

Birding

Northern, Central & Southern

Thailand



Misty morning near Malee's at Doi Chiang Dao

- with my family

Locations

We (parents and two kids) visited the following sites.

Central Thailand:

Khao Yai NP, Kaeng Krachan NP, Laem Pak Bia and Pak Thale.

Northern Thailand:

Doi Inthanon NP, Doi Chang Dao including Den Ya Kat Substation, Doi Lang, Chiang Saen Lake, Mekong River at Chiang Saen.

Southern Thailand:

Krabi, Khao Nor Chuchi, Similan Islands NP, Khao Sok NP, Chiew Laan Lake, Surin Islands NP

Timing

6. December 2008 – 30 January 2009 (central Thailand 7 Dec. – 23 Dec; northern Thailand 24 Dec. – 6 Jan.; southern Thailand 7 Jan. – 30 Jan.). First time ever to Thailand. Dry season with no rain or a few showers in the south. Very few mosquitoes and leeches. However - this period is also out of the bird breeding season – no dawn chorus and no response to digital replay of songs and calls. It is the period where Thai people have many holidays which means crowds of people in national parks like Doi Inthanon, Khao Yai and Kaeng Krachan. Don't even think about visiting these parks during holidays and weekends – you'll regret it.

If possible do not go to Thailand before the end of February where the breeding season starts and winter guests are still present. The dry season will end in the month of May. It will be less hard work to see many of the species in the breeding period, and you can make use of your digital recorder.

Transportation

Swiss Air: Copenhagen – Zurich, Zurich – Bangkok. Thai Airways: Bangkok - Chang Mai (1h10min); Chang Mai – Bangkok; Bangkok – Krabi (1h30min); Krabi – Bangkok. Car rental in Bangkok Airport, Suvarnabhumi Airport (Central Thailand) and Chang Mai Airport (Northern Thailand). Taxi and boat in Southern Thailand.

Safety

Generally Thai people are very friendly and helpful. Do not worry too much about tropical diseases – the risk is low that you will acquire anything risky. However, follow the medical recommendations on malaria, hepatitis etc. that you get at home before travelling.

The most dangerous thing you will meet in Thailand is the traffic. Thai people drive like maniacs, the traffic regulations are so poor and directly dangerous to traffic security that you'll face injury or death if you don't drive very carefully being prepared for all possible situations. If possible involve all passengers in keeping an eye on the traffic while driving. On highways where people drive 110 – 130 km/hour you can change direction by crossing the barrier in many places. Therefore be prepared that the over taker lane suddenly is partially blocked by a car waiting to cross – there is not space enough for it to stay out of your lane. Be also prepared that trucks and busses often change lane without first using the rear-view mirror, the indicator or that they simply bully their way through traffic. On highways you'll meet people crossing on foot, motorbikes driving in both directions on the sidetrack and most cars crossing dangerously between all three lanes without keeping distance. Good luck – you'll need it.

Taxis in southern Thailand is an option to renting a car. It will save you some money while visiting islands like Similan, Surin and Cheow Laan Lake. Minivan taxis do not have safety belts except on the front seats.

Prices

Thai people are fully aware of the potential of doing business with you, which means that they often will overprice services like transportation and guiding. But this can be negotiated. They also get a provision when helping you to arrange a taxi, boat or an accommodation increasing the price. Listen to what local people consider normal salaries for services.

The minimum salary for a worker doing a days hard work was in December 2008 around 160-180 baht. Boat hire in Krabi is 300 baht per hour (local source), but Mr. Dai and other boatmen will try to make you pay the double or the triple. Do not accept – there are lots of boatmen. Boatmen will focus on using the time that you agreed on paying for. And to them it means sailing around in open waters. They don't understand that it's best to stay around high tide roost areas for waders or in small channels for kingfishers and passerines for extended periods unless you tell them. And that is a bit of a task – most of them hardly speak or understand English. Accommodations with aircon will amount to 1200 - 1500 baht in many places (4 person room), but there are cheaper alternatives available. When we visited Thailand main tourist operators were down with 33% – 50% in customers due to the financial crisis and the occupation of Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok. This is a basis for negotiating prices.

Food

Generally food is cheap, but also vary much in quality. In Similan Islands we met the poorest food in all of Thailand. It was simply horrible. What was not eaten one day was served the next – cold. The best food (and very reasonably priced) we enjoyed at Nature Resort - Khao Sok NP, but nice food was also served at Malee's Nature Lovers - Doi Chang Dao, Morakot Resort - Khao Nor Chuchi and Viang Yonok Resort - Chiang Saen.

Thailand has excellent supermarkets – look for Tesco Lotus and Big C commercials in all medium sized and larger towns.

Accommodations

Especially National Park accommodations are greatly overpriced considering what you get. Cabins are not maintained, and in Similan Islands our first choice at 1000 baht per night (Payoung) was infested with nightly visitors – full-size rats. Rats were also running in and out of holes in the tents that you can rent on the campground (pers.com. other tourists). If you can't get overpriced 2000 baht bungalows don't stay overnight at Similan.

Highly recommended accommodations with nice food and very pleasant people around were Nature Resort, Khao Sok NP; Ban Maka, Kaeng Krachan NP, Malee's Nature Lovers Bungalows, Doi Chiang Dao; Viang Yonok Resort, Chiang Saen Lake and Morakot Resort, Khao Nor Chuchi.



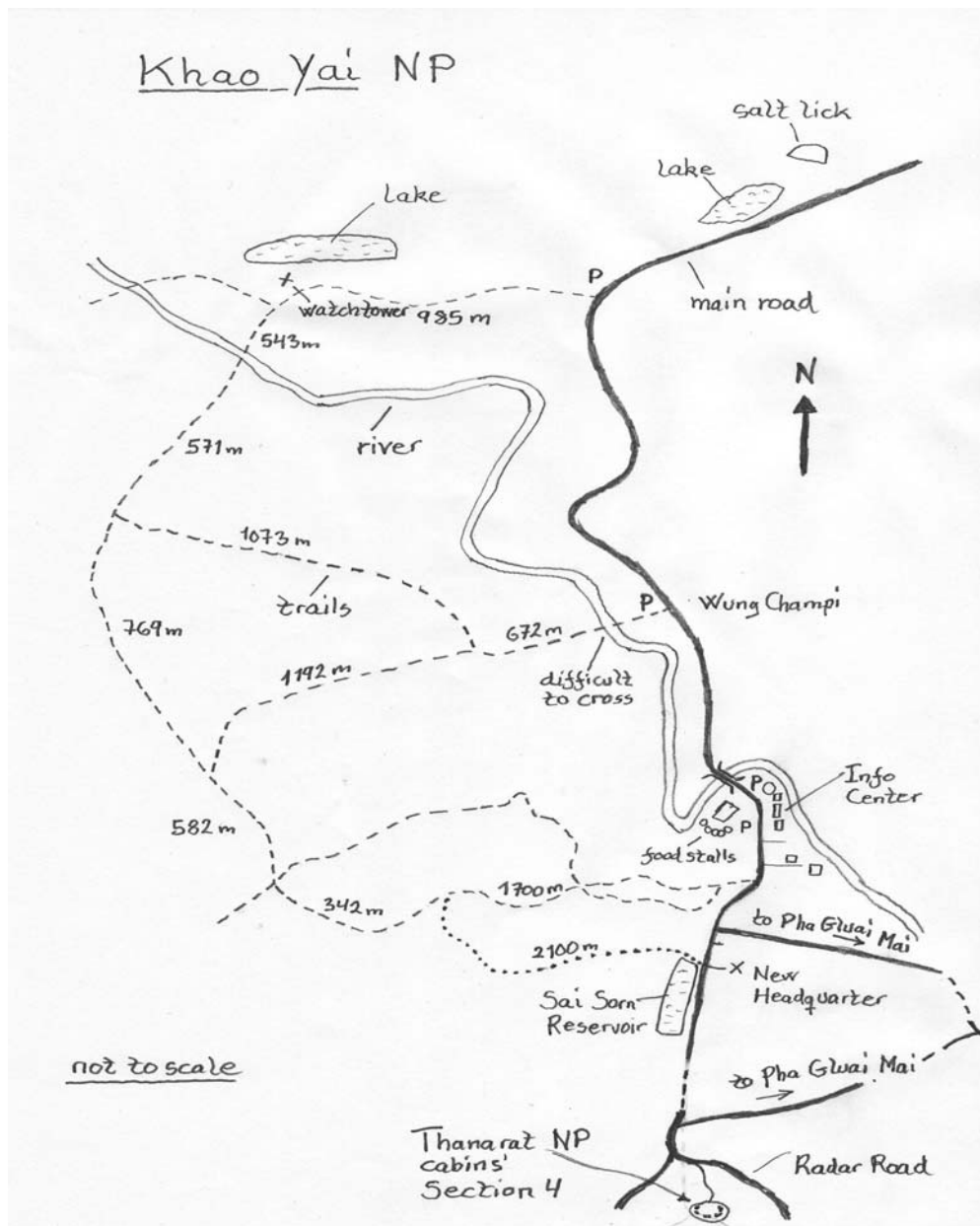
Rafflesia kerrii, Khao Sok NP

Family and kids!

Do not be fooled to think that you can twitch birds like you use to do. I'm lucky to have a wife educated biologist and she is therefore interested in nature. She is not a birder, but likes to see colourful, large or biologically interesting species, but hate working on small brown jobs that inflate the list. Prolonged use of the digital recorder and waiting an hour for a species to be persuaded into cooperation is also out of the question. Our kids are like all other kids at their age (8 and 11) – they prefer swimming pools, snorkelling, ice creams, other children to play with, internet access etc. They do not see the beauty in the topography and forest cover as we – the adults – do, they do not find small, fast moving, brown birds interesting, an elephant is an elephant – domesticated or wild, they prefer to sit instead of walking, to sleep instead of being up at dawn, they like animals at close distance – hate dots in the horizon or canopy etc. How is it then possible to be birding Thailand with kids? The short version – it is not, if you fully consider the needs of the children. But we did the trip and here are the regrets and conclusions.

