

ITINERARY
SOUTHERN INDIA: WESTERN GHATS ENDEMIC
November 11 – December 1, 2024



One of the rarest birds we'll see is the Palani Laughingthrush. These birds were formerly lumped with the Ashambu Laughingthrush, and collectively known as "Kerala Laughingthrush". The Palani Laughingthrush has a very small range and is currently considered near threatened. We've seen them well on our tour.

Photograph by participants David and Judy Smith.

We include here information for those interested in the 2024 Field Guides Southern India: Western Ghats Endemics tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

Colorful and exciting, Southern India possesses some of Asia's most magnificent national parks, which in turn are home to 30 endemic birds and a variety of mammals, ranging from the endemic Nilgiri Langur to Indian Giant Squirrel, Gaur, and Indian Elephant. Separated by valleys and plains of rice paddies, coconuts, sugar, and silk farms, the mountain blocks where most of the parks are found are collectively known as the Western Ghats. In the valleys we'll see brightly painted trucks and giant wheeled oxen carts, traveling the roads together with more 'normal' modes of transport. In addition to the endemic birds, South India has an additional 17 bird species shared only with Sri Lanka, and another 6 distinctive forms which may be elevated to full species status.

We'll begin our journey in the low country at Bangalore and visit the famous Nagarhole National Park, where endemic Malabar Parakeets and White-cheeked Barbets call from our lodge grounds, and Indian Elephants and Gaur inhabit the forests and lakeshore. We'll then continue to the Nilgiri and Anamalai mountains, visiting a variety of forests where most of the endemic birds survive—Malabar Barbet and White-bellied Treepie often give themselves away with their loud and distinctive calls, Malabar Trogon is a real treat, but so are Gray Junglefowl (far more beautiful than its name suggests), White-bellied Blue-Flycatcher, and Crimson-backed Sunbird. In the undergrowth we'll search for the rare Wayanad Laughingthrush and the secretive White-bellied and Nilgiri sholakilis; the middle levels are better for Gray-headed Bulbul, Nilgiri Flycatcher, and Indian Scimitar-Babbler, while overhead the loud swoosh of wings at any time may signal Great or Malabar Pied hornbills.



The beautiful Malabar Parakeet is an endemic of the Western Ghats. We've seen good numbers of them on the tour in recent years. Photograph by participants David and Judy Smith.

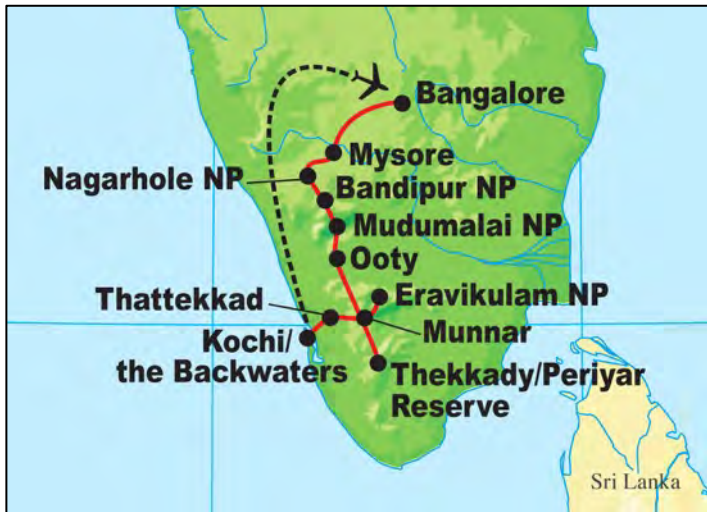
Leaving the mountains behind, we'll descend to the fabulous forests at Thattekad. Here we'll have the opportunity to stay out after dusk in search of Brown Boobook, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Jerdon's Nightjar and Great Eared-Nightjar. And then, on a vast flooded area known as "the Backwaters," amongst the paddy fields and fishing boats we'll see hundreds of waterbirds; Lesser Whistling-Duck and Cotton Pygmy-goose share pools with Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed jacanas, Little and Indian cormorants can be numerous, as are the herons and egrets that feed in the more open areas; Yellow and Cinnamon bitterns inhabit the reed beds. For photographers, the Stork-billed and White-throated kingfishers are a real treat, as are flocks of Blue-tailed Bee-eaters and family groups of Ashy Woodswallows.

