

Sam Veasna Center 14 day Itinerary

Day 1: *Arrive Siem Reap. Afternoon / sunset birding and temples in Angkor Great Park*

Angkor Wat and the 200 plus temples in the Angkor Great Park are truly a wonder of the world. Apsara the Cambodian ministry responsible for the management and conservation of the temples has preserved at least some of the mature dry forest and in places allowed undergrowth to grow, which offers habitat for common species and the odd rarity. Oriental Darter in the moat, Hainan Blue, Taiga and Asian Brown Flycatchers, White-throated Rock-Thrush, Black Baza, Blue Rock Thrush, Forest Wagtails, Olive-backed Pipit, Greater Racquet-tailed Drongos, Asian Barred Owlets Coppersmith Barbet, Ashy Minivet, Yellow-browed and Pale-legged Leaf-Warbler, raucous Red-breasted and Alexandrine Parakeets and White-crested Laughing thrushes. The SVC Guide who is also a licensed temple guide will combine the trip to Angkor Wat with birding in the surrounding forest, which is a short distance from Siem Reap so sunset can be enjoyed amongst the temples and dinner in town.



Angkor Wat. Photo © Nick Butler

Day 2: *Bird Watching in the Phnom Khulen National Park, The Angkor Center for Conservation and Biodiversity, the Lingas at Kbaal Spean and Banteay Srei Temple*

Phnom (mountain in Khmer) Khulen is a range of hills rising to 400 meters 50 kilometers North of Siem Reap. Although heavily degraded there are pockets of original dry dipterocarp forest left, which give a good introduction to this unique habitat, a feature of bird watching itineraries in Cambodia. Highlights which have been seen on SVC training trips include 7 species of woodpecker; Common and Greater Flameback, Greater Yellownappe, Heart-spotted, Black-

headed and Great Slaty Woodpecker, Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker. Rufous-winged Buzzard, Rufous-bellied, Crested-serpent and Changeable-hawk Eagle, Black Baza, Asian-barred and Spotted Owlet plus many orioles, bulbuls, warblers, babblers, sunbirds, etc.



Linga in riverbed at Kbaal Spean © Nick Butler

Craved into the bed of the Tonle Sap River, which originates in the Phnom Khulen hills above Kbaal Spean are 11th century Lingas or phallic symbols.

The Lingas so the legend goes gave fertility to the Tonle Sap Lake ensuring a bountiful fish harvest and a potent king. A pleasant forest path follows the stream and carved pools as it tumbles down the hillside.

Located next to the river is Ankor Center for Conservation and Biodiversity (ACCB), which rescues and provides shelter for wildlife that has been illegally hunted with the aiming of returning it to the wild. ACCB has had success at reintroducing birds into safe habitats, in particular Red-headed Vultures and Lesser Adjutants, unfortunately mammals are more difficult either due to habitat loss, hunting or acclimatization into captivity. ACCB will organize a tour of their Center for SVC where we get the chance to see some of Cambodia's indigenous fauna. A small donation is made on behalf of each customer by SVC to support ACCB activity.



Local restaurants at Kbaal Spean serve simple but well cooked Khmer food for lunch.

Temple Carving Banteay Srei © Nick Butler

Near Kbaal Spean is the temple of Banteay Srei, which arguably has some of the finest preserved and most intricate carvings of all the Angkorian Temples. Banteay Srei is an easy stop on route back to Siem Reap after lunch.

Day 3: *Visit the Sarus Crane Reserve at Ang Trapaeng Thmor (ATT)*

Originating as a reservoir on the Angkorian highway 66, ATT was rebuilt as a man made reservoir by slave labour during the Khmer Rouge regime in 1976. The reservoir is now a Sarus Crane reserve administered by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) with over 300 of these magnificent birds congregating to feed in the dry season along with another 198 recorded bird species, 18 of which are globally threatened. By February the dry season will be well underway and a few pairs of Black-necked Storks frequent the site along with many of the large water birds seen at Prek Toal; Black-headed Ibis, Milky and Painted Storks, Spot-billed Pelicans, Oriental Darters, Asian Openbills and Greater and Lesser Adjutants.



Sarus Crane at ATT. Photo © Eleanor Briggs

A few pairs of Bengal Floricans breed here during the dry months though it is wary and a treat rather than a certainty to see. Other grassland specialists including Red Avadavat, Blue-breasted Quail, and the 3 species of lark occurring in Cambodia. 6 species of duck (A 2010 February Tour lead by Paul Nielsen spotted Tufted Duck) four of which are resident including Comb Duck, can be seen along with birds of prey rare in the rest of the country such as Black Kite, Eastern Marsh and Pied Harriers (A Short toed Snake Eagle was seen by the same group). Numerous waders, rails and shore birds can be found in the marshy belts of aquatic habitat.

