

Northeast India birding 23.2.-12.3.2014

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I had a wish to make a birding trip to Northeast India (Assam and Arunachal Pradesh) for several years. I had read and heard that the area offers a lot new species compared to other parts of India. Finally this became reality when last spring my good friends Pertti Rasp and Vuokko Jernfors proposed to establish an own group and ask India Nature Tours (<http://www.indianaturetours.com/home.html>) to arrange the trip in NE India for us. Pertti and Vuokko had participated to their Northern India general birding trip early 2013 and certainly we knew them from Goa based Backwoods camp which the company is running.

We build our group from the same members with whom we have done our traditional Utö long weekend trips over 10 years. So Timo Luhtala and Juha Jokinen joined the group and were mainly interested in photographing. Leena Kolehmainen was interested to join our adventure trip. We booked the trip already last spring and reserved flights Helsinki - Delhi return for fixed dates. Leena's school winter break was setting the starting date for our trip. Later in summer Kari Engelbart joined us, so we were full with 7 members and a local bird guide which fitted well to two 4x4 cars.

We left to Delhi 23rd on the night flight arriving in Delhi 24th February. Due to logistical arrangements we had one day to spend in Delhi and in the surrounding area. Timo, Leena and I went for a day trip to Agra to see Taj Mahal temple. I have seen it already twice (1990 and 2001) but for Timo and Leena it was the first visit. The rest of us (Pertti, Vuokko, Juha and KariE) went for a day trip to Sultanpur. The site is a good birding destination near Delhi offering shorebirds and warblers.

Very early on 25th Feb we had our flight to Guwahati, Assam capital. Our bird guide, Sikkim based Lakpa Tenzing Sherpa, was waiting us with two drivers and cars. Soon we were on our way towards mandatory destination: Guwahati rubbish dump. The place is holding high number of endangered **Greater Adjutants**. It was sad to see how very poor local people, mainly women (even with their children) were searching some valuable items among rubbish. Our mandatory Adjutant photographing was done in one hour and then we headed towards our first nature destination: Nameri nature reserve.



Greater Adjutants are majestic and impressive birds. Major part of the population is in Assam and the highest amount can be found at Guwahati rubbish dump.



I counted 200+ Greater Adjutants at the site and additionally among them was three Lesser Adjutants.

When we arrived in Nameri Eco-camp, we had less than two hours to explore between the camp and Jia Bhorelli River. One of the good sightings was a group of 10 **Whreather Hornbills** which flew over the river.

We spent three nights at this very nice Eco-camp from where we did a full day trip to inside Nameri nature reserve (eastern side of Jia Bhorelli River) and half day river drafting on our second day. The surrounding of the camp provided already good number of interesting species to see and photograph that we did not go anymore for the second afternoon to Nameri NR. We just photographed around the camp. Below is first the entrance of the camp and then a photo inside the camp showing cosy safari tents.



Nameri nature reserve and Eco-camp surrounding provided us a good number of interesting species to our list. Below are few photos.



*A pair of **Great Pied Hornbill** was hanging around in our Eco-camp high trees.*



*Few **River Terns** were flying by the Jia Bhorelli River. Now and then they landed to sit down by the river sand strips.*



*An absolute target species was this very shy and scarce **White-winged Duck** which we managed to see on a pool inside Nameri NR. We managed to get few distant shots until the pair took off.*

It is worth to mention that on our walking path inside Nameri NR Vuokko found fresh Tiger prints. It very clearly had walked the same trail during the night. It's good to mention that we had a gunman with us in case of any danger (usually elephants and wild buffaloes). The forest itself was very

good habitat to various birds and also for day butterflies. Also Eco-camp surrounding offered good opportunities to photograph butterflies.

On 27th we did river drafting floating down 10km searching **Ibisbill** and **Long-billed Plover**. The latter species had already left to their breeding sites but Ibisbill we still found on two places. A single bird was rather scary but a pair allowed us to approach and photograph very well, photo below.



