

# Trip Report: 'Namsang Road' (Joypur Reserve Forest in Dehing-Patkai WLS) Upper Assam, India 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec 2010 – By Pritam Baruah

This is a rather brief report on a good day of birding in Joypur RF of Dehing-Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary over four years ago. It is January 19<sup>th</sup> 2015 as I am writing this. The annotated trip list was written soon after the day visit in Dec 2010 and I've always wanted to publish a small report around it but never found the time. Eventually the intent was lost in procrastination. I visited Joypur again in Dec 2011 but lost my trip list. In any case the second visit wasn't as successful as the first. It is never too late for a report though. So without further ado:

## ➤ Geography

Located in the far eastern side of Assam, Joypur (or Jeypore) Reserve Forest is part of the last remaining stretches of tropical lowland rainforest remaining in the Brahmaputra Valley. These forests are of the so called 'Assam Valley Tropical Wet Evergreen Forest' type, dominated by *Dipterocarpus macrocarpus* (locally called Hollong, the State Tree of both Assam & Arunachal Pradesh) and are considered to be the northern-most lowland rainforests in the world. Joypur is contiguous with the Dilli RF in the west and the Upper Dihing RF to the east, forming a block of over 600 sq km of lowland rainforest in Assam state. Towards the south it is contiguous with the evergreen hill forests of Patkai-bum Range in Arunachal Pradesh & N Myanmar. Located at the junction of two biodiversity hotspots (Eastern Himalayas & Indo-Burma), the biodiversity of the region (known locally as Patkai) is very high and given that these lowland forests have shrunk to a tiny fraction of their historical extent, urgent steps have been taken to conserve them; Parts of the forest including Joypur have been declared as the Dehing-Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary (111 sq km).

Geography of the region 74 km x 118 km



There are seven species of cats and seven species of primates in the protected area (highest of any protected area in India along with Namdapha NP). Bird diversity, especially in winter is very high as it is in the wintering range of many hill birds. It is also worth considering that the low ends of the altitudinal ranges of many hill birds are believed to be especially low in the eastern extremity of the Brahmaputra Valley. This means that some species that are likely to be found here are very unlikely to be found in similar elevations further west.

### ➤ Diary & Annotated Trip List

The visit was part of a longer trip all over the Brahmaputra Valley. I used my own car and a driver. I started from Guwahati and birded in Nagaon, Kaziranga, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Dibru-Saikhowa & Digboi, before driving to Duliajan from Digboi through the road that skirts the northern edge of Dehing-Patkai WLS. I stayed the night at a guest house in Duliajan and drove (via Naharkatia town) to Joypur village in the northern boundary of the RF very early morning on 22<sup>nd</sup> (it took 1.30 hours at the time). Note that it is also possible to stay at the Forest Inspection Bungalow in Joypur or at the Tai-Phakey Eco-Tourism Camp in Tipam village between Naharkatia & Joypur at very reasonable rates.

Now this was a site I had chosen purely by looking at forest cover in satellite maps and I was not really sure if there were any trails there. But I knew that if there were no trails I could at least go birding on the motorable road to Deomali, which from the maps appeared to be cloaked in primary lowland rainforest on both sides. The first thing I did on reaching was seek out the forest guard post and wake them up (that took a lot of effort). They called up the Ranger and got permissions for me - easy. However they were not keen on accompanying me so I asked them if they could point me to any trails or dirt roads with very little traffic. And voila – they told me about a barely motorable dirt road in the RF that apparently ran through excellent habitat, skirting the Burhi-Dihing River to a village called Namsang. Right there I decided to call that dirt road - **'Namsang Road'** and off I went.



6 km x 10 km

The trip list below is evidence that the visit was quite successful. Birding was mostly all on foot and I had my car follow me slowly at some distance. At times (not often though) I got in the car to move ahead a little faster until I saw interesting habitat or heard interesting sounds. I birded for about 9 hours non-stop and recorded 116 species including many high quality ones. Per my calculations however, it could have been at least 15 more if there was even one more observer with me. And per my overall impression over two trips, I consider Namsang Road to be among the birdiest lowland (<600 masl) forest trails in all of India – comparable to the ‘Laughingthrush Trail’ (as I call it) in Digboi Oilfield Reserve (where I once observed a mixed flock with at least 21 species – the richest aggregation I’ve ever found in India) and the legendary lowland trails around Deban in Namdapha NP. For my return, I drove from Joypur to Jorhat that same evening through beautiful tea country (Joypur-Naharkatia-Tingkhong-Rajgarh-Moran, then Moran-Jorhat on NH-37).



