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**Cambodia's Angkor Wat, Nature & Birding**  
**A Cultural Icon and Time in the Wild, Nearly-Vanished Landscapes of Asia**  
**Jan. 5 - 16, 2015**

**With an extension to Mekong River for rare Irrawaddy Dolphins &**  
**the Biodiversity Hotspot of Seima Forest**  
**Jan. 15 - 19**

Any mention of Cambodia conjures images of the magnificent, mysterious ruins of Angkor Wat. But beyond these stunning temples lies another Cambodia, wild and beautiful, and rarely encountered.



Here in the Northern Plains of Cambodia you'll find the largest intact block of a unique ecosystem that once extended through much of Indochina. Its particular community of large mammals and birds can be found nowhere else on earth. Our Naturalist Journeys group will explore not only Angkor Wat, but also those backroads, where some of the world's rarest birds still find shelter in Cambodia's dipterocarp forests, immense wetlands, and remnant grasslands.

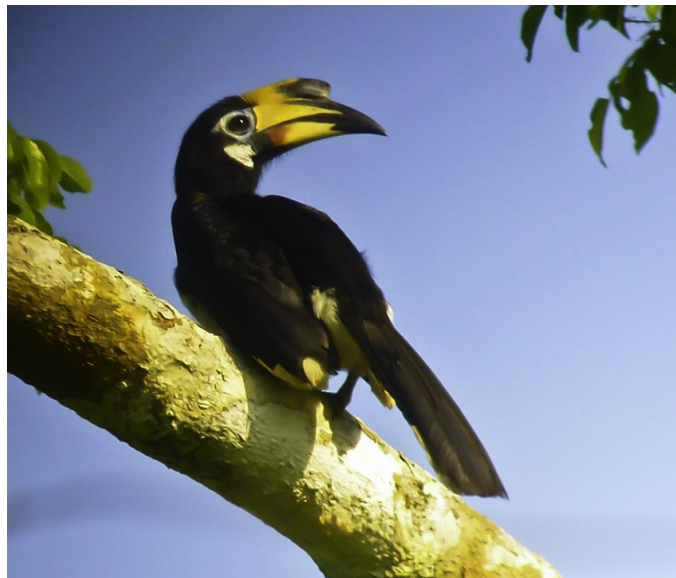
Cambodia is considered to be the stronghold for a number of globally threatened mammals and birds, supporting

possibly the only viable populations of White-shouldered Ibis and Red-headed Vulture. Come see a remarkable landscape that has all but vanished from Southeast Asia!



Immerse yourself in the splendors of Angkor Wat, the exquisite beauty of Southeast Asia's birds, the marvels of a floating village, and the hospitality of a gracious people. And, at the same time, see firsthand a remarkable partnership of villagers and conservationists.

Cambodia excels at meshing conservation with nature tourism, for the direct benefit of local communities – achieving possibly the most successful effort of this kind, anywhere in the world. Funds generated by ecotourism have enabled villages to dig wells for access to clean water, build schools, maintain roads and bridges, and build health clinics. In return, the villagers have become the guardians of some of the most critically endangered birds anywhere.



Naturalist Journeys will be working directly with the Sam Veasna Center for Wildlife Conservation – the catalyst (along with its parent organization, the Wildlife Conservation Society) for conservation and ecotourism in

Cambodia — to bring you this unusual opportunity to explore a fascinating, friendly country, and to see some of the world's rarest and most beautiful birds. In Cambodia, you'll find a warm and welcoming people, now emerging from the shadows of a difficult past.

## ITINERARY

Mon., Jan 5 – Departures from the U.S.

Because we cross the International Date Line, plan to leave home ahead of our tour start date, as you lose most of a day during the flight to Cambodia (but upon returning, we'll gain that day back again!).

Of note: If you'd like to relax and adjust to time changes before our adventure starts, we strongly suggest that you arrive a day or two early and we can help with your arrangements if you do. Siem Reap's spectacular temples, butterfly garden, silk factory, and colorful markets will reward you for any extra time you spend there!



Reap (D)

### **Wed., Jan. 7 – Arrive Siem Reap, Cambodia**

Today we arrive in Siem Reap, a vibrant and comfortable city of temples and markets, where tuk tuks and bicycles outnumber the cars. The capital of the northern province of Siem Reap, this prosperous city is the gateway to Cambodia's ancient temples. Although rest is emphasized today, energetic folks may opt to explore the fascinating night market along the river front.

