

## Laem Pak Bia & Pak Thale

Updated 27/11/2015

### Introduction

**Laem Pak Bia/Pak Thale** (pronounced Lairm Pug Beer/Bark Talay) is a large area of salt pans, mudflats, mangrove remnants and a sand spit, in Petchaburi province. This is without doubt the premier bird watching site for shorebirds in Thailand, with large numbers of birds and many rare species appearing annually.

This region is very open and exposed which allows for good views of the birds, but as with any shorebird watching, a telescope is highly desirable; in fact it is almost essential. In addition to the sand spit, mudflats and salt pans there are lots of ditches, brine shrimp pools as well as smaller areas of freshwater wetlands and scrubland meaning that a very wide variety of species can be found here; this site has far more than just shorebird watching to offer.

Laem Pak Bia/Pak Thale is 2 to 2.5 hours from Bangkok making it a suitable destination for day trips from the capital or as a place to stay for a day or two before moving on to, or coming from, Kaeng Krachan National Park, making Petchaburi province probably the best area for LTRs watching in Thailand.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper  
(Photo by a reviewer)

### Birding Highlights

Laem Pak Bia/Pak Thale is an excellent place to see a large variety of waterbirds. In the dry season, between late September and May large numbers of Waders, Gulls and Terns escape the northern winter by coming here. The critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper is by far the most sought-after bird here which is regularly seen at the salt farms at Pak Thale between late October and late March. Nordmann's Greenshank is an annual visitor too as are large numbers of Great Knot and Black-faced Spoonbill in more or less an annual visitor in ones and twos.

These globally endangered/threatened species are just a few of the birds to be found here. Other highlights are the small population of resident Malaysian Plovers on Laem Pak Bia sandspit along with a few individuals of Chinese Egret and "White-faced Plover", although wintering large gulls have become scarce in recent years probably due to increased disturbance on the sand.



White-faced Plover  
(Photo by John Stevenson)

A visit to Laem Pak Bia/Pak Thale won't leave you disappointed and the possibility of finding a rarity, or even a new bird for the Thai list, is high here, with Lesser Black-backed Gull, Slaty-backed Gull and Red Phalarope added in recent years.

A checklist of the birds for this location can be found here - [Laem Pak Bia & Pak Thale](#)

### Bird Watching Trips:

If you need help organizing a bird watching trip to Thailand, take a look at the suggested itineraries for ideas on creating a tailor-made trip and contact me for advice [Thailand bird tours](#)

### Travel Information

Use the interactive map below to plan your route to Laem Pak Bia (Blue Pin) and Pak Thale. The blue line shows the route from the Petchaburi highway in Petchaburi city (Blue Pin) to Laem Pak Bia (Red Pin) and on to Pak Thale (Green Pin).



To get to Laem Pak Bia and Pak Thale you must first travel to Petchaburi. If coming by car, this will take just under two hours from Bangkok in the early morning (it is a simple journey) but I just get on the exp-rte way in Bangkok and follow signs for Dao Kanong/Rama 2 (at Highway 35 on maps). After crossing over the Chao Phraya river on a large bridge follow signs towards Samut Sakorn (at this point stop following the signs for Dao Kanong) and continue along the highway until Petchaburi is reached; the town is signposted for the most of the way.

If travelling by bus, take a taxi to the Southern bus terminal where buses depart regularly to Pranburi, stopping at Petchaburi, Cha Am and Hua Hin. Alternatively, mini vans run to Petchaburi, Cha Am and Hua Hin from Victory Monument in Bangkok.

Once in Petchaburi there are two ways to get to Pak Thale and to Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The easiest way to navigate is to follow the highway past Petchaburi and turn left onto road 3177, following signs for Had Chao Samran then, about 13 kilometres later, take the left hand turn at the Had Chao Samran crossroads (about 400 metres before the seafront at Had Chao Samran), and drive along the road through the salt pans with good grading all along towards Pak Thale.

Alternatively, the most direct route from Petchaburi to Pak Thale is to follow signs for Ban Laem, navigating through the small roads towards the coast; this is easier than it sounds. Those taking this route can later follow the coast road south towards Had Chao Samran birding along the way.

For those arriving in Petchaburi by public transport it would be necessary to find somewhere to hire a motorcycle to follow this route in order to enjoy the bird watching here.

For birdwatchers wishing to get onto the sand spit it is essential to take a boat, unless you want to endure a long, hot walk along the beach, thankfully the road which was constructed upon the spit was dismantled after the construction of 7 boulder dams parallel with the shore and two breakwaters perpendicular to the sand spit, however, the spit is now more a series of islands as a result. Boats can be chartered for \$800 baht from a small boatyard. This is located about 2 to 3 kilometres north of Had Chao Samran and it is obvious as a lot of boats are visible as the large canal is crossed. Drive into the entrance of the boardwalk and head to the end where you will come to Mr Daeng's place. Mr Daeng has taken hundreds of birders to the spit and knows exactly how to find all the specialities there.



Boat to Laem Pak Bia Sand Spit  
(Photo by Nick Upton)

If Mr Daeng is not in you can wait for him to return or find yourself another boat man. Working around showing your binoculars will probably get you a positive response but they can and do show Laem Pak Bia painted man. [Laem Pak Bia birding](#)

### Finding Birds

Roots of terns and shorebirds are often found at the sand bar close to the end of the Laem Pak Bia sand spit. The spit itself is home to breeding Malaysian Plovers and in winter this is the place to look for "White-faced Plover" (birds can be found here [by Nick Upton Reports](#)).

Spoon-billed Sandpiper is almost guaranteed in the salt farms around the village of Pak Thale but it does occasionally show up in other shallow pools and, from time to time, on the sand spit.

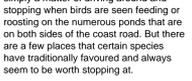
A number of passerine species can usually be found in the Environmental Research Project and in the mangroves, including Golden-bellied Gerygone, Dusky Warbler, a number of Acrocephalus warblers and Racket-tailed Treepie amongst others. Pintail Snipe can be seen here (although Common Snipe is present too), Ruddy-breasted Crane and Slaty-breasted Rail are in the nearby open areas.

Shorebirds can be found all over the Laem Pak Bia/Pak Thale area. It is simply a matter of driving around and stopping when birds are seen feeding or roosting on the numerous ponds that are on both sides of the coast road. But there are a few places that certain species have traditionally favoured and always seem to be worth stopping at.



Map of Laem Pak Bia & Pak Thale area showing locations like Ban Pak Thale, Wat Kommaram, Laem Pak Bia Salt Farms, Environmental Research Project, Boat Hire, Abandoned Building, Restaurants, Had Chao Samran Cross roads, and Laem Pak Bia Sand Spit. Includes a key for Sea, Villages, Mangroves, Sand, Main Road, and Dirt Tracks.

**Abandoned Building:** Roughly 3.5 kilometres north of the Had Chao Samran cross roads there is a dirt track which heads inland, past a small rubbish dump, to a large, partially constructed, abandoned building which can easily be seen from the road (see map and photo above). The dirt track starts immediately after a large, concrete sludge gate, as one heads north in this coast road numbered 4028 on maps. The scrubby vegetation, rubbish dump and pools in this spot give birders a good opportunity to find some species other than the shorebirds which are the main attraction in the area.



Abandoned Building  
(Photos by Nick Upton)

As one drives along the dirt track some scrubby, dry vegetation is passed which extends from the dump. This vegetation, of which there is also a small patch around the abandoned building itself, is a good spot for finding a variety of interesting species including Green Bee-eater, Indochinese Bushlark, Plain-backed Sparrow, Paddyfield Pipit, Zitting Cisticola, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Dusky Warbler and Oriental Reed Warbler. Sometimes Oriental Skylark and Richard's Pipit can be found too and some other common species are Great Egrets as well as a Pied Fantail, Common Iora and Red Collared Dove.

