

ANN AND ROLAND GO BIRDING IN KASHMIR, LADAKH AND RAJASTHAN

JULY 24TH – 13TH AUGUST 2022

Destinations: Delhi, Surajpur, Srinigar, Kargil, Leh, Tso Kar, Khar-Dungla, Jaipur, Ajmer, Sonkhaliya, Bikaner and Tal Chhapper

TRAVEL

We flew with Air France from Manchester - Delhi - Manchester via Paris without any problems. We arranged the internal flights from Delhi to Srinigar and Leh to Delhi ourselves. We flew with SpiceJet and were entirely happy with the experience.

Just for a change, we had no lost/delayed luggage!!

LOGISTICS AND GUIDING

We booked our tour through Asian Adventures, a company we have used before having met Iqbal and Mohit some years ago at the Bird Fair.

Our guides were Deepak Kumar for Kashmir etc and Mahendra Singh in Rajasthan. We already knew Mahendra, a very professional and expert guide but Deepak was new to us. He was also an excellent guide with good background knowledge of the areas we visited and I would be happy to bird with him again.

A note about Asian Adventure: I somehow managed to break my camera up in Leh. When Iqbal learned of this, he immediately contacted me to see how he could help. I was amazed! He actually arranged for Deepak to fly from Leh to Delhi (instead of catching the bus) with my camera and it was then taken to a repair shop. Then another member of the team took the overnight bus to Jaipur and turned up at our hotel at breakfast the next day along with Mahendra and my camera! My face must have been a picture. You can't beat that for service and it wasn't their fault I broke my camera.

ITINERARY

July 24th : Arrive Delhi at 23h29

July 25th : Surajpur visit

July 26th : Fly to Srinigar

July 27th : Srinigar

July 28th : Srinigar

July 29th : Srinigar to Kargil

July 30th : Kargil

July 31st : Kargil to Leh

August 1st : Leh to Tso Kar

August 2nd : Tso Kar

August 3rd : Tso Kar

August 4th : Tso kar to to Khar-Dungla La via Leh

August 5th : Leh to Delhi and drive to Jaipur

August 6th : Jaipur to Ajmer to Sonkhakiya to Ajmer

August 7th : Ajmer to Sonkhaliya to Ajmer

August 9th : Ajmer to Bikaner

August 10th:Bikaner to Tal Chhapper

August 11th : Tal Chhapper

August 12th : Tal Chhapper to Jaipur (PM Safari in Jhalana)

August 13th : AM Safari in jhalana. Jaipur to Delhi

August 14th : Fly home

ACCOMMODATION

Delhi: Hotel Shanti Palace. Close to airport and entirely adequate. Nice restaurant.

Srinigar: Ibrahim Houseboat. We had the best room on the boat ☺ Staying here was a dream come true for me. Loved it apart from them never having made breakfast on time or cooked the evening meal as we had requested.

Kargil: Hotel Kargil. Fantastic! Lovely hotel complete with a bunker! Nice garden. Great buffet meals.

Leh: Mahay Retreat. The hotel was down a quiet road away from the centre but only a 15-20 minute walk away. There was a nice outside seating area in the garden and next to a large flower and vegetable patch. Our room was a good size and very comfortable with views over the gardens and mountains. The bathroom was entirely adequate. We didn't like the food!

Tso Kar: Tso Kar Eco Resort. Probably the best place in town! Smallish room with just 2 single beds and a small table. Fabulous view from window. No shower in bathroom but you wouldn't want one anyway unless you were a Finn! Glacial water!!! The food was pretty basic (vegetarian) but tasty and the chai was plentiful. Lovely staff ☺

Jaipur: Hotel Umaid Mahal: Fantastic! Very swish and we had a superb large room on our first stay. A much smaller one on the second. Very comfortable with all we needed and the restaurant served some lovely food. There was some evening entertainment from local traditional musicians and dancers ☺ Lovely staff.

Ajmer: Hotel Master Paradise. We didn't stay in Ajmer. We stayed in Pushkar, 120 kms away. It was a 3 hour drive and we were fuming because we had to finish birding early and weren't told about the stupidly long drive. The restaurant at the hotel was total rubbish. Our room was ok. Can't comment on the bathroom. Just fell into bed for a few hours sleep before we had to get up again for another 3 hour drive back to Sonkhakiya without even a hot drink or anything to eat. Fortunately, Mahendra had already contacted Asian Adventures who were able to get us into the Clark Hotel for the next 2 nights.

Bandanwara: Clark's Hotel. A new, 5 star hotel. Very nice indeed with lovely rooms (lots of toiletries etc). Swimming pools looked very inviting especially when it was 41 degrees outside but for the first time ever, I didn't bring a swimming costume! The downside was the awful loud piped music in the corridors until 23h00 though they did turn it off when we complained! The service in the restaurant was also appalling with food arriving cold, not cooked as requested or not arriving at all!

Bikaner: The Lallgarh Palace. Wow! What a place to stay! A real palace! Loved it but sadly we only stayed for one night and didn't get to visit the museum, see the swimming pool or fully visit the grounds.

Tal Chapper: Raptors Inn Homestay. Described as being basic but was far from it! We were in the new part and had a lovely room and en-suite bathroom. Everything had been well thought out with plenty of sockets, shelves, a place to work and a wardrobe. The food was plain but plentiful and the porridge was delicious. They even had Mazza!! ☺

DIARY

JULY 24TH Travel. No problems. Immigration at Delhi fairly quick. Deepak and driver waiting for us outside with Asian Adventures goody bags. Off to Shanti Palace for a few hours sleep.

JULY 25th DAY ONE. Set off for Surajpur at 5 stopping on the way for some quite productive roadside wetland birding with 37 different species noted plus 5-striped Palm squirrels and a few Little grey mongoose. Lots of *Pheasant-tailed jacanas* looking splendid and *Grey-headed Swamphens* everywhere. Excellent views of *Black Bittern* and *Black-breasted weaver*, (L) ☺ Chai and breakfast next: bananas and samosas then off to the Bird Sanctuary where it was getting decidedly warm now the clouds had cleared. We tried and tried without success for the *Bristled grassbird* but there was

neither sight nor sound of one and whilst *Common hawk cuckoos* were very vocal, they were very difficult to see. Excellent close up views of a *Shikra* perched right in front of us! We then birded along the road outside where we got our second lifer of the day: *Striated babbler* ☺ *Black francolin* were calling but we only caught a glimpse of one.

Our lovely driver, Piwan, was also a birder and joined us on our walks which was great and we were pleased when he said he would also be our driver in Rajasthan ☺

Roland and I had a quick lunch in Delhi before being dropped back at the hotel in the late afternoon. We had a bit of a walk but there's not much to see round there and we got fed-up being hassled by the children so we just bought water and went back. There were lots more noisy pilgrims now – we had seen some during the day and whilst some were making the journey to the Ganges for Holy Water on foot, there seemed to be many more on lorries with massive speakers belting out Bangla and definitely in the party spirit.

Ate at the hotel restaurant which was very good though the portions were small.

