

COMPLETE BHUTAN: SPRING BIRDING IN THE EASTERN HIMALAYAS

13 – 29 APRIL 2026 17 APRIL – 03 MAY 2027



Satyr Tragopan is one of the most special and sought-after birds in the world – and is arguably the biggest attraction on this tour!



The fabled Kingdom of Bhutan, fondly known as "the Land of the Thunder Dragon" is an almost ethereal country straddled in ancient history. Perhaps most well-known for the role Bhutan has played in the formation of Buddhism, it comes as no surprise that iconic and significant monasteries such as the Tiger's Nest Monastery, or Taktsang, draw the bulk of the visitors to the country. The general wildlife tourism and, in particular, the bird-watching tourism, is also a major drawcard for visitors, with the government having formally protected over two-thirds of the country's total land area. This means that there are vast areas of largely untouched habitat, and its unique location in the eastern Himalayas makes it arguably the premier destination to see many of the highly sought-after Himalayan species. Birds like the stunning Beautiful Nuthatch, the gorgeous Ward's Trogon, the unbelievable Fire-tailed Myzornis, the giant Rufous-necked Hornbill, the scarce Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, and of course, the spectacular pair of Satyr Tragopan and Himalayan Monal (as well as other vivid pheasants) are all prime examples. A plethora of other exciting birds add to the tour, with large numbers of seemingly strange sounding families, like drongos, laughingthrushes, white-eyes, leafbirds, sunbirds, accentors, and parrotbills all likely. Even the Critically Endangered (IUCN) White-bellied Heron, will be sought out – a species on the brink of extinction, with only around 250 individuals thought to be left in the world. Three different monotypic families of birds are another major attraction, with Ibisbill, Wallcreeper and Spotted Elachura - all sure to cater to some of the desires of world birders.



White-bellied Heron is one of the rarest birds in the world, with fewer than 250 birds remaining.

This tour begins in the high-elevation city of Paro, before undertaking a 17-day long road trip through the country. We venture east to the Punakha Valley, seeking out our first forest birds and also searching for the rare White-bellied Heron, before heading east to Trongsa, and south to Tingtibi and Panbang, where we will tackle the mid-elevation mossy forests for the stunning Beautiful Nuthatch, amongst others. These lowland areas also offer stands of bamboo and other



riparian woods and support a vast number of birds we're unlikely to see anywhere else, including the trio of hulking Rufous-necked, Great and Wreathed Hornbills. We then transfer to the birdrich Yongkhola region for a few days, where the forests are dripping with a wide array of soughtafter birds, including Ward's Trogon. The higher alpine zones follow, with some time around Ura and Chumey dedicated to giving us the best chances to see the highly sought-after pheasants, including Satyr Tragopan and Himalayan Monal. The tour concludes in Paro, following an enthralling road trip through all the best birding sites in Bhutan.

Itinerary (17 days/16 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Paro

This tour begins with your arrival at the spectacular Paro International Airport. Most flights usually arrive in the morning, and the remainder of the day will be spent birding and exploring the Paro Chhu (local word for river). **Ibisbill** is one of the major targets on our radar here, along with other desirable birds like Wallcreeper, Black-tailed Crake and Solitary Snipe.



Ibisbill occurs right in the middle of Paro – sometimes it's even one of the first birds seen.

Red-billed Chough breed within the massive Rinpung (Paro) Dzong, and are a common sight over the town. Whilst we're scouring the river for our target species, we're also likely to find other birds like Brown Dipper, White-capped Redstart and Rufous-breasted Accentor.

Overnight: Paro



Day 2. Birding Chele La Pass

Based at our comfortable hotel in Paro, we have the full day available to us. We'll head up the famous Chele La Pass, which is one of the highest passes in the entire country, at over 12,000 feet (4,000 meters). Mrs. Gould's Sunbirds are common in these alpine reaches, and Blood Pheasants can be numerous in the upper reaches of the pass. This is also a reliable area to look for Himalayan Monal, and even Satyr Tragopan occurs here, though the latter species is scarce here and more likely to be heard. Himalayan Bluetails are delightfully common, and we'll search the rocky outcrops at the top for the likes of Alpine and Altai Accentors, while flocks of Snow Pigeons fly around showing off their incredible colors. Small seedeaters also occur widely, and large flocks of Plain Mountain Finches flit about, while some careful work is required to find the likes of Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch. A quick search of the Paro Chhu running through town will surely give us further views of Ibisbill, and we can search for others like Wallcreeper as well.