***Ibisbill** was absolutely one of the highlight species to our group though I have seen the species in Nepal and Kyrgyzstan in the past ten years.*



*Large **Crested Kingfisher** (Himalayan Pied Kingfisher) was sitting in two places by the river.*



A single **Oriental Pied Hornbill** flew over our floating boat over the river providing good opportunity to photograph it.



Tens of **Ruddy Shelduck** pairs were by the river through our river drafting.



Wild Buffaloes (this time river's Nameri NR side) brought old memories especially to Pertti and Vuokko who had to run a long way December 2007 at Divar Island near Goa when an angry buffalo was chasing them. The moment is still very well in their memory as they were really afraid of their life when a buffalo was running behind them long way.

Near our Eco-camp we saw good number of nice species. Below is a photo of **Rose-Breasted Parakeet** pair (seen 100+ birds) and a **Daurian Redstart** male.



Nameri NR had a pair of **Grey-headed Fish-eagle** and **Pallas's Fish-eagle**. Near our Eco-camp we saw a pair of **Oriental Hobby**, tens of **Green Imperial-pigeons**, twice seen **Barred Cuckoo-dove**, **Blue-bearded Bee-eater**, **Brown Shrike**, a very shy **Small-billed Scaly Thrush**, 2 **Little Pied Flycatchers**, **Small Niltava** and 2-3 **Common Hill-mynas**.

In Nameri NR we saw additionally among others **Sultan Tit**, **Striped Tit-babbler**, 6+ **Streaked Spiderhunters** and **Pied Falconet**.

On 28th we headed towards Himalayan mountains and our next destination was Dirang for the coming 3 nights.

Towards Himalayan hills to Se La Pass and Mandala Road

Early Feb 28th we left our nice Nameri Eco-camp and drove towards Bhalukpong which is the border town between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Our trip organizer had arranged us permission to enter Arunachal. Those papers were checked at the border. Then we started to climb gradually up to Himalayan hills.

On our way up we did several stops to search few target species. We picked up two very shy **Pale-headed Woodpeckers** on a bamboo forest, just seen very briefly. We heard a **Red-headed Trogon** but did not get any sight of it. A female **Scarlet Finch** showed up only to me. Our guide heard also male calling but did not find it. Two groups of **Long-tailed Sibias** were noisy by the road. Nice flock of **Silver-eared Mesias** was very well visible for photographing for a while but my camera was not ready. At least 5 **Yellow-bellied Warblers** were new among warbler species.

A bit later from a river we found a **Slaty-backed** and **Little Forktail**.



At every stop we found new species to our trip. Those hill forests provided new species compared to Assam lowland habitat.



Scenery was already delighting me who has used to see forests in Finland. However, dense vegetation made hard to find bird species.

We arrived in Nagmandir to a bridge where we soon found two **Brown Dippers**. To our surprise a **Wallcreeper** was hopping on the rocks middle of the river, photo below. Soon it and another bird flew to a nearby roadside wall.





A bit later in a small village we found a male **Hodgson's Redstart** sitting behind a house by the road.

We stopped at Tenga for a lunch. After it and a bit later we passed Bomdila and started descend towards Dirang. Sun was shining a bit and we did a good stop. We found **Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler**, **Crimson-breasted Pied Woodpecker**, 1m and 2 female **Dark-breasted Rosefinches**.



A male **Dark-breasted Rosefinch** was openly sitting by the road. A bit further was a dark female sitting.

It was already dark when we arrived in our Hotel Pemaling just before Dirang. It's at the elevation of 1675m.

Next morning (Mar 1st) we had to leave already 4 am towards Se La Pass which is over 4200m a.s.l. Major part of the morning we drove in darkness. The weather was also foggy. After 6pm we finally started to be over 3000m and around 3500m a.s.l. we made our first stop eating our field breakfast. At the same time we tried to find **Himalayan Monal** but no luck this time.



Early morning before Se La Pass was nice and sunny. A bit later clouds coming from north soon covered the sky.

We climbed to the pass and continued to the northern side of the pass. A gate at the pass welcomed us to Tawang county, photo below. It was freezing cold and rather strong wind made our walking really chilly.



After the pass we made a stop near houses to search **Grandala**, **Snow Partridge** and few other high elevation species. We found near the houses a pair of **Alpine Accentor** and **Plain Mountain-finch**, photos below.





