 Bare-faced Bulbuls seemed to occur along this stretch of road. Similarly, a flock of 10-15 Sooty Babblers appear to call this area home. Avian diversity is otherwise decidedly limited with hardly any significant mixed flocks of note. This stretch of road is also the best area to spot the globally threatened Lao Langur. Aside from the highlights listed below, the more common bulbuls and scattered sightings of **Streaked Spiderhunter** & a tame **Green-backed Tit** did their best to keep us entertained.



Roadside karst formation KM 32

There is a short trail shortly after the KM 35 marker post that allows access into the evergreen forest at the base of one such limestone escarpment. The trail can be found on the right side of the road heading towards Na Hin Village. This short trail passes through several seasonal riverbeds before terminating sharply at the base of an inaccessible karst. The flora in this area is similar to that found in Cambodia, with monsoonal evergreen species like *Hopea* sp. Mixed flocks appeared to frequent the riverine forest towards the

end of the trail. The first part of the trail is over-run by thick scrub and undergrowth and held little of interest.

We only spent one morning and one mid-morning in this area, and hence could have overlooked some specialities. One notable dip was Limestone Leaf-Warbler, recently split as a full species from Sulphur-breasted Warbler and observed here on several occasions by James Eaton in late December. During our time there, we failed to locate any in the mixed flocks, and none of us had knowledge of its vocalisations. Other notable species observed are outlined below:



Reasonable forest at the end of KM 35 trail

Roadside Karst Forest

Bare-faced Bulbul: A large, robust bulbul with a distinctive call and flight pattern, this is currently the biggest avian trump card Laos appears to have. Although the birds were unresponsive to playback during our time here, they have a distinction of being the only species in the area that readily perches on the pointed tips of limestone karsts. In fact, virtually every bird we put the scope on which was perching on a limestone karst was a Bare-faced Bulbul! Their flight pattern of flaps interspaced with gliding is also distinctive when birds are observed flying from karst to karst. We observed a group of 5-6 birds on two separate mornings here, in my view likely the same flock on both occasions. 3 other bulbul species are found here, namely the **Black-crested, Stripe-throated & Grey-eyed Bulbuls**, but the BFB appears larger and more robust than all of them in flight, as well as having a tendency to fly much higher between the peaks of the karsts.



Bulbul on the Rocks! The newly described **Bare-faced Bulbul**

Sooty Babbler: Another local specialty, this globally near-threatened species appears to be locally common in Laos, judging from past reports and scientific literature, and Na Hin was no exception. The 4km stretch of roadside limestone forest enroute to Na Hin appears to support a large flock of 10-15 of these characters. We observed the same flock twice in one morning first at 630am and then again at 10am at virtually the same location in the vicinity of the KM 35 marker post. No playback was required, although as with all *Stachyris* babblers the flocks were extremely active and difficult for the camera to get to grips with!



The recently rediscovered **Sooty Babbler**, a locally common limestone specialist at Na Hin

Lao Langur (Non-Avian): One was seen brilliantly and photographed by Ashley Banwell at about 9am in the morning along the zigzag hairpins between KM 32 & KM 34. Unfortunately the primate probably heard his excited “cries” to the rest of the group and scampered off. This was our group’s only encounter with this species, despite spending another afternoon and morning in the area.



Ashley Banwell promptly became the envy of the group with this series of captures!

