

India: Birds, Tigers and the Taj Mahal Species List | January 27 – February 10, 2026 with Naturalist Journeys



Compiled by Stephen Grace with local guide Avi Sarkhel. Our clients included Bill, Anne, Arden, Arlana, David, Dottie and Bobbie.

This 15-day itinerary recorded 260 species across 69 families while traversing a broad ecological gradient—from the semi-arid landscapes of northwest India to the moist sal forests of central India. The result was a richly layered avifauna: resident subcontinental specialists, wintering Palearctic migrants, wetland-dependent taxa, a strong raptor contingent, and forest-interior guilds characteristic of mature deciduous woodland systems.

Locations: Delhi; Chambal River & environs (Uttar Pradesh/Rajasthan); Kailadevi Wildlife Sanctuary; Ranthambore NP; Jaipur region; Kanha NP (Mukki, Kanha & Kisli zones)

Habitats Covered: Urban green space, riverine wetlands, agricultural mosaic, dry scrub/Aravalli Hills, Chambal River sandbars, dry deciduous forest (Ranthambore), moist sal forest and meadow-wetland complex (Kanha)

Species totals reflected both wetland productivity (Chambal, Yamuna, Kanha meadows) and structurally complex dry forest habitats (Ranthambore, Kailadevi).

Delhi & Yamuna Corridor

Urban and peri-urban habitats around Delhi produced typical north Indian city assemblages with strong raptor presence.

Notable species included Alexandrine Parakeet, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Black Kite (high-density urban scavenger), Egyptian Vulture, and Asian Koel (winter presence).

Wetland patches yielded Red-naped Ibis, Black-winged Stilt, and Common Snipe. Yamuna River birding at the Taj complex added Ruddy Shelduck, Pied Avocet, Asian Woolly-necked Stork, Red-wattled Lapwing, and a single Great White Pelican. Mixed wagtails and Common Myna were widespread in disturbed habitats.

Transit to Chambal

Roadside agricultural wetlands were productive for wintering waterfowl: Northern Pintail, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, and Green-winged Teal, along with overhead Knob-billed Duck.

Several Sarus Cranes, the world's tallest flying bird, were recorded.

Raptors observed during transit included Shikra, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Indian Spotted Eagle, and Steppe Eagle. A behavioral highlight was extensive nesting of Bank Myna in artificial concrete tunnel weep holes—demonstrating

adaptive use of anthropogenic substrates.

Chambal River & Riparian Mosaic

The Chambal River remains a relatively undammed, sediment-rich system supporting significant sandbar and open-channel avifauna. Key species included Indian Skimmer (feeding in shallow runs), Small Pratincole, Great Thick-knee, and multiple Pied Kingfisher exhibiting sustained hovering foraging behavior.

Wetland margins supported Purple Heron, Painted Stork, Black-necked Stork, and additional Asian Woolly-necked Storks. Riverine waterfowl included Bar-headed Goose (wintering high-altitude migrant) and mixed duck flocks.

Lodge grounds and adjacent agricultural matrix produced strong diversity: Indian Gray-Hornbill, Brown-headed Barbet, Greenish Warbler, Hume's Warbler, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Gray-headed Canary-Flycatcher, Orange-headed Thrush, and Isabelline Shrike.

Three owl species were recorded in a single afternoon session: Brown Boobook, Indian Scops-Owl, and Spotted Owlet (multiple individuals). Indian Thick-knee was observed in open scrub with characteristic large orbital morphology consistent with nocturnal adaptation.

Kailadevi Wildlife Sanctuary (Aravalli Hills; dry scrub/rocky ravine habitat)

Dry thorn scrub and rocky escarpments supported arid-adapted passerines and raptors. New additions included Tawny Pipit, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (males transporting water via belly feathers noted), Yellow-throated Sparrow, and Dusky Crag-Martin.

Raptors included Oriental Honey-buzzard, Tawny Eagle, and additional views of Indian Vulture. Mixed feeding flocks contained Small Minivet and parakeet concentrations, notably Plum-headed Parakeet (clear sexual dimorphism observed).

Evening spotlighting produced Indian Nightjar, and diurnal roosting species were documented pre-dusk.

