

Biodiverse Bhutan: Birds, Mammals & Beyond
Nov. 5-20, 2025
Pre-extension: Panna Tiger Reserve Oct. 31-Nov 4, 2025
Trip Report by Kent Skaggs



With guides Norbu Bumthap, Saurabh Sawant and Kent Skaggs, with 10 participants: Jackie & Eric, Kathy, Leslie & Walter, Margaret & Cliff, Peggy & Randy and Susan



Friday, Oct 31 - Arrival in New Delhi

Our adventure started in New Delhi at the Roseate House which was a short distance from the Indira Gandhi International Airport. The group gathered in the hotel lobby at 6:30 PM where we had a short meet and greet before walking to a nearby restaurant for dinner where we were joined by our guide for the India portion of the



tour, Saurabh and his protege Nehal. After enjoying several tasty Indian dishes, Saurabh went over the plans for the following morning and our departure for Khajuraho and ultimately the Panna Tiger Reserve.

Saturday, Nov 1 - New Delhi | Khajuraho | Panna Tiger Reserve

Travel day! But first we ate breakfast, then gathered our bags and loaded into our transportation to the airport where we boarded a flight for Khajuraho. Once in Khajuraho, we boarded a mini-bus for about a half hour drive to where we would be staying for the next three nights - the Sarai at Toria Lodge. Upon arrival at the lodge, we got situated into our rooms and then had lunch. After lunch, we had a little bit of downtime before we gathered again mid-afternoon to travel to the Panna Tiger Reserve for our first of several safaris into the reserve.

After a short drive in three jeep-like open top vehicles, we were at the entrance to Panna for our 3:00 PM safari. While we waited in line, we got checked in and picked up our park-assigned guide for each vehicle. Once the gate opened, the vehicles followed a main road that eventually led to side roads leading to other areas of the park. Each vehicle in our group went in a different direction looking for whatever wildlife they could find, but in particular - tigers. There were no tigers seen on our first venture into Panna, but there was lots of wildlife seen including Northern Plains Gray Langur, Wild Boar, Chital (Indian Spotted Deer), Sambar, Nilgai and Ruddy Mongoose. Not being the prime time of day for birds, we still saw 36 species including Indian Peafowl, Gray Francolin, Red-wattled Lapwing, Asian Woolly-necked Stork, Shikra, White-eyed Buzzard, Common Hoopoe, Asian Green Bee-eater, Black-rumped Flameback, three species of parakeets (Alexandrine, Rose-ringed and Plum-headed) and three species of drongos (Black, Ashy and White-bellied).

As we waited to exit the park and drop off our guide, several Savanna Nightjars were seen flying about hunting insects. Then we returned back across the Ken River, which appeared like glass in the fading light. As we drove the entrance road to our lodging, we noticed rather large creatures flying by. They turned out to be Indian Flying Foxes heading out to feed for the night. Once back, we dropped our gear off in our rooms and freshened up a bit, before gathering to do the checklist for the day, followed by supper and then off to bed. We had gotten a taste of Panna and we were eager to explore it further come morning.

Sunday, Nov 2 - Panna Tiger Reserve

The group gathered at 5:30 AM and then loaded up into our designated vehicle for our first morning safari in Panna. The plan was to search for tigers early and then if we were unsuccessful, to see what else we could find. As we drove through the reserve on an absolutely beautiful morning, we watched the landscape come to life as many of the mammal species seen the previous day were actively foraging and birds were very active as well. We explored the park until mid-morning before stopping for a picnic breakfast and then continuing our search



for Panna's wildlife. Birding was especially good this morning with 67 species being seen in total by the group. Some of the highlights were Oriental Honey-buzzard, Indian Vulture, Crested Serpent-Eagle, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Gray-headed Fish-Eagle, Brown Fish-Owl, Indian Gray Hornbill, Peregrine Falcon (Shaheen), Siberian Stonechat and great looks at several Purple Sunbirds.

We finished the morning safari and headed back for lunch and to take a little break before going back to Panna for the afternoon safari. Since we had a really good morning with the bird life and several mammals, the decision was made by our guides to make a concerted effort to try to find tigers. We searched an area where tigers had been seen in the morning, hoping they would reappear, but we were unsuccessful. Despite not seeing any tigers, we soaked in the beauty of the surrounding landscape and simply enjoyed being in a wild place watching wildlife do their thing. Then it was back to Sarai at Toria for dinner and to get a good night's rest as we would be repeating our efforts again in the morning. Would day three in Panna produce a tiger sighting? We had our fingers crossed that it would.

