

Trip Report India

Including

Sultanpur NP, Keoladeo NP, Bund Baretha, Bhindawas,
Ramnagar, Corbett NP, Nainital, Mongoli Valley, Sat Tal
Guwahati, Kaziranga NP, Panbari Forest, Nameri NP

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For more info, comments, questions etc please contact us at simaai@hotmail.com.

How to use this report

It is about impossible to use this report without the excellent Birdwatchers Guide to India by Krys Kazmierczak and Raj Singh. All locations mentioned in this report are described in detail in this guide, so there's no need to repeat this. When we refer to an area that is not mentioned in Kazmierczak and Singh, we'll try to explain the location as accurate as possible.

For general information on the country, health, climate etc. we refer to Kazmierczak and Singh and books like the Lonely Planet (North India).

Everything in this report is based on a one-time experience. Nevertheless we don't hesitate to give our opinion on diverse strategic subjects and items like relative abundance of birds. So when reading this report keep in mind that a lot of things can be completely different when you're there, especially the presence or abundance of birds. The total trip list is not included in this report. This list is separately available in Excel format.

There's one peculiar aspect about this report we'd like to mention before we start with the relevant items. This might be one of the few reports you read in which the authors did not succeed in finding all or most of the targets. As a matter of fact in the first part of our trip we dipped about all specialties (like Siberian Crane, Skimmer, Ibisbill, Tawny Fish Owl, Tiger etc.). Luckily the second part in Assam compensated a lot (read on for more info). We came to realize that trip reports are primarily written by those with successful and impressive lists, making the real thing harder than it seems after reading these reports. Nevertheless, or actually because of this effect, we felt obliged to write down our experiences. A lot of things are changing in India for the worse, with the absence of the former omnipresent Gyps vultures as most striking example and the absence of the Siberian Cranes in Keoladeo NP as sheer case of bad luck (and supposedly bad planning). Our final trip list can be interpreted by fanatic birders as being relatively easy to match and by those hiring local help as easy to exceed.

The country

Tall stories go around about India, and a lot of them are true: India is crowded, dirty and full of birds. Nevertheless we did not have the toughest vacation ever. A lot depends on how you prepare and plan the trip (see also **Strategy**). Good health precautions are essential, but in our opinion there's no need to become paranoid about this topic. All relevant aspects about staying healthy in India are covered in detail in guides like the Lonely Planet. Best thing to do is to consult your doctor in time (at least a month before leaving) for vaccinations and malaria prophylaxes. We had no problems with our health, except for some travelers diarrhoea, causing no serious problems. You better stay actively involved with your health and safety during the complete trip, not neglecting this when things are going fine.

We never felt unsafe except during some of the drives in Assam, especially one during the night (we strongly advise not to drive during the dark hours). On the other hand we didn't visit large cities or took one of those 'tourist trains' between Delhi and Agra. Having a private driver certainly makes it easier to get around and feel safe in India. Safety is a fast changing subject. Assam has a bad reputation being an unsafe area due to rebel activity but tourists seldom are subject to attacks. Most governments have a foreign affairs office where you can gather the most recent information. It is sometimes possible to find recent travel advise on the internet. In the Netherlands the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has an internet site with information on traveling and safety (see **Relevant Internet sites**). Like most third world countries your worst fear should be joining the traffic chaos.

Strategy

India still is a pretty cheap country but much depends on the way you organize the trip. During our preparations we realized that there's a direct relation between the money spent and a potential good bird list. The cheapest option is to make all arrangements yourself and using public transport, but this might cost a lot of time and consequently, birds. On the other hand, several tour operators are more than willing to arrange everything for you, leaving you to the birding essentials. Some of those tour operators are specialized in finding target birds. This option surely is the most expensive but if you choose a tour operator that is specialized in birds they will do everything to get you to the local specialties.

Our strategy was somewhat in between the two extremes. For the first half of the trip (around Delhi) we were able to arrange a car with driver over the internet for a good price. Major advantage is that we were picked up by the driver on arrival at the airport, skipped the fuss of finding transport at the airport, and were 'in business' less than two hours after arrival. A disadvantage of travelling by car is that it is not as quick as some of the (night) trains. It took us two days (including some birding en route) to get from Agra to Ramnagar, while a night train does it in one night, not even losing a day. Another relative disadvantage was that we actually didn't need a car in areas like Keoladeo NP

and Corbett NP. We even rented a second car (an open 4-WD) for three days to get into Corbett NP (see **Itinerary**). So having the constant availability of a car for two weeks certainly wasn't the cheapest option, but it definitely was luxuriously handy to have a car and driver ready at all times (early mornings was no problem for our driver). See **Car hire** for details on the car and driver hire.

For the second half of our trip, in Assam we decided to get a totally arranged trip, primarily because of the uncertain safety situation in Assam. We got a good offer for a custom trip by Flamingo Travels, which worked out very well for us since we only had to bother finding birds. See **Organized package deal** for more details.

So strategy mostly depends on available time and budget. With limited time we advise to get an arranged trip for at least a part of your holiday. With limited budget it is best to try to arrange things yourself. Also it is best to make your itinerary not too tight: travelling at a mean speed of 30 km/h is the rule rather than the exception.

Books and maps

We used the following books and guides:

Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent by Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp (1999). The field guide version proved very useful, though texts are limited and the order in which the birds are presented makes it hard to find the groups you're looking for (We made our own index to groups).

A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent by Krys Kazmierczak and Ber van Perlo (2001). Even after 3.5 weeks of experience it is hard to decide which of these books was the best. Some plates are better in the Grimmet et al. while others are better in Kazmierczak and Van Perlo. It is advisable to take both.

A Birdwatchers' Guide to India by Krys Kazmierczak and Raj Singh (1998). Though already old this book proved to be invaluable. Good site descriptions and useful maps. Only a few spots are not described well enough to find them yourself (like Bhindawas and Bund Baretha), and several recent spots around Delhi (like Basia) which are certainly worth a visit, are not added.

We bought a Map of India (Worldcart, 2000) but this one was not good enough to be useful.

Car Hire

When hiring a car it is advised to hire a car with driver. Not only is it suicidal to drive by yourself in India, it will be pretty hard to find your way since not all route information is bilingual. Moreover, insurance rates and deposits are often high, you may get all kinds of bureaucratic problems regarding your driving license etc. and, finally, the state and road tax system can be difficult to comprehend.

We were able to arrange a car at Metropole Tourist Service by e-mail (metropole@vsnl.com). The package included a self supporting driver. It is advised to

ask specifically for a self supporting driver (in terms of food and lodging), and to make explicit agreements on who's paying for expenses like fuel, parking fee and entrance fees. We paid Rs 16500 for 15 days car hire with self supporting driver and fuel included and 200km free per day.