Overnight: Paro

Day 3. Birding Dochula Pass and the Lamperi Royal Botanical Park

This will likely be the first of many early starts, as we head east to the Dochula Pass, bypassing Bhutan's capital city - Thimpu. The Druk Wangyel monastery at the top of the pass features manicured gardens that play host to the likes of **Darjeeling Woodpecker** and **Stripe-throated Yuhina**, along with the highly sought-after **Fire-tailed Myzornis**. Additionally, **Black-faced** and **White-throated Laughingthrushes** commonly occur, and with some careful searching, we may also find the massive **Spotted Laughingthrush**. In recent years, the also enormous **Great Parrotbill** has been found to be reliable here.



Fire-tailed Myzornis is a high-altitude special occurring on some of the passes we traverse.



As we slowly bird our way through the pristine broad-leaved and moss-clad forests heading down from the monastery, we make a stop off in the formally proclaimed Lamperi Royal Botanical Park. This is another fantastic spot to stretch our legs, and Blue-fronted Redstarts and Great Barbets will likely greet us on our arrival. Comical Yellow-billed Blue Magpies bounce around the grass, while delicate **Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers** drum from the treetops. We are also likely to come across our first 'warbler flocks,' which will test our identification skills. A great variety of similar Phylloscopus warblers occur, and we're likely to see Whistler's, Lemon-rumped, Chestnutcrowned, Ashy-throated and Grey-hooded Warblers. The pristine forests here also give us our first chance for the scarce Ward's Trogon, but it is difficult here and better seen elsewhere on the tour. Grey-sided Laughingthrush is another generally scarce bird that we can sometimes find here as well. Bright flocks of minivets sweep through the trees, and equally bright flycatchers also vie for attention, with Verditer, Rufous-gorgeted and Ultramarine Flycatchers all possible.

After an exciting day of birding, we'll descend into the Punakha valley, where we will spend the next two nights.

Overnight: Punakha



Spectacular **Verditer Flycatchers** are common virtually throughout Bhutan – it'll be tough to grow tired of this species!

Day 4. White-bellied Heron and the forests of Punakha valley

We have a full day to spend birding around Punakha, and we will start by looking for the rare and now Critically Endangered White-bellied Heron. The tale of this bird is unfortunate, with it formerly being a widespread species in the foothills of the Himalayas. Due to a combination of factors, there are thought to be fewer than 250 of these birds left in the wild today. Bhutan is arguably the best country to search for this difficult species, and it will be a major target during



our time here. With so few of these birds existing, we will count ourselves extremely lucky if we manage to find one. While searching for the heron, we're likely to see many other waterbirds, which might include rafts of ducks, ranging from Ruddy Shelduck to Bar-headed Goose, along with the strange-looking Common Merganser, large Crested Kingfisher and the endangered (IUCN) Pallas's Fish Eagle. Sandbars may also host the scarce Small Pratincole. We will also explore some wonderful riverine forest sections along the scenic Mo Chhu. Skulkers abound here, and we will have a tough task ahead of us to see any of the following: Chestnut-headed, Greybellied and Slaty-bellied Tesias, Scaly-breasted Cupwing or the sought-after Spotted Elachura. The elachura in particular is of great importance to many, as it was recently moved into a family of its own, making it a monotypic family (the only member of its family). Small Niltavas flit from the mid-strata, while the ever-persistent call of Golden-throated Barbets ring out. We will also keep an eye out for both Spotted and Slaty-backed Forktails on the forested sections of the river here.



Grey-bellied Tesia is a master skulker! This diminutive bird requires a huge amount of patience and skill to see, but given enough time, we should get some visuals of this exciting bird.

