



Satyr Tragopan (all photos by Dave Farrow)

# BHUTAN

**11 - 28 APRIL 2016**

**LEADER: DAVE FARROW.**

This year's Birdquest tour to Bhutan was once again a wonderful experience in a beautiful country where magic continues to flow around the forested mountain slopes. Despite the fact that on some days our birding was hampered by thick fog, low cloud and rain, we managed to find most of our targets, plus a few surprises thrown in to keep us on our toes. Our 'bird-of-the-trip' was a Red Panda that picked just the right moment to cross the road in front of us, a brief but stunning view of this chestnut ghost. Gamebirds once again featured strongly, and we counted a minimum of 12 Satyr Tragopans, most of which were on the roadsides, their apparent boldness aided by the rain and foggy conditions. Seven Himalayan Monal sightings was a tour record, plus we saw several Blood Pheasants on the high passes. A Himalayan Wood Owl was a nice find near one of our camps, though a vocal Hodgson's Frogmouth would not show himself. Black-tailed Crake showed well, and we had great views of Ibisbill along the Paro River. Raptors abound in these mountains,

and highlights included an abundance of Black Eagles, Pallas's Fish Eagle, migrant Short-toed and Booted Eagles, and a female Amur Falcon seen on our way through Assam. Parrotbills gave a good account of themselves, and we saw six species including Orange-eared, Fulvous, Grey-headed, Brown, Great and Pale-billed (aka Lesser Rufous-headed), with Greater Rufous-headed heard only. Wren Babblers are always a favourite and we had a superlative look at a Long-billed (the little Kiwi!) plus Rufous-throated, Scaly-breasted, and Spotted Elachura (which of course is no longer a Wren Babbler!) We had some jigsaw views of Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler, Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler gave us a prolonged and close performance, good looks at a charming Golden-breasted Fulvetta, and found White-hooded Babblers in the south of the country. We saw 13 species of Laughingthrush, with the gorgeous Spotted coming high on the list of favourites. Fire-capped Tits showed well this year, plus Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker and Sapphire Flycatcher. Spot-winged Starlings were a welcome thrill, as was a fine Collared Treepie, a write-in and a Bhutan lifer for the leader.

We began our tour on a sunny early morning at Paro airport, and after a brief pause at our hotel we set about birding along the river valley, where the suite of soon-to-be-familiar river birds made their introduction. We saw Plumbeous Water Redstarts, Brown Dipper and White-capped Redstart, plus an Ibisbill that kept its distance as it fed on a shingle island. Also here we saw Grey-backed Shrikes, Hodgson's Redstarts, Black Bulbuls, Rosy Pipit, and a horde of Red-billed Chough. We resumed in the afternoon, visiting a bit of forest edge further up the valley, where the Tiger's Nest monastery looked down on us from high on its cliff above us. Yellow-billed Blue Magpies were very confiding here, as were a troop of White-throated Laughingthrushes. A pair of Spotted Laughingthrush feeding on open ground was most unexpected, and Brown Parrotbills were also an exciting find, posing for us on the tops of bushes. Also here we saw Blyth's Leaf Warblers, Rufous-breasted Accentors, Green-backed Tits and Blue-fronted Redstarts, to complete an excellent start to our tour, before we retreated to bed early, ready for a pre-dawn outing tomorrow.



Rufous-breasted Accentor



Brown Parrotbill

We headed out in the dark, driving uphill towards the high pass of the Chele La at 3750m. A Grey Nightjar sitting in the road was the only thing that slowed us down, and as the light came up we reached the higher elevations, and soon saw a pair of Blood Pheasants beside the road. We continued up and over the pass, searching for our target of Himalayan Monal. Once easy to see here, they seem to have become scarcer and harder to find. We jumped off the bus to study a flock of Altai Accentor, also finding our first Black-faced Laughingthrushes and Himalayan White-browed Rosefinches, and were also surprised to see a couple of Red-throated Thrushes. Returning towards the pass we then saw a big blue male Himalayan Monal flop down onto the road, and we quickly jumped out of the bus to scope it as it sat on a bluff below the road. It then flew down to a grassy slope to join a female that was nigh on invisible on the brown patches. Hurrah! We picked a spot to eat our packed breakfast, and saw both Collared and White-winged Grosbeaks from this vantage point. We spent the rest of the morning strolling downhill, finding Himalayan Bluetails, Grey Crested

and Coal Tits, Lemon-rumped and Buff-barred Warblers, more Blood Pheasants, some Spotted Nutcrackers, and had good looks at vocal Hodgson's Treecreepers. We found our first Rufous-vented Yuhinas and Mrs Gould's Sunbirds, White-browed Fulvettas and Long-tailed Minivets. We descended to Paro for a hot lunch, before heading towards the capital. A stop alongside the broad Paro River produced two Ibisbill that lurked on a shingle island in mid-stream, and at another point we saw Ruddy Shelduck and River Lapwings. A pause in the bustling capital was long enough for a photo stop of the Dzong, before we ascended to the nearby pass of the Dochu La and our lodgings for the night.



*Fire-capped Tit*



*Black-throated Bushtit*

We stepped out before breakfast for a stroll uphill in the moss-draped fir forest, and despite it being a little quiet we managed a great view of a vocal Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler, plus our first Whistlers Warbler. After checking out of our rather eccentric hotel, we walked the road through these high forests and saw Darjeeling Woodpecker, Blyth's Swifts, Rufous-vented and Stripe-throated Yuhinas, Yellow-browed Tit and Green-tailed Sunbird. Dropping lower in elevation we took a walk down a side trail in order to avoid roadworks, and found Common Cuckoo, a pair of Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers and another Darjeeling Woodpecker. A pair of Fire-capped Tit played hard to get at first, but eventually provided some reasonable views. We paused for lunch in a roadside restaurant, and nearby we explored a side track where we found a friendly Brown-flanked Bush Warbler, Red-tailed Minla, Rufous-bellied Niltava, White-tailed Nuthatch and a super Pygmy Blue Flycatcher. At lower levels we had a good view of a Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler and Slender-billed Oriole, before the day slipped into dusk and we checked into our well-appointed hotel.

In the half-light of dawn we drove up the valley of the Mo Chu River, finding three Kalij Pheasants on the road as we did so. It was cool and overcast, and the Spotted Elachuras were singing with gusto. The first three would not be lured into view, but the fourth showed superbly well, his little body vibrating as he pumped out his high-pitched song. Another six were heard during the day, to put the count into double figures! It was a birdy morning, with Golden-throated and Great Barbets, Rufous and Crimson-breasted Woodpeckers, Lesser Yellownapes, Rufous-chinned Laughingthrushes posing in the open, Asian Emerald Cuckoo, Black-chinned and Nepal Fulvettas, Small Niltava, a Red-headed Trogon, Black and Rufous-bellied Hawk Eagles, a Crested Serpent Eagle complete with serpent, Rusty-fronted Barwings, Dark-sided and Verditer Flycatchers, Black-throated Sunbird, Yellow-vented and Grey-hooded Warblers, Maroon Oriole and Grey Treepies. We had a splendid cooked lunch delivered to us in the field, then we bumped our way back down the road to Punakha, seeing Crested Kingfisher and Long-tailed Shrike en route. After photos of the Dzong were acquired (and where did all those tour buses come from?) we headed up the Po Chu River in search of rare Herons, but as is typical were unsuccessful. We did see an adult Pallas's Fish Eagle, Asian House Martins and Red-rumped Swallow, before it was time to head home for some well-earned refreshment.

