

Gujarat Desert Mammals Tour

Destination: India **Duration:** 16 Days **Dates:** 6th Dec – 21st Dec 2013

-  Watching as two females came to drink in front of us with two 4 month old cubs
-  Having great jungle cat, desert cat, desert fox & Indian fox sightings in the Kutch.
-  Checking off over 190 species of birds (a Royle Safaris record for Gujarat!)
-  Finding rarely seen reptiles such as the Indian soft-shelled turtle & red sand boa
-  Seeing an incredible 29 species of mammals in the wonderful state of Gujarat!
-  Enjoying the company and expert knowledge of Jugat in the Great Rann of Kutch.
-  Having 4 sightings of striped hyena including walking with a pair only 10m away!
-  Spotting rare birds like the sociable lapwings, crab plovers and bimaculated larks.
-  Finding a male lion at a nilgai carcass, a kill from the night before
-  Staying at and having in the current Maharajas's palace in Gondal to ourselves.

Tour Leader / Guides

Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)
 Rizwan (Little Rann of Kutch Guide)
 Jugat (Greater Rann of Kutch Guide)
 Mobi, Ibrahim & Bali (Sasan Gir National Park Guides)
 Haider (Velavadar National Park Guide)
 Umal (Driver for transfers during Delhi)
 Vikram (Driver for transfers throughout Gujarat)

Participants

Mr. Joe Boyer
 Mrs. Rhoda Boyer

Overview

Day 1:	Delhi
Days 2-4:	Little Rann
Days 5-7:	Great Rann
Day 8:	Gondal
Days 9-11:	Gir NP
Days 12-14:	Velavadar NP
Day 15:	Delhi





Day by Day Breakdown

Overview

Gujarat is one of the most unique areas of India, the culture, history and wildlife here is very different to the rest of India and all of these reasons make this wildlife watching holiday very interesting. When people think of Indian wildlife they are automatically drawn to tigers, elephants and cobras but the country has such a huge range of ecosystems that the variety of wildlife found in India is truly staggering. From snow leopards and mountain goats in the Himalayas to Indian one-horned rhinos and gharials of the fertile grasslands of the Terai and the tigers and chital in the central sal forests to dhole and lion-tailed macaques in the southern rainforests; India is full of wildlife and very different ecosystems. This huge variety of wildlife often leads people to compare safaris here to African safaris however this is a little unfair as Africa is an entire continent; but even so India holds its own and on this tour you may feel more like being on an African safari than an Indian one. This is manifest as you travel to Sasan Gir Forest National Park in order to see the world's only population of lions outside of Africa, here around 450 lions exist and as of late 2013 some are to be released into another park in Madhya Pradesh to help genetic diversity and increase their survival hopes by starting a second population. But lions are not the only 'unusual' Indian mammal that can be seen on this tour, with Indian leopards, Indian wolves, striped hyena, blackbuck and Indian wild ass all well represented in the desert state of Gujarat.

This tour takes us around 4 protected areas in Gujarat and in each of these protected areas there are certain species that are doing particularly well. In fact the conservation success rate that occurs in these protected reserves, sanctuaries and national parks is of stark contrast to some of the parks in central India that suffer from terrible poaching and land encroachment problems. The Asiatic lion has increased from around 25 in 1911 to the current population of over 400; Indian wild ass have increased from a low of around 270 in the 1970's to over 4,000 at present; Indian wolves, striped hyena and blackbuck all have increasing population trends and Gujarat is almost certainly their stronghold (either globally or locally). Velavadar is also the last place in the world where good numbers of lesser floricans breed as well as Indian bustards and thanks to large introductions of mugger crocodiles into Sasan Gir in the 1970's the park's dams and rivers now have the largest mugger crocodile population in the world. By exploring these parks and reserves we want to highlight the fantastic conservation work that is being conducted here with a view to similar techniques being adopted in other Indian national parks. One of the major ways that many of these species have increased is that there are huge populations of prey animals in many of these locations (particularly Sasan Gir Forest) the abundance of predators is relatively high and we try to find some of these, whilst the Asiatic lion, Indian wolf and striped hyena are all relatively easy to find on this tour we also search out Indian leopards, jungle cats, desert cats, Bengal foxes, honey badgers, rusty-spotted cats and desert red foxes too; all of which are harder to see. Despite not being dominated by tigers, Asiatic elephants and the more 'typical' Indian mammal life we are confident of finding many mammal species as well as enjoying the rich bird life, the resident birds being supplemented during December by the many migratory birds from Central Asia, the Middle East and South & Central India that winter here, before continuing their journeys.

During this two week tour we aim to see as many of these species and many more besides as we travel to the Little Rann of Kutch, Greater Rann of Kutch, Sasan Gir National Park and Velavadar National Park. By visiting these special reserves and national parks and seeing the unique wildlife that they harbour we aim to showcase a very different side of India than is usually seen on safari and all of this whilst enjoying the local cultural delights of the powerful and iconic Gujarat state.



Day 1 **Delhi**

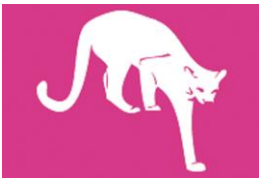
Arrival

This evening Joe and Rhoda were met at the airport by Martin and our local driver and then transported through the busy streets of Delhi to our hotel for the night. As the flight arrived during the night we all decided that it was best to head straight to bed and prepare for our travel to Ahmedabad, Gujarat tomorrow morning after breakfast.

Day 2 **Little Rann of Kutch**

Traveling

This morning we breakfasted at the hotel in Delhi before leaving for the airport in the mid-morning and catching our flight to Ahmedabad (Spice Jet S24121) that departed at 12:30 and arrived in the former capital of the prosperous and unique state of Gujarat, Ahmedabad. Once dubbed the Manchester of the East due to the abundance of textiles factories the city is also forever linked with the iconic figure of Mahatma Gandhi as he was born here and his non-



violent approach to independence. The flight was uneventful and on our arrival in Ahmedabad we were met by Anil and Vikram. Vikram would be our driver and companion for the duration of our time in Gujarat. We then hit the road and after a while getting out of the bustling city of Ahmedabad we hit the highways heading west. Once we were outside of the city the drive took a couple of hours and along the way we saw plenty of bird life. The agricultural fields (growing castor oil, cumin seeds, cotton, chick peas and mustard seeds) and telegraph wires playing host to a dazzling array of birds. From raptors like black kites, black-winged kites and common kestrels to flocking birds like common mynah, bank mynah, brahmīnī starlings, short-toed larks and laughing doves as well as cattle, intermediate, little and great egrets, little grebes, green bee-eaters, spotted doves, house crows and red-vented bulbuls. The wealth of bird life along India's roads is phenomenal and something that never ceases to delight and amaze wildlife watchers as they traverse the country from national park to national park. With all of these and many more bird sightings along the way we travelled without any problems and reached Rann Riders Resort (in the small village of Dasada) a little before sunset. We were greeted on arrival by the resort's pet emu, three Labradors, St Bernard and Persian cat; we were briefed on the resort and met our guide for our time here. A very knowledgeable guide named Rizwan. We arranged to meet him in the morning at 06:30am after a breakfast at 06:00am and then we would enter the Wild Ass Sanctuary that makes up a great section of the Little Rann of Kutch and currently harbours around 4,000 Indian wild ass.

Day 3 Little Rann of Kutch

Wildlife Watching

Today we set off after breakfast at around 06:30am in our jeep with our guide and driver Rizwan; the drive takes us through and past various agricultural fields and as yesterday the crops and roadside bushes and telegraph wires provide great roosts for a plethora of bird species. Early on we saw many red-wattled lapwings, a flock of foraging grey francolins quickly crossing the road, a large flock of rose-ringed parakeets nosily waking up and a flock of Indian pond herons leaving their roost and dispersing to various water holes in the surrounding countryside. We then entered this section of the Rann of Kutch by travelling through an exquisitely carved sandstone gate (similar in style and appearance to the carvings on the temples of Khajuraho). This 12th Century gate was built by the Shrilanki Dynasty and once formed part of a wall protecting a fortified village. Nowadays this gate is all that remains and beyond the gate we entered the salt extraction quarries before finally arriving in the barren, bleak and inhospitable world of the Little Rann of Kutch. In our search for the iconic species here we came across many desert wheatears (both the bold and striking males and plain and brown females), huge flocks of chestnut-bellied sandgrouse (who would remain almost invisible until we passed close by and they would rise into the air whistling as they did and fly away. Before landing again and melting back into the low lying scrub). The Rann of Kutch has two major terrestrial ecosystems, the first is the flat, cracked and baked dry lowlands that are flooded annually by the monsoons; of which connect the Kutch to the Arabian Sea. This adds to the salinity when the sea water recedes and is evaporated leaving the salt crust that is then harvested and stacked in the quarries for transportation out of the Kutch when needed. The second are slightly raised areas which do not flood and are less salty and these are home to many of the plant species that inhabit this region. Despite not being as salty as the lowland areas the soil is still salty (due to the fact that the whole Kutch was once part of the Arabian Sea), and so all of the plants here are halophytes and very hardy indeed. In fact all the organisms that live here have to be very hardy and have adapted to this very saline and hostile environment. Along with the sandgrouse and desert wheatears we spotted hen and Montagu's harriers (all males seen), short-toed and crested larks (the short-toed forming huge flocks of several hundred) and a couple of variable wheatears. However it was after around 40 minutes of being in the sanctuary when we saw our first family group of Indian wild ass. This was a small group of 7, these small families are common and consist of a matriarchal society with the young of various different ages, once the males become mature they are forced out and sometimes form bachelor groups until they are strong enough to gain access to a family and mate with the females during the breeding season. This group (like many in the Rann of Kutch are not very used to being approached by people and they didn't hang around very long for us to get closer to them. However our target this afternoon was to find a large group that is very used to people and would hopefully allow us to get closer. For now we left the ass alone and travelled around the bays in search of the rare McQueen's bustard and other bird life. Along the way we came across large flocks of short-toed larks that rose from the ground where they were invisible and took the sky in large clouds; also foraging along the ground (but in much smaller flocks) were crested larks and rufous-tailed larks. Perched on many bushes were desert or variable wheatears, black drongos and the occasional pied bushchat and common stonechat. Another avian highlight as we searched for the bustard were many common cranes, the cranes arrive in the Rann of Kutch in December and stay until March before returning (over the Himalayas) to their breeding grounds in Siberia. These large birds were seen in great numbers over the next few days and today we had great views of several groups of 3. The groups of 3 usually consisting of a breeding pair and their chick of the year. This chick was hatched and raised in Siberia and this will be its first migration, they are likely to fly back to Siberia together and then the chick will try and find a mate for itself to have a chick of its own with before making the return journey next December either unsuccessful on its own or successfully with a mate and chick. Apart from being a little smaller the chicks are distinguishable from the adults by lacking the striking grey, black and white markings and being more sombre brown all over. We also saw a Montagu's harrier, a male, flying low over the stunted vegetation in search of rodents to hunt; then Rizwan spotted a male MacQueen's bustard, the large bird (by no means the largest of the bustards known from India, but an impressive species nonetheless),