Accommodations at the Sonalong Boutique Village, Siem





## **Thurs., Jan 8 – Angkor Wat**

Dating from the 12th century, Angkor is one of the true wonders of the ancient world, on a par with Egypt's and Greece's antiquities and Peru's Machu Picchu. For nearly 500 years, Angkor lay shrouded in jungle until it was rediscovered by a French explorer. We begin our visit before daybreak at the central complex of Angkor Wat – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – to watch dawn illuminate the ruins. The immense towers are shaped like lotus buds, and the thousands of projections that adorn the ruins all represent serpents, an apt symbol for the kundalini energy of yoga. Although Cambodia is now a Buddhist country, Angkor Wat was conceived by King Suryavarman II as a Hindu center dedicated to Vishnu, the sustainer and preserver of the universe. Nearly all surfaces are covered in bas-relief carvings that depict scenes from Hindu mythology.

We begin our adventures with a foray into the main temple complex at Angkor Wat, with the added bonus of leisurely birding on the temple grounds. Possible species include Black Bazas, Red-breasted and Alexandrine parakeets, Coppersmith and Lineated barbets, Blue Rock-Thrushes, Hainan Blue Flycatchers, Ashy Minivets and a couple of Asian mammals: the Variegated Squirrel and that troublemaker, the Long-tailed Macaque.

### **Accommodations at the Sonalong Boutique Village, Siem Reap (B,L,D)**



## **Fri., Jan 9 – Tonle Sap Stork Colony & Prek Toal Floating Village**

We set out in the cool early hours by bus, then boat, to the floating village of Prek Toal, and its nearby canopy towers, erected for viewing the impressive stork colony of Lake Tonle Sap, a Biosphere Reserve and the largest natural lake in

Southeast Asia. Waters of the Mekong River feed the lake. Here, we observe the biggest large-waterbird nesting colony in all of Asia. Breeding birds include five storks – Greater and Lesser adjutants, Milky and Painted storks, Asian Openbills – as well as Black-headed Ibises, Oriental Darters, and Spot-billed Pelicans. The colony perches atop mountainous hummocks of vine-shrouded emergent trees.

After our time in the waterbird colony, we enjoy lunch at the floating village, where all buildings are constructed on bamboo mats that rise and fall with water levels in the lake.

This floating village is like nothing you've ever experienced! Tonle Sap is a most unusual lake: it reverses its flow during the wet season! Only a floating village could thrive under the challenging conditions of greatly fluctuating water levels, and reap a year-round livelihood from Lake Tonle Sap, which nurtures the world's most productive inland fishery.

We return in the afternoon to Siem Reap.

### **Accommodations at the Sonalong Boutique Village, Siem Reap (B,L,D)**



### **Sat., Jan 10 – Florican Grassland / Prey Veng**

Our 4WD safari vehicles pick us up early in the morning, and we'll head for the Tonle Sap (or Florican) grasslands, home to more than half of the world population of the critically endangered Bengal Floricans, the world's rarest bustard. Our chances are good for finding this striking rarity, and in addition we may see Pied and Eastern Marsh harriers, Cinnamon Bitterns, Sarus Cranes, Pintail Snipes, Small Buttonquail, Green Bee-eaters, Oriental Skylarks, Lanceolated Warblers, Striated Grassbirds, Siberian Rubythroats, Red Avadavats, and other species characteristic of tall grassland with scattered shrubs and wet depressions.



Cambodia has protected six of the largest remaining tracts of lowland grassland in Southeast Asia, all in the Tonle Sap floodplain. Yesterday we explored the Lake Tonle Sap and its floating village, and today we see a related habitat: the wildlife-rich floodplain of that lake. With some safeguards, the grasslands can still be used compatibly by local people for traditional fishing, grazing and deep-water rice farming. These low-intensity practices maintain the habitat needed by the florican.



This afternoon, we continue on to our overnight safari camp at Prey Veng. Here we'll experience the kindness and hospitality of the villagers who not only provide the tented camp, but care for us during our stay. One of the stellar species at Prey Veng is the endangered White-winged Duck, and tonight we wait at dusk for its return to a favored roosting tree.

### **Accommodations at the Prey Veng Safari Camp, provided by the local village (B,L,D)**



## Sun., Jan 11 – Prey Veng

Prey Veng is situated within Khulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary, and features both dry dipterocarp forest and a very fine wetland next to our safari camp – an ancient baray about a mile long and a half-mile wide. (Barays are artificial wetlands constructed centuries ago by the Angkor empire.)



