

India – Goa at Leisure

Birds, Beaches & Bhajees

Friday 05 February – Saturday 20 February 2010

Leaders: Mike Witherick and local guides

Friday 26 November – Saturday 11 December 2010

Leaders: Roger Lawrence and local guides

2010 Cost: **£2,449** single room supplement **£340**

Friday 04 February – Saturday 19 February 2011

Leaders: Roger Lawrence and local guides

2011 Cost: **£2,549** single room supplement **£350**



Rufous Treepie

The State of Goa is situated on the west coast of India, bordered by Maharashtra to the north and Karnataka to the south and east. It is a former Portuguese colony, but has the style of a Mediterranean enclave in an Indian setting. Goa has long been popular as a beach holiday destination but it is only comparatively recently that the birding potential of this small area has come to the attention of European birdwatchers. We visit at the best times of year for birding, as many Palearctic visitors are wintering and the forests will produce many mixed feeding flocks for us to sort through. This sixteen-day itinerary will be taken at a leisurely pace, which befits the times of year and the temperatures. The distance travelled is never great, but as in most of India, the road system is quite slow and in need of repair! The birds to be encountered include many new species for those who have previously visited Northern India, and we also have many interesting waders and gulls to sort through on each high tide. We have also included a two-night stay at the Backwoods Camp, where we can experience two whole days of birding in a new setting, with the chance of some local specialities. We have visited Goa 18 times in the last few years and we thoroughly recommend our choice of hotel and the local birding guides we use. All of our groups have found that the locals are friendly and the beaches and birding are superb. The cuisine is a mixture of western and eastern, but the seafood is amongst the best available anywhere in the world. Travel with us to this delightful area and see why this destination is becoming increasingly popular with the well-travelled birdwatcher.

ITINERARY

Day 1

We catch the afternoon charter flight from London and fly to Goa.

Days 2 to 15

We arrive in the morning into Goa and transfer to our hotel near Baga Beach. Our time during the next two weeks will be spent making a leisurely exploration of Goa. The area near to the hotel holds many good sites for birding and initially we can begin to acquaint ourselves with the common species. Our first birds should include Red-wattled Lapwing, White-breasted Waterhen, Common and Black-capped Kingfishers, Asian Koel, Common Tailorbird, Black and White-bellied Drongos, Common and Jungle Mynas, Paddyfield Pipit and Yellow Wagtail.

The majority of the excursions we make will be within 90 minutes drive of the hotel. Carambolim

Lake is close by and normally filled with hundreds, if not thousands, of water birds. Many egrets and herons are present and we may find Asian Openbill, Lesser Adjutant and Woolly-necked Storks, Lesser Whistling-duck, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Comb Duck, Purple Swamphen, Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacanas and Small Pratincole. The sandy beaches that make the area famous are excellent for watching waders at strategic times, depending on the tides. Both Lesser and Greater Sandplovers will be present, along with Pacific Golden and Grey Plovers, Whimbrel, Common Redshank and Terek Sandpiper. The sand banks in the estuary at Morji are a roosting place for many seabirds and if conditions are right we can sift through the large flock to pick out both Lesser and Great Crested Terns, Pallas's, Heuglin's, Slender-billed, Black and Brown-headed Gulls. The sand dunes and fields behind the beach often hold migrant plovers to challenge our identification skills.

We can take one of the boat trips up the Zuari River, as this will allow us close views of many of the water birds. White-bellied Sea Eagles will be sailing overhead, and kingfishers include Lesser Pied, Stork-billed, White-throated, Black-capped and the rare Collared. Both Green and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters should be perched along the riverbank and we may be lucky enough to see a Slaty-breasted Rail scurrying through the twisted roots of the mangroves. Then of course there will also be the Mugger Crocodiles!

Fort Aguada, built in 1612, stands on the top of a headland. There is water on three sides, with a river creek, the River Mandovi and the Arabian Sea, where we look for the resident pods of Indo-pacific Humpbacked Dolphins. The area around the fort is often a site for Indian Peafowl and Blue Rock-Thrush.

We shall search some drier areas for Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Rosy Starling, Eurasian Hoopoe, Indian Robin, Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark and Small Skylark. House Swifts feed over these areas in large numbers and the flocks are worth checking for Indian Swiftlet and a variety of hirundines.

The reserve at Bondla is just over an hour's journey away. This is the smallest of Goa's three forest reserves, but it often produces the best birding. Much of the vegetation is mixed deciduous and evergreen forest and there is normally water present throughout the year. The terrain is hilly as it lies in the foothills of the

Western Ghats. Some of the species to look for here are Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Brown Fish-Owl, White-rumped Shama, Emerald Dove, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Rufous Woodpecker, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Small and Scarlet Minivets, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher and Black-naped Monarch.

Two nights will be spent at the Backwoods Camp, about 90 minutes drive from the hotel. This camp is now large enough to accommodate our groups and each tent has its own private facilities. It is located close to the Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park (normally called Molem). It covers about 240 sq km of monsoon forest of both deciduous and evergreen vegetation. The main species we hope to find here in the early morning and late evening are Indian Pitta, Sri Lankan Frogmouth, the elusive Malabar Trogon, Blue-eared Kingfisher, Black and Grey-headed Bulbuls, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Rufous-bellied and Black Eagles, Mountain Imperial-Pigeon, Indian Blue Robin, White-bellied and Heart-spotted Woodpeckers, Malabar Parakeet and Velvet-fronted Nuthatch. Birding here will be exciting; the forest also holds a few mammals although most are wary of humans but troops of Common Langurs are normally inquisitive enough to put in an appearance and the sharp-eyed should spot a Malabar Giant Squirrel.

Water plays a key role in birding around Goa and there are many areas near to the hotel where we can look for water birds. Greater Painted-snipe, Cinnamon Bittern, Pintail Snipe, Clamorous Reed Warbler and Ruddy-breasted Crake are all present. Freshwater pools can have Indian Shag, Little Cormorant, Darter, Green-backed Heron, Indian Pond Heron (Paddybird), Great, Intermediate, Little and Cattle Egrets and Stork-billed Kingfisher. Even small areas of woodland can provide such spectacular species as Oriental Magpie Robin, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Coppersmith Barbet, Purple-rumped and Crimson-backed Sunbirds and Black-rumped Flameback.

Throughout our stay we shall try and birdwatch in the cool morning and late afternoon, giving us time around the hot midday period to eat and take a siesta. The distances travelled will, on average, not be great, and the leader will strive to make this a relaxing holiday, filled with great birdwatching.

Day 16

We fly from Goa and arrive into London in the afternoon.



Pheasant-tailed Jacana



Brown Hawk-Owl

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Days 2-15	Baga Beach, with two nights at Backwoods
Day 16	Depart Goa

Party Size

Maximum of 12 clients.

Accommodation

Comfortable accommodation in twin/double and single rooms, with private facilities. Tented accommodation with private facilities at Backwoods Camp.

Transport

By coach.

Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, airport taxes and tips.

Excludes

Video and camera fees charged at many parks.


Gratings

 Good/Tented

 230

 Warm to Hot

 Low

 Special

 Relaxed

 Good

 Easy

 Charter



Common Langur