Monday, Nov 3 - Panna Tiger Reserve

It was another early start as we headed back to Panna for the morning safari. When we got there, there seemed to be a little more excitement in the air as we waited for entry into the reserve. The reason for the excitement among the guides and drivers was due to the discovery of a tiger kill late the previous afternoon. When we got through the gate we headed directly to the kill site and upon arrival, we saw a tiger having breakfast. As we scanned nearby we located a second tiger, which was the sibling of the one on the kill. Mom, who had made the kill of an adult male Sambar, was present as well and was sprawled out in the grass in a food coma. The scene was a bit surreal as we were actually witnessing tigers in the wild that seemed totally oblivious to multiple vehicles and dozens of people looking on. Those who had cameras took as many photos as possible before we moved on so others could get a better view of these magnificent creatures.

Away from the tiger jam, the group split up to see what else we could find. Rhesus Macaque and Golden Jackal were added to the mammal list and several new birds were added as well including Common Hawk-Cuckoo, Bonelli's Eagle, Eurasian Hobby, Bay-backed Shrike, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher and Indian Silverbill. All of this before breakfast. At our designated location for our picnic breakfast, a pair of Spotted Owlets were added to our growing list. A few other new bird species were added after breakfast along with another tiger sighting as one was heard and then seen on the opposite bank of the Ken River. It eventually walked into the river for a drink and dip as it lay down in the water to cool off. The group made another stop to check on the three tigers seen earlier in the morning before heading back to the gate to conclude a spectacular morning.



Back for lunch and a break before heading back to Panna for the afternoon safari. While we were waiting to get in the gate, we were asked if we wanted to see a snake. Apparently, a Russell's Viper had found its way into the souvenir shop and was just hanging out. Some of the group took a look at this pretty, yet very venomous snake before hopping back into the vehicles and setting off inside the park. With the pressure off now that we had seen tigers in the morning, we explored the park at a more relaxed pace in the afternoon. The weather was very pleasant and the late afternoon light enhanced an already beautiful landscape. We did stop to view the tigers again...well, just because. As we headed back to the entrance, we paused to take in the setting sun before exiting the park.

We returned for dinner, updated our checklist and went to bed as we would be getting up early again, one last time before departing. It had been a wonderful day and everyone should have gone to sleep with a smile on their face.

Tuesday, Nov 4 - Panna Tiger Reserve | New Delhi

We were up early again for our last safari in Panna. It was another beautiful morning albeit a little cooler. The group decided to focus on birds, so we spread out to see what we could find, although we did stop by to take a look at the tigers one last time. The birds were very active, maybe due to the cooler weather, so we saw lots of activity and several new bird species in Sirkeer Malkoha, Oriental Darter, Wire-tailed Swallow, Tickell's Leaf Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Taiga Flycatcher and Red Avadavat. We cut short our visit this morning in order to get back to our lodging and pack up our belongings before hitting the road to the airport. It had been a wonderful time exploring Panna, but now it was on to our next adventure.

We said goodbye to our hosts, loaded up into our vehicle and then headed for the airport in Khajuraho. It wasn't long before we were at the airport so we grabbed our bags, got checked in and waited a short time before departing for New Delhi. Once there, we checked back into the Roseate House and relaxed a bit. We gathered late afternoon to take a short walk to a different restaurant for dinner. At this point, the rest of our party had joined us and we were all set for the main tour in Bhutan. After a very good meal, we returned to the hotel to get some rest and prepare for our departure in the morning.

Wednesday, Nov 5 - Welcome to Bhutan! - Paro | Thimphu

We enjoyed a more casual start this morning, so everyone ate breakfast at their leisure and then gathered in the lobby with our luggage where we took a transfer to the airport. After going through all the necessary checkpoints we arrived at our gate for our flight to Bhutan. We soon got word that our flight had been delayed



so we settled in and relaxed while we waited for an update. The scheduled departure time continued to get pushed back and at one point it did not look like we were going to get out that day, but luck was on our side and we finally were able to board and head out for Bhutan.

Once we were in the air, we settled in and enjoyed the views out the windows which were spectacular. And then we were hit with another curveball. The pilot came on and said that because of our late departure, they might have to reroute us back to India and that he would keep us informed. A short while later he confirmed this, but shortly afterward informed the passengers that they were indeed going to try to make it to Paro. As we neared Paro, the pilots showed off their expert skills while flying through the mountain valleys that lead up to the airport. It was a rather exciting approach, but once we were on the ground, we were elated to be in Bhutan.

Thursday, Nov 6 - Thimphu | Tsirang: Home of the White-bellied Heron

We had an early departure this morning as we wanted to get out while the birds were still active. Our first destination was Dochula Pass. When we arrived, we got out and walked a short distance along the highway, looking and listening for birds. It was a bit brisk but the views from the pass to the north, where we could see some of the Himalayan Mountain range, were nothing short of spectacular. Then the birds started to show up with Speckled Wood-Pigeon, Long-tailed Minivet, Yellow-billed Blue-Magpie, Southern Nutcracker, Yellow-bellied Fairy-Fantail and Blue-fronted Redstart making an appearance along with a few others.

After this, we moved a short distance down the road where our mobile kitchen had set up breakfast for us. We fueled up, enjoying a tasty meal before venturing a little further down the road to the Lampelri Recreational Park which was Bhutan's first botanical park. Once there we set off on a loop trail to see what we could find. It had turned into a beautiful day and the layers we had in place for birding at Dochula Pass were now being shed as the sun got higher in the sky. Some of the birds we encountered were a bit challenging to see as they were actively feeding and didn't stay still for very long. This included a group of Black-throated Parrotbills that came zipping through the undergrowth leaving one just a few seconds to get your binoculars on one before they disappeared. Other birds like Blue-fronted Redstarts and Dark-breasted Rosefinches were much more accommodating as they were feeding more out in the open. In all, we got our first looks at several species including White-browed Fulvetta, Whiskered and Stripe-throated Yuhina, Striated Laughingthrush, Rufous Sibia and Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher.

When we finished up at Lampelri, we traveled about 20 minutes to an area where we tried to locate a Ward's Trogon. One was heard but kept out of view, so we proceeded down the road a little ways to where our mobile kitchen was set up for lunch. While we waited for the finishing touches to be set up for lunch, Saurabh spotted a Steppe Eagle gliding overhead and a Eurasian Kestrel was seen nearby as well. After eating another tasty meal,



we loaded back on the bus for a relatively long drive to our next destination. We made a few stops along the way as we saw birds here and there including our first Plumbeous and White-capped Redstarts, and then a planned stop at a location to look for the endangered White-bellied Heron. We continued on to the Damphu Resort where we would be staying the night. After getting settled in, we updated the checklist, ate dinner and then retired for the night. It was a good first day to start our adventure in Bhutan and we were looking forward to seeing what tomorrow would bring.

Friday, Nov 7 - Tsirang | Damphu | Punakha

It was another beautiful start to the day and with our bags packed we were ready to head down the road, but while waiting to depart we added a new bird as a pair of Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babblers made themselves visible. We drove a short distance down the road we came in on the day before and stopped to do some birding. As we walked along the road, the birds started to appear with several providing good looks. Blue-throated Barbet, Long-tailed Shrike, Red-vented Bulbul and Blue-whistling Thrush were all seen at close range perched in the open, while White-crested Laughingthrush, Rufous-bellied Niltava and Yellow-breasted Greenfinch moved about in the trees looking for breakfast.

From here we headed down the road a little further, where our mobile kitchen was set up for breakfast. Fueled up, we headed to the White-bellied Heron Conservation Center to see the work that the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) was doing on behalf of this critically endangered bird. Thinley Phuntsho, who is a Research Officer at the center, gave us a tour through the facilities and discussed the conservation efforts that the RSPN is undertaking to protect the White-bellied Heron and its habitat and the challenges associated with the work. We stayed at the center for a little over an hour before getting back on the bus to head back towards Punakha. Along the route, we stopped again at a vantage point along the Puna Tsang Chhu River to scan for the White-bellied Heron but were unsuccessful.

A little further down the road we met up with our mobile kitchen for lunch before continuing on. We stopped at another location to scan for the White-bellied Heron, but again were unsuccessful. As we neared Punakha, we got out of the bus and walked along the river to see if we could find any waterfowl or shorebirds or anything else present. A group of Ruddy Shelducks were seen on a gravel bar towards the middle of the river while a couple of Little Ringed Plovers and a River Lapwing were seen a little closer to shore. We finished up our walk at a location where a pair of Plumbeous and Hodgson's Redstarts were actively feeding along with several White Wagtails. From there it was a short drive to the Hotel River Valley where we would be staying for the next two nights. We grabbed our things and got settled into our rooms before gathering to update the checklist and have dinner. Then it was off to bed as we had another early start in the morning.



Saturday, Nov 8 - Punakha | Jigme Dorji National Park

We gathered at 5:30 AM and loaded onto the bus to head for Jigme Dorji National Park. It was overcast as we started toward the park with some clouds settling into the valley obscuring our view of the Mo Chhu River below. As we climbed in elevation, the clouds eventually started to clear, making for a beautiful start to the day. Shortly after passing through the entrance to the park, we got off the bus and walked for a short stretch along the road. Our first find was a very cooperative Pygmy Flycatcher, allowing us several good looks before we continued on. We then tried to coax a Spotted Elachura and a Large Niltava from their hiding places but were unsuccessful. A Yellow-bellied Fairy-Fantail doing some flycatching was a nice consolation however. We then got back in the bus and drove a little further into the park before getting back out to walk some more along the road. A pair of Small Niltavas, Gray-chinned Minivets and Himalayan Swiftlets were added along with a few other species. We tried to coax a Scaly-breasted Cupwing into view but again to no avail.

