

BHUTAN

APRIL 6–MAY 1, 2009

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Bhutan is a journey—a journey quite unlike anything you have ever experienced. The VENT Bhutan tour is a trip back in time; it is an exploration of the birds and wonderful natural history of the Himalayas and it is fun! Everything we as a company had hoped for came to fruition—our 2008 tour to Bhutan continued the revelation that this country is truly paradise on earth. Untouched, primeval forests extend as far as the eye can see, and the birding is fantastic beyond anyone’s dreams. Each year we locate more and more little-known, spectacular, and rarely seen species, including some of the rarest on our planet—for example, on recent tours we found the extraordinary and almost mythical Wedge-billed Wren-Babbler AND Long-billed Wren-Babbler! The Bhutanese people form one of the most fascinating and least disturbed cultures in the world. It is a rich Buddhist culture which respects all forms of life, resulting in an avifauna that is not only marvelously diverse, but also remarkably visible and approachable. Some of the species we regularly encounter include the incomparably beautiful Ward’s Trogon; extraordinary numbers of the endangered Rufous-necked Hornbill; all three of the little known Spelaeornis babblers; breathtaking encounters with male Satyr Tragopans; rediscovery of the exquisite and virtually unknown Beautiful Nuthatch; not to mention the addition of some thirty new species to the kingdom’s known avifauna (we found Bhutan’s first Spectacled Finch on our 2008 tour!), as well as a plethora of other gorgeous and little known Himalayan species. VENT has now operated 20 full-length Bhutan birding tours, making us by far the most experienced bird-tour company to explore this country. In addition to leading 15 of these tours, our leader, David Bishop, has also undertaken a number of treks to explore additional areas of the country. This exploration continues. As a consequence, you can be assured that as new areas of Bhutan open up, VENT will be the first to offer new and exciting itineraries to this extraordinary kingdom.

The Himalayas are made up of the world’s highest mountains, pristine and majestic. With satin skies pierced by rugged, snow-encrusted crags and their slopes blanketed in forests full of excitement, these mountains harbour untold birder’s dreams. This is THE tour for which you have been waiting. Imagine birding among woodlands clothed in a rhododendron and magnolia rose-tinged mist, the haunt of cosmic Satyr Tragopans, innumerable glowing sunbirds, dapper grosbeaks, and subtle rosefinches—all to the accompanying delicate bouquet of flowering daphnia. Primulas carpet every spare patch of open ground, and azaleas and terrestrial orchids cling to the steeper inclines.

For some years now, scientists and naturalists alike have been aware that the farther east one travels in the Himalayas, the richer the forests become in birds and other wildlife. Bhutan is the pinnacle of that diversity. From the immense grassy flood plains and duars of the northern edge of the great Brahmaputra River, we will ascend in stages through mighty lowland Sal forests, super-rich subtropical forests, and temperate deciduous and evergreen forests, eventually reaching a pass with an elevation of 13,000 feet.

Bhutan’s forests are spellbinding in their extent and diversity. We will travel where very few other Westerners have been and witness birds, plants, and other wildlife rarely or never seen elsewhere and

almost never seen in such a superbly pristine environment. Our tour is scheduled to coincide with the onset of spring. Many species will be in song, and many plants will be flowering. However, snow will be present at high altitudes, keeping species that breed above 12,000 feet within our reach, such as the fabulous Ibisbill (seen frequently on all previous tours), forest jewels such as Fire-tailed Myzornis, and a dazzling array of fascinating babblers, in addition to such “lesser lights” as a host of exquisite red-starts and nifty warblers. With extreme luck, we may even see a Red Panda gamboling among flowering rhododendron woods. We will be birding among some of the least westernized and most fascinating cultures on our planet, and time will be set aside to enjoy the best of Bhutan’s cultural sites.

But it is Bhutan’s woods that beckon; range after range of untouched forest. Bhutan is the last hope for many species and communities, especially in the incredibly rich, mixed broad-leaved and subtropical forests. There will be so much to see that it is truly difficult to select a handful of species for particular mention. However, we will make a special effort to find such globally threatened species as the spectacular Satyr Tragopan (we saw an incredible total of eight—yes, eight glorious males, during our 2008 tour!), and Yellow-rumped Honeyguide—we have enjoyed superb studies of this rare and little known species on all of our previous tours! We will also seek out a wonderful coterie of neat and little known babblers such as the bamboo specialist, Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler; and Long-billed, Bar-winged and Spotted wren-babblers. We were the first birders to ever see Ward’s Trogon, during our inaugural 1994 tour. Other such cosmic rarities to be found include Blyth’s Kingfisher; a host of little known parrotbills; three species of tesias; and a neat collection of delightfully charming warblers (the Black-faced Warbler is a real humdinger).

Accommodations are generally much better than we had anticipated, and our ground agents do a magnificent job of making things as comfortable and enjoyable as possible. Since our 2003 tour, we have been treated to very comfortable walk-in tents and cots, so camping is more of a delight than ever. One thing you can be assured of is exemplary hospitality. Full American cooked breakfasts and lunches prepared by our ground agents in the field add considerably to the relaxation and overall enjoyment of the tour. Some of our dining locations in the shadow of towering, snow-covered mountains just have to be seen to be believed. Most of our birding will be along little-traveled, paved roads that bisect untouched forest. When appropriate and the opportunity exists, we will walk forest trails; however, this will not be an excessively strenuous tour. Although a sense of adventure will be a decided advantage, anyone in reasonable health will be able to cope with this very special tour. So join VENT–THE Bhutan birding experts, for a very, very special spring tour.

NOTE: *This tour can be taken in conjunction with our Assam: Kaziranga and Nameri National Parks tour from March 29 – April 7, 2008.*

April 6-7, Days 1-2: Fly USA to Delhi, India. Our international flights depart the USA on April 6 and arrive in Delhi late evening on April 7. After clearing customs and immigration, we will be met by our ground agents and escorted to our hotel. For those who are ready to start birding, we will meet in the hotel coffee-shop at **5:00 a.m. on April 8.**

NIGHT: Radisson Airport Hotel, Delhi

April 8, Day 3: Birding Delhi Area. Our Delhi overnight (for those arriving into India during the early hours of the morning) ensures there is no likelihood of participants missing the connection to Bhutan. Furthermore, it gives everyone time to rest and recuperate, as well as see many birds we will not see on the rest of the tour.

Few large cities can equal Delhi in the number, variety, and tameness of its birds. During the Palearctic winter, many species migrate south to the Indian subcontinent and supplement Delhi's resident bird fauna. Delhi's numerous parks, ruins, and gardens function as a huge man-made oasis for birds and other wildlife in an otherwise dry, semi-arid region. Hindu reverence for life also contributes to the approachability of so many birds. It is astonishing to see the stately Common Peacock stalking arrogantly along the ramparts of an ancient fortress.

We will spend the morning birding along the Yumna River. This is a remarkably birdy site and we can expect to see 80+ species this morning. Among the large number of waterbirds that will be present, we may find such specialties as Black-necked and Painted storks, Western Marsh-Harrier, any of the migrant eagles, possibly Small Pratincole, Brown-headed Gull, a good diversity of shorebirds, Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon, Alexandrine Parakeet, Indian Gray Hornbill, Striated Babbler, Bluethroat, with luck the increasingly rare White-tailed Stonechat, a nice selection of warblers and prinias, and possibly something unusual such as a Gray-necked Bunting or Black Francolin.

During the afternoon we will either explore an area of woodland where we can expect to see a good selection of quite different species, including Gray Partridge, Indian Peacock, Spotted Owlet, Asian Koel, White-breasted Kingfisher, Black-rumped Flameback, Black-hooded Oriole, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Jungle Prinia, and Large Gray and Jungle babblers, to mention but a few or the attractive Sultanphur Jeel.

NIGHT: Radisson Airport Hotel, Delhi

April 9, Day 4: Fly Delhi, India to Paro, Bhutan. This morning we will take our comfortably appointed Druk Airbus flight to Paro, Bhutan. With a bit of luck, we should enjoy good views (if it is clear, incredibly spectacular views) of the Himalayas along the way, including many of the highest mountains in the world. After clearing customs and immigration, we will be met by our Bhutanese hosts and from there drive to our attractive hotel perched on the side of the beautiful Paro Valley. As Steve Hilty (another fine senior VENT leader) remarked on first setting foot in the kingdom, "This is fairytale land."

The Paro Dzong (monastery), guarded by icy crags, sits warming under the late afternoon sun. It seems to welcome our approach to our beautifully located hotel. An Ibisbill, so subtle as to be taken for a glacial stone, dips quietly in the snowmelt. This is indeed the Kingdom of Bhutan and the land of the peaceful Dragon.

We will spend the afternoon exploring the lovely but relatively dry Paro Valley, where such species as the highly sought after Ibisbill can be found, in addition to such typically Himalayan riverine species as Pied Wagtail, White-capped River Chat, Blue Whistling-thrush, Blue-fronted Redstart, the ubiquitous Plumbeous Redstart, and Oriental Turtle-Dove. With a bit of luck we may even be treated to a view of the very elusive Black-tailed Crake.

This historic valley lies beneath Jomolhari, one of the highest of Bhutan's Himalayan peaks and it's most sacred. The upper reaches of the valley host the impressive ruins of Drugyel Dzong. Although the Paro Valley's slopes are largely clothed in relatively unproductive (avifaunistically speaking!) native Blue Pine forests, these woodlands should provide us with a good introduction to the avian riches of this Himalayan Kingdom. Species we may encounter include Crested Goshawk, Eurasian Kestrel, Kalij Pheasant, Brown Dipper, White-collared Blackbird, and Long-tailed and Gray-backed shrikes. Northward migration will be underway, and valleys such as this act as important conduits.

Consequently, we should be alert to virtually anything, including species not yet recorded from Bhutan. On previous tours we have located a handsome pair of very territorial and most obliging Spotted Laughingthrushes and several very vocal Indian Blue Chats. Perhaps we can repeat this good fortune in 2009.

NIGHT: Detchen Cottages Hotel, Paro

April 10, Day 5: Chelila; Drive to Thimpu via the Ha Valley. Adding a visit to Chelila has been a tremendous success; however, it requires making a rather early morning departure. From our hotel, we will wind upwards through increasingly majestic pine and fir woodlands to a pass at c. 4,200 meters (c. 13,000 feet). If we are lucky and the weather is clear, we should be treated to splendid views of both Jomolhari and adjacent Jiju Drake, not to mention a 270 degree view of the Paro and Ha valleys and their surrounding hills. But this is not our main objective. Chelila provides us with our only opportunity of the tour to ascend above the treeline into alpine meadows and dwarf rhododendron scrub, and thus have the possibility of several birds we may not encounter elsewhere. Without doubt our primary target will be the incomparable Himalayan Monal—a pheasant of unparalleled beauty. On previous tours we have been incredibly lucky, including views of a pair of Monals that ran, and then walked, across the road in front of our bus, permitting everyone extended views of this spectacular species. As if that weren't enough, coveys of Blood Pheasants will often stand their ground and swear at us, while tens of exquisite Collared Grosbeaks feed hungrily on the ground around us! Other species we may encounter include Himalayan Griffon, Kalij Pheasant, Spotted Laughingthrush, Rosy Pipit, Blue-fronted Redstart, Rufous-breasted Accentor, and exquisitely coloured White-browed Rosefinches. After breakfast we will gradually bird our way down into the very recently (2004) opened Ha Valley. We will then spend the rest of the day driving and birding through a wonderland of vast forests occasionally interspersed with farmlands that never fail to delight the eye. This is a long but wonderfully fruitful day and we can expect to arrive at our accommodations in the capital Thimpu during the early evening.

Located at 7,700 feet, Thimpu is one of the few of the world's capitals that lack traffic lights! Instead, some very theatrical policemen direct traffic. We will enter Thimpu across the Lungten Zampa Bridge (Bridge of Prophecy) festooned with prayer flags, and carefully wind our way through this town of civil servants and shopkeepers to our hotel.

NIGHT: Riverview Hotel, Thimpu

April 11, Day 6: Cheri Valley and Thimpu Area. We will spend today exploring the beautiful Thimpu valley, which is surrounded by fine stands of Blue Pine and temperate evergreen forests. We should find a number of wintering species, in addition to newly arrived migrants: Common Merganser, Crested Serpent-Eagle, and Black Eagle. Along rivers throughout the valley, we may find the intriguing Ibisbill; perhaps Crested Kingfisher; Darjeeling and very handsome Rufous-bellied woodpeckers; Hoopoe; Great Barbet; Nepal House-Martin; Long-tailed Minivet; Gold-billed Magpie (a real gem); Spotted Nutcracker; Red-billed Chough; Black-browed and Gray-crested tits; Striated and Black-faced laughingthrushes; Brown Parrotbill; Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush; the glorious Mrs. Gould's Sunbird; White-tailed Nuthatch; and the inevitable Rufous Sibia (the most ubiquitous of the babblers). With a bit of luck we may also encounter the enigmatic Yellow-rumped Honeyguide.

We will also take time to examine some of Thimpu's fine architecture, in particular such sites as the imposing Tashicheodzong, currently the seat of government. During the afternoon, we will return to Thimpu in time to visit the local market and have a rare opportunity for some shopping.

NIGHT: Riverview Hotel, Thimpu

April 12, Day 7: Thimpu via Dochu La to Punakha. We must depart before dawn if we are to give ourselves the very best chance to view the Himalayas as they unfold in the morning light. After breakfast at the pass, amidst seemingly endless prayer flags, we'll commence our exploration of Bhutan's high elevation, mixed evergreen and broad-leafed forests. The diversity of birds, mammals, and flowering plants is seemingly endless, and almost anything is possible. On previous tours we have watched in disbelief as groups of the fabulous Fire-tailed Myzornis converged on a flowering rhododendron, together with a galaxy of Mrs. Gould's and Green-tailed sunbirds, Lemon-rumped Leaf-warblers, Fire-breasted Flowerpeckers, and Green Shrike-Babblers. At the same time, Olive-backed Pipits sing in display overhead, and Gold-billed Magpies forage along a moist gully. Perhaps we'll linger over the fine details of a rarely observed Plain-backed Thrush (yes, one of those very elusive *Zoothera* thrushes),

while flocks of Red Crossbills wheel overhead. Or we may battle with the “oh so near, but so frustratingly elusive” Hill Partridge. But in particular we will look for the incredibly beautiful male Satyr Tragopan. On previous tours we have been treated to a wonderful exhibition, as a very confiding male and female fed unconcernedly for half an hour, giving us unsurpassed views. The beauty of this bird’s plumage challenges even this author’s purple prose!

At lower elevations, we should encounter a number of different species including Mountain Hawk-Eagle, Eurasian Treecreeper, Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler (an extraordinary species, not unlike some of the Scimitar-billed Woodcreepers of the Neotropics!), Golden Bush-Robin, and the handsome Fire-capped Tit. Perhaps, as we did on previous tours, we will have the opportunity to watch, at length, a pair of Little and Slaty-backed forktails as they forage in a crystalline, tumbling brook, or gaze entranced as metallic sunbirds hover just at arm’s length.

We will spend much of the morning birding through some of the most beautiful and bird-rich forests imaginable before we descend to the relatively open habitats adjoining the impressive Puna Tsang Chu (Tsang River). Here we will search for the wonderfully characterful Crested Kingfisher, in addition to any migrant waterfowl that may be loafing on the river’s gravel bars. It goes without saying that there will be countless opportunities for photography. In addition, on some of our previous tours, we located what appears to be the regular feeding haunt of the world’s second largest and perhaps least known heron, THE White-bellied Heron. We have set time aside this afternoon to search for this incomparable bird.

NIGHT: Zangtho Pelri Hotel, Punakha

April 13, Day 8: Tashitang Valley. We will rise early this morning to arrive at these beautiful forests before dawn. Here at an elevation of approximately 4,500 feet (1,400 m), the climate is noticeably warmer than at most of the elevations we will have encountered to date. Consequently, bird activity is at its greatest in the early morning, before the sun gets really warm! We will spend most of the morning birding along a broad track that follows the thunderous Mo Chu River through enchanting, warm broad-leaved forest. The Mo Chu often harbors a number of interesting waterfowl. In 1994, we found the first Baer’s Pochard (a rarity in itself) for Bhutan. There are also a number of specialties that we will be focusing on, including nesting Ibisbill, the very rarely observed and globally threatened White-bellied Heron, River Lapwing, Red-headed Trogon, Gray-headed Woodpecker, Striated Bulbul, the glowing Little Niltava, all three tesias (the Chestnut-headed is a gem), Pygmy Blue-Flycatcher, Pygmy Wren-Babbler, the infrequently seen and very striking Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush, Red-faced Liocichla, and the stunning Scarlet Finch. However, THE quest for the day is the exquisite Spotted Wren-Babbler. This darling songster, previously virtually unknown in the wild, put on a simply stunning show for us on our previous tours. Armed with a marvelous taped rendition of its song, we will hopefully repeat this command performance. The Tashitang Valley is a really lovely spot. Whether eating a delicious breakfast freshly cooked over a bush-fire under a gigantic oak, or luring in some sprite-like denizen of the forest undergrowth, one cannot help being beguiled by the beauty of the colors and soul-lifting scenery found here.

Shortly after lunch, we will return to Punakah, where, if the head abbot is not in residence, we may be permitted to explore the inner sanctum of this spectacular dzong.

NIGHT: Zangthro Pelri Hotel, Punakha

April 14, Day 9: Drive from Punakha to Pele La. The first hint of dawn will find us crossing the Wangdi Chu beneath the ramparts of Wangdi Dzong, before steadily climbing an increasingly lush, forested valley at the foot of Pele La. We’ll make a stop for breakfast and take time to search for birds and plants, or just relax and be entranced by the unfolding scene of magnificent snow-capped Himalayan peaks. Specialties we may encounter include Kalij Pheasant, the gorgeous Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Spotted Forktail, Black-eared Shrike-Babbler, Black-throated and Brown parrotbills, Brown Bullfinch, the infrequently seen Gold-naped Finch, and the emerald Fire-tailed Myzornis, a very unusual babbler. In most parts of its range this babbler is very rare, but in Bhutan it can on occasion be wonderfully common. “There is just so much to see!”

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After breakfast, we'll continue to climb through increasingly exquisite, mixed broad-leafed and then evergreen forests. Before long we'll be ascending through a wonderland of gnarled, moss-covered trees and some really exquisite temperate, mixed conifer forest, ablaze with numerous species of flowering rhododendrons and magnolias. Yaks graze amidst blankets of Primulas. Jagged snow-capped peaks of the high Himalayas soar in the distance. *Can it get better than this?*

After lunch we will reach the high (11,400 feet) Pele La pass where we will make a detour to a delightful campsite hidden among rhododendron woods, yak and vociferous Satyr Tragopans.

NIGHT: Camping, Pele La (10,500 feet)

April 15, Day 10: Search for Pheasants and Parrotbills and then Drive to Trongsa. By splitting into two days what we previously did in just one, we will be able to spend more time in prime pheasant habitat. This will give us the very best chance of seeing such spectacular species as Satyr Tragopan, Blood Pheasant, and possibly Himalayan Monal and Hill Partridge. Perhaps we may see even that most wondrous of creatures, a Red Panda. However, these gorgeous forests, lit by unimaginably beautiful rhododendron trees, grazed at their periphery by migrating herds of yak, and garnished with wayside primulas, are home to so much more. Perhaps we will get lucky and find a group of the rather uncommon Gray-headed Bullfinch; or a flock of 200 Collared Grosbeaks (stunning); several rosefinches are possible, including Dark-rumped, Common and Blanford's; also the demure Crimson-browed Finch; almost any accentor is possible; Golden-breasted Fulvetta (one of the most handsome of all small passerine species); Stripe-throated and Rufous-vented yuhinas; Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler; Buff-barred Leaf-Warbler; Rufous-vented Tit; the distinctive crested race of Coal Tit; Rusty-flanked Treecreeper; possibly White-browed or Rufous-breasted bush-robins; Gray-winged Blackbird; and the very elusive Plain and Long-tailed thrushes.

