India - Southern

Endemics of the Western Ghats



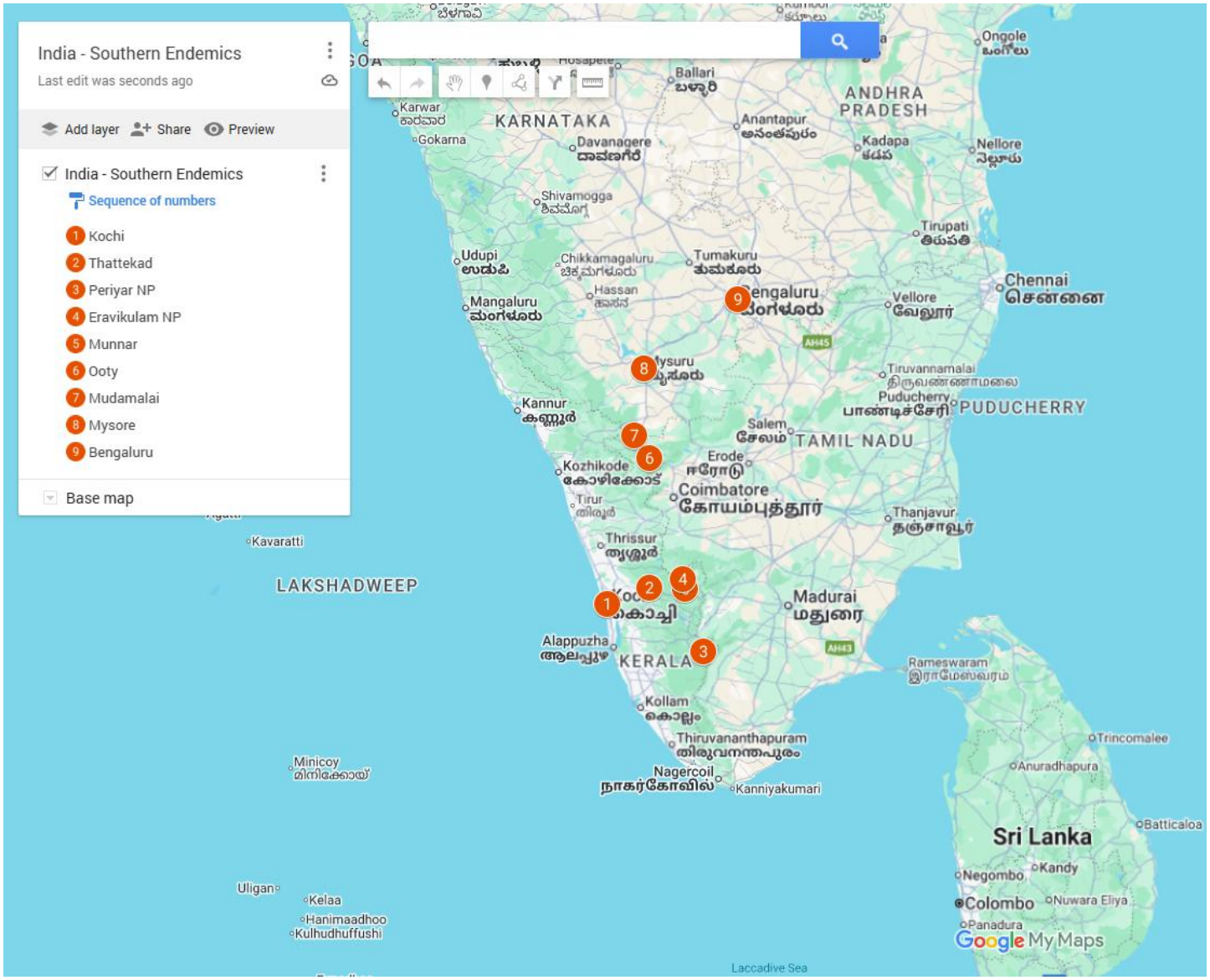
White-bellied Blue Robin by Stephan Lorenz

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, 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, 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!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Kochi**
Day 2	**Kochi to Thattekad**
Day 3	**Thattekad**
Day 4	**Thattekad to Periyar National Park**
Day 5	**Periyar National Park**
Day 6	**Periyar National Park to Munnar**
Day 7	**Munnar**
Day 8	**Munnar to Udhagamandalam (Ooty)**
Day 9	**Ooty**
Day 10	**Ooty to Mudamalai**
Day 11	**Mudamalai to Bengaluru via Mysore & Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary**
Day 12	**Final departure**

Birding sites in detail



Birding sites in detail

Thattekad Bird Sanctuary. This very productive site is only a short drive from Kochi. Here, we might find notable species such as Lesser Whistling Duck, Purple Heron, Medium Egret, Crested Honey Buzzard, Crested Serpent Eagle, Crested Goshawk, Grey-headed Swamphen, Bronze-winged Jacana, Whiskered Tern, Banded Bay Cuckoo, White-rumped Needletail, Indian Swiftlet, Malabar Gray Hornbill, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Indian Roller, Oriental Dollarbird, Malabar Barbet, Brown-capped Woodpecker, Vernal Hanging-Parrot, Malabar Woodshrike, Ashy Woodswallow, Small Minivet, Indian Golden and Black-naped Orioles, Southern Hill Myna, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Nilgiri Flowerpecker and Little Spiderhunter.



