

BEST OF VIETNAM

MARCH 13 – 28, 2011

NORTHERN VIETNAM EXTENSION

MARCH 26 – APRIL 4, 2011

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“Enchanting,” perhaps more than any other adjective, aptly describes the lush, verdant country of Vietnam. The extraordinary nature and the beauty of its forests and wildlife are a feature of our tour, but Vietnam is much more than just a natural history attraction. A country with such a long and convoluted history demands that any visit here also pay proper heed to its fascinating culture and antiquities. Thus, unlike most birding tours, VENT will include visits to such must-see sights as the Imperial Palace of Hue, and Hanoi’s French colonial quarter. The birds and other wildlife will be our primary focus, however, and we will work very hard to share with you some of the splendid specialties of this relatively little-birded Indochinese nation.

This will be one of those very special VENT tours that participants will treasure for years to come. Indochina, particularly Vietnam, harbors some of Southeast Asia’s most alluring and fascinating landscapes, adorned with a remarkable diversity of habitats. As we discovered on our 2010 tour, many superb areas persist, especially within Vietnam’s expanding system of reserves and national parks. We will explore the very best of these reserves and seek out some of the least known, extremely localized, and most fascinating birds and mammals in the whole of Asia. In fact we have made several changes to our 2010 itinerary and added some time in the UNESCO World Heritage site of Hoi An and an opportunity to search for the rare and little known Sooty Babbler and recently described Black-capped Laughingthrush.

A cursory glance at a map of the region will show that Vietnam is an unusual country, roughly shaped like an hour-glass; it is long and thin. Balanced on the edge of the Southeast Asian continent, the country lies on a north-south axis and covers a huge latitudinal range. In the north, one’s eye is drawn to the Red River Delta, while in the south the huge Mekong Delta dominates the map. Both of these very important topographic features figure prominently in the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. In Vietnam’s far northwest lies the Hoang Lien Son Range, the south-easternmost extension of the Himalayas. The central, very slender part of the country is traced by the Truong Son Range, while further south the Da Lat Plateau divides south and central Vietnam. This topography and Vietnam’s location on the edge of the mainland contributes to a complex climatic system. This all goes toward explaining Vietnam’s extraordinary biological diversity. Vietnam is in the top 25 countries of species richness; for example, two thirds of mainland Asia’s babblers are found in Vietnam. Vietnam also has a high rate of endemism with seven species of primate (and seven more restricted range species) and five species of babbler (seven more restricted range).

We will cover most of the major biomes, but without rushing around. Thus, there will be sufficient time to search out such gems as the surprisingly common Bar-bellied Pitta; Germain's Peacock-Pheasant; the splendid Siamese Fireback; the elusive Red-collared Woodpecker; and a truly wonderful collection of babblers and laughingthrushes, many of them endemic to Vietnam or Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and southern Yunnan of China). Some of the other goodies we may encounter include several forest-dwelling partridges; the endangered Green Peafowl; possibly Baer's Pochard; a very diverse selection of some of Asia's loveliest woodpeckers; several barbets, including the near endemic Red-vented Barbet; with a bit of luck, Brown Hornbill, in addition to a couple of others; a good range of raptors, including the very local Pied Falconet and Jerdon's Baza; Blue-rumped and Bar-bellied pittas; some really great thrushes (if we're lucky, it will be cold up north and cause an invasion year!); a host of flycatchers, chats and robins; and the spectacular Sultan Tit—to mention but a few! We may also encounter some of Vietnam's wonderful mammals, among which are some of the most beautiful and distinguished primates anywhere in the world. Sadly, all of them are rare and not easy to see, but we should be able to find Douc langur and possibly a couple of others.

VENT's Northern Vietnam Extension will explore superb Cuc Phuong, the oldest of Vietnam's national parks. Walking amidst the park's magnificent moist evergreen forests, we will search for such gems as Blue-rumped Pitta in addition to other exciting birds ranging from Pied Falconet to Limestone Wren-Babbler and possibly gorgeous Silver Pheasant. This can be a very birdie place and nearby we will search for the endangered Delacour's langur – a very attractive leaf-monkey. From Cuc Phuong we will head across the country to the old French hill station at Tam Dao, haunt of Chestnut Bulbul, Gray Laughingthrush and darling Short-tailed Parrotbill.

Our tour of Vietnam is an absolute must for those who love to travel, explore and experience a completely new land—its fauna, flora, history and culture. We are thrilled to be returning to Vietnam. Furthermore, we will explore areas generally not visited by other birding tour companies, thus giving VENT clients an incomparable tour of Vietnam. Vietnam is a delightfully rich, safe and undeniably fascinating country. We feel that like your leader, you too will find it difficult to drag yourself away when that times falls.

