



Bhutan Trip Report 2025

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Tour leaders: Norbu, Tshering Dorji and Mike Hoit This was a very special route through the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan - Druk Yul in the native Dzongkha language. By starting our journey via the land border with India in the lowlands of the southeast, and departing from Paro, we were able to traverse most of the country, exploring the full range of altitudes - and as a result, all forest types in this country where two-thirds of the ecosystem remains intact. Following the sole highway from east to the more human-influenced west (with a few diversions!), we experienced some of the finest birding the Himalayas have to offer. Among the seemingly endless avian highlights were White-bellied Heron, Ward's Trogon, Satyr Tragopan, Himalayan Monal, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Himalayan Cutia, Sikkim Wedge-billed Babbler, Spotted Laughingthrush and Tibetan Serin, mostly seen in the most beautiful scenery. Even though we saw 353 species, it wasn't all about the birds. Mammal sightings included great views of Bhutan Giant Flying Squirrel, Golden and Capped Langurs, Himalayan Goral and the newly-split Sikkim Pika but pride of place must go to the Himalayan Red Panda! And it would be remiss to visit such a unique place without taking in some of the cultural places that make Bhutan so remarkable, and so the latter half of the trip was punctuated by stops at dzongs, temples and monasteries. More than most other countries, the people of Bhutan elevate this tour further. Everyone is unfailingly friendly, but it was our exceptional local guides Norbu, Tshering and Sangay, the tireless and sharp-eyed Tenzing (driver and so much more), and the camp crew (Tshering Choehel, Ishila, Karma Lala, Khengs, Kililey and Trarchen) who made our travels such a success.



Prayer flags © Mike Hoit

Day one, April 2nd: Delhi to Samdrup Jongkhar.

Rather than Bhutan, our adventure started in neighbouring India! The group met up in New Delhi for a welcome dinner, and the next day we took a very early flight to Guwahati in Assam, in the northeast of the country. Birding began at a classic location: a garbage dump. Here, enormous Greater Adjutants picked through the smouldering pile of detritus, and a filthy pool held waterbirds including Temminck's Stint, 'Tibetan' Citrine Wagtail, Bronze-winged Jacana and Rosy Pipit. We then continued to the border town of Sashipur, completed various bureaucratic formalities, crossed into Bhutan and checked into the accommodation in Samdrup Jongkhar. Initial birding in the nearby hills were a good introduction to forest birds; Great Hornbill and Plain Flowerpecker representing opposite ends of the scale. Our first taste of Bhutanese hospitality, including ema datchi – the national dish of chillies in cheese sauce – awaited back at our charming hotel.



Greater Adjutant © Mike Hoit



Golden-throated Barbet © Mike Hoit

Day two, April 3rd: Samdrup Jongkhar to Morong.

Today was spent ascending to Morong, at 1570 metres above sea level, making many birding stops. At lower elevations in the morning we saw Ruby-cheeked Sunbird and Golden-fronted Leafbirds – whose ranges only just creep into Bhutan – and got great views of Green-billed Malkohas, Brown

Dipper and Crested Kingfisher, while two Yellow-throated Martens and a group of Capped Langurs were good mammal sightings. At lunchtime we were introduced to the camp crew, who were to provide field lunches and breakfasts of impressive quality and diversity for the duration – just how did they manage it? Around our campsite were some obliging near-endemic Bhutan Laughingthrushes and Rufous-breasted Accentor, viewable without having to tear yourself away from the tea and biscuits. Birding back along the road late afternoon, the star of the show was the stunning Rufous-necked Hornbill, with other sightings including Sultan Tit, Golden-throated Barbet, Small Niltava and Himalayan Cuckoo.



Ward's Trogon © Mike Hoit



Dinner at the camp © Mike Hoit

Day three, April 4th: Morong to Trashigang.

The very productive morning hours were spent in the forests near Morong, at around 1500 metres above sea level. More Rufous-necked Hornbills gave great views, as did White-naped, Whiskered and Black-chinned Yuhinas; Black-throated Sunbirds and Golden Babblers were seen at point-blank range, and a male White-tailed Robin flitted in a gully. Non-birds included another pair of Yellow-throated Martens, Capped Langurs and the first Assam Macaques. The rest of the day was spent travelling to Trashigang, but we made a speculative birding stop at the first patch of moss-draped rhododendron forest - which held a fantastic pair of Ward's Trogons! Seeing this tricky, sought after bird with the minimum of fuss was quite something. Another roadside stop held Yellow-rumped Honeyguide at some Giant Rock Bee hives before, finally, we dropped down to our hotel perched high above Trashigang.



