



Email: [contact@ficuswildlife.net](mailto:contact@ficuswildlife.net)

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## **South India Bird Endemics & More**

**(11 nights)**

### **Highlights**

Explore the best of south India's birds on this expertly guided tour. In this tour we take you to some of the best locations for bird-watching in the **Western Ghats** of south India, a mountainous ecoregion from where close to **400 species** of birds are known to occur. The ghats are also categorised as an **Endemic Bird Area** by Birdlife International, with over **20 endemic birds** and several other sub-continental endemics recorded from ecoregion.

Many of the locations we visit on this tour are also very scenic and rich in other wildlife. In addition, south India's vibrant and historic culture and friendly people will be a charming addition to your overall travel experience.

### **For Whom**

Bird-watching groups; Bird photographers; Wildlife enthusiasts

### **Costs**

INR 75000 (USD 1675/GBP 1200)

*Please note that prices will increase for groups fewer than four persons*

### **Facilities**

Accommodation: High quality accommodation or comfortable home stays with modern amenities

Food: Largely local and pan-Indian, with a few international dishes

Transport: Road transfers in A/C vehicles.

Difficulty level: Easy with a little hiking in mountainous terrain involved



WILDLIFE & NATURAL HISTORY TOURS

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## Best time to visit

October - March (ideal); April -May (good)

## Itinerary\*

**Day 1, 2 & 3, Thattekad:** We leave Cochin, Kerala mid-morning and reach Thattekad (Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary) by noon on Day 1. We spend three days exploring the small sanctuary for a significant chunk of south Indian bird specialities.

The Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary is located on the banks of the Periyar River on the foothills of the Western Ghats of Kerala. The habitat matrix of the location, which includes riverine, low-land evergreen and plantation forests, contain an amazing density of birds and offers excellent photographic opportunities for several Western Ghats bird specialities among an impressive bird-list of over 250 species. Some of the south Indian endemic birds found here include the **grey-headed bulbul, rufous babbler, Malabar grey hornbill, Malabar parakeet, white-bellied treepie, Wynaad laughing thrush, ruby-throated bulbul, white-bellied blue flycatcher, Malabar barbet and Malabar woodshrike**. Sightings of rarities such as the **black baza, crested goshawk, Red spurfowl, Malabar trogon, Ceylon bay owl and the Ceylon frogmouth** are not uncommon. Winter is interesting for several migrant flycatchers, warblers and wetland birds.

Elephants are regularly seen in and around the Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary, along with several other mammals including rare sightings of top predators such as Indian wild dogs and leopards. The wet, humid habitats of the location also contain an exciting diversity of plants, herpetofauna and invertebrates.

**Day 4 & 5, Munnar :** We reach Munnar in the afternoon on Day 4 and will spend two days exploring the landscape for mid and high altitude specialities of the Western Ghats.

Munnar is a small hill station town (1500m) nestled among tea plantations and wet montane forests (sholas) in the Western Ghats of Kerala. The shola forests surrounding Munnar and the montane forest-grassland ecosystem of the nearby higher reaches are excellent locations to encounter several of south India's high altitude endemic birds. Some of the Western Ghats endemics you are likely to encounter around Munnar include **the white-bellied blue robin, painted bushquail, black and orange, white-bellied blue and Nilgiri flycatchers, grey-breasted laughing thrush, white-cheeked barbet, broad-tailed grassbird, Malabar whis-**

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\* Please send us an enquiry with your interests and duration of visit if you require a tailor-made itinerary for south India birds.



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**ting thrush, crimson-backed sunbird and Nilgiri wood pigeon.**

We will make a special effort to find the rare **yellow-throated bulbul** while birding around Munnar. Winter reveals several **warblers** and rarities such as the **blue-capped rock thrush** and **Indian blue robin**.

Other wildlife include potential sightings of Nilgiri tahr, a Western Ghats endemic mountain goat in the shola-grasslands around Munnar. Elephants, Nilgiri langur and wild dogs can be seen on occasion.

**Day 6, 7 & 8, Top Slip:** After some morning birding around Munnar, we drive through a scenic route on our way to Top Slip. Excellent birding opportunities on the ghat route along the way, with the road passing through sholas, shaded hill streams and grassy/rocky hill sides and deciduous forests and scrub in the lower elevations. We reach Top in the early evening, after a relaxed drive, with plenty of birding enroute and spend the next two days looking exploring the biodiverse moist hills forests of the location for ecoregion bird endemics and rarities.

Top Slip is a scenically located tourism zone within the Indira Gandhi Tiger Reserve - a major protected area within Anamalai Hills of Tamil Nadu. The Anamalais are among the the most interesting natural history locations in south India for their biodiversity rich, extensive mid-elevation and montane evergreen forests. Top slip's forests are excellent habitat for nesting populations of **Great-pied Hornbill** among other species that require large tracts of mature forest. Among the noteworthy rarities that have been recorded from here are the **Jerdon's Baza** and **Rufous-bellied Eagle**. The location also contains a chunk of the regional endemics including the **Wynaad Laughing Thrush** and **Ceylon Frogmouth** among a bird list of over 300 species.

Top Slip is also known for its endemic primates including the Nilgiri langur and Lion-tailed macaque and could come across other typically elusive mammals including the brown palm civet and brown mongoose, that are restricted to the moist forests of the Western Ghats. Megafauna such as Elephant and Gaur and several other herbivorous mammals are regularly sighted around Top Slip. Tiger and Leopard are found here, but are difficult to see in the area. The moist forests here typically engross naturalists with their fascinating diversity of herpetofauna, invertebrates, flora and forest scape.

