

ORNITHOLIDAYS' TOUR TO INDIA – SOUTHERN TOUR

Christmas & the New Year

19 December 2006 – 02 January 2007

A Personal Diary

Tuesday, 19 December

We met at Heathrow's Terminal 3, a small group sadly minus two Ornitholidays regulars, one of who had been taken ill on Sunday. The early afternoon Emirates flight to Dubai took off more or less on time and we were soon tucking in to a tasty lunch to fortify us for a six and a half hour flight.

Wednesday, 20 December

The connecting flight from Dubai to Chennai (formerly Madras) was almost an hour late and there was a long, hot wait on arrival to get through immigration control but Avijit, our Indian guide for the tour, was waiting for us patiently. We were soon on our way to our hotel through the busy morning traffic in our bright yellow Tempo Traveller minibus with Ajith our smiling, cheerful driver at the wheel. Keen to waste no time we met at midday after a freshen up, collected a packed lunch and set off for Vedanthangal, a large heronry and one of India's oldest reserves given legal protection in 1798. It was 85km. from the city, a journey that was to take over two hours. We soon learned to measure journeys in time taken rather than distance in kilometres! A brief stop en route produced Asian Palm Swifts, an Intermediate Egret and three Asian Openbills, rather bizarre storks whose bills meet only at the tip and Ken saw a Black-winged Kite but the rest of us would have to wait to see that delightful little raptor.

We had our spicy meal before entering the reserve to begin the serious birding. Even as we ate Avijit pointed out a noisy gang of Yellow-billed Babblers, a species occurring only in South India and Sri Lanka. Ken spotted an Indian Golden Oriole and a Coppersmith Barbet, two colourful interruptions to our repast.

Vedanthangal was amazing – a wetland with small islands covered in bushes and *Barringtonia* trees all packed with waterbirds. Spot-billed Pelicans, Painted Storks, Asian Openbills and Little Cormorants on nests with young, Eurasian Spoonbills, Black-headed Ibis, Black-crowned Night-herons and weird Oriental Darters all jostled for space. As the sun began to set many more cormorants, a flock of Glossy Ibis and masses of Eastern Cattle Egrets flew in to roost. On the water there were Northern Pintail and several Garganey plus a Common Moorhen that Helen drew our attention to. To add a little extra spice, a Spotted Owllet looked lazily down at us through leaden lids from a hole in a waterside tree, looking rather as we felt, as tiredness began to take its toll. As we made for the gate a Southern Coucal, two spotty female Asian Koels and a Rufous Treepie, a sort of colourful version of our Magpie, watched our departure.

As we began our drive back to the hotel two tight, well-behaved flocks of ducks, mainly Indian Runners, approached the bus being shepherded along the road followed by an equally orderly flock of goats, somehow seeming surreal and unfamiliar in our tiredness.

We made a brief stop at a grassy area where a small group of Paddyfield Pipits engaged our attention, a family that Marian found less than exciting and Helen found a couple of Grey Francolins to keep us on our weary toes. The rest of the journey back was, to say the least, tedious, the heavy evening traffic making progress very slow so most of us took the opportunity to doze. It was 19.30 before we reached our hotel. Over a buffet diner we began to get to know one another but we were all only too pleased to get back to our rooms for some much needed sleep.

Thursday, 21 December

The night was short if sweet. Our wake-up call came at 04.00, our bags were collected at 04.30 and we left a quarter of an hour later. Ajith had driven our bus overnight to our next destination but we were going on to Mysore by train this morning so another bus and driver transferred us from the hotel to the railway station. We travelled on the 06.00 Shatabdi, the top class air-conditioned Indian trains where one's ticket includes

food and refreshments. When we arrived at the station it was raining, the only wet weather of the tour. Red-coated porters put our bags onto a trolley, took them to our coach and then loaded them onto the luggage racks. Then followed considerable haggling with Avijit over their payment, but all was sorted out and the train left on time. A litre of bottled mineral water was brought to each of us followed by a 'tea kit' then breakfast as the train passed through countryside of rice paddies and sugar cane, impoverished villages and small, crowded towns set in a semi-arid landscape with outcrops of boulder-strewn granitic hills breaking up the farming scene. Everyone enjoyed the experience even if some were a bit disappointed not to see people on the carriage roofs or hanging out of the doors, the image one has at the mention of Indian trains. Unfortunately the combination of grime and tinted windows made both birding and photography difficult. Despite this we managed to see Woolly-necked Storks, Indian Black Ibis, Indian Rollers and Black Drongos on the journey. At Bangalore (the name having been changed just a few months ago to Bangaluru which, believe it or not, means "city of boiled beans"!), the IT capital of India, many of our fellow passengers departed. It was a half empty train that pulled in to Mysore Central at 13.15 where Ajith was waiting for us with the spotlessly clean and cool air-conditioned bus. Our splendid hotel was very close to the station so it was only a few minutes drive. In contrast to Chennai's congested chaos, Mysore has wide, tree-lined avenues, attractive architecture and is altogether less polluted, calmer and more pleasant. It was rather a pity not to be able to spend more time here.

After a short break we were soon birding again. The afternoon location was Ranganathittu Wildlife Sanctuary less than half an hour's drive from the hotel. This was a fabulous place, a man-made lake fed by the River Kaveri surrounded by beautifully manicured gardens but full of birds. Purple and Purple-rumped Sunbirds, Oriental Magpie Robins, Indian Grey Hornbills, Greenish and Tickell's Leaf Warblers, Indian Golden Oriole, Common Iora and White-browed Wagtails came and went. Denise found us a lovely Tickell's Blue Flycatcher behaving perfectly for all to see.

We were then rowed slowly around the lake past rocky islets on which stood several Great Thick-knees and splendid River Terns with their bright yellow bills and red legs, all very tolerant of our close approach. We also got very adjacent to a couple of impressive Muggers (Marsh Crocodiles) who gave us inviting, toothy smiles, revealing their awesome dentition, but they slipped into the water when we got too close.

We had hoped to see Streak-throated Swallows here but this is not their time to breed so they were conspicuous by their absence. We did see the last season's mud nests slung beneath overhanging rock ledges a few metres above the water, but that was as close as we were to get to a "tick"! However, White-throated, Lesser Pied and Common Kingfishers perched obligingly on overhanging branches and in the trees were nesting Asian Openbills and Little Cormorants with Indian Shags and Great Cormorants close by to study the identification differences. Oriental Darters sat with hanging wings and reptilian necks (Indians call them snake birds). Eurasian Spoonbills stood like candles on one large tree and one or two Purple Herons added to the aquatic variety. A fabulous white morph male Asian Paradise Flycatcher, tail twice as long as its body, appeared briefly in the waterside tangle of branches while overhead the sky was filled with Black and Brahminy Kites and an occasional Western Marsh Harrier. A perched Crested Serpent Eagle was difficult to see in the tangle of twigs and branches as we slipped past but we would get far superior views of this impressive raptor later in the tour. One tree had noisy roosting Indian Fruit Bats almost the size of a buzzard when they flew restlessly about. We were out on the water for almost three interest-packed hours, a truly magical experience.

Once ashore, although the light was beginning to fail, we still managed to add four new species to our rapidly growing list before we left this wonderful place to drive back to Mysore. All were common Indian birds but were our first encounters with them. Pied Bushchat, Common Tailorbird, Laughing Dove and Ashy Prinia, in my opinion the most attractive of the *Prinia* group.

The drive back to base was considerably easier and more pleasant than last night's journey. After a freshen up we met at 19.30 for another tasty meal in nice surroundings and convivial company, a fitting end to a most enjoyable if rather hectic day, but we were ready to retire for a longer rest by 21.30. No one could doubt that this was not one of Ornitholidays' 'At Leisure' tours, but the pace would slacken a little from now on.

Friday, 22nd December

Our wake-up call at 06.30 preceded breakfast half an hour later and by 07.45 we were on our way to our next destination, Mudumalai. The “newspaper ritual” followed as we drove away from Mysore. There was always good-natured banter every morning between Avijit and Ajith over the buying of a daily newspaper. Ajith always liked to have his paper, in Malayalam, to keep up with world events and to give him something to read on his long vigils awaiting our return to his bus from our birding activity.

Frequent stops en route at likely looking birding locations produced an excellent list of sightings by the end of the journey. Whilst the distance between Mysore and Mudumalai was not great, the condition of the road surface was poor and progress was slow. Our first stop was at a large lake or ‘tank’ not far out of Mysore. One of our first new birds was a very smart Bronze-winged Jacana. Other water birds included Indian Spot-billed Duck, Northern Shoveler, Glossy Ibis, the extraordinary Purple Swampphen and our first waders – Wood and Common Sandpipers and Black-winged Stilts. Avijit heard the unmistakable song of a Zitting Cisticola in sedge close to where we were standing and the bird eventually obliged by showing itself. A Blyth’s Reed Warbler was less elusive.

Three Tawny Eagles in flight justified another stop as we drove through the semi-arid, partly agricultural landscape with low terraced paddies being harvested and the rice threshed and winnowed to rid it of its husks. There was no question of mechanisation here! Harvested bean vines were carefully laid out on the road for passing traffic to do the threshing for the labourers and herds of goats, sheep and cattle were being moved about in search of fresh, if sparse and rather scarce pasture. The scene was probably almost as it had been for centuries, apart from the traffic, of course.

On the opposite side of the road we spent quite a long time chasing pipits, an occupation not completely to Marian’s liking! Several sat on overhead wires and much debate ensued as to their identity. There were certainly two species involved and we finally settled for Blyth’s and Paddyfield. There were also plenty of Ashy-crowned Finch-larks, not easy to see on the dusty soil, their plumage being good camouflage, but were much easier when they flew up briefly before landing again and disappearing. It was Ken who spotted the very smart Tricoloured Munia among the Finch-larks, a single bird and the only one of its kind that we were to see on the tour.

