



**BIRDING INDIA: GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD / DESERT
NATIONAL PARK CUSTOM TOUR TRIP REPORT**

01 - 04 MARCH 2025

By Chris Lotz



*We enjoyed seeing **Great Indian Bustard** on three consecutive days during this trip.*

Overview

This was a custom four day extension to our Northwest India and Forest Owllet tours. The main purpose of the trip was to see **Great Indian Bustard**, a Critically Endangered (BirdLife International / IUCN) species that is becoming rarer and more difficult to see. Sadly, finding this majestic bird might be impossible in coming years, so we figured that while we were in India we should fly to Rajasthan and head for the Thar Desert to try see this species at its last stronghold.

The trip was highly successful, and we enjoyed several excellent viewing and photography sessions with **Great Indian Bustards**. We also enjoyed seeing a good number of other specials that the Desert National Park has on its birding menu. These included 15 raptor species, such as the Critically Endangered (BirdLife International) **Red-headed Vulture** and a lot of other vultures (**Egyptian Vultures** were, for example, everywhere), many **Laggar Falcons**, a **Red-necked Falcon**, and various eagles, many of them really close-up. We also saw **Demoiselle** and **Common Cranes**, **Black and White Storks**, **Yellow-eyed Pigeon**, the charismatic **Greater Hoopoe-Lark** among several other lark species, the localized Indian endemic **White-browed Bush Chat** and five different wheatear species, including **Red-tailed Wheatear**. Please see the full bird list at the end of this report for further details.

Mammal-wise, we were very happy to see Asiatic Wildcat (the Indian subspecies of **African Wild Cat**), Desert Fox (a subspecies of **Red Fox**), the stately but strange-looking antelope **Nilgai**, the graceful gazelle **Chinkara**, and **Indian Grey Mongoose**.

The experience of being in a luxury tented camp in the middle of a sparsely populated part of India (very unusual!), was absolutely wonderful, and it was tough to leave after three idyllic days here.



The Indian subspecies of African Wild Cat was a delight to see!

Detailed Report

Day 1, 1st March 2025. Flight to Jaisalmer and initial birding in Desert National Park

After finishing our successful Forest Owlet tour, we flew from Mumbai to Jaisalmer in Rajasthan to start our short Desert National Park trip. After the flight touched down in the late morning, we headed to our luxury tented camp in the middle of the desert and had an amazing meal. A couple of **Chinkaras** (Indian Gazelles) greeted us as we arrived at the camp.

After relaxing a bit during the heat of the day, we headed out for some afternoon and evening birding. Not far from our camp, we found a neat-looking male **Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark**. We then found our first **Laggar Falcon**, a stunningly beautiful bird. When we stopped for this falcon, we also saw **Cinereous** and **Griffon Vultures**. Wheatears were much in evidence, and we saw a **Red-tailed Wheatear**, along with the more numerous **Variable**, **Isabelline**, and **Desert Wheaters**. A couple of **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** and around 100 **Demoiselle Cranes** gave us flight views. There were a lot of larks around, including **Desert Lark**, **Crested Lark**, and large numbers of **Greater Short-toed Larks**. Two **Asian Desert Warblers** cooperated beautifully and posed well for photos. One of the highlights of the afternoon was seeing about 20 **Trumpeter Finches** coming in to drink.

We then visited Khaba Fort, overlooking the ruined village of Kuldhara from the 13th Century, seeing **Brown Rock Chat**, **Grey Francolin**, and a couple of other birds. On the way back in the dark, we found a **Red Sand Boa** next to the road.

