

Myanmar. January 02 – 07, 2013.

By Bengt Legnell



One of thousands of Temples in Bagan. Most of them are almost one thousand years old.

The journey to Myanmar proved to be a bit of a nightmare to organize. Since there are restrictions on transferring money to the country, it is difficult to book hotels or domestic flights (be prepared for flight-schedules that may change at a moment notice) The Burmese tour-operators I contacted seemed to be both very expensive and a bit unreliable (they gave me wrong info about flights f.ex.)

In the end, I felt “to heck with it all”, and decided to do it myself instead. (This meant that we had to skip traveling to Mt. Victoria...who wants to pay \$12-1400 for 3 nights there??...)

Fortunately, I have a very good old friend, a Scotch-man, who presides over an international school in Yangon for a good many years. With his help I managed to do necessary bookings.

– Thank you for all your help Isaac! The trip would have been impossible w/o your input.-

This made the trip a whole lot cheaper and since I had traveled these parts of the country last year, I think we did OK without bird-guides etc...

In order to make sure everything was in place before the others in the group arrived, I went ahead and spent a few days in Yangon making last minute check-up’s –

Börje G, Olle K and Bengt P arrived around 11.00 from KL and only 4 hours later we all touched ground at the small airport in Heho. Here Ko Pan, an old birding-friend I met at Ang San Suu Chi’s election-rally last year (he was the election manager for that province) met us and drove us to our hotel I Kalaw. Unfortunately he was unable to spend much time with us, as he was engaged with another birding-party.

We did the first two days birding the Shan-hills outside Kalaw, the following 2 days we spent at Inle lake and ended the trip by flying from Heho to Bagan where we spent the last 2 days.

It is not the ideal to spend such a short time on these locations...both Kalaw and Bagan could easily merit another day each...but since we planned to travel on to Sabah/Borneo after the visit here, we could only spend 6 days in Myanmar.



The Shan State hill country outside Kalaw.

We did a lot of walking in the hill-country outside Kalaw. There were quite a lot of birds...but, oh so shy...! Not easy birding. Some of us got to see the main target, the semi endemic (there is also a small population on the Thai side of the border) **Burmese Yuhina**. Other nice birds here were; **2 Bluebearded Bee-eaters, 2 Speckled Piculets, 4 Grey-capped Woodpeckers, 2 Slenderbilled & 4 Maroon Orioles, 3 Japanese Tits, 10 Red-vented, 2 Ashy, 10 Black & 5 Mountain Bulbuls**. There were lots of Swallows in the air; among all the **Barnswallows** we also saw **5 Wire-tailed & 10 Asian House Martins**. On the forest floor I found **1 Asian Stubtail & 1 Yellow-streaked Warbler**...there were also **Dusky** (in the lower agricultural parts) & **Raedde's Warbler** (more a forest edge bird), **2 Rusty-breasted & 4 White-browed Scimitar-Babblers, 7 Golden Babblers, 3 Silver-eared & 6 White-browed Laughing-thrushes, 3 Spectacled Barwings, 20 Silver-eared Mesias, 10 Grey-headed Parrotbills, 1 Mrs Gould's Sunbird, 1 Brown-throated Tree-creaper, 2 Eye-browed & 2 Black-throated Thrushes**. There were also **3 Black-backed Forktails** in the stream. At the forest edge we saw **2 Rubythroats, 1 Pale Blue Flycatcher, 2 Daurian & 1 White-capped Redstart**—nice! We heard the strange call of the **Black-tailed Crake** (response to play-back) in a small patch of weedy marsh in the middle of a small, valley-bottom rice field, just outside the forest.

In the grassland we saw **1 Yellow-eyed Babbler, Striated Grassbirds & Brown-breasted Bulbul**. Not too bad for 1½ days birding.

After the visit to Kalaw, we took a mini-van down to Inle lake. We spent one afternoon and one morning on a little boat in the lake...think that gave us enough time to see the birds there. We did not have time to enter the bird-sanctuary in the lake (most of the wild duck-population is there, but we could see some of them at the border to the sanctuary)

I got surprised how genuine the people were here. In spite of being a “tourist destination”, the people were helpful and very friendly.



