

## Thailand, 22<sup>nd</sup> November – 5<sup>th</sup> December 2017

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After considering a couple of potential locations for a late 2017 wildlife-watching trip, I failed to get my act together for any of them and went for the easy option of a last minute Thai holiday. For the first five days I headed south to catch up with a mate who was travelling in the area, and to then meet other friends; very much not a mammalwatching part of the trip! After returning to Bangkok I split my time between Kaeng Krachan (KK), Khao Yai (KY) and Pang Sida (PS) before trying for cetaceans in the Gulf of Thailand. Having previously visited the country in 2009 (Kaeng Krachan and Petchaburi area, four days) and 2012 (Krabi area, seven days), I had a limited hit-list of birds I was hoping to clean up on by day, leaving plenty of time to focus on mammals. This was - mostly - extremely successful, although extra time would have been useful at a couple of locations, and if I'd been able to stay for longer I would have tried to visit a couple more areas detailed below. The species lists for each site follow the sequence of the field guide.

### **Logistics/Accommodation**

As well as being a brilliant place for mammalwatching (although still somewhat underrated, in my opinion), it's really, really easy to organise independently. Plenty of good standard, cheap accommodation can be booked online (I used booking.com), the roads are generally good (and driving standards not too terrifying), the food is outstanding, and the people friendly; for the most part, everything just works. Most flights from Phuket land at Don Mueang (the smaller of Bangkok's two airports), which had the benefit of better choice and cheaper deals on car hire, but the disadvantage of being nestled in a truly baffling road system which outfoxed my satnav on several occasions. Several people advised that a 4WD or similar is necessary to reach the higher parts of KK, so I went for a Toyota Hilux - £185 for eight days with Budget (via rentalcars.com) seemed reasonable, and I had no problems with the service. Even this car struggled on some steep, degraded section of the KK road as it was only a two wheel drive; I'd also recommend something with good clearance for Pang Sida as well.

The boat trip into the Gulf of Thailand was with Wild Encounter Thailand. As mentioned in other trip reports, they are excellent - a real effort is made to educate participants, and promote responsible ecotourism, and kept in touch before the trip. I'm reluctant to recommend any other operators at their expense, but it's worth bearing in mind that Baan Maka can also arrange trips if your schedule doesn't match up with that of Wild Encounter. These depart from the Phetchaburi side of the gulf, but head out to the same waters.

Just before leaving the UK I took delivery of the brand new Android version of the Echometer Touch 2 bat detector. This was an excellent new toy to play with; while acoustic data on the region's bats is somewhat lacking, Francis's Field Guide to the Mammals of South-East Asia give echolocation frequencies for some species. Using the two in conjunction made it possible to take a fair stab at identification in a number of cases. As ever, though, the bat IDs away from roosts should be regarded as tentative.

As many others have noted, getting access to Thailand's national parks after dark is difficult - sometimes for good reasons, often not. In reality the situation actually varies a bit between localities. I decided to camp at the three I visited to see what was possible. In all cases I just turned up at the campgrounds and rented gear (details below); in theory you can book online on the Thai

National Parks website, but it doesn't seem that this works all that often. The general information pages for the parks are pretty good though (linked in the sections below).

The other hotels used were:

[D House Hostel](#) – a small, friendly guesthouse near Don Mueang with good food options nearby. Convenient after an evening arrival but despite being less than 1km the road system means it's a 20 minute drive, if you don't get lost. I got lost, and it took twice as long. Probably not worth it if you've got a car.

[Baan Maka Nature Lodge](#) – outstanding. Nice rooms, some of the best food I ate, and lovely grounds full of wildlife. One of the new owners, Ian, was a great source of info on all wildlife (his partner Games was away guiding at the time of my visit), and happy to take guests on night walks. They will also arrange access to hides in the forest, and transport to higher elevations for those without a SUV. I stayed here for two nights either side of camping in KK – the entrance is only 15 minutes by car.

[Jungle Planet Nature Lodge](#) – I decided to stay outside Khao Yai NP for one night to avoid weekenders at the campsite, and stumbled upon this gem. As well as operating the lodge, Phaphon also runs tours, and was happy to share his knowledge; I messaged him ahead of time through their Facebook page and he gave me locations of fruiting trees and the site for Serow. Comfortable rooms, ten minutes' drive from KY entrance. For those using public transport, this would be a good option to arrange access to the park with someone who knows their stuff.

[Golden House Hotel](#) – To avoid camping in Pang Sida on a Saturday night, I stayed in nearby Sa Kaeo; as it turns out, I need not have worried about weekend crowds. An excellent brand new motel with English speaking staff and shops/restaurants nearby I you feel the need to stay outside the park.

[Baan Mai Guesthouse](#) – a decent (if soulless) hotel walking distance from skytrain stations and the minibus pickup location for the Wild Encounter Thailand trips. Not much going on in the neighbourhood though and limited eating options; it's probably better to stay in a more interesting area and get a taxi there (or I could have kept the car for longer and driven to the jetty).

### **Sites not visited**

I considered visiting [Kui Buri NP](#) instead of Khao Yai to look for Banteng, before deciding on the latter for a wider variety of possible species (and to avoid a very long travel day to get to Pang Sida). This site is a couple of hours south of KK and close to Khao Sam Roi Yot, and by all accounts is a very pleasant park with relatively few tourists. It's also very good for Gaur (which seems high on the wishlist of many mammalwatchers) and Asian Elephant.

Khao Paeng Ma is another site for Gaur, recommended by Jungle Planet. It's around 60km east of the main (northern) gate of KY, on the edge of the national park. From what I could gather, the species is almost guaranteed (albeit in vary numbers) in late afternoon – a taxi driver staying at Jungle Planet showed me pictures on his phone of Gaur and Eurasian Wild Pig from that day. The location Phaphon gave me is [here](#); he suggested that a car with decent clearance would be needed.

There is apparently a large camp of Lyle's Flying Fox at [Wat Nong Si Da](#) in Saraburi which would be a convenient stop en route from Bangkok to Khao Yai if you haven't seen the species elsewhere.

I also toyed with visiting Khao Sok NP at the start of my trip. However, it is not as straightforward to stay overnight as it once was: as of October 2017, an ongoing feud between the national park and the wildlife sanctuary has resulted in the ranger station bungalows (including Klong Saeng) being shut. Access can be arranged through lodges, but the information I had is that it's far more expensive, and a matter of chance whether you get a boatman who knows what he's doing. Additionally, water levels were also going to be high after an ongoing wet season, making spotlighting ground-dwelling species difficult. Probably still worth a visit with more time and using a known guide.

### **A few notes on Southern Thailand**

Despite not looking for mammals, I still saw a few species in the Phuket/Khao Lak area. There are still some good areas of forest which must hold some interesting species, although it's a very touristy area with a lot of development in places. The below might be of interest to anyone holidaying in the region.

**Common Treeshrew** – one seen at the forest edge by the main road just south of Khao Lak town.

**Island Flying Fox** – one seen flying in daylight on Similan Island No. 4.

**Intermediate Roundleaf Bat** - a number of mid-large roundleaf bats at Naiyang Beach were echolating at around 95kHz, indicating this species

**Least Pipistrelle** – several tiny *Pipistrellus* at Naiyang Beach were probably this species

**dolphin sp** – a small pod seen on the journey out to the Similan Islands. Impossible to attempt and ID when you're on a bumpy speedboat and the animals are heading in the other direction!

**Grey-bellied Squirrel** – seen in most areas with trees (e.g. Kamala Hills and Naiyang Beach, both Phuket; Khaolak Yama resort)

**Western Striped Squirrel** – seen at Khaolak Yama, presumably possible anywhere.

**Lesser Bandicoot Rat** – a couple along the road to Khaolak Yama resort initially assumed to be this species, but the status/ID of these is unclear (discussion [here](#))

**House /Malaysian Wood Rat** – two or three in the same area as the bandicoot rats

### **Kaeng Krachan National Park & around, 27<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> November**

As many others have noted, this is a brilliant national park, and I could have happily stayed here for far longer. The afternoon of 27<sup>th</sup> was spent in Lung Sin hide (arranged through Baan Maka when I booked the accommodation); after a night walk around the grounds of the lodge, I returned to this area and spotlit along the road. I didn't see any mammals along the forest edge, it could well turn up some good stuff, but anyone doing the same must stick to the road and not enter any trails without permission.

I drove into the national park pre-dawn the next day, getting up early to get there first, but needed have worried too much – I'd been at Ban Krang for 40 minutes before anyone else arrived, and no one had camped there overnight! I spent the morning at lower elevations, until the road was again open to 'up' traffic at 1.30pm. Camping at Panoen Tung was easily arranged on arrival (550 Baht for an already-erected tent, sleeping bag, pillow, mat); the basic restaurant served food until 6.30pm,

and the extremely helpful staff even told me what time martens and porcupines turn up! Late afternoon was spent on the trail to the Tortip waterfall and around the campsite; after dark it was possible to explore the vicinity on foot without any hassle, though I didn't push my luck too far. Similarly, no-one seemed to mind when I left at 3.30am to drive to Tortip – not that I saw any mammals, although the return leg was scuppered by tourists coming the other way to see dawn at the waterfall!

On my way out of the park I spent an hour or so at the waterholes along the access road in the middle of the day, before returning to Baan Maka. Another hide session produced the same species as previously but nothing better; a friend of mine saw (and photographed) a Golden Cat at one of these hides in 2012! In addition to checking the lodge gardens again, Ian took some of us to a nearby patch of forest for a speculative spotlighting session.

**Northern Treeshrew** – up to two seen at both Lung Sin hide, Baan Maka

**Lesser False Vampire** – One at a night roost under room 8 at Baan Maka at 10.50pm on 30<sup>th</sup>, not seen when checked at other times. A stunning bat. Exactly where Paul Carter had seen it several weeks earlier – excellent gen!

**Dobson's Horseshoe Bat** – a horseshoe bat watched hawking from a perch by the lake at Baan Maka late on 27<sup>th</sup> was echolocating at 49kHz & structurally looked ok for this species

**Ashy Roundleaf Bat** – a small, dull grey-brown roundleaf bat with very limited noseleaf (good detail seen through a scope) under the restaurant eaves at Panoen Tung after dark on 28<sup>th</sup> was echolocating at over 150kHz, which matches this species

**Stump-tailed Macaque** – a troop of at least 15 in KK, around km 5 on 29<sup>th</sup>

**Dusky Langur** – common in KK

**Banded Langur** – a group of at least 4 along the track to Tortip Waterfall on 28<sup>th</sup>. Be aware that the illustrations in the field guide can be misleading – I thought that I'd seen Banded near Paneon Tung in 2009, but now think they were just paler Duskiess.

**White-handed Gibbon** – troops seen very well just after the third stream crossing (twice) and at km25 on 29<sup>th</sup>. Commonly heard

**Lesser Mousedeer** – outstanding daytime views of at least one at Lung Sin hide

**Fea's Muntjac** – excellent views of one at last light by the car park for the viewpoint at Panoen Tung. Plenty of droppings in that area.

**Sun Bear** – An incredible chance sighting on 28<sup>th</sup> at first light, and the joint highlight of the trip. Just 400m before Ban Krang, one appeared at the roadside, paused started to cross, but was spooked by my car and shot back into the forest. Later that day, a photographer told me that this was the regular animal which had deserted the restaurant area while some building work was going on, and had been seen across the river at the youth camp. In early 2018, however, it was again being seen from the restaurant kitchen.

**Javan Mongoose** – one crossing the main road on my way to Baan Maka on 27<sup>th</sup>, close to the golf club

**Crab-eating Mongoose** – two gave great views along the nature trail that starts on the west side of stream crossing 3 around 7.45am on 28<sup>th</sup>

**Masked Palm Civet** – One by the restaurant at Panoen Tung at 10pm on 28th

**Yellow-throated Marten** – Point-blank views of two behind the restaurant kitchen at Panoen Tung around 5pm on 28<sup>th</sup>, and again at 9am the next day. A different pair near the gatehouse just before the campsite, and another one crossing the road around km 18, both on 28<sup>th</sup>. They were also being seen from Daap hide near Baan Maka around the time of my visit.

**Leopard** - one heard way down in the valley south of the road to Tortip Waterfall pre-dawn on 29th

**Burmese Hare** – two between Baan Maka and KK entrance early on 28th

**flying squirrel sp** – eyeshine from what I think was a largish flying squirrel at the start of the nature trail just before the gatehouse before Panoen Tung. A few species might be possible here.

**Black Giant Squirrel** – one in a fruiting fig at km27.5 on 29th

**Grey-bellied Squirrel** – common, including Lung Sin hide and Baan Maka grounds.

**Pallas's Squirrel** – only one identified in KK Hide, near stream crossing 3

**Western Striped Squirrel** – Baan Maka and Lung Sin gide

**Indomalayan Pencil-tailed Tree Mouse** – after a lot of searching, one of these fantastic rodents in a vine tangle behind room 9 at Baan Maka. Fast moving and able to disappear as if by magic!

**Malayan Porcupine** – a family of five behind the restaurant from as early as 6.30pm (the staff said they wouldn't arrive till late!), giving unbelievable views – a little bit too close at times. The two adults were rampaging around for most of the night, and at least one different large animal was around the campsite car park as well.

**Asiatic Brush-tailed Porcupine** – One in the foundations of the toilet block of Ban Krang campsite late morning on 29<sup>th</sup> (the one at the west end of the grass, not the one in the car park), as per Ben Schweinart's trip report. You have to get your head right into the hole, and it's a pretty nasty smell! Not present as far as I could see the previous day, so this site might not be used every day.

### [Khao Yai National Park, 30<sup>th</sup> November – 2<sup>nd</sup> December](#)

Right up until my departure I was undecided about whether to visit KY, having heard mixed reviews, many downright negative. Of course, everyone can only speak from their own experience, but I had a great time and would recommend giving it a go – with a few caveats. Yes, it's busy – the main road was non-stop traffic on the Saturday – but for the most part it seemed well organised, and at least people are visiting and taking an interest. It was quite easy to lose people by heading onto trails or less-visited parts of the park; tourists concentrate around a few locations. I rented a tent and all the gear at Pha Kluai Mai campsite for 280 baht, where the small restaurant was open from 7am until 8.30pm (though they never seemed that happy about cooking anything!). Only about 20 other people were camping on 30<sup>th</sup> and it was easy to find a quiet spot; however by late morning on the Friday there were already 45 tents up, with a constant procession of arrivals trying to get a good spot! Presumably staying here on a weekend would be less than pleasant.

The 'night safaris' have received mixed reviews, but I decided to give it a go in the hope of a loris. As I was on my own I had to pay the full 500 baht, but was to be picked up from the campsite. As a result, we were away from the main HQ area in quieter areas, and within ten minutes the guide had found me a Bengal Slow Loris! We stayed out for well over the allotted hour, the driver and spotter were highly competent, not wasting too much time on deer and avoiding other vehicles, and we saw

plenty of mammals. Personally, I thought this was well worthwhile, but at the weekend and/or crammed in with other tourists it might be a different story. While in theory you aren't supposed to drive through the park at night, there are so many cars around that it might be possible to get away with some sneaky spotlighting if you're careful. No such luck if you stay at Pha Klui Mai, however: the road out is gated after 9pm, and the rangers seem to stay up all night. I had no problem spotlighting on foot around the campground and along the road to Haew Suwat waterfall, though.

I spent one late afternoon at the Nong Phak Chi watchtower but nothing of note emerged into the grasslands before dark. At dawn next morning I visited the clearings and saltlicks along the Khao Khieo road and lucked into an elephant – I would have spent another session here but the lack of decent viewpoint was frustrating, and I think most sightings will be brief and depend on luck. Instead I decided to go and check out the bat caves outside the park. I asked for directions at the visitor centre by the gate, which resulted in not only being driven to the Khao Luk Chang emergence viewpoint ([14.534458](#), [101.356366](#)), but being taken to some caves near a temple prior to dusk. I didn't note the exact location and we had to ask some monks for access, so it's probably best to enquire with the staff and hopefully they'll be just as helpful.

A useful map of the park is on [thaibirding](#) website.

**Northern Treeshrew** – one along the trail that runs west from the road at km33

**Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat** – I was woken by the racket from at least 9 of these at 4am in Pha Klui Mai. They were in the lone palm tree in the part of Pha Klui Mai campsite on the opposite side of the road to the office and shop, between the two toilet blocks. Presumably only a night roost, as they were gone by mid morning on 1<sup>st</sup>

**Asian Wrinkle-lipped Bat** – an impressive emergence, apparently 2-3 million individuals at the Khao Luk Chang viewpoint just before dark on 1st

**Intermediate Horseshoe Bat** – this is apparently the horseshoe in the temple bat cave. At least three on 1st

**Malayan Horseshoe Bat** – some mid-sized bats echolocating around 75 kHz Khao Luk Chang may have been this species.

**Bengal Slow Loris** – one low down in a roadside tree on the night safari, between the campsites. Brilliant, although I forgot to take photos until it was mostly out of view!

**Northern Pig-tailed Macaque** – common, e.g. on the road up to the main tourist complex, and scrounging around the restaurants, HQ and campsites.

**Long-tailed Macaque** – large troop seen en route to KY, at [Wat Phra Phutthabat Noi](#) (a well-known birding stop)

**White-handed Gibbon** – a pair along the km33 trail on 1<sup>st</sup>, presumably the same in a fruiting fig along the road at km33.5 on 2<sup>nd</sup>. Heard between Pha Klui Mai and Haew Suwat, some calls suggesting hybrids were also present. Neither sight nor sound of any gibbons along Khao Khaio Road, which has been good for Pileated in the past.

**Yellow-throated Marten** – a roadside animal just below the fire station mid afternoon on 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Large Indian Civet** – one on the night safari, of the edge of the old golf course; my guide's reaction suggested that this is fairly unusual.

**Small Indian Civet** – prolonged views of two on the night safari in the clearing on the right just south of Sai Sorn reservoir.

**Asian Palm Civet** – one in Pha Klau Mai campsite

**Asiatic Elephant** – a large (but tuskless) individual at first light in the clearing on Khao Khaio Road on 1<sup>st</sup>, though it soon disappeared into the forest. Fresh droppings on the road c.750m before the HQ on 30<sup>th</sup>

**Sambar** – common and ridiculously tame

**Northern Red Muntjac** – seen a few times, also fairly confiding around the HQ

**Indochinese Serow** – a fantastic encounter with a male at the Pha Dieo Dai lookout at 7am on 1st. Park on the Khao Khaio Road on the last bend as you head up ([14.366682, 101.405460](#)), and follow the boardwalk to the cliffs. The animal was directly below the cliff at the right end as you look across the valley, only 15m or so below me, but moved into cover when some noisy tourists arrived. There had also been a more confiding female and young Serow present on other days, which are apparently unconcerned by people – there are photos on the Jungle Planet facebook page. I have often heard the serows here referred to as Southern, but surely they should be the *maritimus* subspecies of Chinese (sometimes split as Indochinese)

**Black Giant Squirrel** – seen at km33.5 and the entrance to Pha Klau Mai

**Grey-bellied Squirrel** – encountered regularly; also at Wat Phra Phuttabat Noi

**Pallas's Squirrel** – seen on Khao Khaio Road and km33

**Finlayson's Squirrel** – foxy singles along km33 trail and Pha Klau Mai plus a whitish one at Wat Phra Phuttabat Noi

**Indochinese Ground Squirrel** – one ran across the road just before the Nong Pak Chi campsite

**striped squirrel sp** – one along the km33 trail; I'm not sure if Cambodian or Western occurs here, and not seen well enough

**Malayan Porcupine** – one crossed the road on the drive to the campsite just after dark on 30<sup>th</sup>, one in Lam Takong campground and two south of the reservoir on the night safari, and a final one in Pha Klau Mai late evening

### [Pang Sida National Park, 2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> December](#)

This is a relatively seldom-visited park which is worthy of far more attention. Leaving Khao Yai via the southern gate (towards Prachin Buri), it's a straightforward 2.5 hour drive to the gate. I decided to stay outside the park on the assumption that it would be busy on Saturday night, but I overestimated how popular Pang Sida is, at least in November. The following morning, one car followed me to the viewpoint at the end of the road, and very few people were at the campsite. Even at Sunday lunchtime, a modest number of tourists were around, and hardly any ventured beyond Pang Sida waterfall. So if you want to avoid the crowds of Khao Yai, this might be the place. The flipside of this is that it isn't as well set up for visitors, so there are a few logistical considerations. When I turned up at Huai Nam Yen (HNY) campground expecting to hire a tent, I eventually understood that I needed to drive back down to the headquarters to arrange this; even back at the main complex it took a while to sort out (450 baht for all the gear). I never saw any sign of life at the restaurant at HQ - although maybe it opens on demand when the adjacent campsite isn't deserted – and there are no eating options at the higher campground. I used the excellent,

cheap cafes outside the gate during the day (there's no problem with being re-admitted to the park on the same ticket), and then took my own food in for the evening and breakfast.

A useful map of the park is [here](#), although it should be noted that the distances aren't quite right – the turning for the Gaur grassland tower is 4.5km after the entrance, and Huai Nam Yen campsite is at km18. What is called an excellent dirt road in several reports has clearly not been maintained in a while; the tarmac ends after 1.9km, it has now deteriorated, and there are several rutted and eroded sections. As of late 2017 it was still passable in a regular car, but only with extreme care.

The main benefit of Pang Sida is that it's possible to drive the road at night, as long as you're staying within the park. In fact, once you're above the second checkpoint (2.1km from the entrance), no-one seems to care what you do! The ever-helpful rangers at HNY were completely unfazed when I turned up well after dark, and helped put my tent up, and they didn't bat an eyelid when I drove off in the dark. The forest along the road is fairly dense secondary-type growth, so I was reliant on chance sightings of animals crossing the road; with an extra person to spotlight your chances of seeing something are far greater. I saw nothing between the grassland turning and the campsite after dusk and similarly drew a blank later on. In the end, a pre-dawn drive leaving at 4am was far more successful. I perhaps wasn't helped by a full 'super moon' which was up for the entire night.

In addition to driving the length of the road several times (at all hours), I spent an afternoon in the somewhat dilapidated watchtower in the 'Gaur grasslands'. The view here is excellent, and it felt like a far more likely spot to see something good than the clearings at KY. As with the two previous sites, I drew a blank on Dhole, the only one of my main targets I failed to see. While walking back to the main track at dusk, I bumped into some maintenance staff; they insisted that I got a lift on the back of the tractor, otherwise I was apparently going to be eaten by a tiger! This was the only time I encountered any issues with walking trails on my own, despite several reports suggesting guides are required (at least in theory) in most cases. There was an apparently very active saltlick, with numerous fresh footprints of Gaur, Elephant and deer after 10.7km (on the left as you drive up), which must be worth staking out.

**Northern Pig-tailed Macaque** – a troop of at least 35 just above the park HQ

**Pileated Gibbon** – a noisy group of 5+ at km22-23 mid-morning on 3<sup>rd</sup>, eventually giving good views. Heard distantly from km16 on 4<sup>th</sup>

[Asiatic Elephant – fairly recent footprints along the track to the Gaur grasslands and at km10.7 and, disconcertingly, very fresh droppings appeared on the road at km24 between me driving up the road and returning 25 minutes later]

[Gaur – high densities of fairly fresh footprints particularly at km10.7 and km22]

**Eurasian Wild Pig** – a distant animal in the Gaur grasslands from the watchtower late afternoon on 3<sup>rd</sup>

**Northern Red Muntjac** – seen a few times on the road

**Masked Palm Civet** – a furtive animal around Huai Nam Yen campsite late evening on 2<sup>nd</sup>

**Asian Leopard Cat** – one which crossed the road at 4.15am on 4<sup>th</sup> at 10.5km re-emerged and walked right past the car – a superb way to finally connect with a bogey animal!

**Asiatic Black Bear** – amazingly, I crested a slight rise at km11.7 to find a brilliantly shaggy sitting on the road about 30m from the car at 6.20am on 4<sup>th</sup>. After briefly freezing in shock (both of us) it galloped off into the forest. An outrageous case of lightning striking twice!

**Black Giant Squirrel** – one at HQ

**Grey-bellied Squirrel** – seen at HQ, the gate by the butterfly watching area, and Huai Nam Yen

**Finlayson's Squirrel** – two in the main campsite by HQ

**Indochinese Ground Squirrel** – seen several times briefly running across the road

**Cambodian Striped Squirrel** – one by the entrance

**Indomalayan Niviventer** – a largish rat climbing in vines in the thicket over the stream at Huai Nam Yen campsite around midnight appeared to be this species. I think it was too rufous for Indochinese Arboreal Niviventer (*N. langbianis*), although it was dark and I was distracted by a frogmouth nearly flying into my head!

### Gulf of Thailand, 5<sup>th</sup> December

The end of my trip coincided with the Father's Day national holiday, so Wild Encounter Thailand had a trip running on a Tuesday. A stroke of luck, I thought; have a relaxing last day with guaranteed whales – a cetacean tick, no less, if Eden's is split from Bryde's. I should have known better. There had been daily sightings for the previous couple of weeks, but despite visiting the areas where the whales had been the previous day, we found none. This certainly wasn't for a lack of trying by the excellent crew: they scanned endlessly, and we covered a huge distance over the course of a very long day. I was happy to be and sea and search, but some of the less-keen punters must have had an incredibly boring day! Our lack of a quick success meant we didn't have time to look for the smaller cetaceans, these require luck (all the following info is from Wild Encounter staff). Irrawaddy Dolphins are the most likely to be found, but even these hadn't been seen for several weeks; Finless Porpoises are only encountered infrequently, but I suspect the trips don't get a chance to look in the right areas too often. Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphins used to be seen from time to time, and I have heard reports of this species from birders from, for example, Laem Pak Bia on the west coast of the gulf; however there may only be a single individual left in that area, so sightings are unlikely.

So, a slightly disappointing finish, but I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Wild Encounter (and will hopefully get another chance to go out with them); the only mammal of the day was **Long-tailed Macaque** on the drive down.