

## Goa - November 20<sup>th</sup> to December 4<sup>th</sup> 2007

I don't know how we arranged the trip but somewhere during the summer months of 2007 we did? Why I agreed to go to Goa I couldn't answer either but now that it's over I'm just so glad that I did as it has been the best experience of my short traveling life. Craig, my traveling companion had wanted to go for many years but being a bit of a boring stick in mud type manic patch watcher, the whole idea of going to India just didn't appeal to me. The birding was top notch but the best part of the experience for me was the fantastic attitude of the local people, the wonderful food and the relaxed attitude that prevails in Goa. So different to the cut and thrust life we live in the western world. I loved every minute other than the arduous plane journey and the Hassel of the airport. For a semi serious birder as I am its funny to think the birds were only a part of the trip rather than the main thing. Anyway - here goes ... I will do my best to explain the unexplainable. Quite how you can put into words what we've just experienced is anyone's guess? I will give a go anyway. There is a list of the birds we saw at the end - it might be just as well to skip most of the tripe I'm probably going to write as my trip reports generally mirror meeting me in person - lots of meaningless waffle and stupidity. If you like that sort of thing then read on - if not jump about 30 pages forwards it'll save you about an hour of torture and boredom.

For those of you who haven't yet been to Goa here are a few things that may be of use 'if you fancy trying it? For those of you who know the ropes - skip this bit.

**Visa:** A 6 month tourist visa can be obtained from the High Commission of India offices located in London, Birmingham and Edinburgh. They cost 30 pounds if you turn up in person and can be available on the day (though they don't guarantee this) or 50 pounds if you use one of the many agencies which can be found on their website. If you use the postal route make sure you allow at least a month for turn around - mine took about 3 weeks. Details are available on their website. Craig went and got his in person from London and it was more hassle than the extra 20 quid was worth in my opinion. You need to fill in the form which you can download off the website and provide 2 passport sized photographs and postal visas must be sent in 2 Royal Mail special delivery envelopes (inc the SAE) which adds a few quid to the cost. Please note that the procedure has been changed since August 2007 so check up on the new way of getting a visa if your familiar with the old system of getting one a year or two ago.

They can be contacted on: [www.hcilondon.net](http://www.hcilondon.net)

**Getting around:** I read an awful lot of trip reports before I left, one of which said - 'do not hire a car - you WILL have a crash!' After going I can see what he meant - its chaos on the roads over there. It's best to hire a taxi as they are cheap and easily available. You could probably shop around and get a taxi for a whole day for around a ten to twelve quid which is okay to visit most of the sites but if you want to see some of the specialised stuff (Owls, Nightjars, Sparrow Larks etc) then you will need a guide. This is a little more expensive but still not too bad. We had a cheap taxi driver for most of the trip then paid a guide for a few sessions towards the end to find a few skulkers such as Indian Pitta and Brown Wood Owl plus successful sites for missable things like Pallid Harrier, Yellow-wattled Lapwing or hard

to find areas such as the Sparrow Lark site at Dona Paula or Saligao Zor etc. Our cheap taxi driver was a bloke called Tony (Anthony) who we met on our second day and made friends with. A more lovely man it would be hard to find. He was also extremely conscientious about being on time, often showing up half an hour early even during our first light starts. It's obviously extremely important to get an honest and reliable taxi driver and you just can't get a better one than Tony. Tony however isn't a birder but knows the roads extremely well so getting to any site will not be a problem. He does however have a fantastic knack of spotting birds even if he isn't sure what they are. He got me on quite a few birds that I would otherwise have walked straight past. He isn't online but he can be reached by phone on the following numbers:

Tony mobile: 9881695894

Tony home: 9822176454

He is willing to pick up from Diabolim airport which may be useful if you are making your own arrangements for flying out?

The other taxi driver we used was Santosh. Santosh is a fantastic bloke who has all the good birds staked out. He is slightly more expensive than Tony but still very affordable. It's best to contact Santosh by phone. His phone number is 9881180424. You won't find a better guide than Santosh so snap him up if he is available. Another driver we met who had a good reputation was Mahesh. We didn't use him ourselves but he would appear to know where all the birds were. His phone number is 982248558. (+91 for outside calls) He is online and can be contacted on [maheshgoadriver@yahoo.co](mailto:maheshgoadriver@yahoo.co)

You cannot walk 100 meters without a cab pulling up and shouting 'Taxi'. If you do take a taxi always agree a price prior to getting in it.

**Money:** I took English money and some Dollars that I had. The going rate at the time was 80 rupees to the pound and about 38 Rs to the dollar. Do not change your money in your hotel but try some of the money changers you see in the streets as they offer a much better rate. We saved about 2000+ Rs between us by using this method. If you are staying at the Marinha Dourada (as we did) then about 300 yards to your right from the hotel entrance is the best place to change your money. The blokes name is Vin and he is open between 09.00 until midnight Monday to Saturday. He also has a couple of phone booths where you can ring home if you need to for about a quid. Vins a lovely bloke too and is very helpful if you need any advice.

**Dogs:** There are lots of semi feral dogs. Don't worry they are as passive as the local people. As a person who is a bit wary of dogs this came as a huge relief. After the horror stories of dogs in Turkey etc this info might be of use to the more dog cautious birder.

**Beggars:** Always a tricky one this? I was told by the locals if you feel the need to give a little money to the locals then give them a small note - perhaps 20 Rs or so. One good thing about Goa is that the government sells the poor 5Kg of rice for just a few rupees so no one in Goa needs to go hungry. There are coconuts everywhere so these can be used by the

locals in an emergency. I was told to buy them some food if they asked for money just in case they are alcoholics and spend the money on booze.

**Crime:** Goa would appear to be fairly safe during daylight hours though we were warned to be slightly more careful at night by the locals even though the risk was infinitesimally small of getting into trouble. I was offered drugs on one occasion so obviously where there are drugs there is normally the risk of robbery or worse if you are not careful.

**Insects:** Mosquitoes were remarkably lacking which was a bonus. We did use 100% and 55% deet insect repellent as a few mosi's started to show up in the evening but they were not too much of a problem in November/December.

**Electric:** To charge up camera batteries etc you will need a three pin Indian adaptor. These can be purchased online from Roaming Fox Travel Accessories. We also bought our 100% and 55% deet from them. They sell everything else you will need for a birding trip too and turn orders around very quickly. To contact them: phone 0871 918 2838 or online at [www.roamingfox.co.uk](http://www.roamingfox.co.uk)

**Bird Books:** We took two fields guides 'A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent' by Kazmierczak and van Perlo plus 'A pocket guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent' by Grimmet, Inskipp and Inskipp. Although both books were useful neither was ideal. Covering well over a 1000 species in such a small guide meant there were lots of birds covered that we had no chance of seeing in Goa making the birds we were trying to find within the pages hard to locate. The Kazmeirczak book is easier to get around having a useful inside cover which shows a single bird from each family and the plate numbers where they can be found but the plates lack certain species in flight which is unsurprising in such a small book when you think about it. The Grimmet book is much better in this regard but the plates are too cluttered and the distribution maps too hard to locate in my opinion. Some of the birders were using the 'Helm guide to the Birds of Southern India' which is a far better book if you only want a book just for Goa rather than the whole subcontinent. The Helm guide is the one I would go for if I had my time again.

**Accommodation:** There are hotels all over the place in Goa but it's probably best to stay either in Arpora, Baga or somewhere in that general region. We stayed at the Marinha Dourada in Arpora which was ideal as there are lots of birding spots within walking distance or from the hotel grounds. The hotel overlooks Baga hill and Arpora wood and is a fantastic spot for raptor watching or sifting through the myriads of hirundines and swifts that wheel about over the salt pans in the hotel grounds. Lots of Herons, Bee-eaters, Kingfishers and passerines can be seen there too. The rooms are clean and spacious with air con and en suite facilities. A fridge is kept stocked with water, fizzy drink and beer and if you get hungry then room service will bring you grub as you need it. Arpora wood is a 15 minute walk away and Baga hill about 5 minutes walk. A five minute taxi ride away is Baga which is another good place to stay. The Beira Mar Hotel overlooks a marsh which provides brilliant birding and on the other side of the town are Baga fields which again are stuffed with birds. The food at both hotels is very good as is the atmosphere. Marinha Dourada is a 3 star and the Beira Mar a 2 star accommodation. There are taxis waiting outside both hotels.

**Food:** The food was fantastic everywhere we went. We eat at the *Marinha Dourada*, *Beira Mar*, *East Meets West* (across the road from the *Beira Mar*) and *All Spice* which is 5 - 6 minutes walk from the *Marinha Dourada*. Turn right out of the main gate of the hotel go to the end of the road and turn right at the T-junction. *All Spice* is about 500 yards along the road on your left. A curry and a starter plus a nan and popadoms cost about a fiver. We also started eating breakfast at *All Spice* which is served from about 08.00 until midday. You can stuff yourself for about three - four quid. I wouldn't bother even going anywhere else. If you're birding - a decent breakfast at about ten o'clock allows a nice early morning birding session and sets you up until after dark for your main meal. During the middle part of the day after a relaxing breakfast session, pick a shady spot and search through the raptors soaring about before making up your mind where to try in the evening - it's such a chilled out way of birding. You could go mad and knock yourself out birding during the middle part of the day but the birding is far harder then and you will probably only get about 5 extra species for your effort if you are lucky. By standing and scanning the skies from the shade of the hotel or the roadside palm trees we picked up some good birds which came to us (rather than us charging about in 80% humidity and stifling heat looking for them) such as Tawny Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Black Eagle, 5 Amur Falcon, Plain Martin and a local rarity in the shape of a Pacific Swift. By 3.00pm we were ready for attacking the woods or the marsh at a time when it was starting to cool down and the birds were getting active again.

**Sites Visited:** we visited most of the sites on the *Goan* bird circuit. One place we didn't go was the reserve at *Bondla* which is a fantastic site by all accounts. It was an hour's drive from our hotel and to be honest we just couldn't be bothered to go. It's a good place for *Malabar Trogon* and *Forest Wagtail* amongst a host of other *Goan* goodies. The sites we did go to were:

**Arpora Wood:** To get into the wood get a taxi to the *Cabana* nightclub and start birding as soon as you get off the main road. There is a path which takes you through a walled off area (past the *Cabana* Nightclub) and into the bushy/wooded area. Off the main path to the right there are a couple of paths which drop down the valley into an open area which need exploring. It's an easy place to bird and is full of birds. You can walk there (allow 15 mins) from the *Marinha Dourada*. Turn right as you leave the hotel then take the left at the main road. About a mile along the road there is a sharp bend to the left with an obvious opening on your right with a *Club Cabana* sign and this is the way into *Arpora*.

**Baga:** The 3 main sites for birds in the *Baga* area are the fields, the Hill and the *Beira Mar* Hotel. To access the **Baga Fields** cross the new bridge over the river and the fields are immediately on your left. About 500 meters from the bridge there is a small sand pathway out in the scrub opposite a small fenced off field. You can walk all the way to the *Beira Mar* from there but there are many routes you can take either through the grass or towards the bushes and farmed fields. Once again it's stuffed with birds out there - *Pipits*, *Starlings*, *Pintail Snipe* and *Buttonquail* are your main target though there are lots of *Munia*, *Bee-eaters*, *Hoopoe*, *Cisticola* and other *Warblers* etc to keep your interest. **Baga Hill** is back across the river and runs parallel to it right down to the coast and back to *Arpora* in the

opposite direction. There are various paths up into the Hill, the best one is a five minute walk from the Marinha Dourada. Cross the small river bridge just west (1 minute) as you come left out of the Marinha Dourada entrance and take the third road on your right just past two small shop/stalls on your right. You will know this is the right road as there are a few roads shooting off to the right when you get there and it is the widest of the 3 roads too - you could drive up the track quite easily. Check all the paths, then when you get to the top, cross through the hole in the wall on your left and you will find a large opening where you can see into the valley below and right around to the coast. The paths go in various directions from here but I'm told you can follow the path on the top right down to the coast. Target species here include Jerdons Leafbird (easy), Blue-faced Malkoha and Grey-headed Bulbul - 3 species I couldn't find anywhere else during our trip. It's also packed with small energetic flocks of Tawny-bellied Babblers, another specie we couldn't find until we tried the hill. There was a White-eyed Buzzard hanging around here which was seen by two separate observers but unfortunately I couldn't relocate the little blighter! **The Beira Mar Hotel** can be found by driving down the main road into Baga (keep on the left and the first fork in the road) and the entrance is just past the taxi rank on your left. It's a bit of a maze when you get in there but ask the car park attendant where to go when you get in and he will direct you (after saluting you - as he did on the 15 separate occasions we parked there!) into the outside bar/restaurant which backs onto the marsh. The target species here are Cinnamon Bittern, Painted Snipe, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Slaty-breasted Rail, Clamorous Reed Warbler (right underneath the railings is the best spot for these), Paddyfield Warbler, Bluethroat etc. Stand on the edge of the swimming pool and check the small shallow pools at dusk and the dead scrub in the late afternoon. There is a resident Lesser Spotted Eagle sitting in a tree 50 meters off here plus all the other stuff sits around on the wires whilst the marsh is full of waders, Raptors etc. A couple of hours in the evening until you clear up should suffice. You can get a drink here and the foods quite good (after 7.00pm) too. As it get dark a platoon of Night Heron sized Fruit bats make their way over towards the hotel - the only thing missing is the 'Flight of the Valkeries' music - its very impressive the first time you see these enormous beasts.

**Backwoods:** Backwoods is an experience all of its own and the holiday wouldn't have been the same without it. We went for 2 nights (3 days) and enjoyed every minute. We paid 5500 Rs, which is quite expensive by normal Goan standards but for this you get picked up from your hotel, 3 decent meals and drink a day and a fantastic guide without whom you would miss most of the birds on offer. The tents have a built in toilet and shower and now have an electric source too. The beds don't look much but they are exceptionally comfortable. You may want to ask for an extra blanket as it gets cold at night in the hills even in India and you will want a Jumper/thin coat for sitting about in the eating/drinking area as you can easily sit up quite late as the bar is open until 12.00. A torch is useful too. We took some Mosquito rings for the tent though I don't know whether we needed them or not? We used them anyway just in case - there are few things worse than a tent with a few mosquito's in it in my opinion. You will get many species at Backwoods you won't get anywhere else but that's not the best reason to go in my opinion.

To contact go to: [www.backwoodsbirding.com](http://www.backwoodsbirding.com) 1 - 4 night stays can be arranged.

