

Nepal

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White-browed Fulvetta

A personal report by Martin Tribe

Birdfinders' 2008 tour to Nepal began with the group meeting at Heathrow for the flight to Doha (Qatar) and then onto Kathmandu. On landing at Kathmandu we were met by our local guide Suchet Basnet, who turned out to be an excellent birder with a terrific knowledge of Nepal's birds, amazing eyes and ears when it came to finding birds and a great person to be with.

Driving from the airport to our hotel in Kathmandu we picked up the expected Black Kites, House Crows and Common Mynas, and had an Oriental Magpie-robin in the hotel garden. We were soon to discover that the cities of Nepal have scheduled power cuts, often once or twice a day and use back-up generators to supply power, although there's always that short gap between sudden darkness and power to some lights, and, importantly, to battery chargers.

Our first full day was mostly a travel day as we took a Buddha Air flight (we could also have used Cosmic Air or Yeti Airlines!) to Biratnagar in south-east Nepal. The airport and immediate gardens gave us our first Rufous Treepie, Brown Shrike, Chestnut-tailed Starlings and, the soon-to-be often-seen Red-vented Bulbul and Asian Pied Starling. We travelled in two four-wheel drive vehicles to Koshi Camp, getting Jungle Mynas, numerous Black Drongos and Black Kites, Indian Pond Herons (pond rats to Suchet, and fairly soon to us too!) and Indian Roller.

At Koshi Camp we were immediately greeted by Spotted Owlet and the black-headed variety of Long-tailed Shrike. Also in the immediate grounds were Taiga Flycatcher, Common Tailorbird and Spotted Dove. As we unloaded the bags, or rather they were unloaded for us, four White-rumped Vultures flew over our heads.

We had most of the afternoon so we went for a walk to Koshi's pools and the edge of a forested part of the reserve. The pools held Common Coot and Common Moorhen, not too thrilling yet, but we soon found close flying Ashy Wood-swallows, giving superb views, Asian Palm Swifts, White-throated and Pied Kingfishers, Jungle Babblers, Lesser Whistling-ducks and a Bronze-winged Jacana. A couple of us managed to see our first Swamp Francolins, a bird the reserve is rightly famous for. The first woodland bird was two Grey-headed Canary Flycatchers, a bird we found again many times in various localities. A Stork-billed Kingfisher flew overhead calling loudly and soon settled so we could all admire this huge-billed bird. Another pool added four Ferruginous Ducks and White-breasted Waterhen to our growing tally and we had four Asian Openbills fly over as we admired Black-hooded Orioles at the forest edge. Then it was Grey-backed Shrike followed by Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker and more Chestnut-tailed Starlings. A flock of birds came through comprising mostly warblers: Humes's, *tristis* Common Chiffchaffs, and Tickell's Leaf-warblers. A lone Dusky Warbler was found, leading us to a superb Siberian Rubythroat and at least two Smoky Warblers in a damp, vegetated valley. Back at camp the day finished with Paddyfield and Thick-billed Warblers and a Jungle Cat followed by a good dinner, the bird log and sleep in our tents.

The next day dawned very foggy, something we found to be a common occurrence in southern Nepal. As I stuck my head out of the tent a flock of about 40 Yellow-breasted Buntings landed in a nearby tree but quickly flew off. We hunted for Swamp Francolin and found four in the mist and watched a Common Hawk-cuckoo sitting in a nearby tree holding its wings in a strange droopy fashion, something we didn't see in later views of other Common Hawk-cuckoos.

Today we aimed to visit Koshi Barrage, formed by damming of the Koshi River. Although the Barrage isn't far from the camp it took us a while to get there because we kept stopping for birds. First stop was very close to the camp when Suchet spotted some activity: Olive-Backed Pipits, Crested Buntings, a Greater Coucal and a Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike. Sugar cane fields held hundreds of

Yellow-breasted Buntings and a few Plain Prinias and close-by we added Red-wattled Lapwing, Bluethroat (red-spotted form), Long-legged Buzzard, two Rufous-winged Bushlarks and Siberian Stonechats, as well as the usual common species.

