

Northern India & The Himalayan Foothills

Naturetrek Tour Report

21 January - 6 February 2005

Report compiled by Chris Kehoe



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour leaders: Chris Kehoe (Naturetrek)
Dilip Saini Kumar (local guide)
Manoj Sharma (local guide)

Tour participants: Vanessa Moore
Colin Moore
Russell Cryer
Diane Tibbs
Gill Ratcliffe
Richard Ratcliffe
Alison Rymell

Day 1

Saturday 22nd January

Overcast and dull, some light drizzle, cool.

Our inbound flight from Dubai arrived on time, airport formalities were brief and we were soon met by our ground agents from Travel Inn including Dilip, our guide for the next few days and Deepal and Nazir, our bus driver and mate. After transferring the short distance to the very smart Claridges Hotel there was plenty of time for a wash and change and a spot of lunch before we set off through the mesmerising traffic chaos of the national capital for a few hours afternoon birding at Okhla. Despite the unprepossessing nature of the riverside near the Okhla Yacht Club (exacerbated today by overcast conditions and some light drizzle) a host of good birds were soon found before Dilip organised a boat to take us to the more serene setting of Okhla Island, just opposite. Before darkness fell we were treated to a host of interesting species including Black Ibises, River Lapwings, many Citrine and White Wagtails (the latter of various exotic races), an Isabelline Shrike, a couple of Spanish Sparrows and a scarce and localised Striated Babbler. Many other birds were seen, plus a Common Mongoose, most of which were to become a familiar sight during the coming days in the flat lowlands of Northern India.

Day 2

Sunday 23 January

Overcast and dull then bright and sunny, cool.

After an early breakfast we set off on the five hour (with stops) journey to Bharatpur. Our first stop after an hour or so was at a roadside pool near Koshi where a wide selection of wetland species included our first Painted Storks and White-tailed Lapwings. A chill north wind brought with it fine drizzle and we soon pulled into a roadside eatery for a warming cup of hot chocolate before finding a small group of Sarus Cranes just over the car park wall. Leaving the main Delhi to Agra highway at Marutha, we continued towards Bharatpur on a quieter but bumpier road where a couple of brief stops were made to view roadside pools and canals, one of which contained the only Pied Avocets of the tour. We arrived at Bharatpur in bright sunshine at 13.00.

After settling in to the spectacular Laxmi Vilas Palace, home of the Maharaja of Bharatpur's uncle, we enjoyed lunch before making our first foray into the fabled Keoladeo Ghana National Park (KGNP) nearby. The emphasis on this first fairly brief visit to KGNP was owls and we had immediate success in the shape of a

roosting Brown Hawk Owl just outside the park proper. Over the next couple of hours we were also successful in finding roosting Collared Scops Owls and a breeding pair of Dusky Eagle Owls. We also enjoyed our first views of several other species typical of the dry areas of the park, including Grey Francolins and several Red-breasted Flycatchers and mammals such as Nilgai, Chital and a couple of Golden Jackals. The braziers provided in the courtyard of the Laxmi Vilas Palace were most welcome as evenings here were decidedly chilly.

Day 3

Monday 24 January

Dry and bright, warmer.

Our first full day at the fabled Keoladeo Ghana NP began with a brief look at the nursery before the mist began to clear and we began an exploration of the dry grassland habitats at Sapin Mari. Being a dry year (after another failed monsoon in Rajasthan), wetland habitats were comparatively limited in extent, indeed our birding this morning was on foot in an area where boat trips used to run. While this reduction in water led to some reduction in the number of individual birds of various species present it had the welcome effect of making some of the specialist dry country species more readily accessible than is often the case. Thus, after a short while we encountered a splendid flock of Indian Coursers and very soon after found our prime target appeared in the shape of six Sociable Lapwings which trotted around in the company of numerous Red-and Yellow-wattled and White-tailed Lapwings. Before reaching the first wetland area at Sapin Mari we added Southern Grey Shrike, Brown Shrike (unusual here) Common and Sarus Cranes and Imperial Eagle to our growing species list. New birds came thick and fast as we slowly made our way to Keoladeo Temple, where our packed lunches were being delivered, particular highlights being Black-necked Storks, a handful of Black Ibises, a rather brief Smoky Warbler and several perched Spotted Eagles amongst the numerous ducks, geese, waders and herons present. A Rock Python was tasting the air above its roadside hole as we passed.

After a leisurely packed lunch break at the temple, which was, however, regularly interrupted by overflying raptors of various species, we made our way to the main wetland area at nearby Mansarovar. A Black Bittern took quite some locating as it skulked in the centre of a dense bush but beyond lay large areas of open water and flooded grassland where masses of birds were gathered and gave much better views. During the next couple of hours we moved at a snails pace to take in the huge variety of wetland species present, each new vantage point producing something new and exciting. This was Bharatpur at its best and of the new species that contributed to an impressive day total of over 130 species, particular favourites included Bronze-winged Jacanas, Indian River Terns and several perched Steppe Eagles.

Day 4

Tuesday 25 January

Overcast, damp, then dry and bright, cool then warmer.

A day trip to Bund Baretha today was punctuated by a number of en route stops that produced a range of interesting birds. First was a Wryneck in a roadside as a couple of Spotted Owlets sat in a tree opposite. A little further on a collection of birds foraging in bare fields included several Red Collared Doves and a number of Baya Weavers while a further group of Baya Weavers contained several Red-headed Buntings with a small and restless flock of Red Avadavats nearby. Light drizzle turned to heavier rain so we took refuge on the veranda of a forest resthouse just north of Bund Baretha and, in addition to a refreshing cup of masala chai, were treated to

great views of two Orange-headed Thrushes rummaging through the leaf litter in the garden and a couple of Brown-headed Barbets in the trees above. As the rain eased we continued on our way but soon stopped again to enjoy magnificent views of a Black Bittern in a roadside ditch.

On our arrival at the dam at Bund Baretha the rain had stopped completely and in gradually improving light we were able to enjoy views of the plentiful wildfowl gathered on the water, including numerous Cotton Pygmy Geese and Red-crested Pochards. Making our way to the abandoned summer palace, the splendid location for our picnic lunch, a couple of Common Rosefinches were found and scanning of the reservoir during lunch itself revealed an Asian Openbill Stork and a Stork-billed Kingfisher as well as a host of wildfowl, several Glossy Ibises and River Terns. After lunch we walked slowly back down to the dam, but not before everyone had enjoyed views of the Sulphur-bellied Warblers scouring the palace walls and a nearby rocky hillside. Just below the palace we encountered another Sulphur-bellied Warbler and as we were watching this our target species of White-capped Bunting appeared and showed very well. A couple of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas and a small group of Garganey added further interest during our pleasant stroll before we re-boarded the bus near the dam and paid a brief visit to a nearby nursery where a roosting Long-tailed Nightjar was scoped.

Day 5

Wednesday 26 January

Dry and bright, cool.

Another full day at Keoladeo Ghana NP began with a visit to the nursery area, where our only Coppersmith Barbets were seen and a couple of Indian Grey Hornbills posed briefly for the scope. A 'buzzing' Taiga Flycatcher here made a change from the numerous 'rattling' Red-breasted Flycatchers we had seen so far. Bright sunshine encouraged a number of butterflies from their torpor but it was not quite warm enough to encourage any pythons from their holes. Today we made our way to the Temple via the dry grasslands and acacia scrub along the eastern boundary of the park (where a Brook's Leaf Warbler was found at the Jatoli Canal) and on past the bird rich Mansarovar wetland area again where an obliging Smoky Warbler was watched in roadside bushes. During lunch we once again pitted our wits against the numerous Aquila eagles overhead, this time enjoying excellent views of a juvenile Imperial Eagle and a convincing candidate of the rare and little known Indian Spotted Eagle amongst the more numerous Greater Spotted and Steppe Eagles. After lunch, Dilip took us on a search for Nightjars, with Yellow-eyed Babblers seen en route, which resulted in breathtakingly good views of a slumbering Long-tailed. Nightjar before we concluded our time at this remarkable park with a final leisurely perusal of the avian riches back at Mansarovar.

Day 6

Thursday 27 January

Bright and sunny, warmer.

Straight after breakfast we set off on the 45 minute drive to Fatehpur Sikri, the first of several cultural sites on the programme today. With the assistance of an expert guide, everyone was able to enjoy this sightseeing visit to the full before we moved on again and soon found ourselves checking into the grand Mughal Sheraton at Agra. Soon afterwards we were at the even grander Taj Mahal where an hour and a half was spent enjoying this manmade wonder. After lunch back at the Sheraton it was time for a tour of the Red Fort (complete with an overhead Booted Eagle). The day's non-birding events concluded with a shopping expedition to the relative

retail sanity of a government run shop nearby. After dinner at the Sheraton we were on our way again, this time transferring to Marutha for a 23.20 appointment with the Kumaon Express, our comfortable enough sleeper train to Lalkuan, the railhead for the Himalayan foothills and Corbett National Park.

Day 7

Friday 28th January

Bright and sunny, cold and wet at night.

Arriving at Lalkuan on time at 09.00, we were met once more by Deepal and Nazir who had left us yesterday at Fatehpur Sikri and driven here to collect us from the train. After negotiating the busy traffic of Lalkuan and Haldwani we joined the quieter Ramnagar road where a welcome tea break at a roadside café allowed first views of Black Bulbuls and Grey Bushchats before we proceeded towards our destination of Kumeria in the Corbett NP buffer zone. Arriving at the excellent Quality Inn, Kumeria in the early afternoon we enjoyed lunch on the lawn as our first Rufous Sibilis and Crimson Sunbirds were watched in the garden trees, Plumbeous and White-capped Water Redstarts and Brown Dippers inhabited the rushing river below. Less expected, but very welcome indeed, was the Collared Falconet that gave stellar views perched on top of a tall conifer in the garden before being joined by its mate. Nearby a pair of Greater Flamebacks posed in a bare tree as Crested Tree Swifts and a Mountain Hawk Eagle soared overhead.

During lunch we met Manoj Sharma, our guide for the foothills section of the tour, and soon afterwards he whisked us off to show us some of the birds he had staked-out for us nearby. First stop was at the nearby roost site of a superb Tawny Fish Owl, a real rarity, and a little further on were two Brown Fish Owls for comparison. A visit to a forest resthouse at Mohin saw us entertained, but somewhat exhausted, by a very busy feeding flock containing numerous new birds such as Fulvous-breasted and Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpeckers, Velvet fronted and Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches, plentiful Grey-hooded Warblers and, rather fleetingly, a group of White-crested Laughing Thrushes among many others. Nearby, our first Lineated Barbet showed well before a small group of Oriental Pied Hornbills winged into view and settled to feed in the treetops. This had been an excellent introduction to the joys of birding in the foothills and we retired to the luxury of the Quality Inn well satisfied with our haul. To everyone's delight Dilip could not drag himself away and decided to spend another day with us to enjoy a well deserved birding mini-break before returning to his home at Bharatpur.

Day 8

Saturday 29th January

Dry and sunny, quite warm, cold at night.

A pre-breakfast birding session in and around the Quality Inn was very productive, both Orange-bellied and Gold-fronted Leafbirds were found in nearby trees with Orange-gorgetted and Slaty-blue Flycatchers, Rufous bellied Niltava and Grey-winged Blackbirds in the hotel garden. The first of several spectacular Crested Kingfishers was on the Kosi river below. After breakfast we took a short stroll down the road and out onto the riverflats where an excellent Little Forktail was watched and another pair of Brown Fish Owls were found. Our first Slaty-headed Parakeets appeared while Brown Dippers sped up and down the river. Nearby, roadside scrub and trees produced Puff-throated Babblers, Lemon-rumped Warblers, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babblers and Whistler's Warblers while a Greater Yellownappe was also seen and a Peregrine (Shaheen) Falcon soared overhead amongst a flock of Eurasian Crag Martins.

Lunch at the Quality Inn was again punctuated by the appearance of the Collared Falconets and our first Slender-billed Vultures were overhead before we made our way along the road to the river on the other side of the hotel. This afternoon's session provided us with still more quality birds in the shape of Blue-throated and Great Barbets, our first satisfactory views of Spangled Drongos, Black-crested Bulbuls, a Blue Rock Thrush and numerous other birds.

Dilip finally left us this evening but his time at Kumeria had been rewarded with a new bird in the shape of the mornings Little Forktail, nobody could have deserved it more.

Day 9

Sunday 30th January

Dry and sunny, quite warm, cold and misty at night.

An early start today saw us boarding two jeeps for the journey to Dhikala in the heart of Corbett NP, though not before the breakfast table was vacated to see four Kalij Pheasants in the hotel garden. The journey to Dhikala was undertaken at a steady pace with frequent stops to examine anything of interest, the rewards were excellent. Before reaching the park entrance we stopped once more to pay homage to the roosting Tawny Fish Owl and a short while afterwards the first of several Pallas's Fish Eagles and a Changeable Hawk Eagle showed well. Inside the park a large mixed species feeding flock contained a Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo and many Ashy Bulbuls were found before some park staff in a jeep drew our attention to a perched Great Hornbill, although the news that they had just seen a Tiger as well was a little galling! A stop to overlook the Ramganga River produced both Pallas's and Lesser Fish Eagles but much more unexpected was the superb adult White-tailed Eagle that also wheeled around over the rushing water. Just before reaching Dhikala, a Jungle Owlet was found and on the approach road itself a male Black Francolin appeared.

From the Dhikala compound a large herd of Indian Elephants were on view in the grassland below, rather unusually as they typically retire to the forest during the day and are consequently often difficult to see at Corbett. After lunch most of the group boarded Elephants in the hope of encountering a Tiger but despite not finding one some good birds were seen in the shape of Maroon Oriole, Red Junglefowl, Grey-headed Woodpecker and Himalayan Flameback.

Day 10

Monday 31st January

Misty then bright and sunny, warm later.

Finding Tigers is largely a matter of luck and even a prolonged stay at Corbett NP offers no guarantee of seeing one. However, it is hard to forget that Tigers are around (movements on foot being restricted because of this) and to at least make a determined effort to try to see one. So it was then, that acting on information received from park staff about the whereabouts of recent sightings we set off in the cold and misty pre-dawn to an area several kilometres east of Dhikala where we felt our best chance may lie. Luck was very much on our side today. Soon after dawn the nearby alarm call of a Samba saw us speeding around a corner to where another jeep contained two grinning Indian visitors who were pointing into the grass beside us. A few seconds later we were watching a tigress ambling through long grass a few yards away. Reversing back to where we had just come from

we waited expectantly to see if she was still heading in the same direction; suddenly there was a Tiger walking out of the grass and right across the road right between our jeeps before disappearing back into the grass on the other side of the road. From a nearby watchtower this marvellous big cat was soon relocated crossing the river and walking along the shoreline opposite where it remained in clear view for several minutes. All encounters with Tigers are special but we were especially fortunate to be able to enjoy such close and prolonged views. As if this wasn't enough we were treated to a performance by a glorious Yellow-throated Martin as we were returning to Dhikala. A hearty breakfast was enjoyed by all.

After breakfast, a short while was spent birding around the Dhikala compound where Aberrant Bush Warblers were found in the scrub and a rather distant but very spectacular Pied Harrier was quartering the grassland among the still present Elephants. We then headed off to the Dhikala watchtower, one of the few places where walking is allowed in the park and enjoyed a mixed feeding flock containing several Black-headed Bulbuls before, low and behold, another Tiger was spotted in the distance as it lounged around in the late morning sun. This individual remained in view for at least half an hour before sneaking off into a grassy hollow, probably to stalk some nearby Chital. After lunch we boarded our jeeps again and set off to explore the Ramganga Reservoir and extensive grasslands to the west of Dhikala. Rewards came almost immediately as the male Pied harrier was viewed at much closer range. Several Oriental Skylarks were flying around as we approached the lake shore where Marsh Muggers and Gharials were hauled out and numerous waders and wildfowl were on view.

Moving into the grassland above the lake we began to encounter good numbers of (Siberian) Stonechats and the search through them began to see if we could find one the rare specialities now known to occur here in winter, the enigmatic Hodgson's Bushchat. After a while the first candidate for a Hodgson's was found and eventually at least five birds were identified, including one adult male. Other birds seen in this habitat were a Bright-headed Cisticola and a couple of Isabelline Shrikes before we once more reached the lakeshore where a handful of Rosy Pipits were present. Back at Dhikala there was time to scan the scrub below and grassland beyond the compound before darkness fell.

Day 11

Tuesday 1st February

Dry, bright and sunny, misty later, very cold overnight.

After a final look around the Dhikala area we boarded our jeeps and gradually made our way out of Corbett NP, arriving at the Dhangari gate at around 12.30. Highlights along the way were a Small Nitava, our first White-throated Laughing Thrushes and a briefly seen Whiskered Yuhina amongst other birds and close views of an Indian Elephant in roadside jungle. A stop at a resthouse near Dhangari provided a Blue-capped Redstart and a Black-throated Thrush, two former at unusually low elevation here which hinted that the severe weather in the mountains recently might provide us with some avian surprises in the coming days. Lunch at the Claridges Hideaway, just north of Ramnagar, came with welcome confirmation that our preferred route to Naini Tal was now open again after being closed by snow up until a few days previously. After a short but sadly unsuccessful attempt to find a Wallcreeper at Ramnagar we set off for there. A brief visit to the Jim Corbett museum was an interesting diversion before we began to climb the many hairpins that lead to Naini Tal. Just before darkness fell we reached a spot where a mountain stream came tumbling under the road and met with instant success as a hoped for Spotted Forktail appeared and gave excellent views. After a few days of relative hardship at Dhikala it

was pleasant to check into the plush surroundings of the Claridges Naini Retreat on a wooded hillside above Naini Tal.

Day 12

Wednesday 2nd February

Dry and bright, cold then warmer, very cold overnight.

After breakfast we walked a couple of kilometres down to the main road where our bus was waiting, we hadn't wanted to risk it being snowed-in at the Retreat if the weather took another turn. The walk provided us with first views of several new mid-altitude species including Oriental Turtle Doves, Green-backed and Spot-winged Tits and the delightful Black-throated Tit. Streaked Laughing Thrushes were common along the roadside and Blue-fronted and Blue-capped Redstarts also appeared. We then began to drive towards the Mangoli Valley with several good stops en route. The first of these produced a fleeting Lammergeier but another soon appeared and gave more prolonged views soaring against the rugged hillsides. A Northern Goshawk was an unexpected find and in rapid succession we saw Russet Sparrow, a small flock of Rock Buntings, the first of several Brown-fronted Woodpeckers and an immaculate male Orange-flanked Bush Robin (though it is hard not to still think of them as Red-flanked Bluetails). A scrubby patch below the road held a small flock of Fire-fronted Serins and a Kalij Phoeasant before we decided to press on to the Mangoli Valley. A Common Goral (a kind of Mountain Goat) standing on a crag was a rare sight.

On entering the Mangoli Valley we soon saw a couple of Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babblers and Black-chinned Babblers but a Grey-sided Bush Warbler was rather fleeting. A couple of Lesser Yellownapes showed well and soon after our first Mountain Bulbuls were located. Overhead a large cloud of Nepal House Martins were hawking. Close scrutiny of each small gully and open patches of leaf litter eventually resulted in good views of both White-throated and Rufous-headed Laughingthrushes and a rarer Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush that performed beautifully. A Wren-babbler creeping furtively through a mossy gully remained silent but showed the neat pale spotting on the crown and wings of Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler. A picnic lunch was taken on a small bridge overlooking a stream where a splendid Spotted Forktail was foraging and nearby a couple of Striated Laughing-thrushes were found as Himalayan Greenfinches perched up in field-side trees. A search for Chestnut-headed Tesia was unsuccessful but while scanning those areas of the stream visible from the main path Manoj located a Slaty-backed Forktail which disappeared upstream almost immediately. While trying to locate this bird a further 2 two or three Spotted Forktails were found before we eventually located not one but two Slaty-backed Forktails foraging in the stream below us and enjoyed great views through the scope. The walk back to the road was rather quieter, perhaps due to low cloud rolling into the valley but did produce our first amazing Red-billed Blue Magpies. Back at the road we had a chai stop and while sitting on the roof behind the chai stall a succession of good birds appeared, nearby fields contained Olive-backed Pipits and three female Pink-browed Rosefinches, everyone enjoyed great views of a Yellow-lored Tit and the shrubbery contained both Lemon-rumped and Buff-barred Warblers, more Black-chinned Babblers. An obliging Asian Barred Owlet perched in full view above us. The return drive to Naini Tal was followed by a stroll up to Snow View where the distant snowy peaks of the high Himalayas were clearly visible and a further views were enjoyed of several of the characteristic species of this altitudinal range. Snow was till lying in several places and we saw Leopard pug marks crossing a rooftop.