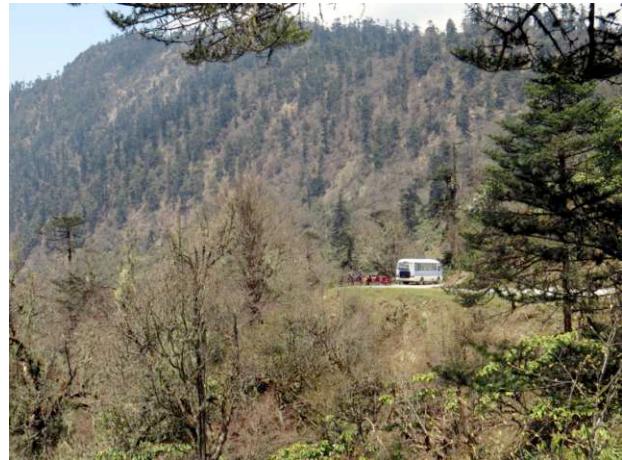
The next morning we made another foray along the Po Chu in search of White-bellied Heron, but to no avail. We headed downriver to Wangdi, finding an errant Little Egret and an Osprey, before ascending the highway

eastwards. The road widening and construction meant it was a dust bowl all the way up to the top, yet we managed some stops along the way seeing Striated Prinia, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, Mountain Hawk Eagle, some great views of Fire-capped Tits, Green-crowned Warbler, Short-billed Minivet and Ultramarine Flycatcher. Respite from the road-building carnage came on the Pele La, where we strolled in peace down the old road through flowering rhododendrons, and enjoyed a picnic with a view of the high mountains, complete with fresh snow on them. We saw multiple Himalayan Griffons, Rufous-vented Tit, Darjeeling Woodpecker, Alpine Accentor, Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch, and had a great surprise when a male Himalayan Monal stepped out into a clear area for a minute or two. An even greater surprise came a few minutes later when a male Satyr Tragopan jumped out of the thicket and briefly sat atop a stump before disappearing again, unfortunately rather too brief a view for all of us to see it. We traveled the short distance from here to the Phobjika valley, finding Whistler's Warbler and Slaty-blue Flycatcher as we went. Down in the swampy valley bottom we kicked around until it started raining, and saw a horde of Plain Mountain Finches, a migrant Amur Wagtail and two Hen Harriers.

Our plan was to go out pre-dawn to hunt for Wood Snipe, however waking to heavy rain meant that this had to be abandoned! We left after breakfast and drove up to the Pele La where the weather improved, and had a big surprise when four Himalayan Monals were disturbed from their feeding on their open slopes, one of which showed extremely well as he sat in a tall fir tree, his bright colours closely matching the colours of the tree to provide an unexpected camouflage. We also saw Grey-sided Bush Warbler and some Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch, and a group of Black-throated Thrush fed in open areas on the other side of the pass. Then we headed downhill towards Tongsa on muddy ripped-up roads, pausing to look at some raptors over the road that proved to be Booted and Short-toed Eagle, both write-ins, before ascending once again, to the Yutong La where a short stop added Ashy-throated and Lemon-rumped Warblers, but little else stirred along the roadsides. We headed into Jakar and to our very pleasant hotel, a nice end to a rather long travel day.



*Black-tailed Crake*



*Pele La*

A fine breakfast helped us on our way as we continued our journey eastwards, with a stop close to the town at an attractive little swamp giving us a nice view of Black-tailed Crake. Further on up the road we saw yet another male Himalayan Monal on the road, and up around the Sheltang La we saw a fine male Red-headed Bullfinch, White-winged Grosbeak, some friendly Rufous-fronted Bush Tits and Lemon-rumped Warblers. At the Ura valley we saw a splendid flock of 66 Snow Pigeon that flew around in a tight formation before coming back down to land close by, a Himalayan Griffon that was harried by Crows and eventually landed, plus a few lovely pink Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinches. We headed up towards the Thrumshing La and ate our picnic at the roadside, a pleasant affair as there was almost no traffic on this section of road. Around the pass we found Fire-tailed Sunbirds and a male Golden Bush Robin, then around the chorten with much hat waving and shouts of 'Haggeloh!' for good luck. We had reached the fabled Lingmethang Road, the birding highway of legend, and before we had got very far along it we saw a gorgeous little Fulvous Parrotbill in the

bamboo, and lured in a noisy Great Parrotbill that flew in circles around us. We reached our camp and checked in (now complete with electricity and a new building!) then set off down the road for a late afternoon search of big red gamebirds. As the sky dimmed and fog swirled up the mountainside, we found a total of four different male Satyr Tragopans feeding on the roadside, one of which we watched feeding on the verge for good 25 minutes. Whoopee!!



*Satyr Tragopan – male*



*- female*

It rained during the night, and our pre-breakfast birding along the road was rather gloomy and revealed just some Rufous-winged Fulvettas, and a brief view of a flock of Snow Pigeons. After some breakfast we returned to the high road, although fog was now hampering our progress. We found a fine pair of Hoary-throated Barwings, but Bar-winged Wren Babbler and Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler were vocal but could not be lured in. Two Yellow-bellied Flowerpeckers were a nice find, then dropping lower in altitude we hoped to shake off the fog, however it was either that or rain in equal quantities! A lull in the bad weather coincided with a busy bird flock in some bamboo with Golden-breasted Fulvetta, Orange-eared Parrotbills, White-spectacled Warbler and Chestnut-crowned Warbler showing well. Returning to higher levels we ran into the rain once again, and saw little until we ran into another very obliging male Satyr Tragopan feeding on the roadside. Just before dusk near our camp, we managed to tease out a vocal Himalayan Wood Owl in the rain, and had a good look as he sat low down in a large tree. It continued to rain and things were beginning to feel a little damp, but our camp crew produced another fine dinner for us.

The rain had stopped and the sky was clearing. We were hopeful of some increased bird activity, but it was quiet at the higher altitudes, although we did see another three Tragopans on the road, as tame as you like! We had a good close encounter with a couple of Broad-billed Warblers in the swirling mists, then dropped down in altitude and found a small flock of Scaly Laughingthrushes. In ever richer forests as we headed down the road, we heard a quiet barking call of Ward's Tropicbird. It took a while to pinpoint their location, and eventually a pair were spotted sitting below us in bamboo, the male like a big raspberry dessert as he sat among the mossy branches. They moved off into the forest but not before we had enjoyed some good looks of both sexes in the scope. Phew! Pressure off, we hung around a while longer at this elevation and saw Sapphire Flycatchers, Orange-eared Parrotbill, Large Niltava, Streak-throated Scimitar Babbler, White-throated Fantail, Bay Woodpecker and Greater Yellownape. Around some Giant Rock Bee nests we saw a Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, and further along the road we found Yellow-throated Fulvetta and Grey-cheeked Warbler. A flock of Himalayan Cutia showed well, and a pair of Grey-sided Laughingthrushes showed briefly. Once we were into the lushest section of forest, we had a brief encounter with some Sikkim Wedge-billed Babblers that were well buried in the herbage, and near the end of the day we had a superb view of a Long-billed Wren Babbler that came out and sat centre stage, and showed us the full glory of his elongate beak and stripey plumage. Our first Rufous-necked Hornbills finished off the day for us, and we rolled into our fine camp for the night.

We started at dawn the next morning in some of the richest forests along this road, but it seemed that we were awake before the birds were! We had an al-fresco breakfast at the roadside, before going on to have partial views of a White-gorgeted Flycatcher, a Collared Owlet that showed really well, and a Rufous-throated Wren Babbler that popped out of a thicket and into a well-placed open patch. A vocal Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo made an appearance, and a female Scarlet Finch sat up on a treetop. The fog rolled in mid-morning, and everything cooled down, but a trio of Sultan Tit gave us a great close view and a Blue-bearded Bee-eater sat on a open perch. The poor weather enforced a pause at camp for lunch, and unfortunately the afternoon was fogged out at all levels higher than our camp, but we persisted at lower elevations and found Pale Blue Flycatchers, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Striated Yuhina and White-crested Laughingthrush. Our evening at camp was accompanied by heavy rain and rolling thunder, irksome for our birding but not uncommon in this neck of the woods.



Rusty-fronted Barwing



Blue-bearded Bee-eater

The rain and thunder continued, and come the morning we could barely see across the length of our camp in the dense fog! We made an exploratory drive up into the forests above us, and managed to find a trio of Long-tailed Broadbills before the fog rolled back in, so we headed downhill to fog-free altitudes. The lower levels were quite birdy, with Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Blue-throated Barbet, Blue-throated Blue Flycatchers, Ashy Bulbuls, Yellow-vented Warbler, Blue-capped Rock Thrushes, some dapper Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes, and Black-chinned Yuhina. The fog appeared to lifting higher up so we headed back uphill in the afternoon. We managed to find a Hodgson's Frogmouth that was calling in the daytime, however extensive searching could not pinpoint the roosting bird. Further uphill, we found Grey-sided and Bhutan Laughingthrushes, and eventually some White-naped Yuhina, before the sky grew dark again and we ended up heading back to camp. After dinner we tried again to find the Hodgson's Frogmouth, and although it called close by, we could not see the pesky bird! A gorgeous Hodgson's Giant Flying Squirrel was some compensation, and we had a great view of one of these long-tailed animals munching on oak leaves.