PLEASE NOTE that we have recently redesigned our itinerary. Many of our participants are only able to take shorter tours while other participants prefer to enjoy a comprehensive coverage of the country they are visiting. We have therefore added several new sites to the overall tour and divided the tour into two parts, which nicely compliment one another.

March 13-14, Days 1-2: Travel to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam. Most flights from the United States arrive at the Ho Chi Minh City (SGN) international airport late in the evening. Please plan to arrive in Ho Chi Minh on **March 14th**. Upon arrival and after clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by our ground-agents and escorted to our attractive hotel.

Formerly known as Saigon, the expansive, bustling metropolis of Ho Chi Minh City is located just to the northeast of the vast Mekong Delta. A mix of neoclassical and modern international architecture, Ho Chi Minh City, also known as the “Paris of the East” during the French colonial period, still retains a flavor of those more elegant times.

NIGHT: The Majestic Hotel, Ho Chi Minh City

March 15, Day 3: Nam Bai Cat Tien National Park. This morning we gather in the hotel lobby at 7:00 a.m. to meet before breakfast. After breakfast, we will drive northwards from Saigon to Nam Bai Cat Tien National Park, stopping *en route* for anything of interest. We should arrive in time for lunch and will commence exploration of this fabulous reserve during the afternoon.

NIGHT: Nam Bai Cat Tien National Park Guest House

March 16-17, Days 4-5: Nam Bai Cat Tien National Park. Located only 100 kilometers to the northeast of Ho Chi Minh City, Nam Bai Cat Tien was the first national park to be established in southern Vietnam. The park lies at the base of foothills that eventually extend to the Lang Bian Plateau. The beautiful lowland forest in the eastern half of the park is probably one of the last remaining areas that support the full spectrum of the rich Cochinchina avifauna. This area was very fortunate to escape the spraying with defoliants during the war, which destroyed vast tracts of forest elsewhere in southern Vietnam. This wonderful reserve protects a mosaic of different habitats, dominated by a series of seasonal wetlands at its center and, as a result, a fascinating array of wildlife.

In the early mornings, Green Peafowl can be heard calling from the larger trees surrounding the wetlands, where they can have a good preen before flying down to commence feeding. With luck we may also find roosting Brown or Tawny fish-owls in this habitat. Along the edges of pools and marshes, Cinnamon Bittern, Lesser Whistling-Duck, White-breasted Waterhen, Watercock, Bronze-winged Jacana, and Stork-billed Kingfisher are all possible. We may also see Palearctic migrants from northern Asia, such as Oriental and Black-browed reed-warblers, Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler, and Dusky Warbler. In the evening, impressive numbers of Great Eared-Nightjars emerge to hunt over open areas, while Large-tailed Nightjars call from the tree-tops. Other birds that we could encounter include Little Heron, Yellow Bittern, the diminutive but very lovely Collared Falconet, Red-wattled Plover, Pintail Snipe, Lesser Coucal, Black-hooded Oriole, Yellow-bellied and Plain prinias, Baya and Streaked weavers, the very localized and most striking Asian Golden Weaver, Chestnut and White-rumped munias, and Yellow-breasted Bunting. Nam Bai Cat Tien is one of the few places where the endangered White-winged Duck might still occur, and with extreme luck we may see one of these evocative birds in flight over the swamp forest.

A drivable track, leading from the park headquarters in the south to Dac Lua substation in the north, bisects the reserve. The first part of the track runs close to the banks of the Dong Nai River. Many birds are active along the riverbanks in the mornings, and we may encounter White-breasted, Pied, and Black-capped kingfishers; Chestnut-headed Bee-eater; the spectacular Black-and-red Broadbill; Racket-tailed Treepie; and Rufescent Prinia, as well as winter visitors such as Lanceolated, Thick-billed, and Radde's warblers. As we move farther into the heart of the park, the evergreen forest becomes taller, although still open, and is interspersed with more dense patches of forest and thorny clumps of bamboo. Much of the bird activity tends to be concentrated around fruiting trees, where we could find such birds as Thick-billed, Ashy-headed (split from Pompadour), and Pink-necked pigeons; Green Imperial-Pigeon; Red-breasted Parakeet—regularly seen in large numbers right around our accommodations; Vernal Hanging-Parrot (the “Infernal Hanging-Parrot” to some!); Orange-breasted Trogon; Banded Kingfisher; White-browed Piculet; Green-eared and Lineated barbets; the little-known endemic Red-vented Barbet; Ochraceous and Black-crested bulbuls; Great and Common ioras; Golden-fronted and Blue-winged leafbirds; and Asian Fairy-bluebird. In roving flocks we may find Green-billed Malkoha, Laced Woodpecker, Banded and Dusky broadbills, Large Wood-shrike, Scarlet Minivet, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Abbott's and Scaly-breasted babblers, and the endemic Gray-faced Tit-Babbler.

