

# Northern India & The Himalayan Foothills

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline Itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	<u>Depart London</u>
<b>Day 2</b>	<u>Delhi</u>
<b>Days 3/6</b>	<u>Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary</u>
<b>Day 7</b>	<u>Agra–Delhi</u>
<b>Days 8/11</b>	<u>Corbett Tiger Reserve</u>
<b>Days 12/15</b>	<u>Nainital</u>
<b>Day 16</b>	<u>Delhi</u>
<b>Day 17</b>	<u>Fly London</u>

### Dates

#### 2020

Friday 13th – Sunday 29th November 2020      £3,495

#### 2021

Friday 8th – Sunday 24th January 2021      £3,495

Friday 12th – Sunday 28th November 2021      £3,495

#### 2022

Friday 7th – Sunday 23rd January 2022      £3,695

Friday 11th – Sunday 27th November 2022      £3,695

### Cost

From £3,495 (London/London);  
£500 reduction if booked without flights, land only trip.



Tiger by Raghu Kulkarni



Bar-headed Geese

Incredible India



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**Single room supplement**

£795

**Grading**

A/B (easy to moderate difficulty). Birdwatching walks of moderate length

**Focus**

Birds and mammals



Ibisbill



Black Bittern

## Introduction

There is nowhere in the world quite like India and from the moment of arrival in this vast country every visit is filled with unforgettable memories. While daily life in modern India appears to have many of the trappings of the 21st century in terms of motor cars, computers and so on, underlying this facade is a unique culture which has developed over thousands of years and which permeates every aspect of society.

Arriving from a European background it may sometimes be difficult to understand everything you see, but this is part of the mystic appeal of the country and ensures that no day spent in India can ever be described as boring. One of many paradoxes is that northern India, which has one of the largest human populations in the world, also boasts one of the most diverse avifaunas in Asia, and away from the big urban concentrations the countryside is often breathtakingly beautiful.

The itinerary of this tour was first researched by the late David Hunt, a well-known UK naturalist, and the itinerary is now considered one of the classic Indian wildlife tours! So, it is with great pleasure that we are able to offer you a chance to join us on this famous trail. It combines all the best elements of three distinct habitats into one outstanding birdwatching holiday. Beginning at Bharatpur amid bird-filled wetlands, we then head north towards the mighty Himalayan mountains to experience several days of sub-Himalayan birding at Corbett (National Park and) Tiger Reserve, where Tiger and Indian Elephant are two of the mammal possibilities to supplement the wonderful birding. We move even closer to the mountains for the last phase of the tour which we will spend at the former hill-station of Nainital where many of the birds found in the surrounding areas are typically Himalayan species associated with these higher elevations. It is possible to see in excess of 350 bird species during this tour plus a fine variety of mammals. Perhaps equally important is the opportunity to observe many facets of India from city to country, and a day sightseeing in historic Agra ensures that the splendours of the Moghul past are not neglected.

## Day 1

Friday

### In Flight

We depart from London on direct British Airways scheduled flight to Delhi at 6.55pm. We will be in flight overnight.

## Day 2

Saturday

### Delhi

We arrive in the morning at 8.50am and transfer to our hotel located close to the airport. Our stay in Delhi for this holiday is usually at the 5-star hotel, usually The Pullman Hotel for a convenient access to the Delhi airport, (we cannot guarantee a particular hotel, but always endeavor to book one of a high standard not far from the airport). The hotel features an array of eclectic and exciting eateries. Whether you're looking for a quick bite while you're on the go or a comfortable setting in which to savour a meal, tantalizing



options, are at hand. With a varied variety of three restaurants and lounges at The Pullman, you can indulge in different Asian cuisines. We may also make use of its facilities, which include a pool and a spa and health centre before the next phase of our journey. Our stay in this comfortable hotel is well deserved after a long flight! If we do not stay at the Pullman, a hotel offering an equivalent standard of rooms and service will be used.

The driving in Delhi through a wonderful noisy chaos of buses, scooters, cars and motorised rickshaws, amid which all manner of less conventional modes of transport can be spotted ranging from overloaded bullock-carts to gaudily decorated Lorries! Sacred cattle saunter through the melee oblivious to the risk, or rummage through piles of litter looking for anything that might be edible. Birds are certainly not excluded from the city and we may see Common and Bank Mynas foraging at the roadside and perhaps some less expected sights, such as a Hoopoe exploring a patch of grass or Ring-necked Parakeets winging overhead.

