

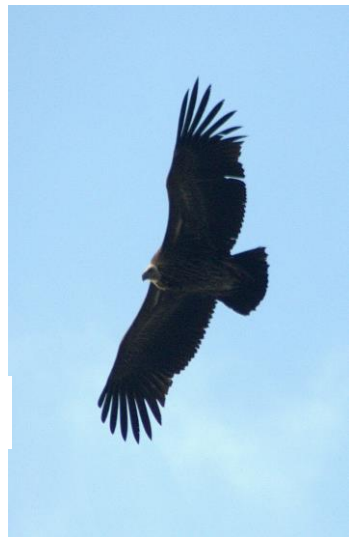
Realm of the Red Panda

Destination: Dobate, Nepal

Duration: 9 Days

Dates: 2nd - 10th March 2013

-  Finding and hand rearing an orphaned newborn Bhutan giant flying-squirrel
-  Tracking the elusive red panda with the expert guide Phinju Sherpa
-  Spotting over 95 species of Sub-Himalayan birds
-  Hiking the spectacular forests and bamboo groves of North Eastern Nepal
-  Staying and experiencing the local lifestyle in a quaint home-stay in Dobate
-  Having excellent views of several aggregations of Himalayan griffon vultures
-  Managing to capture a very elusive leopard cat on our camera traps
-  Spotting and finding evidence of an impressive 13 mammal species
-  Seeing Mt. Everest and Kanchenjunga during the flight from Kathmandu
-  Tracking red pandas through a very unique, primeval and charismatic ecosystem



Tour Leader / Guides

Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)
 Rajiv Paudel (Red Panda Tour Leader)
 Phinju Sherpa (Head Red Panda Tracker)
 Sangay (Red Panda Tracker & Home-stay Owner)
 Tashi, Stenzin & Pladen (Extra Red Panda Trackers)

Participants

Mr. Chris Scharf
 Mrs. Hinling Yeung

Overview

Day 1: Ilam

Days 2-6: Dobate

Day 7: Ilam

Day 8: Kathmandu

Day 9: Home



Day by Day Breakdown

Overview

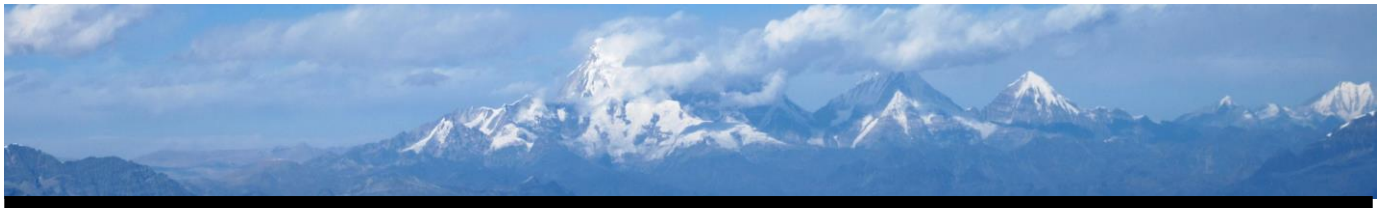
For anyone interested in wildlife and travelling far and wide to see some of the rarest species in the world; the red panda has long been high on most people's lists. However up until very recently there was not a reliable place or people who were skilled in finding them. That all changed once conservationists started their incredible work in the oak, rhododendron and bamboo forests of North-East Nepal. Their overall aim is to protect a continuous corridor of red panda habitat from the border with Yunnan, China in the north and Singhalila National Park in India. This would be linking two very important red panda populations outside of Nepal with 4-5 distinct populations in Nepal that are all in danger of becoming fragmented and isolated. Whilst working to this goal they have employed local people as 'forest guardians' to help collect data, protect the forests and wildlife and also help to educate and change the attitudes of the local people so that they start sustainably using the forests' resources as opposed to the exploitation that goes on throughout the Indian Subcontinent. Whilst the forest guardians were trained and employed in their work they began to see more and more red pandas and a handful of these local people are now amongst the world's best red panda trackers.