A Common Cuckoo heralded the onset of dawn in our camp, and after breakfast we packed up and started heading back up the road, thick fog cloaking our way. We stopped where it had cleared a little, and had a rather fluky view of a female Ward's Tropic plus a Pygmy Blue Flycatcher. Higher up the mountain we found a Large-billed Leaf Warbler, and heard a Black-headed Shrike Babbler singing from the clouds. At the higher levels it had cleared and we were above the thick mist, and found Fire-tailed Sunbird and Chestnut-tailed Minla, then pressed on over the high cold forests that seemed to be as yet devoid of any spring activity. On the Sheltang La we walked the road in search of birds, finding White-winged Grosbeak, a Eurasian Wren of the race *nipalensis*, Rufous-fronted Bushtits and several other typical birds of the high forests. Another male Satyr Tragopan appeared near Sengor, one on the Sheltang La and then another in the pinewoods closer to Jakar, and we rolled in to town in the rain, and enjoyed hot showers at our comfortable hotel.

The next morning we headed up to the Yutong La, amazed that fine weather seemed to be the order of the day. We found singing Hume's Bush Warblers, then over the top we had some truly exceptional views of Slender-billed Scimitar Babblers at close range. We also had a brief look at Green Shrike Babbler, before time constraints forced us to press on. As we bumped our way downhill, pandemonium erupted in the bus with bellows of 'Red Panda!', and sure enough, there just ahead of the bus, crossing the road at a brisk trot was a bright chestnut animal with a big bushy tail. *OMG!* It was a lifer for everybody (except the leader) including all of our Bhutanese crew. Our driver Lambo, who had been plying these routes for *decades*, was as ecstatic as we were. Truly an auspicious sighting, and we trundled down to Tongsa with big smiles on our faces. Despite the road being rather messy, a pair of Spotted Forktails gave us a surprise view just below town, before we pressed on to our appointment with a time slot, for when the closed road ahead would open briefly for traffic. We joined a queue of vehicles, all waiting to pass across a horrendous bit of road that was carved out of a cliff. It was a scary bit of road, but we made it through without mishap, although some of us had to assist other vehicles with a push out of the mud! Heading on, a stop near Khosela produced a handsome Spot-winged Starling, and a big river crossing gave us Slaty-backed Forktail, Mountain Hawk Eagles and some nesting Blyth's Swifts. We sped along the 'Shemgang bypass', an impressive feat of engineering with the road simply blasted out of a cliff, and made brief stops for Himalayan Bulbul and Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch. At lower levels we enjoyed a great look at a Great Hornbill, and a Chestnut-winged Cuckoo flew around calling manically. We reached our camp, and settled in with cocktails and a backdrop of crickets and river noise. Some of the Thimphu staff of our ground agents had come out to see us for the night, and made sure we were as comfortable as could be. A Spot-bellied Eagle Owl called from across the roaring river as we settled into our beds for the night.



*Red Panda*

As the light dawned around our camp, the birding was busy with Pin-tailed and Wedge-tailed Green Pigeons, Barred Cuckoo Dove, Great Hornbills, White-throated Bulbuls, Lesser Necklaced, Rufous-necked and White-crested Laughingthrushes. After some breakfast we headed uphill, interrupted by a quartet of White-hooded Babblers, and a pair of Yellow-bellied Warblers nest-building in a dead bamboo stem. Higher up in the warm forest with massive epiphyte-laden trees, we searched in vain for Beautiful Nuthatch, however we saw White-browed Piculet, Green-billed Malkoha, Rufous-necked Hornbill and Long-tailed Broadbill, and working

our way up to Shemgang town that sits at the top of the hill we saw Mountain Hawk Eagles, Crested Honey Buzzard, Crested Serpent Eagles and Rufous-bellied Hawk Eagle. As it became quite hot the cicadas began to whine, we enjoyed lunch provided by our camp crew at a spectacular viewpoint complete with prayer wheel. The afternoon was spent searching further for Beautiful Nuthatch, but the most exciting thing we found was an archery picnic at the roadside, with groups of men seemingly firing arrows at each other! We did see both White-naped and Black-chinned Yuhinas, Silver-eared Mesia and Rusty-fronted Barwings bashing through the dense thickets, and enjoyed a close look at Square-tailed Drongo Cuckoo. As we headed back to our camp at twilight, a large roost of Great Hornbills was found in roadside pine trees, with a minimum of 29 birds counted.



*Orange-eared Parrotbill*



*Fulvous Parrotbill*



*Pale-billed Parrotbill*



*Grey-headed Parrotbill*

We took a new path the following morning, across the Mangdechu River and along a small road, where a Himalayan Goral showed very well on a cliff, kicking stones onto the road below as it galloped upslope. There was much bamboo here, and we found White-browed Scimitar Babblers, Rufous-faced Warblers, Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher, and an exquisite Pale-billed (or Lesser Rufous-headed) Parrotbill. (A Bhutan lifer for the leader.) Also here we found an Indian Paradise Flycatcher (a write-in), Banded Bay Cuckoo, Ashy Woodswallow and Plain Flowerpecker. Working our way back across the river, we ascended the road up to the ridge on a very bright and hot day, and paused by an elegant stupa on the ridge. From here we walked for several kilometers down the hill, finding Black Eagles hunting low over the trees, Blyth's Shrike Babblers, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Grey-chinned Minivets, Black-throated Bushtits, Sultan and Yellow-

cheeked Tits, a migrant Brown Shrike, and brilliant male Scarlet Finches. A Leopard growled repeatedly and clearly from lower down the slope, to add further piquancy to the splendid forested vista.



*Yellow-throated Marten*



*Tanden & Lambo*

We broke camp early, and excitedly began our journey southwards towards the forests of the Gelephu area – ‘terra incognita’ for the leader despite this being my eighteenth visit to the country. Some birding near to the camp produced Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Greater Yellownape and Grey-throated Babbler. A brief exploration of the first section of the ‘Shemgang bypass’ nearly ended badly when on our return way we discovered there was a minor yet spectacular landslide spilling onto the road. We approached with caution, cleared some rocks from the road and rushed through, and continued our journey uphill toward the Tama La, the next pass to the south. A pause by an overlook produced some very responsive Grey-headed Parrotbills, then further uphill in some very lush forest we found Sultan Tits and Asian Emerald Cuckoo as it began to get hot and quiet. We lunched at the top of the pass where we found a road casualty Scaly Thrush, and at lower elevations we found some rather friendly Yellow-throated Fulvettas. In more open country we found a vocal Tickell’s Thrush, Red-rumped Swallows, Chestnut-tailed Starlings, and White-vented Myna. Further down the road we found some very rich forest where we saw Silver-eared Mesia, and heard some Red-faced Liocichla and Blue-winged Laughingthrush. A Beautiful Nuthatch called briefly, and was probably glimpsed escaping, but following that there was no sign whatsoever. Bah! We headed to our new camp in a peaceful clearing just off the road, where Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babblers called and a Grey Nightjar came calling around the camp, the perfect spot for our last night of camping. It has to be said that our camps were excellent throughout, and the wonderful catering took us all by surprise.

The last morning that would be woken by Common Cuckoo, we decamped and began our birding where we had left off the previous day, on a steep forested mountainside hanging above the last valleys of Bhutan. A pair of Rufous-necked Hornbill posed as they sat below us, and a pair of Speckled Piculets popped up for a view. The rich subtropical forests held lots of potential, but the birds were coming slowly on this sunny morning. A female Asian Emerald Cuckoo perched up for us, Long-tailed Broadbill was nest-building over a ravine, then the rasping notes of a Collared Treepie were heard coming from the forest. The bird was duly teased to the forest edge, and showed well before it returned to being secretive. A ‘write-in’ and an excellent find. There was an additional cast of showy Sultan Tits, Long-tailed Sibias noisily chasing each other, and Black-chinned, White-naped and many Striated Yuhinas. A Blue-winged Laughingthrush could not be coaxed out, staying mostly unseen among the herbage, and a few Mountain Imperial Pigeons flew over. A female Red-headed Trogon also popped out for a viewing. We then went exploring the base of the foothills, finding Crested Kingfisher along the emerging mountain river, Golden-fronted Leafbirds and Black-crested Bulbuls, before heading to a very scenic little lunch spot, nestled alongside the river with Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters on display. Here we ate our final lunch prepared by the very excellent camp crew, before it was time to say goodbye and return to cooler altitudes for some final Bhutanese birding. The afternoon activity continued, and we had a good look at a Cutia, several Small Niltavas, Hodgson’s Hawk Cuckoo, a migrant

Black-naped Oriole, and an Eyebrowed Wren Babbler called a few times from a ravine before losing interest. In the late afternoon we rolled out of the hills and onto the plain surrounding the border town of Gelephu. A Rufous Treepie made it a ‘three-Treepie-day’, three Red-naped Ibis flying over the town were a surprise, and Cinereous Tit, Jungle Babbler and House Swift padded the list some more.