*Red-headed Trogon (female)*

This report will not be complete however, without introducing the ‘Manager Hotel’. After 9 hours of non-stop birding I was pretty hungry and asked around in Joypur village for a good restaurant. I decided to go to the ‘Manager Hotel’ after all three different passersby I asked, suggested it without hesitation. I thought it wouldn’t be difficult to find it as it came highly recommended and it was a one-street town. But it was way more difficult than I thought. When I finally located it after 15 minutes of back-and-forth on the same half km (I had almost given up), I was incredulous to see that it was no more than a roof with four long benches and no signage. One of the benches had a row of large traditional pots full of fresh food waiting to be served. A medium sized cow was tethered near the benches, presumably the restaurant’s fresh milk supply. It was spotlessly clean. And most bizarrely, there was a ‘manager’ wearing a crisp dress-shirt, trousers and formal black shoes – easily standing out among the simplicity all around. A tiny adjoining room had in it a person busy cooking multiple things over wood fire. It turned out he was also the waiter. The manager brusquely motioned him to take care of us and with impressive speed he set aside his cooking station and began serving us ample food. No menu of course. The plate came with unlimited of everything. The manager, always standing, kept a close eye on our plates while we ate and ensured that we didn’t have less of anything on our plates. Suffice to say that the food turned to be the some of the tastiest I’ve ever eaten. There was even a bewildering variety of delicious chutneys to go along. The food was a mix of influences from Bihar (the manager’s ancestral home) and Assam (his adopted home). By now it made sense why this simple (and somewhat eccentric) establishment was loved so much in town. Surely ranks as one of my most memorable meals on the road. We thanked the manager and started the long drive to Jorhat.

1	<b>Crested Goshawk</b>	1	This forest raptor was seen well close to a feeding flock, possibly looking for a snack.
2	<b>Pied Falconet</b>	1	One seen on a bare branch until I had to move away.
3	<b>Grey Peacock Pheasant</b>	1	One first heard and then seen about 100 meters into the forest from the entrance. This very difficult to see species lived up to its reputation at first but eventually allowed great views.
4	Kaleej Pheasant	2	Male & female by the roadside at the entrance.

5	Green Imperial Pigeon	6	At the very top of a large fruiting tree.
6	Oriental Turtle Dove	S	
7	Spotted Dove	S	
8	Emerald Dove	1	
9	Thick-billed Green Pigeon	5	On the same tree as (5)
10	Red-breasted Parakeet	S	
11	Green-billed Malkoha	1	
12	Red-headed Trogon	3	Surprisingly common. Posed for me in different locations.
13	White-throated Kingfisher	1	
14	Little Green Bee-eater	2	
15	Blue-bearded Bee-eater	2	
16	<b>Austen's Brown Hornbill</b>	1	<b>[NT]</b> A major target. The Dihing-Patkai forests are probably the most accessible place in India to see this species (Namdapha is much further away).
17	<b>Great Hornbill</b>	1	<b>[NT]</b> Surprisingly only 1 seen. Maybe locally uncommon.
18	Coppersmith Barbet	S	Mostly solitary but a large group 20+ seen at the entrance.
19	Blue-throated Barbet	H	
20	Blue-eared Barbet	1	One is a canopy feeding flock.
21	Speckled Piculet	1	Seen in a massive flock of warblers.
22	Greater Yellownape	1	
23	Lesser Yellownape	1	
24	Rufous Woodpecker	1	
25	<b>Pale-headed Woodpecker</b>	1	This bamboo specialist was seen in a gully filled with bamboo.
26	Greater Flameback	H	
27	<b>Long-tailed Broadbill</b>	1	Seen in a large mixed feeding flock.
28	<b>Silver-breasted Broadbill</b>	4	A single flock containing only this species.
29	Barn Swallow	S	
30	Citrine Wagtail	S	
31	White Wagtail	S	
32	Olive-backed Pipit	S	
33	Ashy Woodswallow	S	
34	Black-winged Cuckooshrike	4	
35	Large Cuckooshrike	S	
36	Long-tailed Minivet	S	A single Minivet flock contained all three species of minivet listed here. The minivet flock was seen in the mid-story & canopy of a Dipterocarp dominated area which also seemed to have 2 other distinct feeding flocks - an understory flock of babblers, flycatchers & a mid-story flock of warblers.
37	Short-billed Minivet	S	
38	Scarlet Minivet	S	
39	Red-vented Bulbul	S	
40	Red-whiskered Bulbul	S	
41	Ashy Bulbul	S	
42	White-throated Bulbul	S	
43	Black-crested Bulbul	S	All bulbuls were common but surprisingly, no Black Bulbul.

