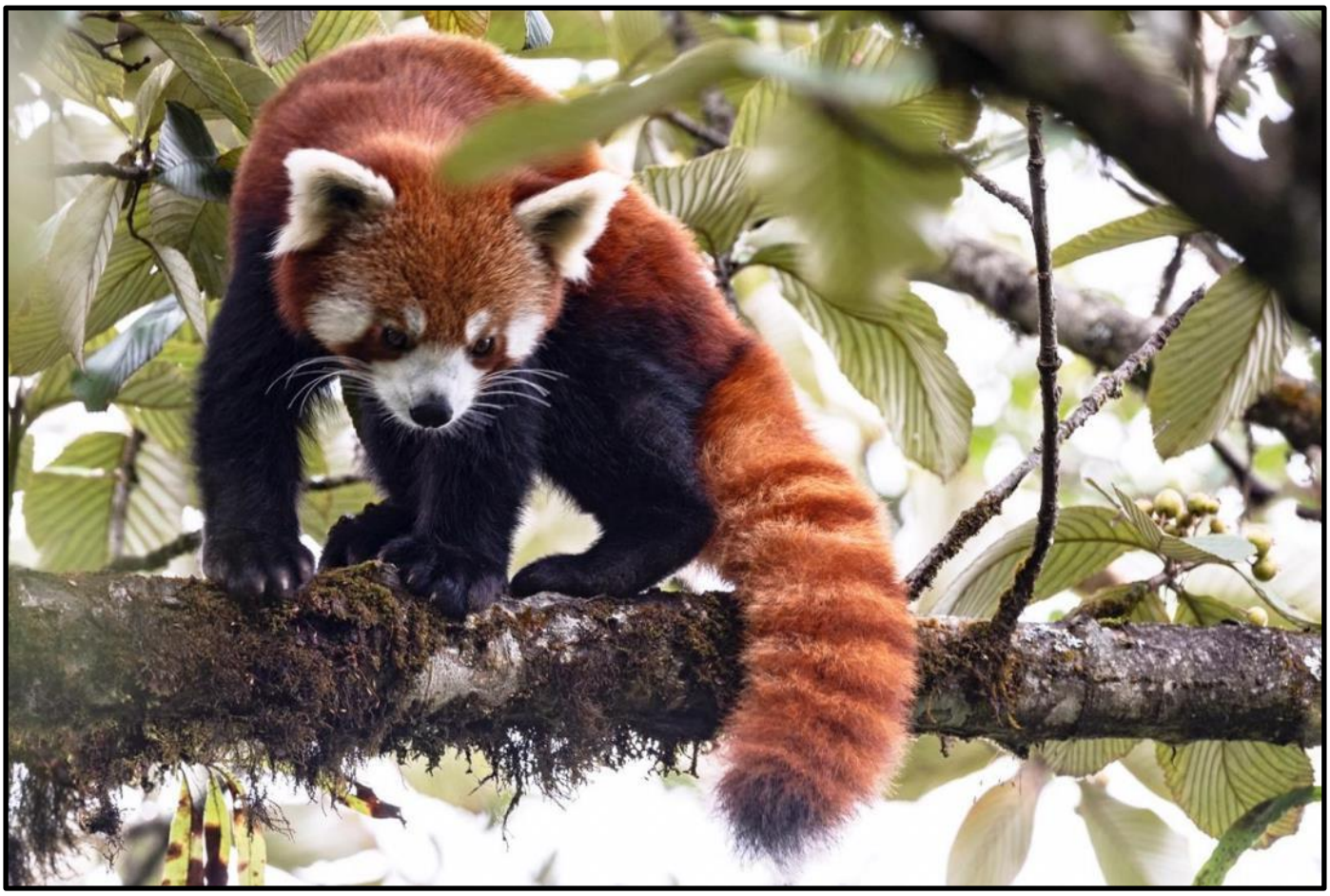
India

Red Panda Quest



Red Panda by Ansar Khan

The Red Panda is one of the world's most sought-after mammals. For a long time though, this species remained a pipedream for most people. Based in a comfortable homestay straddling the Indian and Nepalese border, our tour centred around the stunning Singalila Ridge puts us in prime position. The Red Panda is currently the subject of a research and conservation program in this region, and there is simply no better place to look for it. Assisted by local researchers and trackers, and with ample time, we have a very high chance of multiple sightings!

