



NORTHWEST INDIA: LIONS AND DESERT BIRDING IN GUJARAT

14 - 27 FEBRUARY 2019



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Painted Sandgrouse is one of our targets on this trip.

This tour focuses on the amazing birds and wildlife in the deserts of Gujarat in northwestern India. We have the opportunity to see some very exciting and Critically Endangered (IUCN), rare, localized, and/or endemic birds as well as a range of interesting overwintering species, such as **Great Indian Bustard, Macqueen's Bustard, Crab-plover, Indian Courser, Demoiselle Crane, Sirkeer Malkoha, Painted, Chestnut-bellied, and Spotted Sandgrouse, Painted Francolin, Sykes's Lark, Laggar and Red-necked Falcons, Marshall's Iora, White-naped Tit, White-bellied Minivet, and Grey Hypocolius.**

The tour will also focus on finding some of the country's major mammals, such as Asiatic Lion (the only place in the world where you can see this subspecies, *P. l. persicus*, reliably), Asiatic Wild Ass, Indian Leopard (the subspecies in India is *P. p. fusca*), Blackbuck, Four-horned Antelope (Chousingha), and Chinkara (Indian Gazelle).

You could combine this tour with our exciting **Birding Tour India: The South – Western Ghats and Nilgiri Endemics** (13th – 26th January 2019), or our very popular **Birding Tour India: The North – Tigers and Birds** that runs directly before this one (28th January – 13th February 2019), or you could follow it up with our **Birding Tour India: The Northeast – Birds and Mammals of Eaglenest, Nameri and Kaziranga**, which visits the mountains of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (2nd – 15th March 2019). We can also easily offer you extensions at each location if you'd like to prolong your stay in this wonderful and vibrant country.

Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Ahmedabad and travel to Velavadar

You will arrive in Ahmedabad early in the morning (either from the Northern India tour or on an international flight) and will be transferred to Velavadar in the Bhavnagar District. Here you will check in at our comfortable, family-run hotel. We'll get some time in the afternoon for some local birding, where we'll seek out some of the common birds of the area.

Overnight: Velavadar

Day 2. Velavadar

We will spend the day birding the Velavadar area and Blackbuck National Park. Here we could see Gray Wolf, Blackbuck, Jungle Cat, Indian Fox, and Golden Jackal during the day, but the birds are likely to take center stage here with the likes of **Sirkeer Malkoha, Painted Francolin, Chestnut-bellied and Spotted Sandgrouse, Rufous-tailed, Crested, and Sykes's Larks, and, Desert and Variable Wheatears.** This area is excellent for raptors, and during the day we will be on the lookout for **Short-toed, Tawny, Steppe, Eastern Imperial, Greater Spotted, and Indian Spotted Eagles, Laggar Falcon, Eurasian Hobby, Red-necked Falcon, White-eyed and Long-legged Buzzards, Black-winged Kite, and more.**

Overnight: Velavadar

Day 3. Velavadar to Gir

We will drive from Velavadar to the Gir National Park area, arriving there in time for lunch. The afternoon will be spent birding in the area outside the park.

Overnight: Gir

Day 4. Gir National Park

Gir is a rich mix of dry deciduous forests, acacia scrub, and grassland, fed by rivers and reservoirs. Mammals will be a big focus of our time here; Gir is the last stronghold of the Asiatic Lion and we will be looking for them. Other mammals possible here include Indian Leopard, Sambar, Chital (Spotted Deer), Nilgai, Wild Boar, Four-horned Antelope (Chousingha) – the world's only four-horned antelope, and Chinkara (Indian Gazelle). As we are driving around looking for mammals we likely will also spot some interesting birds, such as **Bonelli's Eagle, Laggar Falcon, Painted Sandgrouse, Marshall's Iora, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Blossom-headed Parakeet, and Tawny-bellied, Yellow-eyed, Jungle, and Large Grey Babblers.**

Overnight: Gir

Day 5. Gir National Park to Jamnagar

After another morning game drive looking for the Asiatic Lion and other mammals and birds we will drive to Jamnagar, where we will arrive in the early evening, ready to spend the whole of the next day birding the local area.

Overnight: Jamnagar

Day 6. Jamnagar

The coastline of the Gulf of Kutch offers some of the best coastal birding in India. We will look for the majestic **Crab-plover** along with a huge supporting cast that may include **Kentish Plover, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Pallas's Gull, Lesser Crested Tern, Black-bellied Tern, and Western Reef Heron,** as well as a whole lot more.

