



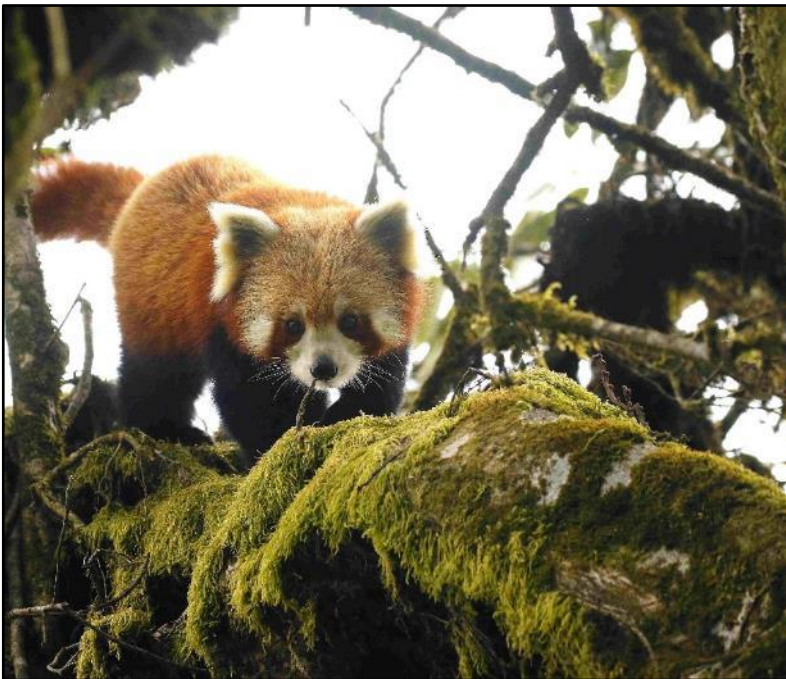
VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

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NEPAL'S HIMALAYAN & TROPICAL LOWLAND PARADISE RED PANDA TO SATYR TRAGOPAN & MORE!

APRIL 7-27, 2025

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Surely one of the world's cutest animals is the endangered Red Panda. Hopefully we will enjoy multiple encounters with this iconic beauty. © Andrew Whittaker.

VENT is pleased to provide an enthralling opportunity to experience the exceptional wildlife treasures of Nepal from the scenically stunning Himalayan foothills to the bird rich tropical lowlands. Based for a week in a delightful Nepali homestay within Singalila National Park, straddling a forested ridge with breathtaking views, and within the heart of Red Panda and highly sought-after Satyr Tragopan strongholds. Observing the world's cutest mammal, the Red Panda; a jaw-dropping male Tragopan; or the mighty snow-covered Mount Everest are truly unforgettable experiences! Delightful spring climate, flowering rhododendrons, and great trails through fascinating bamboo forest offer an abundance of exotic birds.

On our initial scouting trip and past three tours, we have managed no less than thirteen magical encounters with different pandas plus observed six crippling male tragopans! Furthermore, a superb on-site bird blind and feeding station (best in the Himalayas) offers incredible close viewing of a host of avian gems including a variety of exotic & colorful laughingthrushes, Yellow-billed Magpies, Whistling-thrush, and chats plus offers unparalleled photographic opportunities.

Lush mid-elevation forests here are home to exciting mixed-species bird flocks with many mouth-watering altitudinal specialties: Blood Pheasant, Darjeeling, Rufous-bellied and Crimson-breasted woodpecker, dazzling Golden-breasted Fulvetta, rare Fire-tailed Myzornis, Golden-naped Finch, Red and Chestnut-tailed minla, Chestnut-headed Tesia, huge Spotted Laughingthrush, Rufous Sibia, plus an exciting assortment of warblers and tits. In addition, there is a gorgeous assortment of colorful

sunbirds, including the exceptional Fire-tailed; great chats; colorful flycatchers; magic rock-thrush; rosethroats; accentors; to ever-so-cute flocks of bamboo-loving parrotbills!

We begin this Himalayan birding bonanza in bustling Kathmandu at our relaxing and delightful forested hotel complex where brightly colored, easy-to-see birds abound: Brown Wood-Owl and Brown Fish-Owl; Blue-throated, Coppersmith and Great barbet; Chestnut-headed Bee-eater; White-throated Kingfisher; Lesser Yellowthroat; Velvet-fronted Nuthatch; Scarlet Minivet; Orange-headed Thrush; Himalayan Black-lored Tit; Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babblers; and many cuckoos, warblers, bulbuls to the exquisite Crimson Sunbird.



The exquisite male Satyr Tragopan © David Wolf



Splendid Crimson Sunbird male © Andrew Whittaker

The hotel's golf course is even home to herds of Spotted Deer, Golden Jackal and groups of playful Rhesus Macaque!

During our days birding the rich forested lowland hills around Kathmandu, we will look for a very different set of stellar species including the endemic Spiny Babbler, rare Red-headed Trogon, Blue-throated Bee-eater, incredible Long-tailed Broadbill, Golden-fronted Barbet, Maroon Oriole, Slaty-bellied Tesia, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, charismatic forktails, plus a colorful assortment of vibrant minivets, leafbirds, chats, and different gorgeous, iridescent sunbirds and flycatchers. In total, we can expect close to 375 species of birds for the tour!

Throughout the Himalayas we will enjoy a delightful spring climate, an incomparable show of flowering rhododendron & magnolias trees, and explore well-kept trails through mystical bamboo forest that will deliver an abundance of exotic, colorful, sought-after eastern Himalayan birds.

In comparison, the rich tropical Koshi lowlands will be much warmer while we explore forests, wetlands, grasslands and river islands on the delightful Koshi River for a completely different set of exciting avifauna and big game too! from Asian Elephants wild Buffalo to the endangered Ganges River Dolphin.

Finish off our delightful tour in the famous Chitwan National Park famous for its abundance of Greater One-horned Rhino to the king of them all the mighty Bengal Tiger! Our base is a delightful forested eco lodge ideally positioned right next to the park with immaculate breeding Indian Paradise Flycatchers right on our doorsteps. Exciting daily safari drives find us exploring these rich Sal Forests and marshes which simply abound with wildlife in search of the king of the jungle. A true tour highlight that is unique to our lodge will be our afternoon bird walk with the gentle giants the Asian Elephants and their mahouts to see at close range magnificent rhinos bathing in their wallows! Nepal certainly is a country that captivates the imagination, leaves a long-lasting impression and offers a true sense of serenity to our inner peace. Altogether, be prepared for truly stupendous birding and fascinating mammal viewing trip of a lifetime.

Our remote and delightful base at Habre's Nest is located in a global biological hotspot at 9,000 feet in lush Himalayan rhododendron, oak, and bamboo forests on the Nepalese-Indian border. The lodge boasts the iconic Red Panda and a plethora of exciting and colorful birds right at our doorstep, with over 300 species already recorded from the park. This comfortable and intimate Nepali-style homestay offers excellent facilities and exceptional services. Hills and mountain slopes are blanketed in rich temperate montane rain forests as far as the eye can see, with medicinal fresh air, and of course magnificent birding—indeed it's a true Himalayan birder's paradise!



A magnificent spring view of Habre's Nest perched on the forested Singalila Ridge © Shantanu Prasad

There is simply no better place for observing one of the cutest and rarest mammals on our planet—the charismatic Red Panda—with to date, 34 known by our lodge researchers! Panda researchers and biologists have been working on this endearing species for over a decade and are incredibly knowledgeable. No one knows these endangered, once mythical, creatures as well as they do.

The mighty Himalayan Range—with its giant spurs, Singalila and Chola—virtually encloses this region in a titanic horseshoe offering a magnificent setting. Starting from the plains of North Bengal, tangled interlacing ridges rise range after range to the foot of the great wall of high Himalayan peaks

and passes opening into Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan. Balcony views from our lodge are truly breathtaking, and can be enjoyed while sipping a nice afternoon cuppa of Nepalese tea (truly some of the best tea I have ever enjoyed and I'm a Brit)! At dusk, awe-inspiring sunsets and at night, amazingly clear, starry nights provide extra enjoyment.



Stunning Himalayan views from the lodge veranda with a nice hot cuppa tea!
© Shantanu Prasad

Our base offers easy access through forests dripping with orchids, mosses, lichens, and enchanting bamboo. It is simply perfect for birding, especially for enjoying exciting mixed-species flocks or cool skulkers. Mouth-watering, colorful Himalayan specialties abound.



A favorite is the localized Yellow-billed Blue Magpie. © Andrew Whittaker

altitudinal migrants joining the hardier resident species, and all in vibrant breeding plumage.

The well-constructed bird blind and feeding station provides close studies and exceptional photographic opportunities of delightful forest species such as Yellow-billed Blue-Magpie; Oriental Turtle Dove; an incredible lineup of laughingthrushes—Spotted, Scaly, Black-faced and Chestnut-crowned; Golden Bush-Robin; Blue Whistling-Thrush; Chestnut-headed Tesia; odd-looking Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler; Scaly-breasted Cupwing; Hoary-throated Barbwing; Red-headed Bullfinch; attractive rosefinches; and even the magnificent Yellow-throated Martin are regular visitors.

Our trip is ideally scheduled to visit the Himalayas at the best time of the year—early spring—when we will enjoy a delightful climate, with freshly arriving summer and



The blind offers stunning views of the delicately marked Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush. © Andrew Whittaker

The dawn chorus will fill the forested hillsides and valleys with mystical calls and beautiful songs. A few of the other outstanding species we hope to see include Blood Pheasant; Hill Partridge; a myriad of marvelous songsters with “Old World” warblers and stupendously colorful chats, redstarts, rock-thrush and even blue flycatchers; interesting babblers (including intricately colored, minlas and leiothrix); bulbuls; shrike-babbler; yuhina; forktails; delightfully pinkish rosefinch; accentors and bamboo loving parrotbills (always a favorite). Several outstanding stunners we hope for are Spotted Nutcraker, Golden-breasted Fulvetta, Red-winged and Chestnut-tailed minla, Himalayan Shortwing, and Golden and White-browed and Bush-Robin. The exquisite Fiery-tailed Myzornis is certainly most sought after, plus an unprecedented number of wonderful laughingthrush (always a group favorite) including the fabulous Spotted, Scaly, Chestnut-crowned and Black-faced laughingthrush.

A further enchantment is that the montane forests will be ablaze with magnificent blooming Rhododendron and Magnolia groves. Roadsides and clearings carpeted in flowering primulas and geranium offer a kaleidoscope of color—a botanist’s delight! In addition, mossy banks will be dripping with a multitude of orchids and odd cobra lilies, adding an even more emphatic splash of color plus exotic fragrances!

These eastern Himalayan forests are twice as rich in their flora and fauna than the western Himalayas, thus rewarding us with a greater density of



Hillsides are ablaze with blooming Rhododendron flowers offering nectar for sunbirds and others like this White-browed Fulvetta.

© Shantanu Prasad

exciting birds and animals to seek, making for a truly memorable and stupendous trip. Birding will mostly be on foot along secluded jeep trails and trekking trails through enchanting montane forests of the Singalila Ridge. This will not be too strenuous of a tour; however good health will be required to cope with some longer hikes on this trip of a lifetime to the delightful Himalayan cordillera of Nepal.



Spotted Forktail © Andrew Whittaker

In addition to the wondrous birding from our enchanting lodge, we will also relish two days of exciting birding around the lush and bird rich valley of Kathmandu. The forested slopes and hills are home to the region's top birding hotspots like Phulchowki Hill, which hosts a superb lineup of over 250 bird species, including many exciting new species of birds for us. Species of interest include the outrageous multicolored and exotic looking Long-tailed Broadbill, Golden-throated Barbet, Red-headed Trogon, Yellownape, Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, and exotic Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon. Other species

adding color and excitement to us from these verdant valleys should include Bonelli's Eagle; Fire-breasted Flowerpecker; the incomparable Himalayan Cutia (rare); stupendous, White-crested Laughingthrush; Velvet-fronted Nuthatch; Maroon Oriole; skulky Slaty-bellied Tesia; a colorful assortment of parakeets, niltavas, chats, and "Old World" warblers; and the endearing Spotted Forktail.

The species rich tropical lowlands of the famous Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve offer a completely new set of mouthwatering colorful tropical birds. Plus, the Reserve is a migrant hotspot (you never know what could turn up like our country first; a stunning Firethroat we found on our scouting trip, to a dream male Siberian Rubythroat!) as well as great for big game! Highlights such as the sought-after endangered Bengal Florican & Swamp Francolin, enormous Asian Elephant, Wild Water Buffalo, odd Nilgai (Blue Bull), and cute Bengal Fox can be expected.

The lush tropical lowlands of the Koshi area include Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Collared Falconet, Black Baza, tiny Collared Falconet to Red Necked Falcon, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Cinnamon Bittern, Indian Courser, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Small Pratincole, outrageous Indian Roller, Dollarbird, green pigeons, stupendous Blue-tailed Bee-eater, mouthwatering Greater Painted Snipe, Small Pratincole, Pallas's Gull, Sirkeer Malkoha, Citrine Wagtail, White-tailed Stonechat, orioles, kingfishers, and colorful Purple Sunbirds, leafbirds and more.

April 7, Day 1: International Flight to Kathmandu. Qatar Airlines provides service from the United States with a connection in Doha (Qatar), which will arrive the following day. If time permits, we suggest arriving a day early to allow for potential flight delays and to be well rested. VENT will be happy to assist with additional lodging arrangements and transfers should you choose to arrive prior to April 8.

NIGHT: Aboard aircraft in transit to Kathmandu

April 8, Day 2: Arrive in Kathmandu. Upon arriving at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport (airport code KTM), you will be met by a representative of our ground agent and transferred the short drive to our luxury forested resort where a room will be reserved in your name. Amidst the backdrop of the majestic Himalayas, delightful Gokarna Resort is set within a vast 470 hectares of natural forest reserve and an 18-hole golf course; an oasis of peace and tranquility where nature abounds. Exceptional birding and both Spotted or Barking deer, primates and even the resident Leopard occasionally can be seen!

The resort is a truly delightful relaxing location outside the hustle and bustle of the capital to rest up and recharge your batteries after your international flight, and offers a superb introduction to the local Himalayan avifauna too. Species recorded here are too many to include, with over 200! This fabulous, extensive forested complex explodes with a marvelous dawn chorus of the musical songs of mostly barbets and newly arrived cuckoos (both the famous Eurasian Cuckoo and Asian Koel) while Black Kites call overhead. At night we can even observe the resident large Brown Wood-Owls or even Brown Fish-Owl fishing! Brightly colored easy-to-see birds abound here, especially Great, Coppersmith and Blue-throated Barbet.



Blue-throated Barbets are common at our delightful hotel.
© Andrew Whittaker

The magical kingdom of Nepal sits high on the spine of the world's most famous mountain range, offering nerve-tingling scenery, a complex culture and some of the best walking trails in the world.

Nepal is a mecca for adventure travellers and Kathmandu is the gateway to this montane paradise.

Life in Nepal adds new meaning to living on the edge—a delicate balance of high altitude, hard work and social festivities, all steeped heavily in ancient tradition. Although economically poor, Nepal's culture is rich. It's not hard to see why this is a haven for Buddhism. You'll come across monasteries, village temples, and prayer flags atop passes and houses wherever you go. The wondrous Nepalese people also will leave an indelible favorable impression. Kathmandu is truly a place filled with warmth, vivid colors, impressive temples and amazing culture.

NIGHT: Gokarna Forest Resort, Kathmandu

April 9, Day 3: Morning birding excursion for Spiny Babbler with afternoon birding the Gokarna Forest Reserve. During the Palearctic Spring, many wintering species further south are now migrating north through the region, thus supplementing Kathmandu's resident bird fauna. Hindu reverence for life also contributes to the approachability of so many birds. Pre- breakfast birding option in the birdy grounds. Following breakfast, we will head out into the valley in search of the only Nepal endemic the delightful Spiny Babbler.



Endemic Spiny Babbler © Andrew Whittaker

Other species could include Himalayan Buzzard, Booted Eagle, Gray-backed or Spotted Forktail, Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush, Indian Golden Oriole, Long-tailed Shrike, Tickell's Leaf Warbler, Red-rumped Swallow, White-capped Redstart, Scaly-breasted or White-rumped Munia.

This afternoon we will explore the extensive forest reserve around the hotel along well-kept paths, gardens and golf course accompanied by a knowledgeable local guide, in search of some exciting dry forest species. This excursion will offer us a wonderful introduction to Nepal's avifauna. Even though the reserve is so close to the bustling city, it is an oasis for birds. This well-preserved old growth forest was established a century ago as a private hunting preserve for former royalty and the kings of Nepal.

On our inaugural trip in 2022, we easily recorded sixty species here. We hope to see Kalij Pheasant, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater; Velvet-fronted and Chestnut-bellied nuthatch, wonderful flocks of Red-billed Blue-Magpie, Gray Treepie, White-throated Kingfisher, Ring-necked Parakeet, Asian Koel, Common Cuckoo, Green-billed

Malkoha, Rufous Treepie, Indian White-eye, Gray Wagtail, Scarlet or Long-tailed Minivet, Orange-headed Thrush, Gray-backed Shrike, amazing Himalayan Black-lored Tit, Lesser or Greater yellownape, Crimson-bellied or Gray-headed Woodpecker, exquisite Crimson Sunbird, the odd crested Himalayan bulbuls, Rusty-Cheeked Scimitar-Babblers, Blue-throated

Flycatcher, Oriental Magpie-Robin and an assortment of warblers. During springtime, the valley is a migrant trap so almost anything could turn up; we have seen Siberian Rubythroat, Red-throated Thrush, White-bellied Robin and even Long-tailed Broadbill.

NIGHT: Gokarna Forest Resort, Kathmandu



Greater Yellownape © Andrew Whittaker

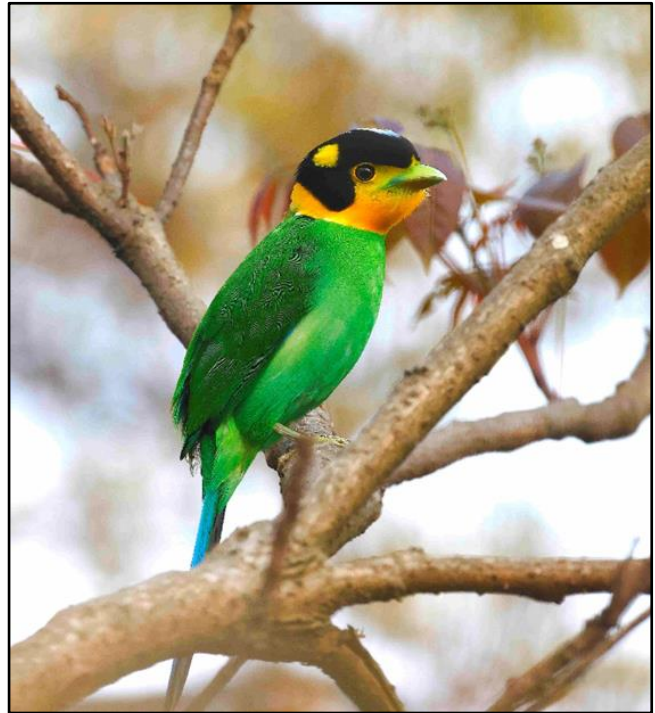
April 10, Day 4: Birding Excursion to the Phulchowki Hills Birding Hotspot. Today we plan to arrive as early as possible for our full day birding these fabulous mountain forests. This delightful hill is the most prominent peak in the valley, offering exciting birding in varied forest types and different altitudes along the road that winds up to the top. This transition zone is between subtropical and temperate climates. The vegetation consists of a variety of natural forest types including pine, oak, and rhododendron depending on altitude and aspect. Mammalian species such as Himalayan Black Bear, Leopard, and Jungle Cat occur, although we would be extremely lucky to see them. However, avian diversity is high; the hills' list of around 300 species insures we have lots to enjoy, such as the phenomenal-looking Long-tailed Broadbill.