Other exciting Himalayan mammals may be found in these forests, and the birdlife is superb. Over the course of our visit here, we hope to see Blood Pheasant, Satyr Tragopan, Fire-tailed Myzornis and Golden-breasted Fulvetta to name but a few; and all in a glorious setting, with the world's highest mountains towering above us. The friendly hospitality of the locals will round out this experience, which is sure to be something truly unique!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in New Delhi, India**
Day 2	**Flight to Bagdogra, transfer to Singalila National Park**
Days 3 to 8	**Trekking in Singalila National Park**
Day 9	**Singalila National Park to Bagdogra, flight to Delhi & final departure**



Birding sites in detail



Red Panda by Ansar Khan

Singalila National Park. We will explore the lush eastern Himalayan forests on the Indian side of the border, primarily in the Tinchuley Forest that abuts the greater Singalila National Park of India. Set amidst the Singalila Ridge, at an elevation of around 2,800 meters above sea level, these forests are cloaked in fir, hardwood and Rhododendron. With a thick bamboo understory and hundreds of orchid species, the trees are adorned in mosses, lichens and bryophytes. The world's highest mountains, including Everest, tower above us and can be seen if conditions allow. Slow walks on different trails each day, armed with the latest knowledge from local researchers and assisted by skilled trackers, we will set about to find the distinctive Red Panda.

The Red Panda is instantly recognizable, it is one of the most striking and unusual mammals in the world. Although previously considered to be either a raccoon or a bear, we now know that it is not particularly close to either of these, and is indeed in its own family, the Ailuridae. Furthermore, it is quite unusual for a 'carnivore', in that its diet is primarily bamboo! An Endangered species, this area holds one of the highest densities within its limited range, which spans from the eastern Himalayas to southern China. Conservation-minded folks on both sides of the India/Nepal border have teamed up here to help conserve the species with research projects and tourism initiatives.

It is widely accepted that nothing in nature can be guaranteed; however, we have allowed ourselves enough time in the area that several quality sightings of Red Panda are highly likely. We have also timed our tour so that, if we are fortunate, we even have an excellent chance of seeing them with cubs! Of course, in such bountiful forests many more exciting mammals occur; but apart from Red Panda, all others are typically shy and very difficult to find in the dense vegetation. However, possibilities could still include Assam Macaque, Indian Muntjac, Himalayan Serow and Yellow-throated Marten. With some spotlighting at night, there is a chance for Leopard Cat and Bhutan Giant Flying Squirrel. It is also worth noting that, although sightings of any of the following mouth-watering species will be very unlikely, there is still an outside opportunity for Indochinese Clouded Leopard, Asian Golden Cat, Marbled Cat, Himalayan Black Bear and even Chinese Pangolin.



Blood Pheasant by David Hoddinott

The birding in this area is sensational. Nearly 300 species have been recorded, and at the top of the list are some exceptional pheasants. The stunning Satyr Tragopan is arguably the most alluring of the lot, and we stand a great chance of seeing this amazing species. Other exciting gallinaceous birds in these forests are Blood Pheasant, Hill Partridge and Kalij Pheasant. Overhead, we can watch the skies for Himalayan Swiftlets and White-throated Needletails zooming around, or perhaps a



Fire-tailed Myzornis by Glen Valentine

flock of Ashy Wood Pigeons passing over or perching to enjoy the early morning sun. The massive shape of a Himalayan Griffon is likely to come soaring overhead at some point, and we will watch for Golden Eagles and Mountain Hawk-Eagles as well.