foraging for seeds, grasshoppers and other insects among the shrub and grass. We followed him for a while until he was very hard to find in between the longer grass and bushes. So we left the bustard quest successful and then began to leave the sanctuary, seeing a second group of Indian wild ass and many more cranes along the way. We then passed the 12th century gateway before arriving at a small lake that was packed to the brim with egrets (great, intermediate and little egrets), red-wattled lapwings, common greenshanks, common sandpipers and hundreds and hundreds of common teal. We then carried on and headed through the various rural villages back to Rann Riders Resort in time for tea and coffee before lunch was served. At lunch we watched as a northern palm squirrel travelled along the rafters of the dining hall back and forth carrying large wades of soft nesting material. The busy squirrel most have made 5-6 trips back and forth carrying loads that seemed to cause balance issues, but the squirrel managed and presumably gained a very comfortable lining for its nest. When we set off this afternoon to another area of the Little Rann of Kutch we had not travelled far when we came across great views of a black-winged kite perched on a telegraph wire and flying along as we drove up the road. We also found a male and female purple sunbird feeding on the side of the road, the magnificence of the males iridescent colours standing in stark contrast to the dull and drab female. Also along the sides of the roads were many green bee-eaters, some of which perched stationary for long enough to get a picture of; many didn't. We then arrived at the lake where a group of Indian wild ass are often encountered, before heading towards the ass's preferred feeding area we drove onto a bridge overlooking a dam and a couple of lakes. Once again the bird life was prolific with hundreds of greater and lesser flamingos and fewer common teals, northern pintails, great & intermediate egrets, black-winged stilts, little grebes, Indian cormorants and a good sighting of a western reef egret. We also saw many Indian pond herons, a couple of common greenshanks and a small flock of common sandpiper. We then drove around to the other side of the lake to where a large group of Indian wild ass (50 plus strong) were grazing and socialising on the banks of the lake. The Indian wild ass is one of the hardiest species of mammals and can actually survive on saline water if needed as well as managing to find enough nutrient on the nutrient poor halophytic plants of this salty desert. They do not have any natural predators here and their main threat historically has been humans as well as disease (mainly introduced by people bring exotic breeds of horses into the region); this reached an all time low in the 1970's when only around 270 Indian wild ass remained and since then they have been protected and no with a population over 4,000 they are beginning to expand outside of the Rann of Kutch. This is the first time in nearly 100 years and they are now being recorded around villages as far away as Pakistan and Rajasthan. We got out of the jeep and walked towards one of the groups for a closer look, however this half of the herd was already on the march and they were lost in the bushes before we got very close, so we decided to head to another side of the vegetation for a closer look at the rest of the group. We found this half of the herd in a nice open meadow and watched as they fed, played (the younger animals (possibly 1-3 years old) play fighting with each other, nipping at the others rump and receiving little kicks to the chest and belly), rolled in the dust to get rid of parasites and just socialised in general. Like all horse species the Indian wild ass is very social and they have a very complex and comprehensive system of calls, body language and positioning that all act to communicate the wants and desires of individuals. It takes many years of watching them to understand this language in depth but after only a short time observing this large group at close quarters it was possible to notice what certain brays or posturing meant in a certain context. Most of this was done between the young males who were the most active in play fighting and trying to get the adults to join in, albeit without success. In amongst this herd were 3 young male Nilgai who were also play fighting, getting down on their front knees and locking their short-straight horns for a bout of strength. Whether the Nilgai were consciously travelling with this herd of wild ass or it was a coincidence we didn't know, but it was nice to see the two largest species in the Kutch together. As the sun began to set we travelled to a large and open expanse of salt pan where we watched the sun set over a lake full of more greater and lesser flamingos. After sunset we went in search of some possible nocturnal wildlife, we first visited a desert fox (a subspecies of the cosmopolitan red fox) den that didn't have any sign of recent activity before spotlighting on our way back to the accommodation. Along the way we only spotted a Indian hare and a soft-coloured soft-furred rat, the former in the desert scrub and the latter close to the resort in the agricultural land. We returned just in time for dinner (after getting bogged down in the salt pan and delaying and therefore having to choose an alternative exit) and got an early night before heading back in search of more wildlife tomorrow morning.

Day 4 Little Rann of Kutch

Wildlife Watching

This morning we set off towards a different area of the Little Rann of Kutch, today we would focus on the enormous populations of migratory and resident water birds. Stopping on a bridge over a small river that feeds a saline lake, we found dozens of great and intermediate egrets as well as a small flock of foraging white storks, a colony of Indian cormorants (with some little cormorants too), painted storks, red-wattled lapwings, river terns as well as black-headed & brown-headed gulls. Overhead skeins of bar-headed and greylag geese flew by arriving from Central Asia and having safely navigated the Himalaya. We then went off the main road and driving through the sun baked salt-encrusted earth we came across four nilgai and small pools of water packed with common teal, black-winged stilts and red-wattled lapwing. We also had a sighting of many groups of common cranes as they flew from grassy meadow to grassy meadow in their never ending search for seeds. We carried on driving towards a large body of water and on closer inspection we saw lines and lines of flamingos (both greater and lesser) as well as huge flocks of Dalmatian pelicans as far as the eye could see. Literally thousands of flamingos and pelicans



everywhere we looked. Also in the lake were hundreds of great egrets and northern shovelers, along the shores were scores of common sandpipers, common redshanks, common greenshanks, painted storks, grey herons, Indian pond herons, red-wattled lapwings, black-tailed godwits, ruffs, terek sandpipers and Palla's gulls. The wealth of bird life here was staggering and we spent a considerable amount of time just staring at the various aggregations and if this wasn't enough every now and again huge skeins of pelicans, geese, cranes, cormorants or storks would come flying in overhead; either landing in the lake or flying onwards to other areas. It was hard to believe that this is not the peak of migration but only the beginning. The birds start arriving from Central Asia, Siberia, Southern India, the Middle East and Eastern Africa (depending on the species) from mid-late November and continue until January-February when they are at a peak and there can be over 50,000 Dalmatian pelicans and even higher numbers of flamingos and nearly all of the world's population of common cranes! A little further along we came across a large flock of bar-headed geese, this species is not common here and has been very rare in recent seasons; with this group of around 40 being exceptional as Rizwan had only seen 5-6 bar-headed geese in an entire season before this morning! Also feeding with the geese was a small flock of ruff, their non-breeding winter plumage nowhere near as impressive and wonderful as the males breeding plumage complete with brilliant neck ruff. We carried on driving around the lake and were amazed once again as the number of pelicans, flamingos and other birds just increased as we arrived at more and more large bodies of water, all complete with hundreds of birds. On the return to the lodge for lunch we came across many other bird species in the agricultural fields and roadsides including rosy starlings, black-winged kites, a booted eagle, an Egyptian vulture, a white-tailed stonechat, rose-ringed parakeets and spotted, laughing and Eurasian collared doves. In the afternoon we would try and find the very rare and globally critically endangered sociable lapwing. None had been seen this winter and it was still very early in the season for them, they arrive from their breeding grounds in Kyrgyzstan in late December, but we decided to give it a go as the rains had come a little earlier here and the wheat fields (the sociable lapwings' preferred habitat) were in good shape. Driving towards the wheat fields Martin spotted a turtle walking along a ridge around 50m away from the road, we stopped and got out to have a closer look and found a large Indian soft-shelled turtle hiding under an acacia bush. Martin moved it into the open so we could properly see it and identify him, we took some pictures before placing it back in under the bush. This is most likely a female searching for a safe spot to lay her eggs as she was a good distance (20m) away from the water. Carrying on we found many of the usual birds associated with agricultural India such as black drongos, black-winged kites, brahminy & rosy starlings, common mynahs, red-wattled lapwings, Indian pond herons, common kestrels, grey francolins, green bee-eaters, common & jungle babblers and red-tailed larks. As we searched various wheat fields that have yielded sightings in past years we had great views of a courtship behaviour of two black drongos on a fence only 2m away from us. In one other field we found a small flock of Indian coursers, this attractive bird is another speciality of the arid farmlands of north and central India. As well as the Indian coursers in the field there was a perched common kestrel and short-toed eagle as well as a male hen harrier flying overhead and a shikra that flew low over the field and spooked the coursers into taking to the air. Apparently this field was productive for rodents and other small animals with the wealth of raptors that were watching and patrolling the area. After we had checked the last possible field we were on our way back and Martin spotted a Indian grey mongoose stalking an Intermediate egret and or black-headed ibis in a small roadside pool, however on seeing us the mongoose aborted the hunt and ran away and into the thick grasses that lined the road. The way back also resulted in a long-legged buzzard and many more common kestrels and black-winged kites; all sightings capping a great afternoon for raptors, if not for sociable lapwings. Our last major sightings before arriving back at the resort and having dinner were a white-throated kingfisher feeding on a large centipede (over 15cm long) as well as a large herd of Nilgai heading into the agricultural fields for a nights feeding. This is a big problem for the farmers and many spend the night in the field and shout and bang metal pots and pans together to drive the persistent antelopes off. Few places in the world showcase the ever presence human – animal conflict than rural India. The constant battle carries on throughout the country every day and night and it is remarkable that the large human population is as tolerant as it is of the wildlife.