These deep woods are home to a different set of laughingthrush from our lodge, including the striking White-crested, cool Striated, noisy flocks of White-throated and with luck, the skulkier Rufous-chinned or Gray-sided. Tiny gems such as Slaty-bellied or Gray-bellied tesian need to be carefully coaxed out using playback while spectacular Red-headed Trogon (rare), Blue-throated Bee-eaters or vivid flycatchers including Rufous-bellied, Large or Small Niltava, Ultramarine and Rufous-gorgeted are more easily encountered foraging for insects. The mid-story is the realm of exciting mixed-species flocks containing flashy Golden-throated Barbet, Maroon Oriole, Red-billed Leiothrix, Yellow-bellied Fairy-Fantail (stunning but uncommon), Nepal Fulvetta, Lesser Racket-tailed or Hairy-crested drongo, Black-winged Cuckooshrike, and understory flocks of Gray-throated or Black-chinned Babbler (antbird equivalents). Mature trees are home to several dazzling minivets, the Long-tailed being the commoner; spiffing woodpeckers such as Greater and Lesser yellownapes; Rufous-bellied or the smaller multi-colored Velvet-fronted nuthatch; Indian Blue Robin (rare); wonderous Black-faced Warbler; plus an

assortment of challenging “Old World” warblers. We’ll keep our eyes peeled overhead for any soaring eagles with Bonelli’s, Mountain Hawk, Crested Serpent and Black being resident; or to spot an accipiter such as Besra or Crested Goshawk as they hunt for small forest song birds. We’ll plan to arrive back at our resort by late afternoon for a well-earned rest.

NIGHT: Gokarna Forest Reserve, Kathmandu

April 11, Day 5: Morning Flight from Kathmandu to Bhadrapur; Drive to Habre’s Nest. Following breakfast, we will transfer a short distance to the airport to catch our early morning breathtaking, short flight over the mighty Himalayas to the historical city of Bhadrapur in southeastern Nepal, famous for rice production in its fertile soils with an abundance of greenery. On arrival we will be picked up by our local ground agents and begin our transfer in land cruisers to Habre’s Nest, our Himalayan paradise home for the next seven nights.



Long-tailed Broadbill © Andrew Whittaker

We’ll first traverse rich lowlands with abundant rice paddies, where we will make a quick birding stop. Here fantastic colorful Indochinese Rollers are often found perched along the roadside trees, while the rice fields can hold Lesser Adjutant, Asian Openbill, Red-naped Ibis, Indian Pond Heron, Red-wattled Lapwing, White-browed Wagtail, Asian Pied Starlings and more. We will continue crossing several river bridges and past huge tea plantations before arriving in the foothills of Joubari, where we will take a break and have a meal in Fikkal at a famous momo restaurant with delicious Nepalese homemade dumpling. Here we change into another set of 4 x 4 land cruiser and land rover and drive up along the dirt road that can be rough through these enchanting foothill forests. We’ll stop at a scenically delightful, crystal-clear bubbling mountain stream dissecting the dirt road; home to charming Green Magpie, Brown Dippers (rare) and with luck, pairs of most-cherished Slaty-backed Forktails. Delightful ever-present Plumbeous Water Redstart and its larger cousin the gorgeous White-capped Redstart are common and chase insects off the boulders along the stream. We’ll keep our eyes open along the way for maybe a smart pair of Khalij Pheasant on the roadside, or even our first Red Panda, finally arriving at the Singalila Ridge which separates the Sikkim state of India from Nepal’s West Bengal state where our lodge is found.

Some lucky groups on the drive in or out have even seen Leopard Cat, Clouded Leopard or Golden Cat in past years! We should arrive in the late afternoon at Habre’s Nest Homestay. The marvelous local Nepalese staff will give us a warm welcome and serve the famous freshly produced and delicious Nepal Tea before showing us to our rooms. The scenic splendor of the Singalila Ridge and its verdant foothill forests are truly breath-taking. The mountain ridge runs north-south for about 50 km, connecting the grand Himalaya of Nepal to India and running along the India-Nepal border from Mane Bhanjang to Phalut (and continuing into Sikkim). Clear days can offer mouth-watering views of the mighty Himalayan chain stretching from Nepal to Sikkim and Bhutan.



A striking male Kalij Pheasant in Singalila National Park © Shantanu Prasad

The wonderful facilities at the homestay, which is constructed in a charming Nepali style (typical of the region), include four rooms, each with private bathroom with hot and cold running water, comfortable warm bedding (plus water bottles), and eco-friendly fireplace. A communal balcony offers exceptional views over forested valleys to distant mountains, often affording a stunning sunset or fiery dawn view. Common areas include a heated lounge and bar, dining area, library, souvenir shop and power back-up. We will also enjoy the cuisine, a perfect blend of local foods and Indian foods with a western touch. It is truly a heavenly place.

NIGHT: Habre’s Nest, Kaiakata



Blue Whistling-Thrush © Andrew Whittaker

April 12-17, Days 6-11: Exploring the Rich Himalayan Forests in Singalila-Tinchule Reserves.

Our trip is perfectly scheduled for visiting during the best time of the year—early spring. We can sit back and enjoy a delightful climate while freshly arriving summer and altitudinal migrants join the hardy resident birds. Better still, they are dressed up in their very best vibrant breeding colors! Spring in these forested slopes is characterized by echoing loud, far carrying and evocative songs of our main avian target—the stunning tragopan! We will tantalizingly hear males almost daily emitting their deep, drawn-out call within rhododendron thickets right below the lodge.

Another common voice will be the sad, drawn-out whistles of skulky Hill Partridge which is very tinamou-like, while freshly arrived male Himalayan cuckoos will also be proclaiming their territories with their song. The most vocal songbird often perched on tree tops singing its heart out is the stunning Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush. Normally the first species to join these magical daily dawn symphonies is the melodic voice of the charismatic groups of Yellow-billed Blue Magpie and gorgeous Blue Whistling-Thrush.

Our exciting daily routine will be fairly similar each day. First, we’ll depart on an early birding morning walk, quietly and slowly moving through the nearby secluded forest trails and jeep tracks right outside the lodge that dissect extensive charming montane forests. Later we’ll return to enjoy a breakfast of a delightful selection of home cooked food. The cheese omelets are the best I have ever tasted! Sometimes if we are on a longer walk, we have breakfast served in the field, which is great fun. Then we head back out birding and return for lunch. Following an excellent lunch, we have our relaxed mid-day break before heading out again in the mid-afternoon, returning at dusk with time to shower before a delicious dinner. Afterwards we enjoy going through the exciting day’s bird list over some rhododendron wine, soft drinks or other alcoholic beverages. This site is certainly one of the best places ever in Asia to see a family of delightful Yellow-throated Martin!

The Tinchuley Forest Reserve is a Himalayan birding mecca, with a seemingly endless list of potential magical and often poorly-known avian gems. The lodge’s list already stands at over 300 species and is still growing! We are wonderfully situated



Delightful Yellow-throated Martin © Andrew Whittaker

smack-bang in the avian epicenter of the Eastern Himalayas, which are amazingly twice as rich in bird and animal species as sites in the Western Himalayas. Of the songbirds, the stunning Fire-tailed Myzornis, Rufous-throated Wren-Babbler, Gould's Shortwing and odd Hoary-throated Barbwing are perhaps the most exciting and range restricted. Typical of these extremely rich Eastern Himalayan forests is an outrageous diversity of laughingthrushes, with some exceptional species occurring here. Laughingthrushes are always a trip favorite—large and colorful—occurring in small, often very vocal parties with beautiful, loud songs that the flock leader initiates and the group answers in a noisy chorus. We will have great opportunities to find them all, including the Scaly, Black-faced, gorgeous Chestnut-crowned, and the largest of all, the huge knockout Spotted Laughingthrush.

One of the main focuses of the trip, of course, is to locate and enjoy seeing the iconic and magical Red Panda. Our highly experienced panda crew split into seven different groups of two each day combing the mountains looking for Red Pandas for us. This system works extremely well and we should enjoy hopefully not one but multiple panda encounters with what surely has to be one of the world's cutest and most distinctive animals. The first time I saw one, I just wanted to hug it! So far on our three tours, we have had an impressive nine different panda encounters!



Incomparable Spotted Laughingthrush © Andrew Whittaker

Birding exploration will be mostly on foot along a dirt jeep trail through largely untouched, old-growth montane broadleaved evergreen forest, with significant areas of bamboo, secondary growth, and scrub. Waves of beautiful birds sweep by in mixed-species flocks almost every turn in the road could bring another avian surprise, including multiple rarely-seen and poorly-known Himalayan specialities. We certainly will be able to enjoy many exciting project birds too; in other words, skulkers living within the dense understory. With time on our hands, we will carefully entice many such wonderful surprises out for good views with tape-playback. Examples include incredibly snazzy sought-after Hill Partridge, Himalayan Shortwing, tiny Rufous-throated Wren-Babbler, Scaly-breasted Cupwing, Broad-billed Warbler, Chestnut-capped Babbler, and the wonderfully endearing and brightly coloured Chestnut-headed Tesia, a true jewel of the bamboo.



