



**NEPAL:
EASY HIMALAYAN BIRDING ADVENTURE**

16th – 28th MARCH 2020



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Striated Laughingthrush is one of our spectacular targets on this trip.

The former kingdom of Nepal, now officially the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, is a land-locked country in Asia and one of the most mountainous on the planet. It is located in the central Himalayas, and of the world's ten highest mountains eight are in Nepal! This land was cut off from the outside world for many decades after the Second World War. But now it has opened up its boundaries to travelers, and it offers birders the opportunity to experience the immensity of birding the world's highest mountain range without the high costs and visa restrictions associated with visiting Bhutan.

Nepal boasts a spectacular diversity of habitats, from the lush lowlands of the Terai ("moist land"), conserved in the famous Chitwan National Park, to the top of Mount Everest! This remarkable heterogeneity of different habitats in such a small country means that Nepal boasts a bird list of over 850 species in a country less than half the size of Germany (i.e. a similar size to Arkansas).

Our itinerary is designed to maximize your exposure to the different habitats and birds Nepal has to offer, without trekking on foot for days into the higher Himalayas. Some of the many exciting avian possibilities include **Ibisbill, Bengal** and **Lesser Frigatebirds, Swamp Francolin, Lesser Adjutant, Sarus Crane, Black-bellied Tern, White-tailed Stonechat, Himalayan Rubythroat, Wallcreeper, Indian** and **Bristled Grassbirds, Nepal Fulvetta, Himalayan Cutia, and Tibetan Serin**, along with a potentially huge list of raptors, forktails, woodpeckers, thrushes, chats, and laughingthrushes. We will also look for the sole Nepalese endemic: **Spiny Babbler**. Non-avian highlights could include **Indian Rhinoceros, Bengal Tiger, Ganges River Dolphin, Asian Elephant, Indian Leopard** (*Panthera pardus fusca*), **Fishing Cat**, and **Wild Water Buffalo**.

Throw together some amazing wildlife, very nice food, incredibly friendly people, highly interesting culture, and some of the best scenery on the planet, and a great tour will be had.

If you'd like to extend your birding in this part of Asia, you could join our **Bhutan: Spring in the Eastern Himalayas** tour (30th March – 18th April 2020), which follows directly after this Nepal tour. The Bhutan tour will provide some amazing mountain birding for many incredible species including **Ward's Trogon, Beautiful Nuthatch, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Satyr Tragopan, and Himalayan Monal** and will act as a perfect complement to the Nepal tour.

Itinerary (13 days/12 nights)

Day 1: Arrival in Kathmandu

Depending on your arrival time at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu you may be able to take an optional extra city tour of this ancient and fabled city (you could also arrive a day or two earlier if you wish to fully explore the city). Kathmandu boasts some of the most impressive Buddhist temples on the planet, and Buddha himself was actually born in Nepal. If you take this optional extra city tour you will have an opportunity to visit some of these

impressive sites, including the inspiring Swayambhunath temple complex, which sits high atop a hill in the city and offers exquisite views across the Kathmandu valley and onto the high Himalayas. The temple grounds are frequented by naughty troops of **Rhesus Macaques**, so watch over your belongings! For those arriving later in the day or not interested in the city tour you will be met and transferred to our hotel in the city with the rest of the day at your leisure. We will meet for a group dinner in the evening.

Overnight: Kathmandu

Days 2 - 3: Shivapuri Nagarjun, Phulchowki, and Godavari

We will have two days birding within and around the Kathmandu valley as we acclimatize to the area from our base in Kathmandu. We will spend time birding around Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park, Phulchowki, the highest of the hills surrounding the Kathmandu area (2,800m), and the nearby Godavari Botanical Garden. All are beautiful spots with lush gardens and forests, The Shivapuri Nagarjun and Phulchowki areas provide us with an opportunity to see a wide diversity of central Himalayan mountain specialties and some fantastic and classic Himalayan views. The highly-enigmatic and colorful **Himalayan Cutia** is one of our main targets over these two days, but with luck we may also find **Golden-naped Finch**, **Tibetan Serin**, **Maroon-backed Accentor**, or the rare and local endemic **Spiny Babbler**.

Other species that we will search for include the aptly-named **Hoary-throated Barwing**, the kaleidoscopic **Bar-throated Minla**, and the dazzling **Scarlet Minivet**. Laughingthrushes abound, with **Striated**, **Streaked**, **Grey-sided**, **Rufous-chinned**, **Chestnut-crowned** and **White-throated Laughingthrushes** all possible. Other Himalayan specialties include **Darjeeling Woodpecker**, **Rufous-breasted Accentor**, **Rufous-vented**, **Stripe-throated**, and **Whiskered Yuhinas**, **White-tailed Nuthatch**, **Nepal**, **White-browed**, and **Rufous-winged Fulvettas**, and a host of warblers, which includes the colorful **Chestnut-crowned**, **Black-faced**, and **Ashy-throated Warblers**. Barbets are numerous and include **Great** and **Golden-throated Barbets**, and with some luck and patience we may get good views of the remarkable **Chestnut-headed Tesia** or the skulking **White-browed Shortwing**, while flowering trees may attract **Fire-tailed**, **Green-tailed**, and **Black-throated Sunbirds**. We will also keep our eyes firmly peeled on any shady watercourses for the stunning **Spotted Forktail** and **Blue Whistling Thrush**.

In the Godavari Botanical Garden we can often find **Asian Barred Owlet**, **Black-chinned Babbler**, **Small** and **Rufous-bellied Niltavas**, **Grey-backed Shrike**, **Blue-fronted Redstart**, **Grey Treepie**, **Scaly Thrush**, and **Grey Bush Chat**.

There are so many birds for us to look for here across the range of elevations, such as **Kalij Pheasant**, **Speckled Piculet**, **Rufous-bellied** and **Bay Woodpeckers**, **White-collared** and **Grey-winged Blackbirds**, **Chestnut Thrush**, **Hodgson's Redstart**, **Golden Bush Robin**, **Black-throated Parrotbill**, **Orange-bellied Leafbird**, **Red-billed Leiothrix**, **Rufous Sibia**, **Maroon Oriole**, **Scaly-breasted Wren-babbler**, and **Red-billed Blue Magpie**. There will certainly be some magnificent birds to enjoy during our time here.

Overnight: Kathmandu (two nights)

Day 4: Flight to Biratnagar, drive to Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

Today we will fly to Biratnagar in the southeast of Nepal, and we'll keep an eye out for Mount Everest on the way. Once landed we will immediately travel across to the nearby Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. This reserve is situated in the eastern Terai of Nepal and protects an extensive

area of wetlands and grassland along the floodplains of the Saptakoshi River. Koshi Tappu was declared a Ramsar site in 1976 and is home to the last surviving population of **Wild Water Buffalo** in the country. We will start birding as soon as possible and target some of the birds listed below.

Overnight: Koshi Tappu

Day 5: Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

The exciting wetlands, grasslands, and scrublands around Koshi Tappu are home to an impressive array of species. The reeds of the wetland habitats hold species such as **Cinnamon** and **Black Bitterns**, **Ruddy-breasted Crake**, and **Greater Painted-snipe**. The threatened **Swamp Francolin** may be seen scuttling through the tall grasslands, and here we will also look for **White-tailed Stonechat**, **Striated Grassbird**, **Citrine Wagtail**, and **Rosy Pipit**, among many others, which include the blood-red **Red Avadavat**, the spectacular **Siberian Rubythroat**, and **Rufous-vented Prinia** (the only location for this endemic subspecies). Impressive numbers of waterfowl on the nearby Kosi barrage may include the striking **Falcated Duck** as well as **Ferruginous Duck** among the commoner species. Both **Black-bellied** and **River Terns** also occur.

Other wetland species include **Spot-billed Pelican**, **Bar-headed Goose**, **Lesser Adjutant**, and **Asian Openbill**, as well as the highly attractive **Pheasant-tailed** and **Bronze-winged Jacanas**. The less-vegetated parts of the floodplain hold the subtly but exquisitely-marked **Small Pratincole**, **Sand Lark**, **Bengal Bush Lark**, **Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark**, and **River Lapwing**. Koshi also provides feeding terrain for a host of birds of prey, including **Red-necked Falcon**, **Pied** and **Pallid Harriers**, **White-rumped Vulture**, **Pallas's Fish Eagle**, **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Greater Spotted Eagle**, and **White-eyed** and **Long-legged Buzzards**.

This wildlife reserve also provides opportunities for a host of exciting wildlife sightings, which may include **Gharial**, **Fishing Cat**, **Jungle Cat**, **Nilgai**, and the increasingly-rare **Ganges River Dolphin**.

Overnight: Koshi Tappu

Day 6: Travel between Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve and Chitwan National Park

This will essentially be a travel day, as we drive through some beautiful landscapes for the full day between Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve and Chitwan National Park. We will break up the long journey along the way by looking for the highly-sought, stunning, and unique **Ibisbill**, sure to be a trip highlight. While looking for the Ibisbill we may also find **Wallcreeper**, **White-capped** and **Plumbeous Water Redstarts**, **Spotted** and **Little Forktails**, and **Brown Dipper** among the huge boulders along the rivers.

Overnight: Chitwan

Days 7 - 8: Chitwan National Park

Chitwan is Nepal's oldest national park, and it conserves the largest tract of threatened lowland Terai grasslands and subtropical forests dominated by sal trees (*Shorea robusta*) in Nepal. The increasingly-scarce **Bengal Florican** is one of our key targets here, and with luck we may sight this species. With a touch of additional luck we may just enjoy visuals of a male doing its spectacular display. Chitwan is home to a wide variety of other forest and grassland specialties. These include species like **Indian** and **Bristled Grassbirds** and **Jerdon's** and **Slender-billed Babblers** (the best place on the Indian subcontinent for this species), **White-tailed Stonechat**,

Black-breasted Weaver, Barred Buttonquail, Rosy Pipit, and the hulking **Lesser Adjutant.** We will also have to be on the lookout for the skulking, yet breathtakingly beautiful **Himalayan Rubythroat** as we make our way around suitable scrub habitat.