We said fond goodbyes to our guide Tanden and driver ‘Lambo’, our companions for the last 18 days, as our onward transport was two largish cars sent from Assam. Once the young drivers had been instructed in how to pack luggage properly, we squeezed in and set off across the border. It was a bit of a shock to cross a different and less-organised world, and once we had been processed at the Indian ‘Foreigners Checkpoint’ (by the world’s surliest immigration officer) we set off across the Brahmaputra plains. On the northern side of the river it was notably birdy, with a healthy density of common species dotting the roadsides. We made a few short stops where we saw Yellow-wattled Lapwings, Pacific Golden Plover, Lesser Adjutant, Bengal Bushlark, and a female Amur Falcon hawking from a telephone wire. We crossed the Brahmaputra on a very long bridge, then sped along through cultivation to the airport at Guwahati where our tour ended. It had been a great adventure traveling through these wonderful mountains, and I for one was pining for the high passes when we reached the plains of India. Bhutan is still a wonderful and magical birding destination, despite the very visible developments, and I was perhaps not the only member of the group who would have been quite happy to turn round and do it all again!



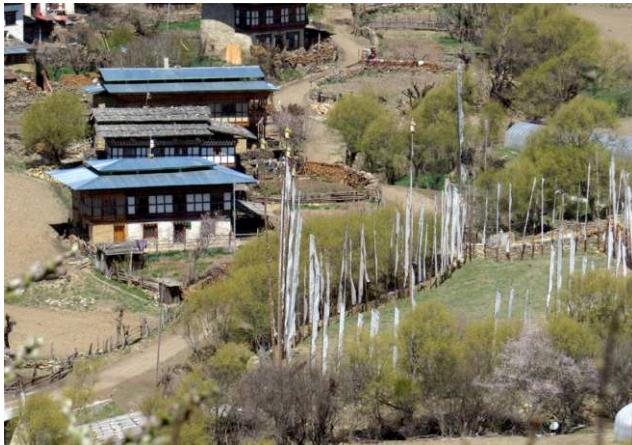
White-winged Grosbeak



Archery at Shemgang



Midday lull on a mountain ridge near Shemgang



Ura village



More watermelon, madam?



Our capable crew: Tanden, Lambo, Tashi and Jigme



Punakha Dzong



Himalayan Monal

#### SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

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

Species which only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO)

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

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

**Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*** Six seen near Thimphu, another six near Wangdi.

**Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*** Six seen near Wangdi.

**Hill Partridge ◊ *Arborophila torqueola* (H)** Heard often, never close enough.

**Rufous-throated Partridge ◊ *Arborophila rufogularis*** A glimpse of one at Yongkola, many heard in the south.

**Chestnut-breasted Partridge ◊ *Arborophila mandellii* (H)** Several heard at Yongkola, until the fog rolled in...

**Blood Pheasant ◊ *Ithaginis cruentus*** Eight birds seen on the Chele La, another pair near the Thrumsing La.

**Satyr Tragopan ◊ *Tragopan satyra*** Some remarkable encounters. See note.

**Himalayan Monal ◊ *Lophophorus impejanus*** A record count of seven birds, all but two were males. See note.

**Kalij Pheasant ◊ *Lophura leucomelanos*** Three along the road at Punakha, another two briefly at Shemgang.

**Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*** Many seen along the Assamese roadsides.

**Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*** Two examples seen along the Assamese roadsides.

**Red-naped Ibis** *Pseudibis papillosa* A great surprise to see three flying over Gelephu.

**Indian Pond Heron** *Ardeola grayii* A handful along the Assamese roadsides.

**Eastern Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus coromandus* Seen along the Assamese roadsides.

**Great Egret** *Ardea alba* Odd birds noted along the Assamese roadsides.

**Intermediate Egret** *Egretta intermedia* The most numerous Egret along the Assamese roadsides.

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* A single at Wangdi was an unusual record.

**Little Cormorant** *Microcarbo niger* A few singles along the Assamese roadsides.

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* Noted at Punakha and Gelephu.

**Western Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* One along the river near Punakha.

**Crested Honey Buzzard** ♀ (Oriental H B) *Pernis ptilorhynchus* Several seen, mostly in the warm south.

**Himalayan Vulture (H Griffon)** *Gyps himalayensis* A good number over the Pele La, some 15+. Another at Ura.

**Crested Serpent Eagle** *Spilornis cheela* Regular sightings along our route, especially down around Tingtibi.

**Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus* A very large individual seen between the Pele La and Tongsa.

**Mountain Hawk-Eagle** *Nisaetus nipalensis* Frequently seen soaring, a couple of birds seen perched.

**Rufous-bellied Hawk-Eagle** *Lophotriorchis kienerii* Four individuals seen, progressively better views.

**Black Eagle** *Ictinaetus malaiensis* Remarkably common on this tour, especially from Tongsa southwards. 17 noted!

**Booted Eagle** *Hieraetus pennatus* A single dark morph between the Pele La and Tongsa.

**Crested Goshawk** *Accipiter trivirgatus* A couple of good looks along the way.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* A handful seen early in the tour.

**Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus* A great view of two at Phobjika, hunting Plain Mountain Finches.

**Black Kite** *Milvus [migrans] govinda* A few of the resident race along our way in Assam.

**Black-eared Kite** *Milvus [migrans] lineatus* A migrant heading north near Gelephu.

**Pallas's Fish Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* One showed well as it flew up river at Punakha.

**Himalayan Buzzard** ♀ *Buteo burmanicus* Several examples seen in the higher elevation areas.

**Black-tailed Crake** ♀ *Porzana bicolor* Two seen near Jakar, a nice view at close range.

**Ibisbill** *Ibidorhyncha struthersii* Just three seen, one above Paro and two below the town.



*Ibisbill*



*Black Eagle*

**River Lapwing** *Vanellus duvaucelii* Seen along the rivers at Paro, Thimphu and Punakha and near Gelephu.

**Yellow-wattled Lapwing** *Vanellus malabaricus* Two seen in Assam, one sat on a nest.

**Red-wattled Lapwing** *Vanellus indicus* One on the river at Gelephu, a couple more in Assam.

**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* Three in breeding dress in Assam.

**Bronze-winged Jacana** *Metopidius indicus* A couple on roadside wetlands in Assam.

**Eurasian Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola* Two seen near the Chele La, one sat posing in a streambed.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* Several birds seen along the rivers at Paro and Thimphu.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* A few examples along the rivers in western Bhutan.

**Rock Dove (R Dove)** *Columba livia* Available in places.

**Snow Pigeon** ♀ *Columba leuconota* 66 birds in a flock at Ura, another 20+ seen at Sengor.

**Oriental Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis* Seen commonly and daily until reaching the Gelephu area.

**Red Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia tranquebarica* A few seen in Assam.

**Spotted Dove** *Spilopelia chinensis* Seen at lower elevations and around cultivation.

**Barred Cuckoo-Dove** *Macropygia unchall* Nice looks at several at Tingtibi.

**Common Emerald Dove** *Chalcophaps indica* (H) Heard at Tingtibi.

**Pin-tailed Green Pigeon** ♀ *Treron apicauda* Good views of some of these handsome Pigeons at Tingtibi.

**Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon** *Treron sphenurus* A single feeding in the open at Tingtibi was nice.

**Mountain Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula badia* Several seen in the forests north of Gelephu.

**Green-billed Malkoha** *Phaenicophaeus tristis* A good look at one near Shemgang.

**Chestnut-winged Cuckoo** *Clamator coromandus* A vocal bird circled us repeatedly near Tingtibi.

**Asian Koel (Common K)** *Eudynamys scolopaceus* (H) Heard at Gelephu, also in Assam.

**Asian Emerald Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx maculatus* At least five seen, a couple even perched for views.

**Banded Bay Cuckoo** *Cacomantis sonneratii* A single bird seen near Tingtibi was a good find.

**Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo** *Surniculus lugubris* Often heard, several seen in the Tingtibi area.

