

India

Goa

12–27 January 2008

Participants:

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Yellow-wattled Lapwing

Leaders: Leio de Souza and Nigel Warren

Day 1: Overnight direct flight from London to Darambolin, Goa.

Day 2: On arrival in Goa, as usual it took time to get through immigration before we meet up with Leio who was waiting with our bus and driver to take us to the hotel about an hours drive away. After checking in at the Bierra Mar we had lunch overlooking the marsh at the back of the hotel getting to grips with some of the commoner Indian birds. Blue-tailed and Little Green Bee-eaters, White-breasted Kingfishers, Chestnut-tailed and Rosy Starlings, Jungle and Common Mynas, White-rumped and Scaly-breasted Munias, lots of egrets, Purple Heron and Indian Pond-herons, White-breasted Waterhen and a very vocal and showy Clamorous Reed-warbler. Overhead meanwhile, Black and Brahminy Kites, Booted Eagle and Western Marsh-harriers all gave the group a good start to the trip. After lunch, we stayed local visiting the Baga Fields where we added Red-wattled Lapwing, Shikra, Spotted Dove, Asian Koel, Indian Roller, Malabar Lark, Long-tailed Shrike, Black Drongo, Small Minivet, Oriental Magpie-robin, Pied and Siberian Stonechats, Indian Robin, Zitting Cisticola, White-browed Wagtail and Richard's and Paddyfield Pipits. Finally, back at the Bierra Mar, we ended a long but rewarding first day with Black-crowned Night-heron, Greater Painted-snipe and Pintail Snipe.

Day 3: An early start to visit Saligao Spring to look for the Brown Wood-owls. Due to disturbance however, we couldn't locate them but we did see Besra, Indian Spotted Eagle, Crested Serpent-eagle, Plum-headed Parakeets, Crested Treeswifts, Stork-billed Kingfisher, White-cheeked and Coppersmith Barbets, Ashy, Bronzed and White-bellied Drongos, Black-headed and Indian Orioles, Rufous Treepie, Blue-winged and

Golden-fronted Leafbirds, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta, Common (Nilgiri) Blackbird, Common Tailorbird, Blyth's Reed-warbler and Green and Greenish Warblers. A mixed flock of Grey-headed, Red-vented, Red-whiskered and White-browed Bulbuls, Asian Paradise-flycatcher, Common Iora and Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike kept everyone on their toes whilst a Pale-billed Flowerpecker sat on its nest was a real test to see. On the way back to the hotel we stopped at an area of grassland and pools where we added Oriental Honey-buzzard, Black-shouldered Kite, Little and Indian Cormorants, Plain Prinia, Pacific Golden-plovers, Black-winged Stilts and a Common Sandpiper. During the lunch break back at the hotel, four Woolly-necked Storks and a Temminck's Stint were feeding on the marsh with Brown Shrike, Greater Coucal and an Osprey all putting in appearances. In the afternoon, after a couple of hours break from the heat, we visited Club Cabana, a nearby wooded hillside. White-bellied Sea-eagles, Little Sift and Asian Palm-swifts drifted overhead, with Black-lored Tit, Thick-billed Flowerpecker, Crimson-backed, Crimson and Loten's Sunbirds were further additions to the list. On the return to the hotel we passed some more pools where amongst the commoner waders were two Greater Sandplovers. Finally, the Baga Fields produced a large flock of Baya Weavers with three Streaked Weavers amongst them. The evening vigil looking over the marsh added three Alexandrine Parakeets and a Common Moorhen.

Day 4: After an early cup of coffee and good views of the two resident Spotted Owlets, we headed for Baga Hill, just a short bus ride away. On the walk up, Common Woodshrike, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Scarlet Minivet, Tawny-bellied Babbler, Tickell's Blue-flycatcher, White-throated Fantail and Grey-breasted and Ashy Prinia were all added. On the top we had our first views of several Indian Peafowl and a possible Rufous-bellied Eagle was seen briefly. Back at the bottom of the hill Striated Heron and Pied Kingfisher were added whilst eating our packed breakfast. After our usual midday break, we visited Fort Aguada where new birds included Eurasian Hoopoe White-eyed Buzzard, Black-rumped Flameback, Orange-headed Thrush and both Blyth's and Olive-backed Pipits.

