

Nepal

Chitwan, Koshi & Phulchowki



Saturday 05 March – Friday 18 March 2011

Leaders: Mike Witherick and local guides

2011 Cost: **£2,899** single room supplement **£280**

Nepal and Kathmandu – the names conjure up images of pagodas, Buddhist and Hindu temples and a panorama of snow-capped Himalayan peaks. This will be *Ornitholidays'* eighth visit to this magical region and although it may not be Shangri-la, it is a holiday that will provide some unforgettable sights, sounds and experiences. Kathmandu lies in a wide valley-basin, at about 1,300m in the mid-Himalayas, and the city is an interesting mix of the ancient and modern, with thousand-year-old temples juxtaposed with Internet cafés! For a small country (the size of England and Wales), Nepal has recorded an amazing proportion (almost 10 per cent) of the world's bird species. A particular thrill will be to search for species, which are winter visitors here from their Siberian breeding grounds – such as Falcated Duck, White's Thrush and Siberian Rubythroat. The Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve is one of Asia's finest wetland sites. Nepal also possesses one of the world's great natural parks – Chitwan, a fine example of lowland grassland and forest, and home to the world's densest concentration of the Indian One-horned Rhinoceros. Riding on elephant back we should have good views of these vast myopic creatures and perhaps also glimpse the lord of the elephant grass – the Tiger. Most of our explorations will be in the lowlands, but we have allocated two days to visit the special birding site on the mountain above Kathmandu – Phulchowki. Here, the variety of colourful babblers is impressive; and stunning Himalayan views are often possible, with scarlet-flowering rhododendrons in the foreground.



Indian Rhinoceros

ITINERARY

Days 1 & 2

We depart this evening from London on a scheduled flight to Kathmandu (via Doha). We arrive in Kathmandu next day and transfer to our hotel in Thamel, a colourful and friendly shopping area close to the main city centre, where we stay for three nights. Those who prefer not to spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing may have time for a little sightseeing prior to our welcome Nepali dinner this evening.

Days 3 & 4

A short drive brings us to the lower slopes of Phulchowki, where we will spend most of the day, with a picnic lunch. Phulchowki (2,500m) is the highest peak in the valley: a wonderful birding spot. The variety of laughing-thrushes, babblers, yuhinas, bulbuls, flowerpeckers, flycatchers, sunbirds, tits and warblers is tremendous. Today we will concentrate on the lower slopes and we hope to find birds such as Kalij Pheasant, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Nepal Fulvetta, Spotted Forktail and Fire-tailed

Sunbird. We will look up for Black and Mountain Hawk-Eagles and scan the leafless trees for Great Barbets. The following day will be spent bird watching on the upper slopes of Phulchowki. By driving to about 2,400m (as high as is now permitted) in the early morning, we should get a good view of the snow-clad Great Himalayas. Manaslu (the world's seventh highest peak), Langtang and part of the Annapurna Range are visible, when the weather is clear! We shall then spend the rest of the day walking down the mountain through its fine temperate and subtropical forest, with a picnic lunch en route. Commonest birds here are Rufous Sibia and Buff-barred Warbler; Orange-flanked Bush Robins can often be seen on the track. Among the colourful Himalayan babblers, we will keep eyes open for Chestnut-tailed Minla, White-browed Fulvetta, Stripe-throated and Whiskered Yuhinas and the rare Cutia, a specialist of mossy trunks.

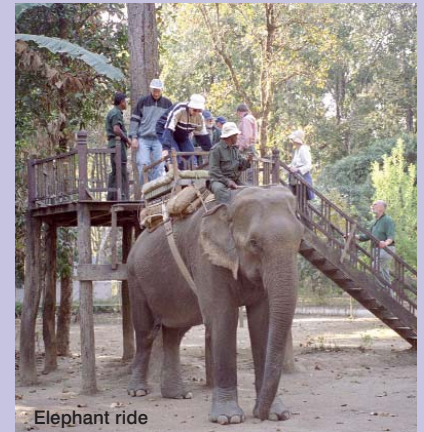
Days 5 to 8

We leave the Kathmandu Valley and take our time descending the steep and winding road

towards the lowlands. Well-chosen stops may produce species such as Brown Dipper, Wallcreeper, and (if we are very lucky) Ibisbill. Our destination is Chitwan National Park, which comprises mainly *sal* forest and riverine grasslands, a magnificent environment with a greater variety of wildlife than any other area of Nepal. Over 480 species of birds have been recorded here, and we can expect to see nearly one third of these, as well as many mammals and reptiles. Red Junglefowl will be scratching for food on the jungle floor, while Oriental Pied Hornbills glide overhead. Crested Serpent-Eagles hunt over the forest, while Ruddy Shelduck and Open-bill Storks feed on the marshy margins. Birds of prey are found here in good numbers and we can hope to see Osprey, Grey-headed Fishing-Eagle, Crested Honey-buzzard, White-eyed Buzzard and perhaps a Collared Falconet. Mammals include the endangered Indian Rhinoceros, Wild Boar, Sambar, Muntjac, Spotted and Hog Deer, Rhesus and Grey Langur Monkeys. Tiger, Leopard, Sloth Bear, and Gaur (wild bison) are all present and regularly seen by the lucky ones!



