

ORNITHOLIDAYS' TOUR TO VIETNAM
Land of the Dragon People

10 – 27 November 2008



Leaders: Uthai Treesucon and Simon Boyes

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A Personal Diary

Monday, 10 November

Our group of 11 are eagerly anticipating the Vietnam adventure: we are in good time for the morning Malaysia Airlines Boeing 747 to Kuala Lumpur from Heathrow's Terminal 3. It is a 12-hour flight, mostly through the night. This loyal band have all travelled with Ornitholidays before: a remarkable total of 191 tours between them! Is this a record?

Tuesday, 11 November

At dawn we land at Kuala Lumpur, now eight hours ahead of GMT. For two hours we wait in transit, watching Black-naped Orioles and Crested Mynas near the terminal. The biggest surprise is a pair of Black Hornbills, which fly past our panoramic windows.

The connecting flight to Hanoi takes three hours, heading north. We have to change our watches one hour back. At Hanoi Airport, we very quickly collect luggage and pass through the entry formalities. Here to meet us are Uthai, our specialist birding guide from Bangkok, and Long, our rep from the Hanoi agency. Changing money into Vietnamese dong, (at the rate of 26,000 to £1), we can become dong millionaires just by changing £38!

Hung is our coach-driver for the final hour-and-a-quarter leg of our journey to Tam Dao. We start through Hanoi suburbs with bikes, mopeds and Chinese-style triangular hats (*non-la*) much in evidence. The paddyfield section seems void of birdlife, but for a few Little Egrets, Black Drongos and Tree Sparrows. After the hard times of the war, even the smallest bird became food for a hungry population. The last part is a succession of sharp bends as we climb to the hill station of Tam Dao. Hotel Mela is our base for three nights. There is time for Deborah to try out the chilly swimming pool, while the rest of us unpack and rest. Before sunset we take a short walk along the quiet road past the hotel, but only Yellow-browed Warbler gives satisfactory views.

By 1730 the light has faded, and we meet an hour later for an excellent dinner. After our long travels, an early bed is especially welcome.

Wednesday, 12 November

Breakfast is at 0530, and sunrise about 0600. It is only a short journey by road to the 'water tank trail', an old logging road where we spend the morning. First we have to clamber over rocks piled up by a landslip, but thereafter it's an easy, flat and wide trail. Birding starts slowly in the chilly conditions: the sun only hits us at 1000, as we are on the west side of the mountain.

Male Fork-tailed Sunbirds start us off, followed by a flock that consists of White-bellied Erpornis, Grey-cheeked Fulvettas and Golden Babblers. An Eye-browed Wren-Babbler performs beautifully below us in an open gully, thanks to Uthai's skilful help with playback. Next come a Pallas's Leaf Warbler and two Chestnut Bulbuls. A Red-flanked Bluetail feeds on tiny berries. Nearby is a Mugimaki Flycatcher, a migrant moving south: I discover that 'mugimaki' is simply the Japanese word for flycatcher. Olive-backed Pipits show well on the track, and Sultan Tits in the canopy. Overhead we watch an Oriental Honey Buzzard and a pair of Crested Goshawks. At the end of the road, a Streaked Spiderhunter visits a splay of orchids up in a tree, and a Spot-necked Babbler gives confiding views. There are brief views on the walk back of Golden-throated Barbet, Ratchet-tailed Tree-pie and Puff-throated Bulbul. The butterflies are also noteworthy, for their size, colours and diversity.

Lunch is of four courses, in Vietnamese style. Pumpkin soup and spring rolls are especially enjoyed. After a siesta, we set off again in the coach, down the winding road. Near the bottom, we stop at 230m, according to Uthai's altitude-meter. The habitat is open pinewood (a mature plantation) with a scrubby understorey. Here the scopes are useful for Long-tailed Shrike, Blue Whistling Thrush of the (potentially split) migrant subspecies with black bill, and a Small Niltava unusually low in the foothills. Also here are Rufescent Prinia, Striped Tit-Babbler and Blyth's Leaf Warbler. Red-billed Blue Magpies fly across the clearings in loose flocks, and give us perched views. A short walk along the road adds Ashy Drongo and the local, grey subspecies of Great Tit. Uthai points out some of the special plants like magnolia and wild jasmine.

After dinner, we outline the plans for tomorrow, and run through yesterday's and today's checklists.

Thursday, 13 November

At breakfast we sing a rousing chorus of Happy Birthday to Deborah. This morning we tackle the eastern slope of the mountain that overlooks Tam Dao town. A long series of steps leads up to the radio antenna on top, and we climb slowly up the lower half. Whistled imitations of the Collared Owlet call bring in Fork-tailed Sunbirds, Grey-cheeked Fulvettas and one or two Bianchi's Warblers. There is a welcome resting area with seats, where Grey Laughingthrushes finally give views, after many glimpses lower down. Two Dark-sided Flycatchers return many times to favourite perches, and two pairs of White-browed Shrike-Babblers are equally obliging. Other birds here include Mountain Tailorbird, Golden-throated Barbet and a briefly seen Thick-billed Pigeon.

Climbing a little higher, we come across a large flock of confiding Black-chinned Yuhinas, which strip berries from the shrubs alongside us. Chestnut-flanked White-eyes stay still enough to be enjoyed by all in the scopes; and an Ashy Bulbul with green wings perches nearby. The best moment of the return walk is a close encounter with a pair of Streaked Wren-Babblers, which show their streaks to almost all of us. A small but brilliant long-tailed butterfly is yet another successfully captured by John's camera: a dragontail.

After a satisfying lunch, there is time for a short rest before we set off again for the water tank trail. Here the emphasis is on quality rather than quantity: a few new birds give us great views. First comes a tiny member of the woodpecker family, White-browed Piculet, followed by Red-billed and Coral-billed Scimitar-Babblers below us in a patch of bamboo. Frustration with many glimpses of White-hooded Babbler turns to delight as one perches in the open: long enough for scope views. Finally, to Uthai's delight, a small flock of Short-tailed Parrotbills appears in bamboo just above us.

There is also a supporting cast to these stars: a Hill Blue Flycatcher spotted by Phil, a flock of Silver-eared Mesias, and a few Chestnut Bulebuls. A Mountain Hawk-Eagle gives only a brief view before it disappears from view. We return to base just after sunset, for hot showers, dinner, checklist and packing for tomorrow.

Friday, 14 November

...is mostly a travel day, as we leave Tam Dao after breakfast for Cuc Phuong, to the south of Hanoi. We have time for some local birding before we have gone far: we return to Wednesday afternoon's areas at the bottom of the hills. Here Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher and a soaring Ashy Woodswallow are new, as well as a chipmunk-like Himalayan Striped Squirrel. A few of the group manage brief views of Siberian Rubythroat and Rufous-fronted Babbler, but we have more luck with two different Pale-footed Bush Warblers. New *Phylloscopus* warblers are Hume's and Two-barred. On the raptor front, Jerdon's Baza, Crested Serpent Eagle and Crested Goshawk show well. The butterflies at the park headquarters are again impressive.

We arrive at the Sen Restaurant in a western suburb of Hanoi at noon. The buffet has enormous choice, but many of us start with Uthai's recommendation of the fish. We continue to practise our chopsticks skills. The restaurant overlooks a wetland where many Chinese Pond Herons and one White-breasted Waterhen make a living. Brown Shrike and Siberian Stonechat favour the margins; and a Plain Prinia pops up in the car park.

It takes nearly four hours of slow driving to reach Cuc Phuong. Hanoi seems to be one huge construction site, with a fascinating lack of road rules, except that biggest wins. The thousands of motorbikes, mopeds and bicycles all seem to survive somehow. Tending vegetable gardens in the central reservations of the dual

carriageways is one idea that may not take off back home. One late stop combines Crested Mynas on a rooftop with photographs of the dramatically vertical limestone hills. In the foreground are unusually flooded fields (with many elaborate gravestones rising from the water) and Common Kingfishers.

We check into our rooms at the Cuc Phuong National Park before dark. Hot showers and a dinner of many tasty courses bring another fascinating Vietnam day to a close.

Saturday, 15 November

After breakfast a Black Baza perches in a tree above the badminton court, but soon disappears. Black-crested and Grey-eyed Bulbuls are scoped, but not for long. Very few Vietnamese birds sit out in the open: a legacy of decades of hunting pressure.

A short drive into the national park brings us to a boardwalk, which leads to a cave used by prehistoric man. As we step out of the coach, Sultan Tit and Sulphur-breasted Warbler are in the canopy above us. From the boardwalk, Rufous-throated Fulvetta gives good views, eventually to us all, and sings tunefully. Limestone Wren-Babblers perform perfectly and immediately in response to playback, hopping from one limestone outcrop to another. Bay Woodpeckers are less helpful, but give views to some.

