

# BHUTAN

22 APRIL – 11 MAY 2009

## TOUR REPORT

Once again we enjoyed another superlative Birdquest to the wonderful mountain kingdom of Bhutan. We recorded 387 species on the tour, 351 that were inside Bhutan itself - our second highest ever total for the country. Dry numbers can never tell the story, however a mouth-watering list of birds may help! Some of our many memorable highlights were five Satyr Tragopans, Blood Pheasant, Himalayan Monal, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Pied Falconet, Rufous-necked Hornbill (the finest of the five Hornbill species seen), Black-tailed Crake, Ibisbill, Greater Adjutants, Ashy Woodpigeon, Blyth's Kingfisher, Ward's Trogons, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, a Beautiful Nuthatch (that took just two seconds to find!) seven species of Wren Babbler including a sublime Long-billed (our 'bird-of-the-trip') and a fine Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler, Gold-naped Finches, Long-billed Ground Thrush, Tickell's Thrush, Green Cochoa, Sapphire Flycatcher, Blue-fronted Blue Robin, four species of Forktail, thirteen gorgeous species of Laughingthrush including the incomparable Spotted, Crimson-faced Liocichla, Coral-billed and Slender-billed Scimitar Babblers, Golden-breasted and Yellow-throated Fulvettas, five species of Parrotbill, Black-headed Shrike-Babbler, Broad-billed Warbler, Fire-capped Tit, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Slender-billed Oriole and the lovely Spot-winged Starling.

We began our birding in the beautiful mountain valley of Paro, and despite a sleepless journey we were wide-awake for a roadside pair of Black-tailed Crakes, plus a handsome Ibisbill along the rivers edge, along with Himalayan Wagtails, Plumbeous Water Redstarts, White-capped River Chat and River Lapwing. In the bushes were plenty of Cinnamon Sparrows, plus Grey-backed Shrikes, Red-billed Chough and Common Hoopoe. Later in the day we bashed around some wet areas, and were rewarded with at least one rather flighty Solitary Snipe and a couple of Pintail Snipe.

An early start was required for an early ascent of the Chele La, the highest pass of the tour. As we drove up to the highest pass of the tour, two Grey Nightjars flipped along the road in the gloom, and as the first light dawned we saw three Kaleej Pheasants scuttling off the roadside. Higher up we encountered our first gorgeous Blood Pheasants, and higher still, we needed to cross the pass and continue down the other side before we found a splendid male Himalayan Monal, charging about on a yak pasture like a psychedelic turkey! An al-fresco breakfast ensued on the top of the 3780m pass, where we were joined by a Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler, Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch, and the only Plain Mountain Finches and Rosy Pipits of the trip. Further explorations in the thin air produced Himalayan Orange-flanked Bush Robins, Blue-fronted Redstarts, White-winged and Collared Grosbeaks, an early Greenish Warbler, Rufous-breasted and a tame Alpine Accentor, a stunning pair of Spotted Laughingthrush, Black-faced Laughingthrushes, Himalayan Treecreeper, Rufous-vented and Grey Crested Tit, a pair of Fire-tailed Sunbirds and a single Mrs. Gould's Sunbirds, Himalayan Buzzard, Long-tailed Minivet, numerous White-collared Blackbirds, Spotted Nutcracker and Yellow-billed Magpie. We descended back into the Paro valley for lunch then drove to the capital, Thimphu. We paused in the centre of town before heading further up the valley, to a cliff festooned with the nests of the Giant Rock Bees with three Yellow-rumped Honeyguides in attendance. We also saw our first Dark-sided and Ultramarine Flycatchers, White-throated Laughingthrush and Rufous Sibia – a taste of things to come!

The following morning we made a fairly short drive up to the Dochu La, where a pre-breakfast stroll yielded a splendid Darjeeling Pied Woodpecker, Red-headed Laughingthrush, Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, and the soon to become familiar Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher. A hot breakfast was welcome, then we pressed on, having 'best-ever' views of a very compliant Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler, Green Shrike Babbler, Rufous-fronted and Yellow-browed Tit, Lemon-rumped and Large-billed Leaf Warblers, Whistlers Warblers, Dark-breasted and Common Rosefinches and our first Striated Laughingthrushes. Dropping from the higher altitudes into the warmer mid levels we had a great view of a vocal male Fire-capped Tit, plus Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Common Cuckoo, Grey-winged Blackbirds, Speckled Woodpigeon and a vagrant Red Collared Dove. As we dropped further we found White-tailed Nuthatches attending a nest, Maroon Oriole, Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon, Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike and a family party of Red-headed Tits. As dusk fell we reached our lodgings for the next two nights, a delightful hotel overlooking the town of Punakha at 1500m.

Our birding here took us up the forested Mo Chu valley, where in the early morning we were successful in extracting both Spotted and Pygmy Wren Babblers from the undergrowth, both of which performed superbly. Further searches here produced our first Great and Golden-throated Barbets, Square-tailed Drongo Cuckoo, Asian Barred Owlet, Grey Treepies, gorgeous Maroon Orioles and some Hair-crested Drongos, Yellow-vented Warblers, Black-chinned Yuhina, Small Niltava, a shy Lesser Shortwing, Nepal Fulvetta, Black-throated Sunbird and Grey-chinned Minivet. As the hillsides warmed up, various raptors emerged and we saw Mountain Hawk Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Oriental Honey Buzzard and a Pallas's Fish Eagle, joined by Himalayan Swiftlets. The rivers here are particularly rich, and we enjoyed a showy Slaty-backed Forktail alongside Brown Dippers on a side stream, while on the main rivers we saw Ibisbill and Himalayan Pied Kingfisher. Rather more unexpected was yet another Pallas's Fish Eagle perched in a pine, late migrant Common Shelduck, Common Merganser, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Pintail and a drake Garganey, and two vagrant Chinese Pond Herons!

Continuing our journey eastwards, our progress was slowed by a pair of Slender-billed Orioles and Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babblers at the roadside, but we pressed on to higher altitudes and the thrills waiting there for us. The staccato cry of a Ward's Trogon was heard from a steep slope, and an immature male came up to investigate our presence. Hurrah! We also found a pair of Cutia, Green-crowned Warbler, and a vocal Spot-winged Grosbeak. Up on the high pass of the Pele La, we found that most of the bamboo had simultaneously flowered and died, a rare event indeed. We saw Himalayan Vulture, Grey-sided and Hume's Bush Warbler, before heading downhill once more and into persistent rain. Nearing our night stop at Tongsa the rain came to an end, time enough to find Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, and Red-billed Leiothrix buzzing through the bushes.

An early foray along cool forested valleys produced a jay-walking Spotted Forktail and a surprise female Ward's Trogon, slightly 'off-altitude' and clearly on its way somewhere. Turning a corner, we had yet another surprise in the shape of a superb Long-billed Ground Thrush, feeding in a roadside gutter. He was mashing through the wet mud and leaf litter, eventually finding a worm that he presented to a second (presumably female) bird that had been waiting just out of sight! Awesome! No less spectacular was our first male Scarlet Finch, Blue-headed Rock Thrush and the demure Strong-footed Bush Warbler, then we ascended to our next high pass, the Yutong La. Usually rich in bamboo, this year as on the Pele La it had died off, but the birds were still here and we had close views of a pair of Great Parrotbills, some rather more furtive Brown Parrotbills, Slaty-blue Flycatcher, White-browed Bush Robin, more Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler, and female Dark-rumped Rosefinches. As we descended towards our night-stop among the pines of the Bumthang valley, we met our first Eurasian Magpies.

A whole day of driving slowly through high altitude forests followed, and we began our morning birding on another high pass. A loud braying from nearby drew our attention to a male Satyr Tragopan that briefly stood in an open area, unfurling his blue throat skin as he called! Awesome! We also had a very brief view of another male Himalayan Monal, saw more Blood Pheasants, Rufous-breasted Accentors, White-winged Grosbeaks, and saw our first Red-headed Bullfinches feeding in the flowers of a rhododendron. Golden Bush Robins and Chestnut-headed Tesia were typically skulking, and in excitable flocks we found our first Hoary-throated Barwings and Orange-barred Leaf Warblers. We reached our first camp near the village of Sengor, and searching the nearby hillsides, we found a lovely little Bar-winged Wren Babbler to finish off a splendid day.

Explorations around our camp began early with some great views of Scaly Laughingthrushes noisily greeting the day, and then we almost stumbled into a male Satyr Tragopan that was feeding on the roadside just 20m from our camp! We watched it from just a few metres away, and it only moved away when a car came speeding around the corner! We continued to find good birds, with more Fire-tailed Sunbirds, a Himalayan Cuckoo, Oriental Skylarks and Hodgson's Redstart, and dropping to a slightly lower altitude zone we found Black-eared Shrike Babbler, Tickell's Leaf Warbler, and met our first Black-throated Parrotbills.

We began to make our way down the mountain, towards our second camp, en-route collecting White-browed Shortwing and Broad-billed Warbler, both of which were obliging enough to give us some great views. We stood in a bamboo thicket glimpsing an elusive Blue-fronted Robin as he shot back and forwards, a typical encounter with this shy species that preceded an atypical one which came closer and showed well to some of us. Our first Little Forktail showed well on a roadside torrent, Nepal House Martins zipped along the road cuttings, and we met our first Large Niltava, Grey-chinned and Short-billed Minivets, Striated and Mountain Bulbuls. Thick cloud came swirling down the mountain so we dropped down to where the skies were clear, and enjoyed some vocal and confiding Grey-sided Laughingthrushes, Rusty-fronted Barwing, White-naped and Black-chinned Yuhinas, Dark-sided, Little Pied and Pale Blue Flycatchers, a Blue-bearded Bee-eater and our first stunning Rufous-necked Hornbills.

