

Assam & Bhutan

Brahmaputra to Himalaya

A Greentours Tour Report

21st January to 6th February 2017

Led by Ian Green & Seda Soylu

Day 1 January 21st Departure

We left Heathrow in the evening bound for Delhi.

Day 2 January 22nd Arrival

We arrived into Delhi more or less on time and were met by our agents in Delhi. After seeing to a few practicalities we were back in the travel mode and soon enough boarding our flight eastwards to Guwahati. En route the Himalayan peaks shone to our north, getting closer and closer. We passed Everest which we could see clearly then Kanchenjunga which seemed so close we could almost touch it. We could see off to its right Bhutan's highest mountain. Then it was down across the mighty Brahmaputra and into Guwahati where we collected our baggage and met up with our driver.

Already the sun was lowering in the western sky and so night fell even as we left the city. The journey to Kaziranga took us a while, it is not the distance on these Assamese roads, merely the many and varied inhabitants of the tarmac that ensure every journey is both slow and endlessly interesting! Eventually we arrived at our rather lovely hotel and were given a warm welcome and a much needed and excellent dinner.

Day 2 January 23rd Kaziranga – East and Central Ranges

A leisurely start this morning saw the sun up and Yellow-footed Green Pigeons and Great Mynahs sitting in the trees when we went for breakfast. Well-fed we met up with our drivers and local guide and headed out to discover the delights of Kaziranga. We started with a drive along the main road half an hour east to the East Ranges. The drive itself was a wonderful education into life in Assam as we passed through little hamlets and farms full of people smiling back at us. Everywhere there was colour whether it was the little roadside shops full of sweets and cigarettes or brilliant clothing of the women. The birds too did their best to distract us, for even along the main road we were drawn to a halt by a fabulous tight flock of Rose-ringed Parakeets flashing brilliant green in

the morning sun. It took us more than an hour to cover the last kilometre of dirt road to the gate so many birds were there to watch. There were Open-billed Storks, a pair of fabulous Oriental Pied Hornbills, our first Indian Rollers and White-breasted Kingfishers.... Around the gate area we quickly added three more species of kingfisher with Eurasian, Pied and an impressive Stork-billed Kingfisher. Once inside the gate we soon started to see mammals. First was a single Indian One-horned Rhinoceros sitting quietly on the edge of a Bheel (large water body). A large herd of Barasingha or Swamp Deer grazed further out, the eastern form of this species is now a very rare animal almost confined to this one reserve. In the trees we spotted Hoary-bellied Squirrel and soon we were watching our first Hog Deer too. A pair of Changeable Hawk Eagles were much enjoyed and then soon after a Crested Serpent Eagle gave great views. Then there came a half hour where we sat under some trees enjoying a rich pageant of forest birds passing through the varied trees. It was hard to look anywhere without ones attention being arrested by the sight of Bombax, or silk cotton trees, in spectacular red flower and these were attracting birds in numbers. We watched lots of Mynahs – Jungle, Great and Common – feeding in them alongside Red-vented and Red-whiskered Bulbuls. There were Rufous Treepies, a group or two of Scarlet Minivets, a Grey-crowned Pygmy Woodpecker, a superb Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker...

We watched more Rhinos out in the open as well as large numbers of wild Water Buffalo. Some of the males have spectacular horns, indeed the spread of a large wild Water Buffalo's horns is the largest in the animal kingdom. There were of course hordes of birds out in this wetland paradise too. There were very many ducks including many familiar species from the palearctic regions but also Eastern Spot-billed Ducks and Pygmy Cotton Teal. Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas were enjoyed too. Black-necked Storks and Lesser Adjutants were very impressive, and great to see a good number of these birds, and there were a few Spot-billed Pelicans too. Two Ospreys flew over and a Grey-headed Fish Eagle too, we'd just seen one flying off with a fish a little earlier. A little further on and there was a fine male Water Buffalo on the edge of some grassland where two Hog Deer lit up our interest by running into the open, eyes over their shoulders, tails raised...nothing followed them though. Two Spotted Owlets peered out of a tree hole and later the second driver spotted a superb Asian Barred Owllet sitting out in the open.

All the while butterflies were in evidence. Groups of Common (Striped) Tigers were commonplace along the tracks. Also frequent were Glassy Tigers and Common Crows and here and there we spotted Grey Pansies. Our guide found us a Lemon Pansy and Tim spotted a superb Common Pierrot which we were all able to watch at close range. We stopped by a watchtower and spent a while enjoying the birds and animals from there. A Bright Sunbeam was perched by the edge of marsh. On the landward side we found a Common Iora, some Long-tailed Minivets, and a Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher.

After breakfast a lovely Red-base Jezebel was found just outside the lodge.

In the afternoon we headed to the Central Range, just fifteen minutes away from our lodge. Once inside we soon started to count up the Indian One-horned Rhinoceroses. In total we were to see at least twenty with at one point thirteen in view together. One of the first we saw was right by the track, just thirty metres from us. We also saw a number of Indian Elephants during the afternoon including a couple of fine tuskers. Perhaps the best was the first – for as we watched some nearby

birds we were suddenly aware of branches cracking as an Elephant walked through the forest right by us, this one also coming out on the road a little way along making for fine photographs. Hog Deer were also a feature of the afternoon with hundreds seen, several of them very close by and some fine stags too. We stopped at one point for an hour and were able to hang around on foot – this was a spot that Tiger had been seen in the last few days at this time.... As we waited, keeping a wary eye on the Hog Deer, Buffalo and Rhinos out in the grassland we birdwatched nearer at hand. Most impressive was a Pallas's Fish Eagle that came and landed on a nearby Bombax. Two Large-billed Crows landed at its feet, paltry in comparison, though they gave it so much jip that it left in the end. Nearer at hand were Taiga Flycatcher and all three common Shrike species. A Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*) right next to us kept us busy. A Coppersmith was much enjoyed and there was a lovely Little Pied Flycatcher too. Tickell's Leaf, Greenish and Yellow-browed Warblers were all present. There were plenty of Darters around and more Black-necked Storks and a few Black-necked Ibises. As the afternoon waned flocks of Bar-headed Geese headed in, and before long there were many in the grassland in front of us, but still no Tiger. So when the news came in that one had been seen a couple of kilometres further in we headed to the watchtower there with alacrity. We were ten minutes too late though and had to be content with magnificent views of the Kaziranga landscape as the sun set. Then of course we heard that a Tiger had come out where we'd been waiting.... We hurried back but this time were thwarted by just a minute or two.... It wasn't to be. However we'd had an enthralling and wildlife-rich day, so we didn't feel too disappointed.

Back at the Infinity Lodge we were treated to a superb dinner, the lightly spiced and very fragrant dishes a real treat.

Day 4 January 24th Kaziranga – Elephant Ride, West and Central Ranges

Things started rather early today. We were down at the park entrance before it got light and in fact had to wait twenty minutes or so before it was light enough to ride out on our elephants. As we mounted it was still very much pre-dawn with the grasslands before us shrouded in low mists and animals only visible as shadowy shapes in the distance. This all changed quickly as dawn's light gathered pace – the sun doesn't so much come up here it jumps into the sky! Soon the ten or so Elephants with us and others on were rumbling through the grass. It was a totally magical morning and any of us who felt beforehand that this was just a touristy thing to do were soon enthralled. Much of the credit for this must go to the landscapes and the morning light, but the cast of actors was pretty good too. We soon found a Rhino with a baby. This we were able to enjoy from all of twenty metres – remarkable. The female appeared pretty unconcerned, merely shielding her youngster a little. We were to come across a dozen more equally fabulous leviathans as we traversed the grassland. The herds of Barasingha were wonderful and we got right in amongst them, and Hog Deer were plentiful too, often with small youngsters in tow. At one point we watched the sun rise then soon afterwards were photographing the deer and rhinos with the sun lighting the mists behind them and the Assamese hills rising in the background – sublime! Skeins of Bar-headed Geese flew in V-formation across the pink skies whilst Swamp Francolins called loudly around us. Bright-headed Cisticolas jumped up and down in the air above the grasses. A Painted Snipe was flushed. A King Cobra with a body as thick as a human arm lay coiled in a hole in the

ground – it must have been a stupendous snake if we could have seen the whole thing. A Wild Boar sauntered across and the mahout on one of the elephants called it over and so the boar came right up to the elephant. Returning to the pavilion we found that a Tiger had walked across while we had been out!

Then it was back for breakfast and for a warm-up – it had been a cool morning. After some great omelettes and toast, we were out again. This time heading out to the west range with Polash. En route he stopped to show us Blossom-headed Parakeets, Ashy-headed Wood Swallows, and a pair of Oriental Pied Hornbills. The landscapes of the West Range were particularly varied. There were open scrubby woodlands to begin with, then open water, then a long area of forest which was particularly beautiful, then again a mix of tall grassland and trees. Throughout we came across Rhinos, perhaps another twenty of them. Water Buffalo were common too and we saw one group of three superb males in the water. Hog Deer were again numerous. A wonderful surprise was a Smooth-coated Otter which lolloped out onto the track, nowhere near any water, and then lolloped on down it! Another great mammal sighting was a Malayan Giant Squirrel, a large black and white squirrel with a long tail. Birds of course continued to be numerous and wonderful. Stork-billed Kingfisher was seen and of course the commoner kingfishers too. There were again plenty of storks and we had great views of Lesser Adjutant and Woolly-necked Storks. Purple Heron was seen. It was a brilliant morning for raptors and vulture. These were a number of groups of the latter, mostly Long-billed Vultures but also a Eurasian Griffon too. A sparrowhawk, probably a Shikra, chased a Booted Eagle. We saw Crested Serpent Eagle and also a very close Spotted Eagle too. There was a great view of a Shikra later. Three Crested Honey Buzzards were seen, the last of which, a dark bird, was very close to a bee hive we found covered in a thick coating of bees – no-one wanted the buzzard to come down and disturb the bees! In the forest we came across a Grey-headed Woodpecker, earlier we'd seen a Black-rumped Flameback. There were other nice birds in here too including White-rumped Shamias, an Asian Barred Owlet, Common Ioras and a Puff-throated Babbler. Butterflies were less numerous today but did include a couple of Citrus Swallowtails and particularly along the tracks through recently burnt grassland there were lots of Indian Fritillaries.

We returned for lunch, and a wander round the grounds where butterflies were to the fore. Chocolate Soldier and Peacock Pansy were seen and there were also a number of blues, Common Palmflies and Lemon Emigrant.

