

The Philippines

Main Tour

Luzon, Boho, Palawan

14 Days/13 Nights

February 2 - 15, 2024

\$4975*

Single supplement \$400

Internal airfare included

* Price is based on a group of 6.
\$400 small-group surcharge will
apply for groups of 4 or 5.



Azure-breasted Pitta

Banaue

Highlands Extension

6 Days / 5 Nights

February 15 - 20, 2024

\$1170

Single Supplement \$140

These tours are limited to just 8 participants, so register *EARLY* to avoid disappointment!

OVERVIEW

With approximately 7,100 islands stretching from the Malayan-Indonesian complex in the south to close to Taiwan in the north, the Philippines presents a remarkable opportunity for birder. The processes of geography and evolution have left one of the highest degrees of endemism known in the world, with some 237 species of birds only found within the archipelago. Add to that list a number of other species mainly found within the islands and a huge potential for further splits, and one can see the attraction for birding here. Unfortunately, the element of human influence is also one of the highest in the world, placing the Philippines in the unenviable position of harboring the most bird species in danger of imminent extinction. Virtually anywhere in the country there are people, either settlers or native tribes, encroaching on remnants of habitat on each of the islands. This pressure can be so intense that, within a season, a whole area can vanish, taking with it what was possibly a large percentage of the remaining population of several species in one fell swoop. Hence many visiting birders are told – **visit now, before it is too late.**

The list of non-endemics is nearly 500, for a total of 731 species recorded in the islands, according to Clements. This number has been increasing each year as more people regularly bird in the Philippines and more foreign tours visit the islands. As a consequence, it is difficult to get an accurate count, as different authorities offer a variety of counts: Oiseaux.net puts the Philippine list at 761, while eBird places it at 667.

There are seven distinct Endemic Bird Areas in the Philippines, and we will visit 3 of them during our main tour (Luzon, Mindanao and the Eastern Visayas, and Palawan) and a fourth during the extension (Mindanao). This tour was designed specifically for **Cheepers!** to provide a shorter and less strenuous trip for our clients than most that are offered by other tour companies. Because this is the first tour of this type, we don't have a record of the number of species seen on previous tours following the same itinerary. Based on our guide's past experience with the sites we plan to visit, we expect to see 250 – 300 species, including 140 – 150 endemics.



Spotted Kingfisher



Green Racquet-tail



Flaming Sunbird



Philippine Eagle-Owl



Palawan Flycatcher

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 00, Jan. 31: DEPART THE UNITED STATES

You will lose a day as you cross the international date line, so you must depart the US on January 31 to arrive on February 2, the first day of the tour. If your flight arrives late in the evening on February 2, you might want to consider arriving a day early to give yourself some time to rest and acclimate to the time difference before the first day of birding, which will begin early in the morning of February 3. If you opt to arrive a day early, we will make hotel reservations for you and add the cost to your final invoice.

Day 0, Feb. 1: IN TRANSIT

Day 1, Feb. 2: ARRIVAL IN MANILA

Today you will arrive in Manila, where you will be transferred to your comfortable hotel. For people who arrive early enough, we will enjoy a welcome dinner at the hotel.

Overnight Best Western Hotel La Corona, Manila (D)