Organized package deal

Flamingo Travels arranged a complete package for us in Assam. We made all arrangements over the internet. The deposit was payed by bank transfer. The package included the return flight Delhi - Guwahati, all transfers and accommodation, two excursions per day and the entrance fees and guide prices in Kaziranga and Nameri National Park. Total costs were \$ 1000,- per person. Flamingo Travels booked us in Aranya Lodge, one of the better lodges near Kaziranga NP with a nice garden and a high bird potential. In Nameri NP we stayed at the Tourist Guest House in the town of Bhalukpong which was about 20 km from the entrance of the park. This hotel was good but dinner options were limited and the food was not very tasty. It might be good to know that Nameri Eco Camp is not inside the park either but about 1,5 km from the river bordering the park. The direct surroundings of the Eco Camp were not that inspiring for birding, so we didn't mind staying at Bhalukpong, one hour drive from the entrance. Actually, birding potential around the hotel at Bhalukpong seemed better than around Nameri Eco Camp (to our surprise we found a Pied Falconet from our balcony at Bhalukpong!).

Flamingo Travels certainly did a very good job entertaining us. They arranged excursions every morning and afternoon, keeping us busy continuously. They were able to arrange a whole-day visit to the Eastern Range in Kaziranga NP, which normally is only allowed for scientific reasons (in return we had to do a small survey). We decided to skip an elephant ride in Nameri NP, but the elephant ride in Kaziranga NP (only 1 hour nowadays) is quite nice to see wildlife at close range (mammals). The raft we took in Nameri NP was neat and can be good for birding, though not spectacular in terms of rafting (we found a beautiful Wallcreeper during the 'ride').

Flamingo Travels is also able to arrange you local experienced birdwatching guides. We asked them for a non-birding guide, for reasons that eluded me and that don't make much sense afterwards. Flamingo Travels will be able to help you find the relatively easy targets and to create the options for finding birds by yourself.

Here's the info on Flamingo Travels:

Flamingo Travels & Adventures(A) Pvt. Ltd.
Renuka Complex,Zoo Road Tiniali,
R.G.Baruah Road, Guwahati-24
Assam, India
Ph. ++91-361-2456514/2454669
E-mail: info@flamingotravels.com

Prices

During our stay the rates were 45 rupees for € 1,-.

Prices are subject to change everywhere, but apparently especially in India. We were unhappily surprised to find that (just two months before our arrival) the government of Assam had raised a lot of prices, especially the – weird – camera-fees. We had to pay 500 rupees (€ 11,-) per still camera per day, apart from all other fees that are applicable. (Prices for videocameras are even higher.) In our opinion that is exorbitant high for tourists just wanting a snapshot or two. We decided not to use the camera all the days we visited Kaziranga NP and Nameri NP.

Hotel prices were all between 300 and 550 rupees (€ 7,- and € 12,-) per room. This was including the extra fee we had to pay for a third person in one room. None of the hotels had problems arranging an extra bed to sleep together in one room. This actually turned out to be cheaper per person. Hotels in Assam were included in the package deal.

Food was never expensive (between 100 and 450 rupees) but sometimes hard to come by (in Ramnagar we had problems finding a restaurant with English speaking staff). If our hotel didn't serve food we chose local restaurants.

Other relevant prices en route are mentioned in **Itinerary**

Relevant internet sites

Indian sites

<www.ee.princeton.edu/~vivek/indianbirds.html> Good to browse during preparation.

Recent info makes this site interesting

<www.flamingotravels.com> Flamingo travels arranged the trip in Assam for us. They are also able to buy the airline tickets for you.

<www.camacdonald.com/birding> The Indian site has a lot of links to information on different areas. Links do not always work but this site is a good start.

<www.delhibirds.org> Specific information on birding in and around Delhi. Good and informative site, with recent sightings.

<www.indianbirds.com> Lot of information on birding in India

Trip reports

<www.birdtours.co.uk> This is a great site with a huge amount of trip reports. Certainly good to check while preparing the trip.

<www.crosswinds.net/~birdtrips/tripreports> This used to be one of the greatest sites to find trip reports. Still a lot of trip reports but no recent reports are added any more.

Background info

<www.joho.nl> Dutch site including good and relevant tips concerning safety and travelling in foreign countries. Worth checking and reading the tips on India.

<www.buza.nl> Dutch governmental site with recent information on safety issues, it is advised to check this site before arranging a trip.

Other sites

<www.orientalbirdclub.org> Might prove useful for general information. You can also buy trip reports from the Oriental Bird Club.

<worldtwitch.virtualave.net> The gate to finding rare birds all around the world did not prove very useful for India. The popup screens are annoying.

<metropole@vsnl.com> E-mail address of Metropole car hire, the place where we rented our car with driver.

Itinerary and places visited

The itinerary is for the convenience of the reader split in to the regular itinerary information and more specific information on the places visited and birds (boxed). A total trip list is available separately.

We use the following codes to indicate numbers:

V – few birds, between 1 and 10

X – several birds, between 10 and about 50

XX – lots of birds, between 50 and 100

C – abundant, over 100 birds

CC – highly abundant, hundreds of birds

M – Exceptionally abundant, huge flocks, around and over 1000 birds

MM – unimaginable abundant tens of thousands of birds. The thing you come across in Keoladeo NP in good winters.

17-11-2002: Arrived at Delhi International Airport around 7:00 o'clock in the morning. First target was to find an ATM (not present at the airport) and then we were off to our first birding spot: **Sultanpur (Jheel) National Park** (entrance fee: Rs 45, parking fee: Rs 25). We stayed here for about 3 hours to leave enough daylight time to drive to Bharatpur.

Sultanpur (Jheel) National Park

Location: about 2 hours drive south of Delhi. It is not really on the way to Bharatpur and Agra but it is possible to combine a visit to Sultanpur NP in the morning with the drive to Bharatpur (5 hours from Sultanpur NP) in the afternoon.

Date(s): 17-11-2002 (3 birding hours).

Notes: Sultanpur NP was our first stop in India, consequently it took some time to get used to the common birds of India and it was hard to separate goodies from the normal birds. For example: we never thought that the Asian Koël (female), one of our first birds, would be our only Koël of the entire trip. Sultanpur NP still had good amounts of water and if we'd known by then that Keoladeo NP had already dried out we might have taken more time to scan the area for water birds. Due to lack of time we didn't visit the drier part of the park.

Highlights: A group of about 100 **Painted Storks** were still on their breeding sites, Sarus Crane (2), Asian Koël (1), Bluethroat (1), Large Grey Babbler (V), Ashy Prinia (V), **Orphean Warbler** (1 juv), Red Avadavat (1), Eurasian Golden Oriole (1).

In Bharatpur we stayed at the Sunbird Hotel, one of the nicest and cleanest hotels during our trip, close to the entrance of Keoladeo NP. We stayed here for three nights in a double with an extra bed, Rs 500 for the room. The showers had warm water and the cook was willing to make us breakfast and packed lunch at 6:00 am, making it possible to be in the park at dawn. Sunbird Hotel also rents bicycles.

18-11-2002: Whole day birding in Keoladeo NP (entrance fee: Rs 200 pp, no still-camera fee), without guide but the guides present were willing to show stuff without hiring them.

Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur)

Location: About 200 km south of Delhi (5 hours drive), 40 km west of Agra (2 hours).

Date(s): 18 and 19-11-2002 (15 birding hours).

Notes: It took a while before we realized that we were birding on the bottom of the swamps. Only when we approached the temple we started to get suspicious about the lack of water. Indeed, the only remnants of water were around the temple (two ponds) and a small area south of Sapan Mari. Consequently the huge numbers of water birds were absent, as a matter of fact most water related birds were hard to find and present in very small numbers (if present at all). Especially after seeing the series "Land of the Tiger", the part that is about Keoladeo NP, it was pretty hard to realize this complete lack of water and the related lack of birds.