Other birds we may encounter include Crested Honey-Buzzard; Crested Goshawk; Shikra; Brahminy Kite; Crested Serpent-Eagle; Red Junglefowl; Barred Buttonquail; Red Turtle-Dove; Emerald Ground-Dove; Chestnut-winged, Banded Bay, Asian Emerald, Plaintive, and Drongo cuckoos; Greater Coucal; Asian Palm-Swift; Indochinese Swiftlet; Silver-backed and Brown-backed needletails; Wreathed, Oriental Pied, and Great hornbills; Indian Roller; Common Dollarbird; Blue-bearded Bee-eater; Green-eared, Blue-eared, and

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Coppersmith barbets; Common Goldenback; the huge Great Slaty and White-bellied woodpeckers; the very attractive Black-and-buff and, perhaps, Heart-spotted woodpeckers; Ashy Minivet; Stripe-throated and Streak-eared bulbuls; Black and Hair-crested drongos; Brown Shrike; Gray-headed (Chestnut-tailed) and Vinous-breasted starlings; Golden-crested and Common Hill mynas; Black-naped Oriole; Ashy Woodswallow; Large-billed Crow; Indochinese Green Magpie—rare and elusive; Rufous-tailed Robin; Siberian Rubythroat; Bluethroat; Siberian Blue Robin; Oriental Magpie-Robin; White-rumped Shama; Chestnut-capped Babbler; Striped Tit-Babbler; Large Scimitar-Babbler; White-crested Laughingthrush; Pale-legged and Two-barred Greenish warblers; Red-breasted, Asian Brown, Tickell's Blue, and Hainan Blue flycatchers; Black-naped Monarch; Asian Paradise-Flycatcher; Ruby-cheeked, Purple-naped, Purple-throated, and Olive-backed sunbirds; Little Spiderhunter; and Yellow-vented, Plain, and Scarlet-backed flowerpeckers. With a bit of luck, we may find such skulking beauties as Germain's Peacock-Pheasant, Siamese Fireback, Scaly-breasted and Orange-necked (very rare) partridges, the little known Blue-rumped Pitta, and the lovely endemic Bar-bellied Pitta—notably common here, but tough to see.

Despite this long list of birds, the birding can be slow, but with a little diligence the careful observer can reap tremendous rewards. This reserve supports many very special birds. For example, it is the only place we have a reasonable chance for such species as Siamese Fireback and Germain's Peacock-Pheasant, which are surprisingly common here. These forests are also home to a number of very special mammals, including the recently discovered population of Javan rhinoceros, as well as the very attractive black-shanked Douc langur and yellow-cheeked crested gibbon. With persistence, we should turn up several very good birds and perhaps some of the resident mammals.

NIGHTS: Nam Bai Cat Tien National Park Guest House

March 18, Day 6: Morning Birding Nam Cat Tien; PM Drive to Da Lat. After a full morning's birding in Cat Tien and lunch, we will drive northward through the cultivated hills before climbing up onto the Lang Bian Plateau.

NIGHT: Novotel Hotel, Da Lat

March 19-20, Days 7-8: Da Lat Area. One of earth's avian hotspots and centers of bird endemism is the Lang Bian Plateau, which supports a wonderfully rich collection of birds, including several species found nowhere else in the world. We will be making a special effort to locate Gray-crowned Crocias (only rediscovered within the last ten years, we have enjoyed amazing views of this handsome species on previous VENT tours); Black-hooded, White-cheeked, and the very striking Collared laughingthrushes; Yellow-billed Nuthatch; and Vietnamese Greenfinch. Among the host of other species we may encounter are the following possibilities: Rufous-throated and Bar-backed partridges; Silver Pheasant; Chinese Francolin (all gallinaceous birds are very tough to see in Vietnam); Jerdon's Baza; Gray-faced Buzzard; Black and Rufous-bellied eagles; Changeable Hawk-Eagle; Black-shouldered Kite; Pale-capped Pigeon (a global rarity, but there is a real chance here of encountering this species); Wedge-tailed and Mountain imperial-pigeons; Little Swift; Golden-throated, Moustached, Red-vented and Black-browed barbets; Bay and Gray-capped Pygmy woodpeckers; Greater and Lesser yellownapes; Greater Goldenback; Red-rumped Swallow; Large and Indochinese cuckoo-shrikes; Long-tailed and Gray-chinned minivets; Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike; Mountain, Black, Ashy, Black-crested, Red-whiskered, Flavescent, and Sooty-headed bulbuls; Orange-bellied Leafbird; Richard's, Red-throated, and Olive-backed pipits; Ashy Drongo; Slender-billed and Maroon orioles; Eurasian Jay; Green Cochoa (very tough); Lesser Shortwing; Eyebrowed and Siberian thrushes; Blue Rock-Thrush; Daurian Redstart; Gray Bushchat; Blue Whistling-Thrush; Slaty-backed and Spotted forktails; Gray-headed Parrotbill; Spot-throated Babbler (a great songster but tough to see); Pygmy Wren-Babbler; the very nifty and highly localized Short-tailed (now more appropriately named Indochinese Wren-Babbler) and White-browed scimitar-babblers; Rufous-capped Babbler; Silver-eared Mesia; Blue-winged Minla; Mountain and Rufous-winged fulvettas; Black-headed and Rufous-backed sibilias; the very elusive Orange-breasted Laughingthrush; Vietnamese Cutia; White-browed and