We then proceeded to where our mobile kitchen had set up for breakfast. After getting refueled we were about to continue further into the park before another Scaly-breasted Cupwing started singing nearby. This one turned out to be more accommodating than the first one and came into the clear for everyone to see. We then drove a little further up the road and got out of the bus to start walking again. We didn't get far however as we encountered a mixed feeding flock right next to us. Yellow-bellied Fairy-Fantail, Green-backed Tit, Gray-hooded Warbler, Black-throated Tit, Golden Babbler and Nepal Fulvetta were all present along with a few other species. We added a few other species as we worked our way up the road before we got back in the bus and retraced our way back out of the park. On our way back to Punakha we were able to see what was obscured by the low cloud cover. Golden fields of rice in the lower areas were surrounded by lush, green vegetation on the slopes. Combined with mostly clear blue skies and the occasional rows of poinsettias planted along the road that were in bloom, this made for a visual feast for the eyes.

As we came back into town, we met up with our mobile kitchen for a late lunch before visiting the Punakha Dzong, which is the second oldest and second largest dzong in Bhutan. Norbu served as our guide during our visit where he provided lots of interesting information regarding the dzong, including its dual role as an administrative site and a religious site. Once finished with the tour, we returned to our accommodations for a little downtime before gathering again to update the checklist, have dinner and return to our rooms to pack and rest up as we would be back on the road to our next destination in the morning.

Sunday, Nov 9 - Punakha | Phobjika Valley & Black-necked Cranes

Our visit to Punakha had been enjoyable but it was time to continue our journey to our next destination which was the Phobjika Valley. The plan was to break up the drive with occasional stops where we could get out and walk for a bit to see what we could find. Our first stop was pretty productive with several different species seen



including Barred Cuckoo-Dove, Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon, Black Bulbul, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Bhutan Laughingthrush and Red-tailed Minla. We checked out another section along the highway before meeting up with our mobile kitchen crew for breakfast. Fueled up we continued down the road to our next stop. As the sun got higher in the sky, the bird activity started to slow down a bit but we still enjoyed a nice variety of species as we added Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Striated Bulbul, Fire-tailed Myzornis and Green-tailed Sunbird to our growing list.

Our next two stops were pretty quiet as we tried to locate a Ward's Trogon without success, but the day was beautiful and so were the views. We eventually caught up with the mobile kitchen for lunch before continuing on. Before we hopped back in the bus, we walked up the road to check for one of our target birds - the Yellow-rumped Honeyguide. On a sheer cliff face, there were some beehives which are a favorite food source for the honeyguide. We were in luck as one was perched nearby, guarding the hives against other potential rivals.

From there, we drove a little further before turning off onto the Lawala-Gangtey Road which leads to the Phobjika Valley. Shortly after crossing the Lawala Pass, we got out of the bus and walked along the road for a bit. We added a few new species in Himalayan Buzzard, Rufous-vented Tit, Eurasian Wren and Plain Mountain Finch before continuing down the road into the Phobjika Valley. It was late afternoon now and the shadow of the ridge above us was now covering most of the valley below. We found a vantage point to get out and scan for Black-necked Cranes as they were the main reason we were here. We were in luck as a family of three were relatively close, but our spotting scopes provided a better view. Then it was on to the Gangtey Luxury Tented Camp where we would be staying for the next three nights. Before settling into our 'tents' we enjoyed some hot tea in the reception/restaurant. We returned a little later to update the checklist and to eat dinner, before heading to bed as we would have another early start in the morning.

Monday, Nov 10 - Phobjika Valley | Old Pelela Road

Our destination this morning was the Old Pelela Road which was a short distance from the Phobjika Valley. As we retraced our route on the Lawala-Gangtey Road we had a Kalij Pheasant cross in front of us making for a good start to the morning. Once we arrived at Old Pelela we got off the bus and started walking. We only made it a few yards before Norbu pointed to a bird that was flying towards us. It turned out to be a Wallcreeper and it landed close by providing everyone good looks. We continued on adding Black-faced Laughingthrush, Dark-rumped Rosefinch and Gray-sided Bush Warbler among others before arriving at our mobile kitchen for breakfast.

Fueled up, we continued down the road to see what else we could find. Rufous-vented Tit, Blue-fronted Redstart and White-winged Grosbeak were seen while we enjoyed what had turned into a beautiful morning. The group was starting to move on from one spot when Saurabh found a Lemon-rumped Warbler and while showing the



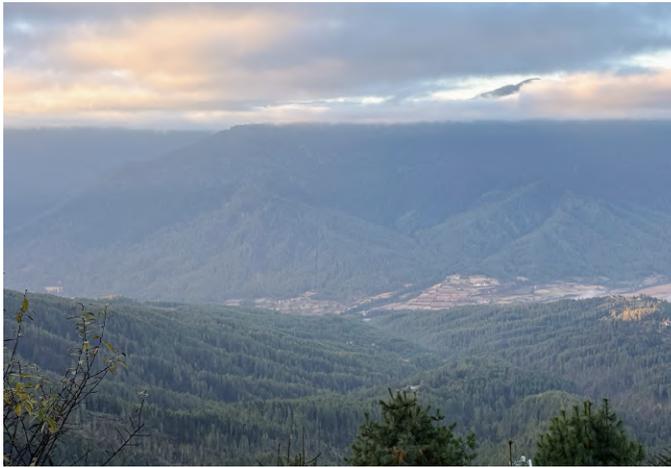
location of that bird to one of the group, another popped into view - a male Satyr Tragopan. The bird was in some dense cover but could be seen on occasion and most of the group was able to get a look at it. From here we walked a little further, coming across a Eurasian Sparrowhawk and a Mountain Hawk-Eagle before turning around and walking back up the road to where the bus was parked. We got in and drove a short distance back to where our mobile kitchen was waiting for us with lunch. Once we finished, we returned to the Phobjika Valley and the Black-necked Crane Conservation Center, before taking a little break back at our 'tents'.

Late afternoon we found a vantage point that looks out over the valley. Below us were several Black-necked Cranes scattered about feeding. We counted 14 in all, which was the number of cranes that had been recorded to date for the season at the crane center. As we enjoyed the view a large group of Red-billed Choughs circled high above, drifting by in front of us on a thermal and eventually fading from view, presumably heading to roost. We then returned for some more downtime before gathering again to update the checklist and eat dinner. Then it was off to bed. It had been a very enjoyable day and we were looking forward to taking part in the activities that would be taking place the following day.

Tuesday, Nov 11 - Festival of the Black-necked Cranes

A couple of hearty souls joined the guides for some early morning birding while the rest of the group enjoyed an extra hour of sleep before breakfast. The birding crew was able to add Oriental Skylark to the list and also got some closer looks of the Black-necked Cranes before joining the others for breakfast. Then it was off to the Gangtey Monastery for the Black-necked Crane Festival. After some official announcements, the group was treated to multiple dance performances by mostly local school children but some adults participated as well. There certainly was a pageantry associated with each performance with unique costumes and choreography. We spent the entire morning experiencing all aspects of the festival, both inside and outside of the monastery.

We returned for lunch and then took a brief break before most of the group went back to the monastery to hike the Gangtey Nature Trail. Lots of festival attendees had this idea as well so we had plenty of company as we proceeded down the trail. It was a little quiet to start but we eventually started running into some birds including a couple of new species in Rufous-breasted Accentor and Hodgson's Treecreeper. As we broke out of a treeline, the Phobjika Valley was laid out before us. We scanned looking for the Black-necked Cranes and discovered that there had been some new arrivals as the total number had increased from 14 to 23. We finished up our hike and returned to our lodging for a little break before dinner. Checklist completed, we then enjoyed our final meal at Gangtey Luxury Tented Camp.



Wednesday, Nov 12 - Phobjika Valley to Chumey Nature Resort

It was up early with our bags packed and back onto the bus so we could continue our journey through Bhutan. We said our farewell to the Phobjika Valley and the Black-necked Cranes and settled in for our ride to the Chumey Nature Resort, although we would be making stops along the way.

Our first stop was just past the Old Pelela Road intersection where we saw some familiar species as well as adding a new one in Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch. Then we met our mobile kitchen for breakfast before continuing down the road. It was only a couple of minutes before we saw a flock of Snow Pigeons whirling around up a slope and a short time after that, Norbu heard from the bus a Crested Kingfisher calling. We stopped to see if we could find it and found that there was a pair perched alongside a stream that paralleled the highway. At our next stop we heard a Streak-throated Scimitar-Babbler so we tried to get it to show itself but it remained out of sight. We did get another look at a Chestnut-headed Tesia which was a nice consolation. We continued walking along the road until we reached a bridge that crossed a stream. Norbu then received a call from our driver Tenzin who had heard a Ward's Trogon calling so we returned to see if our luck was any better with this trogon. Fortunately for us it was as we were able to get great looks at a male and pretty good looks at a female too.

We then got back on the bus, making another brief stop before reconnecting with our mobile kitchen for lunch. Shortly after getting off the bus, Saurabh spotted a Black Eagle gliding overhead which was a new species for the trip. After lunch we continued on, making a quick stop in Trongsa before climbing our way up to the Yotongla Pass and then starting our way down. We made one stop where we found a mixed flock of feeding birds, most of which were tits - Coal, Rufous-vented and Gray-crested. Then we headed to the Chumey Nature Resort for the night. Before we gathered for the checklist and dinner however, we tried to lure a Himalayan Owl in. We did hear one but it didn't come to investigate the 'intruder' that had showed up in the neighborhood.

Thursday, Nov 13 - Tharpaling Monastery | Jakar

It was a very early start to this morning as we were scheduled to pay a visit to the Tharpaling Monastery in hopes of seeing one of the most sought after birds in Bhutan - the Himalayan Monal. The monastery wasn't far away but the road leading to it was in a bit of disrepair making for very slow going up the mountainside.