Since the start of the project here in Nepal they have an incredible 95% success rate in showing people red pandas, however (as we found out) they can be much harder to find when conditions are not ideal. For this tour we arrived at the best time of year, the beginning of Spring. The red panda has a very slow metabolism as their diet is very poor in nutrients, as a result of this they are very temperature sensitive and cannot tolerate temperatures above 25°C very well. So usually Spring time is a good time as the daytime temperatures rarely reach this mark and the red pandas spend longer sprawled out on the branches of tall trees so that they can warm up in the sun. Otherwise they spend time the day curled up in the canopies protected from the sun by the leaves or inside tree hollows out of sight. When we arrived we heard that only a few days before they had seen one of the 4-5 resident red pandas next to the main pathway out of the village and confidence was high. However the weather did not cooperate with us, there was not the usual low cloud cover and instead high daytime temperatures. But this did not just reduce the amount of time the red pandas would spend in the trees on show, but the increased sunlight has increased the number of small hairy caterpillars that hatched. This species is present at this time of year in small numbers but the combination of sunlight and warm temperatures has meant a boom or plague of caterpillars. This is a problem for the red pandas as the caterpillars congregate in their billions on trees and their itchy hairs make climbing the trees all but impossible. This probably meant that as well as spending less time sunbathing the red pandas would be on the ground more and the dense bamboo forests means that they just disappear into the undergrowth when they are on the ground.

It appears that we picked the wrong period to visit this region this time, with red pandas and no caterpillars the week before as well as the week after. But the trip was not a total failure as we did see some of the regions mammals and bird species very well, including hand-rearing an orphaned Bhutan giant flying-squirrel and capturing a leopard cat on our camera traps.

But there are other non-natural processing occurring here that are in damming contradiction to the work being conducted by the conservationists here (deforestation, over grazing and poaching), all in all making the work done here more important than ever and increasing the importance of sustainable eco-tourism in the region. Whilst we did not see red pandas on this tour, we are very hopeful that this is the exception and have offered discounted places on our 2014 tour here to Chris and Hinling. It was a combination of exceptional circumstances during a the same 4 days we were in the area, as we have since been informed that red pandas have been seen in the area and the climate has returned to normal and there have been mass dies offs of the caterpillars. However well planned and researched these trips are every now and again there are unforeseen and unavoidable circumstances that can affect the tour.

This trip report documents on a day by day account the highlights of the tour as well as including a sightings log of all the species seen and identified.



Day 1 **Ilam**

Arrival & Travelling

Very early this morning Martin met with Chris in Delhi International Airport at the gate for our flight to Kathmandu, the flight was on time and after a doctor was called for a passenger sat behind Martin (who apparently died and was revived onboard!) we arrived in Kathmandu, although we were almost turned around to Lucknow. When we arrived we met with Rajiv Paudel, the Kathmandu representative of the Red Panda conservation projects and waited for Hinling to arrive at the airport. Hinling had arrived in Kathmandu the day before and was enjoying some sightseeing this morning, so we waited at the airport until we were all here. We had decided to fly from Kathmandu to Bhadrapur today and had a few hours to wait before catching the short flight east. During the flight we had great views of the Himalayas, it was a little cloudy but most of the 7,000m plus peaks were clearly visible. This included great views of Mt. Everest, its 8,000m plus neighbour Lhotse and then Kachenjunga which is the 3rd highest mountain in the world. In fact throughout this flight we saw 4 of the top 5 tallest mountains in the world. We landed close to Kachenjunga and once we loaded up the vehicles to take us into the heart of red panda habitat we began the climb towards the Himalayas. Of course we wouldn't be travelling into the true Himalaya but we would be spending time in the shadow of these incredible and imposing mountains right in the North East corner of Nepal and close to both India (6-7 hour walk away) and China (2 day walk away). Before we left Bhadrapur we stopped to stock up on some snacks and juice and then began travelling through tea plantation country and over the first hill range. Along the way we saw several species of lowland bird species, such as black drongos, Asian pied starlings, bank mynahs, cattle egrets, spotted doves, red-vented bulbuls, Indian pond herons and Eurasian spoonbills. Then as we entered the fragmented remains of tall bamboo forests along the hill roads we saw a couple of Assamese macaques. This is a very similar looking species to the very common Rhesus macaque found in the lowlands, but they have thicker fur, are slightly larger and stockier. We stopped along this road for some lunch, surrounded by tea plantations as far as the eye could see, it was a great place to stop and have some of the local tea. As the roads here are very steep and winding we do not risk driving them at night and so only made it to Ilam as it got dark. We checked into the guest house, had a light dinner and got a good nights sleep.