Day 2, Feb. 3: TANAY EPIC PARC

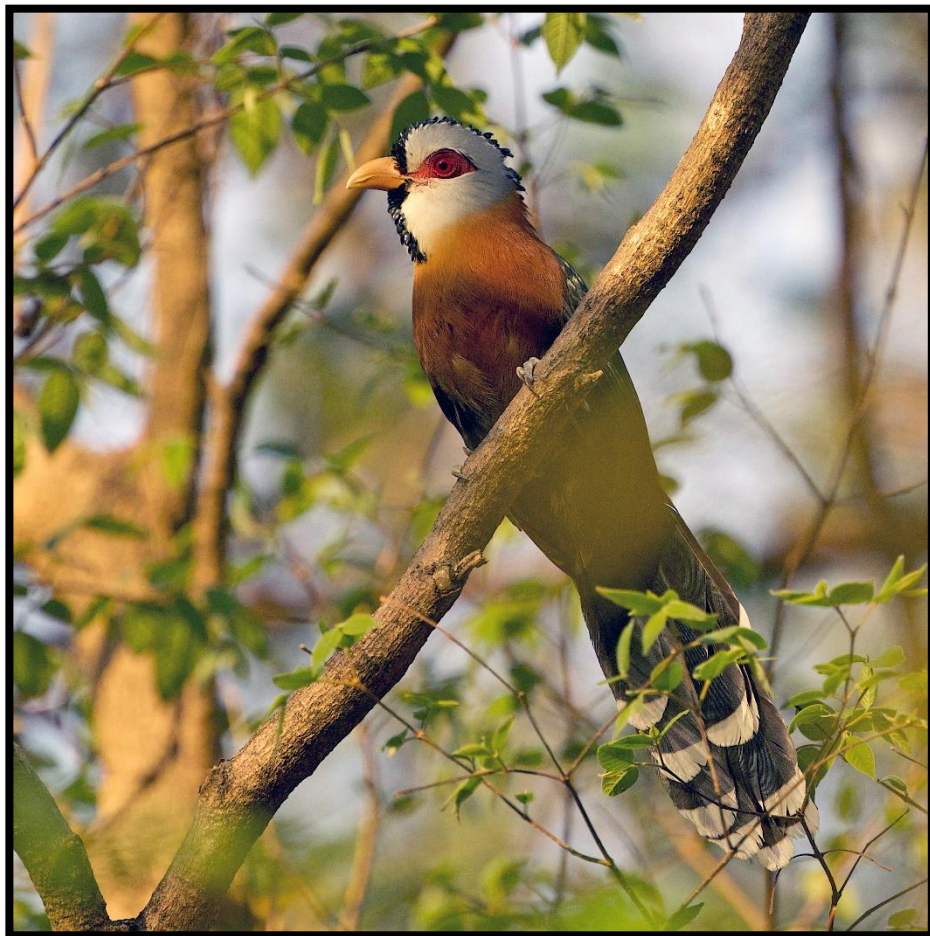
We will depart Manila early this morning to drive to Tanay EPIC PARC, where we will enjoy an easy introduction to Philippine birds. EPIC PARC stands for Ecological Playground Integrated Commune for Prayer, Adventure, Recreation and Culture. EPIC PARC is 200 hectares of rainforest nestled in Tanay Rizal with mountainous slopes featuring breathtaking views and diverse landscapes. Over

100 species of birds have been recorded in the area, where countless century-old trees and exotic plants abound. Some target species for

today include *Asian Emerald Dove*,

White-eared Brown-Dove, *Phillippine Coucal*, *Red-crested* and *Scale-feathered Malkohas*, *Luzon Hornbill*, *Indigo-banded* and *Brown-breasted Kingfishers*, *Rufous-crowned* and *Blue-tailed Bee-eaters*, *Philippine Pygmy Woodpecker*, *Guaibero*, *Philippine Hanging-Parrot*, and *Balicassiao*, to name but a few.

Overnight Tanay Epic Jungle Park (BLD)



Scale-feathered Malkoha

Day 3, Feb. 4: INFANTA ROAD

This morning we'll bird along Infanta Road, a lightly-used stretch of highway that was discovered by birders several years ago as a good site for several uncommon endemic species. This site offers relatively easy roadside birding, where we have a good chance to sight the stunning **Whiskered Pitta**, one of the main targets for the tour. Other birds we can hope to see today include **Bicol Ground Warbler**, **Northern Rufous Hornbill**, **Cream-breasted Fruit Dove**, **Flame-breasted Fruit Dove**, and **Philippine Trogon**. We also have chances of seeing the rare **Grand Rhabdornis** and **Black-crowned Babbler**. On a night walk, we hope to see **Luzon Scops-Owl**.

