

NORTHERN INDIA: CHAMBAL, AGRA and DELHI

*John & Judy Geeson
Andrew & Ann Duff*

March 29th – April 2nd 2013

The aim of this short pre-tour extension was to visit the well known Chambal River to see three key species: Indian Skimmer, Ganges River Dolphin and Gharial, and also to visit, or in some cases re-visit, some of the famous Mughal and other buildings in Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Delhi – before flying on to N.E.India for an intensive birding tour in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The itinerary was discussed with, and all arrangements made by **Jo Thomas** of **Wildabouttravel** (contact: jo@wildabouttravel.co.uk) through her local ground agents **Indiantryst**. The comprehensive package included transport, full board at Chambal, B&B in hotels in Agra and Delhi, guides and most entrance fees.



DAILY DIARY and ITINERARY

March 29th - 0945 Gulf Air flight from Heathrow arr. Bahrain 1845 (GMT + 3hr);
1040 Gulf Air flight to

March 30th - Delhi arr.0430 (GMT + 5.5hr); through passport, baggage claim
and bank, then met by “Abhi” from Indiantryst 0530.

Loaded into minibus and drove
south out of Delhi via Agra to
Chambal Safari Lodge
arr.1200; met by owners, settled
into our comfortable bungalows and
relaxed over lunch in the garden.



Chambal Lodge (photo Judy Geeson)

Afternoon walk 1530-1830 with our allocated nature guide
“Guj” around the wooded lodge grounds – seeing Red-breasted Flycatchers,
Greenish Warblers, Smoky Warbler, Brown-headed Barbet, Coppersmith Barbet,
Rufous Treepies, Indian Scops Owl, Asian Koels and Yellow-footed Green Pigeons,



India Scops Owl



*Yellow-footed Green Pigeon
(all photos Judy Geeson)*



Brown-hd.Barbet

and surrounding fields – Plain and Ashy Prinias, flocks of Red-headed Buntings and
Black-breasted Weavers, Spotted Owlet and a Bluethroat; Bronze-winged Jacanas
and Greater Painted Snipe were on a village pool; mammals included a group of
Nilgai and an Indian Hare. Much needed shower before 1930 dinner. Struggled to
stay awake doing the days bird list, but an Indian Palm Civet spotlighted in the trees at
2030 to end the day.

March 31st – Met for early coffee/tea, followed by Black-rumped Flameback beside the bus, then set off from the Lodge 0600 towards the **Chambal River**, spending 0630-0830 birding along the narrow road through dry scrubby ravines and fields;

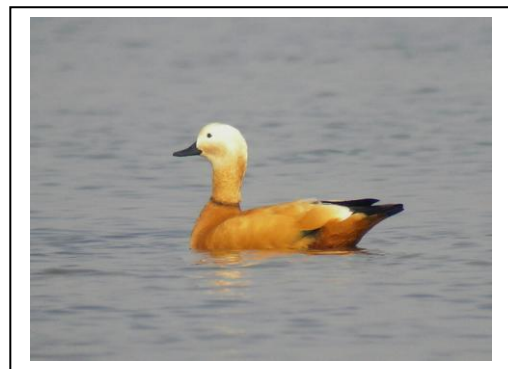


The “ravine area” and Jungle Bush-Quail (photos Judy Geeson)

Here we saw: Greater Coucal, Green Bee-eater, Yellow-eyed and Common Babblers, 5 spp. of Prinias, Indian Bushlark, Indian Robin, Black Redstart, Indian Silverbill, Jungle Bush Quails, plus the first Golden Jackal.



Bar-headed Geese (Andrew Duff)



Ruddy Shelduck (Judy Geeson)

Down at the riverside – Crested Larks, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Tawny Pipit and Tree Pipits were found in the short vegetation, followed by a selection of waterfowl: Bar-headed Geese, Ruddy Shelduck, Comb Duck, Lesser Whistling Ducks, and waders:

River Lapwing, Black-winged Stilt, Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper and both Little and Temminck’s Stints at the waters edge.

