



Off to Bhutan

Quality Birding in Bhutan

BIRDING ACROSS BHUTAN



Birding in the land of Happiness

Guide: Norbu

17th March - 2nd April 2003

Trip Report by Roger Lawrence



BIRDING ACROSS BHUTAN.

17th March – 02 April, 2013.

I had led a tour to Bhutan for a well-known bird tour company in 2007, but got no further east than the centre of the kingdom so was keen to return to complete a crossing from Paro to the south east, leaving at Samdrup Jonkhar. My wife and I had also visited Eagle Nest (Arunachal Pradesh) in 2008 but failed to see several 'key' species so a return to Bhutan became an ornithological priority for me. Two friends would accompany us. They had been with us on two largely birding visits to India and had very much enjoyed the experience. I would make all the arrangements.

Using the internet it quickly became clear that one company, and using one local birdguide in particular, would be the way to best make use of what, at the outset, seemed a rather pricey visit.

The company was Off to Bhutan and the guide was Norbu (www.bhutanbirdig.com). We had left the decision to go rather late so would Norbu be available? An email to him and a very prompt reply quickly established that a Canadian tour company had cancelled at the last minute. Our trip was on!

Norbu arranged everything, the flight on DrukAir from Kolkata, the Bhutan visas, all accommodation and food, both in hotels and camping where no hotels were available, transport and anything else necessary.

Anyone visiting Bhutan at the time of year that we had chosen must spend a minimum of US\$250 per person per day and to have paid in advance for visas to be issued. Admittedly this seems very expensive but it does include everything except alcohol and incidentals.

Trip Detail

17TH MARCH: ARRIVE PARO AND BIRDING ALONG PARO RIVER

The new International Terminal at Kolkata's Netaji Subhash Bose Airport, had only been opened a couple of days before we arrived and it took us a while to find DrukAir's desk. The 50 minute flight to Paro's amazingly beautiful terminal building was fine and Norbu, his nephew Kinga who he is training to be a bird guide and our driver for the tour, Dorji, awaited us.

The drive to our hotel, Hotel Olathang, took only a few minutes even including a stop to look at our first birds, White Wagtails (subspecies *Motacilla alba personata*), Cinnamon Sparrows, Red-billed Choughs and Plumbeous Water-redstarts.

After lunch in downtown Paro we visited Paro Dzong, seeing our first Hodgson's Redstart and Rufous-breasted Accentors by the roadside, several confiding Red-billed Choughs and a couple of Rufous Sibias in a small tree opposite.

The rest of the afternoon and early evening was spent birding along the river driving between sites. The temperature had dropped and a bitter wind blew down the valley once the sun disappeared as we watched a Grey-backed Shrike



Ibisbill @ Norbu

and tried to relocate a Solitary Snipe that flew over our heads. Norbu eventually drew out a Black-tailed Crake using one of the many recordings that he has on his iphone. This was the first of the species that I had failed to see on my previous visit to Bhutan.

By now it really was getting cold so we returned to the hotel to warm up before dinner and to prepare for an early departure in the morning, hoping to see three species of pheasants.



Blood Pheasant @ Norbu

nearby. Several White-winged Grosbeaks of both sexes perched high in the treetops. At yet another stop a flock of some 30 or so Snow Pigeons flew about but only gave flight views. A tit flock consisted mainly of Coal Tits but, unlike 'our' bird, had prominent crests (*Periparus ater aemodius*) plus some Grey-crested Tits and at least one Rufous-fronted Tit. Spotted Nutcrackers called from the forest everywhere that we stopped and at the pass we saw a couple of Himalayan White-browed Rosefinches and a fine male Common Rosefinch. Much more familiar were a couple of female Red Crossbills. A birdwave consisting of White-browed Fulvettas and Bar-throated Minlas moved restlessly through the roadside vegetation while Collared Grosbeaks added to an ever-growing list of species. At one point on the drive we spotted a Jungle Cat by the side of the road. Despite the fact that it quickly bounded off into the

18TH MARCH: PARO - CHELELA BIRDING

We left the hotel at 05.00 in order to reach Chelela, the highest point on the road that crosses the kingdom from west to east by first light. The pass of Chelela lies at 3,988 metres above sea-level so it was a steady climb on a narrow but traffic-free road. At 06.00 almost simultaneously, Norbu and I spotted a bird ahead of us on the road. It was a splendid male Blood Pheasant. It walked briefly off the road and into the forest but soon returned to give us all excellent views. In the early bright light the colours far exceeded anything shown in the fieldguides. There was a female nearby too and we watched them for some time.

Small flocks of Plain Mountain Finches flew low through the pines adding to the beauty of the scene. Snow patches and a backdrop of majestic Himalayan peaks, among them Jumolhari, the second highest mountain in the country at over 7,000 metres, made a memorable sight. At another stop a bit further on, we were rewarded by a larger flock of about 20 Blood Pheasants plus a female Himalayan Monal and brief views of a much more colourful male disappearing up the forested mountainside above us.

Upon reaching Chelela we took a walk, the first bird we saw being a Black-faced Laughingthrush very close to us. Two Alpine Accentors flew in and hopped about on the road ahead of us but seemed unfazed by our presence and a Blue-fronted Redstart sat on a prayer flag

forest when we stopped, we all had a pretty good look at it.

In the afternoon we were to have hiked up to one of the classic tourist destinations, Tiger's Nest, but lack of time prevented us. It was a couple of hours drive to Thimphu, and I think that there was more nodding-off than there should have been in our vehicle, Dorji proving to be a very careful and confidence-inspiring driver. We arrived at the Namgay Heritage Hotel, one of the more comfortable and up-market hotels in the capital. It would be another early start in the morning so after a very tasty buffet-style meal we all retired for an early night.

19TH MARCH: THIMPHU - DOCHULA - PUNAKA

We packed, loaded up and left the hotel just before 6am and drove up to Dochula, a pass at 3,100 metres above sea-level. We did not make any stops on the way and reached the pass in just under an hour. Here there was an elaborate monument to the Bhutanese soldiers who lost their lives when an Assamese militants' encampment was broken up and the terrorists ejected in 2005. This took the form of a large group of stupas or chortens right at the summit.

Birding began slowly. It was still cold despite being 800 metres lower than we were at this time at Chelela yesterday. There were no pheasants here but the verdant growth of many flowering daphne and rhododendron shrubs provided a source of nectar for several Green-tailed Sunbirds that delighted us with their colourful plumage shimmering in the early morning sunlight.

An Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher appeared close to the road where we were watching and a Hoary-throated Barwing could hardly have been more cooperative. Distantly we saw a few Himalayan Black Bulbuls before we went to the restaurant near the pass for our breakfast.

After a hearty meal we descended along a 'nature trail', a path through the forested hillside of about 1.5 km that cut off many of the hairpin bends on the road. Birds were plentiful as we clambered down to rejoin the road much lower. Noisy White-throated Laughingthrushes, a Striated Laughingthrush, too many Stripe-throated Yuhinas to count and more Hoary-throated Barwings were all around us.

Once we reached the road we re-joined our vehicle and drove to a botanic garden. Here we saw our second species of woodpecker of the day. We had seen a Darjeeling Woodpecker just below Dochula. This was a Rufous-bellied Woodpecker. It was the large number of Blue-fronted Redstarts that was the most remarkable feature of the birding here. There was also a female Himalayan Red-flanked Bush-robin, several Chestnut-headed Laughingthrushes and a Verditer Flycatcher.

We continued our descent towards our lunch stop at Lobesa in the Punakha Valley pausing frequently to locate bird flocks. Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, a Hodgson's Treecreeper, formerly considered conspecific with Eurasian Treecreeper but now generally accepted as a separate species, Long-tailed Minivet, Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher and Red-headed Tit were all seen well by everyone. Then came the real high-



Ward's Trogon @ Norbu

light of the day when Norbu played the call of Ward's Trogon. There was almost instant response and a pair appeared at eye-level very close to us indeed remaining motionless for long enough for us all to get excellent views and photo opportunities. The fabulous male was particularly obliging.

