

Photo gallery: birds of Arunachal Pradesh

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Photos: Ramki Sreenivasan

Top: This is the first record of the mysterious Black-tailed Crake *Porzana bicolor* from Eaglenest. It was photographed at Ramaling (between Lama Camp and Tenga) at 0400 hrs. Though occasionally seen in some parts of the Assam plains (like Manas), this bird is keenly sought by birders. **Bottom:** One of Arunachal's rare specialties (not to mention India!), Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardii* can often be seen in Eaglenest—especially in the cloud forests near Bompou. Ironically these were the first of the trogons I photographed, though I live very close to its Malabar cousins! We spent over an hour with this male, which was busy hawking insects, and sometimes would land just above our heads.



Photos: Ramki Sreenivasan

Top: L: The lack of rufous ear coverts separates the Bhutan Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron imbricatum* from the Streaked Laughingthrush *T. lineatum* found in the western Himalaya. It is best seen in Eaglenest, in the deep ravine next to Lama Camp, often in the company of the Eaglenest specialty—the Bugun Liocichla. **R:** The Beautiful Sibia *Heterophasia pulchella* is one of the commonest birds of Arunachal. Gregarious and omnipresent, it is best seen near Lama Camp in Eaglenest. **Middle: L:** One of the 'masked Zorros' of the NE Hills, the Black-faced Flycatcher-Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps* closely resembles Yellow-bellied Fantail-Flycatcher *Rhipidura hypoxantha*. **R:** The Yellow-throated Fulvetta *Alcippe cinerea* is the commonest fulvetta in Eaglenest. One sees and hears these birds so much that their chirps keep resounding even in sleep! **Bottom: L:** The Mountain Tailorbird *Orthotomus cuculatus* is a striking bird similar to the Broad-billed Warbler, and has a glorious song. It is seen typically in the thick undergrowth of the NE rainforest. **R:** Very attractive, vocal, but seldom seen, the Broad-billed Flycatcher-Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni* is found at mid-altitudes next to Bompou Camp in Eaglenest.



Photos: Kamal Sreenivasan

Top: L: Brown-throated Fulvetta *Alcippe ludlowi*. Photographing smaller birds is one of the many thrills of the NE Hills. After a day or two in the NE one starts remembering the field guide plate numbers for fulvettas, wren-babblers, yuhinas, minlas, and shrike-babblers! **R:** A striking high-altitude bamboo specialist, the Brown Parrotbill *Paradoxornis unicolor* is invariably found near Eaglenest Pass (2,800 m). **Middle: L:** Very common in Eaglenest, these fire-breasted Flowerpeckers *Dicaeum ignipectus*, at 8 cm, are one of the smallest birds of the Indian Subcontinent. **R:** This beautiful Bar-throated Minla *Minla strigula* possibly had a nest nearby, given the food it was carrying, and its belligerent behaviour. **Bottom: L:** We spent two very cold and sleepy early mornings in Mayodia Pass (2,655 m) in the Mishmi Hills waiting for monals and tragopans. We drew a blank on them and the only consolation was a flock of these bold Yellow-billed Blue Magpies *Urocissa flavirostris* that surrounded our jeep. **R:** Collared Owlet *Glaucidium brodiei*—the smallest of our owl(et)s, these were earlier aptly named Pygmy Owlet. Constantly heard across the NE Hills, this most unfortunate bird is incessantly mobbed by birds of all types – from the forest floor to the canopy! Playing its call is one of the most effective ways to attract birds.



Photos: Ramki Sreenivasan

Top: L: Rufous-winged Fulvetta *Alcippe castaneiceps*. **R:** The Eastern Himalayan race of the Red-headed (Chestnut-crowned) Laughingthrush *Garrulax erythrocephalus*, like this Eaglenest pair, actually does not have a chestnut crown but a gray head, chestnut nape and silver cheeks. **Middle: L:** Earlier known as the Nepal or Himalayan Cutia, this male Cutia *Cutia nipalensis* is a striking Himalayan bird with striking sexual dimorphism. **R:** Female Cutia. **Bottom: L:** The jet-black male Gold-naped Black Finch *Pyrrhoptes epauletta* is very striking with its gold-nape. Like most finches they are very shy and I was lucky to get this pair (with an 800 mm lens) completely engrossed in devouring these tiny fig-like fruit. **R:** The Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus* is the commonest tit of the NE.



Photos: Ramki Sreenivasan

Top: L: Easily the most striking of the fulvettas, which breaks their typically brown/grey uniform, this very agitated Golden-breasted Fulvetta *Alcippe chrysotis* was photographed in Mishmi Hills. **R:** The Gold-headed Babbler *Stachyris chrysaea* is a small (10 cm) and very striking babbler present in most mixed hunting flocks. **Middle: L:** Rufous-necked Scimitar Babblers *Pomatorhinus ruficollis* are very handsome birds and I found them far bolder in May than during my earlier winter visits to Eaglenest. **R:** A lucky image when this splendid male Grey-chinned Minivet *Pericrocotus solaris* landed in front of me as we were getting into the jeep and I still had my rig mounted. **Bottom: L:** The commonest sunbird in Eaglenest, the Green-tailed *Aethopyga nipalensis* is also the most inquisitive! This full-frame image was taken at minimum focus distance. **R:** The male Mrs Gould's Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae* is truly spectacular and is like a splash of color in the evergreen jungle. It is named after Elizabeth Gould (1804–1841)—wife of the legendary John Gould (1804–1881).



