

BHUTAN

10 APRIL – 29 APRIL 2007

TOUR REPORT

This year's Birdquest to Bhutan was a massively productive adventure that grossed 431 species, a total that of course included those Bhutanese specialities such as a fantastic pair of Beautiful Nuthatches, five Himalayan Monal, two Satyr Tragopans, (including an awesome male on the roadside - our bird of the trip!), innumerable Blood Pheasants, a male Grey Peacock Pheasant, three Black-tailed Crakes, Ward's Trogon, Pied Falconet, several Ibisbills, a family of three Tawny Fish Owls, Dark-rumped Swifts, two Yellow-rumped Honeyguides, Long-billed Ground Thrush, six species of Wren-Babbler including Bar-winged, Long-billed and Rufous-throated, with the seventh, Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler, just heard only. Add to this many Rufous-necked, Wreathed and Great Pied Hornbills, Violet and Asian Emerald Cuckoos, Blue-fronted Blue Robin, Broad-billed Warbler, Black-headed Shrike-Babbler, five species of Scimitar Babbler, five of Parrotbills and twelve species of Laughingthrush. This was the tenth Birdquest tour to Bhutan, and the first to exit through Samdrup Jongkhar since 2000. In Bhutan itself we added 31 species not seen on the recent version of the itinerary, and our 'add-on' birding around Delhi and in Assam added another huge tranche of good birds that included Greater Adjutant, Slender-billed Vulture, Indian Courser and Indian Bushlark.

We began our birding in Delhi, with a sweltering afternoon visit to the lagoon at Sultanpur on the outskirts of this busy city. As we strolled from the shade of one tree to the next we found majestic Black-necked Storks, Eurasian Spoonbill, Glossy Ibis, Comb Duck, Indian Spot-billed Duck, Grey Francolin, Grey-headed Swamphen, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Brown-headed Barbet, Streak-throated Swallow, Indian Golden Oriole, Garganey, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Hume's Whitethroat and Bluethroat, plus dry country species such as Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Indian Black Robin, Large Grey Babbler, Bay-backed Shrike and Common Woodshrike. The real prize was four Indian Courser running about on the flats, plus a single Indian Bushlark that showed well at close range.

After an air-conditioned rest, we boarded our Druk Air Airbus that flew past the loftiest peaks of the High Himalayas, including Mount Everest (9'o'clock, going left!) standing clear in the morning sunshine. We descended through the steep valleys into Paro, completed Bhutanese formalities and transferred to our hotel, the new and luxurious Zhewaling. A gentle introduction to Bhutanese birds ensued, and along the Paro river we found our first Ibisbill, so confiding and confident in its 'boulder-camouflage' that we approached it to within 15m! At an unassuming little marsh we watched two Black-tailed Crakes marching up and down, prolonged close views of this delightful yet skulking beastie. Other birds featured in the valley were late migrant Hodgson's Redstarts and Little Buntings,

a River Lapwing chick with it's parents doing some curious distraction behaviour in mid-stream, and the soon to become familiar Plumbeous Water Redstarts, White-collared Blackbird, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Red-billed Chough, Rosy Pipit, Himalayan Black Bulbul and Long-tailed Minivet. As the evening drew in, our attention was drawn to small bird in the pines just outside our hotel. It looked familiar, but surely it couldn't be - a Wood Warbler! It certainly was, the first for the country and for the subcontinent as a whole! What an auspicious way to begin our stay in this magic kingdom.

The following day an early start was in order, for a pre-dawn drive up to the highest pass of the tour, the Chele La, that reaches 3780m. The roadside began to produce birds long before we reached the top, as we swung round a corner to be confronted by our first Blood Pheasants. As we advanced uphill, a large shape and a rush of colour heralded the awesome Himalayan Monal, with a male settling down to feed in plain sight, it's psychedelic hues glistening at us in the thin air. With our main targets acquired, we ate breakfast al-fresco, distracted by numerous passerines emerging to sing from the bushes, such as Himalayan Red-flanked Bush Robin, Golden Bush Robin, Blue-fronted Redstart, Black-faced Laughingthrush and Spotted Nutcracker. Further explorations at these high altitudes revealed Himalayan Vulture, Himalayan Buzzard, Black Eagle, a pair of Spotted Laughingthrushes quietly feeding under rhododendron bushes, Rufous-vented Tit, Grey-crested Tit, the newly-split Hodgson's Treecreeper, Plain Mountain Finch, Dark-rumped Rosefinch and Collared Grosbeak. A Eurasian Woodcock was studied as it stood in the open by a forest stream, and as we worked our way downhill we found Mrs Gould's Sunbird and Brown Bullfinch. Returning to Paro we paused for lunch, we then had to negotiate some very messy and time-consuming roadworks on the road to Thimphu, but managed to add Red-crested Pochard, Asian House Martin and Brown Dipper to our tally.

After a brief pause in the ever expanding (and feral dog infested!) capital Thimphu, we headed up to the 3115m pass of the Dochu La. Early morning failed to yield the hoped-for Tragopan, but much bounty was present with Kaleej Pheasant of the *melanota* race, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Hoary-throated Barwing, Whistler's Warbler and Rusty-flanked Treecreeper. The undoubted highlight was a busy flock of Fulvous Parrotbills that picked a good moment to swarm into the patch of bamboo that we were stood next to. A hot breakfast was welcome after this excitement and then we continued downhill, pausing at intervals to study Mountain Hawk Eagle, Himalayan Swiftlet, White-throated Needletail, Ultramarine Flycatcher, Large and Rufous-bellied Niltavas, Blue-winged and Bar-throated Minlas, some surprise Golden-breasted Fulvettas, our first Rufous Sibilas, Chestnut-crowned Warbler, Red-headed Tit, and four Fire-capped Tits that were getting in the mood around some tall cherry trees. Lunch was taken close to an active nest of a pair of White-tailed Nuthatches, and then we pressed on for the river valleys at Punakha. There the boulder-strewn torrent was home to several Ibisbills, Himalayan Pied Kingfishers and some migrant Pale Sand Martins, but alas there was no sign of the 'enigmatic' White-bellied Heron. That's seven times I've looked here and never seen it! I have come to the conclusion that it's a conspiracy by the sprites of these mountains and forests, to keep me returning to this magical land!

The Mo Chu river has good forest along it's noisy course at 1600m, and we spent much of the following day birding along its banks. As we drove up in the half-light we coincided with a pair of Tawny Fish Owls returning to their roost, and enjoyed a point-blank view of this huge bear-like bird sat on a roadside stump. Further on, as the sun rose we found Crested Serpent Eagle, Barred Cuckoo Dove, Asian Barred Owlet, Great and Golden-throated Barbets, Greater Yellownappe, Bay Woodpecker, Grey-chinned Minivet, Mountain Bulbul, an early Ferruginous Flycatcher arriving for

the summer, Small Niltava, a glimpse of a Lesser Shortwing, numerous noisy Striated Laughingthrushes, Red-headed Laughingthrush, Golden Babbler, Nepal Fulvetta, Black-chinned Yuhina, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Grey-hooded Warbler, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Black-breasted Sunbird, many gorgeous Maroon Orioles, Hair-crested Drongos and Grey Treepies. Our main target of Spotted Wren Babbler gave itself up with a superb close view of this feisty mite, spitting with rage, and the local and vocal Yellow-vented Warblers eventually came down from the trees to give us some great views. Along the more open riversides we saw a drake Tufted Duck, Green Sandpiper, Amur Wagtail, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babblers in the bushes and a dark-breasted Peregrine shooting by. A Pallas's Fish Eagle soared majestically over the windy valley and we revisited the Tawny Fish Owls, finding Mum, Dad, and a huge ginger-coloured juvenile sat napping in the trees.

Moving on from this comfortable station we headed east, pausing as we left to soak up the Slender-billed Oriole singing from the pines outside our hotel. We got delayed at a productive spot for migrants at Wangdi, by an Osprey, Thick-billed and Dusky Warblers, Grey-headed Starling, Striated Prinia and a Lesser Coucal. We continued towards the Pele La, with further roadside halts providing perhaps the best mammal views of the trip; first of a Himalayan Goral, then shortly after of a big dog of a European Otter that kept popping in and out of the water just below the road. We had great looks at our first Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, which came with with a supporting cast of Blue-headed Rock Thrush, Bhutan Laughingthrush, Black-throated Prinia, and a Russet Bush Warbler that sat up singing for us, even allowing scope views. Now that's a first! Further up the trail we saw Asian Emerald and Oriental Cuckoo, Yellow-browed Tesia and Green-crowned Warbler. A distant call from the forest drew our attention to a Ward's Trogon, a bird that is becoming increasingly hard to find near the road. It was time for a stiff descent down a steep slope, into the forest, and we found the vocal female lurking among the thick trees, quite obliging once we had made the effort to make her acquaintance. As we pressed on over the pass and through the higher altitudes, we found Hume's Bush Warbler in the dwarf bamboo, Little Forktail on a roadside stream and our first Strong-footed Bush Warbler that popped out to greet us. Arriving in a rather nice hotel at Tongsa, we relaxed in the warmth as the rain came in for the night.

As today was Sue's birthday, I had arranged for special avian confectionary to be strewn across our path. It started with a tame Long-billed Ground Thrush, grubbing around in muddy leaf-mould and periodically scuttling, Crake-like, back and forwards across the road. No less than three Spotted Forktails emerged onto the tarmac, allowing us the great views that this gem of a bird truly deserves. A Plain-backed Thrush also jumped out onto the road, and in the trees we found Whistling Hawk Cuckoo, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, and a large troop of Golden Langur that were the icing on the birthday cake! Ascending to higher altitudes we found a Broad-billed Warbler in a clump of bamboo, nest-building Eurasian Jays, and many Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrushes hanging around the road cuttings. Higher still, a Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler came and sang at us in plain view, and then we had eyeball-searing views of a Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler that came and showed his all. In between not-infrequent bursts of rain, we saw many Red-headed Bullfinches, a furtive Great Parrotbill, Grey-sided Bush Warbler, Lemon-rumped Leaf Warbler, Rufous-breasted Accentor, hundreds of Cinnamon Sparrows and dozens of Little Buntings crowding into fruit trees, and finally a group of eight Brown Parrotbills swarming through the bamboo.

