Bhutan

Highlights of Spring



Blood Pheasant by David Hoddinott

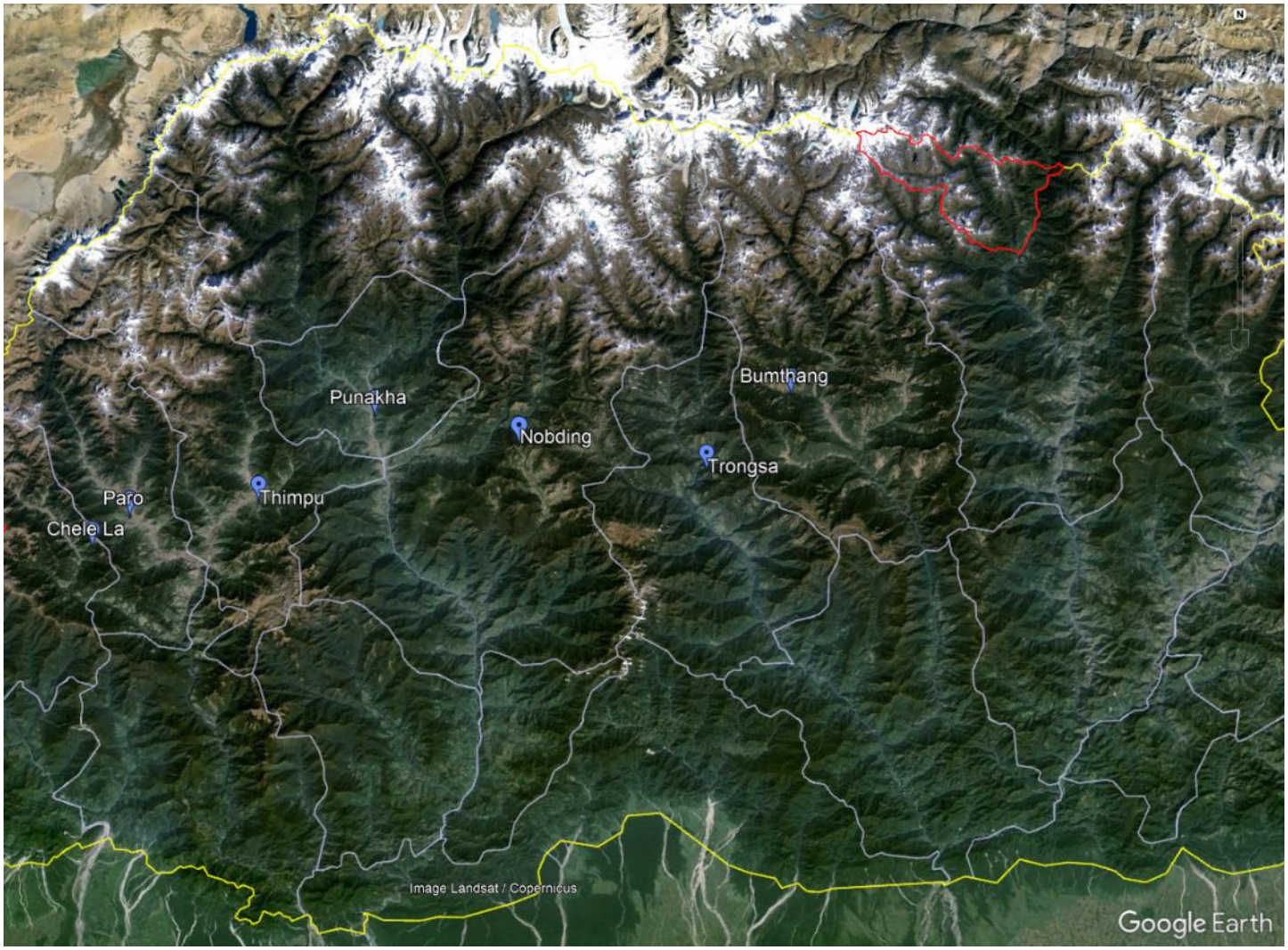
One of the least spoilt countries in the mighty Himalayan range, Bhutan boasts incredible mountain scenery and endless verdant forests, whilst shrouded in Buddhist myth and legend and replete with a plethora of incredible and beautiful birds!

On a typical day's birding with us in this avian wonderland, you will find yourself in breath-taking 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 countryside, 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!

This tour has been specially designed to make use of hotel lodging only (no camping required)!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Paro**
Day 2	**Paro to Punakha via Dochu La**
Day 3	**Tashitang Valley**
Day 4	**Punakha to Trongsa**
Day 5	**Trongso to Bumthang**
Day 6	**Bumthang**
Day 7	**Bumthang to Trongsa**
Day 8	**Trongsa to Nobding**
Day 9	**Nobding**
Day 10	**Nobding to Thimphu**
Day 11	**Thimphu to Paro**
Day 12	**Chele La**
Day 13	**Final departure**



Birding sites in detail

Dochu La. The higher slopes of the scenic Dochu La harbour some excellent birds like the radiant-green Fire-tailed Myzornis, outrageous, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Ward's Trogon, Black-headed Shrike-Babbler, 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.



Ward's Trogon by David Hoddinott

Punakha Valley. Situated at 1 250m above sea level, the Punakha Valley valley is almost tropical. Time permitting we'll visit the avian-rich Royal Botanical Park located on the lower slopes of the Dochu La pass, where a host of fabulous birds can be found. Highlights could include the handsome Darjeeling & Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers, Crimson-browed Finch, Himalayan Bluetail, Ibisbill, Spot-winged Starling, Slender-billed Oriole 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, Green-tailed and Mrs. Gould's Sunbirds, Snowy-browed Flycatcher and the shy and seldom-seen Hill Partridge.