Along the road, we spend time on three difficult species, which require persistence, concentration and sharp eyesight to see well! They are Bar-bellied Pitta, Grey-bellied Tesia and Large Scimitar-Babbler. Uthai is surprised that the tesia, a tiny tail-less warbler, is here. Scarlet Minivets are easier to enjoy, as they are bright and conspicuous. Their feeding tree also has Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker and Black-winged Cuckooshrike. After a morning of challenging birding, a Pied Falconet perched in the open does much to restore spirits. This tiny falcon, one of the world's smallest raptors, stays for us all to enjoy in the scopes.

Today's temperature has been perfect all morning, a pleasant change from chilly Tam Dao. After lunch, some rest while others wander round the compound, finding Spotted Dove, Asian Palm Swift, Grey-crowned Warbler and Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker. The main afternoon forest walk along the road is disappointingly quiet. Highlights are another Pied Falconet, a Red-vented Barbet and a Black-naped Monarch. Near our rooms is an ornamental lake, where we finish up. White-throated Fantail and Ashy Drongo offer views to all, but a close-up Lanceolated Warbler is an arch-skulker and eludes some.

Dinner is another tasty meal with many courses. After calling the checklist, an owl-prowl produces the evocative sounds of Collared Scops (a low *wow*), two Mountain Scops (a high double whistle like a toy train) and a Collared Owlet (four whistles). John and Colin follow Uthai along a narrow, muddy trail for a close-up of the Mountain Scops, just above their heads. It doesn't stay for the rest of us, but the dancing fireflies bring some consolation. So ends a day tinged with frustration!

Sunday, 16 November

Today is much more bird-filled, beginning with Ashy Minivet and Banded Bay Cuckoo around our rooms at breakfast.

Most of the day we spend at the forest station of Bong, in the centre of the national park. As we step out of the coach, an impressive mixed flock is passing by, in no hurry. So for 20 minutes or so we can watch Lesser and Greater Yellownapes, Green-eared Barbet, Blue-winged Leafbird, Maroon Oriole, Hair-crested Drongo and Large Woodshrike. A Ratchet-tailed Tree-pie is with them too, but it keeps more hidden. The wave passes, but next arrivals are Large Cuckooshrikes, and later a mixed flock of 17 Hill Mynas mixed with 51 Gold-crested Mynas.

Uthai takes most of the group on a longer forest hike of five kilometres or so, along a narrow trail. Their tally of new birds includes Grey-throated and Scaly-crowned Babblers, Black-browed Fulvetta, White-tailed Flycatcher and Yellow-bellied Warbler, a bamboo specialist. Uthai identifies (on call) an Omei Spectacled Warbler, a recent split from Grey-crowned. Robson (2005) mentions this confusing species from Thailand and Cambodia, but it is regularly seen now wintering in Vietnam. There is brief flight view of a Red-headed Trogon too.

Meanwhile Mary, Jenifer, Rob and I saunter round the more open areas of Bong, where we can watch two Pied Falconets in the scope. A Mountain Hawk-Eagle perches in a dead tree, and a pair of Greater Racket-tailed Drongos mob a Crested Goshawk, both in flight and perched in view. There are two Striated Herons at a disused swimming pool, and a pair of Blue-and-White Flycatchers feeding on tiny berries.

After an excellent lunch in the Bong restaurant, we find Verditer Flycatcher and a gathering of Black-crested Bulbuls near the same pool. A Russet Bush Warbler rivals yesterday's Lanceolated for the title of sulkiest skulker, but still gives brief views to a few. We return to base for a half-hour rest, shortened a little by Uthai's shout of Japanese Thrush. They offer only flight views to most of us, as they dive into trees where Common (soon likely to be split as Chinese) Blackbirds are feeding. The afternoon walk takes us through open country near our rooms, and back past the Primate Rehabilitation Centre. Highlights are Stripe-throated and Sooty-headed Bulbuls in the scope, and a sweetly singing Puff-throated Babbler on a fence.

Monday, 17 November

We leave early for Hanoi Airport, and complete the journey in three and a half hours plus a short stop. Despite having to pass through the city, traffic keeps moving, and the scooter-filled streets are again a sight to behold. At the airport we discover that our flight has been cancelled due to heavy rain in Dalat. However, we change our tickets for the flight to Ho Chi Minh City, which leaves in fact a few minutes earlier than the scheduled time for the Dalat one! So, we find ourselves on a Vietnamese Airlines Boeing 777 for the flight of one hour, 40 minutes to Saigon, as it is still usually called. Serving a hot lunch to so many passengers in such a short time is a great achievement by the flight crew. Following much mobile phone conversation, a new coach has hastily been hired to drive us to Dalat. Tong is our driver, and we leave at 1330.

The early part of the journey passes through Saigon City, then endless suburbs, and finally rubber and teak plantations. A few new birds include Germain's Swiftlet, Large-billed Crow, Olive-backed Sunbird, and Indian Roller. As it gets dark, the countryside becomes more mountainous. Our Dalat guide, Trien, has arranged (by phone) a dinner at a hotel in Bao Loc, two-thirds of the way. It is an especially tasty and enjoyable meal, much appreciated. Much of the road is pot-holed, and we are slowed by recent rain. We finally pull into the Novotel in Dalat at 2215, after eight hours (not including stops) on the road from Saigon. After a day without birding stops, we look forward to tomorrow...

Tuesday, 18 November

The excellent buffet breakfast is at the Café de la Poste, immediately across the road from the hotel. Soon afterwards, we start exploring the valley of Ta Nung, close to the city. We have warmth and sunshine, a contrast with yesterday's heavy rain in Dalat. New birds crop up at regular intervals, from White-browed Scimitar-Babbler and Flavescent Bulbul to White-throated Rock-Thrush and Grey-cheeked Warbler. Sunbirds are represented by Mrs Gould's and the stunning crimson-breasted subspecies of Black-throated, which offers photos to Colin and John. Yellow-vented Flowerpecker shows well too; and we have obliging White-cheeked Laughingthrushes sat out in the open. Black-crowned Parrotbills (a recent split from Grey-headed) respond to playback for a while, but soon disappear. Overhead a Crested Serpent Eagle has a difference of opinion with a Grey-faced Buzzard, but they soon go separate ways. The butterflies are particularly impressive, often feeding on the introduced *Lantana*: they include golden birdwing and great mormon. They are much easier to photograph than Vietnamese birds!

On a more sinister note, two bird-catchers are also in the valley, using a caged Red-whiskered Bulbul to try to trap more. At least we put them off 'working' where we are. Lunch is at a restaurant in the bustling centre of Dalat: an excellent meal with lots of authentic Vietnamese dishes. Uthai, Sue and Colin walk back to the hotel, while the coach option gives the others 45 minutes rest.

We return to Ta Nung for the afternoon - there seems more activity than this morning. A Burmese Shrike starts us off, but Mountain Bulbul, Rufous-bellied Eagle, and Pin-tailed Pigeon soon follow. Red-throated, Mugimaki, Verditer and Little Pied Flycatchers feed above a well-tended vegetable garden. The obligatory skulkers are Rufous-browed Flycatcher, Spot-throated Babbler, and Siberian Blue Robin. But it is the barbets that steal the show: three species, all scoped. They appear in order of size, from the little Blue-eared, through Black-browed, to the huge-billed Red-vented. As sunset approaches, a noisy gathering of

Ashy Drongos includes a few Asian Fairy Bluebirds, all sallying to catch insects. Grey Nightjars can be seen in the half-light as we drive back, after a very enjoyable day in the field. Dinner is at another fine restaurant near the central market.

Wednesday, 19 November

As we eat breakfast in the French café, a Peregrine Falcon perches on the huge Eiffel-shaped tower across the road.

A short drive takes us through town, past fertile market gardens, to the foot of Mount Lang Biang. Until the 1950s the forests here abounded with game including tiger, deer, boar, bear and even elephant. The last king (active until 1954) was a great hunter, and the French administrators also increased the pressure on the wildlife. Once the area had been hunted out, deforestation began on a large scale. Now the mid-slopes are covered in pine plantations, and broadleaved forest only survives around 1,800m, near the summit.

