Pangolakha WLS, East Sikkim, India

April (i) 2016

As the time passes by so as water flows through Teesta river; but the birds of the Himalayas are always there in the beautiful state of Sikkim. The beauty of birding in Sikkim is beyond the description of any poetic narration. As soon as your step into the state via Rongli, you will start noticing activities and movements of bird and other fauna life in hamlets. This year in the month of April as well I had a tour to Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary. A birding team from Mumbai joined me during this tour.

As they came from south-western part of India, they had to avail flight in order to save time. Pick up was arranged from Bagdogra Airport on 2nd April 2016. They had a scheduled arrival of flight around 1:40 PM. After picking them from Bagdogra, we moved towards Rongpo and there after headed towards Mankhim. Mankhim is a village adjacent to lower parts of Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary. Since the distance was long (around 140 kms-5 hrs of driving), thus on day 1 after picking them up we hardly had any time left for birding. The itinerary and birding we did is as follows.

Itinerary for April 1st and 2nd week of 2016:

- **2nd April 2016** - Came from Bagdogra Airport to Mankhim (via Salugara-Sevok-Teesta-Melli-Rongpo-Rhenok). Reached at home stay at Mankhim around 5 PM in the afternoon. Very little time was left in our hand thus we considered it as a rest day. After having high tea, we took our dinner within a 30 minutes gap.
**3rd April 2016** - We started very early, around 5 AM we were hearing calls of birds around home stay. We did morning birding between 5:30-9 AM in and around Mankhim-Aritar area. After having breakfast, we did very little birding till 10-10:30 AM. Took a rest of one hour and started birding again after lunch from 2:30 PM onwards. Post afternoon birding we came back and had high tea. Took our dinner around 8:30 PM.

**4th April 2016** - Today we had to leave Mankhim. Though we did little bit of birding in and around home stay. Post breakfast we check out from Aritar and as scheduled we started moving towards Zuluk. On the way we had our lunch. The route was Mankhim-Rhenok-Rongli-Sisney-Lingtam-Nimachen-Phadamchen-Zuluk. We did our birding on the way and arrived at Zuluk late afternoon. Had some high tea around 5:30 PM. We took our dinner a little early at 7 PM.

**5th April 2016** - In the morning we started around 5:30 AM nad did birding on Dhupidara-Lungthu-Laxman Chowk area with packed breakfast. We had our lunch outside. Post afternoon birding when we returned back to our home stay we took our dinner as day before at 7 PM.

**6th April 2016** - We covered lower altitudes (Padamchen-Nimachen-Lingtam-Sisney) in the early morning and higher altitude during afternoon birding session. Post birding we took a tea break adjacent Lungthu.

**7th April 2016** - Today we repeated same as 5th April.

**8th April 2016** - Today we had to leave Zuluk. After doing morning birding session in and around Tambi-Lunthu from 5-8:30 AM; we had our breakfast at home stay. After freshing up, we left around 10 AM. Did our birding on the way Phadamchen-Nimachen-Rongli-Rongpo. We took our lunch at Rongpo around 2 PM. Post lunch we headed towards Siliguri. We reached Siliguri around 5-5:15 PM that day. Since both the participants were from Puna, they had to stay one night at Siliguri to catch next day flight. Flights from leave 4:30 PM at last. Thus they had to schedule flight accordingly.

**Temperature Range:**

-10°C ~ 15°C

**Altitude Range:**

3000' to 13500' (from MSL)

**Habitat:**

- Montane Forest.
- Temperate Coniferous.
- Broadleaf.
- Wetland.
- Riverine.
- Alluvial.
- Alpine steppe.
- Sub Alpine Forest.
Cold desert climate.
Tundra Valley.
High altitude marshes.
Cultivation Land.
Human Habitat.

Timing and itinerary schedule along with seasonal bird activity changes from month to month. This itinerary was not followed in late April.

We saw a flock of 15 plus Myzornis in the early morning. Later they moved uphill as the day progressed. Such daily migration takes places in higher altitudes. In the afternoon, the same flock would move downhill and rest there for the night. **Fire-tailed Myzornis** (*Myzornis pyrrhura*)|06.04.2016| Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary, East Sikkim
Other than Blood Pheasant and Shiyafale, we had Long-tailed Broadbill too from Pangolakha WLS. **Long-tailed Broadbill** (*Sarisomus dalhousiae*) [03.04.2016] Pangolakha WLS, East Sikkim

Twilight Saga of Bullfinches. Male to the left and female to the right. This foraging couple were moving uphill around mid day. Followed by some Niltavas and Golden Babblers we saw them in the hills of Chuzachen RF.  
**Red-headed Bullfinch** (*Pyrrhula erythrocephala*) [05.04.2016] Chuzachen RF, East Sikkim

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Chestnut Thrush are infrequently seen in Himalayas. Previously got it from Khangchendzonga NP in February, this time got it from Pangolakha in the month of April. Photographed one is foraging on pile of compost. Farmers use organic composts as fertilizer - 'Green Sikkim'. But the worst factor being a photographer was, that compost had slugs and maggots; where this individual found protein source. **Chestnut Thrush** *(Turdus rubrocanus)* [05.04.2016] Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary, East Sikkim
Gorgeousness is everywhere for a Himalayan Monal. **Himalayan Monal** (*Loophorus impejanus*) |06.04.2016| Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary, East Sikkim

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I didn't expect to see Short-eared Owl in 12,500 ft. Since, most of the records that frequently come for this species are from drier states of west. My first ever encounter of Short-eared Owl from Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary.

