

## **BIRDING THE "BAILEY TRAIL" IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

**A First ever trip report from West Kameng & Tawang - Aug 2002**

**By**

**Peter Lobo**

Arunachal Pradesh is spread below the water divide between Tibet and India, on the Himalayan Watershed, and between India and Burma, along the crest of The Patkoi Hills. The region is an 83,578-sq kms, of tangled mountain Ridges, deep valleys, dense forests, and mighty rivers. It shares a border of 157 kms with Bhutan on its West and 441 kms with Burma on its East. On the Northern frontier lies Tibet, across the McMohan Line – now disputed by China. This border runs for approximately 1030 Kms, and is neither marked, nor mutually accepted by India nor China. Along this long border the mountains rise and fall between the elevation of 7080 Meters to 1829 Meters. To the South lies the Brahmaputra River Valley in Assam – a state in India.

The main crest line of the Himalayan divide between India and Tibet generally runs in a West to East direction, between Bhutan and Burma. However the major river valleys run generally North to South, each of them joining to form the mighty Brahmaputra in the state of Assam. The terrain is therefore highly jagged and wild, rising in mighty convulsions of mountain ridges and spurs from the North bank of the Brahmaputra River. The resultant tangle of deep gorge like valleys, densely wooded mountain slopes dissected by numerous torrents and rivers, prevented east – west communications, and resulted in the growth of relatively isolated tribal sub cultures, along the river systems. The five main rivers are from West to East – Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit, and Tirap, with a large number of tributaries, drain into the Brahmaputra River. Three of these rivers along with their tributaries drain only the Southern slopes of the Himalayan watershed. The Siang and the Lohit however rise in Tibet and cut across the Himalayan Range into India.

The western most districts of Arunachal are Tawang and West Kameng - named after the Kameng river which drains the basin of Gorii Chen and Kangto peaks. This area is known the world over for its Buddhist Monastery at Tawang. What is not known is that it also offers delightful bird watching and trekking. Closed to visitors till recently, selected areas have been now opened to tourists. However a route specific entry permit is still required.

The route to Tawang - through West Kameng, encounters four ridges, all of them running roughly West to East. From the foothills, following the Kameng River, we first cross the Chaku Ridge. Descending into the narrow valley of the Tenga River – a tributary of the Kameng, we follow the course of the river upstream in a westerly direction to the township of Rupa, at 1700 Meters. Climbing steeply out of the valley we reach the hilltop town of Bomdila. This is named after the Bomdila Pass at an elevation of 2743 Meters. We have to descend once again to the picturesque Valley of the Dirang River – another tributary of the Kameng at 914 Meters. Immediately to the

North lies the Sela Ridge rising upto 4900 Meters. The Highway crosses the ridge via the Sela pass at 4267 Meters, to begin another steep descent to the valley of the Tawang Chhu River, at 2200 Meters. Crossing the river the road climbs up to the Tawang Township and monastery at an elevation of 3048 Meters. North East of Tawang are encountered a number of spurs enclosing Tawang in a horseshoe, which rise up to the Himalayan watershed to the Peaks of Gori Chen at 6500 meters and Kangdo, which rears its head at a proud 7090 Meters.

In ancient days trade routes followed the river systems. Crossing over the Himalayan Watershed from Tibet over the Tukung-la pass the ancient traders from Tibet traveled along the head waters of the Tawang Chhu River and crossed the Sela ridge to reach the barter markets of the Brahmaputra Valley to exchange their loads of wool, skins, precious stones and yak butter for salt, tea, cloth, and other commodities. This route was first explored by British surveyors lead by F.M. Bailey in 1913 - and came to be called the 'Bailey Trail'. This trail witnessed the full fury of the Indo-Chinese war in 1962. when the Chinese army crossed the Sela ridge along this trail.

