Full Detailed Itinerary - Philippines: Endangered Endemics

Day 1: ARRIVAL in Manila (Luzon)

Following your arrival in the Philippine capital you will be picked up and transferred to a comfortable hotel in Manila. There is no birding on this day, and so you are free to arrive when you wish. The first activity will be a welcome dinner at the hotel in the evening, so please try and arrive before that.

Day 2: Manila Park to Los Banos, (Luzon)

The tour begins with an early departure from Manila to visit La Mesa Ecopark in nearby Quezon City. This site is particularly good for the endemic Ashy Thrush, and we will look for this and several other species including an oddly-named parrot, the Guaiabero, Philippine Woodpecker, Philippine Pied-Fantail and if we are really lucky, Hooded or Blue-breasted Pittas. After a few hours birding there, we travel southeast to Mount Makiling, where there should be some time in the afternoon to search for grassland species like Barred Buttonquail, and the Luzon endemic, Spotted Buttonquail. We spend the next two nights in the nearby university town of Los Banos, famed for its natural hot springs.

Day 3: Mount Makiling, (Luzon)

Some of the best-looking birds in the Philippines can be found on the flanks of this mountain that borders the chilled-out university at Makiling. Crazy-looking Scale-feathered and Red-crested Malkohas roam the forests, and the beautiful endemic Spotted Kingfisher can often be found too. The extremely shy Luzon Bleeding-heart has been found here, although quiet streams around the mountain are more reliable for the endemic Indigo-banded Kingfisher. We should be able to do some owling here and will target Philippine Scops-Owl and Luzon Boobook. After a day birding the mountain and surrounding campus we will return to Los Banos for the night.

Day 4: Mount Makiling to Infanta, (Luzon)

We’ll have more time this morning to continue scouring Mount Makiling for species like Indigo-banded and Spotted Kingfishers, and another bird confined to Luzon, Gray-backed Tailorbird. As the morning heats up, we will head to Infanta where we spend the next two nights in a fairly basic hotel.

Day 5: Infanta, (Luzon)

The endemic Whiskered Pitta used to be a bird only seen by doing a very tough hike. In recent years, it has been regularly seen in forest along the road near the town of Infanta, and we have a decent chance to see it. Other birds we will look for along the Marilaque Highway include Flame-breasted Fruit-Dove, Philippine Serpent-Eagle, Rufous Hornbill, Philippine Hanging-Parrot, Blue-headed Fantail, Yellow-wattled Bulbul and Philippine Fairy-Bluebird.

Day 6: Subic Bay via Candaba Marsh, (Luzon)

We’ll have more time this morning to continue scouring the Infanta area for targets. As the morning heats up we will head to a nationally important wetland area, where a number of freshwater pools and marshes play

host to massive numbers of ducks and wetland species. Top among them is the uncommon Philippine Duck, while Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Barred and Buff-banded Rails, White-browed Crake, Yellow and Cinnamon Bitterns, and our first shorebirds may also be in attendance. The scattered trees surrounding the marsh can also hold Island Collared Dove. Next, we head to the steamy lowland jungles surrounding the naval base at Subic. Here we will be searching for Luzon specialties like Green Raquet-tail, White-lored Oriole, Blackish Cuckooshrike and other more widespread endemics like Philippine Falconet and Philippine Woodpecker.

Day 7: Subic Bay, (Luzon)

We have a full day birding the forest-covered naval base at Subic, giving us time to search for more of Luzon's lowland species like Rufous Coucal, Northern Sooty-Woodpecker, Yellow-breasted Fruit-Dove, and White-fronted Tit. We may also get our first taste of the endemic Philippine Creepers (a unique genus of uncertain familial affinities), as Stripe-sided Rhabdornis is regular in these lowland forests.

Day 8: Subic Bay to Manila, (Luzon)

We have a final morning checking the lowland jungle at Subic, giving us further time to search for Luzon´s lowland species. Other species encountered may include Blue-naped Parrot, Luzon Hornbill, Luzon Flameback and Purple Needletail. Then we will head back to Manila for an overnight stay.