Ashy Prinia

Asian Green Bee-eater

Asian Koel

Asian Openbill

Bank Myna

Barn Swallow

Bengal Bush Lark

Black Bittern

Black Drongo

Black Francolin

Black Kite

Black-breasted Weaver

Black-crowned Night Heron

Black-headed Ibis

Black-winged Stilt

Blue-tailed Bee-eater

Bronze-winged Jacana

Brown Rock Chat

Common Hawk-Cuckoo

Common Moorhen

Common Myna

Common Tailorbird

Eastern Cattle Egret

Eurasian Collared Dove

Eurasian Hoopoe

Eurasian Teal

Glossy Ibis

Greater Coucal

Grey-headed Swamphen

Grey-throated Martin

House Crow

House Sparrow

Indian Peafowl

Indian Pied Myna

Indian Pond Heron

Indian Robin

Indian Spot-billed Duck

Knob-billed Duck

Laughing Dove
Little Cormorant
Little Egret
Pheasant-tailed Jacana
Pied Bush Chat
Plain Prinia
Purple Heron
Purple Sunbird
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Scaly-breasted Munia
Shikra
Spotted Owlet
Streaked Weaver
Striated Babbler
Tricolored Munia
White-breasted Waterhen
White-throated Kingfisher
Wire-tailed Swallow
Wood Sandpiper
Zitting Cisticola

JULY 26th. DAY TWO. Off to Srinigar. No problems. No photographs allowed from the air or in the airport though the planeload of soldiers were busy taking numerous selfies there.

We had to register before we left the building and our driver, Macboul, was waiting for us outside with his very comfortable car. The sky was blue and it was hot, hot, hot!

Lunch at the Stream restaurant which was supposed to be a very good. Big portions but not at all spicy ☺ and swimming in ghee ☺

Next stop: Shankaracharya Temple. 245 steps but I made it to the top ☺ Just. The temple itself was very small and you weren't supposed to take photos but apparently it doesn't count if you use your mobile phone ;) We went down some steps to another shrine, pausing for photos of the fantastic view on the way and then made our way back to the car. A bit of roadside birding further down got us our 3 target birds: *Kashmiri*, *Slaty-blue* and *Rusty-tailed flycatchers*. ☺

Back down by the lakes, we had a short walk looking for and finding *Clamorous reed warbler*. Amazing views as it circled us!! We also paused to watch a *Pied kingfisher* doing a bit of fishing, had distant views of *Little bittern* and admired the *Whiskered terns* in full breeding plumage.

Off to our houseboat next. I was initially disappointed to learn that it wasn't on Dal lake and the walk to it was a through a rather scruffy looking area – hardly unusual ;) – but Nigeen Lake was absolutely the right place to be ☺ It was so peaceful, the water was cleaner and the reflections of the willow and poplar trees in the still water were stunning. Throw in a beautiful sunset just for good measure and the result was stunning. ☺ *Little grebes* with chicks in the foreground, *Whiskered terns* fishing, The idyll was spoiled by the evening meal and Spice Jet cancelling our flight from Leh but our room was lovely and we were soon booked onto an earlier flight And so to bed.

Black Bulbul
Black Kite
Clamorous Reed Warbler
Common Kingfisher
Common Moorhen
Common Myna

House Crow
House Sparrow
Indian Pond Heron
Kashmir Flycatcher - VU
Large-billed Crow
Little Bittern
Little Egret
Little Grebe
Pied Kingfisher
Rock Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Rusty-tailed Flycatcher
Slaty-blue Flycatcher
Whiskered Tern
White-throated Kingfisher

JULY 27TH DAY THREE.

Breakfast should have been at 4h30 but the houseboy was still asleep so we ate the fruit on the table and then it was a mad dash when he finally woke up at ten to five!

Our destination today was Dulmarg and it had obviously rained a lot overnight nearby as there were big puddles everywhere. It was quite a long drive but very interesting and we made only one stop when Deepak spotted a *Rock bunting* by the roadside. We also saw *Blue rock thrush* and *Streaked laughing thrush* here. Quite cool. Onwards and upwards to Little Switzerland (I don't think they would be pleased there with the comparison) and I shouted to stop for *Yellow-billed blue magpie* but we didn't. ☹️ Deepak explained that they were very common and we would see loads. Our hearts sank – you know for sure when a bird guide says that, you won't see any! And we didn't. Lifer too.

It was 6h50 when we stopped for a walk. We couldn't take the scope because of the army presence and CCTV. Basically, we took our time walking along looking for anything that called or moved. All very pleasant but also very quiet, cloudy and a bit chilly. We had one small feeding party and eventually stopped for a tea break with Macboul – he had brought home made Kashmiri tea and some local bread with him. The tea was delicious 😊 More walking, a little bit of sun and then much low cloud ☹️ so we went into "town" for a brew. There was a lake there with a small funfair, lots of alpine meadows, a golf course and a variety of shops, cafes and small hotels. It was hardly picturesque but I am sure that it's a different story in winter with all the snow. Anyway, it was a fairly popular spot and there were plenty of people enjoying the horse rides, especially the small group we came across earlier!! Suitably refreshed, we returned to our walk until lunchtime when we returned to the village and had lunch at the Bakshi Hotel where the owner insisted on us eating Kashmiri food which we were happy to comply with. By this time it had started bucketing it down and the whole area quickly turned into a quagmire with tourists scurrying all over the place seeking shelter. It had just about stopped when we left (without seeing the magpies in the alpine meadows) and the sun came out. We stopped at a couple of viewpoints on the way back and at an apple orchard for chai and for me to buy apples. Our next stop was at a Kashmiri craft place recommended by Macboul but it was just like the ones in Goa really. They did have some lovely pashminas though. Tea and dried fruit shop next. Not a happy experience ☹️ Off to a small supermarket – couldn't get moth balls but did get some Taj Mahal teabags! When we came out it was thundering, lightning and lashing it down. Water, water everywhere. Fortunately, it had more-or-less stopped by the time we got back to our houseboat. We couldn't sit outside though because everywhere was soaking wet and the new guests were very rude and loud. Tea was awful and swimming in ghee which was most definitely not what we had requested.

Despite the slowness of the birding and not the best conditions, we notched up 31 species today, 24 of which were new for the trip and 8 were lifers 😊

We saw more 5 striped squirrels of course and Rufous macaques in the village.

Bar-tailed Treecreeper

Black Kite

Black-and-yellow Grosbeak

Blue Whistling Thrush

Chestnut Thrush

Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush

Coal Tit

Collared Owlet

Common Myna

Dark-sided Flycatcher

Himalayan Woodpecker

House Crow

House Sparrow

Kashmir Nutcracker

Kashmir Nuthatch

Large-billed Crow

Lemon-rumped Warbler

Long-tailed Minivet

Oriental Turtle Dove

Rock Bunting

Rock Dove

Rufous-naped Tit

Russet Sparrow

Slaty-headed Parakeet

Streaked Laughingthrush

Variiegated Laughingthrush

Western Crowned Warbler

Western Jackdaw

Whiskered Tern

White-cheeked Nuthatch

Yellow-billed Blue Magpie

JULY 28TH DAY FOUR

Rain, rain, rain overnight and still raining when we got up. No breakfast. Houseboy still asleep. Swore he was awake but thought we wouldn't be going out because it was raining. Eventually got some tea and hard boiled eggs which we put in our pockets as they were so hot – unfortunately, they were not hard boiled as promised ☹️ Set off at 6 and the rain had almost stopped by the time we got to Dachigam. There was already another birding group there but we let them go first then followed on at our leisure. Our first birds were a group of noisy *Yellow-billed blue magpies* ☺️ Again, the birding was quiet but we went a little further up from the park (we had permission) and were lucky enough to see a Himalayan brown bear with 2 cubs and a few Kashmiri deer ☺️. I had no idea they were so small! Some Himalayan grey langurs crossing the river using trees watched us warily – very nervous and what magnificent males! Unfortunately, we dipped on *Plumbeous redstart* and *Little forktail* because there was too much water in the rivers but *Chestnut-eared bunting* made up for that. We visited the zoo before leaving but they only had a leopard and a couple of bears.

Lunch at Lazeez followed and very good it was too.

Time now to bird behind a small temple at Sharab Kul but only after drinking tea together ☺️. Got to get those priorities right! Our targets were *European bee-eater* and *European goldfinch*. An amazing spot by Deepak got us the bee-eaters but we dipped on the goldfinch though we could have walked further up to look for it. Then we had an invasion of *Common starlings*!

The weather was lovely as we went back to the boat via an ATM. You can't use foreign credit cards in Kashmir, Leh, Ladakh etc and we had to pay for most of our meals ourselves so needed plenty of cash. It was really hot as we sat out drinking tea on our houseboat and our host ordered a Shakira for us as promised. Off we went for a romantic hour long sail when all of a sudden a bloke in a boat appeared trying to flog trinkets! Soon got rid of him and instructed the boatman to shoo away any others thinking of disturbing us. Lovely views of the mountains and also of an Indian lady waterskiing in full garb having a whale of a time ☺

Tea was better tonight but not exactly good.

Ashy Drongo

Barn Swallow

Black Bulbul

Black Kite

Black-crowned Night Heron

Brown-flanked Bush Warbler

Chestnut-eared Bunting

Cinereous Tit

Common Kingfisher

Common Moorhen

Common Myna

Common Starling

European Bee-eater

Green-backed Tit

Himalayan Bulbul

Himalayan Woodpecker

House Crow

House Sparrow

Hume's Leaf Warbler

Indian Pond Heron

Large-billed Crow

Little Egret

Little Grebe

Long-tailed Shrike

Mallard

Oriental Turtle Dove

Pied Kingfisher

Rock Dove

Rose-ringed Parakeet

Streaked Laughingthrush

Tickell's Thrush

Tytler's Leaf Warbler

Ultramarine Flycatcher

Western Crowned Warbler

Western Jackdaw

Whiskered Tern

Yellow-billed Blue Magpie

JULY 29TH DAY FIVE

Deepak wanted an early start as we had to drive to Kargil but guess what? No breakfast. Still asleep. There were soldiers every 20' this morning as lots of pilgrims would be travelling to Amarnath where there is an ice lingam in a cave (Shri Amarnath). There were lots of soldiers all along our

route through Kashmir with a greater presence in all the villages we went through. You certainly wouldn't want to tangle with them especially when you looked at their weapons!

We stopped at Gagangir for a rather horrid walk through mud and cow pats birding in front of shepherds' houses which seemed a bit intrusive and seeing very little, not even at the waterfall – just a *Blue whistling thrush* - probably too much water. One of the shepherds showed us a much easier way down ☺ What a hard life these people must lead, especially in winter. All we saw was a *Plumbeous water redstart* as we crossed the bridge then *Cinereous tits* and glimpses of *Indian blue robin*. Interesting though. Macboul had rung Deepak because we were taking too long so we had to hurry back but then he produced tea and seemed in no hurry to leave. Strange because we had to get to the start of the pass before 10. Something to do with the lorries. So off we went again. At speed. Before long, in the middle of a vast area of mud and roadworks, we were stopped and told to pull over and park up. And there we sat, in the middle of nowhere for six and a half hours. Apparently, there had been a landslide but communications were poor and no-one really seemed to know what was going on. The only bright point was when an ice-cream seller on a bike braved the rain and mud and stopped close by. Naturally, we bobbed across and availed ourselves of some refreshment. Delicious – strawberry kulfi lolly and a magnum type ice-cream set us back less than a quid. Bargain. ☺ Should have had 2 each at that price! Enterprising little boys living in roadside tents started going up and down the lines of cars peddling chai and they were soon joined by adults who later appeared with crisps, apples, shawls etc etc! It helped pass the time as did a bit of birding which added to our list for the day: *Black redstart*, *Citrine wagtail*, *Eurasian hoopoe*, *Rock bunting*, *Siberian stonechat* Bit difficult to find a wee spot though. Alright for the men When they opened the road there was a bit of a cheer went up but by that time many people had turned round and gone back the way they had come.

Fantastic scenery on the way to the Zoji La Pass - 28.5kms of unsurfaced road, only wide enough for a car in places, classed as one of the world's most dangerous roads, sheer drops, no crash barriers.....good job I didn't know all this beforehand! We made it to Point Zero (3,528m – 11,575') and stopped for photos and very expensive chai – 50/- each, toilets 20/- unless you were a man and nipped behind the tent! No time to admire the shawls or local dresses, off we went again at breakneck speed only stopping briefly for *Red-billed chough* and Long-tailed marmot. It was certainly an “exciting” drive

Next stop was as we crossed into Ladakh where we had to register and fill in more forms. We were supposed to be visiting the War Memorial at Drass but didn't have time – there was a sign saying “Second coldest inhabited town in the world”. Dread to think what it's like in winter ☹ It was just after 8.00pm when we finally arrived at our hotel in Kargil and Macboul was keen for us to get our stuff out of the car quickly, give him his tip and set off back home. As he was a Kashmiri driver, he could not drive us in Ladakh. I did not envy him having to drive back over the pass or indeed any of that road in the dark especially after such a stressful day.

The hotel was fantastic and as we hadn't eaten since breakfast, we fully appreciated the tasty buffet even though it was a little depleted by that time.

Black Kite

Black Redstart

Blue Whistling Thrush

Cinereous Tit

Citrine Wagtail

Common Moorhen

Common Myna

Eurasian Hoopoe

Eurasian Magpie

House Crow

House Sparrow

Indian Blue Robin

Indian Pond Heron
Large-billed Crow
Little Grebe
Long-tailed Minivet
Plumbeous Water Redstart
Red-billed Chough
Rock Bunting
Rock Dove
Siberian Stonechat
Western Crowned Warbler
Western Jackdaw
Whiskered Tern
White Wagtail
White-throated Kingfisher

JULY 30TH DAY SIX

Lovely buffet breakfast at 7. Nice garden outside. Sun shining and lovely blue sky. Just beautiful ☺
Our driver today was Hussein. He didn't speak much English but had a lovely smile. Our destination was allegedly Handerman Village, one of the northernmost villages in India on the banks of the Drass River. It was under Pakistan control from 1947 until 1971. We only went to the viewpoint though and had the border pointed out to us with an explanation of the Kargil War. We then hurtled back to Kargil and into the countryside beyond to see the Nun and Kun glaciers. It was a long, bone-shaking journey with one brief stop at a police checkpoint in Ttaisura where we had our papers verified and drank chai in the café next door. It was all very scenic and we were very taken by the irregular shaped fields and the patterns they made but we weren't seeing any birds! We eventually stopped again at the last village, Parkarchik, where we had some delicious Rajma at the Glacier View Hot Tea Stall. The drive back along different roads wasn't quite as bad as the way there but we were pretty fed up well until we made a detour to see the 7m tall carved Maitreya Buddha at Karste Khar on the banks of the Karste River before returning to Kargil.

A 200km drive was absolutely not what we had expected of today and though the scenery was fantastic and the villages interesting we couldn't always stop for the photos we wanted and didn't stop for any birds except for the first *Oriental turtle dove* –we passed lots!!

We bobbed out to the market after dinner but practically everywhere was closed by then. We did manage to buy some of the famous Kargil apricots though. Small, but very tasty.

Black Redstart
Blue Rock Thrush
Blue Whistling Thrush
Cinereous Tit
Eurasian Magpie
House Sparrow
Oriental Turtle Dove
Red-billed Chough
Rock Dove

JULY 31ST DAY SEVEN

A lovely breakfast again but it was grey, cloudy and VERY windy out.

