

Besides temples and beaches and although we've been to Phuket long time ago for scuba diving, I did not realize there was so much wildlife in this country until I read several interesting trip reports on CloudBirders and MammalWatching. Therefore, my wife and I decided to pay a visit to Thailand for our vacation in February 2025: 2 full weeks spent in the center of the country to minimize driving distances and spend enough time in each location visited to maximize our chance for nice mammals (and birds) encounters.

The preparation for this trip was a bit hectic. Indeed, I initially contacted Peter Ericsson (peter.ericsson@gmail.com), a well-known birding guide in Thailand who is also keen on mammals and was interested to organize the itinerary I had in mind, something not so usual for birders as most of our wildlife targets were mammals. After some discussions and based on some Mammalwatching trip report advices, we set a 2-week long itinerary to visit Pak Tale (for birds 😊), Kaeng Krachan NP, Huai Kha Khaeng, Phu Khiao, Khao Yai NP and a whale watching tour in the Gulf of Bangkok. The price asked by Peter for an all-inclusive private trip was decent and we booked with him...until a few weeks later my working company told me an unexpected event would prevent me from taking vacation in February and I had to cancel my trip. Luckily, Peter had not spent any money yet but of course canceling a guided trip is always unpleasant. Then, a couple of months after, my company informed me things had changed and we could finally leave for vacation on our dates. However, given the situation, I did not have the courage to contact Peter again saying: "Hi, I'm free again so can you guide us even if I initially cancelled?"... I had to find a plan B and then contacted Jirayu Ekkul, a local guide famous in the MammalWatching community. Luckily, he was still available on our dates and was more than happy to guide us on the itinerary we had in mind. So, no change in the itinerary and it turned out that his price was almost the same as what Eric was asking for. We finalized the booking with Jirayu as well as our flight tickets with AF-KLM. Everything was fine until the very last week before departure when Jirayu's father sadly passed away and he had to take care of the funerals. As a consequence, Jirayu could no longer guide us, but he was able to arrange another guide and driver from his crew who he promised would be as good as him. Our guide was Ghan and the driver's name was Nut. Ghan's English was a bit difficult to understand, which sometimes led to some confusing situations on what and why we were doing certain things during the trip, but he was a very hard worker and restlessly looking for all the wildlife targets we had in each park and he was very good at spotting them. He was definitely doing his best to please us. Nut turned out to also be an excellent spotter in addition to being a good and careful driver. For the last 3 days of the trip, Nut had to leave to prepare the upcoming scheduled whale watching tours (yes Nut was also organizing and leading these tours: a very polyvalent guy 😊) and was replaced by another driver: Fluke. Fluke was a very energetic and funny young guy, apparently quite new in Jirayu's crew and therefore, seemed genuinely happy to drive and look with us for new mammals and birds he never saw before. Therefore, even if we eventually didn't have Jirayu's who had great praise in many reports, I think Ghan, Nut and Fluke were also very good and both Jirayu and I thanked them for the good work they did.

Besides our guide and driver, and as said in all the reports you can read about Thailand, all the people we met were very friendly and smiling all the time. In all the parks, the rangers were giving many information about last sightings and were even keen to come and help us during spotlight sessions on foot at night (Kaeng Krachan and Phu Khiao for instance). The weather was pleasant during the entire trip: mostly dry and sunny, with decent temperatures, not too hot. We only had 2 days of rain while visiting Khao Yai, which disturbed a bit the visit and the quality of the wildlife sightings but nothing too dramatic. The food we had during the trip was OK globally speaking but unlike what is said in most trip reports, I was not especially amazed by the quality and taste of the food that was served.

Now talking about wildlife watching, we managed to see 44 different mammal species during this 2-week long trip and countless birds, which I believe is a good score thanks to the commitment of our guides. Nothing was easy though during this trip to see mammals: first because most of them were seen in forests and conditions are always more difficult for observations (and taking nice photos) in such a biotope. Using a thermal camera is definitely a plus. The density of wildlife is also not very high and most of the animals were very shy. Poaching is evident in some places and doesn't help for wildlife watching. For several targets, we had to spend many many hours waiting in the usual places and/or do very long night sessions before seeing them. For instance, in February this year, seeing sun bear in Kaeng Krachan proved to be much more difficult than expected and we saw only one on the last night after changing our initial plan because none were seen after 3 nights and days. Finding a leopard cat was also very tough, even in Phu Khiao where some habituated individuals are more or less seen every night. I was very surprised we could not see any single elephant although we missed some of them by a few minutes, so they are there for sure. Finally, after a full day spent on the sea without seeing any Eden whale and we had to go back to port with obvious disappointment, we finally saw them at the last minute and well ! Thank you Nut for extending the tour duration to allow such observation. Bottom line is that on the long list of mammal and bird targets we had we could see all mammals but one. We missed yellow-throated martens that I thought could be quite easy, but we saw a sun bear, a leopard cat, Eden's whales, 7 species of squirrels, 10 species of primates ! and several species of ungulates.

No miracle in seeing Asiatic black bears (that we missed by a few hours though in Khao Yai NP, damned!) or black leopards (that was definitely around on the days we visited Kaeng Krachan NP) but we had a couple of nice and unexpected sightings with a group of 6 smooth-coated otters, one crab-eating mongoose and finless porpoises showing very well near the boat. So we came back very happy from this trip, our camera SD cards full of nice pictures, and Thailand for sure deserves some time to visit for its wildlife.

Below some specific details about accommodations, park description and wildlife watching for all the places we visited during our trip.

Pak Tale

After a smooth and uneventful flight to Bangkok through Amsterdam, we arrived on time on a beautiful sunny Sunday morning. I was pleasantly surprised by how fast we claimed our luggage and went through customs. Only 40 minutes after landing, we were already exiting the airport terminal where Ghan and Nut greeted us. We then drove directly to our first destination: Pak Tale, located 3h drive South West of Bangkok. We stopped en-route to a place where Nut knew **crab-eating macaques** used to leave and indeed, we could easily observe and for long a group of macaques resting in a small remnant forest patch near a peer. These were the only mammals we saw during the day as the rest of our time in Pak Tale was dedicated to bird watching and more particularly waders. When it got too dark, we drove a short distance to our hotel: ECO-Moment resort. It was a nice place in front of a nice sandy beach with comfortable and clean rooms. We had dinner in a small restaurant nearby serving good seafood. On the following morning, we took an early breakfast at the hotel before driving back to Pak Tale for a second birding session to look for the critically endangered spoon-billed sandpiper: one of the star birds there. We only had some very distant views before it got too hot and anyway time to move on and drive to our next destination.