Yellow-eyed Babbler



Red-vented Bulbul



Pale Blue Flycatcher



White-capped Water-Redstart

The main targets at the lake were a small population of **Jerdon’s Bushchats** and **Collared Myna**. Both were fairly easy to find, if you know where to look...fortunately Ko Pang had given us that info...we found both along the canal between the city and the lake. The Myna we also found at a village on the north-eastern side of the lake, passed the bird-sanctuary.



The ancient Kobe 2-stroke engine is used for a lot of things...pumping water, plowing rice-fields...or like on the photo...just put it on the body of an ol'orry.



A typical, small scale, valleybottom mix of rice & vegetable cultivation. It was here we found the Black-tailed Crake. Photo; Bengt Petersén.

Other birds we saw during our visit here were; **15 Ruddy Shelducks, 2-300 Indian Spotted Ducks, 1 Northern Showler, 5 Northern Pintails, 50 Garganeys, 5 Common Pochards & 15 Ferruginous Ducks** just outside the birdsanctuary. Among the reeds & FLOATING Vegetable cultivation (they are planted on top of floating islands made up of vegetable-waist, hay & lake-mud. Tomatoes and other vegetables are grown in the lake this way) we saw **2 Gray-headed Swamphens** (all these splits make me cracy!), and, what I could determine,... **2 Jacksnipes?, 4 Fork-tailed Swifts cooki, 2 Pied Kingfishers, 3 Brown Prinias, 4 Collared Mynas, 5 Baya-weavers & 3 Jerdon's Bushchat.** In the sky above us soared **30 Openbilled Storks, 5 March-Harriers, 5 Himalayan Buzzards, 3 Black Kites & 5 Black-shouldered Kites.**



Life is simple around the lake, Myanmar's second biggest. It is very shallow, not much deeper than a few meters during rainy season...down to less than ½ meter during dry season



Since the introduction of the floating vegetable plantations in the beginning of 1960's the size of the lake has decreased substantially. Many fishermen are forced to leave their homes.



The ethnic Inthana fishermen have a very strange way of paddling their canoes, standing up, with the oar placed around their leg. As the lake is very shallow and in places full of sea-weeds etc, they need to stand up to see where to go when they propell the canoe forward. (we got stuck a few times) Some of the fish caught here caters to the aquarium trade with beautiful, endemic, Sawbwa Barbs, Crossbanded Dwarf & Lake Inle Damio.



Floating Tomato garden.



Houses have to be built on stilts, as water levels seasonally change 1½-2½ meter in the lake.

After our stay in the Shan mountains, we caught a flight to Bagan –with a quick stop in Mandalay first - (the airlines have two prices, one for nationals, one for visitors. We paid about \$100/domestic flight.) After some problems with the room booking - the guesthouse we had booked were full, in spite of having confirmed our booking – Bagan was so different from peacefull Inle and Kalaw. Here the almighty \$\$\$ ruled, the more of them, the merrier. I think this is what democrocy means to many here...freedom choose...to get rich – quickly - at any means...and to get this “freedom of choice” from the “inventors themselves” ...who are the only one who can afford, or posses the \$ to pay the price for this “democracy... by turning their

pockets inside out, raise hotel-prices from \$50 to 250 (that happened in Yangon) impose “tourist-taxes” or entrance fees of \$20-100..or more...when you enter a city or temple...etc, etc...after all, we “ choose” to come here by our own free will...

