



Vietnam Birding with a Camera

Main Tour: Feb 1 - Feb 10 , 2025

Extension: Feb 10 - Feb 17, 2025

Guide: Dorian Anderson



Introduction

Before I (Dorian) recap this year's tour, I want to offer clarification for those thinking about this departure in the future. While billed as 'Birding with a Camera' (BwC), this tour runs differently than other BwC tours for two reasons. It's a great tour, you just need to know how it works!

First, we spend a lot of time, sometimes up to five to six hours a day (usually in 1.5- to 2-hour blocks), in hides, particularly during the Tan Phu leg of the trip. Without doing that, we'd have little-to-no-chance at many of the high-leverage species we seek on this tour (photo below, for example). Fortunately, the hides also offer very close views of many common species, a circumstance which makes them great for photography. Patient birders and photographers won't have trouble staying engaged in the hides, but casual birders might get frustrated/bored during these stationary periods.

Blue-rumped Pitta



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Second, and while we do spend time outside of the hides, birds in Vietnam are very, very shy. It is therefore difficult (if not impossible) to photograph them in the field. Birders who are willing to work hard to tease shy, regionally-special birds from the concealing habitat won't have a problem staying engaged outside of the hides, but pure photographers (i.e. those without any interest in listing) are likely to get frustrated/bored during those mostly-birding bouts.

Abbott's Babbler



In summary, the in-hide portions of this trip feel like a photo tour while the out-of-hide portions feel like a traditional birding tour. Rather than mis-advertise the tour as either, we split the difference with the BwC designation. I (Dorian) am a serious photographer and a hardcore lister, so this tour worked really well for me because it engaged both of those interests.

One last note - if you're a pure birder, and especially if you haven't visited Asia previously, you should consider [our Thailand tour](#), which runs at the same time of year. That departure will offer you opportunity at more species; however, the Vietnam trip sees more range-restricted and endemic species. Thailand is a more general birding destination (i.e. quantity) while Vietnam is a more specialized trip (i.e. quality).

OK, on with the recap! All photos taken

by guide Dorian on this year's departure.

Day 1 - Saturday, February 1 - Arrivals in Ho Chi Min City (Saigon)

Clients and guide arrived at the Vien Dong Hotel without incident and spent the day resting. Gathering for an introductory dinner at 6pm, we opted for an Indian restaurant because we knew we were in line to eat A LOT of Vietnamese, particularly once we left the Ho Chi Minh's cosmopolitan clutches. The meal was excellent, and we retired early in anticipation of an early start tomorrow.

Day 2 - Sunday, February 2 - Hides at Tan Phu

We departed the hotel very early and headed for Tan Phu, where a private property hosts a fantastic series of blinds/hides. A troubling tradition of bird hunting and trapping has rendered many of Vietnam's birds very shy/reclusive, so waiting for them to visit established feeding stations is the best way to view — and the only way to photograph — them. Our first session began at 8:30am and yielded close views of **Asian Emerald Dove**, **Greater Racket-tailed Drongo**, **Ochraceous Bulbul**,

Abbott's Babbler, and **Indochinese Blue Flycatcher**. Wonderful as those were, a confiding **Blue-rumped Pitta** up-staged them all (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S211602511>).

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo



Stretching our legs after two hours in the hide, we birded a nearby road and found **Banded Broadbill**, **Brown-rumped Minivet**, **Great Iora**, **Blyth's Paradise-Flycatcher**, **Pale-legged Leaf Warbler**, and **Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S211602548>). Unfortunately, none of the species observed in the field would come close enough for decent photos. That trend that would continue for the duration of the tour and reinforced the need for hides, particularly when it came to seeing the shyest/rarest species.

We hit a second hide after lunch, where we soaked in close views of **Laced Woodpecker**, **Gray-eyed Bulbul**, **Scaly-crowned Babbler**, **White-throated Rock-Thrush**, and **Purple-naped** and **Little Spiderhunters**. A female **Bar-bellied Pitta** caused a stir among clients and guide (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S211646459>). A subsequent boat of road birding produced treetop and/or fleeting views of **Green-billed Malkoha**, **Gray Nightjar**, **Asian Barred Owlet**, **Dark-necked Tailorbird**, and **Asian Brown Flycatcher** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S211647499>).

We finished the day in the same hide in which we began it. Our hopes were pinned on Orange-necked Partridge, but we had to settle for **Gray-headed Woodpecker**, **Hainan Blue Flycatcher**, and **Puff-**

throated Babbler, among others. Complete checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S211647882>. After dinner, we tried for Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl but struck out.

Day 3 - Monday, February 3 - Hides at Tan Phu

While Bar-bellied and Blue-naped Pittas, which we saw yesterday, are range-restricted in Southeast Asia, **Germain's Peacock Pheasant** is even moreso; it's found only in a small region in southern Vietnam and eastern Cambodia. Given that fact, we made this special species our highest priority on this morning. Entering a hide to which the bird had been recently faithful, we waited just fifteen minutes before a female presented! We hung around for another hour-and-a-half, hoping for the male, but we were treated to **Slaty-legged Crane** (a tough bird anywhere in its range), **Black-**

Puff-throated Babbler



Hainan Blue Flycatcher



Stripe-throated Bulbul



Buff-breasted Babbler



Scaly-crowned Babbler



Gray-eyed Bulbul



backed Dwarf-Kingfisher (tiny and cute), and **Racket-tailed Treepie** in his absence (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S211785033>).