From Pele La (La means "Pass") we will descend into the heart of central Bhutan's Black Mountain region. Much of our journey will be through beautiful, pristine, mixed broad-leafed evergreen forest. Of course, there will be regular stops for birding, botanic exploration, and photography along the way. At Chendibji and the site of a classic Nepalese Chorten, we'll search along a picture-perfect stream for a resident pair of Crested Kingfishers. In addition, Brown Dippers and White-capped Redstarts are usually seen feeding midstream, while Gold-billed Magpies search for insects among the many flowering rhododendrons. From Chendibji, we'll continue on to Trongsa.

NIGHT: Yangphil Lodge, Trongsa

April 16, Day 11: Trongsa to Shemgang. Trongsa is rightly famous for its spectacular dzong (it is certainly your leader's favorite). Located on a precipice dominating the entrance to three valleys, the dzong seems symbolic of Bhutan. Our attractive accommodations are ideally located on a hill looking on to the dzong, providing a breathtaking panorama of sunrise as it emerges far down the valley, spreading its warming rays over ridge after ridge of pristine forest. Our birding today takes us south along the road towards Shemgang. Here we will explore mixed broad-leafed evergreen forests at elevations between 8,000 and 3,000 feet. We should encounter a number of very special birds, including the strange and rarely observed Yellow-rumped or Himalayan Honeyguide (another bird we have enjoyed with exceptionally good, long views on all previous VENT Bhutan tours). This bird only occurs in the vicinity of huge hives belonging to the Rock Bee, *Apis dorsata*.

Other species we might see include Rufous-bellied Eagle; Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon; Barred Cuckoo-Dove; Himalayan Swiftlet; flocks of nesting Fork-tailed Swifts; Crimson-breasted and Darjeeling woodpeckers; Striated Bulbul; Spotted Bush-Warbler; the richly marked Red-billed Leiothrix; flocks of captivating Long-tailed Minivets; Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush; perhaps one of the real skulking thrushes such as the subtly marked Long-billed or Scaly thrushes; Slaty-blue, the rare Sapphire, and Little Pied flycatchers; and Little and Spotted forktails (these attractive stream specialists inhabit a creek that splashes across the road). As always, there is a chance of something exceptional, such as the rarely seen Purple Cochoa feeding at a fruiting tree or, as on previous tours, a pair of Blue-bearded Bee-eaters putting on a show.

It is a long drive to Shemgang and our campsite beyond. However, there will be plenty of opportunities to stop and bird—perhaps we will find something really unusual, as we have on previous tours; for example, in 2000 we made only the second Bhutan record of a Spot-winged Starling. The ever-changing landscape and profusion of flowering plants and trees, combined with the imposing traditional Bhutanese homes, creates a sense of unreality. This will persist throughout the entire tour. Our camp tonight is located at a superb site within the forest quite close to a tumbling river at c. 2,000 feet and beset by Great Hornbills and Pin-tailed Green-Pigeons. Sleep well!

NIGHT: Camping near Tingtibi (2,000 feet)

April 17-18, Days 12-13: The Shemgang Road. The granting of permission to our company to bird along the magnificent and very rarely visited Shemgang Road (we were the first birding group ever to do so in the year 2000) enables us to work one of the most beautiful and peaceful roads in the world. Furthermore, the elevations complement nicely those along the now famous Limithang Road, enabling us to see a wonderful coterie of rarely seen and special birds. One of the highlights of this part of the tour is the huge numbers of Golden Langur monkeys that are extremely common and approachable. We will camp right in the midst of this little known primate's world range, which is confined to south-central Bhutan. On previous tours we have seen the rarely observed Goral, and one participant, resting in the bus, saw what was almost certainly the hind end of a tiger disappearing into the forest. We have only just begun to scratch the surface of what birds these forests hold. However, some of the species we hope to see include Rufous-throated and Chestnut-breasted partridges; Gray Peacock-Pheasant; Pin-tailed Green-Pigeon; Barred Cuckoo-Dove; nine species of cuckoo; possibly Tawny Fish-Owl; Red-headed Trogon; Blyth's Kingfisher (with a bit of luck); Blue-bearded Bee-eater; the sensational Rufous-necked and Great hornbills; White-browed Piculet; Bay Woodpecker; Long-tailed Broadbill; Lesser Shortwing; White-tailed Robin; possibly Green Cochoa; several scimitar-babblers; the exquisite Cutia; several laughingthrushes, fulvettas and yuhinas; Gray-headed Parrotbill; the rarely seen Rufous-faced Warbler; Pygmy Blue-Flycatcher; Sultan Tit; and with a bit of luck, the incomparable Beautiful Nuthatch—we have studied a pair of these exquisite birds for nearly 15 minutes on previous tours!. Other possibilities include White-bellied Heron, Collared Treepie, Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbill, and perhaps even something really wild such as a Long-billed or Wedge-billed wren-babbler. Our 2008 tour found a group of the very rarely seen Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbills in addition to three of the all too rare Pale-headed Woodpeckers and a group of infrequently seen White-hooded Babblers foraging in stands of giant bamboo. Hopefully we will be able to repeat this success on our 2009 tour.

NIGHT: Camping near Tingtibi (2,000 feet)

April 19, Day 14: Shemgang to Trongsa. After a final morning's birding, we will reluctantly wend our way back to Trongsa and the luxury of hot running water and a regular bed.

NIGHT: Yangphil Lodge, Trongsa

April 20, Day 15: Trongsa to Bumthang. This morning we will gradually wind our way up Yutong La through some truly magnificent rhododendron/magnolia forests. As we cross the pass at 11,400 feet, we will descend through equally impressive silver fir and spruce forests to the upland valleys of the Bumthang. These broad glacial valleys, although not especially diverse, harbor a number of exciting species including Ibisbill, Kalij Pheasant, accentors, and the elusive Fulvous Parrotbill!

Our accommodation tonight is in a comfortably appointed, traditional-style Bhutanese home. The owner of the guesthouse and her family are widely considered to be among the finest weavers in the kingdom, and for those who wish to purchase something very special, she has some museum quality pieces for sale (ranging from U.S. \$400 to \$1,000). There are also smaller, less expensive items available for purchase. For many participants, meeting her and seeing her work has been a highlight of the tour.

NIGHT: Aum Leki's Guest House, Bumthang

April 21, Day 16: Drive to Sengor. The drive to Sengor, just below Thrumsingla, is considered by many to be one of the most spectacular in the world! As always, our journey is likely to be conducted against a backdrop of jagged snow-capped mountains, magnificent forests, prayer flags fluttering in the breeze, and villages little changed for 500 years. Each day in this medieval land evokes perennially special memories.

Along the way we will explore the Ura Valley, the most lovely of the Bumthang valleys. Ensnared in the depths of this charming valley is a startlingly exotic temple dedicated to Guru Rinpoche. This ornate monastery located in a delightful village provides us a magical window from which to experience the daily lives of these hardy people. Nearby, Red-billed Choughs abuse visitors from shingle roofs, while vast flocks of Cinnamon sparrows and Plain Mountain-Finches scrounge among recently plowed fields. With its spring light and pastel shades, this valley and its village are indeed an artist's dream.