We were expecting our first stop to be Mulbekh Monastery but we sailed right past stopping further on by the 30' high limestone sculpture of Maitreya Buddha carved into the rock face. You used to be able to see it in its entirety from the road but a small monastery has been built at the base so it's not as easy to see.

Our second stop was on the Namika La Pass, at a height of 3,7700m and our third stop was at Fotu La which at 13,478 ' or 4,108m surpasses Zoji La. It was somewhat breezy up there but not too cold. Our fourth stop was at the Lamayuru Monastery which was fantastic! It is a living monastery and very beautiful though small and I would have loved to have videoed the monks and their pupils playing the most wonderful music but photography was not allowed. Understandably. Fortified by chai, we regained our vehicle and set off for lunch but not before an emergency stop for *Eurasian hobby* and to look at the Moon landscape which was rather special.

Magnetic Mountain next – the only hill in India which has this magnetic effect. You park your car within a marked box on the road, switch off the engine and the car will move on its own! Apparently aeroplanes are affected too as they fly over and the pilot has to increase the speed to counteract the jerks.

Just beyond here lies the beautiful Gurudwara Pathar Sahib, a Sikh sahib with a fascinating background Very interesting – free chai and snacks too.

Further down, we stopped at a lake as there were some waterfowl on it – unfortunately, as I got out of the car, my camera preceded me. Oops. It seemed to be still working but it soon transpired that it was well and truly broken. ☹️ *Hulme's whitethroat, Common moorhen, Eurasian coot, Little grebe, Mallard* were seen here.

We still had another stop to make at the Hall of Fame and War Memorial. Expensive and we were running short of time but it was all very interesting and well-presented, especially the War Memorial itself.

And so to our hotel just outside Leh. We had plenty of energy left to go exploring before dinner. Full of tourists and tourist shops – all very samey.

*The scenery today really blew us away. Again!

*Deepak was very excited when he spotted Blue sheep today. So were we! These Bharal are not sheep, but caprine which means goat.

Alpine Chough

Blue Rock Thrush

Common Moorhen

Eurasian Coot

Eurasian Hobby

Eurasian Magpie

Hill Pigeon

House Sparrow

Hume's Whitethroat

Large-billed Crow

Little Grebe

Mallard

Mountain Chiffchaff

Oriental Turtle Dove

Rock Dove

AUGUST 1st DAY EIGHT

After an early buffet breakfast we went out into the sunshine behind the Shanti Stupa. It was very pleasant and quite warm with a goodly number of birds bobbing about. The best ones were the *Fire-fronted serin* ☺ and the *Chukkar partridge* with chicks. So cute and what stunning markings on the adults. ☺ We also had great views of Long-eared pika, a lifer!

Our next spot was down by the river (Pahalgam). We were stopped on the way by a gentleman giving out free bottles of water near the mosque because it was the first day of Muharam, the first month of the Islamic calendar and a month of remembrance. It was a lovely spot and Deepak quickly spotted a pair of *Ibisbill* in the swollen river. Hussein went off to get our passports back while we were there – we had had to request permits for entry into Tso Kar. Off we went again and after a

quick chai stop and for something to do with the permits we set off for Thiksay Monastery suddenly coming to a halt – something joyful was happening – and it transpired that the Dalai Lama was there! We waited while he drove past slowly. Not a good view, but we saw him! And Roland got a short video ☺

Thiksay is one of the largest monasteries in Ladakh and dating from 1430. It is situated on a hillock overlooking the Indus Valley. Our first views of it were very impressive. The monastery is built over 12 storeys, has 12 stupas and contains many beautiful and interesting statues and other Buddhist artifacts. The 49' high Maitreya Statue is stunning. ☺ There are fantastic panoramic views over the valley and cold Leh deserts.

Back on the road we stopped to watch *Desert wheatear* jumping from stone to stone – maybe playing King of the Castle? ;) - and later for our very first views of Wild asses. Beautiful!

As we stopped for lunch in Kharu, Rajma again, Roland discovered he still had our room key in his pocket Fortunately we would be going back there on the 4th

Needless to say, we were driving through indescribably beautiful scenery as we travelled on to the checkpoint at Upshi where the official was very officious! Very picky and trying to find fault with our passes but we were eventually allowed to carry on, thank goodness. A little further on, in Upshi itself, we stopped and Deepak said to get out and grab some tea and something to eat. It turned out that it was all free because the townsfolk were so happy that the Dalai Lama was visiting Ladakh for a month, that they had closed all the shops and restaurants and this was their celebration. Very nice it was too and the ladies were very friendly.

Suitably refreshed we continued along the Lel- Manali highway stopping at the start of the Taglangla Pass by a river where we were hoping to see a *White-throated dipper* but although he wasn't there, we did see a very confiding *Black-winged snowfinch* ☺

We finally arrived at the top of the Taglangla Pass around 17h15. At 17,582', this is the second highest motorable pass in the world. Fortunately, it wasn't very windy and not too cold so we could take our time over the photos, meeting some lovely Indians and sharing our stories.

Time now to head down to Tso Kar a fluctuating salt lake known for its size and depth situated in the Rupshu Plateau and valley, dominated by the peaks of two mountains, Thugje (6050 m) and Gursan (6370 m) Driving into the "village" was a bit depressing with all the tumbledown stone-built dwellings, a few cafes and a couple of tented areas then we got to our Eco-resort which looked ok – a longish low whitewashed building for the rooms and a separate restaurant.

Chai time, dinner was later. Vegetarian but tasty and we even got a dessert which is pretty unusual. A bit cold by now and we were glad of the thick blankets on our bed. Not a sound outside. Bliss.

During the course of the day we also made stops for:

- 3 Chukkars with lots of chicks ☺ We saw 5 more later in the day.
- Himalayan marmot (lifer)
- Lammergeier x2 flying to a nest with 1 young in it
- Horned lark
- Tibetan snowcock
- More wild ass c20
- Blue sheep closer up c30
- Pika
- Sangam Point where the Indus meets the Sanskar River, you can try out the world's highest rafting area, 12,000. Didn't look at all inviting to me. Looked downright dangerous.

* This morning I saw a signpost to the Invisible Village. It's not actually invisible and is called Zbavul. It got its name because in 1948 when India was fighting Pakistan in Kashmir, the Pakistani army reached this village but bypassed it completely because it was hidden behind a gorge with just one access point and was invisible to them.

*Hussein had to leave us at this point and we would have a different driver in the morning – Tondup who was very nice but spoke only a little english.

Bearded Vulture

Black Redstart
Black-winged Snowfinch
Bluethroat
Chukar Partridge
Citrine Wagtail
Common House Martin
Common Rosefinch
Common Swift
Desert Wheatear
Eurasian Crag Martin
Eurasian Hoopoe
Eurasian Magpie
Hill Pigeon
Horned Lark
House Sparrow
Hume's Whitethroat
Ibisbill
Large-billed Crow
Mallard
Mountain Chiffchaff
Oriental Turtle Dove
Pallas's Gull
Red-fronted Serin
Robin Accentor
Rock Bunting
Rock Dove
Tibetan Snowcock
White Wagtail

AUGUST 2ND DAY NINE

It was definitely chilly when we got up and the tap water was even chillier.

Not much warmer in the restaurant but by the time we set off at 6h45 the sun was shining brightly in a beautiful azur sky. We drove down the road a little looking at this and that (Red fox , *Blandford's snowfinch* ...) then walked across the "marsh" to the saline lake – much smaller at this time of year – and Deepak flushed all the waders. Walking a kilometre tuft to tuft at altitude was tiring and I was sweltering in all my layers! After walking back we drove to a deserted village – just a scattering of shepherds' homes, really and a sparkling stream. Fabulous reflections of the mountains in the lake. From here we walked to the *Saker* roost but he wasn't at home ☹ Our lifers this morning were *Blandford snowfinch*, *Great rosefinch* and *Hulme's short-toed lark*. We saw a few *Black-necked crane* but at scoping distance as were the birds on the lake.