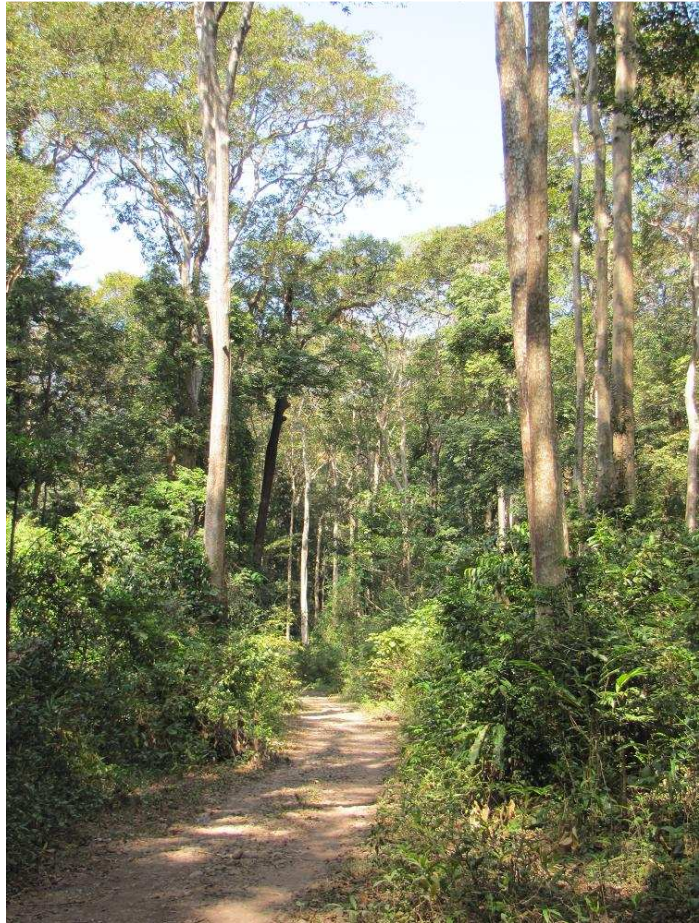
KM 35 Forest Trail

Red-vented Barbet: The first surprise find of the tour and a lifer for Stijin, who had missed it in Vietnam, this Indochinese specialty was observed loosely associating with a mixed flock as they passed through a fruiting emergent, where it promptly paused to devour fruits allowing for excellent scope views. We would encounter this species again later on in the primary forest beyond KM 48. On both occasions the birds were silent, with only their robust flight profile giving away their positions.

Other species observed during our mid-morning foray here include a female **Indochinese Cuckooshrike** which preceded the Barbet's arrival, a **Buff-breasted Babbler** foraging in one of the seasonal riverbeds, a vocal **Streaked Wren-babbler** which performed brilliantly on a fallen dipterocarp at the trail's end and a trio of **Yellow-vented Green-Pigeons** overhead.

Site B: "National Park" Trail -Labelled [6] on Map

This trail is unmistakable, given that it starts from the only temple in Na Hin Village. The entrance to the trail is "demarcated" by a pile of granite boulders and a bare area of soil in front of the temple which serves as an informal parking area of sorts. The trail crosses a small stream shortly thereafter before entering a reasonable tract of lowland monsoonal evergreen forest dominated by flora such as Teak & *Hopea* with a generally sparse understorey. We did not go very far into this trail, probably no further than 1km in, and the forest appears to be fragmented to a certain degree with numerous openings dominated by weeds and bamboo. We only spent a late morning & one evening here, so further; more through exploration is likely to reveal much more from this comparatively rare habitat type in Indochina. This was also the trail where some inquisitive village children did their best to procure some bush meat. Thankfully the tame **Crimson Sunbird** they were determined to shoot down was still on its feet when we scared them off!



Section of the National Park Trail, Na Hin

Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl: Pride of place must certainly go to this species, apparently a first record for C Laos. Ashley was very keen to do some night birding in this area, even though Stijin's pass experience here had been nothing but swarms of mosquitoes. Yours truly had picked various possibilities with which to carry out some speculative playback on. For about 1 hour nothing happened. Then at 7pm, after trekking about 1km into the trail speculative playback of one of Scharringa's Eagle-owl screeches was greeted by a dark shadow instantly flying into one of the tall emergents in the area. The lights were put on it and lo and behold one of Asia's most difficult forest owls was there for all to see. The bird perched briefly for about 2 minutes before flying off. It would proceed to give us the run-around for the next hour or so, calling regularly while circling us but always keeping to the dense cover in the crowns of the emergents.

During our diurnal foray into this trail at about 11am in the morning, a single mixed flock was observed which contained at least 2 male **Hainan Blue-Flycatchers** and a pair of **Great Ioras** amidst more common species such as **Scarlet Minivets** & **Velvet-fronted Nuthatches**.



Male **Hainan Blue Flycatcher**

Site C: Logging Road & Viewpoint @ KM 46 Route 8
-Labelled [3] & [4] on Map

This logging road, presumably created by a Vietnamese owned HEP company, along with the associated "viewpoint" along Route 8 was one of the poorer areas we birded during our time here. Admittedly, we spent a very short amount of time here, just 2 evenings and short intermissions while heading towards the excellent forest beyond KM 48.