We had hardly started to continue the journey before we did a fast stop for a close, sitting White-eyed Buzzard. A few photographs later we continued as far as a small pool by the roadside where stopped for Black Stork, plus Little Ringed Plovers and Common Greenshank. We soon added a flying Himalayan Griffon, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-larks and Black-shouldered Kite to the list, plus another White-eyed Buzzard, and Richard's and Paddyfield Pipits.

On reaching the first of the lakes just before the Barrage we found various species of ducks: Red-crested Pochard, Northern Shoveler, Common Teal, Northern Pintail, Common Pochard, Gadwall and Ferruginous Duck. A Western Marsh-harrier flew low over a nearby field and we added Little Cormorant to the growing list. Suchet had us stop at a lake a little further up the road where we saw numerous Bronze-winged Jacanas, five Pheasant-tailed Jacanas and six Cotton Pygmy-geese. Two Black Ibis were found just as a Lesser Adjutant flew in over a group of Purple Swamphens.

At the big area of water at the actual barrage we had the same ducks plus a male and a female Falcated Duck, 27 Greylag Geese with two Bar-headed Geese and numerous Ruddy Shelduck. A little further on a sand bank we had appropriately-named Sand Larks and a couple of Common Tailorbirds in some scrubby bushes.

On the other side of the Barrage itself, the barrier holding back the water, we saw a few Gangetic Dolphins (Indian River Dolphin), the world's most threatened cetacean, then moved on to the other side of the water where we found Plain Martins, Asian Darter, Caspian and Great Black-headed Gulls, two Common Goldeneye (unusual here), a close juvenile Besra quickly followed by a Shikra and a Striated Heron. The trackside scrub held Dusky and Paddyfield Warblers and Blyth's Reed-warbler. We found three more Lesser Adjutants and a Temminck's Stint and admired soaring Eurasian and Himalayan Griffons.

On the way back to Koshi Camp we found two Yellow-wattled Lapwings, a declining species, Citrine Wagtail and a Eurasian Hoopoe. Back at the camp we found two groups of four Swamp Francolins. The night was filled with the sound of fighting Spotted Owlets.

Our second full day at Koshi again dawned very foggy. We walked along the forest edge to get to our inflatables for a river journey. The forest, although misty, gave us a few new species: Blue-throated Barbet and Verditer Flycatcher. We heard, then found a Jungle Owlet, quickly followed by four Black-rumped Flamebacks and a Streak-throated Woodpecker. At one point I had two flamebacks and the Streak-throated Woodpecker in one 'scope view.

We set off on two boats, each with a man from the camp doing the rowing. Things started quietly with Pied Kingfishers, Great Crested Grebes, Great and Little Egrets and Ruddy Shelducks. Our first raptor was a White-tailed Eagle flying quite close. We found an adult and two juvenile Black-necked Storks, Common Kingfisher, two Caspian Gulls and a Smoky warbler. Landing on a sandy beach near some tall grasses we heard Yellow-bellied Prinia and saw Rufous-vented Prinia, a bird found by Suchet and his friends that is now an accepted sub-species (*nepalensis* I believe) of Rufous-vented Prinia – a bird you won't yet find in the Nepal field guides. A Greater Spotted Eagle flew over soon followed by seven Mallard! We found an Osprey on a post and Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover and Temminck's Stint on the banks. Suddenly we had the luck to have two Black-bellied Terns appear and show very well flying past and over our boats. Not long after this a raptor appeared overhead and we added Pallas's Fish-eagle to the list.

We landed on another sandy beach bordering tall grasslands for a lunch stop and immediately had White-tailed Stonechat – male and female. We also had Graceful Prinia here.

