



BIRDING INDIA: FOREST OWLET EXTENSION TOUR TRIP REPORT

26 - 28 FEBRUARY 2025

By Chris Lotz



*We enjoyed spending two sessions with **Forest Owlet** during this tour.*

Overview

This year, we ran this three day extension trip to the Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary in the Indian state of Maharashtra, as a private tour for one person. We fitted this in between a private version of our Gujarat birding tour, and a Rajasthan custom tour. The trip was nicely successful, and we got to spend two wonderful sessions with our main target bird, the rare **Forest Owlet**. During this short tour, we also saw three other owl species, **Savanna Nightjar**, **White-eyed Buzzard**, three parakeet species including the gorgeously colorful **Plum-headed Parakeet** and the Western Ghats endemic **Blue-winged** (Malabar) **Parakeet**, **Orange Minivet**, **Black-headed** and **Indian Cuckooshrikes**, the Indian endemic **Vigor's Sunbird**, many **Cotton Pygmy Geese** and other wildfowl, and lots of other star birds (there are too many to mention here but do consult the bird list below for comprehensive details).



Plum-headed Parakeet showed well.

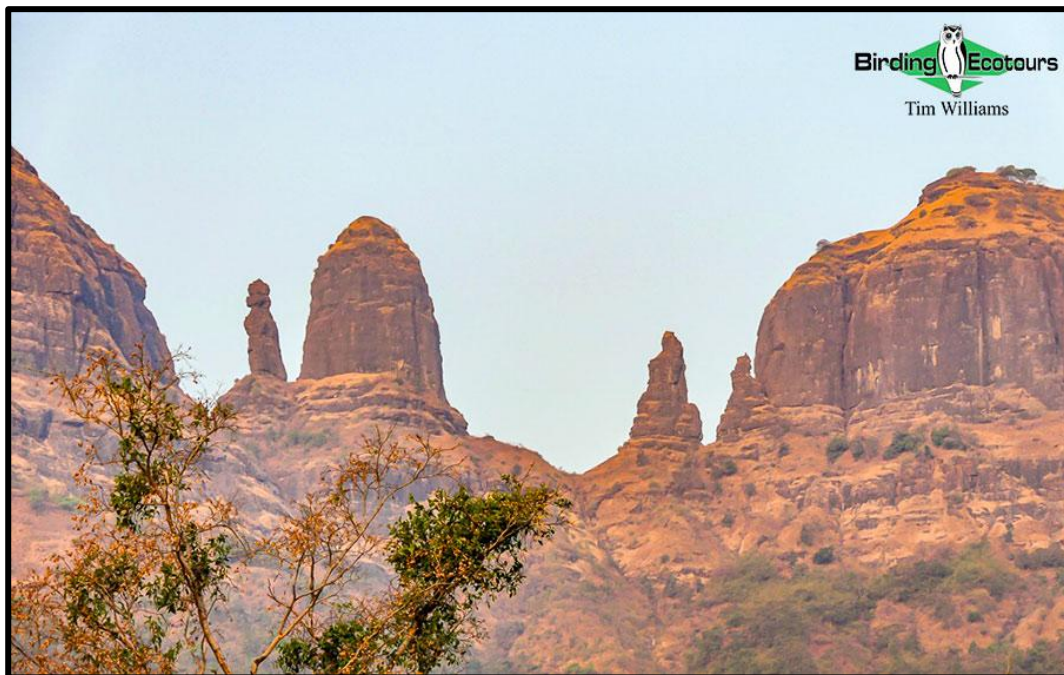
Detailed Report

Day 1, 26th February 2025. Mumbai to Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary for initial birding

We had just finished our northwest India birding tour, and we flew from Ahmedabad to Mumbai, arriving at lunch time. It took us a while to navigate the slums as well as some of the wealthier areas of the megacity of Mumbai, but eventually we arrived in the picturesque hills of the Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary. From an avian point of view, these hills are the northern extremity of the endemic-rich Western Ghats, and indeed we had the opportunity of finding some of the localized birds of this habitat, although the best birding tour for finding these endemics is shown here. Within

about an hour, we had already found our main target, the Endangered (International Union for Conservation of Nature/IUCN) **Forest Owlet**. This tiny, small, diurnal owl was rediscovered in 1997; please find more information [here](#).