We exchange coach for three jeeps for the drive to the top of the road. From here we walk through open pinewoods, with some shrubby understorey. Long-tailed Minivet, Chestnut-vented Nuthatch and Green-backed Tit appear straight away. Soon follow Slaty-backed Flycatcher, Grey-headed Woodpecker and a rather uncooperative Blue-bearded Bee-eater. A male Vietnamese Greenfinch has the unusual distinction of staying put while all 11 of us enjoy scope views. Most brilliant bird of the morning is the point-blank male Gould's Sunbird, whose blue, yellow and scarlet are intensified by the morning sun. At the end of the pine belt, half the group rest while the others continue on a steeper and muddier trail into the native forest. Their reward is Yellow-billed Nuthatch, Yellow-cheeked Tit, White-tailed Leaf Warbler, and White-browed Shrike-Babbler. Desired species like Vietnamese Cutia and Collared Laughingthrush remain in the 'heard only' category.

Lunch is at a restaurant near the lake in the centre of town. After a short rest, we set out again for Datanla, where we take a short walk near a watersports centre. Here Indian Cuckoo and Slender-billed Oriole give scope views. Nearby is a lake named Ho Tuyen Lam, (*ho* means lake). We overlook a coffee plantation dotted with persimmon (sharon fruit) bushes, with the lake as a backdrop. White-cheeked Laughingthrushes abandon their secretive nature to feed in full view on the ripe persimmons. So, for a surprising moment, does a Black-crowned Parrotbill. Easier to see are the Chinese Pond Herons, Black-collared Starlings, Black Bulbuls and Spotted Doves which are common residents here.

A brief view of Hill Prinia and 'heard only' Radde's Warbler and Bay Woodpecker are our final birds (back at the top part of Ta Nung) before drizzle and bad light stop play for the day. Trien has found another restaurant for us to try, this time in a large and smart hotel: John and I sample the red wine, from locally grown grapes. Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time.

Thursday, 20 November

After breakfast, we return to Ta Nung for a final session. The rain holds off, but a gusty wind makes birding tricky. Starting with species we have seen before, we find a stunning male White-throated Rock Thrush, near the spot where a female appeared on our first visit. There are Mugimaki Flycatchers, Pin-tailed Pigeons flying like sandgrouse, and another brief showing by a Blue-bearded Bee-eater. New findings include Black-throated Tits flying past, and a Rufous-backed Sibia. Uthai leads a commando party along a narrow trail where Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Omei Spectacled Warbler and Chestnut-crowned Warbler appear. Later, Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike and Large Niltava add to the tally. The rest of us, on easier ground, watch Streaked Spiderhunters and a Blue-and-White Flycatcher. Oriental Honey Buzzard and Bay Woodpecker fly over.

The main target bird of Ta Nung is Grey-crowned Crocias, a rare inhabitant of mountain forest in a very restricted range. For 55 years until its rediscovery in 1994, it was believed extinct. Three Crocias leave their appearance to the last moment, as the group starts to return to lunch. They appear, with Mountain Fulvettas, close to the vegetable garden where they previously refused to respond to playback! Such are the uncertainties of birding.

Lunch is at the Moulin Rouge Restaurant, not far from our hotel. The afternoon is at leisure for shopping and sightseeing, or simply resting. The market and the embroidered silk prove popular: both workshops and

finished product! Crossing the roads in the face of squadrons of scooters is interesting too. Our final Dalat dinner is in a lakeside restaurant: again enjoyed by all.

Friday, 21 November

At breakfast, the Peregrine Falcon is again up on its tower, awaiting the fly-past of its meals, in the form of House Swifts. It is a pale, northern migrant, here for the winter. We leave the comforts of the Novotel, and drive two hours south-west to Di Linh, through a landscape of pinewoods, paddy fields and coffee estates. The rice is being harvested by hand, and around Di Linh coffee beans are being dried in front of almost every property.

Today's birding area is hilltop forest on the Phan Thiet road, half an hour from Di Linh. The walking is easy along the quiet road, where we are rarely disturbed by traffic. The first of many Fairy Bluebirds and a migrating flock of Black Baza start us off. Thereafter birding is lively all day, with few quiet moments. New to us are Dark-necked Tailorbird, Speckled Piculet, Black Eagle (carrying a small snake) and Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, among much else. At last a Collared Owlet appears and gives fine scope views to all. Until now it has been heard only on seven days. Radde's Warbler is normally a skulker, but John finds us an obliging one that stays in the open, on the bank above the road, for ages.

Trien has brought a picnic with us, which we eat at a small, rustic teahouse at the top of the pass. They sell beer and some unusual soft drinks. Uthai calls the café the '7/11'. A shout from Andrew alerts us to our first long-staying Blue-bearded Bee-eater; but the secretive Black-hooded Laughingthrushes only allow a brief look.

Vietnamese Cutia is the star of the afternoon. There are three, calling in a stand of pines and eventually offering lovely views. We also enjoy Brown-rumped Minivets, Black-throated Tits and Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, all together in a loose flock. Later in the afternoon Yellow-vented Pigeons and Vernal Hanging Parrots fly past, but Black-headed Sibilas and Barred Cuckoo-Doves show themselves for longer. The forest is rich in minivets, barbets and Fairy Bluebirds, and has provided us with the easiest birding so far. At 1630, with the light still good, Uthai surprisingly calls 'enough birds!' Half an hour later, we are settling into our simple but adequate rooms in the Nhat Minh Hotel. Night soon falls, and we set out to eat at a local restaurant, not often frequented by international tourists.

Saturday, 22 November

The same restaurant produces a creditable breakfast at 0600. Soon afterwards, we collect our luggage from the hotel, and set off. Initially we have time to return to yesterday's forest along the Phan Thiet road. Having encountered most of the common species yesterday by walking, we concentrate on a few skulkier ones, such as the laughingthrushes. While the White-cheeked are happy to pose in the open, their close relatives have other ideas. We spend half an hour on a flock of Black-hooded, ending up with good views for half the group. The Orange-breasted is more secretive still, offering little more than glimpses. Red-billed Scimitar-Babblers are nearby, a catch-up for some. More obliging are Black-throated Tits swinging on a vine, a Speckled Piculet that perches in the open, and a pair of Grey-faced Tit-Babblers. Indochinese Cuckooshrike also gives views to all; but Phil is the only one to see a Chestnut-winged Cuckoo cross the road.

At 1100 we leave the forest and set out for Cat Tien, with a lunch-stop at Bao Loc. Through the afternoon, many doze while a few remain alert for Burmese Shrikes and Red-rumped Swallows. The journey is unfortunately lengthened by half an hour thanks to two wrong turnings, but eventually we arrive at the Dong Nai River, where we leave the bus. As we cross the ferry with our luggage, a fine Large Hawk Cuckoo perches up for the scopes. Here too are Lineated Barbet and Green Imperial Pigeon. Cat Tien has an altitude of 195m, and feels hotter and more humid than anywhere else on the tour.

After we have settled into our rooms, 20 or so Great Eared Nightjars fly above the canopy, with one smaller Large-tailed Nightjar a little lower. After dinner, Uthai finds us a close-up Collared Scops in the first five minutes of the owl-prowl.

Sunday, 23 November

After breakfast, the area round our rooms is lively with Black-capped Kingfisher, Common Flameback, Red-breasted Parakeet, Ruby-cheeked Sunbird and more. Two open jeeps are our transport inside the national park. The drivers are Hau and Hai – not Chinamen after all! They take us into the forest, where our first success is a pair of Black-and-Red Broadbills. One of these extravagantly coloured birds looks down at us from an open perch. In the same area are Hainan Blue Flycatcher and Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike.

Two Germain's Peacock-Pheasants call, one on each side of the road. They refuse to show themselves; but a few of the group see one retreating as we edge forward. Playback of an Asian Barred Owlet brings in a Black-naped Monarch, and a Purple-throated Sunbird that stays motionless for minutes. Banded Broadbills are less obliging than their crimson cousins, but in the end most of us have enjoyable views. The session ends with an Asian Barred Owlet in both scopes, until we decide to return for lunch.

A delicious lunch is followed by a siesta until 1500. Setting out again in the jeeps, we head west, where the habitat is as much grasslands as forest. We make a promising start with Oriental Pied Hornbills, a tree full of Ashy Woodswallows and a Lesser Coucal, when heavy rain comes on. Nearby is a foresters' sub-station, where we shelter for an hour. The green tea made for us is far too strong to drink, but it's a kind thought. Indian Rollers and Red Turtle Doves sit up on a dead tree, but the scope views are somewhat obscured by the sheets of rain. A shuttle service soon delivers us to our rooms, as these jeeps each have four inside seats for passengers. It is a disappointing end to the day, in what should be the first month of the dry season.

Monday, 24 November

Racket-tailed Tree-pie and Greater Racket-tailed Drongo share the top branches of a dead tree after breakfast. Also round the rooms are Streak-eared Bulbul and Black-naped Oriole.

