



COMPLETE NORTHERN INDIA: TIGERS, BIRDS AND HIMALAYAS

27 JANUARY – 12 FEBRUARY 2020

27 JANUARY – 12 FEBRUARY 2021



© Andy Walker/Birding Ecotours 2017

Bengal Tiger is a big mammalian target on this trip.

India, with its fabulous scenery, incredible wildlife, fascinating culture, and wonderful monuments must truly be on any world-birder's and traveler's wish list! The tour will visit world famous national parks such as Ranthambhore, Keoladeo Ghana (formerly known as Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary), and Corbett National Parks, and spend time in the breathtaking scenery of the Himalayan foothills at Pangot and Sattal. A visit to this part of India would not be complete without taking in the majestic UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Fatehpur Sikri and the Taj Mahal, and we will visit both of these very impressive places to soak up the sights and sounds. India is well known for its amazing food, and we will sample a great deal of different, interesting, and tasty local dishes throughout the tour.

The tour gives the possibility of connecting with numerous exciting birds, such as **Indian Skimmer**, **Indian Courser**, **Koklass** and **Cheer Pheasants**, **Painted Spurfowl**, **Bearded Vulture** (Lammergeier), **Collared Falconet**, **Sarus Crane**, **Ibisbill**, **Painted Sandgrouse**, **Tawny** and **Brown Fish Owls**, **Blue-bearded Bee-eater**, **Great Hornbill**, **Sirkeer Malkoha**, **Long-billed Thrush**, **Spotted**, **Slaty-backed**, and **Little Forktails**, **Golden Bush Robin**, **Himalayan Bluetail**, **Himalayan Rubythroat**, **Wallcreeper**, **Rufous-breasted** and **Altai Accentors**, and **White-capped Bunting**. Furthermore, the tour offers the chance to search out one of the world's most highly-sought but elusive big cats, the **Bengal Tiger**, with a supporting cast that could include **Indian Leopard**, **Asian Elephant**, **Gharial**, **Mugger**, and **Indian Python**.

You could combine this tour with our preceding **Birding Tour India: The South – Western Ghats and Nilgiri Endemics** and with our following tours: **Birding Tour India: The Northwest – Lions and Desert Birding in Gujarat** and **Birding Tour India: The Northeast – Birds and Mammals of Eaglenest, Nameri and Kaziranga**, which visits the mountains of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. We can also easily offer you extensions at each location if you'd like to extend your stay in this wonderful and vibrant country.

Itinerary (17 days/16 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in New Delhi, nearby afternoon birding

After your late-morning arrival into New Delhi we will transfer to our nearby hotel for check-in (check-in is usually noon). After lunch we will spend the first afternoon of the tour birding at a fantastic wetland site near New Delhi, where we could see some interesting species such as **Painted** and **Black-necked Storks**, **Bar-headed Goose**, **Knob-billed Duck**, **Indian Spot-billed Duck**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Garganey**, **Ferruginous Duck**, **Eastern Imperial**, **Indian Spotted**, and **Booted Eagles**, **Brook's Leaf Warbler**, **Sind Sparrow**, **Striated Babbler**, **Citrine Wagtail**, **Baillon's Crake**, **Spotted Owlet**, and **Moustached Warbler**. This site is a great introduction to Indian birding and is the perfect first birding site for those who have never been to India/Asia before, but it is also really enjoyable for those who do already know the birds of the region. Our guides love visiting this site time after time, and a great afternoon will be had by all. Overnight: New Delhi

Day 2. Travel to Ranthambhore and tiger safari in Ranthambhore National Park

As New Delhi wakes up we will take the early morning train out of the city and head south to the Ranthambhore area, where we will arrive in time for lunch in our luxurious hotel on the outskirts of the national park. We will keep our eyes peeled along the way in case of any birds close to the train. Sometimes we get close views of waders/shorebirds, raptors, and storks.

During the afternoon we will take our first game drive (called 'safari' in India), our prime target being the majestic **Bengal Tiger**. Seeing one of these incredibly huge and stunningly beautiful 'big cats' is sure to be an early trip highlight. Ranthambhore is a great place to find them, yet they are generally never easy, and patience and careful scanning will be required; it is amazing how such a large animal can hide in grass! However, once it has been found it is definitely worth the effort.