Day 2, 2nd March 2025. A full day exploring Desert National Park

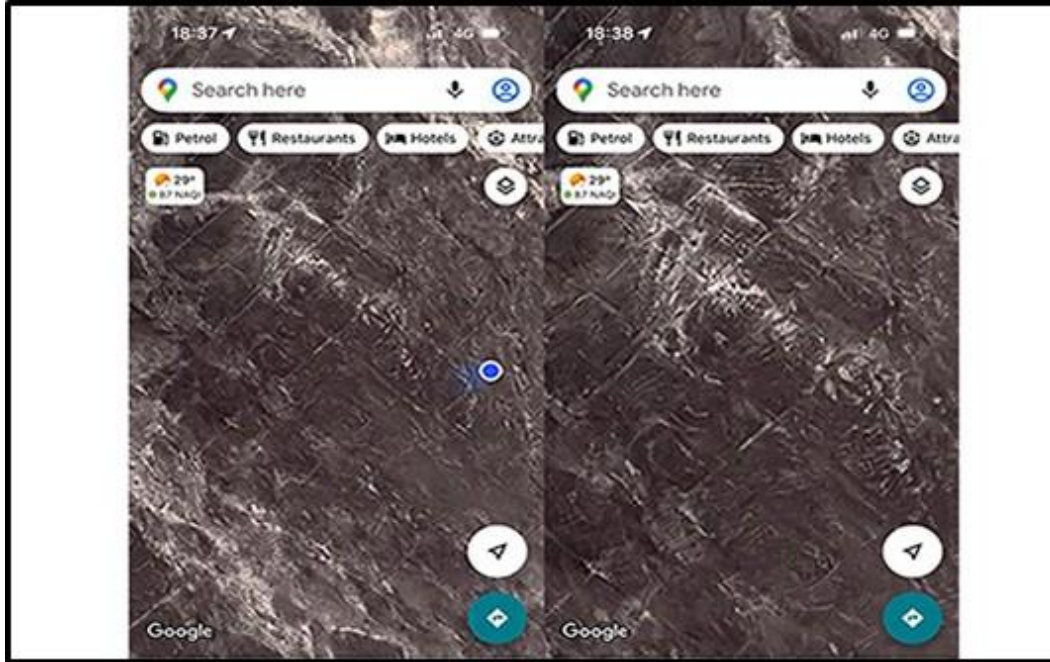
After breakfast, we headed out on our quest to find **Great Indian Bustard** and were richly rewarded with prolonged views of one displaying from the top of a dune. Hooray! We also got close views of another species we were targeting, **White-browed Bush Chat**, and its more common relative, **Siberian Stonechat**, was also around in numbers. Furthermore, a good number of other bird species were seen, including **Grey Francolin**, **Indian Peafowl**, **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse**, **Great Grey Shrike**, **Rufous-fronted** and **Plain Prinias**, **Indian Silverbill**, **Purple Sunbird**, and dazzlingly colorful **Asian Green Bee-eaters**.

Raptors were numerous, and some were nesting. We saw a **Laggar Falcon** bringing prey to its two chicks on a nest, and an **Egyptian Vulture** sitting tight on a nest pretty close to the road. Later, we found many vultures at a carcass. These were mainly **Griffon Vultures**, but we were glad to also see about a dozen **Cinereous Vultures** and a couple of **Himalayan Vultures**. Other raptors abounded too, and included **Steppe Eagle**, **Tawny Eagle**, **Montagu's Harrier**, and **Common Kestrel**. As the name would suggest, **Common Babbler** indeed abounded, and **Variable Wheatears** were pretty numerous too. A couple of **Tawny Pipits** put in appearances. As we got back to our camp for lunch, a male **Indian Robin** was there to greet us. Apart from birds, some nice mammals were also around, such as a number of **Chinkaras** (Indian Gazelles), a superb, cute Desert Fox (a subspecies of **Red Fox**), and a great many **Spiny-tailed Lizards**.



*We saw many **Egyptian Vultures** on this tour, including this one on a nest.*

In the afternoon, we headed out to look for **Greater Hoopoe-Lark** and were well rewarded with prolonged, superb sightings of this unusually well-marked and charismatic lark. In the vicinity, there were several other nice birds too, e.g. **Red-tailed Wheatear**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Bay-backed**, **Isabelline**, and **Great Grey Shrikes**. At the **Greater Hoopoe-Lark** site, we also looked at some petroglyphs – ancient lines cut by humans into the bare ground in straight lines crossing each other at 90 degrees – like a chessboard.



The above screenshots show the chess board pattern of these petroglyphs (Google Maps).



Petroglyphs can be seen running perpendicular to each other in the above photo.

Day 3, 3rd March 2025. Another full day exploring Desert National Park

We started today's birding at the Akal Wood Fossil Park, hoping to see Indian Eagle Owl but were, unfortunately, unsuccessful. The best bird we did find at this fascinating place was a **Black Stork**.

On our way back to our camp, we stopped for three **White Storks** and a few **Common Cranes**. Mammal-wise, **Chinkaras** (Indian Gazelles) were around, along with three **Indian Grey Mongooses** (or Mongeese?)!

We also saw many **Common Babblers**, a few **Jungle Babblers**, a couple of **Grey-throated Martins**, a **White-browed Fantail**, and various other birds when we checked a temple area to try (unsuccessfully) and see Indian Spotted Creeper (outside of the usual areas we look for this species on the other side of Rajasthan during [our Indian monsoon birding tour](#)). On the way back to our luxury “camp” (with huge walk in en suite air-conditioned tents), we stopped at a different temple also hoping to see Indian Eagle Owl, but again without success. Here, however, we did see lots of **Trumpeter Finches**, **Yellow-throated Sparrows**, a **Green Sandpiper**, a **White-throated Kingfisher**, a few **Little Swifts**, **Desert Larks**, **Brown Rock Chats**, **Indian Silverbills**, and other birds. As we drove along, we saw a couple of **Indian Rollers**. The highlight of the morning, however, was seeing an Indian Desert Cat, a subspecies of **African Wild Cat**, when we stopped to look at a Desert Fox (a race of **Red Fox**).

