

Wild India

Corbett's Legacy

A Greentours Itinerary

Northern India provides some of the world's most impressive wildlife and cultural spectacles.

Day 1 To Delhi

We'll arrive into Delhi late in the evening and settle into our pleasant hotel just twenty minutes from the airport.

Days 2 & 3 Corbett Buffer Zone: Kumeria & Mohan

We'll catch the morning train northwards across the plains and after just a few hours will find ourselves arriving at the rather abrupt junction between plain and mountain.

The Den is beautifully sited above the riverbank and amid a particularly wildlife-rich area. It is an ideal base to explore the Kosi River Valley and Corbett buffer zone. This is a fantastically rich area. Fabulous White-crested Laughing Thrushes will wake us with their maniacal laughter whilst Pallas's Fish Eagles and Mountain Hawk Eagles patrol the skies above the Inn. Both Tawny and Brown Fish Owls roost in trees down by the Kosi River where beautiful White-crowned and Plumbeous Water-Redstarts as well as the stunning Spotted Forktail live. Others here are Brown Dipper and Little Forktail. Wintering Wallcreepers are not uncommon! Mammals are found in good numbers in the buffer zone though Tigers and Leopards are shy. We'll see Wild Boar, Sambar and at night near the river we should look out for Indian Crested Porcupine, Golden Jackal and Small Indian Civet. In the tall broad-leafed forests that line the river are Great Slaty Woodpecker, Rufous-Bellied Niltava and the lovely Long-tailed Broadbill.

Days 4 – 7(am) Corbett National Park: Dikhala

Corbett National Park is for so many reasons the flagship amongst India's impressive panoply of national parks and protected areas. Its importance is such that way back in 1936 it became India's very first national park. In 1973 it was the scene of the launch of one of the great conservation movements – Project Tiger.

Corbett's beguiling mix of open grasslands, wide rocky rivers, Himalayan foothills and beautiful Sal forests is home to a tremendous biodiversity matched only by the Brahmapaturan foothills at the Eastern end of the country. Corbett is large too and

this gives its animal populations the chance to wax and wane in more natural rhythms. Wild herds of Asian Elephants roam the grasslands by our hotel and Jungle Cats, Leopards and Tigers are all likely. The supporting cast includes Hog Deer, Indian Muntjac and Nilgai. There's plenty of Rhesus Macaques of course and we'll see troupes of the elegant Terai Grey Langur. Spotted Deer or Chital are often associated with the langurs and both are worth watching to see if they'll tell you if a predator is nearby!

An amazing 600 species of bird have been recorded here. We'll see the gorgeous Green Magpie, elegant Kalij Pheasant, Red Junglefowl and the rapacious Collared Falconet, itself no bigger than a Chaffinch. By the unspoilt banks of the Ramganga River we can watch the Gharial, a prehistoric-looking fish-eating croc, whilst strident Himalayan Crested Kingfishers patrol the banks. We'll see an amazing variety of woodpeckers, bulbuls and drongos and the rapacious Collared Falconet, itself no bigger than a Chaffinch. We'll watch the tracks carefully as both Rain Quail and Jungle Bush Quail, and even Small Buttonquail and Barred Buttonquail, are perhaps more easily spotted in Corbett than anywhere. Red Spurfowl and Emerald Dove often feed in the same spots. Pairs of magnificent Great Indian Hornbills whoosh overhead as we watch Himalayan Swiftlet and Lesser Fish-Eagle. Back on the deck there's both Grey Francolin and Black Francolin, and the wonderful Great Thick-knee. More avian highlights include Barred Owlet, Slaty-headed Parakeet, Stork-billed Kingfisher and the gorgeous White-tailed Rubythroat.

Day 7(pm) – 10(am) Manila Hill Station

We'll head 6000 feet up into the Himalayan foothills to Manila where we can enjoy a completely new set of birds and animals as well as magnificent views of the high Himalaya. It is just under three hours from Corbett to Manila, once part of the Katyuri kingdom and famous as the home of the eponymous goddess.

Once a hill station beloved of Delhi's inhabitants, Manila's elegance has faded somewhat but the picturesque town still retains a charm not least from its magnificent position around six thousand feet up with a panorama of great Himalayan peaks (including 26,000 foot Nanda Devi). The birdwatching is excellent with Lammergeiers and Himalayan Griffon Vultures soaring over the convoluted landscape. Various laughingthrushes and accentors are on the agenda and in woodlands are some of the glorious jewels of these hills such as Golden Bush Robin, Fire-capped Tit, Orange-flanked Bush-Robin and the immaculate Red-billed Blue Magpie. In Manila's parks, gardens, meadows and pine forests we can see Black-headed Jay and the stunning Great Barbet whilst brilliantly-coloured Slaty-headed Parakeets are abundant. The rare Cheer Pheasant is possible here and we'll look for Nepal Wren Babbler and Pink-browed Rosefinch, whilst down in the river we'll encounter Ibisbill. Other birds of note we'll likely encounter around Manila are Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler, Chestnut-headed Tesia, Small Niltava, Snowy-browed Flycatcher, Spotted Forktail, Long-billed

Thrush, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Dark-breasted Rosefinch, Black-throated Thrush, Chestnut Thrush, Himalayan Woodpecker, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, and both Collared Owlet and Asian Barred Owlet. Yellow-throated Martins might cross our path from time to time and Muntjac are common. Leopard Cat is a possibility at night and we'll certainly come across Himalayan Goral on rocky hillsides.

