

Naylor et al. (2002) part

MARCH 2002

Birding trip to Nepal 11th to 27th March 2002

Itinerary

- 11th Flew Manchester to Katmandu, via Amsterdam and Sharjah, using KLM and Transavia. Departed Manchester at 14.30 and arrived in Katmandu at 12.45 on the 12th.
- 12th Arrived Katmandu at 12.45 and hired a taxi to take us directly to Pokhara, thus saving a days travelling time and a nights accommodation in Katmandu. Booked in at the Hotel Tulsi for two nights.
- 13th Breakfast at Laxman's café then taxi to footbridge below lake dam. Birded forest till 14.00. Lunch at Fishtail Lodge then birded dump and gardens till 17.00.
- 14th Breakfast by the lake at the Boomerang restaurant. Taxi to top end of lake, spending 6 hours birding the marsh and paddies.
Returned to hotel 14.30 to meet Buban, our porter, and join taxi to Naya Pul. Walked to Birathante, arriving at 16.30, signed in at the check point and arranged to stay at the Laximill Lodge in order to start the trek fresh in the morning.
- 15th Tea at 06.00. Birded to Syauli Bazaar where we stopped for breakfast (10.30). Birded up to Ghandruk where we booked a night at the Malacheha Lodge. Severe thunderstorm with hail.
- 16th Birded locally before taking breakfast at 08.30. Birded to Tadapani till 16.30, booking into the Himalaya Lodge. More rain.
- 17th Birded round Tadapani till breakfast at 09.00. The views were fantastic after last night's rain had cleared the atmosphere. Headed for Deorali tearooms (14.00), booking into Laliguran's Hotel before birding the slopes and ravines close by.
- 18th Birded around the lodge again (06.00 – 07.30). After breakfast at 08.30, walked down through the forest to Chitre, arriving at about 15.00 in a thunderstorm. Stayed at the New Daulgira Lodge.
- 19th Departed at 07.15 after tea on the balcony. Climbed to Ghorepani – Deurali, arriving about 10.30. After breakfast birded lower Poon Hill and the village gardens. Booked into the Hotel Tukuche Peak View for two nights.
- 20th Awakened at 04.30 by other guests leaving to climb Poon Hill for sunrise. Walked the ridge to Deorali Tearooms and back, calling at Laliguran's again for lunch. Returned to Ghorepani in mist with the accompaniment of thunder, arriving at 17.00.
- 21st After 20 mins at the dump we set off for Tikedungha at 07.00. Heavy rain forced us to shelter at the Green View Lodge at Birethante where we took lunch. Eventually we decided to set off for Tikedungha arriving at the bottom of the steps in a severe thunderstorm at 17.00.
- 22nd Up at 06.00; breakfast at the lodge before strolling down to Birethante for lunch. Taxi from Naya Pul back to the Tulsi at Pokhara (14.00). Set off for Fishtail Lodge but caught in violent thunderstorm with hail size of marbles at the ferry. Returned to hotel after storm.
- 23rd 06.00 breakfast at the Boomerang before hiring a taxi for the day to take us to the top end of the lake, finishing at Fishtail Lodge for the last 2 hours.

- 24th Left 07.00 for Katmandu, arriving about 13.00. Booked into Tibet Guesthouse for two nights. Afternoon shopping.
- 25th Hotel 4w drive took us up Phulchowki for day.
- 26th Returned to Phulchowki as far as halfway house. Back at 13.00. Some shopping and relaxation for the rest of afternoon before leaving for the airport at 18.00. 21.30 flight home.

Daily Diary

Tuesday 12th

Arrived at Tribhuvan airport, Katmandu, at around 12.45 and very quickly cleared baggage reclaim and customs including obtaining visas. Intending to try to reach Pokhara today we approached the taxi desk where we were quoted 6000Ru for the journey. This was unacceptable but when we made to walk away the price dropped to 4500Ru, which we agreed. Then commenced the most nerve-wracking ride ever. It took a long time to clear the city as the festival of Shiva was being celebrated. The streets were either closed or choked with traffic. Eventually we were on our way and despite the condition of the roads and the car our driver drove quite recklessly, obviously with the intention of returning to Katmandu the same night. Everywhere children had thrown barriers of rope across the road to stop travellers and demand a donation. After paying once or twice it got beyond a joke. We would have been broke by the time that we reached Pokhara had we paid up every time. It certainly slowed our progress.

We arrived in Pokhara at around 18.00 and made our way to the Hotel Tulsi where Martin and Allen stayed on their previous visit. All the staff remembered them and made us very welcome. After some haggling Martin managed to negotiate a very reasonable rate of 20\$ per night for the three of us. It is a splendid hotel in the centre of Pokhara and is highly recommended. After dumping our bags in the room we went along the main street to the lakeside where we had a meal in the Laxman Restaurant then returned to the hotel for an early night after a tiring journey.

The hotel arranged our trekking visas for a small fee and organised our porter, who was to be Buban, who had accompanied Martin and Allen in December. It saved us time and any hassle.

Wednesday 13th

Up at 6.30 and strolled down to Laxman's for a leisurely breakfast of milk tea and porridge or omelette. Took a taxi to the footbridge below the dam at the South end of the lake. The hedge to the left of the bridge held a single WHITE-RUMPED MUNIA. Birded along the lower path round the base of the hill, where we had brief views of a LONG-TAILED BROADBILL and excellent views of GREEN MAGPIE. A huge flock of at least 300 birds were only COMMON WOOD PIGEON, which is apparently quite a good record in Nepal.

We headed into the forest past the ranger's house and spent the morning climbing towards the temple picking up a very confiding SCALY THRUSH, FULVOUS-BREASTED and GREY-HEADED WOODPECKERS, LESSER YELLOWNAPE, GREY-HOODED, YELLOW-BROWED and WHISTLERS WARBLERS, RUFOUS-BELLIED NILTAVA, LARGE CUCKOOSHRIKE, MAROON ORIOLE, WHITE-CRESTED LAUGHING THRUSH, PALE BLUE FLYCATCHER and ASHY BULBUL.

Turning back before the summit we made our way to Fishtail Lodge. This proved easier said than done as there is no access to the lodge from the forest and therefore there isn't a path. After a rough scramble we reached the barbed wire fence and we were directed by one of the staff to the North end near the dump where we could gain access along the lakeshore. This was only possible because the water level had dropped appreciably since Martin and Allen were here in December. We decided to chill out with some lunch and a cold drink before tackling the dump. As we sat by the lake a bird swooped over us, landing in a tree lower down the garden. On investigation it proved to be a superb BLUE-BEARDED BEE EATER, which was then joined by its mate.

After lunch we headed for the dump, which consists of a damp bank under a group of dense bushes adjacent to a pump house. As we cautiously descended the steps by the pumphouse Martin, looking over the flat roof, called

out TICKELL'S THRUSH. Eager to see it Allen and I scanned the roof but could only see a WHITE-BREASTED WATERHEN, which Martin conceded could have been the bird that he had seen.

The bushes of the dump resemble the rhododendron bushes that we have in England, with multiple, thick stems and large leaves. Access is possible at one or two places but visibility is limited by the profusion of closely spaced stems. The best access is along the shore next to the pump house but this is difficult when the water in the lake is high. It is possible to reach the dump from behind the pump house but is restricted to one person at a time.

Soon after taking up positions the WHITE-TAILED ROBIN, that had been present in December, appeared. It is a charming bird and so confiding that it often perched within 2m of us, seeming unconcerned by our presence. The dump was fairly quiet but over the next hour a male ORANGE-HEADED THRUSH joined the robin periodically. Close by a CHESTNUT-HEADED TESIA was vocal but proved difficult to see well. Back at the dump, just before we called it a day, Martin heard and spotted a female WHITE-BROWED SHORTWING which Allen and I failed to locate. All these birds, probably the same individuals, had been present in December.

The only way to and from Fishtail Lodge is via a rope hauled pontoon ferry. We left by this means, catching a taxi back to the Tulsi. A wonderful introduction to the birds of Nepal.

Thursday 14th

Up at 06.30 followed by a very pleasant breakfast in the garden of the Boomerang Restaurant, overlooking the lake. It was very lively with LITTLE GREBE, HOUSE SWIFT, HIMALAYAN SWIFTLET and BARN SWALLOW on and over the lake; YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER, TAILORBIRD ORIENTAL WHITE-EYE and SPOTTED DOVE in the garden and LONG-TAILED SHRIKE, STONECHAT and lots of WHITE WAGTAILS on the shore.

Two warblers in the garden were giving a strange call, which we could not place. They tended to keep low in small bushes, spending some time on the ground. They were a plain greyish green colour and, initially, appeared to be a race of CHIFF CHAFF despite the fact that we were not convinced that the leg colour was black. It was described as a dark flesh colour at the time but on reflection the light conditions and the possibility that they could have been wet may have influenced their appearance. However, although dark, they were clearly not black. We eventually let them go without positive ID.

Following breakfast we organised a taxi for the day to take us to the North end of the lake, Phewa Tal, where we spent about 6 hours birding the paddies and marsh. Most of the water fowl had congregated near the mouth of the river with 101 COOT, 50+ LITTLE, 3 GREAT CRESTED and 7 BLACK-NECKED GREBES, 40+ TUFTED DUCK, 15+ WIGEON, 2 POCHARD, 3 MALLARD, 6 SHOVELLER, TEAL, GADWALL and 20 NORTHERN PINTAIL present.

In the paddies we found ROSY, PADDYFIELD, RICHARD'S PIPITS and a single RED-THROATED PIPIT. Across the river in the marsh were 5 INTERMEDIATE EGRETS, LITTLE EGRETS, 1 GREY HERON, 20 BRONZE-WINGED JACANA, 4 PURPLE SWAMPHENS and 2 COMMON SNIPE. 5 LITTLE RINGED PLOVERS and 2 COMMON SANDPIPERS were along the shoreline. A STEPPE EAGLE was roosting close to the shore and later 2 other birds were seen soaring over the valley. By now we were ready for a cold drink and a small hut at the side of the road came up with the goods.

After a rest we walked further North along the road to a couple of man-made lakes at the side of the road, one of which was almost dry. Next to the dry one was a large tree and a stand of bamboo in which a bird was calling. Although we could see movement it was some time before it really showed. It was a splendid SMOKY WARBLER, which was soon joined by a second. This was obviously not the bird that we had heard calling so we continued to search. Eventually we found another bird, which was not one of the SMOKYs. It was only a brief view but Martin and Allen felt that it was probably a BROWNISH-FLANKED BUSH WARBLER; a good bird. It was most frustrating trying to prove its identity but persistence gave its reward by providing enough decent views to nail it. A BROWN SHRIKE was also a good find close by.

As we intended heading for the start of the trek today we returned to the hotel at 14.30 where Buban, our porter, was waiting for us. Our main rucksacks were placed in store at the hotel until we returned, with Martin's being used for sleeping bags and the few other items that we were taking with us. We carried small rucksacks for water etc. The hotel van took us on the hour long journey to Naya Pul from where we walked to Birethane arriving at 16.30; the starting point for the trek. On the walk along the river we had our first sighting of a splendid LAMMERGEIER and our only BONELLI'S EAGLE; a good start.

After reporting in at the checkpoint we booked in at the Laxmill Lodge for the night so that we could get an early start in the morning. The lodge is owned by an Englishman but is managed by a Gurkha. We were the only guests that night and after dinner the manager came to chat with us. He proudly informed us that he had met Prince Philip and showed us the photographs of the occasion when he was presented with a medal at Buckingham Palace. Apparently many Nepalese aspire to join the British army, regarding it as a great honour. He didn't appear any way resentful of the fact that he was reduced to managing a lodge but I suppose that it is a relatively high profile job by Nepalese standards.

An early night was disturbed somewhat by the sounds of creatures skittering about in the thatched roof.

Friday 15th

We decided not to bother with breakfast, making do with a pot of tea, before commencing the trek at 06.30. Initially the track gently climbs following the river Modi Khola through Chimrong as far as Shauli Bazaar. The lower valley has a succession of small farms with terraced fields. The river, although rather tame at this time of year, is obviously a raging torrent in the rains. The bed is strewn with huge boulders. The typical birds of this habitat, BROWN DIPPER, WHITE-CROWNED WATER REDSTART and PLUMBEOUS WATER REDSTART were all present as was SLATEY-BACKED and LITTLE FORKTAIL. The surrounding woodland was home to RED-BILLED BLUE MAGPIE, GREY-CAPPED PYGMY WOODPECKER, CRIMSON SUNBIRD, LONG-TAILED SHRIKE, CHESTNUT-BELLIED NUTHATCH, RUFOUS GORGETTED FLYCATCHER, SMALL NILTAVA, LONG-TAILED MINIVET, ASIAN BARRED OWLET, GREATER YELLOWNAPE, WHISTLERS and GREY-HOODED WARBLERS, BLUE-BEARDED BEE EATER and BLACK-CHINNED BABBLER. A large flock (c50) of SLATEY-HEADED PARAKEETS was feeding on the fruit trees and in excess of 200 SNOW PIGEONS flew up and down the valley. 2 IBISBILL were seen flying up the river but could not be located despite extensive searching. Stopping to photograph a small but high waterfall our only WALLCREEPER was spotted a few feet up a cliff right by the path. Further along Martin caught a glimpse of a large black and white bird as it dropped into a paddy above the track. We were very surprised to find WOOLY-NECKED STORK searching for frogs. Presumably it was migrating up the river and felt like a snack.

