

ANN AND ROLAND GO BIRDING IN GUJURAT

JANUARY 27TH – FEBRUARY 12TH 2018

TRAVEL

Our flights were booked through Air France: Manchester-Paris-Mumbai-Ahmedabad and return through Delhi. More of that later!

TOUR ARRANGEMENTS

We booked a tour through Asian Adventures. We travelled to India with them last year and were highly satisfied with all the arrangements. Since our return we have booked to go to Kerala with them this December. Iqbal and Mohit attend Bird Fair every year. We had the same guide, Mahendra Singh, last year and this year. He is very likeable and has eyes like a hawk. He is very knowledgeable about mammals as well as birds. Top man

ITINERARY

28th January: Ahmedabad to Velavadar
29th January: Velavadar
30th January: Velavadar – Gir National Park
31st January : Gir National Park
1st February: Gir National Park – Jamnagar
2nd February: Jamnagar
3rd February: Jamnagar – Bhuj
4th February: Bhuj
5th February: Bhuj
6th February: Bhuj
7th February: Bhuj – Little Rann of Kutch
8th February: Little Rann of Kutch
9th February: Little Rann of Kutch
10th February: Little Rann of Kutch – Ahmedabad
11th February: Ahmedabad and departure

ACCOMMODATION

Narayani Heritage, Bhavnagar for 2 nights
Gir Birding Lodge for 2 nights
Hotel President, Jamnagar for 2 nights
CEDO Camp near Bhuj for 4 nights
Desert Outpost for 3 nights but this was changed to Rann Riders without us being informed
Le Grand Residency, Ahmedabad for 1 night but this also was changed to without our knowledge.

BIRD LISTS

Unfortunately not every day has an accurate individual bird list and some of the common birds such as *Red-wattled lapwing* were not noted every day but I believe the final and full bird list to be an accurate record of the birds we saw in Gujarat.

DIARY

January 27th – January 28th.

Up at 2h00. Warning light came on in car 5 miles from airport and water gauge sky high ☹️ Carried on to airport parking with fingers crossed. Check in no problem. First experience of a Premium Lounge – very civilised. About to board flight when we were told it had been delayed for an hour due to fog in Paris. Late taking off and delayed again in Paris. Had 30 minutes to get from plane to gate for next flight and just made it. Late taking off. Further delayed on arrival at Mumbai because the airport was busy. Finally got off plane and raced to immigration only to find approximately 3,000 people already there. I joketh not. Persuaded a nice man to help us get priority treatment and then dashed off to collect our luggage only to find it wasn't there. Had to report it, fill forms in etc etc and get escorted out of baggage hall. Raced to Jet Airways desk to get boarding passes but couldn't do them and said we had missed the flight anyway. Raced up to departures to try and print off said boarding passes with Air France and had to prove to security that we were booked on a flight before they would let us up there. Took 2 attempts and there was no-one from Air France on duty! We spent the next five hours vainly trying to get help. Or rather Roland did because after about 2 hours I collapsed onto a seat with our hand luggage leaving him to walk round in ever-decreasing circles. Whilst I was sitting there, there was a bomb scare which livened things up a little! A very nice young lady on the information desk eventually got hold of someone from Air France who booked us on an Air India flight at 17h30. We were taken to the lovely but expensive Niranta airport hotel where we were able to have breakfast and lunch for free and were told NOT to miss our flight this time!! As if it were our fault!! The whole experience was an absolute nightmare. Never again. Meanwhile, our guide Mahendra had arrived at Ahmedabad at 2h30 and been somewhat concerned not to find us there. Although we are friends on Facebook, there was no wi-fi at the airport and I couldn't contact him. I did, however, have Iqbal's number so was able to contact him and explain our dilemma. Anyway, the hotel was lovely. Great shower and comfy bed and we duly presented ourselves at departures well in advance of our flight. It was a good job we were early as there was only one person checking all the hand luggage at security We didn't bother with the shops but there was an amazing exhibition depicting traditional housing and artefacts on several levels. The plane itself was comfortable and despite the flight only being an hour long, we were served with a full meal! The staff were amazingly well-organised. When we finally exited the airport at Ahmedabad having had our documents scrutinised a goodly number of times, Mahendra greeted us with a smile, a hug and lovely welcoming sweet-smelling marigold garlands. It was so good to see him again and to have finally arrived at our destination! Our driver soon had our bags in the car and we set off for Bhavnagar. We stopped on the outskirts of Ahmedabad to buy some snacks and chai but then carried on at speed. The roads were remarkably good though there were plenty of evil speed bumps to negotiate!! Never known so many. It was like that all over Gujarat. We arrived at our hotel around 11.00pm. The hotel building used to be the administrative office of the Maharaja and later as part of the Kumar Shal (Boys School) run by the royal family. It is built round a courtyard and is a perfect example of the architecture of the region. Our room was large with an en-suite bathroom and perfectly sufficient for our needs.

January 29th.

After a simple breakfast of chai at 5h45, we set off for Velavadar, approximately one hour's drive away. The drive was interesting, taking us through the town, surrounding countryside

and salt flats. Once we turned off the main road it was a little more bumpy and we caught the odd glimpse of a Blackbuck though the light was not good enough for photos. We came to a sudden stop when Mahendra spotted a Jungle cat by the side of the road. It stayed there eying us up for a good few minutes giving us excellent close up views. ☺ Once we arrived at the park we were joined by our guide, Pravin. Unfortunately, the parks in Gujarat demand extortionate fees for the use of a camera and we decided that 1350/- each for a pass both morning and afternoon was daylight robbery so didn't pay it. The stupid thing is that you can use your phone camera for nothing! We spent the morning driving round the park with one stop for our tasty packed breakfast up an observation tower. The birding was quite good in the first part of the park which has one of the largest Harrier roosts in the world. We certainly saw plenty of *Montagu's*, *Pallid* and *Marsh harriers* plus stunning views of an exquisite female *Hen harrier*. We were astounded by the huge flocks of *Greater Short-toed larks* which seemed to be everywhere! *Short-toed snake eagles* were numerous as were *Spotted eagles* and at one point we saw five sitting close together! We also saw lots of Blackbuck which are very beautiful plus some very photogenic Nilgai, an Indian grey wolf, an Indian fox, Wild boar and another Jungle cat. We had to exit the grasslands and cross over the road to get to the wetlands where we found an excellent crop of waders and other water birds. The slope we had to climb up to get to see the water was covered in the webs of Funnel spiders. We had to be out of the park by 11 and drove back down to the main road where there was a shop/café and where Mahendra asked if we could eat our packed lunch of rice, dahl, chicken and fruit. They made us fresh roti to eat our food with and we had some very tasty chai too. We watched the resident mice scurrying around the shelves etc whilst we ate and also had curious nesting *House sparrows* and *Common myna* hoping for a crumb or two. The owner was a bit taken with us and when Mahendra and the driver had gone to use the facilities, he came over to get some photos of us and with us then brought us a few tit bits to eat – peanut brittle and nuts. Afterwards we drove slowly back to the Park and hung about the car park whilst waiting for it to re-open. Here we could use our cameras and saw *Indian robin*, *Purple sunbird*, *Sykes warbler*, *White-eared bulbul*, *Ruddy shelduck* (flying), *Western reef egret*, *Clamorous reed warbler*, *Brown shrike* and *Spotted owl* plus Striped squirrels. There are toilets there and they were amongst the best I experienced in Gujarat ;). The man in charge wanted Roland to leave his camera with him saying he couldn't trust him not to use it whilst in the park. Needless to say Roland won the argument and neither of us used our cameras, not even when we had a *Short-eared owl* sitting staring at us with his huge wide-open eyes and only a matter of feet away. A lifer for us. Views like that aren't two-a-penny and none of us got a decent photo using our phones. You can imagine how livid we were at the end of the day when we found out that we had been given incorrect information on the price of a camera pass which would have been £12.50 for the whole day. Apart from the Owl the only other excitement was a Jackal running about and yet more eagles! They seemed to be everywhere! We left after a couple of hours and were supposed to be exploring a few tracks on the way back down to the main road but that didn't happen. I was disappointed not to see Blackbuck again as I didn't have a good photo of one and will probably never see one again. We stopped at the same café for another cup of chai and were very warmly welcomed. Back at the hotel we had time for a shower before meeting Mahendra for our evening meal at the Nilambag Palace which was once the home of a Maharaja. We ate outside in the Garden Restaurant and the food was absolutely delicious. By far the best meal of the trip and up there with the best I have ever had! Mahendra suggested garlic naan, chicken curry, dahl, spinach paneer to die for,

vegetables and rice. This was followed by ice-cream (no kulfi ☹️) and gulub. Time to go shopping – no news from Air France about the whereabouts of our luggage and Roland was sweltering in his rugby shirt! We drove into the centre of Bhavnagar and prepared ourselves for the fray! The streets were packed with cars, tuk-tuks, hand carts, cows, pedestrians and the noise was deafening! We couldn't see how on earth we were going to negotiate the traffic but Mahendra just smiled and said Follow me! We did and boy, was it scary! We managed to get Roland a short-sleeved shirt and some sunscreen and Mahendra got his hot water bottle. As we drove back I noticed some very posh looking chariots parked outside our hotel. They were wedding chariots but when I went to take photos the next morning, the flashiest one had a cover over it.

A brilliant day apart from the camera debacle.

Mammals: Jungle cat x2, Indian grey wolf x1, Indian fox, Nilgai, Blackbuck, Wild boar, Jackal, Striped squirrels

Birds

Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark

Barn Swallow

Bay-backed Shrike

Black Drongo

Black-headed Ibis

Black-tailed Godwit

Black-winged Stilt

Blyth's Reed Warbler

Brahminy Starling

Brown Shrike

Clamorous Reed Warbler

Common Babbler

Common Crane

Common Greenshank

Common Kestrel

Common Kingfisher

Common Moorhen

Common Myna

Common Redshank

Common Sandpiper

Common Shelduck

Crested Lark

Desert Wheatear

Dunlin

Dusky Crag Martin

Eastern Cattle Egret

Eastern Orphean Warbler

Eurasian Collared Dove

Eurasian Hoopoe

Eurasian Spoonbill

Eurasian Teal

Great Egret

Great White Pelican

Greater Coucal

Greater Flamingo

Greater Short-toed Lark

Green Bee-eater
Grey Francolin
Grey Heron
Grey-headed Swamphen
Gull-billed Tern
House Sparrow
Indian Cormorant
Indian Pond Heron
Indian Robin
Indian Silverbill
Indian Spot-billed Duck
Indian Spotted Eagle - VU
Isabelline Wheatear
Kentish Plover
Knob-billed Duck
Laughing Dove
Lesser Flamingo
Lesser Kestrel
Lesser Whitethroat
Little Cormorant
Little Egret
Long-billed Pipit
Montagu's Harrier
Northern Pintail
Northern Shoveler
Painted Stork
Pallid Harrier
Pied Avocet
Pied Kingfisher
Plain Prinia
Purple Heron
Purple Sunbird
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Rosy Starling
Ruddy Shelduck
Rufous Treepie
Rufous-tailed Lark
Shikra
Short-eared Owl
Short-toed Snake Eagle
Siberian Stonechat
Spotted Owlet
Sykes's Warbler
Tawny Eagle
Tawny Pipit
Temminck's Stint
Tufted Duck
Western Marsh Harrier

Western Reef Heron
Western Yellow Wagtail
Whiskered Tern
White Wagtail
White-eared Bulbul
White-eyed Buzzard
Wood Sandpiper
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon

January 30th.

Breakfast (omelette, toast, bananas and chai) was at 7. We had the long drive to Gir in front of us. The drive was, of course, fascinating and again, the roads were good part from the speed bumps! In fact, all the main roads in Gujarat are of good quality thanks to the efforts of Narendra Modi, the current Indian Prime Minister. He was the Chief Minister of Gujarat from 2001 until 2014 and some see him as the saviour of Gujarat because thanks to him, prosperity was brought to the area. He had the sense to see the importance of having a good road system and built a big canal which helped to irrigate the land and turn wasteland into an area where cotton and pomegranates could be grown as well as castor, coriander, cumin and peanuts. When the rest of India saw what he had achieved in Gujarat they thought he should be able to do that for the rest of the country. Or so we were told – I am not a political person but did read up a little on this man when we got home. It makes for interesting reading... We had a chai break mid-morning. There were quite a few overladen lorries parked up at the crossroads and the drivers were very keen to pose for photos! The trees were alive with *Citrine wagtails*! We arrived at Gir around 12 and were shown to our bungalow which had a decent-sized bedroom with 2 single beds, a tea-tray and an adjoining shower. Basic but adequate. From our verandah, we had a splendid view of the large mango orchard in front which stretched as far as the wall to the National Park. Lunch was fairly basic vegetarian food but there was a choice and a constant supply of fresh rotis! After a brief rest from the mid-day heat, we went for a walk round the orchard – the Flame of the Forest trees on the other side of the wall were a magnet for *Chestnut-shouldered petronia* (*Yellow-throated sparrow*) and *White-browed fantail* as well as *Oriental White-eye*. We then scouted the *Tickell's blue* which favours the reception area along with *Rufous tree-pie* and *Asian koel* then strolled down the drive, onto the road and down by the river spotting *Thick-billed flowerpecker*, *Yellow-wattled lapwing* and others on the way. It was a very pleasant walk and we netted quite a few new species for the trip including *Yellow-eyed babbler* and *Red-naped ibis* – a lifer for us. We were hoping to see *Yellow bittern* but were unlucky, possibly because there had been quite a bit of disturbance (ladies doing their washing in the river, goats, noisy children etc). Dinner was at 19h30. We had 2 geckos – one in our bedroom and one in our bedroom. No, we didn't eat them! Unfortunately, there were mothballs about which absolutely stink but I think that underneath that awful smell, there may have been another one emanating from the bathroom

Good news: Air France had located our luggage and were sending it to us by plane and road. On public transport i.e. Indian bus ☹

Animals: House gecko, Striped squirrel, Colobus monkeys

Birds

Asian Koel
Black-headed Ibis

Black-winged Kite
Black-winged Stilt
Booted Eagle
Cinereous Tit
Citrine Wagtail
Common Iora
Common Kingfisher
Common Moorhen
Common Sandpiper
Common Snipe
Common Tailorbird
Crested Honey Buzzard
Eastern Cattle Egret
Eurasian Sparrowhawk
Glossy Ibis
Grey Heron
Grey-headed Swamphen
Indian Peafowl
Indian Silverbill
Intermediate Egret
Jungle Babbler
Jungle Prinia
Large Grey Babbler
Large-billed Crow
Lesser Whitethroat
Little Egret
Little Swift
Oriental Magpie-Robin
Oriental White-eye
Pale Martin
Purple Heron
Purple Sunbird
Red-naped Ibis
Red-rumped Swallow
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Rufous Treepie
Scaly-breasted Munia
Short-toed Snake Eagle
Small Minivet
Spotted Dove
Sulphur-bellied Warbler
Sykes's Warbler
Thick-billed Flowerpecker
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher
White Wagtail
White-breasted Waterhen
White-browed Fantail
White-browed Wagtail
White-throated Kingfisher
Wire-tailed Swallow

Wood Sandpiper
Yellow-eyed Babbler
Yellow-throated Sparrow
Yellow-wattled Lapwing

January 31st.

