

Birding Snippets

Singapore • Malaysia • Indonesia • Thailand © Southeast Asia ©

No. 16 • September 2012

Marathon birding in NW Thailand Part 6 : Practicalities



Sites visited marked by green circles, main towns/villages indicated by purple squares

Getting There The international airport at the city of Chiang Mai is the gateway to northwest Thailand, which is often referred to simply as northern Thailand.

Getting Around

Rental Vehicle We got around in a rented 4WD vehicle. There are many vehicle rental options, all easily found with a simple internet search. We chose a competitively priced 2.7L 4WD vehicle from Budget (www.budget.co.th). Apart from Den Ya Kat (located at Doi Chiang Dao), all the other areas visited can be reached in an ordinary sedan, which would naturally cost less to rent. One way to cut costs is to rent a normal car and visit all the places less Den Ya Kat, then return the car and switch to



Toyota Vigo 4WD

a 4WD and do the Den Ya Kat portion last. In this case, prior arrangements would have to be made for the 4WD vehicle to ensure that one is available.

Getting around is not too difficult as the roads are generally good and the destinations are (mostly) sufficiently sign-posted in English. Renting a vehicle with a driver does not cost a lot more and may be a viable option to allow visiting birders to focus on finding birds and nap on the drives between destinations.

At pump stations, there are no English signs to differentiate between petrol and diesel, but the pump attendant would know what your vehicle needs, as diesel is mainly for trucks while most cars run on petrol.

*At the
Doi Inthanon National Park
Accommodation Center,
getting the keys to our
bungalow.*



Accommodation and food

Doi Inthanon



The national parks website at www.dnp.go.th has comprehensive information on accommodation within the various national parks. Somehow, I could not complete the booking process on the internet, which was rather frustrating. In the end, the good old telephone did the trick and I managed to make my booking by calling Doi Inthanon National Park directly, speaking to a nice



Our bungalow at Doi Inthanon National Park



Simple interior of the Doi Inthanon National Park bungalow.

lady staff member who spoke good English. We did not stay at national park accommodation at the other sites. For Doi Chiang Dao, Doi Ang Khang and Tha Ton, we simply showed up and there were vacant rooms at the hotels. I must mention that our trip was from 26 February to 04 March 2008, which was not during the peak season.

Our bungalow at Doi Inthanon National Park has 3 single beds – 2 in a bedroom and 1 in the hall. There's a square table and 2 chairs in the hall. Hot water shower is available. There are no cooking facilities but with electrical outlets, all one needs is a small electric travel kettle to prepare a hot cup of tea, coffee, milo or instant noodles to warm oneself up in the chilly mornings! (The Park HQ and accommodation area is at an elevation of 1300m.) There are places around the park HQ where one can get lunch and dinner.

Doi Inthanon National Park HQ area at 1300m above sea level. Mr Deang's shop is just up the road on the left.



From the park HQ, Mr Deang's place is located just up the main road and is a good place to pop in for lunch. There are many pictures of birds and the back of his restaurant may turn up some good birds which come to pick up scraps from his kitchen's outflow. He even had the "A Guide to the Birds of Thailand" by Lekagul & Round at local prices! He also has a few basic rooms to accommodate visitors.



A signboard at Mr. Deang's shop.

Mr Deang's shop/
restaurant/ rooms are
surrounded by greenery.



Doi Chiang Dao



Garden setting at Malee's.



Cosy room at Malee's.

The usual accommodation choices at Doi Chiang Dao are Malee's Nature Lovers' Bungalows, often simply referred to as Malee's, the other is Chiang Dao Nest. Meals are available at both places. There is an excellent birder's log book at Malee's while both places (now) offer free wireless internet.

Information for Malee's

Website: <http://www.maleenature.com/>,

e-mail : maleenature@hotmail.com

Tel : +66-53-456426

Mobile : +66-81-9618387

Information for Chiang Dao Nest

Website : <http://nest.chiangdao.com/>

Email : nest@chiangdao.com

Tel : +66-53-456242, +66-53-455795

Mobile : +66-86-0171985

An option for the hardy is to camp out at the Den Ya Kat substation. That would save one from waking up at 4am to make the 1.5 to 2 hr drive to get there by dawn, but bring your own food and warm camping gear! The substation is at 1454m above sea level and gets cold at night!

Doi Ang Khang

At Doi Ang Khang, Ang Khang Nature Resort (by the Amari chain) is the best and most expensive accommodation option.

Website: <http://www.oamhotels.com/angkhang/>

Tel : +66-53-450110.

Ang Khang Villa is a decent looking alternative that cost about half the price of the former and is near to restaurants and walking distance to the Royal Project, where the Thrushes can be found.