We paused at Shauli Bazaar at about 10.30 for breakfast. Whilst we were eating, a very obliging STRIATED PRINIA sang and displayed from a cabbage patch.

Here we left the river and began to climb more steeply towards Ghandruk. There was an obvious change in habitat from relatively gentle sloping fields in the valley bottom to steep sided, thickly wooded, fairly dark gullies following streams up into the mountains. Consequently the variety of bird species also changed with the first SHIKRA, COMMON KESTREL and REDHEADED VULTURES and 2 more fabulous LAMMERGEIER. GREY replaced PIED BUSHCHAT; RUSSET SPARROWS began to appear; LAUGHING THRUSHs were represented by WHITE-CRESTED and STREAKED; a stunning male CRESTED BUNTING was the only one of the trip. YELLOW-BREASTED GREENFINCH were not seen again until Phulchowki, and then only a single bird; a few GREEN-BACKED and BLACK-THROATED TITs, BLACK-THROATED SUNBIRD and a single ORANGE-BELLIED LEAFBIRD all added to an exciting day.

As we approached Ghandruk at about 16.30 the heavens opened. We were trapped sheltering under an overhanging cliff just below the village. Our gen indicated that this was a site for LONG-BILLED THRUSH but there was no sign of it. Buban had gone on ahead and he came back down to find us carrying an umbrella. The final pull, only about 50m straight up, nearly put my lights out.

We booked into the Malacheha Lodge and watched the hailstones bouncing off the porch.

Martin Realised that he had lost his light jacket and was concerned that his flight tickets and house key were in the pockets. It had probably been dropped just below Naya Pul and was almost certainly a write off. It was a bit of a worry but there was nothing we could do about it until we returned to Birethante.

Saturday 16th

Got up at 06.00 to a beautiful clear morning and a fabulous view of Annapurna South. Whilst we admired the view a large all dark raptor soared out in front of us and commenced a roller coaster display. Any displaying raptor is worth watching but a huge BLACK EAGLE is something else. After it moved off we headed straight down to the wet gully that we had sheltered in last evening. This morning the LONG-BILLED THRUSH was co-operative. We were very fortunate as this normally shy species stayed perched out long enough to give excellent views. A

little lower down the track we heard a PYGMY WREN-BABBLER up another wet gully. Martin climbed up but was unable to go very far and was unable to locate the bird. It was lively, with VERDITERS particularly obvious and we spent the next 2 hours, until breakfast, around Ghandruk.

After breakfast we began the climb out of the village heading for Tadapani. As we crossed another wet gully a bird dropped in below us. Despite our search we could not locate it but higher up the same gully we picked up a TICKELL'S THRUSH, which proved as obliging as the long-billed.

The views of Annapurna South, as we left the village, were truly stunning.

After about an hour we stopped for milk tea at the Lonely Planet Restaurant.

Within a few metres of the restaurant we spotted a group of birds in some bushes. It proved extremely difficult to get a decent view as they were constantly on the move and the foliage was quite dense. However, with patience Martin eventually identified them as Minlas and Yuhinas. WHISKERED & STRIPED-THROATED YUHINA gave good views but the MINLAs, both BLUE-WINGED & CHESTNUT-TAILED, were not very co-operative only showing briefly, but we did get identifiable views before moving on.

Our route now took us across the bare flank of a hillside, where the effects of deforestation were very evident. Birds were scarce along this stretch.

During the day we picked up several species which we didn't see again i.e. BAR-WINGED FLYCATCHER, SHRIKE, TICKELL'S THRUSH, CRIMSON-BREASTED WOODPECKER & MOUNTAIN BULBUL. Other birds worth noting were GREY-SIDED BUSHWARBLER, GREEN SHRIKE BABBLER, HIMALAYAN GRIFFON, CINEREOUS VULTURE, YELLOW-BILLED BLUE MAGPIE and a nice selection of warblers and tits.

We reached Tadapani at about 16.30 and, after a wander round, booked into the Hymalaya hotel on Buban's recommendation. With hindsight we should have booked into a lodge, which overlooked the forest and was more peaceful. After dumping our gear we spent some time checking out the variety of birds feeding in flowering trees. These included many DARK-THROATED THRUSHs, RUFOUS VENTED TITs, WHITE-COLLARED & GREY-WINGED BLACKBIRDS, GREY-CRESTED TIT, BLACK-HOODED ORIOLE and PINK-BROWED ROSEFINCH. There were other rosefinchs but identification was made very difficult by the pollen from the trees coating the heads of the birds making them appear very strange.

As dusk fell the temperature dropped dramatically and we had another storm. Fortunately the dining room had a good fire and the food was good but it was crowded. It became quite noisy and carried on well into the night which was unfortunate as we had rooms close by and we wanted an early night.

Sunday 17th

Up at 06.00 and birded, mostly overlooking the forest, till breakfast at 09.00. Much of the time was spent grilling the rosefinchs feeding in the trees but we had no more success than last evening; SPOT-WINGED ROSEFINCH being the only one confirmed. HOARY-THROATED BARWING, RUFOUS-BELLIED WOODPECKER & REDHEADED BULLFINCH were also picked up before breakfast.

One of the lodges overlooked the trees and had we stayed there we could have birded from the balcony. It was also much quieter than the Hymalaya hotel. We decided to try it for breakfast and found it excellent and served by a very friendly young girl, who came over and sat chatting to us. Whilst we scoffed our porridge I noticed two birds flying over high and fast. They were obviously wildfowl, giving us our only record of COMMON MERGANSER.

Today we were heading for Deorali Tearooms that was fortunately not a long trek, as the weather became rather inclement. Before the rain, as we made our way down a thickly wooded valley, Martin heard a SCALY-BREASTED WREN BABBLER very close under the bank of the stream which we were following. At that point a large tree had fallen across the stream giving lots of cover for a bird the size of a wren. Martin clambered down to the bed of the stream whilst Allen and I made our way beyond the fallen tree. I then climbed onto the trunk of the tree to try to spot the babbler. As I stood looking towards Martin it popped out in front of me not more than 2 metres away. I had a dilemma; how was I to attract Martin and Allen without spooking the bird. I couldn't shout so it was a case of pointing agitatedly and speaking in a low calm voice. Fortunately it did not seem at all concerned by our presence and we all got stunning views.

