

ASSAM: KAZIRANGA & NAMERI NATIONAL PARKS

APRIL 5-14, 2008

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Recently referred to as the 'Serengeti of Asia,' Kaziranga National Park is without doubt one of the most wonderfully exciting reserves in the entire Oriental Region. Located on the south bank of the mighty Brahmaputra River, its mosaic of marshes, vast reed-beds, riverine woodlands and lowland sub-tropical forests literally teem with birds and mammals—many of them big, mega-charismatic beasts! Kaziranga provides a rare window onto what wild Asia must once have looked like. During the course of previous VENT tours to this reserve, we have recorded more than 240 species of birds and a large number of very spectacular mammals including multiple close studies of Great One-horned Rhinoceros, Asian Elephant and the evocative-sounding Hoolock Gibbon. The photographic opportunities on this tour are outstanding.

Just to whet your appetite, the following are some of the bird and mammal highlights we encountered on previous VENT tours to Kaziranga National Park: hundreds of the globally threatened Spot-billed Pelicans flying into roost; a lingering, close study of the richly coloured Cinnamon Bittern; six species of stork including the severely endangered Greater Adjutant and the impressive Black-necked Stork; Pallas' Fish-Eagle bugling from its nest; four species of vultures at a kill; point-blank looks at the globally threatened Swamp Francolin; incredible views of displaying male Bengal Floricans, yet another globally endangered species; mouth-watering views of a male Red-headed Trogon; gigantic Great Hornbills; a very localized and rarely seen Black-breasted Parrotbill swearing at us from his grassland redoubt; and, perhaps most astonishing of all, a male Gray Peacock-Pheasant working right in front of the entire group in response to our tape. And then there was the male Tiger that gazed at us across the bheel as we (for a while!) wandered unknowingly! We also enjoyed sensational views of the little known Jerdon's and Slender-billed babblers. All this to the accompaniment of trumpeting herds of Asian Elephants, indignant at our close proximity to their young, and Hoolock Gibbons ululating through Panbari forest, raising the hairs on everyone's necks. Common and nonchalant Great One-horned Rhinos, Capped Langurs and Giant Pied Squirrels beguiled even the most focused birder. And there is so much more! Tiger, Fishing Cat, Wreathed Hornbill...the list is seemingly endless. Join us for what promises to be a very exciting trip!

In addition to all this we have added a couple of days at the lovely but little known Nameri reserve where in addition to many of the species mentioned above, we will seek out such spectacular global rarities as the very elusive White-winged Duck, Ibisbill in addition to Jerdon's and Black bazas, Oriental Hobby, Ruddy Kingfisher and Blue-naped Pitta.

NOTE: This tour can be taken in conjunction with our Bhutan tour, April 14 – May 9, 2008.

April 5-6, Days 1-2: Fly USA to Delhi. Your international flight to Delhi will likely arrive late in the evening of April 5 or during the early hours of April 6. After clearing customs and immigration, you will be met at the Delhi International Airport by a representative of our ground agent and escorted to our hotel.

NIGHT: Radisson Airport Hotel, Delhi.

April 7, Day 3: Fly to Gauhati and Drive to Kaziranga National Park. This morning we will fly across the entire breadth of northern India to the capital of Assam, Gauhati. After a short birding respite close by the airport, we will commence our drive to Kaziranga National Park. For the entire length of our journey we will follow the course of the mighty Brahmaputra River. Here the rich alluvial deposits left by the river's frequent summer floods have created emerald-green farmland—which, with its well kept rice fields plowed by water buffalo, is more reminiscent of tropical Southeast Asia. At this time of the year, the temperature will be pleasantly warm. We will take the entire afternoon to reach the park, with regular stops along the way to look for birds and mammals. Some of the species we may see include the globally endangered Greater Adjutant (a few pairs still nest on the periphery of the national park); Asian Openbill; Pied Harrier (the male is impressively handsome); Red-breasted Parakeet; Asian Palm-Swift; Pied and White-throated kingfishers; Blue-tailed Bee-eater; Large Cuckoo-shrike; Red Whiskered Bulbul; Gray-headed Myna; and White-rumped Munia.

As we enter the park we should be especially watchful for mammals, including the Great Indian Rhinoceros and Asian Elephant.

