

Goa, India

8–23 January 2005

Participants:

Geoff and Sheila Barlow

John Deppman

Wayne Geater

Mike Richardson



Leaders:

James P. Smith

Pramod Madkaikar

Greater Flameback

Day 1: After meeting in the late afternoon at Gatwick South Terminal, we boarded our direct evening flight to Goa. There were no delays and we were relieved to take off more or less on time.

Day 2: We landed at Dabolim airport in Goa at 08.45 hrs local time and then passed through immigration, customs and the chaos of baggage claim before meeting our local ground agent and boarding the coach to Baga. By the time we reached the Bier Mar Hotel, we'd noted out first classically Indian roadside birds with Cattle Egret, Indian Pond-heron, Brahminy Kite and the black-eared form of Black Kite. All of these birds were to become almost daily fare over the next two weeks. After checking into our rooms we met for lunch at the Bierra Mar's outdoor restaurant, which happens to overlook the Baga fields, one of the better-known birding hotspots in Goa. After a relaxing lunch and a short rest we arranged to meet later by the pool for some birding. We were soon into our first really good birds of the tour, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters on the wires over the fields, Greater Coucal, and a bevy of small brown jobs that included some very good species; Bluethroat, Blyth's Reed-warbler, Paddyfield and Booted Warblers. Large flocks of Scaly-breasted and White-rumped Munias were making good use of the wires over the fields were along with some Chestnut-tailed Starlings. We were later greeted by Pramod, who was to be our local guide for the next two weeks and then headed out into the Baga fields on foot. The place was full of birds. Richard's and Paddyfield Pipits called as they flew up in front of our group, and Malabar Larks gave good views. Black and Brahminy Kites and Western Marsh-harriers quartered the fields and even a Shikra put in an appearance. Common species such as Red-wattled Lapwing, Green and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, Black Drongo, White-breasted Kingfisher, Jungle Myna, Rose-coloured Starling, Red-rumped Swallow and numerous Pied and Siberian Stonechats provided a fine backdrop to our first warm afternoon of Indian birding. Less expected was a European Roller (our only one of the entire tour) found on wires with several Indian Rollers close by for comparison. Nearby, a vegetated pool held three Greater Painted-snipe, an especially attractive species and a highlight for many visiting birders. The trip was off to an excellent start! As we strolled back to the hotel, Little Swifts and Asian Palm-swifts cruised over the fields at dusk. And, as we sipped cool drinks at supper, an enterprising birder put a spotlight on a calling Spotted Owlet right above the restaurant bringing a fine first day to a close.

Day 3: We met before first light at 06:30, taking breakfast at the hotel and then met Pramod and our driver at 07:00 for the fairly short drive to Goa Velha. This wetland area held large numbers of Lesser Whistling-ducks, Garganey, and a handful of northern breeders such as Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler and Eurasian Teal. Pramod's sharp eyes picked out not one, not two but three

