



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

India

Budget North

19th October to 29th October 2023 (11 days)



Tiger by David Hoddinott

Home to over a billion people in arguably the world's richest cultural landscape, India is a country with no equal. This great nation boasts a staggering geographical diversity ranging from deserts and forests to tropical, palm-lined shores and snow-capped peaks. India is, of course, also famous for its rich avifauna and iconic mammalian megafauna, foremost of which is the regal Tiger. Our tour visits all the famous birding sites in the north central region of this amazing country, and includes a visit to the fabled Ranthambhore National Park, the tiger reserve widely considered to be one of the best places to see this most magnificent of the world's big cats! Join us in this unforgettable celebration of India's incredible birds, iconic mammals, dramatic scenery and kaleidoscope of cultures!

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE...**THE ITINERARY**

Day 1	Arrival in New Delhi
Day 2	New Delhi to Ranthambhore National Park
Days 3 to 5	Ranthambhore National Park
Day 6	Ranthambhore to Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur)
Day 7	Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur)
Day 8	Bharatpur to Chambal River via Fatehpur Sikri
Day 9	Chambal River
Day 10	Chambal River to New Delhi via Agra (Taj Mahal)
Day 11	Final departure



TOUR ROUTE MAP...



THE TOUR IN DETAIL...



White-throated Kingfisher by Adam Riley

Day 1: Arrival in New Delhi. On arrival in India's bustling capital city of New Delhi, we will transfer to our accommodations within the city limits. With remaining daylight, we should encounter our first Black Kites, flocks of screaming Rose-ringed Parakeets, Spotted and Eurasian Collared Doves, Pied, Bank and Common Mynas, Eastern Jungle and House Crows, Red-vented Bulbuls and Eurasian Tree Sparrows. These ubiquitous Indian "urban" birds will become familiar figures in our travels through the country. Time permitting, we may visit a nearby set of sports fields in the late afternoon where Grey Francolin, Red-wattled Lapwing, White-throated Kingfisher, Black Drongo,

Paddyfield Pipit, White Wagtail and both Greenish and Hume's Leaf Warblers may be found.

Day 2: New Delhi to Ranthambhore National Park. Today is essentially a travel day as we journey by bus down into south-eastern Rajasthan. We will make stops along the way for lunch, and where opportunistic birding presents itself. At Sawai Madhopur we will transfer to our lodge and, time depending, we will do some birding in the area surrounding the lodge, which has produced the endemic Painted Sandgrouse, Indian Stone-curlew, Brahminy Starling, Common Woodshrike and Ashy-crowned sparrow-Lark in the past.

Days 3 to 5: Ranthambhore National Park. We will have the next three full days to explore this fantastic reserve and the surrounding area. The tropical dry deciduous and thorn forest covers an area of more than 1,300 square kilometres (500 sq miles); so needless to say, there is plenty of area to roam! Dominated by the 10th century Ranthambhore Fort which sits atop a plateau 700ft above the plains, this scenic reserve contains high concentrations of herbivores such as Spotted Deer, Sambar and Wild Boar, and it is this abundance of prey species that supports one of the healthiest populations of Tiger anywhere on Earth. Locating these magnificent cats requires a combination of skill and patience – and, of course, a small dose of luck!

We will use open-top jeeps and canter vans to explore the park in search of tigers, watching for telltale signs such as pugmarks or scat in the road and listening for the alarm calls of Sambar, Spotted Deer, Southern Plains Grey Langur and Indian Peafowl. With luck, these will lead us to a tiger padding along a dusty track or sprawled out in the



Plum-headed Parakeets by Adam Riley





Spotted Deer (Chital) by Rich Lindie

Quails, the uncommon White-naped Woodpecker, Indian Scops Owl, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Alexandrine and Plum-headed Parakeets, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Sirkeer Malkoha, Common Iora, White-bellied Drongo, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (which can often be located by its sweet song given from dense bamboo patches), the active White-browed Fantail, Grey-breasted and Rufous-fronted Prinias and Yellow-throated Sparrow. While in the area, we will also keep our eyes peeled for Indian Vulture, Pallid Harrier, Shikra, Bonelli's Eagle and Crested Serpent Eagle. If time permits, on one of the days we may visit Soorwal Lake to look for a host of water associated birds that may include Dalmatian and Great White Pelicans, Spotted Redshank, Temminck's Stint, Common Ringed Plover, Indian Courser, Indian Stone-curlew, Blue-tailed and Green Bee-eaters, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Indian Bush Lark, Moustached Warbler, Ashy and Yellow-bellied Prinias, Rosy Starling and the ever-popular Greater Painted-snipe.