NIGHT: Wild Grass Lodge, Kaziranga

April 8-10, Days 4-6: Kaziranga National Park. Kaziranga is without doubt one of the truly great wildlife sanctuaries of southern Asia. Encompassing an area of approximately 430 square kilometers (recently enlarged to 900 sq km), it boasts a wonderful melange of habitats. They range from the vast, head-high grasslands interspersed with lagoons and marshes that border the Brahmaputra, to monsoon woodlands alive with flowering *Erythrina* trees, to the rich lowland, subtropical forest at the foot of the Panbari hills. Consequently, Kaziranga supports a profusion of wildlife, including an exceptional number of uncommon and globally threatened species such as the Great One-horned Rhinoceros (impressively common in Kaziranga, this is its global stronghold); Asian Elephant (also common); Tiger; Fishing Cat; Bengal Florican (a seriously threatened member of the Bustard family; it too is locally common here); and Swamp Francolin.

Some of the other species we may encounter include Spot-billed Pelican; Black-necked and Lesser Adjutant storks—all three species are regarded as globally threatened; the handsome Bar-headed Goose; a good variety of ducks including, if we are lucky, the very striking Falcated Duck; Pallas' Fish-Eagle; several migrant birds of prey including Greater Spotted, and perhaps Steppe eagles; Red-necked Falcon (this gem is uncommon but we have enjoyed superb views of it on some previous tours); Kalij Pheasant (moderately common); Gray Peacock-Pheasant (very noisy but tough to see); Red Junglefowl; Bronze-winged Jacana; Gray-headed Lapwing; River Tern; Gray-fronted, Orange-breasted, Thick-billed and Yellow-footed Green pigeons; Green Imperial-Pigeon; Blossom-headed, Alexandrine, and Red-breasted parakeets; possibly Emerald Cuckoo (a rare winter visitor); Green-billed Malkoha; Asian Barred-Owlet; Brown Hawk-Owl; Large-tailed Nightjar; Stork-billed Kingfisher; Wreathed, Oriental Pied, and Great hornbills (the latter the largest of all arboreal hornbills and among the most magnificent of birds); Red-headed Trogon; Chestnut-headed and the strange Blue-bearded bee-eater; Lineated and Blue-throated barbets; Rufous Piculet; Rufous, Streak-throated, Gray-headed, and Fulvous-breasted woodpeckers; Silver-breasted Broadbill (difficult); Black-headed and Maroon orioles; Crested Treeswift; Scarlet Minivet; Blue-winged Leafbird; the exquisite Asian Fairy-Bluebird; White-throated Bulbul; Greater Racket-tailed Drongo; Greater and Lesser Necklaced, Rufous-necked and White-crested laughingthrushes; Slender-billed Babbler (rare and local); the bamboo specialist Indian White-headed Babbler; the handsome Chestnut-headed Babbler in the tall elephant grass; White-rumped Shama; perhaps Black-backed and White-crowned forktails; Striated Grassbird; a plethora of *Phylloscopus* leaf-warblers (most of which present quite a challenge at this time of the year); Gray-bellied and Slaty-bellied tesias (wonderful, seemingly tail-less songsters of the forest understory); Chestnut-crowned Warbler;

Gray-headed, Asian Pied, and Spot-winged starlings; Red-throated and Rosy pipits; Little Spiderhunter; Scaly-breasted Munia; and Yellow-breasted and Black-faced buntings. There is always the chance of something really rare, such as the elusive Pied Falconet, the little known White-cheeked Partridge, possibly a Blue-rumped Pitta, or a group of the sensational Sultan Tit. During a recent VENT tour to Kaziranga we rediscovered the spectacular Black-breasted Parrotbill and the little known Jerdon's Babbler. We will make a special point of seeking out both of these species in addition to other recently discovered rarities such as the enigmatic Bristled Grassbird, Marsh Babbler, White-tailed Stonechat, and both the very rare Hodgson's and handsome Jerdon's bushchats.

In addition to some of the mammals already mentioned we should also see Asian Wild Buffalo (the ancestor of all domestic water buffalo); Swamp and Hog deer; Capped Langur; and with a bit of luck, Hoolock Gibbon.

NIGHTS: Wild Grass Lodge

April 11, Day 7: Drive from Kaziranga to Nameri Wildlife Sanctuary. After a final morning of birding we will cross the Brahmaputra River and continue northwards to the little known Nameri Wildlife Sanctuary. If time permits, we will commence our exploration of Nameri this afternoon.

