

# India – Southern Tour

## Western Ghats



**Saturday 20 November – Saturday 04 December 2010**

Leaders: Tony Pym and local guides

2010 Cost **£2,899** single room supplement **£400**

**T**he beautiful landscape of Southern India is dominated by several ranges of ancient volcanic hills known collectively as the Western Ghats. The region is one of the most important areas for endemic species in Asia. There are 16 birds unique to this area including Nilgiri and White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, Black-chinned, Kerala and Wynaad Laughingthrushes and Nilgiri Pipit plus several others shared only with Sri Lanka. We shall aim to see most of them on this tour. A few mammals like the charming Smooth-coated Otter, Giant Squirrel and Travancore Flying Squirrel, the magnificent Gaur and the shy Mouse Deer and possibly even Asian Elephant, all more difficult to see elsewhere, should be encountered. It is perhaps surprising that the lush evergreen and mixed deciduous forests, the grass covered slopes and the tea plantations with their wooded gullies or sholas have not until recently been visited by birders as frequently as areas in Northern India. In the days of the Raj however, the British established several hill stations, such as Udhagamandalam (formerly Ootacamund or "Ooty"), in these lovely hills whose climate was a pleasant relief from the fierce summer heat of the plains. The pace of life is slower and the people gentler than one finds in the north of the country.

On this tour we visit three states, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala and some of the best and longest established wildlife sanctuaries in the sub-continent. Our transport will mainly be by bus, but between Chennai, formerly Madras, and Bangalore we travel in the air-conditioned comfort of a Shatabdi Express train to ensure we fully savour the delights of the real India.

### ITINERARY

#### Days 1 & 2

We board a scheduled flight from London to Chennai (Madras), where we arrive next day and transfer to our hotel. We visit the Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary, where we should see Painted Stork, Great White Pelican, Indian Pond Heron, Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Oriental Darter, Black-crowned Night-Heron and many other species that will become familiar to us during our tour.

#### Day 3

Today we leave Chennai by a Shatabdi Express train for Bangalore. We are met on arrival and transfer to Kokkre Bellur ('village of herons'). We spend the morning watching Asian Openbills and Spot-billed Pelicans nesting in trees around the houses. We hope to see Glossy and Indian Black Ibis, Bar-headed Goose, Indian Spot-billed Duck, Cotton Teal, Indian Grey Hornbill, Rufous-tailed Lark and Zitting Cisticola. Later we transfer to Mysore where we stay overnight. On our way we take a short detour to visit the delightful Ranganathittu Wildlife Sanctuary which we explore by boat to look for Great, Indian and Little Cormorants, Oriental Darter, Purple

Heron, Great White, Intermediate, Eastern Cattle and Little Egrets, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Asian Openbill, Woolly-necked and Painted Storks, Great Thick-knee, River Tern, Black-headed Ibis, Western Marsh Harrier, Crested Serpent-eagle, Osprey, nesting Streak-throated Swallows, White-spotted Fantail, Tickell's Blue, Brown-breasted and Asian Paradise Flycatchers and Tawny-bellied Babblers. We should also see basking Marsh Crocodiles (Muggers). We spend the night in the Chittaranjan Palace, built for Mysore's princesses, now lovingly restored as a small hotel. With its extensive gardens, formal lawns and shaded pergolas, and fringed by majestic trees, the hotel is an oasis of calm.

#### Days 4 & 5

We travel to the Mudumalai wildlife sanctuary, part of Mudumalai National Park. Situated in the Nilgiri Hills at an altitude of 900m (3,000 ft), this sanctuary covers an area of 321 sq. km and the main attractions here are the herds of Chital (Spotted Deer), Guar, Elephant, Wild Boar, Sambar and a variety of birds and reptiles. Theppakadavu is an elephant camp in the heart of the sanctuary. We stay in a hotel located close to the park amidst thick, lush green woods and bamboo bushes for two nights. In the afternoon we look for species

such as White-rumped Shama, Tickell's Blue and Verditer Flycatchers, Puff-throated Babbler, Nilgiri Flowerpecker, Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike, Small and White-bellied Minivets, Grey-headed and Yellow-throated Bulbuls, Vernal Hanging Parrot, Heart-spotted and White-bellied Woodpeckers. We spend the next day in the Mudumalai area with morning and afternoon walks looking for more birds in the adjoining area. Plum-headed and Malabar Parakeets, Loten's, Small, Purple and Purple-rumped Sunbirds, Lesser Yellow-nape, Greater and Black-rumped Flamebacks, Crested Treeswift, White-cheeked Barbet, Bonelli's, Black and Rufous-bellied Eagles, Grey Junglefowl, Yellow-eyed Babblers, Yellow-wattled Lapwings are some of the birds that we might see here. Later, after dark, we go for a jungle drive on the outskirts of the park trying to see some mammals such as the Asiatic Elephant, Gaur, Wild Boar, and with luck, even an elusive Leopard or Tiger.

#### Day 6

We leave Mudumalai and transfer to Udhagamandalam (Ooty), one of the hill towns of the British Raj. After freshening up at our hotel we proceed to Cairnhill Reserved Forest and spend the next couple of hours searching for some of the southern Indian endemic or near endemic birds, such as Black-and-orange, Kashmir and Nilgiri Flycatchers, Black-chinned Laughingthrush and Indian Blackbird. We might also see Orange-headed Thrush, Olive-backed Pipit and Tickell's Leaf-warbler. If time permits we may carry on further to the Muthorai area and look for Nilgiri Woodpigeon, Syke's and Malabar Larks and Olive-backed and Richard's Pipits.