There was an awesome supporting cast of species. These included **Greater Coucal** (the southern subspecies that has been split in the past), **White-eyed Buzzard**, dazzling **Asian Green Bee-eater**, **Plum-headed Parakeet**, **Indian Cuckooshrike**, **Common Woodshrike**, **Common Iora**, **Ashy Drongo**, spectacular **Greater Racket-tailed Drongo**, **Rufous Treepie**, and a number of others. After our short initial stint of birding, we went to our hotel and had a delicious meal, with the pressure off as we'd already seen our main target.



Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary scenery.

Day 2, 27th February 2025. A full day of birding Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary

We started our day at Mahuli Fort Base, which was very productive. We enjoyed awesome views of a stunningly beautiful **Jungle Owlet**. We also saw **Yellow-footed Green Pigeon**, **Indian Grey Hornbill**, **Coppersmith Barbet**, **Rufous Woodpecker**, **Plum-headed Parakeet**, **Blue-winged (Malabar) Parakeet**, **Indian Cuckooshrike**, **Black-hooded Oriole**, **Indian Golden Oriole** (briefly), **Grey-breasted Prinia**, **Ashy Prinia**, **Sulphur-bellied Warbler**, **Greenish Warbler**, **Indian White-eye**, **Tawny-bellied Babbler**, **Jungle Babbler**, **Brown-cheeked Fulvetta**, **Tickell's Blue Flycatcher**, three sunbird species including the Indian endemic **Vigor's Sunbird**, **Jerdon's Leafbird** and others.

We then went to a wetland site where our main target was **Cotton Pygmy Goose**. We saw over 50 of them, along with many **Lesser Whistling Ducks**, **Tufted Ducks**, a pair of **Garganeys** (the male in stunningly bright summer plumage), a **Knob-billed Duck**, an **Indian Spot-billed Duck**, and a

couple of **Eurasian Wigeons**. A number of other waterbirds were also around, including some common shorebird species (please kindly see the bird list at the end of this report for full details).

We then went back to the lodge for lunch and a break during the heat of the day. We decided to spend the late afternoon trying for **Forest Owlet** again and we were richly rewarded with excellent views. Another highlight was getting brilliant views in perfect light of a pair of **Plum-headed Parakeets**. We also briefly saw a **White-naped Woodpecker** and various other birds in the teak-dominated open dry forest. We ended off the day watching and listening to **Savanna** and **Jungle Nightjars**.

Today also proved a good day for reptiles. We saw a large **Russell's Viper** (highly venomous), a **Common Bronzeback Tree Snake** (non-venomous), and a **Giri's Geckoella**.



*We enjoyed second views of **Forest Owlet**.*

Day 3, 28th February 2025. A final morning birding Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary, then back to Mumbai

This morning we headed back to the Mahuli Fort Base to try and connect with a couple of missing target birds. To our delight, one of the first birds we connected with was a sweet little **Indian Scops Owl** in a hole in a tree; we could just see its little head and face. Later, we admired another cute owl, **Spotted Owlet**, which is a close relative of Forest Owlet. We also managed to find a stunningly bright female **Orange Minivet**, along with **Common Hawk-Cuckoo**, **Shikra**, **Coppersmith Barbet**, **Brown-headed Barbet**, **Black-naped Monarch**, a truly spectacular, close-up white morph **Indian Paradise Flycatcher**, some **Cinereous Tits**, **Puff-throated Babbler** (close-up), **Jerdon's Leafbird**, **Blyth's Reed Warbler**, and many others.

At a nearby site, we then added a pair of **Black-headed Cuckooshrikes** to our growing list. There were also a few **Alexandrine Parakeets** and **Small Minivets** around.

We then headed back to the hotel, packed up, had lunch and drove to Mumbai where the tour ended. All in all, the trip was very successful; we chose to spend two sessions with our main target, **Forest Owlet**, but also enjoyed seeing a good number of other great bird species.