In February 2010 the critically endangered Eld's Deer was seen in large numbers of 20+ on most SVC visits to the site.

ATT is about 2 hours from Siem Reap depending on the route taken which varies according to feedback from previous trips and the local guides in order to see species of interest along the way. Silk is traditionally manufactured in the adjacent village of Phnom Srok and there is a small Angkorian temple 10km from the WCS Station.

An option requiring an additional night would be to visit Banteay Chma one of

the most significant Angkorian temples in Cambodia, which is only an hour beyond ATT, accommodation is available next to the temple in a comfortable home-stay.

In 2010 SVC will start working with WCS to further involve the local community in eco-tourism starting with local guides who will be responsible for locating in advance the Sarus Crane and other target species. The conservation contribution or entrance fee that each visitor pays is used for local development and conservation projects such as nest protection and a 'rice bank' which provides an insurance of this staple food for the local community in case of rice crop failure.

Day 4: *Visit the Core Bird Reserve of Prek Toal on the Tonle Sap Great Lake close to Prek Toal floating village, for Greater Adjutant and large water bird colonies.*

The Tonle Sap is the largest natural lake in South East Asia, fed by the phenomenal annual backflow of water from the Mekong River. Situated in the North West corner of the lake, Prek Toal core bird reserve is home to the largest breeding colonies of water birds in South East Asia.

The reserve covers 22,000 hectares of seasonally flooded forest where only the tallest trees stand proud of the lake during the annual flood, providing a habitat for cormorants, pelicans, storks, and many other birds to roost and nest.

The village of Prek Toal, adjacent to the reserve floats at the river mouth of the Sangke River where it flows into the lake. Every house is built on a platform of bamboo and moves according to the water level throughout the year. Schools, local restaurants, a church, even vegetable patches, pig-pens and crocodile farms all float.



Spot-billed Pelicans in Prek Toal Core Reserve. Photo © Jan Mathhysen

In Cambodia and throughout South East Asia, Prek Toal is unmatched for the number and population of endangered water birds it supports during the dry season. Large numbers of cormorants, storks and pelicans are virtually guaranteed from January to May along with herons, egrets and terns.

The sanctuary harbours seven species of global conservation significance: Spot-billed Pelican, Milky and Painted Storks, Lesser Adjutant, Greater Adjutant, Black-headed Ibis and Oriental Darter and has a globally significant population of Grey-headed Fish Eagle.

Since the Core Reserve was declared in 2002 and came under the protection of Ministry of Environment as advised by WCS, the numbers of all the above species have increased.

Day trips to Prek Toal generally leave Siem Reap at 5am for Chong Khneas, about 10km by road, which acts as the Siem Reap port on the Tonle Sap Lake. The Group transfers to a boat for the journey to Prek Toal. Depending on the lake water levels the boat journey cuts through the flooded scrub surrounding Chong Khneas and a small band of primary forest lining the lake where the boat moors for breakfast. At Prek Toal the group transfers to a local boat, which is part of an initiative to help spread income from eco-tourism to the local village economy, and heads off into the core reserve for a WCS observation platform next to a bird colony. A pack lunch can be organised allowing the group to maximise the time spent bird watching or they can return to Prek Toal for a Khmer lunch in a floating house. A village tour by paddle-boat can be organised before returning to Siem Reap.

(Note; overnight trips to Prek Toal can be organised with accommodation in the village offering the opportunity for sunrise or sunset bird watching in the core reserve)

Day 5 – 7: *Transfer to Tmatboey via the Florican Grasslands for Bengal Florican. Overnight Tmatboey Lodge winner of the Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Award.*

The critically endangered Bengal Florican and many other water-birds are found in the grasslands around the Tonle Sap lake. WCS has worked with local communities to set up Integrated Farming and Biodiversity Areas (IFBAs) to conserve prime florican habitats. SVC bird watching trips give an income to the villagers who assist the SVC Guide in locating the birds.



Bengal Florican in IFBA. Photo © Allan Michaud

Finding the florican is usually easy, as they have been monitored since the start of the WCS conservation project in 2002. The peak display time is between dawn and 9am and then again between 4.30pm and dusk.

The Manchurian Reed Warbler is a winter visitor, found in the tall grass and scrub away from water. Greater-spotted and Imperial Eagles winter in the area feeding on the abundant rodents. There are large numbers of Eastern Marsh Harriers and smaller number of Pied Harriers wintering in the area, along with a few Black Kites, Peregrines and numerous resident Brahminy Kites. Oriental Plover pass through in March.

