



Off to Bhutan

Quality Birding in Bhutan

BEST OF BHUTAN BIRDING



Bhutan - Birding Druk Yul: Land of the Thunder
Dragon

15 March to 3 April 2010

Guides: Norbu, Sherab Dorjee and Tom Stephenson

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INTRODUCTION

Bhutan conjures up images of an isolated Himalayan kingdom with incredible mountain ranges, a vibrant culture, colorful masked dancers, fantastic temples and architecture, prayer flags fluttering in the wind, food laced with spicy red and green chilies, friendly people and abundant Gross National Happiness. And of course, birders think of Bhutan's rare and very special birds including Satyr Tragopan, White-bellied Heron, Palla's Fish Eagle, Ward's Trogon, Beautiful Nuthatch, Dark-rumped Swift, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, Rufous-necked Hornbill, and many others. We were very fortunate to have been able to experience all of the above during a fantastic trip to Bhutan.

Birding was the main attraction of our trip, but we had many opportunities to experience cultural activities as well. We visited impressive Dzongs, extraordinary monasteries where we sipped butter tea and learned about Bhutan's form of Buddhism, textile cooperative, and markets. Amazingly, we found ourselves in Zhemgang during their annual festival called a Tsechu and got to see masked dancers performing ritual dances 100's if not 1000's of years old. All of that in addition to so many great birds made this trip very magical and we would highly recommend visiting Bhutan!

Nearly 75% of Bhutan is covered in primary forests and the scenery is fantastic. There are magnificent broad-leaved and rhododendron forests, vast expanses of dwarf bamboo, and wide, boulder-covered riverbeds. We travelled from west (Paro) to east (Trashigang) on the main road... well, it's the only road - National Highway 2, and then headed south to India via Samdrup Jongkhar. The road is narrow (2 cars or trucks cannot usually pass together) and winding, but because we travelled so slowly (averaged 30 Km/hr) car sickness was, happily, a non-issue. Because of the steepness of the mountains and the dense forest cover almost all birding was done from the road. And fortunately, there is very little traffic in most areas. That could be changing soon, however, as roads are being widened, so if you're considering going, then the sooner the better!

It rained several days of our trip, which was unusual for this time of year, and the day we drove through the Shangtala area we even enjoyed big wet snowflakes falling on us! The weather didn't dampen our spirits or our luck as we had fantastic views of 4 Satyr Tragopan and 15 Blood Pheasant – on this day alone! We also had good views of several mammals including Assam Macaque, the rare and endangered Golden Langur, Black Giant Squirrel, Himalayan Striped Squirrel, Hoary-bellied Squirrel, Nepal Gray Langur, Himalayan Pika, Yellow-throated Marten, Indian Muntjac or barking deer, and Yak.

Despite the several days of wet weather the crew was impressive and attentive. They seemed to magically prepare delicious and nutritious Bhutanese meals to please both the meat eaters and the vegetarians. In the morning the crew brought us steaming cups of coffee and tea, "bed tea", - right in to our tent. This was followed by hot water to wash. And just when you needed it the camp crew arrived with a mid-morning snack of biscuits, hot roasted cashews and peanuts, coffee, tea and soft drinks. We enjoyed lunches al fresco (often with some great birds) and dinner was served, when we weren't in hotels, in the comfortable dining tent under glowing lanterns (and our headlamps!)

Our trip proved to be truly exceptional in all ways. We had a fantastic culture experience, incredible mountain scenery and amazing number of great birds and extraordinary guides and crew. Our total number of birds seen in Bhutan was 330 including 17 heard only and 42 new birds in Guwahati with 0 heard only, making a grand total for the trip: 372 species. For those who went on to Kaziranga and also Delhi the grand total was 509 species. Fantastic! We would love to return again someday.

15TH MARCH: ARRIVE PARO AND TRANSFER THIMPHU

Our flight from Delhi was nothing less than spectacular. We had been given a heads up by our guides to sit on the left side of the plane so we could see the Himalayan Mountains. Mount Everest was too covered in clouds and did not show itself, but there were many high peaks that were free from clouds and we pressed our noses against the window panes and clicked the cameras. The plane twisted its way through the snow-capped Himalayas and the captain pointed out the names of some of the peaks. Before long the Paro Valley came into view. As the plane wound its way up the Paro river valley the Bhutanese architecture came into view – incredible homes and dzongs with wood and bold colors– and there were fields beautifully dressed in early spring green colors and the apricot trees exploding in full bloom. As we touched down we saw that even the airport was beautiful. Wow! This was already an amazing trip.

Passing through customs proved to be easy and we were soon meeting our marvelous guides Norbu, Sherab Dorjee and their mentor and our mutual friend, Tom Stephenson, and before we knew it were on our way birding. Tom has been to Bhutan several times including a month stay training local guides for the government. His knowledge of the birds and songs was keen and Norbu and Sherab were also excellent spotters and able to quickly identify the birds we found.

Right after customs we headed for the center of town and the Paro Chhu (River). Right on cue, a Common Buzzard was perched in a bare tree. And then, looking over the edge of the bridge we spotted our first Ibisbill. Wow! We would see three more on day one. Beneath the footbridge and along the riverbanks we also saw our first of many Plumbeous Redstarts. Before we left town we saw Oriental Turtle Dove, Rock Pigeon (a nice one!), River Lapwing, Olive-backed Pipit, Red-billed Chough, Grey Wagtail, Blue Whistling Thrush, Hodgson's Redstart, and White-capped Water Redstart.

On day one we learned the call of the Hill Partridge, which we heard most everyday but never saw. Later we learned that Tom does a very nice Partridge call and his efforts nearly enticed one to show himself.

At a place where 2 rivers, the Thimphu and Paro.(Chum-zom), came together we stopped to check for birds. The highlight was when Sherab spotted a Wallcreeper that was very close to us, moving along the crack of some boulders. We drove up the Paro Chhu to visit the Kyichu Lhakhang (Monastery). It is the oldest monastery in Bhutan and provided a peaceful setting as Green-backed Tits serenaded us while we turned our first prayer wheels of the trip (clockwise of course!). The Kyichu Lhakhang was built in the 7th century by the Tibetan King Songsten Gampo. Norbu, our fantastic bird guide, who is also a certified cultural guide



Ibisbill @ Norbu

and trekking guide told us the history of the Kyichu Lhakhang. It was believed that a giant demoness was lying across Tibet and spread into the Himalayas. The demoness prevented the spread of Buddhism. To overcome the demoness the King ordered that 108 temples be built over her body to hold her down. Kyichu Lhakhang is one of 12 temples that were actually built in Bhutan.

We continued the drive up the Paro River valley and got good views of one of several Black-tailed Crakes we'd see on the trip. This very rare high elevation species is a much sought-after bird, and Bhutan is probably the best place in the world to see it.

At lunch in a restaurant in Paro we were introduced to staple of the Bhutanese diet - Ema Datsi. Ema Datsi is green or red chile prepared with a cheese sauce and varies by cook and day. Ema Datsi soon became a favorite on the trip and we sampled many versions of this traditional dish - including the lunch that will not be forgotten –super fiery hot Ema Datsi!

After lunch, Karma, who was the excellent driver of our very spacious bus, drove us to the capital of Thimphu. The road to Thimphu is pretty much the only paved road in the country. It runs west to east, it's very winding and so narrow that it does not allow two cars to pass in most places and requires the drivers going downhill to yield to the drivers coming uphill. As Karma carefully navigated his way we were able to take in the majestic snow-capped mountains and beautiful and colorful homes - many of which are decorated with life-like body images that are designed to ward off evil spirits.

Our first stop was at the sewage ponds! Here we checked off Bar-headed Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Gadwall, Ruddy Shelduck, and amazingly Tom located two Spot-billed Ducks as they dashed by overhead. Fortunately we were able to track them, and later found

Trip Detail

them for great looks on the river. They were of the darker, Chinese subspecies, and not a common species for Bhutan.

As dusk settled over Bhutan we headed to our home for the night, the lovely Hotel Kisa. Near the river just below our hotel we watched an informal archery tournament – the national sport. We had had a very full day of adventure that was chock full of birds. Paro is one of the most beautiful places we have ever seen. We were completely enchanted with Bhutan!

Other birds seen on Day one included: Common Teal, Northern Pintail, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Osprey, Besra, Common Kestrel, Great Cormorant, Long-tailed Shrike, Grey-backed Shrike, Large-billed Crow, Long-tailed Minivet, Brown Dipper, White-collared Blackbird, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Common Stonechat, Eurasian Treecreeper, Eurasian Crag Martin, Rufous Sibia, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Russet Sparrow, White Wagtail, and Oriental Skylark.



Yellow-rumped Honeyguide @ Norbu

We then drove up to the Tango Monastery that was started in the 13th century. We birded along the way and saw another large flock of Laughingthrushes, this time with three species: Chestnut-Crowned, White-throated and Black-faced.

As we hiked up the hill to the Tango Monastery we saw more birds including Eurasian Treecreeper, Winter Wren, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Rufous-breasted Accentor, White-tailed Nuthatch, Grey-crested, Green-backed, Yellow-browed and Rufous-fronted Tits. While we birded, dozens of red-robed monks hiked past us. Monks alone, monks in pairs, monks in groups, and monks talking on their cell phones! They were heading down into the small town located below the monastery to honor, meet or catch a glimpse of an important lama who was coming to town. We continued to bird our way uphill side-stepping out of the way of the river of red-robed smiling monks.

Norbu took this opportunity to receive a blessing from a young monk who is the reincarnation of Gasey Tenzin Rabgay, 4th temporal ruler and the person who built the famous Tiger's Nest monastery. He is a descendant of

16TH MARCH: THIMPHU - SEWAGE POND - TANGO MONASTERY HIKE

We drove north from Thimphu and stopped along the roadside to check for the elusive and much sought after Honeyguide. Within minutes Norbu said "I have the bird!" Unbelievably, Norbu had already located the Yellow-rumped Honeyguide! It was sitting nearly motionless on a branch. What great spotting!

We returned to the Thimpu sewage ponds and wetland area. We saw four Ibisbill in the river, Besra, Great Cormorant – the breeding plumage adults were sporting very white heads, Brown dipper, the stunning Common Hoopoe, both Common and Pin-tailed Snipe (distinguished in part by their very different flying style), Common and Green Sandpipers, Ruddy Shelduck, Eurasian Widgeon, River Lapwing, Oriental Skylark, Eurasian Kestrel, and the handsome Long-tailed Shrike.

We then birded our way into Jigme Dorji National Park. About 6000 people live inside the park boundaries mainly earning a living from subsistence farming. We watched some of the local people pick up supplies and load their pack horses. The supplies were given to them by the government in order to rebuild a bridge that had been washed out by heavy rains. The horses were short, stocky and beautifully outfitted in Bhutanese textiles that covered the bridges of their noses. The lead horses were easy to identify as they wore large red pompoms on their foreheads and had bells on their halters.

