

## Phu Khiao Wildlife Sanctuary, Thailand, Dec 2021–Jan 2022

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**Highlights:** leopard cat, large Indian civet, red giant flying squirrel, Indochinese grey langur (4 lifers)

### Phu Khiao Wildlife Sanctuary

Phu Khiao is a gem in Thailand's protected area system, located in NE Thailand about 500km north of Bangkok. I had heard good reports about the abundance of wildlife from a few mammalers, including Stuart Chapman, a travel mate and regular mammalwatching.com contributor, who visited several times over a period of a few years. Phu Khiao (sometimes spelled Phu Kieo) is part of a large protected area complex that includes Nam Nao National Park and is apparently being considered as a future tiger reintroduction site which sounds like a great idea to me, and I hope Thailand's Dept. of National Parks (DNP) has the ambition to go through with it.

I only had a few days in the wildlife sanctuary and so didn't get a long species list but as there was a lot of wildlife to see, and it is a truly stunning setting, I thought I'd share a short note and tips for those who are keen to visit one of my now favourite sites in Thailand, and a place where several large mammal species are almost guaranteed.

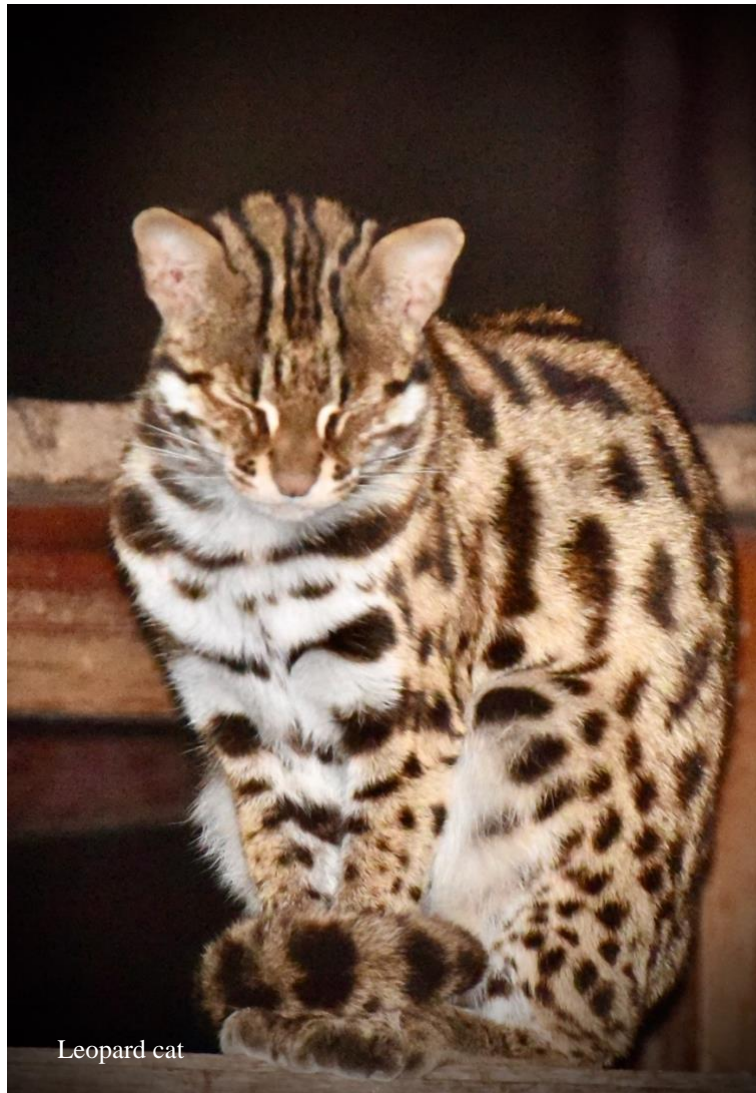
The first on the list showed itself on the road from the entrance gate to Thung Kramang camp when a **dhole** jumped out from behind a bush from where there must have been an animal carcass, given the smell of death that wafted into the car as we passed. After pitching the tent, **sambar deer** turned up and were regular visitors over the next few days (and need to be kept an eye on as they like to munch on anything they see left out by campers).

