



North India and Himalayan Foothills: Comprehensive Birding, Tigers, the Taj Mahal and More

Day 1: Arrival into Delhi; PM Train to Sawai Madhopur near Ranthambhore National Park

Arrive in Delhi via international flight, ideally before noon. We will pick you up, and the group will gather before our afternoon trip by train. The train will take us to Sawai Madhopur, a busy town on the periphery of Ranthambhore National Park.

We will then be transferred to a wildlife lodge at the edge of the park.

Day 2: Birding Ranthambhore National Park

We will spend all of day 2 exploring Ranthambhore from an open jeep or canter, with some time birding on foot in surrounding scrub.

The National Park is situated in a region of semi-desert interspersed with rocky outcrops, sheer cliffs, and grasslands dissected by jungle-filled ravines. Ranthambhore's birdlife is a rich combination of desert species and the more widespread of northern India's forest birds. Key species include Painted Spurfowl, Painted Sandgrouse, Indian Courser, Sirkeer Malkoha, Sulphur-bellied Warbler and six species of vulture.

Ranthambhore is also home to an array of mammals, including Tiger. The tigers tend to congregate around the park's five perennial lakes during the dry winter months. Although the number of tigers in Ranthambhore is relatively low given the park's area, this is one of the most assured locations in the country for a sighting of this otherwise elusive cat.

Second night at a wildlife lodge on the edge of the park.



Day 3: Morning Birding at Ranthambhore National Park; then Transfer to Bharatpur National Park

On day 3, we will spend the morning birding Ranthambhore National Park, focusing on any key species we may have missed.

When it starts to warm up in the late morning, we will depart by road for Bharatpur, to set up the following day and morning of birding. Bharatpur is undoubtedly India's most famous bird sanctuary.

We will make a few birding stops along the way as appropriate spots present themselves, and/or bird calls or sightings present opportunities to break up the drive.

Day 4: Birding Bharatpur National Park

Today, we will spend the day birding and exploring Bharatpur Park on foot and by cycle-rickshaw.

Successive and prolonged regional droughts throughout the last decade have affected a marked decrease in the numbers of birds wintering in the artificial marshes here.

However, although densities may appear low, the park hosts an impressive selection of species, most notably Black-necked Stork, Sarus Crane, Glossy Ibis, Black-headed Ibis, Bar-headed Goose, Comb Duck, Indian Spot-billed Duck, White-tailed Lapwing, Greater Painted-Snipe and Black Bittern, with numerous passerines in the intricate mosaic of mature woodland, sandy acacia scrub, and open grassland surrounding the wetlands.

Night in a birding lodge on the outskirts of the reserve.



Day 5: Morning Birding at Bund Baretha and the Taj Mahal

Spend the morning at nearby Bund Baretha, scanning the expansive reservoir, its islands and sand banks for waterfowl and raptors.

Return to Bharatpur, departing after lunch for Agra and a visit to the Taj Mahal, before continuing to Jarar village.

Jarar lies at the heart of the agricultural region sustained by the perennial Chambal River, its fields and open woodland home to species such as Brown Hawk-Owl (or Brown Boobook) and Indian Grey Hornbill, for which we will search before dusk.

Spend the night in a cozy wildlife lodge.

Day 6: Chambal River, Jarar to Delhi

While the Chambal River is the lifeline to this agricultural region, it is equally invaluable in ecological terms, in recognition of which a 400 km (250 mi) stretch of the river and its banks are protected, primarily to support Ganges River Dolphin and a reintroduced population of Gharial. The river is also home to a diverse avifauna that includes Indian Skimmer, our primary target here, along with Black-bellied Tern, Red-naped (Indian Black) Ibis, River Lapwing, Indian Thick-knee (or Stone-curlew), Great Thick-knee, with Crested Bunting, Sand Lark and Desert Wheatear along the shore and in the thorn scrub of the

Chambal's unique mud ravines. Spend the morning exploring the river by boat, before departing by road for Delhi.

Night in a city hotel.



Days 7-10: Delhi to Sattal, Kumaon Himalaya: Sattal and Pangot

Depart Delhi early in the morning for the long drive to Sattal, to spend four days birding in the foothills of the western Himalaya, a region that contrasts starkly with the plains in terms of topography, climate, vegetation, and birdlife.

To enable us to thoroughly explore the range of elevations, accompanying habitat types, and their associated species, we will spend two nights in Sattal (1450 m, 4760 ft), before climbing into the higher hills to Pangot (2610 m, 8560 ft) to focus on the more altitude-dependent montane specialties of the region.

In winter months, resident species are joined by migrants from higher altitudes. With a high density of birds moving in mixed flocks, birding here is exhilarating, particularly at bird-rich mid-altitudes. A mix of temperate forests, mature oak woodland, Rhododendron, conifers, lakeside scrub, grassy slopes, and cultivation provide habitat to an astonishing variety of species and Himalayan specialties, most notably including Himalayan Griffon, Lammergeier (Bearded Vulture), Koklass Pheasant, the more elusive Cheer Pheasant, White-crested Laughingthrush, White-throated Laughingthrush, Striated Laughingthrush, Long-billed Thrush, White-tailed (Himalayan) Rubythroat, Siberian Rubythroat, Golden Bush-Robin, Blue-winged Minla, Rufous-bellied Niltava, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted (Himalayan) Greenfinch, Black-throated Accentor, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Himalayan (Altai) Accentor, Spot-winged Grosbeak and Himalayan (Pied) Woodpecker.

The entire region is dissected by shallow mountain streams, home to some distinctive riverine species, including White-capped Redstart (River-chat), Plumbeous (Water-) Redstart, and three species of Forktail: Spotted, Little, and Slaty-backed.

Nights in a mountainside hotel or birding camp at Sattal (group size dependent), and birding lodge at Pangot.



Days 11-15: Pangot to Corbett National Park

Descend through the foothills to Corbett National Park, to spend four days birding on foot and from open jeep in this uniquely picturesque wilderness, nestled against the foothills in the terai region of Uttarakhand where the avifauna of the Himalayas merges with that of the Indo-Gangetic plains.

This location, combined with the great diversity of habitats, from deciduous forest to vast savannah grasslands, makes Corbett one of the richest birding areas in Asia. Key species here include Great (Pied) Hornbill, Great Slaty Woodpecker, Common Green-Magpie, Maroon Oriole, White-throated Bushchat, Crested (Himalayan Pied) Kingfisher, Wallcreeper, Ibisbill wintering along the boulder-strewn banks of the Kosi River, and 50+ species of raptors, including Grey-headed Fish-Eagle, Lesser Fish-Eagle, Pallas's Fish-Eagle and Collared Falconet. One of the great advantages of Corbett is the persistence of many exceptional woodland areas, in particular at Mohan and Kumeria, outside the park boundaries. The possibility of exploring these on foot, often from the road, significantly increases our chances of finding some of the more skulking of Corbett's birds, including Grey-bellied (Yellow-browed) Tesia and Chestnut-headed Tesia. Over 50 species of mammals find a home here, including Asian Elephant and Tiger, necessitating our use of open jeeps within the park boundaries.

Spend 3 nights in a comfortable wildlife lodge outside the park with one night in a simple forest rest house idyllically located at Dhikala, within the grasslands of the park's western range, overlooking the floodplain of the Ramganga River.

Drive to Delhi in the afternoon of day 15.

Day 16: Depart Delhi

Depart Delhi on your onward journey. Flights out anytime this day.

