

THAILAND HIGHLIGHTS

FEBRUARY 23 – MARCH 14, 2010

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The Orient is a timeless land of ancient cultures, golden pagodas, and wonderful, little-known exotic birds. Thailand, situated at the cross-roads of three bio-geographic provinces, is the heartland of the subcontinent. It hosts a remarkably diverse avifauna of well over 900 species, including some of the world's most beautiful birds. Thailand also offers a plethora of interesting mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, a number of which we shall see. On previous tours we have enjoyed encounters with white-handed gibbons, the rarely observed slow loris, leopard, Asiatic elephant, and a variety of squirrels, including the spectacular giant red flying squirrel.

This tour is an ideal introduction to the biological riches of the Oriental region. From our bases in lovely accommodations with exquisite food, we will explore nearby birding hot-spots, including the lush lowland forests and deciduous woodlands of the rightly renowned Kaeng Krachan and Khao Yai National Parks, and the rich montane forests of the far north, in the foothills of the Himalayas. Our tour is timed to coincide with the cooler, drier winter season, when there are large numbers of Palearctic migrants present, in addition to resident birds.

*While the pheasants are perhaps the finest spectacle of any Oriental tour, Thailand also boasts a vast array of characteristic southeast Asian birds that cannot fail to bedazzle the birdwatcher, including pigeons, parakeets, malkohas, trogons, hornbills, barbets, broadbills, pittas, minivets, bulbuls, leafbirds, spiderhunters, babblers (a really exciting, delightful group), parrotbills, and the challenging *Phylloscopus* warblers.*

This tour can be taken by itself or in combination with Cambodia (February 11-24, 2010) and/or Best of Vietnam (March 13-31, 2010).

February 23-24, Days 1-2: Travel to Bangkok, Thailand. Participants can take one of a number of connections which depart the United States on February 23 and arrive in Bangkok on February 24. Upon arrival and after clearing customs and immigration, participants may proceed to our airport-area hotel, where a room will be reserved in your name. Those arriving in Bangkok early enough on February 24 are welcome to join our leaders for dinner.

Participants wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting with the group or missing dinner should consider arriving in Bangkok on February 23 and spending the night. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with any additional lodging arrangements.

NIGHT (February 24): Novotel Airport Hotel, Bangkok

February 25, Day 3: Drive to Khao Yai National Park. Despite Bangkok's huge size, there are still remnants of the vast marshes and swamp forests that once characterized the entire Chao Phraya River valley that is the centerpiece of continental Thailand. We will visit several sites during the relative cool of the morning, including the famous Buddhist monastery at Wat Pai Lom, where thousands of Asian Open-billed Storks congregate to

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nest. We will also explore patches of open country, interspersed with pools and freshwater marshes which, at this time of the year, can produce many wonderful surprises in addition to a good diversity of regular migrant and resident species. We will drive northward to the ancient capital of Ayuthya, where we will lunch amidst a pantheon of stupas, and remnants of this lovely and important Siamese antiquity. During our peregrinations, we can expect to encounter a good range of open-country-scrubland and secondary-woodland birds, as well as large numbers of freshwater wetland species. Some of the birds we may encounter include Little Cormorant; Purple and Gray herons; Great, Intermediate, Little, and Cattle egrets; Javan Pond-Heron; with a bit of luck Yellow and Cinnamon bitterns; Black-shouldered Kite; Ruddy-breasted Crake; White-breasted Waterhen; Common Moorhen; Pheasant-tailed (uncommon) and Bronze-winged jacanas; Red-wattled Lapwing; possibly the dapper but increasingly uncommon Gray-headed Lapwing; a smattering of shorebirds, such as Little Ringed Plover and Wood Sandpiper; Red and Spotted turtle-doves; Zebra Dove; perhaps Alexandrine Parakeet; Asian Koel; Greater and Lesser coucals; Common, White-throated, Stork-billed, and the gorgeous Black-capped kingfishers; Indian Roller; Hoopoe; Coppersmith Barbet; Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker; Asian Palm-Swift; Yellow-vented and Streak-eared bulbuls; Black Drongo; Thick-billed and Great Reed warblers; Black-browed and Pallas's Grasshopper warblers; Oriental Magpie-Robin; Siberian Stonechat; Red-throated Flycatcher; Pied Fantail; Brown Shrike; Asian Pied and Black-collared starlings; Common and White-vented mynas; the handsome Plain-backed Sparrow and Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker; and with a bit of luck, the very localized Asian Golden-Weaver.

After lunch we will continue on to our very comfortable accommodations near Khao Yai National Park, stopping *en route* to search for the very localized Limestone Wren-Babbler. We may possibly arrive in time for some relaxed birding around the very attractive gardens of our resort – with flocks of Red-breasted Parakeets wheeling overhead and various species of gorgeous sunbirds and flowerpeckers foraging alongside Little Spiderhunter, Common Hill Myna and Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher.

