

GOA, INDIA

30th January to 7th February 2000



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INTRODUCTION

Flights

When we were looking to book flights to Goa only a 7 day or 14 day duration was available during 2000. The only option was therefore to accept a charter flight of 7 or 14 days or to fly by scheduled flight to Mumbai (Bombay) then make our way to Goa. As we wished to go for 10 days, we flew to Mumbai via Kuwait. Wildwings (0117 984 8040) looked at a number of options, with us finally opting for Kuwait Airways at a cost of £424 including taxes. We also pre-booked the flight from Mumbai to Goa with Indian Airlines at a cost of £50 and the return from Goa to Mumbai by overnight first class rail at a cost of £22.

Accommodation

We pre-booked the Hotel Beira Mar at Baga as most other birders appeared to have stayed there. We booked for two three day spells with a two night gap when we planned to visit the Western Ghats. The cost per person for B&B was £17/night. Evening meals were taken in the local restaurants where some excellent cuisine was sampled. A starter followed by a good chicken or seafood curry with several drinks came to about £6 each.

The hotel was ideally situated although the result of certain wildlife (bed bugs) in one room only became apparent when Phil returned home. The hotel management were very helpful allowing us to leave at the hotel all the kit we did not require for the Western Ghats. Another tip is to make use of the very cheap laundry service. We left all our dirty clothes when we left for the hills, it was washed and ironed upon our return.

Another hotel that birders should seriously consider is the three star Marinha Dourada Hotel which is situated close to some good pools and about half a mile from the Beira Mar, further inland but closer to Baga Hill.

Transport

We utilised taxi's during our stay at the coast. A lot of taxi drivers claim to know all the main birding sites and most probably do. However, very few will know the roosting sites of the owls, so the most knowledgeable taxi drivers are to be found outside the Beira Mar. We used the services of Naresh Vaingankar who proved first class and appeared to know most of the British tour leaders who visit Goa. The taxi drivers will meet you at any pre-arranged time, often before dawn, then deliver you to your chosen site. They will then either stay with the vehicle looking after any equipment or depart and collect you later in the day.

For the trip to the Western Ghats we pre-booked a 4 wheel drive Tata (similar to a Landcruiser) with a driver at a cost of £140. Ultimately this proved unnecessary as cheaper alternative transport was available. Backwoods (see below) will pick up & return you to your hotel as part of their service and the Baga taxi drivers will also take you to both Molem & Bondla.

Backwoods Camp

We attempted to pre-book an overnight stay at Backwoods Camp from the UK but finally sorted this out whilst in Goa. The camp is becoming very popular so pre-booking at busy times will become essential. The proprietors have decided to limit the camp size to just 6 double tents (max. 12 people) to keep the impact on the site to a minimum.

The price includes all meals, a well appointed tent (with flush toilet and shower) and the services of expert guides. The cost for our one night visit was £22 each. Backwoods can be contacted by Email on either loven@goal.dot.net.in or surlawoods@hotmail.com or by mail to Backwoods, E 499, Travasso De Cruz, 31st January Road, St. Tome, Panjim, Goa 403 001, India. Telephone number 436109, fax 91 832 224904.

Before we stayed at Backwoods we stayed at the rather tired chalets at Molem which can be booked when you arrive at the forest reserve with an average evening meal available at the site.

Insurance

We called over 15 insurance companies before we found the required cover at a reasonable price. Shop around. We used Viking Travelsafe on 0870 6060 522 at a cost of £21 each.

Visa

A visa at a cost of £19 is required for a holiday in India. Contact the High Commission of India on 0171 836 8484 or 0891 444544 for an application form.

You must have at least six months remaining on your UK passport before you travel.

Immunisations

For the most up to date information on jabs required contact your own GP or MASTA (Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad) on 0906 8224 100 who offer an excellent postal service. For India you should have immunisation against Polio, Tetanus, Typhoid & Hepatitis "A" all of which carry a moderate or significant risk.

You should also take Paludrine and Chloroquine to combat Malaria one week before you travel and up to 4 weeks after you return. Boots the Chemist have a pack that will cover this regime at around £15.

MASTA will also advise you on any other risks you might encounter.

