

# Kerala, India

28 January - 11 February 2008

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Kerala has not been promoted as a prime birding destination, but when me and my girlfriend came across two really pricey “last minute” tickets (incl. flight tickets and an unspecified hotel accommodation) via the Swedish charter agency, Solresor – [www.solresor.se](http://www.solresor.se) – we decided that we should try it out. But what should we do during our two week stay?

Since I ‘am a devoted birder I simply had to do some birding during this time. But were should I go to do that? Via Internet and search engine google I rather quickly ended up on a site that was named “*Birds in Kerala*”, that sounded promising. I sent an e-mail to the address that I found at the bottom of the page, with a short question if it was possible to arrange a birding trip with them during some time of our visit in India. Them was in fact Kalypso Adventures, the agency behind the webpage – [www.birdskerala.com](http://www.birdskerala.com) – Within a couple of hours I got an e-mail back from Thomas Zacharias, the founder, with the positive answer that Kalypso were willing to arrange the trip for me and my girlfriend. Now I just had to convince my non-birding girlfriend (although she is very fond of animals of different kinds) what a great idea this was. I had to put in two days in Periyar, hopping that this would give us the chance of seeing more than just birds. During the following e-mail correspondence between me and Thomas we eventually decided for a trip with following itinerary and accommodations.

Day 1, 2, 3	Pick up from Cochin. Hornbill Camp, Thattekkad (Full board)
Day 4,5	Olive Brook, Munnar (B&B)
Day 6,7	Wilderness, Periyar (B&B)
Day 8	Return to Kottayam

Included in the package were a birding guide, car with driver, water and all entries to parks and sanctuaries. This arrangement was almost as expensive as our original tickets down to Kerala! Approx. 880 USD/pers. With this arrangement we were going to visit some of Keralas best known birding destinations like Thattekkad bird sanctuary, Munnar and the Periyar Tiger reserve. By this we also hoped to see loads of birds, mammals and beautiful sceneries. During the trip we did see lots of birds

Map showing part of Kerala, India. Numbers indicates visited localities:

1. Varkala
2. Cochin
3. Cochin Int. Airport
4. Thattekkad
5. Munnar
6. Periyar

and many types of scenery but the mammals were harder to find, which was a small disappointment, especially for the girlfriend.

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### Kerala(s)...

...is one of the smallest states in India. It's situated along the Malabar Coast at the south-western tip of the Indian subcontinent. To Swedes this is a rather new charter destination.

To the north Kerala borders to the state Karnataka and in the east the high mountain range, which is called the Western Ghats, constitute the eastern border to the state of Tamil Nadu. Western Ghats is the common name used for the mountain range that runs along the western part of India, from Gujarat in the north to Kerala in the south. Western Ghats is also a biodiversity hot spot and is classified as an Important Bird Areas (IBA). This is mainly due to the considerable list of endemic bird species that exists here. Around the town of Munnar, which is situated at the southern range of the Western Ghats, you have a great chance of seeing the once that lives at high altitudes. Here are a couple of peeks reaching well over 2500 m above sea level. One of which lying within Eravikulam National Park that inhabits the endemic and much endangered Nilgiri Thar, a mountain goat.

...is one of the most densely populated states in In-

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dia. This is something you will soon be aware of when you arrive. Especially the coastal area is packed with people. The population per km<sup>2</sup> declines a bit as you travel inland, from the coast and into the interior parts of Kerala.

...climate can be described as hot all year around. The average winter temperatures lying around 25°C, rising to a maximum of 33°C in summer but the climate at high altitudes can be much cooler, especially at nights. The former British hill station, Munnar, is situated at 1800 m above sea level. Here the nights can feel extremely cold, so warm clothing is well recommended if you are planning a trip to this part of Kerala. In May the monsoon arrives and with that also the rainy period, which holds its grip on the state until September.

### What about the birds...?

If you are going to Kerala in hope of getting a long checklist of birds you will end up a little bit of disappointed as this part of India is one of the poorest in terms of bird diversity. During our two weeks in the state we noted 186 species of birds. Without any assistance from a guide this list would have been a lot shorter. But to get a considerably longer list you do not have to travel much further north than to Mysore and Bangalore in Karnataka (the state situated north of Kerala). So why go to Kerala? The reason must be spelled as endemic! The list of endemic bird species in Southern India is relatively long. In Kerala and in neighbouring areas you will have a really good chance of seeing most of them! Except the endemic once there are also a couple of species that has a rather narrow distribution, such as the Sri Lanka Frogmouth (*Batrachostomus moniliger*), that you with relative ease can find in Kerala. For a first time visitor to India, Kerala can also (like Goa) be a great introduction to the bird fauna on the Indian subcontinent.

### Endemic bird species

Depending where you look you will end up with a list between 20 and 27 endemic bird species. During this trip I used the systematic given on the Internet based [www.globaltwitcher.com](http://www.globaltwitcher.com), which leans on the systematic given by Clements,

[www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist). According to these there are twenty species that can be characterized as being endemic to the south-western part of India. In the rather new reference book by Rasmussen et al, *The Birds of South Asia*, they have "spitted" many endemic races, giving them status as being true species. Therefore it can be wise to check for these races as well.

In the box on the next page I have stated all species

that are endemics to southern India. I have in the box also printed the races that sometimes are treated as true species. Rasmussen et al have also put exclamation marks on a few more races, meaning that they too can/will be treated as full species in the near future. For a complete list of these you better look in *The Birds of South Asia!*

#### Endemic bird species in Southern India:

Nilgiri Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba elphinstonii</i>
Malabar Parakeet	<i>Psittacula columboides</i>
Malabar Trogon	<i>Harpactes fasciatus</i>
Malabar Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyroceros griseus</i>
White-cheeked Barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>
Malabar Lark	<i>Galerida malabarica</i>
Nilgiri Pipit	<i>Anthus nilghiriensis</i>
Grey-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus priocephalus</i>
Yellow-throated Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus xantholaemus</i>
Malabar Whistling-thrush	<i>Myophonus horsfieldii</i>
White-bellied Shortwing	<i>Brachypteryx major</i>
Broad-tailed Grassbird	<i>Schoenicola platyurus</i>
Black-and-orange Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula nigrorufa</i>
Nilgiri Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias albicaudatus</i>
White-bellied Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis pallipes</i>
Wynaad Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax delesserti</i>
Nilgiri Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax cachinnans</i>
Grey-breasted Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax jerdoni</i>
Rufous Babbler	<i>Turdoides subrufa</i>
Crimson-backed Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma minima</i>
Western Crimson Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga vigorsii</i>
White-bellied Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta leucogastra</i>

#### Races that sometimes are treated as true species:

"Grey-fronted Green Pigeon"	<i>Treron pompadora</i> *
"Malabar Barbet"	<i>Megalaima (r.) malabarica</i>
"Flame-throated Bulbul"	<i>Pycnonotus (m.) gularis</i>
"Nilgiri Thrush"	<i>Turdus (m.) nigropileus</i>
"Nilgiri Flowerpecker"	<i>Dicaeum (c.) concolor</i>
"Malabar Woodshrike"	<i>Tephrodornis (g.) sylvicola</i>
"Malabar Starling"	<i>Sturnia (m.) blythi</i>

During our trip we managed to tick eighteen of these species (or near species).

\* Pompadour Pigeon (*Treron pompadora*) has a disjunct population in South-western India. By some these birds are treated as a separate species. Although this is not supported by *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, vol. 4.

Crimson-backed Sunbird





## Localities

In this section I will only give some short notes on the localities that we visited. You can find more information on each site in the itinerary. You can also find much more on the Internet. You can start with [www.birdskerala.com](http://www.birdskerala.com)

### *Thattekkad*

Thattekkad and its surroundings produced most birds of all localities that we visited. The area itself is named after the small village that is situated close to the sanctuary. You can reach the area by travelling east on NH49 from Cochin to Munnar. At the village Kotamangalam you turn north towards Thattekkad. Since I wasn't the driver I can't give a better road description than this. Anyway it might be wise to hire a driver to get to the area.