Around the "viewpoint", which is nothing more than a cleared area of slope as a result of a landslide, House-martins were abundant. As with other wooded areas enroute to Na Hin, **Nepal House-Martins** were dominant. Careful scanning amongst the huge feeding

groups numbering in excess of 50 birds yielded 2 **Asian House-Martins** and an equal number of agile **Fork-tailed Swifts** higher up in the sky. Along the roadside between the viewpoint and the KM 48 trail, odds and ends included multiple **Grey Bushchats**, 2 smart-looking **Grey-backed Shrikes**, a handsome male **Black-throated Sunbird** and **Moustached Barbets**. We also observed a flock of Green-Pigeons briefly over the road which were likely **Yellow-vented Green-Pigeons**.

The logging road at KM 46 held little of interest during our diurnal forays. It ascends gradually for the first 200 metres before levelling out and goes on for another 2-3km before ending in the base camp for some sort of Vietnamese consortium where both their equipment and personnel reside. At the very least, you can't miss the multitude of Vietnamese national flags billowing in the wind! Aside from being the only area around Na Hin where we saw **White-rumped Shama**, we also heard **Mountain-Scops**, **Collared-Scops** & **Brown Hawk-owls** here after dark. We also briefly spotlighted an unidentified **Giant Flying Squirrel** (*Petaurista sp.*) here.

Site D: KM 48 Woodcutter's/Hunter's Trail & Forests Beyond -Labelled [1] on Map

This is the site of some of the best primary hill forest I have seen in mainland South East Asia. Getting to the good forest involves quite some work though. As Stijin's website rightly puts it, it takes about 30 mins (20 mins at my pace) to reach the small side trail near the top of the ridge. The trail is mostly uphill with only small areas where it levels off or descends. Assuming you follow this trail all the way to the top of the ridge, you will be greeted by a wooden shack with a zinc roof that is supposedly a weather station. This building is surrounded by bamboo clumps and wild ginger thickets, which are also features of most of the initial 20 min hike up. For easy reference, I will separate the two "habitat types" and the associated birds seen.

Part A: "The Road to Pitta Ridge"

I personally disliked this trek. As was the theme in the Philippines and elsewhere, some sort of energy sapping trek was always needed to reach the good forest. Anyway, the 20-30 min uphill track is done on a fairly broad trail, although the boundaries either drop off steeply or are otherwise inaccessible, making it very difficult to observe ground birds. The boring regrowth featuring banana trees, bamboo clumps and ginger thickets is interspaced with several emergent fruiting figs, whose sole purpose for not being felled is to attract fruit-eaters in for easy kills, as demonstrated by the balls of feathers that were probably once Leafbirds, Barbets & Pigeons next to the ashes of once active campfires. These morbid sights aside, the trees do indeed attract birds and are worthy of attention.

Right off the bat, there is already action to be had. Within 50m of the road lies a small trail that branches off to the right. On two occasions, once in the early morning and late evening, I flushed and observed very briefly a bird which looked suspiciously like a male **Eared Pitta** right at the start of this trail. Stijin himself has also heard this species before near the start of the trail in April, and the habitat certainly looks good for it. Be prepared!

As with most areas of regrowth, there was generally little of note on the ascent up. There is always a chance of Thrushes; Pittas & Stubtails though as there are areas of extensive leaf litter enroute to the ridge top. During multiple ascents, I notched up views of **Sultan Tits**, abundant **Blue-winged Leafbirds**, skulking **Grey-throated & Buff-breasted Babblers**, a restless flock of **Japanese White-Eyes**, **Puff-throated Bulbuls**, a **Grey-backed Shrike** & a **White-eared Barbet**. Basically, nothing that would set the heart racing!

Things start to get interesting around the weather station proper. Without entering the primary forest, the area where bamboo thickets meet the start of the hill forest is the exact spot where Stijin managed to tape in a single Red-collared Woodpecker in April. He reported that the bird came straight in to a personal recording and indeed, there are multiple stumps in the area



Na Hin's Weather Station tucked away in a corner of the ridgeline

riddled with woodpecker holes. An afternoon vigil here yielded little of note apart from a single **Little Pied Flycatcher** although at least 2 **Pale-headed Woodpeckers** were heard in the general area.