Climbing slowly through extraordinarily primeval larch, silver fir, spruce and towering hemlocks, we eventually reach our camp just below Thrumsingla (12,400 ft). We will spend the afternoon exploring the upper reaches of this truly magnificent road. Be especially alert to coveys of Blood Pheasants scuttling by or Orange-flanked Bluetails making their way up to the treeline. At this time of the year, many species are only found in large, mixed, Parid-dominated flocks. These typically include Gray-crested, Coal, Green-backed, Yellow-browed, Black-throated and Black-browed tits; Mrs. Gould's and Green-tailed sunbirds; Orange-barré, Ashy-throated, Lemon-rumped and Blyth's leaf-warblers; White-browed and Rufous-winged fulvettas; Stripe-throated Yuhina; and Green Shrike-Babbler (astonishingly common in Bhutan, but totally absent some years). Other species we may encounter include Satyr Tragopan (two stupendous males watched at length as we descended to our camp, during David's 2008 tour); Eurasian Sparrowhawk; Upland Buzzard; Mountain Hawk-Eagle; Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush; Plain-backed, and White-collared thrushes (the latter a wonderful songster); Orange-flanked and White-browed bush-robins; Blue-fronted Redstart; Orange-gorgeted and Slaty-blue flycatchers; Rufous-bellied Niltava; Eurasian, Rusty-flanked and Brown-throated treecreepers (this is a great opportunity to sort out these three similar species); Gray-sided Bush-Warbler; Black-faced and Chestnut-crowned laughingthrushes; and Bar-winged Wren-Babbler, which was one of the great finds of our previous Bhutan tours. With the aid of a superb tape made on those tours, we will attempt to repeat this entrancing performance. Needless to say, we were the first birders to ever see this marvelous bamboo specialist! We also have a good chance of seeing Tibetan Serin, Red Crossbill, Red-headed Bullfinch, White-winged and Collared grosbeaks, and the dapper Gold-naped Finch, in addition to a host of confusing but very nifty rosefinches. From Thrumsingla, we will descend through a wonderland of moss-draped trees. At higher elevations many of these huge sentinels will still be blanketed in snow, a totally entrancing scene. In addition to forest birds, we should check the fields for flocks of Snow Pigeons and a nearby area of azalea scrub for Blood Pheasant.

NIGHT: Camping at Sengor (10,000 feet)

April 22-24, Days 17-19: Drive Sengor to Yongkola. Our night at Sengor will find us camped in the midst of some truly breathtaking scenery at about 10,000 feet. This provides an unparalleled opportunity to explore the upper elevations of the Limithang Road to look for some of Bhutan's most prized bird species: Satyr Tragopan, Blood Pheasant, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler, and Bar-winged Wren-Babbler. All of these are species that are difficult to find elsewhere. Our ground crew makes camping remarkably comfortable. A number of participants on previous VENT Bhutan tours, who had never been camping before, remarked that they thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

After birding the upper elevations of the Limithang Road, truly one of the great birding roads of the world, we will commence our gradual descent to our Yongkola camp at about 6,200 feet. From a pass at 12,400 feet to just under 3,000 feet, this largely paved and infrequently traveled road leads us through some of the most beautiful forests in the entire Himalayas. We have three days to explore the wonderfully rich, subtropical, warm and cool, broad-leaved forests along the lower section of this road. Stretching away, seemingly endlessly, towards the horizon, these are magnificent forests with many tall trees sporting impressive girths on huge buttresses. Orchids abound,

and the understory of the forest is often relatively clear, although the higher strata are often strung with enormous woody vines and lianas.

Clearly we could use much more time here; however, we will endeavor to show you a number of the fabulous specialties of this superb area in the time we do have. These forests are birded so little that almost anything could turn up; maybe this year we'll find the enigmatic and very rarely seen Gould's Shortwing!

The following are just a selection of the birds recorded on our previous tours. We hope to see them all again: Satyr Tragopan; Hill and Rufous-throated partridges; Rufous-bellied and Crested serpent-eagles; Rufous-necked Hornbill (rare or extirpated throughout much of its range, the forests of Bhutan are almost certainly the stronghold for this impressive species); Speckled Wood-Pigeon (generally rare throughout its entire range); Blue-bearded Bee-eater; and Ward's Trogon. The male of the latter species is absolutely gorgeous, and the participants on our 1994 tour were the first birders to ever see this species in the wild.

We may also find Fulvous-breasted, Crimson-breasted, Bay and Lesser Yellow-nape woodpeckers; Golden-throated and Blue-throated barbets; Large and Oriental hawk-cuckoos; Collared Owlet; Himalayan Treepie; Gray-chinned, Short-billed and Long-tailed minivets; Yellow-bellied Fantail; Brown Dipper; Blue-headed Rock-Thrush; White-browed Shortwing; Verditer Flycatcher; Large Niltava; Hodgson's Redstart (in farmland at the edge of the forest); Plumbeous Redstart (very common with many males vigorously defending streamside territories); White-capped Redstart (totally cosmic, another stream specialist); Slaty-backed Forktail; Rusty-flanked Treecreeper; Sultan, Black-throated, Rufous-fronted, Yellow-browed and Yellow-cheeked tits; Mountain and Ashy bulbuls; Hill and Striated prinias; and Chestnut-headed, Slaty-bellied and Gray-bellied tesias. We have seen all three species of tesia superbly well on our previous tours.

In addition, we will search out Gray-sided, Yellowish-bellied and Brown bush-warblers; a good variety of leaf-warblers, including the attractive Yellow-faced Leaf-Warbler; the delightful Gray-hooded, White-spectacled, Chestnut-crowned, Broad-billed and Black-faced warblers; White-crested, Striated (a great mimic), Rufous-necked, Gray-sided, and perhaps the elusive Blue-winged laughingthrushes; Streak-breasted and perhaps the elusive Coral-billed and peculiar Slender-billed scimitar-babblers; Rufous-throated Wren-Babbler (a little known and endangered species); Rufous-capped and Golden babblers; Red-billed Leiothrix; Cutia; Rufous-bellied, Black-headed (rare), White-browed and Black-eared shrike-babblers; Rufous-fronted Barwing; Chestnut-tailed and Red-tailed minlas; White-naped, Whiskered, and Black-chinned yuhinas; and the exquisite Golden-breasted and Yellow-throated fulvettas. Both species of fulvettas are virtually unknown elsewhere in their range.

With a bit of luck, we will encounter the rarely seen Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill, as well as Fire-breasted Flowerpecker; Crimson-browed Finch; Spot-winged Grosbeak; and Scarlet Finch (sometimes in large flocks, the males have to be seen to be believed!). Perhaps we'll find one of the Himalayas' rarest birds, such as the cobalt Blue-fronted Robin, the enigmatic Blue-rumped Pitta, or the almost mythical Wedge-billed and Long-billed wren-babblers!

