

Tour Report

Birding Trip – India (Assam) and Bhutan



Robert Curry (Bob) & Glenda Curry- private tour for 24 days featuring Kaziranga NP, Nameri NP in Assam (India) and East to West birding traverse in Bhutan ; **1st April -24th April 2012**

Tour leader: Chewang Rinchen Bonpo

Part I: India, Assam



INDIAN –ONE HORNED RHNIO

Day 1: 1st April 2012: Guwahati – Kaziranga National Park:

After Bob and Glenda arrived on flight in Guwahati airport, we all headed towards the first birding spot in the outskirts of the city in the city's garbage dump for the endangered **Greater Adjutant Stork** where the half of the population of the entire species is concentrated in this particular site.

After a brief visit to the Garbage dump site we headed for a long drive of 05 hours towards Kaziranga National Park – The UNESCO world heritage site.

Day 2 & Day 3: 2nd April - 03rd April 2012: Kaziranga National Park:

We spend a total of two full days to explore different parts of the park on vehicle and elephant back. First day we explored the central range followed by western range and the second day by elephant safari in central range in the morning and vehicle safari in eastern range in the afternoon.

The highlight of Kaziranga was the spectacular sight of the display of **Bengal Florican** in western range followed by a open view of the skulking **Slender-billed Babbler**, **Chestnut –capped Babbler** and other species like **Grey-headed Fish Eagle**, **Palla's Fish eagle**, **Shrika**, **Spot-billed Pelican**, **Swamp Francolin**, **Red Junglefowl**, **Great Hornbill**, **Pied Hornbill**, **Green Billed Malkoha** along with the mammals like **Indian Elephant**, **Swamp Deer**, **Hog Deer**, **Indian Water-Buffalo** and the main attraction of Kaziranga and the pride of Assam the **Indian One- horned Rhino**.

Day4: 4rd April 2012 & Day 5: 5th April 2012: Kaziranga National Park – Nameri National Park

We had a morning visit to the central range but had to return early out of the park because of the thunder storm. The next destination of our tour was Nameri National Park where we spent one and half day to explore the forest on foot.

The main target bird for Nameri the **White-winged Duck** was not an easy go, had hard time finding in different pond walking for hours in humidity, heat and thunder shower in between but we did not give up and atlast had an excellent scope view of two birds (male and female) on our second attempt in the main pond.

The day birding we saw **Pied Falconet (hovering in the air)** , **Peregrine Falcon**, **Blue –Bearded Bee-eater**, a close view of **Orange –breasted Green Pigeon**, **Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon**, a brief flight view of **Pin –tailed Green Pigeon** , a short but good view of **Thick-billed Green Pigeon**, **Blue –bearded Bee-eater**, **Great Hornbill** , **Sultan Tit** and many more .



Red Junglefowl

Part II: Bhutan



Satyr Tragopan - Male

Bhutan a Himalayan Kingdom in the eastern Himalayas is one of the most beautiful country with rich and fewer disturbances in its nature. The kingdom is well known as “Druk “in the Himalayas refers to the Dragon and so the name “Land of the Thunder Dragon”. As most of the Himalayan people “Drukpa” or the Bhutanese are mostly Buddhist by religion which believes strict in non-killing of living being thereby making Birds and animals tolerant to Human that is they do not dash out in the first sight of birders and also the density of birds is better compared to its neighbour state .

The tour program as designed by a reputed Tour operator Gurudongma tour & treks traverse through the Himalayan Kingdom as following

- (Samdrup Jhonkar-Narphung- Trashigang –Monger-Yongkhola)- East Bhutan
- (Bhumthang –Trongsa- Zhemgang-Punakha)- Central Bhutan
- (Thimphu- Paro)- West Bhutan

Day 6 & 7: 6th April 2012 & 7th April 2012: Samdrup Jhonkar –Narphung

We started early from Nameri towards the border town of Bhutan(Samdrup Jhonkar) as the drive was around 07 hours and we wanted to be there on working office hours for our paper-works for the permit, in which our local guide Chencho helped us with all the necessary formalities which took us half a day's time .

We started next morning towards Narphung birding enroute our plan was to drive and stop in good patches of forest to bird. We had some species of birds in the early part of the morning like *Himalayan Crested Kingfisher*, a pair of *Black-backed Forktail*, *Grey-throated Babbler*, *Yellow-Bellied Warbler*, *Fulvous breasted Woodpecker* and many more but soon the weather condition turned bad with rain and mist and so we had a break in the army town for an hour but as the weather did not improve we drove towards Narphung.

