

Trip Report
Laos Cambodia Vietnam
2025 - 2026

Intro

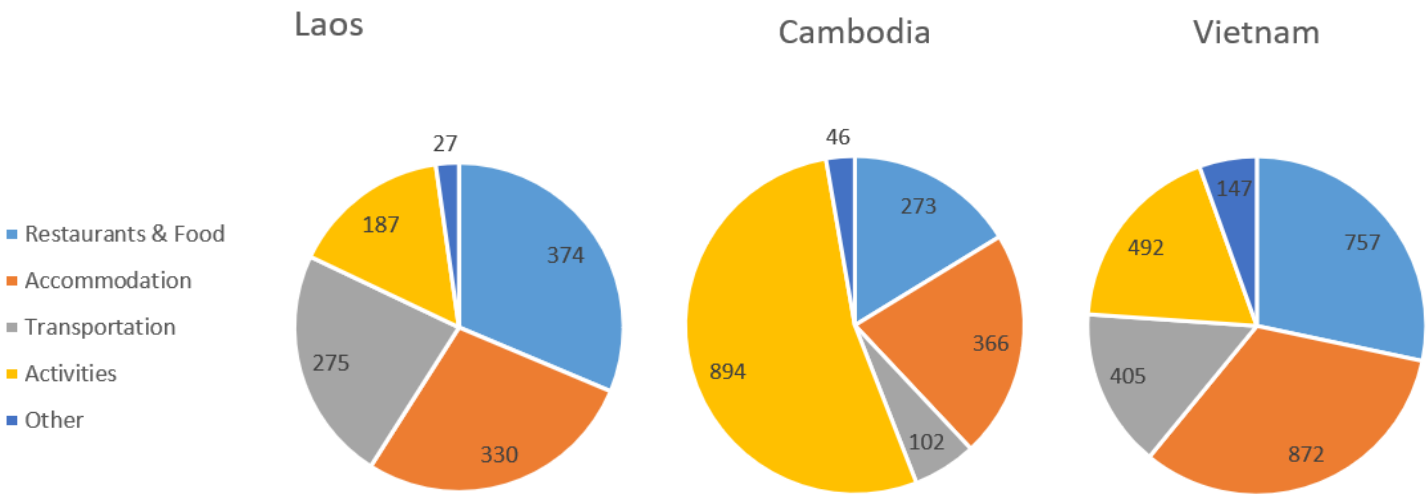
We (Jorick van de Water and Onnika van Oosterbosch) visited Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam as part of our year-long sabbatical focused on mammals (primates mostly), birds, and visiting conservation organisations. After Thailand we continued through Laos, Cambodia, and Southern Vietnam before flying to the south of India (Kochi). After 3 months of India and Nepal we visited Vietnam again, but this time only the northern part, going from Hanoi to Da Nang. As all of these visits were relatively short, I decided to combine them in one report.

We are not hardcore birders with set target lists or mammalwatchers staying up all night, but enjoy being in nature, arranging things (mostly) ourselves, and recording what we see. The primary goal of writing these trip reports is to give practical tips and overviews for other travellers and wildlife lovers who want to be independent, save money, and self-arrange most of their trip as well. Travel preparations were made with information from iNaturalist and trip reports from Cloudbirders and Mammalwatching. **Mammals**, **birds** and **herpetofauna** we successfully identified are marked, to make scanning for species in this report easier. If it doesn't have a colour, we didn't see or hear it and it's just a mention.

Accommodations were booked either through Booking or Agoda, or directly through WhatsApp as this is sometimes easier, cheaper and/or better for the accommodation.

All expenses were meticulously administrated by Onnika and separated into different categories. In some instances, categories were combined in a single one. For example in the case of packages which are both accommodation and (often guided) activity are categorised as activity. For the breakdown, with a total cost of 30.4 mil LAK for Laos (1.193 EUR / 14 nights), 7.7 mil KMR for Cambodia (1.681 EUR / 12 nights) and 78.9 mil VND for Vietnam (2.673 EUR / 14 & 24 nights), see below. Give or take some conversion fluctuations.

All photos were all taken by me (Jorick van de Water), using Canon R7 + RF100-500L. Photos in this report and much more is posted on my Instagram: @wild.water.photos. If you have any questions about our itinerary, contacts or sightings, you are very welcome to contact me there!



Logistics

Transportation & Navigation

In Laos we could save a bit by borrowing a small car to drive to LCTW and The Rock. Cambodia and Vietnam were all motorbike rentals. Driving behaviour (and road quality) was by far the worst in Laos. Navigation was done with (offline downloaded) Google Maps and driving times were usually very accurate. For trails in and around National Parks maps.me came in very handy. Buses were booked usually through 12Go, although we used RedBus once or twice in Vietnam, as well as the more local platform Vexere. Taxis were best booked with Loca (Laos), PassApp (Cambodia) and of course Grab (Cambodia, Vietnam).

Sim Card

As we have older phones, we are still tied to physical SIM cards. Usually we stick to about 1 or 2 GB/day, in whatever duration fits most with our visit. In Laos the costs were 150k LAK for a card and some credit available in many shops in Vientiane (Unitel in our case). In Cambodia this was 3,50 USD just on the side of the road in Kratie (Smart), and in Vietnam 170k VND at a Viettel store in Ho Chi Minh City.

Payments

Most payments were made in cash taken from ATMs, check the ATM Fee Finder app to see which banks charge any fee. In Laos and Cambodia most banks charged a fee, while in Vietnam VPBank is (still) free. Where possible and where no extra charges were applied we paid by card. Our card (Wise) worked everywhere without any issues and almost always uses a lower conversion rate in comparison to other cards. Use this link to receive a free card or make a fee-free transfer up to 500 EUR. Both Cambodia and Vietnam also have a platform to make QR payments, but you would need to have money in a wallet first, which charges a fee.

Weather

Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam were all visited at the beginning of the dry season (December and first half of January). Absolutely no rain, apart from half a day when returning from the hides in Da Lat. Temperatures were around 25 degrees during daytime and just under 20 at night, with once again Da Lat being around 5 degrees colder. Arriving in Hanoi we had the tail end of a heat wave, but temperatures were pleasant afterwards, with a day rain in Cuc Phuong and rain during the train ride to Dong Le.

Other practicalities

To save on buying and lugging around water bottles, we brought our **Water-to-Go** filter bottle with us to drink tap water and reduce our plastic bottle usage. During the whole trip we did not have to buy a single water bottle. Before, we used an older model which was not easy to drink from, but the newer models are much better. The filters can last up to 3 months when used by 2 people until it starts to get more difficult to drink water due to the filter being ‘full’. Interested in using this filter bottle? Use the code **JWATER15** to get a 15% discount!

Overview

30-11-2025	Udon Thani, Thailand → Vientiane (3 nights)
03-12-2025	Vientiane → Luang Prabang (3 nights)
06-12-2025	Luang Prabang → Vang Vieng (2 nights)
08-12-2025	Vang Vieng → Kong Lor (1 night)
09-12-2025	Kong Lor → The Rock (2 nights)
11-12-2025	The Rock → Vientiane → Pakse (3 nights)
14-12-2025	Pakse → Kratié (3 nights)
17-12-2025	Kratié → Siem Reap (6 nights)
23-12-2025	Siem Reap → Phnom Penh (3 nights)
26-12-2025	Phnom Penh → HCMC (2 nights)
28-12-2025	HCMC → Cat Tien (5 nights)
02-01-2026	Cat Tien → Da Lat (6 nights)
08-01-2026	Da Lat → HCMC (1 night)
09-01-2026	HCMC → Kochi (India)
	India & Nepal
09-04-2026	Kolkata → Hanoi (6 nights)
15-04-2026	Hanoi → Cat Ba (2 nights)
17-04-2026	Cat Ba → Cuc Phuong (8 nights)
25-04-2026	Cuc Phuong → Ninh Binh → Dong Le (2 nights)
27-04-2026	Dong Le → Phong Nha Khe Bang (2 nights)
29-04-2026	Phong Nha - Khe Bang → Da Nang (4 nights)
03-05-2026	Da Nang → Kuala Lumpur

Detailed Itinerary

Vientiane

We came into Vientiane through the Friendship bridge from Udon Thani, Thailand. It was off to a good start, as we booked a local bus through 12Go – about 11 EUR for two people – to get us over the border, who made it very clear they would not wait for people taking too much time at the border to get the visa. As we already bought it online (which costs 50 USD online as compared to 40 USD on the spot) it should've gone faster. But instead, we were redirected to the wrong booth by a disinterested border guard, had to wait almost an hour before being able to continue, and the bus left. Luckily, we had our baggage out and the songthaew driver accepted the drive for 400 THB, as we had no LAK and also didn't have a SIM yet to arrange a pickup. Accommodations in Vientiane are plenty, although we stayed at a friend's place.

