

# Northern India.

Visiting Sultanpur, Chambal, Bharatpur, and Ranthambhore.

7 – 16 October 2010

Early October is not the best time to visit the Northern part of India as winter migrant are only just beginning to arrive. But as the primary focus of this visit was for some coaching at the Commonwealth Games I was tied to this period. But going that far, I just had to fit some birding into the trip. Bharatpur and Ranthambhore are two reserves I've long wished to visit so it seemed logical to try to visit these two reserves on my first visit to the sub-continent. As well as being early in the "birding season" it didn't help matters that the monsoons in the region were the heaviest and longest for over 30 years which meant there was plenty of water in Bharatpur, and everywhere else, so waterbirds were much more widely dispersed – for example at Okhla the only ducks seen were 3 Indian Spot-billed Ducks. The vegetation was also thick and luxuriant, which made the birding hard work at times. That said, a trip total of some 211 species, of which 105 (+ 3 or 4, depending upon current taxonomic status) were lifers, was a decent total for the 8 days birding.

Flights were booked direct with Air India and all arrangements, including the driver and local guides, in India were managed by the very helpful team at Junglere Birding.

The accommodation was great throughout.

Delhi – Hotel, Sunstar Grand.

Chambal – Chambal Safari Lodge

Bharatpur – Hotel Sunbird

Ranthambhore - Hotel Safari Lodge

I had no problem with the food – and managed to miss the dreaded Delhi belly.

Day 1 (7 Oct)

Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary.

After a slightly delayed arrival in Delhi (arrived about 8:30am – was scheduled to arrive at 7:50), I was whisked straight off to the nearby reserve of Sultanpur, for an introduction to Indian birding. Lunch was taken in the local area, followed by exploring the surrounding farmland looking for Sandgrouse, Coursers and Painted Snipe. A total of 110 species were seen, the highlights of the visit to the reserve included the awesome spectacle of the mixed breeding heronry consisting of Painted Stork; Asian Openbill; Grey; Purple; Black-crowned Night; and, Indian Pond Herons; Great White; Intermediate; Little; and, Cattle Egrets; Great; Indian; and, Little Cormorants; Oriental Darter; Eurasian Spoonbill; and Black-necked Ibis; a fly over Indian Spotted Eagle; and Grey-bellied Cuckoo. Highlight of the afternoon session was undoubtedly the party of 10 Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse first seen in flight but later found on the ground and a flushed pair of Barred Buttonquail.

Day 2 and 3 (8 and 9 Oct)

Non birding days in Delhi at the Commonwealth Games. Commonest birds in Delhi appear to be either House Crows, Rose-ringed Parakeets or Black Kites!

Day 4 (10 Oct)

National Chambal Sanctuary

An early start heading south to Chambal, stopping off on route to visit the Taj Mahal – which included a juv Egyptian Vulture soaring over the Mausoleum with the more numerous Black Kites. Arrived at Chambal lodge after lunch and was taken birding around the lodge area by the resident guide. Highlights included Crested Honey-buzzard; Pied Cuckoo; a migrating flock of around 60 Red-headed Buntings, Plum-headed Parakeet and a pair of Bronze-winged Jacana (a much better bird in real life compared to the pic in Grimmett). At least two newly arrived Greenish Warblers flitted around the lodge gardens.

Day 5 (11 Oct)

Chambal – Bharatpur (Keoladoe NP)

Morning cruise on the Chambal river to look for Gangetic Dolphin, and waterbirds. Highlights included Little Particulate; Black Ibis; River Lapwing and Brown Fish Owl. Unfortunately no Dolphin, and I was too early for the Indian Skimmers (which tend to arrive in November). Back at the Lodge a Brown Hawk owl was located – a winter visitor which had arrived overnight.

After checking into my hotel at Bharatpur, I met up with my guide for the next couple of days, Mr Rattan Singh. Rattan took my round the farmland near his home looking for Yellow-wattled Lapwing, and Bar-tailed Lark. While 3 of the former were found only one, a brief and unsatisfactory flight view, of the latter could be located. A female Bluethroat and Blyth's Reed Warbler were other highlights.

