India - Kerala's National Parks & Backwaters

Naturetrek Tour Report

9th - 17th November 2025





Siender Lons



Guar on the hills

Sri Lanka Frogmouth

Tour report by Narayana



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Tour participants: Narayana (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Summary

This tour was quite delightful, and we enjoyed many great wildlife sightings. We began with the backwaters, which brought countless species of birds and a chance to immerse ourselves in the unique wetlands of the Western Ghats. Relaxing on a luxury houseboat, we took in the traditional craftsmanship that makes these boats so special.

From there, we continued to the woodlands of the Western Ghats themselves, where the forest revealed a tremendous number of endemics. Among the birds, we saw Malabar Whistling Thrush, Malabar Barbet, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Malabar Woodpecker, the elusive Sri Lanka Frogmouth, and the stunning Malabar Trogon.

The trip was also rewarding for mammal sightings. We observed Nilgiri Langur, endemic to this region, along with plenty of Sambar, Gaur, Indian Crested Porcupine (one of the rarest animals to spot), and Malabar Giant Squirrel. The graceful Gray Slender Loris was a highlight among primates. Butterflies and other small creatures added to the richness. A visit to Thattekad Bird Sanctuary turned out to be a major highlight. Known as one of the country's best birding spots, it offered perfect habitat for frogmouths and other specialties.

Our journey ended with a city tour of Kochi, which was delightful for its history and culture. It's remarkable how the city has developed, while still preserving its charm.

Day 1

Sunday 9th November

Clients left the UK for the long flight to India.

Day 2

Monday 10th November

Kochi to Kumarakom

Misty and hazy the whole day

It was a very cloudy and hazy day, but the morning was pleasant. I met a couple of clients who had arrived a day early, and then waited for everyone else to arrive. We had breakfast in Kochi and talked about the upcoming journey. Then we headed to our first destination, Kumarakom. The drive felt long because of traffic the whole way. Once we reached the parking area, we got on the boat, reached the resort, and checked in, feeling relaxed.

We met up for our first birding excursion and drove for twenty minutes to reach the feeding areas. We got to see beautiful birds, and enjoyed watching and photographing them. Everyone was especially excited when we spotted a Greater Spotted Eagle. Even though it was far away, we managed to get a good view.

The afternoon's best part was watching the tractors plooughing the paddy fields. So many birds (egrets, herons, ibises, terns and swallows) were following the tractors, drawn by all the insects turned up from the soil. The number of birds was absolutely incredible; we must have seen about fifteen to twenty thousand in total.

As it started to get dark, we returned to the resort, sat down for dinner, discussed the day and planned for tomorrow, before calling it a night.

Day 3

Tuesday 11th November

Kumarakom – Alleppey

Misty and hazy to start, then sunny and humid

It was a beautiful morning to start the day. After waking up and having coffee, we headed out for birding and photography. A twenty-minute drive took us to a natural wetland and feeding ground; as soon as we got out of the vehicle and picked up our binoculars, we were greeted by a family of around twenty Lesser Whistling Ducks with chicks; they were such a lovely sight. We watched them for a while, and then there were birds everywhere! A Marsh Harrier caught our attention for some time, and clients spotted jacanas and a Western Reef Heron, which were highlights of the walk.

We spent more than three hours birding, then had breakfast and checked out, everyone in good spirits. Our next stop was Alleppey, where we checked into a luxury houseboat, remarking on how plush the experience felt. The boat cruise began with drinks and wonderful hospitality. Lunch was beautifully laid out, with lots of varieties of local cuisine. We enjoyed our meal and sat on the deck, watching for new bird species. Everyone relaxed and enjoyed some leisure time. After a couple of hours, we stepped out at one of the island villages, where we saw birds, butterflies, and lizards; then we returned to the boat to start cruising again.

As dusk approached, our boat halted for the night. We gathered for our daily discussion, sharing what we'd seen and planning for the next day. Dinner was served on board; it was a perfect way to end the day.