The afternoon session took us down to the Central Range again. Our aim was to see the Tigers that were appearing with some regularity there but like the day before we were unsuccessful. They had even been seen there in the morning, but no dice this afternoon. There was plenty else to keep us busy though. Of course the Rhinos were out and about and things got quite tasty late in the afternoon when three came down to the water right in front of the jeeps. These then came up and walked across the road, the mother getting quite irked by a passing jeep and doing a little shimmy towards it. Hog Deer wandered over and gave great views and a Wild Boar came up onto the track and walked down towards us coming quite close. Out in the grassland the Hog Deer were mixed more or less evenly with a large group of Rhesus Macaques, these all becoming 'meerkat-macaques' as the sun waned and looking quite amazing as they all stood up on their hind legs! Woolly-necked Storks and Black-necked Ibises fed out in the wetland as Spotted Redshanks flew past and there were endless groups of Bar-headed Geese flying in to roost. In the nearby trees were Rufous

Treepies, Little Pied Flycatchers and Black-hooded Orioles. A Grey-headed Fish Eagle flew in and land in the Peepal above us only for a Pallas's Eagle to almost knock it out of the tree from the other direction. Then it was back to base where we had a long relax before dinner. During the latter the chef cooked up some fine fried chicken by special order for those who didn't want the local food. The latter include a sublime Malai Kofta and the Chicken do piazza was pretty excellent too.

Day 5 January 25th Kaziranga, Elephant Ride, Central and East Ranges

We went for another early morning Elephant ride this morning, though it was the second shift this time so not quite so early. We drove a different route to get there too, taking us through a wonderful rural scene of people getting up and starting the farming day. Once on the Elephants we were out into grassland, this time the sun had already risen and there was a little more warmth in the air. The ride followed much the same pattern as the last one though the route was different. Again we rolled through the grassland until we found some Rhinos. These were again totally obliging. Then we continued to the next group, enjoying Hog Deer and Wild Boar on the way, and we finished with a grassland thick with Barasingha. There were birds too, today's star turn was a tree full of pelicans! We added Blyth's Pipit to the list.

Then it was back to breakfast. The rest of the morning was spent back at the Central Zone. It seemed the Tigers had gone quiet, no news of them today. We did of course continue to see Rhinos, quite a few of them. Sadly one was a little still-born calf right by the trackside. Just further along was a Blue Tiger posing on a liana. Polash pointed out a couple of Spotted Owlets then a little further down it was the turn of a Dusky Horned Owl which could be seen peering out of its nest. In the grassland below we spotted Yellow-eyed Babblers and Plain Prinias. Stonechats were common. A tree with various starlings, mynahs and Rufous Tree-pies in it turned out to have a Blue-bearded Bee-eater too, though we didn't know until it flew off over our heads. The tracksides hereabouts had quite a few butterflies, notably several Citrus Swallowtails, and a few Castors. These wouldn't land and we had to guess that they were probably Common Castors. Lemon Pansies, Grey Pansies, Glassy Tigers and Common Tigers were also seen. Raptors again played a large part in the day's events. This morning we found a fine Crested Serpent Eagle sitting in a tree and also both Pallas's Fish Eagle and Grey-headed Fish Eagle doing the same. Overhead a number of Long-billed Vultures were seen. A superb immature Steppe Eagle drifted over and Spotted Eagle too. At the last stop, by a large bheel, an Osprey sailed over. Here Ruddy Shelducks, Eurasian Wigeon and Great Cormorants were seen, and a sounder of Wild Boar fed by the edge of the water. A Peacock Pansy kept company with an Indian Fritillary and a Yellow Jezebel flew past.

We returned for lunch and a break. Next to the Infinity Resort was some fallow land which had a number of butterflies on it including Common Mormons, the Nigger, and some Common Three-rings.

The afternoon was spent in the East Range. This turned out to be the most exciting part of the trip thus far. We started with a great surprise along the road as Polash spotted a pale falcon on a tall roadside tree. It was a superb adult Red-necked Falcon (aka Red-headed Merlin), an increasingly rare bird and rarely seen these days. As we neared the park entrance Polash spotted another falcon,

this one giving rapid and acrobatic chase to some of its smaller cousins. This was a very pale blue-grey *calidris* race Peregrine. Once inside the park the raptors continued with Steppe Eagle, Spotted Eagle, Pallas's Fish Eagle and Crested Serpent Eagle. There were flocks of Small Pratincoles flying back and forth in front of large groups of Bar-headed Geese and Lesser Whistling Ducks were being harried by the fish eagle. Pacific Golden Plover, Grey-headed Lapwings and many Northern Lapwings were noted. The open bheel provided much grazing for animals and we could see large numbers of Water Buffalo, Hog Deer and at least ten Indian One-horned Rhinoceroses. Two of the latter were having a fight – quite a heavyweight contest!

A Hog Badger was seen briefly by those in the front jeep and soon afterwards Polash spotted a Smooth-coated Otter running around on a grassy knoll. We watched this fine animal for a while before spotted 6 more chasing around in the water. They were a bit distant but we enjoyed seeing the adult catch and eat a fish and the youngsters coursing back and forth around her. Ferruginous Ducks and both Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas were seen.

There were also a number of Elephants out in this arena. For an arena it rather seemed; and the idea gained further footing as suddenly Polash, aware of the alarm calls being made by a large posse of Hog Deer, spotted a Tiger walking along the edge of a wooded area behind a group of attentive Water Buffalo. The Buffalo were staring at the impressive orange cat. Orange it very much was, the lowering sun casting a fulsome glow to its already magnificent coat. Suddenly there were two Tigers, then three! They came in and out of cover before finally reaching a grassy bank behind which two of them disappeared but the third sat looking back towards us with its fine broad beautifully patterned mug. We were so pleased! The Tigers came and went for a while. It was interesting to watch the Water Buffalo and assess their reaction. Most of them were looking carefully at the Tiger/s or where they had been or where they thought they were. After a while one buffalo detached itself from the group and walked over toward the last spot the Tigers were seen, then, rather unaccountably it just turned its bottom on the spot!

We headed on, stopping for a bit of a watch hardly further along. The sun had now set and it was getting cooler and less bright. We watched several Hoary-bellied Himalayan Squirrels. Large groups of Darters flew over. Then it was time to go, but not before our driver had again spotted the Tigers. This time we realised that there were in fact four! On the way out we spotted a Sambar and eyeshine near the main road revealed a nightjar. We went with Polash to try a nightwalk near his house but with no success. Dinner was again sublime, the Manchurian meatballs (vegetarian!) were particularly good!

Day 6 January 26th Kaziranga – East and West Ranges

We had a more relaxing start this morning convening for breakfast at seven and departing for the east range at seven forty-five. Deer and bird alarm calls welcomed us the entrance of East Range. A Tiger was moving just out of sight. Unfortunately it stayed just out of sight. Little Green Bee-eaters were enjoyed though. Moving inside we soon found both Pallas's and Grey-headed Fish Eagles. We stopped for a long while at a view point over the marsh. Here Polash spotted a fine male Falcated Duck. Meanwhile we searched for butterflies. A Large Yeoman was a great highlight. Common

Crows and Common Tigers were.... Common. We found an Evening Brown too. Black-naped Monarch and Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher were in the trees above us.

Moving along we could see plenty of Rhinos and Wild Water Buffalo as well as Hog Deer along the edge of the wetland and there was the usual mix of ducks, egrets, waders and storks – it's impossible to look at any of these bheels without totting up a quick thirty species of wetland birds! In the trees above us we spotted Crested Serpent Eagle and the usual starlings and mynas. A group of Red-breasted Parakeets were much appreciated – they are really pretty birds and there were several Mountain Imperial Pigeons. Stork-billed Kingfisher was photographed. A jeep in front of us had found a Hodgson's Porcupine. It was rather hidden in the vegetation below the road but we could see various parts of it at various times and the quills were always visible. Continuing we'd hardly gone a hundred metres when a group of Smooth-coated Otters were found in the water close to the road. One sat on the bank eating a fish whilst the other six cruised around the water seemingly in formation. At one point a fish jumped clear of the water to get away from the otters!

We drove on down the track now passing through dry sandy forest before we reached the banks of the Brahmaputra River. The scene was really something. Suddenly it was like we'd reached a coast. There was, at this season, very little water, just a channel here and there, but instead a wide expanse of sand stretched off to the horizon. Well not quite, but it was three kilometres away and apparently the river is often 16km wide when in full flow! Over the river fish eagles soared, and on the near shore we watched Long-toed Stints, Common Sandpipers and Little Ringed Plovers.

Then we were off back towards the entrance. Not much time to stop now, but we did briefly revisit the Otters, six of whom were now lounging on the bank, and we stopped also for a Great Hornbill that flew in and landed obligingly.

Back at the hotel we took lunch. The coriander chutney drew much praise. Tim and I ventured into the nearby scrub and found a range of butterflies including Common Evening Brown, Common Caerulean, Purple Sapphire, Dark-brand Bushbrown, Nigger, and Common Fivering.

In the afternoon we headed to the west range. In many respects this was a quiet trip. We visited a viewpoint looking out over a bheel where no less than forty-one Indian One-horned Rhinoceroses were in view – quite a significant percentage of the world population. Also so many buffalo and Hog Deer. One of the latter caused some amusement as its horns had grown with a recurved point – on both antlers. Three Steppe Eagles sat on the ground eating something. We drove round the circuit stopping for the odd bird. Swamp Francolin was seen, White-rumped Shama too. Taiga Flycatcher was seen. A White-eyed Buzzard was studied for a while. Suddenly news of a Tiger came and we turned round and a minute later were at a junction wondering whether it had disappeared, but no, there it was coming out on to the track a couple of hundred metres along and spray-marking on a stump before sauntering (do Tigers move in another way?) off down the track and then disappearing into the forest.

We decided to carry on round the track, the light was failing fast now. Sunset was beautiful at a rangers station where we met the house cat. A Jungle Cat to all intents and purposes, only missing the ear tufts, so a hybrid, but mostly Jungle Cat. Then it was on round to the entrance passing more

Rhinos, some Oriental Pied Hornbills, a huge flock of Little Cormorants, and an Indian Spotted Eagle as well.

Day 6 January 27th Kaziranga – Burradapur & Local Village

This morning we left at seven for an area to the west of the main park. This was a small but very beautiful area of forest that abutted the Brahmaputra River. We spent the entire morning on the two kilometre stretch between the main road and a ranger watchtower on the shores of the mighty river.

We had hoped to see or at least hear Hoolock Gibbons but today they were strangely quiet. Maybe it was the weather – it was cooler than of late and a little cloudy. However we did soon find some Capped Langurs. There were three that were particularly photogenic posing in a tall tree, long tails hanging down. The trees in fact may well have been the highlight of the morning. There were amazing figs everywhere, stranglers and otherwise, but all massive and beautiful. The lianas caused quite a stir too as they draped themselves through the trees. One huge corkscrew liana erupted from the ground and then split into coiled rays going high into the crown of a Peepal. It looked like Tibetan Prayer Flags without the colour.

A Sambar was seen and there were numerous Hog Deer. We saw no Rhinos inside the protected area but there were a few visible from the main road.

There were lots of butterflies. Most numerous were once again Common Tigers. There were perhaps fifty of these right by one ranger station, and so we got out to photograph them and encountered plenty of other butterflies too. There were Blue Glassy Tigers, Glassy Tigers and Common Crows. There was also a Double-branded Crow or two. Peacock, Lemon and Grey Pansies were common too. A stunning *syntomid* moth was very colourful and we also saw a large yellow and bluish *Geopteryx* moth. John found a large hairy caterpillar. In places we found numbers of Chocolate Albatrosses and there were a couple of species of Grass Yellow too. A Great Orange-tip made a hasty exit, so too a Common Mormon, however it was the Grey Count that stole the show. This elegantly hook-tipped nymphalid has dark sparsely patterned wings with a wide white blaze on the distal part of the hindwing and we saw it perched in the leaf litter quite often. We also saw a Baron, and a rather fine lycaenid.