Several species of *Phylloscopus* warblers were seen during the morning – Grey-faced (Ashy-throated), Lemon-rumped, Grey-hooded and Blyth's Leaf-warblers. Lunch, in a restaurant overlooking the cultivated fields of the broad Punakha Valley, produced our first, and much more mundane Common Mynas and Red-vented Bulbuls.

During lunch, Kinga had changed into his smart dho, the national dress which is obligatory to wear when on any vaguely official business. In the afternoon he took us to visit the great dzong of Punthang Dechen Phrodrang ("Palace of the Great Bliss") where the two rivers called the Phochu and Mochu have their confluence. This is where the First King was crowned in 1907 and is the winter residence of the Spiritual Leader and entire central body of monks so we had to be on our best behaviour! Norbu did not accompany us but took our luggage to our hotel so it was Kinga who gave us a guided tour. We visited the Third Courtyard and watched the monks at prayer.

The walk back to join Norbu and Dorji involved crossing the longest suspended foot bridge in Bhutan after which we drove a short

Trip Detail

distance along the riverbank in search of probably one of the rarest birds in the world – White-bellied Heron. There may be as few as 200 of this Himalayan heron left. Amazingly we located one right away fishing in the river. With the telescope trained on it we quickly attracted a gathering of local youth all anxious to see it. The bird could not have behaved better. It was just below us and wading in the river the huge heron soon caught a very large fish, probably a trout, and promptly swallowed it. We watched this magnificent bird for about half an hour before driving to the hotel, stopping only to look at some 200 Ruddy Shelduck in the Phochu (chu = river).

20TH MARCH: BIRDING INSIDE JIGME DORJI NATIONAL PARK

Another short night! We met Norbu in the hotel's lobby at 04.55 for the drive to the Jigme Dorji National Park, a journey of about an hour along the valley of the Mochu (Mother River). We were joined by our camp support team who were to provide us with two meals and mid-morning tea/coffee today enabling us to spend the whole day in the National Park.

Wren-babblers and tesias were to be our main focus to start with, groups of 'skulkers' that I was particularly keen to see as well as possible. I knew that Norbu had made good recordings of most of them so I was quietly confident. Early on a group of three dark, long-tailed wood pigeons flew over our heads, almost certainly Speckled Wood pigeons but I hoped for better views. Also at the beginning of the day a Wallcreeper flew past the vehicle which Norbu's sharp eyes latched onto immediately. We stopped instantly and had good views of the bird just down the road on a rock face searching for prey items, wings and tail flicking constantly. Much time and effort on Norbu's part was then spent in vain trying to get a Spotted Wren-babbler that called incessantly from the tangle of undergrowth to show itself. We had more success with a Slaty-bellied Tesia that gave brief but good convincing views. A Pygmy Wren-babbler finally did come out into the open for long enough for everyone to see it.

During the day we had many stops, Norbu's window open as we drove along, his attuned ears and sharp eyesight locating any feeding flocks. Notable species and all seen well, included Mountain Bulbuls, Black-eared Shrike-babblers,



Black-eared Shrike Babbler @ Norbu

Rusty-fronted Barwings, several Small and one female Large Niltava, Rufous-winged Fulvetas and in a small valley-side stream Little and Slaty-backed Forktails, Grey Treepies, a perched Mountain Hawk-eagle, a pair of Crested Serpent-eagles, Brown Dipper, River Lapwing and a Common Merganser (Goosander).

Three Yellow-throated Martens appeared on the far bank of the Mochu, bouncing along playfully and we saw several Himalayan Striped Squirrels.

We finally left the National Park in the early evening for the hour's drive for our second night in the Damchen Resort in Punakha. The weather had been exceptional – blue skies and warm sunshine with just a few drops of rain at the close but not enough to interrupt the birding.



Trip Detail



21ST MARCH: PUNAKHA - NOBDING - PHOBJEKHA

We found the Kinga had gone back to Thimphu last night and we were rather sad that we had not been able to thank him and bid him farewell. Norbu appeared at 06.00 for what was to be a long drive, taking most of the day, with birding stops of course, to reach the Phobjekha Valley. We were accompanied by our camping support team of a chef and his assistant, a driver and a general helper for pitching tents, serving food etc. Six men to look after four of us is not a bad ratio! A routine was soon established – they were usually ahead of us and would meet us at a series of pre-arranged spots where they prepared and served breakfast, morning tea/coffee, lunch and dinner if we were not staying in a hotel. Their cooking was excellent, often far better than in the hotels!

Our first stop, and not until 07.00, was for breakfast. It was an amazing place to have a meal. The crew had pitched a mess tent and set up our table, complete with tablecloth, chairs, cutlery and crockery at what could loosely be described as at a traffic island, a sort of low hillock in the middle of the road, except there was virtually no traffic! Cereal, a delicious cooked breakfast, juice, tea/coffee/hot chocolate, toast, the full works was served with us surrounded by a forest full of birds. Himalayan Black Bulbuls, four Great Barbets having a territorial dispute and a beautiful male Fire-bellied Flowerpecker right over our heads complemented a memorable meal. What more could one want?

Continuing on in the vehicle after breakfast the first stop was at a cliff face where several large bees' nests were attached beneath an overhanging ledge. Here, very close to the road, we watched two Yellow-rumped Honeyguides flying in to feed, probably the only species of bird that can digest beeswax. At the same time in the gully on the opposite side of the road, Whiskered Yuhinas, a Rufous-capped Babbler as well as the ubiquitous Rufous Sibias were constantly in view.

Several other stops and short walks along the road produced two Plain-backed Thrushes, then Bhutan Laughingthrush and Strong-footed (Brownish-flanked) Bush-warbler on a



Yellow-rumped Honeyguide @ Norbu

roadside rubbish dump as well as two Barking Deer and three Hoary-bellied Squirrels chasing one another about. At a tiny hamlet called Nobding a Grey-winged Blackbird was in full song with Eurasian Jays flying about and Tree Sparrows sitting on a tractor in a farmyard.

We had stopped at 11.00 for a coffee break and arrived at our lunch stop at 12.45. There was certainly little chance that we would be short of nourishment on this tour! How the team manage to produce such delicious food at the roadside is a real puzzle.

In the afternoon one of the highlights was seeing two Maroon-backed Accentors just before we turned off the main highway with its heavy lorries and roadworks, the entire country, it seemed, in the process of having its roads widened. The slow progress was actually an advantage for birdwatching. The Phobjekha Valley was a haven of tranquillity in comparison.

At the head of the valley the vegetation was bamboo thicket. We left our vehicle and began slowly walking down the road, obtaining really good views of a Spotted Laughingthrush and a Grey-sided Bush-warbler. However, perhaps the most surprising bird was a Eurasian (Black-billed) Magpie!

A large flock of Black-throated Parrotbills together with a Golden-breasted Fulvetta were seen close to the turn-off and a little earlier a

Trip Detail

Streak-breasted Scimitar-babbler made an appearance and a Black-headed Shrike-babbler, a scarce species in Bhutan, flew over our heads.

This valley is one of the main wintering sites for Black-necked Cranes. I had seen over 170 of them on my tour in 2007 but had been here a couple of weeks earlier. Unfortunately, this time we missed them by a day. Later, when we visited the Crane Information Centre, we discovered that the last group had departed for their breeding grounds in Tibet yesterday. While we scanned the broad valley in the hope of seeing one, a flock of over 50 Oriental Skylarks dropped into a field next to us.

There had been a few pellets of snow falling as we entered the valley, but this developed into a thunderstorm and power failure when we reached our hotel, Hotel Gakeling close to the Information Centre, and our dinner was candle-lit.

It had been another good day's birding. There had been four Speckled Woodpigeons perched high in a leafless tree. Through the 'scope we had splendid views, more than making up for the rather unsatisfactory flight view of a couple of days ago. Warblers included Black-faced, Grey-hooded, Blyth's and Tickell's Leaf-warblers. We also had really good views of Green-tailed and our only Mrs. Gould's Sunbird of the tour, while Fire-capped Tits were yet another colourful addition to the day's sightings.

