ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

The Philippines

Highlights

18th February to 27th February 2023 (10 days)



Palawan Peacock-Pheasant by Erik Forsyth

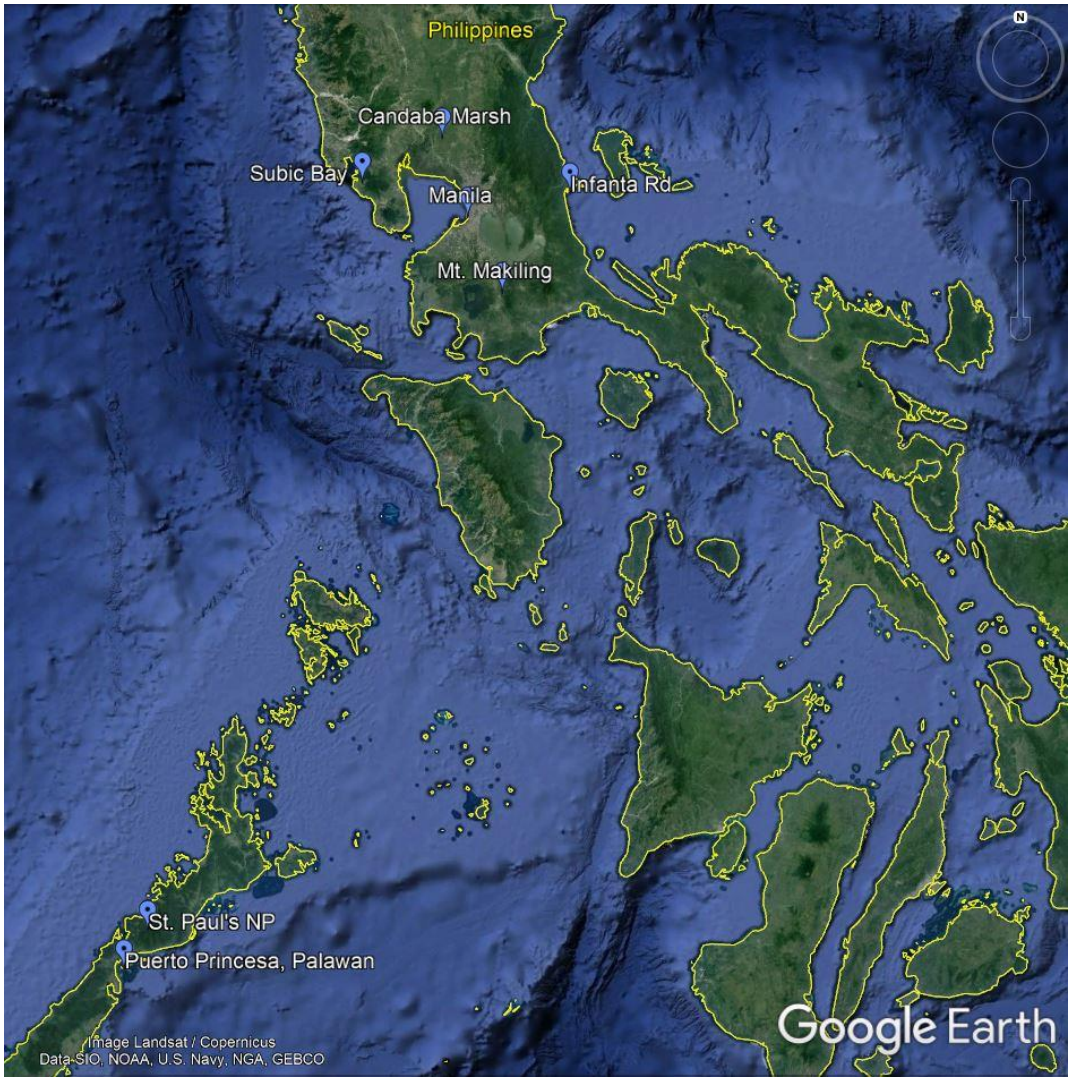
Our Philippines Highlights tour covers the very best birding sites for those with less time to spend in the field, but still wishing for a fantastic overview of the region's special species. During our tour, we can expect to encounter many of the islands' most critically endangered and endemic birds plus numerous other spectacular migrants and residents. Potential highlights include the stunning Palawan Peacock-Pheasant, Philippine Megapode, Red-vented (Philippine) Cockatoo, Palawan Frogmouth, Philippine Hawk-Owl, Scale-feathered and Rough-crested Malkoha, Spotted Wood Kingfisher, Whiskered, Hooded and Red-bellied Pitta, Blue-headed and Green Racket-tail, Palawan Hornbill, Ashy Thrush, Coleto, Balicassiao, Elegant and Palawan Tit, Palawan Flowerpecker, Guaiabero – and much besides!

