

Northern India

November 6th – 21st 2005

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The subcontinent enters the senses. From the pink light of her northern deserts to the green heat of Sri Lanka, she is more or less unique. Docile, stubborn cattle define her streets as much as evening smoke and impatient city drivers. Smells of spice mingle with those of dung and river and the scent of cooking and cooking fires. She enters the writings of casual observers and the poetry of Eliot and her sounds, sitar and tabla, are synonymous with the buzz of every casual yet instinctively constructed day. Yet there is more, and all pay respect to its presence. Taciturn cattle and animated humanity exist in ease; one will shout and the other will take no heed, in a time-honoured ritual. Microchip exists with plough and harrow in much the same way, and you have come here to observe. Do so carefully and it will serve you well, for India's babble has a purpose; it is nothing less than life itself.

Ian Hodgson December 2005



Spotted Owlet

Itinerary

November 5th/6th Our Virgin Atlantic flight from Heathrow to Delhi lifted into the London night with fireworks flashing below and little over 8 hours later we bumped down on to Indian soil, just before mid day on the subcontinent. Rather dazed, and accompanied by Rattan Singh, our guide for the duration of the trip, we drove through the streets of the capital to our hotel, where Vida and Sheila were consigned, rather unkindly, to Room 101, with the rest of us spread about the place and looking forward to a decent night's sleep. First, though, we joined another bus for a tour of India's capital, which involved a visit to Lakshmi Narayan temple on the western outskirts of Old Delhi, and India Gate, a 40m stone arch inscribed with the names of Indian servicemen who died in the great conflicts that plagued the early 20th century. As always, though, it was the sights and sounds of this amazing place that provided the most vivid impressions. On a filthy lot in a grove of trees dotted with the corroding carcasses of old tanker transporters and shacks thrown together from pieces of wood, with plastic sheeting draped over railings for shelter, a girl whirled through incredible poverty in a bright red shawl, her face illuminated by a smile of pure delight. Our evening meal involved ordering from a take-away menu that advertised *Chienoise* (poodle?) noodles among other things, and after liberal doses of cheesy peas, kingfishers, dal makhani, pakoras and more kingfishers we collapsed into deep slumber, untroubled by the blaring car horns, voices and dogs howling in the street outside.....

Black Kite, Rose-ringed Parakeet, House Swift, Hoopoe, Dusky Crag Martin, Purple Sunbird, Bank Myna

November 7th Delhi is a good deal less polluted (yes, really) than when I was last here in 1996, thanks to conversion of most public transportation to run on CNG (compressed natural gas), and with the amount of traffic it is just as well. An hour after setting out we had still not cleared the chaotic free-for-all in which red traffic lights mean stop if there's no alternative, motor bikes drive straight at oncoming traffic on the wrong side of the road and impromptu left turns from the right lane without the slightest suggestion of doing so seem *de rigeur*. The remarkable thing is that nobody seems to mind.

Nevertheless, we eventually left the huge urban sprawl behind and emerged into a dusty countryside of cultivation and scattered bushes, quickly finding Indian Robin and Brown Rock Chat at the edge of a village, then Black Ibis, Black-headed Ibis, Black Francolin, Black-shouldered Kite, Wire-tailed Swallows, Pied Bushchat and our first Large Grey Babbler in some nearby fields. 7 Sarus Cranes and a puzzling Peregrine of utterly unfamiliar race followed and we added Common Woodshrike and Hume's Warbler in some tall roadside trees before reaching Sultanpur Jheel.

A mixture of acacia woodland surrounding a large grass-fringed lake with open, dry areas, Sultanpur is by all accounts the only wildlife sanctuary in the state of Haryana. We commenced our visit by walking through an avenue of acacias that produced our first Nilgai of the trip and birds that included Small Minivet and a more familiar trio of Red-breasted Flycatcher, Orphean Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat, before emerging into dry, open country. Here we added Silverbills and Avadavats, an unexpected Wryneck, Black-breasted Weaver, White-tailed Stonechat, Bluethroat and, as the grassland faded into even more arid terrain with scattered low bushes, some very dark Long-billed Pipits, with several Tawny Pipits for comparison and several Hume's Short-toed Larks in a flock of Greater Short-toed Larks on a recently ploughed field. Beyond this, the landscape was even drier and dustier, recalling the Tanqua Karoo on the fringes of the northwest Cape and Namibia, and on a flat, open expanse walked 2 Indian Coursers, with Variable Wheatear nearby and a Rufous-tailed Shrike, its plumage as dusty-toned as the desert itself. We wandered back through acacia scrub, adding Greater Spotted, Bonelli's and Booted Eagles and White-capped Bunting, then a party of Olive-backed Pipits and an impressive pair of Black-rumped Flamebacks as we retraced our steps through the woodland and back to the bus. We stopped on our way back into Delhi to look at a small band of Yellow-wattled Lapwings that ended the birding part of the day with a very presentable total of 111 species.

Well, nearly ended it, that is. As we waited on Delhi railway station for our onward transfer to Ranthambhor, a Barn Owl appeared on top of one of the platform lights, doubtless attracted by the numerous rats that live amid the grime, then drifted silently back into the night, much as we longed to do. We had arrived at the station at 9.30, just to be on the safe side for our 10.05 departure, but had to linger until our train eventually rolled in at 11. We piled in, spreading ourselves about to the amusement of our fellow passengers; locals who clearly had much less expansive ideas about personal space. The train slipped away from the bustle, our chatter eventually became a murmur, the lights went down and the train rolled steadily on into the Indian night, heading for our first taste of Rajasthan, land of deserts and tigers.....

Indian Cormorant, Little Cormorant, Darter, Purple Heron, Indian Pond Heron, Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Black Ibis, Lesser Whistling Duck, Spot-billed Duck, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Black-shouldered Kite, Crested Serpent Eagle, Shikra, Greater Spotted Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Booted Eagle, Black Francolin, Grey Francolin, Indian Peafowl, Sarus Crane, Purple Swamphen, Indian Courser, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Red-wattled Lapwing, Greater Coucal, Barn Owl, Spotted Owlet, Pied Kingfisher, Brown-headed Barbet, Coppersmith Barbet, Wryneck, Black-rumped Flameback, Greater Short-toed Lark, Hume's Short-toed Lark, Plain Martin, Wire-tailed Swallow, Asian House Martin, White-browed Wagtail, Citrine Wagtail, Paddyfield Pipit, Tawny Pipit, Long-billed Pipit, Olive-backed Pipit, Small Minivet, Zitting Cisticola, Ashy Prinia, Plain Prinia, Graceful Warbler, Orphean Warbler, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Taiga Flycatcher, Bluethroat, Indian Robin, White-tailed Stonechat, Pied Bushchat, Variable Wheatear, Isabelline Wheatear, Brown Rock Chat, Hume's Warbler, Large Grey Babbler, Oriental White-eye, Rufous-tailed Shrike, Bay-backed Shrike, Long-tailed Shrike, Southern Grey Shrike, Common Woodshrike, Rufous Treepie, Asian Pied Starling, Black-breasted Weaver, Red Avadavat, Indian Silverbill, White-capped Bunting

November 8thNocturnal musings upon the conundrum of how we would know when we had arrived at our destination when Indian railway stations seem not to have notices telling passengers where they might be were concisely answered when we were woken at 6am by the carriage attendant as the train began to pull away from the station. Apparently he had fallen asleep and Rattan's efforts to wake him had proved futile until it was too late. We tumbled off the train half an hour along the line at Indargargh, blinking in the pale early morning light at a treetop flock of 120 Green Bee-eaters, purchased tickets to get us back to Sawai Madhopur and bundled ourselves back on another train that pulled in after about an hour. To add insult to injury for most of us, Rattan spotted a Sirkeer Malkoha from the train, but probably only Sheila managed to match his view. However, we returned to Sawai Madhopur nearly three hours behind

schedule and decamped into our waiting open-topped bus from which we saw our first Long-tailed Minivets before making the short but rather chilly journey to our accommodation, a luxurious bungalow resort just outside the park boundary, arriving in time for a 9am breakfast and a welcome chance to chill out after an eventful start to the day.

We wandered over the dry, rolling and deeply eroded landscape beyond the hotel gates, where flocks of lop-eared goats picked their way through low succulent vegetation, finding our first Rufous-fronted Prinias and Indian Bushlarks, Brown and Bay-backed Shrikes and Painted Sandgrouse, which gave great views on a nearby low hill. Jungle Cat and Indian Hare in a grassy enclosure were a bonus and we returned for a substantial lunch, looking forward to our first game drive of the trip.

Replete, we piled into our canter, an open-topped lorry-bus, with five rather bemused Germans, taking an added layer to guard against the chill that would return late in the afternoon. Entering Ranthambhor through a gate held fast in the fingers of a gigantic banyan, we passed beneath steep cliffs crowned by a thousand year old fort. Noting Long-billed Vultures and White-bellied Drongos above us we drove on through a narrow ravine, beyond which the landscape became more open, with River Terns, Whiskered Terns and Gull-billed Terns at the edge of a still, reflective lake, herds of Sambar and Chital in the dry forest and Wild Pigs with masses of waterbirds and Citrine Wagtails at weedy lake fringes. As our circuit of the public part of the park steadily continued, parties of Yellow-footed Green Pigeons and Red-headed Buntings appeared in the soft, warm light of late afternoon.

Our park guide was visibly intent now, reacting to increasingly frequent alarm calls from langurs and chital from inside the forest. We were very close to a tiger. Stopped for some time, the atmosphere charged with anticipation, we scanned the understorey for a sign and suddenly the call went up – ‘there it is!’ Well, for some of us there was a flank, a tail, a suggestion of movement, but nothing more and the creature disappeared with an air of calm finality, leaving a sense of something unanswered. Still, our guide was undeterred, sensing something that years inside the park had taught him, and we moved on slowly as dusk began to gather, slowly skirting a forest lake where a line of jeeps and canters waited. Two or three hundred yards past, flashes from cameras told us they had something and steadily we reversed to within a hundred yards. Then, there it was! A magnificent tigress padded steadily up the bank from the lake and on to the track, spray marking trees as she moved by, followed by two cubs, each well grown and full of her confidence as she gazed evenly about, tasting the air, passed silently behind us and into the open forest no more than forty yards away, then down a low slope and gone.