Most of the morning we explore the Heaven Rapids trail on foot. A Woolly-necked Stork flies up from the track as we drive in. Our highlights include Great Iora, three sunbirds (Crimson, Purple-throated and Purple-naped), White-bellied Woodpecker and Abbott's Babbler. A Bar-bellied Pitta gives a brief view to some as it hops across a gap. Our concentration on the birds is tested this morning by leeches, which are out in numbers after yesterday's rain. We find the best solution is wearing leech socks, and applying salt to any that have latched on. Otherwise it's a case of picking them off and flicking them into the bushes!

The mammal list has two additions: Black-shanked Douc Langur and a rat-sized tree shrew. The langurs make enormous leaps in the treetops, including one carrying a small infant. A pair of Great Hornbills fly over, revealing a spectacular pied pattern to wings and tail. It is always satisfactory to see the bird illustrated on the cover of our checklists. The final success before lunch is a female Banded Kingfisher, which arrives in view in response to playback. It perches motionless for minutes, except for the slow, rhythmic raising and lowering of its crest feathers: wonderful to watch in the scopes.

Having been caught out by rain yesterday, we only have a short rest after lunch. We repeat the trip that we had to abort, to the west of camp. Ironically it turns out hot and sunny, leading to a few light-hearted comments about not being given enough siesta! We strike riches in the abundance of birdlife: numbers of rollers, bee-eaters, and doves that we have not seen previously. Raptors include Grey-faced and Rufous-winged Buzzards, and an Osprey that stays perched for an hour or more. Oriental Pratincoles fly high above us, catching insects. New to the trip are Red-wattled Lapwing, Chestnut-capped Babbler and Coppersmith Barbet. A Dusky Warbler shows briefly too. In a forested section we find Vernal Hanging Parrot feeding, and several Hair-crested Drongos. Mammals include Wild Boar and piglet, Sambar and very young fawn, and Muntjac.

On the return journey, we have instant success looking for Green Peafowl in the grassland. A magnificent male, with long crest and train, and hues of purple and blue amid the green, walks slowly enough for us to watch for a minute or two. Once we have returned to base, Uthai's playback soon whistles up Laced Woodpecker and a handsome flock of White-crested Laughingthrushes. On the dot of 1725, Great Eared Nightjars start streaming over the forest, leisurely catching insects as they go. One Large-tailed Nightjar flies over too, faster and lower: a repeat of Saturday evening.

The kitchen staff Nam and Buoi produce another much enjoyed meal. A Brown Hawk Owl, spot-lit by the ferry, and a Collared Scops Owl nearby bring one of our best days to a climax.

Tuesday, 25 November

For our last day in Cat Tien, the group splits to follow preferences: Uthai's commando team, complete with leech socks, picnic lunch and extra water, trek to Crocodile Lake. After a short jeep ride, this involves a trail of five km in each direction. The rest of us are keen to hear how they get on....

Meanwhile, the rest of us opt for an easier day, using another national park jeep for a morning and afternoon safari into the savanna. Around our rooms, both before and after breakfast, birding is interesting, with good views of Black-naped Orioles, Oriental Pied Hornbills and our first Vinous-breasted Starlings. Red-breasted Parakeets, Ashy Minivets, Great Iora and Bronzed Drongos also give a good account of themselves.

On the morning safari, a tree full of Hair-crested Drongos also holds a Vernal Hanging Parrot. We are surprised to see four Green Peafowl (briefly) in flight, and another on the ground, as late as 1000. This one is out in the sun, feeding with Red-wattled Lapwings. These peafowl are declining, endangered by habitat loss. Here around the park headquarters they must be fairly safe, but hunting pressure elsewhere in the park is still a problem. Poachers have already accounted for all the park's Tigers, and the last six Javan Rhinoceros have been captured and taken into captivity for their own safety. Among the many Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters are a few larger Blue-tailed. At the turn-around point, a Grey-faced Buzzard soars overhead, as do two Lesser Adjutant Storks. We stop for an Asian Barred Owlet, staring at us fiercely, on the way back.

Lunch is followed by a rainy siesta. By 1530, the rain has cleared enough for us to set out again on a short outing, passing Black-crowned Night Herons as we go. Racket-tailed Tree-pies, Siberian Stonechat, Muntjac, Sambar and Wild Boar (with many piglets) are also enjoyed. The highlight is seeing a flock of eight Green Peafowl roosting high in trees, including one male with magnificent tail, silhouetted against a stormy sky.

Uthai's group - John, Colin, Sue and Phil – return with tales of a good morning on the way to Crocodile Lake. Bar-bellied Pitta, Siamese Fireback and Scaly-breasted Partridge appear on the track ahead of them. Other sightings include Violet Cuckoo, Drongo Cuckoo, Heart-spotted Woodpecker, and Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker. The lake itself produces Lesser Whistling Duck, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Purple Swamphen, Bronze-winged Jacana, Grey-headed Lapwing and Stork-billed Kingfisher. After their picnic, rain sets in and makes for a soggy return to the jeep, with leeches to contend with too. Their clothes and boots may be damp, but not their spirits. We swap stories at dinner, with drinks offered by Ornitholidays. Afterwards we make a sincere vote of thanks to Uthai for all his hard work and dedication in finding us such a good selection of Vietnam's birds.

Wednesday, 26 November

A final early session at Cat Tien produces a pair of conspicuous Blue-bearded Bee-eaters, various bulbuls, drongos and flycatchers. Deborah puts us onto a Green-billed Malkoha, preening quietly in the sun.

After breakfast the ferry takes us back across the river, with the luggage-laden jeep on board too. Coach-driver Loc is there to meet us: he has been catching fish and relaxing for three days. The journey to Saigon is uneventful, with Green Bee-eater the only addition to the list. At midday we arrive at a beautifully situated riverside restaurant, where we enjoy our last Vietnamese meal while watching the various types of boats, tugs, and barges navigating the waters. From here it is only 25 minutes through busy, photogenic streets to the airport. In both Hanoi and Saigon, it is amazing how the high density of traffic, including thousands of bikes and scooters, manages to keep moving freely.

After saying goodbye to Loc and Trien, our excellent guide in the south, we check in with Malaysian Airlines. Our other, most important farewell is to Uthai, who hopes to leave this evening for Bangkok. However, Bangkok Airport is closed, due to political unrest. For four days he is stuck in Saigon; but for us, it is 'plane' sailing. The flight to Kuala Lumpur lands after an hour and three quarters, including a hot meal.

After a four-hour wait, we board the 747 for London. It takes off a little late, but makes up lost time and gains more. We land at a chilly Heathrow 40 minutes early, at 0445 on Thursday morning. Our four Malaysian flights have all been on time or early, and characterized by attentive and friendly service. Our luggage arrives quickly, and we say our goodbyes and set off on the last leg of a memorable tour, to our various homes.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to Uthai Treesucon for his dedication, hard work and sense of humour in finding so many Vietnamese birds for us: not an easy matter in a country that seems comparatively birdless to a casual observer. It involves knowing every song and call-note, and expert use of an MP3 player. Without Uthai, the list of birds seen would have been considerably smaller! Also, thanks to Long and Trien for good interpreting and helping in dining rooms; and to Hung, Tong, Loc, Hau and Hai for safe driving. Malaysian and Vietnamese Airlines also worked hard for us in various ways. Most of all, many thanks to you all for participating in this fascinating but challenging tour with enthusiasm and good humour at all times. I hope we may meet up on another Ornitholiday again soon. Thanks also to John and Colin for the photographs that illustrate this report.

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December 2008

Itinerary and Weather

Wherever possible, **shade** temperatures at dawn and midday are given.

