Working independently, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace developed the theory of evolution. While Darwin’s theories began on Galapagos, Wallace’s activities centred on Indonesia, where he collected specimens for British museums. Wallace noticed that the distribution of creatures from Asia extended south as far as Java and Bali. Although many had evolved far enough to become different species, they remained firmly allied to Asian families.

Leaving Bali, Wallace crossed the Lombok Strait, a distance of just 35 miles, and noticed a dramatic change. The creatures east of this line, such as on Flores and Komodo, had Australian ancestry. Wallace found cockatoos and friarbirds, whilst the bulbuls and woodpeckers had been left behind in Java and Bali.

Like Galapagos, each of the islands we will visit has its own unique fauna and flora. Some, like the Javan White-eye or Javan Plover, differ very little from their close relatives. Others, like the Javan Kingfisher and Bali Starling, are striking in their differences. The Dragons of Komodo recall a time past. A time when giant lizards roamed the earth. These prehistoric leviathans are not out of place among the dramatic volcanic islets here.

Today, Wallace is a hero celebrated by naturalists who named many species after him. The endemic Wallace’s Hanging-parrot, Wallace’s Scops Owl and Wallacean Drongo are amongst the many species we hope to see. The first half of our tour is spent looking for endemic birds on Bali and Java. The most iconic of these is the Bali Starling, of which only a handful of wild birds survive. Then a short flight across the Wallace Line takes us to Flores, with its own charm, isolation and endemics. From here, we will visit Rinca Island in Komodo National Park, a UNESCO site where ‘there be dragons!’

ITINERARY

BALI AND JAVA
Our flight from the UK takes us to Bali, a beautiful Pacific island topped with volcanic peaks and scattered with temples. As you would expect of this destination, the infrastructure is very good, with quality hotels and a network of good roads that allow us to explore the island.

Following our long journey, we will spend the night at a hotel close to the airport. The next day we will drive to Bedugul, passing coastal lagoons which hold Cerulean Kingfisher, Javan Plover and Javan Pond Heron. We will visit Batu Karu Temple for Javan Flameback and Javan Forktail before arriving at Bali Handara Kosaido for our next night. Our hotel nestles inside the crater of an extinct volcano. The following morning, we will find mountain birds in abundance, many of which are endemic. Flame-fronted Barbet, Blood-breasted Flowerpecker, Javan Owlet, Indonesian Honeyeater, Yellow-throated Hanging Parrot and Grey-cheeked Green Pigeon all occur here.

In the afternoon, we will descend from the Central Highlands to reach the coast at Bali Barat National Park, our base for the next two nights. Here we have a full day birding in search of Javan Kingfisher, Black-thighed Falconet, Javan Banded Pitta and Green Junglefowl. Two members of the startling

Komodo Dragon and Barred Doves
family here are critically endangered and this is the best place in the world to see them. On Bali, the Black-winged Starling is found only in this park and is equally threatened. The Bali Starling is easier to locate due to its colour. This snow-white bird has a blue face and long crest, but its beauty led to its demise. In 2006, only six wild birds were left! Our guide heads a team protecting them and this concerted effort has increased the number to about 50, but it remains one of the rarest birds in the world.

On day six, we will take a short ferry ride to East Java where we will spend three nights at Ketapang. Here we will be birding at Baluran National Park and Ijen Nature Reserve, two of the best places to find Javanese endemics. Overlooked by a spectacular volcano, the forest holds Javan Hawk-eagle, Pink-headed Fruit Dove, Sunda Minivet, Black-banded Barbet, White-crowned Forktail, Javan Frogmouth, Sunda Warbler, Ruddy Cuckoo-dove, Dark-backed Imperial Pigeon, and Grey-cheeked Tit-babbler.

FLORES AND KOMODO NATIONAL PARK
After a third morning of birding in Java, we cross back to Bali and head to Denpasar, ready for our flight to Flores. Arriving at Ende in Flores, part of the Lesser Sunda archipelago, we will check into our hotel for two nights and do a little local birding that afternoon.