Day 6: Ranthambhore to Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur). After breakfast today we depart for Bharatpur, taking the four-hour journey to our accommodation near the incredible Keoladeo National Park. Usually known simply as 'Bharatpur', the extensive series of shallow ponds were artificially created as a duck-shooting preserve by a former Maharaja of Bharatpur, but is now a wetland sanctuary attracting thousands of wintering waterfowl, waders, cranes and raptors.

Here we will explore the reserve on foot, following the network of raised dykes that criss-cross the labyrinth of ponds. Scanning through the waterbirds is usually our first priority and we will likely be overwhelmed by the staggering numbers of species. Possibilities include the beautiful Bar-headed Goose, whose migration sees them travelling from Northern China over the high Himalayan mountain ranges to winter here on the plains. Other species may include Garganey, Northern Pintail, Lesser Whistling, Indian Spot-billed and Ferruginous Ducks, Common and Pied Kingfishers, Little and Indian Cormorants, Oriental Darter, Grey and Purple Herons,



A family of water-loving Nilgai by Adam Riley





Sarus Crane by Rich Lindie

Great, Yellow-billed and Little Egrets, Black-crowned Night Heron, Painted, Woolly-necked and Black-necked Storks, Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacanas, White-breasted Waterhen, Purple Swampphen and Black-winged Stilt. Regal and elegant Sarus Cranes are often heard calling before they are seen striding over the flooded grasslands.

Day 7: Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur). We have a full day today to explore the riches of this amazing reserve. The marshy edges attract a variety of migrant passerines, including the secretive Bluethroat, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Rosy Pipit, Western Yellow, Citrine and White-browed Wagtails, whilst Wire-tailed Swallows hawk insects overhead. Raptors are especially well represented at Bharatpur, with concentrations of large migrant eagles such as Eastern Imperial, Greater Spotted, Steppe and Indian Spotted being of special interest. Other raptors we may find include Western Marsh Harrier and Laggar Falcon.

Extensive areas of arid *Acacia* dominated woodland and dry grasslands surround the ponds and we will be sure to explore this habitat for Black-rumped Flameback, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Indian Grey Hornbill, Greater Coucal, Brahminy Starling, the very uncommon and localised Marshall's Iora, White-eared Bulbul, Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher, Zitting Cisticola, Purple Sunbird, Baya Weaver and small flocks of Indian Silverbill. These Indian residents share their habitat during the winter months with a wide range of migrants from northern Asia, notably Red-breasted Flycatcher, the scarce Brooks's Leaf Warbler, skulking Siberian Rubythroat, Olive-backed Pipit and Isabelline Wheatear. We will also search for the nocturnal residents at their day roosts, including Dusky Eagle-Owl, Spotted Owlet and Large-tailed Nightjar, while a visit to the plant nursery may produce a wintering Orange-headed, Scaly or even Tickell's Thrush. Mammals we should see include groups of the huge Nilgai (Blue Bull), largest of all, Asian antelope, as well as Golden Jackal, Sambar and the attractive Northern Palm Squirrel. Reptiles such as the huge Flap-shelled Turtle are often seen sunbathing on dry land while Asian Monitors patrol for prey items. If we are lucky, we may even come across an Indian Rock Python sunning itself.

Day 8: Bharatpur to Chambal River via Fatehpur Sikri. This morning, we depart early on the journey to Chambal Safari Lodge via Agra. Our first stop of the day will be at the ancient city of Fatehpur Sikri. This amazingly well preserved historical - city was constructed by Mughal emperor Akbar in 1570 and served as the empire's capital from 1571 until 1585. Though it took 15 years to build, it was abandoned after only 14 years because the water supply was unable to sustain the growing