Blue-winged (Malabar) Parakeet by Glen Valentine

Thattekad is also an excellent site for several of South India's tricky endemics and near-endemics, and these include Grey-headed and Flame-throated Bulbuls, Sri Lanka Frogmouth (for which the local guides often have a roosting site), White-bellied and Blue-throated Blue Flycatchers and Malabar Trogon.

Periyar National Park. Periyar National Park supports a variety of habitats, ranging from grassland and dry deciduous forest to broad-leaved evergreen forest, bamboo forest and riverside scrub. We'll spend our time here searching for some very special species indeed and highlights could include the highly secretive and wary Wayanad Laughingthrush, Malabar Imperial Pigeon, the spectacular White-bellied Treepie, White-bellied, Blue-throated Blue and Rusty-tailed Flycatchers, Rufous, Tawny-bellied and Dark-fronted Babblers, roosting Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Indian Pitta, White-rumped Spinetail, Brown-backed Needletail, the colourful Grey-fronted Green Pigeon, Malabar Grey and Great Hornbills, Malabar Trogon, Malabar Starling, Blue-winged Parakeet, Malabar Barbet, the striking Black Baza and the regal Legge's Hawk-Eagle (a very low-density forest raptor).



White-bellied Treepie by Glen Valentine

Other noteworthy species we will look out for are Indian Swiftlet, the scarce Blyth's

Swift, Crested Honey Buzzard, Black Eagle, Rufous-bellied Eagle, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, the very uncommon and unobtrusive Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Common Flameback, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Indian Scimitar Babbler, Brown-cheeked Fulvetta, the spectacular Asian Fairy-bluebird, Southern Hill Myna, Ashy Woodswallow, Pin-tailed Snipe and Forest Wagtail, among many other more regular and widespread species. There will also be reasonable mammal viewing opportunities with Asian Elephant, Gaur, Wild Boar, Sambar, Chital, Toque Macaque and Nilgiri Langur all possible.



Palani Laughingthrush by Stephan Lorenz

Eravikulam National Park. This scenic reserve is located high in the Cardamom Hills of the Western Ghats. Originally established to protect a sure-footed goat called the Nilgiri Tahr, the park supports a good selection of birds that includes several extremely range-restricted and specialised species. These include the scarce and unobtrusive Painted Bush Quail, White-bellied Blue Robin (Sholakili), 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 but can be a serious challenge to locate and see, while the beautiful Palani Laughingthrush is fairly common and obtrusive in the forested ravines. Other species we might come across as we bird the mountainside include Red-rumped and Hill Swallows, the exquisite Blue Rock Thrush, Black and Booted Eagles, Dusky Crag Martin, and Loten's Sunbird.

Munnar area. We'll bird several small localities around the outskirts of Munnar. The combination of montane forest, secondary growth, thickets and grassy slopes usually produces a number of excellent species and we'll particularly be on the lookout for Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, Indian Black-lored Tit, Crimson-backed Sunbird, Black-throated Munia, Indian Scimitar Babbler, Palani Laughingthrush, the extremely difficult Broad-tailed Grassbird, the rarely seen Tytler's and Western Crowned Warblers, Chestnut-tailed Bee-eater, Common Rosefinch, Nilgiri Flowerpecker and possibly even Common Grasshopper Warbler.



Nilgiri Wood Pigeon by Stephan Lorenz

Udhagamandalam (Ooty). We will drive towards the Blue Mountains near Udhagamandalam, among the highest mountains in all Southern India. The scenery is superb within a

garden-like settings 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 of British occupation. The town has certainly changed quite a bit since these times, yet the odd grand building and luxurious hotel 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.



Black-and-orange Flycatcher by Adam Riley

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, the secretive Nilgiri Blue Robin (Sholakili), the rare and migratory Tytler's and Western Crowned Warblers, Indian Blackbird, Blue-capped Rock Thrush, Malabar Flameback, Nilgiri Wood Pigeon and the rare and secretive Nilgiri Thrush.

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 but are still rich in avian specialties and endemics.

Mudumalai. The Mudumalai hills, much of which is protected within the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, are one of the largest areas of protected forests in India. Our birding outings will take us into the broad-leaved riverine and bamboo forests, woodland, scrub, and secondary growth of both Mudumalai and Masinagudi. Several endemics and localised specialities occur here and we'll be searching for such gems as Malabar Whistling Thrush, 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 gorgeous, white-throated race of Orange-headed Thrush, Indian Pitta, Malabar Flameback, the scarce White-naped Woodpecker, Indian Nuthatch, Rufous and Tawny-bellied Babblers, Malabar Woodshrike, Loten's Sunbird and with exceptional luck, the very rare and secretive Nilgiri Thrush.



