

Northern plains and Himalayan foothills

One of our favourite destinations is this classic Northern Indian itinerary covering the world famous birding sites of Corbett, Bharatpur and Nainital. We begin with a visit to Corbett National Park which nestles in the foothills of the Himalayas and is one of the most famous of India's tiger reserves. It is also home to a wonderful array of forest and grassland birds. The area around the hill station of Nainital, situated a little over 2000m above sea level, is well known for the quality of the classic Himalayan birding that it offers. The Chambal River offers the chance of Indian Skimmers and Ganges River Dolphins, whilst world famous Keoladeo National Park at Bharatpur is home to a fantastic selection of breeding and wintering waterbirds, a wonderful variety of raptors and many highly sought-after species. Along with a day spent enjoying the cultural delights in Agra, which includes a visit to the Taj Mahal, this tour is a must for anyone with any interest in India's, indeed Asia's, wonderful birds.

■ Chris Bradshaw has travelled extensively in the Indian Subcontinent, visiting almost annually since 1998 and has led numerous tours to all parts of India.

Day 1: Fly to Delhi, where arrival is in the early hours of the morning.

Day 2: After some rest in a hotel we begin our journey across the flat Gangetic Plain to the foothills of the Himalayas. Black Kites of the form *govinda* are common around Delhi along with Eastern Cattle Egret, Indian Pond Heron, Red-wattled Lapwing, White-throated Kingfisher, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Common and Bank Myna, House Crow and Red-vented Bulbuls. We make a stop on the Ganges where species such as Sand Lark, Brown-headed and Pallas's Gull, Ruddy Shelduck, and Pied Bushchat are likely. With luck we may encounter a White-tailed Stonechat or River Tern. Continuing our journey we reach our hotel near Ramnagar where we have a two-night stay.

Day 3: We begin our birding in the environs of our hotel situated close to Corbett Park and the Kosi River. The spectacular landscape of the Kosi River is home to Crested Kingfisher, Plumbeous and White-capped Water Redstarts, Brown Dippers, Little Forktail, Wallcreeper and hopefully Ibisbill. Flocks of White-crested Laughingthrushes are often obliging here. Walking along the forest edge brings us a

Dates

Friday January 11th - Thursday

January 24th 2019*

*Ranthambhore extension until
January 27th

Leader: Chris Bradshaw

Group Size: 8

Birds: 330-360

superb selection of Himalayan birds. Roaming the forest are feeding flocks, with Lemon-rumped and Grey-hooded Warblers, Yellow-bellied and White-throated Fantails, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrikes, Bronzed Drongos and Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch all regular features of such flocks. We spend time searching for some secretive species that inhabit the dense undergrowth, with Black-chinned Babbler, the delightful Chestnut-headed Tesia and Scaly-breasted and Nepal Wren-babblers among our targets. Flowering shrubs attract the stunning Crimson Sunbird and Orange-bellied Leafbirds. The area is good for owls, with Jungle Owlet and Brown Fish-owl often seen and with luck perhaps also Tawny Fish-owl. Among the many other species we hope to encounter are Red-breasted Parakeet, Pallas's Fish-



Altai Accentor

Photo: Chris Bradshaw

eagle, Grey Treepie, Lineated and Blue-throated Barbets and Scarlet Minivets.

Days 4-5: After two nights in the Kumeria area we head into Corbett National Park, with a two-night stay at Dhikala. The park comprises some wonderful forests with open grassland areas. As we travel slowly through the park we hope to encounter groups of Red Junglefowl and Kalij Pheasants picking amongst the leaf litter. Woodpeckers might include Streak-throated, Fulvous-breasted, Lesser Yellownape and with luck Great Slaty, whilst further possibilities include Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Large Cuckooshrike, Ashy Bulbul, Long-tailed Minivet and White-throated Laughingthrush. We will linger in the grasslands as we search for Black Francolin, Bright-headed and Zitting Cisticolas, Lesser Coucal, Siberian Stonechat and perhaps the rare Hodgson's Bushchat. The park is excellent for raptors and we have excellent chances of encountering Cinereous and Red-headed Vultures, Changeable Hawk-eagle, Lesser Fish-eagle and Osprey. Other species we look for include White-tailed Rubythroat, Aberrant Bush-warbler, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-babbler, Maroon Oriole, Great and Oriental Pied Hornbills and Crested Treeswift. The park is of course inhabited by reasonable numbers of Tigers and we

have a good chance of seeing this magnificent cat. Other mammals should include Indian Elephant, Chital, Sambar Deer and Hog Deer.

Day 6: After some final birding in Corbett we make our way out of the park and travel into the foothills to the former hill station of Nainital for a three-night stay.

