

Nepal – A Birdwatching Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Day 2/3	Kathmandu
Day 4/6	Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve
Day 7/9	Chitwan National Park
Day 10	Kathmandu
Day 11	Fly London



Pre-tour Suklaphanta National Park extension

Day 1	Depart London
Day 2	Kathmandu
Day 3/6	Suklaphanta National Park
Day 7	Fly Kathmandu (join Day 2, above)



Post-tour Pokhara extension

Day 10/12	Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge
Day 13	Kathmandu
Day 14	Fly London



From top: Stork-billed Kingfisher, Ibisbill and Pied Hornbill



N.B. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Please note that on some tours we may operate the itinerary in reverse.

Day 1

In Flight

We depart from London this afternoon on board Qatar Airways' scheduled flight to Kathmandu, via Doha.

Day 2

Kathmandu

We arrive in Kathmandu in late-morning and transfer to the Hotel Royal Singi, our base for two nights. Those who prefer not to spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing may have time for a little sightseeing, it depends on your arrival in Kathmandu.



Royal Singi Hotel – Kathmandu

Day 3

Kathmandu

Today we will spend birdwatching on the forested slopes of Phulchowki, at 2,756 metres the highest peak in the valley. Phulchowki is a wonderful spot for birds and plants located in the eastern outskirts of Kathmandu valley. The variety of laughingthrushes, fulvettas, bulbuls, flowerpeckers, sibia, flycatchers, sunbirds, tits and warblers is tremendous. We will drive up Phulchowki in the early morning, ascending as far as the ice will allow (the icy tracks



Phulchowki (left), White-tailed Nuthatch (top right) and Kathmandu (bottom right)

are only

for a few weeks in winter). Here we should get good views of the snow-clad Great Himalaya, including the Annapurna range, Langtang, Manasalu and many of Nepal's other high peaks (provided the weather is clear!). We will then spend the rest of the day walking down the mountain through its fine temperate forest, with a picnic lunch en route. Some of the many highlights should include Himalayan Bluetail, Fire-tailed Sunbird, White-collared and Grey-winged Blackbirds (in winter months), Long-tailed Minivet, White-tailed Nuthatch, Buff-barred Warbler, Orange-bellied Leafbird and many more. More elusive species include Himalayan Cutia, Kalij Pheasant, Red-billed Leiothrix and Black-faced Warbler.

Before heading back to our hotel we will stop (if there is enough time) at the base of Phulchowki hill. Within this mixed broadleaf patch we hope to find some of the lower altitude species such as the spectacular Blue-whistling Thrush, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Lemon-rumped Warbler, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Fantail and perhaps the elusive Spotted Forktail.

Mammals are, of course, more elusive. However, stealthy progress may reward us with views of some of the more common diurnal species. The cheeky Rhesus Macaques that scavenge a living around the villages are far from shy than their far more elegant cousins, the Grey Langurs, are more wary, and more likely to be encountered at Chitwan National Park. The reclusive Assamese Macaque is still more wary and infrequently encountered. Higher up the mountain, the Orange-bellied Squirrel is the most likely mammal to be found, preferring the oak and rhododendron forests. The exquisite Yellow-throated Marten is also worth looking for, being regularly seen here; whilst the Indian Muntjac, though regularly heard on the mountain, is less easy to see. Such animals as Leopard have been seen on rare occasions in the past by our groups but you should consider yourself very lucky to encounter this sought-after species!

If you would prefer to spend this day doing a sightseeing tour of the city and temples of Kathmandu we will be pleased to arrange this for you (but this must be booked with us prior to your departure from London and will cost £250 for any single traveller and £195 per person for 2 or more). The tour may include Nepal's largest Hindu temple at Pashupatinath, the Buddhist "stupa" (shrine) and Tibetan settlement at Boudhinath, and the fine temples and palaces of Patan's Durbar Square. It also includes lunch in one of the traditional restaurants.

Day 4 – 6

Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

Today in the morning, we will catch our internal flight to Biratnagar, a bustling town situated in the Gangetic floodplains of south-eastern Nepal. Heading east, the flight gives spectacular views of the Himalaya (weather



permitting) including distant views of the world's highest peak, Mount Everest. On arrival at Biratnagar, we will travel by road for one and a half hour to Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve.

