

INDIA February 23rd to March 8th 2012

By Peter Findley

Delhi airport is one of the best I've been to – modern, clean and spacious. It was here we encountered the Indian's love of paper-work in triplicate! We were met and driven to our hotel for a rest and then taken to Okhla Reserve for some introductory birding. Okhla is a freshwater barrage with wooded fringes and reed-beds. The guide was excellent and we quickly found 98 species including White-tailed Stonechat, White-tailed Lapwing (one of several stunning new waders for me this trip), Yellow-bellied Prinia and Striated Babbler. The next morning we set off to Bandhavgarh with a manic driver who seemed intent on getting to his destination as fast as possible. Driving in India is interesting – there are rules but no-one seems to know them; roads are useful surfaces for walking, cattle, market stalls or even lying down on; if there's a gap it is compulsory to squeeze into it; there is no such thing as lanes, just gaps; on the few dual-carriageways you can go anywhere and any direction you like; it is compulsory to over-load your vehicle whatever it is; indicators do not exist and it is compulsory to blow your horn at all times!

Bandhavgarh is a 250 sq. km Reserve with 59 Tigers. The Park opens at 0630 and only about 40 jeeps are allowed in. The drivers jostle for position at the entrances. However, total chaos is ensured by the paper-work system used which is random, lengthy, loud and time-consuming. Finally you're off and hurtling over the rocky tracks to find a Tiger. The guides and drivers are very skilled at this and they look for pug-marks in the sand of the tracks and listen for the alarm calls of deer or monkeys. Once a Tiger is spotted all hell breaks loose. 40 jeeps try to get into the same position to get the best view and photo. We had five four-hour game drives and found the Bamira male – the nine-year-old top banana of the whole Park and a perfectly magnificent animal. We felt very privileged.



The accommodation at the Monsoon Forest Lodge was in spacious and well appointed tents. The roads around the area were actually a series of potholes linked by fragments of tarmac but my vertebrae survived the experience.

Next up was Kanha. We stayed at the Kipling Camp which had grounds in the forest, excellent guides who spoke good English, brick cottages, their own Elephant called Tara, two English gap-year students and a manager who was an expert on butterflies. We went for a walk around the camp and found fresh Tiger, Leopard and Wolf pug-marks! Everything here was orderly and calm. The roads around and inside the Park were excellent, smooth and well maintained – bliss! The Park itself is ten times the size of Bandhavgarh and much better organised though still with the same amount of paper-work! It has a range of habitats and is much more open and consequently a wider spread of birds and animals.

We were welcomed by an evening dance troupe and dinner under the stars. The food here was very good and the cottages comfortable and efficient. This was the only place to have a wi-fi connection and we took the opportunity to find out the football scores... Although we only had two drives here and were unable to find a Tiger, we did see and photograph a magnificent male Leopard just behind the jeep. This was the best view of Leopard Rishin, the Lodge Manager, had had for ten years!



Kanha is a wonderful place and I could have spent many days here quite happily.

We travelled to Agra by overnight train. I was assured that we were lucky to get a first-class carriage to ourselves and it was reasonably comfortable. At Agra we were met by our driver for the rest of the trip – Krishna and a very good driver he turned out to be. Visiting the Taj Mahal was an interesting experience. The building itself is spectacular especially in the early morning. The security checks to get into it were exhaustive to say the least, but then it is such a valuable site. From here we went to the Chambal Safari Lodge which is clearly a well established and efficient Lodge. It is a plantation of native and garden plants and trees but is totally surrounded by farmland. The crops being harvested at this time were potatoes and Mustard – a very labour intensive activity.

This little oasis held a variety of woodland birds including Brooke's Leaf Warbler but the main attraction was the river trip to the Chambal River Reserve. Here we saw Gharial, a fish eating crocodile with an elongated snout and vicious looking teeth, Marsh Muggars, huge crocodiles, Indian Skimmers, River Lapwings and the outrageous Greater Thick-knee. Star of the show, however, was the Gangetic River Dolphin on our return. We also had a trip to the Sarus Crane area.



