

December 2007 • Vol 7 • Issue 12

JetWings

Nightlife
The best
nightspots in Goa

Exotica
Getting married
in Goa

**Christmas in
New York**
Where to go,
eat and shop

Discover
Goa's Best

JET AIRWAYS 

Birding

On the wing



This time around when you visit Goa, explore beyond the obvious and try something a little unusual, like birding.

Text & photographs Krishnan V.

152 | Itwings | December 2007

“There it comes,” someone whispered, and our heads turned to look over the side of the boat where a majestic White-bellied Sea Eagle gracefully dove in to snatch a fish out of the water with its sharp talons. Suddenly, we were wide awake and extremely interested.

Goa, the very name conjures up images of picture perfect beaches with idyllic coconut palm trees swaying in the mild ocean breeze. To many of us, the same name brings up tantalising images of bottles of chilled beer and delectable shack food on the beach. We had been to Goa many a time; we'd done the beaches, marvelled at the architecture and the churches and revelled in its parties. This time around, one of our friends suggested we try something a little different and wild and that's how we hit upon the birding idea. The hardest part was having to rise early while on vacation, that too in Goa, but we pulled it off, aided by liberal quaffs of fresh-ground Java coffee.

First sightings

The bird sanctuary on Chorao Island lies across the Mandovi River and is accessible via ferry from Panjim. Named after renowned ornithologist Dr Salim Ali, this bird sanctuary is the abode of myriad species of birds, both local and migratory. The sanctuary consists essentially of mangrove forests crisscrossed by small canals. Our guide had already got us permits and we clambered on to his small paddle boat, which swayed precariously. Motor boats are prohibited in the

◀ Little Stint.



Take the path less travelled
and the world will follow

The Comp
Raym



Interestingly, the first sighting of a bird for anyone is called "a lifer" — nothing to do with prisons and other such thoughts!

sanctuary so as not to disturb the birds. The early morning quiet and chirping of the birds and the gentle lapping sound of the water was a refreshing change from the sounds of Mumbai traffic that one is usually used to in the mornings.

None of us knew what to expect, our avian knowledge being limited to the crow and sparrow. The most number of birds known to even the more knowledgeable amongst us, extended no more than three, with the addition of the odd parrot.

As the boat gently drifted through the canals, we were witness to a host of avian activity. A Brahmini Kite flew overhead with its characteristic "scream" that, to me, sounded like a creaky door opening in a horror movie. On the ground and on the banks, hundreds of waders such as ruffs, redshanks, sandpipers and stints pecked away at the mud. A flock of godwits wheeled around and settled a distance away. Kingfishers perched patiently on the mangroves, only to disappear in a flash of blue

on spotting their prey. Our guide informed us that there were five types of kingfishers seen in the area. We saw the Small Blue Kingfisher, the White-throated Kingfisher and the Black-capped Kingfisher. Not bad for a first birding expedition! Interestingly, the first sighting of a bird for anyone is called "a lifer" — nothing to do with prisons and other such thoughts! So given this quaint terminology, practically all the birds we saw were "lifers" for us! One can also climb up to a watchtower in the sanctuary but we decided we were having too much fun on the canal cruise, and gave the watchtower a pass.

In the few hours we spent cruising around, our guide explained the ecology and the importance of mangroves. He also explained how the mangrove ecosystem facilitates breeding grounds for several varieties of fish and insects that are natural prey for birds. Apart from birds, flying foxes, jackals and crocodiles are also found in the sanctuary. The mangroves also act

▲▲ A small male minivet.

as a natural barrier and prevent sea ingress into the land, thus providing a buffer to the coastal region from possible natural calamities.

Exotic varieties

We headed out to Bondla and Mollem to catch a glimpse of some of the different types of birds. The best part of Bondla birding starts in the two-odd kilometre approach to the sanctuary. Situated at the foot of the Western Ghats, Bondla lies about 52 km east of Panaji and an hour-and-a-half-long drive from Baga or Candolim. The habitat is largely mixed forest in gently undulating terrain. We got lucky and sighted a gorgeous Malabar Trogon, which flew past us in a mesmerising scarlet flash. We even saw the Brown-headed Barbet, Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Hair-crested Drongo and the common rosefinch. A Grey Hornbill perched on a tree yonder picked on some figs. About 20 km ahead of Bondla is the Bhagwan Mahavir National Park at Mollem. The bird life here is similar to

UNI WORLD CITY
NEW TOWN, KOLKATA

BENGAL
unitech
UNIVERSAL

Uniworld City brings
world class living in Kolkata.



INTRODUCING



HARMONY

Imagine sprawling greens, mesmerizing water fountains and melodious wind chimes as the highlight of your living space. Presenting the new phase of Uniworld City, Harmony, part of a 100 acre residential development.

- Options of 2-3 Bedroom Apartments and Penthouses
- 2 Feature Gardens
- Breathtaking Central Park, Jogging Track, Children's Play Area
- Well Equipped Clubhouse with a Swimming Pool, Modern Gym and Library

With over 2500 homes sold already, Uniworld City is spreading the joy of world-class living to the City of Joy!