**Day 9, 10 & 11 Bandipur/Masinagudi:** We reach Ooty by noon on Day 9, after a drive up-the hills from Top Slip. We reach Bandipur, driving down the steep Sigur road from Ooty, by evening on Day 9. Good birding opportunities in the scrub and deciduous forests along the way. We spend the next two days exploring the habitats in and around Bandipur and Masinagudi, mostly for dry habitat bird specialities of the Western Ghats.



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The Masinagudi plateau (900m) is located on the northern foothills of the Nilgiris, adjacent to the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary. The area immediately surrounding Masinagudi town falls in the rain-shadow of the Nilgiris and consequently, the vegetation here largely comprises dry, thorny scrub species with few patches of luxuriant riverine forest. Visibility is excellent for birding and birdlife is very good, with over 250 species recorded from here and the adjacent deciduous forests of the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary and Bandipur Tiger Reserve. Some of the bird specialities from these locations include the **white-bellied minivet, Jerdon's bush lark, Malabar lark, grey-headed bulbul, white-bellied woodpecker, sirkeer malkoha** and quite a few south Indian endemics that we might have missed in Thattekad.

Wildlife is abundant and very visible around Masinagudi, where megafauna such as elephant, tiger, gaur and leopard, along with much other wildlife, are regularly sighted. The area lies within the Nilgiri Biosphere reserve and is contiguous with some of south India's most wildlife rich protected areas of Mudumalai, Bandipur and Nagarhole.

**Day 12, Ranganathittu/Bangalore:** After some early morning birding and breakfast, we head towards Bangalore, a major city well connected by road, air and rail networks. En-route we stop at the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary - a famous heronry on islands in the Cauvery River. The sanctuary is excellent for close views, especially of Eurasian spoonbills and night herons among several species of terns, cormorants, herons and storks. We reach Bangalore in the evening, from where you can transfer to onward destinations.

***Suggested Extension (with south India wetland birds - Nov to Mar only)***

Pulicat Bird Sanctuary:	Migratory waders and wildfowl in a brackish lagoon
Point Calimere:	Migratory waders and wildfowl and terrestrial birds in diverse habitats

***Potential Extensions*** (please let us know if you would like to include any of the following destinations onto the itinerary):

Periyar Tiger Reserve:	Endemic Birds & Mammals
Kabini (Nagarhole National Park):	Peninsular Birds & Megafauna

**FYI and Guidelines**

1. South India is politically stable and is a very safe and tourist friendly region. While petty crimes occur sporadically, crimes rates, are generally low in the region.



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2. Climate in south India is generally tropical and constant. However, due to broad elevational range that we cover during the tour, weather conditions can be quite variable based on where you are and when you travel. We will advise you on weather conditions, clothing etc dependent on when you choose to travel.
3. Please bring your binoculars or spotting scope along.
4. Most birding will be on foot and sometimes in mountainous terrain. We recommend you wear comfortable walking/trekking shoes while birding.
5. A hat and sunblock are highly recommended and sunglasses will be useful.
6. Please bring essential medication with you, since the local outlets will not always carry what you are looking for. Do check with your doctor on medication and medical safety before you travel to the region.

### **Terms and Conditions**

1. Costs are calculated based on minimum 6 persons traveling. We can work out a costing for smaller groups, once we have details from you. Maximum group size for this tour is 10.
2. Tour costs are per person based on twin sharing basis ex-Cochin and is all inclusive (transport, accommodation, food, personnel and all taxes and fees). Personnel includes an expert birding guide/tour leader and resource persons from the local community. Alcoholic beverages, porter charges, laundry and ala carte snacks are extra. Please check with us on specific items are included in the published tour costs.
3. If you are paying in foreign currency, we might have apply a currency surcharge if the INR appreciates ) against the USD by the time you travel.
4. Bookings are confirmed only upon full payment of the tour cost and at least one month in advance from the proposed departure date
5. We reserve the right to cancel the tour at anytime due to unforeseen circumstances. We will refund the entire booking amount under these circumstances.
6.
  - a. Our preferred mode of payment is through electronic transfers into our bank account. Relevant details will be provided to you once you are ready to make the payment.
  - b. Online credit card payments in US Dollars/GBP are accepted through Paypal. Indian customers can also use a credit card to pay online through Paypal, but please be aware that you will be charged an additional currency conversion fee for the same.
  - c. We accept demand drafts/cheques in Indian Rupees as well as travelers checks in INR, GBP or USD
7. In case you want to cancel your booking:
  - a. A 90% refund if cancellation requested more than one month before the proposed date of departure
  - b. A 15% refund if cancellation requested less than one month from the proposed date of departure.



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### **Disclaimer and Emergency Contact**

Participants should be aware of unlikely, but potential risks involved during wildlife tours and general travel. This may include, among other things, injuries or fatalities associated with general travel, snake bites, field activities and encounters with wildlife. We require that all tour participants sign this disclaimer that acknowledges the risks associated during our conducted tours and relieves us of any liabilities arising out of the same. This also acknowledges that you have read and abide by the terms and conditions mentioned in the document.

Name of participant:

Age:

Emergency contact person:

Relationship:

Tel no:

Email:

Signature and Date: