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The Philippines

14th February – 6th March 2010

Leader: Rob Hutchinson

The Philippines archipelago is comprised of more than 7100 islands yet the total land area is slightly smaller than the British Isles. The astonishing degree of biological endemism within the Philippines is well represented by the country's avifauna, although the total list for the Philippines is not large at just over 590 species. Of approximately 400 resident species more than 200 are endemic.

During this tour we will concentrate on three of the largest islands – Luzon, Mindanao and Palawan which account for more than two-thirds of the land area. They have the largest numbers of endemic species, of which we can expect to see over 120 including such spectacular species as Philippine Eagle, Palawan Peacock-Pheasant, Azure-breasted Pitta, Silvery Kingfisher, Rufous Hornbill, Celestial Monarch, Philippine Trogon and two representatives of the endemic Rhabdornis family.

Sadly much of the rainforest which once cloaked these beautiful islands has already disappeared and many bird species which are dependent on primary forest are in serious decline. However, the Philippines still offers some of the most exciting and fascinating birding in Asia including many of the regions rarest and most desirable birds.

Day 1:

International arrivals into Manila International Airport. Night in Manila.

Day 2:

Early morning flight from Manila to Cagayan de Oro (Mindanao) then continue to Damitan village, Bukidnon province. From here we will walk into the Kitanglad Mountains to a comfortable tented camp, which will be our home for the next three nights. We will spend the afternoon birding above the camp.

Days 3-4:

We will have two full days to explore the remnant forest. One of the main targets here will be the magnificent Philippine (Monkey-Eating) Eagle – the national bird of the Philippines. We will work both the lower areas and the higher trails up to at least 2000m in search of the Mindanao endemics and other specialities which are restricted to this montane habitat including Mindanao Racquet-tail, Red-eared Parrotfinch, White-cheeked Bullfinch, Stripe-breasted Rhabdornis, McGregor's Cuckooshrike, Blue-capped Wood Kingfisher, Apo Sunbird, Apo Myna and if we are fortunate, the ultra-skulking Bagobo Babbler.

Dawn and dusk vigils should produce the recently described Bukidnon Woodcock while night-birding around our lodge could produce Philippine Frogmouth, Philippine Nightjar or with a good deal of luck Mindanao or Giant Scops Owls.

Day 5:

After some final early morning birding we depart from the camp, returning to Damitan before

transferring to Bislig where we will stay in the Paper Country Inn for the next four nights.

Days 6-8:

We will have three full days to explore the logging concession at PICOP.

Although deforestation has damaged much of the concession, some good forest still remains and gives us a good chance to find some of Mindanao's lowland forest specialists. Possibilities here include Rufous Hornbill, Writhed Hornbill, Pinsker's Hawk Eagle, Steere's Honey Buzzard, Blue-capped Wood Kingfisher, Silvery Kingfisher, Red-bellied Pitta, Azure-breasted Pitta, Little Slaty Flycatcher, Celestial and Short-crested Monarch, Black-headed Tailorbird, and Mindanao Wattled Broadbill. Night-birding possibilities include Philippine Frogmouth, Chocolate Boobook and Mindanao Boobook.

Closer to the town we will visit the disused Bislig Airfield where we have a good chance of seeing Philippine Duck and Eastern Grass Owl.

Day 9:

After some final birding at PICOP we drive to Davao to connect with a late afternoon flight back to Manila (Luzon). Night in Manila.

Day 10:

Depart early morning for birding at Candaba Marshes before continuing into the Central Cordillera Mountain Range to Banaue where we will arrive in the later afternoon. Night at Banaue.

Day 11:

We will spend the full day birding around Mount Polis departing early morning to make the most of the early morning bird activity. The remnant montane forest here still holds many Luzon montane endemics including Chestnut-faced Babbler, Luzon Bush Warbler, Long-tailed Ground Warbler and Green-backed Whistler. Scarcer possibilities include Mountain Shrike, White-cheeked Bullfinch and Flame-crowned Flowerpecker and Benguet Bush Warbler which is widespread here but extremely difficult to see. During the day we will visit the scenic village of Bay-yo where the mountain river at the bottom of a steep valley is a reliable site for Luzon Water Redstart.

