

BHUTAN

27th March - 12th April 2012

255 Birds Seen and 11 heard
11 Mammal Species

Group Members:

Susan Ennis
Robert Ennis
Patricia Wetton
Brian Wetton
James Hays
Trevor Weston
Timothy Key

Leader: Chubzang Tangbi

Report by: Chubzang Tangbi

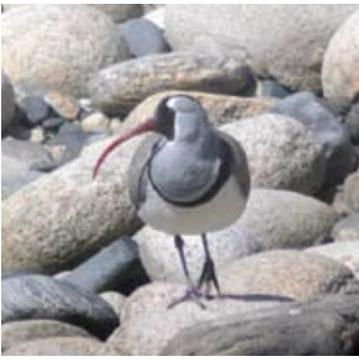


Day 1 (27th March): Flight into Paro and evening birding in and around Paro. The group arrived from Kolkata at 11:20am, where I welcomed them to Bhutan. From the airport I introduced them to their driver for the next 2 weeks before loading their luggage onto the van and beginning their birding tour in our Himalayan kingdom.

We began by following the Thimphu road to Shaba from where we took the river bank road for a short distance where we had good views of a single **Common Stone Chat** and some **White Wagtails** before stopping to walk along the banks. Soon the group encountered their first sightings of the majestic **Ibisbill**. At first it was against the light and seemed quite dull in colour but later it flew to a better position where we had a superb view with its dark crimson coloured beak quite clearly highlighted.

Other species we encountered along this stretch included: **Common Hoopoe**, **Rock Pigeon**, **Hodgson's Redstart**, **Plumbeous Water Redstart**, **Olive-backed Pipit**, **Rufous-breasted Accentor**, **River Lapwing** and a couple of **Mallard ducks** swimming in the clear melt-waters of the Pa Chhu. From here we took the 20 min drive back to Paro to check into our hotel the Khangkhu where we had lunch.

A short rest with a few minutes to chat about the mornings sightings, before heading back to our bus and beginning our ascent to the lower Chele La Pass. Suddenly we were rewarded with a road-side view of a small flock of **Kalij Pheasants** (more flocks were encountered on the returned to Paro), **Red Crossbills**, **Green-backed** and **Rufous-fronted Tits** and a pair of **White-collared Blackbirds**, all feeding along the roadside. At 3000m we left the main road and took an old logging road, where we walked for a short while before seeing a big flock of **White-browed Fulvettas** feeding in the bushes along the road while **Long-tailed Minivets** performed in the tree tops. We continued walking along this disused track before we had our first encounter with the beautifully plumaged **Yellow-billed Blue Magpie**. Road birding in the blue pine forest had been quite impressive but it was getting late and the group had travelled far. It was time to drive back to Paro for dinner and a well earned night's rest. Before the first of many very early morning starts! Night at Khangkhu Resort, Paro .



Day 2 (28th March): Drive to Chele La (Pass) and back to Paro and continue to Thimphu. The first of our early morning starts, leaving at 5 am. As we passed the hotel we saw a nice male Hodgson's Redstart waving goodbye! We proceeded along the Paro - Chele La road through first the pine forests which were gradually taken over by spruce and eventually thick fir forest, where we stopped for the first sighting of single female Blood Pheasant sat on a stump below the road followed by a half a dozen sightings later on. As we made our way further up the mountain range to the pass at 3989m, we encountered a flock of Rufous-vented and Coal Tits while a couple of Collard Grosbeaks demanded attention by singing loudly from the treetops above, but we had to wait until later in the morning to have a stunning view of this beautiful bird. Walking along the pass we were pleased to see several flocks of White-winged Grosbeaks, a nice male White-browed Rosefinch, a Rufous-breasted Accentor, a glimpse of 4 Fire-tailed Sunbird flying over the hillside -unfortunately missed by some group members! Orange-flanked Bush Robin, Long-tailed Minivet, White-browed Fulvettas, a small flock of Grey-headed Bullfinch, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Himalayan Buzzard and our first encounter with the commonly found Large-billed Crow. The calls of both the Hill Partridge and the Rufous-bellied Woodpecker were clearly heard by all group members, but no sightings made. Just before breakfast we encountered perhaps the special bird of the day a male and a female Dusky Thrush and roughly 20 Dark-throated Thrush. White-collard Blackbirds were calling from all directions as we settled for breakfast while Blue-fronted Redstart sat singing along-side us while we enjoyed our well earned breakfast.

We made good use of the tape by playing Spotted Laughingthrush with eventually gave us a glimpse of this wonderful bird. Black-faced Laughingthrushes scolded us from bushes below which obscured their view, but clearly seen later in the day.

After breakfast we spent the rest of the morning behind the pass on the Haa district side and caught sight of a White-throated Redstart. We made our way back towards Paro stopping for the majestic view of the Mt. Jomolhari at 7,326m.

Lunch was set by the roadside in a forest of primeval firs. After enjoying a lovely meal and the beauty of the pristine forest, we continued driving the 37 km back to Paro. Enroute we had yet another great view of a flock of Kalij Pheasants before checking out of the hotel and making our way to Thimphu, stopping at Shaba to give it another try for the stunning Wallcreeper and this time we were rewarded with a clear sighting of this bird. In addition we encountered a small flock of Russet Sparrows, half a dozen Sand Martins and Barn Swallows. We continued towards Thimphu but took a break at the Thimphu Sewage plant where we played the call of the Black-tailed Crake and fortunately managed to get sightings of a couple of these magnificent birds, but unfortunately missed by some group members. Walking along the sewage plant we had good views of: River and Northern Lapwing, at least 20 Ruddy Shelducks, a single Common Teal, yet another great view of Ibisbill, Rosy and Olive-backed Pipits, Common Sandpiper and an incredible sighting of an Eurasian Sparrowhawk when it nearly caught a White Wagtail! We also saw a Common Buzzard hovering above us and caught sight of a couple of Red-billed Choughs feeding on the ground, as we made our way to our Hotel Riverview and called the day.

Mammals: Himalayan Pika (*Ochotona himalayana*), common from 3500m to the pass at 3989m and Sambar Deer (*Rusa unicolor*), at Chele La, only seen by James.

NIGHT: Riverview Hotel, Thimphu.



Day 3 (29th March): Drive to Punakha, stopping at Dochu La (Pass), and Lampelri walk (4 hrs) and Pho Chu valley.

Another start at 5am! We were on the road in dark to get to Dochu La (3150m) at first light. We got out of the van to see Dochu La pass in the mist, quite surreal! We birded the east side of the pass where we saw **White-collared Blackbird**, while **Chestnut-crowned** and **Black-faced Laughingthrushes** sang from the bushes below. A small flock of **Stripe-throated Yuhinas** were seen with good views. The early morning call of a female **Dark-rumped Rosefinch** got the group excited and looked forward for the rest of the day. Shortly after that we saw a female **Spot-winged Grosbeak** which flew and landed on a treetop where all group members had a good look at this beautiful bird. **Mrs Gould's** and **Green-tailed Sunbirds** were busy feeding on the beautiful flowering rhododendrons. As we descended from the pass we encountered a single **Whistler's Warbler** followed by a small flock of **Blyth's Leaf** and **Ashy-throated Warblers**, **Green-backed Tits** and **Ashy Drongos** amongst them.

We stopped for breakfast at Lampelri before beginning our 4hrs walk down to Lumitshawa. Shortly after breakfast we encountered our first sighting of the **Verditer Flycatcher**. We had just started our walk when we saw a small flock of **Yellow-bellied Fantails**, a male and a female **Slaty Blue Flycatcher** and **Hoary-throated Barwing**, while **Large Niltava** sang from the thick forest under-growth and in the sky above **Pacific Swifts** practiced their acrobatic skills! We also enjoyed a small mixed flock of **Rufous-capped Babblers**, **Rufous-winged Fulvettas**, **Chestnut-tailed** and **Red-tailed Minlas** and had great views of **White-tailed Nuthatches** who were calling from all directions. Continuing our walk, we encountered our first big flock of **White-throated Laughingthrush** followed by a couple of **Striated Laughingthrushes**. An **Eurasian Jay** was busy feeding on acorns in a nearby oak tree while a flock of **Rufous Sibia** were busy feeding in the Rhododendron trees when a single **Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler** interrupted this peaceful scene by singing quite loudly from a bamboo thicket, where we had good views of this little bird. Soon we heard a raptor call and looking up saw two **Mountain Hawk Eagles** soaring on thermals soon joined by a third. Later we had good sightings of a **Black Eagle**, making it quite a day for viewing raptors. But back to ground level where just before our lunch stop we saw a pair of **Grey-hooded Warblers** zipping back and forth as they fed on midges and other tiny insects around an evergreen tree.

After lunch we made our way down to the lower valley of Punakha where we made a detour along the Pho Chhu to look for the **White-bellied Heron** (one of the rarest bird in the world and perhaps the bird of the trip). Along the way we encountered: **Common** and **White-throated Kingfishers**, two **Common Mergansers/Goosanders**, a large flock of **Ruddy Shelducks**, a **Grey Heron** and a pair of **Red-wattled Lapwing** amongst **River Lapwings** and **Spotted Doves** while **Long-tailed Shrike** and **Red-vented Bulbul** and the **Common Myna** were seen everywhere. These are beautiful birds, but our target was the extremely rare **White-bellied Heron**. We carried on walking quietly searching for this elusive bird when there on the river bank, calmly searching for food was a single prime adult **White-bellied Heron**. A truly incredible experience! This is one of the rarest birds in the world and perhaps THE bird of the trip! Not only did we have fantastic views of this rare bird but also managed to take photos to gloat about later! But our day wasn't over, as in the distance, perched on a Chir Pine below eye level, we caught sight of a single **Crested Serpent Eagle**. Wow, what a day! Absolutely amazed, we made our

way back to our Hotel in Punakha, Meri Puensum Resort, to absorb the realities of what the day had brought.



Day 4 (30th March): Morning in and around Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Park, JDNP and afternoon visit the Punakha Dzong. Yet another 5am start, a quick early morning drink before climbing into the bus and beginning our beautiful drive up-stream, along the Mo Chhu valley into Jigme Dorji National Park; the biggest national park in the country. Approaching the park a single **Grey Nightjar** was nearly missed by our bus, as it decided to look for food on the road; but disaster was averted and we were greeted by the calls of **Great** and **Golden-throated Barbets** as soon as we entered the park itself. Getting out of the bus, pair of **Orange-bellied Leafbirds** were giving an interesting displaying which was interrupted by an **Asian Emerald Cuckoo** showing himself on the treetop, soon to be joined by a female. This in turn was followed by a single **Barred Cuckoo Dove** who flew above our heads while an **Asian Barred Owlet** hooted its beautiful call then flew quite closely to the group allowing us a stunning view before disappearing into the canopy. **Grey-hooded Warblers** whistled from all over the jungle and gave us exceptional views and a single **Yellow-vented Warbler** darted into view but I was the only birder lucky enough to catch a glimpse of it before it flew back into the dense cover. Small flocks of **Rufous Sibias**, **Rock Pigeon**, **Blue Whistling Thrush**, **Spotted** and **Oriental Turtle Doves** were seen throughout the day.

