

THE MISHMI HILLS & BEYOND

Saturday 14th Feb – Wednesday 4th March 2009

The north-eastern corner of India is home to some of the rarest, endemic and sought-after specialities of the Indian Subcontinent and this revised tour takes us on an exciting bird-filled ride through the best lowland sites in Assam, as well as a 7-night stay at a conveniently located new lodge in the relatively unexplored Mishmi Hills of Arunachal Pradesh. We begin at the wonderful Nameri Wildlife Sanctuary where White-winged Duck and Ibisbill reside, followed by the famous Kaziranga National Park. Home to a 1,000-strong population of Indian One-horned Rhinoceros, it also supports a healthy population of Indian Elephant, wild Water Buffalo and Swamp Deer. All excursions here will be by open-topped jeep allowing us unrivalled views of the multitude of water-loving, grassland and forest species present including Swamp Francolin, Bengal Florican, Greater Adjutant and White-tailed Rubythroat. And then we head to the mystical Mishmi Hills where a wealth of Eastern Himalayan birds can be found. Our main target will be the Mishmi Wren-babbler which was rediscovered in 2004 after an absence of some 60 years. Other possibilities range from Blyth's Tragopan to Beautiful Nuthatch, amongst a fine assortment of barbets, minlas, fulvettas, parrotbills and rosefinches. We will also take a boat ride at Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary and search the tall grassland where the endemic Marsh Babbler, Black-breasted Parrotbill and Swamp Prinia can be found.



Bengal Florican

Our Tour Itinerary

Days 1 - 2 We will meet at London Heathrow for the overnight scheduled flight to Kolkata. On arrival we will transfer to a hotel for breakfast before taking the short internal flight to Guwahati in the state of Assam. On arrival we will drive across the fertile plains to a wonderfully located eco-camp

situated close to Nameri Tiger Reserve. This is an excellent place to relax and our 3 nights here will be spent in large African-style safari tents that come complete with full, en-suite facilities.

Days 3 – 4 What a place to wake up to in the morning, with a multitude of new forest sounds all around! The grounds of the camp and immediate vicinity hold an enormous variety of birds with Asian Barred Owllet, Lineated Barbet, Red-breasted Parakeet, Yellow-footed and Pin-tailed Green-Pigeons and Daurian Redstart all present. At night the sounds of the surrounding jungle often betray the presence of Oriental Scops-owl, Brown Hawk-owl and even Himalayan Wood-Owl on occasion. Most of our time will be spent across the Jai-Bhorelli River where there are several secluded pools nestled deep within the forest and if we are quiet and luck is on our side it is possible to find the rare White-winged Duck, one of the main ornithological prizes to be found on this tour. Once again, birds are numerous here and one of the highlights will be the extremely good numbers of Wreathed Hornbills present, whilst Pallas's Fish-eagle is also very conspicuous along the river. A few trails traverse the primary forest and grassland where we will also hope to see Mountain Hawk-eagle, Rufous-bellied Eagle, Oriental Hobby, River Tern, Great Pied Hornbill, Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker, Greater Yellownappe, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Blue-eared Kingfisher, Blue-throated Barbet, Vernal Hanging-parrot, Lesser Coucal, Green-billed Malkoha, Large Hawk-cuckoo, Barred Cuckoo-dove, Long-tailed Broadbill, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Blue-fronted Redstart, Maroon Oriole, Rosy Minivet, Little Pied and Taiga Flycatchers, Black-crested and White-throated Bulbuls, Sultan Tit, Short-billed Minivet, Streaked Spiderhunter, Yellow-browed and Thick-billed Warblers, Crimson Sunbird, Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker and Lesser Hill-Myna. Our previous visits have also produced Cinnamon Bittern, Wedge-tailed Green-pigeon, Stripe-breasted Woodpecker, Pale Blue Flycatcher, Small-billed Scaly and Black-breasted Thrushes, Spot-throated and Abbott's Babbler, White-throated Laughingthrush and Spot-winged Starling. Our last morning will be spent sailing down the river which usually affords excellent views of the truly wonderful Ibisbill, along with Long-billed Plover, Small Pratincole, Crested Kingfisher, and both White-capped and Plumbeous Water Redstarts amongst many others.