We had to be at Reception for 6h15 for our safari in a gypsy. It was a bit nippy but even nippier driving about! We had to go and get our guide and tickets first and this time we paid the £12.00 each for camera passes! We were also allocated a trail – you cannot drive anywhere you want but have to stick to whichever trail you have been allocated to. This took about 20 minutes and then we drove to the entrance to the National Park where our guide and driver went off to hand in the paperwork. We then had to wait for the Park to open. When you first go in, you are on a public road but when you get to your trail, there is a gate and you have to hand your trail pass in. It was still dark but we saw 2 Indian hares and an *Indian Nightjar*. Sunrise was stunning. We saw a few good birds: *Plum-headed parakeets*, *Crested tree swift*, *Changeable-hawk eagle*, *Spotted owlet* lots of Spotted deer, Nilgai, a crocodile, but no lions.

We went back to the lodge for breakfast where Mahendra broke the news that our cases had been stolen ☹️ The man who was bringing us our luggage didn't book a room in a hotel last night as instructed but decided to sleep at the bus stand in Junaghad. And while he slept, someone nicked our cases. He rang poor Mahendra at 4h00 to tell him this and ask what he should do! A shopping trip was hastily planned. Needless to say there were no shops in the local village and it wasn't market day so we went to the next one. Roland soon got 3 more shirts – United Colours of Benetton for a couple of quid each – yeh, right! Finding me something to wear was a little more difficult but I managed to get a dress and a bra of sorts for under a fiver. No knickers or socks!

We went back out at 14h30 and this time we were allocated route 7 which is a long one – 42kms. – and we saw lions! 😊 We saw one full grown male with a younger one. They were quite close to the side of the road and there were more down by the river but we couldn't really see them. A little further on, there was a lioness drinking from a water trough and again we had excellent views. Gir is nowhere near as busy as the other parks we have visited and the people around were mostly very quiet. We couldn't stay too long watching her as we weren't even half-way round and had to travel quite fast towards the exit but not so fast that we couldn't stop for an adult lioness with 2 cubs about 9 months old! Not close up but good enough! I was fascinated by the silvery white Indian gum trees, also known as Ghost tree which is very apt!

Another delightful surprise was that our suitcases had been found 😊😊 We certainly didn't expect to get them back but the Indian Police excelled themselves this time. It turned out that there was CCTV where our man had fallen asleep and the thief was caught on camera. He was fairly easily identifiable because he walked with a limp. Apparently the police flooded the area asking people if they had seen a limping man with a bright pink and a black suitcase wrapped up in clingfilm. You couldn't make it up could you?! He had actually been trying to sell them (unsuccessfully) in the local market! Anyway, they got him and the chief of Police came over personally to hand our luggage over. We had to have an official photo of him and Roland shaking hands and us all looking happy. Which we were, of course! We were also impatient to dash off to a spot further up the road which we had earmarked as being suitable to see the lunar eclipse. Unfortunately, it was too hazy to see anything so we went

back to the camp. We did get to see it later though when the moon was higher in the sky. It was excellent. Altogether a right good day.

Animals: Crocodile, Spotted deer, Nilgai, Indian hare, Asiatic lion, Sambar, Colobus monkeys

Birds

Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark

Black Redstart

Changeable Hawk-Eagle

Cinereous Tit

Collared Scops Owl

Common Buzzard

Crested Serpent Eagle

Crested Treeswift

Grey Francolin

Grey-breasted Prinia

Indian Nightjar

Indian Peafowl

Oriental Darter

Oriental Magpie-Robin

Plum-headed Parakeet

Red-vented Bulbul

Small Minivet

Spotted Owlet

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher

White-browed Fantail

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon

Yellow-throated Sparrow

February 1st

Reception at 5h15 and same routine except that we went for chai instead of waiting at the entrance as we had plenty of time to spare. A stunning sun rise again but few birds about and suddenly Mahendra shouted Lion! There was a magnificent male ahead of us and to our left. We stopped. As you do. The lion strolled across the road in front of us, turned right behind some bushes and came out just in front of me! He looked around, yawned and sat down. :0 He could only have been 20' feet away at most. When I looked at him through my bins, I couldn't fit his whole head into the circle. Amazing. We sat watching for a couple of minutes then Mahendra murmured that there was another one further back behind us and a couple of other gypsies. He (the lion) walked across the road and round the back of the vehicles then started walking towards the first lion. I fully expected there to be a bit of a fight between the 2 and worried fleetingly about being too close but ours stood up to meet him, there was a bit of pawing of the ground, ours weed to mark his territory and the second lion moved slowly away round the back of the undergrowth. Judging by the noise the crows were making, there had to be a kill there. Reluctantly we moved on and not much further down we could see where the kill had taken place and how it had been dragged away. The rest of the drive was fairly tame! We had splendid views of Spotted deer and Sambar but there were hardly any birds around. We did see a *Painted stork* though as well as *Coppersmith barbet*, *Large cuckooshrike*, *Common woodshrike*, *Woolly-necked stork* and an *Oriental honey buzzard*.

After lunch I went for a walk in the orchard and found a bird hide right at the back. There was also an empty pool. Had I known it was there, I would have got someone to help me carry some water up so I could sit in the hide for a while. I didn't see any new birds though there was quite a big flock of *Yellow-throated sparrow* (20+) and some cute Striped squirrels eating the Flame of the Forest flowers.

It was soon time to head towards Jamnagar some 200 kms away. We went through Junaghad which looked really interesting. One of my regrets on our birding trips is that we don't have time to visit the places we see. One day we will have to come back and just do some sight-seeing. Maybe. We made a couple of stops firstly for a sugar cane drink at Fikadia where we also bought some grapes. Heaven only knows what Health and Safety would have thought of the drinks stall – I have never seen so many flies in all my life but I just smiled at the vendor and told him how good the drink was!! Secondly because Mahendra spotted an *Indian stone-curlew* in a field. How, heaven only knows! We passed lots of cotton fields and our next stop was for a flock of *Red-naped ibis* and a reservoir where we got out and had a bit of a walk. We saw quite a lot of working camels again today. Our hotel*, when we got there, was in town and the noise was HORRENDOUS!!! Our beds were solid and certain areas of the hotel were in need of a good clean. Mahendra told us that the hotel was the best in town but Booking.com tells me otherwise! ;) It was ok, actually and the food was good. But noisy! Once the traffic started to die down, the dogs took over. It sounded like there was a pack of at least 50 fighting outside and it went on forever.

*Hotel President – popular with birdwatchers.

Animals: Asiatic lion, Nilgai, Spotted deer, Striped squirrel

Birds:

Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark

Black Kite

Black-winged Stilt

Common Babbler

Common Myna

Common Pochard - VU

Common Woodshrike

Coppersmith Barbet

Crested Honey Buzzard

Eurasian Coot

Grey Wagtail

Indian Peafowl

Indian Robin

Indian Roller

Indian Spot-billed Duck

Indian Stone-curlew

Large Cuckooshrike

Laughing Dove

Little Grebe

Little Stint

Marsh Sandpiper

Northern Pintail

Oriental Honey Buzzard

Painted Stork

Purple Sunbird

Red-naped Ibis
Red-vented Bulbul
Tawny Pipit
Whiskered Tern
Woolly-necked Stork – VU
Yellow-throated Sparrow

February 2nd.

Breakfast at 7 – very basic – then off to the coastal area stopping on the way for a flock of *Great white pelicans* in a gravel pit. There were also such birds as *Spoonbill*, *Northern shoveler* and *Long-tailed shrike* here. When we got to Balachadi Beach, we parked up on the grass and scanned around before walking left past some bushes then out onto the stones scanning until we hit a decidedly slippery area! We racked up quite a list of birds including *Yellow-crowned woodpecker*, *Oriental skylark*, *Sand lark*, *Isabelline* and *Desert wheatear*, *Hoopoe*, *Brahminy starling*, *Clamorous reedwarbler* and *Crested lark*. The tide was well out and it was difficult to see any birds on the sands but we could make out *Common greenshank*, *Ruff*, *Whimbrel*, *Common sandpiper*, *Common kingfisher*, *Curlew*, one *Crab plover* and a few other species. We had a bit of a drive round the area (up to the Sainik School and so on) seeing *Greater coucal*, *Peafowl*, *House swift*, *Barn and Wire-tailed swallows* and the suchlike before deciding to have an early lunch locally rather than going back into town – that way we would catch the tide coming in. We found a very nice new place where we had a good thali washed down with buttermilk and chai. The restaurant was spotless so I had high hopes of the toilets We drove next to the mosque on a headland. We couldn't see a lot – it was all too far out – so we went back to the bay. There was a group of lads saddling up what looked like a wedding horse. They waved me over but Mahendra had already set off so I had to follow. We walked out over the stones again but stopping short of the slippery ones and this time we could see a bit more clearly and had views of *Crab plover*. We could see the horse on the sand being led by someone in his wedding finery – they were apparently making a pre-wedding video complete with Bollywood style music. We continued scanning but as we retraced our steps, said horse came flying in front of us and disappeared into the distance. I joked to the lads chasing it that it was probably in Mumbai by then! We had hoped that we would have good views of the waders as they moved up the sand in the bay towards us but that was not to be. The people who had walked out to the sea and the wedding lot created too much disturbance so we had no option but to leave. I have to confess that I enjoyed watching the filming – most amusing – but I was disappointed not to get better views of the birds. It was good watching the *Crab plovers* fly though. Off we went back through Jamnagar to Bedi Port and the salt flats. In heaven with my *Greater Flamingoes* here! Not close but pretty near ☺ After this we moved to the salt pans. We spent the afternoon driving round the area revisiting spots and getting out to walk wherever we could and for the obligatory chai stop of course! We got a few lifers today: *Sand lark*, *Desert wheatear*, *Black-crowned sparrowlark* and *Variable wheatear*.

Some of the housing we saw today was pretty grim especially by the salt pans.

We saw 10 ladies crammed into a tuk tuk!

Again we saw quite a few working camels.

We had an hour or so to spare before tea when we got back to the hotel so Roland and I took ourselves off to explore the town. We like a bit of an adventure! It was great! I made a couple of videos of the traffic etc to show people back home how different everything is.

We managed to cross roads on our own and found an ice-cream shop which had tons of choice and it was all home made. Cost sod all too. Roland spotted a vehicle labelled: Vehicle for retrieval of dead Animals!

We made it back for the delicious evening meal of butter chicken, prawn curry, potatoes and vegetables in sauce, chapattis, rice and naan with tomato soup to start!! And then we took Mahendra out for an ice-cream!

Another brilliant day.

Animals: Indian Mongoose, Wild boar

Birds:

Bank Myna
Barn Swallow
Bay-backed Shrike
Black Drongo
Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark
Black-headed Ibis
Black-tailed Godwit
Black-winged Kite
Black-winged Stilt
Brahminy Starling
Brown-headed Gull
Brown Shrike
Citrine Wagtail
Clamorous Reedwarbler
Common Babbler
Common Chiffchaff
Common Crane
Common Greenshank
Common Kestrel
Common Kingfisher
Common Redshank
Common Sandpiper
Common Tailorbird
Common Woodshrike
Crab Plover
Crested Lark
Desert Wheatear
Dunlin
Eastern Cattle Egret
Eurasian Collared Dove
Eurasian Curlew
Eurasian Hoopoe
Eurasian Spoonbill
Eurasian Teal
Glossy Ibis
Great Egret
Great White Pelican
Greater Coucal
Greater Flamingo
Greater Sandplover
Greater Short-toed Lark

Green Bee-eater
Grey Francolin
Grey Heron
Grey-breasted Prinia
Grey-necked Bunting
Grey Plover
House Crow
House Sparrow
Indian Peafowl
Indian Pond Heron
Indian Robin
Indian Roller
Indian Silverbill
Indian Spot-billed Duck
Indian Stone-curlew
Isabelline Shrike
Isabelline Wheatear
Jungle Babbler
Large-billed Crow
Laughing Dove
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Little Cormorant
Little Egret
Little Stint
Long-tailed Shrike
Marsh Sandpiper
Marshall's Iora
Montagu's Harrier
Northern Shoveler
Oriental Magpie-Robin
Oriental Skylark
Oriental Turtle Dove
Painted Stork
Pied Avocet
Pied Kingfisher
Pintail Snipe
Purple Sunbird
Red Knot
Red-breasted Flycatcher
Red-nape Ibis
Red-rumped Swallow
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Rosy Starling
Ruff
Sanderling
Sand Lark
Short-toed Lark
Siberian Stonechat

Small Minivet
Southern Grey Shrike
Spotted Dove
Sykes's Lark
Terek Sandpiper
Variable Wheatear
Western Reef Heron
Whimbrel
Whiskered Tern
White-breasted Waterhen
White-eared Bulbul
White-throated Kingfisher
Wire-tailed Swallow
Wood Sandpiper
Wood Snipe – VU
Yellow-crowned Woodpecker

February 3rd.

6.00am start because of another long drive. We didn't have breakfast but took some parathas with us instead. The streets near the hotel were really hectic as they were setting up the market so our initial progress was slow. More time to look around at what was going on ☺ We had planned to do some birding on the way but in the event we only made one brief stop at a pond and then to photograph a Nilgai family. We did pass a large wetland area teeming with birds but Mahendra was fast asleep and I didn't like to wake him. We also stopped at an HONEST service area to eat our parathas and have chai but Roland bought a couple of yummy looking samosas too. There was a ginormous area of salt pans by the coast as we went over the Surajbari Bridge but there didn't seem to be many birds. We did see *Heuglins gull* and lots of *Great white egrets* though. At the toll gate there was a notice about making sure you got the right change and not to be fobbed off with wafers or namkeen (snacks)! Further on, there was a field of at least 50 camels. Nothing else around – just the camels! We arrived at CEDO camp around 12h45, just in time for lunch. It seemed like a very nice place. Our room looked out onto the central courtyard which is also where we ate. It was pretty basic but had everything we needed. Our lunch was simple vegetarian food but perfectly adequate. It was very hot so we had a rest until 15h15 then chai then we set off for Chaduva thorn forest where we had a short walk to look for *Sykes's lark*. We soon found 2 small groups of 5. Excellent views. I wish the same could be said for *White-naped tit* which had us wandering fruitlessly and at length through the thorny scrub and cacti. We did see *Grey-naped bunting*, *Marshall's iora*, *Small minivet*, lots of *Red-vented bulbuls*, *House sparrows*, *Southern grey shrike*, flocks of *Black-crowned sparrowlark*, *Grey-breasted prinia*, *Bay-backed shrike*, *Common woodshrike*, *Indian silverbill* as we wandered though! Then right at the end, near the Temple, there was a group of *Peafowl*, and *Grey francolin*. We also saw a *White-breasted waterhen*! Chai and crunchy snacks when we got back to the car came as a nice surprise and we stopped in town to get a pomegranate and some grapes. It was years since I had had a pomegranate and as they grow so many in this area I thought I'd have a fresh one.

Animals: Nilgai, Wild boar

Birds

Bay-backed Shrike
Black Drongo

Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark
Black-winged Kite
Black-winged Stilt
Brahminy Starling
Common Kestrel
Common Woodshrike
Great Egret
Greater Coucal
Greater Short-toed Lark
Green Bee-eater
Grey Heron
Grey-breasted Prinia
Grey-necked Bunting
House Crow
Indian Peafowl
Indian Pond Heron
Indian Robin
Indian Roller
Indian Silverbill
Indian Spot-billed Duck
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Little Cormorant
Long-tailed Shrike
Marshall's Iora
Montagu's Harrier
Oriental Magpie-Robin
Pied Kingfisher
Red-rumped Swallow
Red-vented Bulbul
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Small Minivet
Southern Grey Shrike
Sykes's Warbler
Variable Wheatear
Western Reef Heron
White-breasted Waterhen
White-throated Kingfisher

February 4th.

