

Land of the Thunder Dragon

Bhutan or 'Land of the Thunder Dragon' is a small, forested country nestling in the heart of the Himalayan Mountains. A large percentage of Bhutan is covered in pristine forests of oak and a mix of rhododendron and bamboo. The country also has spectacular river systems originating from the high Himalayas attracting the spectacular and rare Ibisbill. Bhutan still retains much of its historical culture, heritage and centuries old rituals. Our journey in Bhutan starts at Paro in the west and continues along the west/east road to Samdrup Jongkhar, the entry point into northeastern India and Assam. This is a comprehensive tour of Bhutan visiting a wide range of sites among some of the most spectacular scenery on earth. We can expect a range of incredible birds including Satyr Tragopan, Blood Pheasant, Beautiful Nuthatch and Fire-tailed Myzornis.

Day 1: We have a flight to Delhi in India.

Day 2: Morning flight to Paro in Bhutan. Transfer to our hotel situated above the River Paro. A walk around the garden may be productive for Spotted Nutcracker, Buff-backed Warbler, Rufous-fronted and Green-backed Tits, Long-tailed Minivets and noisy parties of Yellow-billed Blue Magpies. After lunch, we visit the Paro Valley and Drugyel Dzong a 17th century fort surrounded by pinewoods. Around the dzong we should find Kalij Pheasant, Rufous Sibia and Blue Whistling Thrush. On our return journey we check boulders in the Paro River for Brown Dipper, White-capped and Plumbeous Redstarts.

Day 3: An early start is essential to visit the impressive Chele La Pass, an important area for Bhutan's pheasants. We have a good chance of locating Himalayan Monal, Blood Pheasant and Satyr's Tragopan. After reaching the summit we take the pass to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. Birds at higher altitudes may include Dark-rumped and White-browed Rosefinches and White-winged Grosbeak. Lower down, mixed feeding flocks may comprise Black-faced and Spotted Laughingthrushes, Red-headed Bullfinch, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Brown Parrotbill and Stripe-throated Yuhina. Before reaching Thimphu, a sector of river is reliable for Ibisbill, River Lapwing, Long-billed Plover,

Dates

Saturday March 4th – Tuesday
March 21st 2023

Leader: Rinchen Drakpa and Mark Finn

Group size: 8

Birds: 290-320

Ruddy Shelduck, Wallcreeper and wintering Oriental Skylarks. Nights stay in Thimphu.

Day 4: This morning we leave early in order to be at Dochu La for sunrise. Our interest lies in the cool broad-leaved forests and the mixed feeding flocks they attract. Along the road we may encounter Golden Bush Robin and Grey Bushchat. Mixed flocks may have Blue-winged, Red-tailed and Chestnut-tailed Minlas, White-browed and Nepal Fulvettas and Whiskered, Rufous-vented, Black-chinned and White-bellied Yuhinas. At higher elevations we look for Grey-winged and White-collared Blackbirds, White-throated Laughingthrush, Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, Golden-spectacled, Yellow-rumped and Tickell's Leaf Warblers. Lower down in stands of oak, we have a chance of Yellow-browed Fantail, White-tailed Nuthatch, Grey-hooded Warbler and Yellowish-bellied Bush Warblers. Open areas attract altitudinal



Blood Pheasant

Himalayan migrants in Rosy Pipit, Mrs Gould's Sunbird and Ashy-throated Warblers. Later in the day, we visit the Do Chu River where the rare White-bellied Heron and Pallas's Fish Eagle reside. Two-night stay at Punakha the old capital of Bhutan.

Day 5: The Mo Chu valley is our destination, a mix of river and forest habitats. Agricultural fields attract Siberian Stonechat, Rufous-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, Hodgson's Redstart, Long-tailed and Grey-backed Shrikes. Mixed feeding flocks occur near the hotel gardens and may include Yellow-bellied Fantail, Grey-cheeked, Grey-hooded, Hume's and Lemon-rumped Warblers and Oriental White-eyes. After a late breakfast, we pass the spectacular Punakha Dzong, a combined monastery and fortress overlooking the river. Along the Fo Chu River we may encounter Pallas' Fish Eagle, Crested Kingfisher and lingering winter ducks. The road passes by patches of woodland holding Barred Cuckoo Dove, Red-tailed Minia, Black-throated Tit, Asian Brown and Slaty-blue Flycatchers. Entering the national park,

river systems have Scaly-backed Forktails. Flocks of birds occur on a regular basis here and we should connect with Yellow-vented and White-spectacled Warblers, White-throated Fantail, White-bellied Epornis and Rufous-capped Babbler. Flowering trees attract Great Barbet, Large Nilvata, Orange-bellied Leafbird and Black-throated Sunbirds. The area is also a regular wintering ground for Long-tailed Thrushes.

Day 6: Our tour takes us through broad-leaf and evergreen forests to Pele La at 3000 metres. The lower slopes have Golden-throated and Blue-throated Barbets, White-tailed and Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches and Fire-breasted Flowerpeckers. At higher altitudes Speckled Piculet and Black-eared Shrike Babbler are possibilities. We make a stop at a regular haunt of Yellow-rumped Honeyguide. After setting up camp in Dungdung, we make an afternoon visit to Probjikka, for Black-necked Cranes, Hen Harrier and Red-billed Chough. A check in the extensive bamboo thickets may reveal White-browed Rosefinch and Crimson-browed Finches



Himalayan Monal

whilst Himalayan Griffon Vultures cruise overhead. We have one night camping at Pele La.

