

India – Rare Mammals and Birds of Gujarat

Naturetrek Tour Report

13 - 25 November 2016

Report compiled by Manisha Rajput



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Tour participants: Manisha Rajput (leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Sunday 13th November

The group was in flight to Ahmedabad airport.

Days 2/3

Monday 14th / Tuesday 15th November

Velavadar National Park

The group arrived to be met by Manisha and transferred to the Country Inn Hotel. Unfortunately, the start of the trip was complicated by the demonetisation, but I'm really thankful to our guests, because with their enthusiasm and the cheerfulness, we were able to cope with the situation which did not detract from the complete success of our tour. Although we had to queue to change our INR500 and INR1000 notes, we enjoyed discussing the birds we hoped to see.

Our first destination was at Velavadar National Park, the perfect parallel of African Savannah. Velavadar National Park is known for its large Blackbuck antelope population; Velavadar is also one of the few places where the wolf is proliferating in India, and where Jackal, Jungle Cat and Black-naped Hare are more easily seen, together with Indian Fox on the periphery. One can witness a massive roost of Montagu, Pallid and Marsh Harrier. Our stay was at Blackbuck Lodge, the perfect setting which looks like an African Safari Resort.

We did three Safaris during our stay at Velavadar National Park, resulting in sightings of Wolves, White-browed Bush Chat (also called Stoliczka's Bushchat), harriers, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Greater Spotted Eagle and Painted Francolin. I also had a good nature walk with Peter and Pete.

Days 4/6

Wednesday 16th / Friday 18th November

Gir National Park

After the sumptuous breakfast, we left Velavadar and started our journey towards the land of Lion King (Gir National Park). A tapestry of dry deciduous forests, acacia scrub and grassland, fed by rivers and reservoirs, Gir is the last abode of the Asiatic Lion and has a thriving population of Leopard, Sambar, Chital (Spotted Deer), Nilgai (Blue Bull) and Wild Boar. Gir is also one of the major habitats of Chousingha (the world's only Four-horned Antelope) and Chinkara (Indian Gazelle).

We checked in at Lion Safari Camp, located next to Hiren River, the picturesque and rewarding location for the birders.

We enjoyed six Lion-tracking safaris, on almost all the routes of Gir National Park, and out of which five safaris were productive.

One interesting part was seeing the homes of the Maldharis (the nomadic herdsmen / owners of the livestock) who are living inside the sanctuary. We also visited the Siddis village (the Siddi tribe in Gujarat is reckoned as the lost tribe of Africa) and the Kamleshwar Dam (which is the biggest reservoir in Sasangir). The dam is a crocodile breeding farm and the home for a variety of water birds.

There is a narrow-gauge railway track slashing the park.

The highlights were sightings of Lion, Leopard and also herbivores such as Chital, Nilgai and Sambar.

Reptiles included Marsh (Mugger) Crocodile, Dumeril's Black-headed Snake and Checkered Keelback Snake (also called Asiatic Water Snake).

The experience of birding, wildlife encounters and photography was marvellous, and it was always tempting to explore to the maximum.

Our bonus was the fruitful Nature Walks: we were able to spot 12 species of butterflies on those, and to visit to the Giant Fruit Bat colony and the Gir Interpretation Zone.

Our stay at Lion Safari Camp was also memorable due to the wonderful staff, whether it is the services of the front-office team or other departments of the camp (restaurant, pantry, housekeeping, guest relationship and the groundsman).

One of the most enjoyable moments was enjoying our mugs of tea amidst the always romantic evening of Gir.

Day 7

Saturday 19th November

Rajkot

Today we left Gir, to continue our journey to witness the rich history of Gujarat, spending the night at Rajkot which is a commercial and industrial city of Gujarat.

We opted for birding activity instead of roaming around in the city, and species seen included White-bellied Drongo, Golden Oriole and lots of water birds, two species of Pelicans along with Greater Flamingo.

We were also relieved to have the opportunity to change currency here. We stayed at the Imperial Palace Hotel.

Days 8/9

Sunday 20th / Monday 21st November

Greater Rann of Kutch

Today we drove further, to another paradise for birding: "The Greater Rann of Kutch". It is located in the Thar Desert, having the marshy salt flats which give the land a white and snowy look. One can see an endless landscape of pure white land, which in the monsoon season is filled with water, making it a seasonal salt marsh.

We enjoyed good amount of birding during the transit, seeing Martins and Swallows as well as the resident birds. We had a brief stop at Hamirsar Lake at Bhuj, where the wetland birds, pelicans and cormorants were the main attraction.

Having chosen the Gujarati cuisine from our lunch menu at the Hotel Prince, we continued our journey towards hotel Infinity Resort, our luxury accommodation at Nakhatrana.

Although we were tired due to the long hours' journeying, we set out soon after reaching at our destination, as Kutch offers super opportunities for special birding moments.

The session was short but we enjoyed an extraordinary performance: we spotted White-naped Tit, coursers, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and some wheatears. We were lucky to spot Jackal, Blue Bull and a Chinkara and, of course, the roosting activity of Green Bee-eater.

We finished our day early, after dinner, with the wish for more extraordinary birding for the next day.

Great Indian Bustard, was on the top in our wish list on day two at Kutch. It was cold and foggy when we started our morning safari. At the time of sunrise, we started working with our telescope in search of the Great Indian Bustard. Suddenly!!! - It was the wow moment for us when we spotted a Wolf, and immediately after that we spotted two Great Indian Bustards and other resident birds.

After the successful safari, we went to the Field Office of Corbett Foundation (whose director is a friend of mine) and had our breakfast with him, later returning to the resort for lunch.

The route for an afternoon session was in the Chari - Dhand area, where we saw Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Red-Tailed (also known as Rufous-tailed) Wheatear, Pipits, Long-legged Buzzards and had a glimpse of Saw-scaled Viper crossing the road.

Unfortunately, we were unable to find Grey Hypocolius, which is a prime attraction while birding at Fulay (Banni), but we saw many other species and really enjoyed our last safari.

Days 10/11

Tuesday 22nd / Wednesday 23rd November

Little Rann of Kutch

On Tuesday, we continued our journey, with a packed lunch, to our next destination: the Little Rann of Kutch, a sanctuary for the Indian Wild Ass. An ancient seabed turned by geological forces into saline desert plains, the Rann has grassy patches that offer good birding. Our accommodation was at the Rann Riders lodge which is imaginatively using local materials, and has extensive grounds with a water-body, ponds, gardens, plantations and agricultural fields. Here we had a very comfortable stay with sumptuous food, followed by local folk dance.

Our morning Safari into the Little Rann provided great results: Macqueen's Bustards, Desert Fox, Wild Ass and Blue Bull. Other species included Flamingos, all three species of pelican, Merlin, harriers, White-eyed Buzzard, Common Kestrel and some resident birds.

Days 12

Thursday 24th November

Little Rann - Ahmedabad

Our last day's morning drive was at Nava Talav, and it was almost like a bird farm, given the numbers and proximity: Greylag Goose, Bar-headed Goose, Spoonbills, Common Snipe, Black-headed Ibis, White -tailed Lapwing, other waders, and ducks including Spot-billed Duck.

At the end of this successful session, we went back to the lodge with excellent records on our cameras and many stories to discuss with our friends.

After having our lunch at Rann Riders, we started our journey to Ahmedabad. We had time for shopping at Fab India and a Gala Dinner at the Country Inn; apart from the delicious meal, we would not forget the bout of the laughter formed from a funny name of one particular dish. However, later, the group had to leave for the airport, for the flight back to the UK.

Our tour came to an end, but our minds were full of the memorable events and everlasting memories of the trip. **“The time has arrived to say ‘Hope to see you soon!’”**

Days 13

Friday 25th November

We arrived back in the UK after our very successful tour.

