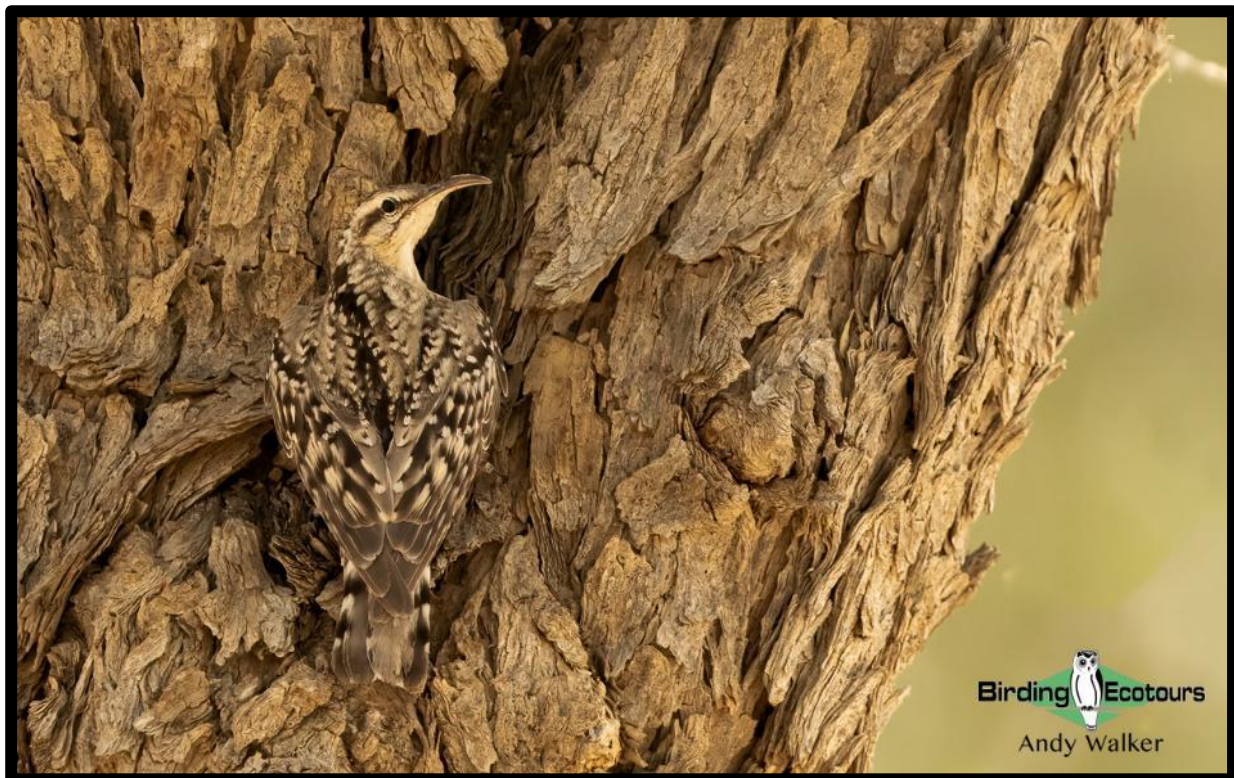




**BIRDING INDIA: IN SEARCH OF THE INDIAN SPOTTED CREEPER
CUSTOM TOUR TRIP REPORT**

27 APRIL - 02 MAY 2025

By Andrew Walker



*The incredibly well camouflaged **Indian Spotted Creeper** was the main target of this successful custom family listing tour.*

Overview

This custom tour in Rajasthan, India took place between the 27th April and 2nd May 2025. The tour focused on finding **Indian Spotted Creeper**. In late 2024, the two spotted creepers (African Spotted Creeper and Indian Spotted Creeper) were separated from Treecreepers, Certhiidae and elevated to family status, Spotted Creepers, Salpornithidae. This tour for a family lister birder from the United States of America, visited the Tal Chhappar area where we thought we had a good chance of connecting with this hard to find species and hence new family.

We enjoyed great success and found **Indian Spotted Creeper** at two sites. The first site was between New Delhi and Tal Chhappar, where we found a bird exhibiting breeding behavior (flying around with food) and the second site was at Tal Chhappar itself, where we found a relaxed bird foraging. Both individuals gave good views, the second bird giving prolonged and close views.

