## **Northern India**

November 6<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> 2005

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The subcontinent enters the senses. From the pink light of her northern deserts to the green heat of Sri Lanka, she is more or less unique. Docile, stubborn cattle define her streets as much as evening smoke and impatient city drivers. Smells of spice mingle with those of dung and river and the scent of cooking and cooking fires. She enters the writings of casual observers and the poetry of Eliot and her sounds, sitar and tabla, are synonymous with the buzz of every casual yet instinctively constructed day. Yet there is more, and all pay respect to its presence. Taciturn cattle and animated humanity exist in ease; one will shout and the other will take no heed, in a time-honoured ritual. Microchip exists with plough and harrow in much the same way, and you have come here to observe. Do so carefully and it will serve you well, for India's babble has a purpose; it is nothing less than life itself.

Ian Hodgson December 2005



Spotted Owlet

## **Itinerary**

**November 5**<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Our Virgin Atlantic flight from Heathrow to Delhi lifted into the London night with fireworks flashing below and little over 8 hours later we bumped down on to Indian soil, just before mid day on the subcontinent. Rather dazed, and accompanied by Rattan Singh, our guide for the duration of the trip, we drove through the streets of the capital to our hotel, where Vida and Sheila were consigned, rather unkindly, to Room 101, with the rest of us spread about the place and looking forward to a decent night's sleep. First, though, we joined another bus for a tour of India's capital, which involved a visit to Lakshmi Narayan temple on the western outskirts of Old Delhi, and India Gate, a 40m stone arch inscribed with the names of Indian servicemen who died in the great conflicts that plagued the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As always, though, it was the sights and sounds of this amazing place that provided the most vivid impressions. On a filthy lot in a grove of trees dotted with the corroding carcasses of old tanker transporters and shacks thrown together from pieces of wood, with plastic sheeting draped over railings for shelter, a girl whirled through incredible poverty in a bright red shawl, her face illuminated by a smile of pure delight.

Our evening meal involved ordering from a take-away menu that advertised *Chienoise* (poodle?) noodles among other things, and after liberal doses of cheesy peas, kingfishers, dal makhani, pakoras and more kingfishers we collapsed into deep slumber, untroubled by the blaring car horns, voices and dogs howling in the street outside............

Black Kite, Rose-ringed Parakeet, House Swift, Hoopoe, Dusky Crag Martin, Purple Sunbird, Bank Myna

**November 7<sup>th</sup>** Delhi is a good deal less polluted (yes, really) than when I was last here in 1996, thanks to conversion of most public transportation to run on CNG (compressed natural gas), and with the amount of traffic it is just as well. An hour after setting out we had still not cleared the chaotic free-for-all in

which red traffic lights mean stop if there's no alternative, motor bikes drive straight at oncoming traffic on the wrong side of the road and impromptu left turns from the right lane without the slightest suggestion of doing so seem *de rigeur*. The remarkable thing is that nobody seems to mind.

Nevertheless, we eventually left the huge urban sprawl behind and emerged into a dusty countryside of cultivation and scattered bushes, quickly finding Indian Robin and Brown Rock Chat at the edge of a village, then Black Ibis, Black-headed Ibis, Black Francolin, Black-shouldered Kite, Wire-tailed Swallows, Pied Bushchat and our first Large Grey Babblers in some nearby fields. 7 Sarus Cranes and a puzzling Peregrine of utterly unfamiliar race followed and we added Common Woodshrike and Hume's Warbler in some tall roadside trees before reaching Sultanpur Jheel.

A mixture of acacia woodland surrounding a large grass-fringed lake with open, dry areas, Sultanpur is by all accounts the only wildlife sanctuary in the state of Haryana. We commenced our visit by walking through an avenue of acacias that produced our first Nilgai of the trip and birds that included Small Minivet and a more familiar trio of Red-breasted Flycatcher, Orphean Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat, before emerging into dry, open country. Here we added Silverbills and Avadavats, an unexpected Wryneck, Black-breasted Weaver, White-tailed Stonechat, Bluethroat and, as the grassland faded into even more arid terrain with scattered low bushes, some very dark Long-billed Pipits, with several Tawny Pipits for comparison and several Hume's Short-toed Larks in a flock of Greater Short-toed Larks on a recently ploughed field. Beyond this, the landscape was even drier and dustier, recalling the Tanqua Karoo on the fringes of the northwest Cape and Namibia, and on a flat, open expanse walked 2 Indian Coursers, with Variable Wheatear nearby and a Rufous-tailed Shrike, its plumage as dusty-toned as the desert itself. We wandered back through acacia scrub, adding Greater Spotted, Bonelli's and Booted Eagles and White-capped Bunting, then a party of Olive-backed Pipits and an impressive pair of Black-rumped Flamebacks as we retraced our steps through the woodland and back to the bus. We stopped on our way back into Delhi to look at a small band of Yellow-wattled Lapwings that ended the birding part of the day with a very presentable total of 111 species.

Well, nearly ended it, that is. As we waited on Delhi railway station for our onward transfer to Ranthambhor, a Barn Owl appeared on top of one of the platform lights, doubtless attracted by the numerous rats that live amid the grime, then drifted silently back into the night, much as we longed to do. We had arrived at the station at 9.30, just to be on the safe side for our 10.05 departure, but had to linger until our train eventually rolled in at 11. We piled in, spreading ourselves about to the amusement of our fellow passengers; locals who clearly had much less expansive ideas about personal space. The train slipped away from the bustle, our chatter eventually became a murmur, the lights went down and the train rolled steadily on into the Indian night, heading for our first taste of Rajasthan, land of deserts and tigers............

Indian Cormorant, Little Cormorant, Darter, Purple Heron, Indian Pond Heron, Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Black Ibis, Lesser Whistling Duck, Spot-billed Duck, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Black-shouldered Kite, Crested Serpent Eagle, Shikra, Greater Spotted Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, Booted Eagle, Black Francolin, Grey Francolin, Indian Peafowl, Sarus Crane, Purple Swamphen, Indian Courser, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Red-wattled Lapwing, Greater Coucal, Barn Owl, Spotted Owlet, Pied Kingfisher, Brown-headed Barbet, Coppersmith Barbet, Wryneck, Black-rumped Flameback, Greater Short-toed Lark, Hume's Short-toed Lark, Plain Martin, Wire-tailed Swallow, Asian House Martin, White-browed Wagtail, Citrine Wagtail, Paddyfield Pipit, Tawny Pipit, Long-billed Pipit, Olive-backed Pipit, Small Minivet, Zitting Cisticola, Ashy Prinia, Plain Prinia, Graceful Warbler, Orphean Warbler, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Taiga Flycatcher, Bluethroat, Indian Robin, White-tailed Stonechat, Pied Bushchat, Variable Wheatear, Isabelline Wheatear, Brown Rock Chat, Hume's Warbler, Large Grey Babbler, Oriental White-eye, Rufous-tailed Shrike, Bay-backed Shrike, Long-tailed Shrike, Southern Grey Shrike, Common Woodshrike, Rufous Treepie, Asian Pied Starling, Black-breasted Weaver, Red Avadavat, Indian Silverbill, White-capped Bunting

November 8th ......Nocturnal musings upon the conundrum of how we would know when we had arrived at our destination when Indian railway stations seem not to have notices telling passengers where they might be were concisely answered when we were woken at 6am by the carriage attendant as the train began to pull away from the station. Apparently he had fallen asleep and Rattan's efforts to wake him had proved futile until it was too late. We tumbled off the train half an hour along the line at Indargargh, blinking in the pale early morning light at a treetop flock of 120 Green Bee-eaters, purchased tickets to get us back to Sawai Madhopur and bundled ourselves back on another train that pulled in after about an hour. To add insult to injury for most of us, Rattan spotted a Sirkeer Malkoha from the train, but probably only Sheila managed to match his view. However, we returned to Sawai Madhopur nearly three hours behind schedule and decamped into our waiting open-topped bus from which we saw our first Long-tailed Minivets before making the short but rather chilly journey to our accommodation, a luxurious bungalow resort just outside the park boundary, arriving in time for a 9am breakfast and a welcome chance to chill out after an eventful start to the day.

We wandered over the dry, rolling and deeply eroded landscape beyond the hotel gates, where flocks of lopeared goats picked their way through low succulent vegetation, finding our first Rufous-fronted Prinias and Indian Bushlarks, Brown and Bay-backed Shrikes and Painted Sandgrouse, which gave great views on a nearby low hill. Jungle Cat and Indian Hare in a grassy enclosure were a bonus and we returned for a substantial lunch, looking forward to our first game drive of the trip.

Replete, we piled into our canter, an open-topped lorry-bus, with five rather bemused Germans, taking an added layer to guard against the chill that would return late in the afternoon. Entering Ranthambhor through a gate held fast in the fingers of a gigantic banyan, we passed beneath steep cliffs crowned by a thousand year old fort. Noting Long-billed Vultures and White-bellied Drongos above us we drove on through a narrow ravine, beyond which the landscape became more open, with River Terns, Whiskered Terns and Gull-billed Terns at the edge of a still, reflective lake, herds of Sambar and Chital in the dry forest and Wild Pigs with masses of waterbirds and Citrine Wagtails at weedy lake fringes. As our circuit of the public part of the park steadily continued, parties of Yellow-footed Green Pigeons and Red-headed Buntings appeared in the soft, warm light of late afternoon.

Our park guide was visibly intent now, reacting to increasingly frequent alarm calls from langurs and chital from inside the forest. We were very close to a tiger. Stopped for some time, the atmosphere charged with anticipation, we scanned the understorey for a sign and suddenly the call went up — 'there it is!' Well, for some of us there was a flank, a tail, a suggestion of movement, but nothing more and the creature disappeared with an air of calm finality, leaving a sense of something unanswered. Still, our guide was undeterred, sensing something that years inside the park had taught him, and we moved on slowly as dusk began to gather, slowly skirting a forest lake where a line of jeeps and canters waited. Two or three hundred yards past, flashes from cameras told us they had something and steadily we reversed to within a hundred yards. Then, there it was! A magnificent tigress padded steadily up the bank from the lake and on to the track, spray marking trees as she moved by, followed by two cubs, each well grown and full of her confidence as she gazed evenly about, tasting the air, passed silently behind us and into the open forest no more than forty yards away, then down a low slope and gone.

Woolly-necked Stork, Ruddy Shelduck, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Osprey, Egyptian Vulture, Long-billed Vulture, Red-necked Falcon, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Bronze-winged Jacana, Oriental Pratincole, Gull-billed Tern, River Tern, Whiskered Tern, Painted Sandgrouse, Oriental Turtle Dove, Red Collared Dove, Yellow-footed Green-pigeon, Alexandrine Parakeet, Plumheaded Parakeet, Asian Koel, Sirkeer Malkoha, Green Bee-eater, Indian Bushlark, Long-tailed Minivet, Rufous-fronted Prinia, Oriental Magpie Robin, White-browed Fantail, Common Babbler, Brown Shrike, White-bellied Drongo, Brahminy Starling, Red-headed Bunting

**November 9**<sup>th</sup> After yesterday afternoon, today was bound to be an anti climax, but the morning drive through an arid, dusty part of the park turned up some good birds, notably an almost subterranean Jungle Bush-quail, Red-headed Vulture, our first Grey-headed Canary-flycatchers, at least 3 Brown Crakes and 2 Collared Scops Owls at a nest hole in some open woodland. Notably, we took a slightly different route to the park this morning, passing a donkey painted pink for the Hindu festival of Diwali, munching away utterly unconcerned at its appearance.