Near a village called Hangala we got off the bus and ate our packed lunch then spent half an hour in the hope of seeing harriers. No joy with the raptors in this heat and at this time of day. A party of Large Grey Babblers by the roadside, beautiful Bay-backed, Brown and Long-tailed Shrikes and on the opposite side of the road near a reservoir, Indian Black Robins and a Hume’s Whitethroat, split from Lesser Whitethroat, provided continual interest. A rather oddly behaved warbler feeding on the ground and not too clear to observe was later to be identified as a Booted Warbler. Helen saw a White-browed Bulbul and managed to point it out to the rest of the group.

We eventually drove back into Tamil Nadu state and entered the Bandipur National Park. Stops along the road produced beautifully colourful Small Minivets, Oriental White-eye and Ken was particularly pleased to find the diminutive Indian Pygmy Woodpecker, a species he had failed to see in Sri Lanka. Further on at a bridge we clambered down to bird a small stream in quite thick forest, much of it bamboo thicket. Our first Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher of the tour was easy to see and was very approachable. There was also a Yellow-browed Bulbul, Oriental White-eyes and more Small Minivets moving through in a feeding flock, but Avijit was unable to find a Brown Fish-owl known to roost here. Back up on the road Little Swifts, Indian Swiftlets and Crested Treeswifts flew about and, as we were about to continue our journey to our resort at Masinagudi, Avijit’s keen eyesight resulted in excellent ‘scoped views of a very distant Asian Fairy-bluebird on a tall bamboo some distance away.

Our cottages at Casa Deep Woods, although rather basic, were in a superb forest setting and well away from the hustle and bustle of traffic and general mayhem with only the sounds of the forest to lull us off to sleep.

Saturday, 23rd December

Helen was first out before dawn broke. I joined her and we had a cup of delicious masala chai before the rest of the early brigade joined us at the main building for a pre-breakfast stroll. Our reward for being keen

was a Spotted Owlet and a noisy group of Indian Scimitar-babblers although a better view was required. I saw a superb Blue-faced Malkoha just beyond the main buildings complex but unfortunately it disappeared into a tangle of vines before I could call the rest of the group to see it.

Breakfast was at 07.00. We then had a short wander round the grounds of the camp before driving off to do a longer forest walk. This interlude produced a Brown-breasted Flycatcher, a Large-billed Leaf-warbler and eventually after much patient searching everyone managed to see a couple of Puff-throated Babblers creeping about at the base of the huge bamboo clumps like little rufous-crowned thrushes.

Kuttappan, a very experienced local guide that Denise and I had birded with last year, joined us. The short drive took us to some nice open forest where birding was much easier. At first Vernal Hanging-parrots were rapid fly-pasts, disappointing particularly for Marian but immediately we got out of the bus there were Brahminy and Grey-headed Starlings that were easy to see. A Pale-billed Flowerpecker, for some not the most exciting bird of the day, was the first of several sightings of this tiny canopy dweller. In complete contrast Kuttappan noticed a huge and very impressive young Crested Hawk-eagle fly into a large tree. It remained for long enough to be scoped for everyone to admire before flapping powerfully away. A bird familiar a little closer to home – a Hoopoe, flew through and Bronzed Drongos, the smallest of the Indian *Dicrurus* species and really a forest dweller, were conspicuous as they sallied forth like large flycatchers to capture insects. Indian Pygmy Woodpecker and a Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker, several beautiful Indian Nuthatches, much more colourful than ours, moved through in a feeding wave with Gold-fronted Leafbirds. Tawny-bellied Babblers took a little more effort to see well as they moved through the *Lantana* and other dense bushes but wonderful endemic Malabar Parakeets advertised their presence noisily and perched obligingly. Our first White-browed Fantail characteristically swung its tail from side to side as it flew from tree to tree. Helen spotted a nice male Black-headed Cuckooshrike and, not to be outdone, Marian found a Spotted Owlet, like our Little Owl, quite diurnal in habit.

Hume's Whitethroat and a couple of Yellow-eyed Babblers tested our endurance and Kuttappan found a Grey-breasted Prinia. Our first Black-naped Hare dashed away and a Black Eagle heralded several large raptors – Crested Serpent-eagle, Oriental Honey-buzzards and a Short-toed Eagle. For me, however, the most satisfying sighting was of four White-bellied Minivets, not an easy species to find and one of two target species in this area. Back at the bus a Red-throated Flycatcher performed well as we debated where to eat our packed lunch. The consensus was to take our food back to the resort to eat it sitting down in greater comfort. It had been a most successful and satisfying morning's birding.

The sought-after bird of the afternoon was looked for in a different sort of habitat. Another fifteen minutes drive took us to short turf grassland with scattered bushes. Here Yellow-wattled Lapwings were our first new species. To Marian's horror there were also Blyth's and Paddyfield Pipits in abundance plus a Malabar Lark, a Western Ghats endemic. There were several Booted Warblers, like the one we saw on the way to Mudumalai, preferring to feed on the ground. After a little searching Kuttappan heard the bird we had come here to see. In a small ditch there was a Jerdon's Bushlark, a lark found only in southern India and Sri Lanka. It behaved beautifully and was not only unusually easy to observe, but reasonably simple to photograph too.

Flushed with success we returned to the bridge where we ended our day's birding yesterday. As we descended to the stream two lads were about to end a chicken's days for the table but had the sensitivity to let us get well past before causing its demise. Another search for the big owl proved as fruitless as yesterday's effort but we did see a Brown-cheeked Fulvetta and there was a family of Wild Boar. The memorable event here was watching a troop of Capped Grey Langur Monkeys (Grey Langur has now been split into six distinct races). They followed one another in a rapid and amazingly acrobatic chase through the trees and across the stream, making huge leaps from bamboo to bamboo. Round and round they raced quite obviously just for the sheer fun of it.

We ended the day at a small pond with a dam and weir. As we arrived a Green Sandpiper flew off and a Malabar Whistling-thrush disappeared rapidly before we could really see it properly. A Blue-faced Malkoha was equally quite difficult too but there were plenty of Racket-tailed Drongos and Malabar Parakeets.

It was dark by the time we got back to our resort. The log call at dinner revealed that we had seen 40 new species today, not a bad day's birding.

Sunday, 24th December

Several of us met at 06.30 in the bamboo thicket by the stream that ran through the resort's land where Avijit successfully taped out a female Indian Blue Robin followed by a couple of Indian Scimitar-babblers that were much easier to see than yesterday's birds.

By 07.50 we had eaten breakfast, packed the bus and were on our way to Udhagamandalam, also known as Ootacamund but thankfully known to Indians and foreigners alike as plain Ooty. This was one of the many hill stations used by the British to escape from the Indo-Gangetic Plains in the heat of the summer at the time of the Raj. Standing at about 2,300m above sea level, it used to be a very fashionable town but its former glory as 'The Queen of the Hills' is now somewhat faded. Until the 1970's 'Snooty Ooty' was home to rather snobbish British inhabitants who chose to stay on after Independence. Although only 30km. away, the road soon begins to climb steeply past endless tea 'gardens' eventually giving way to small, very neat market garden plots where carrots and a whole variety of temperate vegetables were growing. Thirty six very sharp and steep hairpin bends had to be negotiated before we finally arrived. As we neared the town we passed groups of Toda, a local hill tribe, the men wearing beautifully embroidered white shawls.

On the way and before the road began to climb, we made several stops to bird. The first, having seen a couple of Grey Francolins by the roadside, produced Yellow-throated Sparrows, our second Black-headed Cuckooshrike, a hovering Black-winged Kite and two superb Bay-backed Shrikes. At the bridge, now so familiar to us, a Black-naped Blue Monarch was seen well and a second visit to the dam and pool produced an Asian Brown Flycatcher and several very bright Orange Minivets. We drove past several Cheetal (Spotted Deer), Bonnet Macaques and Capped Grey Langurs.

We reached our rather splendid hotel at about 11.30. Our intention was to drop our cases and go straight out again but the rooms were not ready and we rather wasted an hour and a half before we collected a packed lunch and set off. We were making for Emerald Shola (a shola is a forest). It proved rather difficult to find but the effort was well rewarded. It was a beautiful setting, wooded country above a large reservoir. After we had eaten our lunch, we walked along the road from the bus and saw first a Nilgiri Flycatcher, then a stunning Black-and-orange Flycatcher two much sought-after endemics. Square-tailed Black Bulbul was another species that we had not seen so far before we struck off up a steep path that took us to a grassy hillside with shola on either side. After a lot of patience and much effort we managed to get reasonable views of the endemic Nilgiri Blue Robin. What used to be called White-bellied Shortwing has now been 'split'. This bird has orange flanks and has an incredibly restricted range in Tamil Nadu and was a species that I had not seen before so was to cost me a round of drinks later!

The delay at the hotel meant that we had far too little time to spend here; the location's potential was enormous. It was now getting late and by 18.30 it is quite dark so reluctantly we had to return. We had not quite finished however. As we walked back towards the bus a Pied Flycatcher-shrike put in an appearance and Helen and Marian saw two Velvet-fronted Nuthatches.

Christmas celebrations were in full swing when we got back to the hotel. Ooty has a large Christian population and familiar carols were being played as we went for dinner, a huge buffet with plenty for the 'spiceaphobes' to choose from as well as tasty chilli-packed dishes and it was another jolly, if rather short evening after yet another pretty successful day.

Monday, 25th December

Christmas Day, the like of which most of us would not have experienced before. We left the hotel just after 05.30 for what was to be a 12-hour drive to Munnar. The problem was that the road had been badly damaged in the last monsoon and necessitated a long diversion via Kotagiri, cutting out Coonoor, to reach Coimbatore. Here we had a most welcome buffet breakfast at 09.30 and an hour's break from the bumpy driving. Just outside Coimbatore we stopped for some birding at a lake full of waterfowl where we saw many Northern Shoveler, Garganey, many Eurasian Coots, Spot-billed Ducks, a single Spot-billed Pelican,

assorted egrets, Purple Swamphens but best of all a couple of distant Cotton Teal necessitating the use of a telescope to be sure of their identity.