Reports & Map

Special thanks go to John Martin & Dave Fisher who both supplied us with detailed notes and maps. We also used the rather expensive (£16) and now out of date "Goa, the independent birders guide" by Peter Harris as well as the February 1999 trip report published by Mark Beevers. We also used the Goa Beach Guide map available at £6 from Subbuteo Natural History Books (01352 756551).

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Participants:

Rick Andrews, Whitchurch, Bristol.
Phil Bristow, Cyncoed, Cardiff.
Dave Gilmore, Roath, Cardiff.
Judd Hunt, Fairwater, Cardiff.
Mike Powell, Llanishen, Cardiff.

Summary:

- 29th January: Fly from Heathrow to Kuwait, then Kuwait to Mumbai (Bombay).
30th January: Birding close to Mumbai Airport before flying to Dabolim Airport, Goa. Late afternoon overlooking fields at rear of Beira Mar Hotel.
31st January: Beira Mar Hotel, Baga Hill & fields, Ciba Geigy & Carambolin Lake.
1st February: Maem Lake, Saligao, Fort Aguada & Beira Mar Hotel.
2nd February: Beira Mar Hotel, Panjim Salt Pans, Ponda, Molem & Dudhsagar Falls.
3rd February: Molem & Backwoods Camp.
4th February: Backwoods Camp, Mapusa, Morjim Beach & Siolim.
5th February: Beira Mar Hotel, Dona Paula, Santa Cruz, Chorao Island, Baga Hill & fields.
6th February: Beira Mar Hotel, Saligao, Chapora Fort, Marinha Dourada Hotel, Baga Hill & fields.
7th February: Beira Mar Hotel, Old Goa, Ciba Geigy, Carambolin Lake & Margao Railway Station. Konkan Express to Mumbai.
8th February: Flight to Heathrow via Kuwait.

Detailed itinerary:

Day 1: Arrived at Mumbai International Airport from Kuwait, clearing customs around 05.30. Met the ground agent and collected our onward flight tickets etc. He then directed us to the Hotel Leela about 25 minutes walk from the airport for breakfast. Walked back, spending time working the fields between the hotel & airport. At midday flew to Goa, then taxi to Beira Mar Hotel, Baga. Late afternoon spent searching fields and overlooking marshy area at rear of hotel.
Overnight at Beira Mar Hotel.
Birding highlights:
Mumbai airport fields: Little Bittern, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Asian Pied Starling (20+), Citrine Wagtail (2), Scaly-breasted Munia (3).
Baga fields: Little Pratincole (9).
Beira Mar: Cinnamon Bittern (2), Baillon's Crake, Painted Snipe (7), Bluethroat (3).

- Day 2: From dawn, overlooked the marsh from the Beira Mar then took taxis to the river mouth at the base of Baga Hill. Walked the coast path north, then headed back along the ridge before dropping down to the river via one of the indistinct paths. Walked back to the hotel across the fields. In the afternoon took the taxi's to Ciba Geigy to twitch the River Tern, but access to the site was denied so watched from the perimeter fence. Spent remainder of day at the excellent Carambolin Lake.
Overnight at Beira Mar Hotel.
Birding highlights:
Beira Mar: Stork-billed Kingfisher.
Baga Hill: Indian Peafowl, Peregrine, Pallas's Gull, Malabar Grey Hornbill, White-browed Babbler (2), Puff-throated Babbler, Pale-billed Flowerpecker (2), Crimson Sunbird (2).
Baga fields: Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark (2), Hoopoe (2).
Ciba Geigy: Indian Darter (3), Asian Openbill Stork (52), River Tern, White-bellied Sea-Eagle.
Carambolin Lake: Lesser Whistling Duck (600), Cotton Pigmy Goose (50), Pheasant-tailed Jacana (45), Bronze-winged Jacana (25), Purple Gallinule (180), Streak-throated Swallow (7), Blue-tailed Bee-eater (12).
- Day 3: At first light took taxis to Maem Lake for the roosting Fish Owls. Took all morning to walk slowly around the lake then after lunch visited Saligao Spring for the roosting Wood Owl. Mid afternoon visited the Pitta site at Fort Aguada and the headland around the fort.
Last hour of light spent overlooking the marsh from the Beira Mar.
Overnight at Beira Mar Hotel.
Birding highlights:
Maem Lake: Cinnamon Bittern, Brown Fish Owl (2), Crested Tree-swift (4), Large Cuckoo-shrike, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Puff-throated Babbler (2), Tawny-bellied Babbler (5), Verditer Flycatcher, Booted Warbler, Malabar Whistling-thrush, Orange-headed Ground-thrush, Nilgiri Blackbird, White-cheeked Barbet (2), Loten's Sunbird, White-bellied Drongo (2).
Saligao: Besra, Brown Wood Owl, Crested Tree-swift (2), Common Wood-shrike, Golden-fronted Leafbird (2), Malabar Whistling-thrush, Orange-headed Ground-thrush, White-bellied Drongo.
Fort Aguada: White-bellied Sea-Eagle (2), Indian Peafowl (4), Indian Pitta, Rufous Tree-pie, Orange-headed Ground-thrush (2), White-browed Bulbul.
Beira Mar: Cinnamon Bittern (2), Baillon's Crake, Pintail Snipe (5).
- Day 4: Spent first two hours overlooking the marsh from the Beira Mar whilst waiting for the pre-arranged transport to the Western Ghats. Roadside stops at Panjim & Ponda en route to Molem. Booked into the now rather tired chalets at the Molem Reserve centre then drove to Colem for the bus to Dudhsagar Falls. Afternoon at the falls before returning to the centre for the last hour of light.
Overnight at Molem Reserve chalets.