Days 9: Manila, (Luzon) to Sabang, (Palawan)

After a short flight to Puerto Princesa, the capital of the lushly forested island of Palawan, we drive towards the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River NP. There will be some time along the way to start searching for our first island specialties, like Palawan Tit, and the powder Blue Paradise-Flycatcher. We will head to a new site that has been increasingly reliable for Philippine Cockatoo too. This extremely rare and endangered bird will require some luck to see, but we have had considerable success in the past. Our next two nights will be spent in the beach town of Sabang, with turquoise waters offshore, and bird rich rainforest running down to the shoreline. We will search at dusk for some special Palawan night birds, including Palawan Frogmouth and Palawan Scops-Owl, either around the resort or close by along the approach road.

Day 10: Puerto Princesa Subterranean River NP, (Palawan)

The birding on Palawan can be surprisingly easy, and we should find many of the island endemics including Palawan Hornbill, Sulphur-bellied Bulbul, and Palawan Blue Flycatcher without too much trouble. Others may require some luck, like the dazzling, very rarely seen, Palawan Peacock-Pheasant. This lush national park is one of the most scenic spots on the tour, with its white sandy beaches that are flanked behind by towering limestone peaks cloaked in rainforest. The national park has a long list of birds that includes almost all of the Palawan endemics that are our main focus, including Blue Paradise-Flycatcher, Palawan Tit. Ashy-headed Babbler, White-vented Shama, Palawan Flowerpecker, and Yellow-throated Leafbird. However, the park offers our best chance of another choice Palawan specialty, the striking Falcated Wren-Babbler. Along with the endemics we will seek out a host of other Southeast Asian species like Blue-breasted and Hooded Pittas, Oriental Hobby, the monstrous Great Slaty Woodpecker and Velvet-fronted Nuthatch. The national park is also home to a bunch of different kingfishers including Blue-eared, Rufous-backed and Stork-billed Kingfishers. After a morning in the park we will spend the afternoon birding the forest-lined road nearby.

Day 11: Sabang to Puerto Princesa, (Palawan)

We will have a final morning to look for any remaining targets, whether it be in the park, or on the approach road. In the afternoon we will travel back towards Puerto Princesa city slowly birding for Copper-throated

Sunbird and anything else we might still need. We may also visit a Puerto Princesa beach late afternoon if desired for Chinese Egret and other shorebirds if the tides are good for this.

Day 12: Balsahan Trail, (Palawan) to Manila, (Luzon)

The Balsahan Trail is a quiet track that runs through rainforest, which offers our best chance for the endemic Palawan (Melodious) Babbler and the reclusive Palawan Flycatcher, both of which are absent from St. Paul's. Although these will be our main quarries, Balsahan has plenty of other species, including most of the Palawan specialties should we still be missing any. It also provides more chances for Palawan Scops-Owl, Hooded Pitta, and many others. Occasionally Ruddy Kingfisher can also be found there too. At the end of the day we will again return to the Palawan capital Puerto Princesa, where we will catch a flight back to Manila, where we connect with international flights home or start the post-tour extension.

Visayas Extension

Extension Information

This visits the central Philippine Visayan islands of Negros, Cebu, and Bohol. While diversity is limited, spectacular local endemics include Flame-templed Babbler, White-winged Cuckooshrike, Yellow-breasted Tailorbird, the amazing Visayan Broadbill, and an incredibly cute primate, the goggle-eyed Bohol Tarsier. A short stop in Cebu ought to reveal the endemic Black Shama.

Day 1: Flight from Manila, (Luzon) to Tagbilaran and Rajah Sikatuna NP, (Bohol)

Today we start our Visayan adventure by flying from Manila to Tagbilaran, on the island of Bohol, then drive to Rajah Sikatuna NP, where we will start our Philippine birding in earnest.

Day 2: Rajah Sikatuna NP, (Bohol)

We will have a full day to explore the Rajah Sikatuna National Park. In the early hours of dawn, we might hear the distinctive whistles of a Rufous-lored Kingfisher. Bohol now has its own endemic species, Bohol Sunbird, after the decorosa race of Metallic-winged Sunbird was elevated to species status. There are also several species endemic to Bohol, Leyte & Samar, which include Samar Hornbill, Northern Silvery Kingfisher, Visayan Broadbill, Yellow-breasted Tailorbird, and Visayan Blue Fantail. We will search for all of these, along with several Bohol endemic subspecies including local races of Striated Wren-Babbler, Yellow-bellied Whistler, Black-crowned Babbler and Rufous-tailed Flycatcher, plus some other juicy targets like Everett's Scops-Owl and the stunning Azure-breasted Pitta.