Woolly-necked Stork, Ruddy Shelduck, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Osprey, Egyptian Vulture, Long-billed Vulture, Red-necked Falcon, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Bronze-winged Jacana, Oriental Pratincole, Gull-billed Tern, River Tern, Whiskered Tern, Painted Sandgrouse, Oriental Turtle Dove, Red Collared Dove, Yellow-footed Green-pigeon, Alexandrine Parakeet, Plum-headed Parakeet, Asian Koel, Sirkeer Malkoha, Green Bee-eater, Indian Bushlark, Long-tailed Minivet, Rufous-fronted Prinia, Oriental Magpie Robin, White-browed Fantail, Common Babbler, Brown Shrike, White-bellied Drongo, Brahminy Starling, Red-headed Bunting

November 9th After yesterday afternoon, today was bound to be an anti climax, but the morning drive through an arid, dusty part of the park turned up some good birds, notably an almost subterranean Jungle Bush-quail, Red-headed Vulture, our first Grey-headed Canary-flycatchers, at least 3 Brown Crakes and 2 Collared Scops Owls at a nest hole in some open woodland. Notably, we took a slightly different route to the park this morning, passing a donkey painted pink for the Hindu festival of Diwali, munching away utterly unconcerned at its appearance.

While Fran caught frogs in the hotel pool, some of us wandered off after lunch into the dry, dusty fields beyond the hotel, where we found few birds except for 9 Red-headed Buntings, a flock of 21 Greater Short-toed Larks – much greyer than their European counterparts – and 4 Ashy-crowned Sparrow-larks.

The afternoon drive continued the rather subdued feel of the day, although we added a beautiful Painted Spur-fowl by the side of the access road, Black Bittern, our only Paddyfield Warbler of the trip and 2 Blue Rock Thrushes. We all took the opportunity late in the afternoon to decamp from the vehicles to relax for a while in a truly tranquil setting, looking down on a grazing herd of Nilgai, in the lovely pale light of late afternoon.

Black Bittern, Red-headed Vulture, Crested Goshawk, Jungle Bush-quail, Painted Spur-fowl, Brown Crane, Collared Scops Owl, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark, Blue Rock Thrush, Grey-breasted Prinia, Paddyfield Warbler, Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher, Jungle Babbler, Ashy Drongo

November 10th Its proximity to Delhi makes Ranthambhor one of the most popular national parks in India and it is said to be best avoided at weekends. The park is government run and it is a matter of luck who your driver turns out to be and where you are allocated to go – they were very strict with our first guide a couple of days ago who was spotted by one of the park rangers ‘backtracking’ instead of following his

appointed route. It was necessary for John to justify his actions in writing, more or less stating that he had no choice because he was with a group of western birdwatchers. Kidnappers, more or less! Many tourists seem uncommitted to serious nature watching, and groups like our own are in the minority. Thus, there is probably a temptation for some of the drivers to simply go through the motions and this was certainly true of ours today. Both drives were dusty and produced little of interest apart from an adult Bonelli's Eagle and those who ventured out in the lunchtime heat saw more, in the form of a Indian Thick-knee, than for much of the rest of the day. Needless to say, we took little persuading to abandon our final drive next morning in favour of an early start for the 260km drive to Bharatpur.

Ferruginous Duck, Indian Thick-knee, Chestnut-shouldered Petronia

November 11th Setting out at 7, we began the long drive to Bharatpur, passing women in bright shawls as they headed for the fields and the crisp uniforms of eager schoolchildren, waving happily at us as we plodded along on the narrow roads with its insistently stubborn traffic. Initially flat cultivation dotted with trees and villages with people standing about, the landscape became steadily more arid, and a stop at the river Banas came as bright relief from the eroded semi-desert plains it bisected. Here we saw our first and only Streak-throated Swallows, our first White-eared Bulbuls and River Lapwings, a few Little Swifts, as opposed to the plentiful House Swifts we had seen thus far, and a golden rodent that our recently purchased guide to Indian mammals allowed us to identify as an Indian Desert Jird. What desert is to one is dessert to another, as the famous foxy saying goes.

After refuelling, with a flock of 60 Bimaculated Larks and an Isabelline Wheatear nearby, we were soon back into the flat, deeply gullied badlands and we stopped at an open area, overgrown in patches with a bean-like succulent that apparently produces a pod from which the locals make a cotton-like fabric. This also, apparently, attracts Sirkeer Malkoha, but not today and we had to be content with a couple of parties of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, huge flocks of Greater Short-toed Larks, amounting to nearly 700, a party of 60-70 Rosy Starlings, several Desert Wheatears and an initially puzzling female Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark.

On we traipsed, negotiating camels and tractors of basic construction mingling with more modern, slick types, all towing heavy carts subjected to varying degrees of overloading and sometimes sounding like mobile discotheques, but all enthusiastically blaring horns at every opportunity at anyone or anything that, equally consistently, took not the slightest scrap of notice.

By now we had noticed that our driver, whose name sounded uncomfortably like Numb Nut, had an unerring eye for every pothole on, and sometimes off the road, particularly during a very bad last 40km or so, and it was with some relief that we pulled up at the decorative entrance gate to Keoladeo Ghana National Park, more familiarly known as Bharatpur. Allowing for stops en route, the 260km had taken a good 6 hours to negotiate. Entry requirements met, forms completed and signed and money paid, we drove on down the narrow access track to the lodge inside the park. Rather regally titled the Hotel Bharatpur Ashok, it is a quaint establishment that looks old and run by ex British Rail staff, one of whom proudly told us that he had worked there since it opened for business 30 years ago. Indeed, the lodge lived up to its appearance in the evening, with the staff producing a lukewarm and rather unappetising meal that was at best indifferent. Jackals howled in the night in sympathy at our plight. After all, they have to go through the bins, for goodness' sake.

I digress. Although it was fairly late in the afternoon (about 4pm), we did have time to wander through some light woodland at the edge of the wet part of the reserve, now wet after a good monsoon, following three years of drought. This produced our first Indian Grey Hornbills, a flock of 20 Yellow-footed Green-pigeons, a Lesser Fish Eagle, at least a hundred Glossy Ibises and, flicking about in some isolated bushes in the lake, several Plain Leaf Warblers, which were subtle, to say the least. Some of us were also fortunate to find Jungle Nightjar and a roosting Dusky Eagle Owl.

A mole cricket in the restaurant was the highlight of the evening, but we slept well enough, in between bouts of howling. The jackals were noisy as well.

Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Lesser Fish Eagle, Eurasian Hobby, River Lapwing, Ruff, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Dusky Eagle Owl, Jungle Nightjar, Little Swift, Indian Grey Hornbill, Bimaculated Lark, Streak-throated Swallow, White-eared Bulbul, Plain Leaf Warbler, Desert Wheatear, Rosy Starling, Baya Weaver

November 12th Pre-prandial perambulations around the periphery of the park principally produced a plethora of *Phylloscopi*, including Common Chiffchaff and Greenish, Plain Leaf and Hume's Warbler, with Blyth's Reed and Lesser Whitethroat making up the numbers.

Following breakfast, along the same vaguely edible lines of last evening's meal, we joined cycle rickshaws, two per vehicle, and creaked off along the flat track that leads to Keoladeo Temple, passing lakes and

patches of woodland. It was clear at the outset that the recent droughts have reduced numbers of birds visiting and nesting in the park, though it was too early in the winter for peak wildfowl numbers. Still, we were kept entertained by a pair of Dusky Eagle Owls at their nest, impressive numbers of Eurasian Hobbies, including 5 in one dead tree, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Jungle Nightjar, at least 3 Sarus Cranes and some large birds of prey, including Greater Spotted and Booted Eagles. Arguably, though, the star of the morning was an immense Indian Rock Python, measuring at least 15' in length that was digesting its latest meal on a sturdy branch above the water.

Lunch was a boxed affair, taken in the grounds of the small temple, its lawn adorned with feeding Hoopoes and the surrounding trees holding an intriguing warbler that, after considerable deliberation, we decided was a Brooks' Leaf Warbler. Moving on, a muddy bay just beyond the temple held a good selection of waders that included 2 White-tailed Lapwings, deliberate in their actions as always, 3 Temminck's Stints, a Kentish Plover and at least 23 Marsh Sandpipers, with a flock of 47 Common Cranes in the distance. By the time we had finished being led a merry dance by a Large-tailed Nightjar and an Indian Nightjar, eventually obtaining very good views of both, it was late in the afternoon and time to head back. We bade farewell to our rickshaw drivers and piled back into the lodge for an evening meal that, whilst not exactly a gourmet's delight, was better than yesterday's.

Black-necked Stork, Comb Duck, Common Crane, White-tailed Lapwing, Marsh Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint, Large-tailed Nightjar, Indian Nightjar, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Brooks' Leaf Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Eurasian Golden Oriole

November 13th Our plans to be away at 5.30 were thwarted by the gate attendant who refused to let our driver into the park until it opened at 6.30, though something must have shifted the obstacle as we did manage to get away by 6. Still in darkness, we passed numerous shapes along the road, some jogging, some just walking into the day.