Indian Peafowl



Elephant ride

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1 Depart London
- Days 2-4 Kathmandu
- Days 5-8 Chitwan National Park
- Days 9-12 Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve
- Day 13 Kathmandu
- Day 14 Depart Kathmandu

Party Size

Maximum of 10 clients.

Accommodation

The accommodation we use is normally the best available in the area. Both of the Machan Camps have private facilities, but at Koshi Camp the facilities are shared. Both camps provide hot water. The tents are permanent and are walk-in safari style.

Transport

By coach, jeep, zodiac and elephant.

Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, airport taxes and tips.

Gradings

- Good/Tented
- 300
- Warm to Cool
- Low
- Special
- Relaxed
- Excellent
- Moderate
- Scheduled



Tiger

For our first two nights in Chitwan we stay in Machan Paradise View Lodge. We can explore on foot in the afternoon and visit the elephant stables close to the lodge. At dusk we look out for Brown Hawk Owl, Brown Wood Owl, and Jungle Owlet. While in Chitwan we will have two elephant-rides and from this silent and elevated transport, we search the forest and grasslands for Tiger, Rhino and other animals. Our second two nights are spent at the Machan Wildlife Lodge, situated amidst *sal* forest, which will provide us with a unique insight of the deep forest. We shall make excursions on foot and by jeep, allowing us to appreciate the park's varied habitats. In the dry *sal* forest, we should find a variety of woodpeckers, drongos, cuckoos, minivets, parakeets and perhaps such rarities as Blue-bearded Bee-eater or Red-headed Trogon. The grasslands have their own important birdlife, including many babblers of limited distribution, and White-tailed Stonechat. These should be outstanding days.

Days 9 to 12

It is a daylong journey on the east-west highway from Chitwan to Koshi. Driving through the 'terai' of lowland Nepal, we pass through many villages and towns that give a unique insight into the Nepalese way of life. By making an early start we aim to reach Koshi Camp by late afternoon, where we stay for four nights. Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve is situated in the Saptakoshi River plain in the far eastern corner of Nepal, close to the country's southern border with India. The vast expanse of open water created by the barrage and the marshes, lagoons, sandbanks, mudflats and arable land that lie around it offer an outstanding wetland habitat and is one of the finest bird watching sites in Asia. Almost all of Nepal's long list of wildfowl, waders, storks, ibises, egrets, terns and gulls occur here, plus a

great variety of landbirds, especially warblers and birds of prey. Over 100 species should be seen each day in this wonderful area, among them such local specialities as Swamp Francolin, Greater Painted-snipe and Striated Grassbird. Lesser Adjutant and Black-necked Storks, both now globally threatened, feed in the wetlands. Raptors include Imperial, Greater Spotted, Steppe and White-tailed Eagles, various vultures and harriers, including Pied. The heart of the reserve lies north of the barrage, where seasonally inundated grasslands, lagoons and remnant patches of khair and sissoo forest lie alongside the eastern bank of the broad Koshi River. This region is the last refuge of the wild Water Buffalo in Nepal, and we may also see Jungle Cat, Asiatic Jackal, and Bengal Fox. The sharp-eyed may also be lucky enough to see some of the endangered Gangetic River Dolphins that live here. Our most regular and rewarding wildlife outings will be on foot, exploring the grasslands, river, lagoons and woodlands close to the camp, and the vicinity of the barrage, a short drive away. We will also take you by silent, unmotorized zodiac onto the wide waters of the Koshi River to enjoy the birdlife of the otherwise inaccessible sandbanks and islands.

Days 13 & 14

This morning we drive to Biratnagar Airport, from where we catch our return flight to Kathmandu, past Mounts Everest, Makalu and Langtang. There will be a city tour this afternoon, including the Buddhist stupa (shrine) and Tibetan settlement at Bodhnath and the temples and old royal palace in Kathmandu's Durbar Square. Our final night in Nepal will be spent in Kathmandu. In the morning we transfer to Kathmandu Airport for our return flight to London (via Doha), arriving in the evening.