Last place to visit was Bharatpur, a World Heritage Site for its wetland habitats. It has suffered greatly in the last five years by having the rivers upstream dammed for agriculture but this winter water was pumped into it and there had been a modest return to waterfowl numbers. Although much reduced there were still breeding Painted Storks and large flocks of ducks, particularly Garganey. Dusky Eagle Owl, Black Bittern and Sarus Crane were found by our guide and we were also taken to a site for Greater Painted Snipe. Within the Park you are transported around by a cycle rickshaw!

The bird of the trip was here and we photographed it both mornings. A superb candybar of a male Siberian Rubythroat -



We returned to Delhi and flew out on the 8th of March

INDIA CHECKLIST FEBRUARY 23RD TO MARCH 8TH 2012

BIRDS	OKHLA	BANDHAVGARH	KANHA	CHAMBAL	BHARATPUR
Little Grebe (Dabchick)	1		1	1	1
Great Cormorant	1			1	1
Indian Cormorant	1			1	1
Little Cormorant	1		1	1	1
Darter Bird					1
Cattle Egret	1	1	1	1	1
Large/Great/White Egret				1	1
Black-crowned Night Heron					1
Cinnamon (chestnut) Bittern					1
Black Bittern					1
Lesser Adjutant		1		1	
Painted Stork	1			1	1
Asian Openbill	1			1	1

Woolly-necked Stork			1	1	1
Black-necked Stork				1	1
Intermediate Egret	1		1	1	1
Little Egret	1		1	1	1
Purple Heron	1			1	1
Indian Pond Heron	1	1	1	1	1
Eurasian Spoonbill					1
Grey Heron	1			1	1
Sarus Crane				1	1
Black-headed (White) Ibis	1		1	1	1
Black Ibis	1		1	1	1
Bar-headed Goose	1			1	1
Greylag Goose	1				
Lesser Whistling-duck (Teal)	1		1	1	1
Bhraminy or Ruddy Shelduck	1			1	1
Northern Pintail	1			1	1
Common Teal	1				1
Spot-billed Duck	1			1	1
Eurasian Wigeon	1			1	1
Common Pochard	1				1
Cotton Pygmy-goose (Cotton Teal or Quacky			1		
Comb Duck (Knob-billed Goose)				1	1
Garganey	1			1	1
Gadwall	1			1	1
Northern Shoveler	1				1
Tufted Duck	1				1
Ferruginous Pochard				1	
Black-shouldered (Black-Winged) Kite	1	1	1	1	1
Black (Pariah) Kite	1		1	1	1
Brahminy Kite					
Shikra		1	1	1	1
Changeable (Crested) Hawk Eagle			1		
Grey-headed Fish Eagle			1		
Red-headed Vulture		1	1		
Long Billed (Indian) Vulture		1	1		1
Egyptian (Scavenger) Vulture		1	1	1	1
Eurasian Marsh Harrier					1
Crested Serpent Eagle			1		
Common Kestrel				1	1
White-eyed Buzzard		1			
Long-legged Buzzard				1	
Oriental Honey-buzzard				1	1
Booted (Hawk) Eagle					1
Great Spotted Eagle					1
Tawny Eagle				1	1
White-rumped Vulture			1		1
Grey Francolin (Grey Partridge)			1	1	1
Red Junglefowl			1		
Grey (Sonnerat's) Junglefowl			1		1
Indian (Common) Peafowl	1		1	1	1
Brown Crake				1	1
White-breasted Waterhen	1	1	1	1	1
Common Moorhen	1		1	1	1
Purple Swampphen	1				1
Common Coot	1				1
Water Rail					1
Bronze winged Jacana				1	1
Pheasant tailed Jacana					1
Black-winged Stilt	1			1	1
Eurasian Thick-knee (Stone Curlew)			1		
Great Thick-knee (Great Stone Plover)				1	
Indian Courser					1
Small (Small Indian) Pratincole				1	
River Lapwing				1	
White-tailed Lapwing	1				