Continuing down the placid river, which in places was very shallow so occasionally the rower had to get out and push us off the shingle, we found White-rumped Vulture, Short-toed Eagle and eight Pacific Golden-plovers. At another sandbank stop we found two more Sand Larks, Black Ibis, Asian Darter and 21 Common Greenshanks. Carrying on down river we added Crested Serpent-eagle and Oriental Honey-buzzard and then landed at another beach. Here, amongst the footprints of Indian Elephants we found Great Thick-knee and Bright-headed Cisticola and had Black Vulture and Eurasian Griffon soar close overhead.

Back in the boat and we had another close encounter with a pair of Black-bellied Terns, plus a Eurasian Spoonbill, two Common Cranes and an Eastern Imperial Eagle.

Leaving the boats we walked about a kilometre to a nearby marshy area. We found a group of obliging Blue-throated Barbets, then later Purple Swamphen, Cinnamon Bittern and Bronze-winged Jacanas. We had a target species and as we searched we had three Yellow-footed Green Pigeons. Soon after we all had excellent views of the bird we were after: Striated Grassbird. Also here we had, amongst others, Hoopoe, Green Bee-eater, Common Snipe and Citrine Wagtail.

Another day dawned foggy at Koshi and we saw the usual Spotted Owlets and Long-tailed Shrike, plus the unusual sight of a Himalayan Griffon-vulture sitting amongst the bushes and grasses at the edge of the marsh. The bird had been found in a nearby village and brought to the camp the day before. We left Koshi for the long drive to Royal Chitwan National Park. The usual common species were seen en route plus a fly-by Woolly-necked Stork. We made a comfort stop in a forest and were soon distracted by the pale *minor* race of Great Tit, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch and Golden-fronted Leafbird. A hour or so on we stopped for lunch and had the chance to admire our first Spangled Drongos.

Onward towards Chitwan but first a stop by a river where there was a chance of Ibisbill. No Ibisbills were seen but we did get our first (of many) Plumbeous and White-capped Water Redstarts and four River Lapwings.

My notebook has a blank space now because we stopped for Black-backed Forktail and the bird appeared only when I wasn't there! Suchet and I tried hard, including running up a steep wooded hill to try to get above the bird. We succeeded as the bird flew down to the waiting others, but didn't hang around for me to see it. It's impossible for everyone to see every bird on a trip but missing this one was particularly unpleasant!

We arrived at what we thought was Chitwan only to be moved, luggage and all, onto a large military looking vehicle for a very bouncy drive across the Rapti River to the lodge at the edge of the forest. We did see a few Black Storks on the way over. At the lodge we settled in and sat around a large log fire eating a very nice barbecued dinner.

Our first full day at Chitwan was to be spent mostly in the forest but first we did a walk through the grassland. However, before that, at the edge of the camp by the kitchen is a small wooded valley. Our first birds of the day were found here: White-rumped Shama, White-tailed Robin, Common Tailorbird and Puff-throated Babbler. Out in the grassland we had a fly-over Peregrine before locating a flock moving along the forest edge. Here we found Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Scarlet Minivet, White-bellied Drongo, Chestnut-chested Nuthatch, Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker and Common Iora. The grasses themselves held Siberian Stonechat, Spotted Bush-warbler (a very elusive bird) and Long-tailed Shrike. Deciding to move into the forest we were soon watching a pair of Black-crested Bulbuls quickly followed by a group of Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpeckers and an Emerald Dove. The birds just kept coming with both Blue-throated and Lineated Barbets found, Bronzed Drongo, and two Lesser Yellownapes.

We found a more-open area at a 'crossroads' of paths. One particular tree, heavily hung with dark green creeper, held male and female Crimson Sunbirds, superb when the sun caught the male, and a Streaked Spiderhunter. Nearby we added Red-billed Blue Magpie, Green-billed Malkoha, Grey-breasted Prinia and a quick view of a Common Green Magpie. A group of Plum-headed Parakeets caught our attention and just as we had finished admiring them, and spotting the female Blossom-headed Parakeet with them, I noticed a small bird fly to the top of a tree just above us. Fortunately the tree was virtually leafless as the bird turned out to be a Collared Falconet, which sat there until we had all seen it exceptionally well in bins and 'scopes.