The Tented Camp with private facilities close to the great Koshi River will be our base for three nights. The Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve is situated in the Sapta-Koshi River plain in the eastern corner of Nepal, close to the country's southern border with India. The reserve covers 175 square kilometers to the north of a kilometer-long barrage that spans over the Koshi River. This was built between 1958 and 1964 to control and prevent flooding in the plains of northern India to the south. The vast expanse of open water created by the Koshi River, and the marshes, lagoons, sandbanks, mudflats and arable land that lie around it offer an outstanding wetland habitat, and one of the finest birdwatching sites in Asia. Almost all of Nepal's long list of wildfowl, waders, storks, ibises, egrets, terns and gulls occur here, plus a great variety of land birds, especially warblers and birds of prey. Well in excess of 100 species should be seen each day in this wonderful area, amongst them such local specialities as Swamp Francolin, Red-necked Falcon and Striated Grassbird.

Other species to look out for include Siberian Rubythroat, Dusky, Smoky, Tickell's Blyth's Reed, Paddyfield and Thick-billed Warblers, Scaly and Black-throated Thrushes, Richard's Pipit, Painted Snipe, Pied Harriers, Black Bittern,



Clockwise from top left: Spotted Owlet, Pied Harrier, Jungle Cats and birdwatching by the Koshi River the rare Falcated Duck and Baer's Pochard.

The sharp-eyed may also be lucky enough to see one of the endangered Gangetic River Dolphins south of the Koshi Barrage. The heart of the reserve lies some 14 kilometres north of the barrage, where seasonally inundated grasslands, lagoons and remnant patches of Khair (*Acacia catechu*) and Sissoo (*Dalbergia sissoo*) forest lie alongside the eastern bank of the broad Koshi River. This region is the last refuge of the Wild Water Buffalo in Nepal, and other mammals include Fishing Cat, Jungle Cat, Asiatic Jackal, Spotted Deer and Nilgai (or "Blue Bull") – the subcontinent's largest antelope. Our most regular and rewarding wildlife outings will be on foot, exploring the grasslands, river, lagoons and woodlands close to the Camp, and the vicinity of the barrage, an hour drive away. Departing on the state of river after the monsoons, we will also take you by raft

onto the wide waters of the Koshi River to enjoy the birdlife of the otherwise inaccessible sandbanks and islands. As seven big rivers drain out here, after the monsoon the landscape and the flow of the river changes every year, some years making it impossible to explore the sandbanks and the islands due to the lack of proper embarking and disembarking points.

This is also a chance to find Marsh Mugger Crocodile that has survived the monsoons floods and live in the river and the ponds, and perhaps encounter the rare Smooth-coated Otter.

Back in Koshi Camp this evening it will be worth gazing skywards at dusk to look out for the regular passage of Black-crowned Night Herons and the Indian Flying Foxes that pass over the Camp most evenings.



Ruddy Shelducks (left) and Black Bittern (right) at Koshi Tappu

Day 7

Chitwan National Park

It is a long journey of around eight to ten hours on the east-west highway from Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve to the Chitwan National Park. Due to annual damage by the monsoon, the highway is under a constant state of repair and tends to be a patchwork of tarmac and rough dirt roads in places. Although tiring, it is also a fascinating journey. Driving through the 'terai' lowland of Nepal, we will pass through a variety of villages and towns giving a unique insight into the Nepalese culture and way of life. By making an early start with packed lunch we will aim to reach Chitwan by late afternoon. On arrival, we will transfer to a comfortable Jungle Villa or Tigerland Safari lodge for 3 nights. Located on the edge of Chitwan National Park, Jungle Villa



or Tigerland Safari Resort is spread over 8 acres of land and have comfortable rooms in a natural setting of lush vegetation, overlooking the national park. The rooms are tastefully decorated with en suite facilities. The park comprises 932 square kilometers of grassland, Sal and riverine jungle, a magnificent environment with a greater variety of wildlife than any other protected areas of Nepal. Over 500 species of birds have been recorded here and we can expect to see nearly one third of these, as well as many mammals and reptiles.

These are likely to include the endangered Great One-horned Rhino, Wild Boar, Sambar, Muntjac, Spotted and Hog Deer, Rhesus and Langur Monkeys, and the Marsh Mugger and the fish-eating Gharial Crocodiles. Leopards, Sloth Bears, and Gaur (wild bison) are all found in the reserve and occasionally seen by the lucky ones! Over 100 adult Tigers occur in the area but are very elusive and difficult to see. Amongst the smaller mammals that we may encounter are both Hoary-bellied Squirrel and Northern (or Five-striped) Palm Squirrel, and both Small Indian and Indian Grey Mongooses.



Greater One-horned Rhinoceros (left) and Oriental Turtle Dove (right)

Day 8 – 9

Chitwan National Park

We will be based in Chitwan National Park for two full days. Making early starts we will spend the first or last few hours of daylight exploring the surrounding riverine forest and grassland. Many mammals are easier to see at this time and it is certainly the most productive and enjoyable time of day to search for the more elusive mammal species. During the rest of the day we will explore the rivers and go in search of further mammal species, and the park's rich and colorful birdlife, on jeep and on foot through the forest. These should be outstanding days.



Chitwan National Park (left) and Giant Hornbills (right)

Day 10

Kathmandu

This morning we begin the seven to eight hour drive to Kathmandu by private coach or by taking a short flight to Kathmandu. On arriving close to the Kathmandu Valley the road follows the edge of the fast flowing Trisuli River, a fairly reliable site for Ibisbills (seen only in winter months) an enigmatic wading bird of the Himalaya. Other birds likely to be found beside the river include the beautiful White-capped Redstart, Brown Dipper and, if we are very lucky, perhaps one of the wintering Wallcreepers that frequent the road and riverside rock faces. We arrive in Kathmandu in mid-afternoon and transfer to the Hotel Royal Singi, our base for a night.

Day 11

In Flight

We transfer to Kathmandu airport to catch a Qatar Airways morning flight to London. We are due to arrive in London by late-evening.

Pre-tour Suklaphanta National Park Extension

Cost: from £1,395

Single room supplement: £95

(The minimum number of people required to run this extension is six, however we may run it in case of less numbers at our discretion, with local guides.)

Day 1

In Flight

We depart from London this afternoon on board Qatar Airways' scheduled flight to Kathmandu, via Doha.

Day 2

Kathmandu

We arrive in Kathmandu in late-morning and transfer to the Hotel Royal Singi, our base for a night. Those who prefer not to spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing may have time for a little sightseeing.

Day 3 – 6

Suklaphanta National Park

This morning we will fly to Dhangadhi, a small town situated in the far west of Nepal, in the lowlands close to the Indian border. Suklaphanta National Park is just an hour and 30-minute drive away.

This remote and little visited national park is situated in Kanchanpur district, in the extreme south-west of the



Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve

Nepal terai (lowlands). Recently expanded, it now covers 305 square kilometres (plus a broad, surrounding buffer zone) and protects some of the richest and most extensive grasslands in Asia, as well as both Sal and riverine forest, providing a mixed habitat that supports an estimated 20 Tigers, one of the highest densities in the world today, although this particular population is shy and not habituated to man's presence as in the popular Indian reserves where tourists abound! The international border between Nepal and India demarcates both the reserve's western and southern boundaries, beyond which lies the Luggabugga Florican Reserve in India.

Between the reserve's Sal and riverine forests span the largest phantas (grasslands) in Nepal and these are of international importance on account of the unique selection of threatened birds and other wildlife that they hold. Four small lakes – Rani Tal, Salghaudi Tal, Kalikitch Tal and Shikari Tal – add significantly to the reserve's biodiversity.

The reserve offers a density of all mammals that is hard to match anywhere else in Nepal, and amongst a wealth of species it supports the world's largest population of the nominate race of Swamp Deer. The other mammal species recorded here, we have a moderate chance of encountering a Tiger, though it is Golden Jackals, numerous Spotted and Hog Deer, and both Rhesus Macaques and Terai Langurs that we will see most of. We may be lucky in seeing Leopard, Asian Elephant, Nilgai, Smooth-coated Otter and the nocturnal and little-known Hispid Hare. Suklaphanta also has a healthy population of Marsh Mugger Crocodiles and Indian Rock Pythons. Additionally, nearly 400 species of birds have been recorded in the reserve, including 50% of Nepal's globally threatened species, over half of which are true grassland specialists.