Day 10(pm) – 13(am) **Sattal Lakes and the Mehragaon Valley**

Sattal is another hill station set amid pine and oak clad hillsides above seven interconnected lakes where we'll find Siberian Rubythroat, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Fire-tailed Sunbird, and the lovely Chestnut-tailed Minla inhabiting the epiphyte-laden trees. The lakes themselves are home to Red-Wattled Lapwing, Jack Snipe, Eurasian Woodcock, Indian Cormorant, Common Crane and Stork-billed, Himalayan Crested and Pied Kingfishers. Blue Whistling Thrushes seem everywhere and we'll find both Brown Wood Owl and Tawny Fish Owl. As we walk quiet paths through the woodlands we'll hope for both Kalij and Koklass Pheasants. By streams Slaty-backed Forktail, Himalayan Bluetail and Blue-eared Kingfisher and low over the treetops hunt both Mountain Hawk-eagle and Black Eagle. white-rumped Needletails arc through the skies and whilst nearer at hand are Black-headed Jay, Black-lored and Black-throated Tits, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Black-chinned Babbler, Rufous Babbler, Scaly-breasted Wren-babbler, Black-capped Sibia, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker and a whole host of sunbirds including Black-throated Sunbird, Black-breasted Sunbird, Crimson Sunbird.

Day 13(pm) **To Delhi and Departure**

Around lunchtime on Day 13 we'll return to Delhi and spend the night in

Day 14 **Arrive UK/Europe**

Bharatpur Pre-Tour

19 February **To Delhi**

We'll arrive into Delhi late in the evening and settle into our pleasant hotel just twenty minutes from the airport.

20 – 23 February

Bharatpur - Keoladeo Bird Sanctuary

This morning Delhi's new roads will take us south to the famous Keoladeo Ghana National Park. Known to birdwatchers as Bharatpur, this is one of the most important wetlands in the world. Packed into just 29 square kilometres are a wide diversity of birds, no less than 350 species having been recorded. Perhaps the most delightful aspect of Bharatpur is the approachability of the wildlife. This, combined with the extreme abundance, makes this paradise an absolute mecca for wildlife photographers the world over. Early mornings are quite magical as mists rise from the water-lily bedecked jheels, obscuring the legs of a stately Blue Bull as it stands by a row of Jamun trees, these covered in the ghostly shapes of numerous Painted Storks - this is what Bharatpur is all about! Bharatpur was originally constructed by diverting local irrigation canals back in the late 19th century. This was so that the local Maharaja could indulge his passion for wildfowling and in so doing he created a wetland masterpiece. However, the hunting stopped over thirty-five years ago and nowadays vehicles are kept out and all is quiet. Except that is, for the feeding frenzy of the vast numbers of birds! It has been estimated that Bharatpur's Painted Storks take 1200 tonnes of food per square mile during the time it takes to raise their chicks. And that, as they say, is a lot of frogs! In fact the waters are thick with life, a veritable living soup of frogs, toads, snails, terrapins, pondweed, carp, catfish and waterlilies. All this food sustains one of the biggest heronries in the world as well as several species of stork. The largest is the Black-necked Stork, which stands nearly five feet tall and can be seen from a vast distance, which is just as well, as they are now very rare! Taller still are Sarus Cranes which move solemnly through sedgebeds, looking skyward as flocks of Common Cranes descend noisily from the sky, their clarion calls ringing atmospherically across the marshes. Cormorants, Darters and the comical-looking Comb Duck are all common, and stunning Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged Jacanas decorate the Sapanmari Jheel. Brightly coloured kingfishers, bee-eaters and rollers flash past Babul trees overhanging pools where Purple Gallinules chunter away in reeds like demented purple chickens.

Bluethroats, Orange-headed Ground Thrushes, Indian Grey Hornbills and Coppersmiths inhabit forest dotted with pools as do roosting Long-tailed Nightjars, confident in their beautiful cryptic camouflage. Spotted Owlets line up along branches and we'll hear the deep hoarse hoots of Dusky Horned Owls - these often perch on tall treetops as dusk approaches - while cute Collared Scops Owls peer down at us from their roosts. Raptors really are exceptional at Bharatpur, with Imperial Eagle, Spotted Eagle, Red-headed Vulture and the ubiquitous Crested Serpent Eagle all featuring. Dry lands offer yet another selection with Sirkeer Malkoha, Yellow-wattled Lapwing and the beautiful Red Avadavat, whilst beautifully patterned Rock Pythons bask in the sunshine. Bharatpur is also fantastic for mammals. Sambar and Blue Bull will be sighted daily whilst boisterous groups of Wild Boar splash in the

shallows. Rhesus Macaques argue noisily in Kadam trees and Common Grey Mongoose wander along the paths as if they own them!