Out on the road, more shadowy shapes in the headlights proved variously to be human, horse, cart or bicycle, all unlit and moving steadily in the pink glow of the approaching dawn, the lingering smell of evening fires overlaying the landscape. The scene flowed by, past fields of beehives, stupa-shaped hay ricks, stone cisterns and an ornate gate decorated with stone animals that stood pointlessly by the roadside, past more roadside eucalyptus and into Uttar Pradesh. The pink sandstone walls of the ancient Moghul city of Fatehpur Sikri stood sentinel on a low hillside, silhouetted beyond the tree-dotted fields, then an incongruous incoming mobile phone message advertising the benefits of a new service provider, as incompatible with our surroundings as the hoardings that blared out their garish messages to the taciturn fields and their inhabitants – *Johnson – not just tiles – life styles*.

Lines of storks and egrets rippled across the fields into the fresh day, humanity huddled around roadside fires in towns and villages amid dusty decrepitude, a dog lapped from a fetid puddle, a myna stood on a goat and crows on a buffalo; all waited patiently for the inevitable sun to bake the day.

After 50km and just about an hour, we arrived at Agra. Delayed briefly at a railway crossing for the overnight sleeper to rumble by we pressed on, through ramshackle partly-built suburbs contrasting with an area of bougainvillea-decked prosperity where stylish wrought-iron gates seemed to be the most popular form of ostentation, then past mould-encrusted concrete slums inspired by some Soviet architectural philosophy that just lent a sense of depression to the chaos. Against this background, our breakfast was rudely lavish, but we had little time to feel too much guilt, pressing on at 8.25 through a couple of market towns where the press of humanity was simply astonishing. Nobody who has been only to the tourist resorts of Goa can possibly have an inkling of the real India. Nothing can prepare you for this, this challenging of the senses and ideas that you either accept or fail to live with; the challenge that makes the Indian subcontinent the most fascinating of places.

The river Chambal appeared suddenly beyond deeply fissured sandbanks with thorny scrub thickets that bordered the track into the sanctuary; a wide channel of deep blue-grey water rushing over boulders in a broad, shallow bed that clearly holds a good deal more water in times of flood. A brisk breeze blew down the valley as we boarded the waiting boat, accompanied by an armed guard, not for protection against crocodiles but from the dangerous human inhabitants of the area. Although we did not know at the time, one of the area's most notorious bandits had been killed in a gun battle with the police less than a week before our visit.

Ghazals and Marsh Muggers lay patiently on sandbars as we passed steadily upriver, picking out Great Thick-knees, River Lapwings, Black Ibis, Black-bellied Terns and an early party of Bar-headed Geese on the edge of the river and Blue Rock Thrush and an adult Bonelli's Eagle on the sandy crags above. The attraction of the river is Indian Skimmer, and we came perilously close to missing it, an increased amount of water having reduced the population from over 80 a week or so earlier to just one, that stood on a grassy

spit as we floated quietly by, flying out into the channel and past us in a close up display that justified the effort in getting here.

Lunch at Chambal Safari Lodge, near Bah, with the couple who operate the trips to the Chambal Sanctuary was the best yet; stuffed tomato, raita, okra curry, dal and rice, with the added attraction of a colony of flying foxes in their grounds. Waving goodbye, we left this oasis of calm and rejoined the chaos outside, retracing our steps to Agra and the Taj Mahal, surely one of the most magnificent of man's creations on this little planet.

After a meal in our temporary hotel in Agra that included cheesy peas made from cottage cheese, we decamped at 9 for a bumpy ride to Mathura, four of us travelling in an old Morris Oxford in front of our bus. Our onward overnight train journey to Nainital, in the foothills of the western Himalaya, departed just after 11 and, seasoned rail travellers by now, we slept soundly through the night, some more eventually than others.....

Bar-headed Goose, Great Thick-knee, Black-bellied Tern, Indian Skimmer

November 14th One bitten, we were probably all well awake as the train pulled in to Lal Kuan at 8.45 and, more or less successfully evading the begging scamps in the vehicle park across the track, we boarded our bus for the 60km onward journey to Nainital. Now in India's newest state, Uttaranchal, created in November 2000, it was lush here, the roadside vegetation denser than on the plains from which we had just emerged, but the first real clue as to our altitude was the ferocity with which a stream rushed past our breakfast stop. Replete with Blue Whistling Thrush, it was just beyond the pandemonium of Haldwani, the biggest town we had driven through away from Delhi and Agra, but which has apparently done little to warrant a mention in the guide books. We soon began to wind steeply upwards into the forested Kumaon Hills and stopped a few times at likely looking spots, adding Plumbeous Redstart, White-capped Water Redstart, Asian Barred Owlet, Jungle Owlet and Grey-hooded and Golden-spectacled Warblers to our rapidly expanding list, lunching at a small restaurant near Nainital, through which we eventually passed in mid afternoon, with the chill of evening already apparent.

Himalayan Bulbul, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-lored Tit, Scaly-breasted Munias, White-capped Bunting, Russet Sparrow and Streaked Laughingthrush were all seen as we climbed, giving a clue to the character of the birding we could expect over the next few days. We diverted to some open *bhaj* forest around Sat Tal, where a large mixed flock of Lemon-rumped and Grey-hooded Warblers preceded 2 Mountain Hawk Eagles over the trees and after a party of Puff-throated Babblers, vegetation around a scrub-fringed lake produced several Blue-winged Minlas, 2 Rufous-bellied Niltavas and a Golden-spectacled Warbler. Green-backed Tit and Bar-tailed Treecreeper were eventually seen by most of us and for a fortunate couple, bringing up the rear as the group headed back up the hill, a Red-billed Leothrix, low down in some overhanging scrub with two or three more minlas.

Pangot more or less amounts to a few dwellings on a sharp bend in the road that runs through the hills, from which a dusty track leads down to two buildings nestling amid terraced fields on the side of an open, partially forested valley. The lower of these would be our accommodation for the next few days, while we would climb the hill for breakfast and evening meal each day, an exertion that would underline the fact that we were above 2000m in altitude! The last couple of days had passed in something of a daze and spreading ourselves about was a luxury after our recent nomadic lifestyle. As we piled into the kingfishers in the small, comfortable dining area with relish, Rattan introduced his son, Lokesh, who despite his shyness proved over the next few days to be a very capable birder, engaged presently with a couple who appeared to have ventured far from a vast country on the opposite side of the world.

Mountain Hawk Eagle, Asian Barred Owlet, Jungle Owlet, Grey-capped Woodpecker, Scarlet Minivet, Himalayan Bulbul, Blue Whistling-thrush, Lemon-rumped Warbler, Golden-spectacled Warbler, Grey-hooded Warbler, Rufous-bellied Niltava, Plumbeous Redstart, White-capped Water Redstart, Grey Bushchat, Streaked Laughingthrush, Puff-throated Babbler, Red-billed Leothrix, Blue-winged Minla, Green-backed Tit, Black-lored Tit, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Bar-tailed Treecreeper, Grey Treepie, Russet Sparrow, Scaly-breasted Munia

November 15th The morning was bright and crisp and as we climbed through the forest the first light of day played on jagged snow-covered peaks in the distance, their icy faces marking the boundary of the great Tibetan plateau. Clambering from our vans we wandered along in mainly deciduous forest., where Dark-throated Thrushes recalled Nepal for most of us, but 3 Chestnut Thrushes were utterly new, or very nearly so, for everyone; both early winter visitors from the Himalaya we could see gradually brightening in the rising sun. Rufous Sibilias accentuated the similarity to Pulchowki in Nepal, but Himalayan Woodpecker and Green Shrike-babbler were new for all of us; both are found mainly in the western Himalaya, though how the diminutive babbler deserved the shrike epithet was a puzzle. It is only marginally bigger than most

fulvettas and didn't seem capable of impaling anything much bigger than a small, ailing fly. Still, we were willing to accept that, when cornered, they are probably unaccountably vicious little sods.

Our disappointment at having to leave to return for breakfast soon evaporated in a flurry of Black-headed Jays and White-throated Laughingthrushes in the lodge garden, with a female Pink-browed Rosefinch in the trees just beyond, and we added Striated Prinia, Blue-fronted Redstart, Mountain Chiffchaff, Nepal House Martin and Common Raven as we scanned the valley below, to the now familiar accompaniment of masala omelette and, I seem to recall, chips.

Returning to the vans, we moved on beyond Pangot, venturing into mixed woodland that produced a steady flow of new birds. Most notable were Fire-tailed Sunbird, several flocks of Buff-barred Warblers and Spot-winged and Black-throated Tits, a male Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, a noisy Red-billed Blue Magpie, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, 2 Blue-capped Redstarts, Maroon Oriole and numerous Ashy-throated Warblers around a small stream, as we wandered down the track to lunch where the stream ran through the valley beneath an open, grassy hillside.

A few were lucky to see Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler where the stream tumbled over rocks briefly exposed amid the clinging vegetation and moving on along the opposite side of the valley it was initially shaded and quite chilly. However, soon after we bumped into pairs of Chestnut-crowned and Striated Laughingthrushes, crests raised in alarm like Hoopoes, we emerged into the sun once more. The remainder of the afternoon added Grey-headed Woodpecker, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, a flock of 32 Black Bulbuls tumbling down the valley from the trees above, a pair of Kalij Pheasants and Pale-billed Flowerpecker, with a Himalayan (Siberian) Weasel adding the mammal interest.

After a really enjoyable and productive day our hosts treated us to foreign food this evening, and as we waited for our meal of chicken, roast potatoes, peas, carrots and cauliflower a photograph on the lodge wall gave us a chance to place names and altitudes to the peaks that had drawn our gaze through the day. Although we were hardly any distance from Nepal, the country that has 10 of the world's 14 peaks of more than 8,000m (26,000'), there are few mountains above 25,000' in this part of the western Himalaya, but apart from Kanchenjunga (8,598m) in Sikkim, Nanda Devi (7,816m – 25,645') is the highest in India. Those in the range that crowned the horizon from our various viewpoints through the forest were, from the west, conical Trishul (23,360'), the long elongated face of Mrigthuni (22,490') and the cone of Maiktoli (22,320'), with Nanda Devi in the background to the east.

Himalayan Griffon, Kalij Pheasant, Blue-throated Barbet, Speckled Piculet, Brown-capped Woodpecker, Brown-fronted Woodpecker, Himalayan Woodpecker, Nepal House Martin, Black Bulbul, Chestnut Thrush, Dark-throated Thrush, Striated Prinia, Ashy-throated Warbler, Buff-barred Warbler, Mountain Chiffchaff, Blue-capped Redstart, Blue-fronted Redstart, White-throated Laughingthrush, Striated Laughingthrush, Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler, Green Shrike Babbler, Rufous Sibia, Black-throated Tit, Spot-winged Tit, White-tailed Nuthatch, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Maroon Oriole, Black-headed Jay, Blue Magpie, Common Raven, Pink-browed Rosefinch, Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, Rock Bunting

November 16th

Away before dawn, with a clear moon illuminating the landscape, we began our day at a small settlement overlooking steep terraced hillsides devoted almost entirely to growing crops, and it was decidedly chilly as we walked steadily along the broad track, looking down on to a hedgerow through which flowed a flock of 50-60 White-throated Laughingthrushes, tumbling out on to the adjacent fields and bounding along below a solitary house, unconcerned at a brightly-clad woman fetching and carrying wood at the start of her day. There was a Great Barbet in trackside bushes, a Maroon Oriole in scrubby growth above and Blue Whistling Thrushes dotted about, frequently in the open, then a flock of 95 Dark-throated Thrushes flew east up the valley, catching the early morning sun that turned them into flickering golden specks as they rose and disappeared from view, low against the side of the valley.

Back at the road, our morning continued in a delightful grove of holm oaks, dappled and gently warmed by the sun rising in the still air. Birds were everywhere, dancing through the trees; a close Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, flocks of perky Spot-winged Tits, energetic Black-throated Tits and steady Green-backed Tits, then warblers, Grey-hooded and Buff-barred, a few Bar-tailed Treecreepers and a female White-browed Shrike Babbler, located by Rattan in some tight vegetation of medium height nearby.

And all of this before breakfast, which turned out to be an idiosyncratic preparation of jam sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, bananas, parathas and mango and lime pickle, taken on an open, grassy knoll in the forest. Upward we continued, to around 8,000', emerging from the forest into a steep, open rocky area with grass and stunted trees, overlooking the Kosi River, winding broadly from the snows of the western Himalaya into the dusty plains of Uttar Pradesh. Given the rather solitary and retiring habits of our own humble Dunnock it seemed slightly bizarre to be looking for flocks of Altai Accentors, but there they were, at least 12 on the crags above and another party of 30 or more in the grassy fissures below. A couple of Crag Martins circled beyond the cliff edge, 2 Upland Pipits perched on rocks and an adult Peregrine peered down from the ridge

above. With the sound of singing children wafting up from a school far below us we moved on to explore a couple of patches of woodland, silently draped with moss and lichen, which proved to be inexplicably quiet. This persuaded us to drop lower to a belt of conifers, admixed further on with more deciduous trees, full of tits, nuthatches and creepers, including definite Kashmir Nuthatch and a male White-browed Shrike Babbler. 3 Steppe Eagles drifted over as we continued to descend and we finished the morning in some completely deciduous forest with a scrubby understorey in which there was a brief Green-tailed Sunbird, a staggeringly plain Yellow-browed Tit and two Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babblers that tried their best to elude us before we returned to Pangot for a late and welcome lunch.

Most of us piled into a couple of vans and drove down through the forest to Nainital and spent a pleasant enough two or three hours in the bustle of the local shops, emerging like magpies with variously coloured baubles and beads. All in the best possible taste, of course.

Steppe Eagle, Great Barbet, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Crag Martin, Upland Pipit, Altai Accentor, Kashmir Nuthatch, White-browed Shrike Babbler, Yellow-browed Tit, Green-tailed Sunbird, Grey-backed Shrike

November 17th Leaving the cook and the gentle waft of porridge, it was dark as seven of us piled into two vans with Rattan, his son Lokesh and three drivers. We sneaked, rather than drove along the winding forest road above Pangot and when a Large-tailed Nightjar fluttered across the track in front of us, the oncoming dawn had cut the horizon in jagged black peaks across the sky. The harsh '*ko-rok-ko-ror*' of a male Koklass Pheasant brought us to a halt and on foot we crept along the road, peering into the forest below for any sign of movement. Some of us saw the dark outline of the male flying away below and others the browner form of the female as she launched herself from the bank above into the forest, but we all felt frustrated and the male very soon became quiet, although another called for a short while in the distance.

Further on, a stop along the Pangot-Nainital road at the decaying Kilbury Guest House was notable largely for a loose flock of Himalayan Swiftlets circling gently in the bright, cold morning air, and it was some relief to leave the dark, chilly forest to return to the lodge for that porridge

Our breakfast coincided nicely with the time for raptors to wake and diligent scanning by Paul located both Lammergeier and Indian Spotted Eagle in the distance before we rejoined the vans and our luggage and, waving farewell to the staff, left Pangot at 9.45.

The drive was not rewarding from a birding point of view, though we did see more Steppe Eagles and a pale Common Buzzard above Nainital, then Blue-fronted Redstart, Black-chinned Babbler and White-capped Water Redstart at the head of the Mongoli valley near a wedding reception with a dastardly band and some tired and emotional guests. Mountain Chiffchaff and Rufous-breasted Accentor near a couple of women washing clothes in a mountain stream, Himalayan Flameback, a Pied Thrush and a few Olive-backed Pipits were all the rest of the Mongoli valley had to offer and a stop overlooking Kaleduni Forest produced Thick-billed Flowerpecker and Lineated Barbet, but little else.

We entered the flat lands beneath the hills well into the afternoon and immediately noted an upturn in bird activity, quickly adding Crested Bunting, Asian Palm Swift and Red-whiskered Bulbul by the roadside. We lingered at Kosi barrage until dusk, attracting amused looks from the locals against a background of Brown Dipper, Citrine Wagtail and a hefty Crested Kingfisher and after a long day piled into our overnight lodgings at Tiger Camp, just outside Corbett NP with some relief, delighted to have more forms to fill in. In triplicate.

Lammergeier, Common Buzzard, Indian Spotted Eagle, Koklass Pheasant, Himalayan Swiftlet, Asian Palm Swift, Crested Kingfisher, Lineated Barbet, Himalayan Flameback, Pied Thrush, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Brown Dipper, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Black-chinned Babbler, Thick-billed Flowerpecker, Crested Bunting

November 18th Muezzin. Dogs in the moonlight, Mice in the walls. Thus began our day. Towards the park entrance, we turned away from the bustle of the road and walked through some light forest, stopping where the early winter river rushed over smooth boulders beneath steep sandstone cliffs, populated by Plumbeous Redstarts and Plain Martins. Patiently we scanned the river and the cliff face until, suddenly, one of the guides accompanying us drew our attention to a Wallcreeper, searching for insects in crevices and openings in the cliff, cascading down the rock face after a flying insect in a delightful display of acrobatic elegance. Back on the road, we briefly noted a male Crimson Sunbird, passed our first Crested Treeswifts, and then stopped at a bend as Rattan spotted some shapes high in the trees. Piling out of the vehicles, there above us were 3 huge Great Hornbills, for whom the phrase 'slipping unobtrusively' carries little meaning. It seemed difficult to know at this point whether the wallcreeper or the hornbills had been more exciting, but we had little time to deliberate, stopping once more at a grove of teak trees that held Himalayan Flameback, Scaly-bellied Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker and Greater Yellownappe, with the added attraction of a superb Orange-gorgetted Flycatcher.

A little way along we entered the park, carried out the usual formalities and commenced our drive to Dhikala, following the course of the Ramganga River, not exactly a trickle but drier with the monsoon long gone, waiting for winter snows high in the mountains to melt in spring. We carried steadily on through dry, open *sal* forest confined to the jeeps throughout, making the journey rather chilly, though we did have a couple of opportunities to get out and stretch our legs during a drive that must have been close to 40km. Birds seen from the jeeps included a secretive party of Ashy Bulbuls and a large mixed flock of Grey-hooded and Buff-barred Warblers, with Green-backed Tits, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch and White-throated Fantails, while our lunch stop produced 2 Crested Kingfishers and 2 Lesser Fish Eagles in trees bordering the river below. Fulvous-breasted and Streak-throated Woodpeckers racked the 'pecker total up to an impressive 8 for the day, mammal interest was provided by a couple of Muntjacs, and as we neared the compound at Dhikala, we stopped for a pair of Pallas's Fish Eagles at their nest, with a Collared Falconet close by in the same band of trees; from one extreme to another.

2 Goosanders flew low over the reservoir as we checked into our rustic accommodation, then we jumped back on the jeeps for an afternoon drive through the grassland and forest edge bordering the lake, passing clumps of wild cannabis. The drive didn't turn up a tiger, but we were quite satisfied with a few Lesser Coucals and 2 Hodgson's Bushchats; rather like stonechats but much chunkier and with a shrike-like amount of white in the wing in flight. Only recently rediscovered breeding in Corbett, they commenced a notable end to the afternoon that also included 4 Hog Deer peering at us from the grass, 3 ringtail Hen Harriers circling low over the lake fringe as they prepared to roost and a Southern Grey Shrike that our guide reversed to check out, so uncommon are they in the park.

We huddled in the restaurant after dark, not looking forward to chilly, damp rooms, but after a decent meal we all slept like logs at the end of another long day.