After this birding spectacle, we will visit the legendary Punakha Dzong - Bhutan's most impressive dzong and currently in use as a monastery. The dzong is situated at the confluence of the Mo Chhu and Po Chhu and has been subject to many attacks, floods, fires, and earthquakes since it was built in the 1600s. The beauty and tranquility of this edifice is awe-inspiring.

Overnight: Punakha



Day 5. Birding to Trongsa

Following our productive time in the Punakha valley, we transit to Trongsa for the night. This is an exciting travel day, as we anticipate spending our morning around the Nubding forest, which is home to the highly sought-after **Ward's Trogon** and **Himalayan Cutia**, amongst others. If we're lucky, a **Yellow-rumped Honeyguide** may come into to a rock bee colony that is sometimes present in the area. We will also likely be able to stop on the Pele La Pass for a short time, where we can look for more high-altitudinal species like **Fire-tailed Sunbird** and **Spotted Laughingthrush**. **Wallcreeper** can occasionally be found along the route, and we anticipate getting into Trongsa in the afternoon. We should also have time available to bird the nearby Yotong La Pass in the late afternoon, where we can carry on searching out high-altitude species. **Satyr Tragopan** is a speciality of this pass, though its rugged hills and dense forests make seeing this species here difficult. A wide range of other species can be found here, including the sought-after **Fire-tailed Myzornis**. We will eventually settle into our comfortable hotel after a long and sure to be exciting day.

Overnight: Trongsa



Yellow-rumped Honeyguide has a close relationship with rock bee colonies, and we pass several known stakeouts for this uncommon species.

Days 6-7. Birding the broad-leafed forests of Tingtibi

Leaving Trongsa in the morning, we venture down to Tingtibi, for some lower elevation forest birding, where we will spend two nights. This long, windy road follows the course of the Mangde Chhu for the duration of the drive. It will soon become apparent just how numerous both **Large Hawk-Cuckoo** and **Himalayan Cuckoo** are in this area – their distinct calls will be with us almost continuously here and, with some patience, we're sure to get some good views of them.



One of the reasons we venture to this area is to search for **Beautiful Nuthatch**. As its name implies, this is a spectacular bird. It has a close association with **Sultan Tit** and we'll be keeping a beady eye (and ear) open looking for **Sultan Tits** as well, in the hope that a **Beautiful Nuthatch** is nearby. We're also likely to see both the similar Chestnut-bellied and White-tailed Nuthatches.

This is a very birdy area, and we're sure to accumulate a long bird list as we go about our search. This area also gives us our first chance to see the hulking **Rufous-necked Hornbill**, while other crowd favorites include the likes of Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Greater Yellownape, Black-eared Shrike-babbler, Maroon Oriole and the delightfully tiny Golden Babbler. We should also add to our laughingthrushes with Rufous-necked and White-crested Laughingthrushes, along with close relatives like Rusty-fronted Barwing, Silver-eared Mesia and Red-faced Liocichla. We'll also be sure to give the bare trees a scan as the tiny Fire-breasted Flowerpecker and flashy Orange-bellied Leafbirds frequently perch up.

Additionally, we will explore some of the bamboo patches here, which hold some scarce species. White-hooded Babbler and both White-breasted and Pale-billed Parrotbills are targets, along with others like the rare Broad-billed Warbler and fidgety Rufous-faced Warbler. Flocks of Pin-tailed Green Pigeons zoom overhead, while enormous Great Hornbills compete with each other for fruiting trees. Rufous-bellied Eagles and Mountain Hawk-Eagles float overhead, while the tall canopies can be searched for the likes of **Rufous Woodpeckers** and the shy **Square-tailed** Drongo-Cuckoo.



Beautiful Nuthatch is another major target species of this tour – we stand good chances at finding them in several localities.

Parties of noisy Nepal Fulvettas flitting through the undergrowth normally herald the arrival of a bird party, and we'll pay special attention to them in the hope they bring many other species into



play. Possibilities include Yellow-bellied Warbler, Yellow-vented Warbler, White-browed Scimitar-Babbler, Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush and Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher. Bright Crimson Sunbirds can be common, and a wide range of other species will be seen, and we're also likely to see our first mammals, which might include Gee's Golden Langur and the enormous Black Giant Squirrel.

