



Bhutan: Birds, Culture, and Natural History

November 7-26, 2016

Price: \$7,100 from Bangkok, Thailand

Single Supplement: \$500

High in the majestic eastern Himalayas and nestled between Tibet and India, sits the small Kingdom of Bhutan, increasingly renowned as one of the planet's precious, unspoiled spots. In this mountain Kingdom, an intact Buddhist culture is integrated into every aspect of daily life set amid spectacular mountain scenery, pristine forests and picturesque valleys. The breathtaking landscape is dotted with fluttering prayer flags, colorful farmhouses amidst terraced fields, and impressive monasteries clinging to impossible cliffs.

This shining cultural gem is also a birder's paradise. Over 60 percent of the country is forested, and unlike other Himalayan countries, much of Bhutan's original forest remains intact. As a result, Bhutan lies in an area designated as one of the world's ten biodiversity hotspots. Its wide altitudinal range—from sub-tropical lowlands to alpine peaks—provides an array of climatic conditions and habitats, from sub-tropical jungles to temperate forests and tundra that support over 650 bird species. The diversity of bird life in Bhutan is further augmented by numerous migrating species that pass through Bhutan on their travels north and south. For these reasons, Bhutan's bird list includes some of the rarest and most sought after species in the eastern Himalayas. Thirty-four species of birds classed as threatened or near threatened are found in Bhutan, including the high elevation Black-necked Crane and the critically endangered White-bellied Heron. Because of Bhutan's progressive forest conservation practices many of these species still thrive in Bhutan and can be found easier here than elsewhere in their range.

In addition to having an astonishing diversity of bird life in a country no larger than Switzerland, Bhutan is home to at least 165 species of mammals, including Golden Langur, Leopard, Rhinoceros and Asian Elephant in the lowlands; Red Panda, Himalayan Black Bear and Musk Deer in the middle-elevation forests; and Snow Leopard and Takin on alpine meadows. Although very rarely seen, Tigers might be found anywhere from the base of the foothills to above tree line. The diversity of Bhutan's flora is no less impressive. More than 600 orchid species (including at least 50 that are endemic), 46 species of rhododendrons (four endemic), and more than 300 species of medicinal plants are found within its borders.

During our expedition we will see a wide variety of birds, wildlife, and scenic wonders. Our walks and drives will take us through virgin forests, across high open pastures, to Bhutan's most extensive high-elevation wetland, as well as to mountain villages and monasteries. Throughout the tour we'll occasionally stop to visit the impressive goembas (monasteries), dzongs (the monastery/fortresses that serve as Bhutan's administrative and religious centers), lhakhangs (temples), and chortens (stupas) that are important features of Bhutan's religion and culture, both past and present. We'll have opportunities to enjoy traditional Bhutanese arts and crafts, which represent Bhutan's living heritage, and reflect the culture's spiritual and intellectual life. Surrounding us at every turn will be examples of Bhutan's distinctive architecture with its traditional shapes, colorful patterns, outrageous "motifs," and an unmatched combination of engineering skill and aesthetic beauty.

ITINERARY

Day 1 November 7: Arrival in Bangkok and pre-trip meeting

We will hold a pre-trip meeting in the lobby of our hotel in Bangkok, Thailand on the evening of November 7th to make sure everyone made it this far, answer last minute questions, and plan our departure for the airport the next morning. Exact time of the meeting TBA.

Day 2, November 8: Arrive Paro and drive to Thimphu.

Our flight to Paro leaves Bangkok early, around 7 AM. The flight may make a brief stop en route in Dacca, Bodhgaya or Kolkatta. We'll arrive in Paro, Bhutan mid to late morning. Upon arrival in Paro you will immediately be struck by the transparent purity of the air. After Immigration and Customs formalities, we'll be welcomed by our local host and guide and drive the two hours to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. Leaving the airport we will see our trip's first birds: Gray-backed Shrike, White Wagtail, and Hodgson's Redstart. A little further into our drive we will stop along the Paro Chhu (River). Some of the birds we may encounter here include Ibisbill, Brown Dipper, Ruddy Shelduck and River Lapwing.

During our afternoon in and around Thimphu, we may visit the slopes above the town to see the Takin, Bhutan's national mammal, and a few other Himalayan mammals in captivity, while birding the forested surroundings. Kalij Pheasant is possible on the slopes above town.