Day 13

Thursday 3rd February

Bright and sunny, fairly warm.

Immediately after breakfast we set off on the one hour drive to Sat Tal, though the walk downhill from our hotel produced a good find in the shape of a very brief Dark-rumped Rosefinch. Walking down the approach road to Sat Tal we were delighted and rather amazed to see three Yellow-throated Martens gambolling along on the edge of a gully. Further Spotted Forktails were found at a roadside stream (it was becoming hard to imagine that this species is sometimes difficult to come by!) before we reached the fields near the abandoned Eureka Forbes Factory. A Chestnut Thrush was skulking in the roadside ditch here and eventually showed well in the company of several Slaty-blue Flycatchers but there was no sign of any of the hoped-for accentors so we pressed on towards the valley bottom and the Sat Tal lakes. A couple of short stops produced a selection of species previously seen species but a flock of 15 Red-billed Leiothrix's were new and much appreciated and a Common Buzzard was seen. Arriving at the tea stalls at Sat Tal we immediately headed for an area of unremarkable looking bushes just behind them. After a short while it became apparent that several thrushes were skulking about and we were surprised but rather pleased to see that most were Tickell's Thrushes, a species that most people had missed previously. A couple of Grey-winged Blackbirds were also present and a Small Niltava showed very well. While scanning the leaf litter under the bushes from a different vantage point a superb male Golden Bush Robin was discovered, one of the avian highlights of the tour, and remained in view for several minutes for everyone to enjoy. During our packed lunch at the lakeside, large numbers of raptors were in the air above a nearby hillside and on closer inspection most proved to be Slender-billed Vultures, though a single Red-headed Vulture, several Steppe Eagles and three Peregrines were also seen. A stroll along the streamside below the dam produced yet more Spotted Forktails and a single Green-tailed Sunbird before we began to retrace our route to the accentor fields. Back at the fields the accentors were performing well with no fewer than five Black-throated and six Rufous-breasted seen, Chestnut Thrushes had increased to two.

Day 14

Friday 4th February

Overcast with sunny spells, dry.

Our final day at Naini Tal began with a short stroll to the so far rather neglected wooded slope right next to the hotel, this paid immediate dividends when a female White-collared Blackbird was discovered and during the next half an hour or so we found a male and a small group of male Pink-browed Rosefinches. Apart from Gill Ratcliffe, who had arranged a morning's horse riding in the hills around, the rest of us returned to Snow View where cloudy conditions obscured the Himalayas (lucky we had seen them earlier) but not the two Greater Yellownapes that performed well at close range. Before returning to the hotel for lunch we had time to visit the High Fields where a Rufous-breasted Accentor and a couple of Rock Buntings were found before an excellent local rarity in the shape of a Goldcrest was found and provided Manoj with a new bird. After lunch some of the group opted for a shopping excursion to Naini Tal while the rest of us decided to concentrate our birding efforts on the woodland and gardens in the vicinity of the hotel, this proved very productive. Returning to the area where the dark-rumped Rosefinch had been seen yesterday we eventually succeeded in getting excellent views of two males while a female remained more elusive. As afternoon turned to evening thrush activity increased noticeably and in addition to no fewer than three White-collared Blackbirds at least three Chestnut Thrushes and

ten Grey-winged Blackbirds emerged from cover. We said our farewells to the excellent Manoj this evening and he returned to his home at Ramnagar

Day 15

Saturday 5th February

Dry and bright, misty later, warm.

The rather long return journey to New Delhi commenced immediately after breakfast, we were soon winding our way back down to the plains and south across flat agricultural land towards Highway 24. A brief stop to look at some Sarus Cranes at a small roadside wetland south of Khladungi allowed us to reacquaint ourselves with several other lowland species that we hadn't seen for several days. Eventually arriving at the River Ganges at 13.45 we found a rather unusual picnic spot under the railway bridge there before setting off north along the river bank to see what we could find. The hoped for Gangetic Dolphins were soon located, though as with so many cetaceans, the views of individuals were rather brief and incomplete, before attention turned to the birds present. Brown-headed Gulls were new, as were two Pallas's Gulls roosting on a small spit where assembled duck included a couple of Garganey, a Grey Plover here was an unexpected find. Rather distant views were had of a Great Thick-knee before we moved on in the hope of better views and succeeded in finding another at a more respectable distance, along with a small group of Kentish Plovers. Passerines in this area included Crested Larks and, just as we were leaving a good but brief view of an unexpected Jungle Prinia. By early evening we were entering the outskirts of Delhi where the the skies were filled with an amazing number of Black Kites and the roads with an even more amazing number and variety of vehicles ! It was dark before we reached our hotel near the airport but there was plenty of time for a wash and change before an early hours departure.

Species lists

Birds

Nomenclature and taxonomy generally follows Grimmett and Inskipp's The Birds of Northern India (2003) which follows the treatments in the The Birds of the Indian Subcontinent (1999) by the same authors with the exception of their revised new taxonomic treatments of Indian Spotted Eagle and the Long-billed Vulture complex. In addition, the recent Europe-wide split of Red-breasted and Taiga Flycatchers is followed here.

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* (3:15)

Males were seen on a couple of occasions on tracks near Dhikala, Corbett NP and a female showed well in fields above Sat Tal

Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerrianus* (4:15)

Regularly seen in small groups at KGNP, Bharatpur, a couple were at Bund Baretha

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus* (1:15)

Surprisingly just one, a female, was seen during the Elephant Safari at Corbett NP

Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos hamiltoni* (3:15)

At least four were in the grounds of the Quality Inn, Kumeria on our final morning there and a couple more were seen in and around Naini Tal

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* (9:15)

Rather common and widespread on the plains (where, however, some were presumably of semi-feral origin) and inside Corbett NP, not seen at higher elevations

Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica* (1:15)

A handful were present at Bund Baretha

Greylag Goose *Anser anser rubirostris* (4:15)

Present in good numbers at KGNP, Bharatpur with smaller numbers along the River Yamuna at Okhla

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* (3:15)

Several hundred were at KGNP, Bharatpur with others seen at Bund Baretha and flying over at the Ganges River crossing on Highway 24

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* (6:15)

Present in small numbers at many wetland sites on the plain and in the lower foothills

Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* (2:15)

One or two were present at KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha

Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus* (1:15)

Up to 100 were at Bund Baretha

Gadwall *Anas strepera* (5:15)

Common, found in good numbers at almost all larger wetlands on the plain and in the lower foothills

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas Penelope* (3:15)

Present in small numbers at Bharatpur and Bund Baretha

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (3:15)

Scarce, singles were at KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha with a few present in a distant large duck flock at Ramganga Reservoir, Corbett NP

Spot Billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* (5:15)

A few were at Okhla but the majority of the birds seen were at KGNP, Bharatpur where at least 30 were present

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypea* (3:15)

Only seen at KGNP, Bharatpur, where common, and at Bund Baretha. Some may have been missed in the distant duck flock at Corbett NP

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* (5:15)

Present in moderate numbers at most larger wetlands on the plain and at Ramganga Reservoir, Corbett NP

Garganey *Anas querquedula* (2:15)

Half a dozen females were at Bund Baretha and a pair was on the Ganges on our return towards Delhi

Common Teal *Anas crecca crecca* (7:15)

Quite common, present on most wetlands that held wildfowl

Red Crested Pochard *Rhod1ssa rufina* (1:15)

At least 50 were present at Bund Baretha

Common Pochard *Aythya farina* (1:15)

Only seen at Bund Baretha where small numbers were mixed in with the more numerous Red-crested Pochards

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* (1:15)

A small handful at Bund Baretha were the only ones seen

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* (1:15)

One was in a roadside bush between Bharatpur and Bund Baretha

Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus mitchelli* (7:15)

Fairly common in the foothills where one or two birds were seen everyday

Brown-fronted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos auriceps* (3:15)

Only seen in and around Naini Tal where it was reasonably common, at least ten being seen

Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos macei* (3:15)

Seen with some regularity in and around Corbett NP

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker *Dendrocopos mahrattensis pallescens* (1:15)

Only seen at KGNP, Bharatpur where one posed nicely in a sunlit treetop at the nursery and another was seen more briefly later on

Lesser Yellownappe *Picus chlorolophus chlorolophus* or *simlae* (2:15)

One seen briefly at Corbett NP was followed by a very showy individual at the entrance to the Mangoli Valley

Greater Yellownappe *Picus flavinucha* (3:15)

Singles seen briefly at Kumeria and Corbett NP were followed by two males which gave excellent views at Snow View, Naini Tal on our second visit there

Streak-throated Woodpecker *Picus xanthopygaeus* (2:15)

A total of three were found at Corbett NP

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus sanguinceps* (2:15)

One seen during the Elephant Safari at Corbett NP was surprisingly the only one seen well, a couple more were heard and one seen in flight near Kumeria

Himalayan Flameback *Dinopium shorii* (2:15)

Only seen at Corbett NP where three were recorded

Black-rumped Flameback *Dinopium benghalense* (6:15)

The most widespread woodpecker with records coming from both the plains and lower foothills, at least ten were seen altogether

Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes lucidus* (1:15)