Spotted Owlets roosting in the tall palms behind us and Cotton Pygmy Geese and Bronze-winged Jacanas foraged amongst the vegetation in front. A Stork-billed Kingfisher showed well on wires above the marsh and a stroll through the village to some nearby rice fields produced Green Warbler, White-browed Bulbul and a Pale-billed Flowerpecker. The fields themselves were a little quiet but we still found a Common Snipe and a skulking Bluethroat. From here, we drove the short distance to Carambolin Lake, which was evidently loaded with birds as soon as we arrived. Indian Purple Swamphens were present in large numbers, and at least four Oriental Darters dried their wings in the warm sunshine with Little Cormorants being plentiful around the lake. A couple of Indian Cormorants were also present and it was a treat to find several Pheasant-tailed Jacanas. Across the road, an extensive area of rice fields supported Asian Openbills, Woolly-necked Storks, many Yellow Wagtails and a mixed selection of waders including Black-winged Stilt, Ruff, Common Greenshank and a couple of Pintail Snipe in a field of rough pasture. After such a productive morning, we escaped the heat for a while over lunch at a nearby restaurant. Although it was still hot, we were hungry for more birds and drove to a nearby small wood at Carambolin, which gave us shade and some very good birds, beginning with Black-rumped Flameback, several Eurasian Golden Orioles and Oriental Magpie Robin. After a few minutes, Pramod located two Brown Hawk-owls at a favoured roost site, which gave us excellent daylight views. Further down the road, Red-whiskered and Red-vented Bulbuls both showed well and a fruiting tree gave us great looks at a couple of Coppersmith Barbets and Thick-billed Flowerpeckers. We were so absorbed in the barbets, that we almost missed stunning views of a male Loten's Sunbird feeding from flowers on the tree that was giving us our shade! With an extremely low tide, there was plenty of exposed mud harboring many waders on the mudflats though admittedly many of these were rather distant. However, by carefully picking through the waders were found plenty of Lesser Sandpipers and Kentish Plovers, Common Redshanks, Common Greenshanks, and a couple each of Marsh and Terek Sandpipers. We were so engrossed in these that it wasn't until Wayne noticed a pratincole just yards away that we turned around and changed our focus. There amongst the saltmarsh grasses were large numbers of Small Pratincoles and Little Stints. The camouflage of both species was so impressive that they could have easily been missed altogether. It wasn't until the whole flock flew and resettled that we realized over 300 Small Pratincoles had been resting just yards from our viewing point. As we returned towards the woodland, it was clear that some birds were enjoying the warm thermals and we had excellent passages of two very good birds – a Lesser Adjutant and the recently split (from Lesser Spotted) Indian Spotted Eagle cruising overhead. Our final session of the day came from an overlook at Carambolin fields where we had some really fine birds, including a ghostly male Pallid Harrier perhaps pursuing the distant flock of Greater Short-toed Larks, a stunning Black-shouldered Kite, Ashy Woodswallow, Chestnut-shouldered Petronia, several Long-tailed Shrikes and a Brown Shrike which turned out to be the only one of the entire trip. It had been a long and full first day and we reflected on our day over the log call and supper at the Bierra Mar Hotel.

Day 4: No peace for the wicked! Pramod, our local guide had us up early, meeting at 05:30 for the departure to Backwoods Camp. The journey was relatively traffic-free but somewhat foggy once we reached the upland forest areas. A Crested Serpent-eagle resting close to the road was the most notable bird en-route, but with tea and coffee waiting for us at Backwoods we didn't hang around, arriving at the camp at about 07:45. Our first sojourn into the forest gave us Pompadour Green-pigeon, White-rumped Shama, Yellow-browed Bulbul and Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike. There was, however, no sign of the hoped for Spot-bellied Eagle-owl. After a late but substantial breakfast, we headed up to Tambdisurla Temple, which proved to be a good move as it was evidently very birdy as soon as we entered the grounds. First, a Taiga Flycatcher showed well, rapidly followed the rare Blue-and-white Flycatcher, Malabar Whistling-thrush, Dark-fronted and Puff-throated Babbler, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, and the only Common Flameback of the tour and all this before we'd even reached the temple! Pramod was hopeful of seeing the rare Blue-eared Kingfisher in this area, as a single bird had spent most of the winter here. As we sat quietly by a largely empty riverbed our hearts sank, as upwards of 200 Russian tourists marched steadily down the trail in a line that just never seemed to finish. When we eventually waved bye-bye to the last tourist Pramod, who'd gone a little further upstream, whistled us over, he'd found the Blue-eared Kingfisher! We were all treated to excellent views as it perched above a small pool in the riverbed. That was a life bird for yours truly....and there was much rejoicing! The party wasn't over either. From the temple we had views of Crested Serpent-eagle and Oriental Honey-buzzard, and back down along the riverbed, excellent views of the rather scarce Brown-breasted Flycatcher, in fact two birds were found there. Tambdisurla temple had given us a top-notch morning and we returned to the camp for a hearty lunch, and a relax in the heat of the afternoon. By 15:45, the staff at Backwoods was feeding us again, this time tea, coffee and biscuits before we entered the woods once more. Pramod took us along different trails this time, one of which opened up onto the local river and here we sat for a while, enjoying the scenery and picking up some very nice birds, including Black-capped Kingfisher, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Streak-throated Swallow, Indian Swiftlet, White-cheeked Bulbul and a really-fine male Verditer Flycatcher. A little later we were overlooking some rice paddies amidst the woodland, which provided a decent horizon and we were rewarded with great flyover views of Malabar Pied Hornbills, Crested Treeswift and the typically zippy Vernal Hanging Parrots dashing over the treetops. Ashy Drongo, Blyth's Reed-warbler, Long-tailed Shrike and Grey Wagtail were all feeding in the area as well. Wayne's vigil during the mid-afternoon siesta time had given him Malabar Grey Hornbill, and a flyover Great Hornbill, so he'd managed to see all three possible hornbills in Goa in just one afternoon! At supper, Pramod picked out the distant calls of Brown Hawk-owl and Oriental Scops-owl and we settled down for a chilly night at Backwoods.

