



## **NORTH INDIA: *Himalayas, Bharatpur and the Taj Mahal***

**28 November – 12 December 2009 (15 days), Leader: Keith Barnes, Set departure. Photos by Keith Barnes. All photos taken on this trip.**



*Bird of the trip, the Ibisbill, was absurdly close to the river's edge in the exact spot we'd had it on our 2008 tour!*

Our Northern India tour is one of our most popular Asian trips – not only does it provide some of the highest bird lists for an Asian destination (we found around 383 species this year alone on a shorter 2-week trip), but also adds a number of impressive mammals to the equation. Not least among these is the World's best cat – Bengal Tiger. In addition to this, India provides some of the very best birding

photo opportunities of any tour, as birds are simply everywhere, with the respect given to nature through the powerful Hindu influence in India's rich culture has left many of these birds both abundant and approachable. We kicked off the tour in style with some 'city birding' down at Sultanpur Jheel that saw us rack up over 100 species on our first day around India's capital Delhi alone. You'd think it would all be downhill from there, but as with all our previous year's tours, everyone was justifiably 'blown away' by both the breathtaking scenery, and scintillating birding during our trip into the foothills of the greatest (and youngest), of all the great mountain chains – the Himalayas. Our time around the old British hill station of Naini Tal in Kumaon was voted as the best birding of the trip, the hordes of tits, nuthatches, woodpeckers, colorful jays and finches keeping us all very busy, so that there was rarely a dull moment as we perused these Himalayan 'bird waves', scanned the mountain slopes for pheasants, including encounters with both tricky pheasants, Cheer and Koklass Pheasants, and checked the undergrowth for tesias and wren-babblers. All the while, the impressive form of India's highest mountain, Nanda Devi, (close to border of the Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal), loomed large in the background. Highlights in the Oak and Rhododendron forests within these Himalayan foothills included a spritely Chestnut-headed Tesia that danced around us in Bajun; Spotted Forktails were found working the boulders in the crystal-clear mountain streams; a gorgeous male Siberian Rubythroat was found hopping around in some bushes in Bharatpur; and a bunch of interesting thrushes, that included prolonged looks at the normally shy, and ridiculously well-endowed Long-billed Ground-Thrush, to add to the host of tits, nuthatches, warblers, prinias, jays, magpies, finches and woodpeckers we ran into in these scenic mountains.



*Naini Tal is one of the classic Himalayan foothill birding destinations.*

We then retired to the edge of Corbett National Park. In only a very brief visit to this area we managed to find the undisputed top bird of the trip, before we had even reached our final hotel. Scanning the pale boulders along the river edge, and searching the fast-flowing rapids, turned up the biggest shock of the tour – a pair of India's most sought-after, and enigmatic shorebird – the exquisite Ibisbill. At this point we could have been forgiven for just packing up and going home. However, the bird-rich area of Kumeria has lots to offer and we 'plowed on', to take in the

impressive sight of a pair of Pallas's Fish-eagle sharing a recently caught fish within their huge treetop nest; and also later picked up the diminutive Little Forktail hopping around on some boulders within the Kosi River, just a short walk from our inn. Our trip to the park at Corbett was well worth it, getting us our only sighting of 'Old Stripes', the enigmatic Bengal Tiger as well as numerous encounters with seasonally common Indian Elephants.



*Highlights at Corbett included Bengal Tiger (top left), Pallas's Fish-Eagle (top right) and Indian Elephant (bottom).*

From there we headed south through the Gangetic Plain to the dusty town of Bharatpur in eastern Rajasthan. Keoladeo Ghana reserve has long been internationally recognized as a vital site for many Asian wetland birds. Due to another poor monsoon, as with other recent years, the reserve itself was suffering from a severe shortage of water. However, not to be deterred by this, we hit some other impressive wetland sites near Bharatpur and picked up most of these normally expected wetland specialties in the process. Highlights there included concentrations of Bar-headed Geese, Painted Storks and a number of stately Sarus Cranes; in addition to a bunch of raptors like the scarce Indian Spotted Eagle, Red-necked Falcon and the critically-endangered Indian Vulture. After a cultural respite from

birding for the obligatory visit to the Taj Mahal, the world's greatest symbol of love, we hit the Chambal River for more specialties. Not least among these was a hulking Great Thick-knee lurking on the banks of the river. Although, the superb reptiles along the Chambal were close to stealing the show, with big numbers of 'snouty' Gharials, as well as a few bruising Mugger Crocodiles seen there also. After this excellent Chambal river safari we returned to Delhi where the tour drew to a close.



*Gharials are rare and declining and it's great to see them in decent numbers in Corbett NP.*



*Crested Bunting was found in the reedbeds next to Bund Baretha.*

- 28 November:** ARRIVAL Sultanpur Jheel + Qubtar Minar.  
**29 November:** Okhla Barrage, Rhamnagar River, Naini Tal.  
**30 November - 2 December:** Naini Tal area.  
**3 December:** Naini Tal - Kumeria.  
**4 December:** Kumeria to Corbett NP  
**5 December:** Corbett NP - Kumeria  
**6 December:** Kumeria – Delhi  
**7 December:** Delhi – Bharatpur  
**8-10 December:** Bharatpur area  
**11 December:** Bharatpur – Taj Mahal – Chambal.  
**12 December:** Chambal - Delhi.

## **BIRD LIST**

**Taxonomic order and nomenclature follow Clements, 6th edition updated 2007. Birds that are marked with (GO) were seen by the guide only. Birds that are marked with (H) were only heard.**

### **GREBES: Podicipedidae**

- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Little Grebe  | <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> |
| <b>Seen on wetlands around Bharatpur, and Sultanpur Jheel.</b>    |                               |
| Great Crested Grebe   | <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>     |
| <b>Just a few seen on Bund Baretha and wetlands beyond there.</b> |                               |

### PELICANS Pelecanidae

Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus*

A group of birds were seen feeding actively on a large wetland area well beyond Bund Baretha.

### CORMORANTS: Phalacrocoracidae

Indian Cormorant *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*

Only recorded on a couple of days - including a few on the Yamuna River, out the back of the Taj Mahal.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Commonly encountered on water bodies throughout the tour.

Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*

A common and regularly encountered cormorant on the tour.

### ANHINGAS: Anhingidae

Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*

Seen in small numbers on wetlands near Bharatpur, and at Sultanpur Jheel.

### HERONS, EGRETS AND BITTERNs: Ardeidae

Gray Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Present in small numbers on most wetland sites visited.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Singles were recorded around Delhi, and at Bund Baretha.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Commonly recorded throughout the tour.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*

A little less commonly seen than the previous species, although still regularly recorded at a number of different sites.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Present at almost all wetland areas visited on the tour.

Indian Pond-Heron *Ardeola grayii*

Commonly recorded throughout the tour.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

A very common roadside bird throughout northern India.

TAXONOMIC NOTE: Some authors (e.g. Rasmussen & Anderton 2005) split this form as a separate species, Eastern Cattle Egret *B. coromandus*.

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Just a single bird was seen at Bund Baretha.

### STORKS: Ciconiidae

Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*

One of the spectacles of the tour was the large colony of these impressive storks nesting at Sultanpur Jheel; with others seen in Bharatpur, and large numbers were seen on several of the large wetlands beyond Bund Baretha.

Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*

Three sightings involved a couple on Bund Baretha, a few more on one of the large wetlands beyond there.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

A group was found on a massive wetland beyond Bund Baretha and more at Bharatpur.

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*

Two singles were seen on the journey from Delhi to Bharatpur; a group of 7 and another group of 5 were seen on different large wetlands beyond Bund Baretha; and another single was seen at Sultanpur Jheel.

Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*

India's finest stork. A pair were seen in Keoladeo Ghana, and another single was seen at Sultanpur Jheel.

#### IBIS AND SPOONBILLS: Threskiornithidae

Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*

Mainly recorded around Delhi, at Okhla and Sultanpur Jheel.