Overnight Tanay Epic Jungle Park (BLD)

Day 4, Feb. 5: INFANTA ROAD – SUBIC BAY

We'll enjoy another early morning birding outing on Infanta Road before heading to Subic Bay, another prime birding spot that harbors over 180 species, including 63 endemics. We should arrive in time for a good bit of afternoon birding. Subic Bay is one of the very last remaining lowland forests on Luzon, located within an old American Naval Base. We will explore these extensive lowland forests along roads and a few trails, providing us an excellent opportunity to look for **White-fronted Tit** and **Green Racquet-tail**, two birds that are hard to find elsewhere. We will also keep an eye open for **White-lored Oriole**, **Philippine Green-Pigeon**, **Blue-naped Parrot**, **Rufous Coucal**, **Blackish Cuckoo-shrike**, **Northern Sooty Woodpecker**, **Luzon**



Whiskered Pitta

Flameback, **Stripe-headed Rhabdornis**, and **Trilling Tailorbird**, among many others. Subic also gives us the chance for some excellent nightbirds like **Philippine Scops-Owl**, **Luzon Hawk-Owl** or even the **Chocolate Boobook**. And, with some luck, the mighty **Philippine Eagle-Owl** may show up.

Overnight Mango Valley Hotel, Subic Bay (BLD)

Day 5, Feb. 6: SUBIC BAY

We'll enjoy a full day of birding at this remarkable site. For a place that harbors so many species, it's impossible to list all of the possibilities, but a few of the birds we can hope to see, in addition to those listed for yesterday, include *Whiskered Treeswift*, *Brahminy Kite*, *Northern Sooty-Woodpecker*, *Philippine Bulbul*, *Pacific Swallow*, *Ashy Minivet*, *Dollarbird*, *Gray-rumped Swiftlet*, *Coletto*, *Philippine Pied-Fantail*, *Whiskered Tern*, *Philippine Falconet*, *Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike*, *Black-naped Oriole*, and, with some luck, we might even see *Philippine Serpent-Eagle* or *White-bellied Sea-Eagle*.

Overnight **Mango Valley Hotel, Subic Bay (BLD)**

Day 6, Feb. 7: SUBIC BAY – LA MESA ECO PARK – ANGONO CAVE

This will be a long day with an extra-early start and continuing into the evening, but the day's sightings will make it worth the trouble! Departing very early from Subic Bay, we'll arrive at La Mesa Eco Park in time to enjoy a full morning of birding in this bird heaven in the heart of Quezon City. Arriving early in the morning gives us the best chance to see *Ashy Thrush*. La Mesa has become the best site to see this thrush as it has at least 5 territories within the park. The park also holds *Red-bellied* and *Hooded Pittas*, also primary target species for the park.

Other possible species include *Lowland White-eye*, *Indigo-banded Kingfisher*, and *Collared Kingfisher*, which are very commonly seen, as well as *Slaty-legged Crake*, *Plain Bush-hen*, *Philippine Magpie-Robin*, *Grey-backed Tailorbird* and *Philippine Coucal*. La Mesa Eco Park is also a great spot for migrating and wintering birds, for which the list is still growing. Some migrants that have been recorded in the park include *Scaly Ground Thrush* and *Pechora Pipit*. *Philippine Pygmy Woodpeckers* are commonly heard and seen, as well as *White-breasted Wood-swallow*, *Mangrove (Philippine) Flycatcher*, and *Philippine Pied-Fantail*.

Later in the afternoon, we will drive about an hour to Angono Cave in Rizal to try for the *Philippine Eagle-Owl*. This impressive Eagle-Owl has its stake-out at the cave, affording us a perfect opportunity to see this mighty owl.