Though quantity was low, the quality of birding was still pretty good. Most areas were pretty good for warblers. The area around the nursery was a great spot, while the forests between the nursery and Jatoli canal were very quiet. We got some free help from the local guides with a nice rufous form of Oriental Scops-Owl and an Orange-headed Thrush as highlights. The second day we hired a guide for three hours hoping to find more nightjars, owls and specialties. This only resulted in a beautiful pair of Large-tailed Nightjar.

Highlights: Black-headed Ibis (V), Imperial Eagle (1 ad, 1 juv), Red-headed Vulture (2, both days), Sarus Crane (2), Eurasian Thick-knee (1 'in' Sapan Mari), Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (25 flying over), Collared Scops-Owl (2 in a palm tree next to the temple), Oriental Scops-Owl (1), Grey Nightjar (1 sitting in a branch above the road east of the temple, 1 found by ourselves 2 km south of the temple), Large-tailed Nightjar (male and female, we were kindly asked by the guide that showed us these birds not to reveal the exact spot), Southern Grey Shrike (1), Bay-backed Shrike (1), Orange-headed Thrush (1), Brooks's Leaf-Warbler (1 near Lala Pyare).

Around noon Simon ruined his bike with his tripod, just south of the temple. This made it impossible for us to get to the drier southern parts of the park. We walked up to Python Point (one guide found us a python, lying in a dead stump) and back to the hotel which took us the rest of the day.

19-11-2002: The severe drought made us change plans. Our initial plan was to spend at least a complete second day in the park, but instead we only birded during the morning in the park and went to Bund Baretha in the afternoon. From 9:00 to 12:00 we birded with a young birding guide south of the temple and near Lala Pyare Ka Kund (official guide rates Rs 70/hour). Nice and fanatic guy. After lunch we left for Bund Baretha (2 hours drive). Lots of water and lots of birds but very poor light. It is best to visit this area in the morning when light is much better. The few afternoon hours were not enough to bird the

whole area, for example we skipped the stream north of the dam. It is best to plan a day for this area, especially when Keoladeo NP is dry.

Bund Baretha

Location: about 2 hours drive from Bharatpur (south).

Date(s): 19-11-2002 (3 birding hours).

Notes: We visited Bund Baretha in our quest for water in the afternoon of the second day at Bharatpur. Our driver couldn't find it but after asking around it proved to be rather easy. Bund Baretha compensated rather well for the dry Keoladeo NP with a lot of water and a lot of (water) birds. Unfortunately the lake was also filled with fishermen, ruining our best chance of finding Indian Skimmer. We visited the dam and (for better light) the area around the palace.

Highlights: Asian Openbill (1), Red-crested Pochard (V), Cotton Pygmy-Goose (20), **Great Thick-knee** (1 on an island close to the dam), Isabeline (Chinese) Shrike (1), Indian (Brown) Chat (1 near the palace), **Isabelline Wheater** (1).

Driving back in the dark was not nice and not smart.

20-11-2002: Accepting our mistake of choosing the complete wrong year to visit Keoladeo NP we left this day, to have more time in the mountains and probably an extra visit to Bhindawas, an artificial lake near Delhi, if time would allow it. We took a brief look over the Yamuna riverbed behind the Taj Mahal (Agra) and had a short stop at Sur Sarovar (Keetam Lake, there's a small entrance fee).

Agra, Yamuna River

Location: directly next to the Taj Mahal in Agra.

Date(s): 20-11-2002 (2 birding hours).

Notes: The Yamuna River was rather dry, dirty and empty in terms of birds. We spend a little time to check the area in vain for Skimmers, Black-bellied Terns, Small Pratincoles and Gulls. This might be why we wouldn't advise to drive a great distance just to bird this river, but if you're planning to visit the Taj Mahal anyway (which we didn't) it wouldn't hurt to check the river.

Highlights: **Greater Flamingo** (1 flying over), River Lapwing (V), Dunlin (V among some Little Stints).

Sur Sarovar (Keetam Lake)

Location: between Agra and Delhi, about 20 km from Agra, east of the road (signposted).

Date(s): 20-11-2002.

Notes: Since Sur Sarovar is known to be a good place when other places are dry we couldn't resist to visit this reservoir on our quest for water while driving back to Delhi, heading north to Ramnagar. Well, water there was, but most of the lake was invisible due to excessive growth of water hyacinth and the open parts were strikingly empty. No more than a few groups of the most common ducks made us decide to continue our trip to the north directly.

Highlights: none.

The drive including both stops took the whole day. We ended northeast of Delhi in a town called Hapur where we found a simple but noisy hotel (Siddhartha Hotel) in the middle of town (Rs 450).

21-11-2002: Early departure but a flat tire (and bad spare) made us lose two hours. We stopped at the Ganges River-crossing for a few hours.

Ganges River Crossing

Location: 90 km east of Delhi.

Date(s): 21-11-2002 (2 birding hours).

Notes: A walk down to the river on the south-eastern side resulted in some (actually one) birds that we didn't see elsewhere. (Take a huge amount of luck if you want to see the dolphin.)

Highlights: Brown-headed Gull (V), Sand Lark (X), Oriental Skylark (V).

We drove to Ramnagar where we stayed at the KMVN Tourist Hotel (Rs 440), almost next to the reception center of Corbett NP, where we had to do the paper work for entering Corbett NP. The park had just opened for the season. Luckily there was still space in the dorms at Dhikala from the next day onwards. Corbett is one of those typical Indian parks with a huge amount of rules and regulations. First and most constraining is the rule that you're not allowed to leave the car. Birding from a sedan is not advisable. Second rule is that nature takes a break at midday: it is not allowed to be inside the park between 12:00 and 14:30. Before you enter the park you should register at the Corbett Reception Centre in Ramnagar. This can take a while. We were lucky and were helped by the 4-WD driver we hired to enter the park (see later). Here you can also make reservations for accommodation in the park. You pay for at least three days (two nights) but it is allowed to stay longer. When staying for one day another entrance is used (Amdanda instead of Dhangarhi). The price we paid for three days, two nights in the dorm (three persons) was 2750 rupees (entry fee Rs 1400, dorm log huts Rs 1200, vehicle entry Rs 150, no still-camera fee).

We decided not to enter the park driving our Tata Indica but to hire an open 4WD Jeep (Rs 2000 for three days). We used the services of Girish Dhasmana 'Wild Adventure Safari – phone 05947 51793', who also helped us arranging everything at the reception centre. Girish is not a birdwatcher but he did know where to stop for feeding flocks and how to make not seeing a Tiger still very exciting. He certainly did his best to help us find as many birds as possible. After the arrangements for Corbett NP we used the last daylight hours at the Kosi River dam in Ramnagar.

Ramnagar

Location: 260 km northeast of Delhi, about 6 hours drive.

Date(s): 21-11-2002 (1,5 birding hours), 25-11-02 (3 birding hours).