We descended further few kilometers and then started to try to find **Blood Pheasants**. The outcome was zero. However, by a small stream Lakpa found a **Solitary Snipe** and it was really nice surprise and unexpected finding. He mentioned that sometimes those streams have had Solitary Snipes.



A big flock of Plain Mountain-finches were flying around. Few **White-throated Redstarts** and a nice flock of 30 male and 5 female **Grandalas** flew further up of the hill. No sign of Snow Partridges which I hoped to see as I missed it also spring 2008 at Langtang trek in Nepal. **Winter Wren** was also hopping near the stream.



In the attached place (towards north) we tried to find Blood Pheasant on the left side hills. On the right side streams was a Solitary Snipe feeding. Further right on the hills flew the flock of Grandalas.

First signs indicated coming snow and we had to hurry up to the pass and southern side of the pass until the weather is too bad. On the southern slopes we made our lunch break. I and few others started to experience high altitude sickness (HAS). I had a bit difficulties to eat, no appetite.



*Near our lunch place we found a small group of **Himalayan White-browed Rosefinches**, female in the photo.*

On the way down we saw at least 4 **White-winged Grosbeaks**, **Spotted** and **Black-faced Laughingthrush** as well as 6+ **Bhutan (Streaked) Laughingthrushes**.

We descended further down to Sangthi Valley and did few stops. There we found 10 **White-collared Thrushes**, 5+ **Russet Sparrows**, **Green Shrike-babbler**, 7 **Black-faced Warblers**, **Hodgon's** and **Rusty-flanked Treecreepers**, 3 **Green-tailed Sunbirds**, etc.



Green-tailed Sunbird male was very actively responding to Collared Owlet call.



A bit further down the valley was two **Oriental Turtle Doves** by the road. One of them of ssp *meena* was nicely sitting on a tree branch.

Last stop was by the river at Dirang where we searched **Long-billed Plover**. After 20 minutes scoping we found a displaying pair on an island of the river. It was a very good ending of the day. Timo and I did not feel well and we both were shivering due to light fever caused by HAS. Juha had also some symptoms.

When I had eaten in our hotel restaurant, I started to feel better. Leena skipped the whole trip to avoid possible HAS.

Next morning (Mar 2nd) we all headed towards Mandala Road. We gradually climbed the road up and we wanted to be at Mandala Pass (3200 m a.s.l.) rather early. We were there around 10am and the ground was frozen in all places where the sun did not reach yet.



Already at the lower part of Mandala Road was this flock of **Himalayan Greenfinches**.

We did see also on the lower part 4 **Fire-breasted Flowerpeckers**, 3 **Rufous-breasted Accentors**, a **Rufous-capped Babbler**, 2 **Lemon-rumped Leaf-warblers**, 2 **Red-tailed Minlas** and a calling **Strong-footed Bush-warbler**, photo below.



We did several short walking on the lower part of the Mandala Road. Our cars followed us behind.

On our way up we saw two brown-bellied Spotted Nutcrackers (*ssp hemispila*). On the higher elevation and at the pass was good number of new houses built by a local tribe. This also meant that some parts of the nice forest were logged off.



Western side of Mandala Pass we searched several target species. We did found 30 **Stripe-throated Yuhinas**, 3 Streak-breasted Scimitar-babblers, 6 **Grey-crested Tits**, a **Black Eagle**, etc.



On the upper photo we had lunch break on the hill right side. There we saw also several nice species. The hills further back are close to Bhutan border.



We did see here several Black-faced and Bhutan Laughingthrushes and additionally few Grey-crested Tits.

At our lunch break site we were lucky to find several good species what for it was a bit hard to stop for eating. Nice flock of 10 **Blanford's Rosefinches**, 2 **Golden-naped Finches**, 3 **Brown-throated Fulvettas**, a **Plain-backed Thrush** and 4 **White-collared Thrushes**. Based on bird books Blanford's Rosefinches should be only on Bhutan side but it seems that its range is reaching just a bit to Arunachal side as well. Our guide Lakpa had seen at the same site a year earlier also the species' flock.





