



Vietnam - Endemic birds and endangered primates in the heart of Indo-China

Introduction

Vietnam is one of the most beautiful, friendly and fascinating countries in Asia and an early season visit there finds the country at its best, the climate mostly cool, dry and enjoyable, the winter birds still in and the resident ones gearing up for breeding. Vietnam hosts, according to your splitting beliefs, no less than 13 true endemic species (and this number continues to increase as further work is done and new discoveries made), a further 7 or so restricted to Indochina and a number of very interesting and distinct “subspecies” several of which are destined to be future splits. A large range of Southeast Asian species of wider distribution and a host of birds wintering from further north add to the richness of this destination.

Vietnam is also host to the largest selection of mammals of any Southeast Asian country. Many are critically endangered, little known and almost impossible to see but amongst them are more than 20 species of primate – an astonishing total for such a relatively small country. Some are widespread but a unique aspect of this tour is to seek out some of the rarer ones – especially a number of colourful Leaf-Monkeys and two species of endemic Gibbons. We have a chance of up to nine species (Black, Delacour’s Golden-headed and Ha Tinh Leaf-Monkeys, Black-shanked, Grey-shanked and Red-shanked Douc Langurs and Buff-cheeked and Northern White-cheeked Gibbons) some of which are amongst the rarest primates on earth hanging on in their last isolated strongholds.

Our unique and comprehensive itinerary, covering the best sites from south to north, seeks out all but a few inaccessible endemic birds and several of the mammals. The tour was run successfully in 2011 (see report) and we shall do better of this unique country in a way that few westerners have ever enjoyed.

Transport by model minibus, accommodation in luxury/good standard hotels and park bungalows and memorable Vietnamese food throughout. Includes park entry fees, local transportation and all drinks, within reason and including beer and Vietnamese wine, are complementary.

Price does not include air fares to and from Vietnam, optional tipping or items of a personal nature.

Tour leader: Nguyen Hoai Bao <http://www.birdwatchingvietnam.net/birdguide.asp>

Prices are as follows:

Main Tour: US\$ 4800.00 Single supplement US\$ 450.00 Ho Chi Minh– Ha Noi

Extension: US\$ 380.00 Single supplement US\$ 50.00 Ha Noi – Ha Noi

These prices are based on a minimum of 6 participants. If less a supplement may be applicable

Further information:

Trip report of the same tour in 2011

http://www.birdwatchingvietnam.net/reports/vietnam_birding_report_2011.pdf

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Vietnam - Endemic birds and endangered primates in the heart of Indo-China

1 February

Arrival in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), transfer to Majestic Hotel. If time permits a visit to the Cu Chi Tunnel, a renowned historic site some 50km from Ho Chi Minh City centre. Here is but part of the huge and complex underground tunnel system used by the Viet Cong in the Vietnam War.

Other option for who arrive one day earlier is visit Can Gio mangroves and mudflat for some interest targets such as “White-faced” Plover, Nordman Greenshank, other common shorebirds and a chance for Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Evening welcome dinner and briefing

Overnight Majestic Hotel, Ho Chi Minh City

2 February

After an early start we will drive northwards towards the renowned Cat Tien National Park. We will stop en route to search for the rare endemic Orange-necked Partridge. Other endemic forms here include Indochinese Green Magpie and our first (of several) chances for Bar-bellied and Blue-rumped Pittas. Onward to Cat Tien and our first exploration of this superb National Park in the afternoon.

Overnight at the Cat Tien National Park (3 nights)

3 & 4 February

The premier National Park in South Vietnam, Cat Tien is located in Cochinchina in the Da Lat foothills and boasts an impressive mosaic of forest and seasonal wetlands which largely escaped the defoliants used in the Vietnam War. We will bird by jeep track and forest trails to seek out the endemic Germain’s Peacock-Pheasant, other spectacular birds such as Siamese Fireback, Green Peafowl and Scaly-breasted Partridge, endemic Pittas, the endemic Grey-faced Tit-Babbler and a host of other species also known from Malaysia and Thailand.

