It had been three years since the last Birdquest to Bhutan, and we returned for an outstanding trip full of superlatives and record-breaking. We recorded 387 bird species on the tour, 351 that were inside Bhutan itself, our joint third highest ever total for the country. Some of the headliners included a lengthy encounter with the magnificent White-bellied Heron – the leaders bogey-bird that chose this year’s tour to finally gave itself up, twenty sightings of fourteen Satyr Tragopans (surely a record count!), stunning views of Chestnut-breasted Partridge, the colourful partnership of Blood Pheasant and Himalayan Monal on our first morning, a stunning pair of Beautiful Nuthatches attending their football-like nest, and numerous Rufous-necked Hornbills including a great encounter with a female walling herself into her nest hole. Despite this being the thirteenth Birdquest to Bhutan we added seven species to the list, including a flock of Amur Falcons, and a first for the country in the shape of a calling Malayan Night Heron. We also saw Pallas’s Fish Eagle, Jerdon’s Baza, Black-tailed Crakes, Ibisbill, a pair of Ward’s Trogons, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, Sapphire Flycatcher, Blue-fronted Blue Robin, four species of Forktail, thirteen gorgeous species of Laughingthrush including the incomparable Spotted, five species of Wren Babbler including the cute Long-billed, Crimson-faced Liocichla, Coral-billed and the extraordinary Slender-billed Scimitar Babblers, Golden-breasted and Yellow-throated Fulvetas, five species of Parrotbill, Black-headed Shrike-Babbler, Broad-billed Warbler, Fire-capped Tit, Gold-naped Finch, Blanford’s Rosefinch, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Bay-backed Shrike and Slender-billed Oriole, with a splendid finale of two Hooded Pittas on our last morning.

We began our birding in Bhutan following a flight from Delhi that en-route passed Mt Everest, and we descended into the steep-sided Paro valley to land at the beautifully decorated airport. Here we met our guide Tanden, and our tireless driver (and part-time bird finder) Tenzin. Despite a long intercontinental journey we were wide-awake for a roadside pair of Black-tailed Crakes that appeared noisily in an iris bed, and some other introductory birding along the rivers edge provided Himalayan Wagtails, Plumbeous Water Redstarts, White-capped River Chat and River Lapwing. In the bushes were plenty of Cinnamon Sparrows plus a few Grey-backed Shrikes, and overhead the local Red-billed Choughs were joined by a couple of Eurasian Hobby. An errant Indian Roller was unusual here, our first Bhutan rarity of the trip! The development of this area continues rapidly, but it provides an excellent launch pad from which to begin our Himalayan birding.
An early start was required for an early ascent of the Chele La, the highest pass of the tour at 3780m. As we drove up, a Grey Nightjar flipped across the road in the gloom, and as the first light dawned we encountered our first gorgeous Blood Pheasants, the first of 12 seen today. Higher still, and just short of the pass we found a splendid male Himalayan Monal, walking across the short sward to where a demure female skulked in the bushes, shimmering in the early morning light like a demi-god of the mountains. A second pair of these magnificent beasts appeared at the roadside as we continued towards the pass, where we celebrated with an al-fresco breakfast! The focus then switched to smaller birds, with several Himalayan Red-flanked Bluetails frolicking in the cold morning air, plus Blue-fronted Redstarts, White-winged and the striking Collared Grosbeaks, several gorgeous Himalayan White-browed Rosefinches, Rosy and Olive-backed Pipits, Rufous-breasted Accentor, a stunning Spotted Laughingthrush and a few Black-faced Laughingthrushes. Dropping a little lower into the taller trees we found Himalayan Treecreepers, Rufous-vented and Grey Crested Tit, Long-tailed Minivet, numerous White-collared Blackbirds, Spotted Nutcracker and Yellow-billed Blue Magpie. Checking roadside streams yielded a Solitary Snipe and a Eurasian Woodcock, put to flight from boggy corners. We descended back into the Paro valley for lunch then drove to the capital, Thimphu, and skirting this fast-growing town we headed further up the valley to where a cliff was festooned with the nests of the Giant Rock Bees. Here we found three Yellow-rumped Honeyguides in attendance, and watched as one nibbled away at the wax on an old comb, while two others sat nearby.

The following morning we made the short drive up to the Dochu La, beginning our birding in the misty mossy forest with a Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, and after a welcome hot breakfast we negotiated the ugly roadworks and convoys of trucks to find Yellow-browed Tit, Large-billed Leaf Warblers, Whistlers Warblers, Common Rosefinch, and a furtive Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler. Dropping from the higher altitudes into the warmer mid levels we enjoyed a peaceful stroll in more open woodland where we found Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Grey-winged Blackbirds, Black-winged Cuckooshrikes, Eurasian Jays and gorgeous Mrs Gould’s Sunbirds. We gave up our attempt to bird along the busy road and headed for Punakha, and in particular the stretch of river called the Po Chu. Here we found a vagrant Bay-backed Shrike, plus the local Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, Grey-headed Starling, Himalayan Pied Kingfisher, and a delightful Ibisbill shepherding two small chicks on a mid-river island. A little further along a dark shape stood in the shallows on the other side of the powerful river. Surely it couldn’t be... but I have looked here at least ten times previously, in this exact same spot, and seen nothing... But there it was - finally - White-bellied Heron! We were able to approach it until we were right opposite, while it majestically waded through the rapids before us. Wow! A very auspicious day!

We spent a day birding up the forested Mo Chu valley, and in the early morning were successful in extracting a fine Spotted Wren Babbler from the undergrowth. Further searches here produced our first Great and Golden-throated Barbets, Crimson-breasted Pied Woodpecker and Lesser Yellownape, a pair of Kaleej Pheasants, Asian Emerald and Square-tailed Drongo Cuckoo, Grey Treepies, gorgeous Maroon Orioles, Yellow-vented Warblers, Black-chinned Yuhina, Small Niltava, a shy Pygmy Wren Babbler and a showy Slaty-bellied Tesia, Black-throated Sunbird, Scarlet and Grey-chinned Minivets. As the hillsides warmed up, various raptors emerged and we saw Mountain Hawk Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Oriental Honey Buzzard, and a Pallas’s Fish Eagle was found perched by the river before it went off and soared away over the hills. Also up in the sky were White-throated Needletails, Himalayan Swiftlets, Blyth’s Swift (split from Pacific) and Nepal House Martins. We enjoyed a Slaty-backed Forktail plus Brown Dippers along the riverside, while further down the main rivers we witnessed the drama of an agitated mother Ibisbill trying to collect her three chicks who were separated by a fast flowing section of river. Two eventually swam across to the island where she shepherded them away, but the hapless third chick was attacked and seemingly killed by an
aggressive River Lapwing! I shall never think of the River Lapwing in the same way ever again! We rounded off the day with some brief views of the King as he drove by.

Continuing our journey eastwards, we began with good looks at Slender-billed Orioles by our hotel, then we continued our journey past Crested Buntings and Blue-capped Rock Thrushes, across the river at Wangdi and began climbing up to the Pele La. We made several stops in the roadside forests (somewhat bemused by the widespread ‘development’ of stone quarries, road widening and general mess that was being made of the roadside habitat in the name of progress) and found a flock of Cutia, Barred Cuckoo Doves, Grey-bellied Tesia, Red-headed Tit and Green-crowned Warblers. Up on the Pele La a pair of Great Parrotbills were extremely furtive, a male Himalayan Monal flew by, and a lively flock lifted our spirits with a fine male Fire-tailed Sunbird, Stripe-throated and Rufous-vented Yuhinas. We also found Himalayan Vultures soaring around the high slopes, Himalayan Buzzard, Grey-sided Bush Warbler and a shy Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler, before heading downhill once more and onto our night stop at Tongsa. We paused on the edge of town and found a troop of Golden Langur, along with our first Bhutan Laughingthrush, before heading for our well-positioned hotel that offered stunning views of Tongsa dzong and the mysterious forested ridges stretching southwards.

An early foray along cool forested valley sides produced close views of a pair of Streak-breasted Scimitar Babblers and a Grey-bellied Tesia, and close to our lodgings we found a singing male Indian Blue Robin, and a Russet Bush Warbler that was lured in to our feet. After breakfast we headed up onto the high forest of the Yutong La. Usually rich in bamboo, the die-off has left large swathes of brown, but the birds were still here and we had a brief look at a pair of Great Parrotbills, some superbly close Brown Parrotbills, Slaty-blue Flycatcher, White-browed Bush Robin, Alpine Accentor, Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler and Hume’s and Grey-sided Bush Warblers. As we descended towards our night-stop among the pines of the Bumthang valley, we met our first Eurasian Magpies, and we explored a wet area where we found a Citrine Wagtail, Pintail Snipe, Rosy Pipits, Siberian Stonechats, and had a great surprise when stampeding horses flushed a Japanese Quail that had been lurking unseen, and we had good views of it crouching in a stubble field. A very nice hotel awaited us, although the King was also dining there (no views this time) so we were entertained with dinner in a satellite building.

The hotel were understandably a little slow off the mark the following morning after their hosting of such an important visitor, but we got away reasonably early, and headed up hill towards the Sheltang La. A surprise female Satyr Tragopan rather randomly crossed the road in front of us, then we paused by the picturesque village of Ura where found Rufous-breasted Accentors, White-winged Grosbeaks, and a couple of female Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch. As we slowly headed uphill to the Thrumsing La at 3700m, we saw a Black Eagle that was mantling a Squirrel in a tall fir, a Speckled Woodpigeon perched on a tall spike looking confused, then on the top of the pass we found Fire-tailed Sunbird, Blood Pheasant and our only Golden Bush Robin. Pausing on the descent we found a pair of Great Parrotbill that showed very well indeed, a male Dark-rumped Rosefinch at very close range, and a pair of scarce Blanford’s Rosefinch – only the second time that this bird has been seen on this tour. It began to rain as we reached our first camp near the village of Sengor, but was not enough to deter the roadside antics of first a stunning male Satyr Tragopan, then a female emerged that was so tame, our trainee guide Sonam crept to within a few feet of it before it shifted! The same male then reappeared in the road as we headed back to camp. Common where found!

We started on the high road at first light, and found Gold-naped Finch, Brown Bullfinch and White-browed Shortwing, then having enjoyed a fine camp breakfast we continued along this birding super-highway finding a gorgeous Scaly Laughingthrush, Slender-billed Scimitar Babblers, Broad-billed Warbler, and along the road at a lower altitude we found bijou Golden-breasted Fulvetta together
with lovely Orange-eared Parrotbills swarming in their dozens through the bamboo, joined a mixed flock with White-throated Fantail, Red-billed Leiothrix, Rufous-capped and Golden Babblers. We also found White-spectacled and Grey-cheeked Warblers together for comparison, Black-eared Shrike Babbler and our first Yellow-throated Fulvetta. On our return up the mountain we paused for a rare view of Common Hill Partridge, then this was followed by no less than 10 Satyr Tragopans on the road, with four males together in a pre-roost gathering – awesome! A record count!

After a chilly night we broke camp, and after breakfast we started to head downhill. A little more time at the higher altitude was in order, if only to say cheerio to the neighbourhood Satyr Tragopan male that was on the road again! That makes it a total of 20 sightings of 14 birds in a 48-hour period! Unbelievable! Next we found a quartet of Crimson-browed Finches, a pair of Yellow-bellied Flowerpeckers, Mrs Gould’s Sunbird, a pair of Little Forktail, Nepal House Martins zipped along the road cuttings, and then we found two Rufous-throated Wren Babblers, one of which approached to within two metres! We spent time searching the moss-laden trees for Ward’s Trogon, and it wasn’t long before a male jumped into view, followed by a female that came right up to the roadside unbidden. We followed them as they fed quietly among the mossy branches, a wonderful sight that frankly I thought we had missed this time. We headed down to our camp, picking up a Pale Blue Flycatcher en route, and found Rufous-necked Laughingthrush in the camp itself.

The following morning we began early with a gorgeous pair of Rufous-necked Hornbills, and then found an endearing Long-billed Wren Babbler along the roadside. We ate our breakfast al-fresco, with eggs cooked for us at the roadside by our camp crew. Following this we returned to where we had heard a Chestnut-breasted Hill Partridge, and after descending the steep slope a short way we had to wait just a few short minutes before it came trotting past us, just a few metres from our position. Marvellous stuff! A rarely seen bird that I have not had views of since 2002! Further birding produced several Black and Mountain Hawk Eagles, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Black-spotted Yellow Tit and Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo. A night drive added a new mammal in the form of a Hairy-footed Flying Squirrel, and the next day we found an obliging Blue-winged Laughingthrush, and a male Sapphire Flycatcher. A bamboo patch held some delightful Golden-breasted Fulvetta, a noisy flock of Grey-headed Parrotbills was found just before the rain came down. The rest of the afternoon was spent dodging showers, but a flock of White-naped Yuhina entertained us plus a Brown-throated Treecreeper sung his loud chatter.

Our final morning began with an upturn in the of birdsong, and soon enough we hit a flock of Rusty-fronted Barwing together with some Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbills (our fifth species of Parrotbill of the trip), followed by Pygmy Blue Flycatcher, some sublime Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler, Spotted Forktail, Black-faced Warbler, and our first Black-throated Prinia. We broke camp just as the rain returned, and leaving this pleasant location we headed downhill towards Mongar. While proceeding through the warmer lower altitude forest we found a furtive Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush, Speckled Piculet, Ashy and Himalayan Bulbul, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, our first Bronzed Drongos, Crimson Sunbird and Blue-throated Barbet.

After a night recharging in the small town of Mongar, we headed onto the nearby Kori La, finding Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers, Speckled Woodpigeon, and a tree full of Tickell’s Warblers alongside two unexpected Fire-capped Tits. Up on the top of the pass we had a stroll through some delightful mossy forest, and found a feisty Black-headed Shrike Babbler, a flock of Cutia, Rufous-breasted Accentor, and Spotted Nutcracker at the same altitude as Streaked Spiderhunter! Best of all was a Blue-fronted Robin that performed in the bamboo understorey, offering far better views than is normal for this notorious ‘black-bullet’ of a bird. A few other birds popped out as the afternoon rain set in, with Scarlet Finch and Crimson-faced Liocichlas found. A wet drive to Tashigang was punctuated with Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon, before the road deteriorated as landslides and alluvium from
torrential rain had made the road almost impassable. After a rather nervous journey, we were happy to roll into the town of Tashigang in one piece!

From Tashigang we headed towards the final forested ridge that snakes down towards the plains of Assam. A scenic drive for the most part and punctuated with birds such as Red-rumped Swallow, Himalayan Vultures, Indian Blue Robin and Little Bunting. Before we could reach our third and final camp at Morong we had to pass though some shocking roadworks where the lovely roadside forest and scrub had been scoured away by diggers and bulldozers, part of extensive development being carried out all over the country. We reached the camp in pouring rain and hail, but were able to made a short sortie out along the remaining roadsides where we found a trio of Rufous-chinned Laughingthrushes. As darkness fell, the rain hammered down, and the thunder dragon roared his displeasure around the hills.

An early morning foray along the roadsides produced a showy Lesser Shortwing darting about on a bank. We had been told about a nest of Beautiful Nuthatch along this road by friends travelling in the opposite direction, and after some searching were able to find the site. The birds were attending a cavity built into an ant's nest that was situated in the top of a small tree, at eyelevel close to the road. Soon enough two birds flew in together and began posing around the entrance and periodically popping into the nest itself. What a glorious sight, extended views of these gorgeous birds were had on a number of occasions, as they brought items into the nest, seemingly still adorning the interior with grass and other things. We should consider ourselves extremely fortunate to witness such a rare sight of one of the most beautiful creatures in this whole continent.

The rest of the day seemed slower by comparison, but the area of our camp provided great looks at a Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler posing in a banana tree, another Beautiful Nuthatch flew low over the camp, a Plaintive Cuckoo joined us for breakfast, plus we saw Himalayan Greenfinch, Crimson-faced Liocichla, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, Mountain Tailorbird and had some rare views of a perched Rufous-bellied Eagle.

In between rain showers the next morning we found a male White-bellied Redstart (a.k.a Hodgson's Blue Robin) lurking in the herbage, a write-in for this tour. As the skies cleared we headed down the road making frequent stops, adding Striated Prinia, some northbound Oriental Honey Buzzards, Sultan Tits, Common Green Magpie, and a perched pair of Wreathed Hornbills, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Grey-headed Starlings, Common Hill Myna and Rufescent Prinia, and were able to hear a newly-arrived Hooded Pitta singing away from a far ravine. We made our way to our hotel; a new venue surrounded by good habitat, where at dusk a Malayan Night Heron called from the river valley – a Bhutan national first!

The following morning we were greeted at breakfast by a Great Pied Hornbill perched in a tree by the terrace, and moving into the lower foothill valleys we explored side streams where we found Crested Serpent Eagle, Violet Cuckoo, Rufous Woodpecker, White-throated Bulbul, Grey-throated Babbler, Blue-throated Flycatcher, and a pair of Black-backed Forktails that nervously awaited our departure so they could take food to a hidden nest. Both Blue-naped and Hooded Pittas were heard but
remained hidden, but Thick-billed Green Pigeons showed well along with Asian Fairy Bluebirds in a fruiting tree. We headed uphill to escape the heat of midday and take lunch among some evergreen forest, and our camp crew served us with a final feast before bidding farewell and heading back to Thimphu. Soon after a loud call drew our attention to a pair of Chestnut-winged Cuckoo that noisily flew hither and thither, and nearby we found a rather furtive Long-tailed Broadbill. Slowly moving downhill we added Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush, White-browed Scimitar Babbler, Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Dollarbird and Plain Flowerpecker. A small group of Amur Falcons passing overhead was an exciting find, clearly passing through on their epic cross-Asia migration.

A final hour of birding before our departure from Bhutan was spectacularly successful, with a calling Hooded Pitta that perched for us in clear view high in the trees. A short while later, a second bird nearby was persuaded to do the very same thing! The first time this has been seen on the tour, they had clearly arrived recently and were full of beans. With this fitting send-off, we packed up, said goodbye to our splendid hosts, and headed into the rather more chaotic and noisy road system of India. We drove slowly towards the Brahmaputra, finding many birds at the roadside including an Ashy Woodswallow on its nest, many Asian Openbill, a few Lesser Adjutant, Bronze-winged Jacana, Lesser Whistling Ducks, an errant Great Crested Grebe, Cotton Teal, a flock of summer-plumaged Pacific Golden Plovers, Blue-tailed Bee-eater and Striated Grassbird. We ended our road journey at Guwahati airport, and flew to Delhi where the tour ended.

This tour, the thirteenth Birdquest to the country, just keeps producing more and more great birds, and continues to offer some of the very best in Himalayan birding. Each year the tour encounters new thrills, and when mixed with the character of this very special little nation it always makes for a memorable journey.
SYSTEMATIC LIST

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H)
Species which were only recorded by the leader are marked with the symbol (LO)
Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL)
Species which were recorded only in India are indicated by the symbol (I)

PODICEPEDIDAE
Great Crested Grebe  *Podiceps cristatus* (I): A surprise find en-route to Guwahati.

PHALACROCORACIDAE
Little Cormorant  *Phalacrocorax niger* (I): Numerous examples seen as we crossed Assam.
Great Cormorant  *Phalacrocorax carbo*: Three seen on the rivers around Punakha.

ARDEIDAE
Little Egret  *Egretta garzetta* (I): Plenty were seen en-route to Guwahati.
Great Egret  *Egretta alba* (I): A couple en-route to Guwahati airport.
White-bellied Heron  *Ardea insignis*: As with every visit to Bhutan we made the pilgrimage up the Po Chu river, forlornly attempting to see this species. After 17 visits, 13 Birdquest tours, and at least ten attempts to see it in this very same spot, my heart nearly stopped when our driver Tenzin started fumbling for his bins and mumbling ‘something is there...’ It certainly was! A large grey lump in the shallows of the river that turned into a tall Heron, with majestic elegance and a white-belly! Amazingly, this shy creature allowed us to approach until we were level with it on the riverbank, before it flew upstream to where the local ranger told us it had a nest. I always maintained that I never saw this species as it meant I would have to keep returning to Bhutan. Now I’ve seen it, now what? Go back for more views, I guess!
Purple Heron  *Ardea purpurea* (I): A single was seen close to Guwahati airport.
Eastern Cattle Egret  *Bubulcus coromandus* (I): Many seen in fields en-route to Guwahati.
Indian Pond-Heron  *Ardeola grayii* (I): Plenty were seen en-route to Guwahati.
Malayan Night Heron  *Gorsachius melanolophus* (H) (LO): On our first evening at our Samdrup Jongkhar, a deep hooting could be heard coming from the direction of the river. This may represent the first record for Bhutan of this secretive species. It was not calling the following evening, but sound recordings were acquired.

CICONIIDAE
Asian Openbill  *Anastomus oscitans* (I): Several flocks of these seen in the fields en-route to Guwahati.
Black Stork  *Ciconia nigra*: A surprise trio of birds seen circling over a ridge near Samdrup Jongkhar. Just the third time ever on this tour.
Lesser Adjutant  *Leptoptilos javanicus* (I): A dozen or more seen en-route to Guwahati airport, but no amount of searching could locate its larger relative.

DENDROCYGNIDAE
Lesser Whistling Duck  *Dendrocygna javanica* (I): A good number were seen en-route to Guwahati.

ANATIDAE
Ruddy Shelduck  *Tadorna ferruginea*: A single bird on the Thimphu water treatment plant.
Cotton Teal  *Nettapus coromandelianus* (I): Nice to see a dozen of these on roadside floods near to Guwahati airport.
Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*: A single on the river at Paro, and a couple on the ponds at Thimphu water treatment plant.

**ACCIPITRIDAE**

Jerdon’s Baza *Aviceda jerdoni*: Great close looks at a pair taking to the up-draughts near Samdrup Jongkhar. Just the third time this has been seen on this tour.

Oriental Honey-Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*: Two were seen at Punakha, and between Morong and Samdrup Jongkhar we found several birds that appeared to be drifting northwards. Another two were seen en-route to Guwahati airport.

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* (I): A single hovering near Guwahati airport.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* (I): A couple at Delhi airport and a perched individual near Guwahati airport. All these birds should refer to the race *govinda*.

Black-eared Kite *Milvus lineatus* (I): Three seen in the air near Guwahati airport.

Pallas’s Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*: A close but brief look at a perched adult along the Mo Chu near Punakha, with presumably the same bird seen soaring over nearby hills.

Himalayan Vulture (H Griffon) *Gyps himalayensis*: A good number were seen in the Pele La area, a few more on the Yutong La, and singles seen near Sengor and on the Yonphu La.

Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*: Two were seen near Punakha, two more in the Samdrup Jongkhar area, and a single over fields in Assam.

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*: One was seen distantly displaying, with shivering wingbeats and fluffed out undertail feathers, along the Mo Chu at Punakha, another near Samdrup Jongkhar, and a closer view of one as we drove through Assam.

Shikra *Accipiter badius* (I): Two were seen along the road to Guwahati.

Besra *Accipiter virgatus*: A glimpse of a bird, that shot through the middle storey of the forest on the Lingmethang Road.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*: Three sightings of presumably the locally breeding mesachistos race around some the high passes.

Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo burmanicus*: A handful were seen in high country, plus another near Morong.

Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*: Frequent sightings of this fine raptor along our route, with some doing their signature ‘stall-speed hunting’ close to the treetops, one mantling a Squirrel on the Thrumsing La, plus we saw others that seemed to have angry Ashy Drongos hanging off them!

Rufous-bellied Eagle *Hieraaetus kienerii*: Four examples were seen, with the best views being of one that was perched above Morong village offering a rare view. The others seen were more typically distant.

Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis*: Frequently seen (18 sightings in total!) over the middle-altitude forests, with a couple of pallid juveniles observed, and several good looks at perched birds.

**FALCONIDAE**

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: A few seen in open country, particularly in the west of the country.

Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*: A surprise showing of at least six birds rather high overhead at Samdrup Jongkhar, drifting eastwards. The whitish underwing coverts were clearly visible, and apart from one adult male, they all appeared to be female and immature males. The only previous time I have seen this species is just a few kilometres away on the border strip, where I saw a large flock leaving their roost in the shade trees of a tea plantation back in November 1995.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: Three were seen over the Paro valley, a single near the Kori La, then a few were seen migrating eastwards over the foothills above Samdrup Jongkhar.
Japanese Quail  *Coturnix japonica*: A bird was flushed by galloping horses as we checked a small marsh at Bumthang, and subsequently proved to a Quail that allowed us prolonged close views of it on the ground. As our bird was a female, it is a difficult I.D to separate this from Common Quail, confused further by the fact that Common Quail is allegedly a winter visitor to the valley, and Japanese Quail breeds in some numbers in the valley during the summer months! I propose that it was a female Japanese Quail, due to the heavy breast markings and spiky feathers on the throat that are visible in some photographs. But I may be wrong...

Common Hill-Partridge  *Arborophila torqueola*: These are always hard to get close to, but we had one responsive bird that walked into view on a very steep stretch of road near Sengor. Others were heard along our route, typically at higher altitudes.

Rufous-throated Hill-Partridge  *Arborophila rufulularis* (H): Heard at mid-altitudes around Yongkola and above Deothang, seemingly close at times but never even glimpsed!

Chestnut-breasted Hill-Partridge  *Arborophila mandelli*: A calling bird close to the Lingmethang Road could not be lured closer, and when we shifted position, the reason became clear when it ran down the tree it had been singing from and scuttled away! We returned to the spot a while later, descended the slope a short way, and were amazed to see it emerge close by and walk right past us, and trot off down the slope! An awesome view of a rarely seen bird, this is the first time it has been seen on the tour since 2002!

Blood Pheasant  *Ithaginis cruentus*: Fantastic encounters on the Chele La on our first morning in Bhutan, where we saw some 12 birds! Another two were seen on the top of the Thrumsing La when we stopped for an alfresco lunch.

Satyr Tragopan  *Tragopan satyra*: A record-breaking count this year. Gone are the days when we used to struggle with this one – we had 20 sightings of 14 birds, within 48 hours! Most of these were males, and we even disturbed a party of four males together on the road, in some kind of bachelor party. The rain probably helped, but also I think we hit their mating time fair and square. Common where found!

Himalayan Monal  *Lophophorus impejanus*: A marvellous start to our Bhutanese odyssey, with two pairs of these on the Chele La, with the psychedelic males offering splendid views. We also saw another male in flight on the Pele La. Such a large and brilliantly hued bird, it really has to be seen to be believed!

Kaleej Pheasant  *Lophura leucomelanos*: Two races were seen on our tour; in the west of the country we found the dark-backed, white-breasted *melanota* race, a pair near Punakha along the Mo Chu, plus a female as we drove towards the Pele La. In the east we saw the pale-rumped, dark-breasted *lathami* race near the Kori La and Tashigang, and also near Morong.

Grey Peacock Pheasant  *Polyplectron bicalcaratum* (H): Heard calling distantly from a valley bottom near Deothang.

RALLIDAE

Black-tailed Crake  *Porzana bicolor*: A pair were seen on a small roadside swamp near Paro on our first afternoon in Bhutan, then another two were seen in wet areas near Tashigang.

Common Moorhen  *Gallinula chloropus* (I): A single seen in Assam.

JACANIDAE

Bronze-winged Jacana  *Metopidius indicus* (I): A fair number were seen on the roadside swamps in Assam.
CHARADRIIDAE

Pacific Golden Plover  *Pluvialis fulva* (I): A flock of 18, almost all in striking breeding plumage, found in the paddyfields en-route to Guwahati.

River Lapwing  *Vanellus duvaucelii*: Our first two were seen mobbing a trespassing human on the river at Paro, two more at Thimphu waterworks, a couple on the Po Chu and several more on the Mo Chu. Near Punakha we witnessed a drama unfold where the adult Lapwing was jousting with the mother Ibisbill, then while the Ibisbill shepherded two chicks to safety, the straggler was attacked and seemingly killed by the Lapwing! The trigger to this was unknown, but I for one shall never feel the same about River Lapwings!

Red-wattled Lapwing  *Vanellus indicus*: A trio seen in fields along the Po Chu, and also seen in good numbers en-route to Guwahati.

SCOLOPACIDAE

Eurasian Woodcock  *Scolopax rusticola*: At least one flushed noisily away from us on the Chele La.

Solitary Snipe  *Gallinago solitaria*: A single bird was flushed from a mountain stream high on the Chele La, affording a brief flight view. It flushed once more, but disappeared into the forest, as they do.

Pintail Snipe  *Gallinago stenura*: A single was flushed from a small swamp at Bumthang.

Green Sandpiper  *Tringa ochropus*: Four was seen at Paro, and singles were seen at the small lake on the Dochu La and on the Mo Chu.

RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Ibisbill  *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*: Our first was along the Po Chu where an adult fed on a shingle island with two chicks in attendance. Along the Mo Chu not far from Punakha we found a drama unfolding where the mother was noisily shuttling between a single chick on an island, and two chicks along the shore. The two swam across to the island after much encouragement, then the River Lapwing that had been getting very agitated and was sparring with the mother, flew down and pecked one of the Ibisbill chicks to death!

STERNIDAE

Whiskered Tern  *Chlidonias hybrida* (I): At least five were seen at the swamp near Guwahati airport.

COLUMBIIDAE

Rock Pigeon  *Columbia livia*: Commonly available.

Speckled Woodpigeon  *Columbia hodgsonii*: A poor showing this year; a single was seen at an unusually high 3500m near the Thrumsing La, and three singles were seen in flight on the Kori La.

Oriental Turtle-Dove  *Streptopelia orientalis*: Seen commonly and almost daily throughout Bhutan, disappearing at lower altitudes in the south-east.

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

Red Collared-Dove  *Streptopelia tranquebarica*: A small number seen in Assam.

Barred Cuckoo-Dove  *Macropygia unchall*: Five were seen in roadside bushes between Wangdi and the Pele La, and another near our hotel at Samdrup Jongkhar.

Emerald Dove  *Chalcophaps indica* (H): A single bird heard on our last morning.

Thick-billed Green Pigeon  *Treron curvirostra*: A few were seen zipping past at speed at Samdrup Jongkhar, before we found a fruiting tree with several birds lurking within.

