

India Birding and Wildlife

Andaman Islands, Kerala & Ganges River delta

January 23 – February 12, 2010

Tour Leader: Kelly Sekhon assisted by local birding experts

A week's extension to Borneo & Malaysia –17 to 25 Jan, 2010

We offer a visit to the birding and nature hotspots of Malaysia & Borneo prior to the main India tour.



The tour will visit cosmopolitan Kuala Lumpur followed by a drive to the Taman Negara National Park for a two days stay. Taman Negara is one of the oldest rainforests in the world, estimated at over 130 million years old. The abundance and diversity of nature here is phenomenal in what is

one of the world's most complex ecosystems.



We then fly via Kuala Lumpur to our comfortable lodge located in the heart of Borneo's Wildlife Conservation Area along the banks of the Kinabatangan River. Borneo -the world's third largest island is home to an amazing variety of birdlife. We visit the orangutan



rehab centre located in Sepilok within an area of 11,000 acres of virgin equatorial rainforest. A river cruise along the Sukau-Kinabatangan River cruise to see the proboscis monkeys and other native fauna is included.



India Tour Highlights

Led by Kelly Sekhon on his 8th successful India nature tour you will travel from the tropical jungles of Kerala in the far south to the rainforests of the Andaman Islands and then to the mangrove forests of the Ganges delta, the variety of bird and animal life in addition to cultural sites that you will see will truly be amazing. Kelly has many years of experience both as tour organizer and field trip leader.

- ❖ Periyar National Park in Kerala - elephant herds & rich bird life
- ❖ The Andaman Islands- tropical islands chain with large number of endemics

- ❖ Sundarbans National Park - world's largest expanse of mangrove forests, tigers, mammals, reptiles and hundreds of bird species
- ❖ Cochin, Calcutta, Chennai(Madras) & Port Blair
- ❖ Post tour extension to Delhi, Agra(Taj Mahal,Jaipur (Rajasthan, Bharatpur Sanctuary-world famous birding hot spot.

Andaman & Nicobar Islands- are an 800 kms long archipelago of 572 islands (only 26 are inhabited) that lie east of mainland India in the Bay of Bengal. The southernmost island is only 200 km from the northern tip of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. The capital, Port Blair is located on South Andaman Island.



The islands are hilly with evergreen tropical forests and sandy beaches fringed with coconut palms and mangrove lined creeks. The islands comprise 0.25 % of the total land mass of the Indian sub-continent whereas contribute a



whopping 12 % of the endemic avifauna of the region. Our stay should enable us to see a good number of these. The sea around the islands abounds with marine life including a wide variety of corals. Considering the diversity and uniqueness of fauna and flora and the fragile nature of the eco-system here, 96 wildlife sanctuaries and 9 National Parks have been established in the Andaman Islands.

Cochin, Kerala or Kochi is a cosmopolitan city located in the southern state of Kerala, called the 'Queen of the Arabian Sea'. It is a palm-fringed, lagoon-studded town where the red of the earth contrasts with the green of the vegetation. Kochi sprang into being in 1341 when a flood created a natural safe port. The local royal family relocated here in 1405 after which the city grew rapidly attracting Christian, Arab and Jewish traders from the Middle East.



Periyar Tiger Reserve - set amidst the foothills of the Western Ghat mountain range



of Kerala, India's southern most state, is the Periyar National Park and Tiger Reserve. A scenic lake that lies at the heart of the sanctuary was formed with the building of a small dam in 1895. The lake meanders around the contours of wooded hills providing a permanent source of water for local wildlife.

Periyar is well located as a centre for seeing most of the specialties of the Western Ghats, as well as large numbers of other resident hill species and migrants. 266 species of birds have been positively recorded, approximately 67% of them are residents, known to breed

or suspected of breeding here. Its attraction for birdwatchers is enhanced by the proximity of low plains on three sides. There is considerable local migration in dry weather, of lowland species up to the foothills.

Apart from herds of the Asiatic elephants, other animals to be seen in the Periyar sanctuary are the wild bison (gaur), wild boar, sambar, barking and mouse deer, dole or Indian wild dog and maybe the tiger – as there are an estimated 40 tigers here. Four species of primates are found in Periyar - the rare lion-tailed macaque, the nilgiri langur, common langur and the bonnet macaque. Monitor lizards can be spotted basking in the sun on the rocks along the lakeshore and visitors who hike into the park often see pythons.



Thatekkad Bird Sanctuary is one of the most popular National Parks of Kerala. This sanctuary is situated in dense tropical evergreen and deciduous forests with grassland patches. The



renowned ornithologist, Dr. Salim Ali designed the sanctuary which was created in 1983 based on his recommendation made many years previously. Ali described Thatekkad in the 1930's as the richest bird habitat in peninsular India, comparable only with the eastern Himalayas. Since then much of the forest has been diverted to cultivation and teak and mahogany plantations but what survives gives a glimpse of the phenomenal bird diversity of the once widespread lowland forests of Kerala. The sanctuary is spread over an area of 25 sq. km. covered with deciduous forests and plantations of rosewood, teak and mahogany. The Bombay

Natural History Society has identified 253 species here.

Eravikulam National Park and Munnar is a hill town 125 kms east of Cochin. The altitude of Munnar at over 5000 ft means a pleasant climate throughout the year though in Dec-January the temperatures can fall to single digits. The shola-grassland eco-system typical of Munnar is home to a large numbers of birds, many of them endemic.

Eravikulam National Park is a plateau at an average altitude of 6500 feet, about 30 kms from Munnar in the Western Ghat mountains. This park was originally established to protect the Nilgiri Tahr which is in the endangered list of Indian mammals. It was declared as a sanctuary in 1975 and considering the ecological, faunal, floral and zoological significance, it was declared as a National park in 1978. It covers an area of 97 sq. kms of rolling grasslands and high elevation 'sholas'.