Continuing on we flushed a female Peafowl, found three Red Junglefowl, and had Himalayan Swiftlets flying overhead. A short walk into the wood and we found two Greater Yellownapes, Oriental White-eye and a Golden-fronted Leafbird. We then heard a intriguing roar from quite nearby, which the locals said was a Sloth Bear. We thought we saw it but it turned out to be a group of people from a nearby village running through the forest and directly away from the bear!

After lunch things calmed down a bit and the only new bird for an hour or so was Greater Raquet-tailed Drongo. However, soon it was flock time again as Vaughan and Sveta, hanging back for a better view of a Pale-chinned Flycatcher we had just found, called us back. Once again it was the usual frantic forest birding where birds appear everywhere and it's a challenge to get on everything, especially with directions and bird names being called from all around. We saw White-bellied Epornis (was Yuhina), Western Crowned and Grey-hooded Warblers and Blyth's Leaf-warbler, then, as we took stock, found a Speckled Piculet soon followed by a Tickell's Thrush.

We had been out almost eight hours and it was now time to head back to the camp. On the way I noticed a huge bird about 20m up flying away from us. Fortunately it very soon stopped and could be 'scoped. It was then we realised Suchet saying he thought it was a special bird was right as we all admired a superb Spot-bellied Eagle-owl. Closer to the camp we found an obliging flock of Red-breasted Parakeets and back near the camp Trevor and I locate a pair of Grey-headed Woodpeckers. Phew, we were done for the day, but were we? Scanning the river and grassland from the balcony we found a Lesser Coucal, Red-vented Bulbuls and two male and a female Goosander. A flock of swallow-like birds was noted feeding over the water and once we got the 'scope on them we realised they were all Small Pratincoles! A superb end to an amazing day.

Next morning we had some time in the forest before we left the camp to drive to another camp in Chitwan, located further west in the park. The forest walk was superb as ever with our first new birds being a pair of Greater Flamebacks, calling as they flew overhead, then landing in a tree so we could see them properly. Then we had a fun hour or so chasing down some elusive Great Hornbills: we eventually saw three well. Other birds about where Chestnut-bellied and Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, Slaty-headed Parakeet, Spangled Drongo and Himalayan and Red-whiskered Bulbuls. A small flock of birds contained Greenish and Western Crowned Warblers, Common Iora, lots of Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrikes and Oriental White-eyes and our first Striped Tit-babbler.

As we took the bumpy route away from the camp we found Black Storks, two Crested Serpent-eagles, Pied Bushchat, White and White-browed Wagtails and Paddyfield Pipits. Nothing new was seen on the drive to west Chitwan and after we'd settled we were taken for a very short walk, only a few tens of metres, to be shown two roosting Brown Hawk-owls, just above the path. Some of the group went on the elephant ride into the forest and saw numerous Peafowl. The rest of us went for a walk through open forest and onto riverine grassland. We soon picked up Red-wattled Lapwings, Booted Eagle, a group of Grey-breasted Prinias and a pair of Pied Bushchats. An open scrubby area added Little Green Bee-eater, four Large Cuckoo-shrikes, Hoopoe, Common Hawk-cuckoo and 14 flyover Black Ibises. Where the trees were larger we found Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker, Lesser Yellownape and Asian Barred Owlet. The grassland gave us White-tailed and Siberian Stonechats and a Peregrine stooping at, but missing, a Plum-headed Parakeet. We also saw Spotted Deer here. Finally, by the lodge, we added Brown Crakes on the nearby river margins.