When the horses were finally loaded they started their 2 day journey back home. The people walked alongside the horses guiding them and making sure the packs were secure. We hiked up the trail and as they came by we stepped aside to let them pass. After they passed we were rewarded with good views of a pair of Hoary-throated Barwings, Blue-fronted Redstart and Golden-breasted and White-browed Fulvettas. Returning to the vehicles we were lucky to see a flock of beautiful Chestnut-Crowned, and White-throated Laughingthrushes.

Trip Detail

Lama Drukpakunley (1455-1529) one of Bhutan's favorite saints, also known as the Divine Madman. It was the Divine Madman who was responsible for the flying phalluses found on many Bhutanese homes.

By the time we hiked up to the monastery almost all the monks had made their way downhill into town. Tango monastery included many fine examples of intricate religious wall paintings. Norbu, our certified cultural tour guide, was able to explain many aspects of Bhutanese religion to us.

We then drove back down to Thimphu, on the way spotting Darjeeling Woodpecker, a spectacular flock of Snow Pigeons and other birds including Grey-backed Shrike, Common Stonechat, Blue Whistling-thrush, Long-tailed Minivets, and Little Bunting. Thus concluded a great day of birding.

17TH MARCH: PARO - TIGER'S NEST MONASTERY

We left Thimphu early to head to Paro to pick up the remaining three people in our party who had been delayed due to poor weather conditions in the eastern US. Soon we were all acquainted and heading to Taktsang Monastery or Tiger's Nest monastery, which most people refer to as simply The Tiger's Nest. Whatever it is called, it is a fantastic monastery nestled on a steep rocky cliffside at 10,000+ feet. It was built in the late 1600's but burned to the ground in 1998. It has been totally rebuilt and it is jaw-dropping beautiful. It is site that Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) was carried to on the back of a tigress who was his Tibetan wife. Later Guru Rinpoche came back and meditated in the caves found here. We hiked through pine forest decorated with fluttering prayer flags and turning prayer wheels.

Along the way we saw an amazingly close and confiding group of Spotted Laughingthrush. At the top, besides stunningly close views of Tiger's Nest, we also had a large group of almost tame Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrushes. What amazing birds.

We didn't want the late arrivals to miss some of the key Paro birds, so we headed back to the river side. As we were speeding along (well, that's relative, isn't it...) Tom yelled out "STOP"..(something he was to do many, many and many more times throughout the trip...) There, camouflaged amongst the large boulders was an Ibisbill. It took us a long time to find it and we couldn't really figure out how it was spotted in the first place... Once we found it, however, we had long, satisfying scope views. Such a fantastic bird.

We finally made it to a small marsh by the river and Tom was able to call in another Black-tailed Crake for some great views. Across the road we then, with Norbu's help, were able to flush a pair of Solitary Snipes. We also had our daily dose of Plumbeous and White-capped Water Redstarts as well as a Hodgson's Redstart, Green Sandpiper and Common Buzzard.

We then drove up to Drukgyel Dzong. Built in 1649 by the Zhabdrung, it is now an interesting ruin that also offers some good birding habitat. This Dzong is situated on what was the end of the main trail from Tibet into the Paro Valley, offering defense against Tibetan invasions and then later a trade



Tiger's Nest monastery @ Norbu

center. It was built with a false tunnel entrance that once was used to good effect against an invading Tibetan army.

As we walked around the perimeter Tom heard an unexpected song: Brown Parrotbill! This sought-after nomadic species feeds usually on dwarf bamboo. We found a flock of about 6 birds calmly feeding by a fence row, offering some great, long scope views of this normally elusive species. Other birds seen on the path around the old Dzong included Yellow-billed Blue magpie, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Blyth's Leaf-warbler and flocks of tits.

We retired to an amazing hotel, situated right on the river. And on the way to dinner that night we heard distant Grey Nightjars calling away.

Other birds seen included Northern Pintail, Rock Pigeon, Oriental Turtle Dove, Great Cormorant, Grey-backed Shrike, Large-billed Crow, Red-billed Chough, Long-tailed Minivet, Blue Whistling Thrush, White-collared Blackbird, Common Stonechat, Rufous Sibia, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Russet Sparrow, White Wagtail, House Crow, Blue-fronted Redstart, Grey-crested Tit, Rufous-fronted Tit, White-throated Laughingthrush, Black-faced Laughingthrush, and White-browed Fulvetta.

Heard only included Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Green-backed Tit, Grey Nightjar, and Spotted Nutcracker.



18TH MARCH: PARO - CHELELA BIRDING - LAMPERI ECO CAMP

Up very early today (3:45 AM), one of the only really early starts of the trip, we headed up to the Chelela Pass (nearly 4000 meters). Chelela offers an opportunity to get high above tree line in order to have a better chance at seeing Blood Pheasant, Himalayan Monal, and Kalij Pheasant; all active very early in the AM. There was snow on the ground and the temperature was a bit nippy, but never mind all that, we got great views of 6 Blood Pheasants, 7 Himalayan Monal and 1 Kalij Pheasant!

Later in the day we were delighted to get good looks at 2 Greater Yellownapes. We did OK with raptors this day too, with 3 Black Eagles, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, and a Common Buzzard.

We saw our first Slaty-backed Forktail today and the only Goldcrest of the trip was seen today too.

As we walked and drove the road to and from the summit we ran into numerous flocks and single birds including Snow Pigeons, Spotted Nutcracker, Red-billed Chough, Long-tailed Minivet, White-collared Blackbird, Eurasian Treecreeper, flocks of Green-backed, Grey-crested, Coal, Rufous-fronted, and Rufous-vented Tits; Ashy-throated Warbler; and Black-faced, Spotted and Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrushes,

At one point Tom pulled out his iPod and played Buff-barred Warbler, eliciting an almost immediate response. As we were a bit early they were just arriving and not as vocal as we found them to be a bit later in the trip.

At other times, driving or walking we'd all come to a sudden stop for a number of great species including the amazingly cute Fire-capped Tit, Altai Accentor, Rufous-breasted Bush Robin, White-throated Redstart, two absolutely stun-



Himalayan Monal @ Norbu

ning sunbirds: Mrs Gould's and Green-tailed Sunbirds, White-browed Rosefinch, Collared Grosbeak, and White-winged Grosbeak. And of course, who wouldn't stop for a Yak!

It was difficult to pry ourselves away from Cheli-la, but we finally did and drove a couple of hours to our next stop.

Other birds seen that day included Rock Pigeon, Oriental Turtle Dove, Ibisbill, Common Buzzard, Great Cormorant, Grey-backed Shrike, Large-billed Crow, Blue Whistling Thrush, Hodgson's Redstart, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Rufous Sibia, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Russet Sparrow, White Wagtail, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Blue-fronted Redstart, White-browed Fulvetta, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Green-backed Tit, Ruddy Shelduck, River Lapwing, Brown Dipper, Himalayan Swiftlet, Coal Tit, and Ashy-throated Warbler.

Heard only: Buff-barred Warbler and Stripe-throated Yuhina.

Trip Detail



19TH MARCH: LAMPERI - JIGME DORJI NATIONAL PARK (SHATEN)

Last night we stayed near a little-visited Botanical gardens with some new habitat for the trip, and we had a lot of great birds. We spent most of the day walking or driving slowly along the road on our way to a campsite right inside Jigme Dorji Park. One of the first birds we heard was a distant Brown-throated Treecreeper. As was often the case, we were able to bring it with Tom's recorder, and had great views while it fed on some near by tree trunks.

Some of the other species we encountered included Great Barbet, a stunning Golden-throated Barbet, Grey-backed Shrike, Blue Whistling Thrush, White-collared Blackbird, the beautiful and almost omnipresent Rufous Sibia, White Wagtail, the shining Green-tailed Sunbird, Stripe-throated Yuhina, Common Stonechat, Common Hoopoe, White-tailed Nuthatch, Olive-backed Pipit, Greater Yellownappe, Grey Treepie, Ashy Drongo, Grey Bushchat, Black-throated Tit, Oriental White-eye, and Mrs Gould's Sunbird.

At times we would drive slowly along the road, Tom with his head out, listening for flock sentinels or other species. This led to the common "stop!" call and some really great flocks. Some of the flocking species included Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, a flock sentinel bird; the very cute Black-faced, Chestnut-crowned, Grey-cheeked, and Yellow-vented Warblers, Striated Laughingthrush, the fabulous Black-eared Shrike Babbler, Chestnut-tailed Minla, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Rufous-fronted Babbler, Whiskered Yuhina, and the very cool Fire-breasted Flowerpecker.

Less often in flocks, but definitely worth the stop were Blyth's Leaf, Grey-hooded, and Ashy-throated Warblers, Short-billed Minivet, an active flock of White-throated Laughingthrushes, the truly blue Verditer Flycatcher, Himalayan Swiftlet, and cruising overhead was a Mountain Hawk Eagle. We also had the good fortune to find flocks of two no-



Golden-throated Barbet @ Norbu

madic species: Tibetan Siskin, and a very vocal flock of Brown Bullfinch. And in one flock we had a handsome Ultramarine Flycatcher. Without exception, our outdoor lunch spots included a lot of great birding. Today at lunch, Tom heard a dark ticking sound and went running off yelling "rare bird, rare bird"...A few yards up the road was a calling Blue-fronted Robin, a rare and hard to see bird. Unfortunately it didn't stick around long enough for everyone to put down their dishes and get to the spot. However it did sing back for us as Tom tried to lure it back.

Along the river we had great looks at the standard Bhutan river-side birds including White-capped Water Redstart, Brown Dipper, Plumbeous Water Redstart, as well as some migrants including Mallard (actually not so common), Eurasian Wigeon, and Common Merganser. We also had great views of Crested Kingfisher and another Wallcreeper, which actually is often found on boulders in the larger rivers in Bhutan.

Earlier in the day, on the road, we ran into a friend of Tom's Yeshey Dorji, a talented pho-

Trip Detail

tographer and author of *Birds of Bhutan*, a very handsome coffee-table book on Bhutan and its culture and birds. Yeshey mentioned that there had been a report of 7 odd-looking cranes or swans flying along the river. He was going to try and investigate as the callers didn't know what species they were. Later, as we drove along the river Norbu shouted out "There they are!" Flying in formation, were 7 young Common Cranes. We called Yeshey to confirm this very unusual species for Bhutan.

Other birds included Hill Partridge heard only and Rock Pigeon, Oriental Turtle Dove, Great Cormorant, Large-billed Crow, Russet Sparrow, Blue-fronted Redstart, Rufous-fronted Tit, Green-backed Tit, Ruddy Shelduck, Common Kestrel, Common Myna, Black Bulbul, and Red-vented Bulbul.



Chestnut-headed Tesia @ Norbu

Final highlights of this very birdy day included the beautiful and vocal Orange-bellied Leafbird, blinding Scarlet Minivets, a handsome Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, the almost glowing Large and Small Niltavas, Mountain Bulbul, Bhutan (or Streaked) Laughingthrush, White-bellied Yuhina, Black-throated Sunbird, and a Rusty-flanked Treecreeper.

Other birds included Oriental Turtle Dove, Great Cormorant, Blue Whistling Thrush, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Rufous Sibia, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Green-backed Tit, Brown Dipper, White-capped Water Redstart, White-throated Laughingthrush, Golden-throated Barbet, Great Barbet, Crested Kingfisher, Grey Treepie, Ashy Drongo, Verditer Flycatcher, Brown-throated Treecreeper, Black-throated Tit, Black Bulbul, Red-vented Bulbul, River Lapwing, Grey Wagtail, Gadwall, and Large-billed Crow.

Heard only included Rufous-throated Partridge, Bay Woodpecker, and Slaty-bellied Tesia.

20TH MARCH: FULL DAY BIRDING JIGME DORJI NATIONAL PARK

Today we spent most of our time birding the road in Jigme Dorji Park along the Mo chu River and near our camp right inside the park. We were treated to many special birds, and it was great being able to wake up and get to our birding right away.

Today we had a few outstanding highlights. The first was an absolutely amazing and cooperative Chestnut-headed Tesia. Tom or Norbu first heard its call note and we gathered the group for the show. It soon started singing and presented itself several times in good view.

Shortly after the Tesia came another super cute bird. One of the group got a quick glimpse of what they thought might be a wren. In fact it turned out to be a Pygmy Wren Babbler offering some really good views.

Lunch was interrupted first with a cooperative Slaty-backed Forktail. Soon after, Mountain Hawk Eagle flew by. We started to sit down and there was another interruption: a Crested Serpent Eagle. And shortly later a Rufous-bellied Eagle. It's not that easy to eat in Bhutan!

Right near our campsite we found a very cooperative Blyth's Reed Warbler. Well, cooperative in the sense that it stayed in the same place for a long time. It still took some maneuvering to get some good photos of this skulker.

There were a number of other warblers in the area as well, including Blyth's Leaf, Grey-hooded, Chestnut-crowned, Yellow-vented, Yellow-browed, and Greenish Warblers.

We had fun watching a large flock of very active Rusty-fronted Barwing, really beautiful birds that tend to stay in flocks by themselves. Other flocks yielded Oriental White-eye, Striated Laughingthrush, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Whiskered Yuhina, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, the noisy Nepal Fulvetta, Black-chinned Yuhina, and Rufous-capped and the glowing Golden Babblers.

21ST MARCH: SHATEN - NOBDING - PHOBJEKHA

After another early start we drove down Mochu (river) to to the Punakah Dzong. Today turned out to be one of amazing culture combined with some mega-rarities, a great combination!

As we drove along the river we all heard the now-common STOP command. Flying down the river was a Pallas's Fish Eagle. This globally Vulnerable species is rare and hard to see. A few do nest in Bhutan and it's highly sought after. This bird had a large fish in its talons. We had long looks then turned around and followed it up the river. We found it perched in a tree for more long looks. Then it flew by once again, with much less of the fish remaining!

Basking in the luck of seeing this species we were not prepared for our next stroke of good luck: Sherab, who has a phenomenal eye, spotting a White-bellied Heron fishing in the Mochu river near Punakha! The White-bellied Heron is a very large heron standing about 4 feet tall. A magnificent bird!, The White-bellied Heron is a bird in big trouble due to habitat loss. Bhutan may be its last refuge and there probably are fewer than 100 birds remaining worldwide. –sadly, this bird may be headed for extinction. There had been no reports of the Heron this winter, when they usually come down from their more hidden nesting areas. We were very happy to find this amazing bird.

After becoming satiated on the heron we continued on to the back side of Punakha Dzong. On the way we found an Asian Barred Owlet perched in full view on a tree in a pasture. Since we were stopped.... of course we found some more birds including a Blue Rock Thrush, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, a confiding pair of Barred Cuckoo Doves, and an Oriental Magpie Robin.

Birding the road behind and across the river from the Dzong we had a few more good species including Striated Prinia. Tom and Frank then found a really amazing bird, a Brown Rock Chat. Not rare worldwide, but possibly the first record for Bhutan. Unfortunately the bird was working some rocks just over a ledge, and wouldn't come back out for others to see (or for photos....)

Since the culture in Bhutan is so unique and amazing, we had planned to visit the nearby Punakha Dzong. To get there we all walked over the river on the longest suspension foot bridge in Bhutan. Quite an experience. And the Dzong itself was magnificent. The carvings, painted designs and Buddha statues were other worldly. We stayed a long time and no one wanted to leave. In fact this trip report was almost written by a group of 6 newly initiated monks...

On the way out in the courtyard Tom yelled out "Honey Buzzard" and flying fairly low was an Oriental Honey-Buzzard. We took this as a sign that the real world was pulling us back to the road for more birds; and sure enough, on our way out, Tom and Norbu called in an Asian Koel that was vocalizing



White-bellied Heron @ Norbu

outside the Dzong. It might have been nervous about the Common Kestrels perched on the dragon heads on the Dzong's roof...

We were now on our way to Probjikhla Valley, a very scenic drive through bamboo and rhododendron and conifer forests, meadows and river valleys.

On the way we encountered lots of great birds including a flock of Kalij Pheasants, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Grey Treepie, Bhutan Laughingthrush, Crested Serpent Eagle, Fork-tailed Swift, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, and, unbelievably, another Yellow-rumped Honeyguide attending a large group of Giant Honeybee hives.

Gangtey is small village situated in a fabulous spot (about 3000 meters elevation) in the Phobjikha Valley. It is the winter home to a number of Black-necked Cranes. These globally Vulnerable birds are declining rapidly. Bhutan is one of their winter refuges and Probjikhla Valley is one of their main spots in Bhutan. The people in the valley treat the birds as sacred, and have decided that they did not want to have electricity brought in to the valley as they were worried about the lines hurting the birds.

It was late for the cranes, but we had heard there was an injured bird that probably was going to stay until the worst happened to it. We had been delayed by so many incredible birds that darkness was approaching as we entered the valley. As we entered the plain Norbu spotted the injured bird, which was attended by one other adult bird. Fantastic! We walked out to a good viewing area and had great scope views. On the way we also had Eurasian Sparrowhawk, a huge number of displaying Oriental Skylarks, and a Hen Harrier. We kept our eyes peeled because the winter before Tom had found a Short-eared Owl in this valley, maybe only the second or third record for the country.

Trip Detail

It was getting even darker and we drove back to the upper end of the roosting area, and were lucky to find two more Cranes resting. What a great end to a fantastic day.

We then retired to our hotel, the Magnificent Gangtey Gampa / Hotel Dewachen.

Some of the other birds seen that day included Oriental Turtle Dove, Great Cormorant, Blue Whistling Thrush, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Rufous Sibia, Green-backed Tit, Brown Dipper, White-capped Water Redstart, Grey-hooded Warbler, Great Barbet, Crested Kingfisher, Ashy Drongo, Black Bulbul, Red-vented Bulbul, Whiskered Yuhina, River Lapwing, Slaty-backed Forktail, Nepal Fulvetta, Black-chinned Yuhina, Large-billed Crow, Rock Pigeon, Grey-backed Shrike, Russet Sparrow, White Wagtail, Blue-fronted Redstart, Ruddy Shelduck, Common Stonechat, Common Hoopoe, Olive-backed Pipit, Common Merganser, Common Myna, Mrs Gould's Sunbird, Hodgson's Redstart, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Ibisbill, Common Buzzard, Northern Pintail, Common Sandpiper, Little Bunting, Long-tailed Shrike, Red-wattled Lapwing, and Peregrine Falcon.



Satyr Tragopan @ Norbu

Blue Whistling Thrush, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Rufous Sibia, Green-backed Tit, White-capped Water Redstart, Ashy Drongo, Black Bulbul, Red-vented Bulbul, Whiskered Yuhina, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Streaked Laughingthrush, Black-chinned Yuhina, Large-billed Crow, Rock Pigeon, Russet Sparrow, Blue-fronted Redstart, Olive-backed Pipit, Mrs Gould's Sunbird, Hodgson's Redstart, Common Buzzard, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Striated Prinia, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Chestnut-crowned Warbler, Spotted Nutcracker, White-throated Laughingthrush, Blyth's Leaf Warbler, Striated Laughingthrush, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Yellow-browed Warbler, Greenish Warbler, White-collared Blackbird, Rufous-fronted Tit, Ashy-throated Warbler, Green-tailed Sunbird, Stripe-throated Yuhina, White-tailed Nuthatch, Chestnut-tailed Minla, Long-tailed Minivet, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Grey-crested Tit, Winter Wren, Eurasian Crag Martin, Eurasian Jay, and Asian House Martin.

22ND MARCH: PHOBJEKHA - PELELA - TRONGSA

We said good-bye to the Phobjikha valley and the Black-necked Cranes and headed toward the high pass at Pele La. We travelled through a variety of habitats on our way to the pass and then on to our hotel in Trongsa. In one area of tall bamboo, we stopped and Tom played the song of the Great Parrotbill. Sure enough, one responded, and a pair came right in for some great views.

At the pass we were once again at a higher elevation. This gave us a chance to see some of the birds that we had seen earlier at CheleLa near Paro, plus some others, of course.

Some highlights included a very cooperative female Himalayan Monal, Himalayan Griffon, Lemon-rumped Warbler, Whistler's Warbler, Green Shrike Babbler, Rufous-vented Yuhina, Alpine Accentor, Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, Dark-rumped Rosefinch, Red-headed Bullfinch, White-browed Rosefinch, Collared Grosbeak, White-winged Grosbeak, Buff-barred Warbler, Yellow-browed Tit, Black-faced Laughingthrush, Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush, White-browed Fulvetta, Eurasian Treecreeper, Coal Tit, Yellow-cheeked Tit, and Rufous-vented Tit.

At one point Tom heard a Darjeeling Woodpecker and we all clambered up the slopes and finally got some great views of this handsome bird.

We also had the incredibly great fortune to find another male Satyr Trogopan, which again offered great views.

After hearing a bit of noisy flock we saw a tiny shape flash across the road. Tracking it down, we found it to be a Collared Owlet perching out for us to watch for a bit.

Lower down, after the pass, we found some more great birds including Streaked-breasted Scimitar-babbler, Hoary-throated Barwing, a very cooperative Mountain Imperial Pigeon, and a Black-winged Cuckooshrike.