Birding highlights:

Panjim Salt pans: Lesser Whistling Duck (130), Cotton Pigmy Goose (50), Bronze-winged Jacana (20).

Ponda: Crested Serpent Eagle.

Molem: Indian Black Eagle (2), Jungle Owlet, Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike (4), Taiga Flycatcher, Orange-headed Ground-thrush, Forest Wagtail, Plain Flowerpecker (2), Brown Flycatcher.

Dudhsagar Falls: White-eyed Buzzard, Emerald Dove (3), White-rumped Needletail (45), Dusky Crag Martin (2), Brown-breasted Flycatcher (3), Malabar Whistling-thrush, Spangled Drongo.

Day 5:

Spent the whole of the morning, from dawn, walking the wide track from behind the Molem Reserve centre returning at midday to meet our pre-arranged transport to Backwoods Camp. After lunch at Backwoods, walked one of the trails with a guide. Upon return birded the camp area before a further walk along a different trail until dark.

Overnight at Backwoods Camp.

Birding highlights:

Molem: Crested Serpent Eagle (2), Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, White-bellied Woodpecker, Brown-capped Pigmy Woodpecker, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (8), Rufous Treepie (2), Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike (2), Scarlet Minivet (2), Tawny-bellied Babbler (3), Western Crowned Warbler (8), White-rumped Shama (2), Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Blue-capped Rock Thrush (3), Orange-headed Ground-thrush, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (2), Thick-billed Flowerpecker (2), Chestnut-shouldered Petronia (2).

Backwoods Camp: Tawny Eagle, Indian Black Eagle, Grey Junglefowl (3), Vernal Hanging Parrot (2), Sri Lanka Frogmouth (2), Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (40), Rufous Woodpecker, White-bellied Woodpecker, Brown-capped Pigmy Woodpecker (2), Heart-spotted Woodpecker (2), Indian Pitta (2), Large Woodshrike (6), Scarlet Minivet (4), Asian Fairy Bluebird (3), Black-crested Bulbul (2), Yellow-browed Bulbul (2), Dark-fronted Babbler (4), Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (2), Malabar Whistling-thrush, Orange-headed Ground-thrush (5), Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (4), Forest Wagtail, Spangled Drongo.

Day 6:

Birded one of the Backwoods trails before breakfast then a different trail before lunch. Collected from the camp in pre-arranged transport after lunch and returned to Baga via a short roadside stop near Mapusa. Late afternoon took taxis to Morjim Beach then just prior to dark birded the paddies at the rear of Siolim Ferry jetty on the return trip.

Overnight at Beira Mar Hotel.