Brahminy Kite, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Hen Harrier, Collared Falconet, Lesser Coucal, Crested Treeswift, Great Hornbill, Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker, Greater Yellownappe, Streak-throated Woodpecker, Scaly-bellied Woodpecker, Rosy Pipit, Ashy Bulbul, Common Iora, Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher, Hodgson's Bushchat, White-throated Fantail, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Wallcreeper, Hair-crested Drongo

November 19th It was a still, atmospheric morning as we set out from the compound. A thin veil of mist softly clothed the landscape as we cut through tracks into the grassland, limiting visibility so that Small Buttonquail and Aberrant Bush Warbler close to the edge of the track were all we could see until the forest edge began to emerge, silhouetted in the rising warmth. A commotion drew our gaze to 2 Black-hooded Orioles, determinedly seeing off a couple of intruding Maroon Orioles from their favoured tree, with 2 Large Cuckoo Shrikes and a Changeable Hawk Eagle nearby. Grey-breasted and Jungle Prinias and a male Besra followed, and then Brian spotted a superb male Siberian Rubythroat, perched in full view on a head of grass, pearls of dew glittering beneath it in the pale early sun. Bluethroat, Marsh Harrier and Pied Harrier were all added, and as we watched 5 Indian Elephants from a tower at the edge of the forest, barely visible in the tall grasses, langurs and deer began to bark in alarm and a group of feeding Chital nearby stood still and tense, all looking in the same direction. A tiger was very close.

We waited, as tense as the deer, but to no avail. The alarm calls stopped and the Chital resumed their quiet feeding, apparently content that the danger had passed; probably the tiger was sitting quietly somewhere. For us, it was time to return, and we headed back, three hours having disappeared in an extended moment, it seemed.

We left Dhikala just before mid day and began to retrace our steps to Tiger Camp. It was warmer than on our way into the park and we added our only Cinereous Vulture of the trip as we drove through the grasslands just beyond the camp, then after a flock of 25 Small Minivets rained down from the trees above we stopped overlooking the river, where Lesser Fish Eagle and Pallas's Fish Eagle perched impassively. We had the bonus of a Wallcreeper flying upriver on to boulders below our vantage point, then set off once again, stopping at another riverside viewpoint that produced a gharial and some enormous black fish, possibly catfish of some sort, hanging steadily in the clear, cold waters.

The rest of the drive was fairly uneventful, though most of us saw 2 Kalij Pheasants by the track and one party a male Red Junglefowl that shot up into some trackside trees as we passed, and we were all grateful to leave the jeeps at a late lunch stop in the forest, where we piled into a wholesome repast of chips and coffee, garnished with a noisy party of at least 11 White-crested Laughingthrushes in the forest and 7 Plumbeous Redstarts and a White-capped Water Redstart in a 300m stretch of the nearby river.

When we come to reflect on the trip, none of us will ever forget the female tiger with two cubs that passed our jeep only 40 metres away on our first afternoon in Ranthambhor; the very animal we had all hoped so much to see. But, neither will we forget how this amazing experience was bettered on this, our last afternoon in Corbett. Less than three minutes from the park entrance, literally our last chance, Rattan stopped the jeeps and there, ambling along a river bed, into some patches of coarse grass and out into the open, was a

magnificent male tiger, paws the size of cats, tasting the air and gazing evenly about, eventually melting into the forest after a full five minutes. It was remarkable that we all got to see it; John's crew had stopped some way back along the track to speak to Mohit, the brains behind Asian Adventures and organiser of our trip, visiting Corbett with his family, and it was at the last minute that they sped up behind us and saw the tiger as it came back into the open.

Cinereous Vulture, Pied Harrier, Besra, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Red Junglefowl, Small Buttonquail, Large Cuckoo-shrike, Bright-headed Cisticola, Jungle Prinia, Aberrant Bush Warbler, Siberian Rubythroat, White-crested Laughingthrush, Black-hooded Oriole

November 20th Given the long drive back to Delhi that lay ahead, and the need to be at the airport late tomorrow morning, this was effectively the final day of our trip. So, we set out along the eastern boundary of Corbett to Kumaria Forest Reserve, stopping a couple of times en route, once where gangs of White-crowned Laughingthrushes and Jungle Babblers competed with each other to produce the most noise, then at a bridge over a narrow torrent in the forest where we found both Small and Rufous-bellied Niltavas. Stopping by the roadside in some light forest, there was substantial bird activity from a mixed flock made up principally of Lemon-rumped and Grey-hooded Warblers, with Grey-headed Canary-flycatchers, White-throated and Yellow-bellied Fantails and our first Rufous-tailed Flycatcher. Climbing down a track in the forest to a spot where the Kosi River rushed over large, pale boulders in a broad, flat riverbed it did not take much persuasion to find a suitably comfortable rock to sit and contemplate the past couple of weeks. However, as the river hastened by our musings were interrupted by the arrivals of a Little Forktail, then a pair of Brown Dippers, evidently interested in a dark cave amid the rocks where they appeared to be nesting. This section was densely packed with Plumbeous Redstarts, which seem to be very common where suitable conditions exist, and at least one White-capped Water Redstart, but Rattan had one more thing up his sleeve, pointing out a roosting Tawny Fish Owl in the trees above, its horizontal ear tufts and bright yellow eyes creating a unremittingly uncompromising expression; just the job for repelling door to door salesmen. We realised after a while that another was roosting within a yard or so and, reluctant to leave, we watched them at length. Soon though, it was time to go and we drifted back to the lodge, collected our belongings and set out for Delhi.

The journey to the capital was about 250km but so tortuous was the traffic that it took 7½ hours of driving to negotiate, and with a couple of rest stops we eventually piled into our hotel at 10pm. It probably isn't fair to elaborate on the journey, since most others on the trip had been tolerable, but the smoke, fumes and dust of the day lingered in the air throughout, gradually increasing in density as we neared Delhi and culminating in an unbelievable stench from a sugar refinery. Although we had seen some sights during the last two weeks, one deserves recall; a tractor pulling a trailer that was so utterly overloaded by goodness-knows-what wrapped in a giant tarpaulin that overlapped on all sides that its front wheels were only nominally in contact

with the ground.

Tawny Fish Owl, Rusty-tailed Flycatcher, Small Niltava, Little Forktail, Yellow-bellied Fantail



November 21st Well, that was it. An uneventful journey to the airport, then some bureaucratic nonsense at check-in, but a thoroughly excellent flight home on a 6-month old airbus. You know it's good when there are blue lights in the toilets. Well done, Mr Branson, well done Rattan and well done John for enduring the headaches of ensuring the arrangements were well made and went as planned.

Northern Palm Squirrel

Systematic List of Species

By John van der Dol

The nomenclature in the following list tends to be that used by Grimmett, Inskipp and Inskipp in “the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent”. However the taxonomic situation in this region is also undergoing several changes and a recent publication by Rasmussen and Anderton, “Birds of South Asia, the Ripley guide” has made several changes. As they suggest that they have published what many are thinking, I have adopted some of the new names and splits. However it tends to be a personal choice as to which list one wishes to follow. I therefore sometimes will give two names where two are available, but where a split exists I have used the latest Rasmussen name.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Two or three at Ranthambhor and up to 15 at Bharatpur on the first six days

Indian Cormorant *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*

Commonly found at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Also commonly found at Ranthambhor, Bharatpur but also at Corbett

Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*

Common at Bharatpur but otherwise just small numbers

Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*

Up to three at Ranthambhor but many more at Bharatpur and a single at Corbett

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Apart from one at Corbett, only seen in fair numbers on the plains

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Up to six on the first six dates

Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*

Common in all suitable areas

Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*

Also commonly found in wetland areas

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Perhaps less common than the previous two species but still plenty in suitable areas

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*

Common throughout

Cattle Egret *Bulbulcus ibis*

Common throughout

Little Heron (Striated Heron) *Butorides striata*

Between one and three on five dates

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Two at Ranthambhor, three at Bharatpur and a single at Corbett

Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis*

A single at close quarters at Ranthambhor

Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*

An estimated 200 at Sultanpur followed by up to three at Ranthambhor and large breeding colonies at Bharatpur with fully grown young

Asian Openbill *Anastormus oscitans*

Singles at Sultanpur and Ranthambhor while they were also breeding at Bharatpur where numbers were not counted

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Seven at Ranthambhor were followed by a single and a two at Corbett

Wooly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*

Up to seven on eight dates in all areas

Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*

Just one very distant bird at Bharatpur

Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*

Up to twenty in all wetland areas

Indian Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa*

Three at Sultanpur and nine along the Chambal river were the only records

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*

A count of 120 at Bharatpur was followed by 57 there the next day

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Fifty at Bharatpur followed by an uncounted number there the next day

Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*

Up to 19 at Ranthambhor and uncounted numbers at Bharatpur

Grey Lag Goose *Anser anser*

Present at Bharatpur

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*

Nine were seen on the boat trip on the Chambal River

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

Seen in all suitable areas with a count of 77 on the Chambal River being the highest

Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*

Eight at Bharatpur was the sole record

Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*

Between six and 25 on three days at both Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Many at Sultanpur followed by just a single at Ranthambhor

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Good numbers throughout the wetland areas

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

Good numbers in all wetland areas

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Small numbers at Sultanpur and two at Ranthambhor

Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha*
Small numbers at Sultanpur and Bharatpur

Pintail *Anas acuta*
Common in all suitable areas

Garganey *Anas querquedula*
Four at Sultanpur, two or three at Ranthambhor and two at Bharatpur

Shoveler *Anas clypeata*
Small numbers in the wetland areas

Red-crested Pochard *Rhodonessa rufina*
A single drake at Dhikala

Common Pochard *Aythya farina*
Three at Bharatpur was the only record

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*
A single at Ranthambhor

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*
Two at Nainital were the only ones seen

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*
Two flying down the river at Dhikala

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
One or two on six dates in all areas

Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus*
Between one and six on nine dates

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*
Seven at Sultanpur, nine along the route from Bharatpur to Chambal and up to six on a further nine dates

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*
Seen throughout in small numbers but sometimes more numerous on rubbish tips on the outskirts of some towns

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*
Singles on two days at Corbett was a little surprise as one associates them with seaside locations

Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*
Two at Corbett were followed by three along the same river the next day. Excellent views were had of this sought after species

Lesser Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga humilis*
A juvenile at Bharatpur was followed by two and three along the same river as the previous species at Corbett