Website : <http://www.angkhang-villa.com/>

Tel : +66-53-450010, +66-53-450023,

Mobile : +66-87-1837500

Ang Khang Villa also operates the isolated Ang Khang Villa 3, also known as Ban Luang Resort. There are no shops or restaurants nearby but it has a small waterfall at the back of the grounds which holds White-capped Water Redstart.

*The small waterfall
at the back of
Ang Khang Villa 3
which holds a
White-capped Water
Redstart*



Thaton At Thaton, we stayed at the Garden Home Resort. It is set by the riverside and is planted with lychee trees, but March was not the season for these sweet and succulent fruits. Cheap food is available along the main road of this small village.

Website :

<http://www.thatonaccommodation.com/gardenhome.htm>

Tel : +66-53-373015

Chiang Mai On our final night, we stayed at the Royal Lanna, a high rise hotel with big spacious rooms, right smack along the night bazaar in Chiang Mai city, giving us good views of the city and the convenience of being near just about everything.

Website : <http://royallannahotelchiangmai.com/>

Fees

National Park entrance fee was 400 Baht per pax per entry as of March 2008. Of the places visited, only Doi Inthanon and Sri Lanna are national parks.

At Doi Chiang Dao, a permit is only required if visiting Den Ya Kat. The fee was around 200 Baht per pax plus about 30 Baht for the vehicle.

At Doi Ang Khang, the Royal Project charges a small entrance fee.

Weather and Clothing



Lookout platform on the Ang Ka Nature Trail near the top of Doi Inthanon National Park. It was very cold and windy in the mornings. Conditions were much better in the afternoon.

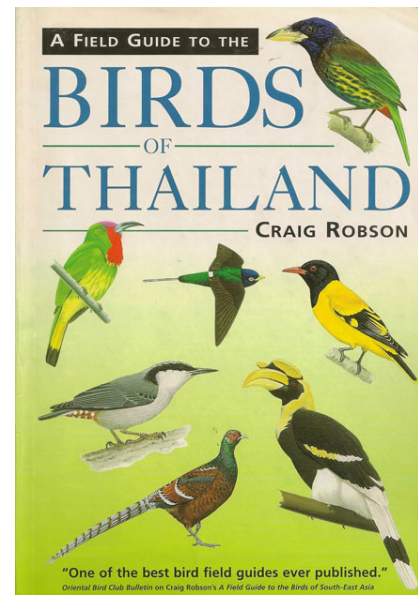
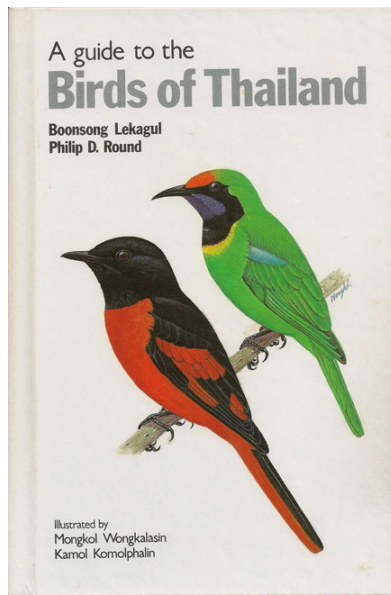
End February / Early March is the end of the cold season and beginning of the hot season. At lower elevation like Mae Hia, Tha Ton and Chiang Mai, it is hot in the day becoming pleasant in the late afternoon. At the top of Doi Inthanon (2565m), warm clothing is a must in the early morning and late afternoon, and even in the middle of the day if covered in cloud or drizzle. Gloves and headgear are recommended! The Den Ya Kat substation at Doi Chiang Dao (1400m) is pleasant in the morning with a shirt and a jacket. Same for Doi Ang Khang.

Field Guides (book) and other resources

Field Guide We had with us both Lekagul & Round's A Guide to the Birds of Thailand (1991) and Robson's Birds of Thailand (2002). As with most field guides, each has its strengths. Robson's has more recent information and the plates face the text. For Lekagul & Round, one may have to flip a few pages from the plates to find the corresponding text. However, Lekagul & Round has one BIG advantage over Robson's with respect to the tricky *Phylloscopus* warblers. In this older guide, the warblers are arranged into 4 groups. The differences between these 4 groups are explained and greatly helps in the process of elimination to zero in on the ID.

Lekagul & Round (1991)
on left, is good for
Warbler ID
and
Robson(2002) on right
is more up to date.

We specifically avoided
Robson's 'Birds of
Southeast Asia' so that we
would not be confused by
the extra 300 species which
does not occur in Thailand.



Other resources We also looked up the internet for trip reports to get an idea of the species likely to be encountered at the various sites as well as for directions.