We didn't do any wildlife watching around Vientiane apart from visiting the Laos Conservation Trust for Wildlife (LCTW), which is about 2 hour's drive. They rescue captured animals, many of them critically endangered, from wildlife trade. They also have some breeding programmes, such as the very successful one for **Siamese Crocodile**. You can book several packages on their website to visit the centre and have the possibility (we did) to make some enrichment food for the **Asiatic Black Bears**, **Sun Bears** and a very sleepy looking **Binturong**. They also have several **Northern Yellow-Cheeked Gibbons**, **Laotian Langurs** and recently released a troop of **Indochinese Grey Langurs** (end of 2025) into the neighbouring National Park, of which one came to visit us when we were having lunch at a lookout point just outside the sanctuary. Recommended visit if you're in the area!



Northern Yellow-cheeked Gibbon



Indochinese Grey Langur

Luang Prabang

Train tickets can be booked at the train station. However, the train stations are usually quite far out of the city so it's not that easily done. Through the LCR railway app it should be possible, but somehow not for us, luckily we had some Laotian friends arrange the tickets for 234k LAK per person.

There was not a lot of birding done (or to be done) around Luang Prabang. We gave two locations a try, but were quite unsuccessful both times. The first one was Green Jungle Park across the river. Besides the non-interesting birding session in the landscaped gardens, they also keep a lone elephant for rides around the area. So not a recommendation to visit.

The other location was at Kuang Si waterfall, which also wasn't a success. Open at 08:00 it is nice and quite before the busloads of noisy Chinese come in about an hour later. What is a recommendation is visiting Free The Bears, which is included in the waterfall entrance tickets (even though they do not get any support from it). They have - at the time - 19 **Indochinese Black Bears**. If you can, also arrange a visit to their *actual* sanctuary which houses over 120 **Indochinese Black Bears** (!), several **Sun Bears**, **Rhesus Macaques**, a **Binturong** and even 2 **Red Pandas**! It's only available with a private tour and a donation of 60 USD per person, which can be booked through their website. This also includes making enrichment feed for the bears. Once again very recommended and for a good cause.

In Luang Prabang we also had our most upsetting experience, as we saw Pangolin scales being sold in broad daylight near one of the hotels at the market! We quickly snapped a picture and reported it through Free The Bears, who would go after it.

Vang Vieng

From Luang Prabang we took another train ride to Vang Vieng for 162k LAK per person, and unfortunately no wildlife watching was done here either. The surroundings are beautiful though to do some touristy stuff, but very devoid of life. From here we took a bus back to Vientiane, booked through 12Go but would've been cheaper to book it on the street (540k LAK vs 300k LAK, for 2 people). Don't expect the bus to leave at the stipulated time, as they collect people from all over Vang Vieng and only left once it's full.



Indochinese Black Bear



Indochinese Black Bear

Kong Lor

From Vientiane we had a (quite long) drive to Kong Lor. Most of the road is fine, until you get off the main road at Vieng Kham (18.09783, 104.28712). Especially the part going down just after The Rock, the road was very bad. There was even a truck lying on its side! Near Kong Lor we stayed a night at Spring River lodge which was very enjoyable with nice views over the river (600k LAK). Hopefully a one-off thing, but the only downside was the intense party going on in the nearby village which lasted until 07:00! You can also do some kayaking and walks around the limestone mountains to do some birding. Once again relatively quiet, and the most interesting bird of note was a **Pygmy Cupwing**.

The Rock

The main reason for us to travel to this area. Accommodation at The Rock is good but relatively pricy, and so is the food. We paid 2.4 mil LAK to stay here for 2 nights. It has many pod-like rooms, but also some very big family-style tree houses, of which the first one (Langur) also has beautiful views over the karst mountains. The pods closest to the restaurant have the best views. At the end of the houses is a small accessible forest area which you also visit when doing the zipline course. The latter is enjoyable, but not particularly useful for wildlife spotting.

From the rooms there is a boardwalk shortcut to reach the restaurant, so you don't have to walk on the road which has many big trucks and long-distance busses rambling over it. Close to the restaurant is also the main attraction: the boardwalk. It is accessible from 06:00 (if you stay there ask the guard), otherwise it's only possible from 09:00ish (although employees are present at 07:30ish). If you stay at the pods, it's free to access, otherwise it's 50.000 LAK.

We visited the boardwalk twice in the afternoon and twice in the morning. We saw a group of 6 **Laotian Langurs** already on our first afternoon, just a couple of stairs down from the main entrance. The second afternoon they were a bit further away, and this was also the time when a big group of **Rhesus Macaques** made their way down the rocks. Squirrels were plentiful as well, mostly very Red/brown **Finlayson's Squirrels** and some **Maritime Striped Squirrel**.

The **Bare-faced Bulbuls** were present both mornings, sitting on top of the rocks close by at the end of the loop, which has the best lookouts. At times it was quite birdy, and we noted **Sooty Babbler** (many), **Limestone Leaf Warbler** and **Indochinese Cuckooshrike** to the list.


Laotian Langur


Bare-faced Bulbuls

Pakse

For many backpackers, Pakse is the start of the 'Pakse loop'. We did hire a motorcycle but didn't do a full loop and just visited the nearby waterfalls. We reached Pakse with a surprisingly comfortable night bus from Vientiane for about 500k LAK per person, and stayed at the relatively nice KK Hotel for 500k LAK per night.

For any wildlife activity, the Bolaven plateau is the most interesting. We visited 3 waterfalls in the area; Tad Champee, Tad Fane and Tad Yuang on the same day. The drive to Tad Champee is about an hour on motorbike and when we arrived, we were the first ones there and the 'owners' did not even seem awake yet. A very pleasant location and beautiful waterfall in the morning light, but birdwise unremarkable for us (similar for the later waterfalls). The path down to the waterfall and surrounding areas and plantations are quite lush so it definitely has potential. Most visitors (if at all) visit later in the day so we had the whole place to ourselves.

Kratie

To get to Kratie/Kracheh we took the VET air bus (Vireak Buntham) from Pakse for 25 EUR per person, booked through their website. Very shady border crossing, with 'officials' claiming that they need to take a photo of us, and the extra 'fee' you have to pay to get a Cambodian visa. After a surprise bus change at Stung Treng, we reached Kratie in 9 hours.

The first two nights we stayed at 'Tonle Mekong Homestay' for 70K KMR per night for 2 people, including meals. Very cheap, and interesting to get a sense of local village life. You can also do some village and surrounding tours with the owner. From here we did a morning bird walk to 12.46443, 106.03535 which was very enjoyable and yielded some new species for us, such as **Red Avadavat** and **Black Bulbul**.

Kratie is known as the main town to go to Kampi and do the river tours to see the Irrawaddy Dolphin. We did two tours; one in a motorboat and one in a kayak to get to see them. The motorboat we arranged through our guesthouse. It costs 10 USD, which is a fixed price for one hour. The tuktuk from Kratie and back (including waiting time) is another 10 USD. If you have your own transportation, you can also just drive yourself to 12.60603, 106.02266 and book a boat on the spot. The dolphins mostly stay in the deeper pools south of the islands, which is where we got our first decent views of the **Irrawaddy Dolphins**.



Irrawaddy Dolphin



Irrawaddy Dolphins

A more enjoyable option for us was also seeing them by kayak. We booked a half day kayak trip through Sorya guesthouse where we also stayed for one night (27 USD for a room). Our kayak guide was Ben, and we could recommend him very much. Ben takes his time, speaks good English, knows a couple of the birds and can help you keep your kayak steady when trying to take pictures of either birds or dolphins. The trip includes one or two island walks, depending on time needed to see the dolphins. The price depends on the amount of people; for 2 people was 40 USD per person. Starting point is just north of the islands, and you paddle through the rapids in between the islands, ending at the deeper pools south to the south. This was also our chance to see the **Mekong Wagtail**, and we got good views of it when kayaking through the rapids. Although it's definitely more expensive than going out on a boat, it was much more enjoyable and the dolphins also tend to get closer because there is no engine sound around (unless it's busy with other boats as well).

