

Western India & the Himalaya Itinerary

[Link: Western India & the Himalaya](#)

Tour Overview

India is a vast country and our Western India & Himalaya birding tour will focus on two very different areas: Gujarat in the dry west and the foothills of the Himalayas. The west is relatively sparsely populated and here we will search for Asiatic Lion, Indian Wolf and Blackbuck and an array of rare or endemic bird species, such as Gray Hypocolius, White-naped Tit, Crab Plover, Terek Sandpiper and Saunders's Tern. The scenery will be spectacular!

After a visit to world-famous Keoladeo Ghana National Park (Bharatpur) and the Taj Mahal at Agra we make our way via Delhi to the foothills of the Himalayas. Here we stay at Corbett National Park, where tiger and leopard are possible and next we will bird in the vicinities of two hill stations. Birdlife in the latter two locations will be very different from what we have encountered so far, and our lists will grow by leaps and bounds. Expect a trip list between 300 and 400 bird species, plus a number of large mammals and reptiles.

Itinerary

Day 1. Arrive Ahmedabad

Our Western India & Himalaya birding tour begins with arrival at Ahmedabad. You will be met and transferred to our hotel in Ahmedabad. We will have an orientation get-together before we get a well-deserved rest at our hotel.

Day 2. Transfer to Great Rann of Kutch

Today is mostly a driving day, with occasional birding and comfort breaks, in order to reach Nakhatrana. Located at the Great Rann of Kutch, Nakhatrana will be our home base for the next couple of days. From here we search the low lying area of salt flats with scattered vegetation for many hard-to-find species. Night at Infinity Rann of Kutch.

Days 3 and 4. Great Rann of Kutch

Two full days at Great Rann of Kutch, including a half-day visit to the coast at Mandvi, will give us many opportunities to look for specialties of the region, including coursers, Gray Hypocolius, Sykes's Nightjar, White-naped Tit, Desert Warbler, Gray-necked Bunting and Pale Rock Sparrow. Vultures, eagles (including Eastern Imperial) and falcons are also present in impressive numbers. Along the coast our targets include Crab Plover, Terek Sandpiper, sand-plovers and various gulls and terns. Night at Infinity Rann of Kutch.

Day 5. Transfer to Gir National Park

After breakfast we drive to Gir National Park. After arrival and check-in at the lodge, we may do some birding along the nearby productive riverbank. Our target here is Greater Painted-Snipe, but there will be numerous other species. The Gir Lion Sanctuary and National Park covers some 540 square miles of wonderfully unspoiled rugged hill country. Night at Gir Birding Lodge.

Day 6. Gir National Park

Morning and afternoon drives in Gir N.P. will give us chances at Asiatic Lion, although the species is quite rare (our 2018 group saw three). The numerous Spotted Deer, Sambar, and Nilgai form the lions' main prey base, while other mammals in the park include the elusive Leopard. We're sure to see an array of new birds, too, perhaps including Spotted and Painted Sandgrouse, Indian Black Ibis, Crested Hawk-eagle, Rock Bush-quail, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon and Tawny-bellied Babbler. Night at Gir Birding Lodge.

Day 7. Transfer to Velavadar National Park

After a morning jeep safari to Gir National Park and an early lunch we drive to Velavadar National Park. This day will get us into semi-desert country, the focus of the first part of the tour. After arrival and check-in at the Blackbuck Lodge, we may do some birding around the lodge, time permitting. Night at Blackbuck Lodge.

Day 8. Velavadar National Park

Morning and afternoon game drives to Velavadar National Park, during which we will see numerous graceful Blackbucks and other large mammals. In 2018 we spotted a few Indian Wolves and Jungle Cats. Common Cranes and Steppe Eagles are ubiquitous and in 2018 we saw Gujarat's first White-tailed Eagle at a local waterbody. Here we should also encounter some waterfowl, storks and shorebirds. Night at Blackbuck Lodge.

Day 9. Transfer to Ahmedabad. Fly to Jaipur

We will have one more morning game drive in Velavadar National Park. After breakfast we pack a lunch and drive to Ahmedabad airport for a late afternoon flight to Jaipur. Here we transfer to our hotel, Shapura House.

Day 10. Drive to Bharatpur (Keoladeo Ghana National Park)

After breakfast we drive to Bharatpur, check in and enjoy lunch, after which we will bird inside Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary (Keoladeo Ghana National Park). Nights at Hotel Sunbird.

Day 11. Keoladeo Ghana National Park

Full day birding at Keoladeo Ghana N.P., the most renowned bird sanctuary in all of India. We will use cycle rickshaws and also make a number of walks. If the monsoons have been good, there will be lots of water with huge numbers of birds (geese, ducks, herons, storks, raptors, shorebirds, etc.), but even in dry conditions there will be plenty to see. Our daily list should be huge.

Day 12. Bharatpur to the Taj Mahal and on to Delhi

This morning we head for Agra. En route, time permitting, we may visit Fatehpur Sikri, a deserted town built during the Mughal Empire. In Agra we will visit the Taj Mahal. No matter how often you have seen it in images, it remains a stunning building and complex and is a must-see when visiting India. The Yamuna River behind the Taj can be surprisingly bird-rich – there is a profusion of raptors over the Taj and there are chances of seeing Pallas's Gull, River Lapwing and Brown-headed Barbet. Afterwards we will drive to Delhi. Arrive Delhi and check in to our hotel.

Day 13. Drive to Corbett National Park

Today the second leg of our tour starts, with a focus on the Himalayan foothills and its rich bird-life. After breakfast we will drive to Corbett National Park. Corbett is situated at the foothills of the Himalayas and will give us not only a change of scenery and bird-life, but also a chance to see tigers. We will make a few comfort breaks, but otherwise this will be mostly a travel day. Night at Camp Riverwild at Corbett.

Days 14 & 15. Corbett National Park

Two full days birding in Corbett National Park with two jeep safaris to the Bijrani zone and the Durgadevi Zone for birding and animal watching. This is the oldest National Park in India, established in 1936. The park is covered by Sal and mixed deciduous woods and harbours over 500 species of bird, including Ruddy Shelduck, Red Junglefowl (the ancestor of our domestic chicken), Indian Peafowl, Ibisbill, a variety of diurnal raptors and numerous passerine species. Here we will make a couple of game drives, looking for Bengal Tigers, but also for Leopard and a host of other large mammals and reptiles. Nights at Camp Riverwild at Corbett.

Day 16. Corbett to Pangot, near Nainital

This morning after breakfast we will start driving to Pangot. Expect this journey to take 4 – 5 hours, birding a little on the way. Check in at our lodge and, if time permits, enjoy birding down the valley from our lodge, where you may add Red-billed Blue Magpie and Velvet-fronted Nuthatch to your list! The evening will give us some time to relax. Night at Nest Cottages.

Day 17. Pangot area

This is another bird-rich area, situated at about 1900 m of elevation, and today we'll search for Koklass Pheasant as well as the more difficult Cheer Pheasant, and there will be plenty more to see in these beautiful wooded Kumaon hills. Great Hill Barbet and Black-headed Jay are often seen and others include Rufous-bellied and Himalayan Woodpeckers, Altai Accentor, Slaty-headed Parakeet, Yellow-browed Tit, White-tailed Nuthatch, Bar-tailed Tree creeper, Upland Pipit, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker and Whiskered Yuhina. Overhead we may see Lammergeier and Himalayan Griffon, while streambeds may produce forktails and water-redstarts. Night at Nest Cottages.

Day 18. Pangot to Sattal

After a couple of hours of early morning birding we drive to the Sattal (Seven Lakes) area to enjoy some lake and mountain birds. After check-in and lunch at our hotel, we head off to explore in the afternoon - typical species may include Siberian Rubythroat, Red-billed Leiothrix, White-throated and Streaked Laughingthrushes, Grey Treepie, White-capped Bunting, Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch, Rusty cheeked Scimitar-babbler, Slaty-blue Flycatcher, Mountain Chiffchaff, Sulphur-bellied and Hume's Warblers and so many others. Night in Sattal.

Day 19. Sattal

We will bird all day in the Sattal area. The elevation is about 1370 m, so the bird life will differ somewhat from that at both Corbett and Pangot. We should encounter Greater Flameback, Greater Yellownape and possibly Great Slaty Woodpecker, several species of tit, White-crested Laughing-Thrush, nuthatches and treecreepers, and more. Night in Sattal.

Day 20. Sattal to Delhi and departure

After a leisurely breakfast we will leave around 8 a.m. We then drive to Delhi Indira Gandhi International airport. Upon arrival at Delhi we will have a farewell dinner and then take our International flights back home. Our Western India & Himalaya birding tour concludes with many fond memories and experiences.

What to Expect

Our days on our Western India & Himalaya birding tour will start early, with occasional siestas during the warmest part of the day, and there will be several late afternoon/evening forays. There will be some easy to moderate hikes, but much of the birding will be from or near the vehicle.

Our accommodations are comfortable and there is enough choice in the cuisine to suit everyone's taste. Transportation will generally be in comfortable, air-conditioned vehicles, except during safari rides. There are a number of long drives of 3 to 4 hours or more.

Daytime temperatures will usually range from mild to hot, but evenings and nights can be cool or even cold, especially in the mountains.

Air pollution is occasionally a problem for people with breathing difficulties, so you may wish to bring a simple mask along.

Each evening, the day's list of birds and other wildlife will be reviewed and plans for the next day will be discussed.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- Internal flights included
 - Comfortable accommodations, ranging from good to basic and clean
 - All meals included; several will be vegetarian.
 - Eagle-Eye guide plus local guide throughout
 - Park, conservation and entrance fees
 - Gratuities
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Tour Price Does Not Include

- Travel to and from start/end location
- Travel Insurance
- Items of a personal nature