Continuing over the passes and high road eastwards, we startled a pair of Himalayan Monal at the roadside, who settled back down and continued feeding on the verge. Himalayan Red-flanked Bush Robins were numerous and showy, plus we found several Black-faced Laughingthrush, Orange-barred Leaf Warblers, a Goldcrest, Dark-rumped Rosefinches, White-winged Grosbeaks, and had a good

look at the awesome Spotted Laughingthrush. A hunt for the Snow Pigeon resulted in a close look at one feeding in a ploughed field, and as we progressed through the high country and down to our campsite we found Asian House Martin, Golden and White-browed Bush Robins. Swinging around a bend in the road, my eyeballs nearly popped when a male Satyr Tragopan shot a pulse of deep crimson to the back of my retinas, standing in full view on the verge of the road! Having finally got the right words out of my mouth, ('Stop!' being the most important one, but the driver Tenzin had already clocked it...) we watched as he casually strolled along in the open and then down a slope, his dark hues eventually merging with the deep greens of the forest. Wow! You lucky lucky people! Everything after that seemed boring, so we went and drank tea in our new home, our well-appointed camp at 2900m.

From our position here near the top of the famous Lingmethang Road, where the road meanders along the slopes of the south-eastern part of the Thrumsing La National Park, we ambled along the 'highway' finding great birds as we went. Close to our camp we found Slaty-blue Flycatcher, and we crawled inside a thicket to see a male White-browed Shortwing. A surprise find was two furtive female Crimson-browed Finches that were feeding quietly by the roadside. The song of a Bar-winged Wren Babbler lured us up another slope, and we rewarded with an intimate encounter with this great little bird. Further thrills included Green Shrike Babbler, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Grey-sided Bush Warbler, Rufous-fronted and Yellow-browed Tits, another Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Mountain Hawk Eagle, and a female Satyr Tragopan that slipped off the roadside. A little way down the mountain brought us within the altitudinal range of Rusty-fronted Barwing, and we had a fine view of our first of these cheeky birds. A troop of Scaly Laughingthrushes came bounding upslope and performed for us on the roadside bollards, showing off their subtle but intricate plumage.

Further down in the middle altitudes, things were definitely getting busier, with Crested Goshawk, a very active Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, Nepal House Martins busy around their cliff colonies, our first Striated Bulbuls, and two pairs of Little Forktail. The mournful wail of Common Hill Partridge was pursued but he remained hidden, so we made do with a group of Spot-winged Grosbeaks and some Hoary-throated Barwings. Around a very lively corner we found a very vocal Black-headed Shrike Babbler plus the commoner Black-eared, Cutia and a fine pair of Sapphire Flycatchers. The bamboo buzzed with Golden-breasted and Yellow-throated Fulvettas, Black-throated Parrotbill and Red-billed Leiothrix, and here we found our only White-spectacled Warbler. We continued to our lower camp near the village of Yongkola, set in the richest zone of all in this wonderful forest.

Alas, after listening to a night of rain we awoke to find fog and low cloud blanketing everything, so we dropped lower into the 'drizzle-zone' and continued birding. In spite of the weather (which persisted for two days!) we made a good start with Emerald Dove, Asian Emerald Cuckoo, Square-tailed Drongo Cuckoo, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Oriental Cuckoo, Crimson-breasted Woodpecker, Lesser Shortwing, White-browed Shrike Babbler, Mountain Tailorbird, Grey-cheeked and Black-faced Warblers. Rain often causes atypically confiding behaviour from some species, and we enjoyed Grey-sided Laughingthrushes feeding at the roadside, and Blue-winged Laughingthrushes together with Crimson-faced Liocichlas that were positively showy, bouncing around in berry bushes and feeding on the little fruits. A Pygmy Wren Babbler was just about persuaded to show himself in the gloom, we found our first White-naped Yuhinas and our first Rufous-necked Hornbills (- which in the mist we saw so little of, they could have been flying monkeys!)

Persevering in this inclement weather, we found Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Grey-faced Woodpecker, Bay Woodpecker, Slaty-backed, Little Pied and Pale Blue Flycatchers, Black-spotted Yellow Tit, Brown-

throated Treecreeper and Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo. The light improved on the Rufous-necked Hornbills, and we had a superb hour-long encounter with a huge bird-flock that included several Coral-billed Scimitar Babblers, 40 Rusty-fronted Barwings, 20 Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbills, and a pair of Crimson-breasted Woodpeckers. The normally skulking Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush emerged to call to us from the edge of a rough field, and Himalayan Greenfinches tinkled around the crops.

A last morning to play catch up was blessed with finer weather, so birds and birders alike were busy interacting. We found Speckled Woodpigeon, Collared Owlet (often heard but seldom seen), White-gorgeted Flycatcher, Pygmy Blue Flycatcher, a surprising eye-contact with a Blue-fronted Blue Robin, a flock of Cutia and a rather second-hand Long-billed Wren Babbler. We set off for the next part of our journey east, but were arrested after a short distance by some glorious Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes and the most amazing eye-level air show by a large flock of White-throated Needletails. On the Kori La pass we paused for some lunch under the watchful gaze of a White-tailed Nuthatch, and found Grey-winged Blackbirds and Brown-throated Treecreeper, Heading towards Tashigang and our next night stop (for the first time in several years), we were introduced to Himalayan Bulbuls and Blue-throated Flycatchers, a *lathami* Kaleej Pheasant and a Lesser Coucal.

After a comfortable night in the 'fleshpots' of Bhutan's eastern capital, over breakfast we watched House Swifts and Red-rumped Swallows before setting a course southwards. Roadside thrills began with Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon, Eurasian and a Small Cuckoo, Lesser Yellownape and White-crested Laughingthrush. Around a small marsh we found another Black-tailed Crake and Red-billed Leiothrix, enjoyed point-blank views of Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler and Bhutan Laughingthrushes, before heading for our next camp (which would become known as 'windy ridge!') After 'checking in' we headed further down the trail, delayed only by some fine Rufous-necked Hornbills perched by the road, and set about searching for that jewel of the epiphytes, Beautiful Nuthatch. With the afternoon drawing to a close, we found a pair feeding in Alder trees, dropping down to eye-level at a range of 15m so we could appreciate every angle and colour of these fantastic creatures. Satiated and thrilled, we returned to a camp through a frightening rainstorm that slowed our progress to a crawl, and when we returned to camp... disaster! Where *was* the camp! The storm had ploughed through it, flattening all the tents and reducing them to sodden piles of bedding and baggage! Nothing was left standing, the camp crew were huddled in an outhouse having rescued what they could. Time to break out the emergency case of Fosters! With stoic acceptance by these unflappable Birdquesters (busy toasting their success with the Nuthatch!) and a sterling effort from our camp crew, we rebuilt the camp, cooked dinner, dried sleeping bags around a roaring camp fire and generally sorted out the mess. Two hours later we were back in business and settled down for a night's sleep. Or so we thought! At 3am, another storm hit the ridge, down came the tents once more, so it was time to abandon camp, climb aboard the bus and await the dawn! Having now given up any thought of staying on this exposed ridge, we packed up our things, ate breakfast, and set off for a days birding in the direction of the foothills and the border. In the moist broad-leaved forests we found a splendid little Rufous-throated Wren Babbler, plus Short-billed Minivets with a nest, Silver-eared Mesia, White-naped Yuhinas, Scarlet Finch, Bronzed Drongo, and some excited parties of Long-tailed Sibia. More Coral-billed Scimitar Babblers and Crimson-faced Liocichla were seen, plus a vocal Grey-bellied Cuckoo and our first Mountain Imperial Pigeons. Settling for an extra night in a Samdrup Jongkhar hotel after our adventures in 'Camp Desolation', we made our way down to the border town for a welcome hotel bed and a curry.

The foothill forests here between 300 and 900m held a whole new selection of birds for us, and after some early showers cleared and the place began warming up, raptors began to take to the air such as Oriental Honey Buzzard, Crested Serpent Eagle, Crested Goshawk, Rufous-bellied Eagle and Mountain Hawk Eagle, while Eurasian Hobbies migrated steadily eastwards. Around fruiting trees we found Pin-tailed, Thick-billed and Wedge-tailed Green Pigeons, plus we saw Mountain Imperial Pigeons, Green-billed Malkoha, Himalayan Pied Kingfisher, Wreathed and Great Pied Hornbills, Blue-throated and Blue-eared Barbets, Grey-capped Woodpecker, Large Woodshrike, Asian Fairy Bluebird, Black-crested, Red-whiskered, White-throated and Ashy Bulbuls, Red-throated Flycatcher, White-browed Scimitar Babbler, Grey-throated Babbler, Striped Tit Babbler, Rufescent Prinia, Sultan Tit, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Crimson Sunbird, White-rumped Munia, Plain Flowerpecker and Common Hill Myna. A Violet Cuckoo refused to pose for us, a Pied Falconet showed on a treetop as did a pair of Dollarbirds, and the rather degraded riverine habitat still held a couple of pairs of Black-backed Forktails. We found the nest of Bronzed Drongo full of large chicks, a couple of Dark-rumped Swifts gave us a fly-by and Blue-naped Pitta called from a gully, remaining hidden despite some off-trail inspections. Quite a day that was! Having accumulated so many species already, the following day took a little more effort, but had new additions such as Citrine Wagtail, Baya Weaver and Red Collared Dove, and enjoyed many more Green Pigeons, Asian Palm Swifts and their curious nests, Yellow-vented Warbler, more noisy Long-tailed Sibias, and Common Iora. A loud cackling sound drew us into the embrace of the forest one last time, and with a lot of patience we managed to lure in a male Grey Peacock Pheasant to within a few metres of us, until it boosted itself off the slope and back down into it's gully. This was certainly the first time I've ever seen this bird in Bhutan in 14 visits!