Sambar Deer



Suklaphanta Wildlife Camp

It is this unrivalled selection of rare grassland birds that will most excite the birders amongst us, and it is best seen on birdwatching walks along the forest trails and through the grasslands (not permitted in Indian national parks, but one of the many attractions of Nepal's national parks and reserves). We will also wait in, and watch silently from, some of the watchtowers built around the reserve. Resident specialities include Swamp Francolin, Great Slaty Woodpecker (one of the largest of the world's woodpeckers), White-naped Woodpecker, Indian Grassbird and Finn's Weaver, whilst White-throated Bushchat occur in winter and in spring and summer Bengal Florican and Bristled Grassbird come to breed in the grasslands. The park also supports a particularly wide range of woodpeckers, warblers and bush warblers, whilst such rarities as Jerdon's Babbler and Jerdon's Bushchat may also be seen.

Many of the parks mammals will also be seen on walks through the reserve, though our best mammal - viewing will be afforded by jeep safaris, which will allow us to explore the full extent of the reserve. Indeed, we will take full-day and half-day safaris in the reserve using jeeps.

During our 4-night stay at Suklaphanta, we will be staying in our own tented camp situated on the edge of the park. Our aim during our stay here will be to observe, enjoy and photograph the reserve's many species of mammals and birds.

Day 7

Kathmandu

After a final morning's game drive or walk in the reserve, we must reluctantly leave Suklaphanta today, making the short drive back to Dhangadhi airport for the flight back to Kathmandu. Here we transfer into the city, to the Hotel Royal Singi, and meet rest of the party not doing the pre-tour extension.

Post-tour Extension to Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge



Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge (left) and a Nepali woman (right)

Cost: from £1,395. Single room supplement: £495

(The minimum number of people required to run this extension is six, however we may run it in case of less numbers at our discretion, with local guides.)

Day 10 – 12

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge

From Chitwan we now head to the Pokhara Valley, a five or six-hour drive away. The spectacular mountain views from the valley itself and the lakeside of Phewa Tal are renowned enough, but we will drive high above this tourist town to a peaceful wooded ridge a thousand feet above the valley floor. For the next three nights we will be staying at Nepal's finest tourist retreat, Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. Set atop a high forested ridge, amongst the Himalayan foothills that surround the Pokhara Valley, TMPL looks straight onto the most spectacular panorama, comprising all of the iconic giants of the Annapurna range of the Great Himalaya.

These include, when the weather is clear (and this cannot always be guaranteed!), views of Machhapuchhare (Fish-tail Mountain) and no fewer than three of the world's 8,000-metre peaks: Dhaulagiri, Annapurna I and Manaslu! Each of the lodge's spacious stone-built cottages has a private verandah or patio from which to soak in these fine views and the forest around; indeed, it can be tempting to relax and simply enjoy the views and forested grounds to which a wealth of wildlife is attracted, especially hill birds and some mammals. Exquisite minivets are bound to attract your attention, together with a wide selection of warblers, flycatchers, woodpeckers, laughingthrushes, sunbirds, flowerpeckers and rosefinches.

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge is owned and managed by Englishman Marcus Cotton, a passionate conservationist, birder and butterfly enthusiast who has lived in Nepal since the 1980s. Around the lodge, Marcus has planted many flowering plants and shrubs to attract the birds and butterflies. The ridge attracts a great many birds of prey, which drift overhead on the thermals that rise from it. Steppe Eagles and vultures (it is sometimes possible to see most of Nepal's eight species of vulture from this one ridge!) are the most obvious. There are many other special birds of this region, amongst them the beautiful Common Green Magpie and White-crested Laughingthrushes, whilst Ashy Bulbuls are common birds of the lodge grounds. Many other high-altitude species that winter here can be found, the likes of Little Pied and Snowy-browed Flycatchers provide the observer with a touch of quality.

Our three-night stay here will allow us the chance to walk amongst these hills and forests, through scrub and alder groves, and to enjoy the impressive sight of terraced fields, reaching thousands of feet up and down the mountainsides. The lower terraces are usually for rice, the higher ones for barley, wheat, potatoes, buckwheat and millet. As well as birds, there are many colourful butterflies to be seen on our walks and, with luck, we may glimpse an interesting animal or two: Muntjac, Langur Monkeys, Orange-bellied Squirrels and Yellow-throated Martens have all been seen here.

Day 13

Kathmandu

After a final morning's walk or relaxation on the terrace, we must reluctantly leave the lodge today, making the six hours drive back down to Kathmandu. **Please note**, we can arrange air travel for you and this is from an additional £135 per person.