Down by the ranger station we took breakfast overlooking the Brahmaputra. We could see several boats drawn up onto the sand. A large cruise boat with lots of cabins presumably full with tourists came past and at this point a couple of us saw the Gangetic Dolphin rising to the surface, even once putting its pointy pink snout well clear of the water! There were birds here too. A large flock of Black Storks loafed on the wide expanse of sand. There was a River Lapwing looking dapper in the morning light. In the trees by us we saw a large group of Black-crested Bulbuls and a Lineated Barbet was a wonderfully green sight. A Brown Fish Owl was visible, but you could never see all of it at once. Booted Eagle and two Changeable Hawk Eagles soared over a hill. Back nearer at hand were several White-rumped Shamans, Green-billed Malkoha, Black-naped Monarch, Ruby-throated Sunbird, Spangled Drongo, Small Niltava and Yellow-footed Green Pigeon. A Great Hornbill flew past.

In the afternoon Dr Pandeep took us to visit a village by the eastern part of park. The founder of the Infinity Resorts chain had some years ago started a foundation aimed at helping villages situated in the proximity of certain national parks to both improve their situation and also to ameliorate the conflict between themselves and the wildlife that comes and goes out of the park. When Rhinos, Elephants and Tigers are your immediate neighbours life can take on a rather sharper edge! The park boundary indeed was just twenty metres to our left as we drove down the dirt track into one of the villages (there are thirty-five on the fringes of Kaziranga) helped by the foundation. We stopped and walked along the track noting the gardens full of cabbages, mustard and squash. We stopped by the school where the doctor told us of the work they are doing there to encourage the children to empathise with the wildlife. Then it was down to one of the houses involved in a weaving cooperative. We were very much welcomed here and shown how they operate the looms. We were also shown round the house which was an eye-opener on the living conditions here and we were shown the rice-flour grinder and how it operated. Outside there was a slightly raised field and this we were told was the high ground under construction. Every year the village is inundated for around two weeks and the families have to move all their food stuffs and livestock a few kilometres to the high ground by the main road and camp there. Their first priority from the foundation was the building of this raised land so that they would not have to move in the time of flood. We were told the story of a man from the village that this year had called the foundation in to help him during the flood. They had arrived in a boat to find the man floating in his bed with his whole year's harvest around him on the bed and they were already close to the ceiling! They managed to get him out with his harvest and to safety! We went out back to look at the family's fields where coriander, mustard and rice were grown. A lovely Blue-throated Barbet sat atop a tree and a Blue-bearded Bee-eater flew past. Now the people of the house plied us with masala chai and some tasty sweets including something made from banana, rice flour and jaggery which was exceptionally nice. Then we had a look at some of the items woven by the ladies and one or purchases were made! We walked back down the road stopping off at another lady's house where we were shown her bee-hives, another initiative from the foundation and one that had borne much fruit with the lady selling all her honey very easily. It had been a very informative and enlightening couple of hours and the villagers had been extremely welcoming.

Day 8 January 28th journey to Bhutan

We started our long journey after a pleasant breakfast, departing at seven forty-five. We waved goodbye to the Infinity Resort, a great place to stay and with exceptionally good food. Leaving we passed large chunks of Kaziranga before heading north and crossing the great Brahmaputra River.

Lunch was at a great little roadside restaurant which belied its appearance by producing an excellent lunch.

The afternoon was merely spent reaching Bhutan. We crossed the border without much delay and entered the little town of Gelephu where we settled in for the night.

Day 9

January 29th

Bhutan – Gelephu to Tingtibi

After breakfast we took to the road heading out of the very tiny bit of Bhutan that is flat and into the slopes that are the very bottom of the Himalaya. We spent the day travelling to Tingtibi, a small settlement about three and a half hours direct drive from Gelephu. We took eight hours, so we spent a considerable amount of time in the field too.

Our first stop was by a bridge where Kandhu sorted out passport formalities and we birdwatched. There were no less than three redstarts here. White-capped Water Redstart is a gorgeous bird and this was the first of many today, and there were also Plumbeous Water Redstart and Daurian Redstart all together down by the water. A lovely Slaty-backed Forktail was with them and both Grey and White Wagtails too. The first of many Blue Whistling Thrushes was by the water too. A pair of Scarlet Minivets came in and wowed us, whilst a Small Niltava was enjoyed only by a few of us.

Up the road a little we walked a two kilometre section of road down to some hot springs. This was most enjoyable and at the start and end was full of birds. We started with two magnificent Great Indian Hornbills. Blue-throated Barbet was enjoyed and Oriental Whiteeyes and a Streaked Spiderhunter was seen. Down by the river we saw a Green Magpie, a superb Crimson Sunbird, and our first Yellow-bellied Fantails, as well as an entertaining flock of Scarlet Minivets that gave us such great views. The first butterflies were in the wing now – Lemon Pansies.

We continued up the road stopping every now and again. Another fine butterfly appeared – the Circe – and we saw Apefly and Indian Red Admiral. Generally though butterflies were few – another Circe appeared and there was an Indian Tortoiseshell too. Kandhu spotted a troupe of Golden Langurs by the road. These were much enjoyed and gave great views.

A Little Forktail was spotted along the road, then a Maroon Oriole, then a Spotted Forktail, the birds kept coming...

We stopped for lunch at a great viewpoint. Kandhu it turned out had a team just to prepare lunches and they had camped out at this spot! They provided an excellent repast. A cream of mushroom soup followed by a main meal including what we surmised must be deep-fried Imperial Pigeon legs so small were they compared with a chicken, but they said they were chicken... Tea and coffee too were much appreciated. The view looked out over Bhutan's hillsides, the eight auspicious symbols were lined up on the approach to the picnic spot.

In the afternoon we continued on up to the pass. A sign suggested people stay in their cars due to the large rock bee hives hanging from the cliffs ahead. We had to be kept in though as Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush and Black-winged Cuckoo-Shrike tried to tempt us out.

At the pass we spent a while walking down the far side. A group of birds here included Rufous Sibia, Striated Bulbul and some Chestnut-tailed Minlas were in the tree tops. Nearer at hand were Whiskered Yuhinas and a little downslope we found two fine Great Barbets. A Black Eagle sailed across the road and was enjoyed by all at close range and another highlight was an entertaining flock of Black-throated Tits. Later we passed several more Slaty-backed Forktails, and then spotted a tree full of Wedge-tailed Green Pigeons. Whilst watching these we noted a Plain-backed Thrush.

We arrived into Tingtibi at around 4.30pm and settled into our guesthouse. It was as promised, rather basic! But it did have en suite toilets and showers though the later didn't work and had to be replaced by large buckets of steaming hot water. Meanwhile, outside, the men of the village, all dressed in colourful skirts, were raucously playing darts, one of Bhutan's national sports.

Day 10 January 30th Zhemgang

We breakfasted at seven thirty and an hour later set off up the road to Zhemgang. This took us on a circuit of about 80km almost the entirety of which was through forest much of it extremely beautiful. The roads were very quiet, there were very few vehicles all day so one could just get out and wander along the road. These mid-altitude forests have an extremely rich fauna, and the most obvious aspect of this are the birds and today we were to discover just how fantastic they are. The birds seen during the day were quite unbelievable in terms of both beauty and numbers.

We started low down not far out of town. Here we spent an hour and a half slowly wandering up the road. There were loads of birds in the trees! Black Bulbuls were everywhere. They were joined by Orange-bellied Leafbirds, Bronzed Drongos, Ashy Drongos and Spangled Drongos. There were flocks of Whiskered Yuhinas and also a few groups of White-naped Yuhinas. A fine Black-throated Sunbird kept himself a little hidden. On the tree tops were Blue-throated Barbets.

Some Golden Langurs appeared and kept us entertained as they leapt from tree to tree. Later we stopped as a troupe of Assamese Macaques crossed the road. Kandhu stopped us for a Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo and a Wreathed Hornbill flew over. A Clematis was found flowering on the roadside.

Butterflies were not very noticeable even though the weather was sunny and warm but around eleven a few came out. The first was a Chestnut Tiger which danced up and down along the roadside before settling. Later we found an area of Poinsettia-lined road to be good for Yellow Orange-tips and here we also saw Indian Tortoiseshell, Indian Cabbage White and a couple of sailors and blues.

We stopped in an area where Beautiful Nuthatch is known to frequent the heavily epiphyte laden boughs of the large roadside trees. We had no luck with this lovely bird but saw so many others. Mrs Gould's Sunbirds were common and we saw a good number of them well. There was a mixed party of Blue-winged and Red-tailed Minlas. Our first laughingthrushes were suitably enough Bhutan Laughingthrushes. Treetops held a good number of Barbets and we had great views of Golden-throated and Blue-throated Barbets as well as Great Barbets. Seda found a pair of gorgeous Blue-bearded Bee-eaters. We saw a couple of Hoary-bellied Himalayan Squirrels and also the gorgeous little Himalayan Striped Squirrel. On the road were Black-throated Thrushes, a Blue-fronted Redstart, Olive-backed Pipits, and of course Blue Whistling Thrushes.

Just as we were about to get on the bus a party of birds came by that literally had our heads spinning. Us leaders were just reeling out names every few seconds with a vague attempt to point out where the birds were so many were there in front of us. They were all close too. There was a band of those lovely Red-tailed Minlas, a bunch of Nepal Fulvettas, a whole party of Streak-

throated Yuhinas and a few of the bulkier White-naped Yuhinas. White-bellied Empornis was also here – another Yuhina really! There were several chunky Black-headed Shrike-Babblers and also a few of the tiny Black-eared Shrike-Babbler. Rusty-fronted Barwings were notable and there was even a Rusty-flanked Treecreeper. Grey-hooded Warblers were here and there and of course there were a few leaf warblers too, Lemon-rumped at least. Under cover Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babblers moved through and there was a whole gabble of White-crested Laughingthrushes and one or two Rufous-capped Babblers. It was an adrenalin-filled few minutes!

We stopped at Zhemgang where we visited the Dzong. There are around twenty Dzongs throughout Bhutan and each one heads a region. They are basically fortified monasteries. They usually have an administrative part that deals with the day to day life of the area, and an area where the monks are immersed in Buddhism. We were surprised to learn that hardly any (none?) other tourist had visited this Dzong. Kandhu secured permission to enter and so we followed him to the upper and older building which he told us had been founded in the 12th century but the present building had been created in the 17th century. We entered the main building and wound our way up several staircases and found ourselves in a most amazing scene. The monks were conducting a ceremony and were chanting mantras. As we entered a few glanced up at us but continued on with their chanting. Older monks in the centre each had a drum (like a Bodhran) held up on a stand next to him and a curious 'crook; which he used to strike the drum. The chanting and the drums was incredibly atmospheric and certainly stirred the soul. Every so often a group of 'trumpeters' changed the tempo. Many of the monks were using a kind of throat-singing as they chanted and one was so deep he might have been an elephant! We learnt that the rather thickset monk wandering around with a whip was the disciplinary monk and later saw him administer a little of the same to a sleepy monklet. The ceremony was apparently to wish long life on the new prince. We left feeling privileged to have been allowed in to see all this.

However we were now very hungry and lunch was getting later and later. It was nearly two as we hove up into a small clearing a few kilometres after Zhemgang and found our picnic laid out and tables and chairs ready. Lunch was excellent (some fine meatballs, potato-flour breads, deep-fried aubergine, vegetables, and a very fine soup) and was in the most exquisite setting. All around was that wonderful forest. A troupe of Golden Langurs was in the trees close to us and entertained us with a kind of langur Olympics with a fine show of risky leaping and general athleticism. A Crimson-breasted Woodpecker perched on an open bough and a Besra flew over. No less than 5 Great Barbets perched atop a tree. After lunch we potted uphill all of fifty metres and found another great selection of birds. Everyone had great views of the striking Green Magpie. There were also a number of Grey Treepies here. Mountain Bulbuls were everywhere. There was a great mix of laughingthrushes in the shrubbery. Another group of White-crested Laughingthrushes was enjoyed, and a couple of Red-faced Liocichlas wowed us with their brilliant colours. Blue-winged Laughingthrushes were rather less bright but beautifully patterned as were the larger Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrushes. Last to arrive were a few Striated Laughingthrushes. It was all too much... we had to leave!

Down the road we stopped for a while and walked a track which was relatively quiet for birds – more Blue-winged Laughingthrushes, but we did see a new mammal. These were the newly described Arunachal Macaque, a species that thus far was not known from Bhutan!

Then it was past Barred Cuckoo-Doves, forktails and the like and back to the guesthouse where we had a break before dinner. Later we went out on a night drive and saw just the two mammals, neither of them particularly well – Common Palm Civet and Muntjac!

Day 11 January 31st along the Mangde Chu Valley to Gongphu

Our journey took us down the Mangde Chu Valley for the morning. As we descended we came across lots of bamboo and spent a while here. The lunch team had seen a Goral here but we couldn't locate it. There were a few birds though. Black-chinned Yuhinas were common and we also noted Black-throated Sunbird, Plain Flowerpecker and White-naped Yuhinas. There were a couple of lovely Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbills in creepers above the bamboo, an uncommon species in Bhutan. We also saw our first Blue-eared Barbet here.

Moving down the valley we visited the river bank. Here there were plenty of Common Caeruleans and also a few Common Castors as well as Pale Grass Blue. Down by the river we found a superb Crested Kingfisher. And perhaps even better was the Brown Dipper that we watched walking around feeding in the water – great stuff! Two Crested Serpent Eagles soared over, a Besra rushed through and a Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo flew across the river.

Lunch was taken on a roadside corner. It couldn't compete with the previous days but was nonetheless rather enjoyable not least for the great meals the team produced. There were plenty of Nepal House Martins in the sky when we arrived and at the end of the meal an incredibly cute group of Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes came and posed firstly on a fence and latterly on roadsides boulders.

Driving up to Gongphu we stopped a couple of times for more groups of these lovely laughingthrushes and also for a large flock of Yellow-breasted Greenfinches that were feeding in rice stubble.

We arrived at the eco-lodge full of trepidation regarding its level of comfort only to find a beautiful though quite rustic place. The separate cabins were plain but were clean. The whole was surrounded by lovely forest.

After putting the bags in the room we went off for a walk. This took us through fields to start with up to the edge of the village where we encountered a few people. Their reactions surprised us a little. They were very friendly but seemed undecided as to how they should respond to us, the women in particular breaking down into giggles. It might have been something to do with a party going on up the road to celebrate the starting of a new house. Kandhu said though that we might well be the first foreign tourists in the village!

Past the village we found that the landscape soon became forested again. Late afternoon never seems to be particularly busy in the forests and so it proved here. Some Spotted Forktails gave great views along the track and though we couldn't locate the Bay Woodpecker that was calling a Grey-headed Woodpecker did appear.

Dinner was prepared by our travelling chef and was much enjoyed and then we adjourned to the large fire that had been built in the middle of the compound and chatted and drank beer and warmed ourselves thoroughly before drifting off to bed. I took my torches and went off for a nightwalk. I walked for an hour and a half, the latter part through superb montane forest, without seeing anything, only to turn around and immediately start seeing animals on the way back. First was a fabulous Bhutan Giant Flying-Squirrel which stared back at me, its reddish-orange pelage having two dark stripes through the head. The tail was long and thick – an impressive animal. Soon after I found another and then another two chasing each other around the top of a massive tree and gliding between branches. Several other animals at ground level disappeared into the greenery before I could get a look at them, one was a porcupine that made loud noises and rattled its quills at me in warning!

Day 12 February 1st Gongphu to Pangbang

We all awoke very happy to be surrounded by such marvellous habitat. Fabulous trees lined with ferns and orchids were all around us. Chestnut-headed Tesia, Black-faced Warbler and Spotted Forktails were just by the eco-lodge. After an excellent breakfast provided by our travelling chef we headed off for a walk, a reprise of last nights, along to the village edge and then into the forest. To say it was full of birds would be an understatement. We only went a few hundred metres along the track but in that time (nearly two hours!) we met two massive bird parties. The trees and bushes around us were quite literally raining birds. Close to us, often just a couple of metres away were warblers and yuhinas. The warblers were mostly Ashy-throated and lots of Lemon-rumped as well as plenty of bright Grey-hooded Warblers. At one point a fabulous male Green-tailed Sunbird came to see us as well. It was a morning for woodpeckers. We started with a Fulvous-breasted then a Lesser Yellownappe before a couple of Greater Yellownapes were enjoyed. Best of all though was a superb Speckled Piculet. There were a number of squirrels in the trees with these bird parties including several Hoary-bellied and a couple of Red-bellied Himalayan Squirrels too. Rufous-winged Fulvettas sought insects in the epiphytes in the manner of nuthatches and we saw several of the real thing – some very pretty Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches. Grey-throated Babblers also had the same technique. There were also lots of lovely Golden Babblers as well as Rufous-capped Babblers. Green-backed Tits were everywhere and there were groups of Black-throated Tits and occasionally striking Yellow-cheeked Tits. Rufous Sibilas were noted and there were several sightings of Lesser Racket-tailed Drongoes. Grey Treepies call musically. Scarlet Minivets came incredibly close and a group of Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike belted through. We thought we had missed seeing any laughingthrushes but just as we arrived back at the eco-lodge a pair of Striated Laughingthrushes hove into view as well as a Blue-fronted Redstart, a female Hodgson's Redstart and a Grey Bushchat. Two fine Yellow-breasted Greenfinches perched atop a tall tree.

We set off at nearly eleven descending to the valley floor but stopping for a Jungle Owlet perched out in the open, here was also a Rufous-necked Hornbill. Reaching the main road we journeyed down the valley, stopping frequently for birds and butterflies. We even spotted an Otter cruising down the river turning on its back as it did so, but the road conditions at that point meant we couldn't stop. Birds of prey were a feature and we stopped for a Crested Serpent Eagle perched and

also a Crested Goshawk nicely perched. Later we were to see another down the valley with its white rump sides characteristically fluffed out. We also saw our fifth species of woodpecker for the day – the Grey-crowned Pygmy. However it was mainly butterflies that featured today and we saw some fine species. Pride of place probably went to the Circe whose bright colours helped to distinguish him from the species that it mimics, the Chestnut Tiger. This butterfly had the most shocking yellow proboscis. The orange Cruiser was seen and the even larger Large Yoeman posed beautifully for photographs. The Chocolate Soldier was seen and also Common Sailor along with what was probably Yerbury's Sailor. A Glassy Bluebottle sped past. Among the whites we saw Yellow Orange-tips and Common Gull. Lots of blue species were seen including Pea Blue and the gorgeous Purple Sapphire several of which were seen. Best though was a fabulous Dark Judy, a metalmark that sat quietly as we crowded around it.

After settling into the guesthouse in Panbang we went out for an afternoon walk up the road. All seemed quiet as we walked and I think we might have been thinking about an early bath when suddenly a Great Hornbill made a typically spectacular entrance. Then there was a fine close Blue-throated Barbet on a tree and a nearby Mountain Imperial Pigeon. Up the road a little another Great Hornbill flew in and allowed photography. Then things started to really hot up when a pair of fabulous Red-headed Trogons appeared. The male showered us with red as he flew past disappearing quickly, the female stayed and allowed 'scope views. We could hardly better that could we? Just a minute later Seda spotted a female Wallcreeper just above the roadside – fabulous! We watched her for half an hour as she wandered the bank above the road! We walked back downhill feeling pretty pleased and still had time to enjoy more Wreathed Hornbills and Indian Great Hornbills flying over and even a gorgeous Green Magpie before retiring for hot showers!

Dinner was very enjoyable though the chilli cheese was considerably hotter than the very mild versions we'd already encountered and left some of us with red faces!

Day 13 February 2nd Bhutan Manas

After breakfast we set off for Manas. It is a twelve kilometre drive along a dirt road from Panbang. Virtually all of the road goes through great forest close to the river, but we didn't stop until we reached the crossing for the national park entrance. Here we got on a boat that took us across the river. A pair of Common Mergansers were on the river and a Kestrel sat on the rocks. Once across the other side we walked up the bank into the national park headquarters. The grounds here had had the understorey removed but all, or most, of the big trees were still standing. Many of these were huge. The Silk Cotton Trees were as ever beautiful but seemed bigger than the ones we'd seen before, and there were a host of other species too.

We waited to meet a ranger watching Red-breasted Parakeets in the trees and a tame Sambar by us. A Mithun, the national animal of Assam stood quietly to one side. This is a hybrid between domestic cattle and the Gaur or Indian Bison and is much prized by Assamese people.

Once we'd met our ranger we were off on a walk into the national park. Even before we'd left the compound we were treated to a fine display of birds. In the tall silk cottons were lots of birds these including some fabulous Greater Racket-tailed Drongos and a number of Blue-bearded Bee-eaters.