A male **Blanford's Rosefinch** and a female where behind are part of the flock.



Golden-naped Finch was feeding constantly on the dry flower seeds.



This very tame **White-collared Thrush** was very cooperative to photographers.

On our way down we saw 15+ Beautiful Sibias, 3 **Brown Parrotbills**, 4 Plain-backed Thrushes, 30+ Streak-throated Yuhinas.



Beautiful Sibia is very noisy in the forest. They were usually by pairs and very actively responding to Collared Owlet calls.



***Plain-backed Thrush** was hopping by the road and provided us a possibility to photograph. Usually they are hiding well in dense bushes like it did at lunch break site.*



***Streak-throated Yuhinas** were rather numerous by the road.*



On our return we saw well Himalayan India-China border mountains. They are reaching up to 6000m and even over.

The day ended at dusk at a site near Dirang where we heard and saw 2-3 **Black-tailed Crakes**. We had very good two days on those high elevation habitats. Now also Leena and Juha were sick due to high elevation. Timo and I were already doing better.

Covering Eaglenest reserve

Early March 3rd we left Dirang after breakfast and drove towards Eaglenest. We stopped at a nice bamboo site on our way to Bomdila. There we heard two and briefly saw one **Bay Woodpecker**. The site had also three species of Yuhinas: 1 **Whiskered** (photo below), 10 **Rufous-vented** and 10 **Stripe-throated** Yuhinas.



When we passed Bomdila, we got a paper which stated that March 7th to 12th is a strike in the whole Arunachal Pradesh and roads will be blocked. The reason for it was two murders within a month and those cases police did not investigate. The news had immediate impact to our plans. We had reserved to stay in Eaglenest March 3-8th. Now we had to leave Eaglenest already on 6th, two days earlier to drive out to Assam late on 6th.

We arrived Eaglenest at noon and enjoyed lunch at Lama Camp which locates 2350m a.s.l.. From the camp we could see Tenga from where we started to climb small track up to Eaglenest reserve.



Safari tents with good sleeping bags provided nice night sleeps and allowed us to hear night birds like owls and nightjars.

After lunch we did first drive downwards and found good number of target species. Among best species were **White-browed Bush-robin**, 2 **Red-headed Laughingthrushes**, 4 **Striated Laughingthrushes**, 3 **Striated Babblers**, 10 **Black-chinned Yuhinas**, 1 **Rufous-winged Fulvetta**, **Hoary-throated Barwing**, 2 **Rufous-throated Wren-babblers**, 2 **Grey-cheeked Warblers**, 10 **Red-headed Bullfinches** as well as a calling **Hill Partridge** . Our list started to fill with new species.

Late in the evening after dinner when we went to tents to sleep, we heard **Mountain Scops-owl** and **Forest Eagle-owl** calling, as well as early next morning we heard **Grey Nightjar** calling.



Eaglenest northern hills a bit down from Lama Camp towards North.

Next morning (Mar 4th) we covered the same area and now our main target was to find **Bugun Liocichla** which is one of the specialties in the area. The species was found 2007 and our guide Lakpa mentioned that currently is known 7 territories of the species near Lama Camp. Certainly very dense vegetation makes hard to find the species as we noticed. We tried to find the species in 4 known territories. In the end we saw briefly two birds and our driver two others in another place. I saw briefly two times single bird and few of us saw the pair which clearly had its territory. The same site had also a flock of around 10 **Rusty-fronted Barwings** which we followed several hundred meters. However, Bugun Liocichlas did not accompany them as we believed and as they usually do. However, later I and few others saw a **Red-faced Liocichla** among Rusty-fronted Barwings.



Usually Bugun Liocichlas accompany among Rusty-fronted Barwings (in photo). Our guide mentioned that in a flock usually one Liocichla is against 9 Barwings. Now we saw a Bugun Liocichla pair staying firm in their territory. It finally also responded to the taped song after our long try.



Our excellent bird guide Lakpa playing a tape to find Bugun Liocichla from a last year territory a bit down from Lama Camp. We could not find species from this site.

