

Goa 1997 October

The purpose of this brief guide is to help people, like ourselves, who are keen, not very fit and can, at best, only afford a package deal rather than a guided tour from a specialist birding holiday company.

Being arthritic I tend to “walk by car” and cannot set off on long hikes – I have rarely found this major drawback and, at home, consider my car to be a mobile hide. It also makes me very good at spotting tiny birds whilst travelling at speed. My wife who is as keen as me and a bit fitter has been known to flush the occasional jack snipe or grouse out of pity, or check out a likely spot to avoid me wasting my limited mobility on a wild goose chase (forgive the pun).

Maggie and I researched as best we could by reading everything we could find on Goa and investing in Salim Ali’s “Book of Indian Birds” as well as Ali & Ripley’s bigger book. The former is well illustrated (although oddly ordered) and has a useful text but is not comprehensive. The latter has (nearly) the lot but the illustrations are old fashioned and somewhat lurid. I found a small photographic guide which was nice to look through but far too small to be of use. (I gave it to a local in the hope of inspiring interest) For example, I saw green warblers everywhere but did not identify them until I looked through the Western Palaearctic guide to warblers on my return as they are not mentioned in either of the books.

We went with “Inspirations” for about £500 a head for a week (2 weeks would have been very little more but I could not get away). Our hotel was not as good as it could have been and, the lack of air-conditioning made it nearly intolerable as the humidity is high in March. January & February are the recommended months. We took potluck and tried to convince ourselves that there might be migrants passing through from further south as well as late staying winter visitors. In the event we were well satisfied with our tally (although a lot of ducks etc. had flown north) and we really loved Goa and the Goans.

Transport & Travel

Goa is an ex-Portuguese colony and the driving proves it! Those of you who have searched for Great Bustards in the Algarve, will know that the average Portuguese driver will hang back on your tail, if the long straight road is clear, and will wait until there is a blind summit, on a blind bend, with traffic coming the other way, and only then overtake! The Goans use the same method but with an Eastern fatalism supplement and an increased death wish. Driving oneself is not recommended – you only have to see the hippie tourists covered in elastoplast who dared to hire a moped.

In any event it will cost less than £20 to hire a taxi with driver for a full day. (motorised rickshaws can be had for half the cost of taxis for short journeys). Local buses may be fun if you can keep close enough to the window to feel the breeze or if you really like to play Sardines. A morning spent birding relatively locally will cost, perhaps, 300 rupees (less than £6.00p).

Nevertheless, it helps to plan for the next day out if you pick up a map from the tourism office at the airport – you will need to change up some cash as they only accept rupees.

All the best sites are within 2 hours of the northern hotels and most within half an hour or so. Wherever you stay there will be good birds within walking distance (even for fat cripples like me) and, if you are lucky, even the hotel grounds will turn up a few choice specimens. When travelling back take a taxi to the airport and arrive three hours before departure if you want to ensure your choice of seats. Ignore the calls for embarkation until half an hour before take-off as the departure lounge has very little to offer except cold drinks – better to wait in the airport café.

Weather etc.

In March dawn is around 6.15am. and dusk 6.45pm. (none of the books mention this essential) and for the first couple of hours it is cool enough to stroll. For all the rest of the time I recommend a sun hat, a spot where you can get a sea breeze or a shade tree to watch besides. During our trip it averaged 90 degrees Fahrenheit and 85% humidity!

Those of you who lay (or even stand) in the direct sun need a high factor sun cream. (You should see all those men whose follicles are challenged sporting sunburned pates on the flight home).

It is rarely overcast but when we visited Bondla there were puddles so it can rain a little in the dry season up in the Western Ghats.

Costs

The beauty of low costs enhances the beauty of Goa once you get there. A curry for two with a couple of beers never cost more than £6.00p at the best restaurants and can be a matter of pence. (I recommend the Alcove restaurant overlooking Vagator Beach, which has a very friendly proprietor who will always try to make you something to order if at all possible) and who cooks from scratch rather than keeping a stock of ready prepared food. Apart from the wonderful food and hospitality it overlooks the beach from on high and the sunsets were truly beautiful.