44	Common Iora	S	
45	Golden-fronted Leafbird	S	
46	Asian Fairy Bluebird	S	
47	Grey-backed Shrike	1	
48	Black-naped Monarch	1	
49	White-throated Fantail	3	Singles seen in 3 different flocks.
50	Blue Whistling Thrush	1	
51	<b>Lesser Shortwing</b>	S	Very common – seems a new territory even 30 meters or so.
52	<b>Rusty-bellied Shortwing</b>	1	[NT] This is a rather low elevation sighting for this species. Also recorded at this elevation in N Myanmar & Nameri.
53	<b>White-tailed Blue Robin</b>	1	Commonly heard. Seen 1.
54	White-rumped Shama	1	
55	Oriental Magpie Robin	1	
56	White-crowned Forktail	4	On the road. First birds at the entrance.
57	Black-backed Forktail	S	Very common along NR. Seen and heard more than 10.
58	Red-throated Flycatcher	S	
59	<b>Slaty-blue Flycatcher</b>	1	Rather uncommon in lowlands.
60	Snowy-browed Flycatcher	S	Seemed to be quite common in the area.
61	Pale-chinned Flycatcher	1	
62	Pale Blue Flycatcher	1	
63	Small Niltava	S	Several along roadside vegetation.
64	Large Niltava	1	In a mixed feeding flock.
65	White-crested Laughingthrush	S	Surprisingly, the only Laughingthrush seen. The unpredictability of species is evident here as, in nearby Digboi Oilfields where the habitat is disturbed, six species of Laughingthrush can be seen within a 100 meter stretch of trail.
66	Striped Tit-babbler	S	
67	Rufous-fronted Babbler	1	One seen briefly in a mixed flock was most likely this species as the very similar Rufous-capped is rare or absent this low. The calls of both species are almost indistinguishable.
68	Grey-throated Babbler	S	Seen in understory flocks with flycatchers and other babblers. Field marks unique to south of Brahmaputra were observed.
69	<b>Large Scimitar Babbler</b>	H	I scoped this out in many suitable areas but only one responded to playback. Didn't show.
70	Silver-eared Mesia	S	One large Mesia-only flock.
71	White-bellied Erpornis	S	Seen in a massive warbler flock.
72	Nepal Fulvetta	S	Seen in feeding flocks. Also a flock with only Nepal Fulvetta.
73	<b>White-hooded Babbler</b>	S	A single flock containing only this species.
74	Blue-winged Minla	S	A single flock contained both this and (75)
75	Red-tailed Minla	S	
76	<b>Rufous-throated Fulvetta</b>	S	This rather uncommon Fulvetta was seen in sparse understory and might have been following a flock that was nearby.
77	Pygmy Wren Babbler	1	Commonly heard. Seen 1.
78	<b>Spot-throated Babbler</b>	1	This uncommon species was seen well in sparse understory.
79	Abbott's Babbler	1	Surprisingly only one seen each.

80	Common Tailorbird	S	
81	Mountain Tailorbird	1	In a flock.
82	Slaty-bellied Tesia	1	
83	Grey-bellied Tesia	1	Both Tesia were rather common but I attempted to see (& saw) one of each.
84	Rufous-faced Warbler	S	I ran into several massive warbler flocks and must have spent at least 4 hours following warbler dominated flocks. They contained a very good selection of warblers and other species. This exquisite warbler was seen in such mixed flocks.
85	Yellow-bellied Warbler	S	
86	Chestnut-crowned Warbler		Always a delight to see this species. Seen in a warbler flock.
87	<b>Grey-crowned Warbler</b>	1	One in a low bush. <i>Seicercus tephrocephalus</i> is rather scarce in India (only found in the Patkai Range, Upper Assam) so I was very glad to connect with it.
88	Grey-cheeked Warbler	S	
89	White-spectacled Warbler	S	
90	Whistler's Warbler	S	Present in most mid & understory flocks.
91	Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher	S	
92	Tickell's Leaf-Warbler	S	
93	Greenish Warbler	S	
94	Blyth's Leaf-Warbler	S	
95	Yellow-browed Leaf-Warbler	S	
96	<b>Yellow-vented Warbler</b>	S	This pretty warbler was common in mixed <i>Phylloscopus</i> flocks.
97	Cinereous Tit	S	
98	<b>Sultan Tit</b>	S	An impressive flock of 20+ leading a massive mid-story flock.
99	Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	S	20+ in a mixed species flock.
100	Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker	S	
101	Oriental White-eye	S	Common but particularly impressive was a massive storm of White-eyes along with Rufous-faced Warbler, Sultan Tit & various <i>Phylloscopus</i> in the mid-story of a large fig.
102	Streaked Spiderhunter	S	Several individuals in multiple flocks.
103	Little Spiderhunter	1	Only one in a flock.
104	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	S	
105	Maroon Oriole	S	
106	Black Drongo	S	
107	Ashy Drongo	S	
108	Bronzed Drongo	S	
109	Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo	S	In feeding flocks.
110	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	S	A common leader of flocks.
111	Spangled Drongo	S	
112	Asian Pied Starling	S	
113	Jungle Myna	S	
114	Common Hill Myna	S	
115	Eastern Jungle Crow	S	
116	Rufous Treepie	S	