Through Kalypso Adventures we pre-booked our accommodation (full board) at the Hornbill Camp. This is a tent camp, but it has all the conveniences (like toilets and showers) that you might need after a long day of birding.

With the help of our guide, Sathyan, we visited a range of habitats in the area. The many different habitats is also one of the reasons to why this is Kerala's best Birding Hot Spot.

During our visit we visited wetlands, dry-lands, dry forests, rainforests and evergreen forests and that produced many of the species that a visitor might want to see, like Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Malabar Parakeet, Malabar Grey Hornbill and the White-bellied Blue Flycatcher. You can find more info about our adventures in the area in the itinerary, 2-5 February.

### *Munnar*

Munnar is a town situated at the southern range of the Western Ghats. It was the British that founded a hill station in the area, mostly to get away from the warm weather in the lowlands but also to grow tea. Today the tea plantations cover most of the land surface and our guide referred to it as the "green desert". The remaining forest stands on the steepest of hill sides.

The surrounding area of Munnar is a great place for spotting some of the high altitude species like the Nilgiri Pipit, White-bellied Shortwing and the Black-and-orange Flycatcher.

You will find more information on Munnar in the itinerary, 5-7 February.

### *Periyar National Park*

Periyar is promoted as a Tiger reserve as you will be aware of as soon as you arrive to Kumily, the city that borders the Park. The road going in to the reserve is bordered by hundreds of small shops and restaurants that scream to every tourist that comes here, every little place seemed also to have a picture of a tiger. But seeing a wild tiger in the area is extremely difficult.

The main reason to why we decided to go to Periyar was to see some mammal-species. So far during our trip India had not impressed us when it came to mammals. We had managed to see three mongoose, two squirrels, one monkey and one tame elephant (then we have excluded the dogs!). If you would like to walk inside the park you are as a visitor only allowed (?) walk some short stretches of trails that just barely enter the park. It seems that you just "sniff" on a very small part of the park. To have some chance of seeing

mammals you have to go on a cruise on the dam. The boats leave the jetty three times a day, in the morning, midday and in the evening. The best chance of seeing any animals you will have on the tours that leave in the morning and in the evening. This is also a much visited park by the Keralans so you better be in time to be able to get the best places in the boat. You will find more information on Periyar in the itinerary, 7-9 february.

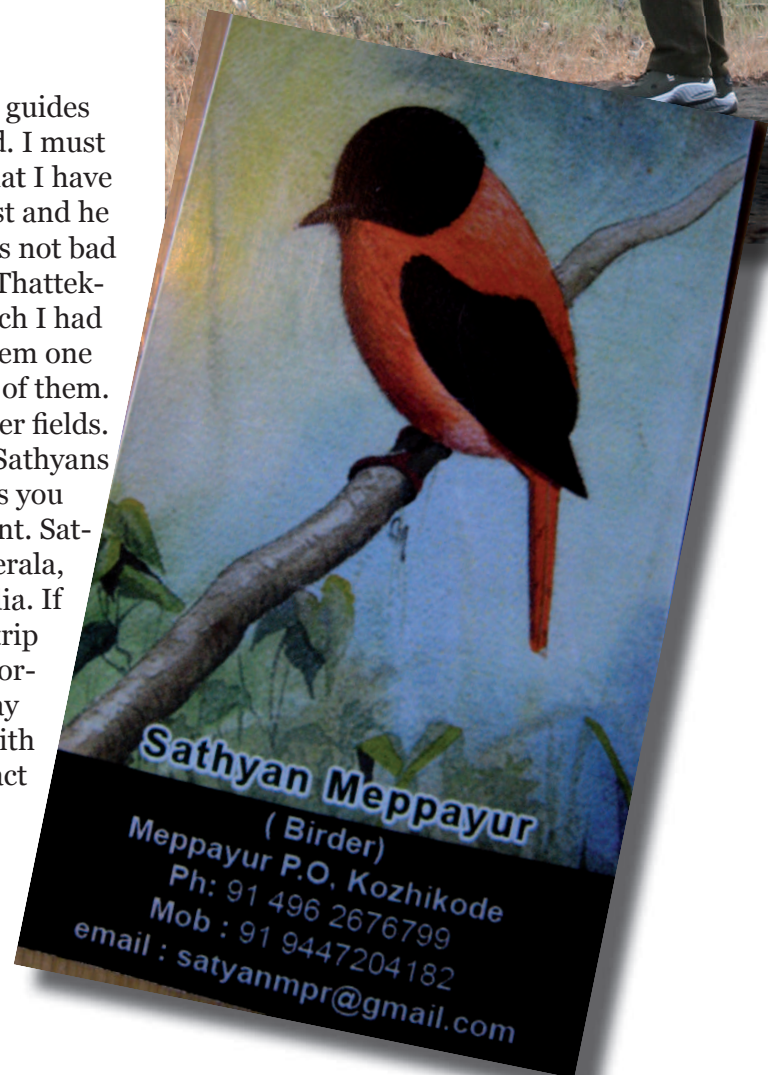
### Used literature and recordings:

- Grimmett, R. & Inskipp, T. 2005. *Birds of Southern India*. Helm Field Guides,  
Gurung, K. K. & Singh, R. 1996. *Field Guide to the Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent. Where to watch Mammals in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan*. Academic Press.  
Scharringa, J. 2005. *Birds of Tropical Asia. Sounds and sights*. DVD-ROM. Bird Songs International.

### Sathyan Meppayur

I have had shifted experiences of those bird guides that I have engage during my travels abroad. I must say that Sathyan is one of the better once that I have encountered. He is a great field ornithologist and he has a very good ear for bird sounds, which is not bad when birding in the tropics. At one time in Thattekkad I was handling my tape recorder in which I had loads of bird recordings. I started to play them one by one for Sathyan and he nailed almost all of them. Impressive! He is also talented in many other fields. When we travelled around we mostly used Sathyan's own tape recordings and they were great. As you can see on his business card he can also paint. Sathyan's "home birding area" constitutes of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in Southern India. If you would like to engage Sathyan during a trip in these regions you can find his contact information in his business card that is on display to the right. You can also come in contact with him through *Kalypso adventures* (for contact information see in an earlier section of this

Sathyan at the "Black Rocks", Thattekkad





Black Kite

## Itinerary

### 28th January

About eight and a half hours after entering the airplane in Stockholm, Sweden we arrived to Trivandrum (or Thiruvananthapuram as it is spelled by the locals), the capitol of Kerala, late on the 28th. After having collected our bags we were placed in the bus that would take us to our hotel in Varkala, a bit up the coast from Trivandrum (about 1-1,5 hour drive). We hit the beds very late (or if you will early) and very exhausted. Not surprisingly *House Crow* became the first species on the travel list.

### 29th January

Varkala. The tourist area at Varkala is mainly situated on a steep cliff edge. The main walking path in the area runs along the edge and many small shops, restaurants, ayurveda centres and hotels are situated along this path. In some places you can descend the some sandy beaches which there are three of, one in the south, one in the middle (the “Mona Lisa”) and “the black beach” in the north. To my mind there is not much to see and do here. You will probably know most of the things worth knowing in just a couple of days! This the first day at Varkala didn’t show any qualities in terms of birds either. Although both the *Black* and the *Brahminy Kites* were common and they regularly used the up-winds created along the cliff edge. Over the Indian Ocean I noted some *Sandwich Terns* and *Common Cormorants* and around the houses at the cliff top I heard the characteristic calls from the *Asian Koel* and the *Greater Coucal*. At the seashore

we also noted two *Indian Grey Mongoose*.