Other birds seen that day included Oriental Turtle Dove,

Trip Detail



Crested Bunting @ Norbu

Blyth's Leaf Warbler, Striated Laughingthrush, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Yellow-bellied Fantail, White-collared Blackbird, Green-tailed Sunbird, White-tailed Nuthatch, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Black-faced Laughingthrush, Coal Tit, Yellow-browed Tit, Lemon-rumped Warbler, Great Barbet, Great Cormorant, Grey-hooded Warbler, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Grey Treepie, Nepal Fulvetta, Grey-backed Shrike, Common Stonechat, Common Kestrel, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Kalij Pheasant, Long-tailed Shrike, Fork-tailed Swift, Oriental Magpie Robin, Golden-throated Barbet, Verditer Flycatcher, Oriental White-eye, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Scarlet Minivet, Mountain Bulbul, White-bellied Yuhina, Black-throated Sunbird, Eurasian Wigeon, Short-billed Minivet, Grey Bushchat, Rufous-fronted Babbler, Little Pied Flycatcher, Ashy Bulbul, Striated Bulbul, Common Tailorbird, Fire-capped Tit.

Heard species included Hill Partridge, Common Myna, Barred Cuckoo Dove, Yellow-vented Warbler, Bay Woodpecker, Large Niltava, Pygmy Wren Babbler, Rufous-throated Partridge, Slaty-bellied Tesia, White-throated Fantail, and Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler.

During the night at our campsite we heard 4 species of owls: Mountain Scops Owl, Asian Barred Owlet and Collared Owlet and Collared Scops owl.

23RD MARCH: TRONGSA - ZHEMGANG - TINGTIBE

Today we had a longer drive so, with Tom and Norbu's heads outside to listen for flocks we proceeded along. For being in the car quite a bit of the day, we actually had a lot of great birds.

Some highlights included great views of Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, the vocal but very hard to see (Tom called it in) Large Hawk Cuckoo, the striking and handsome Black-eared Shrike Babbler, Rufous-bellied Eagle, the really beautiful Chestnut-tailed Minla, Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Lesser Yellownappe, Blue-throated Barbet, and Common Kingfisher.

At one point Norbu heard a Common Green Magpie, and we all got out to have a look at this fantastic bird. As usual, other birds just kept popping up and we had great views of Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, the almost prehistoric looking Green-billed Malkoha, Chestnut-tailed Starling, Black Eagle, Crested Bunting, Bronzed Drongo, and unbelievably, another Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler.

As we continued down the road, Tom heard Grey-bellied Tesia. So out we went and, after some time with this skulker, finally had some very good views. Of course while we were out we continued walking a bit and found a stunning Spotted Forktail, some very cooperative Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes, a noisy flock of White-crested Laughingthrushes, which have to be some of the funniest birds in the world; Red-tailed Minla, and Striated Yuhina.

Some other species seen included Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Rufous Sibia, Green-backed Tit, White-capped Water Redstart, Ashy Drongo, Black Bulbul, Red-vented Bulbul, Whiskered Yuhina, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Streaked Laughingthrush, Large-billed Crow, Rock Pigeon, Russet Sparrow, Blue-fronted Redstart, Mrs Gould's Sunbird, Hodgson's Redstart, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Chestnut-crowned Warbler, White-throated Laughingthrush,



Trip Detail

24TH MARCH: ZHEMGANG - DAKPHEL - TINGTIBE ROAD

Although very unusual for this time of year, we began to experience some rain and fog, which slowed us down a bit at times. Even so, we found some very interesting species in the great birding area of Zhemgang, including the Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Lesser Racquet-tailed Drongo with its tail streaming out behind, and a White-browed Scimitar-babbler. We also had good looks at a Streaked Spiderhunter and a Spotted Dove, which is more patterned on its back than our introduced birds in LA. Later we found a tree with 2 species of Pigeon: Pin-tailed and Wedge-tailed Green Pigeons. Then to complete the Racquet-tailed day, we found a Greater Racquet-tailed Drongo, which made for a good comparison with the previously seen Lesser.

Further down the road, Tom heard the harsh calls of a group of White-throated Bulbuls. They turned out to be as skulky as usual, but finally made a showing. In the same area we also had Striated Bulbul, more Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes, Striated Yuhina, which is one of the less common Yuhinas, and the stunningly bright Small Niltava.

Another partially harsh call helped us locate a striking Sul-tan Tit. Then later we saw Pale-blue Flycatcher, another Spotted Forktail, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, and a handsome Blue-throated Barbet.

Walking further down the road Tom started beckoning and running again...this time for a flock of the very beautiful Red-faced Liocichlas. In the vicinity we also had the rarest of the Yuhinas, the White-naped Yuhina, as well as White-browed Scimitar Babbler, Blue-winged Minla, and yet another Streaked Spiderhunter.

One of the key targets of Bhutan is Beautiful Nuthatch. This very rare, Red-list-threatened species is probably easiest to find in the world in Bhutan. We spent some time in one possible area searching the high mossy epiphytes for this striking species. We finally heard one and tried to call it in. Although Tom, Norbu and a couple of others in the group had fast glimpses of it far away and high, it didn't cooperate. And the rain didn't help either, unfortunately. We went away determined to try again.

Other birds seen included Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous Sibia, Green-backed Tit, White-capped



Spotted Forktail @ Norbu

Water Redstart, Ashy Drongo, Black Bulbul, Red-vented Bulbul, Whiskered Yuhina, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Large-billed Crow, Blue-fronted Redstart, Hodgson's Redstart, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Chestnut-crowned Warbler, Striated Laughingthrush, Yellow-bellied Fantail, White-tailed Nuthatch, Chestnut-tailed Minla, Yellow-browed Tit, Lemon-rumped Warbler, Great Barbet, Great Cormorant, Grey-hooded Warbler, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Grey Treepie, Nepal Fulvetta, Grey-backed Shrike, Golden-throated Barbet, Verditer Flycatcher, Oriental White-eye, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Scarlet Minivet, White-bellied Yuhina, Black-throated Sunbird, Short-billed Minivet, Rufous-fronted Babbler, Little Pied Flycatcher, Ashy Bulbul, Barred Cuckoo Dove, Yellow-vented Warbler, White-throated Fantail, Olive-backed Pipit, Stripe-throated Yuhina, Yellow-cheeked Tit, Black-throated Tit, Grey Wagtail, Rusty-fronted Barwing, Golden Babbler, Spotted Dove, and Grey-chinned Minivet.

Heard only species Owlet, Asian Barred Owllet, Hill Partridge, Mountain Scops Owl, Large Niltava, Rufous-throated Partridge, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Oriental Cuckoo, Collared Scops Owl, and Hume's Warbler.



Bar-winged Wren Babbler @ Norbu

25TH MARCH: ZHEMGANG - DAKPHEL - TINGTIBE ROAD

Up early again, 4:15 AM. Sunny and warm. Camped 6 km north of Zhemgang at 1200 meters.

Today we continued our focused search for Beautiful Nuthatch. However, as always in Bhutan, we were rewarded many other birds. One highlight was a Spotted Wren Babbler that, unlike the nuthatch, was very cooperative. As the rain continued on and off, we ran into more birds, which were just not themselves, as it were. Tom did find a male

Trip Detail

Black-headed Shrike Babbler, which is a rare and sought after species. Unfortunately only some of the group could get on it, as it took cover from the rain. We also heard and got close to the really spectacular Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler, which also refused to cooperate. And finally we heard a Rufous-necked Hornbill fly by....too many great escapes today!

We did score with some really great birds including Blue and Blue-capped Rock Thrush, the “ready for Disney” Silver-eared Mesia, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Rufous-bellied Eagle, and Grey-throated Babbler among many others.

When the birding slowed down mid day we headed to Zhemgang, a charming village with fantastic views of the mountains and valleys. As we stopped to walk around Norbu ran back and told us that we had great fortune to happen to be there on the day of their annual Tsechu. A Tsechu is a religious festival held in each district of Bhutan on the tenth day of one month of the lunar Tibetan calendar.

We soon learned that Tsechus are social gatherings, which people from all over the region attend in their finest national costumes. It was a very memorable and colorful experience, especially since we were the only Westerners attending the festival. It was held in an outdoor arena-like space and included masked dancers, clowns and incredibly colorful outfits. One clown came into the audience and was pestering the people. We found out later that the fact we were banged in the head by his small drum was a good thing and that we had been blessed! What a great show.

As for the birds, we actually had a very good day, notwithstanding the rain. Some of the birds we saw included Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous Sibia, Green-backed Tit, White-capped Water Redstart, Ashy Drongo, Black Bulbul, Red-vented Bulbul, Whiskered Yuhina, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Large-billed Crow, Hodgson’s Redstart, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Striated Laughingthrush, Yellow-bellied Fantail, White-tailed Nuthatch, Chestnut-tailed Minla, Yellow-browed Tit, Great Barbet, Grey-hooded Warbler, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Grey Treepie, Nepal Fulvetta, Golden-throated Barbet, Verditer Flycatcher, Oriental White-eye, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Scarlet Minivet, White-bellied Yuhina, Black-throated Sunbird, Short-billed Minivet, Spotted Forktail, Ashy Bulbul, Striated Bulbul, Striated Yuhina, Yellow-vented Warbler, White-throated Fantail, Black-throated Tit, Grey Wagtail, Small Niltava, Rusty-fronted Barwing, Golden Babbler, Spotted Dove, Grey-chinned Minivet, Red-faced Liocichla, Blue-winged Minla, White-naped Yuhina, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, White-crested Laughingthrush, Large Niltava, Rock Pigeon, Russet Sparrow, Mrs Gould’s Sunbird, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Blyth’s Leaf Warbler, Common Stonechat, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Kalij Pheasant, Long-tailed Shrike, Fork-tailed Swift, Mountain Bulbul, Grey Bushchat, Black-eared Shrike Babbler, Black Eagle, Common Green Magpie, Bronzed Drongo, Red-tailed Minla, Common Myna, Striated Prinia, Brown-throated Treecreeper, Crested Serpent Eagle, Hen Harrier, Blue Rock Thrush, Himalayan Swiftlet, Blue-capped Rock Thrush, Slaty-backed Flycatcher, Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, and Common Tailorbird.

Back at camp at dusk, Tom, Frank and Susan climbed a small hill behind the campsite, with the goal of getting better views of the singing Brownish-flanked Bush Warblers on the hillside. Much to their surprise they flushed a Eurasian Woodcock, which gave some good views as it flew off into the dark.

And as usual, we were surrounded by choruses of Asian Barred Owlet, Mountain Scops Owl, Bay Woodpecker, Rufous-throated Partridge, Oriental and Large Hawk Cuckoo, Grey-bellied Tesia, Pygmy Wren Babbler, Slaty-bellied Tesia, and Grey-headed Woodpecker.