Map We used the Periplus Chiang Mai / Northern Thailand regional map. It does not have all the details but it has coverage of the areas we went. The main map covers all our destinations. An intermediate-scale map shows Chiang Mai to Chom Thong, including the turnoff to Doi Inthanon. The strength of this map is that the Chiang Mai city map includes the airport and the "canal road", which enabled us to get to our first destination with confidence.



How we got around

The description below is based on the sequence of our travel in Northern Thailand.

Airport to Mae Hia From the airport's car park,
1) turn right and go straight until the first major junction.
2) Then, turn left onto Om Muang Road. A short while later, the inner city's moat and walls will appear on the right.



A dirt track inside Mae Hia.



Mae Hia – road leading to the wooded area.

Mae Hia to Doi Inthanon



On the Route 108 towards Chom Thong.

- 3) At the Suan Dok Gate, which is the first major junction, turn left onto Suthep Road.
- 4) Go straight until the “canal road” – Khlong Chonprathan Road (Route 121) and turn left. This will be a cross junction. It is easy to miss the “canal road” and overshoot (as we did), because the canal is in-between the northbound and southbound lanes, and it has waist high concrete walls on both sides, which prevents the driver from seeing the canal from the traffic lights. But it will be obvious once one drives over it! If that happens, just make a U-turn farther up and get back onto the “canal road” on the southbound lanes.
- 5) Drive for 4.9km from the “canal road” junction and turn right to get into Mae Hia. Again, it is easy to miss the turn because it is along a right bend of the road. We missed this turn as well! The great thing for us was that by proceeding farther on to make a U-turn, we found a perfect lunch stop serving excellent *mi haeng* (dry noodles).

There is a guard post at the entrance to Mae Hia Agricultural Research Centre but the guards are friendly to birders, just wave your binoculars to get in! Drive to the fields, ponds, open areas and fringes of the forest to do your birding.

- 1) Exit Mae Hia and turn right onto the “canal road”.
- 2) Turn left at the first set of traffic lights.
- 3) Go on until you reach the junction with Highway 108.
- 4) Turn right onto Highway 108 and proceed south. The drive to Chom Thong will take around 1 hour.
- 5) Approaching Chom Thong, look out for big signs indicating Doi Inthanon and turn right to get to the Doi Inthanon access road.

Pay your entrance fee at the Park Gate a few km on. The Park HQ and most of the park accommodation are located around 30+km up the access road.

We went to Park HQ Accommodation Center to get the keys to our park bungalow. To get to the park accommodation area, backtrack on the park's main road for 370m, then turn left for 400m and make a right turn where there is a guard post. Drive through the campsite and the Black-tailed Crake spot (there is a permanent hide here) to get to the park bungalows.

Doi Inthanon National Park HQ surroundings.



Lower section of Mae Pan Falls.

Another gate known as the "2nd checkpoint" is located at around 37.5km (on the park's main access road), near one of the "jeep tracks", have your tickets with you in the vehicle just in case the guards ask to see it. In our case, they never did. The top of Doi Inthanon is another 9km or so from the 2nd checkpoint. The Mae Cham road is just the left turn after the 2nd checkpoint, signposted along the Mae Cham road is a right turnoff to the Mae Pan Waterfalls.

Ang Ka Nature Trail near the top of Doi Inthanon National Park.

Note that there is another boardwalk near the summit, across the road, next to the visitor center.



**Doi Inthanon to
Doi Chiang Dao**

On the way down from Doi Inthanon, after passing the entrance gate for 900m, we took a left turn and continued for another 900m to arrive at the Inthanon Highland Resort to look for the Asian Barred Owlet.

Entrance arch of the Inthanon Highland Resort which was actually located at the foothills at 320m above sea level. It is a reliable site for the Asian Barred Owlet.



We decided to revisit Mae Hia, so we re-traced our route. From Mae Hia, we got on the canal road, heading north and it eventually joined up with the main Chiang Mai to Thaton trunk road (Route 107). Before reaching Chiang Dao town, we made a right turn at Mae Taeng town to detour to Sri Lanna National Park. Look for road signs indicating Mae Ngat Dam.

Chiang Dao town is smack on Route 107. When driving through Chiang Dao town, go slow and look for the small signboard on the left indicating a left turn for Malee's Nature Lovers Bungalows.

*On Route 107 northbound,
turn left to Malee's
when you see
this bunch of signboards at
Chiang Dao town.*





Signboard beyond Malee's.

The Doi Chiang Dao Wildlife Sanctuary office is located up a slope 200 metres beyond Malees. You'll need to make a right turn to get up the slope. Get your Den Ya Kat (DYK) permits here. The road beyond Malee's comes to a dead end at the Temple's car park.

Malee's to Den Ya Kat



'Firebreak' area at Den Ya Kat, where Mrs Hume's Pheasant is sometimes seen.

From Malees, get back to Chiang Dao town and when back on the trunk road (Route 107) drive 5km south, yes, back where you came from, to the next village – Mae Na, where the DYK turn-off is (coordinates are N19° 19' 45.76" E98° 57' 17.09"). The English sign says "Checkpoint 16km" and faces south, so you can't see it when coming from Malee's or Chiang Dao Nest! What makes it more difficult to find the turn-off is that you'll be driving in the darkness of the early morning in order to get to DYK by dawn. Both the accommodation are to the north of Mae Na village. Coming from the north, it is a right turn. The road will take one pass houses and fields. When the sealed road ends, and you're on dirt tracks, look out for a sharp right turn and take it; going straight will lead to nowhere but frustration. Unfortunately this 'junction' of sorts is not sign-posted. Much farther up, there is a guard post where you may be asked to produce your permit. Moving on, you'll come to a T-junction, turn right here and go all the way to the end where there are a few buildings – this is the Den Ya Kat substation (GPS coordinates are N19° 22' 26.37" E98° 50' 5.21").

Nearing the end of the 'road' at Den Ya Kat. Mountain Bamboo Partridges were seen walking across the dirt track and then hiding amongst the bushes on the left of the track.



**Den Ya Kat to
Doi Ang Khang**



*View from the road to
Ban Luang Resort,
Doi Ang Khang.*

Get back to the main trunk road (route 107) at Mae Na village and head north (left turn). Approaching Chiang Dao town, you can take the left bypass to avoid the town traffic and rejoin the trunk road north of the town. We went straight, into town, for lunch. After Chiang Dao town, the road sign will indicate a left turn (route 1178) for Doi Ang Khang. We took the alternative route which was to go straight along route 107. The turn-off (route 1249) for Doi Ang Khang is well sign posted.

To get to the restaurant of the royal project, take a right after entering 250m from the gate, drive for about 1km and the restaurant would be on your left. The area for the thrushes is at the back of the restaurant.

*The back of the restaurant
at the Royal Project at
Doi Ang Khang
where thrushes visit.*



*Note the 3 hides
on the right.*

**Doi Ang Khang
to Tha Ton**

Get back onto Route 107 on the northbound lanes. As you drive on, Route 107 becomes Route 1089 (you may or may not realize) and in about an hour's time, you would arrive at Tha Ton. Cross the river, turn left, and after a few hundred meters, the Garden Home Resort can be seen on the left.

*Entrance to the
Garden Home Resort,
Tha Ton.*



Getting to Doi Lang To get to Doi Lang, go back across the river, heading south (actually westsouthwest) this time, for about 500m and take the right turn onto Route 1314. Go on this road for about 20mins, when you see a guard post manned by soldiers, turn right (coordinates for the turnoff are N20° 06' 01.62" E99° 16' 22.16"). Slow down as the soldier may give you a friendly reminder on the landslide at the end of the road. Thereafter, it is straight all the way to Doi Lang, 2000m above sea level. Note that there is another guarded checkpoint right on the road where visitors have to sign-in. This is a few kilometers before the end of the road.

The road on Doi Lang sits atop a 2000m high ridge that borders Myanmar.



Tha Ton to Huai Hong Khrai Royal Project (outside Chiang Mai) The main road (southbound) – Route 1089 / Route 107 – leads straight into Chiang Mai. The drive takes about 3 hours. As we approached Chiang Mai, we followed road signs indicating Chiang Rai. It was a detour east, along Highway 11, and thereafter, northeast onto Route 118. The Royal Project is signposted along the Chiang Mai-Chiang Rai road (Route 118), and entails a right turn after 24km. (GPS coordinates for the turnoff are N18° 54' 34" E99° 12' 59.64").

Drive on the small road for a few kilometers. Coming to a manned barrier, smile and drive through. After crossing a small dam, with the water on your right, you would have arrived. (GPS coordinates for the Huai Hong Khrai area of interest are N18° 52' 46" E99° 12' 59").

At Huai Hong Khrai, Green Peafowl are kept in these huge cages. Their calls attract (possibly) wild Green Peafowl which roam freely.

The leafless trees are not dead but are deciduous and have shed their leaves due to the dry season.



Getting Back to Chiang Mai / Airport

Leaving Huai Hong Khrai Royal Project, make a left turn at the Chiang Mai-Chiang Rai road and head straight into the city! With the Periplus Chiang Mai Map, we found it quite easy to make our way to the night bazaar where our hotel (Royal Lanna) was located and subsequently to the airport the next morning.

View of Night Bazaar street from Royal Lanna Hotel.

Shops line both sides of the street.