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Species Lists

Birds

- Bar-headed Goose, *Anser indicus*
 Knob-billed Duck, *Sarkidiornis melanotos*
 Gadwall, *Anas strepera*
 Indian Spot-billed Duck, *Anas poecilorhyncha*
 Northern Pintail, *Anas acuta*
 Eurasian Teal, *Anas crecca*
 Grey Francolin, *Francolinus pondicerianus*
 Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
 Painted Stork, *Mycteria leucocephala*
 Woolly-necked Stork, *Ciconia episcopus*
 Red-naped Ibis, *Pseudibis papillosa*
 Eurasian Spoonbill, *Platalea leucorodia*
 Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*
 Indian Pond Heron, *Ardeola grayii*
 Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea*
 Great Egret, *Ardea alba*
 Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*
 Great White Pelican, *Pelecanus onocrotalus*
 Spot-billed Pelican, *Pelecanus philippensis*
 Indian Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*
 Oriental Darter, *Anhinga melanogaster*
 Crested Honey Buzzard, *Pernis ptilorhynchus*
 Crested Serpent Eagle, *Spilornis cheela*
 Changeable Hawk-Eagle, *Nisaetus cirrhatu*
 Booted Eagle, *Hieraaetus pennatus*
 Steppe Eagle, *Aquila nipalensis*
 Shikra, *Accipiter badius*
 Montagu's Harrier, *Circus pygargus*
 Black Kite, *Milvus migrans lineatus*
 White-eyed Buzzard, *Buteo teesa*
 Great Indian Bustard, *Ardeotis nigriceps*
 Brown Crake, *Amauornis akool*
 Grey-headed Swamphen, *Porphyrio poliocephalus*
 Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra*
 Common Crane, *Grus grus*
 Indian Stone-curlew, *Burhinus indicus*
 Black-winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*
 Yellow-wattled Lapwing, *Vanellus malabaricus*
 White-tailed Lapwing, *Vanellus luecurus*
 Pheasant-tailed Jacana, *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*
 Black-tailed Godwit, *Limosa limosa*
 Spotted Redshank, *Tringa erythropus*
 Greylag Goose, *Anser anser*
 Ruddy Shelduck, *Tadorna ferruginea*
 Eurasian Wigeon, *Anas penelope*
 Northern Shoveler, *Anas clypeata*
 Garganey, *Anas querquedula*
 Painted Francolin, *Francolinus pictus*
 Indian Peafowl, *Pavo cristatus*
 Greater Flamingo, *Phoenicopterus roseus*
 Asian Openbill, *Anastomus oscitans*
 Black-headed Ibis, *Threskiornis melanocephalus*
 Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus*
 Yellow Bittern, *Ixobrychus sinensis*
 Striated Heron, *Butorides striata*
 Eastern Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus coromandus*
 Purple Heron, *Ardea purpurea*
 Intermediate Egret, *Ardea intermedia*
 Western Reef Heron, *Egretta gularis*
 Dalmatian Pelican, *Pelecanus crispus*
 Little Cormorant, *Microcarbo niger*
 Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*
 Black-winged Kite, *Elanus caeruleus*
 Indian Vulture, *Gyps indicus*
 Short-toed Snake Eagle, *Circaetus gallicus*
 Greater Spotted Eagle, *Clanga clanga*
 Tawny Eagle, *Aquila rapax*
 Eastern Imperial Eagle, *Aquila heliaca*
 Pallid Harrier, *Circus macrourus*
 Western Marsh Harrier, *Circus aeruginosus*
 Brahminy Kite, *Haliastur indus*
 Long-legged Buzzard, *Buteo rufinus*
 Macqueen's Bustard, *Chlamydotis macqueenii*
 White-breasted Waterhen, *Amauornis phoenicurus*
 Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus*
 Sarus Crane, *Grus antigone*
 Barred Buttonquail, *Turnix suscitator*
 Great Stone-curlew, *Esacus recurvirostris*
 Pied Avocet, *Recurvirostra avosetta*
 Red-wattled Lapwing, *Vanellus indicus*
 Little Ringed Plover, *Charadrius dubius*
 Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*
 Eurasian Curlew, *Numenius arquata*
 Common Redshank, *Tringa totanus*