From raptors we saw Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Northern Goshawk, 2 Black Eagles in the morning walking when the sun was shining. Other good species were 3 **Rufous-capped Babblers**, 2 **Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbills**, **White-tailed Nuthatch**, 20 **Gold-naped Finches**, a calling **Strong-footed Bush-warbler**, a calling **Spotted Wren-babbler** and a calling **Cutia**.

Our initial plan was to spend first two nights at Lama Camp but now for the shortened Eaglenest stay after lunch we moved over the Eaglenest Pass to Bompou Camp birding on our way there. When we got Bugun Liocichla, more good species were waiting us around Bompou Camp.

On our drive to Bompou Camp we did several stops at the pass and after it to search new species. At the pass we saw 3 **Chestnut-tailed Minlas**, 2 **Green Shrike-babblers** and 10 **Rufous-fronted Tits**. After the pass we saw 5 noisy **Spotted Laughingthrushes**, a female **Dark-rumped Rosefinch** and 2 **Spotted Nutcrackers**. It started rain a bit when later on we tried to search very rare **Ward's Trogon** without success. We drove to Bompou Camp and prepared for a dinner in the darkening evening.

Eaglenest Pass is at the level of 2920m a.s.l. and Bompou Camp at a level of 1900m. It's an old army camp which was kicked away from the nature reserve. This camp did not have any electricity. Lama Camp had an aggregate which offered some electricity support to charge camera batteries in the evening.

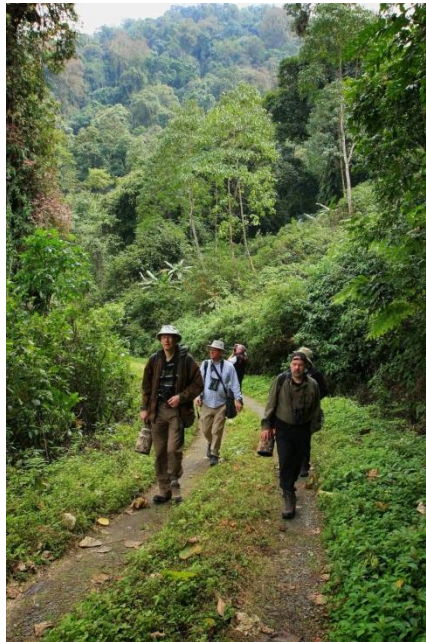
I must say that I and others as well were amazed how good food those young men prepared in such basic conditions like Bompou and Lama Camp. After our excellent dinner we enjoyed to watch millions of stars in the environment where no lights were preventing to see the whole sky and stars. Our safari tents were again good and we called it "million star hotel".

Mar 5th we started to cover lower part of Bompou Camp down to Sessna Camp (1450m) where we had our lunch. In the morning we experienced few light rain showers. We had also our breakfast in the field. These southern slopes of very untouched Himalayan hills were really excellent in bird wise as well and scenery wise. We tried to find **Beautiful Nuthatch** without success. Otherwise the list of day's new species was impressive: a calling **Rufous-throated Hill-Partridge**, 4 Kaleej Pheasants, 2 calling **Grey Peacock Pheasants**, 2+ **Mountain Imperial Pigeons**, a calling Large Hawk-cuckoo, 3+ **Rufous-necked Hornbills** (at Sessna Camp), 2+ **Golden-throated Barbets**, 2

Greater Yellownapes, 8 **Grey-chinned Minivets**, 10 Yellow-bellied Fantails, 2 **Spotted Forktails**, a calling Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher, a calling **Scaly Laughingthrush**, **Red-faced Liocichla** (at Sessna Camp), 7+ White-crested Laughingthrushes, 2 **Golden Babblers**, 7 **Yellow-throated Fulvettas**, 7 **Black-eared Shrike-babblers**, 5 **Black-headed Shrike-babblers**, 7 **Cutias**, 2 calling **Pygmy Wren-babblers**, **Rufous-throated Wren-babbler**, **Long-billed Wren-babbler**, 2 **Sikkim Wedge-billed Babblers**, a calling **Large Scimitar Babbler**, 7 **Grey-headed Parrotbills**, 5 Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbills, 4 **Chestnut-crowned Warblers**, 4 **Sultan Tits**, 5 **Black-breasted Sunbirds**, a male Scarlet Finch (at Sessna Camp), 6 Bronzed and 1 Lesser Racket-tailed Drongos and a calling Common Green Magpie.

