



Wilderness Birding Adventures

Birding Cambodia

January 19 - February 1, 2024

Price: \$5,800 from Siem Reap (tour ends in Phnom Penh)

Single Supplement: \$385

For most, birding may not be the first thought that comes to mind with the mention of Cambodia, as few countries have suffered as much in modern times. However, after emerging from the grip of a harrowing war-torn 20th century, stability and a growing infrastructure have returned, welcoming conservation groups, tourists, and birders alike.

For many reasons, Cambodia may just be Southeast Asia's best-kept birding secret. Large tracts of open gallery forest in the north of the country are home to some of the rarest species in Asia. Southeast Asia's largest freshwater lake, Tonle Sap, and its seasonally flooded forests provide a wetland habitat teeming with life, including the endangered Greater Adjutant and Milky Stork. Several species which are now gone from neighboring countries still cling to existence in the vast forests and expansive wetlands of Cambodia. Combine all this with regular international flights, decent roads, comfortable hotels, and delicious food and the groundwork is laid for a world-class birding experience!

Since the 1990s, several remarkable discoveries have been made in Cambodia. These exciting finds include a surviving population of Giant Ibis, one of the world's rarest birds and two newly described species, the Mekong Wagtail and Cambodian Tailorbird. Other rarities found along our route include White-shouldered Ibis, White-rumped Falcon, Bengal Florican, Pale-capped Pigeon, Rufous-winged Buzzard, and Black-headed Woodpecker. It is not surprising that Cambodia now rightfully claims its place among the list of "must-visit" birding destinations.

In addition to the country's avian treasures, the ancient history of Cambodia is entirely fascinating and has left us with the "eighth wonder of the world," the incomparable Angkor Wat. We'll visit this and other lesser-known ancient wonders on our 14-day itinerary, which weaves its way from the modern cities of Siem Reap and Phnom Penh through the ancient Angkorian ruins and remote villages of the rural north. Our itinerary is anchored by three extended stays—four nights in Siem Reap, three nights at Tmatboey, and three nights in Sen Monorom--thus simplifying travel logistics and allowing more time in some of the country's most amazing and productive birding areas.

ITINERARY

Day 1, January 19:

Arrival via Siem Reap International Airport

Arrival and transfer from the Siem Reap International Airport to our hotel. Participants will arrive throughout the day and we'll meet at our hotel in the late afternoon. Exact time TBA. If you choose to arrive before the tour we can help make your arrangements to stay at the same hotel.

Siem Reap International Airport has regular air service from many major regional hubs, including Bangkok, Seoul, Hong Kong, and Singapore. After making your travel arrangements to Siem Reap, please let us know your arrival information.

Overnight in Siem Reap at a local hotel.

Day 2, January 20:

Birding at the Angkor Complex, Including the Temples of Angkor Wat, Ta Prohm and Bayon

No trip to Cambodia, birding or otherwise, would be complete without a visit to the incomparable Angkor Wat complex. Surviving since the 12th century, this UNESCO World Heritage site is the largest religious monument in the world. Just six kilometers north of central Siem Reap, this stunning and diverse ancient architecture also offers world-class birding among its sprawling vegetated grounds. The open forests surrounding Angkor Wat provide easy birding and a gentle introduction on the first full day of our Cambodia tour.

We'll begin the day early, arriving in the pre-dawn to look for Brown Boobook and Asian Barred Owllet. We'll then spend the rest of the morning birding the forested grounds and gardens. Angkor Wat, the main attraction of the Angkor Archaeological Park, is surrounded by mature dry forest and undergrowth, offering habitat for common species and the odd rarity, including: Oriental Darter, Hainan Blue, Taiga and Asian Brown Flycatchers, White-throated Rock-Thrush, Black Baza, Blue Rock Thrush, Forest Wagtail, Olive-backed Pipit, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Asian Barred Owllet, Coppersmith Barbet, Ashy Minivet, Yellow-browed and Pale-legged Leaf-Warbler, raucous Red-breasted and Alexandrine Parakeets, and White-crested Laughingthrush.

By late morning, the birding will have cooled off and we'll spend the rest of the day touring the impressive ancient temples. Our local leader is also a licensed temple guide and we'll tour a few of the most spectacular and famous structures. Our day will end with a sunset at Angkor Wat and dinner in Siem Reap.

Overnight at hotel in Siem Reap at a local hotel.

Day 3, January 21:

Prek Toal Waterbird Colonies and Tonle Sap

Prek Toal Bird Sanctuary lies on the northwest shore of Tonle Sap Lake, the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia. The Prek Toal area consists of seasonally inundated freshwater swamp forest with incredibly high botanical diversity. Short tree shrub makes up most of the landscape, forming a dense understory with scattered large trees, which provide the vital nesting ground for large water birds.

