

NATIONAL CHAMBAL SANCTUARY & CHAMBAL SAFARI**November 2004****Ian Tillotson**

After a long journey from London and from Delhi, my arrival at Chambal Safari was late and in darkness. I was made instantly welcome, and after being shown my room, I was enjoyed an hour or so of very necessary relaxation in the pleasant evening temperature, in the moonlit garden, and in the most agreeable company of Ram Pratap Singh, the proprietor. We were joined, in a nearby tree, by a collared scops owl, probably the most easily observable owl that I have ever encountered in the wild.

In my comfortable room, I slept well, relaxed by the soft sounds of the Indian night, and woke to not so soft sounds of the abundant rose-ringed parakeets. No need for an alarm clock here. Before breakfast, I enjoyed a gentle stroll around the garden and adjacent woodland, simply entranced by the abundance of wildlife, all of which was easy to observe, and which included a host of colourful bird species and a resident colony of fruit bats.

Chambal Safari Lodge is the centre point of a family estate, and is steeped in the tradition and the history of that family. It is presently being developed into a residential lodge that will provide superbly for the leisure and pleasure of visitors who seek a wild life experience, for those who may be in search of history and folklore, or for those who simply value the peace and serenity of a truly tranquil location. Historically, the woodlands around the house have been managed with the interests of wildlife in mind. Management for this purpose continues. The result has been the creation of wonderful open, sunlit but sheltered forest of mature and ancient trees, which are the home to a huge range of forest birds. The garden is truly undisturbed and peaceful in the extreme. The lodge and its surrounds are pleasingly India, but without the clamour and confusion of urban development or haste. The accommodation is comfortable, and during my visit was under rapid development to increase its capacity and to aim to even higher quality. The food, the quality of service and the friendly atmosphere are of the highest order.

For those who would choose to make a longer visit, and who would use the lodge as a base, there are many more historic and wildlife locations within easy distance, for day or for weekend visits.

For all of my working life, I have been closely and professionally involved in wildlife and habitat conservation and management. In retirement I have continued to work in environmental management, and I have chosen to expand my professional interests into ecological tourism. My visit to Chambal was part of a longer tour of sites and locations to consider their future potential for visitors from Europe. I have no hesitation in making the highest recommendation for the Chambal Safari Lodge and the Chambal Sanctuary to anyone wishing to enjoy the experience of Indian culture and wildlife from the comfort of a tranquil and delightful location.

INDIA TOUR REPORT**15th January – 27th January 2005****Avian Adventures**<http://www.birdtours.co.uk/avian-adventures/April-05/India/India-2005.htm>

Day 9: 23rd January 2005 - With Bharatpur not being as good as it can be we jumped at the chance of going to the Chambal River for the day. This exciting new location is about three hours drive from Bharatpur. We left early with our local guide on board and he soon had us at road side stake out sites for Asian Openbill Stork, Red Turtle Dove and Red Avadavat, three good additions to our growing list. We arrived at the Chambal Safari Lodge for morning drinks, and explored the old orchard grounds finding Koel, Brown-headed Barbet, Grey Hornbill and a tree full of Fruit Bats. An Oriental Honey-buzzard soared overhead. Then it was time for the short drive to the river where we donned life jackets and boarded our small boat for a two-hour river trip. The river levels were quite high so there were few exposed sandbanks. Unfortunately no Indian Skimmers or Ganges River Dolphins were seen but we did have a close encounter with a group of Gharial, the fish eating crocodiles as they rested on a sand bar. The birding was exciting too. An increasingly rare Black-bellied Tern flew past, a group of Red-crested Pochards swam by, two Brown Crakes showed well in a small creek, Bonelli's Eagles soared overhead and a Long-legged Buzzard perched obligingly in a riverside tree. A short look on the river banks and in the surrounding agricultural land produced two Great Thick-knees, and various larks and pipits including a lone Richard's Pipit. We finished the day with tea and biscuits at the Safari Lodge and then it was time for the drive back to Bharatpur. It had been a most rewarding day out.

INDIA BHARATPUR – BIRDSEEKERS**February 2005****Leaders: Nick Bray, Viv Stratton, & Dilip Saini**http://www.birdwatchingtours.co.uk/reports/after_tour_docs/Bharatpur.doc**Day 5 - Tuesday 15th Feb**

With the lure of some cracking birds, our early start didn't seem to bother anyone at all. In fact today may well have been the highlight of the week, with so many different sightings and experiences. Our drive to the Chambal River Lodge passed quite uneventfully, and on arrival at the lodge our coach dropped us off a couple hundred yards from the entrance and we walked in, seeing a party of Large Grey Babblers, Plain Prinia, Indian Grey Hornbill and a pair of Coppersmith Barbets. An inviting cup of tea greeted our arrival, and an even more inviting 'rest room'! The major sightings here were an unexpected Common Hawk Cuckoo that flew up into a large tree and posed nicely allowing us good scope views, and a brief male Asian Koel found by Viv. It wasn't far to the river, and this segment of the journey was uneventful, apart from a minor detour being taken when the residents of a village decided to blockade the main road in protest at a lack of electricity. Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to see the villages bustling to

life, with people cramming the streets, and multi-coloured displays of fruit and assorted vegetables along the roadside, with the odd camel thrown in for good measure!

On arrival at the river, Crested Lark, River Lapwing, Great Thick-knee, Desert Wheatear, Red-crested Pochard, White-browed Wagtail, Pied Kingfisher, Little Ringed Plover, and a pair of Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Larks all vied for our immediate attention. Heading upriver, several Small Pratincoles could be seen flying around, whilst several River and Black-bellied Terns passed close by our boat. As we cruised downriver, there were many Gharials seen, plus a few huge Gangetic River Turtles. Over in the distance a pair of Bonelli's Eagles soared, whilst on the river a Goosander and an Osprey were both more familiar to us than a group of Lesser Whistling-Ducks. A couple Long-legged Buzzards also showed well, just before the first of an amazing count of 72 Indian Skimmers. We had such superb views of these totally brilliant, and much wanted birds. Circling the island they were roosting on was fantastic, and we watched several flying around us, and also here were several more Gharials, and a couple huge Marsh Muggers. Returning back to base we passed several Small Pratincoles and Kentish Plovers perched on the riverbank. Just as we disembarked, a Long-legged Buzzard passed low overhead, and a White Wagtail of the race *personata* (split by some authorities as Masked Wagtail) were seen. Returning to the lodge for our picnic lunch, we had plenty of time to relax before Dilip spotted a Large Cuckooshrike sat at the top of a huge Banyan tree, and it finally gave itself up to everyone after giving us the run around. Other goodies around the garden included a pair of Asian Koel, as well as the Common Hawk Cuckoo still being present, plus Spotted Owlet, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Greenish Warbler and Brown-headed Barbet. Finally it was time to leave and we headed back to our hotel, making one stop along the way when a flock of birds were seen perched on a telegraph wire. They turned out to be Baya Weavers, and whilst looking at them they were joined by several Tree Pipits, as well as Rufous-tailed and Long-tailed Shrikes and flock of Green Bee-eaters. We seemed to cause quite a stir in the village and were soon joined by a large crowd of onlookers; no doubt bemused as to what a bunch of tourists were doing in their fields!