ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

India

Oriental Bird Club

Southern Birding & Wildlife of the Western Ghats

23rd November to 4th December 2023 (12 days)



Sri Lanka Frogmouth by Markus Lilje

Hemming the rugged lands of southern India are the impressive Western Ghats Mountains, a land of endless valleys, rolling tea estates and breathtaking highland vistas, well-known for harbouring a superb range of highly localised endemic birds and a host of special mammals. This comprehensive tour showcases many of these special creatures: the gorgeous Indian Pitta, scarce White-bellied Minivet, Nilgiri Laughingthrush, Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, rare Sri Lanka Frogmouth, exquisite Malabar Trogon, Malabar Whistling Thrush and Heart-spotted Woodpecker are just some of the incredible birds we will

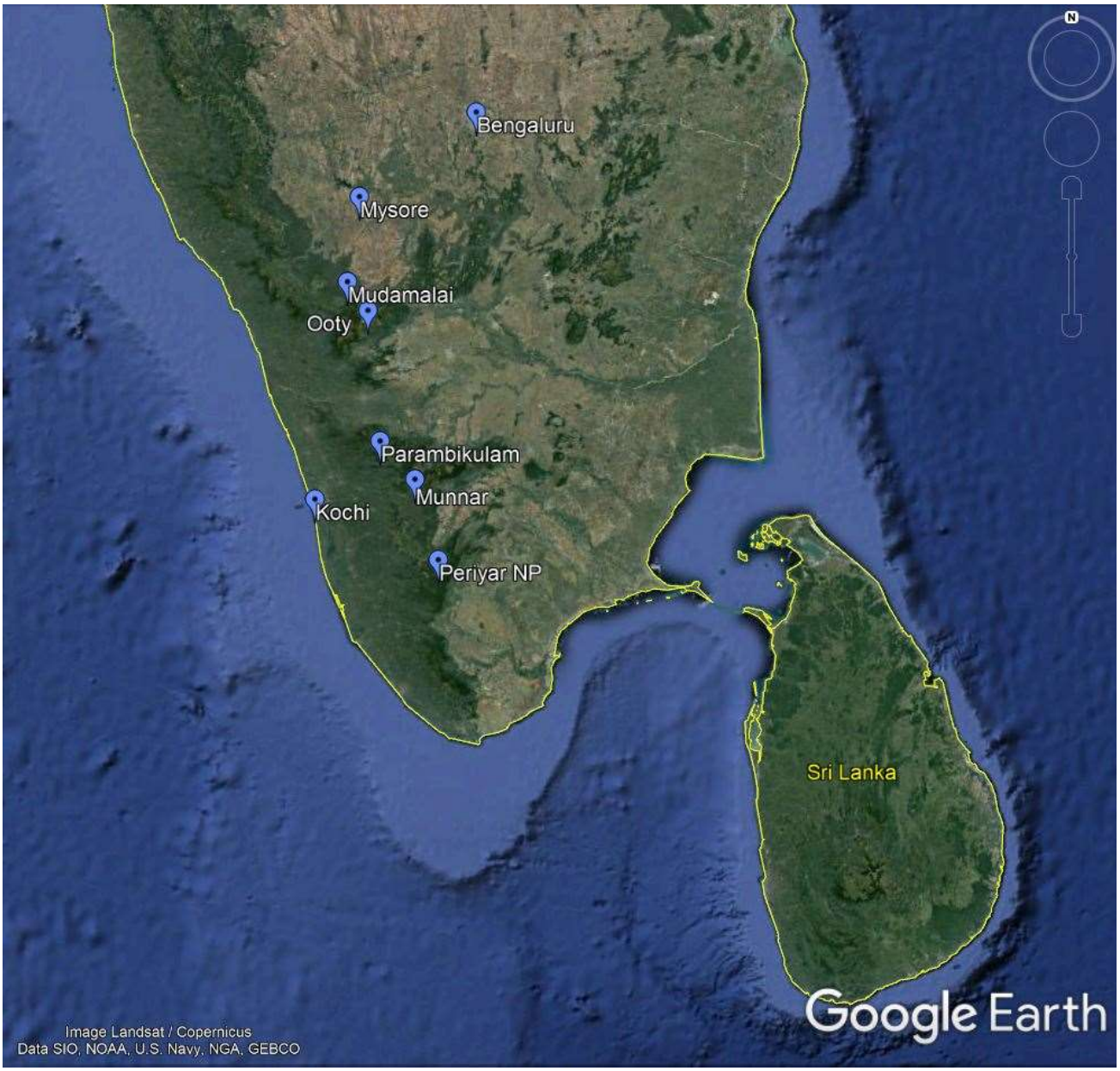
search for, while Indian Elephant, Dhole (Indian Wild Dog), Sloth Bear, Gaur (Indian Bison), Wild Boar and Smooth-coated Otter are potential mammalian highlights. Join us for an unbeatable birding exploration to the southern part of this immense and extremely rewarding nation!

