

ANN AND ROLAND GO BIRDING IN NEPAL

APRIL 13TH – 26TH 2013

Travel

We travelled from Manchester to Kathmandu via Doha with Qatar Airlines at a cost of £694.25 each. There were no problems with the flights and the service was generally good-excellent.

Doha Airport is a bit of a nightmare as the planes park such a long way from the terminal. The bus ride is quite a long one as is the ride out to a plane. You need at least an hour and a half between connecting flights. There is a big duty-free shop and the airport is very busy at night! Flying in was spectacular with all the lights and skyscrapers!

Clearing Kathmandu airport was, surprisingly, a doddle. 26 degrees ☺

Guide and Ground Arrangements

We used Rajendra Suwal of Nepal Nature dot com Travels (www.nepalnaturetravels.com). We opted for the Best of Nepal Wildlife Tour on his web-site as we wanted to experience more than just birdwatching on this trip. The cost was £1372.00 each, fully inclusive. Rajendra is bi-lingual and is very well-informed on his country, culture and wildlife etc. He was courteous at all times and went out of his way to make sure we were happy. I would happily recommend him, especially if you are a birder!

Currency

The Nepalese rupee. The exchange rate was 129 to the Pound while we were there. You can change money in the big hotels or use ATMs.

Food

Excellent! There is usually a good choice of Chinese, Indian, Nepalese food on the menus and for those unwilling to try anything new, there are European style foods available too. No MacDonalds thank goodness.

Nepal

Nepal was a surprise. We hadn't read up much on the country so didn't really have any expectations but were surprised to find so much poverty and so little modernisation. I feel quite embarrassed now about my lack of knowledge and had truly not realised how turbulent the last decade has been. I must do my homework more carefully in future. It is, however, a beautiful country with magnificent mountains and lovely people and I have to say that it was lovely to visit a country so unmarked by tourism.

DAILY DIARY

Sunday, 14th April 2013 New Year's Day (2070)

Park Village Resort

When we came out of Kathmandu Airport, Rajendra was waiting for us in the Arrivals Hall. He soon had us installed in a beat-up taxi and off we went to our hotel, the Park Village Resort (<http://www.ktmgh.com/park-village-hotels-resorts.html>). Kathmandu was far less exotic than we had imagined. Everything looked a bit ramshackle and I have never seen so many shops in all my life. All the buildings were two, three or more storeys high and the ground floor was invariably an open-fronted shop! The roads were mostly unsurfaced and all the pavements seemed to have been dug up with the rubble just being left in piles! Dust everywhere – no wonder so many people were wearing face masks! The electricity cables were a wonder to behold – we thought the tangles in India were bad but they are not a patch on the ones in Kathmandu! Heaven help the poor electricians! Our hotel was set back off the road and out of the centre. It was set in pleasant grounds but not jungle as specified in the description. They were also less extensive than expected as most of the area was built on! Our room on the first floor was excellent with a nice balcony at the front. The verandah at the rear overlooked a field, school and housing with the mountains beyond. The visibility wasn't very good but the view would have been stunning on a good day. We had a buffet lunch and spent the afternoon having a wander round the grounds and acquainting ourselves with the bird life. A Eurasian Cuckoo called incessantly. Yes, you can get fed up with hearing one! Our itinerary specified a power-point presentation and an open-air barbecue neither of which was forthcoming. We ate dinner in the hotel restaurant – there was a special reduced menu in honour of New Year's Day. Roland opted for Fish Curry Rice whilst I chose the Spicy Chicken Curry. The food was good but not what we would call spicy! There again, not everyone eats curries as hot as we do! We had ice-cream for afters. There were Spotted Owlets in the trees at the back of our room that night and whilst we could hear them, we couldn't see them.

Day's List

Eurasian Cuckoo

Common Myna

House Crow

House Sparrow

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

Red-vented Bulbul

Oriental Magpie Robin

Eurasian Collared Dove

Jungle Myna

Black Kite

Red-throated Flycatcher

Olive-backed Pipit

Oriental White-eye

Ashy Drongo

Spotted Dove

Barn Swallow

Red-billed Blue Magpie

Black-lored Tit

Red-rumped Swallow

Rose-ringed parakeets

Cattle Egret

House Swift

Shikra

Monday, 15th April 2013

Leopard Tracks in Shivapuri

The dratted cuckoo was at it again first thing and Roland declared that he had been bitten to death during the night. So much for the Brewers Yeast tablets he had been taking for weeks in order to avoid being tasty to the mozzies! There was loads of choice for breakfast: cereals, breads, hot dishes of an exotic nature. We were ready and waiting for Rajendra at 7. He was accompanied by his friend, Dipak, who had a jeep. The drive through Kathmandu didn't seem quite as bad as the previous afternoon though everywhere still seemed very higgledy-piggledy and unorganised. Obviously not everyone in the city had mains water as there were people collecting water from hoses lying by the side of the road. We learnt later that many people do not have electricity either and live in rather squalid conditions. Blocks of new high-rise flats are being built on the outskirts to accommodate the fast-growing population and we did see many quite magnificent houses, again with several floors- each one built separately, a bit like the tiers of a cake with long balconies/verandahs round them and painted bright colours. The fact that each building has its own design adds to the haphazard appearance of the city. It was all fascinating – you didn't know where to look next. At least there was an absence of cattle in the streets! We learnt that the terrible road conditions were due to a road-widening scheme but instead of doing it a bit at a time, the roads and pavements had all been dug up at once! Added to that, deep ditches were being dug and there were piles of sand, bricks, etc everywhere!

Rajendra had changed today's itinerary so that instead of going to Nagi Gompa via Pani Muhan then towards Shivapuri we drove towards Nagarjung Forest and the Bhairab Temple where we went for a bit of a walk. This was mostly deciduous forest with some stands of pine. We continued on our way to Shivapuri National Park along a very bumpy road and made our way up to a Buddhist Shrine partly on foot, partly driving, where we stopped for a picnic lunch. We were 7,200 feet up and the view was pretty good but would have been amazing had the visibility been better. Several people were busy decorating the temple and trees with streams of prayer flags. It all looked very colourful but the strings are dangerous to the local wildlife. We walked to the top of the tower and there were masses of huge dragonflies whizzing about. We went to a different area after lunch but there had been a forest fire so there was nothing about. We decided to retrace our route on foot and were amazed to see leopard tracks! He/she must have followed just behind us! We only added two more birds to our list and were back at the hotel for four o'clock. We just sat about and looked for birds or showed the security guards how to use the scope while they practised their English on us!

Animals seen during the day were Hoary Bellied Himalayan Squirrel and Barking Deer. We also saw the leopard tracks and Scaly Anteater holes.

A disappointing day birdwise.

Day's List

Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch

Black Bulbul

Blue Whistling Thrush

Mountain Bulbul

Red-vented Bulbul

Black Kite

Blue-throated Barbet

Bronzed Drongo

Blue-capped Rock Thrush

Great Barbet

Black-lored Tit

Asian Paradise Flycatcher

Red-billed Blue Magpie
Grey Treepie
Grey-hooded Warbler
Rufous Woodpecker
Greenish Warbler
Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher
Scaly Thrush
Maroon Oriole
House Martin
Long-tailed Minivet
Himalayan Griffon Vulture
Grey-winged Blackbird
Kalij Pheasant
Hotel:
White-throated Kingfisher
Large-billed Crow
Verditer Flycatcher
Asian Koel

Tuesday, 16th April 2013

Kathmandu-Pokhara

Today we were to travel to Pokhara, the second largest city in Nepal . Three out of the ten highest mountains in the world — Dhaulagiri, Annapurna I and Manaslu — are situated within 30 miles (linear distance) of the city, so that the northern skyline of the city offers a very close view of the Himalayas on a clear day. Due to its proximity to the Annapurna mountain range, the city is also a base for trekking and full of tourists. It is a nice place. Loads of hotels, restaurants and trekking shops

