

The National Parks of Southern India

Naturetrek Tour Report

15 November – 3 December 2014



Leopard



Nilgiri Tahr



Rusty-tailed Flycatcher?



Black-chinned Laughingthrush

Report compiled by Dilan Mandanna



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Tour Participants: Dilan Mandanna (leader) and three clients

Day 1

Saturday 15th November

The tour started with overnight flights from the UK to India

Day 2

Sunday 16th November

Tour members arrived on time at Bangalore airport where we met Dilan. After introductions we went to our hotel where we had lunch.

After lunch we went to Lalbagh Botanical Garden in Bangalore. We saw many butterflies such as Mottled Emigrant, Danaid Eggfly and Lemon Pansy. At the lakeside we spent some time birdwatching and saw several egrets together with Grey Heron, Common Coot and Purple Swamphen. We also spotted some raptors including Brahminy Kite and Black Kite. After the visit we returned to the hotel and in the evening we planned for our next day.

Day 3

Monday 17th November

Today we headed for Mysore. En route we visited Ramanagara hill where we saw an Indian Vulture sitting on a cliff and also we also spotted many other birds including Plain Prinia, Coppersmith Bar-bet, Common Moorhen and Scaly-breasted Munia.

We reached Mysore at 12.30pm and after lunch we were accompanied by a local guide, Mr. Deva-raj. We went to the Palace and Mr Devaraj explained the story behind each beautiful painting and amazing carving on the wooden ceilings and doors. We then went to Chamundi hill and had a short walk through a small patch of forest to the Nandi temple. It was a clear evening and we had a good view of Mysore city. Bird sightings included Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Black Drongo, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Common Iora and Indian Blue Robin.

After the visit we returned to our hotel. Later we gathered in the reception lobby and completed our daily checklist before having dinner.

Day 4

Tuesday 18th November

Over breakfast in the restaurant we had a long discussion about a bird spotted in the hotel garden and eventually we realized it was an Asian Brown Flycatcher!

After breakfast we set off for Kabini. We stopped at a few places en route. We spent some time near the lakes and saw birds including Spot-billed Pelican, Asian Openbill, Purple Heron, Bronze-winged and Peasant-tailed Jacanas and Black-crowned Night Heron. Roger noticed two raptors and through the spotting scope they were identified as Marsh Harriers. Also spotted were Common Coot, Cotton Pigmy-goose, and Black and Red-naped Ibis.

We checked in at Kabini River Lodge by noon and were briefed about the place and activities over the next few days. Later we went on a jeep safari and saw a tusker (Elephant) grazing near the main road. As we moved inside the forest we encountered many more Elephants plus Spotted Deer, Common Langur and Gaur. Birds seen

included Streak-throated Woodpecker, Crested Hawk Eagle, Alexandrine and Plum-headed Parakeets, Greater Adjutant, Green Imperial Pigeon and Yellow-footed Green Pigeon. On our way back we spotted a Tiger walking on the road just in front of our jeep. We followed it for about 300 metres before it disappeared into the forest.

Back at the resort we watched wildlife documentary on Nagarhole National Park and did our species checklist for the day.

Day 5

Wednesday 19th November

On a cloudy morning we took a different safari route and went towards 'back water' where we saw Gaur and Spotted Deer grazing on roadside. Bird sightings included Grey Heron, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Painted Stork, and Common and Wood Sandpipers. We also saw some raptors like Crested Serpent Eagle, Greater Spotted Eagle and Osprey. Moving on we spotted a male leopard walking on the road and we got some good photographs.

After breakfast we had a short walk around the resort area and enjoyed seeing many butterflies like Common Lascar, Common Gull, Common Sailor, Dark Blue Tiger and Chocolate Pansy. We also spotted a male Paradise Flycatcher and had good view of Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Western Crowned Warbler and Coppersmith Barbet.

Later, under a clear sky, we had a boat safari. We started by seeing many cormorants: Little, Indian and Great. As we moved closer to the forest we noticed a big tusker beside the water. We also saw many Wild Boar, Spotted Deer and Sambar Deer, and had good bird sightings too. We took photographs of Darters and cormorants sitting on dry branches in the sunset and enjoyed our boat ride back.

Day 6

Thursday 20th November

It was a clear morning and good weather for birding! We noticed many birds perched on dry branches which gave us clear views: birds like Green Imperial Pigeon, Malabar Parakeet and Malabar Barbet. We heard White-bellied Woodpecker calling and it took some time to locate it! We also noticed a Black Baza which was a rare sighting in this location, and further on we saw one more and everyone had a good view. As we took a different return route we were lucky enough to see a pack of Wild Dogs by the roadside and we spent some time taking photograph of them. We also spotted Jungle Owlet on our way back.

Later, we went on another jeep safari to back water side and saw different bird species.

Day 7

Friday 21st November

It was our last jeep safari at Kabini and we saw a Crested Hawk Eagle sitting on a branch having a Monitor Lizard for breakfast. On the drive we spotted Malabar Parakeet, Hill Myna, Rufous Treepie and White-rumped Shama.

We said goodbye to Kabini River Lodge and headed towards Ooty. As we passed Bandipur National Park we saw a huge Tusker by the roadside, and many Bonnet Macaques and Common Langurs. We reached Ooty at 3.30pm and went on a short walk near the resort. We had good views of a few new birds such as Nilgiri Flycatcher, Booted Warbler, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher and Oriental White-eye. We also saw a small troop of Western Ghats, an endemic mammal, Nilgiri, and Langurs on a tree.

That evening at the restaurant we shared our notes on the day's sightings.

Day 8

Saturday 22nd November

We started our day by visiting Doddabetta which is the highest peak in Ooty. We heard the call of Nilgiri Laughingthrush and we all had very good views of two pairs and took good photographs of them too. Next we went to the Botanical Garden where we could see the Ooty landscape. We spent some time looking for birds and saw Square-tailed Bulbul feeding, and Brown-breasted and Black-and-orange Flycatchers on a small tree: we took a few pictures too.

After lunch went to a different patch of forest in search of Nilgiri Blue Robin and Wood Pigeon. We saw a big troop of Nilgiri Langurs and heard Nilgiri Blue Robin calling but we just had a glimpse of it. As it was a cloudy evening we returned to the lodge.

Day 9

Sunday 23rd November

It was a cloudy morning as we went in search of Nilgiri Blue Robin on our final try! We saw a Black-and-orange Flycatcher as we entered the forest, and then we heard the call of Nilgiri Blue Robin which we located perched on a small tree and everyone had good views.

We left Ooty at 9.30am and started going towards Topslip. It was a scenic drive and we reached Banyan Tree Homestay by lunch time. In the afternoon we went to a place where we could walk along the canal. We spotted many Yellow-billed Babblers, and other birds like Grey-breasted Pinia and Indian Bushlark. The bird activity was good and we had superb views of a Blue-bearded Bee-eater feeding on a tree branch.

Back at the homestay we gathered to do our checklist before enjoying local traditional homemade delicious food for our dinner.

Day 10

Monday 24th November

Today we went to Topslip with packed lunches. After getting trekking permits we were accompanied by a forest guard and followed him into the forest. Our first stop was to see a pair of White-cheeked Barbet. We also saw a Black Eagle flying through the canopy and everyone had a good view of it. We reached a place where we could hear quite a few bird sounds. There was a ficus tree in fruit with quite a few birds feeding including Malabar Barbet, Lesser Yellowthroat, Flame-throated Bulbul and Yellow-throated Bulbul. We also saw Jungle Striped Squirrel and Dusky Striped Squirrel on this walk.

After lunch we went to a medicinal plant garden and museum where we learned about different medicinal plants and their uses. We then spent the afternoon walking in the forest and encountered much wildlife including a group of Wild Boars with piglets. We notice some bird activity and saw Orange Minivet and Chestnut Starling. On our way back we took different path and saw birds like Malabar Parakeet, Vernal Hanging Parrot and Indian Scimitar Babbler. We got back to the homestay at 5.30pm.

Day 11

Tuesday 25th November

We left Banyan Tree Homestay after breakfast and reached Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary at 10.30am. Along with a forest worker, we went on a short walk beside the river and found a Brown Fish Owl roosting on a tree branch and many butterflies.

We reached Munnar by lunch-time. After lunch went to a nearby small forest and spotted Kerala Laughingthrush, Nilgiri Wood Pigeon and Malabar Whistling Thrush.

Day 12

Wednesday 26th November

After an early breakfast we left the hotel at 7.30am and reached Rajamalai Checkpost where we caught the first bus to Eravikulam National park. It was a clear day and as we walked we heard the call of White-bellied Blue Robin. We found it perched on an open branch and everyone had a good look at the bird. We also noticed Nilgiri Tahrs were on the cliffs: they started coming down and we got a close at them and took some photographs. We all spotted a Booted Eagle as it flew over our heads.

We went to a different area of the forest after lunch where we saw many Hill Swallows flying in the sky. We took a short walk through the forest and saw Greenish Warbler and Canary Flycatcher. We heard Wynaad Laughingthrush calling and caught a glimpse as they flew across the road. We also noticed mixed flocks which included Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Orange Minivet and Bronzed Drongo.