And so the time comes, as it always does, to leave. We started after dawn, waiting at the border for the formalities to be completed, adding Asian Koel and Eastern Jungle Crow to our Bhutan list. Then it was out onto the plains of Assam and the journey to Guwahati airport. We had to keep stopping though, what with Slender-billed and White-rumped Vultures taking to the air, Asian Openbills and Lesser Adjutant lifting off from the paddyfields and soaring around, and as we neared the Brahmaputra river itself we found our first Greater Adjutants. These goliaths grew more numerous as we approached the airport, with at least ten seen, many cruising around in the hot air with the more numerous Lessers. We also found Richard's Pipits, Bronze-winged Jacanas, Garganey, Ruddy Shelduck, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, Striated Grassbirds, and a Large Cuckooshrike on its nest, adjacent to a road gang who downed tools to come and observe it - or us (probably the latter!) The last bird of the tour was a Japanese Sparrowhawk that showed nicely, perching on posts and zipping about over a roadside swamp.

We reached Guwahati airport, flew to Delhi and spent our last night drowning in the opulence of a very posh Delhi hotel. Then it was time to return home, bidding farewell to our fellow adventurers and travelling companions. This was certainly a trip that will remain in mind for a long time yet! This tour continues to provide the very best in Himalayan birding, combined as it is with the magic of this very special little country. I cannot recommend it highly enough!

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): One seen in Delhi at Lodi Gardens.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*: Plenty found along the rivers around Punakha, plus a single seen on the Paro river.

ARDEIDAE

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (I): A number were seen at both Sultanpur and en-route to Guwahati.

Great Egret *Egretta alba* (I): Seen at Sultanpur plus a single en-route to Guwahati.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia* (I): A few at Sultanpur.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (I): A couple at Sultanpur.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* (I): Some five at Sultanpur plus a single en-route to Guwahati.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus* (I): A handful at Sultanpur plus many more en-route to Guwahati.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii* (I): A couple at Sultanpur plus many more en-route to Guwahati.

CICONIIDAE

Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* (I): Good numbers en-route to Guwahati, with 40 or more seen.

Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* (I): An adult and two juveniles at Sultanpur.

Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* (I): At least 15 of these monsters seen en-route to Guwahati, with some 15 others not assigned to species.

Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius* (I): If the above is a monster, then this is a leviathan! We saw at least ten (if not more) en-route to Guwahati, with one individual trying to get airborne so low over our heads that the sky went dim!

THRESKIORNITHIDAE

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (I): A single seen at Sultanpur.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* (I): Six birds seen at Sultanpur.

DENDROCYGNIDAE

Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica* (I): Just three seen, on ponds en-route to Guwahati.

ANATIDAE

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* (I): Six near Guwahati airport were the only ones of the trip.

Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotus* (I): A good 20 or so of these at Sultanpur.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*: Three seen at Sultanpur, plus a single bird on the ponds at Thimphu sewage works.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* (I): Three birds at Sultanpur.

Indian Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* (I): A score at Sultanpur, this is split from the Chinese Spot-billed Duck *A. zonorhyncha*.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* (I): Some 150 birds at Sultanpur.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* (I): A splendid drake seen en-route to Guwahati.

Garganey *Anas querquedula* (I): Twenty or so seen at Sultanpur, plus another ten with the above en-route to Guwahati.

Common Teal *Anas crecca* (I): One solitary bird at Sultanpur.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*: A lonely female seen on the ponds at Thimphu sewage farm.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*: A rather out-of-place drake on the river at Punakha.

ACCIPITRIDAE

Oriental Honey-Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*: Singles were seen at Sultanpur and en-route to Guwahati, with several sightings of a couple of birds near Samdrup Jongkhar including one that was being persistently chased by a couple of bees!

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* (I): A few seen in Delhi, then plenty more in Assam, these birds refer to the race *govinda*.

Black-eared Kite *Milvus lineatus* (I): A single immature bird was identified near Guwahati airport.

Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*: One or maybe two splendid adult birds seen soaring along the valley at Punakha.

White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* (I): At least one if not more en-route to Guwahati.

Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris* (I): A flock of nine birds lifting off in the warm morning air was a fortunate sighting en-route to Guwahati.

Himalayan Vulture (H Griffon) *Gyps himalayensis*: Ones and twos seen on the Chele La, Pele La, Yutong La and en-route to the Thrumsing La.

Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*: A couple seen early on in the tour, then several seen around Deothang and Samdrup Jongkhar that offered splendid views. Another was seen en-route to Guwahati.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* (I): Singles seen at Sultanpur and en-route to Guwahati.

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*: Two were seen very well on the Lingmethang Road, one of which was displaying nicely overhead with fluffed out undertail feathers, then we had another three in the south-east of the country.

Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipter gularis* (I): A final identification conundrum and bit of excitement to keep us on our toes at the 'fat-lady-sings' point in the tour. A good look at one that perched on posts overlooking the marsh close to Guwahati airport.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: Often seen, particularly at higher altitudes where the race *melaschistos* is a breeding bird, though one large pale female may refer to the migrant northern form such as *nisosimilis*.

Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo burmanicus*: Several nice examples seen at Paro, Chele La and Sengor. I have never yet seen the Upland Buzzard in Bhutan, these *burmanicus* birds are similar in plumage yet so much smaller.

Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*: Frequently seen hunting over the forests or soaring about, from 3800+m down to the lowland border areas.

Rufous-bellied Eagle *Hieraaetus kienerii*: A late entrant, we had a good look at one that soared quite low over us near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis*: Several airborne birds were seen plus a couple of perched onesshowing off their crests. A typical sight over the middle-altitude forests.

PANDIONIDAE

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*: A single bird seen perched below Wangdi Dzong.

FALCONIDAE

- Pied Falconet *Microhierax melanoleucos*: Some sharp eyes picked out one perched on a snag high on a hill near Samdrup Jongkhar, unfortunately it didn't stay for long.
- Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Regularly seen in open country.
- Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: A total of seven seen on passage from west to east over the Samdrup Jongkhar foothills, plus another in Assam.
- Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*: Good views of one of the darker *peregrinator* race along the Mo Chu.

PHASIANIDAE

- Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* (H) (I): Heard at Sultanpur.
- Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* (I): Some half-a-dozen seen at Sultanpur.
- Common Hill-Partridge *Arborophila torqueola* (H): These Partridges seem to get harder to get close to these days, let alone see them! We made several attempts to see this in high forests along our way, though were never successful!
- Rufous-throated Hill-Partridge *Arborophila rufogularis* (H): Heard at mid-altitudes around Yongkola and Narphang La, however they were always distant.
- Chestnut-breasted Hill-Partridge *Arborophila mandelli* (H): Heard around Yongkola and in the south-east, although like the above were always distant and/or inaccessible.
- Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus*: Only encountered on the Chele La, where there were more than enough to keep us happy! Between us we saw some 35 birds!
- Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan satyra*: A fantastic view of male standing on the roadside and then lumbering off slowly through the undergrowth, near the Thrumsing La. My usual strategy for seeing this fellow was hampered somewhat by a high level of disturbance by road gangs and other birders! (Tsk, tsk!) We did however see a female briefly, along the higher section of the Lingmethang Road.
- Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*: Two psychedelic males and an *almost* demure female were seen around the Chele La, then quite surprisingly we saw another pair along the road near Jakar.
- Kaleej Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*: Four birds seen, starting with a great view of a male *melanota* bird near Thimphu, a couple more of these seen in the west, and then a good look at a male of the *lathamii* race near Tashigang.
- Grey Peacock-Pheasant *Polyplectron bicalcaratum*: Oh yes! Certainly the first time this has been seen on this tour, we managed to lure in a vocal male close to Deothang, he crept in unannounced and offered us a very close but brief look as he spotted us, panicked and then boosted himself off down the slope.

RALLIDAE

- Black-tailed Crake *Porzana bicolor*: An insignificant swamp near Paro hosted two birds marching about in the open at close range. We saw another one later on a small marsh near Tashigang.
- Grey-headed Swamphen *Porphyrio poliocephalus* (I): Four seen at Sultanpur plus a single seen en-route to Guwahati.
- Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* (I): Numerous at Sultanpur plus another seen en-route to Guwahati.
- Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* (I): A single at Sultanpur.

JACANIDAE

Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopodius indicus* (I): A couple of dozen of these seen in the swamps en-route to Guwahati.

CHARADRIIDAE

Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus* (I): Two noisy birds seen at Sultanpur.

River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii*: Our first encounter was perhaps the best, with a pair with chick on the river at Paro, with one of the adults doing a curious distraction display in mid-stream. We also found them around Thimphu and Punakha.

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* (I): Seen in good numbers at Sultanpur and en-route to Guwahati..

SCOLOPACIDAE

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*: A superb long look at a feeding bird near the Chele La.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* (I): Two seen at Sultanpur.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* (I): A single migrant at Sultanpur

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*: Two seen on the river near Punakha.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* (I): 15 or more seen at Sultanpur, plus another four en-route to Guwahati.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: A total of four seen along the Thimphu and Punakha rivers.

RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*: At Paro we saw just one, which showed very well down to 15m, pretending to be a boulder! Disturbance to the riverine habitat here has increased dramatically in the last couple of years, but the rivers round Punakha were better and we saw three there.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (I): Numerous at Sultanpur with 30 seen.

GLAREOLIDAE

Indian Courser *Cursorius coromandelica* (I): The big bonus of our stay in Delhi, we had some very nice views of four scuttling about on the 'flats' at Sultanpur

COLUMBIDAE

Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*: The early spring and warm weather in west and central Bhutan meant most of these had already left to go higher, but we had a superb look at one feeding in a field at Ura with three others overhead.

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*: Commonly available.