Chai at 6h15 then off to Banni grasslands via the Fulay tooth brush jungle to look for *Grey hypocolious* this being the only place it is found in India. We had a chilly wait but sunrise was beautiful and we got to see lots of *White-eared bulbuls* and a handful of *Marshall's iora* as well as *Hulme's whitethroat* before our bird finally appeared. We thought our only view was going to be that of a female but after more hanging about we decided to set off again and a very obliging male popped out in the early morning sunshine on the other side of the road. He was soon joined by another male giving us excellent and prolonged views. ☺ We left the main roads to travel on rough back roads to Banni which was a bit exciting in places especially when our way was blocked by a massive herd of cows and then a slightly smaller herd of buffalo. We found a suitable patch in the middle of the "desert" for breakfast. Right yummy: bread, jam, marmalade, cheese, paratha, chutneys, fruit, banana chips, fruit and

nut cornflakes and lashings of chai! They really looked after us exceedingly well at CEDO. Our next task was to find an *Indian eagle owl* which we did quite quickly – he was standing in the shade underneath a bush. Where else?! Next stop was up a watch tower to look for waders in the Chhari-Dhand wetlands: *Common teal*, *Pochard*, *Great white* and *Dalmatian pelican*, *Northern pintail*, *Black-headed ibis* to name but a few. We had hoped to find *Asian desert warbler* here too but only managed *Lesser whitethroat* plus crows. Time now to hunt the *Red-tailed wheatear* who despite always being in his particular rocky outcrop, just wasn't there! Time to go back for lunch stopping to admire *Painted sandgrouse* on the way. In the afternoon we went back out looking unsuccessfully for the Wheatear again then drove round looking for a good spot to photograph the sunset from with hopefully some cranes flying across the sky. It was a lovely sunset but unsurprisingly there were few cranes to photograph as they were all behind us! Hundreds and hundreds of them! It is a shame they are so nervy as it meant we didn't get close up photos of them at all but they were wonderful to watch 😊. *Marsh harrier*, *Long-legged buzzard*, *Greater spotted eagle* were also seen along with more huge flocks of *Greater Short-toed lark*. We also saw several wild boar during the day and an Indian hare and a nightjar on our way home. Sign of the times – a lady herder with a handbag dangling from her pole!

Animals: Indian hare, Wild boar

Birds:

Bay-backed Shrike
Black Drongo
Black Redstart
Black-headed Ibis
Black-tailed Godwit
Black-winged Kite
Black-winged Stilt
Blue Rock Thrush
Common Babbler
Common Crane
Common Kestrel
Common Pochard - VU
Crested Lark
Dalmatian Pelican - VU
Desert Wheatear
Eastern Cattle Egret
Eurasian Collared Dove
Eurasian Coot
Eurasian Spoonbill
Eurasian Teal
Gadwall
Great Cormorant
Great Egret
Great White Pelican
Greater Coucal
Greater Flamingo
Greater Sand Plover
Greater Short-toed Lark
Greater Spotted Eagle - VU
Grey Francolin
Grey Heron

Grey Hypocolius
Grey Plover
House Crow
Hume's Whitethroat
Indian Eagle-Owl
Indian Robin
Indian Spot-billed Duck
Indian Spotted Eagle - VU
Laughing Dove
Lesser Whitethroat
Long-legged Buzzard
Long-tailed Shrike
Marshall's Iora
Northern Pintail
Painted Sandgrouse
Painted Stork
Red-naped Ibis
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Rufous-tailed Lark
Siberian Stonechat
Steppe Eagle - EN
Variable Wheatear
Western Marsh Harrier
Western Yellow Wagtail
White-eared Bulbul
Wire-tailed Swallow

February 5th.

Tea at 7 meant a lie-in!

Back to the thorn forest this morning and views of a Black-naped hare and a nightjar on the way. We had a right good walkabout and finally got the *White-naped tit* just when we had all but given up on it. Worth the wait 😊 We also got *Desert whitethroat*. 😊

Our packed breakfast was yummy again

We saw loads of *Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse* this morning – at least 30.

We found a hidey-hole that had been created within a massive cactus. Someone using it as a hide for hunting or on the run? Who knows.....

The aloo paratha at lunch were absolutely delicious. No food for guests is cooked on the premises – it is brought in from the local village.

We were able to look at Mr.Tiwari's fossil collection at lunchtime and his son brought out the contents of the shop. This was mostly bags of different sizes made by local women and featuring local stitching styles and patterns. Really beautiful and so cheap. I could have spent a fortune but we restricted ourselves to a few beautifully stitched small dolls and suchlike. Do ask to look if you go there. The Tiwari family were very welcoming – lovely people. I would most certainly recommend this as somewhere to stay. Lovely atmosphere. 😊

In the afternoon we went back to Banni for the *Desert wheatear* and this time we managed to see it! 😊 We couldn't find a *Desert warbler* though. It was dull and cloudy so we didn't

see many raptors – only a few *Montagu's harriers* one of whom had a tasty grasshopper to eat.

Excellent encounter with Indian mongoose.

Great views of a *Sirkeer malkoha* in a bush by the roadside.

We had to stop for a group of men carrying an injured buffalo on a stretcher – he had a bandage on one leg and a broken horn. It looked like heavy work!

We passed a man on a splendidly decorated and “dressed” camel in the morning.

We stopped to photograph camels in the afternoon – just loose on the road. One had his front legs tied together loosely. Mahendra said it was because he was naughty!

The dogs last night were horrendously noisy. Mahendra's room was closer to them than ours and he hardly got any sleep.

Animals: Black-naped hare, Indian mongoose

Birds:

Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark

Bay-backed Shrike

Black Redstart

Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark

Black-headed Ibis

Black-winged Stilt

Blyth's Reed Warbler

Brahminy Starling

Brown Rock Chat

Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse

Common Babbler

Common Kestrel

Common Myna

Common Sandpiper

Crested Lark

Desert Wheatear

Eastern Cattle Egret

Eurasian Spoonbill

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

Glossy Ibis

Great Cormorant

Greater Coucal

Greater Short-toed Lark

Green Bee-eater

Grey Francolin

Grey Heron

Grey-necked Bunting

Indian Bush Lark

Indian Peafowl

Indian Pond Heron

Indian Robin

Indian Roller

Indian Silverbill

Indian Spot-billed Duck

Jungle Prinia

Laughing Dove

Lesser Whitethroat

Little Cormorant
Little Egret
Little Grebe
Marshall's Iora
Montagu's Harrier
Purple Sunbird
Red Turtle Dove
Red-vented Bulbul
River Tern
Rufous-fronted Prinia
Rufous-tailed Lark
Sirkeer Malkoha
Small Minivet
Variable Wheatear
White-breasted Waterhen
White-eared Bulbul
White-naped Tit - VU
White-throated Kingfisher
Wire-tailed Swallow

February 6th.

Chai at 7h00 then off to the sea-side stopping at Mandavi mudflats on the way. There was evidence of this being an old fortified town. It was a little cool watching the waders. There were several people feeding the many *Brown-headed gulls*. One man with a child had a massive packet of biscuits for them. There was quite a good crop of birds for us: *Painted stork*, *Western reef heron*, *Ruff*, *Spotted redshank*, *Pacific golden plover* We scanned the fields on the way to the beach for *Pratincoles* but didn't see any. There was a 2 storey British style house which looked completely out of place. Brits abroad maybe? You just can't get away from them... The tide was out when we arrived at the beach and we had chai before doing anything else! There were a few bushes not far away and there were several *Western reef heron* there plus a *Hoopoe* and *Common babblers*. A nearby house had a pile of fish scraps outside and poles with strings for drying fish on – these were popular with the crows! A small boy with a donkey cart walked past – he was transporting fish waste and had a novel method of getting the donkey to walk faster: he had a plastic bottle with stones in which he shook at him! Fully refreshed we walked out to the sea and along the edge and back. We met some Canadians who confessed to having knocked down the buffalo we saw the previous day. They had seen *Ruddy turnstone* but we couldn't find any. They had obviously moved on but we did see a small flock of *Greater flamingo* landing on a small sandbank which was a bit of a surprise. Our list included *Caspian plover*, *Lesser sand plover*, *Gull-billed* and *Lesser-crested tern*, *Redshank*, *Sanderlings*, *Ringed plover* plus a *Dalmatian pelican* when we got back to the car.