Kaeng Krachan NP

We left Pak Tale around 10am and then drove towards Kaeng Krachan National Park where we would spend 4 nights and days with lots of expectations in terms of bird and mammal targets. After about 2h drive, Nut and Ghan suggested to stop at a temple close to the park so as to try for **stump-tailed macaques** as a group use to leave there according to them. They make a good decision as this would be the only place we would see this funny looking monkey. The place was not very wild but as soon as we arrived at the temple, there was indeed a large group who roamed between the temple and some modern building. They were quite tame so we could approach them easily for some nice photo opportunities.

We continued our drive to the place where we would sleep and take our meals for the following days: the Samarn Bird Camp. We booked this hotel because the famous Baan Maka resort was fully booked due to some scholarship event. Sarman Bird Camp turned out to be a very nice hotel owned by lovely people, with very comfortable rooms, serving the best food we had during our trip to Thailand and conveniently located just a couple of kilometers from the park entrance. We settled into our rooms, had a late lunch and still had some time to pay a visit to the park for the afternoon. Ghan and Nut were actually very eager to visit the park and we realized later on that Jirayu's team were all really found of this park as according to them this is the best place in the entire country to have some exciting mammal encounters. After paying the entrance fees, we drove towards the Baan Krang Campsite, the first and very large campsite inside the park with several park ranger offices, a small restaurant, and a large campground full of tents and people. This is a good place to look for both birds and mammals according to past sightings and especially a supposedly reliable place for sun bears. On the other hand, I found the toilets and showers in this camp to be really dirty, if not disgusting, which I found surprising for such a well-known and busy place with both international and local tourists.

The road to the Baan Krang Campsite is fully tarred and in good shape so no problem to drive there even with a small sedan car as mentioned in many reports. The road is quite scenic surrounded by hilly and luxurious forests and passes through several waterholes that are supposed to allow interesting mammal sightings according to previous reports. However, during our stay and although we passed in front of these waterholes numerous times, we saw absolutely nothing... We had our first mammal observation just before reaching the campsite, it was a beautiful **black giant squirrel** very busy licking tree sap on a tall leafless tree. What a cool squirrel. Once we arrived in the campsite, we directly went to the trash area behind the restaurant where sun bears are often observed but we saw none. After a while, we decided to drive a bit after the campsite where we crossed three different small water streams. In this area, we got out of the car and walked along the track where we observed our first **dusky leaf monkeys** in fairly good conditions. We also saw one **lar gibbon** very high in a giant tree but against the light so not good for pictures. We also had glimpses of squirrels but too brief to allow us to determine which species it was. It was getting late, so we drove back to our hotel. A few kilometers after the campsite, I stopped something moving on the side of the road and shouted Nut to stop the car. He

quickly reversed the car and then managed to observe a nice **crab-eating mongoose** long enough for some nice pictures! This was an uncommon sighting according to our guides, so we were lucky to see one so well. We reached the hotel when it was dark and had a delicious dinner with beers to celebrate this very good afternoon start in Kaeng Krachan!

For the following morning, Nut told us we would need to wake up early and leave no later than 5am so that we could reach the Phanoen Thung Campsite located deeper in the park and higher in the mountains just when the sun comes out and sun bears can be regularly seen. The drive started at night so we did some spotlighting while driving but we saw nothing except some eyeshines belonging to **wild boards** according to Ghan. We reached the Baan Krang campsite just on time when rangers open the gate to the dirt track climbing up the mountains to the Phanoen Thung Campsite. En route, we saw one **red muntjac** and a **few dusky leaf monkeys** when some light started to appear. We reached the place where a black leopard had been regularly spotted before our trip, so we drove very slowly on that portion of the road, but we didn't see it. We finally arrived at the campsite a bit after 7am. Ghan and us walked directly to the area behind the restaurant and then to the campground where sun bears are often seen, just to hear from the people who slept there that indeed one individual showed up just a few minutes before we arrived. A young Chinese lady showed us a video she took with her cell phone of a large sun bear running between the tents. So frustrating to miss the bear in such circumstances! We remained and walked a bit around the camp just in case, but saw no bear. On the other hand, we spotted one **grey-bellied squirrel** and one **dusky leaf monkey** female with a cute orange baby in her arms. After that, we took our breakfast at the small platform behind the restaurant looking at the place where sun bears and yellow throated martens are regularly seen. We stayed there the entire morning, but we saw nothing except many colorful birds. It was then time to drive down to the other campsite, once again passing through the leopard place without seeing anything, and we arrived at the campsite for a late lunch. We roamed around the camp with Ghan, observed again many cool birds and had a super observation for long minutes of a family of **lar gibbons** and we could even see them making impressive jumps from one tree to another. We then decided to stay at the trash area behind the restaurant waiting for bears, but we saw nothing here also. After many hours of waiting and later in the afternoon, we drove back to our hotel for another nice diner. We did not stay too long because we had book a night walk in the Baan Maka garden with the hope to see slow lorises that are often spotted there based on previous trip repots. And indeed, when we arrived at the lodge, their local guide told us it should be an easy task. Unfortunately, and as written earlier, a large group of school kids were staying at the lodge and they were really loud. As a consequence, animals were probably afraid by such a noise level and we saw nothing during the walk except for one **greater short-nosed fruit bat**. However and good for us, the guide did not give up and told us to follow him with our car to another place not far from the lodge where he'd often see slow lorises. We had a lengthy night walk there but except for a few nice nocturnal birds (nightjar, owl) we did not see a single loris... The guide was very surprised that we could not observe any slow loris that was supposed to be easy and he felt sorry for us but at some point we had to stop the night session and we came back to our hotel for a well-deserved sleep after this very long day and a bit frustrated to say the least given the few observations we had and compared to what we could see the day before.