Trip Detail

26TH MARCH: ZHEMGANG - TRONGSA

Today we dropped down from about 2200 meters to 800 meters. At one gully Tom heard one of our nemesis birds from the day before, but this time we had a break in the weather and, after some persistence, everyone got a great view of the really striking Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler.

However we were determined to stick to our quest for the Beautiful Nuthatch – and still no luck.

As we were driving Sherab spotted a Malkoha flying into a bush. We stopped for great views of Green-billed Malkoha. As we were watching that cool bird, Tom yelled “Rufous Woodpecker” and back up the hill a bit we were treated to great views of not only Rufous Woodpecker, but also Crimson Sunbird, and a Streaked Spider-hunter. Then, on the way back to the bus we ran into great views of the fabulous Bay Woodpecker, a very cooperative White-browed Scimitar Babbler, Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Lesser Yellow-nape, and a Crested Bunting.

Although we had some good raptors every day, today seemed a bit more special than usual with sightings of 10 species: Mountain Hawk Eagle, Rufous-bellied Eagle, Crested Goshawk, Northern Goshawk, Shikra, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Buzzard, Common Kestrel, Black Eagle, and great views of a Collared Owlet.

Further down the hill, Norbu and Sherab pushed the bus to avoid making any noise so that we could get a better look at a close group of Kalij Pheasants! Talk about going the extra mile!,

Other well-seen highlights for the day included Ultramarine Flycatcher, Maroon Oriole, Hill Prinia, Blue-winged Laughingthrush, and White-browed Shrike Babbler.

Other birds seen included

Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous Sibia, White-capped Water Redstart, Ashy Drongo, Black Bulbul, Red-vented Bulbul, Whiskered Yuhina, Large-billed Crow, Hodgson’s Redstart, Striated Laughingthrush, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Chestnut-tailed Minla, Great Barbet, Grey-hooded Warbler, Grey Treepie, Nepal Fulvetta, Golden-throated Barbet, Verditer Flycatcher, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Scarlet Minivet, Black-throated Sunbird,



Rusty-fronted Barwing @ Norbu

Short-billed Minivet, Spotted Forktail, Ashy Bulbul, Striated Yuhina, Yellow-vented Warbler, White-throated Fantail, Grey Wagtail, Rusty-fronted Barwing, Golden Babbler, White-naped Yuhina, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Rock Pigeon, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Long-tailed Shrike, Fork-tailed Swift, Grey Bushchat, Black-eared Shrike Babbler, Bronzed Drongo, Red-tailed Minla, Blue Rock Thrush, Blue-capped Rock Thrush, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Blue-fronted Redstart, Chestnut-crowned Warbler, Great Cormorant, Grey-backed Shrike, Olive-backed Pipit, Pale Blue Flycatcher, Plumbeous Water Redstart, White-throated Laughingthrush, Oriental Magpie Robin, Eurasian Wigeon, Black-chinned Yuhina, Black-winged Cuckooshrike, River Lapwing, Northern Pintail, and Gadwall.

Heard only for the day included Green-backed Tit, Small Niltava, White-crested Laughingthrush, Large Niltava, Spotted Wren Babbler, Grey-throated Babbler, Beautiful Nuthatch, Asian Barred Owlet, Mountain Scops Owl, Rufous-throated Partridge, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, Oriental Cuckoo, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Pygmy Wren Babbler, Blue-throated Barbet, and Chestnut-headed Tesia.

But still no Beautiful Nuthatch!!



Trip Detail



Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler @ Norbu

barred Warbler, Rufous-breasted Accentor, and White-throated Redstart.

On the way to the hotel, with his head out the window, Tom once again yelled stop. Singing in a nearby field was a Russet Bush Warbler. It turned out to be very responsive and we had good looks before continuing on to our lodging, the Jakar hotel where we were able to overlook the fields and spot a Bar-headed Goose.

Other birds seen included Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous Sibia, White-capped Water Redstart, Black Bulbul, Large-billed Crow, Hodgson's Redstart, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Chestnut-tailed Minla, Verditer Flycatcher, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Rock Pigeon, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Great Cormorant, Grey-backed Shrike, Olive-backed Pipit, Plumbeous Water Redstart, White-throated Laughingthrush, Oriental Magpie Robin, Common Buzzard, Green-backed Tit, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Russet Sparrow, Blyth's Leaf Warbler, Crested Serpent Eagle, Hume's Warbler, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Ashy-throated Warbler, White Wagtail, Ruddy Shelduck, Common Hoopoe, Oriental Skylark, Red-billed Chough, Bar-headed Goose, and Orange-flanked Bush Robin.

Heard-only birds included Great Barbet, Golden-throated Barbet, White-browed Scimitar Babbler, Mountain Scops Owl, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Hill Partridge, White-winged Grosbeak, and Grey-sided Bush Warbler.

27TH MARCH: BUMTHANG - YOTONGLA - BUMTHANG

Today we did some driving, very sad to leave the Zhemgang area behind, with its great birds and culture. But we had to continue our quests! We went past 3 of 4 valleys of Bumthang and stopped for a bit in the village. We visited Yathra textile hand weavers and later a textile cooperative and some other local sites. Kurjay Lhakhang dates to 8th century and was the site where Guru Rinpoche meditated and captured a local malevolent deity. The Jamlhakhang Lhakhang (monastery) dates from the 7th century and was established to hold down the demoness who was draped over Tibet.

To our amazement, there materialized over the town a huge flock of Himalayan Griffon, at least 100 birds. Since we had been in a hotel the night before, and hence bathed, we were fairly sure they hadn't followed us down from the pass! They circled around and we ran into individuals in a couple of different spots, some very close. At one point a Mountain Hawk Eagle was flying in the vicinity of these giants. Normally a large-looking bird, it was dwarfed by the huge wingspan of the Griffon.

Bumthang is also the home of Bhutan's population of Black-billed Magpie. Oddly, this population is separated from the main range of the bird by quite a distance. And it has not really spread much into other areas of Bhutan.

On the way we went over Yontongla pass. Here we were able to see some more high elevations birds, although the weather was a bit drizzly, with even some light snow. Tom and Norbu heard a distant song, or actually, part of a song. Playing back the full song brought in immediately a beautiful Yellowish-bellied Bush-Warbler.

Some other birds seen at or near the pass included the stunning Beautiful Rosefinch, the handsome Eurasian Jay, another flock of Brown Bullfinch, Blue-fronted Redstart, Mrs Gould's Sunbird, Himalayan Swiftlet, Stripe-throated Yuhina, Black-faced Laughingthrush, Coal Tit, Spotted Nutcracker, Rufous-fronted Tit, White-collared Blackbird, Green-tailed Sunbird, White-browed Fulvetta, Eurasian Treecreeper, Collared Grosbeak, Buff-

28TH MARCH: BUMTHANG - THRUMSHINGLA - SENGOR

Once again the weather was a bit bleak, but we had some ground to cover, so we weren't too inconvenienced by it today. We went through several elevational changes including two passes. As we stopped for a dark morph Common Buzzard, an amazing flock of 250 Snow Pigeons graced us with their presence. You can never get too much of these contrasty birds as they wheel and turn as a group with high snow-capped mountains in the distance.



Blood Pheasant @ Norbu

Trip Detail

In another location Norbu spotted a fleeing Blood Pheasant. We stopped and were able to call them back for amazing, very close views of males and females. And then, to top that, unbelievable we found 4 more(!) male Satyr Tragopans! Truly jaw-dropping!

We also had good views of Rosy Pipit, which had been strangely missing from some earlier spots.

Other birds seen included Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous Sibia, White-capped Water Redstart, Large-billed Crow, Hodgson's Redstart, Rock Pigeon, Blue-fronted Redstart, Olive-backed Pipit, Common Buzzard, Green-backed Tit, Mrs Gould's Sunbird, Stripe-throated Yuhina, Hume's Warbler, White-collared Blackbird, Green-tailed Sunbird, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Black-faced Laughingthrush, Coal Tit, Spotted Nutcracker, Rufous-fronted Tit, Ashy-throated Warbler, White-browed Fulvetta, Buff-barred Warbler, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Red-billed Chough, Black-billed Magpie, White-winged Grosbeak, Whiskered Yuhina, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Common Kestrel, Eurasian Wigeon, Himalayan Griffon, White-tailed Nuthatch, Yellow-browed Tit, Long-tailed Minivet, Grey-crested Tit, Rufous-vented Tit, Rufous-vented Yuhina, Alpine Accentor, Orange-flanked Bush Robin, and Winter Wren.



Golden Babbler @ Norbu

flock or interesting species. Most of the flocks had 10 or so species of birds. In this area some of the most handsome flock birds included Rufous-capped Babbler, Black-eared Shrike Babbler, Rufous-vented Yuhina, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Chestnut-tailed Minla, White-throated Fantail, Golden Babbler, and Chestnut-crowned and Black-faced Warblers. Another outstanding flock individual was a White-browed Piculet, which looks like a miniature woodpecker.

In groups by themselves we saw once again the brilliant Red-billed Leothrix, the not so common White-naped Yuhina and a Dark-rumped Rosefinch. Raptors appeared now and then, and today we had an elegant Crested Goshawk.

Bhutan is one of the best places in the world to see a group of real skulkers, the Wren-babblers. Earlier in the year Norbu had done a lot of scouting for a couple of species that are very hard to find. We patrolled a series of gullies that Norbu had targeted for one, the Bar-winged Wren Babbler. After some time we heard a response far up one of the ravines. It started to approach but then we were hit with a rain shower, and unfortunately it didn't cooperate again, so we had to leave it as

29TH MARCH: SENGOR - NAMLING - YONGKALA

For the next 3 days we explored the famous "Limnetang Road" area in Yongkala. This is a very bird-rich area containing several important Bhutan species. Although we were still plagued by on and off rain (did we mention that this was very unseasonal!) we were able to see almost every target species and several that are very often not seen at all. We owed a lot of our success to Norbu's knowledge of the area and the birds there. When one spot failed he would guide us to another, even for rare species. He also was tireless in trying to locate Ward's Trogon, Beautiful Nuthatch and some of the other great birds we saw.

There were so many great birds over these days it's hard to choose which ones to highlight. Here are a few:

We had already seen way more than our fair share of these striking birds. But who could possibly pass up another opportunity....at oogling 2 more Satyr Tragopans?? We may have set a record for the most times seeing these shy and often-missed birds.

Another highlight was long looks at Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler, one very cool skulker. Tom and Norbu were very patient and skilled with calling these birds out and we all had great views.

