



WILDWINGS

Our 2014 departure to Goa will be a fully inclusive, small group tour.

GOA BIRD FESTIVAL 10th - 24th JANUARY 2010

By Tour Leader DAVE FELL

Saturday 9th January: Dave and Theresa Fell met 14 participants at Gatwick Airport for the flight to Goa. After exchanging stories about our journeys and the horrendous winter weather which hindered our travel arrangements and kept us on tenterhooks as to whether (no pun intended) we would ever take off, we finally boarded and took to the air only one hour later than scheduled.

Sunday 10th January: Nearly 10 hours later we approached Dabolim Airport, Goa when we were diverted to Mumbai to take on fuel. This was because a plane was stranded on our runway making it impossible for us to land. So five hours later, we eventually arrived at our destination, tired but glad to be there.

On arrival at the Beira Mar Hotel, we were allocated our rooms, showered, changed and explored whilst trying to get to grips with a few of the more commoner bird species. We had dinner with a few Kingfishers (beer that is) and an early night.

Monday 11th January: After a short introductory meeting, we walked through Baga Fields seeing Indian Roller, Stork-billed and White-throated Kingfishers, Green and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, Red Collared Dove, Common and Pintail Snipe, white phased Booted Eagle, Woolley-necked Stork, Richard's, Tawny and Tree Pipits, mynas and munias.

In the afternoon, a short taxi ride took us to Baga Hill, where more new birds were hitting us thick and fast. Parakeets, Coppersmith Barbet, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Indian Spotted Eagle, Blue-winged (Jerdon's) and Golden Fronted Leafbirds, Black-hooded Oriole and bulbuls to name but a few.

We then tried our luck at Arpora, Club Cabana a known site for Indian Pitta but after much searching we could 'only' find an Orange-headed Ground Thrush.

Back at the hotel as dusk fell, several Night Herons flew into the marsh to feed and a Spotted Owlet was seen.

Tuesday 12th January: Up bright and early and our taxis took us to Saligao. As we walked down the lane towards the spring we made frequent stops as birds were singing and calling all around us. Good views were had of White-cheeked and

Coppersmith Barbets, Indian Oriole, Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike, White-throated Fantail, White-bellied Drongo, Asian Paradise, Brown and Tickell's Flycatchers, Black-lored Tit, Purple-rumped, Purple and Vigos (Crimson) Sunbirds, Brown-cheeked Fulveta and various bulbuls.

On reaching the spring it was disappointing to find that our target bird, Brown Wood Owl, was nowhere to be found. Probably disturbed by the nearby cutting down of trees and clearing of hillside vegetation. For what purpose, one can only guess?

Back at the hotel four Indian Grey Mongoose were seen.

The afternoon was spent at Carambolim Lake where there was a whole host of water birds. Egrets, ducks including the delightful Pygmy Cotton Teal, Purple Gallanules and both Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacanas, cormorants and Anhingas. Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns fed over the lily-strewn lake while seven Ruddy Shelduck circled overhead as did a Great Spotted Eagle.

The nearby paddyfields were feeding grounds for waders including sandpipers, shanks, Ruff, Black-winged Stilts and a scattering of Small Pratincoles. Beyond the paddyfields Glossy Ibis and Open-billed Storks fed.

Usually after the lake we would visit a village to see Brown Hawk Owl but we had been reliably informed that for some unknown reason they had deserted their usual roost so we headed back to the hotel.

At the hotel the leader suggested a "crake watch" but everyone decided a shower was the better option. To their dismay the leader was rewarded with stunning views of a Cinnamon Bittern which walked into the open and sat there for several minutes before disappearing.

Wednesday 13th January: An early start today for the only all day trip, to Chora Island. We caught the first ferry across to the island (actually it is an isthmus) as the sun rose and headed straight to Mayem Lake hoping to see Brown Fish Owl but we failed yet again to find a large owl species. A walk around the lake produced a great photographic opportunity with Clamorous and Blyths Reed Warblers showing extremely well. Also here were eight Malabar Grey Hornbills, Pied Kingfisher, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Crested Treeswift, a roosting Grey Nightjar, Orange-breasted and Pompadour Pigeons, Orange Minivet, Bronzed and Racket-tailed Drongos, Common Woodshrike, Thick-billed Flowerpecker, a pair of Little Spider-hunters (probably feeding young) plus a Indian Scimitar Babbler was heard but could not be tempted to show itself.

