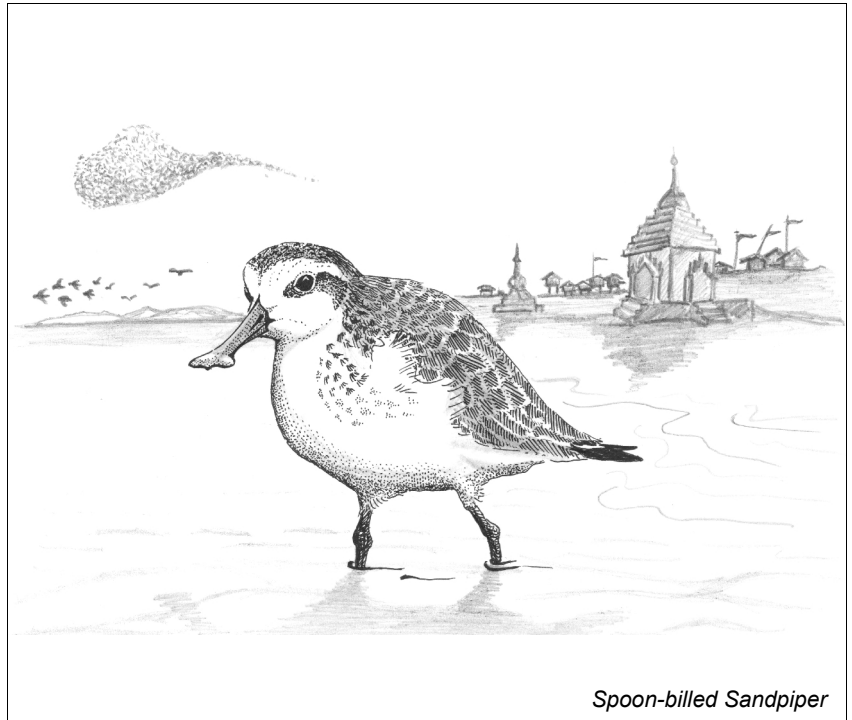


MYANMAR (BURMA)

Burmese endemics and Spoon-billed Sandpipers in the 'Land of the Golden Pagodas'



Burma, now known as Myanmar, finally opened its doors to the world in the early part of the twenty first century and visitors are once again able to enjoy the great treasures it possesses. In addition to its remarkable cultural heritage, it is, without doubt, the most ornithologically diverse country in Southeast Asia.

Our tour will take us birding among paddyfields, to lakes and the coast, and then on to the beautiful and remote forests cloaking Mount Victoria. Rarely visited by birders, it is home to the endemic Burmese Tit and White-browed 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.

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is on the brink of extinction. Bird Holidays and ArcCona joined forces with the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force and BANCA (the Birdlife partner in Myanmar) to undertake conservation tours 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 to save shorebirds in the East Asian Flyway.

Myanmar has a wealth of both natural and ancient treasures which have 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 an unspoilt landscape.

ITINERARY

YANGON

We will arrive in Yangon in the afternoon. Later that day we will visit 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.

GULF OF MARTABAN

From Yangon we will drive to Thaton for a two night stay. On the way we will make the first of two visits to the coast. The vast mudflats hold thousands of shorebirds, herons and terns. The Myanmar coast holds most of the remaining population of Spoon-billed Sandpipers, which is now perhaps less than

400 adults. 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.

Among the flocks of Lesser and Greater Sandpipers, we have found many Terek and Broad-billed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stint and Great Knot. Great Black-headed Gulls stand 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. On day five, we will drive to Sane Let Tin and take a boat ride into the Gulf of Martaban. This will allow us to explore the area better and walk among the birds over vast areas of sand and mudflats, or paddle in shallow water.

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 in attendance. Drogos 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 ibis, egrets and herons fly to roost in nearby trees. Gorgeous male Pied Harriers gather along with Eastern Marsh Harriers. On one tour we counted more than 20 of each! Striated Grassbirds, Yellow Bittern 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 the dark starry sky at Moeyingyi, free from light pollution. The following day we may be greeted by a Black-capped Kingfisher, which regularly sits on the roof, while wintering Siberian Rubythroats skulk in the undergrowth. We have plenty of time to look for Long-toed Stint and Citrine Wagtail and watch Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Purple Swamphen and numerous Purple Herons, before making our way back to Yangon for the evening flight to Bagan.

BAGAN

Bagan is our base for the next two nights. Like Angkor Wat, it is one of the great wonders of ancient Asia. We begin by birding among the thousands of temples and pagodas that hold massive golden Buddhas. 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. We will take a boat ride on this famous river where we could see Sand Larks and White-tailed Stonechats.

MOUNT VICTORIA AND THE CHIN HILLS

We will then drive to the lower slopes of Mount Victoria, birding along the way. Rural Myanmar has charming ox-carts and horses, while motorised vehicles are still quite scarce. Indian Rollers, Smyrna Kingfishers and Brown Shrikes line the roadsides, but White-rumped Falcon and Collared Falconet are more highly prized.

Mount Victoria is still relatively unexplored. The habitat changes with elevation from dry deciduous forest, through rhododendron to grassland at the peaks. We have three days 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 such as 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 once again, before taking a flight to Yangon to connect with our flight home.

CLIMATE AND PACE

In lowland areas the weather 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 bird activity and tide times. 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 Pleasant View Hotel, Yangon, two nights at the Mya Nadi Hotel, Thaton, one night at the Sane Let Tin, one night at the Moeyingyi Resort, two nights at the Sky Palace Hotel, Bagan, three nights at the Sky Palace Hotel, Mount Victoria and one night back at the Sky Palace Hotel in Bagan. All are of a medium to good standard, with en suite bathrooms.

PRICE INCLUDES

All birdwatching excursions with expert leader and local guide, full-board accommodation (starting with lunch on 1st, ending with dinner 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 Emirates. Outbound flight departs early afternoon, arriving back in the UK late 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 January 2017
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 27th September 2016):	£3990 per person sharing (£290 single supplement)
Full Cost:	£4140 per person sharing
Deposit:	£1000 per person