Chestnut-fronted shrike-babblers; White-bellied Yuhina; Dark-necked and Mountain tailorbirds; Hill Prinia; Yellow-browed, Ashy-throated, Blyth's, and White-tailed leaf-warblers; Russet Bush-Warbler; Asian Stubtail; White-spectacled and Chestnut-crowned warblers; Gray-bellied Tesia; Little Pied, Mugimaki, Gray-headed, Rufous-browed and Verditer flycatchers; Large Niltava; White-throated Fantail; Green-backed, Yellow-cheeked, Yellow-browed, and Black-throated tits; Brown-throated Treecreeper; Chestnut-vented and the superb endemic Yellow-billed nuthatches; Burmese Shrike; Black-collared Starling; Fire-breasted Flowerpecker; the stunning Mrs. Gould's Sunbird; the endemic Vietnamese Greenfinch; Red Crossbill; Scaly-breasted Munia; and Chestnut Bunting. With a great deal of luck we might find such elusive species as Blue or Rusty-naped pittas.

NIGHTS: Novotel Hotel, Da Lat

March 21, Day 9: Fly Da Lat to Danang via Saigon. This morning we will fly south to Saigon in time to connect with our onward flight to Danang. Upon arrival in Danang, we will transfer by bus to Hoi An. During the afternoon we will explore the historic trading port and UNESCO World Heritage Site.

NIGHT: Life Heritage Resort, Hoi An

March 22, Day 10: Drive into the Central Highlands. This morning we will drive to Kham Duc along the newly built Ho Chi Minh Trail highway, which take us southward toward Dak Glei before entering remote Quang Nam Province where we will stay overnight at Kham Duc. This afternoon we will begin our exploration of the Loxo Pass.

NIGHT: Kham Duc Hotel, Quang Nam Province

March 23, Day 11: Loxo Pass. The Central Highlands are the least populated part of the country and probably the last area that might be truly termed wilderness in Vietnam; here unbroken forest stretches as far as the eye can see. This border area, which is shared with Cambodia and Laos is the site where two new bird species (Golden-winged Laughingthrush and Black-crowned Barwing) were described as recently as the 1990s! These new species were originally found by Birdlife International expeditions to the remote Mount Ngoc Linh (2598m), which is the highest peak of the Central Highlands but is unfortunately a closed military zone. Fortunately, the handsome Black-crowned Barwing has since been found at Loxo Pass, which we will explore today. The forests of this superb area support a number of other very attractive species including the wonderful Short-tailed Scimitar-Babbler, now more appropriately named Indochinese Wren-Babbler. Other species we may encounter include the lovely Asian Emerald Cuckoo, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Grey-bellied Tesia, Small Niltava, Grey-headed Parrotbill, Coral-billed Scimitar-Babbler, Spot-throated Babbler, Red-tailed and Blue-winged minlas, the scintillating Red-tailed Laughingthrush (always a challenge to see), and the striking White-winged Magpie.

NIGHT: Kham Duc Hotel, Kam Duc

March 24, Day 12: Drive to Hue. This morning we will return to Danang and then head northward to the ancient city of Hue, arriving in time for some exploration of this city's wonderful antiquities.

NIGHT: Pilgrimage Village, Hue

March 25, Day 13: AM Hue; PM Drive to Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park. After a morning exploring the antiquities of Hue, we will drive north to Quang Binh province for two nights stay at the periphery of Phong Nha-Ke National Park.

