

GOA

14th to 21st March 2004

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This was my first trip to India and very much a last minute exploratory one. I knew a week was not really enough to do the area justice and that March was not the ideal time to go since many winter visitors would have departed. The holiday was the usual compromise between birding and bird photography and although I did end up with rather a modest trip list, I had some excellent birds and was more than content with what I saw.

The weather was very hot and apparently the humidity had soared just before I arrived, which confined the best birding to the morning and evenings. It was possible to continue birding in the shade during the hottest part of the day, but activity was greatly reduced and the time was generally better spent resting (and drinking Lime Sodas!).

I stayed at the Marinha Dourada Hotel in Arpora and was more than happy with it; the rooms were air-conditioned with fans and good shower facilities and the restaurant and general service was excellent. The live entertainment in the evenings was the usual appalling fare of cheesy cover versions although there were some rather good local musicians one night. The hotel is well placed for all the local birding sites and is right by some salt pans, which held a good selection of wetland species.

I found a very good guide in Abhi Naik, whom I used for 4 trips and recommend thoroughly. He is reputed to be the best local guide and frequently works for Wildwings and Sunbirder. He charged about 800R a day which usually included transport, and I felt this was good value since it wasn't much above what I would have paid for a taxi. He has just discovered a new site for Brown Fish Owl, which I had excellent views of, and was also able to show me Brown Wood Owl and Brown Hawk Owl. He is contactable on his mobile (9822137098) or by e-mail at naikabi@rediffmail.com

ITINERARY

- 14th PM: Arrival and quick look around the Marinha Dourada
- 15th AM & PM: Marinha Dourada area
- 16th AM: Baga Hill, PM: Arpora Wood & Biera Mar Hotel
- 17th AM: Backwaters boat trip near River Zuari, PM: Baga fields & Baga Hill
- 18th AM: Mayem Lake, PM: Saligao and Arpora Wood
- 19th AM: Morjim Beach, PM: Marina Dourada & Arpora Wood
- 20th AM: Carambolim Lake, PM: Arpora Wood
- 21st AM: Arpora Wood & Marinha Dourada

Marinha Dourada

The area around the hotel was a good place to familiarise yourself with the more common birds and the salt pans were particularly good for photography. **White-throated Kingfisher** was very confiding here and a good selection of waders included **Temminck's Stint**, **Marsh Sandpiper** and **Pacific Golden Plover**. Other interesting species such as **Paddyfield Pipit**, **Malabar Crested Lark**, **Ashy Woodswallow** and **Ashy Prinia** were regularly present and raptor watching over Baga Hill produced an **Oriental Honey Buzzard** on one occasion.



Ashy Woodswallow



White-breasted Kingfisher



Pacific Golden Plover



Marsh Sandpiper

Baga Hill

I really didn't do this site justice, preferring to concentrate on Arpora Wood instead. My only visit to the open area at the top of the hill produced **Indian Peafowl** and I also heard and glimpsed several **Grey Nightjar** at dusk.

Arpora Wood

This excellent site is accessible via the track that leads past the Club Cabana. My main target here was **Indian Pitta**, and I made several visits. Although both my sightings were in the evening, the area is definitely more productive in the morning; unfortunately due to time constraints I only managed to make one such visit on my final day. The best views of Pitta were obtained on the track just beyond the Club Cabana, where a path leads into a more open area on the right hand side. It was almost at dusk on a Saturday night and the club was warming up its sound system, perhaps not my ideal soundtrack to such an immense birding experience but there you go! On another evening, I flushed a bird on the right hand trail where the track forks a little further on. Arpora Wood is superb for forest birds and I had a good selection of interesting species including **Orange-headed Thrush**, **Tawny-bellied Babbler**, **Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike**, **Tickell's Blue Flycatcher**, **Blue-winged Leafbird** and **Crested Serpent Eagle** although I am sure I missed a great deal. A local birder told me he has recorded around 120 species in the area, the majority of which are forest specialists.

Biera Mar Hotel

This hotel is the most popular base for birders visiting Goa and overlooks several paddyfields renowned for some of the more secretive wetland species. Unfortunately the timing of my visit meant the area was too dry for bitterns, but there was still a female **Painted Snipe** present, which I had good views of before dusk, as well as a very likely **Pintail Snipe**. Other good birds included a **Black-capped Kingfisher**, a large flock of **Rose-coloured Starling** and a very dark and probably melanistic **Indian Pond Heron**.