Finally, we'll arrive at Kochi on the subcontinent's southwest coast. It's a thriving port city with a fascinating history, a mix of the old and new, Chinese and Indian, and the first burial site of Vasco da Gama, who died here in 1524 (his remains were later reinterred in Lisbon).

Our tour is designed to provide a survey of the best birding and wildlife sites in Southern India. We'll be particularly looking for the endemic and near-endemic birds but will also have ample time to enjoy and study many of the more common and widespread species. The tour is also great for mammals, with lots of Indian Elephants, Gaur (the world's largest bovine), Sambar, Spotted Deer, Indian Giant Squirrel, both Common and Nilgiri langurs (monkeys), Bonnet Macaque (another monkey), and Nilgiri Tahr (an endemic wild goat). There's also a chance of leopard and tiger, but both are uncommon and very shy.

In most of the reserves we'll be accompanied by local expert guides, who will not only take us to some of the best birding sites but will also give us information on many of the mammals, flowers, and trees which occur there. At Nagarhole (pronounced Na-gar-ho-lay) elephants (and other large beasts) can be common, and most of our excursions will be in vehicles. These are provided by the park authorities, who also decide which group will have which vehicle/s on any given day. We plan to travel in a 15-seat vehicle, but we may also be given small Mahindra four-wheel drives and

have to divide the group. If this does occur, rest assured, the drivers and local guides are experts at finding the birds and big game, and we will rotate the group equally, giving everyone the opportunity to travel with each guide. At Mudumalai we may also travel in small vehicles to reach some birding areas, but once there the actual birding will be done together on foot.



Special note: In addition to the local park guides that will accompany us for most of the tour (Mudumalai to Periyar), we will be joined by the **renowned local expert leader, Sathyan Meppayur**. Sathyan not only has exceptional local knowledge of where many of the most difficult and localized birds can be found, but will also be happy to discuss any aspect of the local cultures and customs that you may be interested in.

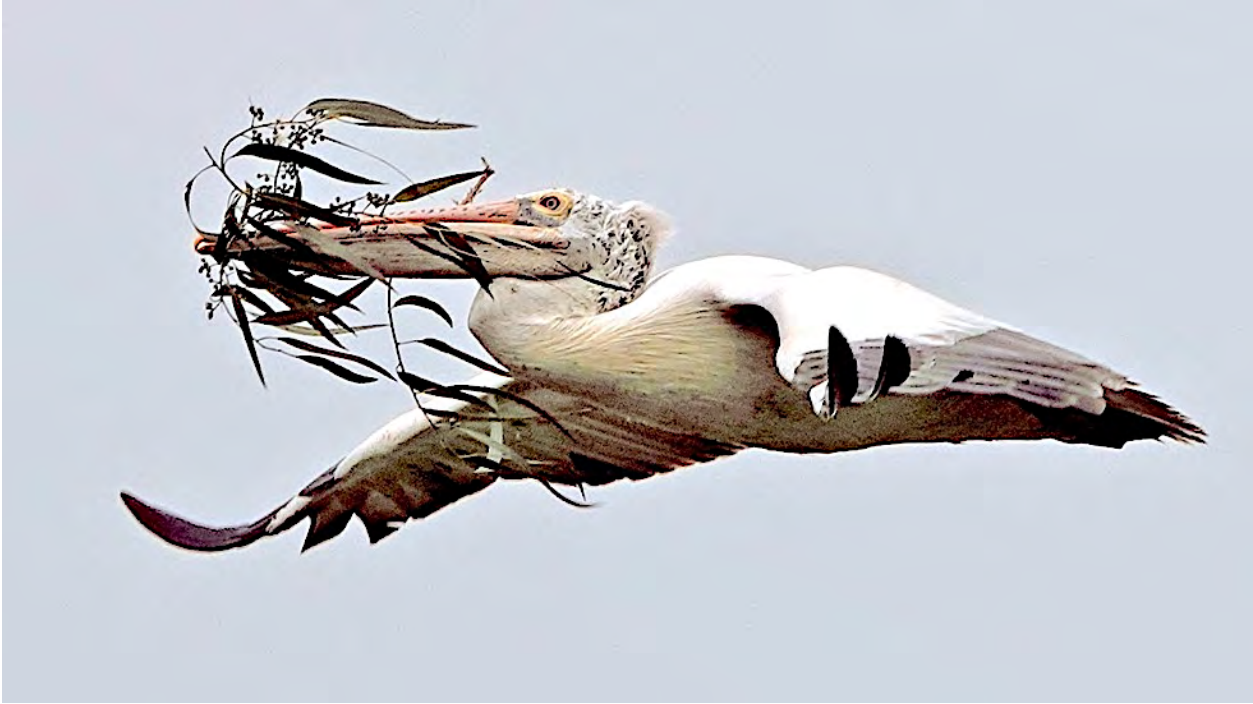
We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS & WALKING:** In highland areas like Ooty, Munnar, and Eravikulam, we will be walking at around 7500ft. on slopes. These walks are short and slow paced (for a maximum distance of 1 mile). Elsewhere, we will walk on good to moderate trails and may be out birding for up to 3-5 hours at a time.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** Although several of our stays are for 2 nights or more, we will have several long drives as we travel from one area of endemic birds to the next, and sometimes on bumpy roads. Participants should be able to step up and down 10-12 inches to get into and out of our various vehicles. Some of the dirt tracks we drive on may be dusty. If there has been rain, land-leeches may be present in some parks; these are not dangerous, but no one really likes them, and you should be prepared for the possibility of having to encounter these. Food on this tour may be spicier than what some Americans are used to, but if you like Indian food, then you'll love this tour.
- **PACE:** The pace of this tour is generally easy-going, although in some areas (with easy trails) we may be out on foot for up to 4-5 hours. Sometimes we will begin birding early and then return to our hotel by about 9:30 am for a sit-down breakfast. We'll have a shorter walk after breakfast, and then (in the hotter areas) a break after lunch before another walk or drive in the afternoon.
- **WEATHER:** Weather is generally good, though it can be hot and humid in the lowlands, where temperatures can reach into the 90's F. Evenings and early mornings might be cool with lows in the 60's F. We do some early morning drives in open vehicles that might get quite chilly, so a jacket, hat and gloves are recommended. Rain is a possibility.
- **ELEVATION:** We reach elevations of up to 7500 feet on this tour and will spend one night at 7200 feet. Elsewhere we will mainly be at 3000-4000 feet, and at sea-level at Kochi.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Participants should be prepared to make comfort stops in nature, as there are simply no other options (away from our lodgings) on many sections of this tour's route.

- **OPTING OUT:** Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or sometimes a half-day. This will not be possible on days when we are changing locations (as we do often on this tour).

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with your guide for the tour.



The Spot-billed Pelican is a near-threatened species that breeds in India. We've seen adults like this one at nesting colonies near Mysore. Photograph by participant Diane Drobka.

Itinerary for Southern India: Western Ghats Endemics

Days 1-2, Mon-Tue, 11-12 Nov. To Bangalore. Many flights leave the US late in the day, flying overnight to a connecting city such as Frankfurt, Dubai, or London before continuing on to Bangalore. In this case, you will most likely arrive in Bangalore in the early morning hours of Day 3, and we strongly urge you to consider flying a day early either to spend a night in your connecting city or to have a day to rest up in Bangalore before the drive to Mysore on Day 3 (November 13th). Larger East Coast cities may have flights departing earlier on Day 1, which allows for an earlier arrival in Bangalore and makes the extra day less of a necessity. Night of Day 2 (November 12th) at The Chancery Hotel in Bangalore.

Day 3, Wed, 13 Nov. Drive to Mysore. We'll have breakfast at our hotel and then head southwest towards Mysore. Our first birds will probably be Black Kites and House Crows, but we'll also keep a lookout for Brahminy Kite, White-throated Kingfisher, and Indian Roller. The road to Mysore has recently been upgraded, so it won't be long before we reach the small village of Kikkare Bellur, 70 kms away. This really is an amazing place and such a contrast to the bustle of Bangalore city life. Set among a mix of rice paddies, sugar cane fields, and banana and silk farms is a large "water tank" (reservoir), and the area is just alive with birds—including Spot-billed Pelican (sadly, a mysteriously declining species) which nests with Painted Storks right in the village gardens. We'll check the nearby rice fields for Red-naped Ibis, and then the tank for a wide selection of herons, egrets, and ducks. In order to be flexible and maximize our time in the field, we'll carry a picnic lunch.