Day 3: Rajah Sikatuna N.P. (Bohol) to Tarsier Sanctuary and ferry to Cebu City, (Cebu)

After a final morning of birding on Bohol looking for any remaining targets, we will take the ferry across to Cebu where we will spend the night.

Day 4: Tabunan, (Cebu) to Bacolod, (Negros)

On our morning of birding on Cebu, we will start early and search for the island endemic Cebu Boobook before dawn. The most important site to visit today will be Tabunan, a tiny relict patch of forest high in the hills above Cebu City. We will look for the endemic Black Shama. Other birds we might find in the area include Streak-breasted Bulbul, Mangrove Blue Flycatcher, White-vented Whistler, Magnificent Sunbird, and the Cebu endemic subspecies of Coppersmith Barbet. In the afternoon, we will fly to Bacolod (on the island of Negros), where we will spend the next two nights. We may have time for some local birding, and could find Visayan Bulbul, Yellowish White-eye and Philippine Tailorbird.

Day 5: Mount Kanlaon, (Negros)

We have a full day to explore Mount Kanlaon, one of the premier birding sites on Negros. Almost all of the Negros endemics can be found on this mountain where the relative inaccessibility of the site has meant that some forest has been spared. This also means that we have a long walk to get to good habitat and this will require an early start.
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We aim to get to the forest in time to give ourselves a chance for the Negros Scops-Owl pre-dawn. Today we will also be focusing on several restricted-range endemics including Flame-templed Babbler and White-winged Cuckooshrike, although we will also be looking for Visayan Hornbill, Visayan Fantail, Lemon-throated Leaf Warbler, White-vented Whistler and the white-bellied form of Balicassiao. In the afternoon, we may visit the hot spring resort at Mambukal in search of the rare Dimorphic Dwarf-Kingfisher and the diminutive Black-belted Flowerpecker, which is endemic to Negros and Panay.
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Day 6: Flight to Manila, (Luzon) for departure

Depending on flight schedules, we may have time to visit the Gawahon Ecopark where we will search for the localized endemics Negros Jungle-Flycatcher, White-vented Whistler and Visayan Fantail. We will then fly back to Manila to begin the main tour.

Mindanao Extension

Extension Information

The massive southern island of Mindanao is loaded with endemics, not least the impressive Philippine Eagle. Other specialties inclide Cinnamon Ibon, a potential family level split, the high altitude Apo Sunbird and Apo Mynah, and the elusive Bukidnon Woodcock. In addition to that, in the Philippines there is always another series of endemic nightbirds, in this case Philippine Frogmouth, Chocolate Boobook, Mindanao Scops-Owl, and Giant Scops-Owl!

Day 1: Manila to Mount Kitanglad, (Mindanao)

We depart Manila early and fly to Cagayan de Oro (Mindanao), from there we'll travel into the mountains, and the lair of the fabled Philippine Eagle. We will take a two-hour drive to the tiny village of Dalwangan, from where we will begin our hike up to our tented camp on Mount Kitanglad. The hike takes around an hour and a half, and we will be accompanied by horses that will carry our luggage up the mountain. Mount Kitanglad is one of the most important sites in the Philippines and our base for the next three nights. We will begin birding the mountain in the afternoon searching for Mindanao specialties like Cinnamon Ibon and Stripe-breasted Rhabdornis. As we camp where the birds are, we have a shot at some of the very special

night birds that haunt the mountain, including Philippine Frogmouth, Mindanao and Giant Scops-Owls, and the recently described Bukidnon Woodcock.

Day 2: Mount Kitanglad, (Mindanao)

We have two full days to explore the mountain and will cover a range of elevations searching for a number of Mindanao mountain specialties like Apo Sunbird, McGregor's Cuckooshrike, Mindanao Raquet-tail, and a whole bunch of other new birds. The ultimate focus though will be to chase down one of the world's rarest raptors, the monstrous Philippine Eagle, which competes with South America's Harpy for position as the world's largest eagle, for which this remains one of the most reliable sites on Earth. Some time will be spent at a lookout (3km up from our lodging) surveying the forest canopy for this giant amongst raptors gliding conspicuously over the treetops. We will also take a hike higher up from there (a further 3km) in order to have a shot at some of the highest elevation species on the mountain like the striking Gray-capped Shrike, handsome Apo Sunbird, White-cheeked Bullfinch, and the bizarre, punk-crested Apo Myna that will leave you in no doubt you are in a very unique birding area indeed.