**Carambolim:** All the hotel taxi drivers know the way to Carambolim so don't worry about getting there or hiring a guide. It's another essential place to visit - try and get there for first light which was about 06.30 in November/December. When you get there park by the lake just past the railway crossing which is festooned with Gallinules, both Jacanas, Herons etc. Cotton Pygmy Geese are easy here so stay here until you find a few. There are wooded and marshy areas here and all need to be checked out to get the best out of a morning/evening session here. The star turns here are the Brown Hawk Owl (in the wood), Jungle Owlet, Malabar Pied Hornbill etc with the possibility later on in the year of seeing Comb Duck and Spot-billed Duck. Check the marsh on the opposite side of the road as we found a Watercock, 2 Painted Snipe and a large group of Asian Openbill Storks there. You may find a young lad there who is a sort of warden for the area. Ask him to show you where the Owls are - he is most helpful. His name is Suresh and he stayed with us for about an hour showing us the Brown Hawk Owl, 2 Roosting Spotted Owlets and a Pied Hornbill which I wouldn't have seen even though it flew right over my head! The Jungle Owlets eluded us on that day but I think we were a bit unlucky to miss them? Bung him a bit of money if you can.

**Morjim Beach:** You won't need a guide for Morjim - just hire any old taxi (it's about half an hour from Arpora) and park as close to the estuary as you can. There are some shady pine trees on your left as you first see the beach so stop there and walk out to where the Gulls are and have fun fun fun!! We were told not to go too early but arriving at first light a huge movement of passerines and hirundines was happening intermingled with many hundreds of Small Pratincoles. Amongst the Gulls you should find the daddy of all Larids - the Great Black-headed Gull, and very impressive they are too even in winter plumage. You will see Slender Billed, Yellow-legged (*barabensis*), Heuglins Gulls plus Caspian, Lesser Crested and Gull-billed Terns here amongst the 100's of Brown-headed Gulls. We missed out on Greater Crested Tern here but they do occur. Both Sand Plovers species and Kentish Plover will be seen here plus there are Buttonquails in the grass and lots of passerines in the bushes and on the fences along the roadside. Bay-backed Shrike can be found amongst the palm trees apparently and we found a nice Grey-necked Bunting sitting on a fence near to where our taxi was parked. A few Dolphins were swimming about offshore on our third visit.

**Maem Lake:** another good spot. It's probably best to get a guide for here but it's not essential. It's about a 40 minute drive from Arpora and the hit list includes Brown Fish Owl, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Emerald Dove and if you are lucky Blue-bearded Bee-eater which were heard calling by Santosh when we were there but couldn't be seen unfortunately. Crimson Sunbird can be found near the car park and another group found a real rarity the day after our visit - an Ultramarine Flycatcher. Blue-eared Kingfishers occurs here too and there are a pair of nesting Crested Hawk-eagles in the wood. Listen out for their Curlew like call or just keep an eye out for the nest high up on the hill which the birds visit from time to time. We saw Indian Scimitar Babbler, 2 Grey Nightjar and 2 Yellow-crowned Woodpecker here. It also turned up only our second sighting of Crested Treeswifts too so keep your eyes peeled for those if you still haven't seen many. There are lots of birds around the lakes bushes and trees though the lake itself was virtually devoid of life - just the odd Cormorant and Kingfisher on view while we were there.

**Dona Paula:** You will need a guide for this spot - not to show you the birds but purely just to find the place. It's famous for its Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks but it's good for Tawny Pipit, Oriental Skylark and Short-toed Lark too. We also had bonus Pied Cuckoo, Booted Warbler, Grey-necked Bunting and a pair of Spotted Owlets during our short visit.

**Saligao Zor:** The spot for Brown Wood Owl. The Zor (a small stream where the locals do their washing) is an extremely difficult place to find so it's essential to hire a guide not only to find the spot but also to find the Owls when you get there! Without Santosh we wouldn't have stood a chance of finding the birds. With our other taxi driver it took us a couple of hours of asking around and when we did eventually find the area we were met with a forest full of ten zillion trees - any one of which could have held the Owls. Santosh eventually located the birds after about 10 minutes on our second visit!! There is more than one Zor in Saligoa so be careful if you decide to do what we did. The Owls aside, the wood holds many birds. We saw 2 nice Blue-naped Monarchs here and could hear a few Grey-headed Bulbuls. It's a nice spot anyway and well worth a visit. The Owls are weird looking things - extraterrestrials with feathers! 'Well worth the entrance fee' though as my old mate Dave Gilbert used to say.

**Divar Island:** A Goan version of the Isle of Sheppy (in Kent if you know the spot?) which is packed with birds such as Harriers, Pipits, Larks and there are many passerines in the low scrub too. We went for the Pallid Harriers (and saw quite a few) but we also saw Brown Shrike and Black-shouldered Kite too. Oriental Skylark is easy here if you haven't seen them anywhere else. We had to catch a ferry across the river to get there (very expensive it was too ... um er ... 10 Rupees! Have a whip round if you're short of cash.) but I wasn't sure if I could find the spot again? Santosh took us on that day though you may be able to get a Joe soap taxi driver who knows how to get there if you want to save money? On getting off the ferry we drove for about a mile and stopped if that's any help? The Pallids were easy to find in the late afternoon and the males are vastly impressive if like me you've not seen them before. There were Sykes Warbler (*H.rama*) seen here too by another group.

**Zuari River:** Another essential trip. We arranged the mini adventure with Santosh and the boat trip cost 1000 Rs each. We were the only birders on the boat which other than Santosh held another guide and a boat driver and no one else. Take your telescope if you go as the boat is very stable and a scope is useful for some of the smaller wading birds on the muddy river margins. We wanted to see Collared and Black-capped Kingfisher, Slaty-breasted Rail and Great Crested Tern and as it happened we got the set! Bonus birds like Spoonbill, Darter, Black-headed Ibis, Clamorous Reed Warbler and our best views of Striated Heron were had here too. It was absolutely brilliant - I could hardly believe we saw 8 Collared Kingfishers ... yes 8 - and really close too. The 30 Great Crested Terns sitting on top of poles 20 meters from the boat weren't too shabby either!

**Other sites:** The marsh and paddies at Santa Cruz were visited once. The fields were packed with migrant waders and are well worth a visit. We went with Santosh who normally finds a couple of places to go on the way or way back from a site where there are a few birds such as **Fort Aguada** and **Tikkanem**. Another fantastic place to visit is the marsh at **Siolim**. A short section of road dissects two huge areas of open wet farm fields which were

so packed with birds, nothing I can write can get even close to describing. An evening or a morning session is best of course and a scope will be needed to get on some of the birds. 1 - 2000 Small Pratincoles, 40+ Asian Openbills, lots of Black-winged Stilts and other waders, Wagtails, 5 species of Kingfisher, 1000+ Egrets and Herons, 3 Bee-eater species etc will keep you occupied for an hour or three. We also saw a perched female Amur Falcon here plus a big flock of Black-headed Ibis. We learned from a Dutch birder (Benni van der Hill\*) that this is the spot where the Grey-headed Lapwings have been seen for the past couple of winters though they were not seen here during our few visits.

\*bad joke

Right now that bits over I can get on with the day to day nonsense.

**Day 1:** Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2007

Our flight was due to leave from Gatwick airport at 02.10 in the morning. After picking up Craig in the evening we arrived at the airport at 10.45. I was relieved to find Gatwick virtually deserted by comparison to my previous visits, so after booking in we settled in and waited for the boarding call. Eventually we got onto the plane and slightly later than planned the plane took off from old blighty at 02.30am. The pilot announced the route we were to take, flying over Germany, Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Syria, Saudi Arabia and the Oman before flying the thousand miles or so across the Arabian Sea to the west coast of India which sounded pretty good to me at the time but was of course a total bore in reality. The flight was scheduled to take 9 hours and 10 minutes. It seemed like about 9 days to me at the time. After a couple of hours or so it started to get light so at least it was worth looking out of the window. The in flight entertainment was down - though I doubt if this was too much of a loss after seeing the dross they showed on the return flight on the way home and the grub they fed us was suitably repulsive. Other than a 1 inch square bit of Carrot Cake all the other stuff was dreadful - even the fruit juice tasted weird. I wrote in my notepad 'vile juice' which in my opinion was about right. If your thinking about marketing a new fruit based drink then I think this wouldn't be the best of names for such a product? We flew with Thompson's and unlike my only other long haul flight with BA drinks had to be paid for on the flight. Thanks to Thompson for taking the opportunity to rip off all their captive customers in want of a cool drink. The 2 pairs of people either side of us paid 12 and 14 quid respectively for a drink each - British Airways would have done this for free. One other bad thing was that the two people sitting directly in front of us were the two illest people I've ever had the misfortune to encounter outside of an old peoples hospice in a leper colony during a period of plague. They were sneezing and coughing almost constantly and I was paranoid about catching their lurgy and it ruining my holiday. At one point without raising his hand to his nose the ill bloke sneezed whilst in a semi standing position right over his seated ill female traveling companion. Absolutely disgusting! Anyway - after what seemed like an age we arrived in Goa and chaos ensued. The plane landed (we'd already seen Black Kite, Brahminy Kite, House Crows, Egrets etc whilst airborne) then we got stuck on the runway as another plane was towed across right in front of us! You wouldn't get that at Gatwick eh? I had my bins to hand but unfortunately they were steamed up after a good

freezing in the plane. It was quite late in the afternoon but still extremely hot and it took about 5 frustrating minutes to stop them misting up. I was already moaning my head off and we'd only just arrived. There were lots of Little Swifts overhead (a new bird for me ... yawn) which kept me amused until we could get into the terminal.

By the time we had gone through customs and picked up our luggage it was very nearly dark. After wrestling with the awaiting army of Indian porters intent on getting a tip for helping you the four yards to the coach with your baggage (the only tip they got from me was 'leave my luggage alone') the Thompson rep showed us to our awaiting coach and in a jiffy we were off on the hour and a quarter drive through mayhemsville to our hotel in Arpora. We had a vantage point right at the front of the coach and laughed all the way through our trip at the shenanigans that were going on amongst the nighttime traffic. Undertaking and overtaking were all on the driving agenda. It's customary in India to constantly honk your horn every two seconds. My personal favourite was triple lane overtaking on a one lane road, uphill on a blind bend in darkness where some of the cars and motorbikes were not even using headlights. The general rule of thumb is even if you can go one quarter of a mile an hour faster than the car you trying to overtake then its perfectly acceptable to give it a try whatever is going on in the packed oncoming traffic lane. Where our underpowered coach struggled to climb uphill or had to stop, another lane of traffic would stream past on the inside mounting the roadside verge as it went. Many of the motorbikes had 3 people on them and we marveled at the ability of various women riding sidesaddle on the back of the constantly weaving and hard breaking motorbikes without even holding on. They would get a job in a circus as a balancing act if they were in England.

We arrived at the hotel in one piece - booked in and were shown to our rooms. The room was nice - quite spacious, clean and tidy. We turned the air con on and started the overhead fan up as it was really hot and humid three floors up where we were. I had planned the next day in great detail; the plan was to walk to Arpora Wood for a morning session then do a bit of birding round the hotel before hitting Baga/Beira Mar in the evening. I had even walked the area in cyber fashion on Google earth about 25 times so I knew exactly where to go as I had found a written map some bloke had put on a trip report on the internet and had mentally walked his route online sitting in my living room in England. We read through a few trip reports to whet the appetite in our room before trying to get a bit of kip before first light. Even though I'd been up all night I still couldn't get to sleep properly, probably more down to excitement than anything.

**Day 2: Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2007 - Arpora/Hotel.**

After a night of broken sleep I eventually got up about 04.00am and trying not to wake Craig, started getting my stuff together for the walk up to Arpora Forest. I had a few walks around the hotel grounds in pitch darkness where I could hear a few birds calling like Green Sandpiper, Greenshank and what I thought might have been a Marsh Sandpiper? I felt awful - really really grotty, far worse than I've ever felt after a flight but the adrenalin of a first day in a new country got me through. As dawn started to break through a few Night Herons started to fly through the hotel grounds to roost in nearby palm trees then a few Cattle, Intermediate Egrets and a Western Reef Egret were spotted as it started getting lighter. After getting our stuff together we started off on the walk towards Arpora seeing White-browed Wagtails, White-breasted Kingfisher whilst lots of

Little Swifts and Red-rumped Swallows flew around overhead. The fields along the roadside held lots of Herons, Red-wattled Lapwings, a White-breasted Waterhen etc whilst Black Drongos and Green Bee-eaters perched on the wires along the road. Nearer to the wood we started hearing Greenish and Green Warblers. Most of them were Green Warblers though there were quite a few Greenish amongst them. We ended up just standing around at the entrance to Arpora woods where there was an open area full of birds. Blyth's Reed Warbler, Asian Koel, Golden Oriole etc were seen here and there were Red-whiskered Bulbuls all over the place as the occasional Sunbird and Flowerpecker zipped about overhead. Further along we came across many more Little Green Bee-eaters, 2 Large Cuckooshrike, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, White-bellied and Black Drongo showed whilst a party of Langur Monkeys made their way through the trees overhead. An enormous butterfly flew into view at one point with bright yellow hindwings - surely a Birdwing of some description - fantastic. Other things seen during the next 2 hours included Spotted Dove, White-browed Bulbul, Puff-throated Babbler, Long-tailed Shrike, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, White-rumped Munia, Common Tailorbird, Grey-breasted Prinea, Oriental Magpie Robin, Ashy Woodswallow, Purple Sunbirds whilst the only Drongo Cuckoo and Malabar Woodshrike of the whole trip gave good views. The sky was full of raptors and hirundines - an obvious Steppe Buzzard flew around amongst the Black Kites etc - just so much going on and far too hectic to keep up with for a first full session. On the walk back to the hotel in blazing energy sapping sunshine we saw our first White-bellied Sea Eagle - huge silver grey and white majestic raptors - absolutely magnificent. On getting back to the hotel it was apparent all was not well with us. We were just so shattered - slightly confused (nothing unusual for me but Craig felt much the same) with a blinding headache. I would assume we were suffering a bit of jetlag? I was obviously dehydrated and very tired after two nights with very little kip but I've been dehydrated and tired before but this was very different. We mulled around the hotel grounds all day cancelling the planned trip to Baga in the afternoon which was about all we could manage. Raptor watching turned up a group of 4 Amur Falcon, a Crested Hawk-eagle plus a few Booted Eagle, lots of Brahminy Kites and both *govinda* and *lineatus* (Black-eared) Black Kites. After dark we went to the hotel restaurant eating a delicious mutton biryani with a few other bits. I even had soup as a starter as I was trying to get as much fluid into my drained body as I could manage - I haven't eaten soup in years. The agony continued overnight - I still felt dreadful.

**Day 3:** Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007 - Arpora, Hotel, Baga fields and Beira Mar.

I was up at 03.00 feeling yuk!! Double Yuk perhaps? I had arranged a taxi with the hotel at 06.00 but for whatever reason it didn't turn up? I did notice during my stay that even if some of the Goans didn't understand what you were saying then they would just say 'yes' giving you the impression they had understood every word. Perhaps this is why our cab didn't turn up? We ended up walking back to Arpora Wood, arriving about half hour after daybreak at 7.00am. Many of the birds we had seen the day prior were seen again along with a magnificent Rufous Treepie, Indian Rollers, Coppersmith Barbet, Black-hooded Oriole, Common Cuckoo, Red Avadavat, Pied Flycatcher-shrike and the first Hoopoe and Jungle Babblers of the trip. The Black-hooded Orioles were just mind blowing - a staggering florescent yellow thing with a black head and bright red bill. Birds just don't come any better. We saw the White-bellied Sea Eagles again - they have a nest somewhere in the

wood and we would go on to see them every day either in the wood or flying around from the hotel. By about ten it was getting far too hot to be walking around so we went back to the main road intending to walk back to the hotel if a taxi didn't try and pick us up along the way. After less than one minute came the cry - TAXI - and it was Tony who went on to become a mate of ours for the next two weeks. We jumped in and told him we needed a reliable taxi driver - explaining what had happened earlier that same morning with the taxi not turning up. We agreed for him to pick us up at 06.00 the next morning to take us to Morjim beach so after he dropped us off at the Marinha Dourada we spent the intervening time raptor watching from the hotel grounds - picking a shady spot down below our room overlooking a large salt pan with Baga Hill in front of us and Arpora Hill to our left. We ordered a bit of room service food which we eat outside as we lounged about looking at a hundred plus soaring birds of prey. Half a dozen Oriental Honey Buzzards, 3 Osprey, 1 Tawny Eagle, 1 Greater Spotted Eagle, 2 White-bellied Sea Eagle, a few Shikra, another Amur Falcon, Asian Palm Swift, Alpine Swift, Indian Swiftlet, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters and the like were added to the ever growing list of birds we were seeing.

In the afternoon we used one of taxis hanging about outside the hotel and we went off to Baga Fields with the intention of going to the Beira Mar Hotel for the last hour or so of daylight. On arrival we pulled up next to the path out into the fields behind another birding taxi to be told the fields were far too wet to go out there which was a bit of a blow. We stood around seeing Indian Roller, Streak-throated Swallow, Richards Pipit, 2 Alexandrine Parakeet, Fan-tailed warbler, Pied Kingfisher etc from the roadside before heading off to the Beira Mar hotel a bit earlier than intended. Now we had a bit of a problem as we had to walk through Baga to get to the Beira Mar and there were street stall holders strewn all the way through the streets between us and the hotel. The street sellers shout out to all the foreign tourists and being a bit of a soft touch this caused me quite a bit of hassle. One woman (Sarah as it turned out) somehow persuaded me to give her one minute of my time. A barrage of hard selling battered my eardrums for the next five minutes - I even offered her money just to let me go!! Nothing she had I wanted to buy - then to make matters worse the woman at the next stall queued up in the hopes of getting us to her stall after we'd escaped the clutches of the mad saleswomen Sarah! Craig actually bought a few bits off her (bits of junk for his poor girlfriend) bartering with her like he'd been doing this sort of thing his entire life but I just couldn't cope with it if I'm honest. Only people who know me could understand just what an ordeal this was for me. After what seemed like an age we escaped, vowing to get a taxi through the area in future rather than risk it on foot and getting collared by Sarah and co, walking as quickly as we could manage into the bar area of the Beira Mar. We settled down with a drink as we set our telescopes up to survey the marsh which backs on to the hotel. As the afternoon wore on we picked up quite a few birds - 6 Painted Snipe, Hoopoe, White-breasted Waterhens, Ashy Drongo, Purple Gallinule plus there was a really close Lesser Spotted Eagle sitting in a tree just into the marsh. We were told by a bunch of helpful blokes from Shetland that there were a couple of Spotted Owlets visiting the restaurant handrails after dark so we decided to stay for some food there and see if the Owls turned up. As it got dark one of the other birders pointed out a bat flying in our direction. All I could see were a few small herons then it dawned on me that the presumed Night Herons were in fact the bats!! They were huge - immense things - I couldn't believe my eyes. During our delicious chicken Korma we heard a whistle from the Shetland

lads before a Spotted Owlet landed in a small tree alongside the restaurant. The other blokes had a spotlight which showed the Owls off superbly.

**Day 4:** Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2007 - Morjim, Siolim, Baga Fields and Beira Mar.

Up early again (05.00am) and met Tony at the hotel gates at 06.00am. Half an hour later we arrived at Morjim beach hoping for the dream bird - Great Black-headed Gull. Well a dream bird for a boring Gull man like myself anyway? On arrival we walked down towards the beach and set up our gear where there were already quite a few Gulls gathering down on the shoreline. The main action first thing was going on overhead where there were lots of Wagtails and Hirundines on the move as well as the occasional Short-toed Lark and Pipit. Soon we started picking up a steady stream of Small Pratincoles, a few even settled on the beach nearby which was nice. On the beach there were lots of Lesser Sand Plovers with occasional Greater Sand Plover. A few Kentish Plovers were running around closer to the sea, we also saw a Tereck Sandpiper and a few other bits. The Gull flock held our attention after a while and amongst the 1000 or so Brown-headed Gulls we managed to pick out quite a few Yellow-legged Gulls, 10+ Slender-billed Gulls, a few 1<sup>st</sup> winter Heuglin's Gulls and eventually 10 Great Black-headed Gulls showed up amongst them - fantastic. The only Terns we could find were a handful of Gull-billed, 15 Lesser Crested and 3 Caspians. I was hoping for Greater Crested Tern but none showed. When we'd had our fill of the Gull/Tern flock we had a walk around the surrounding area looking for passerines finding a few Grey-headed Starlings, 2 Indian Robins and a nice Grey-necked Bunting. We narrowly missed 3 Barred Buttonquail another group had just flushed near the beach. After a drink and a nice chicken toastie at a roadside shack in Morjim we drove down to an area I'd seen on Google earth which looked like it might hold a few waders. It turned out to be a good move as we found 25 Tereck Sandpipers, 5 Pacific Golden Plovers and a Striated Heron there. Another White-bellied Sea Eagle flew over the river as we walked back to the taxi to leave. On the way back to the hotel Tony showed us a spot he knew at Siolim which was packed with birds even though it was getting on towards the hot part of the day. There were many hundreds of Egrets there plus c200 Small Pratincole, a few Temmincks Stint, 60 Black-winged Stilt, a Stork-billed Kingfisher, a few Gull-billed Tern and quite a few Chestnut-headed and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters as well as many other waders, herons and raptors. After we left the marsh Tony spotted an Asian Openbill Stork sitting in a roadside field which was quite a good spot from him.

At the hotel we had a light siesta before Tony came and got us for the pre-arranged 3.30 pickup. Our first stop was Baga Fields. Craig didn't fancy the walk and stayed near the taxi on the roadside, scanning and taking a few photos but I had a half hour walk out into the boiling hot fields. The fields weren't wet at all as it turned out and the birding was superb as I came across lots of Pipits (mainly Richards - also 1 - 2 Blyth's and a few Paddyfield) Hoopoe, Indian Rollers, Malabar larks, 50+ Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, a few Grey-headed Starlings, 1 - 2 Brahminy Starlings, 50+ Rose-coloured Starlings, Plain Prineas, Fan-tailed Warblers, Siberian Stonechats, 2 Black-headed Munia, 2 Pied Bushchat etc. I also flushed a Barred Buttonquail which in its attempts to escape me crashed into a three feet high sandy bank rolling to the bottom like a ball of wool before getting its bearings and diving into cover. Quite a comical little scene as it happened.

Next stop the Beira Mar. We stayed until dark seeing 'the' resident Lesser-spotted Eagle, 7+ Painted Snipe (2 babies ... ahhh, 3 males and 2 females) , 2 Scaly-breasted Munia and 2 Indian Yellow Tits amongst many other things - then at dusk a Cinnamon Bittern appeared and gave very brief flight views - so brief I only managed naked eye views and Craig missed it altogether. We did try a snack at the Beira Mar as the restaurant wasn't yet open but if I'm honest I didn't think too much of it. The horrible chicken burger with chips and crisps and not very nice onion baghi were still posted as I was absolutely starving but there was no way I was going to eat it again.

When we got back to our hotel we decided to ask whether or not it was possible to get a take away breakfast - a concept the people at the hotel found difficult to grasp. We had paid for bed and breakfast but had as yet gone out well before breakfast was served. Anyway - Craig did his best to explain and after getting back to our room a knock at the door came and hey presto it was a hotel porter with our take away breakfast all ready to take with us the following morning. It consisted of: 4 boiled eggs wrapped in tin foil, 6 pieces of dry white bread, a few small plastic tubs of jam, a pot of *hot* coffee and 2 glasses of fruit juice with a piece of cling film over the top to stop spillage!! Better than nothing but not exactly what we expected?

**Day 5:** Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2007 - Carambolim, Saligao Zor and Beria Mar.

Tony was already waiting for us outside the hotel at 05.45 for the trip down to Carambolim Lake. On arrival we parked on the first part of the lake just across the railway tracks and stayed there for about the first 2 hours. As it started to get light it was apparent that the lake was swarming with birds. Hundreds of Grey-headed Swamphens mingled with lots of Pheasant-tailed and Bronzed Jacanas. Ducks included c20 Cotton Pygmy Geese, lots of Lesser Whistling Ducks, 70 Garganey and a few Shoveler whilst 3 Oriental Darter, 15 Black-headed Ibis and 60 Glossy Ibis flew around the lake amongst the 3 species of Cormorant. (1 Greater Cormorant) Other things seen included a handful of Pied Kingfisher and Gull-billed Tern, a Striated Heron plus a few Purple Herons. On the marsh backing on to the main lake on the other side of the road we added a few things we'd not already seen. Ashy Prinea, Black-rumped Flameback, a Watercock and a flock of 300+ Baya Weavers were noted here as were 2 more Painted Snipe, c60 Asian Openbill Storks and many Plain Prinias and other bits and pieces. It was here we met the warden for the area - a young lad called Suresh, who after asking us to fill in our names and addresses on a sheet he carried around on a clipboard, offered to show us a few things we wouldn't have found without his help. He wasn't hopeful of finding the famous Brown Hawk Owl in the small wood as the tree it used to sleep in had been cut down, but he did know where to see a roosting pair of Spotted Owlets and the area where the local Jungle Owlets hung out. We all jumped into the taxi and soon we were looking at 2 Spotted Owlets on the opposite corner of the lake - one down - two to go! The Jungle Owlets weren't so obliging unfortunately - and though Suresh did flush one, we didn't get a sniff ourselves. Never mind - we did see our first Greater Coucal plus another Common Cuckoo also unbelievable views of Blyth's Pipit which walked around on the road about 30 feet in front of the taxi right out in the open. Our luck changed when Suresh decided to have a look for the Brown Hawk Owl anyway. After about 10 minutes of aimlessly looking around amongst the trees near to where the huge tree it used to kip in lay in about 20 pieces on the floor - the old man (who I had read about on the internet) who

lives there started pointing into a tree near to his little house - and lo and behold it was the Hawk Owl. We were indeed very fortunate as I don't think Suresh thought we had any chance of finding it. If you go for the Owl - the old man will hold his hand out for money. Make sure you don't give him too much as he spends it on drink apparently? I was going to give him a large Rupee note - but Suresh gestured that I shouldn't and handed him just 20 rupees instead explaining why when we were out of earshot. Bear this in mind if you see him. Well happy with our little excursion we all jumped in Tony's taxi and drove Suresh back to the spot near the lake where we had seen him in the first place. We saw lots of birds as we drove through the reed beds and marsh which included 2 lovely Red-headed Buntings which posed on some overhead wires down to no distance. I was surprised just how obvious the males were in non-breeding plumage - the females were another story of course, being virtually identical to Black-headed. After dropping Suresh off we stood around the lake for another hour - taking a few photos and soaking in the atmosphere. At some time during this time I noticed Suresh frantically waving to me as he ran down the path - he was shouting 'Hornbill - Hornbill' it was then I looked up to see a Malabar Pied Hornbill about 40 - 50 feet right over my head as it disappeared over the trees along the pathway I was standing on! I was so absorbed by the digi-scoping that my mind was elsewhere. Unfortunately Craig had wandered off and missed it all together. The local House Crows were going mad so we followed their calls for the next few minutes or so but couldn't relocate the Hornbills. There were two birds as it turned out - Suresh had seen them flying right towards me but I couldn't hear him yelling. Other than very good views of a Greater Spotted Eagle soaring about over the lake nothing new was seen so about 11 - 11.30 we decided to try Saligao Zor for the roosting Brown Wood Owls which turned into a bit of a fiasco if I'm honest. Now although we'd been in Goa for nearly two days we still hadn't fully recovered from the journey, lack of sleep and the heat exhaustion/dehydration. We also hadn't been eating properly which didn't help. Anyway Tony said he had got directions off his brother who had been asking around as to where the Owls were and he thought 'if' we could find the Zor (he knew Saligoa pretty well already) we would find the Brown Wood Owls. We reluctantly agreed to give it a go.

It was already getting very hot and we struggled to get it through to Tony just how hard it was for us hot weather wimps to deal with the heat. We drove into Saligao and Tony started asking the locals where the Zor was and eventually we were pointed to a spot near a nightclub in the middle of nowhere where there was 'a' Zor but obviously not 'the' Zor. I had a trip report with me telling us where to find the Owls when we got there and there was no mention of a nightclub and it said you could drive right up to the Zor and we needed to park the car and walk to this one. When we did get to the Zor I then realised it was 100% definitely not the right one as I had seen photos of the one we wanted on the internet and it was nothing like this one. Craig and I were shot to bits and it was getting hotter and hotter. We did see the first Small Minivets and a pair of Black-rumped Flamebacks here plus another Steppe Buzzard soaring over the wood but we needed to get away from the heat. Unperturbed by our predicament as we wilted light a bunch of delicate flowers in a furnace and even more determined than ever to find these Owls he had been promising us, Tony started asking the locals for directions once again and within about ten minutes we drove down this thin leafy road and there in front of us was 'the Zor' - I recognised it immediately from the photo I had seen on the internet. A new enthusiasm filled us but after about half an hour of checking every likely looking tree we gave up and went back to

the hotel feeling absolutely shattered. Tony did flush a Oriental Honey Buzzard at one point thinking it to be the Owl - but that was as close as we got to the Brown Wood Owls on that occasion.