The park is host to several primate species with our main targets Buff-cheeked Gibbon and Black-shanked Douc Langur. Other mammals such as the huge Gaur, Sambur, Wild Boar and Pig-tailed Macaque are also possible

Overnights Cat Tien National Park

5 February

We leave Cat Tien for the relatively short drive to Di Linh. Certain birds can be easier to locate here at the Nui San Pass than in Da Lat including Blue and Rusty-naped Pittas, Spotted Forktail, White-cheeked, Black-hooded and Orange-breasted Laughing-Thrushes, Vietnamese Cutia and “Black-headed” Parrotbill, a probable split from the more widespread Grey-headed

Overnight Nhat Minh Hotel, Di Linh

6 February

After an early morning return to the Nui San pass (which will give us our first chance for the elusive Green Cochoa) we will drive up to the Langbian Plateau and the evocative hill resort of Da Lat. We will stop at any interesting patches of habitat en route and also see several attractive waterfalls. Da Lat is situated at a delightfully cool



Vietnam - Endemic birds and endangered primates in the heart of Indo-China

1475 metres asl in a temperate region dotted with lakes and waterfalls and surrounded by forest including various native pine woodlands.

Overnight Hoang Anh Gia Lai Resort, Da Lat (3 nights)

7 & 8 February

We will explore the Da Lat Plateau including the 2169 metre Mt Langbian, cloaked with evergreen forest right up to its peak and accessed by a progressively steeper footpath. Our efforts should be rewarded however as this is the home of the spectacular endemic Collared Laughing-Thrush, as well as Yellow-billed Nuthatch and the Vietnamese forms of Cutia, Rufous-winged (Black-crowned) Fulvetta and Black-throated (Grey-crowned) Tit which are sure fire bets for splitting before too long. The elusive and handsome Green Cochoa is also here and should be vocal at this time of year and a number of other Asian and wintering birds will also be encountered.

Nearer to Da Lat itself is Ta Nung Valley, famous for the relatively recently re-discovered Grey-crowned Crocias which is regularly encountered here. Other endemics such as Black-hooded and Orange-breasted Laughingthrushes and Vietnamese Greenfinch are also possible

Overnight Hoang Anh Gia Lai Resort, Da Lat

9 February

An early morning departure for Ban Me Thuot and a stop at Lak lake for some waterbirds and wintering warblers en route. Later on we reach Yok Don national park for 1 night stay at Ban Don Tourism area. Our main target here is Mekong Wagtail but other species such as Black-headed Woodpecker, Collared Falconet, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch are among the specialities.

Overnight Dakruco hotel

10 February

After our morning birding at Serepok river bank for Mekong Wagtail, we will head for the rarely visited Mang Canh Forest. This wilderness forest experience will allow us to link with a student studying the rare Grey-shanked Douc Langur, one of our prime mammal targets and where another fine range of Indochinese birds may be expected.

Overnight Hoa Sim hotel (2 nights)

11 February

Our main targets at Mang Canh are Grey-shanked Duoc Langur and Chestnut-eared Laughing-Thrush but we will also be on the lookout for Black-hooded Laughingthrush, Pale-capped Pigeon, the endemic Ratchet-tailed Treepie and we have another chance for Yellow-billed Nuthatch.

