

RED PANDA TRIP REPORT (NEPAL)

4–19 November 2023

David Andrew, and Graeme and Moira Wallace



I recently joined Graeme and Moira Wallace in Nepal specifically to seek out **Red Pandas** at Habre's Nest (<https://habresnest.com/>), a Red Panda conservation and ecotourism initiative on the border between Sikkim (India) and extreme south-east Nepal. None of us had seen a Red Panda on previous (separate) visits to the Himalaya and it was high on everyone's 'wanted' list; we also took the opportunity to look for Spiny Babbler, Nepal's only endemic bird species.

- Graeme and Moira had found Habre's Nest during a web search (*habre* is the local Nepalese word for Red Panda) and we stayed 7 nights with 5 full days of wildlife-viewing and relaxation in the comfortable lodge.
- The lodge employs 20 local trackers who fan out daily to search for the pandas and most of our sightings were before mid-morning.
- Red Pandas have individual face markings and Shantanu Prasad, the driving force behind Habre's Nest, has a photo database of all individual animals known from the area.
- We had daily sightings of **Red Pandas** at close range on 5 consecutive days, with a total of 5 individuals including two well-grown cubs, and 7 sightings in all.
- November is one of the prime times for Red Panda and viewing conditions were excellent, with clear and sunny mornings and a daily temperature range of about 0–20°C (afternoons were sometimes cloudy).
- We highly recommend Habre's Nest to anyone who wishes to see this beautiful Himalayan mammal.
- Adjacent Singalilla National Park in Sikkim is apparently good for spotlighting, but at the time of our visit the Indian authorities were not allowing foreigners to access the park from Nepal; we spotlit for one night on the Nepal side of the border, which is badly deforested, and saw only a **Grey-headed Flying Squirrel**.
- Other mammals included '**Himalayan**' **Weasel**, which seems to be the Stoat or Ermine *Mustela erminea* widespread in the Palaearctic (although it's not called 'Himalayan' by people in, say, Essex); and a **Himalayan Goral** sunning on a ledge near the Mount Everest viewpoint at Sandakphu.
- The lodge offers a generous bounty to prevent local farmers killing **Short-tailed Moles**, which are endemic to the region. One was caught during our stay, but it died before it was brought to the lodge and unfortunately we saw only a photo of the 1000-rupee mole.
- Habre's Nest has a comfortable bird hide, from where a variety of laughingthrushes and other species were visible at close range, and a pair of **Yellow-throated Martens** deigned to visit one morning.
- The lodge sits at about 3000 metres above sea level, and at the time of our visit many bird species had already migrated to lower elevations so diversity was quite low.

- We also spent a couple of days birding in the Kathmandu Valley, mainly at Mount Phulchowki, and Badri our bird guide located a pair of Spiny Babblers at Tamang Gau for us as well as numerous other goodies (full list below).

All internal transport, accommodation and our excellent bird guide in the Kathmandu Valley, Badri Chaudhary, were organised by Shantanu Prasad and all arrangements went smoothly. At the time of our visit access for foreigners to Habre's Nest was possible only from the Nepal side, but if India relaxes border requirements it may be more convenient for some to get there from Darjeeling in Sikkim.

- **NB** Shantanu also runs a lodge in Bengal specifically set up for **Fishing Cat** conservation and tourism (<https://baghrolbasa.com/>). He has plans to develop more wildlife-watching lodges in India in coming years.



The climax of the trip was this inquisitive pair of cubs that eventually climbed down to within a couple of metres of us.



Spotted Laughingthrush soaking up the sun.