Notes: Ramnagar stuck in our memory as being the most dirty of the places visited. Of all the trip reports we read during our preparations not one spoke of the amounts of waste and human faeces scattered around the riverbank near the 'Circular tower'. This might be related to the fact that we failed to find Ibisbill there, while most of the trip reports speak of successful findings around Ramnagar. Apparently these 'minor inconveniences' are easily forgotten after having found an Ibisbill.

Most birding sites are pretty crowded and you *will* get annoyed by the honking busses passing by when you're watching a Jungle Owlet. So, though birding can be good around Ramnagar, this certainly was not our favorite spot.

We birded the area around the dam and for about 2 km downstream from the dam in the riverbed. For our own convenience (and yours when you fail to find Ibisbill) we forget about the circular tower spot.

Highlights: River Lapwing (V), Jungle Owlet (1 in trees on the far side of the dam), Himalayan Swiftlet (V seen only on a few occasions), Crested Kingfisher (V), Wallcreeper (1 on the dam, 2 in the waterbed downstream), White-capped Water-Redstart (V), Plumbeous Water-Redstart (X).

22-11-2002: This was a full day birding in Corbett NP. From the gate it took us about 4 great birding hours to get to Dhikala. After lunch we spent a few hours at the edge of the reservoir before it got dark.

Corbett National Park

Location: 20 km northeast of Ramnagar (1 hour to the entrance), 280 km northeast of Delhi.

Date(s): 22,23 and 24-11-2002 (27 birding hours).

Notes: Corbett NP definitely was one of the birding highlights of our trip. Many birds everywhere in a beautiful environment. Our decision to hire an open 4-WD was one of the best we made. By not being allowed to leave the car, good views on the area directly around you are more than essential. Birding already started at the entrance during dawn. The whole trip from the entrance to Dhikala was good for birds. The Dhikala compound was not that productive but we only spent the required hours there. The Elephant ride was not productive for birds. Our only morning at the watchtower (24-11) was kind of disappointing with only one active flock of Bulbuls around the tower.

Sadly we were not allowed to go to Kanda to try for higher elevation species and specialties like Great Slaty Woodpecker: one of the bridges was down. Alternatively we birded another potential spot for Great Slaty, somewhere around Patairpani. No Great Slaties but lots of woodpeckers.

During our drive back to Ramnagar birding again was good along the road. We stopped at Gairal, which is also a nice area to bird but due to overcast activity was low.

Highlights: Black Stork (X), Northern Goshawk (1), Cinereous Vulture (1, possibly the same bird the following day), Red-headed Vulture (up to at least 5 on 23-11), Eurasian Griffon (V), Lesser Fish-Eagle (V), Pallas's Sea-Eagle (V), Changeable Hawk-Eagle (2, one juv flying around Dhikala seen on several occasions), Collared Falconet (2 birds seen from the Sarapduli watchtower), **Grey-headed Lapwing** (far away but recognizable near the reservoir; this out of range species was one of the biggest surprises in Corbett), Emerald Dove (1 showing well near the entrance), Plum-headed Parakeet (1 together with Slaty-heads around the Dhikala watchtower), Slaty-headed Parakeet (4 together with the previous), Brown Fish-owl (4 sightings of which 2 from the Dhikala compound), Great Hornbill (2 birds seen), Blue-winged Minla (1), Rufous-bellied Niltava (great male along the road to Dhikala), White-bellied Drongo (V, the only of the trip), Green Magpie (V, great views of two birds along the road).

When you enter Dhikala you are not allowed to leave the compound without an armed guide except when driving back to Ramnagar. The price of this guide (Rs 100 a day) was not included in the price we paid at the headquarters in Ramnagar. At dusk we searched

the area around Khinnanauli for Brown Fish Owl (successfully) and Tawny Fish Owl (unsuccessfully). The dorms were good enough for a well earned sleep.

23-11-2002: We wanted to visit Kanda, one of the higher elevated areas in Corbett NP but this was not possible because a bridge was not rebuild yet. Instead we tried another area in the Sal forest around Patairpani, a very good area for woodpeckers. We birded the whole morning until we had to return to Dhikala for lunch. In the afternoon we took an elephant ride (Rs 250 pp) but this ride was not productive at all, except for a large number of Junglefowl. Normally it is best to arrange the elephant ride together with the accommodation at the reception center in Ramnagar but during our visit it was not very crowded so we could arrange it in Dhikala.

24-11-2002: We started the morning with a breakfast and then went to the watchtower. At check-out time we left Dhikala and went back to Ramnagar, birding along the way. Strange you don't need a guide for this trip. We stopped at Gairal en route. Around 3 pm we were back in Ramnagar. We were running out of money so we tried to find a bank that was willing to change US Dollars but to our surprise none of the banks in Ramnagar were willing to do this. Keep this in mind (you can change money in Nainital). We spent the night at the Everest Hotel (Rs 300).

25-11-2002: In the morning a serious try for Ibisbill at the Kosi River. We decided to check the downstream area from the dam with no success. Another try was made at the Quality Inn (Corbett Jungle Resort) near Kumeria where we searched for about 2 hours before we left for Nainital.

Kumeria

Location: 30 km northeast of Ramnagar (2 hours drive).

Date(s): 25-11-2002 (2 birding hours).

Notes: In another attempt to find Ibisbill we made a short stop at the Kosi river bed near Corbett Jungle Resort (Quality Inn). Time was limited here and birding was in the heat of the day but there was still some activity in the riverbed.

Highlights: Brown Dippper (2), Spotted Forktail (1).

In Nainital we found out that it was not possible to use foreign bank cards or credit cards in the available ATM, so our shortage of money started to become acute. We stayed in a nice and cheap hotel in the middle of the Mallital area named Kohli Cottage (4 person room for Rs 300 and an assistant (named Hari) begging you to write something in his booklet about his 'full service' – full service it was when our toilet was blocked). Warm water shower is essential here.

26-11-2002: Our first excursion in the Nainital area was Mongoli Valley.

Mongoli Valley

Location: About 12 km south of Nainital (1,5 hours).

Date(s): 26 and 29-11-2002 (9 resp. 3 birding hours).

Notes: On both visits Mongoli Valley was great birding with lots of birds, especially in the first 100 meters. In the Valley we only took the south road, through the forest.

On our first visit we accidentally stopped at a wrong place, about 1 km before 'the real' Mongoli valley entrance. A path left of a small building (shrine?) led to a gully with small terraces. We birded there at dawn for a few hours before we realized that this could never be Mongoli Valley. Actually birding was surprisingly good with a major advantage that the sun warms this area hours before it starts penetrating Mongoli Valley. We don't know the name of this valley so for this trip report we call it the 'Sub Valley'. If you have an early morning start we would advise you to start here and head to Mongoli at around 9:00 o'clock. To find Sub Valley you do exactly the same when visiting Mongoli except that you stop when the road sharply curves right (seen from Nainital) for almost 180° passing a ridge, about 1 km before the Mongoli Vallei entrance. There is a sign 'Bajun' (causing our confusion) and a small building on the outside of the curve. Just left of this building a paved path leads down. Follow this path until you see the gully and the grassy terraces on the left side of this road.