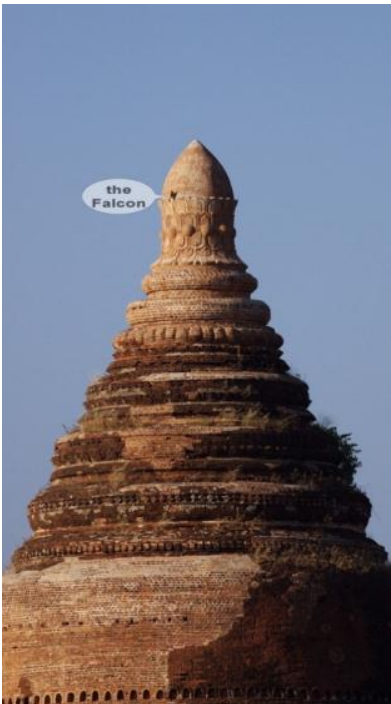
...but Bagan is good birding!... If you manage to go beyond the temples...or to the remote ones, maybe out in the beanfields...wow! In just one fantastic morning, we found all 4 Bagan endemics. First the hard to get **Hodded Treepie**, that actually came flying to greet us, just as we got off a Taxi behind the most remote tempel-ruin, south of the main tempel area. Then, the bean-fields between the tempel-ruines suddenly teemed with **Burmese Bushlarks**. Suddenly a flock of beautifully coloured **Jerdon’s Minivets** were feeding all around us. The hardest to get, was the supposedly easiest...but after some time we saw a flock of of the large **White-troated Babblers** as well. A **Lagger falcon** hunted between the temple-ruins.



Jerdon’s Minivet.



White-throated Babbler



Lagger Falcon



Jerdon's Minivet



Hooded Treepie



Burmese Bushlark

Early the following morning, we took a walk down to the jetty by Irrawaddy River. We had arranged a for a boat to help us bird along the river the day before. After some major repair of the engine -they took it apart B4 the motor started - we went up-river to some sandbanks, where we had spotted about **100 Ruddy Shelducks**. We also saw a **Common Shelduck** there. There were quite a few **Sandlarks** in the sand-dunes. We had no idea where to find the other 3 targetbirds on this cruise, so by chance we turned around and went down the river. After carefully have examined the sandbanks (and another total breakdown of our engine) we suddenly realized they were full of well camouflaged **Little Pratincoles**, 100's of them...it would have been so easy to overlook them, as they sat 50-100 meters up on the sandbanks in the river. Then, on the opposite side of Bagan we saw our second target, the **White-tailed Stonechat**, a male sitting in a bush and then flying off, flashing the white in the tail. A little further up the river, Bengt P spotted the last of our birds...or in fact there were 4 of them sitting right by the riverside - as told by their name - **River Lapwings**. We could not spend a whole lot of time in Bagan either, as our flight back to Yangon left later that same afternoon.

In conclusion; Myanmar is definitely worth a visit. Ideally, one should spend about 9 days only on the 3 locations described in this report. To arrange the trip from abroad can be quite costly, and difficult because of the present banking-restriction (hopefully, they will be lifted very soon)



Sandlark



Small Pratincole



River Lapwing



Ruddy Shelduck

Those Bank-restrictions can be quite hard. F.ex. when I tried to send some money to a bank account in a British Bank, to a British citizen, with a British name and address...I happened to mention in the bank-order, that the money was for air tickets in MYANMAR! The Swedish Bank – Nordea – a few days later...while I already had left for the jungles in Cambodia...refused to send the money...causing a lot of problems...first accepting...then refusing...

It is very easy however, to arrange airticketing, hotelbooking etc right in Yangon, once you arrive there...just try to avoid traveling on holidays and weekends...aircrafts are quite new, European and work well (turboprop) Price is around \$100 for a domestic flight to Bagan or Heho (Kalaw/Inle) There is also riverboats going from Yangon...I never tried them, but plan to go to Pleiku in the south by boat next trip (\$70)...busses & trains are very slow 10-14 hours to Bagan or Kalaw! Hotels are nice and still (God knows for how long) fairly cheap in Kalaw (here you also find the 2 best birdguides, Gideon & Ko Pan, birders who not only guide but spend month in the field, doing surveys on Gurney's Pitta and Spoonbilled Sandpiper etc) and Inle. A nice clean standard room is about \$40-50, slightly more expensive in Bagan for the same standard...but plenty of cheap backpackers lodges...

If you go to this fascinating country, remember to bring \$\$\$, Cash! That is still the only way to pay! And avoid Yangon. Don't stay there longer than necessary! It is expensive to stay there. If you have time, though, an early morning's visit to Shwedagon Pagoda is worth it. We did a sunrise stint there...saw the sun lit up the real gold plated stupa (30 tons of pure gold) and all the diamonds etc (4-5000 carats together) **2 Peregrine Falcons** sitting on top, hunting Pigeons!

Bird-list

Ducks & Grebes.