Indian Pond Heron



Black Drongo

Mayem Lake

Mayem Lake is set in a wooded valley north east of Baga. The lake itself held relatively little of interest except a **Blue-eared Kingfisher**, although the surrounding lush vegetation yielded some good birds such as **Little Spiderhunter**, **Golden-fronted Leafbird**, **Orange-breasted Green Pigeon** and **Nilgiri Woodpigeon**. A pair of **Changeable Hawk Eagles** were also nesting in the area.

Carambolim Lake

All the winter wildfowl had left this site with the exception of a small flock of **Lesser Whistling Duck**, but the lake still had good numbers of **Bronze-winged Jacana**, **Purple Gallinule** and several **River Terns**. Good views were had of a **Brown Hawk Owl** at Carambolim Wood on the eastern side of the lake.



Bronze-winged Jacana



Purple Gallinule

Morjim Beach

Morjim Beach is a great site for waders, gulls and terns although bird numbers were much lower than earlier in the winter. One compensation of an early spring visit were the many summer-plumaged birds including several smart **Great Black-headed Gulls**, but the star bird was a stunning **Caspian Plover** amongst the many **Lesser Sand Plovers**.



Caspian Plover



Lesser Sand Plover



Great Black-headed & Brown-headed Gull,
Crested & Lesser Crested Terns



Red-whiskered Bulbul

Backwaters boat trip

This was down a canal close to the Zuari river, and was actually 'Jake the Snake's crocodile cruise' although Abhi booked it more for the kingfishers. We saw six species, including two **Collared Kingfishers** and several **Black-capped Kingfishers**, as well as five crocodiles, one of which was over 10ft long. Some other good wetland birds were also seen such as **Lesser Adjutant** and **Black-necked Ibis**.

SPECIES LIST (those in bold seen around the Marinha Dourada Hotel)

Little Grebe	Carambolim Lake
Darter	Backwaters boat trip
Little Cormorant	several sites
Great White Egret	several sites
Intermediate Egret	several sites
Little Egret	most wetland sites
Western Reef Heron	several along the River Zuari
Cattle Egret	ubiquitous
Grey Heron	Backwaters boat trip
Purple Heron	2, Carambolim Lake
Striated Heron	Marinha Dourada area & Backwaters boat trip
Indian Pond Heron	most wetland sites, a melanistic bird at the Biera Mar Hotel
Night Heron	2, Biera Mar Hotel
Lesser Adjutant	1 overhead, Backwaters boat trip
Black-headed Ibis	1 overhead, Backwaters boat trip
Lesser Whistling Duck	flock of c10 over Carambolim Lake
Oriental Honey Buzzard	1 over Baga Hill from the Marinha Dourada
Black-shouldered Kite	1 near Mayem Lake
Brahminy Kite	abundant
Black Kite	ubiquitous
Shikra	several seen in the Baga area
Changeable Hawk Eagle	2 with nest at Mayem Lake + a 3 rd bird there
Booted Eagle	1 over Baga Hill from the Marinha Dourada
Osprey	1, Backwaters boat trip
White-bellied Sea Eagle	both adults and immature birds seen regularly in the Baga area
Marsh Harrier	Carambolim Lake and Marinha Dourada
Crested Serpent Eagle	1 over Arpora Wood
Red Spurfowl	1 flushed at Mayem Lake
Indian Peafowl	3-4 at Baga Hill
White-breasted Waterhen	Biera Mar Hotel
Moorhen	Carambolim Lake
Purple Gallinule	abundant at Carambolim Lake
Bronze-winged Jacana	Carambolim Lake
Yellow-wattled Lapwing	2 near Mayem Lake
Red-wattled Lapwing	Marinha Dourada area
Greater Sand Plover	1 ad winter at Morjim Beach
Lesser Sand Plover	50+ at Morjim Beach
Caspian Plover	1 summer male at Morjim Beach
Little Ringed Plover	Marinha Dourada area
Kentish Plover	50+ at Morjim Beach
Pacific Golden Plover	up to 9, Marinha Dourada area
Whimbrel	Backwaters boat trip
Redshank	Marinha Dourada area
Greenshank	Marinha Dourada area
Marsh Sandpiper	up to 15, Marinha Dourada area
Wood Sandpiper	most wetland sites
Green Sandpiper	Biera Mar Hotel
Painted Snipe	1 female at the Biera Mar Hotel
Common Sandpiper	most wetland sites
<i>Gallinago</i> sp	1 at Biera Mar Hotel was probably a Pintail Snipe
Little Stint	up to 5, Marinha Dourada area
Temminck's Stint	1-2, Marinha Dourada area
Slender-billed Gull	1 at Morjim Beach
Black-headed Gull	1 at Morjim Beach
Brown-headed Gull	c50 at Morjim Beach
Great Black-headed Gull	4 ad summer and a 1 st winter at Morjim Beach