In the afternoon there will be a birdwatching trip to Sultanpur National Park and Bird Sanctuary, 13 miles from our hotel. Sultanpur covers 1.5 sq km and was declared a bird sanctuary in 1971 and was upgraded to the status of national park in 1991 by the Haryana Government. This is an ideal birding spot; large numbers of migratory species arrive each year. The habitat is a mix of wetland, woodland and grassland. In the wetland area several trees have been planted on the mounds, which provide good nesting and perching opportunities for birds.

Bird species of particular interest includes: White Pelican, Little Cormorant, Painted Stork, Black-headed Ibis, Little Egret, Great Egret, Spot-billed Duck, Eurasian Thick-knee, Red-wattled Lapwing, White-tailed lapwing, Black-winged Stilt, Black tailed Godwit, Spotted Redshank, Shikra ,Grey Francolin, Black Francolin, Indian Roller, White-throated Kingfisher, Pied & Common Kingfisher , Crested Lark, Red-vented Bulbul, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Laughing Dove,

Spotted Owlet, Magpie Robin, Southern Coucal, Hoopoe, Purple Sunbird, Baya Weaver, Bank Myna, Common Myna, Blue-tailed and Green bee-eaters, Bluethroat, Paddyfield Pipit, Long-billed Pipit and Sind Sparrow.

## Day 3

Sunday

### Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary

Soon after breakfast we will leave by coach for Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary (also known as Keoladeo Ghana Bird Sanctuary), arguably the most exciting birdwatching site in Asia. During our time at Bharatpur we will be staying at The Birder's Inn, situated just outside the Sanctuary. This small privately owned lodge offers 24 spacious rooms that overlook a garden populated with fruit trees that attract various garden birds. You have all the necessary modern comforts like air-conditioning, swimming pool, hot and cold running water, a multi-cuisine restaurant & grill that serves a delectable variety of dishes.

The journey to Bharatpur will take about five hours on reasonable roads. As we approach Bharatpur, the countryside assumes a more rural aspect and the sparser road traffic will increasingly include haughty looking camels pulling carts laden with grain, or wagons piled high with produce being hauled by teams of oxen. The colourful turbans of the villagers are another indication that we have entered the historic state of Rajasthan where the different colours denote which district the wearer comes from. The closer we draw to Bharatpur the more likely we are to encounter storks and herons feeding wherever a stream or pool provides them with a source of food. However, while we are sure to see most of these in large numbers over the following days a stop will certainly be warranted if we meet a mixed flock of ducks, waders, Red-naped ibis and Woolly-necked stork in a roadside field. These are the birds that we are unlikely to see in the Sanctuary but may come across en route in the agricultural land it favours.

The dusty, fortified old town of Bharatpur is actually a few kilometres from the Bird Sanctuary, also known throughout the world simply as 'Bharatpur'. Once the hunting preserve of a maharaja, the area was flooded to encourage wildfowl for winter shooting and the success of this measure is evidenced by a stone tablet inside the Sanctuary which records the huge numbers of ducks killed on particular dates. Fortunately the marshes now enjoy complete protection and the water levels are carefully controlled, although in this arid region there are conflicting demands to provide irrigation for the adjacent farmland. The Sanctuary is now effectively an oasis with its boundary marked by a brick wall. Inside this perimeter is a mixture of habitats, not just the wetland areas but also tracts of mature forest, sandy acacia scrub and more open areas of grassland frequented by Blackbuck, Sirkeer Malkohas (large members of the cuckoo family) and on occasions, Sociable Lapwing. A single-surfaced road runs from the entrance gate to the Forest Lodge and Shanti Kutir where the Sanctuary's accommodation is located. Beyond this the road bisects the flooded 'jheels' (shallow, expansive lakes) as it continues for several kilometres to the Sanctuary boundary, but road traffic is prohibited on this stretch, access being limited to an electric-powered bus operated by the Sanctuary and a fleet of cycle rickshaws. The taxi service offered by the latter is an arrangement to compensate local villagers for land incorporated into the Bird Sanctuary and provides a way for them to benefit from the tourist revenue generated by the Sanctuary. Numerous raised embankments or bunds radiate into the marshes from the road and are screened by lines of acacias which offer shade and shelter for a variety of passerines. From our base at the Birder's Inn in Bharatpur city, it is possible to explore each area of this relatively small Sanctuary on successive days, and the combination of habitats could result in a bird list well in excess of 150 species during our stay.