Day 5 Little & Greater Rann of Kutch

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

This morning we went on our last safari drive around the Little Rann of Kutch and very early on an Indian hairy-footed gerbil crossed the road close to the jeep; we headed to the lake where a large group of Indian wild ass are approachable (the same lake area we visited on the first afternoon here). As the sun rose we found a flock of grey francolins feeding in the middle of the road also here were a small flock of common babbler just waking up and warming themselves in the sun before beginning their day of busily foraging. On the lake many greater and lesser flamingos began to be silhouetted with the rising sun and we came across a group of 5 Indian wild ass and 3 young



male Nilgai, we followed these ass and Nilgai and came across a larger group of both. We stopped and had some fantastic photography of the Indian wild ass (11 individuals) as they groomed each other and socialised (rubbing their heads and necks against each other). The group was made up of females and their offspring of various ages and the socialising was mostly towards reinforcing bonds between the adults and the youngsters. Also around here was a growing herd of Nilgai, with adults and young males joining from further afield. We watched as the Indian wild ass began to file away and the Nilgai (never easy to get close to) ran off into the distance and we left to see if we could find a desert fox around a den that Rizwan knows. After a little searching around the den we found one of the foxes resting under a bush, he quickly got up and for the next 10 minutes or so we followed the fox as it moved from bush to bush. This is the same fox species that is common in Europe and North America and in fact the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) has one of the largest ranges of any mammal in the world. Here they are smaller and much paler than the red fox we were all familiar with from the UK and US respectively. But the distinctive triangular ears, reddish colouration and white tail tip all hallmarks of the red fox (here known as the desert fox). We left the fox to its own devices and began to head back to the resort as we have a long drive ahead of us this afternoon. On our way back we met three local Rabari herdsman, these men still use the traditional cattle herding techniques that is being lost from their culture and they stay with their cattle 24 hours a day, following them around the Kutch and sleeping in the desert. We stayed and talked a while with them (with Rizwan translating) and had some fun pictures taken with them; they took great pride and enjoyment in seeing themselves on the cameras. We also stopped at a small family house in the salt pans, the salt workers here section off areas of the barren ground and fill them with a shallow amount of water and after around 3 months the water fully evaporates and during this process it leaches the salt in the ground to the surface and this is then skimmed off and transported to the edge of the desert and loaded into trucks and exported throughout India. Amazingly 40% of India's salt is produced this way from the Little Rann of Kutch. After spending time with this family and understanding a little of the hard work that they go through for 9 months of the year as they collect the salt and live on the barren salt pan. A little further on we came to a huge group of Indian wild ass (40 plus) and around 10 nilgai in a very photogenic setting as they moved in single file against the endless flat salt pan and the blue sky. After leaving the desert Rizwan spotted a pair of spotted owlets in an old tree next to the side of road, we had excellent views of them in broad daylight as they perched on a large branch low down. Also in the tree was a large flock of rose-ringed parakeets noisily flying around in the canopy; after some pictures of the owlets and parakeets we left and continued to the resort. The drive is a long one and takes around 8 hours, however there were very little traffic and we made very good time. Along the way we past huge salt farms (of the same design we had seen this morning but on an industrial scale and it was now very obvious how 40% of India's comes from here). Many of these salt pans had western reef egrets, great egrets, Dalmatian pelicans, black-winged stilts, common sandpipers and little-crested terns living in and around them. After stopping to take in a small camel caravan moving along down the main highway we arrived at the accommodation in around 6 hours. Here we met the very knowledgeable and nice owner Jugal and decided to head out straight away and see if we could see any wildlife this afternoon. As we only had an hour or so before sunset we stayed close to the camp and tried an area of scrub forest where a caracal was rescued (from being caught in a thorn bus), treated and released. Before sunset Jugal took us to a sandstone cliff where small rock holes had become the roosting site of two barn owls, then after dark we spotlighted around the scrub forest hoping to find the very elusive caracal. All we found were a couple of Indian nightjars (one of which allowed Rhoda and Martin to approach within a couple of feet to get incredible close up photographs) and a pair of Indian hares, before they quickly ran off and disappeared into the bushes. We returned for dinner and got an early night in preparation for a day in the Banni grasslands of the Greater Rann of Kutch tomorrow.

Day 6 Greater Rann of Kutch

Wildlife Watching

This morning we set off from the camp at 06:30am and headed to the vast Banni grasslands (4,000km²) which are slightly higher in altitude than the Little Rann of Kutch and as a result there is much more vegetation and the grasslands and low acacia and *proposis* vegetation is home to huge diversity of bird and mammal life. Some of which Jugal was going to hopefully show us today. It was a misty morning on the Banni grasslands and we waited for the mist to clear, watching the sun rise over vast wilderness and within view of an extinct volcano. What a magical way to start the day; we then started wildlife watching with a Montagu's harrier gliding over the terrain searching for small rodents and other prey. We quickly found a red-tailed wheatear and variable wheatears as they began their days in the early morning sun. We also found very well preserved tracks of a desert cat, but they were not fresh so went on in search of other mammals and more birds. We were treated to great views of a male pallid harrier perched on a post as well as hundreds of common cranes. Despite the vast numbers of cranes we had seen in both the Little Rann and today in Banni grasslands, Jugal told us that these numbers are lower than usual and more will be arriving later in the winter, it was hard to believe as there were so many of this huge and beautiful bird everywhere we looked. We also stopped for some very cooperative and photogenic crested larks, greater short-toed larks and desert wheatears before we had breakfast in the field. The sun was now getting high in the sky and its warmth was beginning to take hold. To add to the larks and wheatears that were posing nicely for photographs we also had numerous great shrike encounters including bay-backed, grey, brown, long-tailed, southern-grey and the very rare steppe grey shrike. We also came across a couple of young men who were breaking in a camel and training it to take a rider. It was fascinating watching the skill required to ride the camel bare-back. Interesting the



jockey mounted the camel behind the single hump (being dromedary camels) instead of in front or on top of the hump which is more commonly seen. This approach seemed to offer less control over the animal and also significantly more chance of falling off. But I have never trained a camel so I am sure his approach is the correct one and in deed he didn't fall off! We then found a jungle cat, we followed the jungle cat between some scrub bushes for around 10 minutes and got some incredible views. We watched as the jungle cat went from being concerned with us to fully focused on something unseen in the grass in front of it. The large round ears focused on the ground, the body ready to pounce, every muscle taunt and ready. But alas the unseen prey animal must have made its escape or it was a false alarm as the jungle cat just stopped the stalk and carried on. We then began to move out of the park and back towards the resort. Passing a large lake we disturbed a family of wild boar, the two adults, 1 adolescent and 4 piglets came out of the vegetation and bolted away into the grasslands. Before leaving the grasslands and entering the agricultural lands we had great views of numerous raptors including large steppe eagles, greater-spotted eagles and an unusually coloured (with a very pale head, nape and breast) eastern Imperial eagle. In addition to the eagles we had more sightings of marsh, pallid and Montagu's harriers. We also stopped at a small flock of chestnut-bellied sandgrouse and we were able to get close up pictures of both the male and female. Then as we left and were travelling between the large fields of fully grown castor seed fields a desert cat strolled out in front of us and crossed the road, unfortunately it didn't stick around and disappeared into the castor seed field and out of sight. However we were treated to great views of a small colony (maybe 5-10) Indian desert jirds close to a school. These small diurnal ground squirrels live in communal burrow systems (not dissimilar to prairie dogs and marmots of North American grasslands and Eurasian highlands respectively). Whilst we could see the jirds well when we were not intend of photographing them, they all disappeared into their burrows as soon as we got closer for pictures and they didn't come back up (other than the briefest of brief glances to see if we were still there). On the way back to the camp we also visited a 500 year old Hindu temple complex, largely still in use today some of the temples were kept in better condition than others, however we were here to check out one of the oldest and least used temples. Well least used by humans as the acrid smell and 2cm of soft bat droppings on the ground clearly showed that at least one species of mammal was using this building. As it was winter the greater mouse-tailed bats were down in the cellar of one of the rooms, we could get down into the cellar however we were able to see a couple of this large, black and largely naked bats as they flew around in the cellar and one came and landed near the doorway. From here we headed back to the camp and had lunch and a rest before heading back to Banni grasslands (a different area) for more wildlife watching in the afternoon. The afternoon started pretty quiet with many of the raptors now high in the sky soaring on the thermals now that the sun had warmed the air sufficiently. For a couple of hours the best sightings we had were of some grey fancolins very close to the road and a male Montagu's harrier feeding on the ground. Then as the sun began to descend towards the horizon we found a small flock (5) of sociable lapwings. This critically endangered bird was absent from the Little Rann of Kutch but we had incredible close views in perfect evening light. We watched this bird (with only 3,000 left in the world) for a while, they seemed very relaxed around the vehicle and didn't mind us getting very close in deed. We then left them in peace and carried on driving as the sunset, we then found a golden jackal wandering parallel with the road, we followed him for a while until we realised he was trying to cross the road so we stopped and allowed him to scamper across and away into the distance. However it wasn't long until we came across a pair of golden jackals and they were slightly more accommodating for pictures, they stayed around for a short while, however they were standoffish and eventually had enough of us and disappeared into the vegetation. By now the sun was long gone and we began to spotlight, we found another jungle cat and had great views as well as brief views of a desert cat and once again very close up views of an Indian nightjar. We also found a Indian fox on our way back to the main road, this slight species is very well adapted to the arid regions of north west and central India. Unfortunately as not many people spotlight here the wildlife is not very used to vehicles and they do not stay around for very long. This is frustrating for us but beneficial to the wildlife as poaching does occur here (although in smaller numbers than elsewhere in India) and animals being afraid of people and vehicles is a good thing. Before we came back to the camp we did see an Indian gerbil cross the road, its large size apparent when compared to the Indian hairy-footed gerbil we saw a couple of days previously.



Day 7 Greater Rann of Kutch

Wildlife Watching

Today we decided to see some very different parts of the Greater Rann of Kutch, firstly we headed off to another grassland, the grasslands of Nalaya and in particular the Indian Bustard Sanctuary. This huge bird is now very endangered and even this protected grassland is being encroached by countless fields all of which are using pesticides and herbicides which are having a devastating effect on the natural grasses here, firstly by killing their pollinators and also the grasses directly. Irrigation is also taking valuable water from the sanctuary and directing it to



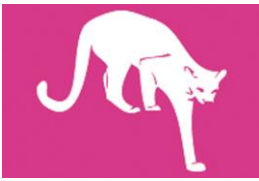
the fields of cotton and lentils. So we didn't hold much hope for spotting a bustard that have been decreasing in number so much recently, but there were other species that we may see around here and shortly after setting off we had another Indian gerbil cross the road, then once we arrived at the grassland we had great views of a short-toed snake eagle as well as brief views of 2 chinkara (Indian gazelle) and 4 nilgai. Before we stopped for breakfast we saw more birds including great views of large flocks of greater short-toed larks and grey-necked buntings as well as red-tailed larks, crested larks, a common kestrel and Eurasian hoopoe. After breakfast we came across a large flock of chestnut-bellied sandgrouse and a pair of foraging Indian grey mongooses. The mongooses moving purposefully along a raised barrier (for irrigation) along the side of the road. We then found a yellow monitor crossing the road and then climbing down the roadside to a small pool of water and an cotton plantation. We then found more chinkara (a mother and her year old calf) however they two ran off quickly after seeing us and then we had another brief sighting of a third Indian grey mongoose before having great close up views of a red sand boa. These stubby snakes are seldom seen as they live a lot of their lives under the ground and we found this one seemingly expanding the entrance to his hole, in fact it could have been modifying the hole in order to hibernate in it for the winter. Martin place the boa just outside his hole and we took some great photos before placing the boa back next to its hole and watching as it safely dug down and disappeared deep into the ground. We stood around and waited for the boa to disappear safely as there was a stray dog passing by and we didn't want the dog to take advantage of the snake on the surface with only its head in the hole as it excavated the entrance with strong movements of its head and neck. Having never really thought about the logistics of digging a burrow in hard sand without any limbs this was an eye opening sighting. Luckily the boa could escape into the hole without much extra digging and we left it alone in its burrow and watched the dog trot harmlessly by. After we decided to call it on the bustards we headed towards the Gujarati coast at around 11:30am. Along we way we stopped at a small roadside pool with an Eurasian kingfisher very close to the road and posing for great photos, we also found a basking Indian soft-shelled turtle and a group of 5 pied kingfishers flying, hovering and perching around the pool. We stopped for lunch in a coastal town of Mandvi before carrying on to the coast and stopping just before we got there for a juvenile booted eagle soaring low over a field. Once we reached the beach and Arabian Sea we drove along the beach and through a fishing village to a good birding area and left the car and headed on out foot. The beach at this point was deserted and around 70m wide and stretched out for miles. It was odd seeing such a huge expanse of sandy beach in a hot country not inundated with beachgoers, however Indian doesn't really have the same beach culture as the West and this meant that apart from some old and rusting parts of boats and ships lying in the sand and the wooden pillars marking fishing nets the beach was pretty much a wading birds paradise. In deed the abundance of food was evident with countless snails, hermit crabs and almost microscopic crabs busily filtering through the sand and creating millions upon millions of small balls that littered the beach. Walking along the beach we saw many great egrets, sanderlings, greater & lesser sand plovers, ruddy turnstones, Eurasian curlews and common redshanks & greenshanks foraging along the fringes of tidal pools and small inlets in the beach. Most of these waders all feeding on different sized prey as well as prey from different depths in the sand, meaning that many different species of aders can inhabit the same area of beach and not compete for food with each other. In the skies there were many gull-billed & lesser-crested terns flying acrobatically around and dive bombing the water as well as larger Heuglin's & slender-billed gulls flying in more straight lines up and down the shoreline. But the best sighting was of three crab plovers feeding in the surf, this group was a mated pair and their offspring from last season. This large plover looked more like a gull from the distance and their distinctive thicken bill is perfectly adapted for breaking into crabs (their preferred food). We walked towards them and managed to get some good pictures, we then carried on up the beach for a while but looking into the distance there didn't seem to be much bird activity so we decided to start the long journey back to the camp for dinner. The journey back was pretty uneventful and we arrived back at CEDO after dark.



Day 8 Gondal

Bird Watching & Travelling

This morning Jugal took us out to a nearby thorn forest for some more birding before we left. This thorny forest (mostly acacia trees) was a different habitat to what we had explored previously and we found some new bird species. The highlight of which was the rare and endemic white-naped tit, this is a study subject of Jugal and over the last few years Jugal has become the world's expert in this pretty little bird that is confined to the thorn forests of Gujarat. We also had great sightings of common woodshrikes, Indian robins, small minivets (including a flock of beautiful males very close), common babblers and also brief views of a Marshall's iora. We had great views of the male minivets as they called and displayed to each other (probably due to the presence of females nearby) as well as great views of the white-naped tit foraging on the periphery of the trees and bushes. We watched a stunning

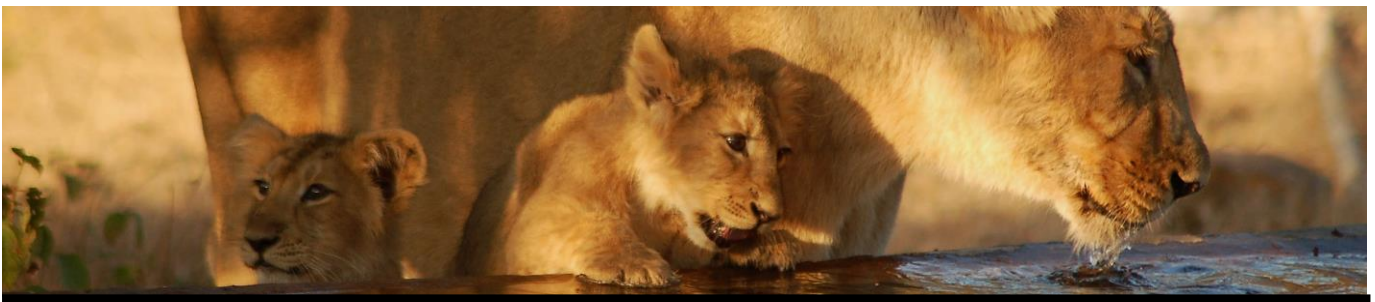


sunrise from a hillock in the forest and then enjoyed breakfast in the forest, surrounded by noisy red-vented bulbuls and overlooking a small flock of Indian coursers in the opposite wheat field. We then went back to the camp, collected our belongings and hit the road east to Rajkot and then south to Gondal. Tonight we were staying at one of the Maharaja of Gondal's palaces. He has 5 palaces in Gondal and two have been converted to hotels, one into a school and two are kept as his residences. His Royal Highnesses were in residence in the same complex as ourselves the night we stayed here. We had this particular palace (the Orchard Palace) to ourselves tonight and enjoyed exploring the opulent rooms and grounds, complete with peafowl, stuffed animals, handsome portraits and artwork and handicrafts from all over India and the rest of the world. At dinner we found out about the wonderful vintage car collection that the Maharaja has here and made arrangements to see them the following morning. Joe being very interested in automobiles and the distinct possibility of there being some of Detroit's finest models on offer it was too good a chance to pass up. So we finished our meal in the main hall of the palace (the same food that the Royal Family was having for dinner tonight and prepared by the Royal chefs in the Royal kitchen – whether we were the official tasters we didn't know, but the food was delicious).

Day 9 Sasan Gir National Park

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

This morning, after breakfast, as promised we were taken to see the vintage car collection next door to the palace. With over 50 cars in the collection (however many of the newer models are off limits to the public) the collection is extensive and there were some incredible rarities from the 1930's through to the 1970's including European classics Delage, Rolls Royce, Jaguar and Mercedes as well as many American cars such as a Lincoln limousine, Corvette, Chevrolet and some interesting Ford models. However the piece-de-resistance was a 1907 'New Engine' carriage from the UK. This is one of the first automobiles and one of only a handful left in the world. With an original steam engine and wooden chassis the vehicle was more like a tram than a car and we were very privileged to see inside as well as outside. We were then taken to see the 128 year old Maharaja's private train carriage, the Royal Family have their own private railway around Gondal and this carriage was used up until 1996 when the family travelled from Gondal to Delhi in this beautiful carriage. Once we had seen how the 'other half live' in India we packed our bags and left to carry on our journey south to the last home of the Asiatic lion (well last home until the relocation project to Kuno Wildlife Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh is completed), Sasan Gir National Park and Sanctuary. As we reached the buffer zone of the park we found a large troop of southern plains grey langurs on the road, unfortunately they were being fed by local people as they throw food (including the plastic wrappings) out of the window. This is not only littering and can make the animals sick, it leads to the langurs taking liberties with people, leading to the inevitable conflicts including being hit by cars and killed and biting humans and possibly spreading diseases. The main problem is the Hindu god Hanuman (the monkey god) and the langur and macaques are seen as incarnations of the god and are revered, fed and worshiped. Well we left the troop of langurs all jumping and climbing over cars and running all over the road with little fear or regard for vehicles anymore; and travelled to our accommodation for lunch. We checked in and ate lunch here before visiting the park headquarters and having a look around the informative (if a little dated and dilapidated) information centre. After getting a feel for the park and its wildlife we were more than ready to explore Gir tomorrow.



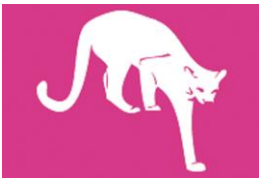
Day 10 Sasan Gir National Park

Wildlife Watching

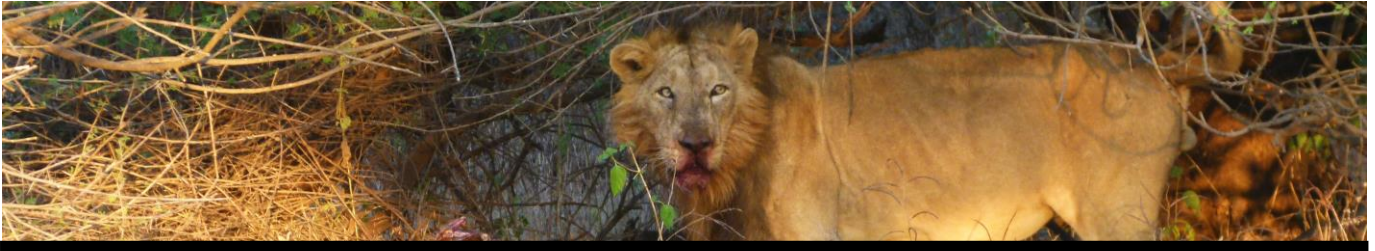
Today we went in search of some of the 411 Asiatic lions that inhabit the forests of Gir and the surrounding areas. This is the last population of this subspecies of lions in the world, *Panthera leo persica* was once found from Greece in the west through the Middle East and into eastern India, but systematic hunting and persecution led to their gradual decline and ultimate extinction from over 99% of this range. This was the same in Gujarat until the Nawab (prince) of Junadagarh saw this drastic decline and ordered that the remaining lions around here to be protected. This was only around 25 lions and originally they were only protected to ensure that there would be some to hunt! However very quickly the Nawab realised their plight and ordered that they were to be free from hunting and the sanctuary was established. Since then (1911) the population has soared and now stands at over 400 individuals in the wild and many more in captive breeding programmes throughout the world. This is truly one of the greatest conservation success stories in the world (and from a country that often is depicted as so bad when it comes to tiger poaching; it is worth applying credit where credit is due in the case of the Asiatic lion). In fact there are so many lions here now that there are too many for the protected areas to support and as of April 2013 the supreme court in Delhi ordered that a small population to be translocated to a new park that was set up in Madhya Pradesh with the



express intention of hosting Asiatic lions, so that their prey stocks have been increased to support the new predators. This will be the first step to having Asiatic lions being released into more protected areas in India and as well as increasing their numbers it also helps counter possible inbreeding and the risk of a single disease of natural disaster crippling the single population in Gir forest. So with so many lions around we held high hope of seeing some in the next two and a half days. This morning we tried route 6, there are 8 routes in the park and they are given out at random on entrance to the park (however Martin and Nitin (our Gir logistics guru) had arranged for Mobi and our routes to be organised depending on the most likely places to see lions etc); with routes 4 and 6 being the best recently these are the ones that we tried. However as we would find out the routes are not fool proof. Early on as the mist started to be burnt off by the rising sun we heard a male lion roaring very close (within 100m judging by the intensity and volume of the roars), the park's trackers were out and heading into the forest to find it, however no jeeps were allowed down the particular road where the lion was. So we listened to the intimidating roars before heading onwards and it was not long before we found fresh (from this morning) leopard tracks walking down the road. We followed the leopard tracks until they headed into the forest, we then came to a large group of chital. This mixed age and sex herd was feeding in a small meadow in the forest and not far away we found a pair of rose-ringed parakeets in brilliant light for pictures. Whilst in this area we heard distant alarm calls of the chital but it was too far into the forest for us to try and find out what it was; we carried on a found tracks (also from this morning) of a lioness and at least one cubs walking along the road. Again we followed these until they disappeared into the forest and we continued our search, only finding more chital and three adult female sambar feeding close to the road. The size of the sambar compared to the chital very apparent with the huge sambar standing over 5ft at the shoulder and weighing over twice as much as an adult chital. The rest of the morning was very quiet, we travelled to another route to where a male lion had been seen briefly this morning by a tracker, but to no avail. The only other notable sighting was a nice ruddy mongoose encounter, this species is much rarer and elusive than the similar Indian grey mongoose in Gir and we had great views. The two species are very similar in appearance and size, the distinguishing features being the reddish tinge to the body and the shorter tail that is often held curled up at the tip when moving and showing a black tail tip. We then left the park and headed to the lodge for breakfast, followed by lunch and then the afternoon jeep safari back into the park. The afternoon started off similar to the morning had ended with a pair of very large male sambar lying in the shade of a dense forest. They were joined by a pair of rufous treepies, the colourful crow species picking ticks and other parasites from their huge bodies. One of the sambar was truly enormous and at the maximum size that they reach, he must have been a very old bull and looked like he would give any animal in the forest a run for their money in a one on one. The next interesting sighting was of a pair of adult female nilgai in small river channel before we heard of a male lion that had been seen (probably the same one that was briefly seen this morning) and we got special permission to leave our route and go to route 4 to see if we could see the lion. We had to wait our turn (particularly as we were no trespassing on other people's allocated route) but after around 10 minutes we were guided up the road to where the male was sleeping (well resting as his eyes flicked back and forth – constantly aware) under a small tree close to the road. We stayed a few minutes and enjoyed the close sighting before carrying on our way (along our newly adopted route). It wasn't long after leaving the resting male that we gained permission to go down route 2 and to where a female and cubs were seen, the trackers had found the 2 lionesses and 2 cubs at a sambar carcass deep in the forest but they were making periodic journeys to a nearby water tank at the side of the road and the trackers had called Mobi and told him we and told him that we can go and wait at the water tank and see if the lions walked this way. When we arrived we were met by the caws of many jungle crows, attracted from all around by the carcass hidden from view. We waited a few minutes, then we saw the large tawny figure of a lioness come striding boldly out of the forest and straight towards where we were parked behind this water tank. Following her was one bounding cub, then a second and then the other adult lioness bringing up the rear. They walked straight to the tank and began to drink, the tank was around 50cm off the ground and at perfect height for the females to stand and drink from but the cubs (based on size around 4 months old) had to climb up onto the tank or stand up against it in order to drink. We then watched as the lionesses drank continually, it is thirsty work feeding on a carcass in the baking Indian sun, whilst the cubs drank but also gently played a little. Their playfulness was a little nullified by the intense sun, which was only just now beginning dip beyond the teak trees than make up around 70% of the dry forest of Gir. The light was perfect and the lions just around 5m away from us for around 10 minutes, it was magical to see the cubs and their mother and aunt so close and so relaxed; it never fails to surprise when you see the Indian forest guards and trackers walking around the lions with nothing more than a stick. This would be deemed completely unsafe in Africa, but these Indian lions live around people and see them every day at close quarters. The lions and the people in India have a unique and very different relationship with each other than the people and lions in Africa. Exactly how this occurred or what the subtle differences are is very hard to call, but it enables the tribal villages to continue living here despite the high density of lions and also allows the guards and trackers to safely walk around the forest and get close to the lions. It is also incredible to see that the guards often spend longer looking at the jeeps and their occupants (making sure that everyone behaves currently) and have their back to the lions than the other way around. But the proof is in the pudding and there is no human – lion conflict (when it comes to man-eating, there is conflict in terms of the lions taking livestock – but even this is largely tolerated now, thanks to increased revenues from tourism). After the lionesses had had their fill they turned and silently melted back into the dry grasses and forest as if it was all imagined...but we have the pictures and videos as testimony to this incredible sighting. As we



were now far from the exit gate and the afternoon safaris were coming to an end we had to move quickly towards the exit. Along the way Martin spotted a couple of raptors, firstly a shikra; this Indian sparrowhawk was perched quite low to the ground and quickly flew away into the forest once we stopped and reversed for a closer look; then further on Martin spotted a crested serpent eagle in a large fig tree. The eagle had a snake locked in its talons and took off to land in another tree (still visible) but a little more shaded as we stopped. The snake was mostly eaten and unidentifiable and we watched the eagle feeding on the snake for a while. It was amazing to see the eagle carefully placing its foot on the snakes body, pinning it against the branch before using its sharp beak to tear at the other end and get mouthfuls of food. After a couple of minutes here we were really pushing the time and we made good speed to get out on time. We then freshened up and had dinner at the lodge before a good night's sleep in preparation for doing it all again tomorrow.



Day 11 Sasan Gir National Park

Wildlife Watching

Today started the same as yesterday however we had a different guide and driver this morning. Our guide was Bali and our driver Ibrahim. The pattern of the safaris would also be very similar to yesterdays; with a quiet morning followed by a great afternoon. Our route this morning was 5 and early on the only sighting included many chital (sometimes when on safari in Gir it can seem like you are seeing all 50,000 or so chital that live here!), as well as a crested serpent eagle distant in a tree. We came to a section of road where we could hear the trackers working inside the forest, we waited for a while to see if they had found anything but after around 15 minutes they sounded like they were moving off and we carried on to a local Rabari tribal village. This village was full of birds this morning, a huge flock of rose-ringed parakeets flying and cawing from every bush and tree top as well as large numbers of yellow-footed green pigeons, red-vented bulbuls, chestnut-shouldered petronias, red-wattled lapwings, cattle egrets and Indian peafowls all singing, fluttering and flying around. A little after the village we found a large male sambar browsing before arriving at the water tank that we saw the lionesses and cubs yesterday and found out that we had just missed (by around 2 minutes) the lions as they had come from the kill site in the forest for another drink. We didn't wait around as it seemed very unlikely that the lions would come out for another drink any time soon (especially as the mornings are significantly cooler and more forgiving than the afternoons). We then began to make our way out of the park and the last great sighting of this morning was a very nice view of a spotted owlet perched in the sun on a bank next to the road. After this sighting we headed to the lodge, breakfasted and then Vikram took Rhoda and Joe to a shop in the local market where he had found someone selling some handicrafts similar to one that Joe had taken a liking to from his room. After this successful visit they went to see the mugger crocodiles and various freshwater turtles that are in a successful captive breeding project behind the park headquarters (in the same complex as the visitor centre we visited on the first day in Gir). It is nice to see the crocodiles and turtles up close here as they are difficult to get close to and see at all (respectively) in the park; with the crocodiles part of a very successful reintroduction in the 1970's where around 1,000 were released and currently the various lakes and dams in Gir are home to the world's largest single population of mugger crocodiles. The turtles are not faring so well and number very few. All freshwater turtles in the Indian subcontinent (25 plus species) are endangered and many are critically endangered with captive breeding programmes their major hope for the future. Pollution, egg collection, hunting for food, sand excavation, dam building, increased river usage and more and more unreliable monsoons are all big influences on the turtle numbers here and elsewhere in the Subcontinent. This afternoon we decided to try our luck on route 7 and quickly came across a large feeding group of southern plains grey langur and chital close to the side of the road. These species commonly form a symbiotic relationship in which the deer provide a very good early warning system for the langurs and the langurs provide food for the deer by dropping as many leaves as they eat from the trees. We then left and came to a roost for a breeding pair of Indian scops owl who were both posing very nicely in their small tree hole at the side of the road. Strangely the scops owls (a nocturnal owl species) prefers to spend the days in the entrance of their roost hole and look out over the world, as opposed to remaining hidden from view inside the hole. Well this unusual behaviour makes it easier to find scops owls. This afternoon we had further fantastic birding sights such as a shikra perched closely to the road and then we stopped and watched a pair of hunting green bee-eaters directly above us. Watching them swoop down with their fan shaped wings and tails spread and catching the sun, before returning to the same branch that they took off from. The next great bird sighting this afternoon came in the form of a white-eyed buzzard who was perched high on a tree and allowed us to get good views. We then drove towards the Kamleshwar reservoir / dam and had great views of a foraging ruddy mongoose as it walked through the undergrowth at the side of the road. Arriving at the dam we were the only jeep in view and with the sun beating down from the cloudless sky the view across the largest body of water in the national



park. As we drove around the dam to a watch tower we saw a large mugger crocodile (one of the 1,000 or so released here in the 1970's) basking on the shore as well as many Indian & little cormorants, river terns, purple sunbirds, white-breasted kingfishers, grey-breasted prinias and a rare western reef egret flying over the dam or fluttering around the vegetation on the shoreline. From the watch tower we saw many more crocodiles in the lake as well as some golden masher feeding on scraps at the end of a small jetty. We then carried on and saw many busy jungle babblers as well as another white-eyed buzzard and Indian scops owl before heading to the same place we had seen the male lion a couple of days ago. The lion was still around the area and when we arrived we were greeted by the pungent and familiar smell of a decaying carcass. We found the lion shoulder deep into the body of a male nilgai. The kill was made the day before and the effect the sun baking down on the flesh was evident in the air. However despite the smell we did spend around 10 minutes (before it was getting too dark and we had to leave the park) with the male lion as he eat some of the meat and crunched on the large rib bones. He was obliging enough to pose for us with his muzzle tainted with blood and his belly gorged and bloated. Watching the lion feeding on the nilgai from this close was a brilliant way to cap our time in Sasan Gir National Park, on our way out we didn't see anything else of note and prepared for the long journey to Velavadar National Park (our last port of call in Gujarat) tomorrow morning.

Day 12 Velavadar National Park

Travelling

This morning was our last safari inside the park and we took the gate next door to our lodge this morning, this was route 2 and even before we had entered the park Martin heard a male lion roaring loudly and close to the lodge grounds. Quickly after entering the park we heard much chital alarm calling before dawn, we stopped nearby and waited for the sun to rise before carrying on and finding another Indian scops owl in an different tree hole from the pair we saw yesterday. Close to where the owl was perched in the tree we found fresh lion prints as well as more chital alarm calls, we focused around here and also found fresh leopard tracks from this morning. Clearly this was a very productive area for big cats this morning. But as the morning continued it turned out to be another quiet morning in Gir as far as big cat sightings went. We then went to where the trackers had been working this morning we waited nearby and watched the a couple of trackers headed into the forest in search of lions, there was further chital and now langur alarm calling. But time was not our side as the park was about to close for the morning safaris and we had to leave before the trackers could come back and direct us to where the lions are. We then had breakfast and left the village of Sasan, we headed through the park to reach the main road to Velavadar. This unofficial safari followed the railway line through the periphery or the park's core zone and along the way we saw many Indian peafowls, chital as well as a female sambar, greater coucal and a small flock of red-naped ibis. Shortly after the leaving the forest in the agricultural land on the parks borders we found a small herd of nilgai (all females and youngsters) as well as a decent sized herd of Indian gazelles (chinkara). The rest of the journey was uneventful with the usual Indian roadside birds and rural Indian life passing us by until we arrived at the luxurious Blackbuck Lodge next door to Velavadar National Park. After meeting the friendly and conscientious owner Naveed we had our dinner and got a good night's sleep before our first trip into Velavadar in the morning. The main reason for this national park is the large population of blackbuck but in recent years the striped hyena sightings have been incredible here and we hoped for more in the next couple of days.

Day 13 Velavadar National Park

Wildlife Watching

This morning we met Haider our driver for the next couple of days and then we headed the 20m or so down the road to the park gates. As the park opened in the morning the dozens of harriers (Velavadar has large populations of Montagu's, pallid and marsh harriers that roost here over winter, possibly the largest harrier concentrations in the world), common cranes, great egrets, grey herons, cattle egrets and black drongos flew from their roosts to their daytime haunts. Some on the small exposed bushes or fence posts, some the larger trees and some the river banks of the many small ponds and irrigation canals around here. On entering the park we saw a small group of wild boar moving quickly across the grassland as well a beautiful common kestrel perched on a small tree next to the road. We drove quickly past the many herds of blackbuck and nilgai as we wanted to get to the hyena den as early as possible as there is a chance that one or more of the hyenas would be still in the den and we could catch them before they leave to carry on their daily routine and enter the dense forest. The den here is a large concrete pipe line (for water flow) which goes underneath the road and for the last few years a male and female have been breeding here, two years ago they had 4 cubs and there was another breeding pair in the park too; however in the last 18 months the cubs from this litter have left to find a territory of their own and the other breeding pair have also left for pastures new. At present there are just the two adults and their two one year old pups, it is one of these four striped hyena that we would hope to see. Whilst waiting for the hyenas to wake up and leave the den we watched a herd of blackbuck some 200-300 strong, we watched this group as the many young males were play fighting; practising their skills in defending lekking sites and females for when they will have to fight for real in the future. We then returned to the den site and one of the pups emerged and stood against the rising sun for a few minutes. Her big ears focused on us as she stretched and yawned. She then sniffed around the long grass close to the den site and scent marked herself (as it turned out the other hyenas had already left the den this morning and so she was probably smelling their recent scent marking) and then she set off into the grasslands, we were able to follow her



route for a while. Her large ears and sloping back visible above some sections of the grass. According to Haider this is the normal route of the hyenas and they make their way over the grassland towards the small forested area to the west. They spend the majority of the day in the shade of the forests before patrolling for food during the evening and night and then returning to the den in the early morning. We drove around to a watch tower and could see and follow the young hyena as she walked through the grasslands towards the forest (as predicted) and no doubt following the earlier pathway of her parents and sibling. From the watch tower we also had great views out of the park and the huge numbers of blackbuck were very evident, as were large numbers of nilgai. These two herbivores are by far the dominant species in the grasslands here and they form the prey base for the small number of Indian wolves which in turn provide the carcasses for the striped hyena. Also from the watch tower we were able to see many of raptor species that inhabit the park; many of the harriers that roost overnight stay in the park and patrol the grasslands in search of rodents, reptiles and partridges. Also flying around are several common kestrels; these two birds of prey using very different hunting techniques, the harriers flying low over the ground and the kestrels hovering expertly over an area and then swooping down when a prey animal has been detected. We also spotted a short-toed snake eagle perched on a tree, the eagle spending the morning perched and waiting for the air to warm up and the thermals to begin before soaring high into the sky and searching for prey from the heavens. As we drove around the small national park we stopped various times to observe some of the large blackbuck herds, including some that crossed the road and began to stot at our presence. Stotting (or pronking) is the behaviour where an antelope or gazelle jumps high into the air during running away from a potential threat; by jumping the animal advertises to the predator that it is aware of them and that it is a physically fit individual and not worth hunting, it also warns other members of the herd about the threat, so it has a dual purpose when it comes to avoiding predation. We also watched as some of the young blackbuck started playing, just running around after each other and stotting along the way. By chasing each other they are practising for escaping predators in the future; most herbivores are not well known for their 'play' as babies, this is mostly because they have less time to play as their lives are nearly always in threat. However this kind of play is vital for their development and it is great to sit and watch them for a while as you will see these subtle behaviours that are often overlooked. At a small waterhole we came across a pair of Indian spot-billed ducks and a purple heron and a little further on a large bachelor herd of blackbuck. Some of these males being almost jet black in colour and with huge 1.2m (4ft) long spiralled horns, these males are so beautiful it is easy to see why they were such a prized hunting trophy during the British Raj. It was hunting for their pelts and horns that nearly led to their extinction and with the formation of this park in 1976 the blackbuck began to bounce back and this population of around 4,800 is the largest single population of blackbuck in the world (excluding large populations in Argentina and the United States which were introduced for hunting). On leaving the park we drove past the old rest house and the range complex (consisting of derelict buildings) and new buildings that house the guides, rangers and also students who travel here with school on field trips. Around here we saw many species of birds, including large numbers of rose-ringed parakeets, black drongos, feral pigeons, spotted doves and also a pair of spotted owlets. Once we arrived back to the lodge we had some time to freshen up before breakfast, the little pool in the lodge grounds is home to around 15 soft-shelled turtles and some of them were very active this morning. We then had breakfast and the afternoon to relax and then after lunch we travelled back to the park for our next safari. This afternoon we once again saw many blackbuck and nilgai, but we travelled to another area of the park. This side of the park is home to large bodies of water, the area naturally floods annually with the monsoon but as the surrounding areas are now all agricultural areas the park rangers have made dams to maintain a year around water source and also to stop all of the water being drained off for irrigation. One of these lakes is very large and home to huge numbers of birds during the winter. We saw many Eurasian coots, Dalmatian pelicans, lesser flamingos, common teals, northern pintails and comb ducks. Together with these birds who all formed large flocks were Indian & little cormorants, purple & grey herons, river & gull-billed terns and Eurasian spoonbills. We then came across a jungle cat crossing the road, after running across the road it stopped on the side of the road and we had very nice views until it melted away into the grass. Its tawny colouration being a perfect match for the grass here. We then came to a small herd of female nilgai and their very playful calves, the calves all running with very exaggerated head and leg movements. As we were driving towards the small forested area to see if we could stumble across the hyenas as they spent the day in the forest Martin spotted a steppe eagle drinking from the far side of a water hole. It was shortly after this sighting when Rhoda spotted a mammal disappear into a tunnel under the road, we stopped the car and waited and a short while after an adult striped hyena appeared on the other side of the road having moved through the tunnel. We climbed out of the vehicle and stood only 10m away from the hyena as it slowly and completely unperturbed moved into the scrub forest. As we were all taking pictures and soaking in this incredible striped hyena sighting the second adult came out of the same tunnel and followed the first one. As we had followed the first one a little way into the scrub the second hyena (the male) was only around 2-3m away from us it moved away. The hyenas here are completely unmoved by the presence of people and it was one of the greatest wildlife encounters in Royle Safaris history to be this close to two adult striped hyenas and for them to be completely relaxed and unmoved by our presence. This is a species on the brink of extinction throughout eastern and northern Africa and most of the Middle East. It is the remarkable population (the tiny population) that is found here that may hold the key to their continued survival throughout their range. If people can see and appreciate this incredible and beautiful in the wild in experiences like the one we had today then the whole image of the hyena could change for the better. We watched the hyenas as they walked back through the scrub to about 20m away where they lay down and began to sleep. We then waited with them for a while and also drove up and down



the road (200m or so) to see if we could find the pups. We didn't find the pups this afternoon but did see many more harriers, including male pallid and Montagu's harriers on the roads and allowing us to have great views. On our return to the forest we found the hyenas sleeping in the long grass in the middle of the scrub forest and we stayed with them until the sun began to set. On our way out we saw many more harriers as they began to fly back into the park to roost. Close to the gate we found our second jungle cat that crossed the road and once again was very accommodating for pictures. We then retired to the lodge for dinner and a good nights sleep before exploring Velavadar National Park once again.



Day 14 Velavadar National Park

Wildlife Watching

On entering the park we once again were greeted with another incredible sunrise and the scores of harriers, cranes, herons, egrets and drongos taking to the skies and flying back into the park or away from it, depending on where they spent the night roosting. Also abundant were nilgai and blackbuck again; but we didn't have to wait very long before we spotted another jungle cat on the side of the road, this one remained mostly hidden behind the grass before disappearing into the grasslands. We then came to a small acacia tree where birds were beginning to wake up and we watched the common kestrel, black drongo and a small flock of Eurasian hoopoes begin to stir and then take off and begin their day. We then arrived at the striped hyena den and didn't have to wait very long before the adult male emerged and we were treated to fantastic views as he yawned (showing his large and powerful molars and jaws), stretched and then lay down in a small clearing in the grass and slept. We sat patiently and watched the large male (one of the two we walked with yesterday) for around 10 minutes before he got up and slowly walked into the grass, following almost the exact same pathway as his pup yesterday morning. As we watched him walk silently into the grasslands, from the opposite side a family of wild boar (two adults and 6 piglets) came bolting over the road and running away into the distance. We wondered if the piglets would entice the hyena to maybe take chase, but with so many carcasses of the abundant blackbuck and nilgai (as well as the plentiful livestock in the surrounding fields) the striped hyena do not need to catch their own food. As we watched the striped hyena walk off in one direction and the sounder of wild boars running off in the other we had a pair of common cranes flying directly over the top of us. The rest of the morning was spent watching the large herds of blackbuck and nilgai before visiting the buildings near the park entrance where the rose-ringed parakeets and spotted owlets once again stole the show. We briefly went over to the other side of the park to see if we could find one of the 24 Indian wolves that inhabit the park (the Indian wolf was to be the only major Indian desert predator that eluded us on this tour), but we visited the wetlands and saw most of the same birds as yesterday before coming across another steppe eagle, a small roost for black-headed ibis and Eurasian spoonbills as well as great views of a male Montagu's harrier in the middle of the road. We then returned to the lodge for breakfast and during breakfast we were joined by many of the lodge's northern palm squirrels and also a male and female purple sunbird; who just brightened our breakfast. During the afternoon safari we once again had fantastic sightings of the hyena, this time back at the den site (the same den we stake out in the mornings) Haider went down on foot to the entrance of the den and collected some incredible close up shots of the hyenas whilst they were still in the den. Also this afternoon another one of Velavadar's accommodating jungle cats allowed for great prolonged views on the side of the road; as with our other safaris here the blackbuck, nilgai and plentiful bird life complimented these two beautiful and elusive predators. The highlight for birding this afternoon was a very rare sighting of a pretty painted francolin. This was just about the last new species for the tour and another rare bird species seen on this 'mammal' trip. This evening back at the lodge Naveed has arranged for an open air dinner at the back of the lodge complex and towards the grasslands that border the entire lodge. Eating outside in the presence of a few blackbuck and nilgai that often visited the grasslands around the lodge after dark was a great way to end the time at the Blackbuck Lodge.

Day 15 Delhi

Travelling

Today we had a relaxed morning and at breakfast we spotted a large family (two adults and 4 babies) of Indian grey mongoose appearing from one of the drains underneath the pathway and energetically foraging along the trail and away into the grass. We then left for Ahmedabad after breakfast and this journey was half rural, including some wetland areas around rice paddies where many cattle, intermediate and great egrets were joined by white-breasted kingfishers, purple herons and huge numbers of Indian pond herons. The second part of the journey was more industrial however we did have a pair of small Indian mongoose run out and across the road as well as many black kites, house crows and more common birds of urban India. Once we arrived at Ahmedabad airport we had lunch in a hotel near to the airport and then departed back for Delhi. Despite a short delay (not bad for flights in and out of Delhi at this time of year) we arrived in Delhi and were taken back to the hotel. With Joe and Rhodas' flight leaving



at 03:00am tomorrow morning we left the hotel for the airport late that night (after dinner) and Joe and Rhoda got off safely.

Day 16 Home

Departure

This morning Martin had to catch his flight home, as Rhoda and Joe had left late last night the tour was officially over; and what a successful tour it was as well.