Pin-tailed Green Pigeon  *Treron apicauda*: A single sighting of pair near Samdrup Jongkhar that posed well for a few minutes before shooting off again.

Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon  *Treron sphenurus*: Unusually we only saw two, at the roadside en-route to Tashigang.
Mountain Imperial Pigeon  *Ducula badia*: A few flying birds were seen between Morong and Samdrup Jongkhar, but never perched.

**CUCULIDAE**

Greater Coucal  *Centropus sinensis* (I) (H): Heard en-route to Guwahati.

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

Chestnut-winged Cuckoo  *Clamator coronandus*: A nice surprise on our last afternoon, with two birds near Deothang that responded noisily and confidingly.

Asian Koel  *Eudynamys scolopaceus* (I) (H): A few heard as we crossed Assam.

Asian Emerald Cuckoo  *Chrysococcyx maculatus*: Several birds seen along our route, at Mo Chu, Kori La, Morong, Deothang and at Samdrup Jongkhar. One or two even perched briefly for a quick view, otherwise they were all doing advertising flights over the treetops.

Violet Cuckoo  *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus*: Similar to the above, two or three seen as they roved high overhead calling.

Plaintive Cuckoo  *Cacomantis merulinus*: A songster by our Yongkola camp was a bit furtive, but a further two were seen at Morong, including one actually in the camp!

Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo  *Surniculus lugubris*: Heard along the Mo Chu and below Yongkola, then seen in some number around Samdrup Jongkhar, with three birds together on our last morning.

Large Hawk-Cuckoo  *Hierococcyx sparrowioides*: Common and noisy in the hill forest, a few actually showed well, for example at Yongkola camp.

Common Hawk Cuckoo  *Hierococcyx varius* (I) (H): Heard in Assam.

Whistling Hawk-Cuckoo  *Hierococcyx nisicolor*: Not encountered till we reached the south-east, a few were heard between Morong and Deothang, with a brief fly-by sighting by our camp.

Indian Cuckoo  *Cuculus micropterus* (H): The distinctive ‘one-more-bottle’ call was heard fairly regularly on the Lingmethang Road and in the south-east.

Eurasian Cuckoo  *Cuculus canorus*: Heard regularly in the higher forests, with sightings of two singles identified by call at Yongkola camp and at Yonphu La. They probably parasitize the Grey Bushchats, which is nice.

Himalayan Cuckoo  *Cuculus saturatus*: Heard frequently in the hill forest, we positively identified six singing males along our way. The old ‘Oriental’ Cuckoo *C. saturatus* has been split three ways, into this one (which retains the specific name *saturatus*), Oriental (or Horsfield’s) Cuckoo *C. horsfieldi* and Sunda Cuckoo *C. lepidus*.

Small Cuckoo (Lesser C)  *Cuculus poliocephalus* (H): Just a single contact, one heard near Morong.

**STRIGIDAE**

Collared Scops Owl  *Otus lettia* (LO): Seen by the leader near the hotel at Samdrup Jongkhar, also heard at Morong.

Brown Wood Owl  *Strix leptogrammica* (H): A pair were duetting in the pre-dawn on the ridge above Yongkola one morning, but never subsequently. A write-in no less.

Himalayan Wood-owl  *Strix nivicola* (H): Distant birds were heard calling in the small hours from our Sengor camp.

Collared Owlet  *Glaucidium brodiei* (H): Only heard distantly on a handful of occasions, despite our appropriation of his call!

Asian Barred Owlet  *Glaucidium cuculoides* (H): Heard on a few occasions in the hill forest, but he never wanted to come closer!

**CAPRIMULGIDAE**

Grey Nightjar  *Caprimulgus jotaka*: A single bird was seen coming off the road as we headed up to the Chele La. Another was perched briefly by our Punakha hotel, also heard at our Sengor camp.
Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* (H): One heard calling near our Samdrup Jongkhar.

**APODIDAE**

Himalayan Swiftlet *Aerodramus brevirostris*: Seen on a few occasions over lower and mid altitude forests.

White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*: A small flock was seen along the Mo Chu, a few more in the Mongar area, and in good number around Samdrup Jongkhar.

Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis*: Seen fairly commonly in the Samdrup Jongkhar area. Also seen en-route to Guwahati.

Blyth’s Swift *Apus leuconyx*: Regularly seen, from Punakha through to the South-east, with birds seen going into nest crevices near Sengor. This is split from Pacific Swift, which now becomes four species.

House Swift *Apus nipalensis*: A small flock seen near Samdrup Jongkhar.

**TROGONIDAE**


Ward’s Trogon *Harpactes wardi*: Perhaps one of the most wanted of all birds on this trip, it gets harder to find each year and I really thought we might miss it. One of my regular roadside sites had succumbed to development and habitat ‘disturbance’, so we were very fortunate to find a silent pair on the Lingmethang Road, quietly feeding close to the road in some typically lush mossy forest.

**ALCEDINIDAE**

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*: One seen near Samdrup Jongkhar.

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*: Seen fairly commonly on the Assam plains, and in Bhutan at lower altitudes such as along the Po Chu, near Mongar, Tashigang, and in the Samdrup Jongkhar area where we saw a male present his mate with a rather gruesome gift – the head of an Oriental White-eye!

Himalayan Pied Kingfisher (Crested K) *Ceryle lugubris*: Two birds along the Po Chu river, plus another near Wangdi were the only sightings.

Lesser Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* (I): A couple were seen in Assam.

**MEROPIDAE**

Blue-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctyornis athertoni*: Several good looks at these, with three or more seen near Yongkola, and another near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* (I): Two birds on wires near Guwahati.

Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus* (I): A few of these were zipping about as we approached Guwahati airport.

**CORACIIDAE**

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*: As suspected at the time, a bird near Paro airport was a ‘Bhutan lifer’ for the leader, and clearly something of a vagrant at this altitude. Interestingly it was of the nominate form and not the ‘Black-billed’ Roller *C. benghalensis affinis* that occurs in nearby Assam.

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*: Some great looks at birds perched up near Samdrup Jongkhar.

**UPUPIDAE**

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: A handful were seen at regular intervals in open country, with a nest cavity located near Paro.
Bucerotidae


Great Pied Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*: A single appeared in a close tree by our Samdrup Jongkhar hotel as we had breakfast, with another seen in flight.

Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*: We had a plethora of good close sightings of these beauties along the Lingmethang Road, particularly on our final morning near Yongkola when the forest decided to come alive just as we were heading off! Below Morong we enjoyed several more encounters, and had the rare privilege of witnessing a female in her nest cavity, busily plastering the opening with mud that the male brought to her, in order to wall herself in for her incubation. An amazing sight.

Wreathed Hornbill *Aceros undulatus*: A nice view of a pair near Samdrup Jongkhar, with another pair seen flying over the foothills to roost.

Capitonidae

Great Barbet *Megalaima virens*: Heard often and seen frequently in the lower altitude warm broadleaved forests, and in the south-east they were particularly visible while providing an enchanting backdrop of sound.

Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata* (H): One heard from our Samdrup Jongkhar hotel.

Golden-throated Barbet *Megalaima franklinii*: Numerous sightings along our route at lower-middle altitudes, such as along the Mo Chu, the Lingmethang Road, and in the South-east.

Blue-throated Barbet *Megalaima asiatica*: We found our first ones en-route to Mongar then a few more were visible and audible at lower altitudes in the south-east.

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala* (H): One singing at the Samdrup Jongkhar border post.

Indicatoridae

Yellow-rumped Honeyguide *Indicator xanthonotus*: We saw three birds together at a site near Thimphu, attending the nests of Giant Rock Bees on a rock face and eating the wax from old hives. We also had a good view of one along the Lingmethang Road. A former roadside site near Nobding was defunct, probably due to the adjacent quarry workings.

Picidae

Speckled Piculet *Picumnus innominatus*: A very excited bird was watched at close range near Yongkola.

Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus*: A flock of four showed well near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Crimson-breasted Pied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos cathpharius*: Just three examples seen, the first was a male on the Mo Chu, another on the Dochu La, and a third on the Lingmethang Road.

Darjeeling Pied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos darjellensis*: We had a good look at three birds on the Chele La, then another on the Dochu La and two near Sengor.

Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Hypopicus hyperythrus*: Several good looks at these beauties, with three on the Dochu La and another trio on the Kori La.

Rufous Woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus*: Two birds seen well near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Lesser Yellownape *Picus chlorolophus*: First encountered along the Mo Chu, then several were seen between Morong and Samdrup Jongkhar.

Greater Yellownape *Picus flavinucha*: Two seen briefly between Wangdi and the Pele La were the only sightings of the tour.

Grey-faced Woodpecker (Grey-headed W) *Picus canus*: Heard near at Punakha, and singles were seen on the Kori La and near Deothang.
Bay Woodpecker  *Blythipicus pyrhotis*: A real sneak and often only located by its maniacal cry, one was seen on the Lingmethang Road but for the most part they remained hidden.

**EURYLAMIDAE**

Long-tailed Broadbill  *Psarisomus dalhousiae*: A poor showing this year, with just a single calling bird eventually coming into view near Deothang.

**PITTIDAE**

Blue-naped Pitta  *Pitta nipalensis* (H): A bird heard near Samdrup Jongkhar could not be located.

Hooded Pitta  *Pitta sordida*: These summer migrants had clearly just arrived in the foothills near Samdrup Jongkhar, with at least six heard calling loudly from the gullies and hillocks. A couple of birds were coaxed closer but remained hidden in dense cover, then on our last morning we tried once again and had the pleasure of two different birds responding and flying into view, calling back at us from high in bamboo. Wonderful views, and the first ever actual sightings of this species on the tour.

**ALAUDIDAE**

Oriental Skylark  *Alauda gulgula*: Three birds seen in fields at Bumthang, also heard at Ura.

**HIRUNDINIDAE**

Barn Swallow  *Hirundo rustica*: Several birds were feeding around Mongar town, also seen near Tashigang.

Red-rumped Swallow  *Hirundo daurica*: Odd birds were seen, near Mongar and near Deothang, and also in Assam.

Nepal House-Martin  *Delichon nipalense*: Fairly numerous this year with flocks seen in several places, especially where suitable nesting cliffs were present such as on the Lingmethang Road.