Yellow-rumped Honeyguide © Mike Hoit

Day four, April 5th: Trashigang to Yongkola.

Having been travelling north, today we joined Bhutan's main highway and turned west. Along the way, we paused a few times - mostly in dry, open Blue Pine woodland - seeing Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Kalij Pheasant, Crested Bunting and Tickell's Leaf Warbler. The morning's main birding spot was in montane forest near our first high pass, the Kori La, at 2400m elevation; the headline bird was the iconic Fire-tailed Myzornis, with other montane species including Darjeeling Woodpecker. In the afternoon we started birding the famous Lingmethang Road, with the lower elevations turning up Yellow-vented Warbler, Ashy Bulbuls and Capped Langurs in a butterfly-filled forest gully, and Speckled Piculet and White-throated Needletail along the roadside.



Capped Langur © Mike Hoit



Blue-throated Barbet © Mike Hoit

Days five to seven, April 6th-8th: The Lingmethang Road.

The fifty-five kilometres of road running from Lingmethang to Sengor passes through forest of all types as it rises from 600 to over 3000 metres above sea level, and is home to almost the full suite of eastern Himalayan birds. It is rightly famed as one of the best birding areas in Asia, and we certainly

found out why! Having experienced the lower reaches of the Lingmethang Road yesterday, we spent much of the time at mid-elevations: mixed flocks were a regular feature, with gangs of White-breasted Parrotbills, Black-crowned Scimitar-babblers and Rusty-fronted Barwings in the low bamboo layers, and warblers, Red-tailed and Blue-winged Minlas, Whiskered Yuhinas and Rufous Sibias up in the trees. Splashes of colour were provided by Scarlet Finches, Asian Emerald Cuckoos, Long-tailed Broadbill and Red-headed Trogon, while we had several fantastic encounters with Himalayan Cutias, an emblematic species of mossy forests. Laughingthrushes were usually about, and of the seven species seen, Grey-sided showed incredibly and atypically well; and after some effort, Rufous-throated Wren Babbler and Sikkim Wedge-billed Babblers, two range-restricted dwellers of dark, damp gullies also performed brilliantly. And all this with delicious hot field lunches prepared by the camping crew! After dark, we were tormented by Hodgson's Frogmouths, bumped into a Brown Wood Owl, and great views of two flying-squirrels: the awesome Bhutan Giant, and the smaller Hairy-footed.



Himalayan Cutia in forest © Mike Hoit



Moving to the uphill, stands of bamboos held colourful Golden-breasted Fulvettas, Crimson-naped Woodpecker, and two species of sneaky scimitar-babbler – Streak-breasted and Slender-billed. Via Little Forktails and Nepal House Martins around spectacular waterfalls, we entered higher elevation conifer and rhododendron forests, finding another suite of species including Hoary-throated Barwings, Southern Nutcrackers and a close female Satyr Tragopan at the roadside. At the end of day seven, we were at camp in an alpine meadow, home to Red-billed Choughs and White-collared Blackbirds by day, and Himalayan Owls by night.



Namling waterfall © Mike Hoit



Sengor Camp © Mike Hoit

Day eight, April 9th: Sengor and the high passes to Trongsa.

Heading onwards and upwards towards the 3500m Thrumshing La our morning started with some great views of Blood Pheasants – twenty-one were seen today, all at close range! Other pine-loving species like Hodgson's Treecreeper and Rufous-vented Tit were found, before the clouds rolled in. However the prize sighting was a Himalayan Red Panda, found by the irrepressible Tenzing, which we scoped at length once it finally positioned itself in view! Visibility at the pass was zero, but dropping down to where it was clearer we found White-throated Redstart, Dark-rumped Rosefinch and Snow Pigeons; lower still was lunch in the stunning Ura valley with its numerous Black-rumped Magpies. At another high pass at Yotong La things were a little quiet, but further on were White-winged Grosbeaks and masses of Rufous-naped Yuhinas. In the early evening, we rolled into our hotel in Trongsa via Kalij Pheasants and a swirling flock of Nepal and Asian House Martins and Himalayan Swiftlets.



Drumstick Primrose © Mike Hoit



Western Red Panda © Mike Hoit

Day nine, April 10th: Trongsa to Tingtibi.