We took a packed lunch with us. We had to set off early because it was 132 miles away which might not be much on our roads but on Nepalese roads it's a totally different matter!!! We had a new driver with a comfortable car. He was to stay with us until we returned to Kathmandu and he was a lovely man. He always drove carefully and was happy to stop for photos or a bird. It took us ages to get out of Kathmandu because of the slow-moving uphill traffic so we had plenty of time to look around and take things in. Multi-storey buildings with shops, shops and more shops on the ground floor and living quarters, schools, offices even hospitals above! A huge Stupa which I hoped we would get a chance to visit on our tour of the city and still the road continued to rise ever more steeply. Fields and brick kilns in the valley, terracing on the hillsides, a stream of motorcyclists. I was impressed that all the drivers wore crash helmets but puzzled as to why the passengers (up to three of them) didn't. Well, it's because of drive-by shootings a few years ago when the pillion riders couldn't be identified due to their helmets! So now they have to go helmet-less. We ground to a standstill as we approached the pass littered with broken-down lorries holding everyone up! It wasn't much better on the other side! There were people selling crisps and water to the drivers in the tail backs Unfortunately visibility was poor and we couldn't enjoy the view properly: fumes, ash, dust all made for much haze. We were on the Trbhuvan and later Prithvi Highway which links Kathmandu with the Eastern Terai Region. It is the only major eastbound exit from the Kathmandu valley so heaven help them if they need to evacuate the area in a hurry! The city has no rail or navigable links and only one congested highway for its road links to the south (India, the Terai Region and Bangladesh). The highway to Pokhara follows a series of deep river valleys passing ancient stone villages criss-crossing through rocky mountain gorges with hairpin turns of widths of one bus wide in numerous areas Exciting. We followed the Trishuli River with its roaring rapids (good for rafting)and which rises in China and eventually runs into the Ganges. Crossing from one side of the river to the other is exciting too – there are some precarious suspension bridges and the

other way is to pull your-self across in a suspended cage! You need strong arms for that. The cascading rice terracing on the hillsides is amazing and of course the people living up there have to transport everything themselves, usually on their backs. The women carry woven baskets on their backs using a wide strap across the forehead to secure the basket. No ponies or donkeys to carry the load here. Just people. We had a brief stop for a cup of tea at a roadside café at Belkhu and scanned for Ibisbill but they had all gone. I watched a man and woman moving sand down on the river-side. He was shovelling it into her basket which she then carried about a hundred yards or so to start another heap. After a while they swapped jobs. A lorry would come to pick up the sand at some point and take it to Kathmandu for use in the building industry. Slow and badly paid work. There are big sand-mining plants in the area too – an important local industry along with vegetable and rice growing. Some farmers have tractors etc but we also saw people ploughing with old wooden ploughs and a team of oxen. It is impossible to use machinery on the terraced hillsides. Everything is done by hand. As we continued on our way we saw many small forest fires which contributed to the thickening atmosphere. A little further on it was time for our picnic lunch by a trickle of a stream. We were able to pull over to the side of the road and park next to a big rock which had “Park here” written on it! Unfortunately there were no Forktails around just a very impoverished-looking lad collecting bottles which he would presumably try and sell. There was quite a lot of rubbish lying about. Not much further on we were delayed at the Lower Marshyangdi Dam (for hydropower). That has been completed but the road past has been destroyed and takes careful manoeuvring in one-way traffic – more like an obstacle course really. Later we went through a really old town called Dumre where nothing seemed to have been modernised – I really should have asked if we could stop and take some photos but wasn’t sure about Rajendra’s attitude to photos. I needn’t have worried though because in the next town (Damauli) I did ask if we could stop and I think he took more photos than we did! Roland and I had a home-made ice-lolly each from a street vendor. Yum! We got the impression that the people there were not used to tourists – they looked a little bemused! The old houses fascinated me. They were usually two-storeyed with lots of doors downstairs and a windowed upstairs often with a verandah along. Another popular style was to have an open passage running through the middle of the house from back to front but only on the ground level. Clay bricks are used quite a lot as are stones. Traditionally straw was used for roofing but today corrugated iron is more popular. You see lots of one-storey houses with tin rooves covered in stones to stop the roof blowing away! We stopped in the next town too but it was less impressive – it had been modernised quite a bit with money from the Gurkha Pension Fund. Visibility was gradually getting worse and worse and then it started lightning. Rain followed – not a lot but it did clear the air and eventually we reached Pokhara where we had time to look at a couple of streams and the gardens near the Phewa Lake dam. It was getting dark by then so we went to our hotel, the Kailash Resort (<http://www.mountkailashresort.com>) which was excellent. We ate at the Phewa Resort two doors which had entertainment on: local music and dancing. It was very good. The food was too: mutton thali for the men and curry with nan for me. .

Hotel:

Greenish Warbler

Grey-headed warbler

Tea stop

White-throated Kingfisher

Chestnut-tailed Starling

Little Egret

Sand Martin

Rufous Treeoie

Jungle Myna

Oriental White-eye

Red-vented Bulbul

Oriental magpie Robin

House Swift

On way

Himalayan Griffon Vulture x4

Lunch

Himalayan Bulbul

White-throated Needletail x2

Cliff face

Common Kestrel

House martin

Pokhara

Black Kite c50 circling

White-throated Kingfisher

Red-billed Blue magpie

Indian Pond Heron

White-capped water Redstart

Hair Crested Drongo

Blue Whistling Thrush

Greater Coucal

Cattle Egret

White-breasted Waterhen

Asian Koel

Wednesday, 17th April 2013

Spiny Babbler

An early start for walks in the forest. We drove up the road to Sarangot – no easy task as there were scores of vehicles coming downhill and we were going uphill. We could just about see the tops of the Himalayas on our way but visibility was once again very poor. We stopped at 2,500' for a bit of a stroll. It was very pleasant and the highlight was the **Spiny Babbler** which was very obliging and posed beautifully for photos. We then tried another track lower down but there was nothing about so we went back to the hotel for breakfast before going out on the lake. It was very pleasant but hard on the bum and we had to wear life jackets. I felt like I had inflated corsets on which were most uncomfortable and restrictive and made me sweat buckets too! It was disappointing birdwise and there was lots of rubbish along the shoreline plus people bathing, fishing, doing their washing.... We spent a moment or two watching a group of soldiers on the shore who were being taught how to swim. We stopped off at the Tal Barahi Temple on an island in the lake. It is a must visit temple for Hindus and apparently most Nepalese have a picture of it on their wall. We were surprised that pigeon food was being sold and fed to the huge number of feral pigeons there but that is traditional as a pigeon does not have to be dead to be considered sacrificial. The shrine itself is only small and is surrounded by bells which devotees ring as they walk round it. Lunch was at the Fishtail Restaurant (<http://www.fishtail-lodge.com>). Very nice. We had to get a ferry from there back to the shore – a pull-along push raft! Our driver was waiting to whisk us off to visit the eagle migration route at Naudanda ridges, checking for Forktails and forest birds on the way. We weren't overly successful but we did, however, see some wonderful scenery and again found the terracing so amazing. Absolutely every available inch of land that can be used, is used. In some houses you actually step out of the front door onto a cultivated terrace! Small areas between houses are also cultivated. Agriculture remains Nepal's principal economic activity, employing 80% of the population yet only about 20% of the total area is cultivable; another 33% is forested; most of the rest is mountainous. Rice and wheat are the main food crops. Anyway, we thought it a good omen when we stopped fairly early on to observe a **Red-headed Vulture** – massive with very striking features and after we had gained more height we stopped in a village and decided to climb up the hillside.

This took us through someone's property and then Rajendra set off up some steps cut into the hillside which led to a man's house and his land. He kindly allowed us to continue up the steps, along his terraces and up a trail to the top of the hill where there were the remains of a fort. It was an excellent spot with a 360degree view but, as usual, visibility was poor and the weather was looking **very** threatening – huge black clouds surrounded us. One of the houses we could see further down was an oval shape – a traditional style in rural areas. Traditional houses are built of wood (sal, sissau or pine) and stone. Any type of stone is suitable for the walls but special stones are needed for the roof. Slates are oily-black and have a good appearance but are not always available nearby so straw is the second choice. Most people today use breeze block of course though as already mentioned, brick is also popular. Traditional old plaster is made from rice husk with cow dung and adhesive soil. As we walked back down the hillside, we could see children playing with hoops and sticks in their garden. We made several stops along the river on the return journey but there was a complete absence of Forktails. Tea was eaten in a traditional Nepalese restaurant – it was set out like the interior of a traditional house with logs stored just below the ceiling. We saw a sparrow fly in between the logs – he probably had a nest in there. We had some snacks: spicy chicken (excellent), spicy goat (less excellent) and momo which are like dim sum dumplings (delicious) then it was thalis all round. We were seated upstairs looking out over the street and this room was open-fronted. The street outside was lined with motor-bikes and all the shops were still open. Tourist shops, all brightly lit. We bought postcards, stamps and a book on Nepal from the bookshop. At one of our brief scanning spots this afternoon, there were some yellow raspberries growing. They looked more like blackberries and had small, hard seeds in them. Not very tasty.