Asian House Martin  *Delichon dasypus*: Never as numerous as the above, the only ones seen were a flock near Punakha.

**MOTACILLIDAE**

Himalayan Wagtail  *Motacilla [alba] alboïdes*: Found along the big rivers in the west of the country, and also seen at Bumthang.

Citrine Wagtail  *Motacilla citreola*: A nice example seen on a small marsh at Bumthang.

Grey Wagtail  *Motacilla cinerea*: Odd singles were encountered along our route.

Paddyfield Pipit  *Anthus rufulus* (I): Only found in Assam where they were song-flighting over roadside paddies.

Olive-backed Pipit  *Anthus hodgsoni*: Commonly encountered along our way, with some singing on territory in the high forests where they breed.

Rosy Pipit  *Anthus roseatus*: Six were seen on the Chele La, another group also on the Yutong La, some acquiring their nice pink breeding plumage.

**CAMPEPHAGIDAE**

Black-winged Cuckooshrike  *Coracina melaschistos*: Not uncommon in the warm broadleaved forests, often heard and occasionally seen along our route.

Grey-chinned Minivet  *Pericrocotus solaris*: Found in the mid-altitude forests, we found them most commonly along the Lingmethang Road.

Long-tailed Minivet  *Pericrocotus ethologus*: Just a handful of sightings on the tour, typically the highest altitude Minivet, and also found in poorer habitats than the others.

Short-billed Minivet  *Pericrocotus brevirostris*: A few pairs noted along or route, such as on the Dochu La, along the Lingmethang Road and near Morong.
Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus speciosus*: The Minivet of the sub-tropical forests, we found them around Samdrup Jongkhar and Deothang, with others scattered along our route at lower altitudes including some fine displaying males.

Pied Flycatcher Shrike *Hemipus picatus*: A few seen at lower altitudes such as near Punakha, Yongkola and Morong.

Large Woodshrike *Tephrodornis gularis*: A pair were seen near Samdrup Jongkhar.

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

RHIPIDURIDAE
White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis*: Regularly encountered in the warmer broad-leaved forest such around Yongkola, Kori La and in the Morong area.

Yellow-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hypoxantha*: Regularly encountered in the higher forests, also as low as the Yonphu La.

PYCNONOTIDAE
Striated Bulbul *Pycnonotus striatus*: These first appeared near Yongkola where they were numerous, also on the Kori La and around Morong.

Black-crested Bulbul *Pycnonotus flaviventris*: Only found in the low altitudes forests around Samdrup Jongkhar.

Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*: A handful were seen in the Samdrup Jongkhar area, also at our Morong camp.

Himalayan Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*: Only seen in the dry grassy pine areas at lower altitudes, near Morong and Tashigang

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*: Commonly available around cultivation and scrappy habitat at lower altitudes, reaching to 2600m on the Yonphu La.

White-throated Bulbul *Alophoixus flaveolus*: Just a couple seen near Samdrup Jongkhar, where several others be heard uttering their nasal calls.

Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala*: Quite a few seen, near Yongkola, Morong, and most numerous around Samdrup Jongkhar.

Mountain Bulbul *Hypsipetes mcclellandii*: First seen along the Mo Chu at Punakha, with other singles popping up at Yongkola and near Deothang.

Himalayan Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*: Seen frequently though not ubiquitously, at a range of elevations, and often vocal and showy.

AEGITHINIDAE
Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*: A handful seen at lower altitudes around Samdrup Jongkhar.

CHLOROPSEIDAE
Gold-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons*: A couple showed well in the lowland forest around Samdrup Jongkhar.

Orange-bellied Leafbird *Chloropsis hardwickii*: Odd ones were encountered in various lower-middle altitude forests of the Lingmethang Road and between Morong and Deothang. A male by our Yongkola camp showed well and sang loudly during our stay there.

LANIIDAE
Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*: A few migrants were seen in the Samdrup Jongkhar area.
Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*: The first surprise write-in of the tour, with a bird perched on a wire at Punakha. There have been few national records of this vagrant, and was a ‘Bhutan lifer’ for the leader.

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*: Encountered almost daily, some in higher altitude open country where they were obviously on territory, plus odd singles still lingering at lower altitudes with one still near Samdrup Jongkhar at the end of the tour.

**CINCLIDAE**

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii*: Three birds seen near Paro, a few in the Punakha area, and a single on the Yutong La.

**PRUNELLIDAE**

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*: A single bird appeared at the roadside on the Yutong La.

Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophiata*: Our first was on the Chele La, then several were seen around Ura where they showed extremely well, and odd skulkers were noted on the Lingmethang Road, the Kori La and Yonphu La.

**TURDIDAE**

Long-billed Ground Thrush *Zoothera monticola* (H): A distant song at Sengor was our only contact.

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

Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus boulboul*: Common in their favoured ‘disturbed forest’ habitat, on the Dochu La, on the Kori La, and en-route from Tashigang.

Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*: Very common along the roads, and seen on every day in Bhutan except for the last morning!

**MUSCICAPIDAE**

Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*: Regularly encountered, favouring mid-elevation broad-leaved forest edges, and always returning to the same perch!

Slaty-backed Flycatcher *Ficedula Hodgsonii*: A female at Kanglung was the only one of the tour.

Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophiata*: The ‘OGF’ was numerous at higher altitudes from the Yutong La eastwards to the Lingmethang Road.

White-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula monileger*: Never very birder-friendly, we made numerous attempts to see these but were always hampered by dense thickets, steep terrain and shy birds! A total of four birds were glimpsed (though never by all!) near Yongkola, and also Morong.

Snowy-browed Flycatcher *Ficedula hyperythra* (H): A single songster was heard on the Lingmethang Road.

Little Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula westermanni*: Heard more often than seen, singles were seen at Yongkola and Morong.

Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris*: Our first was near Thimphu, and then we saw a few along our route as far as the Kori La, usually favouring the oak.

Slaty-blue Flycatcher *Ficedula tricolor*: A total of three of these high altitude breeders were seen, all on high passes between the Yutong La and Sengor.

Sapphire Flycatcher *Ficedula sapphira*: It took a while to get views of this speedy little sprite, but we eventually got views a male on the Lingmethang Road.

Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassinus*: Notably common at middle altitudes, and seemed to be increasingly visible as we headed further east.
Large Niltava  *Niltava grandis*: Always rather furtive, we saw a total of three along the Lingmethang Road, with several others heard.

Small Niltava  *Niltava macgrigorae*: A good look at a male of these often secretive birds along the Mo Chu, then a couple of pairs were seen near Morong.

Rufous-bellied Niltava  *Niltava sundara*: Regularly encountered along our route, often in rather disturbed habitat, with some good close views of outrageously coloured males.

Pale Blue Flycatcher  *Cyornis unicolor*: We had good looks at two or three of these sweet songsters near Yongkola, also heard in the south-east.

Blue-throated Flycatcher  *Cyornis rubeculoides*: One was seen briefly near Wangdi, then we had a good long study of a pair at Samdrup Jongkhar. The male showed a bold orange wedge up the throat almost to the bill, which doesn't fit what is written in the Ripley guide, but I am sure these are a form of *rubeculoides*, and not Large Blue Flycatcher *C. magnirostris* as I had once suspected.

Pygmy Blue Flycatcher  *Muscicapella hodgsoni*: We had some excellent close views of a tiny male that eventually gave itself up, after remaining invisible in the tops of the trees along the Lingmethang Road.

Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher  *Culicicapa ceylonensis*: Commonly encountered in the lower and middle altitudes of the Lingmethang Road and the South-east.

Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush  *Monticola rufiventris*: Frequently seen in the higher altitude forests, making the most of the road-cuts and usually perching in plain view. They were especially numerous near Sengor.

Blue-headed Rock-Thrush  *Monticola cinclorhynchos*: Frequently seen along the roadsides adjacent to rocky cuttings at warmer, lower altitudes than the above, with our first ones appearing around Punakha and onwards towards the Pele La. This is a summer visitor that winters in Southern India.

Blue Rock-Thrush  *Monticola solitarius*: A single bird was seen at the roadside near Tashigang, as we nervously negotiated our way along a rather hairy landslide-dominated section of the highway.

Lesser Shortwing  *Brachypteryx leucophrys*: After numerous songsters taunted us from deep within their home thickets, we had a remarkable view of one hopping out onto one of the few remaining vegetated roadside banks near Morong.

White-browed Shortwing  *Brachypteryx montana*: Good views of three males in the early morning near Sengor. Another was heard on the Kori La.

Indian Blue Robin  *Luscinia brunnea*: A songster at Tongsa shot in almost to our feet, then another male also came in close for a look at us on the Yonphu La.

Himalayan Red-flanked Bush-Robin  *Tarsiger rufilatus*: Rather numerous and showy on the Chele La, and only seen subsequently on the Ura-Sheltang La.

Golden Bush-Robin  *Tarsiger chrysaeus*: A male showed in the open briefly on the top of the Thrumsing La.

White-browed Bush-Robin  *Tarsiger indicus*: One sang from an exposed perch for us at the Chele La, and another did likewise on the Yutong La. Interestingly both were first-year males, with female-type plumage.

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): One was heard singing sweetly near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Black Redstart  *Phoenicurus ochruros*: Not usually seen, we actually saw three separate males; on the Dochu La, on the Po Chu, and on the Yutong La.

Hodgson’s Redstart  *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*: Two females at the roadside on the Dochu La were the only ones of the trip.
Blue-fronted Redstart  *Phoenicurus frontalis*: A handful of these lovely birds were seen on the Chele La, and also the Dochu La and the Pele La.

White-capped River-Chat  *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*: Regular sightings along our route, favouring higher altitude watercourses, also seen away from water on occasion.

Plumbeous Water-Redstart  *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*: Not uncommon along the rivers and streams, especially in the west of the country.

Hodgson’s Blue Robin (White-bellied Redstart)  *Hodgsonius phaenicuroides*: A hesitant little song from some rank herbage near our Morong camp signalled the presence of one of these, a write-in for the tour. A male showed briefly before retreating to cover.

White-tailed Blue Robin  *Myiomela leucura*: After some failed attempts to see this on Lingmethang Road, we were pleased with one that fed along the track at the Kori La, then we had a few more sightings in the south-east, including one pecking at a worm in the middle of the road at Morong.