On the following day, we didn't leave so early and took our time to drive very slowly along the tarred road to look for wildlife but things were pretty quiet to say the least... At the Baan Krang campsite, we stopped for lunch and waited again for sun bear in the "usual" places but with no luck. We then drove to the Phanoen Thung upper camp where we would sleep so as to give us more chance for bear sighting in the late afternoon and early morning hours. On the road, we stopped for a long time at the black leopard area and once again we saw nothing. As soon as we parked our car close to the campground, Nut started to mount our tents. The campground in Phanoen Krang is very nicely surrounded by the forest and it is great to spend a night there listening to the jungle night sounds and loud calls of lar gibbons in the morning. In addition, I found the toilets and showers in much better state and much cleaner than in Baan Krang. While we were walking near the camp with Ghan to enjoy the views on the mountain and in search for wildlife, Nut sent him a message to quickly come back to the camp! We thought Nut finally spotted a sun bear but no, what he observed was a group of **Robinson's banded langur**. Not as good as a sun bear but anyway a new, cool and not so easy species to observe in the park after all. We followed the group for long minutes eating in fruiting trees and interacting between each other, including some cute black babies. Awesome observation! After that, we had dinner at the same place behind the restaurant but saw again nothing... We decided with Ghan to have a night walk along the road near the camp and during a couple of hours we managed to see two **Malayan porcupines** who were totally oblivious to us and even came sniffing our shoes. Then and thanks to our thermal cameras, we could spot a few **common woolly bats** roosting inside a bamboo next to the road and a few small rodents that we could not identify because all of them ran off as soon as we tried to put the torch light on. The best observation of the night though was a beautiful **Bengal slow loris** who was eating in a fruiting trees a few hundred meters away from the camp. What a cool primate, indeed moving very slowly as its name suggests, and we were so happy to see one there after missing it in the Baan Maka garden. We went back to our tents around 11pm for a good sleep and we wake up very early as soon as the light came out but again,

we dipped on the sun bear. Man! we were starting to get very concerned that one of our main mammal target would elude us during this trip... We packed our camping gear in the car to slowly drove back downhill and after a few kilometers, Ghan and Nut suddenly shouted loudly together: **Indochinese serow**! Just in front of the car indeed, a magnificent serow was eating leaves on the side of the road very unconcerned by our presence. We stopped the engine and managed to observe him for long minutes before he probably thought he had enough with us and then walked nonchalantly inside the thick forest. What a great sighting in a place not usually known to spot such a mammal in Thailand.

When we arrived at the Baan Krang campsite, we ate a late breakfast and discussed with Ghana and Nut on how we could maximize our last chance to see a sun bear on the few hours remaining in Kaeng Krachan. We all agreed we should spend our last night in the camp and not at the hotel as initially planned. Done deal! We quickly drove to the hotel to take some clothes and inform the owners of this change in plan, and we organized for the afternoon a visit to a famous bird hide nearby. There are several bird hide options around Kaeng Krachan that are very famous among birdwatchers and Nut proposed us to visit one of them: Mr Bird's hide, not only because of the cool birds easily seen there but also because it is a very good place to observe small mammals that are very tough to see otherwise. The bird show in such hide was indeed pretty much non-stop with tens of species observed in excellent conditions and for mammals, the list was quite impressive as well. We could observe in about 2 hours no less than three different squirrel species: the very common **grey-bellied squirrels**, a few **Himalayan striped squirrels** and one **Indochinese ground squirrel**. In addition, we observed a few **Northern tree shrews**, and last but not least, an awesome **lesser mouse deer** that came to drink twice, probably the same individual. What an amazing place!

After this very successful time spent at the hide, we drove back to the Baan Krang campsite for our last night inside the park and thus, last chance to see a sun bear. While Nut was installing our tents, we walked with Ghan around the camp to look for some wildlife, but we did not see anything special. We took our dinner at the camp restaurant and waited anxiously near the trash area. It was starting to get dark, but nothing in view... After an hour it was now fully dark but still nothing... until Nut spotted something: three **Malayan porcupines**. These guys are really common at night in Thailand! Nut spotted later on another mammal that turned out to be a **common palm civet**. After a while, we decided with Ghan to walk in the upper section of the campsite to check if we would see something outside of the trash area. We saw some eyeshine very quickly and identified it was another **common palm civet**. We didn't see anything else and came back to where Nut was waiting and talking with other guides/rangers. Time was flying and we were starting to really get desperate. Then one guide said something to Nut and was frenetically finger pointing down the main building area near the restaurant. We quickly ran to where the guide was and to our amazement and relief, finally, a beautiful **sun bear** was there, walking on the grass about 50 meters from us. What a sight! after so many hours of waiting and on the last night, all our efforts were finally rewarded with a sun bear that we could observe for more than 30 minutes looking for food and leftovers from the restaurant. At some point, he walked very close towards us, which made me feel a bit nervous, but the guides and rangers didn't seem to bother at all, so we stayed relaxed and enjoyed the show. After hundreds of pictures taken 😊, we finally decided to stop the night session and went back to our tents for a sleep, our head full of souvenirs. On the following morning, we woke up early, put all the camping gear inside the car and drove to the Samarn Bird lodge for a shower, nice breakfast, and for Nut to rest a bit before the long drive to our next destination.

Huai Kha Khaeng

We reached our next destination: the Huai Kha Khaeng Park after a 6h-long but straightforward drive on very good, tared roads. A few km before reaching our hotel, we saw on the side of the road a huge colony of bats roosting in very large trees. We stopped the car to approach them a little for pictures and it turned out to be a colony of thousands of **Lyle's flying foxes**. Quite impressive to watch.

We arrived mid-afternoon at our lodge, the Rim Bueng Charoen Resort located in a small village and had the advantage to be very close to the park entrance, which was very convenient. This small resort is owned by a very friendly old couple and they put us in a nice en-suite chalet, a bit outdated but very comfortable. They were serving only breakfast, probably the worst we had during this trip but eatable, and for dinner we had to drive for about 30min to the next town. After checking-in at the lodge, we quickly drove to the park for the rest of day. However, we arrived a bit late in the afternoon and thus, it was not making real sense to pay for the park fees for just a short period of time since this park is surprisingly closing quite early in the afternoon. Instead, we drove to a viewing platform nearby the entrance gate outside of the park. This platform is overlooking a large field where it is said bantengs are regularly coming to graze but we saw none... We then decided to drove along a track where we saw a troop of **crab-eating macaques** and after that we decided to come back to the park entrance parking lot and surroundings where we could stay until dark. It was a good idea since we saw along the river in some distance several **bantengs**, one **sambar deer** and one **northern red**

muntjac coming to drink. On the other side of the park entrance there was a small wooden bridge where we walked to and then, saw a tame **golden jackal** and a few **unidentified squirrels**. It was there, literally a few hundred meters from the gate that a tiger family was seen for a few days on a banteng kills for a few days just before our trip. Simply an amazing sighting! Of course, they were gone just a couple of days before we arrived at the park...