Forest Walk

Great Barbet

Asian Koel

Himalayan Bulbul

Long-tailed Shrike

Blue-throated Barbet

Spiny Babbler

Wedge-tail Green Pigeon

Oriental White-eye

Oriental Turtle Dove

Grey Treepie

Chestnut-shouldered Petronia

Blue-capped Rock Thrush

Russet Sparrow

Greenish Warbler

Eurasian Cuckoo

Black-lored Tit

Large Cuckooshrike

Egyptian Vulture

Crimson Sunbird

Red-vented Bulbul

Long-tailed Minivet

White-rumped Munia

Blue-throated Flycatcher

Puff-throated Babbler

Grey-hooded Warbler

Great Tit

Common Buzzard

Lake

Little Grebe

Black-crowned Night Heron
Grey Wagtail
Shikra
White-crested Laughingthrush
Common Sandpiper
Large-billed Crow
Little Egret
White-throated Kingfisher
Blue Whistling Thrush
Grey Heron
Cattle Egret
White-breasted Waterhen
Grey Treepie
Blue-throated Barbet
Barn Swallow
White-rumped Vulture
Osprey

Foothills

Large-billed Crow
Red-headed Vulture
Indian Pond Heron
Intermediate Egret
Asian House Martin
Eurasian Tree Sparrow
Pied Bushchat
Long-tailed Shrike
Himalayan Griffon
Common Kestrel
Himalayan Bulbul
Ashy Drongo
Verditer Flycatcher
House Swift
White-capped Water Redstart

Thursday, April 18th 2013

Sunrise over Anapurna

Up extra early this morning! Would it be clear for our trip to see the sun-rise over Anapurna???? Yes, indeed it was! We were amongst the early arrivals so were able to procure a good spot for the event. Magical. I liked the effect of the sun on Fishtail Mountain (Machhapuchhre 6,993metres) more than the actual sun-rise but it was a wonderful experience shared with many people from all over the world. We let them go and had a lovely cup of chai before we went back to the hotel for breakfast. We could actually see the mountains from our balcony too! ☺ It was a beautiful day and time to set off on the long, long drive to Lumbini. We didn't get there until nearly 8.00pm! We took the mountain road through absolutely stunning countryside, being in the foothills of the Himalayas. It was fairly quiet and good going though very exciting in parts! Plenty of good hills, hairpin bends, narrow roads etc! Lots of forest, exciting villages and towns. Lovely houses, lots of colour, traditional life .. We stopped at Raanzsola to look at a breeding colony of Cattle Egrets in a banyan tree on the main street. I took some photos then wandered up a side street, swallows swooping at my feet and in and out of the shops, to look at the houses. When I wandered back down, Rajendra seemed to have disappeared but then I looked up and saw him on someone's balcony! The owners

of the shoe shop on the ground floor motioned to some stairs inside and told me I could go up too! Wonderful views of the birds and the local population was a tad amused by our antics! Further on, we stopped to picnic in a deep gorge. It was a windy spot but without the breeze, it would have been too hot. Our next stop was just before Butwal to admire the extraordinary Siddha Baba Temple which is dedicated to Lord Shiva. It is a complicated-looking building built up the hillside and is a special pilgrimage site for Hindus: it is said that Siddha Baba will grant the wishes of devotees visiting the temple and every time that wish is granted the person should release a pigeon there. Rajendra told us an interesting tale about how Butwal got its name (nothing but wall referring to the towering walls of the gorges) but I found out later that it actually comes from Batauli Bazaar, the oldest part of the city. Butwal itself is quite large and is situated on the west bank of the River Tinau in the shadow of the Siwalik Hills.. We were moving into the Terai Plains now, an area of open farmland which was once completely uninhabitable because of malaria. The introduction of DDT in the 1950s has reversed this, however. We started to see lots of paddy and wheat fields and hundreds of cyclists!

We had a bit of fun finding the exact spot we wanted and I am sure our driver really enjoyed negotiating the circuitous, narrow,unmade roads ... it was quite late by the time we got there but we set off on a bit of a walk and got quite a good list before we had to leave for Lumbini. We hadn't gone far before we stopped for three **Lesser Adjutant** then seven **Black-headed Ibis** but our greatest excitement was for the eight **Sarus Cranes**! Wow! What fabulous birds! We had seen the smallest bird – the Bee hummingbird in Cuba- and now we had seen the world's tallest bird! Taller than me.... We went on to see another 24 plus 2 flying. Great stuff. It was dark as we approached Lumbini but instead of going straight to our hotel, we made a detour into part of the Lumbini Gardens looking for owls and jackals. We only managed to see one jackal though. Driving through Nepal in the dusk and dark would not be one of my favourite activities because of the lack of lights. No street lights of course but they also seem to be optional on vehicles and then you have farm vehicles and carts lumbering along as well as the myriad pedestrians who don't even use a torch to navigate by! Our hotel was the Buddha Maya Garden (<http://www.ktmgh.com/buddha-maya-garden.html>) and we dumped our bags and set off for the buffet. The dining area was very nice but the food choice was disappointing. Probably the worst during our time in Nepal. Our room, however, was very nice with a small balcony and a view over the pond in the form of a temple at the back and the fields where there was a painted statue of an elephant. The local people worship elephants. We could hear the jackals calling as promised. As for the owls – there was a power cut and we couldn't hear anything over the noise of the generator before sleep claimed us.

Pokhara

Red-billed Blue Magpie

Oriental Magpie Robin

House Sparrow

Barn Swallow

House Swift

Red-vented Bulbul

Blue-throated Barbet

Cattle Egret

Crimson Sunbird

On Way

Steppe Eagle

Himalayan Griffon

Egyptian Vulture

White-rumped Vulture

Cattle Egret

Little Egret

Ashy Bulbul
Himalayan Bulbul
Purple Sunbird
Oriental White-eye
Hill Prinia
Pied Bushchat
Paddyfield Pipit

Wetlands

Common Coot
Common Moorhen
Little Cormorant
Blue-tailed Bee-eater
Asian Openbill
Smoky Warbler
Bronze-winged Jacana
Little Grebe
Intermediate Egret
Mallard (Laysan Teal)
Purple Swamphen
Pied Kingfisher
Pheasant-tailed Jacana
Indian Pond Heron
Barn Swallow
Great Crested Grebe
Plain Prinia
Tufted Duck
Lesser Whistling-duck
Cotton Pygmy-goose
Eurasian Wigeon
Garganey
Gadwall
Black-bellied Tern
Black Drongo
Rose-ring Parakeet
Black-shouldered Kite
Lesser Adjutant
Black-headed Ibis
Sarus Crane
Black Ibis
Common Kestrel
Ruddy Shelduck

Friday, April 19th 2013

Walking Forest

Shattered. Bum still sore from Pokhara. Up at 5h15 for an early morning walk to the Lumbini Gardens (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lumbini>). This holy site is bordered by a large, monastic zone in which only monasteries can be built. There are no shops, hotels or resataurants.

