

# **Project : East Himalaya Birding Programme**

**(Project undertaken by : Association for Conservation & Tourism)**

## **Introduction**

### **BIRDING POPULARITY**

International statistics show that most of the tourists are nature lovers and a considerable number out of them are birdwatchers. In Europe & America, every second travel company offers 'Birding Tours'. We all know that birdlife in the US, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia etc has been very well publicised and the travel industry there is largely dependent on operating ' Birding Tours'. There are numerous ' Bird Clubs' in these countries and ' Birding' is an activity that starts at the school level. No other field science, other than ornithology, allows comfortable mixing of experienced amateurs, literate semi-professionals & hardcore professionals. The bird watching fraternity, forming the largest group among the nature lovers, conservationists and experts are always keen and open in sharing each others field experience. Every 'Birder' is keen to travel places to add to his checklist and learn more interesting facts about this popular science. The 'Birder' would extend all his resources to see an interesting 'Lifer'.

### **EASTERN INDIA BIRDING**

Eastern India is home to more than 850 species of birds and is considered as being the richest birding area in the country. The area comprises of the Eastern Himalayas, represented by a stretch of extremely rugged mountain country along the northern border of India. It lies roughly between latitudes 26°30' and 28° N, and longitudes 87° and 97°30'E. Its nearness to the sea and inflow of the moisture laden southwest monsoon winds makes it the most humid tract to the entire Himalayan chain. The lower latitude and relatively warmer climate have resulted in higher timberline, higher alpine zone and higher snowline zone than in the Western Himalayas. Moist steamy & tropical valleys occur in the foothills flanked by densely forested slopes seemingly side by side with great snow-capped mountain ranges. The abrupt juxtaposition of so many different biotopes or life zones - ranging from almost plains level to over 6000 mts, and from tropical heat to arctic cold, has given to the Eastern Himalayas a flora & fauna that for richness and variety is perhaps unequalled in the world. Sheltered in the rain-shadow lie dry, practically rainless valleys, add to the ecological complexities of the jumbled habitats and make the area as a whole particularly rich in birds, plants & insect life.

### **BIRDING AND COMMUNITY TOURISM**

Birding is usually done in areas which have considerable natural habitats. Hence such destinations are away from towns & cities where there is lack of tourist hospitality infrastructure. The best birds can actually be seen from villages adjoining to the natural covers. Community tourism can be developed in villages with 'Birding' as a major activity. Birdwatchers are field people and can easily adapt to clean & basic services that the villagers

can always be trained in. To develop 'Community Tourism' in the East Himalaya, Association For Conservation & Tourism has taken a major integrated developmental programme.

## **Area of Work in the First Phase**

### **EAST HIMALAYA**

East Himalaya is a part of one of the EIGHT HOTTEST BIODIVERSITY HOTSPOTS of the world. This is a part of the Indo-Burma region. Other than India, the East Himalaya touches the countries of Nepal, Bhutan, China and Bangladesh. Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and West Bengal occupies more than 100,000 sq. kms of East Himalaya approx. Which is about 25% of the Indian Himalaya. This shows a major portion of the Himalaya is existent in the East. Similarly, the whole of Nepal and Bhutan are a part of the Himalaya. The topography varies from the low foothills reaching upto the highest mountains of the world, the Mt. Everest and the Mt. Kanchenjunga. A massive area is covered with snow glaciers feeding a large network of rivers, the major ones being the Brahmaputra, Ganga, Koshi and Teesta. The areas below the snow are mainly used for forestry, agriculture, grassland habitations and infrastructure such as dams, reservoirs and roads. The forest cover is about 140,000 sq. kms even after losing about two third of the forest in the last few decades. The East Himalaya is the home of more than a hundred indigenous communities. The biodiversity explored till date provides mind boggling figures, about 8000 species of angiosperms of which 3200 are endemic, 800 species of birds, 150 species of reptiles, 80 species of amphibians, 200 species of fishes and the list continues. More than 80 wild relatives of crops belonging to cereals, millet, pulses, oil yielding plants, spices and fruits have been recorded here in scientific studies. Keeping in view whatever little that has been described, the ecological importance of the region is beyond question. The region undoubtedly is overpopulated and there is a slow economic development. People live below the poverty line and are dependent on land and local natural resources. The problems are increasing everyday and the administration has tried everything that is possible locally and globally but for AN INTEGRATED IMPLEMENTABLE ECOTOURISM PROCESS.

### **MT.KANCHENJUNGA REGION**

Mt. Kanchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world and the highest in India is a myth by itself. The people of Sikkim consider the mountain to be their Guardian Deity and are referred to as Khang-chen-dzo-nga, the large mountain of five treasures. This forms the backdrop of a large region and eighty percent of the tourist attraction is the view of the range itself. The view is so popular that it forms the picture of the hundred rupees Indian currency note. The region mainly covers Sikkim & North of West Bengal in India, Eastern parts of Nepal and connecting Bhutan. In the East Himalaya, this is a composite region well connected with each other and possesses a wide diversity of nature and culture. The ultra-varied topography and its closeness to Bay of Bengal make it unique. North Bengal houses the Singalila National Park, Neora Valley National Park & Senchal Wildlife Sanctuary in the higher altitudes, the Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary in Himalayan foothills of Terai, continuing with the Garumara National Park, Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary and Buxa Tiger Reserve towards the Bhutan approaches known as Dooars. Sikkim boasts of the Kanchendzonga National Park & Singba Rhododendrone Sanctuary in the North, Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary & Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary in the East, Barsey Rhododendrone Sanctuary in the West and the Maenam Wildlife Sanctuary in the South. There are different ethnic groups throughout the region, some of them who were always here, some migrated

from the adjoining countries and many of them who were brought by the then British rulers to work for them in tea gardens, forests, railways etc. This forms a varied culture and religious base. The Tantric Buddhism (Lamaism) is still a myth to the world. The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, which is the only of its type and now a World Heritage Site is a pride for the region. The Darjeeling Tea today is the most appreciated drink appreciated worldwide. The portions of Nepal and Bhutan are equally rich in nature and culture. Keeping in view the natural & cultural richness of the region and the poverty of the people here, the Kanchenjunga region may be considered for developing an International Ecotourism Park.

## **PROPOSED CIRCUITS**

There are five intersecting and interconnected circuits in the Kanchenjunga Region which houses numerous known, less known and unknown tourist destinations which have to be developed locally and promoted globally to make tourism a tool for conservation and faster sustainable economic development. The Kanchenjunga Region International Ecotourism Park can be formed with these five circuits mentioned hereunder.

- **Sikkim circuit** - the activity spread over the four districts of East, West, North & South.
- **Darjeeling circuit** - the areas west of river Teesta upto the Nepal border covering Singalila Ridge.
- **Kalimpong circuit** - starting from East of Teesta upto the limits of Neora Valley National Park.
- **Dooars & Bhutan circuit** - foothill stretch connecting with Bhutan covering Timphu, Paro & Punakha.
- **Terai & East Nepal circuit** - foothills of Darjeeling circuit & East Nepal adjoining to Mt. Kanchenjunga.

## **Advisory Board**

### **Bill Harvey**

At 54 years of age, we better know William G. Harvey as Bill Harvey. He has worked with the British Council in the UK, Asia and Africa for 30 years. He is the author of birds of Bangladesh and co-author of "A Photographic Guide to the Birds of India". Bill Harvey has lived and worked in this region for 10 years. He writes widely on birds and conservation matters in scientific journals and popular magazines and newspapers. He now lives in New Delhi and is closely associated with the Northern India Bird Network, which he helped establish.

