

THAILAND HIGHLIGHTS

FEBRUARY 12-28, 2006*

*Dates differ from those in our 2006 Tour Directory

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. Also to be found there is 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, 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 region. From some really lovely accommodations and nurtured by exquisite food, we will explore conveniently 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, there is 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 our tour to Cambodia (February 1-13, 2006).

February 12-13, Days 1-2: Travel to Bangkok, Thailand. Participants not continuing from our Cambodia Tour are encouraged to take Thai Airways Flight 775 which is scheduled to depart Los Angeles at 12:05 p.m. on February 12 and arrive in Bangkok at 10:55 p.m. on February 13 (subject to change). Upon arrival and after clearing customs and immigration, you will be met by a tour leader or a representative of our ground-agent and escorted to the attractive Amari Airport Hotel. Those not on this flight may simply proceed from customs to the hotel where a room will be reserved in your name.

Participants wanting to avoid the risk of misconnecting should consider arriving in Los Angeles on February 11 or Bangkok on February 12 and spending the night. Upon request, VENT will be happy to assist with these arrangements.

NIGHT: Amari Airport Hotel, Bangkok (February 13)

February 14, Day 3: Drive via Samut Sakhon to Kaeng Krachan National Park. This morning we will drive west and south along the Gulf of Siam to the Thailand's largest national park of Kaeng Krachan. En route we

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will stop to examine the extensive mud flats and salt pans which line this part of Thailand's coast. 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 Plover; Greater and Lesser sand plovers; 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; Flycatcher; Long-tailed Shrike; and Brown-throated Sunbird. In addition we may find one of nature's most extraordinary members, the Spoonbilled Sandpipers. In recent years this blue-ribbon bird has been found fairly regularly wintering here (as we saw on our 2003 tour) in addition to such other shorebird gems as Broad-billed Sandpiper and Great Knot.

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 lovely resort some time during the afternoon, possibly in time to do a little birding in the scrub and parkland that surround our accommodations.

NIGHT: Kaeng Krachan Resort

February 15-16, Days 4-5: 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 broadleaved evergreen forests cover a large proportion 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 km.) eastwards 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.

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; Grey 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 Malkoha; Brown Hawk Owl; Collared Scops Owl; Collared Owlet; and Asian Barred Owlet. Several other much more rarely seen owls also occur in these forests such as the gigantic Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl, but the chances of seeing such dreamed-of species is remote. We may also encounter Large-tailed Nightjar; Himalayan Swiftlet; Fork-tailed Swift; the superb Brown Noddy; Grey-rumped and possibly the 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 Yellowthroat; Laced, Grey-headed, the uncommon Bamboo, Bay, Heart-spotted, and Great Slaty woodpeckers; Common Flameback; perhaps Olive-backed Woodpecker; 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 cosmic species as Eared, Blue and, at higher elevations, Rusty-naped. We should encounter Red-

rumped Swallow; Large Wood Shrike; Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike; Ashy, Grey-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, Grey-eyed, and Ashy bulbuls; several kinds of drongos; Black-naped, and the severely threatened Silver Oriole (rare); Asian Fairy Bluebird; Crested Jay; the peculiar Ratchet-tailed Tree-pie (only recently discovered here, more than one thousand kilometers from its previously known location); Common Green Magpie; Sultan Tit; Velvet-fronted Nuthatch; Buff-breasted, Abbott's, Rufous-fronted, and Grey-throated babblers; White-hooded Babbler; White-browed, Coral-billed, and Large scimitar-babblers; White-crested, Greater and Lesser Necklaced, and Black-throated laughing-thrushes; 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 grey-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 park still supporting 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; 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; as well as a variety of civets and many species of squirrels.

NIGHTS: Kaeng Krachan Resort

February 17, Day 6: Drive to Khao Yai National Park. We leave Kaeng Krachan early this morning for our drive back through Bangkok to Khao Yai. We will stop for some further birding and a lunch break at Khok Kam, which involves only a short detour from our route. On arrival in the afternoon at our comfortable accommodation near Khao Yai we should have time for some relaxed birding around the very attractive gardens. Flocks of Red-breasted Parakeet wheel overhead, while various species of gorgeous sunbirds and flowerpeckers forage alongside Little Spiderhunter, Hill Myna and Tickell's Blue Flycatcher.