In Cambodia and throughout South East Asia, Prek Toal is unmatched for the numbers of endangered water birds it supports during the dry season (December-March). Our visit will be timed perfectly to coincide with an incredible concentration of wintering waterbirds, including a number of rare and difficult to find species.

The sanctuary harbors seven species of global conservation significance: Spot-billed Pelican, Milky and Painted Storks, Lesser Adjutant, Greater Adjutant, Black-headed Ibis, and Oriental Darter and has a globally significant population of Grey-headed Fish Eagle. Since the Core Reserve was declared in 2002 and came under the protection of the Cambodian Ministry of Environment as advised by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the numbers of all the above species have fortunately increased.

To reach the reserve we'll begin early with a short drive from our hotel in Siem Reap, followed by about an hour-long boat trip to Prek Toal Village. Here we'll board a second boat to head into the Core Re-

serve, birding along the way. In the Core Reserve, we'll visit the bird observation towers which provide a fantastic vantage of the entire area. After lunch, we may have an opportunity to take a tour of the floating village on Tonle Sap.

Overnight in Siem Reap at a local hotel.

Day 4, January 22:

Ang Trapaeng Thmor Sarus Crane Reserve

In addition to being a staging ground for more than 300 Sarus Cranes during the dry season, over 200 species of birds have been recorded at the Ang Trapaeng Thmor Reserve (ATT), of which 18 are classified as globally or near globally threatened. ATT is also one of a handful of sites in Cambodia where the endangered Eld's deer can occasionally be seen. The area is a mix of open fields, wetlands, gallery forests, and a large trapaeng, or reservoir, which was created with slave labor under the Khmer Rouge. We'll make many productive stops today to bird much of this habitat from on or near the roads. We'll also take a couple short walks into the forest to look for roosting owls and other species.

During the dry season, a few pairs of Black-necked Storks frequent the site along with many of the large water birds seen at Prek Toal, including Black-headed Ibis, Milky and Painted Storks, Spot-billed Pelican, Oriental Darter Asian Openbill, and Greater and Lesser Adjutants. Several pairs of Bengal Floricans breed here during the dry months, though they are quite wary. Other grassland specialists that we may encounter include Red Avadavat, Blue-breasted Quail, and three species of lark. Six species of duck, including Comb Duck, are possible here, as are Black Kite, Eastern Marsh and Pied Harriers.

Overnight at our hotel in Siem Reap at a local hotel.

Day 5, January 23:

Birding the Florican Grasslands in the Morning. Tmatboey in the Afternoon

The critically endangered Bengal Florican and many waterbirds are found in the grasslands north of Tonle Sap Lake. This striking bustard is the focus of our visit to these grasslands. Finding the florican is usually straightforward here, as they display in the early morning by leaping above the grassland. Another specialty of the site is Manchurian Reed Warbler, a winter visitor that can often be found in the tall grass away from water. Greater-spotted and Imperial Eagles also winter in the area in small numbers along with Eastern Marsh Harrier, Pied Harrier, Black Kite, and Peregrine Falcon.

After our early morning visit to the Florican grasslands, we'll head toward the forests of Tmatboey. Tmatboey is an isolated village of 220 families located in Kulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary in the Northern Plains of Cambodia. Tmatboey supports globally important breeding populations of two critically endangered Ibis species: the Giant Ibis and the White-shouldered Ibis. Because of this, it is the site of a unique community ecotourism project established by the Ministry of Environment and the Wildlife Conservation Society's (WCS) Cambodia Program. The Tmatboey Ibis Project aims to directly link birding tourism, bird conservation, and community development. A conservation contribution is levied on each visitor (included in your tour cost), which is used for infrastructure improvements and other development projects, as part of the agreement with WCS to conserve wildlife and maintain natural habitats.

We'll overnight at Tmatboey Ecolodge. The lodge is comprised of a central recreational dining building and four surrounding bungalows, each with two rooms with solar-powered electricity, fans, and hot showers. The accommodations are basic but quite comfortable.

Day 6, January 24: Tmatboey Ecolodge

Tmatboey is one of the most important birding sites in Cambodia and has always been a favorite location of ours, so on this itinerary, we've added an extra night at this rustic, but comfortable ecolodge. Here we'll walk through a rich ecosystem of open woodlands, seasonally-inundated grasslands, deciduous dipterocarp forest, and scattered wetlands. This landscape supports an unparalleled assemblage of threatened bird and mammal species and is perhaps the richest remaining example of the characteristic deciduous dipterocarp forest in Cambodia.