Ranthambore National Park (Dry Deciduous Forest, Dhok-dominated)

Ranthambore's dry forest and lake systems yielded strong raptor and woodland bird diversity. Noteworthy observations included Crested Serpent-Eagle, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Brown Fish-Owl, and additional Shikra.

Wetlands supported Great Thick-knee, White-browed Fantail, and assorted herons. Indian Roller was observed along forest edges and roadside perches, often revealing bright turquoise wing panels in flight.

Urban-edge habitat at Jhalana (Jaipur) added White-eared Bulbul, White-capped Bunting, and additional dry-zone passerines. Reservoir birding outside park boundaries produced large flocks of Black-tailed Godwit, Asian Openbill (clear mandibular gap adaptation), Glossy Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, and Ruff. An Osprey was observed carrying fish (head-forward aerodynamic positioning), and a Short-toed Snake-Eagle exhibited active hovering and stoop hunting behavior.

Kanha National Park (Mukki & Kisli Zones; moist sal forest & meadow-wetland complex)

Kanha's structurally diverse sal forest and meadow complexes significantly expanded the trip list. Wetland margins

yielded Lesser Adjutant, Cotton Pygmy-Goose, and repeated sightings of Black Stork. Meadow and reed-edge habitat supported Blyth's Reed Warbler (skulking behavior).

Canopy activity included Brown-cheeked Fulvetta, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, and Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon (arboreal frugivore rarely descending).

Owls were well represented: Jungle Owlet, repeated Indian Scops-Owl, Spotted Owlet, and Brown Fish-Owl. Bright forest passerines included Scarlet Minivet (sexual dimorphism clear), Indian Golden Oriole, and Black-hooded Oriole. Monarch-flycatchers included Black-naped Monarch and Asian Paradise-Flycatcher (elongated tail streamers on adult male).

Other key species included Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (vocal mimicry observed), Red Junglefowl (wild ancestor of domestic chicken), White-throated Kingfisher (terrestrial insect predation observed), and Eastern Red-rumped Swallow over meadows.

Special interest sightings included Greater Painted-snipe (two males; reverse sexual dimorphism noted). Additional raptors included Crested Serpent-Eagles, perched Changeable Hawk-Eagle, and thermal-soaring storks and vultures.

Summary

Across varied habitats, the trip documented strong winter waterfowl diversity, high raptor representation, multiple owl species, dry-zone larks and pipits, and rich sal-forest passerine assemblages. Behavioral observations included adaptive nesting by Bank Myna, hovering foraging in Pied Kingfisher, and vocal mimicry in Greater Racket-tailed Drongo. Two Indian endemics were recorded: Red Spurfowl and Indian Scimitar Babbler (heard only).

Habitat transitions—from urban riparian corridors to semi-arid scrub and ultimately moist central Indian forest—drove distinct avian community shifts and provided a comprehensive cross-section of north and central Indian winter birdlife.

BIRDS

260 species were recorded, of which 1 was heard only, 2 were endemic, and 1 was introduced.

The eBird link below details the 260 species of birds our group observed during the tour. If you're new to eBird, be sure to click "Show All Details" on the right side of the list to expand the report and reveal where and when each of the birds were seen and how many.

[Naturalist Journeys Birds, Tigers & the Taj Maha | 27 Jan–10 Feb 2026 | eBird Trip Report](#)

Following is a list of the mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and butterflies we were fortunate to observe during the trip.

MAMMALS (27):

Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus* — Seen at Chambal Safari Lodge roosting and flying with their nearly five-foot wingspan.

Among the largest bats in the world (wingspan to ~5 feet). Unlike most bats, they rely primarily on vision and smell rather than echolocation, and they are major long-distance pollinators and seed dispersers.

Blyth's Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus lepidus* — Observed in storage shed at Shergah.

Uses constant-frequency echolocation specialized for detecting fluttering insects. The complex horseshoe-shaped noseleaf helps focus and direct ultrasonic calls.

Sacred Langur / Northern Plains Gray Langur (Hanuman Langur) *Semnopithecus entellus* — Common at Ranthambore and Kanha.

A leaf-specialist with a complex, multi-chambered stomach for fermenting cellulose. Frequently associates with chital, which benefit from dropped leaves and alarm calls.

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta* — Seen often in urban areas.

Exceptionally adaptable, thriving in cities as well as forests. The species gave its name to the “Rh factor” in human blood groups.

Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* — Seen many times at Kailadevi and Kanha.

