

BHUTAN

Birding in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan

Trip Report by Brian Wetton



Brian and Pat Wetton went to Bhutan in March-April 2012. Organised by Birdfinders, the tour was led by Chubzang Tangbi of Langur Eco Travel. He was a very good leader and birder and he and his team of driver (Depak), cook (Ilu) and camp crew (Rinzin, Sonam and Garitamgmy) provided excellent logistical support. The nine nights in hotels were of a good comfortable standard and the seven nights camping provided comfortable tents, campbeds, sleeping bags, camp fires and hot water bottles when necessary, and a very ample kitchen offering tasty food in camp and in the field during birding. We saw 257 species of birds (including 3 in Kolkata) and heard 11 others. The accompanying birders were Bob and Sue Ennis from British Columbia, Jim Hays from Arizona, and Brits Tim Key and Trevor Weston. It was a nice size group and the camaraderie was excellent.

ITINERARY:

- 26th March** - Heathrow to Kolkata via Doha with Qatar Airways
- 27th March** - Drukair flight to Paro (Khangkhu Hotel). Birding the Paa Chhu (PA) and Lower Chele La (CL)
- 28th March** - Chele La and Paa Chhu and the on to Thimphu (TP) (Riverview Hotel) and its sewage works
- 29th March** - Dochu La (DL), trail to Lumetsawa (LS) and to Punakha (Meri Puensum Resort) and Pho Chhu (PC)
- 30th March** - Tashithang (TS) in Jigme Dorji Nat. Park and Mo Chhu (MC). Punakha Dzong & Meri Puensum
- 31st March** - Nobding Valley (NV) and Phobjikha Valley (PV) to camp at Pele La (PL)
- 1st April** - Pele La, Chendibji Valley (CV) to Trongsa (Yangkhil Resort) and upper Shemgang Road (ZR)
- 2nd April** - Shemgang Road via Kuenga Rubten & Langthel to camp at Wangduegang
- 3rd April** - Shemgang Road to Shemgang and Tingtibi Road (TT) to camp at Tingtibi
- 4th April** - Return on Tingtibi Road & Shemgang Road to Trongsa (Yangkhil Resort)
- 5th April** - Yotong La (YL), Bumthang, Chamkhar Chhu (CC), Jakar, Shelthang La (SL) & camp at Ura
- 6th April** - Ura, over Thrumshing La (TL) to Sengor (SG) and Lingmethang Road (LR) to Yongkola camp
- 7th April** - Upper and lower Lingmethang Road. Camp at Yongkola
- 8th April** - Upper and lower Lingmethang Road. Camp at Yongkola
- 9th April** - Lingmethang Road, Thrumshing La and Shelthang La to Jakar (Gongkhar Hotel)
- 10th April** - Yotong La to Trongsa, Chendibji Valley, Nobding Valley & Wangdue Phodrang (Puna Cottages)
- 11th April** - Lampelri Botanic Gardens (LG) & Dochu La to Paro (Khangkhu Hotel) and Paa Chhu
- 12th April** - Depart Paro via Drukair flight to Kolkata (Pearl Hotel). City tour of Kolkata
- 13th April** - Qatar Airways flights via Doha to Heathrow

SITE PROFILES:

Paa Chhu

Glacial fed river running through Paro with shingle islets, rocky bluffs, marsh and adjoining pastures

Chele La

Road west of Paro leading to a pass at 3988 metres. Blue Pine forest, pastures and rocky crags.

Thimphu

Marsh nearly destroyed by development and sewage works with no official access.

Dochu La

Pass at 3200 metres between Thimphu and Punakha. Cloud forest with pine, rhododendrons and Daphne scrub

Lumetsawa Trail

Seven kilometre trail through pine forest to Lumetsawa from Dochu La

Pho Chhu and Mo Chhu

Glacial fed rivers north of Punakha with gravels and adjoining forest

Tashithang (Jigme Dorji National Park)

Road north of Punakha leading along the Mo Chhu into the huge forested National Park.

Nobding Valley

A valley leading up to the village of Nobding on the road between Wangdue and the Pele La. Upper slopes are well-forested whilst the lower slopes contain cultivation terraces.