NIGHT: Nameri Tented Eco-Camp

April 12-13, Days 8-9: Nameri Tiger Reserve/National Park. Nameri is a small recently established reserve encompassing an area of 212 sq. km (21,200 ha) but contiguous with the important and larger Tiger reserve of Pakke. Nestled at the foot of the Eastern Himalayas and bisected by the Bhorolli River, it is a serenely, lovely area and supports a very important remnant of the once vast forests and swamps that characterized the northern floodplain of the Brahmaputra River. In addition to another opportunity to encounter many of the species listed for Kaziranga National Park, we will be making a special effort to locate several other species which we are unlikely to encounter at Kaziranga: the very elusive and globally endangered White-winged Duck; the incomparable Ibisbill, Jerdon's Baza, Pied Falconet, Oriental Hobby, Long-billed Plover, Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl, Wreathed and Great hornbills, Ruddy Kingfisher, Blue-naped Pitta and Pale-chinned Flycatcher, to name but a handful. Nameri is also home to large numbers of elephants in addition to Tiger, Assamese Macaque, Capped Langur, Wild dog, Golden Backed Jackal, Bengal Fox, Hog Deer, Barking Deer, Mouse Deer, Leopard, Jungle Cat, Leopard Cat, Fishing Cat, Indian Gray Mongoose, Wild Boar, Indian Porcupine and Indian Pangolin.

We should be delighted with the very comfortable tented camp where the food and hospitality plus birding right at our doorstep make for a charming and memorable experience.

NIGHTS: Nameri Tented Eco-Camp

April 14, Day 10: Fly Gauhati Back to Delhi. It will be very hard to tear ourselves away from this little piece of paradise. However, early this morning we will return to Gauhati, arriving in time to connect with our flight back to Delhi. Those participants who are taking only the Assam: Kaziranga and Nameri National Parks tour will fly home from Delhi late this evening or in the early morning hours of April 15th. Day rooms will be provided until 10pm. Those continuing on the Bhutan tour will overnight at the Radisson Airport Hotel, Delhi.

DAY ROOM: Radisson Airport Hotel, Delhi

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to extend your stay or arrive early, please contact the VENT office at least **two months** prior to your departure date. These arrangements may range from an extra night at the initial hotel of the tour to a week or more extension including accommodations, sightseeing, and transportation. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

TOUR LIMIT: This tour is limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADER: David Bishop

David Bishop loves his vocation and cannot imagine anything better than exploring wild and beautiful places in Asia in the company of friends and clients. David has spent much of the past 30 years studying the birds and natural history of the Oriental region, in addition to New Guinea and the Southwest Pacific. Once a police officer amid the streets of London's West End, David has emerged as an acknowledged authority on the birds of these exotic regions. His enthusiasm for these places and their birds is contagious. This, along with his skills in locating wildlife, sharing what he sees with others, and conversing with local people in their native language, ensures you the very finest quality tour. David has undertaken a number of expeditions to survey the birds and other wildlife of previously unexplored regions throughout New Guinea (largely together with Jared Diamond) and the Oriental Region. This has resulted in a number of exciting discoveries and rediscoveries including the incomparable Wallace's Standardwing, a bizarre bird-of-paradise. Some of the results of this work, together with observations gained during the VENT tours he leads, has been published in the scientific and semi-popular literature to which David is a regular contributor. In July 1997, David, together with Brian Coates, published *A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, the Moluccas, and Lesser Sundas)*, and David is currently working on other book projects. David lives with his wife and daughter (his son currently resides in England) in the attractive university town of Armidale, NSW, Australia.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the **Assam: Kaziranga and Nameri National Parks** tour is **\$5495** person in double occupancy from Delhi. The tour cost will include all meals from breakfast on Day 3 to dinner on Day 10, lodging beginning on April 5 and ending on April 14, internal flights (Delhi to Gauhati and return), ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader. The fee does not include airfare from your home to Delhi, India and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, telephone calls, laundry or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$565**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodation, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you. Singles may not be available at all locations.

If combining Assam with Bhutan, there will be an additional \$150 hotel fee for a full night on April 14th.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refunds are made according to the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less \$125 per person is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$125.
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available.

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: Application forms for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

CLIMATE: Assam will be warm (in the open during the middle of the day) and at times humid, with a strong possibility of some rain. It may be cool whilst traveling in the open jeeps for an hour or so around dawn and dusk.

CLOTHING: Casual is the order of the day, although short pants, short skirts and halter tops are not appropriate in this rather conservative region. Participants may like to have one set of slightly more dressy clothes to wear at our hotel in Delhi. Hard wearing, easy-to-wash-and-dry field clothes are ideal. Sturdy hiking boots with a solid lug sole are essential; sneakers or sports-type shoes are not as appropriate. Laundry service will be available at all the places we stay in Assam. Elsewhere, arrangements will have to be negotiated on the spot. Other items that are recommended include a head covering for protection against the sun. Thick socks that absorb perspiration and cushion one's feet from hard surfaces are important; and it would also be useful if they were long enough to tuck the bottom of one's pants into.