Common Shelduck.....1 in the Irrawaddy River outside Bagan.
Ruddy Shelduck.....15 in Inle Lake, about 100 in Irrawaddy/Bagan
Indian Spot-billed Duck.....5 on the way to Kalaw, 100 in Inle Lake, 20 in Bagan
Northern Showler.....1 in Inle lake, 1 in Irrawaddy/Bagan
Northern Pintail.....5 in Inle Lake
Common Pochards.....5 in Inle Lake.
Ferruginous Duck.....15 in Inle Lake.
Little Grebe.....a few in many suitable locations.

Storks, Herons & Cormorants

Asian Openbill.....about 30 in Inle, 1 in Bagan
Pond Heron SP.....All 3 probably occurs here; India, China or Java?
Eastern Cattle Egret.....A few in all locations.
Great Egret.....Didn't pay much attention. One in Bagan.
Intermediate Egret.....Didn't pay much attention. 1 in Inle Lake.
Little Egret.....Some here and there.
Little Cormorant.....Didn't pay much attention. 1 in Inle Lake
Indian Cormorant.....Seemed to be the most common Cormorant in Inle
Great Cormorant.....At least one in Inle Lake.

Raptors.

Crested Honey Buzzard.....1 in Kalaw, 1 in Bagan.
Black-winged Kite.....5/day in Inle lake
Black Kite.....3 in Inle. Think they were Black, not Black-Eared
Western Marsh Harrier..... Saw 3 in Inle. At least 1 western.
Eastern Marsh harrier.....1 in Kalaw, 1 in Inle
Crested Goshawk.....1 displaying in Kalaw.
Shikra.....1 in Kalaw, 1 in Inle lake.
Besra.....1 in Kalaw
Grey-faced Buzzard.....2 in Kalaw
Himalayan Buzzard.....1 in Kalaw, 5 in Inle Lake
Common Kestrel.....1 in Kalaw
Lagger Falcon.....1 observation both days in Bagan
Peregrine Falcon.....2 on top of the stupa on Swedagon, Yangon.

Crakes etc.

Black-tailed Crake.....1 heard well in Kalaw

Grey-headed Swamphen.....*porphyrio poliocephalus* splitter! 2 | Inle

Common Morehen.....3 on the way to Kalaw, 3 in Kalaw

Euroasian Coot.....over 200 in Inle Lake

Waders.

Black-winged Stilt.....5 in bagan

River Lapwing.....4 in Bagan (Irrawaddy)

Little Ringed Plover.....Very common on sandbanks along Irrawaddy

Kentish Plover.....about 10 along Irrawaddy

Greater Painted Snipe.....2 in Inle

Jack Snipe?.....flushed two very small snipes against strong sun.

Common Snipe.....2 on Irrawaddy sandbanks

Spotted Redshank.....7 in Irrawaddy, Bagan

Green Sandpiper.....4 in Inle, common in Bagan/Irrawaddy

Common Sandpiper.....2 in Bagan

Temminck's Stint.....Common along the sandbanks, Irrawaddy

Pratincoles & Gulls

Small Pratincole.....100's on sandbanks along Irrawaddy.

Brownheaded Gull.....Seen in numbers at Inle & Irrawaddy.

Doves & Pigeons.

Rock Dove.....Common in all locations.

Oriental Turtle Dove.....Common.

Spotted Dove.....Common

Cuckoos.

Greater Coucal.....On on the way to Kalaw, 1-2 in Bagan.

Greenbilled Malkoha.....2 in Kalaw

Owls.

Asian Barred Owl.....Heard in bagan

Swifts.

Himalayan Swiftlet.....4 in Kalaw

Germain's Swiftlet.....Didn't look, but a few in Yangoon

Asian Palm Swift.....Common

House Swift.....*apus nipalensis?* splits! guess this one. Yangon

Fork-tailed Swift (Cook's Swift).....*apus cooki*. Split from *pacificus?*. 4 in Inle.

Rollers, Kingfishers, Bee-eaters & Hoopoes.

