



Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park

Introduction

Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, in Prachuab Khiri Khan province, covers an area of approximately 99 sq.km encompassing a number of varied habitats including steep limestone mountains, freshwater marsh, beaches, limestone islands, mangrove remnants and coastal pools.



Freshwater marsh & mountains (Photo by Dave Gandy)

The forest on the mountains receives very little rainfall and the vegetation reflects this as does a fairly sparse avifauna, however, the wetland habitats more than make up for this and provide an opportunity to see a large number of species in a short length of time.

Thung Sam Roi Yot is the largest freshwater marsh in Thailand, provides an important habitat for numerous species of birds and other small animals. It is a shame to see that encroachment into this area still regularly occurs and that almost all the wetland areas to the seaward side of the mountains have been converted to shrimp ponds despite the international importance of the site.

In spite of these problems, this remains an excellent region to find wetland species and indeed, some of the shrimp ponds appear to be reverting to a more natural state. Additionally, Khao Sam Roi Yot seems to be visited less often than it was in the past and large areas of habitat that are seldom visited exist, and the potential to find exciting birds here is high.

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Birding Highlights

Waterbirds are the primary reason for visiting Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, with a large number of species present. The beaches here are one of the few places where Malaysian Plovers nest in Thailand along with small numbers of Little Terns, but plenty of other wetland birds can be found on the coastal shrimp ponds and the freshwater marsh.



Malaysian Plover (Photo by Stijn De Win)

Waders such as Spotted Redshank, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Kentish Plover are quite numerous here and Malaysian Plovers breed in small numbers along the more lonely beaches.

Raptors are well represented at Khao Sam Roi Yot too, with Eastern Marsh Harrier fairly common and this is good place to look out for Greater Spotted Eagle and Oriental Hobby which likes to associate with the limestone outcrops.

Click here for a checklist of the birds of Khao Sam Roi Yot

Bird Tours : Check the suggested itineraries for ideas on creating a tailor-made birdwatching trip to Thailand: Thailand bird tours.

Travel Information



Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park is a fairly easy place to get to; regular buses run from the southern bus terminal in Bangkok to the town of Pranburi via Cha-Am and Hua Hin; the journey takes a little over 3 hours.

Songtaews run from Pranburi to a small village in the national park. There is some accommodation where this terminates, but if you are heading to the headquarters or Hat Laem Sala then a motorbike taxi from Pranburi is probably a better way to get there.

On the way into the park is a gate where the entry fee of 400 baht will be collected, although if on the songtaew you may get away with not paying.

For those driving from Bangkok, simply follow the main route south and follow the signs to Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park from Pranburi. These signs are in English.

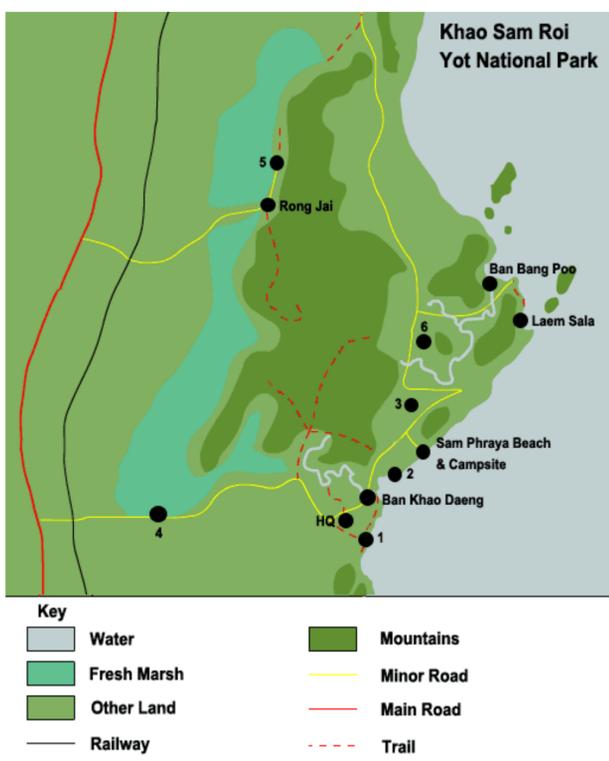
For birdwatchers coming from the south any bus heading northwards will pass through the town of Pranburi where the driver will stop if asked.