### **Bikram Grewal**

Bikram Grewal, at 51 years is a publisher by profession, has written best-selling guides to Indian Birds. He has written twenty other books on various subjects of natural history. He has a special interest in the history of Indian ornithology. The latest book "A Photographic Guide to the Birds of India", with Bill Harvey and Otto Pfister, Bikram has made a deep in Indian ornithology

## **Sumit Sen**

Sumit K Sen at 48 years is a Webmaster and photographer. A retired banker by profession his love for birds at young age was rekindled. It is an abiding interest in promoting and protecting India's natural heritage that drove him to create [www.kolkatabirds.com](http://www.kolkatabirds.com), a photographic and information website for the birds of India, with the help of his friends and well-wishers.

## **Honorary Co-ordinator**

The Vice-President of the association for conservation and tourism, Supratim (Raj) Basu who is the initiator for most of the Community Tourism sites in the Kanchenjunga region has volunteered to be the co-ordinator of this programme. He will connect bird watching activity with the viable villages and their people, and will participate in the field programmes. He will also be leading the national and international promotional and marketing drives under this programme. He has conceptualized the Kanchenjunga Region International Ecotourism Park, has been a resource person for Ecotourism workshops in Nagaland, Meghalaya, Sikkim, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh etc, he is also the member of the Wildlife Advisory Board-Govt. of West Bengal, member of the ecotourism committee-Himalayan Tourism Advisory Board-Govt. of India, panel speaker on Responsible Tourism for Govt. of India-Deptt. of Tourism, Executive President for Eastern Himalaya Travel and Tour Operators Association, Treasurer of DHR-India Support Group, Convener of the Project Management Team of the UNESCO sponsored Darjeeling Himalayan Railway project etc His Majesty's Govt. of Nepal has awarded him for his contribution towards tourism in Nepal.

## **Co-ordinator (Birding)**

Born in 1971, Sujan Chatterjee has been birding for the last 15 years. He has travelled all over India for birding and has seen more than 850 species of birds in India. He has been the part of various surveys, projects and findings, like the following.

- 5 Co-Investigator in -- Oriental Bird Club U.K. funded project 'Survey of Galliformes Birds in Neora Valley National Park', 2003.
- 5 Co-Discoverer -- a new bird subspecies for India, *Lanius cristatus superciliosus*, 2002.
- 5 Co-investigator in – Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore funded project 'Inland Wetland Survey', 2002.
- 5 Field Investigator in -- A bird survey project funded by West Bengal Forest Development Corporation Ltd. "Bird Status Survey in the Lava and Lulagaon Range" (Darjeeling District of West Bengal) carried on by Prakriti Samsad, 1999 –2001.
- 5 Field Investigator in -- Collaborative project with Forest Directorate of Government of West Bengal and Sunderbans Tiger Project on the 'Birds of Sunderbans Tiger Reserve' by Prakriti Samsad (a Bird watcher's NGO) commencing from 1997-2000.
- 5 Field Investigator in -- A Department of Science and Technology (West Bengal) funded project on 'Survey of the Vertebrate biodiversity of Ayodhya Hills (Purulia District)', West Bengal, in Collaboration with Bangabasi College, Calcutta and Prakriti Samsad, 1999.
- 5 Volunteer investigator in --Gaur Project carried on by WWF India-Eastern Region 1997.

- 5 Field Investigator in – General Survey in Neora Valley National Park (Birds) by North Bengal University, 1995.
- 5 Active participation in Annual Midwinter Waterfowl Census 1990-2003.

**He has made various short surveys of avifauna at following protected areas like**

- Tso Moriri, Panggong Tso, Hanley Marshes, ~ Jammu & Kashmir
- Sultanpur Wildlife Sanctuary ~New Delhi
- Harike National Park~ Punjab, Auli,
- Corbett Tiger Reserve ~ UttarPradesh,
- Gir National Park~ Gujrat
- Palamau Tiger Reserve, Hazaribagh National Park ~ Bihar/Jharkhand
- Kaziranga National Park, Panbari Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajiv Gandhi (Orang) Wildlife Sanctuary ~ Assam
- Buxa Tiger Reserve, Sunderban Tiger Reserve, Neora Valley National Park, Singalilla National Park, Gorumara National Park, Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary, Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary, Lava and Lulagaon Ranges, Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, Kulik Wildlife Sanctuary, Narendrapur Wildlife Sanctuary, Bethuadahari Wildlife Sanctuary, Ballavpur Wildlife Sanctuary ~ West Bengal
- Simlipal Tiger Reserve, Chilika Lake Wildlife Sanctuary~Orissa
- Vedanthangal Wildlife Sanctuary, Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary ~ Tamil Nadu
- Periyar Tiger Reserve ~ Kerala
- Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary, Bhimasahankar Wildlife Sanctuary ~ Maharashtra
- Kanha Tiger Reserve, Bandhavgarh National Park, Achanakmar Wildlife Sanctuary ~ Madhya Pradesh
- Ranthambhor Tiger Reserve, Keoladeo Ghana National Park ~ Rajasthan.

He is the Co-host of a website [www.kolkatabirds.com](http://www.kolkatabirds.com) and the moderator of a Bird Discussion Group, [bengalbirds@yahoo.com](mailto:bengalbirds@yahoo.com)

## **Project Proceedings First Phase**

In the first phase of the project survey of the region has been done with the help of the advisory board members and experts of the bird watching field. Most of the places which have been covered are a part of the Community Tourism Network which has been initiated by Help Tourism and has been handed over to act (association for conservation & tourism) for nurturing and development. This exercise has helped to explore the viability of these Community Tourism Destinations as bird watching sites.

- 21 November 2002: Alpana, Bikram, Bill, Mike and Sunita flew from Delhi to Bagdogra, Sujana from Kolkata, met by Raj from Help Tourism and Sumit who had taken the overnight train from Kolkata. After lunch at airport, drove to Gorumara Jungle Camp, birding nearby in the late afternoon. Stayed at Jungle Camp.
- 22 November: Morning in Gorumara National Park, afternoon at nearby Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary. Stayed at Jungle Camp.
- 23 November: Morning birding near the Mahakal Trail, Gorumara; then drive to Lulagaon, birding en-route and at Lulagaon late afternoon. Stayed at Lulagaon.

- 24 November: Morning birding same area at Lulagaon, afternoon spent at Rishyap. Stayed at Rishyap.
- 25 November: Whole day spent at Neora Valley National Park, morning birding the upper trails and afternoon the lower. Stayed at Rishyap.
- 26 November: Morning birding from road near Lava. Drove to Darjeeling, afternoon spent at Darjeeling Zoo. Stayed at Cedar Inn, Darjeeling.

**The brief of the trip reports made by Mike Prince are as follows: India:  
Birding North Bengal (21 - 30 November 2002)**

This is a report on a birding trip to North Bengal. The participants were Delhi-based Alpana Khare, Bikram Grewal, Bill Harvey, Mike Prince and Sunita Chaudhry, plus Kolkata-based Sujan Chatterjee and Sumit Sen. We spent nine days there in total, our itinerary involving three main areas: the lowland Gorumara National Park and nearby Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary, the hill areas of Lulagaon, Lava, Rishyap and Neora Valley National Park, and the Sandakphu trek (Singalila National Park) on the Nepal border. Logistics regarding sites visited, travel and accommodation were organised largely by Sujan and Sumit in conjunction with Raj from Help Tourism, and we are all very grateful to them for a superb job done.