Siem Reap

To rest up a bit and visit some surrounding areas, we used Siem Reap as a central point. We visited Tonle Sap, Angkor Wat, and the Bengal Florican Grasslands. A big recommendation within Siem Reap is to visit APOPO HeroRats for 10 USD per person. They should get all the support they can working in Cambodia and elsewhere. Not only for detecting landmines, but also fighting the illegal wildlife trade both in Asia and Africa. Very cool to see (and hold) a **Giant African Pouched Rat** and see them in action!

Going to the Angkor Wat temple complex and back - and just moving about the city in general – we passed by the big group of **Lyle's Flying Foxes** several times (13.36310, 103.85897). They're hard to miss above the little fruit shops, with their constant screeching and flapping. One of the evenings walking along the canal, we spotted 2 flying squirrels moving between the palm trees at about 13.35474, 103.85729 which most likely would have been **Red-cheeked Flying Squirrels**.



Mekong Wagtail



Lyle's Flying Foxes

Bengal Florican Grasslands

We asked quotations at both Sam Vaesna and Cambodia Bird Guide association to visit both the Bengal Florican Grasslands and Tonle Sap. For the Bengal Florican Grasslands, Sam Vaesna gave a better price, and for Tonle Sap the Cambodia Bird Guide Association. Neither wanted to give a lower price if we did both, so we decided to go with either organisation. Price was quite steep at 330 USD for two people, and in hindsight did not feel worth the amount.

The visit to the Grasslands got off to a bad start as the guide was instructed to pick us up an hour later than mentioned before. Leaving the main road at 13.03775, 104.47719, we arrived at the grasslands a little late – after sunrise – where local farmers were already on the lookout for Bengal Floricans, as well as another birding group. After some time and no sighting, about 4 farmers walked the fields with the aim of flushing the bird, which seems a bit questionable. At some point we were asked to follow them through the fields as well. While waiting we had flybys of **Eastern Marsh Harrier**, **Rufous Winged Buzzard** and **Pied Harrier**. Eventually we had about 5 photo opportunities where the **Bengal Floricans** were flushed, which seemed to be the same 2 birds each time. After, we did a short walk around a lake and some rice fields at 13.02467, 104.49051. **Small Buttonquail**, **Blue-breasted Quail**, **Pin-tailed Snipe**, **Spotted Owlets**, and **Hainan Blue Flycatcher** were most notable.

Tonle Sap

As mentioned above, we asked quotes for an excursion to Tonle Sap at both Sam Vaesna and Cambodia Bird Guide Association, with the latter one coming out on top for 380 USD for 2 people, all included. We were picked up at our hotel by guide Brakk in the early hours and brought to the harbour. From there, we took a big boat towards to floating village to arrange entrance tickets to the nature reserve. There, we took a smaller boat all the way to the watchtower where we stayed for about 2 to 3 hours before going back again. The watchtower is somewhat shaky, but provides some shade and space for a maximum of about 10 people.

The visit was very fruitful, and Brakk was quick at identifying all the soaring birds. The **Spot-billed Pelicans** were hard to miss, just like the **Painted Storks** covering many trees. **Lesser Adjutants** and **Greater Adjutants** were also seen in the trees, and we had a flyby of a couple of **Black-headed Ibises**. It took over an hour before we saw our first **Milky Stork**. Once sighted, the white underwings were a clear giveaway.



Bengal Florican



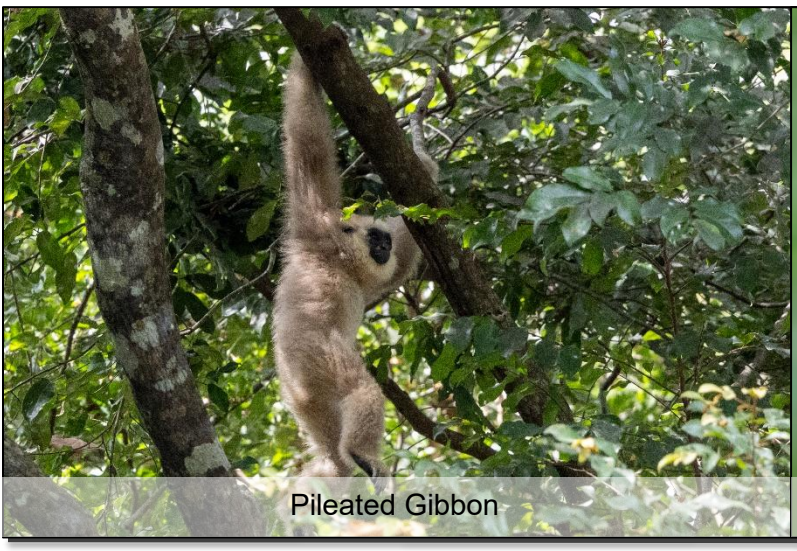
Milky Stork

Angkor Wat

Angkor Wat provided a good opportunity to combine the visit to the temples with some birding and wildlife watching. We visited the temples on 2 days; once by bicycle and once by motorcycle, with the latter one definitely being more comfortable because of the long travel distances! We specifically birded two sections, which are also often done by local bird groups. The first one was going south from 13.46697, 103.87791, at the east gate of Preah Khan. Nice views over the water as well as some forest species. Some good views of **Black-capped Kingfishers**, **Grey-headed Lapwings**, **Cotton Pygmy-Geese** and many **Lesser-Whistling Ducks** on the water side, and a **Shikra**, **Two-barred Warbler** and **Forest Wagtail** on the other side.

Black-bearded Tomb Bats are plentiful around the different temples in Angkor Wat, but many of them are often in locations which you cannot visit, such as the Bayon temple where we heard many of them but could not locate any. The easiest ones though are right above you when you enter the main temple Angkor Wat, watching all the people pass by. Here we also did some more birding along the forest edge at 13.41122, 103.86401, which where we got some good looks at a **White-throated Rock-Thrush**.

Both **Northern Pig-tailed Macaques** and **Long-tailed Macaques** are abundant on the temple grounds, with an especially big group found at the Baphuon temple. Just when walking away from the temple we suddenly heard monkeys calling. It took us a couple seconds to realize these were actually the released **Pileated Gibbons,** making their awesome ‘bubbling’ sound! We quickly rushed towards the sound and had good views of a family of 4, acting somewhat annoyed by a group of labourers restoring a stairway (and they were also taunting them a bit). Very cool to see these primates in between the temples.



Pileated Gibbon



White-throated Rock-Thrush

Phnom Penh

For our time in Phnom Penh we stayed just outside the city on the other side of the Mekong River at 'Meet the Province' (11.57366, 104.96509). Ferries cross the Mekong constantly (except at night) for 50k KMR per person. Besides the good stay and the Cambodian cooking classes you can do at Meet the Province (recommended!), it is also located conveniently close to Wat Ta Kod, a good location for the endemic **Cambodian Tailorbird**. The overcast weather made it quite difficult to spot, together with the many mosquitos from the shallow waterbodies all around. The area is nice enough for a walkaround when you ignore the pile of trash, turning left just before reaching the pagoda. Scanning the forest at 11.57859, 104.96596 we also had our first **Black Bittern**, but unfortunately it quickly flew away. **Pallas' Squirrels** were plentiful around the temple grounds. For 32 EUR we got the Long Phuong bus onwards to HCMC, which went a lot smoother than the Laos-Cambodia border. Drinks, sandwich, and passport processing were all taken care of by the staff.

Cat Tien

We reached Cat Tien from Ho Chi Minh city, by taking a Grab to the bus station Tu Ga (10.86175 106.67846) and getting on the Da Lat/Cat Tien bus at 08:30. Tickets can be bought on the spot. The bus left right on time, very speedy picking up all kinds of people and other things along the way and dropped us off right at the entrance of Green Hope Lodge for just 110k VND per person. Here, we stayed for one night before going into the park. Very popular and recommended location, and the owner can help you arrange all kinds of things, both in- and outside the park. They also have bicycles for rent for 100k VND per person per day, which are better quality than the ones inside the park, especially if you're not Vietnamese-sized. However the park also asks 100k VND and another 50k VND for every extra day you bring bicycles into the park. Rooms are very good, just like the views over the river. Good views of **Pied Kingfishers** and **Collared Kingfishers** flying over the river, as well as many **Great-eared Nightjars** flying out at dusk.

On the last day we also did a boat tour, booked through Green Hope Lodge 700k for the whole boat. It got us some nice views of **Long-tailed Macaques**, **Black-shanked Doucs** in the sanctuary, as well as some **Ashy-headed Green-Pigeons**, **Golden-crested Mynas**, **Dollarbirds** and a **Collared Falconet**.



