

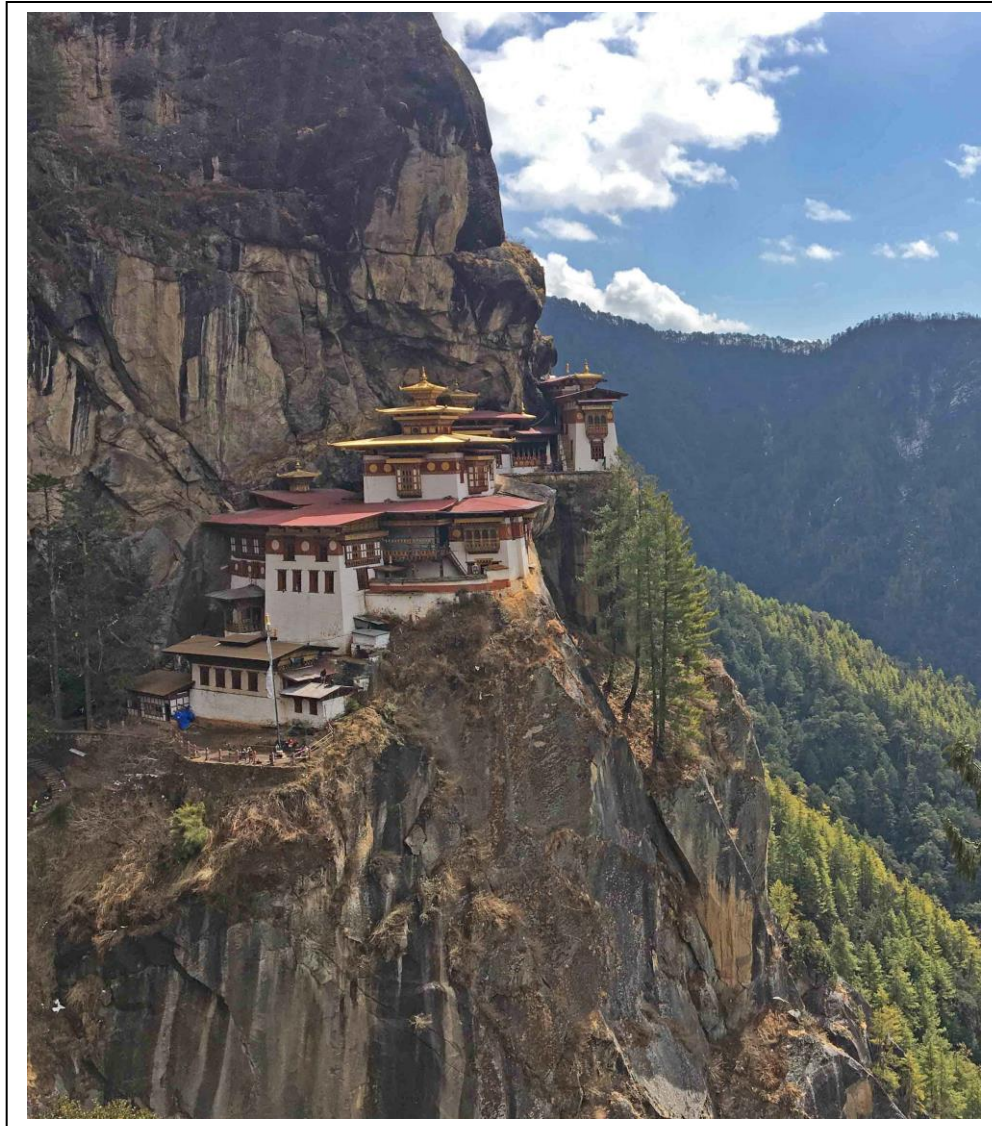


BHUTAN

Birds and Wildlife in the Land of the Thunder Dragon



26th April – 17th May 2024



Tigers Nest. Photo by Richard Baines 2019.

“Wonderful birds, amazing scenery, incredible cultural sites and probably the best guides you could wish for” Harry Kingman review of our 2020 tour

Day 1: Departure London Departure from London Heathrow for Kathmandu by Qatar Airways or Emirates Airlines. Departures from regional UK airports are available on request.