**ITINERARY**

- 27 November: Morning drove to Manebhanjang where transferred to two jeeps. Then drove Sandakphu trek to summit, birding at various stops along the way. Afternoon birding near summit. Stayed at Sandakphu.
- 28 November: Early morning birding around summit, (and enjoying sunrise over Everest and Kanchenjunga), then drove down to Gairibans, stopping frequently, for late morning birding. Afternoon continued driving and birding down to Tunling. Stayed at Tunling.
- 29 November: Early morning birding at Tunling, then drove to Bagdogra airport, stopping occasionally where we saw birds and passed spare time before flight at Bamunpokhri. Alpana, Bikram, Bill, Mike and Sunita flew to Delhi, Sumit to Kolkata.
- 30 November: Sujan birded at Phulbari Barrage before taking train back to Kolkata.

**Systematic List (1 to 30)**

The taxonomy, sequence and nomenclature in this report follow Grimmett, Inskipp & Inskipp. Note that where estimates of numbers of birds seen are given, these are largely based on personal observations. Hence the actual numbers seen on the trip by the group is likely to be greater in many instances. In addition, where a species was only seen by one member of the group (which, typically for forest birding, happened on a number of times) this is usually indicated in the text below. Species included in brackets were not confirmed, but have been included in the list as probables, or (in the case of Barn Swallow) on the basis of an interesting observation.

1. Hill Partridge *Arborophila torqueola* Calling birds heard at both Lulagaon and on the Sandakphu trek.
2. Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus* One male seen from the Gorumara viewpoint.

3. Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelana* Seen on two occasions at Lulagaon and once on the Sandakphu trek. Unfortunately not seen well enough to determine the subspecies but likely to have been *lathamii* based on range.
4. Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* Only recorded in the Gorumara area where small numbers (up to about 20) were common.
5. Lesser Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna javanica* One seen on a small pond en-route from Bagdogra airport to Gorumara and also recorded at Phulbari Barrage.
6. Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* Three seen in flight at Gorumara, also recorded at Phulbari Barrage.
7. Gadwall *Anas strepera* Phulbari Barrage.
8. Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Phulbari Barrage.
9. Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus* Two recorded in the Gorumara National Park and also seen on the nearby Mahakal trail, plus at Lulagaon. A male seen at Gorumara showed considerable red at the sides of the crown and was presumably of the subspecies *semicoronatus*.
10. Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos macei* Two or three seen at Gorumara and on the Mahakal trail.
11. [Darjeeling Woodpecker *Dendrocopos darjellensis* ] A woodpecker seen briefly in flight over the village of Manebhanjang showed large white oval wing patches and can only really have been this species.
12. Lesser Yellownape *Picus chlorolophus* About four seen at Gorumara and also seen on the Mahakal trail nearby. Subspecies not determinable between the nominate and *simlae*.
13. Greater Yellownape *Picus flavinucha* Singles in the lowlands at Gorumara, the Mahakal trail and Bamunpokhri.
14. Himalayan Flameback *Dinopium shorii* Seen at Gorumara with two on the Mahakal trail and two at Bamunpokhri. Difficult to distinguish from Common Flameback *D. javanense* (which is not likely to occur in the area) other than the fact that they appeared fairly large-billed and to approach Greater Flameback in size.
15. Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes lucidus* Four seen at Gorumara and also recorded on the Mahakal Trail.
16. Great Barbet *Megalaima virens* Common in the hill areas: recorded at Lulagaon (where about 100 seen), Rishyap, Neora Valley NP, Lava, Darjeeling (about 50 at Darjeeling Zoo) and Sandakphu.
17. Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata* Only seen at Gorumara and Chapramari, with four at the latter site.
18. Golden-throated Barbet *Megalaima franklinii* At least five seen very well at Lulagaon on 23/11 with a few also seen there the following day.
19. Blue-throated Barbet *Megalaima asiatica* Singles at Gorumara and on the Mahakal Trail.
20. Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* A few (about six) noted at both Gorumara, where they often sat in the open enjoying the early morning sun, and Chapramari.
21. Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis* Apart from a few seen en-route in the agricultural lowlands, one was seen at Gorumara.
22. Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* Singles near Gorumara Jungle Camp, at Gorumara and at Chapramari.
23. Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis* One seen by the river at Gorumara.
24. White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* Only recorded near Gorumara where relatively common.

25. Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* Seen en-route in the lowlands and at Gorumara.
26. Green-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus tristis* Three seen at Gorumara and one at Chapramari. Good views were eventually had: although the birds were generally very close they usually kept obscured deep in the foliage.
27. Vernal Hanging Parrot *Loriculus vernalis* Small numbers seen and heard flying over at Gorumara: unfortunately only the typical views of this species!
28. Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* Small numbers recorded daily in the Gorumara area.
29. Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* Only seen in the lowlands, where common in the Gorumara and Chapramari areas.
30. Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri* Common around Gorumara where at least 100 seen near Gorumara Jungle Camp at dusk on 21/11 and similar numbers in a large, mixed species, feeding flock of parakeets nearby on 23/11. Also seen at Chapramari.

## Systematic List (31 to 61)

31. White-rumped Needletail *Zoonavena sylvatica* About five seen clearly in flight at Gorumara on 22/11. The spines at the tip of the tail were unsurprisingly not visible.
32. Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus batasiensis* A flock over palms at Gorumara on 22/11 and also seen at Phulbari Barrage.
33. House Swift *Apus affinis* Four seen at Kalimpong on 26/11 were of the *nipalensis* subspecies, showing a slightly more forked tail than the “Little Swift” found over most of the subcontinent.
34. Brown Wood Owl *Strix leptogrammica* Two separate birds were seen briefly (one of which was first heard calling) after dark at Lulagaon on 23/11 and one seen at a similar time in the Neora Valley National Park on 26/11. Although not seen well enough to determine this, these birds would have been of the Himalayan subspecies *nepalensis* which is sometimes considered a separate species.
35. Asian Barred Owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides* One presumed calling at Gorumara Jungle Camp during the night of 21-22/11 and one seen well at Gorumara the following morning, being heavily mobbed by passerines (including Ruby-cheeked Sunbirds).
36. Spotted Owlet *Athene brama* One heard calling near Gorumara Jungle Camp at dusk on 21/11.
37. Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* A male was sat on the road to Gorumara National Park pre-dawn on the 22/11. The white tips to the outer tail feathers were visible whilst it was on the ground as well as in flight.
38. Savanna Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis* One flew past in the twilight on 21/11 over agricultural feeds at Gorumara Jungle Camp; the fully white outer tail feathers could just be seen.
39. Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* Common, recorded on all but two dates.
40. Speckled Wood Pigeon *Columba hodgsonii* Although never seen well, a flock of about 15 flew over at Lava on the morning of the 26/11 and there were other flyover sightings on the Sandakphu trek on two occasions.
41. Ashy Wood Pigeon *Columba pulchricollis* One was seen well in flight at Gorumara and also recorded in flight at Lava. Very noticeable white head in flight, contrasting



with dark upperparts: quite difficult to distinguish from Speckled Wood Pigeon without good views.

42. Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* Common, recorded nearly every day with the greatest numbers in the lowlands. The grey sides and tip to the tail eliminate the subspecies *meena* and the obvious pinkish colour of the head; neck and underparts suggest the more easterly *agricola*.
43. Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* Common in the Gorumara area but not noted elsewhere.
44. Red Collared Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica* Small numbers at Gorumara on 22/11 were the only sightings of the trip.
45. Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Very common in the lowlands but not noted at higher elevations.
46. [Barred Cuckoo Dove *Macropygia unchall*] A dove with an obvious long tail that was seen briefly as it flew over the jeep on the lower part of the Sandakphu trek was in all probability this species. Recorded as common by several other trip reports but it surprisingly eluded us since it is presumably resident in the area.
47. Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* Singles were seen en-route in the lowlands on 21/11 and on each of the next two days at Gorumara and Mahakal Trail.
48. Yellow-footed Green Pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera* About 200 were seen flying over in small flocks in the late afternoon near Gorumara Jungle Camp on 21/11 and several were seen at Gorumara the following day. In the early morning birds were coming to salt in front of the watchpoint there. The obvious separation between the grey belly and the mustard-yellow breast is indicative of the northern subspecies *phoenicoptera* and is very different from the smooth colour below of the peninsular subspecies.
49. Pin-tailed Green Pigeon *Treron apicauda* Three were seen with the Yellow footed Green Pigeons at Gorumara.
50. Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea* Very good views of several with other pigeons at the Gorumara watchpoint.
51. White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* A single at Chapramari was the only sighting.
52. Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* A single at Chapramari and some also at Phulbari Barrage.
53. Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura* A snipe that flew up from beside the road enroute from Bagdogra to Gorumara did not show a clear white trailing edge to the wing and was almost certainly this species.
54. Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Six were seen beside the river at Gorumara and there was an intriguing record of a wader, probably a Greenshank, seen briefly at Neora Valley, probably disorientated by the fog. Also recorded from Phulbari Barrage.
55. Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* One seen at Gorumara.
56. Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Recorded from Phulbari Barrage.
57. Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus* Seen at Phulbari Barrage.
58. Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* Seen en-route in the lowlands and at Gorumara even heard calling during the night there.
59. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* Seen at Phulbari Barrage.
60. Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* Two were seen en-route between Bagdogra and Gorumara, one at Chapramari and interestingly two on the Sandakphu trek, which were likely to have been passage birds.
61. Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Common in the lowlands but not seen at higher elevations.

## Systematic List (62 to 92)

62. Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* A big surprise was of a fine adult soaring with a few vultures and Steppe Eagles a few kilometres below Mirik on the journey back to Bagdogra from Sandakphu on 29/11. Although still quite high in the hills the Teesta river was in view and it seems likely it had drifted up from somewhere along the river.
63. Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* One immature seen near Mirik on 29/11.
64. White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* Singles at Gorumara and on the Mahakal Trail, and seen on the Sandakphu trek. A few also with the other raptors seen near Mirik on 29/11.
65. Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris* One seen at Lulagaon on 24/11 and one on the Sandakphu trek at GAR on 28/11 were presumed to be this species as opposed to Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus*.
66. Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus* Six seen on the Mahakal Trail and other sightings from Sandakphu, including 16 on 28/11, mostly at the summit in the early morning.
67. Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela* Singles of the nominate race recorded at Gorumara, Chapramari and Bamunpokhri.
68. Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* Seen at Phulbari Barrage.
69. Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* A migrating ring-tail was seen at the Sandakphu summit in the early evening of 27/11.
70. Shikra *Accipiter badius* Just single sightings en-route in the lowlands on two occasions.
71. Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* A typically dark above melaschistosbird was seen in the valley from Rishyap.
72. Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentiles* One bird, presumably the same, seen near Lulagaon on both 23/11 and 24/11.
73. White-eyed Buzzard *Butastur teesa* One seen en-route, not far from Gorumara, on 23/11.
74. Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* One at Gorumara and one at Sandakphu summit, which spent several minutes in a hovering hunting flight.
75. Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* Two different birds were seen at, or near, Lulagaon, one in the valley from Rishyap and one in the nearby Neora Valley National Park.
76. Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* Late migrating birds seen at Lulagaon on both 23/11 and 24/11 and on the Sandakphu trek, where there were 21 on 28/11, with another six in the hills below Mirik
77. Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* After hearing an unexpected report of seven at Sandakphu on 27/11 we saw four birds (two adults and two juveniles) there the following day. There are very few, at least recent, records for West Bengal and these sightings suggest a small migration.
78. Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraetus fasciatus* One immature seen at Gorumara on 22/11.
79. Mountain Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis* Singles seen at Lulagaon on both 23/11 and 24/11 and at Neora Valley on 25/11. The Neora Valley bird was seen in flight and perched briefly before 6 am.
80. Collared Falconet *Microhierax caerulescens* Good views of one at Gorumara and one at nearby Chapramari later the same day.
81. Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Single birds were seen en-route in the lowlands on two occasions, with one also seen on the Sandakphu trek.

82. Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* Records en-route from Bagdogra, at Gorumara and the Mahakal Trail and at Phulbari Barrage.
83. Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Two seen at Gorumara on 22/11.
84. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Small numbers seen in the Gorumara area and en-route in the lowlands.
85. Great Egret *Casmerodius albus* Seen at Phulbari Barrage.
86. Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia* One in the Gorumara National Park on 22/11 was the only sighting.
87. Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Common in the lowlands but not recorded at higher levels.
88. Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii* Common in the lowlands but not recorded at higher levels.
89. Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* Four were seen in the Gorumara National Park on 22/11.
90. Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* Two birds seen in flight at Gorumara and one at Chapramari.
91. Long-tailed Broadbill *Psarismus dalhousiae* Very good views of these spectacular birds in Gorumara on 22/11 and at least 12 on the Mahakal Trail on 23/11. They are presumably relatively common here.
92. Golden-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons* Birds, of the nominate subspecies, seen at Gorumara and the Mahakal Trail, with one singing bird also in the hills below Mirik.

## Systematic List (93 to 122)

93. Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* All the sightings were of birds seen en-route, on 21/11, 23/11 and 29/11.
94. Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* Birds of the black-headed subspecies *tricolor* were seen en-route and in the Gorumara area.
95. Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius excubitoroides* The most frequent shrike species encountered, with small numbers at Gorumara, Chapramari, Mahakal Trail and Phulbari Barrage, and one also in the hills at Lulagaon.
96. Yellow-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris* Small numbers seen at Neora Valley (eight here), Lava and on the Sandakphu trek. These were the nominate subspecies, with pale yellow underparts and a grayer mantle than the western subspecies *cucullata*.
97. Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* Fairly common in the lowlands, but replaced by Grey Treepie in the hills.
98. Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae* One was seen at Gorumara but otherwise all the sightings were in the hills, with birds seen at all the main sites visited.
99. Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* A bird seen and heard on the Sandakphu trek on 27/11 was also heard on the subsequent two days. It would have been of either of the eastern subspecies *hemispila* or *macella*.
100. House Crow *Corvus splendens* Common, records from most sites including around habitation in the hills.
101. Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* Just two birds seen in the lowlands, at Mahakal Trail but quite common in the hills with records from Neora Valley, Lava and the Sandakphu trek where 40 were estimated near the summit on 28/11. Those birds seen well were very raven-like with powerful bills and a slightly wedge-shaped

