

# Thailand

04/12/2024-05/01/2025



I visited Thailand for three weeks around Christmas / New Years with the following itinerary:

14/12-19/12: Bangkok

19/12-24/12: Phuket and a scuba diving liveaboard in the Similan Islands

24/12-27/12: Khao Yai National Park

27/12-02/01: Bangkok 🇹🇭

02/01-05/01: Kaeng Krachan National Park

## Bangkok

Not much of my time in Bangkok was dedicated to wildlife. However, two places that stood out were [Chatuchak Park](#) and [Lumpini Park](#).

Chatuchak park is a sizable green space in Northern Bangkok, adjacent to the famous bustling Chatuchak weekend market. An afternoon stroll through the park yielded many **Finlayson's Squirrels** and **Northern Treeshrews** as well as a single **Pallas's Squirrel** in addition to many nice birds and very large **Asian Monitor Lizards**.

My hotel was close to Lumpini park, and I had a few morning walks there. It's much smaller and feels a lot more urban than Chatuchak park, and the only mammals seen there were a few **Finlayson's Squirrels**. The real attraction in Lumpini were the **Asian Monitor Lizards** - they are very large, active and fascinating to watch. One morning, I saw a monitor lizard struggling to swallow a decaying turtle, and on another morning I saw a monitor lizard lunging itself out of the water like a crocodile to catch a Large-billed Crow that was drinking from a pond. Within seconds every lizard in the pond was rushing to get a piece of that crow to the sound of dozens of screaming crows. That was a really raw and impressive scene to watch. Urban nature at its best.



*Asian Monitor Lizards*

## Phuket and Similan Islands

My friend Eran joined me in Bangkok and we continued to Phuket to board a scuba diving liveaboard in the Similan Islands and Richelieu Rock at some of the richest coral reefs I've ever seen.

The only mammals seen in Phuket were a squirrel (most likely **Grey-bellied Squirrel**) walking on a power line and an unidentified rodent running on a water pipe next to a house. When we returned from the liveaboard to Khao Lak piers, we saw a couple of **Long-tailed Macaques** on the beach. Apparently a pod of dolphins was following our boat for 45 minutes one of the nights while at the liveaboard, but I was sleeping and missed them. Some notable birds seen in the Similan islands include **White-bellied Sea Eagle** and **Nicobar Pigeon**.



*Similan Islands*



*Shaded Batfish on a plate of anemones*



*Coral Grouper*



*Blue-ringed Angelfish*

## Khao Yai National Park

24/12

Eran and I flew from Phuket to Bangkok, picked up our car rental, and drove directly to Khao Yai National Park. We arrived at the park around 17:00 and drove to the visitor center to check into our accommodations at the park. Enroute to the visitor center we saw a single **Grey-bellied Squirrel**, a **Northern Pig-tailed Macaque** and a couple of **Sambar Deer** (the latter two species were commonly seen on all days). We also saw **Malayan Porcupines** next to our accommodations at zone 4.



*Malayan Porcupine*

We then took one of the park's organized night drives. We signed up for the later drive at 20:00, which turned out to be a wise move as we were by ourselves on the road most of the drive whereas the earlier 19:00 drive had a caravan of dozens of vehicles. The one-hour drive was productive with a **Golden Jackal**, both **Large Indian Civet** and **Small Indian Civet**, many **Sambar Deer** and **Malayan Porcupines** as well as an unidentified rat with a very long tail crossing the road. Unfortunately, the park was at capacity and this was the only night where we could find accommodations inside the park. We had to stay outside the park for the next two nights which meant no more spotlighting.



*Thai Treeshrews are known for their liberal politics.*

25/12

At dawn we drove to the Pha Diego Day lookout to try for Mainland Serow, but didn't see any. And while we dipped on the Serow, that spot offered stunning sunrise views as well as a large flock of **Oriental Pied Hornbills**. We continued for a morning drive in the central area of the park and to check out Nong Phak Chi wildlife watchtower area which wasn't productive. Beautiful Gibbon songs filled the air all morning, but we couldn't see any Gibbons (or any other mammals).