## Day 4 – 6

Monday – Wednesday

## Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary

During the wet season thousands of cormorants, Painted Storks, Openbill Storks, egrets and herons nest in the tops of babul trees above the water and throughout the winter months. Numbers of youngsters can be seen feeding alongside their parents. The spectacle is increased by the presence of wintering Grey-lag and Bar-headed Geese, various ducks, Spoonbills, White Ibis, cranes, Purple Swampheens, jacanas, waders and dozens of other water-loving birds turning the marshes into a birdwatching paradise. With one sweep of the binoculars it is possible to move from White-tailed Plover, Purple Swampheens, Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed Jacana to Great Egret, Black-necked Stork, Purple Heron and Sarus Crane, an exercise that can be repeated with different permutations of birds throughout the Sanctuary. As if the water birds were not enough, Bharatpur is also a magnet for raptors and a typical day might include sightings of Indian and Greater Spotted Eagle, Crested-Serpent, Imperial and Steppe Eagles in addition to four or five species of vulture. A diversion through the woodland areas is always productive and birds found here include Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Dusky Eagle Owl, Grey Hornbill, Coppersmith and Brown-headed Barbet, Small and Scarlet Minivet and Spotted Creeper. Roosting Long-tailed or Indian Nightjars are not infrequently on view in the tree nursery near the Forest Lodge and the rickshaw men are always keen to point out Spotted or Indian Scops Owls at their daytime rest sites. The icing on the Bharatpur cake for many British birdwatchers is the occurrence of many Asian passerines which are either scarce migrants in Western Europe or only known as rare vagrants. Olive-backed Pipits, Citrine Wagtails, Red-breasted and Grey-headed Canary Flycatchers, Yellow-browed Warblers and Bluethroats are common wintering birds in the Sanctuary and less predictable but highly prized visitors from the north can include various flycatchers, Siberian Rubythroat, Orange-headed Ground-Thrush, Tickel's Thrush, Dusky and Smoky Warblers.

Cocooned within Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary it is easy to forget that the wetland areas are largely artificial and that much of the surrounding district is very arid and desiccated outside the monsoon period. On one of the days, we will visit Bund Baratah Reservoir where River Tern, White-capped Bunting, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Rufous-tailed and Ashy-crowned Finch Lark, Brown Crake and Great Thick-knee are among the special attractions. A few kilometres away, we will visit the Bayana town a sight for the nesting colony of highly endangered Indian Vulture.

Although famed for its birds, other wildlife is well represented within Bharatpur Sanctuary. Nilgai or Bluebull, the largest of the Asian Antelopes, find the swampy vegetation much to their liking and can often be seen grazing on exposed islands. Sambar Deer share their love of watery situations but herds of delicate Spotted Deer or Chital tend to prefer drier, shady areas where the nervous does can keep a concerned eye on their irresistibly beautiful fawns. There are few predators to worry the deer, although packs of Jackals roam the Sanctuary betraying their presence by a chorus of eerie howling as dusk settles. The fawns might also fall prey to one of the large Pythons which enjoy the protection of the sanctuary and in one particular area can often be seen soaking up the sun, although always within easy slithering distance of the underground burrows they cohabit with porcupines. The local mongooses would not wish to tangle with one of these 4-metre long snakes but jauntily forage along the trails looking for more manageable morsels. Lively Palm-Squirrels are perhaps the most conspicuous and noisy of the mammalian residents, constantly chasing round from tree to tree, and Wild Boar the least secretive, crashing through the undergrowth with much squealing and snorting when disturbed. Lucky observers might be treated to the sight of the rare Fishing Cat which was filmed at Bharatpur for the BBC Life on Earth series.