In the afternoon we'll visit the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary (close to Mysore)—a good area for Indian and Little cormorants, Oriental Darter, Intermediate and Little egrets, Indian Pond-Heron, Asian Openbill, Woolly-necked Stork, Black-headed Ibis, and Eurasian Spoonbill. We'll be seeing many of these waterbirds again later in the tour, so our main target will be Great Thick-knee, not possible elsewhere but often on the rocky islands here. Night at Southern Star Hotel, Mysore.

Day 4, Thu, 14 Nov. To Nagarhole National Park. This morning we'll drive a further 80 kms to one of South India's most famous national parks—Nagarhole (*Nagarholay*). Here, in the deciduous woodlands and along the shores of the now dammed Kabini River, large herds of Indian Elephant may occur, while Gaur, the world's largest bovine, may also be seen on the open grassy shores if the water levels are low. Sambar, Spotted Deer, Wild Boar, Common Langur and Bonnet Macaque are all common, while Dhole (Indian Wild Dog), Tiger, and Leopard are also resident, though it would take a great deal of luck to see any one of them. Much of the birdlife is, however, far easier, with Malabar Parakeet, Asian Koel, White-cheeked and Coppersmith barbets, Small Minivet, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Oriental Magpie-Robin, Jungle Babbler and Purple Sunbird all occurring in the lodge garden. Indian Pitta may also be here, but it's uncommon, rather shy, and surprisingly difficult to see among the dappled light and leaf-litter. We'll have three nights at Nagarhole, giving us time to really enjoy drives within the park, and walks in the more open semi-cultivated country. Night at Kabini River Lodge.



*Southern India is home to a number of beautiful woodpeckers, including the stunning Black-rumped Flameback.
Photograph by participants David and Judy Smith.*

Days 5-6, Fri-Sat, 15-16 Nov. Nagarhole National Park. Accompanied by local guide/s, we'll take morning and evening drives in open-sided vehicles within Nagarhole National Park. Our routes will be determined by the knowledge of these local experts and are likely to include several trips to the dry deciduous woodlands, along the lakeshore, and a walk in open country to look for the endemic Malabar Lark.

An excellent way to find birds is to wait by a flowering Red Silk Cotton tree, where Plum-headed Parakeets, Red-whiskered Bulbuls, Chestnut-tailed and Malabar starlings, Common and Jungle mynas, and Purple-rumped Sunbirds may be present by the dozens. In the dry woodlands, mixed-species flocks occur and typically include White-cheeked Barbet, Yellow-crowned and Rufous woodpeckers, Black-rumped Flameback, Orange Minivet, Cinereous Tit, Indian and Velvet-fronted nuthatches, Black-hooded Oriole, White-bellied and Ashy drongos and Rufous Treepie.

By driving along the tracks in the early morning, we should get fabulous looks at the beautiful Gray Junglefowl and, with luck, Red Spurfowl. No matter where we go we'll certainly be seeing lots of birds, whether it's Indian Peafowl on the lakeshore, White-bellied and Heart-spotted woodpeckers in the woodlands, Malabar Pied-Hornbills flying from a roost site, or Vernal Hanging-Parrots feeding in the canopy. Nagarhole is indeed a birdy place. Nights at Kabini River Lodge.

Day 7, Sun, 17 Nov. To Mudumalai. Today we'll drive to another park; Mudumalai (adjoining Nagarhole and passing through Bandipur NP along the way). These three, together with yet another adjoining park (Wynaad) form one of the largest protected forest areas in India, although much of it is inaccessible to the public. Mudumalai and the surrounding area are a mix of both wet and dry deciduous forest, with easy access to riverine forest, teak plantation, and semi-arid thorn scrub. We'll have two days to explore these areas, but as we leave the Kabini River Lodge we'll first pass through some degraded farmland (and another chance for Malabar Lark). Later, as we pass through our first scrub country, we

may take a short walk in search of Jungle Bush-Quail, Jerdon's Bushlark, Rufous-tailed Lark, Blue Rock-Thrush, and Large Gray Babbler, but these are all species that we may see again during our stay at Bamboo Banks—our lodging for two nights. We'll be joined this evening (and for the next 11 days by local expert Sathyan Meppayur). Night at Bamboo Banks.