- 11 Nov Arrive Hanoi 1310. Drive to Tam Dao. Walk from Mela Hotel.
Sunny, 17-24°C (63-75°F)
- 12 Nov Tam Dao – water tank trail; p.m. foothills near national park headquarters (n.p.h.q.).
Dry, some sun, cold early. 12-19°C (54-66°F)
- 13 Nov Tam Dao. A.m. Steps leading to radio mast; p.m. water tank trail.
Dry, sunny early, 11-17°C (52-63°F)
- 14 Nov Tam Dao to Cuc Phuong N.P., via Tam Dao n.p.h.q. and Hanoi.
Dry, sunny, 11-25°C (52-77°F)
- 15 Nov Cuc Phuong. Forest walks.
Dry, mostly sunny, 19-25°C (66-77°F)
- 16 Nov Cuc Phuong. Bong Forest Station.
Dry, mostly cloudy, 22-25°C (72-77°F)
- 17 Nov Cuc Phuong to Hanoi. Fly to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). Drive to Dalat.
Cloudy, light rain. Hanoi 22°C (72°F); HCMC 28°C (82°F)
- 18 Nov Dalat. Ta Nung Valley. Dry, mostly sunny, 18-25°C (64-77°F)
- 19 Nov Dalat. Mount Lang Biang a.m; p.m. Datanla, Ho Tuyen Lam, Ta Nung.
Some sun, some drizzle, 17-24°C (63-75°F)
- 20 Nov Dalat. Ta Nung a.m; city p.m.
Windy, some drizzle, 18-22°C (64-72°F)
- 21 Nov Dalat to Di Linh. Phan Thiet Road.
Some sun, some drizzle, 18-23°C (64-74°F)
- 22 Nov Di Linh. Phan Thiet Road. To Cat Tien N.P.
Dry, cloudy, 22-26°C (72-79°F)
- 23 Nov Cat Tien N.P.
Cloudy, heavy rain late p.m. 24-30°C (75-86°F)
- 24 Nov Cat Tien N.P.
Dry, partly sunny, 24-30°C (75-86°F)
- 25 Nov Cat Tien N.P.
Sunny a.m., rain p.m. 24-31°C (75-88°F)
- 26 Nov Cat Tien to Ho Chi Minh City. Depart 1640.
Sunny, 22-30°C (72-86°F)

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

No of days recorded	Location	Abundance Scale (max. seen on 1 day)
1 2h means seen on 1 day and heard on 2 other days	T = Tam Dao C = Cuc Phuong N.P. D = Dalat P = Phan Thiet Road Ct = Cat Tien N.P. J = On journeys	1 = 1 - 4 individuals 2 = 5 - 9 3 = 10 - 99 4 = 100 - 999

Taxonomic notes (^{1,2, etc}) follow the list. Species in **bold** are Vietnam endemics.

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Location	Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Little Grebe	3	D	J 1	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Grey Heron	1		Ct 2	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Purple Heron	2		Ct 1	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Striated (Little) Heron	1	C	1	<i>Butorides striatus</i>
Chinese Pond-Heron	10	D	Ct J 3	<i>Ardeola bacchus</i>
Eastern Cattle Egret ¹	6	D	Ct J 3	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
Great Egret	1		Ct 1	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
Little Egret	9	D	Ct J 3	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Black-crowned Night-Heron	1		Ct 2	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Woolly-necked Stork	2		Ct 1	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
Lesser Adjutant	1		Ct 1	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
Lesser Whistling-Duck	1		Ct 3	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
Osprey	3		Ct 1	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Jerdon's Baza	1	T		<i>Aviceda jerdoni</i>
Black Baza	2	T	P 2	<i>Aviceda leuphotes</i>
Oriental Honey-Buzzard	2	T D		<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
Black Kite	1	T		<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Grey-headed Fish-Eagle	1		Ct 1	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>
Crested Serpent-Eagle	4 1h	T D	Ct 1	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
Japanese Sparrowhawk	1		Ct 1	<i>Accipiter gularis</i>
Crested Goshawk	4	T C		<i>Accipiter trivirgatus</i>
Shikra	1		J 1	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
Rufous-winged Buzzard	1		Ct 1	<i>Butastur liventer</i>
Grey-faced Buzzard	4	D P	Ct 1	<i>Butastur indicus</i>
Common Buzzard	1	T		<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Black Eagle	2		P 1	<i>Ictinaetus malayensis</i>
Rufous-bellied Eagle	1	D		<i>Hieraaetus kienerii</i>
Mountain Hawk-Eagle	2	T C		<i>Spizaetus nipalensis</i>
Pied Falconet	2	C		<i>Microhierax melanoleucos</i>
Eurasian (Common) Kestrel	2		J 1	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Peregrine Falcon	3	D		<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Bar-backed Partridge	- 2h	T P		<i>Arborophila brunneopectus</i>
Chestnut-necklaced Partridge	- 1h	C		<i>Arborophila charltonii</i>
Scaly-breasted Partridge	1 2h		Ct 1	<i>Arborophila chloropus</i>
Siamese Fireback	1		Ct 1	<i>Lophura diardi</i>
Red Junglefowl	2 2h	T C	Ct 1	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
Germain's Peacock-Pheasant	1		Ct 1	<i>Polyplectron germaini</i>
Green Peafowl	2		Ct 2	<i>Pavo muticus</i>
White-breasted Waterhen	2		Ct J 1	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
Common Moorhen	1		J 3	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Purple Swamphen	1		Ct 2	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
Bronze-winged Jacana	1		Ct 1	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>
Grey-headed Lapwing	1		Ct 3	<i>Vanellus cinereus</i>
Red-wattled Lapwing	2		Ct 2	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
Common Sandpiper	1	D	Ct 2	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>

Oriental Pratincole	1						Ct	2	<i>Glareola maldivarum</i>		
Pin-tailed Pigeon	2					D		2	<i>Treron apicauda</i>		
Yellow-vented Pigeon	1						P	2	<i>Treron seimundi</i>		
Wedge-tailed Pigeon	- 1h			C				-	<i>Treron sphenura</i>		
Thick-billed Pigeon	5		T				Ct	2	<i>Treron curvirostra</i>		
Pompadour Pigeon ²	- 1h						Ct	-	<i>Treron pompadora</i>		
Pink-necked Pigeon	1						Ct	1	<i>Treron vernans</i>		
Green Imperial Pigeon	6						Ct	J	3	<i>Ducula aenea</i>	
Mountain Imperial Pigeon	2					D			1	<i>Ducula badia</i>	
Rock (Feral) Pigeon	8					D		J	3	<i>Columba livia</i>	
Barred Cuckoo-Dove	1						P		1	<i>Macropygia unchall</i>	
Red Turtle-Dove	4						Ct		4	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	
Spotted Dove	9 1h			C		D	Ct	J	3	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	
Emerald Dove	- 1h						Ct		-	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	
Red-breasted Parakeet	4 1h						Ct		3	<i>Psittacula alexandri</i>	
Vernal Hanging Parrot	5						P	Ct	1	<i>Loriculus vernalis</i>	
Chestnut-winged Cuckoo	1							P	1	<i>Clamator coromandus</i>	
Large Hawk-Cuckoo	1						Ct		1	<i>Cuculus sparveroides</i>	
Hodgson's Hawk-Cuckoo	1					D			1	<i>Cuculus fugax</i>	
Indian Cuckoo	1					D			1	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	
Banded Bay Cuckoo	3 4h			C		D	P	Ct	1	<i>Cacomantis sonneratii</i>	
Plaintive Cuckoo	1							Ct	1	<i>Cacomantis merulinus</i>	
Violet Cuckoo	1 1h							Ct	1	<i>Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus</i>	
Drongo Cuckoo	1							Ct	1	<i>Surniculus lugubris</i>	
Green-billed Malkoha	8 1h		T	C		D	P	Ct	1	<i>Phaenicophaeus tristis</i>	
Greater Coucal	2 2h							Ct	1	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	
Lesser Coucal	2							Ct	1	<i>Centropus bengalensis</i>	
Mountain Scops-Owl	1 1h			C					1	<i>Otus spilocephalus</i>	
Collared Scops-Owl	2 2h			C				Ct	1	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>	
Collared Owlet	1 8h		T	C		D	P		1	<i>Glaucidium brodiei</i>	
Asian Barred Owlet	4 1h							Ct	1	<i>Glaucidium cuculoides</i>	
Brown Hawk Owl	1 3h							Ct	1	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>	
Great Eared Nightjar	3 1h							Ct	3	<i>Eurostopodus macrotis</i>	
Grey Nightjar	1					D			1	<i>Caprimulgus indicus</i>	
Large-tailed Nightjar	3							Ct	1	<i>Caprimulgus macrurus</i>	
Germain's Swiftlet	5						P	Ct	J	2	<i>Aerodramus germani</i>
Brown-backed Needletail	1							Ct		1	<i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>
House Swift ³	4					D			4	<i>Apus nipalensis</i>	
Asian Palm Swift	1			C					2	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>	
Orange-breasted Trogon	- 2h							Ct	-	<i>Harpactes oreskios</i>	
Red-headed Trogon	1 1h			C					-	<i>Harpactes erythrocephalus</i>	
Pied Kingfisher	1							Ct	1	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	
Common Kingfisher	2		T					Ct	1	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	
Stork-billed Kingfisher	1 1h							Ct	1	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>	
Banded Kingfisher	1 2h							Ct	1	<i>Lacedo pulchella</i>	
White-throated Kingfisher	5							Ct	J	1	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
Black-capped Kingfisher	2							Ct	J	1	<i>Halcyon pileata</i>
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	5						P	Ct		4	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	1							Ct		1	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
Green Bee-eater	1								J	1	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
Blue-bearded Bee-eater	5 2h			C		D	P	Ct		1	<i>Nyctyornis athertoni</i>
Indian Roller	6							Ct	J	3	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
Dollarbird	5					D		Ct		2	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>
Oriental Pied Hornbill	3							Ct		3	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>
Great Hornbill	1							Ct		1	<i>Buceros bicornis</i>
Red-vented Barbet	4 5h			C		D	P	Ct		1	<i>Megalaima lagrandieri</i>
Lineated Barbet	3							Ct		2	<i>Megalaima lineata</i>
Green-eared Barbet	1 2h			C				Ct		1	<i>Megalaima faistricta</i>
Golden-throated Barbet	4		T			D				1	<i>Megalaima franklinii</i>
Black-browed Barbet ⁴	4 1h					D	P			1	<i>Megalaima oorti</i>
Blue-eared Barbet	3 2h					D	P	Ct		1	<i>Megalaima australis</i>