Red-naped Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. We did well for this increasingly scarce Ibis, picking them up on the banks of the Chambal River. NB. This is also sometimes referred to as INDIAN BLACK IBIS.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

A single was seen feeding on one of the small islands at Bund Baretha, and a group was seen on a large wetland beyond there.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Noted on a number of the wetlands.

#### FLAMINGOS: Phoenicopteridae

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

A few seen at one wetland not far from Bund Baretha.

#### DUCKS, GEESE AND SWANS: Anatidae

Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*

Fairly commonly recorded at a number of different wetland sites visited.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Huge flocks were especially noted at Bund Baretha, although others were seen around Delhi.

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*

Arguably the most handsome goose in the world. We saw some huge flocks on some of the larger wetlands beyond Baretha, and also recorded them along the banks of the Chambal River (with over 200 birds there alone), with a few others also at Sultanpur Jheel.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

A very attractive and common duck in northern India. Large concentrations were seen on the Kosi River by Ramnagar. Others were also picked up at Bund Baretha (and a number of wetlands in that area), and along the Chambal.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

A few seen at a large wetland west of Bund Baretha.

Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*

Never in huge numbers, a maximum of 9 birds were seen on a large wetland beyond Bund Baretha. Others were seen on Baretha itself, and also at Sultanpur.

Cotton Pygmy-goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*

A contender for the world's smallest goose, this diminutive goose was only recorded on Bund Baretha, with around 20 seen there.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Large numbers were seen at a number of different wetland sites.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Fairly commonly recorded at a variety of wetlands.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Large concentrations were recorded at Okhla, Sultanpur and Bund Baretha.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Not a common bird at all in northern India, with just a pair seen at Bund Baretha and a single male by Ramnagar Dam.

Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha*

A very striking and attractive Indian duck. First seen at Okhla, and later recorded around Bund Baretha, and Sultanpur.

NB. Sometimes called INDIAN SPOT-BILLED DUCK.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Commonly recorded, at a number of different sites.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

A single bird was picked out from the thousands of waterfowl at Bund Baretha.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

One of the commonest duck species in northern India.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

A couple of big groups were seen around Bund Baretha, and several were seen during our Chambal River Cruise.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Just a few were seen at Okhla, Sultanpur, and around Bund Baretha.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Only recorded on the second day in Delhi, when a small raft were seen at Okhla Barrage.

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*

Just a single female bird was seen on the Rhamnagar River. NB. Sometimes called GOOSANDER.

#### OSPREY: Pandionidae

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Two singles were seen beyond Bund Baretha.

#### HAWKS, EAGLES AND KITES: Accipitridae

Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*

This extremely variable raptor was seen a number of times around Bharatpur.

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

Small numbers were recorded at a number of different sites.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Delhi must be the best place in the world for this scavenging raptor, where literally thousands were seen swarming over a rubbish dump, and lining the pylons all around. An impressive sight.

Pallas' Fish-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*

A pair of these much sought-after birds of prey, were nesting by the Kosi River near our final hotel, the Quality Inn, and more were seen within Corbett NP.

Lesser Fish-Eagle *Ichthyophaga humilis*

A pair of these much sought-after birds of prey, were found next to a river within Corbett NP.





**Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus*  
 A commonly encountered raptor on the Gangetic Plain.

**White-rumped Vulture** *Gyps bengalensis*  
 This striking and distinctive now critically-endangered vulture was seen near Corbett.

**Indian Vulture** *Gyps indicus*  
 AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. Unfortunately another of India's critically endangered vulture species, due to the formerly widespread use of the veterinary drug *Diclofenac*. We were happy to see some largish (around 8 birds!) groups nesting at Bayena (near Bharatpur).

**Himalayan Griffon** *Gyps himalayensis*  
 Several of this huge pale griffons were seen in the Naini Tal area, especially around Vinayak our highest site of the tour (around 2,300m).

**Eurasian Griffon** *Gyps fulvus*  
 Seen in the foothills.

**Red-headed Vulture** *Sarcogyps calvus*  
 Just three sightings of another of India's troubled vultures, with two singles seen in Corbett.

**Short-toed Eagle** *Circus gallicus*  
 A single very tatty looking individual was seen circling over a large bird-packed wetland in the Bund Baretha area and another over Bayena.

**Crested Serpent-Eagle** *Spilornis cheela*  
 Just two sightings in Keoladeo Ghana.

**Western Marsh-Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*  
 Only recorded on the second day in Delhi, where 3 were seen in Okhla.

**Northern (Hen) Harrier** *Circus cyaneus*  
 Regularly recorded in Corbett.

**Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus*  
 Recorded in Corbett.

**Pied Harrier** *Circus melanoleucos*  
 Recorded in Corbett.

**Shikra** *Accipiter badius*  
 One of India's commoner raptor species, singles were run into in Bharatpur, and Bund Baretha.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*  
 One was seen briefly in the Himalayas. LO.

**Eurasian Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*  
 A single soaring bird was seen at Bund Baretha.

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*  
 One was seen on the Chambal River Cruise.

**Indian Spotted Eagle** *Aquila hastata*  
 NEAR-ENDEMIC. This scarce near-endemic was recorded only once as we came close to Bharatpur during our journey from Delhi to there.

**Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga*  
 A bird was seen flying over the temple at Keoladeo Ghana, and then another adult bird was seen very well perched up at Sultanpur Jheel.

**Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis*  
 One of the most regularly recorded raptors in the foothills of the Himalaya.

**Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca*  
 A bird was seen perched on a large island on a huge wetland beyond Bund Baretha.

**Bonelli's Eagle** *Aquila fasciata*  
 A nesting pair were seen close to our boat along the Chambal River.

**Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennata*  
 One flew over us at Sultanpur Jheel.

**Changeable Hawk-Eagle** *Spizaetus cirrhatus*  
 Seen several times at Corbett NP.

**Mountain Hawk-Eagle** *Spizaetus nipalensis*

A low-flying adult was first seen by a small mountain lodge at Pangot, with a couple of further sightings in the Kumeria area on the edge of Corbett.

#### FALCONS: Falconidae

Collared Falconet *Microhierax caerulescens*

This tiny raptor was seen inside Corbett NP on several occasions.

Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

5 sightings at a number of different sites.

Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera*

This often hard to find falcon put on a great show for us this year. First our local guide picked up a pair perched on a close roadside pylon that remained there for some time allowing photos and great scope views in the process. Definitely one of the best raptors of the trip. NB. TAXONOMIC NOTE: This Asian race, *chicquera*, is sometimes split from the African race by some authors, and then re-named as RED-HEADED FALCON.

Laggar Falcon *Falco jugger*

One bird flew over the group very close at a wetland beyond Bund Baretha.

Peregrine (Shaheen) Falcon *Falco peregrinus peregrinator*

Seen on several occasions in the mountains.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

One bird flew over the group in the Himalayan foothills.

#### PHEASANTS AND PARTRIDGES: Phasianidae

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*

A male bird sttd dentinel right next to the road at Pangot.

Gray Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*

NEAR-ENDEMIC. Seen almost daily around Bharatpur, and also recorded at Sultanpur Jheel.

Jungle Bush Quail *Perdica asiatica*

Seen well near Bharatpur.

Hill Partridge *Arborophila torqueola*

Heard only at Naini Tal. HO.

Koklass Pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha*

Unfortunately this proved a little tricky this year, with a close calling bird eventually flushing across the road.

Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichi*

Probably the single star bird of the trip. After failing ont he first occasion, a second try at Pangot netted us this scarcely seen pheasant, much to everyone's delight.

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*

The original chicken. We saw a few at Corbett.

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*

INDIA'S NATIONAL BIRD. AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. This superb pheasant is abundant in the Bharatpur area, large numbers of which were seen feeding out in the open fields in the early morning (a short time after they had left their roosting sites in the local villages).

#### BUTTONQUAILS: Turnicidae

Barred Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator*

A couple were seen well near Baggam.

#### CRANES: Gruidae

Sarus Crane *Grus antigone*

These superb, stately cranes were first seen on the drive between Delhi and Bharatpur; and later seen again on a large wetland beyond Bund Baretha. A small group were also seen by the roadside near the Ganges River crossing.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

A small group was seen flying over Bharatpur.

**RAILS, GALLINULES AND COOTS: Rallidae**

Brown Crake *Amaurornis akool*

An unusually bold pair were seen feeding right out in the open by a busy road for over 5 minutes, en-route to Bharatpur; with another equally confident pair by Bund Baretha.

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*

Almost daily around Bharatpur.

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Okhla Barrage had some very impressive concentrations of this large gallinule, with well over a hundred birds seen there. A few were also seen in the Bharatpur area.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

A few were seen at a number of wetlands throughout.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

A few were seen at a number of wetlands throughout.

**JACANAS: Jacanidae**

Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*

Just the one bird seen, at Bund Baretha.

Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus*

A few were seen around Bund Baretha.

**PAINTED-SNIPES: Rostratulidae**

Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*

This superb and distinctive shorebird had arrived in good numbers at Bharatpur this year, with around ten birds seen feeding in a dirty ditch in the town there.

**IBISBILL: Ibisbillidae**

Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*

**BIRD OF THE TRIP.** An easy choice for the top trip bird. It was hard to look past this enigmatic shorebird among the highlights, as it is not only a scarce and therefore a much wanted bird by listers, but is also an undeniably attractive and striking wader and monotypic family. We saw a pair of awesome Ibisbills along the Kosi River en-route near Kumeria.

**AVOCETS AND STILTS: Recurvirostridae**

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

One of the commonest shorebirds recorded in northern India, seemingly being found on any small patch of roadside water.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

A couple were seen on our very first day in Delhi at Okhla; with another also seen on the shores of the Chambal River.

**THICK-KNEES: Burhinidae**

Great Thick-knee *Burhinus recurvirostris*

This huge shorebird should ordinarily be 'a given' at the Chambal River, although proved strangely elusive there, with just a single bird found hiding in amongst the boulders.

**COURSERS AND PRATINCOLES: Glariolidae**

Indian Courser *Burhinus recurvirostris*

We tracked a group of these down near Bharatpur.

Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea*

Surprisingly seen on the way up to the Himalayas across a sizeable river.

**PLOVERS AND LAPWINGS: Charadriidae**

River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii*

This 'Asian Spur-winged Plover' was seen in Bharatpur, and also seen on the banks of the Yamuna River, out the back of the Taj Mahal; and finally a good number of them were feeding among the boulders of the Kosi River, on the edge of Corbett.

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

A very common bird in the lowlands of northern India, and therefore recorded regularly throughout the plains.

White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*

Thin on the ground this year, with just a handful of birds seen, at Okhla, Sultanpur Jheel, and Kosi wetland en-route to Bharatpur.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

A few were seen on a large wetland beyond Bund Baretha.

Snowy Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

A few were seen on the banks of the Chambal River, and at least 20 birds were found on a large wetland beyond Bund Baretha.

#### SANDPIPERS: Scolopacidae

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Small numbers were recorded around Bharatpur.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

A single bird was seen by the roadside en-route to Bharatpur from Delhi; and large numbers were recorded on a large wetland site beyond Bund Baretha.

NB. TAXONOMIC NOTE: The birds recorded on the tour were of the *limosa* 'form', that is sometimes considered a separate species from the eastern *melanuroides* populations, and subsequently re-named WESTERN BLACK-TAILED GODWIT.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Commonly recorded at a number of wetlands around Bharatpur.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Fairly common in the Bharatpur area, and also seen out the back of the Taj Mahal.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Recorded at a few sites in the Bund Baretha area.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Recorded at a number of wetland sites in Rajasthan.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

Small numbers were recorded in the Bund Baretha area.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Recorded at a number of wetland sites in Rajasthan.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Recorded at a number of wetland sites in Rajasthan.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Small numbers were seen on a large wetland beyond Bund Baretha.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Small numbers were seen at a number of sites in Rajasthan, and also on the Kosi River in Uttaranchal.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Small numbers were seen on a large wetland beyond Bund Baretha.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Small numbers were seen on a few wetlands in Rajasthan.

#### GULLS: Laridae

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*

A few were seen at both the Chambal and Ganges Rivers, and Bund Baretha.

NB. This is sometimes also called PALLAS'S GULL.

Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*

Just one at the Kosi Wetlands. LO.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

A large flock were flying around the Ganges River.

**TERNs: Sternidae**

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Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Bund Baretha, and the region beyond BB.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

4 were seen on Bund Baretha, and a similar number were seen on a large wetland beyond there also.

Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda*

This fast-declining, and now localized species, was seen near Bund Baretha and on our Chambal River Cruise. All birds seen were in black-bellied summer plumage.

River Tern *Sterna aurantia*

Recorded on two days in the Bund Baretha area.

**SANDGROUSE: Pteroclididae**

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Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*

A few birds flew over our boat on the Chambal.

**PIGEONS AND DOVES: Columbidae**

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Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*

Many of these 'pure bred' Rock Doves seen throughout the plains.

Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Fairly commonly recorded at a number of sites.

Red Collared-Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*

A single was seen en-route to Bund Baretha; and another was seen at Sultanpur Jheel.

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

Commonly seen.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Commonly seen at a number of sites on the tour.

Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*

Seen once at Corbett. LO.

Yellow-footed Pigeon *Treron phoenicopterus*

This attractive green pigeon was first picked up at Okhla in Delhi, with more seen around Tughlaqabad Fort.

**PARROTS: Psittacidae**

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Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*

This chunky huge red-billed parakeet was a seen in Delhi.

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

India's commonest parakeet, the sights and sounds of them were a daily feature in the lowlands.

Slaty-headed Parakeet *Psittacula himalayana*

These dark-hooded montane parakeets were regularly seen during our day at Sat Tal in the Himalayan foothills. NB. Sometimes alternatively called HIMALAYAN PARAKEET.

Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*

India's most beautiful parakeet, their rich, cherry-colored heads were a few times on our day trips out of Bharatpur.

Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexanderi*

Seen once in the Himalayas.

**CUCKOOS: Cuculidae**

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Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*

Just the one was seen.

Banded Bay Cuckoo HO

Surprising, heard only in the Himalayas.

Sirkeer Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii*

**AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC.** Seen at the base of the Indian Vulture cliffs at Bayena.

Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*

Commonly recorded at many sites.

Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*

Just the once at Corbett NP.

#### OWLS: Strigidae

Indian Scops-Owl *Otus bakkamoena*

**AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC.** These endemic owls are usually staked out in Bharatpur where the local guides know a couple of regular roost spots. So it proved again this year, with a pair found right beside the Keoladeo temple.

Dusky Eagle-Owl *Bubo coromandus*

Another Bharatpur star bird. A pair were nesting in the park this year.

Brown Fish-Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis*

We were lucky with this formidable owl this year. We saw one roosting at Kumeria.

Tawny Fish-Owl *Ketupa flavipes*

We saw several of the ginger beasts this year, some near Kumeria and others within Corbett.

Collared Owlet *Glaucidium brodiei*

The call of this owl usually has a great impact on small passerines in the Himalayan foothills, and was often well-utilized to stir up a mobbing party. Eventually on one occasion this cute little owl also came in to check out the recording, when it also swiveled its head round revealing the cracking unique 'false eyes' on the back of its spotted head.

Asian Barred Owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides* HO

Only heard at Corbett.

Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*

This gregarious, cute owl was seen around Bharatpur. The largest gathering involved four birds by the Keoladeo temple, that Bharatpur's parks is named after.

Brown Hawk-Owl *Ninox scutulata*

This bird was found roosting within the Keoladeo Ghana park.