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

SOUTHERN INDIA

Day 1	**Bengaluru to Mysore**
Day 2	**Mysore to Mudamalai**
Day 3	**Mudamalai**
Day 4	**Mudamalai to Udhagamandalam (Ooty)**
Day 5	**Ooty to Parambikulam**
Day 6	**Parambikulam**
Day 7	**Parambikulam to Munnar**
Day 8	**Munnar**
Day 9	**Munnar to Periyar National Park**
Day 10	**Periyar National Park**
Day 11	**Periyar to Kochi**
Day 12	**Kochi and depart**

TOUR ROUTE MAP…



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…



Mysore Palace by Markus Lilje

Day 1: Bangalore to Mysore. This morning, we will depart from Bangalore on our route south towards Ranganathittu. Our first bird sightings should include the ubiquitous Black Drongo and Indian Roller that often perch along the roadside wires.

Our initial scheduled stop will be in the town of Kokkare Bellur where the localised Spot-billed Pelican, and occasionally Painted Stork, nest in the village trees. Exploring the scrubby bush and woodland in the area can be very rewarding and, in particular, we will look for Jerdon's Leafbird, the secretive Blue-faced Malkoha, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Purple-rumped Sunbird, and even Red-naped Ibis. We will then make our way to the famous bird sanctuary at Ranganathittu, where we board a small boat on the Cauvery River. From the boat a Great Cormorant and Black-headed Ibis roost can be enjoyed, along with a variety of other species, including the impressive Great Stone-curlew, Oriental Darter, Little Cormorant, Asian Openbill, River Tern, attractive Red-wattled Lapwing and Marsh Crocodile, while along the banks of the sanctuary we may find the endemic White-spotted Fantail, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Pale-billed Flowerpecker and White-cheeked Barbet. Tonight we will overnight at a lovely hotel in the town of Mysore, commonly described as the "City of Palaces".

Day 2: Mysore to Mudamalai. An early start this morning will see us arriving at the beautiful Mysore Palace to enjoy a stroll around the exterior. Incorporating a wide and fascinating array of courtyards, gardens and buildings, this stunning structure is second only to the Taj Mahal in terms of tourist popularity within the country. Interestingly, the Maharaja of Mysore at the time, Rajarshi Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, actually commissioned a British architect, Lord Henry Irwin, to construct the palace in order to replace the old one, which had been destroyed by fire. Completed in 1912, it was further expanded around 1940, and then continually beautified until reaching its current state of sheer perfection. Common birds we may find while admiring its remarkable periphery include Indian Grey Hornbill, Greater Coucal, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Grey Francolin and possibly Shikra.



Nilgiri Laughingthrush by Markus Lilje

We then begin our journey towards the Mudumalai hills, one of the largest areas of protected forests in India. En route we will stop occasionally to take advantage of available habitat or roadside sightings and, by mid-afternoon, we will arrive in the



Black-and-orange Flycatcher by Adam Riley

hills and can begin birding on foot through a wide diversity of habitats. The nearby secondary scrub supports small populations of Yellow-wattled Lapwing, the scarce White-naped Woodpecker and endemic Malabar Lark, and, if the weather cooperates, we can search overhead for Red-headed and Indian Vultures soaring in the thermals.

Our accommodation is located at the foot of the Nilgiri Mountains where a variety of habitats, from dry deciduous thorny scrub to moist evergreen forests, will be explored.

Day 3: Mudamalai. This morning, we will enjoy birding the broad-leaved riverine forests and secondary growth of Mudumalai and Masinagudi. Several endemics and localised specialities occur here, including Grey-headed Bulbul, Malabar Whistling Thrush, endemic Malabar Grey Hornbill, Grey Junglefowl, Blue-winged and Plum-headed Parakeets, the vocal Indian Scimitar Babbler, Puff-throated Babbler, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Nilgiri, Thick-billed and Pale-billed Flowerpeckers, the incredible white-throated race of Orange-headed Thrush, Loten's Sunbird, and the rare and localised White-bellied Minivet.

The continuous call of the endemic White-cheeked Barbet can be heard as we search for other more widespread birds such as Brown Wood Owl and Brown Fish Owl, Jungle and Spotted Owlets, Black-rumped and Greater Flamebacks, Vernal Hanging Parrot, Crested Treeswift, Jerdon's Bush Lark, White-browed Fantail, Yellow-crowned and Streak-throated Woodpeckers, Indian Nuthatch, White-browed and Yellow-browed Bulbuls, Hume's Whitethroat, Indian Golden Oriole, Indian Blue Robin, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Bay-backed Shrike, Orange Minivet, and Golden-fronted Leafbird.