A lunch stop for 45 minutes in Chinnar National Park produced birds as well as food. No matter where you are in India from the centre of Delhi to the most remote rural areas, interesting birds can be found. Helen found us a Malabar Woodshrike, a Western Ghats endemic, Ken spotted a Black-hooded Oriole, Helen and I watched a White-browed Bulbul and we all had excellent views of a pair of Copper-smith Barbets excavating a nest hole. An Alpine Swift flew over and Marian found a Gold-fronted Leafbird.

As we drove on, first through the Anamali Hills then the Cardamom Hills, tea bushes all neatly clipped and with gaps to give the pickers access to every bush, created a wonderful mosaic in green across the steeply sloping landscape. Monoculture dominated the landscape, some of the tea 'gardens' covering what looked to be impossibly steep slopes. Pied Bushchats were ubiquitous but occasionally we encountered Little Swifts and Indian Swiftlets. Two 'Steppe' Buzzards added a little variety; one nicely perched atop a shade tree, like all the rest stripped of its lower branches for fuel wood. We also passed through several fenced plantations of valuable sandalwood.

Our hotel was 20km beyond Munnar. Just before we reached it we stopped at some road works where Avijit knew there were likely to be some new species. Neither he nor we were disappointed. Instantly we entered the shola we came upon about 15 Nilgiri Woodpeckers, a scarce and difficult endemic species to find or to see well. We all saw at least one of them very well as they came in to roost – luck was with us, for they rarely use the same roost regularly. Another endemic with an incredibly restricted distribution in South India, a Kerala Laughingthrush, also put in a brief appearance but we did not see it well. We would have to wait until tomorrow for a better view. Marian and Ken saw a pair of Grey Junglefowl as we clambered down the slope but it was a brief view and they did not stay for long enough for us all to see them. Senthyl, who would provide us with a local guide tomorrow, met us briefly in the shola before we continued to our rather large hotel, our home for the next two nights.

The restaurant was crowded and full of people intent upon enjoying themselves but we were rather the party poopers and went off to bed long before the festivities had died down.

Tuesday, 26th December

The hotel was in darkness when we made our way down to Reception. Two night watchmen were asleep behind the desk but quickly woke and put the lights on. There was some delay in collecting our packed breakfast and it was 06.30 before we left, still in darkness. Dawn broke very rapidly as it always does in the tropics, and we had tantalising glimpses of birds along the roadside. Almost certainly we passed Malabar Whistling-thrush and Blue-headed Rock-thrush and a Nilgiri Woodpecker flew past.

A very excited group of Indians, shouting and pointing up the hillside prompted our first stop. In Malayalam they told Ajith that elephants had just passed through but what they were pointing at was just a large black basaltic rock among the trees!

We eventually reached Munnar and picked up our local birder guide, Sajoo. Although he had only been birdwatching for two years he was very sharp-eyed and seemed to know his birds pretty well. A special permit had been obtained to allow us entry to the Eravikulam National Park at 06.30. This was two hours before the official opening time, when there would be an influx of noisy tourists, but all the delays had eroded this advantage somewhat and it was 07.30 by the time we arrived at the park entrance and transferred to a park bus. We did not drive all the way up to the main bus park but walked slowly up the steep hill listening for calls in the roadside scrub. The scenery was mountainous and impressive, a privilege to be here in the peace and tranquillity of a superb landscape.

At a likely looking patch of dense shola, Avijit tried taping White-bellied Blue Robin but although we saw brief glimpses of a blue bird skulking in the dense tangle below the road, it could have been any one of several species. However we did see another species that is difficult to see in South India – Indian Blackbird (*Turdus simillimus*), recently split from Eurasian Blackbird (*T. merula*) and whose behaviour is nothing like our familiar garden bird.

All too soon bus loads of shouting tourists began to arrive and we began to despair of seeing much at all. However, we need not have worried, the birds obviously being quite used to the disturbance and we were soon watching a key endemic, Nilgiri Pipit. The first birds were rather distant but then several appeared right by the roadside and on overhead wires giving really good views. Ken had views of an Indian Yellow Tit, an Indian endemic, but the rest of us would have to wait to see this one. Pied Bushchats were ubiquitous and very numerous and a Eurasian Sparrowhawk was watched catching a small *passerine* and flying off with it. Several Nilgiri Flycatchers were in the roadside trees and we had brief views of Kerala Laughingthrushes. Plain Prinia was another addition to our trip total too.

A female Blue Rock-thrush perched on an electricity pole and remained there for a long time surveying the streams of excited people filing non-stop up the road in search of Nilgiri Tahr, an Western Ghats endemic ungulate similar to Chamois. Marian and Ken were keen to see this mammal and, accompanied by Avijit strode on up the road where we were told there was a group of them that were easy to watch. Hazel was happy to sit on a wall enjoying the scenery and chatting to passing Indians so Helen, Denise and I joined her and awaited their return.

After we had eaten our breakfast we descended again and drove back towards Munnar. We stopped before reaching the town and in a shola we had a magical half an hour or so with good views of White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, a male Indian Blue Robin and Blue-headed Rock-thrush. In a marshy field beyond the shola we had flight views of two Black-headed Mummies, but not good enough to tick.

Afterwards, in a very comfortable hotel, we had a quiet drink in cool and very pleasant surroundings before having a couple of hours free to explore the town. Some of the group went with Sajoo to visit his church and a covered market, and then they had a ride back to our bus in an auto-rickshaw or tuktuk.

At 1600 we all met and then drove through the town to a dam at the start of a hill road leading to Sunset Point, Cardamom Shola and Pothamedu Village. Buses are not allowed any further than the dam so we transferred to four auto-rickshaws and drove to the shola to start birding again. A Nilgiri Flycatcher was seen well by everyone and a local drew our attention to a huge stick insect that was at least 10 inches long, motionless in a rose bush outside a resort. Several Common Rosefinches and many Oriental White-eyes moved through the magnificent trees and, as we set off back down in our fleet of tuktuks, a group of Indian Rufous Babblers, a Western Ghats endemic and usually very skulking and not easy to observe, sat out in full view on a rock.

We ended the day's birding at a roadside cave where masses of Indian Swiftlets were flying in to roost, avoiding the passing traffic by swooping in almost vertically against the rock face. We watched an obliging Dusky Striped Squirrel, a rare Western Ghats endemic mammal, before dropping Sajoo en route and returning to our hotel.

Wednesday, 27th December

Some of us did a bit of pre-breakfast birding outside the hotel where vocal Lesser Hill-mynas with their peculiar long yellow wattles, were feeding in a fruiting fig. There were also Common Rosefinches that Helen had been watching. Hill Swallows were perching on the gable ends of the hotel and a White-cheeked Barbet called incessantly but gave rather poor views. As we drove through the seemingly endless tea gardens after leaving the hotel on a narrow continuously winding road, Pied Bushchats were perched at regular intervals on any convenient post.

Our first stop before leaving the area completely was in a superb shola under-planted with cardamom where 15 minutes out of the bus produced a multitude of birds – Lesser Hill-mynas, Vernal Hanging-parrots, Square-tailed Black Bulbuls, Yellow-browed Bulbuls, Malabar Woodshrikes, Orange Minivets and a Grey-fronted Green Pigeon. Various other crops included pepper, vanilla and coffee; the red beans lay out on the road to dry.

A diversion from our route at Pooparai took us to a vast, spectacular, almost vertical escarpment called Bodi Ghat. We had hoped to find Yellow-throated Bulbul here but it was not to be. However, we did have close views of a splendid male Common Iora in full breeding plumage. One of Ken's 'birds of the day'. Loten's

Sunbird with its enormously long, curved bill was new for the tour as was Jerdon's Leafbird and Nilgiri Flowerpecker. Gold-fronted Leafbirds and Indian Rufous Babbler (seen only by Helen and Marian who also had a brief view of an unidentified mongoose sp.), a Black Eagle and two Oriental Honey-buzzards added to the diversity.

Back on our route to Thekkady we stopped again when we came upon a photo opportunity where tea plucking was in progress. Then followed a long, tortuous and often hair-raising drive to our hotel on the Thekkady peninsula inside the Periyar Tiger Reserve where we arrived at about 14.00. Lunch was followed by birding for the rest of the day around the hotel and boat landing on Periyar Lake, a vast man-made body of water on the boundary between Tamil Nadu and Kerala. This proved most productive despite hordes of people walking down the main road to the boat landing for a trip on the lake. A 'tonking' Malabar Barbet was seen well by all of us. Malabar White-headed Starlings, a breeding pair of Woolley-necked Storks, Nilgiri and a Thick-billed Flowerpecker and a wonderful Emerald Dove, found by Denise right below us as we stood on the balcony of the information centre, were all splendid value. The dove was particularly pleasing as they are forest birds and are often extremely difficult to see well. A Racket-tailed Drongo and a Common Hawk-cuckoo, also known as the Brain-fever bird all remained perched for long enough for prolonged viewing.

Thursday, 28th December

Birdwatching before 07.00 was a waste of time. Ken joined Denise and me at 06.30 but in the half hour before breakfast we didn't see a bird!