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	**Manila to Subic Bay via La Mesa Park and Candaba Marsh**
Day 2	**Subic Bay area**
Day 3	**Subic Bay to Infanta Road**
Day 4	**Infanta Road**
Day 5	**Infanta Road to Mt. Makiling**
Day 6	**Mt. Makiling**
Day 7	**Mt. Makiling to Palawan (St Paul's National Park)**
Day 8	**Sabang (St Paul's National Park)**
Day 9	**Sabang to Puerta Princessa**
Day 10	**Iwahig AM, flight to Manila and depart**

TOUR ROUTE MAP



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…



Ashy Thrush by David Hoddinott

Day 1: Manila to Subic Bay via La Mesa Park and Candaba Marsh. Early this morning we will depart Manila and head to La Mesa Park, an area of forested trails, where will search for Ashy Thrush, Lowland White-eye and Red-bellied Pitta. After lunch, we will continue on our journey to Subic Bay in central Luzon. Along the way, we will stop at the inconspicuous Candaba Marsh to search for a number of waterbirds, that might include Philippine Duck, Philippine Swamphen, Island Collared Dove, Barred Rail, Plain Bush-hen, the outrageous Pheasant-tailed Jacana (often in breeding plumage), White-browed Crake, Watercock and up to three species of bittern, namely Yellow, Cinnamon and the scarce Black. After birding through this fantastic site, one of the few accessible wetlands remaining in the Philippines, we will continue our journey to Subic Bay, where we will spend the next two nights. On one of the nights we will search for owls which may produce Chocolate Boobook, Luzon Hawk-Owl and Philippine Scops Owl.

Day 2: Subic Bay area. Today we will bird Subic Bay's tall tropical forests in search of several scarce Luzon endemics. At dawn, it is sometimes possible to see thousands of Philippine and Golden-crowned Flying Foxes returning to daytime roosts before we arrive at our birding site. Among other more widespread Philippine specialities, we will specifically be targeting the localised Green Racket-tail that often whizzes past through the canopy, the tangle-loving Rufous Coucal, Blackish Cuckooshrike, the scarce arboreal White-lored Oriole and the seldom-seen White-fronted Tit. Although uncommon, Sooty Woodpecker is regularly encountered at this site and we should be able to find this massive woodpecker as well as more widespread species, including Whiskered Treeswift, Purple Needletail and perhaps Blue-naped Parrot.



Chocolate Boobook by David Hoddinott

Day 3: Subic Bay to Infanta Road. After some final birding this morning, looking for species we are missing, we leave Subic Bay for the Infanta Road. We should arrive at our motel on the Infanta Road in the late afternoon in time for some exploration. Species possible include Plain Bush-hen, Long-tailed and Brown Shrike, Blue-throated Bee-eater, Philippine Coucal, Plaintive Cuckoo, Ameline, Glossy and Pygmy Swiftlets, White-throated Kingfisher, White-breasted Woodswallow and Black-naped Oriole. As the evening rolls on we will look out for Great-eared Nightjar and Luzon Hawk-Owl.



Coleto by Dubi Shapiro

Day 4: Infanta Road. Departing early this morning, we will arrive at our first birding site in time to search for the highly sought - after Whiskered Pitta, a bird of forested hill-slopes that has been noted regularly at this site. At this time of the year the birds are calling and may be breeding which will enhance our chances of seeing this rare bird.

Here mixed flocks often contain the active Blue-headed Fantail, Philippine Bulbul, Balicassiao, Coleto, Bar-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, Olive-backed Flowerpecker, Philippine Fairy Bluebird, Elegant Tit and we will listen for the bubbling song of Citrine Canary-flycatcher that is sometimes in attendance. Many other highly sought-after birds occur here including Rufous and Luzon Hornbills, attractive Flame-breasted and Cream-bellied Fruit Doves, the smart Philippine Pied Fantail, Amethyst Brown Dove, White-browed Shama, Lovely and Luzon Sunbirds, while overhead we will watch for Philippine Hawk Eagle, Guaiabero, Purple Needletail and Blue-crowned Racket-tail. After dinner, we will search for Luzon Scops Owl and Chocolate Boobook.