Day 5: The day began well, tea, coffee and biscuits at 06:45 immediately followed by decent views of an Indian Pitta feeding behind the Backwoods kitchen in the murky early morning light. This prized gem of any Goan trip was feeding together with

Nilgiri Blackbirds, Orange-headed Thrush and Oriental Magpie Robin. Another Indian Pitta was to follow, right at the beginning of our first walk out into the forest. Not bad for starters! Pramod led us on another beautiful woodland loop through mature forest adjacent to the camp. Woodpeckers featured with Brown-capped Pygmy, Rufous and Heart-spotted all being found. The female Spot-bellied Eagle-owl also lifted her head a little inside at the nest hole revealing her crown and ear tufts but not too much else, before promptly sitting back down! A little further along the track, Small Minivets and Malabar Grey Hornbills were found, the latter becoming a feature of the day with no less than 22 being seen. After breakfast (scrambled eggs on toast this time), we headed out towards a new raptor watch point at a small village not too far from Backwoods camp. We weren't disappointed, before we reached the watch point we had good views of a perched Black-shouldered Kite and on our arrival, a large raptor soaring over our station turned out to be a juvenile Rufous-bellied Eagle! After this, other species put on a great show, though some were distant, many appeared overhead or very close to our watch point. The raptors began to flow, with Crested Goshawk, Mountain Hawk-eagle, Bonelli's, Booted and Black Eagles all being added to our trip list. The same spot also gave us views of some difficult passerines with Crimson-fronted Barbet and a small party of the scarce Black-throated Munia being seen well by all in our group. Pride of place however, must go to a magnificent Great Hornbill (rare in Goa) with its bizarre slow-motion flight action as it careened across the sky above the forest. On the whole, it had been a wonderful morning and we headed back to camp for lunch, and of course, the all-important siesta. After our break, it was clear that Pramod had something special lined up for us. By taking an intricate network of tracks just outside the camp, we found ourselves staring into a bamboo thicket. And there, about 10 feet above the ground was a fantastic pair of Sri Lanka Frogmouths! One bird was reddish in tone, the other rather more grey, but both extremely weird-looking like a curious mix of Chuck-will's Widow and a scops-owl. Daytime views of Sri Lanka Frogmouth are few and far between and it was a real privilege to start our afternoon on such a high. A little later we birded an area called Sulha, which composed of an open, scrubby area close to an attractive river. By watching patiently in the shade, we were rewarded with good views of Plain Flowerpecker, Spangled Drongo, Coppersmith Barbet, over 20 Malabar Grey Hornbills, and a good selection of bulbuls including Black-crested. Impressive fly-overs included over 100 Pompadour Green-pigeons, Vernal Hanging Parrots, Malabar Parakeets and a Black-shouldered Kite. After a brief watch for Dusky Crag-martins, which did not perform, we climbed a rather open, barren hillside and sat and waited for the sun to set, and nightfall to arrive. Our main quarry was nightjars, but before we settled, a Brown Hawk-owl flew through the dusk and out of sight. Pramod used his skills to the full, and eventually we were rewarded with excellent spotlight views of Grey and Savannah Nightjars, the latter being especially thrilling and showing extremely well in flight. It had been another superb day, full of high-quality birds often seen extremely well.