We arrive in Kathmandu in the evening and transfer to the Hotel Royal Singi, our base for a night.

Day 14

London

We transfer to Kathmandu airport to catch a Qatar Airways morning flight to London. We are due to arrive in London by late-evening. Flight times will be confirmed closer to departure dates.

Grading

Grade A. This is a birdwatching and mammal holiday, based around easy walks, vehicular safaris and other wildlife excursions. No trekking (except for optional moderate day walks in the hills at Pokhara Mountain Lodge on post-tour extension) or no great hardship is involved, and the holiday is suitable for those of all ages and degrees of fitness!

Weather

Between November and January in Nepal, you can expect dry and cold weather. Temperatures in lowland Nepal range from 2-4°C in the early morning, to 10-24°C during the day, dropping to 2-4°C again at night. Rain at this time of year is unusual. Late March/April marks the height of spring in Nepal. It is also the 'pre-monsoon' season, when afternoon cloud can build up to cause occasional short rain storms that generally clear quickly to leave good views. Generally it will be sunny, especially in the mornings, with daytime temperatures of 20-30°C around Kathmandu and Pokhara, and in the hills. In Koshi, Suklaphanta and Chitwan it will be much hotter, generally 35°C during the middle of the day, falling to 20°C at night – sun hats, sun cream, cotton clothes and shorts all being needed at this season. We advise you to consult your leader the night before regarding the expected temperatures and keep provisions for warm/light clothes accordingly.



The Himalaya as seen on the flight to Koshi

Clothing

Please inspect the separate clothing list, sent to you on booking, thoroughly. Take lightweight clothing for daytime wear; however, warmer clothing will be useful for mornings and evenings, and a light jacket may be useful on Phulchowki and at Pokhara. Khaki or other "bush" colours are recommended, as bright colours can often scare the animals. Shorts and T-shirts will be equally essential in the heat of the lowlands... and a wide-brimmed hat is essential protection from heat-stroke and sunburn.

Food & accommodation included in the price

The cost of all meals and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday, with the exception of lunches and dinners in Kathmandu. We use the Hotel Royal Singi in Kathmandu, a simple but comfortable hotel in the city; all rooms have private facilities. In Chitwan we stay in a comfortable Jungle Villa Resort; all rooms have private facilities. In Koshi and Suklaphanta, we stay at our own permanent tented camp, consisting of large walk-in safari-style tents with comfortable twin beds and simply furnished with locally made furniture. Toilets and showers are shared at Suklaphanta.



Jungle Cat



Greater One-horned Rhino



Wild Asian Elephant



Lesser Adjutant Stork

Focus

Birds, and mammals.

Tour leaders

Suchit Basnet, Hem Sagar Baral, Hathan Chaudhary or Tika Ram Giri, plus local guides.

Mammal & bird lists

Where available these are automatically provided on booking, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: visa, travel insurance and all items of a more personal nature such as drinks, laundry, souvenirs, and tips for your guide and driver.

Boat/Raft Trips

The boat/raft trips are done only if the water levels permit.

Other extensions

As you will appreciate, this holiday to Nepal is short and action-packed! Inevitably there are many other interesting places to visit in Nepal should you have time. As the majority of your holiday cost is spent on air fares, we would strongly recommend an extension to your 11-day holiday. If you don't fancy our scheduled Suklaphanta and Pokhara extension, we should be delighted to tailor a holiday extension for you that is suited to your particular objectives and needs. You might wish to sample some of the cultural delights of Nepal, for example, or even to visit another national park or tiger reserve. In Nepal, anything is possible; just call our very own India consultant, Rajan Jolly, on 01962 73301, for expert advice.

It should be noted that flight times vary on different days of the week – some return flights will be day-time flights, whilst others depart Kathmandu in the evening and arrive into the UK the following morning.



How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

N.B. Please note that as all our Bargain Selection tours are carefully costed on groups of 16 persons to maximise value for money, it may be necessary to impose a small group surcharge of 10% on groups falling short of 5.



Hodgson's Bushchat



Bluethroat



White-throated Kingfisher



Royal Bengal Tiger

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Pied Hornbill



Common Kingfisher



Green Bee-eater



Goosander



Small Pratincole



Green-tailed Sunbird



Blue-throated Barbet



Blue-tailed Bee-eaters

Photos on this page by David White