Day 5: Infanta Road to Mt. Makiling. This morning we will have a few hours to bird the Infanta Road searching for any species we are missing before making our way to Mt Makiling for a two-night stay. Depending on our arrival time at Mt Makiling, we may bird alongside a few cultivated fields where possibilities may include Barred Rail, Barred and the endemic Spotted Buttonquail, White-breasted Waterhen, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Hair-crested Drongo, Coppersmith Barbet, Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker, Striated Swallow, Glossy and Pygmy Swiftlet and Asian Palm Swift, Striated Grassbird, White-breasted Woodswallow, Scaly-breasted Munia, Zitting Cisticola and Paddyfield Pipit.

Day 6: Mt. Makiling. We will have the entire day to bird on this inactive volcano, which harbours several of the Philippines' fantastic forest birds. Normally the initial sounds typical of the forest are the eloquent White-browed Shama and the haunting calls of one of the most stunning kingfishers in the world, Spotted Wood Kingfisher. Proceeding slowly and quietly, we should have great views of these charismatic species and if we are very fortunate, we might find the secretive Ashy Thrush feeding on the side of the road.



Whiskered Pitta by David Hoddinott

The small network of steep dirt roads here follow the natural contours of the mountain ridges where the bordering forest, often dense in many places, supports a vast number of Philippine endemics.



Philippine Fairy-bluebird by Erik Forsyth

These include the shy White-eared Brown Dove, Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker, Coleto, Philippine Bulbul, Balicassiao, the stunning Elegant Tit, Sulphur-billed Nuthatch, skulky Grey-backed Tailorbird, Yellow-bellied Whistler and both Red-keeled and Striped Flowerpeckers. The strident calls of small flocks of tiny Guaiabero may alert us to look upwards, where we will also be keeping an eye out for whirling groups of Pygmy Swiftlets. As it warms up, we also hope to have our first encounter with the impressive and often vocal Philippine Serpent Eagle. The noisy song of Philippine Hawk-Cuckoo should eventually give away its location, while roadside flowers attract the endemic Flaming Sunbird. Mt. Makiling is also one of the best sites for the outrageous Scale-feathered and Rough-crested Malkohas, which move mostly silently below the canopy in search of insects and caterpillars, and we will also keep an ear out for the mournful calls of the rare Luzon Bleeding-heart. After a full day in the field, we will return to Los Banos for the night.

Day 7: Mt. Makiling to Sabang, via Puerta Princesa, Palawan. A very early start with a morning flight to Puerto Princesa on the elongated island of Palawan. Although this island is often celebrated for its remarkable diving opportunities among vast coral reefs, it is also covered with beautiful landscapes characterised by a central mountain range of spectacular limestone cliffs that teem with endemic birds. Upon our arrival, we will make our way to a stretch of mangroves along the edge of the South China Sea where local fishermen collect their nets inside shallow wooden canoes. Here we will scan for shorebirds and egrets, including possibilities for the rare Chinese Egret. Afterwards, we will proceed towards Sabang and St. Paul's National Park along the northern coast of the island, birding en route in tall mangrove habitat that should produce Copper-throated Sunbird. Further along, a scenic forested stretch may reveal a variety of interesting species, including the endemic Palawan Hornbill, Lovely Sunbird and Palawan Tit. We will also target the Red-vented Cockatoo this afternoon where we may see them flying in to roost.



Palawan Scops Owl by Rich Lindie

In the late afternoon, we will arrive at our accommodation on the beachfront and settle in for the next three nights. Along the coast, only a stone's throw away, is a scene of conventional paradise: aqua-marine waters rolling onto vast white sand beaches, coconut trees blowing in the breeze, and all this beneath mountain cliffs lined with tropical vegetation! Night birding in the area surrounding our accommodation can be productive, and during at least one of our nights here we will venture out in search of Palawan



Hooded Pitta by Erik Forsyth

Frogmouth (split from Javan Frogmouth) and Palawan Scops Owl, which has an impossibly quiet call that we will need to listen for very carefully.