#### NIGHTJARS: Caprimulgidae

Gray Nightjar *Caprimulgus indicus*

Another of Bharatpur's daytime stake-outs, we saw one at a day roost within the park.

Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*

A superb, cryptically patterned individual allowed very close approach within Keoladeo Ghana, at a known daytime roost site.

#### SWIFTS: Apodidae

Little Swift *Apus affinis*

Recorded in Delhi and in the Himalayan foothills, although only in small numbers.

White-rumped Needletail *Zoonavena sylvatica*

Only once in Corbett

#### TREESWIFTS: Hemiprocnidae

Crested Treeswift *Hemiproctne coronata*

First seen at the Quality Inn, Kumeria.

#### KINGFISHERS: Alcedinidae

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Great views at scattered localities.

Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*

This much-requested bird is generally scarce on this circuit, so we were delighted with one at Corbett NP.

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

The most commonly recorded kingfisher on the tour, recorded at many sites.

Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris*

We saw three of these fantastic 'fishers' at the dam at Ramnagar, and later saw a few more during our final afternoons birding along the Kosi River in Kumeria.

NB. This species is also sometimes known as HIMALAYAN PIED KINGFISHER.

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*

Seen a number of times around Bharatpur, and later along the Chambal River, and also at Sultanpur Jheel.

#### BEE-EATERS: Meropidae

Blue-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctyornis athertoni*

A pair of these large Bee-eaters eventually gave themselves up at Corbett NP.

Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*

This gorgeous emerald-green bee-eater was recorded at a number of lowland sites on the tour.

#### ROLLERS: Coraciidae

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*

A harbinger of good fortune in Hindu culture, they were a regular feature on roadside wires in the Bharatpur area.

#### HOOPOES: Upupidae

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Picked up fairly regularly throughout the tour.

#### HORNBILLS: Bucerotidae

Indian Gray Hornbill *Ocyroceros birostris*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. First seen in the grand hotel grounds of the Bagh at Bharatpur, where a small group were often roosting in the area. Also recorded a number of times around Bharatpur.

#### BARBETS: Capitonidae

Great Barbet *Megalaima virens*

This classic montane barbet was first seen at Sat Tal and near the Mongoli Valley, also in the Himalayan foothills.

Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. First seen on our first morning at Okhla in Delhi, and then recorded a number of times in the Bharatpur area (including within Keoladeo Ghana park).

Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata*

A handful were found at Corbett NP.

Blue-throated Barbet *Megalaima asiatica*

This attractive barbet was unsurprisingly popular, getting a worthy mention when running through the tour highlights at the end. Just two sightings this year, with a pair at Sat Tal, and another viewing near Mongoli in the Himalayan foothills.

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*

Recorded at Okhla in Delhi, and around Bharatpur.

#### WOODPECKERS: Picidae

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

One single was seen in the Delhi area, at Sultanpur Jheel.

Brown-capped Woodpecker *Dendrocopos moluccensis*

This pale-eyed 'pecker' was seen once near Kumeria.

NB. This *nanus* 'race' is sometimes split off as INDIAN PYGMY WOODPECKER.

Gray-capped Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus*

This pygmy woodpecker was seen twice in the Kumeria area around Corbett.

**NB. Also known as GREY-CAPPED PYGMY-WOODPECKER.**

**Brown-fronted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos auriceps*

**AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC.** Several in the Himalayan foothills.

**NB. Also known as BROWN-FRONTED PIED WOODPECKER.**

**Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos macei*

**A NEAR-ENDEMIC SPECIES.** This scarce woodpecker was seen feeding in some open pines in Corbett.

**Yellow-crowned Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos mahrattensis*

**A pair were seen en-route to Bund Baretha, and three further sightings followed in the Bharatpur area.**

**NB. Also known as YELLOW-FRONTED PIED WOODPECKER.**

**Rufous-bellied Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos hyperythrus*

**One of the top woodpeckers in the Himalayas, where the greatest woodpecker diversity on the tour occurs. We found this bird surprisingly easy on this tour, getting them three separate times there (these included two red-capped males, and one spotty crowned female). On all occasions the birds were extremely confiding, and remained in full view for over 5 minutes and were much appreciated for that!**

**Himalayan Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos himalayensis*

**AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC (primarily in the Himalayas).** Two separate birds were found in Pangot, feeding in some open pines.

**NB. Also known as HIMALAYAN PIED WOODPECKER.**

**Lesser Yellownape** *Picus chlorolophus*

**For the second year in a row this species was found in company with a Greater Yellownape for superb side-by-side comparison, this time in the Mongoli area, near Naini Tal.**

**Greater Yellownape** *Picus flavinucha*

**We enjoyed three sightings of this flashy woodpecker in the Himalayan foothills.**

**Gray-faced Woodpecker** *Picus canus*

**This large woodpecker was seen 4 times in the foothills, including a number of times around Sat Tal.**

**Himalayan Flameback** *Dinopium shorii*

**This handsome flameback was seen just the once in the Kumeria area at the base of the Himalayas.**

**Black-rumped Flameback** *Dinopium benghalense*

**AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC.** This handsome flameback (is there a bad one?!), was seen two or three times around Bharatpur, and also as we descended from the Himalayan foothills.

**Great Slaty Woodpecker** *Mulleripicus pulverulentus*

**A group of 4 seen just the once within Corbett NP.**

#### **LARKS: Alaudidae**

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**Indian Bushlark** *Mirafra erythroptera*

**AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC.** Two sightings on the tour, firstly beyond Bund Baretha, and later another single at Sultanpur Flats in Haryana.

**Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark** *Eremopterix griseus*

**AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC.** This striking lark was run into en-route to Bund Baretha, and also around Sultanpur Jheel where a great number of larks were seen in our short time there.

**NB. Also known as ASHY-CROWNED FINCH-LARK.**

**Rufous-tailed Lark** *Ammomanes phoenicura*

**AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC.** A pair of these very distinctive larks showed well near Bund Baretha.

**Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla*

**A small group were seen on our journey to Bund Baretha, and later a huge flock of over 150 birds was seen near Sultanpur Jheel.**

**Sand Lark** *Calandrella raytal*



Just one group at Chambal.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Seen first in the dry agricultural lands en-route to Bund Baretha, and then seen again on the banks of the Chambal, and fairly commonly at Sultanpur Jheel.

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*

Seen a couple of times on tour.

**SWALLOWS: Hirundinidae**

Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola*

Fairly commonly recorded in the Bharatpur area, and later also seen at Sultanpur Jheel.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Commonly recorded throughout the tour.

Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*

This extremely attractive *hirundine* was seen most regularly around our resort at Bharatpur. Also seen along the Chambal River.

Dusky Crag-Martin *Ptyonoprogne concolor*

A pair were seen at the attractive sandstone fort of Tughlaqabad in Delhi, with a couple of others seen on our two day trips out of Bharatpur.

Nepal Martin *Delichon nipalense*

2 birds were seen at Pangot.

NB. Also known as NEPAL HOUSE-MARTIN.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

Commonly recorded in the Himalayan foothills.

Streak-throated Swallow *Petrochelidon fluvicola*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. A single was first seen at Bund Baretha, although a much better bird showed really well as it hawked low for insects over a small wetland close to our resort at Bharatpur.

NB. Also known as INDIAN CLIFF SWALLOW.

**WAGTAILS AND PIPITS: Motacillidae**

Oriental Pipit *Anthus rufulus*

Surprisingly, just a single sighting of two birds on our way to Bund Baretha, sharing the field with a bunch of Ashy-crowned Sparrow-larks, Greater Short-toed Larks and others.

NB. Also known as PADDYFIELD PIPIT.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*

Found just the once, within Corbett NP.