Day 6 (12 Oct)

Bharatpur

Like many birders, Bharatpur is one of those places which I just had to visit at some point, and here was my chance. Unfortunately a male Tiger had appeared on the reserve a few days earlier and, as the reserve is closed to motorised transport, the authorities had closed most of the reserve worried that the Tiger would attack a visitor. As such we were restricted to the central road as far as the Temple. That coupled with the fact the winter visitors had only just started to arrive meant that birds were thin on the ground but some good birding was still to be had. I think Rattan found the restrictions more frustrating than myself and he worked hard to try to get as many of the key species as possible. Highlights included Sarus Crane; a copulating pair of Black-necked Storks with a Dusky Eagle-Owl in the same tree; Sykes's and Booted Warbler, Hume's Whitethroat; Red-breasted and Taiga Flycatchers; Collared Scops Owl; and a Spotted Eagle. Unfortunately no nightjars could be found in their usual haunts.

In the late afternoon we headed into the town of Bharatpur looking for Painted Snipe. After visiting a number of sewage filled ditches and pools – many, teeming with waders, with Temminck's Stint, Wood Sandpiper and Black-winged Stilt's and the ubiquitous Red-wattled Lapwings being the most numerous - we struck lucky with a pair of these enigmatic waders from a bridge over a refuse filled stream/ditch. And better still, the female was displaying towards the dowdier male. I managed to grab one half decent record shot as dusk fell.

Day 7 (13 Oct)

Bund Bertha

The reservoir was very full and very few birds could be seen on the lake. We explored the woods/scrub from the embankment before driving part way towards the Palace and exploring the farmland. Highlights included Black Bittern; Brook's Leaf Warbler; Hume's Leaf Warbler; Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher; Yellow-legged Buttonquail (which walked across the path in front of me) and Tickell's Leaf Warbler.

Back to Bharatpur in the afternoon to look for Coursers. This looked to be drawing a blank when just as we were about to leave 19 Indian Coursers appeared in a field in which we had been watching an Isabelline Wheatear only minutes before. The other highlight was a pair of Sarus Cranes with a less than week old chick.

Day 8 (14 Oct)

Transfer to Ranthambhore

An early start for the journey South to Ranthambhore. Generally uneventful, but a stop about 40 minutes short of our destination, to check out the River Banas, just south of Malarna Doongar, saw me pick up my only River Terns and Streak-throated Swallows. A short distance further down the road a quick stop was called in order as a large raptor was spotted – a Red-headed Vulture – my first "Indian" vulture of the trip.

Tiger safari in Ranthambhore

Not great birding from the Canter, but did manage great views of a Collared Scops Owl. Fresh Tiger tracks were found, but no sign of the cat itself. Other highlights included Long Billed Vulture and White-eyed Buzzard.

Day 9 (15 Oct)

Ranthambhore

2 Tiger safaris today with a spot of birding around the hotel before the morning trip and during lunch. Better birding in the park today. Highlights in the park included Brown Crake; Jungle Prinia; and White-browed Fantail. Away from the park, highlights included 2 Long-tailed Nightjars (my only id'd nightjar of the trip), Tawny Pipit; Lesser Short-toed Lark; and White-bellied Drongo. It was dusk as we left the park and numerous Nightjars could be seen hawking overhead but from the moving truck getting a positive id was impossible.

Day 10 (16 Oct)

Return to Delhi – Okhla

On the early morning train to Delhi – unfortunately no window seat. Afternoon at Okhla before heading to the airport to return to the UK. Highlights of a bird depleted Okhla were great, prolonged views of a group of 8 or 9 Striated Babblers with which was an unstreaked brown Babbler. The nearest I could find to this in Grimmett is the Rufous Babbler, but that's a range restricted species from a relatively narrow coastal strip in South West India – a long way from Delhi.

Martin Bell

## Species Lists

### Birds

Species list (based on the IOC list, v 2.6, Oct 2010)

		7	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i> common	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i> Common in wooded areas but also seen in farmland	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i> A pair on a pool close to the lodge at Chambal were the first. Small numbers also at Bharatpur and the lakes at Ranthambhore		x		x				x
Comb Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melantosa</i> Small numbers at Sultanpur and Bharatpur	x			x	x			
Cotton Pygmy Goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i> 6 females on a pond close to the barrage at Bund Bertha					x			
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i> A number within a mixed flock of duck on the main jheel at Sultanpur and out in agricultural land near this reserve	x							
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i> A number within a mixed flock of duck on the main jheel at Sultanpur and out in agricultural land near this reserve	x							
Indian Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhynchos</i> Small numbers at Sultanpur, Bund Bertha and Okhla (for example 3 at Okhla - the only ducks seen there)	x				x			x
Northern Shoveller	<i>Anas clypeata</i> A number within a mixed flock of duck on the main jheel at Sultanpur and out in agricultural land near this reserve	x							
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i> A number within a mixed flock of duck on the main jheel at Sultanpur and out in agricultural land near this reserve	x							
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i> A number within a mixed flock of duck on the main jheel at Sultanpur and out in agricultural land near this reserve	x							
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i> 2 were scoped in the main duck flock on the main jheel at Sultanpur	x							
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> Common, found on most pools								
Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i> Common in suitable habitat	x			x	x			x
Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i> Small groups seen at Sultanpur and Bund Bertha	x				x			
Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i> not numerous but easy to see in suitable habitat	x			x				x
Black-necked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>				x				