We then had breakfast at the visitor center food court and a photoshoot with the resident **Northern Pig-tailed Macaques**. I went on to check for bats at the visitor center's basement (left of the entrance). The first room of the basement was bat-free, but the second, deeper room had a bunch of **Andersen's Leaf-nosed Bats** as well as piles of trash on the floor that made it very difficult to walk further in. After that, we went to check the river bank behind the food court (towards the entrance to trails 4/5 ) for **Buffy Fish Owls** as it is a known nesting site. We couldn't find the owls, but did see many birders looking at the opposite bank of the river, where a pair of **Pin-tailed Parrotfinches** were moving around in the foliage. We also saw a **Great Hornbill** which was quite impressive.



*Northern Pig-tailed Macaque*

We continued to hike trail 2 (Pha Kluai Mai Campground – Haew Suwat Waterfall) - a pretty trail by a stream that ends at an underwhelming waterfall. No mammals were seen there. Back at the food court for lunch, I checked the owl site again, and this time the owl was out and presented itself well.



*Buffy Fish Owl*

We then hiked trail 4 (Dong Tiw – Sai Sorn Reservoir) which was lovely but didn't yield any mammals either - not even at the famous giant fig tree at the trails 4/5 split. The only new mammal seen that afternoon was a **Northern Red Muntjac** by the side of the road about 1km north of the visitor center. We headed out of the park around 5pm to catch the **Wrinkle-lipped Free-tail Bat** exodus from the Khao Luk Chang [bat cave](#) outside the park at sunset. This was a really impressive spectacle that lasted for about 30 minutes, with raptors trying to pluck bats from the vanguard.



*Northern Red Muntjac*

26/12

The main goal for today was to see Gibbons. We drove into the park around 6am and, based on a recommendation from the park staff, looked for Gibbons along the first 1KM of trails 4/5 . We heard the Gibbons very near, but the canopy was so thick that we couldn't see them. We did see a **Grey-bellied Squirrel** and a **Silver Pheasant**. We then decided to hike trail 1 - a short trail behind the visitor center, where we finally saw a family of **Lar Gibbons** in the trees above the trail. The way Gibbons move among the treetops and vocalize is just brilliant.

The morning got even better after breakfast when I went to get coffee and saw a pair of **Smooth-coated Otters** in the stream by the food court. I ran back to our table to get my camera, muttering to Eran "Otters!" and ran back to them. Luckily they drew a crowd which made re-finding them easy and we were able to observe them catching fish for a few minutes.



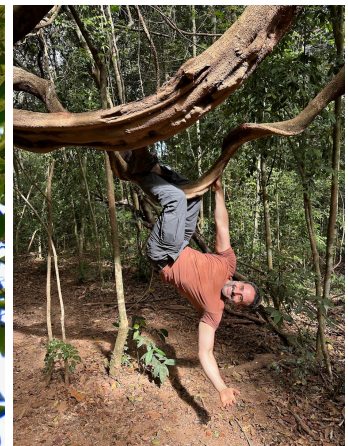
*Smooth-coated Otter*

The rest of the day was spent hiking. We did a long hike where we combined trails 5 and 3 - hiking from the visitor center to KM33 via Nong Phang Chi watchtower. That combined hike was gorgeous, about 9KM traversing through varied kinds of forest and grasslands. The only mammals seen on that hike were a single **Lar Gibbon** on a distant tree and **Lesser False Vampire Bats** roosting at a hollow tree about 50 meters left from the entrance to trail 3 (KM33 sign).



*Checking for False Vampire Bats by KM33*

Next, we headed to the south of the park to see Haew Narok Waterfall which is quite impressive. There are elephant barriers on the trail to prevent elephants from falling down the waterfall! The only mammals seen there were more **Northern Pig-tailed Macaques**. The rest of the afternoon only yielded a few more **Sambar** and a **Red Muntjac** on a soccer field by the visitor center. Before we left the park I wanted to try looking for elephants from Nong Phang Chi watchtower as the salt lick near it (to the north) had a lot of fresh elephant dung. We didn't see elephants, but did see a **Golden Jackal** running in the grass.



