

# Birds of Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat

Somewhat overlooked as birders head to the better known Indian birding sites, the western corner of India offers some excellent birding possibilities with a number of exciting and rare species. On this tour we go in search of some birds with very restricted ranges, including the rapidly declining Great Indian Bustard plus Grey Hypocolius, White-browed (Stoliczka's) Bushchat, White-bellied Minivet, Crab Plover, Yellow-eyed Stock Dove, Green Avadavat among our hoped for highlights along with the magnificent spectacle of thousands of Demoiselle Cranes at Kheechnan. In addition, we visit the magnificent Golden Temple, the holiest place of the Sikh religion in Amritsar.

**Days 1-2:** Fly from London to Delhi arriving in the early hours of day 2. On arrival, we take an internal flight to Amritsar and travel to Harike where we begin our birding. Harike is an excellent, extensive area of wetlands that is somewhat neglected by birders but has some great birding. Specialties of the area include White-tailed Stonechat, wintering Mountain Chiffchaffs, Jerdon's and Striated Babblers, Rufous-vented Prinia, Sind Sparrow and Black-breasted Weaver. The rich wetlands host a wide variety of species typical of the region with Oriental Darter, Glossy Ibis, Ruddy Shelduck, Indian Spot-billed and Ferruginous Duck, Red-crested Pochard, White-tailed Lapwing, Pallas's and Brown-headed Gull and Whiskered and River Terns among the many possible wetland species. Overhead, raptors might include Shikra, Marsh Harrier, Black Kite or Greater Spotted Eagle. Wooded and scrubby areas may be host to Olive-backed Pipit, Long-tailed Minivet, Brook's Leaf Warbler or Black-throated Thrush, while a range of other commoner species include Citrine Wagtail, Indian Robin, Common Woodshrike, Hume's Leaf Warbler, and Rufous Treepie,

**Day 3:** We spend the morning at Harike before travelling to Amritsar, where we visit the magnificent Golden Temple, the holiest place of the Sikh religion.

**Day 4:** After breakfast we drive to Tal Chappar, where we go in search of two infrequently encountered specialties: Yellow-

## Dates

Friday November 24th – Saturday  
December 9th 2017

Leader: Chris Bradshaw

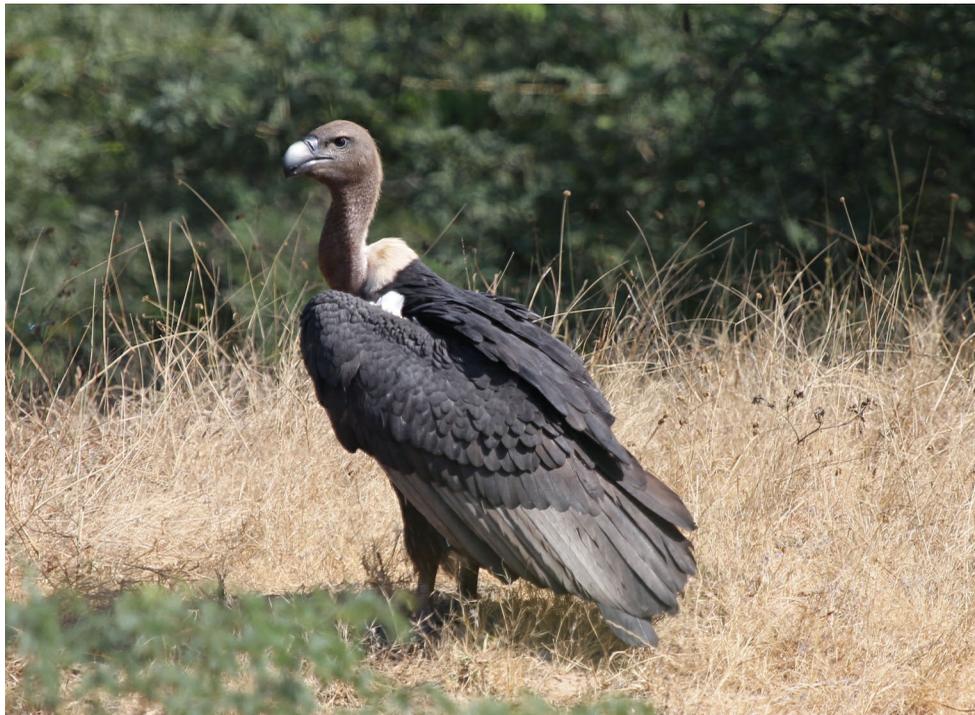
Group Size: 8

Birds: 300 - 330

eyed Stock Dove and Indian Spotted Creeper. Birds of prey may feature Eurasian Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, Steppe and Imperial Eagle and perhaps Red-necked Falcon.

