









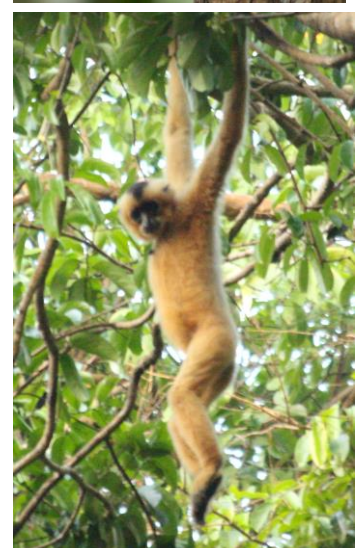
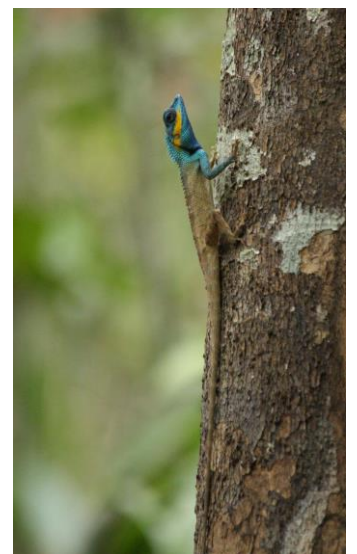
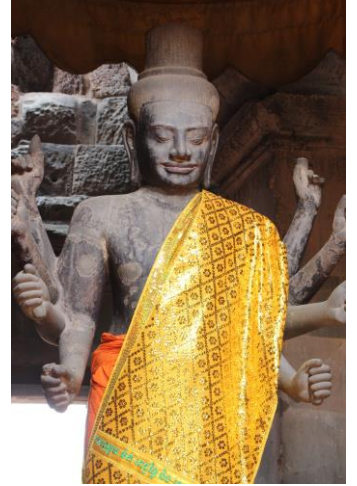
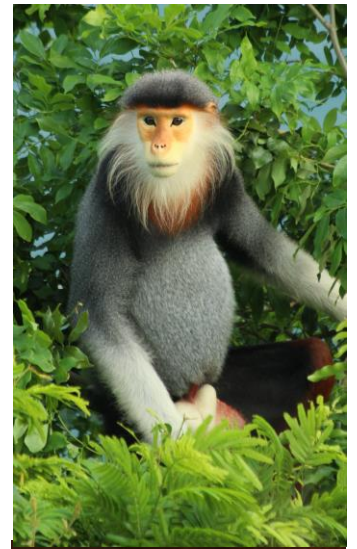


Cambodia & Vietnams' Rare Primates

Destinations: Cambodia & Vietnam

Duration: 16 Days **Dates:** 24th April – 10th May 2016

-  Tracking families of Northern and Southern Buff-cheeked gibbons in the forest
-  Having spectacular close views of many Red-shanked Doucs in Son Tra
-  Spotlighting the incredibly rare Spotted Linsang & Owston's Civet in Vietnam
-  Hiking the wonderful pristine forests of Bach Ma National Park
-  Finding beautiful coloured Pyrops and Banded Kraits in Cat Tien National Park
-  Enjoying a pod of Irrawaddy Dolphins around out boat in the Mekong River
-  38 mammal species spotted including Spotted Linsang and Cave Nectar Bats.
-  Visiting the stunning city of Angkor Wat and the atmospheric ruins of Beng Mealea
-  Observing over 100 species of birds including incredible Great Hornbills
-  9 different species of primates seen in Cambodia and Vietnam on this trip



Tour Leader / Guides

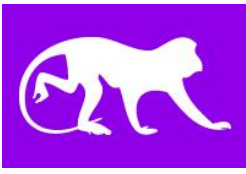
Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)
 Piset (Angkor Wat Guide)
 Danny (Cambodia Driver)
 Hin (Cambodian Boatman)
 How, Pim & Tam (Cambodian Guides)
 Lon, Pawn, Hout, Show (Cambodian Motos drivers)
 Jack (Vietnam Driver)
 Pyaish & James (Vietnam Naturalist Guides)
 Trong (Vietnam Gibbon Guide)
 Tuan (Son Tra Nature Reserve Guide)
 Kam (Bach Ma National Park Guide)
 Hai (Phong Nha Ke Bang National Park Guide)
 Voi (Van Long Guide)
 Phi (Northern Vietnam Guide)

Participants

Mr. Thomas King
 Mrs. Marie King

Overview

Days 1-2:	Siem Reap
Day 3:	Ban Lung
Day 4:	Vuen Sai CA
Day 5:	Ban Lung
Day 6:	Kratie
Days 7-9:	Cat Tien NP
Day 10:	Danang
Days 11-12:	Bach Ma NP
Days 13-14:	Phong Nha NP
Day 15:	Van Long NR
Day 16:	Hanoi
Day 17:	Home



Day by Day Breakdown

Overview

The biodiversity of South East Asia is wonderful and little understood or fully appreciated. When people think of South East Asia wildlife is rarely something that springs to mind first. Two of the best countries in the world for rare primates are Cambodia and Vietnam; but when people think about Cambodia the thought of the wonderful ruins of Angkor Wat and splendid street food tend to be the main focus. Or maybe the horrible atrocities of the Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge regime and of course the Vietnam / American war of the 1970's. Whilst these aspects do often define these countries there is a lot more here for anyone wishing to visit the remaining areas of wilderness.

This tour does just that, whilst also visiting the ruins of Angkor Wat we will also search for dolphins along the Mekong, track families of recently discovered gibbon species in badly protected forests in eastern Cambodia and hike the trails of some of Vietnam's most popular and least visited protected areas. The remaining forests are home to so many species and a wealth of wildlife that needs protecting but with increasing human populations in this part of the world coupled with rapidly developing and expanding cities and the ever present threat of poaching and illegal logging; time to save the forests and wildlife is running out. Only recently an animal that is abundant here was declared the most trafficked animal in the world. The pangolin is an example of the vast illegal trade in endangered and rare wildlife in this part of the world. With the tonnes and tonnes of pangolins recently seized it is amazing that any wildlife still survives in the forests of South East Asia and that is even more of a reason why we need to increase awareness of the wonderful wildlife here and also the problems it is facing. At Royle Safaris we believe that this is best achieved by bring tourism to these locations in a sustainable way and of course by employing as many local guides and conservation groups.

So starting in Siem Reap, Cambodia and ending in northern Vietnam we will explore the wild areas in these two wonderful countries and aim to see some of the world's most incredible species and particularly some of the rarest primates in the world. Cambodia is home to some large areas of forest but unlike the well run parks such as Cat Tien National Park, these large areas have little or no protection, they suffer on going deforestation and poaching and we will meet some of the people working hard to preserve what little forest is left. This is particularly true in the Cambodian forests of Ratnakiri where very recently (2010) a new population of gibbons was discovered and we will see the problems that this population face for their continued survival.

Another very interesting aspect of this trip is the affect that years of conflict and communism have had on this part of the world, with Vietnam and Cambodia still technically communist countries and having suffered millions of bombings during the American / Vietnamese war it is interesting to see how the countries and people have developed and also visit some caves and areas that were bombed repeated and where the Viet Cong set up their headquarters. Much of the forested areas remaining in Cambodia and Vietnam were the home of the Khmer Rouge and Viet Cong and the bombs and landmines have had an untold impact on wildlife. Seen from the air the areas are massive but we would have to get in on the ground to see what wildlife was still around here.

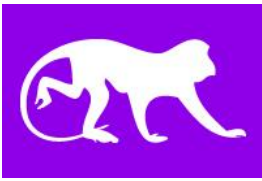
Travelling into Vietnam from Cambodia we will visit one of the natural world's best kept secrets; Cat Tien National Park, a huge park of forests, grasslands, lakes and hills which still harbours elephants, guar, leopards, bears, rare primates, many endangered and endemic birds and Siamese crocodiles. After leaving here we will visit some other areas of Vietnam for wildlife but the contrast in the volume of life will be a stark contrast to the small nature reserves which are set aside for their natural beauty or for the protection of individual species. Often these are primates and they are the last remaining populations of their species in the world.

Some of these other protected areas combine incredible natural beauty such as the forested hills of Bach Ma and the incredible limestone karsts of Van Long with very rare and elusive wildlife which will be the focus of our time spent in these areas.

All in all we believe that this is a true exploration of the wilderness areas in Cambodia and Vietnam, a unique mammal watching itinerary focusing on primates that should result in some truly incredible and once in a lifetime moments and memories as well as showcasing some of the natural world at its best. All done with the expert help of wonderful local guides, some nice local cooking and friendly staff at all of the locations. There are not many places where you can tick off some of the worlds most endangered and elusive animals one day, then visit a wonder of the ancient world the next and wash it all down with a cold beer and some hot noodle soup.

We at Royle Safaris hope you enjoy reading this trip report and that it takes you back to your time in Cambodia and Vietnam; and all of the places we visited as well as the sightings log that will hopefully help you identify some of the animals you took pictures of.

Please contact us if you have any questions or queries we are always happy to help.



Day 1 **Siem Reap**

Arrival & Rest

Today Tom and Marie arrived in the afternoon, they were met at the airport by Peter (who organises our logistics when in Cambodia and Danny (our driver for Cambodia) and transferred to the hotel. Martin arrived a little later in the evening and we had dinner.

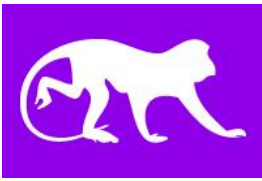
Day 2 **Siem Reap**

Sightseeing

At 8am this morning we departed the hotel with Piset (our guide for Angkor Wat) and Danny and headed to the massive temple complex of Angkor Wat, in fact it is the largest religious monument in the world. It was originally constructed as a Hindu temple of god Vishnu for the Khmer Empire and gradually transformed into a Buddhist temple toward the end of the 12th century. It was built by the Khmer King Suryavarman II and acted as the capital of the Khmer Empire. We first visited Ta Prohm, this is like entering the world of 'Tomb Raider' and you and really began to feel like you are exploring the ancient wonders which had been reclaimed by the surrounding forest. Of a similar design to the later Jayavarman VII temples of Preah Khan and Banteay Kdei, this sprawling monastic complex is only partially cleared of jungle overgrowth. Intentionally left partially unrestored, massive fig and silk-cotton trees grow from the towers and corridors offering a 'jungle atmosphere' and some of the best 'tree-in-temple' photo opportunities at Angkor. Ta Prohm is well worth an extended exploration of its dark corridors and open plazas. This temple was one of Jayavarman VII's first major temple projects. Ta Prohm was dedicated to his mother. (Preah Khan, built shortly in the same general style, was dedicated to Jayavarman VII's father.) Ta Prohm was originally constructed as a Buddhist monastery and was enormously wealthy in its time, boasting of control over 3,000 villages, thousands of support staff and vast stores of jewels and gold. Of the monastic complex style temples, Ta Prohm is a superior example and should be included in almost any temple itinerary. We stayed here and explored the carvings including the little aspara's (dancer) face that is perfectly surrounded by fig tree roots as well as the very mysterious *stegosaurus* carving in and amongst carvings of fish, wild boar, monkeys, birds and other wildlife. Exactly what the carving is meant to be no body knows but it cannot surely be that of a dinosaur, but the carvings are so good and accurate that it is also very unlikely that they have made such a mistake when carving a likeness for an animal they see so much. As the morning turned into the afternoon we headed to a city, not a temple.

We then went onto visit the city of Angkor Thom is a 3km² walled and moated royal city and was the last capital of the Angkorian empire. We entered the walled city via the Victory Gate, with the bridge over the moat lined by the large statues of daemons and gods. Inside the gate there were large colonies of Theobald's tomb bats sheltered from the intense heat of the day. After Jayavarman VII recaptured the Angkorian capital from the Cham invaders in 1181, he began a massive building campaign across the empire, constructing Angkor Thom as his new capital city. He began with existing structures such as Baphuon and Phimeanakas and built a grand enclosed city around them, adding the outer wall/moat. He then constructed some of Angkor's greatest temples including his state-temple, Bayon, set at the centre of the city. There are five entrances (gates) to the city, one for each cardinal point, and the victory gate leading to the Royal Palace area. Each gate is crowned with 4 giant faces. The South Gate is often the first stop on a tour. We didn't go into the city as the temperature was very hot and lunch was a good idea at this point, but we did walk along some of the walls and through the South Gate, the walls (called the Elephant Terrace) have huge elephant carvings (including the spiritual 3-headed elephants) guarding the city, these used to be personified by actual elephants during the reign of Jayavarman VII. There was some modern work being done around the elephant terrace as they were preparing for the king of Cambodia and an annual ceremony that is due to occur here in the coming days. This is to celebrate the Khmer new year and the ceremony is the ploughing festival to mark the start of the farming season, so large stages were being erected in preparation.

The walls marked the site of a huge city which (at its peak) had 1,000,000 inhabitants at the same time in history as London only having around 50,000. This is a show of the strength and power of the kingdoms here and how advanced they were and would have been if it wasn't for the constant fighting with neighbouring countries and kingdoms in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. Before stopping for lunch we visited the Royal Palace, this is one of the few places in the whole of Angkor Wat which is not very well restored, but the male and female swimming pools (which separated the male and female members of the Royal family and courts when bathing) but only the foundations of the palace remained. We then walked up a nearby temple in the Royal courtyard, climbing to the top to get some nice views out over the rest of Angkor Thom. From here we made a short stop at Bayon, passing many temples being restored. Most of the restoration being done by countries that have had a colonial or historical interest in the country or our Buddhist themselves such France, Japan, India and China. Bayon is a smaller temple



that is most famous for its many images of Buddha on the columns, towers and walls. The giant stone faces of Bayon have become one of the most recognizable images connected to classic Khmer art and architecture. There are 37 standing towers, most but not all sporting four carved faces oriented toward the cardinal points. Who the faces might represent is a matter of debate but it has been argued it may be Loksvara, Mahayana Buddhism's compassionate Bodhisattva, or perhaps a combination of Buddha and Jayavarman VII. Bayon was the Jayavarman VII's state-temple and in many ways represents the pinnacle of his massive building campaign. It appears to be, and is to some degree, an architectural muddle, in part because it was constructed in a somewhat piecemeal fashion for over a century. Another excellent reason to visit Bayon are the stunning bas-reliefs on the exterior walls of the lower level and on the upper level where the stone faces reside. The bas-reliefs on the southern wall contain real-life scenes from the historical sea battle between the Khmer and the Cham. It is not clear whether this represents the Cham invasion of 1177AD or a later battle in which the Khmer were victorious. Even more interesting are extensive carvings of unique and revealing scenes of everyday life that are interspersed among the battle scenes, including market scenes, cockfighting, chess games and childbirth. Also note the unfinished carvings on other walls, likely indicating the death of Jayavarman VII and the subsequent end of his building campaign. Some of the reliefs on the inner walls were carved at a later date under the Hindu king Jayavarman VIII. The surrounding tall jungle makes Bayon a bit dark and flat for photographs near sunrise and sunset.

From Bayon we had lunch and enjoyed views over the mote and large walls that surround Angkor Wat, with just the towers visible. After lunch we entered the wonderful and vast complex of Angkor Wat, walking over the large and largely restored bridge, lined with the seven headed Nagas. When we entered through one of the many gates into the grounds of Angkor Wat the scale and spectacle hits you. Angkor Wat is visually, architecturally and artistically breath-taking. It is a massive three-tiered pyramid crowned by five lotus-like towers rising 65m from ground level. At the apex of Khmer political and military dominance in the region, Suryavarman II constructed Angkor Wat in the form of a massive 'temple-mountain' dedicated to the Hindu god, Vishnu. It served as his state temple, though the temple's uncommon westward orientation has led some to suggest that it was constructed as Suryavarman II's funerary temple. Other temples of the same style and period include Thommanon, Banteay Samre, Wat Atwea and Beng Melea, which may have served as a prototype to Angkor Wat.

The temple itself is 1km² and consists of three levels surmounted by a central tower. The walls of the temple are covered inside and out with bas-reliefs and carvings. Nearly 2,000 distinctively rendered apsara carvings adorn the walls throughout the temple and represent some of the finest examples of apsara carvings in Angkorian-era art. But it is the exterior walls of the lower level that display the most extraordinary bas-reliefs, depicting stories and characters from Hindu mythology and the historical wars of Suryavarman II. It is in the viewing of the bas-reliefs that a tour guide can be very helpful. The first level of is the most artistically interesting. We begin our exploration with the bas-reliefs that cover the exterior wall of the first level, following the bas-reliefs counter-clockwise around the temple. Bas-relief highlights include the mythological Battle of Kuru on the west wall; the historical march of the army of Suryavarman II, builder of Angkor Wat, against the Cham, followed by scenes from Heaven and Hell on the south wall; and the classic 'Churning of the Ocean Milk' on the east wall.

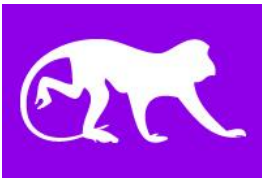
The temple interior is not as densely carved as the first level exterior, but still sports hundreds of fine carvings of apsaras and scenes from Hindu mythology. Piset was very helpful when explaining the stories of the various chambers, statues and architectural forms to be found in the interior. Even though Angkor Wat was constructed as a Hindu temple, it has served as a Buddhist temple, since Buddhism became Cambodia's dominant religion in the 14th century. We climbed all the way to the top of the highest tower to get great views out over the whole complex and from here we departed from the opposite gate we entered and returned to the hotel to rest and have our dinner.



Day 3 **Ban Lung**

Travelling & Sightseeing

This morning we were picked up by Danny and headed out of Siem Reap towards the forests of eastern Cambodia and the Ratnakiri region. Along the way we stopped at Beng Mealea, this monument as originally a Hindu temple, but there are some carvings depicting Buddhist motifs. Its primary material is sandstone and it is largely unrestored, with trees and thick brush thriving amidst its towers and courtyards and many of its stones lying in great heaps; making for a very different experience from Angkor Wat. The history of the temple is unknown and it can be dated only by its architectural style, identical to Angkor Wat, so scholars assumed it was built during the reign of king Suryavarman II in the early 12th century. Smaller in size than Angkor Wat, the king's main monument, Beng Mealea nonetheless ranks among the Khmer empire's larger temples. After exploring here we got back into the vehicle and continued on our journey towards the province of Ratnakiri and the town of Ban Lung. The drive took most of the day and we didn't have anything planned on our arrival, so we relaxed had dinner and met How who would be our

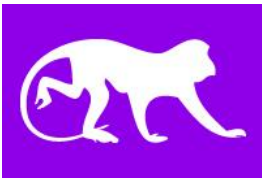


gibbon tracking guide over the next couple of days. How briefed us on the time we would be departing tomorrow to get to the conservation site and how we would explore the forests around where the gibbons live. This species of gibbon is called the northern buff cheeked gibbon and they were only discovered only in 2010. Since then around 500 gibbons are known to live around here and this makes this the largest population of this species of gibbon in the world and therefore incredible global importance. Tomorrow we would enter this forest and the next day hopefully see this incredibly rare and up until not long ago unknown species of gibbon.

Day 4 **Vuen Sai-Siem Pang C A**

Travelling & Sightseeing

Today we left lodge and with the nice early morning breeze blowing drove with Danny and How to the Sasan River, along the way we passed some cashew plantations (one of the most important cash crops grown here) and then shockingly live mine fields. We started noticing red marked posts in the ground either side of the road and on closer inspection saw that they were marked with skull and crossbones. Danny explained that they are the locations of known mines, however the landmine moving equipment had not got around to removing them just yet. The most startling thing about all of this was the fact that there were people living around the landmines, children playing here, literally in a minefield. It is incredible to think that nowadays there are people living in these conditions and with an estimated 300 million unexploded mines and bombs in the country and the current rate of removal it will be over 150 years before all of them are removed. We carried on and got to the river where we met Hin and went in the local boat and headed downstream on the Sason River to a Hmong (hill tribe) village that still lives pretty much as they always have done. Pim told us that there were around 7-8 Hmong tribes still living in and around the Ratnakiri area and there are 12 languages spoken in total. They all practise the traditional animist belief system where there are spirits and gods embodied in all living things such as the forest, animals and abiotic factors like the river, rain and the earth itself. In many respects this belief system is easier to understand and one all seeing and all powerful god. To see how this belief system was still practised was fascinating. The village we would visit is home to around 800 Chatcha people of the Hmong hill tribes. As we arrived on our boat we were first met the sight of all of the women in the village (and many of the children) on the sandy river bank. They were collecting water for drinking and cooking as well as washing their clothes and themselves in the river. Interestingly they were not collecting the drinking and cooking water direct from the river, but instead from a little further back. Digging holes in the sand and collecting the naturally filtered water. We were told that this is the way they do it now because there had been some problems with chemical runoff upstream and people had got ill. So they wait for the sand to purify the water now then collect it. We then walked up the riverbank to the village and at once the sight of so many children hit us, the local custom here is to around 2 kids every 3 years and the large stilted family homes can house 30-40 people in one large room. The village kept some pigs, sheep and chickens as well as having large rice paddies which are harvested twice per year. During the rice growing seasons the whole village move from these large houses to the fields and live in smaller and seasonably built homes, this is because they work in the paddies daily and so cuts down on the travel time to and from and also because it allows the family to protect their crop from wild animals. Probably the most startling fact of this village and the Hmong people's as a rule is that their average life expectancy is only 55! That is around 30 years younger than most of the western world and even 16 years younger than the Cambodian average of 71. We walked through the village and then into the 'ghost forest', this is the spiritual forest where the cemetery is. The animist graves are large (mausoleum like) and have various carved figures around them, these figures represent various things that will protect them or be given to them in the afterlife. It is always traditional for two elephant figures (usually just tusks) to be carved from wood and placed on the back of the tomb, these are to represent the elephants that carry the departed to the next life. At the front of the tomb are two human representations that carry things of value for the departed to take with them into the future. Traditionally these were things were for swords, armour, bows & arrows, scarves etc but nowadays we saw figures with wooden sunglasses, mobile phones and even AK47's, this is a sign of the modern world and the change in what people think is important now compared to the not so long ago days. This forest was home to many species of birds and including stripe-throated bulbuls, grey-headed parrots, Asian paradise flycatchers, blue-tailed bee-eaters, common iora and blue-winged minla. Unfortunately for these birds there were so many young boys around here with slingshots. Birds in rural Cambodia (and most of South East Asia) are used for target practise and this has led to huge declines in their numbers. We then headed back to the river and back down the river to a larger village and the headquarters of the conservation area. We had our lunch here as our motos and drivers arrived from the nearby village. They would take us the 45 minutes or so down dirty tracks, over dry paddy fields and into the forest. Along the way there were various species of birds flying around but no mammals seen, it was not surprising as we saw huge swathes of forest being cleared for logging and the rest of the area was mostly paddy fields. It was only around 30 minutes into the journey when the forest started to look more substantial and what could be home to primates. After arriving at the conservation centre we were given a brief tour around (it is a basic field site) and then taken on our guided walk into the forest and surrounding meadows. The ever present noise of chainsaws and the tales of local corruption not allowing adequate policing of illegal activities here was ominous and there was a distinct lack of wildlife seen. At around 5pm we went for a walk around the surrounding forest, it was still stifling hot and we didn't hold much hope for seeing anything but it was worth a try. How showed us some local plants that are used for food and medicinal purposes as well as a large tree that is used for oil collection and it is very flammable, the number of these trees with charred marks up their trunks is testament to how often the local people come here and collect the oil and



accidents happen and the tree catches fire. We had nice views of a yellow-vented woodpecker feeding on a large tree before we were alerted to avoid a swarming nest of tasty biting red ants. They fold the leaves together and create large clumps of leaves that teem with ants and hang from trees and bushes and are very nasty if you brush past them and end up with hundreds of angry ants on you. This section of forest was heavily degraded and the rate of deforestation is such that it is feasible that the forest will be smaller when we finish the walk than it was when we started. Only by bringing more people here to see the gibbons will the area receive the attention and protection and income to the local people that can keep the area alive for future generations. But with some patience and perseverance we did find a tree with a large number of Cambodia striped squirrels running around as well as a pair of large Pallas's squirrels running through the tree tops in pursuit of each other. We watched the Pallas's squirrels and they then slowly crossed over a branch which arched over the pathway and allowed us to have some great views. We then entered more open meadows and watched a flock of blue-rumped parrots noisily coming into roost, as well as disturbing three green peafowl that had come to roost and then took off in a flap as we approached not knowing that they were there. Martin then found a pair of greater false vampire bats roosting in a large hollowed tree trunk before we found the feather of the huge and critically endangered giant ibis. Being one of the world's rarest birds this forest and surrounding areas needs protection for this species as it is a hotspot for some of the last few. Even though they are very hard to see and we had to content ourselves with this feather.

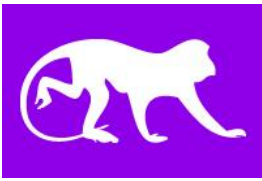
We then made our way back to the camp and had dinner before getting an early night. We would have to get up early and head to the habituated gibbon family's territory before dawn and in time to hear them start their morning calls. This species only typically makes their territorial calls for around 10-15 minutes per morning and when they are not calling they are very hard to find. So we had to be in their territory for when they are calling (around dawn), so it would be around 3:30am start tomorrow and some sleep tonight would be a great idea.



Day 5 **Vuen Sai-Siem Pang C A**

Wildlife Watching & Travelling

This morning we left at 4am and walked around 1 hours through the dark into the forest, the strange calls of nightjars echoing through the still night. When we finally arrived at the territory of the habituated gibbon family it was still dark and we were very unlikely to have missed their calling window. We sat and lay down and listened to the forest at night and just as the sun was beginning to brighten up the sky a little we heard a distant family of gibbons calling along with the morning chorus of birds, the mynahs, parrots, parakeets, hornbills and other birds all beginning their day noisily. The gibbon calls were loud in the still air of early morning, and this distant and rival family group spurred 'our' group into calling in response. They were quite close by, as far the strength of their calls could determine and it didn't take Tam long to locate them as he ran into the forest. Once we found them we spent around 2 hours following them as they moved from tree to tree, calling, playing and feeding a little and then moving off again. Watching this incredibly rare primate in the beautiful morning light has to be some of the best primate watching imaginable. At first the gibbons were travelling around the canopy from their sleeping trees and their feeding trees. So we followed as best as we could through the thick under bush until they slowed and settled and started to feed on the figs and leaves. There are not many trees in fruit at this time of year and so they feed predominately on leaves and these are typically at the top of the trees. But we were lucky and we found the gibbons low down, including some great views of them only 4-5m up and unobstructed but branches and leaves. The group contained an adult female with a young baby, 2 adult males and one male who is 2.7 years old. They know the exact ages as they have been followed and studied every day since they have been habituated in 2012. We had great views of the mother and the youngster very close and in the open as they swung low in front of us. Then more calling, very loud and representing a third gibbon family. It is amazing that there were at least 3 groups in very close proximity to each other, all of this calling prompted our group to call as they were in the tree right above us. Hearing the whooping call crescendo from this distance was amazing and very loud. As we watched the gibbons move from tree to tree and go about their morning business a massive great hornbill flew by and then amazingly we watched as the mother and baby drank from water trapped in leaves high up in the tree, gibbons get most of their water from the fruit they eat but of course when fruit is scarce they drink from all the water they can find high up in the canopy. After around 2 hours following them we left the forest and had breakfast outside in the meadow as the sun warmed the air and the birds were all out in force. We then walked slowly back to the camp. Noticeable birds along the way included There were some birds around including blue-winged leafbirds, little bee-eaters, lesser whistling ducks, black-headed woodpeckers, brown shrikes and Javan pond herons among other species. We arrived back at the conservation centre in the mid morning and as we waited for our motos to arrive we packed up our stuff. Then left



via motos again across the paddy fields to the village, from here we caught the ferry over the Sasan River and met up with Danny again on the other side, we then drove slowly back to Ban Lung. This evening a storm to end all storms hit the town and everything was battered down (literally) as the largely open restaurant took huge abuse from the elements; all adding to the experience at dinner, before we retired to get an early night after a couple of long days.

Day 6 **Kratie**

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

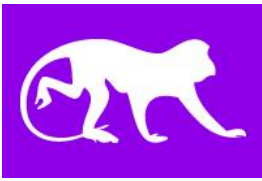
Before leaving the town of Ban Lung we visited a nearby volcanic lake, Boeng Yeak Lom. This is a beautiful emerald-hued crater lake of almost near perfect circular shape, set amid the vivid greens of the towering jungle. It is one of the most peaceful, beautiful locations Cambodia has to offer and the water is extremely clear. Several wooden piers are dotted around the perimeter, making it perfect for swimming. The lake is believed to have been formed 700,000 years ago and some believe it must have been formed by a meteor strike as the circle is so perfect. The indigenous minority people in the area have long considered Yeak Lom a sacred place and their legends talk of mysterious creatures that inhabit the waters. After visiting this lake we left Ban Lung and travelled further south-east towards the Vietnamese border and to a town on Mekong River. After around 3 hours of driving (mostly following the Mekong River) we arrived at Kratie, most of the way we were passing rubber plantations which is a huge part of the economy of Cambodia. We travelled straight to an area of the Mekong called Kampi Pools, this is an area of deep water troughs in the river which make very good habitats for fish. During the flooding season the fishing is very good, but during the dry season the area is taken over by the endangered and very elusive Irrawaddy dolphin. This is by far the best place in the world to see this species and tomorrow morning we would head out here and see if we could find them. Instead we crossed the river to an island in the Mekong by ferry and the motorbike and tuctuc to our lodge. The lodge was situated close to a roosting site for the noisy and endangered Lyle's flying fox. We could see the occasional one flying across the darkening sky as the sun sank lower and lower and we enjoyed our dinner. There was distant lightning all night, brightening up the sky but the rumbling thunder was very far away and we were not going to experience two tropical storms in a row.



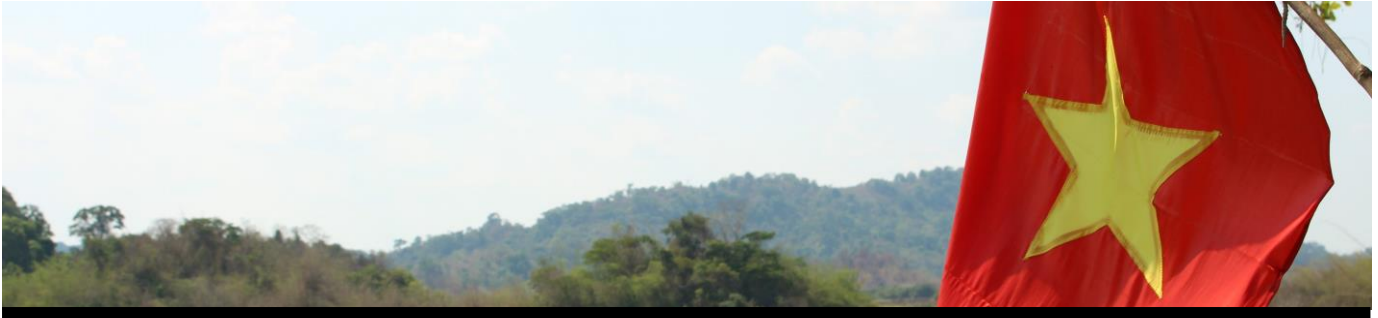
Day 7 **Kratie – Cat Tien National Park**

Dolphin Watching & Travelling

This morning we left the lodge and crossed back over to the mainland from the river island and then visited the Kampi Pools area of the Mekong and hired a boat and headed out slowly and as quietly as possible into the lake. As we headed into the river it wasn't long before we saw some of the pale, bulbous headed dolphins as they rose to the surface to breathe. There were at least 10 individuals in around 3 different and distinct pods; there were also at least 2 young calves still staying very close to their mothers. We watched as they fished occasionally, speeding up in their rate of breathing, movements and become more erratic as they excitedly chased the fish around. We also saw a very interested behaviour and one that is not fully understood, this is when the lift their head out of the water and blow water from their mouths in a long squirt. Whether this is for communication between individuals in the group or a display for rivals or just a dolphin having fun, we do not know. But it is fun to watch the dolphins make a circle with their mouth and fire long jet or water out. After here we travelled further east and towards the border with Vietnam. When we arrived at the border crossing we said goodbye to Danny and proceeded through the passport checked and when safely on the Vietnamese side we met our new guide driver Jack and drove with him towards the largest park in Southern Vietnam and the country's most popular national park, Cat Tien National Park. Along the way we stopped for some lunch and changed some money and then headed along the very windy and hilly roads (which were under repair and very bad), once we left the towns and settlements we started to pass plantations or palm leaves (used to make handicrafts and mats), rice paddies, rubber and of course the popular cashew nut. In fact the roads were so bad that it took a very long time to arrive and as we headed through the Cat Loc Nature Reserve (nearby Cat Tien National Park), which was last place on mainland Asia in which the Javan rhino lived before they were declared extinct here in 2011, it was already getting dark. It is such a shame that the park and forests around here only got better protection and more money for infrastructure after the rhino was declared extinct as the park and surrounding forests are large enough to maintain a population of them if the government could have been bothered to do anything whilst the species was still around. To get to the park and the lodge we first had to cross the Dong Nai River in a little ferry and then take a short trip down to the lodge (around 5 minute drive into the forest). After setting into the lodge we had dinner, the lodge restaurant has its own little cast of geckos. Small tropical house geckos and the much larger tokay geckos that live in the rafters of nearly every building in SE Asia and are particularly prevalent and noisy here. After checking in and dinner we got an early night as tomorrow would



be the early start and the chance to track the close relatives of the northern buff-cheeked gibbons we had seen in Cambodia, the southern buff-cheeked gibbons.



Day 8 Cat Tien National Park

Wildlife Watching

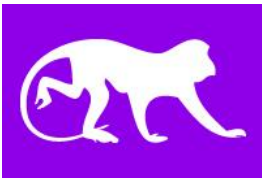
So at 5am we left the lodge with the local gibbon guide Trong, we walked into the forest and set up some hammocks in the dark at a wonderful and enormous fig tree. We lay in the dark as the morning sunlight slowly started to come through canopy above, we waited for the gibbons to start calling. Unfortunately the gibbons from the habituated group did not call this morning, they must have been at the other side of their territory or just keeping quiet. However that is unlikely as the gibbons in the rehabilitation centre (just over the river (around 500m away)) were calling, which surely would have prompted this group to call if they were close enough. Also there is a local festival occurring at the moment and the park was thick with Vietnamese tourists and there was a chance that the increased human presence and noise was having a negative impact on where the gibbon family was at the moment. But Trong said we can try again tomorrow and hope for more luck. From here Tom and Marie went with Trong to the rehabilitation centre, here the local conservation groups and international NGO's are working hard to confiscate and re-home (when possible) animals from the illegal pet trade and they have many gibbons, pygmy slow loris, sun bears, black-shanked doucs and Annamese silvered langurs. However the enclosures are large and as close to natural looking as possible and seeing many of the animals is hard. But it is very good that there is work being done here to try and stem the illegal pet trade and do their best to rehabilitate the animals back into the park. We then met up back at the lodge for lunch and then in the afternoon after the temperature had dropped a little we planned to have a walk, but the heavens had opened and the rain lashed down, so we decided on a night safari drive instead and hoped the rain would have stopped and also that the first rains here for weeks would prompt many more animals out and about tonight.

So after dinner we walked the 15 minute walk from the lodge to the park headquarters (next to where we disembarked the ferry). Along the way we came across a beautiful (and very deadly) banded krait in the road. We had great views of this stunning snake as it slithered off the path and into the undergrowth. Walking with Pyiash we also found a large millipede and several driver ant columns moving in their never ceasing quest for food. At the headquarters an eastern grass owl was perched on the phone lines and making forays to catch animals, but not cooperating with pictures. After the paperwork was completed we boarded the government operated vehicles. Most of the wildlife in the park is nocturnal and we hoped for some interesting sightings to go along with the most commonly seen animals such as sambar deer, barking deer and Eurasian wild pigs. Shortly after starting out, in the grasslands either side of the road we found many sambar deer and a few Eurasian wild pigs as they browsed the bushes and rooted the soft soil for food respectively. We also had an incredible sight as a spotted linsang, this small graceful, cat-like carnivore is very rarely seen, but we watched as the linsang slunk away through the grass next to the road and disappeared into the forest and out of sight. It was the highlight of the trip so far (from a rare animal point of view), hardly ever seen in the wild and seen just 3m away next to the vehicle is unheard of. We also had views of small Indian civets, Malayan porcupines and common palm civets and what is very likely the eye shine of a pygmy slow loris, but it was too distant to be 100%. All in all this is a very good night safari and when coupled with some nice bats around the lodge under the spotlights, such as cave nectar bats and a greater false vampire bat coming into the dining room at dinner, it was an incredible nocturnal mammal fest. Before we left the dining room for our beds Pyiash found and caught a Malayan krait near one of the rooms, we viewed the snake which had been taken away from where someone could be sacred of maybe even bitten (even though that is very unlikely, it is not great practise to have lethally venomous snakes around the grounds of a lodge); the colours of the ghostly white and blue banding making this krait look even more beautiful than the stunning banded krait we had seen earlier. Certainly the rainfall has prompted the frogs and reptiles into being more active and we hoped for some great sightings tomorrow too. We got an early night as we would be up early and trying again for the gibbons again tomorrow morning.

Day 9 Cat Tien National Park

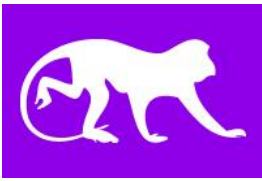
Wildlife Watching

Our day started as it did yesterday with a bright and early trip into the forest to look for the southern buff-cheeked gibbons. In the early morning light the songs of birds was what we heard at first and then the occasional cicada before the gibbons from the sanctuary started to call and then as the sun rose the habituated family started to call,



they were very close and we didn't take very long to find them at all. For around 1.5 hours we watched the family as they moved from tree to tree. We observed fantastic brachiation as the trees they were moving around were devoid of many leaves and allowed for great views of this unique mode of transport. Many of the behaviours were very similar to what we saw in Cambodia, only this group was smaller, being made up of 4 individuals, 2 males and 1 female and her young baby. This species is very similar in appearance to the one we saw in Cambodia and up until 2010 they were believed to be the same species, but genetic studies found out they had been separated by the Mekong River for over 500,000 and had evolved into distinct (yet similar) species, this one now being called the southern buff-cheeked gibbon. By seeing this species we are likely to be among the very first non-scientists (excluding the two Royle Safaris clients who did the same trip a few weeks earlier) to have seen both these species in the wild. Also very active this morning were variable squirrels and eastern striped squirrels, busy running through the branches alongside slaty-grey woodpeckers and other birds such as lesser racket-tailed drongos, dollarbirds, puff-throated babblers, rufous-fronted babblers, little spiderhunters, grey-headed parakeets and white-rumped shama among others. Once back at the lodge we had breakfast and then at 11am we headed with Pyiash in a vehicle down the road towards Crocodile Lake, this would be a 5km hike into the forest to get to a huge lake where the critically endangered Siamese crocodile has been successfully reintroduced. It is also a very good place to see some of the resident troops of black-shanked doucs, however the incredible heat was going to hinder the chances of seeing this primate. Our early morning session for these primates had been taken up with the second gibbon tracking this morning, but we would keep our eyes out as always and maybe we would get lucky. We hadn't got very far before Pyiash spotted one of the most well camouflaged spiders on the lichen marked bark of a tree. Tom then spotted a very large and very hairy moth hiding from the heat of the day on the underside of a leaf before the large and impressive strangler figs of this area of old primary forests started to dominate the forest. We spent some time observing some of the smaller creatures of the forest including microtermite, their nest on the side of a tree and they use their enclosed tunnels to get up and down the tree and along the branches as they forage for plant material to breakdown. They build these mud and saliva structures to protect themselves from the sun and predatory ants and if they are broken a little they are rebuilt very quickly, showing the industrial nature of the busy termites. We also found some carpenter ants and a white-rumped shama foraging around some very pretty bracket fungi on a fallen tree, we then arrived at one of the largest trees in the area. A huge reddish wood tree, called the Giant Tung Tree which is believed to be over 400 years old. How a tree can survive earthquakes, flooding, high winds, storms and more recently loggers to live for 400 years is incredible and hopefully one day many of the trees we are passing with reach such sizes and people will marvel at a huge forest of ancient trees.

As we continued the heat of the sun was slowing our progress so we stopped regularly and took time to observe as much as possible including a brilliantly coloured tree lizard, the lizard with an electric blue head and neck was positioned on the trunk of a tree near the path and allowed for some goof close up pics. Pyiash then spotted a solitary black-shanked douc in the canopy of a tree next to the path, some of us saw the movement of the branches and Martin spotted a shadowy figure as the monkey climbed down into the centre of the tree and into the densest foliage. This is where they spend most of the day, particularly when it is hot like today and whilst we waiting a good few minutes we didn't see the douc come back out and into view so we carried on and arrived at the lake in the early afternoon. The lake is full of birds and many species we had not seen so far including watercocks, little grebes, South East Asian gallinules, great egrets, white-breasted waterhens, white-throated kingfishers, purple herons, great-billed herons, pygmy cotton geese, spot-billed ducks and of course more commonly spotted species like Javan pond herons, barn swallows, spotted doves and lesser whistling ducks. We arrived at the small café overlooking the lake and cooled off with a drink and searched out over the water for the elusive Siamese crocodile and other wildlife. Pyiash spotted one very quickly, a 2m long one in a nearby pool just off the main body of the lake but it had submerged before anyone else could see, it did later come up again in the same place and this is what was seen. A little later a second croc appeared swimming across the main lake, its sinuous motion sending the tell tale 'v' shaped wake out across the placid water. Underneath the café a large South East Asian monitor lizard dug around in the sand looking for ants and termites. After a couple of hours and conscious of the long walk back and sunset we left the lake and hiked the trail back. Luckily it was getting ever so slightly cooler and this was evident in the fact that we saw a huge giant black squirrel just above the road and climbing low down branches, letting us have great views and then the highlight of the hike, a solitary male southern buff-cheeked gibbon in a large fig tree eating away at the fruit. It is very hard to see this species normally (even with the habituated group) and only usually possible in the early morning when they call and you can pin point them but we found this single, silent male and had great views as he sat in the tree exposed eating and watching us. Then came the birding highlight of our time at Cat Tien National Park as we found and observed a bar-bellied pitta feeding just around 3-5m away on the forest floor. It is amazing how much a little drop in temperature can change the chances of seeing animals when it is so hot in the middle of the day. We didn't however see the black-shanked douc and searched the same tree as we passed by again. We then made it the vehicle and drove slowly back the 18km to the lodge and had a well deserved cold drink, rest and arranged to head out into the forest after dark with James who was working with the lodge as he conducted his PhD on the dragonflies of Cat Tien and was an incredible expert in the invertebrate life of the forest. So after dinner we headed out into a nearby area of forest with James in search of some of the smaller creatures in the forest. First were different kinds of fungal hypha including net like mycelium which is a means of the fungi to spread and absorb as many nutrients as possible from rotting vegetation. As we waked we could hear a clicking noise from the leaf litter, on closer inspection we could see the tiny soliders termites of some species of



microtermite clicking their oversized jaws together in a defensive display aimed at us (the intruders to their food collection work). James also showed us the different marks and damage that different types of animals cause on leaves and how to know what kind of infestation your plants at home may have, with caterpillar damage (in this case the sawfly caterpillar) being located on the edge of the leaves and beetle damage typically occurring in the middle of leaves and causing holes. Further we found a huge female giant huntsman spider on the bark of a tree, however large this specimen was we were assured that this is a small version and the largest of this species as the longest leg span of any true spider (tarantulas are not true spiders) at around 20cm across. As we hiked the pathways walking very slowly and taking everything we found various other species such as millipedes, a tiny juvenile tarantula defending its hole, jumping spiders another female giant huntsman (which was larger, but still not the 20cm giants that must be around), assassin bugs with their long sharp mouthparts, hawkmoths and various different species of huntsmen. Having an expert in the forest's invertebrates and microscopic life was a fantastic insight into the ecology of the forest, but we were all amazed when he found an absolutely stunning species of pyrops. Pyrops are beautifully coloured large leafhopper bugs that have a particular host tree that only feed on the sap of. We found several on a particular tree and this species was white and blue and called *Pyrops coelestina* and according to James was very rare and little understood and had only recently been described from this forest. Further along we found cockroaches, flat-headed palm-suckers, incredible white-coloured plant hopper nymphs that looked like fairies. We saw a nicely coloured (in breeding colours) male common garden lizard near the pathway as well as many fireflies which glowed in bursts around the forest and then a small Malayan krait was briefly seen crossing over a mostly drive stony stream bed. Before we returned to the lodge we had views of a newly emerged clearwing damselfly (one of James's specialist species), it had just emerged from its larval state yesterday and was still soft and very vulnerable as well as being very beautiful and then the last sighting of note was a rare to find laternbug. On our return we went straight to bed, tomorrow we would leave the park and head north to the central region of Vietnam and the modern city of Danang.



Day 10 Danang

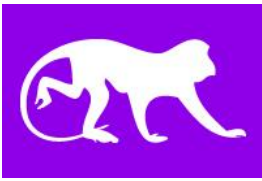
Travelling

Today we had a more relaxing morning at the lodge and breakfast before departing for the ferry at 9am, we then met up with Jack again and he drove us to Ho Chi Minh airport and we caught our flight north to Danang. It was a long day of travelling and it was around 8pm when we arrived and so we quickly checked in and left for a nearby restaurant for dinner and then back to the hotel to prepare for our morning with the knowledgeable local primate guide Tuan tomorrow at Son Tra Nature Reserve.

Day 11 Son Tra NR & Bach Ma NP

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

At 5:15am we left the hotel and travelled to the forested hills of the Son Tra Nature Reserve located on a peninsular just north of the city and the connected to the forested hills of Bach Ma National Park; our ultimate destination later today. All along the beach were hundreds of people practising Ti Chi and swimming in the sea, it looked like the whole population of Danang had woke up early to exercise. Once we arrived we started to drive up the hill roads and looking for wildlife, this is one of the hotspots for the incredibly colourful red-shanked douc and probably the best place to see this species in the wild. However our first primate sighting of the day was the much rarer (in this part of the world – although very common in other areas) rhesus macaque. There was a small troop just walking up and moving through the trees to their feeding trees. Seeing this species so commonly in the urban areas of the Indian Subcontinent to see fully wild macaques in the trees was a little surprising and was watched as they moved among the canopy until they were out of sight and we carried on around the winding roads. It wasn't too much longer before we found a small family group of red-shanked doucs feeding on new leaves on the top of the trees. Because their diets are mostly fresh leaves when feeding they do spend a lot of time right at the top of the trees and are visible when looking down on them as we were in this case. The views were good, they were around 30-50m away and we watched as youngsters jumped from tree to tree chasing each other. The bird life around here was also plentiful with many species flying and singing around, with the white-crested laughingthrushes being particularly spectacular in appearance. Driving a little further on we found more doucs and this time there were 4 young ones and 2 adults around 10m from the road and at eye level. It is the views like this that make Son Tra



Nature Reserve by far the best place in the world to see this species. But close and unobstructed views of this quality are not common, we were very lucky this morning. After we had watched the doucs feeding, grooming and the youngsters playing for a good while we left and drove towards the summit and along the way saw more doucs (of the same troop) further down the slope and then the stunning red coloured leaves of the trees further up hit us and made some great scenic photographs. Then reaching the summit at 669m the views over the coast, long sandy beach and modern harbour town of Danang were stunning. There are old Vietnam war bunkers and guns up here as well as a more modern observatory and Buddhist pagodas. At the top we watched a large parasitic wasp digging its nest hole and then visited an 800 year old many rooted fig tree. The tree was incredible with thousands of trunks and a vast network of exposed roots, it was however precariously located just next to a road that had been cut out of the rock just below it and whether it would survive another 80 years, never mind 800 years, is up for serious debate. We then left and started to travel back to the town, we stopped for pictures of a huge pagoda recently built into the hillside and overlooking the town in reverence. We packed our bags once back at the hotel and then went for lunch at a nearby restaurant and then afterwards were driven to Bach Ma National Park. On arrival we met our new guide Kam and were taken up the winding road (in thick fog) towards our hill station located around 100m off the summit.

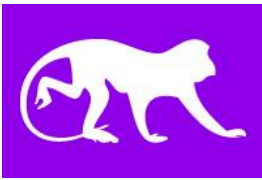
The mountains of Bach Ma changed the climate and it was 10-15°C cooler up here and much damper and mistier. This made the hiking around more enjoyable as the temperatures at sea level were just so hot at this time of year. After settling in we went for a guided walk with Kam up to the summit, the views are incredible from the top and along the way we had chances of seeing various species of birds and mammals if we were lucky. The first thing that hit you here was the deafening noise of the cicadas, so many different hums and drones all coalescing into one hugely loud wave of sound. Also dotted along the sides of the road and along the muddy banks were large mounds made by large earthworms here. Growing over 50cm the earthworms push up the soil from their burrows into little mounds. Kam also showed us some of the uses of the various plants around here, such as using the roots of ferns as sponges for cleaning wounds and trees whose bark produces nice fragrant oils that are used for massages. We then entered a small tunnel, built in 1973 and called Da Boc it was built to hide munitions and people from the American aerial surveys during the Vietnam war. Long since abandoned they have become the home of many bats and that is what we were looking for today. We found many bats belonging to two species, firstly the very numerous Pearson's horseshow bat numbering in their hundreds and then the less numerous intermediate leaf-nosed bat. Leaving the cave and continuing our walk up to the summit we found some fresh tracks from the very elusive and rarely seen large-antlered muntjac, but we couldn't see very far into the dense forest to see if the deer was still around. We did see an inornate squirrel scurrying around on the ground looking for food before it spotted us and disappeared into the forest. Once at the top we found the pagoda and a ceremonial gong (which we of course rung), and the views were amazing. Seeing well out to the sea in one direction and out over a sea of trees in the other. One of the trees being very spectacular in having two different leaves at the same time, the *Hamma forestis*, these different leaves represented both male and female parts of the same tree. So in unfavourable times the tree can pollinate itself and continue its survival without the need of another individual. Thunder was heard rumbling away in the distance, but we looked like we would be spared the storm. We left but not before Kam showed off one of his famous tricks which is to perfectly mimic many of the bird calls here as he attracted 4 stripe-throated yuhinas very close to us for pictures. The butterflies around the summit were also impressive and before we left we saw a couple of Pallas's squirrels on our way down to the villa and dinner. After dinner and when it was fully dark we went out for a little spotlighting walk, it was very quiet but we did get views of two wonderful mammals, firstly a brief view of an Owston's civet, coming from behind a tree and away across the path and then disappearing into the forest and a large Edward's giant rat crossed the pathway. Later that night Tom and Marie would be woken up after one of these large rats had climbing into their room through a hole in the roof for the TV aerial to come through, after being shooed off the same rat tried to get into Martin's room but by now the holes had been clogged up with towels.



Day 12 **Bach Ma National Park**

Wildlife Watching

At 5am we set off to get to the summit for sunrise and hopefully hear the gibbons calling to see if we could pinpoint where they are. The sunrise was beautiful and the sky was clear enough to offer us stunning views over the whole of the park and to the Bach Ma mountain and the highest point in the region. The only life we saw was a lone black kite soaring the skies over the forest, it was actually quite unusual to see this species in a completely natural setting after getting so used to seeing them around towns and cities in Asia nowadays. We did hear a troop of northern buff-cheeked gibbons calling way off down into one of the many valleys here, the gibbons here had



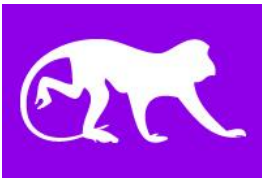
recently been found to be northern buff-cheeked and not southern white-cheeked gibbons as previously thought. A bit higher up the slopes and on the opposite side to the gibbon calling we could hear the deeper calls of a troop of stump-tailed macaques. Then, to our surprise as they are a difficult species to see here, a family of around 12 red-shanked doucs came out of the trees nearby us (50-60m away) and started to feed on the fresh leaves of the canopy. This group included a very young baby climbing and playing with any of the other doucs that would entertain it. We watched as the sun rose and rose and the doucs climbed and moved from tree to tree, jumping around until they were put of sight in and amongst the foliage. We then left the summit and started to walk back down for breakfast, once again the butterflies were out in force and at breakfast we had some striated yuhinas fluttering around; then Marie, Tom and Kam (Martin had damaged his leg earlier in the trip and was suffering quite bad at the moment – it later turned out to be sciatic nerve problems) went for a hike down into the forest and towards a fire-watch tower around 5km away. It was a very hard and steep walk, through stunning forest with many species of birds calling. There were many invertebrates including a giant woodlouse and cicadas. Once they returned Tom and Marie were understandably tired and we opted to take the afternoon off and have a night walk after dark. This night walk went down the road from the villa and not up towards the summit as the night before. It was quieter but the park officials were having an impromptu party at our villa tonight (in preparation for a larger gathering of guides and their families in a day or two) and the noise was clearly putting a lot of animals off. However we did have stunning views of a masked palm civet, just around 2m off the road and pretty much at eye level. We watched as the civet watched back and then slowly climbed down the vines and away from view. There were no further sightings of note and we headed back to the villa and retired for the night.