Day 12:

Final morning at Mount Polis in search of any specialties we are still missing while keeping an eye out for rarer species like Luzon Racquet-tail, Flame-breasted Fruit Dove or Luzon Jungle Flycatcher. Luzon Scops Owl and Whiskered Pitta are both easily heard near the pass at Mount Polis but they are difficult to see, as the steep slopes are difficult to access. In the afternoon we drive back south to Subic Bay for an overnight stay.

Day 13:

We will spend the whole day birding around Subic Bay Naval Base. The remaining lowland rainforest within the American Naval Base at Subic offers excellent birding and we will expect to see a number of more widespread endemics while searching for several species that are difficult to see elsewhere including Green Racquet-tail, Luzon Hawk Eagle, Rufous Coucal, White-lored Oriole, Blackish Cuckooshrike, Sooty Woodpecker, Philippine Tailorbird, Luzon Hornbill and hopefully White-fronted Tit. Night at Subic Bay.

Day 14:

We will spend a final morning birding at Subic Bay before driving to Los Banos in the afternoon. Night at Los Banos.

Days 15-16:

Two days birding at Mount Makiling. The well-preserved forests on the mountain are an excellent introduction to Philippine birding. We can expect to see several widespread endemics together more difficult species including the stunning Scale-feathered Malkoha, Philippine Trogon, Luzon Hornbill, White-browed Shama, Spotted Wood Kingfisher and even rarities such Luzon Bleeding-heart and Ashy Thrush are occasionally seen.

Birding in nearby grasslands usually produce Spotted Buttonquail, while rivers are home to Indigo-banded Kingfisher and night-birding is often rewarding here with a good chance of seeing both Philippine Boobook and Philippine Scops Owl.

Day 17:

We take an early flight this morning to Puerto Princesa on the island of Palawan. On arrival we will visit a nearby beach to search for coastal birds including the endangered Chinese Egret before continuing to Sabang on the edge of St. Paul's National Park in time for an afternoons birding. Night in Sabang.

Day 18:

Today we will spend a full day birding at St. Paul's National Park. In the beautiful untouched forest within the park we will expect to find most of the islands endemics, hopefully including the skulking Falcated Ground Babbler and the spectacular Palawan Peacock Pheasant. The area near our resort is a good area to search for Palawan Frogmouth and Palawan Scops Owl and we will make a special effort to search for these elusive birds. Night in Sabang.

Day 19:

We will spend a final morning birding at St. Paul's before returning to Puerto Princesa in the late afternoon. Night in Puerto Princesa.

Day 20:

Today we will bird along the Balsahan river within the Iwahig penal colony. This is an excellent site to search for the islands two endemic night birds and we will leave early for a pre-dawn attempt if we have not seen them already at St Paul's. There is considerable overlap with species seen at St. Paul's but we will also hope to add Melodious Babbler and perhaps the elusive Palawan Flycatcher. In the afternoon we will drive south to Narra and in the late afternoon take boats out to Rasa Island. Rasa Island is now the most reliable site in the Philippines for the endangered Philippine Cockatoo and we should enjoy good if slightly distant views as they come in to roost on the island, after dark we will hope to spotlight Mantanani Scops Owl, a small island specialist found only within the Philippines Archipelago and islands off North Borneo. Night in Narra.

Day 21:

This morning we will return to Puerto Princesa. We will depart Narra early and stop en-route to search for Palawan Flycatcher at one of its most reliable sites. Midday flight to Manila to connect with return international flights.

Total tour cost:	£ 3100	\$ 4560
Single room supplement:	£ 350	\$ 515
Deposit:	£ 300	\$ 600

Maximum Group Size: 7**The cost includes:**

All accommodation, all main meals, overland transport, internal flights, permits, entrance fees, guide fees & translator

The cost excludes:

International flights, departure taxes, tourist visa, insurance, tips, drinks & other items of a personal nature

For further information please contact us via [e-mail](#) or phone: **+44 1332 516254**