At the lower end of the valley we stopped for a 'Mars' bar at a small café. The surrounding trees were lively with tits, yuhinas and minlas. As we started following another stream out of this valley what we first thought might

be another wren babbler popped out of a wall. It was a WINTER WREN but it was dark and covered in spots. Quite amazing that this should not be classified as a separate species. At the same spot some plump rodent type creatures kept appearing out of a tumble of boulders. At the time we thought that they were some kind of rat with long ears but I have since identified them as PIKA.

Out of the valley we followed a relatively level track round the side of a mountain with scree slopes above and Rhododendron forests below. A LAMMERGEIR drifted by reasonably low. It started to rain but Martin could not resist climbing up to the scree line to check out a flock of birds which we could see feeding among the rocks. They were mainly PLAIN MOUNTAIN FINCHES but a SPOT-WINGED ROSEFINCH and 10 ALTAI ACCENTORS were with them. It is probable that there were other birds present but the weather was against us and we continued on to the next tearoom where we sheltered for a while. Some impressive black and white monkeys posed for photographs in the trees outside.

When the rain eased we moved on, dropping steeply down into another valley. Now it began to rain much harder and as none of us had any wet weather gear we tried to shelter in the lee of a small generator station. It was impossible to avoid getting wet so we decided to make the best of it and carry on up a staircase. Eventually, about 14.00, we reached Laliguran's Hostel just below Deorali Tearooms. We stopped for refreshment and a warm fire in front of the fire. Another couple who had been in front of us had stopped for a meal and recommended the food. However, after tea we climbed the short distance to Deorali, where we intended staying. It was not very inviting so we retraced our steps to Laliguran's where we were welcomed with open arms. Taking a couple of rooms we dumped our gear, left Buban chatting up the daughter of the landlady, and set off up the hillside at the rear of the lodge. More MOUNTAIN FINCHES, a BLUE-FRONTED REDSTART and WHITE-BROWED ROSEFINCH took some digging out. We soon returned to the comfort of the lodge to order our evening meal. It was pretty cold and damp but we had a pleasant meal besides a roaring fire and afterwards were joined by the owner and his daughter, both of whom spoke excellent English; remarkable in such an isolated spot. Eventually we retired leaving Buban chatting to the daughter.

Monday 18th

Spent 06.00 to 07.30 birding round the lodge. Birds seen included ORANGE-FLANKED BUSH ROBIN, WHITE-BROWED ROSEFINCH, OLIVE-BACKED PIPIT, BUFF-BARRED WARBLER, GREEN-TAILED SUNBIRD and RUFIOUS-BELLIED NILTAVA. The latter was later called into question. (see end of day)

After an excellent breakfast we bade farewell to our hosts, promising to return if we ever visited Nepal again. As we climbed towards the tearooms we picked up 3 BLACK-FACED LAUGHING THRUSHES. The plan had been to head straight for Ghorepani but we were ahead of schedule and decided that we could afford to detour by way of Chitre. It isn't a long detour and one could easily reach Ghorepani in the day by this route. The detour starts at Deorali Tearooms, dropping quite steeply down on a poorly defined track through an open forest of conifers. We were immediately into birds with a flock of COLLARED GROSBEAKS. Persistence or luck is needed to get a clear view of them. Also present were a GREEN SHRIKE BABBLER and a few COAL TITS (on returning home we discovered that there is a strong possibility that these were hybrid COAL/SPOT-WINGED TITS and consequently they have not been counted in the trip total). As we dropped down through the forest HILL PARTRIDGE was heard calling across the valley. We weren't too sure of the way, and Buban was no help, so we made our way straight down the hillside until we found a stream, which we then followed downstream along a well-trodden path. The trees were mostly deciduous by this time and quite splendid, festooned with mosses and orchids. GREY WAGTAIL, smart as it was, seemed out of place alongside SPOTTED and LITTLE FORKTAILS. As we meandered down the valley it began to open out and birds became more numerous. Two YELLOW-THROATED MARTENS caused some consternation but were a delight to see.

Glancing up at the mountainside we noticed a strange ball drifting down from a high pasture. It obviously consisted of foliage which Martin and Allan were convinced was a natural phenomena. I am of the opinion that it was man made and possibly a way for the farmers to get fodder down off the mountain, though I am not sure how they know where it will land. It was not the only one that we saw.

A MOUNTAIN HAWK EAGLE was perched high up near the track. Birds, with a call that we could not place were all around us. They were easy to mimic and responded but were reluctant to show themselves. When we

eventually, found them there were about 40 RUFOUS SIBIA. As we neared Chitre, although we didn't know this at the time, a valley came in from the right, which looked well worth exploring. We separated with Allen going downstream and Martin and I entering the valley. Not far in a flock of small birds flew over chittering and landed in the top of a tree. All I could think of was REDPOLL, which I brought to Martin's attention. Of course, he knew immediately that they were FIRE-FRONTED SERIN; again our only sighting. We tried to attract Allen's attention but he had wandered too far. As we followed him the MOUNTAIN HAWK EAGLE appeared drifting along the side of the valley; a brilliant view.

Lower down the valley a very noisy flock of TIBETAN SISKIN and 4 RED CROSSBILLS proved difficult to see despite the constant twittering.

By this time, mid afternoon, the weather was looking quite threatening and we still did not know how far it was to Chitre. The few people that we met did not seem to understand even when Buban asked the question. The rain and hail arrived before we reached the village and we sheltered as best we could under some trees. This was quite fortunate as several birds, including a stunning MRS GOULD'S & GREEN-TAILED SUNBIRDS, also chose to shelter there as well. We had been having a lot of trouble trying to separate them, which we found frustrating, but seeing them together demonstrated how difficult sunbird ID can be.

With a lull in the storm we made a dash for the village, which was only over the hill, stopping at the first lodge for milk tea. After the tea we braved the weather once more as we looked for a suitable place to stay. We chose the New Daulugia Lodge at the lower end of the village. It was not the most salubrious of establishments but it suited our requirements and the view from the balcony was fabulous when we could see it. The toilet was at the end of the balcony; quite dangerous in the dark. The showers were in huts across the garden. However the dining room was warm, the food was good and the price was right. We spent some time sitting on the balcony and amassed quite a good bird list i.e. BLUE-WINGED MINLA, RUSSET SPARROW, ORIENTAL TURTLE DOVE, LARGE-BILLED CROW, MAROON ORIOLE, LONG-TAILED MINIVET, BLUE-WHISTLING THRUSH, RUFOUS GORGETTED FLYCATCHER, BLUE-FRONTED REDSTART, GREY BUSHCHAT (gave us trouble again) WHITE-TAILED NUTHATCH, GREEN-BACKED TIT, LEMON-RUMPED, HUME'S, BLYTH'S-LEAF CHESTNUT-CROWNED, BLACK-FACED & GREY-HOODED WARBLERS, CHESTNUT-TAILED MINLA WHISKERED & RUFOUS-VENTED YUHINA, RUFOUS SIBIA, YELLOW-BILLED BLUE MAGPIE, GREY-CRESTED TIT, RUFOUS-BELLIED NILTAVA and BROWN-THROATED TREECREEPER. A pigeon that appeared on the roof of a hut in the next garden was dismissed as FERAL, but we realised later that it had been a HILL PIGEON, which is quite common round villages at higher altitudes

When the rain stopped, we had a walk around the village and up a side valley. Nothing exciting but the potential for a new find is a strong incentive to explore.