22ND MARCH: PHOBJEKHA - PELELA - TRONGSA - KOSHALA

We left Hotel Gakeling at 05.30 and started towards Trongsa, four hour's drive if we did not stop. This took us over another high pass, Pelela at 3,400 meters above sea-level, last night's snow in patches by the roadside. When we reached the pass our support team were getting our breakfast ready by the roadside but we were to have a birding session first, and a memorable session it turned out to be. We took the old, now abandoned road from the pass, so there was no traffic at all. The weather was lovely, clear and crisp after last night's storm. As we left Dorji and our vehicle and followed Norbu down the road, two Red-billed Choughs circled above our heads calling noisily. There must have been at least a hundred White-winged Grosbeaks flying about, landing in groups in the tops of the tallest trees. A male and two female Himalayan White-browed Rosefinches fed by the roadside and Alpine Accentors prodded about on the grass verge. A pair of Crimson-browed Finches was feeding on seeding plants and seemed unaware of our presence. Then two Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinches arrived to join the other finches. A bird wave consisted mainly of Stripe-throated Yuhinas and several male Green-tailed Sunbirds glistened in the morning sunlight. Using his ipod, Norbu succeeded in calling out a Hume's (Grey-sided) Bush-warbler for us all to see well. A pair of Yellow-billed Blue Magpies flew over as we walked slowly down the road and a White-collared Blackbird sang from a treetop while the ubiquitous Oriental Turtle Doves seemed to be everywhere.

However all this paled into insignificance as we proceeded. Three Himalayan Monals were by the roadside ahead of us. We had already seen one male briefly as we drove up to Pelela, but it had scuttled away and up the steeply wooded slope above the road leaving us wanting a more prolonged view so as to fully appreciate its wonderful colours – now we got just



White-browed Rosefinch @ Norbu

that. They were clearly aware of us but did not seem too concerned and we had plenty of time to watch two males and a female as another male flew low above our heads – wonderful, but even better was to come. Norbu spotted a pair of Satyr Tragopans a little further along the road, the male displaying arrogantly on a tree stump. We watched from a little distance while Norbu got closer in order to photograph them until they wandered into the denser vegetation and disappeared from view.

By now we were ready for our breakfast and walked back to the road junction at the pass hardly able to believe our good fortune, and it was still barely eight o'clock. We did a little more birding after our meal, adding White-tailed Nuthatch and Orange-bellied Leafbird to the day's total before getting into the vehicle and setting off again, stopping whenever Norbu heard anything of interest calling.

A Blue-winged Laughingthrush, half hidden in the scrubby vegetation by the roadside was a new bird for the trip, and stops added Fire-tailed Sunbird, Olive-backed Pipit and Long-tailed Shrike. There was a variety of warblers

Trip Detail

but a White-browed Piculet was particularly memorable. Several Golden Langurs caused a brief deviation from things avian but we were soon scrutinising the Phylloscopus warblers, easier said than done as they flitted restlessly among the branches. Probably easiest were the Lemon-rumped Warblers, hovering to pick insects off the leaves and showing their diagnostic pale yellow rumps. Himalayan Greenfinches and a particularly obliging Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-babbler kept us busy up until our mid-morning coffee break provided yet again by the wonderful support team at 11.00.

Birding continued with two Blue-throated Flycatchers, and further stops when more bird waves with Yuhinas and Fulvettas were encountered took us towards lunch. Brown Parrotbill and a probable Booted Eagle added to the avian variety.

The road in this part of the country is particularly bad. The construction of a new hydro-electric Power Scheme, the Mangde Chhu project, that will provide the country with even more electricity to sell to India (HEP is Bhutan's main source of income), requires a much improved road and there are many kilometres in the process of construction, resulting in traffic disruption and inevitable delays. Indeed it is the poor state of the roads that makes journeys so long and driving so difficult.

Verditer Flycatchers were becoming more and more numerous. Nepal House Martins swooped above a gorge while below, in the river, Ruddy Shelducks were the only waterfowl but at one stop two Slaty-backed Fork-tails performed well for us. A Common Green Magpie, seen from the moving vehicle only by those in the front seats, was eventually relocated and admired by all.

We arrived eventually at our first camp site at Kashala at 1,425 Metres above sea-level. Our tents were already pitched when we arrived and a table set for our dinner. As we pulled up two Large Hawk Cuckoos were calling loudly and flew off but were no more than silhouettes in the evening light. Each tent had two camp beds, sleeping bags and a battery light and was really perfectly comfortable. We used the 'bandstand' as a dining room, retiring early as tomorrow would be yet another early start



Trip Detail

23RD MARCH: KOSHALA - ZHEMGANG

The first birding session of the day is usually the most productive and we were soon adding new species. An Ashy Bulbul was our first new species as a noisy gang of White-crested Laughingthrushes swept through the bushes. A Blyth's (White-browed) Shrike-babbler was seen well as part of yet another bird wave, and a White-browed Scimitar-babbler added a bit of 'class'. Two fabulous Sultan Tits continued the quality theme and a Blue-bearded Bee-eater responded beautifully to playback and perched very close to us on overhead wires. A Mountain Bulbul was another nice bird to see, while a Shikra, Common Kestrel, Oriental White-eyes and several Verditer Flycatchers were rather more mundane. Phylloscopus warblers included Whistler's Warbler in another feeding flock that appeared suddenly, then were gone just as rapidly.

Woodpeckers have been rather scarce when one considers the extent of the forested habitat (72% of Bhutan's surface is forested) so a Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker was a welcome addition to the day's total. A male Little Pied Flycatcher showed well, a really charming little bird, and Norbu managed to persuade a Striated Prinia to sidle into view in a bamboo thicket. Blue-throated and Great Barbets were calling as a pair of Kalij Pheasants crept away through the undergrowth. Above, in the canopy, Bronzed Drongos shimmered in the sunlight and several Pied (Bar-winged) Flycatcher-shrikes came and went. Oriental Turtle Doves continued to be very numerous.

At 09.30 breakfast was brought to us, and from then until mid-morning refreshments we were treated to another Blue-winged Laughingthrush, Black-faced Warbler, Fire-breast-



Blue-bearded Bee-eater @ Norbu

ed Flowerpecker, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Olive-backed Pipits and more Golden Langurs and a Giant Squirrel. Towards the end of the rather bumpy journey, our reward was a pair of beautiful Rufous-necked Hornbills that flew into trees on the hillside just above the road. We had, as usual, stopped many times en route, taking in Brown-throated Treecreeper, Striated Bulbul, Crested Serpent-eagle and much more.

We had descended from our first camp to a mere 720 metres above sea-level when we reached our second camp site, Tingtibe Camp at Shemgang (Zhemgang) in the early evening. We would stay here for two nights. As we drove in to the clearing, Norbu spotted a very large owl at the top of a tree but a little distant. Through the 'scope it was obviously a huge Forest (Spot-breasted) Eagle-owl using the tree as a lookout for its next meal. We quickly settled in to our now familiar tents, ate yet another very tasty meal and retired for the night.



Rufous-necked Hornbill @ Norbu

A break for breakfast between 09.15 and 09.40 was followed by good views of Scaly Laughingthrush, Olive-backed Pipit and Mountain Bulbul while at the next stop I added a 'much-wanted' Red-faced Liochicla to my 'Life List'. Bronzed Drongos, several Rusty-fronted Barwings, Rufous Sibia and Striated Bulbuls brightened our morning as we clambered in and out of our Toyota Hiace.

24TH MARCH: ZHEMGANG - TINGTIBE ROAD

After the arrival of our bowls of hot water outside our tents and early morning tea and biscuits, we were away from the camp by 05.30. Twenty five minutes later we were watching a pair of Slaty-backed Forktails in a tumbling stream by the roadside. We had brief views of a Scaly-breasted Wren-babbler and a Blyth's Shrike-babbler followed by several Blyth's (Fork-tailed) Swifts that passed by overhead. At this second stop, and a walk further along the road, there was a Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Striated Laughingthrushes and several Ashy Drongos.

At a third stop, and still only 08.30, several Blue-winged Minlas, a very busy Yellow-bellied Fantail and at least one White-bellied Epornis (Yuhina) swept through while Scarlet Minivets sparkled in the canopy and two Himalayan Griffon Vultures circled majestically overhead.