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*

This large, distinctive pipit was seen feeding in the riverbed in Kumeria, and again within Corbett NP.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

A pair were seen beyond Bund Baretha, with another seen near a large lake close to Bharatpur. However, the biggest numbers were on the dry flats at Sultanpur, where around 50 birds were seen.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

Seen on a number of occasions, including in the Bharatpur area, and also in the Himalayan foothills.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Just the one confirmed sighting, on one of our day trips at Sultanpur.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

A number of different 'races' were seen on this tour, where there was a bewildering number of variants ran into within the white wagtail group at a variety of wetland sites throughout. These included individuals that appeared to be from the *personata* group, sometimes referred to as MASKED WAGTAIL; in addition to a whole host of other variants including ones that looked like they were from the *alboides*, BLACK-BACKED WAGTAIL group.

White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla madaraspatensis*

**AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC.** A scattering of sightings were made during the start of the tour (including in Delhi itself), and later also seen along the Chambal and Kosi Rivers.

**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*

Beema type, SYKES'S WAGTAILS, were seen on two days only. A singleton was seen during our first birding session at Okhla in Delhi, and then literally hundreds were seen by a huge wetland beyond Bund Baretha, where many were attracted by the farmer who was busy tilling his field.

**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola*

Mainly seen during the first part of the tour around Bharatpur, although around 10 were seen on our first morning at Okhla, and others were noted at Sultanpur. In addition an individual of the race *calcarata* was seen at the base of the Himalayas.

**Gray Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*

A scattering of sightings throughout.

#### CUCKOO-SHRIKES: Campephagidae

**Small Minivet** *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*

This delightful minivet was seen during our last mornings birding within Keoladeo Ghana.

**Long-tailed Minivet** *Pericrocotus ethologus*

Small groups were picked up in Sultanpur Jheel, and at Sat Tal in the Himalayan foothills.

**Scarlet Minivet** *Pericrocotus flammeus*

A few only, found at Corbett.

**Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike** *Hemipus picatus*

A whole bunch of these distinctive pied birds were found within a passing bird wave near Kumeria.

#### BULBULS: Pycnonotidae

**Black-crested Bulbul** *Pycnonotus melanicterus*

This striking bulbul was fairly common within the grounds of a small mountain lodge, that we visited as we ascended the Himalayas towards our base for exploring there, Naini Tal.

**Red-whiskered Bulbul** *Pycnonotus jocosus*

First seen at Okhla on our very first day, and then not seen again until we visited a small mountain camp en-route to Naini Tal, (where they were positively common within their small garden).

**White-eared Bulbul** *Pycnonotus leucotis*

This striking bird was seen daily around Bharatpur, that included within the grand gardens of our large hotel, the Bagh.

**White-cheeked Bulbul** *Pycnonotus leucogenys*

**AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC.** This floppy crested bulbul was very common once we reached their Himalayan foothill home.

**NB.** Also known as HIMALAYAN BULBUL.

**Red-vented Bulbul** *Pycnonotus cafer*

One of northern India's commonest birds, that was encountered regularly throughout.

**Ashy Bulbul** *Hemixos flava*

This fetching bird came in to mob an owl tape, at Sat Tal.

**Black Bulbul** *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*

This was very commonly seen in the Himalayan foothills.

#### IORAS: Aegithinidae

**Marshall's Iora** *Aegithina nigrolutea*

Hunted down and seen just the once in Bharatpur.

#### DIPPERS: Cinclidae

**Brown Dipper** *Cinclus pallasi*

A pair of these rusty dippers were seen diving in and out of the clear water rapids of the Kosi River, close to our inn on the edge of Corbett.

### ACCENTORS: Prunellidae

Himalayan Accentor *Prunella himalayana*

A large wheeling flock of around 40 birds was seen at Vinayak.

NB. Also known as ALTAI ACCENTOR.

Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophciata*

A pair of these gorgeous accentors were very appropriately first seen as we combed the 'accentor fields' at Sat Tal, and another was later picked up again near Bajun.

Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis*

The toughest and most sought-after of the accentors. We first saw one on a specific, targeted search at Sat Tal, and later saw a much brighter adult bird close to the small mountain lodge at Pangot.

### THRUSHES: Turdidae

Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

A pair were found at the base of the vulture cliffs at Bayena.

Blue Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*

A great common bird in the foothills, with around 50 counted jumping on and off the mountain road during one morning alone.

Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina*

A gorgeous, gorgeous *zoothera*, that makes all the other normally interesting *zoothera* species look a little lame in comparison! A couple of plain-headed, *citrina* 'race' birds were seen around a temple in Bharatpur.

Long-billed Thrush *Zoothera monticola*

For the guide anyway, one of the top trip birds (due to being a long held 'bogey bird'!) A fantastic bird was disturbed along a small stream in the foothills of the Himalayas, and we then encountered another individual as we entered Corbett NP.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Just one individual sitting high on a tree and singing at dawn as we worked our way up to Pangot.

Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor*

A couple of sightings were made at Bharatpur.

Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus r. atrogularis*

Just the one group of birds that disappeared quickly after they were flushed.

### CISTICOLAS AND ALLIES: Cisticolidae

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

1 was seen at Okhla in Delhi on our first day.

Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*

Spectacularly seen in Corbett by our local guide.

Striated Prinia *Prinia crinigera*

Two separate birds were seen near Pangot.

Rufous-fronted Prinia *Prinia buchanani*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. An area of dry arid country proved again excellent for this unobtrusive species where one bird gave great views at our known spot just after we got out of the bus, during our day beyond Bund Baretha.

Gray-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii*

Fairly commonly seen.

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*

Only seen in the reedbeds near a small wetland on route to Bharatpur.

Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia flaviventris*

Another reedbed prinia that put in an appearance at Okhla, in Delhi on our first day.

Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis*

Fairly commonly recorded around Bharatpur, and in Delhi also.

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata*

Along with Ashy Prinias, a regularly recorded prinia throughout the tour, around Delhi and Bharatpur.

#### OLD WORLD WARBLERS: Sylviidae

Chestnut-headed Tesia *Tesia castaneocoronata*

This superb sprite, once again 'danced' for us, as it circled us excitedly on our final afternoons birding in the Himalayas, in the bottom of the Bajun Valley.

Gray-sided Bush-Warbler *Cettia brunnifrons*

Surprisingly heard and then seen during an impromptu roadside stop between Naini Tal and Mongoli.

Blyth's Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*

This front heavy warbler was seen just once around Bharatpur.

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*

Seen just once on the first day at Okhla.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*

Recorded at Okhla in Delhi first, and later that day at Tughlaqabad Fort and at Bharatpur.

Smoky Warbler *Phylloscopus fulgiventis*

A real surprise individual was found singing in the open at Okhla in Delhi.

Sulphur-bellied Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus*

A few were seen, typically feeding on or close to the ground at Bund Baretha.

Buff-barred Warbler *Phylloscopus pulcher*

Commonly seen in the Himalayas, where their distinctive calls were a common background sound to our time there.

NB. Also known as ORANGE-BARRED LEAF-WARBLER.

Ashy-throated Warbler *Phylloscopus maculipennis*

An atypically distinctive *phylloscopus* warbler. Just recorded the once, in the Mongoli Valley area.

Lemon-rumped Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*

One of the commonest flock members seen in the Himalayan bird waves.

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*

Fairly common on the tour, especially around Okhla and also at Bharatpur, where it was one of the more common jungle sounds.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Just a couple of sightings were made in the Bhapatpur area.

Blyth's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus reguloides*

Just a couple of sightings were made in the Himalayas area.

Whistler's Warbler *Seicercus whistleri*

Three sightings, in the Himalayan foothills, and also around Kumeria.

Gray-hooded Warbler *Seicercus xanthoschistos*

This fantastic warbler was a much appreciated common flock bird in the Himalayan foothills, being recorded on all of our days in that area.

Chestnut-crowned Warbler *Seicercus castaniceps*

A few sightings in Corbett.

Black-faced Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps*

A few sightings in Pangot.

Hume's Whitethroat *Sylvia althaea*

Just the once at Okhla.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Fairly common during the tour, in the Bharatpur area.

#### OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS: Muscicapidae

Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophilata*

Surprisingly few seen, with just a couple seen in the Sat Tal Valley.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

Fairly commonly recorded around Bharatpur.

Slaty-blue Flycatcher *Ficedula tricolor*

A couple of female birds were seen during our day in Sat Tal.

Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassinus*

While out in the park at Bharatpur a few got lucky with this powder blue flycatcher, that visited the resort while the rest of us were out on our morning walk.

Small Niltava *Niltava macgrigoriae*

Three different individuals were seen in the Himalayas.

Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara*

A male and a female bird were seen during our day in the Sat Tal Valley.

Gray-headed Canary-flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*

Seen several times around Bharatpur, and also in Kumeria.

NB. TAXONOMIC NOTE: The family placement of this species is unclear, some believing they should not sit within the old world flycatchers at all, and should be separated within their own monotypic family.

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*

Definitely one of the classic Himalayan birds that are understandably high on the list for visiting birders. We tracked down a furtive male bird, hopping around the flowerbeds of a Bharatpur.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

This highly-desired 'sibe' was seen at Okhla Barrage in Delhi, in the Bharatpur area, and finally at Sultanpur.

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*

Just a few were seen on this tour, around Sat Tal and Pangot in the Himalayan foothills.

NB. TAXONOMIC NOTE: Some authors have split the Himalayan and north Asian forms of this species, with *rufilatusthen* being split off as HIMALAYAN RED-FLANKED BUSH-ROBIN, (and the other 'race' being named NORTHERN RED-FLANKED BUSH-ROBIN).

Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*

Recorded at many sites throughout the tour.

Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicatus*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. A very cool, common species in northern India.

Commonly encountered on the plains, including within Delhi itself where many were seen at Okhla and Tughlaqabad Fort on our first day.

Blue-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus caeruleocephala*

A few were seen in the Sat Tal and Pangot areas, within the Himalayan foothills.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Scattered sightings were made around Bharatpur, and Sultanpur.

Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis*

Singles of this exquisite redstart were seen wintering in Sat Tal, Pangot, and close to Mongoli.

White-capped Redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*

As soon as we hit our first river in the foothills, these stunning redstarts began to appear. A common and attractive redstart of clean waterways in the mountains. Another of those common Himalayan species that are just stunning, and quite simply a pleasure to have as a common trip bird.

NB. Also known as WHITE-CAPPED WATER-REDSTART or RIVER CHAT.

Plumbeous Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosa*

Along with the White-capped Redstart, an attractive and regularly seen bird along any clean waterways in the Himalayan foothills. As with that species they were especially numerous along the Kosi River.

Spotted Forktail *Enicurus maculatus*

A very popular bird, that we ran into feeding in a roadside gully on our way down to Sat Tal. One of the **CONTENDERS FOR BIRD OF THE TRIP**.

White-throated (Hodgson's) Bushchat *Saxicola insignis*

A handful of individuals within Corbett NP.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*

Recorded at a number of sites, including Okhla, and Sultanpur Jheel, and also in the Bharatpur area.

**Pied Bushchat** *Saxicola caprata*  
Commonly recorded in a range of open habitats throughout the tour.

**Gray Bushchat** *Saxicola ferreus*

Recorded in the Himalayan foothills.

**Variable Wheatear** *Oenanthe picata*

This striking wheatear proved easy to come by on this tour, with one seen as we made our way to Bund Baretha from Bharatpur, another couple the following day beyond there; and finally a few further birds were seen on the bird-rich dry flats behind Sultanpur Jheel.

**Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti*

3 or 4 were noted on the day we drove out beyond Bund Baretha; and greater numbers were seen in some dry fields in the Sultanpur area.

**Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina*

2 of these ghostly pale wheatears were seen beyond Bund Baretha.

**Indian Chat** *Cercomela fusca*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. Fairly commonly found in any of the rocky sandstone areas visited (e.g. Tughlaqabad Fort, Bayena etc.)

NB. Also known as BROWN ROCK CHAT.

#### **FANTAILS: Rhipiduridae**

**Yellow-bellied Fantail** *Rhipidura hypoxantha*

A really superb, and unique, little fantail that was first seen in the car park of a small mountain lodge that we stopped off at briefly en-route to Naini Tal; and later seen again in Sat Tal, and Kumeria.

**White-throated Fantail** *Rhipidura albicollis*

We had a few scattered sightings in the Himalayan foothills, where they turned up in some of the mixed feeding flocks there.

#### **BABLERS: Timaliidae**

**White-throated Laughingthrush** *Garrulax albogularis*

This, one of the commoner species of laughingthrush in the foothills, was seen several times there.

**White-crested Laughingthrush** *Garrulax leucolophus*

This fancy 'laugher' justifiably drew a big, appreciative reaction on first sight. A really cool bird, that never fail to impress with its rich rufous body and crisp white head, topped off with a blackish 'highwaymen's mask'.

**Striated Laughingthrush** *Garrulax striatus*

Possibly one of the most frequently badly-drawn birds in the fields guides, as the plates never quite convey what a spectacular bird this is, which is therefore usually a very pleasant surprise when seen for the first time. We were very grateful to find a showy flock later in Mongoli Valley, where the birds flew up into the open crowns of the trees at eye level, right in front of us.

**Streaked Laughingthrush** *Garrulax lineatus*

Arguably the least interesting of the 'laughers', which was the most commonly seen species in the foothills.

**Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush** *Garrulax rufogularis*

We'd hoped to find a group of these intricately patterned 'babblers'. However, we had to be satisfied with fletting views of this as they moved rapidly and noisily, yet without showing themselves, through thick lantana in the bottom of the Sat Tal Valley.

**Puff-throated Babbler** *Pellorneum ruficeps*

In Corbett, we saw one of these ground-stalkers walking slowly through the leaf litter.

**Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler** *Pomatorhinus erythrogenys*

Like many of the scimitar-babblers, very temperamental. You just never know which side to these babblers you are going to run into on the day - the shy skulking ones that stay hidden within the dark shadows of the bamboo scrub, or the showy birds that simply hop around in the open in front of you, making all your previous struggles to see it seem a little futile! Thankfully we experienced the second type of babbler on this occasion at Sat Tal.

Just as the first of the mornings suns rays hit the trees in front of us, one of these underrated babblers emerged from the low scrub and sunned itself on a dead snag. A great opener for the day.

Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga albiventer*

We went after a particular bird at Sat Tal. A really cute little bird, that is a real looker despite 'just' being a little brown job!

Immaculate Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga immaculata*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. Until recently thought to be a Nepal endemic, before being discovered also in India. Once again we were privileged to get great views of this notorious skulker as it hopped out into some open streamside scrub in Kumeria. On another day a headline bird, although overshadowed a little by Ibisbill on that day!

NB. Also known as NEPAL WREN-BABBLER.

Black-chinned Babbler *Stachyris pyrrhops*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. A pair of these furtive babblers were found in a small mountain garden that we visited as we ascended towards Naini Tal, with another being glimpsed in the Sat Tal valley.

Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense*

We first caught sight of this fetching babbler, (that sports bright red spectacles), along the route to Bund Baretha.

Common Babbler *Turdoides caudata*

Recorded in Delhi, and a number of times in the Bharatpur area.

Striated Babbler *Turdoides earlei*

NEAR-ENDEMIC SPECIES. A key site for the species - Okhla barrage - again came up trumps when a whole noisy rabble of these large babblers were found in the reedbeds, along with their decidedly commoner cousin, the Common Babbler.

Large Gray Babbler *Turdoides malcolmi*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. A common and conspicuous babbler, especially in open agricultural areas, around Bharatpur (where they were frequently encountered).

Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striata*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. Comical parties of this extremely gregarious, common babbler were seen daily in the lowland savannas.

Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea*

A very colorful and completely unique babbler, that was much-talked about among the highlights at the tour end. We saw a number of these skulking 'PEKIN ROBINS' in a small mountain lodge garden near Corbett.

Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata*

A very cool, orange-breasted babbler that was, as ever, fairly common in the foothill forests of the Himalaya. Almost always one of the first birds to respond, and lead, the mobbing horde of passerines that came in, in hot pursuit of our owlet recording.

Whiskered Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*

Surprisingly seen in the Naini Tal area.

#### LONG-TAILED TITS: Aegithalidae

Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus*

An undeniably cute 'long-tailed tit', that is a most welcome common flocking species in the Himalayas. This was generally one of the most numerous species within these foothill bird 'waves'.

NB. Also known as RED-HEADED TIT.

#### CHICKADEES AND TITS: Paridae

Black-crested Tit *Periparus melanolophus*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. This cute, dumpy tit was first seen up at Vinayak, and later also seen again around Pangot.

NB. Also known as SPOT-WINGED TIT.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Singles or pairs were seen on four days on the Gangetic Plain.

**Green-backed Tit**

*Parus monticolus*

A regularly recorded flock species in the Himalayan bird waves around Sat Tal and Pangot.

**Black-lored Tit**

*Parus xanthogenys*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. This gorgeous black-and-yellow tit was a flock regular in the foothills of the Himalayas, being seen in Pangot, Bajun and Sat Tal. A few were also seen in passing flocks in the Kumeria area of Corbett.

**Yellow-browed Tit**

*Sylviparus modestus*

This non-descript and scarce montane tit was seen just once in the Himalayas.

**NUTHATCHES: Sittidae**

**Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch**

*Sitta castanea*

A superb male was first seen in the Sat Tal and Pangot areas of the foothills.

**White-tailed Nuthatch**

*Sitta himalayensis*

Fairly regularly seen in the feeding flocks, generally in the higher forests visited, in the foothills of the Himalaya. Often a vocal mobster when an owl recording is being used to stir up an attendant flock.

**Velvet-fronted Nuthatch**

*Sitta frontalis*

This subtly beautiful nuthatch was found a few times in some of the many passing bird waves in Kumeria.

**WALLCREEPER: Tichodromidae**

**Wallcreeper**

*Tichodroma muraria*

Seen a few times between Corbett and the Kumeria areas, where they creep along inside the riverbeds during the winter.

**CREEPERS: Certhiidae**

**Bar-tailed Treecreeper**

*Certhia himalayana*

This regular follower of bird parties, was seen appropriately within a few of the feeding flocks in the Himalayas.

NB. Also known as HIMALAYAN TREECREEPER.

**SUNBIRDS: Nectariniidae**

**Purple Sunbird**

*Cinnyris asiaticus*

The most commonly encountered sunbird on the tour, being regularly seen around Bharatpur.

**Green-tailed Sunbird**

*Aethopyga nipalensis*

Just a few were seen in the Pangot area.

**Black-throated Sunbird**

*Aethopyga saturata*

Just one briefly in Kumeria.

**Crimson Sunbird**

*Aethopyga siparaja*

A superb crimson male, and a few dowdy females, were frequently visiting the flowers of a small mountain lodge we visited en-route to Kumeria.

**FLOWERPECKERS: Dicaeidae**

**Fire-breasted Flowerpecker**

*Dicaeum ignipectum*

Just one found in the Mongoli valley, while we were looking for Striated Laughingthrush.

**WHITE-EYES: Zosteropidae**

**Oriental White-eye**

*Zosterops palpebrosus*

Commonly encountered in a number of areas.

**ORIOLES: Oriolidae**

**Black-hooded Oriole**

*Oriolus xanthornus*

A few of this black-and-gold birds were seen in Corbett NP.

**Maroon Oriole**

*Oriolus xanthornus*



A pair of these spectacular birds was seen in Corbett NP.

**SHRIKES: Laniidae**

Rufous-tailed Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*

2 were seen in the dry, desert-like rocky country beyond Bund Baretha.

NB. Also known as ISABELLINE SHRIKE.

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

Just three sightings of this wintering species, firstly near the temple at Bharatpur.

Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*

A striking NEAR-ENDEMIC species. We had three or four sightings in the Bharatpur area, and also had another 2 birds at Sultanpur Jheel.

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*

The commonest shrike in northern India, seen a number of times in the Bharatpur area, and also at Sultanpur.

Gray-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus*

One was found perched on some roadside wires near the mountain lodge at Pangot, a key site for this scarce shrike.

Southern Gray Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*

A few of these clean, white-breasted shrikes were seen in the dry, boulder country beyond Bund Baretha; with a few more being seen at Sultanpur Jheel, just outside Delhi.

**HELMETSHRIKES AND ALLIES: Prionopidae**

Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*

Recorded first in Bharatpur and again near Bund Baretha.

**DRONGOS: Dicuridae**

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

Another common species (especially on the Gangetic Plain), that was recorded many times throughout the tour.

Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

A few were seen in the Corbett area, with another single bird seen in the nursery at Bharatpur.

Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus*

Small numbers were recorded on both visits to the Pangot area.

Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus remifer*

This spectacular drongo, with prominent floppy crest and distinctively twisted rackets, was seen once in Corbett.

Hair-crested Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus*

This was seen just the once in the foothills near Kumeria.

**CROWS AND JAYS: Corvidae**

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Seen at a number of sites in the Himalayas - Pangot, Vinayak, Sat Tal and Bajun.

Black-headed Jay *Garrulus lanceolatus*

A really classic Himalayan jay, that was seen at Sat Tal, and surprisingly only a couple of times at Pangot.

Blue Magpie *Urocissa erythrorhyncha*

This huge blue-backed, orange-billed magpie is nothing short of spectacular, and understandably received a worthy mention among the trip highlights on our final evening.

NB. Also known as RED-BILLED BLUE MAGPIE.

Green Magpie *Cissa chinensis*

Seen once at Sat Tal.

Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*

A common bird around the Gangetic plain. A bird that hung around us, within feet of us and our lunch, eagerly awaiting any unwanted scraps, was particularly memorable among the many sightings in the Bharatpur area.

Gray Treepie

*Dendrocitta formosae*

Almost missed this common bird, eventually encountering one in the sat Tal Valley.

House Crow

*Corvus splendens*

India's commonest crow species, especially around Delhi where hundreds were seen in a day.

Large-billed Crow

*Corvus macrorhynchos*

Recorded in Bharatpur, and also the very different mountain form, *japonensis* (with distinctly raven-like appearance), was seen a number of times in the Himalayan foothills. A number of different races were involved although confusion still exists over the precise identification criteria and subsequently distributional range for these forms. Note that Clements does not split any of these currently, and fine distributional data for them is lacking due to the problems involved with 'racial' identification.

#### STARLINGS: Sturnidae

Bank Myna

*Acridotheres ginginianus*

This handsome myna is very common in northern India, and was recorded on most days (especially around habitations, and often in company with the next common species).

Common Myna

*Acridotheres tristis*

Very commonly recorded throughout the tour.

Asian Pied Starling

*Gracupica contra*

Fairly common throughout the plains, where it was seen around Bharatpur, Delhi, Sultanpur and on many roadside wires on various journeys across the plains.

Brahminy Starling

*Temenuchus pagodarum*

AN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT ENDEMIC. India has an abundance of stunning starlings, although for me this is the pick of the bunch with its rich, rosy pink underparts and glossy black crest. Thankfully it is also a fairly common bird, that we saw a number of times around Bharatpur, and also in Delhi on our first day.

Rosy Starling

*Pastor roseus*

Just recorded at the one site, on the one day only, by a large wetland beyond Bund Baretha. Judging from the volume of chattering starlings heard there, they appeared to be locally common there.

European Starling

*Sturnus vulgaris*

Just a couple of stray flocks seen.

#### OLD WORLD SPARROWS: Passeridae

House Sparrow

*Passer domesticus*

Very commonly recorded, being one of India's commonest bird species.