Dinner and the log, where Martin revealed that he was sure that the RUFOUS-BELLIED NILTAVA from this morning had actually been a RUFOUS-BREASTED BUSHROBIN. We determined to return over the ridge from Ghorepani to check it out. Bed.

Tuesday 19th

When I awoke and pulled back the curtain the view was breathtaking. Martin remarked; "that must account for the price of the room". We paid about 80p for a double.

We had tea on the balcony watching the sun rise over the mountains before setting out at about 07.00 for the short, steep climb up to Ghorepani/ Deorali. But for the weather we would probably have made this climb yesterday. Part way up we met Martin and his wife (from Halifax), the first birders that we had seen. We had quite a long chat, passing on our sightings. They had already traversed our return route so their sightings were of interest to us.

On the climb we saw SCALY-BREASTED and 2 DARJEELING WOODPECKERS, BEAUTIFUL ROSEFINCH and CRIMSON-BROWED FINCH.

We arrived in Ghorepani at 10.40 and had milk tea whilst Martin checked out rooms. There was little to choose so we settled on the Hotel Tukucho Peak view and booked two nights. As we drank tea ALPINE SWIFT and COMMON BUZZARD were seen flying over.

Having dropped off our bags we headed for Poon Hill, a famous watch point where trekkers go to see the sunrise over the Annapurnas. We didn't climb it, thank goodness, but walked round the base for 2 or 3 kilometres. At the start of the walk, just on the outskirts there is a dump, similar to the one at Fishtail lodge, where birds come

to feed. It was not as productive as it had been in December but still worth checking out. Close by we had a pair of SPECTACLED FINCHES and a CHESTNUT THRUSH. It is a pleasant walk with forest and scrub separated by open grassy areas, which are often frequented by rosefinches. It was fairly quiet but ALTAI ACCENTORS DARK-BREASTED ROSEFINCH and BLUE-CAPPED REDSTART were seen. The remains of the winter snow were still evident with snowdrifts in the more sheltered areas. There appeared to be a strong movement of butterflies but birds were more difficult to find. YELLOW-BELLIED FANTAILS and WHITE-COLLARED BLACKBIRDS were common.

On returning to the village we took more refreshment and then Martin and I went to investigate the gardens to try to locate rosefinchs. They were disappointing, with the only interest being the sighting of another WINTER WREN. This proved particularly unco-operative, but showed well enough for us to decide that it was probably a different sub-species to the previous ones that we had seen.

Time for dinner. The lodge now appeared to be rather full with several different nationalities. The dining room was very cosy. We shared a table with a group of young Japanese. Whilst Martin and Allan chose the staple dal bhat (I wasn't too keen although it was quite edible), the Japanese were more adventurous. It looked rather good and when they failed to eat it all Martin had the cheek to ask if he could try it. They immediately passed him the plate. They must have thought that we were very poor as they then offered to share their sweet with us. They were very friendly. We didn't have a particularly early night and the room had to be cleared of moths before Martin was prepared to turn in. It was just as well as we were still kept awake by the noise of other guests as they went to bed. The whole place seemed to act as a sounding box.

Wednesday 20th

Awakened at about 05.00 by the noise of every other guest in the hotel leaving before dawn to climb Poon Hill to watch the sunrise. They were most inconsiderate with some making no attempt to be quiet. As we were awake we rose at 05.30 and set off over the ridge to Deorali tearooms to try to confirm, or otherwise, the RUFOUS-BREASTED BUSHROBIN that Martin was convinced that he had seen 2 days ago. Martin assured me that this was to be an easy day but I soon realised that he wasn't quite telling the truth. It is a hard climb, and being above 10,000ft, the air is becoming quite thin. As soon as we cleared the trees we started to get views of the mountains and we were early enough to witness the sunrise. We could see the crowds on Poon Hill, who were not much higher than we were, but we had the view to ourselves. Off to the right of the track grassy fields sloped away towards the edge of the hill where it dropped away steeply. Low bushes and scrub grow on the steep sides favoured by a female WHITE-THROATED REDSTART. This bird and its mate, which we had a glimpse of, had been there during December. Near the top of the slope some low bushes were being defended by a singing GREY-SIDED BUSHWARBLER. There were plenty of DARK-THROATED THRUSHs moving in the tops of the trees but it was worth checking them all as we managed to find two superb male CHESTNUT-BELLIED ROCK THRUSHs amongst them. As we continued, the path ran along a knife-edge with steep drops on either side. One side is heavily wooded so it does not feel too bad. Looking over the valley we watched the planes from Jomsom to Pokhara flying below us. Two FORK-TAILED SWIFTS followed them but they were so high and far away that I was unable to locate them. Martin caught a brief glimpse of a male HARRIER sp hugging the side of the valley but it did not reappear and could not be positively identified. A flock of 100+ PLAIN MOUNTAIN FINCHES was in this area.

By now we were into bamboo thickets, which make it impossible to see, more than a couple of metres off the track. Birding is very difficult and it is a case of "looking for rustling in the vegetation" as Martin stated. 2 or 3 birds flew across the path in front of us, which we thought were GREAT PARROTBILLS but they disappeared before we could be sure. We were unable to relocate them and no more were seen. As we dropped down towards Deorali tearooms a bird flitting about in a small patch of bamboo attracted our attention. We took the opportunity to sit down and rest as we waited for the bird to show itself. It moved about cautiously, mostly near the ground and deep inside the bamboo but it occasionally popped into view for a few seconds. Martin identified it as a YELLOWISH-BELLIED BUSHWARBLER and it was decided to try to entice it out by playing a tape. This produced completely unexpected results when, as soon as it was played, a different bird appeared; not the expected bushwarbler but a brilliant WHITE-BROWED BUSHROBIN. After showing briefly it disappeared, never to return.

and, despite spending time searching there was no sign of either, or, indeed, any bird in this bamboo. It may have been due to excessive disturbance, as a herd of YAKs in the valley beyond the bamboo attracted a lot of attention from every trekker (and it is a busy route) and they were very noisy as they stopped to take photos.

