

INDIA'S MONSOON SPECIALITIES BIRDING

TOUR

Day 1:

International arrivals into Delhi International Airport. Night in Delhi.

Day 2-3:

During the monsoon season, Bristled Grassbird suddenly appears in-and-around Delhi, so we will go in search of birds performing their aerial displaying this morning before our early afternoon flight to Srinagar. Night in Srinagar.

Days 4-7:

We bird the coniferous forests and deciduous valley bottoms around Srinagar. Our primary focus will be Kashmir and White-cheeked Nuthatches, Rufous-naped Tit, Kashmir Nutcracker and Tytler's Leaf Warbler. A supporting cast could include Scaly-bellied, Brown-fronted and Himalayan Woodpeckers, Spot-winged Tit, Black-and-yellow Grosbeak, Pink-browed Rosefinch, Himalayan Parakeet, Kashmir and Rusty-tailed Flycatchers, Streaked and Variegated Laughingthrushes with outside chances of Spectacled Finch, West Himalayan Grasshopper Warbler, White-throated Bushtit and even the scarce Orange Bullfinch - the latter is now quite rare in the area largely due to over-grazing leaving little remaining habitat for them to feed during the breeding season, even in the remoter, higher elevation areas. Overnight in Srinagar.

Day 8:

Morning flight back to Delhi and on to Jaipur. Night in Jaipur.

Days 9-10:

After breakfast drive to Ajmer as that area of Rajasthan is the stronghold of the, now rare, Lesser Florican, that is still spiralling down in numbers. Despite the numerous tours to Rajasthan and Gujarat in the dry season, extremely few birders have come across a wintering florican due to their elusiveness. However, from the end of July they perform their spectacular aerial display, making them quite easy to observe and enjoy. During our days in the area we have a few other species to search for, as the lush, green surroundings are full of birds in full display, including Rock Bush Quail, Rain Quail, Indian Pitta, Black-breasted Weaver, Singing Bushlark, Indian Eagle Owl, Red-necked Falcon, and a slim chance of Painted Francolin, right at the edge of its range. Overnight at Ajmer.

Day 11:

After breakfast drive to Talchhaper. Overnight in Tal Chhaper.

Day 12:

Full day at Tal Chhapar, birding grassland and remnant thorn forest. Our main target here is Indian Spotted-creeper. The remnant grasslands and surrounding scrub we have a chance of Indian Eagle Owl, Mammal-wise, Blackbuck is present in numbers. The thorn forest gives us our first chances with Rock Bush Quail, Black Francolin and we go in search of Indian Spotted-creeper. Night at Tal

Chappar.

Day 13:

Depart very early pre-dawn to reach Bikaner rubbish dump to search for vultures and later drive to Jaisalmer late afternoon birding at wood fossil park looking for Indian Eagle Owl and Desert Lark. Night at Jaisalmer.

Days 14-15:

Two days in-and-around Desert National Park. Our priority will be securing views of India's most famous, but unfortunately now rarest species - the Critically Endangered Great Indian Bustard. The population has suffered a recent catastrophic decline and really is facing imminent extinction. However, the area is also full of birds including another declining, rare species - Stoliczka's Bushchat, which we hope to find whilst searching for the bustard. A whole range of semi-desert species are also possible here - Cream-coloured Courser, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, 'Punjab Raven', Black-crowned Finch Lark, Desert Lark, Three Critically Endangered vultures are also possible - Indian, White-rumped and Red-headed, along with the more widespread and Egyptian. Night at Jaisalmer

Day16:

We take an afternoon flight to Mumbai and continue driving to our destination, depending on flight time. This afternoon at Mumbai in western India. From there we will take the expressway to Pune, a small city at the northern end of the Western Ghats where we will spend the night.

Day 17:

This morning we will commence our exploration of the Pune area, including the grounds of an ancient fortress of the Marhatta kingdom. Broad-tailed Grassbird is definitely an Indian 'monsoon speciality'. Active and relatively easy to see at this time of year, it is a silent, hellishly difficult skulker during the dry season and very hard to see during South India tours.

As well as the grassbird, we can also expect to see Painted Francolin, another sought-after species that is difficult outside the pre-monsoon and monsoon periods. We also have a good chance for the attractive Vigors's Sunbird, a Western Ghats endemic that does not reach the parts of South India explored during birding tours to the region.

Other birds of the area include several endemics including both Sykes's and Malabar Larks, Malabar Whistling Thrush and Indian Blackbird. Jungle Bush Quail is also likely. Overnight in Pune.

Day 18-19:

Morning birding around Pune then drive to Tansa wildlife sanctuary for forest owl. Overnight in Tansa. We spend a full day at a reserve outside of Mumbai where the Endangered Forest Owl was found at the end of 2014. This central Indian endemic remained undiscovered for 113 years until its discovery just over 25 years ago and is still very little-known. We will have a full day and following morning in search of this once-mythical species and other species possible while we search for the owl include Vigors's Sunbird - a range-restricted endemic, Mottled Wood Owl, Indian Scops Owl,

Jungle Nightjar, Jungle Owlet, Western Crowned Warbler, White-eyed Buzzard, Indian Golden and Black-hooded Orioles, Jungle Bush Quail, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta and plenty more widespread central Indian species. Night Atgaon.

Day 20:

After final mornings birding in Tansa, we head back to Mumbai in the afternoon for a final dinner. Night in Mumbai.

Day 21:

International departures from Mumbai International Airport (BOM).