Day 2 **Dobate**

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

This morning we breakfasted with the great view out over Ilam and more of the tea plantations that make this region so famous. During breakfast Martin spotted a couple of orange-bellied Himalayan squirrels foraging along a line of trees and bamboo on the edge of the guest house. We then met with Phinju Sherpa who lives in Ilam and is the head red panda tracker (and probably the best red panda tracker in the world) and then left the town of Ilam and headed downwards towards the river, then after crossing the river (which had a Hindu style burning funeral occurring as we passed by). After crossing the river we began to rise high into the hills and towards the small farming village of Dobate. Whilst travelling through here we saw lots of deforestation, the increasing populations in rural Nepal is leading to more and more habitat destruction. This is very evident in this region of Nepal and as forest clearing for cattle grazing, fire wood and farming climbs the hillsides it will not be very long before the prime red panda habitat is destroyed. That is if the Red Panda conservationists do not adequately protect these forests in the same way that they have successfully protected the forests around Tapeljung around the Kachenjunga Conservation Area. This is the first protected area in the world that is dedicated to red pandas and Dobate is a natural extension of this conservation work, but the importance of this conservation work has never been so evident. Along the way we did spot some birds including blue-whistling thrushes and a large flock of foraging white-crested laughing-thrushes. The village of

Dobate is located on the top of a ridge, with a north facing and south facing slope on either side of the village. Due to the presence of the sun the red pandas have only been seen on the south facing slope but there are reports of other wildlife (including some of the intriguing carnivores) from the north facing slope. So we would explore both sides during our time here. Once we arrived at the small village it was mid afternoon and the clouds had already set in over most of the hillsides. This is normal for the afternoons here and the lack of visibility makes seeing a red panda now very difficult, so we decided to try and find somewhere to place our camera traps. The idea of these camera traps is to see if we can capture pictures or videos of some of the really rare and never seen nocturnal species that inhabit the forests. We were particularly hoping for predators as there is in an impressive list of wild cats, including leopards, clouded leopards, marbled cats, Asiatic golden cats, jungle cats and leopard cats. However with the amount of human activity we saw around here we didn't hold much hope that we would get one of these with only 4 nights of camera trapping.



Once we mentioned this plan to Phinju and Sange (the home-stay owner) they knew of the exact place, we walked uphill from the village for 10 minutes and then dived into the north side of the ridge and down a little way into a very dense oak / rhododendron forest. We arrived at a crossroads of 4 different game trails surrounded by two small streams flowing close to the trails. We had three camera traps and positioned them at all angles and then hoped for the best before heading back to the village. All of the time we did try and spot mammals, but we only found birds, we past a few large mixed foraging flocks of birds that included a few different species of tits; rufous-vented tits, grey-crested tits, rufous-fronted tits and great tits were all easily spotted alongside a spotted nutcracker, rufous-bellied woodpecker and yellow-billed blue magpies. We then arrived back at the home-stay for dinner and some rest, tomorrow would be our first day dedicated to trying to spot the incredibly cute firefo!



Day 3 **Dobate**

Wildlife Watching

After breakfast this morning we enjoyed three feeding yellow-billed blue magpies that visit the farm every morning. We then left and headed downhill for around 20 minutes along the main road and towards one of the best red panda watching areas. Just after leaving the village Phinju headed down into the bamboo and oak forests of the ridge, he can cover the steep and loose terrain much quicker than we can around here and so he scouts ahead whilst we walk along the road above him and the forest. Whilst slowly walking along the road we could compare the two different hill faces, the warm south facing slope having much more bamboo and rhododendrons whilst mosses and lichens dominate the trees on the north facing slope. This is what you would expect and also explains why the red pandas much prefer the south facing slopes, as bamboo makes up around 60% of their diet throughout the year and during the late spring (when their favourite species of bamboo) is flowering it can be as much as 95% of their diet. At around 08:20am Phinju radioed up to us that he had found some fresh red panda scats, usually once they find fresh scat the red panda is not far behind as they do not tend to move very far each day. So we waited above on the road but close to where Phinju was and hoped to hear the radio call with 'Punde Kunde!' However this did not come, instead we walked back to the village for lunch and along the way saw a very low Himalayan griffon vulture fly above us, then as the sun got higher and higher in the sky and heated the air we saw many vultures riding the thermals carrying them into the heavens. Due to the use of the anti-inflammatory drug Diclofenic in cattle farming throughout the Indian Subcontinent the numbers of vultures has declined by around 99% in the last 30 years. The reason for this is that the drug poisons the vultures and causes gout and liver diseases; the drug is now largely banned and the vultures are beginning to come back strong, so it is always good to see good numbers of them in the skies in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Pakistan. Also along the way back to the village we spotted a long, thin scat with a tapered end and some segmentation. It measured around 20cm long and 1.5cm in diameter and containing only coarse brown hairs (presumably wild boar or muntjac); we guessed this to be a leopard scat. On further inspection over the next couple of days we found more scats and a regularly used pathways around 5 minutes away from the home-stay and were convinced that at least one leopard was using this forest area around the village. We also heard and found more evidence of this which is described in a couple of days. After lunch we headed out again and this time went down into the forest with Phinju, at first the forest was a mix of cleared land for cattle grazing and small bamboo thickets, but as we got further down into the forest it became much denser and the amount of bamboo began to increase. Chris had tracked for giant pandas previously and commented on how similar some of the habitat was (which would make sense as they share very similar diets), however there is also something unique about the forests here and the huge moss covered tree add to the primeval and mystical atmosphere here, especially when the clouds come rolling in and through the forest. Whilst walking through this terrain we had to be very careful not to place our hands on any branches or tree trunks without checking they were not crawling with small black, hairy caterpillars. We had seen many of these caterpillars on the road above, forming long caravans as they looked to cross the road, but only once we got into the forest and looked at the tree trunks and branches was the scale of the infestation realised. There must have been billions of them throughout the forest and they covered every bit of tree in some areas. During the evening we saw the affect this had on Phinju and Sange as they had very itchy rashes all over their torsos, legs and necks. As they had to half climb some of the trees to check for fresh scats they were covered in the small hairs used as a very good defence by the caterpillars. We asked everyone about the caterpillars and it seems like nobody had ever seen a plague of them like this before and it seemed very recent (they were not here last week) and very localised (only in the 2-3 red panda hotspots) to a small area. Over the next few days we all surmised that it was probably these caterpillars that were scuppering our attempts to find the red pandas. We eventually found a very promising looking spot close to a stream and surrounded by bamboo and large sun-bathing trees and it wasn't long before Phinju found some fresh scats and brought some to us so we could see them. The oval shaped dense scats had a very green sheen and wet texture, both of which showed us that they were fresh from this morning. So we