The period was too long. And Thailand does not offer many close encounters with animals like e.g. Australia does (too much hunting, catching, poisoning, pursuing etc in Thailand – even within protected areas – that was our impression and what we heard from residents). Southern Thailand offered many options that our kids liked, e.g. swimming in Emerald Pool at Khao Nor Chuchi, swimming and snorkelling at Similan and Surin Islands, swimming and canoeing in Chieow Laan Lake, canoeing and swimming in Sok River, elephant ride at Sok etc. Northern Thailand and Central Thailand had less to offer except some markets and caves.

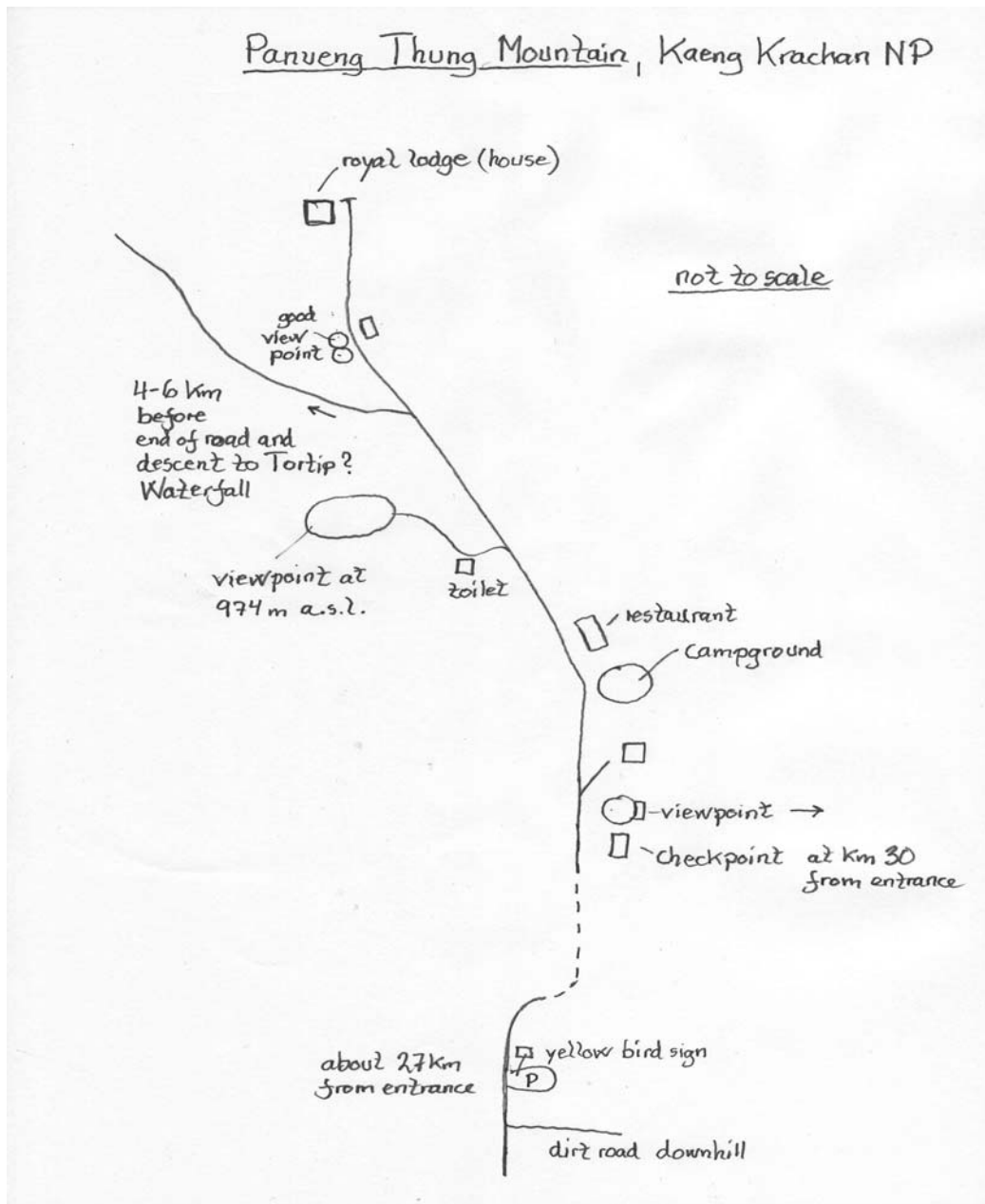
Our children used a lot of time drawing and colouring on paper, and we read stories from the many books brought with us from home. But eight weeks is a long time being outdoor with two biologist parents – too long if you ask the kids. Next time four weeks will suffice, and the destination must have plentiful large birds and mammals that are easily seen (we are considering Namibia, Costa Rica and other parts of Australia). Our children felt very comfortable at Nature Resort, Malees, Ban Maka and Morakot Resort.

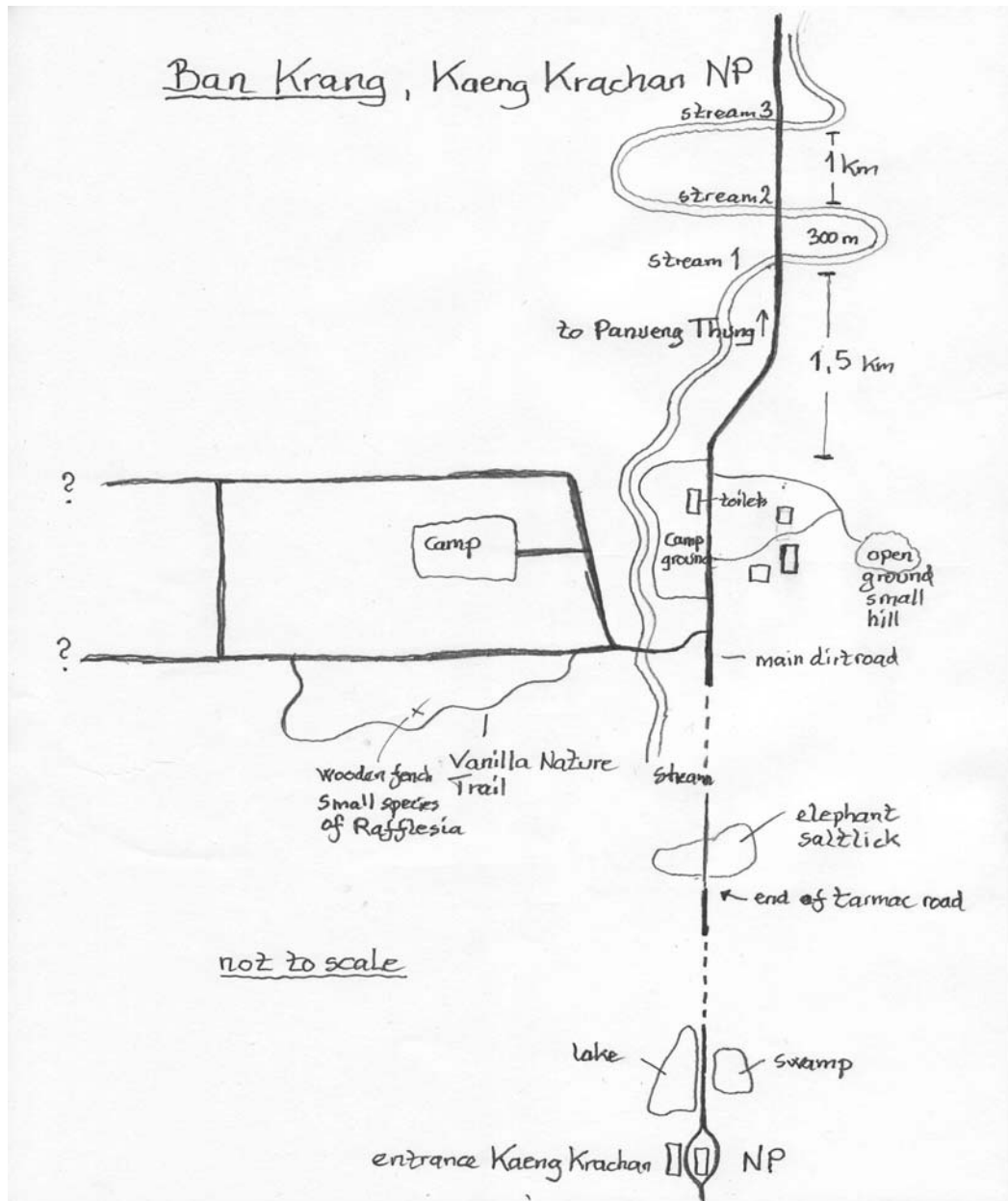


Khao Yai NP

Khao Yai was crowded with Thai tourists during our stay, but fortunately most people stay around the headquarter (HQ) and restaurant, and people also avoid the narrow trails like the excellent one immediately south of HQ. Most tourists will walk the watchtower trail north of HQ, but not early in the morning, so there are many options even during crowded periods. Khao Yai is famous because of the mammals possible to see on the open abandoned golf areas during night safaris. We had great luck on especially one of our three spotlighting trips (only official national park rangers are allowed to be spotlighting). So let me start with the mammals seen. On the second trip we managed to get on the first truck leaving headquarter at 7 pm, and that turned out to be productive. When we arrived at a saltlick six ASIAN ELEPHANTS were digging in the soil. Shortly after another six elephants came out of the forest heading for the saltlick. Among these a small baby. When the next truck was approaching in the dark we left and then ran into an ASIATIC BLACK BEAR sitting in tall grass next to the road. Before these two events we saw four GOLDEN JACKALS hunting out in the open. The three night safaris also produced ASIAN SLOW LORIS, SMALL INDIAN CIVIT and LARGE SPOTTED CIVIT. Check the open restaurant area after dark with a spotlight when the last tourists have left. We usually had one to three MALAYAN PORCUPINES foraging there.

