

ITINERARY  
**BHUTAN**  
*April 3-22, 2027*



*The Himalayan Monal is one of the spectacular pheasants found in Bhutan. This species is found in the higher elevation forests, and is one of nine pheasant species we'll seek. Photograph by participant Steve Broste.*

*We include here information for those interested in the 2027 Field Guides Bhutan tour:*

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

*Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:*

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our website)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

**B**hutan, a rampart stretch of the Himalayas that nestles between Tibet and India, is not only a land of great, jagged, snowy peaks, it also holds some of the most extensive remaining tracts of Himalayan forest, sadly severely depleted elsewhere in this range. While the mountainous terrain has enabled this land of breathtaking beauty and fascinating culture to remain isolated from the outside world for centuries (television was not introduced here until 1999), Bhutan has increasingly opened its doors to visitors, allowing us to explore this almost mystical wonderland of birds. Some 700 species have been recorded in a country barely half the size of Scotland—and now it even has its own field guide! A surprisingly good and (mostly) lightly-traveled network of roads now wends its way over passes and down into valleys,

permitting us to encounter some of the world's most sought-after species, many of which have been reduced in numbers through habitat loss elsewhere.

"A stunning mosaic of unusually broad biodiversity and enlightened conservation practices, Bhutan is amongst the world's unique and most valuable intact ecosystems. Because of its location on the junction of two major biogeographical realms—the temperate Palearctic and the tropical Indo-Malayan—and extreme variations in climate and altitude, Bhutan possesses one of the world's most remarkable assemblages of charismatic vertebrates and more than 60% of the endemic species of the Eastern Himalayas." These words of Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji, Bhutan's Minister of Agriculture, are understandably self-serving; they are also accurate – and how many ministers could make such claims with a straight face?! We suspect you have asked for this itinerary because, whether by word of mouth or from magazine articles, you have heard that Bhutan is a special place: more than 60% of its forests remain intact, the population density is less than 10% that of its neighbors (how many countries have a capital city of only 80,000 people?), the flora (more than 5,400 species) and fauna (e.g. 165 mammals and 700-plus birds, over 400 of them resident) are rich, and the local culture fascinating.

This is a tour to show you both the beauty of this mountain kingdom and the delights of its fascinating wildlife, yet without the difficulties of trekking. As there are so few hotels in Bhutan, however, our journey does necessitate at least two, and perhaps three or four, nights of camping, but our efficient ground crew will ensure that this outfitted camping experience will add to the ambiance of being in Bhutan. This will enable us to be on the spot at some truly superb birding locations where we will walk through oak and rhododendron forests, beneath trees festooned with lichens, mosses, ferns, and orchids in search of such tantalizing delights as Satyr Tragopan, Scarlet Finch, Fire-tailed Myzornis, and the enormous Rufous-necked Hornbill. We realize that the "c" word ("camping") is anathema to some, and it is a decision we do not make lightly, but the accommodations in certain areas simply do not exist or are not adequate, and the birding far too good to pass by. Our outfitter has large tents in which you can stand up fully; they can hold two single cots (with mattresses!) with room to spare for your luggage. Trust us that the professional camp staff is good: for decades in Bhutan, a significant number of ecotourist nights have been spent in outfitted camps or on treks. What we ask them to do is routine for them. In addition to setting up and striking our camps, the staff will prepare many good outdoor meals (nearly all of our breakfasts and lunches will be picnics), with mountain backdrops to forest foregrounds; bring your binoculars to breakfast and lunch! The staff has earned the affection and admiration of all on our previous tours. Note that away from our hotels, camps and meals, bathrooms will be bushes. Along the roads while we are birding, privacy is limited, and thicker bushes may require a little agility to get up or down a bank. In camp and at picnics, a couple of toilet tents, with a seat on a frame above a latrine hole, are employed.



*We'll spend a few nights in camps, where we'll wake to the sounds of prayer flags fluttering and birds singing.  
Photograph by participant Jonathan Newman.*

Our visit has been timed to enjoy the greatest diversity of birdlife: spring remains part of the dry season before the summer monsoon breaks, Bhutan's resident birds will be in full song, and many migrants will be heading north to cross the mountains en route to Tibet and beyond. Many species that move to higher altitudes to breed should still be present at the lower elevations where they have wintered, while others will be arriving from southern India to breed in the forests. As a bonus, some species of rhododendrons, magnolias, and orchids should already be in flower, too.

Even those who have visited India before will find that many of the birds will be new to them. Indeed, many species that are considered rare in Nepal or Thailand are more easily seen in Bhutan. Our experience is that most people simply love the country, including the birding. Join us in pursuit of pheasants, Ibisbill, Ward's Trogon, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Beautiful Nuthatch, and such spectacles as sunbirds in the rhododendrons.

