

Nepal

15–27 March 2010

Extension to 31 March

Participants

Malcolm Bell

Heather Collett

Phillip Davison

Alan and Helen Durndell

Stuart and Susan Ferrington

Ronald Shayler



Swamp Francolin

Leader Suchit Basnet

Day 1: Overnight flight from London to Kathmandu via Delhi.

Day 2: The day was sunny and warm with a light haze over Kathmandu. After about 14:30, the sun disappeared and dark clouds set in and we had a light shower for about 10 minutes. The flight according to the group members were pretty much on time and wasn't bad. Heather and Phillip arrived first as they were in an earlier flight from Delhi. Suchit met them at the airport and Badri escorted them to the hotel. The rest of the group arrived 45 minutes later and with a warm welcome with flower garlands, we transferred to Hotel Marsyangdi in the heart of Kathmandu city. Over a cup of tea at the hotel, we were briefed about the whole tour and about the next day's excursion to Phulchowki hills.

Day 3: We had an early morning wakeup call at 05:30 and after breakfast at 06.00, we left for Phulchowki at 06:40. Driving for about 40 minutes, we reached the base of Phulchowki Hill where we stopped at a point overlooking a gorge with light scrubs and trees. Here we had excellent views of Red-billed Blue Magpie, Blue-fronted Redstart, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-babbler and Black-backed Forktail just to name a few. After spending about half an hour here, we proceeded up the hill making stops for Nepal Fulvetta, Striated Bulbul, Streak-breasted Scimitar-babbler, Small Niltava, Black-eared Shrike-babbler, Green-tailed Sunbird and Whiskered Yuhina. On reaching the highest point, we left the vehicle and walked down. On the way down we enjoyed more interesting birds: Chestnut-crowned, White-throated and Striated Laughingthrushes, lots of Verditer Flycatchers, Rufous Sibia and Buff-barred Warblers (common). We also came across a small flock of Black-faced warblers, Black-throated Tits, and Fire-breasted Flowerpecker amongst others. After a picnic lunch, we walked further down for about 2 and half hours before driving back to the hotel. Fighting the interesting and somewhat frightening traffic of Kathmandu, we safely reached the hotel by 16:30 where we did the day's checklist over a cup of tea.

Day 4: We left the hotel after breakfast at 06:40 for the airport. The traffic is lighter at this time in the morning so we reached the airport in just 15 minutes! The flight was on time and took off at 08:12. The Himalayan range was just visible and we had views of Gauri Sankar, Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) and Manaslu Mountains. After a 45 minutes flight, we reached Biratnagar at around 09:00 from where the vehicles from Koshi Camp drove us to the camp. En route we stopped at a few places to check birds and reached the camp at 11:00. At the camp, Tickell's and Orange-headed Thrushes greeted us whilst the pair of Spotted Owlets near the dining hall looked down at us to welcome. We had tea/coffee and checked our tents with lunch following at 12:00. After lunch, we went for a walk from 15:30 till 17:30. We saw a Himalayan Palm Civet resting in one of the owl boxes and a Jungle Cat was in the

camp gardens. During the walk, we had fantastic views of Red-necked Falcon, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Cinnamon Bittern, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker and many others species of birds.

Day 5: Early morning call at 05:15 followed by tea and coffee at 05:45 and left the camp at 06:00 with a packed breakfast. The morning was cool until 08:00 when it started to warm up. We had our packed breakfast and tea on a sand bank on the Koshi River. From our breakfast spot we had great views of Black-bellied Tern, Kentish and Little Ringed Plovers and Little and Temminck's Stints. After breakfast, we floated down stream seeing Marsh Muggers from the boat. We stopped after about an hour and had excellent views of two Great Thick-knees, Greater Spotted Eagle, Short-toed Snake-eagle and immature Himalayan Griffon-vultures. Vehicles were waiting for us at the boat landing spot at 11:45 and we drove back to camp for a cool shower and drinks, reaching there for lunch at 12:30. In the afternoon, we went out again at 15:30 towards the northern end of the reserve and found four Brown Hawk-owls and a Brown Fish-owl, brilliantly spotted by the local guide Anish. The driver spotted a Black Baza and Suchit called in a Brown-capped Woodpecker. On the way back we saw a Jungle Cat and later a Jackal on the road.