Coppersmith Barbet	1					Ct	1	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>		
Speckled Piculet	2					P	1	<i>Picumnus innominatus</i>		
White-browed Piculet	2	1h	T			Ct	1	<i>Sasia ochracea</i>		
Laced Woodpecker	2	1h				Ct	1	<i>Picus vittatus</i>		
Grey-headed Woodpecker	1					D	1	<i>Picus canus</i>		
Greater Yellownappe	2	1h		C	D	Ct	1	<i>Picus flavinucha</i>		
Lesser Yellownappe	1	1h	T	C			1	<i>Picus chlorolophus</i>		
Common Flameback	2					Ct	1	<i>Dinopium javanense</i>		
White-bellied Woodpecker	1					Ct	1	<i>Dryocopus javensis</i>		
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	1			C			1	<i>Dendrocopos canicapillus</i>		
Heart-spotted Woodpecker	1					Ct	1	<i>Hemicircus canente</i>		
Bay Woodpecker	2	4h		C	D	Ct	1	<i>Blythipicus pyrrhotis</i>		
Greater Flameback	1	3h		C		Ct	1	<i>Chrysocolaptes lucidus</i>		
Black-and-red Broadbill	1					Ct	1	<i>Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchos</i>		
Banded Broadbill	1					Ct	1	<i>Eurylaimus javanicus</i>		
Long-tailed Broadbill	-	1h		C			-	<i>Psarisomus dalhousiae</i>		
Bar-bellied Pitta	3			C		Ct	1	<i>Pitta ellioti</i>		
Barn Swallow	7					Ct	J	4	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
Red-rumped Swallow	9		T	C		P	Ct	J	3	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
Asian House-Martin	2					P	Ct	2	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>	
Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	5	1h			D	P	Ct	2	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>	
Large Woodshrike	3	1h		C		P	Ct	2	<i>Tephrodornis gularis</i>	
Large Cuckooshrike	3			C	D	P		2	<i>Coracina macei</i>	
Indochinese Cuckooshrike	2	1h			D	P		1	<i>Coracina polioptera</i>	
Black-winged Cuckooshrike	3			C			Ct	1	<i>Coracina melaschistos</i>	
Ashy Minivet	3			C			Ct	2	<i>Pericrocotus divaricatus</i>	
Brown-rumped (Swinhoe's) Minivet	4					P	Ct	1	<i>Pericrocotus cantonensis</i>	
Long-tailed Minivet	2				D	P		2	<i>Pericrocotus ethologus</i>	
Scarlet Minivet	5	1h		C	D	P	Ct	3	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>	
Common Iora	3	1h					Ct	1	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	
Great Iora	3	2h				P	Ct	1	<i>Aegithina lafresnayei</i>	
Blue-winged Leafbird	3			C		P	Ct	1	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>	
Orange-bellied Leafbird	2			C	D			1	<i>Chloropsis hardwickii</i>	
Black-crested Bulbul	11			C	D	P	Ct	3	<i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>	
Red-whiskered Bulbul	7		T	C	D			J	3	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
Sooty-headed Bulbul	3			C		P	Ct	1	<i>Pycnonotus aurigaster</i>	
Stripe-throated Bulbul	2	1h		C			Ct	1	<i>Pycnonotus finlaysoni</i>	
Flavescent Bulbul	4				D	P		3	<i>Pycnonotus flavescens</i>	
Yellow-vented Bulbul	1						Ct	1	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>	
Streak-eared Bulbul	1	1h					Ct	1	<i>Pycnonotus blanfordi</i>	
Puff-throated Bulbul	3	2h	T	C		P		1	<i>Alophoixus pallidus</i>	
Ochraceous Bulbul	1	2h					Ct	1	<i>Alophoixus ochraceus</i>	
Grey-eyed Bulbul	6	3h		C	D	P	Ct	1	<i>Iole propinqua</i>	
Mountain Bulbul	2				D			2	<i>Hypsipetes mccllellandii</i>	
Ashy Bulbul	5	1h	T		D	P		3	<i>Hemixos flavala</i>	
Chestnut Bulbul	2		T					1	<i>Hemixos castanotus</i>	
Black Bulbul	7		T	C	D	P		3	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>	
Black Drongo	3							J	3	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
Ashy Drongo	12		T	C	D	P	Ct	3	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	
Bronzed Drongo	4			C			Ct	2	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>	
Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo	2				D	P		1	<i>Dicrurus remifer</i>	
Hair-crested Drongo ⁵	6			C		P	Ct	3	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>	
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	6	1h		C			Ct	2	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	
Black-naped Oriole	5			C			Ct	2	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>	
Slender-billed Oriole	1				D			1	<i>Oriolus tenuirostris</i>	
Black-hooded Oriole	2	1h					Ct	1	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>	
Maroon Oriole	3			C		P		1	<i>Oriolus traillii</i>	
Asian Fairy-Bluebird	7			C	D	P	Ct	3	<i>Irena puella</i>	
Eurasian Jay	1				D			1	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	
Green Magpie	-	2h	T		D			-	<i>Cissa chinensis</i>	
Indochinese Green Magpie	-	1h		C				-	<i>Cissa hypoleuca</i>	