As we walked through the forest, we caught sight of a female **Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush** who was busy feeding on insects in a nearby treetop while a small flock of **Scarlet Minivets** flew back and forth over our heads, quickly followed by a pair of **Grey-chinned Minivets**. **Small Niltava** sang from the forest undergrowth and we managed to get a great view later in the day. Two **Spangled Drongos** performed in the trees above and a small flock of **Nepal Fulvettas** were seen in hanging vegetation below the road along with a **Greater Yellownape** which was well spotted by Brian and a **Spotted Wren Babbler**- noted for its brilliant song, was heard from the bushes, but unfortunately, although we had good responses to the call, no one managed to see this shy bird as it hid within the bushes.

Working our way back to the roadside, we found breakfast ready, but soon after beginning our meal we were joined by a pair of **Black-throated Sunbirds** and yet more views of a young **Mountain Hawk Eagle** flying overhead. Breakfast over we continued birding deep into the park towards Tashithang.

With the aid of the tape, we encountered a **Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler** and on the river we saw a **Brown Dipper** with her young, busily feeding. We also saw the small flock of **Rusty-fronted Barwing** while a **Large Niltava** sang from the road below providing us exceptional views while **Whiskered Yuhinas** were seen on several occasions in small flocks. Upon hearing the **Slaty-bellied Tesia** we played the tape to pull this bird in view but only Patricia managed to get a glimpse. From here we made our way back to Shatem campsite and lunch before continuing to Punakha.

On the way we saw a **Wallcreeper** flying ahead of us who kindly showed us a quick glimpse of

the red plumage on its wings. Amongst the rocks near the river-bed, we caught sight of a pair of **Slaty-backed Forktails** and in the open fields we saw the **Scaly-breasted Munia**. By now the heat of the sun was far too much for birding and a visit to the impressive Punakha Dzong in its magnificent setting at the confluence of the Mo and Pho Chhu (river), had been arranged. Walking to the dzong we heard a single **Asian Koel** and counted 10 **Chestnut-tailed Starlings** feeding on a cotton tree opposite the dzong, and from the wooden cantilever bridge, Bob and Sue caught sight of a **Blue Rock Thrush**. Our visit to Punakha Dzong completed, we clambered into the bus to drive to our hotel and on the way were fortunate to have one last birding treat when we encountered both **Crested** and **White-throated Kingfishers**. What a great day! The spectacular Punakha Dzong, is situated at the confluence of the Pho and Mo Chhu in the sub-tropical Punakha-Wangdue valley. It was built in 1637 by the Zhabdrung and was the seat of government until 1955 when Punakha was the capital of Bhutan. Today it is the winter home for Bhutan's Central Monastic Body. The Dzong houses the sacred remains of the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and the Terton Pema Lingpa. NIGHT: Meri Puensum Resort, Punakha.



Day 5 (31st March): Drive to Pele La (Pass), whole day birding along the Pele La road. Another 5am start to the day in order to catch early birding activities. Driving further east for approximately 45 minutes, we made our first birding stop of the day at Chuzomsa. Here we had another clear sighting of the **Orange-bellied Leafbird** and caught glimpses of a **Crested Kingfisher** as it flew up stream; **Golden-throated** and **Great Barbets** were common. We continued our drive towards Pele La where we birded the lower section of Nobding, making several stops to check for different species. Along the way we encountered a small flock of **Fire-capped Tits**, (about 50 more birds were seen much later in the day), a pair of beautiful **Ultramarine** and **Rufous-gorgeted Flycatchers**, **Fire-breasted Flowerpecker** and a pair of **Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch**, while a small flock of 6 **Bar-headed Geese** flew over the river and **Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babblers** sang from the road below but didn't show. **Grey-hooded Warblers** were dominant in the area with singing individuals in every stop. A female **Little-pied Flycatcher** showed up very briefly before disappearing into the canopy and by playing the tape, we managed to see the beautiful **Blue-throated Flycatcher**. We also had good views of some **Three Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrikes** and a **Blyth's Leaf Warbler**, while a female **Lesser Yellownappe** sitting quietly on a branch of a tree was well spotted by Susan. Sightings were also recorded of an **Asian Emerald Cuckoo** was seen flying across the road, a small flock of **Rufous-vented Yuhina**, a female **Black Redstart** and a **Bar-winged Cuckooshrike** who sang from the near by treetop while we ate breakfast at 1,450m.

After breakfast we made our way towards upper Nobding stopping occasionally for roadside birding. Species we encountered here include: **Crested Serpent** and **Mountain Hawk Eagle**, some 30 **Pacific Swift** filled the air above us while a **Crimson-breasted Woodpecker** was seen on a dead treetop, allowing us great views. A **Bay Woodpecker** was glimpsed by the leader but **Long-tailed**, **Scarlet** and **Grey-chinned Minivets** were seen by all members of the group. As we continued, about 6 **Mountain**

Bulbuls were seen below the road on a ever green tree, just before we reached Khelikha. **Himalayan Black Bulbuls** were quite common in the area and **Blue Whistling Thrush** appeared in most corners we turned! We had great views of **Small Niltava** and a female **Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush** kindly posed for us from a treetop just below eyelevel. The call of the **Hill Partridge** taunts us yet again but refuses to make an appearance.

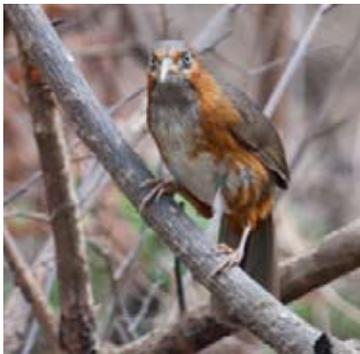
As we continued further, a small flock of **Bhutan Laughingthrushes** and **Streak-breasted Scimitar Babblers** were clearly seen by the roadside, while a little bit later we had some very good views as they flew across the road in front of us. In vegetation below the road a **Grey-sided Bush Warbler** showed up while a **Whistler's Warbler** flickered up and down before it vanished into the thickets. Amongst a small mix flock of **Yellow-browed Tits**, **Ashy-throated** and **Blyth's Leaf Warblers**, while from a flowering shrub, a couple of **Chestnut-crowned Warblers**, **Grey Treepies** and a **Mrs Gould's Sunbird** displayed themselves quite nicely.