Day 6: We made the usual early morning start at 06:00 after a cup of tea and biscuits and left with a packed breakfast. We headed north of the reserve towards an open meadow where after about 45 minutes drive with three stops to see Bengal Fox we reached the area. We had breakfast overlooking the vast meadows and open sand bank where we saw a pair of Yellow-wattled Lapwings. After breakfast, we drove to the meadows and had a big flock of Greater Short-toed, Oriental and Sand Larks, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-larks and Richards Pipits. We spent roughly two hours here searching the entire area for Indian Courser but alas without success. Being content with what we had seen, we made our way back as the temperature had already reached about 28°C. We arrived back at camp at around 11:30 with lunch at 12:00. In the afternoon, we set off in jeeps at 14:30 pm towards the Koshi Barrage. We made a couple of stops on the way to have better views of some of the birds we had already seen like the Purple Swamphen and Black-headed Ibis. We also found two Northern Shovelers along with a pair of Northern Pintails. From the barrage, we scanned the river for a few minutes and our driver Gauri spotted a Gangetic River Dolphin jumping out of the water. We spent about 20 minutes here and after all of us had satisfying views of the dolphins we headed back to the reserve. On the way back we had excellent views of three pairs of Swamp Francolins, Ashy Woodswallows mating and a Common Hawk-cuckoo on a tree.

Day 7: We drove towards the park headquarters early morning after tea. The air was cool but a light mist was present. We stopped at a point overlooking a pond and scanned for any interesting species we could see. We heard a Striated Grassbird calling and Suchit played a tape to which one bird responded and we had good views through the telescope. Then Suchit spotted a female Greater Painted-snipe over the reeds and we had reasonably good views of that too. Driving further, we stopped at a point to have our packed breakfast where we had a Bengal Bushlark flying and singing. After breakfast, we went to check the marshland near the reserve headquarters. We got a few more species to our list like the Rosy Pipit, Citrine Wagtail, Bluethroat, Orange-breasted Green-pigeon and Striated Grassbird. It started becoming warm so we decided to get back to camp for some drinks and to bird around the campgrounds. After lunch at 12:00 and a bit of rest, we visited the roosting site of the flying foxes. We estimated to be over 400 of them in that area. After having a good view of them we drove back to the camp premises to check for the Smokey Warbler, seeing two birds and heard a third.

Day 8: Today we had our first cooked breakfast, after which we set off from Koshi Camp. We made only two stops for tea and lunch. We then made a detour to check for the Ibisbill on the Rapti River north of the town of Hetauda where we scanned from the bridge for about 15 minutes. Susan spotted an Ibisbill flying but it looked disturbed and we lost it for about another five minutes until Stuart spotted it again. This time the light was good and we had very good views through the scope. Malcolm also managed to digiscope one. Then Phil spotted two more birds and we enjoyed them for about another 15 minutes before we were back on the road. We then drove straight to Machan Paradise View and reached there about 16:40. After checking into our rooms, we went to the lookout point and within an hour recorded several new species for the list including Black Francolin, Red-breasted Parakeet, Brown Crake, Red-capped Babbler, Lesser Coucal and White-tailed Stonechat. It was a long but very enjoyable day.