Day 4

Wednesday 12th November

2

Alleppey – Periyar Tiger Reserve - Periyar boat safari

Misty and hazy, thunder in the evening

It was an absolute pleasure to wake up in the morning on a houseboat, in the middle of nowhere. It was an easy, relaxed morning; everyone enjoyed watching birds with a cup of coffee in hand. After breakfast, we reached the boat jetty to leave for our next destination.

Our drive was long and beautiful, winding through tea and cardamom plantations, and passing countless pineapple farms. We made a quick stop along the way before arriving in Periyar for lunch. Here we reached a property inside the Tiger Reserve; it was going to be a great experience.

After lunch, we headed out for a boat safari in the Periyar Tiger Reserve. We enjoyed watching birds everywhere, and spotted many Sambar. There was a special moment when one client spotted something really far off. Everyone tried to see the bird and figure out what it was; since it was quite distant, it took some effort. Suddenly, when the boat stopped, I looked through the binoculars and realized it was a Black Baza, one of the rarest birds in the area.

We loved watching the bird, and seeing a herd of Gaur grazing on the shola and grassland forest was a fantastic scene. We returned to the hotel, all absolutely delighted with the sightings.

Day 5

Thursday 13th November

Periyar Tiger Reserve

Misty and hazy in the morning, afternoon clear and sunny

Today, we set out for a nature walk in the Tiger Reserve. To start off, we had to prepare for leeches; everyone geared up with leech socks. After crossing the river on a bamboo raft, we headed into the park.

The walk was wonderful, and we listened to bird calls all around. The highlight was seeing an Oriental Honey Buzzard soaring above us; we loved identifying it by its pigeon-like head shape. There were lots of fungi growing everywhere, and we spotted a few Grey Junglefowl slowly moving into the bushes. There were plenty of leeches, which made some of us a little uncomfortable, so we finished the walk by 9.30am. Right after, we enjoyed watching the beautiful Malabar Rose butterfly fluttering around.

After breakfast, we took some time to rest and then met at noon for a short, fun walk to look for birds. That walk turned out to be fantastic: we found woodpeckers, minivets, barbets and, best of all, a Heart-spotted Woodpecker and a Plum-headed Parakeet.

After lunch, we set out for another boat ride and spotted many Sounthern Red Muntjacs (Barking Deer) throughout the ride. Most were shy, but a couple of them gave us great opportunities to photograph them. Another interesting sight was a Bengal Monitor lizard moving along a log. We loved watching a Great Cormorant collecting nesting material, and yet again saw some Gaurs grazing on a hilltop. The private boat ride was memorable, and we returned to the hotel just before dusk. Before heading inside, we took a short walk and got to see a Malabar Giant Squirrel climbing a tree, and a macaque feeding on wild mushrooms.

Day 6

Friday 14th November

3

Periyar Tiger Reserve - Thattekad

Misty in the morning, rain in the afternoon

We all knew this was going to be a long day, with winding roads ahead. After breakfast, we left Periyar and started heading toward Thattekad. On the way, we stopped at the Idukki Dam for a quick look around; the view was really impressive, and we took the opportunity to do some birding there too. We managed to spot a Yellow-browed Bulbul, though not everyone got a clear view, and also saw a Red-whiskered Bulbul.

After a coffee break, we continued our drive and reached Thattekad around lunchtime. We all needed some time to recover from the journey, so we enjoyed a good lunch and took a breather. We met up later in the evening for birding, but by then it had started pouring heavily. After waiting for the rain to slow down, we headed out. We were happy with the species we saw, especially Crested Serpent Eagle and Jungle Owlet. A White-bellied

Woodpecker, sitting inside its nest hole, was a fantastic sight. By the time we walked back to the hotel, it was almost dark.

Day 7

Saturday 15th November

Thattekad

Misty in the morning, clear and sunny later

We had an early morning wake-up, and we were all eager to go birding in one of the best sites in the country. After that soothing first coffee, we set off for a long walk. We reached the sanctuary area with our local guide and got ready for the day. The first bird to welcome us was a Malabar Trogon! It was a female, and we spent a good period of time watching and photographing her. Next, we spotted two Malabar Grey Hornbills perched in the treetops, calling loudly. After that, we decided to climb to a higher spot and watch the birds from above, where we saw many more species and enjoyed every moment. Watching Crested Snake Eagle and Crested Goshawk soaring was amazing, and then the sunbirds added to the fun. We also loved watching butterflies feeding on alkaloids from the plants, getting ready for the mating season.

