



**NORTHERN THAILAND:
SPECTACULAR RESIDENT AND MIGRANT BIRDS**

19 – 29 JANUARY 2023



The magnificent White-crowned Forktail is one of our targets on this trip.

This short tour forms a circuit around Northern Thailand, starting and ending in the northern capital city of Chiang Mai. This tour can easily be combined with our Central Thailand tour, which runs immediately before this one starts, **Central Thailand: Shorebird Spectacle and Jungle Birding** – think **Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Nordmann’s Greenshank, Chinese Egret, Blue Pitta, Coral-billed Ground Cuckoo, Silver Pheasant, and Siamese Fireback** etc. for that tour!. Our March southern Thailand tour, **Southern Thailand: 14-day Jewels of the South**, starts a few days after the conclusion of the Northern Thailand tour in 2024 and thus could also be combined with the preceding tour(s) for an exciting, comprehensive Thailand adventure. These tours have been designed to focus on the amazing birding that Thailand has to offer during the northern winter, set in a beautiful country with incredibly welcoming people and some of the best food in the world too.

We will commence our experience of Northern Thailand birding with a visit to Doi Inthanon, the country’s highest mountain. The unique set of habitats here offers us some excellent birds as well as letting us come to grips with some of the more common northern species. Special birds here may include **Rufous-throated Partridge, Mountain Bamboo Partridge, Black-tailed Crake, Spectacled Barwing, Himalayan Bluetail, Himalayan Shortwing, Dark-sided Thrush, White-crowned, Slaty-backed, and Black-backed Forktails, Long-tailed Broadbill, and Red-headed Trogon**. The dry, lowland forest at the foot of the mountain can be full of woodpeckers, and the stunning **Black-headed Woodpecker** is one of the best-looking. Other targets here will include **White-rumped Falcon, Red-billed Blue Magpie, and Blossom-headed Parakeet**.



Long-tailed Broadbill — one of two broadbill species we hope to encounter on this tour.

After our exploration of areas to the southwest of Chiang Mai we will head back north and spend the next few days birding at several mountain sites close to, and sometimes along, the Thai-Myanmar border (e.g. Doi Chiang Dao, Doi Ang Khang, and Doi Lang). These mountains

support huge numbers of overwintering migrants from China, such as numerous warblers, flycatchers, chats, thrushes, finches, and buntings, and also some very highly sought resident species like **Mrs. Hume's Pheasant**, **Hodgson's Frogmouth**, **Rusty-naped Pitta**, **Himalayan Cutia**, **Scarlet-faced Liocichla**, **Silver-eared Mesia**, **Silver-breasted** and **Long-tailed Broadbills**, and **Giant Nuthatch**. Between the mountains here much of the land is farmed for rice, and these rice paddies often also hold exceptional numbers of migrants and a few interesting residents. We will look for **Greater Painted-snipe**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Yellow-breasted Bunting**, and **Wire-tailed Swallow**.



Rusty-naped Pitta is a difficult species to connect with but one we hope to encounter during the tour.

Our final stop of this exciting trip will see us visiting the famous Mekong River along the Thai-Myanmar-Laos border in addition to the nearby Chiang Saen Lake. During our time in this area we hope to find the pretty **Small Pratincole** and, with luck, the Critically Endangered (IUCN) **Baer's Pochard** that sometimes overwinters on the vast waterbody of Chiang Saen Lake. Plenty of other overwintering wildfowl species are possible too, and there is occasionally something unexpected floating about on the lake, such as **Baikal Teal** or **Falcated Duck**! The evening here is pretty spectacular too, and we end the tour with a visit to a harrier roost where hundreds of **Pied** and **Eastern Marsh Harriers** come into the roost site, giving fantastic views as they drop in overhead as the sun disappears.

This tour visits some stunning scenery and incredibly rich forests, and we will sample some of northern Thailand's famed, delicious food during our journey. Furthermore, some of the temples that we will drive past while birding are absolutely spectacular and worth spending time to

appreciate in their own right. Several sites visited also offer very good photographic opportunities for those with an interest.

Itinerary (11 days/10 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Chiang Mai

After your afternoon arrival in Chiang Mai you will take the short transfer to our nearby hotel for the night with the rest of the day at leisure. We will have a group evening meal together. Those who are continuing from the Central Thailand tour will take their flight from Bangkok to Chiang Mai and meet up with the other tour participants at the evening meal.

