ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Bhutan

Assam Extension II

13th April to 17th April 2022 (5 days)

Birding the Buddhist Kingdom II

17th April to 6th May 2022 (20 days)



Satyr Tragopan by Rich Lindie

One of the least spoilt countries in the mighty Himalayan range, Bhutan boasts incredible mountain scenery and endless verdant forests, whilst shrouded in Buddhist myth and legend and replete with a plethora of incredible and beautiful birds!

On a typical day's birding with us in this avian wonderland, you will find yourself in breathtaking surroundings searching for legendary birds in pristine forests, with mighty Himalayan peaks towering in the distance – all in all, Bhutan is a destination like no other! As we journey through this fabled land we will regularly cross dramatic mountain passes, that are adorned with brightly coloured prayer flags and chortens/stupas (temples), and these give way to vast countrysides often dominated by impressive dzongs (temple-fortresses) that so characterise this unique country. We look forward to having you aboard this adventure through a paradise of culture, birds and scenic vistas as we explore the heavenly riches of Bhutan!

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

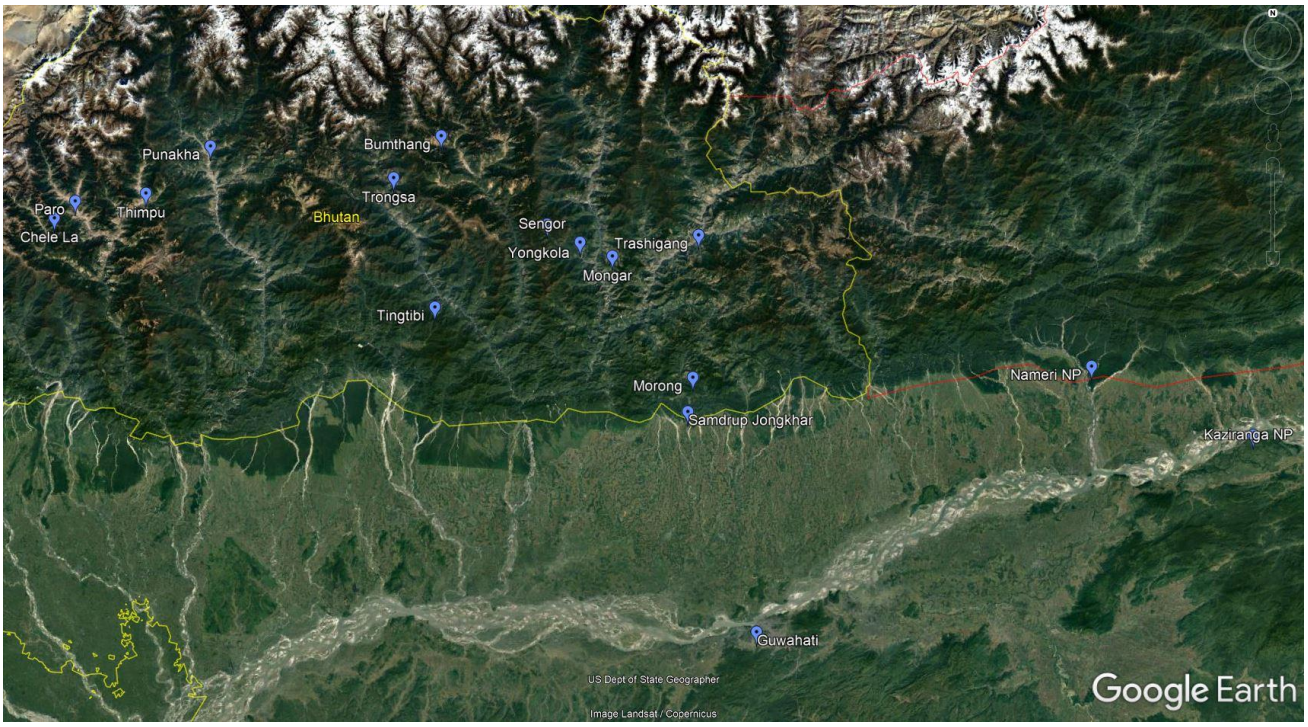
ASSAM EXTENSION

Day 1	**Guwahati to Kaziranga National Park**
Day 2	**Kaziranga National Park**
Day 3	**Kaziranga National Park to Nameri National Park**
Day 4	**Nameri National Park**
Day 5	**Nameri National Park to Samdrup Jongkhar for those doing the main Bhutan tour or Nameri to Guwahati and departure**

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	**Arrive from India into Samdrup Jongkhar**
Day 2	**Samdrup Jongkhar to campsite near Morong**
Day 3	**Morong area**
Day 4	**Morong camp to Trashigang**
Day 5	**Trashigang to Lower Lingmethang Road (Yongkola)**
Days 6 & 7	**Lower Lingmethang Road (Yongkola)**
Days 8 & 9	**Lingmethang Road camp upper level (Sengor)**
Day 10	**Sengor camp to Bumthang**
Day 11	**Bumthang to Trongsa**
Day 12	**Trongsa to Tingtibi**
Day 13	**Tingtibi area**
Day 14	**Tingtibi to Trongsa**
Day 15	**Trongsa to Punakha via Pele La**
Day 16	**Tashitang Valley**
Day 17	**Punakha to Thimpu via Dochu La**
Day 18	**Thimpu to Paro**
Day 19	**Chele La**
Day 20	**Departure from Paro**