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*
An adult at Corbett was only seen by a few people

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*
Up to three on four dates and a count of 21 on the road between Bharatpur and Chambal

White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*
Three just outside the Corbett National Park were seen perched at close range

Indian (Long-billed) Vulture *Gyps indicus*

Between two and six on three days at Ranthambhor

Himalayan (Griffon) Vulture *Gyps himalayensis*

Between four and ten on three dates in the mountains

Cinereous (Black) Vulture *Aegypius monachus*

A single at Corbett was seen by just a few people

Red-headed Vulture *Aegypius calvus*

Up to six on six dates in all areas

Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*

One or two on four dates in the lowlands only

Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Three at Sultanpur, four at Bharatpur and a single at Dhikala

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Four seen going to roost at Dhikala were followed by one there the next morning

Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*

A pair seen at Dhikala by just a few people

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*

Two at Ranthambhor and a single at Corbett

Shikra *Accipiter badius*

Up to six a day on most days

Besra *Accipiter virgatus*

A single male at Corbett

Eurasian Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

A single near Nainital was the only record

Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastate*

An adult at Corbett was the sole record

Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*

Between one and four on five dates in all areas

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*

One at Ranthambhor and four on two dates at Corbett

Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus*

Four singles, all in the lowland areas. An adult male was seen perched on the cliffs at Chambal

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*

A pale phase bird at Sultanpur and six at Bharatpur were the only records

Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus*

A single at Corbett

Mountain Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis*

Two near Nainital and a single in the Mongoli Valley

Collared Falconet *Microhierax caerulescens*

A single rather distant bird was seen at Corbett

Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Up to six on five dates in all areas

Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera*

A rather poor view of a single flying away over the fort at Ranthambhor

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Up to a dozen at Bharatpur on the three days we were there

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus peregrinator*

Single at Sultanpur, one at the Taj Mahal and another at Nainital

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*

A male on the road to Sultanpur, three at Nainital, and three and two at Corbett

Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*

Up to 20 on a daily basis in the lowlands and a single at Corbett

Jungle Bush Quail *Perdicula asiatica*

Two at Ranthambhor were followed by three there the next day

Painted Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea*

A pair seen two days running at Ranthambhor

Koklass Pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha*

Two silhouettes seen in flight and another heard at Nainital was the only result after three early morning excursions for the species. Not very satisfactory but an excuse to return

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*

One seen and two heard at Corbett

Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*

Two, four and eight seen on three dates at Nainital and Corbett

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*

Common everywhere, particularly at Ranthambhor

Small Buttonquail *Turnix sylvatica*

Two in the grasslands of Dhikala, one of which gave excellent and prolonged views

Sarus Crane *Grus antigone*

Seven on the road to Sultanpur, one heard at Bharatpur and another seven seen there the next day

Common Crane *Grus grus*

A flock of 47 at Bharatpur was nice to see

Brown Crake *Amaurornis akool*

Four at Ranthambhor and a single at Chambal

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*

Small numbers in all wetland areas

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Two at Sultanpur and five at Bharatpur were surprisingly the only records

Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Common in all suitable areas

Coot *Fulica atra*

Small numbers throughout and a flock of many hundreds at Bharatpur

Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*

Two at Ranthambhor and three at Bharatpur were the only records

Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus*

Four at Ranthambhor and three at Bharatpur

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Common throughout all suitable areas

Indian Stone-Curlew *Burhinus indicus*

A single at Ranthambhor was the only record

Great Thick-Knee *Esacus recurvirostris*

Excellent views of six birds from our boat along the Chambal River

Indian Courser *Cursorius coromandelicus*

Two at Sultanpur were one of the target species for that area and were seen well

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*

A single was seen at Ranthambhor albeit rather distantly

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

A flock of 20 was seen from the train on the way to Nainital

River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelli*

Three on the way to Bharatpur, 43 along the River Chambal and up to five on three dates in the Corbett area

Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malarbaricus*

One on the way to Sultanpur and five on the way to Bharatpur

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

Commonly found throughout

White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus*

Two at Bharatpur came as a nice surprise

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

A single at Bharatpur and three on the banks of the Chambal

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

One seen at the Chambal River

(Snipe sp *Gallinago sp*)

Two at Ranthambhor and another two at Dhikala remained unidentified

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Large numbers in excess of 100 at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Singles on three dates at Sultanpur and Bharatpur

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Up to six on four dates in the lowlands

Common Redshank *Tringa tetanus*

Three at Bharatpur and a single along the Chambal

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

A count of 23 at Bharatpur was the only record

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Up to seven on any one day in all suitable areas

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

One or two seen virtually daily

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Up to six on three dates and a count of 30 at Ranthambhor

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

One or two a day in the lowlands and up to five a day at Corbett

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Three at Bharatpur and two along the banks of the Chambal

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Flocks totalling 80 were seen along the road to Bharatpur and 20 actually at this site

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Forty at Ranthambhor and a single at Bharatpur

River Tern *Sterna aurantia*

A maximum count of 28 at Ranthambhor while at Bharatpur there were just two birds, and three were noted at Dhikala

Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda*

Just two along the banks of the River Chambal

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*

Up to about 30 at Ranthambhor and just one at Bharatpur

Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis*

A single along the Chambal River gave stunning views

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*

About 10 were seen in a dry stony area along the road to Bharatpur from Ranthambhor

Painted Sandgrouse *Pterocles indicus*

Counts of 14, 4 and 25 were made at Ranthambhor where excellent views were had of this species on the ground in the dry stony area surrounding our hotel

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Eight along the Chambal River and then a few more in the Corbett area were considered to be genuine stock

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

Two singles at Ranthambhor

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Commonly encountered throughout

Red Collared Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*

Between one and four on three dates

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

Up to three on five dates

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Up to ten daily in the lowlands

Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*
A single at Nainital was the sole record

Yellow-footed Pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera*
Up to 20 on four dates at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*
Present in small numbers in all areas except Nainital

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*
Very common throughout, sometimes seen in large flocks

Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*
Up to a dozen on five dates in all areas

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*
Two at Ranthambhor and singles at Bharatpur and Dhikala

Sirkeer Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*
A single seen from the train on the way to Ranthambhor was seen by just a few people

Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*
Up to three on six dates

Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis*
Three seen on both jeep rides at Dhikala

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*
A dark morph bird was seen along the railway line at Delhi station

Collared Scops Owl *Otus bakkamoena*
Four were seen in nest holes at Ranthambhor, all in one day

(Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia*)
As appears to be the case on every trip, only heard with up to two calling at Nainital on three nights

Dusky Eagle Owl *Bubo coromandus*
A single was seen on the first evening at Bharatpur while the next day it was seen again and its mate on the nest was also located

Tawny Fish Owl *Ketupa flavipes*
A pair was found at Krameria on the last birding day. Although difficult to locate in the foliage we had excellent views

Asian Barred Owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides*
A single near Nainital was the only record

Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum*
Also a single in the same place as the previous species and singles were heard at Corbett on two nights

Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*
Only seen at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur where up to three were seen on a daily basis

Indian Jungle Nightjar *Caprimulgus indicus*
A single on two days at Bharatpur gave stunning views as it roosted on a branch over the path

Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*

A single at Bharatpur was seen many times in flight and also perched on the ground where scope views were possible. Another was seen briefly before dawn at Nainital

Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus*

A single at Bharatpur also afforded close views as it roosted above the path

Himalayan Swiftlet *Collocalia brevirostris*

About 20 were seen near Nainital

Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis*

Three were seen on the way to Corbett

Little Swift *Apus affinis*

Two considered to be of this species were noted on the road to Bharatpur

House Swift *Apus nipalensis*

Considered by some to be conspecific with the previous species. Seen commonly, sometimes in good numbers, often over towns

Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata*

Thirty at Dhikala were followed by another 15 in Corbett the next day

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Up to three most days in most areas

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

The commonest Kingfisher of the area and seen virtually daily in good numbers

Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris*

One of the target species of the trip. All records refer to the Corbett area and excellent views were obtained of three singles and a two on four consecutive days

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*

Between one and four on seven dates in all suitable areas

Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*

An amazing 120 were seen in the very early morning from the station platform at Indargargh after which no more than a dozen were seen on any one day. There were no records from Nainital or Corbett

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*

Mostly seen in the lowlands with a maximum count of 14 at Ranthambhor

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Commonly encountered in the lowlands, but none in the mountains

Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros birostris*

Only seen at Bharatpur with between two and six on three days

Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris*

Two at Corbett were seen by just a few people

Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*

Six of this giant of the forest were seen at Corbett one early morning although not the best of views

Great Barbet *Megalaima virens*

Heard on two days in the Pangot area and then two were seen the following day

Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylandica*

Up to three on six dates in most areas

Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineata*

A single at Dhikala was followed by three in Corbett National Park the next day

Blue-throated Barbet *Megalaima asiatica*

One in the Nainital area was followed by two on the road to Dhikala and another single there the next day

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*

Up to three seen or heard most days

Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

A single seen at Sultanpur and two heard at Ranthambhor

Speckled Piculet *Picumnus innominatus*

Just one record from the Pangot area

Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos nanus*

Singles on three dates in mountainous areas

Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus*

One or two on three dates also only in the mountains

Brown-fronted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos auriceps*

Between one and six on five dates in the mountains

Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos macei*

Singles on two consecutive days in Corbett

Stripe-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos atratus*

A single in Corbett was seen by just one or two observers

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker *Dendrocopos mahrattensis*

Between one and four on three dates at Ranthambhor

Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos hyperythrus*

Six at Nainital were followed by two there the next day

Himalayan Woodpecker *Dendrocopos himalayensis*

Seen only in the Nainital area with three, seven and a single on three consecutive days