Sundarbans National Park is the largest estuarine mangrove forest in the world. It is classified as a Tiger Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a Biosphere Reserve and is located in the Ganges delta in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. The region is densely covered by mangrove forests and home to a variety of mammal, bird,



reptile and invertebrate species. The Sundarbans forest is also home to more than 200 tigers. The Royal Bengal tigers here have developed a unique characteristic of swimming in salt waters and are notorious for their man-eating tendencies.



Apart from Royal Bengal tiger, fishing cats, macaques, wild boar, jungle cat, flying fox, pangolin and Chital deer are also found in abundance in the Sundarbans.

Some of the more popular birds found in this region are - Open Billed Storks, White Ibis, Spotted Billed Pelicans, Large Egrets, Night Herons, Paradise Flycatchers, Fishing Eagles, White Bellied Sea Eagles and Whistling Teals.

YOUR TOUR LEADER: Kelly Sekhon has several years of experience both as tour organizer and field trip leader. He has successfully led seven natural history tours to India - to the remote Kinnaur region of the western Himalaya in 1996; to Assam and Sikkim in eastern India in 1999 and 2000; to the National Wildlife Parks of North, South and Eastern India including Rajasthan in 2003, 2006 and 2008 and a nature trek to the alpine Valley of the Gods in the Indian Himalaya in 2004

DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

Day 1 Depart Vancouver.

Day 2 Arrive Singapore. Overnight hotel.

Day 3 Fly from Singapore to Kochi (Cochin). Transfer to hotel. Overnight in Kochi.

Day 4 Short drive to Thattekad Bird Reserve. Full day birding in the Dr Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary. Stay in a country estate. Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 Drive to Munnar in the Western Ghats. Afternoon birding. Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 Full day birding in Eravikulam and Munnar. Breakfast.

Day 7 Drive to Periyar Tiger Reserve. Overnight- Aranya Niwas Hotel. Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 Full day in Periyar Tiger Reserve. Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 9 Drive to Kumarakam on the Kerala backwaters. Breakfast.

Day 10 Day boat cruise through the canals (Kerala backwaters) in a traditional 'kettuvellum' boat with lunch onboard. Evening drive to Kochi. Breakfast and lunch.

Day 11 Morning Kochi sightseeing. Evening flight to Chennai (Madras). Breakfast.

Day 12 Full day tour to Mamallapuram-Kanchipuram. Return to Chennai. Breakfast.

Day 13 This morning we fly from Madras to Port Blair in the Andaman Islands and start our exploration of these remote and rarely visited islands. The Andaman and Nicobar islands hold a total of 17 endemics but since 5 occur only on the Nicobar Islands presently off-limit to non Indians, only 12 may possibly be sighted. This afternoon we will bird around the Mt Harriet National Park- a tropical moist evergreen forest home to several Andaman endemic varieties. Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 Early morning drive towards Sippighat- a marshy wetland located to the south of Port Blair great for viewing water birds and waders. Return to Mount Harriet to view species missed earlier. Breakfast and dinner.



Day 15 Early morning trip to Chidiya Tapu, a patch of moist evergreen forest located to the south of Port Blair and excellent for birding. The birding trail runs for 2 km along the seaside forest. We will also bird at Farar Ganj before boarding the afternoon boat to Havelock Island. On arrival, check into the Silver Sands Hotel. Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 Morning birding at Havelock Island. Take the afternoon return boat to Port Blair. Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 Fly to Calcutta. Calcutta sightseeing drive tour. Overnight in Calcutta. Breakfast.

Day 18 Drive to the Sundarbans National Park. River tour and birding in the river delta. Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 River tour and birding in the Sundarbans. Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 20 Drive to Calcutta. Same night departure flight home via Singapore. Breakfast.

Day 21 Arrive Vancouver.

PRICE: C\$ 4050 for the land part of the tour (including Chennai-Andaman Islands-Calcutta airfare and meals mentioned in the itinerary). The anticipated low season airfare from Vancouver to Delhi is \$1480 on Singapore Airlines. Fares change often and a precise figure will be available 2-3 months prior to travel. Airline and airport taxes and fees are extra and will be an additional \$150-200.

Pre-Tour Malaysia & Borneo extension is C\$1680 including four connecting flights.

Post-Tour North India Nature & Culture extension is C\$890 including connecting flight.

EARLY BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL

POST TOUR EXTENSION – NORTH INDIA, 11 to 19 Feb, 2010

Chambal River Sanctuary, Bharatpur National Park, Agra, Jaipur, Delhi

Day 20 Evening flight to Delhi. Overnight in Delhi.

Day 21 Birding (or sightseeing) in Delhi. Overnight in Delhi.



Day 22 Drive to Agra. Taj Mahal sightseeing. Drive onwards to Chambal River Sanctuary. Night at Chambal Safari Lodge. Breakfast and dinner.

Day 23 Morning boat ride on Chambal River. Overnight at Chambal Safari Lodge. Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 24 Drive to Bharatpur. Overnight in Bharatpur. Birding walks. Overnight stay at the Sunbird Lodge. Breakfast and dinner.

Day 25 Day birding in Bharatpur. Overnight stay at the Sunbird Lodge. Breakfast and dinner.



Day 26 Drive to Jaipur in Rajasthan. Jaipur sightseeing. Overnight hotel. Breakfast.

Day 27 Jaipur sightseeing . Afternoon drive to Delhi airport for late evening departure flight for home.

Day 28 Arrive home.



For a Booking Form and further details, e-mail us at:

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