The sal forests and forest edges are home to a plethora of exciting specials, including a diversity that ranges from the tiny **White-browed Piculet** to the sizeable and noisy **Red Junglefowl** and **Indian Peafowl.** The forest edge provides a great location from which to spot the strikingly-large and colorful **Great Hornbill** as well as **Red-headed Trogon, Green-billed Malkoha,** and the spectacular **Common Green Magpie.** Visitors to Chitwan are typically impressed by the abundance and diversity of amazingly-colored woodpeckers, which include **Himalayan, Greater,** and **Black-rumped Flamebacks,** as well as both **Lesser** and **Greater Yellownapes,** among a host of others (see below). We may also find the vociferous **Greater Necklaced** and **Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrushes** as they move through the woodland in large and marauding flocks. Other birds that we will be on the lookout for in the woodlands here include **Slaty-headed** and **Red-breasted Parakeets, Fulvous-breasted, Streak-throated,** and **Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Black-backed Forktail, Orange-bellied** and **Golden-fronted Leafbirds, Ashy Bulbul, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Blue-eared Kingfisher, Blue-bearded Bee-eater,** and **Sultan Tit.**

Chitwan is a raptor mecca, and during our visit we may encounter the boldly-marked **Crested Serpent Eagle,** the petite **Collared Falconet,** as well as the striking **Black Baza, Mountain Hawk-Eagle,** and **Grey-headed Fish Eagle.** As dusk approaches our owl sightings may include **Brown Fish Owl, Brown Wood Owl,** and **Brown Hawk-Owl,** as well as the smaller **Jungle Owlet** and **Oriental Scops Owl.**

In Chitwan we will not only be searching for birds, because Chitwan is also home to most of Nepal's remaining **Indian Rhinoceros** and **Bengal Tigers,** both amazing and much-sought creatures. Chitwan also hosts two species of crocodiles – the **Mugger** and the **Gharial** – and plenty of other great mammals such as **Indian Leopard, Sloth Bear, Asian Elephant, Chinese Pangolin, Golden Jackal,** and **Gaur.** These all combine to make this a great place.

Overnight: Chitwan (two nights)

Day 9: Travel between Chitwan National Park and Bardia National Park

Facing essentially a travel day we reluctantly leave Chitwan National Park and commence our journey to Bardia National Park in the southwest of the country. Bardia is the largest lowland sanctuary and most undisturbed wilderness area of Terai and we'll check into our accommodation for the next few nights.

Overnight: Bardia

Days 10 - 11: Bardia National Park

We will have two full days to explore the grasslands and woodlands of this huge national park and its buffer zones, where we will hope to find many exciting species, floricans being very high on the wish list. Both **Bengal** and **Lesser Floricans** occur here, though the former is uncommon and the latter is rare. A huge number and wide range of species area possible here, with other high-quality birds we could find during our time here possibly including **Sarus Crane, Swamp Francolin, Sirkeer Malkoha, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Lesser Adjutant, Black, Painted,** and **Black-necked Storks, Red-naped Ibis, Oriental Darter, Indian Courser, Black-bellied Tern, Dusky Eagle-Owl, Red-headed, White-rumped,** and **Slender-billed Vultures, Indian Spotted Eagle, Great Hornbill, Great Slaty, White-naped,** and **Yellow-crowned**

Woodpeckers, Maroon Oriole, Short-billed, Rosy, and Small Minivets, Black-headed Jay, Bengal Bush Lark, Tawny-bellied Babbler, Striated Babbler, Chestnut-tailed and Brahminy Starlings, Grey-winged Blackbird, Tickell's Thrush, Slaty-backed Forktail, Blue-capped Rock Thrush, and White-tailed Stonechat.

The wide range of habitats here also provides excellent opportunities for finding some interesting reptiles and mammals, the three big targets here being **Indian Rhinoceros, Bengal Tiger, and Ganges River Dolphin.** Other non-avian highlights might include **Gharial, Mugger, Asian Elephant, and Swamp Deer.**

Overnight: Bardia (two nights)

Day 12: Travel between Bardia National Park and Nepalgunj, flight to Kathmandu

We will leave the Bardia National Park area and drive to Nepalgunj, where we will catch a flight back to Kathmandu for the final group evening meal of the tour.

Overnight: Kathmandu

Day 13: Departure from Kathmandu, tour concludes

The tour concludes with your international departure from Kathmandu.

Duration: 13 days

Date: 16th – 28th March 2020

Group Size: 4-8

Start: Kathmandu

End: Kathmandu

Price: US\$5,660 per person sharing

Single Supplement: US\$1,040

Price includes:

Domestic flights (Kathmandu to Biratnagar and Nepalgunj to Kathmandu)

Meals and drinking water (from evening meal on day 1 until breakfast on day 13)

Accommodation

Expert tour leader and local bird/wildlife guide fees

National park/birdwatching reserve entrance fees

All transport and tolls while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

Flights to/from Kathmandu

Visa

Meals and drinks before/after tour as described above

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.

Soft/alcoholic drinks

Camera (still/video) permits

Personal insurance

Monument entrance fees

Optional extra city tours

Gratuities

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide to the one advertised due to tour scheduling.