After breakfast we donned the leech socks provided for us. Leeches, although harmless as they do not carry any diseases, can be a nuisance. In the event only Helen had a close encounter and that was one on her hand, but it was flicked off before attaching itself and feeding at her expense. We squeezed past the long queue of people waiting to buy their boat tickets and went down to the water's edge. We boarded a raft consisting of 10 bamboo poles lashed together and, and Raj Kumar, our local guide, hauled on a rope to pull us across an arm of the lake. With much wobbling and hilarity we reached the other shore. Here in wonderful dense forest our morning trek began in earnest. Our first encounter was with endemic Nilgiri Langurs, black primates with a fringe of yellowish hair on their heads and around their faces. Birding got off to a slow start but soon began to liven up. Three Greater Flamebacks together in a dead tree and a rather poor view of a Malabar Grey Hornbill got the morning's tally off to a good start. The call of Racket-tailed Drongos as they flew noisily through the magnificent trees preceded fine views of a superb Black Baza perched above us, one of the prettiest Western Ghats forest raptors. A silk cotton tree in full bloom but with no foliage to hide the birds coming in to feed produced endemic Flame-throated Bulbuls, Plum-headed Parakeets and a female Indian Golden Oriole.

A really obliging Orange-headed Thrush posed for photographs. Beautiful White-bellied Treepies, another noisy forest dweller, passed through. Next, Common Flamebacks were nice to see for comparison so soon after their larger cousins and Ken saw a hen Grey Junglefowl. Raj Kumar then found a noisy, but incredibly skulking, flock of endemic Wynaad Laughingthrushes in an extremely dense thicket. Sensibly, Hazel and Denise sat themselves down on a log to wait while the rest of us, often bent double commando-style, followed Raj Kumar and Avijit into the tangle of often rather thorny shrubs to try to get a decent view. Eventually, after at least half an hour's struggle we all succeeded. Meanwhile in passing Helen had seen an Asian Paradise Flycatcher, I saw a White-bellied Blue-flycatcher and Hazel and Denise had seen what was almost certainly a Hair-crested Drongo.

By now it was already 11.30 and we had been trekking for four hours so we began our return to the lake. Our route took us across wet ground and along the shore at the head of this branch of the lake. Two Oriental Honey-buzzards circled overhead, three Ashy Wood-swallows were perched on overhead wires while, in the water two Smooth-coated Otters were fishing and seen quite well through the telescopes. After another hilarious raft crossing, this time with Avijit at the helm, we headed back to our hotel for lunch.

A siesta followed until 15.30. Boats leave the landing in the afternoon at 16.00 and a lake trip was on the itinerary. I have to say that, based on previous experience, lake trips on a boat crowded with noisy holidaymakers is usually a bit of a waste of time as far as wildlife-watching is concerned, though pleasant

enough. How wrong can one be? A Brahminy Kite drifted over our heads as we sailed past Great Cormorants nesting on half-submerged tree stumps and Oriental Darters hanging their wings out. An Osprey used another stump as a perch and a Crested Serpent-eagle was half hidden in a tree as we sailed for home. However, it was the mammals that made this a memorable trip. Two family groups of Indian Elephants, 14 in total, eight Gaur, incorrectly called Indian Bison and the largest *Bovine* in the world, many Wild Boar, Sambar, the biggest Indian deer and two more Smooth-coated Otters were all approached close enough for us to see well. The most unusual sighting was of a Stripe-necked Mongoose. We got superb views of this. The largest member of the *Herpestids* in Asia, this animal can kill prey up to the size of a Mouse Deer.

A night trek ended the day so an early dinner was necessary. The night's magical activity started from the park entrance at just after 19.00. By now it was dark and we were all issued with torches by the ranger. It was a fabulous starry night with a half moon giving enough light to cast a shadow. We set off on foot, accompanied by two rangers, one with a rifle. Fireflies danced and winked by the roadside. Ken almost trod on a Black-naped Hare that startled us as it fled into the darkness. Owls were calling all around us, or so it seemed. Three different species of small owl responded to tapes superbly. We had surprisingly good views, first of an Indian Scops Owl close by in a tree, then a very ginger-coloured Oriental Scops Owl stared down upon us and looked like a tiny cat, its ears erect, and finally a Jungle Owlet came to investigate. All were seen in the combined light of three torch beams. It was most memorable experience for those of us who decided to participate.

Successful as this had been, we were not finished yet. A little further on, Avijit heard a Jerdon's Nightjar calling. This first flew over our heads then eventually perched on the top of a broken-off sapling very close to where we were standing and gave us superb viewing. Well pleased with ourselves, we returned to the road where a larger night bird, a Brown Hawk-owl, sat high but clear, and finally, even higher in one of the giant forest trees, a large Travancore Flying Squirrel came to investigate our torchlight, its tail arching above its head as it stared at us with indignation and an Indian Muntjac moved slowly away and into the forest. Just before we ended our night's experience, our guides led us off the road to a large, hollow tree. We had to climb into it one at a time and look up inside it in the torchlight. There high up, were three quite large roosting bats that he said were Salim Ali's Fruit Bats, an endangered species with a very restricted range at the southern end of the Western Ghats. What an evening!

Friday, 29th December

After breakfast we had a shorter walk with Raj Kumar, this time mainly along the road running the length of the Thekkady Peninsula and the adjacent forest. No raft laughs this morning! Our target was Red Spurfowl, a very shy and elusive species and difficult to see. Only Marian, who was right behind Raj, managed to get a very brief view of two birds that he found, but we did have superb views of Ken's favourite – Malabar Trogon. Raj Kumar found a female first, then a wonderful male, a gem of a bird. We also all had good views of a new woodpecker for the tour, Lesser Yellownap. At this time in the morning, birds are feeding and at their most active and a wave brought Indian Pygmy Woodpecker, Malabar Woodshrike, Common Iora, White-bellied Treepie and Loten's Sunbird into our field of view. A Malabar Whistling-thrush by the lake, although in dense scrub, was eventually seen reasonably well by everyone.

Out in the open by the shore we could see the forest in profile and birds were easier to see well. Although high in the canopy, Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, Orange Minivets, Ashy Drongos and Flamethroated Bulbuls were all in a fruiting tree. A Heart-spotted Woodpecker, another little gem, was much lower in the foliage but not easy to see and some missed out, but we would see this tiny woodpecker again later in the tour. Usually a lot more difficult to see well, a most obliging near relative of the sunbirds, a Little Spiderhunter, perched close to us and Helen even managed a good flight shot of this long-billed tiny grey and yellow bird. In the same tree an Indian Yellow Tit was also seen well by all. On the walk back to the road through the forest, Raj Kumar pointed out three nice flycatchers – first a Tickell's Blue, then much less colourful but equally distinctive, a Brown-breasted Flycatcher and finally as we reached the road, typically high in the canopy, a Rusty-tailed Flycatcher. Ken spotted a Large-billed Leaf-warbler in the same tree.

We were back in the hotel by 09.30 to complete our packing prior to departure. It had been a good morning so far. An hour later we set off for what was to be a long journey to our next destination but stopped briefly to do a bit of shopping in Kumily. The road was narrow and winding. As we descended, tea 'gardens' gave

way to rubber and pineapple plantations There were also spice ‘gardens’ where two vine crops, pepper and vanilla, one of the most expensive of the spices, grew side by side. It was a fascinating journey. We had two stops, one planned and one necessary if not contemplated. The latter was to change a punctured rear wheel where, amazingly there were no birds but the former was a stop to eat our packed lunch, much more pleasant and productive. This was at an open, high area where a line of crosses led up the hillside close to the village of Nullatini. It was covered by tussock grassland where we had hoped to see Indian Broad-tailed Grass-warbler. This we failed to do despite really hard searching by Avijit, but we did add Long-billed Pipit and Booted Eagle to our list and had nice views of a hovering Black-winged Kite.

The drive on to Thattekkad took the rest of the afternoon and it was getting dark when we arrived at Birds’ Lagoon Resort, its lights twinkling by the shore in an inlet of the Periyar River. We would have to wait until morning to appreciate the beauty of our accommodation setting not far from the Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary. Although billed as a tented camp in the itinerary, nothing could have been further from reality. Our very well appointed rooms were in a new block and we were the very first guests to use them. The fittings glistened with pristine newness but the plumbing was not quite finished. However, a large bucket of piping hot water was delivered to our room on request first thing in the morning. Before dinner, Eldose, the local birding expert and probably one of the best and most knowledgeable birders in southern India, came to see Avijit and me with up-to-date information. Denise and I had birded with him on two occasions in the past so knew him quite well but unfortunately he was not available to show us round.

Saturday, 30th December

We had eaten our breakfast and left the resort to bird at the Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary before dawn broke so we still had not seen our new surroundings in daylight. At the entrance we met Sudish, our guide for the next two days by which time it was light enough to commence birdwatching.

The day’s list opened with two Black-rumped Flamebacks, a couple of Large Cuckooshrikes, then a catch-up on Ken – several Black-hooded Orioles, all before we went through the gate. This augured well for a good morning. A Brown Shrike, a White-breasted Waterhen, a small flock of Lesser Whistling-ducks and a Lesser Yellownappe, more Black-rumped Flamebacks, Bronzed and Racket-tailed Drongos and Grey-headed Starlings then continued our nice sightings. Excitement mounted when Sudish heard an Indian Pitta. Although we all saw it, the bird was in deep shade and did not show its vivid colours off to the best advantage. Grey Junglefowl were spotted running up a bare rock outcrop and we all caught up with Hazel and Denise when we scoped a distant, but perfectly good Hair-crested Drongo. There was a Brown-breasted Flycatcher in the canopy above us as we climbed up the sloping sheet of volcanic rock outcropping through the forest. This created a clear area where we had a better vista in order to watch Palm Swifts overhead and to see Black-naped and Black-hooded Orioles together. There were several very large pigeons flying above us but they were little more than silhouettes against the bright blue sky. Even when one perched close by, the colours were not easy to make out and we would have to wait until tomorrow to have good views of this superb bird - Green Imperial Pigeon.