This area is good for finding a variety of startlings and mynas. In most years a group of White-shouldered Startlings frequent this spot and rarer species for Thailand such as Brahminy Starling, Rosy Starling and Common Starling have been seen several times in recent years.

The dump itself always has attendant Eastern Cattle Egrets, Black Drongos, White-vented Mynas, Eurasian Tree Sparrows and Common Mynas looking for food within the trash. Some of the rarer species are also present here including a Pied Fantail, Common Iora and Red Collared Dove.

Quite frequently a Peregrine Falcon spends the winter hunting from the abandoned building itself, feasting on the Feral Pigeons, Spotted Doves, Red Collared Doves and Mynas that are always to be found loitering. This open area gives a good vantage point over the area and sometimes other raptors can be spotted from here.

The salt pans in this area can be quite productive with Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Eastern Black-necked Godwit, Kentish Plover and most of the other common shorebirds often to be seen at close range from the vehicle. This area also has a habit of turning up some of the rarer species with a few examples of the King's Project in 2007. Spoon-billed Sandpiper in 2010-11 and it is always worth looking for Asian Dowitcher, Pied Avocet and Red-necked Phalarope here.

Although it might seem unlikely, Fishing Cat has occasionally been observed here after dark, but be careful not to mistake one of the local feral cats for this species.

**Boat Hire:** This is the place to get on a boat for the sandspit, but this is also the starting point of a boardwalk which runs along the river through the mangroves and terminates on the beach a few kilometres south of the sand spit's northernmost point. A few interesting species can be seen along the boardwalk such as Golden-bellied Gerygone, Racket-tailed Treepie and Collared Kingfisher but quite frankly, mangroves in this area are not a particularly productive habitat. However, one or two pairs of Mangrove Whistler are present, although seldom seen, and during migratory periods all manner of passage migrants are possible, although nobody seems to have checked this out.

**Laem Pak Bia Sand Spit:** This spot is the place to visit to observe the attractive resident Malaysian Plovers that breed on the beach; these colourful shorebirds are easily found here and between October and April it is also worth searching for "White-faced Plover" (*Charadrius alexandrinus dealbatus*) too with one or three birds of this distinctive wader usually present.



Pacific Reef Egret

A few Chinese Egrets are often found on the mudflats adjacent to the sand spit in the dry season, with Pacific Reef Egret favouring the rocky breakwaters, Javan and Chinese Pond Herons are abundant too - wait for March to see them in breeding plumage. Stinted Heron, Little Egrets and Eastern Great Egrets are also usually spotted on a spit to the west of the interesting location.



Chinese Egret

The end of the sand spit is a great place to see large numbers of roosting terns which usually peak around late February to early April with Common, Whiskered, Little, Caspian and Great Crested Terns usually resting in fairly large numbers here and Gull-billed, White-winged and Lesser Crested Terns in smaller numbers.



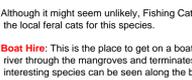
Pallas's Gull

This is also used to be the place where a flock of large gulls, usually "regularly" winter, but in recent times they have become scarce and usually just Brown-headed Gulls joining the terns. Occasionally Pallas's Gull and Heuglin's can be seen and also Black-tailed Gull but look out for rarities, I have found Mongolian Gull, Christmas Island Frigatebird and Black-legged Kittiwake here in the past; Pomarine & Arctic Skuas are scarce but annual and other rare seabirds have been found.



Great Crested Terns  
(Photos by Nick Upton)

Scandering always frequent the water's edge in the dry season and when the tide begins to go out large numbers of other shorebirds arrive to feed on the exposed mudflats. This is the best place to observe Greater Sand Plover with its rather oversized bill and long legs, quite easy to distinguish from Lesser Sand Plover, even the subspecies with larger bills.



Eastern Cattle Egrets

1000 baht is the price charged for this trip and a tip of 100 baht is appropriate for good service.