Days 5 – 7 An early start will see us heading towards the fantastic Kaziranga National Park, where we will stay for the next 3 nights. The reserve lies on the southern banks of the mighty Brahmaputra River where the predominant vegetation is a mixture of tall grasslands and riverine forest interspersed with many marshes, streams and ox-bow lakes, whilst the nearby Mikir Hills rise to over 1,000 metres. This mosaic of habitats and its remote position ensure a haven for wildlife, including some of the most wanted mammals in the Indian Sub-continent. This is one of the few places still left to see the Indian One-horned Rhinoceros, and there are also wild Water Buffalo, Indian Elephant and Swamp Deer. Other mammal species we should see include Rhesus Macaque, Common and Capped Langurs, Sambar, Barking Deer, Hog Deer, Wild Boar and Smooth-coated Otter. Tigers are also present but are difficult to see, as is Leopard and Sloth Bear, but their mere presence will have us search the park in open-topped jeeps and by Elephant-back. We can make regular stops at watch-towers and other vantage points that will provide us with panoramic views across this most picturesque of all India's national parks. The birds here are simply amazing and we are sure to be astonished by the sheer number and variety of water birds present such as Spot-billed Pelican, numerous herons and egrets, Black-necked and Woolly-necked Storks, Lesser Adjutant, Bar-headed Goose, Lesser Whistling-duck, Spot-billed Duck, Ferruginous Pochard and Bronze-winged Jacana, as well as a good variety of waders including Pied Avocet, Pacific Golden Plover, Grey-headed Lapwing, Spotted Redshank and Marsh Sandpiper. Stunning River and Black-bellied Terns patrol the watercourses constantly, whilst Himalayan Griffon and White-rumped Vultures, Pallas's and Grey-headed Fish-eagles, Pied Harrier, Greater Spotted Eagle and Changeable Hawk-eagle are usually conspicuous. The forest, grasslands and surrounding areas are home to Dusky Eagle and Tawny Fish Owls, Kalij Pheasant, Red Junglefowl, Brown-backed Needletail, Blue-naped Pitta, Banded Bay and Drongo Cuckoos, Dollarbird, Blossom-headed Parakeet, Chestnut-headed and Blue-tailed Bee-Eaters, Oriental Pied Hornbill, Streak-throated and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Himalayan Flameback, Oriental Turtle Dove, Streak-throated Swallow, Black-backed Forktail, Ashy Minivet, Small and Rufous-bellied Niltavas, Grey Bushchat, White-crested and Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes, White-browed Scimitar-Babbler, Slender-billed and Abbott's Babbler, Rufous-rumped and Bristled Grassbirds, Pale-footed Bush-Warbler, Golden-spectacled and Paddyfield Warblers, White-rumped Shama, Siberian Rubythroat,

Brown and Grey-backed Shrikes, Bengal Bushlark, Common Green Magpie, Yellow-breasted Bunting, White-vented Myna and Spot-winged Starling. Other scarce or special birds that can be found include Baer's Pochard, Falcated Duck, Greater Adjutant and Slender-billed Vultures, whilst Bengal Florican breeds amongst the tall grasslands and the localised Terai grassland specialist Swamp Francolin can often be easy to see here. Our previous visits have also turned up a few surprises such as Spot-bellied Eagle-owl, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Crow-billed Drongo and Finn's Weaver

Day 8 This morning we will visit the nearby Panberi Reserve in search of the rare Hoolock Gibbon, the only ape in India. This area is good for woodland birds, including many scarce species and we will search for Red-headed Trogon, Blue-eared Barbet, Small Niltava, Pale-chinned and Pygmy Blue Flycatcher, Spot-throated Babbler, Slender-billed Oriole, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Silver-breasted Broadbill, Large Scimitar-babbler, Rusty-bellied Shortwing, Mountain Tailorbird and Yellow-vented Warbler amongst other possibilities. After a good few hours here we will then spend the rest of the day travelling to Tinsukhia where we will spend the night.