While Fran caught frogs in the hotel pool, some of us wandered off after lunch into the dry, dusty fields beyond the hotel, where we found few birds except for 9 Red-headed Buntings, a flock of 21 Greater Short-toed Larks – much greyer than their European counterparts – and 4 Ashy-crowned Sparrow-larks.

The afternoon drive continued the rather subdued feel of the day, although we added a beautiful Painted Spurfowl by the side of the access road, Black Bittern, our only Paddyfield Warbler of the trip and 2 Blue Rock Thrushes. We all took the opportunity late in the afternoon to decamp from the vehicles to relax for a while in a truly tranquil setting, looking down on a grazing herd of Nilgai, in the lovely pale light of late afternoon.

Black Bittern, Red-headed Vulture, Crested Goshawk, Jungle Bush-quail, Painted Spurfowl, Brown Crake, Collared Scops Owl, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark, Blue Rock Thrush, Grey-breasted Prinia, Paddyfield Warbler, Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher, Jungle Babbler, Ashy Drongo

November 10<sup>th</sup> Its proximity to Delhi makes Ranthambhor one of the most popular national parks in India and it is said to be best avoided at weekends. The park is government run and it is a matter of luck who your driver turns out to be and where you are allocated to go – they were very strict with our first guide a couple of days ago who was spotted by one of the park rangers 'backtracking' instead of following his appointed route. It was necessary for John to justify his actions in writing, more or less stating that he had no choice because he was with a group of western birdwatchers. Kidnappers, more or less! Many tourists seem uncommitted to serious nature watching, and groups like our own are in the minority. Thus, there is probably a temptation for some of the drivers to simply go through the motions and this was certainly true of ours today. Both drives were dusty and produced little of interest apart from an adult Bonelli's Eagle and those who ventured out in the lunchtime heat saw more, in the form of a Indian Thick-knee, than for much of the

rest of the day. Needless to say, we took little persuading to abandon our final drive next morning in favour of an early start for the 260km drive to Bharatpur.

Ferruginous Duck, Indian Thick-knee, Chestnut-shouldered Petronia

**November 11**<sup>th</sup> Setting out at 7, we began the long drive to Bharatpur, passing women in bright shawls as they headed for the fields and the crisp uniforms of eager schoolchildren, waving happily at us as we plodded along on the narrow roads with its insistently stubborn traffic. Initially flat cultivation dotted with trees and villages with people standing about, the landscape became steadily more arid, and a stop at the river Banas came as bright relief from the eroded semi-desert plains it bisected. Here we saw our first and only Streak-throated Swallows, our first White-eared Bulbuls and River Lapwings, a few Little Swifts, as opposed to the plentiful House Swifts we had seen thus far, and a golden rodent that our recently purchased guide to Indian mammals allowed us to identify as an Indian Desert Jird. What desert is to one is dessert to another, as the famous foxy saying goes.

After refuelling, with a flock of 60 Bimaculated Larks and an Isabelline Wheatear nearby, we were soon back into the flat, deeply gullied badlands and we stopped at an open area, overgrown in patches with a bean-like succulent that apparently produces a pod from which the locals make a cotton-like fabric. This also, apparently, attracts Sirkeer Malkoha, but not today and we had to be content with a couple of parties of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, huge flocks of Greater Short-toed Larks, amounting to nearly 700, a party of 60-70 Rosy Starlings, several Desert Wheatears and an initially puzzling female Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark

On we traipsed, negotiating camels and tractors of basic construction mingling with more modern, slick types, all towing heavy carts subjected to varying degrees of overloading and sometimes sounding like mobile discotheques, but all enthusiastically blaring horns at every opportunity at anyone or anything that, equally consistently, took not the slightest scrap of notice.

By now we had noticed that our driver, whose name sounded uncomfortably like Numb Nut, had an unerring eye for every pothole on, and sometimes off the road, particularly during a very bad last 40km or so, and it was with some relief that we pulled up at the decorative entrance gate to Keoladeo Ghana National Park, more familiarly known as Bharatpur. Allowing for stops en route, the 260km had taken a good 6 hours to negotiate. Entry requirements met, forms completed and signed and money paid, we drove on down the narrow access track to the lodge inside the park. Rather regally titled the Hotel Bharatpur Ashok, it is a quaint establishment that looks old and run by ex British Rail staff, one of whom proudly told us that he had worked there since it opened for business 30 years ago. Indeed, the lodge lived up to its appearance in the evening, with the staff producing a lukewarm and rather unappetising meal that was at best indifferent. Jackals howled in the night in sympathy at our plight. After all, they have to go through the bins, for goodness' sake.

I digress. Although it was fairly late in the afternoon (about 4pm), we did have time to wander through some light woodland at the edge of the wet part of the reserve, now wet after a good monsoon, following three years of drought. This produced our first Indian Grey Hornbills, a flock of 20 Yellow-footed Green-pigeons, a Lesser Fish Eagle, at least a hundred Glossy Ibises and, flicking about in some isolated bushes in the lake, several Plain Leaf Warblers, which were subtle, to say the least. Some of us were also fortunate to find Jungle Nightjar and a roosting Dusky Eagle Owl.

A mole cricket in the restaurant was the highlight of the evening, but we slept well enough, in between bouts of howling. The jackals were noisy as well.

Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Lesser Fish Eagle, Eurasian Hobby, River Lapwing, Ruff, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Dusky Eagle Owl, Jungle Nightjar, Little Swift, Indian Grey Hornbill, Bimaculated Lark, Streak-throated Swallow, White-eared Bulbul, Plain Leaf Warbler, Desert Wheatear, Rosy Starling, Baya Weaver

**November 12**<sup>th</sup> Pre-prandial perambulations around the periphery of the park principally produced a plethora of *Phylloscopi*, including Common Chiffchaff and Greenish, Plain Leaf and Hume's Warbler, with Blyth's Reed and Lesser Whitethroat making up the numbers.

Following breakfast, along the same vaguely edible lines of last evening's meal, we joined cycle rickshaws, two per vehicle, and creaked off along the flat track that leads to Keoladeo Temple, passing lakes and patches of woodland. It was clear at the outset that the recent droughts have reduced numbers of birds visiting and nesting in the park, though it was too early in the winter for peak wildfowl numbers. Still, we were kept entertained by a pair of Dusky Eagle Owls at their nest, impressive numbers of Eurasian Hobbies, including 5 in one dead tree, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Jungle Nightjar, at least 3 Sarus Cranes and some large birds of prey, including Greater Spotted and Booted Eagles. Arguably, though, the star of the morning was

an immense Indian Rock Python, measuring at least 15' in length that was digesting its latest meal on a sturdy branch above the water.

Lunch was a boxed affair, taken in the grounds of the small temple, its lawn adorned with feeding Hoopoes and the surrounding trees holding an intriguing warbler that, after considerable deliberation, we decided was a Brooks' Leaf Warbler. Moving on, a muddy bay just beyond the temple held a good selection of waders that included 2 White-tailed Lapwings, deliberate in their actions as always, 3 Temminck's Stints, a Kentish Plover and at least 23 Marsh Sandpipers, with a flock of 47 Common Cranes in the distance. By the time we had finished being led a merry dance by a Large-tailed Nightjar and an Indian Nightjar, eventually obtaining very good views of both, it was late in the afternoon and time to head back. We bade farewell to our rickshaw drivers and piled back into the lodge for an evening meal that, whilst not exactly a gourmet's delight, was better than yesterday's.

Black-necked Stork, Comb Duck, Common Crane, White-tailed Lapwing, Marsh Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint, Large-tailed Nightjar, Indian Nightjar, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Brooks' Leaf Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Eurasian Golden Oriole

**November 13**<sup>th</sup> Our plans to be away at 5.30 were thwarted by the gate attendant who refused to let our driver into the park until it opened at 6.30, though something must have shifted the obstacle as we did manage to get away by 6. Still in darkness, we passed numerous shapes along the road, some jogging, some just walking into the day.

Out on the road, more shadowy shapes in the headlights proved variously to be human, horse, cart or bicycle, all unlit and moving steadily in the pink glow of the approaching dawn, the lingering smell of evening fires overlaying the landscape. The scene flowed by, past fields of beehives, stupa-shaped hay ricks, stone cisterns and an ornate gate decorated with stone animals that stood pointlessly by the roadside, past more roadside eucalyptus and into Uttar Pradesh. The pink sandstone walls of the ancient Moghul city of Fatehpur Sikri stood sentinel on a low hillside, silhouetted beyond the tree-dotted fields, then an incongruous incoming mobile phone message advertising the benefits of a new service provider, as incompatible with our surroundings as the hoardings that blared out their garish messages to the tacitum fields and their inhabitants – Johnson – not just tiles – life styles.

Lines of storks and egrets rippled across the fields into the fresh day, humanity huddled around roadside fires in towns and villages amid dusty decrepitude, a dog lapped from a fetid puddle, a myna stood on a goat and crows on a buffalo; all waited patiently for the inevitable sun to bake the day.

After 50km and just about an hour, we arrived at Agra. Delayed briefly at a railway crossing for the overnight sleeper to rumble by we pressed on, through ramshackle partly-built suburbs contrasting with an area of bougainvillea-decked prosperity where stylish wrought-iron gates seemed to be the most popular form of ostentation, then past mould-encrusted concrete slums inspired by some Soviet architectural philosophy that just lent a sense of depression to the chaos. Against this background, our breakfast was rudely lavish, but we had little time to feel too much guilt, pressing on at 8.25 through a couple of market towns where the press of humanity was simply astonishing. Nobody who has been only to the tourist resorts of Goa can possibly have an inkling of the real India. Nothing can prepare you for this, this challenging of the senses and ideas that you either accept or fail to live with; the challenge that makes the Indian subcontinent the most fascinating of places.

The river Chambal appeared suddenly beyond deeply fissured sandbanks with thorny scrub thickets that bordered the track into the sanctuary; a wide channel of deep blue-grey water rushing over boulders in a broad, shallow bed that clearly holds a good deal more water in times of flood. A brisk breeze blew down the valley as we boarded the waiting boat, accompanied by an armed guard, not for protection against crocodiles but from the dangerous human inhabitants of the area. Although we did not know at the time, one of the area's most notorious bandits had been killed in a gun battle with the police less than a week before our visit.

Gharials and Marsh Muggers lay patiently on sandbars as we passed steadily upriver, picking out Great Thick-knees, River Lapwings, Black Ibis, Black-bellied Terns and an early party of Bar-headed Geese on the edge of the river and Blue Rock Thrush and an adult Bonelli's Eagle on the sandy crags above. The attraction of the river is Indian Skimmer, and we came perilously close to missing it, an increased amount of water having reduced the population from over 80 a week or so earlier to just one, that stood on a grassy spit as we floated quietly by, flying out into the channel and past us in a close up display that justified the effort in getting here.

Lunch at Chambal Safari Lodge, near Bah, with the couple who operate the trips to the Chambal Sanctuary was the best yet; stuffed tomato, raita, okra curry, dal and rice, with the added attraction of a colony of flying foxes in their grounds. Waving goodbye, we left this oasis of calm and rejoined the chaos outside, retracing

our steps to Agra and the Taj Mahal, surely one of the most magnificent of man's creations on this little planet.

After a meal in our temporary hotel in Agra that included cheesy peas made from cattage cheese, we decamped at 9 for a bumpy ride to Mathura, four of us travelling in an old Morris Oxford in front of our bus. Our onward overnight train journey to Nainital, in the foothills of the western Himalaya, departed just after 11 and, seasoned rail travellers by now, we slept soundly through the night, some more eventually than others.........

Bar-headed Goose, Great Thick-knee, Black-bellied Tern, Indian Skimmer

**November 14**<sup>th</sup> ...... One bitten, we were probably all well awake as the train pulled in to Lal Kuan at 8.45 and, more or less successfully evading the begging scamps in the vehicle park across the track, we boarded our bus for the 60km onward journey to Nainital. Now in India's newest state, Uttaranchal, created in November 2000, it was lusher here, the roadside vegetation denser than on the plains from which we had just emerged, but the first real clue as to our altitude was the ferocity with which a stream rushed past our breakfast stop. Replete with Blue Whistling Thrush, it was just beyond the pandemonium of Haldwani, the biggest town we had driven through away from Delhi and Agra, but which has apparently done little to warrant a mention in the guide books. We soon began to wind steeply upwards into the forested Kumaon Hills and stopped a few times at likely looking spots, adding Plumbeous Redstart, Whitecapped Water Redstart, Asian Barred Owlet, Jungle Owlet and Grey-hooded and Golden-spectacled Warblers to our rapidly expanding list, lunching at a small restaurant near Nainital, through which we eventually passed in mid afternoon, with the chill of evening already apparent.

Himalayan Bulbul, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-lored Tit, Scaly-breasted Munias, White-capped Bunting, Russet Sparrow and Streaked Laughingthrush were all seen as we climbed, giving a clue to the character of the birding we could expect over the next few days. We diverted to some open *bhaj* forest around Sat Tal, where a large mixed flock of Lemon-rumped and Grey-hooded Warblers preceded 2 Mountain Hawk Eagles over the trees and after a party of Puff-throated Babblers, vegetation around a scrub-fringed lake produced several Blue-winged Minlas, 2 Rufous-bellied Niltavas and a Golden-spectacled Warbler. Green-backed Tit and Bar-tailed Treecreeper were eventually seen by most of us and for a fortunate couple, bringing up the rear as the group headed back up the hill, a Red-billed Leothrix, low down in some overhanging scrub with two or three more minlas.

Pangot more or less amounts to a few dwellings on a sharp bend in the road that runs through the hills, from which a dusty track leads down to two buildings nestling amid terraced fields on the side of an open, partially forested valley. The lower of these would be our accommodation for the next few days, while we would climb the hill for breakfast and evening meal each day, an exertion that would underline the fact that we were above 2000m in altitude! The last couple of days had passed in something of a daze and spreading ourselves about was a luxury after our recent nomadic lifestyle. As we piled into the kingfishers in the small, comfortable dining area with relish, Rattan introduced his son, Lokesh, who despite his shyness proved over the next few days to be a very capable birder, engaged presently with a couple who appeared to have ventured far from a vast country on the opposite side of the world.

Mountain Hawk Eagle, Asian Barred Owlet, Jungle Owlet, Grey-capped Woodpecker, Scarlet Minivet, Himalayan Bulbul, Blue Whistling-thrush, Lemon-rumped Warbler, Golden-spectacled Warbler, Grey-hooded Warbler, Rufous-bellied Niltava, Plumbeous Redstart, White-capped Water Redstart, Grey Bushchat, Streaked Laughingthrush, Puff-throated Babbler, Red-billed Leothrix, Blue-winged Minla, Green-backed Tit, Black-lored Tit, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Bar-tailed Treecreeper, Grey Treepie, Russet Sparrow, Scaly-breasted Munia

November 15<sup>th</sup> The morning was bright and crisp and as we climbed through the forest the first light of day played on jagged snow-covered peaks in the distance, their icy faces marking the boundary of the great Tibetan plateau. Clambering from our vans we wandered along in mainly deciduous forest., where Dark-throated Thrushes recalled Nepal for most of us, but 3 Chestnut Thrushes were utterly new, or very nearly so, for everyone; both early winter visitors from the Himalaya we could see gradually brightening in the rising sun. Rufous Sibias accentuated the similarity to Pulchowki in Nepal, but Himalayan Woodpecker and Green Shrike-babbler were new for all of us; both are found mainly in the western Himalaya, though how the diminutive babbler deserved the shrike epithet was a puzzle. It is only marginally bigger than most fulvettas and didn't seem capable of impaling anything much bigger than a small, ailing fly. Still, we were willing to accept that, when cornered, they are probably unaccountably vicious little sods.

Our disappointment at having to leave to return for breakfast soon evaporated in a flurry of Black-headed Jays and White-throated Laughingthrushes in the lodge garden, with a female Pink-browed Rosefinch in the trees just beyond, and we added Striated Prinia, Blue-fronted Redstart, Mountain Chiffchaff, Nepal House

Martin and Common Raven as we scanned the valley below, to the now familiar accompaniment of masala omelette and, I seem to recall, chips.

Returning to the vans, we moved on beyond Pangot, venturing into mixed woodland that produced a steady flow of new birds. Most notable were Fire-tailed Sunbird, several flocks of Buff-barred Warblers and Spotwinged and Black-throated Tits, a male Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, a noisy Red-billed Blue Magpie, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, 2 Blue-capped Redstarts, Maroon Oriole and numerous Ashy-throated Warblers around a small stream, as we wandered down the track to lunch where the stream ran through the valley beneath an open, grassy hillside.

A few were lucky to see Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler where the stream tumbled over rocks briefly exposed amid the clinging vegetation and moving on along the opposite side of the valley it was initially shaded and quite chilly. However, soon after we bumped into pairs of Chestnut-crowned and Striated Laughingthrushes, crests raised in alarm like Hoopoes, we emerged into the sun once more. The remainder of the afternoon added Grey-headed Woodpecker, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, a flock of 32 Black Bulbuls tumbling down the valley from the trees above, a pair of Kalij Pheasants and Pale-billed Flowerpecker, with a Himalayan (Siberian) Weasel adding the mammal interest.

After a really enjoyable and productive day our hosts treated us to foreign food this evening, and as we waited for our meal of chicken, roast potatoes, peas, carrots and cauliflower a photograph on the lodge wall gave us a chance to place names and altitudes to the peaks that had drawn our gaze through the day. Although we were hardly any distance from Nepal, the country that has 10 of the world's 14 peaks of more than 8,000m (26,000'), there are few mountains above 25,000' in this part of the western Himalaya, but apart from Kanchenjunga (8,598m) in Sikkim, Nanda Devi (7,816m – 25,645') is the highest in India. Those in the range that crowned the horizon from our various viewpoints through the forest were, from the west, conical Trishul (23,360'), the long elongated face of Mrigthuni (22,490') and the cone of Maiktoli (22,320'), with Nanda Devi in the background to the east.

Himalayan Griffon, Kalij Pheasant, Blue-throated Barbet, Speckled Piculet, Brown-capped Woodpecker, Brown-fronted Woodpecker, Himalayan Woodpecker, Nepal House Martin, Black Bulbul, Chestnut Thrush, Dark-throated Thrush, Striated Prinia, Ashy-throated Warbler, Buff-barred Warbler, Mountain Chiffchaff, Blue-capped Redstart, Blue-fronted Redstart, White-throated Laughingthrush, Striated Laughingthrush, Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler, Green Shrike Babbler, Rufous Sibia, Black-throated Tit, Spot-winged Tit, White-tailed Nuthatch, Fire-tailed Sunbird, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Maroon Oriole, Blackheaded Jay, Blue Magpie, Common Raven, Pink-browed Rosefinch, Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, Rock Bunting

November 16<sup>th</sup> Away before dawn, with a clear moon illuminating the landscape, we began our day at a small settlement overlooking steep terraced hillsides devoted almost entirely to growing crops, and it was decidedly chilly as we walked steadily along the broad track, looking down on to a hedgerow through which flowed a flock of 50-60 White-throated Laughingthrushes, tumbling out on to the adjacent fields and bounding along below a solitary house, unconcerned at a brightly-clad woman fetching and carrying wood at the start of her day. There was a Great Barbet in trackside bushes, a Maroon Oriole in scrubby growth above and Blue Whistling Thrushes dotted about, frequently in the open, then a flock of 95 Dark-throated Thrushes flew east up the valley, catching the early morning sun that turned them into flickering golden specks as they rose and disappeared from view, low against the side of the valley.

Back at the road, our morning continued in a delightful grove of holm oaks, dappled and gently warmed by the sun rising in the still air. Birds were everywhere, dancing through the trees; a close Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, flocks of perky Spot-winged Tits, energetic Black-throated Tits and steady Green-backed Tits, then warblers, Grey-hooded and Buff-barred, a few Bar-tailed Treecreepers and a female White-browed Shrike Babbler, located by Rattan in some tight vegetation of medium height nearby.

And all of this before breakfast, which turned out to be an idiosyncratic preparation of jam sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, bananas, parathas and mango and lime pickle, taken on an open, grassy knoll in the forest. Upward we continued, to around 8,000', emerging from the forest into a steep, open rocky area with grass and stunted trees, overlooking the Kosi River, winding broadly from the snows of the western Himalaya into the dusty plains of Uttar Pradesh. Given the rather solitary and retiring habits of our own humble Dunnock it seemed slightly bizarre to be looking for flocks of Altai Accentors, but there they were, at least 12 on the crags above and another party of 30 or more in the grassy fissures below. A couple of Crag Martins circled beyond the cliff edge, 2 Upland Pipits perched on rocks and an adult Peregrine peered down from the ridge above. With the sound of singing children wafting up from a school far below us we moved on to explore a couple of patches of woodland, silently draped with moss and lichen, which proved to be inexplicably quiet. This persuaded us to drop lower to a belt of conifers, admixed further on with more deciduous trees, full of tits, nuthatches and creepers, including definite Kashmir Nuthatch and a male White-browed Shrike Babbler. 3 Steppe Eagles drifted over as we continued to descend and we finished the morning in some completely

deciduous forest with a scrubby understorey in which there was a brief Green-tailed Sunbird, a staggeringly plain Yellow-browed Tit and two Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babblers that tried their best to elude us before we returned to Pangot for a late and welcome lunch.

Most of us piled into a couple of vans and drove down through the forest to Nainital and spent a pleasant enough two or three hours in the bustle of the local shops, emerging like magpies with variously coloured baubles and beads. All in the best possible taste, of course.

Steppe Eagle, Great Barbet, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, Crag Martin, Upland Pipit, Altai Accentor, Kashmir Nuthatch, White-browed Shrike Babbler, Yellow-browed Tit, Green-tailed Sunbird, Grey-backed Shrike

November 17<sup>th</sup> Leaving the cook and the gentle waft of porridge, it was dark as seven of us piled into two vans with Rattan, his son Lokesh and three drivers. We sneaked, rather than drove along the winding forest road above Pangot and when a Large-tailed Nightjar fluttered across the track in front of us, the oncoming dawn had cut the horizon in jagged black peaks across the sky. The harsh 'ko-rok-ko-rorr' of a male Koklass Pheasant brought us to a halt and on foot we crept along the road, peering into the forest below for any sign of movement. Some of us saw the dark outline of the male flying away below and others the browner form of the female as she launched herself from the bank above into the forest, but we all felt frustrated and the male very soon became quiet, although another called for a short while in the distance. Further on, a stop along the Pangot-Nainital road at the decaying Kilbury Guest House was notable largely for a loose flock of Himalayan Swiftlets circling gently in the bright, cold morning air, and it was some relief to leave the dark, chilly forest to return to the lodge for that porridge ............