As we were on our way and soon the weather improved so we pull over and birded with some of the species like *Red-faced Liocichla* (a brief view) , *Greater Rufous –headed Parrotbill*, *Long-tailed Sibia* (full of them on the flowering tree along with the parrotbills) , a flock of *Rusty-fronted Barwing* , a close view of *Large Hawk Cuckoo* , a brief and close view of *Rufous- breasted Bush Robin* , a scope view of perched *Rufous –bellied Eagle*, *Rufous-necked Hornbill* (first the Female followed by the male) , a flock of *Striated Bulbul* and *Golden –Throated Barbet* feeding on the wild berries , excellent view of *Streak Spiderhunter* (one of Bob 's target bird) . We put ourselves in the camp in Narphung which is at an altitude of 2000meter.

Day 8: 7th April 2012: Narphung – Trashigang

As per our plan we started back trek to some of the good patches of forest. We had some species like *Lesser Shortwing* (excellent view of the male in a gully), Excellent view of three species of Wren Babblers *Rufous-throated Wren Babbler*, *Scaly –Breasted Wren Babbler* (White morph) and *Long-billed Wren Babbler* on a single location in a span of one hour , a mixed hunting flock of *Rusty-fronted Barwing* and *Greater –Rufous headed Parrotbill* brought us the beautiful and sort out bird the *Coral –billed Scimitar Babbler* followed by another mixed hunting flock consisting of small passerine the *Golden Babbler* , *Nepal Fulvetta* , *Rufous-capped Babbler* , *Yellow-throated Fulvetta* .

We headed back to the camp for our breakfast and headed towards Trashigang birding enroute with species like the elusive *Blue-fronted Robin*, an excellent view of *Maroon –backed Accentor* , a couple of *Green-tailed & Black-throated Sunbirds* . The drive was very scenic with the villages and the spectacular view of the hills. We put ourselves camping after crossing Trashigang in a paddy field surround by farmhouse.

Day 9: 8th April 2012: Trashigang-Korila pass- Monger

The next morning we were up very early at around four in the morning after our sleepless night as the campsite was flooded due to the heavy rain all night.

We drove towards Korila pass (2450 meters)birding on the way we saw some of the species like a handsome **Crested Bunting**, a couple of **Blue-capped Rock-Thrush** and on Korila pass we had a flock of **White-throated Laughingthrush** feeding on the roadside ,a female **Scarlet Finch** , a pair of **Gold-nape Finch** , a close view of **Yellow-breasted Green Finch** , a flock of **Chestnut –crowned Laughingthrush** , **Bhutan Laughingthrush**, **Grey Sided laughing thrush** , **Spotted Nutcracker** , a excellent view of **Rufous-breasted Accentor** , a loud calling **Yellow-billed Megpie** (three of them) . The night we put ourselves in a hotel in Monger so as to dry our wet stuff and overcome our tiredness of camping.

Day 10: 9th April 2012: Mongar- Yongkhola-Lower Lingmethang Road



We started towards Yongkhola via Lighmethang road. We had some good species like **Rufous-necked Laughingthrush** , **Yellow-vented Warbler**, **Silver-eared Mesia**, **Red billed Leoithrix** , a pair of cooperative **Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler** , a pair of shy **Blue –throated Flycatcher** in the Bamboo forest patch , a close view of **Ashy Bulbul** .

The afternoon session we headed towards the Thrumsingla National Park – Upper Lingmethang road and some of the species for the day were **Red-tailed** and **Blue winged Minla** , **White-bellied Ephornis** , a couple of **Rufous –necked Hornbills** , **Blue-bearded Bee-eater** ,**Pale Blue Flycatcher** ,An hour scope view of three **Himalayan Cutia** (perched still).

The main target bird for us was the **Ward's Trogon** for which we started to work down the road and as we had given up our hope a female of the species appeared from nowhere in a distances but we had bit and pieces view .

The rest of the two nights we put ourselves in Yongkhola in one of the Farmhouses and one night in the camp.

Day 11 & Day 12: 10th April 2012, 11th April 2012: Upper Lingmethang Road

We spend around next two days exploring the Upper Lingmethang Road, the main target bird for us was again the **Ward's Trogon** and this time being male and at last after long hours of trial we found a male in the same place where we had a disappointing view of the female, we had an excellent view in a close distance with our bins and we managed some pictures.

The second speciality for us was the **Yellow-rumped Honey guide** where we spend quite a time in the cliff scanning until Chencho spotted the bird and we all had a scope view of the bird.

Some of the other birds that we had were **Blue-winged Laughingthrush** (displaying individual),**Yellow-checked Tit** , **Rufous-winged Fulvetta** , **Pygmy blue Flycatcher** , **Pygmy Wren Babbler** ,

Black-throated Parrotbill (a pair in the higher Maling Bamboo) , Golden Breasted Fulvetta , Kalij pheasant and so on .The other big target bird for us was the Wedge-billed Wren Babbler which we spend long hours trying to find one and was only awarded with a very short –view of the bird dashing in the bush .