Day 13

Thursday 27th November

Today we left Munnar and headed towards Periyar. We stopped at a spot where we could view the nice valley, and spent some time looking for birds. We had a good view of Black Eagle flying over the forest canopy and saw a small raptor land on a tree: with the help of a spotting scope we identified it as a Himalayan Buzzard.

We checked in at Aranya Nivas and then had some time for lunch and a rest. At 3pm we met for a walk around the campus. We noticed a mixed flock of birds actively feeding in a big tree and spotted quite a few birds like Malabar Woodshrike, Racket-tailed Drongo, Asian Fairy Bluebird and Malabar Barbet. As it was dark and had started to drizzle we returned to the hotel.

Day 14

Friday 28th November

Today started cloudy and drizzly. Accompanied by a forest guide Mr. Rajkumar and set off on a walk along a forest road. We spotted a few birds including Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Great Tit, Common Flameback and Bronzed Drongo. We also saw some Sambar Deer, and as we continued our walk we saw a Forest Wagtail on the forest floor.

Further on we heard a Great Hornbill calling. We went to look for it and our guide found the bird but we could only just see a bit of it before it took off and we got a better view. Moving on, we found a spot where we spent some time birdwatching and saw quite a few species including Yellow-browed Bulbul, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Brown Shrike, Southern Coucal, and Plum-headed and Malabar Parakeets.

Whilst having lunch we spotted a Rusty-tailed Flycatcher and Bonnet Macaques which we enjoyed watching. The weather was getting better as we gathered for our afternoon walk. We used a bam-boo raft to cross the river and

as we entered the forest we saw Grey Junglefowl and Malabar Giant Squirrel. Further on we saw a White-bellied Blue Flycatcher and everyone had a good view of it. We also spotted Malabar Trogon, White-bellied Treepie and Southern Hill Myna. We saw a raptor flying and it perched on a branch: it was a Besra with a Jungle Striped Squirrel. On our way back our guide located a roosting Ceylon Frogmouth and we all had good, close views of it. The ground was muddy and wet and at one spot we saw a male and female White-bellied Flycatcher taking a bath in a puddle of water. We returned to the hotel around 5.30pm.

Day 15

Saturday 29th November

Today we went on a morning walk accompanied by a local guide. We reached an open place where we could see lots of bird activity and spent some time watching a variety of birds like White-bellied Treepie, Malabar Parakeet, Rufous Woodpecker, Large Woodshrike, Jungle Owlet and Lesser Yellownap. It was a good walk as we encountered lots of mixed hunting flocks.

In the afternoon we went on a boat ride. It was raining heavily but thankfully the boat had a covered top. We spotted quite a few birds on our ride including Ashy Woodswallow, Brown Fish Owl, Great Cormorant; and mammals like Sambar Deer, Wild Boar, and Nilgiri Langur.

Day 16

Sunday 30th November

We left Periyar after breakfast and headed towards Alleppy. We stopped at a few places and new birds included terns. We reached the Spice Routes boathouse at 12.30pm and the manager briefed us about our programme. As the excursion started we saw birds like Blue-tailed Bee-eater and Brahminy Kite, and as the boat moved closer to the rice fields we saw lots of egrets and herons. We had a stop for lunch and then the boat trip continued and we enjoyed our ride till evening.

Day 17

Monday 1st December

We left Alleppy after breakfast. After stopping for lunch we went to Thattekad Bird Sanctuary where we met local guide Mr. Sanu. He took us to the forest where he showed us a Frogmouth roosting place. Male and female were sitting together and we all had good views. We also saw Grey-breasted Green Pigeon, White-cheeked Barbet and Malabar Barbet on a fruiting tree. We also had a good sighting of Indian Pitta too! On our way back we visited one more area and our guide showed us a roosting Indian Scops Owl. After that we saw many Crested Treeswifts perched on dry branches.

We reached Kochi by 7.30pm and after freshening up, we gathered in the restaurant and added new species to our checklist.

Day 18

Tuesday 2nd December

Today we went sight-seeing with local guide Mr. Alex to Kochi Palace, Dutch Palace and the Spice Market. Later we went to the beach and spent some time birdwatching. We had a boat ride and enjoyed seeing a few new birds like Brown-headed Gull, Little Tern and Little Crested Tern. We also saw the fishing harbour and the Chinese fishing nets.

In the evening we went to a Kathakali show which is a traditional dance in Kerala. We watched it for an hour before returning to the hotel for a delicious dinner.

Day 19

Wednesday 3rd December

We left the hotel early in the morning and travelled to Kochi airport. It was time to say goodbye and thanks to Dilan. It had been a memorable trip with an excellent and very friendly group.

Group members caught their flight back to the UK and another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

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