We returned to the field after that hide session but struggled to see and/or photograph birds amidst the gathering heat. **White-nest Swiftlet**, **Black-naped Oriole**, **Streak-eared Bulbul**, **Ornate Sunbird**, and **Common** and **White-throated Kingfishers** were all we managed across a rather unproductive hour (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S211784912>).

Given those struggles, we ducked into another hide. It was also quiet but we enjoyed **Stripe-throated Bulbul**, **Buff-breasted Babbler**, and bonus views of female **Bar-bellied Pitta** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S211784755>).

We expected our after-lunch hide session to be slow, but we were mistaken, the constant swirl of **Black-naped Monarch**, **Pin-striped Tit-Babbler**, **Orange-headed Thrush**, and **Siberian Blue Robin** appreciated by all. Additional views of **Blue-rumped** and **Bar-bellied Pittas** were nice, too (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S211798646>). From there it was dinner and bed.

Asian Emerald Dove



Day 4 - Tuesday, February 4 - Hides at Tan Phu

We'd missed several marquee birds to this point, so we motivated for a very early start, one which put us in the hide at 6:30. It was very dark at that early hour, but we didn't have to wait long for **Scaly-breasted Partridge** to materialize from the underbrush. Next up? A pair of striking **Orange-necked Partridges**! The cryptic species is even more range restricted than Germain's Peacock Pheasant, so it was a huge win! But we weren't done with gallinaceous birds; a quartet of **Red Junglefowl** was upstaged by a trio of **Siamese Firebacks**, the beautiful birds feeding twenty feet from us. I could hardly fit the male in the frame at 600mm! Those amazing targets secured (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S211909932>), we exited that hide earlier than expected and dredged-up what we could along the road: **Scarlet Minivet**, **White-bellied Erpornis**, **Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike**, **Yellow-browed Warbler**, and **Pale-legged Leaf Warbler** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S211910015>). Ducking into another hide, we had fleeting views of **Red-headed Trogon** before enjoying extended views of a

Germain's Peacock-Pheasant



Slaty-legged Crane



Siamese Fireback (male)



Siamese Fireback (female)



Orange-necked Partridge



Scaly-breasted Partridge



male **Bar-bellied Pitta** (we'd only seen females to that point, <https://ebird.org/checklist/S211909892>)

We lunched and returned to the hotel for the early part of the afternoon. With all the key species secured at this juncture, we decided to use the remainder of the afternoon to try for the male Germain's Peacock Pheasant. He didn't show at the hide, but we enjoyed a similar species complement — **Orange-headed Thrush**, **Slaty-legged Crake** — to yesterday's visit. That the female didn't show either shows how important it is to build in time to visit each hide multiple times. Yes, it's a lot of stationary/sitting time, but that's what it takes to see these super shy/rare species (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S211937812>).

Siberian Blue Robin



Orange-headed Thrush



Bar-bellied Pitta (female)



Bar-bellied Pitta (male)



Day 5 - Wednesday, February 5 - Cat Tien National Park

We left Tan Phu very early and commuted to near-by Cat Tien NP. Waiting to be ferried across the river and into the park, we had great views of **Blue-eared Barbet**, **Black-crested Bulbul**, and **Asian Fairy-Bluebird** in a low fruiting tree. With **Golden-crested Myna** perched nearby, it was an auspicious start! Eventually across the river, we boarded an open air jeep and bounced our way into the reserve. We hadn't covered a quarter mile before we bumped into **Pale-cheeked Langur** swinging through the treetops. When the gangly beast disappeared into the foliage, we refocused on birds, **Red-collared Dove**, **Burmese Shrike**, **Indochinese Cuckooshrike**, **Black-headed Oriole**, **Ashy Drongo**, and **Vinous-Breasted Myna** presenting in short order. **Green Peafowl** was a massive

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Laced Woodpecker



victory, and the hits kept coming in the forms of **Ashy-headed Green-Pigeon**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Oriental Pied-Hornbill**, **Indochinese Roller**, **Dollarbird**, **Common Iora**, and **Sooty-headed Bulbul**. Most birds wouldn't respond to audio, but a beautiful **Banded Kingfisher** was an exception; the incredible bird perched on a relatively-exposed branch for extended inspection! Marshy impoundments produced a host of waterbirds — **Asian Woolly-necked Stork**, **Little Cormorant**, **Purple Heron**, **Chinese Pond-Heron**, **Red-wattled Lapwing**, etc — and gathering thermals brought soaring **Lesser Adjutant** and **Gray-headed Fish-Eagle** into overhead view. Throw in **Lesser Coucal**, **Crimson Sunbird**, and the diminutive/adorable **Heart-spotted Woodpecker** and it was an amazing morning. Photography proved challenging (as expected), but time in the field (i.e. birding) was a welcome change after three days in hides (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212027361>).