White-winged Magpie	-	2h		C					-	<i>Urocissa whiteheadi</i>
Red-billed Blue Magpie	3		T		D				2	<i>Urocissa erythrorhyncha</i>
Racket-tailed Treepie	3	1h						Ct	1	<i>Crypsirina temia</i>
Ratchet-tailed Treepie	2	1h	T	C					1	<i>Temnurus temnurus</i>
Large-billed Crow	3							J	1	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
Black-throated Tit	3				D	P			2	<i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>
Great Tit	4		T	C		P			1	<i>Parus major</i>
Green-backed Tit	1				D				2	<i>Parus monticolus</i>
Yellow-cheeked Tit ⁶	2	1h	T		D				1	<i>Parus spilonotus</i>
Sultan Tit	3		T	C					1	<i>Melanochlora sultanea</i>
Chestnut-vented Nuthatch	1				D				1	<i>Sitta nagaensis</i>
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	1	2h				P	Ct		1	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>
Yellow-billed Nuthatch	1				D				1	<i>Sitta solangiae</i>
Puff-throated Babbler	1	4h	T	C			Ct		1	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>
Spot-throated Babbler	1	3h			D	P			1	<i>Pellorneum albiventre</i>
Buff-breasted Babbler	-	4h		C			Ct		-	<i>Pellorneum tickelli</i>
Abbott's Babbler	1						Ct		1	<i>Malacocincla abbotti</i>
Scaly-crowned Babbler	2			C			Ct		1	<i>Malacopteron cinereum</i>
Large Scimitar-Babbler	1			C					1	<i>Pomatorhinus hypoleucos</i>
White-browed Scimitar-Babbler	1	3h			D	P			1	<i>Pomatorhinus schisticeps</i>
Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler	-	1h	T						-	<i>Pomatorhinus ruficollis</i>
Red-billed Scimitar-Babbler	3	1h	T				P		1	<i>Pomatorhinus ochraceiceps</i>
Coral-billed Scimitar-Babbler	1		T						1	<i>Pomatorhinus ferruginosus</i>
Limestone Wren-Babbler	1	1h		C					1	<i>Napothera crispifrons</i>
Streaked Wren-Babbler	1	1h	T	C					1	<i>Napothera brevicaudata</i>
Eye-browed Wren-Babbler	1	2h	T	C					1	<i>Napothera epilepidota</i>
Pygmy Wren-Babbler	-	1h			D				-	<i>Pnoepyga pusilla</i>
Rufous-fronted Babbler	1		T						1	<i>Stachyris rufifrons</i>
Grey-throated Babbler	2	1h		C	D				1	<i>Stachyris nigriceps</i>
Rufous-capped Babbler	-	1h					P		-	<i>Stachyris ruficeps</i>
Golden Babbler	2		T						2	<i>Stachyris chrysaesa</i>
Spot-necked Babbler	1	4h	T	C					1	<i>Stachyris striolata</i>
Striped Tit-Babbler	7	1h	T	C		P	Ct		2	<i>Macronous gularis</i>
Grey-faced Tit Babbler	4	1h				P	Ct		1	<i>Macronous kelleyi</i>
Chestnut-capped Babbler	1	1h	T				Ct		2	<i>Timalia pileata</i>
White-crested Laughingthrush	2	4h		C		P	Ct		2	<i>Garrulax leucolophus</i>
Black-hooded Laughingthrush	2					P			2	<i>Garrulax milleti</i>
Grey Laughingthrush	1	1h	T						3	<i>Garrulax maesi</i>
Black-throated Laughingthrush	1		T						1	<i>Garrulax chinensis</i>
White-cheeked Laughingthrush	5				D	P			3	<i>Garrulax vassali</i>
Orange-breasted Laughingthrush	1	2h			D	P			1	<i>Garrulax annamensis</i>
Collared Laughingthrush	-	1h			D				-	<i>Garrulax yersini</i>
Silver-eared Mesia	2	1h	T						3	<i>Leiothrix argentauris</i>
Vietnamese Cutia ⁷	1	1h			D	P			1	<i>Cutia legalleni</i>
White-browed Shrike-Babbler	3	1h	T		D	P			1	<i>Pteruthius flaviscapis</i>
White-hooded Babbler	1		T						1	<i>Gampsorhynchus rufulus</i>
Rufous-throated Fulvetta	1			C					1	<i>Alcippe rufogularis</i>
Black-browed Fulvetta	1	1h		C					1	<i>Alcippe grotei</i>
Mountain Fulvetta	3	1h			D	P			3	<i>Alcippe peracensis</i>
Grey-cheeked Fulvetta	2		T						2	<i>Alcippe morrisonia</i>
Grey-crowned Crocias	1	1h			D				1	<i>Crocias langbianis</i>
Rufous-backed Sibia ⁸	1				D				1	<i>Heterophasia annectens</i>
Black-headed Sibia	2					P			2	<i>Heterophasia desgodinsi</i>
Black-chinned Yuhina	2		T			P			3	<i>Yuhina nigrimenta</i>
White-bellied Erpornis ⁹	7	1h	T	C	D	P	Ct		2	<i>Erpornis zantholeuca</i>
Short-tailed Parrotbill	1		T						2	<i>Paradoxornis davidianus</i>
Black-crowned Parrotbill ¹⁰	4				D	P			1	<i>Paradoxornis margaritae</i>
Lesser Shortwing	-	5h	T		D				-	<i>Brachypteryx leucophrys</i>
Siberian Rubythroat	1	9h	T	C	D	P	Ct		1	<i>Luscinia calliope</i>
Siberian Blue Robin	1	6h		C	D	P	Ct		1	<i>Luscinia cyane</i>
Orange-flanked Bush-Robin ¹¹	2		T		D				1	<i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>

Oriental Magpie Robin	4	T	C			Ct	1	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	
White-rumped Shama	2	5h	T	C		Ct	1	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	
Spotted Forktail	1				D		1	<i>Enicurus maculatus</i>	
Siberian Stonechat	2					Ct	J	1	<i>Saxicola maura</i>
Pied Bushchat	2					Ct		1	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
White-throated Rock Thrush	2				D			1	<i>Monticola gularis</i>
Blue Rock Thrush	4			C			J	1	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
Blue Whistling Thrush ¹²	1	1h	T					1	<i>Myophonus caeruleus</i>
Japanese Thrush	1			C				1	<i>Turdus cardis</i>
Common Blackbird ¹³	3		T	C				1	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Eye-browed Thrush	1				D			1	<i>Turdus obscurus</i>
Grey-crowned Warbler	3		T	C				1	<i>Seicercus tephrocephalus</i>
Omei Spectacled Warbler ¹⁴	2			C	D			1	<i>Seicercus omeiensis</i>
Plain-tailed Warbler	-	2h				P		-	<i>Seicercus soror</i>
Bianchi's Warbler	2	2h	T	C				1	<i>Seicercus valentini</i>
Grey-cheeked Warbler	3				D			1	<i>Seicercus poliogenys</i>
Chestnut-crowned Warbler	1				D			1	<i>Seicercus castaniceps</i>
Yellow-bellied Warbler	2			C		Ct		1	<i>Abroscopus superciliaris</i>
Dusky Warbler	1					Ct		1	<i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>
Radde's Warbler	1	1h			D	P		1	<i>Phylloscopus schwarzi</i>
Yellow-browed (Inornate) Warbler	14		T	C	D	P	Ct	3	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>
Pallas's Warbler	2		T					1	<i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i>
Hume's Warbler	1		T					1	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>
Arctic Warbler	1					Ct		1	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>
Two-barred Warbler ¹⁵	2	1h	T			Ct		1	<i>Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus</i>
Pale-legged Leaf-Warbler	1	2h				Ct		1	<i>Phylloscopus tenellipes</i>
Blyth's Leaf-Warbler	4		T		D			1	<i>Phylloscopus reguloides</i>
White-tailed Leaf-Warbler	2				D			1	<i>Phylloscopus davisoni</i>
Sulphur-breasted Warbler ¹⁶	1			C				1	<i>Phylloscopus ricketti</i>
Thick-billed Warbler	-	1h				Ct		-	<i>Acrocephalus aedon</i>
Lanceolated Warbler	1	1h		C		Ct		1	<i>Locustella lanceolata</i>
Common Tailorbird	8		T	C		Ct		1	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
Dark-necked Tailorbird	5	1h			D	P	Ct	1	<i>Orthotomus atrogularis</i>
Mountain Tailorbird	1	2h	T		D			1	<i>Orthotomus cuculatus</i>
Grey-breasted Prinia	1					Ct		1	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
Rufescent Prinia	3		T	C				1	<i>Prinia rufescens</i>
Plain Prinia	3					Ct	J	1	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
Yellow-bellied Prinia	-	1h				Ct		-	<i>Prinia flaviventris</i>
Hill Prinia	1	3h			D	P		1	<i>Prinia atrogularis</i>
Grey-bellied Tesia	1	2h		C	D			1	<i>Tesia cyaniventer</i>
Asian Stubtail	-	1h		C				-	<i>Urosphena squameiceps</i>
Pale-footed Bush-Warbler	1	1h	T					1	<i>Cettia pallidipes</i>
Russet Bush-Warbler	1			C				1	<i>Bradypterus mandelli</i>
Dark-sided (Siberian) Flycatcher	1		T					1	<i>Muscicapa sibirica</i>
Asian Brown Flycatcher	4	1h	T			Ct		1	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>
Verditer Flycatcher	9			C	D	P	Ct	2	<i>Eumyias thalassina</i>
Mugimaki Flycatcher	7		T		D	P	Ct	2	<i>Ficedula mugimaki</i>
Slaty-backed Flycatcher	1				D			1	<i>Ficedula hodgsonii</i>
Taiga (Red-throated) Flycatcher ¹⁷	7				D	P	Ct	1	<i>Ficedula albicilla</i>
Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher	1		T					1	<i>Ficedula strophiate</i>
Rufous-browed Flycatcher	1				D			1	<i>Ficedula solitarius</i>
Little Pied Flycatcher	5				D	P		1	<i>Ficedula westermanni</i>
Blue-and-White Flycatcher	5			C	D			1	<i>Cyanoptila cyanomelana</i>
Large Niltava	1				D			1	<i>Niltava grandis</i>
Small Niltava	1		T					1	<i>Niltava macgrigoriae</i>
White-tailed Flycatcher	1	2h	T	C				1	<i>Cyornis concreta</i>
Hainan Blue Flycatcher	3					Ct		1	<i>Cyornis hainanus</i>
Pale Blue Flycatcher	-	1h				P		-	<i>Cyornis unicolor</i>
Hill Blue Flycatcher	1		T					1	<i>Cyornis banyumas</i>
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	-	2h				Ct		-	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher	7		T	C	D	P		1	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>