Overnight **Searca Residence Hotel, University of the Philippines, Los Banos (BLD)**

Day 7, Feb. 8: UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES AT LOS BANOS - MT. MAKILING

We will begin with some pre-dawn birding on the University of the Philippines Los Banos campus grounds at the base of Mt. Makiling in an attempt to see *Philippine Scops-Owl* and *Luzon Hawk-Owl*. At dawn, the *Spotted Wood-Kingfisher* will start calling as we return for breakfast. Afterwards, we will slowly make our way up Mount Makiling, searching for *Scale-feathered Malkoha*, *Red-crested Malkoha*, *Luzon Hornbill*, *Philippine Trogon*, *White-browed Shama* and, if we are lucky enough, *Luzon Bleeding-heart*. When we return to the campus grounds, we will search for the *Indigo-banded Kingfisher* along the stream and check the



Philippine Serpent-Eagle

flowering trees for *Lowland White-eye*, *Handsome Sunbird*, and *White-bellied Flowerpecker*. We'll also keep our eyes open for *Spotted* and *Barred Buttonquail* in the surrounding grasslands.

Overnight Searca Residence Hotel, University of the Philippines, Los Banos (BLD)

Day 8, Feb. 9: FLIGHT TO BOHOL – TRANSFER TO BILAR

We'll depart Los Banos to drive to the airport in Manila for our flight to the island of Bohol. Upon arrival, we'll transfer to Bilar, where we'll check in at our lodging for the night at the Butterfly Sanctuary. Once we've checked in, we'll explore the landscaped flowering gardens as time permits, and perhaps have an afternoon visit to one of the birding sites on Bohol, depending on our arrival time.

Overnight Butterfly Sanctuary, Bohol (BLD)

Day 9, Feb. 10: BOHOL

We'll enjoy a full day of birding on Bohol, where we'll visit Rajah Sikatuna National Park near the famous Chocolate Hills. Rajah Sikatuna Park is a haven for nature lovers and a bird-watcher's paradise. It is the widest remaining forest in Bohol, occupying a total land area of 9,023 hectares of which 6,300 hectares are made up of forests, natural and man-made. It was declared a National Park in July of 1987. The park offers many trails that give us the opportunity to enter the forest and search for a very nice selection of forest birds like *Philippine Trogon*, *Rufous-lored (Winchell's) Kingfisher* and *Samar Hornbill*. This is also the best spot to encounter the most extraordinary *Azure-breasted (or Steere's) Pitta*, and the exceedingly-beautiful *Visayan Wattled Broadbill*. Other possibilities include *Philippine Fairy-bluebird* and *Yellow-breasted Tailorbird* (another Visayan specialty). *Streaked-ground Babbler* is a must-see here, as is *Black-crowned Babbler*. At night we will look for *Everett's Scops-Owl*, *Luzon Hawk-Owl* and *Philippine Frogmouth*.

Overnight Butterfly Sanctuary, Bohol (BLD)



Philippine Trogon

Day 10, Feb. 11: TRAVEL DAY, FLIGHTS BOHOL – MANILA – PUERTO PRINCESA (PALAWAN)

This is primarily a travel day, with flights from Bohol to Manila and then from Manila to Puerto Princesa. Depending on flight schedules, we might arrive early enough for a bit of birding near our hotel, but this afternoon will primarily be used as a time for some rest.

Overnight Citystate Asturias Hotel, Puerto Princesa, Palawan (BLD)



Palawan Frogmouth

Days 11 – 13, Feb. 12 - 14: PUERTO PRINCESA

We will have 3 full days to bird the area near Puerto Princesa on the island of Palawan. Birdlife International reports that the vegetation on Palawan is one of the most diverse of any island within the Philippines, but typhoons in 2021 severely damaged the forests and completely destroyed the Sabang Beach site. Because of this, we will concentrate our birding along several of the forested roads and forest patches near Puerto Princesa and two small offshore islands. There are many sites within these parameters for us to explore, and we hope to see many of the 38 Philippine endemic species that live on Palawan, along with a wide range of other species, including near-endemics and non-endemics. Mainly along the Napsan Road, Zigzag Road and at Irawan Eco Park, we will be looking for *Melodious Babbler* and *Palawan Flycatcher*. We will visit Isla de Cania, a small island in the bay of Puerto Princesa, to look for the near-endemic *Mantanani Scops-ow*, while night walks will give us the chance to find *Palawan Scops-Owl*,