Red-wattled Lapwing	1	1	1	1	1
Yellow-wattled Lapwing		1		1	1
Little Ringed Plover				1	
Spotted Redshank				1	
Common Redshank				1	
Common Greenshank	1			1	1
Green Sandpiper	1		1	1	1
Wood Sandpiper	1			1	1
Common Sandpiper				1	
Ruff	1			1	1
Temminck's Stint				1	
Kentish Plover				1	
Greater Painted-snipe					1
Brown-headed Gull	1				
Black-headed Gull	1				
Caspian Gull				1	
River (Indian River) Tern	1			1	
Indian Skimmer				1	
Chestnut-bellied (Indian) Sandgrouse				1	1
Black-bellied Tern				1	
Yellow-footed (Yellow-legged) Green Pigeon	1	1	1	1	1
Rock (Blue) Pigeon	1	1	1	1	1
Oriental (Rufous) Turtle Dove					
Eurasian Collared (Indian Ring) Dove	1	1	1	1	1
Red Collared (Red-Turtle) Dove				1	1
Laughing (Little Brown or Senegal) Dove	1	1	1		1
Spotted Dove		1	1	1	
Rose ringed (Ring-necked) Parakeet.	1	1		1	1
Plum-headed (Blossom-headed) Parakeet		1	1		
Alexandrine Parakeet		1	1		
Common Hawk Cuckoo (Brainfever Bird)	1	1	1	1	1
Asian Koel	1	1		1	1
Greater Coucal (Crow Pheasant or Coucal)	1	1	1	1	1
Collared Scops Owl			1		1
Dusky Eagle Owl					1
Jungle Owlet		1	1		
Spotted Owlet	1	1	1	1	1
Mottled Wood Owl					1
House Swift.				1	1
Crested Treeswift		1			
White-rumped Needletail			1		
Pied (Lesser Pied) Kingfisher				1	1
Common Kingfisher		1			1
White-throated (White-breasted) Kingfisher	1	1	1	1	1
Green Bee-eater	1	1	1	1	1
Indian Roller		1	1	1	1
Common Hoopoe	1	1		1	1
Indian (Common) Grey Hornbill	1	1	1	1	1
Brown-headed (Large Green) Barbet	1	1	1	1	1
Coppersmith (Crimson-breasted) Barbet	1	1	1	1	1
Streak-throated Woodpecker			1		
Black-rumped Flameback Woodpecker			1		
Eurasian Wryneck		1	1		1
Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark				1	1
Oriental (Eastern) Skylark			1	1	1
Crested Lark				1	1
Sand Lark				1	
Greater Short-toed Lark					1
Sand Martin				1	1
Plain (Plain Sand) Martin	1	1	1	1	1
Dusky Crag Martin		1			
Barn Swallow				1	
Wire-tailed Swallow		1		1	1
Red-rumped (Striated) Swallow				1	1
Bay-backed Shrike	1				

Long-tailed (Rufous-backed) Shrike	1	1	1		1
Brown Shrike	1				
Black-hooded (Black-headed) Oriole		1	1	1	1
Black Drongo (King-crow)	1	1	1	1	1
Ashy (Grey) Drongo				1	
White-bellied Drongo		1	1		
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo		1	1		
Brahminy Starling (Brahminy Myna)	1	1		1	1
Rosy (Rose-coloured) Starling (Rosy Pastor)					
Asian Pied Starling (Pied Myna)	1			1	1
Common Myna	1	1	1	1	1
Bank Myna	1			1	1
Jungle Myna.					
Rufous (Indian) Treepie	1		1		1
House Crow.	1			1	1
Large-billed (Jungle) Crow		1	1	1	1
Common Woodshrike		1	1		1
Large Cuckooshrike		1	1	1	
Scarlet Minivet			1		1
Small Minivet		1	1		
White-bellied Minivet		1			
Common Iora		1	1		
Red-whiskered Bulbul	1				1
Red-vented Bulbul	1	1	1	1	1
Golden-fronted Leafbird		1	1		
White-eared Bulbul					1
Tawny-bellied (Rufous-bellied) Babbler		1			
Yellow-eyed Babbler	1	1	1		1
Common Babbler	1				
Large Grey Babbler				1	1
Striated Babbler	1				
Jungle Babbler	1	1	1	1	1
Brown-cheeked Fulvetta			1		
Red-throated (Red-breasted) Flycatcher		1	1	1	1
Ultramarine (White-browed Blue) Flycatcher					
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher		1	1		1
Verditer Flycatcher				1	
Grey-headed Canary (Grey-headed) Flycatcher				1	1
White-browed Fantail (Flycatcher)		1	1		
Asian Paradise-flycatcher		1	1		
Black-naped Monarch (Flycatcher)		1	1		1
Zitting Cisticola (Streaked Fantail Warbler)		1	1		1
Grey-breasted Prinia (Franklin's Wren-warbler)		1			
Yellow-bellied Prinia	1				
Plain Prinia (Wren-warbler)	1		1	1	1
Ashy Prinia (Wren-warbler)	1			1	1
Jungle Prinia (Wren-warbler)				1	
Common Tailorbird	1	1	1	1	1
Clamorous (Indian Great) Reed Warbler			1		1
Lesser (Eurasian) Whitethroat	1			1	1
Common Chiffchaff - <i>P. c. tristis</i>	1	1		1	1
Greenish (Dull Green Leaf) Warbler	1	1	1	1	1
Hume's Warbler	1		1	1	1
Brooke's Leaf Warbler				1	
Orphean Warbler					1
Striated Grassbird	1				
Bluethroat				1	1
Oriental Magpie Robin	1	1	1	1	1
White-rumped Shama					
Black Redstart		1		1	1
White-tailed Stonechat	1				
Common Stonechat (Siberian Stonechat)	1	1	1	1	1
Pied Bushchat	1			1	1
Siberian Rubythroat					1
Indian Robin	1	1	1	1	1