By 4.30 we were back at the Beira Mar. On the way in, one of the taxi drivers started touting for a bit of work and after establishing that we were birders pointed out that the bloke standing next to him was a fantastic birder who had been ferrying people around for 9 years and it turned out to be Santosh. This was quite a coincidence as I had been trying to get hold of Santosh for a couple of months prior to leaving England but had been unable to contact him over the internet. I did have his phone number but didn't fancy ringing India if I'm honest. Santosh is online for 6 months of the year (from October) but he had been in hospital and hadn't been looking at his e-mails. Anyway - I had a chat with him and arranged a trip for the following wednesday as we were heading off to Backwoods the next morning - where we would be for the next 3 days. I felt a little guilty letting Tony down but after the day we'd had with looking aimlessly for the Brown Wood Owls the thought of being shown a few of the more retiring species was proving more appealing. I would still use Tony where I could but Santosh said he could fit us in for 2 - 3 days during our stay which would easily be enough. Anyway - into the Beira Mar and after ordering a few cold 7 Ups we set up and started birding. As we walked across to the viewing platform near the swimming pool where there were a gaggle of birders already in position - I heard a voice from the crowd "Crickey - you're a long way from Pegwell Bay?" (Pegwell Bay in Kent is my local patch) and it was a bloke from back home, Roger Lawrence who was leading a tour. He'd only arrived that day and you could of knocked me down with a feather as I didn't think I would bump into anyone I knew 5000 miles from home? After a bit of a chat we concentrated on the marsh in front of us where we saw a Paddyfield Warbler, 4 Painted Snipe and bonus Woolly-necked Stork which flew up out of a field across the way. To top things off 2 Cinnamon Bitterns flew in - one of which gave full frame scope views right out in the open. As the evening wore on we missed a Bluethroat and Clamorous Reed Warbler as we chatted into darkness. When the restaurant opened we eat a delicious Chicken Tikka Masala as my beloved Liverpool hammered Newcastle 3 - 0 (should have been 6 or 7) at Saint James' Park - what an evening.

**Day 6:** Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2007 - Backwoods.

At last the big day had arrived and we were waiting outside our hotel at 05.15 for the pre-booked trip out to Backwoods. A few other birders and their wives were already there when we arrived at the hotel gate and by 05.30 we were all in the coach and off, picking up a few other birders and Loven (our guide for the 3 days) along the way. The drive went reasonably smoothly and within an hour we were heading into hill country which adjoins the Western Ghats mountain range where Backwoods camp is situated. A few birds could be seen from the coach window including a Rufous Woodpecker - the first one for the trip, but not the last. We made a stop a couple of miles outside the camp where there were lots of Buntings sitting around on wires off the side of the road. Here we saw good numbers of Red-headed and 1 Grey-necked Bunting also numerous Chestnut-shouldered Petronias, 2 Common Rosefinch, an Oriental Turtle Dove and the first Peafowls of the holiday - we'd heard them on the coast but this was the first sighting. Another short stop just outside the camp turned up Indian Roller, Hoopoe, Indian Swiftlet and a bunch of Black-throated Munias amongst a host of other things. We offloaded our stuff at camp - sorted out our tents (we

stayed in Forest Wagtail) and arranged for a walk after breakfast. The tent was brilliant - quite spacious with an electric light, a fan and a built on toilet/shower block. There were lots of birds around the camp - within yards of my tent I saw Greenish/Green Warblers, quite a few Golden and Black-hooded Orioles, Racket-tailed Drongo, Jungle Crows and a stunning Velvet-fronted Nuthatch and all within a few minutes. I'm pretty sure I saw Western Crowned Warbler amongst a moving flock of Phylloscopus Warblers but couldn't nail its identification.

Breakfast was eaten at a little, covered eating area full of deck chairs and small tables. The food was self service and very tasty. I was drinking 4 - 5 cups of tea per sitting and I must admit I developed quite a taste for the strange brew on offer. There was also a bar where you could buy soft drink, water and beer. There were 12 of us in the group, all of us English - 3 photographers, 5 other male birders and 4 of their unfortunate wives! This made the guided tour quite hard especially as some of the paths were quite thin and often time's people at the back of the single file queue missed some of the birds which was far from ideal. One of the guides had injured himself, falling off his motorcycle - otherwise the people would have been split into a far more manageable two groups. Anyway - Loven did a brilliant job even if the pace was quite frantic as we rushed through places where there weren't any birds. During our rest/drink Loven told us the plan was for a quick walk around before getting back at camp for tea at 3.30. After this we would be driven down to another spot where we would spend the remaining light on offer before looking for Nightjars and Owls after dark.

After breakfast we checked out the Frogmouth spot but they weren't there. Loven said the wind had been blowing quite hard prior to our arrival and this had probably displaced them temporarily? We then headed off back down the main path away from camp seeing Mountain Imperial Pigeons, Vernal Hanging Parrot, Common Hawk-cuckoo, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Small and Orange Minivets, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta, Square-tailed Black, Yellow Browed, Flame-throated and Red-vented Bulbuls, Pied Flycatcher-shrike, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Tickells Blue Flycatcher, Thick-billed and Plain Flowerpeckers plus Crimson-backed and Purple Sunbirds. We could also hear White-bellied Woodpecker drumming in the woods - we'd have a better look for these in the morning.

After tea we were driven down to a clearing a few minutes walk from the Tamdi Surla Temple where we scanned the sky for Swifts and the surrounding trees for other birds. Loven couldn't come with us this time as he had an important meeting so it was Rubin's job to help us out. Lots of birds showed up - Mountain Imperial and Grey-fronted Green Pigeons, Malabar Parakeets and more miniscule Vernal Hanging Parrots, Verditer Flycatchers, 2 Blue-naped Monarchs, a few stunning Asian Fairy Bluebirds and a fly through Besra was a nice surprise. The top birds showed up later on when some of the Swifts came down out of the sky and we had great views of a handful of White-rumped Needletails amongst the House Swifts overhead. Later on I saw 3 of their much larger cousins - Brown-backed Needletails, fantastic things. In-between times Rubin walked into the middle of the field we were standing in and had obviously heard something? He was scanning when I walked up to him - then he spotted an enormous Great Hornbill sitting in a tree a couple of hundred of yards away. The bird (the size of a Technicolour mute swan) was just sitting there in plain view - then someone spotted another one in a nearby tree then a third one! Eventually they flew off giving great flight views as they winged off down into the forest. We were very lucky to

see them as they only get about 6 - 8 sightings a season. As dusk fell we went back to the coach and drove to the Nightjar spot. Soon 2 Jerdon's Nightjars showed - well light up by the spotlight the guide had. On the way back to camp we saw another Jerdon's Nightjar when we were listening out for calling Brown Hawk Owl. We failed with the Owls though I did hear one calling about half an hour before first light from the camp the following morning. I slept well that night - my first proper sleep of the trip. It was much cooler out here which helped no doubt?

**Day 7:** Monday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2007 - Backwoods.

I awoke at 06.00 and had a walk around the camp trying unsuccessfully to locate the Brown Hawk Owl that was calling in the forest behind our tent. Loven was up early and soon returned to camp saying he had just heard an Indian Pitta calling just past the camp entrance. We passed the word around as some of the group were still sleeping and arranged to meet at the gate in 10 minutes to try for a sighting. There were a couple of stunning Orange-headed Thrushes in the camp as it got light and what views too! The forest was alive with calls as we met at the gate hoping for the Pitta. Loven went on ahead and soon located where the Pitta was - it was quite vocal and although we could see movement in the undergrowth the only person other than Loven to see the bird was Craig who could see its head amongst the dense undergrowth. After a while we gave up and went on a walk through the woods. The birding was quite slow for a while though we did see 2 Black-rumped Flameback, a handful of Western Crowned Warblers, Racket-tailed and Bronzed Drongos, Dark-fronted and Puff-throated Babblers etc. A few Malabar Giant Squirrels and Langur Monkeys were seen too. Eventually we arrived at the spot where the White-bellied Woodpeckers were - the drumming was getting progressively louder as we neared where they were. You could have cut the atmosphere with a knife - an absolutely brilliant experience and we hadn't even seen them as yet! Soon a bird was spotted and eventually we had good views of a pair of these giant and extremely rare Woodpeckers. The drumming was better than the sightings - often times so loud you would think it hardly credible the sound was made by a bird? After, we made our way back to camp - checking out the Frogmouth spot on the way, and this time they were there - showing brilliantly in a clump of bamboo. The weirdest birds I've ever seen in my life. Slightly comical and quite cute as the pair sat pressed up against each other at eye level 15 yards away. A stunning male Malabar Whistling Thrush showed in the camp that morning as did an Indian Blackbird. Breakfast tasted all the better for our sightings - Craig and I were now right up to speed having acclimatised to the heat after a few days re-hydrating and getting some food into our systems. I was actually enjoying myself - even socialising with the group. We were extremely lucky with the group of people we had at camp. We all got on quite well which was a major plus.

After breakfast we drove down to the temple, where we parked the coach for the walk upstream looking for Blue-eared and Pygmy Kingfisher as well as whatever else jumped out at us. The fruiting fig tree near the car park held our attention for a while - it was full of birds. Grey-fronted Green Pigeon, Barbets, Bulbuls, Asian Fairy Bluebirds, Flowerpeckers etc were all buzzing around in there. Soon we saw 2 Malabar Grey Hornbills too and behind the fig tree 2 Great Hornbills were seen. The walk upstream turned up a few bits - a male Blue-headed Rock Thrush, a few Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, Malabar Whistling Thrush, Brown-breasted Flycatcher and a male White-bellied Blue Flycatcher were the pick of the

bunch. Soon we came across a stunning Blue-eared Kingfisher then another pair further on plus good views of Forest Wagtail which was a bonus as they are scarce at backwoods. A Malabar Trogon was glimpsed as it moved in an overhead tree but views were too poor unfortunately before it disappeared from view. At the end of our walk we found what we were looking for when we spotted an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher which flew across the path looking like a giant Bumblebee. Luckily it landed in a small gap where I (with my immense height) had stunning views in full sunlight before it flew across into the light nearby but still showed quite well. After tea we went back for another look as some of the group hadn't seen the bird properly but we couldn't relocate it. There was a female White-breasted Blue Flycatcher in the same spot where the Dwarf Kingfisher had been earlier - also a group of half a dozen Dark-fronted Babblers. The afternoon was ended off looking for Indian Blue Robins which are very difficult things to see indeed. You have to wait for them to come out to drink at dusk and though we could hear them calling we didn't actually see any even though Loven did play a tape to them but they wouldn't respond. As the light started to go we saw a Tickells Blue Flycatcher, another Brown-breasted Flycatcher there and 2 Malabar Whistling Thrush. I spotted a bird flying into thick cover at one point - it had a white rump and I thought it may have been a White-rumped Shama which was confirmed when I got back to the tent and had a look in the field guide. It was a female and the only one any of us saw even though they could be heard on the day prior during our walk through the forest. Another extremely skulking specie. Loven encouraged a calling Indian Scimitar Babbler to show itself (in silhouette) above us in the clearing by playing the tape to it as we awaited the Indian Blue Robin.

Back at camp we sat up until midnight chatting - I even had a couple of beers myself. 3 Brown Hawk Owls could be heard calling in the distance as huge moths visited the lights as well as some half decent sized bats. A rat which walked amongst our chairs - even getting up on the back of mine as I sat there caused a bit of a hoo-hah amongst the female visitors which gave the rest of us a bit of a laugh. A funny looking thing it was - quite cute for a rat with great big ears. (I called it Dereck ... private joke)

**Day 8:** Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2007 - Backwoods and Arpora.

At first light we gave the Pitta another try. It called a few times but that was it. The plan for the day was to walk upriver (near the temple) then check out the school and spend from late morning raptor watching until 1.00 o'clock when we were to go back to camp for lunch before packing up and leaving around mid afternoon. After the short Pitta session we went back to the coach and went on the walk along the river. In the fig tree near the car park a stunning Malabar Grey Hornbill was showing right out in the open as well as Malabar Barbets, Asian Fairy Bluebird, Blue-naped Monarch etc. Upriver we looked for the Brown Fish Owl but it's difficult to see these days as the locals are taking gravel out of the river apparently and scaring it away. As Loven expected it wasn't about. The school area was a bit better. After watching the kids playing cricket - the bat being a 2 foot length, 3 inch thick piece of branch (with which one of them was playing expertly executed drives through the covers - rousing us to applause as he went) we started picking up new birds. 4 Golden-fronted Leafbirds, Little Spiderhunter and 2 Lotens Sunbirds were new for the trip plus we saw 2 more Pied Flycatcher-shrikes, stunning male Orange Minivets etc. Back near the coach we tried the Bunting spot we'd been to on the way into camp on the first day and there were

far more there this time with about 20 Red-headed and 3 Black-headed Buntings amongst a few Petronias etc. Loven walked back to camp in the hopes of finding the Brown Fish Owl while we went back on the coach for breakfast. He returned unsuccessful. A shame as I would have loved to see the Fish Owl. After breakfast we went to the clearing where the raptor watch was to take place and we were soon seeing things soaring about. Raptors included an adult Bonelli's Eagle, a Short-toed Eagle, an immature Rufous-bellied Eagle and a Mountain Hawk Eagle. There were also a handful of Oriental Honey Buzzards floating about here too. Amongst the many Swifts and Hirundines decent groups of Brown-backed Needletails were whizzing about - one group holding 12 birds. At last Loven picked out a pair of Crested Treeswifts exactly where he said we'd see them too. I was beginning to think we might miss out on these even though they can be common according to some trip reports I'd read prior to leaving England. At 1.00pm we packed up went back to camp, eat lunch, paid our bills and packed for the 2 hour drive back to the coast.

We heard some of the birders saying that Backwoods was over-rated but in my opinion it's an essential place to visit if you have the time. Personally I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

On the drive back we saw a few Peafowl from the coach before Loven called the coach to a halt as he had somehow seen a Crested Goshawk sitting in a tree. We all got out of the coach and had quite good views eventually.

Anyway - back at the hotel two and a half hours or so later I rushed in (dumping my scope and bag in the hotel lobby - asking if I could pick them up on the way back) got a taxi from outside the hotel and made it to Aropa Wood for the last hour and a quarter of daylight. Craig didn't fancy it so I went on my own. The wood was quiet at first but as the sun dropped I started picking up a few things. A Hawk-eagle specie was seen - and later I heard a Curlew like raptor call so perhaps it was a Crested Hawk-eagle though views were too poor? I also saw a Nilgiri Woodpigeon in flight plus stunning views of a White-spotted Fantail. Other bits included Lesser Spotted Eagle, Large Cuckooshrike, Grey-breasted and Plain Prinea etc.

After a shower I did an amazingly stupid thing. I had two very similar coloured T-shirts one of which had an outside label on the back near the collar. Somehow I mistook an inside out shirt for the one with the label on the back and walked off out of the hotel totally oblivious to my mistake. We were heading for the All Spice restaurant about half a mile from the hotel we were staying in - we had been recommended to try it by the people at Backwoods. Anyway - after walking into the wrong place on the way (I am a twit!) we were shown to our tables in All Spice when the waiter comes up to me and says "Excuse me sir - but it would appear your shirt is on inside out" to which I replied "No it might look like it but its one of these silly T-shirts where they put the label on the outside" and carried on with my order. I could tell the waiter wasn't convinced but after a quick glance down I was reassured I had in fact got my shirt on the right way round. After getting back to the hotel an hour or so later I noticed my mistake - the shirt was inside out after all!