As we arrived at the monastery, a monal crossed the road in front of us and then we saw another just prior to parking and getting out of the bus. We were at some of the living quarters for the monks and monals would frequent this area as they had discovered over time that they could get a little extra sustenance in the form of discarded food scraps tossed out by the monks. As we walked around the area it was quiet at first before Tenzin found a couple of females in between two buildings. Then a couple of males were spotted up the slope. We



watched them take flight and glide down past us out of sight. Then a male joined the females we had been watching, providing excellent views. Himalayan Monals now seemed to be on all sides of us so we enjoyed them for as long as we could before they retreated out of sight. The sun was peeking through a window in the mostly overcast sky casting rays of sunlight on the valley below us. The morning couldn't get much better but then a Himalayan Serow was spotted near the top of the ridge above us which was an unexpected treat.

Completely satisfied with our experience at the monastery, we capped it off by eating our breakfast in one of the facilities there with our mobile kitchen doing the honors once again. Then we headed back to our lodging to grab our bags so we could continue on to Jakar. Along the way we stopped to do some more birding along the highway before having lunch and then arriving midafternoon at our lodging and a little bit of downtime. We gathered for the checklist and dinner and then retired early as we would have an early departure in the morning.

Friday, Nov 14 - Jakar to Yongkola

Another early start to the day as we had a bit of a drive to Yongkola and we wanted to fit in some birding along the way. Shortly after getting on the road we had a bit of good fortune as a Himalayan Owl flew across the road in front of us. We stopped, got out of the bus and were able to relocate the bird perched in a tree. It flew back across the road and perched in another tree in clear view allowing the group great looks.

We continued on for a couple of hours until we reached our mobile kitchen. It was pretty chilly with frost on the ground but the sun was shining and there was no wind making for pleasant conditions. After finishing breakfast it was back on the road. We had been driving about a half hour when we had more good fortune as we came across a large flock of Blood Pheasants feeding along the side of the road. We watched and took as many pictures as possible before they disappeared into the vegetation.

Then we traveled another half hour before stopping to walk for a bit along the highway. It was a bit quiet but we did get treated to a couple of Large-billed Crows harassing a Eurasian Sparrowhawk and one of the crows doing the same to a Himalayan Griffon. We continued on for another hour before stopping to walk again. As we were checking out some small birds upslope of us, Saurabh saw a Red Panda on the downslope. As he motioned for the group to come over and take a look, a second one came out of some bamboo into the open while the first disappeared out of view. The second one stayed long enough for everyone to see before it too moved on. We waited for quite a while to see if they would reappear but they stayed out of sight. It was a great find nonetheless and made a very good morning even better.



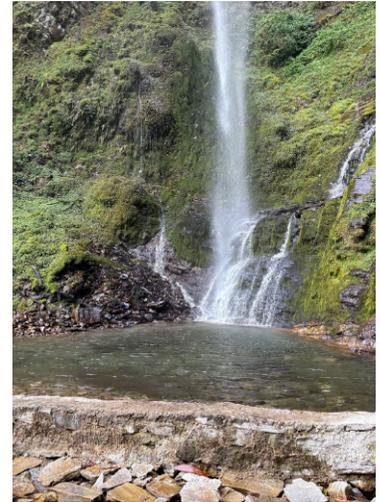
We moved on and a little over an hour we had caught up to our mobile kitchen for lunch. Refueled, we continued on enjoying the scenery along the way and watching a predominantly coniferous forest change into a deciduous forest in what seemed like a matter of minutes. We stopped again mid afternoon to walk along the highway. It was quiet at first but activity began to pick up fairly quickly. Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Bronzed Drongo, Yellow-cheeked Tit and Rufous-winged Fulvetta were seen along with several other species including a brief look at a pair of Rufous-necked Hornbills. Then it was on to our lodging at the Trogon Villa where we would be staying the next three nights. Upon arrival we settled into our rooms and then gathered for the checklist and dinner before retiring for the evening.

Saturday, Nov 15 - Yongkola

A little later start this morning as we gathered at 6:00 AM for coffee or tea and some crackers and cookies. Then we headed back into Phrumsengla National Park which we had passed through the day before to see what we could find. At our first stop we heard a Long-tailed Broadbill and a couple of Scaly-breasted Cupwings calling but all remained hidden. At our next stop we walked for a bit and a distant Bay Woodpecker calling was all we recorded.

The third stop was a little lower in elevation and almost immediately we encountered more bird activity. Oriental Honey-buzzard, Himalayan Griffon, Crested Serpent-Eagle, Mountain Hawk-Eagle and Black Eagle were seen cruising the skies above while Rufous-necked Hornbill, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Golden-throated Barbet, Gray-chinned Minivet, Bronzed Drongo, Yellow-cheeked Tit, White-naped Yuhina, Rusty-fronted Barwing, Sapphire Flycatcher, Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker and Green-tailed Sunbird were just some of the birds we found in the canopy. During this period we stopped for breakfast but it was hard to eat with lots of birds nearby. We saw our mobile kitchen again for lunch as we finished off our morning walk before returning to our lodging for a little break before heading back out mid afternoon.

