

## Prelude

About a year ago Forrest Rowland asked if I wanted to go to NE India on his birding trip. After consulting with my girls I consented. On the first and second of April I journeyed to Guwahati. I left Heathrow at 10:30 AM. It was an eight hour flight to Delhi. We got there a little after 11:00 PM. Then it was an incredible six hour layover until 6:20 AM till our flight left for Guwahati. It's not the only flight in Delhi with a long layover. There are so many that there are actually lounge chairs where people can lay down and rest. (All were taken, darn.) But there was some joy in the airport. I found a Papa Rotti. It's a Malaysian chain I first came across in Las Vegas last summer. They have these rolls that are beyond description they are so good.

## Blue-throated Barbet, An ATM and an E-sim Chase

April 2, 2026

Once I got to Guwahati I was looking and looking for someone to take me to the hotel. A guy came up to me and asked if I was a birder. It was Ted another one of the people on the NE India Rockjumper trip. Eventually two drivers found us and took us the short distance to the hotel. What was striking was how birdy it was even around the hotel in a pretty urban area. My first Indian bird was the gorgeous blue-throated barbet. There were two of them in the tree I have a wonderful view of from my hotel window.

I decided I had two goals for the 2nd. Find an ATM and find a e-sim for my phone. At the Delhi airport a helpful woman recommended Saily for to get an e-sim. I downloaded the Saily app and an Indian e-sim but it seemed really flimsy and wasn't working properly. I found an ATM in Guwahati and took out what I think will be enough rupees for the trip. Then I decided it was time to go looking for an e-sim. A driver offered to give me a ride. He spoke virtually no English but he was very friendly so I decided what the heck. What happened next was absolutely classic. We drove all over looking for a sim. We talked to a friend of his that spoke some English and we used ChatGPT to communicate back and forth. Meanwhile I was compiling a decent list of birds as we plied the highways and byways of Guwahati. Eventually we got to a store where a guy went through all of the paperwork to get me a sim. Unfortunately he got me a physical sim. He tried to convert it to an e-sim but it never worked. I resigned myself to nothing but spotty hotel wifi during this trip. Eventually my new found friend dropped me back at my hotel. As I worked through a mountain of wonderful Indian

food at the hotel's restaurant I used Saily's help ai to see if I could diagnose the problem. And eventually I found the screen with a data roaming button. I turned that on and voila' I had internet service on my phone. Ted came to the restaurant later and we had a great time talking birds and birding over dinner.

21 species, 17 lifers.

## **Birds, Birds, Birds and Prasanna**

April 3, 2026

This morning I was wide awake at 4:00. I was excited because I was going birding. Prior to coming to Guwahati I contacted the hotel wondering if they knew any bird guides. They put me onto Peter Lobo who coordinates the Rockjumper tours for NE India and Peter put me onto Prasanna Bonyabondhu a local guide. I reached out to him and we agreed to meet at the hotel at 6:00 this morning. Peter also told me Bukey the Rockjumper guide for Mishmi Hills and Eaglenest would be joining us. Wow, two guides, one birder, what a deal. I was already outside the hotel birding when they pulled up. I had 12 species while I waited for them. We had a birding extravaganza today. We started in the Garbhanga Reserve Forest. The birding there was incredible. Some of the many highlights included three kinds of green pigeons, dollarbird, tiny and gorgeous speckled piculet and white-browed piculet, (Prasanna worked really hard to get me on the white-browed piculet.), gray-capped pygmy woodpecker, three scarce great slaty woodpeckers flying over, pale-chinned flycatchers, gorgeous yellow-bellied warbler, Asian fairy-bluebird...the list goes on and on. It was truly amazing. By the time we left the forest we had 66 species.

Lunch was Indian food, (surprise, surprise). I learned that that there is a hand washing station because Indians typically eat using their hands. After the meal we were offered anise seeds to chew on. Very refreshing after the delightful but spicy curries of the food.



After lunch Prasanna took me for a real birding treat, one of the most famous birding sites in the world...the Guwahati dump. It's famous because an extremely large percentage of the greater adjutants (pictured) in the world, (a very rare bird), live at this dump. There are something like 1500 greater adjutants in the world and about 40% live at this dump. I wasn't disappointed. We went to the backside of the dump and got great views of the greater adjutants, a truly iconic but somewhat strange looking bird. We also saw striated grassbird, red-wattled lapwing and citrine wagtail just to show that we weren't a one trick pony.



From the dump we went to Deepor Beel, a classic wetlands, in Guwahati. One bird I wanted to see we saw early and often, the cotton pygmy-goose. Other highlights were lesser whistling duck, ferruginous duck, pheasant tailed jacana, Asian openbill, oriental darter, little cormorant, Indian pond-heron, stunningly beautiful chestnut munia, paddyfield pipit, rosy pipit and a pleasant surprise, several lesser adjutant (pictured). The day ended with me finding the spotted owlet (pictured, can you see it?), in the tree it nests in. What an unbelievable day of birding. Prasanna is a spectacular birder and guide. He worked so hard to get me on birds and that's saying something because sometimes I can be the remedial birder in class. And having Bukey along for the ride was an added bonus. He put me on several birds throughout the day as well. He'll be great over the next few weeks. On to Eaglenest!

117 species, 87 lifers