

NORTHERN INDIA**12th - 25th February 2002****Andy & Isabel Senior****19th February**

.....The landscape south of Bah changed markedly, and quite abruptly. The agricultural land was replaced by huge sand dunes largely vegetated with scrub. We met a constant stream of camels carrying firewood - this is apparently cut in Madhya Pradesh and is bought across the border for trade. The change in landscape, and the sudden appearance of many camels gave the area a feeling of otherworldliness - completely different from what we'd grown accustomed to. This feeling was reinforced as we drove out of the dunes. We were confronted by a huge expanse of flat sand, obviously the dry bed of a massive river. In the far distance was the further bank of the river, and in the middle distance was what looked for all the world like a Bedouin camp - a small group of tents set in the sand, surrounded by nothing! This camp however, was set on the steep bank of what was still a pretty substantial river flow, and turned out to be the starting point for our river safari.

The first thing we saw as we dismounted from the Land rover was a flock of some 60 - 70 Indian Skimmers sitting on the beach about 100 metres away. Andreas immediately set up his gear, and began a slow, cautious approach in order to take photographs. Meanwhile, having had great views of these remarkable birds, we continued scanning the area, finding a variety of waders and egrets. Black-winged Stilts and Little Stints both gave good views.

On the small grassy areas between the cliffs and the river, small flocks of Bar-headed Geese grazed, and the shallow waters near the bank held large flocks of Pochard, Red-crested Pochard, Whistling Ducks and Ruddy Shelduck, along with smaller numbers of Pintail and Spot-billed duck. We also found a single male Goosander, our only sighting of this species. In addition to the wildfowl, we had excellent views of a pair of Pied Kingfishers, and again the skill of the boatman allowed Andreas to get some really close shots.

We made close approach to crocodiles laying up on reefs and sandbanks in midstream, and were able to easily distinguish between the more widespread fresh water crocodiles, which we'd seen elsewhere, and the slimmer nosed fish-eating crocodiles that basked with them.

As good a way as any of wrapping up the trip, was a brief sighting of river dolphins.

BIRDING TRIP OF NORTH INDIA**28th February – 22nd March 2002****Fernand Deroussen, Boris Jollivet & Benoît Segerer**www.indiabirds.com/HotSpots/Full_Details.asp?spotid=295&page=3

A little boat, and a beautiful river is waiting for us. The Chambal river is now a unusual national park of 150 km long and few km wide. The first birds are a large flock of Pelican and the bird list is growing rapidly with Wholly-necked Stork, Long-legged Buzzard, Bonelli's Eagle, Great Thick-knee and few species of Tern. The Garials, Marsh Crocodiles and last but not least, the Gangetic Dolphins should justify the journey. The boat trip last three hours, which is enough to discover

the best species but is really short for the quality of the environment (three or four days could be cool here).