Phobjikha Valley

A high valley south of the road to Pele La with extensive grassland pasture and some arable land. The traditional wintering site of Black-necked Cranes.

Pele La

A high pass (3420 metres) between Wangdue and Trongsa with the high Himalayas to its north. Pine, bamboo and rocky screes and scars are all present

Chendibji Valley

A valley between the villages of Rukubji and Chendibji on the road from Pele La to Trongsa. Contains agricultural terraces and forest fringes with rhododendron at higher levels

Shemgang Road and Tingtibi Road

Leading south from Trongsa towards the Indian border at Gelephu, these roads gradually fall in altitude to the town of Shemgang and then to some 500 metres at Tingtibi. The road traverses mixed deciduous forest, open scrub and bamboo and is crossed by several rocky streams

Yotong La

Another pass at 3440 metres between Trongsa and the Bumthang Valley, it has pine forest, bamboo and rocky outcrops

Chamkhar Chu

A glacial-fed river running through Jakar with gravel beds

Shelthang La and Thrumshing La

Further high passes (3500 and 3990 metres respectively) east of Bumthang with pine and fir forest and rocky outcrops

Sengor

A cultivated area around the village of the same name at the western end of the Lingmethang Road

Lingmethang Road

Between Sengor and Mongar lies the village of Lingmethang and the road leading to it from Sengor is a steep, winding forested road cutting through several altitudinal zones. The mixed deciduous forest with patches of bamboo contain a high biodiversity of plants and animals and it is considered one of the birding hot-spots of Asia.

Lampelri Botanic Gardens

An area of mixed deciduous and pine forest near Wangdue with forest nursery and bamboo plantations

Sites Visited



BIRDS RECORDED (See Itinerary for site codes)

Species	No. Days	Max	Sites
Great Cormorant	5	30	PA,PC,MC,ZR
Grey Heron	1	1	PC
White-bellied Heron	1	1	PC
Black-necked Crane	1	2	PV
Ruddy Shelduck	2	20+	TP,PC
Goosander	2	2	PC,CC
Mallard	2	2	PA
Teal	2	5	CV
Black Kite	1	NC	Kolkata
Himalayan Griffon	3	30+	CV
Crested Serpent-Eagle	6	1	PC,NV,ZR,TR,LR
Northern Goshawk	1	1	CV
Sparrowhawk	1	1	PA
Besra	1	1	TR
Common/Himalayan Buzzard	2	2	CL,YL
Black Eagle	5	2	LS,ZR,TR,LR,CV
Mountain Hawk-Eagle	9	4+	various
Kestrel	8	3	various
Hill Partridge	12	H	various
Chestnut-breasted Partridge	2	H	ZR,TR
Blood Pheasant	3	10+	CL,TL
Satyr Tragopan	3	1	PL,SL,TL
Himalayan Monal	2	2	PL,Tangsibi

Species	No. Days	Max	Sites
Kaleej Pheasant	5	15+	CL,LS,NV,ZR
Red Junglefowl	1	H	TR
Black-tailed Crake	1	2	TP
Northern Lapwing	1	1	TP
River Lapwing	3	20+	PA,TP,PC
Red-wattled Lapwing	1	2	PC
Common Sandpiper	2	5	TP,MC
Ibisbill	3	2	PA,CC
Rock Pigeon	12	100+	various
Snow Pigeon	1	50+	SG
Oriental Turtle-Dove	16	50+	various
Spotted Dove	5	3	PC,MC,ZR,TR
Barred Cuckoo-Dove	3	10	TS,ZR,LR
Emerald Dove	2	2	ZR,TR
Pin-tailed Green-Pigeon	2	3	TR
Asian Koel	1	H	Punakha
Asian Emerald Cuckoo	2	1	TS,TR
Large Hawk-Cuckoo	9	1+	various
Himalayan Cuckoo	8	1	LG etc
Mountain Scops-Owl	3	H	ZR,TR,LR
Collared Owlet	4	1	ZR,TR,LR
Asian Barred Owlet	4	1	TS,TR,LR
Grey Nightjar	3	1	TS,TR,Ura
Himalayan Swiftlet	3	30+	CV,LR
Pacific/Fork-tailed Swift	6	10+	various
Ward's Trogon	1	1	LG
Common Kingfisher	1	1	PC