Trees in the dipterocarp family characterize the surrounding dry forest — a forest whose trees are mostly deciduous, thanks to a pronounced dry season. This forest type once covered much of Southeast Asia, and was formerly home to the greatest aggregations of large mammals and waterbirds outside of Africa. Cambodia has the largest remaining contiguous block of this very important, wildlife-rich habitat.

Here at Prey Veng we hope to find not only the White-winged Duck, but also Eurasian Hoopoes, the rare White-rumped Falcon, Collared Falconets, Oriental Honey Buzzards, Gray-headed Fishing-Eagles, Asian Barred Owlets, Scarlet-backed Flowerpeckers, Ruby-cheeked Sunbirds, and spectacular White-bellied Woodpeckers. Stork-billed Kingfishers and Giant Ibis are also possible. The diversity of butterflies is dazzling!

### Accommodations at the Prey Veng Safari Camp (B,L,D)



## Mon., Jan 12 - Prey Veng / Tmatboey

After a morning of exploring Prey Veng, we continue on this afternoon to another region of dry dipterocarp woodlands in Cambodia's Northern Plains – Tmatboey, a village

integral to the conservation efforts in Cambodia. Here, villagers voluntarily protect the critically endangered Giant and White-shouldered ibises, and their nests. As a result, they have benefitted from the income provided by ecotourism — in impoverished Cambodia, a small investment goes a long way!

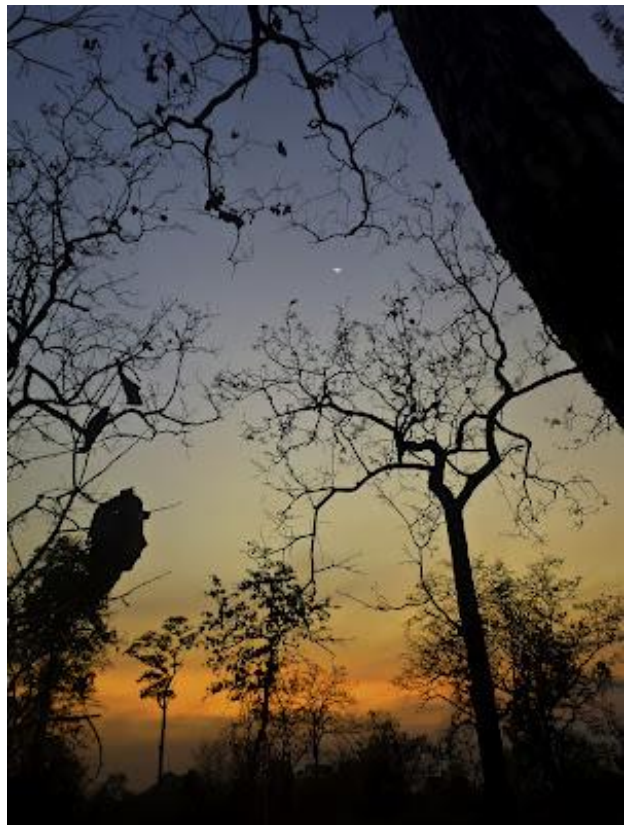


Beyond the mega-stars (the two ibis), Tmatboey boasts a rich assemblage of other species: Woolly-necked Storks, Lesser Adjutants, Chinese Pond Herons, Gray-headed Fish-Eagles, Crested Serpent-Eagles, Shikras, Rufous-winged Buzzards, Changeable Hawk-Eagles, Orange-breasted Pigeons, Green Imperial Pigeons, Blossom-headed Parakeets, Green-billed Malkohas, Brown Fish-Owls, Spotted Wood-Owls, Crested Treeswifts, Orange-breasted Trogons, Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, Indian Rollers, Oriental Pied Hornbills, Asian Paradise-Flycatchers, Rufous Treepies, Golden-fronted Leafbirds, Neglected Nuthatches and more! Clearly, Cambodia is a great place to visit!

Birding at Tmatboey can be fabulous, and relatively easy because visibility is good in the dry forest. The area supports 16 species of woodpeckers alone, including the huge Great Slaty Woodpecker!

At dusk, we position ourselves along a flyway for White-shouldered Ibis returning to their roosts. Once widespread from China to Malaysia, this species now occurs only as a relict population of perhaps 20 birds in Borneo, plus this small population in Cambodia, where, with the villagers' protection at Tmatboey, they are beginning to recover.

### **Accommodations in simple cabins provided for nature tourism by the village of Tmatboey (B,L,D)**



returning to their roosts for the night.

