Nepal

Birding the Himalayas



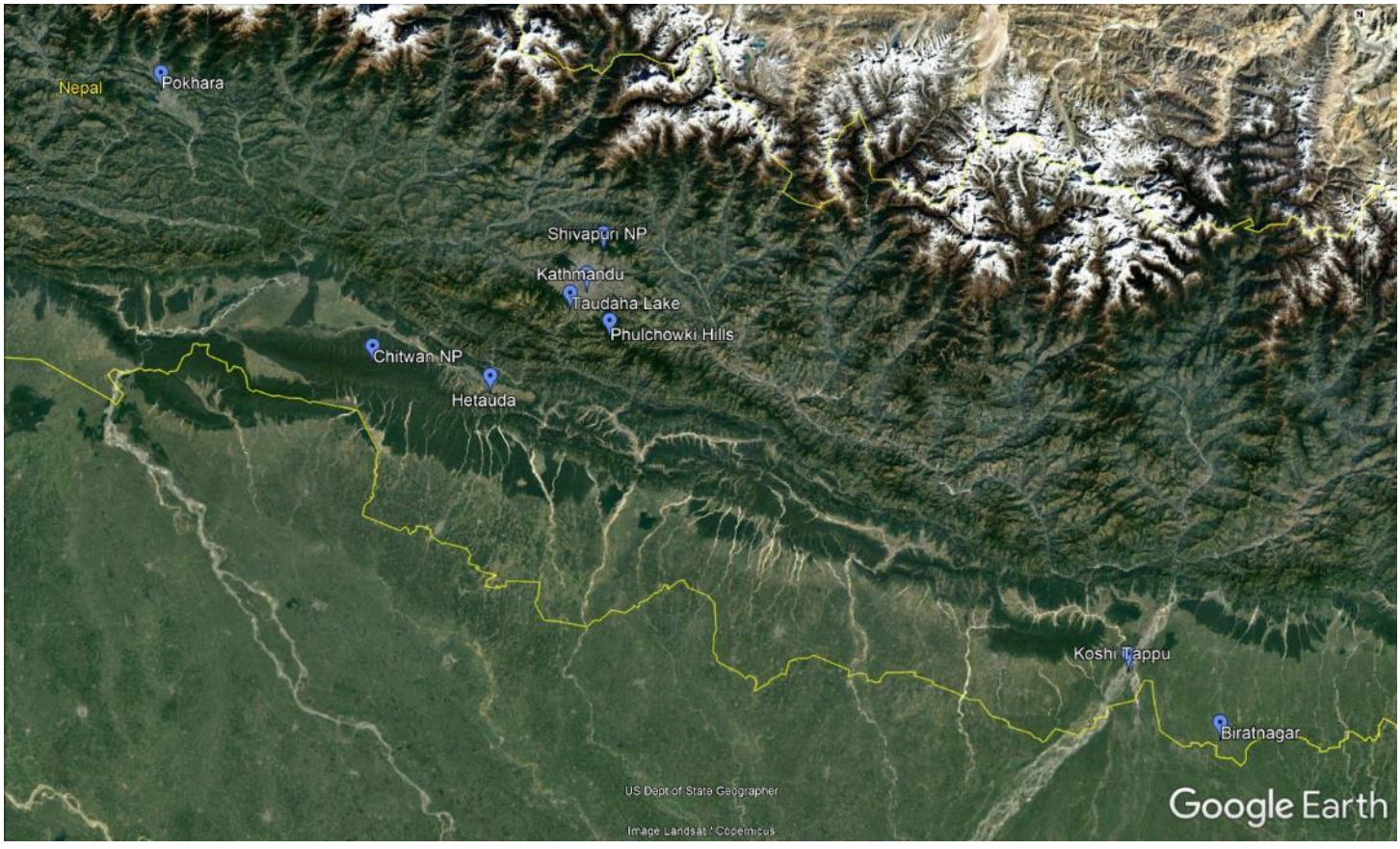
Tiger by Adam Riley

The land of rhododendrons, mighty Mount Everest, sub-tropical jungle and incredible landscapes! Once great seas rolled across Nepal some fifteen million years ago, parts of that gigantic seabed becoming the Himalayas – the highest region in the world. Located beneath their southern slopes is the kingdom of Nepal sharing borders in the east, west and south with India and in the north with the Tibetan region of the Peoples Republic of China. At times Nepal has played the role of intermediary between these two great powers, and at other times it has faced the threat of invasion by both of them. Nepal is a beautiful and diverse land with an amazing variety of wildlife and landscapes. Its cultural mix and intriguing history have conquered the hearts and minds of visitors throughout time.

The birding in the region is no less spectacular, and our tour will explore all the key habitats to be found in this small country. The temperate forests of Shivapuri National Park hold Nepal's only endemic bird; the Spiny Babbler, while Hoary-throated Barwing, a near endemic shared only with Bhutan is also possible. Time will be spent exploring the magnificent Chitwan National Park for a chance to connect with Bengal Florican and endangered mammals such as Tiger and Indian Rhinoceros, while the various gorges and rivers of Hetauda and the riverine grassland in Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve allow us to be absorbed into the natural wonder of this incredible destination.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival into Kathmandu**
Day 2	**Shivapuri National Park**
Days 3 & 4	**Phulchowki Hills**
Day 5	**Taudaha Lake**
Day 6	**Kathmandu; flight to Pokhara**
Day 7	**Phedi to Dhamphus hike**
Days 8 & 9	**Chitwan National Park**
Day 10	**Chitwan National Park to Hetauda**
Day 11	**Hetauda & surrounds**
Days 12 & 13	**Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve**
Day 14	**Koshi Tappu to Biratnagar; flight to Kathmandu**
Day 15	**Final departures**



Birding sites in detail

Shivapuri National Park. Shivapuri is located a short drive north from Kathmandu. The reserve covers 159 km² of pristine habitat, comprised of lowland scrub and temperate forest, and supports a diverse population of wildlife. More than 300 species of bird have been recorded in the area and Shivapuri will no doubt provide us with a splendid opening day to the tour. Low density species that we shall attempt to locate include Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon, Hill Partridge, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Kalij Pheasant, Grey-winged Blackbird and Nepal Fulvetta while other species such as Eurasian Jay, Great Barbet and Indian Paradise Flycatcher should be fairly commonly encountered. The forest is also home to a significant population of range-restricted specials. These include Spiny Babbler - Nepal's only endemic bird, the near endemics Hoary-throated Barwing and the delicate White-throated Tit.



Hoary-throated Barwing by Glen Valentine

Phulchowki Hills. The area is accessed via a short drive to the south-east of Kathmandu and is the highest mountain encircling the Kathmandu Valley at 2760masl. This birding paradise regularly produces some fabulous birds, and we hope to find some of the areas more uncommon species such as Chestnut-headed Tesia, Himalayan Cutia, Ultramarine Flycatcher and Rufous-bellied Niltava. In addition to the above we also expect to find Greater Yellownape, Yellow-browed Tit, Lesser Racket-tailed and Bronzed Drongo, Whiskered Yuhina, Besra, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Red-billed Leiothrix, Black-winged Cuckooshrike, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Black Eagle, Spotted Forktail, Red-flanked BLuetail and possibly even Spectacled Finch, a passage migrant, may put in an appearance if we are very fortunate. White-rumped, Slender-billed and Cinereous Vulture may also be seen overhead, although numbers are terribly depressed these days owing to the massive diclofenac associated population crash in the 1990's. This area is also well known as a migration route and more than fifty such species have been recorded moving to and from their breeding grounds, along a seemingly natural north to south migratory route through the park.



Red-billed Leiothrix by Glen Valentine

Taudaha Lake. Taudaha Lake is located 10 km south-east of the Kathmandu Valley and is the last refuge in this area for migratory water birds. Here we hope to connect with the rare Falcated Duck, while other widespread species such as Mallard, Ruddy Shelduck, Lesser Whistling Duck, Northern Pintail, Common Teal, Common Coot and Common, Ferruginous and Red-crested Pochard are all regularly seen. We will also keep watching for Steppe Eagle which is an occasional visitor to the region.

Pokhara. The surrounding lakes and forests are home to Crimson Sunbird, Puff-throated

Babbler, Red-billed Leiothrix, Besra, Black-thighed Falconet, Ashy Bulbul, Maroon Oriole, Kalij Pheasant, Black-backed Forktail, White-browed Scimitar-Babbler, Red-billed Blue and Common Green Magpie. Migrant ducks such as Common Goldeneye and Falcated Duck take up residence as they pass through on their migration, while nearby we may have a chance to glimpse Himalayan and Red-headed Vulture as we hike up the Peace Stupa at the top of Raniban.

Phedi to Dhamphus hike. We'll embark on a hike from Phedi to Dhampus, a traditional Gurung village. The Gurungs are an ethnic community who inhabit the hills surrounding the Annapurna region. From the village we will explore some stunning and spectacular sub-tropical and temperate forests. Another excellent birding site where we shall search for scarce species such as Golden Babbler, Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler, Fulvous Parrotbill and Golden-breasted Fulvetta. Himalayan and Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) may be seen along the mountainside gliding on the mountain thermals.



Sarus Crane by David Hoddinott

The Annapurna area is widely regarded as one of the richest regions of biodiversity in the world. The Cheer Pheasant, one of eight globally threatened species, may be found while all six of Nepal's Himalayan pheasant species may be located as we traverse the area. Yellow-rumped Honeyguide and Satyr Tragopan are resident, while other near-threatened species of the region include Red-headed and Cinereous Vulture, Pallid Harrier and Ferruginous Pochard. We will have further chances to find Spiny Babbler, Nepal Wren-Babbler and Hoary-throated Barwing, while Spectacled Finch is only seen in this region over the winter months. The region also



Satyr Tragopan by David Hoddinott

provides an excellent platform to enjoy Demoiselle Crane and large numbers of other migrant species, particularly raptors.



Bengal Florican by Adam Riley

Chitwan National Park. Chitwan was the first established National Park of the country, situated in a valley of the central lowlands. The 932 km² park is host to two thirds of Nepal's globally threatened bird species. The habitat consists mainly of Sal woodland and small areas of grasslands while pine and tropical forests are also present. There are several lakes and ponds formed on the floodplains of the three rivers that traverse Chitwan. Of prime interest are the endangered grassland species that include Bengal Florican, Lesser Adjutant and Grey-crowned Prinia. The park is the only known place in Nepal where Slender-billed Babbler occurs, whilst the endangered Indian Spotted Eagle breeds locally. Other threatened species we may encounter include Great Hornbill, Oriental Darter, Black-bellied Tern, Painted and Black-necked Stork, White-tailed Eagle, Grey-headed and Lesser Fish Eagle, Red-headed and Cinereous Vulture, Laggar Falcon, Pallid Harrier, Indian Grassbird and Yellow-breasted Bunting. As we progress through the day, we may also add Sarus Crane, Indian Skimmer, Bengal Florican, Jerdon's Babbler and Pallas's Fish Eagle, while Bar-headed Goose, a high altitude trans-Himalayan migrant is also occasionally recorded in the region. Aside from the numerous birding targets, we shall also spend time focusing on two major mammal highlights in the form of both Tiger and Indian Rhinoceros.

Hetauda & surrounds. Located at the base of the Mahabharata range, the area will allow us to connect with some high-altitude species seeking some warmth from the winter chill. Upon reaching Hetauda we will begin birding a variety of sites, specifically searching for the sought after Ibisbill, Wallcreeper, Brown Dipper, and a quartet of forktails covering Little, Spotted, Slaty-backed and Black-backed.



Cheer Pheasant by Adam Riley

Lower down, we'll look for White-throated Kingfisher, Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo and Greater Flameback, while the endangered Great Hornbill is also seen regularly in nearby forest patches. We may also encounter some great mammals, having further chances of finding Indian Rhinoceros and Tiger.

Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. Home to the last surviving wild Asian Buffalo and Nepal's first RAMSAR site. We'll start with a walk through our magnificent surrounds, an assortment of habitats covering grasslands, ox-bow lakes, riparian vegetation and marshes. To its south is the Koshi Barrage, a massive set of sluice gates that keep large tracts of land under water. After breakfast we'll embark on

rafting excursion along the Koshi River where we will be searching for the critically endangered Bengal Florican amongst a supporting cast of Indian Pond Heron, Asian Openbill, Woolly-necked Stork, Lesser Adjutant, Black-headed Ibis, Lesser Whistling Duck, Ruddy Shelduck, Red-crested Pochard, Ferruginous Duck, Western Osprey, Pied and Pallid Harrier, Black-winged Kite, White-rumped and Cinereous Vulture, Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Long-legged Buzzard and Grey-headed Swamphen. We'll also spend time at the Koshi Barrage with the hope of a special encounter with Ganges River Dolphin.



Wallcreeper by Clayton Burne

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate to undemanding. Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels. Nepal can be an assault on the senses first time around, requiring a little tolerance to begin with.
Birding Ease		Undemanding. Most species provide good visuals in open conditions. Some forest edge, but true forest birding is limited.
Accommodation		Comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Mostly on gently undulating roads/lodge gardens. Some moderate walking in the Himalaya.
Vehicles / Roads		Busses, 4x4 & open safari vehicles. Variable to poor road conditions. Vehicles are manufactured to local requirements, so tend to be a squeeze/on the small size for Western tourists.
Photography		Good to excellent. From vehicle and in lodge gardens.
Annoyances		Slow traffic, poor road conditions. Spicy food, strong smells of various types. Can be cold at altitude & on early morning safaris.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

This tour is made available through our Tailor-made tours department. To explore this offering further for pricing, precise day to day itinerary, inclusions & exclusions, or to tailor the tour to your personal requirements, please contact our Tailor-made team on tailormade@rockjumper.com

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.

- **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.**

- Roads outside of main cities are poorly maintained, causing vehicles to travel very slowly.
- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20 kg (44 lb) for check in luggage and 8 kg (+-18 lb) for hand luggage.
- This tour does require a moderate level of fitness, and participants should be in good general as some of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time.
- It is not permissible to leave the open safari vehicles within national parks with dangerous animals, except at designated sites.
- If you have any physical or medical limitations or conditions, please notify us in advance of departure.
- For much of this tour we will be far away from modern medical facilities.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a good standard, and the hotels and resorts that we make use of range from comfortable to very comfortable. There is no camping on this trip.
- Overnight temperatures, particularly in the Himalayan foothills, can be quite cool and it is advisable to bring layered clothing for warmth and convenience.
- Open jeep tours can be very cold (especially in the mornings), please bring sufficient warm clothing, including gloves, scarf/buff and a beanie (woolly hat).

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins in Kathmandu on day 1, and as this is scheduled as an arrival day; you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude after breakfast in Kathmandu on day 15.

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.

Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu, (IATA: KTM) is the main port of entry & departure for international flights.

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.