NIGHT: Juladis Khao Yai Resort

February 18-19, Days 7-8: Khao Yai National Park. Khao Yai National Park is justly regarded as one of the premier reserves in Southeast Asia, encompassing an area of 2,168 square kilometers and an altitudinal range from 1,600 feet (500 meters) to 4,249 feet (1,328 meters). Its 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 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; Brown, Great, 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. We may also find a troop of the spectacular-sounding White-handed Gibbons or one of the many species of squirrels, such as 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 in areas such as Luc Chang Cave to see hordes of Wrinkled-lipped Bats which emerge at dusk, only to be

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snatched by waiting Peregrines, Shikras and, occasionally, Oriental Hobbies. We will have another chance here to see some of the birds listed for Kaeng Krachan. In addition, we may encounter such species as: 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 Grey 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, Grey-eyed, Puff-throated, and Ashy bulbuls; six species of drongo; Common Green Magpie; Black-naped and Silver orioles (this is a rare but increasingly frequently recorded migrant); Racket-tailed Treepie; 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-bellied 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": Arctic, Greenish, Double-barred Greenish, Pale-legged, Sulphur-breasted and Thick-billed warblers; Brown and Red-breasted flycatchers; as well as 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 in addition to Blue and Eared pittas. Khao Yai is also a good place to see a relatively large number of mammals, and we will make a couple of night drives to look for such species as Tiger, Leopard, Sun Bear, Binturong, Wild Pig, Greater Mouse-Deer, Barking Deer, Sambar, Slow Loris, and Asian Elephant, in addition to nocturnal birds to mention but a few. This is a truly wonderful place and we guarantee that you will find it very difficult to leave it behind.

NIGHTS: Juladis Khao Yai Resort

February 20, Day 9: Drive to Bangkok; Afternoon Flight to Chiang Mai. From Khao Yai we will head south 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, such 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

February 21, Day 10: Morning at Hua Kong Kai; Afternoon Drive to Doi Ang Khang. This morning we will visit an area of tall, mixed, dry dipterocarp woodland where in 2000 VENT was 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 other than by 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 onsite before dawn so that we are 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 minivets, Eurasian Jay and perhaps Siberian Rubythroat. We will visit a couple of other interesting sites in the valley where we may find several rather localized, open country species such as the lovely Wire-tailed Swallow and Indochinese Bushlark.

After lunch we will head to Doi Ang Khang, stopping at a couple of sites along the way on the off chance that one or two very localized birds are at home!

NIGHT: Ang Khang Nature Resort

February 22-23, Days 11-12: 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 broadleaved 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 encounter include: Mountain Bamboo-Partridge, Speckled Wood Pigeon, Crested Finchbill, Brown-breasted Bulbul, White-browed Laughingthrush and the rather noisy but shy White-necked laughingthrushes, Red-faced Liocichla, Spot-breasted and Grey-headed parrotbills, and perhaps Giant Nuthatch. Seeing any of these species makes a red-letter day, so be alert! Other species we may encounter here include: Black Eagle; Grey-headed Parakeet; Bay, 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; Grey-backed Shrike; Japanese White-eye; and Little and Crested buntings.

NIGHT: Ang Khang Nature Resort

February 24, Day 13: Morning at Doi Ang Khang; Afternoon Drive to Doi Inthanon National Park. After lunch we will head south, making regular stops along the way for anything of interest, to the foothills of Doi Inthanon National Park. We pass through montane woodland, where we will stop frequently for birding. Later we travel through rural areas, which can also be excellent for birding, particularly for migrant buntings and pipits. Our attractive accommodations at Doi Inthanon are located in the midst of some birdy scrub and woodland and have consistently produced several good birds over the years.

NIGHT: Doi Inthanon Highland Resort

February 25-26, Days 14-15: Doi Inthanon National Park. We will spend two full days exploring the spectacular Doi Inthanon National Park. Doi Inthanon is Thailand's highest mountain with a maximum elevation of c. 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 Grey-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, including some we will have encountered previously on Doi Chiang Dao. Climbing ever higher, we will ascend through some magnificent sub-montane and eventually 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 Owlet; 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 sibilias; 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

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Fantail; Yellow-browed and Yellow-cheeked tits; Common Rosefinch, and 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, Grey-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

February 27, Day 16: Morning at Doi Inthanon; Afternoon Sightseeing and Shopping in Chiang Mai; Flight to Bangkok. On our last morning we will visit an area of dry dipterocarp woodland. The birding can be very good here until it warms up in the mid-morning, when everything just shuts down. Some of the species we hope to encounter include: Chinese Francolin (always difficult), Black Baza, Rufous-winged Buzzard, the rare White-rumped Falcon, Collared Falconet, Grey-headed Parakeet, the very attractive but rather uncommon Black-headed Woodpecker in addition to Common Flameback and the elusive but very striking White-bellied Woodpecker, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, and the very handsome Red-billed Blue Magpie. On a nearby river we will search for dapper but rather shy Black-backed Forktail.