*River Lapwing
(Judy Geeson)*





Chambal River (Judy Geeson)

We set off in the lodge's own boat for the much-anticipated river trip at 0845, enjoying picnic breakfast on board, whilst good birds came thick and fast :- River Tern, Black-bellied Tern, Wire-tailed Swallow, Sirkeer Malkoha, Blue Rock Thrush, White-capped Bunting, Great Thick-knee, Black Ibis, Painted Stork, Woolly-necked Stork, Asian Openbill and Little Pratincole –



Indian Skimmers (Andrew Duff)

before the star turn of Indian Skimmers performed around the boat.

Good numbers of Gharials and Marsh (Mugger) Crocodiles loafed on the sandy shorelines and at our far point we enjoyed several views of a Ganges River Dolphin. We motored back more briskly and returned to the Lodge by 1130. The middle of the day was spent relaxing either side of lunch; checked out 1500 and drove N to **Agra** and the **Raj Mahal Hotel** arr.1630.



Gharials (Andrew Duff)

April 1st – Left the hotel 0645 with our historical guide for the day Mujeeb and drove the short distance to the **Taj Mahal** arr. 0700, when the photographic light looking towards the famous mausoleum from the main entrance gate was excellent; the tour of the Taj and grounds lasted until 0915; returned to the hotel for a late breakfast.

Left again 1030 – drove E to **Fatehpur Sikri** arr.1145 and explored the ancient city until 1400 – wonderful buildings though very hot and the light rather harsh for photography.



*Diwan-i-Khas,
Fatehpur Sikri
(Judy Geeson)*

Returned to the hotel in Agra for a shower and recuperation, and set off for our evening excursion at 1630, spending 1700-1730 in and around the exquisite **Tomb of Itimad-ud- Daula** (also known as **The Jewel Box** or **Baby Taj**)



*The “Jewel Box”
(John Geeson)*

in beautiful evening light, then continued further along the E side of the Yamuna River to **Mehtab Bagh** to enjoy sunset views of the **Taj Mahal** across the river, making an excellent end to the day.

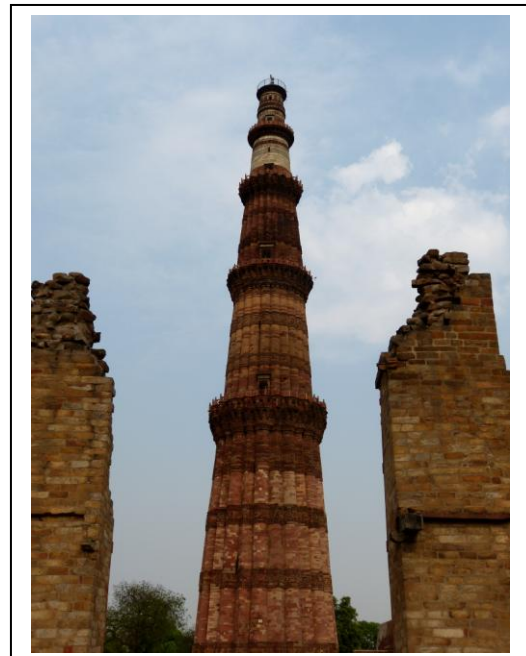


The Taj Mahal at dusk (photo John Geeson)

April 2nd –

Checked out of the Raj Mahal after breakfast at 0830; drove back to **Delhi** arr. at **Hotel Lohmod** close to the airport at 1345.

Set out at 1500 in the hotel taxi to visit the spectacular complex of buildings and ruins at **Qutab Minar** (entrance 250Rs for foreigners) 1530-1645 and returned to the hotel in a heavy thunderstorm arr. 1745.



*Qutab Minar
(John Geeson)*

April 3rd - After breakfast, transferred to Delhi Airport for onward 0950 Jet Airways flight to Dibrugarh.

BIRD CHECKLIST

Unless otherwise indicated, most of the birds recorded were seen at or around Chambal – the lodge grounds, surrounding agricultural fields, the “ravines” or on the river trip.

Dabchick *Tachybaptus ruficollis* – frequent on roadside ponds.

Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* – few on river trip.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* – 4 on river trip.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* - 4 on river trip.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* – small numbers in wet areas most days.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii* – few seen daily.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus (ibis) coromandus* – common.

Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* – 15 on river trip 31/3;
2 on Yamuna River behind Taj Mahal 1/4.

Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* – 1 en route to Chambal 30/3; 1 Chambal 31/3.

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* – 1 on river trip.

Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* – 4 on river trip.

Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* – 1 between Delhi and Chambal 30/3;
1 between Agra and Fatehpur Sikri 1/4.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* – 1 between Delhi and Agra 30/3;
1 Chambal River 31/3; flock of 12 on Yamuna R. at Agra 1/4.

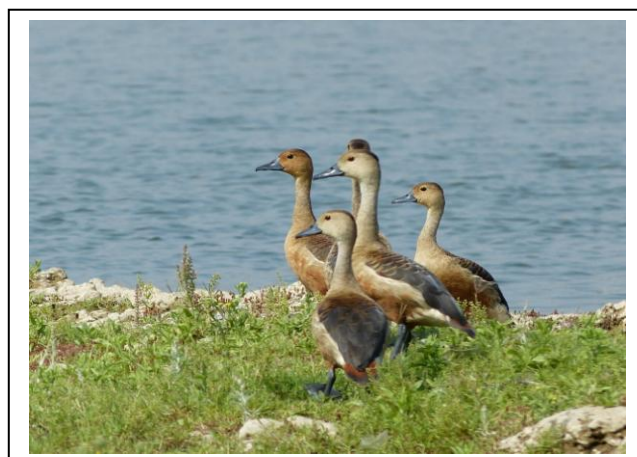
Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* – 4 Chambal River 31/3.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* –
20 Chambal River 31/3;
1+ Yamuna R., Agra 1/4.

Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* –
15 Chambal River 31/3.

Lesser Whistling Duck
Dendrocygna javanicus -
total 100+ Chambal river trip 31/3.

Lesser Whistling Ducks (John Geeson)



(Indian) Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha* – 2 between Delhi and Agra 30/3;
4 Chambal River 31/3.

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* – single birds on several journeys.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans govinda* –
fairly common throughout and numerous around Delhi.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* – common.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* – 2 over fields, Chambal 30/3.

Shikra *Accipiter badius* – singles on several journeys.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennata* – dark morph bird between Delhi and Agra 30/3.

Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* – 1 between Delhi and Chambal 30/3.

Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus* –
1 in agricultural fields near Chambal 30/3, and 3 in ravine area 31/3.

Jungle Bush-Quail *Perdicula asiatica* – group of 3 in ravines 31/3.

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* – fairly common and unmissable.

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* –
1 on a roadside pool and 2 on village pond at Chambal 30/3.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* – seen on several roadside ponds.

Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus* –
an adult + 2 juvs on the village pool near Chambal 30/3.

Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* –
3 (incl. 2 females) on village pond, Chambal 30/3.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*- common on wet areas throughout, but
the gathering of many hundreds in the shallow Yamuna River at Agra was
impressive.

Great Thick-knee *Burhinus recurvirostris* –
3 on Chambal river trip.

Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea* –
2 on river trip.

Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* –
40+ on Chambal River.

Great Thick-knee
(John Geeson)



- River Lapwing** *Vanellus duvaucelii* – 20+ on river trip.
- Red-wattled Lapwing** *Vanellus indicus* – common in all wet areas.
- Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius* – pair on river trip.
- Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* – 1 in small pool between Delhi and Agra and 1 on village pond, Chambal 30/3.
- Green Sandpiper** *Tringa chloropus* – 2 on village pond, Chambal 30/3, and 1 on river trip 31/3.
- Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* – 2+ on river trip; many on Yamuna River at Agra 1/4.
- Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* – 2 over fields near Chambal Lodge 30/3; 10+ on river trip 31/3.
- Common Redshank** *Tringa tetanus* – 6 Chambal river trip 30/3; many on Yamuna River, Agra 1/4.
- Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* – flock of 20 Chambal River.
- Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii* – 6 Chambal river trip.
- Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* – 2 found amongst the “shanks” in the Yamuna River behind the Taj Mahal, Agra 1/4.
- River Tern** *Sterna aurantia* – 4 Chambal river trip 31/3.
- Little Tern** *Sterna albifrons* – 2 pairs Chambal River 31/3.
- Black-bellied Tern** *Sterna acuticauda* – ad + juv Chambal River 31/3.
- Rock/Feral Pigeon** *Columbia livia* – abundant throughout.
- Laughing Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis* – common throughout.
- Red Collared Dove** *Streptopelia tranquebarica* – few seen from the bus on various journeys.
- Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto* – common everywhere.
- Yellow-footed Green Pigeon** *Treron phoenicopterus* – flock of 20 in large trees just outside Chambal Lodge grounds. 30/3.
- Alexandrine Parakeet** *Psittacula eupatria* – 2 Qutab Minar, Delhi 2/4.
- Rose-ringed Parakeet** *Psittacula krameri* – common throughout.

Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala* – 1 over ravines, Chambal 31/3.

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* – 5+ around Chambal grounds 30/3.

Sirkeer Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii* –
1 on banks of Chambal River from the boat 31/3.

Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* –
1 between Delhi and Chambal and 1 Chambal 30/3; 2 Chambal 31/3.

Spotted Owlet *Athene brama* - 1 in fields outside Chambal Lodge 30/3.

Indian Scops Owl [formerly known as Collared Scops] *Otus bakkamoena* –
1 at nest hole in tree, Chambal Lodge grounds.

Little Swift *Apus affinis* – 3 Chambal 30/3;
many Agra, especially over the Taj Mahal 1/4.

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* – fairly common.

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* – 3 Chambal river trip 31/3.



Pied Kingfisher (Andrew Duff)



Green Bee-eater (Judy Geeson)

Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* – common.

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis* –
several seen on roadside wires and in fields around Chambal 30 & 31/3.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* –
2 between Delhi and Chambal, and 1 in fields near Lodge 30/3.

Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros birostris* –
few between Delhi and Chambal, but 8+ at Chambal Lodge 30/3.

Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica* –
a noisy pair around Chambal Lodge.

- Coppersmith Barbet** *Megalaima haemacephala* – pair Chambal Lodge grounds 30/3.
- Black-rumped Flameback** *Dinopium benghalense* – pair Chambal Lodge 31/3.
- Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark** *Eremopterix griseus* - male in short turf beside Chambal River 31/3.
- Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata* – 4+ beside Chambal River 31/3.
- Indian Bushlark** *Mirafra erythroptera* – 1 in dry fields near Chambal River 31/3.
- Plain Martin** *Riparia paludicola* [some authorities consider the Indian race *chinensis* as a separate sp. **Grey-throated Sand Martin**] – c.10 over dry fields near Chambal River 31/3.
- Wire-tailed Swallow** *Hirundo smithii* – 1 Chambal River 31/3.
- Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* – 1 in short turf beside Chambal River 31/3.
- Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* – 2 beside Chambal River 31/3.
- White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba dukhunensis*- 5+ Chambal river trip 31/3.
- Masked Wagtail** *M.a.personata* – 2 on island in Yamuna River, Agra 1/4.
- White-browed Wagtail** *Motacilla maderaspatensis* – 3 Chambal river trip 31/3.
- Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* – 1 male showing characteristics of **Syke's Wagtail** *M.f.beema* Chambal River 31/3.
- Red-whiskered Bulbul** *Pycnonotus jocosus* – 2 between Delhi and Chambal 30/3.
- Red-vented Bulbul** *Pycnonotus cafer* – common.
- White-eared Bulbul** *Pycnonotus leucotis* – 5+ in ravines, Chambal 31/3.
- Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* - 1 male in banks of Chambal River 31/3.
- Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis* - 2 over cereal fields near Chambal Lodge 30/3.
- Rufous-fronted Prinia** *Prinia buchanani* – 2 in ravines, Chambal 31/3.
- Grey-breasted Prinia** *Prinia hodgsonii* – 2 in ravines, Chambal 31/3.
- Jungle Prinia** *Prinia sylvatica* – 2+ in ravines, Chambal 31/3.
- Ashy Prinia** *Prinia socialis* – 1 in cereal crop, Chambal 30/3, and 6+ in ravines near there 31/3; pair in waste ground opposite hotel in Agra 1/4.

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata* – 2 in fields, Chambal 30/3.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* –
2 in scrub near Chambal River 31/3.

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* –
1 in hotel garden between Delhi and Agra 30/3; several others heard.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* –
several in wooded grounds of Chambal Lodge 30-31/3.

Sulphur-bellied Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus* –
a late wintering bird in the Lodge grounds, Chambal 30/3.

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* –
several in Chambal Lodge grounds 30-31/3.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica* –
male in agricultural fields near
Chambal Lodge 30/3.

Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis* –
1 Chambal 30/3.

Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata* –
12+ in ravines area, Chambal 31/3;
pair opposite hotel in Agra 1-2/4..