Day 2: Arrive Kathmandu

Your Yorkshire Coast Nature representative Richard Baines will meet you on arrival.

Overnight in Kathmandu prior to our flight to Bhutan the following day at Swotha Traditional Homes Kathmandu.

Day 3: Arrive Paro – Transfer to Thimphu (1½ Hrs. Drive)

The flight into the Himalayas is one of the most scenic and breathtaking ones with views of some of the tallest mountains in the world. On your arrival at the Paro international airport, our representative will receive you. *Drive to Thimphu the capital city of Bhutan (1½hrs) drive.*



The view from the Kathmandu to Paro flight! **The Himalayas and Everest.** Photo by Richard Baines 2020

Evening birding around the river and ponds in Thimphu searching for one of the biggest target birds, **Ibisbill**, other species we'll be looking for include **Black-tailed Crake**, **Brown Dipper**, **River Lapwing**, **White-capped** and **Plumbeous Water Redstart.** *Overnight: Thimphu*



Ibisbill near Thimphu. Photo by Richard Baines 2020

Day 4: Thimphu – Dochula – Punakha (3hrs. Drive)

Early morning drive to Punakha over the Dochula Pass (3150). Our day starts from this pass with the breathtaking views of eastern Himalayas ranges. The mixed forests of hemlock, fir, oaks, and rhododendron here are good habitat for many good species including, **Fire-tailed Myzornis, Spotted and Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, White-browed Fullvetta, Stripe-throated and Rufous-vented Yuhinas, Rufous-breasted Accentor.**



Rufous-breasted Accentor. Photo by Richard Baines 2020

After breakfast at the pass, we descend down to the Lamperi Botanical Garden and take a nature walk for about hours, birds we'll be looking here for **Brown Parrotbill, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, Darjeeling and Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Blue-fronted Redstart, Striated and White-throated Laughingthrush.**



Darjeeling Woodpecker. Photo by Richard Baines 2020

Later we'll drive to Punakha valley, along the drive you'll look for the species like **Chestnut-tailed Starling, Great and Golden-throated Barbet, Long-tailed Shrike, Spotted Dove, Red-vented Bulbul Long-tailed Minivet, Crested Serpent Eagle and Ultramarine Flycatcher.**

Afternoon: 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.

Remaining of the afternoon, later in the afternoon before we proceed to our hotel, we'll keep driving upstream along the Pho Chu river (male river), we might be lucky to see a **White-bellied Heron**, one of the rarest birds in the world with a population of fewer than 100 worldwide.

Overnight: Punakha

Day 5: Full day birding inside Jigme Dorji National Park

We will spend the whole day birding inside the Jigme Dorji National Park and along Mo Chu River. We have the possibilities of seeing **Red-headed Trogon, Slaty-headed Tesia Small and Large Niltava, Black-chinned and Whiskered Yuhinas**, a trio of forktails, **Spotted Wren Babblers, Blue Whistling Thrush, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Rufous Sibia, Himalayan Swiftlet, River Lapwing, Grey Treepie, Grey-headed Canary and Verditer Flycatcher, Green-backed Tit, Brown Dipper, White-capped Water Redstart, White-throated, Striated, Bhutan and Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush, Golden-throated, and Great Barbet, Crested Kingfisher, Grey Treepie, Ashy Drongo, Rusty-flnaked Treecreeper, Black-throated Tit, Black and Red-vented Bulbul, Ashy-throated, Blyth's and Chestnut-crowned Warblers**, and with luck **Pallas's Fish Eagle**. We also have a good chance of finding the species like **Oriental Turtle Dove**.

In the evening, we'll drive upstream along with the Pho Chu River (male river) one more time to search for **White-bellied Heron**, in case if we have missed the previous day.

Overnight: Punakha.