**Day 9: Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2007 - Maem Lake, Tikkanem and Arpora.**

We met Santosh outside the hotel as planned at 06.45. Mick (from Derby) one of the Backwoods group had tagged along with us as he had been birding alone up until this point. By about 07.30 we were pulling up at Maem Lake. The target specie here is Orange-

breasted Green Pigeon though there are other things here such as roosting Grey Nightjars, Brown Fish Owl and Emerald Dove to keep you on your toes. Santosh went on ahead of us shouting out birds as he went - Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Black, Ashy and White-bellied Drongo, Coppersmith Barbet, Rufous Woodpecker, Black-rumped Flameback, 3 Rufous Treepie, 2 Golden-fronted Leafbird, Black-hooded and Golden Orioles, Common Woodshrike, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Plum-headed Parakeets etc were all seen just off the path or further up the hill. Soon Santosh pointed out a roosting Grey Nightjar sitting along a tree branch near the main path. Another was spotted further along the same trail. Unfortunately there was no sign of the Brown Fish Owl or the Orange-breasted Green Pigeons - though the Pigeons could be heard calling when we were right around the other side of the main lake. Water levels were still quite high so Santosh made a stepping-stone bridge across a shallow inlet which gave access to the back end of the lake. After negotiating this small obstacle where Craig nearly fell in (we wouldn't have laughed - honest!) we had a good view of the hill opposite so we set up here and waited for things to show. A pair of Crested Hawk-eagles were hanging about near their huge nest in a large tree on the hill. I tried to set up my digi-scoping gear but there was something wrong with my telescope? It was badly misted up which I couldn't understand as its nitrogen sealed so obviously this shouldn't happen? I was quite put out by this as I still had quite a few places to go where a telescope would be essential. I wasn't a happy bunny, even more so as one of my digital cameras had packed up only a few days before. It later turned out there was a bit of moisture on the back of the eyepiece - I had dropped my telescope on a trip to France a couple of years back and the eyepiece was ever so slightly loose fitting after that. The rather steamy atmosphere must have affected it as after drying it out at the hotel and sealing it off with a bit of electric tape the scope was okay to use. From our new vantage point a few other things were seen - 2 Crested Swiftlets, one of which landed on a dead branch were only the second sighting of the trip and a White-cheeked Barbet showed amongst many Plum-headed Parakeets on the trees opposite us as stunning Black-hooded Orioles flew backwards and forwards calling like demented Night herons as they went. Then Santosh heard Blue-bearded Bee-eater and quite close by the sound of it - but a sighting eluded us unfortunately. Whilst we were looking for the Bee-eater we came across an Indian Scimitar Babbler perched right out in the open briefly before it saw us and scarpered. A very fortunate sighting indeed. On the way back to the taxi we came across a nice close pair of Rufous Woodpeckers then in the tree where the Brown Fish Owl should have been roosting Santosh heard the light tapping of a Woodpecker. After about a minute of searching through the tangle of branches we spotted a female Yellow-crowned Woodpecker then a nice male which perched in a smaller tree just above our heads. Quite a bonus seeing these as they are difficult to find apparently. After looking unsuccessfully for the Crimson Sunbirds back where the taxi was parked we left and Santosh took us to a small roadside paddy field at Tikkanem. There were a few Wagtails, Little Ringed Plovers and Temminck's Stints immediately on view when Santosh heard a raptor calling over a hill nearby - "Crested Serpent Eagle" he said and he was right as afterwards the bird flew into view and hung around for about five minutes or so. Our attention returned to the rice paddy. There were 2 White Wagtails amongst the various Yellow Wagtails but another bird that was showing quite close to the road obviously wasn't a Yellow and turned out to be a Citrine Wagtail - excellent. Soon afterwards 2 Ruddy-breasted Crakes got spooked by something unseen and showed themselves as they dived for cover further along the same patch of reedy stuff.

During the drive a Mongoose ran across the road - the only one we saw on the trip. Another stop on the way back to the hotel where there were many Malabar Larks and a couple of Indian Robins was made before we said goodbye to Santosh making arrangements for him to pick us up the following morning to try for the Brown Wood Owls at Saligao Zor.

After a rest in the hotel room we decided to try and see the White-spotted Fantail in Arpora Wood but couldn't find it. Craig had stayed in the hotel the day of the Fantail and obviously wanted to see it. It was reasonably quiet in the wood though we did see Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Lesser Spotted and Booted Eagle, various Drongos and Babblers, Grey-breasted Prineas, Jungle and Puff-throated Babblers, Indian Robin, Shikra and 100+ fly over Little Green Bee-eaters. There were 1 - 200 Baya Weavers showing on the roadside wires on the way back to the hotel.

Another delicious meal was demolished in All Spice that night. I double checked that my shirt was on the right way around prior to leaving. I am meant to be an adult (though I still don't feel the need to act like one) so you'd think I would have learned to dress myself properly by now eh? Old Chinese proverb say - 'once a sirry irriot always a sirry irriot' sure applies to me.

**Day 10:** Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> November 2007 - Saligao, Hotel, Baga Fields and Beira Mar.

Santosh picked us up at first light. Mick had once again chosen to come with us and as we were starting to load the car up, Santosh picked up a Dusky Crag Martin which gave excellent views as it flew right over our heads before heading back over the salt pans across the road from the hotel. A good start to the day. It got better when on the way to Saligao, Santosh pointed out a few Yellow-wattled Lapwings sitting just off the roadside in a dry field. As we scanned it turned out there were 9 of them - awesome views too. Nearby a few not very common Common Mynas were scattered amongst a flock of extremely common Jungle Mynas. Another short stop on the roadside to see two nice Black-shouldered Kites also turned up Greater Spotted Eagle, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Malabar Lark etc. Soon after we made it to Saligao Zor but the Owls were not in their normal spot so Santosh made his way up the hill into the forest to look further afield as Mick Fed the mosquitoes that were milling about here there and everywhere as he stood there in his holiday maker shorts and silly hat. Sorry Mick but its true mate! We came across a few birds here - 2 Black-naped Monarchs probably the pick of the bunch though we could hear Grey-headed Bulbuls calling but we were not in a good spot at the time for viewing the forest edge so they went unseen. After about ten minutes we had a shout from Santosh and he had found the Owls. We quickly made our way towards him as he pointed out two vague shapes on the edge of a tree through a mishmash of branches. How on earth he found them was beyond me as they were hard enough to see even when he was trying to point them out to us? He put Craig's scope on them and we shared views for the next few minutes before leaving. Santosh dropped us off at All Spice for breakfast where I read in the sports section of the paper that my beloved Liverpool had hammered Porto 4 - 1 at Anfield on the Tuesday night. A thoroughly satisfying experience for a man with the dreaded football disease as I have. Is there a cure for football? If there is I will take it as it brings me very little pleasure just a whole lot of heartache and stress since the late 1980's. Mind you at least that smarmy twit McLaren got the push whilst we were away - so there was at least some lasting good news on the football front.

We did a bit of raptor watching on the way back to the hotel picking up a Woolly-necked Stork which flew over our hotel. We bumped into Mick again and he had taken photos of a Crested Serpent Eagle he'd seen flying around over the hotel grounds while we were posting breakfast down our throats. We ended up setting up our scopes on the hotel balcony and soon saw the Crested Serpent Eagle later on plus a few other bits and pieces like Greater Spotted Eagle, Booted Eagle, Osprey yawn etc.

In the afternoon we went down to Baga fields with Tony (our cheap taxi driver) where we spent a couple of hours digi-scoping and birding. Birds seen included 3 Pintail Snipe, 2 Clamorous Reed Warblers, Fan-tailed Warblers, Richard's, Paddyfield and a Tawny Pipit, a few Hoopoe, a large flock of Scaly-breasted Munias, Pale Prineas, a number of Rose-coloured Starlings plus 3 Brahminy Starlings and we also flushed another Barred Buttonquail. The later afternoon/evening was spent at the Beira Mar where we saw all the normal stuff including Clamorous Reed Warbler, a Painted Snipe and Craig had a short glimpse of a Cinnamon Bittern. We eat in the East meets West restaurant across the road from the Beira Mar. It didn't look much from the outside but inside it was like Aladdin's cave - all brightly light up - a huge place full of many tables, a huge bar plus a stage where another useless band were setting up their equipment. All the hotels put on music and most of it isn't ethnic as I was expecting, rather being a poor rendition of some out of date western society 'classics' sung in pigeon English with often times the wrong lyrics. My favourite example of this was when walking through the Marinha Dourada back towards our room one evening the two piece band were trying to sing 'help me make it through the night' though the poor Indian bloke lumbered with trying to sing the lyrics in an American type accent was actually singing 'Let me make it through the day' which creased me up. Most of the hotel entertainment was of a similar caliber.

**Day 11:** Friday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2007 - Zuari River, Hotel, Baga Hill and Beira Mar.

Santosh picked up Craig and myself up at 07.00 and by 07.30 we were getting on the boat for the rather exciting Zuari River Trip hoping to see Collared and Black-capped Kingfisher and hopefully some Greater Crested Terns. We set off upriver towards the mangrove creeks seeing quite a few birds on the way including 3 flyover Spoonbill, a few Black-headed Ibis, various waders and herons, Oriental Darter, Osprey, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Western Reef Egrets, Striated Herons plus a bonus Slaty-breasted Rail which Santosh picked up as it skulked beneath the mangrove roots on the exposed riverbank. We backed the boat up for a closer look. There were lots of Kingfishers about and our total at the end of the boat trip was 8 Collared, 6 Black-capped and 6 Stork-billed. The views were very good too as the birds are not too wary of boats and very approachable. After checking the creeks for the Collared Kingfishers we set of up the middle of the main river underneath the two big bridges to a few wooden posts where 30 Great Crested Terns were sitting. The birds once again allowed us to get quite close which was nice. The boat trip could last as long as three hours but as we had already cleared up we went back early and went for breakfast at All Spice for our customary 5 cups of tea, glass of orange, mushroom omelette, 2 pieces of toast and 2 pieces of Goan bread with jam followed by two pancakes and honey. Craig made do with coffee and an English style breakfast - egg, bacon etc. As I write I could eat my breakfast now.

On the way back from All Spice we ended up setting up our scopes opposite Vin's place near our hotel under the shade of the palm trees on the roadside for a raptor watch. Lesser Spotted, Greater Spotted, Booted, White-bellied Sea Eagle and Crested Hawk-eagle were all seen from this vantage spot a few hundred yards from the hotel entrance when I noticed a huge raptor being mobbed by half a dozen Black Kites to our left about half a mile away over Baga hill. Luckily the bird flew towards us across the salt pans then disappeared across Arpora Forest and even now I'm not sure what the bird was? For a certainty it was a Sea Eagle specie though definitely not White-bellied. I still haven't as yet done any research into its identity though with Grey-headed Sea Eagle on the Goan list and occurring slightly further south perhaps it was this specie? We stayed until 1.00pm before heading back to the hotel for a rest until Tony picked us up at 3.00pm for the trip to Baga Hill.

There are many paths up into Baga Hill and we drove straight past the good ones and drove right down to the coast where there were a zillion people opposite on Baga Beach (Hell on earth?) whilst we watched a boat as the men shook hundreds of Mackerel out of its nets before placing them into pots. We walked around the rocky shoreline looking for a path into the wooded hill above us before ending up wandering around a small path through people's gardens which was a bit weird. There were still quiet a lot of birds - our first Tawny-bellied Babblers were seen here also very good views of 5 Grey-breasted Green Pigeons right overhead as well as a group of Brown-cheeked Fulvettas, Golden Orioles, Indian Yellow Tits, Common Ioras, Rufous Treepie, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher etc and 3 Red Spurfowl were flushed just off the path. We also found a Flycatcher specie that wasn't illustrated in any of our fields guides. A Blue Flycatcher with a paler vent and no dark lores. Its longish tail seemed to be notched and was similar in size and shape to Verditer Flycatcher though the colour and the lack of any dark lores ruled this out. It was something odd - we had very good views at no distance with the bird right out on an exposed branch until we got fed up with looking at it. There was a lot of cloud cover on this afternoon and the humidity as we climbed up the hill was beyond belief. I looked as if I had dived in the sea - I couldn't have been any wetter if I had! Even Tony had a bit of a sweat going on - though not much. We gave up and went back to the Beira Mar for the last knockings. Amongst other things there we saw 10 Brahminy Starlings, Clamorous Reed Warbler and a single Painted Snipe before going to eat at All Spice after a second shower back in the hotel.

**Day 12:** Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2007 - The Pitta Spot, Hotel and Divar Island.

We arranged to have two sessions out with Santosh on this day. He had a Pitta staked out at a secret spot within half an hour of our hotel then in the late afternoon we were going to try for the Pallid Harriers that frequent Divar Ilsand. Mick joined us for both sessions - he normally only did the mornings with us as his wife wasn't into birding so he just left her at the hotel - something which seemed to worry me more than him! Soon we were at the Pitta site and could hear the bird calling under a low bush just off the path. Santosh went in and played a tape to it and soon had the bird showing very well - a fantastic little bird showing down to about 30 feet or less as we knelt nearby trying to keep as quiet as possible. There was also an unidentified Warbler under the same bush and another Orange-headed Thrush. Outside of the dark confines of the Pitta bush the surrounding area was crawling with birds. A nice White-spotted Fantail showed well (as they do when you can find them) and there

were a few Small Minivets and Common Woodshrikes dotted about. Then Craig and I spotted a Thrush sitting low down in a tree. It was lightly hidden at first but we could see it was dark with a prominent supercillium. Craig immediately said - 'It's a Siberian Thrush' before it slowly dawned on me - yep he's right - it is a Siberian Thrush! There was another Thrush in the same tree and although I didn't look too hard at it - Craig did and this was a female Siberian Thrush. I concentrated on the male for the next couple of minutes - on consulting the field guide it turned out to be a 1<sup>st</sup> winter male. The enormity of our find didn't really hit home properly until we consulted the Goa bird list we'd picked up from Backwoods back at the hotel. There were no records of Siberian Thrush on it. On the maps in the field guide it shows a few scattered records around Indian and the Andaman Islands slightly further south but a couple of thousand miles east of Goa and 1 record on the west coast just above Goa. We knew they were rare but not that rare. Eventually both birds flew and after going to get Santosh and Mick we couldn't re-locate the birds. They were heading into deep cover so I wasn't totally surprised. Whilst looking we did come across a very showy female Blue-capped Rock Thrush (our second of the trip) also Hoopoe, Golden Orioles etc. Santosh had to leave early on that morning so we got back to All Spice for breakfast just after 09.00am.

After breakfast we bumped into Mick back at the hotel. We'd seen a Woolly-necked Stork on the walk back and Mick had some half decent photos of it as it had flown over the hotel grounds. The three of us ended up raptor watching until 1.00pm from outside our hotel room as Mick had thought he had seen a Black Eagle flying over Baga hill whilst we were at breakfast. This turned out to be a good move yet again as after about an hour of sifting through the many Kites, Honey Buzzards and occasional Eagle on view Craig picked up the Black Eagle across the way flying back towards the hotel about half way up Baga Hill. What a fantastic thing it was too - very large with long wings and tail, its primaries splayed out like an enormous Chough. The flight was extremely slow and deliberate as its head looked around at all angles as it flew. Bright yellow legs and cere glowing in the sun against the contrast of its jet black plumage. A magnificent thing and for me as good a bird as we saw on the whole trip - perhaps even my favourite? I just couldn't get over how slow the damned thing was flying and still staying airborne? It appeared to be doing about half a mile an hour? Afterwards we were joined by a nice couple from Scotland. The Black Eagle didn't show up but we did see another Black-shouldered Kite before we gave up at 1.00pm and retired to the hotel room for a bit of air-con and a cold drink out of the fridge. We did watch a bit of the Sri Lanka v England test match. I saw more live sport out here than I can get on terrestrial TV back home which I thought a bit ironic. All the big Premiership football matches can be seen live out here as all the TV is on satellite. Obviously with the five and a half hour time difference the evening matches are on too late if your due to get up before first light for the birding but the Saturday 12.45, 15.00 and 17.15 kick offs are watchable.

Santosh was waiting for us outside the hotel at 3.00pm and soon we were awaiting the ferry to take us across onto Divar Island. The Island was a much different habitat to any we had encountered in Goa - being a flat, marshy grassland with some dryer grassland and arable farmland. We pulled up where there were already a few birders who we immediately recognized as the Shetland mob we'd been seeing daily at the Beira Mar. Immediately Santosh picked up two Pallid Harriers whilst I was still getting my tripod set up. One was a male but it had landed in the tall grass and wasn't in view by the time I looked. There were

birds all over the place Marsh and Pallid Harriers, Short-toed Larks (including a single flock of 70 - 80), Pipits everywhere ... some perched on the overhead telegraph wires and Oriental Skylarks in song flight were dotted about in the sky. The occasional Gull-billed Tern was seen too even though it was seemingly dry as a bone where we stopped. I stood and watched as Santosh wandered out to where he had seen the male Pallid Harrier land and soon it was flying around right in front of us (right past Mick with camera in hand) and very impressive it was too. I've always wanted to see Pallid Harrier - always hopeful of one on my patch when the occasional migrant Montagu's Harrier show up in May or August whilst raptor watching back home but up until now they've all been Monty's. I don't need to bother now as I had a good afternoon with half a dozen or so of them on this day. After a while we went for a walk into the fields checking out the dead scrub where one of Shetland lads had found a Sykes Warbler. We didn't find the Warbler but had cracking views of a perched Brown Shrike which when it flew off was joined by a second bird that must have been hiding somewhere nearby. There were some extremely funny looking Stonechats out here too. Siberian type Stonechats are very common everywhere in Goa but these were totally different to those or the two races we get back home in England. On the short drive back to the ferry we stopped about 40 foot away from a Black-shouldered Kite sitting on the wires right alongside the road. A flyover immature White-bellied Sea Eagle waved us goodbye as we assembled on the ferry.

The evenings session at All Spice was as good as ever and when we got back to our room we watched Aston Villa v Arsenal on the TV marveling at how Wengers men took Villa apart in the first half. Wow were they good for half an hour - even as an ardent Liverpool F.C. fan I'll admit they are different class at times.

**Day 13:** Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2007 - Dona Paula, Santa Cruz, Hotel, Siolim and Morjim.

Our last day with Santosh. I had nagged him into taking us out for an early morning trip to Dona Paula for the Sparrow Larks and in the end he gave in and agreed to go as long as we were only out until 09.00 as he was busy for the rest of the time we were in Goa. Just as well he did take us as we would never had found the spot without him. There is quite a lot of building work going on there so it would appear the Sparrow Lark spot or this one at least will soon be no more? We wandered out into some short burned grass and waited events seeing a few Oriental Skylarks and Richards and Paddyfield Pipits as we went. There was a Cuckoo sitting on the side of a small bush and before I could get my book out Santosh announced it as a Pied Cuckoo - a good bird too and one he's lucky to see once a season. It showed very well before we moved on and started looking around a bit more for the Sparrow Larks, coming across a very obliging Booted Warbler - a bird I've half expected to come across back home on the south east coast but never have. Not wanting to twitch one means there are a few gaps in my birds-seen quota that shouldn't really be. Anyway - after about ten minutes the first of 3 or 4 Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks showed and gave brilliant views too. Other 'bits' seen here included Tawny Pipit, 2 Spotted Owlets, Indian Robin, Pied Bushchat, a few Grey-headed Starlings, Short-toed Larks and another extremely obliging Grey-necked Bunting amongst other things.

Our next stop was to be Santa Cruz marsh. This was slowed down a bit by a puncture we picked up on the way where one bald tyre was swapped for another in similar condition in record time by Santosh on the roadside watched by a gathering crowd with nothing better

to do than to gawp at the silly people from England with their strange looking equipment, daft hats, pink faces and silly language. I don't think they had ever seen a bloke of my height before either - I felt like an absolute giant amongst the Goan people? I am about 6 foot 7 in my walking boots but even then people are an awful lot taller on average back in England where I'm just quite tall rather than absolutely gigantic. After the wheel was replaced (in about one and a half minutes!) we were back off tootling off down the road to the paddies which were peppered with waders of all shapes and sizes. Many Little and Temminck's Stints, LRP's, 2 Pintail Snipe, a few Pacific Golden Plovers, loads of Wood and Green Sands, 1 Curlew Sandpiper, 50+ Small Pratincole etc were seen from the roadside. There was also a Pheasant-tailed Jacana here - only the second site that we saw this species. Further around at some pits there were 9 Black-winged Stilts and some calling Clamorous Reed Warblers whilst Santosh stopped right next to an Indian Cormorant on the roadside about 30 feet away from the taxi window. It was more like a Shag close up than a Cormorant. Santosh dropped me and Craig off at All Spice for breakfast, we said our goodbyes to Santosh then stuffed our faces silly for the next half an hour! Yummy! Wow was I enjoying my breakfasts out here - better than the birding? A stupidly close White-breasted Kingfisher was perched on a branch about 40 foot from our table so I set up my digi-scoping gear at the table and took a few snaps during breakfast! It was a bit too close - using the zoom on the camera to get rid of the vignetting meant I could just about fit its head and shoulders into the image. Only in Goa eh? Mental!

With breakfast out of the way back in the hotel room we spent time on the veranda watching the Swifts, hirundines and raptors outside between bouts of watching Test Cricket on the TV. If it sounds relaxing then it very much was old beans! To cap things off Craig picked up a Pacific Swift flying around amongst the hundreds of Little Swifts from the room's veranda!! It took me about 30 extremely frustrating seconds to get on the bird but when I did it showed really well wheeling about over the salt pans in the hotel grounds outside. Now I've never seen Pacific Swift before but they are very easy to identify - very skinny and long-tailed with a small though obvious white rump. It stood out like a sore thumb amongst the Little Swifts.

In the afternoon we went with Tony for another go at Siolim marsh for a bit of digi scoping. All the normal birds showed as did 1 - 2000 Small Pratincoles, 45 Black-headed Ibis, a Black-capped Kingfisher, 43 Asian Openbill Storks, a Whiskered Tern and the only Marsh Sandpiper we saw on the whole trip. 4 more Pacific Golden Plovers flew over while we were there too. We did make a quick dash down to Morjim Beach late on, seeing 100's of Gulls and 3 Caspian Terns, a Tereck Sandpiper, 200+ Small Pratincoles as well as all the normal Sandplovers and Kentish etc. On the drive back a Large Stork flew over the river near Siolim Bridge at dusk. It definitely had something hanging from its neck and was obviously a Lesser Adjutant - views were just too poor in the light at the time? It dropped in to roost in the palms near the bridge.

After diner as I wandered back from All Spice on my own (Craig had stayed for a few light ales) I flushed a Barn Owl from just down the road from where we had seen 2 Spotted Owlets a few days back. I watched Birmingham beat Spurs 3 - 2 at White-hart Lane after getting battered for the first 80 minutes, getting a dodgy penalty and the ref sending Robbie Keane off for nothing. I'd missed Liverpools 4 - 0 demolition of Bolton at Anfield earlier. Never mind I've enjoyed it since on tape since I got home. El Ninho's\* goal was a gem!!

\*El Ninho = The Kid, Torres' nickname - our red hot Spanish striker.

**Day 14: Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2007 - Morjim, Siolim and Baga Hill. (Beira Mar)**

Mick, Craig and I arrived for first light at Morjim Beach where a huge number of Gulls, Terns and Waders was already assembling. I was starting to wind down now knowing this was the penultimate day of our micro adventure and couldn't really get too excited, especially so as this was my third time here. Anyway the birding was good though not too many Pratincoles or passerines showed up whilst we were there. The Gull numbers were up though and I counted 52 Slender-billed, 10+ Heuglin's, 7 Great Black-headed and many *Barabensis* Yellow-legged Gulls amongst the huge flock of Brown-headed Gulls on the edge of the beach. There were also 6+ Gull-billed, 2 - 3 Sandwich, 1 Caspian and 21 Lesser Crested Terns plus 6 Tereck Sandpiper, a few Short-toed Larks over amongst the Yellow Wagtails, Small Pratincoles and other stuff. I did have a walk around the palms looking for the Bay-breasted Shrikes Santosh told me about but couldn't find any. We did see 6 waders flying offshore which looked like Knot to me? Red Knot are rare in Goa (very rare I think?) but Great Knot do occur on this stretch of beach? There were a pod of Dolphins playing around offshore before we left.

Our next stop was at Siolim marsh where we saw 2 perched Greater Spotted Eagles, 100+ Small Pratincoles, a Whiskered Tern plus a few Gull-billed, Stork-billed, 3 Pied and a Black-capped Kingfisher plus a nice perched female Amur Falcon - our sixth one of the trip.

After breakfast and a rest/drink at the hotel I decided to try Baga Hill as Mick had since shown me the proper path and it was less than five minutes walk from the hotel gates so we must have driven past it about 25 times! Craig fancied resting up knowing he had to go to work the day he got home so I went with Tony. Craig did get a cab to the Beira Mar in the end seeing a Ruddy-breasted Crake, Cinnamon Bittern, 2 Brahminy Starling and another Brown Shrike whilst we were up Baga Hill. The evening session up Baga Hill was very good with many birds chucking themselves at us as it started to cool down. I had read the Hill had been ruined by development but this isn't true as I had one of my favourite little sessions of the whole trip on this afternoon. Between 4.00 and 6.00 I saw the first Jerdon's Leafbirds (3) and Blue-faced Malkoha of the trip, Common Woodshrikes, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, lots of Small Minivets, White-bellied Drongo, White-faced Barbet, Coppersmith Barbet, Golden Oriole, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Verditer Flycatcher, Rufous Treepie, Asian Koel, Common Ioras, Purple Sunbirds, Jungle Babbler, Tawny-bellied Babbler, Puff-throated Babbler, Greater Coucal, 2 White-spotted Fantails, Common Tailorbird, Oriental Magpie Robin, Shikra, Grey-breasted Prinea etc. and some of the best views too. Perhaps its not what it once was but don't let these reports put you off as its still fantastic. The Leafbirds were good especially as I had given up on seeing them. I bumped into a mixed group of German and English birders (perhaps other nationalities) who were playing a tape under a tree full of birds. I asked what they were looking at and was told a one word monotone answer "Leafbird" to which I replied "which one?" again the one word monotone answer came back "Jerdon's". It was like a scene from the Simpsons involving the Arnie Swartzenegger mimicking film star Wolfcastle. My favourite Wolfcastle bit of the Simpsons involves him in a ridiculous film clip where he breaks free from a tiny female ice sculpture he's hidden in, sitting on a table where all the

nasty villains of the film are sitting around - its not even half the size of his immense bulk has somehow been fitted into - before it breaks and he starts blasting all the baddies into oblivion with his over-sized machine gun. "Ice to see you" is the line as he gets rid of all the bad guys in the corny film. Anyway - I digress. I always have a brief excursion when I write these trip reports for some reason?

That night we took Tony out to dinner at All Spice - it was a story all of its own. We had a great time with Tony who had been a real gent even though his wife had been in hospital for two days while we were with him. He didn't even let on until I asked him. After saying our goodbyes we went back to the hotel still laughing about our evening out with him.

**Day 15:** Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2007 - Baga Hill and home.

I was up well before first light - got my gear together and went off to Baga hill for the last birding session of the trip. Craig stayed behind in the room trying to get a little more sleep which he would need for the journey and work the following day. A full night shift awaited him when he got home y'see. The Hill wasn't a patch on the evening prior and even though I saw a new bird for the trip - a pair of stunning Grey-headed Bulbuls, it wasn't anywhere near as good as the afternoon session. I had a good walk around this time - going about half way down to the coast from the top of the hill where there is a great view of both the coast and the forest below. I did flush 2 Buttonquails neither of which showed any orange as the Barred Buttonquails did. I did wonder whether they might have been Yellow-legged Buttonquails but just couldn't get a decent view on either occasion. There were quite a few Peafowl sitting about in the top of the trees in the forest below plus my best view yet of an Alexandrine Parakeet. Also back on the way down the hill I did find 2 more Jerdon's Leafbirds. If I'm honest I had just about had enough - I had enjoyed every minute but my thoughts were turning to home. The coach was leaving from the hotel at 2.25 in the afternoon so about 09.00 I went back to the hotel picked up Craig and went for a last breakfast before heading back to pack my stuff. It was all pretty relaxed by my normal standards - perhaps Goa had rubbed off on me a bit? By about 4 o'clock we were unloading the luggage from the coach, fighting with the porters for the privilege of carrying the bags at Diabolim airport. The plane was due to go at 6.30 but didn't take off until 7.00. The flight home was an enormously boring 10+ hours which was an hour longer than the flight into India for whatever reason? More plastic food, poor in flight entertainment and uncomfortable agony was endured saved by the blundering pilots in flight speech where he tried to explain our new route. "Hello - I am umm err your er pilot and the er ... route we are taking is ... where is it now? Oh yes - um err ... over ... oh yes and thank you for flying with us ... umm er ... the routes a strange one heading over .. Muskatt then I think were going via Turkey aren't we? ... no hang on - um er we're even heading north over Poland at one point - we um er don't normally take that route" he just went on and on for ages - I was actually laughing out loud! I can only assume he hadn't given many in flight directives to the passengers before? So different from the slick slightly plastic rehearsed repetition you normally get from the pilot prior to a flight. If I was a pilot I would have been much the same though it would have been just impossible to make a worse job of it. After an age we landed back in stinky freezing cold blightly. I thought of the lads from Shetland who had to get another flight after landing in England then would be met by a small island surrounded by the freezing

North Sea where you're lucky if you get four hours of daylight at this time of the year. Talk about one extreme to the other. So it could have been worse?