For those without transport wanting to visit Rong Jai marsh when staying on the seaward side of the park it is worth asking the national park staff to arrange a lift. I managed to get a ranger to take me on his motorbike for 200 baht a number of years ago, but I'm sure a bit more would be appropriate now.

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Finding Birds

Wetland birds are the real attraction at Khao Sam Roi Yot and birdwatching in any of the wetland areas along the roads is likely to reveal a good number of species.



1. Around HQ: A dirt track leading from HQ to the sea passes through some areas of mud and wet patches. Areas of coastal grassland in this area hold Red-throated Pipit in winter and Yellow-legged Butonquail at all times.

Ban Khao Daeng: It is worth looking around this village, particularly in the "winter" as rare starlings such as Rosy Starling and Brahminy Starling have been found and Plain-backed Sparrow is a resident.

South of Sam Phraya: If one walks south along the beach from Sam Phraya some scrubland is passed through and at low tide a large mudflat is exposed. This is a good place to observe many wading species such as Whimbrel, Spotted Redshank, Sand Plovers and Egrets.

3. Wetlands: Wetlands in this area consist of shrimp ponds and overgrown fish ponds. Walking along the road and spending time watching these pools can reveal a large number of species including cranes and rails, Black-winged Stilt, Pintail and Common Snipe and a number of terns species; occasionally Black-headed Ibis turns up.



Black-winged Stilt (Photo by David E. Lewis)

4. Fresh Marsh: The road runs through the edge of the Rong Jai fresh marsh and spending time here can reveal birds such as Eastern Marsh Harrier, Oriental Reed Warbler, Black-browed Reed Warbler, Blunt-winged Reed Warbler and Purple Heron in addition to many other open-country and reedbed species.

5. Rong Jai Marsh: A walkway into the marsh allows visitors good views of reedbed species and the large and colourful Purple Swamphen is easily found. Other excellent birds like Yellow Bittern, Purple Heron and Oriental Reed Warbler are often encountered.

6. Wetlands: More wetlands along the road are worth stopping at and looking for waders, rails and crakes, egrets and herons and other open-country birds. Although some of the ponds in this area look rather sterile they do attract species of waders when water levels are right.

Laem Sala Beach: The trail over the rocks to Laem Sala isn't particularly rich in species but does provide views over the Bang Poo bay where a few shorebird can be found.

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Facilities

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The seaward side of the national park has a number of options for accommodation, but the freshwater marsh side did not on my last visit, however, the visitor centre and ranger station at Rong Jai may have a few rooms.

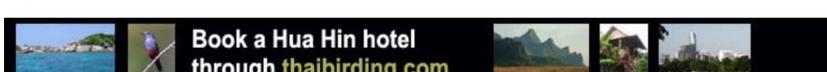
HQ headquarters there are rooms for rent and a small restaurant which serves quite decent food at low prices. The staff at HQ also have bicycles for hire which can be an excellent way of getting around as walking everyone can be extremely exhausting due to the long distances and intense heat.

At Ban Khao Daeng there are a number of small shops that sell snacks, refrigerated drinks and simple meals. There is also a company that organises kayaking trips and boat trips along the river.

At Sam Phraya beach there is a campsite with toilets and a restaurant that serves passable food. It is a pleasant place to sit on the beachfront and cook food if coming with camping gear.

Laem Sala is a very picturesque spot and there are rooms for rent or one can camp for a small fee. The rooms are for large groups but the staff allowed me to stay in one for a small fee way back in 1998, so it is worth asking.

At Bang Poo village and further north along the coast there are a series of small resorts. I've never visited any of these but I'm sure the standard of accommodation is good and the food typically excellent.



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