Our lower camp was warmer and well positioned with a wonderful view across the valleys, an excellent launch pad for finding rare birds. A distant call caught our attention, and with just a little gentle coaxing we lured in a wonderful Long-billed Wren-Babbler. It came up to the roadside, performed at our feet and even hopped onto the road itself. Such a rare character and such a sublime performance sealed this as our 'bird-of-the-trip'. We also found Pygmy Blue Flycatcher, Cutia and Small Cuckoo, enjoyed really close looks at a Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, and found our only Ferruginous and Snowy-browed Flycatchers of the tour. In bamboo-rich areas we found Mountain Tailorbird and White-spectacled Warbler, plus my favourite duo of gorgeous Golden-breasted Fulvetta together with Black-throated Parrotbills. The vivid colours kept coming in the form of Sapphire Flycatchers, Black-spotted Yellow Tit, Blue-winged Minla, Yellow-throated Fulvetta, Gold-naped Finch, Long-tailed Broadbill and Grey-cheeked Warblers. Yellow-browed Tesias frustrated us in an opaque bed of ferns, but our first Bhutan Laughingthrushes were more obliging.

After much effort we finally caught the attention of a Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler, which responded eagerly in an overgrown brush-pile, and lingered in the shadows until all (driver included!) could walk away having had marvelous views. Here on the fabled 'Lingmethang Road' we enjoyed a further deluge of great birds such as Bay Woodpecker, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Green-crowned Warbler, Black-faced Warbler, Lesser Shortwing, White-tailed Robin, Golden Babbler and Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill, while in the skies flew Mountain Hawk Eagle, Rufous-bellied Eagle and White-throated Needletails. Warmer sections of forest had Pied Flycatcher-Shrike, Orange-bellied Leafbird, White-bellied Erpornis, Black-throated Prinia, Sultan Tits and Brown-throated Treecreepers, and from thickly vegetated slopes

we successfully lured Blue-winged Laughingthrush and Crimson-faced *Liocichlas* onto the open road. Our seventh Wren-Babbler – the Rufous-throated, was strangely quiet this year, but after a night of rain they began singing and we eventually persuaded one to show itself - what a lovely little mite!

It seemed a shame to leave our lovely camp, but proceeding through the warmer lower altitudes to reach Mongar we found a Greater Yellownape eating figs, Whistling Hawk Cuckoo, furtive Lesser Necklaced and Rufous-chinned Laughingthrushes, while Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes hopped around in bare fields. We found Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches and our first Bronzed Drongos, and a Leopard Cat that appeared in front of us was probably as surprised as we were!

After a night recharging in the small town of Mongar, we headed onto the nearby Kori La, finding Rufous-bellied and Crimson-breasted Pied Woodpeckers, some all-too-brief Ashy Woodpigeons together with good numbers of Speckleds, Barred Cuckoo Dove and Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon. A vocal and confiding Black-headed Shrike Babbler popped out of the moss forest, and a tight flock of mostly male Tibetan Siskins showed well in the tall trees on the forested slopes. Continuing onwards to Tashigang through drier valleys we found a Himalayan Goral standing on a rocky slope, Himalayan Bulbuls in the bushes and a stray Eastern Cattle Egret.

From Tashigang we headed towards the final forested ridge that snakes down towards the plains of Assam, and in cultivated areas near the town we found some Spot-winged Starlings nesting in an old tree, probably the first national breeding record. Nearby were our first Grey-headed Starlings, plus we saw Rufous Woodpecker, Red-rumped Swallow, Himalayan Greenfinch, Crested Bunting, and a Tickell's Thrush singing heartily from the very top of a conifer. Crossing higher country before descending once more, we found a flock of 17 Himalayan Vultures, Indian Blue Robin, and had good looks at Small and Asian Emerald Cuckoos. We reached our third and final camp, another spectacular location that overlooked the foothills and the plains beyond, and from here made our first foray in search of one of the most prized birds of these glorious mountains. Almost before I could say the words 'Beautiful Nuthatch', there it was flying towards us, and it sat calling from nearby trees and feeding in the lush epiphytes where it entertained us for more than 30 minutes. Wow! An evening search for night birds was less productive, but we were rewarded with good views of three magnificent Hodgson's Giant Flying Squirrels.

Further exploration in this rich area produced a Jerdon's Baza, plus a northward passage of raptors that included numerous Oriental Honey Buzzards, Eurasian Hobby and a Black-eared Kite. We saw Mountain Imperial Pigeons, Plaintive Cuckoo, Red-headed Trogon, more Rufous-necked Hornbills, Grey-capped and Fulvous-breasted Woodpeckers in the same tree, many Blue-winged Laughingthrushes, a pair of Coral-billed Scimitar Babblers, Silver-eared Mesias, Long-tailed Sibia, Striated Yuhina, Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill, Streaked Spiderhunters, and two male Green Cochoas that showed briefly before disappearing into the dense forest.

Our last explorations of montane evergreen forest produced a fantastic air-show by a Black Eagle, a busy flock of Cutia, Large Niltava, Little and Spotted Forktails and White-naped Yuhinas. A little lower down we found a pair of Grey-headed Parrotbill, and a migrant Brown Shrike of the race *lucionensis*. As we dropped ever closer to the border town of Samdrup Jongkhar and our final night stop, we encountered a flock of migrant Black Storks, Himalayan Pied Kingfisher, some showy Sultan Tits, Common Hill Myna, Dollarbirds, Blue-throated and Blue-eared Barbets, Lesser Yellownape, Black-crested Bulbul, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Rufescent Prinia and House Swift, while Great Pied Hornbills cruised across the valleys to roost.

A last days birding in Bhutan was hampered by the grotesque road-works that are carving up and despoiling the formerly productive roadside habitats, however we found some quiet corners where we

had plenty to look at, such as Asian Barred Owlet, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Oriental Pied and some gorgeous Wreathed Hornbills, White-browed Piculet, Asian Fairy Bluebird, Large Woodshrike, White-throated and Ashy Bulbul, Common Iora, Blue-throated Flycatcher, White-rumped Shama, Slaty-backed and an over-shy Black-backed Forktail, Grey-throated Babbler, Striped Tit-Babbler, a striking Yellow-vented Flowerpecker and many Crimson Sunbirds. We saw displaying Crested Goshawks, two Pied Falconets that chased dragonflies from high perches, and had just glimpses of both Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher and the rare Blyth's Kingfisher. Unusual birds for our 'Bhutan-lists' included Baya Weaver, Jungle Babbler, White-vented Myna, Asian Pied Starling, Ashy Woodswallow, and a stray Indian Golden Oriole.

Saying a sad farewell to Bhutan and our splendid hosts, we entered the rather more chaotic and noisy road system of India. We drove slowly towards Guwahati, finding many birds at the roadside including a trio of Red-headed Falcon, White-rumped Vulture, Shikra, Asian Openbill, Lesser Adjutant, Black-necked Stork, Bronze-winged Jacana, Lesser Whistling Duck, a large flock of summer-plumaged Pacific Golden Plovers, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Jungle Myna, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Large Cuckoo-shrike, Black-hooded Oriole, Striated Grassbird, and Chestnut Munia. The big prize of Greater Adjutant held out until the last moment, when we found a swarm of them filling the sky near Guwahati airport.

This tour (the twelfth Birdquest to the country) just keeps producing more and more great birds, and continues to provide what is surely the very best in Himalayan birding, combined as it is with the magic of this very special little country. Each year the momentum continues, and each year the tour has very different features and themes, but is always bursting at the seams with great birds. One day I *will* see the White-bellied Heron, and therefore I cannot wait to return!

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H)

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL)

Species which were recorded only in Delhi are indicated by the symbol (I)

### PHALACROCORACIDAE

Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* (I): Several seen as we crossed Assam.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: Six were seen on the rivers around Punakha.

### ARDEIDAE

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (I): Plenty were seen en-route to Guwahati.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia* (I): As for the above, many in the Assamese paddies.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* (I): A single was seen close to Guwahati airport.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus*: A Bhutan tick for the leader, with a nice summer-plumaged bird seen by the river near Tashigang. Also quite a few were seen in fields en-route to Guwahati.

Indian Pond-Heron *Ardeola grayii* (I): Plenty were seen en-route to Guwahati.

Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola bacchus*: A surprise vagrant in summer plumage along the riverside at Punakha – perhaps just the third record for the country. The fourth record for the country flew past us heading northwards just a few minutes later!

### CICONIIDAE

Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* (I): Some ten or so were seen in the fields en-route to Guwahati.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*: A surprise addition, with four birds seen circling over a ridge near Samdrup Jongkhar. Just the second time ever on this tour.

Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* (I): A bird in sub-adult plumage stalked the fields as we crossed Assam.

Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* (I): At least six encountered in the fields and in the air en-route to Guwahati. There were probably more in with the large flock of the following species.

Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius* (I): Our final big prize of the tour, although they kept us waiting right till the end. Near Guwahati we found several airborne birds, at some range but showing well enough, then a flock of 66 birds appeared, many of which were this species but the identity of all could not be determined. It is not impossible that they were all Greaters though, as 369 birds were seen together at a nearby site during the recent Birdquest Assam tour!

### DENDROCYGNIDAE

Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica* (I): Some 15 were seen en-route to Guwahati.

### ANATIDAE

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*: A surprise migrant seen on the river at Punakha, only the second time it has been seen on the tour.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*: Eight migrants were seen on the rivers at Punakha.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*: Three birds were seen on the Mo Chu at Punakha

Garganey *Anas querquedula*: A lone drake joined a small of flock of Eurasian Wigeon on the river at Punakha. A scarce migrant in Bhutan.

Common Merganser (Goosander) *Mergus merganser*: The first time in seven years that I have seen this in Bhutan. On a duck-filled afternoon at Punakha we found a handsome drake.

## ACCIPTRIDAE

- Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni*: An initially perplexing bird was seen flying past near Deothang, but it appears to have been an immature of this species. Probably the fourth record for the country.
- Oriental Honey-Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*: A single was seen at Punakha, and along the Morong – Deothang ridge we witnessed a passage of northbound birds over three days with as many as 18 on one day, with some birds offering great views at close range.
- Black Kite *Milvus migrans* (I): Some were seen in Assam. All these birds should refer to the race *govinda*.
- Black-eared Kite *Milvus lineatus*: A single migrant bird was seen soaring up the ridge at Morong.
- Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*: Two to three birds seen around Punakha, with a presumed sub-adult over the Mo Chu forests, a perched adult along the Po Chu, then one other just a few kilometres south of there that may have been the same bird.
- White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* (I): A single adult seen en-route to Guwahati.
- Himalayan Vulture (H Griffon) *Gyps himalayensis*: A good number were seen in the Pele La area, then a flock of 17 immatures were seen on the Yonphu La that included one with an arrow sticking out of its wing!
- Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*: Two were seen near Punakha, then they were seen daily in the south-east of the country.
- Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*: Two birds were seen near Deothang, displaying with shivering wingbeats and fluffed out undertail feathers.
- Shikra *Accipiter badius* (I): Two were seen along the road to Guwahati.
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: Just two sightings; one presumed migrant along the river at Punakha, and another at higher altitudes near Sengor that was presumably the breeding *melaschistos* race.
- Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo burmanicus*: Just two seen, on the Chele La and en-route to Thimphu.
- Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*: Several sightings of this fine raptor along our route, with some great views of one near Morong that was doing its signature 'stall-speed hunting' close to the ground.
- Rufous-bellied Eagle *Hieraaetus kienerii*: An adult was seen soaring over Yongkola, then another was seen on the Kori La.
- Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis*: Several seen over the middle-altitude forests, at Yongkola, Kori La, Morong, and at Punakha where we had the best views of all.

## FALCONIDAE

- Pied Falconet *Microhierax melanoleucos*: Only the third time that I have seen this in Bhutan, we had great views of two different birds in the foothills forest near Samdrup Jongkhar, with one that performed superbly as it hawked dragonflies from a bare snag.
- Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: A few seen in open country, particularly in the west of the country and also around Tashigang.
- Red-headed Falcon *Falco chicquera* (I): A surprise write-in although well within its range, we saw three birds perching on low bunds in an area of paddyfields, en-route to Guwahati.
- Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: Three were seen high over the Paro valley, then a small number joined the northward raptor passage over the ridges above Deothang where we saw several over four days.
- Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: Single birds were seen over the Dochu La and Punakha.

## PHASIANIDAE

- Common Hill-Partridge *Arborophila torqueola* (H): These Partridges seem to get harder to get close to these days, let alone see them! We heard quite a few in high forests along the way, though always frustratingly distant...

- Rufous-throated Hill-Partridge *Arborophila rufogularis* (H): Heard at mid-altitudes around Yongkola and above Deothang, seemingly close at times but never even glimpsed.
- Chestnut-breasted Hill-Partridge *Arborophila mandelli* (H): With the best will in the world, we couldn't get close to one of these, with the best contender on the Lingmethang Road refusing to even answer our elaborate luring set-up! A few were heard distantly around Yongkola and also in the south-east, but always inaccessible.
- Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus*: Fantastic encounters on our first morning in Bhutan on the Chele La, where we saw some 8 birds! Another four were seen on the high road near the Thrumsing La, and another pair on the Sengor side.
- Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan satyra*: A great encounter with this much-prized enigma, with a superb male feeding on the verge as we stood on the road watching it just 20m from our camp! This came after our first view near Ura of a bird that briefly extended its blue throat scroll as it brayed from a rather open patch of forest, and some roadside encounters while driving of two females and an immature male – a total of five birds. Common where found!
- Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*: A marvellous start to our Bhutanese odyssey, with a psychedelic male seen running around in a pasture on the Chele La. Such a large and brilliantly hued bird, it really has to be seen to be believed! Another male was seen briefly on the roadside near Ura.
- Kaleej Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*: Only seen in the west of the country, with three birds of the dark-backed, white-breasted *melanota* race seen en-route to the Chele La, a pair near the Dochu La, a pair near Punakha and another pair as we climbed up to the Pele La.
- Grey Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron bicalcaratum* (H): Heard calling distantly in the foothills forest near Deothang.

#### RALLIDAE

- White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* (NL) (I): Two seen in Assam.
- Black-tailed Crake *Porzana bicolor*: An insignificant swamp near Paro hosted a pair that emerged from the irises, marching about proudly close to our bus. A great start to the tour!
- Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* (I): A few seen in Assam.

#### JACANIDAE

- Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopodius indicus* (I): A single bird spotted in a swamp near Guwahati.

#### CHARADRIIDAE

- Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* (I): A flock of 170+, almost all in striking breeding plumage, came down in the paddyfields en-route to Guwahati.
- River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii*: Three were seen on the river at Paro, then many more on the rivers around Punakha.
- Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* (I): Seen in good numbers en-route to Guwahati.

#### SCOLOPACIDAE

- Solitary Snipe *Gallinago solitaria*: At least one and probably more were flushed from swamps near Paro, showing a steady and rather heavy flight and with a rather pallid appearance that is typical. A shame we couldn't get a view of one on the ground, but that is also rather typical!
- Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*: At least two were seen in the swamps near Paro, with some brief looks at birds on the ground.
- Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*: One was seen at Paro, and a couple more near Punakha.
- Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: Singles were seen at Paro, Thimphu and Punakha.



## RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*: Our first two were at Paro where we had a good close encounter, one of them feeding just a few metres from us. A further four were seen on our foray along the Po Chu at Punakha.

## COLUMBIDAE

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*: Commonly available.

Speckled Woodpigeon *Columba hodgsonii*: A good showing this year, with flocks encountered at the Dochu La, along the Lingmethang Road and on the Kori La.

Ashy Woodpigeon *Columba pulchricollis*: A brief showing by two or more on the Kori La, giving perched views for some before they zipped away from us. Only the second time it has been seen on this tour.

Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*: Seen commonly and almost daily throughout Bhutan.

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*: Regularly seen at lower altitudes around cultivation.

Red Collared-Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*: An errant male was found on the Dochu La, then a female was seen at Punakha – all rather odd and perhaps indicating a colonisation attempt? Also seen in Assam, at more typical elevations!

Barred Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia unchall*: Our first posed in mossy trees on the Kori La, then we saw a single near Morong, and a quartet in flight near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*: Three examples were seen near Samdrup Jongkhar, all in typically dashing fly-pasts.

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon *Treron phoenicopterus* (I): A flock posed in roadside trees as we crossed Assam.

Pin-tailed Green Pigeon *Treron apicauda* (NL): A single sighting near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon *Treron sphenurus*: Regularly encountered in the south-east, after our first encounters in the Dochu La area.

Mountain Imperial Pigeon *Ducula badia*: Some good looks at these fat fellows in the Deothang area.

## PSITTACIDAE

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* (I): A few singles seen in Assam.

## CUCULIDAE

Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis* (H): Heard near Deothang.

Green-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus tristis*: A brief view of one near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Asian Koel *Eudynamis scolopaceus*: Just heard in Bhutan, with one at Punakha and another in Samdrup Jongkhar town. Several were seen in flight as we crossed Assam.

Asian Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx maculatus*: A good showing by these this year, from Yongkola to Samdrup Jongkhar. We saw as many as fifteen different birds, with some flying around in noisy threesomes, such as those that gave us our best looks up on the Yonphu La.

Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus*: Two were seen in the Morong area, here at the furthest north-west of their range.

Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris*: Frequently heard at lower altitudes, with just four examples seen.

Large Hawk-Cuckoo *Hierococcyx sparverioides*: Common and noisy, most usually heard although we did see them regularly.

Common Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius* (I) (H): Heard near Guwahati airport.

Whistling Hawk-Cuckoo *Hierococcyx nasicolor*: Several heard along our route in the warmer broadleaved forest, with just two rather poor sightings; near the Dochu La and at Yongkola.

Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus*: The distinctive ‘one-more-bottle’ call (or is it ‘you-can’t see me!’) was heard regularly at lower to middle altitudes, with actual sightings of birds occurring at Yongkola and on the Kori La.

- Eurasian Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: Heard mostly in the higher forests, with four actual sightings of birds identified by call. They probably parasitise the Grey Bushchats, which is nice.
- Himalayan Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus*: Despite being heard regularly, we only ever saw one – along the Lingmethang Road. The old ‘Oriental’ Cuckoo *C. saturatus* has been split three ways, into this one (which retains the specific name *saturatus*), Oriental (or Horsfield’s) Cuckoo *C. horsfieldi* and Sunda Cuckoo *C. lepidus*.
- Small Cuckoo (Lesser C) *Cuculus poliocephalus*: We had flight views of two examples along the Lingmethang Road, then another posed at close range on the Yonphu La, showing markedly different proportions to its larger cousins.

#### STRIGIDAE

- Mountain Scops Owl *Otus spilocephalus* (H): This elusive devil was only ever heard distantly, at Tongsa, Yongkola and from our camp above Deothang.
- Collared Scops Owl *Otus lettia* (H): A vocal bird outside our Punakha hotel would not leave the comfort of a dense pine tree to show himself.
- Himalayan Wood-owl *Strix nivicola* (H): Distant birds were heard calling in the Sengor area.
- Collared Owlet *Glaucidium brodiei* (H): Only heard on a couple of occasions, despite our appropriation of his call!
- Asian Barred Owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides*: A good look at one along the Mo Chu at Punakha, and another more distantly at Samdrup Jongkhar. Also heard at Yongkola.

#### CAPRIMULGIDAE

- Grey Nightjar *Caprimulgus jotaka*: Often heard distantly from our various night stops, and two were seen coming off the road as we headed up to the Chele La.