Stopping for lunch in a beautiful setting beside the stream, just above Nobding, we were caught by a sudden hail storm. Luckily the storm was short and when the clouds lifted, we had great views of the mountains. Continuing our drive to Phobjikha, the Valley of the Cranes, quite unexpectedly we came across a pair of **Black-necked Cranes**. A rare treat at this time of year, as by this time of the year they have usually returned to their summer breeding grounds in Tibet.

We continued driving to the old Pele La road where we stopped to bird off road, while the camping crew set up camp. Walking towards the Dang Chhu Here we saw some of the highly prized birds including a magnificent large flock of about 30 **Altai Accentor** feeding on the ground just above the road; an exception view of a male **Satyr Tragopan** and 2 **Monal Pheasants**, 1 glimpsed on its short flight while a male about 10m distance away gave us some amazing views. Other species we encountered included **Rufous-vented Tit**, **Rufous-vented** and **Stripe-throated Yuhinas** while we were unable to see the bird itself, a **White-browed Rosefinch** sang quite beautifully from a distance bushes.

Returning to the campsite for the night, a bonfire was lit, the clouds had left and the sky shone with stars. The perfect end to an excellent day's birding.

NIGHT: Camp at Old Pele La road, 3,218m.



Day 6 (1st April): Drive from Pele La Pass to Trongsa stopping for birds. Afternoon Shemgang road.

Taking advantage of the campsite we rose later than usual and after a hot drink were ready to begin birding. One advantage of camping in the prime birding spots! And so, around 6 am we began birding towards Pele La Pass and soon encountered a female **Crimson-browed Finch**, perfectly perched on a rhododendron branch, allowing great views and excellent photographic opportunities. This was followed shortly by the appearance of two **Great Parrotbills** who had responded well to the tape calls we were playing. Some of the other species we encountered include **Rufous-vented**, **Yellow-browed** and **Coal Tit** and **Collard Grosbeak** (seen by the leader only). Working our way back to camp, we came across a female **Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher** followed by a male. Continuing along the road we had good views

of a male **Grey Bushchat**, **Black-faced** and **Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrushes** singing quite loudly from the road below.

Following a well earned breakfast of cereal, chapattis, scrambled eggs and baked beans, tea or coffee eaten back at the campsite, we made our way towards Trongsa and birded the eastern side of Pele La. Reaching the village of Longtoe we began using the tape and were rewarded with sightings of a small flock of **Brown Parrotbill**. Scanning the area, on a pond on the opposite side of the road we saw five **Common Teals**.

Rejoining the bus and continuing our descent we caught sight of a **Northern Goshawk** as it flew around a bend in the road while above half a dozen **Himalayan Griffons** were soaring on thermals high in the sky above. Other species we saw along this stretch included the **Blue-fronted Redstart**, **Grey-backed Shrike**, **Red-billed Chough** and a group of **Large-billed Crow**. We stopped for lunch at Sagachewa 2,355m with mountains as our backdrop and the sun shining brightly in a clear blue sky. This made a lovely break in the mid-day and with less birding activity in the heat of the day, we continued to our hotel, to have a short rest before our evening birding towards Shemgang Road.

After the heat of the day had subsided, we birded the broadleaf forest of Chunjey Pang where we encountered a mix flock of **Chestnut-crowned**, **Broad-billed**, **Lemon-rumped** and **Blyth's Leaf Warblers**. A small flock of **Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler** flew ahead of us and later, a lone **Cutia** was seen flying to join a flock, giving us some exceptional views. However, it was on our return to the hotel when we encountered perhaps the bird of the day: the **Long-billed Thrush** as it hopped up a gully with a **Blue Whistling Thrush**. Finally, just before the hotel, we encountered around ten **Barred Cuckoo Doves** flying back and forth from tree to tree giving us some great views to end a good day's birding.

Hotel Yangkhil 1998m - for a well earned rest!

NIGHT: Yangkhil Resort, Trongsa.



Day 7 (2nd April): Trongsa to Shemgang near Wangduegang (110km). Birding along, Chunjey Pang, Dangdung, Koshala and Wangduegang.

Another 6am start and we birded the famous Shemgang road making our first stop at Chunjey Pang where we saw **Eurasian Jay**, a single male **Pale Blue Flycatcher**, **Greater Yellownape**, **Hill Prinia**, **Large Niltava** and a beautifully plumaged **Blue-capped Rock Thrush**. At this point the camping crew had prepared breakfast at Chunjey Pang, which we thoroughly enjoyed in the early morning sunshine and accompanied by bird song.

Breakfast over, we drove just past the village of Taktsi, to the next birding area. Here we left the bus and took a short walk nearer to a cliff-face where we saw a single **Yellow-rumped Honeyguide** and

below the road close to a waterfall, we caught sight of a pair of **Little Forktails**. Returning to the bus we continued our drive to Dangdung, at 740m the lowest elevation for the day, stopping briefly at Kuenga Rubten the former Summer Palace of the Second King. Continuing our descent through the intensely cultivated, terraced fields, we saw a **Crested Bunting** and **Striated Prinia** and as we reached the valley floor, we encountered a small flock of **Striated Yuhinas**.