Trip Detail

We set off back to camp at 11.20 seeing a White-capped River-chat en route, finally arriving at Tingtibe at 12.30. As we drove in and off the road a group of lovely Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes preceded us, disappearing into the vegetation by the camp entrance. There was also a White-throated Bulbul, several Red-vented Buleuls and an Oriental Magpie-robin.

Lunch was served at 13.00, a more leisurely meal than most that we had eaten 'on the hoof', and we did not finish until 14.30. We then birded, very profitably, around the camp site which turned out to be bird-rich and full of quality birds. A White-browed Scimitar-babbler was nice but several Greater Necklaced Laughingthrushes were even better. There were also the only Black-crested Buleuls and Emerald Dove of the tour, the later most uncharacteristically wandering about in full view on the track.

Eventually we drove out again and went to the small bridge over a stream where we had birded this morning. More Greater Necklaced Laughingthrushes were joined by a Golden-throated Barbet, Himalayan Black Buleuls, Grey-chinned Minivets, a pair of Rufous-necked Hornbills, a Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Blue-throated Flycatcher, Striated Yuhinas and the ever-present, it seemed, Verditer Flycatchers. We kept birding until the light began to fail at 17.45 then returned to camp for a bit of relaxation before dinner and another early night.

25TH MARCH: ZHEMGANG - TRONGSA

As usual our bowls of hot water appeared outside our tents at 05.00 and we were eating breakfast by 05.30 before driving away just before 06.00.

A beautiful Red Junglefowl was one of our first birds, a species more often heard than seen, A smart Chestnut-bellied Rock-thrush was followed by several spectacular Great Pied Hornbills flying into the canopy of a tree really close to where we were standing, a most impressive sight! Several Wedge-tailed Green Pigeons were in the top of another tree and a Blue-throated Barbet all ensured that the day got off to a colourful start. A little later a Bay Woodpecker was a first for the tour, then a pair of silent Kalij Pheasants and a Grey Treepie captured our attention. We were at one of two regular sites in Bhutan where Beautiful Nuthatch may be seen, but today we were out of luck. This was one of the birds I had come to see, but I would need to be patient.

Yellow-throated Fulvetta, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Striated Laughingthrush and Fire-bellied Flowerpecker were now of daily occurrence and today was no exception. An obliging Black-throated Sunbird looked almost monotone until caught by the sunlight when its iridescent plumage showed it to be very handsome indeed. A group of Black-spotted Yellow Tits added real colour.

On a dead tree, a Greater Yellownappe was busy excavating a nest hole and was very reluctant to move off even when we got quite close. Red-headed Tits, Golden Babbler, Small Niltava and more Sultan Tits, another Blyth's Shrike-babbler and several Oriental White-eyes were all watched appreciatively and it was not yet 09.45



Golden Langur @ Norbu

After an earlier than usual coffee break we ran into very bad roadworks but saw a Mountain Hawk-eagle, a Black Eagle and a Common Green Magpie. We were now retracing our steps and stopped for lunch at the 'bandstand' site at Koshala, where we had first camped, then drove back north to the main west to east highway.

We had a brief rest stop at 15.40 at another cliff face where three Yellow-rumped Honeyguides were at bees' nests and at 16.45 we finally reached Trongsa. At 2,135 metres we were at a higher elevation again.

After three nights of camping it was good to be back in a hotel again with a welcome hot shower and a bit more room to move about. This was Hotel Yankhil Resort at Tashipang, Trongsa. It was a lovely hotel and a relief to arrive after a long and very rough ride.

We had been very fortunate with the weather so far with no serious rain as yet.



Red-headed Bullfinch @ Norbu

Our mid-morning refreshment break briefly interrupted our birding before continuing on to Bhom Zang Bridge where we saw the first Plumbeous Water Redstart for a while. There was a Brown Parrotbill and Hume's Bush-warbler here too.

By the time we had lunch we had descended to 2,920 metres and we continued to drop lower afterwards. Eventually we stopped at a small craft centre where rain began to fall.

We arrived at Jakar at 14.30, the small, bustling one street town a complete contrast to the primary forest we had been in. We reached our hotel, Hotel Gongkhar Guest House, shortly afterwards. Jakar is the main town in Bumthang, the Dzongkhag, or administrative unit, one of 20 or so into which Bhutan is divided. Jakar was almost totally destroyed by fire a few years ago and has been completely rebuilt. This area has only been open to tourists for five years.

After a bit of half-hearted shopping in Jakar we drove out to some marshy fields on the edge of town. We had very good views, albeit only the head and neck, of a Black-tailed Crake and there were a few Cinnamon Sparrows around too. As we drove back to our hotel with daylight failing, approximately a thousand Plain Mountain Finches flew over the town, probably on their way to roost.

Back in the hotel, each room had a wood-burning stove in the middle so we had a cosy night despite the rather inclement weather outside.

26TH MARCH: TRONGSA - YOTONGLA - BUMTHANG

Without waiting for breakfast at the hotel, we left promptly at 06.00 knowing full well that 'the team' would be on hand to provide for our gastronomic needs a little later. A restless flock of White-throated Laughingthrushes were almost our first birds of the day, although Blue Whistling-thrushes were constantly along the verges as we drove along.

At 06.25, through the open vehicle's window, Norbu heard a wren-babbler singing. We stopped and his ipod was immediately played. This time there was no response. We did, however, see a Black-faced Laughingthrush and it is worth noting that the illustration in "Birds of South Asia, The Ripley Guide" shows the incorrect wing colour. The illustration in Grimmett, Inskipp & Inskipp is much better but still possibly not blue enough. We also saw a Bhutan Laughingthrush.

Our totally reliable support team had breakfast ready for us, but, as we sat down at our table by the roadside cloud enveloped us, but we could still see a group of Plain Mountain Finches feeding on the roadside turf very nearby. An inquisitive Green-tailed Sunbird and White-browed Fulvetas appeared through the mist. Norbu's altimeter showed that we were at 2,985 metres. We set off again at 08.00 and drove a short distance before taking a walk. Rufous-vented Yuhinas, Himalayan White-browed Rosefinches and then four lovely Red-headed Bullfinches made brief appearances before moving on and away into the cloud-enveloped forest. We had now ascended to 3,225 metres. A beautiful male Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher perched near the road and then, almost a complete surprise, a Winter Wren slipped away into the mist as a Fire-tailed Sunbird was just discernible and a Himalayan Buzzard sailed out of sight. We still climbed slowly to the Yotongla Pass another 125 metres higher reaching here by 10.00. An obliging Grey-crested Tit, Rufous-vented Tits and the first Blue-fronted Redstart we have seen for a while added to the day's variety as we began our descent on the far side of the pass.



Trip Detail

27TH MARCH: BUMTHANG -THRUMSHINGLA - SENGOR

Despite the early hour of our departure (05.30) the shower was beautifully hot. Today we would be driving to Sengor via Thrumshingla, yet another high level mountain pass at 3,800 metres.

A lovely male Himalayan Monal was by the roadside and White-collared Blackbird, Blue Whistling-thrush, Eurasian Magpie, Large-billed Crow and, inevitably, Oriental Turtle Dove got the day off to a good start within half an hour of leaving the hotel.

Our first stop at 06.30 produced Rufous-breasted Accentor, Lemon-rumped Warblers, White-browed Fulvetta, Rufous-vented Tit, Beautiful Rosefinch, Grey-crested Tit, Spotted Nutcracker, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie and Plain Mountain Finches.

We stopped for breakfast on the edge of Thrumshingla National Park at 07.30 watching Rufous-vented Yuhinas, Green-tailed Sunbird, Blyth's Swifts and Coal Tits. We continued climbing to 3,515 metres where White-throated Redstart was added to our tally, and reached the summit at 10.50.

At 11.50 we stopped to admire a group of Blood Pheasants and saw a Hodgson's Treecreeper, Hume's Bush-warbler, Rufous-fronted Tits and a Winter Wren. Roadworks still dogged our progress. On a particularly bad section we just managed to get through before workmen closed the road. Unfortunately our support team, who had to pack up after the breakfast stop, were too late and did not make it in time. However, they managed to get through in time for a later than usual mid-morning stop.