Our afternoon birding session was wonderful. We went back and managed to see the Indian Desert Cat (**African Wild Cat**) again and we also managed to spend a lot of time with a very co-operative **Great Indian Bustard** again. A few **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** tried to vie (largely unsuccessfully) for attention. Raptors were numerous and included **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Steppe Eagle**, and **Tawny Eagle**. Just before sunset, we saw a **Red-necked Falcon**, a very nice way to end a great day of birding in India.



Greater Hoopoe-Larks were a highlight.

Day 4, 4th March 2025. A final morning in Desert National Park

This morning, we opted for relaxed birding without any specific goals in mind. This turned out to be wonderfully rewarding, as it was indeed a relaxing way to end the trip, but we also found some amazing species. A Critically Endangered (BirdLife International) **Red-headed Vulture** flew right over us at one point, some extremely close-up **Steppe Eagles** sat on the ground, a large flock of **Yellow-eyed Pigeons** arrived, and we got yet more views of **Great Indian Bustard!** This was a marvelous ending to a great tour.

Bird List – Following IOC (version 14.2, August 2024)

Birds ‘heard only’ are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen. The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: CR = Critically Endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Pheasants & Allies (Phasianidae)	
Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
Grey Francolin	<i>Ortygornis pondicerianus</i>
Swifts (Apodidae)	
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Bustards (Otididae)	
Great Indian Bustard (Endemic) - CR	<i>Ardeotis nigriceps</i>
Sandgrouse (Pteroclididae)	
Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles exustus</i>
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>
Yellow-eyed Pigeon - VU	<i>Columba eversmanni</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Red Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Cranes (Gruidae)	
Demoiselle Crane	<i>Grus virgo</i>
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>
Plovers (Charadriidae)	
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)	
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Storks (Ciconiidae)	
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae)	
Egyptian Vulture - EN	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>
Himalayan Vulture	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>
Red-headed Vulture - CR	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Greater Spotted Eagle - VU	<i>Clanga clanga</i>
Steppe Eagle - EN	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>
Tawny Eagle - VU	<i>Aquila rapax</i>
Eastern Imperial Eagle - VU	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>
Shikra	<i>Tachyspiza badia</i>
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Bee-eaters (Meropidae)	
Asian Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Red-necked Falcon	<i>Falco chicquera</i>
Laggar Falcon	<i>Falco jugger</i>
Drongos (Dicruridae)	
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
Fantails (Rhipiduridae)	
White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
Shrikes (Laniidae)	
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
Bay-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius vittatus</i>
Isabelline Shrike	<i>Lanius isabellinus</i>
Crows, Jays (Corvidae)	
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
Larks (Alaudidae)	
Greater Hoopoe-Lark	<i>Alaemon alaudipes</i>
Desert Lark	<i>Ammomanes deserti</i>
Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix nigriceps</i>
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)	
Grey-throated Martin	<i>Riparia chinensis</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Cisticolas & Allies (Cisticolidae)	
Rufous-fronted Prinia	<i>Prinia buchanani</i>
Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
Common Tailorbird (H)	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
Sylviid Babblers (Sylviidae)	
Asian Desert Warbler	<i>Curruca nana</i>
Laughingthrushes & Allies (Leiothrichidae)	
Jungle Babbler	<i>Argya striata</i>
Common Babbler	<i>Argya caudata</i>
Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	
White-browed Bush Chat (Endemic) - VU	<i>Saxicola macrorhynchus</i>
Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola maurus</i>
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
Brown Rock Chat	<i>Oenanthe fusca</i>
Variable Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe picata</i>
Red-tailed Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe chrysopygia</i>
Sunbirds (Nectariniidae)	
Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae)	
Yellow-throated Sparrow	<i>Gymnoris xanthocollis</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Waxbills, Munias & Allies (Estrildidae)	
Indian Silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)	
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
Finches, Euphonias (Fringillidae)	
Trumpeter Finch	<i>Bucanetes githagineus</i>

Total seen	64
Total heard only	1
Total recorded	65

Mammal List – Following Mammal Watching (April 2024)

Common Name	Scientific Name
Canids (Canidae)	
Red (Desert) Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes pusilla</i>
Felids (Felidae)	
African Wildcat (Asiatic Wildcat)	<i>Felis lybica ornata</i>
Mongoose (Herpestidae)	
Indian Grey Mongoose	<i>Urva edwardsii</i>
Bovids (Bovidae)	
Chinkara	<i>Gazella bennettii</i>
Nilgai	<i>Boselaphus tragocamelus</i>
Total	5

Reptile List – Following Reptiles of the World (October 2023)

Common Name	Scientific Name
Boas (Boidae)	
Red Sand Boa	<i>Eryx johnii</i>
Wall Lizards (Lacertidae)	
Spiny-tailed Lizard	<i>Darevskia rudis</i>
Total	2