#### APODIDAE

- Himalayan Swiftlet *Aerodramus brevirostris*: Seen regularly over the middle altitude forests.
- White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*: Numerous encounters with small flocks of these from the Dochu La eastwards through to the Yonphu La, with some superb views acquired around our camp at Yongkola.
- Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus balasienis*: Several seen near Samdrup Jongkhar, although their palm trees have been destroyed by road-widening! Also seen en-route to Guwahati.
- Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus*: Regularly seen, from the Dochu La down through to the South-east, with birds going into nest crevices seen in two or more localities.
- House Swift *Apus nipalensis*: Small flocks seen near Samdrup Jongkhar, and also around bridges as we crossed Assam.

#### TROGONIDAE

- Red-headed Trogon *Harpactes erythrocephalus*: A rather furtive male was seen below Yongkola, then another perched at length for us near Morong.
- Ward’s Trogon *Harpactes wardi*: Along with the Tragopan, perhaps one of the most wanted of all birds on this trip, and one that gets harder to find each year. However, this year we were fortunate enough to hear the call from the road near the Pele La, and managed to lure in a curious immature male to within a few feet of us. A female surprised us the following morning, appearing beside us at a rather low 2100m a.s.l. Also heard in two places on the Lingmethang Road, but always remaining invisible.

#### ALCEDINIDAE

- Blyth’s Kingfisher *Alcedo hercules*: A rather quick view of a flying bird near Samdrup Jongkhar was just enough for identification. A shame it didn’t stay around for a proper inspection, as it is the first to be seen on the tour in ten years!

- Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: One seen along the river at Punakha, then a couple more near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca*: A convincing, but 'naked-eye-only' view, of one shooting into the forest at Samdrup Jongkhar. Just the second time its ever been seen on the tour.
- White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*: Seen near Mongar, Tashigang, in the Samdrup Jongkhar area and on the Assam plains.
- Himalayan Pied Kingfisher (Crested K) *Ceryle lugubris*: We enjoyed a healthy turnout of six birds along the Po and Mo Chu rivers at Punakha, one of which was attending a nest hole in a river bank. Another two birds were seen close to Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Lesser Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* (I): A single bird seen by a roadside swamp in Assam.

#### MEROPIDAE

- Blue-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctornis athertoni*: Some good looks at these, with one posing well near Yongkola, another near there seen from the bus, and a good example near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus* (I): A score of these were enjoyed as they made themselves busy around sandy banks near Guwahati airport.

#### CORACIIDAE

- Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis* (I): A single seen en-route to Guwahati.
- Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*: Five birds were seen perched up in a large bare tree near Samdrup Jongkhar.

#### UPUPIDAE

- Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: A handful were seen at regular intervals in open country.

#### BUCEROTIDAE

- Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*: A single bird was seen near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Great Pied Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*: Seen well near Samdrup Jongkhar, with six seen on our first evening there, followed by four on the following day.
- Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*: Our first views were of a pair in a fruiting tree on the Lingmethang Road, where subsequently we saw several more. More were seen between Narphang and Deothang, where we had great views of this impressive beauty.
- Wreathed Hornbill *Aceros undulatus*: Some fantastic views of these gorgeous creatures in the Deothang area, with seven in a day seen, including three posing in a pre-roost tree.

#### CAPITONIDAE

- Great Barbet *Megalaima virens*: Heard often and seen frequently in the lower altitude warm broadleaved forests, and in the south-east they were particularly visible while providing a continual backdrop of sound.
- Golden-throated Barbet *Megalaima franklinii*: Numerous sightings along our route at lower-middle altitudes, such as along the Mo Chu, the Lingmethang Road, and in the South-east.
- Blue-throated Barbet *Megalaima asiatica*: Plenty of these colourful fellows uttering their hypnotic beats at lower altitudes around Samdrup Jongkhar, we found our first ones close to Mongar.
- Blue-eared Barbet *Megalaima australis*: A single bird perched up in a distant tree at Samdrup Jongkhar, alongside some Dollarbirds.

#### INDICATORIDAE

- Yellow-rumped Honeyguide *Indicator xanthonotus*: A return to an old site near Thimphu proved to be worthwhile when we saw three birds attending the nests of Giant Rock Bees on a rock face,

eating the wax from old hives. Another one flew past us at high altitude on the Sheltang La, and then we had some very close views of two along the Lingmethang Road.

#### PICIDAE

Speckled Piculet *Picumnus innominatus*: A single bird was seen very briefly near Samdrup Jongkhar.

White-browed Piculet *Sasia ochracea*: One emerged from the forest at Samdrup Jongkhar for a brief viewing.

Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus*: A pair were seen in the same tree as the following species near Deothang, then two more were seen near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Fulvous-breasted Pied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos macei*: Good looks at a pair in a roadside tree near Deothang.

Crimson-breasted Pied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos cathpharius*: Just three examples seen, with the first below the Pele La, another on the Lingmethang Road, and one on the Kori La.

Darjeeling Pied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos darjellensis*: Often a tricky bird to find, we had a good look at a female on the Dochu La, the only bird of the trip.

Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Hypopicus hyperythrus*: Several good looks at these, with one on the Chele La, two below the Dochu La, a female at Tongsa and a male on the Kori La.

Rufous Woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus*: A vocal bird at the roadside near Tashigang gave us a good view, then another briefly joined us for breakfast near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Lesser Yellownape *Picus chlorolophus*: One was seen in flight near Deothang, then another posed well closer to Samdrup Jongkhar.

Greater Yellownape *Picus flavinucha*: One was seen poorly along the Mo Chu, then better views were acquired of a bird eating figs near Yongkola. Also heard in other localities along our route.

Grey-faced Woodpecker (Grey-headed W) *Picus canus*: Seen at Punakha, Tongsa, on the Kori La and close to Samdrup Jongkhar.

Bay Woodpecker *Blythipicus pyrrhotis*: A real sneak and often only located by its maniacal cry, we saw one furtive bird on the Lingmethang Road, then two showed rather better near Morong.

#### EURYLAMIDAE

Long-tailed Broadbill *Psarisomus dalbousiae*: A splendid vocal bird was seen well near Yongkola, then one more was seen near Morong.

#### PITTIDAE

Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida* (H): Two were heard calling from the valley sides near Samdrup Jongkhar.

#### ALAUDIDAE

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*: Four were seen zipping around the pastures at Sengor, and a single was seen soon after crossing into Assam on our last day.

#### HIRUNDINIDAE

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: A couple were seen at Paro, then three were seen at Kanglung near Tashigang.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*: One was seen near our Tashigang hotel, then a small party were at Kanglung. Others were seen around Deothang and Samdrup Jongkhar, and also in Assam.

Nepal House-Martin *Delichon nipalense*: A busy swarm were seen around a cliff at Tongsa, then more were found along the Lingmethang Road, and a good number flew around in the mist on the Kori La.

## MOTACILLIDAE

- Himalayan Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] alboides*: The default 'White' Wagtail along the big rivers in the west, also seen at Jakar.
- Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: Two were seen at Paro, and a single near Jakar.
- Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*: A single was seen along the 'road' near Samdrup Jongkhar, then two others were seen in fields en-route to Guwahati.
- Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*: Regularly encountered in the high forests where they breed, and also found in the Paro valley, and a single bird near Deothang.
- Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseatus*: Two on the Chele La and a single on the Pele La were the only ones of the trip.

## CAMPEPHAGIDAE

- Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei* (1): A single bird was seen in Assam.
- Black-winged Cuckooshrike *Coracina melaschistos*: Not uncommon in the warm broadleaved forests, frequently seen and heard along our route especially in the south-east.
- Grey-chinned Minivet *Pericrocotus solaris*: Regularly encountered in mid-altitude forests.
- Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*: Favouring higher altitudes and poorer habitats than the others, we saw most in the west of the country, and no further east than Sengor.
- Short-billed Minivet *Pericrocotus brevirostris*: Not so numerous this year, with several seen along the Lingmethang Road.
- Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus speciosus*: The Minivet of the sub-tropical forests, we found them numerous around Samdrup Jongkhar and Deothang, with others scattered along our route at lower altitudes.
- Pied Flycatcher Shrike *Hemipus picatus*: Three were seen at Yongkola, the only ones of the trip.
- Large Woodshrike *Tephrodornis gularis*: A single female bird was seen near Deothang.

## MONARCHIDAE

- Black-naped Blue Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*: Seen on a couple of occasions in the Samdrup Jongkhar foothills forest.

## RHIPIDURIDAE

- White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis*: Regularly encountered in the warmer broad-leaved forest, with tight little cup of a nest seen near Morong that may have been made by this species.
- Yellow-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hypoxantha*: Seen daily between the Yutong La and Sengor, always in the higher altitude forest.

## PYCNONOTIDAE

- Striated Bulbul *Pycnonotus striatus*: These began appearing near Yongkola, and were numerous there and also in the south-east, on the Kori La and around Morong.
- Black-crested Bulbul *Pycnonotus flaviventris*: Several were seen at low altitudes in the forest near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*: A handful were seen in the Samdrup Jongkhar area.
- Himalayan Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*: Seemingly restricted to and only seen on the dry hillsides around Tashigang.
- Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*: Commonly available around cultivation and scrappy habitat at lower altitudes, reaching to 2600m on the Yonphu La.
- White-throated Bulbul *Alophoixus flaveolus*: Several of these handsome bulbuls seen near Samdrup Jongkhar, attention usually drawn by their nasal calls.
- Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala*: Just a few were seen around Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Mountain Bulbul *Hypsipetes mcclllandii*: Two were seen at Punakha, odd ones around Yongkola and one more on the Kori La.

Himalayan Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*: Seen almost throughout, from the highest elevations to the foothills, and often vocal and showy. A nest was seen near Yongkola.

#### AEGITHINIDAE

Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*: Two seen at lower altitudes around Samdrup Jongkhar.

#### CHLOROPSEIDAE

Gold-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons*: A few were seen in the lowlands around Samdrup Jongkhar.

Orange-bellied Leafbird *Chloropsis hardwickii*: Odd ones were encountered in various lower-middle altitude forests, then more commonly in the Deothang area.