On the following day, we went back to the park early morning and we paid the park fees for the full day. We were told by the rangers at the gate that we just missed an Asian Elephant crossing the road a couple of minutes before we arrived. Damned! We directly drove the park ranger buildings around 20km from the gate. The track was in pretty good shape, the drive smooth until all of a sudden, a big **wild boar** crossed the road in front of the car to Nut's amazement who had to heavily brake so that we would not hit the animal. Scarry and funny at the same time 😊. When we reached the ranger station, we went for a walk around the buildings where we could see a family of **Indian hog deers** and some interesting birds. We drove to another place nearby where we could see a troop of awesome **Eld's deers** that were resting on the ground, very relaxed, and clearly habituated to human presence. After this good start, we drove back towards the gate to stop at the main and well-known viewing platform of the park in front a small field where bantengs and several other mammals are regularly observed. We were alone when we arrived and enjoyed the platform just for ourselves for most of the day. At the beginning, things were very quiet except for a few birds, including the very nice green peafowl. Then around mid-afternoon, a large group of **bantengs** arrived: females, calves and even a huge and impressive bull looking almost like a gaur. At some point, a **golden jackal** showed up and crossed the field without disturbing the bantengs at all. We also saw a shy **sambar deer** and a couple of **red muntjacs** during our stay at the platform. No other unusual mammals were seen that day. When the park closure time approached, we left the platform and went back to our lodge for a good sleep since we had to leave very early again on the following morning for our next destination.

Phu Khiao

After an early breakfast, the drive to the Phu Khiao wildlife sanctuary was long, about 7h30, but on good roads through nice landscapes: rice fields for the first half of the journey and then tortuous roads through hilly slopes till the entrance of the sanctuary. We arrived around 3pm, which was too late to find descend food at the tiny shop located at the entrance so we went to the nearby Chulabhorn gold course so as to order some food at the restaurant and we picked boxes with us for dinner at the campsite inside the sanctuary. The rangers at the entrance were a bit surprised to see two foreign tourists staying for two nights inside the park but they were keen on sharing with us the latest news about wildlife sightings in the campsite and along the main road through the forest till the Thung Kamang campsite where we slept. We drove slowly watching carefully for any wildlife we would come across. We didn't see much but on the first and now unused campsite where the forest preservation unit and a small pond are located, we saw a nice group of **sambar deer** with many cute babies. Then, we observed a few shy **Assam macaques** that quickly ran up in the trees when we stopped the car. While we were trying to take some pictures, we observe a lone **black giant squirrel**. We continued on the road till the campsite where we again saw more **sambar deer**, including an albino one (strange looking for such an animal). The Thung Kamang is actually very large, and I was surprised to see many ranger offices and accommodations, a restaurant, a well furnished shop, a large conference room as well as many wooden cabins that can be booked for guests. As a matter of fact, there are actually much more sleeping options inside the park than just campsite. We parked our car at the campground area and while Nut was mounting our tents, we went with Ghan to the nearby field area where we climbed on a viewing platform giving good views of the surroundings. We observed there many **Indian hog deer** and again a few more **sambar deer**. We stayed on the platform until sunset and when it got too dark we went back to the campsite to eat our dinner boxes comfortably at the tables of the restaurant. While we were waiting for complete darkness to start our first spotlighting session, an old ranger came to us and very nicely explained us where to look for the leopard cat and giant flying squirrel. He happily helped us with his own torch and stayed with us quite late. I was glad to have him helping since he showed us in the trees next to our tents a nice **small-toothed palm civet** that we could observe superbly for long minutes eating fruits and then, an **Indian red giant flying squirrel** that we even saw flying from one tree to another (quite impressive!). It was a bit difficult to take nice pictures of but a great observation anyway. In addition, we observed some distant and very shy **golden jackals** and a couple of **Malayan porcupines** near the trash area behind the restaurant. This was a productive night session in less than 2 hours! After the ranger left us, we stayed awake and waited much longer until around midnight with the hope to see a leopard cat. The ranger assured us there were actually two habituated individuals roaming near the restaurant almost every night, but we saw none that night. We went back to the tent for a good sleep after this long day. For the full day we had to spend in the park on the following day, we decided to drove most of the time along the main road that goes between both campsites back and forth. We did it early morning and once again in the late afternoon when wildlife is supposed to me more active. We made a few stops in various places along the road, including the park staff Memorial, but to be honest we

saw little wildlife along the road. However, we managed to see again and very well this time some **Assam macaques** including a family with babies, as well as a couple of **Northern pig-tailed macaques**. We searched for a long time **Indochinese grey langurs** until we saw them late evening as a group in fruiting trees in the 1st campsite. Beside those monkeys and a few **sambar deer**, we saw nothing else. Around lunch time, we roamed by foot along the cabins and park ranger area and once again we saw several tame **sambar deer**, one **Northern red muntjac** and more interestingly: a couple of **Finlayson's squirrels**. These guys are really beautiful squirrels. During the hot times of the day, we booked the hide located near the campsite. This is a very interesting and productive hide but only for bird watching. After dinner that we ordered at the local restaurant serving good food and for our second night, we decided to drive a bit in the fields area next to the camp where we only saw a few **Indian hog deer** and nightjars. Nothing else. Therefore, we quickly decided to come back and stay in the campsite near our tents where we scanned the trees and trash area behind the restaurant. We didn't see any civet on this second night but once again one **Indian red giant flying squirrel** (probably the same individual) and several **Malayan porcupines**. It was our last night in the park so Ghan and I stayed awake very late and scanned several places with our thermal cameras until after midnight when finally we spotted a **leopard cat**. Probably not one of the habituated cats that the ranger talked about because this one was pretty skittish and quickly hid in the basement under the conference building when we tried to approach him but he stayed long enough for me to manage to take a crappy picture. He then ran away to the forest and we could not see it anymore. Anyway, nice observation and our second main mammal target of the trip seen. Bingo! The night was short and after breakfast we packed our camping gear in the car and drove back to the entrance gate. We saw again in the 1st campsite the group of **Indochinese grey langurs** in the same fruiting trees. Besides the langurs, we did not see any other mammals that morning until we reached the park gate.