*We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.*

## Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS & WALKING:** We'll do moderate amounts of walking (up to 2-3 miles per day), mostly along roadsides, both paved and dirt/gravel. In some cases, there will be moderate elevational change, though these are usually gentle rather than steep grades; where possible, we'll travel downhill. In some instances, we may walk off the road onto dirt trails (optional).
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** We regularly drive for long periods on this tour. Participants must be able to step up (and step down) 10-12 inches to get into and out of our vehicles. On most days, breakfasts and lunches will be hot meals served in the field, under a dining fly if the weather is – or threatens to be – inclement. Tent camping is necessary on several nights, and several lodges are basic.
- **PACE:** After an early departure (we're typically on the road by 5:00 a.m., occasionally earlier), we'll bird for several hours before stopping for a hot breakfast in the field. We'll then bird for the remainder of the morning. On most days, we'll bird our way to our next destination after lunch; if we're staying at the same location for multiple days, we may offer a short break after lunch before heading back out in the late afternoon. Once we reach Bhutan, it's usually possible to get 7-8 hours of sleep per night.
- **WEATHER:** Temperatures will range from the low 40s at night to 70s F during the day. Overall, the weather should be generally pleasant, but you should come prepared for some light rain, occasional heavy rain for a day, and also for some chilly starts, with temperatures just a few degrees above freezing. There is a small possibility of snow at the highest locations, but it does not stick long in April.
- **ELEVATION:** We will reach an altitude of 12,750 feet on several days of this tour, including on our first full day in Bhutan, and will be at or over 10,000' on at least eight days of the tour. We will always sleep at elevations lower than the higher passes we bird, but there are several higher-elevation nights: at Gangtey Gompa/Phobjika Valley (10,000'; 3000m), Sengor (9,600'; 2900m) and Trongsa (7200'; 2200m).
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Participants must be prepared to make comfort stops in nature, as there are simply no other options (away from our lodgings) on most sections of this tour's route. We will have a tented latrine available at every outdoor meal spot, and two such latrines at all camping locations.
- **OPTING OUT:** Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or sometimes a half-day. This will not be possible on days when we are changing locations (as we do often on this tour).

Our plan is to provide a thorough cross-section of Bhutan's accessible habitats. We will certainly concentrate on the specialties, but so few are the opportunities to see many Himalayan birds that most species will be "specialties" for most participants, and we will enjoy them all.

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.



## About the Birding Areas

Bhutan has only one main road, traversing the country from east to west, and until recently, there was only one basic plan: drive out and back along the one road and its various spurs. Fortunately, now there are a few more roads and these roads pass through a variety of dry and moist conifer and broad-leaved forests of different exposures from high to low. Our stops are selected to spend time in each of the main habitats as we climb and drop and climb and drop, overall working our way through 12,000 feet (3600m) of life zones. While 60% of Bhutan is forested, along the roads the percentage is less, as you would expect, but there are still many excellent birding areas between the cleared regions, and the view over vast tracks of wilderness is inspiring. Despite Bhutan's small size, travel is time consuming; the longest straight stretch of road is reported to be 900 meters. Instead, Bhutan is all curves, climbing and descending, and on a number of days, our "travel time" may consume as much as half of our day. However, the views from our bus are ever-changing, and simply seeing what is out the window is a rewarding part of our tour of Bhutan.

This is not a cultural tour of Bhutan, but we will undertake a few cultural activities. We will try to visit a dzong or two, and we will stop to photograph a handful of dzongs, chortens, water-driven prayer wheels, and the like; some will be right where we are birding or staying. We will offer one or two short shopping outings (primarily lovely textiles, and mainly in Paro). And throughout the tour you will feel immersed in the country, about which our local guide will provide much detail. Our birder's route takes us to areas beyond the normal tourist route, areas that are remote in time and space, contributing to what is really a moderate cultural experience for a birding tour.

Over the years, our itinerary has varied as the Government of Bhutan opened new areas to tourists and depending on which border crossings were open. If some unexpected geopolitical flip-flop occurs, we'll adjust our route as necessary and still have a great time. A further warning: flight schedules sometimes change, and in past years this has meant that there weren't daily flights between Delhi and Paro. If that happens again, we'll almost certainly add a day to the 16 nights we currently have planned in Bhutan. In that case, the tour fee will be adjusted up or down by only the additional fixed, in-country costs. What we promise is that we will do something representative of wonderful Bhutan, that you will enjoy every day of it, and that we will keep you informed as to what the itinerary will be.

We recommend that you consider coming at least a day early to start to deal with jet lag, to make sure that you get to India on time, and so forth. Through our local tour operator, we can arrange for extra nights, local birding outings, or overnight trips to the Taj Mahal or other parts of India.

**A Note About the Tour Fee:** This is an expensive tour. Bhutan limits tourist visits by linking visas to the use of an authorized local operator and by requiring local operators to charge a minimum per person per day "Sustainable Development Fee" for even basic services, with perhaps a third of that going back to the government; thus does Bhutan control the influx and make tourism profitable. A visit to Bhutan is truly special privilege, and one has to pay for it.



*The White-breasted Parrotbill is a range-restricted species found in Bhutan, and parts of northern India and Tibet.  
Photograph by participant Steve Broste.*

## Itinerary for Bhutan

**Day 1, Sat, 3 Apr. Departure for India.** Leaving from North America means a departure today on an overnight flight. There are nonstop flights available from several US airports, plus more traditional changes of plane through Europe and Asia. It is a good idea to arrive in New Delhi in advance of the tour to ensure your (and your luggage's) timely arrival and to start to adjust to a very different time zone.

