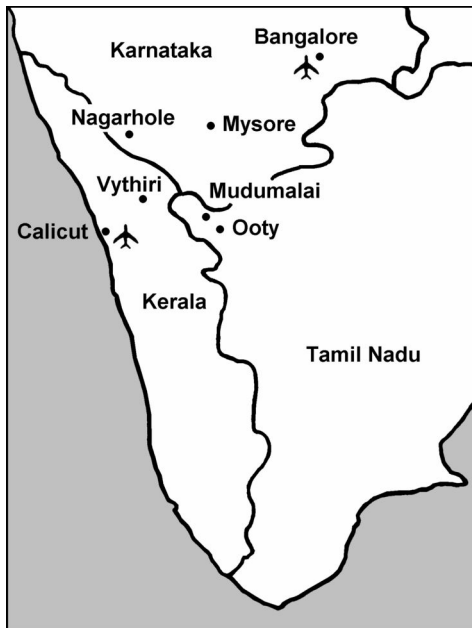


# SOUTH INDIA SAFARI

*the best of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and southern Karnataka*



*Great Thick-knee*

India, and its diverse bird life, is as vivid, colourful and memorable as anywhere on earth. We have planned this tour to show you some of the best wildlife of the sub-continent, in a relatively small area.

The Nilgiri Biosphere Region is an area of high bird endemism and is of global importance for wildlife generally, yet it is infrequently visited by birdwatchers. This tour takes us to a wide variety of habitats within this zone. We will visit impressive stands of giant bamboo, dry scrubland, secret wooded montane valleys (sholas), lush tropical forest and farmland. They all have their own special birds. Indian wildlife can be surprisingly approachable and we are aiming for close views of waterbirds, nightjars, exotic forest birds, even 'difficult' specialities such as Painted Bush-quail and more. The butterflies are spectacular and animals abundant; we will see Indian Elephants and possibly twenty more mammal species.

There is the fascinating cultural backdrop of the Kingdom of Mysore; a stay in Ooty, the historical 'Queen of the Hill Stations'; the quiet rural life and pristine protected wilderness. Also, the climate of the uplands is very comfortable at this time of year with warm sunny days and cool nights.

We have been leading tours to South India for many years and agree with the Tattler Travel Guide which rates Kabini Lake, Nagarhole as one of the top five wildlife places in the world.

## ITINERARY

### **MYSORE, CITY OF PALACES, KARNATAKA**

After an overnight flight we will arrive in Bangalore in the morning. We will then drive down to Mysore at a relaxed pace, with lunch and some birding for common species on the way. One stop will be at a wetland near Kokkare Bellur where we will see jacanas, ibis, bee-eaters and raptors. When in Mysore there will be the option to see the famous Amba Vilas Palace.

The next day we will take a morning boat ride at nearby Ranganathittu Sanctuary for point blank views of the mixed heronry, Great Thick-knee and Mugger Crocodile. Indian Grey Hornbill, Stork-billed Kingfisher, White-cheeked Barbet and the handsome Tickell's Blue Flycatcher are also drawn to this reserve. The afternoon will be spent nearby looking for Singing and Jerdon's Bushlarks, Malabar and Rufous-tailed Larks, Ashy-crowned Finch-lark, Indian Roller, Indian Robin,

Rose-coloured Starling and other open country birds. After two nights in Mysore we will head west to Nagarhole.

### **NAGARHOLE NATIONAL PARK, KARNATAKA**

Our drive to Nagarhole goes through rural areas which are especially good for raptors. Black-shouldered Kite, Indian Spotted Eagle, Pallid Harrier, and Crested Honey and White-eyed Buzzards are all possible. We will spend the next three nights at Nagarhole. Our excellent lodge by Kabini Lake often has Taiga Flycatcher wintering in the grounds. Red-naped Ibis, Flame-throated Bulbul, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Malabar Pied Hornbills, Malabar Flameback, Streak-throated and White-bellied Woodpeckers, Indian Nuthatch, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Oriental White-eye, White-bellied Treepie and Grey-breasted Cuckoo are amongst the wealth of birds in and around here. With over 250 bird species recorded there are plenty for us to find.

Nagarhole is now the best place in South India to see animals. On the boat trips and jeep rides regular sightings include Asian Elephant, Indian Bison, Indian Wild Boar, Chital and Sambar Deer, Asian Wild Dog, Short-clawed Otter and the large, handsome Stripe-necked Mongoose. Bengal Tiger, Leopard and Golden Jackal are also seen but less often. If there has been a kill then we have a chance of seeing vultures and Tawny Eagle.