TOUR ROUTE MAP…



Assam Extension



Elephant ride in Kaziranga NP by Markus Lilje

Nestled in north-eastern India in the formerly independent Assam, Kaziranga National Park is one of the most spectacular wildernesses in all of Asia. This area gains its fame as one of the last places on earth where the prehistoric Indian Rhinoceros can be found. In fact, game abounds in the watery meadows that make Kaziranga so aesthetically pleasing – no other site in Asia can match the vast herds of big mammals that occur here! From both jeep and elephant back, we will search for Indian Elephant, Swamp Francolin, Pied Falconet and a plethora of other exciting birds and mammals that occur abundantly in this biologically diverse part of the natural world. To boot, we will also spend time exploring the riches of Nameri National Park. This park boasts luscious deciduous and evergreen forests along the Jia-Bhoroli River and is a haven for many rare creatures, including one of Asia's rarest birds, the critically endangered White-winged Duck!



Indian Rhino by Markus Lilje

Day 1: Guwahati to Kaziranga National Park. From the town of Guwahati, we will begin our journey to the world-renowned Kaziranga National Park. En route we will make a stop at the local refuse dump that attracts hundreds of the regal Greater Adjutant, a rare and extremely localised bird throughout most of its limited range. Guwahati remains the best place on earth to see this regal stork, while smaller numbers of the more widespread Lesser Adjutant are also attracted to this site. Citrine and White Wagtails are usually around in good

numbers and Striated Grassbird and Plain and Yellow-bellied Prinias will be looked for in areas of rank grass. After soaking in the adjutant storks we will continue our journey to Kaziranga where we will arrive in time for lunch. The entire afternoon will be spent exploring the park in open gypsies, a perfect way to enjoy Kaziranga's abundant wildlife.



Grey-headed Fish Eagle by Markus Lilje

Day 2: Kaziranga National Park. This exciting wilderness of marshes, open grassland, woodlands and forest, which is situated on the floodplain of the Brahmaputra River, will be the focus of our attention for today. A total of one-third of the entire world population of Indian Rhinoceros is located in Kaziranga and we will likely enjoy incredible sightings of these highly threatened beasts. The area is also home to many eye-catching and very special birds including the rare Bengal Florican, which will be searched for in the long grass that covers huge areas of the reserve. Our best chance of viewing the endangered Florican will be from elephant back, though we will have to be lucky to see this extremely rare species! This rather odd form of transport will also give us our best shots at other high priority species such as the near-endemic Swamp Francolin, Baya, Streaked, Black-breasted and the extremely rare Finn's Weavers, as well as Chestnut-capped and Striated Babblers, Bengal Bush Lark, Rosy Pipit and Siberian and Himalayan Rubythroats. The critically endangered Greater Adjutant occurs alongside the Lesser Adjutant in wet areas, and we will keep our eyes peeled skywards for Pallas's and Grey-headed Fish Eagles. Western Marsh and Pied Harriers can be found quartering over the grassland areas, and the stately Black-necked Stork is still fairly numerous throughout the region.



Blue-bearded Bee-eater by Markus Lilje

Kaziranga's network of extensive wetlands is home to huge numbers of resident and migrant waterbirds, most notably the handsome Bar-headed Goose, Indian Spot-billed Duck, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacanas and the splendid Stork-billed Kingfisher, among many other species. Woodland areas are the best place to search for a number of specials, including the huge Blue-bearded, Blue-tailed and stunning Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, Green Imperial Pigeon, Black-winged Cuckooshrike, Large Woodshrike, Lineated, Blue-throated and Coppersmith Barbets, extravagant Green-billed Malkoha, four species of gorgeous parakeets (Rose-ringed, Alexandrine, Red-breasted and the scarce Blossom-headed) and a host of woodpeckers, which includes Streak-throated, Fulvous-breasted and Grey-capped Pygmy, as well as Greater and Black-rumped Flamebacks. We will also explore small patches of evergreen forest in the area where we hope to find numerous interesting species. These include the striking Asian Fairy Bluebird, Black-crested Bulbul and Great and Oriental Pied Hornbills. More secretive species include Puff-

throated and Abbott's Babblers and White-rumped Shama. Other notable birds that we hope to see here are Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Common Emerald Dove, Greater and Lesser Yellownapes, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Streaked Spiderhunter and Crimson and Ruby-cheeked Sunbirds.