NIGHTS: Camping, Yongcola (c.6,200 feet)

April 25, Day 20: To Mongar. After a final morning's birding along the Limithang Road, we will descend into the lovely Shonkhar Chu valley before climbing again to the village of Mongar.

NIGHT: Druk Zhongar Hotel, Mongar

April 26, Day 21: Journey via Trashigang to Rotong. Our journey continues east. From the attractive small town of Mongar, we will ascend through a mixed, broad-leaved evergreen forest. For the photographers among us, the opportunities will be endless. At this time of the year, with migrant birds streaming north, virtually anything is

possible. In addition, there are a number of species whose main habitat is roadside scrub and agricultural areas, including species such as Siberian Stonechat, and Crested and Little buntings.

After crossing the Kori La at 8,000 feet, we commence the last section of today's journey, which takes us through a series of switchbacks as we descend to the Gamri River through Chir Pine (*Pinus roxburghii*) forest, corn fields, and banana groves, to the villages of Nagtshang and Trashigang. As we depart Trashigang, we should have a superb view of the Trashigang Dzong, one of Bhutan's justly famous fortified monasteries. Built in 1659, it is superbly located on a spur overhanging the Gamri Chu and is protected on three sides by rivers and ravines. The dzong commands a fine view over the surrounding countryside. We should arrive at our attractive camp at Rotang during the late afternoon.

NIGHT: Camping, Rotong (8,000 feet)

April 27, Day 22: Rotang to Morong. This is by far the longest settled and most populous region of Bhutan. Consequently, much of the early part of today's journey meanders through relatively intensively farmed land. Nevertheless, it is a fascinating landscape with plenty of birds to see. Shortly before breakfast, we will explore the marshy rice-fields near our camp, where we hope to again find a pair of rarely observed Black-tailed Crakes in residence. Later as we pass through Moshi, we begin to climb through some gorgeous forest to a high point at 8,400 feet. This is the last ridge of the Himalayas before it descends to the plains. The view from here is quite beyond description. Ridge after ridge of untouched forest mystically blends to the horizon. Anticipation of tomorrow's dawn chorus brings tingles to this writer just thinking about it. Our first night on the road will find us camping at about 5,000 feet in some really beautiful broad-leaved forest. The birding possibilities are seemingly endless.

NIGHT: Camping Morong (4,000 feet)

April 28, Day 23: Drive to Somdrup Jonkhar via Bhutan's Sub-tropical Forests. At this point, we have traveled deep into the eastern part of Bhutan. Thus we anticipate finding a number of rare and little known species. Very few birders have ever visited this part of Bhutan. Although many of the birds will be familiar, we also hope to encounter a number of the more elusive lower elevation species such as Chestnut-breasted Partridge, Gray Peacock-Pheasant, Silver-breasted Broadbill, Blue-naped Pitta, and Blue-winged Laughingthrush, any of which represent a very special experience. With a great deal of luck, we may even discover such gems as Rufous-bellied Shortwing, or the beguiling Wedge-billed Wren-Babbler. AND then there is always the extreme possibility of being the first bird-tour to find the seemingly mythical Blyth's Tragopan!!!

NIGHT: Hi Fi Hotel, Somdrup Jonkhar

April 29, Day 24: Birding the Sub-tropical Forests above Samdrup Jonkhar. We will spend much of the day exploring a very "birdy," albeit slightly degraded, area of sub-tropical forest. Birds we may encounter include Thick-billed and Pin-tailed green-pigeons; Emerald Dove; Horsfield's Hawk-Cuckoo; Drongo; Banded Bay, Gray-breasted, Violet, and Plaintive cuckoos; Green-billed Malkoha; Greater Coucal; Blue-bearded and Chestnut-headed bee-eaters; with luck, the very rarely seen Blyth's Kingfisher; Wreathed and Great hornbills (both seen superbly on previous tours); the spectacular Greater Flameback (woodpecker); Asian Fairy-bluebird; Black-naped Monarch; Greater Racket-tailed Drongo; Asian Paradise-Flycatcher; Hill Myna; and Crimson Sunbird.

In 1998, we were only the second group ever to encounter the almost mythical Dark-rumped Swift, which for a short while became a permanent feature of VENT Bhutan tours. However, in recent years, with the advent of the closure of Samdrup Jonkhar, this species has been missing from our lists, and so it was especially pleasing to reacquaint ourselves with this and many other wonderful sub-tropical specialties on our 2006 tour. In addition, on this last tour we also found the very rarely encountered Pied Falconet and were perhaps the first group ever to see the gorgeous Hooded Pitta in Bhutan! You just never know what is waiting out there for you!

NIGHT: Hi Fi Lodge, Samdrup Jonkhar

April 30, Day 25: Drive to Gauhati; Fly to Delhi. From Samdrup Jonkhar, we will enter India. This morning we will bird our way across the fertile and birdy northern plains of the Brahmaputra Valley, stopping at anywhere that looks interesting before arriving at Gauhati, the capital of Assam. Birds we have encountered on previous tours include displaying Black Francolins; Indian Peafowl; Lesser and perhaps even Fulvous whistling-ducks; the globally endangered Great and Lesser Adjutant storks; Watercock; Small Pratincole—occasionally in large numbers; Greater Painted-Snipe; Pheasant-tailed Jacanas—possibly in breeding dress; Coppersmith Barbet; Striated Grass-bird; Asian Pied Myna; and Black-breasted Weaver. We will then take a midday flight to Delhi, arriving during the early evening. Dinner will be provided along with the use of day rooms until 10:00 p.m.

DAY: Radisson Airport Hotel, Delhi

May 1, Day 26: Return Flights Home. You may schedule your return flight at any time today. Most flights depart Delhi very early in the morning, around 1:00 a.m. or 2:00 a.m.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: David Bishop

David Bishop loves his vocation and cannot imagine anything better than exploring wild and beautiful places in Asia and the Pacific in the company of friends and clients. He has spent much of the past 32 years studying the birds and natural history of the Oriental region, in addition to New Guinea and the Southwest Pacific. David was once a police officer amid the streets of London's West End, but 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, have 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.

This is David's eighteenth tour to Bhutan.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to extend your stay, 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 and transportation. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$13,255** per person in double occupancy from Delhi. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 3 to dinner on Day 25, lodging beginning on April 7 and ending on April 30, internal flights on Druk Air (Delhi to Paro, Gauhati to Delhi), ground transportation during the tour, airport departure taxes, Bhutan visa fees, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. The fee does not include airfare from your home to Delhi and return, 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 **\$910**. **Please note: single accommodation in Bhutan is very limited.** 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. Please note that singles may not be available at all locations. This has been taken into consideration in our costing. Some participants, who wish to share a room, may not wish to share a tent. The single tent supplement is **\$300**.

Fuel Surcharges: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While VENT will do everything possible to maintain the original price of the cruise or tour, if fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to implement a fuel surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In most cases, these additional fuel costs are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers who reserve the right, in their agreements to provide services for VENT, to raise their prices due to significant changes in fuel costs.