Part B: A New Pitta Enemy

The part of the trip I wish to forget, or more correctly wish would have ended on a happier note. The excellent primary hill forest in this trail is likely to be Na Hin's best kept secret. Undoubtedly, further exploration is bound to yield interesting species that could well be difficult to see elsewhere in Asia.

As pointed out in Stijin's map, the trail makes a sharp left turn about 30 metres before the weather station itself. Right at this junction, a small trail heads off to the right. During our time there, it was anything but inconspicuous as it was the only area along the whole track which had bundles of wooden planks demarcating its entrance. The first 20-30m of the trail runs through very dense bamboo scrub but it quickly becomes more open where the bamboo meets the start of the primary forest. It was right at this point where a decisive battle was fought and lost on another dark day of birding (I am notching up a lot of such days!).



Blue-naped Pitta Country- Excellent ridge top forests with a dense understorey

Once in the primary forest proper, the trail runs level through some primary hill forest for another 50-100m or so before it starts to descend, first gradually, but towards the bottom it starts getting very steep, with a 60 degree slope to overcome near the bottom itself. Once the slope is cleared, the forest understorey becomes very open with towering emergents forming a closed canopy above your head and primary obstacles become navigating through the granite boulder-lined seasonal riverbeds and rattan clumps. This is likely to be an excellent place for ground birds, with our group's intrepid "basher" Ashley sighting an excellent male **Silver Pheasant** here. I was pre-occupied with trawling for signs of Grey Peacock-Pheasant, which I reckon would be vocal at the right time of year. Rufous-tailed Robin has been seen here and undoubtedly Pittas will be present here.



The trail ends here, as the open nature of the understorey means it's easy to get lost. A GPS is recommended if you are a seasoned basher. Alternatively, if you speak Lao, you can talk to the gatherers you may meet along the way (as we did) who expertly make long treks each day along the riverbeds to gather forest produce such as rattan and edible fruits. Hunters obviously prowl this area too although feather balls and campfires were surprisingly absent here.



The highlights below are my own, as our group split up for good portions along this trail, although for the most part we saw the same species just at different points along the trail. I became increasingly obsessed with the unnameable Pitta and so spent comparatively more time on the top of the ridge itself.

Blue-naped Pitta: A species likely to be at the forefront of any visiting birder's future wish list, it is thus the first on the list. The spontaneous vocalisations of a



Riverine forests at the base of the slope- note reduction in understorey thickness.

presumed male near the entrance to the ridge trail must have been one of the most surprising moments of the trip. The bird burst out in song just out of sight 30 metres into the ridge trail where the bamboo meets the forest. Specifically, observers will encounter a circular area of relatively open ground surrounded by bamboo on the left side of the trail. On the right lies relatively open primary forest with various vine tangles with an entrance into the thicket further along the trail. The bird burst into full song for 5 minutes in this area at 7am on one morning only and thereafter was heard calling intermittently, all the time getting more and more distant, by most of us. In addition to this calling bird at the top of the ridge, at least 1 other was heard in a bamboo gully as we were making our descent down to the riverine forest at lower elevations. Forays into the same area that afternoon and the following morning failed to hear or see any sign of this species. Certainly one for future birders to look out for!

The ridge-top section of the trail was otherwise generally devoid of birds with activity primarily centred on the slope forests and the riverine forest at lower elevations. The descent allows observers a window into the activities of canopy mixed flocks because the crowns of the tall trees on the lower slopes are at eye level. In addition, one can also scan neighbouring gullies, most coated in ginger and bamboo thickets, for understorey birds. In this manner we picked out understorey mixed flocks consisting of **Rufous-throated Fulvettas** & **Spot-necked Babblers**. Other notables associating with these flocks include at least one pair of **White-tailed Flycatchers** and a surreal sight of a lone **White-crested Laughingthrush** generating enough vocalisations to sound like a small party was moving through! In the canopy above **Collared Owlets** were vocal and responsive. A silent flock of 7 **Silver-breasted Broadbills** & an even larger covey of 10-15 **Long-tailed Broadbills** provided a dash of colour to the various shades of green. A surprise **Red-vented Barbet** was also much appreciated. Lower down, hyperactive **White-browed Piculets** energetically drilled into vine tangles while a restless flock of **Scaly-crowned Babblers** was a new addition to the area list.