Like all the other sites visited Khao Yai was also silent without any dawn chorus or birds calling. It was a fight every day to dig out species from the forest. The list of species was increasing with a frustratingly slow rate. But from time to time difficult species, close encounters and extraordinary good observation circumstances were justifying the efforts like e.g. *Siamese Fireback*, *Slaty-backed Forktail*, *White-crowned Forktail*, *Red-headed Trogon*, *Buffy Fish-Owl*, *Brown Wood-Owl*, *Silver-breasted Broadbill*, *Orange-headed Thrush*, *Siberian Blue Robin*, *Heart-spotted Woodpecker*, *Mountain Hawk-Eagle*, *Wreathed Hornbill* and mind-blowing views on *Blue Pitta*. It never came out successful waiting for Coral-billed Ground-Cuckoo at the stakeout behind the toilets at Pha Gluai Mai Camp Ground. Many people tried and I only heard of one observation during our six day long stay at Khao Yai. It was a brief visit around 1pm one day.





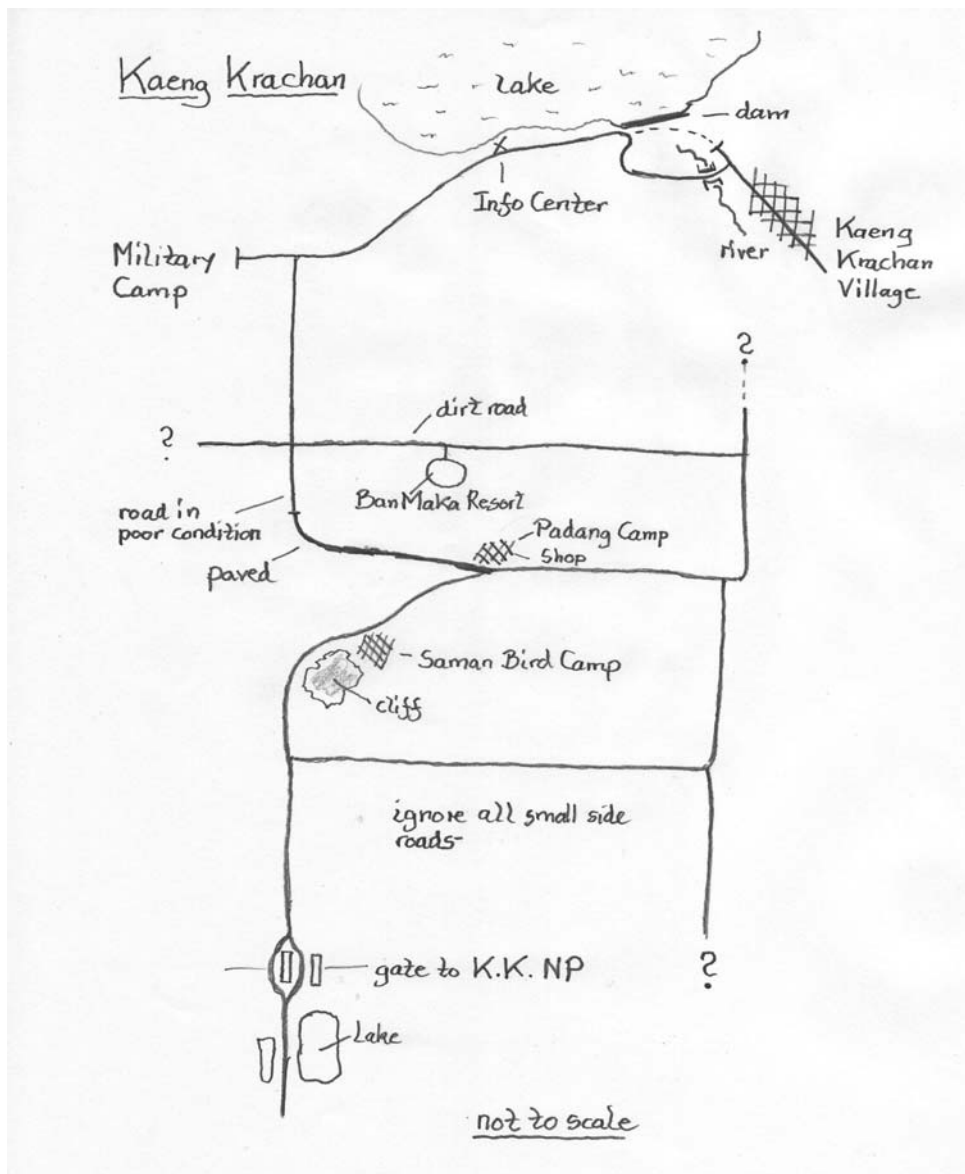
Kaeng Krachan NP

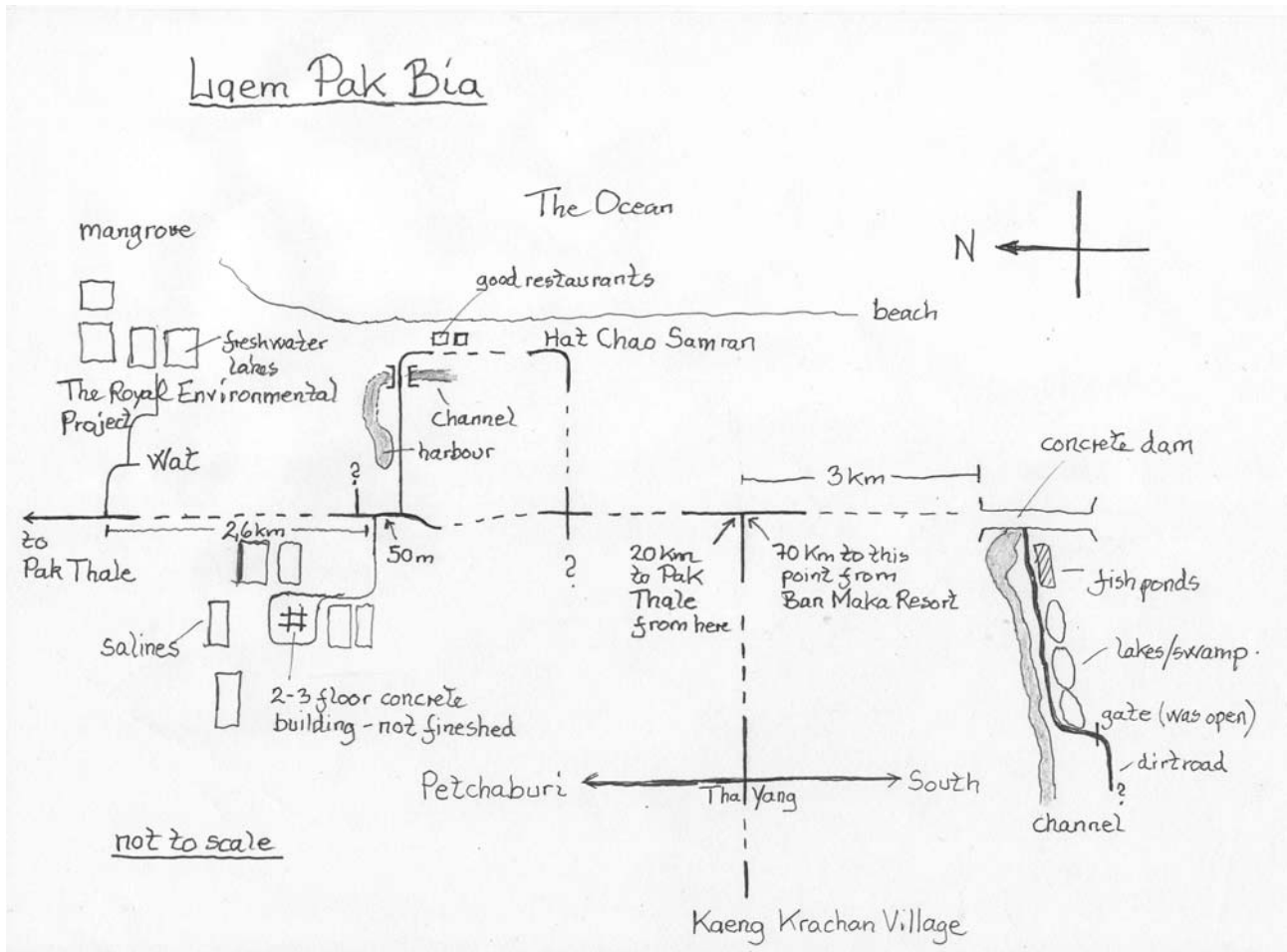
The habitat, the scenery, the viewpoints were absolutely fantastic in Kaeng Krachan NP. The diversity in altitudes like Bang Krang Campground in the lowlands and almost any site uphill to the Panueng Thung Mountain viewpoint at 1000 m a.s.l. turned every day into a new experience. In combination with a very pleasant stay at Ban Maka Resort this national park was one of our best experiences.

Birds were not plentiful at this time of the year, but the potential must be very high considering the quality of the habitat. Nice observations included impressive *Stork-billed Kingfisher*, *Spotted Owlet*, *Brown Wood-Owl*, *Asian Barred Owlet*, *Jerdon's Baza*, *Black Baza*, a flowering tree full of *Greater, Blue-winged* and *Orange-bellied Leafbirds* together with many *Everett's White-Eye* and *Streaked Spiderhunters*, a small flock of *Black and Red Broadbills*, *Common Green Magpie*, *Lesser* and *Greater Necklaced Laughing Thrush*, skulking *Spot-necked Babbler*, our first *Great Hornbill*, great looks on perching *Crested Serpent-Eagle* and a much wanted *Sultan Tit*. A major dip was Ratchet-tailed Treepie. However, one experience over-shadowed all bird observations – a LEOPARD on the road for some 10-15 minutes. A COMMON PALM CIVIT also displayed itself nicely in the lights of our car.