Day 6: Tea, coffee and biscuits at 06.45 were welcome after a cool night at Backwoods and shortly after first light we set out for the 30-minute drive to Molem Nature Centre and the surrounding woodland. The woodland birding was typically patchy, beginning well with Taiga Flycatcher and Golden-fronted Leafbird but then hitting a quiet period until Pramod picked out a stunning male Malabar Trogon! Sitting quietly in the forest, this difficult species could so easily have been missed but we all had good views before it vanished just as quickly as it had appeared. But we were thrilled with another endemic bird, especially in the form of a trogon. After this our luck changed and we were kept busy all the way along the track and back to the restaurant for breakfast. Birds came thick and fast including some new ones for our trip; Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, White-bellied Drongo, Western-crowned Warbler (many), Green and Greenish Warblers, Tickell's Blue-flycatcher, Asian Paradise-flycatcher, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Rufous Treepie and finally, at last, Mike caught up with Velvet-fronted Nuthatch. We celebrated with freshly squeezed mango juice, banana, coconut porridge and masala omelets for breakfast! Our post-breakfast loop at Molem was rather quiet but we did have good views of Dark-fronted Babbler, White-rumped Shama and Thick-billed Flowerpecker and a couple of Ashy Woodswallows cruised over the woods. Back at the camp lunch was disturbed when Wayne's sharp eyes noticed a dove sat above the stream running through the camp. Although brief, several of our party were fortunate enough to have close, naked eye views of an Emerald Dove but it escaped into the woods pursued by most of the birders staying at the camp! After tea and biscuits, we returned to Tambdisurla Temple in the afternoon, primarily to search for a mystery flycatcher that had been found earlier in the day by John Martin. We had barely entered the gate when I heard the call of Hume's Warbler coming from the canopy and, with patience, several of our group managed to get views of this very active *Phylloscopus*. Pramod, however, sensing a Goan rarity, was well ahead along the track and we joined him, settling down to wait for the flycatcher to appear. We didn't have to wait for long, as we found the bird feeding high from tree tops above the river, feeding behavior that was rather different from the low feeding, skulking flycatchers that we'd seen earlier in the trip. Visually, it wasn't the most exciting bird to look at but it was certainly something good. After deliberation over some digiscoped images later in the evening, it was concluded that the flycatcher was a Dark-sided, and as such, almost certainly the first good record for Goa. Rather interestingly, the winter areas for this NE Indian breeder are still largely unknown. Perhaps we'll see more records from Goa in the future? After the excitement, a Brown-breasted Flycatcher drew little attention and Pramod led us down to a rice paddy where we enjoyed beautiful scenery and some fly-over Mountain Imperial Pigeons. The White-rumped Needletails hawking overhead were an absolute treat. It had been another wonderful day in the Western Ghats, and we returned to the camp for another tasty supper and our daily log call.

Day 7: It had been yet another chilly night at backwoods, but it soon warmed up, especially when the Indian Pitta reappeared at the back of the camp kitchen! Wayne produced some particularly impressive photos of this bird. Another woodland loop this time gave us great views of the male Spot-bellied Eagle-owl perched high in the canopy overlooking the nest site. We all had excellent views, and left the site without any undue disturbance to the birds. The rest of the pre-breakfast session was a little slow but we did

have our first Large Woodshrikes of the trip, and found another feeding party of Western-crowned Warblers, along with a few Bronzed Drongos. Post-breakfast found us back at the raptor watch point which, although a slower session than the previous, still provided us with great looks at Oriental Honey-buzzard, Black Eagle, Shikra and a much needed Besra, the only one of the whole trip. Hirundines and swifts were evident with good views of Indian Swiftlet, Little Swift, Crested Treeswift, Asian Palm-swift and several House Martins. Returning to Backwoods for lunch and a relax, Sheila won a major prize in seeing the Emerald Dove which again came down the stream while Geoff was busy working on his bulbuls! With time running out to see White-bellied Woodpecker, a bird which we'd actually heard drumming on several occasions, we returned to the rice paddies near Tambdisurla Temple hoping that the vantage would increase our chances of finding the woodpeckers. Birds along the track included a party of Brown-cheeked Fulvettas, and from the rice paddy we enjoyed views of perched Mountain Imperial Pigeons for the first time on the trip. Other nice species included an adult Rufous-bellied Eagle, Asian Fairy Bluebirds, and a Little Spider Hunter. Pramod and Wayne returned from a wander through the fields with news of Red Spurfowl and Indian Pitta. Sadly, the White-bellied Woodpeckers didn't show and with that we closed our day at dusk and headed back to the camp.