Our breakfast coincided nicely with the time for raptors to wake and diligent scanning by Paul located both Lammergeier and Indian Spotted Eagle in the distance before we rejoined the vans and our luggage and, waving farewell to the staff, left Pangot at 9.45.

The drive was not rewarding from a birding point of view, though we did see more Steppe Eagles and a pale Common Buzzard above Nainital, then Blue-fronted Redstart, Black-chinned Babbler and White-capped Water Redstart at the head of the Mongoli valley near a wedding reception with a dastardly band and some tired and emotional guests. Mountain Chiffchaff and Rufous-breasted Accentor near a couple of women washing clothes in a mountain stream, Himalayan Flameback, a Pied Thrush and a few Olive-backed Pipits were all the rest of the Mongoli valley had to offer and a stop overlooking Kaleduni Forest produced Thick-billed Flowerpecker and Lineated Barbet, but little else.

We entered the flat lands beneath the hills well into the afternoon and immediately noted an upturn in bird activity, quickly adding Crested Bunting, Asian Palm Swift and Red-whiskered Bulbul by the roadside. We lingered at Kosi barrage until dusk, attracting amused looks from the locals against a background of Brown Dipper, Citrine Wagtail and a hefty Crested Kingfisher and after a long day piled into our overnight lodgings at Tiger Camp, just outside Corbett NP with some relief, delighted to have more forms to fill in. In triplicate.

Lammergeier, Common Buzzard, Indian Spotted Eagle, Koklass Pheasant, Himalayan Swiftlet, Asian Palm Swift, Crested Kingfisher, Lineated Barbet, Himalayan Flameback, Pied Thrush, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Brown Dipper, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Black-chinned Babbler, Thick-billed Flowerpecker, Crested Bunting

**November 18<sup>th</sup>** Muezzin. Dogs in the moonlight, Mice in the walls. Thus began our day.

Towards the park entrance, we turned away from the bustle of the road and walked through some light forest, stopping where the early winter river rushed over smooth boulders beneath steep sandstone cliffs, populated by Plumbeous Redstarts and Plain Martins. Patiently we scanned the river and the cliff face until, suddenly, one of the guides accompanying us drew our attention to a Wallcreeper, searching for insects in crevices and openings in the cliff, cascading down the rock face after a flying insect in a delightful display of acrobatic elegance. Back on the road, we briefly noted a male Crimson Sunbird, passed our first Crested Treeswifts, and then stopped at a bend as Rattan spotted some shapes high in the trees. Piling out of the vehicles, there above us were 3 huge Great Hornbills, for whom the phrase 'slipping unobtrusively' carries little meaning. It seemed difficult to know at this point whether the wallcreeper or the hornbills had been more exciting, but we had little time to deliberate, stopping once more at a grove of teak trees that held Himalayan Flameback, Scaly-bellied Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker and Greater Yellownape, with the added attraction of a superb Orange-gorgetted Flycatcher.

A little way along we entered the park, carried out the usual formalities and commenced our drive to Dhikala, following the course of the Ramganga River, not exactly a trickle but drier with the monsoon long gone, waiting for winter snows high in the mountains to melt in spring. We carried steadily on through dry, open sal forest confined to the jeeps throughout, making the journey rather chilly, though we did have a couple of opportunities to get out and stretch our legs during a drive that must have been close to 40km. Birds seen from the jeeps included a secretive party of Ashy Bulbuls and a large mixed flock of Grey-hooded and Buff-

barred Warblers, with Green-backed Tits, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch and White-throated Fantails, while our lunch stop produced 2 Crested Kingfishers and 2 Lesser Fish Eagles in trees bordering the river below. Fulvous-breasted and Streak-throated Woodpeckers racked the 'pecker total up to an impressive 8 for the day, mammal interest was provided by a couple of Muntjacs, and as we neared the compound at Dhikala, we stopped for a pair of Pallas's Fish Eagles at their nest, with a Collared Falconet close by in the same

band of trees: from one extreme to another.

2 Goosanders flew low over the reservoir as we checked into our rustic accommodation, then we jumped back on the jeeps for an afternoon drive through the grassland and forest edge bordering the lake, passing clumps of wild cannabis. The drive didn't turn up a tiger, but we were quite satisfied with a few Lesser Coucals and 2 Hodgson's Bushchats; rather like stonechats but much chunkier and with a shrike-like amount of white in the wing in flight. Only recently rediscovered breeding in Corbett, they commenced a notable end to the afternoon that also included 4 Hog Deer peering at us from the grass, 3 ringtail Hen Harriers circling low over the lake fringe as they prepared to roost and a Southern Grey Shrike that our guide reversed to check out, so uncommon are they in the park.

We huddled in the restaurant after dark, not looking forward to chilly, damp rooms, but after a decent meal we all slept like logs at the end of another long day.

Brahminy Kite, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Hen Harrier, Collared Falconet, Lesser Coucal, Crested Treeswift, Great Hornbill, Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker, Greater Yellownape, Streak-throated Woodpecker, Scaly-bellied Woodpecker, Rosy Pipit, Ashy Bulbul, Common Iora, Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher, Hodgson's Bushchat, White-throated Fantail, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Wallcreeper, Hair-crested Drongo

November 19<sup>th</sup> It was a still, atmospheric morning as we set out from the compound. A thin veil of mist softly clothed the landscape as we cut through tracks into the grassland, limiting visibility so that Small Buttonquail and Aberrant Bush Warbler close to the edge of the track were all we could see until the forest edge began to emerge, silhouetted in the rising warmth. A commotion drew our gaze to 2 Blackhooded Orioles, determinedly seeing off a couple of intruding Maroon Orioles from their favoured tree, with 2 Large Cuckoo Shrikes and a Changeable Hawk Eagle nearby. Grey-breasted and Jungle Prinias and a male Besra followed, and then Brian spotted a superb male Siberian Rubythroat, perched in full view on a head of grass, pearls of dew glittering beneath it in the pale early sun. Bluethroat, Marsh Harrier and Pied Harrier were all added, and as we watched 5 Indian Elephants from a tower at the edge of the forest, barely visible in the tall grasses, langurs and deer began to bark in alarm and a group of feeding Chital nearby stood still and tense, all looking in the same direction. A tiger was very close.

We waited, as tense as the deer, but to no avail. The alarm calls stopped and the Chital resumed their quiet feeding, apparently content that the danger had passed; probably the tiger was sitting quietly somewhere. For us, it was time to return, and we headed back, three hours having disappeared in an extended moment, it seemed.

We left Dhikala just before mid day and began to retrace our steps to Tiger Camp. It was warmer than on our way into the park and we added our only Cinereous Vulture of the trip as we drove through the grasslands just beyond the camp, then after a flock of 25 Small Minivets rained down from the trees above we stopped overlooking the river, where Lesser Fish Eagle and Pallas's Fish Eagle perched impassively. We had the bonus of a Wallcreeper flying upriver on to boulders below our vantage point, then set off once again, stopping at another riverside viewpoint that produced a gharial and some enormous black fish, possibly catfish of some sort, hanging steadily in the clear, cold waters.

The rest of the drive was fairly uneventful, though most of us saw 2 Kalij Pheasants by the track and one party a male Red Junglefowl that shot up into some trackside trees as we passed, and we were all grateful to leave the jeeps at a late lunch stop in the forest, where we piled into a wholesome repast of chips and coffee, garnished with a noisy party of at least 11 White-crested Laughingthrushes in the forest and 7 Plumbeous Redstarts and a White-capped Water Redstart in a 300m stretch of the nearby river.

When we come to reflect on the trip, none of us will ever forget the female tiger with two cubs that passed our jeep only 40 metres away on our first afternoon in Ranthambhor; the very animal we had all hoped so much to see. But, neither will we forget how this amazing experience was bettered on this, our last afternoon in Corbett. Less than three minutes from the park entrance, literally our last chance, Rattan stopped the jeeps and there, ambling along a river bed, into some patches of coarse grass and out into the open, was a magnificent male tiger, paws the size of cats, tasting the air and gazing evenly about, eventually melting into the forest after a full five minutes. It was remarkable that we all got to see it; John's crew had stopped some way back along the track to speak to Mohit, the brains behind Asian Adventures and organiser of our trip, visiting Corbett with his family, and it was at the last minute that they sped up behind us and saw the tiger as it came back into the open.

Cinereous Vulture, Pied Harrier, Besra, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Red Junglefowl, Small Buttonquail, Large Cuckooshrike, Bright-headed Cisticola, Jungle Prinia, Aberrant Bush Warbler, Siberian Rubythroat, White-crested Laughingthrush, Black-hooded Oriole

November 20<sup>th</sup> Given the long drive back to Delhi that lay ahead, and the need to be at the airport late tomorrow morning, this was effectively the final day of our trip. So, we set out along the eastern boundary of Corbett to Kumaria Forest Reserve, stopping a couple of times en route, once where gangs of White-crowned Laughingthrushes and Jungle Babblers competed with each other to produce the most noise, then at a bridge over a narrow torrent in the forest where we found both Small and Rufous-bellied Niltavas. Stopping by the roadside in some light forest, there was substantial bird activity from a mixed flock made up principally of Lemon-rumped and Grey-hooded Warblers, with Grey-headed Canary-flycatchers, White-throated and Yellow-bellied Fantails and our first Rufous-tailed Flycatcher. Climbing down a track in the forest to a spot where the Kosi River rushed over large, pale boulders in a broad, flat riverbed it did not take much persuasion to find a suitably comfortable rock to sit and contemplate the past couple of weeks. However, as the river hastened by our musings were interrupted by the arrivals of a Little Forktail, then a pair of Brown Dippers, evidently interested in a dark cave amid the rocks where they appeared to be nesting. This section was densely packed with Plumbeous Redstarts, which seem to be very common where suitable conditions exist, and at least one White-capped Water Redstart, but Rattan had one more thing up his sleeve, pointing out a roosting Tawny Fish Owl in the trees above, its horizontal ear tufts and bright yellow eyes creating a unremittingly uncompromising expression; just the job for repelling door to door salesmen. We realised after a while that another was roosting within a yard or so and, reluctant to leave, we watched them at length. Soon though, it was time to go and we drifted back to the lodge, collected our

belongings and set out for Delhi.

The journey to the capital was about 250km but so tortuous was the traffic that it took 7½ hours of driving to negotiate, and with a couple of rest stops we eventually piled into our hotel at 10pm. It probably isn't fair to elaborate on the journey, since most others on the trip had been tolerable, but the smoke, fumes and dust of the day lingered in the air throughout, gradually increasing in density as we neared Delhi and culminating in an unbelievable stench from a sugar refinery. Although we had seen some sights during the last two weeks, one deserves recall; a tractor pulling a trailer that was so utterly overloaded by goodness-knows-what wrapped in a giant tarpaulin that overlapped on all sides that its front wheels were only nominally in contact with the ground.

