

MYANMAR

Burmese endemics in the 'Land of the Golden Pagodas'



Burma, now known as Myanmar, has one of the most diverse bird faunas per unit area of any country in the world, making it the last frontier of Asian biodiversity. With over a thousand species of bird it is, without doubt, the most ornithologically diverse country in South East Asia and new discoveries are made annually. With most of its bird books written in the early 1900s and few birders visiting for over half a century, Myanmar has finally opened its doors to birders in recent years. Bird Holidays has been visiting for some time now and has assisted the Spoon-billed Sandpiper projects there. We continue to work with local people as part of our tours to look for other birds and explore its remarkable cultural heritage.

Our tour will take us birding among paddyfields by Inle and Moeyungyi lakes, where oxen still plough the fields with Asian Open-billed Storks in attendance. The drongos and mynas ride on the backs of water buffalo, periodically darting out to take insects disturbed by their feet. Then we go to the Hill Station at Kalaw, brimming with Himalayan woodland birds, and then on to the beautiful and remote forests cloaking Mount Victoria. Rarely visited by birders, it is home to Burmese Tit and White-browed, or Mount Victoria, Nuthatch, while the list of endemics keeps increasing due to new discoveries. Close to Mount Victoria is one of Asia's best kept secrets. Over two thousand temples on the banks of the Irrawaddy River dating from the 9th Century make Bagan one of the great archaeological wonders of the world.

ITINERARY

YANGON TO MOEYINGYI WETLAND

We will arrive in Yangon in the afternoon and will go to the Shwedagon Pagoda, one of the most prestigious cultural sites in Yangon. An amazing area of lion statues and golden spikes, the pagoda also hosts an extraordinary wildlife spectacle. Each day hundreds of drongos gather to roost and, as light fades, millions of bats come out from the roof. Like a column of smoke, the procession is spectacular and seemingly endless, with Peregrines, Kestrels and Black Kites all trying to catch one for their supper.

The next day we will visit Hlawgar Park, a mix of woodland and wetland that holds Oriental Darter, Racket-tailed Treepie and Chestnut-headed Bee-eater. After lunch, we head to Lake Moeyungyi, a huge lake with plenty of emergent vegetation where we can birdwatch peacefully by boat. The lake itself is home to impressive numbers of birds and it is not unusual to see a thousand Pintail in the air. At dusk we will watch as thousands of ibis, egrets and herons fly to roost in

nearby trees. Gorgeous male Pied Harriers gather along with Eastern Marsh Harriers and one year we counted more than 20 of each! Striated Grassbirds, Yellow Bittern and Black-browed and Oriental Reed Warblers are common in lakeside vegetation. Plaintive Cuckoos can be found and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters pick off stray insects. At night we will enjoy a dark starry sky at Moeyungyi, free from light pollution. The following day we may be greeted by a Black-capped Kingfisher, which regularly sits on the roof, while wintering Siberian Rubythroats and Bluethroats skulk in the undergrowth. We have plenty of time to look for Long-toed Stint and Citrine Wagtail, watch Purple Swampphen and numerous Purple Herons, or perhaps a Falcated Duck, before making our way back to Yangon for the evening flight to Heho and Inle Lake.

INLE LAKE AND KALAW

High on the Shan Plateau is Inle Lake. Famous for its fishermen who row boats with their legs, leaving hands free to net carp; we will use more conventional methods to check for birds. The rare Jerdon's Bush Chat is one of several good

birds found here with Baer's Pochard sometimes seen among the many Ferruginous Duck, Spot-billed Duck, Garganey, Lesser Whistling Ducks and Pheasant-tailed Jacana. Great Spotted Eagles may disturb a Chinese Grassbird or Rosy Pipit as they fly over the vegetated islands. With two nights here, there is ample time to enjoy its charm and see its best birds.

Day five is a short drive to Kalaw, an old colonial hill station. The forests here bear all the hallmarks of the finest Himalayan birding with many bird families well represented. We will do some birding here in the late afternoon, but we have a full day's birding here the next day. We will look for the endemic Burmese Yuhina, Spectacled Barwing, Green Magpie, Davison's Leaf Warbler, Blyth's Shrike-Babbler, Long-tailed Broadbill, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher and Yellow-cheeked Tit in a landscape of tea plantations, a reservoir and an old monastery.

On day seven, we head for Bagan, looking for birds en route at the base of Shan Hill.