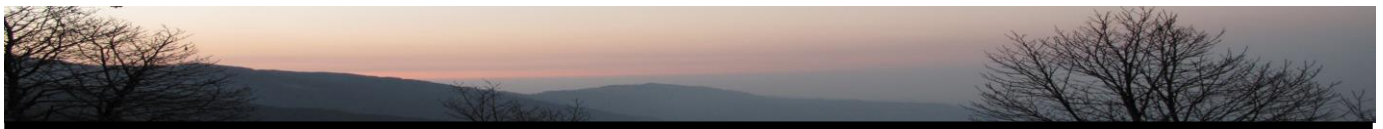
concentrated our efforts on this area for the rest of the afternoon but to no avail. In a couple of days we realised that there would have been a red panda in the area but with the caterpillars blocking their routes into the trees that there were probably on the ground and curled up in tree hollows and other very difficult to get to places. Being very vulnerable on the ground they do not often come out into the open whilst on the ground and are therefore next to impossible to see. As the clouds started to come in strong and started to flow up through the forest we lost all visibility. Whilst the clouds coming up into the already atmospheric and moody forest was a stunning spectacle we were left disheartened by the lack of red panda sightings on our first day. Although on the way back up the slope Phinju found more scats from today close to a stream flowing down into the valley. We decided that tomorrow we should focus on this area again as there is definitely at least one red panda in the area.

Day 4 Dobate

Wildlife Watching

This morning was very clear in the skies (much better visibility than yesterday) however the increased sunlight was not a good thing as it would decrease the sunbathing period of the red pandas in the morning. They would head into shaded and discrete locations as soon as the temperatures rose too much. But regardless we headed in the same direction as where we saw the fresh scats yesterday, we sent Sange down there to scout that area whilst Phinju and Rajiv travelled from there further west towards a small clearing in the bamboo where we would be waiting for them. This way they would be fully exploring this area and if there was a red panda sunbathing in the open we would definitely see it. Whilst we waited Chris spotted a small skink close to the base of a tree, none of us got a very good look at it until it disappeared into the undergrowth but the most common skink around here (and also the one that fit the brief description that Chris gave) is the common keeled skink. We waited here until around 11:00am and until the sun was very hot in the sky. We then headed back to the village for some lunch and began to think about the possible reasons why we were finding it much more difficult than usual. It was around now that we began to piece together the details of the abnormal weather, caterpillar plaques and the lack of sightings. This afternoon we split up, with Phinju headed west of the village again to make sure that we have fully searched every to the west while we headed east and to new areas. The cloud cover had drastically changed by this afternoon and the visibility started badly (at around 14:00 and just got worse as the day progressed). We eventually found some fresh scats from this area (around 1-2 days old) but the only notable sightings were many species of birds, including the beautiful fire-tailed myzornis, mountain hawk-eagle, white-browed shortwing, Tickell's leaf-warbler, rufous-bellied tits, rufous-bellied nilvatas and black-faced warblers amongst others.

As we were now over the normal amount of time it takes to see red pandas here at this time of year we had enlisted the help of two trainee forest guardians to help us tomorrow. Tashi would come from a nearby village closer to the Indian border whilst the young Pladen from Dobate village would be recruited to help us.