Day 9: After an early start with tea and biscuits and with light mist hanging over the grassland, we set off, travelling on the backs of Indian Elephants on our quest for Indian Rhinoceros. The unusual rhythm of the elephants was an interesting experience. The grassland was full of small birds but to see them through binoculars

was a challenge. The elephants having a drink were also interesting to watch, hear and experience. We moved along to short grassland and came across a few Hog Deer and two Jackals before heading into the forest where we came across some Spotted Deer. After about 30 minutes of searching through the thick vegetation we came across a big Indian Rhinoceros crashing through the thick undergrowth. The elephants gathered together and slowly drove it into an open patch. After watching and photographing the rhino for about 30 minutes we headed back towards the resort seeing some Red Junglefowl on the way. Back at the resort we had our breakfast and at around 09:30 went for a walk. The temperature was in the high 20s °C and we walked in light forest taking short rests under the shady trees. We had an excellent view of a Crested Serpent-eagle with a water snake (Checkered Keelback) in the grassland. It then flew to the tree to enjoy its catch and we took some good photos. The forest was much quieter than in the morning but had good views of Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch and Chestnut-headed Bee-eater and heard an Oriental Scops-owl. A vehicle from the resort picked us up and drove us back for lunch. At 15:00, we set off again by Land Rover. We stopped at the river crossing on the bridge and saw three Gharials, two Mongooses and a male Himalayan Flameback to name a few. We then drove through a long oxbow lake (Lami Tal) and came across some Marsh Mugger crocodiles basking on the bank. We also saw two female Greater Painted-snipes feeding on an open stretch of the bank and a small flock of Orange-breasted Green-pigeons were on a tree close by. Two Pompadour Green-pigeons also flew into a tree and stayed long enough for all of us to see them before they flew off. Phil then spotted a Cinnamon Bittern and we had excellent views after it flew onto an open bank. On the way back, we encountered another Indian Rhinoceros in thick bushes, a female Samba Deer and some of us had a glimpse of a Sloth Bear, followed by some Wild Boar and a herd of Spotted Deer. We finally reached the resort at 18:33, met at 19:30 for the log followed by dinner.

Day 10: We took the early morning jeep after an early breakfast at 06:00, driving south of the park headquarter by the side of Lami Tal. When we reached the Sal forest, we had a good 2-hour walk when we found a pair of Greater Yellow-naped Woodpeckers, Large Woodshrike, Orange and Pompadour Green-pigeons, flight views of Green-billed Malkoha, Western Crowned-warbler, Black-naped Monarch, female Asian Paradise-flycatchers, Puff-throated Babbler, White-bellied Yuhina and Striped Tit-babbler. We got back to the resort for lunch at 12:30 and at 15:00 decided to take a drive to a different location in the reserve where we saw a Changeable Hawk-eagle, Crested Treeswifts and White-rumped Needletails.

Day 11: After breakfast we set off in a Land Rover to the western side of the park across the Rue River. The morning air was cool and fresh and the temperature being about 18°C. The drive was via Rapti Bridge where Gharial and Ruddy Shelducks were seen again. After completing the formalities at the entrance to the National Park, we found two Indian Rhinoceros later followed by a mother with and her calf. We stopped near a grassland where Suchit called in Slender-billed Babbler and after a good look at them we drove on crossing the Rue River towards the Tiger Tops tented camp. We walked a good hour to find Blue-bearded Bee-eaters, Greater-necklaced Laughingthrush, Lesser Yellow-naped Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Warbler and Black-naped Monarch. It was now nearly 10:40 and we were a long way from camp so we headed back slowly finding five Gaurs near the road and five more Indian Rhinoceros wallowing at the same lake! After lunch some of us choose to do the elephant safari and the rest went on a Jeep safari. We came across another Indian Rhinoceros (very close), two individual Gaurs and three Sloth bears! We also had glimpses of a Rufous-rumped Grassbird and an excellent view of Grey-crowned Prinia. Back at the resort we enjoyed the evening with a local Tharu dance and some of us (men!) joined in with the dancing.