NIGHT: Juldis Khao Yai Resort

February 26-27, Days 4-5: Khao Yai National Park. Khao Yai National Park is justly regarded as one of the premier reserves in Southeast Asia. It encompasses an area of 2,168 square kilometers and an altitudinal range from 1,600 feet (500 meters) to 4,249 feet (1,328 meters). Khao Yai's lush, tall, evergreen forests alternating with grassy clearings, waterfalls, and unpolluted creeks provide ideal habitat for many species of birds and mammals. Birding is relatively easy along the forest-lined roads, although we will also work the forest trails in order to see some of the more retiring specialties. Typically, one can walk for some time without seeing many birds. Then, suddenly, there is a change in atmosphere, and the forest is alive with activity. Mixed flocks of a dozen or more species and as many as 100 individuals can be frustrating and overwhelming, as well as tremendously exciting. However, after the third or fourth experience of such waves, one learns to sift out the "good" species and not be distracted by the more common—if demonstrative—ones. We shall also keep a watch out for fruiting trees, where we may see congregations of frugivores such as Thick-billed Green-Pigeon; Mountain Imperial-Pigeon; Asian Emerald Cuckoo (uncommon); Brown (the rarest of this group), Great, Wreathed, and Oriental Pied hornbills; and Green-eared and Moustached barbets. We may also see the dazzling Fairy Bluebird, and, if we are fortunate, Golden-crested Myna. Troops of spectacular-sounding white-handed gibbons resonate throughout the forest, and we are likely to encounter several species of squirrel, including the attractive variable squirrel.

Normally, it will be cool in the mornings and late afternoon and warm during the middle of the day. Bird activity is greatest during the cooler part of the day, so we will concentrate our birding then. Khao Yai is vast, and we cannot hope to see it all. However, we will cover a cross-section of the most productive sites and make specific forays to areas such as Luc Chang cave to see hordes of Wrinkled-lipped Bats, which emerge at dusk, only to be snatched by waiting Peregrines, Shikras, and, occasionally, Oriental Hobbies. Some of the other species we may encounter include Besra and Japanese sparrowhawks; Changeable Hawk-Eagle; Silver Pheasant (we had great looks at an adult male on our 2003 tour!); Siamese Fireback (if we are very fortunate); Scaly-breasted Partridge; Barred Cuckoo-Dove; Thick-billed Pigeon, Vernal Hanging-Parrot; Green-billed Malkoha; Brown Hawk-Owl; Mountain Scops-Owl; Great-eared, Large-tailed, and Gray nightjars (these birds provide a

marvelous spectacle at dusk); Red-headed and Orange-breasted trogons; Chestnut-headed Bee-eater; Heart-spotted and Great Slaty woodpeckers; Dusky, Banded, and Long-tailed broadbills (these are some of the real gems of the Orient); with a great deal of luck, possibly either Eared or Blue pittas; Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike; Black-winged Cuckoo-Shrike; Scarlet Minivet; Red-whiskered, Stripe-throated, Gray-eyed, Puff-throated, and Ashy bulbuls; six species of drongo; Common Green Magpie; Black-naped and Silver orioles (this is a rare but increasingly recorded migrant); Abbott's Babbler; White-browed and the elusive Large scimitar-babblers; and Lesser Necklaced, White-crested, and Black-throated laughingthrushes. The last five species often associate as a small foraging party. We may also see Black-throated Sunbird and Buff-breasted Flowerpecker.

A number of interesting migrants winter in the area, and we are most likely to see the relatively tame Radde's Warbler, which forages near the ground at the edge of the forest, and a host of confusing and challenging "little brown jobs" such as Arctic, Greenish, Two-barred Greenish, Pale-legged, Sulphur-breasted, and Thick-billed warblers; Brown and Red-breasted flycatchers; and the elusive Siberian Blue Robin. If we are very lucky, we may also find such forest specialties as the wild-sounding Coral-billed Ground-Cuckoo and Blue and Eared pittas. Khao Yai is also a good place to see a relatively large number of mammals, and we will make a special night drive to look for such species as sun bear, binturong, wild boar, greater mouse-deer, barking deer, sambar, slow loris, Asian porcupine, and Asian elephant, in addition to nocturnal birds. This is a truly wonderful place, and we guarantee that you will find it very difficult to leave behind.

NIGHTS: Juldis Khao Yai Resort

February 28, Day 6: Drive to Bangkok; Afternoon Flight to Chiang Mai. After a final morning's birding, we will head south from Khao Yai back to Bangkok before catching an afternoon flight to Chiang Mai and the outlying foothills of the Himalayas. Chiang Mai, often referred to as Thailand's northern Shangri-la, is an attractive city located in a fertile valley 300 meters above sea level. Founded in 1296, it has withstood invasion from the Burmese and various other influences, to the extent that its people still have their own dialect and cultural traditions. It is an ideal base from which to explore the forested mountains, river valleys, and cultivated plains that extend northwards to the borders of Burma and Laos and the region infamously known as the "Golden Triangle."

NIGHT: Rincome Hotel, Chiang Mai

March 1, Day 7: Morning at Huai Kong Krai; Afternoon Drive to Doi Inthanon National Park. This morning we will visit an area of tall, mixed, dry Dipterocarp woodland where, in 2000, VENT became the first bird-tour company to locate a previously unknown population of the spectacular Green Peafowl. Once widespread but unfortunately hunted close to extinction throughout much of its range, this exotic pheasant has until now been virtually impossible to find in Thailand without mounting a mini-expedition. Thus our outing this morning is a very special opportunity. Nevertheless, the birds can be very shy, and we will have to ensure we are on site before dawn—in position to locate the calling males, which bugle from the dense foliage of tall trees. In addition to this marvelous bird, we may also find some of the following: Lesser Whistling-Duck, Chinese Pond-Heron, Common and White-breasted kingfishers, the lovely Rosy as well as the somewhat less lovely Ashy and Brown-rumped minivets, Eurasian Jay, and perhaps Siberian Rubythroat. We will then return to Chiang Mai for lunch before driving southwards to Doi Inthanon National Park. If time permits, we will commence our exploration of this park this afternoon.