In the afternoon we went to a different patch of thorn forest (Pakhdo Hill?) hoping to see a *Peregrine falcon* but he wasn't at home though we saw more mongoose on the way which is always a bonus! Later, Mahendra led us along a path through the bushes and we came out onto the edge of a cliff with a pool down at the bottom! It was so unexpected and very picturesque! We tarried there for quite a while and the driver brought our chai and snacks over. He was very taken with the place and took loads of selfies. There were lots of birds coming down to drink including *Indian pond heron*, *Common kingfisher*, *Crag martin*, *White-*

faced bulbul though the *Black-headed bunting* failed to put in an appearance. We stopped on the way back to admire *Streak-throated swallow*.

Tonight it was the cricket commentary that kept us awake rather than the noisy dogs!!

Animals: Indian mongoose, Striped squirrel

Birds:

Barn Swallow
Black Drongo
Black-headed Ibis
Black-tailed Godwit
Black-winged Stilt
Brown Rock Chat
Brown-headed Gull
Common Babbler
Common Kestrel
Common Kingfisher
Common Myna
Common Redshank
Common Ringed Plover
Common Sandpiper
Crab-plover
Crested Lark
Curlew Sandpiper
Dalmatian Pelican - VU
Dunlin
Dusky Crag Martin
Eastern Cattle Egret
Eurasian Collared Dove
Eurasian Curlew
Eurasian Hoopoe
Eurasian Oystercatcher
Eurasian Spoonbill
Eurasian Teal
Eurasian Tree Sparrow
Glossy Ibis
Great Cormorant
Great Egret
Greater Coucal
Greater Flamingo
Greater Sand Plover
Green Bee-eater
Grey Francolin
Grey Heron
Grey Plover
Grey-necked Bunting
Gull-billed Tern
House Crow
House Sparrow
Indian Peafowl
Indian Pond Heron
Indian Robin
Indian Roller

Indian Silverbill
Indian Spot-billed Duck
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Lesser Crested Tern
Lesser Sand Plover
Little Cormorant
Little Egret
Little Grebe
Little Stint
Little Swift
Long-tailed Shrike
Northern Shoveler
Pacific Golden Plover
Painted Sandgrouse
Painted Stork
Pallas's Gull
Purple Sunbird
Red Turtle Dove
Red-breasted Flycatcher
Red-naped Ibis
Red-rumped Swallow
Red-tailed Wheatear
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Ruff
Rufous-tailed Lark
Sanderling
Slender-billed Gull
Spotted Dove
Spotted Redshank
Streak-throated Swallow
Terek Sandpiper
Western Reef Heron
Whiskered Tern
White Wagtail
White-eared Bulbul
White-throated Kingfisher
Wire-tailed Swallow

February 7th.

Breakfast at 7

Followed by the long drive to Rannriders in the Little Rann of Kutch. Our itinerary said we would be staying at the Desert Outpost Resort which didn't look very nice but this had been changed without our knowledge to Rannriders. Good move 😊 We had 2 stops on the way. The first one was at a Krishna Palace (hotel, restaurant, couple of shops, CLEAN TOILETS) for chai and the second was at a small wetlands just before Halvad where we got a good crop of waders. We saw lots of *Black-shouldered kites* on the wires as we travelled plus the usual suspects. We arrived at our destination in time for lunch. The food was nice enough but not

very spicy – obviously geared towards tourists. We were allocated a beautiful round thatched “hut” with which I was very impressed. We had a bedroom with a dressing room and a bathroom with a big shower. There was mirrored mosaic on the patterned walls with embroidered window blinds. Our hut was one of 4 in a clearing with a raised pond.

After lunch we had a rest then went for a walk in the grounds and the surrounding countryside. There was a small wetlands across the road where a man was fishing by putting his nets in the water then splashing about to drive the fish towards the nets. The only fish I saw him catch were very small. We thought we had seen a *Red-wattled lapwing* doing the injured bird thing to draw us away from his nest but it turned out the poor bird had 2 broken legs ☹️

Unfortunately, we had to move out of our lovely hut when we got back as there was no hot water. We were allocated an older bungalow which was nowhere near as attractive but we did have a big entrance hall and a nice porch plus frogs 😊 and red water lilies in our pond! Plus hot water 😊

Animals:

Birds:

Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark
Barn Swallow
Black Drongo
Black-headed Ibis
Black-tailed Godwit
Black-winged Kite
Black-winged Stilt
Citrine Wagtail
Common Pochard - VU
Common Redshank
Common Sandpiper
Common Snipe
Common Tailorbird
Desert Wheatear
Eurasian Collared Dove
Eurasian Coot
Eurasian Curlew
Eurasian Spoonbill
Eurasian Teal
Garganey
Glossy Ibis
Great Egret
Green Bee-eater
Green Sandpiper
Grey Heron
Grey-headed Swamphen
Indian Pond Heron
Indian Robin
Indian Stone-curlew
Lesser Whitethroat
Little Cormorant
Little Egret
Little Grebe
Little Stint

Long-tailed Shrike
Northern Pintail
Northern Shoveler
Painted Stork
Pheasant-tailed Jacana
Pied Bush Chat
Pied Kingfisher
Purple Sunbird
Red-naped Ibis
Red-wattled Lapwing
Siberian Stonechat
Sykes's Warbler
Tawny Pipit
Variable Wheatear
Western Yellow Wagtail
White Wagtail
Wood Sandpiper

February 8th.

6h30 start with a packed breakfast. Off we went to Bajana to get our permits then drove through Zinzuwada into the desert (actually a huge salt marsh) with our boy racer driver in an open jeep! Great fun careering round the bumpy, dusty desert! And freezing cold! We soon saw a few Asiatic wild asses. They were very nervy and we never managed to get close to one. I had expected to see them in great numbers but they were mostly on their own or in small groups of up to five. Certainly not numerous. We seemed to spend the whole morning racing about getting dustier and dustier and not seeing a lot. We had some excitement when Mahendra and the driver shouted Over there! I just managed to see something moving in the distance and we set off at great speed. They had spotted a *Macqueen's bustard* but neglected to tell us what we were looking at and it flew away without us getting a decent look at it. It flew over some bushes so we crashed through them but only succeeded in scaring it away again. So, we can say we saw the bustard but did we get a proper look at it? No. Apart from that we saw a few raptors: *Common kestrel*, *Sparrowhawk*, *Peregrine falcon*, *Short-toed eagle*. We also saw a Jackal. Not surprisingly, we got a puncture at one point!

After we had had breakfast, the driver gave most of what was left to a man who was working on a small salt farm. How difficult it must be to eke out a living in this way and how dismal living in such an open area with nothing to relieve the view of open desert. Zinzuwada was a lot busier when we went through it at lunchtime. We went through a beautiful carved entrance which must have been at least 20 foot deep with very intricate carving overhead. There was also evidence of other historical buildings but we didn't get to see them. Negotiating the rubbish was a bit grim in places as it was strewn right across the road in places. We saw a lot of this while travelling round Gujarat. Some villages had dug pits for rubbish on the outskirts and some obviously took a pride in keeping the way through clear as we saw the villagers sweeping the road and road edges but in others, the rubbish was piled up along the edge of the road and allowed to spill across without restraint.

We went out again at 15h30 and headed towards Nawa Talao Lake. We had seen a few *Demoiselle cranes* this morning but now we could see LOTS!!! WE stood well back to admire them and the other birds but 6 ladies walked down to the water's edge and frightened them away before we could get a proper look and photograph them. They were staying at the

same place as us and their jeep driver should have known better than to let them do that or to pose for selfies with them there. We had a good walk round and also drove round to the other side, picking up a few new birds for the trip: *Wigeon*, *Little ringed plover*, juvenile *Imperial eagle*. There was a beautiful *Dalmatian pelican* just coming into breeding plumage and we had amazing views of 7 *Common snipe* feeding together out in the open! *Yellow wagtails* everywhere! Beautiful sunset.