Day 12: After breakfast we left Chitwan at 07:00 with our packed lunches. We made only one stop before Mugling for a small flock of White-rumped Munias. At Mugling, we met with a car to take Heather, Phil and Malcolm back to Kathmandu. After exchanging handshakes and bidding each other goodbye we set off towards Pokhara. On the way we stopped to watch four species of vultures on the same tree: White-rumped, Red-headed and Cinereous Vultures and Himalayan Griffon-vulture. Further along the road we made a short stop at a roadside restaurant for refreshments. Driving along we reached Pokhara at around 11:55 and after checking the baggage we wouldn't be taking with us on the trek into a hotel, had our packed lunch. Continuing with our light trekking luggage, we headed towards Naya Pool (one and half hour's drive). On reaching Naya Pool we set off on our trek accompanied by porters carrying our luggage. The first birds we saw were Plumbeous Redstart, Slaty-backed Forktail and a White-capped Water-redstart. Continuing up the trail we had excellent views of an Asian Barred-owlet calling from an open perch. On reaching our first night's base we had tea and biscuits before watching a Brown Dipper from the riverbank and having a nice shower. We reconvened at 19:00 to do the log followed by dinner.

Day 13: We got up at first light and, after breakfast, when it was nice, pleasant and cool we set off to conquer the hill to Ghandruk. The day started off with Susan and Stuart spotting three White-crested Laughingthrushes feeding on the Silk Cotton Flowers. The sun caught us up as we climbed higher but with plenty of rests for dinks we reached the base of Ghandruk village “knackered” as Susan called it! With a good hour's break for lunch we climbed for another 45 minutes to reach our hotel. On the way we had marvellous views of Lammergeier soaring very low, a male Little Pied Flycatcher, 100s of Nepal House Martins catching insects and a male Blue-capped Rock-thrush. The view of the Annapurna South and Machhapuchree (Fishtail) was very clearly in view until lunch, after which the peaks were covered in clouds.

Day 14: After a morning cup of tea we set off towards the forested slopes above Ghandruk village. The morning air was cool and fresh and the mountains were visible. The day started with a pair of European Goldfinches. Passing through the narrow lanes of the village with old traditional Gurung houses, we came to a small forested ravine where some of us got views of a Chestnut-headed Tesia. We spent a good time hoping to have better views of the tesia but it disappeared in the vegetation never to be seen again, but we did see Lemon-rumped Warblers, Common Rosefinches and Whiskered Yuhina. A Red-billed Leiothrix was calling and it responded to Suchit's tape and although it didn't come out into the open, most of us had views of it. On reaching the forest Suchit made an owl call and a flock of birds came in: Black-throated and Fire-breasted Sunbirds, Rufous-winged Fulvetta, Blyth's Leaf-warbler, Brown-throated Treecreeper and two Golden Babblers, which came to about 8 feet. We had breakfast in a restaurant in the forest with some excellent porridge, Tibetan bread and eggs. After breakfast we went further on into the forest and had excellent views of Grey-bellied Tesia. On the way back, a male Mrs Gould's Sunbird got attracted to Suchit's owl call. We came back to the same restaurant for lunch, which was delicious! After lunch we headed back to the hotel for some rest.

Day 15: Today we retraced our steps back to Naya Pool and got Aberrant Bush-warbler, Upland Pipit and Little Forktail as new birds for the list. We also had better views of White-rumped Munia, a pair of Brown Dippers feeding their two chicks and Slaty-backed and Spotted Forktails. Three forktail species in a day! We reached Naya Pool after a long trek (no, downhill isn't any easier!) stopping for lunch en-route. A vehicle from the hotel in Pokhara met us and drove us back for a rest followed by dinner.

Day 16: We met at 07:30 for breakfast (some of the early people had Brahminy Starling and Bank Myna in the hotel gardens). After breakfast, we left for the airport but our flight got delayed for about an hour. On reaching Kathmandu, we had lunch at the hotel and left towards Nagarjung forest to spend the last couple of hours birding. We were met with a big surprise as that day at Nagarjung forest was a full-moon day festival. It took us about one and half hours to get there and then we were not allowed in! We drove a little further and spent about 30 minutes to scan into the forest. The day started becoming gloomy and dark so we headed back to the hotel, which took us another one and a half hours! Suchit bade us goodbye at the hotel.

Day 17: Badri from Nature Safari Tours dropped us to the airport to catch the flight back to London.