That evening I went out for a walk with one of the rangers to the nearby grasslands, and apart from large numbers of **hog deer** and **sambar**, a group of three **golden jackals** turned up and yelped and howled as they wandered around the landscape for the next couple of hours. Later that night one came quite close as we were sitting around the campfire. **N.B.** the rangers do allow open fires here, unlike most of the other parks in Thailand, and there are a few fire pits scattered across the camp site. I was also quite impressed that the rangers occasionally toured the campsite checking in on the campers and reminding to keep a watch for animals coming close to the tents – apart from dhole and golden jackal, they have had bears passing through.

The next morning we took a walk along the 3km 'sky walk' trail, that takes in a few low hills, viewing towers, and a brand-new suspension bridge across a stream bed. There was plenty of sign of elephant, gaur, and sun bear, but we had no sightings. We heard the calls of **white-handed gibbons**, but they were quite far off.

That night I walked around the HQ and various office buildings with my thermal scope and got three lifers. The first was a **large Indian civet**, a species that had eluded me for years. Around 11pm I heard movement in the branches of a tall pine tree, and moments later a **red giant flying squirrel** flew above my head, and of course I failed to get a photo off in time. Another species that has eluded me despite many years in mainland SE Asia presented itself almost with

laughable ease. A ranger had earlier told me that there were two or three living around the various wooden buildings around the HQ, and so I decided to stake out the kitchen/restaurant. At midnight I got my reward although at first I was distracted by something scratching around in the undergrowth behind the kitchen, which turned out to be muntjac, and then a rat scuttling around the eaves of the building. As I scanned the surroundings with my thermal scope, it revealed a very relaxed **leopard cat** sitting on the window ledge.



Over the next couple of days I added another lifer, the **Indochinese grey langur**, which were relatively easy to see along the road between the entrance gate and HQ at Thung Kramang camp. Another night walk turned up **small-toothed palm civet** and **Malayan porcupine**. I checked some of the culverts for bats and got some photos but could not ID properly.

With the aid of a ranger I was allowed to put out a couple of camera traps in the hope of getting golden cat, and although there was no such luck with that, in just two nights I captured a leopard cat (missing its tail), a large Indian civet, muntjac, and Asian elephant (which luckily for me made no attempt to destroy my camera, as so often happens if they are not in a metal box).

I will definitely return to Phu Khiao, as there are a few small rodents, as well as quite a few medium-sized mammals that I have still missed in SE Asia which are possible here.