### **Accommodations in the cabins of Tmatboey (B,L,D)**

#### **Tues., Jan 13 – Tmatboey**

We rise very early to be in position at dawn for seeing a distant, shy Giant Ibis, as this critically endangered bird rouses for the day. As light grows over the deciduous dipterocarp forest in Cambodia's Northern Plains, the dawn chorus announces the arrival of a new day, and we settle in for a memorable spell of savoring the rich biodiversity of Tmatboey.

Late in the evening, as Crested Treeswifts swoop through the woodlands and over the fields, we again watch the skies for a rare sight: White-shouldered and Giant Ibis,



## **Wed., Jan 14 – Tmatboey / Vulture Restaurant**

Our last morning at Tmatboey, we'll continue to seek out its remarkable birds, before departing for our afternoon drive to the [delete very! there are no degrees of uniqueness] unique Veal Krous Vulture Restaurant near the village of Dong Plet.

When we arrive there, we settle into our safari tents, which by now will be familiar, since this safari camp is very like what we experienced at Prey Veng. The vultures won't dine until tomorrow morning, so later this afternoon we explore trails of the surrounding dry forest; species are similar to those of Prey Veng and Tmatboey. Towards evening, we

will walk a short distance to a dike overlooking fields and forest, where Savanna Nightjars hawk insects as night falls. Other possible birds include Hoopoes and Stork-billed Kingfishers, but the big draw here is the vultures!

### **Accommodations at the Vulture Restaurant Safari Camp, provided by the local village (B,L,D)**



## **Thurs., Jan 15 – AM Vulture Restaurant / Koh Ker / travel to Siem Reap**



Several species of Asian vultures have been brought to the brink of extinction by the poison diclofenac, used in Asian cattle dips, but banned in Cambodia. The effort to rescue these vultures (which perform a vital service in the ecosystem) has included leaving uncontaminated prey at several sites, where the birds may feed without the danger of being poisoned. Only in Cambodia do Asian vulture populations remain robust, and this country is critical to their continued survival. The Vulture Restaurant which we are visiting is accessible for visitors, and our use of the facilities provided by the villagers brings them much-needed income, as it does at Tmatboey and Prey Veng.

By dawn we are inside the tall blinds-on-stilts that overlook the vulture feeding area, provisioned with a dead cow. We are most likely to see many White-rumped Vultures and a few of the spectacular Red-headed Vultures – this is a vulture with an attitude! Seeing Slender-billed Vultures is possible, but they appear much less frequently. All three species are considered critically endangered by the IUCN.

The main tour now wraps up, with an afternoon drive to Siem Reap and a farewell dinner for those who are departing. En route, we'll stop for a break at the Angkorian temple of Koh Ker.

### **Accommodations at the Sonalong Boutique Village, Siem Reap (B,L,D)**

## **Fri., Jan. 16 – Departures**

**Today those taking only the main tour will be driven to the airport, to depart for flights at your leisure. Thanks to crossing the International Date Line as we fly east, we expect to arrive back in the U.S. the same day we leave Cambodia. You may also choose to stay longer to enjoy**



**additional travel on your own, in Cambodia or in nearby countries like Thailand or Viet Nam. (B)**

**EXTENSION to the  
MEKONG RIVER &  
SEIMA:  
Cambodia's Biodiversity  
Hotspots!**

## **Irrawaddy Dolphins & Splendid Birding Jan. 15 - 19**

### **Thurs. Jan. 15 Travel to Kratie on the Mekong River**

After our morning at the Vulture Restaurant, those who join us for the extension spend the afternoon driving to Kratie on the Mekong River, about a 5-hour trip.

**Accommodations at an air-conditioned hotel in Kratie (B,L,D)**



### **Fri., Jan 16 – Mekong River & Irrawaddy Dolphins / Seima Protection Forest**

The iconic Irrawaddy Dolphin is critically endangered in Indochina, where its main stronghold is the Mekong River. Fewer than 100 dolphins are thought to survive in the Mekong River, with many fewer elsewhere in Indochina. The Irrawaddy Dolphin – actually a member of the oceanic dolphin group – is closely related to Orcas! These dolphins are most often found in brackish water and estuaries, but they also have adapted to a 120-mile stretch of freshwater in the Mekong River.

From its far origins on the Tibetan Plateau, the Mekong flows 4900 km, making it the world's twelfth-longest river. It's considered to be the most productive river in the world. It is the lifestream of mainland Southeast Asia.