NIGHT: Doi Inthanon Highland Resort

March 2-3, Days 8-9: Doi Inthanon National Park. We will spend two full days and one whole morning exploring the spectacular Doi Inthanon National Park. Doi Inthanon is Thailand's highest mountain, with a maximum elevation of about 8,200 feet (2,590 meters). Undoubtedly, this is the foremost birding locality in northern Thailand, with 343 species recorded to date. Dry Dipterocarp forests on the lower slopes give way to stands of pines interspersed with open grassy areas which support wintering Siberian Rubythroats; Buff-throated, Radde's, and Yellow-streaked warblers; a few Little and Chestnut buntings; and an occasional Gray-

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faced Buzzard. Hill evergreen forest then grades into lower-stature montane forest at about 4,700 feet (1,500 meters) and hosts a large number of species. Climbing ever higher, we will ascend through some magnificent sub-montane forest, eventually reaching montane forests on the summit. Here, flowering rhododendrons surround a Sphagnum bog that is bisected by a board-walk, permitting us to explore the interior of this superb habitat. Some of the birds we may encounter at higher levels include Black Eagle; Common Buzzard; Mountain Hawk-Eagle; Rufous-throated Partridge (we will almost certainly hear pairs duetting, but they are very tough to see, our best chance being as we quietly walk around the sphagnum bog on the summit shortly after dawn); Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon; with luck, Ashy Wood-Pigeon; Large Hawk- and Asian Emerald cuckoos; Collared Owl; Great, Golden-throated, and Blue-throated barbets; Stripe-breasted, Maroon, and Bay woodpeckers; Fork-tailed Swift; Short-billed Minivet; Orange-bellied Leafbird; Striated, Mountain, White-headed (very handsome but rather scarce), and Flavescent bulbuls; five drongos; Brown-throated Tree-creeper; Slaty-bellied Tesia; Ashy-throated and White-tailed leaf-warblers; Chestnut-capped Warbler; Red-billed Scimitar-Babbler (if we are lucky); Pygmy Wren-Babbler; Golden Babbler; Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush; White-browed, Chestnut-throated, and Black-eared shrike-babblers; the very attractive Spectacled Barwing; Rufous-winged Fulvetta; Dark-backed and Rufous-backed sibilas; Silver-eared Mesia (a real gem); Chestnut-tailed Minla (noisy, conspicuous, stunningly attractive, and often abundant near the summit); White-browed and Lesser shortwings; Scaly Thrush; Dark-sided Thrush (with luck, one or two can often be found quietly digging away in the soft ground surrounding the summit bog); White-capped River Chat; Plumbeous Redstart; Snowy-browed and Slaty-backed flycatchers; Large, Rufous-bellied and Vivid niltavas; the charming Yellow-bellied Fantail; Yellow-browed and Yellow-cheeked tits; Common Rosefinch; with luck, one of the rarer species such as Pink-browed Rosefinch; and Chestnut Bunting. We will also be on the look out for the inconspicuous and rarely seen Green Cochoa—a most handsome species.

Once every few years there is an exceptional invasion of thrushes and other Palearctic breeding species; perhaps we will be lucky. Species we may encounter include Eye-browed, Chestnut, Gray-sided, and Siberian thrushes; Siberian Bluethroat; and Red-flanked Bluetail. Sometimes the rarely encountered Purple Cochoa can be found with these flocks.

NIGHTS: Doi Inthanon Highland Resort

March 4, Day 10: Morning at Doi Inthanon; Afternoon Drive to Doi Ang Khang. We will have another morning of birding in Doi Inthanon National Park before heading north towards the Burmese border and our lovely resort in the hills of Doi Ang Khang. We will of course make regular stops along the way for anything of interest.

NIGHT: Ang Khang Nature Resort

March 5, Day 11: Doi Ang Khang. We have the entire day to explore this truly lovely area. For much of the time, we will be birding from a narrow, little used, paved road surrounded by stunning, evocative landscapes that will forever be your image of the mystical Burma/Thai borderlands. We will explore an interesting mélange of scrub, native pine woodlands, and biologically rich and diverse mixed broad-leaved evergreen forests. In such a setting, almost anything could turn up. In addition, the hills and forests surrounding Doi Ang Khang support some very special birds—in fact, several we are unlikely to encounter anywhere else on tour. Some of the birds we hope to find include Mountain Bamboo-Partridge, Speckled Wood-Pigeon, Crested Finchbill, Brown-breasted Bulbul, White-browed Laughingthrush and the rather noisy but shy White-necked Laughingthrush, Red-faced Liocichla, Spot-breasted and Gray-headed parrotbills, and perhaps Giant Nuthatch (now very rare). Seeing any of these species makes a red-letter day, so be alert! Other species we may encounter here include Black Eagle; Gray-headed Parakeet; Bay, Speckled Piculet, Stripe-breasted, and Crimson-breasted woodpeckers; Striated Bulbul; Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler; Slaty-bellied Tesia; Pale-footed Bush-Warbler; Buff-bellied and Yellow-streaked warblers; Mountain Tailorbird; Daurian Redstart; White-tailed Robin; Gray-backed Shrike; Japanese White-eye; and Little and Crested buntings.

