

India - Kerala's National Parks & Backwaters

Naturetrek Tour Report

8th – 16th February 2026



Asian Fairy-bluebird



Great Hornbill



Streak-throated Woodpecker



Velvet-fronted Nuthatch

Tour report by Shaan Subbaiah



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Summary

Our adventure began in the tranquil backwaters of Kumarakom, where endless horizons of paddy fields, swamps, and Dutch-inspired canals met the unique wetlands of the Western Ghats. From there, we unwound aboard a luxury houseboat in Alappuzha, before heading into the wild for boat safaris at Periyar Tiger Reserve, and immersive jungle walks through Thattekad Wildlife Sanctuary, in search of Kerala's remarkable endemic species.

Our sightings included an incredible lineup: Malabar Whistling Thrush, Malabar Barbet, Malabar Grey Hornbill, and the magnificent Great Hornbill. We were thrilled to spot Malabar Woodpecker, Brown-breasted Flycatcher, White-bellied Treepie and White-bellied Woodpecker, along with the elusive Sri Lanka Frogmouth. The list was made even more special with sightings of Flame-throated Bulbul, Square-tailed Drongo-cuckoo, Jungle Owlet, Greater Spotted Eagle and the breathtaking Malabar Trogon.

The trip was equally rewarding for mammal sightings. We observed Nilgiri Langur, endemic to this region, along with plenty of Sambar, Gaur, and Malabar Giant Squirrel. Butterflies and other small creatures added to the richness: they included the endemic Dussumier's Forest Skink (*Baccaurea courtallensis*) and Bengal Monitor lizards. We clocked up 132 birds, twelve mammals and four reptile species on this journey.

Day 1

Sunday 8th February

Travel day

Clients set out from the UK to India.

Day 2

Monday 9th February

Kochi to Kumarakom

Bright and sunny the whole day

We welcomed our esteemed clients in Kochi and made our way to our first destination, Kumarakom. The day was all about acclimatising to the slow, easy rhythm of the town and soaking in rural life in Kerala: the excitement of seeing men proudly wearing the traditional *lungi*, drinking freshly-tapped *toddy* from coconut palms, and discovering the locals' love for motorbikes and cars.

We met up for our first birding excursion and drove for fifteen minutes to reach the feeding areas. Everyone was especially excited when we found a Greater Spotted Eagle. Even though it was far away, we managed to get a good view among the swamplands.

Day 3

Tuesday 10th February

Kumarakom – Alleppey

Bright and sunny to start, then sunny and humid

It was a beautiful start to the day as we headed out for birding and photography. A short fifteen-minute drive brought us to a natural wetland and feeding ground. The moment we stepped out with our binoculars, we were welcomed by a lively flock of White-rumped Munias, Lesser Whistling Ducks up in a tree, and Black-hooded Orioles tending to their nests. A Western Marsh Harrier and Brahminy Kites held our attention overhead, while the wetlands revealed jacanas, Indian Pond Herons and Wood Sandpipers, which were true highlights of the walk.

We spent over three hours birding, before returning for breakfast and check-out, with everyone in high spirits. Our next stop was Alappuzha, where we boarded a luxury houseboat and instantly remarked on how plush the experience felt. The cruise began with refreshing drinks and warm hospitality, followed by a beautifully laid-out lunch, featuring a variety of local cuisine.

After the meal, we relaxed on the deck, scanning the waterways for new bird species and enjoying some well-earned leisure time. A couple of hours later, we stepped ashore at one of the island villages, where we explored and spotted birds, butterflies and lizards, before returning to continue our cruise. As dusk approached, the boat anchored for the night. We gathered for our daily recap, sharing sightings and planning for the next day. Dinner was served on board, making a perfect, peaceful end to a memorable day on the backwaters.

Day 4

Wednesday 11th February

Alleppey – Periyar Tiger Reserve – Periyar boat safari

Sunny and bright; cooler 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; we decided to check out early and reach Periyar right in time for lunch, to soak up the famous landscapes around the reserve. Meanwhile, everyone enjoyed watching birds with a cup of coffee in hand.

Our drive was long, with windy roads and featuring beautiful tea terraces, pineapple farms and cardamom plantations. We made a quick stop along the way before arriving in Periyar for lunch. Our abode for the next two days was within the core of the reserve, giving us instant access to natural riches.

We headed out for a boat safari in the Periyar Tiger Reserve after lunch. We enjoyed watching birds everywhere, and spotted many Sambars and Gaurs. There was a special moment when we were greeted by Nilgiri Langurs when we got back from the safari.

Day 5

Thursday 12th February

Periyar Tiger Reserve

Bright and chilly morning, afternoon clear and sunny

Today, we set out for a nature walk in the Tiger Reserve. We wore leech socks, but luckily there weren't any bloodsuckers! We took a bamboo raft and crossed the river. We watched White-bellied Woodpeckers, followed by a bombardment of different species of birds from each direction. When the time to return came, our hearts were still sunk deep into the jungle, and we did not want to head back at all.