We checked out a new area for our afternoon walk which produced some new species in Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Common Green-Magpie, Striated Yuhina, Blue-winged Minla and Streaked Spiderhunter before trying for a few nocturnal species. Our main target was Hodgson's Frogmouth but if there was one nearby it was staying quiet. We did hear a Brown Wood-Owl calling but it remained out of sight so we decided to drive back into the park to see if we could find anything along the road. We eventually were rewarded with a sighting of a Bhutan Giant Flying Squirrel and were able to get some photos of this beautiful creature. On our return to the lodge we also encountered a couple of Northern Red Muntjac (a.k.a. - Barking Deer) alongside the road to cap off our wildlife viewing for the day. Then it was checklist, dinner and off to bed.



Sunday, Nov 16 - Yongkola

This morning we returned to the area we visited the previous afternoon and found several species that we had already encountered, but we did get extended looks at a couple of Spotted Forktails which was much appreciated. We met our mobile kitchen for breakfast and then returned to Phrumsengla National Park for the remainder of the morning. As we walked along the road, Tenzin had found a Himalayan Cutia which was new for the trip. As everyone gathered to see the bird, we discovered there were two. Fortunately for us, the cutias stayed in the same general area so everyone was able to get good views. There were several other birds moving about so we continued to scan to see if there were any other new species mixed in. Lesser Yellownape and a brief view of an Orange-tailed Leafbird were the only other additions. We did see two more Orange-tailed Leafbirds a little further up the road that stayed in view long enough for everyone to get a look.

The bird activity was slowing down a bit which was fine as it was time to eat lunch. We then returned to our lodging to take a break before heading back out midafternoon. During our afternoon walk we added three more species in Rufous-bellied Eagle, Crimson-naped Woodpecker and Yellow-throated Fulvetta. We finished up our birding with a second attempt for a Hodgson's Frogmouth but again were unsuccessful. On our way back however we did encounter a large male Sambar alongside the road which was a nice surprise. We gathered for the checklist and dinner before retiring to our rooms to pack and get some sleep.

Monday, Nov 17 - Yongkola | Bumthang

Early departure this day as we had a fairly long drive ahead of us. We had enjoyed our time at the Trogon Villa and birding the surrounding area, but it was time to continue our adventure. As we retraced our route back to Jakar, we stopped momentarily to take some photos of the mountains to the east just before the sun emerged above them. It was a beautiful scene and a very nice memory to take home from this area of Bhutan.

We continued on a little further before stopping at a location where our mobile kitchen was waiting for us. This spot was next to a small restaurant/lodge and since it was a chilly start to the morning we opted to eat indoors where a wood burning stove made it quite comfortable. Then it was back on the road making one planned stop to look for birds and Red Pandas. The birds were a bit quiet but we did see some Black-faced Laughingthrushes and some White-winged Grosbeaks, but no pandas. We moved on enjoying the countryside around us. Just a short distance up the road, we rounded a corner to see a Red Panda in the road. We watched from the bus as the panda trotted down the road away from us. It eventually left the road and entered into some cover on the downhill slope. We then got out of the bus to see if we could locate it but the vegetation was thick enough to prevent us from getting another look.



Smiles on our faces after the panda encounter, we continued down the road stopping briefly when we encountered birds and to take photos of the wonderful landscape. We eventually caught up with our mobile kitchen for lunch before settling back into the bus for the remainder of our drive back to Jakar. Having arrived at our hotel we found our rooms and took a break before gathering for the checklist and dinner. Then it was back to our rooms to pack our things and prepare for our flight back to Paro in the morning.

Tuesday, Nov 18 - Flight to Paro | Downtown Paro | Ibisbill

A relaxed start to this morning as our flight was scheduled for 9:30 allowing everyone to sleep in a little before eating breakfast. Afterwards we grabbed our bags and headed to the airport which was a short drive from the hotel. Checked in, we didn't have to wait long for our plane to arrive. We boarded and then enjoyed the roughly 30 minute flight to Paro. Tenzin was there waiting for us so we got back on the bus and headed for our hotel to check in and rest a bit before going to a restaurant for lunch.

After lunch we took a little time to explore some of the shops in downtown Paro where most of the group found some items to take home with them. Then it was time to do a little more birding in hopes of finding a couple of species that we hadn't seen yet - Ibisbill and Black-tailed Crake. As we drove along the Paro River, it didn't take long for Norbu to spot an Ibisbill resting on a rock in the river. We got out of the bus and set up our scopes so everyone could get a good look at this unique bird. Then we turned around and headed back along the river to a different location to look for the crake. It wasn't long after we arrived at the spot that Tenzin located one in a marshy area next to the river. There ended up being three all together and we stayed long enough for everyone to get a good look before returning to the hotel.