Great Hornbill by Glen Valentine

Game viewing in the reserve is excellent and besides the Indian Rhinoceros, there are also plenty of wild Water Buffalo and Indian Elephant. Furthermore, Kaziranga is one of the reserves where Bengal Tiger still occurs in reasonable numbers; here they tend to favour areas where the grass is long and dense, which aids them in ambushing their main prey, the increasingly rare Barasingha (Swamp Deer) and Hog Deer. We will, however, be lucky to encounter one of these regal beasts. While in the forests we will also keep our eyes and ears open for Hoolock Gibbon, Capped Langur, Assam Macaque and Rhesus Monkey. Other mammal species we may find include Sambar and Wild Boar, all of which frequent the grassy, watery meadows in the reserve.

Day 3: Kaziranga National Park to Nameri National Park. We have a final opportunity for some birding in Kaziranga before lunch, otherwise we could depart earlier for Nameri National Park where we will arrive in the late afternoon. Upon arrival we will search an area for Oriental Hobby and if we are fortunate, Brown Hawk-Owl after dark.

Day 4: Nameri National Park. We will have a full day to explore the forested areas of this park for our main target – the highly endangered White-winged Duck. This large forest duck inhabits forested pools and slow-flowing river channels and our chances of finding it are very good. Whilst searching for this rare species, we will also be on the lookout for other forest denizens, including the rare Pale-capped Pigeon, Pin-tailed and Wedge-tailed Green Pigeons, seldom-seen Pied Falconet, spectacular Sultan Tit, Common Green Magpie, Greater Necklaced and Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes, Green-billed Malkoha, Pale-chinned Blue and Slaty-backed Flycatchers, Chestnut-bellied and Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, gigantic Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Vernal Hanging Parrot, the attractive and scarce Black-breasted Thrush, Maroon Oriole, Barred Cuckoo-Dove, Wreathed and magnificent Great Hornbills and Oriental Dollarbird. In the afternoon there will be an option to either return to the forest in search of any species we may have missed in the morning or to take a boat cruise on the Jia-Bhoroli River. The river here attracts such species as Small Pratincole, Great and Indian Stone-curlews, River Lapwing, River Tern, Crested Kingfisher, Sand Lark and in winter and early spring, the incomparable Ibisbill.



White-winged Duck by Markus Lilje

Day 5: Nameri National Park to Guwahati. In

the morning, after breakfast, we depart this wonderful region and make our way to the Bhutanese border, where we begin the main tour to the Himalayan birding paradise of Bhutan. Those not doing the main tour will take a transfer back to Guwahati.

Birding the Buddhist Kingdom

Day 1: Arrive from India into Bhutan, Samdrup Jongkhar. For those not doing the Assam Extension, the tour will begin in the Indian town of Guwahati, after which we will cross the border from India into the south-eastern corner of Bhutan where we will meet our local hosts and our Bhutanese birding adventure will begin!



Blue-throated Barbet by Markus Lilje

This tour is timed to coincide with the glorious advent of spring, offering an exceptional visual spectacle and a host of exciting and mouth-watering birds. Bhutan is a remote country, still remarkably isolated from much of the distractions of the modern world, and we are privileged to be among the lucky few to visit this fascinating land.

If time allows we will do some introductory Bhutanese birding around town where we may find a few characteristically low-altitude species such as gaudy Blue-throated, Coppersmith and Lineated Barbets, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Indian Pond Heron, Ashy Woodswallow, Cinereous Tit, Asian Koel, Chestnut-tailed Starling and Pied and Great Mynas.

Day 2: Samdrup Jongkhar to campsite near Morong. This morning we will begin our journey into the mountains and higher altitude forests that so characterise this fabled land. As we journey into Bhutan's forested foothills, the transition from the vast lowland plains of India is stark and characterised by a refreshingly variable topography.



Sultan Tit by Markus Lilje

We will spend the morning exploring the foothills surrounding Samdrup Jongkhar. The remnant forest patches and small stands of bamboo that hug the river outside of town support a number of exciting lowland species. Lowland specialities that we will be on the lookout for this morning include the impressive Wreathed and Great Hornbills, Mountain Hawk-Eagle, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, tiny Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Common Iora, Rufescent Prinia, bright blue Black-naped Monarch, beautiful red-and-black Scarlet Minivet, Black-crested, Ashy and Black Bulbuls, Pin-striped Tit-Babbler, Golden-fronted Leafbird, bamboo-dwelling Yellow-bellied Warbler, White-rumped Shama,

outrageous Sultan Tit, brilliant Asian Fairy-bluebird and stunning Long-tailed Broadbill.

Rocky streams in the area harbour the prominently patterned Black-backed Forktail as well as Slaty-backed Forktail, White-capped and Plumbeous Water Redstarts, Grey Wagtail, Brown Dipper and Crested Kingfisher. There is also the possibility of seeing some of the area's rarely encountered birds such as Dark-rumped Swift and Pied Falconet. If we are fortunate to find a fruiting fig tree we may be treated to a host of gaudy frugivores including hornbills, barbets and colourful species of green pigeon that are attracted to this irresistible food source.



Beautiful Nuthatch by Markus Lilje

After lunch, we will head further north, through the forested foothills, towards our campsite near Morong. The remainder of the afternoon will be spent birding a stretch of beautiful, mossy, mid-altitude broad-leaved forest. Our main target here is the extremely special and aptly-named 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, Black-throated Bushtit, Striated Laughingthrush, Long-tailed Sibia, the sensational Silver-eared Leiothrix and awesome Rufous-necked Hornbill, to name a few.