Can you spot the White-browed Piculet?

In the riverine forest, both **Red-headed** & **Orange-breasted Trogons** were heard with the former seen briefly. The forest floor was alive with good numbers of **Siberian Blue Robins** & **Emerald Doves**, although disappointingly no thrushes or pittas were observed. Otherwise, there was significant overlap between the avifauna here and along the slopes, although the habitat in this area was clearly not suitable for Blue-naped Pittas, with a notable absence of any sort of bamboo. In this area, Neil Bostock observed what he believed were a flock of **Grey-cheeked Fulvettas** which in retrospect could be Black-browed Fulvettas which are also found in neighbouring Central Vietnam.

Miscellaneous Information:

-Sainamhai Resort



Landscape view of Sainamhai Resort grounds.

This resort is located on the outskirts of the “authentic Lao village” on the map. Its peaceful surroundings overlooking the river make it an ideal base for birdwatchers that prefer to be away from the hustle and bustle of Route 8. It is important to note that all the other guesthouses lie along Route 8 which according to Stijin now supports a lot more traffic than it used to as it is now a fully tarred highway. The resort style bungalows here should be more than adequate for birders and the restaurant is centrally located on a longhouse built on the banks of the river which allows for quite a view of the area while dining.

Various viewpoints afforded by the restaurant longhouse

Take note however that the food served at the restaurant was decidedly mediocre. Although all restaurants in the area serve “Western Food”, from the experience of my companions these choices should generally be avoided unless you are deeply homesick (not that eating rock-solid steak and chips would cure that!). There was a general consensus that the restaurant at Mithuna Guesthouse served much better cuisine more typical of the region such as green and red curries although their “local cuisine” menu is only written in Lao so ordering is a bit of a challenge.

For the impatient birders out there, another small point to note is that dining in Laos is a protracted affair. Even simple dishes like Fried Rice seem to take 20-30 mins to prepare on average so it may work to your advantage to make advance orders before returning to your accommodation to freshen up and do whatever you need to do. This concept hold true even in “big cities” like Vientiane & Luang Prabang.



Riverine forests at the base of the slope- note reduction in understorey thickness.

As an additional aside, we had no problems requesting for breakfast at the resort at 530am before first light. The fare was simple but adequate and featured fried eggs with toast and jam.

-Route 8 Birding

As mentioned in the itinerary, we spent an afternoon birding along Route 8 itself beyond the KM 48 trail up to KM 52. We were informed that reasonable roadside forest was present but obviously things had changed significantly since Stijin was last here with the constant blaring of horns from heavy vehicles making it a miserable experience overall. The forest itself also does not generally reach the roadside, instead you can certainly see forest on the slopes above but most of the roadside slopes are now overgrown with bamboo and weeds, presumably the aftermath of landslides. The only avian sighting of

note was a pair of vocal **Pale-headed Woodpeckers** at the KM 52 marker post which we somehow played in and saw briefly. Another notable area was shortly before the KM 52 marker there is a small woodcutter's trail that enters some decent bamboo forest on the right side of the highway that may be worthy of future exploration.

This road should otherwise be avoided at all costs unless listening to heavy vehicle horns is your cup of tea. Birds sold separately!

Conclusion:

There is no doubt in my mind that with the recent string of avian limestone discoveries and reclassifications, the accessible village of Na Hin is more than likely to become a focal point for visiting birders to the region. First-time visitors to Laos will likely be surprised, as I was, by the friendliness of its people and the dramatic natural scenery to be found around Na Hin. With the Laotian government making a concerted effort to put the country on the global stage, economic & infrastructure development is bound to follow, not necessarily a bad thing for a country which has largely been closed to the outside world. Hopefully the Laotians themselves would see the value in protecting their remaining biodiversity, of which quite a significant portion still exists, as birders and other eco-tourists contribute to the local economies of these rural areas.

Disclaimer: The photos in this report are taken by both Albert Low & Ashley Banwell. Ashley has kindly granted permission for his photos to be used in this report. If anyone would like to use these photos for their own purposes, a written email would be much appreciated.