Cambodian Tailorbird



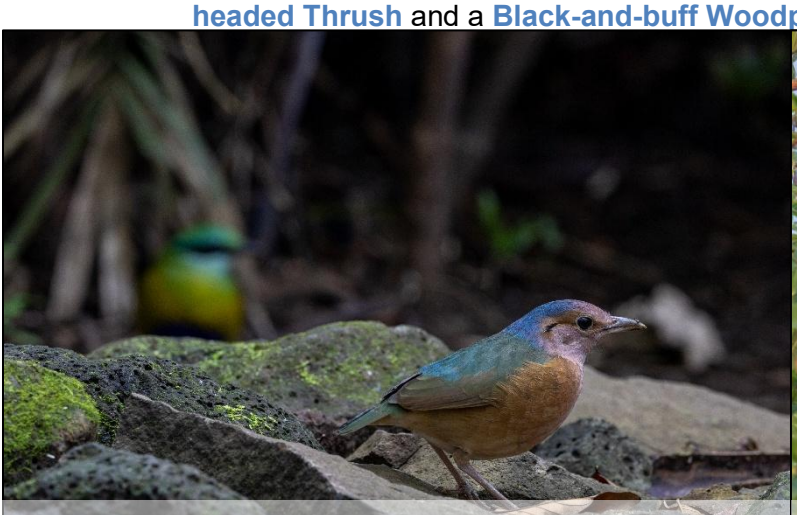
Collared Falconet

Headquarters area

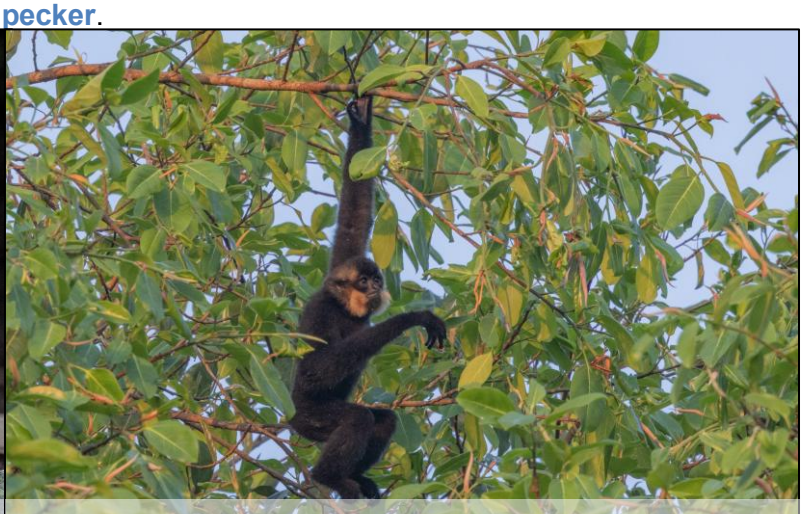
Accommodation within the park is limited, and if you want to access the park you are dependent on the ferry (60k VND for crossing and entrance). A bridge is currently under construction, which was planned to be opened by end of February, but postponed until end of 2026. To get the most out of our visit, we booked accommodation within the park. We contacted the park by mail beforehand (cattienvietnam@gmail.com), and were given two options: 400k and 800k per night. We chose the 800k per night, for 3 nights, although we would recommend 4 nights in the park for full potential. Rooms were simple but okay. Restaurant options in the park are also quite limited and at a higher price than the options outside of the park. We ended up having most of our BLD's at the nearby Restaurant Bamboo with simple dishes for 80k to 100k VND. Breakfast starts at 08:30 but often we've seen people eating there well before 06:30. No supermarket or anything seen for snacks inside the park, so bring it with you!

The visitor centre can be helpful, but it depends on the person behind the counter. On our last day we tried to book a bird hide through them (they mentioned the opportunity on the first day), but the guy behind the counter just said 'no'. Outside the park at the ferry crossing, there was a flyer with the possibilities. The main hides can be booked through Bao at +84908931000 for 500k VND per person per day per hide and are within walking distance from the visitor centre. The guide goes with you and leaves after a while. Hardly anyone visits the hide for a whole day, so often you can just walk in and out if you know where to find them. Hide #2 is for the **Blue-rumped Pitta** and **Bar-bellied Pitta** (and a **Northern Smooth-tailed Treeshrew**). Very close to the visitor centre, beside the bicycle rental. We only visited this one. Hide #3 for the Peacock-Pheasant and a short walk towards the grasslands. The hides can be quite leechy so bring repellent, socks or 'leech cream' (which can be bought at Green Hope Lodge).

Behind the headquarters are some gibbons in a cage which 'attract' other gibbons in the morning. Around 06.00 they usually started singing most days, and could be seen from the toilets of just besides the bicycle rental. Inside the park there are three main directions to travel; paved towards the grasslands (west), paved towards Bau Sau (north) and gravel towards Heaven's Rapids (east). The road first part until the T-junction towards Bau Sau and Heaven's Rapids is quite bad to cycle though, but nice to bird. Good views of the **Southern Yellow-cheeked Gibbon** here also later in the morning, **Black-and-red Broadbill**, **Orange-headed Thrush** and a **Black-and-buff Woodpecker**.



Blue-rumped Pitta and Bar-bellied Pitta



Southern Yellow-cheeked Gibbon

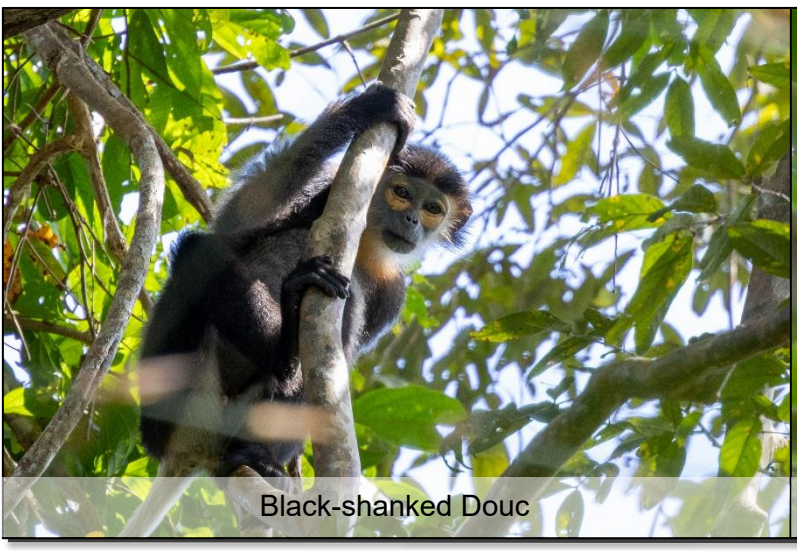
Not surprising, it was significantly busier during holidays (New Year's in our case). What you'll notice is more 'safari' trucks driving along the roads towards the grasslands and especially towards the Bau Sau trail. Many groups were singing, shouting and playing music, so not very beneficial when trying to find wildlife. The only positive about this is that more smoothies and drinks stands are open around the visitor centre during this time.

Bau Sau (Crocodile Lake)

The road from the T-junction (11.43927, 107.42639) towards Bau Sau is where we saw most of our **Black-shanked Doucs**, which are still surprisingly shy. As it's a nice path to slowly cycle, birding here is also quite comfortable. A **Lesser Yellownape**, **Banded Broadbill** snacking on a lizard, **Crested Goshawk** and an early morning crossing of a **Siamese Fireback** were some nice ones.

A visit to Bau Sau is 250k VND per person. The stand in front to buy the tickets is open from 07.00 to 15.00ish, but it is possible to enter earlier as well; there is no gate or anything. We entered at 06.30 and left at 16.00. The path is made of rocks with concrete, so relatively easy to walk. Walking and birding all the way to the lake can easily take more than 3 hours, so plan accordingly, especially on the way back. Notable birds along the way were **Scaly-breasted Partridge** and **Germain's Peacock-Pheasant**; make sure you recognize the sound. We were just about to properly get our eyes on one when a motorcycle came passing by and scared them away! About ¼ of the way in there was a big tree full of **Oriental Pied-Hornbills,** which at some point flew out all at once; an amazing sight to see!

Black-shanked Doucs and **Northern Pig-Tailed Macaques** seemed to be relatively common along the trail; and it takes quite some time to investigate every rustling of the trees. However, this paid off! Halfway in, around 08.00, we passed by the huge Tung trees. Here, much to our surprise, we had quite a large group of **Annamese Silvered Langurs** passing by. On the way back at 15.00 we had another (or the same) group passing by. Pretty much the same location; where there are benches but no Tung trees. **Pallas' Squirrel**, **Cambodian Striped Squirrel**, **Northern Treeshrew**, **Northern Smooth-tailed Treeshrew**, **Indochinese Ground Squirrel** were all seen here, as well as a **Black Giant Squirrel**!