Tonight we will enjoy the first of many nights camping throughout the country. Our comfortable canvas tents will be set up ahead of time with a picturesque view of the forested valley below. When we arrive in camp our crew of backup staff, including our own chef, will be ready to serve us tea, coffee and a hearty traditional meal over-looking the fantastic scenery below.

Day 3: Morong area. We will spend the entire day birding and exploring the lush forests around Morong. The foothill forest here pulsates with bird life and we will really be able to get stuck into the vast array of wonderful Bhutanese birds that inhabit these forests.



Grey-sided Laughingthrush by Rich Lindie

We are sure to be entertained at breakfast by a number of delightful species such as Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, immaculate Blue-fronted Redstart and Russet Sparrow that often move through the edge of the camp in the early morning. We are also likely to see our first of many vivid Blue Whistling Thrushes, chattering Green-backed Tits, Whiskered Yuhinas, Rusty-fronted Barwings and colourful Chestnut-tailed Minlas this morning. These extremely attractive species will be seen commonly throughout the tour but are always a pleasure to encounter.

Some of the other eye-catching and vibrant species that we may see today include White-naped Yuhina, Streaked Spiderhunter, striking Orange-bellied Leafbird, secretive Blue-winged and Grey-sided Laughingthrushes, Sikkim Treecreeper, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, brilliant Scarlet Finch, gorgeous Black-eared Shrike-Babbler and Yellow-throated Fulvetta. Brown-flanked Bush Warblers call from forest-edge thickets and we may even see a soaring Crested Goshawk as well as Black Eagle and Rufous-bellied Eagle overhead.



Ward's Trogon by Markus Lilje

Day 4: Morong camp to Trashigang. Today we continue our journey into the heart of the country, passing through lofty forests and rhododendron-filled valleys as we make our way to the slopes of Yongphu La. Several birding stops will be made along the way in areas of lush, verdant, montane forest. Some of the desirable species that we will be on the lookout for this morning include the much sought-after Ward's Trogon, highly nomadic Golden-naped Finch, scarce White-spectacled Warbler, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, exquisite Green-tailed Sunbird, Yellow-cheeked and Yellow-browed Tits, White-tailed Nuthatch and Fire-breasted Flowerpecker. Himalayan Vulture can be seen soaring overhead while noisy bands of White-throated Laughingthrush scurry off the road edges. We will also keep our eyes open for the migratory White-throated Needletail that could turn up almost anywhere.

In the early afternoon we will search carefully in the vicinity of the large Giant Rock Bee nests clinging to cliff faces for the rare Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, one of only two species of honeyguide found in Asia and if we are very lucky we may even happen across a Wallcreeper as we slowly meander to the top of Yongphu La. After winding our way through a series of pine-clad slopes we will arrive in the settlement of Trashigang in the late afternoon. In the vicinity of our hotel, we will have our first opportunity to experience the village life of the Bhutanese people. The local markets here showcase a great variety of sundries including grains, garlands of dried chillies, hand woven silk garments, bamboo crafts, hocks of yak meat, fermented cheese balls and colourful textiles. Trashigang is situated at the foot of a steep wooded valley, and within the town, it is possible to visit the scenic Trashigang Dzong that overlooks the confluence of the Dangme Chu and the Gamri Chu.



Yellow-rumped Honeyguide by Markus Lilje

Day 5: Trashigang to Lower Lingmethang Road (Yongkola). Today will be a fairly long travel day as we make our way towards Kori La passing through dry, shrubby hillsides and native Chir pine forest where we may encounter Himalayan Bulbul, Crested Bunting, Striated Prinia, Blue-capped and Blue Rock Thrushes, Hodgson's Redstart and noisy flocks of

extravagant White-crested Laughingthrush. We will wind our way through breathtaking Himalayan scenery on narrow but good roads that tightly hug the dramatic slopes of the middle Himalayas.



Golden-naped Finch by Markus Lilje

Passing over the lofty Kori La, adorned with an array of colourful prayer flags, we will stop to search through the stands of rhododendrons and stunted growth for several mid-altitude species. Specials include Darjeeling Woodpecker, Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush, dazzling Green-tailed Sunbird, migrant Blue Rock Thrush, Grey-winged Blackbird, striking Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Slaty-blue Flycatcher, Black-faced Warbler, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Rufous-breasted Accentor and the flame-throated Red-billed Leiothrix that moves secretively through forest undergrowth. Here we also have further chances for the rare Ward's Trogon and Golden-naped Finch as well as the highly-elusive Black-headed Shrike-Babbler. We may also encounter nomadic seed-eaters like Crimson-browed Finch and Yellow-breasted Greenfinch.