We left the park (easy since the hotel was just across the river), lunched, and rested through the heat of the day. Returning to the park at 2:30, we walked the opposite direction than we drove in the morning. Persevering through

low activity, we managed to turn-up **Vernal Hanging-Parrot**, **Black-and-Red Broadbill**, **Ashy Woodswallow**, **Bronzed Drongo**, **White-rumped Shama**, and **Blue-winged Leafbird**. Tired after a sweltering hour, clients rested on a bench while I (Dorian) wandered down the road. A hundred yards removed from the group, I noticed a slight rustling at the road margin. A moment later a slender, scaly critter emerged from the brush. I couldn't believe my eyes. It was one of the rarest, most cryptic animals on Earth. Gesticulating wildly, I shouted.....

“PANGOLIN!!! GET OVER HERE!!!”

Clients shuffled towards me, and we all enjoyed amazing views of the super, uber, hella rare animal as it foraged along the roadside. The mythical beast was nowhere on my radar, so scoring one in broad daylight, along a road trafficked by jeeps and cyclists, was a miracle. Our local guide had never seen one, and he'd lived in Vietnam for 40-some years! Sunda Pangolin was my best find, birds or other, on any of the thirty-some tours I've run for TB. So yeah, pretty special! Here is a list of birds we saw on this outing: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S212039594>. Pangolin photos below by client Jim Anderson.

***It's worth noting that we are likely to add another day at Cat Tien NP to future iterations of this itinerary because we want to strike a better balance between field and hide. Please consult the website and tour description for the potential changes.



Day 6 - Thursday, February 6 - Cat Tien and Di Linh

We'd not exhausted Cat Tien's avian riches, so we made another foray into the park on this morning. We were time-limited because of our afternoon hide appointment in Di Linh, but we nonetheless pressed deeper into the park than yesterday, again with the aid of the open air truck. As nice a sight as was **Common Flameback**, it was overshadowed by a beautiful **Orange-breasted Trogon**, the female posing for decent pictures. Once in the park's interior, we found **Green-eared Barbet**, **Gray-**

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headed Canary Flycatcher, Ruby-cheeked Sunbird, and Gray-faced Tit-Babbler, another range-restricted species found only in isolated pockets in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. Time pressure forced us forward faster than we would have liked, hence the thought of adding another day at Cat Tien, but that didn't stop us from ticking a trio of raptors — **Oriental Honey-buzzard, Shikra, and Collared Falconet** — as we vacated the park (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212139795>).

Our afternoon hide session in Di Linh was the best we'd had. There was never a dull moment; **Mugimaki Flycatchers, Orange-headed Thrushes, and Indochinese and Hainan Blue Flycatchers** were in constant view. **Verditer Flycatcher** and **White-browed Scimitar-Babbler** made periodic appearances, and two **Red-headed Trogons** swung through, albeit only for a brief moment. **Blue** and **Blue-rumped Pittas** were 'old hat' at this stage, so 'Best Bird' honors instead went to **Black-headed Parrotbill**, a species which is, effectively, restricted to a tiny portion of southern Vietnam. The bird only showed for a few seconds, but some had nice looks as it came and went from the water feature. The capper was a cooperative group of six **Silver-breasted Broadbills** which appeared at the end of our three-hour vigil. They posed for pictures for five solid minutes! It was an awesome encounter. That target secured, we vacated the hide, dropped stuff at the hotel, and enjoyed dinner in town before calling it a night (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212160818>).

Mugimaki Flycatcher



Siberian Thrush (female)



Gray-throated Babbler



White-browed Scimitar-Babbler



Silver-breasted Broadbill



Day 7 - Friday, February 7 - Di Linh and Da Lat

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Gray-headed Canary-Flycatcher**Verditer Flycatcher**

Given yesterday's successful hide session and this afternoon's scheduled hide session, we decided to use this morning for some birding. The road above our overnight was quiet at the outset, **Brown Shrike** our only trip first across the first half-hour, but activity picked up as the morning progressed. Audio helped us secure good looks as **Indochinese** and **Red-vented Barbets**, two regional endemics, and we subsequently enjoyed **Black-throated Sunbird**, **Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo**, **Long-tailed Broadbill**, **Maroon Oriole**, and **Chestnut-headed Bee-eater** along the the twisty road. What started as a slow outing ended up being productive (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212254460>).

The afternoon was spent at an impermanent/stealth hide outside Da Lat. Why impermanent? Well, the hide owners put up and take down a curtain (of sorts) each time rather than erecting any sort of permanent blind. Why? Because they fear bird trappers finding a permanent blind and using it to lure and trap birds. Just that afternoon, we'd seen a caged White-cheeked Laughingthrush at a gas station of all places. It was disgusting, offensive, and heartbreaking. There is much to like about Vietnam, but the trade in captured birds is about as awful as it gets. It's that trade which explains why approaching birds is so difficult; hence the prevalence of hides, permanent or less-so. Anyway....the impermanent hide was, not surprisingly, much less active than any of the more permanent hides we visited. Among the seven species we observed, **Large Niltava**, **Rufous-browed Flycatcher**, **Blue Pitta**, and **Black-hooded Laughingthrush** (very range-restricted, effectively a Vietnamese endemic) were new for the trip (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212267633>).