After breakfast, we took some time to rest, and then met at noon for a short, fun walk to look for birds. It turned out to be fantastic: we found a Bengal Monitor lizard climbing up a tree, minivets, Asian Brown Flycatchers, and River Terns.

After lunch, we headed out for another boat ride. One client had firmly declared that she wanted to see Asian Elephants. To her (and our) delight, we were the only boat among six to spot them: two impressive tuskers and a herd of four matriarchs with a calf. We spent a magical fifteen minutes watching them grazing, before time nudged us to return to the lodge for the evening. Over dinner, we relived the day's fun moments, and decided on an early check-out the next morning, so that we could reach the next destination in time for lunch.

Day 6

Friday 13th February

Periyar Tiger Reserve – Thattekad

Misty in the morning, humid and hot in the afternoon

We all knew this was going to be a long day, with winding roads ahead. After an early breakfast, we made sure that we did an hour's birding and admired the Turtle Café, while waiting for Great Hornbills to come by; alas, we could only hear them. 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. 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, and headed out towards the Salim Ali Sanctuary. We were happy with the species we saw, especially the Square-tailed Drongo-cuckoo and Crested Honey Buzzard. We were thrilled to get our very first clear views of Malabar Grey Hornbills gliding past us, pausing to feast on the vibrant blooms of the Red Silk Cotton Tree, alongside Southern Hill Mynas, orioles and Mountain Imperial Pigeons. Despite the humid and tiring conditions, the moment was truly special. Some of the bamboos were flowering (a rare phenomenon), and the Black-throated Munias were in the middle of an incredible feeding frenzy.

Day 7**Saturday 14th February**

Thattekad

Bright and sunny in the morning; clear, humid, and sunny later

We had been eagerly anticipating today: it would be our best opportunity to add a significant number of new birds, and we ended up clocking an impressive sixty-six species for the day alone.

Flocks of Malabar Barbets gave us fantastic photographic opportunities, while Oriental Dollarbirds and both Grey-capped Pygmy and Heart-spotted Woodpeckers kept us busy along the trails. Flame-throated Bulbuls and Asian Fairy-bluebirds lit up the canopy, and to our great surprise, a pair of Sri Lanka Frogmouths appeared at eye-level: it was an unforgettable moment.

Post-breakfast, we decided to skip the afternoon session and instead head out for a night excursion: we connected with Jerdon's Nightjar, Indian Scops Owl and the impressive Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl, and even a chance of encountering Indian Pittas. Afterwards, it was time to say farewell to our guide and to drive back to the hotel. Over dinner, we completed our final tally: the bird list had reached an outstanding 132 species in total.

Day 8**Sunday 15th February**

Thattekad – Kochi

Sunny and clear

We reached Kochi safely, checked in to the hotel for the night, and regrouped for lunch and a city tour. Our guide shared with us 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, and we returned to land to watch a traditional Kathakali dance performance. Then it was back to the hotel: it was time to say goodnight and goodbye, and to prepare for an early start tomorrow.

Day 9**Monday 16th February**

Kochi airport – UK

We woke up really early in the morning. One client checked out of the hotel and drove straight to the airport, while the others left for Alappuzha, for their private extension. It had been a wonderful week in south-west India, full of amazing sightings and cultural experiences.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic	Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
			9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
	Cotton Pygmy Goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>		✓					
	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	✓						
	Red Spurfowl - E	<i>Galloperdix spadicea</i>				H			
	Grey Junglefowl - E	<i>Gallus sonneratii</i>				✓	✓		
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓	✓				
	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopaceus</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓
	Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo	<i>Surniculus dicruroides</i>					✓		
	Common Hawk-Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>					H		
	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓				
	Grey-fronted Green Pigeon - E	<i>Treron affinis</i>				✓	✓	✓	
	Mountain Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula badia</i>				✓	✓		
	Purple Swampphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	✓						
	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	✓	✓	✓				
	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓						
	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	✓						
	Bronze-winged Jacana	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>	✓		✓				
	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓						
	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	✓			✓			
	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	✓	✓					
	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
	River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>				✓			
	Asian Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		
	Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
	Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓			
	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	✓		✓				
	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	✓		✓				
	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓			
	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>		✓					
	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Medium Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea coromanda</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	✓	✓					
	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓				
	Jerdon's Nightjar - N	<i>Caprimulgus atripennis</i>						✓	
	Sri Lanka Frogmouth	<i>Batrachostomus moniliger</i>						✓	
	White-rumped Spinetail - N	<i>Zoonavena sylvatica</i>		✓					
	Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓
	Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>				✓		✓	
	Indian Scops Owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>						✓	