Animals: Jackal, Asiatic wild ass

February 9th.

6h30 start. Off to find the *Hoopoe lark*. The spot was a long way off and we drove fast and furiously through the desert leaving a massive dust cloud behind us and throwing up clods of dried earth as we went. We found a lark without too much trouble and then I realised he had nesting material in his beak so we followed him at a distance then parked up close to where the nest was on the ground. This way we got to see both the male and the female. Great views of course due to the lack of vegetation etc! ☺ *Desert wheatear* were also in the area. We decided to have breakfast here and then drove back across the desert looking for anything that might come our way. No bustards, unfortunately. The round trip was 160kms. Mahendra very kindly arranged for us to have some ice-cream at lunch which was a really nice gesture and one we appreciated greatly.

For once, I was knackered and actually had a rest before going out again! Most unusual for me.

We had more good views of Indian mongoose on the way out this afternoon and paused to have a look at the salt pans just as you enter the desert. Our targets for the afternoon were *Short-eared owl* and *Mcqueens bustard*. We didn't see either but not for lack of trying. ☹ However, we did see Nilgai, Asses, a rabbit, Wild boar and DESERT CAT!!! It was only the second time our driver had seen one and Mahendra's third. Our first, of course! Roland spotted him right in front of our jeep when the 3 of us were looking in a different direction. We had great views of him and were even able to follow him for a while. We were feeling really happy when we stopped near a Desert fox's lair. Our guide said she had 2 young and although we had stopped by several times we hadn't seen them yet. He got out of the jeep and realised we had 2 punctures. Hardly surprising! He told us to wait there while he went off to get them fixed. Now, bear in mind that we are well into the desert and that the nearest village was quite a way away and the light was starting to fade..... We waited and we waited. No fox and no jeep so Mahendra decided we should walk down to the "road" where we could be found more easily. So we did. And we waited and we waited. We looked at the stars through our bins and we waited some more. We played with the star attachment on the laser pointer and looked at the stars again then Mahendra got a phone call to say the driver couldn't find us! So we shone the laser pointer into the sky and he eventually found us! We then raced about a bit more looking for Nightjars and anything else which might be out in the dark. We didn't see any nightjars but we did get more than one view of Indian fox at last. Really cute. We had a couple of men on a motor bike drive up to us to see if we were lost as we were driving round in circles! They were still working in the salt pans when we drove past. Dinner had finished by the time we got back to the lodge but they brought us a plated meal which was a bit dried up. Better than nothing and very good of them to do so.

Back home in England whilst writing this up, I discovered that the place we found the Hoopoe Lark was very close to the Vachhraj Dada Temple. I wish I had known this beforehand

or that Mahendra had told us about it then we could have gone to see it. I had asked him about the pilgrims walking through the desert too! We might even have seen one or two different birds in the nearby pool. Silly me. I also read about the Agariya who farm these salt pans from October to June. There are actually over 100,000 working in the Thar desert and I had thought it was just the small area we saw that was farmed! They lead a really harsh life with few of them living past 60.

Animals: Indian mongoose, Asiatic wild ass, Nilgai, Rabbit, Wild boar, Desert cat, Indian fox

February 10th.

7h30 start and off to Nawa Talao Lake again. There were much less birds today and we didn't see anything new but we found *Sykes's warbler* as we were leaving. Excellent views of the juvenile *Imperial eagle* again plus pelicans and one *Demoiselle crane*. We were back at the lodge earlier than expected so bobbled about on our own. We set off for Ahmedabad after an early lunch expecting to bird on the way but that didn't happen though we did stop to look at at least 8 *Egyptian vultures* near a dump next to a steel works. We were hoping to go shopping/birding when we arrived in town but it turned out our driver was off to a wedding later on so wanted to get away. We did go to a couple of sweet shops but they were very expensive so we didn't buy any. We didn't get to go birding in the Law Gardens as planned either because our hotel had been changed to the Metropole though we didn't know this until we arrived there! Modern style – could have been anywhere. Anyway, Mahendra was staying in a different hotel to us so he went off on his own and we arranged to meet the following morning for our sight-seeing tour which it seemed he wasn't looking forward to. Not being ones to stand still, we dumped our bags in our room and set off to explore the area. We soon found an ice-cream shop and of course we had to try it out! The side streets round the back of the hotel were quite interesting as there was a market and 2 old temples plus the usual general chaos! We also found a Royal Enfield showroom on the main road with bikes on display along the pavement. Walking in the opposite direction took us over a bridge and down to a sandstone temple. As we were crossing the bridge, a bike carrying 4 people drew up next to us and the lady asked us where we were from. Turned out they were from London! Got lots of waves and smiles from other people too. There was a man throwing food over the side of the bridge and when I looked down, he was feeding *Comb ducks*! We walked down to the temple and took photos of the sunset – it was a popular spot but the begging children were a real nuisance. There were clouds of *Rosy starling* flying overhead. Almost a murmuration but not quite! Back at the hotel we pondered what to do about food. We didn't fancy the hotel menu and it was expensive so we went out again and down to the corner where we had seen a few restaurants. As we debated over which one to go into, a man detached himself from a group who were sitting there and asked if he could help. We thought he was local but it turned out he was actually Canadian and staying in Ahmedabad with his friends! They were going to Saffron and this is where we went too. It turned out to be an excellent choice as the food was delicious and well-priced. It was a good job we went when we did because it very quickly got full and there was a queue of people waiting outside when we left. Saffron is actually a chain of restaurants and there is one in London. We had the biggest ever poppadum as a complimentary starter. Roland had a Tikka sizzler and I had spicy cheese thing. The bill came to 842/- (about £8.40) and was worth every rupee 😊 We weren't quite ready to go back to the hotel so we went for an ice-cream and sat outside watching the world go by.

February 11th.

We got up early and had breakfast in the hotel then went to the Gandhi Ashram which was only a short walk away from the hotel. There weren't a lot of visitors at that time but it was getting busier by the time we left. It was really interesting and it was free. Mahendra and our driver for the day had arrived when we got back. I told them both which places we wanted to go to and was really surprised when I found out how close to each other they were! I had been seriously misinformed! The Sidi Saiyyed Mosque was first on my list. This was built in 1573 and is famous for the stunning stone latticework windows. Truly beautiful. There were a lot of homeless people around here but not one asked us for money. There were a couple of men handing out food to them perhaps from a local charity. We had to take a tuk tuk from here to Bhadra Fort which is surrounded by a market and very narrow streets. It wasn't far but it was an exciting ride and the market was truly fascinating. Next up was the Jama Mosque (1424) with its 15 domes. At some point we stopped the car and got out to go watch a local wedding. It was really busy round here and there was all sorts going on besides the wedding! We had to pass the bird market which was quite distressing. The wedding music was really loud and people made way for me so I could photograph (and video) the musicians who posed happily for me. There was a live singer, lots of amplifiers, wedding chariots etc and lots of boys scrambling to have their picture taken. Total chaos but happy chaos. Our driver took us to the hotel opposite the Sidi Sayeed Mosque for lunch. Very posh and very expensive. Not our scene at all. The next place he took us to was much better and much cheaper. Nice and clean with clean toilets. We all had a thali which the waiter kept coming to replenish. Excellent service 😊 Off into the sunshine and chaos again visiting more old mosques, an absolutely fascinating Step Well, the Hutheesing Jain Temple and the Sardar Patel National Memorial. I was shattered by then! In-between we had found a sweet shop which catered to our needs and was near the wedding spot where a second wedding was taking place! We got dragged into the procession and had to have photos taken with all and sundry 😊 it was lovely and the ladies were so beautiful in their colourful attire and traditional jewels. We had one last task to fulfil – a trip to the Famous Samosa Shop where we stocked up on goodies to eat at the airport. Whilst Roland was getting served, I was busy photographing the monkeys across the road and on my way back to the car, an old man stopped me and asked me to take a photo of him with his newborn grandchild. He was so proud and pleased and went to get his daughter to have her photo taken too. She was very giggly and shy but happy with the photo. Their living conditions looked appalling but that is, unfortunately, not unusual in India.