Once we had seen our main target species we were able to enjoy some of the other birds and wildlife of the area, including Tal Chhappar Sanctuary. Although a big list of birds was not the target of this tour, we enjoyed recording 104 bird species (two heard only), with many species giving good views. Some of the additional highlights seen, included **Rain Quail**, **Indian Peafowl**, **Black Francolin**, **Indian Stone-curlew**, **Greater Painted-snipe**, **Egyptian Vulture**, **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse**, **Yellow-footed Green Pigeon**, **Red-naped Ibis**, **Red-necked Falcon**, **Asian Green Bee-eater**, **Indian Roller**, **Bay-backed Shrike**, **Great Grey (Indian Grey) Shrike**, **Citrine Wagtail**, and **Grey-necked Bunting**. We also enjoyed sightings of the stunning **Blackbuck**, along with **Chinkara** (Indian Gazelle), **Nilgai**, **Red Fox** (White-footed Fox/Indian Desert Fox), and **Indian Hare**, among other animals.



Blackbuck is an attractive inhabitant of open grassland and dry thorn scrub and is quite numerous at Tal Chhappar Sanctuary.

Detailed Report

Day 1, 27th April 2025. Arrival in New Delhi

John arrived into New Delhi in the evening, transferred to our hotel near the airport, and headed to bed after a long journey from New York!

Day 2, 28th April 2025. Travel from New Delhi to Tal Chhapar

We met for breakfast in our hotel in New Delhi, thereafter we connected with our local guide and driver to commence our long (c7.5 hrs.) journey to Tal Chhapar. Traffic wasn't too bad once we got away from the city and we made good progress. A coffee shop and toilet stop at a resort gave us a few birds, such as **Oriental Magpie Robin**, **Large Grey Babbler**, **Brahminy Starling**, and **Purple Sunbird**. Roadside birds as we made our drive included **Black Kite**, **Black-winged Kite**, **Red-wattled Lapwing**, **Rose-ringed Parakeet**, and other common Indian birds.

A stop just over halfway through our drive in some interesting looking woodland habitat couldn't have gone better. As we walked into the open wooded habitat we picked up a close pair of attractive **Asian Green Bee-eaters**, vocal **Common Woodshrike**, a foraging pair of **Red-naped Ibis**, and several other species. Suddenly the call of **Indian Spotted Creeper** rang out. We immediately walked towards the direction of the sound, flushing a **Grey Francolin** along the way. After a nervous bit of scanning we picked up the bird but it immediately flew away! Luckily, a short while later we were able to pick it up again as it moved back towards us. It was clearly actively foraging and we even noted it carrying food back into the direction of where we initially saw it.



*We enjoyed early success with our main tour target – **Indian Spotted Creeper!***

As **Indian Spotted Creeper** was the whole reason for the trip we persisted with the bird, trying to improve our views and get some photos (which was tough considering it was midday and about 113°F (45°C)!). We did, however, succeed in getting some pretty satisfactory views of this busily foraging bird, which we did consider to be breeding in the area. Immensely satisfied with our sighting (if not a little surprised at how quickly we'd succeeded in our mission!), we continued our journey to Tal Chhapar, where we arrived in the late afternoon.

We took a rather hot late afternoon walk in some open woodland outside of Tal Chhapar Sanctuary, where we saw **Egyptian Vulture, Indian Roller, Spotted Owlet, Great Grey (Indian Grey) Shrike, Bay-backed Shrike, Small Minivet, and Yellow-throated Sparrow**. Here we also saw our first **Blackbuck, Chinkara (Indian Gazelle), and Nilgai** of the trip. We also noted an interesting wetland area on the edge of town, which was full of birds (including a flock of around 50 **Western Yellow Wagtails** and one glorious male **Citrine Wagtail** all in breeding plumage), and we decided we'd check that area out properly over the coming days.



Bay-backed Shrikes were fairly common and showed well at times.