Eventually we moved on. Another group of birds crossed the path and fortunately one or two perched in bushes next to the path enabling a positive identification of BROWN PARROTBILL. We heard another HILL PARTRIDGE at this spot but it was a long way away.

We did not stop at Deorali Tea-rooms, heading straight down to Laliguran's, where Martin had had the probable bushrobin. No sign before we reached the hostel. They were very pleased to see us and we stayed for lunch after which Martin gave an interview to two reporters from the Katmandu Post on how the troubles were perceived by foreign visitors. They also took a photograph of the three of us. Now we retraced our steps, carefully searching the gullies for the RUFIOUS-BREASTED BUSHROBIN. Our diligence paid off as a bird was spotted that was either our target or a RUFIOUS-BELLIED NILTAVA. On close scrutiny it became obvious that the bird was a RUFIOUS-BREASTED BUSHROBIN. At certain angles it was almost impossible to see both the white undertail coverts and belly or the all rufous chin. Many people must surely have passed it off as a RUFIOUS-BELLIED NILTAVA.

Satisfied with our day's work we began the return journey over the ridge with 3 bushrobins in the bag ORANGE-FLANKED being the third. A short distance before the stand of bamboo where we had spent so much time on the outward trek I heard a bird song, which I could not place. Martin and Allen were off exploring. I searched the undergrowth and eventually spotted the small bird under a bush. I thought that it may be the yellowish-flanked bushwarbler and immediately called the others. By the time that they arrived the bird had moved away, although it was still singing. Martin was intrigued and after Allen and I had given up the hunt he carried on and was rewarded by stunning views of a singing GOLDEN BUSHROBIN. We had never heard one sing before. We were over the moon. How many birders have seen all 4 bushrobins in one trip never mind one day?

Lingered for a while looking for the bushwarbler at the stand of bamboo. The girls from the tea-rooms and Laliguran's, on their way to Ghorepani dressed in their Sunday best, paused to say hello and to photograph the yaks. After they had passed I attempted to photograph the same yak and had to take refuge behind a tree as it became agitated. By now the afternoon clouds had begun to gather and we thought it prudent to move along. Martin lingered after something attracted his attention. Allen and I, a little concerned by the rising wind, swirling fog and a very dark sky had carried on. We paused after a while, expecting Martin to follow but there was no sign so we strolled back along the path. Suddenly Martin appeared, out of breath; he had been shouting for us, but we had not heard him. He had been watching a mixed flock comprised of SPOTTED, CHESTNUT-CROWNED & BLACK-FACED LAUGHING THRUSHs accompanied by BROWN PARROTBILL, MRS. GOULD'S SUNBIRD & WHITE-BROWED FULVETTA. Needless to say they had moved through and, although we could hear them moving in the forest parallel to us, we could not locate them.

The weather was becoming more threatening, with thunder rolling round the mountains, but at least it was not raining as we dropped back into Ghorepani.

At 3200m, the ridge was the highest part of the trek. The altitude was noticeable but not, particularly troublesome if one took one's time.

The second night in Ghorepani was much more peaceful as most of the trekkers seemed to have left during the day.

Thursday 21st

No early morning risers for Poon Hill today so we had a lie-in till 06.00. Martin and I left Allen in the lodge and went up to the dump for last look before we left. A male CHAFFINCH was most unexpected and had Martin as excited as at any time on the trip. A thrush in the top of a tree looked interesting but, unfortunately, the light was all wrong and we could not get enough detail to identify it, although DUSKY THRUSH seemed a likely candidate. It flew off as we moved to a better viewing position, leaving us to wonder.

Returning to the lodge we found that Allen had disappeared and Buban did not know where he was. We waited for some time before deciding to set off, knowing that Allen was familiar with the route. Just below the town we stopped for milktea to give Allen a chance to catch us up, but he did not appear so we pressed on slowly. Buban was quite worried so we sent him ahead with instructions to return to tell us if he located him.

When we finally caught up with him he had been watching a small flock of birds on a feeding circuit, which included two BLACK-THROATED PARROTBILLS and a BLACK-EARED SHRIKE BABBLER. The flock did not re-appear.

Our route now took us through dense forest and deep, dark gorges where there were birds aplenty, with lots of small feeding flocks. Unfortunately the weather turned sour with heavy persistent rain and we were, reluctantly forced to take shelter at the Green View Lodge in Banthante. We took the opportunity to have lunch. The lodge is built into the side of a hill and on the lower side overlooks a garden and scrubby slope. Flocks of birds were moving up the valley and it was possible to view many of them from the window. Notable was the appearance of a stunning male WHITE-BROWED SHRIKE BABBLER, which I called out as a grey bushshrike (but knowing that it wasn't). It gave absolutely wonderful views; probably the bird of the day, if not the trip.

The rain eased and we retraced our steps for a short distance to see if we could re-locate the flocks that we had been forced to abandon. However, it soon became obvious that the weather was set and we made the decision to see how far we could go before the rain became too heavy to continue.

The descent to Tikedungha, down approximately 3300 steps and 1350m is hard in good weather but in the rain it was quite treacherous in places, especially when the knees begin to protest. As we approached the outskirts of Tikedungha a thunderstorm began, forcing us to dive into the first lodge, aptly named the Tikedungha Lodge. I was ok. The food was good, with plenty of beer (if required) and we spent the evening considering a great day's birding which could have been so much better but for the weather. The list included DARJEELING WOODPECKER, 4 male SNOWY-BROWED & 6 male + 1 female PYGMY BLUE FLYCATCHERS, 2 CHESTNUT-HEADED TESIA, 25+ WHITE-THROATED, 6 STRIATED & 8 CHESTNUT-CROWNED LAUGHINGTHRUSHs, 2 RUSTY-CHEEKED SCIMITARBABLERS, 3 FIRE-BREASTED FLOWERPECKERS, GREEN-TAILED & FIRE-TAILED SUNBIRDS, 1 BLACK-EARED SHRIKE BABBLER, 1 VINACEOUS ROSEFINCH, 100+ NEPAL HOUSE MARTINs, LEMON-RUMPED, BLYTH'S LEAF, GREY HOODED, CHESTNUT-CROWNED & BLACK-FACED WARBLERS and a GREY-SIDED BUSHWARBLER.

The toilet, on the second floor, where our rooms were situated, was stuck out overhanging the garden, giving a great view across the valley from the hole in the wall. It was a bit fraught trying to find it at night in the pitch black.

Friday 22nd

Up at 06.00 with an early breakfast at the lodge before the final leg of our trek. We strolled down the short distance to a suspension bridge over the river and then climbed up through the main part of the village. A wet gully outside the village had held a SLENDER-BILLED SCIMITAR BABBLER in December but it had either moved out or the growth of vegetation gave it more places to hide.

