

BLACKBUCK

filmed in October 2012 for the S4C series Teithiau Tramor Iolo.

Camera: Lynfa Jenkin

Sound: Cheryl Jones

Guide: Rajveer Singh Idoliya

Director: John Gwyn

<http://www.aden.co/BlackBuck.jsp>

NORTHERN INDIA

21st December 2012 to 6th January 2013

Participants - Alison Blinston and Nick Blinston (alison.hall3 AT virgin.net):

http://www.surfbirds.com/trip_report.php?id=2302

After 2 nights, Deepak drove us on to Chambal Safari Lodge, surrounded by a very fertile area, more or less untouched by tourism and near to the Chambal River. The lodge was comfortable but was suffering from Fog and said to be experiencing the lowest temperatures in a decade, consequently birding was not as good as it might have been. We took 2 of their "safari trips", first to the Chambal River where we were able to walk down through the river cliffs, seeing dry land birds such as Tawny Pipit, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Crested Bunting, Brown Rock Chat, Desert and Variable Wheatears, Indian Bushlark and Sandlark. The river trip gave superb views of Indian Skimmer, and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, as well as Marsh Crocodile, Gharial and Indian Tent Turtle. The second trip, billed as the Blackbuck Safari, gave great views of the twisted horned Blackbuck Antelope, as well as Indian Courser, Isabelline Wheatear, Short-toed Lark and Southern Grey Shrike. The area around Chambal Lodge, provided the chance to explore and see something of a rural Indian community. In the agricultural land we also managed to get good views of Jungle Cat, see 2 species of Weaver and our only sighting of Black-billed Ibis. The flooded fields were an opportunity to test our skills in identifying various Wagtail species.

CHAMBAL SAFARI LODGE Uttar Pradesh

January 2013

Ashima Kumar

<http://ashimakumar.blogspot.in/2013/05/published-in-india-today-travel-plus.html>

The ravines of Chambal once notorious for the bandit brigades, today seem frozen in time with its curious mud mounds and a River that flows through them. The Chambal River, home to a variety of bird and animal life, is one of the last vestiges of the highly endangered Ganges Dolphin. Away from Uttar Pradesh's noise and bustle This region between Bah and Etawah is quiet but forgotten. The river itself considered unholy. A late evening arrival at the Chambal Safari lodge some 70 kilometers from Agra just short of Bah, brought us to the Chambal safari lodge (Mela Kothi) a family estate turned into a lodge. It is a quiet world happy in its quirks and whims. We wake up to a fresh morning to the sounds of rose-ringed parakeets and Babblers. After a scrumptious breakfast it is time to get introduced to the magnificent Chambal with a boat ride upstream.

The Chambal is one of India's cleanest rivers. Due to the lack of Human intervention the river bank instead of being soiled with rubbish and plastic bags is littered with mussel shells and pebbles and the sandy banks a vibrant yellow from the mustard growing in the fields on either side. The 425 kilometer of river has been declared as protected area since 1979. The Sanctuary area runs across three states of UP, MP and Rajasthan. UP has 150 kilometers of river stretch in the Sanctuary running along Bah (Agra) to Etawah. As we head upstream, it becomes apparent why the lodge is a haunt for birding and nature enthusiasts. The sheer number of birds that inhabit the area is astonishing. Amongst them are flocks of bar headed geese, the world's highest flying birds that migrate south from Tibet and Mongolia across the Himalayas come and nest here. The Indian Skimmer with its black head and curious orange beak, numbers of its species have been dwindling over time can be seen nesting on the sandy spits and islands in the river. Besides these Ospreys, Ruddy shell ducks, Demoiselle cranes and Cormorants are a plenty. As you head further upstream along the calm waters the low murmur of the boat engine and the splash of the water the only sounds. One gets to see the Marsh crocodile and the Gharial sunning on the sandy banks. The skilled boatmen shut down the engine and take you as close as possible without disturbing the animal giving you great photo ops. Just as we are getting accustomed to this, we hear a plop! It's the Ganges River Dolphin surfacing for air every now and then, when it does; you get to see a sight now becoming rare of this amazing creature that puts up a great show for us.. Not many would know that it is our National Aquatic animal the plight of which in our hands has put it on the brink of extinction. We return to the lodge, still in a daze from our close encounters with the Dolphin. The staff introduces us to their shy in-house resident, the Civet cat. It's a different world and we are loving it.

A must do trip for every wild life enthusiast; enjoy nature in all its glory and the need to awaken to the imminent threat to this fragile ecosystem that too shall be lost if we carry on polluting our rivers

NATURALIST JOURNEYS

January 2013

<http://www.naturalistjourneys.com/pdfs/IND13TRIPREPORT.pdf>

FIELD GUIDES

January/February 2013

<http://www.fieldguides.com/triplists/ind13LIST.pdf>

TIGERS & BIRDS OF BANDHAVGARH

Sunday 3rd February - Thursday 14th February 2013

Hannu Jännes

<http://www.birdquest-tours.com/India-Bandhavgarh-tigers-birding-wildlife-tour-report/2013>

Once again Tigers took the lead role on this very popular, highly successful, tour running for its ninth successive year, but there is so much else in addition including lots of great birds, places of great natural beauty, extraordinarily beautiful buildings and the colourful, always interesting, everyday life of the Indian people themselves.

This year we had close-up views of two different Tigers, including three amazing eyeball to eyeball encounters with the dominant Barmeera male. Other non-avian highlights included three good sightings of Sloth Bear, a species that is usually hard to see in Bandhavgarh, some Ganges River Dolphins, couple of Common Palm Civets, many prehistoric looking Gharials and Indian Rock Python. The number of bird species recorded was 283, a whopping new record for this itinerary! Highlights included a flock of the increasingly scarce Indian Skimmers at the Chambal River, amazingly close views of Black-necked Storks, Sarus Cranes and Comb Ducks at a village pond near the Chambal River, several encounters with Painted Spurfowls, two elegant Indian Coursers, a good showing of vultures including our first sightings of Himalayan Vultures on this itinerary, 20 species of hawks and eagles including Tawny, Indian Spotted, Greater Spotted and Eastern Imperial Eagle, several Crested Hawk-Eagles and White-eyed Buzzards, both the Jungle and Rock Bush-quail, eight species of owls including the very handsome Mottled Wood and the majestic Brown Fish Owl, a very confiding Brown Crake, the threatened Black-bellied Tern, large and noisy groups of Malabar Pied Hornbills and a good selection of passerines including six species of prinia and seven species of pipit, Tickell's, Orange-headed and Small-billed Scaly Thrush, both Jerdon's and Gold-fronted Leafbirds, and a flock of the subtly beautiful Sind Sparrows. The biggest ornithological surprise of the trip was a discovery of a first winter male Blue-and-White Flycatcher at Bandhavgarh, the second ever record for India!

NORTH INDIA AND NEPAL TOUR – Birding Tours, Germany**8th - 21st February 2013****Som GC**

http://www.birdingtours.de/uploads/media/Reisebericht_Indien_und_Nepal_Februar_2013.pdf

INDIA WILDLIFE SPECTACULAR**Wednesday 13th February - Sunday 3rd March 2013****Mike Watson**

<http://mikewatsonsdairy.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.wildimagesphototours.com/pdfs/report/INDIA%20WILDLIFE%20SPECTACULAR%20REP%2013-ebook.pdf>

We skipped Agra's Red Fort this time, unfortunately it is sadly not as well appreciated as its neighboring World Heritage Site and our previous folks have always wanted more of the wonderful Chambal River.