From back on the path again we saw a plethora of species, Asian Fairy-bluebird, Plum-headed Parakeets, Lesser Hill Mynas, Indian Pygmy Woodpecker, and a pair of Jungle Owlets nestled up together. Unfortunately a Draco or Gliding Lizard disappeared too quickly for everyone to see it but a Small Sunbird was more cooperative and we all had a good look at this lovely little bird. A Black-naped Blue Monarch put in a brief appearance. Despite having seen so many wonderful birds, without question the morning’s highlight and one of the birds of the tour was yet to come. Sudish called us to follow him and then pointed at just above eye level into a bush right by the path. The bird was so close that at first we all looked beyond it. It was a much sought-after Ceylon Frogmouth no more than three metres away. It sat motionless, occasionally lazily opening an eye to give us a disdainful glance, its cryptically coloured plumage being its protection. This bird is beautiful in its ugliness, eyebrows and feathers sticking out in all directions around its huge, broad bill. As though this was not amazing enough, a couple of hundred meters further on Sudish took us to a pair of these extraordinary birds again at eye-level sitting side by side across a branch facing in opposite directions, absolutely motionless. The male’s plumage was grey-brown, wonderfully waved and spotted with white and his mate was much more ginger in colour. Incredible!

Paling into insignificance, Malabar White-headed Starlings and Flame-throated Bulbuls were almost ignored as we made our way back to the bus. Avijit then found a pair of Indian Scops-owls and Sudish called up a pair of Brown Hawk-owls, all 'scoped easily and in full daylight. Helen and Hazel, neither of whom had come out on the night walk in Periyar, had all but caught up with the rest of us and seen the owls in good light.

Before we drove back to our resort for lunch and a siesta, Avijit bought a packet of fish food and threw it, a little at a time into the river where several species of fish, some at least half a metre long and with bright blue fins quickly gobbled it up. Ashy Woodswallows and Whiskered Terns sat on power lines above the new bridge across the Periyar River. We had seen 67 species, eight of them new for the tour by 11.30, a nice morning's birding.

After lunch Marian opted to do some revision for an exam when she got back home. The resort was a relaxing, quiet environment to work in and Hazel wanted to finish her book. The rest of us went off with Avijit and Sudish in search of more birds.

A 'staked out' Mottled Wood Owl was our first target and Sudish didn't take long to find it. Red Spurfowls were more obliging than they had been at Thekkady and we saw a couple reasonably well. In some open woodland, Streak-throated Woodpecker, somewhat similar to our Green Woodpecker but with streaked underparts and an all red crown, was our second new bird of the afternoon. Our next addition was a small party of White-rumped Munias. Ken and Denise had nice views of a Heart-spotted Woodpecker and Avijit pointed out a Common Woodshrike, the first we had seen. Three species of oriole, three of bee-eater and the first Yellow-billed Babblers since Munnar continued a nice afternoon's walk.

It was dark by the time we all met up for dinner back at the resort. Replete, we ended another full day cruising on the resort's floating dining platform. Propelled by an outboard motor we edged our way through the water lilies and out into the main river. In complete darkness but using a couple of flashlights we searched the riverine forest along the shore for night birds. It was not as successful as the night walk in Periyar had been and felt considerably cooler, although my thermometer recorded 24°C. We did see an Indian Jungle Nightjar on a broken branch and, in the light of the torches; a Jerdon's Nightjar flew out to investigate our strange craft and its crazy occupants. We dropped Sudish at the bridge then sailed back home to bed.

Sunday, 31st December

After a long day and late night yesterday we had a slightly later breakfast. With packed lunches in the bus we drove to pick up Sudish and set off for the dam at Idamalayar. As we crossed the Periyar River there were Whiskered and River Terns in flight. A fine cock Grey Junglefowl prompted a photo-stop and a Black Baza seen from the moving bus resulted, in another interruption to our journey. Here there were also Green Imperial Pigeons seen in much better light than those of yesterday and Lesser Yellownappe, Black-hooded Oriole and plenty of Racket-tailed Drongos were bonuses. Another photo call came when we saw a Small Indian Mongoose was spotted strolling down the road, I think our 20th mammal species of the tour.

Upon arrival at 08.45 there were Dusky Crag Martins flying low over the dam. As at all sensitive installations in India, photography here is strictly forbidden as was made clear to us by the guard when we arrived. We had a long but gentle climb up the stony track to the summit and Hazel decided to stay with Ajith and the bus and to admire the splendid scenery in comfort. An Asian Brown Flycatcher was the first bird to stop for; White-bellied Treepies moved noisily through the forest canopy and we all admired these magnificent birds. Avijit then found us a really nice addition to the trip total – a Fork-tailed Drongo-cuckoo, sitting in a tree face-on to us so that we could clearly see the under-tail barring, not an easy bird to come across. I spotted a smart Pied Flycatcher-shrike, which we all saw. We are fortunate that everybody has seen nearly all the birds on the tour. Helen added Brown-cheeked Fulveta to the day's tally as Small Sunbirds' iridescent glow attracted admiration, but this was nothing compared with the delight we all expressed when two male and one female Malabar Trogon came into view. Dark-fronted Babblers were less cooperative as they moved quietly through the dense bamboo thickets but eventually even one of these performed well for all to see as it plucked insects from a spider's web.

Possibly the bird of the day, although very distant, sat at the very top of a dead tree on the mountainside horizon. It was an Oriental Hobby, a scarce raptor and a 'lifer' for Sudish and it remained on its high lookout for most of the time that we were at the dam site. As we climbed higher we got better and better views. We even saw it copulate briefly with its mate. Helen managed to see a Heart-spotted Woodpecker at last as we continued upward, and a variety of nice species came and went. The road entered a tunnel cut through the rock and, as we arrived there an Emerald Dove was flushed out of the far end.

Just beyond here we passed over the col and the track began to descend into primary forest. Helen remained at the top as the rest of us carried on for a short distance in an attempt to find a Speckled Piculet. Two Velvet-fronted Nuthatches searching for insects in the moss on the trunk of a giant forest tree were compensation for missing out on that one. Ken found a Rusty-tailed Flycatcher high in the canopy and a couple of Grey-breasted Prinias were an addition to the list. The uncomfortably close trumpeting of an elephant prompted a hasty retreat and we quickly rejoined Helen who had been watching an Orange-headed Thrush.

We saw some superb butterflies on our walk back down the track to meet up with Hazel and to have our lunch. Three-spotted Grass Yellow, Common Sailer, Red Helen, Common Lascar, Paris Peacock, Grey Pansy and many more. As we arrived back at the bus Avijit and I spotted two Striated Herons flying across the reservoir. One settled on a moored boat so that anyone interested could find it with ease. Lunch was interrupted several times as raptors came into our field of view – a Mountain Hawk-eagle, a Brahminy Kite and a couple of Oriental Honey-buzzards, all rather distant but positively identified.

After lunch we drove back to the Forest Rangers' Office at the bridge and we walked down to the water's edge. Unfortunately we were surrounded by groups of noisy young men celebrating the New Year rather boisterously. We saw very little other than a Crested Serpent-eagle and an Asian Openbill. Our birding ended a little early and we were back at Birds' Lagoon Resort by 16.30. Two Bronze-winged Jacanas in the inlet by the resort closed our birding proceedings for the day and there was time for a rest before dinner. No one stayed up to see the New Year in but the meal was, as usual, delicious and a fun event. The fireworks and celebrations by the other guests certainly did not interrupt my sleep.

Monday, 1st January 2007

There was just enough time to fit in a short, final birding session here before breakfast and our departure from Thettakkad for Kochi. Hazel wanted a bit more time before we began the journey and Marian declared that she was 'birded out'. The rest of us set off to meet Sudish at the entrance to the Salim Ali Bird Reserve where we arrived at 07.00.

Ken had hoped to see Indian Pitta again and thought that he might have found one in riverside thicket but it turned out to be Orange-headed Thrush – close! Indian Reed Warbler was the only additional species but there were also Black-naped and Black-hooded Orioles, Green Imperial Pigeons, nice views of Indian Rufous Babbler and a Greater Flameback, so it was hardly a dull final session here.

We bade farewell to Sudish who made one last effort to find us Dollarbird and Stork-billed Kingfisher, neither difficult birds but one always misses something on a tour such as this. Very sadly, we heard later that just after we had left him he fell badly and broke a leg.

The drive to Kochi (Cochin) took over two hours. We made one brief stop by the roadside at a landfill site by the estuary close to our destination. Brown-headed Gull and Rosy Starling were new species and a distant Osprey and River Terns were bonuses. We settled in to our comfortable hotel on the man-made Willingdon Island where the Backwaters meets the Arabian Sea. Kochi is a very busy port and Kerala's prime tourist destination. After some lunch we went out to do a bit of sightseeing plus some retail therapy, particularly for Helen and Marian. Our intention had been to visit a Hindu temple, the famous Jewish Quarter (Jew Town) and the Chinese Fishing Nets on the waterfront in Fort Kochi, the oldest part of the town. In the event we visited a palace, now a museum. We were advised not to walk to the Chinese Fishing Nets, as there was an anti-American and anti-British demonstration about to take place resulting from the execution of Saddam Hussein. Avijit came up with what was a better alternative – to see the sights from the water. A boat was quickly hired and Hazel, Denise, Ken, Avijit and I set off for an hour and a half cruise.

Helen and Marian were so involved in their bartering that they decided to continue and not to come with us. We passed prawn and crab fishermen, rows of drift nets being cleaned on the shore after the day's fishing and saw the big Chinese Nets dipping slowly into the water and being hauled out again. Two huge oil tankers steamed into the port (there are two refineries just upstream) completely dwarfing us. It was a great experience. We even managed to add our last two new birds to the list – Western Reef Egret and Gull-billed Tern, along with many Whiskered Terns, Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets and Little Cormorants. We docked again at 17.30 and met up with Helen and Marian who eagerly showed us their purchases before returning to the hotel for the last, jolly buffet dinner of the tour.