White-bellied Heron. Photo by Richard Baines 2020

Day 6: Punakha – Nobding – Phobjekha (3½ drive)

Early morning we'll wind up your way to the Phobjekha Valley stopping along the way looking for **Cutia**, **Blyth's Shrike Babbler**, **Grey-bellied Tesia**, **Grey-hooded**, **Blyth's** and **Black-faced Warblers**, **Green-tailed** and **Mrs. Gould's Sunbird**, **Striated Prinia**, **Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush**, **Verdieter**, and **Ultramarine Flycatcher**, **Mountain Hawk Eagle**, **White-capped River Chat**, **White-tailed Nuthatch**, **Yellow-browed**, and **Fire-capped Tits** and a few different species of **Cuckoos**, we'll also make all our effort to search for the local scarce species like **Ward's Trogon** and **Yellow-rumped Honeyguide**, one of the two species of Honeyguide occur in Asia.

Before reaching Pelela pass we'll take the road to Phobjekha valley, crossing Lawala pass the vegetation changes into dwarf bamboo, here we'll search for the species like **Spotted**, **Chestnut-crowned**, and **Black-faced Laughingthrushes**, **Spotted Nutcracker**, Great and **Brown Parrotbills**, **Oriental Skylark**, **White-browed Shortwing**, **Yellow-billed Blue Magpie**, **Chestnut-headed Tesia**, **Large-billed** and **Whistler's Warbler**, **Hen Harrier**, and many more.

Overnight: Phobjekha



Satyr Tragapon. Photo by Norbu (off to Bhutan)

Day 7: Phobjekha – Pelela – Trongsa – Bumthang (5hrs. drive)

We will have another early start to the Pelela pass, and spend our morning hours birding along the old abandon road. The open meadow and Rhododendron Forest here are good for high altitude species such **Himalayan Monal**, **White-winged Grosbeak**, **White-throated Redstart**, **White-browed** and **Dark-rumped Rosefinches**, **Plain Mountain Finch**. We also make a special effort to try for Satyr Tragopan, which occurs along this road occasionally, Satyr Tragopan is one of the special birds of the Himalayas that bring many birders to the Himalayas. Bhutan is probably one of the best places to find them.

Continue your drive to Bumthang, crossing the Yotongla pass (3400m). Some of the birds we'll be searching around here include **Red-headed Bullfinch, Grey-crested, Coal, Rufous-vented and Yellow-browed Tits, Bar-throated Minla**. we continue your drive to your hotel in Bumthang valley. The remaining of the will be spent birding along the Chamkhar river, here we will get another chance to see **Ibisbill**, which is fairly common here.

Overnight: Bumthang

Day 8: Bumthang – Phrumshingla – Sengor (5hrs. drive)

We drive from Bumthang to Sengor going over Phrumshingla (3800m). Phrumshingla is the prime habitat for **Blood Pheasants** and also hold other high-altitude species like, **Snow Pigeons, Orange-flanked Bush Robin, Golden, and White-browed Bush Robin, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Greats Parrotbills, Plain-backed Thrush, White-collared and Grey-winged Blackbird, Buff-barred, Ashy-throated, Blyth's and Large-billed Leaf Warbler**.

Later in the evening, we will be birding around Sengor looking for **Satyr Tragopan**. Sengor is known as the hotspot for **Satyr Tragopan**. Here, it is also possible to do some night birding searching around our campsite to try for **Himalayan Wood Owl**.

Overnight: Sengor

Day 9: Full Day Birding Around Sengor and Phrumshingla

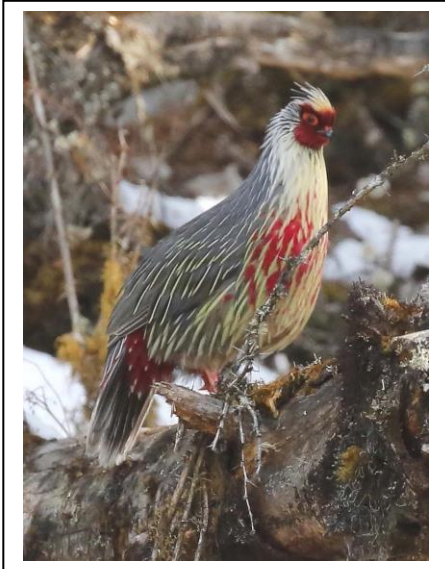
We will have a pre-breakfast outing driving the stretch of 10km road toward Namling, this stretch of road is one of the best sites for **Satyr Tragopan**, other birds of interest here include the super skulker and shy species like **Bar-winged Wren-Babbler, Scaly-breasted Cupwing, and Chestnut-headed Tesia. Green-tailed and Mrs. Gould's Sunbirds, Red-headed Bullfinch, Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler, Green Shrike Babbler** and varieties of Tits.

