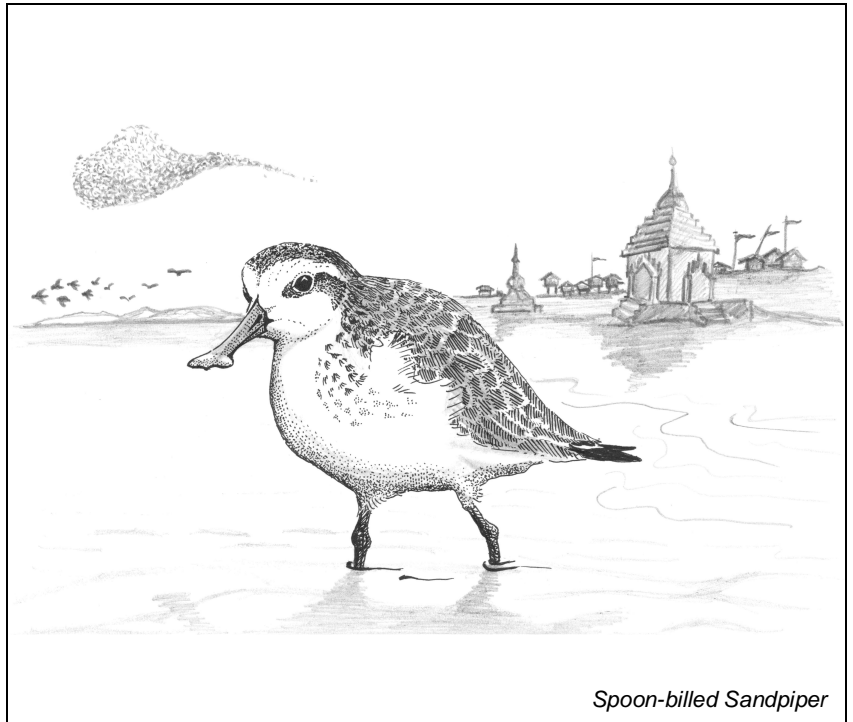


MYANMAR

Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the Land of the Golden Pagodas



Spoon-billed Sandpiper

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is on the brink of extinction. Bird Holidays and ArcCona have joined forces with the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT), and BANCA (Birdlife partner in Burma) to undertake a conservation tour to its wintering grounds, where hunting has been identified as the primary cause of its decline. Ecotourism is playing its part in helping to save this wonderful bird. It provides work for local people, demonstrating the sustainable value of a living Spoon-billed Sandpiper compared to a bird trapped for the pot. We also supply our counts to the species Task Force, helping in their vital work saving shorebirds in the East Asian Flyway.

The Myanmar coast holds most of the remaining population of Spoon-billed Sandpiper, which is now perhaps little over 200 birds. We can expect to see several of these charismatic waders with the help of the ex-hunters who have now become guides. Myanmar is also, without doubt, the most ornithologically diverse country in South East Asia.

The other part of our tour will take us birding among paddy fields and lakes and then on to the unspoilt forest of Mount Victoria. Rarely visited by birders, it is home to the endemic White-browed Nuthatch and Burmese Tit, along with many other forest jewels. Close to Mount Victoria is one of Asia's best kept secrets. Over two thousand temples on the banks of the Irrawaddy River dating from the 9th Century make Bagan one of the great archaeological wonders of the world. Surveying from the tops of lofty pagodas, hungry Laggar Falcons and Besras target small birds at the edge of the forest.

Myanmar has a wealth of both natural and ancient treasures that has been off limits to travellers for many years. In time the country may lose some of its rural charm, but for now we are able to enjoy the unspoilt landscape.

ITINERARY

YANGON

We will arrive in Yangon after our flight. In the early evening we will go to the Shwedagon Pagoda, one of the most prestigious cultural sites in Yangon. An amazing area of lion statues and golden spikes, the pagoda also hosts an extraordinary wildlife spectacle. Each day hundreds of drongos gather to roost and, as light fades, millions of bats come out from the roof. Like a column of smoke, the procession is endless with Peregrines, Kestrels and Black Kites all trying to catch one for supper.

BAGAN

The following morning we will fly to the ancient town of Bagan, where we begin birding among wonderful temples.

Here we will focus on Burmese endemics such as Burmese Bushlark, Hooded Treepie and White-throated Babbler. There are Blue Rock Thrushes, Plain-backed Sparrows, Rain Quails and several bulbul species that will ensure we are kept busy. We may see Laggar Falcon or pick out a River Lapwing or Small Pratincole over the Irrawaddy River.

MOUNT VICTORIA AND THE CHIN HILLS

We will then drive to Kanpetlet on the lower slopes of Mount Victoria, birding along the way. Rural Myanmar has charming ox-carts and horses, with motorised vehicles still quite scarce. Indian Rollers and Brown Shrikes line the roads.

Mount Victoria is still relatively unexplored, having only recently been visited by ornithologists. The habitat changes with elevation from dry deciduous forest, through

rhododendron to grassland at the peaks. We have four nights here in which to explore.