We stopped at one stream and we had the cutest member of the Forktail group: Little Forktail. Further down the road, Tom heard a faint high call and yelled out Pygmy Blue Flycatcher. This bird turned out to be somewhat elusive, but we ended up walking past its area a couple of times and eventually almost everyone got a good look, including one brief scope view.

As always on this trip, we ran into many flocks. Sometimes we would walk into them, more often we would drive slowly with Tom and Norbu sticking their heads out the window, yelling STOP whenever they heard a

Trip Detail

a “heard only” bird... This was mitigated by the fact that we did see very well 5 other species, one of which has only recently been discovered in an accessible area in Bhutan. More on that tomorrow...

Other birds seen included Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous Sibia, White-capped Water Redstart, Large-billed Crow, Hodgson's Redstart, Blue-fronted Redstart, Olive-backed Pipit, Green-backed Tit, Mrs Gould's Sunbird, Stripe-throated Yuhina, White-collared Blackbird, Green-tailed Sunbird, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Spotted Nutcracker, Ashy-throated Warbler, White-browed Fulvetta, Buff-barred Warbler, Red-billed Chough, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, White-tailed Nuthatch, Yellow-browed Tit, Verditer Flycatcher, White-throated Laughingthrush, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Blyth's Leaf Warbler, Brown Bullfinch, Striated Laughingthrush, Grey-hooded Warbler, Scarlet Minivet, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Bay Woodpecker, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Black-throated Tit, Yellow-cheeked Tit, Streaked Laughingthrush, and Hoary-throated Barwing.

Heard only included Black-faced Laughingthrush, Hill Partridge, Golden-throated Barbet, White-browed Scimitar Babbler, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Collared Owlet, White-crested Laughingthrush, Rufous-throated Partridge, Pygmy Wren Babbler, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Grey-bellied Tesia, Rufous-throated Wren Babbler, and Tawny Owl.

30TH MARCH: YONGKALA - NAMLING - LIMITHANG ROAD

Today it also rained on and off most of day. Despite the rain, we still had some amazing birds. We started off the day with a bang. The day before Norbu and Tom had heard a call of one of the most sought after Wren-babblers in Bhutan. So today we positioned ourselves quietly by a patch of bamboo. Tom played the song and almost immediately we were treated to one of the rarest and oddest birds of the trip: Wedge-billed Wren Babbler! This species has a very odd bill, and is large for a Wren Babbler. It was seen by all and most of us saw it several times over the course of a few minutes. Really great!

As we were watching the Wedge-billed WB, a small group of warblers including Grey-cheeked Warbler came out to watch. It was hard to know what to concentrate on!

We had more great flocks today including Yellow-bellied Fantail, Black-eared Shrike Babbler, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Yellow-vented Warbler, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Pale Blue Flycatcher, Grey-throated Babbler and Golden Babbler. Some of us also saw Broad-billed Warbler, which surfaced briefly on one flock. The guides had seen one the day before, and so we had another chance today.

Further down the road Tom heard a scold and pulled some of the group together to see another Pygmy Wren Babbler. Oh, by the way, I forgot to mention another Satyr Tragopan! Incredible.

At lunch time Karma, our really great and bird-sensitive driver, pulled Tom over and said that he had found a really blue bird. Sure enough, sitting in a tree was the very beautiful Sapphire Flycatcher. Everyone had great views.

After lunch we traveled to a more open area overlooking a river. There we were astounded to find another Pallas's Fish Eagle dwarfing a nearby Osprey. This was a young bird. Pal-



Wedge-billed Wren Babbler @ Norbu

las's Fish Eagles are very rare in Bhutan, and seeing one takes a lot of luck. I guess our Satyr Tragopan karma was spilling over into the raptor category!

Nearby we had fun watching a Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, quite an odd looking bird with subtle but handsome coloration. We also heard and were finally able to call in a Bay Woodpecker, a truly stunning bird. In the vicinity we found Oriental Cuckoo, Grey-winged Blackbird, and Rufescent Prinia.

Other birds seen included

Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous Sibia, Large-billed Crow, Hodgson's Redstart, Green-backed Tit, Green-tailed Sunbird, Ashy-throated Warbler, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, White-tailed Nuthatch, Verditer Flycatcher, White-throated Laughingthrush, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Striated Laughingthrush, Grey-hooded Warbler, Scarlet Minivet, White-throated Fantail, White-naped Yuhina, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Yellow-cheeked Tit, Golden-throated Barbet, White-crested Laughingthrush, Hume's War-

Trip Detail

bler, Whiskered Yuhina, Black Bulbul, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Grey-backed Shrike, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Oriental Magpie Robin, Great Barbet, Ashy Drongo, Red-vented Bulbul, Grey Treepie, Nepal Fulvetta, Grey Wagtail, Long-tailed Shrike, Bronzed Drongo, Blue Rock Thrush, Streaked Spiderhunter, Lesser Yellownape, Crested Bunting, Crimson Sunbird, Blue-throated Barbet, Oriental White-eye, Spotted Dove, Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, Common Tailorbird, Little Pied Flycatcher, Rufous-necked Laughingthrush, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Slaty-backed Forktail, Greater Yellownape, White-throated Kingfisher, and Himalayan Bulbul.

Heard only birds included Hill Partridge, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Collared Owlet, Rufous-throated Partridge, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Mountain Scops Owl, Asian Barred Owlet, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Black-tailed Crake, and Chestnut-breasted Partridge.



Ward's Trogon @ Norbu

it started singing from way up the hillside and began to come down towards the road. Soon it was right near, but still hidden. As the rain picked up, the bird finally flew across the road, but unfortunately never presented itself for the satisfying looks we'd had of the other skulkers seen on the trip. Well, you can't win them all! And the overall close encounter was still magical.

Since it was now raining we went lower down the slopes to see if we could find some better weather, and also another of our targets: Blue-bearded Bee-eater. As the landscape opened up, we started scanning the tops of trees and Tom and Norbu went out into the drizzle to play the bird's song. Finally they got a response, and we all were rewarded with great looks at a pair of these fantastic-looking birds.

As we went along the road, we also found lots of other birds. Some of the more special include the almost glowing Emerald Dove, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, and good looks for most of a Scaly Laughingthrush. We stopped for a Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker, and Sherab spotted a nearby young Barking Deer, giving great looks at this very shy nocturnal species.

At one point in the day, Tom heard a Grey Peacock Pheasant. We listened for a bit, but it was much too far away for a chance at a view..

Other birds seen included

31ST MARCH: YONGKALA - NAMLING - YONGKALA

Today the weather was a bit better, and our hopes were high. The day started very auspiciously. Tom heard a quiet scold note right in the camp. Calling over everyone near, he called out a Rufous-throated Wren Babbler for some really great looks, and right in camp!

Soon after, we hit the road. One of our main targets for the last couple of days had been the very rare Ward's Trogon, near-threatened on the IUCN list. We had visited the known sites and had not yet been able to get any responses. Of course the weather probably had something to do with this.

As today was one of our last chances for this important species, we tried very hard once again. After some time, Norbu spotted a male and we were finally rewarded (no pun intended, since "re" certainly wasn't relevant!) with good looks at both a male and female Ward's Trogon. Usually the bird calls which helps you locate it, as it is very shy and hides in the epiphytes. This time, Norbu's great spotting skills saved the day as the bird never called at all. It was truly amazing that he found it and his determination and dedication to finding this great bird was really exceptional.

As we watched the trogon, we found a good flock including the stunning Cutia and a fantastic White-browed Shrike Babbler.

Relieved at our success, we then continued down the Limnethang Road for more species. Driving along slowly we stopped as usual for flocks or other special species. At one point Tom or Norbu heard a Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler. We stopped and were rewarded with good looks. And then, walking for a bit, we discovered a rarer congener, the Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler. As we walked back to the bus it was starting to drizzle a bit. All of a sudden Tom whispered for everyone to gather around a long ravine. At the very top he had heard a call from a Lesser Short-wing. With everyone settled, he recorded its brief scold and sure enough,

Trip Detail

Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous Sibia, Large-billed Crow, Green-backed Tit, Green-tailed Sunbird, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, White-tailed Nuthatch, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Verditer Flycatcher, White-throated Laughingthrush, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Striated Laughingthrush, Grey-hooded Warbler, White-throated Fantail, Golden Babbler, White-naped Yuhina, Bay Woodpecker, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Yellow-cheeked Tit, White-crested Laughingthrush, Black Bulbul, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Grey-backed Shrike, Oriental Magpie Robin, Great Barbet, Ashy Drongo, Red-vented Bulbul, Grey Treepie, Nepal Fulvetta, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Yellow-vented Warbler, Long-tailed Shrike, Bronzed Drongo, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Pale Blue Flycatcher, Oriental White-eye, Spotted Dove, Little Pied Flycatcher, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Slaty-backed Forktail, Grey-cheeked Warbler, Blue-fronted Redstart, Buff-barred Warbler, Yellow-browed Tit, Blyth's Leaf Warbler, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Chestnut-crowned Warbler, Black-throated Tit, Rufous-capped Babbler, Black-faced Warbler, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, Rufous-throated Wren Babbler, Crested Serpent Eagle, Himalayan Swiftlet, Rusty-fronted Barwing, Fork-tailed Swift, Black Eagle, Black-chinned Yuhina, Hill Prinia, Grey-chinned Minivet, Mountain Bulbul, Osprey, Nepal House Martin, and Yellow-throated Fulvetta.

Heard only included Pygmy Wren Babbler, Hume's Warbler, Oriental Cuckoo, Hill Partridge, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Collared Owlet, Rufous-throated Partridge, Mountain Scops Owl, Asian Barred Owlet, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Pygmy Blue Flycatcher, Grey-bellied Tesia, Maroon Oriole, and Large Niltava.

1ST APRIL: YONGKALA - KORILA - TRASHIGANG

As we sadly left the Limnethang Road area the weather, of course, turned mostly sunny! Today we were had a fairly long drive, but that still didn't stop the birding! Some of the highlights included another of our most sought after birds, the Rufous-necked Hornbill, as we finally saw one flying through the trees. Not a great view but we had all been anxious to see this great and rare species.

We also had great looks at a male Scarlet Finch, found sitting alone, by Norbu. This was a bit odd, as these birds are usually in flocks. We also stopped for Gray-headed Woodpecker, another long look at Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Emerald Dove, Asian Barred Owlet, the subtle but beautiful Blue-winged Laughingthrush, Common Green Magpie, Barred Cuckoo Dove, Speckled Wood Pigeon, Common Hawk Cuckoo, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Spot-winged Grosbeak and Wallcreeper.

We drove steadily after lunch to reach the Trashigang Dzong. Tom had given a talk at the American Museum of Natural History on Bhutan the year before. In attendance were two Bhutanese monks. They were in the US providing spiritual guardianship for an exhibit of Bhutanese art at the Rubin Museum, the first time the works had ever been out of the US. Tom had kept in touch and one monk, Sonam, was in residence now at the Trashigang Dzong.