22 February

Optional trip to the Taj Mahal

The zenith of Moghul architecture and one of the most fabulous monuments in the world, is found in Agra, capital of all India under the Moghuls. The Taj Mahal is one of the few places in the world that can truly transcend the hordes of tourists and accompanying fripperies. This magnificent building is an experience not to be missed. Don't leave the optics behind though for along the Yamuni River are Black-bellied Tern and River Lapwing. Later we visit the vast Agra Fort whose red sandstone ramparts protect wonderful pavilions of such intricate workmanship and mosques and audience halls decorated with ornate pillars inlaid with jasper and lapis lazuli. Those not going to the Taj Mahal can spend extra time at Bharatpur.

24(am) February

To Ranthambhor

After some early morning wildlife-watching around Bharatpur we'll have breakfast before catching the mid-morning train (first class) through the fascinating countryside of Rajasthan for a two and a half hour journey to Sawai Madhopur, just a few kilometres from the magnificent landscapes of Ranthambhor.. We'll arrive in time for lunch at the Kothi Resort.

Ranthambore Pre-Tour

23 February

To Delhi

For those who did not do the pre-tour to Bharatpur it is to Delhi for the night.

24(am) February

Ranthambore National Park

For those joining from the Bharatpur pre-tour - After some early morning wildlife-watching around Bharatpur we'll have breakfast before catching the mid-morning train (first class) through the fascinating countryside of Rajasthan for a two and a half hour journey to Sawai Madhopur, just a few kilometres from the magnificent landscapes of Ranthambhor. We'll arrive in time for lunch at the Kothi Resort. For those joining from Delhi it is an early morning train (first class) direct to Sawai Madhopur, also arriving in time for lunch at the Kothi

24(pm) – 28(am) February Ranthambore National Park

The Kothi couldn't be better placed with marvellous views of the scarp slope which marks the boundary of this majestic unspoilt remnant of the great jungles of Central India. Ironically Ranthambhor escaped destruction largely because it was the favoured hunting ground of the Maharaja of Jaipur. It became one of the first Project Tiger reserves and has since developed into an outstanding National Park. Because of the strict protection enjoyed by the Tigers they became active by day and thus much more visible to visitors. Ranthambhor's friendly Tigers, as they became known, are frequently encountered in broad daylight. While we cannot guarantee sightings of these beautiful but elusive animals, we have given ourselves a fine opportunity of seeing and hopefully photographing them with four and a half days in the park - and it is likely that we shall see them on more than one occasion! Impressively large numbers of Sambar and Spotted Deer (Chital) also graze these grasslands and are sometimes joined by Indian Gazelles (Chinkara). Jungle Cats can sometimes be seen stalking sandgrouse or doves in the grasslands in the beautiful evening light. Leopards sometimes saunter across the tracks, particularly in the steep and wooded hills surrounding the hugely impressive Rajput fort of Ranthambhor which overlooks the park's main lake. Hanuman Langurs frequent the battlements whilst overhead Bonelli's Eagles and Crested Serpent Eagles soar. Sounders (herds) of Wild Boar are a common sight by the small lakes which dot the wonderful dry deciduous woodlands and tawny grasslands which make such a beautiful landscape. Peacocks swagger through these open woodlands - they are abundant - and above them Small Minivets, White-bellied Drongos and Blossom-headed Parakeets perch in fruiting trees, often in company with groups of Indian Tree-pies and Yellow-legged Green Pigeons. Stork-billed Kingfishers, their huge dagger-like bills making them look top-heavy, hunt along small rivers inhabited by Mugger Crocodiles and the secretive Brown Crake. Outside the park are arid grasslands which are home to Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Indian Courser and the Bengal Fox. At Lake Soorwal we can find a rich variety of birds and herds of the rare Blackbuck. Immaculate males, their beautiful black-and-tan coats contrasting with their strikingly white bellies and superb two-foot long spiralled horns, are a really magnificent sight. This is a superb birdwatching site with flocks of Demoiselle Cranes, White Pelicans and lots of waders including Great Thick-knee and Small Pratincoles.

28 February(pm) Return Delhi

This afternoon we'll return to Delhi and spend the night at the Atrio Hotel close to the airport where those joining for the start of the main tour will also convene.

Call 01298 83563 or visit www.greentours.co.uk for the latest trip report from our previous Wild India tours. If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

To Book a on this Holiday please click on the 'Book this Tour' button found on the right-hand side of the page where you downloaded this itinerary, or fill in the booking form which you can download from <https://www.greentours.co.uk/booking/> (also found in the Greentours brochure) and post to Greentours, 8 Eliot Close, Armitage, Rugeley, WS15 4UP, UK. Tel +44 (0)1298 83563. After booking your place you'll receive a confirmation letter and a detailed information pack will be dispatched twelve weeks prior to departure. Mammal and bird checklists are available.