Glorious Chestnut-headed Tesia © Andrew Whittaker

On one morning, we will have an exciting early pre-dawn drive up to reach more distant higher altitude sites to enjoy the dawn among a different vegetation and habitat that holds a delightful set of higher elevation species. Principally our pre-dawn departure allows us to observe a breathtaking spectacle as dawn breaks on clear days a truly outstanding Himalayan vista! Four of the five highest peaks in the world, including the mightiest of them all, **Mount Everest!** Together with Everest, Kanchenjunga or the Sleeping Buddha, Lhotse, and Makalu, form the mighty backbone of the Himalayas; all above 26,000 feet and thus are snow-capped year-round.

Open rocky slopes with conifers and dwarf rhododendrons hold mouth-watering singing Fire-tailed Sunbirds, Blue-fronted or White-throated redstarts, Rosy Pipit, Collared Grosbeak, Greenish Warblers, Gray-sided Bush Warbler, jaw dropping Golden Bush-Robin, Rufous-breasted Accentor,

Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch, flocks of Red Crossbill (a good split), and Plain Mountain Finch (common). Today we'll reach the maximum elevation of the tour, around 11,000 feet or 3,600 meters, which involves little walking and we will take it easy.



Magnificent Himalayan Sleeping Buddha © Andrew Whittaker

The endearing Red Panda will be one of our main goals and certainly a true highlight to spend quality time observing them in their natural habitat. They spend most of their lives

up in trees, are very agile and even have a furry foot pad to help walk effortlessly, even on icy branches, and they sleep aloft as well. Red Pandas are the size of a house cat, though their big, bushy tails add an additional 18 inches. The tail is used as a wraparound blanket, which helps in the chilly Himalayan weather, along with their double-layered fur, which also makes them waterproof and therefore incredibly well adapted to deal with harsh winter weather. When foraging, they are mostly a bamboo specialist and an individual can eat a staggering 20,000 leaves a day! To help with this task, they possess a unique extended wrist bone that functions almost like a thumb and greatly aids their grip to eat. They are normally solitary except when mating; however, oddly they use a common latrine, which (like a visitor's log book) contains all the information about other users. Females give birth in the spring and summer, typically one to four young. Young pandas remain in their nests for about 90 days, during which time their mother cares for them and they remain with her for 18-20 months. Males take little or no interest in their offspring.



**A cute family group of Red Panda by the lodge with mum and her big cubs
© Shantanu Prasad**

Despite their name, Red Pandas aren't actually closely related to giant pandas at all, having given taxonomists fits in the past. Currently, research published in 2000 in the journal *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* determined that Red Pandas are considered members of their own unique phylogenetic family—the Ailuridae. Taxonomic "infraorder" places them in a group with bears, pinnipeds (seals, sea lions, and walrus), raccoons, and mustelids (weasels, skunks, otters, and badgers). When located, we will be able to enjoy precious time observing and photographing these magnificent creatures and watch their endearing behavior.

The Himalayan broadleaf forests here are exciting to explore with a great diversity of oaks, rhododendrons and particularly magnolia, (which will be flowering), and include many endemic plants of Indomalaya, Indochinese, Himalayan, Eastern Asiatic and even Gondwanan origin. The trees are delightfully decorated by intriguing mosses, delicate lichens and orchids. In fact, there are incredibly over 600 varieties of orchid species known from Singalila (mostly at lower elevations), the largest concentration in any single geographical area in the world! The forest understory is dominated by lush moss and large areas of bamboo thickets harboring some super cool bamboo specialists. These include much sought-after Slender-billed and Streak-breasted scimitar-babblers (the former with its amazing sickle-shaped bill), the vibrant Golden-breasted Fulvetta, Himalayan Shortwing, Hume's Bush Warbler (what a song) and of course groups of highly desired parrotbills, which are very well represented here with the huge Great and medium-sized Brown to the delicate, fast-moving, tight noisy flocks of charming Fulvous and commoner Black-throated Parrotbill.

Without doubt, our prime avian target is an inconceivably beautiful pheasant, often considered to be one of the most beautiful birds in the world, the incomparable Satyr Tragopan! We stand an exceptionally high chance in these forests of seeing this mind-blowing dream bird for many. Being here during their early breeding season is perfect timing. Male Tragopan are vocal at dawn, emitting their deep, far carrying, drawn-out call within bamboo thickets in an attempt to attract as many females as possible to their lek. Here the male conceals himself behind a rock or fallen log, waiting patiently for a passing female. When a potential mate wanders into view, he ambushes

her. Twitching his head, he gradually exposes and inflates his retractable, fleshy, electric blue lappet, and erects and waggles his matching blue horns while beating his wings rhythmically, in synchrony with a series of vocal clicks, before rising to his full height, fanning his tail, stretching his wings downwards, and fluffing his crimson-colored feathers to their fullest. The male brandishes this wacky trio of now-you-see-them-now-you-don't ornaments during his spectacular courtship display that is rooted heavily in the principle of 'shock and awe.' If the stunned female sticks around until the end of the show, the male will vault the obstacle and attempt to copulate.



An endearing pair of bamboo specialists – the Black-throated Parrotbill
© Shantanu Prasad

exploration of these heavenly forests are the delightful Yellow-throated Martin, small Barking Deer or Himalayan Orange-bellied Squirrel.

Dense vegetation bordering the jeep-tracks harbors such gripping birds as Golden Bush-Robin, Broad-billed Warbler, Scaly Thrush and several interesting skulky bush warblers too. We will always be on the lookout for the colorful, eye-catching Fire-tailed Myzornis (in its own monotypic genus and tentatively placed in the “Old World” babbler), which often converge on flowering rhododendrons or tree-sap, sometimes in company with blazingly colorful Green-tailed Sunbird and Buff-banded Warblers.

Our pre-dawn excursions to higher altitudes will be exhilarating as our land rovers exit broadleaf forests, which give way to distinct sub-alpine conifer habitat near the peak of Sandakphu. Here we will begin our search for several super cool higher elevation specialists, such as Spotted Nutcracker, while the massive Himalayan Vultures glide by, or we could spot a soaring Black or Mountain hawk-eagle. However, by far the most alluring inhabitant here is found within the forest understory, coming out to the edges to feed—the exquisite but rare Blood Pheasant. Even Himalayan Monal has recently been rediscovered here! Fingers crossed.

This area is also home to the rare Himalayan Brown Goral (a goat antelope) which our group were very fortunate to discover



The much sought-after, odd Fire-tailed Myzornis is a very unusual babbler. © Shantanu Prasad



The alluring and exquisite Blood Pheasant © Shantanu Prasad

here for the first lodge record! We located a small group two years ago and since all tours have again succeeded in seeing them.

The sheer beauty of this dramatic landscape coupled with the vibrant colors of the surrounding rhododendron forests is truly quite enchanting.

At this time of the year around here, many species are only found in the large mixed-species flocks, where small birds can be surprisingly numerous and dominated by a variety of yuhina, tits, nuthatches, and fulvettas. However, with them we also find various interesting challenging *Phylloscopus* warblers like Buff-barred, Ashy-throated plus striking Lemon-

rumped warbler and Blyth's Leaf-Warbler; also, strikingly colorful Blue-winged Chestnut or Red-tailed Minlas, or Rufous-winged Fulvetta. Hopefully we can chase down the persistently calling diurnal owl—the cute looking Collared Owlet plus woodpeckers including Rufous-bellied, Crimson-breasted and commoner Darjeeling, which hunt for beetle larva in tree trunks. Himalayan flycatchers abound; interestingly, they are quite unlike the rather drab North American species. Here males are mostly a breathtakingly beautiful mix of two contrasting bold, bright colors and simply a joy to see. We can therefore look forward to enjoying various hues of blue, orange, white, and turquoise with the likes of several stunners, namely Ultramarine, Verditer, as well as the stunning Rufous-bellied niltavas (flycatchers too). We will fall in love with the colorful and perky chats as their diversity is also outstanding, and crippers such as skulky White-browed and Rufous-breasted bush-robins.

We will certainly include a few exciting night excursions during our stay. Incredible starry nights along Singalila Ridge can be mind-blowing and hard not to enjoy. Hopefully we can encounter some cool owls, which could include the impressive and scarce Himalayan Wood-Owl or a Gray Nightjar. We'll always be watching to encounter the eye-shine of a nocturnal mammal. We stand a fair chance of finding the smartly marked Bhutan Giant Flying Squirrel, the largest of all flying squirrels. However, we will require much more luck to find the likes of a Leopard Cat, Himalayan Black Bear, Indochinese Clouded Leopard, Marbled Cat, or Asian Golden Cat. All do occur here in small numbers and are seen infrequently by only a lucky few. Last tour we even found fresh Leopard scat!



This outstanding two-toned blue/orange combination is commonly found in many Himalayan birds like this magnificent male Rufous-breasted Bush-Robin © Shantanu Prasad

Constantly surrounded by such pristine habitat ensures many exotic and fascinating Himalayan plants and flowers for us to enjoy. This area boasts the greatest diversity of orchids on our planet (over 600 species) and spring is a prime blooming month for them. We should definitely encounter some spectacular orchid species in flower. Commonly found here are *Dendrobium*, *Pleione*, and *Coelogyne*, to name a few genera. Many of these Himalayan orchids have long been cultivated and improved for showiness and therefore are grown with many orchid specialists worldwide.