Tawny Fish Owl, Rusty-tailed Flycatcher, Small Niltava, Little Forktail, Yellow-bellied Fantail

**November 21**<sup>st</sup> Well, that was it. An uneventful journey to the airport, then some bureaucratic nonsense at check-in, but a thoroughly excellent flight home on a 6-month old airbus. You know it's good when there are blue lights in the toilets. Well done, Mr Branson, well done Rattan and well done John for enduring the headaches of ensuring the arrangements were well made and went as planned.

Northern Palm Squirrel

# Systematic List of Species By John van der Dol

The nomenclature in the following list tends to be that used by Grimmett, Inskipp and Inskipp in "the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent". However the taxonomic situation in this region is also undergoing several changes and a recent publication by Rasmussen and Anderton, "Birds of South Asia, the Ripley guide" has made several changes. As they suggest that they have published what many are thinking, I have adopted some of the new names and splits. However it tends to be a personal choice as to which list one wishes to follow. I therefore sometimes will give two names where two are available, but where a split exists I have used the latest Rasmussen name.

#### Little Grebe Tachybaptus ruficollis

Two or three at Ranthambhor and up to 15 at Bharatpur on the first six days

#### Indian Cormorant Phalacrocorax fuscicollis

Commonly found at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

#### Great Cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo

Also commonly found at Ranthambhor, Bharatpur but also at Corbett

#### Little Cormorant Phalacrocorax niger

Common at Bharatpur but otherwise just small numbers

#### Oriental Darter Anhinga melanogaster

Up to three at Ranthambhor but many more at Bharatpur and a single at Corbett

#### Grey Heron Ardea cinerea

Apart from one at Corbett, only seen in fair numbers on the plains

## Purple Heron Ardea purpurea

Up to six on the first six dates

## Great Egret Casmerodius albus

Common in all suitable areas

## Intermediate Egret Mesophoyx intermedia

Also commonly found in wetland areas

## Little Egret Egretta garzetta

Perhaps less common than the previous two species but still plenty in suitable areas

#### Indian Pond Heron Ardeola grayii

Common throughout

## Cattle Egret Bulbulcus ibis

Common throughout

## Little Heron (Striated Heron) Butorides striata

Between one and three on five dates

#### Black-crowned Night Heron Nycticorax nycticorax

Two at Ranthambhor, three at Bharatpur and a single at Corbett

#### Black Bittern Dupetor flavicollis

A single at close quarters at Ranthambhor

## Painted Stork Mycteria leucocephala

An estimated 200 at Sultanpur followed by up to three at Ranthambhor and large breeding colonies at Bharatpur with fully grown young

#### Asian Openbill Anastormus oscitans

Singles at Sultanpur and Ranthambhor while they were also breeding at Bharatpur where numbers were not counted

#### Black Stork Ciconia nigra

Seven at Ranthambhor were followed by a single and a two at Corbett

## Wooly-necked Stork Ciconia episcopus

Up to seven on eight dates in all areas

#### Black-necked Stork Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus

Just one very distant bird at Bharatpur

#### Black-headed Ibis Threskiornis melanocephalus

Up to twenty in all wetland areas

#### Indian Black Ibis Pseudibis papillosa

Three at Sultanpur and nine along the Chambal river were the only records

#### Glossy Ibis Plegadis falcinellus

A count of 120 at Bharatpur was followed by 57 there the next day

#### Eurasian Spoonbill Platalea leucorodia

Fifty at Bharatpur followed by an uncounted number there the next day

#### Lesser Whistling Duck Dendrocygna javanica

Up to 19 at Ranthambhor and uncounted numbers at Bharatpur

#### Grey Lag Goose Anser anser

Present at Bharatpur

## Bar-headed Goose Anser indicus

Nine were seen on the boat trip on the Chambal River

#### Ruddy Shelduck Tadorna ferruginea

Seen in all suitable areas with a count of 77 on the Chambal River being the highest

## Comb Duck Sarkidiornis melanotos

Eight at Bharatpur was the sole record

#### Cotton Pygmy Goose Nettapus coromandelianus

Between six and 25 on three days at both Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

#### Eurasian Wigeon Anas penelope

Many at Sultanpur followed by just a single at Ranthambhor

#### Gadwall Anas strepera

Good numbers throughout the wetland areas

#### Common Teal Anas crecca

Good numbers in all wetland areas

#### Mallard Anas platyrhynchos

Small numbers at Sultanpur and two at Ranthambhor

## Spot-billed Duck Anas poecilorhyncha

Small numbers at Sultanpur and Bharatpur

#### Pintail Anas acuta

Common in all suitable areas

#### Garganey Anas querquedula

Four at Sultanpur, two or three at Ranthambhor and two at Bharatpur

#### Shoveler Anas clypeata

Small numbers in the wetland areas

#### Red-crested Pochard Rhodonessa rufina

A single drake at Dhikala

#### Common Pochard Aythya farina

Three at Bharatpur was the only record

## Ferruginous Duck Aythya nyroca

A single at Ranthambhor

#### Tufted Duck Aythya fuligula

Two at Nainital were the only ones seen

## Common Merganser Mergus merganser

Two flying down the river at Dhikala

#### Osprey Pandion haliaetus

One or two on six dates in all areas

#### Oriental Honey Buzzard Pernis ptilorhyncus

Between one and six on nine dates

#### Black-shouldered Kite Elanus caeruleus

Seven at Sultanpur, nine along the route from Bharatpur to Chambal and up to six on a further nine dates

#### Black Kite Milvus migrans

Seen throughout in small numbers but sometimes more numerous on rubbish tips on the outskirts of some towns

## Brahminy Kite Haliastur indus

Singles on two days at Corbett was a little surprise as one associates them with seaside locations

## Pallas's Fish Eagle Haliaeetus leucoryphus

Two at Corbett were followed by three along the same river the next day. Excellent views were had of this sought after species

#### Lesser Fish Eagle Ichthyophaga humilis

A juvenile at Bharatpur was followed by two and three along the same river as the previous species at Corbett

#### Lammergeier Gypaetus barbatus

An adult at Corbett was only seen by a few people

## **Egyptian Vulture** Neophron percnopterus

Up to three on four dates and a count of 21 on the road between Bharatpur and Chambal

## White-rumped Vulture Gyps bengalensis

Three just outside the Corbett National Park were seen perched at close range

#### Indian (Long-billed) Vulture Gyps indicus

Between two and six on three days at Ranthambhor

#### Himalayan (Griffon) Vulture Gyps himalayensis

Between four and ten on three dates in the mountains

#### Cinereous (Black) Vulture Aegypius monachus

A single at Corbett was seen by just a few people

## Red-headed Vulture Aegypius calvus

Up to six on six dates in all areas

#### Crested Serpent Eagle Spilornis cheela

One or two on four dates in the lowlands only

#### Eurasian Marsh Harrier Circus aeruginosus

Three at Sultanpur, four at Bharatpur and a single at Dhikala

#### Hen Harrier Circus cyaneus

Four seen going to roost at Dhikala were followed by one there the next morning

#### Pied Harrier Circus melanoleucos

A pair seen at Dhikala by just a few people

#### Crested Goshawk Accipiter trivirgatus

Two at Ranthambhor and a single at Corbett

#### Shikra Accipiter badius

Up to six a day on most days

#### Besra Accipiter virgatus

A single male at Corbett

## Eurasian Buzzard Buteo buteo

A single near Nainital was the only record

## Indian Spotted Eagle Aquila hastate

An adult at Corbett was the sole record

#### Greater Spotted Eagle Aquila clanga

Between one and four on five dates in all areas

#### Steppe Eagle Aquila nipalensis

One at Ranthambhor and four on two dates at Corbett

#### Bonelli's Eagle Hieraaetus fasciatus

Four singles, all in the lowland areas. An adult male was seen perched on the cliffs at Chambal

## Booted Eagle Hieraaetus pennatus

A pale phase bird at Sultanpur and six at Bharatpur were the only records

#### Changeable Hawk Eagle Spizaetus cirrhatus

A single at Corbett

## Mountain Hawk Eagle Spizaetus nipalensis

Two near Nainital and a single in the Mongoli Valley

## **Collared Falconet** *Microhierax caerulescens*

A single rather distant bird was seen at Corbett

#### Eurasian Kestrel Falco tinnunculus

Up to six on five dates in all areas

#### Red-necked Falcon Falco chicquera

A rather poor view of a single flying away over the fort at Ranthambhor

#### Eurasian Hobby Falco subbuteo

Up to a dozen at Bharatpur on the three days we were there

## Peregrine Falco peregrinus peregrinator

Single at Sultanpur, one at the Taj Mahal and another at Nainital

#### Black Francolin Francolinus francolinus

A male on the road to Sultangur, three at Nainital, and three and two at Corbett

#### Grey Francolin Francolinus pondicerianus

Up to 20 on a daily basis in the lowlands and a single at Corbett

## Jungle Bush Quail Perdicula asiatica

Two at Ranthambhor were followed by three there the next day

#### Painted Spurfowl Galloperdix spadicea

A pair seen two days running at Ranthambhor

#### Koklass Pheasant Pucrasia macrolopha

Two silhouettes seen in flight and another heard at Ninital was the only result after three early morning excursions for the species. Not very satisfactory but an excuse to return

#### Red Junglefowl Gallus gallus

One seen and two heard at Corbett

## Kalij Pheasant Lophura leucomelanos

Two, four and eight seen on three dates at Nainital and Corbett

## Indian Peafowl Pavo cristatus

Common everywhere, particularly at Ranthambhor

#### Small Buttonquail Turnix sylvatica

Two in the grasslands of Dhikala, one of which gave excellent and prolonged views

## Sarus Crane Grus antigone

Seven on the road to Sultanpur, one heard at Bharatpur and another seven seen there the next day

## Common Crane Grus grus

A flock of 47 at Bharatpur was nice to see

## Brown Crake Amaurornis akool

Four at Ranthambhor and a single at Chambal

## White-breasted Waterhen Amaurornis phoenicurus

Small numbers in all wetland areas

## Purple Swamphen Porphyrio porphyrio

Two at Sultanpur and five at Bharatpur were surprisingly the only records

#### Moorhen Gallinula chloropus

Common in all suitable areas

## Coot Fulica atra

Small numbers throughout and a flock of many hundreds at Bharatpur

www.sandwichbirdtours.co.uk

#### Pheasant-tailed Jacana Hydrophasianus chirurgus

Two at Ranthambhor and three at Bharatpur were the only records

#### Bronze-winged Jacana Metopidius indicus

Four at Ranthambhor and three at Bharatpur

## Black-winged Stilt Himantopus himantopus

Common throughout all suitable areas

#### Indian Stone-Curlew Burhinus indicus

A single at Ranthambhor was the only record

#### Great Thick-Knee Esacus recurvirostris

Excellent views of six birds from our boat along the Chambal River

#### Indian Courser Cursorius coromandelicus

Two at Sultanpur were one of the target species for that area and were seen well

#### Oriental Pratincole Glareola maldivarum

A single was seen at Ranthambhor albeit rather distantly

#### Northern Lapwing Vanellus vanellus

A flock of 20 was seen from the train on the way to Nainital

#### River Lapwing Vanellus duvaucelli

Three on the way to Bharatpur, 43 along the River Chambal and up to five on three dates in the Corbett area