Depending on the activities, we will either return to the campsite for breakfast or picnic breakfast can be arranged along the way. remaining of the day will be spent around the Phrumshingla pass, birding in big open meadow, spruce, hemlock, fir and Rhododendron bushes, looking for any high-altitude species that we have missed from the previous day, the main target includes **Blood Pheasant, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Fire-tailed Sunbird** in their breeding plumage.

Overnight: Sengor

Day 10: Sengor – Namling – Yongkala (2hrs. drive)

Today we'll start moving downhill into the sub-tropical forest birding. The drive takes us through the narrow winding road which usually remains foggy. Halfway through our journey, we will pass through a famous cliff known as Namling Dra (Cliff) which has a reputation for being the most hair-raising section of the road in Bhutan and also have the biggest waterfall which may be more than 300 ft. high that fades before hitting the ground.



Blood Pheasant and Black-faced Laughingthrush. Photos by Richard Baines 2020

The species we are likely to come across include **Gold-naped Finch**, **Black-headed Shrike Babbler**, **Scaly** and **Black-faced Laughingthrushes**, **Yellow-rumped Honeyguide**, **Grey-hooded**, **Black-faced** and **Whistler's Warblers**, **Crimson-breasted** and **Darjeeling Woodpeckers** just to name a few.

Overnight: Yongkala

Day 11 - 13: Yongkala – Namling – Limithang Road

For next three days we will explore the entire stretch of Namling, Limithang road and all the way to Phrumshingla pass. This stretch of 77-kilometer road all inside Phrumshingla National Park is touted as one of the finest birding sites in Asia. This road gives access to the altitude ranging from 100m at the lowland to 3,750 to the highest point with a different variation of habitats. At the lowland habitat consists of mostly scrub and subtropical forest and farmlands, cool broadleaved and warm broadleaved with thick undergrowth and bamboo forest dominating the mid-altitude and at the higher altitude are mostly made up of temperate conifer, rhododendron shrubs, and open meadows.

We explore Namling – Limithang Road basically walking along the narrow road with lots of twists and switch-backs. The pristine cool broadleaved and warm broadleaved with thick undergrowth and bamboo forest which is very rich in birdlife. Some of our main targets include **Beautiful Nuthatch**, **Ward's Trogon**, **Himalayan Cutia**, **Golden-breasted**, **Yellow-breasted**, **Rufous-winged**, and **Nepal Fulvetta**, **White-breasted** and **Black-throated Parrotbill**, varieties of Laughingthrushes such as **Rufous-chinned**, **Grey-sided**, **Blue-winged**, and **Striated Laughingthrushes**, **Red-faced Liocichla**, and the endangered **Rufous-necked Hornbill**.

Apart from these exotic species, the forest here also hosts some of the shy and secretive species such as **Rufous-throated** and **Long-billed Wren-Babbler**, **Pygmy Cupwing**, **Slaty-bellied Tesia**, **Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler**, and **Spotted Elachura** recently split from the **Wren-Babbler** and form a family of its own.



Himalayan Cutia. Photo by Norbu (off to Bhutan)

We'll also, explore lower Limithang Road. (600m), habitats consist of scrub and subtropical forest and farmland. Here we may encounter **Black-tailed Crake, Rufous-necked and White-crested Laughingthrushes, White-browed Piculet, Cresting Bunting, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Greater, and Lesser Yellownape, Black-chinned and Striated Yuhinas, Asian-barred, and Collared Owlet**, we might also be lucky to see **Tawny Fish Owl**.