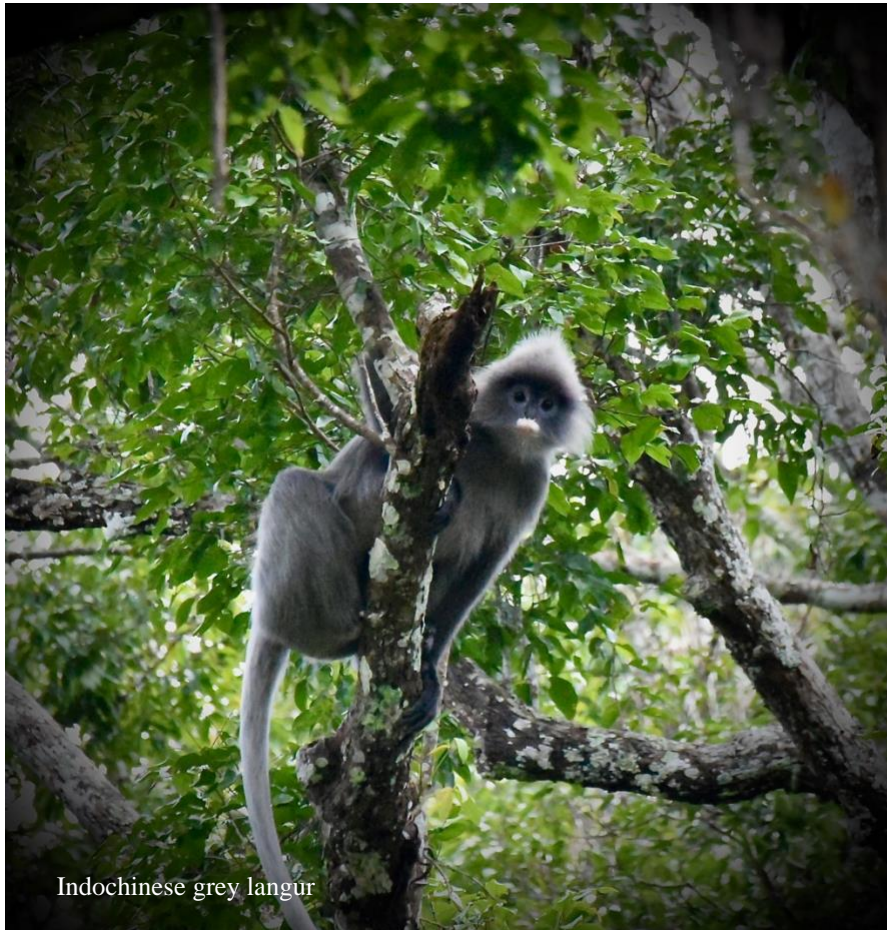
### **Practicalities**

Phu Khiao is a long drive from Bangkok, at least 7-8 hours with a stop or two, so a little far for a weekend trip, but doable. An alternate would be to fly to Khon Kaen and rent a car from there; it would be approx. 2 hours drive to the [entrance](#), then it is another 30-40 minutes drive to [Thung Kramang camp](#). Note that you need to be at the entrance gate by 4pm otherwise there is a good chance of being turned away. Also check entry requirements because as of late 2021/early 2022, DNP is taking bookings for some parks to limit visitor numbers. Check online for latest news. There are a couple of apps available to register, incl. QueQ, and NationalPark4Thai.

Thung Kramang camp is located at the end of the road, approx. 25km from the entrance gate. There is a wildlife sanctuary office here, set among the pine trees (flying squirrels, see earlier), and this is where you can rent your tent, sleeping mat, and sleeping bag. The tents are two/three-person camouflage tents that set up very quickly. All the camping equipment was new or in very good condition. Note that the tents don't have a fly sheet so watch out for rain or bring a separate tarp. Costs are approx. THB 200/night for a tent, and THB 30-60/night each for sleeping mat and sleeping bag.

To buy camping gear in Bangkok try Decathlon: <https://www.decathlon.co.th/en>, and to rent very good quality gear try Outdoors rental: <https://www.outdoorsrental.com/>. They also provide tent and outdoor gear cleaning services. <https://www.facebook.com/Outdoors-Rental-109207454237033>

The restaurant at Thung Kramang serves basic but good food at cheap prices. The campsite has basic toilet and washing facilities, and there is a very small store selling some basics such as eggs, noodles, snacks, toilet paper etc. Best to bring what you need with you before entering the wildlife sanctuary. The nearest 7-11 is here: <https://goo.gl/maps/akS2CYVVxyuXgZVz5> about 30km from the entrance gate. A fuel station is nearby, approx. 500m north on left hand side, or in Khon San: <https://goo.gl/maps/6jrTbi4Ci6w6KYms7>. I recommend filling up before entering Phu Khiao, especially if you plan on being there a few days and wildlife spotting up and down the road.