#### LANIIDAE

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*: Two were seen near Tashigang, then a further four were seen in the Deothang area, one of which showed the pale grey crown of the race *lucionensis* which is possibly a first for the country.

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*: Several of the black-headed *tricolor* form were noted around cultivated areas at lower altitudes.

Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus*: Frequently encountered in higher altitude open country, where they were obviously holding territories and starting to breed. Odd singles still lingered at lower altitudes, with one still near Deothang at the end of the tour.

#### CINCLIDAE

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasi*: Two seen near Punakha were surprisingly the only ones of the trip.

#### PRUNELLIDAE

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*: A single bird performed well for us on the Chele La.

Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophiata*: Three were seen on the Chele La, and three more on the Ura-Sheltang La. Many birds that normally linger in the higher valleys in April had obviously gone uphill already.

#### TURDIDAE

Long-billed Ground Thrush *Zoothera monticola*: A fantastic treat at Tongsa when we found a bird shovelling through the mud at the side of the road. We had great looks for many minutes, and watched as he found a nice juicy worm that he presented to his mate, who chose to appear just at that moment. This well-received fellow was our No.3 'bird-of-the-trip'. Also heard singing by our Sengor camp in the very early morning.

Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor*: Another unexpected Thrush, we watched what we presumed to be a first-year male singing his heart out from the top of a conifer at Kanglung. Only the third time it has been seen on this tour, there was probably another one singing too.

White-collared Blackbird *Turdus albocinctus*: Fairly visible in open areas and forest edge at high altitudes.

Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus boulboul*: A healthy showing in their favoured disturbed habitat on the Dochu La with at least six birds present, the only others seen were two on the Kori La.

Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*: Very common along the roads, and seen on every day in Bhutan.

Green Cochoa *Cochoa viridis*: A big surprise near Deothang, and some sharp spotting! Two travelling males crossed the road and headed uphill into the forest, offering tantalising glimpses before they were lost all too quickly. Yet another bird seen only once previously on this tour.

## MUSCICAPIDAE

- Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*: Regularly encountered, favouring mid-elevation broad-leaved forest edges, and always returning to the same perch!
- Ferruginous Flycatcher *Muscicapa ferruginea*: A single bird was seen well inside the forest on the Lingmethang Road. A summer visitor that is never very numerous.
- Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophhiata*: Fairly numerous at higher altitudes such as in the Sengor area, the Dochu La and the Yutong La, with odd birds seen elsewhere.
- White-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula monileger*: Never very birder-friendly, we made numerous attempts to see these but were always hampered by dense thickets, steep terrain and shy birds! A total of three birds were glimpsed (though never by many) near Yongkola and Morong.
- Snowy-browed Flycatcher *Ficedula hyperythra*: A pair were seen inside the forest on the Lingmethang Road.
- Little Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula westermanni*: Mostly encountered around Yongkola with a handful more in the Deothang area, with some vocal males visible in warm broad-leaved forest.
- Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris*: Our first was near Thimphu, and then we found them intermittently along our route as far as the Tashigang area.
- Slaty-blue Flycatcher *Ficedula tricolor*: A handful of these high altitude breeders were seen between the Yutong La and Sengor.
- Sapphire Flycatcher *Ficedula sapphira*: A good show this year with three different males appearing for us on the Lingmethang Road. Gorgeous!
- Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassinus*: Common and visible in many of the forests, they seemed to become more abundant as we headed further east, with many flying to and from nests in roadside banks with mouths full of food!
- Large Niltava *Niltava grandis*: A total of six males were seen, between the Lingmethang Road and Morong.
- Small Niltava *Niltava macgrigoriae*: Two were seen along the Mo Chu, then singles near Yongkola and Morong. Many more of these rather furtive birds were heard along our way.
- Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara*: Regularly encountered in the mid-altitude, cool broad-leaved forests, with a nest containing four cream-coloured eggs discovered in a bank on the Kori La.
- Pale Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis unicolor*: Two males were seen near Yongkola, one of which was getting very upset by our 'tactical-Owlet'! A female seen on the Kori La was perhaps the first I have ever seen.
- Blue-throated Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides*: After some intent luring near Samdrup Jongkhar, we saw at least two males. Although one had an orange wedge up the throat almost to the bill, a second bird had a much smaller intrusion of orange up its throat, so it seems clear that these are a form of *rubeculoides*, and not Large Blue Flycatcher *C. magnirostris* as I had initially suspected.
- Pygmy Blue Flycatcher *Muscicapella hodgsoni*: Two tiny males were in typically sneaky form, along the Lingmethang Road.
- Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*: Only a handful were seen along our route, typically in the lower and middle altitudes of the South-east.
- Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush *Monticola rufiventris*: Frequently seen, making the most of the road-cuttings in the higher forests and always perching in full view.
- Blue-headed Rock-Thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus*: Frequently seen along the roadsides adjacent to rocky cuttings at warmer, lower altitudes than the above, and particularly noticeable around Yongkola and points east. This is a summer visitor that winters in Southern India.
- Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius*: A single bird leapt off the road near Tashigang.
- Lesser Shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophrys*: A rather common but very sneaky denizen of the middle altitude forests, usually heard singing from impenetrable thickets. We had glimpses of responsive males near Punakha and at Yongkola.

- White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana*: Several attempts to lure singing birds on the higher section of the Lingmethang Road came good with a fearless male that leapt out for a viewing. Splendid views!
- Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea*: Just a single bird seen near the Yonphu La, but despite numerous other birds singing their loud Nightingale-like song up there, we didn't see any others.
- Himalayan Red-flanked Bush-Robin *Tarsiger rufilatus*: Rather numerous and showy on the Chele La, and only seen subsequently on the Ura-Sheltang La and near Sengor.
- Golden Bush-Robin *Tarsiger chrysaeus*: A female was glimpsed on the Yutong La, with slightly better views of two more in the Thrumsing La area. Rather skulking!
- White-browed Bush-Robin *Tarsiger indicus*: Three were seen in and around the bamboo on the Yutong La, then another male was seen in the Thrumsing La area.
- Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*: Regularly seen; at lower altitudes, around cultivation, and commonly in the Samdrup Jongkhar area.
- White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*: One was seen briefly near Samdrup Jongkhar, with another heard singing sweetly there.
- Hodgson's Redstart *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*: A female at the roadside near Sengor was the only one of the trip.
- Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis*: At least six birds seen well on the Chele La were the only ones of the trip, all others presumably having reached their high altitude breeding areas.
- White-capped River-Chat *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*: A few seen along higher altitude watercourses along our route, though never very common.
- Plumbeous Water-Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*: Not uncommon along the rivers and streams, although only in the west of the country.
- White-tailed Blue Robin *Myiomela leucura*: Heard fairly frequently from the Lingmethang Road eastwards, and males obliged us with views at Yongkola and on the Kori La.
- Blue-fronted Blue Robin *Cinclidium frontale*: The later dates this year seemed to provide us with more songsters, and we managed some fleeting glimpses of one male on the Lingmethang Road, as is typical, and another male showed rather well to some of us, if you were stood in the right place! And all the while pouring out their beautiful mournful song...
- Little Forktail *Enicurus scouleri*: Two showed well on a Lingmethang road-side torrent, then a single bird surprised us near Morong, hopping on the roadside.
- Black-backed Forktail *Enicurus immaculatus*: A single bird was seen all to briefly near Samdrup Jongkhar, unsurprisingly behaving very shyly this year, surrounded as it was by the grotesque mess of 'road-widening' and landscape despoiling.
- Slaty-backed Forktail *Enicurus schistaceus*: A single bird showed very confidently on a side stream of the Mo Chu, and another showed well on the road close to Deothang.
- Spotted Forktail *Enicurus maculatus*: Surely the finest of the genus and a real favourite all round, we found one on the road near Tongsa in the early morning, and a second bird being elusive around a roadside stream near Deothang.
- Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferreus*: Available in marginal habitats, and increasingly common along the scrubby and cleared road edges in the south-east. Many nests were active in the roadside banks, and one with fairly large downy chicks was found easily.

#### TIMALIIDAE

- White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis*: Frequently encountered at middle to higher altitudes, with our first group near Thimphu making a nice introduction.
- White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus*: The first group were close to our Yongkola camp, then we saw another group below there, and a third party near Mongar.
- Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush *Garrulax monileger*: One was seen rather poorly alongside the above species near Yongkola, also heard at lower elevations near Deothang.