Day 7: Near camp is the old Pele La road where we scan the slopes for Himalayan Monal. Higher up the road, Alpine Accentor, Great Parrotbill, Dark-throated Thrush, Hoary-throated Barwing and Black-faced Laughingthrushes are all possible. In the pinewoods we may locate Dark Rosefinch and Grey-crested Tit. We transfer to Trongsa through cool broad-leafed forests where Chestnut-crowned and Black-faced Laughingthrushes, Red-billed Leothrix and Grey-sided Bush Warblers reside. Night at Trongsa.

Day 8: An early start is essential as we enter the Black Mountain National Park via the town of Zhemgang. The road passes farms and patches of forest holding Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, Verditer Flycatcher and Crested Buntings. Near a river we search for Chestnut-bellied and Blue Rock Thrushes, Ashy Bulbul and Blythe's Leaf Warbler. At the summit we look for Asian Barred Owlet, Black Drongo, and Mountain, Striated and Black-crested Bunbuls, and a variety of barbets. The forest floor here may reveal Slaty-bellied Tesia. Transfer to our camp at Tingtibi at one of the lowest

elevations in Bhutan and surrounded by forest.

Day 9: Around the camp Great Pied Hornbill, Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker, Spangled and Lesser Racket-tailed Drongos are present. The latter often attracts Greater and Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes, White-throated Bulbul, White-headed Babbler and Maroon Oriole. Further up the road, we visit a haunt of the rare Beautiful Nuthatch. Other interesting birds are Yellow-cheeked and Sultan Tits, Black-winged Cuckooshrike and White-browed Shrike Babblers. In the afternoon, we visit another sector of forest for Rufous-necked Hornbill, Streaked Spiderhunter, Golden and Grey-throated Babblers, Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler and Crimson Sunbirds.

Day 10: Return to Trongsa looking for Crested Goshawk, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, Fulvous-breasted, Grey-capped and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Spotted Forktail and Little Pied Flycatcher. Overnight in Trongsa.

Day 11: Bumthang is just less than 70 kilometres away and reached via the Yotongla Pass. We eventually enter the Bumthang Valley home to Beautiful Rosefinch, Spotted Laughingthrush and

wheeling flocks of Snow Pigeons. Specialities, which need a little searching for, include Fulvous, Great and Brown Parrotbills, Rufous-breasted and White-browed Bush Robins. We also have a good chance of locating Himalayan Black Bear feeding on the hillsides. On arrival at Bumthang, a seasonal marsh is reliable for Solitary and Wood Snipe, Buff-bellied Pipit and Citrine Wagtail. Overnight in Bumthang.

Day 12: We continue eastwards to Thrumsing La, the highest point on the east/west road. The road drops dramatically after this point into an area of pristine semi-tropical rain forest, gorges and cliffs. This is generally known as the Limithang Road, one of Asia's premier birding spots. En route to Sengor we may find Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Blue-naped Pitta, Blue-fronted Robin and four species of Wren-babblers – Long-billed, Rufous, Wedge-billed and Bar-winged. Accommodation at Sengor is poor so we have three nights under canvas.

Days 13-14: Two days spent exploring the Limithang Road, one of the best areas to find Bhutanese specialties. We hope to locate Collared Scops Owl, Collared Owlet, Himalayan Swiftlet, Striated, Black-crested, White-cheeked, Ashy, Black and Mountain Bulbuls, Hoary-throated Barwing, Fire-tailed Mizornis, Golden-breasted and Yellow-throated Fulvettas, Slender-billed, Rusty-cheeked and Coral-billed Scimitar Babblers, Hill Prinia and Bronzed Drongos. At lower levels we may find Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Yellow-cheeked Tit, White-spectacled Warbler, Rufous-necked and White-crested Laughingthrushes and Grey Treepies.

Day 15: Mainly a travel day to Trashigang in northeast Bhutan where we stay overnight. En route, an area of pines holds Pygmy Blue, Blue-throated and Blue-fronted Flycatchers and Green Magpie. On the descent into Trashigang we may encounter Brown-throated Treecreeper, the scarce Grey-sided Laughingthrush and Little Bunting.

Day 16: Today we travel towards Narthang south-east passing through pine forest and sub-tropical broadleaved forest. Birding en-route may produce sightings of Mountain Hawk Eagle, Upland Buzzard, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, White-browed Shrike Babbler, Beautiful Nuthatch, and Bhutan Laughingthrush.

Day 17: Drive further south to the border town of Samdrup Jongkhar on the border of India. The sub-tropical broadleaved forest has rich avifaunal diversity with possible species in Rufous-bellied Eagle, Rufous-throated Partridge, Great, Wreathed, Oriental Pied and Rufous-necked Hornbills, Pin-tailed Green Pigeon, Cutia, Chestnut-tailed and Asian Pied Starlings, Crested, White-throated and Common Kingfishers, Spotted Forktail and Black-naped Monarch. Night at Samdrup Jonghar.

Day 18: Cross the border into India and transfer to Guwati for flights to Delhi and onto London.

Prices

Prices to be confirmed

Single room/tent occupancy: £
Deposit: £
Air Fare: £

Not included: drinks, insurance and items of a personal nature. Entrance fees into historical monuments and any related camera fees. Visa to enter India and Bhutan.

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Good to basic accommodation in Bhutan and India. Tented accommodation within Bhutan as stated (better standard than the local hotels).