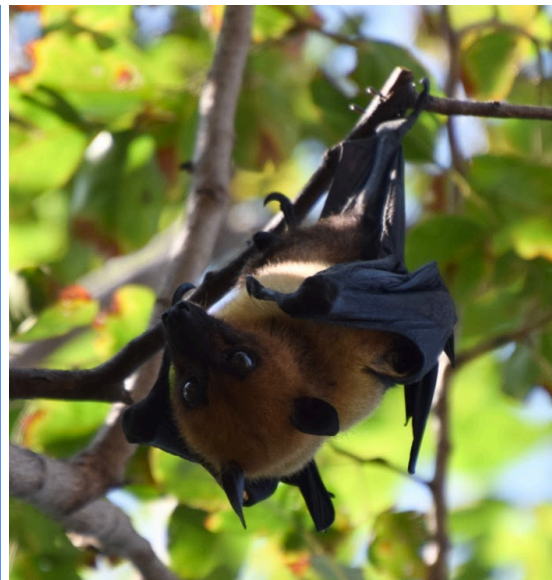
*Primates of Khao Yai*



*Sambar Deer*

27/12

We started the morning pre-dawn at the known Serow stakeout spot at the parking lot of [Ban Tha Chang hot springs](#) and stayed there until about an hour after sunrise. No serows showed up, and the only mammals seen were a few **Finlayson's Squirrels**. We continued to Bangkok, stopping to see the **Lyle's Flying Fox** colony at [Wat Nong Si Da](#).



*Lyle's Flying Fox*

## Kaeng Krachan National Park

02/01

After New Years in Bangkok, Eran flew to Cambodia and I continued solo to Kaeng Krachan NP with the goal of seeing a Sun Bear. There is some overlap with [this report](#) by Jon Hall who visited Kaeng Krachan during the same dates.

I drove from Bangkok to the park, arriving in the late afternoon. Around KM7, there were cars waiting for a Leopard to cross the road as there was at least one Leopard (non-melanistic) that has been crossing the road around that area most evenings. I decided not to wait, and continued to Ban Krang camp (BK) in hopes to see my main target that day.

When I arrived at the campsite, I met a guy sitting by the entrance sign to the camp. I asked him if he had seen anything cool, and he listed a few species of flycatchers and swifts. I had to clarify that by “anything cool” I mean mammals, especially bears. He pointed me to the dumpster behind the restaurant. A few minutes after I got to that dumpster, at around 17:00-17:30, a **Sun Bear** emerged from the forest sniffing around for food. This was “Dragonfruit” - an old bear who is one of the three individuals that frequent the campsite. It was habituated, and I was able to observe it for a few minutes before it returned to the forest. I also saw a **Northern Treeshrew** around the dumpster.



*“Dragonfruit” the Sun Bear*

I then went to check out the upper camping site at BK, when I saw a lot of movement in a tree on the opposite side of the hillside. I initially thought it was a troop of monkeys, but then I saw that the branches were being pulled down by some larger dark animal. Maybe a Gaur browsing on the tree branches ? Nope - it turned out to be a **Sun Bear** pulling down branches and it looked as if it was building a bed for the night.

Continuing to the lower camping area at BK, I saw a troop of **Dusky Langurs** traversing through the treetops. It was getting dark, and I drove out of the park, with no mammals on that drive.

I stayed the night at Baan Makaa Lodge and walked the nature trail a few times that night unsuccessfully looking for a Bengal Slow Loris. I would have given up after the first attempt, if it wasn't for a group I met that said they had just seen a Loris a few minutes ago about 100m back. It turns out Slow Lorises are not that slow and I missed it.

03/01

I drove to the park after an early breakfast, and headed to the second campsite - Phoen Thung camp (PT). On the drive up to PT I saw a single **Lar Gibbon** calling. As the road between BK and PT involves a serious elevation gain, the treetop in which the Gibbon was hanging was at eye-level from the road and gave a nice prolonged view.



*Lar Gibbon*

After arriving at PT, I had a cup of (instant) coffee at the restaurant, where two **Yellow-throated Martens** were snacking on kitchen scraps at the back. The views from the various lookout points at PT are lovely

and I enjoyed walking around there after all that driving. I didn't see any more mammals that morning, but saw some nice birds and managed to accidentally step on an **Ornate Flying Tree Snake** that was sunning itself on the ground while I was scanning the treetops. The snake somehow managed to escape unharmed and I somehow managed to not get a heart attack.