After passing through the fair-sized village of Mongar we will drop right down to 600m and break for lunch in an open field where Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes and Crested Buntings often forage. The remainder of the afternoon will be spent birding the lowland forest patches above the town of Lingmethang. Here we may encounter the lime-coloured Common Green Magpie, Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Slaty-backed Forktail, Yellow-vented Warbler, blue-and-white Ultramarine Flycatcher and Black-chinned and Striated Yuhinas. In the late afternoon, we will continue to our comfortable lodge on the lower reaches of the fabled Lingmethang Road where we will be based for the next three nights.

Day 6 & 7: Lower Lingmethang Road (Yongkola). The Lingmethang Road is rightfully famous among birders and is often regarded as one of the best birding sites in all of Asia as it affords the birder an opportunity to access the seemingly endless tracts of pristine broad-leaved and coniferous forest that spans across a vast altitudinal range. All this is protected within the Phrumsengla National Park and we will spend a full five days covering the various different habitats and altitudes along this road in search of the area's splendid diversity of birds and interesting mammals.



Himalayan Cutia by Markus Lilje

We are fortunate to have two full days set aside along the lower portion of the road to explore the rich forest, peppered with orchids and draped in vines and alive with the sights and sounds of some of the most wonderful birds in all of the mighty Himalayas! Likely to steal the show are several of Asia's most sought-after birds and two of our main targets, the beautiful but rare Ward's Trogon

(the male an unbelievable pink and the female an unusual lemon yellow!) and the incomparable and endangered Rufous-necked Hornbill. We also have more chances at finding Beautiful Nuthatch, feeding along massive moss-covered branches.



Rufous-necked Hornbill by Markus Lilje

Additional delectable species we will be searching for here include flocks of busy White-breasted and Black-throated Parrotbills, Golden-breasted and Yellow-throated Fulvettas, the shy Rufous-throated and Pygmy Cupwings, Lesser Yellownape, Crimson-breasted Woodpecker, the vivid Asian Emerald Cuckoo, Grey-cheeked and often-elusive Broad-billed Warblers, radiant Large Niltava, White-naped Yuhina, White-tailed Robin, the much-desired Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler, unobtrusive Mountain Tailorbird, outrageous Himalayan Cutia, Little Forktail, resplendent Mrs. Gould's Sunbird, secretive Blue-winged and Grey-sided Laughingthrushes and one of Asia's most difficult laughingthrushes, the elusive Scaly Laughingthrush. Two of the rarest birds that we might come across here are the bizarre and once near-mythical Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler and Long-billed Wren-Babbler.

Day 8 & 9: Lingmethang Road camp upper level (Sengor). We will spend the next two days enjoying the fine selection of birds on offer in the upper reaches of the Lingmethang Road. The forests here exhibit well-known northern hemisphere plants such as spruce, hemlock and fir and are simply a delight to bird.

Targets in this area include Black-faced, Chestnut-crowned and Spotted Laughingthrushes, the secretive Rusty-flanked and Hodgson's Treecreepers, Snow Pigeon, shy and reticent Alpine Thrush, Tibetan Serin that flock in large groups, the widespread but bizarre-billed Red Crossbill, Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler, which skulks through the dense undergrowth, Green Shrike-Babbler, noisy Spotted Nutcracker, striking Golden-naped Finch, skulking Scaly-breasted Cupwing, White-browed Shortwing, tiny Chestnut-headed Tesia and the delightful Bar-winged Wren-Babbler. Notably, the steep forested slopes in this area are well-renowned for harbouring one of the most stunning birds on the planet – the incredulous Satyr Tragopan – and we will endeavour to track down this regal pheasant during our time here!



Gould's Sunbird by Markus Lilje

Day 10: Sengor camp to Bumthang. Today we ascend the slopes that surround Phrumsengla National Park, through a diversity of habitats, including stands of bamboo where we will search hard for the large and vociferous Great Parrotbill and if we are extremely lucky the minute Fulvous Parrotbill. We can expect to be entertained by Red-billed Chough, which prefers the open montane ranges, along with Russet Sparrow and perhaps Plain Mountain Finch. We will explore the head of

the pass for the dazzling Fire-tailed Sunbird, equally spectacular Fire-tailed Myzornis as well as Grey-crested and Rufous-vented Tits.



Great Parrotbill by Rich Lindie

Additional species that may entertain us along our journey include Himalayan Bluetail, White-browed Bush Robin and extremely scarce and nomadic Rufous-breasted Bush Robin, the prominently marked White-collared Blackbird, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Eurasian Wren, Dark-rumped, Dark-breasted and Common Rosefinches, Olive-backed Pipit and the erratic but eye-catching Snow Pigeon. The spectacular drive towards Bumthang then weaves through the indigenous hillside forests past rows of prayer flags and through local villages surrounded by snow-capped peaks. On the rare occasion of a clear day, we will be able to see Bhutan's highest peak, Gangkar Puensum, which reaches a lofty 7,541 meters and remains the highest unclimbed peak on earth!

Day 11: Bumthang to Trongsa. Our journey this morning passes through numerous small villages and goembas (Buddhist monasteries) settled neatly within the Chume valley. Birds that we will search for along the way include the secretive Brown Parrotbill and extremely localised and subtly attractive Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch. Passing over the top of Yotong La we can keep an eye out for migrant Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Mountain Hawk-Eagle overhead, White-browed and Golden Bush Robins, bizarre and unpredictable Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler, Spotted and Black-faced Laughingthrushes, Alpine Accentor and White-winged Grosbeak.