### 30th January

Still at Varkala and one more day in the sign of laziness, mostly spent in the sun and in the Indian Ocean. The feeling from the day before, that Varkala didn’t have much to offer a birder continued. But I did see more species than I did the day before. In the vicinity of our hotel I noted *Black-rumped Flameback*, *Rufous Treepie*, *Ashy Drongo*, *Rose-ringed Parakeet* and *Coppersmith Barbet*. The best bird of the day was probably the *Sykes’s Warbler* that was feeding in a bush just outside our hotel balcony.

### 31st January

Since I had been a bit too careless the day before and had been a bit too much in the sun, this day became a very slow day indeed. I spent most of it in the shadow adding not more than a *White-throated Kingfisher* to my trip list.

### 1st February

Finally we were going to do something else! This day we had planned to go by train from Varkala to Cochin, where we had agreed to meet up with the guide who would take us to some of Keralas best known bird areas.

The day before we asked a couple of people in the hotel area if they knew when the train to Cochin left the station in Varkala. We were told that it would leave at 6.40 am. Therefore we arranged with the hotel staff that a taxi would take us to the train station at 5.40 am, well in time for departure we thought. When we this morning came out in the lobby at the arranged time there was nobody there to meet us. Correction there was actually one person in the lobby – the guard! He was sleeping like a little boy on the floor just inside the door. After a while we eventually got our drive, but when we sat down in the car the driver had some new and fresh information. The train would leave at 5.55 am. Now we were really in a hurry and most likely to miss the train. The driver drew like crazy along the narrow streets of Varkala. But when we arrived at the station there were no sign of a train! Had we missed it? The man at the ticket office could calm us down; the train wouldn’t leave until 6.15 am he said. We had waited for about one hour when the train arrived to the station, at 7.00 am. Shortly thereafter we were off to Cochin. I think this says a lot about how it is to travel in India. Time is great but it’s not a fixed science. You have to take it as it comes and welcome to India!

During the trip to Cochin we travelled through a wetland area which is called “the Backwaters”. This is an area composed of lakes and waterways, like canals and small rivers. As the train puffed its way through the area we saw some of our first herons of the trip,

mostly *Cattle Egrets* but also *Indian Pond-herons*, *Great Egrets* and one *Purple Heron*.

After about three hours we were finally at Ernakulam station and from there we took a rickshaw to our hotel – The Fort House – situated nicely on the shore at the northern tip of Fort Cochin. In and around the vicinity of the Fort House I noted the first *Jungle Mynas*, *Magpie Robins*, *Blyth's Reed Warblers*, *Common Tailorbirds* and *Brown-headed Barbets*. Above the water I noted some *Whiskered Terns*, two species of *Kites*, *Western Reef-egret* and best of all one *Great Black-headed Gull*. At dusk hundreds, and hundreds of primarily *Indian Cormorants* flew in to roost somewhere inland. Among them were also many *egrets*.

## 2nd February

I woke up at 6.00 am to do some early morning birding in the vicinity of the Fort House before breakfast. I could relive the movement of *cormorants*, but now the stream of birds was directed the other way around. From the roosting area and out to the areas where they fed during the day. This was really an impressive movement! I did also see some *Rosy Starlings*, *Brown-headed Gulls* and one *Yellow Wagtail*.

At 9.00 am we were picked up by, as I thought, our guide; a man dressed in all white. His name was Georgi from Kalypso Adventures. Now we were off to Thattekkad, on the way we only had to do a short at Kalypso Adventures office inside Cochin. Now one more man entered the car, this was Sathyan – our guide! Gorgi was our driver...!

On the way to Thattekkad we first stopped at Cochins airport, looking especially for Larks and Pipits in the dry grassland surrounding the airfield. With the help of Sathyan the list of birds grew longer and longer. *Yellow-wattled Lapwing*, *Red-wattled Lapwing*, *Jerdon's Bushlark*, *Paddyfield Pipit*, *Richard's Pipit*, *Indian Robin*, *Indian Roller*, *Shikra* and *Booted Eagle*. They all ended up in the checklist. We also noted *Brown Shrike*, both the nominate race *L. c. cristatus* and also one bird that fitted the plumage shown by the race *L. c. lucionensis*, by some treated as a separate species; "*Philippine Shrike*". Closer to Thattekkad we saw our first *Asian Openbills*.

We arrived at the Hornbill Camp at 13.00 pm. Hornbill Camp is a camp constituted of tents which are standing on concrete flat. Connected to every tent was also a shower with toilet. The campsite was very nicely situated close to a stretch of the riverbanks bordering Periyar River (as I understand it this river has no con-

nection to Periyar, the tiger reserve!). On the opposite side of the river lies Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary.

At 16.00 pm we went for our first tour in the area. We went to a very arid place that was said to be good for Nightjars. But before they started displaying we had some light left. We had our first encounters with three Malabar endemics; the *Parakeet*, *hornbill* and the *Whistling-thrush*. We did also see *Plume-headed Parakeet*, *Vernal Hanging Parrots*, three species of *Drongos*, *Emerald Dove*, *Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker* and much more. While awaited the darkness and the Nightjars we did also manage to see *Rufous Babbler*, *Lesser Yellow-nape* and *Black-crested Bulbul*. Soon after sunset, three species of *Nightjars* started to display; *Great-eared*, *Jerdon's* and *Savanna*. Calling in to the night did also one *Oriental Scops-owl* and one *Jungle Owlet*.

## 3rd February

Morning excursion to the sanctuary. On our way to the entrance we noted a group of *Ashy Woodswallow* and two *White-browed Wagtail* sitting on a wire crossing the river. Inside the sanctuary we walked a trail that followed the Periyar River upstream and we noted a lot of new birds along the way. Among these were *Pompadour Green Pigeon*, *Crimson-fronted Barbet*, *Blue-winged* and *Golden-fronted Leafbird*, *Large-billed Leaf Warbler*, *Brown-breasted* and *Blue-throated Flycatchers*, *Plain Flowerpecker* and *Chestnut-tailed Starling* (both ssp. *blythii* and ssp. *malabaricus*. These are sometimes treated as separate species). At 12.00 we were back at the campsite again, for some siesta during the hottest time of the day. A few *River Terns* regularly patrolled the river.

The second excursion of the day started at 15.30 pm and the target area this time was "the ever green forest", about one hour and ten minutes from the camp. On the way we stayed at a place along the road hoping to see the Mottled Wood Owl that supposedly had a regular roosting place, not that far from the gates to



Thattekkad Sanctuary. This time the owl was not in its place. But we did see our only *Chestnut-shouldered Petronias* of the trip.

“The ever green forest” did not impress us at all. The birds were almost nonexistent. Only the monotone sound from the cicadas filled the soundscape of the forest. Although we did note some birds like the *Mountain Imperial Pigeon*, *Crimson-backed Sunbird* and some *Bronzed Drongos*. Like we had done the evening before we awaited the darkness and hoped that the main attraction of this evening, the *Sri Lanka Frogmouth*, would show!

Some playback from Sathyan and a short moment of waiting and then, the spooky sound from a frogmouth very close by. We eventually saw the bird as well. A very strange looking creature and one of the highlights of the trip!

#### 4th February

This morning’s excursion went south along the Periyar River. We went through a larger resort and stopped close to a larger dam building and walked a trail going south along the dried of river. Most notably seen were *Lesser Whistling-ducks*, *Bay-headed Bee-eater*, *Heart-spotted Woodpecker*, *Tickell’s Blue Flycatcher* and *Velvet-fronted Nuthatch*. We also saw a small party of the *Dark-fronted Babbler*. Finally an *Indian Pitta* answered our playback and gave us some short glimpses of when moving in the undergrowth.

On our way back to the Hornbill camp we made a short stop at a nearby wetland, seeing *Little Cormorant*, *Oriental Darter*, *Bronzed-winged Jacanas* and *White-breasted Waterhens*.