Black-shanked Douc



Annamese Silvered Langur

Activity around the lake can be very nice and we spend a good while around lunch time here recovering from the walk. Good for a toilet break, some food, and you can even spend the night here (unclear how to arrange this though, most likely also through the park's mail). We spoke to some other tourists who did, and who were lucky enough to spot a Southern Pygmy Slow Loris spotlighting around the area! Birdwise the lake can also be very nice. During lunch we saw 3 raptors flying around the area and sitting in the trees: **Osprey**, **Eastern Marsh Harrier** and **Grey-headed Fish-Eagle**. **Lesser Whistling-Ducks**, **Cotton Pygmy-Geese**, **Common Kingfishers**, **Oriental Darters** and **Purple Herons** were common around the lake. Twice we had a **Cinnamon Bittern** flying over. At the location where you can overnight, a brave **Black-shanked Douc** even climbed down and had its lunch while looking us straight in the eye when we were having ours. And there are the **Siamese Crocodiles** being fed the scraps from the kitchen. About half a dozen were lying on the lakeside.

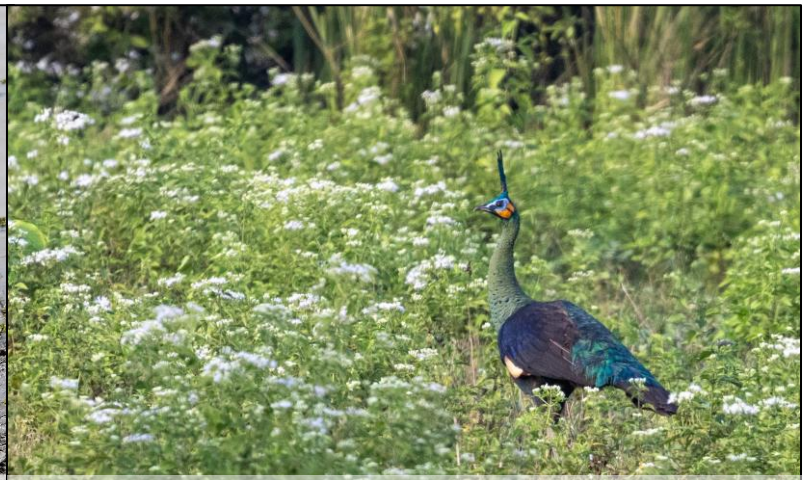
Grasslands

We cycled this area twice. The road is very smooth which makes for a pleasant ride, as long as you don't do it during the day as it does not have a lot of tree cover. This is also the direction in which the night safari goes. For any (semi)serious wildlife watcher the night safari would not be a recommendation as it only takes 50 minutes, you're often grouped with noisy tourists and usually do not see more than Sambar Deer. So we didn't book one. The area between the second and the third watchtower – especially between the road and the river – seemed to be some good places to do spotlighting though, because of the different vegetation types and open areas.

On the road towards the first watchtower (11.40489, 107.39159) we saw both **Northern Pig-tailed Macaques** and **Long-tailed Macaques**. In the first – more forested – part we added a **Violet Cuckoo**, **Collared Falconet** and **Orange-breasted Trogon** to the list, while in the lone trees further on we had a **Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo** and a **Burmese Shrike**. Within the managed grasslands we spotted both a **Northern Red Muntjac** and a **Sambar Deer** coming out after sunset, as well as a **Green Peafowl**. We visited the second watchtower (11.40545, 107.38561) and the third (11.40488, 107.37433) in 2 separate afternoons, but most sightings were while we were on the bicycle.



Siamese Crocodile



Green Peafowl

Night walks

To do any night walks you officially need a guide. However, there only seems to be one 'official' night guide in the park, and he was already fully booked when we got to know him. He can be found on Facebook by Khanh Cat Tien, and is also a good herping guide as mentioned by some of his clients. Before we knew this, we were just walking by ourselves from the visitor area towards the T-junction & Forest Floor Lodge when we bumped into a group who was doing a night walk together with Khanh. Although he didn't say it was not allowed, we got a lot of questions what we were doing. So it seems to be somewhat of a grey area. We encountered them when they were watching a **Sambar Deer** in the bushes, and on the way back we spotted a **East Asian Porcupine** rustling around just on the side of the road.

If you have a guide from outside the park you still need a local ranger to accompany you. We got to know a guest who was doing a tour with Next Continent and tagged along one evening exploring the botanical garden towards Heaven's Rapids. Unfortunately, it was a very unproductive evening, and we didn't see our much-hoped Southern Pygmy Slow Loris. Though chances were slim anyway, and a better chance seems to be the forests close to Bau Sau. The guides from Next Continent were pleasant, friendly and knowledgeable. Afterwards we walked the boardwalk and some trails leading off from it, but only encountered a **Ruby-eyed Green Pit Viper**, the local celebrity. Mouse Deer are supposed to be common around here, but no luck for us.

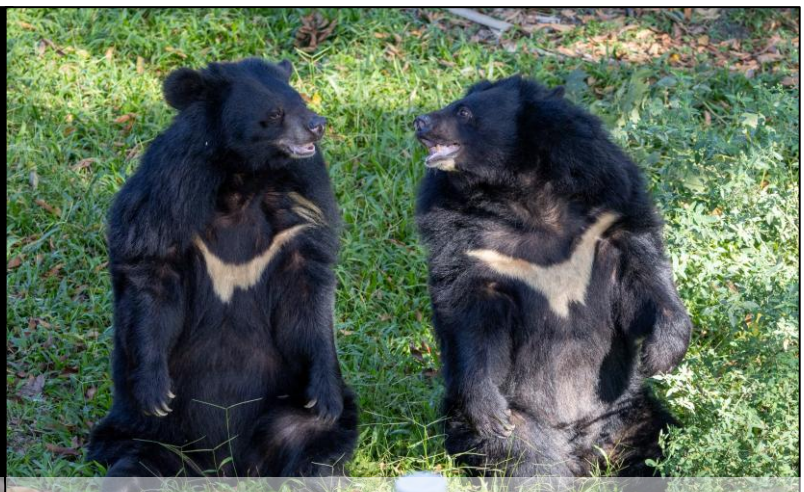
Sanctuaries

Within the park there is also a sanctuary of Free The Bears and the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre (EPRC). We only visited Free The Bears, and it's possible to arrange a visit, arrange a bear package to make treats for the bears (both **Indochinese Black Bears** and **Sun Bears**), and get to know all about the veterinary practices. Once again well worth the visit, and for a good cause.

Onward transport to Da Lat was arranged through Green Hope Lodge for 420k VND for 2 people. The bus company has a free shuttle service to pick you up and bring you to the office along the main road.



Ruby-eyed Green Pit Viper



Indochinese Black Bears

Da Lat

The first location we did some birding around Da Lat was at the Tuyam Tam lake, on the west side. Nice area with big pine trees to walk around in and quite close to the city. However, big holiday home style developments going on from 11.88005, 108.40772 onwards. We tried to walk to the end of the road but were quickly shoo'ed away by the construction workers. We met people from Annambirding who have a hide here, mainly for Blue Pitta and Indochinese Green Magpie, but we didn't see them. We did see **Long-tailed Minivet**, **Blyth's Leaf Warbler**, **Kloss' Leaf Warbler**, **Chestnut-winged Nuthatch**, **Mugimaki Flycatcher**, and some **Vietnamese Greenfinches**. In the afternoon we visited Tinh Tam Lake and surroundings, at which the **White-cheeked Laughingthrush** was the most interesting.

Later, we contacted Annambirding to visit their hides in Cổng Trời, roughly the area starting at (12.09099, 108.37842). Once over the ridge the pine forests turn into broadleaf and it's also quite a bit colder and foggier. In total it was 1 mil VND per person, plus another 500k VND for the guide that shows you the hide, gives you a box of mealworms, and tells you which hide is best for which species. Optional was 1.2 mil VND for transport to the hides, but we visited the area by motorbike (150k VND, an hour's drive north from Da Lat). A guide that stays and calls the birds (over and over and over…) was 1 mil VND instead of 500k VND.