SPECIAL NOTE: Please, absolutely no bright colors. Although the birds and other wildlife are relatively approachable, we will be trying to see a number of very elusive species. So please bring muted-color clothes, hats, gloves, bags or other paraphernalia. Furthermore, if you can avoid crackling nylon/plastic jackets and pants, this will enhance everyone's enjoyment of the trip and enable the leader to hear those critical but so easily overlooked subtle call notes of the birds you want to see.

CURRENCY: Rupee (RS). 100 paisa = 1 RS (the paisa is rarely used). American Express, Mastercard, Visa, and Diners Club have limited acceptability. Wild Grass Lodge does not take credit cards. Participants are advised to carry sufficient funds in low denominations, American Express Travellers' Checks, and/or US dollars in cash.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure is required for United States citizens to enter India. **Visas ARE required for entry into India and should be obtained prior to departure.** For further information, you may wish to contact the India consulate nearest you or Pinnacle Travel Document Systems (www.traveldocs.com on the web or 888-838-4867 by phone), a company which handles visa procurement. Non-United States citizens should check with their local Indian consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should have a quality pair of binoculars that are in good condition, along with a day pack (good for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film or memory cards, etc). Your tour leader will be carrying a Leica spotting scope; however, you are welcome and **encouraged** to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish—many clients find a spotting scope of their own a great advantage especially on this tour. You should bring all the camera equipment, spare batteries and film or memory cards that you will need, as they will be almost impossible to obtain once we depart Delhi. UV and polarizing filters are recommended. Plastic bags are very useful to protect

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equipment from rain and dust. Many of the areas we will be birding will be close enough to our parked vehicle to give us frequent access as needed. The vehicle will be attended by a driver and his mate. Water bottles are important if you like to carry a regular supply of water.

Other useful items include flashlights or headlamps, as we will be out at night on a few occasions; **handywipes** and paper tissues are very useful; spare glasses or contact lenses; one face cloth; and sunscreen (strongly recommended especially for higher elevations where the UV is much greater). Sunglasses will be very useful. All participants should bring a good quantity of all their medical/pharmaceutical supplies, as they will be very difficult to obtain anywhere on tour.

LAUNDRY: Laundry service will be available at all the places we stay in Assam.

LUGGAGE: When traveling within India, one piece of checked luggage weighing no more than 44 pounds is allowed free of charge. In addition, you are allowed one piece of carry-on luggage and whatever you carry over your arm or in your hands (i.e. coat, book, purse, umbrella, etc.). In reality, we find that the internal Indian airlines are fairly flexible; however, you should be prepared for some excess baggage charges in the range of \$20.00 to \$30.00 if you exceed the baggage limits by more than 5 or 6 pounds. We feel it is better to incur this charge, rather than to cut back on your baggage and therefore not have enough clothing or equipment for the trip.

MISC: Electricity - 220 volts, 50 cycles

Language - Hindi, English and 14 other languages are spoken.

Time - 10 to 10½ hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time

HEALTH: Participants are advised NOT to drink the tap water or unboiled water placed at the table except as advised by your tour leader. Your leader will carry a supply of iodine tablets for your use; however, bottled drinks (including noncarbonated bottled water), will be available at **all times**. Participants should not eat uncooked vegetables or food with meat that has cooled and/or been sitting in the open, permitting flies to settle. Unpeeled fruit is fine, provided you wash the exterior first in clean water.

No vaccinations are required; however, cholera and yellow fever inoculations are required only if you arrive within five days of departing from an infected area. Malaria may be a remote possibility in Assam. If participants wish to protect themselves with a prophylactic, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommends Lariam (Mefloquine), and Malarone (Atovaquone and Proguanil Hydrochloride). Malarone is a newer prophylactic thought to have fewer side-effects than the previously favored Lariam. For travelers who are unable to take Mefloquine or Malarone, the CDC recommends the drug Doxycycline as an alternative. Travelers who are also unable to take Doxycycline may be prescribed the drug Chloroquine, but the CDC warns in such instances that the traveler must particularly be aware of the risk of contracting the Chloroquine-resistant strain of malaria. However, any prophylactic has possible side-effects and David Bishop's personal advice is not to take anti-malarials as the chance of contracting malaria, especially at this time of the year, is minimal. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Cana-

dian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books. **We also recommend Andrew Isles bookstore for the Asia-Pacific region at <http://www.andrewisles.com/AndrewIsles/>. Andrew can also often obtain difficult to find and out of print books.**

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MAPS: * Himalaya - 1:1,500,000, Nelles series; N.E. India (India 5) - 1:1,500,000, Nelles series.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. **We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.**

RESPONSIBILITY: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved 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. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on June 4, 2007 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.