And so our birding on this tour comes to an end. We will return to Chiang Mai for our now traditional farewell luncheon and, for those who wish, a few hours shopping among Chiang Mai's fine shops and stores. Thai Silk Batik is an absolute must, before departing on our return flight to Bangkok!

NIGHT: Amari Airport Hotel, Bangkok

February 28, Day 17: Departure for Home. Participants can depart Bangkok at any time today. Thai Airways Flight 774 is scheduled to depart Bangkok at 7:40 a.m. and arrive in Los Angeles at 9:05 a.m.

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

TOUR LEADERS: Susan Myers and David Bishop

Susan Myers has been studying the fauna of Australia and Asia for over 20 years. After her university studies in Biological Sciences, she moved to Japan where she lived for four years, learning the language and studying the natural history and culture. Once a qualified nursing practitioner, Susan has also worked as a scuba dive instructor on Australia's Great Barrier Reef in Queensland, showing international visitors this marine marvel. Her passion and enthusiasm for all aspects of natural history, especially birds, began in early childhood. She has published papers on ornithology and general ecology in a variety of scientific journals. Susan has traveled extensively through most of southern and eastern Asia and led tour groups to many destinations in this region. Her deep affection and appreciation of Asia and its wildlife, her special language skills, and her understanding of the different cultures of this region ensure an extra dimension to your tour. Susan's involvement in nature tourism now exceeds 15 years.

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 30 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, 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, has 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 **\$3945** per person in double occupancy from Bangkok. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 3 to dinner on Day 16, 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 **\$600**. 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 this tour with Cambodia (February 1-13, 2006) will receive a combined tour discount of **\$100**.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, complete the VENT registration form and return it with a deposit of \$500 (check or money order in US dollars) per person. If registering by phone, the deposit must be received within 10 days or the space will be released. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before departure date, the deposit less \$75 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 to protect yourself.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$75.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available.

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: Application forms 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 to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. 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, as are other coverages such as terrorism protection; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

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 United States citizens to enter Thailand, a United States 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

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or less, a visa is no longer required. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

CLIMATE: During the tour, you will experience a wide range of temperatures and climate, from the seventies and high 80s in the lowlands, to as low as the 30s at higher elevations. We will almost certainly encounter some rain, possibly heavy rain (unlikely except at night). 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 both from the point of view of humidity and temperature. A light 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 morning on top of Doi Chian Dao, Doi Ang Khang, Doi Inthanon and Doi Suthep are invariably very cold for the first couple of hours and a thick, warm sweater is 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. Light-weight (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 is far superior to the seemingly comfortable sneakers/training shoes.

Please remember Thailand is a predominantly Buddhist country and rather conservative about standards of dress. Women should dress modestly: no halter tops, shorts or miniskirts please.

LAUNDRY: Twenty-four hour laundry facilities are available at **most** 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 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 seek the advice of their doctor with regard to the form of prophylactic to use. There are currently three prophylaxis commonly prescribed: Meflonique (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.

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. Be prepared to pay excess baggage charges if you bring more than the **allotted** amount. 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 ad-

visible 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 is incomparably better than one huge almost impossible to lift suitcase.**

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 leaders will have spotting scopes. However, you are welcome to and **in fact 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 film, etc. Other items of use include a flashlight 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 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.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an 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 our 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.

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.

Cummings, J. & S. Martin. Thailand. Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 2001. A very useful travel bible.
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. **This or the new Robson field guide is the field guide you should carry with you on tour. It details and illustrates all the species you will encounter on the VENT Thailand tour.**

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

Robson, C. A Field Guide to the Birds of South-east Asia. New Holland Publishers, UK. 2000. **This superb new field guide is essential for anyone with even a remote interest in the birds of this exotic region. Although the Thai Guide is sufficient, this guide will provide you with much more cutting-edge detail, up to date information, and covers several species not included in the Thai Guide.**

Robson, C. 2002. A Field Guide to the Birds of Thailand. New Holland Publishers. UK. 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 the VENT 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, 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 July 29, 2006 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.