One of the species that Norbu was determined that we would



Himalayan Monal @ Norbu

see whenever we encountered any large bamboo stands was Great Parrotbill. For a couple of days now he had played their recorded song on his ipod but without success. Today however he finally got a response. We were just 13 kilometres from Sengor and at 3,430 metres above sea-level when a small group made their appearance and we had brilliant views. In complete contrast and at the same place we saw our only Goldcrest of the trip!

Our roadside camp site for tonight was just beyond Sengor. We took a short break here before birding again at 16.20. A Green Shrike-babbler and another group of Red-headed Bullfinches appeared and Norbu succeeded in taping out two Bar-winged Wren-babblers that flew across a small clearing and into the base of a clump of bamboo where we could see them very well. On the opposite side of the road a Scaly-breasted Wren-babbler was also calling, but this did not respond to taping



Bar-winged Wren Babbler @ Norbu

ed visibility, one being a Grey-faced Warbler. There were also Lemon-rumped Warblers and a Green Shrike-babbler. A little later, when visibility permitted, an Orange-barred (Buff-barred) Leaf-warbler was an addition to our trip list and in the bird waves Hoary-throated Barwings, Bar-throated Minla, Stripe-throated Yuhinas, Yellow-browed and Red-headed Tits and much else.

We drove on passing Bhutan's highest water-

28TH MARCH: SENGOR - NAMLING - YONGKALA

An opportunistic Large-billed Crow sat on a fence post watching me hopefully as I stood outside our tent enjoying my early morning biscuits and tea. Birding commenced at 06.10 with more bullfinches, assorted yuhinas and tits but it was a very inquisitive Pika or Mouse Hare, a distant relative of rabbits and hares (Lagomorphs) that held our attention. It emerged from a small drainage hole in a wall and appeared quite fearless as it watched us watching it. There are several species in the Himalayas, but this was probably Royal's Pika.

After quite some time, Norbu finally managed to tape out a Bar-winged Wren-babbler. More colourful, but only a female, was a Golden Bush-robin but otherwise the usual species were much in evidence.

At 09.30 we began birding again but we were soon enveloped in cloud but not before a small party of Red Crossbills landed in the pines but there were no adult males with them. Several birds were close enough to identify despite the limit-

Trip Detail

fall, Namling Falls, then continued on foot, still going downhill but still in cloud and still continuously surrounded by birds – Grey-headed Canary-flycatchers often leading a bird wave consisting of Red-headed Laughingthrushes, Rufous-capped Babblers, Whiskered Yuhinas, Golden-breasted Fulvettas, Olive-backed Pipits, An Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher – a veritable cornucopia of species.

Down at 2,000 metres as we rounded a bend in the road, we were amazed to see a Long-billed Wren-babbler right out in the open on the edge of a bush and eventually a Rufous-throated Wren-babbler and a Blue-winged Laughingthrush were also seen very well by all four of us. We finally reached our camping site at a little over 1,800 metres at a quarter to five.

Despite the often dense cloud surrounding us, we had still had an excellent day's birding and seen some really quality species, so it was with considerable satisfaction that we sat down to another tasty dinner and another early night.

29TH MARCH: YONGKALA - NAMLING - LIMITHANG ROAD

We were at Yongkala and still just inside the National Park. It was Norbu's intention that we should spend the day birding up and down the Limithang Road. Our tents were pitched above the road and there was a proper toilet block and a couple of circular shelters with benches in which we ate. The support team and their gear were down by the roadside. There had been overnight rain and for the first and only time, we saw leeches but very few and no one got bitten.

Our bowls of hot water were laboriously carried up the flight of steps to our tents at 05.30 and our usual tea and biscuits provided so that birding began at 06.00. A Yellow-browed (Grey-bellied) Tesia called continuously from the overhanging vegetation right next to our camp site but proved impossible to see. Just up the road we did succeed in seeing several White-breasted (Greater Rufous-headed) Parrotbills and a White-throated Fantail. There was also a flock of Black-throated Parrotbills as well as the now quite familiar 'wave species' but new for the trip were several Himalayan Cutias that Norbu attracted towards us using his ipod recordings. We had exceptional views of these. At breakfast at our roadside table, we felt very pleased with the first two hours birding, all done on a short walk for our camp site.

Between breakfast and our mid-morning break we walked up the road and saw a wonderful array of species including Black-faced, Whistler's and Grey-cheeked Warblers, White-tailed Nuthatch, Grey-chinned Minivet, Black-spotted Yellow Tit, a Black Eagle and many more. Then until we returned for lunch we walked down the road adding Orange-bellied Niltava, Golden-throated Barbet, Nepal House-martins, a spectacular Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Rufous-capped Babblers and gaudy Scarlet Minivets.

The weather deteriorated after lunch and a few spots of rain began to fall from a gloomy sky so we returned to camp.



Black-throated Parrotbill @ Norbu

However, this was a good move for we finally succeeded in seeing the Yellow-browed Tesia, still calling right next to the support group's catering tent by the road and also a beautiful, tiny Pygmy Blue Flycatcher, another 'lifer' for me.

In the middle of the afternoon we drove down the road and out of the Park, past the South African group's camp, to a considerably lower elevation (1,300 metres) where our first Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Red-vented Bulbuls, Green-backed Tits, Pied Flycatcher Shrike and a Long-tailed Shrike had a much more lowland Indian flavour. Rather more exciting was a most obliging Chestnut-headed Tesia and a Blue-bearded Bee-eater. Light rain was now falling steadily but we still managed to continue birding. Finally, as the rain got heavier and showed no sign of stopping, we returned to camp and called it a day as far as birding was concerned.

A very wet evening followed and after dinner we were confined to our tents as rainfall intensity increased accompanied by rumbles of thunder.

30TH MARCH: YONGKALA - KORILA - TRASHIGANG

At 06.00 we were walking up the road again, in cloud but thankfully the heavy overnight rain had stopped and we were able to birdwatch without too much difficulty. Mist shrouded everything so visibility was a bit limited but we were still able to see the closer birds well enough to identify them. Fortunately the birds in the feeding flocks were looking for rather smaller organisms than *Homo sapiens* so took no notice of us as long as we did not move too suddenly. The first really good bird was a Long-tailed Thrush, one of the *Zoothera* thrushes, right by the roadside which allowed us to get reasonably close before flying off.

As the mist started to thin our list increased proportionately. Yet again the presence of a Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher signalling the arrival of a flock including White-throated Laughingthrushes, a variety of warblers, Chestnut-crowned and Whistler's Warblers the more unusual, Yellow-throated Fulvetta and Common Green Magpie just to name the more interesting. This really is a fabulously bird-rich forest!

At about seven o'clock the weather began to improve and the cloud dispersed, the sky clearing to become a bright, clear morning. This improvement prompted one of the best birds of the trip to make a most remarkable appearance. In response to Norbu's recording a splendid Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler came right out into the open, hopping about in full view for several minutes. This species had not been seen in Bhutan before the year 2000! Completely euphoric, we slowly made our way back to camp for breakfast.

Our breakfast awaited our return at 08.00 after which we left the 'gang' to pack up. We then drove out of the National Park and the wet, sub-tropical forest that had held such a rich variety of species, and away down the road, beyond the point we had reached yesterday before the weather had deteriorated.

Stops produced a Hair-crested (Spangled) Drongo, Bronzed Drongo, Rufous-necked Laughingthrush and Grey Treepie among other things. Capped Langurs and Himalayan Giant Squirrel, then fantastic views of a Streaked Spiderhunter searching banana flowers for insects, a confiding Green-billed Malkoha and a Black Eagle were other notable sight-



Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler @ Norbu

ings. As we descended to 850 metres White-throated Kingfishers and Spotted Doves began to appear. A bird that I had been surprised not to have seen until now was then added to our list, a Himalayan Pied Kingfisher. Continuing to descend we next had nice views of a male Crested Bunting together with Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-babblers and a Eurasian Kestrel.