Day 3, 29th April 2025. Birding Tal Chhapar area

The pressure to find the **Indian Spotted Creeper** was off, so we could enjoy a pre-breakfast drive around Tal Chhapar Sanctuary in the morning. It was a thoroughly enjoyable occasion, with good views of **Grey Francolin, Black Francolin, Indian Peafowl, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Red Collared Dove, Laughing Dove, Spotted Owlet, Indian Roller, Asian Green Bee-eater, Indian Bush Lark, White-browed Fantail, Black Drongo, White-eared Bulbul, Red-vented Bulbul, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Babbler, Large Grey Babbler, Indian Robin, Brown Rock Chat, Indian Silverbill,** and a late **Grey-necked Bunting**

that was looking rather spiffy. **Blackbucks** were numerous and we also found a large group of **Wild (Indian) Boar** and several **Indian Hares**.



*The colors of **Indian Roller** always impress. Probably best-looking in flight, but not bad when perched either!*



*A very close view of a **Spotted Owlet** was a highlight of our pre-breakfast birding session.*

After breakfast we visited a couple of woodland areas that we had checked out late yesterday afternoon. A **Black-rumped Flameback** was frustratingly elusive, while several **Egyptian Vultures** and a lone **Northern Raven** were found scavenging on dead cows. The number of **Indian Spiny-tailed Lizards** present was quite impressive. We found mostly the same species as yesterday, however, at our second site we again struck gold, with another **Indian Spotted Creeper** seen. This bird was fairly relaxed and wasn't rushing around taking food to a nest, so we got some repeated good, lengthy, and close views (photo below and front cover).



*It was great to get another chance to study **Indian Spotted Creeper** at close range.*

After satisfying ourselves with further views of the creeper and with the temperatures soaring, we decided to head back to our accommodation for a rest over the middle of the day. However, along the way we did make a stop at the little wetland area, where we again found a big flock of **Western Yellow Wagtails**, along with some interesting shorebirds, including a pair of **Greater Painted-snipes** and breeding plumaged **Spotted Redshank**, along with **Black-winged Stilt**, **Pied Avocet**, **Common Redshank**, **Ruff**, **Little Stint**, **Temminck's Stint**, and **Wood Sandpiper**. The wetland was also busy with **Indian Spot-billed Ducks**, **Little Grebes**, **Common Moorhen**, **White-breasted Waterhen**, **Indian Pond Heron**, and a huge number of **Eurasian Collared Doves** and **Rock Doves** (Feral Pigeons). The periphery of the wetland also held **Indian Pied Myna** and **Paddyfield Pipit**.

A brief stop at a lake nearer to our accommodation gave us a small flock of **Lesser Whistling Ducks**, a hunting **White-eyed Buzzard**, a distant **White-throated Kingfisher**, **White-browed Wagtail**, **Western Yellow Wagtail**, and a stunning male **Citrine Wagtail**.

We enjoyed lunch and a break during the heat of the middle of the day and then headed out into the saltpans for the late afternoon. Unsurprisingly it was also still hot here, but we added a few

new birds to our list, including **Rain Quail** (which was a bit of a surprise), **Spotted Redshank**, **Ruff**, **Little Stint**, **Pied Avocet**, and plenty of other common shorebirds, **Short-toed Snake Eagle**, **Asian Green Bee-eaters**, **Crested Larks**, **Common Babblers**, **Delicate Prinia**, **Pied Bush Chat**, and **Indian Silverbill**. We headed back to our accommodation after another great day of birding in India.



Spotted Redshank looked rather striking and gave close views.

Day 4, 30th April 2025. Birding Tal Chhappar area

We took a pre-breakfast drive near Tal Chhappar town. Our first brief stop was at the now familiar small wetland, where we had further sightings of **Greater Painted-snipe**, **Spotted Redshank**, and a couple of stunning breeding plumaged **Indian Pond Herons**. A small flock of **Eurasian Teals** were a new addition to our trip list. We then drove into some sparse woodland with some dunes where we eventually found the local subspecies of **Red Fox** (known locally as White-footed Fox or Indian Desert Fox). Initially shy, we persisted in the area until we gained some nice views.

A walk through the habitat here gave us sightings of **Black Francolin**, **Grey Francolin**, **Bay-backed Shrike**, **Great Grey** (Indian Grey) **Shrike**, **Rufous-fronted Prinia**, **Plain Prinia**, and several other species. A flock of **House Crows** attracted three **Northern Ravens** and they were all found to be mobbing a **Red Sand Boa**, which in turn was trying to hunt the **Indian Spiny-tailed Lizards**, however, all seemed to leave hungry! As we left the area to return to our accommodation for breakfast, we picked up **Egyptian Vulture**, **White-eyed Buzzard**, **Rufous Treepie**, **Small Minivet**, and **Grey-throated Martins**.