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic	Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
			9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	Oriental Scops Owl	<i>Otus sunia</i>				✓			
	Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl	<i>Ketupa nipalensis</i>						✓	
	Black Baza	<i>Aviceda leuphotes</i>						✓	
	Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>					✓	✓	
	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>			✓				
	Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga clanga</i>	✓						
	Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>				✓			
	Shikra	<i>Tachyspiza badia</i>			✓		✓		
	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓	✓				
	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓
	Malabar Trogon	<i>Harpactes fasciatus</i>				✓		✓	
	Great Hornbill	<i>Buceros bicornis</i>				✓	✓	✓	
	Malabar Grey Hornbill - E	<i>Ocyrceros griseus</i>					✓	✓	
	Oriental Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>						✓	
	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	✓			✓			
	Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>			✓		✓	✓	
	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓			
	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>				✓		✓	
	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>	✓	✓					
	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smymensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Malabar Barbet - E	<i>Psilopogon malabaricus</i>	✓					✓	
	White-cheeked Barbet - E	<i>Psilopogon viridis</i>				✓	✓	✓	
	Heart-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Hemicircus canente</i>						✓	
	Common Flameback	<i>Dinopium javanense</i>			✓	✓		✓	
	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>		✓			✓		
	Lesser Yellownape	<i>Picus chlorolophus</i>				✓			
	White-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus javensis</i>				✓			
	Greater Flameback	<i>Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus</i>				✓		✓	
	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus nanus</i>						✓	
	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>		✓	✓				
	Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>				✓		✓	
	Blue-winged Parakeet - E	<i>Psittacula columboides</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Vernal Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus vernalis</i>					✓	✓	
	Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>						✓	
	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>				✓	✓	✓	
	Scarlet (Orange) Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>				✓	✓	✓	
	Ashy Woodswallow	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>		✓			✓	✓	
	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	✓						
	Malabar Woodshrike - E	<i>Tephrodornis sylvicola</i>						✓	
	Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>		✓			✓		
	Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>			✓	✓		✓	
	Bronzed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>						✓	
	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	
	Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>					✓		
	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
	Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>				✓		✓	
	Indian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>		✓		✓			

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic	Common name	Scientific name	February 2026						
			9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
	White-bellied Treepie - E	<i>Dendrocitta leucogastra</i>				✓	✓	✓	
	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	✓	✓				✓	
	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	
	Cinereous Tit	<i>Parus cinereus</i>					✓	✓	
	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>		✓				✓	
	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	✓	✓					
	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	✓	✓					
	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓					
	Flame-throated Bulbul - E	<i>Rubigula gularis</i>							✓
	Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>					✓	✓	
	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	✓		✓		✓		
	Yellow-browed Bulbul - N	<i>Acritillas indica</i>				✓	✓	✓	
	Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>				✓			
	Jungle Babbler	<i>Argya striata</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>							✓
	Southern Hill Myna - N	<i>Gracula indica</i>				✓	✓		
	Chestnut-tailed Starling	<i>Sturnia malabarica</i>				✓	✓	✓	
	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓	✓	✓				
	Jungle Myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	
	Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Geokichla citrina</i>				✓		✓	
	Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>				✓			
	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>			✓	✓		✓	
	Brown-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa muttui</i>						✓	
	White-bellied Blue Flycatcher - E	<i>Cyornis pallidipes</i>				✓			
	Malabar Whistling Thrush - E	<i>Myophonus horsfieldii</i>				✓			
	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>	✓	✓				✓	
	Nilgiri Flowerpecker - E	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>					✓	✓	
	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>	✓	✓				✓	
	Crimson-backed Sunbird - E	<i>Leptocoma minima</i>						✓	
	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>					✓		
	Loten's Sunbird - N	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>						✓	
	Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>						✓	
	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>		✓					
	Black-throated Munia - N	<i>Lonchura kelaarti</i>					✓		
	White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>	✓	✓					
	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	✓						
	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>			✓	✓			
	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>			✓				

Mammals

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic		February 2026						
Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>				✓			
Bonnet Macaque	<i>Macaca radiata</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Nilgiri Langur - E	<i>Semnopithecus johnii</i>			✓	✓	✓		
Gray Slender Loris - N	<i>Loris lydekkerianus</i>						✓	
Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>		✓			✓	✓	
Pygmy Striped Squirrel - E	<i>Funambulus sublineatus</i>				✓			
Indian Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa indica</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus medius</i>		✓					
Indian Gray Mongoose	<i>Urva edwardsii</i>	✓						
Gaur	<i>Bos gaurus</i>			✓	✓			
Sambar	<i>Rusa unicorn</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Red Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus vaginalis</i>						H	
Eurasian Wild Pig	<i>Sus scrofa</i>			✓	✓			

Reptiles

E=Endemic		February 2026						
Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Bengal Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>			✓				
Indian Black Turtle	<i>Melanochelys trijuga</i>			✓	✓			
Oriental Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>					✓		
Dussumier's Forest Skink - E	<i>Sphenomorphus dussumieri</i>					✓	✓	