Blue-winged Parakeet by Adam Riley

This area is usually a reliable site for Indian Elephant and we hope to come across these spectacular animals. Additional mammal possibilities include the rarely sighted Dhole (Indian Wild Dog), Sloth Bear, Leopard, and even Bengal Tiger, though we will need a hefty dose of luck to spot any of these beasts! Dinner tonight will be followed by a night birding excursion where we will search for Savanna and the near-endemic Jerdon's Nightjars.

Day 4: Mudamalai to Udhagamandalam (Ooty). This morning we will transfer towards the Blue Mountains near Udhagamandalam, among the highest mountains in all of Southern India. The scenery is superb within a garden-like setting of rhododendron and magnolia forests draped with an assortment of orchids. The small hill station here was once a very popular, charming and thriving location during the time



Yellow-throated Bulbul by Stephan Lorenz

of British occupation. The town has certainly changed quite a bit since these times, yet the odd grand building and luxurious hotel still remains and provides some insight into what it may once have looked like. The higher elevations of the Western Ghats are dotted with patches of moist evergreen forest, locally known as sholas, and it is these forests that hold many of the region's most desirable endemics.

We will spend the day soaking in our surroundings while looking for geographically restricted species. These could include the gorgeous Nilgiri Laughingthrush, Black-and-orange Flycatcher, flashy White-spotted Fantail, Nilgiri and Rusty-tailed Flycatchers, secretive Nilgiri Blue Robin, splendid White-bellied Treepie, and rare and secretive Nilgiri Thrush, which has also been seen in this area. Some of the other species that we may find here are Vernal Hanging Parrot, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, the stunning Heart-spotted Woodpecker, Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher, Little Spiderhunter, and the migratory Blue-capped Rock Thrush. After a full day's birding through this unique habitat, we will then make our way to our accommodation, surrounded by neatly manicured gardens.

Day 5: Ooty to Parambikulam. We will begin our day searching for the scarce and nomadic Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, as well as other specialities, including Ashy Prinia, Indian Black-lored Tit, Western Crowned Warbler, the localised White-browed Bulbul, Indian Blackbird, and Puff-throated Babbler skulking through the undergrowth. The stunted forest in this area is an absolute delight to bird, and it is interesting to note that this immense mountain range was once completely blanketed by these forests, contributing to what was once the largest tract of rainforest in all of Asia. The eventual realisation of the value of teak and rosewood in Europe, however, meant that these forests have been harvested to a mere fraction of their former glory.

We then spend the afternoon driving up to Parambikulam for a two-night stay. Time permitting, we will begin birding as soon as we arrive. After dinner, we'll take a short walk around the camp to search for the remarkable Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Oriental Scops Owl, Brown Hawk-Owl, Jungle Owlet and, with luck, the rare Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl.



White-bellied Treepie by Markus Lilje

Day 6: Parambikulam. Our lodge here is conveniently located within striking distance of prime birding habitat, and we will spend the entire day exploring the rich forested areas around Parambikulam in the foothills of the



Malabar Lark by Stephan Lorenz

Western Ghats. This dense lowland tropical forest comes alive in the morning with the dawn chorus of birds and monkeys alike. Some of the specialities we will be searching for include the spectacular White-bellied Treepie, Malabar Grey Hornbill, retiring Red Spurfowl in pocket stands of bamboo, Grey Junglefowl, the superb Malabar Trogon, Malabar Whistling Thrush, White-bellied Blue Flycatcher, and Crimson-backed Sunbird. Mammal possibilities include Gaur (a forest-dwelling buffalo), Asian Elephant, the huge Indian Giant Flying Squirrel, Wild Boar, Nilgiri Langur and Bonnet Macaque.

Day 7: Parambikulam to Munnar. This morning we will have some additional time to continue birding this fabulous area, searching for Indian Peafowl, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, the huge Great Hornbill, Blue-winged Parakeet, stunning Malabar Barbet, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Blue-faced Malkoha, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, the large White-bellied and Heart-spotted Woodpeckers, Lesser Yellownape, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, Common Emerald Dove, Malabar Woodshrike, secretive Indian Blue Robin, Brown-breasted Flycatcher, Black-naped Monarch, Dark-fronted Babbler, Flame-throated Bulbul, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Southern Hill Myna, Malabar Starling, bamboo-loving Rufous Babbler, Black-hooded Oriole, and perhaps the localised Black-throated Munia, to mention just some of the potential species we may find in this remarkable region. In the afternoon we will then make our way to our next destination, the town of Munnar.