From the first flicker of dawn, announced by the vociferous Grey Francolins, to the onset of dusk there is a non-stop flow of interesting birds at Bharatpur. There is no doubt that this magnificent Sanctuary is one of the greatest bird

watching sites in Asia. Other birds we can expect to find during our stay include Indian Darter, Black Bittern, Dusky Eagle Owl, Indian and Greater Spotted Eagles, Imperial Eagle, Woolly-necked stork, Glossy Ibis, Black-headed & Red-naped ibis, Red-crested Pochard, Ferruginous Duck, Comb Duck, Cotton Pygmy-Goose, White-breasted Waterhen, Brown Crake, Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, White-tailed Lapwing, Greater Painted Snipe, White-breasted, Common and Pied Kingfishers, Long-tailed, Brown, Bay-backed and Isabelline Shrikes, Small Minivet, Blyth's Reed, Clamorous Reed, and Paddyfield Warblers, Tailorbird, Magpie Robin, Treepie, Chestnut-shouldered petronia, Spanish Sparrows and magnificent Indian Courser.

## Day 7

Thursday

### Agra to Delhi

A day of sightseeing in Agra begins with an early morning visit to the deserted ruins of Fatehpur Sikri, once the capital of the Moghul Empire, and which is situated roughly halfway between Bharatpur and Agra City. Dusky Crag Martins and Little Swifts skim over the red sandstone walls of this ancient place and, although the accent is on history during our visit, birds are always on hand for those members of the party with less interest in the events of the past. Hoopoes, Brown Rock Chats and possibly a Blue Rock Thrush may be seen as we walk round and clouds of Black Kites and vultures circle overhead. On occasions, wintering Wallcreepers find the numerous rocky crevices worthy of investigation.

About one hour from Fatehpur Sikri, we enter the historic city of Agra and we will have a guided sightseeing tour of the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort. Even these world-famous buildings are not without ornithological interest for those reluctant to abandon birding – the Yamuna River here is always populated by flocks of waders, and the skies filled with Black Kites. Possibilities include Ruddy Shelduck, River Lapwing, Pied Avocet, Marsh Sandpiper, River and Black-bellied Terns, Great Black-headed and Brown-headed Gulls, Lagger Falcon and Spotted Owlet. The quieter corners of the Taj gardens might reveal Barbets, Grey Hornbills and perhaps a few warblers. Omnipresent at every site are the chattering, inquisitive little Palm Squirrels and a fine mixture of colourful butterflies. Today, though, the birds take second place to the magnificent buildings, of which the main attraction is the breathtakingly beautiful white marble monument of the Taj Mahal, one of the best known images of India and never a disappointment in real life.



Taj Mahal

Later, after our early lunch, we will travel by road for another four to five hours to Delhi, where we will stay in a comfortable hotel The Holiday Inn Mayur Vihar.

Today is going to be a long and tiring day, however, very rewarding!

**Day 8 – 9****Friday – Saturday****Delhi – Corbett Tiger Reserve (Dhikuli, Garjia and Kumeria)**

In the early morning, we will travel by road to our lodge, Tiger Camp, which is located on the periphery of Corbett Tiger Reserve and surrounded by thick jungle on one side and the river Kosi on the other. We will stay there for four nights. Tiger Camp consists of comfortable rooms (not tents) with en suite facilities. It is close to the Reserve and offers good value for money. Tiger Camp is situated in a delightful location near a fast-flowing river where White-capped water Redstart and Plumbeous water Redstarts flit among the boulders and Brown Dippers plunge in and out of the torrent. Wallcreepers not infrequently explore the rocky shoreline here and the Crested Kingfisher is another regular visitor. The surrounding forests are rich in birdlife and, unlike the nearby Tiger Reserve, it is possible to explore these on foot which greatly increases the list of potential bird species we could see. Sensational birding is assured with possibilities including Crested Serpent Eagle, Plum-headed and Slaty-headed Parakeets, Brown Fish-Owl, Blue-bearded Bee-Eater, Great Hornbill, Bronzed Drongo, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler, White-crested Laughing-Thrush, Yellow-bellied Fantail-Flycatcher, Himalayan Rubythroat, Spotted Forktail, Black-lored Tit, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Indian Nuthatch and Oriental White-Eye to name just a few. The passage of a mixed-species feeding flock will cause a few minutes of chaos as the bushes appear to rain birds and we are just as likely to encounter such a party in the gardens of the hotel as in the forest. One of the great things about this area is that every outing seems to bring a new selection of birds and surprises occur with each excursion. Even meal times are not safe from interruption as the restaurant windows afford a good view of the gardens and many a meal has been temporarily abandoned when a passing raptor or a new flycatcher attracts attention. Although deemed to be safe for walking, one sometimes speculates whether Tigers will respect the ill-defined boundary of the Tiger Reserve and Leopards certainly wander freely although they are always hard to observe. There is a pleasant walk by the river just two minutes away from the main part of the lodge.