Speckled Woodpigeon *Columba hodgsonii*: We started with a glimpse of two near Sengor, six showed better near Yongkola, then finally we enjoyed good looks at 30 on the Kori La, dispersed only when a Mountain Hawk Eagle made an inept power dive into the middle of them!

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

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* (I): A few were seen at Sultanpur.

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

Red Collared-Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*: A single male hanging out with Green Pigeons near Samdrup Jongkhar was a 'Bhutan tick' for the leader. Others were seen at Sultanpur and in Assam.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* (I): A few were seen at Sultanpur.

Barred Cuckoo-Dove *Macropygia unchall*: Three were seen along the Mo Chu at Punakha, then a couple more in the Deothang area.

Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*: One was seen at 1650m near Yongkola, surprisingly, then a couple more at a more typical altitude near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon *Treron phoenicopterus* (I): At least fifteen seen at Sultanpur.

Thick-billed Green Pigeon *Treron curvirostra*: Numerous around a fruiting tree near Samdrup Jongkhar, we counted at least 15 one day.

Pin-tailed Green Pigeon *Treron apicauda*: A good half-dozen seen on two days around Samdrup Jongkhar, pumping their sting-like tails.

Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon *Treron sphenurus*: A great roadside view of our first near Punakha, six near Tashigang and then a flock of 15 near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Mountain Imperial Pigeon *Ducula badia*: In good numbers around Samdrup Jongkhar and above Deothang, most were flying purposefully to somewhere unknown.

PSITTACIDAE

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* (I): Plentiful in Delhi, one seen near Guwahati.

CUCULIDAE

Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* (I): One seen at Sultanpur.

Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*: Seen twice in Bhutan, once near Wangdi and then again in a grassy area near to Tashigang.

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

Chestnut-winged Cuckoo *Clamator coromandus* (H): Heard calling distantly near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Asian Koel *Eudynamis scolopaceus*: This got on to our Bhutan list by virtue of a male heard at the Samdrup Jongkhar border post, then a pair were seen in Assam.

Asian Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx maculatus*: A total of four males were seen at various points along our route, mostly doing their territorial flights, but a couple of perched birds offered some quick views in the scope.

Violet Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus*: Twice we saw this flying over high near Samdrup Jongkhar, calling but never perching.

Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonneratii*: (H): A distant sound below Deothang.

Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis merulinus* (H): Another distant heard-only, from 'windy ridge'.

Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus*: A great view of one near Deothang, singing well. This is the far north-east of their range, and it overlaps here with the above species.

Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris*: Frequently heard at lower altitudes, we saw our first on a wet morning at Yongkola, and another near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Large Hawk-Cuckoo *Hierococcyx sparverioides*: Common, noisy, yet just a handful seen. Our first was in the rain at Yongkola, then we saw another three in the south-east.

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

Whistling Hawk-Cuckoo (Hodgson's H-C) *Hierococcyx nisicolor*: Several were heard along our route in warm broadleaved forest, and one was lured in near Tongsa and gave a good flight view as it cruised overhead (Is that it!?)

Small Cuckoo (Lesser C) *Cuculus poliocephalus*: Surprisingly never heard, but we saw a perched bird by the roadside as we travelled south from Tashigang.

Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus* (H): Vocal but distant at Yongkola and Samdrup Jongkhar.

Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus*: Commonly heard with just two examples seen.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: We heard plenty but the only area we saw it was between Tashigang and 'windy ridge' where we saw three.

STRIGIDAE

Mountain Scops-Owl *Otus spilocephalus* (H): This elusive devil was only ever heard distantly, at Tongsa, Yongkola and from 'windy ridge'.

Tawny Fish-Owl *Ketupa flavipes*: At Punakha we enjoyed superb views in the half-light of dawn of a huge adult perched on a roadside stump, with a return to the site later in the day that revealed two adults and a big ginger juvenile at their roost. Just the fourth time we have seen this in ten years!

Himalayan Wood Owl *Strix nivicola* (H): A distant calling bird near Sengor could not be lured closer.

Collared Owlet *Glaucidium brodiei*: Several were heard, and then we found one calling away, perched on a naked snag in broad daylight on the Lingmethang Road. Only the second time that we have seen this species on this tour!

Asian Barred Owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides*: Heard frequently, such as around our camp at Yongkola where one was seen poorly, but we had already enjoyed a good view of one in the daytime along the Mo Chu at Punakha.

CAPRIMULGIDAE

Grey Nightjar *Caprimulgus jotaka* (H): Heard frequently, usually distantly from our various night stops, though a closer calling bird at Sengor could not be lured into view.

APODIDAE

Himalayan Swiftlet *Aerodramus brevirostris*: Seen regularly over middle altitude forests.

White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*: A dozen were seen near the Dochu La, though never showing as well as the horde that performed below Yongkola, where up to 80 birds came down to eye-level to give us a fantastic eyeball-searing show. Also seen on several occasions around Samdrup Jongkhar.

Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus balasienis*: Not uncommon around Samdrup Jongkhar where we saw their strange little nests in the palm trees. Also seen en-route to Guwahati.

Pacific Swift (Fork-tailed S) *Apus pacificus*: Frequently seen, closest views were of vocal birds around suitable nesting crags and road cuttings.

Dark-rumped Swift *Apus acuticauda*: Our first contact was with some birds calling noisily from within their nest cliff near Samdrup Jongkhar, but we only saw a couple of birds briefly after that. A restricted range species and subcontinent breeding endemic, the only sites for it are here and at Cherrapunjee in Meghalaya.

Little Swift *Apus affinis*: Frequently seen in the Samdrup Jongkhar area, with a few more seen in Assam.

TROGONIDAE

Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi*: A glorious forest sprite that typifies this tour in many ways. With increased disturbance along the roads, they become harder to find each year. A very vocal and excited female near the Pele La would not come up to the road, so we had to 'down-slope' our way in to find her, rewarded eventually with lengthy prolonged views. Others were heard on the Lingmethang Road and on the Kori La, but always remained invisible.

ALCEDINIDAE

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: A couple were seen along the river near Samdrup Jongkhar.

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*: At lower altitudes these started to appear regularly, also seen in Assam and at Sultanpur.

Himalayan Pied Kingfisher (Crested K) *Ceryle lugubris*: Quite a few seen on this tour, with our first showing nicely along the Po Chu and Mo Chu rivers, then later on close to Samdrup Jongkhar.

MEROPIDAE

Blue-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctyornis athertoni*: One was seen near Yongkola, uttering his harsh guttural chatter but never staying still for long.

Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* (I): A good number were present at Sultanpur.

Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus* (I): Three birds seen around the marsh near Guwahati airport.

CORACIIDAE

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*: A single bird seen en-route to Guwahati. This form is sometimes referred to as 'Black-billed Roller', *C. b. affinis*, (which ranges across south-east Asia) as distinct from the *C. b. benghalensis* group of the subcontinent.

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*: At least two seen, perched up on the top of snags in the forest near Samdrup Jongkhar.

UPUPIDAE

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: A handful seen at Sultanpur, and in the west of Bhutan at various points.

BUCEROTIDAE

Great Pied Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*: Seen well near Samdrup Jongkhar, with one seen on one day and four on another.

Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*: Our first views were laughable, with large shapes in the fog on the Lingmethang Road. This was all forgotten with many birds seen very well between Narphang and Deothang, with some nice examples of pair bonds and a variety of casque stripes.

Wreathed Hornbill *Aceros undulatus*: Several seen cruising around the ridges above Samdrup Jongkhar, with some great views acquired.

CAPITONIDAE

Great Barbet *Megalaima virens*: Heard and seen frequently in the lower altitude warm broadleaved forests, particularly visible in the south-east

Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica* (I): A couple were seen at Sultanpur.

Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata* (H) (I): A heard-only along the Assamese roadside.

Golden-throated Barbet *Megalaima franklinii*: A scattering of sightings along our route, at lower-middle altitudes where they were often heard.

Blue-throated Barbet *Megalaima asiatica*: These monotonous fellows kept up their hypnotic beats at low altitudes around Samdrup Jongkhar. Plenty were seen plus a couple of nest holes found.

Blue-eared Barbet *Megalaima australis*: A good look at one very vocal bird near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala* (I): Heard only at Sultanpur, and seen from the Taj Palace Hotel.

INDICATORIDAE

Yellow-rumped Honeyguide *Indicator xanthonotus*: Singles were seen at two roadside sites where Giant Rock Bees had their hives on the rock faces of the cuttings. Our second was remarkably active for this species, flying around calling from tree to tree.

PICIDAE

Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus*: Several sightings around Samdrup Jongkhar probably referred to the same family. We watched a pair feeding a fledged youngster that had circular white spots on the upperparts.

Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos macei*: A good look at a female by the roadside near Deothang. Another was seen en-route to Guwahati.

Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos mahrattensis* (I): A single bird seen at Sultanpur.

Crimson-breasted Pied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos cathpharius*: Our first view was a very brief one near Nobding, then we had full satisfaction at Yongkola with a pair that were feeding low down, keeping company with Barwings and Parrotbills!

Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Hypopicus hyperythrus*: A vocal pair gave us a good look on the Dochu La, then another male was seen well near Sengor.

Rufous Woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus* (H): A couple of birds were heard near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Lesser Yellownappe *Picus chlorolophus*: A total of three birds were seen along roadsides between Tashigang and Samdrup Jongkhar.

Greater Yellownappe *Picus flavinucha*: A pair seen along the Mo Chu, then another pair on the Lingmethang Road.

Grey-faced Woodpecker (Grey-headed W) *Picus canus*: Regularly heard, we had a good look at a pair near Yongkola in the rain.

Black-rumped Flameback *Dinopium benghalense* (I): One seen at Sultanpur.

Bay Woodpecker *Blythipicus pyrrhotis*: Normally a real sneak, with its maniacal cry, we actually saw seven different birds along our route with some good views acquired.

EURYLAMIDAE

Long-tailed Broadbill *Psarisomus dalhousiae* (H): A distant bird heard calling near Samdrup Jongkhar.