Once there we were able to find Sonam and received a private tour of the Dzong, including Yak-butter tea in a private prayer room. We were also able to see young monks studying their scriptures, and visited a shrine room not open to the public. This was a perfect and soothing ending to a few days of some great birds.



Rufous-necked Hornbill @ Norbu

Other birds seen included Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous Sibia, Large-billed Crow, Green-backed Tit, Green-tailed Sunbird, White-tailed Nuthatch, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Verditer Flycatcher, White-throated Laughingthrush, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Striated Laughingthrush, Grey-hooded Warbler, White-throated Fantail, Golden Babbler, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Yellow-cheeked Tit, White-crested Laughingthrush, Black Bulbul, Grey-backed Shrike, Oriental Magpie Robin, Ashy Drongo, Red-vented Bulbul, Grey Treepie, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Yellow-vented Warbler, Long-tailed Shrike, Bronzed Drongo, Oriental White-eye, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Grey-cheeked Warbler, Blue-fronted Redstart, Yellow-browed Tit, Blyth's Leaf Warbler, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Chestnut-crowned Warbler, Black-faced Warbler, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, Himalayan Swiftlet, Fork-tailed Swift, Black-

Trip Detail

chinned Yuhina, Hill Prinia, Grey-chinned Minivet, Large Niltava, Golden-throated Barbet, Whiskered Yuhina, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush, Crested Bunting, Blue-throated Barbet, Common Tailorbird, Rufous-necked Laughingthrush, Greater Yellowthroat, White-throated Kingfisher, Grey-winged Blackbird, Himalayan Bulbul, White-capped Water Redstart, Olive-backed Pipit, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Red-billed Chough, Chestnut-tailed Minla, Brown Bullfinch, Rock Pigeon, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Common Kestrel, Orange-flanked Bush Robin, Great Cormorant, Common Hoopoe, Black-throated Sunbird, Grey Bushchat, Blue-capped Rock Thrush, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Common Stonechat, Common Green Magpie, and Barn Swallow.

Heard only included Bay Woodpecker, Great Barbet, Pygmy Wren Babbler, Hume's Warbler, Oriental Cuckoo, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Collared Owlet, Rufous-throated Partridge, Mountain Scops Owl, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Rufous-vented Tit, Grey-sided Bush Warbler, Spotted Wren Babbler, Grey Nightjar, Lesser Shortwing, and White-tailed Robin.



Beautiful Nuthatch @ Norbu

We were now definitely ready to retire to our camp to eat and go over the day's sightings.

Also seen were Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Rufous Sibia, Large-billed Crow, Green-backed Tit, Green-tailed Sunbird, White-tailed Nuthatch, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Verditer Flycatcher, Striated Laughingthrush, Grey-hooded Warbler, White-throated Fantail, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Yellow-cheeked Tit, White-crested Laughingthrush, Black Bulbul, Grey-backed Shrike, Oriental Magpie Robin, Ashy Drongo, Red-vented Bulbul, Grey Treepie, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Long-tailed Shrike, Oriental White-eye, Blue-fronted Redstart, Yellow-browed Tit, Blyth's Leaf Warbler, Black-faced Warbler, Fork-tailed Swift, Grey-chinned Minivet, Whiskered Yuhina, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush, Common Tailorbird, White-throated Kingfisher, White-capped Water Redstart, Olive-backed Pipit, Rock Pigeon, Common Kestrel, Common Hoopoe, Black-throated Sunbird, Grey Bushchat, Hume's Warbler, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Little Pied Flycatcher, Crested Serpent Eagle, Black Eagle, Mountain Bulbul, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Grey Wagtail, Rufous-vented Yuhina, Streaked Laughingthrush, Common Buzzard, Russet Sparrow,

2ND APRIL: TRASHIGANG - KHALING - MORONG

Today we had to leave a bit early so that we could camp in the lower elevation forests prior to our leaving Bhutan. We also were on a mission: Beautiful Nuthatch!

As we descended from Trashigang, we first stopped at a Kanlung University where we had a chance for a few localized birds. The first local bird seen was a Barn Swallow, followed soon after by our primary target, Red-rumped Swallows, which nest at the University. As we were locating the swallows we also had great views of the beautiful Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, as well as some warblers and other birds.

Continuing on, we stopped several times as Tom or Norbu, heads always out the window, heard something. We were rewarded by quite a few good birds including a Crimson-breasted Woodpecker seen at eye-level, Oriental Cuckoo, Blue-capped and Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrushes, Crimson Sunbird, and Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler.

Although Tom and Frank had had a Rufous-breasted Bush Robin earlier in the trip, we were able to find another for good looks by all. Also on the "another chance for great looks at uncommon birds" were Blue-winged Laughingthrush, Rufous-throated Wren Babbler, yet another! Black-tailed Crake, Black-winged Cuckooshrike, Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush, and for some, another Spotted Forktail. We also had good looks at a Plain-backed Thrush.

But we didn't want these birds to distract us from our main mission. Towards the end of the day we entered an area with large old trees full of hanging moss and epiphytes. Once again with some light rain, we heard the bird, and Norbu finally spotted a pair of Beautiful Nuthatch that were at eye level, very close! Finally, all that searching really paid off with great long scope-filled views of two very close birds. And they truly are Beautiful!

Trip Detail

White Wagtail, Short-billed Minivet, Beautiful Nuthatch, Striated Bulbul, and Little Bunting.

Heard only birds included Chestnut-crowned Warbler, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, Asian Barred Owl, Large Niltava, Golden-throated Barbet, Bay Woodpecker, Great Barbet, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Collared Owl, Rufous-throated Partridge, Spotted Wren Babbler, Grey Nightjar, Hill Partridge, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Black-faced Laughingthrush, Small Niltava, and Collared Scops Owl.

3RD APRIL: MORONG - DEWATHANG - SAMDRUP JONGKHAR

This last day we had a chance to bird at much lower elevations than we had visited during the rest of the trip. In past times, Bhutan used to extend much further into the “Duars” or lowlands of India. However the British saw to it that these fertile lands were slowly appropriated into their new empire. And the saying now is that Bhutan ends when a stone, rolling from the Himalayas, stops in the plains.

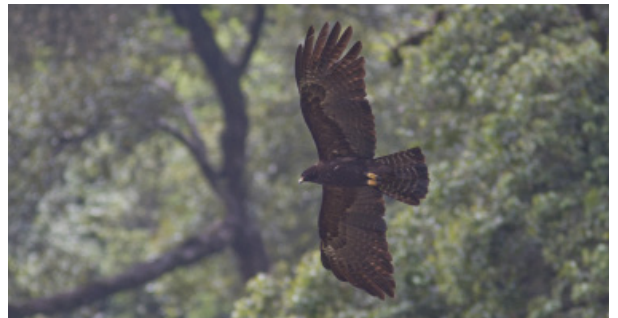
This last stretch of road was busier than most of the rest of the trip, and included some trucks carrying stones and materials for road construction. Fortunately, we were able to start early to get ahead of the traffic and later Norbu led us to some trails off the road that resulted in some great new species.

As we began our walk along the road, we first were rewarded with a male and a female Rufous-necked Hornbill. Soon 2 more males flew in for great scope views. While everyone was studying these magnificent birds, Tom yelled out Beautiful Nuthatch!!! Sitting out on a bare tree, a very unlikely spot, and not much above eye level, was an amazing, singing Beautiful Nuthatch. It was a real dilemma to know where to look!

Driving slowly a bit more down the road, Tom spotted a flash of white flying between two trees, and yelled out Stop, Long-tailed Sibia!! We were soon treated to a small, active flock of these interesting birds, and as usual, came up with even more including another flock of the Disney-qualified Cutia.

As we progressed down the road we came to an open area and found another extremely rare bird, a pair of Dark-rumped Swifts. These little-known birds may only nest in SE Bhutan and maybe also in nearby India. The worldwide population is estimated at as low as 200 birds, certainly fewer than 1000. It was exciting to get extended looks at this very rare species.

As we continued to walk down the road, we went through a variety of open and forested areas that rewarded us with many new birds. We saw Pale Martins flying overhead, an uncommon species for Bhutan, Common Iora and had great looks at Tickell's Leaf-warbler. We found Asian Fairy Bluebird, a truly stunning bird; Golden-fronted Leafbird, another real “looker”, Large Woodshrike, the beautiful Orange-headed Thrush, Ferruginous Flycatcher, Red-throated



Black Eagle @ Norbu

Flycatcher, White-rumped Shama, and Daurian Redstart. And all this before lunch!

After lunch, we hiked into the forest a bit along a river bed and again saw some great new species. First up was a cooperative Black-backed Forktail. Then Tom beckoned everyone over to his scope. There in the far distance was an all dark bird with a red bill: a Dollarbird. Later this subdued but still handsome bird came in for much closer looks, and a bit later we found its “brother, the Indian Roller.

Soon after someone yelled “Hornbills” and we were treated to a pair of the uncommon Wreathed Hornbills. In preparation for the trip Tom had sent many pictures of the possible species and ID tips, so we were all prepared to easily ID the hornbill by its tail pattern.

Further down the road we finally heard another of our target species: Red-headed Trogon. We had tried to call in this bird in a couple of other locations in the rain, with no luck. Now we had a chance, and, with Norbu's persistence and excellent spotting skills, we were all finally able to get a look at a flying bird, after a few saw it perched.

We were later treated to great looks at a small flock of Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush, as well as White-rumped Munia, Blue-throated Flycatcher, Jungle Babbler, Drongo Cuckoo, and Asian Palm-Swift.

And as the day drew to a close and we had our final, exciting species of the day: House Sparrow!

Trip Detail

Other birds seen included

Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Whistling Thrush, Large-billed Crow, Verditer Flycatcher, Grey-hooded Warbler, Black Bulbul, Grey-backed Shrike, Oriental Magpie Robin, Ashy Drongo, Red-vented Bulbul, Long-tailed Shrike, Oriental White-eye, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Black-faced Warbler, Whiskered Yuhina, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Blue Rock Thrush, Common Tailorbird, White-throated Kingfisher, White-capped Water Redstart, Olive-backed Pipit, Rock Pigeon, Common Kestrel, Black-throated Sunbird, Grey Bushchat, Barn Swallow, Oriental Cuckoo, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Crested Serpent Eagle, Black Eagle, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Crimson Sunbird

Common Buzzard, Russet Sparrow, Short-billed Minivet, Plain-backed Thrush, Red-rumped Swallow, Golden-throated Barbet, Bronzed Drongo, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Lesser Shortwing, Blue-throated Barbet, Greater Yellownape, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Scarlet Finch, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Spotted Dove, Mountain Imperial Pigeon,

Hodgson's Redstart, Scarlet Minivet, Streaked Spiderhunter, Ashy Bulbul

Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Green-billed Malkoha, Blue-winged Minla, Common Myna, Slaty-backed Flycatcher, Silver-eared Mesia, Common Kingfisher, Crested Kingfisher, Black-crested Bulbul, and Red-whiskered Bulbul.

