

BIRDING ACROSS BHUTAN

Day 1: Guwahati, drive to Samdrup Jongkhar | 3hrs drive

We take a morning flight from Delhi to Guwahati, the largest city in the state of Assam, located on the south shore of the Brahmaputra River. We leave Guwahati along busy roads packed with cars, street hawkers and rickshaws, cross the Brahmaputra River, and continue across the Indian plain of Assam. We look out for Little Cormorant, egrets, Indian Pond Heron, Ashy Drongo and Red-wattled Lapwing in roadside wetlands, with possible sightings of Small Pratincole, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Citrine Wagtail, Rusty-rumped Warbler and Striated Grassbird. We will also make a special effort to find lesser and Greater Adjutants, both highly endangered species. We enter Bhutan, complete the immigration process at the border, and enter the town of Samdrup Jongkhar where we spend the night.

Overnight: Hotel Menjong | Tashi Gashel

Day 2: Samdrup Jongkhar – Morong (3hrs)

After our final morning exploring lowland forest between Samdrup Jongkhar and Deothang. This forest is remarkably rich and diverse; target species here include the rare Dark-rumped Swift, Pied Falconet, Jungle Babbler, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Pin-tailed Green Pigeon, Wreathed and Great Hornbill and Puff-throated Babbler. We will head further north towards through the forested foothills towards the Morong. The remainder of the afternoon will be spent birding a stretch of mossy, mid-altitude broad-leaved forest. Our main target here is the extremely special, Beautiful Nuthatch. Other interesting species we may encounter this afternoon while searching for the highly-sought nuthatch include Black-faced Warbler, Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher, Striated Laughingthrush, Long-tailed Sibia, Silver-eared Mesia and Rufous-necked Hornbill to name a few.

Overnight: Morong Campsite, at 1710m.

Day 3: Morong to Trashigang (6hrs)

We will have a before-breakfast outing back to the location of the Beautiful Nuthatch if we didn't find it yesterday. After breakfast at the campsite, we make our way to Trashigang stopping along the way for birding. Today's target species will include Rufous-necked Hornbill, Grey-sided Laughingthrush, and Long-tailed Broadbill with other possibilities such as Black Eagle, Mountain Hawk Eagle and species of yuhinas.

Overnight: Hotel Druk Deothjung

Day 4: Trashigang to Kori La to Mongar to Yongkala (5hrs)

En route to Yongkala, we stop at Kori La. The forest here is rich in mosses and lichens, and we search these mountain forests for Steak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, Grey-winged Blackbird, Hoary-throated Barwing, Long-tailed and Short-billed Minivets, Bhutan Laughingthrush, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Brownish-flanked Bush-Warbler and Spotted Wren-Babbler. In the afternoon we will reach Bhutan's wet subtropical forest and one of the finest birding areas in the Himalayas, at Campsite Yongkala, for a three-night stay. We bird these lush forested valleys searching for shortwings, Black-headed Shrike-Babbler, Ward's Trogon, Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, barbets, Golden Bush Robin, Chestnut-breasted Partridge and many other rare species alongside Little Forktail, Large Niltava, Russet Bush-Warbler, Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Violet Cuckoo and Rufous-faced Warbler.

Overnight: Campsite Yongkala (1875m).

Day 5 & 6: Yongkala; the Limithang Road

We spend two full days birding along this incredible 80 km long road, ranked amongst the ten top birding sites in the world, with waterfalls and ravines appearing around every bend. We search for the area's specialties such as Wedge-billed Wren-Babbler, Rufous-throated Wren-Babbler, Spotted Wren-Babbler, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Coral-billed Scimitar-Babbler, Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler, flocks of parrotbills, Golden-breasted Fulvetta, Scarlet Finch, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Lesser and White-browed Shortwings and many more.

Overnight: Campsite Yongkala.

Day 7: Yongkala to Sengor (3hrs)

We start early, moving uphill in search of high altitude species that include Blood Pheasant and Satyr Tragopan, the bird that draws many birders to Bhutan. The dense conifers forest hold many good species such as Mrs Gould's Sunbird, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Bar-winged Wren-Babbler, Red-headed Bullfinch, Rusty-fronted Barwing, Gold-naped Finch and Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler. Our campsite near the pastureland is good for thrushes.

Overnight: Campsite Sengor (3000m).

