



Kaziranga Extension 29 March-2 April 2011

Guide: Josh Engel

**All photos taken by the guide
on this tour.**

**Kaziranga scene at left, with Indian
elephant, swamp deer, and wild
Asian water buffalo.**

INTRODUCTION

Kaziranga National Park, located in the northeastern Indian state of Assam, is one of the world's great game parks and is hands-down the best place to see large mammals anywhere in Asia. With the majority of the world's existing populations of Indian one-horned rhinoceros, wild Asian water buffalo, and swamp deer, as well as the highest density of tigers anywhere, mammals are never out of view (and often there are many species as once, like in the photo above). Like other of the great game parks around the world, the birding is as good as the mammal-watching: raptors are abundant, waterbirds are everywhere, and the grasslands and forests hold a variety of highly sought species.

Because this extension had participants from both the preceding Northeast India tour as well as the Bhutan tour that followed, I have elected to write a separate trip report. Besides the awesome mammal-viewing and incredible photographic opportunities that Kaziranga offers, it also holds hundreds of birds that are not possible on either of those tours. In just two full and two partial days in and around the park, we saw about 100 species not seen on each of the main tours.

TOUR REPORT

The group met up on the road to Kaziranga, at an overlook where after introducing ourselves we got down to business, scoping Indian one-horned rhino, hog deer, Himalayan Griffon, and Hair-crested (Spangled) Drongo. We arrived at the hotel and after a delicious Indian lunch took a short walk near the hotel grounds, getting good looks at Common Tailorbird and a few other common birds.

We then left for a walk through the tea gardens bordering Paanbari Forest. The weather was perfect and birds were very active. We got our first real taste of Indian birds, including great

looks at some common species including Rufous Treepie, Lineated Barbet, and Red-breasted Flycatcher. A few goodies joined the mix, including a scoped, singing Blue-eared Barbet and some incredible Thick-billed Pigeons, gorgeous framed against large orange fruits in the late afternoon sun. A small group of Asian Fairy Bluebirds at a fruiting tree included a male that glowed blue in the evening sunlight. We also saw our first cuckoos of the trip, Asian (Square-tailed) Drongo- and Plaintive.

The next morning began the real Kaziranga safari, with a visit to the park's eastern range. We pretty much had the place to ourselves, except for the thousands of waterbirds swarming the wetlands and herds of ungulates around the beel's edge. We found a good vantage and began scoping. Greater and Lesser Adjutants, Black-necked Stork, various herons and egrets, Spotted-billed Pelican, a great variety of migrant ducks including Red-crested Pochard and Garganey, Spotted Redshank, and a single young Brown-headed Gull. Raptors, as usual, were out in abundance, and we had great views of Himalayan Griffon, Greater Spotted Eagle, Pallas' Fish Eagle, and quick views of the scarce Red-necked (Red-headed) Falcon. Mammals were out in force, and besides the usual Kaziranga megafauna, we enjoyed watching the antics of a group of smooth-coated otters, including one feeding on an outsized fish. The return trip was highlighted by a colorful pair of Small Minivets.



Both are common sights in Kaziranga: Red Junglefowl (left, picking prey out of elephant dung) and Indian one-horned rhinoceros.

We visited the Central Range for the afternoon. Mammals again were seemingly everywhere, and we got up-close views of many rhinos and big herds of elephants, including some very young ones being protected by their older relatives. Some people got very good views of Striated and Chestnut-capped Babblers and a shining male Siberian Rubythroat in the burnt-over grasslands. A pair of the highly-sought Swamp Francolins were feeding on the edge of small beel, and we had superb views of two other ground-dwellers, the original chicken, Red Junglefowl, one of which was keeping company with a pair of Kalij Pheasants. As we returned

to the entrance to leave, flocks of parakeets, wagtails, mynas, and egrets were all heading eastwards to roost. Just before we left, we were pleasantly surprised to find a pair of the normally skulking Puff-throated Babbler feeding right on the road.