BAGAN

Bagan is our base for the next two nights. Like Angkor Wat, it is one of the great wonders of ancient Asia. We begin by birding among the thousands of temples and pagodas that hold massive golden Buddhas. Here we will focus on Burmese endemics such as Burmese Bushlark, Hooded Treepie and White-throated Babbler. There are Blue Rock Thrushes, Plain-backed Sparrows, Rain Quails and Irrawaddy Bulbuls that will ensure we are kept busy. Laggar Falcons watch from the tallest temples, from time to time spooking River Lapwings and Small Pratincoles over the Irrawaddy River.

We will take a boat ride on this famous river where in the past we have seen Sand Larks, Rain Quail and White-tailed Stonechats.

MOUNT VICTORIA AND THE CHIN HILLS

We will then drive to the lower slopes of Mount Victoria, birding along the way. Rural Myanmar has charming ox-carts and horses, while motorised vehicles are still quite scarce. Indian Rollers, Smyrna Kingfishers and Brown Shrikes line the roadsides, but White-rumped Falcon and Collared Falconet are more highly prized.

Mount Victoria is still relatively unexplored. The habitat changes with elevation from dry deciduous forest, through rhododendron to grassland at the peaks. We have three nights here in which to explore. Only recorded at this one site, the White-browed Nuthatch dwells among the mossy trunks of highland trees. Two other nuthatch species also live here, sharing branches with endemic Burmese Tits. Many others such as Chin Hills Wren-babbler have restricted ranges, making this place very special. Wintering Siberian birds rub shoulders with Himalayan species. There are laughingthrushes, leafbirds and sunbirds. Minivets light up the canopy, along with various leaf-warblers. Niltavas flit through the bamboo as waves of fulvettas, minlas and scimitar-babblers pass by. The list of possibilities goes on and on, and includes Brownish-flanked and Russet Bush-warblers, Mountain Bamboo-partridge, Spot-throated Babbler, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, Blue-throated Barbet, Darjeeling Woodpecker, Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike, Blue-winged, Chestnut-tailed and Red-tailed Minlas, Rufous-winged, White-browed and Nepal Fulvettas, Grey Sibia, Whiskered and Stripe-throated Yuhinas, and White-bellied Redstart.

From here, we return to Bagan for one night giving us plenty of time to enjoy the birding and sightseeing around the temples again, before taking a flight to Yangon, connecting with our flight home.

CLIMATE AND PACE

In lowland areas the climate is mostly hot in the day and cool at night. At Mount Victoria and high elevations it can be cold in the night with cool mornings. We do not expect rain but it is possible. Breakfast will be early to take advantage of bird activity. There is some uphill walking at Kalaw and Mount Victoria but at a sensible pace. Some of our wetland birding may be done from a boat if conditions allow.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Full board accommodation is provided, with one night at the Panorama Hotel, Yangon, one night at Moeyingyi Resort, two nights at Inle Lake Resort, two nights at the Pine Hill Resort, Kalaw, two nights at the Sky Palace Hotel, Bagan, two nights at the Sky Palace Hotel, Mount Victoria and one night back at the Sky Palace Hotel in Bagan. All are of a medium to good standard, with en suite bathrooms. Food is Burmese, with Chinese, Indian or Western choices in the more touristy places, hot and spicy dishes can be avoided if you wish. It is difficult to get a variety of food in the more remote places like Mount Victoria, where we may have some set meals, but staff will always try their best to accommodate most tastes.

PRICE INCLUDES

All birdwatching excursions with Bird Holidays leader and expert local guide, full-board accommodation (starting with dinner on 9th, ending with dinner on 20th), soft drinks at meal times, bottled water throughout, transport by mini-coach, boat trips, reserve entrance fees and international flights.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Travel insurance. Tourist visa (currently about £20). Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Return flights from London Heathrow to Yangon using the scheduled services of Emirates. Outbound flight departs early afternoon, arriving back in the UK late morning. **Domestic flights from Manchester and other UK airports are available on this tour. See booking form for details.**

13 nights including two overnight flights:	8th to 21st January 2018
Principal leader:	Phil Palmer
Local guide:	Lay Win
Maximum group size:	12 clients with one leader and a local guide
Cost with discount (if you book before 25th September 2017):	£3990 per person sharing (£340 single supplement)
Full Cost:	£4140 per person sharing
Deposit:	£1000 per person