We will arrive at our comfortable guest house perched above the village of Trongsa, in time for lunch. Directly after lunch, we will have the opportunity to visit the spectacular Trongsa Dzong, the ancestral home of Bhutan's royal family. The wide stair rockwork and enchanting stone courtyards provide access to the elaborate internal structure, where resident monks go about their pious endeavours. Located in central Bhutan, Trongsa holds one of the most singularly magnificent dzongs in the entire kingdom, replete with magnificent architecture, an extensive history and golden roofs that glimmer in the sunlight across the valley. Situated high above Mangde Chhu, the Trongsa Dzong is a spectacular sight to behold! The remainder of the afternoon will be spent exploring the nearby broad-leaved evergreen forest in search of specialities like the handsome and boldly-patterned Spotted Forktail, mite-sized Grey-bellied Tesia and Spotted Elachura, which has recently been placed in its own monotypic family.



Spotted Forktail by Dubi Shapiro

Day 12: Trongsa to Tingtibi via Zhemgang.

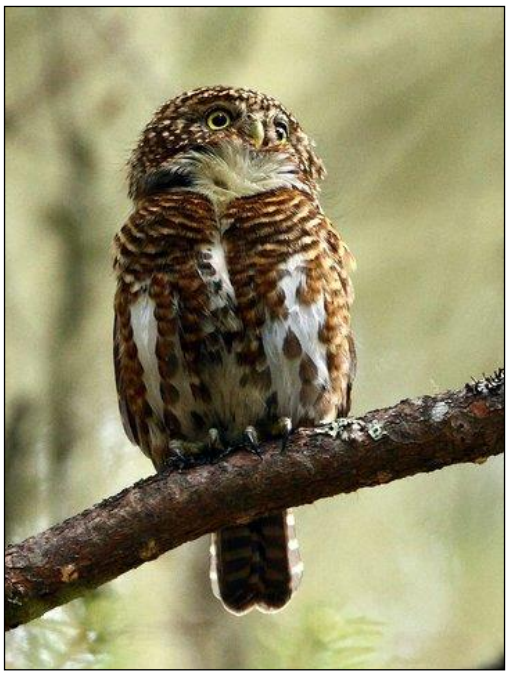
Today we will make our way south into the lowlands, keeping watch for species that occur in the deep vegetated valleys, farmlands and rolling hillsides along our route. Noteworthy Species that we may encounter along the way include Little Forktail, Hair-crested Drongo, Oriental Magpie-Robin (thought by many to have one of the most beautiful songs in Asia), confiding Blue-capped Rock Thrush, Speckled and White-browed Piculets, black-and-chestnut Crested Bunting, and if we are very lucky a flock of Spot-winged Starling on migration between their wintering grounds in north-east India to their breeding grounds in northern India. Closer to Tingtibi, we will start our search for one of the world's rarest birds, the second largest heron in the world –White-bellied Heron.



Golden Langur by Glen Valentine

Day 13: Tingtibi. The rarely visited region of Tingtibi south of Zhemgang has turned up amazing birds and rarities in the past. There is a wide variety of habitat here, from mossy, evergreen forest along the main road south of Zhemgang stretching to streamside lowland forest and deciduous thickets in the valley below as well as several good patches of bamboo. The area also supports the endearing Golden Langur, a highly range-restricted monkey that is common here, while even Tiger and Sloth Bear occur in the area, but we would be extremely fortunate to encounter either of these two very rare mammals.

Some of the many lowland bird species we will be looking for include the very secretive Rufous-throated Partridge, nomadic Pin-tailed and Wedge-tailed Green Pigeons, Barred Cuckoo-Dove, stunning Red-headed Trogon, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, localised Rufous-faced and Yellow-bellied Warblers, Lesser Necklaced and Blue-winged Laughingthrushes, secretive Spotted Elachura, Grey-throated Babbler, Nepal Fulvetta, the gaudy Long-tailed Broadbill, tiny Speckled Piculet, rare Pale-headed and noisy Bay Woodpeckers, the giant black and yellow Sultan Tit, Banded Bay and Indian Cuckoos and Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo and two very rare bamboo specialists: the seldom-seen Pale-billed Parrotbill and White-hooded Babbler.



Collared Owlet by Markus Lilje

Day 14: Tingtibi to Trongsa. A final morning birding this diverse area will allow us to seek species we might have missed before we make the return journey to the town of Trongsa. We will take a different and more scenic route back to Trongsa via the scenic town of Zhemgang. Birding along old main road via Zhemgang is fantastic and the mossy broad-leaved forest surrounding harbours some of Bhutan's very special birds such as Beautiful Nuthatch, Rufous-necked Hornbill and Himalayan Cutia as well as Red-faced Liocichla, Blue-winged Laughingthrush and Hodgson's Hawk-Cuckoo.