After a short break for breakfast we took a drive along the periphery of Tal Chhappar Sanctuary, where we saw numerous **Blackbucks**, but also the target for our drive, **Indian Stone-curlew**. Nice close views were obtained of this incredibly cryptically plumaged species.



Indian Stone-curlew seemed quite at home in the arid area we found ourselves birding in.



*The gorgeous **Brahminy Starling** is a common and widespread Indian bird and found in busy urban areas as well as the countryside.*

Another look at the small wetland area gave us sightings of **Black-winged Kite**, **Red-necked Falcon**, **Green Sandpiper**, **Red-naped Ibis**, **Indian Roller**, **Asian Green Bee-eater**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Ashy Prinia**, **Indian Pied Myna**, **Blyth's Reed Warbler**, and plenty of **Western Yellow Wagtails**, in addition to many of the birds seen earlier in the morning. The temperatures were again heading upwards, so we made our way back to our accommodation for our lunch and a siesta.

In the late afternoon we ventured out again, and first visited the periphery of Tal Chhapar Sanctuary within the saltpans, where we found at least 15 **Rain Quails** - incredible! While trying to improve our views of the quails, we noted **Black Francolin** and **Grey Francolin** as well as several other common species, such as **Asian Green Bee-eater**, **White-eared Bulbul**, **Large Grey Babbler**, **Common Babbler**, **Black Drongo**, and **Bank Myna**.

For the final hour of the day we decided to check out the small wetland near town again, as each visit had provided some interest, and this final visit was to be no different! We quickly found an adult **Black-crowned Night Heron** and the numbers of **Indian Pond Herons** was higher than previous visits, as were the numbers of **Greater Painted-snipes**, with three females out in the open foraging (but no sign of the male we'd seen at the site earlier). An **Indian Stone-curlew** appeared out of nowhere to take a drink, and a pair of **Little Ringed Plovers** dropped in briefly before flying off at great height. We also had two **Little Cormorants** flying over. While we were looking up, we also saw at least three **Wire-tailed Swallows** and several **Grey-throated Martins**. A gorgeous **Yellow-footed Green Pigeon** showed nicely, as did other colorful birds such as **Ring-necked Parakeet**, **Indian Roller**, **Asian Green Bee-eater**, **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater**, and **Western Yellow Wagtail**. A **Blyth's Reed Warbler** showed briefly as it fed in the adjacent vegetation, **Indian Pied Mynas** were vocal around their nests, and a **Spotted Owlet** came out to survey the area as the sun was setting. It was an enjoyable end to another great day of birding at Tal Chhapar.



Indian Pied Myna was making sure everyone knew it was around!



One of three female Greater Painted-snipes that were feeding out in the open.

Day 5, 1st May 2025. Travel from Tal Chhappar to New Delhi

We departed Tal Chhappar after breakfast for our long journey back to New Delhi. We noted a few typical roadside birds along the way, such as **Black-winged Kite**, **Black Kite**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Indian Roller**, **Asian Green Bee-eater**, **Bay-backed Shrike**, **Great Grey (Indian Grey) Shrike**, and an assortment of mynas and doves. We also drove past a large **Glossy Ibis** colony (the colony also containing plenty of **Eastern Cattle Egrets**). An **Indian Grey Mongoose** was a new mammal for the trip.

We arrived back in New Delhi in the middle of the afternoon and enjoyed a final dinner together, looking back at what had been a short but great Indian birding tour.

Day 6, 2nd May 2025. Departure

Our successful **Indian Spotted Creeper** tour ended after breakfast at our hotel in New Delhi. We'd enjoyed great views of two creepers at two different sites and another bird family bit the dust!

