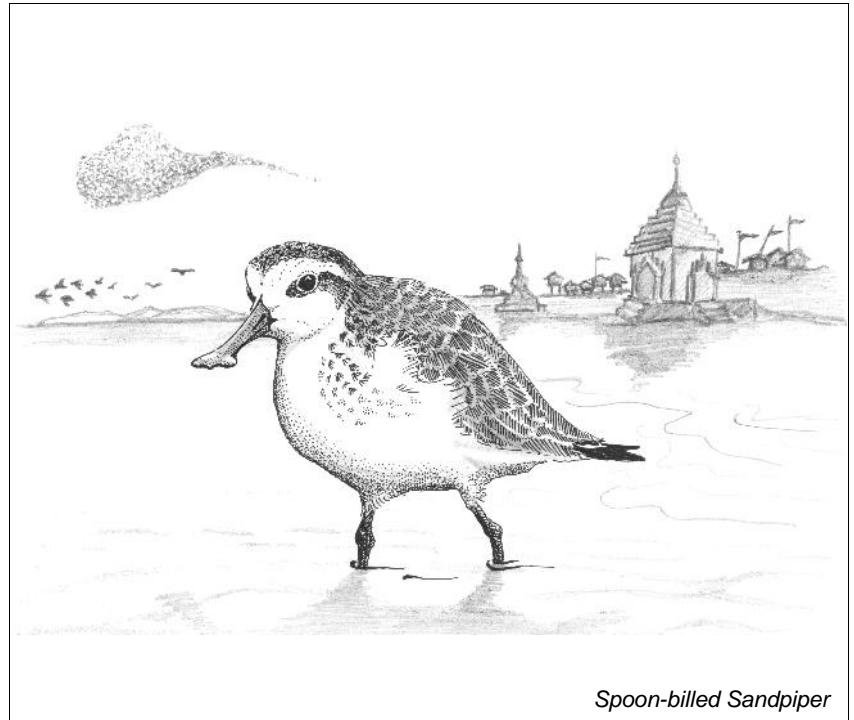


MYANMAR (BURMA)

Burmese endemics and 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 and BANCA (the Birdlife partner in Myanmar) 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 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 Sandpipers, which is now perhaps less than 200 birds. We can expect to see this charismatic wader with the help of ex-hunters who have now become guides. Phil and our local guide, Lay Win, have more experience than most when it comes to finding them. Phil has taken part in three expeditions to find them in Siberia, while Lay Win surveys wintering birds in Myanmar. This year he located the famous Spoonie called 'Green EA', which was hatched where Phil worked in Meinypil'gyno.

Myanmar is also, without doubt, the most ornithologically diverse country in South East Asia. The second part of our tour will take us birding among paddy fields and lakes and then on to the beautiful unspoilt forests cloaking Mount Victoria. Rarely visited by birders, it is home to the endemic Burmese Tit and White-browed Nuthatch. To illustrate how localised this species is, more birders have seen a Spoon-billed Sandpiper than this nuthatch! 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.

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 in the early evening and 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 spectacular and seemingly 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 the 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. Laggar Falcons watch from the tallest temples, from time to time spooking River Lapwings and Small Pratincoles over the Irrawaddy River.

MOUNT VICTORIA AND THE CHIN HILLS

We have a permit to 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, Smyrna Kingfishers and Brown Shrikes line the roadsides, while White-rumped Falcon and Collared Falconet are more highly prized.

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 Wren-babbler have restricted ranges, making this place very special. Wintering Siberian birds rub shoulders with Himalayan species. 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, 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 the first of two visits 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, we have found many Terek and Broad-billed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints, and a few Great Knots. Great Black-headed Gulls stand out tall amongst these. 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 roost in nearby trees. Gorgeous male Pied Harriers gather along with Eastern Marsh Harriers. One 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 regularly 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.

CLIMATE AND PACE

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. 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. 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 in search of 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 Umbra Hotel, four nights at the Sky Palace Hotel, Kanpetlet, another night at the Bagan Umbra 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 11th, ending with lunch on 22nd), soft drinks at meal times, bottled water throughout, transport by mini-coach, boat trips, reserve entrance fees and international flights. 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. 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 Singapore 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:	10th to 23rd February 2015
Principal leader:	Phil Palmer
Local guide:	Lay Win
Maximum group size:	12 clients with one leader and a local guide
Cost with discount (if you book before 28th October 2014):	£4130 per person sharing (£290 single supplement)
Full Cost:	£4280 per person sharing
Deposit:	£600 per person



Find out more by visiting:-
www.saving-spoon-billed-sandpiper.com
www.arccona.com/spoonbilled/htm
www.eaaflyway.net/spoon-billed-sandpiper.php