

SUPERTOUR REPORT 2009

In February this year Paul (Howie) Nielsen the SVC bird guide trainer, site surveyor and Cambodian bird expert together with Art an SVC guide lead a small group of birdwatchers on the first SVC Super Tour. Most of SVC's clients travel with well-managed and expertly guided international groups but after 2 years of getting to know the sites and their resident birds we took advantage of Howie's availability to do our own Super Tour. The itinerary took in 11 sites in 14 days and was accompanied by 3 international bird watchers.



Howie and Art

The trip started with a gentle introduction to Cambodian birding in the forest surrounding the **Temples of Angkor** and then moved onto the **Sarus Crane Reserve** located on and around the Angkorian reservoir of Ang Trapaeng Tmor. Apart from the cranes the site is a haven for a variety of herons, storks, ducks and jacana. Later in the year critically endangered Eld's deer emerge from the forest to graze and drink.



Adjacent to the floating village of **Prek Toal** on the Tonle Sap Lake is the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) protected core reserve and home to the largest water-bird nesting colony in South East Asia.

Painted Stork © Jan Mathysen

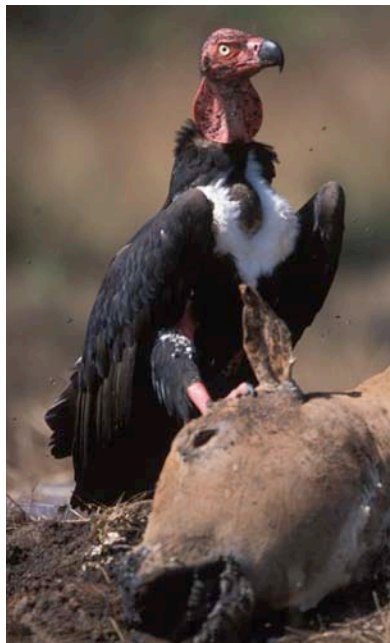
The reserve is visited by boat through semi-flooded forest where the group saw darters, pelicans, kingfishers and egrets on route to the WCS observation platform. The 360° view gave sightings of more than 50 cormorants nesting in a single tree and alongside 11 Spot billed Pelicans. Multiple trees held large numbers of Open billed, Painted and 1 Milky Stork. Grey headed fish Eagles put on a good show and a Greater Adjutant was seen from the platform.

The group then moved onto the **Ibis Site** and the award-winning lodge of **Tmatboey** in the heart of the largest expanse of dry dipterocarp forest left in S.E Asia. An early morning start was rewarded by the bugling of the Giant Ibis atop a tree with prolonged views.



Giant Ibis © Marco Witte

Later that day White shouldered Ibis proved cooperative allowing a good look at both adults and chicks in the nest.



The next stop was the **Vulture Restaurant** further into Preah Vihear Province where WCS's conservation project involves killing a cow, timed to coincide with SVC clients, for the 3 critically endangered species; Red headed, White rumped and Slender billed Vulture, which were seen feeding on the carcass together with a possible sighting of a Cinereous Vulture.

Red headed Vulture © Alan Michaud

In one of the most remote parts of Cambodia are forest ponds or trapaeng, which offer a chance to spot the **White winged Duck**. A predawn start and patience were required in the hide before the group saw the birds alighting and settling to feed. Returning to the camp Howie caught a Bar bellied Pitta in the undergrowth and movement in the canopy turned out to be a Pileated Gibbon. A Banded Broadbill finished off the morning.

On route to Mondul Kiri in the East of Cambodia the group stopped at Kratie on the Mekong and nearby pools where the Irrawaddy Dolphin is still found. There are numerous sand islands in the middle of the river where the group saw the **Mekong Wagtail** and a Small Pranticole amongst others.



Giant Hornbill © Tom Tams

The last destination was the **Seima Bio-diversity Conservation Area (SBCA)** with mixed evergreen Southern Annamitic forest more usually associated with Vietnam. The flagship Orange necked Partridge was not seen though it had previously been heard, this was more than made up for by a plethora of other species -

starting with a Giant Hornbill flying over the canopy viewed from an open former quarry. The next morning the group were drilled for silence, successfully spotting Germain's peacock Pheasant, a Great slaty Woodpecker and Golden crested Mynah. Doucs Langurs and Long tailed Macaques provided the entertainment at the forest camp during lunch. The afternoon provided 1 of the guests with a bird high on his wish list, a Heart spotted Woodpecker.

On the return to Siem Reap the group drove off the main road into the grassland of the Tonle Sap floodplain for the critically endangered **Bengal Florican**. This is one of the most threatened habitats in Cambodia with the grassland being ploughed for rice paddy. WCS's efforts to create Integrated Farming and Biodiversity Areas IFBA's paid off on this trip. A male remained visible for extended viewing through the scope. The icing on the cake was a flock of Red Avadavit. Also flushed from the grass were Button Quail, Manchurian reed Warblers and Blue breasted Quail.



Bengal Florican © Alan Michaud

Howie will be leading a Super Tour in 2010 Jan 18th to 31st and February 15th to 28th, visiting all the above sites, for more details including a complete bird list from the 2009 trip please contact our Bookings Manager,

bookings@samveasna.org and visit our website www.samveasna.org