#### Yellow-wattled Lapwing Vanellus malarbaricus

One on the way to Sultanpur and five on the way to Bharatpur

## Red-wattled Lapwing Vanellus indicus

Commonly found throughout

## White-tailed Lapwing Vanellus leucurus

Two at Bharatpur came as a nice surprise

#### Kentish Plover Charadrius alexandrinus

A single at Bharatpur and three on the banks of the Chambal

## Little Ringed Plover Charadrius dubius

One seen at the Chambal River

## (Snipe sp Gallinago sp)

Two at Ranthambhor and another two at Dhikala remained unidentified

#### Black-tailed Godwit Limosa limosa

Large numbers in excess of 100 at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

## Eurasian Curlew Numenius arquata

Singles on three dates at Sultanpur and Bharatpur

## Spotted Redshank Tringa erythropus

Up to six on four dates in the lowlands

#### Common Redshank Tringa tetanus

Three at Bharatpur and a single along the Chambal

## Marsh Sandpiper Tringa stagnatilis

A count of 23 at Bharatpur was the only record

#### Greenshank Tringa nebularia

Up to seven on any one day in all suitable areas

#### Green Sandpiper Tringa ochropus

One or two seen virtually daily

## Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola

Up to six on three dates and a count of 30 at Ranthambhor

## **Common Sandpiper** Actitis hypoleucos

One or two a day in the lowlands and up to five a day at Corbett

#### Temminck's Stint Calidris temminckii

Three at Bharatpur and two along the banks of the Chambal

#### Ruff Philomachus pugnax

Flocks totalling 80 were seen along the road to Bharatpur and 20 actually at this site

#### Gull-billed Tern Gelochelidon nilotica

Forty at Ranthambhor and a single at Bharatpur

#### River Tern Sterna aurantia

A maximum count of 28 at Ranthambhor while at Bharatpur there were just two birds, and three were noted at Dhikala

#### Black-bellied Tern Sterna acuticauda

Just two along the banks of the River Chambal

#### Whiskered Tern Chlidonias hybridus

Up to about 30 at Ranthambhor and just one at Bharatpur

#### Indian Skimmer Rynchops albicollis

A single along the Chambal River gave stunning views

## Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse Pterocles exustus

About 10 were seen in a dry stony area along the road to Bharatpur from Ranthambhor

#### Painted Sandgrouse Pterocles indicus

Counts of 14, 4 and 25 were made at Ranthambhor where excellent views were had of this species on the ground in the dry stony area surrounding our hotel

#### Rock Dove Columba livia

Eight along the Chambal River and then a few more in the Corbett area were considered to be genuine stock

#### Oriental Turtle Dove Streptopelia orientalis

Two singles at Ranthambhor

## Eurasian Collared Dove Streptopelia decaocto

Commonly encountered throughout

#### Red Collared Dove Streptopelia tranquebarica

Between one and four on three dates

## **Spotted Dove** Streptopelia chinensis

Up to three on five dates

## Laughing Dove Streptopelia senegalensis

Up to ten daily in the lowlands

## Emerald Dove Chalcophaps indica

A single at Nainital was the sole record

#### Yellow-footed Pigeon Treron phoenicoptera

Up to 20 on four dates at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

#### Alexandrine Parakeet Psittacula eupatria

Present in small numbers in all areas except Nainital

#### Rose-ringed Parakeet Psittacula krameri

Very common throughout, sometimes seen in large flocks

#### Plum-headed Parakeet Psittacula cyanocephala

Up to a dozen on five dates in all areas

#### Asian Koel Eudynamys scolopacea

Two at Ranthambhor and singles at Bharatpur and Dhikala

#### Sirkeer Malkoha Phaenicophaeus viridirostris

A single seen from the train on the way to Ranthambhor was seen by just a few people

## **Greater Coucal** Centropus sinensis

Up to three on six dates

## **Lesser Coucal** Centropus bengalensis

Three seen on both jeep rides at Dhikala

#### Barn Owl Tyto alba

A dark morph bird was seen along the railway line at Delhi station

#### Collared Scops Owl Otus bakkamoena

Four were seen in nest holes at Ranthambhor, all in one day

## (Oriental Scops Owl Otus sunia)

As appears to be the case on every trip, only heard with up to two calling at Nainital on three nights

#### Dusky Eagle Owl Bubo coromandus

A single was seen on the first evening at Bharatpur while the next day it was seen again and its mate on the next was also located

#### Tawny Fish Owl Ketupa flavipes

A pair was found at Krameria on the last birding day. Although difficult to locate in the foliage we had excellent views

#### Asian Barred Owlet Glaucidium cuculoides

A single near Nainital was the only record

## Jungle Owlet Glaucidium radiatum

Also a single in the same place as the previous species and singles were heard at Corbett on two nights

#### Spotted Owlet Athene brama

Only seen at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur where up to three were seen on a daily basis

## Indian Jungle Nightjar Caprimulgus indicus

A single on two days at Bharatpur gave stunning views as it roosted on a branch over the path

## Large-tailed Nightjar Caprimulgus macrurus

A single at Bharatpur was seen many times in flight and also perched on the ground where scope views were possible. Another was seen briefly before dawn at Nainital

## Indian Nightjar Caprimulgus asiaticus

A single at Bharatpur also afforded close views as it roosted above the path

#### Himalayan Swiftlet Collocalia brevirostris

About 20 were seen near Nainital

#### Asian Palm Swift Cypsiurus balasiensis

Three were seen on the way to Corbett

#### Little Swift Apus affinis

Two considered to be of this species were noted on the road to Bharatpur

#### House Swift Apus nipalensis

Considered by some to be conspecific with the previous species. Seen commonly, sometimes in good numbers, often over towns

#### Crested Treeswift Hemiprocne coronata

Thirty at Dhikala were followed by another 15 in Corbett the next day

#### Common Kingfisher Alcedo atthis

Up to three most days in most areas

## White-throated Kingfisher Halcyon smyrnensis

The commonest Kingfisher of the area and seen virtually daily in good numbers

#### Crested Kingfisher Megaceryle lugubris

One of the target species of the trip. All records refer to the Corbett area and excellent views were obtained of three singles and a two on four consecutive days

#### Pied Kingfisher Ceryle rudis

Between one and four on seven dates in all suitable areas

#### Green Bee-eater Merops orientalis

An amazing 120 were seen in the very early morning from the station platform at Indargargh after which no more than a dozen were seen on any one day. There were no records from Nainital or Corbett

#### Indian Roller Coracias benghalensis

Mostly seen in the lowlands with a maximum count of 14 at Ranthambhor

## Hoopoe Upupa epops

Commonly encountered in the lowlands, but none in the mountains

## Indian Grey Hornbill Ocyceros birostris

Only seen at Bharatpur with between two and six on three days

#### Oriental Pied Hornbill Anthracoceros albirostris

Two at Corbett were seen by just a few people

#### Great Hornbill Buceros bicornis

Six of this giant of the forest were seen at Corbett one early morning although not the best of views

## Great Barbet Megalaima virens

Heard on two days in the Pangot area and then two were seen the following day

#### Brown-headed Barbet Megalaima zeylandica

Up to three on six dates in most areas

#### Lineated Barbet Megalaima lineata

A single at Dhikala was followed by three in Corbett National Park the next day

#### Blue-throated Barbet Megalaima asiatica

One in the Nainital area was followed by two on the road to Dhikala and another single there the next day

#### Coppersmith Barbet Megalaima haemacephala

Up to three seen or heard most days

#### Wryneck Jynx torquilla

A single seen at Sultanpur and two heard at Ranthambhor

## Speckled Piculet Picumnus innominatus

Just one record from the Pangot area

## Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker Dendrocopos nanus

Singles on three dates in mountainous areas

## Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker Dendrocopos canicapillus

One or two on three dates also only in the mountains

#### Brown-fronted Woodpecker Dendrocopos auriceps

Between one and six on five dates in the mountains

#### Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker Dendrocopos macei

Singles on two consecutive days in Corbett

#### Stripe-breasted Woodpecker Dendrocopos atratus

A single in Corbett was seen by just one or two observers

#### Yellow-crowned Woodpecker Dendrocopos mahrattensis

Between one and four on three dates at Ranthambhor

## Rufous-bellied Woodpecker Dendrocopos hyperythrus

Six at Nainital were followed by two there the next day

#### Himalayan Woodpecker Dendrocopos himalayensis

Seen only in the Nainital area with three, seven and a single on three consecutive days

#### Lesser Yellownape Picus chlorolophus

Just one seen in Corbett

#### Greater Yellownape Picus flavinucha

Between one and three on four dates at Nainital and Corbett

## Streak-throated Woodpecker Picus xanthopygaeus

Singles on two days in Corbett

#### Scaly-bellied Woodpecker Picus squamatus

Two at Corbett were followed by a single there the next day

## Grey-faced (headed) Woodpecker Picus canus

Between one and three on four dates in Nainital and Corbett

## Himalayan Flameback Dinopium shorii

One to four on three dates in Corbett

#### Black-rumped Flameback Dinopium benghalense

Mostly found in the lowlands on a daily basis, particularly at Bharatpur and then six seen at Corbett

#### (Great Slaty Woodpecker Mulleripicus pulverulentus)

Unfortunately a single was only heard in Corbett

#### Indian Bushlark Mirafra erythroptera

Four at Ranthambhor and a single there a couple of days later

#### Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark Eremopterix grisea

Four males and two females were seen at very close range at Ranthambhor and another five were seen in some dry area on the way to Bharatpur

## Bimaculated Lark Melanocorypha bimaculata

A distant flock of about 60 birds was seen on the way from Ranthambhor to Bharatpur which was frustrating as it was a new species for most of the group

## Greater Short-toed Lark Calandrella brachydactyla

Ten at Sultanpur, 21 at Ranthambhor and flocks totalling about 700 in the dry stony area on the way to Bharatpur

#### Hume's Short-toed Lark Calandrella acutirostris

About 20 mixed in with the previous species at Sultanpur were difficult to pick out

#### Sand Lark Calandrella raytal

A single on the banks of the Chamball River

#### Crested Lark Galerida cristata

Two at Sultanpur and another two at Chambal

#### Eurasian Skylark Alauda arvensis

Two and three at Dhikala on consecutive days were the only record

#### Plain Martin Riparia paludicola

Commonly found throughout

## Eurasian Crag Martin Hirundo rupestris

Five were seen in the Nainital area

## **Dusky Crag Martin** Hirundo concolor

Two at the airport was our first species of the trip, after which they were common at Ranthambhor and two were noted at Dhikala

#### Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica

About 20 at Sultanpur, up to three at Ranthambhor but more common in the mountains

## Wire-tailed Swallow Hirundo smithii

About 15 at Sultanpur and six at Ranthambhor were the only records

## Red-rumped Swallow Hirundo daurica

Up to 30 most days in all areas but missing from the Nainital area

## Streak-throated Swallow Hirundo fluvicola

About 60 at the River Banas on the way to Bharatpur

#### Asian House Martin Delichon dasypus

A single at Sultanpur was followed by half a dozen on two days at Nainital

## Nepal House Martin Delichon nipalensis

A dozen seen at Nainital on two occasions. Other larger but more distant flocks were likely to have been this species also