**Day 5:** After a morning birding at Tal Chappar we drive to Jaisalmer. En-route we pause for a late afternoon visit to the now famous village at Kheechnan where we can marvel at the spectacle of thousands of Demoiselle Cranes which migrate to this region from their Central Asian breeding grounds and are fed twice daily by the villagers here. Transfer to Jaisalmer for a three-night stay.

**Day 6-7:** We have two full days allocated for birding in the Desert National Park where our main target is the magnificent, but sadly rapidly declining endemic, Great Indian Bustard. This area remains one of its last strongholds but even here is becoming harder to find each year. We also look for another endemic, the rare White-browed (Stoliczka's) Bushchat, whilst other species we might find in this desert area include Cream-coloured Courser, Hoopoe Lark,



**White-backed Vulture** Photo: Chris Bradshaw

Plain Leaf Warbler, Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Bimaculated Lark, Asian Desert Warbler and Trumpeter Finch. Raptors are a feature of the park with White-rumped and Red-headed Vulture, Short-toed, Tawny and Eastern Imperial Eagles, Long-legged Buzzard and Laggar Falcon all being possible. In the late afternoon of day 7 there is an opportunity for a tour of the beautiful old city of Jaisalmer.

**Day 8:** After breakfast we travel to Siana and arrive in time to undertake an initial exploration of the area. In the evening, we will have the chance to head out to search for Leopard as this area is a stronghold for them and featured in David Attenborough's *Life of Mammals*. We also have a chance of seeing Jungle Cat and perhaps even Striped Hyena and Wolf.

**Day 9:** We spend the whole day in the Siana area exploring the desert plains and rocky hills. We hope to find Rock Bush Quail,

Painted Sandgrouse, Indian Vulture, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark, Large Grey Babbler and Striolated Bunting.

**Day 10:** After breakfast we travel to Mount Abu. On arrival at Mount Abu we explore the fields and scrub around the outskirts of the town as we go in search of our main target, the Green Avadavat. This is a declining Indian endemic that is classified as vulnerable by Birdlife International and difficult to find in much of its range. Other birds we may find include Red Spurfowl, Dusky Crag Martin, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Chestnut-shouldered Petronia and Indian Scimitar-babbler.

**Day 11:** We spend the morning birding at Mount Abu and then travel to Zainabad situated in the Little Rann of Kutch. There should be some time for some initial birding on arrival.

**Day 12:** We spend the day exploring the



**Green Avadavat** Photo: Chris Bradshaw

Little Rann of Kutch. The Rann of Kutch is a unique landscape that was once part of the Arabian Sea, but became separated and is now a huge featureless plain encrusted with salt and inundated with water during the rains. These areas attract an excellent selection of birds that include dry country species such as Hoopoe and Sykes's Larks, Black-crowned Sparrow-lark, Chestnut-bellied and Spotted Sandgrouse, Indian and Cream-coloured Courser and, with luck, Macqueen's Bustard. Pools and marshy margins attract a variety of wetland species, including White and Dalmatian Pelican, Painted, Openbill and Woolly-necked Storks, Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Common Crane. Waders include Small Pratincole, Yellow-wattled Lapwing and perhaps Sociable Lapwing or Collared Pratincole. Overhead, raptors are a feature with Short-toed Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, White-eyed Buzzard, Steppe, Greater Spotted and Booted Eagle and Red-necked Falcon amongst a wide variety of possible species. Other birds to be found in the area include Barred Buttonquail, Indian Courser, Wire-tailed Swallow, Bay-backed Shrike, Red-

breasted Flycatcher, Ashy Prinia, Blyth's Reed and Booted Warblers, Bluethroat and Chestnut-shouldered Petronia and Baya Weaver.

**Day 13:** After some final birding in the Little Rann of Kutch, we drive to Nakatrana, where arrival is in the evening.

**Day 14-15:** We have two full days birding in the area of Bhuj. There are many species to be found here, but we focus on finding a number of very special birds that are present including Grey Hypocolius which is a regular winter visitor. Other uncommon species that can be reliably found include White-bellied Minivet, the rare and very localised White-naped Tit and Stoliczka's Buschat. Further possibilities are Syke's Lark, Variable, Desert and Red-tailed Wheatear, Marshall's lora and Grey-necked Bunting. We also visit some coastal wetlands where our focus will be to find the ever popular Crab Plover, which is present on this coast. Other wader possibilities include Terek Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers and Great Thicknee.

**Day 16:** We have some final birding in the Bhuj area before returning to the airport to catch a flight to Mumbai. Here there will be the opportunity to have a wash and change before dinner and catching our flight back to the UK, where arrival will be the next morning.

## Prices

Ground Price: £3,695  
Single room: £350  
Deposit: £350  
\*Air Fare: £640

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

**Not included:** drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature. Visa to enter India.

*\*Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*