Day 13: 12th April 2012- Yongkhola – Sengor 3000m



The day we headed towards Sengor – 3000 meters camp, birding enroute we saw Little Forktail, Chestnut –crowned Laughingthrush, Short-billed Minivets, and Brown –throated Treecreeper.

We reached our campsite in Sengor which was one of the most scenic places on earth with the forest filled with the Rhododendron flowers bloom of colours like red and pink and the edges of the road with Blue Primula.

We birded in the surrounding forest of the camp and soon awarded by an excellent view of Bar-winged Wren Babbler, Other species we saw was brightly coloured Crimson – browed Finch feeding on the berries, a bright red coloured backed Mrs. Gould’s Sunbird in the Rhododendron bushes, Yellow-browed Tit, White-browed Fulvetta , Rufous-vented Yuhina and Wiskered Yuhina .

The main bird that all of us longed to see and speciality of Bhutan was the Satyr Tragopan for which we ventured out in the evening and in no time we were luck with a male on the road, we had an excellent look at each and every details of the bird for about an hour and managed some picture too.

Overnight stay in the camp in Sengor in that altitude was cold.

Day 14: 14th April 2012- Sengor -3000meters- Thrumshingla pass – Bhumthang

We made our start in the first light towards the Thrumshingla pass (3750 m) and as we approached the pass we were all woken-up with the sight of Blood Pheasants on each turn of the road altogether we had fourteen individual of birds that morning.

We stopped in some of the patches of the forest and looked for other species and was awarded by species like Rufous-vented Tit, White-winged Grosbeak, Yellowish –bellied Bush Warbler, Dark-rumped Rosefinch, Fire-tailed Sunbirds and beautiful White-browed Rosefinch male and female. As the day approached the forest was filled with mist and clouds so we headed towards our next destination Bhumthang.

On our way to Bhumthang we were stuck in one of the road –block near the pass for an hour after which we birded in the lower altitude of the forest as we approached Bhumthang in the open and dry pine forest with the species like Red-billed Chough, Yellow-billed Chough and Black-billed Megpie.

We reached our hotel in the afternoon and the rest of the day was spent in exploring the cultural aspect of the beautiful valley town of Bhumthang.

Day15- 15th April 2012: Bhumthang- Yotongla pass 3425 meters- Trongsa



The next day as per our plan and request from Glenda we explored some of the monasteries of Bhumthang but we still had our bins with us to look at the birds like [Brown Parrotbills](#), [Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush](#) along with the rich architects and beautiful wall painting of the monasteries, it was day for birdguide to relax and Chencho to work with his explanation about the monasteries.

After our lunch in the hotel we headed towards our next destination Trongsa passing the Yotongla pass(3425 meters) as I could sense Bob was hungry for more species and soon he was fed by [Great Parrotbill](#) (a pair of birds give us an excellent look)and [Fire-tailed Myzornis](#). The drive through Yotongla was one of the most beautiful sites to see as both of the road side was filled with Rhododendron bloom. We reached our hotel in Trongsa in the evening.

Day 16-16th April 2012: Trongsa- Zhemgang (Tingtibee)

We headed from Trongsa to our next destination to the lower elevation forest of Zhemgang (Tingtibee) It was a long drive for about five hours but on the way we made some stoppage for birding and bagged ourselves with species like [Large-Niltava](#) (close view of the male bird), a couple of [Chestnut-crowned Warblers](#), [Blyth's Leaf Warblers](#), [Tickell's Leaf Warblers](#) (a couple of them may be in their migration phase) a couple of [Blue-capped Rockthrush](#).

As we had stop for a break in one of the beautifully made resting-shed, I notice a bright green coloured bird that dashed in the bush and as we were after the bird in no time we realised we were looking at a pair of [Fire-tailed Myzornis](#) gave us an excellent show in the sunlight.

