



ARCCONA CONSULTING

Nature-tourism in Myanmar



Evening exodus of bats at the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon

Myanmar is the largest country in mainland south-east Asia. Its continuous coastline of almost 3,000 km extending along the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea offers very attractive wildlife destinations and opportunities for nature tourism. Many sandy beaches and hundreds of tiny islands provide ample opportunity for wildlife observations as well as snorkelling, fishing and swimming. In the coastal zone, besides mangroves, coral reefs, sea grass beds, sandy beaches there are many intertidal mudflats. These are home to many globally threatened water bird species, such as the Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Nordmann's Greenshank, and Lesser Adjutant Stork. Five different marine turtles, dugong and Irrawaddy Dolphins among others, as well as water birds in internationally significant numbers live on Myanmar's rich and diverse coast. The Myanmar coastal zone is also important for fish stocks, which support artisanal fishery, and other livelihoods for local people. Rapid and often unsustainable development (Zöckler *et al.* 2013 [hyperlink: http://www.lighthouse-foundation.org/fileadmin/LHF/PDF/Scoping_Myanmar_2013.pdf](http://www.lighthouse-foundation.org/fileadmin/LHF/PDF/Scoping_Myanmar_2013.pdf)) is beginning to jeopardise the fragile relationship between these crucial habitats and the livelihoods of rural people who make up a high proportion of the population of Myanmar. Unsustainable hunting and harvesting practices by local people can be combated by introducing nature tourism.

Myanmar is a very diverse country and rich in inland and freshwater habitats. Unlike many of its neighboring countries its rich forest areas still harbour wildlife, including tigers and many other wild cat species, Asian Tapir, pangolin and monkey species, such as the endemic Snub-nosed monkeys and Hoolock Gibbons as well as many endemic and rare bird species, snakes and butterflies. The Tanintharyi and Lenya National Parks in the south host the most diverse tropical forest fauna of all. It is proposed to link both national parks and reserves with a corridor by the Lenya Park extension. This important place is where the globally critically endangered Gueney's Pitta has its last stronghold in the world. The huge complex of over 400,000 ha offers a refuge for wildlife and a huge opportunity for wildlife encounters.

A third major habitat complex comprises of the inland lakes and wetlands. Moeyongyi, the only Ramsar site in Myanmar, offers opportunities to see a rich selection of water birds not far from the capitol Yangon. Lake Indawgyi in Kachin State in the north is still largely pristine and serves as an important resort for Arctic and northern water birds, as well as globally threatened species and is currently being developed as a Ramsar Site by Flora Fauna International (FFI) in close collaboration with the Forest Department of Myanmar.

Several sites listed below capture the rich biodiversity in the country and provide an ideal opportunity in combining nature tourism supporting the protected area development and species conservation.

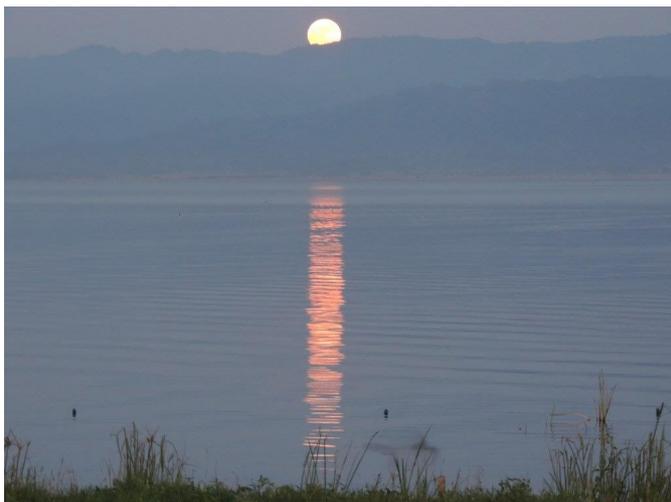
The remaining pristine beaches and inland wilderness offer great tourist attractions and provide important economic opportunities for local communities without jeopardising the natural capital.

Sites from North to South (see map)

1) Lake Indawgyi



Largest inland lake in Myanmar and SE Asia apart from Tonle Sap. Currently protected as a Wildlife Sanctuary and to be developed further as a Ramsar site. Important for thousands of northern migrant water birds and globally threatened species, such as ferruginous Ducks , Sarus Cranes and a last resort for globally threatened Vultures such as White-rumped vultures and many more water birds and birds of prey. Surrounded by gentle wooded hills the scenery is stunning, only enhanced by the far carrying and magic howling of the gibbons that live in these woods.



2) Nan Thar island



Nan Thar Island (Rakhine Province) is about 120 km south of the Myanmar-Bangladesh border off the mouth of the Kaladan River and harbours about 300 ha of intertidal sand and mudflats encircled by a set of sandy islands. It has a small fishing community of about 150 people. Nan Thar has been visited annually since 2008 by ArcCona in conjunction with BANCA, the national conservation NGO in Myanmar.