Globally speaking I found this park quite interesting for the feeling of wilderness it gave: it was not crowded at all with tourists to say the least, the landscape was varied with forest, fields and small lakes and the campsite amenities were in good shape and fairly cleaned. Except for the common Sambar deer that we observed everywhere, I found the density of wildlife low, most of the animals very shy and we spent long times in the park without seeing anything. However, there is certainly an interesting mammal diversity in this park with some species that we could only see there during our trip in Thailand like giant flying squirrels, Assam macaques and Indochinese grey langurs. We also wanted to visit this park to maximize our chance to see mainland leopard cats based on past trip reports. We saw all of that fairly well and only in 2 days / 2 nights so we did well I would say and mission accomplished.

We arrived at the gate late morning and then drove to our next destination, about 4h30 away: the very well-known but busy Khao Yai National Park.

Khao Yai NP

We reached Khao Yai mid-afternoon with rain, the first rain we had since the start of our trip. We stopped at the Terrazzo Khao Yai hotel located just before the park entrance gate and where we would sleep for the next 3 nights. This is a nice hotel owned by a super friendly lady who prepared every day our breakfast boxes since we always left the hotel early in the mornings. It looked like we were the only guests in the hotel but not because the hotel was abandoned: rooms were large, recently renovated and very clean. There was no restaurant in the hotel, so we went to the many local restaurants nearby for our dinners. Unlike for the rest of our trip, we were not lucky with the weather when we visited Khao Yai as we had 2 days of rain and only 1 sunny day. Anyway, this didn't prevent us from visiting and spending full days in the park in search for the wildlife, but it was not easy to find animals and we spent long hours without seeing anything even in the supposedly good places for certain mammals. For example, we did not see a single elephant in the park whereas Ghan and Nut told us there should be easy and almost guaranteed to see in Khao Yai. I can't say if the bad weather played a role in the low mammal observation frequency we experienced. We visited the park during weekdays, so it wasn't too crowded but anyway much busier than all the other parks and locations we visited during our trip in Thailand. We could notice that a large portion of the visitors did not care at all about wildlife watching and were more interested in taking photos of the landscapes or selfies in front of the famous locations of the park.

Since we arrived mid-afternoon on the first day, we still had some time for a short visit in the park and anyway, Ghan and Nut had called the visitor center to book a private car for a night drive organized by the park rangers (it is not possible to do night drives with our own car in this park). We climbed the main road up to the PK30 viewpoint that was indeed nice (under light rain though) and a large group of **Northern pig-tailed macaques** was staying there waiting for the tourist to give them some food although it is written and warned everywhere that giving food to wild animals is strictly forbidden, which creates problems with the macaques who tends to be somewhat aggressive and very smart to grab food from the cars if you don't pay attention. In this group were several cute babies and two impressive males. We continued driving up to the visitor center and along the road we observed

again the common **sambar deer** and we saw one **red muntjac**. When we arrived at the large and beautiful visitor center located next to a scenic river surrounded by tall forest trees, it was already starting to get dark. We again saw many inquisitive **Northern pig-tailed macaques** and we walked a bit behind the restaurant place along the river to a roosting place of a superb fishing owl. The owl had a chick, both were clearly habituated to human presence and were probably the most photographed owls in Thailand 😊 We waited for the night to come and in agreement with our guide and the ranger booked for the night drive, we decided to leave a bit later than all the other cars, which turned out to be a great decision as we didn't have to do the night drive in a long queue of vehicles. This was quieter and I think gave us more chance to see some interesting wildlife. The ranger we had that night was very friendly, taking all the time about his job in the park and all the wildlife he saw in previous tours, and was very good at spotting animals with his torch. Even before leaving the visitor center area, we already saw two **Malayan porcupines**. During the 1h30 long night drive, we also observed several **common palm civets**, one **small Indian civet** but too far for good pictures and two **golden jackals**. We tried for leopard cats that are sometimes seen during those night sessions, but we saw none. We even tried for colugo that the ranger said he occasionally observes but again we saw none. Despite what is described in many reports, I found this night drive pretty interesting with decent sightings but that's true we were alone and not followed, nor following, by all the other cars booked that night. When we came back to the visitor center, we quickly tried successfully with Ghan some nocturnal birds, but we could not stay long and had to drive back to the entrance gate so that we would not leave the park too late and be notified by the rangers and also to be on time to find restaurants still open for a late dinner.

On the following day, we left the hotel very early under more rain and drove directly to an area located after the visitor center and known to be reliable to see Pileated gibbons, a mammal species that Ghan told us would be tricky to find in Khao Yai. After driving back and forth on a same road, we stopped the car and Ghan told us we would walk along this road in the place where he usually finds them. We walked and waited for about 30min and when the sky cleared up and the sun started to shine, Ghan heard the specific calls of **pileated gibbons** and sure enough, a few minutes after we saw a beautiful black male followed by a female and probably a juvenile. We were alone in the place and could observe and follow the gibbons for long minutes in excellent conditions before they disappeared deep in the forest. What a nice monkey species! After that, Ghan and Nut decided to go higher in the mountain to the place where Indochinese serow is regularly seen based on previous reports. By the time we reached the place, several loud local tourists were already walking on the wooden platforms and of course no serow could be seen, probably afraid by the noise. Anyway, since we saw one so well in Kaeng Krachan this was OK and we drove back to the visitor center to eat our breakfast boxes. We are not fond of bats but since some could be easily seen in the basement of the visitor center, we went down there and were lucky to find three different species: a large colony of **Andersen's leaf-nosed bats**, four large **great Himalayan leaf-nosed bats** in a different room and a some other distinctive bats that were identified later on by Jirayu as **Acuminate horseshoe bats**. When we got out, we walked along the river in hope to see otters that are regularly seen near the bridge at the visitor center, but we didn't see any. We continued to walk to the same owl place as the day before and while doing some bird watching, we managed to see a few **grey-bellied squirrels** and one superb **black giant squirrel**. After a short while, we decided to drive towards PK33 where a forest trail starts and a large tree with a cavity hosts a small colony of **lesser false vampire bats** as a roosting place and indeed, they were there. We walked a bit along the trail but we did not see anything except the loud calls of lar gibbons well hidden in tall trees. Therefore, we went back to the car and drove to different areas with the hope to see elephants, but we dipped again on them. After a good lunch taken at the restaurant place next to the visitor center, we roamed around wooden cabins near the campsite and saw several **sambar deer** and **red muntjacs** resting there. This is when Ghan received a message that an Asiatic black bear was seen on the PK33 trail we took just a few hours before. What? We quickly drove and walked fast to the place where it was observed but of course it was gone... Damned! we missed an Asiatic black bear by some minutes only apparently. So frustrating! After that, we tried again for elephants for the rest of the afternoon. A group was seen crossing a road where several cars were still waiting when we arrived. We heard the elephants and saw some vegetation moving but they were walking too deep in the forest, which prevented us from seeing anything. Another frustration! We booked again a night drive that evening. We saw the same mammal species as the day before but notably a Malayan porcupine family with an adorable baby trotting behind them. Such a cutie 😊.