There was a group of Netuwa on the other side of the road and a dirty little kid came begging. Rajendra gave her something but she wasn't satisfied and just kept on pestering. Pain. We passed a huge monastery on our right – very luxurious looking. When we got to the main entrance we walked

down the long path stopping to look in the lake to our right then when we got to the crossroads we veered left and walked the long way round to Buddha's birthplace. (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/666>.) We had to take our shoes off before we entered the sacred garden but fortunately it was block-paved and not too hard on the feet. We first looked at the archaeological zone (ruins) and then went in to the Mayadevi Temple where you can walk up to the spot where Buddha was born (from his mother's thigh) but not take photos. You used to be able to but they have stopped it now allegedly because it holds the queues up. We came out by the ancient Puskarni Tank and walked round it to the sacred Bodhi Tree with many monks sitting below it and nearby before inspecting the Asoka Pillar. A group of Thai people were sitting there holding a service. It was then time to leave so we walked back to the entrance. Our driver was waiting for us and we went back to the hotel for breakfast. I ordered boiled eggs and got ... two hot well-boiled eggs. They had no egg cups. Didn't seem to know what they were. How strange to put boiled eggs on the menu and not to have any egg cups Anyway, time to head off to Chitwan and boy, was it hard to stay awake! I was glad when we stopped in Bharatpur for some delicious sugar cane drink – the best I've ever had, I think! The road between Bharatpur and Chitwan wasn't the best and we were a bit puzzled by the lorries and tractors coming towards us that were absolutely crammed with people. Buses full to overflowing and that was just on the roof! They were apparently returning from a festival at Chitwan – there is an important shrine in the forest just after the bridge and they would have been devotees returning home.

We passed through a large, busy town called Bharatpur with a large area of housing below road-level. These were single storey with weighted-down tin rooves and what looked like open sewers running between the rows of dwellings. Bharatpur is the fifth largest city in Nepal and also the fastest growing. It lies on the banks of the Narayani River. Nepal's premier cancer hospital (B.P. Koirala memorial Memorial Cancer Hospital) is in Bharatpur. The economy is traditionally based on agriculture but the land is gradually being converted into residential and industrial areas. A large number of poultry industries have developed here and it is thought that it covers more than 60% of the total demand of the country. As we came out the other side of the town, there were some rather posh multi-storey houses being built, most of which belong to military men using their retirement money as an investment. I wasn't keen on the area but loved the houses! We were getting closer to our target, the Bish Hazari (20 thousand) Lake and passed through the scenic Sauraha region with its remote villages and acres of fields. Bish Hazari is allegedly so called because it is a group of many lakes but it's really because it's 20,000 feet from the highway! Besides being renowned for its birdlife, there are also lots of crocodiles there.

We arrived at Chitwan at about ten to three and had lunch on the balcony of the restaurant overlooking the river. It was very peaceful and the food was delicious. We were able to watch the elephants bathing in the river – they were having a great time. They seemed very small after the African elephants we had seen recently but still just as lovely. Lunch was followed by a short trip in a flat-bottomed canoe. We had "chairs" with no legs so you had a back support and they were really comfy if you sat with your legs stretched out in front. The water hyacinths were so beautiful – white with a feather-like design which looked as though it had been painted on with a fine brush. So, so delicate. It was lovely floating along so close to the water but I was glad there were no crocodiles around! They get two kinds there: Muggers which will eat anything and Gharials which only eat fish and are becoming increasingly rare. We landed all too soon and had a three-mile walk on a sort of island. We saw what looked like a moving forest on the far side of the river but it was villagers carrying baskets of grasses on their backs! When we got back we just had time for a shower before the evening buffet. We were very impressed with our lodgings. All the lodges in the National park have been closed down and this one on the banks of the Rapti had only been open since last year. It was lovely and clean and well laid out. We had a bungalow to ourselves with a patio at the front and a balcony overlooking the river at the back. Our main room had table and chairs, one small bed and

one huge bed. The bathroom was lovely with a toilet, washbasin and bath/shower. Hot water was from a heater. Everyone at the lodge was lovely from the cleaners to the management. So friendly, polite and helpful. Anyway, after dinner Rajendra asked us if we had seen any activity on the far bank. No, we said. He shone his torch across the river and we could see the eyes then the outlines of loads of deer who had come down to drink! Later, he heard a rhino which must have crossed over but try as we might, we could not find it. Sheer bliss lying in bed at night listening to the frogs. ☺

Lumbini

House Crow

Large-billed Crow

House Sparrow

Jungle Babbler

Red-whiskered Bulbul

Spotted Dove

Common Tailorbird

Rose-ring Parakeet

Eurasian Golden Oriole

Cattle Egret

Asian Openbill

Chestnut-shouldered Petronia

Greater Coucal

Great Tit

White-breasted Waterhen

Greenish Warbler

Lesser Whistling-duck

Greater Painted-snipe

Common Greenshank

Common Coot

Little Cormorant

Marsh Sandpiper

Red-wattled Lapwing

Purple Sunbird

Little Egret

Bronze-winged Jacana

Scaly-breasted Munia

Yellow-bellied Prinia

Common Moorhen

White-throated Kingfisher

Pied Kingfisher

Red Avadavat

Zitting Cisticola

Paddyfield Pipit

Cinnamon Bittern

Blue-tailed Bee-eater

Rufous Treepie

Red-rumped Swallow

Black Kite

Oriental Magpie Robin

Lesser Spotted Eagle

Grey Heron

White-browed Wagtail

Asian Pied Starling

Chitwan

Black Ibis

White-browed Wagtail

Little Egret

Purple Heron

Black-hooded Oriole

Pied Bushchat

White-throated Kingfisher

Common Kingfisher

Red-wattled Lapwing

Bronze-winged Jacana

Greater Painted-snipe

Common Myna

Black Drongo

Eurasian Collared Dove

Little Ringed Plover

Rosy Pipit

Red-collared Dove

Zitting Cisticola

Rufous-winged Bushlark

Great Egret

Asian Openbill

Intermediate Egret

Common Greenshank

Stork-billed Kingfisher

White-bellied Drongo

Indian Roller

Barred Buttonquail

Blue-tailed Bee-eater

Ruddy Shelduck

Eurasian Golden Oriole

Lesser Adjutant

Saturday, April 20th

The Never-ending Walk

Up at 4h45! Coffee at 5h30 followed by an elephant ride. I had been worried sick about this beforehand, convinced I would somehow manage to fall off. I didn't of course. The elephant backed up to a high platform and we had to step on her back and sit with our legs round the posts of a square wooden box on her back. There were blankets to protect her back from the cage. And off we went for a couple of hours. Strange at first but I soon got used to it. We didn't see much in the way of wild-life: **Jungle Fowl** and deer, no rhino which was disappointing but I did manage to accumulate a fair collection of spiders, creepie-crawlies and caterpillars as we plodded through the forest! Our driver used his feet to give commands to our elephant – she had ropes round her neck which had sort of stirrups for him to put his feet in which were just behind her ears. He also had a pointy thing called an *ankush* which was for stern commands. Looked pretty horrid but I was told it was necessary to keep the elephant on task in case of emergency. One of the other drivers had a small axe-head on a handle and that is called a *bancharo*. Commands elephants have to learn may be vocal or physical depending on the job they are being trained for. After a hearty breakfast, we were ready to set off on our 10km walk. 8h30 start. Packed lunch and lots of water. There were 6 of us: myself and Roland, Rajendra and two guides. We were told that the guides were there to protect us