Large Niltava



Black-throated Laughingthrush



Rufous-browed Flycatcher



Lesser Shortwing



Day 8 - Saturday, February 8 - Da Lat and surrounding area

The Da Lat area hosts numerous endemics and regionally-interesting birds, so we had a lot of targets to find down during our two-day stay. Our morning began at another hide, this one high above the city. **Black-headed Sibia**, **Mountain Fulvetta**, and **White-tailed Robin** presented in short order; **Snowy-browed Flycatcher** and **Lesser Shortwing** were shyer and took longer to appear. The real prize, **Rusty-naped Pitta**, made several appearances but never went for the worms or stuck around for long. Everyone had views, but those varied depending on their position in the hide. That's the luck of the draw; no one knows who is gonna have views of what when we sit down (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212389139>)

Taking to the road and the adjacent pine forest at the conclusion of our hide session, we found **House Swift**, **White-browed Shrike-Babbler**, **Green-backed Tit**, **Chestnut-vented Nuthatch**, **Hume's Treecreeper**, **Kloss's Leaf Warbler**, and **Vietnamese Greenfinch**, a striking endemic. Continuing downhill, we intersected **Gray Wagtail** (migrant), **Oriental Cuckooshrike**, and **Vietnamese Cutia**, another stunning endemic. It was an action-packed hour-and-a-half (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212389171>).

The next ninety minutes were anything but action-packed. Seated in another impromptu/impermanent blind after eating our boxed lunch, we saw virtually nothing while we waited for Collared Laughingthrush to appear. The species is VERY range restricted (it's only in mountains around Da Lat) and highly endangered, so we were willing to invest a lot into it. Eventually folding the hand, we moved to another hide, where we hope to find Silver Pheasant. While we waited for that target, we scored views of a brilliant male **Blue Pitta** and sussed out the identification of a female **Little Pied Flycatcher**. Our patience was eventually rewarded with point-blank views of two pairs of **Silver Pheasants!** That they stuck around for a full five minutes was amazing! And if that wasn't enough, we finished our session watching a comical **Grey-bellied Tesia** bouncing/scampering into and out of the arena. It was so fun to watch it shimmy back-and-forth on the various branches. As usual, patience in the hide paid-off (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212389209>)!

Day 9 - Sunday, February 9 - More Da Lat and surrounding area

We spent a lot of time in hides yesterday, so we decided to do some walking this morning. Heading to the Ta Nung Valley twenty minutes outside of town, we strolled through what appeared an abandoned family resort/retreat. That the habitat had reclaimed some of the development was a good thing; birds like **White-throated Fantail**, **Hill Prinia**, **White-rumped Munia**, and **Flavescent** and **Ashy Bulbuls** picked their way through the secondary growth and dangling vines. Overhead we

spied **Olive-backed Pipit**, **Rufous-backed Sibia**, and **Gray-crowned Crocias**, a funky Da Lat endemic which eBird describes as a 'three-way cross of a shrike, a sibia, and a laughingthrush'. Dorian had decent views of that subject, but clients managed only fleeting glimpses (more on that

later). Our two walking hours were a great way to start the day (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212527966>)!

From there, we headed back toward town and made two important stops en route. The first was to secure **Annam Prinia**, an unremarkable species found in isolated pockets in southern Vietnam and eastern Cambodia (though it's effectively a Vietnam endemic). We'd barely exited the vehicle when we heard an example singing from a roadside thicket. Unlike most of the birds we encountered out and about, this bird responded to playback and sat on an exposed twig long enough for us to photograph it. The encounter was massive win (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212529761>). After that, the second stop was up a narrow track for **Da Lat Bush Warbler**, which showed on the offered worms after just ten minutes. Other notable additions at that site included **Gray Bushchat**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Scaly-breasted Munia**, and **White-throated Laughingthrush**.

Unfortunately that last species was fast moving, the group of eight escaping before everyone had good looks (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212536091>).

After a fantastic vegetarian lunch in town, we gained elevation into the hills and revisited the hide which

hosted **Rusty-naped Pitta** yesterday. That bird popped onto an exposed log ten minutes after we arrived and redeemed the marginal looks many had yesterday! That was the primary reason for our visit, so it was another win (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212706332>). With time to spare, we gave Collared Laughingthrush another crack but were unsuccessful. You never get them all, right?