Birding highlights:

Backwoods Camp: Crested Goshawk (2), Crested Serpent Eagle, Pompadour Green Pigeon (2), Malabar Parakeet (2), Vernal Hanging Parrot (4), Jungle Owlet, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Brown-headed Barbet, Heart-spotted Woodpecker (4), Indian Pitta, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (2), Rufous Treepie (2), Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike, Scarlet Minivet (4), Nilgiri Blackbird, Asian Fairy Bluebird (2), Black-crested Bulbul (2), Black Bulbul (2) Yellow-browed Bulbul (4),

Dark-fronted Babbler, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta (4), Taiga Flycatcher, White-rumped Shama, Orange-headed Ground-thrush (3), Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (2), Forest Wagtail, Spangled Drongo, Thick-billed Flowerpecker.

Mapusa: Woolly-necked Stork (3), Greater Spotted Eagle.

Morjim Beach: Lesser Sand Plover (8), Heuglin's Gull (2), Caspian Gull (40), Pallas's Gull (2), Slender-billed Gull, Crested Tern (3), Lesser Crested Tern (25).

Siolim: Little Pratincole (40+), Indian Swiftlet (20), Dusky Crag Martin (2).

Day 7: From dawn, overlooking the marsh from the Beira Mar before taking our usual taxis to the dry plateau area of Dona Paula for Yellow-wattled Plover. After an hour we then visited the Santa Cruz area before travelling to catch one of the ferries to Chorao Island. On the island our taxi driver arranged a dugout canoe trip to the mangroves, but as it was high tide this proved disappointing. Late afternoon spent on Baga Hill before returning to the hotel across the fields.

Overnight at Beira Mar Hotel.

Birding highlights:

Dona Paula: Yellow-wattled Lapwing (3), Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark, Oriental Lark.

Santa Cruz: Woolly-necked Stork (5), Greater Spotted Eagle, White-bellied Sea-Eagle (3), Pacific Golden Plover (6), Greater Sand Plover (20), Terek Sandpiper (23), Broad-billed Sandpiper (2), Isabelline Shrike (2).

Chorao Island: Western Reef Heron (17), Lesser Adjutant, Plain Flowerpecker (2).

Baga Hill: White-bellied Sea-Eagle, White-throated Fantail (2), Common Wood-shrike, Brown Flycatcher, Green Warbler.

Baga fields: Brahminy Starling (10), Hoopoe (4), Blyth's Pipit (3).

Day 8: As usual spent first light overlooking the marsh from the hotel. After breakfast visited Saligao again then went to look for the Indo-Pacific humpbacked Dolphins at the mouth of the Chapora River. Visited the fort area overlooking the river mouth, then went to the salt-pans in front of the Marinha Dourada Hotel. Late afternoon spent on Baga Hill again before returning to the hotel across the fields for the last time.

Overnight at Beira Mar Hotel.

Birding highlights:

Beira Mar Hotel: Black-crowned Night Heron (4), Cinnamon Bittern, Pallid Harrier, Painted Snipe (5), Orange-headed Ground-thrush.

Saligao: White-cheeked Barbet (9), Coppersmith Barbet (14) Rufous Treepie, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike (4), Malabar Whistling-thrush.

Chapora Fort: Yellow-wattled Lapwing (2), Tawny Pipit (2).

Marinha Dourada Salt-pans: Marsh Sandpiper (4), Temminck's Stint.

Baga Hill: Vernal Hanging Parrot, White-throated Fantail (3).

Baga fields: Brahminy Starling (15).

Day 9:

From dawn overlooking the marsh from the hotel. Then after packing bags, checked out of the hotel and took our usual taxis to Ciba Geigy then onto Carambolin Lake. Finally headed for Margao to catch the midday Konkan Express to Mumbai.

Birding highlights:

Mandovi River, Old Goa: Short-eared Owl.

Ciba Geigy: Indian Darter (2), Lesser Adjutant (4).

Carambolin Lake: Asian Openbill Stork (57), Comb Duck (4), Lesser Whistling Duck (600), Purple Gallinule (200+) Brown Hawk Owl (2).

Margao: White-rumped Vulture (3).

From the train: Woolly-necked Stork (4), Black-shouldered Kite (9), White-rumped Vulture (2), Crested Tree-swift (4).