**Day 2, Sun, 4 Apr. Arrival in Delhi; Delhi area.** Most flights will reach Delhi on the evening of Day 2; our local agent will meet you for your transfer to our hotel near the airport. **Please note that if you arrive today, you may do so only hours before our very early departure on Day 3 to catch our flight to Bhutan.** We really do recommend coming early! Be sure to remember to reset the time on your watch and alarm clock. During our tour, Delhi is 9½ hours ahead of Eastern daylight time (5½ hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time); when it's noon in New York (9 a.m. in Los Angeles), it's 9:30 p.m. in Delhi. If you take medication for high elevation, plan ahead for Day 4. Night at hotel in New Delhi near Indira Ghandi International Airport.

**Day 3, Mon, 5 Apr. Flight to Paro; Paro Valley.** Flights to Paro are often early in the morning, perhaps very early, like 5 a.m. (meaning a 1:45 departure from the hotel!), and breakfast may be a snack at the airport and a meal on the flight. If the weather is clear, the magic will begin towards the end of our short flight as the haze is pierced by an impressive line of jagged snowy peaks—among them Mt. Everest and the massif of Kangchenjunga—stretching across the horizon on our descent towards Paro and leaving us in little doubt that we are indeed on our way to a wonderful place!

After clearing immigration and customs, changing money, changing our watches and alarm clocks by a half hour, and buying SIM cards, stamps, and post cards, we will have some time (half a day to most of a day, depending on our flight time) to scan the riverside shingle for one of the world's most sought-after waders—the peculiar Ibisbill. The Paro Valley is well cultivated, with the dry flanking slopes clothed in Blue Pine and patches of evergreen forest. Armed with the compact *Birds of Bhutan* by Carol and Tim Inskipp and Richard Grimmett, we'll sort out such typical avian inhabitants of the valley as Hodgson's, Plumbeous, and White-capped redstarts, Gray-backed Shrike, White Wagtail, Russet Sparrow, and Red-billed Chough. If we have had a very early flight, we will head for the hotel in time for substantial recuperation. Night in Paro.

**Day 4, Tue, 6 Apr. Chele La; drive to Thimphu.** Today will offer our first chance for several of Bhutan's pheasants, which are always a challenge. A very early start (probably our earliest of the tour, at around 4:30 a.m.) will take us to more than 12,000 feet at Chele La (la=pass), where we will scan the slopes for these spectacular species. On a clear morning, the view over the Paro and Ha valleys can be fantastic, and today will be a wonderful kaleidoscope of Bhutan. Pheasants are not the only denizens of Chele La, and in this high-elevation scrub (above tree line), we will look for lingering rosefinches, accentors, and grosbeaks and arriving bush-robins. The forests on the way back to Paro are also birdy, and we will hope for several warblers, tits, Hodgson's Treecreeper, and Spotted and Black-faced laughingthrushes.

After some final birding in the Paro valley, we'll take a several-hour drive east to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, situated at an elevation of 7800 feet (2300 m). We'll undoubtedly stop for a new bird or two, including Ibisbill, if we didn't get lucky quickly on our arrival day. Thimphu, with its narrow, winding streets and fluttering prayer flags, must be unique in world; surely, it's the only capital city with no traffic lights! Many of the buildings have beautifully carved facades, and some of the shops have no conventional door—access is by a short ladder to the window! Please note that Tuesdays are “dry” in Bhutan, which means, perhaps, no alcohol at dinner. Overnight in Thimphu.



*We'll look for Black-faced Laughingthrush in the forests of the Paro valley.  
Photograph by participant Steve Broste.*

**Day 5, Wed, 7 Apr. To Punakha; the Mo Chhu Valley.** An early start is necessary to reach Dochu La (10,450' / 3215 m) in time to admire a vista of Himalayan peaks (if the weather is clear). As we ascend the ridge to the pass, we'll leave the dry conifer forest behind and enter a moister, lush environment with a more varied avifauna. This area supports many “charismatic vertebrates”: Yellow-billed Blue-Magpie, the amazing Fire-tailed Myzornis (an erratic, moss-green and red sunbird-like parrotbill), Green Shrike-Babbler, Rufous-vented Yuhina, Mrs. Gould's and Green-tailed sunbirds, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, and many others. Continuing on our winding mountain route through superb stretches of luxuriant forest, we'll make our first attempts for Ward's Trogon. (This isn't our best spot, but they are possible here.) There should be much passerine activity to enjoy. Even at this time of the year, many of the birds will be in mixed-species flocks (bird parties) that suddenly appear as twittering and trilling “waves” comprising the likes of Blue-winged Minla, Black-throated Tit, Black-faced and Lemon-rumped warblers, Blyth's Leaf-Warbler, Whiskered Yuhina, and Rufous-winged Fulvetta. And a recording of Collared Owlet could produce similar collections of lifers. We'll then descend to Bhutan's former capital, Punakha, located in a dry valley. We plan to spend the late afternoon touring the valley's massive dzong, an amazing building with a long history and much current use. Punakha, at 4160 feet (1280 m), is situated by the confluence of the mighty Mo Chhu (chu=chhu=river) and Po Chhu, the two forming the Puna Tsang Chhu, where we will look for lingering waterfowl and migrating shorebirds. Night in Punakha.



*One of our cultural highlights will be a visit to the immense Punakha Dzong, situated at the confluence of the Mo Chhu and Po Chhu rivers. We'll also spend time birding here, looking for waterbirds. Photograph by participant Michael Boss.*

**Day 6, Thu, 8 Apr. Punakha to Pele La and the Phobjika Valley.** This morning is atypical—we'll start with an emphasis on waterbirds! We'll bird along the Po Chhu, the Mo Chhu, and the Puna Tsang Chhu, where we'll have chances of finding the rare Pallas' Fish-Eagle and, if we're very lucky, one of the world's largest and rarest herons, the White-bellied Heron, though there are fewer and fewer reports of this threatened species from this part of Bhutan. The shingle banks of the river can also be home to Ibisbill, and we'll hope for a late Bar-headed Goose or Pallas's Gull en route to its nesting grounds by lakeshores high up on the Tibetan plateau. A number of elevated overlooks will allow us to scan for lingering waterfowl and shorebirds – Ruddy Shelducks, Common Sandpiper, and Little Ringed Plover among them – and Brown Dipper and various kingfishers are distinct possibilities. The mix of scrubby woodland and agricultural fields along the river banks will undoubtedly yield a variety of new species, possibly including Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler, Crested Bunting, Himalayan Prinia, Indian White-eye, Scaly-breasted Munia, and several warblers.

Once we've had our fill of river birds, we'll work our way east, climbing the long, mountainous flank of Pele La. An old, abandoned road near the summit will give us access to high elevation birds without the hazards of passing traffic. Satyr Tragopan, Himalayan Monal, Darjeeling and Rufous-bellied woodpeckers, Fire-tailed Sunbird, accentors and a variety of rosefinches are all possible here. Late in the afternoon, we'll backtrack a short distance westward then turn south over a shoulder of the ridge to drop into the Phobjika Valley, a scenic high elevation valley with a marshy bottom that is the primary wintering spot in Bhutan for Black-necked Crane. The cranes should be gone, though in some years, we have seen a couple of lingering cripples in April – a bittersweet addition to the list! Night at Yu Loki Guest House in the Phobjika Valley near Gangtey Gompa.

**Day 7, Fri, 9 Apr. Phobjika valley to Trongsa.** We spend another morning birding in the Phobjika valley, on the slopes leading up to Pele La, and along the old Pele La road again. Then, we'll work our way eastwards to the city of Trongsa, stopping briefly at the historic Chendebji Chorten and having a picnic lunch along the way. Trongsa, seat of the Wangchuk dynasty before they became the country's rulers, is home to another impressive dzong, which we'll visit in the late afternoon. Night in Trongsa.

**Day 8, Sat, 10 Apr. Trongsa to Tingtibi.** From Trongsa, we will head south to Tingtibi (where we'll camp), a location that allows us to bird lower and middle elevation forests. Here, we can hope for such specialties as Rusty-fronted Barwing, Yellow-throated Fulvetta, and Rufous-necked Hornbill, along with more widespread species such as Black Eagle, Blue-throated Barbet, Blue-bearded Bee-Eater, and Golden Babbler. In the past, we have occasionally found a pair of the rarely-encountered Beautiful Nuthatch, one of Bhutan's special birds, in the area. We'll also watch for Rufous-bellied Eagle, Asian Emerald Cuckoo, Speckled Piculet, Black-winged Cuckooshrike, Blue-winged, Gray-sided, and

Rufous-chinned laughingthrushes, Red-faced Liocichla, White-naped Yuhina, White-browed Shrike-Babbler, White-tailed Robin, Pale Blue Flycatcher, and some of the monospecific, erratic wintering flocks of Scarlet Finches, Spot-winged Grosbeaks, Tibetan Serins, and Yellow-breasted Greenfinches. Trees here are festooned with lichens and clumps of ferns and epiphytic orchids, rich foraging places for Rufous Sibia, Sikkim Treecreeper, and the rarer Himalayan Cutia. This stretch will also be our first chance to look for the rare and local Golden Langur, which was first described for science in 1955 and is known only from a tiny wedge in Bhutan, barely extending into northern India. Troops may feed leisurely on the leaves of roadside trees, so if we can find them, we may get some good, long views.

Our destination is near the village of Tingtibi (2300 feet; 700m). Where we will make camp varies from year to year; we have used sites ranging from 800 to 1200m (2700 to 4000 feet) in elevation. From camp, we may see Great Hornbills, and other “yard birds” could include Barred Cuckoo-Dove, Greater and Lesser yellownapes, Gray-capped Pygmy-Woodpecker, White-tailed Nuthatch, Gray Treepie, Scarlet Minivet, and Black-crested Bulbul. Within a few kilometers of camp along the road are some moist canyons where we will seek Pin-tailed and Wedge-tailed green-pigeons, Blue-throated Flycatcher, Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike, Orange-bellied Leafbird, several elusive laughingthrushes, Striated Yuhina, Bronzed, Hair-crested, and Lesser Racket-tailed drongos, and the very local Rufous-faced Warbler. In recent years, this has been the most reliable region for White-bellied Heron, which breeds locally, and can sometimes be seen along the Mangde Chhu. Night in Tingtibi area.



*We'll watch for Great Hornbills at our camp near Tingtibi. Photograph by participant Ephraim Heller.*

**Day 9, Sun, 11 Apr. Tingtibi to Panbang.** After breakfast in camp near Tingtibi, today's journey takes us down the valley of the Mangde Chhu to Manas. Our first couple of hours will be spent near Tingtibi in an area of extensive bamboo in which we can look for a variety of bamboo specialists, including Pale-headed Woodpecker, White-hooded Babbler, White-breasted and Pale-billed (formerly Greater and Lesser Rufous-headed) parrotbills, and Yellow-bellied Warbler. We will almost certainly miss a few of the bamboo birds, some which we may encounter in smaller bamboo patches over the next several days. Patches of forest in this area can be good for cuckoos (Banded Bay, Indian, and even Chestnut-winged, and Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo), Pin-tailed Green-Pigeon, and some skulking laughingthrushes like Greater and Lesser Necklaced. We should also have more chances for Golden Langur.

