

**INDIA TRIP****(Ladakh, Corbett National Park, Chambal River, Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary)****Nov-Dec 2011****Participants: Niels Poul Dreyer, Mette Visby Mikkelsen, Ole Michael Lemming, Nils-Erik Norsker (all from Denmark)**<http://dreyerfoto.dk/index/wp-content/uploads/india-trip.pdf>

We arrived at Chambal Safari Lodge [GPS 26.87200333, 78.56334000] at 8 p.m. It was nice to enjoy a beer in the comfortable setting after having been on the road for so many hours. Our birdguide for the next 2 days Dalveer Singh (dalveersinghcs@gmail.com) told us that the Skimmer had not arrived yet. We went to bed a bit worried that we might miss this highly endangered species.

During breakfast at 7:00. Dalveer came smiling and told us that the first skimmer had been seen at the tent of the boatman which was the first sighting for this season. Normally they arrive a bit later. The best time for the Skimmer and for that matter for everything else in North India is between January and April. After breakfast we undertook a forty minutes drive to the boat jetty at the river. En route we stopped to watch a flock of Black-breasted Weavers and Red-headed Buntings sitting on a wire.

We arrived to the boat ramp about 8.30 a.m., which proved to be twenty minutes too late to see the skimmer on the ground. It had departed west upstream. In a rush we entered the boat and headed quickly upstream. About fifteen minutes later we saw the Skimmer just above us. We had great views of a bird species which is in deep trouble and may be on the way to extinction. After a while it flew downstream and did not return.

However we had a great time on the downstream part of the river, we observed three rare species of turtle, two species of crocodile, a Booted Eagle, an Egyptian Vultures, an Eagle-Owl, a Thick-knee, lots of ducks and geese, Red-naped Ibis, Black-bellied and River Terns, Storks and five Ganges River Dolphins and much more. We returned upstream in the afternoon. We had originally booked for a longer boat trip the next morning, but some of us wanted to visit Taj Mahal. It is said that in two to five years the Taj Mahal may be forever closed for tourists as the water level in the Yamuna River is sinking, and thus the wooden fundament of the building is in danger of collapsing.

In the morning we had a good round trip with our guide as he knew all the roosting sites of Collared Scops-Owl, Brown Hawk-Owl and Spotted Owlet. We saw Flying foxes above our cabins. A Brooks Leaf- Warbler was recognized from its hovering behavior and a Brown-headed Barbet was seen feeding on fruits in the garden while Rose-ringed Parakeets flew noisily by. This was a very attractive lodge with lots of birds.

**ROCKJUMPER BIRDING TOURS NORTHERN INDIA****1st TO 18th DECEMBER 2011**<http://www.rockjumperbirding.com/wp-content/media/Northern-India-birding-Trip-Report-Dec-2011.pdf>

In the late afternoon we boarded our bus and drove towards the Chambal River. The next morning we drove down to the river itself. This area is much dryer than any other region that is visited during our North India trip, offering a whole different selection of species that are

restricted to the arid landscape surrounding the river. Two of the key species on the river are Indian Skimmer and the delicate Black-bellied Tern and we were thrilled to locate both of these elegant birds. Other highlights at and around the river included Rock Eagle-Owl at the nest with two chicks, Rufous-fronted Prinia, Rock Bush Quail, the impressive Bonelli's and Short-toed Eagles, equally impressive Bar-headed Goose, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and the remarkable Gharial and Mugger Crocodile.

## **NORTHERN INDIA: HIMALAYAS, TAJ MAHAL AND BHARATPUR**

### **A Tropical Birding Set Departure**

**DECEMBER 3 – 17, 2011**

**Ken Behrens**

[http://www.tropicalbirding.com/wpcontent/uploads/pdfs/Asia/India/TR\\_NorthIndiaSDDec2011.pdf](http://www.tropicalbirding.com/wpcontent/uploads/pdfs/Asia/India/TR_NorthIndiaSDDec2011.pdf)

Farther south, two boat rides on the pristine Chambal River secured prizes like Great Thick-Knee, Black-bellied and River Terns, Indian Skimmer, Sand and Rufous-tailed Larks, Ganges River dolphin, and a pair of impressive crocodiles: mugger and gharial.