Other restaurants recommended by fellow hotel guests were: German bakery near Anjuna Market, The Ronil Hotel in Baga; Starlight at Arpora; Drop Anchor, a seafood place in Baga and Palms & Sands in Candolim.

A cold drink in the hotel will cost 20 rupees (40p) and in the Goan shops 5 rupees. Cigarettes are less than £1 for 20 and beer is at 35 rupees at most. Apart from clothing (A silk sarong can be had for £1.00p.) and souvenirs the best buys are music tapes (the genuine article) for around £1.25p and Lacoste T-shirts (also the genuine article made under licence, but beware lots of bootleg gear) for £4.00p. Hand crafted leather belts at £1.00p and brand name sunglasses etc. at a fraction of the cost of the duty free shop. Forget Anjuna market days which really are geared to tourists and the local hippies and go to Mapusa (pronounced Mapsa) where the locals shop and enjoy the haggling. There is also a good music tape store near the market.

Forget the duty free shop at Dabolim there is a limited range of goods and they only take sterling and not rupees or plastic despite the signs to the contrary. You will probably be disembarking for an hour at Bahrain and this has the cheapest duty free goods anywhere in the world – although their currency is very strong against the pound. 200 cigarettes at less than £6.00p and booze, gold, sweets, perfume etc. at very reasonable costs. CD's were about a third cheaper for the latest titles too. If you are intrepid enough to make your own arrangements, accommodation can be very cheap (as little as 40p a night!). I met someone on the plane home who had hired a bungalow for three weeks at a total cost of £30.00p.

Good birding spots – even the beaches – are wonderfully lonely as most holidaymakers lay in the sun if they are not shopping until they drop. Seafood is excellent and anything well-cooked is no problem.

Health & Safety

Goa is no worse health-wise than anywhere else if you are sensible. Drink only bottled water, do not take ice in your drinks, use bottled water to wash your teeth and only eat fresh fruit and veg if you can wash it in bottled water or peel it; then you can virtually guarantee no diarrhoea for the trip.

Mosquitoes were in evidence at dusk near water (including the hotel pool) so spray and take the pills. We had one very large and colourful cockroach in our room and a very large spider hanging outside the window that, fortunately, stayed put. We saw no snakes, but they were reported by others, and there are all the most poisonous ones to be found in Goa so do not walk across the paddy fields or through the bush without decent footwear and reasonable vigilance. It is true that most snakes take cover if they feel your vibrations so don't be too soft footed (anyway the birds do not seem over shy, it is a mainly Hindu country (with large Christian and Jayne minorities in Goa) so animals are not all shot on sight.)

As for personal safety I felt safer than I would wandering about alone in the UK; and, moreover, less often the butt of ridicule for watching birds. Everyone I met was charming and friendly as well as very polite. I found that, as in the parts of Africa I have watched birds in, having very little did not mean that people felt resentment or dislike of tourists, but, in fact happy that they are bringing money to spend into the country.

Other Taxa

We were lucky enough to see monkeys on several occasions, small stripy squirrels and very large red ones and a mongoose (my friends as I am very wary of potentially deadly snakes). In the back-country there are deer and small antelopes and maybe even a few of the medium size cats but most were despatched by colonialists long ago – we saw none.

Everywhere are dogs, (not unfriendly but some look pretty ropy) cows, (sacred) water buffalo (tame beasts of burden) and pot-bellied pigs (hence vindaloo). The cows move for no one but are only a hazard to careless drivers (95% of the driving population).

Birds & Birding

You are going to get a good trip list whatever you do. In the average paddy field are more cattle egrets than have ever been seen in the entire history of UK birding. On any available wire will be kingfishers (usually white-breasted), bee eaters (mostly blue-tailed) and shrikes (predominantly Rufous) and Indian robins and magpie robins. The supporting cast will sometimes include paddy field pipits (Richard's) and small brown flycatchers but anything can be there. Its hard to drive by without wanting to check every wire. On any tall blade of rice straw will be a Drongo and often they will be racket-tailed. Mynas are everywhere but need to be checked for the less abundant family members.

