



## Best of Northern Vietnam Birding

11 Days: Hanoi ♦ Cuc Phuong National Park ♦ Van Long Nature Reserve ♦ Ba Vi National Park ♦ Sapa ♦ Tam Dao Ba Be National Park ♦ Hanoi



Blue-rumped Pitta by Chairatna Nilnond

### Day 1: Arrive Hanoi. Hanoi to Cuc Phuong National Park

Arrive at Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport and transfer directly to Cuc Phuong National Park, a three-hour drive south of Hanoi. The first national park to be established in Vietnam, Cuc Phuong is an area of limestone hills covered in primary rainforest. The best birding is at the centre of the park where there are several excellent trails including the Loop Trail and the Valley Trail. The main road through the park can also be very productive especially for over-wintering thrushes early in the morning. Overnight at Cuc Phuong National Park.

### Days 2 & 3: Cuc Phuong National Park

Two full days of birding at Cuc Phuong where specialities include Pied Falconet, Bar-bellied, Blue-rumped & Eared pittas, Silver-breasted Broadbill, White-winged Magpie, White-tailed Flycatcher, Fujian Niltava, Limestone Warbler and Limestone Wren-babbler. Overnight at Cuc Phuong National Park.

### Day 4: Cuc Phuong National Park to Ba Vi National Park

Leave Cuc Phuong after breakfast for the journey north to Ba Vi National Park stopping off at Van Long Nature Reserve en route. Take a sampan through flooded rice fields to the dramatic limestone cliffs that are home to the largest population of one of Vietnam's critically endangered primates, Delacour's Langur. During the winter months large numbers of waterfowl can be seen here as well as a raptor or two. From here continue to Ba Vi National Park, three hours' drive to the north for an overnight stay. In the late afternoon bird the road to the summit of Mount Ba Vi to look for wintering thrushes that could include Black-breasted, Japanese, Siberian, Dusky, White's and Grey-backed. Overnight at Ba Vi National Park.

### **Day 5: Ba Vi National Park to Sapa**

A morning to explore Ba Vi National Park further where in addition to wintering thrushes there is a chance of seeing the scarce Rufous-cheeked Laughingthrush, Indochinese Green Magpie, the lovely Red-billed Blue Magpie and Fork-tailed Sunbird amongst others. Depart Ba Vi late morning for the long drive north to Sapa, in the far north-west corner of Vietnam. Arrive at Sapa late afternoon and transfer to hotel. Overnight at Sapa.

### **Days 6 & 7: Sapa**

There are several areas to explore around Sapa including the Ham Rong Gardens, a popular tourist attraction overlooking the town centre. Despite the crowds there are some quieter parts of the gardens where some of the local bird specialities such as White-browed Laughingthrush, Red-billed Leiothrix, Spectacled Barwing and Vinous-throated Parrotbill can be found. At the village of O Quy Ho around 10 km from Sapa such sought-after species as Spot-breasted Parrotbill and Sickle-billed Scimitar-babbler are possible in the mixed primary and secondary forest and scrub as well as more common species including several species of yuhina and two species of finchbill. Another interesting site is at the entrance of Hoang Lien National Park in the shadow of Vietnam's highest mountain, Mount Fan Si Pan. The valley below the park entrance gate has some great birding with White-tailed Nuthatch, Pale-throated Wren-babbler, Golden-breasted Fulvetta, Golden Parrotbill and Green-tailed Sunbird among the possibilities. A short stop at Thac Bac Waterfall en route to Hoang Lien may produce Little Forktail, White-capped and Plumbeous Water-redstarts. Overnight at Sapa.

### **Day 8: Sapa to Tam Dao**

Depart Sapa after breakfast for the drive back towards Hanoi heading east before arriving at the capital to another hill station, Tam Dao. Arrive at Tam Dao in mid afternoon in time for some late afternoon birding. Overnight at Tam Dao.

### **Day 9: Tam Dao**

Tam Dao's specialities include several species that are more usually associated with China and cannot be seen elsewhere in South-East Asia such as the attractive Chestnut Bulbul and Grey Laughingthrush. Resident species here include Red-billed Blue Magpie, Grey Treepie, Coral-billed and Streak-breasted scimitar-babblers, Rufous-headed and Short-tailed parrotbills and Collared Babbler. Winter visitors that may turn up between November and March include White's, Grey-backed, Japanese, Eye-browed and Black-breasted thrushes, as well as Fujian Niltava. Overnight at Tam Dao.

### **Day 10: Tam Dao to Ba Be National Park**

There is time for some final early morning birding at Tam Dao before driving north to Ba Be National Park where the star bird is the extremely rare White-eared Night-heron. Until the recent discovery of this site it was pretty much impossible to see this almost mythical species. Arriving mid-afternoon gives the first opportunity to search for White-eared Night-heron as the birds leave their day roost for nighttime feeding sites. Overnight at Ba Be National Park.

### **Day 11: Ba Be National Park to Hanoi**

Early morning birding to search again for White-eared Night-heron as the birds return to their roost in the pre-dawn half-light. Other species possible here include Mandarin Duck, Tufted Duck, Limestone Warbler, White-winged Magpie and Streaked Wren-babbler. Depart Ba Be mid-morning and transfer to Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport for departure flight.