Tashitang Valley. We'll 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, Mountain Hawk-Eagle, Mountain Bulbul, Fire-tailed Sunbird, 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-



Bhutan scenery by Forrest Rowland

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.



Great Parrotbill by Daniel Danckwerts

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 lodge is located outside the city on a hill above the Punakha Valley with a great view that overlooks the dzong.

Trongsa. Here 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 day 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.

Bumthang. 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!



Himalayan Monal by David Hoddinott

Our journey passes through numerous small villages and goembas (Buddhist monasteries) settled neatly within the Chume Valley. Birds that we will search for include the secretive Brown Parrotbill and extremely localised and subtly attractive Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch.

Yotongla Pass. We'll bird the high-altitude coniferous forests at approximately 3,400m (11,150ft) for Himalayan Vulture, Red Crossbill, Coal, Rufous-vented & Grey-crested Tits, Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, Spotted Nutcracker,

Himalayan White-browed & Dark-rumped Rosefinches, White-browed Fulvetta, Stripe-throated Yuhina, Alpine Accentor, Hoary-throated Barwing and Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler.

Tharpaling Monastery. This rather cold monastery, often shrouded in snow gives us excellent opportunities for Satyr Tragopan, Blood Pheasant, and Himalayan Monal, whilst we may also find flocks of Snow Pigeon, Black-faced Laughingthrush, adorable Large-eared Pika, Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch, Plain Mountain Finch, Little Bunting, Red-billed Cough and Black-rumped Magpie.

Bumthang to Nobding. Many species only inhabit the mixed conifer and rhododendron forests quite high on the mountains, and today we'll spend some time in this habitat searching for Spotted and Scaled Laughingthrushes, Himalayan Shortwing, Hume's Bush Warbler, Grey-sided Bush Warbler, Gold-naped Finch, Scaly-breasted Cupwing and Fire-tailed Sunbird.



Spotted Laughingthrush by Julian Parsons

Pele La. We may encounter the strange Wallcreeper that forages along the impossibly steep cliffs and gorges as well as the gregarious Snow Pigeon. This is also a good site for the sought after Satyr Tragopan. Other species to search for here include Slender-billed Scimitar-babbler, White-spectacled Warbler, Darjeeling Woodpecker, Rufous-fronted Bushtit, 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.



Satyr Tragopan by David Hoddinott

The top of the pass may yield White-winged and Collared Grosbeaks as well as Himalayan Vulture soaring overhead, Himalayan Monal, Spotted Laughingthrush, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Northern Goshawk, and great views of the majestic Bearded Vulture, whilst mammals could include Royle's Pika and Northern Red Muntjac. Nearby sites could also produce species such as Brown Parrotbill, Little Bunting, and Pin-tailed Snipe.



Wallcreeper by Stuart Elsom

Phobjikha Valley. Set against the backdrop of the Black Mountains, this scenic valley hosts a plethora of avian gems including Wallcreeper, Mrs Gould's Sunbird, Blood Pheasant, Green Shrike-Babbler, and Spotted Laughingthrush.

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. Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the monastrey was built in 1692 on a precarious cliff at 3 120 metres (10 240 ft) above sea level. The monastery is indeed a sight to behold and makes for a spectacularly scenic and interesting visit!

Chele La. Situated in the forest-cloaked hills above Paro, 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 appear this morning include Blood and Kalij Pheasants as well as Satyr Tragopan.



Fire-tailed Sunbird by David Hoddinott

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 Accentor, elusive but sometimes vocal Long-tailed Thrush, giant Spotted Laughingthrush and perhaps even a lone Eurasian Woodcock concealed motionless on the forest floor.

Paro. We will spend a short time searching 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 here while it searches for food amongst the boulders of fast-flowing streams in the region.



Tiger's Nest Monastery by Julian Parsons

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Mostly undemanding. Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels & most mobility capabilities.
Birding Ease		Most species provide good visuals in open conditions.
Accommodation		All nights in comfortable hotel lodging. Some nights at high elevation (2 500 – 3 000m / 8 400 – 10 000ft)
Walking / Trails		Mostly easy roadside birding, some moderate uphill walks. One moderate (optional) hike to Tiger's Nest
Vehicles / Roads		Several drives. Most roads are reasonable but can be impacted by weather conditions. Mountainous terrain means most roads are winding (ie: motion sensitive)
Photography		Average to good. No dedicated hides. Very good cultural photo opportunities.
Annoyances		Weather can be cold to very cold. Expect occasional rain & even snow. Winding roads & high altitude.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 13;
- Bhutan Visa Fees,
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees (except as noted above);
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, 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.

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 you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is 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. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Be aware that some of the passes that we will traverse are at altitudes of around 13 000 feet. This can cause altitude issue for some people and also 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.
- While the food is generally good and tasty, it can become quite monotonous as not many different dishes are prepared. The food can 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 local people are friendly and courteous. It is seen as being inappropriate to hand out sweets or other items to interested bystanders or anyone who we may encounter along our tour. Your sensitivity in this regard is appreciated.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour starts in on the afternoon of day 1 in Paro, Bhutan and will conclude here after breakfast on day 13.

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.

Paro Airport, Paro (IATA: PBH) Bhutan, is the main port of arrival and departure for the main tour, it is well connected to larger cities such as New Delhi (India) or Bangkok (Thailand) with Druk Air.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.