Heuglin's Gull	c5 at Morjim Beach
Crested Tern	c10 at Morjim Beach
Lesser Crested Tern	c50 at Morjim Beach
Sandwich Tern	1 at Morjim Beach
River Tern	3-4 at Carambolim Lake
Gull-billed Tern	3-4 at Carambolim Lake
Spotted Dove	Abundant
Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	1 at Mayem Lake
Nilgiri Wood Pigeon	several at Mayem Lake
Plum-headed Parakeet	several seen in the Baga area
Asian Koel	abundant, although heard more often than seen
Greater Coucal	abundant, although heard more often than seen
Grey Nightjar	several on the top of Baga Hill, seen and heard at dusk
Brown Wood Owl	1 at Saligao
Brown Fish Owl	1 at secret site close to Baga
Brown Hawk Owl	1 at Carambolim Wood on the eastern shore of the lake
Spotted Owlet	Marinha Dourada area and Biera Mar Hotel
Asian Palm Swift	Abundant
Little Swift	Marinha Dourada area
Indian Roller	Baga fields
Pied Kingfisher	several wetland sites
Stork-billed Kingfisher	Backwaters boat trip & Carambolim Lake
Black-capped Kingfisher	1 at Biera Mar Hotel, 4-5 on Backwaters boat trip
White-throated Kingfisher	most wetland sites
Collared Kingfisher	2, Backwaters boat trip
Common Kingfisher	most wetland sites
Blue-eared Kingfisher	Mayem Lake
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	4, Backwaters boat trip
Little Green Bee-eater	abundant
White-cheeked Barbet	abundant, although heard more often than seen
Coppersmith Barbet	abundant, although heard more often than seen
Black-rumped Flameback	several sites
Common Iora	Arpora Wood
Golden-fronted Leafbird	Mayem Lake
Blue-winged Leafbird	Arpora Wood
Golden Oriole	several sites
Black-hooded Oriole	male at Arpora Wood
Indian Pitta	seen twice at Arpora Wood
Malabar Crested Lark	Marinha Dourada area & Baga fields
Wire-tailed Swallow	Marinha Dourada area
Red-rumped Swallow	abundant
Ashy Woodswallow	3-4, Marinha Dourada area
Black Drongo	abundant
Ashy Drongo	several sites
White-bellied Drongo	Arpora Wood
Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike	Arpora Wood
Southern Grey Shrike	Marinha Dourada area & Baga Fields
Long-tailed Shrike	several sites
Chestnut-tailed Starling	Biera Mar Hotel & Mayem Lake
Brahminy Starling	Baga fields
Rose-coloured Starling	Biera Mar Hotel
Jungle Mynah	abundant
Rufous Treepie	2 at Brown Fish Owl site
House Crow	ubiquitous
Red-vented Bulbul	abundant
Red-whiskered Bulbul	abundant
Puff-throated Babbler	Mayem Lake & Arpora Wood
Tawny-bellied Babbler	Arpora Wood
Jungle Babbler	Arpora Wood & Baga Hill

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	Arpora Wood
Asian Paradise Flycatcher	Mayem Lake & Baga Hill
White-throated Fantail	Arpora Wood & Baga Hill
Asian Brown Flycatcher	Arpora Wood
Ashy Prinia	Marinha Dourada area & Mayem Lake
Grey-breasted Prinia	Arpora Wood
Blyth's Reed Warbler	several sites
Greenish Warbler	several sites
Common Tailorbird	Marinha Dourada area & Baga Hill
Indian Robin	Baga Hill
Oriental Magpie Robin	abundant
Pied Bushchat	Marinha Dourada area
Orange-headed Thrush	Arpora Wood
Black-lored Tit	Mayem Lake
Paddyfield Pipit	Marinha Dourada area & Baga fields
Richard's Pipit	Baga fields
White-browed Wagtail	abundant
Yellow Wagtail	most wetland sites
Little Spiderhunter	Mayem Lake
Purple-rumped Sunbird	several sites
Purple Sunbird	Arpora Wood
Crimson Sunbird	Marinha Dourada area & Baga Hill
Pale-billed Flowerpecker	several sites
Plain Flowerpecker	several sites
White-rumped Munia	abundant
House Sparrow	Marinha Dourada & airport
Baya Weaver	Arpora Wood