The following day we aimed head towards the Himalayas as we drove to Pokhara. Nothing new was at around the lodge but soon after we left Suchet spotted a Rosy Pipit feeding in a ploughed field.

We stopped at a few places along the road. First stop gave us Plumbeous and White-capped Water Redstarts, birds that are common on mountain streams and rivers. Next stop was a bridge over a gorge. We soon had Brown Dipper and then found a Wallcreeper. Climbing slowly higher we noted Eurasian Griffon-vulture and Red-headed Vulture, then Black and Egyptian Vultures and soon Slender-billed Vulture and Himalayan Griffon-vulture. A good vulture day! Finally, as I emerged from the shower in the room at the

Pokhara hotel I heard Vaughan shouting "Black-backed Forktail". I got dressed very quickly and was soon running to the nearby park where Vaughan had left his 'scope. After a few nervous seconds the bird was on my list! The others gradually appeared and took their turns and on the way back we watched a female Grey Bushchat.

The 6th February 2008 was the day we were to start the trek. Such a small word and yet, we were to find out, with much hidden meaning! First we drove to the village from where many treks start. Our first sight was, however, not avian. From the roof of the hotel we gathered to admire the morning sunlight slowly lighting up the Himalaya.

A stop on the way by a small stream proved to be extremely productive. Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Slaty-blue Flycatcher and two Spotted Forktails to start. Then Slaty-backed Forktail on the same stream. In some scrubby growth we added Whistler's Warblers, Black-chinned Babblers and a Chestnut-headed Tasia. Trees held Lemon-rumped Warblers, Yellow-bellied Fantail and Black-lored Tit. A vegetation-covered bank held a Scaly-breasted Wren-babbler (very hard to see I assure you).

After continuing the drive to the village we arrived and had an easy walk along the riverside, gently climbing higher. Red-rumped and Barn Swallows, and Himalayan Swiftlets flew overhead, and Ashy-throated Warblers flitted around the trees. A fine Rufous-bellied Niltava was seen and some of the group managed a Little Pied Flycatcher. Little Forktail was found in a shady overhang at the river's edge completing the list of possible forktails in Nepal, three of which we had had today! A restaurant stop for lunch added Striated Heron and then it was time to continue up. A male Black-throated Sunbird put in an appearance followed by a male Blue Rock-thrush. As ever, Plumbeous and White-capped Water Redstarts were being seen and we soon found a male Grey Bushchat quickly followed by Black Redstart and Orange-flanked Bush-robin. Next came a Slaty-backed Flycatcher, another Little Forktail, and Small Niltava. As we watched the niltava a couple of Grey Treepies arrived to add to the ever-growing list. A loud laughing sound preceded two superb White-crested Laughing-thrushes that showed very well.

Further along we came across a rather distant flock of about 50 Yellow-breasted Greenfinches, had very good views of a Bonelli's Eagle, finally found, after much searching, three Nepal House Martins (we soon found more of course) plus a distant Goshawk, a Great Barbet (more often seen than heard but we eventually saw quite a few) and another Spotted Forktail. Close to our stop for the night we admired our first Asian Barred Owlet then it was time to rest. It had been quite an easy day really. Tomorrow was to be somewhat different!

The day started well with great views of a Common Green Magpie. As Suchet said "I don't know why they are called common", because they aren't. We were heading to Gandhruk following a well-trodden pathway that varied between virtually level to very steep stone steps. It was the stone steps that were the challenge as, in places, they seemed to go on and on and the trek, supposedly doable in a few hours, took all day. The good news is that we stopped many times on the way up, usually for birds, and saw some good stuff.

Our first stop was barely outside the village we had started from as a flock of Black Bulbuls flew into view. Our first Black Bulbuls, and we admired them; soon we were to realise they are the commonest bird up here and we saw hundreds. Initially following the river we found Blue Whistling-thrush, Yellow-bellied Fantail (very active little birds) and Slaty-headed Parakeets (the only parakeet up here). We found a pair of Greater Yellownapes and were surprised when a flock of about 28 pigeons turned out to be Snow Pigeons. We thought the weather must be a bit rough higher up as it is unusual to see these birds so low down. Birds continued to appear with Red-billed Blue Magpies and Long-tailed Minivets, more forktails in the form of both Little and Slaty-backed and heard-only Great Barbets, heard most of the time whilst we were in the mountains.

We stopped for lunch and had an hour or so to walk around. We got close views of Yellow-breasted Greenfinches and the pale *minor* race of Great Tit. Olive-backed Pipits were quite common and we found another Asian Bared Owlet. We found our first Blue-fronted Redstart and eight Grey-headed Goldfinches.

After lunch we set off again with a close Eurasian Crag-martin overhead and a more-distant Red-headed Vulture soaring by. We soon found our first Russet Sparrows, a very smart looking bird, and found another Lammergeier. A small side diversion, a few meters up a stream where there were a few trees (most of the land on the way up is terraced for cultivation and trees are a rarity). It was a good decision as we found three Dark-breasted Rosefinches and a female Blue-capped Redstart.

Farther up the main path we found some more trees, the most trees we had seen for a while, and more birds began to appear. Lemon-rumped, Buff-barred and Grey-hooded Warblers flitted in the canopy and Green-backed and Black-throated Tits moved through the leaves. This place looked interesting so we moved very slowly along to see what we could find. A slightly more open patch allowed us to look down onto a heavily-vegetated area and we quickly found both Green-tailed and Fire-tailed Sunbirds. Birds came thick and fast with Rufous Sibia, Common Green Magpie, and six Rufous-vented Yuhinas. As we moved back down the path a bit to get closer to the action I heard a rustling in the scrub next to the path, dropped down to one knee and loudly whispered "Kalij Pheasant". We managed to get views of both a male and female as they slowly moved up the hill and deeper into cover. Then another yuhina took our interest when a Whiskered Yuhina made an appearance. We decided we must stop here again on the way back down but now it was time for more climbing.

Not much else was seen on the way up as all our concentration went on climbing the steps and dreaming of reaching Gandhruk. We did stop for a flock of Himalayan Accentors in a tree top, some of which were decidedly fluffy-looking youngsters. The final tally of this flock of accentors was 17! Finally, after a long and tiring day we reached the village entrance, although then found we had lots more steps to climb as the village is large, built on a steep mountainside and our hotel was quite a way up. We did get Dark-throated Thrush by the hotel and then it was time to collapse, shower, eat and sleep.

Today we aimed to go a bit higher up the mountain. From here on up the habitation lessened and the forest increased. After a good breakfast, including what was labelled as Tibetan jam, the best jam I have ever tasted, and after watching some Oriental Turtle-doves

and Russet Sparrows, we set off up more steps. Fortunately not nearly as many as yesterday. Lammergeier and Himalayan Griffon-vultures were seen below us, a change from soaring above us, and Lemon-rumped Warblers and Black-chinned Babblers were common. We stopped at an open area surrounded by trees and admired male and female Green-tailed Sunbirds. A Yellow-browed Tit came in close as did a female Fire-breasted Flowerpecker and, slightly more distant, we found more Dark-breasted Rosefinches and a pair of Pink-browed Rosefinches. Then a nuthatch appeared and we added White-tailed Nuthatch to the ever-growing list.

At another location we found three Stripe-throated Yuhinas and soon after Suchet found three Speckled Wood-pigeons sitting quietly in a nearby tree. As ever most birds flying around or sitting on top of trees were Black Bulbuls. But we kept checking just in case!

The path entered woodland rather than running along next to it and we found a tiny stream, not more than a trickle, running over the ground. A bird moved slightly as it drank from this water and we realised we had Red-headed Bullfinch. We admired these superb-looking birds for quite a while as both males and females came to drink or sat in nearby trees. Definitely a top five of the tour bird. Also here we had Rusty-flanked Treecreeper and a nice sitting-still Collared Owlet.