One of the highlights of the trip - a mating pair just off the main path at Bharatpur

Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melenocephalus</i>	x					x		
	Common in suitable habitat								
Red-naped Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>						x		
	Only one seen, during the river cruise at Chambal								
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platea leucordia</i>			x				x	
	Breeding birds at Sultanpur and Bharatpur								
Black Bittern	<i>Dupetor flavicollis</i>								x
	One flushed, but seen well in flight, by the picnic area below Bund Bertha								
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			x					x
	Common in suitable habitat								
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i>						x	x	x
	Common in suitable habitat, though I was surprised not to find one at Sultanpur								x
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>			x	x	x	x	x	x
	Common, found on most pools								
Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>			x	x	x	x	x	x
	Common found everywhere								
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			x		x	x	x	x
	Common in suitable habitat								
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>			x				x	
	Apart from a fly past individual at Bund Bertha, only seen at Sultanpur, where it was common.								
Eastern Great Egret	<i>Ardea modesta</i>			x				x	
	common in suitable habitat								
Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>			x					
	The only positively identified individuals of this species were in the mixed heronry at Sultanpur.								
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			x		x	x		
	common in suitable habitat								x
Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>			x				x	
	Breeding birds at Sultanpur and Bharatpur								
Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>			x				x	
	found in low numbers								
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			x					
	Only seen at Sultanpur								
Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>			x			x	x	x
	common in suitable habitat								
Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>						x		x
	Individuals seen on 3 days								
Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>						x		x
	one in the Chambal lodge grounds and another just outside Ranthambhore								
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>			x	x	x	x	x	x

	Not as common as I expected, but was seen most days							
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	x	x	x				x
	Commonest bird in built up areas?							
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>		x	x	x	x	x	
	The first was a Juv over the Taj Mahal. After that seen regularly							
Indian Vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>						x	x
	8 birds soaring over Ranthambhore, as well as single birds on the colony cliff							
Red-headed Vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>							x
	1 circling low near Ranthambhore							
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>						x	x
	one perched bird seen well from the dam at Bund Bertha, another in flight at Ranthambhore							
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	x			x	x		
	surprising scarce							
Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Common							
White-eyed Buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>	x						x
	2 brief fly over's at Sultanpur and Ranthambhore							
Indian Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila hastata</i>	x						
	one over Sultanpur							
Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>					x		
	one over Bharatpur							
Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>				x			
	along the R Chambal							
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciatus</i>				x			
	along the R Chambal							
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				x			
	2 hunting along R Chambal							
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>					x		x
	1 or 2 over Bharatpur and at least two over lakes at Ranthambhore							
Peregrine Falcon (Shaheen)	<i>Falco peregrinus peregrinator</i>				x		x	x
	singles at R Chambal and Ranthambhore							
Brown Crake	<i>Amaurornis akool</i>							x
	one showed briefly at one of Ranthambhore's lakes							
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>		x	x	x	x	x	x
	common							
Indian Swamp-hen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio poliocephalus</i>				x	x		x
	surprisingly scare							
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	x		x	x	x	x	x
	common in suitable habitat							
Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				x			
	small numbers at Bharatpur							
Sarus Crane	<i>Grus antigone</i>				x	x		