As we journey down the valley, the forested gorge is so narrow that the road has to climb, and we will make opportunistic stops in forest patches at different elevations to look for more barbets, cuckoos, bulbuls, warblers, and laughingthrushes. As we descend again, small areas of bamboo and wild bananas offer more chances for some of the babblers and parrotbills.

Our destination is the small community of Panbang, located near the confluence of the Drangme Chhu and Mangde Chhu (below which it is the Manas Chhu). Depending on when we arrive, we may have some time to bird the scrub along

the road near our lodging, where we may find birds like Asian Barred Owlet, Gray-throated Babbler, Common Iora, and Yellow-vented Flowerpecker, and Great and Wreathed hornbills can sometimes be seen flying across the hillside opposite the camp. Night in Marang Jungle Camp near Panbang.

**Day 10, Mon, 12 Apr. Royal Manas National Park; Panbang to Nganglam.** In the early morning, we'll continue birding near camp before returning for breakfast around 7:00-7:30. For the remainder of the morning, we will explore the 15 kilometers of road that leads from Panbang to the Indian border. The road passes through lovely forest in which we will bird, and offers views out over the rivers as they join and flow south eventually to join the Brahmaputra. This is a wild and wondrous area that offers a rare glimpse of how much of the Indian Subcontinent must have looked millennia ago.

The birds seem less impressed by the forest than we are, but there are still a moderate number of possibilities typical of lowland 'monsoon' forest, including Lineated Barbet, Greater Flameback, Black-naped Monarch, Black-crested Bulbul, Asian Fairy Bluebird, and Pin-striped Tit-Babbler. We will be looking in particular for four species of hornbill (Rufous-necked, Great, Wreathed, and Oriental Pied).

There are several genera in which 'plains' species meet 'hill species' literally where the plains meet the hills in this valley, including Green (rare here) and Mountain imperial-pigeons, Black-hooded and Maroon orioles, and Golden-fronted and Orange-bellied leafbirds. Another apparent species divide is caused by the river, with Capped Langur on the east side and Golden on the west. Many other species typical of lowland India, some of them poorly known in Bhutan, are also possible here. We will scan the skies for swifts and a variety of raptors, with possibilities including Collared Falconet, which is more likely to be seen perched on a snag than in flight. Small streams may hold a few shy Black-backed Forktails or the larger rivers Crested Kingfisher.

Returning to Panbang in the early afternoon, we'll turn east for a 55 km drive to Nganglam, located on a saddle just above the plains of India. Night at a small-town "business travelers" hotel in Nganglam, the first of two nights here. Think **laundry!**



*Along the rivers we'll watch for kingfishers, including the beautiful White-breasted Kingfisher.  
Photograph by participant Steve Broste.*

**Day 11, Tue, 13 Apr. Manas Ridge above Nganglam.** We will spend much of the day birding the patches of forest on top of the ridge just west of town, searching for a number of special birds. The forest on the upper ridge offers an interesting mix of foothill species and birds that are typical of middle elevations but occur at around record-low elevations here. We will especially hope to find the rare and local (and very skulking) Rufous-vented Laughingthrush (with which we did connect in 2023 and 2024). Other special species include Rufous-backed and Long-tailed sibilias, Collared Treepie, and Gray-headed Parrotbill, and we have a good chance for more widespread tropical birds like Long-tailed Broadbill, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Red-headed Trogon, and Sultan Tit. The area is good for a variety of doves, including Barred

Cuckoo-Dove, Mountain Imperial-Pigeon, Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon, and Asian Emerald Dove. We certainly expect that there are more discoveries to be made here. (Rufous-throated Fulvetta? Spot-throated Babbler?) Night at our hotel in Nganglam.

**Day 12, Wed, 14 Apr. Nganglam to Sengor.** Today will be a fairly long travel day. We'll grab the first few precious early morning hours to bird the wet forests beyond Nganglam. Possibilities include White-browed Piculet, Pale-headed Woodpecker (bamboo), White-bellied Erpornis, White-naped Yuhina, Puff-throated and Golden babblers, and White-browed Scimitar-Babbler. Our route then takes us north up the scenic valley of the Drangme Chhu, and then crosses it to follow the valley of the Kuri Chhu until it intersects Bhutan's main east-west highway west of Mongar. Much of this road is in a dry, rain shadow valley with limited birding possibilities (though Himalayan Bulbul is one of those). From there, we'll ascend the slopes to the small farming community of Sengor, essentially an inholding in Phrumsengla National Park. Along the way, we'll make a few stops to try for Little Forktail, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide and Black-headed Shrike-Babbler, and we'll keep an eye out for Satyr Tragopan as we near our destination. Our likely campsite will be an old field near the forest below the community. Night in camp at 10,000' near Sengor.