For our second and final full day in Kaziranga, we started with an elephant ride. Not just any elephant ride, but an elephant ride with a target: Bengal Florican. Thanks to the mahout's careful spotting, we found a perched florican with shockingly little difficulty. After great perched views, the male got up and flew into some taller grass, displaying the wonderful contrast between its white wings and black body. A Common Quail carefully avoided the elephant's feet, and stuck around long enough for all to see. We were also surprised by a strange small mammal, which turned out to be the rare spotted linsang.

After a scrumptious breakfast—a combination of Indian and Western breakfast cuisine—we set off on another drive. Rain created some problems with viewing, but we persevered and found some great birds, including Ashy Prinia, Dusky Warbler, and our first Gray-headed Fish-Eagle. Scoping from a covered tower, we finally caught up with River Tern and Glenn spotted a Great Hornbill perched on a distant bare snag for all to scope. Less cooperative was a rare Rufous-rumped Grassbird seen by only a couple of people, but most got on the male Bluethroat skulking through the grass. As we were leaving the park, one vehicle got great views of an Asian Barred Owlet.



Kaziranga is excellent for raptors; Pied Harrier is common over the elephant grass (left, with Indian elephant in the background). Eastern Crimson Sunbird can be found in gardens around the park (right).

We decided for another go in the tea gardens in the afternoon. Although birds were singing, it didn't mean they cooperated. A few people glimpsed Rufous-fronted Babbler, Rufous-necked Laughingthrush, White-browed Scimitar-Babbler, and White-browed Piculet, all skulking in the bamboo. Blue-naped Pitta had to go down as a heard only, but fortunately a colorful group of

Scarlet Minivets and a Gray-faced Woodpecker were more cooperative. Again, we found an Asian Barred Owlet upon departure, and this time everyone had leisurely views.

We had a bit of time for birding before our departure for Guwahati, so we took a pre-breakfast walk in the bamboo-covered hills behind our hotel. An Oriental Honey-Buzzard posed against the bamboo and Eastern Crimson Sunbirds flitted about the scrub. More people saw Rufous-necked Laughingthrush this time and we enjoyed watching a pair of Bronzed Drongos mercilessly harassing a pair of Large-billed (Eastern Jungle) Crows. We finally made our way to Guwahati, where plans were laid for getting out of Guwahati the next day (scuttling our plans for morning birding, unfortunately), trying to avoid large-scale protests and strike scheduled to coincide with the prime minister's visit the same day. And all on the day of India vs. Sri Lanka in the Cricket World Cup finals!

TRIP LIST

Taxonomy follows the latest update of The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World (2007), available [here](#). Alternate names, mostly from Rasmussen and Anderton (2005; *Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide*) with a few from recent ornithological literature, are in parentheses. Conservation status follows Birdlife International: CR=Critically Endangered, EN=Endangered, VU=Vulnerable, NT=Near-threatened. Grasslands and wetlands such as those protected in Kaziranga are particularly endangered habitats, so the percentage of threatened species seen on this tour is accordingly high. H=heard only. Asterisk (*) indicates species that were seen on neither the preceding Northeast India tour nor the Bhutan tour that followed.

Lesser Whistling-Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
*Graylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
*Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>
*Indian Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
*Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
*Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
*Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
Green-winged (Common/Eurasian) Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
*Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>
*Swamp Francolin (VU)	<i>Francolinus gularis</i>
*Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
Kalij Pheasant	<i>Lophura leucomelanos</i>
*Spot-billed Pelican (NT)	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
*Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
*Oriental Darter (NT)	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>

*Gray Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
*Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
*Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
*Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Indian Pond-Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
*Black-headed Ibis (NT)	<i>T. melanocephalus</i>
Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
*Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
*Black-necked Stork (NT)	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>
Lesser Adjutant (VU)	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
*Greater Adjutant (EN)	<i>Leptoptilos dubius</i>
*Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Oriental Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Pallas's Fish-Eagle (VU)	<i>Haliaeetus leucoryphus</i>
*Gray-headed Fish-Eagle (NT)	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>
Himalayan Griffon	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>
Crested Serpent-Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
*Western Marsh-Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
*Pied Harrier	<i>Circus melanoleucos</i>
Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
*Greater Spotted Eagle (VU)	<i>Aquila clanga</i>
*Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
*Red-necked (-headed) Falcon	<i>Falco chicquera</i>
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
*Bengal Florican (CR)	<i>Houbaropsis bengalensis</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
*Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
Bronze-winged Jacana	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>
*Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
*Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
*Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
*Brown-headed Gull	<i>C. brunnicephalus</i>
River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Oriental Turtle-Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
*Red Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>