The remainder of the journey into Birethante was relatively level, following the river, through fields and small villages. The birdlife was a little disappointing but still included GREY-CAPPED PYGMY WOODPECKER, 2 SMALL NILTAVAs, 2 MAROON ORIOLES, a CHESTNUT-HEADED TESIA, 3 BLACK-CHINNED BABBLERS, 10 FORK-TAILED SWIFTS, CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE, RED-HEADED VULTURE and our only EURASIAN GRIFFON, WHITE-CRESTED LAUGHINGTHRUSH and a male BLACK-THROATED SUNBIRD.

At Birethante Martin visited the checkpoint to see if his jacket had been found but with no luck. We had lunch at a restaurant overlooking the river, hoping to see CRESTED KINGFISHER. It was our last opportunity and despite a very brief flight view, we were able to add it to the list.

The walk into Naya Pul was similarly uninspiring, although it is a very pleasant stroll. The climb up to the road is a bit of a killer.

The taxi controller tried to rip us off but Martin was having none of it and when we headed for the bus he found someone to take us to Pokhara at our price. We stopped on the edge of Pokhara to check out some hirundines. They were mostly swallows with a couple of CRAG MARTINs. I chose to stay in the taxi and was surprised to see a RED-RUMPED SWALLOW fly across the road in front of the vehicle. At this point I got out to have another look at it but it had disappeared and was not seen by the others.

Arriving back at the Hotel Tulsi at 14.00 the first task was to check Martin's gear for his flight tickets. Fortunately they were found, but the key was missing.

Martin and I decided to walk round to Fishtail Lodge for a look at the dump; big mistake. The clouds were threatening but we ignored them. As we reached the ferry a few spots of rain were falling, which steadily became heavier. A taxi driver asked for an exorbitant fee for a lift back to the Tulsi, which we refused. A few moments later it appeared a bargain but it was too late. The heavens opened and marble sized lumps of hail began to pounce down. Everyone dived for shelter. We went under a lean-to bike shed with some locals. The taxi drivers moved their vehicles under the shelter of a huge tree and then retired to a tent where they brewed tea over a fire. The road was soon flooded and we were stranded. Hiding under a metal roof next to a huge tree was not the wisest thing to do in a violent thunderstorm but neither of us felt like braving the hailstones. The local kids were having a joke at our expense but had all the joking knocked out of them when a thunderbolt struck the ground within 100m. They said very little after that and it certainly gave us something to think about. It took about an hour for the storm to subside enough for us to take a chance and head back on foot to our hotel.

Saturday 23rd

06.00 found us taking breakfast on the shore at the Boomerang Restaurant. It is a very pleasant way to start the day. The shore was teeming with WHITE WAGTAILs, noting at least 40 birds with a few WHITE-BROWED WAGTAILs among them. There are also pipits, stonechats, bushchats, warblers and hyrundines to check out, and the food is quite good too.

We hired a taxi for the whole day (1300Ru), intending to spend most of it in the marsh at the North end of the lake. After checking the lake for wildfowl, many of which seemed to have dispersed, we decided to try to explore the far side of the river where we could get much nearer to the marsh. The only way across is via canoe or a very rickety bamboo bridge. The latter seemed the most convenient, and we had seen the locals cross it with no trouble. However, once halfway across it then becomes apparent just how rickety it really is. It is not for the faint-hearted and even having crossed it twice I am not sure that I would attempt it again. The rewards were hardly worth the effort, as we saw nothing that we couldn't have seen from the other bank. There were lots of pipits, mainly PADDYFIELD and ROSY with one or two RICHARD'S. There were PURPLE SWAMPHENS, BRONZE-WINGED JACANAs, SNIPE, TEAL and GADWALL in the marsh along with INTERMEDIATE, LITTLE & CATTLE EGRETS and couple of GREY HERONS. A solitary CURLEW, a pair of RED-WATTLED LAPWING and a ZITTING CISTICOLA were the only new birds. The area is quite good for raptors as they drift across the valley with HIMALAYAN GRIFFON, EGYPTIAN & RED-HEADED VULTURES, STEPPE EAGLES in various plumage, BLACK KITES and falcons (we only identified EURASIAN KESTREL).

As the temperature rose we headed back to the car conveniently parked by a 'bar' where we could obtain cokes. Then we moved on to the pools to see if the SMOKY WARBLERS were still present. We managed to locate one although it was not as obliging as previously. Our presence seems to amuse the locals and one or two turn out to watch us. One of them directed our attention to a tree on the other side of the road where a bird was moving in the canopy. It turned out to be the only CLAMOROUS REED WARBLER of the trip. We rewarded the finder with a few rupees for which he was very grateful. No doubt he will want a reward for every bird that he points out if he sees us again.

A small tree covered knoll overlooks the pools and we thought that it might be worth investigating. Unexpectedly it produced brief views of COMMON GREEN MAGPIE and a stonking male RED-THROATED FLYCATCHER.

It was getting uncomfortably warm by lunchtime and we decided to head back to town. There is a good raptor watchpoint up in the hills and we were aware that we would pass the path that led up to it so we asked our driver to stop close by. We sat and partook of milktea whilst we considered whether to have a look up this path. In the end we had a go but soon realised that the lower part was being cleared for habitation and, although the surrounding hillsides had birds singing, access was difficult. Walking all the way up may have proved interesting but we didn't feel like a hard climb in the heat of the day so we abandoned the attempt and returned to the taxi and town.

We were dropped off opposite Fishtail Lodge, paid the driver for the full day and let him go. Crossing to Fishtail we were met by the chef who is something of a bird watcher himself. He gave us information on the birds that might be still around and was interested in our news. He asked us if we had seen the KALIJ PHEASANTS which come down to the hotel fence every evening to be fed. There is no hostility to birders just visiting what is actually, quite a high-class hotel; indeed they welcomed us. Food and drink, and presumably the accommodation is quite expensive in Pokhara terms, but the setting is magnificent.

We went straight to the dump where the WHITE-TAILED ROBIN was still showing well. On the whole it was pretty quiet and Allen soon retired to the garden for a coke. Martin and I persevered and after about an hour and a half I was rewarded with views of the WHITE-BROWED SHORTWING. I didn't identify it but gave Martin sufficient description for him to confirm it. The GREY-BELLIED TESIA was also still present and vocal. In the garden the BLUE-BEARDED BEE-EATERS were still present and may well have been nesting.

The only other things that Martin picked up were leeches but he didn't find them until he took off his socks back at our room and covered the carpet in blood.