**Large Hawk-Cuckoo** *Hierococcyx sparverioides* One flying by near Tongsa was the only sighting. Many heard.

**Common Hawk-Cuckoo** *Hierococcyx varius* A single seen at the roadside in Assam.

**Hodgson's Hawk-Cuckoo** ♀ *Hierococcyx nisicolor* A good if brief look at one at Yongkola.

**Indian Cuckoo** *Cuculus micropterus* (H) Several heard along our way.

**Himalayan Cuckoo** *Cuculus saturatus* Often heard, a single seen in flight, another seen was this the following sp.

**Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* At least four seen, others heard.

**Mountain Scops Owl** ♀ *Otus spilocephalus* (H) Heard from at least two of our camps, always very distantly.

**Spot-bellied Eagle Owl** *Bubo nipalensis* (H) Peculiar cries heard from across the noisy at Tingtibi.

**Himalayan Owl** ♀ *Strix nivicolum* Seen well at Sengor, after taunting us with his loud calls. Only the second seen.

**Collared Owlet** *Glaucidium brodiei* A vocal example seen well at Yongkola, often one that goes unseen.



Collared Owlet



Snow Pigeon

**Hodgson's Frogmouth** *Batrachostomus hodgsoni* (H) So close, bloody thing... See note.

**Grey Nightjar** *Caprimulgus jotaka* One perched on the road on our ascent to the Chele La. Heard from our camps.

**Himalayan Swiftlet** *Aerodramus brevirostris* A thin scattering of sightings on our tour.

**White-throated Needletail** *Hirundapus caudacutus* Just two seen, near our Yongkola camp.

**Asian Palm Swift** *Cypsiurus balasiensis* Some around Gelephu and also in Assam.

**Blyth's Swift** *Apus leuconyx* Frequent sightings, nest sites also noted with birds going into cracks in cliffs.

**House Swift** *Apus nipalensis* Many around the town of Gelephu.

**Red-headed Trogon** *Harpactes erythrocephalus* One briefly at Punakha, another showed well near Gelephu.

**Ward's Trogon** ♀ *Harpactes wardi* Good fortune, with a pair showing on the Lingmethang Road, then a female later.

**Indian Roller** *Coracias benghalensis* One flew by near Gelephu, others noted in Assam.

**White-throated Kingfisher** *Halcyon smyrnensis* A few noted at lower elevations in Bhutan.

**Common Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis* Just a couple of sightings on Bhutanese rivers.

**Crested Kingfisher** *Megaceryle lugubris* Nice looks at a couple on wires at Punakha, also seen at Gelephu.

**Blue-bearded Bee-eater** *Nyctyornis athertoni* Multiple sightings, especially in the Tingtibi area.

**Chestnut-headed Bee-eater** *Merops leschenaulti* A few birds seen in the foothills near Gelephu.

**Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops* Frequently seen around upland cultivations.

**Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*** Some great sightings at Tingtibi, with a remarkable roost of 36+ in pines.

**Rufous-necked Hornbill ♀ *Aceros nipalensis*** Many of these awesome beasts in the south of the country.

**Great Barbet *Psilopogon virens*** Frequently encountered, his calls provided a soundtrack for our birding.

**Lineated Barbet *Psilopogon lineatus*** One outside our hotel in Gelephu.

**Golden-throated Barbet *Psilopogon franklinii*** Often seen in warmer middle altitude forests.

**Blue-throated Barbet *Psilopogon asiaticus*** 'The incessant took-a-rook' often heard, also seen, at low elevations.

**Coppersmith Barbet *Psilopogon haemacephalus* (H)** Heard in Assam.

**Yellow-rumped Honeyguide ♀ *Indicator xanthonotus*** Two seen along our route, sitting by their bee hives.

**Speckled Piculet *Picumnus innominatus*** A pair seen on our last morning in the mountains.

**White-browed Piculet *Sasia ochracea*** A wonderful prolonged encounter near Shemgang.



White-browed Piculet



Great Barbet

**Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos hyperythrus*** A pair seen en route from the Dochu La.

**Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus*** A handful seen from Tingtibi southwards.

**Crimson-breasted Woodpecker ♀ *Dendrocopos cathpharius*** A great look at a male at Punakha.

**Darjeeling Woodpecker ♀ *Dendrocopos darjellensis*** Two on the Dochu La showed well, another on the Pele La.

**Greater Yellownape *Chrysophlegma flavinucha*** A few seen, at Yongkola and around Tingtibi.

**Lesser Yellownape *Picus chlorolophus*** Four seen, often in mixed flocks.

**Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*** A few seen later in the tour, vocally different from European birds.

**Pale-headed Woodpecker ♀ *Gecinulus grantia* (H)** Heard calling near Tingtibi.

**Bay Woodpecker *Blythipicus pyrrhotis*** One showed well at Yongkola, others heard.

**Rufous Woodpecker *Micropternus brachyurus*** Two near Punakha, also heard drumming at Tingtibi.

**Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*** Odd birds noted in open country.

**Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*** A nice thrill to find a female hunting from wires in Assam.

**Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*** One seen between Paro and Thimphu.

**Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri*** A pair at a hole outside our Gelephu hotel.

**Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*** One flew over the Gelephu border gate.

**Long-tailed Broadbill *Psarisomus dalhousiae*** Several good looks at Yongkola, Shemgang and Gelephu.

**Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike *Hemipus picatus*** A few sightings at lower elevations.

**Large Woodshrike *Tephrodornis virgatus*** At least three in dry forest near Tingtibi.

**Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus*** A small number seen in the south of Bhutan, more in Assam.

**Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*** A single bird seen close to Gelephu.

**Black-winged Cuckooshrike *Coracina melaschistos*** Several along our way, most visible in the southern valleys.

**Grey-chinned Minivet *Pericrocotus solaris*** Not uncommon around Yongkola and the warmer southern valleys.

**Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*** The higher altitude Minivet, seen in numerous locations.

**Short-billed Minivet *Pericrocotus brevirostris*** A few seen in the richer forests, a pair at a nest near Gelephu.

**Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus speciosus*** Common at lower elevations in the warm southern valleys.

**Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*** A single seen near Tingtibi, also in Assam.

**Long-tailed Shrike** *Lanius schach* Visible around cultivation at lower elevations.

**Grey-backed Shrike** *Lanius tephronotus* Common and visible, already on territory at Paro & other higher elevations.

**White-bellied Erpornis (W-b Yuhina)** *Erpornis zantholeuca* Several seen, at Yongkola and around Tingtibi.

**Black-headed Shrike-Babbler** ♀ *Pteruthius rufiventer* (H) Heard in the mist near Sengor.

**Blyth's Shrike-babbler** *Pteruthius aeralatus* Several sightings, often in pairs, often vocal.

**Green Shrike-Babbler** ♀ *Pteruthius xanthochlorus* Several heard, one seen eventually at the Yutong La.

**Black-eared Shrike-Babbler** *Pteruthius melanotis* A female seen in a mixed flock, songsters heard elsewhere.

**Slender-billed Oriole** ♀ *Oriolus tenuirostris* Two or three seen in the Punakha area, in their favoured pines.

**Black-naped Oriole** *Oriolus chinensis* A single seen in the foothills above Gelephu.

**Maroon Oriole** *Oriolus traillii* Seen well at Punakha and in the southern forests.

**Black Drongo** *Dicrurus macrocercus* A few seen in Assam only.

**Ashy Drongo** *Dicrurus leucophaeus* Frequently seen throughout the tour, though fewer at lower elevations.

**Bronzed Drongo** *Dicrurus aeneus* Not uncommon in the warm lower elevation forests.

**Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo** *Dicrurus remifer* Odd ones of these spectacular birds seen at Yongkola and Tingtibi.

**Hair-crested Drongo** *Dicrurus hottentottus* A few seen at Punakha and Tingtibi.

**White-throated Fantail** *Rhipidura albicollis* A few seen in mid elevation forests.

**Indian Paradise Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone paradisi* A singing bird flew across the road at Tingtibi. See note.

**Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* (NL) One seen on the Dochu La.

**Yellow-billed Blue Magpie** ♀ *Urocissa flavirostris* Pleasingly showy in the higher elevation forests of the tour.

**Rufous Treepie** *Dendrocitta vagabunda* A single seen at a distance at Gelephu.

**Grey Treepie** *Dendrocitta formosae* Seen fairly commonly in the warm lower elevation forests.

**Collared Treepie** *Dendrocitta frontalis* A smart bird and a Bhutan lifer for T/L.



Collared Treepie



Spotted Nutcracker

**Eurasian Magpie** *Pica pica* Not uncommon around the Bumthang and Ura valleys.

**Spotted Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* Seen regularly in the higher altitude forests, race *nipalensis*.

**Red-billed Chough** *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* Many at Paro, numerous at Ura, also at Sengor.