Indian Roller.....A few here & there...6 in Kalaw

Common Kingfisher.....1 in kalaw, 5 in Inle, 2 Bagan (Irrawaddy)

Black-capped Kingfisher.....1 in Inle

White-throated Kingfisher.....a few in Inle & Bagan (Irrawaddy)

Pied Kingfisher.....2 in Bagan (Irrawaddy)

Blue-bearded Bee-eater.....2 first day in Kalaw, 2 in Kalaw following day (not same)

Green Bee-eater.....up to 10 daily

Hoopoe.....about 4 daily in Bagan

Barbets.

Great Barbet.....2 in Kalaw.
Liniated Barbet.....1 in Bagan
Blue-throated Barbet.....2 in Kalaw
Coppersmith Barbet.....1 in Bagan

Woodpeckers.

Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker.4/day in Kalaw.
Stripe-breasted Woodpecker.....2 in kalaw.
Greater Flameback.....1 in Kalaw

Flycatcher-shrikes, Woodswallows, Ioras & Minivets.

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike.....6 in Kalaw, 1 in Bagan
Ashy Wood-swallow.....1 in Bagan
Common Iora.....1 in Kalaw, 1 in Bagan.
Grey-chinned Minivet.....4 in Kalaw
Scarlet Minivet.....10-20 daily in Kalaw
Jerdon's Minivet.....10 in Bagan

Shrikes, Erpornis, Shrike-babblers.

Brown Shrike.....A few in all locations.
Burmese Shrike.....1 in Inle.
Long-tailed Shrike.....5-10 in Kalaw
White-bellied Erpornis.....2 in Kalaw
White-browed Shrike-Babbler.....1 in kalaw

Orioles & Drongos.

Slender-billed Oriole.....2-3 in Kalaw
Maroon Oriole.....4 in Kalaw
Black Drongo.....common
Ashy Drongo.....common in Kalaw
Bronze Drongo.....5 in Kalaw
Lesser racket-tailed Drongo.....1 in Kalaw

Fantails.

White-throated fantail.....a few in Kalaw & Inle

Magpies, Treepies & Crows.

Red-billed Blue Magpie.....7 in Kalaw
Grey Treepie.....Common in Kalaw
Hooded Treepie.....1 in Bagan
House Crow.....common

Tits.

Black-throated Tit.....Common in Kalaw (I leave specifics to hair-splitters)
Parus major-minor cinerereus.....4-5 in Kalaw. (I leave specifics to hair-splitters)



Jerdon's Minivet
Photo. Olle Karlsson



Horse & Ox carts are still very common way of transport in Myanmar. Photo, Bengt. Petersén

Larks.

Burmese Bush-Lark.....about 10-15 in Bagan



Burmese Bushlark

Sandlark.....fairly common on some sand-banks in Irrawaddy

Bulbuls.

Black-headed Bulbul.....a few in Kalaw

Black-crested Bulbul.....common in Kalaw.
 Red-whiskered Bulbul.....5 in Kalaw
 Red-vented Bulbul.....5-10 daily at all locations
 Flavescent Bulbul.....4 in Kalaw
 Streak-eared Bulbul.....some at all locations
 Mountain Bulbul.....5 in Kalaw
 Ashy Bulbul.....2-3 daily in Kalaw
 Black Bulbul.....5-10 daily in Kalaw

Martins & Swallows.

Brown-throated Martin.....think most Martins along Irrawaddy/Bagan are these
 Sand Martin.....a few in Inle
 Barn Swallow.....common
 Pacific Swallow.....2-3 in Irrawaddy/Bagan
 Wire-tailed Swallow.....5 outside Kalaw, a few in Bagan
 Asian House Martin.....10-20 daily in Kalaw/Inle. 3 in Bagan
 Red-rumped Swallow.....some among the Barn at all locations.

Stubtails & Warblers.

Asian Stubtail.....1 in Kalaw
 Dusky Warbler.....4-6 in Kalaw, a few in Bagan
 Tickell’s Leaf-Warbler.....about 5 in Bagan
 Yellow-streaked Warbler.....1 in Kalaw, 1 in Bagan
 Radde’s Warbler.....4 in Kalaw
 Yellow-browed Warbler.....common in Kalaw/Inle
 Greenish Warbler.....3-4 daily in Kalaw
 Blyth’s Leaf Warbler?.....1? These white-tailed are not easy....
 Davison’s Leaf Warbler.....5-7 daily in Kalaw....assume it was Davison’s...
 Marten’s Warbler.....1 in Kalaw
 Black-browed Reed Warbler.....a few in Inle and Bagan
 Oriental Reed-Warbler.....a few in Inle
 Striated Grassbird.....4 in Kalaw

Prinias.