From Dangdung we began climbing up the Koshala road stopping for lunch by a small stream where we encountered a big troop of **Assam Macaques**, *Macaca assamensis*. After lunch we birded the upper Koshala road where we encountered: a bright male **Crimson Sunbird** amongst a Bauhinia flowering tree, followed in quick succession by **Tickell's Leaf Warbler**, **Lemon-rumped Warbler**, **Blue-throated Barbet** and also had a great view of a female **Rufous Woodpecker**, while a **Large Hawk Cuckoo** scolded us from above the road, a single **White Wagtail** (*leucopsis*) was seen feeding by the roadside and for the first time on the trip, we all heard the call of a **Rufous-necked Hornbill**.

Feeling very happy with the day's birding we were taken completely by surprise when approaching the valley gorge before beginning our ascent, when we were met by a very angry truck driver, who seemed determined to frighten all the birds and mammals away from the area, by continually hooting his horn. Luckily James had the foresight to frighten the driver by taking pictures of the truck pretending to report him to the police unless the driver calmed down. Definitely a talking point to engage over dinner!

Later, as we approached our campsite at Wangduegang (1652m), we enjoyed excellent aerial displays from a few **Grey Nightjars** as they flew around the campsite. Mammals: **Himalayan Striped Squirrel** (*Tamiops mccllellandii*), **Orange-bellied Squirrel** (*Dremomys lokriah*), **Malayan Giant Squirrel** (*Ratufa bicolor*) and **Golden Langurs** (*Trachypithecus geei*). NIGHT: Camp at Wangduegang, 1652m.



Day 8 (3rd April): Wangduegang to Tingtibi stopping at Shemgang, Dakphai and upper Tingtibi section. 5:45 and we rose and began our drive to a **Beautiful Nuthatch** site; but unfortunately, we found no traces of this rare bird. However we encountered a big flock of **Silver-eared Mesias** along with **Blue-winged Minla** and a flock of around a dozen **Black-chinned Yuhina**. As we continued our search for the **Beautiful Nuthatch** a single male **Little-pied** and **Pale Blue Flycatchers** sang from the trees, to be joined by a song of the **Large Niltava**, but no sighting. Disappointed that we didn't see the bird we had heard, we moved to another site. On the way we encountered a single **Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush** sitting on a twig amongst the bushes, happily singing and not at all upset by our intrusion, which allowed us exceptional views. A **Collard Owlet** was glimpsed by the group when it flew into the thick undergrowth of the forest below the road and **Black-faced Warblers** were seen almost through out the day. But the **Beautiful Nuthatch** remained elusive and so we returned for breakfast at our campsite.

We had just finished breakfast when high pitched screeches from overhead, made us look up - where we saw an **Eurasian Hobby** being attacked by an **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**; quite a battle!

Continuing to Shemgang we stopped for a big flock **Yellow-breasted Greenfinch** feeding in bushes along the side of the road. In Shemgang itself, we stopped in the town as the annual festival was taking place and decided to take a short cultural break - and lots of photographs!

Continuing our drive through Shemgang, we decided to stop for lunch in a lovely location where we had a great view of the Tingtibi Valley. But lunch was interrupted by a distant call of what I thought could well be the **Beautiful Nuthatch**, but it was quickly followed by **White-tailed Nuthatch**, **White-browed Shrike Babblers** and **Cutia**. Hoping to get sightings of this rarely seen bird, we quickly finished our meal and began our descent to the lower valley camp at Tingtibi, occasionally stopping to check for the **Beautiful Nuthatch**. When we finally were about to give up on this bird, we suddenly caught sight of a pair feeding in a distant tree near Dakphai, 1,460m. We had great close views of this rare bird together with **Mountain and Striated Bulbul**, **Rufous Sibias** and the occasional loud call of **Bay Woodpeckers**.

Approaching Tingtibi we saw several warm broadleaf forest species such as: **Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo**, **Ashy**, **White-throated** and **Black-crested Bulbuls**, **Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker**, **Streaked Spiderhunter**, but the **Lesser-necklaced Laughingthrush** although heard by everyone, was only seen by a few of the group. A pair of **Pin-tailed Green Pigeons** were seen perched high up on the tree while Depak, our driver, spotted a **Rufous-necked Hornbill** flying some distance ahead. A single **Common Green Magpie** showed us with its beautiful colours while an **Emerald Dove** was busy feeding on the roadside. It had proved to be an excellent day with very good birding and an unexpected visit to a magnificent festival.

NIGHT: Camp at Tingtibi, 500m.



Day 9 (4th April): Tingtibi to Trongsa. Birding the Tingtibi area in the morning and Shemgang road. At 6am we started our birding around the campsite when 8 **Rufous-necked Hornbills** flew over and landed on a distant tree giving us some very good views. Perched on a branch close to a pond, a **White-throated Kingfisher** as he waited for movement in the still water, while a **Blue Rock Thrush** was seen on the roof of a labourer's hut. Birding our way above the camp we saw about 4 **Rufous-necked** and 10 **Great Hornbills** feeding in a tree while a **Grey-headed Woodpecker** called from a treetop, we just managed to spot him and continued to have good views while **Grey-throated Babblers** sang from a nearby bush, a difficult bird to see but managed by a few of the group. More **Pin-tailed Green Pigeons** were seen flying to a nearby tree providing us with excellent scope views. As we continued we encountered a feeding flock of **Lesser Rufous** and **Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbills**, a **White-hooded Babbler** and a couple **White-browed Scimitar Babblers** came zipping past us. The song of a **Spotted Wren Babbler** helped us to locate this tiny bird which enabled us to have excellent views of what is usually a shy little bird. We had good views of a pair

of **Rufous-faced Warblers**, who were busy building a nest in bamboo thickets and seemed unaware of our presence, while **Red Jungle Fowl** called from every direction; however seeing them was a different story! We then settled for breakfast near by the road at 555m before making our long drive back to Trongsa, where we had good sightings of the **Blue-bearded Bee-eater**, **Nepal Martin**, **Scarlet Finch**, **Common Tailorbird**, **Striated Yuhina**, **Rufous-breasted Bush Robin**, **Fork-tailed Swift**, **Tickell's Leaf Warbler** and **Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler**.

Mammals: **Yellow-throated Marten** (*Martes flavigula*)

NIGHT: Yangkhil Resort, Trongsa.



Day 10 (5th April): Drive from Trongsa to Ura, birding along Yotong La Pass and stopping at Chume village, Jakar town and Selthang La Pass. An early morning start for the drive to Dorji Goemba and the lower Yotong La pass where we birded for the whole morning. Species we encountered amongst the rhododendron and mixed forests were **Black-eared Shrike Babbler** and **Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush** - who sang throughout the day, **Rufous-breasted Accentor**, **Blyth's**, **Lemon-rumped** and **Ashy-throated Warblers**, **Rufous-fronted Tit** and flocks of **Hoary-throated Barwing**. Although we heard the **Pygmy Wren Babbler**, unfortunately we did not catch sight of this little bird.

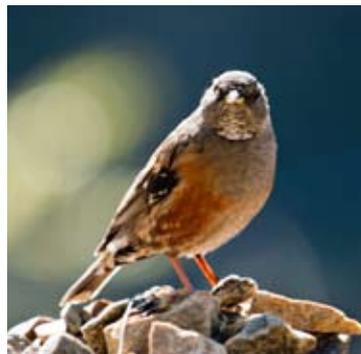
At Yotong La Pass (3440m), we saw a small flock of **Plain Mountain Finch** followed by at least half a dozen **White-browed Rosefinch**, before descending to Chume and onwards to our camp at Ura. Stopping for lunch by the Chamkhar river we spotted a pair of **Ibisbill**, **Brown Dippers**, **White Wagtails**, **River Lapwings** and **Plumbeous Redstart**. Continuing our drive, we stopped to spend a little time strolling through the ancient town of Jakar, but during the afternoon there was a heavy rain storm and so we were unable to continue birding and drove straight to our campsite. NIGHT: Camp at Ura, 3000m.



Day 11 (6th April): Drive from Ura to Yongkola birding along Thrumshing La Pass, Sengor and Namling road. This morning we woke to the call of the **Grey Nightjar** and after an early cup of tea began the drive to the west side of Thrumshing La Pass. Here we encountered a Perched **Mountain Hawk Eagle**, **Buff-barred Warbler**, **Rufous-vented** and **Coal Tits**, a pair of **Red-headed Bulfinch**, **White-browed Fulvetta**, **White-collard Blackbird**, **Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher**, **Olive-backed Pipit**, **Spotted Nutcracker** and a **Rufous-bellied Woodpecker**, but only heard the call of the **Hill Partridge** and the rare **Satyr Tragopan** whose call closely resembles a baby crying! We had our breakfast in a beautiful setting at 3199m. Before continuing with our drive we had good views of a flock of **Blood Pheasants**, a lone **Winter Wren** and an **Alpine Accentor**. Approaching Sengor, around half a dozen **Dusky Thrush** flew into the thick bushes at the side of the road just as it began snowing! Then, on perfect queue, about 30 **Snow Pigeons** were seen feeding in a field along with flocks of **Red-billed Choughs**. We settled for lunch at a local restaurant in Sengor.

Continuing our journey, we birded the upper section of Namling where we saw couple of **Long-tailed Minivet**, **Whiskered**, **Stripe-throated** and **Rufous-vented Yuhinas**, **Little-pied** and **Grey-headed Canary Flycatchers**, **Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush**, **Hodgson's** and **Blue-fronted Redstarts**, **White-capped Redstart**, **White-throated** and **Striated Laughingthrushes** were seen in small flocks while **Black-throated** and **Green-tailed Sunbirds** flitted amongst the trees. Along the drive **Large Hawk Cuckoo** and **Great Barbet** competed against each other in calling!

Reaching our campsite for the night, we settled in for tea and snacks before evening birding, where we encountered a **White-throated Fantail**, but unfortunately a heavy shower of rain halted our birding for the day.
NIGHT: Camp at Yongkola, 1812m.



Day 12 (7th April): Birding along upper and lower Yongkola road. At 6am the day began with the hooting call of the **Mountain Scops Owl**, **Asian-barred** and **Collard Owlets**. Our daily pattern was well established and the camping crew had hot drinks ready so we could begin our drive up to the Upper Yongkola area, where the day was spent birding along the road. Here we encountered some of the most highly prized species beginning with a **Barred Cuckoo Dove** who interrupted our drive as it flew close by our vehicle. Stopping by the road side we heard a **Satyr Tragopan** but it remained elusive as did the **Ward's Trogon** despite using the tape to call for this highly prized bird (near Namling at 2100m), but still only a response and no sightings and so we continued our walk along the upper section of Yongkola and shortly afterwards we encountered a small mix feeding flock of **Yellow-throated**, **Rufous-winged** and **Golden-breasted Fulvettas**, **Black-throated Parrotbill**, **Grey-cheeked** and **Chestnut-crowned Warblers**, **Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher**, **Black-throated**, **Green-backed** and **Yellow-cheeked Tits**, **Fire-breasted Flowerpecker**, **Golden** and **Rufous-capped Babblers**. We were disturbed by a call of a lone

Black-headed Shrike Babbler and decided to play the tape, this time with excellent results as we managed to see this bird fly over head, providing us with exceptional views. This was followed shortly by excellent views of a stunning male **Scarlet Finch** perched on a treetop; a true bonus!

In the mixed bamboo forests we encountered **Green-crowned** and **Whistler's Warblers**, **Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher**, **Darjeeling Woodpecker**, **Grey-sided Bush Warbler** sang as it showed up, **Tickell's Leaf**, **Lemon-rumped** and **Grey-hooded Warblers**, **Black-eared Shrike Babbler**, a flock of **Black-faced Warblers**, and although they remained elusive, we were treated to the calls of a **Grey-bellied Tesia**, **Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler** and **Blue-fronted Robin**, while a **Crested Serpent Eagle** perched at a distance, allowing us great views. A good morning's sightings.