## **CHAMBAL FOR SKIMMERS**

**December, 2011**

**Vijay Cavale**

<http://vijaycavale.blogspot.in/2012/02/chambal-for-skimmers-december-2011.html>

I always wanted to visit "The National Chambal Sanctuary" to watch and photograph the Indian Skimmers. When MN Jayakumar suggested that he was going on an official visit to Agra and would be able to take a few days off for shooting birds, the plan was finalized. Kulushekara and myself on our way back from "Sattal" would meet MNJ in New Delhi and then the three of us would proceed to Agra, Chambal and Bharatpur. Quite a learning experience for me! and plenty of fun!!

30th. After breakfast we left Agra and reached the "Chambal Safari Lodge" by 11 am. About three hours drive I guess. Kartick and Geeta joined us for a day. At the lodge, RP Singh received us warmly and settled us in large comfortable rooms. My first impression of the place was very good and as they say "First impression is the best impression"! We spent the next two nights very comfortably at the lodge before we proceeded to Bharatpur on the afternoon of the 02nd of December, 2011. Good food and good sleep! We made several boat rides in the Chambal River during our stay at the lodge. We were of course here for the Skimmers! Though we were completely disappointed initially, on the 2nd December morning on our 4th and last boat ride, at about 10 am in the morning we finally saw three Indian Skimmers! They appeared from the mist and were flying towards us and believe it or not they actually decided to land in a small sand bank right next to us! It seemed to me like they liked our company as they allowed us to shoot to our hearts content and even went off to sleep! And when we decided to move on, they actually rose and followed us – no kidding!!

Not just the Skimmers! We were able to see several Gharials and Muggers in the river along with a variety of birds! In Summary, we got what we came for and more!

And as we were on our way back after the last boat ride, very happy having bagged the Skimmers, a pair of "Sarus Cranes" flew right over our heads!

**INDIA 2011**

<http://avipics.wordpress.com/2011/05/08/chambal-safari-lodge/>

After the train from the total left over seven hours late, we finally arrived at Agra. Extremely tired and worn out we walked by and quickly grab all the taxi drivers and rickshaw-wallahs who wanted us into their vehicle. After a heated discussion with many people involved as we got to the end of a taxi that would take us to the Chambal Safari Lodge , about 7 mil east of Agra. The taxi journey was a pure horror experience in itself and perhaps, I thought it was funny if I had been more daring, it went extremely quickly into the already messy traffic and that was overtaking the oncoming traffic and a lot of honking yes. We arrived at least until unharmed and were warmly welcomed by both the owner and staff at the lodge. We quickly got our cabin, which was called Koel (a bird) and was fresh to us before we went and ate a hearty buffet dinner.

Chambal Safari Lodge is an old farm property that the current owners have converted into accommodation for tourists and nature in which they can offer different safari options in the neighborhood. Most interesting is of course the boat trips on the Chambal River, but they also have trips to a protected area for sarustranor and to a holy city one mil away. There is also a so-called "Nature Trek" around the lodge and the surrounding agricultural landscape that are accompanied by a guide. This trek is included in the price of accommodation and is approximately 2 hours. The guides at the lodge may be the most sought after birds and where they usually are, but are also knowledgeable regarding other wildlife and nature.

Something that is really good with this lodge is the food. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served in a really well-cooked buffet. One nice thing is when dinner is approaching its ending, it becomes a little 'Evening Show'. This means that the staff is feeding a family palmmårdar Indian (Asian Palm Civet) with leftover chapatibröd. They come up quite unashamedly on the roof and intrigues for the torn bread. As a photographer you get to stand on a chair to reach up flush with the ceiling. It was a really fun experience to see the otherwise nocturnal and right invisible animals run back and forth there on the roof. After the little show was just to sit down with a Kingfisher Beer around the campfire and enjoy.