Species	No. Days	Max	Sites
White-throated Kingfisher	3	1	PC,MC,TR
Crested Kingfisher	2	1	MC,NV
Blue-bearded Bee-eater	2	2	TR,LR
Hoopoe	5	2	PA,TR,LR
Great Pied Hornbill	2	10	TR
Rufous-necked Hornbill	5	4	TR,LR
Great Barbet	13	6	various
Golden-throated Barbet	8	10	various
Blue-throated Barbet	4	5+	ZR,TR,NV
Yellow-rumped Honeyguide	2	3	ZR,LR
Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker	1	1	TR
Crimson-breasted Woodpecker	1	1	NV
Darjeeling Woodpecker	1	1	DL
Rufous-bellied Woodpecker	4	1	CL,YL,DL
Rufous Woodpecker	3	1	ZR,TR,NV
Lesser Yellownape	1	1	NV
Greater Yellownape	7	3	TS,ZR,TR,LR,LG
Bay Woodpecker	2	1+	NV,LG
Barn Swallow	3	2+	PA,MC,CC
Nepal House Martin	2	20+	ZR, Trongsa
Asian House Martin	2	10+	CV, Trongsa
Sand Martin	2	1	PA,CC
White Wagtail (alboides & leucopsis)	11	30+	various
Olive-backed Pipit	10	10	various
Rosy Pipit	2	6	PA
Black-winged Cuckoo-Shrike	5	1+	NV,ZR
Grey-chinned Minivet	7	2+	TS,NV,TR,LR

Species	No. Days	Max	Sites
Long-tailed Minivet	8	6+	various
Short-billed Minivet	1	2	LR
Scarlet Minivet	6	10+	TS,NV,ZR,TR,LR
Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike	3	3	NV,ZR
White-throated Fantail	4	2	LR
Yellow-bellied Fantail	8	6	various
Striated Bulbul	3	20+	TR,LR
Black-crested Bulbul	2	2	TR
Red-vented Bulbul	8	100+	various
White-throated Bulbul	2	20+	TR
Ashy Bulbul	2	5	TR
Mountain Bulbul	7	6+	TS,NV,ZR,TR,LR
Himalayan Black Bulbul	11	50	various
Orange-bellied Leafbird	6	5+	TS,NV,ZR,TR
Long-tailed Shrike	8	5+	various
Grey-backed Shrike	8	3	various
Brown Dipper	2	5	TS,NV
Altai Accentor	1	30+	PL
Alpine Accentor	2	2	TL
Rufous-breasted Accentor	2	20+	PA,YL
Long-billed Thrush	1	1	ZR
Dusky Thrush	1	2	CL
Dark-throated Thrush	1	20+	CL
White-collared Blackbird	10	12+	various
Grey-winged Blackbird	1	1	LG
Blue Whistling-Thrush	15	100+	various

Species	No. Days	Max	Sites
Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher	10	6	various
Little Pied Flycatcher	6	6	TS,TR,LR
Ultramarine Flycatcher	4	4	NV,TR,LR,LG
Verditer Flycatcher	13	10+	various
Large Niltava	7	2+	TS,ZR,TR,LR
Small Niltava	3	2	TS,NV,TR
Pale Blue Flycatcher	1	1	ZR
Blue-throated Flycatcher	2	2	NV,ZR
Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher	10	10+	various
Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush	6	3+	TS,NV,LR
Blue-headed Rock-Thrush	6	10	NV,ZR,TR,LR
Blue Rock-Thrush	1	1	ZR
Lesser Shortwing	1	2	LR
Himalayan Bluetail	1	6	CL
Rufous-breasted Bush-Robin	1	1	ZR
Oriental Magpie-Robin	4	5+	PC,MC,TR,LR
Black Redstart	1	1	ZR
White-throated Redstart	1	1	CL
Hodgson's Redstart	15	6+	various
Blue-fronted Redstart	6	10+	various
White-capped Water-Redstart	11	6	various
Plumbeous Redstart	11	6	various
Blue-fronted Robin	1	H	LR
Little Forktail	1	2	ZR
Slaty-backed Forktail	1	2	TS
Spotted Forktail	1	1	LG

