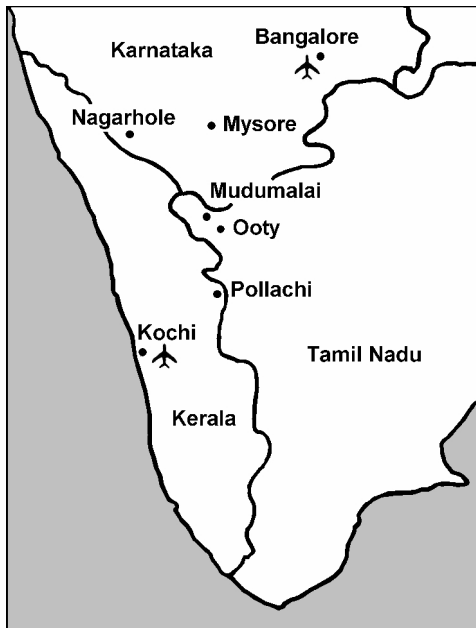


# SOUTH INDIA SAFARI

*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 only recently has this been fully appreciated 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, secluded 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 wild Indian Elephants and possibly twenty more mammal species.

We will find ourselves immersed in the fascinating culture of the Kingdom of Mysore. A stay in Ooty, the historical 'Queen of the Hill Stations', will doubtless be a highlight, and we agree with the Tatler Travel Guide which rates Kabini Lake, Nagarhole as one of the top five wildlife places in the world. The climate of the uplands is very comfortable at this time of year. We will enjoy warm, sunny days and cool nights.

We have been leading tours to the region for many years and believe we have created the perfect South Indian safari.

## 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 Kakkare 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 is 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 Indian 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 one visit, 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 of being here is to stay in an appropriate hotel so we will use 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 if there is a cold snap.

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 in 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.

#### **POLLACHI, KERALA**

From Ooty we travel down to Pollachi for two nights. We will notice a change of habitat, in these 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. We will look for the rare, endemic Lion-tailed Macaque in this area.

#### **KOCHI, KERALA**

Our final night will be spent at a pleasant hotel close to Kochi Airport, before our flight home the following morning.

#### **CLIMATE AND PACE**

It is reliably sunny and dry at this time of year, although cooler at higher elevations. On the last night (at the coast) it will be hot and humid. On most days breakfast will be at 7am so that we can go birding quite early, followed by midday breaks. There will be a couple of optional earlier starts, such as for a morning jeep safari. Birding sessions involve short/medium length walks, almost all on the flat. Birdwatching at Cairn Hill may entail some gentle uphill walking.

#### **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 Coco Bay Resort, Pollachi and the last night at the Quality Airport Hotel, Kochi. All the accommodation is of good quality, with en suite bathrooms. We have chosen hotels known for their service and food which includes international/western dishes.

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

All birdwatching excursions with expert leader and local guide, full-board accommodation (starting with lunch on 18<sup>th</sup>, ending with breakfast on 31<sup>st</sup>), soft drinks at meal times, bottled water throughout, local transport by mini-coach, boat trips, jeep rides, jungle activities, reserve entrance fees and international flights.

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

Travel insurance. Cost of obtaining an Indian visa (approx. £40). Personal items, alcoholic drinks, laundry. Please note: the Indian authorities have now introduced the eTV, a vastly simplified tourist visa scheme, saving us all time and money.

#### **INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS**

Return flight from London Heathrow, Manchester or Glasgow to Bangalore, returning from Kochi, using the scheduled services of Emirates. Outbound flight departs early afternoon, return flight arrives back early evening.

<b>14 nights</b> including one overnight flight:	<b>17<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018</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 4<sup>th</sup> October 2017):</b>	<b>£3590 per person sharing (£290 single supplement)</b>
<b>Full Cost:</b>	<b>£3740 per person sharing</b>
<b>Deposit:</b>	<b>£600 per person</b>