*The Collared Owlet is another bird that is largely confined to the Himalayan region. Like the pygmy-owls that it resembles, this small owl is a diurnal predator, so we've got a good chance to see it, if we can spot it! This one was seen well in 2024.*

*Photograph by participant Ephraim Heller.*

**Day 13, Thu, 15 Apr. Upper elevation forest in Phrumsengla National Park; Sengor to Yongkola.** With Satyr Tragopan and Blood Pheasant in mind, we'll first travel westward up to the summit of Phrumseng La. The towering conifers above Sengor will warrant a series of stops; this is prime Blood Pheasant country, and we will also look for higher elevation specialties such as wintering rosefinches, Southern Nutcracker, and Black-faced Laughingthrush. These conifers again provide us with opportunities to come to grips with various tits: the warbler-like Yellow-browed, the jaunty Gray-crested, and the pretty little Black-browed tits occur here alongside the attractive Green-backed. We reach one of the highest passes of our tour at Phrumseng (Thrumshing) La – 12,350 feet (3800 m). The rhododendron thickets, perhaps just starting to leaf out, may be occupied by returning breeders such as Himalayan Bluetail, Lemon-rumped and Buff-barred warblers, Fire-tailed Sunbird, and, if we are especially lucky, Fire-tailed Myzornis. We'll try the places where we have had intermittent success with such scarce birds as Great and Fulvous parrotbills, Golden and White-browed bush-robins, Spotted Laughingthrush, and Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler. After a picnic breakfast, we'll turn eastwards again and work our way downslope to a lovely hotel in the small community of Yongkola, our base for the next two nights. We'll concentrate on habitats from 8,000 to 10,000' (2,400-3,000m). Satyr Tragopan occurs throughout, although it is far more often heard than seen (we could definitely use some luck here), and we will also be looking for species that tend to

be on the higher slopes, perhaps including Green Shrike-Babbler, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Scaly-breasted Cupwing, and Mrs. Gould's Sunbird. Night at Trogon Villa, Yongkola.

**Day 14, Fri, 16 Apr. Forest above Yongkola in Phrumsengla National Park.** From Yongkola, the road ascends dramatically into superb subtropical wet forest, where we can experience some of the finest forest birding of the entire Himalayan region – in other words, many more charismatic vertebrates! This region is known as Yongkola or as the Lingmethang Road, for towns far below, and is now incorporated into Phrumsengla National Park. The hollow bubbling of Golden-throated Barbets begins soon after dawn. Although their song and those of several cuckoos will soon become a familiar sound to us, spotting them will take time, skill, or luck! This will be another good chance for the threatened Rufous-necked Hornbill and for Ward's Trogon.

This area is particularly well known for several rich stretches of bamboo, and we will hope to encounter the jackpot of the right mixed flock, the one with White-breasted and Black-throated parrotbills and Black-crowned Scimitar-babbler, and we will also hope for other bamboo birds such as Golden-breasted Fulvetta and the skulking Broad-billed Warbler. On the subject of skulkers, this slope is rich in wren-babblers, laughingthrushes, and tesias, along with a shortwing or two, White-gorgeted Flycatcher, and Yellow-throated Fulvetta. With near-endemic specialties like Black-headed Shrike-Babbler to search for, too, and our lucky discovery of Beautiful Nuthatch in 2015 (seen again in 2023 and 2024), we will have a pretty busy day. Night at Trogon Villa, Yongkola.



*Ward's Trogon is a species that we'll seek in Phrumsengla National Park. These beautiful birds have a relatively small range, but are regularly seen in the park. Photograph by participant Margaret Fritze.*

**Day 15, Sat, 17 Apr. Yongkola to Trashigang.** After a final morning's birding around Yongkola, we'll make our way to the small town of Mongar. The hillsides along the way are covered in open pine woodland with a ground covering of grasses, perfect habitat for species like Himalayan Bulbul, Slender-billed Oriole, Himalayan Prinia, and more. We should reach our hotel in Mongar by mid-afternoon with enough time to search the grounds for White-crested Laughingthrush, Red-billed Leiothrix and other species that favor scrubby hillsides. Night in Mongar.

**Day 16, Sun, 18 Apr. Mongar to Trashigang.** This morning, we'll continue eastward towards the small town of Trashigang at the eastern terminus of the main east-west highway. Leaving Mongar, we'll stop in at a large roadside colony of Nepal House-Martins before working our way up another highish mountain pass, Korila, where we'll spend much of our morning. Korila offers us another chance for the often-difficult Ward's Trogon, as well as Fire-tailed Myzornis, Rufous-bellied and Crimson-naped Woodpeckers, Speckled Wood-Pigeon, Bhutan and Gray-sided Laughingthrushes, Golden Bush-Robin, Gray-winged Blackbird, and many more. From Korila, we'll continue on to our hotel near Trashigang, likely arriving with enough daylight left to explore the wooded hillsides nearby. Night near Trashigang.

**Day 17, Mon, 19 Apr. Trashigang to Morong Camp.** We'll depart early, heading southward towards the Indian border. Before meeting our crew for breakfast, we'll bird a small, forested side road with Besra, Gray-headed Woodpecker, Sikkim Treecreeper, and Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler among the possibilities. Further along, near the airport at Yonphula, we'll scour any mixed species flocks for the local Brown-throated Fulvetta, a recent addition to Bhutan's checklist (it isn't even mentioned in the field guide!) One final Giant Rock Bee hive will give us another chance to catch up with Yellow-rumped Honeyguide if we still need it, and roadside flocks may offer up Black-throated Tit, Green Shrike-Babbler, and striking Himalayan Cutias among so many others. We'll have one more highish pass to cross--Kharungla, with perhaps one final stab at Ward's Trogon if timing and conditions are right, before we drop ever lower towards our final night of camping at Morong. Night in Morong Camp.