Green Bee-eater

**Environmental Research and Development Project initiated by H.M King Bhumibol:** This is an area of mangroves and settling pools where quite a number of interesting birds can be found as well as large numbers of common birds. One of the advantages here is that most birds can be seen close range from the car and the sheer number of birds that are flushed out which driving slowly around can be quite amazing at times.



Map of Environmental Research and Development Project showing Salt pans, Village, Mangroves, Temple, Boatyard, and Sea.



Ruff

The open water pools here often attract birds which feed on fish with Whiskered and White-winged Terns usually present and viewable at close quarters between October and May, Caspian Terns often show up here too, Indian and Little Cormorants often fish here, do Pond Herons and four species of Kingfisher; Common, Black-capped, White-throated and Collared Kingfishers. These species along with Little, Intermediate and Eastern Great Egrets plus Grey Heron can often be seen sitting on posts around the area.



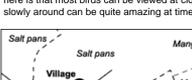
Eurasian Winyneck

A couple of muddy pools frequently attract Ruff, Long-toed Stint, Wood Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint and other waders including Common Snipe but Pintail Snipe usually prefers the reedy areas but take a good look at all Snipe to see if you can separate them - it is easier in flight. Greater Painted Snipe can sometimes be found here too!



Red-wattled Lapwing

The experimental reed plots are a good place to look for Ruddy-breasted Crane and Slaty-breasted Rail and perhaps something rarer. These reeds often host migrant warblers, the Common Kingfisher, Pacific Golden Plover, Dusky Warbler and Black-browed Reed Warbler but much rarer species have been mist-netted here during migration including Large-billed Reed Warbler.



Cannibalistic Monitor Lizard  
(Photos by Nick Upton)

The mangroves are not that productive at most times but Golden-bellied Gerygone is very common and Mangrove Whistler is present although scarce. During migratory periods all manner of passage migrants could show up and this would be when a walk along a mangrove board walk would be most worthwhile.

The dry season here are also the roosting site of birds, mynas, cormorants and doves use this site all year round but in the dry season huge numbers of Black Drongos arrive just before dusk and up to 1000 Blue-tailed Bee-eaters can be seen soaring above the trees before descending. Smaller groups of migratory Startlings also arrive in small groups with White-shouldered being the most common but usually there are some Chestnut-tailed Startlings with them and sometimes something much rarer.



Temminck's Stint

Once these birds have entered the mangroves thousands of very large fruit bats (Lyle's Flying Fox) make the trip in the morning of October and November. This spot frequently has some of the less common shore-billed species too; look out for Ruddy Turnstone, Eared Sandpiper, Dunlin, Nordmann's Greenshank, Asian Dowitcher, Red-necked Phalarope and Whistler. Each year a large flock of Eurasian Curlews frequent this area and most years at least one Far Eastern Curlew turns here. Remember that bill length is not an identifying feature as the females of the red of Eurasian Curlews have very long bills, as the only reliable way to pick out Far Eastern Curlew is from its buffy underwing and back-rump patch, something which can be very difficult to do when they are roosting but quite obvious when the birds are flying out to the mud flats as the tide goes out.



Richard's Pipit

In the northeast corner of the field is a patch which almost always has water in it and it is worth checking for Jacanas, wintering terns (usually Whiskered and White-winged) and sometimes a group of Garganey and Lesser Whistling Ducks occupy this pool - perhaps something rarer might join them.



Common Greenshank  
(Photos by Nick Upton)

One of the specialties of this spot is the large numbers of Oriental Pratincoles that arrive as the field dries up at the end of the rainy season in February and breed on the mudflats. Another ground nesting species that can frequently be heard here is Oriental Skylark in song flight - look out for the last fluttering birds high up in the sky.



Wood Sandpiper

In the low vegetation all over the field wintering Brown Shrike, Black Drongo and Eastern Stonechat are common and there are quite a few pairs of Paddyfield Pipit, Zitting Cisticola, Plain Prinia and Scaly-breasted Munias here also and it is a good place to spot an Indian Roller on the wires, Scarcer species that nest here include Plain-backed Sparrow and Chestnut Munia.