12 February

In the morning, we will finalise our bird seen nearby Mang Den then we drive on to the Lox Xo pass which has reached recent birding fame as the site to see the endemic Black-crowned Barwing. Here, at the forest edge, we have a great chance of finding this recently described species and others to look for include Brown Hornbill,



Vietnam - Endemic birds and endangered primates in the heart of Indo-China

Indochinese Wren-Babbler (formerly known as Short-tailed Scimitar-Babbler), White-winged Magpie, Red-tailed Laughingthrush and a another chance for Yellow-billed Nuthatch

Overnight Kham Duc Hotel (1 night)

13 February

Our original destination of Bach Ma National Park has been complicated by the reconstruction of the road leading up to the higher levels. Happily most, if not all, the birds we could expect in the higher reaches of Bach Ma are also to be found at the Lo Xo Pass including Ratchet-tailed Treepie and a healthy population of Crested Argus Pheasants. We will almost certainly hear this, almost mythical, creature but seeing one is another matter. We will spend most of the day exploring the virgin forests around the Lo Xo Pass before driving on to Hue in the afternoon.

Overnight Lang Co beach resort

14 February

This morning we will access the mid ranges of Bach Ma where we will search in particular for the endemic but elusive Annam Partridge and have our best chance for Northern White-cheeked Gibbon. A good range of additional endemic and other species can be expected. We will then leave for a drive of about five hours north to Phong Nha National Park. Our route follows part of the Ho Chi Minh trail but now a modern highway and passes through some of Vietnam's finest scenery. Phong Na itself is a spectacle of rivers and limestone bluffs and even the almost unknown Vietnamese Pheasant has been seen here. We can try and always hope!

Overnight Song Son hotel (2 nights)

15 February

Two major targets will occupy our time in Phong Nha, the near endemic Sooty Babbler (also found in similar habitat in adjacent Laos). Here we also have further chances for a range of birds including Siamese Fireback, Red-collared Woodpecker, Brown Hornbill as well as the isolated form of Sulphur-breasted Warbler now split as "Limestone Warbler"

16 February

A pre-dawn search for two endangered primates - Black and Ha Tinh Leaf Monkeys as well as the beautiful Red-shanked Duoc langur before the drive north to Cuc Phong National Park, but we will cut our long driving by stay overnight at Thanh hoa city

Overnight Thanh Hoa hotel

17 & 18 February

Early leaving for Cuc Phuong and stop en route at Van Long Van Long Nature Reserve, 30km from Cuc Phong, we will take a sampan ride to some dramatic limestone cliffs that are one of the last haunts of the critically endangered Delacour's Leaf-Monkey.

Cuc Phong is Vietnam's oldest National Park and an area of lowland forest and lakes easily accessed by a paved road. It is rich in birdlife and we have our last chances here for both Pittas, Red-collared Woodpecker and White-winged Magpie as well as a supporting cast which includes Malayan Night-Heron, Pied Falconet, Eared Pitta,



Vietnam - Endemic birds and endangered primates in the heart of Indo-China

Silver-breasted Broadbill, White-tailed Flycatcher, Fujian Niltava and the *annamensis* form of Limestone Wren-Babbler.

Overnight at Cuc Phuong national park (2 nights)

19 February

Our final morning birding at Cuc Phuong, we drive to Ba Vi national park after having late-breakfast for the split (from White-necked) Rufous-cheeked Laughing-Thrush, Collared Treepie, another chance for Green Cochoa and others.

20 February

We will spend most of the day for searching Rufous-cheeked Laughingthrush but other common here are Red-billed Blue Magpie, Common Green Magpie are among our target.

Afternoon we will drive to Ha Noi to conclude the main tour.

Stay overnight in Ha Noi

Ba Be Extension

21 February

Ba Be National Park in the north of Vietnam is where the rare and little known White-eared Night-Heron has recently been found to breed (see BirdingAsia Number 12 December 2009). This day, we will drive further north to Bac Kan province, Ba Be lake national park. Late afternoon, we will look for White-eared Night-Heron when they leave their roost site in the evening.

Overnight Ba Be

22 February

Morning at Ba Be to track down the White-eared Night-Heron and others in this little known area We also can see easily White-winged Magpie, Pied Falconet.

Afternoon, we will drive to Hai Noi (Noi Bai) airport for departure or stay at hotel nearby the airport if you have flight on the following day.