The IFBA's are reached from NR6 (the main road from Siem Reap to Phnom Penh). After visiting the Florican grasslands the group will back track along the N6 to the small town of Dam Daek and the turn for the temples of Beng Melea (approx. 70km from Dam Daek) and Koh Ker a further 40km. Either 1 or both of these temples are well worth a visit if the group has time. Tmatboey, dependent on the road conditions is about 3 hours driving time from Siem Reap.

The Tmatboey Ibis Site is a conservation project set up by WCS together with the Cambodian Government and Tmatboey village. Once it was realised that the site had potential for bird watching tourism a local committee was elected which built the guest accommodation and with training from SVC provides the services for the bird watching groups that visit. In return for the income that this brings the villagers have signed no hunting and land conversion agreements.



Giant Ibis at Tmatboey. Photo © Ron Hoff

The Lodge is comprised of a central recreational thatched building and 4 surrounding bungalows each with 2 double en-suite rooms with solar powered electricity. The accommodation is basic but comfortable.

Tmatboey is a remote Khmer village of 220 families situated in the centre of the Northern Plains of Cambodia, within the Khulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary, the country's largest protected area. Tmatboey is 1 of only 2 known nesting sites in Asia for the Giant Ibis that use large trees in the forest away from the village. White-shouldered Ibis are found closer to the village where they are reliant on the grassland clearings amongst the dipterocarp forest. Woolly-necked Stork are relatively common and can be seen in flocks of over 40. Greater-spotted Eagle regularly over-winter and Grey-headed Fish Eagle and White-rumped Falcon occur at low densities. The Pale-capped Pigeon is another highlight along with an amazing diversity of woodpeckers and Brown Fish Owl, Spotted Wood Owl and Brown Wood Owl. In February 2010 night walks spotted Collared and Oriental Scops Owl, a mystery Aquila Eagle was seen on the same trip.



After settling in to their accommodation the group can take a short walk through the open forest to where the White-shouldered Ibis come to roost at sunset. The next day will start early around 4 or 4.30am with a quick cup of tea or coffee, then a drive and a walk to less disturbed areas of forest where Giant Ibis have been located. Returning around 9am for breakfast at the Lodge.

White-shouldered Ibis at Tmaboey, photo © James Eaton

The group can discuss with the SVC Guide how they wish to spend the day outside the sunrise and sunset birding. Packed lunches can be arranged if they want to spend more time in the forest and night drives / walks can spot the owls and Savannah Night Jar. The village of Tmatboey is remote and self-sufficient. SVC organises an optional village tour, which takes in local trades as well as the school, a market garden, a still for sugar palm wine and points out the projects that the visitor's conservation contributions have assisted.

Day 8: AM birding Tmatboey. Transfer to vulture restaurant at Veal Krous near Dongphlet Village near Chhep. Overnight tented accommodation Veal Krous.

After a last morning's birding and breakfast the group will make their way to Tbeng Meanchey the Provincial Capitol of Preah Vihear Province and on to the village of Dongphlet in the Chhep Protected Forest where as part of WCS conservation program a vulture restaurant is set up to feed the 3 critically endangered species of vulture; Red-headed, White-rumped and Slender-billed.



Vultures at feeding station Veal Krous photo © Alan Michaud

Journey times to Dongphlet village from Tbeng Meanchey are shrinking as the road is improved and will probably be less than 3 hours in 2011, so the group will get the chance for sunset birding perhaps catching a sight of Crested Treeswift, Black Baza, or Collared Falconet (if not already seen at Tmatboey). The 2010 February Tour lead by Paul Nielsen stopped on route, near an ancient baray (moat) and caught site of a White-winged Duck circling the pool.

For some the highlight of the whole itinerary is the Vulture Restaurant at Veal

Krous near Dongphlet, where tents will be set up for the night. Before dawn the group will make their way to a hide positioned not far from where a cow has been killed. Up to 70 vultures maybe present often competing for the carcass with Golden Jackal. In addition to the 3 critically endangered vultures, Cinereous and Himalayan Griffin have been seen.

Day 9: *Transfer to Okoki for White winged Duck. Overnight Okoki*

After breakfast the group will move on approx 30 km through increasingly remote dry deciduous dipterocarp forest (DDF) to the camp site at Okoki where pools in a line of mixed evergreen forest following a water course provide habitat for White winged Duck. This is one of the most pristine parts of Cambodia with a low population density so there is a possibility of seeing mammals. Gaur were seen in 2010 and in 2009 elephants trampled through the campsite during the rainy season when no one was present. Pileated Gibbon are regularly heard and occasionally seen and there are signs of Banteng, Sambar, Wild pig, Muntjac, Long-tailed macaque, Fishing Cat and Leopard.