Gandhi Ashram: founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1918 and also known as Satyagraha Ashram. It is from here that Gandhi began his famous "Gandhi March" to the sea to protest against the Salt Tax imposed by the English. There is also a memorial centre and a library here.

Sidi Saiyyad's Mosque: 1573 It was built by Sidi Saeed or Sidi Saiyyed. Entirely arcuated, it is famous for the 10 beautifully carved latticework windows (Jalis) on the side and rear arches.

Hutheesing Jain Temple: 1850. Named after Seth Hutheesing, a prosperous Hain merchant.

Bhadra Fort: Established by Sultan Ahmad Shah in 1411. He was the founder of Ahmedabad.

Sardar Patel National Memorial houses a paying museum. It is dedicated to the Iron Man of India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

Dada Harir Stepwell. Stepwells are wells in which water is reached by steps and originated to ensure water during periods of drought. They are most commonly found in western India, particularly in Gujarat where there are 120. This Stepwell was built in 1485 by Dhari Harir, the superintendent of Sultan Mahmud Begada's harem. It is octagonal at the top and is 5 storeys deep. The motifs of flowers and graphics of Islamic architecture blend very well with the symbols of Hindu and Jain gods carved at various levels of the well. The dominant carvings on the upper floors are of elephants.

And that was that. Time to head for the airport. We ate our samosas and kebabs sitting on the grass outside the terminal as we had arrived way ahead of time. Luckily so, as we had been dropped at the wrong terminal! We walked the relatively short distance to the correct terminal, declining the offers of tuk-tuk and taxi drivers who were very willing to take us there as it was a long way away! Yeah, right. I wish I could say we had a straightforward journey home but we didn't. Our flight from Ahmedabad was delayed and landed late so we missed our flight from Delhi to Paris. And the one from Paris-Manchester. KLM managed to put us in 2 horrid seats at the back of their flight and routed us via Amsterdam meaning we got home not too long after our scheduled arrival time. Amazingly, our cases arrived safely in Manchester! Now we just had to sort out our broken down car

ALL BIRDS

Ashy Drongo
Ashy Prinia
Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark
Asian Desert Warbler
Asian Koel
Asian Openbill
Asian Palm Swift
Bank Myna
Bar-headed Goose
Barn Swallow
Bay-backed Shrike
Black Drongo
Black Kite
Black Redstart
Black-crowned Night Heron
Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark
Black-headed Ibis
Black-tailed Godwit
Black-winged Kite
Black-winged Stilt
Blue Rock Thrush
Blyth's Reed Warbler
Booted Eagle
Brahminy Starling
Brown Rock Chat
Brown Shrike

Brown-headed Gull
Changeable Hawk-Eagle
Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse
Cinereous Tit
Citrine Wagtail
Clamorous Reed Warbler
Collared Scops Owl
Common Babbler
Common Buzzard
Common Crane
Common Greenshank
Common Iora
Common Kestrel
Common Kingfisher
Common Moorhen
Common Myna
Common Pochard - VU
Common Redshank
Common Ringed Plover
Common Sandpiper
Common Shelduck
Common Snipe
Common Starling
Common Tailorbird
Common Woodshrike
Coppersmith Barbet
Crab-plover
Cream-colored Courser
Crested Honey Buzzard
Crested Lark
Crested Serpent Eagle
Crested Treeswift
Curlew Sandpiper
Dalmatian Pelican - VU
Demoiselle Crane
Desert Wheatear
Desert Whitethroat
Dunlin
Dusky Crag Martin
Eastern Cattle Egret
Eastern Imperial Eagle - VU
Eastern Orphean Warbler
Egyptian Vulture - EN
Eurasian Collared Dove
Eurasian Coot
Eurasian Curlew
Eurasian Hoopoe

Eurasian Oystercatcher
Eurasian Sparrowhawk
Eurasian Spoonbill
Eurasian Teal
Eurasian Tree Sparrow
Eurasian Wigeon
Ferruginous Duck
Gadwall
Garganey
Glossy Ibis
Great Cormorant
Great Egret
Great White Pelican
Greater Coucal
Greater Flamingo
Greater Hoopoe-Lark
Greater Sand Plover
Greater Short-toed Lark
Greater Spotted Eagle - VU
Green Bee-eater
Green Sandpiper
Grey Francolin
Grey Heron
Grey Hypocolius
Grey Plover
Grey Wagtail
Grey-breasted Prinia
Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher
Grey-headed Swamphen
Greylag Goose
Grey-necked Bunting
Gull-billed Tern
House Crow
House Sparrow
Hume's Whitethroat
Indian Bush Lark
Indian Cormorant
Indian Eagle-Owl
Indian Nightjar
Indian Peafowl
Indian Pond Heron
Indian Robin
Indian Roller
Indian Silverbill
Indian Spot-billed Duck
Indian Spotted Eagle - VU
Indian Stone-curlew

Intermediate Egret
Isabelline Shrike
Isabelline Wheatear
Jungle Babbler
Jungle Prinia
Kentish Plover
Knob-billed Duck
Large Cuckooshrike
Large Grey Babbler
Large-billed Crow
Laughing Dove
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Lesser Crested Tern
Lesser Flamingo
Lesser Kestrel
Lesser Sand Plover
Lesser Whitethroat
Little Cormorant
Little Egret
Little Grebe
Little Ringed Plover
Little Stint
Little Swift
Long-billed Pipit
Long-legged Buzzard
Long-tailed Shrike
Macqueen's Bustard - VU
Marsh Sandpiper
Marshall's Iora
Montagu's Harrier
Northern Pintail
Northern Shoveler
Oriental Darter
Oriental Magpie-Robin
Oriental Turtle Dove
Oriental White-eye
Pacific Golden Plover
Paddyfield Pipit
Painted Sandgrouse
Painted Stork
Pale Martin
Pallas's Gull
Pallid Harrier
Peregrine Falcon
Pheasant-tailed Jacana
Pied Avocet
Pied Bush Chat

Pied Kingfisher
Plain Prinia
Plum-headed Parakeet
Purple Heron
Purple Sunbird
Purple-rumped Sunbird
Red Knot
Red Turtle Dove
Red-breasted Flycatcher
Red-naped Ibis
Red-rumped Swallow
Red-tailed Wheatear
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
River Tern
Rock Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Rosy Starling
Ruddy Shelduck
Ruff
Rufous Treepie
Rufous-fronted Prinia
Rufous-tailed Lark
Sanderling
Scaly-breasted Munia
Shikra
Short-eared Owl
Short-toed Snake Eagle
Siberian Stonechat
Sirkeer Malkoha
Slender-billed Gull
Small Minivet
Small Pratincole
Southern Grey Shrike
Spotted Dove
Spotted Owlet
Spotted Redshank
Steppe Eagle - EN
Streak-throated Swallow
Sulphur-bellied Warbler
Sykes's Lark
Sykes's Warbler
Tawny Eagle
Tawny Pipit
Temminck's Stint
Terek Sandpiper
Thick-billed Flowerpecker

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher
Tufted Duck
Variable Wheatear
Western Marsh Harrier
Western Reef Heron
Western Yellow Wagtail
Whimbrel
Whiskered Tern
White Wagtail
White-breasted Waterhen
White-browed Fantail
White-browed Wagtail
White-eared Bulbul
White-eyed Buzzard
White-naped Tit - VU
White-tailed Lapwing
White-throated Kingfisher
Wire-tailed Swallow
Wood Sandpiper
Wood Snipe - VU
Woolly-necked Stork - VU
Yellow-crowned Woodpecker
Yellow-eyed Babbler
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon
Yellow-throated Sparrow
Yellow-wattled Lapwing