For the last day, we were wondering what to do in the morning between staying at the river where otters seem to swim every day and that we missed the day before by the way or try the place where the Asiatic black bear was seen and seemed to be a place where he was sleeping in trees. Give the chance of success, we decided to go the river. When we arrived, **Northern Pig-Tailed macaques** were already waiting for tourists and after waiting for about 2 hours we did not see anything else. We decided to move to the bear place and when we arrived, no bear was to be seen of course. However, while waiting in the area, we saw a family of **lar gibbons** that we could observe in very good conditions. We came back to the visitor center for lunch and when we arrived, a ranger

told us that we just missed the otters. Oh no! After lunch we tried other places for elephants, nothing, we drove and walked to the Nong Phak Chi Watching Tower, nothing, and we made a last tour around the Lam Ta Khong campground where we saw nothing else than the usual tame **sambar deer**. With such a prolific day, Ghan said we should try again the visitor center as the otters could actually swim along the river both in the morning and the afternoon. We then gave us a last chance and when we arrived at the visitor center, a large group of people were looking at the river! We jumped out of the car and were told that otters were just seen a few minutes ago but now were hiding somewhere. Man! Are we banned to see otters forever or what! We decided to wait since we had no other plan anyway and finally after about half an hour, the otters reappeared and it was not one, nor two but a group of no less than six **smooth-coated otters** that we could see and not only for a few minutes swimming in the river but a long time giving us a show cleaning themselves, grooming and playing on a large rock before swimming along the river out of view. Definitely worth the effort and what a superb end of day! We waited for a last night drive that was a bit quiet with only **Malayan porcupines** (again 😊) and **golden jackals** observed. We might have seen a large Indian Civet according to the ranger but the observation was very brief, distant and with no picture to confirm which species it was, so I don't count it. We went back to our hotel for a short night since we had to leave around 5am on the following day for our next and last visited place: the Khok Kham salt pans near the Gulf of Bangkok to try a different place for the observation of the mythical spoon-billed sandpiper and arrive on time during the low tide hours to maximize our chance. As soon as we arrived, we walked along the pans and after only 30 minutes, bingo! we saw two of them extremely well for long minutes and with very nice photo opportunities. After this nice afternoon birding session, we stayed for the night at a hotel nearby I forget the name. It was a nice modern hotel but with nothing special in terms of room style and food served for breakfast.

Gulf of Bangkok

For our last day in Thailand, we booked a full day whale watching tour with Wild Encounter, the company owned by Jirayu. We left the hotel quite early in the morning because we wanted to roam around the pans in the area before reaching the pier where the boat moors. We went to the Red bridge dolphin watching area, a place well know and visited by locals on the week-ends but where the chance to actually see dolphins from there is close to zero according to Jirayu. We then drove up to the Marine and Coastal Resources office in search for some sea birds but what was nice is that driving through some houses, we managed to observe a couple of **Pallas's squirrels**, our last and seventh species of squirrels observed during this trip. Nice! It was now time to reach the pier where we met again Nut, our first driver and who was actually the whale watching tour leader with the crew. There were only 4 other guests booked with us on this tour so we would have ample space on the boat, nice! After a safety briefing and explanations on how the tour would take place, we left the pier to cruise in the gulf of Bangkok in search for any marine wildlife that would show up. The weather was splendid: bright sunny with almost no wind, so a very flat sea. Perfect conditions for whale watching. The first animals we observed were of course numerous sea birds like sterns and gulls but we fairly quickly observe our first mammals: **Indo-Pacific finless porpoises**, first some very brief observations of a couple of individuals but a short hour later, we had prolonged of a group that stayed quite close to the boat, which was an uncommon behavior and we were lucky to observe porpoises so well according to Nut. And after that... nothing else for hours and hours till the point that at 3pm, Nut told us very sadly that we had to go back to land as the tour duration reached its end. All the guests and crew were quite disappointed to say the least. While the boat was cruising back to land, Nut received a call from another boat who spotted two Eden's whales a few Nautic miles away from us. Yeah! Everybody cheered up and we cruised full speed to the place where the whales were seen. At some point, we saw the boat and whale blows and it was not two whales, nor three, but actually five **Eden's whales** who were in the area interacting, feeding fish and giving us the show. What a nice encounter. We stayed in the area for a good hour thanks to the crew who were genuinely as happy as the guests to enjoy the whale show. After this great wildlife sighting, we finally cruised back to land where we arrived well after the normal time.

We said goodbye to Nut, and Ghan and Fluke drove us at night to our hotel close to the Bangkok airport, the Grand BS airport Hotel Suvarnabhumi, a very large and comfortable resort where we could drink a few cocktails to celebrate our trip ending and all the nice wildlife observations we could have during this trip to Thailand. The flight back to France on the following day was smooth and uneventful, which sometimes happens 😊

A few words of conclusion about our wildlife trip to Thailand. I found this country very nice to visit with many interesting nature parks, beautiful landscapes and a surprisingly diversified wildlife for mammals (at least for me 😊). We only visited a few parks and we could have easily stayed longer to visit other places and see even more species if we had the time. Seeing some mammals target proved to be more challenging than expected based on past trip reports but thanks to Jirayu's great team and dedication of Ghan, Nut and Fluke who did their best to find all what we wanted to see, we managed to observe in 2 weeks only,

sometimes in very good conditions, 44 different mammal species and countless bird species. Thailand is definitely a country I recommend for a wildlife trip given how easy it is to travel there and how lovely people are.