Day 5: We decided to try a short early visit to Saligao Spring and this time connected with a young Brown Wood-owl, which gave good views to all, albeit restricted viewing. Next stop was Donna Paula where we soon saw all the three target species, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark and Oriental Skylark. In the afternoon we birded two sites; Curca Saltpans for waders adding Marsh Sandpiper, Lesser Sandplover, Little Ringed Plover and Little Stint. Then onto an area of wetland called Betim Lake for Little Grebe, Oriental Darter, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Lesser Whistling-duck. Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal, Garganey, Northern Shoveler, Purple Swamphen, Eurasian Coot and Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacanas. On the way back to the hotel Western Reef-egret and Sandwich Tern were seen from the bus.

Day 6: Today we spent the morning at Carambolin Lake, first looking for Brown Hawk-owl but finding Jungle Owlet instead. Blue-faced Malkoha, Streak-throated Swallow, Rufous-tailed Lark and Purple Sunbird were all seen on the way to the lake, where we added also Greater Spotted Eagle, Black-headed Ibis, Ruff and Yellow Wagtail. An afternoon off for those who wanted it, and a local walk for those eager for more birds. An Alexandrine Parakeet at a nesthole was new for those who missed the previous sighting, but new birds were now becoming more difficult to find. The evening watch over the marsh behind the hotel finally produced a Cinnamon Bittern for some, and a Common Snipe was picked out amongst the Pintail Snipe.

Day 7: An early start was required for the two-hour drive to Maem Lake where an excellent morning of forest birding ensued. Changeable Hawk-eagle. Brown Fish-owl, Orange-breasted Green-pigeon, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Banded Bay Cuckoo, Rufous Woodpecker, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Asian Brown Flycatcher and a Black-naped Oriole which gave prolonged close views and were all new for the trip. After lunch in the local restaurant, we drove back across Charao Island seeing White-eyed Buzzard and Pallid Harrier. Near the ferry crossing, a large flock of ducks and waders contained a few Eurasian Curlew and Whimbrel and thirteen Terek Sandpipers were seen feeding along the shoreline. From the ferry, much to his

relief, our first Lesser Adjutant Stork was correctly identified by one certain leader of the group who shall remain nameless! Later, during dinner, a Barn Owl did a flypast for the observant few.

Day 8: A morning at Morji Beach on the Chaporni Estuary produced lots of gulls including many Brown-headed, Black-headed and Caspian, about fifty Slender-billed, a dozen Pallas's and a few Heuglin's. Terns included Lesser Crested and a couple of Sandwich Terns. Amongst a large flock of Lesser Sandplovers it was easier to pick out a couple of Greaters than when they are on their own. A Sanderling and a few Dunlin were also roosting amongst the flock. Just behind the beach an Indian Grey Hornbill was seen by a lucky few. During the late afternoon and evening watch over the hotel marsh we had tantalising glimpses of a Ruddy-breasted Crake and the Cinnamon Bittern was seen briefly again.

Day 9: Today we headed off early to the Backwoods Camp in the Western Ghats a couple of hours drive away. We met Leio outside the camp and he started pointing out new birds immediately; the White-headed race of Chestnut-tailed Starling, Eurasian Collared-dove, Puff-throated Babbler, Chestnut-shouldered Petronia and Jungle Crow. After coffee and biscuits, we went for a walk into the forest where Spangled Drongo, Greater Flameback, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Malabar Grey and Malabar Pied Hornbills, Flame-throated and Black Bulbuls, Dark-fronted Babbler, Vernal Hanging-parrot, Pompadour Green-pigeon, Malabar Whistling-thrush, Grey Junglefowl, Yellow-browed Bulbul and Heart-spotted Woodpecker were all added to the list. A pair of stunningly-coloured Malabar Trogons were probably the highlight, but a pair of well-camouflaged Sri Lanka Frogmouths sat side-by-side came a close second. After breakfast we went to a nearby open area in search of raptors and we were not disappointed, we saw Black Eagle, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common Kestrel and a displaying pair of Rufous-bellied Eagles along with Ashy Woodswallows, Alpine Swifts, Himalayan Swiftlets and our only Black-headed Bunting of the trip. During the afternoon everyone had a couple of hours to themselves to either rest or explore the area before we headed for Tamdi Surla Temple a short drive away. A walk along the nearby stream produced Malabar Parakeet, cracking views of Blue-eared Kingfisher, a Brown-breasted Flycatcher, Grey Wagtail and White-rumped Shama. In the open area around the Temple we watched flyover Mountain Imperial-pigeons, Brown-backed and White-rumped Needletails. Then it was back to camp for the evening meal and drinks listening to the noises of the forest.