The picturesque river around Tingtibi is an important backup site for the rare White-bellied **Heron**, should the birds, which are occasionally seen around Punakha, not be seen in the early days of the tour. Kindly note that this is a supremely rare bird, and we will need a good dose of luck to find it.

Overnight: Tingtibi



Hulking **Rufous-necked Hornbills** are a true highlight of the lower-lying forests in Bhutan – this is a scarce eastern Himalayan special we'll try hard to find.

Days 8 – 9. Birding the lowland forests of Panbang.

From Tingtibi, we keep to the lowlands and transfer to the small village of Panbang for two nights. Scenically located at the confluence of the Manas and Tongasa Rivers (called rivers in this part of the country, not 'Chhus'), we slowly bird along the road to Panbang in the surrounding area. We should continue adding to our by now burgeoning list. Green and Mountain Imperial Pigeons perch atop the trees in the early morning, and this is also the best way to find the scarce **Jerdon's** Baza and both of the equally tiny Collared and Pied Falconets. This is a good area for the large hornbills occurring in Bhutan, with Great, Rufous-necked and Wreathed Hornbills all possible.

Additionally, we can look for other sought-after birds like **Long-tailed Sibia**, **Pin-striped Tit-Babbler** and the stunning **Greater Racket-tailed Drongo**. Several bamboo patches occur in the



Warbler if we missed them earlier. Other lower altitude species we're likely to find include the snazzy Streaked Spiderhunter, bright Asian Fairy-bluebird and noisy Golden-fronted Leafbird. The river here is a reliable area to search for Crested Kingfisher and Black-backed Forktail, and has also produced sightings of the rare Blyth's Kingfisher – though we'll need some luck to come across this species. These are only a handful of the birds we'll have on our radar, as we're sure to have impressive daily totals as we work the area.

Overnight: Panbang

Day 10. Long drive to Yongkhola.

This is the longest drive of the trip and will likely take us the bulk of the day, as we transfer from the lowlands around Panbang to the mid-elevation village of Yongkhola, located in the central part of the country. We will be sure to enjoy several birding stops as we make the journey, and we anticipate rolling into our comfortable guesthouse in the late afternoon. We will settle in here for the next three nights.

Overnight: Trogon Villa, Yongkhola



Himalayan Cutia frequents moss-covered trees, occurring at mid-elevation – in which they forage.

Days 11 – 12. Birding Yongkhola and its forests.

Yongkhola is widely known for hosting arguably the best bird-watching in Bhutan. The mix of elevations and pristine forests available in the immediate surrounds gives us our best chances for



some of the most exciting birds possible in the country. We have two full days at our disposal to explore these tracts of pristine forest and track down as many of the specials as possible.

One of the major targets for us will be the scarce **Ward's Trogon** and, although this uncommon bird presents a big challenge even in the best of circumstances, we have a good chance of finding this species. Multiple sites also exist for the arguably even more sought-after **Beautiful Nuthatch** in this area, should we have missed this earlier on the trip around Tsirang. **Himalayan Cutia** is another sought-after species that occurs in the upper-lying forests here and is another of our main targets. A plethora of laughingthrushes can be found, and we'll carefully search for scarce species like **Scaly**, **Blue-winged**, **Grey-sided** and **Rufous-chinned Laughingthrushes**. Many skulking species are also likely to feature strongly on our list of targets here — with **Slender-billed** and **Black-crowned Scimitar-Babblers**, **Red-faced Liocichla**, **Grey-throated Babbler**, **Golden Bush Robin**, **Long-billed** and **Eyebrowed Wren-Babblers**, **Scaly-breasted Cupwing**, **Lesser Shortwing** and **Silver-eared Mesia** all possible.



Ward's Trogon is easily one of the main target species for birding tours to Bhutan. Although it is always an uncommon species that takes much time and effort to locate, we will have several attempts at this highly sought-after species.