An opportunistic omnivore feeding on rodents, carrion, fruit, and insects. Indian populations represent an ancient lineage distinct from African Golden Wolf.

Indian (Asiatic) Gray Wolf *Canis lupus pallipes* — A pack was spotted at Kailadevi on a night drive and during the day. A heat-adapted subspecies of Gray Wolf, leaner and smaller than northern forms. Occupies semi-arid grasslands and scrub, often in landscapes shared with pastoral communities.

Bengal Fox *Vulpes bengalensis* — Seen several times at Kailadevi and once at Shergarh.

Recognizable by its black-tipped bushy tail and large ears for thermoregulation. Often digs multi-entrance dens in open grassland.

Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris tigris* — Encountered on jeep safaris at Ranthambore and Kanha.

India holds over 70% of the global wild tiger population. Each individual’s stripe pattern is unique and used for identification.

Indian Leopard *Panthera pardus fusca* — Three seen at Jhalana.

Highly adaptable and capable of surviving near major cities. Their rosette pattern provides excellent camouflage in dappled woodland.

Rusty-spotted Cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* — Observed at close range on a night drive at Kailadevi.

One of the smallest wild cats in the world, typically weighing just 2–3.5 pounds and about 14–19 inches in body length. Primarily nocturnal and extremely elusive.

Common Palm Civet *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus* — Seen at night at Chambal Safari Lodge.

An arboreal omnivore and important seed disperser. Despite its scientific name, individuals are not hermaphroditic.

Sloth Bear *Melursus ursinus* — One encounter at Ranthambore.

Specialized termite feeder lacking upper incisors, allowing powerful suction feeding. Long curved claws are adapted for digging.

Ruddy Mongoose *Urva smithii* — Seen at Ranthambore and Kanha.

More forest-associated than the Indian Gray Mongoose. Reddish coat and darker tail tip distinguish it.

Striped Hyena *Hyaena hyaena* — Seen at Kailadevi and Ranthambore.

Primarily nocturnal scavenger with exceptionally strong jaws capable of crushing bone.

Ganges River Dolphin *Platanista gangetica* — Several seen in the Chambal River, including one leaping out of the water (rare behavior).

Functionally blind, relying on echolocation in turbid rivers. Often swims on its side while scanning with sonar.

Indian Wild Boar *Sus scrofa cristatus* — Seen at Ranthambore and Kailadevi.

The Indian subspecies of Wild Boar; rooting behavior significantly alters soil and vegetation structure.

Chital (Spotted Deer) *Axis axis* — Common at Ranthambore and Kanha.

Unlike temperate deer, males may retain or shed antlers at different times of year, and breeding is asynchronous rather than confined to a single rutting season. Frequently associate with langurs, benefiting from dropped leaves and shared predator detection.

Hard-ground Barasingha (Swamp Deer) *Rucervus duvaucelii branderi* — Seen in good numbers at Kanha; one male heard giving rutting calls.

This Barasingha subspecies survives only at Kanha. Once reduced to fewer than 70 individuals, intensive habitat management restored the population to around 1,100.

Northern Red Muntjac (Barking Deer) *Muntiacus vaginalis* — One seen briefly at Kanha, where the species is uncommon.

Named for its dog-like alarm bark. Males possess short antlers and elongated upper canines used in combat.

Blackbuck *Antelope cervicapra* — Two seen at Kanha, possibly the only two remaining after a failed reintroduction. Males have striking spiral horns and marked sexual dimorphism. Built for speed in open plains.

Sambar *Rusa unicolor* — Common at Ranthambore and Kanha. India's largest deer and a principal prey species for tigers. Known for loud, resonant alarm calls.

Nilgai (Blue Bull) *Boselaphus tragocamelus* — Seen near Ramathra Fort, Ranthambore, Kanha, and outskirts of Jaipur. The largest Asian antelope; males appear slate-blue. Despite the name "bull," it is not a true bovine.

Chinkara (Indian Gazelle) *Gazella bennettii* — A few seen at Ranthambore. Highly drought-adapted and capable of obtaining most moisture from vegetation.

Gaur (Indian Bison) *Bos gaurus* — Seen at Kanha. The world's largest wild bovine; bulls may exceed 2,200 pounds. Notable for their muscular build and white "stockings."

Indian Hare *Lepus nigricollis* — Common at Kailadevi on night drives. Relies on speed and camouflage rather than burrowing; primarily nocturnal.

Five-striped Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii* — Common throughout the tour. Highly vocal and synanthropic; does not hibernate.

Three-striped Palm Squirrel *Funambulus palmarum* — Seen around Kanha. Distinguished by three dorsal stripes instead of five.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS (9):

Mugger (Marsh) Crocodile *Crocodylus palustris* — Seen on the Chambal River and at Ranthambore. Broad-snouted crocodile tolerant of freshwater lakes and reservoirs; capable of digging burrows during dry seasons.

Gharial *Gavialis gangeticus* — Seen in the Chambal River. Critically endangered fish specialist with extremely narrow snout. Adult males develop a bulbous nasal "ghara" used in vocalization.

Bengal Monitor *Varanus bengalensis* — One seen sunning on a tree branch at Kanha. A large terrestrial monitor lizard using a forked tongue for chemical sensing, similar to snakes.

Common Sun Skink (Keeled Indian Mabuya) *Eutropis carinata* — Fast-moving skink with strongly keeled scales; common in open habitats.

Indian Cobra (Spectacled Cobra) *Naja naja* — One seen hooding and retreating into a hole at Kanha. Venom highly neurotoxic. The spectacle marking on the hood varies geographically.

Checkered Keelback *Fowlea piscator* — Juvenile seen multiple times at Shergarh. Non-venomous and semi-aquatic; frequently mistaken for cobras but harmless to humans.

Indian Softshell Turtle *Nilssonina gangetica* — Seen on lake shorelines at Ranthambore. Large river turtle with leathery carapace; often basks on sandbanks.

Indian Flapshell Turtle *Lissemys punctata* — Seen at Kanha. Named for movable skin flaps that cover the limbs when retracted; capable of aestivating in mud.

Indian Skittering Frog *Euphlyctis cyanophlyctis* — Recorded at Shergarh. Often seen at water edges; capable of rapid skimming movement across the surface when disturbed.

BUTTERFLIES (6):

Little Blue / Hairstreak (*Family Lycaenidae*) — Not identified to species. Many lycaenid larvae maintain mutualistic relationships with ants, secreting substances in exchange for protection.

Plain Tiger *Danaus chrysippus* — Feeds on milkweeds and sequesters toxic cardiac glycosides, advertising toxicity through bright coloration.

Common Crow *Euploea core* — Another milkweed butterfly; slow flight reflects chemical protection from predators.

Common Sailor *Neptis hylas* — Named for its distinctive gliding, "sailing" flight pattern along forest edges.

Gray Pansy *Junonia atlites* — Exhibits seasonal wing pattern variation; eyespots function in predator deflection.

Lemon Pansy *Junonia lemonias* — Frequently basks on open ground; males are territorial and return repeatedly to favored perches.

NOTABLE PLANTS

Dhok *Anogeissus pendula* — Dominant tree of the dry deciduous forests at Ranthambore and Kailadevi.

A drought-adapted species with small, tough leaves that reduce water loss. Its seasonal leaf drop shapes understory light conditions and supports a wide range of herbivores in semi-arid habitats.

Sal *Shorea robusta* — Characteristic canopy tree of Kanha's moist deciduous forest.

Forms extensive, nearly monodominant stands. Its heavy, resin-rich timber is highly valued, and its mast flowering and seed production influence ungulate and rodent populations.

Banyan *Ficus benghalensis* — Seen at multiple sites including temple grounds and forest edges.

A keystone fig species producing fruit asynchronously throughout the year, providing critical food for birds and mammals. Aerial prop roots allow the tree to spread laterally and create vast, multi-trunked structures.

Foxtail Orchid *Rhynchostylis retusa* — Observed in forested habitat at Kanha.

An epiphytic orchid with long, pendant inflorescences resembling a fox's tail. Blooms just before the monsoon; fragrant flowers attract specialized pollinators.

Tropical Speedwell *Veronica javanica* (syn. *Veronica arvensis* var. *javanica*) — Seen in open grassy or disturbed areas.

A small, low-growing herb in the plantain family (Plantaginaceae), often found along roadsides, lawns, and forest clearings. Produces delicate pale blue to lavender flowers with darker veining; thrives in disturbed soils and seasonal grasslands.