*Thick-billed Pigeon	<i>Treron curvirostra</i>
Yellow-footed Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicopterus</i>
Green Imperial-Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
*Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
*Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
*Blossom-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula roseata</i>
Red-breasted Parakeet	<i>Psittacula alexandri</i>
Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis merulinus</i>
Asian (Square-tailed) Drongo-Cuckoo	<i>Surniculus lugubris</i>
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
*Lesser Coucal	<i>Centropus bengalensis</i>
Asian Barred Owllet	<i>Glaucidium cuculoides</i>
Brown Hawk-Owl (H)	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>
House Swift	<i>Apus nipalensis</i>
Asian Palm-Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
*Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
Blue-bearded Bee-eater	<i>Nyctyornis athertoni</i>
*Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
*Oriental Pied-Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>
Great Hornbill (NT)	<i>Buceros bicornis</i>
*Lineated Barbet	<i>Megalaima lineata</i>
Blue-throated Barbet	<i>Megalaima asiatica</i>
*Blue-eared Barbet	<i>Megalaima australis</i>
Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
Gray-capped Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos canicapillus</i>
Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos macei</i>
*Gray-faced Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>
*Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
Greater Flameback	<i>Chrysocolaptes lucidus</i>
*Blue-naped Pitta (H)	<i>Pitta nipalensis</i>
Gray-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius tephronotus</i>
*Large Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>
Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina melaschistos</i>
*Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
Long-tailed Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus ethologus</i>
Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>

Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
Large-billed (Eastern Jungle) Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
*Plain Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch	<i>Sitta castanea</i>
*Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>
Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
White-throated Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus flaveolus</i>
*Dusky Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>
Tickell's Leaf-Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus affinis</i>
Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>
Striated Grassbird	<i>Megalurus palustris</i>
Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
*Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
*Plain Prinia (H)	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
*Rufous-rumped Grassbird (NT)	<i>Graminicola bengalensis</i>
Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>
Taiga (Red-throated) Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula (parva) albicilla</i>
*Siberian Rubythroat	<i>Luscinia calliope</i>
*Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>
Rufous-necked Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax ruficollis</i>
*Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>
White-browed Scimitar-Babbler (H)	<i>Pomatorhinus schisticeps</i>
*Buff-chested (Rufous-fronted) Babbler	<i>Stachyris (rufifrons) ambigua</i>
Gray-throated Babbler (H)	<i>Stachyris nigriceps</i>
*Chestnut-capped Babbler	<i>Timalia pileata</i>
*Striated Babbler	<i>Turdoides earlei</i>
Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
*Ruby-cheeked Sunbird	<i>Chalcoparia singalensis</i>
Eastern Crimson Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>
*Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum cruentatum</i>
Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
Bronzed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>
Hair-crested (Spangled) Drongo	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>
*Ashy Woodswallow	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>
Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>

White-vented Myna	<i>Acridotheres grandis</i>
Jungle Myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Asian Pied Starling	<i>Gracupica contra</i>
Chestnut-tailed Starling	<i>Sturnia malabarica</i>
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Oriental (Paddyfield) Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
Rosy Pipit	<i>Anthus roseatus</i>
Olive-backed Pipit	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>
*House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
*Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>

MAMMAL LIST

*Indian One Horned Rhinoceros	<i>Rhinoceros unicornis</i>
*Wild Asian Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus bubalis</i>
Indian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
Indian Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
*Swamp Deer	<i>Cervus duvauceli</i>
*Hog Deer	<i>Axis porcinus</i>
Assam Macaque	<i>Macaca assamensis</i>
*Spotted Linsang	<i>Prionodon pardicolor</i>
*Smooth-coated Otter	<i>Lutrogale perspicillata</i>
Orange-bellied Himalayan Squirrel	<i>Dremomys lokriah</i>
Hoary-bellied Squirrel	<i>Callosciurus pygerythrus</i>