Rusty-naped Pitta



Gray-breasted Tesia



Silver Pheasant



Blue Pitta



White-tailed Robin



Mountain Fulvetta



Black-headed Sibia



Annam Prinia



Day 10 (Extension Day 1) - Monday, February 10 - Da Lat wrap-up and departures (or start of extension)

The three clients who were flying back to Ho Chi Minh (i.e. those who were booked onto the main tour) spent some additional time in one of the hides (with another local guide) and scored amazing views of **Indochinese Green Magpie**, perhaps the most striking species encountered on the entire tour. Those of us continuing on the extension left the hotel early and headed north.

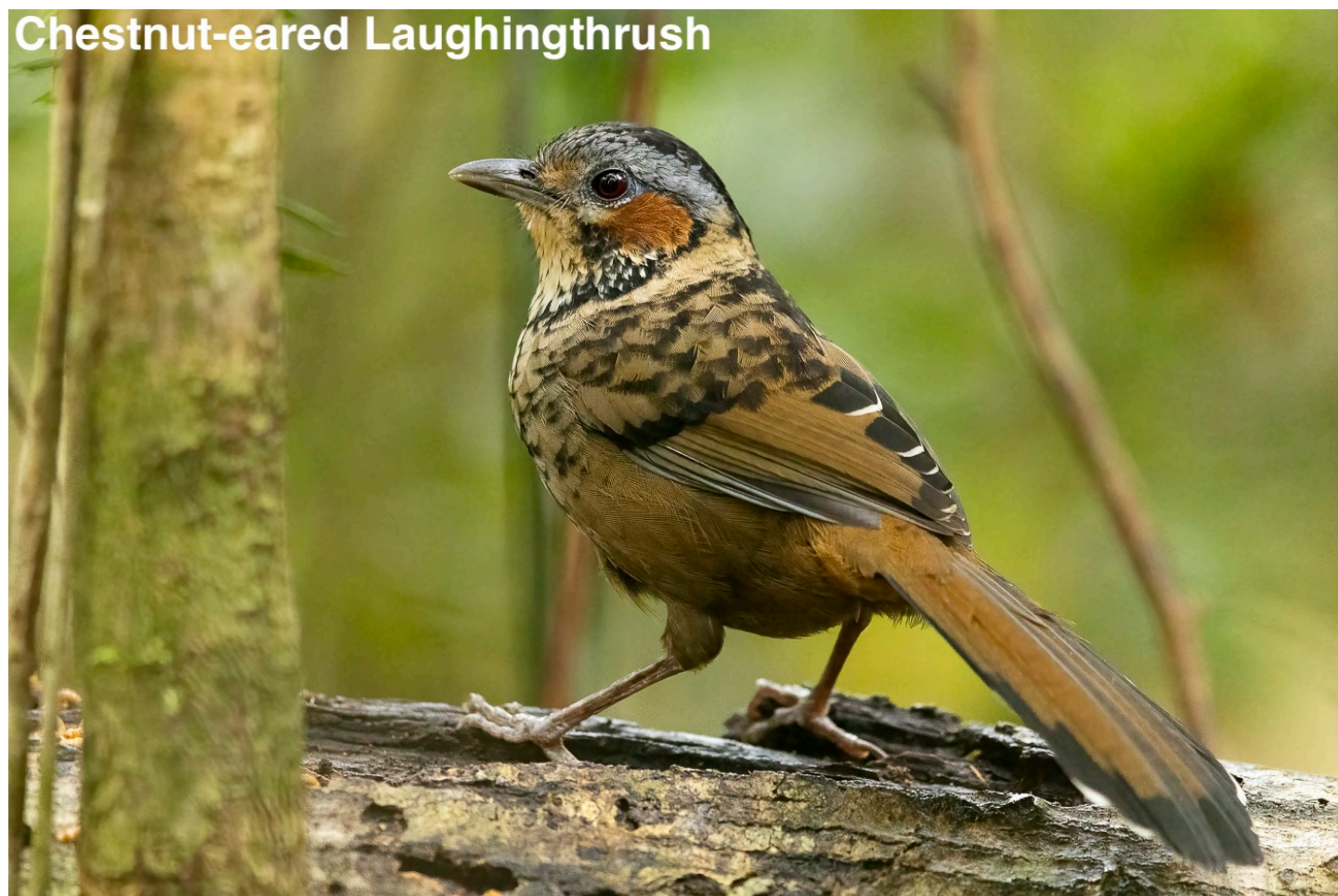
It is here important to note that this year's extension ran differently than previous iterations. While we previously flew to Ho Chi Minh, connected to another flight to reach north, and then drove four hours back south to Mang Den, this year we decided to do it all via driving rather than risk flight/connection issue. The journey ended up being 11 hours and was not fun. We will not be doing it this way again, assuming the extension runs similarly in the future, which it might not for reasons that will become clear as this recap unfolds. We did, at least, make one birding stop en route, where we bettered our views of **Gray-crowned Crocias** and added **Clicking Shrike-Babbler** high in the canopy — and at the limits of identifiability (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212706259>). We spent this and the next night in Mang Den.