The stands of bamboo in the area host a different suite of birds, and we'll keep an eye out for species like the stunning **Golden-breasted Fulvetta** and the tiny **Black-throated Parrotbill**, along with other specials like **Mountain Tailorbird** and **White-gorgeted Flycatcher**, often frequenting such stands. We're also likely to come across several bright seedeaters, which may include the dazzling **Scarlet Finch** and the more subtly marked **Golden-naped Finch**. The cooing of **Barred Cuckoo-Doves** will be a regular feature, and we hope to see this shy bird, along with the tiny **Asian Emerald Cuckoo**, as they display from the tree tops. Several new bulbuls will also



likely feature, with **Ashy**, **Striated** and **Mountain Bulbuls** all occurring here. Many Asian bird groups that we'll now be familiar with will also be seen, and we can expect several yuhinas, fulvettas, minlas, sibias and niltavas, along with more well-known groups like woodpeckers, flycatchers and warblers. These are likely to be some of our best birding days of the trip, and many folks see these days as their favorites!

Overnight: Trogon Villa, Yongkhola

Day 13. Birding the Lingmethang Road to Ura, and Satyr Tragopan.

While birding tours of old used to concentrate their birding in Bhutan on the Lingmethang Road exclusively, major work on upgrading the road has caused some significant disturbances and will see us transit through this area and the former birding meccas of Namling and Sengor to our end destination, <u>Ura</u>. With multiple passes to navigate, this is another long drive that will likely take the bulk of the day, with the usual birding stops along the journey.

As we ascend into the alpine zone, we'll bird especially along the impressive Thrumshing La Pass, where we'll keep our eyes open for **Blood Pheasant**. This is another of our major target species and occurs widely on the pass. They are normally easy to see as they scurry around the road edges.



Blood Pheasants are much less secretive than some of their cousins, like tragopans and monals.

This alpine zone will have many new species for us. Here, the songs of **Green-backed** and **Greycrested Tits** herald the arrival of feeding flocks, and we'll need to be quick to get onto all the birds in these rapidly moving flocks. Both the dainty **Black-throated** and **Rufous-fronted Bushtits** vie for attention, along with the snazzy **White-browed Fulvetta** and **Whiskered Yuhina**. We're also



likely to come across both **Bar-throated** and **Red-tailed Minlas** and our first of many **Greentailed Sunbirds**. Despite all these many exciting birds, the main special is yet to come.

We anticipate getting into Ura in the mid-afternoon and will dedicate the late afternoon and evening to searching the nearby Sheytang La Pass for **Satyr Tragopan**. This bird needs no introduction, and is arguably the most sought-after bird in Bhutan. While this species can occur in reasonable densities in suitable habitat, seeing this bird is another story altogether. We'll need to employ all our skills to find one, and we'll hope good fortune favors us. We have our first attempt at this species this afternoon.

Overnight: Ura



Bar-throated Minla is an excitingly colored bird and is a common sight in the alpine zone.

Day 14. Pheasant spectacular – Satyr Tragopan and Himalayan Monal!

We have another attempt to find our coveted **Satyr Tragopan** this morning. We'll spend the entire morning searching for this species, and many others, on the Sheytang La Pass. We're likely to first hear their eerie howls coming out from the depths of the mossy forest floors and some careful scanning and pinpoint positioning will hopefully reward us (again). **Spotted Nutcrackers** are a common sight up here, and we'll hope to add a few new alpine birds, which might include **Coal** and **Rufous-vented Tits**, **Buff-barred Warbler**, **Goldcrest**, **Hodgson's Treecreeper** and **Red Crossbill**. Eventually, we'll descend down this winding pass into the Bumthang valley, where we will see the localized **Black-rumped Magpie**. Our next port of call is the Chumey area, where we will base ourselves for the night. We should arrive in good time and have the afternoon available to head up towards the Tharpaling Monastery, which sits high above the Chumey valley. The main purpose for venturing up to the monastery, however, is to find another of Bhutan's spectacular and highly sought-after pheasants – **Himalayan Monal**. Numbers of these spectacular birds frequent



the area immediately around the monastery, and they have become known for putting on incredible shows for birders! Like the tragopan before, we have our first attempt for the monals this afternoon.

Overnight: Chumey



This is one of the most anticipated days of the tour – we hope to see the **Satyr Tragopan** (cover image) and the **Himalayan Monal** (pictured here) (photo H005, Wikimedia Commons).