We were soon going uphill again and Dorji stopped in Mongar for a while to refuel the Toyota where Barn Swallows and Eurasian Tree Sparrows were flying about. We set off again, still climbing gradually. Grey Bushchat, Himalayan Greenfinches, a Little Pied Flycatcher, Grey-hooded Warbler, Rufous-breasted Accentor and Bhutan Laughingthrush were added to the day's tally as we reached 2,285 metres and finally before another descent, reached the Korila Pass at 2,375 metres where we had a late lunch.

We crossed the largest river in Bhutan, the Drangmechhu near Trashigang having dropped right down to 685 metres above sea-level, before reaching our accommodation for tonight, the Druk Deotjung Hotel. We were given the 'luxury' rooms on the first floor overlooking the little courtyard. They were fairly basic but perfectly adequate. It seems that the further east one goes the poorer the hotels become. However, the dinner was good and there was Druk 11,000 beer to be had!



Trip Detail



Beautiful Nuthatch @ Norbu

where the team were still erecting our tents. Cinamon Sparrows, a Grey Bushchat and Black-throated Sunbird moved about looking a bit put out by the intrusion.

This area was to be our last chance to catch up with the one species I had hoped to see, but so far failed to add to my life list. We walked about three kilometres down the road from the camp site and within five minutes there they were – a pair of Beautiful Nuthatches at eye-level just metres away on the trunk of a large tree below the road. What fantastic luck, or was it the skill and knowledge of Norbu? It was almost certainly the latter. Verditer Flycatchers were liberally scattered about flycatching on this beautiful warm, sunny evening. We also added a Spotted Forktail, a trip tick, Himalayan Greenfinches, Bronzed Drongos, Red-headed Tits, Black-faced Warbler, a rather distant Rufous-bellied Eagle and Golden-throated Barbet. What an evening!

31ST MARCH: TRASHIGANG - KHALING - MORONG

After torrential rain and a violent thunderstorm in the early part of the night the weather had improved by the time we left after breakfast at 06.00.

The road was in a very bad state as far as Khaling, which we reached at 08.10. A little further on we encountered our first, and only, Gold-naped Finches of the tour where we also saw a Himalayan Red-flanked Bush-robin with Whiskered Yuhinas and a better view of a Long-tailed Thrush than we had a couple of days ago. A Grey-faced Warbler, Green-tailed Sunbirds and a female Shikra were seen too. As usual, we stopped whenever we came upon a bird wave, seeing the now quite familiar species including a Blyth's Shrike-babbler and a Bhutan Laughingthrush.

At 10.30 our support team had caught up with us and we had our mid-morning refreshments. We passed Wam-rong and continued driving until we stopped to stretch our legs and have a stroll at noon. Among the usual feeding flock species – Rusty-fronted Barwing, Rufous-capped Babbler, Mountain Bulbul – a Hume's Warbler was a new species to add to our list

The lunch stop was at a spot with wonderful views across spectacular mountain scenery and some nice birds too. We had brief views of a Yellow-browed Tesia, plus Grey-chinned Minivet, Red-tailed Minla, Yellow-bellied Fantail and White-tailed Nuthatch.

We drove on until we reached the place where we were to camp for the night near Morong, arriving at 3pm

1ST APRIL: MORONG - DEWATHANG - SAMDRUP JONGKHAR

The bad news last night was that a two day strike in Assam was disrupting transport out of Bhutan and that, if it continued, we might run into difficulties tomorrow at Samdrup Jongkhar, the border town. The news suggested that the strike would be over in time for our departure from Bhutan and our journey to Guwahati for our flight back to Kolkata tomorrow. However, we were a little apprehensive but were determined not to let it spoil our last full day of birding.

We left the camp site at 06.30 having had our last team breakfast. A Strong-footed Bush-warbler's distinctive call, a Black-throated Sunbird glistening in the morning sunlight and Verditer Flycatchers' vivid colours imprinted on our memory, we drove off sad that our fantastic tour was nearing its end. Still 'top drawer' species made their appearance – a pair of Rufous-necked Hornbills, a Streaked Spiderhunter, White-naped Yuhinas and a Himalayan (Oriental) Cuckoo flying across the hillside in front of us and, most colourful of all, a flock of Silver-eared Mesias were all a delight and the weather was perfect too.

The variety of species seen was remarkable, Chestnut-bel-



Silver-eared Mesia @ Norbu

lied Rock-thrush, Orange-bellied Leafbird, a Northern Goshawk, Crested Serpent-eagle, Black Eagle and a whole bunch of warblers were delightful, the scene marred only by the dust created by the frequent passing of lorries carrying gypsum being exported to India. Mercifully, we soon came to a properly tarred road, as smooth as glass and totally dust-free, in fact the best road we have seen anywhere in Bhutan! This made birding a lot more pleasant with species reflecting our considerably lower

Trip Detail

elevation. There was a flock of White-breasted Parrotbills and our only Grey Wagtail of the trip, plus Long-tailed Sibias, a species that Norbu had correctly predicted we would see at a lower elevation.

At 12.30 we came to our team who had lunch prepared for us by the roadside. This was the last meal that this wonderful team who had looked after us so well would provide us with.

After photographs and our grateful thanks we left them to pack up and head back for home while we continued downwards to our last hotel, the Tashi Gasel Lodge just 4 kilometres from the international frontier at Samdrup Jonkhar, located at a mere 275 metres above sea-level. We arrived at 13.30 and settled in before commencing birding. Our only House Sparrows were seen here. After a leisurely tea break – there was no point in trying to birdwatch until it cooled down a bit – we set off at 16.30 and were pleasantly surprised at how bird-rich this area was. A Black-backed Forktail and a Crimson Sunbird were both new birds for the trip as were Pin-tailed Green Pigeons, an Oriental Pied Hornbill, two Wreathed Hornbills, a noisy Hill Myna and, best of all, a couple of Dark-rumped Swifts, making the evening session a delight. A Red-throated Flycatcher was also our first and only one of the tour.

The bad news, however, was that the strike in Assam was set to continue tomorrow and in order to avoid problems on the road once we entered India on our way to Guwahati, we would have to be ready to leave the hotel at 03.00. Norbu would go down to emigration control this evening with our passports and try to complete the necessary formalities to save time in the morning. This was a real pity as originally we were to have another half day's birding here and depart in the early afternoon. Sadly Norbu and Dorji did not get back in time to join us for dinner so that we could thank them properly for all they had done for us.



ny and Norbu in particular too highly. He always went to great pains to ensure that we all saw the birds as well as possible. It was a wonderful tour.

2ND APRIL: SAMDRUP JONGKHAR - GUWAHATI

We were all ready just before 03.00 and Norbu and Dorji accompanied us to the border. Two other small groups were also to make their 'escape' with us. Just after three the barrier was lifted and, having changed vehicles to an Indian car, we said our goodbyes and left Bhutan and set off. Fortunately by taking this precaution we avoided any hold-ups and eventually arrived at Guwahati Airport for our flight to Kolkata and eventually back home. The tour far exceeded expectations. The logistics worked perfectly thanks to Norbu's organisation and, of course, his skill and fieldcraft were truly quite remarkable. I could not recommend Off to Bhutan as a compa-



Trip Detail

The order and taxonomy follows the Second Edition of “Birds of South Asia. The Ripley Guide” Rasmussen, P.C. & Anderton, J.C. 2012. National Museum of Natural History - Smithsonian Institution, Michigan State University and Lynx Edicions, Washington D. C., Michigan and Barcelona.