Day 11 (Extension Day 2) - Tuesday, February 11 - Mang Den

This morning was dedicated to a single species, **Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush**. It's one of the rarest endemics we would seek, and — sadly — former sites for this species have deteriorated over the years, the birds no longer visiting traditional blinds and feeding stations. Only in the last two months had local rangers laid eyes on the long-absent birds, a few of them visiting a new, pop-up hide outside Mang Den. Clambering up the hillside and hunkering behind a mesh screen, we waited just two minutes before a pair appeared. It was an amazing encounter; the mottled/streaked birds put on a show fifteen feet from us. To that point, it was the tour's greatest victory.

We used the rest of the morning to bird the road which we followed to the hide. While we managed views of **Gray-chinned Minivet**, **Mountain Bulbul**, **Rufous-faced Warbler**, **Golden Babbler**, **Yellow-billed Nuthatch**, and **Mrs. Gould's Sunbird**, the birding was very slow, particularly after 9am, which isn't that late by birding standards. Making matters worse, absolutely nothing responded to taped calls; species-specific vocalizations, generic mob tape, and elsewhere-reliable Collared Owlet were all ineffective at bringing birds into view. Perseverance was our only recourse and — by 11am — not even that was sufficient. We folded, returned to the hotel, lunched, and rested (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212831914>).

Our afternoon session was a real struggle; the forest was mostly silent and there was zero bird activity. At day's end, we scored a small victory in fleeting glimpses of **Silver-eared Mesia**. Beyond that bird, **Yellow-cheeked Tit** and **Black Bulbul** were our only notable species from the entire afternoon (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212847399>, <https://ebird.org/checklist/S212847348>).



Day 12 (Extension Day 3) - Wednesday, Feb 12 - Mang Den and the northern reaches of Kon Tum Province

Though we took to the local roads early on this day, we replicated many of yesterday's struggles. We added **Asian Palm Swift** and **Crested Goshawk** at our first stop (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212935707>) and found only previously-observed species at our second (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212938170>). It was some of the most challenging birding I'd experienced.

We used the middle part of the day to drive north, into a very remote region of Kon Tum Province. Why were we there? Well, it's about the only place on Earth one can view the endangered Golden-winged Laughingthrush, another species which has declined at the hands of hunting and trapping. The drive consumed the entire afternoon, so our search for the prized bird would need to wait until morning. We did make one roadside to break-up the drive; there we observed **Eurasian Moorhen**, **Gray Heron**, **Amur Stonechat**, **Paddyfield Pipit**, and **Yellow Bittern** (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S212947962>).

Black-crowned Barwing



Day 13 (Extension Day 4) - Thursday, Feb 13 - Kom Tum

Today's feature activity was the pursuit of Golden-winged Laughingthrush. Gaining elevation into the mountains, we reached the appointed area, where they are two hides; a lower, less-difficult to reach structure and an upper, very-difficult to reach installment. The laughingthrush is restricted to the upper blind, which generally attracts a better variety of birds. Considering our physical limitations and the rainy/soggy conditions, we decided we'd settle for the lower blind. And after navigating the

steep/sloppy/muddy trail to that point, we realized we'd made the right call; going to the upper blind would have been a suicide mission! Settling into the lower hide, which — thankfully — had a pretty effective tarp roof, we scored **Brown-crowned Scimitar-Babbler** (comical), **Red-tailed Laughingthrush** (stunning) and **Black-crowned Barwing** (effectively endemic). While the barwing is the most localized, the other two are tough throughout their fragmented range. Besides those new species, the only birds that visited the hide during our vigil were a lone **Snowy-browed Flycatcher** and a single **Slaty-bellied Tesia**. We also heard a **Pygmy Cupwing**, but it never came in. Hope for Indochinese, Rufous-winged, and Rusty-capped Fulvetta expired after three hours, so we folded, dropped to a lower/drier elevation, and enjoyed a roadside lunch (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S213058777>).

Heading to a nearby area for some general birding, **Black Eagle** ticked en route, we walked a quiet, well-surfaced mountain road (Ngok Lay, in eBird). There, we had a brief/frustrating encounter with **White-winged Magpie**. We had glimpses of a pair, but they never gave us the desired response to audio. In the end, we had to let them go, unaccounted beyond 'heard-only'. Birding was very slow, and heavy fog and blowing drizzle got the better of us after an hour (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S213058699>). Cold and damp, we returned to the hotel ahead of dinner.

Snowy-browed Flycatcher



Day 14 (Extension Day 5) - Friday, February 14 - Kon Tum clean-up and drive to Bach Ma NP

We had to depart Kon Tum via Ngok Lay, the mountain road we birded yesterday afternoon, so we made a short stop along that same stretch. A fly-over **Mountain Imperial-Pigeon** as we exited the

van was a good omen, but activity was generally pretty slow. One feeding flock held **Blue-winged** and **Red-tailed Minlas**, but it was otherwise composed of expected/previously-observed species (tits, minivets, sunbirds, etc). Complete checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S213162393>.

The rest of the day was, unfortunately, reserved for driving as we had 6 hours of road time to reach Bach Ma NP. We birded for an hour after arriving at that destination but didn't find much.