Overnight at hotel, Thimphu (2,320m/7,656 ft).

Day 3, November 9: Morning: Birding Dodena Valley; Afternoon: Drive to Punakha

Like Paro, the Thimphu valley is relatively dry and is surrounded by blue pine forests. But to the north of Thimphu city is the valley of Dodena, part of the Jigme Dorji National Park. Here the vegetation consists mainly of evergreen oak forest with bamboo. With an early departure we may encounter Assamese Macaques, Gray Langurs and even Goral (a small brown, native goat), as well as many birds, such as Crested Kingfisher, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Spotted Nutcracker, and Great Barbet. We'll stop at a place with rock-bee hives hanging from a cliff to look for the rare Yellow-rumped Honeyguide feeding on the honeycomb.

After lunch we'll drive to the subtropical valley of Punakha. The drive will take us through blue pine forests and as we ascend the vegetation gradually changes to higher elevation conifers. We'll make our first stop at the Dochu La Pass (3,050 m/10,004 ft) where on a clear day, the view of the Himalayas, including Gangkar Puensum (7,541 m/24,734 ft), the world's highest unclimbed peak, is breathtaking. Dochu La is one of the most spectacular spots in Bhutan with its 108 chortens beautifully laid out across the mountaintop, prayer flags fluttering from the towering pine trees, and the high Himalaya in the distance. The lovely Fire-tailed Myzornis is a distinct possibility, along with an assortment of tit & warbler species, minlas, and fulvetas.

From Dochu La we'll continue driving east and down in elevation to the town of Wangdue Phodrang (also called Wangdi) on the banks of the Punak Tsang Chhu, then from Wangdi we turn north and drive a short distance to the town of Punakha. The road descends through a temperate broadleaf forest and then through a semi-tropical zone where banana, orange trees, and cactus are found.

Overnight in Hotel, Punakha (1,250 m/4,125 ft)

Day 4, November 10: Punakha

This morning, we will drive along the Puna Tsang Chhu (River) all the way up to Tsekha village to seek out one of the world's rarest birds, the White-bellied Heron. Another spectacular and globally threatened species that is occasionally sighted along this river is Pallas's Fish Eagle. From our turn around point we'll bird our way back to Bhutan's longest suspension footbridge (the world's second longest) and walk across the bridge to the Punakha Dzong.

Originally known as Pungthang Dechhen Phodrang, (The Palace of Great Bliss) Punakha Dzong was built in 1637 by the Great Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the Unifier of Bhutan. The Dzong has been destroyed several times by floods, fire and earthquake, but it has always been rebuilt to its original grandeur, and the latest renovation was completed in 2004. The wood and metallic works are superb, not to mention the fantastic sculptures. We will spend the rest of the day birding along the Mo Chhu River in the forest of the Jigme Dorji National Park. Bar-headed Geese, Ruddy Shelduck, and Crested Kingfisher are all possible along the river.

Overnight in hotel, Punakha (1,250 m/4,125 ft)

Day 5, November 11: Punakha to Tsirang

Today we'll mainly be birding in a sub-tropical region. From our hotel, we will drive south along the Puna Tsang Chhu (Punakha River), crossing through farmlands, hydropower construction sites and sparse forests of chir pine. On this drive, we again have a chance of seeing the White-bellied Heron and the Pallas's Fish Eagle. Another big bird to be on the lookout for is the Great Hornbill. About mid way through today's drive we enter the Tsirang region. This region has only recently been opened to tourism and it is here that the north literally meets the south. The people from southern Bhutan are mostly of Nepalese origins and at Tsirang the culture is a mixture of the two ethnic groups. We'll also get our first chance at some of the southern Bhutan avifauna. We will continue past the town of Tsirang and camp at a site called Darachu, on the way to Gelephu.

Overnight in tented camp at Darachu (2,000 m/6,600 ft)

Day 6, November 12: Darachu to Gelephu

Today we descend through cool broadleaf forests to the tropical region of Gelephu, but before leaving Darachu we'll bird the rich forests along the road as we look for the much sought after Beautiful Nuthatch. Other possibilities here include Dark-throated Thrush, Lesser Necked-laced Laughingthrush, Lesser and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos, and Lesser and Greater Yellow-naped Woodpeckers. We'll spend plenty of time birding in this pristine forest until we arrive in the Plains of Sarpang. From Sarpang, we'll drive through the flattest region of Bhutan. The 20 mile stretch of road will provide us the best opportunity to add the birds typical of the Indian Plains to our list. The possibilities include, Black-headed and Maroon Orioles, Indian Roller, Jungle Babbler, Hill and Jungle Mynas, four species of parrot, Red-collared Dove, Indian Pond-Heron, Wreathed, Pied Hornbill, and Great Hornbill, Red Junglefowl, Indian Peafowl, and Flame-backed Woodpecker. Gelephu is the main town in the district of Sarpang and one of the three main entry points into Bhutan from India.

Overnight hotel, Gelephu (230 m/770 ft)

Day 7, November 13: Gelephu to Tingtibi Camp

After spending the early morning birding the borderland plains around Gelephu, we say goodbye to the southern lowlands and ascend towards the District of Zhemgang. The drive through the broadleaf forest is not

only beautiful but is rich with bird life. We will be driving mostly up hill with occasional birding stops and the last two hour drive is downhill until we arrive in Tingtibi at 540 m/ 1780 ft. We'll spend two nights in Tingtibi.

Overnight at a camp near Tingtibi (540 m/1,780 ft)

Day 8, November 14: Tingtibi

Today we bird the rich forests and riparian zones of the Tingtibi area. Here we have a chance to find Lesser and Greater Rufous-headed, Grey-throated, and Black-throated Parrotbill, Collared Falconet, White-hooded Babbler, Red-faced Liocichla, Blue-winged, Laughingthrush, Common Green Magpie, Pallas's Fish Eagle, and Himalayan Cutia. In addition to the bird life, we will be in the range of the Golden Langur, a beautiful and rare near-endemic primate of Bhutan.

Overnight at Tingtibi Camp (540 m/1,780 ft)

Day 9, November 15: Tingtibi to Trongsa

Today, we leave for Trongsa. If we have yet to find Beautiful Nuthatch, we'll have one last chance this morning at a site near Tingtibi. Besides the varied bird life, it will be difficult not to notice the diversity of butterflies that accompany us along our route. Our drive will eventually descend into the valley floor at Langthel, where we begin to wind our way up through the terraced rice farms towards Kuenga Rapten. These picturesque rice fields were carved out of the steep slopes during the time of the third King (1926-1952).

From Kuenga Rapten, we continue on to Trongsa. Time permitting, we may be able to arrange a tour to the dzong. Because of its strategic location in the center of the country the governor of Trongsa controlled the movement between east and the west and collected taxes from the people passing through, which made the rulers of Trongsa always the most powerful in Bhutan. It was from this dzong that the current royal family rose to prominence. The original dzong dates back to 16th century. Because the Trongsa Dzong is built on a very narrow ridge, its courtyards are much less spacious than those of the other dzongs, and one is more conscious of the buildings' thick and battered walls, and their sculptural forms. It is every bit as impressive from inside as from outside.

Overnight in hotel, Trongsa (2,000 m/6,560 ft)

Day 10, November 16: Trongsa to Bumthang

Today, we leave for the rich agricultural region of Bumthang, an area consisting of four rich river valleys. Above Trongsa the road climbs through many switchbacks as it passes through a misty forest of rhododendrons, silver fir, and bamboo on the way to Yotong La Pass (3,425 m/11,234 ft). Soon after the pass, the forest transitions to the blue pines characteristic of Bumthang. En route we'll look for Great Parrotbill and Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler, and with luck we may encounter several species of pheasant.

After about 30 minutes of driving through the pine forest, we'll arrive at Gyetsa, at the upper end of the Chhume Valley, the first of Bumthang's four major valleys. After driving through Gyetsa, we'll arrive at Zungney in the Chhume valley where we'll visit a small shop where locals weave yathra, Bumthang's famous handspun, hand-woven, and boldly patterned woolen cloth. We hope to arrive early enough to take in a tsechu, or festival at a local dzong. Each dzong hosts an annual tsechu. These celebrations are well attended by locals, with some traveling very long distance to attend, and offer a fascinating look at the rich cultural heritage of Bhutan.

Overnight in hotel, Bumthang region (2,575 m/8,448 ft)

Day 11, November 17: Bumthang to Yongkola

Shortly after leaving our hotel, we'll arrive at the junction of the newly constructed by-pass road to Ura, which is another of the four major valleys of the Bumthang district. Here, flocks of Snow Pigeons are frequently sighted in the valley foraging in the farmlands. We'll continue on from the village of Ura back into mountains and if the skies are clear we should be able to get fantastic views Gangkar Puensum, the highest unclimbed peak in the world.

Today's drive is often hailed as one of the most spectacular in the world. It will take us through magnificent forests, prayer flags waving in the breeze, countless waterfalls, and villages that seem to be frozen in time. Eastern Bhutan is more remote than the western regions and many of the villages we pass through appear as if they've remained unchanged for centuries. Thrumsing La pass (3,700 m/12,435 ft) marks the official entrance to Eastern Bhutan. The possibilities of birds in this area include the gorgeous Fire-tailed Sunbird, Blood Pheasant, Himalayan Monal, Satyr Tragopan, Red-headed Bullfinch, Collared and White-winged Grosbeak, and Rusty-flanked and Eurasian Treecreeper. From the pass we'll travel through a wonderland of moss-draped trees and into the village of Sengor. As we descend through these spectacular temperate forests, the bird and plant diversity only increases. Within a matter of hours we will have descended over 5000 feet of elevation.

Overnight at Trogon Villa, Yongkola (1,700 m/5,576 ft)

Day 12-13, November 18 and 19: Yongkola

We'll spend two full days birding Yongkola, one of the richest birding sites in all of Asia. Specialties in the Yongkola region include: Ward's and Red-headed Trogon, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Hill Partridge, Speckled Wood Pigeon, Sultan and Yellow-cheeked tit, and Chestnut-headed, Slaty-bellied and Gray-bellied Tesia, among many, many others

Overnight at Trogon Villa, Yongkola (1,700 m/5,576 ft)

Day 14, November 20: Yongkola to Bumthang

Today we back-track to the Bumthang region with the occasional stop for birds, mammals, and scenery. If we haven't yet found a Ward's Trogon, we'll make a final attempt before leaving the Yongkola region. Since today is roughly the reverse of Day 11, we'll have another chance for clear skies and magnificent views in Thrumsingla Pass.

Overnight at a hotel in Chhume, Bumthang (2,575 m/8,448 ft)

Day 15, November 21: Bumthang to Phobjika Valley

We'll leave our hotel before dawn to drive to a site at about 12,000 feet with the hope of seeing the majestic Himalayan Monal. Other high elevation species possible this morning are Dark-rumped, White-browed, and Beautiful Rosefinch, White-collared Grosbeak, Snow Pigeon and Dark-throated Thrush.

After our morning foray we'll return to the hotel to check out and begin the long drive to Pele la pass. We will back-track until Trongsa and from Trongsa the road will be new for the trip. After about half an hour on this road we come to a viewpoint offering excellent views of the Trongsa valley with its massive Dzong across the depths of the Mangde Chhu gorge. After another hour we will be driving parallel to the eastern slope of the Black Mountains, with wonderful views of the trackless old-growth forests.

Our drive ends after turning south on a side road we enter the Phobjikha valley. Passing Yaks grazing on dwarf bamboo, we descend into this beautiful wide, glacial valley which is the winter home of the Black-necked Cranes. Phobjikha is a designated conservation area which lies adjacent to Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park. Because of the presence of the large flock of Black-necked Cranes that winters in the valley—about 260 of them—Phobjikha is one of the most important wildlife preserves in Bhutan. The first cranes arrive from Tibet in late October, and by early November their numbers will have increased to between 100 and 150.

While today's drive is long, we'll make a few stops to stretch our legs and hopefully add a few species to our trip. The mountain and forest scenery along the way is simply stunning.

Overnight in hotel, Phobjikha (2909 m/9,600 ft)

Day 16, November 22: Phobjikha Valley and Pele La Pass

Today we will rise early to bird at Pele La pass (11,286 ft), departing in the dark for the 30 minute drive to the pass. Pele La's old backroad, contouring along the steep slopes through towering fir trees with panoramic views of the Himalaya, is a great place to look for Himalayan Monal and other high elevation species. We'll spend much of the morning birding around the Pele La and enjoying the incredible scenery and great birding. Be on the lookout for the Great and Brown Parrotbill, Himalayan Monal, Collared Grosbeak, and Darjeeling Woodpeckers.