*The Himalayan Cutia is a relative of the laughingthrushes. They can be locally common in the forests of Bhutan; we'll watch for them on our way to Morong Camp. Photograph by participant Steve Broste.*

**Day 18, Tue, 20 Apr. Morong Camp to Samdrup Jongkhar.** Early mornings near camp can be thrilling, with plenty of bird activity and still some key species to find. Red-faced Liocichlas and Blue-winged Laughingthrushes are likely to be heard, and with luck, seen, along the roadside above camp, as are White-tailed Robin, Large Niltava, Silver-eared Mesia, Yellow-throated Fulvetta, Gold-naped Finch, and many more. Tall forest below camp will offer up a final chance at Beautiful Nuthatch, and bamboo stands here may hold Black-crowned and Streak-breasted scimitar-babblers and White-breasted Parrotbill. Further downslope, a visit to Powerhouse Road may reward us with Speckled Piculet, Fulvous-bellied Woodpecker, Blue-eared Barbet, Rufescent Prinia and other species typical of the lower foothills. As we approach the town of Samdrup Jongkhar, we'll want to scan the river for Black-backed Forktail and the scarce Blyth's Kingfisher at any suitable vantage points. And if there is still some daylight remaining after we've reached our hotel, a short walk around the town may produce some widespread Indian lowland species we're unlikely to have seen elsewhere, perhaps including Spotted Owlet, Lineated and Coppersmith Barbets, Asian Tit, Black-hooded Oriole, and Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker. Night in Samdrup Jongkhar.

**Day 19, Wed, 21 Apr. Samdrup Jongkhar to Guwahati in India; flight to New Delhi.** With a great deal of reluctance, we'll bid farewell to the magical kingdom of Bhutan, cross the border into India and head to the Guwahati airport for our return flight to New Delhi. The journey from Samdrup Jongkhar to the airport should take about three hours. We plan to arrive in Delhi in the afternoon, with time for a nap, clean-up, and re-pack, along with dinner, before returning to the airport to journey homeward; most flights depart late in the evening between 11:00 p.m. to 1 a.m.

**Day 20, Thu, 22 Apr. Continuation home.** Flights to the US generally arrive in the early morning, with plenty of choices for connections home.

## About Your Guides

**Megan Edwards Crewe** has been birding since childhood, when she discovered she could have her father all to herself (rather than sharing him with her brother and sisters) if she was willing to get up very early on Saturdays and tramp around the woods in search of birds.

After graduating from Purdue University, she sampled an impressive variety of jobs (including veterinary technician, park ranger, junior high school science teacher, freelance writer, and computer programmer) before discovering Field Guides. Since joining the company three decades ago, Megan--who brims with information and enthusiasm--has delighted in sharing the wonders and adventures of birding and the natural world with tour participants.

One unexpected bonus of the job was meeting her husband, Mike, with whom she co-led a trip to France in 2000. They now live in a tiny seaside village in England's Norfolk county. There, they are busily converting their garden into a wildlife haven and recording all the species of flora and fauna that make use of it--almost 1300 species so far! Their efforts have been featured by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in their quarterly member's magazine.

**Cory Gregory**, a lifelong addict of all things birds, started learning birds on flashcards at the age of three. Ever since he can remember he knew he wanted to pursue his passion and work with birds. Cory earned a B.S. in zoology in Michigan, where he also worked for Whitefish Point Bird Observatory for several seasons. He then furthered his education at Iowa State University, where he earned a M.S. studying Long-billed Curlews in Nebraska. To this day, the prairie states mean a lot to him.

As an avian ecologist, Cory has worked with a wide range of birds including Steller's Eiders in Alaska, Laysan Albatrosses in Hawaii, Red Knots in Georgia, and Upland Sandpipers in Kansas. In 2014 and 2015, Cory served as a local guide on St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs of Alaska and hasn't stopped guiding since.

Parallel to being a full-time guide, Cory still identifies as a lifelong biologist and will occasionally work field jobs when he can. As recently as 2022, he worked as an avian ecologist in northern Michigan where he captured, handled, and banded Northern Saw-whet Owls.

Cory has been based out of Hannibal, Missouri, for some time and now serves on the Missouri Birds Record Committee. When not on tour, he and his partner, Ashley, pursue their interests in birding, traveling and, recently, moths.

In North America, his stomping grounds, Cory has co-led Field Guides groups to locales coast-to-coast including Arizona, Alaska, New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, Maine, and Newfoundland. Farther afield, Cory has also guided in Costa Rica, Mexico, Jamaica, Colombia, Peru, France, and Australia. He has a busy and wide-ranging schedule coming up thanks to adding Oregon and Michigan to his portfolio of tours. Folks have had a great time traveling with Cory, and we think you will, too!