Highlights: Lammergeier (1 adult), Himalayan Griffon (2), Mountain Hawk Eagle (1 on our second visit to Mongoli Valley chasing partridges), Asian Barred Owlet (2 about 1 km down the road in Mongoli Valley), Himalayan Woodpecker (1), Rufous-breasted Accentor (V in Sub Valley), Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush (female), Striated Laughingthrush (V), Buff-barred Warbler (V), **Chestnut-eared Bunting** (1 in Sub Valley, here also Rock and White-capped Bunting), Grey Treepie (2), Black-headed Jay (V), Red-billed Blue Magpie (a group of about 5 birds seen on both visits).

Before 4 pm (closing time of the banks) we were back in Nainital to change dollars, this time successfully.

27-11-2002: Left early for Sat Tal. This place is not hard to find, most locals know the area.

Sat Tal

Location: 15 km south of Nainital (2 hours).

Date(s): 27-11-2002 (7 birding hours).

Notes: We birded in two locations. An early morning start at the fenced off fields location and the rest of the day in the forests. We started at the tea stall near Sat Tal Estate and walked to the tea stalls south of the large lake. We walked the road back to Sat Tal Estate. Birding from the tea stall to the Christian Ashram was slow. Things started to get interesting when we entered the mixed forest near the northern lake.

Highlights: Great Barbet (1), Greater Yellownappe (1), Black-throated Accentor (2 in the 'Accentor fields'), Rufous-breasted Accentor (V in the Accentor fields), Tickel's Thrush (V, the only sighting of the vacation), Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler (1 very elusive bird in the Accentor fields), Red-billed Blue Magpie (X in the morning birds were flying on and off over the Accentor field, at least 10 individuals, maybe more)

We had a good lunch at one of the tea stalls and walked back taking the main road. Back in Nainital we still had time to check out some of the gardens on the northwestern side of town. Not many birds (lots of kids though), none that weren't easier around Cheena Peak.

28-11-2002: Our alpine day. First we drove to (actually past) the TV tower. Views of the high Himalayan peaks are great when you drive about 1 km past the TV tower. Snow View Point was not an inspiring area so we left this place as quickly as we came. Next

we walked up Cheena Peak and passed the summit by taking the 'high fields' route back to Nainital. The whole area, especially up Cheena Peak was great birding.

Nainital

Location: 320 km northeast of Delhi (7 hours drive), 45 km east of Ramnagar (2,5 hours drive)

Date(s): 27 and 28-11-2002 (2 resp. 8 birding hours)

Notes: We birded the town of Nainital only once (27-11). Not many birds within the city boundary. We paid a short visit to Snow View Point but both bird activity and the 'snow view' were not impressive. The same morning we walked the trail up to Cheena Peak (including great views of the higher Himalayas) and back to Nainital by the path via the 'high fields'. Birds were good in the morning while walking up, activity was slower while walking down. The number and composition of bird species gave us the impression that winter had not really started yet. We had the same idea while visiting Sat Tal and Mongoli Valley, though conclusions are hard to draw from a single visit.

Highlights: **Black Eagle** (1 juv while walking up to Cheena Peak), Rufous-bellied Woodpecker (male and female of this beautiful woodpecker on Cheena Peak), White-collared Blackbird (1 in a group of Dark-throated Trushes near Snow View, 3 in a tree between Cheena Peak and the High Fields), Rufous Sibia (X), White-browed Shrike-Babbler (V up to Cheena Peak), **Green Shrike-Babbler** (at least two birds up to Cheena Peak were a surprise), Yellow-browed Tit (1 in a feeding flock up to Cheena Peak), Black-headed Jay (X), Eurasian Jay (our only one up to Cheena Peak).

29-11-2002: A genuine travel day though we took the liberty of stopping at Mongoli Valley which is on the route when driving back to Delhi or Ramnagar. Rest of the day (7 hours) was taken by the drive back to Delhi. We asked our driver to find us a hotel and he brought us to a nice, clean one (Usha Paying Guest House, C-3, Jangpura Extension, New Delhi) though taking a shower was like committing suicide. We paid 550 rupees for a double with extra bed.

30-11-2002: Our last hope for wetland species was Bhindawas Wildlife Sanctuary, an artificial lake about 3 hours west of Delhi. We fantasized about this area making up for everything that we dipped in Keoladeo NP. There's no route description for this area in Kazmierczak and Singh. Consequently it took us 4 hours to find it.

Bhindawas Bird Sanctuary

Location: 2-3 hours west of Delhi (if you can find it).

Date(s): 30-11-2002 (4 birding hours).

Notes: Our last effort in the search for water. We left the mountains a day earlier just to have time to visit this area. It is known that (even when Sultanpur dries up) this large artificial lake normally always has water. It is hard to describe what we felt climbing up the bird watching tower realizing we finally found the lake but spotting only grazing cattle and walking people. Again dry to the bone was our preliminary conclusion. Whilst exploring the area we found some remnants with ducks and some other goodies so it was not completely for nothing but the idea that we picked a completely wrong year to visit India grew to a fact.

Highlights: Red-naped Ibis (about 15), Spot-billed Duck (V, the only Spot-bills of the first two weeks birding around Delhi), Comb Duck (1), Northern Lapwing (V), Alexandrine Parakeet (V)

1-12-2002: Another travel day. We were dropped off at the National Airport in Delhi by our driver. The flight Guwahati-Assam with Sahara Airlines was good. The price for a one-way ticket was \$ 175,- for foreigners. This was included in the Assam package (see **Organised package deal**). We were picked up by the tourist guide and driver of Flamingo Travels at the airport. We soon found out that the tourist guide was not a knowledgeable birder so we were still on our own in finding birds. A dump with Greater Adjutants was easily found by the flying Adjutants.

Assam general

Location: several places during travelling.

Date(s): 1 till 10-12-2002

Notes: No drought problem in Assam (pffff). During the travelling to and from Kaziranga NP and Nameri NP it pays to keep your eyes open en route.

By far the most impressive site of our bird trip was a rubbish dump somewhere in the middle between the Guwahati International Airport and Guwahati town: over 35 Greater Adjutants were scavenging this dump. This dump is a 100 meters west of the road and it made itself known by the soaring Adjutants.

A stop at the Brahmaputra crossing did not produce anything mentionable.

Highlights: Asian Openbill (XX lots of birds along the road), **Greater Adjutant** (>35), **White-rumped Vulture** (1 flying over the rubbish dump mentioned above, the only of our trip), Brown Shrike (1), Ashy Woodswallow (V en route to Kaziranga NP).

We were taken by the guide to the most famous temple of the region (Kamakhya Mandir). After that we took a short stop at the office of Flamingo Travels and headed for Kaziranga NP where we stayed at the Aranya Lodge for the next seven nights. Most of the trip was in the dark which was not very comfortable. All the excursions were arranged by a guy from Aranya Lodge (organized by Flamingo Travels), who actually did a very good job.

2-12-2002: First thing to get used to in Assam is that the sun is up at 5:30 and Kaziranga NP opens at 7:30. This leaves time to scan the gardens of Aranya lodge. Fortunately there was a lot of activity in these gardens.

Aranya Lodge

Location: Kohora, 230 km east of Guwahati (4 hours drive).

Date(s): 2 and 5-11-2002 (3 birding hours)

Notes: These gardens are pretty good for birds so time spent here is not wasted. We actually found some birds here that we didn't see anywhere else. We only birded from the balcony and in the gardens of the lodge.