On the road from the airport we saw: Great, Intermediate, Little and Cattle Egrets, House Sparrow, House Crow, Black Drongo, Brahminy and Black Kite, Feral Pigeon, Western Reef Heron and Red-vented bulbul. Whilst relaxing in the hotel grounds or on the balcony we saw, at various times: Yellow-cheeked Tit, Purple-rumped Sunbird, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Feral Pigeon, Plain-coloured Flowerpecker, Red-whiskered Bulbul, House Crow, Common Koel, Dull-green Leaf Warbler, Tailorbird, Jungle Crow, Crimson-throated Barbet, Rufous-backed Shrike, Magpie Robin, Black and Brahminy Kite, Pale Harrier, Rufous Babbler, Common Babbler and Green Warbler.

Unfortunately, I missed the Cuckoo-shrike that sat in the jack-fruit tree whilst we were out bird watching and everyone else was having breakfast! In the fields to and from restaurants we saw: Ashy, Black and Racket-tailed Drongo, Common Myna, Cattle Egrets and Paddy Birds, Treepie, Paddyfield Pipit, Black-bellied Finch Lark, Magpie and Indian Robin, Pied Chat, Brown Flycatcher, Common Nightjar and Spotted Owlet.

Any patch of estuary or lake will be home to 4 types of egret and three types of heron as well as lots of the commoner sandpipers and some of the less common waders. I visited a number of sites on two or three occasions and, each time, added at least half a dozen new species, so its worth checking out what seem like your local hot spots with regularity.

Our best experiences were at sites not mentioned in any of the books (apart from Carambolim lake which you can happily watch for a whole day as it truly is heaving with birds). There is a lot of Goa that is not, or has nor been, watched so explore for yourself and talk to your taxi driver or hotel staff who may have noticed somewhere as good as any of the sites that are well known.

I found that local people tried to be helpful and, whilst not recognising a lot of birds were at least as well clued up as the average Brit and knew a kingfisher from a heron and a woodpecker from an eagle. It is still a rural economy and people do walk or cycle and take in their surroundings. Taxi drivers will stop at the drop of a hat and respond well if asked to drive around slowly so you can spot what is going on and are happy to wait except at restaurants. I tended to buy them drinks and offer cigarettes and left tipping until the end of my stay

Every time I set up my scope I attracted a small crowd. It can seem unnerving at first as people tend to just stand next to you without saying anything or just hello (all the

Goans I met were charming and polite). When invited to look through the scope they all did and seemed to enjoy it and not think it daft. By the end of our stay our taxi driver had borrowed some binoculars and was joining in.

There are two types of birder; those who hunt down their quarry and those who wait for it to come to them. I tend to be the latter with only a bit of the former but both styles work. I found, when watching the wet sites; that lots of good stuff flew into trees right beside me (orioles, barbets, flycatchers, lora etc. etc.) On one occasion I had five lifers in one small bush at the same time!

In the reserves and forested areas, the birds seemed to concentrate around buildings or water and there were wide open spaces devoid even of song. The areas where one would expect most in the UK (edges of streams, scrub etc.) were not as productive as the areas one normally ignores (such as village gardens and open fields). (I had black-headed orioles on a water tower, Coucal in a pig pen, and heart-spotted woodpecker in a café garden.)

NB In this report and checklist I have used (for the most part) the names and order appearing in the Salim Ali guide; you may wish to convert them back to a preferred order for your world list update. I do not pretend to be an expert but am 99% certain of any bird mentioned in this text and have been most careful not to include the 'possibles'. All birds have been re-checked with further reference books since our return.

Site Guide

We only had seven days in Goa including our arrival day (after 12 hours travel from Gatwick). Generally, the heat was more tolerable morning and evening (6.30am to 11.00am and 4.00pm to 6.30pm) and the middle of the day too hot for comfort and anyway less productive of birds. Time being limited we used the first day to acclimatise with local visits around Chapora and Siolim. Our second day took in Carambolim – worth a long stay as a lot was going on. (Lots of guides talk about sites thick with birds but Carambolim lake really is; ducks in the thousands in peak times, hundreds of jacana and herons, etc.)