After roughly four hours, it was time to seek out one of the most elusive species: the Sri Lanka Frogmouth. Our guide pointed to a tree and said, "Find the birds". It took a few minutes for everyone to spot them, thanks to their unbeatable camouflage, but finally we all managed to see and photograph them.

As we walked, our guide found another spot where a single frogmouth gave us a wonderful opportunity to photograph it nicely. We loved the experience; but it was time to head back for some lunch and rest. Just before we broke for lunch, we had the chance to experience another amazing creature: Gray Slender Loris! Our guide knew the roosting spot, and we managed to see and even photograph the animal. There were two of them, curled up and extremely well hidden.

After lunch, we regrouped with our guide and continued birding, spotting hundreds of Chestnut-headed Beeeaters. It was fantastic watching them flying around and calling. A Blyth's Reed Warbler caught our attention for a while, and once we finished birdwatching, we were ready for another amazing species, one just as nocturnal as the frogmouth. After a short drive and a walk, we heard and then saw a Mottled Wood Owl, calling for its partner. All of us watched sensitively and made sure not to disturb the bird.

Afterwards, it was time to say goodbye to our guide and to drive back to the hotel. Following dinner, we finished counting our bird list, which had reached 125 species in total.

Day 8

Sunday 16th November

Thattekad - Kochi

Sunny and clear

We woke up and, instead of choosing extra sleep, decided to spend an hour birding. Besides birding, we noticed so much more, thanks to how observant our clients were at spotting smaller creatures along the way. One of the most fascinating things we saw was the relationship between aphids and ants; watching it play out right in front of us was incredible.

Afterwards, we came back and had breakfast, then said our goodbyes to Thattekad, feeling grateful for the beautiful experiences it had given us. On our journey, we chatted about festivals and celebrations in India. We reached Kochi safely, checked in to the hotel for the night, and regrouped in the afternoon for a city tour. Our guide shared how Kochi had been shaped by so many different influences, both invaders and settlers; we visited the Dutch Palace, the Jewish Quarter, and the busy markets. The sunset boat ride was stunning, with a bit of birding thrown in, and we returned to land to watch a traditional Kathakali dance performance. We all loved the show. Then it was back to the hotel; it was time to say goodnight and prepare for an early start tomorrow to catch the flight.

Day 9

Monday 17th November

Kochi airport - UK

Early day! Woke up really early in the morning and checked out the hotel, drove straight to the airport and made sure all went in and smooth check-in. It had been a wonderful week in south-west India, full of amazing sightings and cultural experiences.

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Species lists

Birds

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·	✓	✓				✓	
Tachybaptus ruficollis		✓					
Himantopus himantopus	✓						
Charadrius dubius	✓						
Vanellus indicus	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Hydrophasianus chirurgus		✓					
Metopidius indicus		✓					
Gallinago gallinago	√						
Actitis hypoleucos	√	√					
Tringa glareola	√	√					
Sternula albifrons		√					✓
Chlidonias hybrida	√	√	√				✓
Sterna aurantia							✓
Mycteria leucocephala		√					
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ptilorhynchus Spilomis cheela Cicraetus malaiensis Clanga clanga Hieraeetus pennatus