Day 15: Trongsa to Punakha via Pele La. Our journey today



Golden-breasted Fulvetta by Markus Lilje

crosses over the Black Mountains dividing western from central Bhutan at 3,420 meters. Our first scheduled birding stop today will be at a nearby colony of Nepal House Martins that build their cup-shaped nests along a sheer vertical cliff-face. Our next stop will be in an area of temperate broad-leaved forest and bamboo understory where targets include the striking Golden-breasted Fulvetta, nomadic and unpredictable Black-throated Parrotbill and the very uncommon Brown Bullfinch. As we begin our ascent up the high Pele La we may encounter the strange Wallcreeper that forages along the impossibly steep cliffs and gorges as well as the gregarious Snow Pigeon. Other species to search for here include Great Parrotbill, which prefers stands of rhododendron and bamboo, Golden Bush Robin, Long-tailed Minivet, Green-tailed Sunbird and the skulky Grey-sided Bush Warbler in thick grasses. The top of the pass may yield White-winged and Collared Grosbeaks as well as Himalayan Vulture soaring overhead.

En route the valley widens, affording us dramatic views of the Wangdue Phodrang Dzong, which is stretched along a ridge above the river. Legend has it that when people were searching for a building site for the dzong, four ravens were seen flying in four directions. The people considered it an auspicious sign of the spread of religion to the four points of the compass and Wangdue Phodrang was founded in that place in 1632 with commanding views of the valley below. We will arrive late in the afternoon in the quaint settlement of Punakha.

Day 16: Tashitang Valley. This morning we bird the lovely broad-leaved, subtropical forest along the swift Mo Chu River, situated within the substantially vast Jigme Dorji National Park. Some species we will be looking for along this route include the very rare and highly threatened White-bellied Heron which has unfortunately become very rare in this area, Tawny Fish Owl, Himalayan Swiftlet buzzing overhead, Crested Kingfisher, ever-vocal Great and Golden-throated Barbets, Bay Woodpecker, Short-billed Minivet that often perch for long periods before sallying insects in midair, Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike, Tickell's Leaf Warbler (one of several members of the similar-looking *Phylloscopus* genus), Small Niltava, Pale-blue, Dark-sided, Slaty-backed and Ferruginous Flycatchers, migratory Hodgson's Redstart, skulking Lesser Shortwing, minuscule Slaty-bellied Tesia, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch that pick through the masses of epiphytes for insects, and Chestnut-tailed Starling.



White-bellied Heron by Markus Lilje

Our route takes us beside the impressive fortress and monastery of Punakha Dzong that serves as a magnificent reminder of the Bhutanese devotion to their religion. This was the second of Bhutan's

dzongs to be constructed and until the time of the second king, it served as the seat of the Bhutanese government. Our hotel here is located outside the city on a hill above the Punakha Valley with a great view that overlooks the dzong.



Fire-tailed Myzornis by Glen Valentine

Day 17: Punakha to Thimpu via Dochu La. We will have an early start as we make for the famed high mountain pass of Dochu La. Leaving Punakha, we have a quick look for Slender-billed Oriole which favours pine and is rather localised in Bhutan. Leaving the almost tropical Punakha Valley at 1,250 meters, we ascend through mixed evergreen and broad-leaved forests to the pass at 3,140 meters stopping en route to search for any species that we may still need in this habitat such as Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush, Pygmy Cupwing and Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon.

We will spend the mid-morning birding on the lower slopes of the pass in the beautiful, avian-rich Royal Botanical Park where a host of fabulous birds can be found. Highlights could include the handsome Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Black-winged Cuckooshrike, Grey-winged and White-collared Blackbirds, unobtrusive and mite-sized Chestnut-headed Tesia, the intensely coloured Ultramarine Flycatcher, Sikkim Treecreeper, scarce Spot-winged Grosbeak, elusive but exquisite Fire-capped Tit, Snowy-browed Flycatcher and the shy and seldom-seen Hill Partridge. The higher slopes of the scenic Dochu La also harbour some excellent birds like the radiant-green Fire-tailed Myzornis, outrageous Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, White-browed Fulvetta and Spotted Nutcracker and, if we are very lucky, a flock of Fulvous Parrotbill may even make an appearance.

If the day is clear, the lofty pass of Dochu La affords outstanding views of the surrounding Himalayan peaks, some of which top 7,500m. We will enjoy the visual splendour of the pass littered with prayer flags before descending towards our hotel located in the centre of Thimpu, the only world capital without traffic lights! The pride of the capital, the impressive Trashi Chhoe Dzong, was built traditionally without nails or the use of written plans and will be visible soon after we arrive in the area.



Himalayan Monal by Glen Valentine

Day 18: Thimpu to Paro. This morning we embark on the fairly short but scenic drive towards Paro. Our drive continues through drier habitat where Himalayan Bulbul, Green-billed Malkoha, Orange-bellied Leafbird and Speckled Wood Pigeon may entertain us before we reach the icy rivers of the valley. Here we can scan for Brown Dipper as it braves the frigid waters alongside striking White-capped and Plumbeous Water Redstarts. We then visit the world-renowned Tiger's Nest Monastery that is precariously perched on a cliff-face near the town

of Paro. The monastery is indeed a sight to behold and makes for a spectacularly scenic and interesting afternoon! In the late afternoon, we will settle into our comfortable hotel for our final two nights in the land of the Thunder Dragon.