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros rufiventris* –
male in dry fields near Chambal River 31/3.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* –
6+ in crop fields Chambal 30-/3,
and 1 female in ravines area 31/3.

Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata* –
male in fields near river, Chambal 31/3.

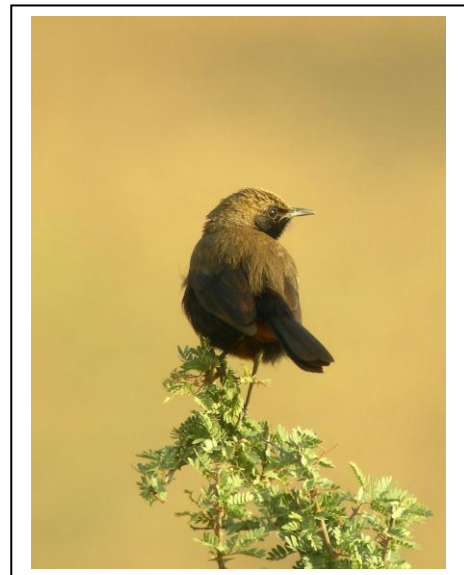
Brown Rock Chat *Cercomela fusca* – 1 on ruin beside Chambal Lodge 30/3;
1 opposite hotel and 1 around Taj Mahal, Agra 1/4; 2+ Qutab Minar, Delhi 2/4.

Common Babbler *Turdoides caudatus* – common in scrubby ravines, Chambal 31/3.

Large Grey Babbler *Turdoides malcolmi* –
flocks common around Chambal and on roadsides elsewhere.

Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus* – common around Chambal.

Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense* - 2 in ravines, Chambal 31/3.



Indian Robin
(Judy Geeson)

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia corruca* – 3 in ravines and dry fields, Chambal 31/3.

Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* – 1+ pair Chambal Lodge garden 30-31/3.

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus* – 2+ Chambal Lodge 30/3.

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* – male over ravines, Chambal 31/3.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis* (most probably race *lahtora*) –
1 on cables over agricultural fields, Chambal 30/3.

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* - common.

Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* – c.6 Chambal Lodge grounds 30-31/3.

House Crow *Corvus splendens* – very common especially around habitation.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos culminatus* –
fairly common, mostly in rural areas.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* – abundant throughout.

Bank Myna *Acridotheres ginginianus* –
numerous near some built-up areas, but patchy distribution.

Brahminy Starling *Temenuchus pagodarum* – c.6 Chambal Lodge grounds 30/3;
3 Qutab Minar, Delhi 2/4.



Common Myna and Asian Pied Starling ((Judy Geeson)

Asian Pied Starling *Sturnus contra* – common throughout.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* – common in towns/villages.

Chestnut-shouldered Petronia *Petronia xanthicollis* –
2 in agricultural fields, Chambal 30/3, and 2 pairs in ravine area 31/3.

Black-breasted Weaver *Ploceus bengalensis* –
c.15 with following sp. in tall reeds in agricultural fields, Chambal 30/3.

Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* –
c.15 with previous sp. in tall reeds in agricultural fields, Chambal 30/3.

White-throated Munia/Indian Silverbill
Euodice malabarica – 5 Chambal 31/3.

White-capped Bunting *Emberiza stewarti* –
pair on banks of Chambal river
(from boat) 31/3.

Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps* –
wintering flock of 12 birds in
agricultural fields, Chambal 30/3.



Red-headed Bunting
(Judy Geeson)

MAMMALS

Indian Hare *Lepus nigricollis* – 1 on open ground outside Chambal Lodge 30/3.

Five-striped Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennanti* – fairly common at Chambal,
but very common around all of the ancient buildings visited.

Asian Palm Civet *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus* –
1 spotlit in trees beside Chambal Lodge after dusk 30/3.

Small Indian Mongoose *Herpestes javanicus* –
pair on waste ground opposite hotel in Agra 2/4.

Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* – 1 in ravines, and two on banks of Chambal River 31/3.

Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus* –
large roost in tree over our bungalow at Chambal Lodge.

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta* – common around habitation.

Ganges River Dolphin *Platanista gangetica* –
one individual surfaced three times in the flat calm waters of the Chambal River 31/3

Nilgai *Bosephalus tragocamelus* – group of 12 around Chambal Lodge grounds.