				Nove	mber 2	2025		
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Western Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus	✓	√					
Black Kite	Milvus migrans	✓	√					✓
Brahminy Kite	Haliastur indus	✓	√	√	√	√	✓	✓
Jungle Owlet	Glaucidium radiatum					✓	√	
Mottled Wood Owl	Strix ocellata						√	
Malabar Trogon	Harpactes fasciatus						√	
Malabar Grey Hornbill	Ocyceros griseus			√	√	√	√	√
Oriental Dollarbird	Eurystomus orientalis			•	•	√	•	•
Stork-billed Kingfisher	Pelargopsis capensis	√	√		√	•		√
White-throated Kingfisher	Halcyon smyrnensis	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Common Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis	V	√	√	√	√	V	v
Pied Kingfisher	Ceryle rudis		√	√	V	V		
Asian Green Bee-eater	Merops orientalis		✓ ✓	V	√	√	√	
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	-	√	√ √	√	V	V	√	_ √ _ √
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	Merops philippinus	V	V	V	,			V
	Merops leschenaulti		,	,	√	,	√	,
White-cheeked Barbet	Psilopogon viridis		✓	✓	√	✓	√	✓
Malabar Barbet	Psilopogon malabaricus				√		✓	
Coppersmith Barbet	Psilopogon haemacephalus				✓			
Heart-spotted Woodpecker	Hemicircus canente				✓			
White-bellied Woodpecker	Dryocopus javensis					✓		
Lesser Yellownape	Picus chlorolophus			✓				
Black-rumped Flameback	Dinopium benghalense		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Malabar Flameback	Chrysocolaptes socialis			✓	✓		✓	
Plum-headed Parakeet	Psittacula cyanocephala				✓	✓	✓	
Blue-winged Parakeet	Psittacula columboides			✓	✓	✓	✓	√
Rose-ringed Parakeet	Psittacula krameri		✓	✓				
Vernal Hanging Parrot	Loriculus vernalis			✓	√		✓	√
Malabar Woodshrike	Tephrodornis sylvicola						✓	
Ashy Woodswallow	Artamus fuscus	√	√				√	
Small Minivet	Pericrocotus cinnamomeus		-		√			
Orange Minivet	Pericrocotus flammeus				√			
Black-hooded Oriole	Oriolus xanthornus				•		√	√
Indian Golden Oriole	Oriolus kundoo		√		√		•	•
Bronzed Drongo	Dicrurus aeneus		•		V		√	
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	Dicrurus paradiseus					√	√	√
Ashy Drongo	Dicrurus leucophaeus					√	V	V
	Dicrurus macrocercus	,	,	,	,		,	
Black Drongo		✓	✓	√	√	√	√	,
Indian Paradise Flycatcher	Terpsiphone paradisi			,		√	✓	√
Brown Shrike	Lanius cristatus			√		√		- √
Rufous Treepie	Dendrocitta vagabunda		✓	✓		✓		√
White-bellied Treepie	Dendrocitta leucogastra			✓	✓			
House Crow	Corvus splendens	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	√
Large-billed Crow	Corvus macrorhynchos	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Yellow-browed Bulbul	Acritillas indica					✓		
Red-whiskered Bulbul	Pycnonotus jocosus					✓	✓	✓
Red-vented Bulbul	Pycnonotus cafer		✓			✓	✓	
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	Cecropis daurica	✓	√					
Greenish Warbler	Phylloscopus trochiloides			√	✓			
Large-billed Leaf Warbler	Phylloscopus magnirostris				✓		√	
Blyth's Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus dumetorum				•		√	√
Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis		√				٧	•
Grey-breasted Prinia	Prinia hodgsonii		√					
Plain Prinia	Prinia inornata		√ √					

				Nove	mber 2	2025		
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Common Tailorbird	Orthotomus sutorius		√	√				
Tawny-bellied Babbler	Dumetia hyperythra							✓
Jungle Babbler	Argya striata			√	√	√	√	✓
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	Sitta frontalis				√		√	
Southern Hill Myna	Gracula Indica			√	√	√	√	✓
Jungle Myna	Acridotheres fuscus	√	√		√			
Common Myna	Acridotheres tristis	√	√		✓	✓	√	✓
Chestnut-tailed Starling	Sturnia malabarica						√	
Malabar Starling	Sturnia blythii			√	√			
Rosy Starling	Pastor roseus						√	
Oriental Magpie-Robin	Copsychus saularis	√	√				✓	✓
Brown-breasted Flycatcher	Muscicapa muttui						√	
Asian Brown Flycatcher	Muscicapa dauurica			√			√	
Malabar Whistling Thrush	Myophonus horsfieldii			√	√	✓		
Red-breasted Flycatcher	Ficedula parva				√			
Purple-rumped Sunbird	Leptocoma zeylonica	√	√				√	
Crimson-backed Sunbird	Leptocoma minima						√	
Loten's Sunbird	Cinnyris lotenius							✓
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus		√					
Black-throated Munia	Lonchura kelaarti						√	
White-rumped Munia	Lonchura striata		√					
Western Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava	√						
Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea				√		√	
White-browed Wagtail	Motacilla maderaspatensis		√	√	✓		√	