White-winged Duck at Okoki

Safari style tents are set up at the Okoki campsite where a well has been dug along with drop toilets crowned with porcelain lavatories. As for Veal Krous a cook will travel with the group and necessary supplies of beer can be organized. The group will stay here for 2 nights rising early to walk through the forest to arrive predawn at hides constructed next to the pools favored by the duck. 2 trapaeng have been located approx. 8km from the campsite where the ducks have also been spotted. Bird watching throughout the day should find a plethora

of DDF specialists including Green Peafowl and Pygmy-falcon, which are resident and night walks could highlight Bay Owl and Blythe's Frogmouth. In 2010 the group succeeded in calling in Bar-bellied Pitta (also seen in 2009) and noted that bird watching at Okoki was hard work though rewarding.

Day 10: *Transfer to Kampong Thom. Overnight Hotel Kampong Thom*

With the improved road the journey time has been shortened (approx. 7 hours from Okoki to Kampong Thom), which should allow for some bird watching en-route including the Tonle Sap Grasslands, this time further South around Kampong Thom. The road runs close to a significant pre Angkorian temple called Sambor Pre Kuk 30km from Kampong Thom, which offers an interesting non-birding diversion. The hotel is clean with en-suite hot showers, aircon and good Khmer food.



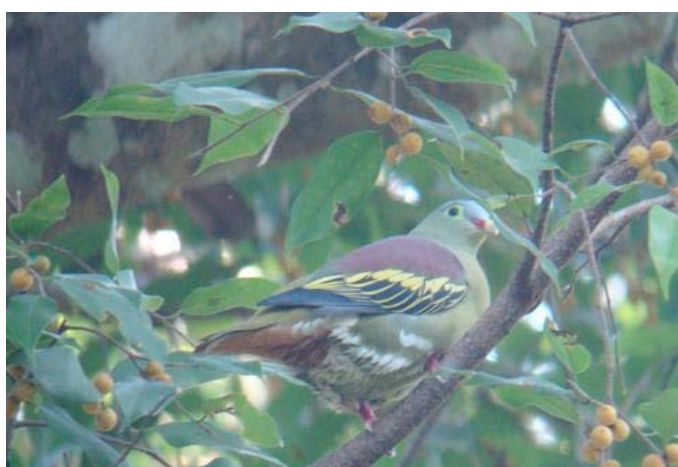
Sambor Prek Kuk, photo © Nick Butler

Day 11 - 13: *Early morning birding in grasslands around Kampong Thom, transfer to Seima Protected Forest (SPF). Afternoon birding in mixed evergreen Southern Annamitic Forest. Stay WCS Station Koh Seima.*

After an early rise and a last look for grassland specialists on the flood plains near Kampong Thom the group will transfer to Keo Seima in Mondulkiri crossing the Mekong River at Kampong Cham which offers a good lunch stop. From Kampong Cham the journey takes approximately 4 hours, which means a pre-sunset arrival at the WCS Station just outside the small town of Keo Seima for walk through the adjacent forest.

The SPF is the most recent addition to SVC's itinerary with visits starting in 2009. The eco-tourist project is in its infancy but the aim is again to follow the successful model at Tmatboey, in effect trading the benefits of ecotourism for conservation agreements from the local communities.

The Orange necked Partridge has been seen and more often heard calling but does not seem to be following any calendar, which would help us to improve the chance of seeing this enigmatic bird. This is more than made up for the diversity of other species reflecting the mixed habitat types; Bamboo, evergreen and DDF. In 2010 a new trail behind the WCS Station offered sightings of White-browed Scimitar Babbler and Germain's Peacock Pheasant, Red-vented Barbet, Scaly-breasted and Orange-breasted partridge. Orange-necked partridge has been heard on this new trail.



Thick-billed Green Pigeon near Kao Seima © Sang Mony (telephone camera through scope)

Cambodia maybe the best place in the world for woodpeckers. Great Slaty can be spotted at forested sites throughout the trip and at SPF noteworthy sightings include; White-bellied, Pale-headed, Heart-spotted and Black-and-buff Woodpeckers. In total 16 species were seen on the 2010 February Tour lead by Paul Nielsen.

The presence of a fruiting tree draws in myna's, barbets, pigeons and hornbills and the pigeon shown above.

The SPF is home to the largest population of Black-shanked Douc in the world, along with Northern Pig-tailed and Long-tailed Macaque and Yellow-cheeked Crested Gibbon, which are regularly seen. In late February 2010 a group spotted Gaur around 9am close to the WCS Station.