PITTIDAE

Blue-naped Pitta *Pitta nipalensis* (H): Well we gave it a good try! A vocal bird near Deothang did not respond to luring, in spite of our efforts at getting down into his home gully!

Hooded Pitta *Pitta sordida* (H): One heard calling from an inaccessible jungle slope near Samdrup Jongkhar.

ALAUDIDAE

Indian Bushlark *Mirafra erythroptera* (I): A nice bonus of our trip to Sultanpur, we had good views of one feeding in short grass

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* (I): Three seen at Sultanpur.

HIRUNDINIDAE

Pale Sand Martin *Riparia diluta*: A flock of 15 migrants were seen over the river at Punakha.

Grey-throated Sand Martin *Riparia chinensis* (I): A single seen at Sultanpur. This is split in the 'Birds of South Asia - The Ripley Guide', from the Brown-throated Sand Martin *R. paludicola* of Africa.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: Some five or so over the river at Punakha, a handful at Tashigang and more en-route to Guwahati.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*: Six were seen from our hotel in Tashigang (thanks to a slow breakfast!), plus three at Sultanpur and one in Assam.

Streak-throated Swallow *Hirundo fluvicola* (I): At least six of these subcontinent endemics seen at Sultanpur.

Nepal House-Martin *Delichon nipalense*: We encountered three separate flocks, near Tongsa, Mongar and along the Lingmethang Road where we enjoyed the action around a nest cliff.

Asian House-Martin *Delichon dasypus*: Three were seen on the way to Thimphu, plus another five were seen near Ura.

MOTACILLIDAE

Himalayan Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] alboides*: The default 'White' Wagtail along the big rivers, although we only saw them in the west.

Amur Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] leucopsis*: One was seen along the river at Punakha.

Baikal Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] baicalensis*: Two were present with the more regular Himalayans along the river at Paro.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*: A shining male of the nominate race was by the river at Samdrup Jongkhar, plus another was seen near Guwahati. A scarce passage migrant in Bhutan.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: Four were seen, all in the south-east. These Himalayan birds have a green-tinged back.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi* (I): Three seen flying and calling, en-route to Guwahati.

Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus* (I): Two at Sultanpur.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*: Regularly encountered, with some birds singing on territory at the highest altitudes, while others dallied as low as 400m.

Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseatus*: Some nice views of two along the Paro river, both in breeding pinks. A couple were also seen near Guwahati.

CAMPEPHAGIDAE

Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei* (I): A pair had a roadside nest en-route to Guwahati that sparked not only our interest, but also that of an entire road gang that came to study both us and the bird, (though mostly the former!)

Black-winged Cuckooshrike *Coracina melaschistos*: Not uncommon in the warm broadleaved forests, with odd singles and pairs seen along our route.

Grey-chinned Minivet *Pericrocotus solaris*: Rather few seen, with pairs seen near Nobding, on the Lingmethang Road and above Deothang.

Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*: Favouring higher altitudes and poorer habitats than the others, we saw a few along the way.

Short-billed Minivet *Pericrocotus brevirostris*: This was actually the most frequently seen Minivet, in the mid-altitude warm broad-leaved forests.

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.

Large Woodshrike *Tephrodornis gularis*: Three birds seen on two days around Samdrup Jongkhar.

Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus* (I): Three birds seen at Sultanpur.

MONARCHIDAE

Black-naped Blue Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*: Two were seen near Samdrup Jongkhar, at very low altitudes.

RHIPIDURIDAE

White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis*: Often seen in broad-leaved forest, and quite an obvious one as he waves at you all the time!

Yellow-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hypoxantha*: Odd ones seen, mostly at higher altitudes such as around Sengor.

PYCNONOTIDAE

Striated Bulbul *Pycnonotus striatus*: Seen on most days on the Lingmethang Road in middle altitude forests, and also in the south-east around Deothang.

Black-crested Bulbul *Pycnonotus flaviventris*: Fairly numerous in the forest near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*: A handful seen in the Samdrup Jongkhar area.

Himalayan Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*: Only seen on the dry hillsides around Tashigang, it's favoured habitat.

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*: Commonly available around cultivation and forest edges at lower altitudes.

White-throated Bulbul *Alophoixus flaveolus*: A handful were seen near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala*: Just a small number were seen around Samdrup Jongkhar.

Mountain Bulbul *Hypsipetes mcclllandii*: These handsome fellows were first seen along the Mo Chu at Punakha, then more were seen around Deothang.

Himalayan Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*: Seen throughout except at the highest altitudes and in the best forest.

AEGITHINIDAE

Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*: At least three seen on our last day around Samdrup Jongkhar.

CHLOROPSEIDAE

Gold-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons*: Two or three seen in the lowlands around Samdrup Jongkhar.

Orange-bellied Leafbird *Chloropsis hardwickii*: Seen fairly commonly in lower-middle altitude forests, particularly in the south-east.

LANIIDAE

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* (I): A single seen en-route to Guwahati.

Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus* (I): Two seen at Sultanpur.

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 fairly open country, at a variety of altitudes although they breed higher up.

CINCLIDAE

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii*: Regularly found on larger rivers along our route, right down to 300m at Samdrup Jongkhar. We saw six on one river on the Yutong La, a family including three pallid juveniles.

PRUNELLIDAE

Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophiiata*: Surprisingly few this year, we saw them mostly at higher altitudes. Many had probably already gone up higher to breed.

TURDIDAE

Plain-backed Thrush *Zoothera mollissima*: A single bird was seen, hopping on the roadside near Tongsa, giving us all a great view.

Long-billed Ground Thrush *Zoothera monticola*: Rarely seen on this tour, we had absolutely brilliant views on the roadside near Tongsa, where an unconcerned bird fed in the roadside guttering, occasionally scuttling Crake-like across the tarmac to the far side. Also heard singing by our Sengor camp.

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

Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus bouboul*: Seeming to favour degraded forest, our first were along the road to Nobding, then we had repeated looks at them on the Kori La and along the road to Deothang.

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

MUSCICAPIDAE

Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*: A total of eight of these newly-arrived migrants were seen, favouring middle elevation broad-leaved forest edges.

Ferruginous Flycatcher *Muscicapa ferruginea*: A single bird was seen well along the Mo Chu at Punakha. A summer visitor, usually arriving in the last third of April.

Slaty-backed Flycatcher *Ficedula hodgsonii*: A female was the only one seen, at the roadside near Yongkola village.

Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophiiata*: Numerous at higher altitudes such as on the high passes.

Red-throated Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla*: Three singles were seen in the south-east of Bhutan.

White-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula monileger*: After a couple of attempts, this vocal songster decided to jump out and give us visual satisfaction, along the Lingmethang Road.

Snowy-browed Flycatcher *Ficedula hyperythra*: A vocal male was lurking around our lunch stop below the Dochu La.

Little Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula westermanni*: Many were heard, we managed to see a couple along the lower Lingmethang Road, and then several were seen more easily in the Deothang area.

Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris*: Our first were seen in the cherry trees below the Dochu La, then we found others near Nobding and along the Lingmethang Road.

Slaty-blue Flycatcher *Ficedula tricolor*: Several seen in the Sengor area, they breed at these higher altitudes.

Sapphire Flycatcher *Ficedula sapphira*: A pair seen well around a very lively corner on the Lingmethang Road.

Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassinus*: Common and visible in many of the forests.

Large Niltava *Niltava grandis*: Heard frequently, although the only ones we actually saw were two in the middle altitude forests below the Dochu La.

Small Niltava *Niltava macgrigoriae*: Very common and visible along the Mo Chu, then they more or less dried up, with others heard on the Lingmethang and Deothang Roads.

Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara*: Our first was a male near the Dochu La, then others were seen along the Lingmethang Road, usually crossing it with a flash of blue.

Pale Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis unicolor*: A single songster was found in the rain near Yongkola, another was heard near Deothang..

Blue-throated Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides*: Our first was a splendid male at the roadside near Tashigang, then we saw a pair as we travelled south from there.

Pygmy Blue Flycatcher *Muscicapella hodgsoni*: Our only contact was a splendid male at close range on the Lingmethang Road, after the rain had stopped!

Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*: Frequently encountered along our route, particularly at lower and middle altitudes.

Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush *Monticola rufiventris*: Frequently seen, making the most of the road-cuttings such as below Sengor, where they were very visible.

Blue-headed Rock-Thrush (B-capped R T) *Monticola cinclorhynchus*: Very visible along the roadsides, similar to the above, but at warmer lower altitudes. This is a summer visitor that winters to Southern India.

Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius*: Singles were seen at Tashigang and near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Lesser Shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophrys*: A very sneaky bird, we began with views of a shadow near Punakha, then had a better glimpse along the Lingmethang Road. Often heard singing sweetly, and even seen buzzing across roads on a couple of occasions.

White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana*: Quite a few were heard on our trip, at higher altitudes than the above, and we managed to lure one in near Sengor and managed some views as he went around us (why do they always go behind?!)

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* (I): A single bird showed nicely at Sultanpur.

Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea*: A male sat out in the open at the roadside near Tashigang.

Himalayan Red-flanked Bush-Robin *Tarsiger rufilatus*: Seen well on the Chele La, then more numerous on the Ura-Sheltang La.

Golden Bush-Robin *Tarsiger chrysaeus*: A good tour for these, we saw eight individuals, with some fantastic males showing well around the Thrumsing La.

White-browed Bush-Robin *Tarsiger indicus*: A total of three were seen between the Thrumsing La and Sengor.

Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*: Regularly seen, at lower altitudes, around cultivation, and commonly in the Samdrup Jongkhar area.

White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus* (H): A couple of birds near Samdrup Jongkhar were heard singing sweetly.

Indian Black Robin *Saxicoloides fulicatus* (I): Fairly numerous and visible at Sultanpur.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochrurus* (I): A single female was seen at Sultanpur

Hodgson's Redstart *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*: A few of these winter visitors were seen at Paro, Chele La and en-route to Thimphu.

- Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis*: Several seen and heard singing on the Chele La, odd singles noted around the high passes along our route, plus a very low female was seen near Deothang.
- White-capped River-Chat (W-c Water Redstart) *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*: A common sight along our route.
- Plumbeous Water-Redstart (P Redstart) *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*: Seen throughout in suitable habitats.
- White-tailed Blue Robin (W-t Robin) *Myiomela leucura* (H): Several attempts to lure these out were met with disdain by the songsters!
- Blue-fronted Blue Robin (B-f Robin) *Cinclidium frontale*: Remarkably, a rather hopeful luring from the road at Yongkola actually brought the bird into view just for a brief moment before it went back to being enigmatic.
- Little Forktail *Enicurus scouleri*: A good haul of these this year, with our first seen en-route to Tongsa, then two different pairs seen along the Lingmethang Road where they favour steep waterfalls and raging rivers.
- Black-backed Forktail *Enicurus immaculatus*: Rather numerous near Samdrup Jongkhar, in spite of being rather shy we had multiple views, including seeing a fledged youngster being fed by the parents.
- Spotted Forktail *Enicurus maculatus*: Perhaps the finest of the genus, we found three on the road close to Tongsa where they showed well before disappearing off into the forest.
- Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maura*: Odd ones seen around cultivation along our route, and they were very common at Sultanpur.
- Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata* (I): A couple seen at Sultanpur.
- Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferreus*: Available in marginal habitats, distressingly common along the cleared road edges in the south-east.

TIMALIIDAE

- White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis*: Frequently encountered at middle to higher altitudes, with our first group below the Dochu La making a nice introduction. Our largest flock was 30+, and these 'Popinjays' are a regular companion on this tour.
- White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus*: Our first group was seen near Yongkola village, then another small group was seen near Tashigang. Others were heard cackling away remorselessly, as they do!
- Striated Laughingthrush *Grammatoptila striata*: Noisy and visible in the forest at middle altitudes, always with the floppy crest!
- Rufous-necked Laughingthrush *Dryonastes ruficollis*: A handsome group of eight showed well near Yongkola, and a couple more were seen near Deothang.
- Grey-sided Laughingthrush *Dryonastes caerulatus*: Our first was a lone bird singing a piping song in the bamboo on the Lingmethang Road, then on subsequent days there we saw at least five more, coming onto the roadsides to feed, which was nice as they are often very skulking.
- Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla rufogularis*: Terribly skulking and hard to see, yet one emerged at the edge of a field at Yongkola and posed in the scope for several minutes. At least until I touched my camera!
- Spotted Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla ocellata*: Always a joy to behold, and a loud sweet song to match. Our first two were on the Chele La, feeding under bushes, then at least three were with us on the Ura-Sheltang La, one of which popped up into view nicely. Also heard at 2500m near Tashigang.

- Bhutan Laughingthrush (Streaked L) *Trochalopteron imbricatum*: Our first was at 2000m below Nobding, then we found them with increasing regularity, with a few on the Lingmethang Road and Kori La and then commonly along the cut-over roadsides above Deothang. This taxon ranges from Bhutan *just* into adjacent west Arunachal and *just* into south-east Tibet, so is *almost* endemic to the country.
- Blue-winged Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron squamatum*: Surely the hardest of the group to see – or perhaps not any more! Our first views were the best, with two birds feeding in a fruiting bush near Yongkola, showing all their rich plumage tones to us, then others were seen skipping across the road or buzzing through the bushes. Also heard in the south-east.
- Scaly Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron subunicolor*: Great views of five birds that came up to the road, posed on the wall and hopped across the Lingmethang Road! Another gorgeous one.
- Black-faced Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron affine*: The highest altitude Laughingthrush, we saw several around the high passes, and even from our breakfast table at Sengor.
- Red-headed Laughingthrush (Chestnut-crowned L) *Trochalopteron erythrocephalum*: Numerous examples were seen at higher to middle altitudes between Nobding in the west and the Yonphu La in the east, often in small flocks hopping down the verge. 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*: Some great views of a pair of these fantastic creatures, feeding in the same bush as Blue-winged Laughingthrush! Another two or three were seen around Yongkola, then another near Deothang. They don’t respond to the song of birds from northern Thailand and eastern Burma, and not surprisingly the ‘old’ Red-faced Liocichla has very recently been split into two, this one retaining the name *L. phoenicea*, and the one in northern Thailand is now called Scarlet-faced Liocichla *L. ripponi*.
- Cutia *Cutia nipalensis*: Our first was a vocal male on the Lingmethang Road that took ages to locate, then we had a splendid flock of nine of these little tigers on our last morning there, followed by another two near Deothang.
- Puff-throated Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps* (H): Several heard calling from thickets around Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrogenys*: A good look at one near Punakha, our only sighting though others were heard along the way.
- White-browed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus schisticeps*: Two birds posed well for us in the forest near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ruficollis*: Several seen along the way, with a superb performance from a pair on the Yonphu La that were eyeballing us from close range!
- Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ferruginosus*: Some brilliant views of three birds following a flock of Parrotbills and Barwings at Yongkola, then a flock of a dozen was seen at Deothang. These stunning birds are of the distinctively black-crowned nominate race.
- Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler *Xiphirhynchus superciliaris*: The words ‘eyeball-searing’ spring to mind when describing our views of these. An initially elusive and uncooperative pair on the bamboo-clad Yutong La eventually decided that ‘close-views-of-humans’ were in order and came to investigate. Our joint-third best ‘Bird of the Trip’.
- Long-billed Wren-Babbler *Rimator malocoptilus*: Only five years since this was discovered in a small area of the Lingmethang Road, and this year we had to contend with two other groups standing around the same corner trying to see the same bird! An initial foray to try and see a calling bird resulted in only a couple of shadows being sighted, the following day we

had second go for another bird that was already wary, yet it did jump out for a couple of seconds so some of us managed to see it.

Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga albiventer*: If only they were all this easy! We only saw one, but after some superb views of a very white bellied individual on the Yutong La, we didn't try for any others.

Pygmy Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga pusilla*: A view, mainly from below, was acquired on the Lingmethang Road in between rain showers!

Rufous-throated Wren-Babbler *Spelaeornis caudatus*: A pitiful view of a non-cooperative example at Yongkola was soon forgotten when we got one to perform for us in the hills above Deothang. This ranges from east Nepal to Arunachal.

Bar-winged Wren Babbler *Spelaeornis troglodytoides*: Traditionally a bit of a bogey for the leader, it's distant song drew us up a steep slope near Sengor where we had a great performance by this fat little fellow, all white-spotted with a chestnut belly. A pair were present, presumably the male was doing all the talking.

Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler *Sphenocichla humei* (H): We missed it this year, but let's not forget how rare and skulking this is! A call was heard at the roadside near Yongkola, and probably another was heard singing near our camp. Roadside habitat near Deothang (where I found it in 2000) had been substantially 'modified' so we couldn't find it there either.

Spotted Wren-Babbler *Spelaeornis formosus*: We had a great look at one pumping out his ludicrously loud techno rhythms along the Mo Chu near Punakha. Others were heard along the way, and a singing bird near Deothang was glimpsed.

Rufous-capped Babbler *Stachyris ruficeps*: A few were seen along the way, most numerous at middle altitudes on the Lingmethang Road, before it started raining that is!

Golden Babbler *Stachyris chrysaea*: A handful seen, along the Mo Chu and Lingmethang Road.

Grey-throated Babbler *Stachyris nigriceps*: A fleeting look near Yongkola, then a better encounter near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Striped Tit-Babbler *Macronous gularis*: Several heard chuntering away near Samdrup Jongkhar, we had a good look at a couple there.

Large Grey Babbler *Turdoides malcolmi* (I): Some eight birds were seen at Sultanpur.

Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striata* (I): Just five seen at Sultanpur.

Silver-eared Mesia *Leiothrix argentauris*: Once we had seen our first ones near Deothang, they proved to be quite common and rather noisy in that area.

Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea*: Always a skulker, we saw one briefly on the Lingmethang Road, then had a good view of one perched out near Tashigang.

Rusty-fronted Barwing *Actinodura egertoni*: Our first ones appeared at 2500m on the Lingmethang Road, then as we dropped lower they became more common, with a gang of 40 in a flock with Parrotbills and Scimitar Babblers being most memorable. We said farewell to them at Deothang at around 900m.

Hoary-throated Barwing *Actinodura nipalensis*: Four were seen on the Dochu La where they were mobbing an imaginary Collared Owlet, then we saw another three while standing in the forest near Sengor, waiting for Hill Partridge that never showed.

Blue-winged Minla *Minla cyanouroptera*: Miscellaneous sightings along the Lingmethang Road, also near Punakha and above Deothang, usually in a mixed flock.

Bar-throated Minla (Chestnut-tailed M) *Minla strigula*: Seen fairly often at higher altitudes on the Lingmethang Road, also on some of the high passes.

Red-tailed Minla *Minla ignotincta*: Only seen on two dates, a five and a six in mixed flocks in the forests below Sengor.