**House Crow** *Corvus splendens* Now in Thimphu, a few were seen there, but not again until Gelephu.

**Large-billed Crow** *Corvus macrorhynchos* Common in the mountains, absent at lower elevations in the south.

**Eastern Jungle Crow** *Corvus levaillantii* Only seen in Assam.

**Yellow-bellied Fantail** *Chelidorhynx hypoxanthus* Some nice examples seen at higher elevations.

**Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher** *Culicicapa ceylonensis* Seen at a range of altitudes, nest-building activity noted.

**Fire-capped Tit** ♀ *Cephalopyrus flammiceps* 3 skittish birds at Dochu La, then close views of a pair near the Pele La.

**Yellow-browed Tit** ♀ *Sylviparus modestus* A few seen in the higher elevation forests.

**Sultan Tit** *Melanochlora sultanea* Good close looks at Yongkola, fairly common in the warm southern forests.

**Rufous-vented Tit** *Periparus rubidiventris* A familiar sight on the high passes.

**Coal Tit** *Periparus ater* Common on the Chele La, also noted on a couple of other high passes.

**Grey Crested Tit** ♀ *Lophophanes dichrous* A few seen in the higher elevation forests.

**Cinereous Tit** *Parus cinereus* A couple of sightings at Gelephu.

**Green-backed Tit** *Parus monticolus* A common Bhutanese bird!

**Yellow-cheeked Tit** *Machlolophus spilonotus* Seen just twice, south of Shemgang.

**Bengal Bush Lark** *Mirafra assamica* A reasonable look at one in roadside fields in Assam.

**Oriental Skylark** *Alauda gulgula* One seen at Phobjika, heard at Sengor.

**Striated Bulbul** *Pycnonotus striatus* Not bad for a Bulbul! Often seen in some of the richer forests.

**Black-crested Bulbul** *Pycnonotus flaviventris* A few were noted along the river at Geleyphu.

**Himalayan Bulbul** *Pycnonotus leucogenys* Two seen along the 'Shemgang bypass' was the only sighting.

**Red-vented Bulbul** *Pycnonotus cafer* Commonly available at lower elevations.

**White-throated Bulbul** ♀ *Alophoixus flaveolus* Just a few seen around Tingtibi and nearer to Geleyphu.

**Mountain Bulbul** *Ixos mcclellandii* Scattered sightings along our route.

**Ashy Bulbul** *Hemixos flavala* Several sightings of showy birds at lower elevations.

**Black Bulbul** *Hypsipetes leucocephalus* Commonly encountered at a wide range of elevations.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* Seen at Punakha and near Geleyphu.

**Asian House Martin** *Delichon dasypus* A flock at Punakha, odd birds seen elsewhere.

**Nepal House Martin** ♀ *Delichon nipalense* A nice encounter with a cliff nest colony on the Lingmethang Road.

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica* A few seen at Punakha, also near Gelephu.

**Scaly-breasted Wren-babbler** *Pnoepyga albiventer* One showed very well on the Dochu La.

**Pygmy Wren-babbler** *Pnoepyga pusilla* (H) Just heard on one occasion, remarkably.

**Yellow-bellied Warbler** *Abroscopus superciliaris* Nest building observed by a pair at Tingtibi.

**Rufous-faced Warbler** ♀ *Abroscopus albogularis* A nice encounter with a vocal pair at Tingtibi.

**Black-faced Warbler** ♀ *Abroscopus schisticeps* A brief view of two in the fog at Yongkola.

**Mountain Tailorbird** *Phylloscopus cuculatus* A singing bird in the bamboo on the Lingmethang Road.

**Broad-billed Warbler** ♀ *Ticella Hodgsoni* Two birds showed very well on the Lingmethang Road.

**Brown-flanked Bush Warbler** *Horornis fortipes* One showed at close range near the Dochu La, many others heard.

**Hume's Bush Warbler** ♀ *Horornis brunneascens* Two seen in the bamboo on the Yutong La.

**Grey-bellied Tisia** ♀ *Tesia cyaniventer* A couple of loud encounters ended up in glimpses for some of us.

**Slaty-bellied Tisia** ♀ *Tesia olivea* One along the Mo Chu at Punakha gave a brief show, others glimpsed elsewhere.

**Grey-sided Bush Warbler** ♀ *Cettia brunnifrons* A small number seen at higher elevations.

**Chestnut-headed Tisia** ♀ *Cettia castaneocoronata* actually remarkably few even heard, glimpses of one at Sengor.

**Black-throated Bushtit** *Aegithalos concinnus* Not uncommon in the warm lower elevation forests.

**Rufous-fronted Bushtit** ♀ *Aegithalos iouschistos* A feature of the forests on the high passes.



*Rufous-fronted Bushtit*

**Tickell's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus affinis* In places these were numerous, migrants headed uphill.

**Buff-barred Warbler** *Phylloscopus pulcher* Seen on the high passes but never in great number.

**Ashy-throated Warbler** *Phylloscopus maculipennis* Often encountered in the higher forests.

**Lemon-rumped Warbler** *Phylloscopus chloronotus* The commonest Warbler in the higher elevation forests.

**Large-billed Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus magnirostris* One seen in the mist near Sengor, a couple more heard.

**Blyth's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus reguloides* Quite common in some higher elevation forests.

**Yellow-vented Warbler** ♀ *Phylloscopus cantator* First seen at Punakha, common at low elevations in the south.

**Grey-hooded Warbler** *Phylloscopus xanthoschistos* Most frequent at low to mid elevations in the south.

**White-spectacled Warbler** ♀ *Seicercus affinis* A smart fellow popped out of bamboo on the Lingmethang Road.

**Green-crowned Warbler** ♀ *Seicercus burkii* One seen en route to the Pele La.

**Whistler's Warbler** ♀ *Seicercus whistleri* Quite visible in some higher elevation forests, at its breeding altitude.

**Grey-cheeked Warbler** ♀ *Seicercus poliopteryx* Several seen well at Yongkola and above Tingtibi.

**Chestnut-crowned Warbler** *Seicercus castaniceps* A single in bamboo on the Lingmethang Road was the only one.

**Striated Prinia** *Prinia crinigera* A few sightings of these fellows in cultivated areas at lower elevations.

**Black-throated Prinia** *Prinia atrogularis* A few encountered along our route.

**Common Tailorbird** *Orthotomus sutorius* A couple at lower elevations in the south.

**Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler** *Pomatorhinus erythrogenys* Nice views at Punakha, one or two elsewhere.

**White-browed Scimitar Babbler** *Pomatorhinus schisticeps* A couple of birds seen well around Tingtibi.

**Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler** *Pomatorhinus ruficollis* Just a single seen on the Lingmethang Road.

**Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler** ♀ *Pomatorhinus superciliaris* A fantastic encounter on the Yutong La. See note.

**Rufous-throated Wren-Babbler** ♀ *Spelaeornis caudatus* One seen well at Yongkola, before the clouds rolled in.

**Bar-winged Wren-Babbler** ♀ *Spelaeornis troglodytoides* (H) At Sengor, frustratingly heard only, wouldn't be coaxed.

**Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler** ♀ *Sphenocichla humei* A shy pair gave glimpses of various body parts at Yongkola.

**Grey-throated Babbler** *Stachyris nigriceps* A few seen at Tingtibi and southwards.

**Rufous-capped Babbler** *Stachyridopsis ruficeps* Odd birds in mixed flocks on the Lingmethang Road.

**Golden Babbler** *Stachyridopsis chrysaea* A few sightings in mixed flocks along our route.



Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler



Yellow-throated Fulvetta

**Yellow-throated Fulvetta** ♀ *Alcippe cinerea* Seen along Yongkola roadsides, also on the Tama La.

**Rufous-winged Fulvetta** *Alcippe castaneiceps* Scattered encounters with these fellows, most near Sengor.

**Nepal Fulvetta** ♀ *Alcippe nipalensis* Frequently encountered, common from Shemgang southwards.

**Eyebrowed Wren-Babbler** *Napothena epilepidota* (H) One called from a rocky gully near Geleyphu.

**White-hooded Babbler** *Gampsorhynchus rufulus* Four birds appeared one morning at Tingtibi. T/L Bhutan lifer!

**Long-billed Wren-Babbler** ♀ *Rimator malacoptilus* Awesome close views of one at Yongkola. See note.

**Jungle Babbler** *Turdoides striata* A handful seen on the outskirts of Geleyphu.

**White-crested Laughingthrush** *Garrulax leucolophus* A regular thrill, fairly common in the warm southern forests.

**Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush** ♀ *Garrulax rufogularis* At least four, good views near Punakha.