NIGHT: Ang Khang Nature Resort

March 6, Day 12: Drive to Thaton. After a full morning of birding, we will descend to the lowlands before continuing north to our attractive riverside accommodations in the small township of Thaton. During the afternoon, we will visit an area of partially flooded rice fields, marshes, and scrubby meadows. This can be very good for northern migrants, and a number of species new to Thailand have been found here. Some of the species we may encounter include Pied and Eastern Marsh harriers; Barred Buttonquail; Gray-headed Lapwing; Pintail Snipe; Bluethroat; Siberian Rubythroat (one of Asia's lesser known jewels); Pied Bushchat; Radde's, Dusky, Pallas's and Great Reed warblers; Lanceolated Warbler (extremely skulking, but this is one of the easier places to see this "mouse"); Spotted Bush-Warbler; Yellow-eyed Babbler; three species of Wagtails; Rosy Pipit; Burmese Shrike; and Chestnut-eared, Yellow-breasted, Black-faced and Crested buntings.

NIGHT: Thaton River View Resort

March 7, Day 13: Doi Lang. We visited this site for the first time a few years ago and found it so attractive, so birdy, and so delightfully peaceful that we vowed we just had to add a full day to our itinerary in order to include it in our scheme of things. A paved, forest-lined road extends along the border from Thaton and provides wonderful vistas over range after range of forested ridges. Standing there at breakfast, I could just imagine one of Southeast Asia's last remaining vultures sailing into view from the neighbouring Shan states. In just a few hours we have found such specialties as the globally threatened Jerdon's Bushchat in addition to Gray-headed Parakeet (increasingly rare in Thailand), Long-tailed Broadbill and Gray-faced Buzzard, to mention but a few. Friends have recorded several other goodies including Mountain Bamboo-Partridge, Crested Finchbill and Red-tailed Laughingthrush! We feel this huge and little explored area offers enormous potential and we are excited at the prospect of going back there in 2010.

NIGHT: Thaton River View Resort

March 8, Day 14: Morning at Chiang Saen; Afternoon at Chiang Rai; Flight to Bangkok. We must depart early this morning for our drive eastwards into the heart of the Golden Triangle and the lovely but ancient city of Chiang Saen, which is located on the imposing Mekong River. The various sand-bars that have formed in the middle of the river and the associated wetlands often support large numbers of ducks and other wetland, scrub and woodland birds of interest. On previous tours we found rafts of gorgeous Ruddy Shelducks – migrants from their breeding sites on the Tibetan Plateau – alongside large numbers of Spot-billed Ducks and even larger numbers of the very attractive Small Pratincole. None of these birds are recorded on more typical bird tours to Thailand and we hope, with the additional time allocated, to add to this list of exciting species. On nearby Chiang Saen Lake, we may encounter large numbers of Lesser Whistling-Ducks in addition to recently arrived northern Palearctic migrants. Again almost anything is possible. Chiang Saen is also historically a very important site as evinced by the very attractive and clearly ancient monuments that seem to appear at almost every turn. It is surrounded by attractive wooded grounds characterized by huge trees, especially teak. After lunch, we will drive to Chiang Rai for our late afternoon flight back to Bangkok.

NIGHT: Novotel Airport Hotel, Bangkok

March 9, Day 15: Birding All Day along the Gulf of Siam. This morning we will drive west and south along the Gulf of Siam in order to explore this area's fascinating mosaic of coastal wetlands. Large numbers of shorebirds congregate here in addition to a few coastal specialties. Species we may encounter include Brahminy Kite; possibly Slaty-breasted Rail; Pacific Golden and Gray plovers; Greater and Lesser sandpipers; Marsh, Green, Wood, and Common sandpipers; Long-toed, Rufous-necked, and Temminck's stints; Brown-headed Gull; Gull-billed and Whiskered terns; House Swift; Collared Kingfisher; Red-whiskered Bulbul; Common Tailorbird; Plain Prinia; Flyeater; Long-tailed Shrike; and Brown-throated Sunbird. In addition, we may find one of nature's most extraordinary members, Spoon-billed Sandpiper. In recent years this blue-ribbon bird has been found fairly regularly wintering here (as we have seen on most of our previous tours – we found five on our 2006 tour!), in addition to such other shorebird gems as Nordmann's Greenshank, Asian Dowitcher, Broad-billed Sandpiper, and Great Knot.

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Dragging ourselves away from this very birdy locale, we will continue south, making several stops along the coast of the Gulf of Siam to explore extensive areas of mangroves and wetlands and adjoining palm-woodland savanna. We should arrive at our attractive resort some time during the late afternoon.