Day 8: Sengor to Jakar (5hrs)

Today we cross one of the high passes, the Thrumshing La, at 3800m. Thrumshing La is the prime habitat for Blood Pheasant and also holds other high

altitude species such as Snow Pigeon, Orange-flanked Bush-Robin, Spotted Nutcracker, Red-billed Chough, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Great Parrotbill, Stripe-throated Yuhina, Grey-crested and Coal Tits and White-browed Fulvetta. We may be lucky and have our first encounter with one of the most colorful pheasants of them all, the Himalayan Monal. We continue through the valley of Bumthang, one of the most beautiful valleys in Bhutan, the one of the most scenic drive to Bumthang goes through the beautiful valley or Ura valley, on the clear day we will be able to see Bhutan's highest peak, Mt Gangkar Puensum. 7550m and it is the highest unclimbed mountain in the world.

Overnight: Hotel Ugyenling | Nature Resort

Day 9: Jakar – Trongsa (3hrs)

Our journey this morning passes the Chume valley, one of the four main valleys of Bumthang region, this valley is famous for its distinctive woolen weaves, known as yathra. At the village of Zugney you will see the fine samples of yathra hanging by the roadside. The weavers all women, can be seen at their looms beside the road. Continuing our journey the road climb up to Yotongla pass, (3500m) the birds we'll see along the way include the Brown Parrotbill, Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch., White-browed and Golden Bush Robins, Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler, Spotted and Black-faced Laughingthrushes, Alpine Accentor, White-winged Grosbeak, Grey-sided Bush warbler.

We will arrive at our hotel in Trongsa by lunchtime, after lunch we will have the opportunity to visit the impressive Trongsa Dzong. This Dzong is the ancestral home for the Royal family of Bhutan. Before becoming the king of Bhutan, the first king was the governor of this Dzong. Even now, we have the tradition that before becoming king, the regent receives the title as governor of Trongsa Penlop.

The remainder of the afternoon will be spent exploring the nearby broad-leaved evergreen forest in search of specialties like Spotted Forktail, Grey-bellied Tesia and Spotted Wren-Babbler.

Overnight: Hotel Yangkhil Resort | Phunshi Guest House

Day 10: Trongsa to Zhemgang (6hrs)

Today on our drive to Zhemgang, we will have lots of stops at several forested valleys. We have chances for Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler, White-browed Scimitar-Babbler, Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, Grey-bellied Tesia, Crested Bunting, Long-tailed Shrike, prinias, Rufous Woodpecker, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Spot-winged Starling, Common Green Magpie, Rufous-bellied Eagle, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Common Kestrel and various minivets. This is also our best chance for the Golden Langur, a rare monkey endemic to Bhutan and only

discovered in the 1950s.

Overnight: Tingtibe Campsite (800m).

Day 11: Zhemgang to Tingtibe Road

Today we explore a wide variety of habitats along the Zhemgang to Tingtibe road. Habitats vary from mossy forests to streamside lowland forest. This is another chance to see Golden Langur, which is fairly frequent here. We also search for Rufous-necked and Great Hornbills, Pin-tailed Green Pigeon, Cutia, White-browed Shrike-Babbler, Scarlet Minivet, various laughingthrushes, woodpeckers, Chestnut-headed and Grey-bellied Tesias, Spotted Wren-Babbler, and another chance to find Beautiful Nuthatch.

Overnight: Tingtibe Campsite

Day 12: Zhemgang to Phobjekha (9hrs)

We head back to Trongsa today, birding many sites on the way; looking for species we might have missed earlier on our way to Zhemgang. After crossing Trongsa, we'll make stop along the way to search for the Black-throated Parrotbill, Golden-breasted Fulvata, Black-faced and Chestnut-crown Laughingthrushes, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, sometime we can also come across the big flock of Himalayan Griffon flying overhead. After a fairly long drive we reach the Phobjekha valley, sacred wintering ground for the Black-necked Crane.

Overnight: Hotel Dewachen | Gakeling

Day 1: Phobjekha to Punakha (4hrs)

After an early breakfast, we drive to the Pele la pass (4000 m) and spend the morning hours birding along the old road at Pele la for high altitude species such as Himalayan Monal, Spotted Laughingthrush, Himalayan Griffon, Brown Parrotbill, and various finches and bush-warblers. Later we drive to Punakha, traveling through the valley of Wangdiphodrang; along the way we look for Ward's Trogon, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide and mixed species flocks.