NIGHT: Saigon Phong Nha Hotel, Quang Binh

March 26, Day 14: Phong Nha-Ke National Park and Nearby Areas. Phong Nha-Ke National Park encompasses a beautiful area of forest on limestone karst in addition to the largest cave system in Vietnam. We will rise early for our exploration of this wonderfully interesting region and may be able to include a short boat ride to the cave entrance. This area is home to several very localized birds and mammals including the peculiar and poorly known Sooty Babbler, as well as the recently described Limestone Warbler and Hatinh leaf-monkey. Other special birds we may encounter include Pin-tailed Green-Pigeon, with great good luck Brown Fish-Owl, Orange-breasted Trogon, White-browed Piculet, possibly Blue and Blue-rumped pittas, Slaty-backed Forktail, and White-vented Mynas. With a bit of luck we may even find the very handsome but elusive Red-collared Woodpecker.

NIGHT: Saigon Phong Nha Hotel, Quang Binh

March 27, Day 15: Drive to Hue and Fly to Hanoi. We will drive back to Hue and then fly to Hanoi in time for a farewell dinner and the conclusion of what will surely be a most memorable tour.

NIGHT: Metropole Sofitel Hotel, Hanoi

March 28, Day 16: Departures Home or Continue on Northern Vietnam Extension. Those participants not taking part in the Northern Vietnam Extension can depart at any time; transfers will be provided to the airport. Hotel check-out time is 11:00 a.m.

NORTHERN VIETNAM EXTENSION

MARCH 26 – APRIL 4, 2011

March 26-27, Days 1-2: Travel to Hanoi, Vietnam. For those participants taking the extension only, please plan to arrive at the Hanoi airport (HAN) on **March 27th**. Upon arrival and after clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by our ground-agents and escorted to our hotel. If you arrive in time, please join the group for dinner this evening. Your tour leader will contact you about where and when to meet.

NIGHT: Metropole Sofitel Hotel, Hanoi

March 28, Day 3: Drive to Cuc Phuong National Park. This morning, we will depart early and drive south to Cuc Phuong National Park. We will make several stops along the way for open country and paddy field species, in particular Gray-headed Lapwing and White-shouldered Starling. However, at this time of the year the rice fields can sometimes be full of birds, and we should be alert for several species of wagtails, Pintail Snipe, and several species of shorebirds, including the rather rare Long-billed Plover and attractive Northern Lapwing. We will also stop at the attractive Van Long Nature Reserve to search an extensive marshy area for White-browed Crake as well as Pheasant-tailed Jacana. However, we will search in particular for the endangered Delacour's langur which can sometimes be seen on the limestone formations immediately behind the marsh. We should arrive at the reserve in time to settle into our rooms before dinner.

NIGHT: Cuc Phuong National Park

March 29-31, Days 4-6: Cuc Phuong National Park. Based at the entrance to the park, we will be ideally situated to explore this fascinating area. With its attractive limestone formations and forested central valley, it provides a refuge for many exciting birds. A walk through this forest is bound to produce some real gems. At this time of year, the climate is warm, but pleasant and comfortable for most of the day. Almost any migrant, in addition to some wonderful resident species, is possible. Some of the specialties we may encounter include

Malayan Night-Heron (very difficult); Gray Peacock-Pheasant; Silver Pheasant (relatively easy to see here); Chestnut-necklaced Partridge; Jerdon's Baza; Pied Falconet; Pin-tailed Green-Pigeon; Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl; Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher; Ruddy Kingfisher; Blue-bearded Bee-eater; Brown Hornbill; Red-vented Barbet; the mysterious and difficult to find endemic Red-collared Woodpecker; Bay Woodpecker; Silver-breasted and Long-tailed broadbills; the gorgeous Bar-bellied and Blue-rumped pittas (both very common and relatively easy to see here!); possibly Eared Pitta; the striking White-winged Magpie; both Indochinese Green and Common Green magpies; Ratchet-tailed Treepie; colorful Sultan Tits; Rufous-tailed and perhaps Japanese robin; White-bellied Redstart (rare); Scaly, Orange-headed, Siberian, Gray-backed, Black-breasted and Japanese thrushes; Eurasian Blackbird; Puff-throated and Buff-breasted babblers; Large Scimitar-Babbler; the localized and very attractive Rufous-throated Fulvetta; Black-browed Fulvetta; Eye-browed, Streaked, and Limestone wren-babblers; Spot-necked Babbler; Hwamei; a variety of bush-warblers; Eastern Crowned Warbler; the rather vocal White-tailed Flycatcher; Fukien Niltava; Narcissus Flycatcher; richly plumaged Fork-tailed Sunbirds; and possibly Tristram's Bunting.