During our 4 nights here, we will consider doing some night birding searching for the **Hodgson's Frogmouth** and **Brown Wood Owl**, we also have a pretty good chance for sighting **Bhutan Flying Squirrel**, a very interesting mammal.

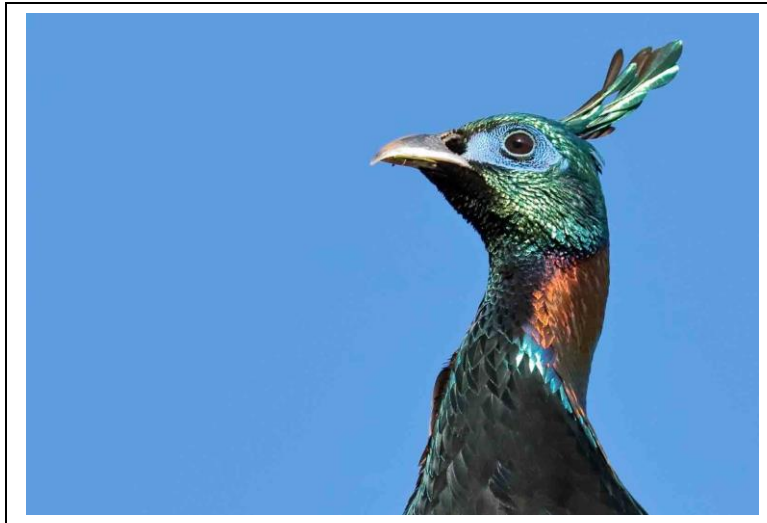
Overnight: Yongkala | 1200m.

Day 14: Yongkala – Phrumshingla – Bumthang (6hrs. drive)

After a final morning birding in this wonderful habitat, we'll retrace our way back to Bumthang passing through the Sengor valley, after crossing one of the high passes, the Phrumshing La (3800m) looking for the missing species on our way in. Then continue our drive through the valley of Bumthang, one of the most beautiful valleys in Bhutan.

In the evening we'll drive to the monastery up in the mountain to have the very close view of the **Himalayan Monal**, the place here offers the best chance to photograph the **Himalayan Monal** as they come close to the monk quarter for feeding, other birds we'll be looking for include **Black-billed Magpie, Oriental Skylark, Beautiful Rosefinch, White-throated Redstart,**

Overnight: Bumthang



Himalayan Monal. Photo by Ian Slingsby on the Yorkshire Coast Nature trip 2020.

Day 15: Bumthang – Yotongla – Trongsa (2½ hrs. drive)

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 search along the way include the **Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch, Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler, 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 of 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: Trongsa

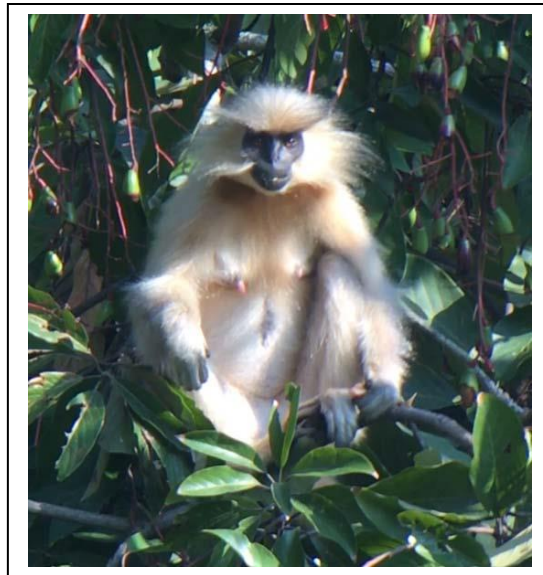
Day 16: Trongsa – Zhemgang – Tingitbe (6hrs. drive)

We will begin our journey by going south of Trongsa. For the most part of our journey, we go through the many different settlements, farmland, and scrubland. Among the many settlements along our journey, In Kuenga Rabten, we have the winter palace of Second King which is now converted into a monastery.