Day 13 Phong Nha Ke Bang National Park Travelling & Wildlife Watching

This morning we set off at 5am again and this time headed downwards instead of up like yesterday morning. We walked for around 3km with many cicadas calling and some good birds around too. We could hear many of the bird calls but the birds themselves were difficult to spot. We climbed another fire watch tower and enjoyed the incredible views out across the forest in all directions. Tom then spotted a couple of beautifully patterned pyrops in a nearby tree. Our education into the invertebrate life of Vietnam's forests from James a few nights previously coming to the fore there. In another tree close by an Asian red-cheeked squirrel was seen feeding and then near the restaurant of one of the villas a Pallas's squirrel was observed from very close quarters as it searched out edible crumbs from around the BBQ. We continued to walk down the hill road and spotted a migratory Oriental cuckoo as well as beautiful golden-crowned barbet flying around the trees and a species of worm lizard writhing its way across the road as well as a small example of the giant earthworms that live in the soil around here and the large and pretty patterned tiger leeches that are often the bane of hikers in the forests. We then walked back to a small villa and restaurant where we had breakfast whilst watching the Pallas's squirrel feeding nearby. As we had dinner we saw even more red-shanked doucs, this is usually such a hard species to see in Bach Ma National Park but we were having great luck so far. We watched as they picked the best fresh leaves from the canopy of the trees whilst we had our breakfast and the sun rose higher and higher over the hills to warm us. After breakfast we waited for motorbikes to bring us back to the villa so we could pack and get ready to be picked up. As we waited Tom found a couple of the large cicadas that had been making such a racket in the mornings. They are very noisy but often very hard to find as their call is designed to make it hard to pinpoint them, but hanging on the side of a thin tree were two of the large greenish brown cicadas, beating their wing cases together to create that noise.

We then went back to the villa, packed up and at 9am our driver arrived and we departed back down to the park's entrance and off north to the park of Phong Nha. We stopped for lunch in the town of Dang Ha, this town has been made famous as it sits in the old demilitarised zone of central Vietnam and the history of the American war is everywhere here. However we didn't spend very long here as we still had a long drive to get to the park this afternoon. Driving north we saw areas that had been heavily affected by the war and the vast cemeteries that dotted the fields either side of the highway. As we approached the park we started to see more and limestone karsts. The sharp and near vertical rocky outcrops started to be seen all around the farms and paddy fields. They are often topped with deep green as the forest and indigenous plants cling onto survival by growing at the tops of these karts. It is these karts which dominate the northern half of Vietnam. They are home to so many endemic species which are getting more and more endangered; mostly because the limestone is also very important in the cement making process and all around here in the distance are cement factories. More karsts need protecting and maybe by increasing tourism for the rare wildlife as well as scenic photography, general tourism and wildlife watching make



this area very valuable to the locals and surely more valuable than the short sighting exploitation for cement production. We then arrived, met our local guide Hai, checked into our hotel and went for dinner with him as he briefed us on what we would be up to over the next couple of days in the massive and stunning Phong Nha National Park.

Day 14 Phong Nha Ke Bang National Park

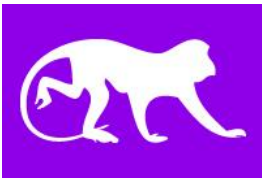
Wildlife Watching

At 4:30am we left the hotel and headed deep into the park, Hai knows a location where troops of monkeys often aggregate in the early morning, but it is 40km into the park, in fact we drove along the Ho Chi Minh trail towards the border with Laos and at a river crossing we got out of the car and started to watch and wait for the primates to come to us. This bridge would allow great unobstructed views out over both sides of the road or the surrounding forest. As the sun rose we spotted a bat hawk moving between two sections of forest, this raptor was followed by many other species of birds as they began their morning routines. Birds such as red-whiskered bulbuls, lesser racket-tailed drongos, black drongos, little spiderhunter and a green-billed malkoha. It wasn't much longer before the trees began to move with the presence of red-shanked doucs, first a large male douc came out on his own and sat in the middle of a tree giving us good views and then on the other side of the road a second troop of red-shanked doucs started their day and began to move to their feeding trees. This troop allowed us great views but they were distant from us. We watched them for a while and then we began to drive back towards the park entrance for breakfast and along the way we stopped at some roosting sites of the critically endangered Hatinh langur which is almost endemic to this park and like many of the langurs in Vietnam rely on the limestone karsts and in the early morning they can often be seen warming themselves in the sun on the limestone cliffs. We didn't see any at the 4 or 5 locations that Hai knew for this species and as the temperatures got hotter and hotter we left and went for breakfast. As the temperature gets hotter and hotter the langurs leave the cliffs and go into the dense trees for shade and to feed out of the harsh heat of the sun. We then had breakfast in the town and had a little while to rest before returning to the park Hai, Tom, Marie and Tan went on a hike into the forest and to a cave system and waterfall. Due to a leg injury Martin didn't go with them as the hike was hard; walking down the Ho Chi Minh trail deep into the forest. This was the secret route through the forest from the coast of Vietnam to the forested hills of Laos, this route was used to transport munitions, supplies and people to and from Viet Cong forces during the Vietnam War and the American's heavily bombed the area and many craters can be seen today and bullet and anti-aircraft shells around the caves were also found. Walking through the damp forest a few different frog species and many insects were seen before arriving at some large rocks which help to make a mini microclimate near a pool and waterfall, with the temperature being 10-15°C cooler here than the rest of the forest. Here Hai and Tan made a traditional style BBQ for lunch; where there was a quick masterclass in how to make Vietnam spring rolls; and afterwards everyone cooled off in the waterfall and natural pool deep in the beautiful forest. The caves around here were full of bats, mostly the common Asian trident bat, but at the height of the war the caves were also home to many Vietnam soldiers and there are the remains of a large anti-aircraft gun nearby the cave. Also in the cave were the remains of snails that macaques (most likely rhesus macaques but possibly stump-tailed macaques) had smashed open and eaten in the shade and shelter of the cave. At around 3:30pm everyone met up together at the botanical gardens at the park headquarters. From here we went to scout out some of the roosting sites of the Hatinh langur, the hope is that we would see some coming back from the forest to the cliffs where they will spend the night, safe from predators. As we drove towards the main roosting site for a large troop of Hatinh langurs we had great views of the stunning Son river with its turquoise colour as it runs parallel to the road. We patrolled back and forth scanning the limestone cliffs but didn't see any of the rare langurs, we did find a troop of rhesus macaques feeding as well as a large skink hunting insects on the side of the road. But no Hatinh langurs and once the sun had set we started to drive back to the town, along the way we spot lighted and whilst it was mostly quiet we did see some bats flying overhead as well as a Pharye's flying squirrel in a tree at eye level just next to the road. The squirrel climbed quickly into the canopy once it had been spotted by us and then presumably jumped and glided away into the forest as we searched but couldn't get the eye shine back again. We then arrived back in the town and had dinner, our last with Hai before we would leave and end further north tomorrow.

Day 15 Van Long Nature Reserve

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

This morning after breakfast Hai took us to the nearby airport at Dong Hai in time for us to catch our flight north to Hanoi. Along the way we passed endless rice paddies and fish farms dotted in between imposing limestone karsts that seemingly spring up out of nowhere. The flight was on time and uneventful, on arrival in Hanoi we met our new local guide Phi and were transferred straight back out of town, over the Red River and across the fertile delta towards more karsts, the grey skyscrapers giving way to the grey karsts and the bright green countryside. The sharp and near vertical rocky outcrops started to be seen all around the farms and paddy fields. They are often topped with deep green as the forest and indigenous plants cling onto survival by growing at the tops of these karts. It is these karts which are also the main home for another primate we are looking for this afternoon, another rare and largely endemic species to Vietnam, the Delacour's langur. The best place to see them is at a small wetland nature reserve that is also protecting a good amount of limestone karst, this site is of huge importance as the limestone is utilised in the cement making process and all around here in the distance are cement factories.