We had decided to make two river cruises this time in the National Chambal Sanctuary. These were probably the most productive photo sessions of the whole tour with many of us taking well over 1,000 photos of numerous different subjects. Very soon we caught up with the number one target here, the amazing Indian Skimmer, with its 'snapped-off' shorter upper mandible, bouncy flight and from time to time living up to its name with some skimming. There was a group of around 30 birds, settling down on sand banks in the river that again allowed some very close approach in very nice light – FANTASTIC STUFF! The cruises also afforded opportunities to photograph some attractive River Lapwings (now a threatened bird of the

Indian Subcontinent's large slow-flowing rivers) and the peculiar but even more photogenic Great Thick-knee. After this highlight we cruised up and down picking up more interesting subjects, notably Gharial amongst the more widespread Marsh Mugger crocodiles. The National Chambal Sanctuary was declared in 1978, mostly to protect the critically endangered Gharial, the bizarre long-snouted fish-eating crocodile.

Named after the Nepalese word 'ghara' meaning earthenware pot, referring to the enlarged growth on the end of the snout of mature males, which can grow to six metres long and one tonne in weight (second only to the monstrous Saltwater Crocodile). Again we saw one beast with a large pot and this time even got some reasonable photos. There are less than 400 breeding pairs left in its remaining range, a mere 2% of its former distribution, which used to include Pakistan, Burma and the Brahmaputra. A truly magnificent animal.

A rich variety of wildlife can still be found on the Chambal, including pretty much all of the characteristic species of the large slow-flowing rivers of the Gangetic drainage system that were once found all over northern India. It is like stepping back in time and other relics included Woolly-necked Stork, Indian Black Ibis, Comb Duck and Black-bellied Tern. Also here were: flotillas of Bar-headed Geese grazing on the weed in the river; Ruddy Shelducks, paired up and several Golden Jackals were prowling the riverbank. We also had some great encounters with cute Small Pratincoles, especially in the evening as they hawked over the river. Also here were smart River Terns, White-browed Wagtails and a few Temminck's Stints as well as a few special visitors, some Greater Flamingoes, a couple of Pallas's Gulls from Central Asia and two pelicans, one of each, Great White and Dalmatian! A 960km long tributary of the filthy River Yamuna, the Chambal River has escaped development and its inevitable pollution owing to the river being considered unholy! It was said to have been cursed by a princess as well as carried the blood of thousands of sacrificed cows, ironically saving it from the even worse fate that has befallen the other rivers around it.

Our very pleasant lodge near the Chambal was as delightful as ever and our wonderful evening meal here was followed by some after dark Common Palm Civet photography in the large trees around the lodge gardens. In daytime there are usually some interesting birds in the near vicinity and this year's visit again resulted in some good photo opportunities of Spotted Owlet and Yellow-wattled Lapwing. We were sorry to head back north to the bright lights of Agra, then Delhi and the next stop on our tour, the 'Kipling Country' of Madhya Pradesh state

CHAMBAL RIVER BOAT TRIP

Monday, 4 March 2013

Nick Bray

<http://zootheabirding.blogspot.com/2013/03/chambal-river-boat-trip.html>

So my northern India tour is up and running and what a way to start - a boat ride on the Chambal River. We all woke up in eager anticipation of what our first proper days birding would bring and after a good breakfast we drove towards the river making our first stop amongst some arid canyons where a quick walk gave us a close perched Shikra, followed by numerous Rose-ringed Parakeets and Laughing Doves, Spotted Owlet, Indian Robin, groups of Common and Large Grey Babblers, Lesser Whitethroat, White-eared Bulbul, Brahminy Starling, Indian Silverbill and best of all a superb White-capped Bunting perched in an Acacia and a

Rufous-fronted Prinia. A Golden Jackal sat on a close ridge was also well received and boosted our animal tally, adding to some Rhesus Macaques we had seen earlier in the nearby town. A short drive brought us to another area where we walked along the track and saw our first Grey Francolin, Indian Peafowl, Black Redstart, Bay-backed Shrike and Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark before cresting the ridge and getting our first views of the river below us.

A few Grey-throated Martins were flying around a narrow gully here, and a Tree Pipit was perched up nicely as well, whilst a Crested and then a flock of Greater Short-toed Larks and a few Siberian Chiffchaffs were seen on our walk down to the river and our waiting boats.