Highlights: Green Imperial Pigeon (2), Red-collared Dove (2), Red-breasted Parakeet (once a group of dozens of birds in the garden), Golden-fronted Leafbird (V birds constantly present), Brown Shrike (1), Grey-backed Shrike (1), Spot-winged Starling (1 among a large group of Chestnut-tailed Starling), Spangled Drongo (V).

Our first excursion was by jeep in the Western Range. This is a good loop for birding. The watchtower at Derban in the western part of this range is a great spot for checking out the grassy area in front of this tower. During midday (from 12:00 till 14:30) it is not

allowed to be inside the park so there's time enough for lunch at the hotel. We spent the afternoon in the Central Range, the forest there was not very productive.

Kaziranga National Park

Location: Kohora, 230 km east of Guwahati (4 hours drive).

Date(s): 2-12-2002 (western and central range, 7 birding hours), 3-12-2002 (elephant ride and eastern range, 9 birding hours), 5-12-2002 (central and western range, 7 birding hours), 6-12-2002 (eastern range and tea gardens).

Notes: Kaziranga NP generally has the same rules as mentioned for Corbett NP: regulated opening hours (morning: from 7:30 till 12:00, afternoon: from 14:30 till dusk), entrance only with a vehicle and guide, a huge camera fee (see **Prices**). All entrance arrangements should be booked in advance at the Forest Department office in Kohora, for us (fortunately) this was done by a guy from the Aranya lodge who did a very good job. We visited the three trails (western, central and eastern range) twice.

Western range is a beautiful trail and pretty good for birds and rhinos. Central range was the least interesting for us. Eastern range is by far the best area for birding, though we were not allowed to get to Debeswari, one of the best spots for the Kaziranga specialties. The guide told us that this trail (from the lookout near the Spot-billed Pelican colony onward) was in bad condition and not used for a long time. We made one elephant ride (3-12).

Highlights: Spot-billed Pelican (XX, all ranges), Black-necked Stork (V, all ranges), **Greater Adjutant** (1, western range), **Lesser Adjutant** (X, western and eastern ranges), **Short-toed Snake-Eagle** (1, central range), Pied Harrier (2, western and central range), Eurasian Griffon (X, the commonest vulture in Kaziranga NP during our visit), **Long-billed Vulture (*tenuirostris*)** (8, eastern range, this was the only place where we saw this vulture), **Booted Eagle** (1, eastern range), Grey-headed Fish-Eagle (4, all ranges), Peregrine Falcon (1, eastern range), Swamp Francolin (X), **Bengal Florican** (1, Derban watchtower), Grey-headed Lapwing (X), Blossom-headed Parakeet (1, eastern range), Stork-billed Kingfisher (2), Great Hornbill (2, central range), Yellow-vented Warbler (X, eastern range), Small Niltava (1, eastern range), White-vented Myna (X).

3-12-2002: The only way to be in the park at dawn is by arranging an Elephant ride. The main difference from the elephant ride in Corbett NP is that here all elephants take the same route together. This herd of elephant-tourists again was not productive for birds but it was nice to get this close to mammals (<10 m from a Rhino). The ride took about 1.5 hour. Apparently it is not possible (anymore) to arrange longer trips on different locations. For the rest of the day, the Aranya guy was able to arrange a trip to the Eastern Range. The entrance to the eastern range is about 1 hour drive from Kohora, so being allowed to stay also during midday gives you a lot more time to check out the area. Debeswari was off limits. We stayed in the area until about 4 o'clock. Our little investigation proved that we were able to see a little over 100 species during this time.

4-12-2002: An early start for a whole day birding at Panbari Forest. Panbari is officially not a part of Kaziranga NP, so most rules (especially opening hours) do not apply here. The worst you might encounter is running into an elephant or having the area closed because of the presence of a Rhino. Long before sunrise we were at the spot where we had to pick up our guide, but due to a night hunt for poachers, he wasn't awake yet. Still early

enough to witness the awakening of the birds. Leaches were present but never in annoying numbers (do take precautions though, even in the dry season).

Panbari Forest

Location: less than one hour drive east of Kohora.

Date(s): 4-12-2002 (8 birding hours), 6-12-2002 (4 hours)

Notes: Panbari Forest is a nice but rather degraded forest. Birding is pretty difficult in the dense shrubbery. The first day we kept having problems with Elephants, causing us to be able to bird only at the edges of the forest. The second day Panbari (6-12) we checked another area called Modarjuri, a bit more to the east. This area was even better for birds, with many of the same species but easier to find and some birds only seen here.

Highlights: Crested Goshawk (1), **Pied Falconet** (1, in Modarjuri), Great Hornbill (2), Speckled Piculet (1, in Modarjuri), Inornate Warbler (1), Slaty-bellied Tesia (V), Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher (2), Crow-billed Drongo (2).

5-12-2002: After an hour birding in the hotel garden we birded the central and western trail again, this time in different order, central in the morning and western in the afternoon. Both visits only produced a few new birds.

6-12-2002: A second visit to the eastern range, this time only the morning, again with a few new birds. The rhino carcass including vultures was still present. In the afternoon we were taken to some tea plantations for birding the rest of the daylight time.

Tea Gardens

Location: Some trip reports speak of 'The Tea Gardens' but fail to explain which area they mean (it's all tea around Assam). We were taken to some tea gardens up a hill, about 20 minutes east of Kohora, south of the main road (don't even try to find exactly the same spot, most areas looked just the same).

Date(s): 6-12-2002 (3 birding hours)

Notes: This area was not exceptionally interesting in terms of birds, and again an Elephant (wild?) teased us/the guides by foraging in the area that we liked to go to.

Highlights: Plaintive Cuckoo (1 hepatic form), White-capped Water-Redstart (1).

7-12-2002: This day we tried another part of the Panbari forest, called Modarjuri. This area looked quite a lot like Panbari forest and produced the same birds and some new ones. No problems with Elephants this time. After lunch we drove to Nameri NP. En route we stopped only at the Brahmaputra crossing but this produced no new birds. We first made the arrangements to visit the park at dawn and then drove to our hotel in Bhalukpong. It took a bit of convincing that we liked to have our dinner before 8 o'clock, because days start early when you want to be in the park before sunrise at 5:30, including an hour drive from the hotel to the park. The cook was also willing to arrange packed breakfast and lunch.

8-12-2002: We arrived at Nameri National Park headquarters before sunrise but the guide was a bit too late. Nevertheless, after crossing the river and entering the park the area was teeming with birds. We walked the trail to the east, along the river, which brings you to the best spots for White-winged Duck. Most of the day was spent following another guide who was anxious to show us the duck (see **Highlights**).

Nameri National Park

Location: 2 hours north of Tezpur, about 4 hours from Guwahati and 4 hours from Kaziranga NP.

Date(s): 8 till 10-12-2002 (20 birding hours)

Notes: *The* spot for White-winged Duck. Make sure the guides know that you're looking for it and they will help you find it. It is about impossible to find it yourself. The trail along the main river proved to be most productive for birds, but birds appeared to be all around in this park, especially Bulbuls. The raft we took was actually outside the park, this can also be a nice option to find river related birds (we dipped on most of these, like Ibisbill (again and now forever!), Small Pratincole (where were they?) and Long-billed Plover).