**Spotted Laughingthrush** ♀ *Garrulax ocellatus* A lucky strike with two birds feeding in the open at Paro.

**White-throated Laughingthrush** *Garrulax albogularis* Seen frequently, from mid to high elevations.

**Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush** *Garrulax monileger* Some reasonable looks at these at Tingtibi.

**Rufous-necked Laughingthrush** ♀ *Garrulax ruficollis* Great encounters with these jewels at Yongkola and Tingtibi.

**Grey-sided Laughingthrush** ♀ *Garrulax caeruleatus* Several encounters at Yongkola.

**Striated Laughingthrush** *Garrulax striatus* Frequently encountered along our route.

**Bhutan Laughingthrush** ♀ *Trochalopteron imbricatum* A few in disturbed habitat, at Yongkola and Shemgang.

**Blue-winged Laughingthrush** ♀ *Trochalopteron squamatum* An eye and a wing was all that was glimpsed!

**Scaly Laughingthrush** ♀ *Trochalopteron subunicolor* Many good views this year on the Lingmethang Road.



Scaly Laughingthrush



Striated Laughingthrush

**Black-faced Laughingthrush** ♀ *Trochalopteron affine* The most visible Laughingthrush at high elevations.

**Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush** *Trochalopteron erythrocephalum* Several encounters with small flocks.

**Himalayan Cutia** ♀ *Cutia nipalensis* Great views on the Lingmethang Road, also found near Geleyphu.

**Blue-winged Minla** *Minla cyanouroptera* Regularly encountered along our route.

**Bar-throated Minla (Chestnut-tailed M)** *Minla strigula* Remarkably few seen, only at higher elevations.

**Red-tailed Minla** *Minla ignotincta* A few scattered sightings, often in mixed flocks.

**Red-faced Liocichla** ♀ *Liocichla phoenicea* Several heard but unseen in the foothills, one glimpsed at Shemgang.

**Rusty-fronted Barwing** ♀ *Actinodura egertoni* Encountered fairly widely below 2000m.

**Hoary-throated Barwing** ♀ *Actinodura nipalensis* Some good looks at pairs around Sengor.

**Silver-eared Mesia** *Leiothrix argentauris* Several looks at these from Shemgang southwards.

**Red-billed Leiothrix** *Leiothrix lutea* A few scattered sightings of this furtive fellow.

**Rufous Sibia** ♀ *Heterophasia capistrata* Seen commonly at most elevations.

**Long-tailed Sibia** ♀ *Heterophasia picaoides* Some noisy examples seen in the foothills.

**Golden-breasted Fulvetta** ♀ *Lioparus chrysotis* Just one seen, in bamboo on the Lingmethang Road.

**White-browed Fulvetta** *Fulvetta vinipectus* Frequently encountered in the higher elevation forests.

**Great Parrotbill** ♀ *Conostoma aemodium* A good look at a vocal bird on the Thrumzing La.

**Brown Parrotbill** ♀ *Cholornis unicolor* A fortunate find of two on the forest edge at Paro.

**Fulvous Parrotbill** ♀ *Suthora fulvifrons* Rare views of a showy little fellow on the Thrumzing La.

**Black-throated Parrotbill** ♀ (Orange-eared P) *Suthora [nipalensis] humii* Stunning views on the Lingmethang Rd.

**Pale-billed Parrotbill** ♀ (Lesser Rufous-headed P) *Chleuasicus atrosuperciliaris* A great look at Tingtibi. See note.

**White-breasted Parrotbill** ♀ (Greater Rufous-headed P) *Psittiparus ruficeps* (H) Heard only at foggy Yongkola.

**Grey-headed Parrotbill** *Psittiparus gularis* A great close encounter with a group near Tingtibi.

**Striated Yuhina** *Yuhina castaniceps* Notably common in the foothills.

**White-naped Yuhina** ♀ *Yuhina bakeri* Seen in the fog of Yongkola, better looks acquired in the south.

**Whiskered Yuhina** *Yuhina flavicollis* Common in the mid-elevation forests.

**Stripe-throated Yuhina** *Yuhina gularis* Not uncommon on the high passes.

**Rufous-vented Yuhina** *Yuhina occipitalis* Like the above, found in higher elevation forests.

**Black-chinned Yuhina** *Yuhina nigrimenta* Several nice encounters in warmer lower elevations forests.

**Oriental White-eye** *Zosterops palpebrosus* Scattered sightings, commonest in the foothills.

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus* A couple of sightings in higher elevation forests.

**Spotted Elachura** ♀ (S Wren-Babbler) *Elachura formosa* One seen very well, another nine heard, at Punakha.

**Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* A nice look at one of the *nipalensis* subspecies.

**Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch** *Sitta cinnamoventris* Some nice examples seen along our route.

**White-tailed Nuthatch ♀ *Sitta himalayensis*** Several seen, on the Lingmethang Road and elsewhere.



*Black-chinned Yuhina*



*Stripe-throated Yuhina*

**Beautiful Nuthatch ♀ *Sitta formosa* (H)** So frustrating, a brief encounter in the foothills, despite days of searching!

**Hodgson's Treecreeper *Certhia hodgsoni*** Nice looks and strong song on the Chele La.

**Sikkim Treecreeper ♀ *Certhia discolor*** Two seen between Wangdi and the Pele La, others heard along our route.

**Spot-winged Starling ♀ *Saroglossa spiloptera*** A fine male seen en route to Tingtibi.

**Great Myna *Acridotheres grandis*** A few seen around cultivation in the foothills.

**Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus*** A single at the Geleyphu border post, just inside Bhutan! T/L Bhutan lifer.

**Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*** Available at lower elevations.

**Pied Myna *Gracupica contra*** A couple in Geleyphu, many in Assam.

**Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica*** A few seen at lower elevations in the south.

**Alpine Thrush ♀ *Zoothera mollissima* (H)** Heard on the Chele La.

**Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor*** A nice encounter with a songster near our final campsite.

**White-collared Blackbird ♀ *Turdus albocinctus*** Quite common at higher elevations.

**Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis*** Five individuals seen on the Pele La.

**Red-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis*** Two seen on the Chele La.

**Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*** Seen commonly at lower altitudes.

**Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*** A few examples seen along our route.

**White-gorgeted Flycatcher ♀ *Anthipes monileger*** A couple of very furtive birds, at Yongkola and Shemgang.

**Pale Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis unicolor*** A pair showed together at Yongkola, a female seen at Shemgang.

**Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides*** Plenty seen at Yongkola and Tingtibi.

**Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara*** A few examples seen, all males.

**Large Niltava *Niltava grandis*** Single songsters at Yongkola and Shemgang.

**Small Niltava *Niltava macgrigoriae*** First seen at Punakha, more seen in the foothills.

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

**Lesser Shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophris*** Few heard, at Yongkola.

**White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana*** A male popped out for a brief show at Sengor.

**Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea*** A fleeting view of one crossing the road near Gelephu.

**White-tailed Robin *Myiomela leucura*** A glimpse of one, others heard in the foothills.

**Himalayan Bluetail *Tarsiger rufulatus*** Very visible on the Chele La, also on the Pele La and Sheltang La.

**Golden Bush Robin ♀ *Tarsiger chrysaeus*** A male popped up into view on the Thrumzing La.

**Little Forktail ♀ *Enicurus scouleri*** A single seen on the Lingmethang Road was our only sighting.

**Slaty-backed Forktail *Enicurus schistaceus*** A couple of singles seen, near Shemgang and the Tama La.

**Spotted Forktail *Enicurus maculatus*** Two seen near Tongsa were a surprise given the road disturbances there.

**Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*** Pleasingly common throughout much of the tour.

**Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophiata*** Not uncommon in higher elevation forests.

**Little Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula westermanni*** A few examples seen along our route.

**Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris*** Seen well on the Dochu La and en route to Pele La.

**Slaty-blue Flycatcher** *Ficedula tricolor* A couple of males seen in higher elevation forests.

**Sapphire Flycatcher ♀** *Ficedula sapphira* A pair teased down from the canopy on the Lingmethang Road.

**Pygmy Flycatcher** *Muscicapella hodgsoni* Good views of this feisty mite in a couple of places.



Large Niltava



Ultramarine Flycatcher

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* A single noted near Punakha.