Some Hill Mynas looked great in the morning sun and there was a fly-by Grey-crowned Pygmy Woodpecker. Butterflies were already starting to keep us busy with Common Sailors, Common Castors and a few Glassy Tigers as well as a variety of whites. As we walked along the path we started to encounter more and more butterflies. There were Common Three-rings, the Nigger, and a couple of species of Bushbrowns. A Dark Blue Tiger or two sailed past. There were Lemon Pansies and those masters of camouflage, the Evening Browns. After seeing a few Common Evening Browns we starting finding the occasional Dark Evening Brown too. A lovely maroon and white Malayan Giant Squirrel was watched for a while. Little Pied Flycatcher was seen. There were no other mammals to be seen but we were seeing plenty of signs! There were Leopard paw marks along the track one set going one way and one set the other way. After a while these were joined by Tiger pugmarks too. The ranger told us of how once he'd seen a black Leopard... still, not much likelihood that we'd come across such creatures but nice to know they were about. We reached a dry streambed where we found some great butterflies and also more pugmarks. There were plenty that looked like Fishing Cat (could possibly have been Golden Cat) and there were also tiny ones that were probably Leopard Cat, and fifty metres up the stream we decided that going further was not a good idea when we found Tiger pugmarks too! The Butterflies though were more than enough to keep us happy. There were lots of Yellow Orange-tips and these were even sipping salts in small groups alongside a few whites. Common Sailor was joined by a Blackvein Sailor and later a Common Lascar. We found two large species of blue here. The magnificent Western Centaur Oakblue still had tails on one wing – this is a very large blue, about the size of the Yellow Orange-tips. There was also a Common Acacia Blue. Most popular though was the gorgeous Common Tit, a hairstreak with twin tails on each hindwing and uppersides shot through with, particularly electric at the top of the forewing. There were a number of other blues including Metallic Caerulean, Malayan, Ciliate Blue and White Hedge Blue. This was the first spot that we'd encountered skippers as more than singletons and here we noted Aitcheson's Skipper, Pale Dart, Rice Swift and Dark-branded Swift. Not long before leaving a gorgeous Commodore joined us and posed nicely and perhaps even better was a Knight, this one in perfect condition. In between the butterflies there were a few nice birds, notable among them two fine species in Grey-bellied Tesia and Long-billed Thrush. There was also a wonderful White-crowned Forktail along the stream and Brown Flycatcher and Black-crested Bulbuls. A Little Spiderhunter was a nice surprise.

Walking back we spotted a Crested Serpent Eagle soaring overhead and a party of Ashy Bulbuls. There were several encounters with the Punchinello, a metalmark butterfly.

Back at the headquarters we headed straight for dinner. Red-breasted Parakeets noisily flew over as we ate. We wandered over to a view over the Manas River. It is a large river and set amid stunning scenery here. We could see River lapwings on the rocks and also Plumbeous Water Redstarts.

The afternoon walk first took us to a pond. It was a short walk but we did again spend time in the birdy silk cottons at the back of the compound. By now we were starting to see a good number hornbills. Great Indian Hornbills and flying back and forth with loud swishing sounds coming from their flight feathers. When around a dozen were flying in quick succession Tim said that it sounded like an international airport out there! Two Wreathed Hornbills flew in and joined the fun. There were a couple of Greater Yellownapes in one tree and a large flock of Fairy Bluebirds in another. A large male Water Buffalo who had been wallowing stared moodily at us – the ranger said they were

'semi-wild' – he certainly looked pretty wild! There were more Punchinellos here and a female Tiger (Common?) Palmfly mimicked the Striped Tiger.

Down by the river we spent the last hour of our time in the national park. There were Rover Lapwings, Little Ringer Plovers and Little Heron along the shore. Both water redstarts were seen in several spots and a Wallcreeper flew across the water and upwards and out of sight. Down by the river there were great tracks of Fishing Cat and downriver the Mahouts were bathing their elephants.

Day 14 February 3rd Bhutanese Manas

We went for a slightly later start this morning knowing that it would be a long day. We spent the morning stopping along the entrance road to Manas. We could have spent all day there! We started with a big bird party. The star bird here was Sultan Tit. There were half a dozen of these beauties amongst a throng of other species. Minivets were abundant, at one point a tree looked like it was covered in red fruit as assorted male minivets were scattered over its boughs. There were no less than three species in this flock – Long-tailed, Scarlet and Short-billed. We had learnt that the females are easier to identify than the males. Several White-throated Bulbuls were among them and also a couple of Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches. Other birds seen at this first stop included Grey-crowned Pygmy Woodpecker, Yellow-vented Warbler and Orange-bellied Leafbirds.

We moved along the road a little. Here a mini-flock of three birds was rather nice. There was a gorgeous male Crimson Sunbird, a fine male Little Pied Flycatcher and also a male Small Niltava. Just nearby we found the male Black-throated Sunbird too, this one associating with some Streaked Spiderhunters and a group of gorgeous Silver-eared Mesias.

It was getting warmer now and so the next stops were dedicated more to butterflies though we did manage to add Striped Tit-Babbler to the list. The butterflies were quite extraordinary given that even here it was the winter season and the books say the butterflies shouldn't be flying yet! We encountered so many fine species. Perhaps the best was a Leopard Lacewing, all red panels and lacy surrounds, or perhaps it as the opalescent Map Butterfly, or the long-tailed Common Imperial. There were many fine Nymphalids seen. The Large Yeoman continued to be popular, it is a large and bright species. There was a Common Earl with a blue blaze across the hindwing that didn't stop for long and also a Commodore with all silky dark patterns. Black Princes were noticeably velvety and there were several startlingly marked Commanders. Striped Blue Tigers are stunning butterflies and we saw a good number of them this morning. Common Jesters were common and we also saw Common Lascar or two and there were a number of Common Castors too. A highlight was a superb common Map which came and sat at our feet – a most distinctive and beautifully delicate butterfly. Most unusual and perhaps beautiful of all the butterflies seen this morning was a superb Indian Purple Admiral. This glorious butterfly looked rather nice as a black and white admiral type butterfly, though considerably larger, but see it from the right angle and you are left awestruck. For there is a brilliant sky-blue iridescence over the entire white parts of the uppersides then. It is only seen from a narrow angle... Stunning. Perhaps the highlight of the trip for two of us occurred as we were standing right above this butterfly just admiring it have filled our memory

cards with images. Suddenly there was a whoosh and a thwack.... Collared Falconet, a tiny falcon, had flown right between Tim and my legs (we were less than a metre apart) and snatched the Admiral from in front of our eyes and flown off with it! The falconet flew up into a big tree and devoured its prey, a stunning butterfly that we'd been enjoying in all its majesty for the last twenty minutes suddenly gone...

There were plenty more butterflies though! Bright Sunbeams were a fantastic sight, their undersides were things of silver that shimmered like fish in a stream. Some large blues with complicated patterns on the underside were the Common Acacia Blue and the Western Centaur Oakblue, the latter the size of a small tortoiseshell and with twinned curved tails on the hindwing. There was a fabulous little hairstreak with a complicated red pattern around the tails on its hindwing – the Chocolate Royal – and the Common Tit flashed its deep purple at us regularly too. We also found a marvellous little Purple Sapphire – it was so tiny, half the size of the ones we'd seen before. There were a number of skippers including the large Suffused Snowflat and the brightly marked Dark Palm Dart.

We were getting late for lunch! Luckily it was an early lunch today. So it was down to the river and across in the boat. Hornbills flew across the downriver there were Common Mergansers. We went for lunch at the same spot, a huge wooden table already laid out with goodies. A jungle crow regularly chased an Indian Roller as we sat and ate, and Great Orange-tip was seen.

After lunch several of us went on a walk back along the main trail to the stream bed we'd had much butterfly success on yesterday. Again there were many Greater Racket-tailed Drongoes and Blue-bearded Bee-eaters in the tall flowering Silk Cotton trees. There were fewer butterflies today – it was a bit later – though as we arrived we saw two rather brilliant new ones. A Great Windmill fluttered above the bushes right by us, sadly not stopping for a photograph, whilst a gorgeous Powdered Baron allowed us as many photographs as we wanted down on the riverbed. We walked on a little admiring tracks of the big cats and see White-throated Fantails. Common and Metallic Ceruleans were frequent along the paths and we saw Punchinellos and Spot Puffins as we walked. A really huge beetle was a fine sight. Great Indian Hornbills were so common on this walk and as we arrived back at the clearing there were seven in one tree. The next tree had several Fairy Bluebirds, also both species of Yellownape, and a Green Magpie that chased a huge katydid across the clearing.

Then it was time for elephant ride. Two huge females came and took the group, Seda and I had a much smaller and considerably more mischievous elephant! The trail the elephants took had us going through a variety of most beautiful forest with stunning trees everywhere. We saw little wildlife – a Fulvous Pied Flat – but the experience was totally enjoyable. Returning we crossed the river and hung around the river edge as the sun set. Then it was back to Panbang. We'd deliberately timed this so that in effect we did a night drive back to the hotel. It turned out to be not particularly productive though we did have very good views of two Common Palm Civets.

Day 15 February 4th to Gelephu

As we were not to be let through the border at Manas this year we had to backtrack all the way to Gelephu this year, a journey that would take us most of the day. We tackled the first part to Tingtibi more or less without stopping. Only a Peregrine could stop us! It was sat atop a dead tree ripping a Great Barbet apart. What a sight. After that we continued until lunchtime. This was taken at a spectacular spot high above Tingtibi. We sat above a tight bend in the road regally watching the world pass by – in truth there were very few vehicles! It was a great spot and continued the tradition of fine picnic spots chosen by our team.

During the afternoon we had less distance to cover so were able to stop occasionally and enjoy the birds. There was a couple of Rufous-necked Hornbills and occasional Great Indian Hornbills. One tree had many barbets in the top – Golden-throated, Blue-throated and Great Barbets – quite a sight. Nearby were Striated, Black, White-throated and Black-crested Bulbuls together. Seda spotted a delightful male Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher on the bank above the bus.

Higher up we stopped for another bird party. This was quite a mixed group. There were lots and lots of Whiskered Yuhinas. With some Rufous Sibias was a female Scarlet Finch. A Little Spiderhunter was seen here. Then it was down to Gelephu where we settled in again to the Kuku Hotel.

Day 16 February 5th to Guwahati

We took breakfast and left the hotel at seven-thirty driving straight to the border. Kandhu had taken our passports down the previous evening and had got the necessary stamps so we had no need for more than a cursory stop at the Bhutanese border. There was an extraordinary change as we crossed the border. Suddenly the roadsides became thick with population. Welcome to India! The two countries are very different. The pot-holed road which crosses the wide nomansland between the borders seems designed to allow a person to catch you up on foot if you've left your passport behind! We reached the Indian checkpost and caught them in their pyjamas! True. Obviously getting through early was unexpected and they were still out back drinking masala chai. Nonetheless they dealt with us efficiently if still with pen and ink.

Then it was on to the long road to Guwahati. Initially poor this soon became a big highway along which we had continuous fascinating views of Indian life. Unlike the virgin forests of Bhutan there was almost no wild land visible here. Just occasional rivers allowed us glimpses of White-breasted Kingfishers and a male Paid Harrier. The paddies though, with a few already being planted, had birdlife – notably lots of Openbill Storks and egrets. Black Kites were here and there.

We stopped for lunch and enjoyed a fine Indian meal, the chips and dry chicken-fry was perhaps less good? Common Mormon was seen. Then it was on to Guwahati itself. Here we had half an hour to spare so we went to an extensive wetland near the airport. This is really a superb birdwatching site and we could have done with more time. There were immense flocks of Lesser Whistling Ducks whilst nearer at hand were groups of the larger and rarer Fulvous Whistling Ducks. There were many other ducks – very nice was a group of Cotton Pygmy Teal. Greater Adjutant

Storks circled over the marsh, one landing amidst, and dwarfing, the whistling ducks. Overhead were abundant Sand Martins, Barn Swallows and Pale Martins. Bronze-winged Jacanas pattered over the near shore and there were waders too – Black-winged Stilts were the first we'd seen on the tour. A Brown-headed Gull flew past, our only gull of the trip. Nearer at hand were Rufous-capped Babblers song-flighting and also a Bengal Lark doing the same. There were new butterflies too in the shape of Tawny Coster and Plain Tiger. Then it was off to the airport where the check-in went very smoothly but the immigration queues for the men looked particularly daunting until John saved us by asking where the first class passengers went and being ushered through quickly along with the rest of us males by a helpful security officer.