We'll return to Phobjikha for a mid-day rest and an afternoon hike into the valley of the wintering Black-necked Cranes. This three-mile from the village, is a picturesque walk through farms and undisturbed forest to a site overlooking the glacial valley where cranes return each evening to roost.

Near dusk, we'll sit quietly along the forest edge watching these majestic cranes spiral down into the valley's wetland to roost for the night, a thrill of a lifetime. Hen Harriers, Snow Pigeons and Short-eared Owls and other open country birds may also be seen. We'll continue our hike across the valley where we'll meet our bus for a ride to our accommodations.

Overnight in hotel, Phobjikha (2909 m/9,600 ft)

Day 17, November 23: Phobjikha to Dochu La

Today we make our way from Phobjikha back to Pele La pass and head west, descending until the bridge below the Wangdue Dzong to arrive at the point where we turned south on Day 2. We're in familiar territory once again. If we missed White-bellied Heron on the way through we can make another attempt today and look for wintering waterfowl and shorebirds along the river. We'll stop at the spectacular Dochu La pass for the night.

Overnight at the Dochu La Hotel (3,100 m/10,000 ft)

Day 18, November 24: Dochu La to Paro, with a visit to the Tiger's Nest Monastery

We'll rise early to watch the sunrise over the Himalayas and bird around the hotel. After an early breakfast, we descend towards Thimphu, continue on to Paro, and drive straight to the trailhead for our afternoon hike up to the Taktsang, the famous Tiger's Nest Monastery. Tiger's Nest is Bhutan's most famous monument, and one of the most venerated pilgrimage sites in the Himalayas. It is perched on the side of a cliff 900 m/2,950 ft above the floor of the Paro valley. The steep hike climbs to a tea house just across a cleft in the cliff from the Tiger's Nest. We will continue on from the teahouse, down and up about 4,000 steps past a waterfall and

into the monastery. Taktsang, which means “Tiger’s Lair”, is so called because Guru Rinpoche, who introduced Buddhism to Bhutan, is said to have arrived at the site (where he meditated in a cave for three months) in a miraculous manner—flying on the back of a tigress. In 1998, a fire of unknown origin destroyed the main structure of Taktsang, but it has since been rebuilt, with traditional materials and techniques, to its previous splendor. Birding along the trail is often slower than at other sites, but we should encounter species such as Black-faced Laughingthrush, Chestnut-tailed Minla, and Yellow-billed Blue Magpie.

Overnight at a hotel, Paro (2,300 m/7,544 ft)

Day 19, November 25: Paro with an excursion to Chelela Pass

This morning we drive to Chelela pass (3,810 m/12,573 ft), the highest road point in Bhutan. We should leave the hotel by at least 4:30 AM to arrive at the pass around 6 AM. We hope to see Himalayan Monal and Blood Pheasants along the road, before what little traffic that uses the road has a chance to disturb the birds. The sunrise illuminating Jomolhari and other high peaks is a sight to behold. After breakfast at the pass, we’ll hike along the ridge through prayer flags and alpine vegetation of dwarf rhododendrons, juniper, gentians and edelweiss, with inspiring views of the sacred mountain Jhomolhari toward the north end of the Paro valley. On the western side of the pass we will also see Mt. Kanchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world, in the distance. In addition to the pheasants, we’ll look for White-throated Redstart, White-winged and Collared Grosbeaks, Altai and Alpine Accentors and perhaps even the majestic Lammergeier, if we are very lucky. After this morning outing, we’ll return to our hotel with a little time to rest before we head off to the family farm of our local host to experience life in rural Bhutan during our farewell party.

Overnight at a hotel, Paro (2,300 m/7,544 ft)

Day 20, November 26, Departure

Today we must get up, say goodbye to our wonderful hosts, and board our flight back to Bangkok. We depart Paro late morning and arrive in Bangkok mid to late afternoon. The plane will probably make a stop en route. The tour ends upon arrival in Bangkok.

TOUR DETAILS

LEADERS: Aaron Lang and a local Bhutanese guide

GROUP SIZE: 11 participants

TOUR COST: \$7,100 from Bangkok, Single Supplement \$500

THE PRICE INCLUDES: Guides, flights between Bhutan and Bangkok, all in-Bhutan expenses (ground transportation, meals, lodging, entrance fees to museums, daily tariff, visa fee, departure tax and tourism tax.) Lodging and dinner in Bangkok on November 7 are also included in the tour price.