- Striated Laughingthrush *Grammatoptila striata*: Noisy and visible in the forest at middle altitudes, especially as we went further east, and always with the floppy crest!
- Rufous-necked Laughingthrush *Dryonastes ruficollis*: At least eight were seen around the field margins below Yongkola. Also heard near Deothang.
- Grey-sided Laughingthrush *Dryonastes caerulatus*: Some great sightings of these this year, with some very vocal birds along the Lingmethang Road, on the Kori La, and a single seen near Morong.
- Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla rufogularis*: A horrible skulker. After failing to lure some into view, we had a reasonable view of one feeding on the ground in a gully below Yongkola.
- Spotted Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla ocellata*: A truly stunning bird, with a loud sweet song to match. Two showed well on the Chele La on our first morning, and another two were seen by our Sengor camp. Many others were heard, from the highest altitudes down to 2600m on the Yonphu La.
- Bhutan Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron imbricatum*: Our first were seen along the Lingmethang Road, and then we found them commonly from the Kori La eastwards to Deothang. This taxon ranges from Bhutan *just* into adjacent west Arunachal and *just* into southeast Tibet, so is *almost* endemic to the country.
- Blue-winged Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron squamatum*: Often an absolute skulker, we enjoyed multiple views of confiding birds in the south-east of the country, after our first ones were seen near Yongkola. Another really stunning bird when they show well.
- Scaly Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron subunicolor*: Several great views over three days at the higher levels of the Lingmethang Road. It was nice to see this subtle yet striking bird so well.
- Black-faced Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron affine*: Generally the highest altitude Laughingthrush, we saw several around the higher mountain passes.
- Red-headed Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron erythrocephalum*: Occasional sightings of this rather misnamed fellow at mid to higher altitudes, from the Dochu La through to Sengor. The ‘Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush’ complex has been split up. Rasmussen started it, and Collar finished it off – it’s all explained in his paper ‘A partial revision of the Asian Babblers (Timaliidae) published in the OBC’s journal ‘Forktail’ No.22.
- Crimson-faced Liocichla *Liocichla phoenicea*: A great look at two that posed on a roadside wall near Yongkola, which preceded numerous contacts with these sweet songsters in the South-east, often hidden in dense scrub although a further three were seen. They don’t respond to the song of birds from northern Thailand and eastern Burma, and not surprisingly the ‘old’ Red-faced Liocichla has recently been split into two, this one retaining the name *L. phoenicea*, and the one in northern Thailand etc is now called Scarlet-faced Liocichla *L. ripponi*.
- Cutia *Cutia nipalensis*: We had some great encounters with these little tigers, with our first appearing near the Pele La, several more along the Lingmethang Road and on the Kori La, and a nice vocal send-off by a group near Morong.
- Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrogegens*: Some good looks at these along the roadside at Punakha early in the morning, then further examples were seen around our Yongkola camp.
- White-browed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus schisticeps* (H): Heard in the foothill forest near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ruficollis*: Our first two appeared in the rain near Tongsa, then another was seen well near Tashigang, briefly accompanied by three fledged young.
- Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ferruginosus*: A pair were discovered near Morong, and gave a nice show around their favoured banana plants before slinking away into the undergrowth. These stunning birds are of the distinctively black-crowned nominate race.
- Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler *Xiphirhynchus superciliosus*: A single vocal bird showed well on the top of the (bamboo-free) Chele La, then a pair showed well on the Yutong La, and finally two

singles were seen in the higher reaches of the Lingmethang Road. A new name given to this species in the latest edition of Robson's Birds of South-east Asia is 'Sickle-billed Scimitar Babbler' which seems not unreasonable...

- Long-billed Wren-Babbler *Rimator malocoptilus*: It is only seven years since this little bird was discovered in a small area of the Lingmethang Road. This year we were lucky enough to meet a highly sociable individual who came in from afar and treated us to some awesome views as he peeked out of the vegetation at the roadside, at one point hopping onto the tarmac and even flying weakly out over the road, before thinking better of it and returning to cover. This show sealed its position as this group's 'bird-of-the-trip', and it was certainly mine in spite of the fact that I have seen him several times before! He's a wonderful combination of rare and cute!
- Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga albiventer*: This little fellow appeared early, on the Dochu La where he provided some exquisite views of his finely patterned plumage, singing from a static perch for several minutes. Our first Wren-babbler of seven, it made a good introduction!
- Pygmy Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga pusilla*: Commonly heard but often tiresome to see, we had a great view of one near Punakha that performed superbly, even jumping out onto the roadside. After that we didn't need to try for another, which is just as well as no others presented themselves for a viewing!
- Rufous-throated Wren-Babbler *Spelaeornis caudatus*: A quiet year for this species, we struggled to find any at all until some overnight rain seemed to stimulate them into voice. We eventually had a good look at one near Yongkola, and another was seen close to our camp at Morong. This east Himalayan speciality ranges from east Nepal to Arunachal.
- Bar-winged Wren Babbler *Spelaeornis troglodytoides*: Traditionally a bit of a bogey for the leader, this year we found one rather easily, singing at the roadside near Sengor. He obliged us with some nice views of his white-spotted head and chestnut belly, before scuttling back into his thicket.
- Spotted Wren-Babbler *Spelaeornis formosus*: A very responsive and showy individual was seen along the Mo Chu near Punakha. Many others were heard at middle to lower altitudes as we travelled eastwards, however none of those showed, even when we asked them too!
- Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler *Sphenocichla humei*: A search for this rare fellow on the Lingmethang Road was eventually successful, with a calling bird teased in to the roadside for many minutes of splendid viewing. Interestingly none were heard singing their usual cheery song, and perhaps they stop singing that when they commence nesting?
- Rufous-capped Babbler *Stachyris ruficeps*: A few were seen along the way in middle altitude forest although never commonly.
- Golden Babbler *Stachyris chrysaea*: A handful were seen, along the Lingmethang and Deothang Roads.
- Grey-throated Babbler *Stachyris nigriceps*: Glimpses of a vocal bird in a thicket near Samdrup Jongkhar were all that we managed, although two others were briefly seen near Yongkola.
- Striped Tit-Babbler *Macronous gularis*: Two showed rather well near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striata*: At Samdrup Jongkhar we had the unusual sight of one actually within the borders of Bhutan (just once previously on this tour) then a handful more were seen as we drove across the Assamese plains.
- Silver-eared Mesia *Leiothrix argentauris*: Once we reached their favoured habitat near Deothang, they proved to be rather common, noisy and showy.
- Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea*: Often a real skulker, we found numerous examples that posed well between Tongsa and the south-east.
- Rusty-fronted Barwing *Actinodura egertoni*: Our first ones appeared briefly along the Lingmethang Road, and they were fairly common in the warmer forests near Yongkola and also in the south-east.

Hoary-throated Barwing *Actinodura nipalensis*: Not seen until we reached the Sengor area, where we had multiple encounters with this pleasing species.

Blue-winged Minla *Minla cyanouroptera*: Seen rather commonly along the Lingmethang Road with a few more seen in the Morong area.

Bar-throated Minla (Chestnut-tailed M) *Minla strigula*: Seen very commonly at higher altitudes such around the high passes, and always arriving early when we played our 'tactical Owllet'.

Red-tailed Minla *Minla ignotincta*: We found these delightful birds regularly, usually in mixed flocks at higher altitudes, and also along the Lingmethang Road.

Golden-breasted Fulvetta *Alcippe chrysotis*: Always a personal favourite of mine, we found some obliging examples along the Lingmethang Road, with some very close views indeed!

Yellow-throated Fulvetta *Alcippe cinerea*: This Eastern Himalayan speciality was not uncommon along the Lingmethang Road-sides between 2100m and 1800m, and often very confiding. We also saw it at similar altitudes above Deothang.

Rufous-winged Fulvetta *Alcippe castaneiceps*: Never numerous this year, we found some near the Pele La, then a handful of others were seen at mid to higher altitudes along the Lingmethang Road, and also on the Kori La.

White-browed Fulvetta *Alcippe vinipectus*: The default small babbler at high altitudes, we saw plenty on the high passes, waving goodbye to these tit-like little cuties as we dropped below 2800m.

Nepal Fulvetta *Alcippe nipalensis*: A few were seen at lower altitudes such as at Punakha and also near Yongkola.

Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata*: A common sight and sound in the Bhutanese forests.

Long-tailed Sibia *Heterophasia picaoides*: Some excitable flocks showed well to us in the forests above Deothang, a bird of sombre plumage but great character!

Striated Yuhina *Staphida castaneiceps*: We found two different small flocks of these in the warmer forests near Deothang.

White-naped Yuhina *Yuhina bakeri*: Some small busy parties encountered in the Yongkola area and also in the south-east around Morong. A dapper little fellow that is restricted to the eastern Himalayas.

Whiskered Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*: Common throughout the middle altitude forests, particularly along the Lingmethang Road.

Stripe-throated Yuhina *Yuhina gularis*: Common at higher altitudes, from the high passes down to the Sengor area. Odd birds were also seen quite low down on the Lingmethang Road and the Kori La.

Rufous-vented Yuhina *Yuhina occipitalis*: Fairly prominent and noisy at higher altitudes and on the high passes, often making an appearance alongside the above species.

Black-chinned Yuhina *Yuhina nigrimenta*: Having missed this in the previous year, we enjoyed multiple encounters at Punakha, Yongkola and in the south-east near Deothang.

Great Parrotbill *Conostoma oemodium*: A pair in the bamboo understorey of the Yutong La sneaked in rather quietly for some great looks all round. This was in spite of the great bamboo die-off up there, and we also heard them on the Dochu La and near Sengor. A bird with a very varied diet, I once watched one grab and kill a Grey-faced Leaf Warbler!

Brown Parrotbill *Paradoxornis unicolor*: Two of these handsome but demure birds were seen high on the Yutong La, then another five were seen in dense bamboo on our way to Jakar.

Grey-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis gularis*: Some calling birds near Yongkola slipped away from us, but then we found a pair near Deothang that showed well. Our fifth Parrotbill of the trip - Hurrah!

Black-throated Parrotbill *Paradoxornis nipalensis*: We saw four separate flocks on three days in the bamboo along the Lingmethang Road, with some inquisitive birds shooting around our heads on our first encounter. What a gorgeous little bird! The Black-throated Parrotbill complex has now been split up into five species, and this one is now called 'Orange-eared Parrotbill' *Suthora humii*.

Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis ruficeps*: Great views of a pair near Yongkola. We had more views of this handsome fellow in the forests near Morong. Often flocks together with Rusty-fronted Barwings, although on these later dates they seemed to have paired up and were independent of feeding flocks.

Black-headed Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius rufiventer*: After much searching we found a very responsive and inquisitive male on the Kori La, singing loudly from a moss-cloaked tree. A God among Vireos!

White-browed Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapis*: We saw a few near Yongkola, singing from the tops of great trees in typical style, then on the Yonphu La we found one singing from scrub!

Green Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius xanthochlorus*: Favouring the higher altitudes, our first was an obliging songster on the Dochu La, then we saw one more on the Yutong La. DNA studies have shown that these Shrike-Babblers are most closely related to Vireos!

Black-eared Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius melanotis*: Occasionally heard singing monotonously, and we saw some nice examples in the mid-elevation forests of the Lingmethang Road, and also two more on the Kori La.

White-bellied Erpornis *Erpornis zantholeuca*: We found two at Yongkola that joined our artificial 'Owlet-frenzy', then another two were seen at very low altitude near Samdrup Jongkhar.