Day three took in Morgim beach and village and the area around the hotel. Day four was to have been to Dr Salim Ali's bird sanctuary but I heard about Sawlem from my taxi driver and went there both morning and evening with a quick detour to look at a forested hillside on the edge of Baga. Day five we visited the CIBA works and a quick re-visit to Carambolim and an evening visit along the river around Chapora and Siolim. Day six was the longest outing to Bondla (via CIBA) which took up the whole day. Our last day included another morning visit to Sawlem and a scout around the Chapora area.

All trips to and from localities were punctuated by stops to check out roadside wires, paddies or interesting streams, estuaries or stretches of bush. We also timed our evening meal so that we would be going to or from a restaurant at around 6.45pm in the hope (occasionally rewarded) of seeing owls or nightjars.

Had we had more time we would have visited Molem and Dr Ali Salim's bird sanctuary.

Sawlem

This will not be found on a map as it is a small spring fed lake on the edge of a tiny hamlet. The map below shows how to get there as well as the site itself.

The arrow points the way to Pilerne and the dotted line is a footpath around the lake. In March only the left end of the lake was deep enough to be clear water and the rest was just boggy. The small square to the right is a shop where you can sit and have a cold drink and still watch the birds. At the top of the map is a heavily wooded, tall hill above which were many raptors mid morning and late afternoon. The trees both sides of the road were very good and the small opening to the lake a vantage point to view the left hand third; the right hand two thirds can be seen from the start of the footpath.

Birds seen at Sawlem: On or in lake: Snipe, Painted Snipe, Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Paddybird, Striated Heron, all four egrets, Grey Heron, Night Heron, Common, Black-capped, Pied, White-fronted and Stork-billed Kingfisher, Grey, Yellow, White and Large Pied Wagtail, White-fronted Waterhen, Kentish, Little-ringed, Lesser Sand and Red-wattled Plover. Above lake or over hill: Buzzard, Long-legged Buzzard, Black Vulture, Tawny Eagle, Brahminy and Black Kite, Sparrowhawk, Greater-spotted Eagle, Wire-tailed and Red-rumped Swallow, Plain Martin. On wires or in trees and bushes by lake lay-by: Golden, Black-headed and Black-naped Oriole, Small and Large Green Barbets, Gold-mantled Chloropsis, Iora, Purple-rumped Sunbird, Pied flycatcher Shrike, Green Warbler, Chestnut-headed and Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Bank, Common and Jungle Myna, Black-headed Munia, White-browed and Red-whiskered Bulbul, Ashy Wren-warbler, Franklin's Wren-warbler, Large-billed Leaf Warbler.

Ciba Factory

The CIBA factory is on the edge of Old Goa very close to the more famous Carambolim lake. It is a roost for storks and spoonbills etc. and is currently being studied by someone doing a census of storks. Entry to the factory lake is open to birders who sign in at the security gate. (Taxi's can park just inside the gate). Whilst small and not thick with birds there is usually something of interest. (If nothing else I spotted a small – three-foot-long – crocodile sunning itself on a rock in the middle of the lake).

The CIBA lake is worth checking whilst on the way to Carambolim or en route for Molem or Bondla. It is possible to park alongside the security fence and "scope" through the chain link fence to see if a formal visit is worthwhile. (Journey time by taxi from Baga area approximately 45 minutes.)

Travel through Old Goa with the imposing old church to your right. As the housing thins out and gives way to industry look out for the CIBA works entry on the left. This is just past a turning which leads, via a windy road, to Carambolim lake. Alternative route to the lake is via a right hand turning just past the old church.

Birds seen at Ciba works lagoon: Greenshank, Temminck's Stint, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Painted Stork, Spoonbill, Red-wattled

Lapwing, Common, White-breasted, and Pied Kingfishers, Large Pied Wagtail, Wire-tailed Swallow, Little and Great Egrets, Grey Heron, Paddybird. (reported by another observer: Woolly-necked and Open-bill stork).