Overnight: Chiang Mai

Days 2 – 4. Three full days of birding Doi Inthanon National Park

We will have an early breakfast in our hotel in Chiang Mai before leaving the city and heading straight to Doi Inthanon National Park for what is sure to be an excellent introduction to birdwatching in Northern Thailand; there are an awful lot of birds to look for here! Doi means mountain in Thai, and Doi Inthanon is Thailand's highest mountain (at 2,565 meters/8,415 feet) and supports some unique habitat in the country. As a result it is a must-visit birding spot, as it holds several species that are not found elsewhere in the country. In addition to the amazing birds and forests here the views are incredibly impressive, and on a clear day you can see for miles, and sometimes you can even be up above the clouds! There are several different roads (including one right to the top, so minimal effort is required), trails, and access points at various elevations, which will allow us to thoroughly explore the different types of forests, the unique bog habitat at the summit of the mountain, and the many rivers heading down the mountainside, which are also worth a check.

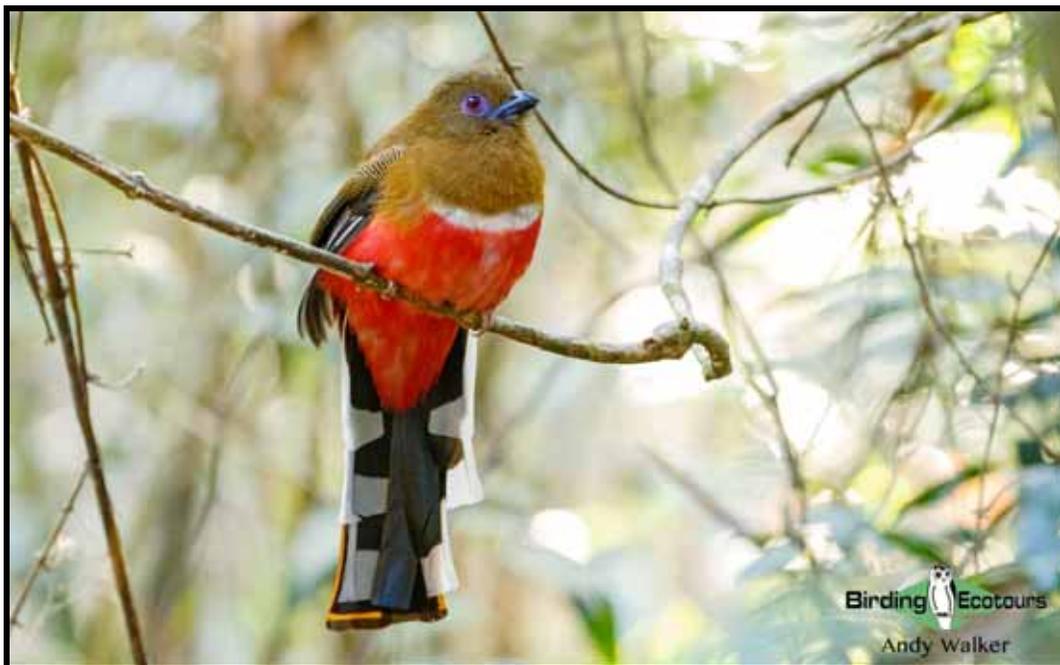
Around the lower elevations we will seek **Blossom-headed Parakeet, Siberian Rubythroat, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Stejneger's Stonechat, Asian Barred Owllet, Spotted Owllet, Brown Hawk-Owl, Large-tailed Nightjar, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Banded Bay Cuckoo, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Striated Swallow, Collared Falconet, Eurasian Jay, Black-headed Woodpecker**, and many more. As we pass rivers, waterfalls, and damp areas we will stop and look for **White-crowned, Black-backed, and Slaty-backed Forktails, Plumbeous Water Redstart, White-capped Redstart, Grey Wagtail, and Blue Whistling Thrush** (both resident and migrant subspecies occur here, one with a yellow bill, the other with a black bill, a possible future split?).

Forest birding high up and around the bog is likely to get us some great birds, and as time goes by (usually once the sun gets onto the trees and warms things up in the morning) things start to really happen here. We hope to find **Rufous-throated Partridge, Mountain Bamboo Partridge, Ashy Wood Pigeon, Black-tailed Crake, Golden-throated Barbet, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Yellow-cheeked Tit, Silver-eared Laughingthrush, Spectacled Barwing, Dark-backed Sibia, Silver-eared Mesia, Blue-winged Minla, Himalayan Shortwing, Scaly** and

Dark-sided Thrushes, Buff-barred and Ashy-throated Warblers, Slaty-backed and Snowy-browed Flycatchers, Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker, Mrs. Gould's, Black-throated, and Green-tailed Sunbirds, and Common Rosefinch.