Some of the species we will be expecting in these kinds of habitat include **Little and Spotted Forktail, Striated Prinia, Crested Bunting, Long-tailed Shrike, Black Eagle.**

Later in the afternoon, we will enter the remote Zhemgang District. Zhemgang district is believed to have one of the highest forest coverages in Bhutan. Crossing the remote towns of Zhemgang, we enter into the cool and warm broadleaved forest. The remaining of our afternoon will be spent birding the entire stretch of Zhemgang and Dekphel Road. Some of the likely species we are hoping here include **Asian-barred and Collared Owlet, Common Green Magpie, Yellow-browed and Sultan Tits, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Spot-winged Starling, Rufous-bellied Eagle, Mountain Hawk Eagle** and various minivets. This is also our best chance for the **Golden Langur**, a rare monkey near-endemic to Bhutan and only discovered in the 1950s.

Overnight: Tingitbe | 500m



Golden Langur. Photo by Richard Baines 2019

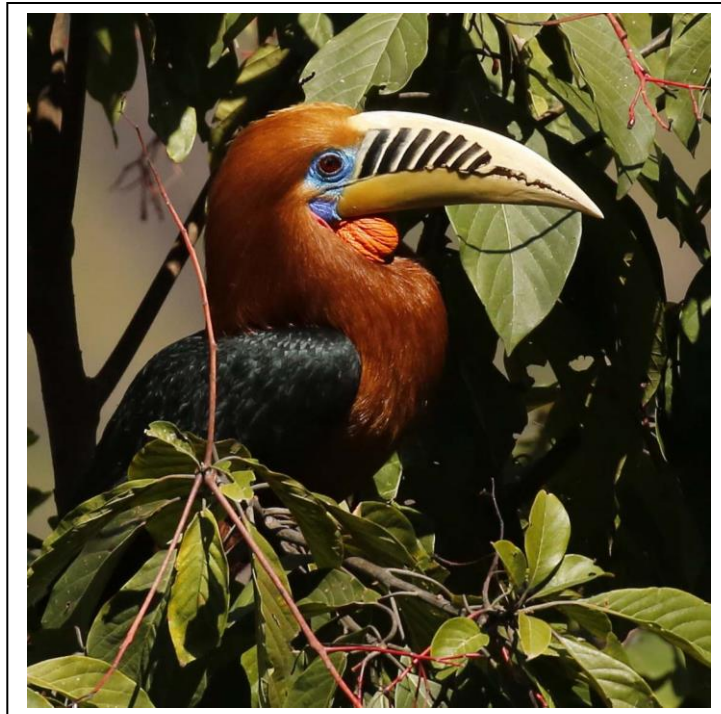
Day 16 - 17: Tingtibe – Dakphel – Gomphu Road

We will spend the entire two-days birding Gomphu, Dakphel, and Tamala road, the Gomphu road that leads to Royal Manas National Park, the oldest national park in the country. the forest here consists of sub-tropical forest and continuous bamboo the forest which is good for the species such as **White-hooded Babbler, Pale-billed Parrotbill, Pale-headed, and Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Grey-throated Babbler, Mountain Tailorbird, Yellow-bellied, and Rufous-faced Warbler. White-browed Piculet, Crested Serpent-Eagle, Emerald Dove, Pin-tailed Pigeon, Red-headed Trogon, Bay, Gray-capped and Fulvous-breasted woodpeckers, Lesser Yellownappe, Long-tailed Broadbill, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, White-bellied Erpornis, Bronzed, and Lesser racket-tailed Drongos,** we might be also lucky to see **Rufous-necked and Great Hornbill and Spot-bellied Eagle Owl.**

One this road there are quite a few lookouts over the Mangde Chu (River). we will scan all the possible sites for **White-bellied Heron** that occur along the river here.

We'll also explore the Dakphel road and Tamala area, some of the key species we will be on the lookout include **Beautiful Nuthatch**, **Rufous-necked Hornbill**, and **Ward's Trogon** in case if we miss earlier on our trip, other birds of interest include **Common Green Magpie**, **Yellow-cheeked** and **Black-throated Tit**, **Grey-chinned** and **Scarlet Minivets**, and few species of flycatchers like **Little Pied**, **Verditer**, **Pale Blue**, **Blue-throated** and many more.