Day 15. Himalayan Monal and transfer to Pele La Pass

The early morning will find us at the Tharpaling Monastery again, as we seek out the spectacular Himalayan Monals. The birds are usually a bit showier in the mornings, and we'll dedicate some time to ensuring we get good views of this special bird. Snow Pigeons are often around the rocky cliffs here, and we'll hope to add the scarce White-winged Grosbeak in the surrounding pines. After having spent the morning around the monastery, we'll settle in for a long transfer to Nubding. Our route takes us through Trongsa and the birdy Yotong La Pass. Although we'll likely be passing through here during the midday period, we'll keep our eyes peeled for specials like Fire-tailed Myzornis and Brown Parrotbill, along with more widespread species like Long-tailed Minivet, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Yellow-browed Tit, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, Grey-sided Bush Warbler and Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush. We should also come across our first Mrs. Gould's Sunbirds along the pass, along with many of the above-mentioned alpine species. Beyond Trongsa, rocky overhangs and cliffs host breeding Nepal House Martins, and we'll also search carefully for the prized Wallcreeper.

Eventually, we'll ascend the Pele La Pass, and immediately head down into the nearby Phobjika Valley. During the winter months, this valley is an important overwintering site for the rare **Black-necked Crane** and, in recent years, a few birds have not migrated in the spring with the main flock. We thus stand a chance at still seeing a few of these rare birds lingering in the valley.



Naturally, we'll keep our ears to the ground as to the current status of the cranes and whether or not there are birds still remaining.

Overnight: Nubding



Not your average pigeon - delightful **Snow Pigeons** are usually evident around the monastery.

Day 16. Birding Pele La and Nubding, transfer to Paro

We have the entire morning to spend birding the high-lying alpine Pele La Pass and the lower-lying mossy, broad-leafed Nubding forests. These two sites serve as important backup places for several species. The alpine rhododendron-dominated reaches at the top of Pele La Pass are home to both **Satyr Tragopan** and **Himalayan Monal**, should we have missed either of these species in the days prior. Here, we can also search for other scarce birds like **Fire-tailed Myzornis** and **Fire-tailed Sunbird**. We're also likely to see several other birds, like **Red-headed Bullfinch** and **Hoary-throated Barwing**. **Himalayan Vultures** are a regular sight overhead, and if luck is with us, we may see other raptors like **Bearded Vulture**.

The very different Nubding forests host our final chances for **Ward's Trogon**, along with other specials like **Himalayan Cutia**. **Yellow-rumped Honeyguide** can often be found in the area, where they frequent rock bee colonies hanging from some of the exposed cliff ledges. We also have our final attempts to see any of the major skulkers that may have eluded us, from the tiny **Chestnut-headed** and **Grey-bellied Tesias** to the minute **Scaly-breasted Cupwing** and the ultrashy **Spotted Elachura**.

Eventually, we'll need to tear ourselves away from the birding and complete our journey back to Paro. The route will take several hours as we transit back through the Punakha Valley and over the



Dochula Pass, where we started the main birding of our tour. We anticipate getting into Paro in the late afternoon.

Overnight: Paro

Day 17. Departure from Paro

The day is set aside for your departure from Paro, and no birding plans are included. Most flights depart from Paro during the mid-morning, and you are welcome to depart at your leisure.

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 guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling or other factors.

Duration: 17 days **Limit:** 5 - 8

Dates: 13 – 29 April 2026

17 April – 03 May 2027

Start: Paro End: Paro

Price: US\$8,380 (+ US\$1,600 government taxes) = US\$9,980 per

person sharing, based on 5 - 8 participants (2026)

Price TBA (2027)

Single supplement: US\$1,060 (2026)

Price TBA (2027)

Price includes:

All accommodation (note that we expect to stay at a more basic home-stay style guesthouse in Ura)

All meals from lunch on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 17 Mineral water



International tour leader and local guide All entrance fees (as described) All ground transport

Price excludes:

International flights to/from Paro, Bhutan
Travel insurance
Soft and alcoholic drinks (except water)
Gratuities (please see our tipping guidelines blog)
Gifts and other items of a personal nature
Any pre- or post-tour activities, and entrance fees for excursions not described