In Aug 2002, assisted by Sudesh Pradhan, I lead a team of British botanists for a study of plants along the "Baily trail". I utilized this opportunity to carry out a first ever birding reconnaissance of West Kameng and Tawang. The environs of the "Bailey trail" traverse a route which starts at an elevation of 2600 meters at the road head. Over a period of 13 days I trekked and recorded birds, whilst crossing over four passes ranging from 3650 meters to 4730 meters. I walked through the valleys of four tributaries of the Kameng River and passed through a variety of habitats - sub tropical and warm broadleaved forests, cool broadleaved forests, coniferous, fir, Oak, bamboo, Juniper, Rhododendron, and alpine scrubland. The population is Buddhist Monpa tribals; who do not trap or kill birds. As a result birds were not shy. I found bird activity in each zone and recorded 188 species. Scroll down for bird list

### **BIRD LIST OF WEST KAMENG AND TAWANG - ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

1. Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*
2. Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
3. Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*
4. Mountain Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis*
5. Booted (Hawk) Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*
6. Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
7. Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*
8. Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*
9. Crested Serpent Eagle *Spillornis cheela*
10. Peregrine(Barbary) Falcon *Falco peregrinus babyloncius*
11. Snow Partridge *Lerwa lerwa*
12. Tibetan Partridge *Perdix hodgsoniae*

13. Hill Partridge *Arborophila torqueola*
14. Sclater's Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*
15. Red Collared Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*
16. Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*
17. Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*
18. Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*
19. Barred Cuckoo Dove *Macropygia unchall*
20. Mountain Imperial Pigeon *Ducula badia*
21. Speckled Wood Pigeon *Columba hodgsonii*
22. Grey-headed Parakeet *Psittacula finschii*
23. Eurasian Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*
24. Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus*
25. Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus*
26. Large Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx sparveroides*
27. Grey Nightjar *Caprimuglus indicus*
28. Brown Wood Owl *Strix leptogrammica*
29. Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*
30. Collared Owlet *Glaucidium brodiei*
31. Himalayan Swiftlet *Cococallia brevirostris*
32. White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*
33. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti*
34. Blue-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctyornis athertoni*
35. Great Barbet *Megalaima virens*
36. Golden-throated Barbet *Megalaima franklini*
37. Blue-throated barbet *Megalaima asiatica*
38. Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*
39. Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
40. Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*
41. Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*
42. Bay Woodpecker *Blythipicus pyrrhotis*
43. Greater Yellownape *Picus flavinucha*
44. Lesser Yellownape *Picus chlorolophus*
45. Three-toed Woodpecker *Picodius tridactylus*
46. Crimson-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus cathpharius*
47. Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopus canicapillus*
48. Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Dendrocopus hyperythrus*
49. Darjeeling Woodpecker *Dendrocopus darjellensis*
50. Yellow-rumped Honeyguide *Indicator xanthonotus*
51. Long-tailed Broadbill *psarisomus dalhousiae*
52. Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*
53. Orange-bellied Leafbird *Chloropsis hardwickii*
54. Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*
55. Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus*
56. Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*
57. Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus*
58. Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*

59. Common Myna *Acridotheres trisits*
60. Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
61. Common Green Magpie *Cissa chinensis*
62. Yellow-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris*
63. Collared Treepie *Dendrocitta frontalis*
64. Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*
65. Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryoctactes*
66. House Crow *Corvus splendens*
67. Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*
68. Daurian Jackdaw *Corvus dauuricus*
69. Black-winged Cuckooshrike *Coracina melaschistos*
70. Short-billed Minivet *Pericrocotus brevirostris*
71. Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethelogus*
72. Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*
73. Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*
74. Mountain Bulbul *Hypsipetes maclellandii*
75. Striated Bulbul *Pycnonotus striatus*
76. Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*
77. Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
78. Pygmy Wren Babbler *Pnoepyga pusilla*
79. Bar-winged Wren Babbler *Spelaeornis troglodytoides*
80. Spotted Wren Babbler *Spelaeornis formosus*
81. Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler *Pomathorhinus ferruginosus*
82. Rufous-capped Babbler *Stachyris ruficeps*
83. Golden Babbler *Stachyris chrysaea*
84. Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea*
85. Silver-eared Mesia *Leiothrix argentauris*
86. Cutia *Cutia nipalensis*
87. Black-headed Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius rufiventer*
88. White-browed Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapis*
89. Black-eared Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius melanotis*
90. Brown-throated Fulvetta *Alcippe ludlowi*
91. Rufous-winged Fulvetta *Alcippe castaneiceps*
92. White-browed Fulvetta *Alcippe vinipectus*
93. Nepal Fulvetta *Alcippe nipalensis*
94. Golden-breasted Fulvetta *Alcippe chrysotis*
95. Blue-winged Minla *Minla cyanouroptera*
96. Red-tailed Minla *Minla ignotincta*
97. Chestnut-tailed Minla *Minla strigula*
98. Beautiful Sibia *Heterophasia puchella*
99. Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata*
100. Rufous-backed Sibia *Heterophasia annectens*
101. Black-throated Parrotbill *Paradoxornis nipalensis*
102. Striated Yuhina *Yuhina castaniceps*
103. White-naped Yuhina *Yuhina bakeri*
104. Whiskered Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*