Day 8, Mon, 18 Nov. Mudumalai area. Depending on whatever Sathyan (our local eyes and ears thinks are best) we'll take drives and walks to search out the most special birds of this area.

In the dry country we'll look for any of the species mentioned yesterday and not yet found. But, we'll also be on the lookout for Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Yellow-legged Button-Quail, Yellow-footed Pigeon, White-naped Woodpecker, White-browed Bulbul, Tawny-bellied and Yellow-billed babblers, White-browed Fantail, Common Woodshrike, Indian Golden Oriole, Brown and Bay-backed shrikes, Sykes's Warbler, and Brahminy Starling.

The moister woodlands here are home to another great selection of birds, and we'll be making a special excursion to look for the very localized Gray-headed Bulbul and a host of other species including Crested Serpent-Eagle, Crested Hawk-Eagle, Brown Fish-Owl (sometimes right in the lodge grounds), Indian Swiftlet, Crested Treeswift, Malabar Gray Hornbill, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, Brown-capped Pygmy and Streak-throated woodpeckers, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Malabar Whistling-Thrush, Indian Blue Robin, Verditer Flycatcher, Indian Paradise-Flycatcher, Puff-throated Babbler, and Nilgiri Flowerpecker. Night at Bamboo Banks.



*Malabar Gray Hornbill is another endemic of the Western Ghats region that we'll seek.
Photograph by participants David and Judy Smith.*

Day 9, Tue, 19 Nov. To Ooty; the Nilgiri Hills. This morning we'll leave early and climb the Nilgiri Hills in smaller vehicles than our usual tour bus; the road is not bad, but a section of bends would make very slow going for our normal larger vehicle. We'll have lunch in the hill station town of Ooty (where we'll later spend the night) and then visit a couple of areas of remnant forest. This will be our first highland forest birding, and although species are not numerous, we'll be looking for several of the more tricky endemics. We'll have chances for most of them again later, but even just a few of the following will make it a successful day—Painted Bush-Quail (secretive and best seen by luck crossing the trail), White-bellied Sholakili (very shy), Black-and-orange Flycatcher (an attractive endemic), and Nilgiri Laughingthrush (another attractive endemic).

After local birding we'll drive to our hotel at about 2400 meters above sea level (7900ft.) Night at Accord Highland Hotel.

Day 10, Wed, 20 Nov. To Munnar. It's a very long drive today as we head south to yet another mountain block. Our destination this afternoon is Munnar, a picturesque hill station town surrounded by tea estates. In the late afternoon we'll bird at a small remnant patch of forest (locally known as a 'shola') where we might see Gray-headed Canary-Flycatcher, Indian Yellow Tit, Tickell's Leaf-Warbler, and Palani (Kerala) Laughingthrush. Night at Tea County, a modern, clean, and very efficient hotel situated at 1600 meters overlooking the town.



*The Nilgiri Flycatcher is one of several small, blue flycatchers we'll watch for.
Photograph by participants David and Judy Smith.*

Day 11, Thu, 21 Nov. Eravikulam National Park. This morning we'll head to the nearby Eravikulam National Park where our main targets are three of the most local South Indian endemics—a second chance for Palani Laughingthrush, plus White-bellied Sholakili and Nilgiri Pipit. The area of the park accessible to the public is surprisingly small, but by first checking the scrubby undergrowth and then the more open grasslands, we have a very good chance of seeing all three species. We also have a good chance for the endangered Nilgiri Tahr, an endemic wild goat whose nearest relatives are thousands of kilometers away in the Himalayas. Should we fail to find any of the special birds, we'll have a second chance (at a different nearby area) tomorrow morning. Additionally, we'll be looking for Nilgiri Wood-Pigeon (a nomadic wanderer whose appearance is never guaranteed on any tour), Dusky Crag-Martin, Hill Swallow, Square-tailed Black Bulbul, and Nilgiri and Blue-throated flycatchers. Night at Tea County.