That evening, for a change, we selected a Tibetan restaurant for our meal. The surroundings were pretty basic and the brief views of the kitchen did not fill us with confidence but the food was fine. Allan, who enjoys new experiences, decided to sample Tibetan beer. It comes in a large tankard with a jug of hot water and a metal straw which is crimped at the end to restrict the flow. The jug is full of grain steeped in hot water and looks particularly disgusting. Martin and I were not tempted to try it. It may well have been this that upset Allan's stomach for the next few days.

Sunday 24th

Today we said farewell to the Tulsi staff and set off back to Katmandu in the hotel's van. The only INDIAN ROLLER was seen on roadside wires. We stopped for a sumptuous breakfast of porridge, omelette, pancakes and toast with honey; not forgetting the milktea. It was a lovely location sitting on a terrace overlooking a valley watching a LARGE CUCKOO SHRIKE.

We made excellent progress with surprisingly little heavy traffic on the road, arriving at the Tibet Guesthouse in the Tamil district by mid-afternoon. After Martin negotiated rates and checked the room we settled in. Allen stayed in whilst Martin and I went out for a drink. A couple of ROSE-RINGED PARAKEETS flew over screeching. BLACK KITES were very common with large numbers circling over the city.

Katmandu has a heavily polluted atmosphere and walking around is hazardous as the streets are so narrow and there is so much traffic. However it is vibrant with shops and bars lining the streets. There are hawkers trying to sell everything from drugs to bananas, but they aren't too persistent and usually accept a polite 'no'. Returning to the room we persuaded Allen to join us for dinner.

Monday 25th

An early breakfast in the hotel before joining the hotel's 4-wheel drive for the hours drive to Phulchowk mountain. We stopped at a shop en route to pick up bananas, mars bars and water for the day as there is no where to get provisions on the mountain. The road, which is extremely poor in places, only leads to a military camp and communications centre at the summit. Birding is mostly from the road with almost impenetrable forest on either side. The technique is to take the vehicle as near to the summit as possible without upsetting the military then walk down the road with the vehicle following along after a set period; then repeating the process all down the mountain. It means that we don't have to carry much gear as we have access to the vehicle at regular intervals.

On the way up we met a party of 10 KALIJ PHEASANTS on the road with 2 EURASIAN JAYS higher up. The car didn't bother them. We pressed on to the top. The visibility was poor and there was no view of the mountains. As we wandered down the road there were parties of birds but they tended to be small and rather elusive. Birding was very difficult. It wasn't helped by rockets fired from the base flying over our heads and crashing into the forest around us. At least one was quite close. Other than this the walk down the mountain was fairly uneventful but the following birds were noted:- 10+ YELLOW-BELLIED & 3 WHITE-THROATED FANTAIL, 1 SNOWY-BROWED, 5 ULTRAMARINE, 6 VERDITER & 4 GREY-HEADED CANARY FLYCATCHERS, 1 CHESTNUT-BELLIED NUTHATCH, 2 ABBERANT BUSHWARBLERS, 2 RUSTY-CHEEKED SCIMITAR BABBLERS, 2 SCALY-BREADED WRENBABBLERS, BLACK-CHINNED & GREY-THROATED BABBLER, GREEN SHRIKE-BABBLER, HOARY-THROATED BARWING, CHESTNUT-TAILED MINLA WHITE-BROWED, RUFOUS-WINGED & NEPAL FULVETTA, FIRE-BREADED FLOWERPECKER GREEN-TAILED & BLACK-THROATED SUNBIRD, YELLOW-BREADED GREENFINCH and 20+ WOOL PIGEONS. ORIENTAL CUCKOO and GOLDEN-THROATED BARBET were calling constantly. Martin eventually managed to locate the cuckoo in a tall tree right over the road but the barbet proved more elusive.

We arrived back at the Tibet Guesthouse at about 17.00 and, after freshening up, went out for dinner. Allen retired as soon as we returned, still not feeling very well, but Martin and I went for a coffee in the lounge. Martin

picked up a copy of the Katmandu Post and was amazed to find his interview, but no photographs much for the general readership.

Tuesday 26th

Our last day in Nepal. A very early breakfast followed by another trip up Phulchowki. As our flight is an evening one we booked the hotel van for half a day, intending to go no further than halfway house. The lower slopes proved more productive yesterday and therefore we decided to concentrate our efforts here today.

First we parked below the Botanical gardens, walked a short distance along the road, and then followed a stream up the hillside. There was an obvious path climbing through quite dense scrub. We were not connecting with flocks of birds but the scrub made viewing difficult. A delightful SPECKLED PICULET made it worthwhile. On returning to the van we found a male HODGSON'S REDSTART perched on the fence almost exactly the same place as it had been in December.

We moved up to Half-way House, parked, and walked about 100m further up the road checking, particularly, for *Cutia* with no success. 5 WHITE-BROWED SHRIKE BABBLERS and 8 RUFOUS-CHINNED LAUGHINGTHRUSHES were nice to see. The ORIENTAL CUCKOO was still calling, as was RUFOUS-THROATED PARTRIDGE, neither of which was seen. 2 GREY-HEADED WOODPECKERS showed well. CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE and MOUNTAIN HAWK-EAGLE are always worth seeing. A PYGMY WREN-BABBLER wouldn't come out. Martin found a RED-BILLED LOETHRIX, the only one of the trip, but could not get us on it. More flocks of common birds were encountered just above the quarry. At this point Allen decided to go to the lower end of the botanical gardens with the van whilst Martin and I went down through the gardens. We had virtually switched off when a bird high up in a tree attracted our attention it sallied out flycatching. It was very good at landing in an obscured position but, with patience, we managed decent views. We weren't absolutely sure what we were looking at but by a process of elimination identified as a DARK-SIDED FLYCATCHER. We rushed to the van to inform Allen but when we returned, much to our surprise, it had disappeared and we failed to relocate it.

With this we called it a day and headed back to the hotel. With some time to kill we went out to do some last minute shopping and then had a light meal before the hotel van took us to the airport. On the way we noted huge numbers of LARGE-BILLED CROWS (>500) going to roost in the city. Security at the airport was tight but we had no trouble and we were processed reasonably efficiently. Some questions were asked about the fact that Martin only had a single entry visa despite having been in Nepal twice during 2002; multiple entry visas cost more money. There was a slight delay due to the late arrival of the incoming flight but we still arrived in Manchester on time.

Conclusion

An excellent trip with very little evidence of the internal troubles that are keeping visitors away. The people are very friendly with very little begging and tolerable hassle from shopkeepers in Katmandu. The trekking lodges are variable but all the ones that we used were acceptable and some were excellent and for less than £1 per night who can complain. The scenery is magnificent but was sometimes spoiled by the storms that beset us most afternoons. The terrain is difficult as one should expect in the Himalayan range but if I can do it anyone can.