In the afternoon we went to a place named Edamalyar, a large dam construction in one of the rivers running towards Periyar. This one runs in a deep ravine and the hill sides are overgrown by tropical rainforest. We walked a stony path up one of the hillsides. A nice walk resulting in some great birds like *Rufous-billed Hawk-eagle*, *Crested Goshawk*, *Dusky Crag Martin*, *Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike*, *Yellow-browed Bulbul*, *Rusty-tailed Flycatcher* and *White-bellied Treepie*. When we met a couple of men telling us that there was a small group of elephants a short walk in front of us, we were told to head back down again. To Magdalenas disappointment I might ad. So far this trip hadn’t resulted in any major mammal sightings, in fact we hadn’t seen much more than some hoof prints made by some kind of deer. We both felt that this part of India must have been totally cleared in terms of its mammal species.

#### 5th February

At 08.20 am we left Thattekkad for Munnar in moun-

tain region close to the state Tamil Nadu. A bit south of Munnar the landscape shifted rapidly from tropical rainforest in the slopes too widespread tea plantations. The plantations were referred to as “the green desert” by Sathyan. The only bird that seemed to thrive was the *Pied Bushchat*.

Just in front of Munnar we turned off the highway and drew along a small road that swirled the hill side.



#### Olive Brook

[www.olivebrookmunnar.com/home.php](http://www.olivebrookmunnar.com/home.php)

After a while we ended up at Olive Brook, our Munnar accommodation. Olive Brook has a very picturesque setting. It is embedded in the tropical forest just below the crest of one of the hill sides. To Magdalenas enjoyment she saw that many of the plants growing in the area were the same as the once that we use to grow in our garden at home!

Birds seen in the area were *Oriental White-eye*, *Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher*, *Eurasian Kestrel*, *Black Bulbul*, *White-cheeked Barbet* and *Crimson-backed Sunbird*.

In the afternoon we went to a place just outside Munnar called Kannimalai. Here the endemic bird species started to appear... *Grey-breasted Laughingthrush*, *White-browed Shortwing* (heard only), *Nilgiri Flycatcher* and *Orange-and-black Flycatcher*. In the same are we also saw *Blue-capped Rock-thrush*, *Indian Blue Robin* and a bird that we knew from home, a *Common Rosefinch* – here in its wintering grounds.

#### 6th February

On the 1st of February the Keralan Government closes Eravikulam National Park. No visitors are allowed after this date and the reason for this is to give the endangered Nilgiri Thar some privacy while they are giving birth to their offspring. For us this meant that we had no chance of seeing this animal and this could also had resulted in not seeing *Nilgiri Pipit* and



*Broad-tailed Grassbird*. Luckily Sathyan had an ace in his sleeve and it was just a short drive from Olive Brook. We went by car to the neighbouring resort Deshadan and from there a path took us all the way up to the top of the peak.

During the walk up the mountain we saw *Nilgiri Flycatcher*, *Grey-breasted Laughingthrush*, *Tickell's Leaf Warbler* and *Greenish Warbler*. Once at the top (about 2200 m above sea level) we almost immediately found one of the target species – Nilgiri Pipit. This was not an easy species to spot as they, almost like rodents, run in the tall grass and they were almost impossible to get into flight. The Broad-tailed Grassbird was even more difficult to locate. We could here one bird singing but couldn't manage to find it in the tall grass. At the hilltop we also noted *Plain Prinias* and a *Black-shouldered Kite*. To my delight the sky was full of swifts. *Brown-backed Needletails*, *Little Swifts*, *Alpine Swifts* and *Fork-tailed Swifts*!

On our way back down to Deshadan we had good views of *Plain Flowerpecker* and *Indian Scimitar-babbler*.

In the afternoon we went to a place situated a bit east of Munnar – the Vaguera Estate Road. On our way there we went first to a museum that showed how tea is produced. There are many steps in the production and whether you want black, green or red tea the production differs a bit from each other. Actually rather interesting!

The target for Vaguera was the Nilgiri Wood Pigeon but that species failed to show. Instead we saw a bunch of other species like *Pacific Swallows* of the subspecies *domicola* (by some treated as a separate

views of this species the day before so Sathyan tried to lure it out in the open by using playback song. Me and Sathyan leaned in to the bush (just our behinds were on the outside) where the song had originated from. To Magdalenas boredom we stood with our heads in the bush for a long while, seeing not more than the stems of some tropical bush. The sun was now descending fast so we had to leave the shortwing without seeing much of it. Back at the car our driver pointed out a bird that was feeding close to the road – A White-bellied Shortwing moved in plain view almost as it was trying to make a fool out of us...!

## 7th February

Our departure to Kumily and Periyar started at 7:00 am. The distance between Munnar and Kumily is about 100 km but as the roads not always are the best that India can offer this change in location would take almost an entire morning to carry out. We arrived to Kumily and our hotel, the wildernest, at 13:30 pm. During this time we had also managed to do a short detour into Tamil Nadu. The detour started at a small noisy little town called Poopara. From here we drove about 5 km on a very winding, serpentine road, down the eastern side of the mountain (the Bodi Gat). At the stone with the inscription “Madurai 106” we stopped. A few moments later we found the target species, the *Yellow-throated Bulbul* and then turned the car around and started to make our way up the mountain again.

The beginning of the road (NH49) from Munnar went through some beautiful valleys that were almost entirely covered by the tea bush. Huge tea plantations



Were is it....? ...I am here...!  
The White-bellied Shortwing playing hide and seek.



species!), *Indian Swiftlets*, *Black-and-orange Flycatchers*, *Bonelli's Eagle* and *Brown-cheeked Fulvetta*. To Magdalenas enjoyment we did also see one *Nilgiri Langur* that quietly sat in the top of a tree feeding on leaves. To this moment we hadn't seen much of any bigger mammals.

On our way back down to the car Sathyan suddenly heard a *White-bellied Shortwing*. We had had poor

lined the road for a long while and there was not that much to see. This was really the “green desert”! From Poopara and onwards the landscape was more varied, but mainly through plantations.

Although we did see some birds along the road. At Munnar we noted *Moorhens*, *Red-wattled Lapwing*, *Long-tailed Shrike*, *Little Grebe*, *Jungle Myna*, *Grey*

*Wagtail* and *Malabar Whistling-thrush*. At one place named Gap Shola we did a quick stop when I noticed a *Blue Rock Thrush* that was sitting on a stone just beside the road. This stop also resulted in the discovery of one “*Steppe Buzzard*” and a small flock of *Eurasian Crag Martins*. Except the bulbul at Bodi Gat we did here also see one *Short-toed Eagle*, *Purple Sunbird*, *Red-vented Bulbul* and *Chestnut-headed Bee-eater* to name a few. The only noteworthy between Poopara and Kumily was *White-breasted Treepie*.

A second species of primate – a group of *Bonnet Macaque* moved around in the forest just outside our hotel in Kumily. The event for this evening was a tour through a Keralan spice garden. A woman had opened her garden to visitors showing them her selection of spices. And an impressive collection it was, she could even name the spices in many different languages, including Swedish!

### 8th February

In the itinerary for this morning was a walk along some selected trails inside the Periyar Tiger reserve. Although visiting the interior parts of Periyar by foot is only made if you are very privileged or if you go on a boat cruise. As we were not that privileged we had to be satisfied with the few selected trails that were open for hikers. Before setting off into the reserve we had to pick up one more guide and because of the existence of leeches we were also recommended to put on leech socks.