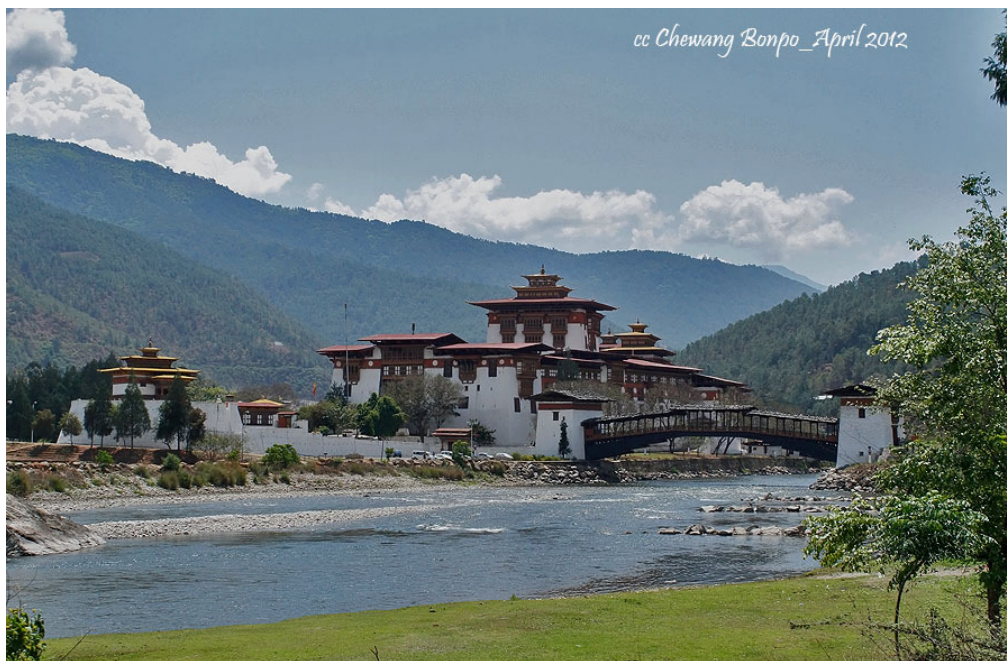
As we approached Zhemgang our main target bird for the area was the rear Beautiful Nuthatch but the evening work to find one was in vain but we had other species to keep us occupied of which the [Golden Langur](#) was one. The night we camped in Tingtibee at an altitude of 880 meters.

Day 17- 18: 17th – 18th April 2012: Zhemgang- Trongsa

The day we had planned to gradually drive back towards Zhemgang and look out for a good forest patches for the [Beautiful Nuthatch](#) as we were birding along the way back we had some of the species like [Great Hornbill](#), [White-browed Scimitar Babbler](#) (a good look at an individual), and an excellent view of [Long-tailed Broadbill](#). After long hours of walk along the road we came across a flock of [Sultan Tit](#) along with [Rufous Sibia](#) and finally the flock brought in a three individual of [Beautiful Nuthatch](#) we had an excellent view showing the clear white marking against the blue back of the bird.

The next day before we headed back to Trongsa we birded in the same patch forest and had some of the species like the [White-tailed Robin](#) , a open view of skulking [White-gorgeted Flycatcher](#) , heard the [Purple Cochoa](#) but could not locate the bird . The night we were back to Trongsa for an overnight stay.

Day 19 – 20: 19th – 20th April 2012 – Trongsa- Pele-la – Phunaka- Jigme Dorjee NP- Phunaka



Punakha Dzong with the Mo-chu River

The day we started late in the morning to Punakha because of the landslide in the route. Soon after we crossed the landslide we came on a very beautiful countryside of Bhutan. We birded in Pele-la pass and some of the species encountered by us were **Grey-sided Bush Warbler**, **Himalayan Monal** (a flight view) and **Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler** (Scope view of an individual). The night we put up in a camp in Mo-chu (Shaten Camp) we did not opt to go for the White-bellied Heron as we had been informed that there was a little chance of seeing one.

The next day birding in the Jigme Dorjee National Park along the Mo-chu River we had some of the species like the **Slaty-backed Forktail**, **Brown Dipper**, **White-capped Water Redstart**, **Orange-headed Thrush** (a brief View). The night we stay in Punakha

Day 21-22: 23rd – 21st – 22nd April 2012- Punakha-Dochu-la (3090 meters)-Thimpu- Paro – Cheli-la (3810)

We drove early in the morning to bird in Dochu-la pass (3090 meters) with some of the species like **Brown Parrotbill**, **Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon**, **Darjeeling woodpecker**, **Rufous-bellied Woodpecker**, **Golden Bush Robin**, **Chestnut-tailed Minla**, and **Kalij Pheasant** with a brief sighting of **Yellow-throated Martin**. Overnight we stayed in Thimpu.

The next day we headed to Paro after our sightseeing in Thimpu town with local Markets, monasteries. As we had planned we made two attempts to Cheli-la pass (3810 meters) as it was the last hour for birding in the beautiful Himalayan Kingdom. The species we had were **Spotted Laughingthrush**, **White-browed Rosefinch**, **Satyr Tragopan** (we were lucky again to have seen male close to the path), **Himalayan Monal** (two individual on the road in the late evening and one in the morning feeding in the open patch in good sunlight), a four individual of **Blood Pheasant**, **Rufous-fronted Tit**, **Goldcrest**, **Grey-crested Tit**, **White-winged Grosbeak**, **Eurasian Woodcock** and many more.