Lunch was followed by a rest then we spent the rest of the day doing some fat birding (walk a bit, drive a bit). Our target was *Tibetan sandgrouse* but we were unsuccessful. I did enjoy the little walk near a grassy area which had lots of pretty flowers, Woolly hare, Ladakh pika and lots of small birds bobbing about. We also had good views of *Northern raven* and *Upland buzzard*. A great day ☺

Bar-headed Goose
Black Redstart
Black-necked Crane
Black-winged Snowfinch
Blanford's Snowfinch
Brandt's Mountain Finch
Brown-headed Gull

Citrine Wagtail
Common Greenshank
Common Kestrel
Common Moorhen
Common Redshank
Common Swift
Desert Wheatear
Eurasian Coot
Garganey
Great Crested Grebe
Great Rosefinch
Green Sandpiper
Ground Tit
Hill Pigeon
Horned Lark
House Sparrow
Hume's Short-toed Lark
Lesser Sand Plover
Little Grebe
Little Stint
Northern Raven
Red-fronted Rosefinch
Ruddy Shelduck
Saker Falcon - EN
Streaked Rosefinch

AUGUST 3RD DAY TEN

Gosh, the water this morning was even colder! Absolutely glacial!

We spent the whole morning looking for *Tibetan sandgrouse* in various areas, starting over by the freshwater lake. Another stunningly beautiful day and equally as warm as yesterday. Even better reflections of the scenery in the still lakes. Although we had been told to disregard the little birds, we did stop for photos of a very confiding *Northern raven*, *Upland buzzard*, Wild asses and *Saker falcon*. We also went up to the small monastery but unfortunately, it was closed. A great morning. Loved the stillness, the beauty, the pure air, that blue sky 😊

For lunch we had Ladakh toupca and Deepak made us his signature dish, vegetarian kedgerie. 😊

We went out again at 4 looking for that dratted sandgrouse but no matter how hard we looked or how much ground we covered, we couldn't find one. Deepak wanted to try again tomorrow morning but we told him to bog off with that. This was one lifer we would just have to dip on. We had already driven 91 kms today looking for it, often driving in circles, enough was enough.

Black Redstart
Black-necked Crane
Black-winged Snowfinch
Blanford's Snowfinch
Brandt's Mountain Finch
Brown-headed Gull
Common Redshank
Common Tern
Desert Wheatear
Eurasian Hoopoe
Great Rosefinch
Ground Tit

Hill Pigeon
Horned Lark
House Sparrow
Hume's Short-toed Lark
Lesser Sand Plover
Northern Raven
Saker Falcon - EN
Twite
Upland Buzzard

AGUST 4TH DAY ELEVEN

It felt a lot warmer when we got up this morning ☺

Another beautiful day but sadly, time to leave.

Deepak wanted to go looking for *Tibetan sandgrouse* again but we insisted on leaving right after breakfast. We thought they must have moved away from the area so off we went in the sunshine. We stopped a few times – once for Tibetan wolf ☺ and later for a *Ladakh pica* gathering nesting material by the roadside until he was frightened away by someone who didn't understand what he was doing. The views of course were beautiful and then we came across a herd of Pashmina goats on the roadside but they went down the slope before I could grab a photo. When we stopped to look for *White-throated dipper* in the river, there were another 2 flocks so I managed pictures and a short video. ☺ The dipper was eventually spotted briefly as he flew downstream. Our next stop was in Karu for chai and we broke for lunch in Leh. We got dropped off there and arranged to meet later. We soon found a restaurant where we could get a thali and tandoori chicken and even had time for me to nip into a shop to buy a rather nice bright red gilet for about £7! ☺

Time now to go to the top of the Umling La Pass, allegedly the highest motorable pass in the world. What a climb with those hairpin bends and more splendid scenery. It was quite warm at the top where oxygen levels are reportedly about 50% less than at sea level. No wonder I had wobbly knees but a trip to the World's Highest Café and a fortifying cup of chai soon steadied them. We then had fun taking photos and I got chatting to some Indians who had motorbikes with a sun-roof over them! They were You tubers so I am on there with them ☺ fame at last! Maybe ;) After a bit of birding: *Lammergeier*, *Red* and *Yellow-billed chough*, *Himalayan vulture* we had to leave though stopped at a couple of viewpoints on the way down. We arrived at our hotel in Leh around 5 so had time to walk into town where I wanted to buy apricots and a t-shirt . We sat outside drinking Mazza afterwards, watching the setting sun with Deepak and completing our last bird list with him.

Alpine Chough
Bearded Vulture
Black Redstart
Black-winged Snowfinch
Brandt's Mountain Finch
Chukar Partridge
Common Kestrel
Desert Wheatear
Eurasian Magpie
Ground Tit
Güldenstädt's Redstart
Hill Pigeon
Himalayan Vulture
Horned Lark
House Sparrow
Northern Raven
Red-billed Chough

Rock Dove
White-throated Dipper

**FULL LIST OF BURDS SEEN WITH DEEPAK
125 SPECIES OF WHICH 21 WERE LIFERS
SURAJPUR**

Ashy Prinia
Asian Green Bee-eater
Asian Koel
Asian Openbill
Bank Myna
Barn Swallow
Bengal Bush Lark
Black Bittern
Black Drongo
Black Francolin
Black Kite
Black-breasted Weaver
Black-crowned Night Heron
Black-headed Ibis
Black-winged Stilt
Blue-tailed Bee-eater
Bronze-winged Jacana
Brown Rock Chat
Common Hawk-Cuckoo
Common Moorhen
Common Myna
Common Tailorbird
Eastern Cattle Egret
Eurasian Collared Dove
Eurasian Hoopoe
Eurasian Teal
Glossy Ibis
Greater Coucal
Grey-headed Swamphen
Grey-throated Martin
House Crow
House Sparrow
Indian Peafowl
Indian Pied Myna
Indian Pond Heron
Indian Robin
Indian Spot-billed Duck
Knob-billed Duck
Laughing Dove
Little Cormorant
Little Egret
Pheasant-tailed Jacana
Pied Bush Chat
Plain Prinia

Purple Heron
Purple Sunbird
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Scaly-breasted Munia
Shikra
Spotted Owlet
Streaked Weaver
Striated Babbler
Tricolored Munia
White-breasted Waterhen
White-throated Kingfisher
Wire-tailed Swallow
Wood Sandpiper
Zitting Cisticola

KASHMIR, LEH, LADAKH

Alpine Chough
Ashy Drongo
Bar-headed Goose
Barn Swallow
Bar-tailed Treecreeper
Bearded Vulture
Black Bulbul
Black Kite
Black Redstart
Black-and-yellow Grosbeak
Black-crowned Night Heron
Black-necked Crane
Black-winged Snowfinch
Blanford's Snowfinch
Blue Rock Thrush
Blue Whistling Thrush
Bluethroat
Brandt's Mountain Finch
Brown-flanked Bush Warbler
Brown-headed Gull
Chestnut Thrush
Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush
Chestnut-eared Bunting
Chukar Partridge
Cinereous Tit
Citrine Wagtail
Clamorous Reed Warbler
Coal Tit
Collared Owlet
Common Greenshank
Common House Martin
Common Kestrel