Overnight rain had, fortunately, cleared by the time we started birding the forests south of Trongsa. In damp, grey conditions it was a morning for the skulkers: Pygmy Cupwings, Grey-bellied Tesias and Lesser Shortwing variably slowed well, briefly or not at all! Plenty of other birds were showier

though, including a flock of Speckled Woodpigeon, Scarlet Minivets, Black-winged Cuckooshrike and Common Cuckoo, while a welcome surprise was a noisy flock of feeding Tibetan Serins. Heading south on a narrow, twisty road, the first Golden Langurs were seen: restricted to just one small part of Bhutan and just into India, these were remarkably common. More heavy rain over lunch eased by the time we reached our next destination, the old road between Zhemgang and Tingtibi. The highlights included Sapphire Flycatcher and flocks of Spot-winged Grosbeaks and Scarlet Finches, plus many of the now-familiar flocking species, before we descended to our campsite near Tingtibi.



Field lunch © Mike Hoit

Day ten, April 11th: Tingtibi and the Zhemgang Road

Today was our big chance for the magnificent and sadly critically endangered White-bellied Heron. Scanning the river near Tingtibi, the Mangde Chu, was initially unsuccessful until we were tipped off that a heron had flown our way, and it was soon relocated - very, very distantly! With some dashing around and repositioning we all got scope views, but need not have worried too much, as we twice had better sightings! One eye-level flyby showed the true scale of this huge heron, before we watched the same or another at length hunting the rocky river - while Great Hornbills and Sultan Tits showed brilliantly in the close trees. A bittersweet moment, as a single White-bellied Heron might be 1.5% of the entire population. Other birds nearby included Pale-billed Parrotbill and Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes, plus Chestnut-headed Bee-eater in the camp, but the activity in the forest was quite low, so in the afternoon we returned to the Zhemgang Road at 1500m elevation. Again no Beautiful Nuthatches could be found, but we did catch up with Erpornis and Pale Blue Flycatcher, and got some great views of Golden Langurs and perched Mountain Hawk Eagle. Then it was back down for a final night under canvas.



White-bellied Heron © Mike Hoit



Birding Tingtibi © Mike Hoit

Day eleven, April 12th: Tingtibi to Phobjikha Valley.

The bamboo close to camp was far livelier this morning, and the White-hooded Babblers that were missing yesterday performed, plus Pale-headed Woodpecker, Rufous-faced Warbler, Pin-tailed Green-pigeon and more Pale-billed Parrotbills. Then it was a long journey, back into the mountains,

but along the way we saw some lively Chestnut-winged Cuckoos, had yet another scenic lunch, and explored the lovely little town Trongsa, with its imposing dzong. We reached the utterly beautiful Phobjhika Valley with a bit of daylight left, and picked up Fire-tailed Sunbird and Brown Parrotbill before dropping down to the flatter areas. There is an impressive wintering population of Black-necked Cranes in Phobjikha, and we knew five had lingered much later into the spring than usual – and there they were, feeding in the evening light! A very lucky bonus, and the perfect end to the day.



Trongsa © Mike Hoit



Black-necked Cranes © Mike Hoit

Day twelve, April 13th: Pele La to Punakha

A cold, damp morning along an old road near the 3400m Pele La produced magnificent Himalayan Monals, Crimson-browed Finch, Red-headed Bullfinches and Slaty-blue Flycatchers over the course of a couple of walks. It was hard work in chilly conditions, but a beautiful spot to see not many birds at least! Warmed up by a hot breakfast served by the trusty crew, we stopped sunnier forests lower down, getting tremendous views of Yellow-rumped Honeyguide and Nepal Grey Langurs. Reaching the broad valley of the Puna Tsang Chu, the trip list got a good boost as we birded the river: Bar-headed Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Falcated Duck and River Lapwings were spotted, among many others, en route to our next hotel, overlooking the Punakha Dzong.



Pele La © Mike Hoit



River Lapwing © Mike Hoit

Day thirteen, April 14th: Jigme Dorji NP and Punakha to Thimpu.

The new birds came early today! Even before leaving the hotel, we had seen Collared Scops Owl, and en route to Jigme Dorji NP great views were had of the unique Spotted Elachura, which had teased us with its song for several days. Once in this lovely forest, with views of snow-capped peaks, we saw some obliging Slaty-bellied Tesias, Hair-crested Drongo, Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon and a good selection of commoner forest birds. Another well-chosen breakfast spot by the river allowed us to add Little Bunting to the list, while Brown Dippers and Crested Kingfishers flashed by. Next on the agenda was a visit to the magnificent Punakha Dzong, a true cultural highlight of the tour, and even here we saw wildlife (Red-crested Pochards and European Free-tailed Bat), while perhaps equally impressive was the Pallas's Fish Eagle seen at lunch. Continuing on to Thimpu, we stopped at the Dochu La, where we had brilliant views of Great Parrotbill alongside Yellow-billed Blue Magpies and White-throated Laughingthrushes behind the café, a Hill Partridge very nearly showed himself, and a Chestnut-headed Tesia hopped around at close range.