As we approached the water's edge a Masked Wagtail was seen at close quarters, a pair of Black-bellied Terns flew along the opposite shore, a pair of Great Thick-knees were spotted on a nearby island, and we also saw Comb Duck, Ruddy Shelduck, Bar-headed Goose, Temminck's Stint and a flock of Red-crested Pochards.

Once aboard our two boats we got closer to the thick-knees, who were also joined by a pair of River Lapwings and a River Tern which all gave superb close views. A boat ride along the Chambal River is one of the 'must-do' things a birder should do in India as the main focus is on seeing Indian Skimmer, the bird that has made this area famous.

Sure enough we did see them after an hour or so journey upstream and were fortunate indeed to get such great views of a flock of 45 birds roosting on a sandy island. The views of everything seen this morning were incredible and we had nice looks at a pair of Bonelli's Eagles flying over, at one stage they mobbed an Osprey that had a recently caught fish in its talons. There was also Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill, Woolly-necked and Painted Storks, Indian Black and Black-headed Ibis.

There was also some flyover Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, a Brown Crake, a flock of Small Pratincoles, Great Black-headed Gull, Lesser Pied Kingfisher, Desert Wheatear, and Wire-tailed Swallow. Non avian interest was plenty with plenty of huge Gharials, as well as Marsh Muggers, a few Soft-shelled Turtles, Jungle Cat and another jackal.

Following lunch and a siesta we walked around the gardens, chasing a previously reported Whistler's Warbler without any luck, and this is a major rarity here which I eventually saw but not for long. But the walk was very pleasant and gave us 7 Yellow-wattled Lapwings, Yellow-footed Green-pigeon, a pair of day-roosting Indian Scops-owls, lots of Indian Grey Hornbills, both Brown-headed and Coppersmith Barbets, and best of all a pair of Ashy Minivets – another really scarce bird here. There was also Taiga and Red-breasted Flycatchers, Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher and Hume's Warbler as well. That evening, just before dinner, we managed to spotlight a Common Palm Civet in the garden to round off a great day

NORTHERN INDIA – CHAMBAL, AGRA & DELHI

March 23rd to April 2nd 2013

John & Judy Geeson Andrew & Ann Duff

[http://www.wildabouttravel.co.uk/trip-reports/J and J Geeson A and A Duff India Chambal Agra ext 2013.pdf](http://www.wildabouttravel.co.uk/trip-reports/J%20and%20J%20Geeson%20A%20and%20A%20Duff%20India%20Chambal%20Agra%20ext%202013.pdf)

INDIA**April 2013****Jeff Hoover**<http://www.tripadvisor.com.my/ShowTopic-g293860-i511-k6553751>[Our India Trip Report with Indian Panorama-India.html](#)

The last destination of our two week Indian adventure was the nature park of Chambal. We were originally scheduled to spend another day in Agra but since we prefer to be out in nature viewing wildlife we asked Indian Panorama to modify our itinerary. Not a frequent tourist destination because of its past history with “bandits”, Chambal is truly a gem waiting to be discovered. We very much enjoyed the comfort of our luxury cottage at Chambal Safari Lodge. The grounds of the lodge itself provided amazing opportunities for wildlife photography - hundreds of flying foxes and parakeets hanging out in the trees, multiple peacocks roaming the wooded areas, and nocturnal common palm civets feeding on berries at night. Our first activity was taking a camel safari from the river to the ruins of Fort Ater – definitely an Indiana Jones type of adventure! Also, crossing the river (which is inhabited by marsh crocodiles) on camelback at sunset was definitely one of the highlights of our holiday. Early the next morning we had our riverboat safari in search of the endangered Ganges river dolphin and gharial (long snouted crocodile). The Chambal River is not considered to be a holy river thus is much cleaner with less pollution. It was definitely an excellent way to end our Indian adventure by viewing in awe both of these species that have been brought back from near extinction. Later that afternoon we proceeded on the 5 hour drive to the airport in Delhi to start our long journey home.