During our stay, possibly on the day of arrival from Delhi, we will spend some time scanning the fast-flowing waters of the River Kosi on the outskirts of the busy market town of Ramnagar. This is a regular wintering site for Ibisbill and we will be hoping to locate one of these unusual Himalayan waders, although they can never be guaranteed and even when present are remarkably difficult to pick out among the similarly coloured stones beside the river.

**Day 10 – 11****Sunday – Monday****Corbett Tiger Reserve**

Having skirted Corbett Tiger Reserve for two days we will enjoy the game drives at the Bijrani and other good ranges.

From the entrance to the Bijrani range the tracks wind through impressive forests and grasslands. At several places the road crosses over dry river courses which become raging torrents during the summer monsoons making road access impossible.

Corbett boasts a large population of Tigers and sightings on this trip have been good over the last few years. Walking inside the Tiger Reserve is strictly prohibited (for obvious reasons!) except in certain designated areas and it is within these that we can safely concentrate our bird watching efforts.

The ornithological advantages of the location will soon be apparent. The bushes and trees around the compound are alive with birds early in the morning and a walk along the trails can produce a stream of exciting finds including wintering thrushes, Himalayan Rubythroat, Grey-hooded Warbler and a number of flycatcher species. Inspection of the river might reveal Goosander, Black Stork, and the trio of birds associated with Himalayan streams: Plumbeous Redstart, White-capped River-Chat and Crested Kingfisher. Further scans could locate Pallas's Fishing Eagles or Ospreys perched on dead trees in the distance, or bizarre Great Thick-knee standing morosely on muddy islands. A superb Great Black-headed Gull might glide in to settle on the bank, one of a small wintering flock on a nearby reservoir, and other rarer waders and water birds are always possibilities. Forests cloak the surrounding hills and at one or two of the spots where we can get down from the coach to walk round we will have the opportunity to see some of the woodland inhabitants such as hornbills, woodpeckers and barbets. There are also large expanses of open grassland in Corbett, particularly around Bijrani, where Black Francolin fly up from underfoot and a variety of buntings



Bengal Tiger

may be identified. Hen Harriers patrol these areas, often in company with other raptors, and at night several species of owl take their toll on the small creatures living there. Add to this mixture a miscellany of babblers, flycatchers, bulbuls, sunbirds and many other wonderful bird species and it is easy to understand why many regard Corbett to be one of the best Indian reserves.



Tawny Fish Owl

Even the most fanatical of birdwatchers would probably admit that an encounter with a Tiger is pretty special and such a meeting will be a tantalising possibility wherever we go in Corbett. On occasions the daily coach from Ramnagar has been forced to stop because a Tiger was sleeping on the road and every dried up river bed or shady thicket is worth checking in case one of these magnificent creatures has chosen to rest there. Leopards are seen far less frequently but, like their striped relatives, could appear almost anywhere. Herds of wild elephant inhabit the Reserve and can sometimes be observed from Bijrani browsing at the forest edge

but, surprisingly for such large animals, they are adept at disappearing into cover. Spotted Deer and Sambar are favourite Tiger prey and both occur throughout Corbett with large herds of the former congregating in the grasslands around Bijrani. The rarer Hog Deer can also be seen here but the widespread little Muntjac is more often heard barking in the forests than seen. Troupes of Grey Langur Monkeys and Rhesus Macaques are almost as much a part of the

northern India landscape as the ubiquitous Palm Squirrels but in Corbett they appear much more wary than their urban counterparts, a caution engendered by the desire to avoid ending up as the evening meal of a big cat! Other mammals might include Wild Boar, Yellow-throated Marten, Jackal and perhaps a family party of otters playing beside one of the streams.. They have no shortage of food as the rivers are teeming with Mahseer, a large salmon-like fish much prized by anglers.