We paid a visit to three hides which were all of okay quality, and there are more in the area. All species came quickly once the feed was placed, and it was a lifer galore. The first one gave us 2 **Silver Pheasants**, **Blue Pitta**, **White-browed Scimitar Babbler**, **Grey-throated Babbler**, **Mountain Fulvetta**, **Dark-sided Thrush**, **Large Niltava**, **White-tailed Robin**, **Snowy-browed Flycatcher** and **Little Pied Flycatcher**. The second one added **Grey-bellied Tesias**, **Streaked Wren-Babbler**, **Collared Laughingthrush**, **Scaly Thrush**, **Lesser Shortwing** and **Spotted Forktail**. The third one **White-spectacled Warbler**, **Black-crowned Fulvetta**, **Black-headed Sibia** and **Rufous-browed Flycatcher**. **Maritime Striped Squirrels**, **Asian Red-cheeked Squirrels** and a **Northern Treeshrew** all came to visit.

The remaining days in Da Lat we climbed 'Samson mountain' going up at 11.88442, 108.43032, and a peaceful birding walk along the road going north at 11.91435, 108.41190. **Indochinese Barbet**, **Speckled Piculet** and **Dalat Red Crossbill** were new ones here.

To get back to HCMC (and onwards to India) we took the Futa bus for 530k VND for 2 people.



Scaly Thrush



Collared Laughingthrushes

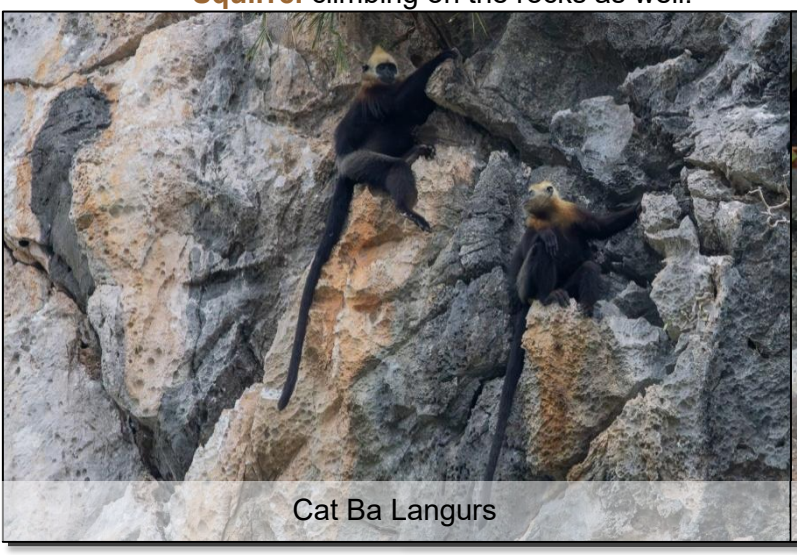
Cat Ba

Coming from Hanoi, we doubted a lot about visiting Cat Ba island due to the relatively low quality of bird- and mammalwatching, with the exception of course being the Cat Ba Langur. There are currently about 90 of these langurs, and most of them are situated in remote area of the island which is closed for tourism. Moreover, tourism focused specifically on the species is forbidden to prevent disturbances. These disturbances mostly come in the form of mass tourism (usually big tour boats) and noise pollution. We still decided to take a visit to the island and do some exploring by kayak. If we would have the dumb luck of spotting them by kayak, we figured it would be the least impactful way of seeing them. If not, we would have enjoyed some kayaking in a beautiful bay.

We took a bus from Hanoi with Good Morning Cat Ba, booked via Vexere for 580k VND for 2 people. We left sharply at 08:30 from their office and arrived around 14:30 all the way at Cai Beo harbour. Here, we were picked up by our homestay (Eco Floating Stay Cai Beo) to stay there for 2 nights (4.38 mil VND, including park fee and transport to the floating homestay). The homestay is situated in a quieter part of the floating village, if you ignore the loud karaoke echoing through the bay from time to time. You can borrow kayaks to paddle around the bay, as long as you don't go through the village and into the main waterways for the big boats.

During some relaxing on the veranda of the homestay after our first kayak session, we noticed a ranger in a park boat going back and forth, constantly looking up. After a phone call, two boats filled with Vietnamese business-looking men showed up, and we decided to get in our kayak and follow them. As suspected, they found a group of 6 **Cat Ba Langurs**! Luckily their visit was brief, and we could enjoy the langurs climbing the cliffs in private afterwards. After taking some pictures of both the langurs as well as the boat guests, we contacted Neahga Leonard of the Cat Ba Langur Conservation Project. These people were apparently from the Bay Management, celebrating the 40th anniversary of the park by visiting the langurs.

Black Kites are plentiful around the bay, and thrushes – **Blue Whistling-Thrush** and **Blue Rock-Thrush** – as well. This was also the place where we saw our first **Light-vented Bulbuls**. On the second evening there were two **Little Herons** chasing after each other which made for some nice entertainment. As it was getting dark, some **Cook's Swifts** were flying around the homestay. Just before leaving and scanning the cliffsides, we managed to find a **Pallas' Squirrel** climbing on the rocks as well.



Cat Ba Langurs



Pallas' Squirrel

Cuc Phuong

We stayed a week in Cuc Phuong national park, as Onnika was volunteering for a week at Save Vietnam's Wildlife. To get there from Cat Ba we booked tickets through Vexere again with tour company Daiichi to Ninh Binh (500k VND for 2 people), and a Grab (556k VND) to Cuc Phuong (somehow several taxi drivers from Xanh SM didn't show up). The park has several rooms to stay in; at the entrance, Mac Lake or all the way at the park centre at the top (although these seemed in to be in a very bad state). We stayed in the E building at the entrance gate, which had nice enough rooms including a fridge, good shower and the hardest beds we had after 5 months of traveling. Because you stay in the park, you don't have to buy entrance tickets every time (60k VND). Shabby motorbikes can be rented for 200k VND per day. As Onnika was doing volunteer work, we had a discounted rate for the accommodation which was 400k VND per night (as opposed to 500k VND).

The park is accessible anytime if you stay inside, but the gate of the 'strictly protected core area' (20.27556, 105.68109) only opens after 06:00. At the centre it said that all day activities should conclude by 19:00, and for any other commercial activities lasting up to 23:00 a permit was needed; also the time when the gate closes. We did one night drive with Huyen (+84 91 607 10 58) for 1.82 mil VND which unfortunately only produced some covered views of a **Northern Pygmy Slow Loris**. Rangers from the park itself are reputedly also a good choice.

The park can get extremely busy in the weekends, with big buses going up and down to the park centre. All the main areas (Mac Lake, Cave of the Prehistoric Man and Park Centre) will be filled with people taking pictures all along the roadside. The many butterflies in April are also definitely worth the attention. There is a bird hide at the top, between the centre and where the road loops, but only a **Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel** came to visit. At the Cave of the Prehistoric Man the **Annam Limestone Babbler** could be easily spotted, and with some effort a **Bar-bellied Pitta** can also be seen here (they were very vocal). **White-winged Magpies** hang around at the visitor centre from time to time, and we got a visit from a **Chinese Sparrowhawk** just at the park gate.

We also did a quick visit to the nearby Four Paws bear sanctuary for 50k VND per person. A very big and well set-up sanctuary with good information. The Endangered Primate Rescue Centre and the turtle Conservation Centre – located just next to Save Vietnam's Wildlife on the same road inside Cuc Phuong – are also well worth a visit!



Annam Limestone Babbler



Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel

Van Long

The Van Long Wetland Nature Reserve is just under an hour's drive by motorbike from Cuc Phuong, with the **Delacour's Langur** being the main attraction (besides the beautiful scenery of course). The most straightforward way of seeing the langur is by taking a rowboat for 300k VND per boat at 20.36341, 105.88244. Make sure to mention that you want to see the langurs, as the boatman/woman then takes a different route, towards the northwest, instead of the usual one to the southeast. As they see them most days, they know exactly where to look (and they have good eyes!). It was often mentioned to us that the best time to see the langurs is at the end of the afternoon. We took the boat at 16:00 and saw two groups of about 7 individuals.