NIGHT: Hyatt Regency Hua Hin Resort

March 10, Day 16: Morning Birding at Kao Sam Roi Yot National Park; Afternoon Drive to Kaeng Krachan National Park. This morning we will visit the distinctive Kao Sam Roi Yot National Park. This attractive park is dominated by dramatic limestone karst pinnacles which rise vertically from a mosaic of freshwater and brackish marshes and farmland, which in turn are bordered by an interesting coastal area of remnant mangroves, sandy beaches, and mudflats. The karst massif itself is swathed in woodland and scrub on all but the steepest slopes. We will focus our attentions on a lovely area of freshwater marshes with their extensive reed-beds and attendant marsh and reed-bed specialties. This will be virtually our only opportunity to sample this distinctive community. Some of the species we will be seeking include Yellow, Cinnamon and perhaps Black bitterns; White-browed, Ruddy-breasted and perhaps Baillon's crakes; Watercock – at this season in non-breeding plumage but nevertheless a huge Rallid!; Cotton Pygmy-goose; Garganey and possibly several other species of migrant Palearctic ducks; Wood Sandpiper; Oriental Pratincole; the very handsome Pied Harrier as well as the more widespread Eastern Marsh Harrier; Black-browed, Blunt-winged, Oriental Reed and the recently described Manchurian Reed warblers; Zitting and Golden-headed cisticolas; Yellow-bellied Prinia; Indochinese Bushlark; Oriental Skylark; and Chestnut and Scaly munias. There is always the possibility of one of Thailand's species of otters or freshwater turtles, so be alert! Later in the morning we will go in search of the increasingly uncommon but nevertheless very attractive Malaysian Plover.

After lunch we will make our way to Kaeng Krachan National Park and our attractive accommodations set in a quite birdy area of scrub and dry woodland.

NIGHT: Kaeng Krachan Resort

March 11-12, Days 17-18: Kaeng Krachan National Park. Kaeng Krachan National Park, encompassing 1,814 square miles (2,920 sq. km.), is Thailand's largest and one of its most magnificent and exciting conservation areas. Biologically rich tropical broad-leaved evergreen forests cover a large portion of the park up to approximately 3,281 feet (1,000 meters), thereafter merging into distinctly different sub-montane forest. Much of the park is extremely rugged and unexplored; however, a drivable track extends about 23 miles (36 kilometers) eastward into the park and to the highest point reached by road. This permits us fairly easy access, as well as some truly superb views out over a sea of undisturbed forest—as far as the eye can see, way into Burma! This is a rare opportunity now in Southeast Asia.

Although the days will be long (we will have to rise early in order to be at the forest by dawn), the reward of traipsing through one of the few remaining true wilderness areas in Southeast Asia should be more than enough compensation. We will provide lovely *al fresco* breakfasts and lunches in the field, permitting those who wish, to spend the entire day enjoying all that these wonderful forests have to offer. For those who prefer a more genteel pace, we will have sufficient vehicles along to permit those who wish to return early to our resort and have a swim or just relax, to do so.

Kaeng Krachan's forests host a fabulous array of wildlife, including some very special birds. Several species more characteristic of the humid lowland Sundaic forests occur here at the northern periphery of their range. We shall search for these and a whole host of other exciting birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, other insects, and flowering plants. Species that we may encounter include Oriental Honey-Buzzard; Crested Goshawk; Shikra; Crested Serpent-Eagle; Mountain Hawk-Eagle; Gray Peacock-Pheasant (common and often noisy but very difficult to see); Silver Pheasant (always a challenge); Ferruginous Partridge (tough); Scaly-breasted and Bar-backed partridges; Red Junglefowl; Thick-billed and perhaps the elusive Yellow-vented green-pigeons; Vernal Hanging-Parrot; Chestnut-winged (rare), Oriental, Banded Bay, and Drongo cuckoos; Chestnut-breasted and Raffles's malkohas; Brown Hawk-Owl; Sunda Scops-Owl; Collared Owlet; and Asian Barred

Owlet. Several other, much more rarely seen owls—such as the gigantic Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl—also occur in these forests, but the chance of seeing such dreamed-of species is remote. We may also encounter Large-tailed Nightjar; Himalayan Swiftlet; Fork-tailed Swift; the superb Brown Needletail; Gray-rumped and possibly lovely Whiskered treeswifts; Orange-breasted and the scintillating Red-headed trogons; Blue-eared, perhaps the gorgeous Banded, and Oriental Dwarf kingfishers; Chestnut-headed, Blue-bearded, and possibly Red-bearded bee-eaters; Common Dollarbird; Brown, Oriental Pied, Wreathed, Great, and (with a bit of luck) the very little-known Plain-pouched hornbills; Great, Blue-throated, Moustached, Green-eared, and Blue-eared barbets; Speckled and White-browed piculets; Greater Yellownappe; Laced, Gray-headed, the uncommon Bamboo, Bay, Heart-spotted, and Great Slaty woodpeckers; Common Flameback; and Dusky, Banded, Silver-breasted, Long-tailed and possibly Black-and-yellow broadbills. Pittas are no easier here than anywhere else, but we should be alert to such species as Eared, Blue, and, at higher elevations, Rusty-naped. We should encounter Red-rumped Swallow; Large Woodshrike; Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike; Ashy, Gray-chinned, and Scarlet minivets; Forest Wagtail; Common and Great ioras; Greater Green, Blue-winged, and Orange-bellied leafbirds; Black-headed, Black-crested, Stripe-throated, Flavescent, Ochraceous, Buff-vented, Gray-eyed, and Ashy bulbuls; several kinds of drongos; Black-naped Oriole; the severely threatened Silver Oriole (rare); Asian Fairy-bluebird; Crested Jay; the peculiar Ratchet-tailed Tree-pie (only recently discovered here, more than two thousand kilometers from its previously known location); Common Green Magpie; Sultan Tit; Velvet-fronted Nuthatch; Buff-breasted, Abbott's, Rufous-fronted, and Gray-throated babblers; White-hooded Babbler; White-browed, Coral-billed, and Large scimitar-babblers; White-crested, Greater and Lesser Necklaced, and Black-throated laughingthrushes; Brown-cheeked Fulvetta; if we are very lucky, Black-throated Parrotbill; Yellow-bellied, Golden-spectacled, Dusky, Yellow-browed, Greenish, Sulphur-breasted, and Lanceolated warblers; Dark-necked Tailorbird; Siberian Blue Robin; White-rumped Shama; White-tailed Robin; White-crowned Forktail; Orange-headed Thrush; Dark-sided, Asian Brown, Verditer, Rufous-browed, Blue-and-white, Red-breasted, Pale-blue, and Gray-headed flycatchers; White-throated Fantail; Asian Paradise-Flycatcher; Ruby-cheeked Sunbird; Little Spiderhunter; Thick-billed and Buff-bellied flowerpeckers; and Everett's White-eye.