Our walk (about 5 km) went through tropical forest but we felt that we just barely entered the reserve. During the walk the new guide showed us a tiger track, but because there was just one print and that this track was highlighted with two short sticks, we were very suspicious about whom or what had left it there. This reserve lives on the fact that some tigers still survive in the area. The population here seems to be mostly nocturnal and therefore there are far between the sightings. To create the illusion that there are more tigers than there are, I think the workers help to “better the odds” by creating tracks in some strategic places, which they later will point out to a hopeful tourist. Although I will point out that this is my belief after having seen just one track on a muddy path. As Sathyan pointed out - If you intend to see tiger you should go to some of the more known reserves in northern India instead of Periyar. What about the birds then? Like other tropical destinations it can be frustratingly few birds in times, but suddenly there are birds everywhere. After having walked for some time Magdalena noticed a thrush-like bird on the trail, just a few meters away from here. She alerted me and I just shouted it out – a *SCALY THRUSH* (a most wanted bird for me)! Now had also Sathyan seen the bird and he could only confirm the ID. He also told us that this was a very rare bird in Kerala and the first confir-

med record of this species in Periyar! During our walk we did also see *Black Eagle*, *Scarlet Minivet*, *Asian Fairy-bluebird*, *Racket-tailed Drongo*, *Little Spiderhunter*, *Orange-headed Thrush*, *Tickell's Blue Flycatcher*, *Brown-breasted Flycatcher* and *Hill Myna*. We were just about to leave the park when Sathyan heard a call from a *Malabar Trogon*. It felt like it was a long search before we finally saw a beautiful male. Inside the park we also noted two species of *squirrels* and *Nilgiri Langur*. Just outside the park entrance we could detect a *Pintail Snipe*.

In the evening we hoped for more animals, so far Kerala hadn't impressed us in terms of mammals. At 15:30 pm we were picked up a last time by Sathyan and Georgi. This time we went to the jetty for a boat cruise on the dam that covers a major part of the reserve. Sathyan had arranged so that we could sit at the front of one of the boats. Before his trip we had heard mixed feelings about these cruises. We could expect everything between seeing absolutely nothing and seeing most of the animals that exist in the park. I think our cruise landed somewhere in between as we saw many of the mammals, like *Wild Boar*, *Sambar*, *Elephants*, *Eurasian Otter* and *Gaur*. The cruise even produced some birds as well, like *Woolly-necked Stork*, *Ashy Woodswallow*, *Oriental Honey-buzzard*, and *Common Kingfisher*.

After this cruise Sathyan and Georgi had to head back to Cochin. Early the next day a new group of anxious birders wanted to use his skills!

### 9th February

In the morning we heard a *Brown Wood Owl* and many *Flying Foxes* flew in to their roost in the forest outside the Wildernest. Kalypso Adventures had arranged so that a taxi would take us to Kottayam. From there we intended to take the train back to Varkala. Because of a misunderstanding from my point of view I bought, what I thought a 2nd class ticket. What a long train ride it became. We ended up in what only can be described as a true 2nd class wagon. As the ride progressed more and more locals jumped in to the wagon. The wagon became so full that many of them were hanging out of the doors when the train were in motion. The air in the wagon was totally stagnant while the train stood still at a station. During most of the trip I couldn't move from my chosen spot, the wagon was that crowded and for quite a while a man stood with his hand just below my chin, begging for money. This was absolutely one of the worst train rides that I had ever done. I had to fight off the thoughts of getting off the train. Three very long hours after having entered the train in Kottayam, we were finally in Varkala. In Varkala we notice that we in fact had bought a “sleeper ticket”. When that wagon passed us we could see how empty it was. This was one horrific train ride but afterwards we can just laugh about it...

## 10th February

The bins had been put away and from here we had planned for a couple of lazy days in Varkala with ayurveda massage – which was a strange experience as well.

## 11th February

In Varkala until 18:30 pm when the bus would take us to the airport and the flight back home to Sweden. During the day I managed to see one *Great Crested Tern* (the last new bird of the trip), a few *Alpine Swifts* and one *Shikra*.

We who did this trip  
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Pictures shown in this report and a few more from this trip can also be found in a larger format on my pbase page – [www.pbase.com/alkekung/indian\\_birds](http://www.pbase.com/alkekung/indian_birds)

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## Species list

Kerala, India, 28.1 – 11.2 2008

I keep my updated bird lists on the Internet page [www.globaltwitcher.com](http://www.globaltwitcher.com); therefore the systematic in this report mainly follows that webpage (which is based on Clements). The list is not complete in terms of races seen during the trip. I have only written out complete names of races that were new to me or if they are of special interest.

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## Birds (*Aves*)

1. Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* ssp. *capensis*  
Few seen in ponds at Munnar, 5-7.2
2. Indian Cormorant *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*  
An impressive movement between roosting and feeding places, noted in the evening of 1st and in the morning of the 2nd at Old Kochi, Ernakulam.
3. Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*  
Noted with a few individuals at Varkala, Old Kochi and at Periyar.
4. Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*  
Few noted at Thattekkad on 4-5.2 and at Periyar on 8.2.
5. Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*  
Few noted Thattekkad on 3-5.2 and Periyar on 8.2.
6. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*  
One seen during the boat cruise at Periyar on 8.2.
7. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*  
One seen while going by train through the “Backwaters” between Varkala and Ernakulam on 1.2.
8. Great Egret *Ardea alba*  
Seen along the trails at the “Backwaters”. Many unidentified bigger Egrets were also seen among the many Cormorants that flew between the feeding and the roosting places at Old Kochi.
9. Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*  
Seen along the trails at the “Backwaters”. Many unidentified bigger Egrets were also seen among the many Cormorants that flew between the feeding and the roosting place at Old Kochi.
10. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*  
Seen at Varkala and also Periyar.
11. Indian Reef-Heron  
*Egretta gularis* ssp. *schistacea*  
A few seen at Old Kochi on 1-2.2.



12. Indian Pond-Heron *Ardeola grayii*  
Among others seen along the tracks between Varkala and Ernakulam, at the “Backwaters” and at Periyar.
13. Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*  
Seen along the tracks between Varkala and Ernakulam. We also saw it between Cochin and Thattekkad.
14. Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*  
First two were seen between Cochin airport and Thattekkad 2.2. A few more were also seen at Thattekkad.
15. Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*  
One seen at Periyar on 8.2.
16. Lesser Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna javanica*  
20 seen at Bhoothantankettu, Thattekkad-area on 4.2.
17. Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes* ssp. *leuphotes*  
One seen at Bhoothantankettu, Thattekkad-area on 4.2
18. Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* ssp. *ruficollis*  
One seen at Periyar on 8.2.
19. Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*  
One seen at Deshadan, Munnar, 6.2.
20. Black Kite *Milvus migrans*  
The most commonly seen raptor together with Brahminy Kite along the coast.
21. Brahminy Kite *Haliastur Indus*  
The most commonly seen raptor together with Black Kite along the coast.
22. Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*  
One seen at Bodi Gat, Tamil Nadu on 7.2.
23. Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela* ssp. *melanotis*  
Seen at Thattekkad 2-5.2 and at Periyar on 8.2.
24. Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus* ssp. *peninsulae*  
One seen at Edamalayar dam, Thattekkad-area on 4.2.
25. Shikra *Accipiter badius* ssp. *badius*  
One at Cochin airport on 2.2 and one also at Varkala on 11.2.
26. Western Steppe Buzzard *Buteo buteo* ssp. *vulpinus*  
One seen at Gap shola, Idukki on 7.2.
27. Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* ssp. *perniger*  
One seen during a walk in the forests of Periyar on 8.2.
28. Bonelli’s Eagle *Aquila fasciata*  
One seen at Vaguera Estate Road, Munnar-area on 6.2.
29. Booted Eagle *Aquila pennata*  
The only one seen was at Cochin airport on 2.2.
30. Rufous-bellied Eagle *Aquila kienerii* ssp. *kienerii*  
A beautiful adult bird circled over Edamalayar dam, Thattekkad-area on 4.2.
31. Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* ssp. *objurgatus*  
The only one, a female, was at Olive Brook, Munnar on the 5th.
32. Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii*  
Seen and heard at Thattekkad on 2-5.2 and at Bodi Gat, Tamil Nadu on 7.2.
33. White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*  
Seen at Thattekkad and Periyar
34. Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*  
One at Munnar on the 7th.
35. Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus*  
Few seen at Thattekkad on 2-5.2.
36. Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*  
Adult birds with a nest seen at Cochin airport-