When I was changing my shoes in the car, I missed a group of **Chestnut-breasted Hill-partridges** which took off from the road when others continued walking down. I also shortly missed 2 **Silver-backed Needleetails** when they flew over the road down to the valley. I saw when Pertti and Lakpa were looking them but I did not pick them up until they disappeared down behind trees

Early in the morning we saw a flock of 7 **Bar-headed Geese** flying over us close to a height of 2500m already over Himalaya to their breeding grounds.



Slowly walking on the track we found good number of new species down from Bompou Camp to Sessna Camp.



Eaglenest southern hills were really excellent untouched forest and provided great bird variety.



Our lunch break at Sessna Camp.



Our group photo with our drivers and bird guide Lakpa taken after our lunch at Sessna Camp.

Photographing in dense forest was very challenging. Usually birds were shy, fast moving or in bad light that only limited number of photos we could take from them. Below are few shots which I managed to take.



***Mountain Imperial Pigeon** pair was sitting on a branch near Sessna Camp.*



***Golden-throated Barbet** was one of those good target species in the area.*



*A big flock of **Striated Bulbuls** were very noisy.*



As usually Crested Serpent Eagle is the most common raptor.



Early last morning before sunrise was this view at Bompou Camp until we headed for our last birding in the area.

On March 6th we wanted to explore again up from Bompou Camp to find **Ward's Trogon** and **Fire-tailed Myzornis**. We did not find rare Trogon in spite of a long walk along good habitat but finally on a third site we found a beautiful Fire-tailed Myzornis pair (photo from a male below). It was one of the must species.



Fire-tailed Myzornis was drinking wood's liquid very frequently and allowed us to photograph nearby.



On the road we found also two groups of Maroon-backed Accentors, altogether 7 birds.

We saw other interesting species like Himalayan Switlet, Blyth's Leaf Warbler and 3 Grey-faced Leaf Warblers. It is worth to mention that when I was awake during the night I heard frequent calling of a migrating flock of Bar-headed Geese which passed our camp in complete darkness. Few others heard it as well.

Our return journey started 2pm. On a way near Eaglenest Pass one driver saw a female **Tragopan** by the road but most of us did not see it at all, neither I. Otherwise return drive via Lama Camp to Bhalukpong did not provide anything to mention. We finally in the darkness at 7.15 pm arrived in Bhalukpong in Assam side where we stayed a night in a state hotel complex. Anyhow, we were out from Arunachal in time.

It would have been nice to stay all five days in Eaglenest but unfortunately this very excellent nature destination and birding paradise visit was this time shorter than planned. Maybe another day I'm there again. Now we had two extra days available for Kaziranga.

Towards Kaziranga

March 7th in the morning we did a short walk (1,5 hour) before breakfast on the nearby Jia Borelli River front in Assam side of Bhalukpong. It was good to see some species prior to our move to Kaziranga grassland habitat. **Striated Heron** was sitting on a small rock. Three River Terns were flying over the river. Few unknown swifts flew over Bhalukpong but their id remained open. Common Swift should not appear there but we could not exclude possible other swift species of the same size. **Wreathed Hornbill** pair was sitting on a top of a river side tree. Oriental Pied Hornbill was calling further away in Nameri reserve. **Bengal (Rufous-winged) Bushlark** took off from the river sand. Around 30 Grey-throated Sand-martins were flying over the river. White-throated Fantail was new to the trip.

After our breakfast we had over 3 hours' drive to Kaziranga. Now started new habitat and accordingly also new bird species. Additionally we had great chances to watch tens of wild animals like **Swamp Deers**, Hog Deers, Wild Boars, Wild Buffaloes, **Asian Elephants**, **Greater One-horned Rhinoceros** and **Smooth-coated Otters**. Certainly we had a dream to see a **Tiger**. Kaziranga nature reserve is a stronghold of the species but it's very hard to see. The area has tall elephant grass covering most of the area. It provides excellent cover to all animals.

We had four nights reserved in a colonial style and nice Green Grass Hotel just outside of the reserve. We had to pay camera fee for every day when we went for drives in the park.

We experienced first sights of Kaziranga reserve from the main road, see photos below.



Grey-headed Fish-eagle landed nearby tree sitting there for a while.



Asian Openbills were flying around.



Good number of *Bar-headed Geese* was feeding nearby.



Several Indian Pond-herons were usual stuff as well.



Large Wild Buffalo created high respect from us knowing its dander in the field. Further behind were two Greater One-horned Rhinos feeding as well.



*Few vultures were flying further in the sky. I have interpreted this bird as a subad **White-backed Vulture** based on dark bill, whitish lower back, very dark underside. Please, correct me if it's not.*

We drove to our hotel before noon, booked in and set to enjoy our lunch. The role of our bird guide Lakpa ended now and we very much thanked him for his pleasant, professional and always smiling attitude during our trip.

After lunch we did our first drive to the middle part of Kaziranga park and now for the Kaziranga part tour guide was Nikkim-Ali. Several Tiger "alarms" and fast drives from place to place on dusty tracks started to annoy me. Certainly we all had great interest to see a tiger but I felt that it was almost reckless to run here and there just to see it. In the end, when we were in a watching tower,

we saw very distantly a **TIGER** slowly walking forward outside of an elephant grass. It was already almost sunset when this happened. I think that one of our target species, and for many others as well, was fulfilled.

In addition, we got some good species to our list. Certainly lots of duck and wader species increased number of our trip species. Additionally various grassland and lowland species were now placing earlier forest and bush species.



Pallas's Fish-eagle landed nearby and did very loud cackling to inform that I'm in my breeding territory. Actually the nest was only less than 1km from this place.



One pair of a rare **Swamp Francolin** came out from grass and showed well but a bit distant for photographing. Usually we just heard their loud calls from the grass habitat.



Several **Yellow-footed Pigeons** were seen in the area, also on later days.



Certainly tens of **Greater One-horned Rhinos** were seen during the drive. This individual had rather bad wounds from fights against other rhinos. Most rhinos had wounds in different parts of their body.

New species for the trip were among others 20 Spot-billed Pelicans, Woolly-necked Stork, 2 Black-necked Storks, 3 **Indian Spotted Eagles**, adult male **Pied Harrier** (which I saw too briefly and distant), 5 Red-collared Doves, 5 Asian Palm-swifts and 2 **White-vented Mynas**.





Two photos above show the scenery of a typical Kaziranga habitat. Upper photo shows more green elephant grass whereas the lower one has mainly dead elephant grass.



Here is a sunset view from a watching tower towards west. Behind the water we had seen a moment earlier a tiger walking away inside high grass. Water in front hosted hundreds of ducks, geese and waders.

Next three days we did drives once to western part, twice to eastern part and three times to central part. Certainly the best areas on bird wise were central and eastern parts.

As explained above, on March 8-10 we did normal morning and afternoon drives and I try to cover key parts of those three days in one bunch. The dates did not have much difference. Certainly animal and bird wise each drive offered a bit different species but most of the species were the same as the habitat offers good variety of birds and thus, only most interesting elements I want to cover in more detail.

Kaziranga park offers an excellent habitat to various raptors and vultures.







*In above photos you can see juv **Pallas's Fish-eagle**, subad **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, subad **Steppe Eagle**, subad Oriental Honey Buzzard, subad Shikra (back and front), **Changeable Hawk-eagle**, **Long-billed Vulture** and **Himalayan Vulture**.*

In eastern part we saw around 20 vultures and most of them were Himalayans but among them were also few Griffons. A single Long-billed was sitting separately. We interpreted that a tiger had killed a deer that thus, vultures had gathered to get their peace of a deer kill.



*20+ **Greater Adjutants** were circling around over Kaziranga reserve. This was the second biggest group of birds after Guwahati rubbish dump.*



*Tens of **Spot-billed Pelicans** flew over the area on 10th March. Birds were seen in several parts almost every day.*



At least 5 **Grey-headed Lapwings** (photo) were on the eastern part. The same place had also 20+ **Pacific Golden Plovers**.