Highlights: Lesser Adjutant (1), White-winged Duck (2), Pallas Sea-Eagle (2), Rufous-bellied Eagle (1), Pied Falconet (1), Eurasian Thicknee (15), Pallas's Gull (1), Vernal Hanging Parrot (V), Wreathed Hornbill (1), Great Hornbill (2), Blue-eared Barbet (1), Asian Fairy-bluebird (X), Black-backed Forktail (1), Black-breasted Thrush (1), Pygmy Blue Flycatcher (1), Sultan Tit (3), Wallcreeper (1 during raft), Streaked Spiderhunter (2).

After crossing the river again in the afternoon, we walked back to the headquarters (about 1,5 km). The forests on this side of the river are very degraded and not productive. Nevertheless we heard Vernal Hanging Parrots here too and there even was a Great Hornbill on this side of the river.

9-12-2002: Our second day in Nameri NP. Again around sunrise in the park. This time we took the trail heading north. This leads to some grasslands but these were not very productive. Most of the morning we checked the western part of the park. Quite some new species proved that we were not yet finished with Nameri. At 12:00 we went back to the headquarters and had a lunch at the Eco Camp. We spent the afternoon rafting the river wild.

10-12-2002: On our last day in Nameri NP we decided to try to improve our very poor sighting of White-winged Duck. This time we approached the pools carefully, fortunately with great success. Still some new species and a huge group of Oriental Pied Hornbill (about 30 birds). We decided to take the afternoon off, to get ready for the long journey back home. The view from the balcony was exceptionally good.

Bhalukpong

Location: 20 km northwest of Nameri NP, near the border to Arunachal Pradesh.

Date(s): 10-12-2002 (1 birding hour)

Notes: We only saw Bhalukpong during daytime on our last afternoon off. The last hour of daylight at the balcony was rather interesting really.

Highlights: Pied Falconet (1), Asian Fairy-bluebird (V), Blue Rock-Thrush (1).

Highlights

Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*, Grijze Pelikaan) –**Vulnerable**–: common and easy to find in Kaziranga NP, over 50 birds, single individuals seen on all visits to western and eastern range.

Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*, Indische Gaper): probably due to the drought very uncommon around Delhi (only one in Bund Baretha), much more common in the wet fields all over Assam.

Black-necked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus asiaticus*, Zwarthalsooievaar) –**Near threatened**–: despite the drought still present at Keoladeo, seen in small numbers in almost all visited national parks, never outside these parks.

Greater Adjutant (*Leptoptilos dubius*, Indische Marabou) –**Endangered**–: large group (> 35) on waste dump near Guwahati (see main body of test), only single individual in Kaziranga NP but hard to separate from Lesser while soaring.

Lesser Adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*, Javaanse Marabou) –**Vulnerable**–: Seen only in Kaziranga NP in small numbers on all visits, sometimes soaring in small groups (<5). One bird was present in Nameri NP.

Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*, Indische Nimmerzat) –**Near threatened**–: largest group seen in Sultanpur NP (about 100) where apparently still on breeding site, probably because of the presence of water. Next largest group (about 30) in a small pond beside the road Delhi-Agra. Very uncommon in the other visited areas (only 1 in Keoladeo NP).

Red-naped Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*, Wrattenibis): only one group of 16 individuals in Bhindawas, where it appears to be resident year round.

Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*, Indische Witte Ibis) –**Near threatened**–: present on most waterbodies but in small numbers. Common in Bhindawas and widespread in Kaziranga NP.

Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*, Europese Flamingo): one bird flying over the Jamuna river in Agra.

White-winged Duck (*Cairina scutulata*, Witvleugelboseend) –**Endangered**–: confined to Nameri NP. The first sighting of this elusive and shy bird was by one of us being just in time to see two birds flying away while approaching a pool. The two other birders missed it by reaching the pool a split second too late! It took over 2,5 hours to (re)locate two birds, running around the forests in search for pools. So here's a tip: try to convince the guides that they point out the pools and then leave the approach to you, then approach every pond very carefully, hopefully not scaring them away. It should be possible to be able to see them sitting in the water, mostly two birds together, without chasing them. This was successful for us on the last day of our visit, with very good views of two birds. The probably best local guide that knows all the pools in the area lives in Nameri NP, about 2 km east of the 'entrance' to the park. Make sure that your guide knows that you want to see the ducks, and they will help you find it.

Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*, Knobbeleend): another indication of the drought in Keoladeo NP: we finally found the only bird of our trip in the last remnant of water in Bhindawas.

Short-toed Snake-Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*, Slangenarend): apart from one individual in Keoladeo NP an unexpected bird in Kaziranga NP (central trail), according to the bird guides a little out of range.

White-rumped Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*, Bengaalse Gier) –**Critical**–: only one individual of this once very common vulture, flying over the ‘Adjutant dump’ near Guwahati.

Eurasian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*, Vale Gier): one of the proofs that things change rapidly in India. This was the commonest vulture in Kaziranga NP during our visit with over 25 birds seen. At a Rhino carcass in the eastern range in Kaziranga NP this species appeared to be dominant over the also present (smaller) Long-billed Vulture.

Himalayan Griffon (*Gyps himalayensis*, Himalaya-gier): at least two birds soaring with Eurasian Griffon near Mongoli Valley.

Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus tenuirostris*, Indische Gier) –**Critical**–: only seen in the eastern range of Kaziranga NP where a handful of birds were present near a Rhino carcass.

Red-headed Vulture (*Sarcogyps calvus*, Indische Oorgier) –**Near threatened**–: we saw two birds on both days in Keoladeo NP and several birds in Corbett NP.

Pallas's Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*, Witbandzeearend) –**Vulnerable**–: not uncommon in Corbett NP and Kaziranga NP. Seen on most days visiting these areas.

Grey-headed Fish-Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*, Grote Rivierarend) –**Near threatened**–: only seen in Kaziranga NP in small numbers on several days in all regions.

Lesser Fish-Eagle (*Ichthyophaga humilis*, Kleine Rivierarend) –**Near threatened**–: only seen in Corbett NP, in singles on two or three days.

Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*, Indische Zwarte Arend): one juvenile flying over while walking to Cheena Peak near Nainital.

Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*, Dwergarend): one bird flying over in the eastern range of Kaziranga NP, apparently a bit out of range.

Pied Falconet (*Microhierax melanoleucus*, Bonte Dwergvalk): though seemingly hard to find we were lucky enough to see three birds on different occasions. The first was in the middle of Modarjuri forest (Panbari), the second was a surprise in Nameri NP, we expected (by the books) Collared here and the third was from the balcony of our hotel in Bhalukpong. All three showed well enough to rule out Collared.

Swamp Francolin (*Francolinus gularis*, Moerasfrankolijn) –**Vulnerable**–: rather easy to find in Kaziranga NP. Seen on almost all visits in all ranges, mostly in numbers between 5 and 20 birds together.

Bengal Florican (*Eupodotis bengalensis*, Baardtrap) –**Endangered**–: we were lucky to find one bird from the Derban watchtower in the western range, especially after realizing that we were not allowed to go to Debeswari.

