

Bhutan

26 March–13 April 2012

Participants

Robert and Susan Ennis

James Hays

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Leader Chubzang Tangbi



Satyr Tragopan

Day 1: Overnight flight from London to Calcutta.

Day 2: Arrival in Calcutta and flight to Paro where the group arrived at 11:20 and I welcomed them to Bhutan. From the airport I introduced them to their driver for the next two 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 Stonechat 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 Eurasian Hoopoe, Rock Pigeon, Hodgson's Redstart, Plumbeous Redstart, Olive-backed Pipit, Rufous-breasted Accentor, River Lapwing and a couple of Mallards swimming in the clear melt-waters of the Pa Chhu. From here we took the 20 minute 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 roadside views 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-collard 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 encountered with the beautifully plumaged Gold-billed 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 3: Drive to Chele La (Pass) and back to Paro and continue to Thimphu. The first of our early morning starts, leaving at 05.00. 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 four 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 Bullfinches, Gold-billed Magpie, Common (Himalayan) Buzzard and our first encounter with the commonly-found Large-billed Crow. The calls of both the Hill Partridge and 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 Black-throated Thrushes. White-collared Blackbirds were calling from all directions as we settled for breakfast while a Blue-fronted Redstart sat singing alongside us while we enjoyed our well-earned breakfast. We made good use of the tape by playing Spotted Laughingthrush, which eventually gave us a glimpse of this wonderful bird. Black-faced Laughingthrushes scolded us from bushes below, in which they were somewhat hard to see, but we were to see them clearly 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. En route 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 it a 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 at Riverview Hotel, Thimphu.

Day 4: Drive to Punakha, stopping at Dochu La (Pass), and Lampelri walk (4 hours) and Pho Chu valley. Another start at 05.00! We were on the road in dark to get to Dochu La (3150m) at first light. We got off 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 that flew and landed on a treetop where all group members had a good look at this beautiful bird. Gould's (previously 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-warblers and Ashy-throated Warblers, Green-backed Tits with Ashy Drongos amongst them. We stopped for breakfast at Lampelri before beginning our walk down to Lumitshawa. Shortly after breakfast we encountered our first sighting of 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 Blyth's 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 Laughingthrushes, followed by a couple of Striated Laughingthrushes. A Eurasian Jay was busy feeding on acorns in a nearby oak tree while a flock of Rufous Sibilas 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. Along the way we encountered: Common and White-throated Kingfishers, two 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, Red-vented Bulbul and 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. Night at Meri Puensum Resort, Punakha.

Day 5: Morning in and around Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Park, JDNP and afternoon visit the Punakha Dzong. Yet another 05:00 start, a quick early morning drink before climbing into the bus and beginning our beautiful drive upstream, 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. As we got out of the bus a pair of Orange-bellied Leafbirds were giving an interesting displaying, which was interrupted by a male 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. Rufous Sibias, Rock Pigeons, Blue Whistling-thrushes, Spotted Doves 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. A 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 Yellowthroat, 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 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 Rivers 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 Tertön Pema Lingpa. Night at Meri Puensum Resort, Punakha.

Day 6: Drive to Pele La (Pass), whole day birding along the Pele La road. Another 05:00 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), pairs of beautiful Ultramarine and Rufous-gorgeted Flycatchers, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker and a pair of Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, while a small flock of six 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 three Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrikes and a Blyth's Leaf-warbler, while a female Lesser Yellowthroat 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 Cuckoo-shrike 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-eagle and Mountain Hawk-eagle, some 30 Blyth's 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 six Mountain Bulbuls were seen below the road on an evergreen tree, just before we reached Khelikha. Himalayan Black Bulbuls were quite common in the area and Blue Whistling-thrushes 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 Warblers and Blyth's Leaf-warblers, while from a flowering shrub, a couple of Chestnut-crowned Warblers, Grey Treepies and a 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 our 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 Himalayan Accentors feeding on the ground just above the road; an exception view of a male Satyr Tragopan and two Himalayan Monals, one 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 at Camp at Old Pele La road, 3,218m.

Day 7: 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 06:00 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, and 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 Parrotbills. 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 Crows. 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 and Lemon-rumped Warblers and Blyth's Leaf-warblers. A small flock of Streak-breasted Scimitar-babblers flew ahead of us and later, a lone Himalayan 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: a 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. We ended the day at Hotel Yangkhil 1998m for a well earned rest! Night at Yangkhil Resort, Trongsa.

Day 8: Trongsa to Shemgang near Wangduegang (110km). Birding along, Chunjey Pang, Dangdung, Koshala and Wangduegang. Another 06:00 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 Yellowthroat, 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 Eastern 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 mcclllandii*), Orange-bellied Squirrel (*Dremomys lokriah*), Malayan Giant Squirrel (*Ratufa bicolor*) and Golden Langurs (*Trachypithecus geei*). Night at Camp at Wangduegang, 1652m.