More karsts need protecting and maybe by increasing tourism to Van Long Nature Reserve the local government will see the benefit of protecting the area. Films (such as King Kong 2017 are filmed here, they had just finished filming the week before we left), photography, general tourism and wildlife watching make this area very valuable to the locals and surely more valuable than the short sighting exploitation for cement production.

Once we arrived at the small village of Van Long we had lunch, it was still a little early to try and see the langurs as they are only observable in their sleeping areas in the early morning and late afternoon, the rest of the day they disappear to feed deep in the forest and avoid the heat of the day. After lunch we drove towards the mountain called Cat Scratch mountain, so called as the karsts formation here appears in long vertical cuts in the rock that look like a giant cat has used the cliff face as a scratching post for centuries. We then met our langur guide Voi, he works here and specialises in showing people the langurs, most tourists that come here come for the stunning rock formations (which are incredible) but are at their best away from the main sleeping sites for the easiest seen groups of Delacour's langurs. We started out in our small and traditional style wooden boats and paddled slowly out towards the looming cliffs. It looked otherworldly, the grey low lying clouds adding a mystifying element to the whole experience. Within around 10 minutes we spotted our first group of Delacour's langurs, they were moving up the slope slowly whilst feeding on leaves. This group had 3 young babies in it, these babies were still bright orange in colour and not the black and white of the adults. Further up the slope the alpha male of the troop was sat watching over the rest of the group. The babies were playing, running around in between the rocks and bushes and chasing each other. Also in the group were some slightly older langurs who were exploring a little further afield and making some incredible and very brave leaps from tree to tree and rock pinnacle to pinnacle. They seemed to glide over the rocks with ease. Even the mothers with young babies were moving expertly over the sharp rocks. This reserve is a stronghold for this species and with only around 150 left in the reserve (250 in total) it was great to see so many young langurs around. We then moved a little way along and found some very nice birds including Javan pond herons and a beautiful crested serpent eagle perched on a rock and watching for any small rodents, amphibians or reptiles to come out of hiding so she it could swoop down. We then found an lone individual langur from another group a little further around the reserve. Most of the rest of his troop were higher up on the slope and difficult to see, so we moved around to a third group and watched as six langurs moved slowly around the cliff tops quite low down and these were the closest we had seen the langurs so far. We found some more in smaller numbers as we turned the boats around and started to head back to the jetty. All together we spotted around 10% of the global population of this species which is incredible. They are doing better and better in recent years however without increased protection there is a good chance that the cement factories could plunder this habitat and cause the extinction of this species. We watched as the last and largest group we had seen climbed high onto the cliff and away from view. As the sun began to get lower in the sky we headed back to the town and our accommodation, just before we left we had great views of two flocks of Asian openbill storks flying overhead and to their roost sites.



Day 16 Hanoi

Travelling

This morning we left Ninh Binh and drove back into Hanoi and to our hotel, after checking in we walked around the block a little and had lunch in a nearby restaurant and then the afternoon was spent exploring some of the city nearby. Walking the narrow, crowded streets and taking in the combination of colonial French architecture, communist blocks and modern Asian concrete structures which make up modern Hanoi. We then had dinner in a quaint French villa in the warm evening air.

Day 17 Home

Departure

Today we had most of the day free in the town before we were picked up by Phi and taken to the airport to catch our flights home in the afternoon.

Species List

Cambodia & Vietnam's Rare Primates – Apr / May 2016

Mammals (* = heard or signs only / CT = camera trap only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Asian trident bat	<i>Aselliscus stoliczkanus</i>
2	Pallas's squirrel	<i>Callosciurus erythraeus</i>
3	Varibale squirrel	<i>Callosciurus finlaysonii</i>
4	Inorante squirrel	<i>Callosciurus inornatus</i>
5	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
6	Owston's civet	<i>Chrotogale owstoni</i>
7	Asian red-cheeked squirrel	<i>Dremomys rufigenis</i>
8	Cave nectar bat	<i>Eonycteris spelaea</i>
9	Intermediate roundleaf bat	<i>Hipposideros larvatus</i>
10	Phayre's flying squirrel	<i>Hylopetes phayrei</i>
11	Malayan porcupine	<i>Hystrix brachyura</i>
12	Edward's long-tailed giant rat	<i>Leopoldamys edwardsi</i>
13	Stump-tailed macaque	<i>Macaca arctoides</i>
14	Long-tailed macaque	<i>Macaca fascicularis</i>
15	Rhesus macaque	<i>Macaca mulatta</i>
16	Greater false vampire bat	<i>Megaderma lyra</i>
17	Indian muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>
18	Large-antlered muntjac	<i>Muntiacus vuquangensis</i>
19	Thick-thumbed myotis	<i>Myotis rosseti</i>
20	Northern buff-cheeked gibbon	<i>Nomascus annamensis</i>
21	Southern buff-cheeked gibbon	<i>Nomascus gabriellae</i>
22	Pygmy slow loris	<i>Nycticebus pygmaeus</i>
23	Irrawaddy dolphin	<i>Orcaella brevirostris</i>
24	Masked palm civet	<i>Paguma larvata</i>
25	Common palm civet	<i>Paradoxurus hermaphroditus</i>
26	Kelaart's pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus ceylonicus</i>
27	Spotted linsang	<i>Prionodon pardicolor</i>
28	Lyle's flying fox	<i>Pteropus lylei</i>
29	Red-shanked douc	<i>Pygathrix nemaeus</i>

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22	Greater coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
23	Pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
24	Common emerald dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
25	Blue-winged leafbird	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>
26	Greater yellownape	<i>Chrysophlegma flavinucha</i>
27	Purple sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
28	Olive-backed sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>
29	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
30	Purple wood pigeon	<i>Columba punicea</i>
31	White-rumped shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
32	Oriental magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
33	Eastern jungle crow	<i>Corvus levaillantii</i>
34	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
35	Racket-tailed treepie	<i>Crypsirina temia</i>
36	Oriental cuckoo	<i>Cuculus optatus</i>
37	Black and red broadbill	<i>Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchos</i>
38	White-tailed flycatcher	<i>Cyornis concretus</i>
39	Tickell's blue flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
40	Asian palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
41	Rufous treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
42	Fulvous whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>
43	Lesser whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
44	Yellow-vented flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum chrysorrheum</i>
45	Bronzed drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>
46	Ashy drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
47	Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
48	Greater racket-tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
49	Lesser racket-tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus remifer</i>
50	Imperial mountain pigeon	<i>Ducula badia</i>
51	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
52	Western reef egret	<i>Egretta gularis</i>
53	Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>
54	Watercock	<i>Gallicrex cinerea</i>
55	Red jungle fowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
56	White-crested laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax leucolophus</i>
57	Collared owlet	<i>Glaucidium brodiei</i>
58	White-throated kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
59	Crested treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
60	Silver-backed needletail	<i>Hirundapus cochinchinensis</i>

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61	Barn swallows	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
62	Bar-bellied pitta	<i>Hydrornis elliotii</i>
63	Brown shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
64	Long-tailed shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
65	Purple-throated sunbird	<i>Leptocoma sperata</i>
66	Bat hawk	<i>Macheriamphus alcinus</i>
67	Blue-throated barbet	<i>Megalaima asiatica</i>
68	Great barbet	<i>Megalaima virens</i>
69	Green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
70	Little bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
71	Blue-tailed bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
72	Collared falconet	<i>Microhierax caerulescens</i>
73	Black kite	<i>Milvus migans</i>
74	Blue rock thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
75	Slaty-grey woodpecker	<i>Mulleripicus pulverulentus</i>
76	Pygmy cotton goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>
77	Blue-bearded bee-eater	<i>Nyctyornis athertoni</i>
78	Black-naped oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>
79	Common tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
80	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
81	Eurasian tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
82	Green peafowl	<i>Pavo muticus</i>
83	Buff-throated babbler	<i>Pelorneum ruficeps</i>
84	Green-billed malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus tristis</i>
85	Greenish warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
86	Black-headed woodpecker	<i>Picus erythropygius</i>
87	Black-backed swamphen	<i>Porphyrio indicus</i>
88	Rufescent prinia	<i>Prinia rufescens</i>
89	Scarlet-breasted flowerpecker	<i>Prionochilus thoracicus</i>
90	Golden-crowned barbet	<i>Psilopogon henricii</i>
91	Alexandrine parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
92	Grey-headed parakeet	<i>Psittacula finschii</i>
93	Blue-rumped parrot	<i>Psittinus cyanurus</i>
94	Dusky crag martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>
95	Streak-eared bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus blanfordi</i>
96	Stripe-throated bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus finlaysoni</i>
97	Black-crested bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus flaviventris</i>
98	Red-whiskered bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
99	Spotted fantail	<i>Rhipidura albogularis</i>
100	White-browed fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>

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