*The vibrant **Black-throated Sunbird** is a stunner.*



*The female **Red-headed Trogon** is a beautiful bird.*

Some of the highlight birds in the middle elevations and working the trees here include **Red-headed Trogon, Long-tailed Broadbill, Maroon Oriole, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Stripe-breasted Woodpecker, Blyth's Shrike-babbler, Clicking Shrike-babbler, Hume's Treecreeper, Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, Rufous-backed Sibia, Little Pied and White-gorgeted Flycatchers, Large, Small, and Rufous-bellied Niltavas, and Rufous-winged and Yunnan Fulvettas.**

While searching on the forest floor we will try our luck with the secretive **Pygmy and Eyebrowed Wren-Babblers, Asian Stubtail, Slaty-bellied Tesia, White-tailed Robin, Lesser Shortwing, and Siberian Blue Robin.** The mountain can also turn up some interesting migrant thrushes (e.g. **Chestnut, Grey-sided, White's, and Eyebrowed Thrushes**), chats (e.g. **Himalayan Bluetail and Blue-fronted Redstart**), and warblers (e.g. **Pallas's Warbler**), and we will certainly be looking for those.

Overnight: Doi Inthanon

Day 5. Morning birding Doi Inthanon area, afternoon transfer to Chiang Dao

After the morning birding session in the Doi Inthanon area we will head north, back past Chiang Mai and up to the foot of the spectacularly scenic Doi Chiang Dao, a huge mountain that bursts out of some relatively flat rice-paddy farmland. If there is time we will check some rice paddies where in the past we have found **Brown-cheeked Rail, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Greater Painted-snipe, Eastern Barn Owl, Pied Harrier, Rufous-winged Buzzard, Grey-headed Lapwing, Pintail Snipe, Chinese Pond Heron, Siberian Rubythroat, Pied Bush Chat, Stejneger's Stonechat, Lanceolated, Pallas's Grasshopper, and Thick-billed Warblers, Long-tailed Shrike, Black-collared Starling, and Wire-tailed Swallow.**

Overnight: Chiang Dao

Day 6. High elevation birding at Doi Chiang Dao

We will spend the early morning near the top of Doi Chiang Dao, the seriously impressive massif that bursts out of the ground seemingly out of nowhere. There are numerous birds to look for here (and a lot of good ones too!), and we will time our 4x4 drive up the rough mountain road to get near the top as the sun rises. We will hope to find the gorgeous **Mrs. Hume's Pheasant** along the way, maybe even **Mountain Bamboo Partridge** too. Other possibilities up here might include **Slender-billed and Maroon Orioles, Grey-headed Parrotbill, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, Himalayan Swiftlet, Grey Treepie, Japanese Tit, Black Bulbul, Hill Prinia, Blue Rock Thrush, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Spot-winged Grosbeak, and Slaty-backed Forktail,** along with numerous warblers and migrant flycatchers.

Depending on the weather on the mountain we may have lunch up here and spend a good chunk of the afternoon continuing birding here. However, if the weather deteriorates, as is fairly common here (or if it gets too hot), we may drop to some middle and lower elevations. Luckily there are plenty of birds to find in this area.

Overnight: Chiang Dao

Day 7. Morning near Chiang Dao, afternoon Thaton rice paddies

The morning will be spent birding the forest and gardens near our accommodation, where we might find beautiful species such as **Pin-tailed Green Pigeon**, **Blue-bearded Bee-eater**, **Silver-breasted Broadbill**, or **Violet Cuckoo**.

After lunch we will transfer to our base for the next few nights in the small town of Fang. In the afternoon we will visit some nearby rice paddies, where we will look for **Small Pratincole**, **Bluethroat**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Pied Harrier**, **Yellow-breasted Bunting**, **Chestnut-eared Bunting**, **Long-tailed Shrike**, **Burmese Shrike**, **Pied Bush Chat**, **Siberian Stonechat**, **Stejneger's Stonechat**, **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler**, and other open-country birds.

Overnight: Fang



Long-tailed Shrike can be seen in the rice paddies across northern Thailand.

Day 8. Full day birding Doi Ang Khang

The mountain of Doi Ang Khang is a little farther north than Doi Chiang Dao and offers a few different species and other potential Chinese migrants from more southerly areas and is a great vagrant hotspot. We will spend a full day in the forests and beautiful gardens on the mountain, where we will search for numerous Chinese migrants and possible vagrants (warblers, thrushes, flycatchers, and chats) along with some interesting resident species.

The apparently declining **Giant Nuthatch** is our key target bird here, but there are plenty of great birds to look for. Sometimes **Rusty-naped Pitta** may show up, and if that's the case we will be sure to try and locate it. Other birds we will try to find during our time here include **Mrs. Hume's Pheasant**, **White-browed Laughingthrush**, **Black-eared Shrike-babbler**, **Striated Bulbul**, **Spot-breasted Parrotbill**, **Spectacled Barwing**, **Scarlet-faced Liocichla**, **Silver-eared**

Mesia, Black-breasted Thrush, White-capped Redstart, Black-headed Greenfinch, Siberian Rubythroat, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Hill Blue Flycatcher, Daurian Redstart, White-tailed Robin, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Streaked Wren-Babbler, Brown-breasted Bulbul, Crested Finchbill, Grey Bush Chat, Common Rosefinch, and Spot-winged Grosbeak. There could be some great photographic opportunities for birds here too.