After the lake a short stop at a mangrove fringed creek produced Plain Prinia, Terek Sandpiper, two Adjutant Storks, 83 Glossy and nine Black-headed Ibis and a flock of about 50 Small Pratincoles.

We took a well earned rest and lunch in a nearby restaurant before driving to Tikanem for a raptor watch but apart from the common kites, the only other raptor seen was a Black-shouldered Kite.

As we waited for the return ferry we scrutinised the many waders feeding on the estuary. Among the many Redshanks and Curlew, Marsh and Terek Sandpipers plus Little Stints were the pick of the bunch but a close up Lesser Sandplover afforded the photographers with crippling views aiding ID.

Thursday 14th January: Another attempt for the Indian Pitta at Arpora resulted in failure so we continued north to Morjim Beach where on arrival a showy Spotted

Owlet sat out in the open. Unusually there were no gulls loafing around on the beach, they were all some way off on a sand bar in the middle of the estuary, but even at this range the bigger gulls could be identified.

After a while a small flock of gulls flew to the beach as others flew overhead as they made their way back out to sea to some fishing boats so ID was again possible. Black-headed and Brown-headed, Slender-billed, Caspian, Heuglins and Pallas's Gulls were all here along with a few Lesser and Greater Crested Terns.

A strange looking gull was spotted and comprehensively photographed. These photos were later studied by German and Finnish birders who both, independently, confirmed some of our suspicions by identifying it as a Baltic Gull (2nd calendar year). This, on our return to the UK, will hopefully be verified and photos will be sent to Leio to register the record. He is of the opinion that it is a first record for Goa!

Also here at Morjim was a mixed flock of about 1000 plovers- Mainly Kentish and Lesser Sandplovers with a scattering of Greater Sandplovers, a couple of Turnstone and a Dunlin. Feeding low overhead was a flock of Indian Swiftlets offering good views at this height. In the nearby scrub were two Brahminy Starlings.

The afternoon was free but some took a walk again into Baga Fields. One of the pools produced more common waders and an Osprey while the now familiar birds – mynas, drongos, munias etc – adorned the wires. Several pipits were flushed as was a handsome male Black-headed Bunting.

An organised flush was done around a small pool and resulted in about 40 Pintail/Common Snipe and 7 Painted Snipe – one female in particular gave excellent views before disappearing back into cover.

We carried on searching for more pipits finding Richards, Paddyfield and photographing a Blyths. Meanwhile back at the hotel a male Pallid Harrier was a good find and one member of the group in his haste to see the bird ran onto his balcony in some state of undress and with shaving foam on his chin.

Friday 15th January: It was 5.30am as we boarded the bus to take us to Backwoods, our base for the next five days. After an hour and a half drive we arrived at the Barabhumi village school, a few kilometres from the camp and we immediately began finding new birds in the roadside trees and bushes. Vernal Hanging Parrot, Malabar Parakeet, Large-billed Crow, White-browed Wagtail, Malabar White-headed Starling, Grey-breasted Prinia and Chestnut-shouldered Petronia.

A circular walk behind the school along the river and back to the road gave more new sightings although the expected Brown Fish Owl was not in residence. Other birds making up for this were Malabar Barbet, five Malabar Pied Hornbills, Blue-faced Malkoha, Small and Orange Minavets, more Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrikes, Black-naped Monarch, Verditer Flycatcher, Western-crowned Warbler and a couple of very elusive Forest Wagtails.

After a hearty breakfast and room/tent allocation we took a leisurely stroll along the entrance track. On the way stopping to view and photograph a pair of Sri Lankan Frogmouth in their daytime roost, such confiding but strange looking night birds. Flight views of Heart-spotted Woodpecker were had but good views were seen of the much smaller Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker and the larger Greater Flameback. A Brown Shrike, Black-naped Oriole and Velvet-fronted Nuthatch were all added to our ever growing list.

During our lunch break we entered a nearby field and viewed the eclipse.

In the afternoon after lunch and a well earned rest, we made the short journey to a field behind the Tambdi Surla Temple. Over the hills we saw Brown-backed Needletails, Mountain Imperial Pigeon, Rufous-bellied Eagle and several Booted Eagles. In the surrounding trees were Flame-throated Bulbul (the Goan national bird), Asian Fairy Bluebird, Yellow-browed and Black Bulbuls and Dark-fronted Babbler.

As we made our way back to the bus we found, in the gathering gloom, a stunning male Blue-capped Rock Thrush, a fitting end to a great day's birding.

Saturday 16th January: We were up at first light and having tea/coffee and biscuits before taking another stroll along the entrance track. New birds here were a female Black-headed Cuckoo Shrike and a very handsome male Grey Junglefowl . A pair of Malabar Pied Hornbills also showed well.

After breakfast we visited a site for a raptor watch seeing Crested Serpent Eagle, two Black Eagles, Booted and Rufous-Bellied Eagles, Oriental Honey Buzzard as well as Brown-backed Needletails, Eurasian Crag and House Martins.

As we waited for lunch to be served, a Puff-throated Babbler showed to a lucky few and after lunch a Tawny-bellied Babbler was found too.

Today's afternoon walk took us back into the forest and here we saw Malabar Trogon, Red Spurfowl, Jungle Owlet, Drongo Cuckoo, Malabar Woodshrike, and Indian Blue Robin. Just outside camp an Indian Pitta was calling and eventually although we were losing the light most of the group managed to obtain reasonable views.

After dinner it was a drive to a nightjar spot and we had a spot-lit view of a Jerdon's Nightjar which allowed us close enough for some very good photo's to be taken.

Sunday 17th January: An early breakfast today before we walked up river from behind the temple. After walking for almost an hour we found our quarry, the enigmatic Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher. At the half way stage we rested in an open area that gave good views in both directions along the river and here we saw Common Rosefinch and a stunning white phase Asian Paradise Flycatcher and eventually a very elusive female Ultramarine Flycatcher was seen well.

As we returned to the temple area, this time on the opposite side of the river, a Brown-breasted Flycatcher and Blue-capped Rock Thrush were both good finds.

Again the afternoon walk was along the entrance track and although we saw plenty of good birds the only addition to the list was a delightful White-rumped Shama.

Monday 18th January: The early walk took us back to the river behind the school and we finally caught up with one (or was it two) Brown Fish Owls. We also added Loten's Sunbird and 22 Asian Fairy Bluebirds were a sight to behold.

Another forest walk gave us Large Hawk Cuckoo, Spangled Drongo and Rufous Woodpecker. It was while watching/looking for the woodpecker that we found a Spot-bellied Eagle Owl. This bird had not been seen since it had lost it's mate several months before and this sparked off a major twitch from the camp when a group of Finns rushed off to see it just as everyone sat down for lunch. After lunch one of the group was fortunate to see a Dollarbird, a bird he had previously seen in Thailand.

The final walk of the day was back to the field/river area behind the temple and here we found a Taiga (Red-throated) Flycatcher and had brilliant views of a male Indian Blue Robin. After dark a Brown Hawk Owl was seen by spotlight behind the camp kitchen area.

Tuesday 19th January: Our final day at the camp and we were up and out early. We took breakfast and spent the morning at Bondla before driving back to Baga arriving at the hotel late afternoon.

Bondla is always a great place for birds and today was no exception. The new birds added to the list, among the many birds seen, were Brown-headed Barbet, Nilgiri Woodpigeon, Indian Robin, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Speckled Piculet, Besra and Changeable Hawk Eagle. Three Malabar Trogons, Indian Blue Robin and a White-rumped Shama were the best of the rest.

Wednesday 20th January: Today we were back to the taxis and off to Dona Paulo, an area of volcanic rock, and the Santa Cruz rice paddies.