as well as to guide us and that if we came face-to-face with a wild animal (tiger, rhino, elephant, bear etc) we should look it in the eye, walk slowly backwards and get behind a tree if possible. Very reassuring. We were standing by a rhino midden at the time – rhinos have clean habits and leave their poo in a communal spot. This one had fresh dung on itWe really enjoyed exploring the riverine forest. It was very pleasant there though it did get hotter as we moved towards the interior. About 70% of Chitwan is covered by Himalayan subtropical broadleaf forests mainly Sal – they can withstand drought, fire and termites so are perfect for the climate there. The riverine forest consists mainly of Silk Cotton Trees (Kapok) and Rhino Apple Trees with an understorey of Velvety Beautyberry, Hill Glory Bower and Gooseberry. Savanna and grasslands account for the rest of the park and we were to walk through all three habitats during the course of the day. We saw plenty of deer as we walked along (Barking and Spotted) and some great birds but then our guides started to look a little uneasy – there were rhino about but they couldn't work out exactly where they were. One of the guides already had a stick with him and the other broke one off a tree as they looked round nervously then realised they were running straight towards us! Quickly, I got behind a small tree, closely followed by the others! Luckily, at the last minute they veered off and missed us, Rajendra said it was because he waved his hat at them. Maybe it was! Anyway, the one was intent on chasing the other so even if they had continued towards us I'm sure they would have just carried on. I was surprised at how big they were – I was sure I had read somewhere that they were pygmy rhinos. Hum. They definitely weren't pygmies and weigh 3 tons on average! Even more than me. They do only have one horn though and are called Indian Rhinoceros, Greater One-horned Rhinoceros or Indian One-horned rhinoceros. They are restricted to Nepal and a small area of Northern India. We continued on our way, stopping for lunch by a river. Our chef had done us proud. No cheese butties today: delicious fried rice, egg curry, aloo paratha, fruit and juice. Yummy! We had walked 8 kms by this time and Rajendra said it was nearly the end of the walk. Only 4kms to go. I was quite disappointed as I was enjoying myself so much. Off we went and then we had cause for concern as we heard rhinos again and there was a distinct lack of cover! We quickly got out of their way and this time we had better views as they thundered past. Possibly the same two as in the morning. Shortly after we heard the surrender cry of one of them – either a female giving in or a male giving up the battle for territory. As we came across signs of rhino mating soon after, we think it was probably male and female! So, two close encounters with rhino! We were thrilled! We were still elated when we stopped for a break up a watch-tower near an ox-bow lake. Nice view. Pleasant rest but why weren't we back at the lodge? Surely we had walked 4kms by now? Yes, we had. And more. Only another 3-4 said Rajendra. And so we carried on and got to the Lake. Great excitement when a young rhino was spotted on the other side having a good nosh – he was adult-sized but hadn't filled out yet. He was totally unconcerned with our presence and we watched him for quite a while before moving on. We had just stopped to take more photos when Rajendra gave such a yell he frightened the living daylights out of me! Two crocodiles in the water fighting over a Python! Amazingly, the python escaped – we watched him swim to the side and slither out whilst an Egret stood calmly by not so much as batting an eye-lid! Wow. What next? Deer behaving oddly, that's what. A small herd standing still noses all pointed in the same direction, ears and tails pricked. And calling. Didn't mean anything to us. We just carried on. More of the same from another group of deer and our guides were looking about nervously. Tiger. Wow! Would we really get to see one? It was suggested that we walk quickly to the next watch tower and seek refuge there. As we got to it, I saw movement in the grass feet away and stopped, hand over my mouth. Alas it was only a deer. We stayed in the tower for quite a while but didn't get to see a tiger and we still only had 4kms to go! The rest of our walk was fairly tame – the odd bird and the odd deer but nothing to get too excited about though the tiger threat was still around and the guides were quite nervy. By this time it was getting quite late so one of our guides rang the Lodge and asked for someone to come and pick us up. The sun was setting when we reached the Rapti Bridge. Beautiful. People were hanging over the sides of the bridge pointing at the large fish in the river below. There were several varieties and it was obviously a sight the locals enjoyed on their way home at night. There was a **Spotted Owlet** in

the last tree by the bridge – so cute. And only about 100 yards further on was our transport home. We had walked 17.9kms! But what a day! ☺ Dinner was scrumptious again and the chef had made a wonderful rice pudding. We could see lightning flashing over the park as we ate – like watching the Northern Lights! It was weird.

Chitwan

Red Junglefowl
Green Bee-eater
Black Redstart
White-browed Wagtail
Asian Openbill
Himalayan Flameback
Rufous Treepie
Alexandrine Parakeet
Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker
Rosy Minivet
Oriental Magpie Robin
Grey-backed Shrike
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Green Sandpiper
Lesser Whistling-duck
Plum-headed Parakeet
Lesser Adjutant
Red-whiskered Bulbul
Spotted Dove
Bar-wing Flycatcher-shrike
White-rumped Shama
Oriental White-eye
Greenish Warbler
Orange-breasted Green Pigeon
Crested Treeswift
Common Iora
Red-collared Dove
Rufous-capped Babbler
Red-breasted Parakeet
Grey-headed Woodpecker
Large Cuckooshrike
Ashy Drongo
Greater Racket-tail Drongo
Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch
Jungle Babbler
Pale-chinned Flycatcher
Black-naped Monarch
Striped Tit Babbler
Olive-backed Pipit
Grey-breasted Prinia
Large Woodshrike
Purple Swamphen
Oriental Darter
Grey-headed Fish Eagle

Chestnut-tailed Starling
White-bellied Drongo
Scarlet Minivet
Black-rumped Flameback
Woolly-necked Stork
Purple Heron
Spotted Owlet
Eurasian Golden Oriole

Sunday, April 21st.

The Day that the Rain Came Down....

Up nice and early as usual but it was persisting it down and had been for a number of hours. We had breakfast and hung about for a while but, if anything, it was getting worse. Not much fun going out in an open jeep.... In the end we decided to stay at the Lodge until it cleared up. Back to bed for us! It was still raining but not as hard when we reappeared. We went for a walk down to the village and watched the elephants for a while. They seemed to be playing with some small straw bundles then Rajendra explained that these were *kuchhis*. These are small straw balls with vitamins or medicine or food supplements inside. They are made by hand and have to be secure so the elephants don't unwrap them. They did seem to enjoy playing with them before they ate them. The Lodge has 4 elephants and each one may eat 50 a day so it's a full-time job keeping them supplied! Whilst we were out, the people at the Lodge had been trying to get hold of a covered jeep but without success. Our driver was called on to take us out but it was only an ordinary car so we couldn't have gone into the Park because of the state of the roads. Then someone had a brainwave – we could don ponchos and go out in the jeep. Hurrah! The packed lunch was unpacked and served up for an early lunch then we all set out in the jeep in our lovely green ponchos. By this time it was hardly raining, it was much lighter and visibility was good. We were all in high spirits. We actually had a great afternoon and on the way back it was so clear we could see the snow-topped mountains glowing pink under the setting sun. We had seen lots of Spotted Deer, Sambar Deer, a group of Wild Boar, Black-faced Langur Monkey, and Rhino! The first one was grazing at close quarters then turned to face us. Its intentions weren't clear and it's difficult to say which was more exciting, the rhino or the driver's attempts to get away! There were lots of puddles and the ground was sticky clay – we went into a great skid and the rhino trotted away decidedly unimpressed. The second one we saw was in the river. We walked along the river bank on what I thought was a fast-paced birding walk and there he was, wallowing in a natural pool! Almost completely submerged and blowing bubbles. ☺ He was about 20m away and we watched him for what felt like ages. It was **so** wonderful. He eventually spotted us and slowly stood up turning to face us. He stared us in the eye before before turning leisurely and making his way out of the water up the opposite bank. He was badly scarred and had a chewed ear – probably about 20 years old we were told. Rhinos are pugnacious creatures – they fight a lot over territory and females so do accumulate lots of injuries even losing their horn sometimes. Bathing in water is like soothing medicine for their wounds. While we were walking along the river we stopped to listen to and watch two **Plum-headed Parakeets** making out. She was going peep-peep and wagging her tail in time to it whilst the male was dancing on the branch! Very amusing. They were still at it when we walked back! ☺ We also saw lots of **Peafowl** during the course of the afternoon. At one point we were following a fairly wide track through grassland which was obviously a catwalk for displaying males and we unfortunately disturbed more than one doing his little dance for a group of appreciative-looking females! Of course, they scattered into the trees. It always makes me smile to see peafowl in trees – so incongruous! A Peahen with four little ones was also an appealing sight.

When we got back to the Lodge we had a slide show about the Park. It was very interesting and well presented.

Dinner was delicious!