Blue-fronted Blue Robin  *Cinclidium frontale*: Almost silent and certainly invisible along the Lingmethang Road, we had the good fortune to have some great views of one at the Kori La. The initial view was certainly the best that I had ever had, and even subsequently when it shot about more furtively, it was still several times better viewing than what is usual with this ‘black bullet’. And what a beautiful song...

Little Forktail  *Enicurus scouleri*: A pair showed well on a Lingmethang road-side torrent, where coitus was observed.

Black-backed Forktail  *Enicurus immaculatus*: A good look at a pair of anxious parents carrying food in a stream valley near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Slaty-backed Forktail  *Enicurus schistaceus*: Just one sighting on the tour, with a bird posing at some range on the bank of the Mo Chu.

Spotted Forktail  *Enicurus maculatus*: Surely the finest of the genus and always a favourite of mine, we briefly saw a pair skip across the road near Tongsa, then another emerged from the forest near Yongkola during a cracker break, and a fourth example was seen at the roadside near Morong.

Siberian Stonechat  *Saxicola maura*: A small number seen in grassy open areas in the west, with several seen around the marsh at Bumthang.

Grey Bushchat  *Saxicola ferreus*: Available in marginal habitats, and increasingly common in the eastern half of the country, taking advantage of the scrubby and cleared areas.

**Timaliidae**

White-throated Laughingthrush  *Garrulax albogularis*: Frequently encountered at middle to higher altitudes, being particularly visible along the Lingmethang Road.

White-crested Laughingthrush  *Garrulax leucolophus*: The first group were close to our Yongkola camp, then we saw another group below there, and a third party hopping on the roadside near the Kori La.

Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush  *Garrulax monileger*: One was seen rather poorly alongside the above species near Yongkola, then we saw small groups several times more between there and the Kori La.

Striated Laughingthrush  *Grammatoptila striata*: Noisy and visible in the forest at middle altitudes, especially as we went further east, and always with the floppy crest!

Rufous-necked Laughingthrush  *Dryonastes ruficollis*: Great looks at these beautiful birds around our camp at Yongkola, with others seen around the field margins as we travelled to Mongar. Also seen near Deothang.

Grey-sided Laughingthrush  *Dryonastes caeruleus*: Rather difficult to run to ground this year, with birds along the Lingmethang Road staying mostly hidden and not very vocal. Also seen on the Kori La.
Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla rufogularis*: A brief look at a skulker in trash habitat below Yongkola, and a brief view of a trio near Morong.

Spotted Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla ocellata*: A truly stunning bird, with a loud sweet song to match. Two showed well on the Chele La on our first morning, the only sightings of the tour. Only heard in one or two other places, one being at only 2600m on the Yonphu La.

Bhutan Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron imbricatum*: Our first were seen on the outskirts of Tongsa, and then we found them commonly from the Kori La eastwards to Deothang. This taxon ranges from Bhutan just into adjacent west Arunachal and just into southeast Tibet, so is almost endemic to the country.

Blue-winged Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron squamatum*: A rather poor showing this year, largely due to the roadside habitat destruction in the south-east of the country where previously they used to be rather showy. We had a good view of one at Yongkola, thereafter just a single poor view near Morong.

Scaly Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron subunicolor*: A great view of one that rather thrilled us all when it hopped up onto the road, being such a striking yet subtly marked bird. Another was seen rather more fleetingly the following day.

Black-faced Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron affine*: Generally the highest altitude Laughingthrush, we saw several on higher mountain passes from the Chele La to the Thrumsing La.

Red-headed Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron erythrocephalum*: Occasional sightings of this rather misnamed fellow at mid to higher altitudes, from the Dochu La through to the Kori La, and most commonly by voice in the early morning around Sengor. This is one of the splits out of the ‘Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush’ complex.

Crimson-faced Liocichla *Liocichla phoenicea*: Our first were a couple of birds seen fairly briefly just before the rain started on the Kori La, then near Morong we saw three individuals along the battered roadsides. They don’t respond to the song of birds from northern Thailand and eastern Burma, and not surprisingly the ‘old’ Red-faced Liocichla has been split into two, this one retaining the name *L. phoenicea*, and the one in northern Thailand etc is now called Scarlet-faced Liocichla *L. ripponi*.

Cutia *Cutia nipalensis*: We had some great encounters with these little tigers, with our first appearing en-route to the Pele La, several more along the Lingmethang Road, some on the Kori La, and a couple at lower altitudes near Morong.

Puff-throated Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps* (H): One vocal bird stayed hidden at Samdrup Jongkhar.

Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrogenys*: Several good looks at these jolly fellows, from the Punakha roadides to our Yongkola camp ‘garden’, and a couple on the last afternoon near Deothang.

White-browed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus schisticeps*: Great close views of a couple of birds near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ruficollis*: Just one encounter on the tour, with a pair watched at close range for a good length of time near Tongsa. A small number of others were heard along the way.

Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ferruginosus*: A trio appeared as if from nowhere on our final morning in the Yongkola area, showing off their striking reds, whites and blacks. Another two birds appeared next to the Morong camp, one of which showed extremely well in some banana trees. These stunning birds are of the distinctively black-crowned nominate race.

Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler *Xiphirhynchus supercilias*: We found our first beside the busy highway on the Dochu La, but he wasn’t showing off, unlike birds near Sengor that thrilled us with good views on two consecutive days, with a finale of two pairs together. What a great bird. A new name given to this species in the latest edition of Robson’s Birds of South-east Asia is ‘Sickle-billed Scimitar Babbler’, which seems not unreasonable...
Long-billed Wren-Babbler  *Rimator malacoptilus*: Ten years ago, nobody was seeing this in Bhutan, or anywhere else, as the call was unknown. Since then there are regular sightings in one small area near Yongkola, and we managed to entice one into view on several occasions as he peered out at us from a thickly-vegetated bank on the Lingmethang Road like a miniature Kiwi.

Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler  *Pnoepyga albiventer*: Of several heard singing at a variety of altitudes, we saw a sneaky buff-throated example on the Pele La, and a white-scaled one on the Yutong La that showed rather better.

Pygmy Wren-Babbler  *Pnoepyga pusilla*: We actually managed to see the first one that we encountered, along the Mo Chu, then few others were even heard.

Rufous-throated Wren-Babbler  *Spelaeornis caudatus*: At least four individuals seen along the Lingmethang Road, although usually mouse-like and furtive in the undergrowth. This east Himalayan speciality ranges from east Nepal to Arunachal.

Spotted Wren-Babbler  *Spelaeornis formosus*: Once we had got close enough to one singing alongside the Mo Chu near Punakha, it performed extremely well. Many others were heard at middle to lower altitudes as we travelled eastwards, however none of those showed, even when we asked them too!

Rufous-capped Babbler  *Stachyris ruficeps*: A few were seen along the way in middle altitude forest although never commonly.

Golden Babbler  *Stachyris chrysaea*: A handful were seen, along the Lingmethang Road and near Morong.

Grey-throated Babbler  *Stachyris nigriceps*: A great look at a vocal bird that jumped out of a thicket near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Pin-striped Tit-Babbler  *Macronous gularis*: A single was seen near Samdrup Jongkhar, where they were also singing by our hotel. The name change reflects the split from the Bold-striped Tit-Babbler *M. bornensis* in Borneo.

Jungle Babbler  *Turdoides striata* (NL): Three seen by our Samdrup Jongkhar hotel.

Silver-eared Mesia  *Leiothrix argentauris*: Once we reached their favoured habitat near Deothang they proved to be rather common, noisy and showy.

Red-billed Mesia  *Leiothrix lutea*: Often a real skulker, but a handful were seen along the Lingmethang Road.

Rusty-fronted Barwing  *Actinodura egertoni*: Our first ones appeared near Yongkola where they were numerous on our last morning, then plenty were found in the warmer forests near Morong and Deothang.

Hoary-throated Barwing  *Actinodura nipalensis*: We had multiple encounters with this pleasant fellow, from the Dochu La to the Kori La, typically favouring the higher altitude forest.

Blue-winged Minla  *Minla cyanouoptera*: Seen on a few occasions along the Lingmethang Road, and also in the Morong area.

Bar-throated Minla (Chestnut-tailed M)  *Minla strigula*: Seen commonly at higher altitudes such as around the Yutong La and the Sengor area.

Red-tailed Minla  *Minla ignotincta*: This delightful bird was never common, with singles or pairs seen on the Pele La, between Sengor and Yongkola, and also on the Kori La.

Golden-breasted Fulvetta  *Alcippe chrysotis*: Always a personal favourite of mine, we found some obliging examples in roadside bamboo near Yongkola, with some very close views indeed!

Yellow-throated Fulvetta  *Alcippe cinerea*: This Eastern Himalayan speciality was not uncommon along the roadsides between Sengor and Yongkola, and often very confiding. We also saw some near Morong.

Rufous-winged Fulvetta  *Alcippe castaniceps*: Never numerous, we found some near the Pele La, in the Sengor area and on the Kori La.
White-browed Fulvetta *Alcippe viniipectus*: The default small babbler at high altitudes, we saw plenty on the high passes, waving goodbye to them as we dropped below 2800m.

Nepal Fulvetta *Alcippe nipalensis*: A few were seen at lower altitudes near Yongkola.

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

Long-tailed Sibia *Heterophasia picaoides*: A bumper year for these, with a flock even coming into our Morong camp. Several excitable flocks kept us company in the warmer forests as far as Deothang, an elegant bird of sombre plumage.

Striated Yuhina *Staphida castaniceps*: A small flock was seen below Yongkola, and a trio showed rather better near Deothang.

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

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

Stripe-throated Yuhina *Yuhina gularis*: Not uncommon at higher altitudes, around the high passes and down to the Sengor area, plus odd birds were seen quite low down on the Lingmethang Road and also on the Kori La.

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

Black-chinned Yuhina *Yuhina nigritoena*: A couple were seen poorly along the Mo Chu near Punakha, then we had better looks at the lower altitudes below Yongkola.