The magical Chestnut-headed Tesia © Andrew Whittaker

In addition, the super photographic blind on-site affords a special chance of getting both amazing close views and unique images of some of the shier forest birds at close range. Interesting species recorded visiting the feeder and setup has included Oriental Turtle-Dove, Eurasian Jay, boisterous Yellow-billed Blue-Magpie, Blue Whistling-Thrush, White-collared Blackbird, and constant flocks of various lovely laughingthrushes, Golden Bush-Robin, Rufous-breasted Bush-Robin, Streak-breasted and Slender-billed scimitar-babblers, White-browed and Golden-breasted fulvettas, and several Rosefinch species, amongst others. Incredibly, sometimes even Tragopan have been observed here or in the lodge garden. One of the top species here has to be the bamboo-loving Chestnut-headed Tesia with its magical colors and explosive song, but it's a devil to try to photograph.

NIGHTS: Habre's Nest, Kaiakata



Magnificent Blue-tailed Bee-eater © Andrew Whittaker

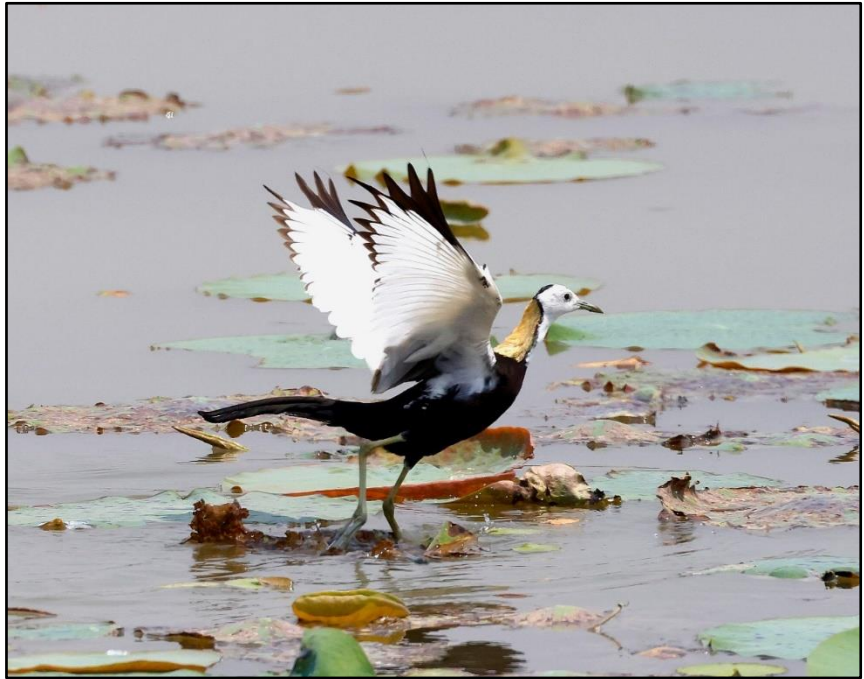
April 18, Day 12: Depart Habre's Nest, Retracing our Steps to Fikkal, and on to the Lush Tropical Lowlands of Koshi and Koshi Wildlife Camp.

We'll have an early start this morning for a travel day with several exciting stops en route to a new biome, the rich tropical lowlands. Reluctantly, we must leave our Himalayan paradise and say goodbye to our wonderful Nepalese hosts who have taken such exceptional care of us. We'll begin retracing our route, descending through the impressive forests, always keeping an eye open for any special mammals or birds along the way. A stop at the river bridges may reward us with Green Magpie or a Slaty-backed forktail. Arriving in Fikkal, we will quickly change vehicles and drive east along good roads, stopping off for a delightful lunch at a great restaurant. Next up we will enjoy a brief stop at a large communal roost of cute looking Indian Flying foxes that roost in a woodland grove and offer excellent views. Soon after we will arrive at a must-stop destination, a wonderous colony of majestic Blue-tailed Bee-eater that offer great photographic opportunities! A few minutes down the road we will

reach our main birding location, a fabulous water bird hot spot, which is a protected area acting as a reservoir for the local community, and is also a superb migrant trap. One never knows what may turn up as was found while scouting, when we photographed the third country record of Indian Cormorant! While last year a rare Tibetan Sand-Plover! We, will be greeted with the sight of flocks of hundreds of Lesser Whistling-Ducks with a few Fulvous Whistling-Ducks along with smaller numbers of Garganey, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Pintail, smart Red-crested Pochard and best of all the very delicate cool-looking Pygmy Cotton Goose which are truly tiny! Sand bars will hold a nice mix of fish lovers such as Intermediate, Little and Great egret; Gray and colorful Purple heron; Oriental Darter, and Little Cormorant. A mixture of migrant shorebirds will be found amongst the resident Red-wattled Lapwings plus we will keep an eye open for any late-wintering Gray-headed Lapwing. This area will give us a great chance to see one of the world's top shorebirds, the stunning Greater Painted Snipe. Mostly crepuscular despite its wonderful bright colors (especially the females), the color pattern makes for a perfect camouflage. Thus, we will have to search hard for a chance of this mega species which often helps to encounter

Pin-tailed Snipe too. Extensive Lilly pads are home to huge Lesser Adjutant, large bright Gray-headed Swampheens and more delicate and super cool Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, at this time, the males are in full breeding plumage showing off their extraordinary tails.

Late afternoon we will pull into Koshi Camp, our delightful and cozy forested base for the next three nights, located in the rich lowlands of southeastern Nepal, bordering the eastern edge of the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. The property adjoins the reserve and gives us direct walking and jeep access to it.



Wonderous Pheasant-tailed Jacana male © Andrew Whittaker

Following a warm welcome by the staff and time allowing, we will do a short exploratory walk in the birdy grounds to the wetland blind. Late afternoon is a good time for finding the shy Cinnamon Bittern and seeing fishing Stork-billed or White-throated Kingfisher.

The camp provides furnished walk-in tented rooms with attached private toilet and hot shower room, each set beneath a quaint locally-constructed thatched shelter. All meals are served in the camp's thatched restaurant and bar, and consist of ample and very wholesome local food, prepared by Kanchha, the head chef. Our stay at Koshi Camp will offer us an authentic taste of remote, rural Nepal, where peace and tranquility reign, together with a magnificent variety of wildlife.

NIGHT: Koshi Wildlife Camp, Bairawa

April 19-20, Day 13-14: Exploring the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve — its River Islands, Wetlands and Nearby Tropical Lowland Sal Forest. We will awaken to a pre-dawn chorus of hooting Spotted Owlet or howling Golden Jackals, but the best of all are the resident pair of duetting Greater Coucal. Their deep resonant series of ten or so “hoop-hoop” initially descending then rising is truly magical. Our two days of exploration of this new rich tropical biome will include the following excursions; however, the exact order we will do them in will be flexible. One morning a pre-dawn departure is planned for driving to the nearby bank of the Koshi River, where we will meet our local boatman. He will paddle us across the river to an island in the lodge's large inflatable boat. Dawn colors will reflect off the water as we see our first delicate Small Pratincoles with their striking black and white underwings, and looking almost tern-like as they hunt for insects above the water and large sandbank. Taller grass stems hold striking White-tailed Stonechats as we scan the nearby field for the crepuscular large-eyed Indian Thick-knee. Meanwhile, we'll constantly keep an eye open in the skies for either hunting Red-necked Falcon or arriving florican coming into feed. The sandy borders and short grass of the island are home to a couple of pairs of unique looking Indian Coursers with their fancy head patterns and odd wing shape, seen when in flight. Following this nice introduction, we will concentrate on locating our main target, the critically endangered and spectacular Bengal Florican. Walking in the tall grass, we will begin to flush Bengal Bushlarks, and Richard's and Paddyfield pipits as we proceed in search of this magical bustard. This is the home to the only population in Nepal of the rare skulky Rufous-vented Grass Babbler (found here as a country first year ago by our guides). Also, one of the best of all cisticolas, the superb Golden-headed, amongst the commoner and much drabber Delicate and Plain cisticola. Shorter grass and ploughed areas have Oriental Skylarks who fill the air with their bubbling songs, and Sand Larks feed nearby on the fields. Here too we shall look for both migrant Mongolian and Hume's

Short-toed larks and any other interesting migrants too. During scouting on the island, we found a country first, a Green Warbler!



The striking Orange-headed Thrush © Andrew Whittaker

Koshi Camp, which comprises 10 acres of ponds, grassland and light woodland, was created 20 years ago specifically to attract birds and mammals and is a migrant trap. The lovely shaded grounds are great to bird. While scouting, we were blown away to record a migrant male Firethroat, a country first! Last year's trip we found a pair of Durian Starlings (a mega rarity)! Bird feeders can have Rufous Treepie, Jungle Babbler and even White-breasted Waterhen. The comfortable hide offers a profusion of life with colorful dragonflies and damselflies dancing over the water lilies in front of the blind. Bronze-winged Jacana are abundant; roosting Black-crowned Night Heron, Indian Pond Heron, White-throated Kingfisher and a pair of Ruddy-breasted Crake will give us a challenge to see. Trees on the banks could produce a hunting Shikra, singing Common Hawk-Cuckoo, stunning Black-hooded Oriole, and we even observed a stupendous Black Baza on the last trip. The wooded grounds have colorful Black-rumped Flameback,

Rufous and Streak-throated woodpeckers while confiding White-throated Fantail danced around the campsite. Roosting resident Spotted Owlet are a daily feature. Taller groves of trees hold Black-naped Monarch, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon and even a few migrant Thick-billed, Paddyfield or Dusky warbler or Blyth's Reed Warbler. We could be lucky to see the resident pair of striking Orange-headed Thrush.

Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve is Nepal's finest wetland reserve, and one of the best known in Asia. Its 175 square km were originally afforded protection to preserve the region's population of the endangered Wild Water Buffalo, but the reserve additionally protects a wealth of wetland, grassland and woodland mammals and birds. The eastern and western embankments of the Sapta Koshi River define the area and is one of the three main tributaries of the mighty Ganges. Rapid and intense flooding of the reserve occurs during the rainy monsoon season; however, embankments have been constructed parallel to the river to control the flooding to benefit locals and the wildlife. In 1987, the reserve was declared a Ramsar site, a wetland of international significance for its abundance of wildlife and large concentrations of migrant birds and big game. So rich in birdlife is this reserve that with little to no overlap from the Himalayan avifauna we will already have seen, we should expect to reach a decent 100+ species during our stay, together with a mix of exciting and rare animals.