Day 8: Palawan (St Paul's National Park). In the morning, we will board our sea vessel in time to watch the sun rise across the sea while making our way to St. Paul's National Park. Declared a World Heritage Site, the park is beautifully located between high limestone cliffs and white sandy beaches covered by a patch of dense pristine forest. Huge Asian Monitor Lizards, sometimes over six feet in length, scavenge across the trails, agile Long-tailed Macaques scamper playfully, and within the forest, Philippine Megapodes scratch leaf litter onto their gigantic mound nests.

Ground-dwelling birds are particularly well represented within the reserve and besides Philippine Megapode, we hope to see the secretive Red-bellied and Hooded Pittas, the latter of which is pleasantly common in the reserve, as well as the striking Palawan Peacock-Pheasant, undoubtedly one of the most beautiful pheasants in the world. Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher can often be heard dashing from one perch to the next as we search for the attractive Blue-headed Racket-tail, Chestnut-breasted Malkoha, Stork-billed and Ruddy Kingfishers, White-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Leafbird that might be found in a fruiting tree along with Sulphur-bellied Bulbul, White-vented Shama, Ashy-headed Babbler creeping through the undergrowth, Blue Paradise Flycatcher, Common Hill Myna and the beautifully coloured Palawan Flowerpecker.

Another jewel of St. Paul's National Park is the famous Underground River that flows for miles until emptying into the sea. As an optional excursion, participants are welcome to board small canoes with battery-powered spotlights that enter from the turquoise lagoon into the dark depths of the cave. Believed to be one of the longest navigable underground rivers in the world, this is a magical experience and we have the chance to observe an unbelievable selection of pristine cave formations. By late morning we will return to our hotel for lunch and in the afternoon bird a nearby forest searching for Red-bellied Pitta, Palawan Tit, White-vented Shama, Ashy-fronted, Palawan and Sulphur-bellied Bulbuls. There will be another opportunity to look for nocturnal birds.



Palawan Hornbill by David Hoddinott

Day 9: Sabang to Puerta Princesa. We will have the morning to search for those birds that we might have missed, and there are certainly difficult denizens of this area that can easily go unnoticed, such as the Palawan

Flycatcher and secretive Falcated Wren-Babbler. After lunch, we will drive to Puerta Princesa birding en route. Depending on time we may revisit the mangroves to look for Chinese Egret if not located before. In the evening we will venture out to an island to look for Mantanani Scops Owl.

Day 10: Iwahig AM, flight to Manila and depart. This morning, we will visit the lowland forest and grasslands of the Iwahig Penal Colony. Our primary target birds here are the localised Melodious Babbler and shy Palawan Flycatcher, both of which can be difficult in the dense tangled undergrowth of this tropical forest. The adjacent cultivated fields and flooded areas may also produce widespread but scarce species such as Watercock and Slaty-breasted Rail; while an organised walk through the grasslands also gives us the opportunity to try and flush out King Quail as well as Pintail and Swinhoe's Snipes.

In the afternoon, we will catch our flight back to the capital city of Manila where the tour will conclude.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to lunch on day 10;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- Extra activities as mentioned in the itinerary; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

The tour fee does not include:

- Visa fees;
- **ANY** flights;
- Any beverages;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls and
- Laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.
c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.
d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

Special Notes:

- In most areas, it will be hot and humid. We will thus make good use of the early mornings and will have a lot of very early starts to avoid, as far as possible, birding in the middle of the day and in order to reach good birding areas. Furthermore, in the rainforest areas the humidity will be high and potentially uncomfortable.
- This tour does require a good level of fitness, and participants should be fit and in good general health as much of the forest birding will be done on foot in remote areas. Furthermore, it is important to note that we will spend most of this tour in remote locations well away from medical facilities. Should you have any physical limitations or medical conditions please notify us in advance of departure.
- Accommodations are generally good, and we will stay either in hotels or guesthouses. Please be aware that at times we may experience maintenance problems in these facilities that are beyond our control. In the smaller towns, the best available accommodation is often basic, and well below the standard of what you have come to expect from the developed world.
- We spend a good deal of time in vehicles, as we do have to cover long distances in order to get to the best areas for birds. Please do not over-pack, sticking to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include **any** airfares. The main tour will depart from Manila International Airport (IATA: MNL) on day 1 by **06:00**; kindly arrive the day before. The tour will conclude in the early evening of day 10 at Manila International Airport (IATA: MNL).

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Manila International Airport (IATA: MNL) is the main port of entry for international flights into the Philippines and is most reliably serviced by Cathay Pacific. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**