

Western India: Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra

28th January – 14th February 2023

Leader: Mike Nelson

Day 1 (28th January):

Arrivals into Amritsar International Airport. Pick-up at airport arrivals and transferred to hotel.

Welcoming dinner with the group at the hotel at 1900, unless informed otherwise.

Night at Ritz Plaza, 45, The Mall, Amritsar. Tel: +91 183 256283639. Website: <http://www.ritzhotel.in/>. Location: <https://goo.gl/maps/jND2YpcNUc1QUsoj7>

Day 2:

Full day birding the extensive marshes at Harike (1-hour drive) in search of the range-restricted speciality Rufous-vented Grass-babbler as the primary goal, with Sind Sparrow and White-tailed Stonechat also likely, while there is a chance of Jerdon's Babbler if we're lucky. Wintering birds abound and can include the scarce White-crowned Penduline-tit, Moustached Warbler, Brooks's Leaf Warbler and Mountain Chiffchaff.

Night at Ritz Plaza, 45, The Mall, Amritsar. Tel: +91 183 256283639. W: <http://www.ritzhotel.in/>

Day 3:

Early morning birding at Harike once more before driving south to Tal Chhapar (460km/8 hours), arriving in the evening.

Night at Raptors Inn, Narbada Baas, Tal Chhapar. Tel: +91 8826907085. W: <http://raptorsinn.com>. Location:

<https://goo.gl/maps/qa6MP4CRGrat7WjG7>

Day 4:

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, Demoiselle Crane, large numbers of Pallid and Montague's Harrier, a variety of *Aquila* eagles predominately made up of Steppe Eagles with the odd Imperial Eagle possible, and a broader, large numbers of passerines and raptors that winter in and around the reserve. Mammal-wise, Blackbuck is present in numbers. The thorn forest (1 hour drive) gives us our first chances with Rock Bush Quail, Black Francolin, Eastern Orphean Warbler and even White-bellied Minivet, as we go in search of Indian Spotted-creeper.

Night at Raptors Inn, Narbada Baas, Tal Chhapar. Tel: +91 8826907085. W: <http://raptorsinn.com>

Day 5:

Depart very early pre-dawn to reach Bikaner rubbish dump (150km/3 hours) to search for Yellow-eyed Dove, which should be present in numbers, as 500-2000 winter in the area. Also, a fantastic site to see Steppe Eagle and other *Aquila* mixed in with Eurasian Griffon at the dump up close. After this, drive west to Jaisalmer (270km/6 hours).

Late afternoon birding at Fossil Wood Park for Striolated Bunting, Persian (Red-tailed) Wheatear, Desert Whitethroat, Indian Eagle Owl and Desert Lark.

Night at Prince Desert Camp, Ki Basti, Sam Sand Dunes, Sam 345001. Tel: +91 93520 00962. Location: <https://goo.gl/maps/PYFGhPUEVQaSibOm7>

Days 6-7:

Two full 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, Desert Whitethroat, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Asian Desert Warbler, 'Punjab' Raven, Black-crowned Finch Lark, Desert Lark, Imperial, Tawny and Steppe Eagles, Variable Wheatear, and Laggar Falcon. Three critically endangered vultures are also possible – Indian, White-rumped and Red-headed, along with the more widespread Eurasian Griffon and Egyptian.

If we have been successful early with the Indian Bustards, we can either spend morning day 7 visiting the famous Demoiselle Cranes of Keechan (170km / 2 hours), and return to Desert National Park for afternoon birding or expand our birding to search for any species we're missing, otherwise we continue our search for the bustard.

Nights at Prince Desert Camp, Ki Basti, Sam Sand Dunes, Sam 345001. Tel: +91 93520 00962.

Day 8:

This morning we plan to visit the Demoiselle Cranes of Keechan (170km/2 hours). Standing on a nearby roof-top we watch in awe as huge flocks of crane fly over from the nearby sand-dunes to feed in a football pitch-sized compound on grain put out by villagers. Number of cranes vary but will likely be between 5000-8000! If we have already visited Keechan the previous day, then we head directly to Siana from Jaisalmer (360km/6 hours).

After Keechan we drive through the heat of the day to Jawai (310km/5-6 hours), renowned for its population of Leopard. Though we have a chance of seeing Leopard, and Striped Hyena we also search for the nomadic White-bellied Minivet, Critically Endangered Indian Vulture and other species that could include Rock Bush Quail and Painted Sandgrouse.

Night at Jawai Bera Leopard Camp, Juna Bera Road, Bera. Tel: +919602682361. W: www.jawaiberaleopardcamp.com/. Location: <https://g.page/jawai-bera-leopard-camp?share>

Day 9:

We have a full day around Jawai for the previously mentioned species, taking both morning and afternoon jeep safaris.

Night at Jawai Bera Leopard Camp, Juna Bera Road, Bera. Tel: +919602682361. W: www.jawaiberaleopardcamp.com/.

Day 10:

We depart early again, pre-dawn to reach Mount Abu for sunrise (130km/3 hours). Spending the morning around the open scrub and fields on the top of Mount Abu will hopefully bring us into contact with another rare Indian subcontinent endemic – Green Avadavat. Mount Abu is one of the few known localities for the species and we have an excellent chance of finding a small flock feeding quietly at the base of nearby bushes. Indian Yellow Tit, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, White-spotted Fantail, Plum-headed Parakeet, White-capped and Crested Buntings are all possible here and any time spent in the forest lower down could include Indian Scimitar Babbler, and a slim chance of Red Spurfowl. Following lunch, we drive back down the mountain and across the plains to the Little Rann of Kutch, possibly in time for some late afternoon (230km/6 hours).

Night at Royal Safari Camp, Malvan Cross Road, Surendranagar, Gujarat. Tel: +91 27572 41333. W: www.theroyalsafaricamp.com. Location: <https://goo.gl/maps/5H3QCbioQ3cMpWpa9>

Day 11:

We take a morning and afternoons jeep ride into the heart of the Little Rann of Kutch today, returning for lunch. The Little Rann is most famous for its still healthy population of Indian Wild Ass, and we should see several as we go in search of the areas avian specialities. Our main targets include roosting Sykes's Nightjar, Greater Hoopoe Lark, Lesser Flamingo, Indian Courser, White-tailed Plover, Great White and Dalmatian Pelicans, Montagu's and Pallid Harriers, Imperial, Tawny and Greater Spotted Eagles while Sociable Lapwing still holds on in ever-decreasing wintering numbers, though sadly the days of Macqueen's Bustard being reliable here seem to have gone now, though we will still spend a morning searching for this rare winter visitor. The camps fertile grounds have been a regular roosting spot for Pallid Scops Owl in recent years, and Sykes's Warbler is often wintering here too.

Night at Royal Safari Camp, Malvan Cross Road, Surendranagar, Gujarat. Tel: +91 27572 41333. W: www.theroyalsafaricamp.com

Day 12:

Today is a driving day, moving west to Bhuj (300km/8 hours). If we depart early enough, we should arrive in Bhuj for late afternoons birding in search, probably in search of Sykes's Lark and Painted Sandgrouse, or we have a mornings birding at Little Rann of Kutch, again. Night at Infinity Resort, Khatawadi, Naani Aral, Nakhatrana Bhuj, Gujarat 370665. Tel: +91 99136 88833. W: www.infinityresorts.com/rann-of-kutch/. Location: <https://g.page/IRROK?share>

Days 13-14:

Bhuj is situated in the Greater Rann of Kutch and, like the rest of Gujarat, teeming with birds, however it is home to a few rare, range-restricted species we are unlikely to see elsewhere. During our two full days birding in and around Bhuj we have to travel in several different directions for our targets, which include Hypocolius, Marshall's Iora, White-naped Tit, Sykes's Nightjar, Sykes's Lark, Painted Sandgrouse, Indian and Cream-coloured Coursers, Dalmatian Pelican, Grey-necked Bunting, Indian Eagle Owl, Persian (Red-tailed) Wheatear and Crab Plover to name a few.

Night at Infinity Resort, Khatawadi, Naani Aral, Nakhatrana Bhuj, Gujarat 370665. Tel: +91 99136 88833.

Day 15:

Depart early to Bhuj Airport (2 hours), flying Air India, AI9626 (0855/1055) to Mumbai. From here we drive north-east out of the sprawling metropolis into the rural backlands of Maharashtra, to Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary (85km/3 hours), possibly in time for some late afternoon/early evening birding.

Night at Hidden Village Resort, Nashik Highway, Atgaon, Shahpur. Tel: +91 9867155792. W: <https://hiddenvillage.in>. Location: <https://goo.gl/maps/htnsuH5CFnWPr4Du9>

Day 16:

We spend a full day at a reserve outside of Mumbai where the critically endangered Forest Owlet was found at the end of 2014. This central Indian endemic remained undiscovered for 113 years until its discovery just over 15 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 possibly 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 at Hidden Village Resort, Nashik Highway, Atgaon, Shahpur. Tel: +91 9867155792. W: <https://hiddenvillage.in>

Day 17:

After final mornings birding in Tansa, we head back to Mumbai in the afternoon for a final dinner (85km/3 hours).

Night at Mirage Hotel, International Airport Approach Road, Marol, Mumbai, 400059. Tel: +91-22-6672 1234, +91-22-6672 1234. W: <http://www.miragehotel.in>. Location: <https://goo.gl/maps/4ZBhMdmHDFzwsa6f9>

Day 18 (14th February):

International departures from Mumbai International Airport.

Please note: departures can be after 2100 on 13th February, as most international departures are overnight.

Important Phone numbers:

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