- area on 2.2.
37. Red-wattled Lapwing  
*Vanellus indicus* ssp. *indicus*  
One bird seen at Cochin airport-area on 2.2. One at Munnar on 7.2 and at least ten at Periyar on 8.2.
  38. Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*  
At least 30 seen at a small pond in the Cochin airport-area on 2.2.
  39. Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*  
One at Periyar on 8.2.
  40. Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*  
One seen at Old Kochi, Ernakulam, 1-2.2.
  41. Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*  
An adult bird seen at Old Kochi, Ernakulam, 1.2.
  42. Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*  
Seen off Old Kochi, Ernakulam, 2.2.
  43. Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*  
Old Kochi, Ernakulam
  44. Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*  
Seen off Varkala
  45. Great Crested Tern *Sterna bergii* ssp. *velox*  
One flew north past Varkala on 11.2.
  46. River Tern *Sterna aurantia*  
A few were seen each day at the Hornbill Camp, Thattekkad, 2-5.2
  47. Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*  
Old Kochi, Ernakulam and also at Thattekkad.
  48. Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*  
At urban areas such as Varkala and Cochin.
  49. Spotted Dove  
*Streptopelia chinensis* ssp. *suratensis*  
At Thattekkad and also one at Bodi Gat, Tamil Nadu on the 7th.
  50. Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* ssp. *indica*  
One at Thattekkad on 2.2 and one at Deshadan, Munnar on 6.2.
  51. Pompadour Green Pigeon  
*Treron pompadora* ssp. *pompadora*  
Seen at Thattekkad and Periyar.  
The Pompadour Green Pigeons that lives in the Western Ghats has by some authors been given racial sta-
  52. Green Imperial Pigeon  
*Ducula aenea* ssp. *pusilla*  
Seen at Thattekkad.
  53. Mountain Imperial Pigeon  
*Ducula badia* ssp. *cuprea*  
Seen at Thattekkad and in Periyar.
  54. Rose-ringed Parakeet  
*Psittacula krameri* ssp. *manillensis*  
Varkala
  55. Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*  
At Thattekkad and in Periyar.
  56. Malabar Parakeet *Psittacula columboides*  
Seen at Thattekkad and at Periyar.
  57. Vernal Hanging-Parrot *Loriculus vernalis*  
Few seen at Thattekkad.
  58. Common Hawk-Cuckoo  
*Cuculus varius* ssp. *varius*  
Commonly seen and heard at Thattekkad.
  59. Banded Bay Cuckoo  
*Cacomantis sonneratii* ssp. *sonneratii*  
Seen at Thattekkad.
  60. Asian Koel  
*Eudynamis scolopaceus* ssp. *scolopaceus*  
Few birds at least seen and heard at Varkala, Thattekkad and Periyar.
  61. Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* ssp. *parroti*  
Few birds at least seen and heard at Varkala, Thattekkad and Periyar.
  62. Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia* ssp. *rufipennis*  
One heard at Thattekkad on 2.2.
  63. Brown Wood Owl  
*Strix leptogrammica* ssp. *indranee*  
One heard at Thattekkad on 3.2 and an one heard at Periyar on 9.2.
  64. Jungle Owlet  
*Glaucidium radiatum* ssp. *malabaricum*  
Heard and seen at Thattekkad
- tus, which in turn has been lifted to full species status by others. Although this is as it seems nothing that has been supported by many, especially not Clements (and [globaltwitcher.com](http://globaltwitcher.com)). This supposed race doesn't exist in The Handbook of the Birds of the World, vol. 4, either. Here the population in Western Ghats have been placed under the nominate race *pompadora*.



65. Brown Boobook *Ninox scutulata* ssp. *hirsuta*  
One heard at Thattekkad on 2.2.
66. Sri Lanka Frogmouth  
*Batrachostomus moniliger*  
Maybe the bird of the trip and what an extraordinary bird species it was! At the “evergreen forest” near Thattekkad we heard at least three different birds and we managed to see one of them. Thattekkad on 3.2.
67. Great Eared-Nightjar  
*Eurostopodus macrotis* ssp. *bourdilloni*  
At least three birds heard displaying over “the black rocks”, Thattekkad on 2.2.
68. Jerdon’s Nightjar  
*Caprimulgus atripennis* ssp. *atripennis*  
One heard displaying over “the black rocks”, Thattekkad on 2.2.
69. Savanna Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis*  
One heard displaying over “the black rocks”, Thattekkad on 2.2.
70. Indian Swiftlet *Aerodramus unicolor*  
At least seen at Thattekkad and at Munnar.
71. Brown-backed Needletail  
*Hirundapus giganteus* ssp. *indicus*  
Only sighting constitutes of about 20 birds seen at Deshadan, Munnar on the 6.2.
72. Alpine Swift  
*Tachymarptis melba* ssp. *dorobatai*  
Five at Deshadan, Munnar and five more at Vaguera, Munnar on 6.2. Two also at Varkala on 11.2.
73. Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus* ssp. *leuconyx*  
Three seen at Deshadan, Munnar on 6.2.
74. Little Swift *Apus affinis* ssp. *singalensis*  
Only seen in the area around Munnar. 20 at Deshadan and 30 at Vaguera on 6.2.
75. Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata*  
Few seen at Thattekkad and Periyar.
76. Malabar Trogon  
*Harpactes fasciatus* ssp. *malabaricus*  
A beautiful male at Periyar on 8.2.
77. Common Kingfisher  
*Alcedo atthis* ssp. *taprobana*  
One bird seen at Periyar on 8.2.
78. White-throated Kingfisher  
*Halcyon smyrnensis* ssp. *fusca*  
Varkala, Thattekkad and Periyar.
79. Green Bee-eater  
*Merops orientalis* ssp. *beludschicus*  
Few seen at Thattekkad.
80. Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*  
Few seen at Thattekkad.
81. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater  
*Merops leschenaultia*  
Three seen at Bhoothantankettu, Thattekkad, 4.2 and one seen Bodi Gat (Tamil Nadu), 7.2.
82. Indian Roller  
*Coracias benghalensis* ssp. *indicus*  
Few seen at Cochin airport-area, Thattekkad and Periyar.
83. Malabar Grey Hornbill *Ocyeros griseus*  
Common around Thattekkad also seen at Periyar.
84. Brown-headed Barbet  
*Megalaima zeylanica* ssp. *zeylanica*  
Varkala and Cochin.

85. White-cheeked Barbet *Megalaima viridis*  
Common at Thattekkad 2.2.
86. Crimson-throated Barbet  
*Megalaima rubricapillus* ssp. *malabarica*  
Seen and heard at Thattekkad.  
This race is sometimes treated as a separate species, the Malabar Barbet.
87. Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*  
One at Varkala on 30.1
88. Brown-capped Woodpecker  
*Dendrocopos moluccensis* ssp. *cinereigula*  
Few seen at Thattekkad and at Periyar.
89. Lesser Yellownappe  
*Picus chlorolophus* ssp. *chlorigaster*  
One seen at “the Black Rocks”, Thattekkad on 2.2. This woodpecker was said to be a rather rare species in Kerala.
90. Common Flameback  
*Dinopium javanense* ssp. *malabaricum*  
Thattekkad.
91. Black-rumped Flameback  
*Dinopium benghalense* ssp. *puncticolle*  
Varkala, Thattekkad and Periyar.
92. Greater Flameback  
*Chrysocolaptes lucidus* ssp. *socialis*  
1 male + 2 females at Thattekkad, 3.2 and 1 juvenile + 1 at Vaguera, Munnar, 6.2.
93. Heart-spotted Woodpecker *Hemicircus canente*  
At least 2 Bhoothatankettu, Thattekkad, 4.2.
94. Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyuran*  
One heard Bhoothatankettu, Thattekkad, 4.2 and one seen well along the road to Edamalayar on 4.2.
95. Jerdon’s Bushlark *Mirafra affinis*  
One seen Cochin airport on 2.2.
96. Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*  
At least 2 at Gap Shola, Idukki, 7.2.
97. Dusky Crag Martin  
*Ptyonoprogne concolor* ssp. *concolor*  
At least 10 Edamalayar Dam, Thattekkad, 4.2.  
At least 30 Vaguera, Munnar, 6.2.
98. Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*  
Different places.
99. Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica* ssp. *domicola*  
At least 20 at Vaguera, Munnar, 6.2. One was also seen at Gap Shola, Idukki, 7.2.  
This race is sometimes treated as a separate species, the Hill Swallow.
100. Red-rumped Swallow  
*Cecropis daurica* ssp. *erythropygia*  
At least 5 Cochin airport, 2.2.
101. White-browed Wagtail  
*Motacilla madaraspatisensis*  
Only few seen. Thattekkad and Periyar.
102. Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*  
One seen and heard at Old Kochi, Ernakulam, 2.2. I couldn’t decide which race this bird belonged to.
103. Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*  
Few seen around Munnar, Gap Shola, Idukki and at Bodi Gat (Tamil Nadu).
104. Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*  
One seen at Cochin airport on 2.2 and one seen Thattekkad, 3.2.
105. Richard’s Pipit *Anthus richardi*  
One seen at Cochin airport on 2.2.
106. Nilgiri Pipit *Anthus nilghiriensis*  
Three seen Deshadan, Munnar, 6.2.
107. Large Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina macei* ssp. *macei*  
Seen at Thattekkad, 2.2 and at Periyar on 8.2.
108. Black-headed Cuckooshrike  
*Coracina melanoptera* ssp. *sykesi*  
Seen at Bhoothatankettu, Thattekkad, 4.2.