## Day 12

Tuesday

### Nainital

We will leave Corbett after lunch to drive to the former colonial hill station of Nainital for the final phase of our tour. Early morning is a good time to surprise Red Junglefowl feeding beside the road and perhaps also one or two Kaleej Pheasants to round off our Corbett list. A Tiger returning from its nocturnal wanderings would be a sensational way to bid goodbye to this wonderful reserve.

After checking for Ibisbill at Ramnagar, we will follow a narrow winding road which gradually ascends in a series of loops along the sides of forested hills, each twisting hairpin taking us slightly higher in elevation until we finally reach the outskirts of Nainital and look down on the buildings of the town clustered on hills around the central feature of a large lake. The resort was very popular with the British Raj in colonial days and echoes of the past are found everywhere in the style of the buildings and the place names. Cafes invite passers by to drop in for tiffin, emporiums abound, and many of the residences still bear faded signs on the gates with resonances of the Home Counties such as Ascot, Windsor or Newbury. Situated at a height of over 2,000 metres Nainital is just 120 kilometres from the snowy peaks of the western Himalayas and the avifauna is typical of the montane regions. A few birds, such as the ubiquitous Common Myna, will be familiar from the lowlands but in general most of the birds we will encounter during our stay will be new for the holiday. The weather can be capricious at this altitude. Nights are always cold during the winter months but days often pleasantly warm, although cold snaps can bring a covering of snow to the hills. It is still primarily a summer resort for people escaping the stifling heat of the plains and is distinctly out of season at the time of our visit but, while the hotels may be designed to cool their guests rather than warm them, the potential discomforts are more than compensated for by a stunning selection of birds! Stepping out of the hotel to find a Red-flanked Bluetail perched on the garden fence and a flock of Red-fronted Serins feeding among the vegetables soon dispels any doubts about the reason for spending several days amid Nainital's faded charms. Further exploration of the gardens and nearby churchyard could produce a fine selection of resident and wintering birds including Oriental Turtle Dove, Scarlet Minivet, Buff-barred and Lemon-rumped-Warblers, Streaked Laughing-thrush, Black-throated and Red-throated Thrushes, Blue Whistling-Thrush, Blue-fronted Redstart, Black-throated and Altai Accentors, Yellow-browed and Green-backed Tits, Pink-browed Rosefinch and Black-headed Jay.

Leopards are alleged to occasionally snatch dogs from gardens at the edge of town and Tigers have also been reported, although the days recalled in Jim Corbett's writings when he was regularly summoned to despatch man-eaters in the surrounding hills have long since vanished into history.

We will stay in a comfortable Vikram Vintage Inn for the four nights. The hotel is situated just a few minutes walk from the Nainital's famous Naini Jheel.



## Day 13 – 15

## Wednesday – Friday

### Nainital

We spend our time at Nainital visiting various sites within easy reach of the town and also undertake two longer day excursions. The first of these is to the Mangoli Valley which begins from the main road some 10 kilometres below Nainital and extends deep into the hills. A footpath runs alongside strips of cultivation, and terraced hillsides with patches of woodland provide thicker cover for forest birds. First discovered as a birding site by the late David Hunt, this delightful but obscure valley is superb for birds and a great many species have been recorded there since his pioneering visits over 20 years ago. Lammergeyers are often among the first birds to be seen upon entering the valley, sailing over the hillsides and perhaps indulging in aerial tussles with other raptors. Noisy parties of Red-billed Blue Magpies forage beside the track, flying up to perch in the adjacent conifers where they can angrily swear at the intruders. Other less conspicuous birds invite discovery, such as restless Ashy-throated Warbler, Speckled Piculet, Golden Bush-Robin and perhaps a Slaty-backed Forktail flying from one rock to another along a bubbling stream which runs through a deep wooded ravine below the footpath. Flocks of White-throated and Striated Laughing-thrushes are easier to locate and Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher and Warblers draw attention to themselves with a cheery Wren-like song. It should be a great day. Other birds to expect include Roufous-breasted Accentor, Brown-fronted Woodpecker, Black Bulbul, Blue-capped Redstart, Black-crested Bulbul, Bar-tailed Tree-Creeper and Grey Tree-Pie. Very often the list of birds can be further enhanced by a stop at a point where the road crosses several small streams cascading down a slope. Spotted and Little Forktails can be seen at this locality raising the possibility of seeing three species of forktail on the same day!