Caramboim Lake

This site and the above can be treated as one site in as much as birds no doubt commute and they are easily visited on the same day. Carambolim is a wonder with its marshy margins and lake covered in birds. Whilst the margins look shallow they are not as evidenced by water buffalo sunk to their shoulders and covered in mynas, drongos and egrets. Access to the site is as above.

I spent a good half day here rooted to the spot as there was always something going on and the sight of more purple gallinules than I suspect are to be found in the whole of Iberia, was almost enough in itself. To the back of the road are lush fields with wires worth watching and the roadside trees proved productive too. The site is noted for variety, sheer numbers and wonderfully close views of water birds and raptors.

The actual lake obviously expands and contracts with the season and the amount of water extracted for agriculture.

A small area of its surface is open water and the majority is covered with lotus leaves and flowers and is a paradise for the numerous jacanas (hundreds of pheasant-tailed and tens of bronze-winged) and herons. The road has palm trees and eucalyptus that were good for woodpeckers and passerines and the fields have wires with finches, munias and bee-eaters etc. There were at least two pairs of marsh harriers nesting in the fields, and the fences at the far end were also worth constant checking. The small stream running into the lake seemed to draw all the kingfishers from time to time and the storks tended to hang to the far side of the lake. Every square meter of the marshy margins seemed to have waders, jacanas, egrets, herons etc. To misquote Isaac Walton "a day spent at Carambolim is a day added to your life".

The railway line appears to still be under construction as I saw no trains, so there is, at present, no need to worry about the unguarded crossing.

Birds seen at Carambolim lake: On lake and marsh: Open-bill Stork, Large Cormorant, Darter, Dabchick, Purple Gallinule, White-fronted Waterhen, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Bronze-wing Jacana, Moorhen, Lesser Whistling Duck, Cotton Teal, Garganey, Ruddy Shelduck, Purple, Western Reef and Grey Heron, Little, Great, Intermediate and Cattle Egrets, Paddybird, Striated Heron, Night Heron, Wood, Common, Marsh and Terek Sandpiper, Redshank, Crested Tern, Gull-billed Tern, Red-Wattled Lapwing, tawny Eagle, Black and Brahminy Kite, Marsh Harrier, Black-capped, Common, little blue, pied and white-breasted Kingfisher, House Swift, Red-rumped, Common and Wire-tailed Swallows, Plain Martin, House Martin, Yellow Wagtail, Large Pied Wagtail, Stilt, Oriental Skylark. On fields, wires and roadside trees: Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker, Purple-rumped Sunbird (in nest), Racket-tailed Drongo, Plain-coloured Flowerpecker, Chestnut-headed, Blue-tailed, Little Green and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, White-backed Munia, Common Rosefinch (v. large flock) Myna, Black Drongo, House Sparrow, Ring-necked Parakeets, House Crow. Birds not seen but reported by others: Cinnamon Bittern, Citrine Wagtail, Ferruginous Duck,

Comb Duck, Pintail, Red-crested Pochard, Little Cormorant and Yellow-throated Petronia.

Morgim

Morgim is a short distance from the hotels across the river by ferry. The river itself can produce some birds (herons, terns, kingfishers, etc.) as the ferry has to wind its way across – taking 20 minutes to weave between the pillars of a bridge under construction.

Morgim beach, whilst not heaving with bird life, has dunes which are worth checking, a strand in the river mouth for waders and gulls, a marsh on the approach road from the ferry and a small area of trees adjacent to the village, all of which can produce some good birds. The main target will be to ensure that you get the gull species which are not always evident elsewhere. Morgim beach is practically deserted and its white sands are attractive to any non-birding companion.

Birds seen at Morgim: from/on beach: Great Black-headed, Herring, Lesser Black-backed and Brown-headed Gulls, Brown Rock Pipit, Bay-backed Shrike, Gull-billed Tern. In trees between village and beach: Coucal, Brown Dove, jungle Myna, Spotted Dove, House Crow. In and around village and bushes: Brown flycatcher, Blossom-headed Parakeet, Golden-backed Woodpecker, Long-billed Sunbird, Crimson-breasted Barbet, Black-backed Woodpecker, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Magpie robin, Racket-tailed Drongo, Rose-ringed Parakeets, Little Green Bee-eater, Wire-tailed swallow, Red-rumped Swallow, Dull Green Leaf Warbler, Black Bulbul, Indian robin. Around marsh to east of village: Golden Plover, Terek, Common, Wood, and Marsh Sandpiper, Redshank, Red-wattled Lapwing, Spotted Owlet (two roosting in palms across marsh by rock wall), Pied, Black-capped, White-breasted, Little Blue Kingfisher, all egrets, Indian Pond Heron, Western Reef Heron. Birds not seen but reported by others: Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers, Caspian, Lesser-crested and Sandwich Terns, Small Pratincole.

Chapora to Siolim

Fort Chapora sits on a hill overlooking the sea and was built when the Portuguese first colonised Goa. Around the Fort are bare hills and areas of bush worth exploring from the vantage of the hill. Down on the river mouth is a small fishing harbour sporting the usual gulls, terns and kingfishers and seems a favourite place for white-bellied sea eagle and kites. A small road runs along the riverside to Siolim and the palm fringes give way to mangrove which we found very productive, and close enough to where we were staying to draw us back a few times.

From Siolim a small road runs back uphill and inland and between it and the river road is an area of old jungle. On this road opposite a couple of larger houses is a large mango tree on the edge of the remnant jungle that was very productive and gave us our best views of paradise flycatchers (several at different stages of plumage) at every visit with peacocks calling (invisibly) from the hillside.

Birds seen Chapora to Siolim: Harbour: River, Common and Gull-billed Terns, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Black and Brahminy Kites, Common and White-breasted Kingfishers, Common and Wire-tailed Swallow, Herring and Brown-headed Gulls, Red

Whiskered Bulbul. River road: Black-capped, White-breasted and Common Kingfishers, White-fronted Waterhen, Cattle Egrets, Paddybird, Blossom-headed Parakeet, Bay-backed shrike, Oriental Darter, Dusky Crag Martin, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Black and Brahminy Kites, Purple-rumped Sunbird, Red-whiskered Bulbul, White-cheeked and Red vented Bulbul, Kerala Laughing Thrush (the books say this should be south of Goa), Small Sunbird, Black-backed Woodpecker, Flame-backed Woodpecker, Osprey. Wooded hillside: Paradise Fly-catcher, White-browed and white-spotted Fantail Flycatchers, Small Minivet, Golden Oriole, purple-rumped sunbird, House Crow, Red-whiskered Bulbul.

There were also Black-faced monkeys crashing through the trees and gorging on ripe fruit.

Bondla

Bondla is a wildlife sanctuary and, apart from a road through, accommodation and a café, zoo and formal garden, is very much a preserve rather than a visitor centre. It is a good two-hour ride from the Northern hotels

Our trip was slightly marred by our taxi being “rear-ended” by a following jeep when the driver had to brake hard to avoid a cow! (It was an experience in itself as a large crowd gathered to argue the case for both drivers.) The drive is very pleasant through heavily wooded hills and by lush rice fields and impressive river gorges.

Birding was best around the zoo, café area and at a ford a couple of kilometres down the road past the café, and at the café itself. A water hole just before the accommodation was disappointing (one Paddybird) but there was a compensating troop of monkeys. The drive back from the reserve entrance to the main road was good for warblers and a few passerines but we stopped only when we heard birdsong. All in all there were not great numbers of birds but the quality was high with quite a number of birds seen here and nowhere else. By all accounts Molem (20 kilometres or so further on) is more productive but time precluded personal experience of this.