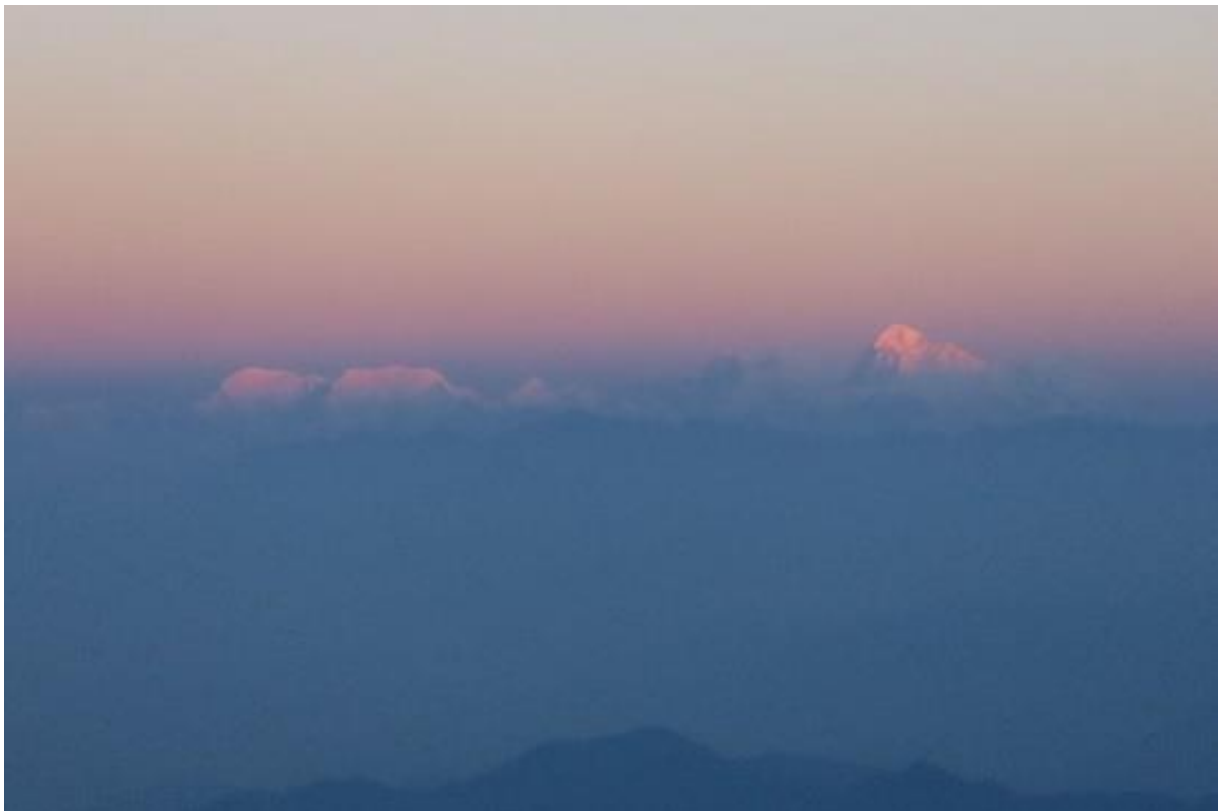


Yellow-throated Martens at the Habre's Nest bird hide.

MAMMAL LIST (new spp. for me in red)

Red Panda (Habre's Nest)
 Yellow-throated Marten (Habre's Nest & Phulchowki)
 Himalayan Weasel (Habre's Nest)
 Sikkim Mouse (Habre's Nest)
 Grey-headed Flying-squirrel (Habre's Nest)

Red Muntjac (Phulchowki & hotel grounds, Kathmandu)
 Chital (hotel grounds, Kathmandu)
 Himalayan Goral (Sandakphu)
 Rhesus Macaque (Phulchowki)



Mount Everest and Lhotse at sunrise – taken from 125 km away.

BIRD LIST

Hill Partridge (h)
Satyr Tragopan (female only)
Kalij Pheasant

(Feral Pigeon)
Oriental Turtle-dove
Eastern Spotted Dove

Grey Nightjar

Indian Pond-heron
Cattle Egret

Collared Owlet (h)

Himalayan Griffon
Bonelli's Eagle
Hen Harrier
Northern Goshawk
Black Kite

Speckled Piculet

Great Barbet
Golden-throated Barbet (h)
Blue-throated Barbet

Rose-ringed Parakeet

Maroon Oriole

Himalayan Shrike-babbler

Long-tailed Minivet

White-bellied Drongo
Bronzed Drongo

Grey-backed Shrike

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike

Grey Treepie
Yellow-billed Blue Magpie
Red-billed Blue Magpie
Plain-crowned Jay
House Crow
Large-billed Crow

Yellow-bellied Fairy-fantail

Yellow-browed Tit
Green-backed Tit
Cinereous Tit
Black-lored Tit

Striated Prinia

Pygmy Cupwing
Scaly-breasted Cupwing

Barn Swallow

Mountain Bulbul
Black Bulbul
Himalayan Bulbul
Red-vented Bulbul

Buff-barred Warbler
Ashy-throated Warbler
Chestnut-crowed Warbler
Grey-hooded Warbler

Grey-headed Tesia (h)
Grey-sided Bush-warbler
Black-faced Warbler

Black-throated Tit

Golden-breasted Fulvetta (h)
Black-throated Parrotbill

Stripe-throated Yuhina
Whiskered Yuhina
Rufous-vented Yuhina

Oriental White-eye

Slender-billed Scimitar-babbler (h)
Streak-breasted Scimitar-babbler
Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-babbler (h)
Spiny Babbler

Black-chinned Babbler
Rufous-winged Fulvetta
Nepal Fulvetta

Striated Laughingthrush
White-crested Laughingthrush
Spotted Laughingthrush
Grey-sided Laughingthrush (h)
Scaly Laughingthrush
Black-faced Laughingthrush
Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush
Rufous Sibia
Hoary-throated Barwing
Blue-winged Minla

White-tailed Nuthatch
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch

Common Myna

Oriental Magpie-robin
Small Niltava
Rufous-bellied Niltava (h)
Blue Whistling-thrush
Blue-fronted Redstart
White-capped Water-redstart
Plumbeous Water-redstart

Fire-breasted Flowerpecker

Fire-tailed Sunbird
Green-tailed Sunbird

Rufous-breasted Accentor

White-rumped Munia

House Sparrow

Olive-backed Pipit

Dark-breasted Rosefinch
White-bowed Rosefinch
Plain Mountain-finch
Red Crossbill

TOP 5 BIRDS

Black-throated Parrotbill (a large flock of c80)
Spiny Babbler (Nepal's only endemic bird)
Rufous Sibia
Scaly Laughingthrush
Grey Treepie