**Hodgson's Redstart ♀** *Phoenicurus hodgsoni* Five along the Paro river on the first day was the only sighting.

**Blue-fronted Redstart ♀** *Phoenicurus frontalis* A few seen at Paro and on the high passes.

**Plumbeous Water Redstart** *Phoenicurus fuliginosus* Seen frequently on most suitable rivers.

**White-capped Redstart** *Phoenicurus leucocephalus* Often seen, sometimes on the most insignificant trickle.

**Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* A couple of singles seen on rocky stretches of road.

**Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush** *Monticola rufiventris* A regular sight along higher altitude roads adjacent to cliffs.

**Blue-capped Rock Thrush** *Monticola cinclorhynchus* Common along the roads in the warmer sections of our route.

**Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus* A couple near Thimphu and one at Phobjika.

**Grey Bush Chat** *Saxicola ferreus* Not uncommon around cultivation at Yongkola, also in the south.

**Brown Dipper** *Cinclus pallasi* Frequent sightings along any suitable rivers.



Crimson Sunbird



Fire-tailed Sunbird

**Golden-fronted Leafbird** *Chloropsis aurifrons* A couple seen close to Geleyphu.

**Orange-bellied Leafbird** *Chloropsis hardwickii* Very common in the warm forests south of Shemgang.

**Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker** *Dicaeum melanoxanthum* Three birds seen in one day on the Lingmethang Road.

**Plain Flowerpecker** *Dicaeum minullum* Singles noted at Tingtibi and at Geleyphu.

**Fire-breasted Flowerpecker** *Dicaeum ignipectus* A few seen in mid elevation forest.

**Mrs. Gould's Sunbird ♀** *Aethopyga gouldiae* A handful seen on higher passes.

**Green-tailed Sunbird** *Aethopyga nipalensis* Very common in the higher elevation forest.

**Black-throated Sunbird** *Aethopyga saturata* Visible in the warmer, lower altitude forests.

**Crimson Sunbird** *Aethopyga siparaja* a splendid pair entertained us at close range near Tingtibi.

**Fire-tailed Sunbird** ♀ *Aethopyga ignicauda* At least four seen around the Thrumzing La, well received by us all.

**Streaked Spiderhunter** *Arachnothera magna* A few seen in the warmer, lower altitude forests.

**Russet Sparrow** *Passer rutilans* Pleasingly common around higher elevation cultivation and habitation.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* Scattered sightings in more populated and cultivated areas.

**Alpine Accentor** *Prunella collaris* A single seen at the top of the Pele La.

**Altai Accentor** *Prunella himalayana* A flock of 20+ on the Chele La were a surprise find.

**Rufous-breasted Accentor** ♀ *Prunella strophiata* Not uncommon in the higher elevation areas.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* A few individuals seen along our route.

**White Wagtail** (Amur W) *Motacilla [alba] leucopsis* A single migrant seen at Phobjika.

**White Wagtail** (Himalayan W) *Motacilla [alba] alboides* Common at Paro, also on several other rivers.

**Paddyfield Pipit** *Anthus rufulus* A single seen in Assam.

**Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* Frequent sightings along our route, on territory at higher elevations.

**Rosy Pipit** *Anthus roseatus* A handful seen at higher elevations.

**Collared Grosbeak** ♀ *Mycerobas affinis* A couple at the Chele La were the only ones of the tour.

**Spot-winged Grosbeak** ♀ *Mycerobas melanozanthos* (LO) A leader only flyby near Nobding.

**White-winged Grosbeak** *Mycerobas carnipes* Fairly common around the high passes.

**Brown Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula nipalensis* A brief glimpse of one on the Lingmethang Road.

**Red-headed Bullfinch** ♀ *Pyrrhula erythrocephala* Great looks at a male singing on the Sheltang La.

**Plain Mountain Finch** *Leucosticte nemoricola* Hordes of them. See note.

**Common Rosefinch** (Scarlet R) *Carpodacus erythrinus* A male by our Yongkola camp.

**Scarlet Finch** ♀ *Carpodacus sipahi* A few females and a couple of males seen along our route.

**Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch** ♀ *Carpodacus pulcherrimus* Nice views at Pele La and Ura.

**Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch** ♀ *Carpodacus thura* Seen well on the Chele La and Pele La.

**Red Crossbill** (Common C) *Loxia curvirostra* A flock overhead on the Yutong La, also seen at Dochu La.



Rosy Pipit



Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch

## MAMMALS

**Moupin Pika** *Ochotona thibetana* Often seen on the high passes.

**Black Giant Squirrel** *Ratufa bicolor* Three seen feeding on fruit near Tingtibi.

**Orange-bellied Himalayan Squirrel** *Dremomys lokriah* Often seen, running on the ground.

**Irrawaddy Squirrel** *Callosciurus pygerythrus* Seen in the richer forests.

**Himalayan Striped Squirrel** *Tamiops mcclellandii* Occasionally seen in the warmer forests.

**Hodgson's Giant Flying Squirrel** *Petaurista magnificus* Superb views of one at Yongkola.

**Leopard** *Panthera pardus* (H) A wonderful and prolonged audio encounter with one at Tingtibi.

**Yellow-throated Marten** *Martes flavigula* Three seen in all, one in the fog was not shy at all!

**Red Panda** *Ailurus fulgens* A n eyeball-searing pulse of chestnut walked across the road in front of us. See note.

**Golden Leaf Monkey (G Langur) *Trachypithecus geei*** Many seen around Tingtibi, a few on the Geleyphu side.

**Capped Leaf Monkey (C Langur) *Trachypithecus pileatus*** Good views at Yongkola.

**Assam Macaque *Macaca assamensis*** Quite a few seen in the south.

**Indian Muntjac (Barking Deer) *Muntiacus muntjak*** A couple by our Tingtibi camp.

**Common Goral (Himalayan G) *Nemorhaedus goral*** Good views of two near Tingtibi.



*Golden Langur*



*Himalayan Goral*

## NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

The most up to date referenced taxonomic list referred to in the Tour Report is that of the IOC World Bird Names. Gill, F and Donsker, D (Eds). 2016. IOC World Bird Names (v2.11). Available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>

**Satyr Tragopan** *Tragopan satyra* I was genuinely worried that road works disturbance might affect our chances to see even just one, however I needn't have worried as we saw a minimum of twelve along the way, all males except for one female! It may have been a different story had the weather been bright and sunny instead of raining and foggy.

**Himalayan Monal** *Lophophorus impejanus* A record count of seven birds, the first ones on the Chele La played hard to get for a while, and seem to be harder to see at this site, however three cocks and a hen on the Pele La performed well. Another male was seen as we drove through pine-dominated forest near Jakar.

**Hodgson's Frogmouth** *Batrachostomus hodgsoni* Annoyingly staying unseen, we did at least have a good aural encounter. This was a Bhutan first for me, and at only the second known site in the country, although I'm sure I could find more of them given time!

**Indian Paradise Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone paradisi* A songster near Tingtibi would appear to be of this taxon. Another two species in the Asian Paradise Flycatcher complex have been recognised by IOC to make a 3-way split.

**Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler** *Pomatorhinus superciliaris* One of the most amazing bill shapes of any bird, we were treated to a very showy bird on the Yutong La. Not long before that chestnut thing crossed the road.

**Long-billed Wren-Babbler** *Rimator malacoptilus* We couldn't have asked for better views of this little Himalayan kiwi. Only discovered in Bhutan in 2005, it seems to be confined to the forests near Yongkola.

**Pale-billed Parrotbill ♀ (Lesser Rufous-headed P)** *Chleuasicus atrosuperciliaris* I was hoping to find this as I had never seen one in Bhutan before. A single bird showed well in tall bamboo near Tingtibi. It was just a shame that its close relative, Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill, was only heard, otherwise we would have seen the most Parrotbill species on any Bhutan tour ever!

**Plain Mountain Finch** *Leucosticte nemoricola* A phenomena of this years' tour was the sheer number of these everywhere, swirling around in large flocks, mostly at higher elevations but some seen down to 1500m. Perhaps they sensed that the high country was still in the grip of winter?



**Red Panda** *Ailurus fulgens* If I may just once again use the word 'pandemonium' to describe the event of just a few seconds when this bright chestnut bushy-tailed creature scrambled down the bank, crossed the road and disappeared down the bank below the road. Thanks to some urgent prompting, I was able to grab my camera and get some snaps before it disappeared. A rarely seen creature that does not normally go trotting past at 9.48 in the morning, it was a first for all four Bhutanese on board. The local name is 'Acho-dongka', meaning 'white-faced brother'. A truly awesome moment.