Non-Passerines

| | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Great Cormorant | <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> |
| White-bellied Heron | <i>Ardea insignis</i> |
| Ruddy Shelduck | <i>tadorna ferruginea</i> |
| Eurasian Wigeon | <i>Mareca penelope</i> |
| Common Merganser | <i>Mergus merganser</i> |
| Shikra | <i>Accipiter badius</i> |
| Northern Goshawk | <i>Accipiter gentilis</i> |
| Himalayan Buzzard | <i>Buteo burmanicus</i> |
| Oriental Honey-buzzard | <i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i> |
| Crested Serpent-eagle | <i>Spilornis cheela</i> |
| Rufous-bellied Eagle | <i>Lophotriorchis kienerii</i> |
| Booted Eagle | <i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i> |
| Mountain Hawk-eagle | <i>Nisaetus nipalensis</i> |
| Black Eagle | <i>Ictinaetus malayensis</i> |
| Himalayan Vulture | <i>Gyps himalayensis</i> |
| Common Kestrel | <i>Falco tinnunculus</i> |
| Common Hill-partridge | <i>Arborophila torqueola</i> |
| Red Junglefowl | <i>Gallus gallus</i> |
| Blood Pheasant | <i>Ithaginis cruentus</i> |
| Satyr Tragopan | <i>Tragopan satyra</i> |
| Himalayan Monal | <i>Lophophorus sclateri</i> |
| Kaleej Pheasant | <i>Lophura leucomelanos</i> |
| Grey Peacock-pheasant (h) | <i>Polyplectron bicalcaratum</i> |
| Black-tailed Crake | <i>Porzana bicolor</i> |
| Ibisbill | <i>Ibidorhyncha struthersii</i> |
| River Lapwing | <i>Vanellus duvacaucelii</i> |
| Common Sandpiper | <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i> |
| Solitary Snipe | <i>Gallinago solitaria</i> |
| Rock Pigeon | <i>Columba livia</i> |
| Snow Pigeon | <i>Columba leuconoya</i> |
| Speckled Woodpigeon | <i>Columba hodgsonii</i> |
| Oriental Turtle-dove | <i>Streptopelia orientalis</i> |
| Spotted Dove | <i>Spilopelia chinensis</i> |
| Emerald Dove | <i>Chalcophaps indica</i> |
| Wedge-tailed Green-pigeon | <i>Treron sphenurus</i> |
| Pin-tailed Green-pigeon | <i>treron apicauda</i> |
| Himalayan Cuckoo | <i>Cuculus saturatus</i> |
| Large Hawk-cuckoo | <i>Hierococcyx sparverioides</i> |
| Green-billed Malkoha | <i>Phaenicophaeus tristis</i> |
| Forest Eagle-owl | <i>Ketupa nipalensis</i> |
| Himalayan Swiftlet | <i>Aerodramus brevirostris</i> |
| Little Swift | <i>Apus affinis</i> |
| Dark-rumped Swift | <i>Apus acuticauda</i> |

Trip Detail

Blyth's Swift
 Ward's Trogon
 White-throated Kingfisher
 Himalayan Pied Kingfisher
 Blue-bearded Bee-eater
 Rufous-necked Hornbill
 Great Pied Hornbill
 Oriental Pied Hornbill
 Wreathed Hornbill
 Yellow-rumped Honeyguide
 Blue-throated Barbet
 Golden-throated Barbet
 Great Barbet
 White-browed Piculet
 Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker
 Rufous-bellied Woodpecker
 Crimson-breasted Pied Woodpecker
 Darjeeling Pied Woodpecker
 Greater Yellownape
 Lesser Yellownape
 Bay Woodpecker

Apus leuconyx
Harpactes wardi
Halcyon smyrnensis
Ceryle lugubris
Nyctyornis athertoni
Aceros nipalensis
Buceros bicornis
Anthracoceros albirostris
Rhyticeros undulatus
Indicator xanthonotus
Megalaima asiatica
Megalaima franklinii
Megalaima virens
Sasia ochracea
Dendrocopos canicapillus
Hypopicus hyperythrus
Dendrocopos cathpharius
Dendrocopos darjellensis
Chrysophlegma flavinucha
Picus chlorolophus chlorolophus
Blythipicus pyrrhotis

Passerines

Oriental Skylark
 Nepal House-martin
 Barn Swallow
 Grey Wagtail
 White Wagtail
 Olive-backed Pipit
 Pied Flycatcher-shrike
 Long-tailed Minivet
 Scarlet Minivet
 Grey-chinned Minivet
 Red-vented Bulbul
 Himalayan Bulbul
 Himalayan Black Bulbul
 Ashy Bulbul
 Mountain Bulbul
 White-throated Bulbul
 Black-crested Bulbul
 Striated Bulbul
 Orange-bellied Leafbird
 Long-tailed Shrike
 Grey-backed Shrike
 Yellow-bellied Fantail
 White-throated Fantail
 Brown Dipper
 Chestnut-bellied Rock-thrush
 Blue-headed Rock-thrush
 Blue Whistling-thrush
 White-collared Blackbird

Alaudia gulgula
Delichon nipalense
Hirundo rustica
Motacilla cinerea
Motacilla alba personata
Anthus hodgsoni
Hemipus picatus
Pericrocotus ethologus
Pericrocotus speciosus
Pericrocotus solaris
Pycnonotus cafer
Pycnonotus leucogenys
Hypsipetes leucocephalus
Hemixos flavala
Ixos maclellandii
Alophoixus flaveolus
Pycnonotus flaviventris
Pycnonotus striatus
Chloropsis hardwickii
Lanius schach erythronotus
Lanius tephronotus
Chelidorhynch hypoxantha
Rhipidura albicollis
Cinclus pallasii
Monticola rufiventris
Monticola cinclorhynchus
Myophonus caeruleus
Turdus albocinctus

Trip Detail

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Grey-winged Blackbird | <i>Turdus boulboul</i> |
| Plain-backed Thrush | <i>Zoothera mollissima</i> |
| Long-tailed Thrush | <i>Zoothera dixonii</i> |
| Himalayan Red-flanked Bush-robin | <i>Tarsiger rufilatus</i> |
| Golden Bush-robin | <i>Tarsiger chrysaeus</i> |
| Oriental Magpie-robin | <i>Copsychus saularis</i> |
| Little Forktail | <i>Enicurus scouleri</i> |
| Slaty-backed Forktail | <i>Enicurus schistaceus</i> |
| Black-backed Forktail | <i>Enicurus immaculatus</i> |
| Spotted Forktail | <i>Enicurus maculatus</i> |
| Hodgson's Redstart | <i>Phoenicurus hodgsoni</i> |
| Blue-fronted Redstart | <i>Phoenicurus frontalis</i> |
| White-throated Redstart | <i>Phoenicurus schisticeps</i> |
| Plumbeous Water-redstart | <i>Phoenicurus fuliginosus</i> |
| White-capped River-chat | <i>Phoenicurus leucocephalus</i> |
| Siberian Stonechat | <i>Saxicola maurus</i> |
| Grey Bushchat | <i>Rhodophila ferrea</i> |
| Asian Brown Flycatcher | <i>Muscicapa latirostris</i> |
| Little Pied Flycatcher | <i>Ficedula westermanni</i> |
| Red-throated Flycatcher | <i>Ficedula albicilla</i> |
| Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher | <i>Ficedula strophilata</i> |
| Pygmy Blue Flycatcher | <i>Ficedula hodgsoni</i> |
| Blue-throated Flycatcher | <i>Cyornis rubeculoides</i> |
| Rufous-bellied Niltava | <i>Niltava sundara</i> |
| Verditer Flycatcher | <i>Eumyias thalassinus</i> |
| Pale Blue Flycatcher | <i>Cyornis unicolor</i> |
| Small Niltava Niltava | <i>macgregoriae</i> |
| Large Niltava | <i>Niltava grandis</i> |
| Bhutan Laughingthrush | <i>Trochalopteron imbricatum</i> |
| Blue-winged Laughingthrush | <i>Trochalopteron squamatum</i> |
| Scaly Laughingthrush | <i>Trochalopteron subunicolor</i> |
| Red-headed Laughingthrush | <i>Trochalopteron erythrocephalum</i> |
| Red-faced Liocichla | <i>Liocichla phoenicea</i> |
| Rufous-necked Laughingthrush | <i>Dryonastes ruficollis</i> |
| Spotted Laughingthrush | <i>Ianthocincla ocellata</i> |
| Black-faced Laughingthrush | <i>Trochalopteron affine</i> |
| Striated Laughingthrush | <i>Grammatoptila striata</i> |
| White-throated Laughingthrush | <i>Garrulax albo gularis</i> |
| White-crested Laughingthrush | <i>Leucodioptron leucolophus</i> |
| Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush | <i>Garrulax pectoralis</i> |
| Rufous-capped Babbler | <i>Cyanoderma fuficeps</i> |
| Golden Babbler | <i>Cyanoderma chrysaea</i> |
| Streak-breasted Scimitar-babbler | <i>Pomatorhinus ruficollis</i> |
| White-browed Scimitar-babbler | <i>Pomatorhinus schisticeps</i> |
| Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-babbler | <i>Megapomatorhinus erythrogenys</i> |
| Silver-eared Mesia | <i>Leiothrix argentauris</i> |
| Black-chinned Yuhina | <i>Yuhina nigrimenta</i> |
| White-bellied Erpornis | <i>Erpornis zantholeuca</i> |
| Striated Yuhina | <i>Staphida castaniceps</i> |
| Whiskered Yuhina | <i>Yuhina flavicollis</i> |
| White-naped Yuhina | <i>Yuhina bakeri</i> |
| Rufous-vented Yuhina | <i>Yuhina occipitalis</i> |