Indian Paradise Flycatcher showed well!

Bird List – Following IOC (version 14.2, August 2024)

Birds ‘heard only’ are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen. The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: CR = Critically Endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)	
Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
Knob-billed Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>
Cotton Pygmy Goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Indian Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Nightjars (Caprimulgidae)	
Jungle Nightjar (H)	<i>Caprimulgus indicus</i>
Savanna Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus affinis</i>
Swifts (Apodidae)	
Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
Cuckoos (Cuculidae)	
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Red Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicopterus</i>
Grebes (Podicipedidae)	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Plovers (Charadriidae)	
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Cormorants, Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)	
Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>
Ibises, Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)	
Red-naped Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)	

Common Name	Scientific Name
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea coromanda</i>
Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae)	
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
White-eyed Buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>
Owls (Strigidae)	
Forest Owlet (Endemic) - EN	<i>Athene blewitti</i>
Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>
Asian Barred Owlet	<i>Glaucidium cuculoides</i>
Indian Scops Owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>
Mottled Wood Owl (H)	<i>Strix ocellata</i>
Hornbills (Bucerotidae)	
Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>
Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)	
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
Bee-eaters (Meropidae)	
Asian Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
Asian Barbets (Megalaimidae)	
Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Psilopogon zeylanicus</i>
Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Psilopogon haemacephalus</i>
Woodpeckers (Picidae)	
Black-rumped Flameback (H)	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
White-naped Woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>
Rufous Woodpecker	<i>Micropternus brachyurus</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Old World Parrots (Psittaculidae)	
Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>
Blue-winged Parakeet (Endemic)	<i>Psittacula columboides</i>
Alexandrine Parakeet (H)	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Vangas & Allies (Vangidae)	
Common Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>
Ioras (Aegithinidae)	
Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
Cuckooshrikes (Campephagidae)	
Small Minivet (H)	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
Orange Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
Indian Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>
Black-headed Cuckooshrike	<i>Lalage melanoptera</i>
Figbirds, Old World Orioles, Piopios (Oriolidae)	
Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>
Drongos (Dicruridae)	
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
Monarchs (Monarchidae)	
Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>
Indian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
Crows, Jays (Corvidae)	
Rufous Treepie (H)	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
Tits, Chickadees (Paridae)	
Cinereous Tit	<i>Parus cinereus</i>
Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae)	
Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
Leaf Warblers (Phylloscopidae)	
Sulphur-bellied Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus griseolus</i>
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
Reed Warblers & Allies (Acrocephalidae)	
Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
Cisticolas & Allies (Cisticolidae)	
Grey-breasted Prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
Common Tailorbird (H)	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
Babblers, Scimitar Babblers (Timaliidae)	
Tawny-bellied Babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>
Ground Babblers (Pellorneidae)	
Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>
Alcippe Fulvettas (Alcippeidae)	
Brown-cheeked Fulvetta	<i>Alcippe poioicephala</i>
Laughingthrushes & Allies (Leiothrichidae)	
Jungle Babbler	<i>Argya striata</i>
Starlings, Rhabdornises (Sturnidae)	

Common Name	Scientific Name
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	
Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
Leafbirds (Chloropseidae)	
Jerdon's Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>
Orange-bellied Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis hardwickii</i>
Flowerpeckers (Dicaeidae)	
Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
Sunbirds (Nectariniidae)	
Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
Vigors's Sunbird (Endemic)	<i>Aethopyga vigorsii</i>
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae)	
Yellow-throated Sparrow	<i>Gymnoris xanthocollis</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>

Total seen	72
Total heard only	7
Total recorded	79

Reptile List – Following Reptiles of the World (October 2023)

Common Name	Scientific Name
Colubrid Snakes (Colubridae)	
Common Bronzeback Tree Snake	<i>Dendrelaphis tristis</i>
Vipers (Viperidae)	
Russell's Viper	<i>Daboia russelii</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Typical Geckos (Gekkonidae)	
Giri's Geckoella (Endemic)	<i>Cyrtodactylus varadgirii</i>
Total seen	3