Photos: Ramki Sreenivasan

Top: L: One of the most-seen warblers in Arunachal, the Grey-cheeked Flycatcher-Warbler *Seicercus poliogenys* has a distinctive call. **R:** Silver-eared Leiothrix *Leiothrix argentarius* is a very colorful bird and is very common in Arunachal where we found flocks both in Eaglenest and Mishmi Hills. **Middle: L:** The Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* is a resident of bare mountain areas with low vegetation. Here photographed in the Mayodia Pass (2655 m) area in Mishmi Hills. **R:** Parrotbills are NE specialties. This is my first clean image of the Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis ruficeps* from Eaglenest. **Bottom: L:** The largest of wren-babblers, the Sikkim Wedge-billed Wren-Babbler *Sphenocichla humei*, a long time target of mine, has a history of taxonomic wrangling with the race *S. roberti* found below the Brahmaputra. Eaglenest is one of the best places in the world to see this amazingly rare bird. In May, this bird was at its vocal best—we recorded as many as 11 different vocalizations from this individual. This image was made at 1600 ISO—the undergrowth was pretty dense and almost pitch dark! **R:** This Red-faced Liocichla *Liocichla phoenicea* is infinitely more difficult to photograph than its more glamorous 'Bugun' cousin!



Photos: Ramki Sreenivasan

Top: L: One of the commoner fulvettas of Mishmi Hills, the Manipur Fulvetta *Alcippe manipurensis* has a poorly defined range in the NE and the bird books omit their extension into Arunachal. **R:** A north-eastern India specialty, the Bay Woodpecker *Blythipicus pyrrhotis* sulks in thick tall bamboo—this one might be a juvenile female. **Middle: L:** I missed the beautiful Long-tailed Broadbill *Psarisomus dalhousiae* multiple times in Panbari, Kaziranga, and finally found plenty of them in the lower reaches of Eaglenest, especially near Sessni, and Ramaling camps. **R:** Sibias are bulbul-sized babblers. The Rufous-backed Sibia *Heterophasia annectans*, a specialty of Eaglenest, is the scarcest and smallest of sibias, and typically, a reliable indicator of the presence of a Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa*—another Eaglenest specialty! **Bottom:** The discovery of Hodgson's Frogmouth *Batrachostomus hodgsoni*, by Shashank Dalvi, catalyzed me to make another trek to Eaglenest in May 2009 just as the monsoon was breaking. We spent an entire day in pouring rain on a 60° slope in dense bamboo to take some images of this female. This discovery is exceedingly significant as this enigmatic bird has very few records in the Eastern Himalaya—mostly from eastern Bhutan and Namdhapa.



Photos: Ramki Sreenivasan

Top: L: The Mountain Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula badia* is a common pigeon in the NE as it is across the hills of the Indian Subcontinent. The NE race is much paler than its peninsular cousins. **R:** The Rufous-capped Babbler *Stachyris ruficeps* is common in the NE Hills though it is heard more than seen. Belongs to the same tribe as the striking Golden and the near-identical Rufous-fronted. **Middle: L:** We found this amazing Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler *Xiphirhynchus superciliosus* near the Eaglenest pass (~2,800 m) and got a few frames after a long chase across the dwarf bamboo. **R:** The Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophilata* is the commonest flycatcher of the NE Hills though it took me years to get a clean shot! I got this bird while waiting in sub-zero temperatures for the mythical Slater's Monal *Lophophorus sclateri* and Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii* at Mayodia Pass (2,655 m) in Mishmi Hills. **Bottom: L:** The Rufous-throated Wren-Babbler *Spelaornis caudatus* is locally common, but difficult to see and circumvent like the rest of the family. **R:** The three barwings are quite common in the NE and form the fulcrum for most mixed hunting flocks. This Rusty-fronted Barwing *Actinodura egerloni* was about to cross the trail.



Photos: Ramki Sreenivasan

Top: L: In May, every patch of jungle was filled with Small Niltava *Niltava macgrigoriae* song though the birds seldom came out into the open. I was lucky to fire when this male popped into a shaft of the early morning sun. **R:** The Hoary-throated *Actinodura nipalensis* is the commonest Barwing, and like its siblings, curious, inquisitive, and ever active. **Middle: L:** Black-throated Parrotbill *Paradoxornis nipalensis*, another of those diminutive north-eastern bullets (all of 10 cm) from the legendary Arunachal forests, which disappear before you can raise your camera. Impossible to photograph in winter, when they are part of hyperactive mixed flocks, they slow down a bit in summer as they leave mixed flocks to go solo. **R:** The Pale Blue-Flycatcher *Cyornis unicolor* was the last bird I shot in Eaglenest in May 2009. I was already late and had packed and unpacked my gear twice when Shashank called out for this from the bottom of a slope! **Bottom:** The Sultan Tit *Melanochlora sultanea* is a leading member of the famed mixed hunting flocks of Arunachal. Though not uncommon, it was a dream species for me, as I never managed to photograph it earlier.



Photos: Ramki Sreenivasan

Photo: Sachin Rai & Shashank Dabhi

Top: L: The unusual Striated Bulbul *Pycnonotus striatus*, though not uncommon, is always a delight to see. **R:** The NE is the best place in India to see the diminutive Stripe-throated Yuhina *Yuhina gularis* along with its myriad cousins. **Middle: L:** Yellow-naped Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*—one of the widely seen birds of the Eastern Himalayas. **R:** The Bar-winged Wren-Babbler *Spelaornis troglodytoides* is one of the most striking wren-babblers—common but difficult to see, and is present at most altitudes at Eaglenest. **Bottom:** Gould's Shortwing *Brachypteryx stellata*.