Chitwan

Hill Myna
Eurasian Golden Oriole
Sand Martin
Sirkeer Malkoha
Red-collared Dove
Scarlet Minivet
Indian Roller
Large Cuckooshrike
Dollarbird
Chestnut-tailed Starling
Orange-breasted Green Pigeon
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker
Red-breasted Parakeet
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater
Pied Bushchat
Eurasian Collared Dove
White-eyed Buzzard
Oriental Pied Hornbill
Crested Serpent Eagle
Oriental Honey-buzzard
Indian Grey Hornbill
Asian Paradise Flycatcher
Lesser Coucal
Common Hawk Cuckoo
Lesser Adjutant
Purple Heron
Red Junglefowl
Spotted Dove
Blue-tailed Bee-eater
White-throated Kingfisher
Plum-headed Parakeet
Yellow-eyed Babbler
Chestnut-capped Babbler
White-rumped Needletail
Bronze-winged Jacana
Greater Coucal
Grey-headed Fish Eagle
White-breasted Waterhen
Red-wattled Lapwing
Asian Openbill
Cinnamon Bittern
Pied Kingfisher

Monday April 22nd

Destination Trogon

An early start was planned whatever the weather. Breakfast was at six and it was peeing down. Off we went to in our ponchos passing many birds and stopping for none. We were on our way to the foothills of the mountains and I was hoping to see the magnificent Red-headed Trogon. We had one

or two exciting moments in the jeep on our way to the river crossing and agreed to deliver some sacks of rice to the army base there. The soldiers hadn't been able to get through because of the rain. However, when we arrived at the crossing it was too deep and the ground too uneven for the jeep to get across. I doubt it would have made it up the far bank anyway even if it had got across – it wasn't much cop. It was suggested we wade across but it was quite deep, wise and fast flowing and I really didn't fancy it. No-one tried to persuade me otherwise so I guess the others weren't over keen either. We unloaded the rice and left it on the bank and stripped off our ponchos as by now it had stopped raining and the sun had come out. It actually turned into a really hot, sunny day. The Nepalese contingent went into a huddle and had much discussion about what to do next. Lots of driving as it turned out. The rest of the morning was quite good with excellent views of a "baby" Rhino with his mum. She had lost her horn and he was about three years old which is the age at which the young leave their mums. Later we saw a real baby on the road just in front of us but where was the mother? We had to sit and wait until she appeared then moved off with her young one. So cute! Only about 6 months old. A further obstacle on our track was a rather large Wild Boar. We sat and watched while he snuffled about before moving into the undergrowth for a root and a lie-down. He soon stood up when we started moving and gave us the evil eye. Thought at one point he was going to charge but he just trotted off instead. We didn't have any other exciting mammal encounters today but did see both Langur and Rhesus Monkeys, Hog Deer, Spotted Deer, Sambar and a Mongoose. It would have been nice to have seen other mammals too such as a Sloth Bear or a Gaur or even a Leopard or Tiger or Pangolin but it was not to be. We had a few short walks and on one of them our guide had a caterpillar on his neck which immediately provoked a very nasty reaction. Roland's antihistamines and our special ointment worked a treat though. One of the morning's highlights was a **Thickbill Green Pigeon** spotted by the guide and we enjoyed watching a **Common Hawk Cuckoo** eating a caterpillar – they suck the soft bit out and discard the rest.

Lunch was eaten up a watch tower from where we would have had great views of any birds or animals in the area. Unfortunately our luck was out. A distant rhino hidden in the grass and some **Hill Myna** were the only excitement though lunch was yummy again. Same as yesterday but with a chicken leg too! The rest of the day was spent driving about different habitats including a little-visited wooded area with hills and hollows. It was lovely but there was nothing there and the only exercise we got was getting in and out of the jeep and walking whenever it got stuck which was often! Too hilly and too wet. We had a bit of a moan especially about not seeing the Trogon or Hornbills when what should we see but two **Giant Hornbill!** Fabulous. Generally speaking though it was a very disappointing and frustrating afternoon.

Yummy tea with chocolate cake.

It was decided that we would spend the next morning in Chitwan to try and make up for our disappointing day.

Chitwan

Thick-billed Green Pigeon

Grey-backed Shrike

Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch

Common Tailorbird

Black Drongo

Crested Serpent Eagle

Changeable Hawk Eagle

Great Tit

Lineated Barbet

Himalayan Flameback

Lesser Spotted Eagle

Black Ibis

Hill Myna

Indian Nightjar

Orange-headed Thrush
Great Egret
Great Hornbill
Common Hawk Cuckoo

Tuesday, April 23rd

Walking with Deer

It was hard work getting up at five today.

We started by driving to the buffer zone on the other side of the river for a lovely sunrise walk through the riverine forest whilst deer watched over us. An **Oriental Buzzard** flew low towards and then alongside us whilst one sat in a tree looking glorious with the early morning sunshine highlighting its plumage. We didn't see much in the way of birds (except for three **Black Baza**!) but we did see our first leeches of the holiday! We were picked up at the end of the walk and taken back to the Lodge for breakfast. Next we were driven to a point higher up the river and floated downstream in a canoe looking for crocodiles before we landed on the far shore for another walk and a visit to the Crocodile Conservation Centre. Unfortunately we never got to the centre but we did see some great birds though the Indian Cuckoo was not amongst them. I swear that bird will haunt me for the rest of my life!

What I learnt today:

1. The bendy Rhino tree is called *Litsea Monopetala*. The rhinos like the young leaves and can bend the young trees over to get at them. Consequently these trees never go straight up but always have a lean on them.
2. Kapok trees have spiky nobbles on the trunk when young.
3. Ring-necked Pigeon are declining in farmland because of the use of pesticides etc particularly on wheat. These are also dangerous to Cranes who peck at it then lose their appetite.
4. The Rhino Apple Tree (*Trewia nudiflora*), much loved by rhino, can apparently cure tapeworm in them when they eat the small unripe ones which have fallen to the ground. Scientists have discovered this by examining their dung.
5. The Nepalese worship frogs especially about two weeks after planting their rice because they help to control pests in the paddy fields. (See *Frog Worship: A Unique Culture* himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/.../ancient_nepal_115_01.pdf)

The elephants were on the bank when we got back and a young couple had taken their baby down so that dad could walk underneath one with him/her in his arms. Auspicious apparently. Mum declined the opportunity!

Time for our last lunch – even more choice than usual including Chinese. Absolutely scrumptious. Then it was time to say our goodbyes and thank yous especially for the frog in our bathroom which we were allowed to buy to put in our collection. I was really sad to leave. It was such a wonderful place to stay and I would have liked to have spent more time in the area.

We set off for Kathmandu (185kms away) a lot later than originally planned but we didn't mind as we had had such a lovely well-coordinated morning. We broke the journey at the Riverside Resort for Cardomon Kulfi and bean coffee and had the surprise of our lives when the screeching above us alerted us to the presence of a **Long-tailed Broadbill**. What a cracking bird! Absolute stunner. Superb views. On this long drive back I was again reminded of the poverty in this country –terrible roads, people with clay ovens in front of their homes, people living in half-derelict houses And yet there is quite a lot of new building. We saw much evidence of people building their own new houses out of breeze block. As we approached Kathmandu it was getting dark but few vehicles had their lights on and there were broken-down lorries everywhere. The long-distance buses were easy to pick out when it got darker with all their disco lights! The tourist area of Kathmandu is very obvious

when you reach it! A maze of narrow streets lined with bars, shops, Irish pubs etc all brightly lit and blocked with traffic. Our destination was the Kathmandu Guest House, an old Rana Palace set back off the road behind gates. <http://www.ktmgh.com/kathmandu-guest-house.html>. It is a big place with rooms costing between 2\$ and 160\$ a night! Something to suit every pocket! There is a café/restaurant as you walk in and a big lobby with a shopping arcade leading off. Our room was fine. We had our own bathroom and a nice little balcony. Mineral water was provided as were tea and coffee-making facilities. We were tickled by the complimentary noodles and a little non-plussed by the small pile of rags with the label “Dusters” on it. Maybe we were supposed to do our own dusting?? There was a hot water bottle in the bathroom – never seen one of those in a hotel room before! Fortunately, we didn’t need it. Another strange feature was the coconut matting door mat with a towel over it as you went into the bathroom and it was also the first time we have seen the shower drain situated in the side of the wall. It was a very interesting place to stay because of its age and construction and had been beautifully restored with lovely gardens. Besides being in the heart of the tourist area, many attractions such as Durbar Square are only a short walk away.

Chitwan

Oriental Honey-buzzard

Common Woodshrike

Black-rumped Flameback

Pied Bushchat

Grey-breasted Prinia

Paddyfield Pipit

Black Baza

Black-shouldered Kite

Black-bellied Tern

Green-billed Malkoha

Lesser Yellownappe

Pale-chinned Flycatcher

Emerald Dove

Black-backed Forktail

Drongo Cuckoo

Black-naped Monarch

Dusky Warbler

Plain Prinia

Riverside Resort

Long-tailed Broadbill

Rose-ring Parakeet

Wednesday, April 24th.