Red-tailed Laughingthrush



Day 15 (Extension Day 6) - Saturday, February 15 - Bach Ma NP and drive to Phong Nha

We took to the upper reaches of the park at daybreak and birded our way, on foot, back to our in-park lodging. We'd only been walking for five minutes when we found three **Red-shanked Doucs** foraging in roadside tree. Sporting maroon pantaloons, gray sleeves, and a fluffy white face against a charcoal body, the langur is one of the most unique and beautiful monkeys in the world. Photo on next page kindly provided by Keith Barnes.

Though our subsequent bout of birding was generally slow — we found just 13 species in two-plus hours — we did manage excellent views of **Red-headed Trogon**, **Indochinese Yuhina**, **Ratchet-tailed Treepie**, and **White's Thrush**. Awesome as those were, it was **Collared Owlet** which left the most lasting impact on us. We'd heard them throughout the trip, but this was the first visual we achieved. That the bird sat for ten minutes on an exposed branch was great. It's worth nothing that recorded Collared Owlet calls failed to generate any interest from passerines through the tour. It was as though passerines were completely deaf to the call. That we heard Collared Owlets calling during the day and witnessed zero mobbing is testament to this. Point in mentioning this is that

Collared Owlets calls were as ineffectual as species-specific calls in Vietnam. This oddity/fact helps explain why our birding sessions were often such a struggle. For example, we heard **Indochinese Green Magpie** on our morning walk, but the apparent pair showed zero interest in our tape. Same for **Blue-Whistling Thrush**, **Streaked Wren Babbler**, and **White-throated Fantail**. Zero response across the board (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S213357475>).

Another long drive (~5hrs) to Phong Nha looming, we ate a late breakfast, loaded up the van, and started north. Besides the fact that birds didn't respond to audio, the many long drives were the biggest downside of the extension.

Day 16 (Extension Day 7) - Sunday, February 16 - Phong Nha NP

Halleluja! This was the morning of general birding for which we'd been hoping for the last week! We started with fantastic views of **Spot-necked Babbler** and had subsequent looks at **Limestone Leaf Warbler**, **Bay Woodpecker**, **Black-winged Cuckooshrike**, **Scarlet Minivet**, **Sultan Tit**, **Crimson Sunbird**, and **Streaked Spiderhunter**. A flock of 20 **Long-billed Broadbills** passed through quickly; a striking **Oriental Hobby** sat in a distant snag for ten minutes. A skulking (and rather distant) **Large Scimitar-Babbler** remained heard-only, unfortunately (<https://ebird.org/checklist/>

[S213674398](https://ebird.org/checklist/S213674398)). Moving upslope in the van, we found **Short-tailed Scimitar-Babbler** and **Black-browed Fulvetta**, two species we'd only heard to this point in the tour. Overhead **Cook's Swifts** were another nice addition (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S213675533>).

We returned to town for lunch and rested ahead of our afternoon birding. That outing returned us to the same stretch of park road we enjoyed in the morning. There we connected with **Green-eared Barbet**, **Gray-capped Pygmy Woodpecker**, **Green-backed Tit**, and **Blue-winged Leafbird**. And best of all? We finally tracked down **Sooty Babbler**! The very range restricted species lives only in limestone hills in a small region spanning Vietnam and Laos, so it was incredibly satisfying to secure it as our last new bird (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S213722821>)!



Day 17 (Extension Day 8) - Monday, February 17 - Flights from Dong Hoi > Ho Chi Minh City

We returned to Ho Chi Minh City, where clients connected to their international flights. Dorian continued to Thailand, where he subsequently lead another 17-day tour starting on the 19th.

Complete Birdlist (taxonomic)

Bar-backed Partridge
Orange-necked Partridge
Silver Pheasant
Siamese Fireback
Green Peafowl
Scaly-breasted Partridge
Germain's Peacock-Pheasant
Red Junglefowl
Rock Pigeon
Red Collared-Dove
Spotted Dove
Asian Emerald Dove
Zebra Dove
Ashy-headed Green-Pigeon
Mountain Imperial-Pigeon
Greater Coucal
Lesser Coucal
Green-billed Malkoha
Asian Koel
Violet Cuckoo
Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo
Gray Nightjar
Brown-backed Needletail
White-nest Swiftlet
Cook's Swift
House Swift
Asian Palm Swift
Eurasian Moorhen
Slaty-legged Crake
Red-wattled Lapwing
Common Sandpiper
Asian Woolly-necked Stork
Lesser Adjutant
Little Cormorant
Little Egret
Chinese Pond-Heron
Eastern Cattle-Egret
Great Egret
Medium Egret
Gray Heron
Purple Heron