Overnight: Ranthambhore

Day 3. Ranthambhore National Park, all day birding/wildlife watching

We will have a full day in and around Ranthambhore National Park; this will include two game drives to look again for **Bengal Tiger** and other wildlife. Target birds include **Indian Peafowl**, **Painted Spurfowl**, **Plum-headed**, **Alexandrine**, and **Rose-ringed Parakeets**, **River Tern**, **Rufous Treepie**, **Citrine Wagtail**, **Indian Vulture**, **Yellow-legged Buttonquail**, **Small Minivet**, **White-browed Fantail**, **White-bellied Drongo**, **White-naped Woodpecker**, **Crested Serpent Eagle**, **Yellow-footed Green Pigeon**, **Bluethroat**, **Bay-backed**, **Long-tailed**, and **Southern Grey Shrikes**, **Indian Bush Lark**, and **Large Grey Babbler**. In addition to looking for **Bengal Tiger** we will also keep our eyes peeled for the **Mugger** crocodile, **Rhesus Macaque**, **Southern Plains Grey Langur**, **Sambar**, **Chital** (Spotted Deer), and **Wild Boar**.

Overnight: Ranthambhore

Day 4. Ranthambhore to Bharatpur

Today we will transfer between Ranthambhore and Bharatpur but will make several birding stops along the way, depending on local water levels and our local knowledge of current bird distribution. Birds we will look for across the course of the day include **Indian Stone-curlew**, **Painted Sandgrouse**, **Yellow-crowned Woodpecker**, and **Variable Wheatear** near the hotel, and then **Greater Flamingo**, **Indian Skimmer**, **Brown Crake**, **Great Stone-curlew**, **Black-bellied Tern**, **Small Pratincole**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Greater Painted-snipe**, and **Yellow-wattled Lapwing** along the way. We are likely to arrive at our hotel in Bharatpur in the late afternoon.

Overnight: Bharatpur

Day 5. Keoladeo Ghana National Park (formerly known as Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary)

We will spend the full day birding around the incredible Keoladeo Ghana National Park, one of the best-known birding sites in the country, and with good reason; this is a great place and always popular with good views of a range of species possible. We will spend the day moving around this vast area on cycle-rickshaws, which is an excellent way to see the site. Time will be spent birding in a range of habitats such as scrub, woodland, lakes, and marshes to try and maximize the number of species seen. Some of the species possible during the day from the wooded/scrubby areas include **Grey Francolin**, **Indian Peafowl**, **Indian Scops Owl**, **Dusky Eagle-Owl**, **Spotted Owlet**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher**, **White-eared Bulbul**, **Pied Myna**, **Brahminy Starling**, **Tickell's Thrush**, and **Indian Robin**, while the

wetlands may produce **Bar-headed Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Black-necked Stork, Black Bittern, Oriental Darter, Sarus Crane, White-tailed Lapwing, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, and Pied Kingfisher**. Hunting over the wetlands we may also find **Western Marsh Harrier, Black-winged Kite, Egyptian Vulture, and Indian Spotted, Greater Spotted, and Eastern Imperial Eagles**.

Overnight: Bharatpur

Day 6. Bharatpur to National Chambal Sanctuary via Fatehpur Sikri

An early start today to look for **Indian Courser**, a difficult and local species. We will also keep our eyes peeled for other species such as **Black Francolin, Sarus Crane, Indian Roller, Isabelline (Daurian) Shrike**, and a range of larks, pipits, and wagtails. After the morning birding session we will commence our journey to the delightful Chambal Safari Lodge, calling in to visit the very impressive Fatehpur Sikri World Heritage Site, one of the best-preserved collections of Mughal architecture in India (the fort was actually abandoned in 1585, only 14 years after the huge building project was complete!). We will arrive at our hotel in the late afternoon and look out for **Brown Hawk-Owl and Indian Scops Owl** in the hotel grounds.

Overnight: Chambal

Day 7. National Chambal Sanctuary

We will have the full day to explore this area, which is very different to other areas on the tour and gives us the opportunity for a wide range of interesting species of birds and other animals. We will take an early-morning boat ride along the Chambal River, where we will look for **Indian Skimmer** as well as **River Lapwing, Great Stone-curlew, River and Black-bellied Terns**, and the huge **Pallas's Gull**. It is not just birds here, however, as we will keep our eyes firmly peeled for the incredibly rare and Endangered (IUCN) **Ganges River Dolphin** as well as the Critically Endangered (IUCN) **Gharial**. We will spend time checking out the scrub around the river, where we may find the secretive and skulking **Sirkeer Malkoha, Crested Honey Buzzard, Bonelli's Eagle, Plum-headed Parakeet, Yellow-eyed Babbler, and White-capped Bunting**. Farmland in this area can also hold some interesting species, and we will have time there as well as in the wooded grounds of our accommodation to look for numerous species.

Overnight: Chambal

Day 8. Chambal to New Delhi via Agra and the Taj Mahal

We'll do some early-morning birding around the hotel grounds before we swap birding time for some culture! After breakfast we will start the journey back to New Delhi. However, along the way we will stop for a tour of the outside grounds of the majestic Taj Mahal World Heritage Site, allowing you the chance for that 'must have' photo souvenir in front of this iconic building. The Taj Mahal was completed in 1648 and is said to be the world's finest example of Mughal architecture. This architectural masterpiece was described by the poet Rabindranath Tagore as 'the tear on the face of eternity'. We will spend the late morning here, enjoying the various pavilions, forts, and other attractions of the Taj Mahal, but keep your binoculars with you as there are often interesting birds flying around the grounds and along the river out back! After lunch in Agra we will continue our journey to New Delhi, arriving in time for dinner.

Overnight: New Delhi

Days 9 – 10. By train from New Delhi to Kathgodam, continue to and birding at Sattal

We will wake early in the morning and check in at the station for our morning train ride to the city of Kathgodam in the north. Here we will experience an altogether different, yet incredibly exciting birding experience in the cooler and stunningly beautiful Himalayan foothills as we make our way to Sattal. On arrival at our hotel around lunchtime we will be immediately impressed by the landscape, cooler air, and a whole suite of new birds. After lunch we'll spend the rest of the day, and the whole of the next day, birding in this fascinating and bird-filled area.

Possible highlights during our time in Sattal may include **Jungle Owlet, Great, and Blue-throated Barbets, Speckled Piculet, Greater and Lesser Yellownapes, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Slaty-headed Parakeet, Black-headed Jay, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Grey Treepie, Yellow-bellied Fantail, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, Red-billed Leiothrix, Himalayan, and Siberian Rubythroats, Golden Bush Robin, Himalayan Bluetail, Spotted Forktail, Rufous-bellied Niltava, Blue Whistling Thrush, Slaty-blue Flycatcher, Crimson Sunbird, Russet Sparrow, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Olive-backed Pipit, Common and Pink-browed Rosefinches, Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, and White-capped Bunting.** There will also likely be a number of laughingthrushes to keep us entertained: **Rufous-chinned, White-throated, Streaked, and Striated Laughingthrushes** (the latter is often voted one of the birds of the trip as it is rather nice-looking!).

Overnight: Sattal

Day 11. Sattal to Nainital and Pangot

The day will be spent birding around Sattal and Nainital, finally arriving at our wonderful lodge high in the mountains in Pangot. We will have a second chance at some of the species listed above, as well as many others, including **Kalij Pheasant, Green-backed Tit, Himalayan Black-lored Tit, Himalayan and Black Bulbuls, Black-throated Bushtit, Rufous Sibia, Bar-tailed Treecreeper, Small Niltava, Slaty-backed Forktail, Blue-capped Redstart, Plumbeous Water Redstart, White-capped Redstart, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Crested Kingfisher, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Long-billed Thrush, Green-tailed Sunbird, and so many more!**

The grounds around our accommodation offer some great birding, and either today or tomorrow we will be sure to pay them due attention. We could find **Black Francolin, Black-headed Jay, Great Barbet, Grey-headed and Brown-fronted Woodpeckers, Striated Prinia, Altai Accentor, White-throated Laughingthrush, Blue Whistling Thrush, and Rock Bunting** here, as well as plenty more. A photographic hide also gives good photo opportunities.