- tail, and a deep call. These were presumably *tibetosinensis*. The two birds at Mahakal Trail may well have been “Jungle Crows”, i.e. *culminates* or *levaillantii*.
102. Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus* Two seen near Gorumara Jungle Camp on 21/11 and one in the Gorumara National Park the following morning.
  103. Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus* A few seen at Gorumara and the Mahakal Trail, with two also at Lulagaon.
  104. Maroon Oriole *Oriolus traillii* Excellent views of birds at Gorumara, Chapramari and especially the Mahakal Trail where at least six were seen on 23/11.
  105. Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei* One seen at Chapramari and three at Mahakal Trail, all presumably of the Himalayan foothills subspecies *nipalensis*.
  106. Black-winged Cuckooshrike *Coracina melaschistos* About four seen on both 22/11 and 23/11 in the areas of Gorumara National Park, the Mahakal Trail and Gorumara Jungle Camp.
  107. Grey-chinned Minivet *Pericrocotus solaris* Small groups noted at Lulagaon on both 23/11 and 24/11.
  108. Short-billed Minivet *Pericrocotus brevirostris* Good views of about ten on the Mahakal Trail with large numbers of Scarlet Minivets.
  109. Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus* Some relatively large flocks seen in the areas of Gorumara (e.g. about 70 in total), Chapramari and Mahakal Trail, with smaller numbers at Lulagaon.
  110. Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike *Hemipus picatus* One at Chapramari on 22/11 was presumably of the subspecies *capitalis* but seen too briefly to confirm this.
  111. Yellow-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hypoxantha* One at Chapramari was the only sighting.
  112. White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis* One at Chapramari and two at Lava, both of one the dark-breasted races.
  113. White-browed Fantail *Rhipidura aureola* Recorded at Gorumara and Phulbari Barrage.
  114. Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* Common in the lowlands, for example several seen daily in the Gorumara, area but not recorded anywhere in the hills.
  115. Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* Small numbers seen in the Gorumara area and also two at Bamunpokhri. These were quite obviously grey birds, easily separable from Black Drongo, and were therefore probably of the *hopwoodi* subspecies.
  116. White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens* At least four were seen at Gorumara on 22/11 but these were the only sightings.
  117. Crow-billed Drongo *Dicrurus annectans* Two were seen well on the Mahakal Trail on 23/11, the seventh species of drongo that morning!
  118. Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus* A few seen at Gorumara and on the Mahakal Trail, for example at least six at the former site.
  119. Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus remifer* Very good views of as many as 12 on the Mahakal Trail.
  120. Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus* Seen at most lowland sites, including about six at Gorumara with others at Chapramari, the Mahakal Trail and Bamunpokhri.
  121. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus* Small numbers at Gorumara and the Mahakal Trail, plus two at Bamunpokhri.
  122. Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia* One was seen by one observer at Gorumara.

## Systematic List (123 to 153)

123. Large Woodshrike *Tephrodornis gularis* Excellent views of a feeding flock of 25 birds, subspecies *pelvica*, that moved together through the forest on the Mahakal Trail.
124. Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush *Monticola rufiventris* After a female was seen at Gorumara, single males were seen at Rishyap, Lava and near the summit of Sandakphu.
125. Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* One or two were regularly on the old factory buildings at Gorumara Jungle Camp.
126. Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus* Common. Records from Gorumara, the Mahakal Trail, Neora Valley, Lava, central Darjeeling and Sandakphu as well as a few en-route sightings.
127. Plain-backed Thrush *Zoothera mollissima* Brief, sometimes roadside, sightings of birds at Gorumara, Lulagaon, Rishyap (where there were two) and Lava.
128. Scaly Thrush *Zoothera dauma* Good views were had of about five nominate race birds fairly high in the canopy of trees at Bamunpokhri.
129. Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* One immature seen on a track at Gorumara on 22/11.
130. White-collared Blackbird *Turdus albocinctus* One seen by one observer on the Sandakphu Trek.
131. Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus boulboul* One female seen at Gorumara.
132. Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis* First seen at Rishyap where a spectacular 1000+ were estimated in the valley in the late afternoon, many of them roosting in the area. Thereafter good numbers seen at Neora Valley, Lava, the Darjeeling area and Sandakphu. All seen well were 'Black-throated', *T. r. atrogularis*.
133. Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* Three were heard and then seen by one observer on the Sandakphu Trek on 29/11.
134. Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* One was seen by one observer and photographed at Lulagaon. A good sighting for the time of year since they normally only winter further south.
135. Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophiiata* One seen by one observer at Lulagaon.
136. Red-throated Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* About four were seen at Gorumara with others on the Mahakal Trail, but no further sightings away from the Gorumara area. None of these birds were assigned to a particular subspecies.
137. Little Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula westermanni* Two males seen at Gorumara.
138. Slaty-blue Flycatcher *Ficedula tricolour* Seen at Lulagaon on both 23/11 and 24/11 but not recorded elsewhere.
139. Sapphire Flycatcher *Ficedula sapphire* One first-winter male at Gorumara on 22/11.
140. Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina* One bird was photographed at Rhino Point, Gorumara.
141. Small Niltava *Niltava macgregoriae* Two were seen at Chapramari.
142. Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara* One seen by one observer at Gorumara.
143. Pale-chinned Flycatcher *Cyornis poliogenys* One seen at Chapramari.
144. [Pale Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis unicolor*] One bird was seen at Rhino Point, although photographs clearly showed a Verditer at the same place. Since no-one can recall two different birds it is safest to consider the Pale Blue a possible – may well

have been the case of none of us paying close attention to the flycatcher because there were too many other birds around at the same time!

145. Pygmy Blue Flycatcher *Muscicapella hodgsoni* One male seen well, low down in bamboo, when we stopped en-route from Sandakphu to Bagdogra (not far past the village of Mirik).
146. Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis* Up to two seen at Gorumara Jungle Camp, Gorumara, Chapramari and the Mahakal Trail.
147. Orange-flanked Bush Robin *Tarsiger cyanurus* Brief sightings of one at Lulagaon and two or three in the Neora Valley.
148. White-browed Bush Robin *Tarsiger indicus* A pair were seen well in the Neora Valley on 25/11.
149. Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis* One at Gorumara Jungle Camp and two on the Mahakal Trail were the only sightings.
150. White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus* Seen and heard singing at Gorumara and the nearby Mahakal Trail.
151. Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* One female at Lulagaon was the only sighting. Very similar to female Blue-fronted Redstart in plumage, although not showing such an obvious white eye-ring and without the black tip to the tail. The subspecies was presumably *rufiventris* based on range.
152. White-throated Redstart *Phoenicurus schisticeps* Somewhat of a surprise since other reports do not seem to mention this species, but we saw several near the Sandakphu summit. Both males and females were quite striking birds, often perching prominently on the top of bushes but equally could be quite unobtrusive.
153. Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis* Common in the hill areas, birds were recorded at Lulagaon, Rishyap, Lava, Darjeeling and Sandakphu.

## Systematic List (154 to 184)

154. White-capped Water Redstart *Phoenicurus leucocephalus* One bird was seen en-route near the Teesta river on 21/11 and two along the river on the way to Lava from Gorumara on 23/11.
155. Plumbeous Water Redstart *Phoenicurus fuliginosus* Two along the river on the way to Lava from Gorumara on 23/11 were the only ones seen.
156. White-tailed Robin *Cinclidium leucurum* One pair and another male nearby were seen at Lava, in the area between Km4 and Km6, on 26/11.
157. Black-backed Forktail *Enicurus immaculatus* One bird was seen, and photographed, by one observer near a small stream on the Mahakal Trail.
158. Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* Two birds at Gorumara and one at Bamunpokhri.
159. Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata* One seen en-route from Gorumara to Lava on 23/11 was the only sighting of the trip.
160. Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferrea* A pair at Lulagaon on 24/11 and one on the Sandakphu trek on 29/11 were the only ones seen.
161. Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus* Common at Gorumara where a maximum of about 60 was recorded on 22/11.
162. Asian Pied Starling *Sturnus contra* Very common in lowland areas, including Gorumara, Mahakal Trail and Phulbari Barrage.

163. Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* Very common in lowland areas, with records from Gorumara and Mahakal Trail, and also seen at Sandakphu.
164. Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus* Two seen near Gorumara Jungle Camp on 21/11 and two en-route from there to Lava on 23/11.
165. Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa* First seen were 12 at Gorumara Jungle Camp on 21/11 with sightings also from Gorumara National Park and Chapramari the following day. A most spectacular sighting was of a flock, estimated at about 600, between Lava and Lulagaon on 23/11. They were feeding in a heavily-forested valley and were seen together in flight on a number of occasions, their calls echoing against the hills. A flock of this size may be unprecedented in India? Large numbers were also present there the following day. The only other sighting was of one near Darjeeling Zoo. Note that Hill Myna *G. religiosa* has been split from Southern Hill Myna *G. indica*. Those birds seen would have been *G. r. intermedia*.
166. Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *Sitta castanea* Two seen at Gorumara, two at Chapramari and two on the Mahakal Trail. Two also seen at Sandakphu on 28/11.
167. White-tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis* Several at Lulagaon, with 10 estimated there on 24/11, and smaller numbers at Neora Valley and Lava, with one also at Sandakphu.
168. Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis* Only recorded from Gorumara with two there on 22/11.
169. Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* Two or three seen at various places on the Sandakphu trek, including in trees at the summit, on both 27/11 and 28/11.
170. Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* Seen or heard daily from 27/11 to 29/11 at various places on the Sandakphu trek. Those birds seen were very dark all over, typical of the *nipalensis* subspecies.
171. Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps* Brief views of one at Lulagaon on 23/11 and two at Neora Valley on 25/11.
172. Rufous-vented Tit *Parus rubidiventris* One on the Sandakphu trek on 28/11 showed a greyish belly typical of the East Himalayan subspecies *beavani*.
173. Coal Tit *Parus ater* Two or three were seen in conifers at the summit of Sandakphu on 27/11, with two also in deciduous trees nearby at Gairibans the following day.
174. Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus* Small numbers seen regularly in the hills, with records from Lulagaon, Rishyap, Lava and Sandakphu.
175. Yellow-cheeked Tit *Parus sponnotus* Two (of the nominate race) at Rishyap were the only ones seen.
176. Yellow-browed Tit *Sylviparus modestus* After four at Neora Valley and a few at Lava, a group of about 15 were seen at Sandakphu. All were of the nominate subspecies.
177. Sultan Tit *Melanochlora sultanea* Probably the surprise sighting of the whole trip, a feeding flock of at least 12 were seen at Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary on 22/11. They were conspicuous as they fed for several minutes in the middle storey, before we were warned back by forest guards since there had been a lone elephant seen in the area a little earlier! None of the trip reports we had seen mentioned Sultan Tit, although it's such a striking bird that it certainly could not be overlooked!
178. Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus* Fast-moving flocks, typically of 30 birds or more, were seen at Neora Valley, Lava and Sandakphu.
179. Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola* Seen near the river at Gorumara only.
180. [Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*] Three old nests were seen inside a shop doorway in Lava village.

181. Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* The only sightings were of birds seen en-route: at Kalimpong on 26/11 and in the hills below Mirik on 29/11. No attempt was made to assign a subspecies.
182. Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus* Seen at Kalimpong on 26/11.
183. Nepal House Martin *Delichon nipalensis* Four seen with Red-rumped Swallows in the hills below Mirik on 29/11.
184. Striated Bulbul *Pycnonotus striatus* Small flocks of 10 to 20 birds seen in the treetops at Lulagaon on both 23/11 and 24/11, plus at Neora Valley on 25/11.

## Systematic List (185 to 215)

185. Black-crested Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus* The flaviventris subspecies was fairly common in the Gorumara area (with a maximum of 40 in the National Park) and also seen on both days at Lulagaon.
186. Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocusus* Small numbers seen at Gorumara and on the Mahakal Trail.
187. Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* One of the darker subspecies, probably bengalensis, was fairly common in the lowlands, the maximum recorded being 15 at Gorumara Jungle Camp.
188. Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus* Pale grey birds of the subspecies psaroides were relatively common in the hills with sightings from Lulagaon, Neora Valley, Lava and Sandakphu.
189. Hill Prinia *Prinia atrogularis* One bird was seen briefly in a tea plantation in the hills below Mirik on 29/11.
190. Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa* A flock of about 20 seen on the Mahakal Trail was the only sighting of the trip.
191. Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler *Cettia robustipes* Very good views had of one at close range at Neora Valley on 25/11.
192. Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* Recorded from Gorumara and the Mahakal Trail, then two birds in a tea plantation in the hills below Mirik.
193. Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybitus* Only one was seen: on the lower parts of the Sandakphu trek on 27/11; a bird clearly of the tristis subspecies.
194. Buff-barred Warbler *Phylloscopus pulcher* One seen at Gorumara National Park, then further records from Lulagaon, Rishyap and Neora Valley, although small numbers at each site.
195. Ashy-throated Warbler *Phylloscopus maculipennis* One seen at Gorumara National Park, then seen also at Lulagaon, Neora Valley and Sandakphu. The commonest warbler seen on the trip.
196. Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* One bird was seen and heard well at Gorumara Jungle Camp on both 22/11 and 23/11.
197. Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* A few seen and heard at Gorumara, on the Mahakal Trail and on a couple of occasions en-route in the lowlands.
198. Eastern Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus coronatus* One bird was seen well at Lulagaon on 24/11.
199. Blyth's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus reguloides* Two were seen at Rishyap on 24/11 with other sightings (about three) from Neora Valley the following day.
200. [Yellow-vented Warbler *Phylloscopus cantator*] Two birds seen at Neora Valley showed bold head markings and a bright yellow supercilium and throat.



Initially thought at the time to have maybe been Black-faced Warblers we immediately realised our mistake shortly afterwards when we found a flock of undoubted Black-faced Warblers. With hindsight it seems likely that these two birds were Yellow-vented Warblers, but they were not seen again.