Most birding will be along a 20-km paved road through excellent forest, with occasional jaunts along nearby narrow trails. The terrain is mostly gentle, with just one hill that we can drive up. On one morning, we will take a more substantial trail that will involve a moderate climb; however, this is a superb forest walk and will give us our only chance for such species as Limestone Wren-Babbler. On another afternoon we will visit a neighboring reserve comprising a spectacular area of jagged limestone karst. In small but very stable woven boats, we will be poled across a shallow wetland (be alert for White-browed Crake, Yellow Bittern and several species of ducks) to the base of the mountains. Here we will await the appearance of the very striking Delacour's langur—one of the world's rarest and most peculiar-looking primates. While waiting, we should be especially alert to Bonelli's Eagle, which we found breeding here on our 2002 tour (a first record for Vietnam), Peregrine Falcon, and Dusky Crag Martin, to mention but a few.

NIGHTS: Cuc Phuong National Park

April 1, Day 7: Drive from Cuc Phuong National Park to Tam Dao. This morning we will take our leave of this attractive park and head toward Tam Dao. The old French hill station is about a three hour drive to the northwest of Hanoi and in days gone by served the city's inhabitants. Although most of the old buildings were destroyed during the war, Tam Dao retains something of the atmosphere of an old hill station in miniature. Sheltered by a semi-circle of forested heights reaching 1,350m, Tam Dao became a popular haunt of ornithologists early in the 20th century. Its rich and colourful forests, now a national park, have a very distinctive character, with a blending of birds that one otherwise encounters in the Himalayas, northwestern Thailand and southern China.

NIGHT: Belvedere Resort, Tam Dao

April 2, Day 8: Tam Dao. We have the entire day to explore the forests surrounding the old French hill station. Despite the apparent extensive area of forest encompassed within the national park surrounding the town, birds and most other forms of wildlife have unfortunately been intensively hunted. However, the area still supports several species of birds that we are very unlikely to encounter elsewhere. Some of the birds we may encounter include Chestnut Bulbul; Chestnut-headed Tesia; Gray-cheeked Fulvetta; Black-chinned Yuhina; the localized and enigmatic Gray Laughingthrush; Streak-breasted, Red-billed, and Coral-billed scimitar-babblers; Streaked and Eye-browed wren-babblers; Collared (split from White-hooded Babbler) and Greater Rufous-headed and the delightful Short-tailed parrotbills; Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike, Chestnut Bulbul, and, with luck, the lovely Red-headed Trogon. Along the forest edge we may find Pale-footed, Brownish-flanked and Russet bush-warblers; and Gray-backed Shrike. A number of highly sought after species also occur including Cochoa, Coral-billed Scimitar-Babbler and the much localized Short-tailed Parrotbill. We will make a special effort to locate these birds. If we are really lucky, we may come across the shy Blue-naped Pitta or rare Purple Cochoa.

NIGHT: Belvedere Resort, Tam Dao

April 3, Day 9: Drive Tam Dao to Hanoi. After some final birding at Tam Dao, we will wend our way back to Hanoi. This evening we will enjoy a farewell meal together in our grand colonial era hotel.

NIGHT: Metropole Sofitel Hotel, Hanoi

April 4, Day 10: Tour Concludes; Fly Hanoi to Home. Our tour concludes this morning with our international flight from Hanoi toward home. Transfers will be provided to the airport.

TOUR LEADER: David Bishop

David Bishop loves his vocation and cannot imagine anything better than exploring wild and beautiful places in Asia in the company of friends and clients. David has spent much of the past 35 years studying the birds and natural history of the Oriental region, in addition to New Guinea and the Southwest Pacific. Once a police officer amid the streets of London's West End, David 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 and sharing what he sees with others, 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, a group of noisy koalas, wallabies, and a plethora of birds in the bush nearby, in the attractive university town of Armidale, NSW, Australia. This will be David's seventh tour to Vietnam.

TOUR SIZE: The Best of Vietnam and the Northern Vietnam Extension tours are limited to 8 participants on each part.

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. All requests for travel assistance (air tickets and /or additional hotel nights) must be received no later than 90 days prior to departure date. Within 90 days, arrangements must be made on your own.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the Best of Vietnam is **\$5,695** per person in double occupancy from Ho Chi Minh City (tour ends in Hanoi). This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 3 to dinner on Day 15, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all internal transportation (including the flights from Da Lat to Saigon, Saigon to Danang, and Hue to Hanoi), transfers from and to the airport, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Ho Chi Minh City and return from Hanoi, airport departure taxes, visas, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, telephone 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 the Best of Vietnam is **\$790**. 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.