Species	No. Days	Max	Sites
Stonechat	2	2	PA,PC
Grey Bushchat	9	6+	various
White-throated Laughing-Thrush	9	6+	various
White-crested Laughing-Thrush	4	8	ZR,TR,LR
Lesser Necklaced Laughing-Thrush	1	1	ZR
Striated Laughing-Thrush	12	5+	various
Rufous-necked Laughing-Thrush	2	10+	ZR,LR
Grey-sided Laughing-Thrush	1	10+	LR
Rufous-chinned Laughing-Thrush	2	1	NV,TR
Spotted Laughing-Thrush	1	1	CL
Bhutan Laughing-Thrush	3	6+	NV,ZR,TR
Blue-winged Laughing-Thrush	1	1	TR
Scaly Laughing-Thrush	1	6	LR
Black-faced Laughing-Thrush	7	10	CL,NV,PL,YL,TL,DL
Red-headed Laughing-Thrush	4	2	DL,YL,TL
Himalayan Cutia	2	4	ZR
Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler	2	4	TR,LR
White-browed Scimitar-Babbler	1	1	TR
Streak-breasted Scinmitar-Babbler	5	5	NV,ZR,TR
Long-billed Wren-Babbler	1	H	LR
Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler	1	1+	TS
Rufous-throated Wren-Babbler	3	1+	LR
Spotted Wren-Babbler	3	1	NV,ZR,TR
Sikkim Wedge-billed Wren-Babbler	1	H	LR
Rufous-capped Babbler	6	6	LS,ZR,LR
Golden Babbler	4	2+	TR,LR

Species	No. Days	Max	Sites
Grey-throated Babbler	1	1	ZR
White-hooded Babbler	1	6+	TR
Silver-eared Mesia	1	20+	ZR
Rusty-fronted Barwing	4	20+	TS,ZR,LR
Hoary-throated Barwing	3	4+	LS,YL,TL
Blue-winged Minla	1	5+	TR
Chestnut-tailed Minla	6	5+	LS,CV,ZR,YL,LR
Red-tailed Minla	2	3	LS,TR
Golden-breasted Fulvetta	3	2+	LR
Yellow-throated Fulvetta	2	20+	LR
Rufous-winged Fulvetta	6	10+	LS,PL,YL,LR
White-browed Fulvetta	7	10+	CL,NV,PL,YL,TL
Nepal Fulvetta	4	2	TS,TR,LR
Rufous Sibia	14	20	various
Striated Yuhina	1	30+	TR
White-naped Yuhina	1	10+	LR
Whiskered Yuhina	12	20+	various
Stripe-throated Yuhina	10	30+	various
Rufous-vented Yuhina	5	25+	PL,YL,TL
Black-chinned Yuhina	3	20+	ZR,TR
Great Parrotbill	1	2	PL
Brown Parrotbill	2	4	PL,YL
Black-throated Parrotbill	1	6	LR
Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill	3	10+	LR
Species	No.Days	Max.	Sites
Black-headed Shrike-Babbler	1	1	LR

Species	No. Days	Max	Sites
White-browed Shrike-Babbler	6	5+	NV,ZR,LR
Black-eared Shrike-Babbler	3	1	YL,LR
White-bellied Erpornis	1	3	TR
Wren	1	1	TL
Striated Prinia	3	2	ZR,LR
Black-throated Prinia	1	2+	ZR
Common Tailorbird	1	1	ZR
Chestnut-headed Tesia	1	H	LR
Slaty-bellied Tesia	3	H	TS,LR
Grey-bellied Tesia	3	1	LR,Trongsa
Grey-sided Bush-Warbler	4	1	LR,LR
Brownish-flanked Bush-Warbler	4	1	LS,ZR,LR
Yellowish-bellied Bush-Warbler	1	2	YL
Tickell's Leaf-Warbler	4	4	ZR,TR,LR
Rufous-faced Warbler	1	4	TR
Buff-barred Warbler	1	5+	TL
Ashy-throated Warbler	4	5+	DL,YL,TL
Lemon-rumped Leaf-Warbler	6	3	CV,ZR,YL,LR
Large-billed Leaf-Warbler	1	1	ZR
Blyth's Leaf-Warbler	9	10	various
Yellow-vented Warbler	1	1	ZR
Grey-hooded Warbler	9	6+	various
Whistler's Warbler	4	1	LS,NV,LR
Grey-cheeked Warbler	3	10+	LR
Chestnut-crowned Warbler	6	4	NV,CV,ZR,LR
Broad-billed Warbler	2	2	ZR,LR