Nilgiri Pipit

109. Scarlet Minivet  
*Pericrocotus flammeus* ssp. *flammeus*  
Few seen at Periyar on 8.2.
110. Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike  
*Hemipus picatus* ssp. *picatus*  
Edamalayar Dam, Thattekkad and Vaguera, Munnar.
111. Black-crested Bulbul  
*Pycnonotus melanicterus* ssp. *gularis*  
Few seen at Thattekkad.  
This race is sometimes treated as a true species, the Flame-throated Bulbul.
112. Red-whiskered Bulbul  
*Pycnonotus jocosus* ssp. *fuscicaudatus*  
Common. Seen at Thattekkad, Munnar and Bodi Gat, Tamil Nadu.
113. Red-vented Bulbul  
*Pycnonotus cafer* ssp. *pusillus*  
Seen at Bodi Gat, Tamil Nadu and at Periyar.
114. Yellow-throated Bulbul  
*Pycnonotus xantholaemus*  
A detour into Tamil Nadu gave us rare bulbul. Two at Bodi Gat, Tamil Nadu, 7.2.
118. Golden-fronted Leafbird  
*Chloropsis aurifrons* ssp. *insularis*  
Seen at Thattekkad.
119. Common Iora  
*Aegithina tiphia* ssp. *multicolour*  
Noted at Thattekkad.
120. Blue-capped Rock Thrush  
*Monticola cinclorhynchus*  
One beautiful male seen at Kannimalai, Munnar, 5.2.
121. Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*  
A young male along the road at Gap Shola, Idukki, 7.2.
122. Malabar Whistling-Thrush  
*Myophonus horsfieldii*  
Few seen at Thattekkad, Munnar and Periyar.
123. Orange-headed Thrush  
*Zoothera citrina* ssp. *cyanota*  
Few seen at Thattekkad, along the road to Munnar and at Periyar.
124. Scaly Thrush  
*Zoothera dauma* ssp. *neilgherriensis*  
One bird was seen along one of the trails at Periyar on 8.2.



Scaly Thrush ssp. *neilgherriensis*

115. Yellow-browed Bulbul *Iole indica* ssp. *indica*  
Edamalayar Dam, Thattekkad and Periyar.
116. Black Bulbul  
*Hypsipetes leucocephalus* ssp. *ganeesa*  
A high altitude species that was commonly seen around Munnar.
117. Blue-winged Leafbird  
*Chloropsis cochinchinensis* ssp. *jerdoni*  
Seen at Thattekkad.
125. Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*  
In Kerala the Eurasian Blackbird is represented by at least two different races; *Turdus m. nigropileus* and *Turdus m. bourdilloni*. We did see both of these taxons. The *nigropileus* is characteristic in having a clear black cap which is something that *bourdilloni* lacks. The systematic among the Blackbirds isn't at all clear. The Blackbirds living in India differs in many ways from those living in Europe. Therefore they are often treated as a full species in its own right – Indian Blackbird *Turdus simillimus*.  
*T. m. nigripileus*: Thattekkad.  
*T. m. bourdilloni*: Thattekkad and Munnar.
126. White-bellied Shortwing  
*Brachypteryx major* ssp. *albiventris*  
One heard and sadly seen very poorly at Kanni-

We didn't expect to see this species at all, but we were very lucky do stumble over one that was searching for food smack on the trail. Had we been a few minutes later it would probably had been scared off by some local women that like us walked the trail. This race have by some authors (i.e. Rasmussen et al.) been given status as a true species and according to Sepphyan a very difficult bird to see in Kerala. This was the first confirmed recording in Periyar!



- malai, Munnar on 5.2. We also heard one bird and later saw another at Vaguera, Munnar on 6.2.
127. Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata* ssp. *franklinii*  
Noted at Deshadan, Munnar, 6.2 and at Gap Shola, Idukki, 7.2.
128. Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*  
Few seen at Old Kochi, Ernakulam, Munnar and Periyar.
129. Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais rama*  
One seen at Varkala, Kerala on 30.1.
130. Common Tailorbird  
*Orthotomus sutorius* ssp. *guzuratus*  
Few seen at Cochin, Thattekkad, Munnar and Periyar.
131. Tickell's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus affinis*  
Few seen at Munnar. Deshadan and Vaguera.
132. Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*  
Seen at Thattekkad and also at Munnar.
133. Large-billed Leaf Warbler  
*Phylloscopus magnirostris*  
One seen at Thattekkad, 3.2.
134. Broad-tailed Grassbird *Schoenicola platyurus*  
One heard singing but not seen Deshadan, Munnar, 6.2.
135. Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*  
Thattekkad.
135. Rusty-tailed Flycatcher *Muscicapa ruficauda*  
One at Edamalayar Dam, Thattekkad, 4.2.
136. Brown-breasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui*  
Thattekkad and Periyar.
137. Black-and-orange Flycatcher  
*Ficedula nigrorufa*  
Few seen at Munnar 5-6.2.
138. Nilgiri Flycatcher *Eumyias albicaudatus*  
Few seen at Munnar 5-6.2.
139. White-bellied Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis pallipes*  
Poor view of one bird at Thattekkad, 3.2.
140. Blue-throated Flycatcher  
*Cyornis rubeculoides* ssp. *rubeculoides*  
At least 5 Thattekkad, 3.2.
141. Tickell's Blue Flycatcher  
*Cyornis tickelliae* ssp. *tickelliae*  
One male Bhoothatankettu, Thattekkad, 4.2 and one male Periyar 8.2.
142. Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher  
*Culicicapa ceylonensis*  
Seen around Munnar.
143. Indian Blue Robin  
*Luscinia brunnea* ssp. *brunnea*  
Three different birds in the shrubs at Kannimalai, Munnar, 5.2.  
What a beautiful bird! This was one of the favourite birds of the trip. But it was an extremely difficult bird to get good views of as it always moved around in the tightest of bushes.
144. Oriental Magpie-robin  
*Copsychus saularis* ssp. *saularis*  
Only few birds seen in Cochin and Thattekkad.
145. Indian Robin  
*Saxicoloides fulicatus* ssp. *fulicatus*  
Only once seen was a pair at Cochin airport on 2.2.
146. Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata* ssp. *nilgiriensis*  
Commonly seen around Munnar.
147. Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*  
Seen at Thattekkad.
148. Asian Paradise-Flycatcher  
*Terpsiphone paradisi* ssp. *paradise*  
Few seen at Thattekkad.
149. Grey-breasted [Kerala] Laughingthrush  
*Garrulax jerdoni* ssp. *fairbanki*  
Few seen at Munnar, 5-6.2. Kannimalai and Deshadan.
150. Indian Scimitar-Babbler  
*Pomatorhinus horsfieldii* ssp. *travancoreensis*  
Few seen and heard at Munnar and Periyar.
151. Dark-fronted Babbler  
*Rhopocichla atriceps* ssp. *bourdilloni*  
Two smaller groups were seen moving around in the undergrowth at Bhoothatankettu and Edamalayar, Thattekkad, 4.2.
152. Rufous Babbler  
*Turdoides subrufa* ssp. *hyperythra*  
Seen in smaller numbers at Thattekkad and Periyar.