Day 8: Munnar. This morning we will head out to explore the Eravikulam National Park situated in the high Cardamom Hills of the Western Ghats. This reserve, originally established to protect a sure-footed goat called the Nilgiri Tahr, supports a good selection of birds as well as several localised species. These include the very rarely-sighted Painted Bush Quail, White-bellied Blue Robin, Nilgiri Flycatcher, migratory Tickell's Leaf Warbler, and the localised and habitat-specific Nilgiri Pipit. The shy and difficult Broad-tailed Grassbird inhabits the steeply grassed mountain slopes in the area, while the beautiful Palani Laughingthrush can be found in the forested ravines. Other species we might come across as we bird the mountainside include Hill and Red-rumped Swallows, exquisite Blue Rock Thrush, White-bellied Blue Robin, Dusky Crag Martin, and Loten's Sunbird. After a full day's birding in this great area, we will retire for a second night at our now familiar accommodation near Munnar.



Malabar Whistling Thrush by Adam Riley

Day 9: Munnar to Periyar National Park. We head to the fabulous Periyar reserve this morning with birding detours en route. On one of these detours, we will explore the steep scrubby hillsides of the Bodi Ghat, which



Nilgiri Wood Pigeon by Stephan Lorenz

supports a small population of the localised endemic, Yellow-throated Bulbul. We will search for this species amongst the more common bulbul species such as Red-whiskered, Red-vented, White-browed, and Flame-throated.

Continuing to our destination near Periyar, we will settle into our accommodations for the next two nights, picturesquely situated along the edge of Lake Periyar. Close to our hotel, we have a chance of locating the beautiful Indian Pitta, a species that migrates down to the forests of Southern India during the colder winter months.

Day 10: Periyar National Park. Periyar National Park contains a variety of habitats, ranging from grassland and dry deciduous forest to evergreen forest and riverside scrub. We will spend the day searching here for some very special species, including the highly secretive and wary Wynaad Laughingthrush. Other birds we will look out for are White-rumped Spinetail, Brown-backed Needletail, Indian Swiftlet, the scarce Blyth's Swift, Crested Honey Buzzard, Black Eagle, Changeable and Rufous-bellied Hawk-Eagles, the striking Black Baza, Grey-fronted Green and Mountain Imperial Pigeons, the uncommon migratory Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Indian Scimitar Babbler, Grey-breasted Prinia, Thick-billed Warbler, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta, the spectacular Asian Fairy-bluebird, Southern Hill Myna, and Forest Wagtail, among many other more widespread species.

We will also have some excellent mammal viewing opportunities during a late afternoon boat trip along the edge of Lake Periyar, where we might come across Indian Elephant, Gaur, Wild Boar, and Sambar (a type of large deer). Birds on and around the lake could include Wooly-necked Stork, Western Osprey, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Ashy Woodswallow, and White-browed Wagtail while occasionally Great Hornbill can be seen flying overhead.

Day 11: Periyar to Kochi. After a final morning's birding near Periyar National Park, we will take an afternoon drive to Kochi where we will overnight and enjoy a final celebratory dinner together.

Day 12: Kochi and depart. This morning the tour will conclude in Kochi.



Flame-throated Bulbul by Markus Lilje

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

The quote for this **12-day** tour of Southern India is broken down as follows:

US$4,995.00 per person based on a minimum group size of **seven** guests on a twin/sharing basis.

Single supplement: US$1,390.00

This includes:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 12 of the main tour;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings during the tour;
- All ground transportation;
- All national park and other reserve entrance fees and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

This excludes:

- **ANY** flights;
- Visa fees;
- Any drinks;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader. If, therefore, you feel that he has given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip him.

Please Note

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- Fitness: this tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health and reasonably fit as most of the birding will be done on foot, and may require walking for several hours at a time.
- Accommodation throughout the tours varies from very comfortable to rather basic hotels and lodges. There is no camping on this trip.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include **ANY** airfares. The tour will depart from Bengaluru on day 1 by **08:00**. Please arrive in advance of this time or the day before. (For those participants continuing onwards from the Andaman Islands Extension, the cost of the hotel for this evening is not included in the tour price). The tour will conclude by mid-morning at Kochi International Airport on Day 12.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru (IATA: BLR) is the starting point for tour. Bengaluru airport has regular international service as well as domestic service from Delhi and Mumbai. Cochin International Airport (IATA: COK), Kochi is the departure point for this tour and is serviced by many of the world's major airlines. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**