A pair were briefly in a bare tree opposite the entrance of the Quality Inn, Kumeria

Great Barbet *Megalaima virens* (6:15)

After the first near Kumeria, a handful were then seen at various sites in the foothills including the Mangoli Valley and Naini Tal

Brown Headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica caniceps* (2:15)

A couple were seen in the trees around the forest resthouse just north of Bund Baretha and one showed well in early morning sunlight in a treetop at KGNP, Bharatpur

Lineated Barbet *Megalaima linea* (2:15)

Subsequent to two that showed very well during our first evening in the foothills this species was seen on a couple more occasions at Corbett NP with others heard there

Blue-throated Barbet *Megalaima asiatica* (3:15)

Two that showed very well near Kumeria were very popular. Further singles were seen at Corbett NP and in a roadside bush near the Mangoli Valley as we returned towards the plains

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala* (1:15)

Surprisingly, the only bird seen was one briefly in a treetop at Bharatpur; none were heard, perhaps due to the prevailing chilly conditions during the tour

Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros birostris* (3:15)

A couple were at KGNP, Bharatpur

Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* (2:15)

A total of four of these truly amazing birds were seen at Corbett NP, one was seen perched and the other three in flight

Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* (2:15)

A total of six were seen at and near Corbett NP

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops* (5:15)

Most of the ten or so recorded were on the plain, especially at KGNP, Bharatpur, but one was also at Corbett NP

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis benghalensis* (6:15)

Frequently seen on the plain where a frequent sight along roadsides, birds were seen in display flights at KGNP, Bharatpur

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (6:15)

Small numbers were at KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha and along rivers in the foothills in and around Corbett NP

Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis capensis* (1:15)

One perched below us during lunch at Bund Baretha was the only one seen

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* (11:15)

Common and very widespread, only absent near Kumeria and at the higher elevations around Naini Tal. A frequent sight on roadside wires on the plain

Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris* (5:15)

Up to five per day were seen along the large rivers in and around Corbett NP

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis leucomelanura* (6:15)

After the first two at Bund Baretha just a handful were seen elsewhere, including a few birds sharing rivers with the previous species in the foothills at and near Corbett NP

Common Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius varius* (1:15)

One at KGNP, Bharatpur on our final evening there was a good find as this is a difficult species to locate when not calling

[**Asian Koel** *Eudynamis scolopacea*]

One was heard but not seen in New Delhi

Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* (7:15)

Regularly encountered in a range of scrubby and grassland settings in the lowlands with one at Sat Tal the only one recorded in the foothills

Lesser Coucal *Centropus bengalensis* (1:15)

According to Manoj this is the only species of coucal to occur in in the grasslands of Corbett NP so one viewed distantly from Dhikala was duly recorded as this species....

Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* (1:15)

Very uncommon, a handful seen in flight over New Delhi were the only records

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* (11:15)

Common and widespread but largely absent from higher elevations at and around Naini Tal

Slaty-headed Parakeet *Psittacula himalayana* (6:15)

Seen in good numbers at a couple of sites near Kumeria, inside Corbett NP and near Naini Tal

Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala* (3:15)

A flock of at least 20 between Bharatpur and Bund Baretha were followed by a few in the lower foothills

Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri* (5:15)

Small flocks were seen regularly in the foothills from Kumeria to Naini Tal

Himalayan Swiftlet *Collocalia brevirostris* (4:15)

Small numbers were regularly mixed in with House Swifts over Corbett NP

House Swift *Apus affinis affinis and nipalensis* (5:15)

Very small numbers (presumably nominate *affinis*) were present in the lowlands, perhaps some had vacated the area due to unusually cold conditions. Quite common in the lower foothills, especially over Corbett NP, where birds may have been the hardier mountain race *nipalensis*

White-rumped Needletail *Zoonavena sylvatica* (1:15)

Three or four were observed in the company of House Swifts just east of Dhikala, Corbett NP

Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne corona* (5:15)

Small flocks were a regular sight over Kumeria and nearby Corbett NP

Collared Scops Owl *Otus bakkamoena* (2:15)

Two showed very well roosting in a tree next to the main road through KGNP, Bharatpur

Dusky Eagle Owl *Bubo coromandus* (3:15)

A pair attending a nest containing a large chick were seen at KGNP, Bharatpur on a couple of occasions

Brown-Fish Owl *Keputa zeylonensis* (3:15)

After two showed well when roosting in a roadside trees near Mohin, south of Kumeria, two more gave even better views in riverside trees just north of there

Tawny-Fish Owl *Keputa flavipes* (2:15)

A roosting bird gave great scope views at the famous site just south of the Quality Inn, Kumeria

Asian Barred Owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides cuculoides* (4:15)

One was briefly at Dhikala, Corbett NP but others opposite the entrance to the Mangoli Valley and at Naini Tal were much more obliging

Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum radiatum* (2:15)

A couple were seen well near Dhikala, Corbett NP

Spotted Owlet *Athene brama indica* (4:15)

A total of six were seen in the lowlands around Bharatpur with a pair being resident at the Laxmi Vilas Palace hotel

Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutuata* (1:15)

One was seen at roost just outside the main entrance to KGNP, Bharatpur to get our visit there off to a flying start

Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* (2:15)

Good views of a roosting bird near Bund Baretha were surpassed by outstanding views of another roosting bird at KGNP, Bharatpur the next day

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia neglecta*

Birds resembling wild Rock Pigeons were seen at a couple of sites but the presence of more obviously feral birds in the same areas throws doubt on whether any pure birds were seen

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur meena* (3:15)

Small numbers (less than 10 in total) were seen in and around Naini Tal, all showed the pale plumage tones and white-tipped tails of the race *meena* which some authorities regard as a separate species, Steppe Turtle Dove *S. meena*

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* (6:15)

Common and very widespread in the lowlands but absent from the foothills

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* (5:15)

After the first two were seen sitting on railside wires near Lalkuan, this species was later discovered in small numbers near Corbett NP and at lower elevations around Naini Tal

Red Collared Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica* (1:15)

At least ten were in a mixed flock of doves feeding in bare roadside fields between Bharatpur and Bund Baretha

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* (8:15)

Common in the lowlands but largely absent in the foothills

[Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica indica*]

One flew past at great speed near Dhikala, Corbett NP but was not seen sufficiently well to justify inclusion on the trip list

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera phoenicoptera* (3:15)

After a couple were briefly seen in roadside trees in New Delhi, a few more showed well at KGNP, Bharatpur

Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* (4:15)

Three were found during our drinks stop at Koshi when en route to Bharatpur. Small numbers, probably totalling five birds, were regularly seen at KGNP, Bharatpur. When returning towards Delhi from the foothills a flock of eight showed very well in fields between Khaladungi and Moradabad

Common Crane *Grus grus* (2:15)

At least 25 rather mobile birds were present at KGNP, Bharatpur

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* (9:15)

Quite common at lowland wetlands, especially KGNP, Bharatpur, with smaller numbers in the lower foothills and around Corbett NP

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio indica* (5:15)

A few at Okhla were followed by a roadside flock of 20 near Bharatpur; KGNP, Bharatpur hosted 30 and Bund Baretha ten

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* (6:15)

Only seen in the lowlands where it was reasonably common at suitably overgrown waterbodies

Common Coot *Fulica atra* (5:15)

Present at several lowland wetlands with the largest concentrations at KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* (4:15)

A small handful were present at KGNP, Bharatpur and other lowland sites; in the foothills a couple were seen at Corbett NP

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa* (5:15)

Common at KGNP, Bharatpur with smaller numbers noted at a couple of other lowland wetlands

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata orientalis* (1:15)

Two flying around calling at Bund Baretha were unusual there

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* (2:15)

A handful were at KGNP, Bharatpur

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* (5:15)

Small numbers were at a few lowland wetlands and at Corbett NP

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* (4:15)

Small numbers were found at several wetlands in the lowlands including Okhla and KGNP, Bharatpur

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* (6:15)

Small numbers were found at wetlands on the plain and along larger rivers in the foothills

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* (8:15)

Present at small numbers at most wetlands visited

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* (6:15)

Quite common in the lowlands but absent from the foothills

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (11:15)

Present in very small numbers at most wetlands visited

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* (1:15)

Rather surprisingly, this species was not seen until a small flock were noted at the Ganges crossing as we returned to Delhi

Temmincks Stint *Calidris temminckii* (3:15)

Up to 30 at Okhla were followed by smaller numbers at KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* (6:15)

Present at most wetlands in the lowlands with the largest numbers at KGNP, Bharatpur

Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirugus* (1:15)

At least two were at Bund Baretha

Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus* (3:15)

At least three were at KGNP, Bharatpur and eight were at Bund Baretha

Great Thick-knee *Burhinus recurvirostris* (1:15)

After missing this species at Bund Baretha and Corbett NP it was pleasing to find two or three on the banks of the Ganges as we returned towards Delhi

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (8:15)

Common, present at almost all wetlands, including village ponds, from the lowlands to the lower foothills at Corbett NP

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* (1:15)

A handful in a roadside pool between Mathura and Bharatpur were the only ones seen

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (1:15)

A single bird at the Ganges River Crossing on Highway 24 was an unusual record

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* (1:15)

A couple at the first river crossing east of Ramnagar were the only ones seen

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus* (1:15)

At least four were on the banks of the Ganges as we returned towards Delhi at the end of the tour

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* (1:15)

One or two were present at KGNP, Bharatpur

Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malarbaricus*

The KGNP, Bharatpur *vanellus* fest contained at least 20 of these scarce and striking birds

River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii* (6:15)

Rather localised and, appropriately enough only seen at rivers with small numbers at Okhla, Agra, Ramnagar and Corbett NP

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus indicus* (12:15)

Very common, widespread and noisy, though not present at the higher elevations around Naini Tal

Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarious* (1:15)

At least six individuals of this now critically endangered species were found in grasslands at Sapin Mari, KGNP, Bharatpur, now one of only two known regular wintering sites in the world

White-tailed Lapwing *Vanellus leucurus* (5:15)

Small numbers were seen at scattered wetlands in the lowlands with larger numbers (at least 50) at KGNP, Bharatpur

Indian Courser *Cursorius coromandelicus* (2:15)

At least 20 of these stunning birds were watched in dry grassland at KGNP, Bharatpur

[Yellow-legged/ Caspian/ Steppe Gull *Larus cachinnans/ barabensis* (?)]

