

# Birding Ecotours



## INDIA: THE NORTHWEST – LIONS AND DESERT BIRDING IN GUJARAT

09 - 22 FEBRUARY 2024



*We will look for Asiatic Lion in Gir National Park.*

This small group tour focuses on the amazing birds and wildlife in the deserts of Gujarat in northwestern India. We will 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. The tour is also great for any family listers or world birders, with monotypic **Crab-plover** and **Grey Hypocolius** both possible.

Other highlight birds possible during the tour include **Macqueen's Bustard**, **Indian Courser**, **Sociable Lapwing**, **Indian Skimmer**, **Demoiselle Crane**, **Common Crane**, **Lesser Flamingo**, **Greater Flamingo**, **Sykes's Nightjar**, **Sirkeer Malkoha**, **Painted Sandgrouse**, **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse**, **Spotted Sandgrouse**, **Painted Francolin**, **Laggar Falcon**, **Red-necked Falcon**, **Pallid Harrier**, **Montagu's Harrier**, **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Indian Eagle-Owl**, **Dalmatian Pelican**, **Greater Hoopoe-Lark**, **Sykes's Lark**, **Indian Bush Lark**, **Sand Lark**, **Marshall's Iora**, **White-naped Tit**, **White-bellied Minivet**, and **White-browed (Stolitzka's) Bush Chat**.

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), **Asiatic Wild Ass**, **Indian Leopard**, **Blackbuck**, **Four-horned Antelope** (Chousingha), and **Chinkara** (Indian Gazelle).

You could combine this tour with our very popular [Birding Tour India: The North – Tigers, Amazing Birds, and the Himalayas](#) that runs directly before this tour, and you could follow it up with our short [Birding Tour India: The West – Forest Owlet Extension](#), a bird with a fascinating history (click the link to find out about it), and you can also combine it with our [Birding Tour India: The Northeast – Spectacular Birds and Mammals](#), which visits the mountains of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Other extensions at each location are also possible if you would like to prolong your stay in this wonderful and vibrant country, details [here](#).



*A pair of the sought-after and rather dapper-looking **Indian Courser***

### Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

#### Day 1. Arrival in Ahmedabad and travel to Blackbuck National Park

You will arrive in Ahmedabad early in the morning (either from the Northern India tour or on an international flight). We will then transfer to Blackbuck National Park, our location for the first two nights of the tour.

Overnight: Blackbuck National Park

#### Day 2. Blackbuck National Park

We will spend the day birding Blackbuck National Park and the local area. Here we could see **Grey 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 Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Steppe Eagle, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Greater Spotted Eagle, Indian Spotted Eagle, Laggar Falcon, Eurasian Hobby, Red-necked Falcon, White-eyed Buzzard, Long-legged Buzzard, Black-winged Kite**, and more.

Overnight: Blackbuck National Park



*Red-necked Falcon is an attractive raptor.*



### Day 3. Blackbuck National Park to Sasan Gir

We will drive from the Blackbuck National Park area to Gir National Park area, arriving in time for lunch. The afternoon will be spent birding in the area outside the park and within our hotel grounds. Some of the bird possibilities for the afternoon include **Tickell's Blue Flycatcher**, **Green Bee-eater**, **Plum-headed Parakeet**, **Indian Paradise Flycatcher**, **Yellow-footed Green Pigeon**, **River Tern**, **Pied Kingfisher**, **Common Kingfisher**, **Yellow Bittern**, **Black-headed Cuckooshrike**, **Tawny-bellied Babbler**, **Indian White-eye**, and **Clamorous Reed Warbler**.

Overnight: Sasan Gir

### Day 4. Gir National Park

Gir National Park 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 it. 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 **Indian Stone-curlew**, **Yellow-wattled Lapwing**, **Bonelli's Eagle**, **White-eyed Buzzard**, **Laggar Falcon**, **Painted Sandgrouse**, **Marshall's Iora**, **Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker**, **Yellow-crowned Woodpecker**, **Crested Treeswift**, **Indian Scops Owl**, **Spotted Owlet**, **Jungle Nightjar**, **Plum-headed Parakeet**, **Rufous Treepie**, and **Tawny-bellied, Yellow-eyed, Jungle, and Large Grey Babblers**.

Overnight: Sasan Gir



*Hopefully we will find **Indian Leopard** in Gir National Park.*

### Day 5. Gir National Park to Jamnagar

After another morning game drive looking for **Asiatic Lion** and other mammals and birds mentioned above we will drive to Jamnagar, where we will arrive in the late afternoon. If time permits we will visit the port area to look for the highly sought **Indian Skimmer**. Other birds possible in this area include **Lesser Flamingo**, **Western Reed Heron**, **Slender-billed Gull**, **Great Knot**, **Lesser Sand Plover**, and several other shorebirds.