On arriving at Dona Paulo we were welcomed by a Common Kestrel and more Indian Robins. We soon located Oriental Skylarks (with their buzzing flight call) Short-toed Lark and Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark. Richard's and Paddyfield Pipits abounded here and a Hoopoe was flushed before we found two confiding Yellow-wattled Lapwings.

At Santa Cruz a watch from a bridge gave cormorants, egrets, kingfishers and hirundines. The paddyfields were far too overgrown and apart from a few common waders very little was seen birdwise so an early return was made to the hotel.

After a strenuous five days at camp this afternoon was free. Some of the group went to the beach, some to their rooms/balcony and others birded the hotel surrounds finding a Peregrine Falcon.

Thursday 21st January: We made a return visit to Baga Hills and found barbets, parakeets, drongos, orioles, a male Black-headed Cuckoo Shrike and another Jungle Owlet as we walked slowly up to the top. At the summit yet another sighting of the huge White-bellied Sea Eagle, an Oriental Honey Buzzard and an impressive flock of about 50 Alpine Swifts.

We walked back along Baga Creek to Lila's, a German Café, for brunch and then either returned to the hotel by taxi or walked via Baga Fields.

A new venue for everyone in the afternoon – Divar Island – an area of open grassland with a tree that afforded some respite from the sun. I was informed that this was a good place for birds and it certainly lived up to its reputation. After a slow start we were continually watching Marsh, Pallid and Montagu's Harriers while a Black-shouldered Kite perched in a nearby tree and a Shikra flew through.

On the football field were 25 Little-ringed Plovers and seven Short-toed Larks and on an area of burnt grass were pipits, Malabar Larks, Oriental Skylarks and a Yellow Wagtail. On the roadside wires sat Indian Rollers and a White-throated Kingfisher caught and ate a sizeable lizard.

Friday 22nd January: Not too early a start today and a most relaxing trip, the Zuari River boat trip looking for Collared Kingfisher.

A short while after boarding our craft and heading down river from Dona Paulo we encountered several dolphin which played around the boat and escorted us for some distance. Gull and terns, mainly Brown-headed and Gull-billed were common

but on arriving at the fishing poles it was unusual to find just Greater Crested Terns perched with no sign of their smaller cousins the Lesser Crested Terns. An assortment of egrets, waders and kingfishers were along the banks and around the many fishing nets set in the river.

More kingfishers were evident as we slowed to a crawl on entering a small lateral mangrove edged creek. Common, Stork-billed, Black-capped, White-throated, and Pied were all seen and then we found two Collared Kingfisher which brought our tally of kingfisher for the trip to seven species! Immediately after this, our boatman found a Marsh Mugger Crocodile among the mangroves.

Returning from the boat trip we made a stop at a small lake in Goa Velha and among the flocks of Whistling Duck were Cotton Pygmy Geese, teal and both species of jacana.

The afternoon was free but some of the group had a walk around Baga Fields and found Red-throated Pipit, Paddyfield and Grasshopper Warblers, Bluethroat and Pacific Golden Plover. An Indian Spotted Eagle was seen from the poolside.

Saturday 23rd January The last day, initially a rest day to do your own thing. Whilst some shopped or sunbathed others took taxis and re-visited Arpora and Morjim.

At Arpora success was had in finding Indian Pitta and two chicks could be seen in the huge nest of the White-bellied Sea Eagle. The gulls and waders at Morjim were much the same as on the previous visit but a Common Tern was new for the trip.

An afternoon walk around Baga Fields was mainly for those who had missed out on Painted Snipe and we flushed 13, all males, as well as numerous Common and Pintail Snipe. A couple of male Black-headed Buntings were on the wires with a large flock of about 1000 Baya Weavers.

Sunday 24th January The trip over the group were seen off from the hotel and wished a safe journey home as Theresa and myself stayed on for a further three weeks for our honeymoon.

Yet another successful Wildwings Goa Bird Festival with 269 species seen and 3 heard.

Theresa and Dave would once again like to thank the group for their more than generous gift which was put into our honeymoon fund. We travelled to Kerala and this was used to hire a house boat for two wonderful days and nights an experience we shall never forget.

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