201. Golden-spectacled Warbler *Seicercus burkii* After two at Gorumara on 22/11, five were seen at Chapramari and small numbers at Lulagaon.
202. Grey-hooded Warbler *Seicercus xanthoschista* Only seen at Lulagaon where there were several on 24/11.
203. Chestnut-crowned Warbler *Seicercus castaneiceps* Two singles at Neora Valley on 25/11.
204. Black-faced Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps* At least 10 of these attractive small birds were in a fast-moving flock at Neora Valley on 25/11 with a few also at Lava the following day.
205. Striated Laughingthrush *Garrulax striatus* Flocks of up to 30 seen at Lulagaon, Neora Valley and Lava.
206. Blue-winged Laughingthrush *Garrulax squamatus* One seen briefly by one observer in a small flock of Black-faced Laughingthrushes on the Sandakphu trek on 28/11.
207. Scaly Laughingthrush *Garrulax subunicolor* A small flock was seen very well at Rishyap on 24/11 with more seen at Neora Valley the following day.
208. Black-faced Laughingthrush *Garrulax affinis* Relatively common, with about 50 in total seen at Neora Valley and several small flocks encountered at various points along the Sandakphu trek
209. Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *Garrulax erythrocephalus* The most widespread of the laughingthrushes, with sightings from Lulagaon, Neora Valley, Lava and Sandakphu.
210. Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ruficollis* Excellent close views were had of three birds at Neora Valley. One seen later at Sandakphu.
211. Pygmy Wren Babbler *Pnoepyga pusilla* One was seen by one observer at Lulagaon and another fed unconcerned at extremely close range (binoculars would not focus!) at Neora Valley.
212. Rufous-throated Wren Babbler *Spelaeornis caudatus* One seen by a single observer at Lulagaon on 24/11.
213. Rufous-capped Babbler *Stachyris ruficeps* Small numbers seen, especially in flocks with Rufous-winged Fulvettas, at Lulagaon, Lava and Sandakphu.
214. Golden Babbler *Stachyris chrysaea* These stunning birds were seen at Neora Valley (about eight) and Lava.
215. Slender-billed Babbler *Turdoides longirostris* One was seen from the river watchpoint at Gorumara National Park. It showed a few times in the tall grassy undergrowth, moving quite slowly and generally staying hidden inside. A little known species, with no known recent records outside Assam, it will be very interesting to know whether Gorumara is a regular site.

## **Systematic List (216 to 246)**

216. Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus* Only recorded from the Gorumara area.
217. Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea* Flocks, of several birds each time, were seen at Lulagaon, Rishyap and on the Sandakphu trek. The central and eastern Himalaya birds are of the subspecies *calipyga*.

218. Black-headed Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius rufiventer* Superb views were had of two males and a female at Neora Valley. Very quiet and unobtrusive, they showed the benefit of stopping to wait in a promising looking area.
219. White-browed Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapis* One briefly at Neora Valley and another, equally briefly, at Gairibans on the Sandakphu trek.
220. Black-eared Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius melanotis* The only sighting was of one, seen by a single observer, on the Sandakphu trek.
221. Rusty-fronted Barwing *Actinodura egertoni* At least three were present in an impressive flock together with many Hoary-throated Barwings at Neora Valley on 25/11.
222. Hoary-throated Barwing *Actinodura nipalensis* A feeding flock containing about 20, together with three Rusty-fronted Barwings, was an impressive sight at Neora Valley on 25/11. Other than this, a few were recorded from the Sandakphu trek on 28/11.
223. Chestnut-tailed Minla *Minla strigula* Small flocks were recorded from Lulagaon on consecutive days and from Neora Valley, Lava and Sandakphu.
224. Red-tailed Minla *Minla ignotincta* The only sighting was of about five at Neora Valley which moved quickly through the forest and were only seen well by one or two observers.
225. Golden-breasted Fulvetta *Alcippe chrysotis* One of the most stunningly beautiful birds seen; we recorded them from Neora Valley and from Gairibans on the Sandakphu trek.
226. Rufous-winged Fulvetta *Alcippe castaneiceps* Common, and in quite large numbers, in the middle hills. Sightings were from Lulagaon, Rishyap, Neora Valley and Lava.
227. White-browed Fulvetta *Alcippe vinipectus* Quite common, but often difficult to get good views of, at Neora Valley and Sandakphu. The lightly streaked throat of these birds is indicative of the *chumbiensis* subspecies, and different from the two western subspecies.
228. Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata* One of the most common birds in places in the middle hills, where it was seen at Lulagaon, Rishyap and Neora Valley. A few also seen on 28/11 at Sandakphu. These birds would have been of one of the central and eastern Himalayan subspecies, either *nigriceps* or *bayleyi*, although the mantle colour was not noted sufficiently to distinguish between these.
229. Whiskered Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis* Very common in the hills. Seen at Lulagaon on both days there and at Rishyap, Neora Valley, Lava and daily at Sandakphu. The hindcollar of the birds seen had a rufous tinge which suggests *flavicollis*, although there did appear to be some variation.
230. Stripe-throated Yuhina *Yuhina gularis* First recorded from Neora Valley and thereafter seen at Lava and Sandakphu, although in smaller numbers than the other two common yuhinas.
231. Rufous-vented Yuhina *Yuhina occipitalis* A common bird in the hills, with sightings from Lulagaon, Rishyap, Neora Valley, Lava and Sandakphu.
232. Black-chinned Yuhina *Yuhina nigrimenta* Singles at Lulagaon on both 23/11 and 24/11, were only seen well by one observer on each occasion.
233. Brown Parrotbill *Paradoxornis unicolor* One was seen briefly at Gairibans, Sandakphu, in a stand of bamboo, on 28/11.
234. Fulvous Parrotbill *Paradoxornis fulvifrons* A flock of about 40 fed in bamboo at Tunling, Sandakphu on the morning of the 29/11.

235. Black-throated Parrotbill *Paradoxornis nipalensis* Two large flocks, totalling 80 birds altogether, were seen feeding actively in bamboo at Neora Valley, on 25/11. There is considerable variation between subspecies; these birds showed the brown crown and cheeks of *humii*.
236. Yellow-vented Flowerpecker *Dicaeum chrysorrheum* One bird was seen by one observer on 23/11 at Lulagaon. A scarce bird in the area, although the streaked underparts make identification relatively easy compared with the other flowerpeckers.
237. Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum melanoxanthum* A single bird was seen at Lava on 26/11.
238. Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectus* Three males were seen at Lulagaon on 23/11 with sightings there also the following day. The only other record came from Rishyap.
239. Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum* Two males were seen at Gorumara on 22/11 and another from the nearby Mahakal Trail the following day.
240. Ruby-cheeked Sunbird *Anthreptes singalensis* A pair at Gorumara on 22/11 was the only sighting.
241. Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* One bird at Gorumara on 23/11 was the only one of the trip.
242. Mrs Gould's Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae* A singing male and a female were seen at Lava on the morning of the 26/11.
243. Green-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga nipalensis* Recorded on consecutive days at Lulagaon, about eight were seen at Neora Valley, about six at Lava and three at Darjeeling Zoo.
244. Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja* We had fantastic views of a male at close range at the Mahakal Trail on 23/11. Distinguishing features of the two Himalayan subspecies, *seheriae* and *labecula*, are apparently quite subtle.
245. Fire-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga ignicauda* Just the one brief sighting at Lulagaon on 23/11.
246. Little Spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostra* One was seen briefly at Lulagaon on 23/11.

## Systematic List (247 to 264)

247. Streaked Spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna* Singles were seen at Gorumara, Chapramari and Mahakal Trail, pleasingly with very good views each time.
248. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Recorded in habitation en-route and near Gorumara.
249. Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* Replaced the House Sparrow at higher elevations, but similarly seen around human habitation. Records from Lulagaon, Lava and villages on the Sandakphu trek.
250. White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* One bird at Gorumara Jungle Camp and two at Chapramari, with further records from Phulbari Barrage. None of these were racially assigned.
251. White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis* One was seen by the river at Gorumara.
252. Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* Only recorded from Phulbari Barrage.
253. Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* One seen near Lava on 26/11 was the only sighting away from Phulbari Barrage.
254. Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* Recorded on both dates at Lulagaon (up to 25 birds), from Rishyap and at Sandakphu on 27/11. The relatively unstreaked

upperparts of those birds seen well at Sandakphu meant that these birds were clearly of the yunnanensis subspecies.

255. Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophciata* Four were seen on the Sandakphu trek on 27/11 and as many as ten there the following day, mostly relatively close to the summit.
256. Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens* One bird was seen with Rufousbreasted Accentors on 28/11 near the Sandakphu summit.
257. Yellow-breasted Greenfinch *Carduelis spinoides* A single bird in flight near Lulagaon on 24/11 was the only sighting of the trip.
258. Plain Mountain Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola* Two or three large flocks, totalling at least 200 birds altogether, were seen at the Sandakphu summit on 28/11.
259. Dark-breasted Rosefinch *Carpodacus nipalensis* Seen at Neora Valley and Sandakphu, usually feeding quite deep into the vegetation.
260. Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus pulcherrimus* One male and two females nearby were seen at the Sandakphu summit on 28/11.
261. Dark-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus edwardsii* Seen on three occasions, at Neora Valley and Sandakphu twice, with at least 12 birds at Sandakphu. Only females or immatures were seen.
262. White-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus thura* About 12 were seen at the Sandakphu summit on 28/11, including singing males.
263. White-winged Grosbeak *Coccothraustes carnipes* The only sighting was of three females at Neora Valley.
264. Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* On both 27/11 and 29/11 small numbers (about eight each time) were seen in the lower reaches of the Sandakphu trek. A total of 259 confirmed species were seen.

## **India: Birding North Bengal & Sikkim (6 - 24 November 2003)**

I have just returned from a tour of North Bengal and Sikkim with Sujan Chatterjee, Bikram Grewal, Bill Harvey, Alpana Khare and Sumit Sen, plus Raj Basu of Help Tourism who arranged the necessary logistics. A full trip report will be produced and circulated in a couple of weeks, so this email just presents very brief highlights of what was a very successful and fantastically enjoyable trip. In all about 320 species were recorded. I met up with Sujan on 6 November for a week's birding in some under-watched sites in North Bengal before the rest of the party arrived on 13 November. Sujan and I first went to Suntalekhola where, despite the unseasonal rain, we saw plenty of good birds including Grey Nightjar, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Maroon Oriole, Grey-chinned and Short-billed Minivets, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, the first of many Slaty-backed Forktails, Sultan Tit, Ashy Bulbul, Yellow-vented, Golden-spectacled and Chestnut-crowned Warblers, Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush, Long-tailed Sibia, White-naped and Black-chinned Yuhinas. Nearby Samsing produced Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Green-billed Malkoha and Thick-billed Warbler. We then spent two nights at Bindu on the Bhutan border, new birds here (and at nearby Today) included Wryneck, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Crested Kingfisher, Brown Dipper, Large Niltava, Hodgson's Redstart, Little Forktail, Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler, Rufous-necked Laughingthrush (actually over the border in Bhutan) and Black-throated Sunbird. We then headed to Karmi Farm at Kolbong near Darjeeling, stopping briefly in Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary en-route

where we briefly saw both Chestnut-headed and Grey-bellied Tesias and Long-tailed Broadbills. Around Karmi were Speckled Piculet, Northern Goshawk, Black Eagle, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Yellow-browed Tit, Black-eared Shrike Babbler, all three Minlas, Nepal House Martins and Fire-tailed Sunbirds. On 12 November we visited Tiger Hill near Darjeeling in the afternoon. The undoubted highlight was a Gould's Shortwing which sat in the open giving me excellent views for about 30 seconds, plus a few seconds for a breathless Sujan who arrived just in time after I shouted to him! Other good species here that afternoon and the following morning were Yellow-billed Blue Magpie, White-collared Blackbird, Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler, Broad-billed Warbler, Spotted and Blue-winged Laughingthrushes, Golden-breasted Fulvettas and Brown Parrotbills. On 13 November we met up with the rest of the group and birded at Kalijhora, seeing Oriental Pied Hornbill, White-rumped Vulture, Black Stork, Grey-backed Shrike, and Brown Dipper. The following morning there produced two migrating Greater Spotted Eagles with one Steppe Eagle, Maroon Oriole, Short-billed Minivet, Orange-flanked Bush Robin, White-rumped Shama, Hill Myna, Yellow-vented Warbler, Striped Tit Babbler, Crimson Sunbird and Streaked Spiderhunter. We then went into Sikkim, spending two nights at Pemayangtse and birding there and at nearby Pelling. Birds included Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon, Mountain Hawk Eagle, migrating Oriental Honey Buzzard and Steppe Eagles, Orange-bellied Leafbird, Long-tailed Minivet, Ultramarine Flycatcher, Large Niltava, Golden Bush Robin, Striated Bulbul, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, Blyth's Leaf, Whistler's, Grey-cheeked and Chestnut-crowned Warblers, Grey-sided and Black-faced Laughingthrushes, Rusty-fronted Barwing, Streak-reasted and a Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler, Scaly-breasted and Pygmy Wren Babblers, Rufous-capped Babbler, White-browed and Black-eared Shrike Babblers, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Rufous-breasted and Maroon Accentors, Dark-breasted Rosefinch and Little Bunting. Interesting to note was a flock of at least 40 parakeets, any species of which is unusual here. Whilst Slaty-headed was definite we also saw at least one bird with a paler head and yellowish bill which we believe to have been a female Blossom-headed Parakeet (subject to checking the literature - further details will be in the full trip report).

## **Second phase**

The first phase of the project has been undertaken by the members of the advisory board and experts supported by Help Tourism, and it has been established that the Kanchenjunga region could be developed into an International Birding Destination. There are three important birding villages which have been earmarked and we need to do a series of workshops in these villages to develop awareness about the birds found there and to train local birding guides. Garumara National Park in Dooars, the foothills, Lava and Rishyap in the Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling Hills and Pelling and Pemayangtse in West Sikkim. Combined workshops of seven days each has to be organized in these villages followed by a fifteen days guide training program for every village. Experts from different parts of the country and abroad with experience in bird watching tours have to be invited to share their knowledge with the villages. Training manuals and awareness materials have to be prepared in local language. Later more villages in the region will have to be roped in where community tourism has initiated and proper bird surveys have been done. The process has to continue till all important birding villages have been covered.

## **Third Phase**

In the third and final phase of the project it is necessary to prepare campaign materials to lure bird watchers from all over the world. Without bird watching tourists, the rich bird diversity of the region will have very less value to the local community and will hardly fetch any co-operation for conservation of this biodiversity hotspot. Initially, there is a need to launch a detailed website and at the same time publish a tourist friendly bird guide highlighting the community tourism initiatives and the rich bird diversity of the Kanchenjunga region. Next there is a need to market the birding tours of this region at the right places to attract birdwatchers to this region. The August 2004 International Bird Fair at Rutland, UK is an immediate launching ground. The co-ordinator of the project who is a bird watching expert along with the vice president of the association who is knowledgeable about the region and the community tourism initiatives have to attend such fairs and expos. The National Birdwatching Event combining local and national support for international bird conservation. Rutland On Line Ltd Birding Tour Operators have to be invited to this region on familiarization tour and an yearly birding festival has to be organized with the support of national and international level nature & conservation NGOs have to be organized.

## Result

The flow of foreign traffic to this region. Region is negligible considering the rich natural and cultural diversity. The infrastructure would grow when there is a regular demand. The infrastructure available now would satisfy bird watching tourists who would also experience the other tourism products of the region and be the campaigners for the region. This would help to attract tourists with other interest. If the whole exercise can be carried out for a period of two years the foreign traffic flow to this region will certainly double.