Special offer for IT professionals. Call us to visit from the office with prior appointment. Office is open on all 7 days.

Bengal Unitech Universal Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd. Block C, 4th Floor, 22 Camac Street, Kolkata-700016
Tel.: +91 33 22892000, 23242000 Fax: +91 33 22811530 Email: kolkata@unitechgroup.com Website: www.unitechgroup.com



▲ Above: A common redshank.

Below: A Heart-spotted Woodpecker.

that at Bondla, but the forests are more extensive and somewhat drier. We saw a Eurasian Sparrowhawk pounce on a kill and also the unmistakable Malabar Pied Hornbill with its characteristic and unique casque, all without stepping out of the car.



156 *wings* December 2007

Our guide mentioned that we could find birds even near popular tourist spots. The Baga fields and the Baga woods (Arpora Forest, adjacent to Club Cubana) were good places to go birdwatching. We were able to see Pied Bushchats, Oriental Skylarks, pipits, lapwings and jungle mynahs, to name a few.

The best bird watching experience at Morjim Beach is often had on low tide when several extensive sand banks are exposed mid-channel.

Unusual sighting spot

We decided to try the not so popular Morjim Beach for the day. It is at the mouth of Chapora's estuary, five kilometres north of Baga, and supports waders and gulls. At Morjim, true to our findings, the pristine beach was much less crowded than Baga or Calangute. We practically had the whole beach to ourselves and only had to share space with the hundreds of birds around. The best bird watching experience here is often had during low tide when several extensive sand banks are



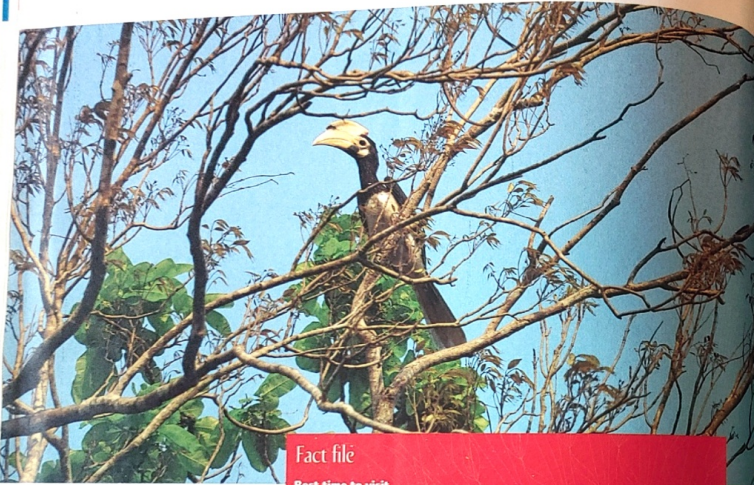
JK TYRE DRIVES TECHNOLOGY

ALL THREE NEW "WORLD CARS"
DRIVE EXCLUSIVELY ON JK TYRE



Maruti Suzuki SX4 Zxi on 205/60 R16 Vectra, Mahindra Logan on 180/65 R14 Vectors & Swift Zxi on 185/70 R14 Vectra, Maruti Suzuki Swift (Lxi & Vxi) on 185/60 R14 Vectors





▲ The Malabar Pied Hornbill.

exposed mid-channel, leaving behind plenty for the birds to feed on. And probably the best area is on the northern end of the beach, near the mouth of the river, where there is a large high-tide roost. This is where the birds congregate when the tide comes in. As the tide ebbs, it leaves behind small fishes and critters for the birds to feed on. We spotted many gulls, terns, plovers, and even a White-bellied Sea Eagle circling lazily in the sky above.

By evening, our parched throats had taken a new interest in the flowing Sandpipers, Kingfishers and Kings that dot the Goan barscape. Back in Calangute, we slipped out of the "mangrove-scape" slid into the "Tito and Mambo-scape" to trance the night away.

Fact file

Best time to visit
Mid-October to April

Location

From Panaji, one needs to take a bus or a cab to the Ribandar ferry wharf and take a ferry across the Mandovi River to the island of Chorao. The sanctuary is within walking distance from the ferry wharf at Chorao.

Travel tips

- You will need permission from the Chief Wildlife Warden, Forest Department of Panaji to enter the Dr Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary at Chorao.
- Most of the taxi drivers who cater to birders hang around the entrance of hotels such as Beira Mar Hotel at Calangute and the nearby Ronil Beach Resort, making these good stay options.
- Carry along a hat, binoculars, camera, a guidebook on birds and some light snacks and water. Wear full-sleeved, earth-colour clothing, as bright colours could scare away the birds.
- As far as bird guides go, the *Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* by Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp, and Tim Inskipp is indispensable. An alternative is *A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* by Krys Kazmierczak.

For further information:

Contact the Office of the Chief Conservator of Forests
Gomantak Maratha Samaj Building,
Panaji-Goa
Tel: (0832) 2225926/2224747/2223508

Range Forest Officer, Wildlife
Dr Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary, Campal, Panaji-Goa
Tel: (0832) 2228772

PLANNING A
TRIP TO ITALY?
REMOVE SUITS
FROM YOUR
SHOPPING LIST.