A might male Asian Elephant seen on our inaugural trip. © Andrew Whittaker

The reserve is predominantly tall grasslands mixed with small patches of Khair-sissoo scrub forest and deciduous mixed riverine forest. We will enjoy observing animal species such as herds of Wild Buffalo, Hog Deer, Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, Blue Bull or Nilgai (an impressive antelope - the largest in Asia), Smooth-coated Otter, exquisite Bengal Fox, several mongoose species, Black Giant Squirrel, and with a good chance of even Asian Elephant (seen on our inaugural tour and during scouting).

A nearby dam on the Koshi even holds the rare Ganges River Dolphin! Another main attraction is a good population of the sought-after Swamp Francolin as well as the commoner and more widespread Black Francolin (though a future split is in the cards, eastern & western). We may be lucky and encounter some late straggling winter visitors such as some interesting raptors, waders or lovely Bar-headed Geese, or even a harrier species, possibly the striking Pied. Other birds of note we could see include Black Bittern, Black-headed Ibis, Asian Openbill, striking Black-necked Stork (rare), Indian Spotted Eagle (rare), Crested Serpent Eagle, Changeable Hawk Eagle, White-eyed Buzzard, and several vultures including the endangered White-rumped Vulture, which breed in small numbers. Black-winged Kite are common in grasslands, and river banks are favored by giant Mugger Crocodiles to sun themselves. Forests and shaded pools hold secretive Sirkeer Malkoha, Eurasian Sparrow Hawk, Lesser Coucal, Asian Palm Swift, Common Kingfisher, Large Cuckooshrike, Purple Sunbird, Common Iora, Brown Shrike and Long-tailed Shrike, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Great Myna or Red Avadavat, plus an exciting assortment of migrant warblers. We will be listening for the harsh calls of a late wintering Siberian Rubythroat;



**Cute and tiny, the Forest Owlet is a fierce predator.
© Andrew Whittaker**

ventbird.com

at this time of year the males will have their striking new ruby throats ready for breeding. The woods here hold a good number of cute diurnal Forest Owlet, which is fairly common and can sometimes be very confiding.



Breathtaking and dazzling Indian Roller
© Andrew Whittaker

Sandy, short grasslands along the river hold a good population of uncommon and stately long-legged Yellow-wattled Lapwing as well as Red-naped Ibis; both favor it as a good feeding area. Little Terns and Pied Kingfishers hover above the banks in search of a tasty fish. Stunning Citrine Wagtails chase insects on the grass while hundreds of breeding Small Pratincole breed on the pebbly and sandy areas. Rocky river shores hold pairs of Ruddy Shelduck and rocks are regularly lined with many migrant flocks of herons, egrets, cormorants, and possibly even the sought-after Pallas's Gull. We will look for Bank Myna or a late Blyth's Pipit amongst the resident odd-looking pale Sand Larks and sexually dimorphic Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark. Two stunners, the Asian Green Bee-eater and dazzling Indian Roller, often perched along a fence line, will win over our close attention.

We will also make an exciting early morning visit to a nearby rich Sal Forest bordering a dried river where another exciting set of birds awaits. Highlights possible here include the tiny Collared Falconet (smallest raptor in the world); sought-after cool-looking Black Baza; Crested Goshawk; Oriental Honey Buzzard; Asian Emerald Dove; Wedge-tailed or Yellow-footed green pigeon; Plum-headed Parakeet; Pied, Gray-bellied or Indian cuckoo; superb Dollarbirds; Lineated Barbet; Eurasian Wryneck; Gray-capped Pygmy Woodpecker; Rosy Minivet; Ashy Woodswallow; Indian Golden Oriole; Oriental Pied Hornbill; Golden-fronted Leafbird; and Brahminy Starling. One night we plan to go owling and do some mammal spotting nearby. Regular sightings of both nocturnal Palm and Indian Palm civets are made here as well as Fishing Cat. Resident owls include Indian Scops Owl and the odd Brown Hawk-Owl, which we often locate on its day time roost.

NIGHTS: Koshi Wildlife Camp, Bairawa

April 21, Day 15: Morning birding Barju Lake before our flight from Biratnagar onto Bharatpur via Kathmandu. This morning, birding the migrant trap that is Barju Lake before our short drive to Biratnagar airport for our morning flight with connections via Kathmandu onto Bharatpur our gateway into the magical and famous Chitwan National Park a World Heritage site & Ramsar site. Nepal's first park established in 1973 covering an area of 952.63 km² (367.81 sq mi) in the subtropical Inner Terai lowlands of south-central Nepal in Nawalpur, Chitwan, Makwanpur and Parsa Districts. Contiguous to the south across the border is the Indian Tiger Reserve Valmiki National Park. The coherent protected area of 2,075 km² (801 sq mi) represents the *Tiger Conservation Unit (TCU) Chitwan-Parsa-Valmiki*, which covers a 3,549 km² (1,370 sq mi) huge block of alluvial grasslands and subtropical moist deciduous forests. We will be picked up by our lodge and transferred to our delightful lodge. The park is a stronghold for both Mugger Crocodiles and endangered Gharial which we hope to see sunning themselves on the sand bars or on a relaxing afternoon boat trip.



Endangered Gharials © Andrew Whittaker

Finally arriving at our well positioned lodge is nestled within lush forests and provides an ideal place to explore the nearby National Park. Time allowing a late we will bird the rich forested gardens. A local pair of Crested Goshawks often nest here while lovely Orange-headed Thrush hunt for worms on the lawn as White- Puff-throated Babbler call from the scrub and with luck we could encounter a small flock of the delightful and localized Rufous-necked Laughingthrush. Spring is in the air and pairs of delightful Indian Paradise Flycatchers will be busy building nests or incubating.

NIGHT: Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge, Chitwan



Pair of Indian Paradise Flycatcher at nest in lodge gardens © Andrew Whittaker

April 22-25, Day 16-19: Four days exploring Chitwan National Park safari style. Nestled at the foot of the Himalayas Chitwan is one of the few remaining undisturbed vestiges of the 'Terai' region, and covers subtropical lowland, wedged between two east-west river valleys at the base of the Siwalik range of the outer Himalayas. This habitat formerly extended over the foothills of India and Nepal. Now the park constituting the largest and least disturbed example of Sal Forest and associated plant communities. Chitwan is thus an outstanding example of biological evolution with a unique assemblage of native flora and fauna. Understandably thus Chitwan has a

particularly rich flora and fauna being home to more than 50 mammal species, over 525 birds, and 55 amphibians and reptiles. We certainly will have our hands full during our four exciting days exploring this vast species rich park!

Daily big game Jeep Safaris into the park will be a treat driving through pristine Sal Forests exploring marshes, natural grassland clearings and rivers and their sandy banks and sand bars for a multitude of exciting mammals and of course many new tropical lowland birds. Some of the notable avian delights to look forward too may include; Black Baza; Changeable Hawk-Eagle; Crested Serpent- Eagle; Lesser and Gray-headed Fish-Eagle; Collared Falconet; Indian Peafowl; Red Junglefowl; Asian Woolly-necked Stork; Red-headed Trogon; Eurasian Hoopoe to magnificent Great Hornbill.



Great Hornbill © Shutterstock

Other colorful species include; Common Kingfisher; Blue-bearded Bee-eater; Dollarbird; Rosy Minivet to the Black-naped Oriole; Ashy Woodswallow; Pied and Gray-bellied Cuckoo; Large-tailed Nightjar; Black-crested Bulbul; White-rumped Shama; Crested Treeswift; Lineated and Brown-headed Barbet; Speckled and White-browed Piculet; Great Slaty Woodpecker (largest in the World) Greater Flameback; Greater Racket-tailed Drongo; Black-naped Monarch; Common Green Magpie; Sultan Tit; Yellow-eyed Jungle Babbler; Black-backed Forktail and the strikingly colorful seed eating Red Avadavat.

One morning we will enjoy visiting the nearby inaugural Vulture Restaurant a wonderful example of dedicated conservationists trying to save and bring back from the near extinction all of Nepal's vultures. Here vultures are deep in religious and spiritually ideas being significant important to Hindu mythology plus important scavengers cleaning up waste. Historically, these birds were once abundant, numbering in the millions and among the most

common in Asia. The region's vulture population was decimated when diclofenac, a drug administered to cattle, turned out to be highly toxic to vultures. This sudden demise of vultures had a sad knock-on effect due to being without nature's free sanitation services (vultures) pathogens spread into water supplies killing thousands of people. On a brighter note this constant feeding restaurant is having great success in local vulture populations and now is copied in many other Asian countries and slowly numbers are on the increase. From a blind we will enjoy close views of a feeding frenzy of several species including the extremely rare slender-billed, huge cinerous, white-rumped, Himalayan Griffon to the smaller red-headed and colorful Egyptian Vultures. Also learn more about this excellent project.



Slender-billed and White-rumped Vultures© Andrew Whittaker



Magnificent Bengal Tiger © Machiel Valkenberg

Large herds of attractive Spotted Deer are a common sight while both Samba and Barking Deer are found in smaller numbers also within the forest and clearings. Marshy areas are the preferred habitat for small groups of Hog Deer. A true abundance of undulates along with Wild Boar allow the park to hold a good number of the apex predator the huge Bengal Tiger that we hope to see.