#### Days 7 & 8

Today we drive to Munnar for a two-night stay at a hotel with scintillating view of the Chinnakanal Waterfalls. After reaching Munnar we will have a leisurely afternoon and take an easy and relaxed walk around the hills to look for Nilgiri and White-bellied Blue Flycatchers, Kerala Laughingthrush, Greenish and Western Crowned Warblers as we amble along the paths of this beautiful, hilly town hemmed in by magnificent soaring mountains and surrounded by tea plantations. The next day we visit the Eravikulam National Park where we look for Nilgiri Pipit, White-bellied Blue Robin, Indian Blue Robin, Kerala Laughingthrush, Painted Bush-



White-breasted Kingfisher



Painted Stork



Chital

### Outline Itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Depart London
<b>Day 2</b>	Chennai (Madras)
<b>Day 3</b>	Mysore
<b>Days 4-5</b>	Mudumalai
<b>Day 6</b>	Udhagamandalam
<b>Days 7-8</b>	Munnar
<b>Days 9-10</b>	Periyar
<b>Days 11-13</b>	Thattekad
<b>Day 14</b>	Kochi
<b>Day 15</b>	Depart Kochi, arrive London

### Party Size

Maximum of 12 clients.

### Accommodation

Comfortable accommodation in twin/double and single rooms with private facilities. The tents at Thattekad are spacious and have en-suite toilets and insect proofing.

### Transport

By coach and train.

### 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.


### Gradings

 Good/Tented

 220

 Warm to Hot

 Moderate

 Special

 Moderate

 Good

 Moderate

 Scheduled



Hoopoe

Quail, Long-billed Pipit, Tytler's, Tickell's, Large-billed and Western Crowned Leaf-warblers and raptors such as Bonelli's and Booted Eagles and Common Kestrel. We take a packed lunch and hope to eat this looking at the locally easy to find (but globally endangered) Nilgiri Tahr. We then visit a bamboo area where we may see Grey-headed Canary, Black-and-orange Flycatcher and Nilgiri Flowerpecker. We stop by a stream where we have a second chance to look for Nilgiri Flycatcher, Black-chinned Laughingthrush, Indian Blue Robin, White-bellied Blue Robin, Kerala Laughingthrush and another endemic species, Indian Rufous Babbler.

### Days 9 & 10

We travel from Munnar to Periyar Tiger Reserve and on the way look for Yellow-throated Bulbul. We stay in Periyar for two nights. The Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary at Thekkady in Kerala, is one of the 29 Project Tiger Reserves in India. The terrain is basically hilly, and the only flat areas of the sanctuary are the grasslands at the edges of the lakes. Periyar also supports a very impressive variety of birds with a very good opportunity to see a few more of South India's endemic birds such as the White-bellied Treepie, Wynaad Laughingthrush, Indian Rufous Babbler, Mountain Imperial-pigeon, and Rusty-tailed Flycatcher. Other important birds include Black Baza, Black Eagle, River Tern, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher and White-rumped Shama. We take a morning hike in the forest to explore the grassland area to look for Grey Junglefowl, Great Hornbill, Black Baza, Brown Hawk-owl, Jungle Owlet, Small Minivet, White-cheeked Barbet, Rusty-tailed, Blue-throated, Red-breasted, Red-throated and Asian Paradise Flycatchers, Indian Golden and Black-hooded Orioles and Grey-fronted Green-pigeon. The mammals that we might see include the elusive Mouse Deer, Sambar, Spotted Deer, Malabar Giant Squirrel and Bonnet Macaque. After lunch we take a two-hour boat ride on the lake to try and see Gaur, Asiatic Elephant, Sambar, Wild Boar, Smooth-coated Otter, Grey-headed Fish-eagle, Crested Serpent-eagle, Tawny and Black Eagles and Great Cormorant.

### Days 11 to 13

We take a last walk in the Periyar Tiger Reserve to catch up with any species that we might have missed earlier. After breakfast we proceed to Thattekad Wildlife Sanctuary, where we stay for three nights at a tented camp. Here we look for the much sought after Mottled Wood-owl, Forest Eagle-owl, Malayan Night Heron, Ceylon Frogmouth, Dollarbird, Rusty-tailed Flycatcher, Grey-headed Bulbul, Nilgiri Woodpigeon and several other rare and endemic birds. Thattekad also has a very good diversity of mammals including Indian Wild Dog, Asiatic Elephant, Travancore Flying Squirrel, Sambar, Chital and Civets. We stay at the resort for three nights and the birds that can be seen here include, Black-rumped and Greater Flamebacks, Streak-throated, Indian Pygmy and Rufous Woodpeckers, Ashy Woodswallow, River and Whiskered Terns. We have two days to explore Thattekad and spend full days out taking a packed lunch. Birds that we might see here include Great Pied and Malabar Grey Hornbills, Malabar Trogon, Ceylon Frogmouth, Jerdon's, Grey and Great-eared Nightjar, Blyth's, Paddyfield and Richard's Pipits and several species of owls. White-cheeked Barbet, Rusty-tailed, Blue-throated, Tickell's Blue, Red-breasted, Red-throated, Black-naped Blue Monarch and Asian Paradise Flycatchers should provide added interest. There will be a good possibility of seeing White-bellied Woodpecker, White-bellied Treepie, and White-bellied Blue Flycatcher amongst other endemics. Later, after dark, we may take a birding walk to try to see nightjars and owls.

### Days 14 & 15

We depart Thattekad today and aim to reach Kochi about midday. We stay at a comfortable hotel for our last night in Kerala. Later in the day we have the opportunity to explore the local attractions such as the Jewish Synagogue, the market and Fort Kochi. After this we can see the Chinese fishing nets at sunset and a Kathakali performance. The next morning we transfer to the airport and catch our flight back to London, where we arrive later the same day.