Only the Amazon surpasses the Mekong in diversity of plants and animals. The Mekong has more families of fish (91) than any other river in the world! A quarter of the fish are endemic, including “megafish” like the Mekong Giant Catfish. At various times in the geologic past, the Mekong has been connected to other river systems, thus gaining more fishes than originated in the Mekong itself, and explaining some of its extraordinary biodiversity.

A boat trip this morning to the Kampi Pools gives us a good chance to see the dolphins, as well as the very local Mekong Wagtail. Small Pratincoles and Asian Golden Weavers are also possible.

This afternoon we drive to Seima Protection Forest, an oasis of dense tropical forest comprising about 1100 square miles, and harboring Asia’s most charismatic wildlife.

## **Accommodations at The Nature Lodge in Sen Monorum (B,L,D)**

### **Sat., Jan 17 – Seima Protection Forest**

Seima offers high biodiversity in a new habitat: tropical mixed evergreen forest, which supports a unique array of rare species. This area’s importance is underscored by the MacArthur Foundation’s support for its conservation and by the emphasis it has received from Wildlife Conservation Society. Seima is a haven for at least 40 species of globally threatened vertebrates, and monitoring reveals that, with protection, many of the critical species are beginning to increase in numbers.



So far, 60 species of reptiles and amphibians and 93 species of mammals are known from Seima – and both mammals and amphibians new to science are being discovered as researchers comb the area. The mammals include several primates, seven cats including Tigers, two bears, two canids, Gaur, and Bantengs. We may find the spoor of wild Asian Elephants, although the beasts themselves are not often seen. Monkeys like Yellow-cheeked Crested Gibbons, Germain’s Silvered Langurs, and Black-shanked Douc Langurs call hauntingly as the early morning light filters through the forest.

Seima, which is the size of Yosemite, also shelters a spectacular array of birds, including rarities such as the elusive Orange-necked Partridges, Blue-winged and Bar-bellied pittas. Chances are good for seeing Green Peafowl, Germain’s Peacock Pheasants, and Great Hornbills. Like Tmatboey, up to 16 species of woodpeckers live here! We spend all day birding and searching for other wildlife at Seima.

## **Accommodations at The Nature Lodge in Sen Monorum (B,L,D)**



## **Sun., Jan 18 – Seima Protection Forest / Back to Siem Reap**

After early morning birding at Seima, we begin our 8-hour journey back to Siem Reap for next-day departures. While a long travel day, this remote wildlife-rich haven is well worth the visit, and we make the day enjoyable with stops.

## **Accommodations at the Sonalong Boutique Village, Siem Reap (B,L,D)**

## **Mon., Jan 19 – Departures**

Depart Siem Reap for flights back to the States. Thanks to crossing the



International Date Line as we fly east, we expect to arrive back in the U.S. the same day that we leave Cambodia.

Intrigued and want to read more? Read an in-depth account of Narca's scouting trip to Cambodia, which you can find on her blog: check the entries for February and March 2012 when she was there enjoying birding, finding butterflies and seeing wildlife, and scouting for this tour.

[http://www.narcamoorecraig.blogspot.com/2012\\_02\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.narcamoorecraig.blogspot.com/2012_02_01_archive.html)

## **Accommodations:**

We will stay in comfortable, air-conditioned boutique hotels when based in the cities. At Tmatboey, we will stay in simple duplex cabins provided by the village; the rooms have showers, fans, mosquito netting over the beds, and western-style toilets. (If you're lucky, you might find a frog in your bathroom.) Tmatboey's guesthouse won the 2007 Wild Asia Responsible Tourism award. For three nights, we'll stay in village-maintained safari camps, which give us close access to wild habitats; villagers stay at the sites, cooking our meals and helping us as needed. The safari tents are reminiscent of those used in Africa – durable, roomy, clean, waterproof, and zippered affairs, complete with floor and zippered windows. Each tent houses two people, with good-quality cots for beds. Bush showers are available. The bush toilets – also zippered enclosures – have been modified (at Narca's request, after the scouting trip!) from the standard Asian style, to have real seats. We found the safari camps were scrupulously clean and well-cared-for.

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## Guides:

Our local guide is Nara Duong, a highly skilled birding guide, with an outstanding knowledge of the birds' vocalizations and a very good command of English. His ability to spot concealed creatures amazed us all. Most of all, we've enjoyed his fine company in the field.



From Naturalist Journeys, Narca Moore-Craig, an exceptional leader by all standards, who scouted our Cambodia tour in 2012, will join Nara as a guide.