We returned to our camp for lunch and then birded the lower section of Yongkola. Here we encountered a flock of **Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill**, **Rufous-necked Hornbill**, **Mountain Hawk Eagle**, **Large Hawk Cuckoo**, **White-throated** and **Yellow-bellied Fantails**, **Great and Golden-throated Barbet**, **Grey-chinned**, **Long-tailed** and **Short-billed Minivets**, flocks of **White-throated**, **Striated** and **Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes**, **Streaked Spiderhunter**, **Black and Ashy Drongos**, **Grey Treepie**, **Striated**, **Himalayan Black** and **Red-vented Bulbuls**, **Long-tailed** and **Grey-backed Shrikes**, **Grey Bushchat** and **Oriental Magpie Robin**. Playing the tape we managed to have a quick view of the **Rufous-throated Wren Babbler** but the **Long-billed Wren Babbler** was only heard. Returning to the camp we had sightings of the **White-tailed Nuthatch**, **Brown-throated Treecreeper** and **Little-pied Flycatcher**.

Mamals: a large group of over 30 **Capped Langurs** (*Trachypithecus pileatus*) were observed below the little village of Yongkola.

NIGHT: Camp at Yongkola, 1812m.



Day 13 (8th April): Birding along the upper and lower section of the Yongkola road. At 5:45 we began our early morning birding in the magical forests surrounding the campsite and drove to the area where we had heard **Ward's Trogon** the previous day, hoping to have better results. Unfortunately, once again, we only managed to hear its call. Continuing our birding along this magnificent landscape and pristine forest environment we encountered **Scaly Laughingthrush** and playing our tape we had excellent views of the **Rufous-throated Wren Babbler** as it responded to the calls. Stopping at a rocky cliff we saw two **Yellow-rumped Honeyguides** next to a huge colony of Bees. Making our way down towards our camp in Yongkola, we saw a **Greater Yellownappe** on a bare trunk of a tree, continuing birding and using our tape calls, we were very close to seeing the **Sikkim Wedge-billed Wren Babbler**. However, although its call was clear because it was in thick bush, we failed to see this shy bird, but had good views of a small flock of **White-napped Yuhina**. We settled for breakfast at the roadside with mountains as our backdrop views before continuing our birding which was still active. Now we had sightings of: **Blue-bearded Bee-eater**, **Crested Serpent** and **Mountain Hawk Eagles** and heard the calls of **Large Hawk Cuckoo**, **Collard** and **Asian Barred Owlets** and had great views of **Rusty-flanked Treecreeper** as it returned the tape calls we were playing. This was

followed by good views of: **Nepal Fulvetta**, **Grey-chinned** and **Short-billed Minivets**, **White-throated** and **Yellow-bellied Fantails**, **Mountain** and **Himalayan Black Bulbuls**, **Blue Whistling Thrush**, **Rufous-gorgeted**, **Little-pied**, **Verditer** and **Ultramarine Flycatchers**, **Large** and **Rufous-bellied** (only Bob managed to see this bird) **Niltavas**, **Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush**, **Plumbeous Redstart**, **White-throated**, **Striated** and **Bhutan Laughingthrushes**, **Rufous-capped** and **Golden Babblers**, **Rusty-fronted Barwing**, **Chestnut-tailed Minla**, **Golden-breasted**, **Yellow-throated**, **Rufous-winged** and **Nepal Fulvettas**, **Rufous Sibia**, **White-napped**, **Whiskered** and **Stripe-throated Yuhinas**, a big flock of roughly 15 **Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill**, **Black-eared Shrike Babbler**, with the calls of both the **Slaty-bellied** and **Grey-bellied Tesia**, as they were throughout the trip.

This was followed by sightings of **Lemon-rumped**, **Whistler's**, **Grey-cheeked**, **Chestnut-crowned**, **Blyth's Leaf** and **Broad-billed Warblers**, **Black-throated** and **Green-backed Tits**, **Fire-breasted Flowerpecker**, **Mrs Gould's**, **Green-tailed** and **Black-throated Sunbirds**, **Streaked Spiderhunter**, a big flock of about 15 **Scarlet Finch**, **Maroon Oriole**, **Black**, **Ashy** and **Lesser Racket-tailed Drongos**, **Grey Treepie** and **Olive-backed Pipit**. As birding activity lessened we drove to the small town of Yongkola where we saw **Striated Prinia**, **Ultramarine** and **Little-pied Flycatchers**. Returning to the camp for lunch, we had more clear sightings of **White-throated Needletails**, **Himalayan Swiftlets**, **Pacific Swifts**, **Great** and **Golden-throated Barbets**, while two **Rufous-necked Hornbills** flew over our camp before perching on a fruiting tree, which gave us amazing views as they happily fed. NIGHT: Camp at Yongkola, 1812m.



Day 14 (9th April): Morning birding along Yongkola and driving from Yongkola to Bumthang. Today we head back towards Paro, but not before spending one last morning birding at lower Yongkola before breakfast where we had good sightings of many more species including the **White-throated Fantail** and a small flock of **Grey-sided Laughingthrushes**. We spent time trying to see a **Lesser Shortwing**, finally making it possible to see this rather elusive bird while **Yellow-throated Fulvettas** were singing all around us. Returning to our campsite we had breakfast and then made our way to Bumthang, occasionally stopping where we had bird activities. Just before Sengor as we were birding along the roadside, to our amazement and joy, we encountered a male **Satyr Tragopan** feeding just above the road-side as it slowly disappeared into the thick bush cover. Finding this rare and beautiful bird certainly was the highlight of the day.