153. Jungle Babbler  
*Turdoides striata* ssp. *malabarica*  
Not uncommon at Thattekkad and Periyar. Also seen at Bodi Gat, Tamil Nadu.
154. Brown-cheeked Fulvetta  
*Alcippe poioicephala* ssp. *poioicephala*  
Two at Vaguera Estate Road, Munnar, 6.2.
155. Great Tit *Parus major* ssp. *mahrattarum*  
Few seen Thattekkad and Periyar.
156. Velvet-fronted Nuthatch  
*Sitta frontalis* ssp. *frontalis*  
Two at Bhoothatankettu, Thattekkad, 4.2 and two at Vaguera, Munnar, 6.2.
157. Purple-rumped Sunbird  
*Leptocoma zeylonica* ssp. *flaviventris*  
1 male + 2 female Bhoothatankettu, Thattekkad, 4.2.
158. Crimson-backed Sunbird *Leptocoma minima*  
Seen at Thattekkad, Bodi Gat (Tamil Nadu) and also common around Munnar.
159. Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* ssp. *asiaticus*  
Thattekkad, Bodi Gat (Tamil Nadu) and Periyar.
160. Little Spiderhunter  
*Arachnothera longirostra* ssp. *longirostra*  
One at Thattekkad, 3.2 and one 4.2. Also one at Periyar, 8.2.
161. Plain Flowerpecker  
*Dicaeum concolor* ssp. *concolor*  
One Thattekkad 3. 2; one Deshadan, Munnar, 6.2; one Periyar, 8.2 and one en route Periyar – Kottayam, 9.2.
162. Oriental White-eye  
*Zosterops palpebrosus* ssp. *egregious*  
Common around Munnar.
163. Eurasian Golden Oriole  
*Oriolus oriolus* ssp. *kundoo*  
Thattekkad and Periyar.
164. Black-naped Oriole  
*Oriolus chinensis* ssp. *diffuses*  
Thattekkad.
165. Black-hooded Oriole  
*Oriolus xanthornus* ssp. *maderaspatanus*  
Thattekkad.
166. Asian Fairy-bluebird *Irena puella*
167. Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*  
Few seen at Cochin airport, Thattekkad, Bodi Gat (Tamil Nadu) and Periyar. All belonging to the nominate race. At Cochin airport we also noted one bird that fitted the plumage given by the race *Lanius (c.) lucionensis* which sometimes is treated as a separate species.
168. Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* ssp. *caniceps*  
A very common bird in and around Munnar.
169. Black Drongo  
*Dicrurus macrocercus* ssp. *macrocercus*  
Many seen along the road between Cochin and Thattekkad. Also seen from the train between Kollam and Ernakulam on 1.2.
170. Ashy Drongo  
*Dicrurus leucophaeus* ssp. *longicaudatus*  
One at Varkala 30.1, one at Thattekkad 2.2 and one at Deshadan, Munnar 6.2.  
This subspecies is sometimes treated as a separate species – Pale Drongo.
171. Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus* ssp. *aeneus*  
Thattekkad and Periyar.
172. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo  
*Dicrurus paradiseus* ssp. *paradiseus*  
One at Thattekkad on 3.2 and a few more at Periyar on 8.2.
173. Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus*  
Few seen at Thattekkad and at Periyar.
174. Rufous Treepie  
*Dendrocitta vagabunda* ssp. *parvula*  
Seen at Varkala and Thattekkad.
175. White-bellied Treepie *Dendrocitta leucogastra*  
Seen at Thattekkad, en route Poopara - Periyar and Periyar.
176. House Crow *Corvus splendens* ssp. *protegatus*  
The most common crow in the coastal areas. Just some few km inland it became rarer.
177. Large-billed Crow  
*Corvus macrorhynchos* ssp. *culminates*  
One seen at Old Kochi, Ernakulam, 1.2 and also seen at Olive Brook, Munnar.
178. Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa*  
Thattekkad and Periyar.

179. Jungle Myna  
*Acridotheres fuscus* ssp. *mahrattensis*  
Cochin, Munnar and Periyar.
180. Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* ssp. *tristis*  
Common.
181. Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica*  
Ten seen Thattekkad, 3.2 and about 50 more on 4.2. At Thattekkad we did on the 3rd also see two birds that fitted the characteristic plumage of “*blythi*”.  
“*Blythi*-birds” are sometimes treated as a genuine race (and even as a true species!). Although this is not the case in Clements, where it’s no mention of this race at all.
182. Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus*  
At least 20 flew past Old Kochi, Ernakulam on 1.2.

183. (Indian) House Sparrow  
*Passer domesticus* ssp. *indicus*  
Ernakulam (Junction stn.) on 1.2 and also in some villages between Periyar and Kottayam on 9th.
184. Chestnut-shouldered Petronia  
*Petronia xanthocollis* ssp. *xanthocollis*  
Two seen Thattekkad on 3.2.
185. Black-throated Munia  
*Lonchura kelaarti* ssp. *jerdoni*  
Three seen at Thattekkad on 3.2.
186. Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*  
One female-coloured Kannimalai, Munnar, on 5.2.

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## Mammals (*Mammalia*)

1. Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*  
Periyar
2. Bonnet Monkey *Macaca radiata*  
Periyar



Bonnet Monkey

3. Nilgiri Langur *Trachypithecus johnii*  
One Vaguera Estate Road, Munnar, 6.2. Also seen at Periyar on 8.2.
4. Indian Giant Squirrel *Ratufa indica*  
Periyar

5. Common (Indian) Palm Squirrel  
*Funambulus palmarum*  
Varkala, Thattekkad and Periyar.
6. Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus*  
Old Kochi, Ernakulam.
7. Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus*  
There was a roost just outside our hotel, the Wildernest, in Periyar.
8. Tiger *Panthera tigris*  
It’s a very big question mark on the only print that we saw at Periyar. I’m very questioned on the fact that it was just one clear track even though there was a very muddy track that the “tiger” must have been following.
9. Common Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsi*  
Few seen at Varkala.
10. European Otter *Lutra lutra*  
Family seen at Periyar on 8.2.
11. Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*  
Periyar.
12. Gaur *Bos frontalis*  
Periyar.
13. Sambar Deer *Rusa unicolor*  
Periyar.

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## Butterflies (*Lepidoptera*)

A few more species were seen but these were the only ones that I could put a name to. Although the impression was that the butterflies weren't that numerous during our stay in Kerala.

1. Common Rose *Atrophaneura aristolochiae*  
A rather common butterfly at Varkala.
2. *Argyreus hyperbius* ssp. *castetsi*  
On seen at Deshadan, Munnar, 6.2.
3. Common Sailer *Neptis hylas*  
Thattekkad.
4. Lemon Pansy *Junonia lemonias*  
Thattekkad.



*Argyreus hyperbius* ssp. *castetsi*

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## Amphibians (*Amphibia*)

We did see some amphibians as well, but as our knowledge about these animals is limited we can only give the common English names to a handful of them. Among amphibians seen were; House Gecko (Varkala, Cochin), Flying Gecko (Thattekkad), Snake Skink (Thattekkad) and Sand-boa (Olive Brook, Munnar). We did also see a big species of Lizard en route between Thattekkad and Munnar.