Blood Pheasant by Markus Lilje

Day 19: Chele La. This morning we have an early start in order to make the most of the great birding opportunities in the forests that cloak the hills above Paro. This is a spectacular day as we will make our way directly to the high expanse of Chele La, where we will particularly be on the lookout for pheasants.

Chele La is probably the best place in the world to see the unbelievably vibrant Himalayan Monal, perhaps the most spectacular bird in the entire Himalayan range! Additional pheasants that may put on a show this morning are Blood and Kalij Pheasants as well as Satyr Tragopan. Other species we may see here include Darjeeling Woodpecker, Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch, the bright Red-headed Bullfinch, Collared and White-winged Grosbeaks, high-flying Plain Mountain Finch, the warbler-like Goldcrest, retiring Rufous-breasted and Alpine Accentors, elusive but sometimes vocal Long-tailed Thrush, giant Spotted Laughingthrush and perhaps even a lone Eurasian Woodcock concealed motionless on the forest floor.

In the late afternoon, we will search along the Paro Chu for the secretive Black-tailed Crake, Pin-tailed Snipe, Rosy Pipit and one of the most sought-after shorebirds in the world - the beautiful Ibisbill. This elegant wader, placed in its own monotypic family, is often found as it searches for food amongst the boulders of fast flowing streams in the region. As the afternoon draws to a close we will return to our



Tiger's Nest Monastery by Glen Valentine

accommodation for a farewell dinner while reminiscing over our adventures shared during the past three weeks.

Day 20: Departure from Paro. Today, after an incredible journey through one of the most remarkable countries on earth, the tour concludes in Paro after breakfast. Be sure to stay awake on the steep flight out of the valley as it provides some of the most dramatic scenery of any scheduled flights in the world – in fact, given clear weather on the Delhi flight, you can gaze over the summit of Mount Everest, the highest mountain peak in the world, surrounded by other astoundingly high Nepalese peaks; a fitting ending to the Bhutanese mountain kingdom experience!

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 20 for those on the main tour, and from breakfast on day 1 to lunch on day 5 for those on the Assam extension;
- Visa fees for Bhutan only;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

The tour fee does not include:

- Visa fees (for India);
- **ANY** flights;
- Any beverages;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls and
- Laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have

to be adjusted as a result.
d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

Special Notes:

- The current order of the main itinerary, with the tour beginning in the south and east of the country, is unique among tour operators and allows us to travel in the opposite direction to the other birding groups that will be present in the country during the high season for birders.
- Be aware that some of the passes that we will traverse are at altitudes of around 13 000 feet. This can cause altitude problems for some people and means that the temperatures tend to be quite low on these days. We can also expect rain and possibly even snow on some days of this tour. If you have problems with altitude please do let the Rockjumper office know. Very hot conditions with high radiation for sunburn are also likely to be encountered in the southern areas of the country on a few days of the tour.
- On some nights we will stay a long way from any solid accommodations or civilisation and will be using camping facilities set up by our agents. There will be walk-in, comfortable-for-two tents with cots, sheets, pillows, and blankets. While our ground agents do provide very comfortable and warm sleeping bags, you may bring your own sleeping bag if you prefer. If participants would prefer a tent to themselves please advise the office. Single tent space is limited and will be assigned in order of tour registration.
- While the food is generally good and tasty, it can become quite monotonous as not many different dishes are prepared. The food can also be quite spicy at times. Please be sure to let us know of your dietary requirements in advance of the tour.
- Bhutan is still relatively untouched by tourism and the people are friendly and courteous. It is seen as being inappropriate to hand out any sweets or other things to interested bystanders or anyone we may encounter along our tour. Your sensitivity in this regard would be much appreciated.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include **ANY** international airfares. The Assam Extension will depart by **06:30** on day 1 from Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati (IATA: GAU). Please do arrive the day before the tour starts. On conclusion of the extension, the tour will head directly to Samdrup Jongkhar, where the main tour will begin.

If you elect NOT to participate on the main tour, you will require a private road transfer taking approximately 5 hours back to Guwahati at an additional fee.

If you opt to participate only on the main Bhutan tour (and not do the extension), you will have to arrive in Guwahati the day before the tour starts, and then take a road transfer to Samdrup Jonkher, Bhutan where the main tour commences. This transfer departs Guwahati at approximately **09:30**. The main tour will conclude at approximately **09:00** at Paro International Airport on day 20.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, Guwahati (IATA: GAU) is the main port of entry for both the Assam Extension and main Bhutan tour. In order to reach Guwahati, you will need to take an internal flight from one of the main Indian airport hubs such as New Delhi or Mumbai. The tour will conclude at Paro Airport, Paro (IATA: PBH) in Bhutan, where you can board flights destined for New Delhi, Dhaka or Bangkok on Druk Air. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**