The tour price includes the flight between Bangkok, Thailand and Paro, Bhutan. If the flight schedule allows and you wish to arrive from India or Bangladesh, let us know and we will adjust the price accordingly.

NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE: Airfare to and from your home and Bangkok, personal expenditures in Bhutan (e.g., shopping, laundry, internet use, alcoholic beverages, gratuities to our Bhutanese guides), transit from the Bangkok airport to the hotel, and personal Bangkok apart from those specifically listed above. No discounts offered by WBA can be applied to this trip.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE: A deposit of \$1,000 is required upon registration. A second payment of \$2,000 is required by May 8, 2016. The remaining balance is due August 8, 2016

CANCELLATION POLICY: Before May 8, 2016 your deposit and any payments will be refunded minus a \$100 cancellation fee. If you cancel between May 8 and August 8, 2016 all but your deposit will be refunded. For cancellations on or after August 8, 2016 no refund is available.

TRIP CANCELLATION/TRAVEL INSURANCE: We strongly recommend trip insurance. Trip cancellation insurance covers you if you have to cancel. Travel insurance provides coverages for medical, theft, etc. during your travels. To shop for either, check out www.insuremytrip.com.

TOUR PACE AND STYLE: While this trip definitely has a birding focus it would be a shame to visit such a fascinating country without taking in some of its rich culture and heritage. We will visit dzongs (secular and religious regional headquarters), the Tiger's Nest monastery, museums, Thimphu city cultural sites, markets, take in a tsechu, and spend an evening with our guide's family in their traditional farmhouse in Paro. Much of the rest of our activity will have a strong birding focus, which often results in delightful impromptu encounters with the local residents. We recommend that you have an interest in birding, but it's not necessary to be a serious birder to enjoy the trip.

This is a road-based tour. While we attempt to balance the time on the road with time out in the field birding, several of our days require very long drives. The road system is the only way to travel through Bhutan, other than trekking (which greatly restricts the amount of country, habitats and species that we could see). The roads are narrow and curvy as they traverse the steep countryside. Because the forests of Bhutan are intact, many of them in pristine condition, the roadsides offer fantastic birding and in many areas are the only paths through the dense forest.

The exact details of this itinerary (route, lodging, camping locations) may change slightly prior to the trip or during the trip as necessary depending on birding, road conditions, weather, etc.

ACCOMMODATIONS: We will be camping as well as staying in guesthouses, hotels and resorts. In November and December in the Himalayas, the skies are clear most of the time and temperatures may drop below freezing at night at higher elevations. Camping may be a bit chilly. For that matter, the hotels can be quite chilly too, lacking central heat.

REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date is required for United States citizens to enter Bhutan. For your Bhutan visa you'll need to send to WBA a full-color scan of the pages of your passport containing the passport details, photo and signature. Our Bhutan visas are arranged by our Bhutanese guides and your WBA guide will have them. A VISA is not necessary for Thailand for stays of less than 30 days.

VACCINATIONS AND HEALTH: No vaccinations are required for travel in Bhutan; however, cholera and yellow fever inoculations are required if you arrive within five days of departing from an infected area. The southern portions of our route (primarily the border zone around Gelephu) is considered an endemic zone for malaria and you might consider consulting your physician regarding anti-malarial prophylactics. As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against hepatitis types A and B. We recommend participants contact their doctor for advice prior to departure. All participants should bring a good quantity of all their prescription and over the counter drugs and medical supplies, as these will be very difficult to obtain in Bhutan.

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 (232-4636). You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel.

FOOD: Breakfasts may include eggs, toast, oatmeal or muesli, juice, and fruit. Lunches and dinners are similar to each other: several cooked dishes typically including rice, potatoes in a sauce, chiles and cheese (the national dish), stewed meats with sauces, and/or cooked greens. Even when we are picnicking out in the country, we usually have hot, cooked lunches. Desserts are occasional. When we get up early to bird before breakfast, we usually will have tea and crackers before heading out. If you have dietary restrictions, please let us know on the guest information form and our guides will try to accommodate you. This form can be filled out on-line at www.wildernessbirding.com/guest

SPENDING MONEY: You will need cash for gifts/souvenirs, alcoholic beverages, hotel laundry, internet use, and an optional tip for our Bhutanese guides. If you go out on the town on your own, you're responsible for meals, etc. A stone bath (outdoors in a wooden trough heated by hot stones from a campfire) in Paro runs about \$30. Souvenirs in Bhutan, including jewelry, beautiful textiles, carvings, handmade paper products, etc. and tend to be on the expensive side.