Mammals with photos or well seen (lifers in green)				
Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen	Pic
Wild boar	Sanglier	Sus scrofa	One seen quickly crossing the road in front of our car in Huai Kha Khaeng	
Lesser mouse deer	Petit chevreton malais	Tragulus kanchil	One or two individuals observed nicely at Bird's hide in Kaeng Krachan	X
Indian hog deer	Cerf cochon	Axis porcinus	Several observed in Huai Kha Khaeng and in Phu Khiao	X
Sambar deer	Sambar	Cervus unicolor	Common in Phu Khiao and Khao Yai NP	X
Eld's deer	Cerf d'Eld	Rucervus eldii	A group observed very well in Huai Kha Khaeng	X
Northern red muntjac	Muntjac rouge	Muntiacus vaginalis	A few seen in every park visited	X
Banteng	Banteng	Bos javanicus	Observed very well in Huai Kha Khaeng	X
Indochinese serow	Saro d'Indochine	Capricornis milneedwardsii	One unexpected and beautiful observation in Kaeng Krachan on the road going down from Phanoen Tung campsite	X
Eden's whale	Rorqual d'Eden	Balaenoptera edeni	5 individuals observed well and feeding during the whale watching tour in the gulf of Bangkok	X
Indo-Pacific finless porpoise	Marsouin aptère	Neophocaena phocaenoides	2 groups observed fairly well during the whale watching tour in the gulf of Bangkok	X
Leopard cat	Chat-léopard	Prionailurus bengalensis	One shy individual observed at the campsite in Phu Khiao	X
Small-toothed palm civet	Civette palmiste à trois bandes	Arctogalidia trivirgata	One very nice observation of an individual eating in a fruiting tree at the campsite in Phu Khiao	X
Common palm civet	Civette palmiste commune	Paradoxurus hermaphroditus	Several observed at night in Kaeng Krachan and Khao Yai NP	X
Small indian civet	Civette indienne	Viverricula indica	Only a few observed at night in Khao Yai NP	
Crab-eating Mongoose	Mangouste crabier	Urva urva	One nice and unexpected observation along the main road in Kaeng Krachan near the Ban Krang campsite	X
Golden jackal	Chacal doré	Canis aureus	Several observed during the day in Huai Kha Khaeng and others at night in both Phu Khiao and Khao Yai NP	X
Sun bear	Ours malais	Helarctos malayanus	After long hours waiting nights and days at the campsites in Kaeng Krachan, finally one observed very well on the last night in Ban Krang campsite	X
Smooth-coated otter	Loutre à pelage lisse	Lutrogale perspicillata	Superb observation of a group of 6 otters in the river stream near the HQ in Khao Yai NP	X
Greater short-nosed fruit bat	Cynoptère à nez court	Cynopterus sphinx	One observed during a spotlighting session in Baan Maka lodge	X
Lyle's flying fox	Roussette de Lyle	Pteropus lylei	One huge colony observed along the road towards Huai Kha Khaeng	X
Common woolly bat	Chauve-souris laineuse de Hardwicke	Kerivoula hardwickii	A few observed and identified as such species roosting in bamboos at night near Phanoen Tung campsite in Kaeng Krachan	
Lesser false vampire bat	Petite fausse chauve-souris vampire	Megaderma spasma	A small colony roosting inside the usual tree at the PK33 trail in Khao Yai NP	X
Andersen's leaf-nosed bat	Rhinolophe d'Andersen	Hipposideros pomona	A large colony observed in the basement of the HQ building in Khao Yai NP	X
Great Himalayan leaf-nosed bat	Grand rhinolophe de l'Himalaya	Hipposideros armiger	4 of these large bats observed in the basement of the HQ building in Khao Yai NP	X
Acuminate horseshoe bat	Rhinolophe acuminate	Rhinolophus accuminatus	A few observed in the basement of the HQ building in Khao Yai NP	X
Bengal slow loris	Loris lent du Bengale	Nycticebus bengalensis	Only one individual observed at night near the Phanoen Tung campsite in Kaeng Krachan	X
Stump-tailed macaque	Macaque à face rouge	Macaca arctoides	A family observed well in a temple near Kaeng Krachan	X
Crab-eating macaque	Macaque crabier	Macaca fascicularis	One group observed in Pak Tale and another one near the entrance at Huai Kha Khaeng	X

Northern pig-tailed macaque	Macaque à queue de cochon	Macaca leonina	A few observed in Phu Khiao and very common in Khao Yai NP	X
Assam macaque	Macaque d'Assam	Macaca assamensis	Two groups observed in Phu Khiao	X
Indochinese grey langur	Semnopithèque gris d'Indochine	Trachypithecus crepusculus	One group observed twice in fruiting trees at the first campsite in Phu Khiao	X
Dusky leaf monkey	Semnopithèque obscur	Trachypithecus obscurus	Several individuals observed along the road in Kaeng Krachan	X
Robinson's banded langur	Langur de Robinson	Presbytis robinsoni	One small group observed at the Phanoen Tung campsite in Kaeng Krachan	X
Lar gibbon	Gibbon à mains blanches	Hylobates lar	Quite common in Kaeng Krachan and Khao Yai NP. Also heard but not seen in Phu Khiao.	X
Pileated gibbon	Gibbon à bonnet	Hylobates pileatus	One family observed in Khao Yai NP	X
Malayan porcupine	Porc-épic de Malaisie	Hystrix brachyura	Surprisingly very common at night in Kaeng Krachan and Khao Yai NP	X
Grey-bellied squirrel	Écureuil arboricole à ventre gris	Callosciurus caniceps	Several observed in all parks visited	X
Pallas's squirrel	Écureuil de Pallas	Callosciurus erythraeus	Only one observed near the departure dock for the whale watching tour south of Bangkok	X
Finlayson's squirrel	Écureuil de Finlayson	Callosciurus finlaysonii	Some nice observations of this cute squirrel in Phu Khiao and Khao Yai NP	X
Indochinese ground squirrel	Ecureuil des palmiers	Menetes berdmorei	Observed at Bird's hide in Kaeng Krachan	X
Himalayan striped squirrel	Écureuil rayé de l'Himalaya	Tamiops maclellandii	Several observed in Kaeng Krachan (at our lodge and at Bird's hide)	X
Black giant squirrel	Écureuil géant oriental	Ratufa bicolor	A few observed very well in Kaeng Krachan and Phu Khiao	X
Indian red giant flying squirrel	Ecureuil volant géant	Petaurista philippensis	One observed very well at the campsite in Phu Khiao	X
Northern tree shrew	Toupatze de Belanger	Tupaia belangeri	Several observed very well at Bird's hide in Kaeng Krachan	X
		Total Species Recorded = 44		
Below some other species that I don't count given the observation circumstances				
Various rodent species	Divers rongeurs		Several small rodents observed in our thermal scopes while spotlighting in Kaeng Krachan but we could not identify any species when putting on the light as they all quickly ran off	