In addition to this wonderful profusion of birds, the relative lack of hunting in this area has resulted in the preservation of a good variety of mammals and large reptiles, not to mention some truly impressive aggregations of butterflies. Some of the mammals that inhabit these forests include tiger (our chances of actually seeing one are slim); leopard (a female wandered along the track in front of our jeep on our 2007 tour!); Asian elephant; sambar deer; Common and Feae's muntjacs; slow loris; pig-tailed, stub-tailed and long-tailed macaques; dusky leaf monkey; white-handed gibbon; dhole (Asian wild dog); sun bear; yellow-throated marten; smooth-coated otter; a variety of civets; and many species of squirrels.

NIGHTS: Kaeng Krachan Resort

March 13, Day 19: Morning at Kaeng Krachan; Afternoon Drive to Bangkok. After a final morning birding in this wonderful reserve, we will reluctantly make our way back to Bangkok for our farewell dinner.

NIGHT: Novotel Airport Hotel, Bangkok

March 14, Day 20: Departure for Home. Participants can depart at any time today.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 14 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Dion Hobcroft & David Bishop

Dion Hobcroft has been working for VENT since 2001. He has led tours to Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, Bhutan, India, Southwest Pacific, Cambodia, Thailand, China, Japan, Russia, Alaska, and the Antarctic. In 2007 alone Dion showed more than 2,000 species of birds to VENT clients. His informative, relaxed, and educational nature, combined with sharp eyes and ears, has established Dion as a favorite of many tour participants. His fieldwork for over 30 years on birds and other terrestrial vertebrates has allowed him to amass an extraordinary knowledge of the biodiversity in the Asia-Pacific region. Born in Tasmania and based in

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Sydney, Dion has traveled widely throughout Australia listing over 760 species, placing him in the top echelons of Australian birders. He is very tuned-in to the songs of bird species in the Asia-Pacific region, and specializes in rare and elusive species. He is delighted to show these skulking rarities to his travel companions. Dion has published several papers on field ornithology, served on national and state rare bird committees, managed *Birdline NSW*, run introduction to ornithology courses for Sydney University, and, before he traveled so continuously, was a popular speaker with various natural history societies. Dion has worked for many research and government agencies ranging from the Antarctic Division, Department of Environment NSW, Agriculture Protection WA, Taronga Zoo, Australian Museum, and the Queensland Department of Primary Industry. Dion lives in Sydney with his wife Lise, and two young children, Grace (age 8), and Daniel (age 4).

David Bishop loves his vocation and cannot imagine anything better than exploring wild and beautiful places in Asia and the Pacific in the company of friends and clients. He has spent much of the past 33 years studying the birds and natural history of the Oriental region, in addition to New Guinea, the Southwest Pacific, and most recently Central Asia. David was once a police officer amid the streets of London's West End, but has emerged as an acknowledged authority on the birds of these exotic regions. His enthusiasm for these places and their birds is contagious. This, along with his skills in locating wildlife, sharing what he sees with others, and conversing with local people in their native language, ensures you the very finest quality tour. David has undertaken a number of expeditions to survey the birds and other wildlife of previously unexplored regions throughout New Guinea (largely together with Jared Diamond) and the Oriental Region. This has resulted in a number of exciting discoveries and rediscoveries including the incomparable Wallace's Standardwing, a bizarre bird-of-paradise. Some of the results of this work, together with observations gained during the VENT tours he leads, have been published in the scientific and semi-popular literature to which David is a regular contributor. In July 1997, David, together with Brian Coates, published *A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, the Moluccas, and Lesser Sundas)*, and David is currently working on other book projects. David lives with his wife and daughter (his son currently resides in England) in the attractive university town of Armidale, NSW, Australia.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$5495** per person in double occupancy from Bangkok. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to dinner on Day 19, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground and air transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Bangkok and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$955**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$300 per person is

refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

If you cancel:

120 days or more before departure date
Fewer than 120 days before departure date

Your refund will be:

Your deposit minus \$300.
No refund available.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance** as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends *Travel Insured International* as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply** usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. Contact *Travel Insured International* prior to registration for details. Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than *Travel Insured International*, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

DOCUMENTS: In order for U.S. citizens to enter Thailand, a U.S. passport that is valid at least 6 months after departure from Thailand must be presented upon entry into the country. For stays of 30 days or less, a visa is no longer required. Non-U.S. citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

DEPARTURE TAX: You will be required to pay Baht 700.00 (amount subject to change without notice) in local currency upon departure. Unlike in many other countries, this tax is not included in the cost of your air ticket.