Day 5 Dobate

Wildlife Watching

With our extra help we left the village and split up, Tashi and Pladen heading east to where we found the scats yesterday and ourselves, Rajiv, Phinju and Sange heading west again as we still believed that this area was the best place for us to base ourselves. This morning there were many birds out, including mountain bulbuls, grey-collared blackbirds, rufous sibilias and a very friendly and noisy flock of whiskered yuhinas feeding along with beautiful crimson sunbirds. After leaving the road we headed down into the forest again, this time in between the two past locations that we had waited. On the way down we found and had good views of a foraging Darjeeling woodpecker as well as a passing skein of bar-headed geese. Throughout the rest of the day we also saw some other great bird species including a Himalayan buzzard, olivaceous sunbirds, ruby-cheeked sunbirds and the elusive red-tailed minla. As it approached the middle of the day we headed back to the home-stay for lunch, when we all arrived back we assessed our findings and decided our plan for the afternoon. It turned out that Phinju had found scats from a mother and baby, but they were both from a couple of days old and the presence of a young panda may also indicate why that particular female was being more shy and elusive than usual? But he had also found a goat carcass, mostly likely made by the leopard that we had seen scats from. It was around 300m down a very steep slope and was all but eaten so we thought it unlikely the leopard would come back to it and so didn't move the camera traps. Rajiv had found another orange-bellied Himalayan squirrel but other sightings were few and far between in the west of the ridge this morning. But we also heard that Tashi had found some red panda scats in a different part of the forest and as we had fully explored the western side of the ridge we moved our operation to the east of the village again for the afternoon. It was very misty today and the daily weather patterns were returning to something more normal for this time of year here. However it was probably too late in our trip for the change in weather to affect the red pandas behaviour enough, we also noticed a decline in the number of caterpillars as the weather got gradually cooler and wetter. We also noticed that this side of the ridge was naturally cooler and wetter



and there were less caterpillars here anyway so it seemed promising again. We also heard that Rajiv had spotted a Himalayan thar in the area, this is an impressive mountain goat species and one that is suffering badly from habitat destruction and livestock competition and one that will probably not have much future here unless the protection of the area increases. In the last couple of days we had seen a far amount of deforestation occurring alongside the road near the village and further examples of the human v environment conflict would appear as the day progressed.

As we carried on further east than we had travelled before we found more leopard scats as well as seeing a change in the makeup of the forest as the bamboo was replaced by rhododendrons and larger trees. After another hour or so of searching the area Phinju met back up with us and explained that he had found a poachers snare with a bird in it, we asked him to collect the snare and the bird so that we can destroy the snare and dispose of the bird so that the poacher got o reward for this illegal practise. When Phinju and Tashi brought the bird and snare back to us, it turned out to be a satyr tragopan. Whilst any poached bird is devastating to see a male satyr tragopan dead, this is one of the most endangered and beautiful birds in the Himalayas. The males of this large reddish and black pheasant type bird have a bright blue throat wattle that expands down their breast as well as growing two very brilliantly blue fleshy horns during the breeding season. These were both clearly visible on this individual, we took him back to the farm and buried him. But before we headed back to the village we discussed a couple of options that we had to try and do something about the poacher. We contemplated collecting the camera traps and setting them up with the snare and bird back where it was found. This could lead to getting an identification on the poacher however it would probably end up with the camera traps being stolen and the poacher collecting the bird (we couldn't leave the snare without the bird as the poacher would see from a distance it had not been triggered and may not come close enough to the camera otherwise). However we were discussing these options when we heard that a local farmer had found 'a baby something on the road'. This was very intriguing, particularly as he couldn't identify what it was and nearly everything that lives here is endangered. So we quickly left that area (taking the bird and snare with us) and went to where the farmer had left the 'baby something'. We arrived on the scene and could clearly see that it was a newborn baby animal. With a sparse covering of hair and its eyes still tightly closed we wrapped him up and took him back to the home-stay. Luckily Martin carried syringes with him in his first aid kit and Chris had some hand warmer, this combination of equipment as well as a cardboard box and old wool jumper and fresh milk from the farm we had the right gear to try and save this little feller. But at the moment we didn't even know what he was. As we were collecting the baby animal and dealing with the tragopan, Sange had collected our camera traps, so when we got back to the home-stay we looked through the pictures and videos. Over the next few hours we fed the baby (whom we called Rio Alphonso – after the brand of fruit juice that the box he now lived in used to contain), with milk in the syringe. We also searched the internet for possible answers to what he could be, as there are not many different mammals around here and the size ruled out all of the small rodents. It also had five clawed toes and four developed fingers and a stump of a fifth, this ruled our cats, dogs and primates (as he clearly had claws and not nails and monkey babies are born well developed and with open eyes). So we narrowed him down to either a yellow-throated marten, red panda (although we ruled that out once we were shown a picture of a baby red panda, of which appear very much like a small red panda as opposed to this undeveloped baby) and a giant-flying squirrel. The latter became the most obvious choice as there were two folds of skin present in between the arms and legs. With a little further investigation it turned out that he was a very rare Bhutan giant flying-squirrel. This species is known from the rhododendron forests of this part of Nepal east through India and into Bhutan, their distinctive back lined pattern on the body and neck was faintly visible on the body of Rio Alphonso and along with detailed descriptions found by Martin in scientific articles on his return to the UK were all the clues we had to what species it was. After a few hours we managed to get the little baby into a pattern of rest and feeding and then looked through the pictures and after many pictures of the mist moving through the forests and some crows we got our reward of three pictures of a leopard cat during the night before. This was a very eventful day, we didn't see a red panda (and were being to believe that it was not out time, the weather, caterpillars and just bad luck were all against us) but we did see one of the most incredible birds in the world (albeit dead), found one of the rarest mammals in the world and almost certainly became the first westerners to hand-rear a new-born wild Bhutan giant flying-squirrel and also capture a very elusive leopard cat on our camera traps! We set up a rota to stay up and make sure that Rio Alphonso would be ok and fed throughout the night and then headed to our rooms.