Tmatboey is one of only two known nesting sites for Giant Ibis, which uses large trees in the forest away from the village. We hope to see them at their roost trees or foraging at seasonal pools. White-shouldered Ibis are found closer to the village where they are reliant on the grassland clearings among the dipterocarp forest. Woolly-necked Stork is relatively common here and can sometimes be seen in flocks of over 40. Indian Spotted Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, and White-rumped Falcon occur at low densities.

Overnight at Tmatboey Ecolodge.

Day 7, January 25:

Tmatboey Ecolodge

We'll have a second full day to enjoy the rich habitats at Tmatboey and work on more difficult targets, like Pale-capped Pigeon, which occurs here in low-densities. An amazing diversity of woodpeckers calls Tmatboey home, including the world's largest woodpecker, the Great Slaty Woodpecker and rarer finds like Yellow-crowned and Black-headed Woodpecker.

Tmatboey is one of the flagship ecotourism projects in Cambodia and it strives to connect local villagers to the lodge by providing income and financial incentives for conservation. Local villagers, now trained as bird guides, have made a special effort to find owls on their day roosts, and with their assistance, we have a great opportunity to find a long list of owls here, including Brown Fish Owl, Spotted Wood Owl and Brown Wood Owl, Spotted Owlet, and Collared and Oriental Scops Owl.

Overnight at Tmatboey Ecolodge.

Day 8, January 26:

Tmatboey to Boeng Toal

After our final morning at Tmatboey, we'll make an afternoon drive to Boeng Toal, near Dongphlet in the Chhep Protected Forest. Wall tents will be set up for the night by the Dongphlet Village Ecotourism Committee members. Here we'll observe another example of WCS helping to promote conservation through economic incentives. The influx of birding tourism to this site is helping reinforce the importance of preserving habitats and wildlife and providing an economic incentive to do so.

Our campsite at Boeng Toal is close to the village of Dongphlet in Chepp district but is within Preah Vihear Protected Forest, and the area around the "Vulture Restaurant" allows access to excellent dry deciduous forest containing many of the same species found at Tmatboey. We'll take a late afternoon walk through the forest where we may get our first views of three species of vulture.

Overnight in a tent camp at Boeng Toal.

Day 9, January 27:

Morning at the Vulture Restaurant of Boeng Toal. Afternoon drive to Kratie.

The “Vulture Restaurant” is exactly that, a feeding program set up by WCS to help sustain three critically endangered species of vulture: Red-headed, White-rumped, and Slender-billed Vultures. The world populations of these vultures have suffered dramatically from Diclofenac poisoning, a veterinary drug commonly given to cattle. This has caused a drastic decline in the populations of Asian vultures. Fortunately, in Cambodia cattle are not given this drug, allowing Cambodia to hang on to a small, but stable populations of vultures.

Before dawn, we’ll make our way to a blind positioned not far from the Vulture Restaurant. Up to 70 vultures may be present, often competing for the carcass with golden jackal. After leaving the blind we may have some time to bird the dry forests for any species that we may have missed at Tmatboey.

In the late morning, we leave Boeng Toal and head toward Kratie, arriving there in the late afternoon. We’ll stop at a small marsh near Kratie, where we may see large numbers of weavers including Asian Golden and Streaked Weaver and other wetland birds.

Overnight in Kratie at a local hotel.

Day 10, January 28:

Morning in Kratie for Mekong Wagtail and Irrawaddy Dolphin.

Afternoon drive to Sen Monorom

In the early morning we’ll leave our hotel and board a boat on the Mekong River to look for the Mekong Wagtail, a regional endemic first described for science in 2001. This wagtail is restricted to channel island habitats where we may also find Indian Spot-billed Duck, Little Ringed-Plover, and Golden-bellied Gerygone. Plying the quiet channels of the braided Mekong River will also provide us with the opportunity to see the rare Irrawaddy dolphins that frequent this part of the river. After a late breakfast, we’ll drive about two and half hours to Sen Monorom in the Mondilkiri Province, where we’ll spend the rest of the afternoon birding roadside areas of the Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary, an important forested area of eastern Cambodia.

Overnight in Sen Monorom at a local hotel.

Day 11, January 29:

Jahoo Gibbon Camp

The Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary is a large protected area in eastern Cambodia covering over 1,100 square miles. This biologically rich region has long faced threats from poaching and illegal logging and WCS and SVC are working to establish community conservation projects, like the one at Tmatboey, here in this region.

