In July 2008, KB and Captain Kittayarn Sumpantaluk heard of a number of water holes near Kaeng Krachan National Park (KKNP) in western Thailand, and suspected that poachers had devised them to capture wildlife. Upon investigation we learned that the poachers were shooting birds to eat including Green-legged Partridge *Arborophila chloropus* and Chinese Francolin *Francolinus pintadeanus*, while trapping others such as White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus* and White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus* to sell in local markets for their ability as songsters. Lesser Mouse Deer *Tragulus kanchil* and Barking Deer *Muntiacus muntjak* were also taken.

The poachers were local people who knew that, in the dry season, simply digging a series of small water holes about 40 cm long by 25 cm wide by 6 cm deep in the forest, and placing fruit such as papaya and bananas nearby, will attract many species of wildlife. Access to the water holes was easy, being constructed along dry stream beds. These dry watercourses lacked vegetation and were a natural pathway through the scrub forest. The poachers returned to the holes each day and replenished water and fruit as required. As a result, birds, mammals and even snakes such as King Cobra *Ophiophagus hannah* came to drink on hot days, while several species of squirrel and tree shrew ate the fruit nearby. Any of these could be easily harvested by a patient hunter willing to sit in a nearby hide or blind for an afternoon. This is a traditional way of hunting in the area and has been in use in the KKNP area for at least five years.

Since the water holes were located on military land, we had some hope that we if could secure the cooperation of the local army command to sanction the water holes officially, we might entice the poachers to participate in a conservation-oriented project to protect instead of harvest wildlife. We hoped to convince the poachers that they might actually do better for themselves financially by attracting Thai photographers and birdwatchers from all parts of the world to come and observe the wildlife at the water holes during the dry season.


Plate 4. Large Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus hypoleucos* at water hole near Kaeng Krachan NP, Thailand, November 2009.

different ages and both sexes coming to bathe and drink at one location. Juvenile Slaty-legged Crake have now been observed, suggesting that this species may be breeding in the area. We have photographed Green-legged Partridge (Plate 3), Large Scimitar Babbler Pomatorhinus hypoleucos (Plate 4), Abbott’s Babbler Malacocincla abbotti (Plate 5), Striped Tit Babbler Macronous gularis (Plate 6), Eared Pitta Pitta phayrei, Orange-headed Thrush Zoothera citrina and the rarely seen Lesser Mouse Deer (Plate 7).

We would very much like to have more international birders visit the water holes to see the birds in the future. The best time to visit is from mid-November to April. The charge is Baht 200 per person per day and all of the money is paid directly to the former poachers. If this project continues to be a success, we would like to expand it to different habitats in the area. We would also like to set up water holes within nearby KKNP itself. Park officials there currently believe that by providing water holes and food to wildlife, we are ‘taming’ them, and the birds and mammals are no longer wild. Yet we have seen how well hides and man-made water holes work in other parks in Thailand such as Phu Kheo national forest. There we have photographed trogons, pittas and broadbills coming to drink and bathe—and then have watched them disappear back into the forest. Time will tell if our plan will continue to move forward. In the meantime, do come to watch and photograph wildlife at the water holes just outside KKNP. Your support makes for a win-win-win situation for birds, people and conservation.

Acknowledgements
Our special thanks go to Narida Adithapworaphan and Deborah Allen whose ongoing help, support and company allow us to do what we do. We thank the Thai military, particularly the Special Forces Group of Song Pinong district, who graciously granted permission and provided assistance to make this conservation project possible. We also thank water hole owner Lung Sin Iamsumang and photographers Bunrot Keowyu, Parinya Padungthin and Suppalak Klabdee.

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