Some of the memories I'm left with are priceless. One day whilst relaxing on the balcony of our air conditioned room we spotted three older European birders (English no doubt?) wandering around the hotel grounds in the full heat of the day. Their attire would have been better suited to a day on the Norfolk coast in mid winter as we saw them lugging around a vast array of scopes, and cameras in 100 degree heat and stifling Humidity. Even at 100 yards distance their bright red faces were glowing like hot coals on a dark night. They were dressed like Victorian missionaries - full white cloths and pith helmets! Quite why they had so many clothes on is anyone's guess? As they walked up the steep ramp to leave the grounds I said to Craig "I bet one of them dies of heat exhaustion before the main gate?" but fortunately none of them did. Another good one was when we saw two young lads carrying a door which they had bolt upright and wedged between them, on a small motorbike in heavy traffic. Other bikes dragged 15 foot long steel cables behind them - sparking on the road as they went. You won't see things like this in England. Some of the houses for rent had signs reading 'House for rent - foreigners only!' Imagine what the authorities would make of that over here? The whole place was a laugh a minute from start to finish. But now here I am in Dullsville writing about it - chuckling to myself as I remember some of the bits. There were some sad bits too. We would spend about an hour each day sitting in a roadside restaurant eating our breakfast and during the many hours we sat there not once did any customers visit the stall across the road where a nice lady stood from early morning to after dark each day with her small children hoping for some custom. I bought a rubbish hat off her for ten times the going the going rate at one point out of sympathy - she seemed quite happy with this. I can't even wear the hat as it has a silly Goa beach label on it which isn't my scene at all. If I can get the label off I might use it? If not - never mind. I will go back one day if I can afford it. The flights quite expensive but its cheap once you get there and surely the thought of a relaxing holiday spent amongst fantastic people will draw me back at some point? There are still a few birds I'd like to see too of course.

Tatty bye - Phil. (Ramsgate in Kent, England.)

And now for the boring bird list ... yawn:

### Goa - November 20<sup>th</sup> to December 4<sup>th</sup> 2007

**Little Grebe:** seen or heard on 3 dates.

**Indian Cormorant:** a few were seen at Carambolim Lake then another was seen on the roadside near Santa Cruz.

**Great Cormorant:** 1 at Carambolim Lake.

**Little Cormorant:** common at all wetland sites.

**Oriental Darter:** 3 at Carambolim then 1 seen from the boat on the Zuari river trip.

**Western Reef Egret:** seen on about half a dozen dates at various wetlands. 6+ on the Zuari River trip probably the highest count we managed.

**Little Egret:** common.

**Great White Egret:** common.

**Intermediate Egret:** common.

**Eastern Cattle Egret:** an apparent split from the western form though they looked much like the other things you see all over the world to me? Common.

**Grey Heron:** singles were seen on 4 or 5 dates.

**Purple Heron:** 1 - 4+ were seen at all the wetland sites.

**Indian Pond Heron:** common.

**Night Heron:** seen daily from the Marinha Dourada hotel - a maximum of 20+ birds. Otherwise, they were seen on a few other dates at a few other sites.

**Striated Heron:** about a dozen separate sightings at Backwoods, Carambolim, Zuari River, Mondovi River etc.

**Cinnamon Bittern:** 1 or 2 birds were seen on 4 dates from the Beira Mar Hotel.

**Asian Openbill:** seen on 3 dates - 1 sitting in a field near Siolim, c50 at Carambolim Lake then 43 at Siolim marsh.

**Woolly-necked Stork:** singles from the Beira Mar Hotel then flyovers on 2 dates over the Marinha Dourada Hotel.

**Glossy Ibis:** c60 were seen at Carambolim Lake.

**Black-headed Ibis:** 15 at Carambolim Lake, 4 on the Zuari river trip then 45 flew over at Siolim marsh.

**Eurasian Spoonbill:** 3 were seen on the Zuari river trip. Apparently there are only 6 birds present in the area so we were indeed fortunate to see any at all.

**Lesser Whistling Duck:** common at any wetland site.

**Garganey:** 70 were seen at Carambolim.

**Shoveler:** a few were seen at Carambolim.

**Cotton Pygmy Goose:** c20 were seen at Carambolim.

**Black-shouldered Kite:** singles seen on 2 dates from Marinha Dourada Hotel, a pair on our drive to Saligao Zor then another single on Divar Island.

**Brahminy Kite:** common near the coast.

**Black Kite:** common.

**Black-eared Kite:** easily seen around the coastal strip.

**Besra:** 1 at Backwoods was the only sighting.

**Shikra:** seen most days at virtually all the sites we visited.

**Crested Goshawk:** a pair of largish accipiters seen over Arpora woods were probably this specie? Another single bird, expertly spotted by Loven on our drive back from Backwoods, showed well after an emergency stop.

**Steppe Buzzard:** singles birds were seen over Arpora wood and Saligao. Another Buteo specie seen from the Marinha Dourada escaped identification though I doubt very much it was a Steppe Buzzard, appearing in jizz and plumage far closer to the Buzzards we see in Britain? I will pass on that one.

**Oriental Honey Buzzard:** fairly common and seen on most days at a variety of sites. 6+ were seen daily from the Marinha Dourada hotel during our mid-day raptor watches.

**Crested Serpent Eagle:** singles at Tikkanem then on 2 dates from the Marinha Dourada Hotel.

**Short-toed Eagle:** 1 was seen during the raptor watch at Backwoods.

**Rufous-bellied Eagle:** an immature bird was seen during our raptor watch at Backwoods.

**Booted Eagle:** fairly common and seen in small numbers on most days.

**Bonelli's Eagle:** an adult bird showed up during the raptor watch at Backwoods.

**Mountain Hawk-eagle:** 1 on the raptor watch at Backwoods.

**Crested Hawk-eagle:** seen on 2 dates over Arpora woods (once from the hotel) then a pair near a huge nest at Maem Lake.

**Black Eagle:** a magnificent 'thing' showed very well near the end of the trip over Baga hill during a mid-day raptor watch from the Marinha Dourada Hotel. One of the best birds of the whole trip for me.

**Lesser Spotted Eagle:** seen on about half a dozen dates. A bird was seen every day sitting in a tree c50 meters away from the Beira Mar Hotel.

**Greater Spotted Eagle:** 1 - 2 were seen daily when we took any time to partake in any raptor watching.

**Tawny Eagle:** 1 was seen from the Marinha Dourada over Arpora woods and Baga Hill.

**Osprey:** 1 - 3 birds were seen most days, most commonly fishing over the salt pans from our hotel.

**Sea Eagle specie:** a large bulky Sea Eagle was showed well for about ten minutes as it appeared over Baga Hill then flew right past us and over Arpora woods on November 30<sup>th</sup>. The wing shape was wrong for White-bellied Sea Eagle (which fly on deeply Vee'd wings like a huge Black-shouldered Kite) and the large head and short tail made the bird shape more like a large Vulture than the common Goan sea eagle. The only other Sea Eagle currently recorded in the area is Grey-headed Sea Eagle, though this is extremely rare. The plumage of our bird did indicate it might well be an immature of this specie? A little more research is needed as the books we had with us were not of much help.

**White-bellied Sea Eagle:** A pair showed daily from the Marinha Dorada Hotel/Arpora woods. Others were seen over Baga beach, Zuari River and the Mandovi River.

**Pallid Harrier:** a lovely male and 4 - 5+ other ring-tails were seen during an evening visit to Divar Island.

**Marsh Harrier:** common in suitable habitat. A very strange black and white male showed well from the Beira Mar Hotel one evening. We were all hoping it was a male Pied Harrier but it turned out to be just an aberrant Marsh Harrier.

**Kestrel:** seen on about half a dozen dates.

**Amur Falcon:** A rare vagrant apparently, though we came across them on 3 separate dates. A group of four showed over the Marinha Dourada Hotel on our first full day then a single was seen in the same area on the following day. We came across another perched bird (a female) sitting around on the wires over the Siolim Marsh. Other birders saw as many as ten birds together - so obviously a bit of migration was going on during our stay.

**Barred Buttonquail:** single birds were flushed on 2 dates at Baga fields.

**Red Spurfowl:** a few birds were heard and flushed from the undergrowth but on all occasions views were very poor. A single was seen with the naked eye at Backwoods then 3+ showed slightly better as they legged it through the undergrowth during an afternoon jaunt up a very steamy Baga Hill.

**Indian Peafowl:** 1 - 6+ were seen at Backwoods and Baga Hill. More were heard at other sites.

**Slaty-breasted Rail:** 1 was seen during the Zuari River Trip.

**Ruddy-breasted Crake:** 2 were flushed at Tikkanem then Craig saw another waddling around in the marsh off the Beira Mar Hotel.

**White-breasted Waterhen:** fairly common at suitable marshy habitats.

**Watercock:** Craig found one at Carambolim Lake. He's a good lad.

**Grey-headed Swamphen:** c200 at Carambolim Lake and a single off the Beira Mar Hotel were the only sightings.

**Moorhen:** seen on a few dates.

**Coot:** scarce. I can only remember seeing them at Carambolim?

**Painted Snipe:** seen most days in the marsh at dusk from the Beira Mar Hotel - maximum seven birds there during the first week of our stay. A family party with two small young were seen there from time to time there. Another pair were seen apparently building a nest at Carambolim?

**Black-winged Stilt:** Up to sixty were present daily at Siolim marsh and another 9 birds were seen at Santa Cruz.

**Bronze-winged Jacana:** common at Carambolim Lake. A few were seen at two other sites.

**Pheasant-tailed Jacana:** common at Carambolim Lake though otherwise only seen at Santa Cruz.

**Small Pratincole:** 1000+ was the maximum count at Mojem beach during our early morning visits and perhaps twice this many were present during our second session at Siolim Marsh. Also seen in good numbers at Santa Cruz.

**Red-wattled Lapwing:** common.

**Yellow-wattled Lapwing:** 9 were seen at Santosh's secret spot for this specie. Fantastic views too from the taxi.

**Pacific Golden Plover:** 5 at Siolim Bridge, 1 at Santa Cruz then 4 flyovers at Siolim Marsh were the only sightings.

**Greater Sandplover:** 6 - 10 birds were seen amongst the hordes of Lessers on Morjim beach.

**Lesser Sandplover:** 100+ daily at Morjim beach.

**Little-ringed Plover:** common at suitable sites.

**Kentish Plover:** common at Morjim Beach.

**Curlew:** a few were seen on the Zuari River trip.

**Whimbrel:** a few were seen on the Zuari river trip.

**Tereck Sandpiper:** 1 - 4 were seen on 2 dates at Morjim Beach and about 25 were seen in the high tide roost at Siolim Bridge.

**Greenshank:** seen in small numbers on a number of dates in suitable habitat.

**Wood Sandpiper:** common. Three figure counts were taken at Siolim Marsh and one evening at the Beira Mar Hotel.

**Green Sandpiper:** common.

**Common Sandpiper:** common.

**Marsh Sandpiper:** 1 at Siolim Marsh near the end of the trip was the only sighting.

**Redshank:** common.

**Ruff:** only 1 was seen - at the salt pan near the hotel.

**Curlew Sandpiper:** singles on two dates at Morjim Beach and Santa Cruz marsh.

**Dunlin:** A few were seen on Morjim beach.

**Temmick's Stint:** 1 - 20+ birds were seen on 6 dates.

**Little Stint:** common at Siolim marsh and Santa Cruz.

**Sanderling:** 2 were seen at Morjim Beach.

**Common Snipe:** seen on a few dates.

**Pintail Snipe:** 3 were flushed one afternoon at Baga fields and other singles were seen at Siolim and Santa Cruz.

**Heuglins Gull:** up to ten plus birds were seen daily on Morjim Beach.

**Great Black-headed Gull:** 10 were seen during our first visit to Morjim then 7 were seen on our third visit there.

**Slender-billed Gull:** common on Morjim beach. 52+ were seen there on our last morning visit.

**Brown-headed Gull:** many hundreds at Morjim beach plus odd flocks were seen on both the Zuari and Mandovi rivers.

**Black-headed Gull:** a handful were seen on Morjim Beach.

**Gull-billed Tern:** common at all the marsh and river habitats.

**Sandwich Tern:** 2 - 3 were seen on one date at Morjim Beach.

**Lesser Crested Tern:** common at Morjim Beach. 21 were there on our third visit.

**Great Crested Tern:** 30 were seen on the Zuari River Trip.

**Caspian Tern:** 1 - 3+ birds were seen on each visit to Morjim Beach.

**Whiskered Tern:** singles were seen on 2 visits to Siolim Marsh.

**Rock Dove:** common.

**Mountain Imperial Pigeon:** easy to see at Backwoods.

**Nilgiri Woodpigeon:** a flyover at Arpora. I couldn't find any at Baga Hill.

**Oriental Turtle Dove:** 1 at Backwoods.

**Spotted Dove:** common.

**Grey-fronted Green Pigeon:** a few at Backwoods then 5 more sitting in a fruiting tree on Baga Hill.

**Vernal Hanging Parrot:** seen at Backwoods, Carambolim and Baga Hill.

**Malabar Parakeet:** seen on about 4 dates - best views at Backwoods.

**Plum-headed Parakeet:** seen on about six dates. Common at Maem Lake. The adult males are very pretty - I can't believe I'm complementing a Parakeet but there you go. The heat must have gotten to me or something??

**Rose-ringed Parakeet:** common.

**Alexandrine Parakeet:** two over the salt pans near the hotel then a single at Baga Hill. We did see a flyover pair somewhere else - but me forget where ... hee hee.

**Drongo Cuckoo:** 1 in Arpora Woods.

**Pied Cuckoo:** A juvenile bird was found at Dona Paula - quite a good bird according to Santosh.

**Asian Koel:** fairly common.

**Common Cuckoo:** singles at Arpora and Carambolim.

**Common Hawk-cuckoo:** a juvenile was seen near the camp at Backwoods.

**Blue-faced Malkoha:** 1 was eventually found on the penultimate day at Baga Hill.

**Greater Coucal:** A real beast. Seen in small numbers on most days.

**Brown-hawk Owl:** one was seen in the small wood at Carambolim. Three were heard calling one evening at Backwoods.

**Barn Owl:** One was seen near our hotel.

**Brown Wood Owl:** An extremely camouflaged pair were expertly found by Santosh at Saligoa behind the Zor. We would have had no chance of finding them without him.

**Spotted Owlet:** 2 on the restaurant railings at Beira Mar, 2 on wires near our hotel then 2 during daylight spotted in an abandoned building at Dona Paula.

**Sri Lanka Frogmouth:** 2 weird looking things straight out the 'Critters' movie sitting in a clump of bamboo at Backwoods.

**Indian Little Nightjar:** 2 found roosting in daylight hours were seen at Maem Lake. A small Nightjar seen flying around in darkness at the Marinha Dourada Hotel as we eat in the outside restaurant was presumably this specie.

**Jerdon's Nightjar:** a few were seen at Backwoods.

**Crested Treeswift:** We struggled to find this specie. They are meant to be easy at Bondla but we decided against going there due to time restrictions and laziness. We did see a pair distantly in flight at Backwoods on the raptor watch then two more (1 perched) at Maem Lake.

**Asian Palm Swift.** Seen at 3 sites. Easiest at Marinha Dourada whilst scanning the Hirundine/Swift flocks wheeling about over the salt pans where 3 - 4+ were seen daily.