Punakha Dzong © Mike Hoit



Striated Laughingthrush © Mike Hoit

Day fourteen, April 15th: Cheri Valley, Thimpu and Paro

Early morning was spent birding our way north from the Bhutanese capital through the pine-clad Cheri Valley. New birds included Red-billed Leiothrix and Rufous-fronted (Black-browed) Tit, alongside great views of stunners like Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush and Mrs Gould's Sunbird.

After breakfast, we set off uphill, to the Cheri Monastery, which perches on a precipitous slope; Rufous-bellied Niltava among numerous Blue-fronted Redstarts and Eurasian Jay were seen en route, and habituated Himalayan Brown Gorals grazed in the clearing. Following lunch, we took a drive-by tour of Thimpu before travelling onwards, checking the rocky rivers for our next target. Even before arriving at Paro, the first Ibisbills were found and gave fantastic views, and north of town we quickly found Black-tailed Crake in a small marsh. Heading to our hotel fairly early for once, there was still another bird to see: an Eastern Barn Owl was tucked up at her day roost in the rafters.



Thimpu © Mike Hoit



Ibisbill © Mike Hoit

Day fifteen, April 16th: Chele La and Paro Valley

Before dawn, we travelled up the winding road towards the Chele La to arrive in the coniferous forests by first light. Male Satyr Tragopans had eluded us so far, but here we had stellar views of no fewer than three, an eye-popping pheasant! A female tragopan was also seen, as well as three brilliant Spotted Laughingthrushes and a couple of too-brief Blanford's Rosefinches. Up at the pass itself - 3800 metres above sea level - in cold and crisp conditions, we had very close views of male Himalayan Monals, found Collared Grosbeaks, Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch and a fabulous flock of Red-throated Thrushes. Working our way back lower we encountered Whistler's Warbler and 'Asian' Goldcrest among the now-familiar forest birds, and as the activity waned we had a final lunch and bade farewell to the crew who had looked after us so well. In the valley bottom we found a fun group of Brown Parrotbills, before visiting the. After a visit to the Kyichu Lhakhang temple, dating back to the 8th century. Along the nearby Paro Chu, we again found Ibisbills, this time a pair with two fluffy chicks - another classic Bhutan day!



Blue-fronted Redstart © Mike Hoit



Haa Valley © Mike Hoit

Day sixteen, April 17th: Tiger's Nest Monastery and Paro Valley.

Our last full day was built around a visit to perhaps Bhutan's most well-known cultural site, the Paro Tkatskang or Tiger's Nest Monastery. The hike is great birding territory in itself, with Blyth's Swifts wheeling around, lots of singing Blyth's Leaf Warblers and White-throated Laughingthrushes, and

tame Yellow-billed Blue Magpies. Those of us who made the full 600 metre elevational gain were treated to a tour of the thirteen temples built into a sheer rock face - quite the experience. After lunch we checked various spots along the river around Paro, failing to find the elusive Solitary Snipe, but seeing yet more Ibisbills and other river specialities, plus Rosy Pipit and a surprise Water Pipit of the subspecies *blakistoni*. The final group meal was a happy affair as we enjoyed amore delicious Bhutanese fare and reminisced over our favourite birds and places of the last couple of weeks (although there were still a few birding opportunities left!).



Tiger's Nest © Mike Hoit

Day seventeen, April 18th: Paro to Delhi.

A pre-breakfast stroll around the hotel grounds were a last chance to see White-collared Blackbird, Grey-backed Shrike, Oriental Turtle Dove and others that we had got used to having around, while the Eastern Barn-Owl remained in situ. Then it was time to say goodbye to this wonderful country, via some final Bhutanese birds on the river next to the airport - including Ibisbill and Brown Dipper! Back in Delhi, we even managed a couple of new birds in the shape of Dusky Crag Martin and Bank Myna, before it finally was time to go our separate ways. What a wonderful experience it had been!



Rufous-necked Hornbills © Mike Hoit



Our group

[Bhutan Birding Tour species list \(eBird\)](#)