Day 9: Wangduegang to Tingtibi stopping at Shemgang, Dakphai and upper Tingtibi section. 05:45 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 Flycatcher 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 Owllet 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 a Eurasian Hobby being attacked by an Eurasian Sparrowhawk; quite a battle! Continuing to Shemgang we stopped for a big flock Yellow-breasted Greenfinches 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 Himalayan 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 Bulbuls, Rufous Sibilias and the occasional loud call of Bay Woodpeckers. Approaching Tingtibi we saw several warm broadleaf forest species including Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Ashy, White-throated and Black-crested Bulbuls, Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker and 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 Pigeons were seen perched high up on the tree while Depak, our driver, spotted a Rufous-necked Hornbill flying some distance ahead. A single 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 at Camp at Tingtibi, 500m.

Day 10: Tingtibi to Trongsa. Birding the Tingtibi area in the morning and Shemgang road. At 06.00 we started our birding around the campsite when eight 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 a Great Hornbill feeding in a tree while a Grey-faced 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 Pigeons were seen flying to a nearby tree providing us with excellent 'scope views. As we continued we encountered a feeding flock of both Lesser 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 Junglefowl 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, Blyth's Swift, Tickell's Leaf-warbler and Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-babbler. Mammals: Yellow-throated Marten (*Martes flavigula*). Night at Yangkhil Resort, Trongsa.

Day 11: 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, which sang throughout the day, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Blyth's Leaf-warbler, Lemon-rumped and Ashy-throated Warblers, Rufous-fronted Tit and flocks of Hoary-throated Barwings. Although we heard 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-finches followed by at least half a dozen White-browed Rosefinches, before descending to Chume and onwards to our camp at Ura. Stopping for lunch by the Chamkhar River, we spotted a pair of Ibisbills, 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 at Camp at Ura, 3000m.

Day 12: Drive from Ura to Yongkola birding along Thrumshing La Pass, Sengor and Namling road. This morning we woke to the call of 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 Bullfinches, White-browed Fulvetta, White-collared Blackbird, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Olive-backed Pipit, Spotted Nutcracker and a Rufous-bellied Woodpecker but only heard the calls of Hill Partridge and 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 Eurasian Wren and an Alpine Accentor. Approaching Sengor, around half a dozen Dusky Thrushes 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 Minivets, Whiskered, Stripe-throated and Rufous-vented Yuhinas, Little Pied Flycatcher, Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher, 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 at Camp at Yongkola, 1812m.

Day 13: Birding along upper and lower Yongkola road. At 06.00 the day began with the hooting call of the Mountain Scops-owl and 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 that 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 and 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-warbler, 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 Parrotbills, 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. Mammals: a large group of over 30 Capped Langurs (*Trachypithecus pileatus*) were observed below the little village of Yongkola. Night at Camp at Yongkola, 1812m.

Day 14: Birding along the upper and lower section of the Yongkola road. At 05:45 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 Yellowthroat on a bare trunk of a tree, continuing birding and using our tape calls, we were very close to seeing the Blackish-breasted 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-eagle, Mountain Hawk-eagle 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 Parrotbills, 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 and Broad-billed Warblers, Blyth's Leaf-warbler, Black-throated and Green-backed Tits, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Gould's, Green-tailed and Black-throated Sunbirds, Streaked Spiderhunter, a big flock of about 15 Scarlet Finches, 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, Blyth's Swifts and 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 at Camp at Yongkola, 1812m.

Day 15: Morning birding along Yongkola and driving from Yongkola to Bumthang. Today we headed 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 White-throated Fantail and a small flock of Grey-sided Laughingthrushes. We spent time trying to see a Lesser Shortwing, finally managing 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 found bird activity. 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 roadside 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-collared 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, 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 Bullfinches along with a close encounter with a Eurasian Treecreeper and Black-faced Laughingthrush. Unfortunately, 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 Himalayan Monals 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 at Gongkhar Lodge, Bumthang.

Day 16: Drive from Bumthang to Wangdue. Birding along east side of Yotong La Pass, Trongsa and Nobding road. Today we rose at 04.45 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 Yellowish-bellied Bush-warbler, Dark-breasted Rosefinch, Brown Parrotbill and Red-headed Bullfinch 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 Martins, 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 Gold-billed Magpie joined us for lunch and a pair of Golden-breasted Fulvettas 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 Griffons 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, Himalayan 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 at Puna Cottage, Wangdue.

Day 17: Drive from Wangdue to Paro. Birding along Dochu La road stopping at Lumitshawa, the Botanical Park at Lampelri. Leaving Wangdue at 04.00, 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 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 Eurasian Hoopoe, Grey-backed and Long-tailed Shrikes, Russet and Eurasian Tree Sparrows, White Wagtail and finally, a stunning view of a Black-tailed Crake. Such a wonderful end to Birdfinders first trip to this magical country. Night at Khangkhu Resort, Paro.

Day 18: Paro, fly out to Kolkata and onward connections to the UK, Canada and the US.

CHUBZANG TANGBI