Though it is very much wide spread through out the globe. But, certainly it brings a question of its sighting from 12,500 ft. I don't see others photographs of this species from Sikkim.

**Short-eared Owl** (*Asio flammeus*) [06.04.2016] Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary, East Sikkim
There are no state of poverty in the womb of Pangolakha! The place is really surprising! Alongside Long-tailed Broadbill we saw Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush too. They were huge in numbers foraging alongside Common Green Magpies.

**Lesser Necklaced laughingthrush** (*Garrulax monileger*) [03.04.2016] Lower Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary, East Sikkim
When we were looking after Himalayan Brown Goral; we heard the call of a foraging flock of 4-5. Most likely courtship were going on then. The outcome were only record shots. Here is 2nd most majestic beautiful bird.

**Blood Pheasant** Male (♂) (*Ithaginis cruentus*) |06.04.2016| Upper Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary, East Sikkim

**Blood Pheasant** Female (♀) (*Ithaginis cruentus*) |06.04.2016| Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary, East Sikkim
Shimmering beauty from lower Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary (East Sikkim), during the birding trip in April '16. **Rusty-fronted Barwing** (*Actinodura egertoni*) [03.04.2016] Near Mankhim, lower PWLS, East Sikkim

**Bird Checklist (As per Birds of Indian Subcontinent field guide by Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp, Tim Inskipp):**

1) Hill Partridge
2) Blood Pheasant
3) Satyr Tragopan
4) Himalayan Monal
5) Ferruginous Duck
6) Common Kestrel
7) Lesser Kestrel??
8) Eurasian Sparrowhawk
9) Himalayan Buzzard
10) Black-eared Kite
11) Black Eagle

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12) Crested Serpent Eagle
13) Mountain Hawk Eagle
14) Snow Pigeon
15) Oriental Turtle Dove
16) Barred Cuckoo Dove
17) Large Hawk Cuckoo
18) Short-eared Owl
19) Asian Barred Owlet
20) Common Hoopoe
21) Great Barbet
22) Bay Woodpecker
23) Lesser Yellownape
24) Greater Yellownape
25) Long-tailed Broadbill
26) Black-winged Shrike-babbler
27) Scarlet Minivet
28) Long-tailed Shrike
29) Ashy Drongo
30) Spangled Drongo
31) Yellow-bellied Fantail
32) White-throated Fantail
33) Yellow-bellied Blue Magpie
34) Common Green Magpie
35) Grey Treepie
36) Large-billed Crow
37) House Crow
38) Red-billed Chough
39) Green-backed Tit
40) Rufous-vented Tit
41) Yellow-browed Tit
42) Black-throated Tit
43) Barn Swallow
44) Greater Short-toed Lark
45) Himalayan Bulbul
46) Black Bulbul
47) Red-vented Bulbul
48) Black-throated Prinia
49) Grey-sided Bush Warbler
50) Mandelli’s Leaf Warbler
51) Grey-hooded Warbler

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52) Whistler Warbler  
53) Chestnut-crowned Warbler  
54) Rufous-capped Babbler  
55) Grey-throated Babbler  
56) White-throated Laughingthrush  
57) Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush  
58) Blue-winged Laughingthrush  
59) Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush  
60) Striated Laughingthrush  
61) Black-faced Laughingthrush  
62) Rusty-fronted Barwing  
63) Hoary-throated Barwing  
64) Red-billed Leiothrix  
65) Blue-winged Siva  
66) Bar-throated Siva  
67) Rufous-winged Fulvetta  
68) White-browed Fulvetta  
69) Rufous Sibia  
70) Whiskered Yuhina  
71) Stripe-throated Yuhina  
72) Rufous-vented Yuhina  
73) Black-chinned Yuhina  
74) Fire-tailed Myzornis  
75) White-tailed Nuthatch  
76) Common Myna  
77) Blue Whistling Thrush  
78) White-collared Blackbird  
79) Grey-winged Blackbird  
80) Chestnut Thrush  
81) Himalayan Bluetail  
82) Golden Bush Robin  
83) Oriental Magpie Robin  
84) Plumbeous Water Redstart  
85) White-capped Redstart  
86) Black Redstart  
87) Hodgson's Redstart  
88) Blue-fronted Redstart  
89) Grey Bushchat  
90) Blue-capped Rock Thrush  
91) Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush
92) Little Pied Flycatcher
93) Rufous-gorgated Flycatcher
94) Verditer Flycatcher
95) Rufous-bellied Niltava
96) Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher
97) Large Niltava
98) Orange-bellied Leafbird
99) Fire-breasted Flowerpecker
100) Green-tailed Sunbird
101) Fire-tailed Sunbird
102) Russet Sparrow
103) Eurasian Treesparrow
104) Alpine Accentor
105) Rufous-breasted Accentor
106) Grey Wagtail
107) Olive-backed Pipit
108) Rosy Pipit
109) Plain Mountain Finch
110) Common Rosefinch
111) Brown Bullfinch
112) Red-headed Bullfinch

Mammal checklist (as per the Indian Mammals | A Field Guide by Vivek Menon):

1) Himalayan Musk Deer
2) Large-eared Pika
3) Moupin’s Pika
4) Siberian Weasel
5) Himalayan Striped Squirrel

Participants:

- Sangeeta Dhanuka + 1