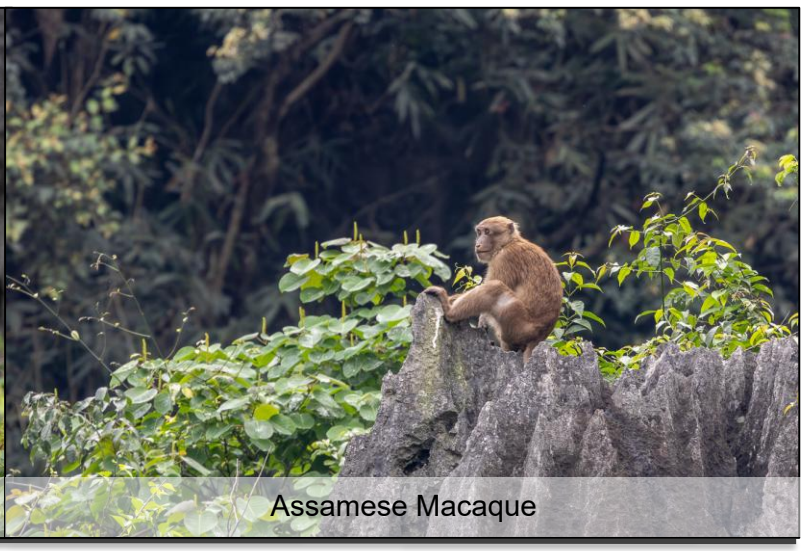
Alternatively, you can go towards the Vườn Thị and have a look around yourself as well. We already had this idea, but also the restaurant owners close to the dock said to go here to look for them. By motorbike you can drive all the way up to 20.38171, 105.87355 to find yourself surrounded by karst mountains and check for the langurs. Although the 'cat scratch mountain' (Núi Mèo Cào) does not have any Delacour's Langurs, we did see two **Assamese Macaques** walking the sharp ridges.

Driving further to 20.38519, 105.87428, we were approached by a man who lives there and often guides people around looking for the langurs. He mentioned that they often come down around 08:30 in the morning to feed close to the wetlands. He then also nonchalantly pointed out a group high on the rocks. When I came back alone 2 days later at 08:15, he was already leading another small photography group around. This seems to be a very regular occurrence. It's still on private land at the border of the Nature Reserve, and he asked for a 100k 'guide fee' and another 100k for accessing his neighbour's private land. Once there, a group of about 10 **Delacour's Langurs**, including two very cute babies, seemed absolutely unbothered by us and just went about their business until 09:30 when they started slowly moving higher up the rocks again. Additionally, you can have some luck spotting them along the road towards 20.39805, 105.86651 as well. The road is currently being widened, and it seems there is even some sort of overpass under construction for the langurs as well!

Birdwise the area was relatively uninteresting. There were quite some **Asian Openbills** around and we had many flyovers of **Greater Coucals** along the canals. The most interesting visit was from a **Pacific Reef-Heron** during our boat ride.



Delacour's Langurs



Assamese Macaque

Dong Le

A trip to Dong Le is worth it if you want to have near-guaranteed sightings of Hatinh Langurs. The best way to do this is through Mr. Tu (17.85926, 106.11070). Mr. Tu has been protecting the Hatinh Langurs for over 15 years. He hardly speaks a word of English (but is handy with Google Translate) and contacting him can be difficult if you don't do it in Vietnamese or through Zalo. Eventually we got into contact with him through his son-in-law Hung. He arranged everything very well – pickup from train station, overnights, drop off in Phong Nha afterwards and everything else – through fast and clear communication in English on WhatsApp (+84 8399 17450). A visit to this area can most likely be wholly self-arranged as well, but we figured supporting such a friendly and dedicated conservationist is much more preferable.

To get to Dong Le we booked a taxi through the Cuc Phuong reception to Ninh Binh station (500k VND). We tried Green/Xahn SM, but they didn't show up. From the train station, it's about 6 hours by comfortable train to Dong Le station, booked through Vexere (892k VND for 2 people). Pickup from train station (200k VND), and staying at their homestay for 2 nights, including all meals (which were very good and plenty) and Mr. Tu's enthusiastic services and cost us 3.5 mil VND. Drop off in Phong Nha afterwards was another 900k VND.

We had a full day to look for the **Hatinh Langurs**. Mr. Tu and his fellow rangers take you around the area on the back of their motorbikes. At the end of the day, we had views of 3 troops of langurs including one very close at a little shrine outside of the village. To get to this shrine, the troop previously had to cross the road on foot/paw. Recently they have built two rope bridge for them to cross. In the late afternoon we also found a troop climbing the karst mountains, and this one had 2 babies amongst them.

As we went through some rice fields, small streams and close to the karst mountains, there was also quite some bird activity. New birds we could add to our list here were **White-shouldered Starling** and **Crested Myna**.



Hatinh Langurs



Crested Myna

Phong Nha-Khe Bang

There are many accommodations along the road at Phon Nha. We stayed 2 nights at Highway 20 Homestay for 655k VND, but could not recommend it. We rented a scooter for 2 days for 300k VND. Be sure to have some proper front wheel suspension on it (ours didn't). The entrance gate to the park is at 17.57465, 106.30743, but it seems to always be open as it's a public road, so no entrance fees required. After the Botanical Garden at 17.55231, 106.30152 the road is very steep and bad quality, which does not make for a pleasant drive with 2 people on it. The main crossroads and bridge are at 17.51899, 106.27230, but the bridge is already a nice place to do some birding. We hung around here for two afternoons and one morning. Two **Chestnut-winged Cuckoos** chasing each other, a **Black Eagle** flying overhead, **Silver-breasted Broadbill**, **Sultan Tit**, **White-crested Laughingthrushes**, **Green-eared Barbet**, **Streaked Spiderhunter**, **Puff-throated Bulbul** and both a **Racket-tailed Treepie** and **Ratchet-tailed Treepie**. At some point we also saw some massive rustling of the trees, which upon closer inspections turned out to be a small group of **Stump-tailed Macaques**, just chilling and eating some leaves.

From the crossroads we drove into all three directions. First eastwards towards the entrance to the elephant cave at 17.52166, 106.28438 and beyond. The entrances towards all the caves can only be accessed with a guide, but just the paths are nice enough to walk into.

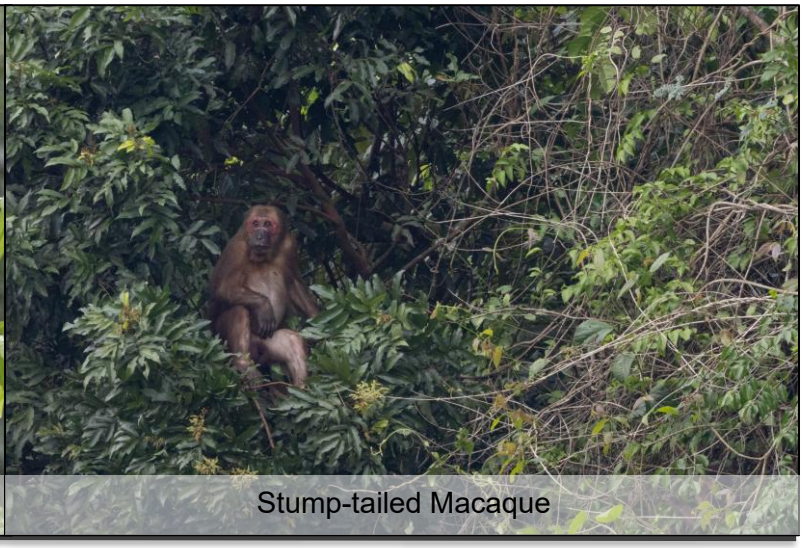
Driving southwards we passed the Eight Ladies Cave and did some scanning at 17.49884, 106.25804, where Onnika nonchalantly said 'I see a monkey'. It was a bit hard to get a look at it, but it turned out to be an **Indochinese Black Langur**! These used to be its own species, and then a subspecies of the Hatinh Langur. Now it's 'just' considered a black morph of it, due to their only giveaway of the white moustache being black. Still, very rare to see in the wild.

Driving west we only visited the Paradise Cave (530k VND for 2 people, parking motorcycle 5k VND), but could not add any interesting birds or mammals to the list. Mostly due to the time of the day, but the cave was nice enough to cool down during the heat of the day.

In the end we only visited the park for 1 afternoon and 1 full day, but would have preferred to spend some more time driving down the different roads at different times of the day. Especially in search of Southern White-cheeked Gibbons, which are usually a bit of a further drive from the crossroads than we did.