These forests are also home to the massive Asian Elephants & Sloth Bear to Leopards, Clouded Leopards, marbled, Jungle and leopard Cats too. However, we will require a lot of luck to see any of these low-density predators. Both Rhesus and Tari Gray Langur are fairly commonly encountered on our safaris. Chitwan holds a very healthy population of spectacular Indian One Horned Rhino, in fact it's one of their strongholds and we certainly will enjoy observing these massive mega fauna. With a world population in Asia at only around only 4000 this park has 700 a significant reward to the conservation of this formidable beast and to the dedicated guards that patrol daily having stopped any poaching.



Indian One Horned Rhino © Andrew Whittaker

Certainly, one of the trip highlights will be our incredible afternoon bird walk with the gentle giants the Indian Elephants along with their mahouts to experience on foot close encounters with rhino in their favorite wallows near the lodge. Followed by a delightful drink on the river bank watching the sunset as the mahouts wash their beloved elephants. Having already had the pleasure of experiencing this excursion I can assure you it's a truly memorable experience that one will never forget!

NIGHTS: Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge, Chitwan

April 26, Day 20: Morning birding close by followed by transfer to Bharatpur onto Kathmandu connecting with homebound flights. Depending on our homebound international flight schedule, on arrival we will be either transferred the short distance by our ground agents to the international section of the airport, or met by a representative of the Gokarna Forest Resort for a transfer to overnight there. Airport transfers will be provided by Gokarna Forest Resort for homebound flights. If required, the VENT office will be happy to book an extra night at Gokarna Forest Resort, Kathmandu.

NIGHT: Aboard aircraft in transit to US

April 27, Day 21: Arriving home in the US.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 8 participants.

TOUR LEADER: Andrew Whittaker with the assistance of local guides.



Andrew Whittaker, began his birding passion at the early age of seven in the UK (thanks to his parents). Andy is also a true all-around naturalist with an innate fascination for all aspects of the natural world; he loves sharing in the field his intimate bird, wildlife, and orchid knowledge in a fun and enthusiastic manner. Andy is a qualified ringer/bander trained by the late Dr. Clive Minton (fondly known as the father of shorebird studies). His lifelong fascination with bird migration has seen Andy working around the globe at several top bird observatories: Eilat, Israel; Long Point, Canada; and in the UK at Sandwich Bay and on Fair Isle, Scotland, as well as researching shorebirds in Borneo on their East Asian flyway. A senior member of the VENT staff, Andy has led VENT tours worldwide since 1993, from dense South and Central American rainforests to the great white continent of Antarctica, and throughout Europe to the deserts of the Middle East. More recently, he has led tours in the bird-rich rainforests of West Africa to the mammal-rich savannas of East Africa, and to observe the cute Red Panda or exotic tragopan in the Himalayas of Nepal. Andy was born in England; however, he considers himself Brazilian, having lived more than 30 years in this mega biodiverse country, first working for the Smithsonian Institution, studying Amazonian rainforest birds in Manaus. He is widely considered an authority on Amazonian birds, having authored numerous technical publications on the region's avifauna. Andy is also well recognized for his intimate knowledge of South American avian taxonomy and bird vocalizations, with over 800 hours of bird recordings housed in the British Library Sound Archive. This trait has enabled him to discover several exciting new bird species (such as the Cryptic Forest-Falcon in 2002), as well as rediscover others thought to be extinct. Andy is an excellent communicator and calm tour organizer and loves nothing better than finding and sharing a rare, poorly-known skulker, or telling one of his many fascinating and fun birding and travel stories. His enthusiasm in the field is contagious, and these traits have made him a favored leader amongst participants. Andy had the honor of working with Sir David Attenborough in Brazil as a consultant for the prestigious BBC Life of Birds series. At present, Andy is working with Kevin Zimmer on a comprehensive field guide to the birds of Brazil to be published by Princeton University Press. Andy is an associate researcher at the Museum Goeldi, Belem; an active conservationist; and loves photography (with many of his bird images being used in books). He is also an avid football fan of Birmingham City FC and Real Madrid due to its worldwide mega star Jude Bellingham coming from his home team. Andy lives in Porto Alegre, Southern Brazil with his partner, Jaqueline, and their many orchids.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for this tour is **\$13,595** per person in double occupancy from Kathmandu. This includes all meals from lunch on Day 2 to dinner on Day 19. Tour fees include accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, internal airfare, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Kathmandu or return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$2,569**. **NOTE: Single rooms cannot be guaranteed at Habre's Nest (Days 5-11). Depending on the make-up of the group, we may have to mix sexes. If a single room is not available, this portion of the single supplement will be refunded.**

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for each section is **\$1,000** per person. A second deposit of **\$3,000** is due 210 days prior to departure (September 9, 2024).

If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 150 days prior to the tour departure date (November 8, 2024).

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: The Nepal's Himalayan & Tropical Lowland Paradise tour visit's remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may **NOT** be available. **For this reason, travel insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this main tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Through Ripcord, "emergency evacuation" can be purchased as a stand-alone benefit or as part of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. If you choose not to purchase insurance through Ripcord, you are required to obtain it through another provider.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:

Cancellation by Participant:

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 210 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 209 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. **For participants' protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant's refund will be:</u>
210 days or more before departure date	Participant's deposit(s) minus \$500*
209 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months from the date of participant tour cancellation, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Cancellation by VENT:

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A "**Force Majeure**" event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or

regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

TRAVEL INSURANCE: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with Redpoint Travel Protection as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend their **Ripcord** plan. Designed for all types of travelers, Ripcord is among the most comprehensive travel protection programs available. Critical benefits of Ripcord include a completely integrated program with a single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims; **medical evacuation and rescue services** from your point of injury or illness to your **hospital of choice**; comprehensive travel insurance for **trip cancellation/interruption**, primary medical expense coverage, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as security evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or other security events, **waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion**, and a **“Cancel for Any Reason”** benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote, or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 14 days of making your tour deposit. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, mid-payment, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 14 days in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. The primary medical expense benefit is available to U.S. residents only. For this reason, non-U.S. residents will pay an adjusted premium when purchasing a comprehensive policy, which includes all of the other benefits available to U.S. residents. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

Concerns about COVID-19 may present uncertainty for those holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint features a **Coronavirus FAQ page** on its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ** page at the following link:
https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

Additionally, some countries maintain COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and in case of quarantine. Ripcord’s comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry

requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a “letter of confirmation” that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler’s consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

BAGGAGE: The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your airline to find out specific weight restrictions. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government’s attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>.

CLOTHING: Casual is the order of the day. Hard wearing, easy to wash-and-dry field clothes are ideal. No laundry service is available at Habre’s Nest. Participants are advised to bring as many clothes with them as they need to stay warm in cold early morning and night temperatures. Participants should bring layers rather than one or two large items. Sturdy, rainproof jackets are strongly recommended, in addition to a warm sweater and warm jacket or vest (down or synthetic).

Other items that are recommended include a warm head-covering such as a fleece or knit hat, or balaclava, in addition to a regular birding hat, gloves and scarf or neck gaiter. Many of our participants have found silk, wool or synthetic thermal long underwear very handy for the cool nights and early mornings. You may not need all of this cold-weather gear, but it is far better to be prepared in case you should.

Note the lowlands of Koshi are warm; sandals and shorts are good to pack.

Sunglasses are very useful (occasionally essential) at higher elevations. Thick socks that absorb perspiration and cushion one’s feet from hard surfaces are important. It is also useful if the socks are long enough so that the bottom of your pants can be tucked inside your socks.

Special Note: Please, absolutely no bright colors for your field gear. THANKS. Although the birds and other wildlife are relatively approachable, we will be trying to see a number of very elusive species. Muted colors are essential to enhance our chances. Please do not wear brightly colored clothes, hats, gloves, bags, or other paraphernalia. Furthermore, if you can avoid crackling nylon/plastic jackets and pants, this will greatly enhance everyone's enjoyment of the trip and enable the leader to hear those critical, but so easily overlooked, subtle call notes of the birds you want to see.

FOOTWEAR: Sturdy hiking boots are essential; sneakers or sports type shoes are not appropriate, as the ground will be wet at times. Wellington (rubber) boots are not really necessary if your hiking boots are rated "water-resistant," and add a lot of extra weight to your baggage, but you may choose to bring them. While in the lowlands, sandals are good to have.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS: This very special Himalayan tour will provide the best foothill forest birding from a comfortable onsite lodge. However, it will be undoubtedly intensive in the sense that every day we will be in the field, often walking at a leisurely pace on some narrow rocky trails with some elevational climbs and sometimes off trail to observe Red Pandas through bamboo. Searching for Red Pandas can sometimes require a physically strenuous hike off-trail through bamboo, while other times they may have very close sightings along hiking trails or near the road.

Birding walks are not too strenuous and not really any elevation gain, only a few hundred feet; maximum length a couple of miles. Daybreak is around 5:30 a.m. at this time of year, and we will therefore have very early starts (often at 5:00 or 5:30) in order to catch the best of the early morning birding. This is often THE time to see such spectacular pheasants as Satyr Tragopan and Blood Pheasants showing well. Lunch will be a leisurely time, mostly at the lodge; however, on a few days we may have a picnic lunch in the field. These are very enjoyable affairs with often a view to die for and always birds to see. We will of course certainly concentrate on the specialties, but so few are the opportunities to see many Himalayan birds elsewhere that most species will be "specialties" for most participants, and we will enjoy them all. At some moments we will hear many species but it will take quite some patience and time to finally get an open view of those difficult to see species. On the other hand, the birding can be overwhelming as well with flocks containing up to 30 species of birds in one singular flock!

ACCOMMODATIONS: Habre's Nest is a very small and exclusive property. Rooms are comfortable with en suite bathrooms with hot and cold running water. Please note that Habre's Nest is located at a high altitude of 3,000 meters above sea level. Singles may be asked to share. Depending on the make-up of the group, while uncommon, we may have to mix sexes. Accommodations at Koshi Camp are clean and simple, much like African safari style tented camps. Everyone has their own private, basic bathroom facilities and a fan to keep temperatures pleasant. At Chitwan Lodge nice spacious rooms with private bathrooms and fans.