Overnight: Jamnagar

Day 7. Jamnagar to Bhuj

This is essentially a travel day as we transfer between Jamnagar and Bhuj, our base for the next four nights. We will plan on making a short trip in the evening for **Grey Hypocolius,** a localized winter visitor, and we may find a range of shorebirds, ducks, and **Common Crane.**

Overnight: Bhuj

Days 8 - 9. Bhuj

We have two full days to explore the Bhuj area, where we will visit a range of sites, looking for **White-browed (Stoliczka's) Bush Chat, Indian Courser, White-naped Tit, White-bellied Minivet, Marshall's Iora, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Grey-necked Bunting, Sykes's Lark,** and numerous other desert-dwelling species.

Overnight Bhuj (two nights)

Day 10. Bhuj to Little Rann of Kutch

The morning will be spent traveling between Bhuj and the Little Rann of Kutch desert outpost, where we will arrive in the afternoon. The Little Rann of Kutch is an ancient seabed transferred over the years by geological forces into a saline desert plain with grassy patches that offer great birding and mammal watching.

Overnight: Little Rann of Kutch

Days 11 - 12. Little Rann of Kutch

The Little Rann of Kutch is a fantastic birding area, and we will have two full days here to thoroughly explore it. Larks are numerous, with **Crested, Sykes's, Bimaculated, Greater Short-toed, and Greater Hoopoe Larks, Oriental Skylark, Singing and Indian Bush Larks,** and **Ashy-crowned and Black-crowned Sparrow-Larks** all possible. Other birds we will be looking for include **Macqueen's Bustard, Chestnut-bellied and Spotted Sandgrouse, Indian and Cream-colored Coursers, Yellow-legged and Barred Buttonquails, Long-legged and White-eyed Buzzards, Desert and Variable Wheatears, Southern Grey, Long-tailed, Red-tailed, and Bay-backed Shrikes, Common Woodshrike, and Asian Desert Warbler.** Wetlands in this dry area may support **Greater and Lesser Flamingos and Great White, Spot-billed, and Dalmatian Pelicans.** Storks can also be numerous here, with **Painted, Black, White, Woolly-necked, and Black-necked Storks** all possible. We will also hope for a range of overwintering ducks and shorebirds.

On one evening we will look at an area where raptors usually come in to roost. We hope to find **Western Marsh, Montagu's, and Pallid Harriers,** a range of *Aquila* eagles, falcons, and buzzards. On another evening we will visit a site to look for the gorgeous **Demoiselle and Common Cranes** as they gather in large flocks, which is sure to be a seriously stunning sight and likely tour highlight.

The Little Rann of Kutch is also home to a wide range of mammals; the main target here will be the Asiatic Wild Ass, but we could also encounter Nilgai, Chinkara (Indian Gazelle), White-footed Fox (a pale Asiatic subspecies of Red Fox and also known as Desert Fox), Gray Wolf, Jungle Cat, Indian Long-eared Hedgehog, and Indian Hare.

Overnight: Little Rann of Kutch (two nights)

Day 13. Little Rann of Kutch to Ahmedabad

After a final morning birding in the Little Rann of Kutch we will transfer back to Ahmedabad, where we will arrive in the evening.

Overnight: Ahmedabad

Day 14. Departure from Ahmedabad

There may be time for an optional city tour, depending on your international departure, as the tour concludes, unless you will join us on our Northeast India tour.

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| Duration: | 14 days |
| Date: | 14 th – 27 th February 2019 |
| Limit: | 4-8 |
| Start: | Ahmedabad |
| End: | Ahmedabad |
| Price: | US\$5,180 per person sharing |
| Single supplement: | US\$800 |

Price includes:

All accommodation (as described above)

Meals (from lunch on day 1 until breakfast on day 14)

Drinking water – two bottles of mineral water per day per person from our tour vehicle (if taken from a hotel this will be at your own cost)

Expert tour leader and local bird/wildlife guide fees

National park/birdwatching reserve entrance fees and jeep safaris

All ground transport and tolls while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

Flights to/from Ahmedabad International Airport

Visa

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.

Optional tours (e.g. monument entrance fees)

Soft/alcoholic drinks

Camera (still/video) permits

Personal travel insurance

Gratuities

Please note that the itinerary above cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide to the one advertised due to tour scheduling.