Day 10: A pre-dawn stakeout for Indian Pitta just on the edge of the camp, in the company of the local elephant, gave close views of two birds down to just a few feet. The morning in the forest added Asian Fairy-bluebirds, Indian Blue Robin, Blue-capped Rock-thrush, Verditer Flycatcher, Large-billed and Western Crowned Warblers, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch and prolonged scope views of the much sought-after Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher. At the raptor watchpoint most of the birds were the same as the previous day but we did add a flyby Crested Goshawk. In the afternoon free time, a few group members saw a fine White-bellied Flycatcher. We tried for nightjars in the evening seeing just one or two Jordon's, but the appearance of a Spot-bellied Eagle-owl surprised everyone, even the owl!

Day 11: Bondla, the smallest of the three main reserves in the Western Ghats, being in a different part of the forest would hopefully provide some different birds. We stopped just outside the reserve in an open area in order to scan the treetops. Lots of birds and amongst them, we eventually found some Brown-headed Barbets. Other birds seen here included Little Spiderhunter, White-browed Fantail and Large Hawk-cuckoo. Once inside the main reserve we added Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker and Black-naped Monarch. For lunch we visited the Shahkiri Spice Farm; no birds but very informative. On arrival back at the camp we were told a Giant Hornbill had been there during the morning but had unfortunately flown off! It was therefore with great delight that we found it later, on the afternoon walk not far from the camp.

Day 12: We stayed locally for the morning walks adding Black-throated Munia, White Wagtail and Crag Martin with individuals catching up with species they had previously missed or gaining better views. In the evening, Leio took us to a hillside, sat us down and with a little patience, we enjoyed views of Grey Nightjar and a stunning sunset.

Day 13: A trip to Molem Reserve in the hope of adding a few more new birds. It took Leio a while to track down the keys to the main gate however, but eventually we gained entry. It initially proved a little quiet with just a Red-breasted Flycatcher added to the list by a few of the group. Things did get much better though when a stunning White-bellied Woodpecker gave good close views to everyone. After breakfast back at the camp, we visited the Temple area again for Indian Blue Robin, unfortunately only Leio saw it before it disappeared back into the forest, so it was back for lunch. Geoff, who had remained in camp, showed us pictures of a group of birds that had passed through, they were Large Woodshrikes, surprisingly the only ones of the trip. During the afternoon we headed back to the Bierra Mar and while most unpacked and had a rest, the Ruddy-breasted Crake gave stunning views bathing out in the open to one lucky person. Later the Cinnamon Bittern showed again.

Day 14: This was the morning of the much anticipated river trip, which didn't disappoint. During the first part of the cruise in the main river Greater and Lesser Crested Terns, assorted herons, waders and the usual raptors were seen. As the river narrowed lots of kingfishers including the very smart Black-headed sat on the fishing nets stretched along the riverside, but as we entered a side channel the boatman pointed out a target bird, a fine White-collared Kingfisher. We saw several birds and it brought our total to eight species of kingfisher for the holiday. Late morning found us back at Carambolin Lake where we eventually tracked down a group of Asian Openbills. Lunch was taken in Panjim and then we had another look at Batim Lake and Curca Saltpans, finishing up at Saligao Spring.

Day 15: A relaxing day. In the morning, we revisited Baga Hill where a very obliging Black-headed Cuckooshrike posed for the photographers and a Crimson Sunbird performed for those who had missed the previous sightings. Ashy Woodswallows gave good close views as we breakfasted at the hotel, and a little later our last new bird of the trip, a Yellow Bittern, surprised a few of the group. Most took the last afternoon off for shopping or boosting their tan, while a hardy few had a final look around the Baga Fields.

Day 16: It was an early start for the airport and flight back home with a very good total of 273 species seen.

NIGEL WARREN