White-rumped Shama, Kaeng Krachan





Laem Pak Bia and Pak Thale

Ban Maka Resort, Kaeng Krachan is a perfect starting point for visiting the west coast of the peninsula – 1,5 hour's easy drive away. We went there on two consecutive days in a weekend to avoid the rush in of Thai tourists to Kaeng Krachan NP. It was a relief for the first time to see numbers of easily observed bird species here compared to the forest habitat at Kaeng Krachan and Khao Yai. There are several good locations to visit in the region (see map). The Royal Environmental Project has mangrove with a boardwalk, several freshwater lakes and sewage water ditches. All these sites are good for birds. Salt ponds are present on both sides of the coastal road linking Laem Pak Bia with Pak Thale.

We only spent some 20 minutes with binoculars and a scope before we found two *Spoon-billed Sandpipers* foraging in salt ponds close to Pak Thale village. We saw our first *Black-capped Kingfisher* – beautiful and impressive, and common it turned out later on the trip. *Red-necked Phalarope* and *Avocet* were two less common species seen here. We found lovely *Pheasant-tailed Jacana* and *Bronze-winged Jacana* in a freshwater swamp, *Ruddy-breasted Crake* in sewage water ditches and a few *Painted Storks*. In the Royal Project lake area we ran into several WATER MONITORS – some of them up to 2,5 meter in length. Large numbers of *Marsh Sandpiper*, *Curlew Sandpiper* and *Broad-billed Sandpipers* were some of the many abundant waders in this area.



Orange-bellied Leafbird, Kaeng Krachan

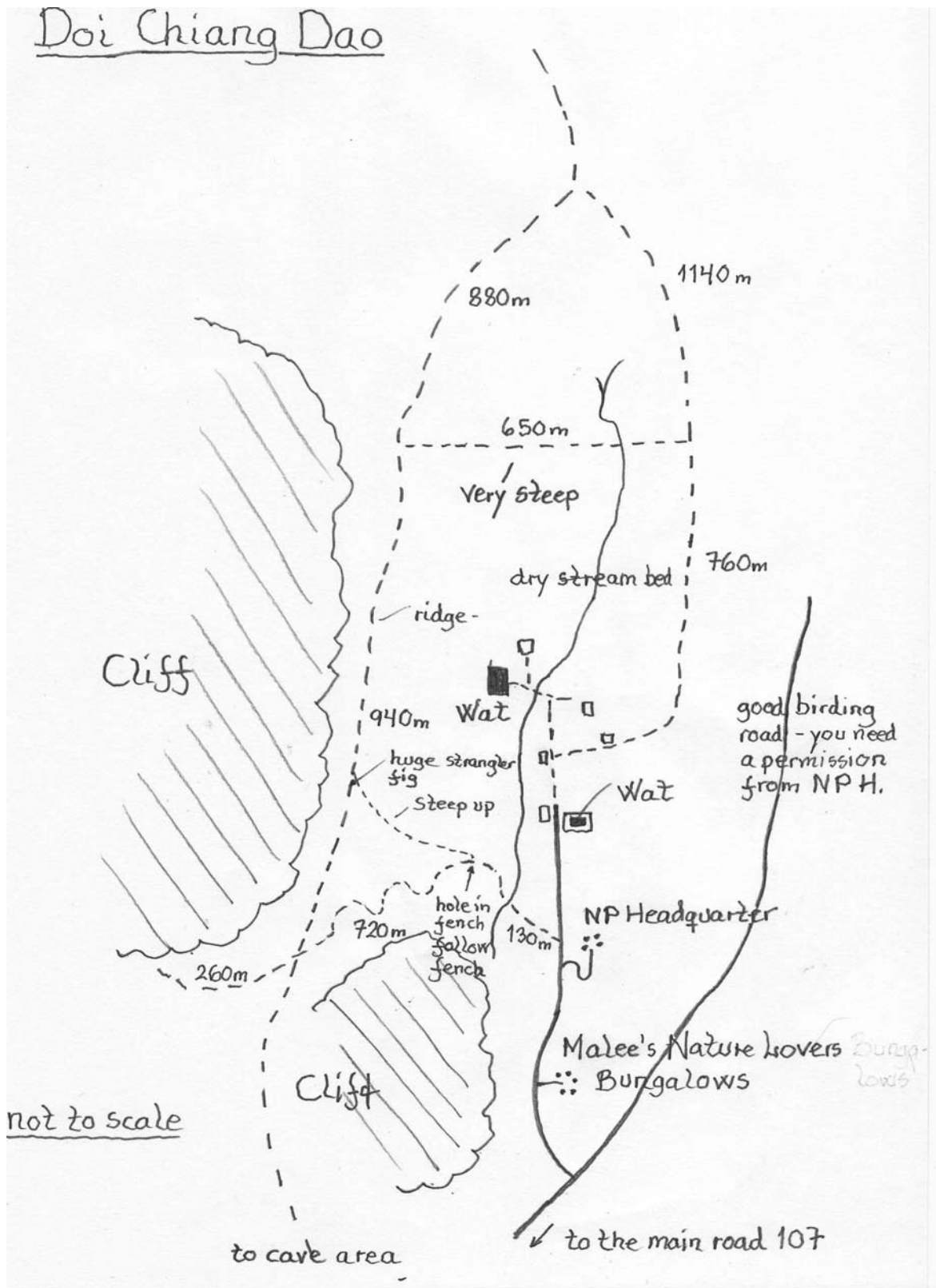
Doi Inthanon NP

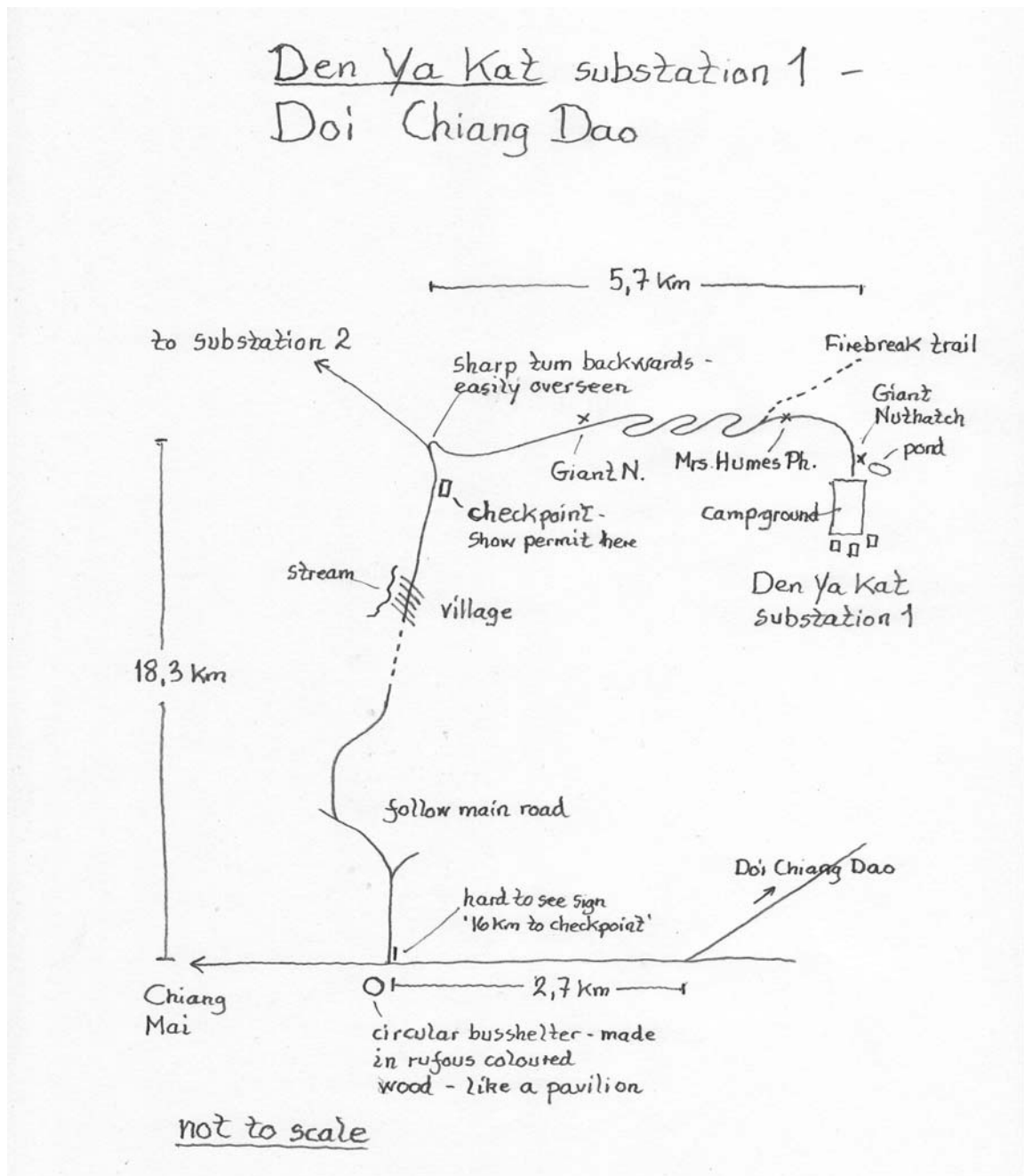
Doi Inthanon was horribly crowded with local tourists during Christmas time. We slept at VS Inthanon Resort which is not recommended. Better stay at the neighbour resort Inthanon Highland Resort. Everything was booked here when we tried 2 month before arrival! There are several locations of interest on this mountain, e.g. the summit boardwalk with cloud forest at 2500 m a.s.l., dry deciduous forest at the km 13 stone (500 m a.s.l.) about 5 km from the National Park gate, the excellent jeep trail at km 37,5 some 50 m from checkpoint 2, Mr. Daeng's guesthouse (restaurant/café and rooms for rent) and lovely Wachiratan Waterfall to mention a few of them. Be at Checkpoint 2 at dawn (especially good on misty mornings) to watch shy forest birds preying on injured insects around the light-sources here. Visit Wachiratan Waterfall early in the morning before the tourists arrive or late in the afternoon when they have left. We finally fled from Doi Inthanon because of the traffic of people and cars, and we were encouraged again arriving at peaceful and beautiful Doi Chang Dao.