*Yellow-throated Marten*

I then drove back down to BK to get some lunch. At BK I saw a couple of **Lar Gibbons** at the trailhead towards the youth hostel, as well as a very restless **Black Giant Squirrel** running in the treetops above the rusty car parked at the entrance to BK.

After lunch, a second **Sun Bear** came to the BK restaurant area. This was a younger individual, named "Pumpkin". Pumpkin drew a fairly large crowd of spectators as it arrived during rush hour at the restaurant. After the pumpkin show I did another walk around BK, this time looking for reptiles. I didn't see any snakes, but there were many geckos at the gazebo near the lower campsite including some enormous **Tokay geckos**.

Later in the afternoon I went for a short hike around KM12, on one of the few trails that split from the main road. The only mammal I saw was a troop of **Dusky Langurs**. The only other mammal seen that day was a **Northern Treeshrew** on some logs by the side of the road near KM7.

Back at Baan Makaa I again tried looking for a Slow Loris but couldn't find one. I did however get to meet Jon Hall, Alexander Coke Smith and Jackie Shen who were having dinner at the lodge.



*"Pumpkin" the Sun Bear*

04/01

After an early breakfast, I drove to the park, heading to PT. The only interesting sight on that morning drive was a **Kalij Pheasant** on the road. This morning, instead of Yellow-throated Martens, a **Sun Bear** was scavenging behind the restaurant in PT. A **Himalayan Striped Squirrel** was seen climbing up a tree by the gated road north of the viewpoint at PT and a troop of **Dusky Langurs** was hanging on low branches by the restaurant. I also saw a **Yellow-throated Marten** at the entrance to the camp.

I again ran into Jon, Alexander, Jackie and Jirayu Ekkul and his team from Wild Encounter Thailand who were kind enough to show me hiding spots of a couple of bat species - a **Northern woolly horseshoe bat** in an abandoned bathroom hidden in Bamboo near to the entrance to PT (on the left side if coming from BK) and three **Malayan Slit-faced Bats** in a culvert a few hundred meters before the entrance to PT.

I then drove out of the park for lunch at Baan Makaa as I booked Birds' Hide for the afternoon outside the park (booked through Baan Makaa reception). On my way out, a large troop of **Stump-tailed Macaques** were hanging on the park road around KM4. During lunch at the lodge, I saw a couple of **Grey-bellied Squirrels** and a single **Northern Treeshrew**.

Birds' Hide was excellent, and I spent most of the afternoon there. Mammals seen there included many **Grey-bellied Squirrels** and **Himalayan Striped Squirrels** as well as a **Northern Treeshrew**, **Lesser Indo-Malayan Chevrotain**, and an **Indochinese Ground Squirrel**. I also saw many birds including **Red**

Jungle Fowl, Kalij Pheasant, Grey peacock-Pheasant, Greater Yellowape, Common Flameback, and several species of Laughingthrushes, Blue Flycatchers and Drongos.

I drove briefly into the park in hopes to maybe catch the Leopard around KM7, but without luck.

However, I saw a **Black Giant Squirrel** running around the treetops near KM6.

This was my last night in Thailand, and I tried again for the Slow Loris - including one attempt joining forces with Jon, Alexander and Jackie, but to no avail.



*Lesser Indo-Malayan Chevrotain*

05/01

This was my last, and probably best, day in Thailand. The plan was to do a last drive in the park and then head back to Bangkok for some spa / massage and relaxation before my red-eye flight to Japan. I decided to start my day early and drive pre-dawn to PT. The drive was very productive with an **Asian Elephant** in one of the clearings near KM10 and a **Fea's Muntjac** crossing the road near KM26.

I walked around PT and drove back down to BK for lunch before heading back to Bangkok. At BK, I ran into a group guide who told me that they saw a Melanistic leopard earlier on the road between BK and PT. He was the second person I met to have seen one there in the span of 24hrs as Jirayu saw one hiding in bushes the previous day. This made me reconsider my plans. The spa will wait. I'm staying in Kaeng Krachan until the end of the day in hopes of a Bagheera miracle.