	a pair at Bharatpur, a n other pair with less than week old chick in wet farmland North of Bharatpur town
Yellow-legged Buttonquail	<i>Turnix tanki</i> x one walked across path in front of me at Bund Bertha
Barred Buttonquail	<i>Turnix suscitator</i> x a pair flushed whilst looking for Painted Snipe in farmland just south of the Sultanpur sanctuary
Indian Stone-Curlew	<i>Bruhinus indicus</i> x A pair found at Sultanpur
Great Thick-knee	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i> x x Common along R Chambal, also seen from the bridge crossing R Banas
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i> x x x x x x Common in suitable habitat
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i> x the only ones seen were on a pool on farmland North of Sultanpur sanctuary
River Lapwing	<i>Vanellus duvaucelii</i> x Common along R Chambal
Yellow Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malarbaricus</i> x x 3 on Mr Rattan Singh's farmland and two on farmland North of Bharatpur
Red Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i> x x x x x x x x Very Common
Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticule</i> x One amongst a mixed wader flock while searching for Painted Snipe in Bharatpur town
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i> x x x common in suitable habitat
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i> x numerous on R Chambal
Greater Painted Snipe	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i> x A pair found on a ditch running through the town of Bharatpur
Bronze-winged Jacana	<i>Metopidus indicus</i> x A pair found on a pond just outside the Chambal Safari Lodge grounds
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i> x two were flushed from damp grassland when looking for Coursers
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i> x several at Sultanpur
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i> x x small numbers
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i> x 3 on R Chambal
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i> x x x x x x x x Common in suitable habitat





	common							
Jacobin (Pied) Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>	x		x				
	Adult at Chambal lodge and Juv at Bharatpur							
Grey-bellied Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>	x						
	1 seen well at Sultanpur							
Common Hawk Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx sparverioides</i>	x	x			x		
	two along the approach road to Bund Bertha, otherwise singles							
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>						x	
	one along the approach road to Bund Bertha							
Collared Scops Owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>					x		x
	one was eventually found by Rattan along the main path at Bharatpur and another was seen very well at Ranthambhore							
Dusky Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo coromandus</i>							x
	A calling male was located in the same tree as a pair of Black-necked Storks were nesting							
Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>							x
	A recently arrived winter visitor was scoped at it's roost along R Chambal							
Spotted Owlett	<i>Athene brama</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Common							
Brown Hawk Owl	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>							x
	one winter visitor which arrived overnight was found roosting close to the Chambal lodge							
Large-tailed Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus macrurus</i>							x
	two flew over the Hotel Gardens just as it was getting light							
Nightjar spp								x
	A number of Nightjars were seen hawking quite high over the approach road to Ranthambhore as we left the park at dusk. Unfortunately the Canter would not stop to allow them to be identified to spp level							
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>			x	x	x	x	x
	common							
Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	common							
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	x						
	One at Sultanpur							
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smymensis</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	common							
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			x	x	x		x
	relatively common							
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>					x		x
	surprisingly scare							
Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	common							
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	
	common							
Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x









	2 found in farmland outside Ranthambhore		
Tree pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	x	x
White-capped Bunting	<i>Emberiza stewarti</i>		x
	2 seen briefly along track to R Chambal		
Red-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza bruniceps</i>	x	
	A passage flock of in excess of 60 birds was feeding on Millet on farmland around Chambal lodge		

## Mammals

Rhesus Macaque	<i>Macaca mulatta</i>	Common
Hanuman Langur	<i>Presbytis entellus</i>	Common at Ranthambhore
Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>	Several seen in and around Bharatpur
Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>	Common at Ranthambhore
Spotted Deer	<i>Axis axis</i>	Common at Ranthambhore
Nilgai	<i>Boselaphus tragocamelus</i>	Common
Common Palm Civet	<i>Paradoxurus hermaphroditus</i>	Several, including Kits, seen around the Lodge at Chambal
Indian Grey Mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>	1 seen at Bharatpur
Small Indian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>	Common in Delhi
Five-striped (Northern) Palm Squirrel	<i>Fanabulus palmarum</i>	Common
Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus giganteus</i>	Colony at the Lodge at Chambal

## Reptiles

Marsh Mugger	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>	R. Chambal
Gharial	<i>Gavialis gangeticus</i>	R. Chambal
Bengal Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>	Bharatpur
Indian Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>	Bharatpur
Indian Rock Python	<i>Python molurus</i>	Ranthambhore
Flap-shell Turtle	<i>Trionyx gangeticus</i>	R. Chambal
Indian Tent turtle	<i>Kachuga tentoria</i>	R. Chambal

## Butterflies

Common	<i>Pareronia valeria</i>
Wandered	
Crimson Rose	<i>Pachliopta hector</i>
Common Crow	<i>Eupluea core</i>
Plain Tiger	<i>Danus chrystippus</i>
Common Leopard	<i>Attella phalanta</i>