Other species we encountered along this drive were **Common Kestrel**, **Blood Pheasant**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Orange-bellied Leafbird**, **Alpine** and **Rufous-breasted Accentors**, **White-collard Blackbird**, **Hodgson's** and **Blue-fronted Redstarts**, **Grey Bushchat**, **Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush**, flocks of **Rusty-fronted** and **Hoary-throated Barwings**, **Red-tailed Minla**, **White-browed Shrike Babbler**, **Grey-sided Bush Warbler**, **White Ashy-throated Warbler**, **Rufous-fronted**, **Black-throated**, **Rufous-vented**, **Coal** and **Green-backed Tits**, **Russet Sparrow**, **Eurasian Magpie**, **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Red-billed Chough**, and **Large-billed Crow**. Climbing up towards Thrumshing La Pass, we saw a small flock of **Red-headed Bulfinch** along with a close encounter

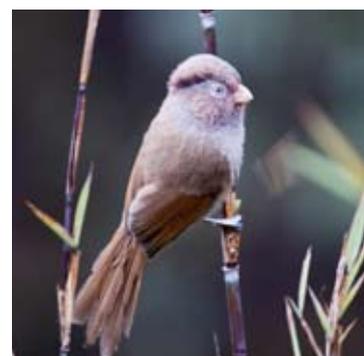
with an **Eurasian Treecreeper** and **Black-faced Laughingthrush**. Unfortunately the **Chestnut-headed Tesia** was only heard on this trip. As we began our descent down in to Bumthang, in the pine forest our drive was interrupted by a pair of **Monal Pheasant** feeding on the roadside, but as soon as they were aware of our presence, they flew off the road and disappeared out of sight. Finally, just before reaching Bumthang, we saw a **Goosander** on an island in the river. NIGHT: Gongkhar Lodge, Bumthang.



Day 15 (10th April): Drive from Bumthang to Wangdue. Birding along east side of Yotong La Pass, Trongsa and Nobding road.

Today we rose at 4.45am in order to get to the eastern side of Yotong La for birding. On our first stop we encountered a flock of **Rufous-fronted Tits** and, once again making good use of the tape, we managed to see the **Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler**, **Dark-breasted Rosefinch**, **Brown Parrotbill** and **Red-headed Bulfinch**, before settling for breakfast near the pass at 3,178m. We continued past Trongsa where we had to wait at road widening works. Leaving the vehicle and our driver, we walked over the road towards a gully. Here, while looking at the cliff face which was filled with **Nepal Martin** we heard the call of a **Grey-bellied Tesia**. Once more making great use of our tape, we returned the call and to our amazement managed to see this tiny bird out in the open, responding vigorously to our tape.

Our journey continued uninterrupted until our lunch spot near Chendebji, where a **Yellow-billed Blue Magpie** joined us for lunch and a pair of **Golden-breasted Fulvetta** were seen above the road in the bamboo thickets, while a **Mountain Hawk Eagle** soared high in the skies above. Continuing our journey towards Pele La Pass we encountered a flock of roughly 20 **Himalayan Griffon** soaring above us while they checked on carcasses somewhere off road. We stopped just after Nobding to try for the rare **Ward's Trogon** which was elusive but managed to get good sightings of **House Swifts**, **Cutia**, **Barred Cuckoo Dove** and a **Golden-throated Barbet**, before continuing to Wangdue and making one last stop at Chuzomsa where we saw a **Crested Kingfisher** by the Dang Chu and had good views of a **Rufous Woodpecker** tapping on a Chir pine tree. Such a great day's birding. Mammals: Common/Himalayan Gorals (*Naemorhedus goral*) on a rocky slope near Chuzomsa. NIGHT: Puna Cottage, Wangdue.



Day 16 (11th April): Drive from Wangdue to Paro. Birding along Dochu La road stopping at Lumitshawa, the Botanical Park at Lampelri. Leaving Wangdue at 4.30am, we drove for 45 minutes past Lumitshawa village in order to reach the **Ward's Trogon** area. The first bird of the day was the **Grey-winged Blackbird** which sang from the treetops before finally coming down and giving us good views. This was followed by a pair of **Spotted Forktails** by the roadside and then the faint call of the **Ward's Trogon** which made the whole group excited. Now we used the tape to call this magnificent bird in. At last, there it was quietly perched on a mid elevation, mossy branch; a beautiful male! We had great views and took lots of photos. Shortly afterwards we saw an **Oriental Cuckoo** which was well spotted by Depak our driver, a **Bay Woodpecker** and a pair of **Kalij Pheasants** who flew across the road seen but only seen by a few of the group.

We stopped for breakfast at Lampelri Botanical Park before continuing our drive to Dochu La Pass where we birded for the remainder of the morning. Here we hiked up a trail above the Pass towards Chungsi Lhakhang (Temple) where we saw **Darjeeling** and **Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers**, **Blanford's Rosefinch**, **Grey-crested**, **Coal**, **Yellow-browed** and **Rufous-vented Tits** and a pair of **Rusty-flanked Treecreepers** who were busy building a nest. Now it was time to return to the pass and continue our drive to Paro, stopping for lunch at Hongtsho - a Tibetan Refugee settlement where we also bid good bye to our wonderful camping crew.

Back in Paro, after checking in we went for a last birding session: evening birding along the Paro Chhu. Here we were rewarded with sightings of the **Common Hoopoe**, **Grey-backed** and **Long-tailed Shrikes**, **Russet** and **Eurasian Tree Sparrows**, **White Wagtail** and finally, a stunning view of the **Black-tailed Crake**. Such a wonderful end to the first trip in this magical country.
NIGHT: Khangkhu Resort, Paro.



Day 17 (12th April): Paro, fly out to Kolkata and onward connections to the UK, Canada and the US.