Common Kingfisher
Common Moorhen
Common Myna
Common Redshank
Common Rosefinch
Common Starling
Common Swift
Common Tern
Dark-sided Flycatcher
Desert Wheatear
Eurasian Coot
Eurasian Crag Martin
Eurasian Hobby
Eurasian Hoopoe
Eurasian Magpie
European Bee-eater
Garganey
Great Crested Grebe
Great Rosefinch
Green Sandpiper
Green-backed Tit
Ground Tit
Güldenstädt's Redstart
Hill Pigeon
Himalayan Bulbul
Himalayan Vulture
Himalayan Woodpecker
Horned Lark
House Crow
House Sparrow
Hume's Leaf Warbler
Hume's Short-toed Lark
Hume's Whitethroat
Ibisbill
Indian Blue Robin
Indian Pond Heron
Kashmir Flycatcher - VU
Kashmir Nutcracker
Kashmir Nuthatch
Large-billed Crow
Lemon-rumped Warbler
Lesser Sand Plover
Little Bittern
Little Egret
Little Grebe
Little Stint
Long-tailed Minivet
Long-tailed Shrike
Mallard
Mountain Chiffchaff
Northern Raven

Oriental Turtle Dove
Pallas's Gull
Pied Kingfisher
Plumbeous Water Redstart
Red-billed Chough
Red-fronted Rosefinch
Red-fronted Serin
Robin Accentor
Rock Bunting
Rock Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Ruddy Shelduck
Rufous-naped Tit
Russet Sparrow
Rusty-tailed Flycatcher
Saker Falcon - EN
Siberian Stonechat
Slaty-blue Flycatcher
Slaty-headed Parakeet
Streaked Laughingthrush
Streaked Rosefinch
Tibetan Snowcock
Tickell's Thrush
Tufted Duck
Twite
Tytler's Leaf Warbler
Ultramarine Flycatcher
Upland Buzzard
Variiegated Laughingthrush
Western Crowned Warbler
Western Jackdaw
Whiskered Tern
White Wagtail
White-cheeked Nuthatch
White-throated Dipper
White-throated Kingfisher
Wire-tailed Swallow
Yellow-billed Blue Magpie

AUGUST 5TH DAY TWELVE

An early start to get to the airport 3 hours before our flight. We thought 2 hours would be sufficient but Deepak insisted on three so off we went and said our goodbyes and thank yous to him before joining the queue outside. Security check on the way in ☺ When we eventually got in we had to join the queue for a more thorough baggage check but when we got to the front we were sent away because we were too early. ☺ All went well at check-in thanks to our upgraded seats and boarding went ok despite the bus. No problems with the flight or in Delhi. Our driver, Hussein, was waiting for us at the exit. We were expecting to see Piwan, who had been our very first driver and who had said he would be with us in Rajasthan. Change of plan obviously. Hussein's car was absolutely spotless and so comfortable. He was also a very polite and considerate driver, stopping for lunch somewhere clean and again later when asked to do so. When we stopped for the Amber Fort which we opted not to visit again, he wouldn't let me cross the road on my own but insisted on holding my

hand! We had lots of monsoon rain on the journey to Jaipur and lots of flooding to contend with but it was even worse for travellers in the opposite direction ☹

We picked Mahendra up outside the Wind Palace and went off to our lovely hotel together but once we were booked in, they went off and left us to enjoy the rest of the day together.

No bird list today. We only saw a few common birds whilst travelling and *Black kites* in Jaipur.

AUGUST 6TH DAY THIRTEEN

Breakfast then off to Ajmer with yet another driver, Jaipal, who told me he was from near Bharatpur and Mahendra's best friend.

IT was a lovely, fine day and we only stopped twice, once for toilets and chai and once for lunch near Bandanwara where we were introduced to some *Lesser Florican* researchers. There was also another Asian Adventures group there but they weren't very friendly. Their driver though came over to chat and it was Piwan, who took us to Surajpur. We picked up a young lad Mahendra knew who was going to take us to see *Lesser Florican*. We did a bit of birding in the fields first (by heck, it was hot) and then had our first sighting of our bird. He was rather distant so only scope views. We tried to get closer but he had been flushed by other groups. Happy to see him though and also with the *Rain* and *Rock bush quails* ☺ It was only about 5 but we were told it was time to go to our hotel which we understood to be in Ajmer which was not exactly close but we had assumed there were no decent hotels nearby. Not the case but off we went and 2 hours later were still on our way It took THREE hours to get to our hotel in PUSHKAR, 120 kms away!! I was livid as we were supposed to be staying here for 3 nights and I had no desire whatsoever to spend six hours every day driving backwards and forwards. Roland wasn't best pleased either. We left it in Mahendra's capable hands and went off for one of the worst meals ever.

Asian Green Bee-eater

Barred Buttonquail

Black Drongo

Black-crowned Night Heron

Black-winged Stilt

Common Chiffchaff

Common Myna

Common Woodshrike

Eastern Cattle Egret

Eurasian Collared Dove

Grey Francolin

House Crow

House Sparrow

Indian Bush Lark

Indian Robin

Indian Roller

Indian Silverbill

Jacobin Cuckoo

Jungle Babbler

Laughing Dove

Lesser Florican (Endemic) - EN

Little Cormorant

Purple Sunbird

Rain Quail

Red-wattled Lapwing

Rock Bush Quail (Endemic)

Rock Dove

Rose-ringed Parakeet

White-breasted Waterhen
Wire-tailed Swallow
Yellow-throated Sparrow
Yellow-wattled Lapwing

AUGUST 7TH DAY FOURTEEN

Very early start. No breakfast. Nothing until Mahendra bought some bananas in Bandanwara and we went to bird the same field as yesterday but with the added excitement of an *Indian eagle owl*! Meanwhile Jaipal had been shopping nearby for snacks and as the *Florican* was displaying again the men had a quick breakfast before we drove to where we could see him well but still scope views. Three other vehicles turned up which led to a bit of a verbal spat but nothing Mahendra couldn't handle. We left around 10 to go to our new hotel in Bandanwara which was only about 8 kms away ☺ and very nice indeed.

Mahendra collected us at 14h15 and off we went to see some farming friends of his. Chai, introductions and a chat followed by a bit of birding on their land where we saw another *Eagle owl*. We tried a few of the florican lekking spots they knew of but nothing doing so we went back for more chai and more chatting. Our host showed us a great video of the *Lesser floricans* mating ☺ Phones were passed around with some excellent photos of them and other birds and wildlife taken nearby. A very pleasant afternoon – cloudy and overcast so not too hot but the only floricans we saw were the ones Mahendra's friend had carved. They were excellent. ☺

We got back to the hotel around 18h30. Happy with 42 birds today of which 10 were new for the trip but no new lifers.