Today we'll make an early morning visit to one such project, the Jahoo Gibbon Camp, an eco-tourism project run by local villagers. The beautiful forests here harbor both yellow-cheeked crested gibbons and black-shanked doucs, two endangered primates. These forests are also home to Green Peafowl, Germain's Peacock Pheasant, Red-vented Barbet, Scaly-breasted Partridge, and Bar-bellied Pitta. We'll spend the day birding this delightful forest.

Overnight in Sen Monorom at a local hotel.

Day 12, January 30:

Birding the Dak Dam Highlands

Dak Dam is an important birding area about 20 km east of Sen Monorom near the Vietnam border along the Annamite Mountain Range. The patchwork of forests here supports populations of Black Eagle, Pin-tailed Green Pigeon, Pale-capped Pigeon, Speckled Piculet, White-cheeked Laughingthrush, Black-browed Fulvetta, Crimson Sunbird, Black-throated Sunbird, Maroon Oriole, Indochinese Green Magpie, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Himalayan Black Bulbul, and other mid-elevation species found more commonly across the border in Vietnam.

Depending on the weather and our birding success this morning, our afternoon birding location will be either in the Dak Dam highlands or back in the Seima area.

Overnight in Sen Monorom at local hotel.

Day 13, January 31:

Morning birding the Seima Protected Forest.

Afternoon to Phnom Penh via the Cambodian Tailorbird.

After the last morning of birding around Seima, we'll travel to Phnom Penh, Cambodia's bustling capital city for our final night. We will make a final birding stop along the way to look for the newly discovered Cambodian Tailorbird. This Cambodian endemic was not discovered until 2009 and was formally described for science in 2013! It is found only in the floodplain wetlands where the mighty Mekong river meets the Tonle Sap and Bassac Rivers. This area is also excellent for open-country species such as Plain-backed Sparrow and we often see large waterbirds such as Oriental Darter and Painted Stork. In the scrub in which the tailorbird is found, we should also see a range of winter visitors, such as Black-browed Reed-warbler, Brown Shrike and Siberian Rubythroat.

Night in Phnom Penh at a local hotel.

Day 14, February 1:

Departure day

Farewell breakfast and transfer to the Phnom Penh International Airport for your flight home.

TOUR DETAILS

We are very pleased to partner with the Sam Veasna Center (SVC) for this tour. SVC is a Cambodian non-profit conservation organization whose goal is to provide alternative sustainable livelihoods from ecotourism for the communities that live in and around critical conservation areas. The ecolodges that we'll use are a direct result of SVC's efforts and help to conserve Cambodia's riches by employing local guides, cooks, and support staff for our tour. A portion of your tour fee goes to support these conservation and community development efforts.

LEADERS: Aaron Lang and a Mony Sang from SVC.

Group Size: 8 participants

TOUR COST: \$5,800; Single Supplement: \$325

Note: Single supplement may not be available at Tmatboey and Boeng Toal (4 nights total)

TOUR BEGINS: Siem Reap, Cambodia

TOUR ENDS: Phnom Penh, Cambodia

THE PRICE INCLUDES: Guides, airport transfers, ground transportation throughout the tour, lodging, and all meals (beginning with dinner on the evening of January 19 and ending with breakfast on February 1), entrance fees to temples, parks and reserves, and conservation contributions.

NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE: Your travel to/from Cambodia, visa fees, airport tax, trip insurance, alcoholic beverages, laundry, phone calls, other personal expenses, and tips for local guide and drivers.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE: A deposit of \$1,000 is required upon registration. The remaining balance is due 90 days prior to the tour (October 19, 2023.)

CANCELLATION POLICY: If you must cancel, your deposit and any payments (minus a \$100 administrative fee) will be refunded with notification to us at least 120 days prior to departure (September 24, 2023.) With 90-119 days notice of cancellation, all but your deposit will be refunded. With less than 90 days notice, no refund is available. We recommend that you obtain travel insurance.

TRIP CANCELLATION/TRAVEL INSURANCE: We strongly recommend trip insurance. Trip cancellation insurance covers you if you have to cancel. Travel insurance provides coverages for medical, theft, etc. during your travels. To shop for either, check out www.insuremytrip.com.

TOUR PACE AND STYLE: Generally speaking this tour moderately physically demanding. Birding will be done primarily by walking along roads and trails through forests and grasslands, mostly on level ground. Expect to walk more than five miles per day, sometimes on uneven or rugged ground. We'll also bird a bit from vehicles, and boats on two occasions. Because Cambodia is a hot country, it will be often be necessary to be in the field before dawn to catch the birds when they are most active. During the heat of the day when birding is usually quite slow, we'll return to our accommodations when possible and rest up before heading back out in the afternoon and evening.

CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT: We will be in Cambodia during the dry season (December to March). Expect daytime temperatures in the 80s (F), occasionally higher. Nighttime temperatures are typically in the mid 60s though occasionally a cold snap will drop to the mid-50s. Rain is unlikely, but possible.

Loose-fitting clothing in natural, subdued colors are best, giving protection from the sun and mosquitoes. Comfortable lightweight hiking shoes/boots are essential. A light jacket is all you might need for

cool evenings. Other essentials to bring: sunscreen, insect repellent, flashlight, alarm clock, small day-pack, binoculars, and bird book. Your leaders will have scopes, but you're welcome to travel with your own as well. Make sure you travel with your binoculars and medications in your carry-on in case of any delay or loss of your baggage. If you're arriving in Cambodia early, Siem Reap is a large city and most things such as sunscreen, insect repellent, toiletries, and clothing can be purchased there.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND FOOD: The hotels that we'll stay in are very comfortable, well-run hotels that incorporate Khmer culture and offer many of the same amenities you would expect from hotels in developed countries. The community eco-lodge at Tmatboey is more rustic and is described in the itinerary. At Boeng Toal we will spend one night camping in "safari-type" wall tents and sleep on cots. Food outside the cosmopolitan centers of Siem Reap and Phnom Penh is generally Khmer. Khmer cuisine incorporates local produce, meat, and fish. You'll find similarities with the more internationally known Thai cuisine, but Khmer dishes have a uniquely Cambodian feel and often lack the fiery spice of Thai food. Bottled and/or filtered water will be carried with us and available throughout the tour.

REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date and a one-month tourist visa are required for entry into Cambodia. Most nationalities (including the US and Canada) receive this on arrival at Siem Reap airport, and at all land borders for a fee of \$35. One passport-sized photo (2 inches x 2 inches) is required. It is also possible, though not necessary, to arrange a visa through Cambodian embassies overseas or an online e-visa through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

VACCINATIONS AND HEALTH: All participants should bring a good quantity of all their prescription and over the counter drugs and medical supplies. Away from Siem Reap and Phnom Penh it will be difficult to find even the most common over the counter drugs. In the case of serious injury or illness, evacuation to Bangkok or elsewhere might be required, as definitive medical care in Cambodia is limited. If your health insurance doesn't cover emergency evacuation internationally, you might consider getting a temporary coverage plan. Global Rescue is one company that offers such plans. (<https://www.globalrescue.com/partner/samveasna/>)

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and typhoid. Dengue is present in urban areas but is less prevalent during the dry season (December-March). Malaria risk is present throughout the year in all forested and rural areas and malaria precautions are considered essential for participation in this tour, including mosquito avoidance (long sleeves, bug spray) and also anti-malarial prophylactics. A chloroquine-resistant strain of malaria occurs in Cambodia so make sure to consult your physician regarding anti-malarial prophylactics for specific use in Cambodia, (and for general health advice) at least four to six weeks prior to departure.

Vaccination against Covid-19 is no longer required by the Cambodian government and they also no longer require testing or quarantine on arrival.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/cambodia>.

CURRENCY: The official currency of Cambodia is the riel, but US dollars (USD) are ubiquitously accepted throughout the country and prices in many restaurants and shops are listed in USD, although change is frequently given back to you in riel. The exchange rate is approximately 4000 riel/1 USD. ATM's are widely available in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh, giving USD against most credit and even debit cards though a fee is incurred for using an international card. Large bills may be difficult to break, especially outside of the cities, and we recommend having plenty of \$1 and \$5 notes on hand for low-cost items in small towns and villages.

TIPPING: While people in the tourism industry are accustomed to tips from their clients, tipping in Cambodia has no set rules and normally people tip according to their satisfaction with the provided services.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Robson, Craig. A Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia. Princeton University Press, 2005.

Das, I. A Field Guide to the Reptiles of South-East Asia. London, UK: New Holland. 2010.

Francis, C. A Field Guide to the mammals of Thailand and South-East Asia. UK: New Holland. 2008.

Ray, N. Cambodia. Lonely Planet: Melbourne, 2002.

REGISTERING FOR THIS TOUR: You can register for this tour and make your deposit at www.wilderness-birding.com/guest/

You may also pay your deposit with a check. Checks can be mailed to:

Wilderness Birding Adventures
40208 Alpenglow Circle
Homer, AK 99603

We hope you'll be able to join us for this remarkable birding adventure!

Photos can be found at our website: www.wildernessbirding.com

For more information or clarification of any details please drop us a line at: info@wildernessbirding.com