The second day trip will take us a little further from Nainital to the popular picnic site at Sat Tal where a chain of small lakes is surrounded by thick forest. This picturesque setting can also be superb for birds, particularly around the edge of the lakes where flocks of laughing-thrushes can be found grubbing in the thick undergrowth and the Warblers are plentiful in the trees. A wide range of birds have been seen at Sat Tal but among the possibilities include Long-tailed Minivet, White-crested Laughing-thrush, Black-chinned Babbler, Red-billed Leiothrix, Slaty-blue Flycatcher, Verditer Flycatcher, Red-rumped Swallow, Grey Bush-Chat, Crimson Sunbird, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker and White-capped Bunting.

Elsewhere around Nainital we will certainly visit a place called Snow View – situated on a ridge above the town where there are great views of the distant Himalayas when weather conditions permit. Despite the constant traffic of people visiting the vantage point the surrounding bushes and trees often harbour a good selection of birds including several species of Laughing-thrush, Indian and White-tailed Nuthatch, Rufous Sibia, Altai Accentor, Roufous-bellied woodpecker, Yellow-breasted Greenfinch and a rare sighting of a Cheer Pheasant. Almost any patch of trees or open

area in Nainital is worth checking for birds, watched Wallcreepers fluttering along a cliff-face above the main road and discover, Lammergeyers and Himalayan Griffon Vultures may be seen soaring wherever a hillside or rock-face produce thermals and, for the very energetic, tracts of forest on the slopes above the town are reputed to contain several species of pheasant, although lack of time precludes mounting an expedition to test the reports.

## Day 16

Saturday

### Delhi/In Flight

Today we exchange the cool pine-scented air of the Himalayan foothills for the dust of the plains as we return once again to Delhi. The long drive will involve crossing a bridge over the mighty Ganges River and we will make a stop to look at the assemblies of waterbirds that occur in the vicinity of the bridge. Indian Skimmers are often to be found on sandy islands in mid-river, and in remnant patches of reed along the bank we may find such species as White-tailed Stonechat. Another exciting possibility is the chance of seeing one or two freshwater Ganges River Dolphins from the bridge.

Here we will transfer to a 5-star hotel, The Pullman or in one of the airport hotels for an overnight stay before we will have a next day transfer to catch the plane to London.

## Day 17

Sunday

### London

We transfer to Delhi airport to catch a British Airways mid-morning flight to London. We are due to arrive in London by afternoon.

**NB. Please note that the itinerary offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some reordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

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## Grading

A/B (easy to moderate). This is a standard birdwatching tour with mainly gentle day walks. However at a few locations, such as the Mangoli Valley near Nainital, an extended walk of between four and six hours is planned, although this will be at birdwatching pace.

## Food & Accommodation

All meals are included in the tour price except main meals in Delhi. Accommodation will be in comfortable tourist hotels with private facilities.

## Extra Expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday: lunches and dinners in Delhi and all items of a more personal nature such as drinks, laundry, souvenirs and tips for guides, hotel staff and drivers.

## Entry requirements

All UK passport holders and most other nationalities require a visa for India, which is obtainable in advance from your nearest embassy.

## Climate

The climate is ideal for birdwatching in January and November; days are usually pleasantly warm without becoming too hot and evenings are much cooler, ensuring comfortable sleeping conditions. The temperature in north and central India ranges from 5-6°C in the early morning to 15-20°C during the day, dropping to 2-3°C again at night. It feels very cold in the mornings – a jacket, hat, gloves, fleece and several layers all being needed at this season. As we increase in elevation to Nainital it will be colder and even snow is possible. The fog can occur in the morning when it is invariably misty at most of northern India. Rain showers are possible at any time but unlikely to be prolonged during the times of year we visit Central India.

## Flights



We use the direct scheduled service of British Airways for most of our tours to India from London Heathrow Terminal 5 because they offer an excellent all-round service (including connecting departures from most of the regional airport, though such departures from regional airports will be subject to an additional charge of around £150) and competitive fares.

If you would prefer to travel World Travellers Plus (normally available at a supplement charge of around £695) or Business (normally available at a supplement charge of around £2,595), please call us for competitive quotes.

These prices are only approximate and could vary according to availability and season. We will be pleased to approach the airline and offer you a quote on request.