Day 12, Fri, 22 Nov. To Periyar. Once again we'll drive south today, this time heading for Thekkady, a small tourist town at the edge of the Periyar Tiger Sanctuary. We'll stop along the way to look for the very localized Yellow-throated Bulbul and hopefully Blue-faced Malkoha, which inhabit a wooded escarpment here. Then, on arrival in Thekkady, the guide will have to spend some time making arrangements with the park authorities for our permits, which we'll need for the following days. During this break, those who like shopping may wish to spend a couple of hours checking out the handicraft shops, which are situated just a short distance from our hotel. Alternatively, you may wish to watch for Loten's Sunbird, which frequently occur in the grounds of our hotel. Night at Spice Village; a lovely arrangement of thatched cottages within attractive walled grounds.

Days 13-14, Sat-Sun, 23-24 Nov. Periyar Reserve. The magnificent moist evergreen forests of this reserve surround a large lake where huge dead tree trunks serve as perches for Oriental Darters, Great and Little cormorants, and Ashy Woodswallows. Along the grassy shoreline Indian Elephants may be seen, as well as Gaur, Sambar, and Wild Boar. Birds more easily seen along the shore and forest borders include Gray-fronted Green-Pigeon, Vernal Hanging-Parrot, and occasionally Great Hornbills—especially if a fruiting tree is found. The increased visibility over the forest here should certainly produce White-rumped Spinetail, but we may also find a low hunting Black Baza, Crested Goshawk, or Black Eagle.

Although we'll certainly be on the lookout for all of these species, most of our time will be spent walking with one of the expert local guides along the forest trails. Some of the birds encountered we will have already seen, but Periyar really is one of the birdiest forests in all of India, and it's a fabulous feeling to walk the trails slowly, discovering (or rediscovering) Malabar Trogon, Malabar Gray Hornbill, Malabar Barbet, Common Flameback, Indian Pitta, Forest Wagtail, Orange-headed Thrush, Rusty-tailed and Brown-breasted flycatchers, White-bellied Blue-Flycatcher, Rufous and Dark-fronted babblers, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta, Little Spiderhunter, and White-bellied Treepie. However, the most special bird of Periyar is Wayanad (Wynaad) Laughingthrush, and we'll put in our best effort to find this elusive species—but there's much else to see, and with two full days here we'll certainly put together an impressive list. Nights at Spice Village.

Day 15, Mon, 25 Nov. To Thattekkad. Today we'll drive to what is quickly becoming known as one of the best areas for forest birding in South India. If we missed them earlier, there'll be more chances for both Gray-headed Bulbul and Wayanad Laughingthrush, and our stay here also gives us opportunity to stay out after dusk to see a variety of owls and nightjars. We'll have two full days to enjoy the wonderful Thattekkad forests. Night at Tapovan Green County Resort.

Days 16-17, Tue-Wed, 26-27 Nov. Tattekkad Forests. During our stay we'll visit two different areas, birding a system of trails within the magnificent evergreen forests that grow here. From time to time we'll pass through areas of bamboo, perhaps seeing Red Spurfowl, or we'll cross a rocky streambed—good for Malabar Whistling-Thrush. We'll also pass by some open clearings where Malabar (Mountain) Imperial-Pigeon, Malabar Barbet, or Great Hornbill may be seen in the canopy. The majority of species, though, are in the forest interior, and it is here that we will spend most of our time, quietly walking the trails while listening for telltale calls. Gray Junglefowl are common, but also watch in the leaf-litter for Indian Pitta, or the distinctive white-throated form of Orange-headed Thrush. Jungle Owlets often give themselves away with their periodic calling, as do Malabar Gray Hornbills, which is a good thing as this is often the first indication of their presence. Noisy flocks of Malabar Parakeets should be with us throughout the day.

Our local guide may know a day-roost site for the fabulous Sri Lanka Frogmouth, or perhaps a Brown Boobook. More easily seen are Black Eagle, Malabar Trogon, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Malabar Woodshrike, White-bellied Treepie, Black-naped Monarch, Flame-throated and Yellow-browed bulbuls, Indian Scimitar-Babbler, Rufous Babbler, Southern Hill Myna, and Crimson-backed Sunbird. This area is almost like our guide Sathyan's second home, and no matter which trails we follow, we expect to see lots of birds. Nights at Tapovan Green County Resort.



