



WILDLIFE & NATURAL HISTORY TOURS

Email: contact@ficuswildlife.net

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South India Bird Endemics & More

(9 nights)

Highlights

Explore the best of south India's birds in 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. This tour is ideal for those who want to explore an incredibly bird-rich ecoregion in a **safe, comfortable and friendly environment**.

For Whom

Bird-watching groups; Bird photographers; Enthusiasts

Costs

INR 62,500 (1350 USD)*

Please note: We can arrange your transfers to Cochin, Kerala and Transfers from Bangalore, Karnataka for an additional cost as appropriate.

Facilities

Accommodation: 3 star hotels/resorts 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 to moderate, with a little hiking in mountainous terrain involved

* Please see terms and conditions for details



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Best time to visit

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

Itinerary*

Day 1 & 2, Thattekad: We leave Cochin, Kerala mid-morning and reach Thattekad (Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary) by noon on Day 1. We spend two 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 fly-catcher, 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 3 & 4, Munnar : We reach Munnar in the afternoon on Day 3 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,**

* 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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painted bushquail, black and orange, white-bellied blue and Nilgiri flycatchers, grey-breasted laughing thrush, white-cheeked barbet, broad-tailed grassbird, Malabar whistling thrush, crimson-backed sunbird and Nilgiri wood pigeon. We will make a special effort to find the rare **yellow-throated bulbul** during our stay here. 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 5, Coimbatore: After some morning birding around Munnar, we drive through a scenic route on our way to Coimbatore. 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 Coimbatore in the evening, after a relaxed drive, with plenty of birding enroute. Overnight in Coimbatore, among the larger cities in south India.

Day 6 & 7, Ooty: We reach Ooty by noon on Day 6, after a drive up-the hills from Coimbatore. We spend the next two days exploring the habitats around Ooty for high altitude bird specialities of the Western Ghats.

Ooty (2200m) is a large hill station town located in the Nilgiri range of the Western Ghats of Tamil Nadu. Several peaks rise above 2000m in the Nilgiris and there is an extensive area of high altitude habitats in this range, providing excellent opportunities to find south Indian birds that are restricted to montane habitats. While the bird life is similar to high altitude habitats around Munnar, notable additions to the bird list here include the **Nilgiri laughing thrush, rufous-bellied race of the white-bellied blue robin** and the **Kashmir flycatcher** (Winter). The **brown wood owl** is also easier to find here than in the other locations in the itinerary.

The landscape surrounding Ooty is rich in wildlife, much of which protected within the extensive Nilgiri biosphere reserve. Common sightings include Gaur, Nilgiri langur, sambar deer and feral buffalos. Leopards (including the melanistic version - the enigmatic, so called black panther) and are seen around Ooty, but sightings are rare. The broader landscape, encompassing the montane habitat of Mukurthi National park, also contain the Tiger and Nilgiri Tahr.

Day 8 & 9, Masinagudi: We reach Masinagudi, driving down the steep Sigur road, by noon on Day 9. Good birding opportunities in the dry forests and scrub along the way. We spend



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the next two days exploring the habitats in and around Masinagudi for dry habitat bird specialities of the Western Ghats.

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. Some of the bird specialities from this location includes 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 10, Bangalore: After some relaxed morning birding, we head towards Bangalore, a major city well connected by road, air and rail networks. We reach Bangalore in the evening, from where you can transfer to onward destinations.

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; Wildlife; Scenery
Kabini (Nagarhole National Park):	Birds; Excellent wildlife
Point Calimere Wildlife Sactuary:	Migratory Waders and waterfowl (winter)
Pulicat Bird Sanctuary:	Migratory Waders and waterfowl (winter)

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.
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 advice you on weather conditions, clothing etc dependent on when you choose to travel.
3. Please bring your binoculars or spotting scope along.



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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, a 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 to make sure if it is 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 1 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. We accept demand drafts in Indian Rupees and online credit card payments in US Dollars through Paypal.
 - b. We accept personal cheques in Indian Rupees, but your reservations will be confirmed only after your cheque is cleared by the bank.
 - c. 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.
 - d. Demand drafts/cheques are payable to "Ficus Wildlife and Natural History Tours" located in Chennai.
7. In case you want to cancel your booking:
 - a. A 100% 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

Participants should be aware of unlikely, but potential risks involved during wildlife tours and general travel. These 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 accept the terms and conditions mentioned in the document.

Name of participant:

Signature and Date: