

VIETNAM (January-February 2024)

During a 3 weeks trip in Vietnam, I managed some time for mammal (mainly primate) watching and focused on 3 places, taking time for the quality of sightings.

1. Cat Tien (Jan 28th-Feb 1st)

I arranged the trip from Ho Chi Minh City through Richard Craik (Vietnam Birding). I stayed at the comfortable Headquarters accommodations and my guide was Duyen (the same guy as the one mentioned in Jon Hall's Cat Tien trip report) who was very experienced. He works for the NP and now for Vietnam Birding since 1994. He did a great job but the communication was not always very easy (maybe my French accent when speaking English?)

During all my stay, the weather was sunny and completely dry.

On my arrival on Sunday, there was a lot of people from HCMC but from Monday morning to Thursday, the park was almost empty with only a few groups of birdwatchers and some people coming for the day from the other side of the river. The forest also appeared empty of wildlife with only few birds and only Pallas's squirrels as mammal. On the other hand, the grasslands were more productive. A late afternoon drive gave a small group of 4 gaurs whereas the night drive organized by the NP in this area produced many sambars, 1 red muntjac, 1 common palm civet..... and 1 mainland leopard cat. The cat showed up nicely for about 10 seconds just next to the road before disappearing into the bush. Of course, I was very happy with the sighting of my 26th cat species but I agree with Seva and Katya's previous report (December 2023). The group in the vehicle cannot shut up and the guide was more than incompetent.

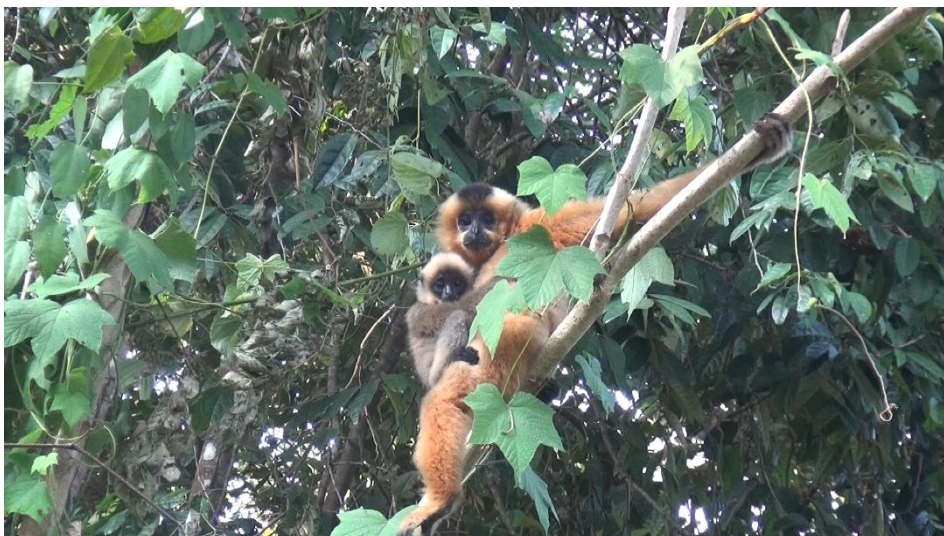
I booked several times a NP private vehicle. Cost: 213 Euros for 3x 4h drive + 3x pick up to go back to Headquarters (+ 1 NP night drive + 1 rehabilitation center visit). It is certainly not negligible but, comparatively, it is less than the difference between a 4 nights stay at NP accommodations and a 4 nights stay at the lodge.

My main interest in Cat Tien was primate watching:

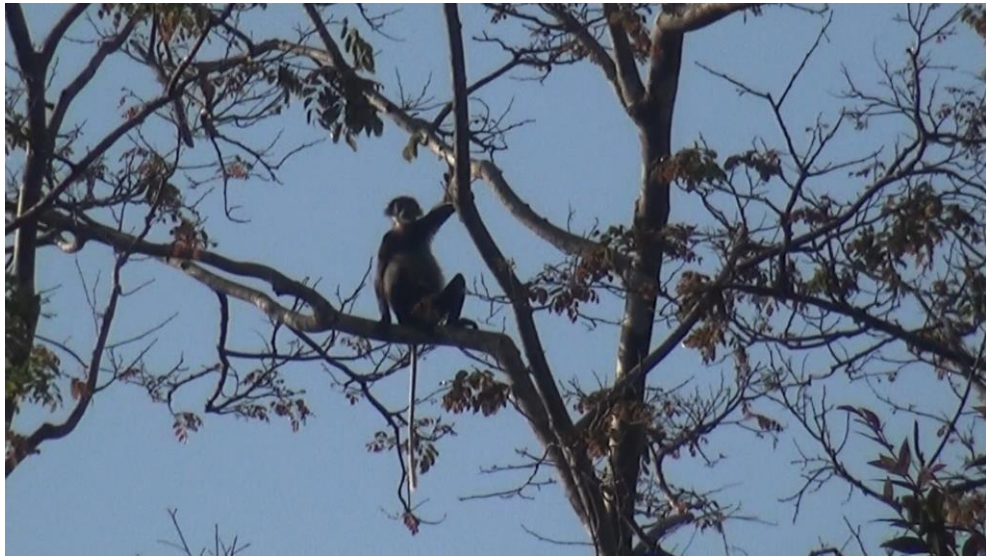
- The wild yellow-checked gibbons come to interact with the gibbons of the rehabilitation center and can be seen from the Headquarters area. There is no need to go inside the forest. I saw them every day.

The time, length and quality of the sightings are irregular. It happens more frequently early morning but I had the closest views of a family at 4 pm on the first day. I also saw briefly a family from the Crocodile Lake road.

- Duyen found several families of black-shanked doucs from the Crocodile Lake road and one other on the Crocodile Lake trail.
- Annamese silver langurs are much more difficult to find, particularly during the dry season. The best place is along the road after the Heavens rapids. We went there 2 times in the morning but we did not spot any silvered langur.
- Surprisingly, we did not see any macaque (long-tailed or pig-tailed). We only heard them and saw movements behind the vegetation.
- Pygmy slow loris: our main target..... We worked on it every night but with only flashlights and no thermal imager, we failed to see one. Things have changed since the park rangers have burnt and cut the vegetation along the road from the headquarters to the junction between Crocodile lake road and Heavens Rapids road. It is now much more difficult to find a pygmy loris than it was mentioned in previous reports. We mainly searched along Heavens Rapids road and around the junction, as well as on small trails between the river and the road. But there are still pygmy loris. Minh (another Vietnam Birding and Jon Hall's previous guide) who was also in Cat Tien let me know that his group (equipped with thermal imagers) found one pygmy loris at the junction 1 month before. He also recommended not to go before 8pm.



Yellow-checked gibbons



Black-shanked douc



Gaurs

2. Son Tra peninsula (Jan 22th)

I stayed for 2 nights in Danang (Nguyen Gia hotel, a comfortable, clean and cheap hotel right on the beach and close to Son Tra peninsula), planning to take a full day to explore Son Tra peninsula and watch the fabulous red-shanked doucs. For this purpose, I had contacted Tuan (tuan.buivan201286@gmail.com) recommended by Alex and Jeanette (trip report Feb-Mar 23). He was not available but he proposed Trang, who is working with him, to guide me. She is a nice person and did an excellent job, knowing very well where to find the douc families.

We went twice (in the morning and again in the afternoon) to the peninsula. It was raining early morning. The rain stops around 8:30 am. The weather remains mostly cloudy in the morning but was sunny in the afternoon. We saw 6 douc families in the morning and 5 more in the afternoon. Red-shanked doucs are really beautiful primates!

Of course, they are difficult to see if it is misty (it happens often there) and they remain hidden if it is raining or if it is too hot. If not, they are active all day long and can be seen from the roads.

If your objective is only to see 1 or 2 families, you can go by your-self with a motorbike (some parts of the roads are steep for bicycle) but if you want in-depth observations, I think that a guide is very useful.

Apart from the doucs, we met several groups of rhesus macaques along the roads.



Red-shanked douc

3. Van Long Nature Reserve (Feb 2nd-Feb 3th)

I stayed for 1 night at Van Long Green hotel to have 2 possibilities to look for Delacour's langurs: one on late afternoon and one on early morning. The hotel had nothing exciting but was OK. Its main advantage is its location, in front of the ticket counter and 50m away from the boat tours starting point.

I took a boat ride from 4pm to 5pm. After 30 minutes, the boatwoman saw langurs in the vegetation but they disappeared quickly. Fortunately, they did climb up the cliffs and were seen again. I had good views of a group of 4 and was able to take some pictures. Apparently, the view of Delacour's langurs from

a boat is not guarantee. They may remain hidden. The best chances are on late afternoon or on early morning.

Another option is to travel the roads around the reserve. You are able to scan larger areas than from the boat but you also see the langurs from further away. I was planned to try this strategy on next morning but it was raining and I finally gave up.



Delacour's langurs