Among the night-birds we will look for is the Sri Lanka Frogmouth. These birds are found in Sri Lanka and the Western Ghats, and we've seen them well on this tour. Photograph by guide Terry Stevenson.

Day 18, Thu, 28 Nov. To Coconut Lagoon; the Backwaters. Today we'll drive to a vast flooded area inland from the coast and known simply as "The Backwaters." It's a beautiful mosaic of flooded paddyfields, dykes covered in coconut palms, canals, and lakes. Our hotel is an attractive collection of tile-roofed cottages in the Indo-Chinese style right at the edge of one of the best birding areas with a wealth of waterbirds only a few minutes' walk away. During a couple of hours this afternoon we should see a good selection of the more common herons and egrets and perhaps one of the more shy species like Yellow or Cinnamon bitterns, or Watercock. Lesser Whistling-Duck, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Garganey, and Northern Shoveler can be common in the flooded paddyfields, with a few Pheasant-tailed and Bronze-winged jacanas walking amongst them in the floating weeds. Dead trees around the fields provide perches for Common, Stork-billed, and White-throated kingfishers, as well as the occasional flock of Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, which pass through at this time of year. In the reedy fringes we may find Clamorous (Indian) Reed-Warbler and Ashy Prinia, and in the palms perhaps a breeding colony of Baya Weavers. Night at Coconut Lagoon.

Day 19, Fri, 29 Nov. To Kochi. After a final walk at Coconut Lagoon, we'll board a converted rice boat for a four-hour cruise through the lakes and canals of The Backwaters. Along the way we should see hundreds of Indian and Little cormorants, and a variety of herons, egrets, storks and terns as we relax and enjoy a traditional (and very tasty) lunch. From Alleppey it's about a two-hour drive to Kochi, where we'll spend the night at Brunton's Boatyard Hotel - overlooking the gateway to the port. Night at Brunton's Boatyard Hotel.

Day 20, Sat, 30 Nov. Fly Kochi to Bangalore. For those not departing from Kochi (an option for anyone wishing to spend more time there; we can discount the tour to avoid paying for the flight to Bangalore, the final dinner there and the hotel night), our flight to Bangalore typically departs in the afternoon, although we've had to take a morning flight on occasion due to changing airline schedules. Assuming an afternoon departure, we'll have the opportunity either to rest, to do some last-minute souvenir shopping, or to visit some of Kochi's famous historical sites. These include St. Francis Church, originally constructed by the Portuguese in 1503 and the first burial place of the famous explorer Vasco da Gama. The Jewish Synagogue, which was built in 1568, is the oldest in the Commonwealth. No less interesting but a good deal younger are the giant Chinese cantilevered fishing nets which are all along the shore a short distance from our hotel. In Bangalore, (for those leaving the tour from there) we will reserve hotel rooms before flights home, which can depart anywhere from around midnight to the late afternoon of December 1. Night near the Bangalore airport.

Day 21, Sun, 1 Dec. Arrival in connecting cities and continuation of flights home.

About Your Guide

Terry Stevenson, originally from England, has made Kenya his home since 1977. He is the principal author of the *Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi*—the only guide in the region to have a *text-and-maps opposite plates* format. In 2009 he co-authored a similar guide, the *Birds of the Horn of Africa*. He is also a member/advisor to the East African Rarities Committee. On November 30, 1986, he set a new World Big Day record with 330 species *seen* in one day in Kenya; the record stands today. One of Africa's foremost bird-tour guides, Terry has led numerous Field Guides tours across the African continent and in Madagascar. Over the past ten years he has also developed a particular interest in Asian birds and has strayed on personal birding holidays to places such as China, Thailand, and Malaysia. Since 2003 Terry has led all our North and South India tours. He is currently living in a mud and cow dung mansion near Mt. Kenya.

Terry Stevenson is both a great technical bird guide and the consummate tour guide, looking after our comfort and needs. A great combination of talents—and, in addition, he has a great sense of humor and is a great conversationalist." R.C., Kenya

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for Terry's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

As stated earlier in the "Special Note," Terry will be assisted by an expert local guide during the tour.