Spanish Sparrow

*Passer hispaniolensis*

Large roadside stands of tall tussock grass were a magnet for finches, buntings and sparrows during our day trips out of Bharatpur to the Bund Baretha area. Two of these flocks were seen to hold a number of Spanish Sparrows.

Russet Sparrow

*Passer rutilans*

A few were seen on several occasions around Pangot, and later also seen in the Mongoli area.

Chestnut-shouldered Petronia

*Petronia xanthocollis*

Recorded on a few occasions both in the Bharatpur area.

NB. Also known as YELLOW-THROATED SPARROW.

#### WEAVERS AND ALLIES: Ploceidae

Streaked Weaver

*Ploceus manyar*

We found several of these heavily-streaked weavers in the many flocks of weavers and finches feeding in the seeding grasses and reedbeds en route to Bharatpur.

Baya Weaver

*Ploceus philippinus*

A few birds seen at scattered localities.

#### WAXBILLS AND ALLIES: Estrildidae

Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava*  
This gorgeous bright red waxbill was seen well in the reedbeds of Okhla, and also at Bund Baretha.

White-throated Munia *Euodice malabarica*  
Recorded around Okhla and a number of times around Bharatpur.  
NB. Also known as INDIAN SILVERBILL.

Nutmeg Mannikin *Lonchura punctulata*  
Seen at a few scattered localities.  
NB. Also known as SCALY-BREASTED MUNIA.

#### FINCHES, SISKINS AND CROSSBILLS: Fringillidae

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*  
A lone bird was seen at Okhla on our first day.

Pink-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus rodochroa*  
A pair posed on some roadside wires in Pangot.

Yellow-breasted Greenfinch *Carduelis spinoides*  
A party of 6 birds was found in the Sat Tal valley, and another bird was seen close to Pangot.

NB. Also known as HIMALAYAN GREENFINCH.

Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*  
At the lodge at Pangot this scarce species in the Himalayas proved to be quite a surprise, especially considering the local race looks nothing like the ones in Europe!

#### BUNTINGS, SEEDEATERS AND ALLIES: Emberizidae

Crested Bunting *Melophus lathami*  
A single bird was found close to the reedbeds at Bund Baretha.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*  
A single bird was found at Pangot.

Chestnut-breasted Bunting *Emberiza stewarti*  
We tried hard to get this key bird in the Bund Baretha area, eventually finding a female bird that gave prolonged views feeding in some dry scrub near an abandoned maharajas palace.

NB. Also known as WHITE-CAPPED BUNTING.

House Bunting *Emberiza striolata*  
We tried several times, (and failed), to find this species in the dry country close to Bund Baretha. So we were very relieved to find up to 3 separate birds at Bayena a few days later that gave great views as they fed low on the cliffs.

Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*  
This attractive, and under-appreciated, bunting was seen a few times feeding in the tall stands of dry grass in the agricultural areas en-route to Bund Baretha. Another male was also found at Sultanpur Jheel.

### MAMMAL LIST

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta*  
Commonly recorded throughout the tour, including within Delhi itself.

Hanuman Langur *Semnopithecus entellus*  
This attractive, and sacred monkey, is fairly common in northern India, especially around Corbett where their distinctive guttural alarm calls are often a good first clue to the presence of a tiger in the area.

Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*  
Although Corbett is a good place to see Elephants they are not to be expected at this time of year, so we were quite surprised to see many of these this amazing and huge animals in the park during our stay.

Sambar Deer *Cervus unicolor*

India's largest deer species. These majestic deer were fairly common within Corbett, although we also picked up a few within Keoladeo Ghana.

**Indian Muntjac**

*Muntiacus muntjac*

Also known as 'Barking Deer' due to their haunting, distinctly dog-like barks that are often heard given as an alarm call. We saw this small rusty deer a few times in the Corbett area.

**Spotted Deer**

*Axis axis*

Also known as 'Chital'. Another deer species that is regular 'tiger fodder', being a common prey species for India's most awesome predator. A few were seen within Keoladeo Ghana and at Corbett.

**Goral**

*Naemorhedus goral*

Found at Pangot while scanning for Cheer Pheasant. It's a cool mountain goat though, despite us not locating the CP on that occasion.

**Nilgai**

*Boselaphus tragocamelus*

Also known as 'Blue Bull'. This large antelope was seen a few times in the Bharatpur area, and were especially common around the edge of the jheel at Sultanpur.

**Wild Boar**

*Sus scrofa*

A few small groups were seen trundling along the tracks in Corbett.

**Golden Jackal**

*Canis aureus*

A few jackals were seen around Corbett, and Bharatpur where one animal even sat openly in the middle of the road, while we snapped away.

**Tiger**

*Panthera tigris*

The undisputed HIGHLIGHT OF THE TRIP was being able to watch this impressive beast in Corbett, where they are seldom seen, we knew one was laying deep in the veg, and so we took a spot that offered us a view across a river and hoped. After 10 or so minutes we got lucky when the cat got up and strolled across the river bed!

**Jungle Cat**

*Felis chaus*

A pair of these small cats was seen as we crossed the Gangetic plain en route to the Himalayas.

**Smooth-coated Otter**

*Lutrogale perspicillata*

At least three of the beautiful animals cavorted in the water at Corbett, and gave us a prolonged showing. Stunning.

**Yellow-throated Marten**

*Martes flavigula*

Our day in the bird-rich valley of Sat Tal produced two sightings of these handsome martens, that included one that walked right across a low wall just below eye-level in front of us.

**Indian Grey Mongoose**

*Herpestes edwardsii*

A couple were seen, one on the way to Bharatpur from Delhi (by a small wetland); and another was seen on one of the day trips out from Bharatpur.

**Northern Palm Squirrel**

*Fanambulus palmarum*

This small chipmunk-like squirrel was a common sight and sound around Bharatpur, and was also even seen within Delhi.

**Indian Flying Fox**

*Pteropus giganteus*

India's largest bat species. A large and noisy colony of these frugivorous bats was visited on the way to Bund Baretha. Others were seen flying over our camp fire at dusk at the Chambal Safari Lodge.

**Gangetic River Dolphin**

*Platanista gangetica gangetica*

An amazing and scarce mammal. As is typical with these dark-bodied animals in murky water, all you get to see is the briefest of glimpses as they break the surface when breathing. While it is never a stunning view, it is a saddening privilege to know that you may be one of the last few people to see these amazing blind freshwater cetaceans before they go extinct.

## OTHERS

**Gharial**

*Gavialis gangeticus*

These long-snouted crocodiles were numerous along the Chambal. A really odd and spectacular reptile that was certainly a highlight of our short safari there.

**Mugger Crocodile**

*Crocodilus palustris*

One of these huge beasts was seen lurking on a muddy bar on a large lake beyond Bund Baretha during one of our Bharatpur day trips. A further few were also seen along the Chambal, where there were numbers were far outweighed by the smaller, long-beaked Gharials.

**Flap Shell Turtle**

*Lissemys punctata*

A few were seen along the Chambal River.

**Bengal Monitor**

*Varanus bengalensis*

Just the one seen at Bharatpur was a treat.

**Sand Boa**

*Eryx johni*

Just the one seen at Bharatpur.

**Mahseer**

*Barbus tor*

One of the participants on this tour was an Ichthyologist (fish scientist) and he got me a very cool lifer. After hearing all about the scarcity and biology of this fish (as well as his desire to see one), we put in a little effort t Corbet and found a few very large individuals in the clear blue waters. Lifer!



## **BIRD LIST**

Taxonomy and nomenclature follow: **Clements, James F. 2000. *Birds of the World: A Checklist*. Fifth Edition. Vista, CA: Ibis Publishing Co.** Includes recent updates.

All the birds on this list were seen by at least one person in the group other than the leader, except those marked with an 'LO' = leader only or 'HO' = heard only. 534 bird species were recorded on the tour.