Black-headed Ibis & Openbills

This can also be a good spot for scanning the skies for raptors. Brahminy Kite is common here and I have also seen Eastern Marsh Harrier and Bordered Eagle (dark morph) here on several occasions. Common Keel is a regular visitor too and Amur Falcon has been recorded here on migration.



Oriental Pratincole

Several dirt tracks allow one to drive into the middle of this area and also towards a shelter next to the sea, but please do remember that this is all private property and access is dependent on a good relationship with the land owners - stick to the larger mud banks and please do not walk on salt pans. Also drive slowly and avoid kicking up a dust storm!



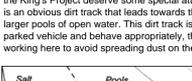
Whiskered Tern  
(Photo by Nick Upton)

In the dry season there are always large numbers of wading birds in this location with some of the most common species being Curlew Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Marsh Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank and Eastern Black-tailed Godwit. Several species of tern are usually found here including Caspian and Gull-billed and sometimes one of the Ruddy Gulls will show up. This spot frequently has some of the less common shore-billed species too; look out for Ruddy Turnstone, Eared Sandpiper, Dunlin, Nordmann's Greenshank, Asian Dowitcher, Red-necked Phalarope and Whistler. Each year a large flock of Eurasian Curlews frequent this area and most years at least one Far Eastern Curlew turns here. Remember that bill length is not an identifying feature as the females of the red of Eurasian Curlews have very long bills, as the only reliable way to pick out Far Eastern Curlew is from its buffy underwing and back-rump patch, something which can be very difficult to do when they are roosting but quite obvious when the birds are flying out to the mud flats as the tide goes out.



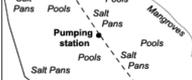
Marsh Sandpiper

Pools in this region usually attract vast numbers of feeding Egrets with Intermediate Egret often being the most common; look out for them when they are in their distinctive 45 degree angle hunting posture. These Egrets are frequently joined by Painted Storks and pools in this area have been used by Black-faced Spoonbill (2011-12) and Milky Stork (2011-13), joining feeding flocks of other large waterbirds.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper

The salt pans alongside the road leading to the shelter at the sea front can be quite good too and sometimes Spoon-billed Sandpiper turns up on these. As the tide rises this is a good place to see waders gradually getting closer and if you have not already seen Terek Sandpiper, look for it here. During migration periods the mud flats here are also a great place to search for Asian Dowitcher and Grey-tailed Tattler.



Pak Thale Shorebird Sign  
(Photo by Nick Upton)

The area of mangroves at the shelter contain a few birds of interest. Golden-bellied Gerygone, Common Tailorbird, Collared Kingfisher and Pied Fantail are common residents and Mangrove Whistler can be found with some luck. Dusky Warblers are a common migrant species in this habitat and there are a few Red-whiskered Bulbuls to be found too, probably of escaped origin.



Laem Pak Bia

This location is not a National Park and you will not be charged to go birding here.



Map of Laem Pak Bia showing roads, land, and sea.

Facilities at Laem Pak Bia/Pak Thale are mostly restricted to Hat Chao Samran. Here there are a growing number of places with bungalows which can be rented for about \$500 baht per night (the [LTRA Resort & Spa](#) seems to be growing in popularity with birders despite the fact that its construction destroyed Malaysian Plover habitat) and a number of shops and restaurants selling anything from ice creams to excellent seafood dishes. I would recommend any of the restaurants (marked on map right) that are situated on the beach within a kilometre north of the main car parking area at Had Chao Samran; the food is great and very cheap. The 7/11 store on the corner at the beachfront is where visitors can buy all manner of snacks and drinks as well as cool off for a few minutes in the air conditioning. There are also a few local shops along the road from Had Chao Samran to Pak Thale and at the entrance to the boat yard there is a small restaurant which sells simple, but good, food very cheaply.