Overnight: Pangot

Day 12. Pangot

There will be an early start this morning to gain some further elevation to allow us to focus on some high-elevation key targets, which will include both **Cheer and Koklass Pheasants** along with commoner and more widespread **Kalij Pheasant and Hill Partridge, Bearded Vulture** (Lammergeier), **Griffon Vulture, Himalayan Vulture, Altai Accentor, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Himalayan Woodpecker, Himalayan Bluetail, (Spot-winged) Coal Tit, and White-tailed Nuthatch.** We will also hope to get some great landscape views of the even higher snow-capped Himalayan mountain ranges, which really are spectacular. We will have the full day to explore this area, and it could be one of the best days of the trip with some very special birds.

Overnight: Pangot

Day 13. Pangot and Nainital to Jim Corbett National Park

After some final birding in the Nainital/Pangot area, where we will look for anything that we may want to concentrate our final efforts on before heading to the Corbett area after lunch. Time permitting, we will likely explore the Kosi River area to look for several beautiful and highly-sought species such as **Blue-bearded Bee-eater**, **Ibisbill**, and **Wallcreeper**. We could also find **Brown Dipper**, **Little Forktail**, **Pallas's Fish Eagle**, **Brown Fish Owl**, **Red Junglefowl**, **Besra**, **Himalayan Swiftlet**, **Nepal House Martin**, **White-capped Redstart**, **Plumbeous Water Redstart**, and **Blue Rock Thrush**. The grounds of our hotel also offer some good birding, and we will look for **Collared Scops Owl** and **Crimson Sunbird** among many others over the next few days.

Overnight: Corbett

Days 14 – 15. Jim Corbett National Park

We will have two full days to explore the areas within and around Jim Corbett National Park. There are numerous great birds to look for here, and we will also look for some of the park's most spectacular wildlife, maybe getting further sightings of the regal **Bengal Tiger**, with the added possibility of **Indian Leopard**, **Asian Elephant**, and an assortment of other creatures such as **Indian Crested Porcupine** and **Yellow-throated Marten**.

Some of the birds we will look for over these two days will include **Red-headed**, and **Cinereous Vultures**, **Jungle and Asian Barred Owlets**, **Changeable Hawk-Eagle**, **Tawny Fish Owl**, **Great Hornbill**, **Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo**, **Collared Falconet**, **White-rumped Spinetail**, **Grey-headed Fish Eagle**, **Banded Bay Cuckoo**, **Stork-billed Kingfisher**, **Himalayan Flameback**, **White-crested Laughingthrush**, **Rosy Pipit**, **Maroon Oriole**, **Common Green Magpie**, **Grey-bellied Tesia**, and **Crested Bunting**.

Overnight: Corbett (one of these nights will likely be spent inside the national park)

Day 16. Corbett to New Delhi

After some time birding around our hotel in the morning we will commence our journey back to New Delhi. Depending on exact timings we may grab another opportunity to look along the river for **Ibisbill**, **Wallcreeper**, and **Indian Cormorant** and will keep a look-out for any other new and interesting species along the way. After our final day birding together we will enjoy another great meal and think about our trip highlights before saying goodbye, as the main tour concludes when we reach our hotel in New Delhi.

Overnight: New Delhi

Day 17. Departure from New Delhi

You will be transferred to the airport for your flights home or your continuation on the Northwest India Tour.

Overnight: Not included.

Please note that the itinerary 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 from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 17 days

Limit: 4 – 8

Dates: 27 January – 12 February 2020
27 January – 12 February 2021

Start: New Delhi International Airport, New Delhi

End: New Delhi International Airport, New Delhi

Prices: US\$6,680 per person sharing (cost based on 4-8 participants) 2020
US\$7,348 per person sharing (cost based on 4-8 participants) 2021

Single supplement: US\$1,128 2020
US\$1,241 2021

Price includes:

All accommodation (as described above)

Meals (from evening meal on day 1 until breakfast on day 17)

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

Expert tour leader

Local bird and wildlife guide fees

Monument entrance fees and monument guide (Taj Mahal grounds and Fatehpur Sikri grounds)

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 New Delhi International Airport

Visa

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

Optional tours (e.g. extra monument entrance fees not included above)

Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing/monument excursions

Soft/alcoholic drinks

Camera (still/video) permits

Personal travel insurance

Gratuities