That guide also mentioned that there are often vine snakes in the bushes by the side of the road when you exit BK towards PT (before the first stream crossing). And sure enough, right at the start of that road there was a large **Oriental Vine Snake** in the bush! I showed the snake to that guide and his clients, as the snake was drinking from a puddle - cool stuff!

I left the park for lunch and to fuel my car, and then headed back to PT for the afternoon, where I ran into Jon's group again. A **Sun Bear** made another visit to the campsite, as well as a troop of **Dusky Langurs** and **Lar Gibbons** while I was there.

As I was driving back down towards the exit, I saw a car stopped on the narrow one-way road between PT and BK (probably around KM23). It was Jon's and Jirayu's vehicle and they signaled me to stop. Then, just ahead of their car, I saw a black feline head popping out of the jungle on the right side of the road. I couldn't believe I'm actually seeing a melanistic **Leopard**! I expected the leopard to bolt across the road, but instead this gorgeous beast walked towards our cars.

As it got close to us, it picked up the pace, bypassed our cars and disappeared back into the jungle. I was ecstatic - a top tier wildlife encounter and a lifetime memory. One of the passengers in the other vehicle filmed the encounter which made it to the [Bangkok Post](#)!

Jon mentioned that there were a few Robinson's Banded Langurs back at around KM26. I considered turning around, but it was getting very close to closing time and I didn't want any delays with the park authorities as I had a flight that night. I probably made the right decision as I exited the park right on the minute of closing and they closed the gate just as I left. I stopped for one last dinner at Baan Maka, and drove to Bangkok airport to drop off my rental car and continue to a ski trip in Hokkaido.



### Stuff I missed

Overall, I had a very productive trip with 31 species in a net week or so of mammal watching. Most were lifers as this was my first visit to Southeast Asia.

I spent significant time and effort searching for, and failing to find, *Bengal Slow Loris* at Baan Maka and *Mainland Serow* at Khao Yai NP. The former was exceptionally frustrating as I walked the nature trail where they are seen 8 times, and every night ran into someone who had "just seen one". I also spent

some time looking into tilted bamboos near the stream crossings at Kaeng Krachan in search of *Hardwicke's Woolly Bat* but only saw frogs, tarantulas and too many wasps.

*Robinson's Banded Langurs* can be seen if you spend enough time at Phenoen Thung camp in Kaeng Krachan. *Gaur* can be seen at dusk around some of the forest clearings by the side of the road before Ban Krang camp. I also missed the rarer *Pileated Gibbons* in Khao Yai.

There are some rare sightings from those parks of *Dhole*, *Asiatic Black Bear*, *Binturong* and more - but those didn't seem to be realistic targets.

### **Special Thanks**

To my friend Eran who traveled Thailand with me, and was really on board with my mammal searching and very early wake up calls. To Jon Hall, Jirayu Ekul and his team, Alexander Coke Smith and Jackie Shen for showing me cool stuff - from bats to a leopard. To Jan Kelchtermans for the tips for Kaeng Krachan. And finally, to all the folks who wrote reports about those two parks that inspired me to visit them.



*Dusky Langur*

## Mammal Species List

1. Finlayson's Squirrel (*Callosciurus finlaysonii*)
2. Pallas's Squirrel (*Callosciurus erythraeus*)
3. Grey-bellied Squirrel (*Callosciurus caniceps*)
4. Black Giant Squirrel (*Ratufa bicolor*)
5. Himalayan Striped Squirrel  
(*Tamias maclellandii*)
6. Indochinese Ground Squirrel (*Menetes berdmorei*)
7. Brown Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*)
8. Malayan Porcupine (*Hystrix brachyura*)
9. Northern Treeshrew (*Tupaia belangeri*)
10. Long-tailed Macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*)
11. Northern Pig-tailed Macaque  
(*Macaca leonina*)
12. Stump-tailed Macaque (*Macaca arctoides*)
13. Dusky Langur (*Trachypithecus obscurus*)
14. Lar Gibbon (*Hylobates lar*)
15. Sambar Deer (*Rusa unicolor*)
16. Northern Red Muntjac (*Muntiacus vaginalis*)
17. Fea's Muntjac (*Muntiacus feae*)
18. Lesser Indo-Malayan Chevrotain  
(*Tragulus kanchil*)
19. Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*)
20. Sun Bear (*Helarctos malayanus*)
21. Yellow-throated Marten (*Martes flavigula*)
22. Large Indian Civet (*Viverra zibetha*)
23. Small Indian Civet (*Viverricula indica*)
24. Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
25. Andersen's Leaf-nosed Bat  
(*Hipposideros gentilis*)
26. Wrinkle-lipped Free-Tailed Bat (*Mops plicatus*)
27. Lesser False Vampire Bat  
(*Megaderma spasma*)
28. Northern Woolly Horseshoe Bat  
(*Rhinolophus perniger*)
29. Malayan Slit-faced Bat (*Nycteris tragata*)
30. Lyle's Flying Fox (*Pteropus lylei*)
31. Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*)