Despite the observation circumstances at Doi Inthanon we also had great experiences with birds, e.g. common and lovely *Yellow-bellied Fantails*, *Red-billed Blue Magpie*, *Rufous Tree-Pie*, *Slaty-bellied Tesia*, *Pygmy Wren Babbler*, wonderful *Rufous-bellied Niltava*, *Large Niltava* and *White-gorgeted Flycatcher*, *Black-backed Forktail* (km 13) and the odd *Dark-sided Thrush* (at Mr. Daeng's place).



Large Niltava, Doi Inthanon





Doi Chiang Dao & Den Ya Kat (DYK) substation

Doi Chiang Dao is a wonderful place. Arriving from south on the main road spectacular scenery is rising out of nothing – a huge rocky, forest-covered massif with Chiang Dao towering as the third highest peak in Thailand. Approaching the massif passing famous Chiang Dao Caves (really worth a visit) and all the tourists, you enter quiet green surroundings very next to the massif. At Malee's Nature Lovers Bungalows you are surrounded by a nice tropical garden with great views to the mountains. Our kids considered this place to be one of the best (together with Ban Maka at Kaeng Krachan) experiences in Thailand. We loved it too.

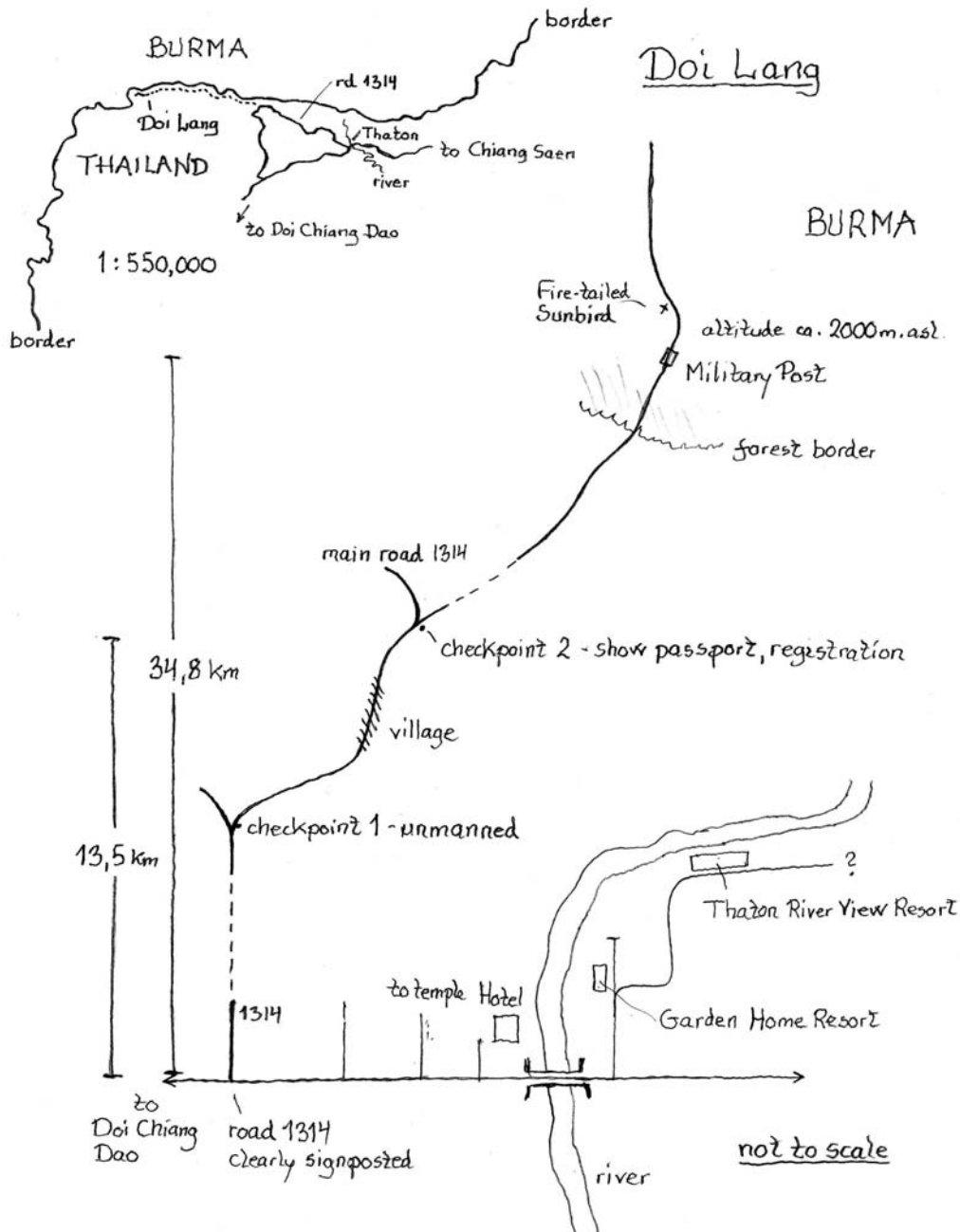
Less popular with the kids was Den Ya Kat Substation – 1,5 hours hard drive in darkness from Malee's. It's uphill on the worst road that you probably will encounter in the whole of Thailand. Forget about it if you don't have a four-wheel drive vehicle with high ground clearance. However, Malee can arrange a car and driver if you don't have your own 4WD vehicle. If possible bring tent, sleeping gear and

food etc. and sleep at DYK substation two or three nights. It's a great place with many birds. You need a permit from the forest authority to visit DYK. The office is close to Malee's site.

From Doi Chiang Dao, at trails near Malee's site, the following high-lights were seen: *White-browed Piculet*, *Banded Kingfisher* male, *White-crowned Forktail*, *Greater Necklaced Laughing Thrush*, *Sultan Tit* and *Great Barbet*. From the ridge at DYK it's worth mentioning *Mrs. Humes Pheasant* male, *Giant Nuthatch*, *Silver-breasted Broadbill*, *Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush*, *Scaly Thrush*, *Eye-browed Thrush*, *Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher*, *Mountain Bamboo Partridge*, *White-necked Laughing Thrush*, *Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler*, *GreyTree-Pie* and a lot of other lovely species.



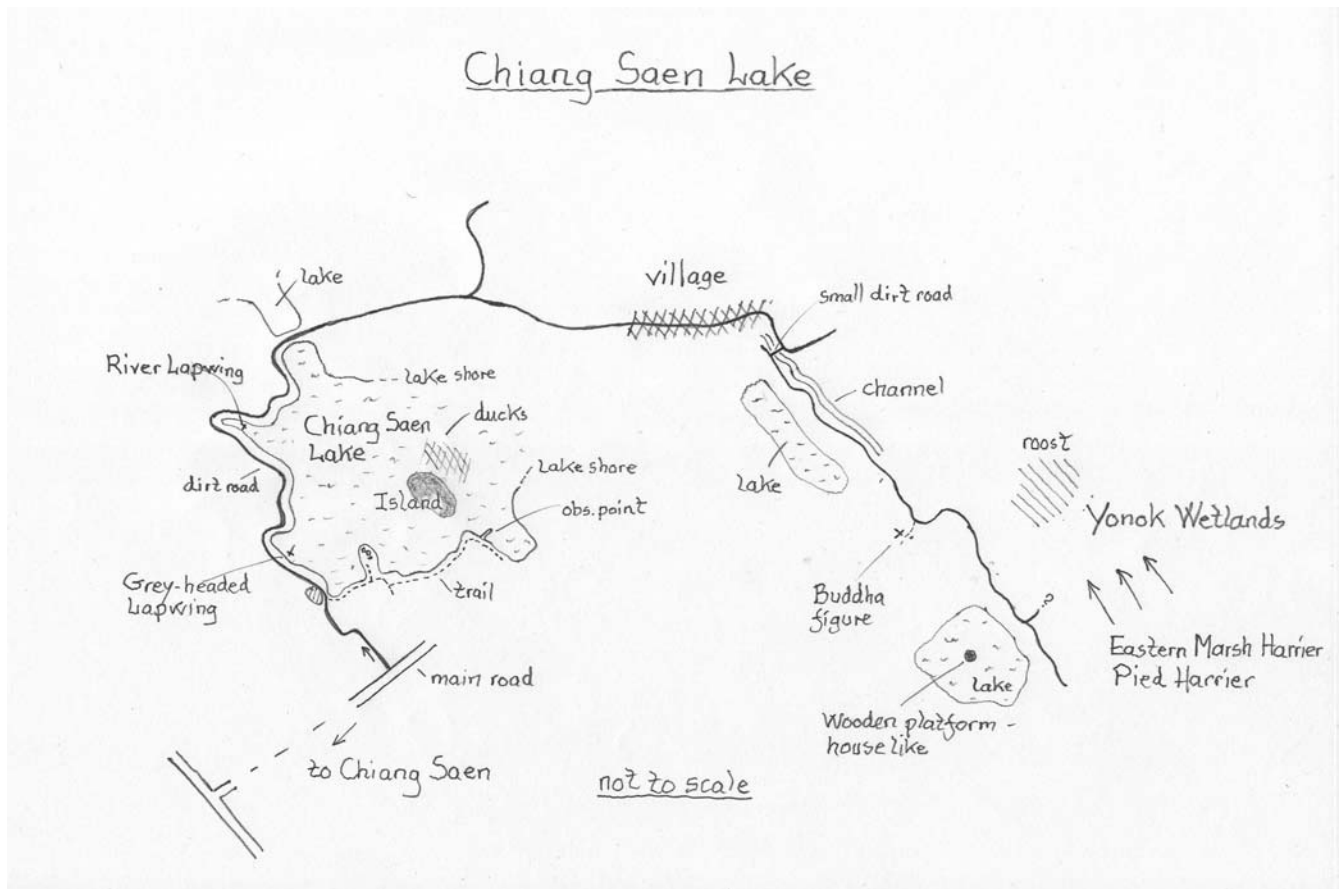
Siberian Blue Robin, Khao Yai



Doi Lang

Doi Lang is reached from Thaton where you find several accommodations, e.g. Riverview Resort and Garden Home Resort. Thaton is a 2 hours drive from Doi Chiang Dao. It will take around 1h15 min from Thaton to the ridge at Doi Lang where you are birding. The top military camp is situated at around 2000 m a.s.l. It is possible to tent near and around the military camp, but space is limited. There were many Thai birders and photographers at Doi Lang when we were there. Highlights seen at Doi Lang were *Golden Bush Robin*, beautiful males of *Orange-flanked Blue Robin*, *Black-throated Tit*, *Crested Finchbill*, surprisingly big and beautiful *Whiskered Yuhina* and *Spectacled Barwing*, *Grey-headed Parrotbill*, *Long-tailed Broadbill*, a rare *Fire-tailed Sunbird* male (easy distinguished from abundant *Mrs. Goulds Sunbird*), *Black-breasted Thrush* and a lot of other nice birds. Despite working hard on it we never encountered *Red-faced Liocicla*, which should be abundant here. Doi Lang is also one of the best places in Thailand to see *Cutia*, but you need luck to meet it. From the ridge there are splendid views into Burma – the border is only 4,5 km away. The forest is superb from 2 km before the military top camp and some 5-6 km after it.