Now it was time to walk a little way back down to a small restaurant. This was for lunch but we were soon ignoring food and admiring excellent birds. First we had superb views of both White-collared and Grey-winged Blackbirds, about 20 of each, and amongst these a real highlight, a very-white-headed Chestnut Thrush. Of course, with these birds were many Black Bulbuls! At the base of the trees some saw a Black-faced Laughing-thrush and an Orange-flanked Bush-robin. I made a trip to the toilet and was looking through the window (no glass) and thinking what a nice view when two Black-faced Laughing-thrushes appeared in the open. I leapt out of the toilet and shouted to the others who dived for the edge of the area we were on to see them. Sadly, I think they quickly departed.

Having had some good birds here we decided this was a good place to stay for a while. We walked around the woods for a while but things seemed to have gone quiet. Then Vaughan called us (from up some steps!) and we charged up to admire a flock of Chestnut-tailed (Bar-throated) Minlas. These birds came back to the same tree every fifteen minutes or so and showed beautifully. We also had both Speckled and Ashy Woodpigeons and a Mountain Bulbul. Heading back we saw what we thought was pigeon fly into cover in a tree below us. Suchet let us know that we had better check it out as it was a Barred Cuckoo-dove, not an easy bird to see. Back at the village we admired yet another Asian Barred Owlet and numerous Himalayan Swiftlets.

So now it was time to head back down the mountain. A relief compared with walking up but with its own problems caused by steepness and pressure on the knees. We had our first new birds whilst only a few minutes from the hotel. We walk past a wooded valley on the way down and whilst we hadn't really noticed it on the way up, on the way back it was definitely worth a look. Almost immediately we had two Streaked Laughing-thrushes that showed well. Soon after that we found a flock that contained: Black Bulbul, Whistler's Warbler, Great, Green, Black-lored and Black-throated Tits, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Black-throated Sunbird, Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher and Brown-throated Treecreeper!

After the flock had passed we carried on down and had just left the village when we found an Aberrant Bush-warbler. A couple of Great Barbets showed well further down and back at the good little woodland we found on the way up we again found Whiskered and Rufous-vented Yuhinas and Fire-tailed Sunbirds and nearby we located a very long-tailed Striated Prinia. Another stop and another new bird: this time three Rusty-flanked Scimitar-babblers. As we admired these birds we also found a Rufous-breasted Accentor. We saw more flocks of Snow Pigeons, one at least 100 birds strong, and found Small Niltava and a male Blue-capped Redstart, although in winter the cap is grey rather than the lovely blue of spring (I saw that in Kazakhstan, also with Birdfinders). Lower down, after the steps, we came across four White-rumped Munias plus more of the birds we'd seen on the way up including two more White-crested Laughing-thrushes. Finally, close to the end of our trek, we stopped to rest and view the river in case of Crested Kingfisher. No kingfisher was seen but we did find a Wallcreeper creeping around on boulders. We drove back to the hotel in Pokhara for a very good dinner and a well-earned rest.

Our next day was spent in the wooded hills around Pokhara. After a short walk we began to ascend into the forest finding our first Asian Brown Flycatcher on the way. We again found many of the species we had already seen, including most of the phylloscs, in various flocks. A Rusty-tailed Flycatcher was new for the trip as was Snowy-browed Flycatcher. Searching the leaf-strewn forest floor we found a Scaly Thrush and then heard a Grey-bellied Tesia calling. After a short wait the bird was found and, unusually for a tesia, it moved around in the open around the base of a tree so we could see it perfectly. A Blue-throated Barbet added a splash of colour and then things really took off. We found a flock containing loads of birds and more kept appearing. We saw about 20 Long-tailed Broadbills (a superb looking bird, much better than in the guides), Grey Treepies, Common Green Magpie, White-crested Laughing-thrushes, Long-tailed Minivets, Greater Flamebacks, two Maroon Orioles, a Lesser Raquet-tailed Drongo, Lesser Yellownappe and a Rufous Woodpecker. This was a very exciting half hour or so as the flock went past them came back. At one point almost every bird we saw was a broadbill!