*This was our 4th trip with **Megan**. We enjoy her sense of humor and people skills. She is organized, very knowledgeable, worked hard to get everyone on the birds, and worked well with our local guides to give us the best experience she could. She also gives good hugs! K.C., Borneo*

*"**Cory Gregory's** birding skills are exceptional. His sight and hearing seem super-human, and his knowledge of the birds' plumage, songs, and behavior is top-notch. He is excellent at finding the birds and getting the trip participants 'on' them. It was a pleasure birding with Cory because he is funny, caring, genuine, smart, and helpful. Cory is one of the best." C. G., Australia*

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for complete tour schedules for Megan and Cory; just click on their photos.

## Financial Information

**FEE:** \$11,350 from Delhi

**Bhutan Sustainable Development Fee:** \$520 per person (included in the tour fee)

**SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional):** \$1475 (Singles may not be available in all areas.)

**DEPOSIT:** \$1150 per person

**FINAL PAYMENT DUE:** October 5, 2026

**LIMIT:** 9

## Other Things You Need to Know

**TOUR MANAGER:** The manager for this tour is Karen Turner. Karen will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her.

**ACCOMMODATIONS:** Accommodations in Bhutan are generally simple (more basic in remote areas). We'll spend two to four nights in comfortable tents with cots, all in delightful settings. Many meals (virtually all breakfasts and lunches) are freshly prepared in the field by our experienced Bhutanese ground team, with dinners taken at the various lodges and camps. Electricity is widespread but mildly unreliable—a flashlight or headlamp with a good supply of batteries is essential; that said, it should be possible to recharge batteries at all of our hotels. All of our hotels have hot water in theory, and most do in practice, but individual units do not always work. Most hotels do not have central heating; individual rooms have space heaters or wood stoves, and a pile of blankets (a couple now have lighter comforters). Hot water at camp is provided in bowls for shaving, putting in contacts, and sponge baths. In general, everything works 90-95% of the time, and if you expect that there will be a time or two when it doesn't, you will be ready for this trip.

**A NOTE ON ALTITUDE:** We will reach a maximum elevation of approximately 12,750' (3800m) and we will be over 10,000' (3000m) on eight days; additionally, although we will bird down to as low as 300 feet, much of our birding will take place above 6000 feet. We will always be sleeping lower than we go during the day; our two highest nights are at 10,000' (3000m) (Sengor camp, Phobjika Valley), the rest being under 8,500' (2500m) (one night) or 7,500'. Most ascents will be made by vehicle; wherever possible we'll work a given area by walking downhill on a paved road or trail or by slowly ascending gentle grades.

**DOCUMENTS:** Be sure to verify the latest entry requirements for each country you will visit or transit.

**Passport:** A current passport is required for international travel. It should be in good condition, valid for at least 6 months beyond your return date, and have at least one blank page for each country on your itinerary.

**Visa:** A **multiple-entry visa** is necessary for US citizens to enter India. Our office will send you the visa link for India (it is an online E Visa). Bhutan requires a visa as well, but our operator will obtain that for you.

If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Indian and Bhutanese consulates nearest you for entry requirements.

**AIR ARRANGEMENTS:** This tour begins and ends in New Delhi, India (Indira Gandhi International Airport, DEL)

**Arrival: Sunday, April 4.** Most flights will reach Delhi on the evening of Day 2, April 4; our local agent will meet you for your transfer to our hotel near the airport. **Please note that if you arrive today, you may do so only hours before our very early departure on Day 3 to catch our flight to Bhutan. We recommend coming early!**

**Departure: Wed, 21 Apr.** Most flights leave late evening, 11:00 p.m. or later. Arrival in the US Apr 22.

**We advise at least some consultation with our office before finalizing your air itinerary to see if we know a "final" Druk Air schedule for flights to Bhutan, because that schedule will determine whether or not we are able to run this itinerary on the scheduled dates or are adding or subtracting a day.**

**LUGGAGE:** Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify their policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether or not such flights are covered by the tour fee, will be the client's responsibility.

**SMOKING:** Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere. Even more importantly, smoking is now largely illegal in Bhutan, and cigarettes are restricted in terms of import to Bhutan and purchase there.

**TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS:** The tour fee is \$11,350 for one person in double occupancy from Delhi.

It includes all lodging from Day 2 through Day 18 (and we will arrange for day rooms in Delhi on Day 19 to use prior to our evening departure), all meals from breakfast on Day 3 through dinner on Day 19, round-trip airfare from Delhi to Paro, all ground transportation, entrance fees, Bhutan Sustainable Development Fee, Bhutan visa fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, restaurant staff, camp crew, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to

recognize any local guide(s) or your Field Guides leader for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

**The above fees do not include** your airfare to and from Delhi, airport taxes, India visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement for the tour is \$1475 for those requesting a single room.** (Singles may not be available in all areas.) If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact us at [fieldguides.com/contact-us/](https://fieldguides.com/contact-us/). Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

**Please submit your deposit of \$1150 per person;** see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or by October 5, 2026.** We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.

Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Refund of deposit and full payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the full tour fee is non-refundable, which would include the full deposit if the final payment has not yet been paid. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

**TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to protect your investment in case of injury or illness to you or an immediate family member before or during a trip. Because we must remit early and substantial deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer refunds for cancellations outside of our Cancellation Policy. If a participant is unable to join or continue a tour due to illness, all related expenses will be their responsibility, and no refunds can be issued for missed days. Please wait to purchase insurance until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate, as most policies are non-refundable.

For full details, visit our Trip Cancellation Insurance page at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/>.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated

reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

JV 07/26; peg 8/26