*Finlayson's Squirrel, KY area*



*Northern Treeshrew, Bird's Hide (KK)*



*Malayan Slit-faced Bat, KK*

## Bird Species List

1. Rock Pigeon
2. Zebra Dove
3. Spotted Dove
4. Red Collared Dove
5. Nicobar Pigeon
6. Mountain Imperial Pigeon
7. Common Emerald Dove
8. Thick-billed Green Pigeon
9. House Sparrow
10. Eurasian Tree Sparrow
11. Oriental Magpie-Robin
12. White-rumped Shama
13. Taiga Flycatcher
14. Siberian Blue Robin
15. Hainan Blue Flycatcher
16. Asian Brown Flycatcher
17. Black-naped Monarch
18. Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher
19. Large-billed Crow
20. Common Myna
21. Great Myna
22. Black-collared Starling
23. Asian Pied Starling
24. Streak-eared Bulbul
25. Red-whiskered Bulbul
26. Mountain Bulbul
27. Ashy Bulbul
28. Stripe-throated Bulbul
29. Flavescent Bulbul
30. Black-crested Bulbul
31. Black-naped Oriole
32. Ornate Sunbird
33. Pin-tailed Parrotfinch
34. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo
35. Ashy Drongo
36. Black-throated Laughingthrush
37. Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush
38. Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush
39. White-crested Laughingthrush
40. Brown-cheeked Fulvetta
41. Barn Swallow
42. Pale-legged Leaf Warbler
43. White-browed Scimitar Babbler
44. Puff-throated Babbler
45. Tailorbird (Common / Dark-necked)
46. Eyebrowed Thrush
47. Blue-tailed Bee-eater
48. Red-bearded Bee-eater



*Mountain Bulbul, KK*



*Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Bird's Hide (KK)*

49. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater
50. Indochinese Roller
51. Common Kingfisher
52. White-throated Kingfisher
53. Striated Heron
54. Chinese Pond Heron
55. Javan Pond Heron
56. Intermediate Egret
57. Little Egret
58. Eastern Cattle Egret
59. Black-crowned Night Heron
60. Gray Heron
61. White-breasted Waterhen
62. Painted Stork
63. Asian Openbill Stork
64. Asian Palm Swift
65. House Swift
66. Long-tailed Nightjar
67. Asian Koel
68. Greater Coucal
69. Brahminy Kite
70. Black Kite
71. Shikra
72. Japanese Sparrowhawk
73. Eastern Marsh Harrier
74. White-bellied Sea Eagle
75. Black-naped Tern
76. Red-Wattled Lapwing
77. Great Hornbill
78. Oriental Pied Hornbill
79. Wreathed Hornbill
80. Blue-throated Barbet
81. Green-eared Barbet
82. Greater Yellownape
83. Common Flameback
84. Orange-breasted Trogon
85. Buffy Fish Owl
86. Red Jungle Fowl
87. Kalij Pheasant
88. Silver Pheasant
89. Grey Peacock-Pheasant



*Common Kingfisher, KY*



*Oriental Pied Hornbill, KK*

I'm not a serious birder, so the observations are either of easily recognizable species, random birds I photographed and then identified, or just birds that nearby birders were kind enough to show me (always appreciated!)