Lesser Yellownape *Picus chlorolophus*

Just one seen in Corbett

Greater Yellownape *Picus flavinucha*

Between one and three on four dates at Nainital and Corbett

Streak-throated Woodpecker *Picus xanthopygaeus*

Singles on two days in Corbett

Scaly-bellied Woodpecker *Picus squamatus*

Two at Corbett were followed by a single there the next day

Grey-faced (headed) Woodpecker *Picus canus*

Between one and three on four dates in Nainital and Corbett

Himalayan Flameback *Dinopium shorii*

One to four on three dates in Corbett

Black-rumped Flameback *Dinopium benghalense*

Mostly found in the lowlands on a daily basis, particularly at Bharatpur and then six seen at Corbett

(Great Slaty Woodpecker *Mulleripicus pulverulentus*)

Unfortunately a single was only heard in Corbett

Indian Bushlark *Mirafra erythroptera*

Four at Ranthambhor and a single there a couple of days later

Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark *Eremopterix grisea*

Four males and two females were seen at very close range at Ranthambhor and another five were seen in some dry area on the way to Bharatpur

Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*

A distant flock of about 60 birds was seen on the way from Ranthambhor to Bharatpur which was frustrating as it was a new species for most of the group

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Ten at Sultanpur, 21 at Ranthambhor and flocks totalling about 700 in the dry stony area on the way to Bharatpur

Hume's Short-toed Lark *Calandrella acutirostris*

About 20 mixed in with the previous species at Sultanpur were difficult to pick out

Sand Lark *Calandrella raytal*

A single on the banks of the Chambal River

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Two at Sultanpur and another two at Chambal

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Two and three at Dhikala on consecutive days were the only record

Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola*

Commonly found throughout

Eurasian Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris*

Five were seen in the Nainital area

Dusky Crag Martin *Hirundo concolor*

Two at the airport was our first species of the trip, after which they were common at Ranthambhor and two were noted at Dhikala

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

About 20 at Sultanpur, up to three at Ranthambhor but more common in the mountains

Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*

About 15 at Sultanpur and six at Ranthambhor were the only records

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*

Up to 30 most days in all areas but missing from the Nainital area

Streak-throated Swallow *Hirundo fluvicola*

About 60 at the River Banas on the way to Bharatpur

Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus*

A single at Sultanpur was followed by half a dozen on two days at Nainital

Nepal House Martin *Delichon nipalensis*

A dozen seen at Nainital on two occasions. Other larger but more distant flocks were likely to have been this species also

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Very common throughout

White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*

Also very common throughout with up to 20 per day on most days

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*

Up to four on five dates but an amazing 110 at Ranthambhor on our first visit there

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Three birds at Bharatpur

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Between one and three on eight dates in most areas

Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*

One to three on three dates

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

Common at Ranthambhor with up to 30 a day and ten were seen in the dry areas on route to Bharatpur

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*

Excellent views of four birds at Sultanpur. These belong to the darker race 'jerdoni'

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

Apart from a dozen at Sultanpur there were ones and twos in most areas

Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseatus*

Two in Corbett was the sole record

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

Singles on consecutive days at Dhikala

Upland Pipit *Anthus sylvanus*

Two near Nainital were new for all in the group

Large Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina macei*

A flock of about 15 was seen early in the morning at Dhikala

Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*

Between one and four on five dates in the lowlands and 24 at Corbett on our last day there

Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*

Four on three dates in the lowlands and ten at Nainital

Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*

A male at Nainital was followed by up to seven on three dates at Corbett

Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike *Hemipus picatus*

Two at Corbett was the only record

Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*

Seven at Corbett were followed by four there the next day

White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis*

Ten at the River Banas between Ranthambhor and Bharatpur and eight and one at the latter place over the next two days

Himalayan Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*

Common in the mountain areas

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*

Very common throughout

Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala*

Thirty in Corbett National Park and a just a single there the next day

Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*

Up to 32 in the Nainital area on three days

Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*

Two at Nainital and singles on two dates at Corbett were surprisingly the only records

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii*

Only seen in Corbett with two singles and two at Kremeria on the last day

Altai Accentor *Prunella collaris*

Flock totalling 100 or more came as a big surprise to us at Nainital after expecting to see them in single figures

Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophiata*

A single at the start of the Mongoli Valley gave reasonable views

Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush *Monticola rufiventris*

A single male at Nainital was the only record

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

Two at Ranthambhor and a single at Chambal

Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*

Seen daily in the mountains with counts of between two and ten

Pied Thrush *Zoothera wardii*

A female was seen by just a few people at the start of th

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

Two at Sultanpur, a single at Ranthambhor, six at Dhikala followed by 15 there the next morning

Bright-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*

A single at Dhikala was seen by just a few from one of the jeeps

Striated Prinia *Prinia criniger*

Between two and four on three dates at Nainital

Rufous-fronted Prinia *Prinia buchanani*

Only seen in the barren lands surrounding our hotel at Ranthambhor where between four and ten were seen on the three days there

Grey-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii*

Between one and six on seven dates both in mountainous and lowland areas

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*

A single bird was seen at Sultanpur

Jungle Prinia *Prinia sylvatica*

Three in the early morning at Dhikala was the only record

Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis*

Two or three on four dates only in the lowlands

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata*

Small numbers in the lowlands and just a few at Dhikala

Aberrant Bush Warbler *Cettia flavolivacea*

A single at Dhikala was seen by just a few people

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*
One at Ranthambhor was the only sighting

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
Twenty at Bharatpur and singles at Corbett and Kumeria

Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*
Just one record at Bharatpur

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*
One or two in most areas

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*
Small numbers throughout

Mountain Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus sindianus*
Four and two were seen at Nainital and one at Corbett

Plain Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus neglectus*
Six at Bharatpur, two there the next day, and one and three at Corbett

Ashy-throated Warbler *Phylloscopus maculipennis*
Five at Nainital were followed by three there the next day

Yellow-rumped Warbler *Phylloscopus chloronotus*
Twenty at Nainital, three at Corbett and a single at Kumeria

Brooks' Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus subviridis*
A single at Bharatpur was unfortunately only seen by a few people

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*
Singles at Bharatpur and Nainital

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*
Probably the commonest of the Phylloscopus Warblers and seen virtually daily although mostly in single figures. Uncounted numbers were seen at Ranthambhor though

Buff-barred Warbler *Phylloscopus pulcher*
Up to 25 a day in during the four days in the mountains

Smoky Warbler *Phylloscopus fulgiventis*
A single gave not very good views at Nainital

Golden-spectacled Warbler *Seicercus burkii*
Two at Nainital and a single at Corbett

Grey-hooded Warbler *Seicercus xanthoschistos*
Commonly found in the mountains with daily counts of up to 20 birds

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*
One to three most days and a count of 20 at Bharatpur

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Sylvia crassirostris*
Up to four on four dates at Sultanpur and Ranthambhor

Rusty-tailed Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*
A single at Kumeria was the only record of this sought after species

Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophilata*

A male at Nainital was followed by three further birds at Corbett

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

Between one and six on most days in the lowlands

Red-throated Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla*

Four at Sultanpur and another four at Ranthambhor were the only sightings

Small Niltava *Niltava macrogrogoriae*

A stunning male was seen on our last morning at Kumeria

Rufous-bellied Siltation *Niltava sundara*

Two at Nainital were followed by a single there the next day and another pair at Kumeria on our last morning

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae*

A single at Ranthambhor was seen by just one or two people

Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*

Up to four on seven dates in all areas

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*

A stunning male was seen by the occupants of just one jeep at Dhikala on our last morning there. As they do in Hong Kong, after rain they sit on top of reeds in the sun to dry out and so good views can be obtained

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

Two at Sultanpur, a single at Bharatpur, and three individuals at Dhikala

Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis*

Commonly found in small numbers in the lowlands but just one record from the mountainous region with one at Dhikala

Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata*

Commonly found in the lowland areas but no records at all from the highlands

Blue-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus*

This stunning species was first encountered at Nainital where a pair was present, then a male on the road to the Mongoli Valley and another male at Kumeria

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Found in small numbers in the lowlands on most days but just one at Dhikala

Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis*

Two and one at Nainital and a female at Corbett were the only records

White-capped Water Redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*

As expected this bird was only encountered in the mountains where between one and four were seen on four days

Plumbeous Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*

Covers the same habitat as the previous species but in larger numbers. Seen on five dates with a maximum count of 20 at Corbett

Little Forktail *Enicurus scouleri*

A single at Kumeria gave fantastic views

Spotted Forktail *Enicurus maculatus*

A single at Nainital was the only record

Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis*

A very sought-after species by western birders. A pair was seen at Dhikala and a single male the next day probably was one of the same pair. This species was only recently discovered to be present here

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus indicus*

Commonly found throughout. Some may well have belonged to the race *maurus* (Siberian Stonechat)

White-tailed Stonechat *Saxicola leucurus*

Singles at Sultanpur and Ranthambhor

Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*

Eight at Sultanpur after which just two or three were seen on five dates mostly in the lowlands

Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferreus*

Up to ten on a daily basis in the mountains

Variable Wheatear *Oenanthe picata*

A single male at Sultanpur was followed by three at Ranthambhor and a further single there two days later

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

Nine in the dry area along the road to Bharatpur and a single at Chambal

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

Three at Sultanpur and another three in the desert area on the road to Bharatpur

Brown Rock-chat *Cercomela fusca*

Two in a village on the road to Sultanpur, two singles in the dry area surrounding our hotel at Ranthambhor and another single at Dhikala

Yellow-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hypoxantha*

A single at Kumeria on our last morning gave stunning views

White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis*

One to three on three days at Corbett and Kumeria

White-browed Fantail *Rhipidura aureola*

One to three at Ranthambhor and a single at Corbett

White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis*

Twenty in the garden of our accommodation at Junglelore Lodge came to bird tables, 60 the next morning in the mountains nearby and another ten in the garden on our third morning there

White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus*

For some perhaps the bird of the trip. These comical birds were seen in the Corbett area on three dates with a maximum count of about 15 in one group. They really are great fun

