



Tips on seeing red-shanked douc, grey-shanked douc and tonkin snub-nosed monkey in Vietnam

Mogens Trolle / December 2018

In the end of December 2018 I spent a very enjoyable week photographing red-shanked douc in Vietnam, an experience I would highly recommend to any primate/mammalwatching fan. My guide told me that he would also be able to arrange a visit to see grey-shanked douc. Additionally, I have done some research into how to go about finding the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey.

In this note I share some experiences, considerations and contacts relevant for organizing seeing these three charismatic primates.

RED-SHANKED DOUC

There is apparently only one known place where you can see wild red-shanked doucs at close range: The **Son Tra Peninsula** nature reserve just north of the city of Da Nang situated on the central part of the country's coast. The population of the forested mountains of the peninsula is estimated to be around 1,000 doucs and along the small paved roads of the reserve the monkeys are often quite tolerant with people. On many occasions I was able to observe and photograph them at distances less than 20 meters while they were feeding quite relaxed and I easily saw several families each day.



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Tuan was my guide during my one week with the red-shanked doucs at Son Tra and also helped me book a hotel. He is a primatologist and works with research as well as conservation projects but will guide people with special interest in "his" primates. Tuan has spent the last ten years studying the red-shanked doucs of Son Tra as well as the grey-shanked doucs in the central highlands. He is no less than the best local guide I've ever had on my many travels and I cannot

recommend him enough. He has an uncanny ability to spot the doucs and predict their behavior. This comes in large part from having studied their feeding ecology which has given him a deep insight into their movements during feeding and in response to changing weather. He basically thinks like them. Besides that, he was professional and flexible, both in the organization of the trip and during my stay and is very pleasant company. You stay in a hotel in the northern part of Da Nang and go to and around the reserve on motorbike. Frequent landslides blocking the roads on the peninsula make going by car unfeasible. I sat on the back of Tuan's bike, but you could also rent your own. Finally, it is worth mentioning the weather. There was quite a bit of rain during my visit, so I lost a whole day plus several mornings on that account where it didn't make sense to go to the reserve. It was also very windy several days and when that happens the red-shanked doucs are prone to "stay in bed", i.e., stay hidden inside vine-covered trees where they are difficult to see. I guess one day would be sufficient to tick off the species, but if you want good chances of observing and photographing this gem of a primate properly, in the open, then I would recommend planning to spend at least three days at Son Tra.

GREY-SHANKED DOUC

Tuan has also researched the Critically Endangered grey-shanked douc, the total population of which is estimated at merely 550-700 individuals. He told me that he would be able to organize a visit to his study site. It's a community forest and there are no fancy lodges/hotels or other tourism infrastructure in place. To get to the area one would drive from Da Nang. Tuan underlines that the grey-shanked doucs are way shyer than the red-shanked doucs at Son Tra and you shouldn't expect to get very close to them. It sounds to me like it would be a good idea to set aside at least 2-3 days at the actual site.

TONKIN SNUB-NOSED MONKEY

After a memorable visit to the golden snub-nosed monkey in Shaanxi, China – the most pleasant monkey I've ever worked with – the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey (TSNM) has been very high on my wish list. The uniquely patterned and colored primate endemic to N Vietnam is Critically Endangered and even rarer than the grey-shanked douc; there are estimated to be about 250 individuals throughout its known range. I have been able to find next to nothing on the internet about how to go see it. However, the published literature (a handful of scientific articles and reports on population surveys are available online) made it clear, that the place to go nowadays is the monsoon primary forest of **Khau Ca** in the remote limestone formations of the Ha Giang Province (see more here: <http://newnaturefoundation.org/khau-ca/>). Through the very kind Andie Ang, a primatologist based in Singapore who has done genetic research on the TSNM in the wild (and who, by the by, runs the page www.primatewatching.com inspired by Mammalwatching.com) I got in touch with Dr. Le Khac Quyet.

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Le Khac Quyet is the leading scientist on TSNM and, in addition, a wildlife photographer – if you Google photos of TSNM the best ones from the wild will be his! He has written me that he was willing to organize a trip for me to Khau Ca, something that requires permission from the local authorities. Furthermore, Quyet wrote: "The limestone terrain is very tough for traveling around. The monkeys are semi-habituated, so you won't be able to get so close to them (closest distance ~20 m)". Like with the grey-shanked douc I'm under the impression that there is very little ecotourism infrastructure in place at Khau Ca, but it sounds like one great adventure!

Other primates in Vietnam: If you wanna go all in on the rare primates in Vietnam, consider including the likewise spectacular Cat Ba (golden-headed) langur and Delacour's langur. You'll find information on those in other reports on Mammalwatching.