Only recorded at this one site, the White-browed Nuthatch dwells among the mossy trunks of highland trees. Two other nuthatch species also live here, sharing branches with endemic Burmese Tits. Many others such as Chin Hills Warbler have restricted ranges, making this place so special. There are laughingthrushes, leafbirds and sunbirds. Minivets light up the canopy, along with various leaf-warblers. Niltavas flit through the bamboo as waves of fulvettas, minlas and scimitar-babblers pass by. The list of possibilities goes on and on, and includes Brownish-flanked and Russet Bush-warblers, Grey-sided and Eyebrowed Thrushes, Mountain Bamboo-partridge, Spot-throated Babbler, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, Blue-throated Barbet, Darjeeling Woodpecker, Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike, Blue-winged, Chestnut-tailed and Red-tailed Minlas, Rufous-winged, White-browed and Nepal Fulvettas, Grey Sibia, Whiskered and Stripe-throated Yuhinas, and White-bellied Redstart.

From here, we return to Bagan for one night giving us plenty of time to enjoy the birding and sightseeing around the temples again, before taking a flight to Yangon.

GULF OF MARTABAN

From Yangon we will drive to Moulmein for a two night stay. En route we will make our first visit to the coast. The vast mudflats hold thousands of shorebirds, herons and terns. We will scan for Spoon-billed Sandpipers, using our local guide's knowledge of favoured roosting and feeding sites to optimise our chances of getting good views of this unique wader. Among the flocks of Lesser and Greater Sandplovers, last year we also found many Terek and Broad-billed Sandpipers and Red-necked Stints, and a few Great Knots. The next day we will return to the coast for a full day to optimise our time spent in this important area.

MOEYINGYI WETLAND

On our journey back to Yangon we will visit Moeyingyi Bird Sanctuary, a huge lake with plenty of emergent vegetation supporting a rich variety of birds. Oxen plough the fields with Asian Open-billed Storks and Intermediate Egrets in attendance. Drongos and mynahs ride on the backs of water buffalo, periodically darting out to take insects disturbed by their feet. The lake itself is home to impressive numbers of birds and it is not unusual to see a thousand Pintail in the air, accompanied by Spot-billed Duck, Garganey, Lesser Whistling Ducks and perhaps a Falcated Duck.

At dusk we will watch as thousands of egrets and herons fly to their roosts in nearby trees. Gorgeous male Pied Harriers fly to roost along with Eastern Marsh Harriers. Last year we counted more than 20 of each! Striated Grassbirds and Black-browed and Oriental Reed Warblers are common in lakeside vegetation. Plaintive Cuckoos can be found and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters pick off stray insects.

At night we will enjoy a dark starry sky at Moeyingyi, free of light pollution. The following day we may be greeted by a Black-headed Kingfisher, which sits on the roof. We have plenty of time to look for Long-toed Stint and Citrine Wagtail and watch Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Wood Sandpiper, Purple Swamphen and numerous Purple Herons, before making our way back to Yangon for the evening flight home.

PACE

Breakfast time will be flexible to take advantage of tide times when searching for Spoon-billed Sandpipers. On most other days breakfast will be early. In lowland areas the climate is mostly hot in the day and cool at night. At Mount Victoria it can be cold in the night with cool mornings at higher

elevations. We do not expect rain but it is possible. There is some uphill walking at Mount Victoria but at a sensible pace. Some of our wetland birding may be done from a boat if conditions allow, but we will also be walking on the beach and mudflats to search for Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Full board accommodation is provided, with one night at the Myanmar Life Hotel, Yangon, one night at the Bagan Umbre Hotel, four nights at the Pinewood Villa Resort, Kanpetlet, another night at the Bagan Umbre Hotel, one night back at the Myanmar Life Hotel, Yangon, two nights at the Ngwe Moe Hotel, Moulmein, and one night at the Moeyingyi Resort. All are of a medium to good standard, with en suite bathrooms. Meals are served in the hotels or at restaurants and cafes.

PRICE INCLUDES

All birdwatching excursions with expert leader and local guide, full-board accommodation (starting with dinner on 21st, ending with lunch on 2nd), soft drinks at meal times, transport, boat trips, reserve entrance fees, international flights and airport taxes. We pay a US\$50 per person fee towards a local former hunting community trust fund that protects the Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the area. A donation is also given to the WWT's Spoon-billed Sandpiper Program. Furthermore, Bird Holidays supports the work of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force and are Species Champions with Birdlife International.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Travel insurance. Tourist visa (currently about £15). Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Return flights from London Heathrow to Yangon using the scheduled services of Thai Airlines. Outbound flight departs late morning, arriving back in the UK early morning. **Domestic flights from Manchester and other UK airports are available on this tour. See booking form for details.**

13 nights including two overnight flights:	21st Jan. to 3rd Feb. 2014
Principal leaders:	Phil Palmer and Christoph Zockler
Local guide:	Lay Win
Maximum group size:	12 clients with one leader and a local guide
Cost with discount (if you book before 8th October 2013):	£4130 per person sharing
Full Cost:	£4280 per person sharing
Single supplement:	£290
Deposit:	£600



WWT

Wetlands for life



Find out more by visiting:-

www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com

www.arconca.com/spoonbilled/htm

www.eaaflyway.net/spoon-billed-sandpiper.php