Mammals

				Nove	ember	2025		
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Bonnet Macaque	Macaca radiata			✓	✓		✓	
Nilgiri Langur	Semnopithecus johnii			√	√		√	
Gray Slender Loris	Loris lydekkerianus						√	
Indian Crested Porcupine	Hystrix indica			√				
Indian Palm Squirrel	Funambulus palmarum	√	✓	√				
Indian Giant Squirrel	Ratufa indica			✓	✓		✓	
Greater Bandicoot Rat	Bandicota indica	√						
Indian Pipistrelle	Alionoctula coromandra					√		
Indian Flying Fox	Pteropus medius	√	✓	√				
Indian Gray Mongoose	Urva edwardsii		✓					
Gaur	Bos Gaurus			√	√			
Sambar	Rusa unicolor			√	√			
Southern Red Muntjac	Muntiacus muntjak				✓			
Eurasian Wild Pig	Sus scrofa				√			

Amphibians & reptiles

				Nove	ember	2025		
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Indian Toad	Duttaphrynus parietalis				√			
Indian Bulfrog	Hoplobatrachus tigerinus				√		√	
Indian Garden Lizard	Calotes versicolor	√	√				√	
Common Dotted Garden Skink	Riopa punctata						√	
Bengal Monitor	Varanus bengalensis				√			
South Indian Rock Agama	Psammophilus dorsalis						√	

			November 2025					
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Common House Gecko	Hemidactylus frenatus	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Indian Black Turtle	Melanochelys trijuga			√	✓			

Butterflies

				Nove	ember	2025		
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Malabar Rose	Atrophaneura pandiyana				√			
Grass Jewel	Chilades trochylus						√	
Striped Tiger	Danaus genutia		✓					
Blue Tiger	Tirumala limniace		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Common Jezebel	Delias eucharis		✓	✓				
Common Grass Yellow	Eurema hecabe			√			√	
Common Crow	Euploea core			✓			✓	
Danied Eggfly	Hypolimnas misippus				✓			
Common Psyche	Leptosia nina		✓	✓	✓			
Dark-branded Bushbrown	Mycalesis mineus						✓	
Common Sailor	Neptis hylas				✓			
Common Rose	Pachliopta aristolochiae				√			
Blue Mormon	Papilio polymnestor						✓	
Clipper	Parthenos sylvia						√	
Southern Birdwing	Troides minos						✓	
Common Three-ring	Ypthima asterope				√			

Dragonflies

			ember 2025					
Common name	Scientific name	10 11 12 13 14						16
Ditch Jewel	Brachythemis contaminata		✓					
Fulvus Forest Skimmer	Neurothemis fulvia				√			
Crimson Marsh Glider	Trithemis aurora				✓			
Common Picture Wing	Rhyothemis variegata				√		√	

Other insects

		November 2						
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
a longhorn beetle	Cerambycidae sp.		✓					
a pond skater	Gerridae sp.				✓			

Spiders

		November 2025							
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
a two-tailed spider	Hersiliidae sp.		✓						
a jumping spider	Salticidae sp.		√						
Giant Golden Orb Weaver	Nephila pilipes				√		√		
Tropical Tent-web Spider	Cyrtophora citricola				✓				

Millipedes

			November 2025					
Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
a millipede	Diplopoda sp.				√		✓	

Molluscs

			November 2025					
Common name	Scientific name	10						
a leech	Hirudinea sp.				✓			
Giant African Land Snail	Lissachatina fulica		10 11 12 13 14 15					