One seen briefly on the Yamuna at Okhla was not (sub) specifically identified, though *L..c. barabensis* ('Steppe' or 'Baraba' Gull) may be the most likely race here. The status, distribution, identification and taxonomy of large white-headed gulls in Asia is even more complex and confusing than in Europe! .

Pallas's Gull *Larus ichthyaetus* (1:15)

Two, an adult and a first-year, were roosting on a muddy spit at the Ganges River crossing in Highway 24

Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus* (1:15)

Only seen at the Ganges River crossing on Highway 24 where at least ten were present with Black-headed Gulls

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* (2:15)

Large numbers were seen at Okhla and small numbers at the Ganges as we returned towards Delhi

River Tern *Sterna aurantia* (5:15)

After a couple were seen at KGNP, Bharatpur, larger numbers were encountered at Bund Baretha, Corbett NP and at the Ganges River crossing on Highway 24

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* (3:15)

One at Bund Baretha was followed by a handful at Corbett NP which included one seen to catch a small fish after several failed attempts

Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* (4:15)

Up to three, probably a family group, were regularly seen at KGNP, Bharatpur where one individual was watched raiding a bee's nest, a couple more were seen in and around Corbett NP

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* (8:15)

Widespread at low densities but with at least 15 seen in total, absent from the higher hills

Black Kite *Milvus migrans govinda* (8:15)

Abundant in urban settings, especially at Delhi where many thousands were seen as we returned through the suburbs on our final day. Much scarcer or even absent in rural areas and the foothills where one at Corbett NP was notable. All of the birds examined closely showed characteristics of the resident Indian race *govinda* ('Pariah Kite') but some migrant *lineatus* ('Black-eared Kite') could easily have been overlooked

Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* (3:15)

At least half a dozen, including fresh juveniles, were at Corbett NP, one of the last remaining strongholds of this rare and declining species. Outside the park an adult was perched near a nest below Kumeria

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* (1:15)

A superb adult was watched over the River Ramganga as we made our way towards Dhikala, Corbett NP. This is a very rare winter visitor to Northern India so came as quite a surprise

Lesser Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga humilis* (formerly *I. nana*) (2:15)

Two sightings involving three birds at Corbett NP

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* (1:15)

After a brief encounter just outside Naini Tal, one then showed very well nearby as we slowly made our way to the Mangoli Valley

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* (5:15)

Widespread at generally low densities throughout the lowlands and lower foothills but numerous at Agra

White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* (1:15)

At least four adults of this now critically endangered (but until very recently still abundant) species were present at Ramnagar where they were apparently nesting

Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris*

This taxon, formerly regarded as one of two subspecies of Long-billed Vulture, was found in moderate numbers in the hills between Kumeria and Naini Tal, one of its few remaining strongholds, a flock of 30 vultures at Sat Tal were mostly this species

Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* (6:15)

Small numbers were seen regularly in the foothills from Corbett NP to the hills around Naini Tal, see the next species for a discussion of the problems when identifying some birds

[Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus*]

The status of this species in the Himalayan foothills is currently the subject of dispute with some Indian experts feeling that most or even all of the birds resembling Eurasian Griffons are actually sub-adult Himalayan Griffons. Given the numbers of birds present that closely resemble Eurasian Griffons this seems unlikely as sub-adults should be less numerous than any other age category when in fact birds resembling Eurasian Griffons are actually the commonest large vultures at sites like Corbett NP. Complicating the matter is a report that all of the birds seen closely have the pale pink legs associated with Himalayan Griffons rather than dark legs of Eurasian. Pending clarification, Eurasian Griffon is not included in the species total for the tour; though it seems highly likely that several were seen it is difficult to pinpoint which individuals were certainly this species

Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* (2:15)

Only seen at Corbett NP where it was a frequent sight with up to 15 in the air together at times

Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus* (2:15)

Two or three were watched at Corbett NP and another was over Sat Tal

Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* (1:15)

One was seen hovering rather distantly over the grasslands at the eastern end of the Ranganga Reservoir, Corbett NP

Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela cheela* (7:15)

Two or three were regularly seen at KGNP, Bharatpur with singles also seen each day in and around Corbett NP

Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus aeruginosus* (4:15)

A handful at Okhla were followed by several at KGNP, Bharatpur where a stunning adult male caused regular mayhem amongst the assembled wildfowl

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

At least four ringtails were quartering the extensive grasslands west of Dhikala

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* (1:15)

A rather distant juvenile was seen at KGNP, Bharatpur on our first full day there

Pied harrier *Circus melanoleucos* (1:15)

A spectacular adult male showed well when hunting over the western end of the Ramganga Reservoir, Corbett NP. Corbett NP is consistently the westernmost location that this predominantly Chinese species is found

Shikra *Accipiter badius* (7:15)

By far the most frequently seen, or identified, accipiter with almost daily records in the lowlands and, to a lesser extent, the lower foothills. A further five accipiters were seen in the foothills that could not be identified due to the brevity of views but which appeared to be neither this or the next species, a couple of these were thought likely to be Besra and one was most likely a Crested Goshawk

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus melaschistos and nisosimilis* (3:15)

Only seen at Naini Tal where three were identified

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentiles* (1:15)

An adult gave rather distant but good scope views soaring above a ridge near Naini Tal. Not long before this sighting the tour leader had been expressing his doubts about the authenticity of claims of this species in the area, Doh!

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* (1:15)

One, a rather dark individual, was along the road to Sat Tal

Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata* (1:15)

This species, recently been split from the Lesser Spotted Eagle of Europe, is not well known and identification criteria are not yet fully established. At least one adult spotted eagle over KGNP, Bharatpur showed a combination of prominent double carpal crescents on the underwing, contrastingly pale central underwing coverts and a strikingly swollen looking and long gape line; based on the best current information its identification as this species seems safe, especially as it was displaying and calling

Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* (2:15)

At least half a dozen were at KGNP, Bharatpur, several of which, including spotty juveniles, perched prominently in roadside trees. While most were typically very dark bodied in appearance at least two were noticeably paler ('fulvescens' morph) with one being a particularly pale sandy rufous colour

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* (5:15)

At least three characteristically patterned juveniles and young immature birds were present at KGNP, Bharatpur where a couple of older birds thought likely to be this species were also seen. Young birds were quite common over the hills around Naini Tal where at least ten were seen.

Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* (2:15)

A near-adult at KGNP, Bharatpur on our first full day there was followed by excellent close views of a circling juvenile during lunch on our final day

Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus cirrhatus* (3:15)

Four or five were seen in and around Corbett NP

Mountain Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis nipalensis* (4:15)

One or two were seen quite frequently over the Quality Inn, Kumeria with a couple more inside Corbett NP

Collared Falconet *Microhierax caerulescens* (4:15)

Excellent prolonged views of a least two, perhaps as many as four, were enjoyed at and around the Quality Inn, Kumeria; these birds very obligingly choosing to sit on top of conifers in the hotel garden as we enjoyed drinks and lunch on the lawn. Another one or two were in the vicinity of the Dhikala compound in Corbett NP

Common Kestrel *Falco tinniculus* (5:15)

A wide scatter of records with birds in the lowlands and as high as Naini Tal

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus calidus and peregrinator* (4:15)

A single soaring over Kumeria was followed by excellent views of one or two birds at Dhikala, Corbett NP. All showed the characteristic rufous toned underparts and extensive black hoods of the resident race *peregrinator* which some authorities regard as a separate species ('Shaheen Falcon'). Three more distant birds at Sat Tal where probably a family group and therefore also 'Shaheens'

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (5:15)

Up to 10 were at KGNP, Bharatpur with smaller numbers at Bund Baretha and one on the River Kosi at Ramnagar

Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* (5:15)

Up to 15 per day were seen at KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha with smaller numbers at Corbett NP

Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* (4:15)

Only recorded in the lowlands with 20 or more at larger wetlands such as KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha and lower numbers at a few smaller wetlands and roadside pools. It is possible that some distant and unidentified cormorants at Ramganga Reservoir, Corbett NP and at the Ganges River crossing on Highway 24 were this species

Indian Cormorant *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* (4:15)

A similar pattern of occurrence and numbers to the preceding species with all records coming from the lowlands: at Okhla; Koshi; KGNP, Bharatpur; Bund Baretha; and a couple of smaller roadside wetlands. It is possible that some individuals of this species were overlooked at Corbett NP

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* (8:15)

Up to 50 were at KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha with smaller numbers at a range of wetlands, including Ramganga Reservoir, Corbett NP where this was the only cormorant species certainly identified

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta garzetta* (6:10)

Widespread in rather low numbers, recorded at KGNP, Bharatpur, Bund Baretha, Agra and Corbett NP

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (9:15)

Rather common, present on virtually all wetlands in the lowlands and in the foothills at Ramganga Reservoir, Corbett NP.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* (4:15)

Up to 15 were seen with records divided between Okhla, KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha

Great Egret *Casmerodius albus modestus* (also known as *Egretta alba*) (9:15)

Widespread and rather common with birds present at almost all lowland wetlands of any size and at Corbett NP

Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia* (5:15)

Most conspicuous at KGNP, Bharatpur where typically found on waters with plenty of emergent vegetation, also present at Corbett NP, others may have been overlooked as many distant egrets were left unidentified

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (9:15)

Widespread but tended to occur in concentrations wherever feeding was good, for example around cattle or recently disturbed ground and absent in many areas

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii* (11:15)

Very common and widespread, present at almost every damp patch away from the highest elevations

Little Heron *Butorides striatus* (2:15)

Only seen at KGNP, Bharatpur where two or three were seen around the Temple area

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (2:15)

About 25 were roosting in trees opposite the Keoladeo Temple at KGNP, Bharatpur

Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis* (2:15)

After a rather skulking individual was seen deep inside a bush at KGNP, Bharatpur, one gave fantastic views in a roadside ditch just north of Bund Baretha

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (2:15)

Two were found at KGNP, Bharatpur on our first full day there and at least 10 were at Bund Baretha the following day

Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* (5:15)

Apart from a few in roadside fields as we returned to Delhi from the foothills, all of the birds seen were divided between Koshi, KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha, over 100 were seen in total.

Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* (3:15)

At least four were at Okhla with singles at KGNP, Bharatpur and near Bund Baretha

Eurasian Spoonbill *Plalea leucorodia* (4:10)

After ten were on a roadside pool near Koshi this species was a frequent sight at KGNP, Bharatpur, where probably over 100 were present; smaller numbers were at Bund Baretha

Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* (2:15)

A total of about 20 were seen as we made our way from Delhi to Bharatpur, most being near Koshi, but only five were seen at KGNP, Bharatpur, no doubt due to the shortage of water there

Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* (2:15)

After the first three at Bund Baretha a couple were at KGNP, Bharatpur the next day.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* (4:10)

At least ten were seen in and around Corbett NP

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*

A total of seven were seen at widely scattered sites from the lowlands near Bharatpur to Corbett NP

Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* (3:15)

Two pairs of this critically endangered species were present at KGNP, Bharatpur and a further two were briefly seen from Dhikala, Corbett NP

Golden-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons aurifrons* (1:15)

At least four gave excellent views near the Quality Inn, Kumeria, often in the company of their orange-bellied cousins

Orange-bellied Leafbird *Chloropsis hardwickii* (2:15)

At least half a dozen were seen in the vicinity of the Quality Inn, Kumeria

Rufous-tailed Shrike *Lanius isabellinus arenarius* (5:15)

A single at Okhla was followed by at least three more birds at KGNP, Bharatpur and one or two at Corbett NP. All birds wintering in India are believed to belong to the race *arenarius*, colloquially known as 'Chinese Shrike'

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus cristatus* (2:15)

This is ordinarily a very scarce bird in NW India away from migration times so at least two singles at KGNP, Bharatpur were noteworthy, the birds showed characteristics of the expected western race *cristatus*

Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus* (4:10)

Small numbers of this delightful little shrike was seen each day at KGNP, Bharatpur and between there and Bund Baretha

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach erythronotus* (11:15)

The commonest and most widespread shrike, this species was seen most frequently in the lowlands but was also present in small numbers in the foothills below Naini Tal, all were of the masked race *erythronotus*

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis lahtora* (3:15)

Singles were seen each day at KGNP, Bharatpur

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius bispecularis* (1:15)

Small numbers (fewer than 10 in total) of this distinctive local race were seen at and around Naini Tal, often in association with the next species

Black-headed Jay *Garrulus lanceolatus* (3:15)

This handsome species was present in good numbers (flocks of up to 20 birds) at a range of sites in and around Naini Tal

Red-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa erythrorhyncha* (3:15)

After the first encounter with this amazing looking bird at the Mangoli Valley, small numbers were seen at a couple of other sites at and near Naini Tal

Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta agabunda* (7:15)

Fairly common in the lowlands and present in the hills as high as Kumeria where it partly overlapped in range with the next species

Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae* (4:15)

Present in small numbers in the foothills at and around Corbett NP and at lower elevations around Naini Tal

House Crow *Corvus splendens splendens* (7:15)

Common in the lowlands, especially around settlements, but absent at higher elevations where it was largely replaced by the next species

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos intermedius* and *culminatus* (13:15)

Individuals of this species were seen on almost every day of the tour with sweet voiced and square-tailed *culminatus* in the plains and more raucous, and wedge-tailed (and rather Raven-like) *intermedius* in the foothills, especially around Naini Tal. Lowland birds are sometimes regarded as a separate species: Jungle Crow *C. culminatus*

Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus* (5:15)

Several of these stunning birds were seen at and near Corbett NP and at Sat Tal

Maroon Oriole *Oriolus traillii* (1:15)

One was seen during the Elephant Safari at Corbett NP

Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei nipalensis* (1:15)

Three were seen rather fleetingly on the outskirts of the Dhikala compound, Corbett NP

Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus peregrinus* (2:15)

Two or three at Bund Baretha were followed by a couple at KGNP, Bharatpur the next day

Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus* (1:15)

About ten were associated with a mixed feeding party in Corbett NP as we transferred to Dhikala from Kumeria

Short-billed Minivet *Pericrocotus brevirostris* (1:15)

As we were almost leaving Corbett NP a male suspected of being this species was found, after a few minutes it was joined by its much easier to identify mate

Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus* (2:15)

Only seen at Corbett NP as we transferred to and from Dhikala, about 15 were seen in total

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike *Hemipus picus capitalis* (6:15)

Seen in small numbers most days in the foothills but absent from the higher elevations around Naini Tal

Yellow-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hypoxantha* (5:15)

After our first encounter with this attractive species near Kumeria small numbers were seen with some regularity in the Corbett NP area, elsewhere, one was at the Mangoli Valley

White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis* (5:15)

Quite common at and around Corbett NP with up to six per day noted, not seen elsewhere

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* (8:15)

Very common in the lowlands where it was a frequent sight on roadside wires, just one was seen in the foothills, at Corbett NP

Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus longicaudatus* (2:15)

What was presumed to be the same wintering individual was present on successive visits to the nursery at KGNP, Bharatpur

White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens* (3:15)

Seen in very small numbers in Corbett NP

Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus* (6:15)

Small numbers were seen quite regularly in forest clearings in the lower foothills

Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus remifer* (1:15)

One showed briefly but quite well in a bare tree top east of Dhikala, Corbett NP

Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus*

One or two gave rather poor views in the nursery at KGNP, Bharatpur but two others sharing a fruiting tree with a Great Barbet near Kumeria showed much better.

Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia* (3:15)

About eight were found in the lower foothills at Kumeria and Corbett NP

Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus* (4:15)

Found in small numbers at both KGNP, Bharatpur and Corbett NP

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* (2:15)

At least seven were seen along a few kilometres of the River Kosi at Kumeria

Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush *Monticola rufentris* (1:15)

A single female at the Mangoli Valley was the only one seen

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* (1:15)

A male was in riverside fields near Kumeria

Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus* (9:15)

After the first was seen in the Corbett NP buffer zone this species was frequently encountered in the foothills, especially at higher altitudes. A common garden bird at Naini Tal

Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera wardii citrina* (1:15)

Two showed very well foraging in leaf litter in the grounds of the forest resthouse just north of Bund Baretha, both were of the plain-headed migratory race *citrina* which breeds in the Himalayas and winters in the North Indian plains

Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* (2:15)

After a rather fleeting individual at KGNP, Bharatpur we were able to enjoy prolonged close views of at least four birds at the surprising location of Sat Tal, rather above the expected wintering altitude of this species, especially given the large numbers of thrushes that had been forced down from higher elevations during recent heavy snow

White-collared Blackbird *Turdus albocinctus* (1:15)

At least three, including two males, were found on a wooded slope near the Claridges Naini Retreat, occurrences of this sought after species are very unpredictable

Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus boulboul* (4:15)

At least two were around the gardens of the Quality Inn, Kumeria, three were at Sat Tal and at least eight were in the vicinity of the Claridges Naini Retreat, Naini Tal

Chestnut Thrush *Turdus rubrocanus* (2:15)

After two or three were found at the Eureka Forbes fields above Sat Tal, at least three more were near the Claridges Naini Retreat, Naini Tal, a very good haul

Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* (Black-throated Thrush) (1:15)

Given the excellent numbers of *Turdus* thrushes present in and around Naini Tal it was a surprise that the only member of this species seen was one running around on the lawn of the Dhangari forest resthouse in Corbett NP. Presumably many birds had been pushed down to lower than usual altitudes by the severe winter weather that preceded our visit to the foothills

Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophia* (6:15)

After the first at Kumeria, this very attractive species was then seen with some regularity in the lower foothills

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* (4:15)

Very common in the lowlands, especially at KGNP, Bharatpur, though more often heard than seen. Less frequent at higher elevations were all of the birds specifically identified were of the next (recently split) species

Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla* (6:15)

After the first was found giving its buzzy call at the nursery in KGNP, Bharatpur this species became relatively common in the foothills with several seen, or more often heard, each day in and around Corbett NP

Slaty-blue Flycatcher *Ficedula tricolor tricolor* (3:15)

Locally quite common in the foothills, particularly prominent around Sat Tal where at least six were found

Small Niltava *Niltava macgrigoriae* (2:15)

One seen briefly at Corbett NP was followed by at three more obliging individuals at Sat Tal

Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara* (4:15)

Seen frequently in the foothills from Kumeria and Corbett NP to the more wooded areas below Naini Tal

Blue-throated Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides* (1:15)

One seen by Russell at Naini Tal was unseasonal

Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis* (6:15)

A wintering bird at KGNP, Bharatpur was seen on a couple of occasions and small numbers were present in and around Corbett NP

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* (4:15)

A handful were found at Okhla, KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha

Orange-flanked Bush Robin *Tarsiger cyanurus* (3:15)

This delightful species was seen in small numbers in most wooded settings in and around Naini Tal

Golden Bush Robin *Tarsiger chrysaeus* (1:15)

A superb and obliging male was a prized find in bushes behind the tea stalls at Sat Tal, a new bird for our guide, Manoj, and just rewards for his tireless efforts on our behalf

Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis* (8:15)

Small numbers were found throughout the lowlands and more sparingly in the foothills where it was absent at the highest altitudes

Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulica* (4:15)

Quite common in the lowlands but absent in the foothills

Blue-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus* (4:15)

After the first at the surprisingly location of Corbett NP this species was a very regular sight in and around Naini Tal

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros rufiventris* (4:15)

Wintering birds were at a range of sites in the lowlands, including the garden of the Laxmi Vilas Palace, Bharatpur, but apart from one at Ramnagar none were recorded in the foothills. All of the males examined showed the black mantles of the race *rufiventris*

Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis* (3:15)

Quite common in and around Naini Tal where five or six were seen each day

White-capped Water Redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* (8:15)

This very attractive species was present in good numbers on most streams and stony rivers in the foothills

Plumbeous Water Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* (7:15)

Status and distribution very much as the preceding species but if anything marginally commoner

Little Forktail *Enicurus scouleri* (1:15)

One showed very well on the River Kosi near the Quality Inn, Kumeria

Slaty-backed Forktail *Enicurus schistaceus* (1:15)

After one was glimpsed, two were eventually tracked down along the stream in the Mangoli Valley

Spotted Forktail *Enicurus maculatus maculates* (3:15)

Very good numbers were found in and around Naini Tal with at least ten different individuals seen at four different sites

Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis* (1:15)

After quite a long search we eventually located at least four of these very rare and little known birds in the grasslands west of Dhikala, Corbett NP; the only known regular wintering area of this species. Two females, an immature male and an adult male were seen

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus (maurus group)* (5:15)

Generally small numbers were encountered at a range of altitudes between KGNP, Bharatpur and Sat Tal; particularly numerous in the grasslands of Corbett NP where at least 20 were seen while we were looking for Hodgson's Bushchats. Four subtly distinct races occur in India but all belong to the eastern group of subspecies that some authorities split as 'Eastern' or 'Siberian' Stonechat *S. maurus*

Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata bicolor* (5:15)

Small numbers were seen most days in the lowlands after the first at Okhla

Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferrea* (7:15)

Only seen in the foothills where a handful were found each day except when at the highest altitudes at Naini Tal

Brown Rock Chat *Cercomela fusca* (4:15)

Small numbers were seen in more arid parts of the plains, including a pair in residence at the Laxmi Vilas Palace, Bharatpur; in the foothills the only record came from Ramnagar

Brahminy Starling *Sturnus pagodarum* (7:15)

This superb species was present in small numbers throughout the lowlands but was absent in the foothills

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (1:15)

About 15 were present at KGNP, Bharatpur but despite being a good local rarity did not receive much attention !

Asian Pied Starling *Sturnus contra* (8:15)

Common in the lowlands, normally in the vicinity of water, but scarcer in the foothills where it was absent at higher elevations around Naini Tal

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis tristis* (15:15)

Ubiquitous, one of only two species seen on every day during the tour

Bank Myna *Acridotheres ginginianus* (4:15)

Rather localised, occasionally the dominant myna in villages in the lowlands but generally scarce and greatly outnumbered by Common Mynas, absent in the foothills

Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus fuscus* (3:10)

About ten that associated with Common Mynas around the Dhikala compound at Corbett NP (a regular location for this species) were the only ones seen

Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *Sitta castanea* (probably subspecies *almorae*) (5:15)

Small numbers were found at and around Corbett NP, where a couple were present in most mixed species feeding flocks, and at lower elevations around Naini Tal

White-tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis* (2:15)

Quite common around Naini Tal where a handful were seen each day; appeared to replace the previous species at higher elevations

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis* (5:15)

Small numbers were found at several sites in the lower foothills after the first near Kumeria

Bar-tailed Treecreeper *Certhia himalayana* (3:15)

Fairly common at and around Naini Tal, an unidentified treecreeper at Corbett NP was probably also this species

Spot-winged Tit *Parus melanolophus* (3:15)

Common in and around Naini Tal

Great Tit *Parus major* (*cinereus* group of subspecies) (7:15)

Seen frequently in small numbers in the foothills but not at higher elevations near Naini Tal where it was replaced by the next species

Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus* (3:15)

Common at and around Naini Tal

Black-lored Tit *Parus xanthogenys* (5:15)

After a couple of fleetingly birds near Corbett NP this striking species was regularly seen in and around Naini Tal

Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus* (3:15)

This lovely little bird was a common member of mixed feeding flocks in and around Naini Tal

Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola* (7:15)

By far the commonest hirundine seen with large numbers over many wetlands in the lowlands and larger rivers in the lower foothills

Eurasian Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris* (1:15)

Up to 20 were found over Kumeria as we had lunch on the lawn of the Quality Inn

Dusky Crag Martin *Hirundo concolor* (2:15)

A couple at Bund Baretha were followed by a small group over the River Kosi at Ramnagar

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (5:15)

Small numbers over wetlands in the lowlands were followed by a few at larger rivers in the lower foothills

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* (4:15)

A handful at Bund Baretha were followed by small numbers at a couple of sites in the lower foothills

Nepal House Martin *Delichon nipalensis* (2:15)

A handful over Kumeria were followed by a large flock containing several hundred birds over the Mangoli Valley

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* (1:15)

Two or three in the High Fields at Naini Tal were notable

Black-crested Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus flaviventris* (3:15)

At least ten were seen in and around Corbett NP

Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* (4:15)

Scarce, only present in the lower foothills and immediately adjacent plains where small numbers were mixed in with Himalayan Bulbuls

White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis* (4:15)

Seen in small numbers most days while we were on the plain. This species was formerly regarded as conspecific with the next species

Himalayan Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys* (8:15)

Only present in the foothills where it was very common and widespread.

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* (15:15)

Very common and widespread throughout. Many (probably too many) races have been described but the birds we saw fell into two clear categories with individuals in the foothills lacking the sharply demarcated black throat of birds in the plains. Along with Common Myna this was the only species seen every day

Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala* (3:15)

Quite common at Corbett NP and a conspicuous member of most feeding flocks that came our way there

Mountain Bulbul *Hypsipetes mcclllandii* (1:15)

At least four of these striking bulbuls were found at the Mangoli Valley

Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus psaroides* (2:15)

About ten were in treetops during a drinks stop *en route* from Lalkuan to Ramnagar, several were present at Sat Tal

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* (1:15)

A couple were heard and one briefly seen in the extensive grasslands west of Dhikala, Corbett NP

Bright-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis tytleri* (1:15)

One was glimpsed briefly and a couple of others were heard west of Dhikala, Corbett NP

Grey-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii* (5:15)

Restless flocks containing up to 15 individuals were found near Kumeria, Dhikala and at Sat Tal

Jungle Prinia *Prinia sylvatica* (1:15)

One was at the Ganges River crossing on Highway 24

[Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia flaviventris*]

Heard but not seen at Okhla Island

Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis* (3:15)

A couple were seen in hotel gardens at Bharatpur and Agra and one was at Ramnagar

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata inornata* (5:15)

Small numbers were encountered each day in the lowlands with another recorded at Corbett NP

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus* (10:15)

Very widespread, birds were recorded throughout the lowlands and at all but the very highest elevations in the foothills

Aberrant Bush Warbler *Cettia flavolivacea*

Quite common on the scrubby embankment below Dhikala compound, Corbett NP but more often heard than seen

Grey-sided Bush Warbler *Cettia brunnifrons* (1:15)

One showed briefly at the entrance to the Mangoli Valley before flying into deep cover

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (4:15)

Several were seen, and others heard, in the lowlands at KGNP, Bharatpur and Bund Baretha

Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* (2:15)

Distribution and numbers were very similar to the preceding species though a couple at KGNP, Bharatpur and near Bund Baretha gave especially good views

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* (8:15)

Widespread in small numbers with birds recorded at all elevations except the highest hills near Naini Tal

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* (5:15)

Quite numerous in parts of the lowlands but uncommon at KGNP, Bharatpur. In the foothills one was at Sat Tal. Most birds showed the expected brown and whitish appearance of *tristis* ('Siberian' Chiffchaff), but a couple showed greyer toned mantles contrasting with bright green wing and tail fringes, characteristics normally associated with the more westerly '*fulvescens*'

Smoky Warbler *Phylloscopus fulgiventor* (2:15)

Singles were seen on each of our full day visits to KGNP, Bharatpur

Sulphur-bellied Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus* (1:15)

Two or three showed very well on and around the abandoned summer palace at Bund Baretha

Buff-barred Warbler *Phylloscopus pulcher* (3:15)

Only seen at and around Naini Tal where it was encountered quite frequently

Lemon-rumped Warbler *Phylloscopus chloronatus* (7:15)

Widespread in the foothills with birds seen from Kumeria to the highest elevations at Naini Tal

Brook's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus subviridis* (1:15)

One was seen fairly well while calling from the crown of a tall *Acacia* at Bharatpur, a couple more were heard more distantly nearby

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* (8:15)

Common and widespread in the lowlands but scarce in the lower foothills and absent around Naini Tal

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* (5:15)

Small numbers were in the lowlands at KGNP, Bharatpur but this became a common species in the lower foothills before disappearing again at higher elevations

Whistler's Warbler *Seicercus whistleri* (1:15)

There is still some uncertainty about the distribution of the various taxa that previously formed one widespread species, Golden-spectacled Warbler *S. burkii*. A few birds seen near Kumeria best fitted the published description of Whistler's Warbler which, according to Manoj Sharma, our guide, is the only member of the complex to have been heard singing in that area

Grey-hooded Warbler *Seicercus xanthoschistos* (8:15)

Common in the foothills where it was often a dominant presence in mixed feeding flocks

White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis* (5:15)

First encountered at Corbett NP, this species then became a regular, if rather unpredictable sight in and around Naini Tal where some large flocks were found

White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus* (2:15)

Only seen at Mohin, near Kumeria, where a couple of small flocks were glimpsed, others were heard

Striated Laughingthrush *Garrulax striatus* (2:15)

Two at the Mangoli Valley were followed by one at Sat Tal

Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Garrulax rufogularis* (2:15)

One gave excellent views in the Mangoli Valley and another was seen more distantly above Sat Tal the next day

Streaked Laughingthrush *Garrulax lineus* (1:15)

Common around Naini Tal where it was particularly associated with human habitation

Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *Garrulax erythrocephalus erythrocephalus* (1:15)

Only seen at the Mangoli Valley where a flock of ten showed well

Puff-throated Babbler *Pellorneum ruficeps* (1:15)

A pair showed very well in a small ravine near Kumeria

Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrogeus* (7:15)

After the first at Kumeria further birds were seen at the entrance to the Mangoli Valley, near the Claridges Naini Retreat and at the Eureka Forbes Fields above Sat Tal. Several more were heard

Scaly-breasted Wren-babbler *Pnoepyga albiventer* (1:15)

One was found at the Mangoli Valley, although silent it showed the neat pale spotting on the head and wings characteristic of this species.