Asian Green Bee-eater
Baya Weaver
Bay-backed Shrike
Black Drongo
Black-crowned Night Heron
Brahminy Starling
Common Myna
Common Woodshrike
Eastern Cattle Egret
Eurasian Collared Dove
Eurasian Coot
Great Grey Shrike
Grey Francolin
House Crow
House Sparrow
Indian Bush Lark
Indian Eagle-Owl
Indian Peafowl
Indian Pied Myna
Indian Robin
Indian Roller
Indian Silverbill
Jungle Babbler
Laughing Dove
Lesser Florican (Endemic) - EN
Little Cormorant
Long-tailed Shrike
New Lifer Today
New Today

Oriental Skylark
Pied Kingfisher
Plain Prinia
Purple Sunbird
Rain Quail
Red-rumped Swallow
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Dove
Rufous-fronted Prinia
Savanna Nightjar
Streak-throated Swallow
White-breasted Waterhen
Yellow-throated Sparrow
Yellow-wattled Lapwing

AUGUST 8TH DAY FIFTEEN

We left at 6 with an excellent packed breakfast which we ate at the farm after we'd had a bit of a drive round looking for the *Florican* et al. The lads had been out on their motorbikes and had found a displaying *Florican* so off we went to find it. It involved a bit of a trek through fields planted with soya beans. Nothing doing. Maybe we were too close? We tried sitting in the tall grass in the blistering heat hoping he would come out again. He didn't. We moved further back and sat under a tree. Still nothing so we eventually gave up and went for a drive round to see whatever we could, returning to yesterday's *Indian eagle owl* spot by a bit of a quarry where we had excellent views of *Baya weavers* nest-building and *Red-rumped swallows* skimming over the water. The sparkles from the mica in the cliffs were reflecting in the water magical ☺ We walked a little farther on and had absolutely stunning views of **2 *Indian eagle owls***. Flying **and** perched ☺. We were back at the hotel for 11h30 and were free until 4 when we again returned to yesterday's good spot looking for the *Florican* again – there was a man already there with filming equipment who said it had been there in the morning but not this afternoon which may or may not have been true if he wanted to see us off. As we drove away we said hello to the researchers who were parked up and keeping an eye on things and they tipped us off about another spot. He was there, but not close and we were discussing getting closer when an official turned up and wanted all our details, passports etc etc because they had had a complaint that we were scaring the birds away. He even had the registration number of our vehicle. He eventually left, satisfied that we were doing no such thing and were true birders though he couldn't see the point of it all. Anyway, Mahendra had heard a *Painted francolin* so we went off to look for him and he was exactly where Roland had said there was one on Ebird 10 days previously. It was worth climbing through barbed wire and trekking through another field for! ☺ Fab. Time to head "home". Lovely sunset.

Today was VERY hot!! 41 degrees.

Asian Green Bee-eater
Baya Weaver
Black Drongo
Black-crowned Night Heron
Black-headed Ibis
Black-winged Kite
Black-winged Stilt
Brahminy Starling
Common Myna
Eastern Cattle Egret
Eurasian Collared Dove

Eurasian Coot
Great Egret
Great Grey Shrike
Grey Francolin
House Crow
House Sparrow
Indian Bush Lark
Indian Eagle-Owl
Indian Peafowl
Indian Pied Myna
Indian Pond Heron
Indian Robin
Indian Silverbill
Indian Stone-curlew
Jungle Babbler
Knob-billed Duck
Laughing Dove
Lesser Florican (Endemic) - EN
Little Cormorant
Little Grebe
Oriental Darter
Oriental Skylark
Painted Francolin
Pale Martin
Purple Sunbird
Red-rumped Swallow
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Dove
Rufous-tailed Lark
Shikra
White-breasted Waterhen
Yellow-wattled Lapwing

AUGUST 9TH DAY SIXTEEN

We went down for breakfast expecting there to be a buffet but you had to order from the menu, which we did. The fruit arrived fairly quickly but no tea. Sometime later my poached eggs arrived but they were fried. I sent them back – two more duly arrived. Fried with the white cut off. The lovely little waitress knew they were wrong because she had googled them - I told her chef needed to go back to school and ate them. Still no tea. Asked again. A little later, tea arrived. But only for me and she poured out one cup and took the pot away. I reminded her about tea for Roland. After 50 minutes we had to leave because Mahendra was waiting in reception and called into the kitchen on our way to say we were leaving. The chef was just coming out with Roland's idli which he refused and then had a bad time trying to check out because they couldn't get the credit card terminal to work. Turned out it had a flat battery ☹ Good job he had enough cash on him to pay our bill. Another 15 minutes wasted!

Fortunately, the traffic was quiet when we set off. We had a long drive ahead of us which was made longer by Jaipal missing a turning so we had to do a u turn but not before we had gone a considerable distanceThen he got stopped for speeding. So, so hot out with no stops at all until lunchtime at 13h30 when we stopped for a mini-thali at somewhere fairly basic . One chai stop in the afternoon and we got to our next hotel around 6. Mahendra laughed at my reaction – I was so

impressed! Staying in a real palace – so, so beautiful from outside and when we got to our massive room and opened the window, there was a *Peacock* outside!! Magic!! I have a thing about them ... but only real ones as opposed to captive ones. We had time for a quick explore outside before the wind suddenly got up, the heavens opened, the thunder thundered – you get my drift. All very impressive and not just the storm.

A very short bird list today as we only wrote down those new for the trip. No mammals apart from the usual squirrels and some working camels.

Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark

Little Swift

Rufous Treepie

AUGUST 10TH DAY SEVENTEEN

Nice buffet breakfast inside, blue skies and sunshine outside.

Sad to leave without being able to visit the museum and enjoy the grounds etc.

We were off to Bikaner, to bird in the Jorbeer Conservation Preserve where we would see a good variety of raptors. Or so we thought. Mahendra said we were going to a dump, which would be smelly. We assumed there was a rubbish dump somewhere nearby. Not so. The dump was IN the Conservation area and was for dead animals – so lots of rotting corpses and carcasses. NOT what we expected and there were more wild dogs than birds or mammals. Raptors? Only *Egyptian vultures* and *Black kites*. Very disappointing ☹ Apparently, they do get lots of raptors but not during the monsoon ☹ and they used to get all sorts of mammals but the dogs have driven them away. We did see a few Nilgai but nothing else.

This was followed by a longish drive to Tal Chapper arriving in time for lunch. And Mazza!! We didn't go out again until 4 when we went to check out the Blackbuk Sanctuary then drove around the countryside looking for birds. We thought we had found another *Painted francolin* but it turned out to be a Black one. Six new birds for the trip today but no lifers.

Asian Green Bee-eater

Baya Weaver

Black Drongo

Black Francolin

Black Kite

Black-winged Stilt

Blue-tailed Bee-eater

Brahminy Starling

Brown Rock Chat

Common Myna

Common Woodshrike

Coppersmith Barbet

Eastern Cattle Egret

Egyptian Vulture - EN

Eurasian Collared Dove

European Roller

Great Grey Shrike

Greater Coucal

Grey Francolin

House Crow

House Sparrow

Indian Bush Lark

Indian Peafowl

Indian Roller

Indian Silverbill

Jungle Babbler
Purple Sunbird
Red Collared Dove
Red-naped Ibis
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
White-eared Bulbul
Yellow-throated Sparrow

AUGUST 11TH DAY EIGHTEEN

Chai at 5h45. Left for the Sanctuary at 6. Most of the sanctuary was flooded which meant we could only visit a small area. So many *Indian peafowl*! ☺ It was quite pleasant at this early hour and we were delighted to see the *Bristled grassbird* we had dipped on in Surajpur. Worth the wait ☺ We had much better views of *Rain quail* and found 2 *Black francolin*. Lots of Blackbuk of course and some tiny Indian gazelle (Chinkara) who seemed anxious to leave by the front gate. Unfortunately I suddenly started to feel unwell as we were leaving and breakfast was definitely a no-no though I managed to go out into the park again afterwards. We were only there for an hour just to find *Spotted woodcreeper* and then I retired to bed, staying there until we went out again at 4. The kulfi man was outside and I decided to risk a lolly which really hit the spot when you are struggling to eat or drink! We went to a very different grassy area adjacent to the park and it was really good. The Desert and Indian foxes were amazing as was Hardwick's spiny-tailed lizard. Lovely to see Nilgai and Blackbuk as well of course. Great views of *Laggar falcon* and *White-eyed buzzard*. Not too hot either. After that we went down an extremely bumpy road looking for Blackbuk to photograph as they crossed but it wasn't a good experience so we went back to the hotel