30	Desert fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>
----	------------	----------------------

			1	*															
--	--	--	---	---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Birds (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
2	Bank Mynah	<i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>
3	Common Mynah	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
4	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
5	Spotted sanpiper	<i>Actitis macularius</i>
6	Marshall's iora	<i>Aegithina nigrolutea</i>
7	Common iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
8	Eurasian Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
9	Rufous-tailed lark	<i>Ammomanes phoenicura</i>
10	Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
11	Northern shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
12	Common teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
13	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
14	Indian spot-billed duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
15	Asian openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
16	Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
17	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>
18	Bar-headed goose	<i>Anser indicus</i>
19	Tawny pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
20	Richard's pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
21	Paddyfield pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
22	Long-billed pipit	<i>Anthus similis</i>
23	Tree pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
24	Greater-spotted eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>
25	Eastern Imperial eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>
26	Steppe eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>
27	Booted eagle	<i>Aquila pennata</i>
28	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
29	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
30	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardea grayii</i>
31	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>

December														
7	8	9	10	11	12	12	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	1	5						1	1		1	1		
~20	6	3	~40	9	~30	~50	3			7				4
~120	2	8	~55	~10	14	~100	~150			29			~75	~50
		32	1		3						3			
	2													
						1								
								1						
					1									
	8	5	4	1						5	7	10		
	~10										~100	~50		
		~200												
	100's	~100	~150								~200	~100		
		~10								2	2	2	2	
											2			
	1													
									1		1			
		79	9											
		101												
				1	1			1						
	2			2										
					1									
				2	1						1			
					1									
				1								1	1	
		1			1									
9	6	~310	64	6	7	4		1		35	8	~10	34	
		21							1	1	7	1	2	
1	54	70	29	21	2		1		1	13	9	10	~100	
		2	2								4			

32	Ruddy turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
33	Spotted owl	<i>Athene brama</i>
34	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
35	Indian thick-knee	<i>Burhinus indicus</i>
36	White-eyed buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>
37	Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
38	Long-legged buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
39	Greater short-toed lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
40	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
41	Indian nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>
42	Lesser coucal	<i>Centropus bengalensis</i>
43	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
44	Pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
45	Greater sand plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>
46	Lesser sand plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
47	MacQueen's bustard	<i>Chlamydotis macqueenii</i>
48	Brown-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus</i>
49	Slender-billed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>
50	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
51	White stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
52	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
53	Short-toed snake eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
54	Western marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
55	Hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
56	Pallid harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>
57	Pied harrier	<i>Circus melanoleucos</i>
58	Montagu's harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
59	Rock (Feral) Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
60	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
61	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
62	Indian jungle Crow	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>
63	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
64	Indian courser	<i>Cursorius coromandelicus</i>
65	Common quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
66	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
67	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
68	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
69	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>

					3									
			2					1		2	2			
61	96	~100	1	33	18	11	78	53	82	1	11	~250		
		1												
							3	2						
					2									
		1		1	2									
	100's	~100	~50	100's	~350					~300	100's			
		~10			12									
			2	4										
					1	1								
	*		1		1			1	1		1			
		2			4									
					6									
					9									
	1													
		~180												
					1									
		~370												
		15												
	2					1		2	1	4	1	2		
		1	1		2					1	1			
	1	2	1	2					3	11	4			
1														
	2	1		1					3	32				
										1	13			
	2	1	1	7	3				4	32		1		
1,000's	~100	~140	100's	~50	~100	100's	~100	13	~100	~100	~50	13	100's	100's
										1				
2	5	2	1	5		8	1			1			2	
								19	~200	~100				
100's	~115	100's	100's	4	~100	100's	100's	54	~30		2		~100	
		12		5										
			1			3								
								1	1					
1							1	2	2					
										3				
9	11	34	~100	17	13	27	4		2	92	74	77	7	

70	Crab plover	<i>Dromas ardeola</i>
71	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
72	Western reef egret	<i>Egretta gularis</i>
73	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
74	Grey-necked bunting	<i>Emberiza buchanani</i>
75	Oriental Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>
76	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
77	Painted francolin	<i>Francolinus pictus</i>
78	Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>
79	Eurasian coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
80	Crested lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
81	Gull-billed tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
82	Common crane	<i>Grus grus</i>
83	White-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
84	Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
85	Crested treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
86	Common hawk cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>
87	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
88	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
89	Wire-tailed swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
90	Pallas's gull	<i>Ichthyæetus ichthyæetus</i>
91	Brown shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
92	Northern shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
93	Rufous-tailed shrike	<i>Lanius isabellinus</i>
94	Southern grey shrike	<i>Lanius meridionalis</i>
95	Steppe grey shrike	<i>Lanius pallidirostis</i>
96	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
97	Bay-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius vittatus</i>
98	Heuglin's gull	<i>Larus heuglini</i>
99	Asian dowitcher	<i>Limnodromus semipalmatus</i>
100	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
101	Coppersmith barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
102	Bimaculated lark	<i>Melanocorypha bimaculata</i>
103	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
104	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
105	Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
106	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
107	Indian Bushlark	<i>Mirafra erythroptera</i>

					3									
		~190	2		1				18	1			49	
	1	1	18		5	25			1				1	
4	8	6	7	2	1					3	3		2	
				100's	~360									
							3							
	7	2		3	2						5	5		
												1		
	17	8	9	18	11	2					12	1		
	4		~10								~50	55		
	31	16	7	~60	3						66	~30		
		2			3						1	2	12	
	86	142	79	~600		3					~30	10		
6	1	4	2					2	1	2	3		4	
3														
								~10						
								1						
	92	~210	19		37	12					6	2	~40	
	26	~60	56		14	~100	10			17	22	1	~25	
		4	1									2	6	
		4												
	5	3		1									1	
				2										
	4	2	1	1	1									
				1										
3	4	2	24				1			10	1	1		
	1					1						1		
					1									
	2													
		~50												
							1			3				
					2									
54	~100	99	~120	13	21	~45	7	1	5	36	5	2	1	
6														
~100	18	~160	64	34	~100	14			6	18			49	
~100	1						42						28	~20
				4	4						1			

146	Red-naped ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
147	Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
148	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
149	Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles exustus</i>
150	Dusky Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>
151	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
152	White-eared bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucotis</i>
153	Pied avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
154	Comb duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>
155	White-browed fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
156	Brown-throated martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
157	Pied bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
158	White-tailed stonechat	<i>Saxicola leucurus</i>
159	Stolicka's bushchat	<i>Saxicola macrorhyncha</i>
160	Common stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>
161	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus</i>
162	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
163	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
164	River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>
165	Laughing Dove	<i>Stigmatopelia senegalensis</i>
166	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
167	Red turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
168	Rosy Starling	<i>Strunus roseus</i>
169	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>
170	Common whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
171	Eastern orphean warbler	<i>Sylvia crassirostris</i>
172	Lesser whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>
173	Asian desert warbler	<i>Sylvia nana</i>
174	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
175	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
176	Large woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis gularis</i>
177	Common woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>
178	Asian paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
179	Lesser crested tern	<i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i>
180	Greater crested tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
181	Black-headed ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
182	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>
183	Common greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>

3		7			6			5	7				
6			1										
8	34	16	22				13	22	62	5	~40	9	~15
	64	~10		3	6								
							12	3		7			
23		2		3		2	32	~210	~100	~115	12		
	5	11	2	6	1						1		
		~150											
		1									~30	~20	
								1					
											2		
1	1	2		2									
		1											
										1	1		1
1		5		1	8					3	2		
	1	1	2	1	1		1	3	3	3			
~150	166	85	~50		62	~30		1		49	81	16	
								3	1				
	1	13							11		~10	11	8
~20	27	38	58	1	32	~25				12	19		
7	3	75	18	5	5	27	22	3	4	22	5	6	15
	3										1		
	16	~30			21	~200							47
	2	3			4			4		2		11	~35
									2				
		1		1	1								
	2												
	1				2								
	37	17										2	
		2	2							2	2	2	2
								1					
						4							
									1				
		6	~50			8							
		2	~10			2							
1		15			2							17	
								9	15	~30			
	2	3			1						1		

184	Solitary sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>
185	Marsh sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
186	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
187	Common babbler	<i>Turdoides caudata</i>
188	Large Grey Babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>
189	Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striata</i>
190	Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>
191	Eurasian hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
192	Sociable lapwing	<i>Vanellus gregarius</i>
193	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
194	Yellow wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>
195	Terek sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>
196	Oriental whiteeye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>

	4									1				
		2												
					2									
	71	15	2	73	31	6					1			
	1													
4	11	10						51	41	15				
			2											
	4	2			2						3	7		
				5										
3	21	50	12	2	4		6	4	8	21	2	1		
2		5			5									
		2			1									
											1			

Reptiles (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Indian softshelled turtle	<i>Nilssononia gangetica</i>
2	Indian garden lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
3	Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
4	Rough-tailed gecko	<i>Cyrtopodion scabrum</i>
5	Red sand boa	<i>Eryx johnii</i>
6	Yellow-green House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus flaviviridis</i>
7	Tropical house gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>
8	Barred-wolf snake	<i>Lycodon striatus</i>
9	Yellow monitor	<i>Varanus flavescens</i>

December														
7	8	9	10	11	12	12	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	1	2			1						12	3	3	
					1		2			1				
									3					
	1													
					1									
2	1													
			1					1						
			1											
					1									

Amphibians (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Common Indian toad	<i>Duttaphrynus melanostictus</i>
2	Indian skipper frog	<i>Euphlyctis cyanophlyctis</i>

December														
7	8	9	10	11	12	12	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
										1				
	2									3				

Freshwater Fishes (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1		<i>Chela anastoma</i>
2	Pool barb	<i>Puntius sophore</i>
3	Golden masheer	<i>Tor putitora</i>

December														
7	8	9	10	11	12	12	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
									~20					
									1		2			
									~10					