Great Parrotbill *Conostoma oemodium*: A sequence of gradually better views acquired, with our first contact with a pair at the Pele La barely showing us even a shadow, then a second encounter at the Yutong La provided some better looks, and finally a pair on the Thrumsing La that showed extremely well. A bird with a very varied diet, I once watched one grab and kill a Grey-faced Leaf Warbler!

Brown Parrotbill *Paradoxornis unicolor*: A pair of these handsome but demure birds were seen high on the Yutong La, showing well by the roadside.

Grey-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis gularis*: A vocal group of at least five at Yongkola showed well in the trees.

Orange-eared Parrotbill *Paradoxornis nipalensis*: We saw two separate flocks of these along the Lingmethang Road on one day only, totalling perhaps 30 birds. What a gorgeous little bird! The Black-throated Parrotbill complex has now been split up into five species, and this one is now called 'Orange-eared Parrotbill' *Suthora humii*.

Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis ruicideps*: A single encounter with a group of five on our last morning near Yongkola. As they so often do, they were accompanying a group of Rusty-fronted Barwings.

Black-headed Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius ruiventer*: After much searching we found a very vocal male on the Kori La, singing loudly from a moss-cloaked tree. DNA studies have shown that these Shrike-Babblers are most closely related to Vireos!

Blyth’s Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius aerolatus*: The original White-browed Shrike-Babbler *P. flavigap sap* has been split into four, and this one occurs from Nepal to Thailand. We saw one singing from a treetop near Nobding, then two more were seen near Yongkola.

Green Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius xanthochlorus*: Rather unusually we only encountered one on the whole trip, with a confiding bird seen near Sengor.

Black-eared Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius melanotis*: A total of three males were seen, all were along the Lingmethang Road in the mid-elevation forests.

CISTICOLIDAE

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* (I): Two seen song-flighting over marshes close to Guwahati.

Striated Prinia *Prinia crinigera*: One around the cultivation and grassy patches near Deothang.
Black-throated Prinia *Prinia atrogularis*: Our first showed well at the roadside near Yongkola, and odd birds were also seen in the south-east.

Rufescent Prinia *Prinia rufescens*: Only found near Samdrup Jongkhar where they were vocal and visible in roadside grassy areas.

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

Mountain Tailorbird *Orthotomus cuculatus*: Two birds were seen along the Lingmethang Road, plus another songster near Morong.

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* (H): Present next to our Yongkola camp, and also heard at Samdrup Jongkhar.

SYLVIIDAE

Chestnut-headed Tesia *Tesia castaneocoronata*: Often heard along the higher altitude roadsides, we had good looks at one on the Dochu La.

Slaty-bellied Tesia *Tesia olivia*: Also heard more than seen, we had a good view of this bold little fellow along the Mo Chu, and a couple were seen near Yongkola.

Yellow-browed Tesia (Grey-bellied T) *Tesia cyaniventer*: The throaty song of this fellow could be heard in several localities, and we actually saw them near Nobding and at Tongsa.

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

Strong-footed Bush-Warbler (Brownish-flanked B-W) *Cettia fortipes*: Not uncommon, and its bold song could often be heard around scrappy habitat. Our first one showed well near Punakha, and we had several more encounters in the south-east, such as by our Morong camp.

Hume’s Bush-Warbler (Yellowish-bellied B-W) *Cettia brunnescens*: Two were seen high on the Yutong La, singing their eccentric songs from the dwarf bamboo.

Russet Bush-Warbler *Bradypterus mandelli*: Typically an arch-skulker with the habits of a mouse, we had great looks at one that came in to our feet at Tongsa! Also heard on the Kori La.

Tickell’s Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus affinis*: Odd birds were encountered, en-route to their high altitude breeding grounds, with a significant concentration on the Kori La and also by our Morong camp.

Orange-barred Leaf-Warbler (Buff-barred W) *Phylloscopus pulcher*: Not uncommon at higher elevation, often in mixed flocks.

Grey-faced Leaf-Warbler (Ashy-throated W) *Phylloscopus maculipennis*: Also favouring the higher altitudes, they were most numerous on the Pele La. A rather good looking and easily identified member of the genus!

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*: A single bird singing by our Samdrup Jongkhar hotel was the only sighting.

Large-billed Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris*: Frequently heard singing in the higher forests and occasionally seen, with perhaps the best views coming next to our Morong camp. A summer visitor that winters in Sri Lanka and South India.

Blyth’s Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus reguloides*: Frequently seen at middle and higher altitudes, typically in mixed flocks attracted by Owlet calls!

Yellow-vented Warbler *Phylloscopus cantator*: Only seen along the Mo Chu where we found them to be common. A localised speciality of the north-eastern subcontinent.

Grey-hooded Warbler *Phylloscopus xanthoschistos*: A frequently encountered bird in the lower altitude forests. Note that Rasmussen has shifted this from Seicercus to Phylloscopus.

Green-crowned Warbler *Seicercus burkii*: A fine view of a singing bird near the Pele La, then further sightings were had along the Lingmethang Road, on the Kori La and the Karung La. Typically encountered around 1800-2400m, it sings with a sweeter and more complex
song than the following closely related species. (The original ‘Golden-spectacled’ Warbler has now been split six ways; Plain-tailed S. soror, Grey-crowned S. tephrocephalus, Marten’s S. omeiensis, Bianchi’s S. valentini, Whistler’s S. whistleri and Green-crowned Warbler S. burkii.)

Whistler’s Warbler *Seicercus whistleri*: Seen often in the higher altitude forests around the high passes (typically breeding above 2800m) as far as Sengor, with one other seen on the Yonphu La.

White-spectacled Warbler *Seicercus affinis*: A pair showed well along the Lingmethang Road, unusually side by side with the following species which allowed for some useful direct comparisons.

Grey-cheeked Warbler *Seicercus poliogenys*: These were fairly evident once we dropped lower on the Lingmethang Road, and they were also seen in the Morong area.

Chestnut-crowned Warbler *Seicercus castaniceps*: A great encounter with a tame nest-building pair along the Lingmethang Road, with several others seen near Yongkola and near Morong.

Broad-billed Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni*: A responsive little fellow that gave us good looks near Sengor, zipping past us across the road.

Black-faced Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps*: This little beauty was seen a number of times in the mid-elevation forests along the Lingmethang Road.

Yellow-bellied Warbler *Abroscopus superciliaris* (H): Heard singing in the bamboo near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Striated Grassbird *Megalurus palustris* (I): A songster posed for us near Guwahati airport.

REGULIDAE

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*: Six were seen in Chele La forests, the only ones of the trip.

AEGITALIDAE

Red-headed Tit *Aegithalos concinnus*: Regularly encountered in lower to mid-elevation forest along our route, with plenty of encounters on the Lingmethang Road and in the south-east. For what it’s worth, I fully endorse the return to the old name!

Rufous-fronted Tit *Aegithalos iouschistos*: Few sightings, with singles on the Chele La and Dochu, and a couple on the Thrumsing La.

PARIDAE

Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps*: Rather unusually we found these in the east of the country, with a pair in cherry trees on the Kori La joining a tree-full of *Phylloscopus* Warblers. Infrequently seen on the tour.

Rufous-vented Tit *Parus rubidiventris*: Some good looks at these in the higher forests of the tour, singing from small conifers and bathing in puddles in the road.

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

Grey-crested Tit *Parus dichrous*: Our first were on the Chele La, and seen again often in the fir forests around the high passes.

Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*: Seen at a range of altitudes and on most days, most were paired up.

Black-spotted Yellow Tit (Yellow-cheeked T) *Parus spilonotus*: Three were seen along the Mo Chu, then fairly regularly along the Lingmethang Road, plus a single in the forests above Deothang.

Sultan Tit *Melanochlora sultanea*: Great looks at several of these stunning tits in the Deothang area.

Yellow-browed Tit *Sylviparus modestus*: Not uncommon at higher altitude, and a regular attendant of our artificially-created ‘owlet-flocks’!

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SITTIDAE
Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *Sitta cinnamoventris*: A single appeared along the Mo Chu, another in the warmer forest below Yongkola, then several were seen around Deothang and Samdrup Jongkhar. Note that the ‘old’ Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch has been split three ways, this one found in the Himalayas and its foothills retains the same English and scientific names.

White-tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis*: Our first encounter was on the Dochu La, then odd birds were noted along our route, with several appearing in rather open woodland on the Kori La.

Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa*: Often hard to find, some news from friends of a nest near Morong was gratefully received, although it took a while to find it! The nest was a large football sized ball of leaves, presumably previously an ant’s nest, with a side entrance cavity. The pair appeared fairly soon after we began watching it, and both birds took turns to enter the cavity, the other posing for us on the nearside. With such a rare sight in our hands, we made sure we spent more time with the nest, gathering data on the spectacle. We observed the pair bringing some fine grasses, and also what appeared to be a grub with bristly hairs (or perhaps some vegetable matter), which it proceeded to dust the surroundings of the nest with. Following this extraordinarily fortunate encounter, one actually flew low through our Morong camp, and another three were seen in huge trees further down the valley. Clearly all that chanting paid off!

CERTHIIDAE
Himalayan Treecreeper (Hodgson’s Treecreeper) *Certhia hodgsoni*: At least three were seen in the high forest on the Chele La, and then another was seen on the Ura-Sheltang La. This has recently been split from the Eurasian Treecreeper *C. familiaris*, however, *C. hodgsoni* includes the western race *hodgsoni* and the eastern *mandelli*, which could be separate species themselves. On this trip we saw *mandelli*.

Rusty-flanked Treecreeper *Certhia nipalensis*: A good look at a single bird on the Dochu La, the only sighting of the tour.

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

DICAEIDAE
Yellow-vented Flowerpecker *Dicaeum chrysorrheum* (LO): A brief view of one in some mistletoe near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum melanoxanthum*: A scarce bird not usually encountered, we had a good look at an obliging pair near Sengor.

Plain Flowerpecker *Dicaeum minullum*: A couple of singles of this demure fellow seen near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectus*: Often audibly zipping about, we had several looks at these attractive birds, typically in the cooler mid-elevation forests.

NECTARINIIDAE
Mrs Gould’s Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae*: Some scattered sightings of this jewel, with our first in flowering trees on the Dochu La, some at the roadside near Sengor, and a single male on the Yonphu La.
Green-tailed Sunbird  *Aethopyga nipalensis*: Probably the commonest small bird at higher altitudes, with numerous encounters between the Dochu La and the Yonphu La.