- Golden-breasted Fulvetta *Alcippe chrysotis*: A personal favourite, we had an early strike with a pair in the bamboo below the Dochu La, then below Sengor we saw at least 20 birds scattered among different mixed flocks.
- Yellow-throated Fulvetta *Alcippe cinerea*: Not uncommon along the roadsides of Lingmethang Road between 2500m and 1800m, we also saw it at similar altitudes above Deothang.
- Rufous-winged Fulvetta *Alcippe castaneiceps*: First encountered on the Dochu La, more numerous on the Lingmethang Road and then a few were seen on the Kori and Yonphu Las.
- White-browed Fulvetta *Alcippe vinipectus*: The default small babbler at high altitudes, we saw plenty on the high passes but no lower than 2800m.
- Nepal Fulvetta *Alcippe nipalensis*: A few seen on the Mo Chu, a few more at lower altitudes on the Lingmethang Road and a single near Deothang. Always rather furtive!
- Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata*: A common sight and sound in the Bhutanese forests.
- Long-tailed Sibia *Heterophasia picaoides*: Some exciting noisy flocks seen on three days around Deothang, with up to 12 birds per group.
- Striated Yuhina *Staphida castaniceps*: Two birds seen briefly at our final lunch near Deothang.
- White-naped Yuhina *Yuhina bakeri*: As we were dreaming of a 'Yuhina Bakery,' selling sticky cakes to offset the misery of continual rain, we found these on the Lingmethang Road. Initially just the one, then four on another day, and then two more small flocks were seen in the Deothang area. A portly and dapper little fellow.
- Whiskered Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*: Common throughout the middle altitude forests, particularly along the Lingmethang Road.
- Stripe-throated Yuhina *Yuhina gularis*: We only really found these in any number near Sengor, with odd birds seen on the Pele La and Yonphu La.
- Rufous-vented Yuhina *Yuhina occipitalis*: Fairly prominent at higher altitudes and on the high passes, this year much commoner than the previous species.
- Black-chinned Yuhina *Yuhina nigrimenta*: Surprisingly, only two seen on the whole tour that were brief in their appearance, along the Mo Chu at Punakha.
- Great Parrotbill *Conostoma oemodium*: A vocal bird on the Yutong La didn't really want to show himself, but we managed to get some fairly close views.
- Brown Parrotbill *Paradoxornis unicolor*: A dense patch of bamboo on our way to Jakar yielded as many of eight of these handsome birds, demure yet full of character!
- Fulvous Parrotbill *Paradoxornis fulvifrons*: The highlight of a productive morning on the Dochu La, with 20+ of these little bamboo buzzballs zipping about in view for several minutes.
- Black-throated Parrotbill *Paradoxornis nipalensis*: A small party of four with a mixed flock showed themselves briefly in the bamboo on the Lingmethang Road.
- Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis ruficeps*: Our first contact with a handful of birds in a mixed flock on the Lingmethang Road snowballed into at least 20 individuals, being very confiding and vocal as they followed the Rusty-fronted Barwings.
- Black-headed Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius rufiventer*: A splendid male sang loudly from a Lingmethang Road-side tree, zipping about and showing off his fine colours. A female was seen close by, and we heard another three along our route.
- White-browed Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapis*: Some five birds seen well on the Lingmethang Road. Often very vocal, we heard them at several points along our route.
- Green Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius xanthochlorus*: Favouring the higher altitudes, we saw just two in the forest near Sengor.
- Black-eared Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius melanotis*: Three different birds seen, all in the mid-altitude forests along the Lingmethang Road, and all singing loudly.

CISTICOLIDAE

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* (I): Three seen at Sultanpur, then a couple more en-route through Assam.

Striated Prinia *Prinia crinigera*: One of the drabbest birds of the tour, we saw a single at Wangdi and another at Tashigang.

Black-throated Prinia *Prinia atrogularis*: A single was seen near Nobding, another by our Yongkola camp, and then several more seen in the Deothang area.

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

Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis* (I): One seen at Sultanpur.

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata* (I): A couple seen at Sultanpur, also heard near Guwahati.

Mountain Tailorbird *Orthotomus cuculatus*: A single bird was seen well along the Lingmethang Road.

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*: Noted at low altitudes at Yongkola, Samdrup Jongkhar and in India.

SYLVIIDAE

Chestnut-headed Tesia *Tesia castaneocoronata*: Several were heard in the Sengor area, seen after repeated attempts. I think most of us got a look!

Slaty-bellied Tesia *Tesia olivia*: A very vocal yet elusive fellow, fortunately the first time we tried to see one along the Mo Chu, we spotted him sat on his song perch inside a bush.

Yellow-browed Tesia (Grey-bellied T) *Tesia cyaniventer*: Something of a good view of one that approached quite closely as we stood on the road near Nobding, repeatedly hopping back and forth. Numerous others were heard along our route, singing their throaty song.

Grey-sided Bush-Warbler *Cettia brunnifrons*: A total of five birds seen, from the high altitudes where they were on territory, to much lower down where they had yet to ascend.

Strong-footed Bush-Warbler (Brownish-flanked B-W) *Cettia fortipes*: Not uncommon and heard often around scrappy habitat, our first of three was seen between the Pele La and Tongsa.

Hume's Bush-Warbler (Yellowish-bellied B-W) *Cettia brunnescens*: This one gave itself up fairly easily, with at least three birds seen, on the Pele La and Yutong La.

Russet Bush-Warbler *Bradypterus mandelli*: One heard singing near Nobding surprised us by appearing in a rather bare bush above us where it sat for a while. The first scope view I've ever had of this species, and it's only the third time this has actually been seen on this tour!

Thick-billed Warbler *Acrocephalus aedon*: A scarce bird in Bhutan and a Bhutan-tick for the leader, we watched one at the roadside near Wangdi. Possibly the fifth record for the country.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*: Er, how to explain... Well basically it's a first for both Bhutan and the Indian subcontinent! On our first day in Bhutan, a walk close to our hotel in the late afternoon revealed a Warbler that showed all the characters and features of this European/African bird. A good study was made, notes taken and a playback test with the song of Wood Warbler made it look very excited for a moment, otherwise it was rather sluggish compared with the observers!

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*: A brief look at one in the same patch of sage as the Thick-billed Warbler at Wangdi. Also heard in en-route in Assam.

Tickell's Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus affinis*: Odd migrants encountered along our route, all heading for the alpine zone.

- Orange-barred Leaf-Warbler (Buff-barred W) *Phylloscopus pulcher*: Only found on two days, with several seen at the higher elevations between Jakar and the Sengor area.
- Grey-faced Leaf-Warbler (Ashy-throated W) *Phylloscopus maculipennis*: Like the above, mainly in the higher forests with our first seen on the Dochu La, then more seen in the Sengor area.
- Lemon-rumped Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus chloronotus*: One seen along the Mo Chu, then more regularly at higher elevations such as the Yutong La and the forests around Sengor.
- Large-billed Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris*: Just a couple seen, one near Tongsa and another near Tashigang. A summer visitor that winters in Sri Lanka and South India.
- Blyth's Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus reguloides*: Frequently seen at middle and higher altitudes.
- Yellow-vented Warbler *Phylloscopus cantator*: Very noticeable when in full voice, we found these commonly along the Mo Chu, and then another performed nicely on our last afternoon near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Grey-hooded Warbler *Phylloscopus xanthoschistos*: Usually a common bird in the lower altitude forests, we only actually saw three, though more often heard than seen.
- Green-crowned Warbler (Golden-spectacled W) *Seicercus burkii*: A couple seen singing well near Nobding, a couple near Tongsa and a single along the Lingmethang Road. Typically encountered around 1800-2200m, it sings with a sweeter voice 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*, Omei *S. omeiensis*, Bianchi's *S. valentini*, Whistler's *S. whistleri* and Green-crowned Warbler *S. burkii*.)
- Whistler's Warbler *Seicercus whistleri*: The simple languid song of this bird was often heard in the higher forests where it was not uncommon, typically breeding above 2800m.
- White-spectacled Warbler *Seicercus affinis*: A single songster in good voice was seen well along the Lingmethang Road, in a typical bamboo-rich habitat.
- Grey-cheeked Warbler *Seicercus poliogenys*: These were evident and fairly common once we dropped lower on the Lingmethang Road, and not dissimilar to the above! Another was seen near Deothang.
- Chestnut-crowned Warbler *Seicercus castaniceps*: Frequently encountered in birdflocks in the middle altitude forests, particularly along the Lingmethang Road.
- Broad-billed Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni*: One performed well at the roadside close to Tongsa, and another was seen in the middle levels of the Lingmethang Road.
- Black-faced Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps*: This little beauty was first seen on the Dochu La, then fairly regularly in the warm forests around Yongkola.
- Yellow-bellied Warbler *Abroscopus superciliaris* (H): Heard singing near Samdrup Jongkhar.
- Striated Grassbird *Megalurus palustris* (I): Four birds doing song flights were seen near Guwahati airport.

REGULIDAE

- Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: A single was seen briefly on the Ura-Sheltang La.

AEGITHALIDAE

- Red-headed Tit (Black-throated T) *Aegithalos concinnus*: Scattered sightings along our route, most regularly seen around Yongkola. I fully endorse the return to the old name!
- Rufous-fronted Tit *Aegithalos iouschistos*: Two small parties of these dapper fellows were seen high on the Lingmethang Road.

PARIDAE

Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps*: Great views of two different pairs below the Dochu La, singing and engaging in nuptial displays. Infrequently seen on this tour, this was just the fourth time in ten years.

Rufous-vented Tit *Parus rubidiventris*: Few seen, and only on the Chele La.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*: Commonly seen in higher altitude forests, sometimes it seemed that there was nothing else!

Grey-crested Tit *Parus dichrous*: Our first were on the Chele La, then seen again on each high pass that we crossed..

Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*: Seen almost daily, at all altitudes.

Black-spotted Yellow Tit (Yellow-cheeked T) *Parus spilonotus*: Three were seen along the Lingmethang Road, one on the Kori La and a further five were found in the forests above Deothang.

Sultan Tit *Melanochlora sultanea*: Our first view was a very brief encounter at Yongkola, then near Deothang we had full satisfaction with a group of five that performed splendidly and noisily!

Yellow-browed Tit *Sylviparus modestus*: Seen several times at higher altitude, and also down to 2100m near Tongsa.

SITTIDAE

Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *Sitta cinnamoventris*: Several excellent examples of these were seen at lower altitudes near Samdrup Jongkhar. The 'Birds of South Asia - The Ripley Guide' splits this from the subcontinent Indian Nuthatch *S. castanea*, and also flags up the fact that the *neglecta* race in Myanmar and South-east Asia may also be a different species. Stand by for armchair ticks!

White-tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis*: Regularly seen between 2000 and 2600m, our first encounter near the Dochu La included a nest with youngsters being fed, and a bird on the Kori La posed well as it sensed the incoming rain and froze on a near tree trunk, just a few metres from us.

Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa*: What a memorable bird that was, not just for its own beauty but for what happened shortly afterwards! A quick sortie to look for this in the late afternoon near our camp above Deothang hit the jackpot when we found a pair quietly feeding on the branches of an Oriental Alder, no tape response, they just appeared at the roadside. We had some of the best views I have ever had, as they calmly foraged about, down to eyelevel at a range of just 15m. Our return home hit a rather scary storm that unbeknown to us had just devastated our camp. This group however was made of strong stuff, and we toasted our Nuthatch success with cold beer over a roaring fire!

CERTHIIDAE

Hodgson's Treecreeper (Eurasian Treecreeper) *Certhia hodgsoni*: Five were seen high up on the Chele La, plus another below the Thrumsing La. The Himalayan population has recently been split from the Northern populations, however, Hodgson's includes the western race *hodgsoni* and the eastern *mandelli*, which could be separate species themselves. We saw *mandelli* on this trip.

Rusty-flanked Treecreeper *Certhia nipalensis*: Two were seen very well on a busy Dochu La, then another by our lunch spot on the Pele La.

Brown-throated Treecreeper *Certhia discolor*: One noisy individual showed well near Yongkola village, then we saw another one rather closer at our lunch stop on the Kori La. 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

Plain Flowerpecker *Dicaeum minullum*: Three seen at low altitudes near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectus*: Often seen zipping about, in a range of altitudes but always favouring warm broad-leaved forest.

NECTARINIIDAE

Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* (I): One seen at Sultanpur.

Mrs Gould's Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae*: Often seen in the higher forests, with the busiest concentration being around Sengor, with at least ten seen in a day. Stunning!

Green-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga nipalensis*: Probably the most visible small bird at higher altitudes.

Black-breasted Sunbird (B-throated S) *Aethopyga saturata*: Only really appearing at lower altitudes, we saw plenty along the Mo Chu, then odd birds later near Yongkola, Deothang and Samdrup Jongkhar.

Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*: Several gorgeous males of this attractive species were seen around Samdrup Jongkhar.

Fire-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga ignicauda* (NL): So often hard to find, only Dave saw one, in flight on the Ura-Sheltang La.

Little Spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostra* (H): Heard near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Streaked Spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna*: Some great looks at these orange-footed fellows around Deothang and Samdrup Jongkhar where they were quite visible..

ZOSTEROPIDAE

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*: Regularly seen at lower altitudes.

EMBERIZIDAE

Crested Bunting *Melophus lathami*: Only seen near Tashigang where we had a good look at a couple of smart males.

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*: Three migrants were seen along the Paro river on our first afternoon in Bhutan, then some 20 or more were found near Jakar, and a handful were seen along the road above Deothang.

FRINGILLIDAE

Himalayan Greenfinch (Yellow-breasted G) *Carduelis spinoides*: A mobile flock of 40 flying around Sengor was rather high up, then we saw a flock of 17 at a more typical altitude at Yongkola, feeding in the fields. Also seen near Tashigang.

Plain Mountain-Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola*: Airborne flocks totalling 80 birds were seen around the Chele La.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*: Three were seen when we stopped to look at the Otter near Wangdi, a female at Jakar and half-a-dozen more on the Yonphu La.

Dark-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus edwardsii*: A male showed very well on the Chele La, two females more on the Yutong La, and a pair near Ura.

Crimson-browed Finch *Propyrrhula subhimachala*: A nice surprise to find two females feeding sluggishly near our camp at Sengor. Only seen on five of our ten tours so far.

Scarlet Finch *Haematospiza sipahi*: Notable in their absence, the only one we saw was a female (plus another glimpsed) in the forest near Deothang.

Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*: Regularly encountered in the highest fir forests

Brown Bullfinch *Pyrrhula nipalensis*: A nice vocal group of three were seen on the Chele La, coming to investigate the bogus Collared Owlet. Two more were seen much lower down along the Mo Chu, and another two near Sengor.

Red-headed Bullfinch *Pyrrhula erythrocephala*: A good year for these, with four appearing on the Chele La, then some five birds singing and being very active on the Yutong La, plus another two near Sengor. You wouldn't believe that it's difficult to find in some years.

Collared Grosbeak *Mycerobas affinis*: Four on the Chele La were the only ones of the trip.

Spot-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas melanozanthos*: Three birds posed for us near Sengor.

White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carripes*: Three on the Chele La were elusive, then we had proper views of several on the Pele La and Ura-Sheltang La.

ESTRILDIDAE

White-rumped Munia *Lonchura striata*: A flock of these were found near Samdrup Jongkhar.

PASSERIDAE

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: Seen in Samdrup Jongkhar (lodging in the same hotel I think!), and of course in India.

Cinnamon Sparrow (Russet S) *Passer rutilans*: Numerous in open country and around cultivation at higher altitudes, we saw an amazing roost concentration near Jakar of 150+.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*: Seen frequently along the way around habitation.

PLOCEIDAE

Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*: Four seen near Samdrup Jongkhar, building nests in palm trees. These refer to the *burmanicus* race, or 'Eastern' Baya Weaver.

STURNIDAE

Grey-headed Starling (Chestnut-tailed S) *Sturnia malabarica*: A single bird at Wangdi was our first, then we saw many more around Samdrup Jongkhar and in Assam.

Asian Pied Starling *Gracupica contra* (I): A few at Sultanpur, and quite common in Assam..

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*: Seen around villages at lower altitudes.

Bank Myna *Acridotheres ginginianus* (I): A handful around the arrivals yard at Delhi airport.

Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus* (I): Quite common along the road to Guwahati.

White-vented Myna *Acridotheres grandis*: A flock of a dozen heading up a valley at Samdrup Jongkhar was unexpected.

Common Hill-Myna *Gracula religiosa*: Fairly numerous around Samdrup Jongkhar, we enjoyed some good views of these handsome birds

ORIOLIDAE

Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo* (I): One seen at Sultanpur, 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 bird just outside our Punakha hotel, in it's favoured pine habitat.

Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus* (I): One seen en-route to Guwahati.

Maroon Oriole *Oriolus traillii*: Often heard singing his sweet song, with odd birds seen along the way but notably plentiful along the Mo Chu.

IRENIDAE

Asian Fairy Bluebird *Irena puella*: Several gorgeous examples were enjoyed around Samdrup Jongkhar.

DICRURIDAE

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* (I): A few seen en-route to Guwahati.

Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*: Well distributed with a wide altitude range and habitat preference.

Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus*: Rather common but only in the south-eastern foothills.

Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus remifer*: Several fine specimens were seen along the Lingmethang Road.

Hair-crested Drongo (Spangled D) *Dicrurus hottentottus*: A few were seen along the Mo Chu, at the bottom of the Lingmethang Road and in Assam.

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*: Good looks at a couple of obliging birds at Samdrup Jongkhar.

ARTAMIDAE

Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus* (I): Five or so seen en-route to Guwahati

CORVIDAE

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: A pair of splendid examples of the *interstinctus* race, seen collecting nest material at the roadside near Tongsa.

Yellow-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris*: Regularly seen along the roadsides at higher altitudes, after our efforts on our first afternoon to see a very skulking individual at Paro!

Common Green Magpie *Cissa chinensis* (H): Heard below the camp at 'windy ridge'.

Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* (I): A single seen en-route to Guwahati.

Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*: Common and noisy in the lower altitude forests, most notably along the Mo Chu.

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. These birds are of the *macella* race that lacks spots on the belly and scapulars.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*: Most numerous around Ura, and often seen around the high cultivated valleys.

House Crow *Corvus splendens*: Alert! They have reached Thimphu! I saw three in the town, and of course there were many more in India.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus japonensis*: The commonest corvid in Bhutan, most frequent at higher altitudes where they always turned up for our picnics!

Eastern Jungle Crow *Corvus levaillantii*: Some five or more seen around Samdrup Jongkhar town, then commonly en-route to Guwahati. 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).

Indian Jungle Crow *Corvus culminatus* (I): Just one seen at Sultanpur.

MAMMALS

Moupin Pika *Ochotona thibetana*: A few sightings at the higher elevations.

Black Giant Squirrel *Ratufa bicolor*: Singles of these impressive beasts near Yongkola and Samdrup Jongkhar.

Orange-bellied Himalayan Squirrel *Dremomys lokriah*: A handful of these were seen, often at higher elevations.

Himalayan Striped Squirrel *Tamiops mccllellandii*: These tiny squirrels were regularly seen in the warm broad-leaved forests.

Northern Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii* (I): Not uncommon at Sultanpur.

Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra*: If it weren't for the stiff competition this would be 'mammal of the trip'. Fantastic views of a big dog on the rocks in a very fast flowing river near Wangdi.

Yellow-throated Martin *Martes flavigula*: One seen going off the roadside near Sengor, and another up a tree near Yongkola.

Golden Leaf Monkey (G. Langur) *Trachypithecus geei*: Only discovered in 1956 and restricted to south-central Bhutan and adjacent Assam, this was one of the rarest creatures seen on the whole trip, and to tell the truth I thought we would miss it by not going to Shemgang. We had great views of 17 on a busy morning near Tongsa.

Capped Leaf Monkey (C Langur) *Trachypithecus pileatus*: Several troops of these splendid animals along the Lingmethang Road, near Tashigang and Deothang.

Assam Macaque *Macaca assamensis*: Always shyer than the above, we saw just three near Deothang and Samdrup Jongkhar.

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta* (I): A few at Sultanpur.

Indian Muntjac (Barking Deer) *Muntiacus muntjak*: Apparently good luck to see his white tail as he goes away, it must of worked on a number of occasions, with a total of five seen along our route.

Common Goral *Nemorhaedus goral*: A distant beast high on a mountain near Paro was our first contact, then we had absolutely stunning views of one close to the road near Wangdi.

Nilgai *Boselaphus tragocamelus* (I): Ten or more seen at Sultanpur.