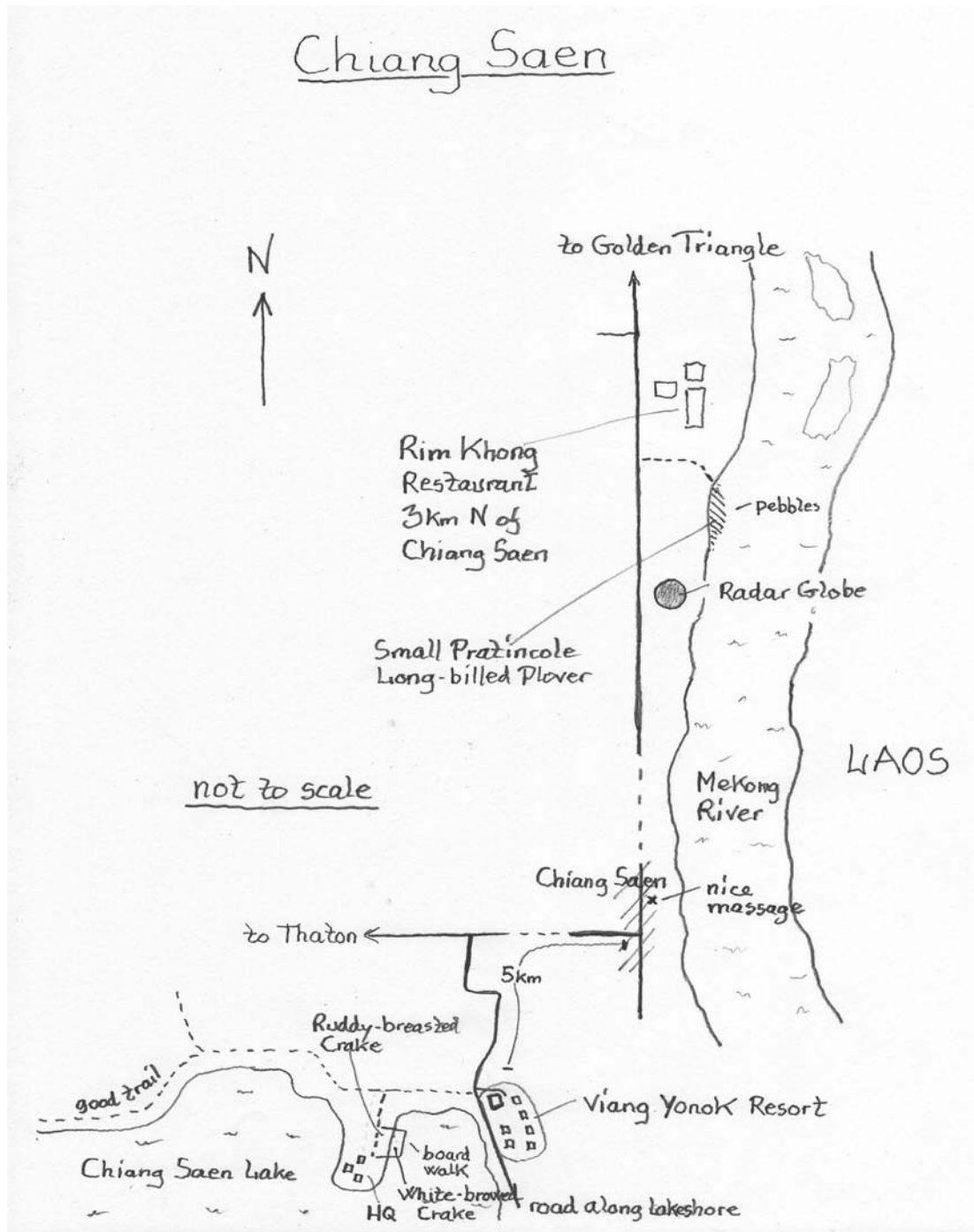
We never really birded the drier parts with scattered trees and groves of forest on our way up and down, despite it's great potential (too tired after a long day – especially the kids). Once we stopped briefly watching a fruiting tree with eight *Great Barbets* in full sun enlightening the plumage of this colourful species. A *SIBERIAN WEASEL* is also worth mentioning from near the ridge.



Chiang Saen Lake

One week before we arrived at Chiang Saen Lake temperatures went up and all the Palearctic ducks disappeared (pers. com. local birder). The ducks left back were *Lesser Whistling Duck* and *Spot-billed Duck* – the first very common, the latter uncommon. Both ducks were rather shy. It was obvious that birds were persecuted here – many excellent places were empty and birds fled at great distance. We were told by local birders that farmer's were killing ducks with poisonous rice – especially the numerous Lesser Whistling Duck. Chiang Saen Lake and the Yonok Wetlands could be a paradise for birds if the authorities cared about this internationally important wetland.

Walking and driving along the shores, however, produced some birds, e.g. *White-browed Crake*, *Ruddy-breasted Crake*, *River Lapwing*, *Grey-headed Lapwing*, *Eastern Marsh Harrier*, *Pied Harrier*, and perhaps the greatest rarity seen - *Eurasian Blackbird* at the Chiang Saen Lake headquarter. *SMALL ASIAN MONGOOSE* was the only mammal seen here.



Mekong River at Chiang Saen Village.

From Viang Yonok Resort at the lake there is only 5 km to Chiang Saen Village at the Mekong River. Heading north along the river bank for about 3 km passing the radar globe on your right hand you meet the Rim Khong Restaurant - also on your right hand. Nice, reasonably priced food is served here. If you walk back 100 m along the main road there's a dirt track leading down to the river - another 100 meters walk. At the river looking south you see an area made of pebbles. This is where we saw *Long-billed Plover* and *Small Pratincole*. Scan the area carefully. They are well camouflaged.



Green Peafowl at dusk, Huai Kong Krai

Huai Kong Krai

Huai Kong Krai Royal Forest Project is situated on road 118, 24 km N of Chiang Mai ring road in forest covered hills. It has a large sign at the entrance on the main road. From the gate drive about 4 km past some lakes until you reach a dam/causeway. Do not follow the road that bends to the left here, but drive straight on and pass the dam. Beyond the dam drive up to the right where you will reach a fenced area. Here you can park. Wild Green Peafowls - attracted to Peafowls in cages - are found inside the fenced area.

I tried to photograph the wild *Green Peafowls*, but they were surprisingly shy. Either they ran with full speed or flew up into distant trees. We were told by a resident birder that Green Peafowl always has been occurring in the wild in this area of Thailand. Wild or escaped – it is a fantastic bird to see in all its splendour. Our visit was late afternoon.

Krabi

The boardwalk is a nice place to observe birds in the mangrove. However, like in all other places there is no maintenance of such a nice facility. It was falling apart and was already dangerous to walk. If not repaired it won't last for more than a year or two. From this site we saw *Mangrove Pitta*, *Ruddy Kingfisher* and wonderful crabs in the most amazing colours. From boat trips it was easier to get good views on *Brown-winged Kingfishers*. Also beautiful *Black-capped Kingfishers*, *Chinese Egret*, *Nordmann's Greenshank* and many other waders were among the species added to the list.

If you stay at the City Hotel you are within walking distance from the mangrove boardwalk. Go to the river bank and turn left, continue for 1 km along the river bank and you'll meet the start of the boardwalk on your right hand side. The boardwalk ends at the foot of the left of the two cliffs seen from the waterfront.



Chestnut-crowned Laughing Thrush, Doi Inthanon

Khao Nor Chuchi

This famous site is only 1,5 hour away from Krabi by taxi. The place to stay is Morakot Resort with small cabins with shower (cold) and aircon. You need two cabins for a family of four. The two women running the place are very friendly and serve good food. Everything is priced reasonably. Morakot has very few cabins, so you better book in advance in the high season for birding (February – May). Many birders miss Gurneys's Pitta unless hiring Yotin, who is pleasant company. If you arrive in the high season you better book him in advance. In the high season you may be lucky enough to find the bird on your own, but don't count on it. We were told by resident foreign birders in Thailand that Yotin has a success rate of almost 90%, so it's worth considering hiring him despite that he is expensive, even by European standards (6000 baht per day; he will charge you the same for half a day). But Yotin is much more than Gurney's Pitta. He is simply an excellent birder that will produce a lot of other 'hard to find' birds that will boost your list considerably.