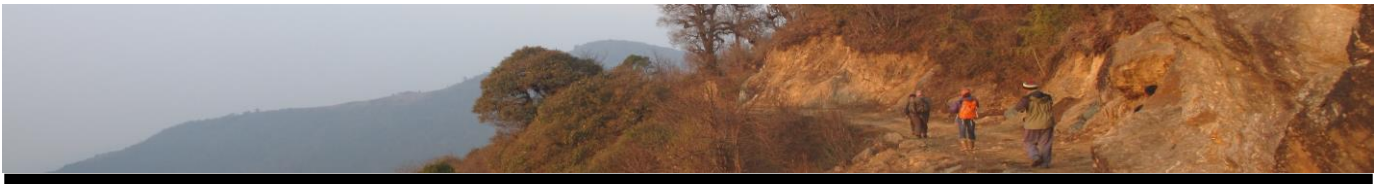




Day 6 Dobate

Wildlife Watching

This morning was our last full day in the area and we were beginning to lose faith in seeing a red panda during this trip, the flying-squirrel, leopard cat and tragopan had taken the pressure off a little but we would still try our best and had Tashi and Pladen (as well as the farmer who found Rio Alphonso) went to the east whilst we headed west once again with Phinju, Sange and Rajiv. We waited on the road as the 3 guides went down into the forest to search for red pandas, whilst waiting we saw many birds again including dazzling crimson sunbirds, chattering whiskered yuhinas and solitary leaf-warblers. But it was a fleeting glimpse of a mammal that was this morning's highlight, Chris spotted a small mammal walking down the road towards us, then when it spotted us it ran quickly down into the forest and we couldn't find it again. Based on the colour and the fact that it was broad daylight it is most likely to have been an Indian grey mongoose. The clouds started coming in earlier today (which is normal for this area and a sign that things are beginning to return to normal), and by 13:30 we had very little visibility. When we returned to the home-stay for lunch we heard that Tashi had found some fresh scats and we also mentioned to Tashi that we wanted him to look after Rio Alphonso after we left tomorrow, we also heard from Rajiv who had travelled far down towards the base of the valley in between Dobate and Hangetam, he said he came across a hollow log close to a river, when he looked down into the log he saw a small spotted cat, most probably a leopard cat but possibly a leopard cub here hiding, well Rajiv said he wasn't going to hang around and see if the mother would come back. Phinju also decided to stay out until gone 18:00 which would be over 12 hours of red panda tracking by the best red panda tracker in the world and still nothing. Phinju takes this as a matter of personal pride and was deeply upset by the lack of red panda activity during our period here. Needless to say we had no further look this afternoon, then after dark and after dinner Chris and Martin went for a short spotlighting walk up and down the road near the village. All we saw was a Himalayan whiskered bat, this reddish bat flew above our heads and off down the hillside.