In the evening we bird along the Pho Chu valley looking for one of our main target birds, White-bellied Heron, one of the rarest birds in the world with a population of fewer than 200 worldwide. Other birds we might see include Common and Crested Kingfisher and the enigmatic Ibisbill.

Overnight: Hotel Lobesa | Zhingkhram Resort

Day 14: Punakha full day birding inside Jigme Dorji National Park.

You'll spend the morning birding inside the Jigme Dorji National Park and along the Phochu River, the birds we might see here include the Red-headed Trogon, Slaty-bellied and Grey-bellied Tesia, Small and Rufous-bellied Niltavas, Black-chinned and Whiskered Yuhinas, a trio of Forktails, Pygmy and Spotted Wren Babbler, Lesser Yellownape, Bay Woodpecker, White-throated, Rufous-chinned and Bhutan Laughingthrushes, Black, Red-vented and Mountain Bulbuls, Grey-hooded, Chestnut-crowned and Blyth's Leaf Warblers and many more

Later in the evening, you'll drive along the Phochu River to try for White-bellied Heron and Pallas Fish Eagle if you have missed the other day.

Overnight: Hotel Lobesa | Zhingkhams Resort

Day 15: Punakha – Thimphu (3hrs)

After breakfast at the hotel visit the impressive Punakha's Punthang Dechen Phodrang (Palace of Great Bliss) standing on the confluence of the two rivers, the Phochu and Mochu, this Dzong has special significance in Bhutanese history. It was the place where the first king of Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuk, was crowned in 1907. At present it is also used as the winter residence for Je Khenpo (chief Abbot) and the entire central monk body. After we finish with the visit, we will drive to Thimphu the capital city of Bhutan, the drive takes us about 3hrs going over the Dochula pass, (3150m) one of the most beautiful passes decorated with 108 stupas

Overnight: Namgay Heritage | Thimphu Tower | Thimphu City Hotel

Day 16: Thimphu - Paro (2hrs)

In the early morning we visit the local sewage pond for Ibisbill and Black-tailed and Ruddy-breasted Crakes. After breakfast we drive north of Thimphu and then hike to the Cheri monastery. During the hike we may see Spotted, Chestnut-crowned and White-throated Laughingthrushes, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Wallcreeper, Brown Dipper and White-collared Blackbird. Goral (Mountain goat) occur around the monastery. We then return to Thimphu for lunch, and continue on to Paro.

Overnight: Olathang Hotel | Gangtey Palace

Day 17: Paro; Cheli La Birding

Early in the morning, we drive to the cool and stunning alpine meadow of Cheli La pass (3890m). This is the highest pass accessible by car in Bhutan. Here we

could be rewarded with three different species of pheasants: Himalayan Monal, flocks of Blood Pheasants, and Kalij Pheasant. Also here are several rosetfinches, grosbeaks and laughingthrushes. We then drive back to Paro for lunch.

In the afternoon we have scheduled a visit to Kichu Monastery, one of the oldest monasteries dating back to the 7th century. It is believed that in the 7th century a Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo, built 108 monasteries representing different parts of the demon.

Overnight: Gangtey Palace | Olathang Hotel

Day 18: Excursion to Taktshang Monastery (Tiger's Nest)

After breakfast at the hotel, 15 minutes drives from here will take you to the parking lot at the base of the Tiger's Nest monastery, from here you can hike to one of the most beautiful and holiest temple in Bhutan. As Bhutan's most scenic icon and most important destination for pilgrimages and reflection for over 1200 years, *Takshang* (or the "Tiger's Nest") clings to the side of a steep cliff some 200 meters above the Paro valley.

The place was first visited by Guru Rimpoche, founder of the tantric form of Buddhism in Himalayan countries, in the 8th century. It was said that he meditated there for about three months. After him, many high Buddhist priests came to meditate at this location and attained the highest level of spirituality. The original temple was built in the 17th century, but tragically, it was consumed by fire in 1998. Like a phoenix, the temple was rebuilt to its fullest glory in 2003. *Takshang* is considered to be the 10th-holiest site in the Buddhist world.

The total hike will take the average person about four hours. From the parking area, it will take about one hour to the tea house (rest and refreshment provided) and then another one and a half hours to the temple.

You can visit three different temples inside the main *Takshang* complex.

Overnight: Gangtey Palace | Olathang Hotel

Day 19: Departure

Transfer to the airport for departure.