If you would prefer to travel from regional airports, please let us know at the time of booking so that we can make the necessary arrangements and obtain a competitive fare.

## Diwali Departure

If your trip co-incides with the festival of Diwali, you can't fail to notice the festive atmosphere in the streets. Your guide will explain the sights and sounds, but here is a little background information to explain the festival. There are several beliefs regarding the origin of Diwali (also known as Deepawali) or 'Festival of Lights'. Diwali is a major Hindu festival and it symbolises the victory of good over evil. The Sanskrit word Diwali means 'an array of lights' and stands for victory of brightness over darkness. Diwali is celebrated in the honour of the return of Lord Rama (a revered Hindu deity and King of Ayodhya) with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana to Ayodhya, from a war in which he killed the demon king Ravana. It is believed that the people lit oil lamps along the way to light their path in the darkness and to welcome them home. People express their happiness by lighting earthen 'diyas' (lamps), decorating their houses, bursting firecrackers and inviting family and friends to their households to join them in a sumptuous feast. The lighting of lamps is a way of paying homage to God for the attainment of health, wealth, knowledge, peace, valor and fame.

The Festival falls in 2019 on Sunday 27th October, in 2020 on Saturday 14th November and in 2021 on Thursday 4th November; and will have some impact on the operation of our tour at that time.



Ibisbill



Black Bittern



Wallcreeper



Birding action

## Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to India. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess

and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/india> regularly prior to travel.

## How to Book Your Place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

**Please provide us with your passport details (passport number, date of issue, date of expiry and your date of birth) at the time of booking. It is important to note that game safaris will be booked using the same passport details that you provide us at the time of booking, and it will not be possible to change these details once they have been booked. (If you renew your passport after booking, please also bring the old passport whose details you gave us at the time of booking as this will also be required).**

### Summary from our previous tour

This year the November Naturetrek tour to Northern India and the Himalayan Foothills was a great success, with 320 species of birds and 19 species of mammals seen. We followed a wonderful itinerary that took us to a wide variety of habitats, from rich wetlands to dry savanna woodlands and semi-scrub to the bird-filled forested slopes of the Himalayan Foothills. This Naturetrek tour has many specialities and Indian subcontinent endemics, and among the many highlights were two pairs of Greater Painted-snipe, several Indian Coursers, three different Wallcreepers, Long-billed Thrush, Golden Bush Robin, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Pin-tailed Green Pigeon, Oriental Pied and Great Hornbills, Black Bittern, a magnificent pair of Sarus Crane, the critically endangered Indian Vulture, Red-headed and Rock Buntings, Brown Dipper, Slaty-backed and Spotted Forktails, superb views of the Rufous-breasted Accentor, Indian Spotted and Greater Spotted Eagles, Booted and Imperial Eagles, Lesser Fish Eagle, a Collared Owlet, Dusky Eagle Owl, Brown Fish and Tawny Fish Owls, amongst many Flycatchers, Warblers and Redstarts, plus many Asiatic species.

In addition to the birds, we had brilliant encounters with Asiatic Wild Elephants, superb views of the Golden Jackal, some species of the Mongoose, Deer and Monkeys, delicious food, great countryside and Himalayan scenery; a visit to the world-famous monument, The Taj Mahal and perfect sunny weather throughout the tour made this holiday such a wonderful and memorable trip.



White-browed Rosefinch



White-throated Kingfisher



Asian Elephant



Wallcreeper

### Summary from our previous tour

'Northern India and Himalayan foothills' is a Naturetrek tour that focuses on the rich avifauna of the famous north Indian birding destinations of Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary, Keoladeo National Park known as Bharatpur bird sanctuary, Corbett National Park and Nainital. There are visits to the cultural attractions of Fatehpur Sikri, Agra Fort and the Taj Mahal. Highlights of the trip included some great species of the birds, such as Siberian Rubythroat, Black Bittern, Indian Spotted Eagle, Large-tailed Nightjar, Brown Hawk-Owl, Little Forktail, Great Slaty Woodpecker, Golden Bush Robin, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Orange-headed Thrush, Wallcreeper and Ibisbill. Among the mammals, highlights seen on the tour were Asiatic Golden Jackal, Indian Grey and Ruddy Mongoose, Jungle Cat, Indian Flying Fox, three species of deer and a Royal Bengal Tiger.