CURRENCY: Upon arrival in Bhutan you can exchange currency at the airport in Paro. ATMs are very hard to come by in Bhutan so make sure to have enough cash on hand. If necessary we may be able to make a stop at a bank later in the trip as well. Very few of the shops we'll visit accept credit cards.

TIPPING: Although tipping is officially discouraged in Bhutan, it is unofficially expected. Near the end of our tours we commonly pool funds for a modest tip to our local guides, driver and road crew. We can pay this in US cash or Bhutanese currency or a combination. If you are interested in contributing to a tip at the end of our trip, we suggest having \$100-150 for this purpose in either US dollars or Bhutanese currency. You are also welcome to tip independently rather than as part of the group, or not at all, as you wish.

SMOKING: Smoking is banned in public places and tobacco sales are illegal throughout the country.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Bird Books

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and T. Inskipp. Birds of the India: Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Second Edition. Princeton University Press. Now that Birds of Bhutan is out of print and difficult to find, this is the best book for the trip.

Inskipp, C., T. Inskipp and R. Grimmett. Birds of Bhutan. A&C Black, 2004. This book was condensed from the larger Birds of India book. While the text lacks some detail, its small size makes it a great book to carry in the field if you can find it.

Rasmussen, P. C. & J. C. Anderton. 2012. Birds of South Asia. The Ripley Guide. Vols. 1 and 2. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington D.C. and Barcelona. A more detailed, up-to-date and comprehensive work on the birds of the region. It's also bulky to travel with, but we'll have a copy along with us.

General Travel Guides

Mayhew, B., Brown, L. and Mahapatra, A. 2014. Bhutan. Lonely Planet Publications. Singapore.

Pommaret, F. 2009. Bhutan: Himalayan Mountain Kingdom. Airphoto International Ltd. London.

Both of these are good overall guides with quite a bit of travel and cultural information.

Additional Reading

Zeppa, J. 2000. Beyond the Sky and the Earth: Journey into Bhutan. Riverhead Trail Publishers. A memoir of a 25 year old Canadian woman's experience as a teacher in eastern Bhutan.

Crossett, B. 1996. So Close to Heaven: The Vanishing Buddhist Kingdoms of the Himalayas. Vintage Publishers. A considerably more journalistic perspective on Bhutan's culture, politics and economy.

Film:

Travellers and Magicians: Bhutan's first feature film.

The Other Final: One of the best small films we've ever seen, but it has not been distributed in the US. Here's a choppy clip from it: <http://www.ceeбанff.ca/portfoliodetail/tv/115>

EQUIPMENT: Because of the wide elevation range, the weather and temperatures on the trip can vary considerably. To help prepare, once you've registered we'll send you a detailed clothing and equipment list.

IN BANGKOK: After making your travel arrangements to Bangkok, let us know when you'll arrive in Bangkok so we can book your hotel room for the night of November 7th. If you're arriving earlier than the 7th we can also help book your accommodations prior to the 7th.

THAILAND TRAVEL DOCUMENTS: You do not need a VISA to visit Thailand if you are staying for less than 30 days.

THAI CURRENCY: You can exchange major world currencies for Thai bhat at the Airport in Bangkok.

REGISTERING FOR THIS TOUR: You may register for this tour and make your deposit at www.wildernessbirding.com/guest/

You may also pay your deposit with a check. Checks can be mailed to:

Wilderness Birding Adventures
40208 Alpenglow Circle
Homer, AK 99603

We hope you'll be able to join us for this remarkable birding adventure!

Photos and past bird lists can be found at our website: www.wildernessbirding.com
For more information or clarification of any details please drop us a line at: info@wildernessbirding.com



The Punakha Dzong at the confluence of the Mo Chhu and Po Chhu Rivers, is a culturally and historically important site in Bhutan and home to one of the world's rarest birds, the White-bellied Heron. Photo Aaron Lang.