Other heard only birds included Striated Laughingthrush, White-throated Fantail, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Grey Treepie, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, Great Barbet, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Collared Owlet, Spotted Wren Babbler, Grey Nightjar, Small Niltava, Yellow-vented Warbler, Grey-winged Blackbird, Common Hawk Cuckoo, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Pygmy Blue Flycatcher, Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler, and White-browed Scimitar Babbler.



Beautiful Nuthatch @ Norbu

of waterbirds and other possibilities, we had to get to the dump and that everything we passed we should be able to get there. That being said, we did stop for a beautiful Red-Necked Falcon.

One of the main targets for the dump was the Internationally Endangered and declining Greater Adjutant. And we were well rewarded with very close views of this prehistoric-looking species. At the real “dump” part of the site we also saw many other birds including lots of Lesser Adjutants, Citrine and White Wagtails, and Rosy Pipit.

We then drove around the back of the area where there was more open water and some scrubby bushes. Over and in the water we found Lesser Whistling Duck, Common Shelduck, Purple Swamphen, Common Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Pheasant-Tailed Jacana, Bronze-Winged Jacana, Black-Winged Stilt, Little Ringed, Grey-Headed Lapwing, Red-Wattled Lapwing, Brown-Headed

4TH APRIL: SAMDRUP JONGKHAR - GUWAHATI

Today we sadly had to leave Bhutan, after an amazing trip full of great birds and an equally fantastic culture. We thanked our driver, Karma, and our Bhutan guides, Norbu and Sherab. We can't say enough about how great they were. Not only were they incredible spotters (Sherab was scary-good) and really knew the birds and their songs; they also were very dedicated to making sure we saw every possible species, and knew all the habitats and “secret spots” for each species. And, after all of that effort, at the end of the day they helped us with our luggage, handled the logistics, and made sure the trip was enjoyed by all. World class!

Our tasks today were to clear Indian customs (Norbu had handled the Bhutan side the night before) and get to the airport in time for everyone's flights out. But even with the limited time we had before our flights, we still managed to get some really great birds!

We started out having to wait for the Indian Customs official. While we waited, we walked along the road to the cross border bridge to scan the dry river bed. Soon, Tom heard the scold of a Thick-Billed Warbler. He ran back to his pack and returned with his iPod and called in the bird for great looks.

After customs we made a dash for the kind of place that makes any birder's top 10 favorite spot lists...the local garbage dump! Tom explained that, even though we were going to be passing many tempting spots, with lots

Trip Detail

Gull, Gull-Billed Tern, Black-Bellied Tern, Indian Pond Heron, Purple Heron, a close Intermediate Egret, Asian Openbill, the handsome Black-Necked Stork, and Eurasian Marsh Harrier.

In the scrubrier areas we had Chestnut-Headed Bee-Eater, Black Redstart, Chestnut-Tailed Starling, Asian Pied, Common, and Jungle Mynas, Rufous Treepie, Ashy Woodswallow, and Coppersmith Barbet,. Of special interest was a calling Striped Tit Babbler.

Other birds seen included Blue-Throated Barbet, Common Kingfisher, White-Throated Kingfisher, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Black Kite, Asian Koel, Asian Palm Swift, House Swift, Rock Pigeon, Oriental Turtle, Spotted Dove, Little Cormorant, Little Egret, Great Egret, Cattle Egret, , Grey-Backed Shrike, House Crow, Eastern Jungle Crow (split from Large-Billed), Black Drongo, Ashy Drongo, Oriental Magpie, Great Tit, Barn Swallow, Red-Rumped Swallow, Red-Vented Bulbul, Oriental White-Eye, Common Tailorbird, Tickell's Leaf Warbler, Purple Sunbird, House Sparrow, and Eurasian Tree Sparrow.

We had to tear ourselves away from the dump so that we wouldn't miss our flights. Tom's car stopped to take a quick photo of a flying Greater Adjutant and noticed an Indian Cobra slowly crossing the road right in front of the vehicle!

It was tough leaving, but we still have strong and fond memories of the great birds and culture of Bhutan.



Trip Detail

KAZIRANGA

A small part of the group continued on with Tom to Kaziranga. That trip deserved its own report and provided over 200 species in 4 days with some very rare birds like Bengal Florican, Slender-Billed Babbler, Pallas's and Grey-Headed Fish Eagles, and the globally threatened Finn's Weaver.

The trip list is below.

With the Delhi add-ons that some of us were able to see, the total list for all parts of the trip was 509 species.

KAZIRANGA BIRD LIST

White-Cheeked Partridge
Grey Peacock Pheasant
Common Flameback
Large Hawk Cuckoo
Plaintive Cuckoo
Oriental Scops Owl
Grey Nightjar
Asian Fairy Bluebird
Dark-Necked Tailorbird
Puff-Throated Babbler
White-Browed Scimitar
Swamp Francolin
Red Junglefowl
Kalij Pheasant
Lesser Whistling Duck
Greylag Goose
Bar-Headed Goose
Ruddy Shelduck
Common Shelduck
Gadwall
Eurasian Wigeon
Spot-Billed Duck
Northern Shoveler
Common Teal
Fulvous-Breasted Woodpecker
Grey-Headed Woodpecker
Himalayan Flameback
Black-Rumped Flameback
Lineated Barbet
Blue-Throated Barbet
Blue-Eared Barbet
Coppersmith Barbet
Oriental Pied Hornbill
Great Hornbill
Eurasian Hoopoe
Indian Roller
Common Kingfisher
Stork-Billed Kingfisher
White-Throated Kingfisher
Pied Kingfisher
Blue-Bearded Bee-Eater
Green Bee-Eater
Blue-Tailed Bee-Eater

Trip Detail

Chestnut-Headed Bee-Eater
Indian Cuckoo
Drongo Cuckoo
Asian Koel
Green-Billed Malkoha
Greater Coucal
Lesser Coucal
Alexandrine Parakeet
Rose-Ringed Parakeet
Blossom-Headed Parakeet
Red-Breasted Parakeet
Asian Palm Swift
House Swift
Brown Fish Owl
Asian Barred Owl
Jungle Owlet
Spotted Owlet
Brown Hawk Owl
Rock Pigeon
Oriental Turtle
Spotted Dove
Red Collared Dove
Emerald Dove
Pin-Tailed Green Pigeon
Pompadour Green Pigeon
Thick-Billed Green Pigeon
Yellow-Footed Green Pigeon
Green Imperial Pigeon
Mountain Imperial Pigeon
Bengal Florican
White-Breasted Waterhen
Purple Swamphen
Jack Snipe
Spotted Redshank
Common Greenshank
Marsh Sandpiper
Green Sandpiper
Wood Sandpiper
Common Sandpiper
Temminck's Stint
Pheasant-Tailed Jacana
Bronze-Winged Jacana
Black-Winged Stilt
Pied Avocet
Little Ringed Plover
Northern Lapwing
Grey-Headed Lapwing
Red-Wattled Lapwing
Osprey
Oriental Honey-Buzzard
Black-Shouldered Kite
Black Kite

Trip Detail

Pallas's Fish Eagle
Grey-Headed Fish Eagle
Long-Billed Vulture
Eurasian Griffon
Red-Headed Vulture
Crested Serpent Eagle
Eurasian Marsh Harrier
Pied Harrier
Crested Goshawk
Shikra Accipiter
Black Eagle
Greater Spotted Eagle
Steppe Eagle
Changeable Hawk-Eagle
Common Kestrel
Oriental Hobby
Darter Anhinga
Little Cormorant
Indian Cormorant
Great Cormorant
Little Egret
Grey Heron
Purple Heron
Great Egret
Intermediate Egret
Cattle Egret
Indian Pond Heron
Black-Crowned Night Heron
Cinnamon Bittern
Black-Headed Ibis
Spot-Billed Pelican
Asian Openbill
Woolly-Necked Stork
Black-Necked Stork
Lesser Adjutant
Greater Adjutant
Blue-Naped Pitta (heard only)
Long-Tailed Shrike
Grey-Backed Shrike
Rufous Treepie
Grey Treepie
House Crow
Eastern Jungle Crow
Ashy Woodswallow
Black-Hooded Oriole
Large Cuckooshrike
Black-Winged Cuckooshrike
Black Drongo
Ashy Drongo
Bronzed Drongo
Spangled Drongo
Common Iora

Trip Detail

Large Woodshrike
Blue Rock Thrush
Grey-Winged Blackbird
Red-Throated Flycatcher
Pale-Chinned Flycatcher
Siberian Rubythroat
White-Tailed Rubythroat
Oriental Magpie Robin
White-Rumped Shama
Black Redstart
Hodgson's Bushchat
Common Stonechat
Chestnut-Tailed Starling
Asian Pied Starling
Common Myna
Bank Myna
Jungle Myna
White-Vented Myna
Velvet-Fronted Nuthatch
Great Tit
Barn Swallow
Red-Rumped Swallow
Red-Whiskered Bulbul
Red-Vented Bulbul
White-Throated Bulbul
Black Bulbul
Zitting Cisticola
Ashy Prinia
Plain Prinia
Oriental White-Eye
Blyth's Reed Warbler
Thick-Billed Warbler
Common Tailorbird
Dusky Warbler
Tickell's Leaf Warbler
Yellow-Browed Warbler
Striated Grassbird
Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush
Rufous-Necked Laughingthrush
Abbott's Babbler
Grey-Throated Babbler
Striped Tit Babbler
Chestnut-Capped Babbler
Yellow-Eyed Babbler
Striated Babbler
Rufous-Winged Bushlark
Plain Flowerpecker
Scarlet-Backed Flowerpecker
Ruby-Cheeked Sunbird
Purple Sunbird
Crimson Sunbird
House Sparrow

Trip Detail

Eurasian Tree Sparrow
White Wagtail
Citrine Wagtail
Yellow Wagtail
Olive-Backed Pipit
Rosy Pipit
Baya Weaver
Scaly-Breasted Munia
Grey-Throated Martin

Kaziranga Mammals Seen:

Great Indian One Horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*)
Wild Asian Water Buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*)
Indian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*)
Indian Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*)
Swamp Deer (*Cervus duvauceli*)
Hog Deer (*Axis porcinus*)
Capped Langur or Leaf Monkey (*Presbytis pileatus*)
Rhesus Macaque (*Macaca mulatto*)
Smooth-coated Otter
Hoary-bellied Squirrel
Small Squirrel..sp