#### White Wagtail Motacilla alba

Very common throughout

#### White-browed Wagtail Motacilla maderaspatensis

Also very common throughout with up to 20 per day on most days

#### Citrine Wagtail Motacilla citreola

Up to four on five dates but an amazing 110 at Ranthambhor on our first visit there

#### Yellow Wagtail Motacilla flava

Three birds at Bharatpur

## Grey Wagtail Motacilla cinerea

Between one and three on eight dates in most areas

#### Paddyfield Pipit Anthus rufulus

One to three on three dates

#### Tawny Pipit Anthus campestris

Common at Ranthambhor with up to 30 a day and ten were seen in the dry areas on route to Bharatpur

#### Long-billed Pipit Anthus similis

Excellent views of four birds at Sultanpur. These belong to the darker race 'jerdoni'

#### Olive-backed Pipit Anthus hodgsoni

Apart from a dozen at Sultanpur there were ones and twos in most areas

#### Rosy Pipit Anthus roseatus

Two in Corbett was the sole record

#### Water Pipit Anthus spinoletta

Singles on consecutive days at Dhikala

#### **Upland Pipit** Anthus sylvanus

Two near Nainital were new for all in the group

## Large Cuckoo-shrike Coracina macei

A flock of about 15 was seen early in the morning at Dhikala

#### Small Minivet Pericrocotus cinnamomeus

Between one and four on five dates in the lowlands and 24 at Corbett on our last day there

#### Long-tailed Minivet Pericrocotus ethologus

Four on three dates in the lowlands and ten at Nainital

#### Scarlet Minivet Pericrocotus flammeus

A male at Nainital was followed by up to seven on three dates at Corbett

#### Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike Hemipus picatus

Two at Corbett was the only record

## Red-whiskered Bulbul Pycnonotus jocosus

Seven at Corbett were followed by four there the next day

#### White-eared Bulbul Pycnonotus leucotis

Ten at the River Banas between Ranthambhor and Bharatpur and eight and one at the latter place over the next two days

#### Himalayan Bulbul Pycnonotus leucogenys

Common in the mountain areas

## Red-vented Bulbul Pycnonotus cafer

Very common throughout

## Ashy Bulbul Hemixos flavala

Thirty in Corbett National Park and a just a single there the next day

#### Black Bulbul Hypsipetes leucocephalus

Up to 32 in the Nainital area on three days

#### Common lora Aegithina tiphia

Two at Nainital and singles on two dates at Corbett were surprisingly the only records

## Brown Dipper Cinclus pallasii

Only seen in Corbett with two singles and two at Kremeria on the last day

#### Altai Accentor Prunella collaris

Flock totalling 100 or more came as a big surprise to us at Nainital after expecting to see them in single figures

#### Rufous-breasted Accentor Prunella strophiata

A single at the start of the Mongoli Valley gave reasonable views

#### Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush Monticola rufiventris

A single male at Nainital was the only record

#### Blue Rock Thrush Monticola solitarius

Two at Ranthambhor and a single at Chambal

#### Blue Whistling Thrush Myophonus caeruleus

Seen daily in the mountains with counts of between two and ten

#### Pied Thrush Zoothera wardii

A female was seen by just a few people at the start of th

## Zitting Cisticola Cisticola juncidis

Two at Sultanpur, a single at Ranthambhor, six at Dhikala follwed by 15 there the next morning

## Bright-headed Cisticola Cisticola exilis

A single at Dhikala was seen by just a few from one of the jeeps

#### Striated Prinia Prinia criniger

Between two and four on three dates at Nainital

## Rufous-fronted Prinia Prinia buchanani

Only seen in the barren lands surrounding our hotel at Ranthambhor where between four and ten were seen on the three days there

#### Grey-breasted Prinia Prinia hodgsonii

Between one and six on seven dates both in mountainous and lowland areas

#### Graceful Prinia Prinia gracilis

A single bird was seen at Sultanpur

#### Jungle Prinia Prinia sylvatica

Three in the early morning at Dhikala was the only record

#### Ashy Prinia Prinia socialis

Two or three on four dates only in the lowlands

#### Plain Prinia Prinia inornata

Small numbers in the lowlands and just a few at Dhikala

#### Aberrant Bush Warbler Cettia flavolivacea

A single at Dhikala was seen by just a few people

## Paddyfield Warbler Acrocephalus agricola

One at Ranthambhor was the only sighting

#### Blyth's Reed Warbler Acrocephalus dumetorum

Twenty at Bharatpur and singles at Corbett and Kumeria

## Clamorous Reed Warbler Acrocephalus stentoreus

Just one record at Bharatpur

#### Common Tailorbird Orthotomus sutorius

One or two in most areas

#### Common Chiffchaff Phylloscopus collybita

Small numbers throughout

#### Mountain Chiffchaff Phylloscopus sindianus

Four and two were seen at Nainital and one at Corbett

#### Plain Leaf Warbler Phylloscopus neglectus

Six at Bharatpur, two there the next day, and one and three at Corbett

#### Ashy-throated Warbler Phylloscopus maculipennis

Five at Nainital were followed by three there the next day

#### Yellow-rumped Warbler Phylloscopus chloronotus

Twenty at Nainital, three at Corbett and a single at Kumeria

## Brooks' Leaf Warbler Phylloscopus subviridis

A single at Bharatpur was unfortunately only seen by a few people

## Greenish Warbler Phylloscopus trochiloides

Singles at Bharatpur and Nainital

#### Hume's Warbler Phylloscopus humei

Probably the commonest of the Phylloscopus Warblers and seen vrtually daily although mostly in single figures. Uncounted numbers were seen at Ranthambhor though

## **Buff-barred Warbler** Phylloscopus pulcher

Up to 25 a day in during the four days in the mountains

## Smoky Warbler Phylloscopus fuligiventer

A single gave not very good views at Nainital

## Golden-spectacled Warbler Seicercus burkii

Two at Nainital and a single at Corbett

## **Grey-hooded Warbler** Seicercus xanthoschistos

Commonly found in the mountains with daily counts of up to 20 birds

## Lesser Whitethroat Sylvia curruca

One to three most days and a count of 20 at Bharatpur

#### Eastern Orphean Warbler Sylvia crassirostris

Up to four on four dates at Sultanpur and Ranthambhor

## Rusty-tailed Flycatcher Muscicapa dauurica

A single at Kumeria was the only record of this sought after species

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#### Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher Ficedula strophiata

A male at Nainital was followed by three further birds at Corbett

#### Red-breasted Flycatcher Ficedula parva

Between one and six on most days in the lowlands

#### Red-throated Flycatcher Ficedula albicilla

Four at Sultanpur and another four at Ranthambhor were the only sightings

#### Small Niltava Niltava macgrogoriae

A stunning male was seen on our last morning at Kumeria

#### Rufous-bellied Siltation Niltava sundara

Two at Nainital were followed by a single there the next day and another pair at Kumeria on our last morning

## Tickell's Blue Flycatcher Cyornis tickelliae

A single at Ranthambhor was seen by just one or two people

#### Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher Culicicapa ceylonensis

Up to four on seven dates in all areas

#### Siberian Rubythroat Luscinia calliope

A stunning male was seen by the occupants of just one jeep at Dhikala on our last morning there. As they do in Hong Kong, after rain they sit on top of reeds in the sun to dry out and so good views can be obtained

#### Bluethroat Luscinia svecica

Two at Sultanpur, a single at Bharatpur, and three individuals at Dhikala

#### Oriental Magpie Robin Copsychus saularis

Commonly found in small numbers in the lowlands but just one record from the mountainous region with one at Dhikala

#### Indian Robin Saxicoloides fulicata

Commonly found in the lowland areas but no records at all from the highlands

#### Blue-capped Redstart Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus

This stunning species was first encountered at Naintal where a pair was present, then a male on the road to the Mongoli Valley and another male at Kumeria

## Black Redstart Phoenicurus ochruros

Found in small numbers in the lowlands on most days but just one at Dhikala

## Blue-fronted Redstart Phoenicurus frontalis

Two and one at Nainital and a female at Corbett were the only records

#### White-capped Water Redstart Chaimarrornis leucocephalus

As expected this bird was only encountered in the mountains where between one and four were seen on four days

## Plumbeous Redstart Rhyacornis fulignosus

Covers the same habitat as the previous species but in larger numbers . Seen on five dates with a maximum count of 20 at Corbett

#### Little Forktail Enicurus scouleri

A single at Kumeria gave fantastic views

## Spotted Forktail Enicurus maculatus

A single at Nainital was the only record

#### Hodgson's Bushchat Saxicola insignis

A very sought-after species by western birders. A pair was seen at Dhikala and a single male the next day probably was one of the same pair. This species was only recently discovered to be present here

#### Common Stonechat Saxicola torquatus indicus

Commonly found throughout. Some may well have belonged to the race maurus (Siberian Stonechat)

#### White-tailed Stonechat Saxicola leucurus

Singles at Sultanpur and Ranthambhor

#### Pied Bushchat Saxicola caprata

Eight at Sultanpur after which just two or three were seen on five dates mostly in the lowlands

#### Grey Bushchat Saxicola ferreus

Up to ten on a daily basis in the mountains

#### Variable Wheatear Oenanthe picata

A single male at Sultanpur was followed by three at Ranthambhor and a further single there two days later

#### **Desert Wheatear** Oenanthe deserti

Nine in the dry area along the road to Bharatpur and a single at Chambal

## Isabelline Wheatear Oenanthe isabellina

Three at Sultanpur and another three in the desert area on the road to Bharatpur

#### Brown Rock-chat Cercomela fusca

Two in a village on the road to Sultanpur, two singles in the dry area surrounding our hotel at Ranthambhor and another single at Dhikala

## Yellow-bellied Fantail Rhipidura hypoxantha

A single at Kumeria on our last morning gave stunning views

## White-throated Fantail Rhipidura albicollis

One to three on three days at Corbett and Kumeria

#### White-browed Fantail Rhipidura aureola

One to three at Ranthambhor and a single at Corbett

## White-throated Laughingthrush Garrulax albogularis

Twenty in the garden of our accommodation at Junglelore Lodge came to bird tables, 60 the next morning in the mountains nearby and another ten in the garden on our third morning there

#### White-crested Laughingthrush Garrulax leucolophus

For some perhaps the bird of the trip. These comical birds were seen in the Corbett area on three dates with a maximum count of about 15 in one group. They really are great fun

## **Striated Laughingthrush** Garrulax striatus

Four at Nainital on one day was the only record

#### Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush Garrulax rufogularis

Two at Nainital were difficult to see and consequently were not seen by all

## Streaked Laughingthrush Garrulax lineatus

Seen on four dates at Nainital with a maximum count of ten

## Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush Garrulax erythrocephalus

Just two at Nainital was the sole record

#### Puff-throated Babbler Pellorneum ruficeps

Three at Naintial and two at Corbett were the only sightings

## Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis

A single at Nainal was followed by excellent views of a pair there the next day and another four were seen along the road in the Mongoli Valley

#### Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler Pnoepyga albiventer

One bird was seen on the side of a stream while we were having lunch in the mountains of Nainital

#### Black-chinned Babbler Stachyris pyrrhops

Three at Corbett were followed by another single there and two at Kumeria

#### Yellow-eyed Babbler Chrysomma sinense

Two at Bharatpur and eight at Dhikala

#### Common Babbler Turdoides caudatus

Despite its name this species was only found on the arid plains at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur with up to 20 seen on four dates