Overnight: Jamnagar.



*We will look for **Indian Skimmer** in the Jamnagar area.*

### Day 6. Jamnagar

The coastline of the Gulf of Kutch offers some of the best coastal birding in India. We will spend some time birding in the saltworks and saltpans as well as at the intertidal area, where we will hope to find our main target bird, the majestic, monotypic **Crab-plover**. There will be numerous other shorebirds, gulls, and terns possible during the day, and we will also visit the Narara Marine National Park. The supporting cast to **Crab-plover** may include **Terek Sandpiper**, **Red-necked Phalarope**, **Pied Avocet**, **Ruff**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Common Greenshank**, **Kentish Plover**, **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Broad-billed Sandpiper**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Pallas's Gull**, **Lesser Crested Tern**, **Little Tern**, **Black-bellied Tern**, and **Western Reef Heron**, as well as a whole lot more.

Other birds possible in the area include **Greater Flamingo**, **Lesser Flamingo**, **Painted Stork**, **Indian Spot-billed Duck**, **Black-necked Grebe**, **Great Crested Grebe**, **Sykes's Lark**, **Sand Lark**, **Western Osprey**, **Graceful Prinia**, **Desert Wheatear**, and **Long-billed Pipit**.

Overnight: Jamnagar



*The monotypic **Crab-plover** at Jamnagar will be a major tour highlight.*

### Day 7. Jamnagar to the Great Rann of Kutch (Bhuj)

This is essentially a travel day as we transfer between Jamnagar and Bhuj, our base for the next three nights. We will plan on making a short trip in the evening to the Nakhatrana area, where we will look for the scarce **White-naped Tit**. This area also holds some of our other targets of the area that we will also look for over the next couple of days, such as **Rock Bush Quail**, **Marshall's Iora**, **Pallid Scops Owl**, and **White-bellied Minivet**.

Overnight: Bhuj

### Days 8 - 9. Bhuj

We have two full days to explore the Bhuj area, where we will visit a number of sites targeting a range of really exciting species. Some of these targets only occur at specific spots, so we will target these locations for the key birds and in doing so will mop up a large list of other great birds along the way.

One of the biggest targets over our two days is the monotypic **Grey Hypocolius**. The area where we usually see this bird also supports a wide range of other species, with raptors such as **Steppe Eagle**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, and **Pallid Harrier**. Both **Painted Sandgrouse** and **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** occur here, along with **Indian Stone-curlew**, **Western Barn Owl**, and an interesting range of passerines including **Marshall's Iora**, **Eastern Orphean Warbler**, **Common Babbler**, **Yellow-eyed Babbler**, **Rosy Starling**, **Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark**, **Rufous-tailed Lark**, **Sykes's Lark**, **Tawny Pipit**, **Long-billed Pipit**, **Desert Whitethroat**, **Desert Wheatear**, **Brown Rock Chat**, **Yellow-throated Sparrow**, and **Grey-necked Bunting**.



We usually aim to finish one afternoon in the bush with the aim of looking for **Indian Nightjar** or potentially some other animals of interest.



*The monotypic **Grey Hypocolius** in the Great Rann of Kutch will be a big tour highlight.*

Some of the birding in the Great Rann of Kutch will see us checking out some agricultural and scrub land, where the main target will be **White-browed** (Stoliczka's) **Bush Chat** (if we haven't found it earlier on the tour). Other species in this zone may include **White-bellied Minivet**, **Marshall's Iora**, **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse**, **Common Crane**, **Black-winged Kite**, **Egyptian Vulture**, **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Common Quail**, **Indian Bush Lark**, **Hume's Short-toed Lark**, **Blyth's Pipit**, **Paddyfield Pipit**, **Rufous-fronted Prinia**, **Sykes's Warbler**, and **Grey-necked Bunting**.

Overnight Bhuj

### **Day 10. Great Rann of Kutch (Bhuj) to Little Rann of Kutch**

We should have time for some pre-breakfast birding for one final time in the Great Rann of Kutch. Our exact plan will be based on how the previous few days have gone. The majority of the rest of the day will be spent traveling between Bhuj and the Little Rann of Kutch desert outpost, where we will arrive in the late 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 offers great birding and mammal watching.

Overnight: Little Rann of Kutch

### Days 11 - 12. Little Rann of Kutch

We will have two full days to explore this exciting area that is not only great for birds but also excellent for mammals (our main mammalian target here is **Asiatic Wild Ass**). We will visit the Nalsarovar area, where some big shorebird targets could fall, namely the Critically Endangered (IUCN) **Sociable Lapwing** and **Indian Courser** (**Cream-colored Courser** can also occasionally be found overwintering here), stunningly beautiful birds and quite rightly popular for visiting birders.



*Finding **Sociable Lapwing** overwintering in India is a real treat.*

If the water levels are suitable in the Nalsarovar area we may also find **Painted Stork**, **Red-naped Ibis**, **Ruddy-breasted Crake** (scarce in this part of Asia), **Spotted Crake**, **Bailon's Crake**, **Pheasant-tailed Jacana**, **Knob-billed Duck**, **Asian Openbill**, **Woolly-necked Stork**, **Sarus Crane**, and **Yellow Bittern**. **Red-necked Falcons** often nest in this area, and we will be sure to keep our eyes peeled for them.

Other large shallow-edged waterbodies in the area may support the simply gorgeous and elegant **Demoiselle Crane**, along with **Common Crane**, **Black Stork**, **White Stork**, **Black-necked Stork**, **Greater Flamingo**, **Lesser Flamingo**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Spot-billed Pelican**, **Great White Pelican**, **Dalmatian Pelican**, **Eurasian Wigeon**, and **White-tailed Lapwing**, and deeper waterbodies may support **Cotton Pygmy Goose**, **Greylag Goose**, **Common Pochard**, and **Ferruginous Duck**.

Here too we may find **Pallid Harrier** and **Montagu's Harriers** hunting the lake shores and adjacent agricultural land, where we may also spot **Isabelline** (Daurian) **Shrike**, **Common Quail**, and **Bluethroat**. We will also come back to the lake shore one night to look for the rather compact-looking **Sykes's Nightjar** as well as **Indian Nightjar** and interesting mammals.





*Flocks of **Demoiselle Cranes** should be seen on this tour.*



***Asiatic Wild Ass** is one of the many mammal species we should encounter on this trip.*

As we drive around the Little Raan of Kutch we will look for the scarce **Macqueen's Bustard** (an overwintering species present in low numbers). This area is often busy with larks like **Crested Lark**, **Bimaculated Lark**, **Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark**, and **Greater Short-toed**

**Lark.** We also hope to locate the very tough **Greater Hoopoe-Lark** (it is right on the periphery of its global range here). Both **Spotted Sandgrouse** and **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** can be found in the area, along with **Yellow-legged Buttonquail** and **Barred Buttonquail**, both miniscule birds.

A few of the other birds we may pick up in the area include **Long-legged Buzzard**, **White-eyed Buzzard**, **Desert Wheatear**, **Variable Wheatear**, **Southern Grey Shrike**, **Long-tailed Shrike**, **Red-tailed Shrike**, **Bay-backed Shrike**, **Common Woodshrike**, **Asian Desert Warbler**, **Citrine Wagtail**, and **Western Yellow Wagtail** (grey-headed and black-headed subspecies usually).

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

Overnight: Little Rann of Kutch

### Day 13. Little Rann of Kutch to Ahmedabad

After a final morning birding in the Little Rann of Kutch, maybe bettering our views of some of the above birds including from a boat trip on Nalsarovar Lake, we will transfer to Ahmedabad, where we will arrive in the evening. We will take our final group evening meal of the trip together and try and decide on a bird and mammal of the trip; it won't be an easy task!

Overnight: Ahmedabad

### Day 14. Departure from Ahmedabad

There may be time for an optional city tour to see historical sites such as the Adalaj Stepwell and the Hutheesing Jain Temple (cost not included), depending on your international departure, as the tour concludes.

Another set of options would be to join us on our short (four days) [Birding Tour India: The West – Forest Owllet Extension](#) after a short flight to Mumbai. Incredibly, this small, diurnal owl was considered extinct for over 100 years! To further extend your stay in India a bit longer why not consider our [Birding Tour India: The Northeast – Spectacular Birds and Mammals](#) – there are so many birding and wildlife-watching options available.

*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.*

<b>Duration:</b>	14 days
<b>Group Size:</b>	4 - 8
<b>Dates:</b>	09 - 22 February 2024 07 - 20 February 2025
<b>Start:</b>	Ahmedabad
<b>End:</b>	Ahmedabad
<b>Prices:</b>	US\$7,825 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants (2024) US\$8,595 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants (2025)
<b>Single Supplements:</b>	US\$985 (2024) US\$1,085 (2025)

**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, please bring a refillable water bottle (if taken from the hotel this will be at your own cost)  
Expert tour leader  
Local bird and 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 and associated additional travel expenses)  
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing/monument excursions  
Soft/alcoholic drinks  
Camera (still/video) permits  
Personal travel insurance  
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))