Foreign tour operators are offering tailored birding tours in support of the Spoon-billed sandpiper conservation and local communities. The hunting of wading birds on their wintering grounds has been identified as the primary cause of their decline. It has been predicted that without help, they could lose vital protected wintering sites and be extinct within 10 years! You can greatly help save this wonderful bird by visiting its main wintering grounds in Myanmar. The coast of Arakhan in the west of the country hosts a good number. The island can be visited by boat and several Spoon-billed Sandpipers can be expected in the rich mudflats near the island. We are not just here to enjoy this charismatic wader; we are also helping to count them. Working with ArcCona and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, we will support the local people by giving a small entrance fee when entering the island, demonstrating the sustainable value of a live Spoon-billed Sandpiper compared to that of a trapped and killed bird. Already the local hunters have agreed not to trap any more Spoon-billed Sandpipers or any other wader. We will meet these wonderfully friendly local people and encounter many more birds

3) Lake Inle

Well known tourist attraction. In need of conservation development. Proposed as Ramsar site

4) Moeyongyi



Moeyungyi Bird Sanctuary

Moeyungyi Bird Sanctuary, currently Myanmar's only Ramsar site, is a huge freshwater lake with plenty of freshwater vegetation surrounded by agricultural land not far from the capitol Yangon. A pleasant, tranquil place to gain insight into rural life, where ox and water buffalo are used to plough the fields. At dusk we get our first impression of the wetland, watching Pied and Eastern Marsh Harriers roosting in the reeds whilst thousands of egrets and herons fly in to roost in nearby trees. We stay overnight in comfortable chalets and enjoy the dark starry nights, free of light pollution.

An early morning excursion by boat takes us around the lake with Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Lesser Whistling Duck, Purple Swampphen and numerous Purple Herons. We will search for Painted Snipe among numerous Common Snipe and Wood Sandpiper. Asian Openbill Storks start soaring in late morning. With luck we will find some Painted Storks among them as well as several birds of prey. Striated Grassbirds, and many other Warbler mingle with rare Crakes and Jacanas on the lakes shore.

5) Golf of Mottama



The Gulf of Mottama or Martaban has the most extensive intertidal mudflats in Myanmar and

is one of the largest areas of this type in South-East Asia. It is formed by the delta of the Sittaung River, which is in turn supported by smaller rivers such as the Bilin River. It is also fed by the large Salween River from the east and is clearly influenced by the gigantic Ayeyarwaddy River from the west. The Sittuang and Bilin River have no in-stream dams and the Salween and Ayeyarwaddy have only a few dams. All contribute massive quantities of crucial sediments, creating vast and productive mudflats, stretching across the Yangon, Bago and Mon State provinces, covering an area of over 4000 km². The funnel shaped geomorphology of the Gulf and the relatively low physical disruption to the flow of its major contributing rivers, makes the Gulf a very special site for water birds and other biota. During the spring tides the regular occurrence of huge tidal bores results in high turbidity in the system, creating a dynamic flow of sediments and nutrients within the Gulf that supports a wide density of benthos for water birds to thrive on (Z. Lunn *in litt.*). The Gulf has been visited annually from 2008-2012, mostly in January and February. It is impossible to survey the vast mudflats entirely but in January 2010 at least the eastern part have been surveyed almost completely, while in previous years the focus was more on the western part. Ahlat, a fishing village, situated at the southern edge of the Gulf of Mottama at the Salween-Thanlwin River Mouth in Mon State is connected with the Gulf of Mottama by a long stretch of mudflats, this is a distinctive area of the Salween River mouth. It hosts big flocks of water birds that do not intermingle with flocks occurring in the central Gulf.

6) Meinmahla Kyun Wildlife Sanctuary



Meinmahla Kyun Wildlife Sanctuary lies in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta (Ayeyarwaddy Province) stretching over 140 km from west to east with many huge mudflats scattered along the coast often accompanied by outer islands, especially at the western and eastern edges of the delta. The reserve is comprised of the last remaining mangroves in the delta and home to the saltwater crocodile, fishing cat and many threatened water birds including the Lesser Adjutant Stork. The outer islands especially are host to globally threatened water birds such as the endangered Nordmann's Greenshank, while also home to the globally threatened Ridgley Turtle.

- 7) Mangroves and Mudflats around Myeik
- 8) Tanintharyi and Lenya National Park



Mudflats and Mangroves near Myeik

Both these projects involve several local and national NGOs. Primarily in this project FFI together with BANCA is working on a new Protected Area connecting the Tanintharyi and Lenya NP in the very south of the country. Unsustainable timber harvesting and the conversion of forest into Palm Oil plantations are major threats to the area and challenge implementing the ambitious conservation tasks. Both areas offer very attractive wildlife observation opportunities and hence are very attractive for nature tourism.

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Partners and Tour operators: <http://www.birdholidays.co.uk/index.html>

Bird Holidays hyperlink: <http://www.birdholidays.co.uk/index.html>

Link to FFI in Myanmar: <http://www.fauna-flora.org/explore/myanmar/>

Link BANCA: <http://www.banca-env.org/>



Evening at Lake Indawgyi