Marsh Sandpiper, <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	Common Greenshank, <i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Green Sandpiper, <i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Wood Sandpiper, <i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Sandpiper, <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Little Stint, <i>Calidris minuta</i>
Temminck's Stint, <i>Calidris temminckii</i>	Ruff, <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
Indian Courser, <i>Cursorius coromandelicus</i>	Small Pratincole, <i>Glareola lactea</i>
Slender-billed Gull, <i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>	Gull-billed Tern, <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
Sandwich Tern, <i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>	River Tern, <i>Sterna aurantia</i>
Whiskered Tern, <i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, <i>Pterocles exustus</i>
Rock Dove, <i>Columba livia</i>	Eurasian Collared Dove, <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Red Turtle Dove, <i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	Spotted Dove, <i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
Laughing Dove, <i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, <i>Treron phoenicopterus</i>
Greater Coucal, <i>Centropus sinensis</i>	Asian Koel, <i>Eudynamis scolopaceus</i>
Indian Scops Owl, <i>Otus bakkamoena</i>	Indian Eagle-Owl, <i>Bubo bengalensis</i>
Brown Fish Owl, <i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>	Mottled Wood Owl, <i>Strix ocellata</i>
Spotted Owlet, <i>Athene brama</i>	Short-eared Owl, <i>Asio flammeus</i>
Jungle Nightjar, <i>Caprimulgus indicus</i>	Indian Nightjar, <i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>
Crested Treeswift, <i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>	Little Swift, <i>Apus affinis</i>
Indian Roller, <i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	White-throated Kingfisher, <i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
Common Kingfisher, <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Pied Kingfisher, <i>Ceryle rudis</i>
Green Bee-eater, <i>Merops orientalis</i>	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, <i>Merops persicus</i>
Blue-tailed Bee-eater, <i>Merops philippinus</i>	Eurasian Hoopoe, <i>Upupa epops</i>
Brown-headed Barbet, <i>Psilopogon zeylanicus</i>	Coppersmith Barbet, <i>Psilopogon haemacephalus</i>
Eurasian Wryneck, <i>Jynx torquilla</i>	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, <i>Yungipicus nanus</i>
Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, <i>Leiopicus mahrattensis</i>	Black-rumped (Lesser) Flameback, <i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
Common Kestrel, <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Merlin, <i>Falco columbarius</i>
Plum-headed Parakeet, <i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	Rose-ringed Parakeet, <i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Common Woodshrike, <i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>	Common Iora, <i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
Large Cuckooshrike, <i>Coracina macei</i>	Small Minivet, <i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
Brown Shrike, <i>Lanius cristatus</i>	Bay-backed Shrike, <i>Lanius vittatus</i>
Long-tailed Shrike, <i>Lanius schach</i>	Indian Golden Oriole, <i>Oriolus kundoo</i>
Black Drongo, <i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	White-bellied Drongo, <i>Dicrurus caeruleus</i>
White-browed Fantail, <i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	Indian Paradise Flycatcher, <i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
Rufous Treepie, <i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	House Crow, <i>Corvus splendens</i>
Indian Jungle Crow, <i>Corvus culminatus</i>	Great Tit, <i>Parus major</i>
White-naped Tit, <i>Machlolophus nuchalis</i>	Rufous-tailed Lark, <i>Ammomanes phoenicura</i>
Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark, <i>Eremopterix grisea</i>	Indian Bush Lark, <i>Mirafra erythroptera</i>
Sykes's Lark, <i>Galerida deva</i>	Crested Lark, <i>Galerida cristata</i>
White-eared Bulbul, <i>Pycnonotus leucotis</i>	Red-vented Bulbul, <i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
Barn Swallow, <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Wire-tailed Swallow, <i>Hirundo smithii</i>
Dusky Crag Martin, <i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>	Red-rumped Swallow, <i>Cecropis daurica</i>
Greenish Warbler, <i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	Clamorous Reed Warbler, <i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>
Blyth's Reed Warbler, <i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	Syke's Warbler, <i>Iduna rama</i>
Zitting Cisticola, <i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Grey-breasted Prinia, <i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
Graceful Prinia, <i>Prinia gracilis</i>	Ashy Prinia, <i>Prinia socialis</i>
Plain Prinia, <i>Prinia inornata</i>	Common Tailorbird, <i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
Common Babbler, <i>Turdoides caudata</i>	Large Grey Babbler, <i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>
Jungle Babbler, <i>Turdoides striata</i>	Lesser Whitethroat, <i>Sylvia curruca</i>