#### CISTICOLIDAE

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* (I): Two seen, singing over marshes close to Guwahati.

Striated Prinia *Prinia criniger*: One of the drabbest birds of the tour, we saw our first near Yongkola, and then more around the cultivation and grassy habitats near Mongar and Tashigang.

Black-throated Prinia *Prinia atrogularis*: Our first appeared at the roadside near Yongkola that was gathering nest material, then in the South-east we saw a further four birds.

Rufescent Prinia *Prinia rufescens*: Only found near Samdrup Jongkhar where they were quite noisy and visible in the grassy areas.

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata* (I) (H): Heard near Guwahati.

Mountain Tailorbird *Orthotomus cuculatus*: A single bird was seen along the Lingmethang Road, plus one other in bamboo near Morong.

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*: Present next to our Yongkola camp, then more commonly seen in the Deothang area.

#### SYLVIIDAE

Chestnut-headed Tesia *Tesia castaneocoronata*: Of the many birds singing in the higher altitude forests, we had fleeting views of two along the Lingmethang Road.

Slaty-bellied Tesia *Tesia olivia*: A noisy yet elusive bird, we actually had great views of an obliging example on the Lingmethang Road.

Yellow-browed Tesia (Grey-bellied T) *Tesia cyaniventer*: This one taunted us with his throaty song in several localities, including a prolonged session with two birds on the Lingmethang Road that proved very hard to see among a bed of ferns, then another on the Kori La gave several glimpses.

Grey-sided Bush-Warbler *Cettia brunnifrons*: Several good views in the higher altitudes, with our first making his introduction on the Pele La.

Strong-footed Bush-Warbler (Brownish-flanked B-W) *Cettia fortipes*: Not uncommon and heard often around scrappy habitat, our first one almost came to our feet on the edge of Tongsa town, and further examples were seen in the South-east.

Hume's Bush-Warbler (Yellowish-bellied B-W) *Cettia brunnescens*: A pair were seen in bamboo high on the Pele La then another was seen on the Thrumsing La, with a few more heard singing their eccentric songs.

Russet Bush-Warbler *Bradypterus mandelli* (H): An arch-skulker, we heard it on the Kori La and the Yonphu La.

- Tickell's Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus affinis*: Several birds seen en-route to their high altitude breeding grounds, on the Lingmethang Road, Kori La and at Morong.
- Orange-barred Leaf-Warbler (Buff-barred W) *Phylloscopus pulcher*: Not uncommon at higher elevation, often in mixed flocks.
- Grey-faced Leaf-Warbler (Ashy-throated W) *Phylloscopus maculipennis*: Also favouring the higher forests, we saw quite a few along our route. A rather good looking and easily identified member of the genus!
- Lemon-rumped Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus chloronotus*: Frequently seen in the higher elevation forests, and therefore none east of Sengor.
- Yellow-browed Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* (H): A single migrant was heard near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*: A feature of running the tour a little later was the arrival of this species at higher altitudes, with birds recorded between 3800m on the Chele La and down to 1750m at Morong.
- Large-billed Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris*: Not actually seen on the previous tour, this year we coincided with their arrival period and had numerous encounters at the higher elevations. A summer visitor that winters in Sri Lanka and South India.
- Blyth's Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus reguloides*: Frequently seen at middle and higher altitudes, the default Warbler for much of the tour..
- Yellow-vented Warbler *Phylloscopus cantator*: Very noticeable when in full voice, we found several of these along the Mo Chu, at lower altitudes below Yongkola, and near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Grey-hooded Warbler *Phylloscopus xanthoschistos*: A frequently encountered bird in the lower altitude forests. Note that Rasmussen has shifted this from *Seiurus* to *Phylloscopus*.
- Green-crowned Warbler *Seiurus burkii*: A singing bird showed well near the Pele La, then more at mid-elevations along the Lingmethang Road and the Kori La. Typically encountered around 1800-2400m, it sings with a sweeter and more complex song than the following closely related species. (The original 'Golden-spectacled' Warbler has now been split six ways; Plain-tailed *S. soror*, Grey-crowned *S. tephrocephalus*, Marten's *S. omeiensis*, Bianchi's *S. valentini*, Whistler's *S. whistleri* and Green-crowned Warbler *S. burkii*.)
- Whistler's Warbler *Seiurus whistleri*: Seen frequently around the high passes and in the higher forests (typically breeding above 2800m) and unsurprisingly none east of Sengor.
- White-spectacled Warbler *Seiurus affinis*: A single bird in the bamboo along the Lingmethang Road gave us the run-around, eventually appearing in front of us for just a minute before vanishing once more!
- Grey-cheeked Warbler *Seiurus poliogenys*: These were fairly evident once we dropped lower on the Lingmethang Road, with our first ones enjoyed near Yongkola. A single was seen near Deothang.
- Chestnut-crowned Warbler *Seiurus castaniceps*: A regular component of mixed bird-flocks in the cool mid-elevation forests, with many seen along the Lingmethang Road.
- Broad-billed Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni*: A responsive little fellow that gave us good looks near Sengor, skimming low over our heads as he crossed the road! Another single of this bamboo-loving mite was seen at a lower altitude near there.
- Black-faced Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps*: This little beauty was seen a number of times in the mid-elevation forests along the Lingmethang Road and on the Kori La.
- Yellow-bellied Warbler *Abroscopus superviliaris* (H): Heard singing in the bamboo near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Striated Grassbird *Megalurus palustris* (I): Two vocal but mostly hidden birds were seen near Guwahati airport.

## REGULIDAE

- Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: A couple were seen in high-altitude forests along our route.

## ÆGITHALIDAE

Red-headed Tit (Black-throated T) *Aegithalos concinnus*: Regularly encountered in mid-elevation forest along our route, with a huddle of cute juveniles seen en-route from the Dochu La to Punakha. For what its worth, I fully endorse the return to the old name!

Rufous-fronted Tit *Aegithalos iouschistos*: Our first three of these delightful high-altitude Tits were on the Dochu La, then they were seen several more times around Sengor and the Thrumsing La.

## PARIDAE

Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps*: We were fortunate to find an obliging singing male on the slopes of the Dochu La. Infrequently seen on the tour.

Rufous-vented Tit *Parus rubidiventris*: Some splendid looks at these in the higher forests of the tour, with several seen singing strongly.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Commonly seen in higher altitude hemlock and fir forests, such as on the Chele La and between Jakar and Sengor.

Grey-crested Tit *Parus dichrous*: Our first were on the Chele La, then we met them again in the fir forests on each of the high passes that we crossed.

Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*: Seen at all altitudes and on almost every day, we witnessed innumerable adults carrying food to nest holes, typically located in the retaining walls along the road.

Black-spotted Yellow Tit (Yellow-checked T) *Parus spilonotus*: Regularly encountered along the Lingmethang Road, we also found them in the forests above Deothang. I have to say I find the new name rather a mouthful!

Sultan Tit *Melanochlora sultanea*: Two of these stunning tits were seen near Yongkola, then a trio near Deothang entertained us with prolonged views at eye-level.

Yellow-browed Tit *Sylviiparus modestus*: Not uncommon at higher altitude and a regular attendant of our artificially-created 'owlet-flocks'!

## SITTIDAE

Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *Sitta cinnamoventris*: Some four birds were seen well in the warmer forest below Yongkola, then a single was seen on our last day near Deothang. Note that the 'old' Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch has been split three ways, this one found in the Himalayas and its foothills retains the same English and scientific names.

White-tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis*: Our first encounter was near the Dochu La where a pair attended an active nest, in the same place as two years previously. They were seen at regular intervals during our tour, typically in the cool mid-elevation forest but one joined the following species at 1500m!

Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa*: Possibly the quickest ever search for this (or any other!) bird – within two seconds of playing the tape, the bird was answering and flying into a tree above our heads! Just the one inquisitive bird kept us entertained for more than half-an-hour, looking like some kind of arboreal Kingfisher as his colours glowed intensely in the overcast conditions. We saw this bird again two days later, and heard one or two others without fixing eyes on them. Often very hard to find, we were exceptionally fortunate to locate it so painlessly. Eat those ferns and spin that prayer wheel!

## CERTHIIDAE

Himalayan Treecreeper (Hodgson's Treecreeper) *Certhia hodgsoni*: One was seen high on the Chele La, and then another was seen on the Yutong La. This has recently been split from the Eurasian Treecreeper *C. familiaris*, however, *C. hodgsoni* includes the western race *hodgsoni*

and the eastern *mandelli*, which could be separate species themselves. On this trip we saw *mandelli*.

Rusty-flanked Treecreeper *Certhia nipalensis*: A good look at a single bird on the Dochu La, plus one other was seen on the Pele La.

Brown-throated Treecreeper *Certhia discolor*: A pair of these showed well near our Yongkola camp, the only sighting on the whole trip. There is another split here: Brown-throated Treecreeper *C. discolor* that occurs in the Himalayas is split from the races found in South-east Asia and South-western China which are now called Manipur Treecreeper *C. manipurensis*.

#### DICAEIDAE

Yellow-vented Flowerpecker *Dicaeum chrysorrheum*: Just the second time this has been seen on the tour, we had a great look at this strikingly marked bird near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectus*: Frequently seen zipping noisily about, we had multiple good looks at these attractive birds typically in the cooler mid-elevation forests.

#### NECTARINIIDAE

Mrs Gould's Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae*: These were in rather short supply this year, with a male seen on the Chele La, and a handful more seen near Sengor. Stunning!

Green-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga nipalensis*: Probably the commonest small bird at higher altitudes, and always number-1 visitor to our artificial 'Owlet-flock'!

Black-breasted Sunbird *Aethopyga saturata*: Only really appearing at lower altitudes, we first encountered them along the Mo Chu, then again around Yongkola, and finally in the south-east.

Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*: Quite a few were seen around Samdrup Jongkhar, with numerous gorgeous males.

Fire-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga ignicauda*: So often hard to find, we kicked things off early with a pair high up on the Chele La, then enjoyed another pair in the rhododendron scrub near Sengor.

Streaked Spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna*: Rather common around Deothang and Samdrup Jongkhar where they showed well and often.

#### ZOSTEROPIDAE

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*: Regularly seen at lower altitudes, most obviously in the Yongkola area.

#### EMBERIZIDAE

Crested Bunting *Melophus lathami*: First seen near Wangdi, we saw some more of these attractive fellows in the fields near Yongkola and around Tashigang.

#### FRINGILLIDAE

Himalayan Greenfinch (Yellow-breasted G) *Carduelis spinoides*: Only found in the south-east where our first were on roadside wires near Tashigang, then other flocks were seen around our camp above Deothang.

Tibetan Siskin *Carduelis thibetana*: Only the fourth time this has been seen on the tour; a tight flock of 45 was found zipping around on the Kori La, and perching in some leafy trees adjacent to us, almost disappearing as they did so!

Plain Mountain-Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola*: Unlike last years exceptional numbers, this year we only saw a flock of five birds which passed over us quickly on the Chele La.

Dark-breasted Rosefinch *Carpodacus nipalensis*: Twice we found females in twos; on the Dochu La and on the Pele La.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*: A single was seen near Sengor, and small flocks were seen on the Dochu La, Kori La and Yonphu La. This *roseatus* race can be quite arresting if you are more familiar with the European race!

- Dark-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus edwardsii*: Just females seen this year, with one on the Yutong La and two below the Thrumsing La.
- Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus thura*: A single female that perched up and called at close range on the Chele La was the only one of the trip.
- Scarlet Finch *Haematospiza sipahi*: Rather thin on the ground this year, with our first male seen near Tongsa, then a further five birds seen near Yongkola.
- Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*: Two flew over calling on the Ura-Sheltang La.
- Brown Bullfinch *Pyrrhula nipalensis*: A very brief view of one on the Lingmethang Road was the only one of the trip. Two fly-overs on the Kori La could have been this species.
- Red-headed Bullfinch *Pyrrhula erythrocephala*: Not so many this year, we saw four on the Ura-Sheltang La, two more near Sengor and a quartet in flight lower down on the Lingmethang Road.
- Gold-naped Finch *Pyrrhoptes epaulaetta*: Often a difficult bird to catch up with, we found plenty this year. Our first was in the rhododendron scrub near Sengor, then a group of four males and two females were seen lower down on the Lingmethang Road, followed by another male there on our final morning. Gorgeous!
- Collared Grosbeak *Mycerobas affinis*: Several were seen well on the Chele La, and a single was seen on the Dochu La. Also heard on one or two of the other high passes.
- Spot-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas melanozanthos*: A vocal immature male singing away near the Pele La was our first, then another two were seen perched on the Lingmethang Road.
- White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carnipes*: Common on the Chele La where we saw 25 or more, then smaller numbers were found on the Pele La, Yutong La and Thrumsing La.

#### ESTRILDIDAE

- Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* (I): A flock of five were seen en-route to Guwahati.
- Chestnut Munia *Lonchura atricapilla* (I): At least ten birds were seen buzzing over a small marsh near Guwahati airport.

#### PASSERIDAE

- House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: Many seen in India, but one at Paro was a surprise. More were seen infiltrating Bhutanese territory along the valley at Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Cinnamon Sparrow (Russet S) *Passer rutilans*: Numerous in open country and around cultivation at middle and higher altitudes, they also featured around our campsites.
- Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: Seen frequently along the way around habitation, though generally at lower altitudes.

#### PLOCEIDAE

- Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*: Two were seen perched up near Samdrup Jongkhar, then a couple more were seen in Assam. These refer to the *burmanicus* race, or 'Eastern' Baya Weaver.

#### STURNIDAE

- Spot-winged Starling *Saroglossa piloptera*: An exciting find near Tashigang, with three males and two females repeatedly entering holes in a pollarded tree, taking what appeared to be pale green caterpillars into the holes. As there is no confirmed breeding record for the country, this is a significant observation, not to mention a pleasing one of an attractive bird!
- Grey-headed Starling (Chestnut-tailed S) *Sturnia malabarica*: Three birds were seen with the above near Tashigang, then several pairs were seen in the Deothang area and also en-route to Guwahati.
- Asian Pied Starling *Gracupica contra*: Two were seen within Bhutan in Samdrup Jongkhar, then they were seen quite commonly in Assam.
- Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*: Seen around villages at lower altitudes.
- Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus* (I): A few were seen along the road to Guwahati.



White-vented Myna *Acridotheres grandis*: At least ten birds were seen just inside Bhutan near Samdrup Jongkhar. Only the second time this has been seen on the tour, and there are few records for the country, although they may have recently colonised the area.  
Common Hill-Myna *Gracula religiosa*: Just four seen around Samdrup Jongkhar.

#### ORIOLIDAE

Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo*: An immature male was seen at Samdrup Jongkhar, an unusual record for the country. Note this is split from Eurasian; Indian has much more yellow in the wing and tail and a strong black patch behind the eye. It ranges as far as Uzbekistan.  
Slender-billed Oriole *Oriolus tenuirostris*: A great look at a vocal and active pair in the early morning near our Punakha hotel. A pine specialist, we saw another bird near Tashigang that was presumably this species, but it has to be said that the above species was not considered!  
Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus* (I): Two birds seen en-route to Guwahati.  
Maroon Oriole *Oriolus traillii*: Often heard singing his sweet song, we regularly found birds in warm broad-leaved forest such as along the Mo Chu and also near Yongkola.

#### IRENIDAE

Asian Fairy Bluebird *Irena puella*: Fairly numerous and visible around Samdrup Jongkhar.

#### DICRURIDAE

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocerus* (I): A few seen en-route to Guwahati.  
Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*: Regularly encountered, in a wide altitudinal range and a variety of habitats.  
Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus*: These appeared at lower, warmer altitudes in the south-east of Bhutan.  
Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus remifer*: Just two singles seen, near Yongkola and Deothang.  
Hair-crested Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus*: A small number were seen along the Mo Chu, and a couple more in pine forest near Mongar.  
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*: A single was seen chasing an Oriental Honey Buzzard near Samdrup Jongkhar.

#### ARTAMIDAE

Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus*: Three were seen around Samdrup Jongkhar town, then more as we crossed Assam. A Bhutan tick for the leader!

#### CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: Five were seen during the tour, at mid-altitudes and always near oak trees. These birds are of the *interstinctus* race.  
Yellow-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris*: Seen often and well around the high passes and higher altitude forests.  
Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* (I): A couple of birds seen en-route to Guwahati.  
Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*: Often seen in the lower altitude forests and scrub, and almost down to the plains.  
Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*: Only seen around Ura and the Bumthang valleys where they were numerous. The birds in Bhutan (*bottanensis* race) are the only population within the subcontinent this side of Pakistan, although they range across Tibet and China.  
Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*: A familiar sight around the higher altitude forests, although we did also see one as low as 2600m near Tashigang. These birds are of the *macella* race that lacks spots on the belly and scapulars.  
Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*: Often seen around high cultivated valleys such as at Paro, Ura and Sengor.

- House Crow *Corvus splendens*: Common in India, with singles also seen at Thimphu and Samdrup Jongkhar..
- Large-billed Crow *Corvus japonensis*: The commonest corvid in Bhutan, most frequent at higher altitudes where they always turned up for our picnics! We saw it on every day, bar the last three around the Samdrup Jongkhar and Deothang area, where there is a significant gap between this and the following species.
- Eastern Jungle Crow *Corvus leuallantii*: A single was seen well inside Bhutan between Samdrup Jongkhar and Deothang, then several more inside India. Rasmussen splits this and the next species from Large-billed Crow *C. macrorhynchus* in 'Birds of South Asia – The Ripley Guide'. There is certainly a gap in distribution between this one on the plains (200m) and the montane *C. japonensis* (c1000m).

## MAMMALS

- Moupin Pika *Ochotona thibetana*: A few sightings at the higher elevations.
- Black Giant Squirrel *Ratufa bicolor*: Superb looks at these impressive beasts on the Kori La, then two more were seen near Deothang.
- Orange-bellied Himalayan Squirrel *Dremomys lokriah*: Seen regularly, particularly on the Lingmethang Road.
- Irrawaddy Squirrel *Callosciurus pygerythrus*: One seen near Tashigang in the same tree as Himalayan Bulbuls. Also seen near Samdrup Jongkhar
- Himalayan Striped Squirrel *Tamiops mccllellandii*: These tiny squirrels were seen often in the warm broad-leaved forests.
- Hodgson's Giant Flying Squirrel *Petaurista magnificus*: A bird-free night drive produced three of these huge, richly-coloured beasts.
- Leopard Cat *Felis bengalensis*: A shock sighting in the middle of the afternoon near Yongkola, with an animal that was probably as startled as we were. He slinked off pretty fast once we had made eye contact!
- Leopard *Panthera pardus* (H): The persistent deep growling of this fellow was heard distantly, across a valley along the Lingmethang Road
- Nepal Grey Langur *Semnopithecus schistaceus*: A single was seen below the Dochu La.
- Golden Leaf Monkey (G Langur) *Trachypithecus geei*: Two animals were scoped at range from our Tongsa hotel.
- Capped Leaf Monkey (C Langur) *Trachypithecus pileatus*: Multiple sightings of these splendid animals along the Lingmethang Road and throughout the southeast.
- Assam Macaque *Macaca assamensis*: Also frequently encountered, although less attractive than the above species!
- Indian Muntjac (Barking Deer) *Muntiacus muntjak*: A single animal seen along the Mo Chu, but heard often from our Yongkola camp.
- Common Goral *Nemorhaedus goral*: We had a great view of one standing above the road near Tashigang, plus one other was seen badly near Punakha.