Tuesday, 2nd January

The hotel waiters were a little slow in getting breakfast together at 06.00. Avijit and Ajith arrived to take us to the airport where several group photographs were taken before we bade them both a rather sad farewell after what had been an excellent tour. Emigration formalities completed, we flew out from Kochi bound for Dubai a little late. The transfer went without hitch and after a good flight with more nice food (we actually had two lunches, one on each flight!) we touched down at Heathrow, collected our luggage and said goodbye before departing for home. I can honestly say that this had been one of the most enjoyable tours that I have ever done for Ornitholidays. We started as strangers just over two weeks ago but ended as quite close friends. We had seen some excellent birds, seen far more mammals than I had expected, travelled through some spectacular scenery and, above all had a very enjoyable fortnight – a Christmas and New Year with a difference.

The top birds of the tour, as voted for by all the clients were:

- 1) Ceylon Frogmouth.
- 2) Malabar Trogon.
- 3) Blue-capped Rock-thrush and Oriental Scops-owl.

Party List

Marian Carter of Morecambe, Lancashire
Denise Lyon of Sandwich, Kent
Ken Sutton of Egham, Surrey
Helen Tibbitt-Eggleton of Sudbury, Suffolk
Hazel Woodcock of Mere, Wiltshire

Acknowledgements

The travel and accommodation arrangements were excellent. Ajith, our bus driver, was always very cheerful and did some very long and tiring journeys. It would be impossible to praise Avijit too highly. He was efficient, always attentive, and managed to find us some wonderful birds. His sense of humour was infectious and everyone enjoyed his company enormously.

This was one of my most enjoyable tours thanks to you, the clients. Perhaps client is the wrong word. I felt that we soon became a group of good friends enjoying India and its wildlife together. Thank you all for making the tour such a success and a final thank you to Ken and Helen for allowing us to use their photographs for this report. I hope that I will have the pleasure of your company on another Ornitholidays tour soon. A Happy New Year to you all.

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January 2007

Itinerary

Tuesday, 19 th December	Fly London (Heathrow) to Dubai.
Wednesday, 20 th December	Fly Dubai - Chennai. Vedanthangal pm. Overnight Chennai.
Thursday, 21 st December	Train from Chennai to Mysore. Ranganthathittu Wildlife Sanctuary pm. Overnight Mysore.
Friday, 22 nd December	Drive Mysore – Mudumalai, birding en route. Overnight Mudumalai.
Saturday, 23 rd December	Birding Mudumalai. Overnight Mudumalai.
Sunday, 24 th December	Drive Udhagamandalam (Ootacamund or Ooty). Birding in Emerald Shola pm. Overnight Ooty.
Monday, 25 th December	Drive Ooty – Munnar birding en route. Overnight Munnar.
Tuesday, 26 th December	Eravikulam National Park am. Birding in Cardomom Shola pm. Overnight Munnar.
Wednesday, 27 th December	Drive Munnar – Periyar via Bodi Ghat. Birding around hotel pm. Overnight Periyar.
Thursday, 28 th December	Birding the forest in Periyar. Boat trip on Periyar Lake pm. Night trek. Overnight Periyar.
Friday, 29 th December	Birding in forest before breakfast. Drive Periyar – Thattekkad birding en route. Overnight Thettakkad.
Saturday, 30 th December	Birding in Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary, Thattekkad am. Local open forest pm. Night boat trip. Overnight Thettakkad.
Sunday, 31 st December	Birding at Idamalayar Dam am. Overnight Thettakkad.
Monday 1 st January	Drive Thettakkad – Kochi. Sightseeing, shopping and boat trip pm. Overnight Kochi.
Tuesday, 2 nd January	Fly Kochi – London (Heathrow) via Dubai.

Weather

There was a brief shower as we left Chennai. Otherwise it was sunny and mainly calm throughout. Temperatures varied from a cool 10°C overnight in Ooty to the norm, which was 28°C - 32°C, everywhere else.

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

No of days recorded	Location	Abundance Scale
1 2h means seen on 1 day and heard on 2 other days	C = Chennai My = Mysore Mu = Mudumalai O = Ooty Mn = Munnar P = Periyar T = Thattekad K = Kochi J = En route	maximum for any one day 1 = 1 - 4 2 = 5 - 9 3 = 10 - 100 4 = 100 - 1,000 5 = > 1,000

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Location		Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Little Grebe	3		Mu Mn	2	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Spot-billed Pelican	2	C		J	4 <i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
Indian Shag*	3	C	My	T	1 <i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
Great Cormorant	4		My Mu P		3 <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Little Cormorant	8	C	My Mu Mn	T K	3 <i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
Oriental Darter*	8	C	My Mu	P T K J	2 <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
Western Reef-heron*	1			K	1 <i>Egretta gularis</i>
Little Egret	8	C	My Mu	P T K	3 <i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Great Egret	4		My	P K J	3 <i>Egretta alba</i>
Intermediate Egret	7	C	My	P T K J	3 <i>Egretta intermedia</i>
Eastern Cattle Egret* ¹	10	C	My Mu O Mn	T K	4 <i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
Grey Heron	5	C	My Mu	K J	3 <i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Purple Heron	5		My Mu	T K J	1 <i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Indian Pond-heron	13	C	My Mu O Mn	P T K	4 <i>Ardeola grayii</i>
Black-crowned Night-Heron	2	C	My		3 <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Striated Heron*	1			T	1 <i>Butorides striata</i>
Asian Openbill	3	C	My	T	3 <i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
Woolly-necked Stork	4		My	P T	1 <i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
Painted Stork	3	C	My Mu		3 <i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
Glossy Ibis	2	C	My Mu		3 <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Black-headed Ibis	3	C	My Mu		3 <i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill	2	C	My		3 <i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Indian Black Ibis*	2		My Mu		2 <i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
Lesser Whistling-duck	2			T	3 <i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>
Garganey	3	C	My Mu	J	3 <i>Anas querquedula</i>
Northern Shoveler	2		My Mu	J	4 <i>Anas clypeata</i>
Northern Pintail	4	C	My Mu	J	4 <i>Anas acuta</i>
Indian Spot-billed Duck	2		My Mu	J	3 <i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
Cotton Teal*	1			J	1 <i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>
Black-winged Kite	4	C		O T J	1 <i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Black Baza	2			P T	1 <i>Aviceda leuphotes</i>
Brahminy Kite	6		My Mu Mn	P T K	2 <i>Haliastur indus</i>
Black Kite	8	C	My Mu O Mn	T K	3 <i>Milvus migrans</i>
Shikra	6	C	My Mu	P T	1 <i>Accipiter badius</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	2			Mn T	1 <i>Accipiter nisus nisosimilis</i>
'Steppe' Buzzard ²	1			Mn	1 <i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i>
Oriental Honey-buzzard	7		My Mu O	P T	1 <i>Pernis ptilorhyncus</i>
Crested Serpent-eagle	4	1h	My Mu	P T	1 <i>Spilornis cheela</i>
Short-toed Eagle	1		My Mu		1 <i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Booted Eagle	1			T	1 <i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>
Mountain Hawk-eagle	1			T	1 <i>Spizaetus nipalensis</i>

Crested Hawk-eagle*	2			Mu				P		1	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>	
Black Eagle	3			Mu				P		1	<i>Ictinaetus malayensis</i>	
Tawny Eagle	1			Mu						1	<i>Aquila rapax</i>	
Osprey	2							P	K	1	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	
Western Marsh Harrier ^{3*}	3	C	My						J	1	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	
Common Kestrel	6			Mu	O	Mn		T		1	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	
Oriental Hobby	1							T		1	<i>Falco severus</i>	
Grey Francolin	3	C		Mu	O					2	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	
Red Spurfowl	2							T		1	<i>Galloperdix spadicea</i>	
Grey Junglefowl	9	1h		Mu	O	Mn	P	T		2	<i>Gallus sonneratii</i>	
Indian Peafowl	3		My	Mu	O					2	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	
White-breasted Waterhen	4		My					T	J	1	<i>Amauornis phoenicurus</i>	
Purple Swamphen	2			Mu					J	1	<i>Porphyrio (porphyrio) poliocephalus</i>	
Common Moorhen	2	C		Mu						2	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	
Eurasian Coot	2			Mu					J	4	<i>Fulica atra</i>	
Black-winged Stilt	1			Mu						2	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	
Bronze-winged Jacana	3			Mu				T		1	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>	
Great Thick-knee	1		My							3	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>	
Red-wattled Lapwing	9		My	Mu	O	Mn	P	T		3	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	
Yellow-wattled Lapwing	1			Mu						2	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>	
Wood Sandpiper	1			Mu						1	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	
Green Sandpiper	1			Mu						1	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	
Common Sandpiper	4			Mu				T	K	J	1	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Brown-headed Gull	1								K		1	<i>Larus brunnicephalus</i>
Gull-billed Tern	1								K		1	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
River Tern	2		My					T			3	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>
Whiskered Tern	4		My					T	K		4	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
Rock Pigeon	10	C	My	Mu		Mn	P	T	K		4	<i>Columbia livia</i>
Green Imperial-pigeon	3							T			2	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
Mountain Imperial-pigeon	1							P			1	<i>Ducula badia</i>
Nilgiri Woodpigeon	2					Mn					3	<i>Columba elphinstonii</i>
Laughing Dove	3		My	Mu							3	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
Spotted Dove	11		My	Mu	O	Mn	P	T	K		3	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	3	C		Mu							2	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Emerald Dove	2							P	T		1	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
Grey-fronted Green-pigeon⁴	2	1h						P	T		2	<i>Treron affinis</i>
Yellow-footed Green-pigeon	1			Mu							2	<i>Treron phoenicopterus chlorigaster</i>
Vernal Hanging-parrot	6			Mu				P	T		2	<i>Loriculus vernalis</i>
Malabar Parakeet	7			Mu	O			P	T		3	<i>Psittacula columboides</i>
Plum-headed Parakeet	6			Mu				P	T		3	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>
Rose-ringed Parakeet	4	C	My	Mu		Mn			K		3	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Fork-tailed Drongo-cuckoo ⁵	1							T			1	<i>Surniculus dicruroides</i>
Asian Koel	5	1h	C	My	Mu	O			T		2	<i>Eudynamis scolopaceus</i>
Common Hawk-cuckoo	2							P			1	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>
Blue-faced Malkoha	1			Mu							1	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>
'Southern' Coucal ⁶	3	C							T		1	<i>Centropus (sinensis) parroti</i>
Brown Hawk-owl	2							P	T		1	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>
Mottled Wood-owl	1								T		1	<i>Strix ocellata</i>
Indian Scops-owl ⁸	2							P	T		1	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>
Oriental Scops-owl	1							P			1	<i>Otus sunia</i>
Spotted Owlet	2	C		Mu							1	<i>Athene brama</i>
Jungle Owlet	2	1h						P	T		1	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>
Ceylon Frogmouth*	1								T		1	<i>Batrachostomus moniliger</i>
Indian Jungle Nightjar	1								T		1	<i>Caprimulgus indicus</i>
Jerdon's Nightjar	2							P	T		1	<i>Caprimulgus atripennis</i>
Crested Treeswift	6			Mu				P	T		3	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
Asian Palm-swift	4	C							T		3	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
Indian Swiftlet	9			Mu	O	Mn	P	T	K		4	<i>Aerodramus unicolor</i>
Little Swift	5	C		Mu		Mn		T			3	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Alpine Swift	2				O	Mn					1	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>
Indian Roller	4	C	My	Mu					J		3	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
Common Hoopoe	2			Mu	O						1	<i>Upupa epops ceylonensis</i>