CLIMATE: During the tour, you will experience a wide range of temperatures and climate, from the 70s and high 80s in the lowlands, to as low as the 30s at higher elevations. We may encounter some rain, but at this time of the year this is an uncommon event. Generally it will be cool in the morning and warm and humid at midday, but not excessively hot, as this is the coolest time of the year. As soon as we ascend to the hill forests such as those of Khao Yai National Park, it will become noticeably more comfortable in terms of both humidity and temperature. A sweater for the evening, especially if we go on a night drive, may be welcome. Temperatures are similar in the north around Chiang Mai; however, the early mornings on top of Doi Ang Khang, Doi Lang and Doi Inthanon are invariably cold to very cold for the first couple of hours, and a thick, warm sweater, jacket, hat and gloves are essential.

CLOTHING: Lightweight, dull-colored field clothing is recommended throughout. This includes several pairs of pants and cool, comfortable shirts. Long-sleeved shirts, a dull-colored hat, and sunglasses are recommended for protection from the sun and mosquitoes. Long socks are very useful, so that you can tuck in your pants and further avoid biting insects. A good rainjacket is advisable, as is a collapsible umbrella. Dress will be casual, although you may prefer something slightly dressier for the hotels in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. **PLEASE, absolutely no light or bright colors.** Dark, muted colors help to prevent spooking the birds, particularly when we are in the forest, and thus enable you to see the special birds and mammals.

BOOTS: Although there will be few, if any, really rigorous walks or uphill jaunts, we may infrequently encounter mud, slippery surfaces and stony ground. Add that to the fact that you are on your feet for much of the day, and it is most important that you provide suitable protection and support for your feet and ankles. Lightweight (gortex or some similar material) boots that come up to the ankle and have a good lug-sole are ideal. Many people are apprehensive that these will be too heavy; this is not true. The protection, grip, and day-long comfort that such boots afford are far superior to the seemingly comfortable sneakers/training shoes.

Please remember Thailand is a predominantly Buddhist country and rather conservative about standards of dress.

DIFFICULTY: In general our tour of Thailand is easy and not especially physically demanding. Most of the time we will be walking on level ground either on paved or unpaved roads or tracks and very occasionally trails. At one or two sites such as at Doi Ang Kang and Kaeng Krachan, there may be some uphill walking but this is infrequent and will always be at a gentle pace with regular stops. Again this will not be especially physically demanding.

At most of the places we visit, especially in the warm, tropical lowlands, it will be important to be in the field before dawn so that we can hear the birds singing as the day starts up. In several cases, including some very critical species, this may be our only opportunity to discover if they are present or not. In addition it can be a very good time to catch the occasional nightjar, owl or even nocturnal mammal. Typically we return to our hotel or lodge for lunch and then rest up and re-charge our batteries before going out again in the late afternoon. This is NOT wasting good birding time because bird activity is virtually nil during the heat of the day and by re-charging our batteries and concentrating our efforts at the most optimal time of day, we will be in good shape to properly enjoy whatever comes our way.

LAUNDRY: Twenty-four hour laundry facilities are available at all of our accommodations.

HEALTH INFORMATION: Sanitation throughout Thailand is relatively good compared to most tropical areas of the world; however, it is advisable to treat water outside of the large, modern hotels with caution. Ideally, stick to bottled drinks, tea, and coffee. You should not eat salads and uncooked vegetables outside the good hotels.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, you should be up-to-date on both your tetanus and polio boosters. Hepatitis-A and B vaccines are recommended. Malaria is present, and participants are strongly advised to take the advice of their doctor with regard to the form of prophylactic to use. There are currently three prophylaxis commonly prescribed: Mefloquine (Lariam), Malarone, and Doxycycline. Vaccinations for cholera, typhoid, and tetanus should be current. Please check with your physician or local travel clinic for more detailed information. Your doctor will advise you on the above and any further medication you may need.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour, recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

LUGGAGE: International flights limit baggage to two checked pieces and one carry-on per person. The carry-on must be able to fit beneath the seat or in the overhead luggage compartment. When **traveling** it is suggested that you wear clothing and a pair of shoes suitable for birding in case your baggage is delayed. It is wise to carry several copies of a list of your expensive equipment—cameras, binoculars, tape recorders, spotting scopes, etc.—for customs inspectors. This list should include a description of the object (include the serial number if possible), place of purchase, and price. Visitors to Thailand are rarely challenged about such equipment, but U.S. customs may be more difficult. However, if you are taking an inordinately large amount of equipment abroad with you, it is advisable to declare this to a customs officer before you leave the United States. **When packing, please consider those who will have to lift and carry your bags. Two medium-weight bags are incomparably better than one huge, almost-impossible-to-lift suitcase.** Ideally everything should be packed in plastic bags within **soft bags so that they will fit easily into our vehicles.**

ACCOMMODATION: Our hotels in Bangkok, Khao Yai, Chiang Mai, Doi Ang Kang and Hua Hin are absolutely superb and rank among some of the loveliest hotels in Asia. Accommodations in Doi Inthanon, Tha Ton and Kaeng Krachan are also very attractive, clean and comfortable and air-conditioned and with private facilities.