ALTITUDE: We will be birding most days ascending gradually from our lodge at 9,000 feet. However, we will drive up to a couple of the higher passes and enjoy exciting higher altitudinal species at a maximum of 11,000 feet, and we will plan our activities with the thin air in mind (e.g., mostly birding gentle slopes or down the road). There may be a few optional, short, energetic activities, but those who don't undertake these will still be in the midst of birds. Most ascents will be by vehicle, and we will then work a given area by walking downhill; however, there will be rare times when we may opt to walk uphill in search of something that is calling. We will almost always be along a road on easy grades. Koshi area is in the lowlands.

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all

medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

Coronavirus (COVID-19):

Concerns about COVID-19 may present uncertainty for those holding travel insurance policies or who are considering future travel and purchasing such insurance. Redpoint features a **Coronavirus FAQ page** on its website that addresses questions and concerns regarding its travel insurance and the impact of COVID-19. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of topics such as policy coverage and limitations, policy modifications, cancellation, refunds, and more.

Please visit the **Coronavirus FAQ page** at the following link:

https://redpointtravelprotection.com/covid_19_faq/

Additionally, some countries maintain COVID-19 entry requirements, including mandates to purchase travel insurance covering medical expenses due to COVID-19 illness and in case of quarantine. Ripcord's comprehensive travel insurance plans are designed to satisfy the various country-specific travel insurance entry requirements. Those who purchase a Ripcord policy will receive a "letter of confirmation" that affirms that the policy satisfies such requirements.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

LAUNDRY SERVICE: There is no laundry service at Habre's Nest but its available at Koshi Camp, Chitwan and in Kathmandu. (And ecologically it is not good for the environment to use detergents at the remote Habre's Nest site).

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip:

- **A small backpack/daypack** – good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all excursions.
- **Flashlight or head lamp**
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Umbrella: The collapsible type is easy to carry and useful both against any rain and sun**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – a highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking
- **Folding stool** – a recommended item for those who have trouble standing for more than 10 or 15 minutes at a time. The typical folding stool is small, lightweight and portable, consisting of three aluminum legs connected by a central bolt, with a sturdy but pliable material seat.
- **Tissue packs**
- **Extra pairs of glasses or contact lenses**

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like "minis" because they are

small and lightweight, but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light-gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes – Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

Camera: You should bring all of the camera equipment, batteries, and digital storage media that you will need. Nearly everyone brings too few batteries and too little digital storage media, and this causes some distress. Note batteries can be recharged at Habre’s Nest at night when the generator is on. PLEASE bring loads (we cannot emphasize this enough). UV and polarizing filters are recommended, especially at higher elevations where glare can be a problem. Plastic bags are very useful to protect equipment from rain and dust. **A really good flashlight or headlamp is essential**, so please ensure that yours is in good working order and that you have spare bulbs and batteries. A spare flashlight or headlamp may come in handy. Couples should bring one flashlight or headlamp each.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: This trip will take place during the early spring, when the weather should be delightful; however, participants should be prepared with cold weather clothing for cool nights and early morning temperatures. (See CLOTHING section.)

For birding around Kathmandu, daytime temperatures will be warm and pleasant, with the lower elevation slightly warmer than our Himalayan foothills base at Habre’s Nest. The time of our visit coincides with spring, which in general should offer us a delightful climate. However, we will encounter a wide range of temperatures from day to night. Often a jacket will be required in early morning or at night. Also—in these mid elevations of Singalila National Park—weather can change quickly, sometimes with cool winds or a little fog. Temperatures should range from daytime highs in the mid-60’s, down to the low 40’s at night. Our rooms have good insulation and individual heating, and hot water bottles are provided for nighttime comfort as well. So, for weather, be prepared for sunny days but cold and damp early morning (maybe). There is a slight possibility of even some late snow falls, and almost certainly a little rain. There may also be occasional hot conditions with very bright sunshine, which typically in the mountains (because of the increased radiation) causes sunburn more readily than one often realizes.

Our birding in Koshi and Chitwan National Park is much warmer than in the Himalayas by 5-10 degrees during the day and so can get hot. However, it cools off well at night. Safari tours on our jeeps during in the early morning or late evening will be cool and a jacket most certainly will be required.

EXTRAS: Credit cards are not accepted at Habre’s Nest, so please bring cash. US\$ is accepted for any alcoholic drinks or souvenirs; as well as **Nepalese Rupee** or **Indian Rupee**. **At Kathmandu and Koshi Camp, credit cards can be used.**

MISCELLANEOUS:

Electricity – Nepal uses 220 volts, 50 cycles, AC. Electricity will be available for charging your batteries at all lodgings, although at Habre’s Nest it is only provided at night by generator. At Koshi Camp electricity is available from approximately 5:00-11:00 p.m.

Internet – Wi-Fi connections are available in Kathmandu, Koshi Camp and at Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge. However, in case of an emergency, Habre’s Nest can only offer very poor and limited Wi-Fi only. Cell phone connections are generally reliable, sometimes even in surprising places in the countryside.

Language –The official language is Nepali.

Currency – Nepalese Rupee. The Indian currency is called the Rupee. Rupee (Rs); Currency can only be changed at banks or authorized money changers. Participants are advised to carry sufficient cash in US dollars.

This can be changed into rupees at airports or major hotels. Automatic teller machines that are compatible with American banking systems are not readily available in India. Participants need to bring enough cash to cover alcoholic beverages, laundry and perhaps shopping expenses.

Time – 10 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Snacks – It is advisable to bring some protein or granola-type bars, dried fruit and nuts or other snacks, as snacks are not always available. Most of our meals will be traditional Nepali style (adapted to our western likings) and you may find yourself wanting a little extra variety at times.

Insect Repellents – Thankfully, there should be hardly any insects. You may bring insect repellent, however, just in case, to deal with the odd occasion that we encounter mosquitos (actually, they are almost completely lacking). Leeches are NOT found.

There are insect repellents for the skin and an insect repellent used to treat clothing that should not be applied to the skin.

Insect repellents for the skin are commonly available in three forms:

- DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide): A chemical compound that is marketed under various brand names (OFF![®], Cutter[™], Ultrathon[™], etc.) and offered in a variety of formulations including sprays, lotions, time-release preparations, and disposable wipes. The formulations will state a percentage of the active ingredient DEET on the packaging. DEET may be applied to exposed skin directly and/or sprayed on clothing. Please be careful when applying DEET as it can damage plastics and lens coatings.
- Picaridin: A synthetic formulation that is derived from piperine, a substance found in plants that produce black pepper.
- Herbal insect repellents: Various mixtures of organic ingredients such as oils from eucalyptus, citronella, cedar, and other herbs. The herbal repellents are more difficult to categorize because of the difference in ingredients from one brand to another. There is considerable variation in their effectiveness.

An insect repellent for clothing is marketed in one approved formulation:

- Permanone[®] (Permethrin) is an odorless spray-on repellent that may be used for **pre-treatment** of clothing, gear, and tents. It should not be used directly on the skin or sprayed on clothing while it is being worn. The pre-treatment process requires a number of hours to complete and must be done outdoors, so is best completed in advance of travel. Do-it-yourself pre-treatment has to be repeated more often than commercial treatment using Insect Shield[®] technology. It is available at various outdoor stores and can easily be found online.
- Insect Shield[®] apparel: Clothing pre-treated with Permanone is made by a variety of manufacturers. It is available for purchase from some sporting goods suppliers. The clothing is advertised as retaining its repellency for up to 70 washings.

The US EPA offers a search tool to help choose a repellent that is best for a particular situation. For example, some repellents work for mosquitoes, but not for ticks.

<https://www.epa.gov/insect-repellents/which-insect-repellent-right-you>

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date, with at least one blank page, is required for United States citizens to enter Nepal.

IMPORTANT BOTH A NEPAL & INDIAN tourist visa are required due to Habre's Nest being right on the boarder and must be obtained prior to departure. The online application website is:

<http://online.nepalimmigration.gov.np/tourist-visa>

Indian visa can be obtained online through the Indian government's website (<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/>) or Travel Document Systems (<https://www.traveldocs.com/> on the web or 888-838-4867 by phone), a company which handles visa procurement. Non-United States citizens should check with your local Indian consulate embassy for instructions.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport. Keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage**.

SUGGESTED READING: A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend www.amazon.com which has a wide selection; www.buteobooks.com and www.nhbs.com which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and www.abebooks.com for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

Birds:

Grimmet, Richard and Carol and Tim Inskipp, **Birds of India: Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, Second Edition, 2012. It covers all of the birds we are likely to see.

Merlin Bird ID. Online app for your phone with photos, maps and voices all at hand in the Argentina packet. Download from App store. Excellent to take with you into the field!

Beebe, W. **Pheasant Jungles**. Reading: World Pheasant Association, 1994. An interesting general read as we will be targeting some of the greatest species: Blood, Kaliji and incomparable Satyr Tragopan!

Mammals:

Gurung, K.K. and Raj Singh. **Field Guide to the Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent**. Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 1998.

Reptiles:

Daniel, J.C. **The Book of Indian Reptiles and Amphibians**. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Whittaker, R. and Captain, A. **Snakes of India the Field Guide**. Tamil Nadu: Draco Books, 2004.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurant staff, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip these can be in US\$. We emphasize that tips are not expected and are entirely optional. Tips should be given directly to your tour leader; they should not be sent to the VENT office.

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT: Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "**VENT**") act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed

necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e., railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on July 25, 2024, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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05/09/24-AW
07/26/24-PN/SB