Day 8: This morning we tried another woodland walk beginning from the camp. The first bird of real note was a Scarlet Minivet, a fine male, followed by memorable views of Purple Sunbird and Pompadour Green-pigeons. A little later we found our first Blue-winged Leafbird of the tour, and several delightful Black-naped Monarchs. After breakfast, we drove to Bara-bumbi High School, which backs onto a river, and it was already hot by 10.00! Crested Serpent-eagle, Oriental Magpie Robin, and Tickell's Blue-flycatcher were the first to appear followed by good looks at Asian Koel, Thick-billed Flowerpecker, and Greater Flameback (much to the relief of Mike!). The star bird of the area was Grey-headed Bulbul, a species, which had eluded us for much of our time at Backwoods. Driving back to the camp for lunch, a walk along the approach road produced a nice Common Woodshrike building a nest plus Ashy Woodswallow and Chestnut-shouldered Petronia. We said our goodbyes to the Backwoods crew, who sent us off with a typically good and substantial lunch. It had been another fine visit to this wonderfully-secluded spot. The two-hour drive back to Baga in rush hour was typically wild but quite normal by Goan standards and our driver returned us safely to the Bierra Mar with enough time for some poolside birding, which produced excellent birds. This time we connected with Baillon's and Ruddy-breasted Crakes, Clamorous Reed-warbler, Paddyfield and Booted Warblers, fly-by Alexandrine Parakeets, and a stunning male Pallid Harrier, only our second of the tour. The log call and another fine supper followed at the Bierra Mar.

Day 9: Although our breakfast was a little late in arriving, we were still on the road by 07:10 and on our way to the Dona Paula plateau. This open area set amidst the suburbs of Dona Paula produced some great birds from the kick-off with Yellow-wattled Lapwings, Indian Robin, Paddyfield Pipit, Tawny Pipit and Oriental Skylark being found almost straight away. There were also good views of White-browed Bulbul for those who'd missed out earlier in the tour. The best bird, however, was a stunning male Ashy-crowned Finch-lark that dropped onto the local soccer field and just sat there, allowing its admirers an extremely close approach. Far more satisfying than the flock of 17 that had flown over earlier in the morning. Siberian and Pied Stonechats were also present, and a debate ensued over the pipit identification without any firm conclusions being reached. From here we dropped down the lowlands and the tidal channels at Santa Cruz. At high tide, there wasn't too much to be found on the channel but the surrounding area gave us White-bellied Sea-eagle, Sand Martin, Zitting Cisticola and good views of Plain Prinia along the track. Our final stop of the morning was Panjim Salt pools where a giant advertising placard gave us welcome respite from the sun. It had already developed into another particularly warm day. The vantage point proved to be a good one with several raptors being seen overhead including White-bellied Sea-eagle, Indian Spotted, Greater Spotted and Booted Eagles. Mike did well to find a Pacific Golden-plover and four Curlew Sandpipers showed off their white rumps when a Western Marsh-harrier flushed them. We also enjoyed some nice flight views of Small Pratincoles before returning to the Bierra Mar for lunch. In the afternoon, we elected to try another walk into the Baga fields finding a similar selection of species to our first afternoon there. With some work on the pipits, a Blyth's Pipit was eventually discovered although the majority was Richard's and Paddyfield Pipits. A small flock of Greater Short-toed Larks was seen several times during the afternoon, and we logged our first Common Mynas of the tour. The three Great Painted-snipes showed well once more, and we had excellent views of Eurasian Hoopoe, Indian Roller, Black Drongo and hundreds of Rose-coloured Starlings and Baya Weavers. Although seemingly not a particularly busy day, we recorded yet another impressive tally of about 95 species.

Day 10: This morning we journeyed north towards Morjim across the Chapora river estuary, now accessed by a relatively-new bridge instead of the old ferry crossing to cut down on the journey time. On reaching Morjim beach it was clear that the tide was not going to be ideal for pushing gulls towards the beach, but there were masses of sandpipers along the shore, which gave excellent views. It wasn't long before we had our first Greater Sandpipers in amongst plenty of Lesser Sandpipers and good numbers of Kentish Plovers. The gull watching then began in earnest, which of course wasn't everyone's cup of tea! Most of the birds were on a distant sand bar in the middle of the Chapora river mouth. However, after a prolonged session we satisfactorily viewed Steppe Gull, Heuglin's Gull, Great Black-headed Gull, Brown-headed, Black-headed and Slender-billed Gulls, and Gull-billed, Great Crested, Lesser Crested and Sandwich Terns. There was also a very big shout when a previously reported Black-legged Kittiwake flew in with a small stream of Brown-headed and Black-headed Gulls, and promptly vaporised amongst hundreds of small gulls! Remarkably, this out of range Kittiwake would be the first for the Indian Subcontinent if accepted. Sadly, it wasn't seen by all the members of our group but it was going to be worth trying for once again. A White-bellied Sea-eagle overhead