Day 3: Mount Kitanglad, (Mindanao)

Kitanglad hosts a bewildering variety of nectar-eating birds and we will check flowering shrubs on the forest edge for the Mindanao endemic Gray-hooded Sunbird, higher up for the aforementioned Apo Sunbird, as well as for Olive-capped, Flame-crowned, White-bellied, and Fire-breasted Flowerpeckers. The dense shrubby areas on our walks up the mountain will also be checked carefully for the reclusive Red-eared Parrotfinch, which we will see if we are lucky, and the Mindanao-endemic Rufous-headed Tailorbird. Montane feeding flocks that roam Kitanglad also hold a number of Mindanao target species like the striking MacGregor's Cuckooshrike, Mindanao White-eye, and the beautiful Black-and-cinnamon Fantail. The lower areas of the mountain may also produce the striking Mindanao Hornbill, more subdued Brown Tit-Babbler, and we will also check areas for the very elusive Blue-capped Kingfisher. In the evening we will check an area for roding Bukidnon Woodcocks that may be seen displaying at dusk and have further searches for the many night birds that grace the mountain.

Day 4: Mount Kitanglad to Davao, (Minadanao)

After some final birding at Kitanglad, we will go down the mountain and drive across Mindanao, breaking up the long drive to Bislig with a night near Davao city.

Day 5: Davao to Bislig, (Mindanao)

We will spend some time this morning looking for 2 very localized endemics: Cryptic (or Russet-tailed) Flycatcher and Whiskered Flowerpecker, before continuing on to the town of Bislig, our base for exploring the richest area of accessible lowland forest on the island. There may be time for some birding in late afternoon around a deserted airfield, where we will cruise the runway for water birds and other species in the marshy grasslands that flank this old airstrip. Possibilities include Philippine Duck, Watercock, Black Bittern, Greater Painted-Snipe, Wandering Whistling-Duck and Blue-breasted Quail. As dusk falls, we will scan the marshes for Australasian Grass-Owls and check the runway for Philippine Nightjars.

Days 6-7: PICOP, (Mindanao)

Very early departures will be in order for us as we head into the lowland forest patches of PICOP. The Paper Industry Corporation of the Philippines had a concession here, although sadly despite the fact that the official logging is now over, the area has undergone rampant and well-publicized recent deforestation by

illegal loggers. We are sure to meet these people in the forest removing the last remnants of this once great forest. However, at least temporarily, many key targets of the lowlands of Mindanao will still be on offer and we will focus on tracking them down. On some of the days we will leave early enough to search for night birds along the way, like Great Eared-Nightjar, Philippine Frogmouth, and Mindanao and Chocolate Boobooks. We will spend full days in the area, with lunch in the field, due to the distances required to get to and from the area (2 hours or so). Some of the specialties that we will be looking for include Rufous, Writhed and Mindanao Hornbills, Celestial and Short-tailed Monarchs, and on the forest floor, Blue-breasted and Azure-breasted Pittas. Indeed the Philippines is home to many spectacular kingfishers and PICOP also offers our best chance at two other very special ones: the diminutive Southern Silvery-Kingfisher that can often be found hanging out by a dirty pond in the area, and the larger Blue-capped Kingfisher that usually requires much more effort to see. Other endemics we hope to find, include Philippine Honey-Buzzard, Pinsker's Hawk-Eagle, Black-bibbed Cuckoo-shrike, Blue-crowned Racquet-tail, Yellowish Bulbul, Rufous-fronted Tailorbird, Blue Fantail, the secretive Striated Wren-Babbler, Mindanao Pygmy-Babbler, Rusty-crowned Babbler, Naked-faced Spiderhunter, Olive-backed Flowerpecker, and Philippine Oriole. Although some of these have become increasingly rare with the removal of large tracts of their habitat, we will still find many species that we will not see anywhere else on any of the modules on this tour.

Day 8: PICOP, (Mindanao) to Manila, (Luzon)

We have a final morning at PICOP searching for remaining targets. Other endemic possibilities also include Philippine Drongo-Cuckoo, Southern Sooty-Woodpecker, Stripe-sided Rhabdornis, Metallic-winged Sunbird, and Bicolored, Pygmy, White-bellied, and Red-keeled Flowerpeckers. After our final birding, we will return to Davao from where we will fly back to Manila to connect with international flights home.

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