Financial Information

FEE: \$10,250 from Bangalore

DEPOSIT: \$1025 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: May 15, 2024

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$1600

***Depending on the group makeup, we may be required to double-up at Kabini River Lodge (three nights) and Bamboo Banks Guesthouse (two nights).**

LIMIT: 10

All participants will be required to confirm they will have completed a full COVID vaccination course at least two weeks prior to the tour (which includes a booster for those eligible to have one). Note too, that many travel destinations may still require proof of vaccination for entry to bypass testing delays or quarantine, and that entry requirements for a destination can change at any time. Proof of a booster shot, too, may be a requirement for some travel destinations.

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Sharon Mackie. Sharon will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

ACCOMMODATIONS, FOOD, AND CULTURE: All the hotels on this tour are clean and comfortable, and Spice Village at Thekkady, and Coconut Lagoon in the Backwaters, could even be described as luxurious. Throughout the tour breakfasts and dinners will normally be taken at the hotels, although it should be noted that hotel breakfasts in southern India rarely begin before 7:30 a.m.—and that's when we want to be out birding. Typically we will not be having a cooked breakfast before about 9:30 a.m., but then it will be substantial, consisting of a wide selection of both hot and cold Indian and European foods. If you like to eat early, this is a good tour to bring along a reasonable supply of snack foods, power bars, etc. Lunches will mainly be sit-down meals at lodges and hotels, but we'll also have quite a few hotel-prepared picnics depending on location. Dinners will again be sit-down meals at hotels or lodges, where there will usually be a wide choice of food (typically buffet style).

For some people, stomach discomfort can be a problem in India, particularly if you don't like spicy food. If you've already been to northern India and didn't care for the daily fare there, then you may be pleasantly surprised by what southern India has to offer. Of course, curries are served on a daily basis (for all meals), but additionally there is often a variety of not so spicy dishes and a limited selection of western-type food.

India can be a culture shock for the unwary, but again (like the food) it's not so extreme in the south as in the north. For one thing, there are far fewer people, and far, far less garbage. Roads are generally better, as there is less traffic, although in many areas progress is somewhat slow due to cattle on the road, people drying grain on the road, or just undulating bumpy sections of road. However, keep in mind that the people are exceptionally friendly wherever we go, the wildlife is fabulous, the scenery wonderful, and the culture rich and interesting.

A NOTE ON ALTITUDE: Around Ooty, we'll be staying and birding at an altitude of 1520-2400 meters (roughly 5000-7800 feet). At Munnar we'll stay at 1600 meters (5200 feet). Most of the trails we walk will be undulating but generally good, however in the Munnar area there are a couple of steeper trails that we may use (with advance warning), but the pace will be slow.

DOCUMENTS: A current **passport** valid for six months beyond your return is necessary for US citizens to enter India. US citizens must also obtain a **tourist eVisa** for India. The eVisa application and information can be found here: <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/>. (Technical information for e-visa: The site is best viewed in Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome or Internet Explorer (Windows) version 9.0 and above. The applicant must also have Adobe Acrobat Reader version 7.0 or higher installed on your computer in order to download and print the completed application form. The website is compatible with Android and IOS devices.) In country contact information will be provided by our office roughly 60 days before departure.

If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Indian consulate nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries

require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Field Guides is a full-service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with rental cars and extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees.

Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Furthermore, **weight restrictions for your checked luggage on the flight from Kochi to Bangalore are a limit of 15kgs (33 lbs).** Above this amount, weight can be taken, but you will be charged at approximately \$8 per kilo. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these flights are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The **tour fee** is **\$10250** for one person in double occupancy from Bangalore. It includes all lodging from Day 2 through Day 20, all meals from breakfast on Day 3 through dinner on Day 20, the internal flight from Kochi to Bangalore (discounts are available to those who end the tour in Kochi, thus not needing the internal flight at the end of the tour to Bangalore), all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your international airfare to and from Bangalore, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers (we will tip generously for the group), phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for the tour is \$1600. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes). *Depending on the **makeup of our group**, participants may be required to double-up at Kabini River Lodge (**three** nights) and Bamboo Banks Guesthouse (**two** nights).

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact us at fieldguides.com/contact-us/. Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$1025** per person, or see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or **by May 15, 2024**. **We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.**

Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs outside of our cancellation policy as published in the itinerary (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive information from us regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/> and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii. We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

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