Spotted Wood Owl and *Palawan Frogmouth*. Some of the endemic/near-endemic species we can hope to find include *Palawan Hornbill*, *Red-headed Flameback*, *Blue Paradise-Flycatcher*, *Yellow-throated Leafbird*, *Palawan Blue-Flycatcher*, *White-vented Shama*, *Palawan Bulbul*, *Ashy-fronted Bulbul*, *Sulphur-bellied Bulbul*, *Ashy-headed Babbler*, *Palawan Tit*, *Palawan Crow*, *Palawan Flowerpecker*, *Lovely Sunbird*, *Pale Spiderhunter*, and the hard-to-find *Falcated Wren-Babbler*. Non-endemic possibilities include, but are not limited to, *Fiery Minivet*, *Dark-throated Oriole*, *Fairy Pitta*, *Blue-naped Parrot*, *White-throated Kingfisher*, *Rufous-bellied Eagle*, and *Nicobar Pigeon*, to name a few. During our stay on Palawan, we will also visit the island of Pandan to search for the Gray Imperial Pigeon.

Overnight Citystate Astrias Hotel, Puerto Princesa, Palawan (BLD)

Day 14, Feb. 15: PALAWAN – MANILA – DEPARTURE

We will enjoy one last morning of birding on Palawan, trying to sweep up any species we might have missed, before we take an afternoon flight to Manila. For people not taking the extension, you will connect to your evening flight home, while those going on to Banaue will check in at a hotel near the airport to stage for the first day of the extension tomorrow morning.

Overnight Best Western Hotel La Corona, Manila (for those taking the extension) (BLD)

End of tour/no overnight stay (for those NOT taking the extension) (BL)



Palawan Scops-Owl

BANAUE / MOUNT POLIS EXTENSION

Day 15, Feb. 16: MANILA TO BANAUE

BLD

Day 16, Feb. 17 BIRDING MT. POLIS – BAY YO VILLAGE -BANAUE RICE TERRACES

BLD

Day 17, Feb. 18 BIRDING MT. POLIS

BLD

Day 18, Feb. 19: BANAUE TO MANILA, FLIGHTS HOME

We will depart Banaue in the morning, traveling back to Manila. We will arrive in Manila in the afternoon, so you can connect to evening international flights home. If your flight home departs earlier than 8:00 PM, a hotel room will be provided for you so you can connect with your flight tomorrow.

BLD

Day 19, Feb. 20:

You will transfer to the airport for your flight home.

B

End of tour

Price Includes:

- ~ Lodging in comfortable hotel/lodges
- ~ Meals as indicated
- ~ All ground transportation, entrance fees
- ~ Internal airfare between islands
- ~ Airport transfers
- ~ Bottled water
- ~ Services of an expert birding guide and two *Cheepers!* Tour Leaders (Jim & Cindy Beckman)
- ~ Pre-trip gift package, including customized checklist
- ~ Post-trip digital photo collection
- ~ Post-trip electronic copy of final checklist

Price does not Include:

- ~ International round-trip airfare to Manila
- ~ Alcoholic drinks
- ~ Travel insurance (*required*)
- ~ Gratuities
- ~ Expenses of a personal nature (laundry, phone calls, extra soft drinks and snacks, etc.)

Cancellation policy:

Cancellation must be made in writing (email or snail mail)

More than 6 months prior to departure – full refund of deposit

Between 4 and 6 months prior to departure – 50% refund of deposit

Less than 4 months prior to departure – No refund of deposit

If cancellation occurs after full payment is made, a refund will be given only if the vacant spot is filled.

Trip insurance is *highly* recommended on all trips.

Medical coverage is REQUIRED for this tour.

Cheepers! Birding on a Budget LLC reserves the right to make changes in the itinerary if the need should arise due to unforeseeable circumstances such as weather, landslides, and other natural phenomena, as well as suggestions by local guides in order to take advantage of an unusual birding opportunity. Lodging is subject to change based on availability.