Shivapuri

Our destination today was Shivapuri National Park. Shivapuri (2732m) is the second highest peak of the hills surrounding Kathmandu I had asked to go to Phulchowki but apparently you need to have guards if you go there and as we had not gone here as planned on the first day, Rajendra changed the arrangements. It was a bit of a cool start and it thundered and rained on and off all day. Our first stop was at the water tank near the gate (Pani Muhan) where we picked up **Slaty-backed Forktail**, **Plumbeous Redstart** and **White-capped Water Redstart** before following the nearby path Rajendra referred to this as the “Jimmy Carter Trail.” The week before our arrival, he had been invited to take Jimmy Carter and his wife birding and this was one of the areas they covered. The rest of our time was spent doing a bit of driving, followed by a bit of walking and so on. Today we were travelling in a four-wheel drive. Good job too. I have never been over terrain like that in a vehicle in all my life. I was **much** happier walking! I must praise the driver here – he was **excellent**. We got up to a height of about 6,500’ and would have had excellent views over the valley and surrounding mountains but

for the poor visibility. The forest was mostly Alder, Oak and Rhododendron with a few stands of pines. We went past Nepal's second largest Buddhist nunnery, Nagi Gomba, but did not visit it. Lunch was a picnic by the River Bagmati. There are still villages within the National Park and we saw a group of children with home-made toys: plastic bottles with wheels attached and a long wooden handle to propel them along the ground. The thundering got stronger and the sky got darker so we left the mountain and went to the Boudhanath (also called Boudha, Bouddhanath or Baudhanath). It is one of the holiest Buddhist sites in Nepal and is one of the biggest stupas in the world. It is built on the ancient trade route from Tibet which enters the Kathmandu valley by the village of Sankhu in the north-east corner then passes by Boudnath Stupa to the ancient and smaller "Little Tibet" before turning south and bypassing the city itself, Tibetan merchants have rested and offered prayers here for many centuries and when refugees entered Nepal in the 1950s many decided to live round here. The Stupa is said to entomb the remains of Kassapa Buddha. It is built on an octagonal base and stands 36m high. You walk round the outside of the stupa clockwise and are surrounded by an outer circle of buildings housing, temples, cafes, shops and hotels. To get to it, you pass through an impressive archway and are supposed to pay but there were so many people there I bet you could have just walked in. We didn't, I hasten to say! The crowd was dense and I was worried about getting lost in it so was pleased when we went up to the first floor of a café from where we had tremendous views of the stupa, the crowds, the street vendors (toys, ice-cream, food, candy floss, flutes ...) and the surrounding buildings. There were many people walking round the different levels of the stupa or just sitting there watching the goings on. At the top, pilgrims were going round putting offerings on the fires. It was absolutely fascinating. When we had looked at everything we went back out into the street to wait for our driver and were able to have a quick look at the shops – clothes, fruit and veg, butchers etc before it was time to go. This part of the city had wide streets and pavements and no road works! Rajendra had kindly invited us out for a Nepali meal in the evening with his son. He took us to the Bhojan Griha Restaurant in an old, restored Nepali house. The original rough wood has been retained and the traditional old plaster (rice husk + cow dung + adhesive soil) has been white-washed over. The floors were covered in brick tiles. The building seemed to have several dining areas and we were led into a room on the first floor with foot-high dining tables and cushions to sit on. We ordered the set meal. The waitress came with some strong local alcohol which she poured from a great height. As neither we nor his son drank alcohol, this left an ample portion for our host! The first course was popcorn, followed by spicy fried potato, then momo, pumpkin soup and a thali. I was full before we got to the thali: boiled rice, cauliflower, spicy salad, spinach, mushrooms, dahl, fish, chicken curry. Everything was good but the mo-mo in particular were wonderful. We had sweet yoghurt for pud. All the waiting-on people were dressed in traditional costume and we were entertained by musicians and dancers who worked their way through each of the rooms performing traditional dances. Their costumes were wonderful as was the dancing and we thoroughly enjoyed the whole evening.

Shivapuri

Slaty-backed Forktail

Plumbeous Water Redstart

White-capped Water Redstart

Blue Whistling Thrush

Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher

Oriental Turtle Dove

Red-billed Blue Magpie

White-bellied Yuhina

Oriental White-eye

Mountain Bulbul

Small Niltava

Nepal Fulvetta

Black-throated Sunbird

Crested Serpent Eagle
Spotted Forktail
Tickell's Leaf Warbler
Golden-throated Barbet
Verditer Flycatcher
Streak Laughingthrush
Grey Bushchat
Black-throated Tit
Black-lored Tit
Large Cuckooshrike
Long-tailed Minivet
Grey Treepie
Little Pied Flycatcher
Great Barbet
Orange-bellied Leafbird

Wednesday, April 25th.

Bhaktapur

Rajendra was busy today but he came to say goodbye to us at breakfast and outline our day. A guide would arrive at about nine and a taxi driver by 9.30 to take us to Bhaktapur. The guide had been instructed to take us on a full tour with lunch and to see us back to the hotel. Our room would still be available so we could have a rest and a shower before checking out. The driver would take us to the airport at night. Great planning. ☺

Our young guide was early – he was polite, spoke excellent English and had a very good knowledge of everything he showed us and left the pace to us. Lunch was eaten in a very nice restaurant where we made sure to taste the excellent local curd that Rajendra had told us about the previous night.

So, Bhaktapur. (<http://www.bhaktapur.com/>) Founded in the 12th Century and home today to some 225,000 people. As you walk from the entrance gate towards Durbar Square, it is like entering another, mediaeval world. A living, working museum not reconstructed as a museum piece as in York but preserved as it has always been. It was absolutely fascinating but you see this time and again in Nepal though on a smaller scale in country areas where the buildings haven't been modernised and traditional methods of farming etc are still being used. Many people would look on this as primitive and it must be really hard work for the Nepalese but something inside me embraces this simple culture and all it represents. Bhaktapur is also filled with Hindu and Buddhist religious sites and art. Today, about 60% of the town's income is from tourism. We bought a few pieces of hand-made pottery. Unfortunately the potters weren't working when we were there but we got a couple of one-horned rhino and a crocodile eating a frog for a couple of pounds. It is embarrassing – the smallest pot animals were only 20p each. Very humbling.

Must sees include: Durbar Square, Dattatraya Square, a Patinga Hiti (water spout), the Peacock Window, the Golden Gate.

A wonderful day out and a fitting end to our holiday. Once back at the hotel we had time to freshen up and have a walk round the tourist shops before our taxi would arrive to take us to the airport. We had the same lovely man who had driven us around Nepal and Rajendra turned up to see us off which was really nice. One last drive through Kathmandu – we looked on it very differently by this time – and then it was time to say thank you and goodbye to our driver and our host who had orchestrated our last day so wonderfully and had indeed gone out of his way to ensure that we had a wonderful time in his country. I would most certainly go back and would recommend anyone contemplating a trip to Nepal to contact Rajendra.

Complete bird list

Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
Ashy Bulbul	<i>Hemixos flavala</i>
Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
Asian House Martin	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>
Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>
Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
Asian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
Asian Pied Starling	<i>Sturnus contra</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Barred Buttonquail	<i>Turnix suscitator</i>
Bar-wing Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>
Black Baza	<i>Aviceda leuphotes</i>
Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
Black Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Black-backed Forktail	<i>Enicurus immaculatus</i>
Black-bellied Tern	<i>Sterna acuticauda</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
Black-lored Tit	<i>Parus xanthogenys</i>
Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>
Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Black-throated Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga saturata</i>
Black-throated Tit	<i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>
Blue Whistling Thrush	<i>Myophonus caeruleus</i>
Blue-capped Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola cinclorhynchus</i>
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
Blue-throated Barbet	<i>Megalaima asiatica</i>
Blue-throated Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis rubeculoides</i>
Bronzed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>
Bronze-winged Jacana	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Changeable Hawk Eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>
Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch	<i>Sitta castanea</i>
Chestnut-capped Babbler	<i>Timalia pileata</i>
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>
Chestnut-tailed Starling	<i>Sturnus malabaricus</i>
Cinnamon Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo refectus</i>
Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Common Hawk Cuckoo	<i>Hierococyx varius</i>
Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>