105. Stripe-throated Yuhina *Yuhina gularis*
106. Rufous-vented Yuhina *Yuhina occipitalis*
107. White-bellied Yuhina *Yuhina zantholeuca*
108. Black-chinned Yuhina *Yuhina nigrimenta*
109. Fire-tailed Myzornis *Myzornis pyrrhoura*
110. Streak-throated Barwing *Actinodura waldeni*
111. Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Garrulax rufogularis*
112. Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *Garrulax erythrocephalus*
113. Scaly Laughingthrush *Garrulax subunicolor*
114. Spotted Laughingthrush *Garrulax ocellatus*
115. Giant Laughingthrush *Garulax maximus*
116. Striated Laughingthrush *Garrulax striatus*
117. Black-faced Laughingthrush *Garrulax affinis*
118. White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis*
119. Dark-sided Flycatcher *Musicapa sibirica*
120. Little Pied flycatcher *Ficedula westermanni*
121. Snowy-browed Flycatcher *Ficedula hyperythra*
122. Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophciata*
123. Slaty-blue Flycatcher *Ficedula tricolor*
124. Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*
125. Small Niltava *Niltava macgrigoriae*
126. Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara*
127. Large Niltava *Niltava grandis*
128. Yellow-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hypoxantha*
129. Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*
130. Broad-billed Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni*
131. Black-faced Warbler *Abrocupos schisticeps*
132. Grey-hooded Warbler *Seicercus xanthoschistos*
133. Golden-spectacled Warbler *Seicercus burkii*
134. Grey-cheeked Warbler *Seicercus poliogenys*
135. Chestnut-crowned Warbler *Seicercus castaniceps*
136. White-spectacled Warbler *Seicercus affinis*
137. White-browed Tit Warbler *Leptopoecile elegans*
138. Grey-bellied Tesia *Tesia cyaniventer*
139. Slaty-bellied Tesia *Tesia olivea*
140. Chesnut-bellied Tesia *Tesia castaneocoronata*
141. Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler *Cettia fortipes*
142. Aberrant Bush Warbler *Cettia flavolivacea*
143. Hill Prinia *Prinia atrogularis*
144. Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
145. Yellow Rumped Warbler *Phylloscopus choloronotus*
146. Ashy -throated Warbler *Phylloscopus maculipennis*
147. Orange-flanked Bush Robin *Tarsiger cyanurus*
148. Rufous-breasted Bush Robin *Tarsiger hyperythrus*
149. White-browed Bush Robin *Tarsiger indicus*
150. Golden Bush Robin *Tarsiger chrysaeus*

151. Hodgson's Redstart *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*
152. Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis*
153. Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis*
154. White-capped Water Redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*
155. Plumbeous Water Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*
156. Spotted Forktail *Enicurus maculates*
157. Little Forktail *Enicurus scouleri*
158. Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasi*
159. Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferrea*
160. Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush *Monticola rufiventris*
161. Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*
162. Plain-backed Thrush *Zoothera molissima*
163. Scaly Thrush *Zoothera dauma*
164. Long-billed Thrush *Zoothera monticola*
165. White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx Montana*
166. Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis*
167. White-collared Blackbird *Turdus albocinctus*
168. Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus boulboul*
169. Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*
170. Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus*
171. Rufous-fronted Tit *Aegithalos iouschistos*
172. Yellow-browed Tit *Sylviparus modestus*
173. Brown-throated Treecreeper *Certhia discolor*
174. White-tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis*
175. Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*
176. Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
177. Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
178. Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*
179. Black-throated Sunbird *Aethopyga saturata*
180. Green-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga nipalensis*
181. Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectus*
182. Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
183. Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophiata*
184. Marron-backed Accentor *Prunella immaculata*
185. Gold-naped Finch *Pyrrhoptes epauletta*
186. Dark-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus edwardsii*
187. Crimson-browed Finch *Propyrrhula subhimachalus*
188. Crested Bunting *Melophus lathamii*