**Indian Swiftlet:** Seen on 3 dates from the hotel (maximum 3 birds) then another single at Backwoods.

**White-rumped Needletail:** a few showed during the first evening at Backwoods.

**Brown-backed Needletail:** 3 were seen near the temple on the first evening then 12+ showed during the raptor watch on our last afternoon at Backwoods.

**Little Swift:** common.

**Pacific Swift:** a rarity. Craig found one amongst a huge group of Little Swifts and Red-rumped Swallows from our hotel balcony on December 2<sup>nd</sup>. The bird showed well for about 5 minutes before disappearing.

**Alpine Swift:** one over the hotel salt pans on our second afternoon.

**Indian Roller:** common.

**Hoopoe:** Seen at Baga Fields, Backwoods and Arpora.

**Stork-billed Kingfisher:** seen on about half a dozen dates. About 6 along the Zuari River the best day for the specie.

**Collared Kingfisher:** a rather impressive eight individuals of this scarce specie were seen on the Zuari River Trip.

**Black-capped Kingfisher:** half a dozen were seen on the Zuari River Trip then singles were seen on two dates at Siolim Marsh.

**White-throated Kingfisher:** common and seen everywhere.

**Lesser Pied Kingfisher:** 1 - 3 on half a dozen dates were seen around the hotel salt pans, Carambolim and Siolim Marsh.

**Blue-eared Kingfisher:** 3 were seen on the walk upstream at Backwoods.

**Common Kingfisher:** common.

**Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher:** good views of a bird up stream at Backwoods.

**Chestnut-headed Bee-eater:** quite a few were seen on our first visit to Siolim Lake and they were seen on 2 dates after this.

**Blue-tailed Bee-eater:** Seen at Siolim, Beira Mar, Marinha Dourada etc.

**Little Green Bee-eater:** common.

**Malabar Grey Hornbill:** 2 pairs were seen on two dates around Backwoods.

**Malabar Pied Hornbill:** one was seen in flight at Carambolim Lake.

**Great Hornbill:** we struck lucky with this specie which has become a great scarcity in the area by all accounts. 3 were seen on the first day at Backwoods then another pair there on the following day.

**Coppersmith Barbet:** seen in Arpora Woods, Maem Lake and Baga Hill.

**Malabar Barbet:** a few were seen at Backwoods.

**White-cheeked Barbet:** seen distantly at Maem Lake then very close at Baga Hill.

**Heart-spotted Woodpecker:** seen on 2 dates around Backwoods.

**Indian Pygmy Woodpecker:** a pair at Backwoods.

**Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker:** a pair were seen at Maem Lake.

**Rufous Woodpecker:** seen on 3 dates the best views at Maem Lake.

**Black-rumped Flameback:** The most common woodpecker we saw. Seen on a few dates at Backwoods, Carambolim etc.

**Greater Flameback:** 2 were seen near the temple at Backwoods.

**White-bellied Woodpecker:** another of the highlights. Heard drumming on the first day then a pair showed well on day 2 in the woods at Backwoods. The volume of the drumming had to be heard to be believed - awesome things.

**Indian Pitta:** heard calling at Backwoods (movement glimpsed with naked eye though Craig did get the bins on its head!) then very good views at Santosh's site near the end of the trip.

**Oriental Skylark:** common at Divar Island and Dona Paula.

**Malabar Lark:** fairly common at a few sites.

**Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark:** good views of 3 - 4 birds at Dona Paula.

**Greater Short-toed Lark:** seen in small numbers at Morjim and Dona Paula and big numbers on Divar Island where there must have been well over a hundred birds? One flock alone held 70 or 80.

**Sand Martin:** a scarce bird in Goa. One was seen (and heard) flying amongst Hirundines on Morjim Beach on our last visit there.

**Plain Martin:** one was seen over the salt pans from the Marinha Dourada.

**Dusky Crag Martin:** Santosh spotted one as we loaded up our gear into his taxi at the entrance to the Marinha Dourada. 2 other probables were seen during the trip too?

**Streak-throated Swallow:** seen in small numbers at Marinha Dourada, Baga Fields, Beira Mar and Backwoods.

**Barn Swallow:** common.

**Red-rumped Swallow.** Very common.

**Wire-tailed Swallow:** seen in small numbers daily. The nicest of the Hirundines.

**Yellow Wagtail:** masses of post roost birds (flyovers) on both mornings we went to Morjim beach and common at most of the paddies too. The only race we were able to positively identify were Grey-headed (*thunbergii*) - one bird we found was in near full summer plumage. We suspected some other as being possibly Black-headed (*feldegg*) but couldn't be sure so early in the season.

**Grey Wagtail:** a handful were seen at a few different sites.

**Citrine Wagtail:** good views were had of a bird in a roadside rice paddy at Tikkanem.

**Forest Wagtail:** one was seen along the river at Backwoods.

**White Wagtail:** A couple were seen in the rice paddy at Tikkanem.

**White Browed Wagtail:** common around the Marinha Dourada.

**Tree Pipit:** seen and heard at a few sites on 3 or 4 dates. 2 at Carambolim looked most odd - very dull for Tree Pipits? I would assume they are a different race?

**Richard's Pipit:** The most common Pipit in my opinion? Easy at quite a few sites especially Baga Fields where there were loads of them shreeping away.

**Paddyfield Pipit:** quite common. The calls quite distinctive and they seen a little more approachable than Richards too.

**Tawny Pipit:** seen in Baga Fields and Dona Paula. If anyone tells you they don't exist in Goa then ignore them as its rubbish.

**Blyth's Pipit:** seen in Baga Fields and Carambolim. They are probably fairly common/regular if you can be bothered to check through every Pipit?

**Ashy Woodswallow:** common at Marinha Dourada, Maem Lake and Backwoods etc.

**Common Woodshrike:** seen at the Pitta site, Maem Lake and Baga Hill.

**Malabar Woodshrike:** seen on one date near the entrance track into Arpora wood on the way to the Cabana Nightclub.

**Pied Flycatcher-shrike:** one in Arpora then about 4 around Backwoods.

**Black-headed Cuckooshrike:** seen near Arpora woods and then at Maem Lake.

**Large Cuckooshrike:** only seen in Arpora where a pair were seen on most visits.

**Orange Minivet:** A few were seen at Backwoods.

**Small Minivet:** seen at Backwoods, the Pitta site and they were common on Baga Hill.

**Red-vented Bulbul:** seen in small numbers at Backwoods, Arpora, Baga etc.

**Red-whiskered Bulbul:** very common and seen almost everywhere.

**Square-tailed Black Bulbul:** easy at Backwoods.

**Flame-throated Bulbul:** quite common at Backwoods - very pretty too.

**Grey-headed Bulbul:** 2 at Baga Hill on the last day were the only ones seen. They were heard calling in the woods at Saligoa Zor but escaped visible detection there.

**White-browed Bulbul:** fairly common at Arpora, Backwoods, Dona Paula etc.

**Yellow-browed Bulbul:** quite easy at Backwoods.

**Common Iora:** common at Arpora, Baga Hill, Backwoods etc.

**Golden-fronted Leafbird:** 4 were seen at Backwoods then a pair at Maem Lake.

**Jerdon's Leafbird:** 3 on the first visit to Baga Hill then a single on the second visit.

**Asian Fairy Bluebird:** Easy at Backwoods - the males are stunning things.

**Long-tailed Shrike:** common everywhere.

**Brown Shrike:** two at Divar Island and a single off the Beira Mar Hotel.

**Black-naped Blue Monarch:** about 4 at Backwoods then a pair at Saligoa behind the Zor.

**Asian Paradise Flycatcher:** reasonably common in woodlands.

**White-spotted Fantail:** singles at Arpora woods, the Pitta Site then 2 were seen during a late afternoon walk up Baga Hill.

**Blue-headed Rock Thrush:** a male at Backwoods then a female at the Pitta site.

**Orange-headed Thrush:** fantastic views of these fantastic birds at Backwoods then a single under the same bush as the Pitta.

**Malabar Whistling Thrush:** Brilliant birds these. Nice to look at but vocally one of the best things we had. Its call recalls a squeaky bike wheel then the song is a drunken fluty whistle which you just can't hear without falling about laughing.

**Indian Blackbird:** seen at Backwoods and the Pitta site.

**Siberian Thrush:** Perhaps a new bird for Goa? We spotted 2 thrush's sitting in a thinly leafed tree - a male and a female. The male (a first winter bird) showed very well down to about 30 meters for a few minutes before flying off with the female. Eye-browed Thrush was seen and photographed beneath the fruiting fig tree near the temple at Backwoods and this was certainly a new bird for Goa. One of a few strange birds reported by the birders during our two week stay.

**White-rumped Shama:** poor views of a female at dusk. Loven could hear them calling at Backwoods but they were just impossible to find there.

**Oriental Magpie Robin:** quite common.

**Indian Robin.** Seen on about half a dozen dates at Morjim, Dona Paula, Carambolim, Baga Hill etc.

**Pied Bushchat:** seen most days on the hotel salt pans then at a few other sites - Baga fields, Dona Paula etc.

**Common Stonechat:** presumably Siberian Stonechats? Common and seen all over the place. Some of the Stonechats at Divar Island were of a completely different race - don't know which??

**Brown-breasted Flycatcher:** about 4 were seen - all at Backwoods.

**Asian Brown Flycatcher:** One then three were seen on two dates at Backwoods.

**Tickell's Blue Flycatcher:** seen in Arpora, Backwoods, Baga Hill, Maem Lake etc.

**Verditer Flycatcher:** seen at Backwoods and Baga Hill.

**White-bellied Blue Flycatcher:** a male and a female were seen at Backwoods.

**Tawny-bellied Babbler:** common in large groups at Baga Hill.

**Dark-fronted Babbler:** half a dozen were seen on two dates at Backwoods.

**Jungle Babbler:** easy to see at Arpora, Baga Hill etc though never plentiful.

**Indian Scimitar Babbler:** a bird came to the tape in very poor light at dusk at Backwoods then a bird was seen briefly in full daylight right out in the open at Maem Lake. We were extremely lucky even with the glimpses we managed by all accounts as they are normally impossible to see even though you hear them quite a lot.

**Brown-cheeked Fulvetta:** common at Backwoods. Also seen at Baga Hill.

**Puff-throated Babbler:** quite common at Arpora, Backwoods, Baga Hill etc.

**Zitting Cisticola:** Still Fan-tailed Warbler to me - but there you go... Common at Baga Fields and a couple of other places etc.

**Ashy Prinea:** seen on a few dates around the hotel, Arpora, Carambolim etc.

**Grey-breasted Prinea:** seen in Arpora, the Pitta Site, Baga etc.

**Plain Prinea:** Quite common at Baga Fields. Also seen at a couple of other sites.

**Clamorous Reed Warbler:** seen at Baga Fields, Beira Mar and the Zuari River. Heard at Santa Cruz.

**Blyth's Reed Warbler:** common everywhere - one even sitting on telegraph wires!

**Paddyfield Warbler:** One was seen well in the marsh behind the Beira Mar Hotel.

**Booted Warbler:** One was seen at Dona Paula.

**Common Tailorbird:** easy at Arpora, Carambolim, Baga Hill, Backwoods etc.

**Greenish Warbler:** common everywhere.

**Green Warbler:** common everywhere.

**Western Crowned Warbler:** about 10 birds were seen on two dates around Backwoods.

**Indian Yellow Tit:** seen in small numbers at Arpora, Beira Mar and Backwoods.

**Velvet-fronted Nuthatch:** about half a dozen were seen at Backwoods.

**Pale-billed Flowerpecker:** common and very boring.

**Nilgiri Flowerpecker:** see above.

**Thick-billed Flowerpecker:** almost as boring as the other Flowerpeckers. Only seen at Backwoods where they were quite common.

**Purple-rumped Sunbird:** quite common.

**Crimson-backed Sunbird:** common.

**Purple Sunbird:** seen on about 5 - 6 dates.

**Loten's Sunbird:** 2 were seen at Backwoods.

**Little Spiderhunter:** 1 at Backwoods.

**Black-headed Bunting:** 3+ were seen on overhead wires on the way out of camp at Backwoods.

**Red-headed Bunting:** 10+ then about 20 were seen at the same bit near the school at Backwoods. We also had good views of a pair on wires over the road at Carambolim.

**Grey-necked Bunting:** singles at Morjim, Backwoods and Dona Paula.

**Common Rosefinch:** 2 were seen amongst the Bunting and Petronia flock on the first day at Backwoods.

**Red Avadavat:** 1 at Arpora.

**Black-headed Munia:** 2 were seen at Baga.

**Scaly-breasted Munia:** seen at Baga Fields, Morjim, Beira Mar etc.

**Black-throated Munia:** a double figure group were seen at Backwoods.

**White-rumped Munia:** common.

**House Sparrow:** fairly common.

**Chestnut-shouldered Petronia:** easy at Backwoods.

**Indian Baya Weaver:** 3 - 400+ at Carambolim then 1 - 200+ were seen on the wires near the salt pans at Marinha Dourada.

**Indian Golden Oriole:** common.

**Black-hooded Oriole:** A real stunner. Common at Backwoods and Maem Lake.

**Black Drongo:** common in open country.

**Ashy Drongo:** quite common at Backwoods, Arpora, Maem Lake etc.

**Bronzed Drongo:** quite common at Backwoods.

**White-bellied Drongo:** easy at Arpora, Maem Lake, Baga Hill etc.

**Greater Racket-tailed Drongo:** a few were seen at Backwoods.

**Brahminy Starling:** 1 - 10 were seen on 3 dates either around Baga Fields or the Beira Mar Hotel.

**Rosy Starling:** seen daily around Baga fields with 40 - 50 birds on the first walk out there. Also good numbers were seen sitting on the wires around the Beira Mar Hotel.

**Grey-headed Starling:** quite common around the coast.

**Malabar White-headed Starling:** 4 were seen on the last day at Backwoods.

**Common Myna:** only seen on 3 - 4 dates with the occasional bird seen around the salt pans across the road from our hotel, Baga Fields then a few from the roadside on one of our drive around with Santosh one day.

**Jungle Myna:** common.

**House Crow:** common.

**Jungle Crow:** common at Backwoods.

**Rufous Treepie:** These fantastic creatures were seen at Arpora Woods, Maem Lake and Baga Hill etc.

We also heard: Grey Jungle Fowl, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Common Flameback, Thick-billed Warbler, Indian Blue Robin etc and probably a couple of other species we just couldn't see. Never mind - it'll give us an excuse to go back.

We also came across some fantastic Insects, Amphibians, Lizards but very few Snakes. One of the other visiting birders (Mick) did come across a five foot snake in the hotel grounds but I didn't see any over about 12 inches myself other than a two foot Rat Snake at Backwoods. Some enormous spiders were seen - often times in webs that spanned about 20

feet as the stretched across the roads - awesome. Langur Monkeys and a Mongoose were also seen at this fantastic place.