White-throated Fantail	5		C	D	P		1	<i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>		
Black-naped Monarch	4		C			Ct	2	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>		
Asian Paradise Flycatcher	1	1h				Ct	1	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>		
White Wagtail	1						J	1	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	
Grey Wagtail	11		T	D	P	Ct	1	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		
Olive-backed Pipit	5		T	C			1	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>		
Paddyfield Pipit	2			D			J	1	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>	
Ashy Wood-Swallow	6		T			Ct	J	3	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>	
Brown Shrike	6			C	D	Ct	J	1	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	
Burmese Shrike	6				D		J	2	<i>Lanius colluriooides</i>	
Long-tailed Shrike	4		T	C				1	<i>Lanius schach</i>	
Black-collared Starling	4				D		J	2	<i>Sturnus nigricollis</i>	
Vinous-breasted Starling	1					Ct		1	<i>Sturnus burmannicus</i>	
Common Myna	3				D		J	1	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	
Crested Myna	1						J	1	<i>Acridotheres cristatellus</i>	
Golden-crested Myna	1			C				3	<i>Ampeliceps coronatus</i>	
Hill Myna	2			C			Ct	3	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>	
Ruby-cheeked Sunbird	1						Ct	1	<i>Anthreptes singalensis</i>	
Purple-naped Sunbird	2	2h		C			Ct	1	<i>Hypogramma hypogrammicum</i>	
Purple-throated Sunbird	2						Ct	1	<i>Nectarinia sperata</i>	
Olive-backed Sunbird	5				D		Ct	J	1	<i>Nectarinia jugularis</i>
Purple Sunbird	1						Ct	1	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	
(Mrs) Gould's Sunbird	3				D			1	<i>Aethopyga gouldiae</i>	
Fork-tailed Sunbird	5	1h	T	C				2	<i>Aethopyga christinae</i>	
Black-throated Sunbird	4				D	P		1	<i>Aethopyga saturata</i>	
Crimson Sunbird	1						Ct	1	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>	
Little Spiderhunter	4					P	Ct	1	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>	
Streaked Spiderhunter	6	3h	T	C	D	P		1	<i>Arachnothera magna</i>	
Thick-billed Flowerpecker	-	1h					Ct	-	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>	
Yellow-vented Flowerpecker	2				D			1	<i>Dicaeum chrysorrheum</i>	
Fire-breasted Flowerpecker ¹⁸	6		T		D	P		1	<i>Dicaeum ignipectus</i>	
Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker	2	1h		C			Ct	1	<i>Dicaeum cruentatum</i>	
Chestnut-flanked White-eye	1		T					2	<i>Zosterops erythropleurus</i>	
Oriental White-eye	8		T	C	D	P	Ct	3	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>	
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	9				D			J	3	<i>Passer montanus</i>
White-rumped Munia	6		T		D	P	Ct	2	<i>Lonchura striata</i>	
Vietnamese Greenfinch	2				D	P		2	<i>Carduelis monguilloti</i>	
Red Crossbill ¹⁹	-	1h			D			-	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	

Taxonomic Notes

- 1 This treatment follows Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), splitting Cattle Egret into Eastern (*B. coromandus*) and Western (*B. ibis*).
- 2 The various taxa within the *T. pompadora* complex are considered by Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) to be sufficiently morphologically distinct to warrant a four-way split – Sri Lankan, Andaman, Grey-headed and Pompadour Green Pigeons. The Vietnam species would fall under the *T. phayrei* species.
- 3 According to *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (del Hoyo *et al.*, 2007 – hereafter referred to as *HBW*), House Swifts in South-east Asia are split as *A. nipalensis*. *A. affinis* (Little Swift) is found in Africa and Lowland India.
- 4 Collar (2006) has proposed that Black-browed Barbet be split into three separate species – Taiwan Barbet *M. nuchalis*, Chinese Barbet *M. faber* and Black-browed Barbet *M. oorti*. The population of *M. oorti* is found in Indochina and Malaysia and Sumatra in two disjunct populations. The form in Indochina belongs to the endemic subspecies *M. o. annamensis*.
- 5 Hair-crested Drongo (*D. hottentottus*) is now split from Spangled Drongo (*D. bracteatus*) of Australia, which never has a ‘hair crest.’
- 6 Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) have proposed that the *P. spilonotus* complex in the Indian subcontinent be split into three separate species. Vietnamese forms are also likely to be split.
- 7 Collar (2006) proposed that Cutia *C. nipalensis* should be split into two species – Himalayan Cutia *C. nipalensis* and Vietnamese Cutia *C. legalleni* based on differences in morphology (barred underparts, shorter wings, longer tail, distinct white outer tail tips, darker rufous upperparts in the male). This has been adopted in *HBW*.
- 8 A very distinct form is found in Vietnam and may possibly be split in the future.
- 9 It is highly likely that the babblers are not one homogeneous group and in fact consist of a number of disparate families (for example Cibois, A. 2003) Recent work on this species even suggests that it is not related to any of the other groups treated as babblers in the current taxonomy. Most surprisingly initial studies suggest that White-bellied Yuhina should be placed with the corvids! Therefore, it must be removed from the *Yuhina* genus and the original genus *Erpornis* has been reinstated (Cibois, A., *et al.* 2002).
- 10 Split from Grey-headed Parrotbill in *HBW*.
- 11 Also commonly called Red-flanked Bluetail.
- 12 The Blue Whistling Thrush seen in Tam Dao had a dark bill, typical of the wintering Chinese population. This is likely to be split in future as Chinese Whistling Thrush (U. Treesucon, *pers. com.*), though not mentioned in *HBW*.
- 13 Migrants in Vietnam are considered to be of the form *mandarinus*, which is significantly larger-looking and more powerful, has a longer cleft tail. Some males are scaly on the upperparts and this form shows significantly reduced dimorphism. Additionally *mandarinus* shows a bare yellow patch in front of, and behind, the eye and seems to have a largely yellow or yellowish bill at all ages. They show a variable amount of yellow on the legs, with typically yellow ‘knees’ (*merula* has blackish or dark grey legs at all ages, and juveniles and first winter males show largely dark bills). The form *mandarinus* has been put forward as a split, likely to be called Chinese Blackbird.
- 14 Omei Warbler (or Omei Spectacled Warbler) is a recent split, mentioned in Robson (2005) as recorded in Thailand and Cambodia. It is now also found regularly in Vietnam, (U. Treesucon, *pers. com.*).
- 15 *P. plumbeitarsus* is treated as a race of Greenish Warbler (*P. trochiloides*) in many publications.
- 16 The form in Vietnam is resident and a future possible split.
- 17 Red-breasted Flycatcher of Europe (*F. parva*) is now usually split: Eastern forms are treated as *P. albicilla*, and commonly called Taiga or Red-throated.
- 18 Also known as Buff-bellied Flowerpecker.
- 19 The form found in Vietnam, often called ‘Vietnamese’ Crossbill, may possibly be split in the future.

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- del Hoyo, J., *et al.* (various dates) *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, Lynx Edicions, Barcelona
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Species seen at Kuala Lumpur Airport, Malaysia, on 11 November.

Scientific names are added for those species not seen in Vietnam.

House Swift, Black Hornbill (*Anthracoceros malayanus*), Dusky Crag Martin, (*Hirundo concolor*), Barn Swallow, Black-naped Oriole, House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Asian Glossy Starling (*Aplonis panayensis*), Common Myna, Crested Myna, Olive-backed Sunbird.

MAMMALS

Northern Smooth-tailed Treeshrew	1			Ct	1	<i>Dendrogale murina</i>
Buff-cheeked Gibbon	- 1h			Ct	-	<i>Hylobates gabriellae</i>
Long-tailed Macaque	3			Ct	2	<i>Macaca fascicularis</i>
Northern Pig-tailed Macaque	- 1h			Ct	-	<i>Macaca leonina</i>
Black-shanked Douc Langur	2 1h			Ct	1	<i>Pygathrix nigripes</i>
Mountain Red-bellied Squirrel	1	T			1	<i>Callosciurus pallassii</i>
Pallas's Squirrel	4		C	Ct	1	<i>Callosciurus erythraeus</i>
Red-cheeked Ground Squirrel	1 1h	T	C		1	<i>Dremomys rufigenis</i>
Himalayan Striped Squirrel	3		C		2	<i>Tamiops macclllandii</i>
Cambodian Striped Squirrel	2			Ct	1	<i>Tamiops rodolphei</i>
Javan Mongoose	1			Ct	1	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>
Wild Boar	2			Ct	2	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
Sambar	2			Ct	1	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
Common Muntjac	2			Ct	1	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>

OTHER ANIMALS included Siamese Crocodile, Green Pit Viper, and various lizards, skinks and geckos. One lizard was a flying lizard (gliding agamid), *Draco sp.*

This list represents those birds and other animals seen by party members of this tour.



Long-tailed Shrike



Butterfly – Junonia almana



Butterfly – Lamproterea curius



Butterfly – Prioneris sita



Crocodile Lake



Cuc Phuong Forest



The group



**Front cover: Black-throated Sunbird
Photographs © Colin Campbell, John Dodd and Simon Boyes**