Exchange Rate Surcharges: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

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. A second deposit of **\$2000.00** per person will be due 180 days prior to departure. 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 180 days or more before the departure date, any monies paid less **\$500.00** is refundable. If cancellation is made between 180 and 120 days before the departure date, the total deposit to date less **\$1000.00** is refundable. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before the departure date, no refund is available. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself.***

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure	Any monies paid less the \$500 deposit
Between 180 and 120 days before departure	Total deposit to date less \$1000
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.

BAGGAGE: Participants are encouraged to take whatever they think they will reasonably need for this tour, including telescope and tripod, camera and video equipment. With regard to clothing, participants should bring sufficient items with them so that from Day 15 when we depart Trongsa, they do not need to have any laundry done. We will only be staying for one night at any of the guest houses from thereon, and getting laundry dry in camp can sometimes be difficult. While participants are permitted two large pieces of baggage into and out of the USA, Druk Air restricts the amount of free check-in baggage per person to 20 kg (44 lbs). We strongly recommend that you carry your check-in baggage in two soft bags so that when camping, one bag can be kept on the luggage truck with all the things you do not immediately need. This will permit more room in your tent and more personal comfort.

ALTITUDE: We will be ascending to elevations above 10,000 and as high as 13,000 feet (driving over passes). However, we will acclimate ourselves by ascending in small increments daily. Most ascents will be by vehicle, and we will then work a given area by walking down hill; however, there will be times when there is no option but to walk up hill. We will almost always be walking along a road on easy grades and at a very slow pace, so this should not be a matter of concern for anyone in moderate to reasonable condition. Those with heart or respiratory concerns should contact their doctor prior to departure.

CAMPING: Bhutan is not a regular tourist destination. Consequently, the infrastructure for visitors is minimal, especially the further east we travel. Needless to say, the very best forests and birding sites are a long way from the nearest guest house. Our land agents will therefore set up very comfortable camps for us in the following locations: Pele La (10,500 feet), Tingtibi (2,000 feet), Sengor (10,000 feet), Yongkola (6,200 feet), Rotong (8,000), and Morong (4,000 feet). All of these are delightful sites, located amidst beautiful forest and mountain scenery. There will be **walk-in**, comfortable-for-two tents with cots, sheets, pillows, and blankets. Participants are recommended to **bring their own sleeping bag**, as previous participants who did so found this to be warmer and cozier than the blankets and sheets provided. If participants would prefer a tent to themselves, please advise the VENT office. Single tent space is limited and will be assigned in order of tour registration. **Many clients have commented on how much they really enjoyed the camping!**

CLIMATE: At the time of our visit (April), and because of the wide range of altitudes (1,000 to 13,000 feet) that our tour covers, we will encounter a wide range of temperatures, including cold and damp, possibly some snow, and almost certainly some rain. There may be occasionally hot conditions with very bright sunshine, which typically in the mountains (because of the increased radiation) burns skin more readily than one supposes.

CLOTHING: Casual is the order of the day; however, short pants, short skirts, and halter-tops are not appropriate in this rather conservative region. Participants may want to pack one set of slightly smarter clothes to wear at our hotels in Delhi and Paro. 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 appropriate, as the ground will be wet and possibly slippery a lot of the time in Bhutan. Wellington (rubber) boots could be useful if we encounter muddy roads/trails or much snow, but bringing them must be balanced against their relatively large size and weight. Some flip flops or shower shoes are recommended. Laundry service will be available at all the places we stay in Bhutan, including while we are in camp; however, it is important to note that once we head east from Trongsa we will only have one night at any particular guest house, or we will be in camp. Participants are therefore advised to bring more, rather than less clothes with them. Participants should bring layers rather than one or two large items. Sturdy, rainproof jackets and pants are strongly recommended (shower proof plastic jackets are not sufficient), in addition to at least one warm sweater, and a down jacket or down vest. Other items that are recommended include a warm head-covering such as a beret or balaclava, in addition to a regular birding hat, gloves and scarf. Many of

our participants found silk or synthetic thermal long underwear very handy for the cool nights and early mornings. Sunglasses are very useful (occasionally essential) at higher elevations, especially if there is a lot of snow about. Thick socks that absorb perspiration and cushion one's feet from hard surfaces are important. It is also useful if the socks are long enough so that the bottom of one's pants can be tucked inside.

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. Muted colors are essential to enhance our chances. Please do not wear brightly colored clothes, hats, gloves, bags, or other paraphernalia. Furthermore, if you can avoid crackling nylon/plastic jackets and pants, this will greatly 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: Indian rupees are accepted throughout Bhutan. Credit cards are accepted by very few places either in Assam or Bhutan. Participants are advised to carry sufficient funds in low denomination American Express U.S. dollar travelers checks and/or U.S. dollars in cash. The latter can be very useful in an emergency.

NOTE: Bhutan has some very fine handicrafts, including hand-woven fabrics that have to be seen to be believed. As mentioned previously in the itinerary (April 20, Day 15), we will stay at the home of the lady widely considered the finest weaver in the kingdom of Bhutan.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date is required for United States citizens to enter India and Bhutan. A multiple entry visa is required for entry into India, and you should obtain this 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.

For your Bhutan visa, please fill out three copies of the form enclosed in your tour information folder and return it with three passport photos to the VENT office for processing. Bhutan visas will be waiting for all participants upon arrival, and VENT will pay the U.S. \$20, upon entry, Bhutan visa fee, in addition to the departure fees from India to Bhutan and back to the United States. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should have a pair of binoculars in good repair (please check before departure!). Your tour leader will be carrying a spotting scope; however, you are recommended to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish, as this will greatly enhance your enjoyment of this tour if you are used to carrying and regularly using your own scope.

You should bring all the camera equipment, batteries, and digital storage media or film that you will need. Digital storage media and film will be almost impossible to obtain once we depart Delhi. **Nearly everyone brings too few batteries and too little film or digital storage media, and this causes some distress. PLEASE bring loads (we cannot emphasize this enough!!!!).** UV and polarizing filters are recommended, especially at higher elevations where glare can be a problem. Plastic bags are very useful to protect equipment from rain and dust. A really good flashlight or headlamp is essential, so please ensure that yours is in good working order and that you have spare bulbs and batteries. A spare flashlight or headlamp is ideal. Couples should bring one flashlight or headlamp each.