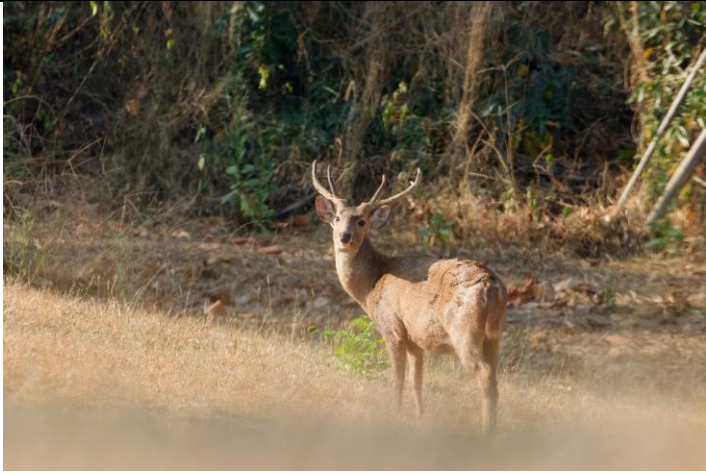
I'm adding to this report pictures of some of the species we observed during that trip, especially those new to me.



Lesser mouse deer



Northern red muntjac



Indian hog deer



Eld's deer



Banteng



Indochinese serow



Eden's whale



Indo-Pacific finless porpoise



Leopard cat



Malayan porcupine



Lyle's flying fox



Greater short-nosed fruit bat



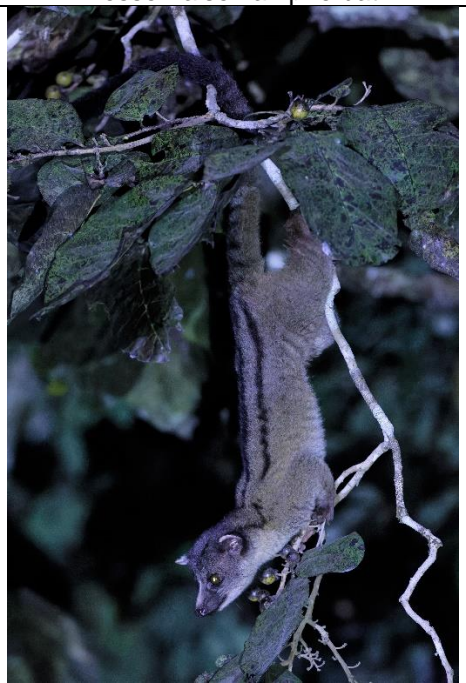
Lesser false vampire bat



Andersen's leaf-nosed bat



Great Himalayan leaf-nosed bat



Small-toothed palm civet



Acuminate horseshoe bat



Common palm civet



Crab-eating Mongoose



Smooth-coated otter



Crab-eating macaque



Stump-tailed macaque



Northern pig-tailed macaque



Assam macaque



Dusky leaf monkey



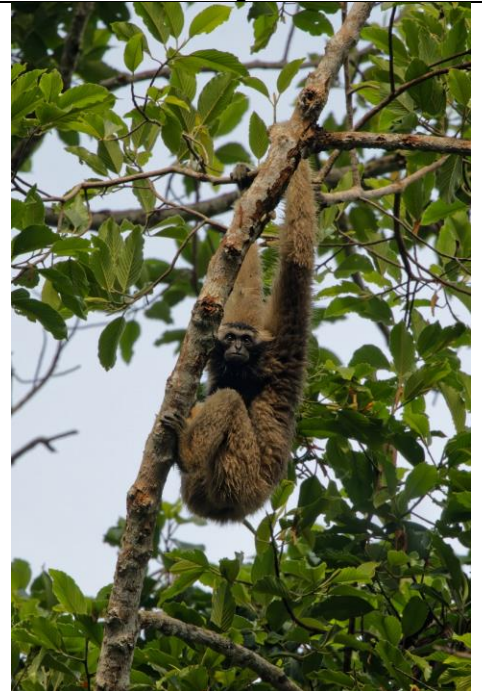
Robinson's banded langur



Indochinese grey langur



Lar gibbon



Pileated gibbon



Bengal slow loris



Indian red giant flying squirrel



Pallas's squirrel



Grey-bellied squirrel



Indochinese ground squirrel



Northern tree shrew



Finlayson's squirrel



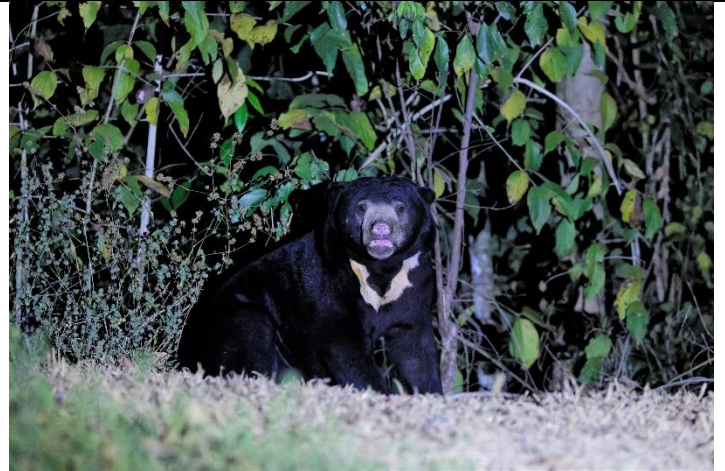
Black giant squirrel



Himalayan striped squirrel



Sun bear



Sun bear