White-naped Woodpecker by Glen Valentine



Nilgiri Flycatcher by Stephan Lorenz

The continuous calls of the endemic White-cheeked Barbet and more widespread Coppersmith Barbet can be heard as we keep a look out for other more regular and widespread species such as Jungle and Spotted Owlets, Black-rumped Flameback, Vernal Hanging Parrot, Crested Treeswift, White-browed Fantail, Yellow-crowned, Brown-capped Pygmy, Rufous and Streak-throated Woodpeckers, White-browed and Yellow-browed Bulbuls, Hume's Whitethroat, Indian Golden Oriole, Indian Blue Robin, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Bay-backed Shrike, Jerdon's and Golden-fronted Leafbirds, Orange and Small Minivets, Yellow-eyed and Yellow-billed Babblers, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, Yellow-throated Sparrow, Bronzed and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos and Common Woodshrike.

Sometimes, our local guide knows the whereabouts of roosting Brown Wood Owl, Brown Fish Owl, or the rare Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl, and at dusk we'll position ourselves in areas that might reveal Indian, Savanna, Jungle, and the near-endemic Jerdon's Nightjars.

This area is us usually a reliable site for Indian Elephant and we hope to come across these magnificent animals. Additional mammal possibilities include the rarely sighted Dhole (Indian Wild Dog), Sloth Bear, Leopard, Jungle Cat, and even Bengal Tiger, though we will need a hefty dose of luck to spot any of these beasts!

Areas of dry savanna and woodland support small populations of Yellow-wattled Lapwing, endemic Malabar Lark, several species of pipit, Blue-faced Malkoha, Shikra, Grey Francolin, Rufous Treepie and the rare and localised, White-bellied Minivet. If the weather cooperates, we'll scan the skies where we might encounter the critically endangered Red-headed, Indian and White-rumped Vultures soaring in the thermals, together with Indian Spotted Eagle.



Malabar Whistling Thrush by Adam Riley

Mudumalai to Mysore. The drive from Mudumalai to Mysore takes us through some arid savanna habitats where we'll make at least one stop to search for a few of India's arid-country species that are tricky to find elsewhere during this tour. Potential new and exciting species could include the scarce Rufous-tailed Lark, Indian and Jerdon's Bush Larks, Yellow-

wattled Lapwing, Large Grey Babbler, Sykes's and Booted Warblers, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Red-naped Ibis, and Indian Spotted Eagle.



Malabar Lark by Stephan Lorenz

Mysore. Time permitting, we'll make a quick stop at the beautiful Mysore Palace to enjoy the view of this impressive building from 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, commissioned a British architect, Lord Henry Irwin, to construct the palace 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.

We will only spend a short amount of time here, viewing the palace from outside the fenced off area of the palace grounds but it is still an impressive sight to behold and well worth the visit.

Mysore to Bengaluru to Mysore. Our route today takes us through several wetlands which might yield a few ducks and other water-associated species. Highlights could include Red-naped Ibis, Ashy Prinia, Western Yellow Wagtail, Red Avadavat, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Bar-headed Goose, and Indian Spot-billed Duck, while more widespread species might include Lesser Whistling Duck, Eurasian Wigeon and Garganey.

Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary. We will then make our way to the famous bird sanctuary at Ranganathittu, where we board a small rowboat on the Cauvery River. From the boat, the roosting and/or nesting sites of Great, Indian and Little Cormorants, Black-headed Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Spot-billed Pelican, Asian Openbill and Painted Stork can be enjoyed at close range, along with a variety of other species, including the impressive Great Stone-curlew, Oriental Darter, River Tern, the attractive Red-wattled Lapwing, the scarce Streak-throated Swallow and Marsh Crocodile. Walking along the banks of the sanctuary might produce the endemic, White-spotted Fantail, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Indian Grey Hornbill, Jerdon's Leafbird and White-cheeked Barbet.



Yellow-throated Bulbul by Stephan Lorenz

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Moderate to comfortable. Suitable for most birding / wildlife interest levels. India is an assault on the senses first time around, requiring a little tolerance to begin with.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Mostly forest & forest edge, some open savanna.
Accommodation		Good to comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Mostly short walks, several slopes. Some trails are narrow & may be muddy.
Vehicles / Roads		Average quality roads. Some long drives due to topography. Vehicles are manufactured to local requirements, so tend to be a squeeze/on the small size for Western foreigners.
Photography		Worthwhile to very good. No dedicated hides.
Annoyances		Spicy food, strong smells of various types. Can be cool at altitude & early mornings. Land leeches will be present, numbers depend on rain fall.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 12;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Camera fees;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- 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.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is 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. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- 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.
- This tour does require a moderate level of fitness and participants should be in good general health as most of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time.
- Accommodation throughout the tour is comfortable. There is no camping on this trip.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins in Kochi on day 1 with an arrival dinner and concludes after breakfast at Bengaluru 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.

Cochin International Airport (IATA: COK), Kochi and Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru (IATA: BLR) and are the primary points of entry and departure. Both airports have regular international service, as well as domestic services via New Delhi and Mumbai.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.