#### Large Grey Babbler Turdoides malcolmi

Only seen in the lowlands in small numbers but 30 were counted at Sutanpur

#### Jungle Babbler Turdoides striata

Seen commonly throughout

#### Red-billed Leiothrix Leiothrix lutea

This lovely little bird only showed itself to one person at Nainital which is a shame

#### White-browed Shrike Babbler Pteruthius flaviscapis

A male and a female were seen at Nainital

#### Green Shrike Babbler Pteruthius xanthochlorus

A single at Nainital was the only record

#### Blue-winged Minla Minla cyanouroptera

Eight at Nainital were followed by two there the next day

#### Rufous Sibia Heterophasia capistrata

Nothing like as numerous as in the Kathmandu Valley. Two at Nainital were followed by ten and three there on the next two days

## Black-throated Tit Aegithalos concinnus

Quite numerous in mountainous areas where between three and 30 were seen on four days and an amazing 100 were estimated on our last day at Nainital

#### Spot-winged Tit Parus melanolophus

Only seen at Nainital where there were counts of four, 50 and six on three consecutive days

#### Great Tit Parus major

Seen in throughout in single figures

## Green-backed Tit Parus monticolus

Up to a dozen a day in Nainital and Corbett on a daily basis

## Black-lored Tit Parus xanthogenys

Up to six on five dates in the mountains

#### Yellow-browed Tit Svlviparus modestus

Just three at Nainital on one date

#### Kashmir Nuthatch Sitta cashmirensis

Two in some pine forest at Nainital were a great surprise as they are not supposed to occur here although local guides suspected that they were present here. Other birds seen in the area, we suspect, may well have belonged to this species also

#### Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch Sitta castanea

Up to six on five dates in the mountains

## White-tailed Nuthatch Sitta himalayensis

Up to six on four dates and 30 on one day in the Nainital area

#### Velvet-fronted Nuthatch Sitta frontalis

One at Nainital and three and two at Corbett

#### Wallcreeper Tichodroma muraria

One on the cliffs on the other side of the river at Corbett was followed by another on the rocks along the fast flowing river in Corbett National Park the next day. Good views of a stunning bird

#### Bar-tailed Treecreeper Certhia himalayana

Seen on four dates in the Nainital area with a maximum count of eight birds

## Purple Sunbird Cinnyris asiaticus

Seen in ones and twos in the lowlands and a maximum count of five at Bharatpur

#### Mrs Gould's Sunbird Aethopyga gouldiae

A stunning fully plumaged male was seen at Nainital

#### Green-tailed Sunbird Aethopyga nipalensis

A male was also seen at Nainital

## Crimson Sunbird Aethopyga siparaja

A female at Nainital was followed by two birds at Corbett

## Fire-tailed Sunbird Aethopyga ignicauda

Three at Nainital were followed by a pair there the next day

## Thick-billed Flowerpecker Dicaeum agile

Two along the road to Corbett gave good but brief views

## Pale-billed Flowerpecker Dicaeum erythrorhynchos

A single at Nainital

## Oriental White-eye Zosterops palpebrosus

Up top 30 seen throughout

#### Indian Golden Oriole Oriolus kundoo

Although originally identified as a Eurasian Golden Oriole (Oriolus oriolus), it is likely that a bird at Bharatpur was of this species

#### Black-hooded Oriole Oriolus xanthornus

One heard in Corbett was followed by four seen there the next day

#### Maroon Oriole Oriolus traillii

Seen both at Nainital and Corbett with up to six on four days

#### Isabelline (Rufous-tailed) Shrike Lanius isabellinus

Three were seen at Sultanpur

#### Brown Shrike Lanius cristatus

Two were noted at Ranthambhor

#### Bay-backed Shrike Lanius vittatus

Tow at Sultanpur were followed by singles at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur on four days

#### Long-tailed Shrike Lanius schach

Between one and four on nine dates in all areas

## Southern Grey Shrike Lanius meridionalis

Up to six a day at Ranthambhor and singles at Sultanpur and Dhikala where it is considered a rarity

#### Grey-backed Shrike Lanius tephronotus

Two and one at Corbett on consecutive days

#### Common Woodshrike Tephrodornis pondicerianus

Three along the road to Sultanpur and two at Bharatpur

#### Black Drongo Dicrurus macrocercus

Ubiquitous in lowland areas and just two at Dhikala

#### Ashy Drongo Dicrurus leucophaeus

Two at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

## White-bellied Drongo Dicrurus caerulescens

The commonest of the drongos with up to seven seen at Ranthambhor on three dates and two at Nainital

#### Hair-crested (Spangled) Drongo Dicrurus hottentottus

Singles on two consecutive days at Corbett

#### Eurasian Jay Garrulus glandarius

Between four and ten on three days at Nainital

#### Black-headed Jay Garrulus lanceolatus

Twelve in the garden at the birdtables at Junglelore Lodge was just spectacular and this was followed by a single and another four on the next two days

#### Red-billed Blue Magpie Urocissa erythrorhyncha

Seven, six and two were seen on consecutive days at Nainital

#### (Green Magpie Cissa chinensis)

This lovely bird was unfortunately only heard on two days at Corbett

#### Rufous Treepie Dendrocitta vagabunda

Very common in the lowlands and up to seven at Dhikala

#### Grey Treepie Dendrocitta formosae

Between two and four seen on three dates at Nainital

#### House Crow Corvus splendens

Present in large numbers, mostly in the lowlands

#### Indian Jungle (Large-billed) Crow Corvus (macrorhynchos) culminatus

This species is seeing some real taxanomic changes. It is likely that the species seen here is the one named here, but it is possible that we have also seen the "split" Large-billed Crow *Corvus (macrorhynchus) japonensis* 

#### Common Raven Corvus corax

Two above the lodge at Nainital was likely the only record

#### Bank Myna Acridotheres fuscus

Commonly encountered in the lowlands particularly round villages and in Delhi itself

#### Common Myna Acridotheres tristis

Also very common throughout particularly around settlements

#### Asian Pied Starling Sturnus contra

A bird of agricultural areas and therefore commonly seen

## Brahminy Starling Sturnus pagodarum

Commonly seen in the lowland areas

#### Rosy Starling Sturnus roseus

One flock of about 60 birds was found along the road to Bharatpur and that was the only record

#### House Sparrow Passer domesticus

Present throughout

#### Russet Sparrow Passer rutilans

This lovely little bird was first encountered at the Junglelore Lodge after which up to 15 were seen over the next three days

#### Chestnut-shouldered Petronia Petronia xanthocollis

Four at Ranthambhor were followed by two on the road to Bharatpur

#### Baya Weaver Ploceus philippinus

A single on the road to Bharatpur, 15 at Corbett and a single there the next day

#### Black-breasted Weaver Ploceus benghalensis

Two were found at Sultanpur

#### Red Avadavat Amandava amandava

Twenty at Sultanpur, one at Dhikala and four there the next morning

## Indian Silverbill Lonchura malabarica

Seen only in the lowlands with counts of up to 50 a day were recorded

#### Scaly-breasted Munia Lonchura punctulata

From single figures up to 30 in the mountains on four days

## Common Rosefinch Carpodacus erythrinus

Two males at Nainital were the only record

## Pink-browed Rosefinch Carpodacus rodochrous

Three birds at Nainital, the first of which was in the garden of Junglelore Lodge, were a welcome addition to everybody's lifelist

#### Yellow-breasted Greenfinch Carduelis spinoides

Four at Nainital by the lodge were followed by 25 in the same area the next day

#### Crested Bunting Melophus lathami

A single male on the wires along the road to Corbett was our only sighting of this lovely bird

#### Rock Bunting Emberiza cia

Only seen at Nainital with counts of one, 15 and six

## White-capped Bunting Emberiza stewarti

An immature male at Sultanpur and then seven, three and a single at Nainital on three consecutive days

#### Red-headed Bunting Emberiza bruniceps

Counts of up to 30 in the dry agricultural areas at Ranthambhor on four dates and two at Dhikala

# 375 species seen, one not specifically identified and three heard only **MAMMALS**

#### Rhesus Macaque Macaca mulatta

Commonly seen throughout

#### Hanuman (Common, Black-faced) Langur Semnopithecus entellus

Also common throughout

#### Sambar Cervus unicolor

Seen in good numbers in all lowland wet areas

#### Indian Muntjac Munticanus muntjak

One at Nainital, two at Dhikala and three there the next day

#### Hog Deer Axis porcinus

Four in the grassland at Dhikala

#### Spotted Deer (Cheetal) Axis axis

Very common in lowland areas

#### Nilgai Boselaphus tragocamelus

Common at Sultanpur, Ranthambhor and Bharatpur including some beautiful Blue Bucks

#### Indian Gazelle Gazella bennettii

Seven at Ranthambhor with four there the next day. Excellent views of this beautiful antelope were had

#### Wild Pig Sus scrofa

Thirty or more at Ranthambhor and 15 at Corbett

## Asian Elephant Elephas maximus

A family party of 13 was unfortunately only seen by a few people in the grasslands of Dhikala

#### Jackal Canis aureus

Commonly heard at Bharatpur and quite a few seen, there was also one at Dhikala, six at Corbett and about four on the road back to Delhi from Corbett

#### Royal Bengal Tiger Panthera tigris

An adult female (Lady of the Lake) at Ranthambhor was accompanied by two fully grown, one year old cubs and all gave stunning views as they passed our vehicle within 40 yards. Right at the last knockings and just a few minutes from the entrance gate to Corbett National Park we had a four or five minute viewing of a male wandering around in the grass by the river on the edge of the forest to which it eventually returned. Although our top target species for this trip, these beautiful cats are never guaranteed and to get fantastic and prolonged views of four of them was in our eyes truly remarkable and a good reason for returning at some time in the future

#### Jungle Cat Felis chaus

Two at Ranthambhor were seen not very well while a single at Nainital was watched stalking its prey for ages. It had more patience than us as we eventually walked away

#### Yellow-throated Marten Martes flavigula

Fantastic views were had of a single at Kumeria

#### Himalavan Weasel Mustela sibirica

A single at Nainital was only seen by one person

## Small Indian Mongoose Herpestes javanicus

Just one record of one at Bharatpur

#### Ruddy Mongoose Herpestes smithii

Three and four seen on consecutive days at Ranthambhor

## Indian (Black-naped) Hare Lepus nigricollis

Two singles at Ranthambhor

## Five-striped Palm Squirrel Funambulus pennantii

Ubiquitous in the lowland areas

#### Indian Desert Jird Meriones hurrianae

Excellent views were had of this species along the banks of the River Banas

#### House Rat Rattus rattus

About six along the tracks at Delhi Station

## Indian Flying Fox Pteropus gigantus

About 60 at roost at our lunch stop near Chambal River

## **REPTILES**

#### Marsh Mugger

Up to six on six dates in all water areas

#### Gharial

Three on the River Chambal and two at Corbett

#### **Monitor Lizard**

Four singles at Ranthambhor and Bharatpur

## **Rock Python**

A huge individual curled up in a tree at Bharatpur was folllowed by a much smaller one in a shed at Dhikala

## **Green Pit Viper**

One was watched at Nainital from a distance!



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