Trip Detail

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| Stripe-throated Yuhina | Yuhina gularis |
| Rufous-winged Fulvetta | Pseudominla castaneiceps |
| Yellow-throated Fulveyya | Pseudominla cinerea |
| Golden-breasted Fulvetta | Lioparus chrysotis |
| White-browed Fulvetta | Fulvetta vinipectus |
| Nepal Fulvetta | Alcippe nipalensis |
| Rusty-fronted Barwing | Actinodura egertoni |
| Hoary-throated Barwing | Ixops nipalensis |
| Rufous Sibia | Malacias capistratus |
| Long-tailed Sibia | Heterophasia picaoides |
| Blue-winged Minla | Siva cyanouroptera |
| Bar-throated Minla | Chrysominla strigula |
| Red-tailed Minla | Minla ignotincta |
| Green Shrike-babbler | Pteruthius xanthochlorus |
| Black-eared Shrike-babbler | Pteruthius melanotis |
| Blyth's Shrike-babbler | Pteruthius aeralatus |
| Black-headed Shrike-babbler | Pteruthius rufiventer |
| Himalayan Cutia | Cutia nipalensis |
| Eurasian Wren | Troglodytes troglodytes |
| Scaly-breasted Wren-babbler | Pnoepyga albiventer |
| Pygmy Wren-babbler | Pnoepyga immaculata |
| Rufous-throated Wren-babbler | Spelaeornis caudatus |
| Bar-winged Wren-babbler | Spelaeornis troglodytoides |
| Long-billed Wren-babbler | Rimotor malacoptilus |
| Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler | Sphenocichla humei |
| Black-throated Parrotbill | Suthora nipalensis |
| Brown Parrotbill | Paradoxornis unicolor |
| White-breasted Parrotbill | Paradoxornis fuficeps |
| Great Parrotbill | Conostoma oemodium |
| Striated Prinia | Prinia ccrinigera |
| Hume's Bush-warbler | Horornis brunnescens |
| Strong-footed Bush-warbler | Horornis forticeps |
| Grey-sided Bush-warbler | Oligura brunnifrons |
| Common Tailorbird | Orthotomus sutorius |
| Goldcrest | Regulus regulus himalayensis |
| Slaty-bellied Tesia | Tesia olivea |
| Yellow-browed Tesia | Tesia cyaniventer |
| Chestnut-headed Tesia | Oligura castaneocoronata |
| Black-faced Warbler | Abroscopus schisticeps |
| Chestnut-crowned warbler | Seicercus castaniceps |
| Grey-hooded Warbler | Phylloscopus xanthoschistos |
| Grey-cheeked Warbler | Seicercus poliogenys |
| Whistler's warbler | Seicercus whistleri |
| Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher | Culicicapa ceylonensis |
| Tickell's Leaf-warbler | Phylluscopus affinis |
| Blyth's Leaf-warbler | Phylloscopus reguloides |
| Hume's Leaf-warbler | Phylloscopus humei |
| Orange-barred Leaf-warbler | Phylloscopus pulcher |
| Lemon-rumped Leaf-warbler | Phylloscopus chloronotus |
| Grey-faced Leaf-warbler | Phylloscopus maculipennis |
| Yellow-vented Warbler | Phylloscopus cantator |
| Rufous-vented Tit | Periparus rubidiventris |

Trip Detail

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| Coal Tit | <i>Periparus ater aermodius</i> |
| Grey-crested Tit | <i>Lophophanes dichrous</i> |
| Green-backed Tit | <i>Parus monticolus</i> |
| Red-headed Tit | <i>Aegithalos iredalei</i> |
| Rufous-fronted Tit | <i>Aegithalos iouschistos</i> |
| Black-spotted Yellow Tit | <i>Parus spilonotus</i> |
| Sultan Tit | <i>Melanochlora sultanea</i> |
| Hodgson's Treecreeper | <i>Certhia hodgsoni</i> |
| Sikkim Treecreeper | <i>Certhia discolor</i> |
| Wallcreeper | <i>Tichodroma muraria</i> |
| Yellow-browed Tit | <i>Sylviparus modestus</i> |
| Fire-capped Tit | <i>Cephalopyrus flammiceps</i> |
| White-tailed Nuthatch | <i>Sitta himalayensis</i> |
| Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch | <i>Sitta cinnamoventris</i> |
| Beautiful Nuthatch | <i>Sitta Formosa</i> |
| Fire-breasted Flowerpecker | <i>Dicaeum ignipectus</i> |
| Oriental White-eye | <i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i> |
| Crimson Sunbird | <i>Aethopyga siparaja</i> |
| Fire-tailed Sunbird | <i>Aethopyga ignicauda</i> |
| Mrs Gould's Sunbird | <i>Aethopyga gouldiae</i> |
| Black-breasted Sunbird | <i>Aethopyga saturata</i> |
| Green-tailed Sunbird | <i>Aethopyga nipalensis</i> |
| Streaked Spiderhunter | <i>Arachnothera magna</i> |
| Alpine Accentor | <i>Prunella collaris</i> |
| Rufous breasted Accentor | <i>Prunella strophciata</i> |
| Maroon-backed Accentor | <i>Prunella immaculata</i> |
| Crested Bunting | <i>Emberiza lathamii</i> |
| Plain Mountain-finch | <i>Leucosticte nemoricola</i> |
| Himalayan Greenfinch | <i>Chloris spinoides</i> |
| Common Rosefinch | <i>Erythrura erythrura</i> |
| Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch | <i>Carpodacus pulcherrimus</i> |
| Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch | <i>Carpodacus thura</i> |
| Red Crossbill | <i>Loxia curvirostra</i> |
| Crimson-browed Finch | <i>Carpodacus subhimachalus</i> |
| Gold-naped Finch | <i>Pyrrhoptes epauletta</i> |
| Red-headed Bullfinch | <i>Pyrrhula erythrocephala</i> |
| Collared Grosbeak | <i>Mycerobas affinis</i> |
| White-winged Grosbeak | <i>Mycerobas camipes</i> |
| House Sparrow | <i>Passer domesticus</i> |
| Eurasian Tree Sparrow | <i>Passer montanus</i> |
| Cinnamon Sparrow | <i>Passer rutilans</i> |
| Maroon Oriole | <i>Oriolus traillii</i> |
| Ashy Drongo | <i>Edolius leucophaeus</i> |
| Bronzed Drongo | <i>Chaptia aenea</i> |
| Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo | <i>Dicrurus remifer</i> |
| Hair-crested Drongo | <i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i> |
| Common Myna | <i>Acridotheres tristis</i> |
| Common Hill-myna | <i>Gracula religiosa</i> |
| Spotted Nutcracker | <i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i> |
| Red-billed Chough | <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i> |
| Large-billed Crow | <i>Corvus (macrorhynchos) japonensis</i> |
| Eurasian Magpie | <i>Pica pica</i> |

Trip Detail

Eurasian Jay
Common Green Magpie
Yellow-billed Blue Magpie
Grey Treepie

Garrulus glandarius
Cissa chinensis
Urocissa flavirostris
Dendrocitta formosea

(h) heard only.



Off TO BHUTAN

We take you to the bird