Indian Skimmer by Rich Lindie



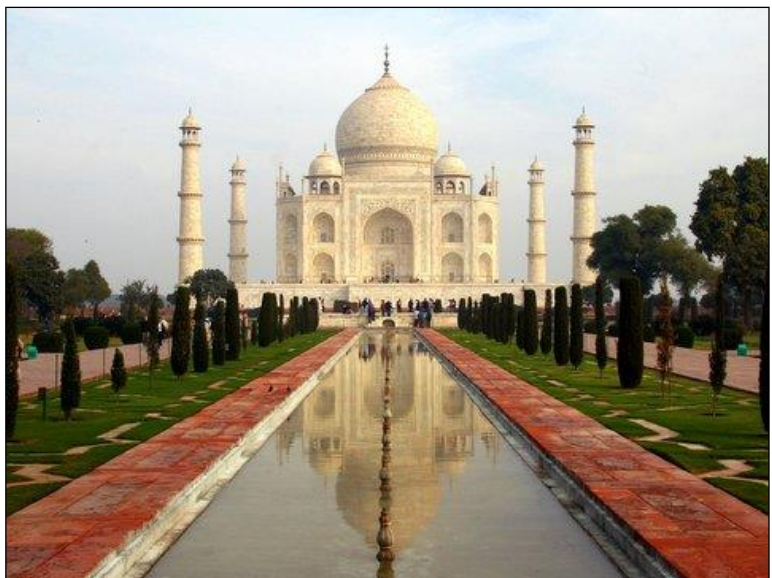


Gharial by Rich Lindie

endangered Indian Skimmer, one of our main reasons for visiting this reliable site, can often be found on islands in the river together with Black-bellied and River Terns. During our boat trip, we will do a lot of scanning and this could turn up other exciting species in the form of Black Stork, Red-naped Ibis, Small Pratincole, Long-legged Buzzard, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Bonelli's Eagle, River Lapwing, Great Stone-curlew, Sand Lark, Desert Wheatear, and possibly even Indian Eagle-Owl roosting on the small cliff faces. We will also be keeping a sharp eye out for one of the rarer inhabitants of this river, the unique Ganges River Dolphin that is confined largely to the Ganges and Brahmaputra Rivers and their tributaries. Another rare species we should encounter is the bizarre, long-snouted Gharial – one of the most localised and critically endangered crocodylians on the planet, together with Mugger Crocodile and Flap-shelled Turtle.

We will also have time to search the woodlands around our lodge grounds, which often hold wintering migrants such as Verditer Flycatcher and Booted and Sykes's Warblers, as well as Indian Flying Fox. The real prize though would be the resident Brown Hawk-Owl, which we often find at its day roost. At night we will take a short walk to look for Common Palm Civet, often found in the trees around the lodge grounds.

Day 10: Chambal to New Delhi via Agra (Taj Mahal). After breakfast at Chambal, we then drive back to Agra for the cultural highlight of the trip, the simply magnificent Taj Mahal, literally meaning "Crown of Palaces". It is also a World Heritage Site and is famous for the elegance of its design, its extraordinary translucent white marble dome, its mathematical symmetry and the immense numbers of intricately carved and inlaid semi-precious stones that adorn its walls. Begun in 1632, tens of thousands of architects and labourers, and over a thousand elephants, toiled for more than 20 years to complete this breathtaking edifice, which was commissioned by the grief-stricken Shah Jahan after his third wife died



The Taj Mahal by David Shackelford





Displaying Indian Peafowl by Marius Coetzee

during the birth of their 14th child. This is without a doubt one of India's most iconic and impressive sites and should not be missed!

In Agra, we will also visit the fabled Agra Red Fort, located in the centre of the city and serving as a monumental reminder of the fascinating history of the region. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is more accurately a 94-acre walled city and was constructed in the 16th century. Exploring this architecturally spectacular complex is fascinating and from here we will also enjoy further views of the shimmering marble Taj Mahal. In fact, Shah Jahan spent his final

years here at the Agra Fort as a captive of his son Aurangzeb who deposed him. Shah Jahan apparently died here whilst imprisoned in a tower with a view of the Taj Mahal.

Whilst marveling at these impressive historical sites, we will no doubt also keep an eye out for birds, and species that we may encounter include Brown Rock Chat and Dusky Crag Martin which call these buildings home, families of Spotted Owlets in the gardens, raptors (Egyptian Vultures are frequently seen around the Taj Mahal), and waterbirds on the holy Yamuna River, including the elegant River Lapwing. We end the day with a long drive to New Delhi.

Day 11: Final departure. All good tours must, unfortunately, come to an end. After breakfast this morning we shall head to Delhi International Airport where the tour will conclude.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 11;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings during the tour;
- All ground transportation (including train journeys);
- Boat excursion on the Chambal River;
- All national park and other reserve entrance fees; and

This excludes:

- **ANY** flights;
- Visa fees;
- Any drinks;
- Tips for local guides and services
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.
- Camera fees.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single



accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.**

b) **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.**

c) **Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**

d) **Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

Tippling: As noted above, gratuities are NOT included on this tour.

Please note:

- The train rides are always something to consider when travelling in India. This is by far the best way to reach many of the sites we visit, as the distances they cover would take infinitely longer if done by vehicle on the congested roads.
- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20 kg (44 lb) for check in luggage and 8 kg (+-18 lb) for hand luggage.
- This tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health and reasonably fit as much of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time. If you have any physical or medical limitations or conditions, please notify us in advance of departure.
- Accommodation throughout the trip is of a good standard and the hotels and resorts that we make use of range from comfortable to rather luxurious. There is no camping on this trip.
- The open jeep tours can be very cold, please bring sufficient warm clothing, including gloves and beanie (woolly hat).

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include **ANY** airfares. The tour will begin in New Delhi on day 1, and as this is scheduled as an arrival day; you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude after breakfast in New Delhi on day 11.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi (IATA: DEL) is the main port of entry for international flights into India for this tour and is well serviced by many of the world's major airlines. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**