Days 9 – 15 An early start will see us arriving on the banks of the mighty Brahmaputra River at Saikhowa Ghat, where we cross the river in a small ferry before driving to the border with Arunachal Pradesh. Our base for the next 7 nights will be a brand new, comfortable lodge situated at 700m in the Mishmi Hills, which will allow us to explore the whole area up to Mayodia Pass at 2800m. Such a diverse range in altitude inevitably means a wide selection of typical Himalayan specialities that include many specialities found in Bhutan and Eaglenest to the west. We will inevitably begin our exploration around the lodge where we can search for Red-headed Trogon, Streaked and Little Spiderhunters, White-browed Piculet, Blue-winged Minla, Nepal Fulvetta, Striated and Black-chinned Yuhinas, Lesser and Greater Necklaced Laughingthrushes, Pygmy Wren-babbler, Chestnut-headed and Slaty-bellied Tesias, Rufous-faced Warbler, Striped Tit-babbler and hopefully Collared Treepie amongst others. The area around Mayodia Pass is excellent for higher altitude species such as Himalayan Red-flanked Bush-robin, Black-faced and Striated Laughingthrushes, Fulvous Parrotbill, Rufous-vented and Rufous-fronted Tits, the range-restricted Manipur Fulvetta, Grey-headed Bullfinch, Dark-rumped and Spot-winged Rosefinches, and both Crimson-browed and Gold-naped Finches. Sclater's Monal is also present above the tree line but access to this area is extremely difficult and requires a very tough hike. Just below the pass are some good patches of bamboo and scrub which are home to Common Hill-partridge, Darjeeling Woodpecker, Rufous-breasted and White-browed Bush-robins, Rusty-fronted and Streak-throated Barwings, Streak-breasted and Slender-billed Scimitar-babblers, Brown-throated Fulvetta, Yellowish-bellied Bush-warbler, Yellow-cheeked Tit and Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, all of which were seen on our visit in 2008. The main objective of visiting this remote and unexplored area is to find the endemic Mishmi Wren-Babbler which was only recently rediscovered after an absence of over 60 years! In fact since its initial discovery in 1947 it was not reliably seen until 2004 and needless to say we will spend plenty of time searching for this enigmatic species, which is now relatively common in certain areas. We will spend most of our time below 1000m birding the lush primary forested hillsides from the roadsides which are home to a very interesting cross-selection of Eastern Himalayan specialities and more widespread birds of the northern subcontinent such as Rufous-throated Hill-Partridge, Blyth's Tragopan, Bay Woodpecker, Golden-throated Barbet, White-gorgeted Flycatcher, Rusty-bellied Shortwing, Black-headed Shrike-Babbler, Himalayan Cutia, Purple Cochoa, White-hooded Babbler, Sultan Tit, Chestnut Thrush, White-naped and Stripe-throated Yuhinas, Golden-breasted and Yellow-throated Fulvettas, Rufous-vented, Scaly and Blue-winged Laughingthrushes, Coral-billed Scimitar-babbler, Golden Babbler, Red-tailed Minla, Beautiful and Long-tailed Sibias, Ashy-throated, Buff-barred and Black-faced Leaf-Warblers, Green-tailed and Black-throated Sunbirds, Lesser Rufous-headed, Brown and Grey-headed Parrotbills, Collared Grosbeak and Dark-breasted Rosefinch. Other skulking and scarce species we will search for include Beautiful Nuthatch, Bar-winged and Long-billed Wren-Babblers and even Fire-tailed Myzornis can be seen amongst the flowering Rhododendrons, whilst the list of other potential species here is extremely exciting. Even Gould's Shortwing, Ward's Trogon and Cachar Wedge-billed Wren-babbler have been recorded here. We should also encounter many large mixed-species flocks that will certainly get our pulses racing and test our identification skills! This is without doubt one of the most exciting new 'hot-spots' in India, and to be in such a remote area practically guarantees the odd surprise or three!

Day 16 After a final morning's birding we will have to leave the amazing Mishmi Hills and make our way back across the Brahmaputra River and return to our hotel in Tinsukhia for a 2 night stay.

Day 17 We will spend a leisurely morning visiting Dibru-Saikhowa National Park which protects an extensive mosaic of swamp forest, shallow wetlands and grassland. Our time will be spent searching for the grassland specialities along the river bank from motorised boats, particularly Swamp Francolin, Jerdon's Babbler and 3 Northeast Indian endemics, Swamp Prinia, Marsh Babbler and Black-breasted Parrotbill. Amongst an impressive list of other species we can also find Lesser Adjutant, Ruddy Shelduck, Falcated Duck, Sand Lark, Rosy and Buff-bellied Pipits, White-tailed Rubythroat, Graceful and Yellow-bellied Prinias, Grey-sided and Aberrant Bush Warblers, Smoky, Dusky and Paddyfield Warblers and Striated and Chestnut-capped Babblers, whilst Ganges River Dolphin is often seen on the Dibru River. Later in the day (if access is granted) we will visit the Digboi Oilfield Wildlife Sanctuary, for which you need a special permit to enter. The habitat here is sufficiently varied to attract an excellent variety of birds and in particular we shall search for the endemic Chestnut-backed Laughingthrush and the localised Collared Treepie. Other birds we can find here include White-browed Piculet, Black-throated Sunbird, Blue-winged Leafbird, Greater and Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes, Rufous-capped Babbler, Nepal Fulvetta, Yellow-vented and Scarlet-backed Flowerpeckers and Ruby-cheeked Sunbird. Anything can turn up here and our last visit also found Falcated Duck and Lesser Fish-Eagle.