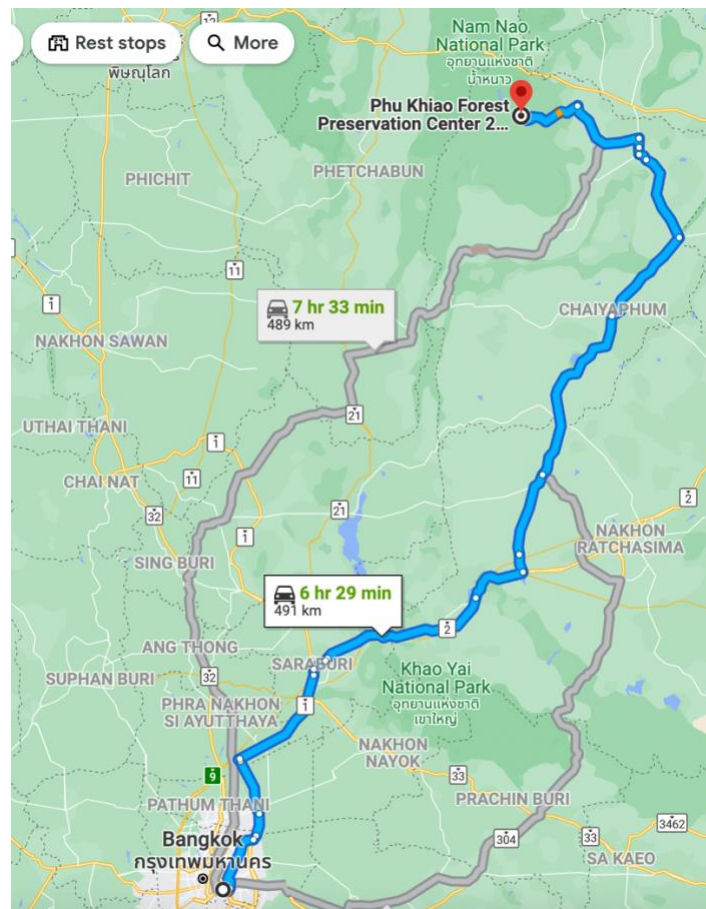
Hog deer



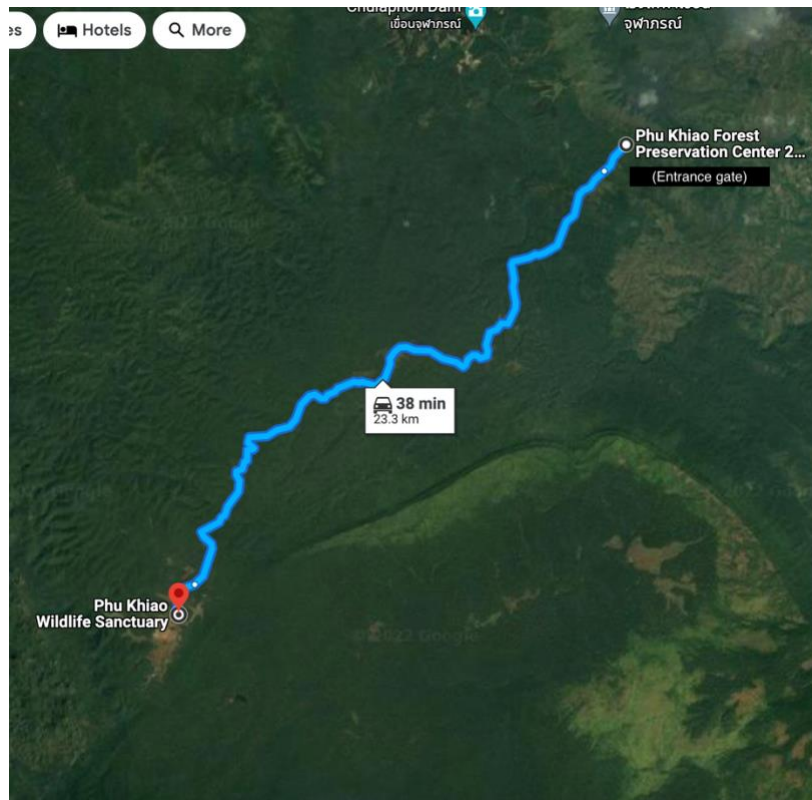
Grasslands at Thung Kramang



Thung Kramang campsite







## MAMMALS SEEN

1	<b>Dhole</b> <i>Cuon alpinus</i>	Seen on the road between entrance gate and Thung Kramang camp. Often reported.
2	<b>Golden jackal</b> <i>Canis aureus</i>	A group of three seen in the grasslands at Thung Kramang, and at the edges of the campsite.
3	<b>Leopard cat</b> <i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>	One animal seen around the HQ area at Thung Kramang, and one caught in camera trap.
4	<b>Large Indian civet</b> <i>Viverra zibetha</i>	One animal seen around the HQ area at Thung Kramang, and one caught in camera trap.
5	<b>Small-toothed palm civet</b> <i>Arctogalidia trivirgata</i>	A pair in a tree about 3km along the road from HQ at Thung Kramang, and one behind the kitchen.
6	<b>Malayan porcupine</b> <i>Hystrix brachyura</i>	One animal seen on the edges of the Thung Kramang grassland, and one in camera trap.
7	<b>Indochinese grey langur</b> <i>Trachypithecus crepusculus</i>	Seen near one of the bridges about halfway along the road between the entrance gate and HQ at Thung Kramang.
8	<b>Red muntjac</b> <i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>	Abundant
9	<b>Sambar</b> <i>Rusa unicolor</i>	Abundant
10	<b>Red giant flying squirrel</b> <i>Petaurista petaurista</i>	In trees near HQ at Thung Kramang, and long the road back towards the entrance gate
	<b>Asian elephant*</b>	Captured in camera trap
	<b>White-handed gibbon*</b>	Heard calls only
	<b>Bat sp.</b>	Photographed in a culvert along the road. No ID possible.
	<b>Rodent sp.</b>	Long-tailed mouse/rat seen briefly in thermal scope on road. No ID possible