A full day in the Kelimutu National Park provides a chance to see Tenggara Swiftlet, Elegant Pitta, Flores Lorikeet, Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker, Russet-capped Tesia and various owls.

A short flight the next day takes us to the opposite side of the island for our final three nights. This region is well known for its volcanic activity; Krakatoa lies along the same chain of islands, a thousand miles to the west. The setting is wonderful, with palm-fringed beaches and golden sunsets over triangular peaks. However, this beauty hides terror, for the following day, we go in search of dragons.

The Komodo Dragon is found on five islands in Komodo National Park and a boat trip to one of these, Rinca Island, is one of the world's greatest wildlife experiences. As we meander through coastal waters that resemble a Lost World film set, we can watch Black-naped Terns and piratic Lesser Frigatebirds. Once ashore, we can expect close views (not too close though) of the Komodo Dragon. Rinca holds the largest population of these venomous reptiles, and wardens ensure our safety, since the dragons sleep with one eye open.

Barred Doves are wary of Variable Goshawks, while White-bellied Sea-eagles soar above the cone-shaped peaks. Being remote, these islands still hold good populations of birds and animals that have suffered severe declines elsewhere. With ten percent of the world population of the critically endangered Yellow-crested Cockatoo on these islands, we must be alert to their calls. Orange-footed Scrubfowl forage at the feet of grazing Timor Deer. Slight regional differences to some of the common birds make the possibility of seeing an undescribed species here very real.

The next day we will birdwatch at the west end of Flores, which has a very different feel to Bali. Flores is less developed and certainly not as touristy. We will look for endemics including Flores Minivet, Flores Leaf-warbler and Flores Green Pigeon, a species often difficult to see.

At this time of year, migration has just begun and raptors follow the island chain towards Australia. This is a major route for Chinese Sparrowhawk, Oriental Honey-buzzard and Black Baza. We should also be mindful that the recently described Flores Hawk-eagle could pass overhead at any time. The volcanic landscape is painted with terraces of rice paddies and woodland patches. Along the road, we have a chance of finding Wallace's Hanging Parrots feeding in fruiting trees. The Wallacean Drongo and Wallace's Scops Owl, birds that commemorate the great man's name, also live here. We should also find the Great-billed Parrot, Brown Quail and endemic Golden-rumped and Black-breasted Flowerpeckers.

Finally, we will return to Bali for our flight back to the UK.

CLIMATE AND PACE
It is likely to be hot and sunny throughout this itinerary, but with a small chance of rain. At higher elevations it should be a little cooler. Breakfast will be taken at about 6.30am most mornings to take advantage of the cooler morning period. Basic fitness is all that is required. Full days will be spent in the field and reasonable length walks will be undertaken regularly. There are some uneven paths and some uphill walks, all taken at a gentle pace.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD
Full board accommodation is provided, with one night at the Patra Jasa Resort, Bali Airport, one night at the Bali Handara Kosaido Resort, Bali, two nights at the Mans Cottages, Bali, three nights at the Ketapang Indah, Java, one night back at the Patra Jasa Resort, Bali, two nights at the Kelimutu Ecloade, Flores and three nights at the Jaya Karta Hotel, Labuhan Bajo, Flores. All hotels are of a good standard and all rooms are en suite. Lunch will normally be at restaurants, but occasionally we will take a packed lunch.

PRICE INCLUDES …..
All birdwatching excursions with Bird Holidays leader and expert local guide, full board accommodation (starting with all rooms are en suite. Lunch will normally be at restaurants, but occasionally we will take a packed lunch.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED
Travel insurance. Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS
Flights from London Heathrow to Bali (via Singapore), using the scheduled services of Singapore Airlines. Outbound flight departs late morning, return arrives back early morning. It is also possible to fly from Manchester and other UK airports. Please phone for details.

15 nights including two overnight flights: 2nd to 17th November 2020
Principal leader: Phil Palmer
Local guide: Hery Kusumanegara and other wardens/rangers
Maximum group size: 10 clients with one leader and local guides
Cost with discount (if you book before 20th July 2020): £5180 per person sharing (£290 single supplement)
Full Cost: £5330 per person sharing
Deposit: £1000 per person