Common Kingfisher
Common Moorhen
Common Myna
Common Sandpiper
Common Tailorbird
Common Woodshrike
Cotton Pygmy-goose
Crested Serpent Eagle
Crested Treeswift
Crimson Sunbird
Dollarbird
Drongo Cuckoo
Dusky Warbler
Egyptian Vulture
Emerald Dove
Eurasian Collared Dove
Eurasian Cuckoo
Eurasian Golden Oriole
Eurasian Tree Sparrow
Eurasian Wigeon
Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker
Gadwall
Garganey
Golden-throated Barbet
Great Barbet
Great Crested Grebe
Great Egret
Great Hornbill
Great Tit
Greater Coucal
Greater Painted-snipe
Greater Racket-tail Drongo
Green Bee-eater
Green Sandpiper
Green-billed Malkoha
Greenish Warbler
Grey Bushchat
Grey Heron
Grey Treepie
Grey Wagtail
Grey-backed Shrike
Grey-breasted Prinia
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker
Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher
Grey-headed Fish Eagle
Grey-headed Woodpecker
Grey-hooded Warbler
Grey-hooded Warbler
Grey-winged Blackbird
Hill Myna
Hill Prinia

Alcedo atthis
Gallinula chloropus
Acridotheres tristis
Actitis hypoleucos
Orthotomus sutorius
Tephrodornis pondicerianus
Nettapus coromandelianus
Spilornis cheela
Hemiprocne coronata
Aethopyga siparaja
Eurystomus orientalis
Surniculus lugubris
Phylloscopus fuscatus
Neophron percnopterus
Chalcophaps indica
Streptopelia decaocto
Cuculus canorus
Oriolus oriolus
Passer montanus
Anas penelope
Dendrocopos macei
Anas strepera
Anas querquedula
Megalaima franklinii
Megalaima virens
Podiceps cristatus
Casmerodius albus
Buceros bicornis
Parus major
Centropus sinensis
Rostratula benghalensis
Dicrurus paradiseus
Merops orientalis
Tringa ochropus
Phaenicophaeus tristis
Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus
Saxicola ferrea
Ardea cinerea
Dendrocitta formosae
Motacilla cinerea
Lanius tephronotus
Prinia hodgsonii
Dendrocopos canicapillus
Culicicapa ceylonensis
Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus
Picus canus
Seicercus xanthoschistos xanthoschistos
Seicercus xanthoschistos albosuperciliaris
Turdus boulboul
Gracula religiosa
Prinia atrogularis

Himalayan Bulbul
Himalayan Flameback
Himalayan Griffon
House Crow
House Sparrow
House Swift
Indian Grey Hornbill
Indian Nightjar
Indian Pond Heron
Indian Roller
Intermediate Egret
Jungle Babbler
Jungle Myna
Kalij Pheasant
Large Cuckooshrike
Large Woodshrike
Large-billed Crow
Lesser Adjutant
Lesser Coucal
Lesser Spotted Eagle
Lesser Whistling-duck
Lesser Yellownape
Lineated Barbet
Little Cormorant
Little Egret
Little Grebe
Little Pied Flycatcher
Little Ringed Plover
Long-tailed Broadbill
Long-tailed Minivet
Long-tailed Shrike
Mallard (Laysan Teal)
Maroon Oriole
Marsh Sandpiper
Mountain Bulbul
Nepal Fulvetta
Olive-backed Pipit
Orange-bellied Leafbird
Orange-breasted Green Pigeon
Orange-headed Thrush
Oriental Darter
Oriental Honey-buzzard
Oriental Magpie Robin
Oriental Pied Hornbill
Oriental Turtle Dove
Oriental White-eye
Osprey
Paddyfield Pipit
Pale-chinned Flycatcher
Pheasant-tailed Jacana
Pied Bushchat

Pycnonotus leucogenys
Dinopium shorii
Gyps himalayensis
Corvus splendens
Passer domesticus
Apus affinis
Ocyeros birostris
Caprimulgus asiaticus
Ardeola grayii
Coracias benghalensis benghalensis
Mesophoyx intermedia
Turdoides striatus
Acridotheres fuscus
Lophura leucomelanos hamiltonii
Coracina macei
Tephrodornis gularis
Corvus macrorhynchos intermedius
Leptoptilos javanicus
Centropus bengalensis
Aquila pomarina
Dendrocygna javanica
Picus chlorolophus
Megalaima lineata
Phalacrocorax niger
Egretta garzetta
Tachybaptus ruficollis
Ficedula westermanni
Charadrius dubius
Psarisomus dalhousiae
Pericrocotus ethologus
Lanius schach erythronotus
Anas platyrhynchos
Oriolus traillii
Tringa stagnatilis
Hypsipetes mcclllandii
Alcippe nipalensis
Anthus hodgsoni hodgsoni
Chloropsis hardwickii
Treron bicincta
Zoothera citrina
Anhinga melanogaster
Pernis ptilorhyncus
Copsychus saularis
Anthracoceros albirostris
Streptopelia orientalis meena
Zosterops palpebrosus
Pandion haliaetus
Anthus rufulus
Cyornis poliogenys
Hydrophasianus chirurgus
Saxicola caprata

Pied Kingfisher
Plain Prinia
Plumbeous Water Redstart
Plum-headed Parakeet
Puff-throated Babbler
Purple Heron
Purple Sunbird
Purple Swamphen
Red Avadavat
Red Junglefowl
Red-billed Blue Magpie
Red-breasted Parakeet
Red-collared Dove
Red-headed Vulture
Red-rumped Swallow
Red-throated Flycatcher
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Red-whiskered Bulbul
Rose-ring Parakeet
Rosy Minivet
Rosy Pipit
Ruddy Shelduck
Rufous Treepie
Rufous Woodpecker
Rufous-capped Babbler
Rufous-winged Bushlark
Russet Sparrow
Sand Martin
Sarus Crane
Scaly Thrush
Scaly-breasted Munia
Scarlet Minivet
Shikra
Sirkeer Malkoha
Slaty-backed Forktail
Small Niltava
Smoky Warbler
Spangled Drongo
Spiny Babbler
Spotted Dove
Spotted Forktail
Spotted Owlet
Steppe Eagle
Stork-billed Kingfisher
Streak Laughingthrush
Striped Tit Babbler
Thick-billed Green Pigeon
Tickell's Leaf Warbler
Tufted Duck
Verditer Flycatcher

Ceryle rudis
Prinia inornata
Rhyacornis fuliginosus
Psittacula cyanocephala
Pellorneum ruficeps
Ardea purpurea
Nectarinia asiatica
Porphyrio porphyrio
Amandava amandava
Gallus gallus
Urocissa erythrorhyncha
Psittacula alexandri
Streptopelia tranquebarica
Sarcogyps calvus
Hirundo daurica
Ficedula parva parva
Pycnonotus cafer
Vanellus indicus
Pycnonotus jocosus
Psittacula krameri
Pericrocotus roseus
Anthus roseatus
Tadorna ferruginea
Dendrocitta vagabunda
Celeus brachyurus
Stachyris ruficeps
Mirafra assamica
Passer rutilans
Riparia riparia
Grus antigone
Zoothera dauma
Lonchura punctulata
Pericrocotus flammeus
Accipiter badius
Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii
Enicurus schistaceus
Niltava macgrigoriae
Phylloscopus fuligiventer
Dicrurus hottentottus
Turdoides nipalensis
Streptopelia chinensis
Enicurus maculatus
Athene brama
Aquila nipalensis
Halcyon capensis
Garrulax lineatus
Macronous gularis
Treron curvirostra
Phylloscopus affinis
Aythya fuligula
Eumyias thalassina

Wedge-tail Green Pigeon
White-bellied Drongo
White-bellied Yuhina
White-breasted Waterhen
White-browed Wagtail
White-capped Water Redstart
White-crested Laughingthrush
White-eyed Buzzard
White-rumped Munia
White-rumped Needletail
White-rumped Shama
White-rumped Vulture
White-throated Kingfisher
White-throated Needletail
Woolly-necked Stork
Yellow-bellied Prinia
Yellow-eyed Babbler
Zitting Cisticola

Treron sphenura
Dicrurus caerulescens
Yuhina zantholeuca
Amaurornis phoenicurus
Motacilla maderaspatensis
Chaimarrornis leucocephalus
Garrulax leucolophus
Butastur teesa
Lonchura striata
Zonotrichia sylvatica
Copsychus malabaricus
Gyps bengalensis
Halcyon smyrnensis
Hirundapus caudacutus
Ciconia episcopus
Prinia flaviventris
Chrysomma sinense
Cisticola juncidis