After the flock had finally moved on we carried on through the woods. We stopped in a an area we could see some sky and saw Black Kites. But not only kites as a paddle-shaped winged bird turned out to be a Mountain Hawk-eagle and with it was a Changeable Hawk-eagle! Superb.

A flock of warblers included the usual phylloscs: Western Crowned, Ashy-throated, Buff-barred, Lemon-rumped and Hume's plus two *Seicercus* warblers Grey-hooded and Chestnut-crowned Warblers.

The morning of the 11th February dawned and soon we were off on the drive to Kathmandu. We all appreciated the rest it gave our legs! We hadn't got far before we stopped to photograph two close and sitting down White-rumped Vultures. The "usual" birds were seen en route plus Long-legged Buzzard and genuine Rock Pigeons (of the race *intermedia* that doesn't have a white rump). We stopped at a few sites looking for Ibisbill getting Woolly-necked Storks, Little Ringed Plover and Pied and Common Kingfishers as

we did so. Our final stop proved fruitful as we found no fewer than six Ibisbills together, some sitting like stones, others preening and walking around. Everyone had great views of these birds that we admired for quite a while.

In the late afternoon we arrived in Kathmandu and were soon back in the hotel in which we spent our first night. Some of us had a wander around the local shops, selling yak wool blankets and mostly trekking gear. The shops are very colourful and vibrant but the shop keepers are not too pushy.

Our final day in Nepal dawned. Last this afternoon we were to board our flight to Doha. Before that, however, we drove up to Mt Phulchowki, the highest of the mountains surrounding the Kathmandu valley at 2760m. On the drive up we stopped a couple of times for the six in total Kalij Pheasants we saw on the road plus at places Suchet thought might be good. The first out-of-the-car stop gave us a flock of Nepal Fulvettas, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Blue-tailed Sivas (Minlas) and the first of what was to be, probably, hundreds of Rufous Sibias. Another stop gave us close views of the beautiful Black-faced Warbler, at least 10 birds, and two Striated Laughing-thrushes. Another of Suchet's stopping places gave us the bird I most wanted to see. At first all was quiet, with only lots of Black-looked Tits, a few other tits and Green-tailed Sunbird. Eventually the bird we sought was found, although it was well hidden and showing very poorly. However, after a short time we eventually had great views of 11 Himalayan Cutias. I was extremely pleased, especially as we had heard that another group here yesterday had seen almost no birds and certainly no Cutias! As we watched these birds a party of White-throated Laughing-thrushes came through and a Eurasian Jay put in an appearance.

Further up the road another flock was located, this one containing, amongst birds we were now familiar with, Whiskered and Stripe-throated Yuhinas, Chestnut-tailed Minlas etc, both White-browed and Rufous-winged Fluvettas. Near here we also had Chestnut-crowned Laughing-thrushes.

We drove and walked to as close to the top as it is possible to go and had lunch. The very top is a military station and is off limits. In the tall trees of the top of the mountain Suchet went to work. A tapping noise eventually led him to a well hidden Darjeeling Woodpecker. A few minutes later we added a Rufous-bellied Woodpecker.

On the way down we found Rufous-chinned Laughing-thrush, a lone White-collared Blackbird and another Collared Owlet being mobbed by Rufous Sibias. The last new bird of the trip was White-browed Bush-robin, after which we battled the afternoon Kathmandu traffic to get to the airport. Despite a computer breakdown at the airport we made in onto the flight and made it home slightly ahead of schedule. And so we reached the end of a superb trip with hundreds of good birds and very good company.