The fee for the Northern Vietnam Extension is **\$3,295** per person in double occupancy starting and ending in the

capital Hanoi. This includes all meals from dinner on day 2 to breakfast on Day 9, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all internal transportation including transfers from and to the airport, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leader. It does not include airfare from your home to Hanoi and return, airport departure taxes, visas, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, telephone 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 the Northern Vietnam Extension is **\$430**. 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.

Participants combining Best of Vietnam with the Northern Vietnam Extension will receive a discount of **\$150** in double occupancy and **\$200** in single occupancy.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for each tour part 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, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. 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. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

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.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please read your itinerary carefully to see whether or not your tour/cruise requires MANDATORY Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip.

This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by Travel Insured International. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

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.

CLIMATE: As a result of its notably diverse latitudes and altitudes, a visit to Vietnam exposes you to an equally diverse array of climates. The climate varies greatly from north to south. The north has a cool, dry season from November to April. The centre is often wet, humid and warm and the south is hot and humid all year round. The Da Lat plateau has a similar climate to the south, but it is cooler. Once we begin to ascend the foothills and climb into the mountains, the temperature can become quite pleasant, but it can also become rather damp and, as a consequence, occasionally cool to very cool in the mountains, especially those of the far north. We will almost certainly encounter some rain, especially in the mountains of the north. In Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) during November, the average temperature is 77°F (25°C), whereas the average in Hanoi is 63°F (17°C).

CLOTHING: Lightweight field clothing is recommended for the southern lowlands (Cat Tien National Park), and these should be in muted, drab colors. Please avoid bright white, yellow, red, or other contrasting colors that will spook the birds. Your clothing list should include cool, loose-fitting, comfortable pants and long-sleeved shirts; a dull-colored hat (not white); a warm sweater and jacket for higher elevations; thick, long socks (loop-stitch hiker’s socks are ideal) are very good, as they absorb perspiration, cushion your foot, and allow you to tuck in the bottom of your trousers and further avoid biting insects. Raingear is essential, including waterproof pants. Laundry facilities are available at all of our hotels and in most instances will be returned within 24 hours. However, laundry cleaning at Nam Bai Cat Tien and Cuc Phuong will have to be organized on a less formal basis and cannot be guaranteed.

While most of the walking will be fairly easy, there will be a few moderately demanding walks where we may encounter mud, slippery surfaces and stony ground. Add to that the fact that you are on your feet for much of the day and it becomes most important that you provide suitable protection and support for your feet and ankles. Lightweight but robust boots (hiking boots) that come up to the ankle and have a good lug-sole are ideal. The protection, grip, and day-long comfort such boots afford is far superior to the seemingly comfortable tennis shoes or sneakers. Wellington boots may be advantageous in one or two places, but the benefits of bringing them have to be weighed against the cost of the extra baggage.

SPECIAL NOTE: Leeches can at times be a nuisance, especially in the lowlands. While spraying your socks and trousers with bug-juice is some help, a pair of leech-socks is much more effective. A website that sells leech socks is www.mosquitohammock.com. They are based in Philadelphia.

DIFFICULTY: In general the VENT tour of Vietnam 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 occasionally trails. At one or two sites such as at Cuc Phuong and Tam Dao there may be some uphill walking, but this 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.

BAGGAGE LIMITS: International checked baggage from the United States to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam is restricted to two pieces, with a maximum total dimension of 106 inches (length + width + height). Whereas each bag may weigh 77 pounds (35 kilograms) on the international flight, internal Vietnam domestic flights are restricted to just 40 lbs (18 kg). Check-in personnel generally weigh your luggage carefully for each flight and will charge you excess baggage for anything over the limit. Each participant will be responsible for his or her excess baggage costs. One carry-on bag is permitted per person per flight. Ideally everything should be packed in plastic bags within soft bags so that they will fit easily into our vehicles. Please note that some airlines have different baggage restrictions. It is best to check your international carrier's restrictions before traveling.

ACCOMMODATION: Our hotels in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Da Lat, Hoi An and Hanoi are absolutely superb and rank among some of the loveliest hotels in Asia. Accommodations in Hue and Tam Dao are good and accommodations in Cat Tien and Cuc Phuong National Parks and elsewhere are all modest, but clean and air-conditioned and with private facilities.

CURRENCY: The unit of currency is the Dong. There is no commission charged on traveler's checks, at least at Ho Chi Minh City airport. 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.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date is required for U.S. citizens. A tourist visa must be obtained before entry into Vietnam. For more information, contact the Embassy of Vietnam, 1233 20th St., NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036 (202/861-2293 or 861-0694; Internet: www.vietnamembassy-usa.org) or Pinnacle Travel Document Systems (www.traveldocs.com on the web or 888-838-4867 by phone), a company which handles visa procurement. Non-U.S. citizens should check with the Embassy of Vietnam in their country.