In Delhi we were met by Negi who whisked us to the hotel where Chander and Rajeesh from the ground agents were waiting to greet us. We passed numerous weddings en route – it was an auspicious day in India for such events – and wondered if one would be happening at the hotel when we got there! Sure enough, there was one. The groom was arriving on a white horse and men holding chandeliers walked round the dancers... once checked-in we came outside to enjoy a little of this spectacularly colourful sight. Then it was in to dinner where we had some of the finest food we'd had during our visit to the subcontinent – excellent fare!

Day 17 February 6th departure

Breakfast was as enjoyable as last night's meal not least for the lie-in until nine! There was some concern in reception when Rajeesh called to say he was stuck in traffic. However his knowledge of the intimacies of Delhi Airport and some helpful Jet Airways staff allowed us to pass through the airport process quickly enough and have plenty of time to relax and look at the shops before boarding the flight to London.

Systematic List Number 1 Mammals

The taxonomy and nomenclature is largely taken from 'A Field Guide to Indian Mammals' by Vivek Menon, 2003. Prater's.

Rhesus Macaque	<i>Macaca mulatta</i>	frequently seen in Kaziranga. In Bhutan one of the animals with the Arunachal Macaques had a kinked tail like Rhesus Macaques
Assamese Macaque	<i>Macaca assamensis</i>	small troupes seen twice in Bhutan
Arunachal Macaque	<i>Macaca munzala</i>	A small troupe of this newly described species was seen between Zhemgang and Tingtibi. The dark cheek sides, straight and short tail, and face mien are distinctive. May not have been recorded in Bhutan before but its limited known range is in immediately adjacent Arunachal Pradesh.
Capped Langur	<i>Trachypithecus pileatus</i>	A small group at Burradapur close to Kaziranga, also several along the approach road to Manas, Bhutan
Golden Langur	<i>Trachypithecus geei</i>	seen almost daily in Bhutan in good numbers and often exceptionally close to us.
Barasingha	<i>Cervus duvauceli</i>	large herds at Kaziranga but very local there. Herds of up to 50 seen but usually only one or two herds a day
Tiger	<i>Panthera tigris</i>	4 seen on the East Range in Kaziranga. These looked to be three full grown youngster and their mother. 1 seen on the West Range in Kaniranga
Common Palm Civet	<i>Paradoxurus hermaphroditus</i>	1 seen on the night trip outside Tingtibi and 2 seen on night trip along the Manas approach road
Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	1 seen (IG only) from the road in the Mangde Chu River. Identification only presumed from habitat
Smooth-coated Otter	<i>Lutra perspicillata</i>	1 male seen trotting along a bank in the west range, and seven seen in two different areas on the east range on consecutive days, all Kaziranga
Indo-Gangetic Dolphin	<i>Platanista gangetica</i>	1 seen from Burradapur near Kaziranga
Hog Badger	<i>Arctonyx collaris</i>	one briefly on the east range, Kaziranga
Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>	A total of three seen at Kaziranga
Hog Deer	<i>Axis porcinus</i>	abundant at Kaziranga where 200 or more seen daily
Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>	just one seen on night trip from Tingtibi
Wild Buffalo	<i>Bubalis bubalis</i>	Rather common at Kaziranga. The status of the animal seen at Manas is uncertain, it was suggested it was semiwild, whatever that is!

Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	scattered in Kaziranga where seen daily seen in small numbers almost daily in Kaziranga
Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>	
Indian One-horned Rhinoceros	<i>Rhinoceros unicornis</i>	Common at Kaziranga where maximum daily count was c.60 separate animals. Many close encounters especially when we went for elephant rides – approach to within five metres or so was possible then a total of 4 seen very well on night walk from Gongphu, Bhutan (IG only)
Bhutan Flying Squirrel	<i>Petaurista nobilis</i>	just once in Kaziranga, several sightings in Bhutan
Malayan Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa bicolor</i>	either this species or Pallas's Squirrel <i>Callosciurus erythraeus</i> seen at Manas a few records in Bhutan
Asian Red-cheeked Squirrel	<i>Dremomys rufigenis</i>	widespread
Orange-bellied Himalayan Squirrel	<i>Dremomys lokriah</i>	Singles noted Zhemgang and Manas
Hoary-bellied Himalayan Squirrel	<i>Callosciurus pygerythrus</i>	one seen in daylight on the east range at Kaziranga and one (IG only) on night walk from Gongphu, Bhutan
Himalayan Striped Squirrel	<i>Tamiops macclellandi</i>	
Hodgson's Porcupine	<i>Hystrix hodgsoni</i>	

Systematic List Number 2

Birds

The taxonomy and nomenclature is taken from Grimmet, Inskipp & Inskipp (1999). An indication of the abundance of each species is given by stating the number of days out of 14 the species was noted, thus 3/14 indicates that the species was seen on 3 days during the trip.

Swamp Francolin	<i>Francolinus gularis</i>	noted once on the west range at Kaziranga. Heard other days
Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	daily in Kaziranga. 5/14
Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	locally numerous in Kaziranga and Guwahati. 3/14
Fulvous Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>	several tens at Guwahati
Bar-headed Goose	<i>Anser indicus</i>	good numbers at Kaziranga. 4/14
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	good numbers at Kaziranga. 4/14
Cotton Pygmy Goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelicus</i>	1 east range, Kaziranga. 30+ Guwahati. 2/14
Falcated Duck	<i>Anas falcata</i>	a superb male east range Kaziranga
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	common at Kaziranga, also Guwahati. 5/14
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	frequent at Kaziranga, also Guwahati. 4/14
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	frequent at Kaziranga. 4/14
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	scattered at Kaziranga, also Guwahati. 4/14
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	common at Kaziranga, also Guwahati. 5/14
Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	common at Kaziranga, also Guwahati. 6/14
Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>	common at Kaziranga. 5/14
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	a few at Kaziranga. 2/14
Ferruginous Pochard	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	2 at Kaziranga
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	noted along the Manas River
Speckled Piculet	<i>Picumnus innominatus</i>	1 Gongphu, Bhutan
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus canicapillus</i>	scattered throughout. 4/14
Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus macei</i>	singles twice in Bhutan
Lesser Yellownape	<i>Picus chlorolophus</i>	just 2 seen in Bhutan
Greater Yellownape	<i>Picus flavinucha</i>	rather frequent in Bhutan. 3/14
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	scattered. 3/14
Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	1 west range at Kaziranga
Great Barbet	<i>Megalaima virens</i>	widespread in Bhutan. 7/14
Lineated Barbet	<i>Megalaima lineata</i>	1 Burradapur, and a few Manas. 3/14
Blue-throated Barbet	<i>Megalaima asiatica</i>	widespread and locally common. 9/14
Golden-throated Barbet	<i>Megalaima franklinii</i>	locally frequent in Bhutan. 3/14
Blue-eared Barbet	<i>Megalaima australis</i>	1 Mange Chu Valley, Bhutan
Coppersmith	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	1 Kaziranga
Great Hornbill	<i>Buceros bicornis</i>	widespread and not uncommon, especially in Bhutan. 8/14
Rufous-necked Hornbill	<i>Aceros nipalensis</i>	A total of 5 seen in Bhutan. 3/14
Wreathed Hornbill	<i>Aceros undulatus</i>	A total of 5 seen in Bhutan. 3/14
Oriental Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>	Small numbers at Kaziranga. 4/14
Red-headed Trogon	<i>Harpactes erythrocephalus</i>	a male and female above Panbang, Bhutan
Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	Subspecies <i>affinis</i> . Widespread away from thick forest. 9/14
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	scattered records. 3/14

Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>	daily in Kaziranga. 5/14
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halycon smyrnensis</i>	Also known as White-breasted or Smyrna Kingfisher. Widespread in India but only seen once in Bhutan. 7/14
Crested Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle lugubris</i>	singles twice on the big rivers in Bhutan
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	daily at Kaziranga. 5/14
Blue-bearded Bee-eater	<i>Nyctyornis athertoni</i>	scattered throughout. 7/14
Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	east range, Kaziranga
Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>	one over the Mangde Chu River, Bhutan
Green-billed Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus tristisi</i>	1 Burradapur
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	singles twice at Kaziranga
Lesser Coucal	<i>Centropus bengalensis</i>	just a few at Kaziranga
Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>	common around Kaziranga. 6/14
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	Common at Kaziranga. 6/14.
Red-breasted Parakeet	<i>Psittacula alexandri</i>	a few at Kaziranga and very common Manas in Bhutan. 3/14
Blossom-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula roseatta</i>	scattered in Kaziranga. 4/14
Himalayan Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia brevirostris</i>	only noted along main road, Kaziranga
Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>	scattered, not Bhutan. 4/14
Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>	single twice at Kaziranga
Dusky Eagle Owl	<i>Bufo coromandia</i>	1 at Kaziranga.
Asian Barred Owlet	<i>Glaucidium cuculoides</i>	scattered records in Kaziranga. 3/14
Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>	1 below Gongphu, Bhutan
Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>	scattered in Kaziranga. 3/14
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	noted near habitation. 14/14
Ashy Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba pulchricollis</i>	singles twice in Bhutan
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	scattered. 4/14
Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	widespread. Less so in Bhutan. 12/14
Red Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	scattered Kaziranga. 3/14
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	noted Kaziranga
Barred Cuckoo-Dove	<i>Macropygia unchall</i>	1 Zhemgang
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>	locally frequent at Kaziranga. 6/14
Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron sphenura</i>	a large group above Tingtibi, Bhutan
Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Mountain Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula badia</i>	scattered. 5/14
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	Kaziranga. 6/14
Pintail Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>	1 at Kaziranga
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	Kaziranga. 3/14
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	noted Kaziranga and Guwahati. 4/14
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	all wetlands. 6/14
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Kaziranga. 4/14
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	Kaziranga. 2/14
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	scattered - rivers. 3/14
Long-toed Stint	<i>Calidris subminuta</i>	Kaziranga – Brahmaputra
Greater Painted Snipe	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>	a male seen central range, Kaziranga
Bronze-winged Jacana	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>	a few at Kaziranga, also Guwahati. 4/14
Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	a few at Kaziranga. 3/14
Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	Kaziranga. 2/14

Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	scattered. 2/14
River Lapwing	<i>Vanellus duvaucelii</i>	large rivers. 2/14
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Kaziranga. 5/14
Grey-headed Lapwing	<i>Vanellus cinereus</i>	Kaziranga and Guwahati. 5/14
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	daily at Kaziranga. 6/14
Small Pratincole	<i>Glareola lactea</i>	some good flocks at Kaziranga. 2/14
Brown-headed Gull	<i>Larus brunnicephalus</i>	one Guwahati
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	a few at Kaziranga. 3/14
Black Baza	<i>Aviceda leuphotes</i>	1 Kaziranga
Oriental Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	a total of 4 at Kaziranga. 2/14
Black Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	scattered records. 2/14
Pallas's Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucorhynchus</i>	frequent at Kaziranga and 2 at Manas. 6/14
Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>	daily at Kaziranga. 5/14
Long-billed Vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>	frequent Kaziranga, also one Manas. 3/14
Eurasian Griffon	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	2 Kaziranga
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>	widespread. 8/14
Pied Harrier	<i>Circus melanoleucos</i>	A female Burradapur, and a fine male on the Indian side south of Gelephu. 2/14
Crested Goshawk	<i>Accipiter trivirgatus</i>	a total of 3 in Bhutan. 2/14
Besra	<i>Accipiter virgatus</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 3/14
Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	scattered throughout. 3/14
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	one at Panbang
Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malayensis</i>	1 between Gelephu and Tingtibi
India Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila hastata</i>	1 at Kaziranga
Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>	scattered at Kaziranga. 3/14
Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	scattered at Kaziranga. 2/14
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraetus pennatus</i>	singles twice Kaziranga
Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatu</i>	several at Kaziranga. 3/14
White-eyed Buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>	1 Kaziranga, west range
Collared Falconet	<i>Microheirax caerulescens</i>	1 took the Indian Purple Emperor we were watching from under our noses along the entrance track to Manas
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinunculus</i>	scattered. 3/14
Red-necked Falcon	<i>Falco chicquera</i>	a great record. 1 seen along the main road at Kaziranga en route to the East Range
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	singles Kaziranga and between Manas and Tingtibi, the latter dismembering a Great Barbet!
Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	Kaziranga. 5/14
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	scattered throughout. 8/14
Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	Kaziranga and Guwahati, locally abundant. 6/14
Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>	Kaziranga. 3/14
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	mainly Kaziranga. 5/14
Great Egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>	Kaziranga and Guwahati. 6/14
Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>	Kaziranga and Guwahati. 7/14
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Kaziranga and Guwahati. 7/14
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	Kaziranga and Guwahati. 7/14

Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Kaziranga and Guwahati. 6/14
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	Kaziranga – just one or two daily. 4/14
Little Heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i>	scattered – a total of 4 seen. 3/14
Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus phillipensis</i>	frequent at Kaziranga. 4/14
Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	Kaziranga and Guwahati. 6/14
Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	Kaziranga. 4/14
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	one group on the shores of the Brahmaputra at Burradapur
Black-necked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>	daily at Kaziranga. 5/14
Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>	daily at Kaziranga. 5/14
Greater Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos dubius</i>	a few at Kaziranga and at Guwahati. 5/14
Asian Fairy Bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>	2 at Kaziranga and good numbers Manas. 3/14
Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>	Manas. 2/14
Orange-bellied Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis hardwickii</i>	widespread in Bhutan. 6/14
Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	Kaziranga. 4/14
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	Kaziranga. 5/14
Grey-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius tephronotus</i>	widespread and common. 11/14
Common Green Magpie	<i>Cissa chinensis</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 4/14
Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	mainly Kaziranga. 6/14
Grey Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta formosae</i>	frequent in Bhutan. 4/14
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	near habitation in Assam. 3/14
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	widespread and locally common. 11/14
Ashy Woodswallow	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>	scattered. 4/14
Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>	Kaziranga. 6/14
Maroon Oriole	<i>Oriolus traillii</i>	1 above Gelephu
Large Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>	1 at Kaziranga
Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina melaschistos</i>	scattered. 3/14
Short-billed Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus brevirostris</i>	near Manas
Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>	widespread and locally common. 8/14
Long-tailed Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus ethologus</i>	scattered throughout. 3/14
Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>	scattered in Bhutan 2/14
Yellow-bellied Fantail	<i>Rhipidura hypoxantha</i>	widespread in Bhutan. 5/14
White-throated Fantail	<i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>	Manas. 2/14
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	open country, not Bhutan. 6/14
Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 6/14
Bronzed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>	widespread. 10/14
Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus remifer</i>	Singleton Kaziranga, frequent in Bhutan. 4/14
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>	common Manas. 2/14
Spangled Drongo	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>	scattered. 2/14
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	Local in wooded areas. 7/14
Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	scattered in Kaziranga. 3/14
Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	Kaziranga. 2/14
Large Wood-shrike	<i>Tephrodornis gularis</i>	singles twice in Manas area. 2/14
Common Wood-shrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>	one flock near Tingtibi
Brown Dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>	singles twice along Bhutan's rivers. 2/14
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	Scattered in Bhutan – mostly singles. 5/14

Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola rufiventris</i>	Scattered in Bhutan – mostly singles. 5/14
Blue Whistling Thrush	<i>Myophonus caeruleus</i>	widespread in Bhutan. 7/14
Plain-backed Thrush	<i>Zoothera mollissima</i>	near Tingtibi
Long-billed Thrush	<i>Zoothera monticola</i>	Manas - IG only
Dark-throated Thrush	<i>Turdus ruficollis</i>	a small group near Zhemgang
Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	1 Manas – IG only
Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula strophiatea</i>	several in Bhutan. 3/14
Taiga Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>	scattered in Kaziranga. 3/14
Little Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula westermanni</i>	scattered in small numbers throughout. 5/14
Large Niltava	<i>Niltava grandis</i>	3 seen Gongphu
Small Niltava	<i>Niltava macgrigoriae</i>	scattered throughout. 5/14
Verditer Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias thalassina</i>	2 close to Tingtibi
Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>	widespread. 10/14
Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	widespread. 14/14
White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	scattered in Kaziranga. 4/14
Hodgson's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus hodgsoni</i>	a few in Bhutan. 3/14
Blue-fronted Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus frontalis</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
White-capped Water Redstart	<i>Chaimarrornis leucocephalus</i>	Common along Bhutan's rivers. 7/14
Plumbeous Water Redstart	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosus</i>	Common along Bhutan's rivers. 7/14
Little Forktail	<i>Enicurus scouleri</i>	near Tingtibi and near Gelephu. 2/14
Slaty-backed Forktail	<i>Enicurus schistaceus</i>	common in Bhutan. 6/14
White-crowned Forktail	<i>Enicurus leschenaulti</i>	noted both days in Manas. 2/14
Spotted Forktail	<i>Enicurus maculata</i>	frequent in Bhutan. 5/14
Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	widespread in Kaziranga. 5/14
Grey Bushchat	<i>Saxicola ferrea</i>	only noted at Gongphu
Chestnut-tailed Starling	<i>Sturnus malabaricus</i>	widespread and common in Kaziranga, also just a few in Bhutan. 7/14
Asian Pied Starling	<i>Sturnus contra</i>	widespread, scarce in Bhutan. 8/14
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	widespread. 14/14
Jungle Myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>	locally abundant in Kaziranga. 5/14
White-vented Myna	<i>Acridotheres cinereus</i>	scattered in Kaziranga. 4/14
Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>	Manas. 2/14
White-tailed Nuthatch	<i>Sitta himalayensis</i>	south of Tingtibi
Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch	<i>Sitta castanea</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 3/14
Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	a female seen just outside Pangbang and watched for a long time, another flew over the river at Manas. 2/14
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	a few seen round Kaziranga. 3/14
Green-backed Tit	<i>Parus monticola</i>	frequent in Bhutan. 4/14
Yellow-cheeked Tit	<i>Parus spilnotus</i>	a few in Bhutan. 2/14
Sultan Tit	<i>Melanochlora sultanea</i>	several in Manas
Black-throated Tit	<i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>	frequent in Bhutan. 5/14
Plain Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	Daily at Nameri. 4/14
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Guwahati wetland
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	locally common in Kaziranga. 7/14
Striated Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus striatus</i>	frequent in Bhutan. 5/14
Black-crested Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>	widespread. 8/14
Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	scattered throughout. 6/14

Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	widespread and very common. 14/14
White-throated Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus flaveolus</i>	a few in Bhutan. 2/14
Ashy Bulbul	<i>Hemixos flavala</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Mountain Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes mcclllandii</i>	frequent in Bhutan. 4/14
Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>	widespread, abundant at Bhutan. 8/14
Bright-headed Cisticola	<i>Cisticola exilis</i>	Kaziranga. 2/14
Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>	seen West Range, Kaziranga
Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>	scattered records. 4/14
Chestnut-headed Tesia	<i>Tesia castaneocoronata</i>	1 Gongphu (IG only)
Grey-bellied Tesia	<i>Tesia cyaniventer</i>	1 Manas (IG only)
Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	scattered. 4/14
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	Kaziranga. 2/14
Dusky Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>	Kaziranga. 2/14
Hume's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>	Bhutan. 2/14
Tickell's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus affinis</i>	Kaziranga. 2/14
Ashy-throated Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus maculipennis</i>	frequent in Bhutan. 3/14
Lemon-rumped Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus chloronotus</i>	locally abundant in Bhutan. 5/14
Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>	Kaziranga. 2/14
Blyth's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus reguloides</i>	Kaziranga
Yellow-vented Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus cantator</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Grey-hooded Warbler	<i>Seicercus xanthoschistos</i>	locally frequent in Bhutan. 2/14
White-spectacled Warbler	<i>Seicercus affinis</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Grey-cheeked Warbler	<i>Seicercus poliogenys</i>	Zhemgang
Rufous-faced Warbler	<i>Abroscopus albogularis</i>	Gongphu
Black-faced Warbler	<i>Abroscopus schisticeps</i>	Gongphu
Striated Grassbird	<i>Megalurus palustris</i>	Burradapur, Kaziranga
Bhutan Laughingthrush	<i>Trochalopteran imbricatum</i>	below Zhemgang
White-crested Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax leucolophus</i>	a number of highly entertaining flocks in Bhutan. 3/14
Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax pectoralis</i>	one flock Manas
Rufous-necked Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax ruficollis</i>	a very tame flock near Gongphu
Striated Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax striatus</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 3/14
Blue-winged Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax squamatus</i>	a flock above Zhemgang
Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax erythrocephalus</i>	a flock above Zhemgang
Red-faced Liocichla	<i>Liocichla phoenicea</i>	a flock above Zhemgang
Abbott's Babbler	<i>Malacocincla abbotti</i>	noted once in Kaziranga and also in Manas, Bhutan. 2/14
Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>	Kaziranga
Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus ruficollis</i>	1 Zhemgang
Rufous-capped Babbler	<i>Stachyris rufifrons</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Golden Babbler	<i>Stachyris chrysaea</i>	a flock below Zhemgang
Grey-throated Babbler	<i>Stachyris nigriceps</i>	below Zhemgang
Striped Tit Babbler	<i>Macronous gularis.</i>	2 at Manas
Chestnut-capped Babbler	<i>Timalia pileata</i>	Guwahati wetland
Yellow-eyed Babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>	central range, Kaziranga
Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>	Very local – only near Gelephu. 2/14
Red-billed Leiothrix	<i>Leiothrix lutea</i>	below Zhemgang
Black-headed Shrike Babbler	<i>Pteruthius rufiventer</i>	a flock below Zhemgang