Bird List – Following IOC 15.1 (February 2025)

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: EN = Endangered.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)	
Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
Indian Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Pheasants & Allies (Phasianidae)	
Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
Grey Francolin	<i>Ortygornis pondicerianus</i>
Black Francolin	<i>Francolinus francolinus</i>
Rain Quail	<i>Coturnix coromandelica</i>
Swifts (Apodidae)	
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Cuckoos (Cuculidae)	
Greater Coucal (H)	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
Sandgrouse (Pteroclididae)	
Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles exustus</i>
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Rock Dove [Feral Pigeon]	<i>Columba livia [dom.]</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Red Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicopterus</i>
Rails, Crakes & Coots (Rallidae)	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
Grebes (Podicipedidae)	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Stone-curlews, Thick-knees (Burhinidae)	
Indian Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus indicus</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Stilts, Avocets (Recurvirostridae)	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Plovers (Charadriidae)	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
Painted-snipes (Rostratulidae)	
Greater Painted-snipe	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>
Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
Cormorants, Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)	
Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>
Ibises, Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)	
Red-naped Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)	
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea coromanda</i>
Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitridae)	
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Egyptian Vulture - EN	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Shikra	<i>Tachyspiza badia</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
White-eyed Buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>
Owls (Strigidae)	
Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Hoopoes (Upupidae)	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Rollers (Coraciidae)	
Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)	
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
Bee-eaters (Meropidae)	
Asian Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus</i>
Asian Barbets (Megalaimidae)	
Coppersmith Barbet (H)	<i>Psilopogon haemacephalus</i>
Woodpeckers (Picidae)	
Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)	
Red-necked Falcon	<i>Falco chicquera</i>
Old World Parrots (Psittaculidae)	
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Vangas & Allies (Vangidae)	
Common Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>
Cuckooshrikes (Campephagidae)	
Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
Figbirds, Old World Orioles, Piopios (Oriolidae)	
Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>
Drongos (Dicuridae)	
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>
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Crows, Jays (Corvidae)	
Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
Indian Jungle Crow	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Larks (Alaudidae)	
Indian Bush Lark	<i>Plocealauda erythroptera</i>
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae)	
Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
White-eared Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucotis</i>
Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)	
Grey-throated Martin	<i>Riparia chinensis</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
Reed Warblers & Allies (Acrocephalidae)	
Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
Cisticolas & Allies (Cisticolidae)	
Rufous-fronted Prinia	<i>Prinia buchanani</i>
Delicate Prinia	<i>Prinia lepida</i>
Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
Sylviid Babblers (Sylviidae)	
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>
Laughingthrushes & Allies (Leiothrichidae)	
Large Grey Babbler	<i>Argya malcolmi</i>
Common Babbler	<i>Argya caudata</i>
Spotted Creepers (Salpornithidae)	
Indian Spotted Creeper	<i>Salpornis spilonota</i>
Starlings, Rhabdornises (Sturnidae)	
Bank Myna	<i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Indian Pied Myna	<i>Gracupica contra</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>
Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	
Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>
Pied Bush Chat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
Brown Rock Chat	<i>Oenanthe fusca</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>
Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)	
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>
Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
Buntings (Emberizidae)	
Grey-necked Bunting	<i>Emberiza buchanani</i>

Total seen	102
Total heard only	2
Total recorded	104

Reptile List

Common Name	Scientific Name
Dragons (Agamidae)	
Indian Spiny-tailed Lizard	<i>Saara hardwickii</i>
Geckos (Gekkonidae)	
Yellow-bellied House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus flaviviridis</i>
Boas (Boidae)	
Red Sand Boa	<i>Eryx johnii</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Softshell and Flapshell Turtles (Trionychidae)	
Indian Flapshell Turtle	<i>Lissemys punctata</i>
Total	4

Mammal List

Common Name	Scientific Name
Hares and Rabbits (Leporidae)	
Indian Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
Squirrels (Sciuridae)	
Five-striped Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus pennantii</i>
Mongoose (Herpestidae)	
Indian Grey Mongoose	<i>Urva edwardsii</i>
Small Indian Mongoose	<i>Urva auropunctata</i>
Bovids (Bovidae)	
Nilgai	<i>Boselaphus tragocamelus</i>
Blackbuck	<i>Antilope cervicapra</i>
Chinkara (Indian Gazelle)	<i>Gazella bennettii</i>
Domestic Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus bubalis</i>
Suids (Suidae)	
Wild Boar (Indian Boar)	<i>Sus scrofa cristatus</i>
Canids (Canidae)	
Red Fox (Indian Desert Fox/White-footed Fox)	<i>Vulpes vulpes pusilla</i>
Total	10