Birds seen at Bondla: Ford: Common Wood Shrike, Crested Hawk-eagle, Purple rumped Sunbird, Golden Oriole, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Shikra. (and lots of butterflies), Pheasants heard calling. By accommodation chalets: Golden Oriole, Black-headed Oriole, Grey-headed Myna, Large Green Barbet, Purple-rumped Sunbird, Jungle Crow, Jungle Myna, Bank Myna. Near café & zoo: Purple-rumped, Yellow-backed, Purple, Maroon-breasted Sunbirds, Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Greenish Leaf-warbler, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Jungle Myna, Rufous-backed Shrike, House Crow, Plain-coloured Flowerpecker. (plus striped squirrels, very large Red Squirrels and Black-faced monkeys). Birds not seen but reported by others: Thick-billed Flowerpecker, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta, Dark-fronted Babbler, Black-naped Monarch, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Red-breasted Flycatcher, Tickell's and Large-billed Leaf-warbler, Orange-headed Thrush, White-rumped Shama, Brown-capped Woodpecker, Vernal Hanging Parrot, Crested Tree Swift, Edible-nest Swiftlet, Asian Fairy Bluebird, Blue-capped rock Thrush, Emerald dove, White-backed vulture.

Other Sites Not Visited But Said To Be Of Interest

Dr. Salim Ali's bird sanctuary – Chorao Island The place for lesser adjutant, and reportedly good for storks and terns.

Bhagwan Mahaveer sanctuary – Molem Reported to hold, among other things: Crested Honey Buzzard, White-rumped Spinetail, Ashy Wood Swallow, Crested Serpent Eagle, Asian Palm Swift, Jungle Babbler, Olive-backed Pipit, Pompadour Pigeon, Jungle Owlet, White-bellied Woodpecker, Black-crested Bulbul, Forest Wagtail, scarlet minivets, chestnut-bellied and Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, Sulphur-bellied warbler.

Baga: The area of remnant jungle behind Lila's café (and her breakfasts are good) and the river and paddy fields viewed from the café are reported to be good most of the time. Birds reported include: Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark, Brown Fish Owl, Black-headed and Grey-necked Buntings, White-bellied Drongo, Paddyfield Warbler, Black-headed Cuckoo Shrike, Golden-fronted and Blue-winged Leafbirds (chloropsis), Speckled Piculet, Malabar Lark, Rufous woodpecker, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta, Rock Bush-quail, Jungle Babbler, Pintail Snipe and Red Spurfowl.

Cotiago sanctuary – near Canacona: I have had no reports but it will presumably hold many of the species found at Bondla and Molem.

Bambolim – remnant jungle I have no reports but presume it to be much like the remnant jungle near Sawlem or Baga.

Fort Aguda – river, and mangroves: Reported to hold: Pintail Snipe, Whimbrel, Oriental Pipit, and Rose-coloured and Chestnut-tailed Starlings

Cicade da Goa – Marsh: Reported to be good for: Red Spurfowl.

“Goa Gen” – a letter from James Jobling of Hertfordshire to a birding magazine.

I assume the Pitta site he refers to is the one at Aguada, where the unfortunate devotee has to squat among indescribable squalor – since some of the locals use the area as a toilet. The excitement and pleasure of pitta watching is somewhat marred by an assault on the nostrils, coupled with wariness and caution as to where one should place one's feet, hands and other portions of the anatomy.

May I recommend two alternative and much cleaner Indian Pitta sites in the area?

The first is at Saligao Zor, at the top of the nullah (ravine) behind the spring; this site also has Malabar Whistling Thrush, Brown Wood Owl, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Black-naped Monarch and a fine selection of other forest birds.

The second alternative is the scrub jungle behind the public seats at Tambdi Surla Temple, where you can see Black Eagle, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Verditer Flycatcher, and Heart-spotted Woodpecker; the road to the temple offers all sorts of goodies, including White-rumped Needletail, Black Bulbul, Crested Serpent-eagle and a roost of Malabar Pied Hornbills.

Indian Endemics which (apparently) may be seen in Goa: Red Spurfowl, Grey Junglefowl, Nilgiri Woodpigeon, Malabar Parakeet, Malabar Grey Hornbill, White-cheeked Barbet, Spot-breasted Fantail Flycatcher, Malabar Whistling Thrush, Nilgiri Flycatcher, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, Grey-headed Bulbul, Rufous Babbler, Malabar lark, Crimson-backed Sunbird.

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