Black-eared Shrike Babbler	<i>Pteruthius melanotis</i>	a flock below Zhemgang
Rusty-fronted Barwing	<i>Actinodura egertoni</i>	a pair below Zhemgang
Blue-winged Minla	<i>Minla cyanuroptera</i>	Above Gelephu and Zhemgang area. 2/14
Chestnut-tailed Minla	<i>Minla strigula</i>	above Gelephu
Red-tailed Minla	<i>Minla ignotincta</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Rufous-winged Fulvetta	<i>Alcippe castaniceps</i>	Gongphu
Nepal Fulvetta	<i>Alcippe nipalensis</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Rufous Siberia	<i>Heterophasia capistrata</i>	widespread in Bhutan. 6/14
Long-tailed Siberia	<i>Heterophasia picaoides</i>	one flock above Gelephu and a single between Tingtibi and Gelephu. 2/14
Stripe-throated Yuhina	<i>Yuhina gularis</i>	Zhemgang area
Whiskered Yuhina	<i>Yuhina flavicollis</i>	widespread in Bhutan. 5/14
Rufous-vented Yuhina	<i>Yuhina occipitalis</i>	Zhemgang area
Striated Yuhina	<i>Yuhina castaniceps</i>	Zhemgang area
White-naped Yuhina	<i>Yuhina bakeri</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
White-bellied Yuhina	<i>Yuhina zantholeuca</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Black-chinned Yuhina	<i>Yuhina nigrimenta</i>	below Tingtibi
Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis atrosuperciliaris</i>	below Tingtibi
Bengal Lark	<i>Mirafra assamica</i>	Guwahati wetland
Plain Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Fire-breasted Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum ignipectus</i>	above Gelephu
Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum cruentatum</i>	scattered in Kaziranga. 2/14
Ruby-cheeked Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes sinalensis</i>	1 at the hotel in Kaziranga
Mrs Gould's Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga gouldiae</i>	Tingtibi and Zhemgang. 2/14
Green-tailed Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga nipalensis</i>	Gongphu
Black-throated Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga saturata</i>	frequent in Bhutan. 4/14
Crimson Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Little Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>	several in Bhutan. 2/14
Streaked Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothora magna</i>	widespread in Bhutan. 6/14
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Common near habitation. 8/14
Russet Sparrow	<i>Passer rutilans</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	locally common. 8/14
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	widespread. 12/14
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	several at Kaziranga. 3/14
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	Kaziranga and Manas. 5/14
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	scattered in Bhutan. 2/14
Olive-backed Pipit	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>	scattered throughout. 4/14
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	?probably this species at Guwahati wetland
Blyth's Pipit	<i>Anthus godlewskii</i>	scattered in Kaziranga. 2/14
Rosy Pipit	<i>Anthus roseatus</i>	several at Kaziranga. 3/14
Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	Kaziranga
Yellow-breasted Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis spinoides</i>	a large flock Gongphu. 2/14
Scarlet Finch	<i>Haematospiza sipahi</i>	a female between Tingtibi and Gelephu
Spot-winged Grosbeak	<i>Mycerobas melanozanthos</i>	a small flock above Zhemgang

Systematic List Number 3

Butterflies

Much of the nomenclature and taxonomy for this list was taken from Haribal's 'The Butterflies of Sikkim Himalaya' which was published in 1992.

Papilionidae

Common Bluebottle	<i>Graphium sarpedon</i>	between Gongphu and Pangbang
Lime	<i>Papilo demoleus</i>	Kaziranga where noted on 2 days
Common Mormon	<i>Papilio polytes</i>	scattered
Redbreast	<i>Papilio rhetenor</i>	Singletons at Nameri and Manas
Great Windmill	<i>Polydorus dasarada</i>	1 at Manas

Danaiidae

Glassy Tiger	<i>Parantica aglea</i>	widespread
Chestnut Tiger	<i>Danaus tytia</i>	scattered in Bhutan
Blue Glassy Tiger	<i>Danaus limniace</i>	only at Kaziranga where rather common
Dark Blue Tiger	<i>Danaus septemtrionis</i>	only noted in Manas
Plain Tiger	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>	Only at Guwahati wetland
Common Tiger	<i>Danaus plexippus</i>	locally very common at Kaziranga
Common Indian Crow	<i>Euploea core</i>	Kaziranga where frequent, also Manas
Striped Blue Crow	<i>Euploea mulciber</i>	scattered throughout
Double-banded Blue Crow	<i>Euploea harrisi</i>	possibly this species Burradapur

Nymphalidae

Knight	<i>Lebedea martha</i>	1 Burradapur and 1 Manas
Cruiser	<i>Vindula erota</i>	between Gongphu and Pangbang
Grey Count	<i>Euthalia lepidea</i>	Burradapur where quite common, also frequent in Manas
Common Earl	<i>Euthalia julii</i>	Manas
Powdered Baron	<i>Euthalia jahnu</i>	superb individual seen in Manas
Indian Fritillary	<i>Argyreus hyperbius</i>	frequent in drier parts of Kaziranga, also noted above Gelephu
Common Leopard	<i>Phalanta phalantha</i>	1 Kaziranga
Commodore	<i>Limnitis danava</i>	Manas
Commander	<i>Limnitis procris</i>	both days at Manas
Blackvien Sergeant	<i>Pantoporia ranga</i>	Manas
Common Sergeant	<i>Pantoporia perius</i>	Burradapur
Indian Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais kaschmirensis</i>	Tingtibi and Zhemgang areas
Indian Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa indica</i>	above Gelephu on two dates
Common Jester	<i>Symbrenthia hippoclus</i>	locally common in Bhutan
Common Sailor	<i>Neptis hylas</i>	widespread and common throughout
Clear Sailor	<i>Neptis nandina</i>	? Kaziranga
Yerbury's Sailor	<i>Neptis yerburyi</i>	? between Gongphu and Pangbang
Common Lascar	<i>Neptis hordonia</i>	Manas on both dates
Common Map	<i>Cyrestis thyodamas</i>	Manas
Common Castor	<i>Ariadne merione</i>	scattered throughout

Indian Purple Emperor	<i>Apatura ambica</i>	a superb individual around our feet in Manas which sadly met its end while there when a Falconet caught it – a trip highlight in every respect!
Black Prince	<i>Apatura parisatis</i>	on both dates in Manas
Circe	<i>Hestina nama</i>	above Gelephu and also between Gongphu and Pangbang
Large Yeoman	<i>Cirrochroa aoris</i>	1 at Kaziranga and also several in Bhutan
Leopard Lacewing	<i>Cethosia cyane</i>	1 Manas
Common Palmfly	<i>Elymnias hypermnestra</i>	scattered throughout
Chocolate Soldier	<i>Precis iphita</i>	widespread and common
Peacock Pansy	<i>Precis almana</i>	frequent in Kaziranga
Grey Pansy	<i>Precis atlites</i>	common in Kaziranga
Lemon Pansy	<i>Precis lemonias</i>	widespread throughout
Common Evening Brown	<i>Melanitis leda</i>	scattered throughout
Dark Evening Brown	<i>Melanitis phedima</i>	Manas
Tailed Red Forester	<i>Lethe sinoryx</i>	1 below Tingtibi
	<i>Orsotrioena medus</i>	scattered throughout
Common Five-ring	<i>Ypthima baldus</i>	scattered records
Common Three-ring	<i>Ypthima asterope</i>	scattered throughout
Dark-brand Bushbrown	<i>Mycalesis mineus</i>	scattered

Pieridae

Great Orange-tip	<i>Hebemoia glaucippe</i>	1 at the hotel in Kaziranga and 1 at Manas
Three-spot Grass Yellow	<i>Eurema blanda</i>	scattered
One-spot Grass Yellow	<i>Eurema andersoni</i>	scattered
Yellow Orange-tip	<i>Ixias pyrene</i>	frequent in Bhutan
Common Gull	<i>Ceporia nerissa</i>	scattered, mostly Kaziranga, but also in Bhutan
Common Emigrant	<i>Catopsilia crocale</i>	possibly this species in Kaziranga
Red-base Jezebel	<i>Delias aglaia</i>	two seen in Kaziranga
Yellow Jezebel	<i>Delias agostina</i>	Kaziranga
Spotted Sawtooth	<i>Prioneris thestylis</i>	several in Bhutan
Pysche	<i>Leptosia nina</i>	widespread in small numbers
Spot Puffin	<i>Appias lalage</i>	Manas
Chocolate Albatross	<i>Appias lyncida</i>	scattered throughout
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	Manas
Indian Cabbage White	<i>Pieris canidia</i>	frequent in Kaziranga

Acraeidae

Tawny Coster	<i>Acraea terpsiphone</i>	Guwahati wetland
--------------	---------------------------	------------------

Lycaenidae

Bright Sunbeam	<i>Curetis bulis</i>	Kaziranga, also both days in Manas
Common Acacia Blue	<i>Surendra quercetorum</i>	Manas
Common Imperial	<i>Cheritra freja</i>	Manas
Common Tit	<i>Hypolycaena erylus</i>	both days in Manas
Common Pierrot	<i>Castalius rosimon</i>	two days in Kaziranga
Chocolate Flash	<i>Tajuria rangala</i>	Manas

Slate Flash	<i>Rapala manea</i>	1 Kaziranga
Western Centaur Oakblue	<i>Arhopaha centaurus</i>	several on both days in Manas
Metallic Caerulean	<i>Jamides alecto</i>	scattered
White Caerulean	<i>Jamides cleodus</i>	common Manas
Common Caerulean	<i>Jamides celeno</i>	scattered throughout
Long-tailed Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>	between Gongphu and Pangbang
Ciliate Blue	<i>Anthene emoleus</i>	Manas
Purple Sapphire	<i>Heliophorus epicles</i>	scattered throughout
Dark Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria karsandra</i>	Kaziranga
Pale Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria maha</i>	scattered in Bhutan
Indian Cupid	<i>Everes parrhasius</i>	between Tingtibi and Gelephu
Common Hedge Blue	<i>Acytolepis puspa</i>	Mangde Chu Valley
White Hedge Blue	<i>Udara akasa</i>	?probably this species. Manas
Apefly	<i>Spalgis epeus</i>	scattered throughout
Forget-me-not	<i>Catochrysops strabo</i>	Kaziranga

Riodinidae

Common Beak	<i>Libythea lepita</i>	Manas
Punchinello	<i>Zemeros flegyas</i>	common in Manas
Dark Judy	<i>Abisara fylla</i>	between Gongphu and Pangbang

Hesperidae

Flat sp		between Gongphu and Pangbang
Fulvous Pied Flat	<i>Coladenia dan</i>	Manas – seen only from Elephant back!
Suffused Snow-flat	<i>Tagiades gana</i>	Manas
Common Small Flat	<i>Sarangesa dasahara</i>	Manas
Pale Dart	<i>Telicota colon</i>	Manas
Dark Palm Dart	<i>Telicota ancilla</i>	Manas
Atkinson's Bob	<i>Arnetta atkinsoni</i>	Manas
Rice Swift	<i>Borbo cinnara</i>	Manas
Dark-branded Swift	<i>Pelopidas agna</i>	Manas