Day 7-8: We visit a number of areas in the Nainital area as we search for some wonderful Himalayan specialties. At Sat Tal we explore an area of fields good for Rufous-breasted and Black-throated Accentors, White-capped Bunting, Black-headed Jay and Russet Sparrow, with Grey-winged Blackbird and Chestnut Thrush also being possible. Flowering shrubs attract Green-tailed and Black-throated Sunbirds, whilst further gems might include Golden Bush Robin and Himalayan Red-flanked Bluetail. Woodland undergrowth is inhabited by small groups of Chestnut-crowned and Rufous-chinned Laughingthrushes, and Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-babblers. Exploring the forests around Pangot we will enjoy birding with a stunning Himalayan backdrop and expect to encounter Rufous Sibia, Brown-fronted Pied and Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers, Green-backed and Yellow-browed Tits, White-tailed Nuthatch, Orange-barred Warblers and Fire-breasted



**Chestnut-bellied
Nuthatch**

Photo: Chris Bradshaw

Flowerpeckers. We will make a particular effort to locate some of the trickier species such as Cheer and Koklass Pheasant and Altai Accentor. Raptors in the area include Steppe Eagle, Lammergeier and Himalayan Griffon Vulture.

Day 9: After some final birding in the Nainital area we travel to Kathgodam, making birding stops en-route. At Kathgodam we take an overnight train to Kashganj.

Day 10: On arrival at Kashganj we have a three-hour journey to Jarar where we have a one-night stay at Chambal Safari Lodge. In the afternoon we have a boat trip along the Chambal River where our principal target is the declining Indian Skimmer, which continues to occur in good numbers here. We also hope to find Great Thick-knee and Black-bellied Tern, along with Gharial and Marsh Muggler Crocodiles and with luck Ganges River Dolphin.

Day 11: Morning birding around the vicinity of the Safari Lodge where we might see Brown-headed Barbet, Spotted Owlet and Yellow-wattled Lapwing. Later we travel to Agra where we visit Agra Fort and the incomparable Taj Mahal at sunset. After visiting the Taj Mahal we travel to Bharatpur where we have a three-night stay.

Day 12-13: The world famous Keoladeo National Park is home to a wonderful selection of birds and if the water levels are good we will see large numbers of wintering waterfowl. Leisurely birding around this wonderful protected area, we will easily see in excess of 100 species daily. Larger waterbirds breed in the park and include Sarus Crane, Asian Openbill, Black-necked and Painted Storks. Large numbers of raptors occur with Greater Spotted, Indian Spotted and Eastern Imperial Eagles all regular. Dry thorny scrub attracts the endemic Marshall's lora, whilst open dry fields attract Rufous-tailed Larks, Blyth's and Richard's Pipits and with luck Indian Coursers and Sociable Lapwings. Waterside vegetation is inhabited by Indian Reed and Blyth's Reed Warblers, Smoky Warblers and with luck Black Bittern. Seeing night-active birds at their daytime roosts is one of the particular joys of this park and we have excellent chances of seeing Indian Scops Owl, Dusky Eagle Owl, Large-tailed and Indian Jungle Nightjars, and with luck perhaps also Brown Hawk Owl or Oriental Scops Owl. Other possibilities include Tickell's and Orange-headed Thrushes, Indian Golden Oriole, Greenish, Hume's and Brook's Leaf Warblers, Indian Stone Curlew and a great deal more besides.



Spotted Forktail Photo: Chris Bradshaw

Day 14: After a final morning birding around Bharatpur we catch an afternoon train to Delhi where we arrive in the early evening. After freshening up and enjoying a final evening meal we head to the airport in order to catch our return flight to London.

Ranthambhore extension: Although we have a good chance of seeing Tiger at Corbett, we offer this extension to Ranthambhore for those who wish to increase their chances further and experience some slightly different birding opportunities.

Day 14: After some early morning birding at Bharatpur we take a late morning train to Sawai Madhopur where we arrive at lunchtime and in the afternoon take our first drive into the park.

Days 15-16: Each day we have morning and afternoon drives in the park. Our main focus will be to search for Tigers, but a wide variety of other mammals are present and in addition to the regular Indian deer species we may be lucky and encounter Sloth Bear, Leopard or Hyena. The birding here is also good and, as this area is drier than most other areas visited during the rest of the tour, has a different range of species. Open country near our hotel attracts Variable Wheatear, Southern Grey Shrike, Tawny Pipit and with luck we might see Rock Bush Quail. Small pools are visited by Painted Sandgrouse and at dusk we

may see Savanna Nightjar. In the park, lakes and ponds attract small numbers of ducks and shorebirds, Brown Crake and Pheasant-tailed Jacana. Persistent scanning of the towering cliffs along the entrance road might reveal the presence of an Indian Eagle Owl whilst we should see the endangered Indian Vulture. With luck we might see White-naped Flameback or Painted Spurfowl and away from the park we may visit other areas in search of larks, hopefully including Hume's Short-toed, Greater Short-toed and Bimaculated.

Day 17: We have a final morning in the park and then take an afternoon train back to Delhi, where we will be able to enjoy a final meal and freshen up before going to the airport to catch our flight home.

Prices

Ground Price: £3,950
Single room: £490
Deposit: £400
*Air Fare: £510
Ranthambhore extension: £1,195
Single room: £195
Deposit: £150

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

Not included: drinks, insurance, and items of a personal nature, air passenger duty taxes and fuel surcharges. Visa to enter India

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