Yellow-eyed Babbler, <i>Chrysomma sinense</i>	Oriental White-eye, <i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
Bank Myna, <i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>	Common Myna, <i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Brahminy Starling, <i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>	Rosy Starling, <i>Pastor roseus</i>
Indian Robin, <i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>	Oriental Magpie-Robin, <i>Copsychus saularis</i>
Spotted Flycatcher, <i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, <i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
Bluethroat, <i>Luscinia svecica</i>	Red-breasted Flycatcher, <i>Ficedula parva</i>
Black Redstart, <i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	White-browed (Stoliczka's) Bush Chat, <i>Saxicola macrorhyncus</i>
White-throated (Hodgson's) Bush Chat, <i>Saxicola insignis</i>	Siberian Stonechat, <i>Saxicola maurus</i>
Isabelline Wheatear, <i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	Desert Wheatear, <i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
Variable Wheatear, <i>Oenanthe picata</i>	Red-tailed Wheatear, <i>Oenanthe chrysopygia</i>
Thick-billed Flowerpecker, <i>Dicaeum agile</i>	Purple Sunbird, <i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
House Sparrow, <i>Passer domesticus</i>	Spanish Sparrow, <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>
Yellow-throated Sparrow, <i>Gymnoris xanthocollis</i>	Baya Weaver, <i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
Indian Silverbill, <i>Euodice malabarica</i>	Western Yellow Wagtail, <i>Motacilla flava</i>
Grey Wagtail, <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	White Wagtail, <i>Motacilla alba</i>
White-browed Wagtail, <i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	Paddyfield Pipit, <i>Anthus rufulus</i>
Tawny Pipit, <i>Anthus campestris</i>	Long-billed Pipit, <i>Anthus similis</i>
Tree Pipit, <i>Anthus trivialis</i>	Water Pipit, <i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
Common Rosefinch, <i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	Grey-necked Bunting, <i>Emberiza buchanani</i>
Black-headed Bunting, <i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>	

Mammals

Five-striped Palm Squirrel, <i>Funambulus pennanti</i>	Indian Gerbil, <i>Tatera indica</i>
Black-naped Hare, <i>Lepus nigricollis</i>	Nilgai, <i>Boselaphus tragocamelus</i>
Blackbuck, <i>Antilope cervicapra</i>	Chinkara, <i>Gazella bennettii</i>
Chital, <i>Axis axis</i>	Sambar, <i>Cervus unicolor</i>
Asiatic Wild Ass, <i>Eguus hemionus</i>	Wild Boar, <i>Sus scrofa</i>
Indian Wolf, <i>Canis lupus pallipes</i>	Golden Jackal, <i>Canis aureus</i>
Desert Fox, <i>Vulpes pusilla</i>	Indian Fox, <i>Vulpes bengalensis</i>
Asiatic Lion, <i>Panthera leo persica</i>	Indian Leopard, <i>Panthera pardus fusca</i>
Indian Grey Mongoose, <i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>	Ruddy Mongoose, <i>Herpestes smithii</i>
Northern Plains Grey Langur, <i>Semnopithecus entellus</i>	Indian Flying Fox, <i>Pteropus giganteus</i>
Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat, <i>Cynopterus sphinx</i>	

Reptiles

Marsh (Mugger) Crocodile, <i>Crocodylus palustris</i>	Common Indian Monitor, <i>Varanus bengalensis</i>
Indian Softshell Turtle, <i>Nilssonina gangetica</i>	Dumeril's Black-headed Snake, <i>Sibynophis subpunctatus</i>
Indian Saw-scaled Viper, <i>Echis carinatus</i>	Checkered Keelback, <i>Xenochrophis piscator</i>