p.25

Osprey
Black-winged Kite
Black Baza
Oriental Honey-buzzard
Black Eagle
Crested Goshawk
Shikra
Gray-headed Fish-Eagle
Gray-faced Buzzard
Asian Barred Owlet
Collared Owlet
Orange-breasted Trogon
Red-headed Trogon
Eurasian Hoopoe
Oriental Pied-Hornbill
Blue-bearded Bee-eater
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater
Common Kingfisher
Black-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher
Banded Kingfisher
White-throated Kingfisher
Indochinese Roller
Dollarbird
Coppersmith Barbet
Blue-eared Barbet
Red-vented Barbet
Green-eared Barbet
Necklaced Barbet
Indochinese Barbet
Heart-spotted Woodpecker
Gray-capped Pygmy Woodpecker
Bay Woodpecker
Common Flameback
Laced Woodpecker
Gray-headed Woodpecker
Collared Falconet
Oriental Hobby
Vernal Hanging-Parrot
Long-tailed Broadbill
Silver-breasted Broadbill
Black-and-red Broadbill
Banded Broadbill
Rusty-naped Pitta
Blue-rumped Pitta
Blue Pitta
Bar-bellied Pitta
Gray-chinned Minivet

Long-tailed Minivet
Scarlet Minivet
Brown-rumped Minivet
Oriental Cuckooshrike
Black-winged Cuckooshrike
Indochinese Cuckooshrike
White-browed Shrike-Babbler
Clicking Shrike-Babbler
White-bellied Erpornis
Black-naped Oriole
Black-hooded Oriole
Maroon Oriole
Ashy Woodswallow
Large Woodshrike
Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike
Common Iora
Great Iora
White-throated Fantail
Black Drongo
Ashy Drongo
Bronzed Drongo
Hair-crested Drongo
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo
Black-naped Monarch
Blyth's Paradise-Flycatcher
Brown Shrike
Burmese Shrike
Long-tailed Shrike
Indochinese Green-Magpie
Racket-tailed Treepie
Ratchet-tailed Treepie
Large-billed Crow
Gray-headed Canary-Flycatcher
Sultan Tit
Green-backed Tit
Yellow-cheeked Tit
Common Tailorbird
Dark-necked Tailorbird
Annam Prinia
Hill Prinia
Plain Prinia
Dalat Bush Warbler
Pygmy Cupwing
Barn Swallow
Ochraceous Bulbul
Puff-throated Bulbul
Gray-eyed Bulbul

Ashy Bulbul
Mountain Bulbul
Black Bulbul
Black-crested Bulbul
Streak-eared Bulbul
Stripe-throated Bulbul
Flavescent Bulbul
Red-whiskered Bulbul
Sooty-headed Bulbul
Yellow-browed Warbler
Alström's Warbler
Pale-legged Leaf Warbler
Chestnut-crowned Warbler
Limestone Leaf Warbler
Kloss's Leaf Warbler
Gray-bellied Tesia
Rufous-faced Warbler
Mountain Tailorbird
Black-throated Tit
Indochinese Yuhina
Gray-faced Tit-Babbler
Pin-striped Tit-Babbler
Golden Babbler
Brown-crowned Scimitar-Babbler
White-browed Scimitar-Babbler
Large Scimitar-Babbler
Gray-throated Babbler
Sooty Babbler
Spot-necked Babbler
Scaly-crowned Babbler
Puff-throated Babbler
Buff-breasted Babbler
Abbott's Babbler
Streaked Wren-Babbler
Short-tailed Scimitar-Babbler
Black-browed Fulvetta
Mountain Fulvetta
Vietnamese Cutia
Gray-crowned Crocias
Red-tailed Laughingthrush
Black-headed Sibia
Blue-winged Minla
Black-crowned Barwing
Silver-eared Mesia
Red-tailed Minla
Rufous-backed Sibia
Black-hooded Laughingthrush

Chestnut-eared Laughingthrush
White-cheeked Laughingthrush
Yellow-billed Nuthatch
Chestnut-vented Nuthatch
Hume's Treecreeper
Golden-crested Myna
Common Myna
Vinous-breasted Myna
White's Thrush
Siberian Thrush
Orange-headed Thrush
Asian Brown Flycatcher
Oriental Magpie-Robin
White-rumped Shama
Large Niltava
Verditer Flycatcher
Rufous-browed Flycatcher
Hainan Blue Flycatcher
Hill Blue Flycatcher
Indochinese Blue Flycatcher
Lesser Shortwing
Siberian Blue Robin
Blue Whistling-Thrush
Siberian Rubythroat
White-tailed Robin
Mugimaki Flycatcher
Snowy-browed Flycatcher
Little Pied Flycatcher
White-throated Rock-Thrush
Blue Rock-Thrush
Amur Stonechat
Pied Bushchat
Gray Bushchat
Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker
Ruby-cheeked Sunbird
Van Hasselt's Sunbird
Ornate Sunbird
Black-throated Sunbird
Mrs. Gould's Sunbird
Crimson Sunbird
Purple-naped Spiderhunter
Little Spiderhunter
Streaked Spiderhunter
Asian Fairy-bluebird
Blue-winged Leafbird
Golden-fronted Leafbird
Scaly-breasted Munia

White-rumped Munia
House Sparrow
Eurasian Tree Sparrow
Gray Wagtail
Paddyfield Pipit
Olive-backed Pipit
Vietnamese Greenfinch