Striated Laughingthrush *Garrulax striatus*

Four at Nainital on one day was the only record

Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Garrulax rufogularis*

Two at Nainital were difficult to see and consequently were not seen by all

Streaked Laughingthrush *Garrulax lineatus*

Seen on four dates at Nainital with a maximum count of ten

Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *Garrulax erythrocephalus*

Just two at Nainital was the sole record

Puff-throated Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps*

Three at Nainital and two at Corbett were the only sightings

Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis*

A single at Nainital was followed by excellent views of a pair there the next day and another four were seen along the road in the Mongoli Valley

Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler *Pnoepyga albiventer*

One bird was seen on the side of a stream while we were having lunch in the mountains of Nainital

Black-chinned Babbler *Stachyris pyrrhops*

Three at Corbett were followed by another single there and two at Kumeria

Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense*

Two at Bharatpur and eight at Dhikala

Common Babbler *Turdoides caudatus*

Despite its name this species was only found on the arid plains at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur with up to 20 seen on four dates

Large Grey Babbler *Turdoides malcolmi*

Only seen in the lowlands in small numbers but 30 were counted at Sutanpur

Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striata*

Seen commonly throughout

Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea*

This lovely little bird only showed itself to one person at Nainital which is a shame

White-browed Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapis*

A male and a female were seen at Nainital

Green Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius xanthochlorus*

A single at Nainital was the only record

Blue-winged Minla *Minla cyanouroptera*

Eight at Nainital were followed by two there the next day

Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata*

Nothing like as numerous as in the Kathmandu Valley. Two at Nainital were followed by ten and three there on the next two days

Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus*

Quite numerous in mountainous areas where between three and 30 were seen on four days and an amazing 100 were estimated on our last day at Nainital

Spot-winged Tit *Parus melanolophus*

Only seen at Nainital where there were counts of four, 50 and six on three consecutive days

Great Tit *Parus major*

Seen in throughout in single figures

Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*

Up to a dozen a day in Nainital and Corbett on a daily basis

Black-lored Tit *Parus xanthogenys*

Up to six on five dates in the mountains

Yellow-browed Tit *Sylviparus modestus*

Just three at Nainital on one date

Kashmir Nuthatch *Sitta cashmirensis*

Two in some pine forest at Nainital were a great surprise as they are not supposed to occur here although local guides suspected that they were present here. Other birds seen in the area, we suspect, may well have belonged to this species also

Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *Sitta castanea*

Up to six on five dates in the mountains

White-tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis*

Up to six on four dates and 30 on one day in the Nainital area

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis*

One at Nainital and three and two at Corbett

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*

One on the cliffs on the other side of the river at Corbett was followed by another on the rocks along the fast flowing river in Corbett National Park the next day. Good views of a stunning bird

Bar-tailed Treecreeper *Certhia himalayana*

Seen on four dates in the Nainital area with a maximum count of eight birds

Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*

Seen in ones and twos in the lowlands and a maximum count of five at Bharatpur

Mrs Gould's Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae*

A stunning fully plumaged male was seen at Nainital

Green-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga nipalensis*

A male was also seen at Nainital

Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*

A female at Nainital was followed by two birds at Corbett

Fire-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga ignicauda*

Three at Nainital were followed by a pair there the next day

Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile*

Two along the road to Corbett gave good but brief views

Pale-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*

A single at Nainital

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*

Up to 30 seen throughout

Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo*

Although originally identified as a Eurasian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), it is likely that a bird at Bharatpur was of this species

Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*

One heard in Corbett was followed by four seen there the next day

Maroon Oriole *Oriolus traillii*

Seen both at Nainital and Corbett with up to six on four days

Isabelline (Rufous-tailed) Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*

Three were seen at Sultanpur

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

Two were noted at Ranthambhor

Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*

Two at Sultanpur were followed by singles at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur on four days

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*

Between one and four on nine dates in all areas

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*

Up to six a day at Ranthambhor and singles at Sultanpur and Dhikala where it is considered a rarity

Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus*

Two and one at Corbett on consecutive days

Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*

Three along the road to Sultanpur and two at Bharatpur

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

Ubiquitous in lowland areas and just two at Dhikala

Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

Two at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens*

The commonest of the drongos with up to seven seen at Ranthambhor on three dates and two at Nainital

Hair-crested (Spangled) Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus*

Singles on two consecutive days at Corbett

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Between four and ten on three days at Nainital

Black-headed Jay *Garrulus lanceolatus*

Twelve in the garden at the birdtables at Junglere Lodge was just spectacular and this was followed by a single and another four on the next two days

Red-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa erythrorhyncha*

Seven, six and two were seen on consecutive days at Nainital

(Green Magpie *Cissa chinensis*)

This lovely bird was unfortunately only heard on two days at Corbett

Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*

Very common in the lowlands and up to seven at Dhikala

Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*

Between two and four seen on three dates at Nainital

House Crow *Corvus splendens*

Present in large numbers, mostly in the lowlands

Indian Jungle (Large-billed) Crow *Corvus (macrorhynchos) culminatus*

This species is seeing some real taxonomic changes. It is likely that the species seen here is the one named here, but it is possible that we have also seen the "split" Large-billed Crow *Corvus (macrorhynchos) japonensis*

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

Two above the lodge at Nainital was likely the only record

Bank Myna *Acridotheres fuscus*

Commonly encountered in the lowlands particularly round villages and in Delhi itself

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Also very common throughout particularly around settlements

Asian Pied Starling *Sturnus contra*

A bird of agricultural areas and therefore commonly seen

Brahminy Starling *Sturnus pagodarum*
Commonly seen in the lowland areas

Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus*
One flock of about 60 birds was found along the road to Bharatpur and that was the only record

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Present throughout

Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans*
This lovely little bird was first encountered at the Junglere Lodge after which up to 15 were seen over the next three days

Chestnut-shouldered Petronia *Petronia xanthocollis*
Four at Ranthambhor were followed by two on the road to Bharatpur

Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*
A single on the road to Bharatpur, 15 at Corbett and a single there the next day

Black-breasted Weaver *Ploceus benghalensis*
Two were found at Sultanpur

Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava*
Twenty at Sultanpur, one at Dhikala and four there the next morning

Indian Silverbill *Lonchura malabarica*
Seen only in the lowlands with counts of up to 50 a day were recorded

Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*
From single figures up to 30 in the mountains on four days

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*
Two males at Nainital were the only record

Pink-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus rodochrous*
Three birds at Nainital, the first of which was in the garden of Junglere Lodge, were a welcome addition to everybody's lifelist

Yellow-breasted Greenfinch *Carduelis spinoides*
Four at Nainital by the lodge were followed by 25 in the same area the next day

Crested Bunting *Melophus lathamii*
A single male on the wires along the road to Corbett was our only sighting of this lovely bird

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*
Only seen at Nainital with counts of one, 15 and six

White-capped Bunting *Emberiza stewarti*
An immature male at Sultanpur and then seven, three and a single at Nainital on three consecutive days

Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*
Counts of up to 30 in the dry agricultural areas at Ranthambhor on four dates and two at Dhikala

375 species seen, one not specifically identified and three heard only

MAMMALS

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta*
Commonly seen throughout

Hanuman (Common, Black-faced) Langur *Semnopithecus entellus*

Also common throughout

Sambar *Cervus unicolor*

Seen in good numbers in all lowland wet areas

Indian Muntjac *Munticanus muntjak*

One at Nainital, two at Dhikala and three there the next day

Hog Deer *Axis porcinus*

Four in the grassland at Dhikala

Spotted Deer (Cheetal) *Axis axis*

Very common in lowland areas

Nilgai *Boselaphus tragocamelus*

Common at Sultanpur, Ranthambhor and Bharatpur including some beautiful Blue Bucks

Indian Gazelle *Gazella bennettii*

Seven at Ranthambhor with four there the next day. Excellent views of this beautiful antelope were had

Wild Pig *Sus scrofa*

Thirty or more at Ranthambhor and 15 at Corbett

Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*

A family party of 13 was unfortunately only seen by a few people in the grasslands of Dhikala

Jackal *Canis aureus*

Commonly heard at Bharatpur and quite a few seen, there was also one at Dhikala, six at Corbett and about four on the road back to Delhi from Corbett

Royal Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris*

An adult female (Lady of the Lake) at Ranthambhor was accompanied by two fully grown, one year old cubs and all gave stunning views as they passed our vehicle within 40 yards. Right at the last knockings and just a few minutes from the entrance gate to Corbett National Park we had a four or five minute viewing of a male wandering around in the grass by the river on the edge of the forest to which it eventually returned. Although our top target species for this trip, these beautiful cats are never guaranteed and to get fantastic and prolonged views of four of them was in our eyes truly remarkable and a good reason for returning at some time in the future

Jungle Cat *Felis chaus*

Two at Ranthambhor were seen not very well while a single at Nainital was watched stalking its prey for ages. It had more patience than us as we eventually walked away

Yellow-throated Marten *Martes flavigula*

Fantastic views were had of a single at Kumeria

Himalayan Weasel *Mustela sibirica*

A single at Nainital was only seen by one person

Small Indian Mongoose *Herpestes javanicus*

Just one record of one at Bharatpur

Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii*

Three and four seen on consecutive days at Ranthambhor

Indian (Black-naped) Hare *Lepus nigricollis*

Two singles at Ranthambhor

Five-striped Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii*
Ubiquitous in the lowland areas

Indian Desert Jird *Meriones hurrianae*
Excellent views were had of this species along the banks of the River Banas

House Rat *Rattus rattus*
About six along the tracks at Delhi Station

Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus*
About 60 at roost at our lunch stop near Chambal River

REPTILES

Marsh Mugger
Up to six on six dates in all water areas

Gharial
Three on the River Chambal and two at Corbett

Monitor Lizard
Four singles at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

Rock Python
A huge individual curled up in a tree at Bharatpur was followed by a much smaller one in a shed at Dhikala

Green Pit Viper
One was watched at Nainital from a distance!



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