For those staying in Petchaburi, or passing through, there are all the facilities typical of a Thai provincial capital. In fact Petchaburi has a large supermarket (Big C) with take-away restaurants and a cinema showing Hollywood movies attached at the southern end of the town. There are several hotels in town too, ranging from very good to scabby. I frequently stay at the [Sun Hotel](#) which is priced around 800 baht per night and is situated at the foot of the cable car to a very obvious temple at the top of a hill, close to the main highway. The [Royal Diamond Hotel](#) is close by on the main highway and is a step up at around 1000-1500 baht per night; both hotels serve good food and provide a Thai breakfast buffet. The night market near the bus station in Petchaburi is a good place to get cheap and excellent Thai food.



Map of Petchaburi showing roads, land, and sea.

Some Useful Books

- Waders of Europe, Asia & North America - amazon
- BIRDS OF THAILAND Order Now@ amazon
- Birds of Thailand Order Now@ amazon
- Wagtails and Pipits Order Now@ amazon
- PERDS Order Now@ amazon
- Birds of Southeast Asia Order Now@ amazon

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[Other Central Thailand Birding Locations](#)

[Shorebirds in the Inner Gulf of Thailand](#)

[Slaty-backed Gull: A New Bird for the Thai Checklist](#)

[The Birds of the Bangkok Area](#)

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[Leg-tagged Shorebirds in the Inner Gulf of Thailand](#)

[Top Ten Birds of Thailand: Number 2 - Spoon-billed Sandpiper](#)

[Rediscovery of a Large-billed Reed Warbler](#)

[Request for Sightings of Wing-tagged Mongolian Gulls](#)

[Laem Pak Bia Road Bridge Cancelled](#)

### Photo Galleries

Select the thumbnail photos to see larger images.

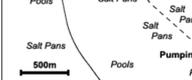


Photo gallery thumbnails including The Boat Yard, On the way to the spit, Birding on the sand spit, Sunset at the Boat Yard, Mudskipper, Temminck's Stint, Marsh Sandpiper, Painted Stork, Indian Cormorant, Brahminy Kite, Paddyfield Pipit, Lesser Cormorant, Javan Pond Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, and Black-winged Stilt.

**Birdwatching Trips:** Laem Pak Bia/Pak Thale is one of Thailand's premier birdwatching locations and is a must visit site on any Thailand birdwatching tour. It is also an excellent option for a day trip from Bangkok throughout the dry season (Nov-Mar) with Spoon-billed Sandpiper present throughout that period.

Look at some suggested itineraries, [Thailand bird tours](#), or contact me for more information: [nickupton@thaibirding.com](mailto:nickupton@thaibirding.com)

### Trip Reports

[Central & Northern Thailand, 1st-14th December 2015](#) by Nick Upton

[Central Thailand, 13-21st February 2015](#) by Nick Upton

[Laem Pak Bia & Hellfire Pass, October 2008](#) by Stephen Totterman

[Laem Pak Bia/Pak Thale & Kaeng Krachan, 19-20th February 2008](#) by Nick Upton

[Laem Pak Bia/Pak Thale, Khao Yai & Kaeng Krachan, February 2008](#) by John Raven

[Laem Pak Bia/Pak Thale, 6-8 December 2007](#) by Paveen J.

[Laem Pak Bia, April 2004](#) by Peter Ericsson

### Related Blog Entries

- [Birding in Petchaburi Province](#) - posted 07/02/16
- [Birding at Laem Pak Bia & Pak Thale](#) - posted 26/12/15
- [Petchaburi Wetlands in winter 2015](#) - posted 03/07/15
- [Increasing Great Knot Numbers](#) - posted 05/05/15
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- [Common Birds](#) - posted 06/12/13
- [Return of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper](#) - posted 16/11/13
- [Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recording Information Page](#) - posted 12/09/13
- [Common Shorebirds at Laem Pak Bia & Pak Thale](#) - posted 09/05/13
- [Large Waterbirds at Pak Thale](#) - posted 28/02/13
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- [Searching for "White-faced Plover"](#) - posted 16/