Silver-eared Mesia can be seen in the forests of Doi Ang Khang.

In the late afternoon we will descend the mountain back to our accommodation in Fang.

Overnight: Fang

Day 9. Full day birding Doi Lang

An exciting day birding along the Thai-Myanmar (Burma) border is on the cards, with some great photographic opportunities too. Literally anything can, and does, turn up here, and we will be primed for Chinese migrants and vagrants, several of them coming to food provided by Thai and Chinese photographers.

Some of the possibilities for the day could include **Mrs. Hume's Pheasant, Hodgson's Frogmouth, Mountain Bamboo Partridge, Siberian Rubythroat, White-bellied Redstart, Burmese Shrike, Black-eared Shrike-babbler, Black-throated Bushtit, Crested Finchbill, Striated Bulbul, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Spot-breasted and Grey-headed Parrotbills, Whiskered Yuhina, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, White-browed Laughingthrush, Scarlet-faced Liocichla, Rufous-gorgeted, White-gorgeted, Sapphire, and Ultramarine Flycatchers, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Oriental Turtle Dove, Mountain Hawk-Eagle,**

Cook's Swift, Crested Bunting, and Himalayan Cutia. We have even had **Rusty-naped Pitta** hopping along the center of the road out in the open here in the middle of the day!



Mrs. Hume's Pheasant requires patience and luck in the mountains, but it is worth it!



Siberian Rubythroat is one of the many migrants we hope to encounter.



Ultramarine Flycatcher is another of the many highly sought migrants we hope to encounter.

Late in the afternoon we will drive off the mountain back to our accommodation for a well-deserved hot meal.

Overnight: Fang

Day 10. Doi Tung – Mae Fah Luang Arboretum, afternoon birding Chiang Saen area

We will leave our base in Fang for the last time and head into the mountains for one final morning session. We will most likely check in on a mountain site that has been very good for migrant thrushes (including several Thai rarities) and other wintering birds over recent years, with species such as **Scaly Thrush, Chestnut Thrush, Grey-winged Blackbird, Eyebrowed Thrush, Grey-sided Thrush, Black-breasted Thrush, Dusky Thrush, Naumann's Thrush, White-tailed Robin, Himalayan Bluetail, Blue-fronted Redstart, and Rusty-naped Pitta** all putting in an appearance.

We will arrive at our hotel near Chiang Saen for lunch and in the afternoon we will visit Chiang Saen Lake. We will hope to find an interesting range of wildfowl, and sometimes the lake holds overwintering **Baer's Pochard** (if we are very lucky). Other rare wildfowl could include **Mandarin Duck, Falcated Duck, or Baikal Teal**. More-frequently-observed species include **Ferruginous Duck, Tufted Duck, Common Pochard, Ruddy Shelduck, Garganey, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, and Indian Spot-billed Duck**. We will also look for **Striated Grassbird and Burmese Shrike**.

We end the day watching the spectacular harrier roost – made up of hundreds of **Pied Harriers** and **Eastern Marsh Harriers**. This really is a sight to behold and a great way to end the tour.

Overnight: Chiang Saen



Pied Harrier — one of the most attractive raptors in the world

Day 11. Chiang Saen area, transfer to Chiang Mai, where the tour concludes

We will have a final morning birding around the Chiang Saen Lake area before we drive back to Chiang Mai. We will look for wildfowl again, but in doing so we might also find **Bronze-winged Jacana, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Grey-headed Swamphen, Wood Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Grey-headed Lapwing, Red-wattled Lapwing, Yellow Bittern**, or some interesting migrants such as **Baikal Bush Warbler, Dusky Warbler, or Eurasian Wryneck**.

Late in the morning we will commence our drive back to the city, arriving in Chiang Mai in the midafternoon, where the tour concludes in time for your evening departure. If you do not wish to depart Chiang Mai this evening we can easily arrange additional accommodation if required. Please consult us before booking your departure flight from Chiang Mai.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 11 days
Group Size: 4 - 8
Dates: 19 - 29 January 2023
Start: Chiang Mai
End: Chiang Mai
Prices: US\$4,835 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants (2023)
Single Supplements: US\$599 (2023)

Price includes:

Meals (from evening meal on day 1 until lunch on day 11)
Bottled water (please bring a refillable water bottle)
Accommodation (based on two participants sharing)
Guiding fees
All entrance fees to national parks, nature reserves, bird blinds/hides, etc.
All ground transport while on tour
Tolls

Price excludes:

Flights
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, minibar, etc.
Alcoholic and soft drinks
Personal insurance
Gratuities