Malabar Trogon	2									T	1	<i>Harpactes fasciatus</i>
White-throated Kingfisher	12	C	My	Mu	O		P	T	K	J	3	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
Lesser Pied Kingfisher	4		My				P	T			1	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
Common Kingfisher	8	C	My	Mu	O		P	T		J	1	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	2							T			2	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	5	C		Mu				T	K		2	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
Little Green Bee-eater	7			Mu	O			T		J	2	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
Malabar Grey Hornbill	4						P	T			1	<i>Ocyrceros griseus</i>
Indian Grey Hornbill	1		My								1	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>
Coppersmith Barbet	4	C	My	Mu		Mn					2	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
Malabar Barbet ⁹	1	1h					P	T			1	<i>Megalaima malabarica</i>
White-cheeked Barbet	7	2h		Mu	O	Mn	P	T			3	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>
Heart-spotted Woodpecker	3							T			1	<i>Hemicircus canente</i>
Indian Pygmy Woodpecker*	5			Mu	O			T			1	<i>Dendrocopos nanus</i>
Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker*	1			Mu							1	<i>Dendrocopos mahrattensis</i>
Streak-throated Woodpecker	1							T			1	<i>Picus xanthopygaeus</i>
Lesser Yellownappe	3							T			1	<i>Picus chlorolophus</i>
Common Flameback	1						P				1	<i>Dinopium javanense</i>
Black-rumped Flameback	2							T			1	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
Greater Flameback	2						P	T			1	<i>Chrysocolaptes lucidus</i>
Indian Pitta	1							T			1	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
Jerdon's Bushlark	1			Mu							1	<i>Mirafra affinis</i>
Malabar Lark	1			Mu							1	<i>Galerida malabarica</i>
Ashy-crowned Finch-lark*	2			Mu							3	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>
Dusky Crag-martin	1							T			3	<i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>
Hill Swallow	2					Mn	P				3	<i>Hirundo domicola</i>
Barn Swallow	7	C		Mu		Mn	P	T	K		4	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Red-rumped Swallow	9		My	Mu	O	Mn	P	T			3	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
Wire-tailed Swallow	1		My								1	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
Western Yellow Wagtail	1			Mu							1	<i>Motacilla flava thunbergi</i>
Grey Wagtail	9			Mu	O	Mn	P	T			1	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
White Wagtail	1			Mu							1	<i>Motacilla alba dukhunensis/personata</i>
White-browed Wagtail	7		My	Mu			P	T			2	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>
Paddyfield Pipit	4	C		Mu				T			2	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
Blyth's Pipit	2			Mu							1	<i>Anthus godlewskii</i>
Nilgiri Pipit	1					Mn					2	<i>Anthus nilghiriensis</i>
Long-billed Pipit	1							T			1	<i>Anthus similis</i>
Ashy Woodswallow	4						P	T			2	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>
Common Woodshrike	1							T			1	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>
Malabar Woodshrike ¹⁰	3					Mn	P	T			1	<i>Tephrodornis sylvicola</i>
Pied Flycatcher-shrike*	2				O			T			1	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>
Black-headed Cuckooshrike	2			Mu	O						1	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>
Large Cuckooshrike	1							T			1	<i>Coracina macei</i>
Orange Minivet ¹¹	6			Mu	O		P	T			2	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
White-bellied Minivet	1			Mu							1	<i>Pericrocotus erythropygus</i>
Small Minivet	4			Mu	O	Mn					2	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
Red-vented Bulbul	8	C		Mu	O	Mn	P		K		3	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
Red-whiskered Bulbul	11		My	Mu	O	Mn	P	T	K		3	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
Square-tailed Black Bulbul ¹²	4				O	Mn	P				2	<i>Hypsipetes ganeesa</i>
Flame-throated Bulbul*	5						P	T			2	<i>Pycnonotus gularis</i>
White-browed Bulbul	2			Mu		Mn					1	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
Yellow-browed Bulbul	4			Mu			P	T			1	<i>Iole indica</i>
Common Iora	7		My	Mu	O		P	T			2	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
Gold-fronted Leafbird	6			Mu		Mn	P	T		J	2	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
Jerdon's Leafbird*	1						P				1	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>
Asian Fairy-bluebird	2			Mu				T			1	<i>Irena puella</i>
'Rufous-backed' Long-tailed Shrike ¹³	6			Mu	O	Mn	P			J	2	<i>Lanius schach erythronotus</i>
Brown Shrike	4			Mu		Mn		T			1	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
Bay-backed Shrike	3			Mu	O						2	<i>Lanius vittatus</i>
Black-naped Blue Monarch*	3				O		P	T			1	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>
Asian Paradise Flycatcher	5		My	Mu			P	T			1	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
White-browed Fantail	2			Mu	O						1	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
Blue Rock-thrush	1					Mn					1	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>

Blue-headed Rock-thrush	1							Mn			1	<i>Monticola cinclorhynchus</i>
Orange-headed Thrush	5								P	T	1	<i>Zoothera citrina</i>
Malabar Whistling-thrush	3	2h						Mn	P	T	1	<i>Myophonus horsfieldii</i>
Indian Blackbird ¹⁴	1							Mn			1	<i>Turdus simillimus</i>
Nilgiri Blue Robin *	1							O			1	<i>Myiomela major</i>
Indian Blue Robin	2							O	Mn		1	<i>Luscinia brunnea</i>
Oriental Magpie-robin	10		My		Mu	O	Mn	P	T		2	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
Indian Black Robin	3							O			2	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus</i>
Pied Bushchat	8		My		Mu	O	Mn	P	T	J	3	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
Brown-breasted Flycatcher	3							Mu			1	<i>Muscicapa muttui</i>
Asian Brown Flycatcher	3							O			1	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>
Rusty-tailed Flycatcher	3								P	T	1	<i>Muscicapa ruficauda</i>
Red-throated Flycatcher ¹⁵	1							Mu			1	<i>Ficedula albicilla</i>
Black-and-orange Flycatcher	2							O	Mn		1	<i>Ficedula nigrorufa</i>
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	5		My		Mu	O				T	1	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
Nilgiri Flycatcher	2							O	Mn		1	<i>Eumyias albicaudatus</i>
White-bellied Blue Flycatcher	2								Mn	P	1	<i>Cyornis pallipes</i>
Kerala Laughingthrush *	2								Mn		1	<i>Trochalopteron fairbanki</i>
Wynaad Laughingthrush	1									P	3	<i>Dryonastes delesserti</i>
Yellow-eyed Babbler	1							Mu			1	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>
Tawny-bellied Babbler	1							Mu			2	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>
Dark-fronted Babbler	1										2	<i>Rhopocichla atriceps</i>
Large Grey Babbler	1							Mu			2	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>
Jungle Babbler	6							O		P	3	<i>Turdoides striata</i>
Yellow-billed Babbler	4		C					Mu			3	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
Indian Rufous Babbler *	3								Mn	P	3	<i>Turdoides subrufa</i>
Indian Scimitar-babbler ¹⁶	2							Mu	O		1	<i>Pomatorhinus horsfieldii</i>
Brown-cheeked Fulvetta	2							Mu			1	<i>Alcippe poioicephala</i>
Puff-throated Babbler	1							Mu			1	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>
Zitting Cisticola	1							Mu			1	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Ashy Prinia	3		My					Mu			1	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
Grey-breasted Prinia	2							Mu			1	<i>Prinia hodgsoni</i>
Plain Prinia	1								Mn		1	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
Indian Reed-warbler	1										1	<i>Acrocephalus brunnescens</i>
Thick-billed Warbler	1							Mu			1	<i>Acrocephalus aedon</i>
Blyth's Reed-warbler	3		My					Mu	O		1	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
Booted Warbler	3							Mu	O		2	<i>Hippolais caligata</i>
Common Tailorbird	4	1h	My					Mu	O	Mn	1	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher	2							Mu	O		1	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>
Tickell's Leaf-warbler	2		My					O			1	<i>Phylloscopus affinis</i>
Greenish Warbler	8		My					Mu	O	Mn	2	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus</i>
Large-billed Leaf-warbler	7							Mu	O	Mn	2	<i>Phylloscopus magnirostris</i>
Hume's Whitethroat ¹⁷	2							Mu			1	<i>Sylvia althaea</i>
Great Tit	5							Mu	O	Mn	1	<i>Parus major</i>
Indian Yellow Tit *	2								Mn		1	<i>Parus aplonotus</i>
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	2							O			1	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>
Indian Nuthatch *	1							Mu			1	<i>Sitta castanea</i>
Pale-billed Flowerpecker	3							Mu			1	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
Nilgiri Flowerpecker ¹⁸	3									P	1	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>
Thick-billed Flowerpecker	1									P	1	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>
Oriental White-eye	6							Mu	O	Mn	3	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
Purple-rumped Sunbird	7		My					Mu	O	Mn	2	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>
Small Sunbird *	3										1	<i>Leptocoma minima</i>
Purple Sunbird	7		My					Mu	O		2	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
Loten's Sunbird	2									P	1	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>
Little Spiderhunter	2										1	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>
Common Rosefinch	2								Mn	P	3	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus roseatus</i>
Tricoloured Munia	1							Mu			1	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>
Indian Silverbill	1							Mu			2	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>
White-rumped Munia	1										1	<i>Lonchura striata striata</i>
Scaly-breasted Munia	3		C					Mu		P	2	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
House Sparrow	7		My					Mu	O	Mn	3	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Yellow-throated Sparrow*	2							O			1	<i>Petronia xanthocolis</i>