Variable Wheatear				1	1
Orange-headed Thrush			1		
Brown Rock-Chat				1	1
Great (Grey) Tit		1	1		
Tawny Pipit		1			
Tree Pipit			1	1	1
Paddyfield (Oriental) Pipit	1	1	1	1	1
Rosy Pipit				1	
Yellow Wagtail	1			1	1
Citrine (Yellow-headed/hooded) Wagtail	1			1	1
White (Pied) Wagtail	1			1	1
White-browed (Large Pied) Wagtail				1	
Grey Wagtail		1	1		1
Thick-billed Flowerpecker				1	
Purple Sunbird	1	1	1	1	1
Oriental White-Eye	1	1	1	1	1
House Sparrow				1	1
Chestnut-shouldered Petronia (Yellow-throated)		1	1	1	1
Black-breasted Weaver				1	
Baya Weaver				1	
Streaked Weaver	1				
Red Avadavat (Red Munia)				1	
Indian (Common) Silverbill (White-throated Munia)	1			1	1
Common Rosefinch				1	1
231 species	98	77	94	142	154
MAMMALS					
Gangetic River Dolphin				1	
Leopard			1		
Tiger		1			
Jungle Cat		1			
Spotted Deer		1	1		1
Barasinga (Swamp Deer)			1		
Gaur			1		
Nilgai				1	1
Samba Deer		1	1		1
Hanuman Langur		1	1		
Rhesus Macaque		1	1	1	1
Five-Striped Palm Squirrel		1	1		1
Wild Boar		1	1	1	1
Muntjac		1	1		
Golden Jackal		1	1	1	
Striped Hyena				1	
Grey Mongoose				1	
Small Indian Mongoose				1	1
Common Palm Civet				1	1
Indian Hare				1	
Indian Flying Fox			1	1	1
Fork-nosed Bat			1	1	1
Greater Mouse-tailed Bat			1		1
Lesser Mouse-tailed Bat				1	1
23 Species		10	14	13	12
REPTILES					
Gharial				1	
Marsh Crocodile				1	
Monitor Lizard					1
Brahminy Terrapin					1
Indian Tent Turtle				1	1
Flat Shell Turtle				1	
Indian Mud-shell Turtle					1
Indian Softshell Turtle				1	
Indian Garden Lizard				1	
Yellow-green House Gecko	1	1	1	1	
Common Smooth Water Snake				1	

11 species				8	4
BUTTERFLIES					
Mottled Emigrant			1		
Common Emigrant			1		1
Three-spot Grass Yellow				1	
Common Mime			1		
Common Indian Crow		1	1	1	1
Striped Tiger					1
Plain Tiger		1	1	1	1
Blue Mormon			1		
Common Evening Brown			1		1
Blue Pansy			1	1	1
Great Eggfly			1		1
White Orange-tip		1	1		1
Yellow Orange-tip			1		1
13 species at least		3	11	4	9

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