Day 7 Dobate

Wildlife Watching

Today was our last morning and our last hope for spotting a red panda, we decided to try as far to the east as the trail would take us before we started the descent to the next village along of Hangetam. Hinling had been up most of the night caring for Rio Alphonso so she decided to stay back in the home-stay for a couple of hours. So Chris and Martin headed east and through what looked like prime red panda habitat and waited in a small cleared area while Sange, Phinju, Rajiv, Tashi, Pladen and Stezin (the farmer) all searched the local area for any sign. We waited in the cleared pasture and watched the crows ride the morning air currents as the sun rose over the hills. Unfortunately this was the only thing we did have to watch as it was once again very quiet, on our way back to home-stay we ran into Hinling who had been for a walk up another trail and had had more luck than we did. She spotted a wild boar and a muntjac (or barking deer), but most of the wildlife here is persecuted to some extent and without the surrounding forests being officially protected they are very skittish of people and neither stayed around for Hinling to get a picture. When we all got back to the home-stay we had some lunch and waited for Phinju to get back as well as the jeep to make its way up the steep road to Dobate. Phinju came back at around 14:00 and hadn't seen any fresh sign, it was a sobering and depressing few days (as far as red panda watching had gone) and hopefully it is the combination of the weather and caterpillars that has reduced their activity and not that the forests here are now beyond help. We have since heard of sightings after we left, when the weather returned to normal and there was mass die offs of the caterpillars, so it was probably just bad timing. We had some of the world's best red panda trackers in a hotspot for the species searching for many hours over the last few days and we are confident that if there was a red panda sunbathing here we would have seen it.

At around 14:00 we left Dobate and headed down the hillsides towards Ilam, apart from the road being very steep and winding and seeing Biram use all of his experience in getting us down in the jeep the journey was quite uneventful. When we got closer to the valley floor we did start seeing some interesting bird species including a green pigeon (we couldn't identify 100% but based on distribution was probably the wedge-tailed green pigeon), grandala, blue whistling thrushes and more whiskered yuhinas as well as another orange-bellied Himalayan squirrel. Once we arrived back in Ilam we checked into the guest house, showered and order dinner as well as making good use of the very well stocked bar at the guest house.

Day 8 Kathmandu

Travelling & Departure

This morning we left Ilam quite early as we had a long drive to the airport in Bhadrapur, along the way we spotted another couple of Assamese macaques in the remnant bamboo groves as well as a larger group in the lowlands

near the town. We also saw many of the lowland bird species that are common throughout the Terai region of Nepal and south into North and Central India such as black drongos, Indian pond herons, black-necked ibis, cattle egrets, red-vented bulbuls and brahminy starlings. We arrived at the airport with news that the flight would be delayed due to fog; however it looked very clear here. So we waited in a nearby cafe and had some snacks, Rajiv's wife is a pilot for the airline that we are flying with so we had a heads up when the flight had left Kathmandu and when to get to the airport to check in. It was around 2 hours delayed but then got off without a hitch, after landing in Kathmandu we said bye to Rajiv and headed into the city and Martin's hotel. Chris and Hinling had arranged their return flights to leave Kathmandu this evening so we had a few hours in the city, which we spent having some food at the iconic Kathmandu Guest House restaurant and then Chris and Hinlinh visited Swayambunath. This is the 'monkey-temple' and one of the highest points in the Kathmandu Valley, sacred to both Hindus and Buddhists the temples on the top of the hill are always very busy and offer great views out over the city. It is also heavily populated with Rhesus macaques as they are worshipped and fed here by the local Hindus, as they are believed to be incarnations of the Hindu god Hanuman. After this brief sightseeing they both left for the airport and their long haul flights back to San Francisco, whilst Martin left for his hotel. Tomorrow Martin travelled back to Delhi to begin his journey to the UK.

Species List

Realm of the Red Panda

Mar 2013

Mammals (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Red panda	<i>Aliurus fulgens</i>
2	Hoary-bellied Himalayan squirrel	<i>Callosciurus pygerythrus</i>
3	Orange-bellied Himalayan squirrel	<i>Dremomys lokriah</i>
4	Himalayan thar	<i>Hemitragus jemlahicus</i>
5	Indian grey mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>
6	Assamese macaque	<i>Macaca assamensis</i>
7	Rhesus macaque	<i>Macaca mulatta</i>
8	Indian muntjak	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>
9	Himalayan whiskered bat	<i>Myotis siligorensis</i>
10	Clouded leopard	<i>Neofelis nebulosa</i>
11	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
12	Bhutan giant flying-squirrel	<i>Petaurista nobilis</i>
13	Leopard cat	<i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>
14	Wild boar	<i>Sus scofra</i>

March								
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Birds (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Black-faced warbler	<i>Abroscopus schisticeps</i>
2	Besra	<i>Accipiter virgatus</i>
3	Jungle mynah	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>
4	Bank mynah	<i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>
5	Common mynah	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
6	Hoary-throated barwing	<i>Actinodura nipalensis</i>
7	Black-throated bushtit	<i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>
8	Rufous-fronted tit	<i>Aegithalos iouschistos</i>