Indian Golden Oriole ¹⁹	7	C	My		Mn	P	T	1	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>	
Black-hooded Oriole	4				Mn		T	2	<i>Oriolus xanthomus</i>	
Black-naped Oriole	2						T	2	<i>Oriolus chinensis diffusus</i>	
Black Drongo	4	C		Mu				K J	2	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
Ashy Drongo	7		My		O	P	T		2	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
Bronzed Drongo	5			Mu	O	P	T		2	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>
White-bellied Drongo	3			Mu	O				1	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	7			Mu		P	T		3	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
Hair-crested Drongo	1						T		1	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>
Brahminy Starling	3			Mu	O				2	<i>Temenuchus pagodarum</i>
Rosy Starling	1							K	1	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>
Grey-headed Starling	3		My	Mu			T		2	<i>Sturnia malabarica</i>
Malabar White-headed Starling*	5					P	T		2	<i>Sturnia blythii</i>
Common Myna	9	C	My	Mu	O	Mn		T K	3	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Jungle Myna	9		My	Mu	O	Mn	P		3	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>
Lesser Hill-myna²⁰	5						P T		2	<i>Gracula indica</i>
House Crow	10	C	My	Mu	O	Mn	P T	K	3	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
Indian Jungle Crow²¹	13	C	My	Mu	O	Mn	P T	K	3	<i>Corvus (macrorhynchos) culminatus</i>
Rufous Treepie	6	C		Mu	O			T	1	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
White-bellied Treepie	4						P T		2	<i>Dendrocitta leucogaster</i>

TAXANOMIC NOTES

As a result of the publication of “Birds of South Asia – the Ripley Guide” by Pamela C. Rasmussen and John C. Anderton (Lynx Edicions, 2005) a number of taxonomic changes are suggested compared with “Birds of the Indian Subcontinent” by R. Grimmett, C. Inskipp and T. Inskipp (Helm, 1998). These are adopted in the Checklist and the Report.

¹ Eastern Cattle Egret	Cattle Egret now split into Eastern (<i>B. coromandus</i>) & Western (<i>B. ibis</i>).
² “Steppe” Buzzard	Distinct racial sub-species of Common Buzzard. Genetically close to nominate (<i>B. b. buteo</i>).
³ Western Marsh Harrier:	Marsh Harrier now split into Western (<i>C. aeruginosus</i>) & Eastern (<i>C. spilonotus</i>).
⁴ Grey-fronted Green Pigeon	Pompadour now split into three species. <i>T. affinis</i> is now a Western Ghats endemic - Grey-fronted Green Pigeon
⁵ Drongo-cuckoo	Tentative split into “Fork-tailed” (<i>S. dicruroides</i>) & “Square-tailed” (<i>S. lugubris</i>).
⁶ “Southern” Coucal	Likely to be split from Greater Coucal (<i>C. sinensis</i>).
⁷ Ceylon Bay Owl **	Split from Oriental Bay Owl (<i>P. badius</i>) of Sikkim and N.E.India.
⁸ Indian Scops Owl	Recently split from Collared Scops Owl (<i>O. lettia</i>) of Himalayas, N.E.India and eastwards.
⁹ Malabar Barbet	Crimson-fronted Barbet now split. In Western Ghats (<i>M. malabarica</i>) is endemic and split from Ceylon Small Barbet (<i>M. rubricapillus</i>).
¹⁰ Malabar Woodshrike	R. & A. split this species from Large Woodshrike (<i>T. gularis</i>) as a Western Ghats endemic.
¹¹ Orange Minivet	Considered by R. & A. as a separate species from Scarlet Minivet (<i>P. speciosus</i>) occurring in S.W. India and Sri Lanka.
¹² Square-tailed Black Bulbul	Another Western Ghats endemic. Black Bulbul now split into Himalayan Black Bulbul (<i>H. leucocephalus</i>) and <i>H. ganeesa</i> .
¹³ “Rufous-backed” Long-tailed Shrike	Long-tailed Shrike occurs as two forms – “Rufous-backed” (<i>L. schach erythronotus</i>) and “Black-headed” (<i>L. s. tricolor</i>). This is a subspecies.
¹⁴ Indian Blackbird	Common (Eurasian) Blackbird does not occur in India. Formerly considered a subspecies, <i>T. simillimus</i> is now a full and endemic species
¹⁵ Red-throated Flycatcher	Red-breasted (throated) now split into Red-breasted (<i>F. parva</i>) and Red-throated (<i>F. albicilla</i>). Either or both could occur in South India.
¹⁶ Indian Scimitar-babbler	An endemic and split from Ceylon Scimitar-babbler (<i>P. melanurus</i>).
¹⁷ Hume’s Whitethroat	Formerly considered a subspecies of Lesser Whitethroat (<i>S. curruca</i>) this is now a full species.
¹⁸ Nilgiri Flowerpecker	Split from Plain Flowerpecker (<i>D. minullum</i>). Another Western Ghats endemic species.
¹⁹ Indian Golden Oriole	European (Eurasian) Golden Oriole (<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>) does not occur in India.
²⁰ Lesser Hill-myna	Split from Common Hill-myna, occurring in the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka.
²¹ Indian Jungle Crow	The <i>macrorhynchos</i> complex has been split into three species. Only <i>C. culminatus</i> occurs in Southern India and is an Indian endemic.

ALTERNATIVE NAMES

Rasmussen & Anderton (2005)	Grimmett, Inskipp & Inskipp (1998)	Rasmussen & Anderton (2005)	Grimmett, Inskipp & Inskipp (1998)
Indian Shag	Indian Cormorant	Ashy-crowned Finch-lark	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark
Oriental Darter	Darter	Pied Flycatcher-shrike	Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike
Western Reef-heron	Western Reef Egret	Flame-throated Bulbul	Black-crested Bulbul
Eastern Cattle Egret	Cattle Egret	Jerdon's Leafbird	Blue-winged Leafbird
Striated Heron	Little Heron	Black-naped Blue Monarch	Black-naped Monarch
Chestnut Bittern	Cinnamon Bittern	Nilgiri Thrush	Scaly Thrush
Cotton Teal	Cotton Pygmy-goose	Nilgiri Blue Robin	White-bellied Shortwing
Black-winged Kite	Black-shouldered Kite	Indian Black Robin	Indian Robin
Besra Sparrowhawk	Besra	Kerala Laughingthrush	Grey-breasted Laughingthrush
Crested Hawk-eagle	Changeable Hawk Eagle	Indian Rufous Babbler	Rufous Babbler
Indian Vulture	Long-billed Vulture	Indian Broad-tailed Grass-warbler	Broad-tailed Grassbird
Western Marsh Harrier	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	Indian Yellow Tit	Black-lored Tit
Caspian Gull	Yellow-legged Gull	Indian Nuthatch	Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch
Ceylon Frogmouth	Sri Lanka Frogmouth	Small Sunbird	Crimson-backed Sunbird
Indian White-rumped Spinetail	White-rumped Needletail	Yellow-throated Sparrow	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia
Indian Pygmy Woodpecker	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	Malabar White-headed Starling	White-headed Starling
Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker		

MAMMALS

Bonnet Macaque	<i>Macaca radiata</i>
Nilgiri Langur	<i>Trachypithecus johnii</i>
Hanuman (Grey) Languet	<i>Semnopithecus entellus</i>
Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
Indian Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>
Cheetal (Spotted Deer)	<i>Axis axis</i>
Nilgiri Tahr	<i>Hemitragus hylocrius</i>
Gaur	<i>Bos gaurus</i>
Wild Pig	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
Smooth-coated Otter	<i>Lutrogale perspicillata</i>
Small Indian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>
Stripe-necked Mongoose	<i>Herpestes vitticollis</i>
Indian (Black-naped) Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
Indian Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa indica</i>
Three-striped Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>
Dusky Striped Squirrel	<i>Funambulus sublineatus</i>
Travancore Flying Squirrel	<i>Petinomys fuscicapillus</i>
Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus giganteus</i>
Salim Ali's Fruit Bat	<i>Latidens salimalii</i>
Indian Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus coromandra</i>

REPTILES

Mugger (Marsh Crocodile)	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
Terrapin sp.	
Draco (Gliding Lizard)	<i>Draco dussumieri</i>
Skink sp.	

This list represents those birds and other animals seen by party members of this tour.