Of the songbirds, the stunning Fire-tailed Myzornis is perhaps the most exciting. The skulking Gould's Shortwing is another possibility, and the mind-blowingly colorful Golden-breasted Fulvetta will be looked for in some of the mixed flocks. We should also see some boisterous flocks of Yellow-billed Blue Magpie and Spotted Nutcracker. A fine array of thrushes move around on the forest floor and visit fruiting trees. Amongst more than 10 species recorded here are Black-throated and Red-throated Thrushes and White-collared and Grey-winged Blackbirds. Flycatcher and chat diversity are similarly outstanding, and we will be on the lookout for such stunners as Large and Small Niltavas, Orange-flanked and White-browed Bush Robins, Himalayan Bluetail, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher and White-throated and Blue-fronted Redstarts. Along cool rushing streams, we can watch for Brown Dipper, Little, Slaty-backed and Spotted Forktails, and Plumbeous Water and White-capped Redstarts. As is typical of these eastern Himalayan forests, there is an outrageous diversity of laughingthrushes, with an exceptional nine species occurring! They are always a highlight, and we will have opportunities to find Spotted, Grey-sided, Chestnut-crowned, Striated, Scaly and Black-faced. Parrotbills are bamboo specialists that are also very well represented here, with the scarce Fulvous, Great and Brown all possible, along with the commoner Grey-headed! We will carefully bird the various mixed flocks moving through the mossy forest for species like White-browed Fulvetta, Stripe-throated and Rufous-vented Yuhinas, Hoary-throated Barwing, Green Shrike-Babbler, Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, Rufous-vented and Grey-crested Tits, Green-tailed and Fire-tailed Sunbirds and an array of Phylloscopus warblers, all here on their breeding grounds. There are also several accentors available in the region, including Altai, Alpine, and Rufous-breasted, as well as a fine array of colorful montane finches, such as White-browed, Beautiful and Dark-breasted Rosefinches, with Plain Mountain Finch, Red-headed Bullfinch, Red Crossbill, and the beautiful Gold-naped Finch.

A nocturnal foray could yield sightings of some of the owls in the region, which include the impressive and scarce Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl, Tawny Fish Owl and Brown Wood Owl. Grey Nightjar is another nocturnal species that we could find.

Apart from our birding in the forest, there is also a photographic station on site at our homestay. Here, we have a special chance to get some amazing views and images of some of the shier forest birds at close range. Species that sometimes visit the feeder setup include Kalij Pheasant, Great Barbet, Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Blue Whistling Thrush, Black Bulbul, Spotted and Scaly Laughingthrushes, Rusty-cheeked and Slender-billed Scimitar Babblers, White-browed and Golden-breasted Fulvettas and Common Rosefinch, amongst others!



Golden-breasted Fulvetta by Ansar Khan

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate. Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels but not suitable for anyone with mobility challenges.
Birding Ease		Main target species are expected to provide good visuals. Birding and wildlife watching is from roadside, forest edge, trails and gardens. Some difficult skulking species.
Accommodation		Basic but comfortable. Remote, and with limited access, but does have electricity and hot water. There is no heating.
Walking / Trails		Moderate walking, mostly on trails, roads and around lodge gardens. Standing on our feet for much of the day.
Vehicles / Roads		Roads are partly sealed and variable with many switchbacks due to the mountainous topography.
Photography		Good to very good. Photographic station at our home stay.
Annoyances		Can be cool to cold in evening, can rain at any time. Entire tour takes place at high altitude (>2800masl)

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 9;
- 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;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels) not noted above;
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Camera fees;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: Please note that the homestay accommodation we use for most of the tour only has 5 rooms in total, meaning single rooming is highly unlikely. If available, single supplement cost for this tour will be charged and rooming allocated based on the order of bookings received. If we 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.**

- You will need to have a reasonable level of fitness to enjoy this tour. While we don't undertake any difficult, strenuous hikes, we will be spending a significant amount of time on our feet on forest trails looking for the region's special birds and mammals.
- **The tour takes place at high altitude (mostly above 2800metres above sea level (9 200ft). If you suffer from altitude sickness, do consult your GP for medical advice regarding recommended medication.**
- Roads have numerous switchbacks and tight corners, which cause even short distances to take considerably longer than normally expected (e.g., a travel speed of 10km/h is typical).
- Accommodation will be in a simple, but comfortable homestay for most of the tour. This homestay is in a remote area but is the best available accommodation - and has the huge benefit of being right in the middle of prime Red Panda habitat. The homestay does have electricity and hot water.
- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly keep to 20 kg (44 lb) for check-in luggage and 8 kg (+-18 lb) for hand luggage.
- Rain is possible at any time of year, whilst temperatures can be cool to cold at night.
- Hiking boots with ankle support are highly recommended.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour is set aside as an arrival day into New Delhi, India and you may arrive at any time in advance of our introductory group dinner. The tour will conclude in New Delhi, India after a flight from Bagdogra in the early afternoon of day 9.

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.

Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi, India (IATA: DEL) is the main port of entry for international flights into India and is serviced by most international carriers.

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.