## Herp Species List

1. Asian Water Monitor
2. Bronze Grass Skink
3. Olive Tree Skink
4. Flat-tailed House Gecko
5. Asian House Gecko
6. Tokay Gecko
7. Ornate Flying Tree Snake
8. Oriental Vine Snake
9. Pond Slider
10. Yellow-headed Temple Turtle
11. Paddy Field Frog



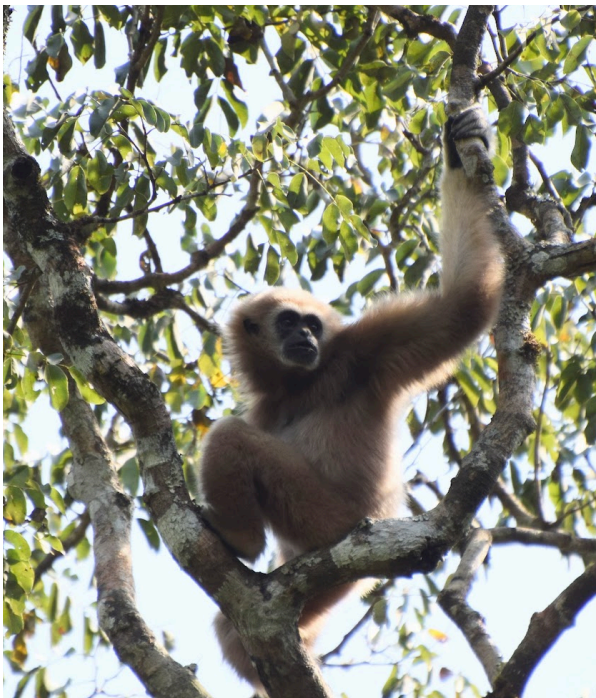
*Tokay Gecko, KK*



*Stratioceros princeps, KK*



*Oriental Vine Snake, KK*



*Lar Gibbon, KK*



*View from Nong Phak Chi wildlife watchtower, KY*



*No Serows, but beautiful sunrise, KY*



*Himalayan Striped Squirrel, Bird's Hide (KK)*



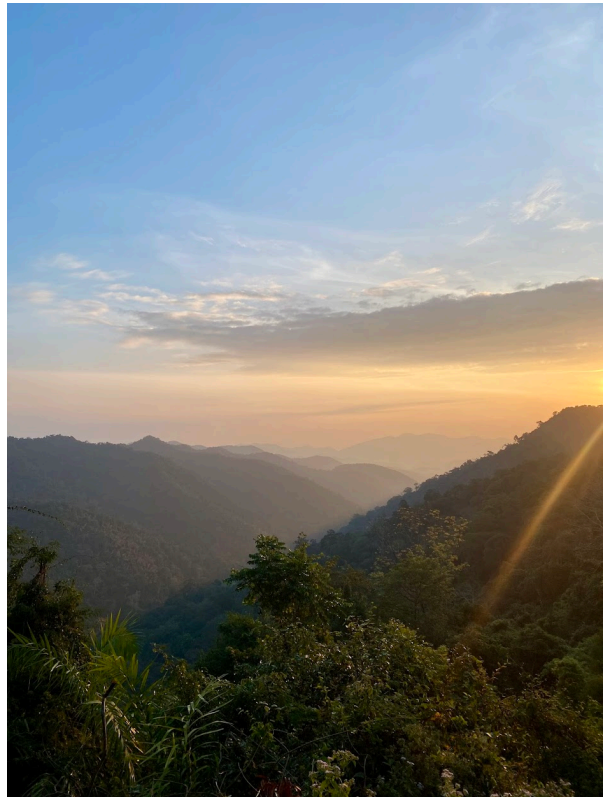
*Sun Bear with something tasty on its paws, KK*



*Kalij Pheasant, Bird's Hide (KK)*



*Stump-tailed Macaque, KK*



*Sunrise en route Phoen Thung, KK*



*Indochinese Ground Squirrel, Bird's Hide (KK)*



*Northern Woolly Horseshoe Bat, KK*



*Jungle traffic - Stump-tailed Macaques, KK*



*Grey Peacock-Pheasant and a Grey-bellied Squirrel, Bird's Hide (KK)*



*Red Jungle Fowl, Bird's Hide (KK)*



*Grey-bellied Squirrel, Bird's Hide (KK)*



*Dusky Langur, KK*



*Lesser Indo-Malayan Chevrotain, Bird's Hide (KK)*