Species	No. Days	Max	Sites
Black-faced Warbler	3	20+	ZR,LR
Black-throated Tit	6	6	NV,TR,LR,YL
Rufous-fronted Tit	3	10	YL,TL
Fire-capped Tit	1	50+	NV
Rufous-vented Tit	7	10+	CL,PL,TL,YL,DL
Coal Tit	5	20+	CL,TL,YL,DL
Grey-crested Tit	3	10+	CL,DL
Green-backed Tit	15	10+	various
Yellow-cheeked Tit	1	6	TR
Sultan Tit	2	2	TR,ZR
Yellow-browed Tit	4	2	NV,CV,YL,DL
Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch	3	2	NV,ZR
White-tailed Nuthatch	8	10+	various
Beautiful Nuthatch	1	2	TR
Wallcreeper	1	1	PA
Himalayan/Eurasian Treecreeper	2	2	PL,TL
Rusty-flanked Treecreeper	3	2+	LR,YL,DL
Brown-throated Treecreeper	1	H	LR
Fire-breasted Flowerpecker	6	10+	various
Mrs Gould's Sunbird	8	6	various
Green-tailed Sunbird	10	20+	various
Black-throated Sunbird	4	5+	TS,TR,TL,LR
Crimson Sunbird	1	1	ZR
Streaked Spiderhunter	4	3	ZR,TR,LR
Oriental White-eye	6	20+	various
Crested Bunting	1	2	ZR

Species	No. Days	Max	Sites
Yellow-breasted Greenfinch	4	15	CL,ZR,LR
Crimson-browed Finch	1	1	PL
Plain Mountain-Finch	1	10+	YL
Blandford's Rosefinch	1	3	DL
Dark-breasted Rosefinch	1	10+	YL
Dark-rumped Rosefinch	1	1	DL
White-browed Rosefinch	3	2	CL,YL,TL
Crimson-browed Finch	1	1	PL
Scarlet Finch	3	5+	ZR,LR
Red Crossbill	1	10+	CL
Red-headed Bullfinch	4	5+	TL,YL,DL
Grey-headed Bullfinch	1	3	CL
Collared Grosbeak	2	6	CL,YL
Spot-winged Grosbeak	1	1	DL
White-winged Grosbeak	5	20+	CL,YL,TL,DL
Scaly-breasted Munia	1	10+	MC
Russet Sparrow	9	20+	various
Tree Sparrow	9	20+	various
Spot-winged Starling	1	1	ZR
Chestnut-tailed Starling	1	10	Trongsa
Asian Pied Starling	1	NC	Kolkata
Common Myna	6	30+	various
Maroon Oriole	4	2	TS,NV,ZR
Black Drongo	12	10+	various
Ashy Drongo	8	10+	various
Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo	4	4	ZR,LR

Species	No. Days	Max	Sites
Eurasian Jay	2	3	TS,YL
Gold-billed Blue-Magpie	9	6+	various
Common Green Magpie	2	2	ZR,TR
Grey Treepie	7	6	various
Eurasian Magpie	3	12+	Bumthang
Spotted Nutcracker	8	15	various
Red-billed Chough	8	300+	various
House Crow	1	NC	Kolkata
Large-billed Crow	15	12	various

MAMMALS:

Common Pika, Himalayan 5-striped Squirrel, Orange-bellied Squirrel, Malayan Giant Squirrel, Capped Langur, Golden Langur, Assamese Macaque, Muntjac, Goral, Gaur, Yak