EQUIPMENT: You should pack a pair of good quality binoculars that are in good repair, along with a belt or day-pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra digital storage media or film, etc.). Your leader will have a Leica scope, **but if you have a spotting scope and wish to bring it along, we strongly encourage you to do so.** We will be birding from roadsides or open trails for much of the time, and a scope can be very useful for seeing treetop birds such as pigeons, doves and parakeets. Other items to bring should include a flashlight or headlamp, camera, extra batteries, water bottle, alarm clock (important), handy wipes (very useful), wash cloth, towel, and umbrella (very useful and should be carried at all times). You should also have a supply of personal

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medication. As a precaution, it is a good idea to pack your binoculars, a change of clothing, toiletry items, medications, and travel documents in your airline carry-on bag.

HEALTH: Care in what you eat and drink is the most important health rule. Stomach upsets are the most likely travel health problem, but the majority of these will be relatively minor. Don't be afraid to try the superb local Vietnamese food. It is part of the experience. Sanitary conditions in the hotels and other accommodations we use are very good; however, participants are advised to wash the outside of all fruit before peeling it. Hot, freshly cooked food should be safe, but it is important to ensure that meat is thoroughly cooked. Uncooked or lightly cooked vegetables are best passed up. Bottled water, fizzy drinks, and beer are widely available.

No immunizations are necessary in Vietnam, but it never hurts to take precautions. Malaria is present, but should not be a serious problem for participants on this tour. Consult with your doctor for specific information related to your needs and your medical history or a local travel clinic.

Chiggers, mosquitoes and other insects can on occasion be a problem. We have found that regular use of Cutters lotion or OFF, in combination with pump-action OFF, are most effective. We recommend you bring one bottle of each per person. Please, no aerosol cans!

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 800-CDC-INFO. 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).

MISCELLANEOUS:

International departure tax is currently U.S. \$14, collected at the time of departure.

Electricity: The electric current is a mixture of 110V and 220V, both at 50 hertz (cycles). Often you will find two-pin U.S.-type outlets carrying 220 volts and round-prong outlets with just 110 volts. Much of the electrical wiring in Vietnam is not up to the most modern standards, thus a good flashlight or headlamp, spare bulbs and batteries are essential.

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

Time: Vietnam is seven hours ahead of GMT/UTC. When it is noon in Vietnam, it is 10:00 p.m. the previous evening in Los Angeles, midnight in Dallas, 1:00 a.m. in New York and 5:00 a.m. in London.

Language: Vietnamese is a tonal language and consequently very difficult for English speakers to learn. Many people, in places such as Ho Chi Minh City, speak some level of English. Elsewhere, older people may speak French; the bulk of the people we encounter, however, will only speak their local dialect and/or Vietnamese.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Whatever you do, bring sufficient memory cards or film with you. As is characteristic of tropical forest areas, photographing wildlife, in particular birds, is difficult on a tour such as this. However, Vietnam 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.

There is no field guide specifically to the birds of Vietnam; however, Craig Robson's recently published Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia is excellent and covers all the birds of Vietnam. Furthermore, during 2005 this field guide was published in a revised and concise edition without as much text and may be more field-user friendly. Unfortunately, there is very little other published material on the natural history of Vietnam; the little that has been published dates from the early part of this century or appears in recent technical publications, such as the excellent journal "Forktail" of the Oriental Bird Club and some of the technical publications of Birdlife International.

Francis, Charles M. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of South-east Asia*. 2008. New Holland Publications. England. **A superb field-guide that is a must for anyone with even a remote interest in mammals.**

Herring, George C. *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950–1975*. 1995 (3rd edition) McGraw Hill-Higher Education,.

Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam—A History*. 1983. Penguin.

Sterling, Eleanor J., Hurley, M. M. & Le Duc Minh. *Vietnam A Natural History*. 2006. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven, USA. **This lovely book is gem; a treasure trove of information on the wonderfully exciting natural history of Vietnam.**

Ray, Nickey, Stewart, I., & Yu-Meie-Balasingamchow. *Vietnam Travel Guide*. 2009. Hawthorn, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications.

Robson, Craig. *Field Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia*. New Holland, London, U. K. 2005. **This is THE book to use on tour in Vietnam.**

Taylor, Keith Weller. *The Birth of Vietnam*. 1991. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rutherford, Scott. *Insight Guide Vietnam*. Singapore: Apa Publications.

White, P. "Vietnam: the Hard Road to Peace." *National Geographic* Vol. 176, No. 5. (1989), pp 561-621.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, 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, motor coach, 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 July 15, 2010, 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.