It was late in the afternoon so we dropped off our gear and purchases in our rooms and then gathered in the reception area to do the checklist before heading to dinner. Then it was back to the hotel to get some rest as the next day would be our last day in Bhutan.

Wednesday, Nov 19 - Chelela Pass Birding | Tiger's Nest

Our last full day in Bhutan had arrived and the group intended to make the most of it. Most would be going on a hike to the famed Tiger's Nest Monastery and the rest would drive up to the Chelela Pass for some more birding. The birding party departed first as it took a little over an hour to get to the pass. On the way up they encountered a small group of Blood Pheasants, providing some nice photo opportunities as the sun was now above the horizon. A little further up they found a couple of new species for the trip in a White-collared Blackbird and a Dusky Thrush. Upon reaching the pass another new species was added in multiple White-



throated Redstarts along with excellent looks at Himalayan White-browed Rosefinches. The group then took a break for breakfast with the mobile kitchen doing the honors.

The hiking party departed the hotel an hour after the birding party, starting their hike to the Tiger's Nest a little after 7:00 AM. Individuals in the group hiked at their own pace up to the Tea House which is a souvenir shop/cafeteria. One couple remained at this location enjoying the views with the rest continuing on to the Tiger's Nest. After touring the monastery, folks returned to the Tea House to grab a bite for lunch before making their way back down the trail to the parking area. Then it was back to the hotel for a well needed rest.

After breakfast, the birding party started working their way back towards Paro, stopping and walking sections of the road to see what they could find. It was a little quiet at times but then they would encounter a mixed feeding flock to sort through before continuing down the road. They met the mobile kitchen crew for lunch for the last time before slowly working their way down the mountain. Green Shrike-Babbler, Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler and Spotted Laughingthrush were added to the trip list. One group of birds that had been eluding the group for most of the trip were parrotbills. Both parties managed to see Brown Parrotbills on this final day.

The group gathered for the checklist, shared some of their highlights from the trip and then had our last dinner together before returning to our rooms to pack and get some rest as we would have an early departure in the morning.

Thursday, Nov 20 - Departures

Our flight back to New Delhi had been moved up to 7:50 AM so we left our hotel at 5:00 just to make sure we were at the airport in plenty of time since this was an international flight. We received a boxed breakfast from the hotel which we ate while we waited to board.

It was a beautiful morning so when we got in the air we were treated to some spectacular views as we watched the Himalayan Mountains for nearly the duration of the flight. Once back in New Delhi, we went through immigration and then grabbed our bags. Some would be staying at a hotel in the airport and others would stay at the Roseate House where we started our adventure. We said our farewells and wished each other safe travels home. The tour was over but we will be reliving our travels in India and across Bhutan for quite some time. It had been a great trip with incredible wildlife and spectacular landscapes. Here's hoping our paths cross again on another adventure with Naturalist Journeys.

A BIG THANK YOU TO NORBU AND SAURABH FOR PUTTING US ON SOME GREAT BIRDS THROUGHOUT THE TRIP AND TO TENZIN FOR GETTING US TO ALL OF OUR DESTINATIONS SAFELY!!

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Favorite bird/animal/experience

Cliff - Fire-tailed Myzornis & lunch in the field

Eric - Hornbills, tigers & the Bhutan Giant Flying Squirrel

Jackie - Ward's Trogon, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Indian Roller & tigers

Kathy - Rufous-necked Hornbill

Leslie - Himalayan Monal & all of the mammals

Margaret - Fire-tailed Myzornis, all of the trees & the Tiger's Nest

Peggy - Tigers & visiting both countries

Randy - All of the new birds & tigers

Susan - Ward's Trogon, Green-tailed Sunbird, the wildlife in general, the guides & the mobile kitchen crew

Walter - Himalayan Monal

Photos: Group (Kent Skaggs - KS), Ward's Trogon (Clifford Drowley - CD), Himalayan Monal (CD), Punakha Dzong (KS), Plum-headed Parakeets (KS), Ken River (KS), Purple Sunbird (CD), Tiger (Jackie and Eric White), Rhesus Macaque (KS), Spotted Owlet (KS), Rufous-vented Yuhina (Randy Skaggs - RS), Scenic (Leslie Drake - LD), Blue-throated Barbet (KS), White-throated Kingfisher (KS), Jigme Dorji National Park (KS), Punakha Dzong (LD), Red-tailed Minla (CD), Black-necked Crane Festival (KS), Black-necked Cranes (KS), Himalayan Monal (CD), View from the Tharpaling Monastery Complex (KS), Tharpaling Monastery Complex (KS), Blood Pheasant (CD), View from the Semtokha-Trashigang Highway (KS), Red Panda (KS), Phrumsengla National Park (RS), Rufous-necked Hornbill (RS), Trogon Villa Lodge (KS), Bhutan Giant Flying Squirrel (KS), Lunch along the Semtokha-Trashigang Highway (KS), View of Mt. Jomolhari (left) and Mt. Jichu Drake (right) (KS)