This 2cy **Large Hawk-cuckoo** was the only cuckoo species I saw. Few saw and photographed also **Common Hawk-cuckoo** a bit earlier.



Small number of **Rose-breasted Parakeets** was in several sites where small forests with tall trees were growing.



Red Junglefowls were calling in several places, above a male and a female.



Great Pied Hornbills we saw also in several places. This bird in the middle part of Kaziranga was by the track and certainly much liked photographing destination.



Black-billed Roller (dark phase Indian Roller) was common in the area.



Small number of **Red Collared Doves** we saw on the tracks.



Small **Indian Cormorant** was scarce in the area.



Long-tailed Shrike was usually by the fields.

Additionally good species were among others ad male and a female **Pied Harrier** (same place as briefly seen on 7th, possible breeding pair in the area), **Emerald Dove**, 2 **Green-billed Malkohas**, Lesser Coucal, 4 Stork-billed Kingfishers, 4 **Blue-bearded Bee-eaters**, **Streak-throated Woodpecker**, 8 **Rosy Pipits**, a male **Daurian Redstart**, **Chestnut-capped Babbler**, **Tickel's Leaf Warbler** and 3 **Scarlet-backed Flowerpeckers**.

As animals are important part of Kaziranga wild life, here are few photos showing them.



Wild Asian Elephants are grey in their color whereas domestic Elephants are browner because they are frequently washed.



Hundreds of **Greater One-horned Rhinos** are living in the area. This Rhino did not have any wounds.



One **Smooth-coated Otter** stopped in front of us. Usually we saw families swimming and playing in the water.



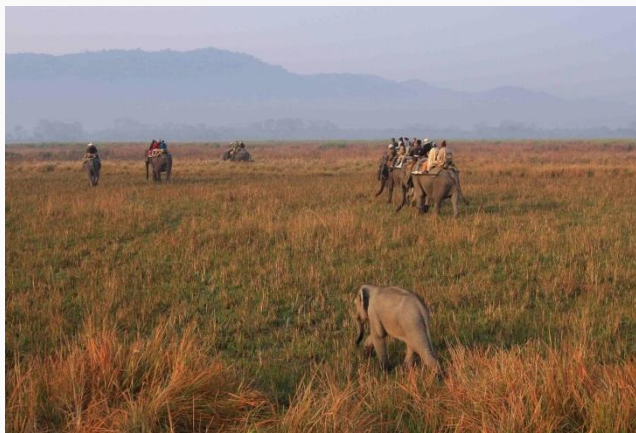
Large **Swamp Deers** had rather good population in the area. It's one of the Kaziranga specialities.



In front on the right side is a group of Wild Buffaloes. Left on back are few Rhinos and more Wild Buffaloes.



Every day new areas were on fire when traditional spring burning process was going on. Old dry elephant grass was burned which should renew faster growth of new grass.



*In the morning of our last full day we had elephant ride of an hour. Our elephant had two small babies which were walking nearby during the ride. It's worth to mention that during elephant ride we saw a male **BENGAL FLORICAN**, which took off when one elephant walked only less than 5m from it. I had missed the species in Chitwan national park in Nepal spring 2008.*

After breakfast on 11th we headed towards Guwahati airport. The drive took almost 5 hours. Later in the afternoon our flight carried us to Delhi where we stayed last night prior our home flight early on 12th to Helsinki.

In this trip I got 52 lifers, 131 Indian ticks (done two trips to northern India, 3 to Goa earlier) and around 340 trip ticks. The whole group saw altogether around 370 species including first day Delhi area birds.

Eaglenest was certainly a place where I would have liked to stay longer. It had so much to offer to find new bird species. Almost half of my new species were from there. The quietness and untouched forests were something which I liked a lot. If the original plan would have been possible to proceed, I think that it would have been ideal on bird wise. Certainly large wild animals in Kaziranga have some interest but for me two days would have been enough.

It was great trip indeed and our group made a lot for the success of the trip. Thanks a lot to all.