Brown Prinia.....3 in Bagan
 Grey-breasted Prinia.....about 5 daily in Kalaw, 3 in Bagan
 Plain Prinia.....2 in Bagan

Babblers.

Puff-throated babbler.....3-5 daily in Kalaw
 White-throated babbler.....about 40 in Bagan
 White-browed Laughingthrush.....5-6/day in Kalaw
 Silver-eared Laughingthrush.....3 in Kalaw
 Golden Babbler.....7-8/day in Kalaw
 Pin-striped Tit-Babbler.....some daily, Kalaw
 Brown-Cheeked Fulvetta.....20 in Kalaw
 Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler.....2 in Kalaw.



White-browed Laughingthrush



White-throated Babbler

White-browed Scimitar-Babbler.....3-4/day in Kalaw

Yellow-eyed Babbler.....1 in Kalaw

Minlas, Liochiclas, Barwings & Sibias.

Blue-winged Minla.....10/day in Kalaw

Scarlet-faced Liocichla.....1 hörd I kalaw

Spectacled Barwing.....3 in Kalaw

Dark-backed Sibia.....common in Kalaw

Parrotbills.

Grey-headed Parrotbill.....10 in Kalaw.

Yuhinas.

Burmese Yuhina.....1-2/day in Kalaw

White-eyes.

Japanese White-eye.....20 in Kalaw

Nuthatches & Treecreepers.

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch.....7 in Kalaw

Brown-throated Treecreeper.....1 in Kalaw

Starlings & Mynas.

White-vented Myna.....common

Collared Myna.....4 in Inle

Common Myna.....common

Vinous-breasted Myna.....20 in Bagan

Black-collared Starling.....3 in Kalaw



Grey-headed Parrotbill



Vinous-breasted Starling.

Foto. Olle Karlsson

Thrushes.

Blue Whistling Thrush.....2 in Kalaw
Black-throated Thrush.....2 in Kalaw
Eye-browed Thrush.....2 in Kalaw

Robins, Redstarts , Forktails.

Siberian Rubythroat.....2 in Kalaw
Oriental Magpie-robin.....5 in Kalaw
Daurian redstart.....1+1 in Kalaw
White-capped Water-Redstart.....1 in Kalaw
Black-backed Forktail.....3 in Kalaw

Chats.

Siberian Stonechat.....Common in Kalaw
White-tailed Stonechat.....1 in Bagan (Irrawaddy)
Pied Bushchat.....common
Jerdon's Bushchat.....3 in Inle
Grey Bushchat.....1 in Bagan

Flycatchers.

Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher.....a few in Kalaw
Pale Blue Flycatcher.....1 in Kalaw
Taiga Flycatcher.....common
Black-naped Monarc.....a few in Kalaw

Leafbirds.

Orange-bellied Leafbird.....2 in Kalaw

Flowerpeckers & Sunbirds

Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker.....a few in Yangon
Yellow-vented Flowerpecker.....2 in Kalaw
Mrs. Gould's Sunbird.....1 in Kalaw
Black-throated Sunbird.....common in Kalaw
Olive-backed Sunbird.....a couple in Kalaw & Yangon

Sparrows, Weavers & Munias.

House Sparrow.....common in Kalaw & Bagan
Tree-Sparrow.....Common
Baya Weaver.....1+4 in Bagan
Scaly-breasted Munia.....common in Kalaw & Bagan

Wagtails & Pipits.

Eastern Yellow Wagtail.....1 in Kalaw, 1 in Bagan
Grey Wagtail.....a couple in Kalaw
White Wagtail.....a few every day
Paddyfield Pipit.....a few in Bagan
Olive-backed Pipit.....about 10 in Kalaw & Bagan.

If you want more information about Myanmar, feel free to send an email to;
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