Days 18 - 19 Unfortunately we must leave this wonderful area after a final look at some nearby areas before transferring to Dibrugarh Airport and returning to Kolkata for an overnight stay before flying back to the UK where the tour concludes the following day.

Leaders: Nick Bray and Peter Lobo

TOUR PRICE

Kolkata/Kolkata **£1995.00** per person

London/London £600.00 per person (provisional)

Single supplement: £295.00

Deposit: £400.00

Maximum group size: 12 Excluding leaders

Included in cost: Internal flight, all meals, accommodation in twin rooms en-suite where available, transport in air-conditioned vehicles throughout the tour, all reserve entrance fees, jeep services at Kaziranga and services of the leaders.

Not included: International flight, insurance, drinks, tips and items of a personal nature, Visa (currently £30), airport departure tax and optional tips for the local guides.

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BOOKING FORM

PLEASE USE BLOCK LETTERS THROUGHOUT

Tour name.....

Dates.....

Surname	Initials	Mr/Mrs/Miss	First Name (That by which you wish to be known on trip)	Are you joining the tour in the UK? Yes/No	Are you over 65

Address for Correspondence:	
Postcode:	
Telephone: (Home)	(Work)
E-mail Address:	
Contact Number: (in case of accident or emergency - this must be filled in)	
Doctors Number:	

Passport Details: * (Please fill in forenames as they appear on your passport)					
Surname	*Forename(s)	Passport No.	Place of Issue	Date of issue	Expiry date

Please make the above reservations

I/We enclose £..... **Deposit** (Please see tour description for amount)

I/We enclose £..... **Flight booking fee £30**

(If you request Birdseekers to arrange your flight add £30 per person)

TOTAL £.....

I confirm that I have read the current terms and conditions as set out in the 2009 brochure and agree and accept them on behalf of all persons named above. Terms and conditions are also available on our web site www.birdseekers.co.uk

SIGNATURE DATE

Please make your cheque payable to 'BIRDSEEKERS' and return, together with completed booking form to the address overleaf.

PLEASE TURN TO BACK OF FORM AND COMPLETE ALL RELEVANT SECTIONS

Other Details:

Accommodation required (please tick) single twin double

Couples please specify if Double or Twin beds required although we cannot guarantee availability:

I am a single traveller and would be prepared to share twin-bedded accommodation yes no

What type of passport do you hold? This must have at least six months to run after the return date of your holiday. British Citizen Other (please state)

Do you have any special dietary requirements (vegetarian, diabetic, other?) yes no

If yes give details.....

Do you have any medical conditions we should know about? Or is there anything else which may prohibit full participation of the tour? Yes no

If yes give details

Flights: please tick as appropriate

You wish to book your own flight. NOTE: Please wait for confirmation from us before you book your flight. When you have booked your flight please notify us of times, number and dates

You wish Birdseekers to book your flight. NOTE: If Birdseekers books your flight there is a booking fee of £30 per person to our agent due with this form and your initial tour deposit.

For office use only:			
Outward Flight No:	Arrival time:	Return Flight:	Departure time:

(Wish List!)

Please fill-in if there are any particular species of bird or other form of wildlife that you would like to see on this tour. We cannot guarantee anything, but it helps to let us know if you have any target species.

Birds:	Other Wildlife: / Sites etc:
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

Other countries you would like to visit?.....

Other interests, Butterflies, Mammals, Flowers, Whales, Photography see www.natural-selection.info/

.....

Please return this form with enclosed cheque to:

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Tel/Fax: 01752 342001

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If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Bookings are welcome right up to the last minute, please ring for details of any vacancies.

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