Great Thick-knee (*Burhinus recurvirostris*, Grote Griel): one bird on one of the islands at Bund Baretha.

Grey-headed Lapwing (*Vanellus cinereus*, Grijskopkievit): several birds in Kaziranga NP, one bird in Corbett NP was a surprise.

Pallas's Gull (*Larus ichthyaetus*, Reuzenzwartkopmeeuw): after missing this species at all the river crossings we checked, we saw a juvenile flying over the river at Nameri NP, which is, according to the books, a bit out of range.

Vernal Hanging-Parrot (*Loriculus vernalis*, Indische Vleermuisparkiet): as with many birds, once we learned the sound it proved to be rather common in Nameri NP.

Blossom-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula roseata*, Bloesemkopparkiet): the least common of the parakeets seen. Only one bird in Panbari Forest and (at least) one bird in the eastern range of Kaziranga NP. Probably overlooked.

Plaintive Cuckoo (*Cacomantis merulinus*, Piet-van-Vliet): the only bird we saw was an hepatic female in the tea gardens near Kohora.

Brown Fish-Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*, Bruine Visuil): 4 different sightings, all in Corbett NP. Nice was a sighting at dusk in Dhikala with two birds flying on and off exactly the same branch after each other.

Wreathed Hornbill (*Aceros undulatus*, Gewone Jaarvogel): one bird flying over at the western part of Nameri NP.

Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*, Dubbelhoornige Neushoornvogel) –**Near threatened**–: we had a lot of different sightings of this magnificent bird: 2 in Corbett NP about 2 km from the entrance at Dhangarhi, 2 birds showing very well in scattered trees in the central range of Kaziranga NP, at least 2 birds not showing well in Panbari forest, 2 birds pretty close in Nameri NP and one calling just outside the park on the south side of the river.

Blue-eared Barbet (*Megalaima australis*, Blauwoorbaardvogel): only one bird in Nameri NP.

Great Barbet (*Megalaima virens*, Grote Baardvogel): 3 birds at different locations in the Northern Indian Hills. The one in Mongoli Valley showed very well.

Speckled Piculet (*Picumnus innominatus*, Aziatische Dwergspecht): one great sighting of a bird in Panbari Forest (Modarjuri)

Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*, Boomkwikstaart): one sighting of a bird in the forest on the western trail.

Mountain Bulbul (*Hypsipetes mcclllandii*, Groenvleugelbuulbuul): only one sighting of two birds in Mongoli Valley (first part) during the second visit.

Isabelline (Chinese) Shrike (*Lanius arenarius*, Chinese Klauwier): a single individual at our lookout spot near the palace at Bund Baretha.

Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasii*, Zwarte Waterspreeuw): our only sighting was of two birds in the Kosi River bed behind Quality Inn (Corbett Jungle Resort) near Kumeria.

Black-throated Accentor (*Prunella atrogularis*, Zwartkeelheggenmus): two birds in the fenced off fields just before Sat Tal.

Black-backed Forktail (*Enicurus immaculatus*, Zwartrugvorkstaart): one bird was present in the same pool where we got good views of the White-winged Ducks in Nameri NP.

Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush (*Monticola rufiventris*, Roodbuikrotslijster): a female together with an invisible male in Mongoli Valley on our second visit.

Blue Rock-Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*, Blauwe Rotslijster): a bird, present in the town of Bhalukpong showed rufous under tail coverts, indicating a possible hybrid with the *philippensis* subspecies.

Daurian Redstart (*Phoenicurus aureus*, Spiegelroodstaart): a beautiful male was present at the entrance of the western range of Kaziranga NP on our first visit.

White-collared Blackbird (*Turdus albocinctus*, Witkraaglijster): one bird was present in a group of Dark-throated Thrushes at Snow View Point and two birds were seen at Cheena Peek (both Nainital).

Black-breasted Thrush (*Turdus dissimilis*, Zwartborstlijster): at least one male in the first feeding flock of Nameri NP, but things were a bit hectic at that time (lots of birds everywhere).

Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*, Dama-lijster): great views of a bird allowing itself to be relocated after being discovered by a local guide.

Blue-winged Minla (*Minla cyanouroptera*, Blauwvleugelminla): we were pretty happy with this bird in Corbett NP but it proved to be more common at Mongoli Valley with a group of at least 5 birds on our second visit.

Green Shrike-Babbler (*Pteruthius xanthochlorus*, Groene Briltimalia): we were surprised by this bird, probably most because nobody mentions it in Nainital. There were at least two birds in a feeding flock also containing White-browed Shrike-Babblers.

Brooks's Leaf-Warbler (*Phylloscopus subviridis*, Brooks' Bladkoning): not one of the easiest birds to find. We found only one in Keoladeo NP, in Acacia trees south of the temple.

Orphean Warbler (*Sylvia hortensis*, Orpheusgrasmus): one of our first birds in India was a juv. Orphean Warbler in Sultanpur NP.

Pygmy Blue-Flycatcher (*Muscicapella hodgsoni*, Dwergniltava): apparently a target species for Nameri NP. We saw one individual of this very charming little bird on the trail leading east from the entrance.

Sultan Tit (*Melanochlora sultanea*, Sultanmees): during our first day in Nameri NP we were accompanied by probably one and the same feeding flock of birds containing also three Sultan Tits. Consequently we saw this species constantly during the morning, but no sign of them the other days.

Wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*, Rotskruiper): all in all? we had a lot of sightings of this charming bird. The first was on one of the pillars of the dam in Ramnagar. Two birds were present in the riverbed south of this dam (about 1 km). Another two birds were seen in the Kosi river bed behind Quality Inn (Corbett Jungle Resort) near Kumeria. The last bird was seen during our rafting experience in Nameri NP.

Chestnut-eared Bunting (*Emberiza fucata*, Grijskopgors): a juvenile bird was present in a group of other buntings, Russet Sparrows and accentors in what we called the Sub Valley (see the site description of Mongoli Valley).

Spot-winged Starling (*Saroglossa spiloptera*, Marmerspreeuw): at one time only we had one bird in an ever-present group of Chestnut-tailed Starlings in the garden of Aranya Lodge.

Crow-billed Drongo (*Dicrurus annectans*, Kraaiebekdrongo): two birds together in the Modarjuri part of the Panbari forest.

Green Magpie (*Cissa chinensis*, Groene Kitta): after a quick look at a elusive bird we had great views of two birds at closerange, while driving back from Dhikala to the entrance.

Grey Treepie (*Dendrocitta formosae*, Grijsborstboomekster): not very hard to find in Mongoli Valley where we saw a bird on both occasions. Also seen at Sat Tal.

Other Wildlife

Mammals

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Nilgai | Common mongoose |
| Three-striped palmsquirrel | Indian one-horned Rhinoceros |
| Rhesus macaque | Wild Buffalo |
| Chital | Barasingha |
| Jackal | Smooth indian otter |
| Sambar | Sloth Bear |
| Black-faced langur | Indian flying fox |
| Muntjac | Capped langur |
| Wild boar | Hoolock |
| Indian elephant | Orange-bellied Himalayan Squirrel |
| Hog dear | Malayan Giant Squirrel |
| Himalayan yellow-throated marten | |

Other

Indian Rock Python
Mugger
Gharial