At the time we were there, the forest was silent like a grave – no dawn chorus and calls at all. It was really hard work. We hired Yotin, but only for half a day because he was already booked and we had a booking in the other end. It was rewarding – a *Gurneys Pitta* male in and out in front of the hide for 3 hours eating tiny termites. When we finally left Gurney's Pitta it was hot and the forest was quiet. Despite the poor odds Yotin managed to produce a beautiful *Blue-eared Kingfisher* at a forest stream together with a few other common species.

On our own a few other highlights were seen: *Orange-breasted Trogon*, *Black and Yellow Broadbill*, *Green Broadbill*, *Collared Scops Owl* and *Banded Pitta* male. A nice surprise was the observation of PREVOST'S SQUIRREL – a stunningly beautiful mammal. According to the literature not present in Thailand except on the very border to Malaysia. I dare say the literature is wrong – the species was seen under excellent conditions, I described it in my notebook and later it was verified by Yotin. Despite rare, it is present in Khao Nor Chuchi.

Birding time was efficiently reduced when I got sick with malaria-like symptoms (cyclic high fever, banging headache, freezing, sweating). Fortunately, it was not malaria (went to a doctor), but symptoms started all over again on three occasions when back home. It turned out to be a very resistant tick-transmitted bacterial infection with malaria-like symptoms.



Nicobar Pigeon near restaurant at Similan Island no.4

Similan Islands

Nicobar Pigeon is found reliably around the headquarter on Similan Island number 4. This is the only island where you can rent cabins. If you stay one day only on Similan Islands – this may pose a problem with respect to Nicobar Pigeon. Some days Nicobar Pigeons are only visible in the morning from dawn to around 09.00 am, and again in the afternoon from 15.30 till dusk. On day trips you arrive later than 09.00 am and leave very close to 15.30. And then of course you'll also miss the coral reefs which cannot be finished in half a day.

Like other islands the avifauna on Similan is pauperized compared to the mainland. However, birds can be found, and new records are likely because few birders stay here for longer periods. We saw *Pied Imperial Pigeon*, *Green Imperial Pigeon* and *Nicobar Pigeon* in numbers. *Asian Koel* was surprisingly easy to see. Other birds not expected included *Moustached Hawk Cuckoo*, *Emerald Dove*, *Cinnamon Bittern* and *Slaty-breasted Rail*. There's a nice roost of ISLAND FLYING FOX at the restaurant and camp ground area.



Khao Sok

We stayed at Nature Resort 20 min easy walk from the national park entrance. Nature Resort is opposite the better known Art's Riverside View, both situated at Sok River. A small bamboo bridge connects the two resorts. It's quieter on the Nature Resort side than at Art's place which accommodates larger groups. I don't know how the restaurant is at Art's place, but at Nature Resort it's excellent. And the tree houses 7 m up on the trunk of huge trees are nice, clean and comfortable with good views on the surrounding landscape.

Khao Sok is a disaster with respect to maintenance of trails and infrastructure. One exception is the broad jeep track running along the river, but vegetation here is rather uniform (bamboo dominated) and it's a bit boring to walk because it's almost straight out all the way (first 3-4 km). The trail starting at the restaurant is much more interesting, but it is not maintained at all. Even platform viewpoints are overgrown and in many places the concrete structure is broken making it dangerous to walk. It was our impression that many NP employees didn't do anything except sweeping the ground free of leaves. No one cares about keeping trails open (too sweaty work?), making interesting trails, maintaining infrastructure except when there is a restaurant, a pool or something like that at the end of the trail. Paying 200 baht and even 400 baht per person per day in entrance fee in national parks is simply too much compared to the services offered.

Khao Sok was very slow birding, but we ran into a few nice birds e.g. a pair of *Red-Bearded Bee-Eater*, a beautiful *Chestnut-naped Forktail*, *Forest Wagtail*, *Temminck's Sunbird* and *Maroon Woodpecker*.



Our boat at Pleipran Raft house at Chieow Laan Lake

Chieow Laan Lake

The scenery at Chieow Laan Lake is absolutely breathtaking. Limestone rocks in fantastic shapes covered in primary forest. It's a must go place. And there are nice birds to be seen. There are several raft-houses where you can sleep. We had Limestone Lake Rainforest Tours to arrange everything for us, and it was top professionally done. But it will be cheaper if you arrange it through one of the local guesthouses at Khao Sok, e.g. Nature Resort. However, it's important to have your own boatman available on the lake. Without him you are stranded on an island of floating houses. We stayed at Pleipran Raft house about 1 hour in longboat from the pier. The pier is 1 hour drive to the west of Khao Sok NP headquarter. From Pleipran you bird from the longboat sailing along the winding shores close to the forest and cliffs. In less

than 20 minutes ride you can reach a 1 km long trail through superb forest. The trail is used for accessing another raft house in an isolated part of the lake system and some caves.

Some nice birds seen at Chieow Laan were *Lesser Fish-Eagle*, *Osprey*, *White-bellied Sea-Eagle* (all three species common), *Violet Cuckoo*, *Dusky Broadbill*, *Crimson-winged Woodpecker*, *Great Hornbill*, *Wreathed Hornbill* and *Red-bearded Bee-Eater*.

Surin Islands

It is difficult to bird Surin Islands from the headquarter area where the cabins are situated. There's only one trail available that connects to a beach with tents on the east side. The trail is difficult to walk. It's up and down over large boulders and you have poor view to the seaside because of overhanging vegetation and to the landside because of steep cliffs. However, when we were there fruiting trees could be found in rather open spaces around the two campsites. It produced a few frugivores like *Green Imperial Pigeon*, *Pied Imperial Pigeon*, *Pink-necked Green Pigeon*, *Orange-breasted Green Pigeon* and *Thick-billed Green Pigeon*. On one occasion I flushed four *Nicobar Pigeons* along the before mentioned trail, but they were not attending the campgrounds like on Similan 4. I never attempted to hire a boat at low tide to search for Beach Thick-Knee on far away peaceful beaches. However, I walked along the trail to the other campground in the dark to look for Beach Thick-Knee at that site because of extensive reef areas exposed during low tide. But even at very early dawn people from the campsite were walking out on the corals and no Beach Thick-Knee were present there. However, *Pacific Reef Heron* and *Collared Kingfisher* didn't pay much attention to the people walking around.



Black-breasted Thrush, Doi Lang



Rufous-bellied Niltava, Doi Inthanon

The following species lists show the birds, mammals and reptiles seen on the trip. I was not familiar with songs and calls of birds in Thailand on arrival, and knew very few when I left because of the non-breeding circumstances. In only two occasions I managed to use the digital recorder bringing out birds in the open - Mangrove Pitta and Ruddy Kingfisher at Krabi mangrove boardwalk. It took one hour's work on both species, and it was on the last two days in January – some 3-4 weeks before the start of the breeding season. Three weeks earlier in January the two species did not respond to replay of calls and songs from the recorder.

Before I left for Thailand I made a top 30 target list of species that I really would like to see. And I was quite optimistic about it at home, despite that it contained many hard to see species. But I was too optimistic – I only saw 12 of the species from the list. In return for the unrealistic target list I had some luck with species in groups that I didn't expect to do well, e.g. pittas, broadbills, thrushes, forktails, pigeons & doves. However, parrots, frogmouths and ducks were a catastrophe, and hornbills a small disaster in terms of number of species seen. So the incentive for paying more visits to lovely Thailand is very straight forward.

Birds

Scaly-breasted Partridge
 Mountain Bamboo Partridge
 Red Junglefowl
 Siamese Fireback
 Mrs Hume's Pheasant
 Green Peafowl
 Lesser Whistling-Duck
 Spot-billed Duck
 Little Grebe
 Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker
 Stripe-breasted Woodpecker
 Speckled Piculet
 White-browed Piculet
 Heart-spotted Woodpecker
 Lesser Yellownap
 Crimson-winged Woodpecker

Greater Yellownap
 Streak-breasted Woodpecker
 Laced Woodpecker
 Greater Flameback
 Maroon Woodpecker
 Great Barbet
 Green-eared Barbet
 Golden-throated Barbet
 Blue-throated Barbet
 Moustached Barbet
 Blue-eared Barbet
 Coppersmith Barbet
 Oriental Pied Hornbill
 Great Hornbill
 Wreathed Hornbill
 Orange-breasted Trogon

Red-headed Trogon
 Brown-winged Kingfisher
 Stork-billed Kingfisher
 Common Kingfisher
 Blue-eared Kingfisher
 Banded Kingfisher
 Ruddy Kingfisher
 White-throated Kingfisher
 Black-capped Kingfisher
 Collared Kingfisher
 Red-bearded Bee-Eater
 Green Bee-Eater
 Blue-tailed Bee-Eater
 Chestnut-headed Bee-Eater
 Moustached Hawk-Cuckoo
 Greater Coucal
 Lesser Coucal
 Plaintive Cuckoo
 Asian Emerald Cuckoo
 Violet Cuckoo
 Asian Koel
 Green-billed Malkoha
 Red-billed Malkoha
 Chestnut-breasted Malkoha
 Indian Roller
 Dollarbird
 Vernal Hanging Parrot
 Hoopoe
 Glossy Swiftlet
 Himalayan Swiftlet
 Germain's Swiftlet
 Asian Palm Swift
 Fork-tailed Swift
 Brown-backed Needle-tail
 Crested Treeswift
 Grey-rumped Treeswift
 Collared Scops Owl
 Asian Barred Owlet
 Spotted Owlet
 Buffy Fish Owl
 Brown Wood Owl
 Large-tailed Nightjar
 Ashy Wood Pigeon
 Green Imperial Pigeon
 Mountain Imperial Pigeon
 Pied Imperial Pigeon
 Oriental Turtle Dove
 Spotted Dove
 Peaceful Dove
 Pink-necked Green Pigeon
 Orange-breasted Green Pigeon
 Thick-billed Green Pigeon

Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon
 White-bellied Green Pigeon
 Emerald Dove
 Nicobar Pigeon
 White-breasted Waterhen
 White-browed Crake
 Purple Swampphen
 Common Moorhen
 Common Coot
 Slaty-breasted Rail
 Ruddy-breasted Crake
 Pintail Snipe
 Common Snipe
 Black-tailed Godwit
 Bar-tailed Godwit
 Whimbrel
 Eurasian Curlew
 Pheasant-tailed Jacana
 Bronze-winged Jacana
 Spotted Redshank
 Common Redshank
 Marsh Sandpiper
 Common Greenshank
 Nordmann's Greenshank
 Green Sandpiper
 Wood Sandpiper
 Terek Sandpiper
 Common Sandpiper
 Ruddy Turnstone
 Great Knot
 Ruff
 Sanderling
 Spoon-billed Sandpiper
 Red-necked Stint
 Temminck's Stint
 Long-toed Stint
 Curlew Sandpiper
 Broad-billed Sandpiper
 Red-necked Phalarope
 Black-winged Stilt
 Pied Avocet
 Long-billed Plover
 Little Ringed Plover
 Small Pratincole
 Kentish Plover
 Lesser Sand Plover
 Greater Sand Plover
 Grey Plover
 River Lapwing
 Grey-headed Lapwing
 Red-wattled Lapwing
 Pallas's Gull

Brown-headed gull
 Caspian Tern
 Lesser Crested Tern
 Great crested Tern
 Black-naped Tern
 Common Tern
 Gull-billed Tern
 Little Tern
 Whiskered Tern
 White-winged Tern
 Jerdon's Baza
 Black Baza
 Oriental Honey Buzzard
 Black Kite
 Brahminy Kite
 White-bellied Sea-Eagle
 Osprey
 Lesser Fish-Eagle
 Eastern Marsh harrier
 Pied Harrier
 Shikra
 Crested Goshawk
 Grey-faced Buzzard
 Crested Serpent Eagle
 Common Buzzard
 Rufous-bellied Eagle
 Changeable Hawk Eagle
 Mountain Hawk Eagle
 Common Kestrel
 Oriental Hobby
 Little Cormorant
 Indian Cormorant
 Great Cormorant
 Little Egret
 Chinese Egret
 Pacific Reef Egret
 Great Egret
 Intermediate Egret
 Cattle Egret
 Grey Heron
 Purple Heron
 Chinese Pond Heron
 Black-crowned Night Heron
 Little Heron
 Yellow Bittern
 Cinnamon Bittern
 Painted Stork
 Asian Openbill
 Blue Pitta
 Banded Pitta
 Gurney's Pitta
 Mangrove Pitta

Black and Red Broadbill
 Silver-breasted Broadbill
 Black and Yellow Broadbill
 Green Broadbill
 Long-tailed Broadbill
 Dusky Broadbill
 Greater Green Leafbird
 Lesser Green Leafbird
 Blue-winged Leafbird
 Golden-fronted Leafbird
 Orange-bellied Leafbird
 Asian Fairy Bluebird
 Brown Shrike
 Long-tailed Shrike
 Grey-backed Shrike
 Black Drongo
 Ashy Drongo
 Crow-billed Drongo
 Bronzed Drongo
 Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo
 Spangled Drongo
 Greater Racket-tailed Drongo
 Large-billed Crow
 Black Magpie
 Eurasian Jay
 Red-billed Blue Magpie
 Common Green Magpie
 Rufous Treepie
 Grey Treepie
 Racket-tailed Treepie
 Black-naped Oriole
 Black-hooded Oriole
 Maroon Oriole
 Black-winged Cuckoo-Shrike
 Rosy Minivet
 Swinhoe's Minivet
 Ashy Minivet
 Grey-chinned Minivet
 Short-billed Minivet
 Scarlet Minivet
 Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike
 Yellow-bellied Fantail
 White-throated Fantail
 Pied Fantail
 Common Iora
 Green Iora
 Great Iora
 Black-naped Monarch
 Asian Paradise Flycatcher
 Large Woodshrike
 Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush
 Blue Rock Thrush

Blue Whistling Thrush
 Orange-headed Thrush
 Black-breasted Thrush
 Eye-browed Thrush
 Scaly Thrush
 Dark-sided Thrush
 Eurasian Blackbird
 Dark-sided Flycatcher
 Brown-streaked Flycatcher
 Mugimaki Flycatcher
 Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher
 Red-throated Flycatcher
 White-gorgeted Flycatcher
 Blue-throated Flycatcher
 Hill Blue Flycatcher
 Tickell's Blue Flycatcher
 Verditer Flycatcher
 Large Niltava
 Rufous-bellied Niltava
 Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher
 Siberian Blue Robin
 Oriental Magpie Robin
 Orange-flanked Bush Robin
 Golden Bush Robin
 White-rumped Shama
 Plumbeous Water Redstart
 White-browed Shortwing
 Chestnut-naped Forktail
 Black-backed Forktail
 Slaty-backed Forktail
 White-crowned Forktail
 Common Stonechat
 Pied Bushchat
 Grey Bushchat
 Ashy Woodswallow
 Asian Glossy Starling
 Asian Pied starling
 Black-coloured Starling
 White-shouldered Starling
 Common Myna
 White-vented Myna
 Hill Myna
 Chestnut-vented Nuthatch
 Velvet-fronted Nuthatch
 Giant Nuthatch
 Brown-throated Treecreeper
 Sultan Tit
 Great Tit
 Yellow-cheeked Tit
 Black-throated Tit
 Asian House Martin
 Plain Martin
 Dusky Craig Martin
 Barn Swallow
 Pacific Swallow
 Red-rumped Swallow
 Striated Swallow
 Crested Finchbill
 Striated Bulbul
 Black-headed Bulbul
 Black-crested Bulbul
 Red-whiskered Bulbul
 Sooty-headed Bulbul
 Stripe-throated Bulbul
 Flavescent Bulbul
 Yellow-vented Bulbul
 Streak-eared Bulbul
 Spectacled Bulbul
 Grey-eared Bulbul
 Puff-throated Bulbul
 Ochraceous Bulbul
 Grey-cheeked Bulbul
 Hairy-backed Bulbul
 Ashy Bulbul
 Mountain bulbul
 Black Bulbul
 White-headed Bulbul
 Golden-bellied Gerygone
 Hill Prinia
 Rufescent Prinia
 Plain Prinia
 Mountain Taylorbird
 Common Taylorbird
 Dark-necked Tailorbird
 Slaty-bellied Tesia
 Asian Stubtail
 Lanceolated warbler
 Dusky Warbler
 Pale-legged Leaf Warbler
 Ashy-throated Warbler
 Yellow-browed Warbler
 Blyth's Leaf Warbler
 White-tailed Leaf Warbler
 Chestnut-flanked White-Eye
 Japanese White-Eye
 Everett's White-Eye
 Grey-crowned warbler
 Chestnut-crowned Warbler
 Yellow-bellied warbler
 Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush
 Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush
 White-necked Laughingthrush
 Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush
 Abbott's Babbler

Buff-breasted Babbler
 Puff-throated Babbler
 Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler
 White-browed Scimitar Babbler
 Streaked Wren Babbler
 Pygmy Wren Babbler
 Ferruginous Babbler
 Moustached Babbler
 Scaly-crowned Babbler
 Striped tit-Babbler
 Rufous-fronted Babbler
 Golden Babbler
 Spot-necked Babbler
 Chestnut-winged Babbler
 White-browed Shrike-Babbler
 Black-eared Shrike-Babbler
 Blue-winged Minla
 Chestnut-tailed Minla
 Striated Yuhina
 Rufous-winged Fulvetta
 Brown-cheeked Fulvetta
 Grey-cheeked Fulvetta
 Whiskered Yuhina
 White-bellied Yuhina
 Spectacled Barwing
 Rufous-backed Sibia
 Dark-backed Sibia
 Grey-headed Parrotbill
 Yellow-breasted Flowerpecker
 Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker
 Orange-bellied Flowerpecker
 Fire-breasted Flowerpecker

Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker
 Brown-throated Sunbird
 Olive-backed Sunbird
 Purple Sunbird
 Temminck's Sunbird
 Mrs Goulds Sunbird
 Green-tailed Sunbird
 Black-throated Sunbird
 Fire-tailed Sunbird
 Little Spiderhunter
 Thick-billed Spiderhunter
 Streaked Spiderhunter
 Forest Wagtail
 Richard's Pipit
 Paddyfield Pipit
 Olive-backed Pipit
 Oriental Skylark
 White Wagtail
 Yellow Wagtail
 Grey Wagtail
 Plain-backed Sparrow
 Eurasian Tree-Sparrow
 Streaked Weaver
 Red Avadavat
 White-rumped Munia
 Scaly-breasted Munia
 Common Rosefinch

403 species

Mammals

Northern Treeshrew
 Common Treeshrew
 Island Flying-Fox
 Asian Wrinkle-lipped Bat
 Asian Slow Loris
 Banded Langur
 Dusky Langur
 Northern Pig-tailed Macaque
 Southern Pig-tailed Macaque
 Long-tailed Macaque
 White-handed Gibbon
 Golden Jackal
 Asian Black Bear
 Siberian Weasel
 Small Indian Civit
 Large-spotted Civit
 Common Palm Civit
 Small Asian Mongoose

Leopard
 Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin
 Asian Elephant
 Red Muntjac
 Sambar
 Black Giant Squirrel
 Cream-coloured Giant Squirrel
 Prevost's Squirrel
 Grey-bellied Squirrel
 Pallas's Squirrel
 Variable Squirrel
 Western Striped Squirrel
 Indo-Chinese Ground Squirrel
 Low's Squirrel
 Malayan Porcupine

33 species

Reptiles

Pit-viper (*Trimeresurus*) sp.
 King Cobra
 Indo-Chinese Rat-Snake
 Long-nosed Whip-Snake
 Mangrove Snake
 Smooth-backed Gliding Gecko
 Spotted House Gecko
 Spiny-tailed House Gecko
 Four-clawed Gecko

Gliding Lizard (*Draco*) spp.
 Water Monitor
 Green Turtle

12 species

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7 June 2009, Bent Otto Poulsen (BOP)



Blue Pitta, Khao Yai NP