provided a nice diversion from the gulls and was our cue to leave the beach and head for the shade of the palms. Here we enjoyed good views of Black-crowned Night-heron, Plum-headed Parakeet, White-cheeked Barbet, Green Bee-eater and Pied Stonechat, but unfortunately for us, no Brahminy Starlings. We ate lunch at a beachside cafe overlooking the Indian Ocean with cool drinks, good food and time to relax during the heat of the day. Returning back to Morjim beach for another try at Brahminy Starling, once again came up short but we did have two excellent new birds for the trip; Yellow-legged Buttonquail and Asian Brown Flycatcher. Perseverance certainly pays off! From here we returned inland to a steep sided, wooded valley at Saligeo. On arrival, the air above the woods was full of raptors and we notched up two more excellent species with Changeable Hawk-eagle and Steppe Eagle amongst the many soaring raptors. In the woodland we had good views of Asian Koel, Verditer Flycatcher and White-cheeked Barbet and Pramod worked hard to locate a roosting Brown Wood Owl, admirably succeeding. Pleased with our success, we headed back to the Bierra Mar, again with enough light to see some crakes (Baillon's and Ruddy-breasted), and the now usual selection of small brown warblers and prinias. Spotted Owlet once again closed our birding for the day, this time in a small tree overlooking the marshes.

Day 11: An early, pre-breakfast departure from the hotel at 06.00 to catch the 06.30 ferry across the Mandovi River to Charoa Island. The river crossing was somewhat chilly, but there were two White-bellied Sea-eagles taking fish from the river even at this early hour and endless streams of Gull-billed Terns flew down river to start the day. Three Eurasian Whimbrels circled the ferry and landed in the mangroves were our first of the tour. Pramod took us to a nice low-lying wetland area for coffee and birding. A steady procession of birds and local folk were starting their day here. Good numbers of Glossy Ibis were foraging amongst the egrets, and Woolly-necked Storks and Lesser Adjutants were found in the marshes. Hundreds of Baya Weavers could be seen leaving a roost site, along with tens of Blue-tailed Bee-eaters. We had exceptional views of Ashy Prinias along the dike here, allowing Wayne to get some equally exceptional photos. We then headed over to Mayem Lake for the rest of the morning, dividing our time around a mid-morning with a breakfast stop which in itself provided some good birds; most notably Large Cuckoo Shrike and a White-cheeked Barbet excavating a nest hole. Over the course of the morning we added some very good species to our list including the hoped for Orange-breasted Green-pigeons, plus Blue-faced Malkoha, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, and Tytler's Leaf-warbler. Unfortunately, despite Pramod's best efforts, the Brown Fish-owls couldn't be found but excellent views of Grey Nightjar and Emerald Dove were ample compensation for those that had missed good views of those species earlier in the trip. Charoa Island was particularly sleepy during the midday hours and Pramod had to do his best to find a roadside kiosk that was open, as most of the islanders had taken a siesta! However, he eventually found a village kiosk selling cool drinks and snacks, a much needed boost. Our remaining time on the island was divided between raptor watching and viewing shorebirds on the rising tide at the ferry terminal. Grey Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Eurasian Whimbrel and Terek Sandpiper were all present on the Mandovi River until the rising tide pushed them away. Tens of thousands of Northern Pintail could also be seen in the shallows and Pramod mentioned that up to 40,000 Northern Pintail winter here. Returning to the Bierra Mar for yet another poolside watch over the marshes produced once again some exceptional birding. On this occasion, a Slaty-legged Crake was seen sparring with a Ruddy-breasted Crake with the Baillon's Crake present once again and along with a Black-capped Kingfisher, the day drew to another impressive close. Remarkably, as a group, we'd recorded over 110 species in just one day!

Day 12: We pulled out from Dona Paula Jetty at about 07.45 for our river cruise, primarily aimed at seeing Collared Kingfisher. Cruising through Mormugao Bay was quite relaxing and we soon began to notice some nice birds, with Lesser Crested Tern, followed by exceptional views of a perched White-bellied Sea-eagle and later, many Great Crested Terns. Black-headed Ibis were seen on the mudflats before we entered the Cumbarjua Canal where we primed ourselves for anything and everything that might look like a kingfisher! First, a Striated Heron, then another and then Pramod found our prize bird; a wonderful Collared Kingfisher! Upstream we found another giving even better views and on our return two more birds, this time together. That was certainly more than we might have hoped for, and on the way back to Agassaim we found a perched Osprey and a Black-capped Kingfisher rounding off a really successful boat trip. We returned to the Bierra Mar for lunch, which turned out to be a drawn out affair, but we did see an interesting munia perched in a tree close to our table and identified it retrospectively as an immature Black-headed Munia. It's a good thing we never stop looking! We later found Black-headed Munias in small numbers in Baga fields, but our first immature presented some really identification challenges. Wayne stayed out, not feeling the need for a rest after lunch, and returned with excellent pictures of Baillon's and Ruddy-breasted Crakes. In the afternoon we made a return trip to the Chapora River, but this time viewing from the southern side of the river mouth where the local harbour supports a small fleet of fishing boats, which in turn attract numerous gulls. Several colour morphs of Western Reef-egret were on view as soon as we arrived and we steadily worked through the gulls and watching several Little Terns fishing and plunge-diving out in the main channel. After half an hour or so, I noticed the Black-legged Kittiwake following a fishing boat into the harbour and put out a big call once again. This time, thankfully, all of our party were able to follow the Kittiwake amongst the gull frenzy and view this incredible first for India! It was also a rare moment for our local guide Pramod, a brand new bird and uncharacteristic show of emotion for a few moments at least! After all the excitement, we elected to climb up to Chapora fortress, built by the Portuguese in 1617. Once we reached the top, the view was simply breathtaking! Kites and White-bellied Sea-eagles hung on the wind above the fort and the only Blue Rock-thrush of the tour was present amongst the ramparts. A fitting end to a rather relaxing day marked by its high quality birds.

Day 13: We returned to the Western Ghats this morning, following up reports of several exciting species from Bondla, a site about 90 minutes south-west of Baga. The drive was worth it, and after a traditional Goan breakfast of a Baji and fresh bread rolls, we were soon watching some good birds on the approach road to Bondla. Highlights from our first stop including Black Eagle and exceptional looks at a Little Spiderhunter. Climbing up the road towards Bondla resort and zoo, we parked and walked down the hill birding from the roadside. Although seemingly slow at times, we ended up having some great birding along this road – the first bird to wow us was a cracking male Blue-capped Rock-thrush, followed by a White-bellied Blue-flycatcher and then Tytler's Leaf-warbler. Looking almost too hard into the canopy, all of us but Wayne failed to notice an odd-looking flycatcher feeding right over the road above our heads. The pale underparts initially suggested Asian Brown Flycatcher, but the rusty upper tail looked more Redstart like, and the dark legs really gave the identification away – it was a Rusty-tailed Flycatcher. Pramod described this rare bird as being less than annual in Goa. As if that wasn't enough, just 100 yards down the road, Wayne (again!) spotted two marvelous Malabar Trogons, one female and one a young male. We enjoyed these special birds for a while and they came closer and closer, as shy birds often do when if they're not pursued. To cap off an excellent morning, a male Grey Junglefowl strutted across the road in front of our vehicle and the female gave reasonable views in the understory by the road. What a fine morning it had been! It felt good to relax a while from the restaurant balcony at Bondla watching parties of Jungle Babblers in the bamboo thickets and Orange-headed Thrush and Spotted Deer in the leaf litter. Being a Thursday, the zoo was closed for the day but this ensured that the area was relatively free of tourists and allowed us to enjoy good views of some shy woodland birds such Black-rumped Flameback, Tickell's Blue-flycatcher, White-rumped Shama and Puff-throated Babbler. Further down the road, an open park seemed like an odd place to see a Clamorous Reed-warbler, but there it was in a hedgerow. Our second Taiga Flycatcher of the day also showed exceptionally well close by. It was lovely young male, with just a small amount of red under the chin. There was no doubt that the heat of the afternoon was beginning to take its toll, and with this we walked back the hill for our ride back to the hotel. It had been a day of quality rather than quantity, with two outstanding birds; Blue-capped Rock-thrush and Rusty-tailed Flycatcher.