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

Crimson Sunbird  *Aethopyga siparaja*: One was seen in flowering bushes at the very bottom of the Lingmethang Road, and a couple more on our last morning at Samdrup Jongkhar.

Fire-tailed Sunbird  *Aethopyga ignicauda*: Often hard to find, we were fortunate enough to see two males; one on the Pele La and another on the Thrumsing La.

Streaked Spiderhunter  *Arachnothera magna*: An odd sighting of one high on the Kori La feeding around rhododendron flowers at 2600m, then multiple sightings from Morong southwards at more typical altitudes.

ZOSTEROPIDAE

Oriental White-eye  *Zosterops palpebrosus*: Seen at the very bottom of the Lingmethang Road, then also in the foothills near Samdrup Jongkhar where we saw a White-throated Kingfisher present the head of one to its mate as a gift! Yummy!

EMBERIZIDAE

Crested Bunting  *Melophus lathami*: A few were seen in roadside fields as we drove from Punakha, then quite a few were in the fields between Yongkola and Mongar.

Little Bunting  *Emberiza pusilla*: A single bird popped up at Bumthang, then two rather furtive birds were seen on the Karung La.

FRINGILLIDAE

Himalayan Greenfinch (Yellow-breasted G)  *Carduelis spinoides*: Our first were in the fields near Yongkola, then more were found in the south-east from the Kori La and Tashigang area, plus another flock at our Morong camp.

Blanford’s Rosefinch  *Carpodacus rubescens*: Something of a thrill to find this – only the second time it has been seen on the tour. A strange song drew us towards where a pair of these lurked in some fir trees near the Thrumsing La, and we eventually got good views although they were definitely rather shy.

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

Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch  *Carpodacus pulcherrimus*: Two females were found in roadside bushes at Ura.

Dark-rumped Rosefinch  *Carpodacus edwardsii*: A great close look at a male near the Thrumsing La was the only sighting.

Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch  *Carpodacus thura*: Some good looks at several of these on the Chele La, including several fine looking males, plus a couple more in trees on the Dochu La.

Crimson-browed Finch  *Propyrhula subhimachala*: A quartet of female and immature birds fed quietly at the roadside near Sengor.

Scarlet Finch  *Haematospiza sipahi*: Rather thin on the ground this year, with one male seen on the Lingmethang Road, then females were seen near Yongkola and in numbers near Morong.

Red Crossbill  *Loxia curvirostra*: A pair were seen en-route from Bumthang, another two were found in the car park of our Mongar hotel, and a further one was seen near the Yonphu La.

Brown Bullfinch  *Pyrrhula nipalensis*: A good showing near Sengor by up to four vocal birds, and another songster was seen well on the Kori La.

Red-headed Bullfinch  *Pyrrhula erythrocephala*: A female seen briefly near Sengor was the only sighting of the tour.
Gold-naped Finch  *Pyrrhoplectes epaulaetta*: Often a tricky bird to find, we had a nice view of a pair near Sengor. Gorgeous!

Collared Grosbeak  *Mycerobas affinis*: Seen very well on the Chele La, with several birds seen that including some very confiding subjects.

Spot-winged Grosbeak  *Mycerobas melanozanthos* (H): Heard on the Dochu La, then no further contacts on the whole tour.

White-winged Grosbeak  *Mycerobas carnipes*: Rather common on the Chele La, and also found on all the other high passes, with good numbers seen between Bumthang and the Thrumsing La.

**ESTRILDIDAE**

White-rumped Munia  *Lonchura striata*: A couple were seen in flight at Samdrup Jongkhar.

**PASSERIDAE**

House Sparrow  *Passer domesticus*: Apart from birds seen in India, we found some by our hotel at Samdrup Jongkhar.

Cinnamon Sparrow (Russet S)  *Passer rutilans*: Numerous in open country and around cultivation at middle and higher altitudes, they featured strongly around our campsites!

Eurasian Tree Sparrow  *Passer montanus*: Seen frequently around habitation along our route, though generally at lower altitudes.

**STURNIDAE**

Grey-headed Starling (Chestnut-tailed S)  *Sturnia malabarica*: Odd pairs were seen in the Punakha area, and not again until we reached the Deothang and Samdrup Jongkhar area.

Asian Pied Starling  *Gracupica contra*: Seen quite commonly in Assam.

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

Jungle Myna  *Acridotheres fuscus* (I): Two seen in Assam.

White-vented Myna  *Acridotheres grandis*: Two were seen just inside Bhutan near our Samdrup Jongkhar hotel, and another two seen in Assam. There are few records for Bhutan, although they may have recently colonised the area.

Common Hill-Myna  *Gracula religiosa*: Several sightings of these handsome birds around Samdrup Jongkhar.

**ORIOLIDAE**

Slender-billed Oriole  *Oriolus tenuirostris*: A great look at three vocal and active birds in the pines near our Punakha hotel.

Maroon Oriole  *Oriolus traillii*: Often heard singing his sweet song, we regularly found birds in warm broad-leaved forest such as along the Mo Chu and near Yongkola, with a single seen near Deothang.

**IRENIDAE**

Asian Fairy Bluebird  *Irena puella*: Fairly numerous in the Samdrup Jongkhar area.

**DICRURIDAE**

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

Ashy Drongo  *Dicrurus leucophaeus*: Regularly encountered, in a wide altitudinal range and a variety of habitats.

Bronzed Drongo  *Dicrurus aeneus*: Two were seen below Yongkola, then plenty more found at warmer altitudes in the south-east of Bhutan.
Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus remifer*: A few examples seen at Yongkola and in the Deothang area.

Hair-crested Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus* (NL) Two seen near Mongar.

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*: A few singles were seen near Samdrup Jongkhar.

**ARTAMIDAE**

Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus* (I): A great look at one sat on its nest on a phone pole in Assam.

**CORVIDAE**

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*: A pair seen in the oak woods on the Dochu La were the only ones of the trip. These birds are of the *interstinctus* race.

Yellow-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris*: Seen well and often, around the high passes and higher altitude forests.

Common Green Magpie *Cissa chinensis*: At least two pairs seen in the Deothang area, interestingly they were turquoise blue and not green.

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

Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*: Often seen in the lower altitude forests and scrub, and almost down to the plains.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*: Only seen around Ura and the Bumthang valleys where they were fairly numerous. The birds in Bhutan (*bottanensis* race) are the only population within the subcontinent this side of Pakistan, although they range across Tibet and China.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*: A familiar sight around the higher altitude forests, although we did see one or two at lower altitudes in the south-east. These birds are of the *macella* race that lacks spots on the belly and scapulars.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*: Often seen around high cultivated valleys such as at Paro, Ura and Sengor, with a notably large flock swirling around the dzong at Bumthang.

House Crow *Corvus splendens* (I): Common in India.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus japonensis*: The lovable ‘picnic Crow’ was common especially at higher altitudes where they always turned up for free food! We saw it almost every day, except around Samdrup Jongkhar where there is a significant gap between this and the following species.

Eastern Jungle Crow *Corvus levaillantii*: A single was seen well inside Bhutan by our Samdrup Jongkhar hotel, then many more seen in Assam. Rasmussen splits this and the next species from Large-billed Crow *C. macrorhynchos* in ‘Birds of South Asia – The Ripley Guide’. There is certainly a gap in distribution between this one on the plains (200m) and the montane *C. japonensis* (c1000m).
MAMMALS

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

Black Giant Squirrel  *Ratufa bicolor*: Superb looks at these impressive beasts near Yongkola, and a few near Morong and Deothang which were strangely frozen in static positions, as if sleeping.

Orange-bellied Himalayan Squirrel  *Dremomys lokria*: Seen regularly, particularly on the Lingmethang Road.

Irrawaddy Squirrel  *Callosciurus pygerythrus*: A couple seen in the south-east.

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

Hairy-footed Flying Squirrel  *Belomys pearsonii*: The result of an otherwise thrill-free night drive near Yongkola, one flew across the road and then sat in a small tree showing mostly his underside, though occasionally some dorsal chestnut pelage could be seen.

Yellow-throated Marten  *Martes flavigula*: The first was surprised at the roadside on the Dochu La, then two went bounding along the shore while we watched the White-bellied Heron, with a fourth showing really well as it emerged from the foliage on a dead tree trunk near Yongkola.

Nepal Grey Langur  *Semnopithecus schistaceus*: Great looks at three near Thimphu, and another two of these large animals was seen on the way up to the Pele La.

Golden Leaf Monkey (G Langur)  *Trachypithecus geei*: At least six were seen rather distantly in the valley at Tongsa, scoped at range but a good view nevertheless. A rare and highly localised animal only discovered in 1956.

Capped Leaf Monkey (C Langur)  *Trachypithecus pileatus*: Multiple sightings of these splendid animals along the Lingmethang Road and throughout the southeast, with the most seen around the Kori La.

Assam Macaque  *Macaca assamensis*: A roadside troop was seen en-route to the Pele La, a single on the Lingmethang Road, and a noisy group near Samdrup Jongkhar.

Indian Muntjac (Barking Deer)  *Muntiacus muntjak*: A couple seen near Yongkola, and another on the Kori La.

Sambar  *Cervus unicolor*: A single beast crossed the road near Tashigang, a write-in no less.
Birdquest Bhutan 2012

Blue-fronted Redstart

Verditer Flycatcher

White-bellied Heron

White-bellied Heron

Ibisbill

Rufous-bellied Woodpecker
Olive-backed Pipit  

Crested Kingfisher  

Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush  

Grey-backed Shrike  

Japanese Quail  

Japanese Quail
Blood Pheasant

Satyr Tragopan

Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler

Rufous-bellied Niltava

Satyr Tragopan

Rufous-breasted Accentor
Scaly Laughingthrush

Rufous-necked Hornbill

Blue-bearded Bee-eater

Rufous-necked Laughingthrush

Ward’s Trogon

Pale Blue Flycatcher
Beautiful Nuthatch

Crested Serpent Eagle

Rufous-bellied Eagle

Pin-tailed Green Pigeon

Sultan Tit

Blue-throated Flycatcher
Hooded Pitta

Mt Everest

Rhododendron bloom

Fir forest, Thrumsing La