Overnight: Tingtibe | 500m



Rufous-necked Hornbill. Photo by Richard Baines 2019

Day 18: Tingtibe – Trongsa (6hrs. drive)

Basically, a transit day for us. we are backtracking our way to Trongsa on a leisurely slow drive stopping for any interesting or missing species we come across. Later in the evening, we'll have free time to stroll around downtown Trongsa.

Overnight: Trongsa

Day 19: Trongsa – Paro (7hrs. drive)

We will have another transit day crossing two high passes, looking for any interesting and missing species that come along.

Later in the evening, we will bird along the Paro River another easiest places to see **Ibisbill** special bird of the Himalayas. This elegant wader with the long decurved bill and enlisted in its own monotypic family. Other species of interest include **River Lapwing, Brown Dipper, Rosy Pipit, Common** and **Green Sandpiper**.

Overnight: Paro

Day 20: Paro – Chelela Birding

Very early morning we take 1½hrs. drive to the cool alpine meadow of Chelela pass (3,890m). this is the highest pass on the car road and the highest point of our trip. Here we should be rewarded with the three different species of **Pheasants**, Colorful **Himalayan Monals**, flocks of **Blood Pheasants**, and **Kalij Pheasants**. Other birds we expect here include **Darjeeling** and **Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Collared** and **White-winged Grosbeak, Himalayan Bluetail, Rufous-breasted**, and **Himalayan Accentor. Snow Pigeon, Plain Mountain Finch, and Red-headed Bullfinch**.

Picnic lunch will be served along the way and after lunch, we check-in the hotel for some rest and in the evening birding along the Paro River or free time to stroll around downtown Paro.

Overnight: Paro | 2400m

Day 21: Excursion to Tiger's Nest

After breakfast we will take a short drive of 20 minutes to the base of the Tiger's Nest temple and then start to Bhutan's most scenic icon and a most important destination for pilgrimages and reflection for over 1200 years, Taktshang (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. Taktshang 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) then another one and a half hours to the temple.

In the evening, visit a typical Bhutanese farmhouse to experience the local hospitality and a traditional hot stone bath. We'll arrange special archery lesson on the traditional bamboo bow and arrow with the lady, who used to be Bhutan Olympic archer and represent Bhutan at the Beijing Summer Olympic Games in 2008

Overnight: Paro | 2400m

Day 22: Departure from Bhutan

After breakfast at hotel our representative, your tour guide and drive will drive you to the airport and bid you good-bye.

'TASHI DELAK' a traditional Bhutanese blessing

Arrival and overnight in Kathmandu

Day 23: Departure Kathmandu

After breakfast at our hotel in Kathmandu our representative and guide will drive you to the airport for your flight back to the UK.

"This was my first overseas birding trip, and I really enjoyed it...after blowing my mind for the first few days (so many new species to get my head round)!!! Your knowledge, the background you gave about different birds' habits and habitats really added to it – ably assisted by Norbu (and Tenzin – spotter extraordinaire!). Thanks too for you tips on photographing birds, which I really appreciated. So – altogether excellent!"

Jan Deck review of our 2020 tour





Your Guides; Richard Baines and Norbu.

The Cost: Per Person sharing twin or double room £8180.00

Single Room Supplement £ 655.00

Tour Cost will include:

- International flights from UK to Delhi and Delhi to Paro and back in economy class.
- Accommodation on twin or double share basis; 20 nights in Bhutan and two in Delhi.
- All meals in Bhutan, Dinner in Delhi, snacks and bottled water
- All travel within Bhutan and Delhi India
- All surface transfers by a private vehicle
- Camping equipment and haulage for camping and trekking tours
- All entry fees to monuments, Museum and National Parks
- Bhutan Visa Fee
- Two expert guides; Norbu and Richard Baines

Cost does not include:

- Visa fee for India.
- Tips, laundry, phone calls, and bar bills.
- Travel insurance