Black-chinned Babbler *Stachyris pyrrhops* (1:15)

After a couple of rather brief sightings around Kumeria about five showed rather better at the Mangoli Valley and at Sat Tal

Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense* (1:15)

A group of five were seen at Bharatpur

Common Babbler *Turdoides caudatus* (2:15)

A couple at Okhla Island were followed by one between Mathura and Bharatpur

Striated Babbler *Turdoides earlei* (2:15)

One or two were found on Okhla Island, a regular location for this often hard to come by species

Large Grey Babbler *Turdoides malcolmi* (5:15)

After several brief views in the lowlands a small flock posed well near Kumeria

Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus sindianus* &/or *striatus* (11:15)

Common and widespread apart from at the higher elevations around Naini Tal

Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea* (1:15)

A flock of 15 near Sat Tal showed very well and were much appreciated

Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata* (6:15)

Two in the garden of the Quality Inn, Kumeria were at an unusually low altitude; regularly seen in and around Naini Tal

Whiskered Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis* (1:15)

A rather uncooperative individual was glimpsed by a few people in Corbett NP

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* (7:15)

Common in the lowlands but much scarcer in the foothills. The racial identification of birds at sites such as KGNP, Bharatpur is unclear. Historically, these have been assumed to be mainly the Siberian breeding race *blythi* but some of the birds there are rather pale and give churring tit-like calls, features more associated with the often neglected form *halimodendri* that breeds in the arid regions of Central Asia. A few darker-headed and more sturdy looking birds with virtually no brown wing fringes or brown tones on the mantle may have been of the race *althaea* ('Humes' Lesser Whitethroat)

Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark *Eremopterix grisea* (1:15)

Four were found at a river crossing just east of Ramnagar

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* (1:15)

One on the bank of the Ganges near Highway 24 was, surprisingly, the only one seen

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula* (3:15)

A couple were heard singing and one briefly glimpsed at KGNP, Bharatpur but about 20 showed well near the Ramganga Reservoir shore at Corbett NP

Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* (5:15)

Fairly common in the lowlands.

Green-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga nipalensis* (1:15)

A male was seen briefly along the trail below the dam at Sat Tal

Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja* (2:15)

A pair were in residence in the garden of the Quality Inn Kumeria with several more nearby

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* (*indica* group) (12:15)

Fairly common in most urban settings and in some more rural contexts

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* (1:15)

At least two were present at Okhla Island but large flocks of unidentified sparrows/ weavers flying over to roost there may have contained several more

Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans* (2:15)

Small numbers were between Naini Tal and the Mangoli Valley but at least 100 were in the Eureka Forbes fields above Sat Tal

Chestnut-shouldered Petronia *Petronia xanthocollis* (2:15)

Present in small numbers at KGNP, Bharatpur but common at the summer palace above Bund Baretha

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* (5:15)

Locally common at Okhla and Bund Baretha but otherwise thinly spread. The most frequently encountered race was *personata* (sometimes split as 'Masked' Wagtail), followed by *alba/dukhenensis* and *leucopsis*. All three races were present side by side at Okhla.

White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderasensis* (6:15)

Scarce on the plain but regularly seen along larger rivers in the lower foothills

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* (8:15)

Common at Okhla where over a hundred were seen but otherwise present in small numbers at a range of wetter sites

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* (3:15)

Fairly common at Okhla but otherwise scarce. All but one of the males seen, a *thunbergi*-type ('Grey-headed') at the Ganges River crossing on Highway 24, appeared to be of the race *beema* ('Sykes's' Wagtail)

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (4:15)

Present in very small numbers at several streams and rivers in the foothills

Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus* (5:15)

All of the 15 or so large pipits in the lowlands that allowed close scrutiny, or calls to be heard, were this species, a couple more were seen in the foothills at Corbett NP

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* (1:15)

The only one seen was at Corbett NP, though paler Paddyfield Pipits with good loreal lines temporarily masqueraded as this species on a couple of occasions

Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* (1:15)

One was seen calling in flight at Corbett NP

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni hodgsoni* (10:15)

Small numbers were found at KGNP, Bharatpur, in and around Corbett NP and at the Mangoli Valley and Sat Tal. All of those seen well showed the quite prominently streaked mantles of the Himalayan race *hodgsoni*

Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseus* (1:15)

Two pipits flying over Okhla Island calling were probably this species but a loose group of at least four small pipits on the shoreline of Ramganga Reservoir west of Dhikala, Corbett NP, definitely were

Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophia* (2:15)

Up to five or six of these very attractive birds were found in the Eureka Forbes fields above Sat Tal and another was seen briefly in the High Fields area of Naini Tal

Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis* (1:15)

At least five shared the Eureka Forbes fields with the previous species and showed equally well

Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* (1:15)

Several small flocks were seen between Bharatpur and Bund Baretha

Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava* (2:15)

A small flock between Bharatpur and Bund Baretha were very fidgety and refused to settle for long, a similarly flighty flock was in the grassland west of Dhikala, Corbett NP

Indian Silverbill *Lonchura malabarica* (2:15)

Small groups were seen in more arid parts of KGNP, Bharatpur on a couple of occasions

Fire-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus* (1:15)

A flock of seven were watched in roadside bushes between Naini Tal and the Mangoli Valley

Yellow-breasted Greenfinch *Carduelis spinoides* (2:15)

Four at the Mangoli Valley were followed by a couple near Sat Tal

Dark-breasted Rosefinch *Carpodacus nipalensis* (2:15)

Two males showed superbly well near the Claridges Naini Retreat but a female there was more elusive

Pink-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus rodochrous* (2:15)

Three females near the Mangoli Valley were followed by a similar number of males in treetops near the Claridges Naini Retreat

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* (1:15) At least two were at Bund Baretha and a handful were at Sat Tal

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* (2:15) Up to six were between Naini Tal and the Mangoli Valley and a couple were in the High Fields at Naini Tal

White-capped Bunting *Emberiza stewarti* (1:15) At least seven were present above Bund Baretha with another seen briefly near Sat Tal

Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps* (1:15) About 15, including at least six males, were associating with Baya Weavers between Bharatpur and Bund Baretha

Mammals

Rhesus Macaque *Macca mulatta* (12:15)

Fairly common and widespread

Hanuman (or Common or Grey) Langur *Presbytis entellus* (9:15)

Fairly common and widespread, commoner in heavy woodland than the previous species

Tiger *Panthera tigris tigris* (1:15)

A female gave prolonged views east of Dhikala, at one point crossing the road between our two jeeps parked 25 metres apart. Later in the day another was viewed much more distantly from Dhikala watchtower

Grey (or Common) Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii* (2:15)

Singles were seen at Okhla and KGNP, Bharatpur

Small Indian Mongoose *Herpestes auropuntuatus* (1:15)

One was seen at KGNP, Bharatpur

Common (or Golden) Jackal *Canis aureus* (6:15)

Seen regularly at both KGNP, Bharatpur and Corbett NP

Yellow-throated Marten *Martes flavigula* (2:15)

This superb species was seen well at Corbett NP with three more were watched for several minutes on the far side of a ravine above Sat Tal

Indian Fruit Bat (or Indian Flying Fox) *Pteropus giganteus* (1:15)

Several were seen roosting near Bund Baretha

Short-nosed Fruit Bat *Cynopterus sphinx* (2:15)

Several of these small fruit bats were roosting under palm fronds at the nursery in KGNP, Bharatpur

[Bat sp.]

Small bats were seen at the Mughal Sheraton in Agra and over the Dhikala compound at Corbett NP but their identity is not known

(Northern) Five-striped Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii* (7:15)

Abundant in many parkland settings in the lowlands

Asian (or Indian) Elephant *Elephas maximus* (3:15)

Up to 34 were on show in the extensive grassland below Dhikala, Corbett NP. This group apparently consisted of members of two herds from either side of the valley, several youngsters were present, along with a couple of aloof tusked. One was seen foraging in roadside jungle as we were leaving the park.

Nilgai (or Blue Bull or Indian Antelope) *Boselaphus tragocamelus* (3:15)

Present in good numbers at KGNP, Bharatpur

Hog Deer *Cervus porcinus* (2:15)

Only seen at Corbett NP where it was uncommon and rather wary

Sambar *Cervus unicolor* (6:15)

Fairly numerous at KGNP, Bharatpur and common at Corbett NP

Chital (or Spotted Deer) *Cervus axis* (7:15)

Fairly numerous at KGNP, Bharatpur and common at Corbett NP

Indian Muntjac *Muntiacus muntjac* (4:15)

Small numbers were found in and around Corbett NP

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* (4:15)

Small numbers at KGNP, Bharatpur were followed by regular sightings at Corbett NP

Gangetic (or Ganges River) Dolphin *Platanista gangetica* (1:15)

Probably two different groups at the Ganges river crossing on Highway 24, at least four animals seemed to be present but there may have been several more

Common Goral *Nemorhaedus goral* (1:15)

One was seen atop a large crag near Naini Tal

Other Fauna

Indian (or Gangetic) Mud Turtle *Lissemys punctata* (4:15)

What was believed to be this species was seen at KGNP, Bharatpur, Corbett and at the Ganges River crossing

[Turtle sp]

Unidentified turtles/ terrapins were quite common at KGNP, Bharatpur and Corbett NP

Gharial *Gavialis gangeticus* (2:15)

A handful at Corbett NP were the result of the successful reintroduction programme there

Marsh Mugger *Crocodylus palustris* (3:15)

Several were seen sunbathing on riverbanks and lake shores at Corbett NPA big impressive crocodile sunning on the banks of the Ramganga River in Corbett and in the bigger lakes at Ranthambhor

Indian Rock Python *Python molurus* (1:15)

A nose at the mouth of a hole was the only sighting at a rather cool KGNP, Bharatpur