Day 14: We departed early at 06:00 once again, this time heading for Southern Goa and the area of Velim Lake. We stopped for breakfast in Margao and then had a relatively short drive to Culculim fields, which were full of birds including lots of Little Ringed Plovers and several Temminck's Stints. On reaching the Velim Lake area, Pramod tried another area of open fields, which turned out to be good for raptors with good views of perched Steppe and Great Spotted Eagles. A recently burnt area was full of lapwings as well with over 20 Red-wattled and 12 Yellow-wattled Lapwings. Spotted Owlets were also to be found here, and we had good views of perched Ashy Woodswallows and Long-tailed Shrike. Amongst the wagtails and pipits frequenting the burn, Geoff, Sheila and I also watched a male Grey-headed Wagtail (*M. f. thunbergi*) amongst the Richard's Pipits. At Velim Lake, we tried a couple of spots before we eventually settled in a shaded area by local shrine to overlook the enormous numbers of birds here. Most were Garganey, Eurasian Teal and Northern Pintail but with fair numbers of Cotton Pygmy-geese as well. Overhead, raptors were beginning to soar including several Greater Spotted Eagles, a White-bellied Sea-eagle and a single Tawny Eagle. Whilst watching the raptors and with a little imagination, the sharp-eyed amongst us could see four or five Alpine Swifts extremely high in the murky sky. Our next port of call was an extensive hyacinth-covered pool at Curtolim, which supported hundreds of waterfowl, including Little Grebes, Lesser Whistling-ducks, and about nine Comb Ducks. Careful scanning here also produced several Ferruginous Ducks and a Pheasant-tailed Jacana. Attractive as these birds were, the heat of the day was beginning to tell, and when the temperature registered 38°C+, it was time to take a break and have a late lunch in a comfortable restaurant near Margao. The end of the second week had been notably warmer than the first. On the way home we checked the pool at Goa Velha once more, finding thousands of ducks including several more Ferruginous and our only Common Pochard of the tour. We still arrived back at the Bierra Mar in time for an optional evening session of viewing the marshes from the poolside. Again, it was productive with more of the usual crakes and a Greater Painted-snipe. The best find, however, was an adult male Black-headed Munia amongst hordes of Scaly-breasted and White-rumped Munias. Log call and another good meal at the Bierra Mar in the evening.

Day 15: Our last full day in Goa. We began with a successful attempt for Indian Peafowl at Fort Aguada seeing at least half-a-dozen birds in the early morning light, that wasn't bad for starters. Moving on to the lower slopes of Baga Hill, Pramod immediately heard the call of Jungle Owlet and we soon had this smart little owl 'scoped up, though slightly hidden by foliage. Climbing steadily up the track we had a flurry of new birds for the trip, with Black-lored Tit, Crimson Sunbird, and several White-throated Fantails. A White-bellied Drongo showed well higher up the same track as did several more fantails, and on reaching the top of Baga Hill several Indian Robins were present. At the top of Baga Hill it was sad to see a recently-placed barbed wire fence with a hotel strongly rumored to be in the planning. Let's hope not, and that access to this fine birding spot remains unlimited for visiting birders. Only time will tell. We moved on, but only a short distance to the Club Cubana at Arpora. The wooded valley behind the club being the main attraction and not the disco! We found a good species straight away, Grey-breasted Prinia, our first of the tour. Pramod's sharp senses also picked out a roosting Grey Nightjar and an Indian Pitta. The raptors once again were a big attraction including great views of our only Short-toed Snake-eagle of the tour. The final stop of the morning on the way back to Baga was the Marinha Dourada salt pans, which duly produced our best views of Pacific Golden-plover and Marsh Sandpiper as well as Small Pratincole and White-browed Wagtail. Returning to the Bierra Mar for lunch, we said our final goodbyes to Pramod

and our driver, and settled down for a relaxed afternoon, and an open agenda. Some folks shopped, others went to the beach, and others just birded from the Bierra Mar. I spent my last hour of daylight in the Baga fields where I was the only person out there birding. As usual, it was extremely interesting with plenty of Little Ringed Plovers in the fields, along with Common and Pintail Snipe and Greater Painted-snipe. I also found a small flock of Tree Pipits and much to my surprise, no less than five Red Collared-doves. Our last addition to the tour was actually a Barn Owl, a pair of which was nesting in a water tower close to the hotel and we managed to squeeze in views of these before supper.

Day 16: An 06:30 departure to the airport was drawn out by other pick-ups from local hotels and we eventually arrived at Dabolim. On first appearances, security appeared chaotic but much to our surprise we were checked in within 30 minutes, with plenty of time to relax before passing through departures and boarding the plane. After a short delay the rest of the flight was smooth and we arrived at Gatwick on time in late afternoon. Our group total of 280 species was one of the higher ones in recent years and not far short of our record of 289 in 2002. And of course, this total is for our group, not the combined total of a number of birders with their own individual itineraries!