A small daypack (either waterproofed or with a strong plastic bag inside) is essential for carrying excess clothing, camera equipment, toiletries, food, and water. However, in many of the areas where we will be birding, we will have regular access to our transport, which 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:

1. **Flashlights or headlamps** (as previously indicated): We will be out at night on a few occasions; a small flashlight or headlamp is essential to find your way in your tent and around camp at night, especially at checklist sessions.
2. **Handywipes:** These are very important, and paper tissues are also especially useful. All participants should carry sufficient amounts for their personal needs for the entire tour. Although basic shower facilities will be available in camp, some participants found the use of handwipes was sufficient for at least one (several?) night.
3. **Spare glasses or contact lenses.**
4. **One bath towel and face cloth:** Our ground agents will provide a brand new towel for all participants. However, a second one of your own, plus your own face cloth, is handy.
5. **Sunscreen:** Strongly recommended, especially for higher elevations where the UV is much greater; **lip balm** is also essential.
6. **Umbrella:** The collapsible type is easy to carry and useful both against rain and sun.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Electricity – Both India and Bhutan use 220 volts, 50 cycles, AC. However, electricity in Bhutan can be unreliable. A flashlight or headlamp with a good supply of batteries will be essential. Do not rely on an electric razor, or having electricity available for charging your video batteries (although all participants have managed well enough on previous trips).

Language - In Bhutan, Dzongkha is the official language; and in India, Hindi, English and 14 other languages are spoken.

Time - 10 to 10½ hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Snacks - It is advisable to bring granola-type bars, dried fruit or other snacks, as western-style snacks will not be available and Bhutanese food may not include the roughage and variety we have grown accustomed to in our Western diets.

Bug juice – Everyone will need insect repellent to deal with the odd occasion we encounter leeches at low elevations (very rarely because we bird mostly from the road) AND at mid-elevations sometimes black flies can be a nuisance at the time of our visit.

TRANSPORTATION/MEALS: In Bhutan we will travel for the duration of the tour in a very comfortable, well appointed, modern, heated, Japanese bus with large, airy windows that are ideal for birdwatching and photography. Additionally, a second vehicle will follow us with all our baggage, and a third vehicle will carry all our camping equipment in addition to a seeming endless supply of cold beer, soft drinks, and bottled water. Many members of our Bhutanese team travel in this truck and set out pre-dawn to prepare a marvelous cooked breakfast in the field, at some of the most unimaginably beautiful and birdy locations. Later in the day they repeat the process for lunch. Dinners are taken at the various lodges and camps. Drinks and snacks will be available at all times in the bus.

HEALTH: Participants are advised NOT to drink the tap water or unboiled water placed at the table unless advised by your tour leader. Bottled drinks (including uncarbonated bottled mineral water), will be available at all times. Participants should not eat uncooked foods such as meat or vegetables, or food 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. A number of forms of Hepatitis may be present in Bhutan. We recommend participants contact their doctor for advice prior to departure. **PLEASE NOTE: While in eastern and central Bhutan, participants will be at least two days from western medical facilities in case of emergency. Please be aware of this before joining the tour.**

All participants should bring a good quantity of all their medical/pharmaceutical supplies, as these will be very difficult to obtain anywhere on the tour.

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.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

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. Canadian 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.

Ali, S. *The Fall of the Sparrow*. Bombay. OUP. 1984.

Beebe, W. *Pheasant Jungles*. Reading. World Pheasant Association. 1994.

Bole, P.V. & Y. Vaghani. *Field Guide to the Common Trees of India*. Bombay. WWF India/OUP. 1986.

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and T. Inskipp. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Christopher Helm Identification Guide Series*, 1998.

Inskipp, C., T. Inskipp and R. Grimmet. *Birds of Bhutan*. A&C Black, 2004. The authors of the above work have now produced a book specifically concerned with Bhutan. While the text is greatly reduced, this book is much more practical to carry in the field and most participants may prefer to

obtain a copy of this book rather than the larger one listed above, unless they plan to bird in India too. (See www.amazon.com for purchase.)

The recommended book to bring on tour.

Daniel, J.C. *The Book of Indian Reptile and Amphibians*. Bombay: Bombay Natural History Society, 2002.

Gurung, K.K. and Raj Singh. *Field Guide to the Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent: Where to watch Mammals in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan*. San Diego: Academic Press, 1996.

Insight Guides. *Indian Wildlife*. Apa Productions, 1987. A superb evocation of the subcontinent's wildlife, in addition to very useful details of its huge variety of parks and reserves.

Kazmierczak, K. & B. van Perlo. *A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Robertsbridge. Pica Press. 1999.

This is a very nice alternative to the Rasmussen & Anderton 2005 or the Grimmet *et al* guide.

Kazmierczak, Krys and Raj Singh. *A Birdwatchers' Guide to India*. Bedfordshire, United Kingdom: Prion Ltd., 1998. This book describes a cross-section of birding sites covering all of India's regions and main habitats, and is very informative. It's a wonderful and fascinating book co-authored by Raj Singh, co-author of *Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent*, and owner of the company handling our ground arrangements in India, Assam, and Bhutan. Currently, it is not available in the USA; however, it is available through Natural History Book Service, 2 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5XN U.K., phone 011-44-1803865913 or fax 011-44-1803865280.

McNeely, Jeffrey A. and Paul Spencer Wachtel. *Soul of the Tiger: Searching for Natural Answers in Southeast Asia*. New York: Doubleday, 1988. One of the most intriguing and beautifully written books on the complex relationships between man, his myriad beliefs and nature, and the implications for conservation.

Menon, V. *A Field Guide to Indian Mammals*. DK Delhi. 2003.

Undoubtedly the very finest field guide to the mammals of India.

Owen, E.T. *Bhutan: Land of the Thunder Dragon*. London, 1998. (out of print)

Polunin, O. and Stainton, A. *Flowers of the Himalaya*. Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1984. A very helpful guide; while not quite encompassing Bhutan, it will provide a useful insight into the flora of the region.

Pommaret, F. *Bhutan: An Illustrated Guide*. 3rd edition. Hong Kong: The Guide Book Company, 1998.

Prater, S.H. *The Book of Indian Animals (Mammals)*. Bombay: Bombay Natural History, 1971. Detailed descriptions and illustrations of most, if not all, the animals inhabiting the Indian Subcontinent. A fairly easy book to obtain in India, if it's not available near your home.

Ramsay, C.R. *Bhutan- Excursion to Enchantment: A Journey through the World's Most Beautiful Places*. Washington: National Geographic, 1988.

Rasmussen, P. C. & J. C. Anderton. 2005. *Birds of South Asia. The Ripley Guide. Vols. 1 and 2*. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington D.C. and Barcelona.

If you want something more detailed and comprehensive than the Inskipp Bhutan book, then you should also obtain the Rasmussen book. This book also has a much more up to date taxonomy.

Schaller, G. B. *The Deer and the Tiger*. 1998. Natraj Publishers, Dehra Dun, India.

Singh, R.L. *India – A Regional Geography*. Varanasi. National Geographic Society of India. 1989.

Whittaker, R. and A. Captain. *Snakes of India. The Fields Guide*. Draco Books, Chennai, India. 2004.

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

**Either map recommended to bring on tour. One will be included in the participant tour folder.*

If participants have difficulty obtaining any titles, they may wish to contact the Natural History Book Service which has one of the most comprehensive collections of books on natural history. 2 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5XN U.K. Phone: 011-44-1803865913, Fax: 011-44-1803865280.

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