March								
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9	Mrs. Gould's sunbird	<i>Aethopyga gouldiae</i>
10	Crimson sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>
11	Asian openbill stork	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
12	Bar-headed goose	<i>Anser indicus</i>
13	Ruby-cheeked sunbird	<i>Anthreptes singalensis</i>
14	Indian pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
15	Rusty-bellied shortwing	<i>Brachypteryx hyperythra</i>
16	White-browed shortwing	<i>Brachypteryx montana</i>
17	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
18	Himalayan buzzard	<i>Buteo burmincus</i>
19	Southern coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
20	Aberrant bush warbler	<i>Cettia flavolivacea</i>
21	Olive backed sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>
22	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
23	Oriental magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
24	Indian roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
25	Common raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
26	Jungle crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
27	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
28	Nepal house martin	<i>Delichon nipalense</i>
29	Darjeeling woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos darjellensis</i>
30	Rufous-bellied woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos hyperythrus</i>
31	Yellow-bellied flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum melanoxanthum</i>
32	White-bellied drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
33	Black drongo	<i>Dicurus macrocercus</i>
34	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
35	Little bunting	<i>Emberiza pusilla</i>
36	Red-breasted flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>
37	Rufous-gorgeted flycatcher	<i>Ficedula strphiata</i>
38	Solitary snipe	<i>Gallinago solitaria</i>
39	White-crested laughing thrush	<i>Garrulax leucolphus</i>
40	Greater necklace laughing thrush	<i>Garrulax pectoralis</i>
41	Asian pied starling	<i>Gracupia contra</i>
42	Grandala	<i>Grandala coelicolor</i>
43	Himalayan griffon	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>
44	White-throated kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
45	Rufous-backed sibia	<i>Heterophasia annectens</i>
46	Rufous sibia	<i>Heterophasia capistrata</i>

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47	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
48	Mountain bulbul	<i>Ixos maclellandii</i>
49	Golden breasted fulvetta	<i>Lioparus chrysotis</i>
50	Grey-crested tit	<i>Lophophanes dichrous</i>
51	Black kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
52	Red-tailed minla	<i>Minla ignotincta</i>
53	Chestnut-bellied rock thrush	<i>Monticola rufiventris</i>
54	Blue-rock thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
55	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
56	Blue whistling thrush	<i>Myophonus caeruleus</i>
57	Fire-tailed myzornis	<i>Myzornis pyrrhoura</i>
58	Rufous-bellied nilvata	<i>Nilvata sundara</i>
59	Mountain hawk-eagle	<i>Nisaetus nipalensis</i>
60	Spotted nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>
61	Maroon oriole	<i>Oriolus traillii</i>
62	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>
63	Green-backed tit	<i>Parus monticolus</i>
64	Rufous-bellied tit	<i>Parus rufiventris</i>
65	Yellow-cheeked tit	<i>Parus spilonotus</i>
66	Black-lored tit	<i>Parus xanthogenys</i>
67	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
68	Small minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
69	Long-tailed minivet	<i>Pericrocotus ethologus</i>
70	Rufous-vented tit	<i>Periparus rubidiventris</i>
71	Blue-fronted redstart	<i>Phoenicurus frontalis</i>
72	Hodgson's redstart	<i>Phoenicurus hodgsoni</i>
73	Tickell's leaf-warbler	<i>Phylloscopus affinis</i>
74	Ashy-throated warbler	<i>Phylloscopus maculipennis</i>
75	Greenish warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
76	Eurasian spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
77	Plain prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
78	Rufous-breasted accentor	<i>Prunella strophiate</i>
79	Rose-ringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
80	Green shrike-babbler	<i>Pteruthius xanthochlorus</i>
81	Himalayan bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>
82	Red-vented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
83	Plumbeous redstart	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosa</i>
84	Spotted dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
85	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>

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86	Orphean warbler	<i>Sylvia hortensis</i>
87	Yellow-browed tit	<i>Sylviaprus modestus</i>
88	Golden bush-robin	<i>Tarsiger chrysaeus</i>
89	Rufous-breasted bush-robin	<i>Tarsiger hyperythrus</i>
90	Black-headed ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
91	Wedge-tailed green pigeon	<i>Treron sphenurus</i>
92	Winter wren	<i>Troglodytes hiemalis</i>
93	Jungle babbler	<i>Turdoides stiata</i>
94	White-collared blackbird	<i>Turdus albocinctus</i>
95	Grey-winged blackbird	<i>Turdus boulboul</i>
96	Yellow-billed blue magpie	<i>Urocissa flavirostris</i>
97	Whiskered yuhina	<i>Yuhina flavicollis</i>
98	Long-tailed thrush	<i>Zoothera dixonii</i>
98	Oriental white-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>

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Reptiles (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Common keeled skink	<i>Mabuya carinata</i>

March								
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