In retrospect, I must say that the Chambal Safari Lodge was one of the nicer places we stayed at during this trip. The whole framing of the incredibly tranquil lodge, really tasty and well prepared Indian food, friendly reception staff and the exciting meetings of the bird, animal and terms of nature made the whole stay here very special. They also try to get into an ecological thinking in their concept, which is admirable in today's littered and polluted India, it is badly needed. I highly recommend a visit here if you are planning a trip to this part of India.

**TRIP REPORT DELHI - AGRA – JAIPUR**

**From January...Late I Know**

<http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowTopic-g293860-i511-k5274622>

[Trip Report Delhi Agra Jaipur from January late I know-India.html](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowTopic-g293860-i511-k5274622)

Chambal River Lodge was very nice. The river was beautiful and clean, allegedly due to a curse hundreds of years before, which kept people from living on the river. We loved the 108 temples of Lord Shiva on the riverbank of Yamuna.. We even had a chance in the evening

after we saw the sunset to join in a Hindu religious ceremony which was very interesting to us. We saw the gharials, turtles and river dolphins on our river boat tour. It was a lovely time and our Gabbar Singh jokes did get us quite a few laughs.

## **TIGERS & BIRDS OF BANDHAVGARH**

**5 February – 16 February 2012**

**Hannu Jännes**

[http://www.birdquest-tours.com/pdfs/report/INDIA%20\(TIGERS\)%20REP%2012-ebook.pdf](http://www.birdquest-tours.com/pdfs/report/INDIA%20(TIGERS)%20REP%2012-ebook.pdf)

After the busy day in the hustle and bustle of Agra, it was time to head back to the dusty, colourful Indian countryside, and the charming Chambal Safari Lodge for a two night stay. As we still had some time left before dusk, our local guide took us to see a roosting Brown Hawk Owl, a winter visitor here, two Indian Scops Owls roosting together and a family party of Spotted Owlets. A full day in the Chambal area with our excellent local guide started with birding a few well chosen spots en route to the Chambal river, which produced several good birds including Rufous-fronted Prinia (and four other species of prinia!), several Jungle Bush Quails seen well, Crested and Whitecapped Buntings, Variable Wheatear, Common Babbler, White-eared Bulbul, three Bimaculated Larks in flight, many Ashy-crowned Finch, and a few Greater Short-toed Larks, and Tawny, Blyth's and Tree Pipits. At the river itself we boarded our small, but comfortable motorboat and cruised upstream seeing (and photographing) an interesting selection of wildlife including Great Thick-knee, tame Pied Kingfisher, Indian Black Ibis, amazingly close Gharials and Mugger Crocodiles, several jumps of the rare Ganges River Dolphin, River, and a single Black-bellied Terns and a flock of Small Pratincoles. After a while we reached the sandbar where one of our main targets, the Indian Skimmers, were loafing. We then spent quite a lot of time photographing the 30 or so skimmers which posed well for us and showed us their skimming skills. This year wildfowl and herons were very scarce on the river, but we still managed to see some very photogenic Ruddy Shelducks, a small number of approachable Bar-headed Geese and a couple of Comb Ducks. While sailing upstream an Indian Soft-shell Turtle attracted our attention by its odd behaviour, and when we took a closer look, we realised that it had been caught by a longline. As any kind of fish/turtle traps are forbidden in this 400 km long protected stretch of river we released the turtle and removed the longline. Despite the full protection status of all water turtles in India, they are apparently heavily poached and transported to SE Asia via Kolkata. Thanks to intensive patrolling along the Chambal river by the forest department the illegal trapping is minimal here, but apparently common and out of control along other rivers of lowland India. Back on the shore we followed the locals loading a small ferry on its way across the river to Madhya Pradesh with people, bicycles, motorcycles, and even a Water Buffalo. After lunch we enjoyed an afternoon birding session around the Chambal Safari Lodge, where among commoner countryside birds we encountered a male Spanish Sparrow (first for the season here), Southern Great Grey Shrike, and a Red-necked Falcon, which all were new birds for us. Other interesting species included our best views of Brown-headed Barbet on the tour, a showy Oriental Honey Buzzard, a pair of tame Indian Thick-knees, a single Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Brooks's Leaf Warbler and a Thick-billed Flowerpecker, a rare bird in the area.