#### **MUDUMALAI, TAMIL NADU**

On day seven we will head to Mudumalai. Our journey through rural Karnataka has lots of interest: village scenes; bird-filled marshes; and rocky outcrops; and so will take much of the day, with picnic and birding breaks. We will arrive at Masinagudi on the edge of Mudumalai National Park for a three night stay in a lovely, low-impact lodge run by a local family. The rooms are simple but the atmosphere and surrounding wildlife have made it highly rated by visitors. You can sit by the swimming pool to watch Chital Deer graze the grounds in the evenings, as Jerdon's Nightjar and Indian Pitta start to call. On the recce, a Sloth Bear came to drink from a pond at the edge of the grounds. Crested Hawk-eagle, Grey Francolin, Jungle Bush-quail, Blue-faced Malkoha, Brown Fish Owl, Bay-backed and Long-tailed Shrikes, White-browed Fantail, Yellow-footed Pigeon, Indian Blue Robin and many other species are present locally. White-rumped Shama can be uncharacteristically showy in the bamboo here and there is also a site for the now rare White-backed Vulture.

There are areas of open woodland and dry savannah-like bush where local guides will aid our search for the associated birds, including Savannah Nightjar, Large Grey and Yellow-billed Babblers, White-naped Flameback, Hume's Whitethroat, Sykes's Warbler, Blyth's Pipit and, with luck, the scarce White-bellied Minivet.

#### **OOTACAMUND (OOTY), TAMIL NADU**

Next we will travel by jeep up to this famous hill station, stopping en route at a hill village where the endemic Painted Bush-quail is regularly seen.

We will have two nights at Ooty. Part of the experience here is being in an appropriate hotel so we stay at the Savoy, of course, built by the British in 1841. It is a little faded but has the feel of history especially in the wood panelled dining hall. Log fires warm our rooms at night.

At Cairn Hill we will birdwatch in the shola, a wooded valley which is home to the highly localised Nilgiri Blue Robin. We hope to see this, as well as the handsome Black-and-orange Flycatcher, Nilgiri Flycatcher, Square-tailed Black Bulbul, Hill Swallow and other birds restricted to this particular terrain.

Whilst staying at Ooty, we will visit Doddabetta, India's highest peak south of the Himalayas. We can drive to the summit where Black-chinned Laughingthrush is reliably found.

#### **WAYANAD, KERALA**

From Ooty we travel down to Vythiri for two nights. We will see a change of habitat, in an area of the mid-elevation foothills rarely visited by birdwatchers. Around our fine lodge is some good tropical forest, giving us an opportunity to see another range of birds. Malabar Whistling Thrush, Fairy Bluebird, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Forest Wagtail, Black-headed and Indian Golden Orioles, Jungle Owlet, Orange Minivet, Malabar Barbet, Rusty-tailed Flycatcher and Southern Hill Myna are just some of the species here, along with a host of butterflies.

#### **CALICUT, KERALA**

Our final night will be spent at a tranquil lodge on the back waters, where we expect to see Nilgiri Flowerpecker, Brahminy Kite, terns, egrets and other common species.

On day 14 we will have on morning birding locally, then relax at our hotel until our evening flight home.

#### **PACE**

On most days breakfast will be at 7am so that we can go birding quite early and take midday breaks. There will be a couple of optional earlier starts, e.g. for a morning jeep safari. Birding sessions will usually involve short/medium walks, almost all on the flat. Birdwatching at Cairn Hill may entail some gentle uphill walking. There will be some free time too.

#### **ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD**

Full-board accommodation is provided with two nights at the Sandesh The Prince Hotel, Mysore; three nights at Serai Kabini Resort; three nights at Jungle Hut, Masinagudi; two nights at the Taj Savoy Hotel, Ootacamund; two nights at Vythiri Resort, Wayanad and the last night at Kadavu Resort, Calicut. All the accommodation is good quality, with en suite bathrooms. We have chosen hotels known for their service and food which includes international/western dishes. Lunches will be at the hotels or, occasionally, a picnic.

#### **PRICE INCLUDES .....**

All birdwatching excursions with expert leaders, full-board accommodation (starting with lunch on 13<sup>th</sup>, ending with lunch on 26<sup>th</sup>), soft drinks at meal times, local transport by mini-coach, boat trips, jeep ride, jungle activities, reserve entrance fees, international flights and airport taxes.

#### **WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED**

Travel insurance. Cost of obtaining an Indian visa (approx. £90). Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry. Please note: the Indian authorities are planning to introduce a visa-on-entry system from April 2014. We hope that it will be up and running in time for this trip, saving us all time and money.

#### **INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS**

Return flight from London Heathrow, Manchester or Glasgow to Bangalore (Bangaluru) returning from Calicut (Kozhikode) using the scheduled services of Emirates. Outbound flight departs early afternoon, return flight arrives back early morning.

<b>15 nights including two overnight flights:</b>	<b>12<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> January 2015</b>
<b>Principal leader:</b>	<b>Roger Barnes</b>
<b>Local guide:</b>	<b>Satheesh K. Nair</b>
<b>Maximum group size:</b>	<b>10 clients with one leader and a local guide</b>
<b>Cost with discount (if you book before 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014):</b>	<b>£3160 per person sharing</b>
<b>Full Cost:</b>	<b>£3310 per person sharing</b>
<b>Single supplement:</b>	<b>£395</b>
<b>Deposit:</b>	<b>£600</b>