Asian Green Bee-eater
Bay-backed Shrike
Black Drongo
Black Francolin
Black Kite
Bristled Grassbird - VU
Common Myna
Crested Lark
Eastern Cattle Egret
Eurasian Collared Dove
Eurasian Hoopoe
Great Grey Shrike
Grey Francolin
House Crow
House Sparrow
Indian Peafowl
Indian Roller
Indian Silverbill
Indian Spotted Creeper (Endemic)
Jungle Babbler
Jungle Prinia
Laggar Falcon
Oriental Skylark
Rain Quail
Red-naped Ibis

Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Steppe Eagle - EN
Tawny Eagle - VU
White-eyed Buzzard
Woolly-necked Stork
Zitting Cisticola

AUGUST 12TH DAY NINETEEN

Breakfast at 7 and they had made me some yummy porridge ☺ Roland's turn to be unwell today ☹
We set off for Jaipur around 7h30. Very pleasant out. No problems on the way.
It was very grey in Jaipur as we made for the Wind Palace which I really wanted to visit. I was not disappointed though I would have liked to have lingered longer. 200/- each for us but only 50 for Mahendra. Jaipur was really busy with it being a holiday weekend and coming up to Independence Day on the 15th. Time now to head off towards Jhalana Safari park and hopefully see a leopard or two! We were early so had some chai and a quick look round the Information Centre which was very interesting. More and more people were rolling up, getting into jeeps and driving away. But not us ☹
Eventually, it **was** our turn and off we went, full of hope. Our driver stopped to point out birds and the Grey langars by the temple and then the rain came on. We were given umbrellas but to be honest they weren't much good. The tracks went from dry to running with water which was fine until there was a sighting at which point our steady driver morphed into a maniac driver. Terrifying. Little to hold onto and little to stop me falling out whilst also trying to hold onto an umbrella! I did not enjoy the rest of our time in Jhalana because of this – lots of false alarms and soaked through to the skin ☹ Added to which, I couldn't get down from the jeep due to being short and advancing in years with a gammy hip and knees!! Talk about embarrassing. Roland came to the rescue of course and lifted me down.

Back to the hotel.

Ashy Prinia
Asian Green Bee-eater
Black Drongo
Black-rumped Flameback
Brahminy Starling
Common Hawk-Cuckoo
Common Myna
Eastern Cattle Egret
Eurasian Collared Dove
Great Grey Shrike
Grey Francolin
House Crow
House Sparrow
Indian Peafowl
Indian Roller
Jacobin Cuckoo
Jungle Babbler
Jungle Nightjar
Laughing Dove
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Dove

Rose-ringed Parakeet
Rufous Treepie
White-throated Kingfisher

AUGUST 13TH DAY TWENTY-ONE

Up at 4h40 for a 5h30 start and back to Jhalana. It was quieter this morning and we could only hope for it to stay dry. It did ☺ and I sat in the front with the driver, with my seat belt on. He was very nice to me. *Grey francolins* everywhere!! We had good views of some lovely *Peafowl* as well as *Spotted owlet*, *Rosy starlings*, *Indian golden oriole*, *Shikra* et al and only one piece of extreme driving, which led to brief views of a leopard by a water hole. Our driver told us he was called Rani and was four years old. He could tell by his facial markings.

Back to the hotel for breakfast and to pack before setting off for Delhi once we had completed our tea shopping! I also wanted photos of elephants for my great nephew and niece – special request. We thought we would be lucky down by the Amber Fort but they had gone! Fortunately we came across some further along the road and stopped to make friends with them as well as take photos. Just lovely ☺ We had to pay for the pleasure though! A bargain at 50/- for each elephant! Payable via the trunk! The weather was good today and we were making good time with few hold-ups when we stopped at a Shiva Dhaba for lunch. Neither of us was feeling great so we just had a Masala dhosa. Our next stop was at a similar place for chai and to say our goodbyes to Mahendra. He was going to be picked up by another group he would be leading in Sonkhaliya. We will be seeing him again in February for another Indian Adventure ☺

We were going to arrive in Delhi way too early but traffic jams only left us with just enough time to go to the Ambience Shopping Mall near the airport. Really you could have been anywhere with Decathlon, Accessorize, MacDonalds etc!

Airport next and more goodbyes – hopefully we will meet Jaipal again sometime in the future. Lovely man.

No problems at the airport thanks to our priority status. The lounge was very noisy – lots of loud people – but a good selection of food if you don't go to Slimming World.

Asian Green Bee-eater
Asian Koel
Bay-backed Shrike
Black Drongo
Black Kite
Black-rumped Flameback
Brahminy Starling
Common Myna
Eastern Cattle Egret
Eurasian Collared Dove
Grey Francolin
House Crow
House Sparrow
Indian Golden Oriole
Indian Peafowl
Indian Roller
Jungle Babbler
Laughing Dove
Purple Sunbird
Red-rumped Swallow
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Dove

Rose-ringed Parakeet
Rosy Starling
Rufous Treepie
Shikra
Spotted Owlet
White-eyed Buzzard
White-throated Fantail
White-throated Kingfisher

FULL LIST OF BIRDS SEEN WITH MAHENDRA IN RAJASTHAN
97 SPECIES OF WHICH 7 WERE LIFERS

Ashy Prinia
Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark
Asian Green Bee-eater
Asian Koel
Barred Buttonquail
Baya Weaver
Bay-backed Shrike
Black Drongo
Black Francolin
Black Kite
Black-crowned Night Heron
Black-headed Ibis
Black-rumped Flameback
Black-winged Kite
Black-winged Stilt
Blue-tailed Bee-eater
Brahminy Starling
Bristled Grassbird - VU
Brown Rock Chat
Common Chiffchaff
Common Hawk-Cuckoo
Common Myna
Common Woodshrike
Coppersmith Barbet
Crested Lark
Eastern Cattle Egret
Egyptian Vulture - EN
Eurasian Collared Dove
Eurasian Coot
Eurasian Hoopoe
European Roller
Great Egret
Great Grey Shrike
Greater Coucal
Grey Francolin
House Crow
House Sparrow
Indian Bush Lark
Indian Eagle-Owl
Indian Golden Oriole

Indian Peafowl
Indian Pied Myna
Indian Pond Heron
Indian Robin
Indian Roller
Indian Silverbill
Indian Spotted Creeper (Endemic)
Indian Stone-curlew
Jacobin Cuckoo
Jungle Babbler
Jungle Nightjar
Jungle Prinia
Knob-billed Duck
Laggar Falcon
Laughing Dove
Lesser Florican (Endemic) - EN
Little Cormorant
Little Grebe
Little Swift
Long-tailed Shrike
Oriental Darter
Oriental Skylark
Painted Francolin
Pale Martin
Pied Kingfisher
Plain Prinia
Purple Sunbird
Rain Quail
Red Collared Dove
Red-naped Ibis
Red-rumped Swallow
Red-vented Bulbul
Red-wattled Lapwing
Rock Bush Quail (Endemic)
Rock Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Rosy Starling
Rufous Treepie
Rufous-fronted Prinia
Rufous-tailed Lark
Savanna Nightjar
Shikra
Spotted Owlet
Steppe Eagle - EN
Streak-throated Swallow
Tawny Eagle - VU
White-breasted Waterhen
White-eared Bulbul
White-eyed Buzzard
White-throated Fantail
White-throated Kingfisher

Wire-tailed Swallow

Woolly-necked Stork

Yellow-throated Sparrow

Yellow-wattled Lapwing

Zitting Cisticola