Indochinese Black Langur



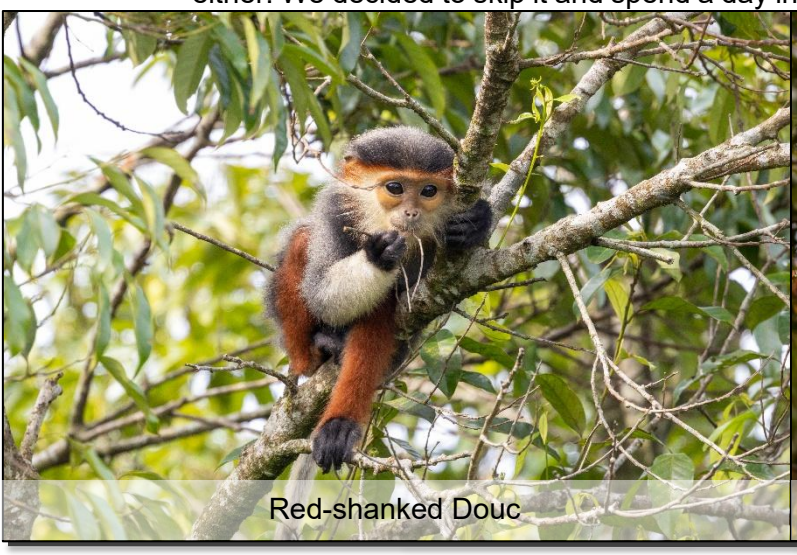
Stump-tailed Macaque

Da Nang

To get to Da Nang we booked a bus through 12Go from the downtown Phong Nha-Khe Bang, which was 950k VND for 2 people. The main reason to go to Da Nang is the Son Tra peninsula to see the Red-shanked Douc Langur. Getting to the peninsula is pretty straightforward, no entry fees or anything. If you want to organise it yourself and also have transport while on the hill, you will need a motorbike. Automatic motorbikes are banned, as some slopes are very steep (up to 18%), which has caused some tourists to get into accidents. Any semi-automatic will do. Be aware that many shops – especially in the 'city centre' – in Da Nang ask for an International Driving License/Permit (IDL/IDP), including a stamp for anything higher than 50cc (which is semi-automatic motorbike). After some walking and asking around we found a shop who would rent to us for 150k VND for a day. The main entrance is at 16.11984, 108.24858. When we arrived at 07:15 and found the parking was already quite full with (automatic) motorbikes and cars, and many people going in as well as (already) going out. The official opening time is 07:30, but I suspect with good weather, holidays (it was reunification day) or weekends, this will be earlier. We were immediately waved through when we approached on the (semi-automatic) motorbike.

Going up people were already feeding and taking selfies with the many **Rhesus Macaques**, which we encountered on several locations along the main route. The main road to spot the Red-shanked Douc Langur seems to be the path going northwards from 16.12596, 108.26440. Before, it was closed due to landslides some time (3 years). Even though it had a barrier in front, several people on motorcycles went in and out, and a driver from a photography tour (HiVooc) gestured we could enter. Several stretches had new concrete slabs with gravel so it seems work was only finished recently. This path goes all the way down and around the island to another entrance (or exit, in our case) at the marine area (16.11948, 108.22618). Along the way, the road has 7 or 8 monkey bridges for the doucs to cross.

We saw 4 troops of **Red-shanked Doucs**, 2 of which along the 'landslide' road, one near the connection and one further along the main road. They're very not shy, and they are often accompanied by many (local) photographers. Unfortunately, we just missed the flowering season, which happened earlier than usual that year. We tried to arrange a visit to see the Grey-shanked Douc Langur around Dong Hoc (15.38348, 108.58307) as well, but getting into contact with the right people proved difficult. A tight schedule and a public holiday didn't help either. We decided to skip it and spend a day in Hoi An instead, before flying to Kuala Lumpur.

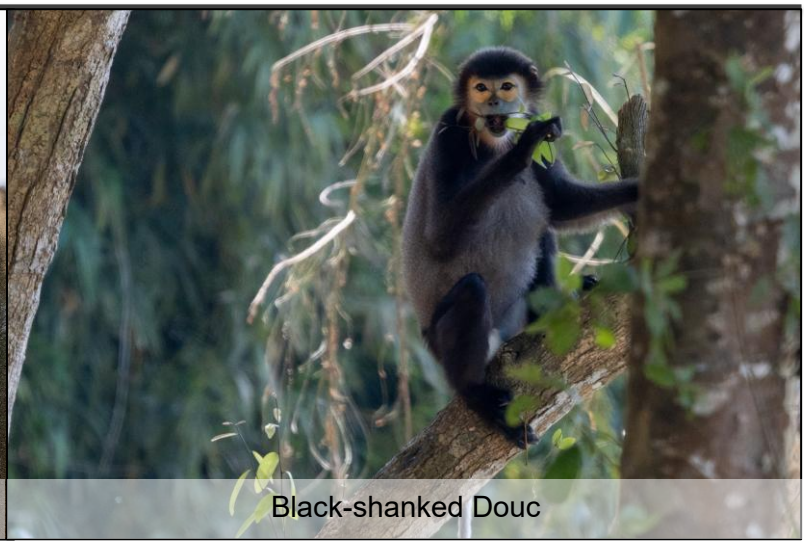


Red-shanked Douc

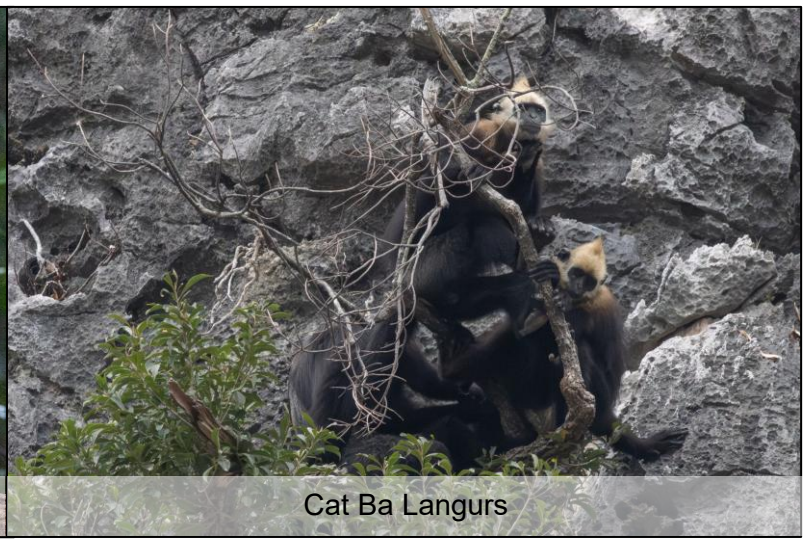


Red-shanked Douc


Laotian Langur


Black-shanked Douc


Silver Pheasant


Cat Ba Langurs


Delacour's Langurs


Hatinh Langurs

Species list

Birds

For the full bird species lists for Laos (30 species), Cambodia (120 species), South Vietnam (149 species) and North Vietnam (78 species), see the link to the trip reports on eBird.

Mammals

Though not particularly active on this platform, I have uploaded several species to iNaturalist. In total we recorded 33 species of mammals, not counting the Indochinese Black Langur and all the animals in the sanctuaries.

English	Binomial
Pileated Gibbon	Hylobates pileatus
Southern Yellow-cheeked Gibbon	Nomascus gabriellae
Indochinese Grey Langur	Trachypithecus crepusculus
Delacour's Langur	Trachypithecus delacouri
Hatinh Langur (Indochinese Black Langur)	Trachypithecus hatinhensis (ebenus)
Laotian Langur	Trachypithecus laotum
Annamese Silvered Langur	Trachypithecus margarita
Cat Ba Langur	Trachypithecus poliocephalus
Red-shanked Douc	Pygathrix nemaeus
Black-shanked Douc	Pygathrix nigripes
Northern Pygmy Slow Loris	Xanthonycticebus intermedius
Stump-tailed Macaque	Macaca arctoides
Assamese Macaque	Macaca assamensis
Long-tailed Macaque	Macaca fascicularis
Northern Pig-tailed Macaque	Macaca leonina
Rhesus Macaque	Macaca mulatta
Irrawaddy Dolphin	Orcaella brevirostris
Sambar Deer	Rusa unicolor
Northern Red Muntjac	Muntiacus vaginalis
East Asian Porcupine	Hystrix brachyura
Lyle's Flying Fox	Pteropus lylei
Black-bearded Tomb Bat	Taphozous melanopogon
Black Giant Squirrel	Ratufa bicolor
Northern Treeshrew	Tupaia belangeri
Northern Smooth-tailed Treeshrew	Dendrogale murina
Red-cheeked Flying Squirrel	Hylopetus spadiceus
Pallas' Squirrel	Callosciurus erythraeus
Finlayson's Squirrel	Callosciurus finlaysonii
Maritime Striped Squirrel	Tamiops maritimus
Cambodian Striped Squirrel	Tamiops rodolphii
Indochinese Ground Squirrel	Menetes berdmorei
Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel	Dremomys pernyi
Asian Red-cheeked Squirrel	Dremomys rufigenis