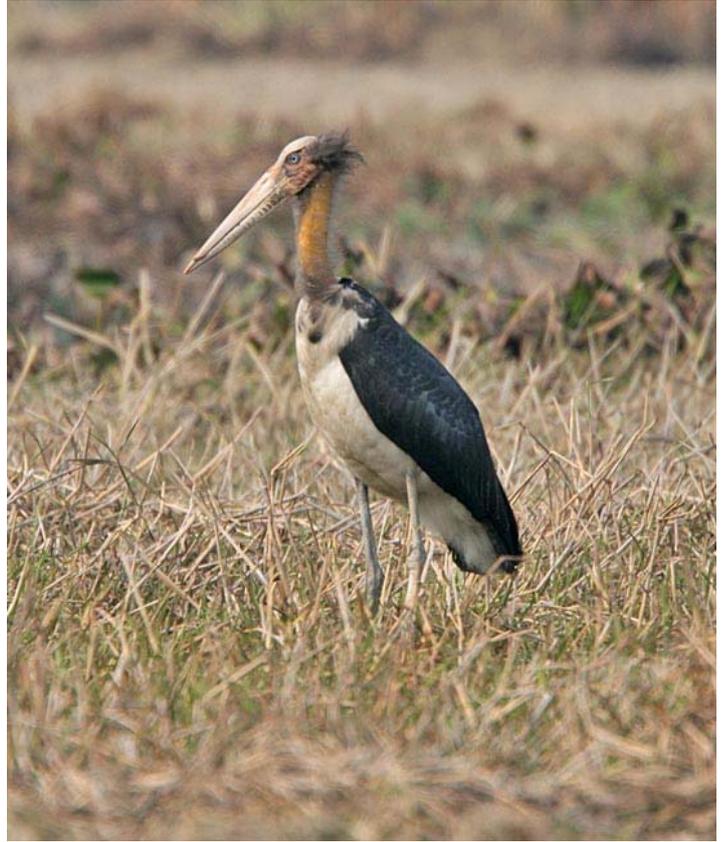


Goa, India

10–25 January 2009

Participants:

Mike Birtwell
Bert and Heike Charest
Ken Heron and Jenny Jones
Edward and Pamela Hope
Jeff Mettam
Marlene Rouncefield
Judyth Swift
Barbara Thomas



Lesser Adjutant

Leaders: Loven Pereira and Bill Blake

Day 1: The group met at London Gatwick and we left a sub-zero Britain behind as our direct flight departed on time.

Day 2: Arriving Dabolim Airport in Goa mid-morning, we negotiated immigration and baggage control before meeting up with Pramod from the Backwoods team who was waiting with our bus and driver to take us to our hotel in Baga. Having checked into the Beira Mar we had time to freshen up before meeting up at the hotel restaurant, which overlooks the marsh area behind the hotel, and time to get to grips with some of the more common Indian birds before lunch. Numerous herons and egrets included Purple Heron, Indian Pond-heron and Intermediate Egrets. Others birds were Woolly-necked Stork, Black-shouldered, Black-eared and Brahminy Kites, Western Marsh-harrier, Osprey, Red-wattled Lapwing, Asian Koel, White-breasted Kingfisher, Blue-tailed and Green Bee-eaters, Eurasian and Red-rumped Swallows, Black Drongo, House Crow, White-browed Wagtail plus White-rumped and Scaly-breasted Munias flocking together on overhead wires. After an excellent lunch, we met up with Loven, our local guide, and walked to the nearby Baga Fields as the midday heat started to subside. Here we added more common and some not so common Indian birds to our growing list: Booted Eagle, Shikra, Spotted Dove, Alexandrine and Plum-headed Parakeets, Asian Palm-swift, Indian Roller, Eurasian Hoopoe, Malabar Lark (our first Malabar endemic), Streak-throated Swallow, Long-tailed Shrike, Chestnut-tailed (Grey-headed) and Rose-coloured Starlings, Common and Jungle Mynas, Siberian and Pied Stonechats, Zitting Cisticola, Plain and Ashy Prinias, Richards and Paddyfield Pipits and iridescent Purple Sunbirds. A Yellow-wattled Lapwing was a surprise when it dropped in beside us; best of all however was a magnificent Red-necked Falcon which perched up and showed well to all and was a new bird for Goa for Birdfinders and our guide Loven.

Day 3: An early start today with packed breakfast to Saligao Spring, a steep-sided, wooded valley with a spring where the local people wash themselves and their clothes. Arriving at first light, a flowering tree attracted Ashy Drongo, Eurasian (Indian) Golden Oriole, Chestnut-tailed Starling, Rufous Treepie, Pale-billed Flowerpecker and Purple-

rumped Sunbird plus a Spotted Owlet staring down at us. Walking to the spring and back produced a good selection of birds that included Oriental Honey-buzzard, Stork-billed Kingfisher, White-cheeked Barbet, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Common Iora, White-browed Bulbul, Oriental Magpie-robin, a group of Brown-cheeked Fulvettas, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Asian Paradise-flycatcher, White-throated (White-spotted) Fantail, Common Tailorbird, Greenish Warbler and Black-lored (Indian Yellow) Tit. Also seen were Grey-headed Bulbul, Nilgiri Flowerpecker (a recent split from Plain) plus Crimson-backed (Small) and Vigors's Sunbirds, the latter a recent split from Crimson Sunbird – all three of which are Western Ghats/Malabar endemics. Black-faced (Hanuman) Langurs and Three-striped Palm Squirrels cavorted in the trees and an Indian Rat Snake was a surprise by the side of the track as we returned to our vehicle to return to our hotel. Back at the hotel the marsh kept us busy with White-breasted Waterhen, Little Swift, Brown Shrike, Ashy Woodswallows plus Blyth's Reed-warbler and Paddyfield Warbler all showing before we ate. After lunch some of the group saw a single Black-headed Munia, a single Black-headed Bunting plus a Tree Pipit on the wires from the restaurant. Our afternoon trip was to a lightly wooded valley at Arpora Hill: the pick of the birds here was Nilgiri Woodpigeon, an elusive Malabar endemic; four birds flew over singly in the late afternoon. Also new were Northern Goshawk, Common Buzzard, White-bellied Sea-eagle, White-bellied Drongo, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Red-whiskered and Red-vented Buleuls, Jungle Babbler and Grey-breasted Prinia. Scanning from the hotels swimming pool veranda towards dusk produced a distant Black-capped Kingfisher but not the hoped for Greater Painted-snipe. Dinner and log call were washed down with a cold beer or two.

Day 4: After breakfast we departed for Carambolin Lake, south of Old Goa. The lily-covered lake was alive with birds as were the surrounding rice paddies and fields. Little Grebe, Indian and Little Cormorants, Oriental Darter, a group of Asian Openbills, many Lesser Whistling-ducks and Cotton Pygmy-geese, Great Spotted Eagle, Common Moorhen, (Indian) Purple Swamphen, Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacanas, Spotted and Common Redshanks, Common Greenshank, Marsh, Green, Wood and Common Sandpipers, Ruff, Black-winged Stilt, Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns, Pied, Common and Stork-billed Kingfishers, Wire-tailed Swallows plus Yellow, Grey and White Wagtails were just some of the birds seen, many of which were new for the trip. Leaving the lake we drove to a small area of woodland close by where we eventually located a roosting pair of Brown Hawk-owls plus a superb male Black-hooded Oriole. En route back to the Beira Mar for lunch, we stopped briefly in Old Goa for a photo opportunity at the World Heritage site of the Basilica of Bom Jesus and, across the square, Se Cathedral, probably the largest 'church' in Asia and a reminder of Goa's colonial Portuguese past. After lunch we visited nearby Baga Hill, walking slowly to the top. It was rather quiet compared to our mornings birding but we still added Black-rumped Flameback, Small Minivet, skulking Tawny-bellied Babbler and a fine male Tickell's Blue-flycatcher. Some of the group were fortunate to see a Red Spurfowl cross a track ahead of us.

Day 5: This morning we headed north to visit Morjim Beach at the mouth of the Chaporni River. Kentish Plovers gambolled on the beach and a sandbar was covered in gulls – mostly Brown-hooded Gulls with smaller numbers of Black-headed and a few Slender-billed Gulls. Towering over these were Caspian and a few Heuglin's Gulls and biggest of all were nine magnificent Pallas's Gulls, adults moulting into summer plumage; the only terns present were Gull-billed. On the beach we found a roosting group of waders consisting of 40 Small Pratincoles, 12 Lesser and a single Greater Sandplover, its larger bill, longer 'thighs' and yellow-green legs showing clearly at very close range. Offshore a pod of dolphins performed acrobatics in the Arabian Sea. In the trees behind the beach we found a roosting Black-crowned Night-heron and some Rose-ringed Parakeets. We returned to the Beira Mar for a late breakfast and to scan the marsh and fields. After lunch we visited Batem Lake where new birds were Northern Pintail, Common Teal, Indian-spot-billed Duck, Gadwall, Garganey, Northern Shoveler and Common Coot. Finally, we visited Dona Paula plateau where our target birds, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark and Tawny Pipit eventually showed well. Also new here were Oriental Lark and a single Little Ringed Plover. A pair of Yellow-wattled Lapwings with Red-Wattled Lapwings was also noteworthy.

Day 6: We left early again, this time with a packed breakfast, heading south to Velim Lake. Our first stop of the morning was at Curtorim Lakes, the first lake and its environs added Glossy Ibis, a Comb Duck, Indian Spotted Eagle, a flock of Pacific Golden-plovers, side by side Little and Temminck's Stints for direct comparison, two River Terns, Greater (Southern) Coucal, Jungle Crow and Baya Weavers plus a showy Indian Mongoose. Searching the many Yellow Wagtails present did not produce the hoped for Citrine Wagtails. Another lake close by held two more Comb Ducks plus a group of 22 Black-headed Ibises feeding in the nearby paddies. Returning to Velim Lake we found more of the same plus Pacific Swift before we returned to the Beira Mar for lunch. We spent the afternoon at Saligao Spring again; this time there was no disturbance at the spring and Loven came up trumps with a fine Brown Wood-owl at its

daytime roost giving scope views to all. Other new birds here were skulking and uncooperative Puff-throated Babblers and a male Black-naped Monarch. Two other male flycatchers were also seen here: a lovely Tickell's Blue-flycatcher plus a superb white Asian Paradise-flycatcher complete with full tail. A Malabar Whistling-thrush sang its mournful whistle but would not cooperate and show itself. Another vigil from the swimming pool veranda produced an adult and juvenile Black-crowned Night-heron plus two garrulous Spotted Owlets before dinner and the birdlog.

Day 7: After breakfast we left for Dona Paula where we boarded a boat and spent the morning birding along the coastal mudflats and the Zuari River. Crossing Mormugao Bay we saw a few Lesser Crested Terns and four Little Terns. We had close views of over 30 Great Crested Terns perched on large posts and many waders seen included Western Reef-egret, Eurasian Curlew and Terek Sandpipers. We entered the Zuari River where kingfishers using posts as lookouts included a fine Black-capped Kingfisher. Finally, we entered a small canal where we found our 'holy grail', a stunning White-collared Kingfisher perched motionless in the mangroves, which was our fifth kingfisher species for the boat trip and sixth of the morning. Our boatman also pointed out a small Marsh Mugger Crocodile hiding in the mangroves. Turning back we landed below the Zuari Bridge where our vehicle was waiting; we saw two Dusky Crag-martins here, our only ones of the trip. After lunch at our hotel we visited Darsham paddyfields where we spent time searching through a good selection of waders, unfortunately every snipe that showed itself well proved to be a Common Snipe. We moved on to Morjim Beach again where the same gulls were joined by some Lesser Crested Terns and the only new birds for the trip were some Dunlins on the estuary. A flock of Small Pratincoles hunted over the estuary towards dusk showing off their striking wing pattern.

Day 8: Another early start this morning saw us take a ferry across to Charao Island before moving on to Mayem Lake. The wooded sides of the lake were full of birds: Crested Serpent-eagle, Orange-breasted Green-pigeon, Crested Treeswift, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Rufous and Yellow-crowned Woodpeckers, Bronzed and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos, Thick-billed Flowerpecker and, for some, a Little Spiderhunter. Loven's keen eyesight also picked out a very well camouflaged Grey Nightjar roosting on a horizontal tree trunk. Heading to Panaji (Panjim) for lunch, we stopped for a feeding group of five Lesser Adjutant Storks and we added a single Common Ringed Plover, Grey Plover and Whimbrel, plus more Terek Sandpipers, seen from the ferry crossing back from Charao Island. After an excellent lunch at a riverside restaurant in Panaji we took a ferry to Divar Island, encircled by the Mandovi River. Using a large tree for shade a raptor watch produced Steppe Eagle, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and four Pallid Harriers, two of which were ghostly adult males, all of which were new for the trip. Fourteen species of raptor for the day also included White-bellied Sea-eagle, Booted and Greater Spotted Eagles and Shikra. In the fields two Greater Short-toed Larks with some Oriental Larks were also new.

Day 9: This morning we returned to Arpora arriving in the pre-dawn half-light. A Brown Fish-owl was seen returning from its night's hunting, landing on top of a bush right in front of us before moving on to its daytime roost somewhere up the valley. Across the valley a Changeable (Crested) Hawk-eagle and Indian Peafowl were still high in the trees where they had spent the night and two more Nilgiri Woodpigeons were seen flying over the ridge. Common and Large Cuckooshrikes were also new as was Blue-winged Leafbird. After breakfast back at the hotel, everybody finally got to grips with a vociferous Clamorous Reed-warbler that showed well in the open and a Common Kestrel was new for the trip list. We spent the afternoon walking the Baga fields again where a Red Collared-dove tantalized with brief views before perching in the open for all to see. Richard's and Blyth's Pipits obliged by calling thus betraying their presence and identities and a single (Indian) Purple Swamphen looked out of place on the edge of a dry field. From the swimming pool veranda we had limited views of two Greater Painted-snipe at dusk.

Day 10: Today we revisited Baga Hill in the morning before breakfast and after lunch we returned to Saligao Spring. At Baga Hill we tried unsuccessfully to tape lure Red Spurfowl in to the open but we did get better views for everybody of birds already seen, in particular Thick-billed and Pale-billed Flowerpeckers and Loten's and Crimson-backed Sunbirds. It was the same story at Saligao where Puff-throated Babblers showed very well and a male Vigors's (Crimson) Sunbird gave prolonged scope views for everyone. Back at the Beira Mar, and thanks to Mike and Jeff allowing the group to use their balcony to view from, we finally had good views of Greater Painted-snipe at dusk.

Day 11: Our final day at the Beira Mar and this morning we revisited Morjim Beach after breakfast. Careful scrutiny of the gulls, terns and waders failed to produce any new birds so a single Brahminy Starling behind the beach was our only trip tick of the morning. After lunch a Ruddy-breasted Crake gave excellent views on a small pool directly below the restaurant as did both Clamorous and Blyth's Reed-warblers. In the afternoon we searched the area around Fort

Aguada, (a 17th century Portuguese fortress) failing to find Blue Rock-thrush but having good views of various flowerpeckers and a single Ruddy Turnstone on rocks below the cliffs was a trip tick. We also saw small groups of Bonnet Macacques in the wooded areas. At dusk back at our hotel we finally added Cinnamon Bittern when it appeared from a tangle of vegetation and the crane showed again.

Day 12: We left early for our journey to Backwoods Camp stopping at Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary just after dawn. As the early morning mists and chill lifted we spent an excellent couple of hours in this area and ate a packed breakfast. New birds here were White-eyed Buzzard, Vernal Hanging-parrot, Brown-headed Barbet, Greater Flameback, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, White-rumped Shama, Verditer Flycatcher and Chestnut-shouldered Petronia. We also had better views of a Changeable Hawk-eagle, many Pompadour Green-pigeons plus a very obliging Little Spiderhunter that kept returning to the same banana flower. Leaving Bondla behind, we drove on to the Bhagwan Mahaveer Wildlife Sanctuary, where Backwoods Camp is situated, seeing Grey Junglefowl from the bus on route. Arriving at the camp we took our luggage to our cabins/tents and then had a brief birding walk along the approach road before lunch. The forest was alive with birds and Malabar Trogon, the delightful Heart-spotted Woodpecker and Hair-crested (Spangled) Drongo were new. Around the camp restaurant Orange-headed Thrush, Nilgiri Blackbird and Flame-throated Bulbul were new too, the latter being a recent split from Black-crested Bulbul and a Western Ghats endemic. Behind the camp kitchen a stunning Indian Pitta gave excellent views and became a well-photographed bird during our stay. In the late afternoon we drove out to Tambdi Surla Temple and walked along a river to an area overlooking a forested ridge. New birds added here were Mountain Imperial-pigeons, Brown-backed and White-rumped Needletails, Malabar Parakeet and Malabar Barbet (two more Malabar endemics), Scarlet (Orange) Minivet, Asian Fairy-bluebird and Square-tailed Black Bulbul, the latter being a recent split from Black Bulbul. Our day ended with an excellent dinner from the Backwoods kitchen staff and the log call.

Day 13: After early morning tea/coffee we drove to Tambdi Surla village stopping on the way for a group of 13 Malabar Pied Hornbills sat in a large tree before they moved off into the forest. In and around the village a good selection of birds were seen, three Common Rosefinches being the only new bird for the trip, and we had scope views of a Malabar Giant Squirrel on the edge of the forest. After breakfast back at the camp, we tried a short raptor watch at the end of the approach road. Barbara found a single Black-throated Munia in a stand of bamboo; superb adult and immature Rufous-bellied Hawk-eagles and some Indian Swiftlets were new and we saw another White-eyed Buzzard. Close to camp we found a pair of Sri Lankan Frogmouths at their daytime roost in a clump of bamboo giving remarkable views. In the late afternoon we drove to a nearby area of farmland where a flowering tree attracted many birds; new birds were a fine male Black-naped Oriole, a Taiga Flycatcher and three Malabar White-headed Starlings, a recent split from Chestnut-tailed Starling and another Malabar endemic. At dusk we visited a sports pitch where we spotlighted a Jerdon's Nightjar on a post when it responded to tape.

Day 14: An early breakfast before driving out to the temple again for a walk along the river. Loven managed to "drum" a huge White-bellied Woodpecker out of some riverside trees, it flew straight towards us and over our heads but unfortunately landed out of sight; two more Mountain Imperial-pigeons flew over. Our riverbed walk produced some very good new birds – a perched Crested Goshawk, a very obliging Blue-eared Kingfisher, three skulking Indian Blue Robins that responded to tape and included two stunning males, two Indian Scimitar-babblers, Western Crowned Warblers plus a Rusty-tailed, three Brown-breasted and a pair of White-bellied Flycatchers, the latter yet another Western Ghats endemic. We also saw at least four Malabar Whistling-thrushes, a large group of Dark-fronted Babblers plus Black-naped Monarch, Tickell's Blue-flycatcher and Asian Paradise-flycatchers making six species of flycatcher for the morning. We finished our walk with a brief visit to the 12th century Mahadeva (Shiva) Temple, Goa's last surviving medieval stone temple. Whilst waiting for lunch at the camp restaurant a non-venomous Bronze-backed Tree Snake entertained us as it hunted, and caught, insects around the restaurant and Fan-throated Lizards flashed their lemon-yellow dewlaps in tree trunk territorial disputes. After lunch we walked one of the camp trails stopping again for the obliging pair of Sri Lankan Frogmouths in the same bamboo clump. New birds were an elusive Jungle Owlet that eventually gave good views to all and a popular Velvet-fronted Nuthatch. Other birds we saw included Malabar Trogon, Malabar Grey Hornbill, a pair of Heart-spotted Woodpeckers, Hair-crested and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos and Scarlet (Orange) Minivets. At dusk we drove to an open hillside hoping to lure Savannah Nightjar to tape but failed; we did see another Jerdon's Nightjar briefly. After dinner on an "owl prow!" around camp we spotlighted Brown Hawk-owl and Indian Scops-owls, which responded to tape. We also heard the deep haunting hoot of a Spot-bellied Eagle-owl, which responded to a Scops-owl call.

Day 15: Our last full day started with early tea/coffee before we left to return to Bondla, taking a packed breakfast with us. We stopped by a bridge as on our previous visit and had a similar selection of birds but not the hoped for Blue-faced Malkoha – a fine Chital stag was as surprised to see us as we were it. This visit we drove into the park proper and new birds seen were a single Emerald Dove, four Oriental Scops-owls (two grey and two rufous birds well hidden in a bamboo clump), a Speckled Piculet which was heard only, three Malabar Woodshrikes that led us a merry dance before giving good views to everyone (a recent split from Large Woodshrike and another Malabar endemic), a fine male Blue-capped Rock-thrush and an elusive Forest Wagtail that blended in so well against the leaf litter. Other birds included a roosting Indian Scops-owl, Greater Flamebacks and Western Crowned Warblers. En route back to camp, we stopped for a raptor watch: Crested Goshawk, Crested Serpent-eagle and Black Eagles were seen. The Indian Pitta was still showing well behind the camp kitchen before our final excursion took us out to the Temple again. A brief raptor watch produced another Rufous-bellied Hawk-eagle and Black Eagles plus more Brown-backed Needletails and Indian Swiftlets. A walk along the river failed to produce the hoped for Black-backed (Oriental) Dwarf Kingfisher whilst a final “owl prow!” after dinner found an Indian Scops-owl but the Spot-bellied Eagle-owl did not respond to tape this time.

Day 16: After an early breakfast we said our goodbyes to Loven and the Backwoods staff leaving at 06.30 for a smooth and uneventful journey to Dabolim airport. On arrival the airport seemed chaotic but we were soon checked in and we had plenty of time to relax before boarding our plane home, which departed on time and arrived at Gatwick ahead of time where the tour concluded. The group total for the tour was a creditable 284 species just short of the record of 289 species. We saw 13 of the 14 available Malabar/Western Ghats endemics that occur in the areas of Goa we visited. My special thanks go to Loven, not only for his exceptional skills as a birdguide, but also for his deep knowledge of his country and its traditions plus his comic sense of humour; thanks also to Malu for his safe driving. As always it is the group that deserve special thanks for their humour, birding skills and patience.

Bill Blake