CURRENCY: The unit of currency is the Baht (pronounced BART). It is a good idea to carry several small-denomination bills for personal purchases. International credit cards are accepted at most hotels, but rarely elsewhere. American Express and Thomas Cook traveler's checks, especially in U.S. dollars, are widely exchangeable.

EQUIPMENT:

- **Binoculars.** Of course, a good pair of binoculars is essential, and many people may want to take a spare pair in case of accident or theft. The same advice applies for people who wear glasses or contact lenses.
- **Spotting scope.** Your tour leader will have a Leica spotting scope. However, you are welcome to and **in fact strongly encouraged to** bring your own. This will be very useful at a number of locations in Thailand.
- **Duffel bags.** One or two small duffel bags can be extremely useful for short trips, and these can be packed in your luggage when not in use. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and documents in your carry-on bag.
- **A backpack or daypack** will be handy for books, sunscreen, repellents, extra memory cards or film, etc. Other items of use include a flashlight or headlamp and batteries with spare bulbs, a small canteen/flask for water, a collapsible umbrella, wash cloth, camera, and notebook and pen/pencil.

MISCELLANEOUS: Be sure to bring all necessary prescription drugs, as well as aspirin, antacids, and a supply of antihistamines should you develop a cold. Items such as toothpaste, deodorant, soap, cosmetics, sunscreen, and sunglasses should be brought with you. For those using electric shavers or other powered devices, please remember that electrical power in Thailand is 220 volts. You may need an adapter for your equipment. Insects such as **mosquitoes**, sand-flies, and leeches can occasionally, but just locally (and rarely in Thailand), be a problem. This is best dealt with by wearing long-sleeved shirts of sufficient thickness and

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density of weave that the “bugs” cannot bite through, long trousers tucked into long socks, and liberal coatings of Cutters or OFF. We recommend the pump-style containers.

Electricity: The electric current is 220V at 50 hertz (cycles). Despite the reliability of power in Thailand, it is always a good idea to carry a small flashlight or headlamp just in case; spare bulbs and batteries are essential.

Weights and measures: Generally the metric system is used, although the imperial system is understood.

Time: When it is midnight in Los Angeles, it will be 3:00 p.m. in Bangkok.

Language: Thai is a tonal language and consequently very difficult for English speakers to learn. Many people throughout Thailand speak some level of English. Elsewhere, older people may not and some of the people in the north such as the Karen and Hmong hill-tribes will only speak their local dialect.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Whatever you do, bring sufficient memory cards or film with you. Characteristically in tropical forest areas, photographing wildlife, in particular birds, will be difficult; however, there will be several times when we are in more open country when the lighting is better and the opportunities can be surprisingly good. However, Thailand has some wonderfully striking and unusual scenery, and we will visit some superb sites. When photographing people, it is courteous to ask first, a smile helps greatly, and if the subject declines, please do not force the issue.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books. We also recommend Andrew Isles bookstore for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com/AndrewIsles/>. Andrew can also often obtain difficult to find and out of print books.

Insight Guides: Thailand. Singapore: Apa Productions, 1985. All Apa productions are superbly produced with magnificent photographs. They also contain a good list of other references for those people wishing to read in more detail on Thai history, culture and religion.

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Graham, M. and P. Round. *Thailand's Vanishing Flora and Fauna.* Bangkok: Finance One Public Company, 1994.

Lekagul, B. and J.A. McNeely. *Mammals of Thailand.* Bangkok: The Assoc. Cons. Wild., 1977 (Out of print).

Lekagul, B. *et al.* *Field Guide to the Butterflies of Thailand.* Bangkok: Assoc. Cons. Wild., 1977.

Lekagul, B. and P. D. Round. *A Guide to the Birds of Thailand.* Bangkok: Saha Karn Bhaet, 1991.

McNeely, J. A. and Wachtel, P. S. *Soul of the Tiger—Searching for Nature's Answers in Exotic Southeast Asia.* New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Parr, J. W. K. *Large Mammals of Thailand.* Thailand: Sarakadee Press, 2003.

Robson, C. *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-east Asia.* UK: New Holland Publishers, 2000.

Robson, C. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Thailand*. UK: New Holland Publishers, 2002. **This or the older Lekagul and Round field guide is THE field guide you should carry with you on tour. It details and illustrates all the species you will encounter on our Thailand tour.**

Round, P. *Resident Forest Birds in Thailand: Their Status and Conservation*. ICBP Monograph No 2. Cambridge: ICBP., 1988. Available from ICBP, 32 Cambridge Road, Girton, Cambridge CB3 0PJ, England.

Whitmore, T.C. *Tropical Rainforests of the Far East*. 2nd. Edition. London: Oxford University Press, 1984. A superb account of the vegetation communities and their constituent plants, trees, soils etc in South-East Asia.

Wyatt, D. K. *Thailand: A Short History*. Bangkok: Thai Wattana Panich, 1984.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on June 1, 2009 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.