Black-shanked Douc ©James Eaton

A feature of the itinerary at SPF is a night drive and the possibility of mammals including Common-palm and Small-toothed Civets and Giant Flying Squirrel as well as Lesser Mouse-Deer or Lesser Oriental Chevrotain and Pygmy Lorises.

Day 14: *AM birding SPF, transfer to Kratie for afternoon birding. Stay overnight Kratie*

After birding along the trails around Keo Seima in the morning the group will make what is now an easy 2 ½ hour transfer to Kratie. 15 km North of Kratie are the Kampi Pools where the Irrawaddy Dolphin can be seen from a boat as well as the Mekong Wagtail (*Moctacilla samveasnae*, named after Sam Veasna). The river habitat is under threat from Chinese dams already constructed and proposed dams in Laos and Cambodia which if constructed will mean the dolphin along with other riverine bird species will become extirpated from Cambodia.

There are a number of hotels in Kratie with clean air-con rooms and en-suite bathrooms and restaurants serving Khmer and Western food.

Day 15: *AM birding Kratie then return to Siem Reap*

Early morning birding should allow Asian Golden and Streaked Weaver to be spotted (the Baya Weaver is a sighting at ATT) then after breakfast the group will set off for the long drive back to Siem Reap which takes about 8 hours.

A Few Notes on Cambodia

Accommodation & Food

A huge variety of hotels, B&B's and restaurants are on offer in Siem Reap dependent on budget and taste (SVC generally books clients into 'Boutique' accommodation in comfortable well run hotels that incorporate Khmer culture). Accommodation at the other sites is as described in the text. Food outside Siem Reap is generally Khmer and for the most part safe. Bottled water is carried with the SVC transport and available everywhere.

Things to Bring and What to Wear

Most SVC trips occur in the cool dry season from December to March. This is the best time to visit Cambodia when the daytime temperatures are low thirties and the heat is dry. Nighttime temperatures are typically in the low twenties though occasionally a cold snap will drop to 13 or 14. By the end of February / beginning of March the temperature has started to climb both day and nighttime reaching a peak in April / May.

Loose natural cloth clothing (with a hat) is most comfortable giving protection from the sun and mosquitoes. Most things are available in Siem Reap usually cheaper than in Europe or America but if your schedule allows little time the usual items for hot country countryside will help make your trip enjoyable; sun cream, mosquito repellent, a torch and earplugs.

Bird Watching

During the course of the itinerary SVC Groups encounter a range of different habitat; ATT – marsh, dry paddy, grassland and lake. Prek Toal – Semi submerged forest, flooded scrub and open lake. Florican Grasslands – Natural grassland and

paddy on floodplain. Tmatboey – Deciduous dry dipterocarp forest (DDF). Okoki and Vulture Restaurant – DDF with pockets of mixed evergreen and forest trapaeng (pools). Seima Protected Forest – Southern Annamitic forest of mixed evergreen, DDF and bamboo. Kratie – Riverine habitat. Bird watching is from the car, by boat and on foot. Hiking boots, which give ankle protection against the small risk of snakebites are recommended for the forest walks. SVC has a couple of scopes, which it will try to allocate if the group has not brought one however in peak season they may have already been taken.

Health & Insurance

*Necessary immunizations should be discussed with your own Doctor but from an expatriates point of view malaria is present in the forests where we visit and dengue fever occurs in the city's though is much less prevalent during the dry season. Numerous stomach bugs are widely available though tend to be more of a challenge to those living in Cambodia rather than visitors who are usually more careful about what they eat and drink. In general food is cooked to order so food poisoning especially in the cooler less humid dry season is unlikely. The provision of emergency health cover while improving is still limited and in case of serious accidents, illness or snakebites it maybe necessary for you to be airlifted out of the country, **you must have health insurance** to cover this eventuality.*

Cambodia is a developing country with a limited though rapidly changing infrastructure, which together with the incredible seasonal changes as exemplified most graphically by the Tonle Sap Lake means that schedules have to have a degree of flexibility. The rapid pace of development mean that Cambodia will change irrevocably over the coming period and the next few years maybe the last chance to catch a country that is an anomaly in the 21st century.

SVC's itineraries take in the WCS Conservation sites across Cambodia where because of its partnership with WCS SVC has exclusive access to environmentally sensitive areas of special biodiversity. These sites by their very nature are often in remote areas where local communities have limited exposure to other Cambodians let alone foreigners. This cultural gap is bridged by the multi lingual SVC Guide but sometimes what seem like the simplest tasks can become very complicated so please have patience.