



## TOUR INFORMATION FOR WEST INDIA: Gujarat and the Rann of Kutch

**These notes are designed to help you prepare for your tour. Please read carefully.**

**ENTERING INDIA:** United Kingdom citizens will need a passport valid for at least six months from date of departure and a tourist visa to enter India.

An online E-Tourist Visa facility is now available to **nationals of the United Kingdom**. It is not available to British Subjects, British Protected Persons, British Overseas Citizens, British National (Overseas) and British Overseas Territories Citizens. Your application would be rejected if your nationality is other than United Kingdom. Visit <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html> for full details. Please read the section "Instructions for Applicant" to find out how early you can apply for an e-Visa. The Indian visa is valid for 60 days from arrival in India and can be applied for between 120 days and 4 days before arrival. If you are combining this tour with another India tour back-to-back you must check how many days, in total, you will be in India before applying for an E-visa.

The scheme has been extended to other countries too, at nine airports in India which have been designated to manage the e-Tourist visa service.

Alternatively, the India High Commission has outsourced its visa application service to VFS Global India Visa Centre. You need to complete the visa form online, print out and either post to VFS Global, or go to one of their offices. You either pay online or at the office using a debit or credit card. Cheques are not accepted. For further details please visit their website at <http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk> or telephone their Visa Helpline on 0905 757 0045 (Mon to Fri) (08:30 hrs - 17:30 GMT). This is a premium number service. Applying for a visa using an outsource agency also involves supplying photographs to accompany the visa application. The size required is 5cm x 5cm, which is different to the standard size you can get printed in a photo kiosk. Please check with your nearest Visa Office for the most up-to-date information. For visa processing VFS Global have offices in London (Victoria), Edinburgh and Birmingham, but expect to wait for at least 2 hours before your name is called.

*Citizens of other nations should contact their nearest Indian High Commission for entry requirements.*

There are other visa service agencies that can provide you with an information pack on how to obtain a visa. They will also process your application for you however they will charge a handling and processing fee. One such company is Trailfinders Visa Service <http://visas.trailfinders.com> (tel: 0207 368 1504). Trailfinders will give you a discount on their processing fee if your flights are also booked with them.

**As soon as you book on the tour, please email the Sunbird office a colour scan of your passport – the page(s) with your photograph and passport details. This is needed by our ground agent in order to obtain permits to enter Sasan Gir Forest. Once you have sent your passport scan it is then crucially important that you do NOT change your passport for this tour.**

It is always a good idea to take a photocopy of your passport and air ticket with you when travelling abroad. They can prove invaluable in helping you get replacements if your originals are lost or stolen. Obviously you should keep the photocopies in a separate bag to the originals.

**TIME DIFFERENCE:** India is 5½ hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time.

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**CURRENCY:** The currency is the Indian rupee (INR). Indian rupees may not be brought in to or taken out of the country, but there are currency exchange services at Ahmedabad airport where cash and traveller's cheques can be changed in to Indian rupees. Our hotel in Ahmedabad is the only other place on the tour where money can be change but here they will only exchange cash – and only US dollars, pounds Sterling or Euros. They will NOT exchange other currencies or cash traveller's cheques. Foreign (i.e. ones not issued by an Indian bank) credit credit cards are fairly widely accepted in Indian (and Gujarat) and there are quite a few places that take cards in the larger cities such as Ahmedabad and Jamnagar. Several of our hotels do not accept credit cards however and the local phone networks can be erratic and they should never be relied on as the only means of payment. As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, you need only bring enough money to cover items of a personal nature.

**LANGUAGE:** The national language is Hindi, but most locals speak Gujarati however English is widely spoken.

**CLIMATE:** The temperatures throughout this tour will not vary very much. Day time temperatures will range from about 20-33°C. However, the early mornings and late afternoons, times when we will be out on games drives at Velavadar, in the Gir Lion Sanctuary and National Park and, especially, in the Little Rann of Kutch can be cool with temperatures perhaps dropping to 14°C. Moreover since we'll explore these areas in open-topped jeeps the wind chill can make it feel quite cold. Gujarat is essentially a flat state and we will not visit any mountain areas. Indeed the highest elevation we reach will be about 190 metres. A warm sweater and even a warm hat and gloves should prove useful for some of the early morning game drives. Gujarat is an arid state, it is unlikely to rain and the humidity is comfortably low throughout this tour.

**PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE:** With the high midday temperatures we will experience we will make a number of early starts and will aim to be out in the field for dawn most days. With sunrise being around 07:00hrs and several of the birding sites being an hour or even two hours from our hotel this will often entail leaving our accommodation at 05:45 or 06:00. On a couple of days we will start even earlier, possibly at 05:00. Most days we should finish at dusk, around 18.30, and we usually manage to have about a one hour break before the checklist and dinner. There may be one or two days when we get back after dusk and we may therefore require a shorter break before dinner.

In the Little Rann of Kutch we will have early morning drives away from our lodge. We will have breakfast before we depart and the drives themselves usually start at about 06:30 or 07:00hrs and typically last for three or four hours after which we will return to the lodge for lunch and a midday break. There will be an option to have a further excursion in the afternoon. The similar safaris in Gir National Park again start in the early morning (we may again leave the hotel before dawn – around 06:15). Snacks will be available before we leave the hotel and we will take a few food items such as biscuits and perhaps some chocolate in to the park with us. The game drives here usually last for between four to five hours after which time we will return to the hotel for a late breakfast or more likely brunch. On several days there will be a further game-drive in the afternoon (these usually run from about 15:00 to 18:30).

There is a reasonable amount of walking involved on this tour, although none of it is particularly strenuous. Sensibly we are not allowed to walk on foot inside Gir Sanctuary (there are lions and leopards at the latter!) and instead we will use open-topped jeeps to explore the reserve. We will use similar vehicles to explore the Little Rann of Kutch but, since there are no dangerous large animals here we are also allowed to walk about, as we are at parts of Velavadar (Black Buck) National Park and at the sites we will visit around Bhuj.

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**HEALTH: It is essential that you contact your own doctor to obtain the latest information on the regions you are visiting.** Please contact your doctor well in advance of your tour's departure as some medication must be initiated weeks before the period of possible exposure.

Although we will not see many mosquitoes they do exist in Gujarat. Malaria preventative and up-to-date inoculations against hepatitis A, polio, tetanus and typhoid are strongly recommended. Hepatitis is reasonably common in India.

Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <http://www.preventingmalaria.info>.

Biting insects are not numerous but may occur locally: insect repellent will provide adequate protection.

Tap water is not safe to drink and should be avoided at all times. Bottled water (which the leader provides at meal times), soft drinks and beer are widely available. Do not eat any salads or peeled fruit.

Mild upset stomachs, often brought on simply by a change of diet, can be hard to avoid in India. We suggest bringing anti-diarrhoea medicine such as Imodium or Arret. Packets of Dioralyte are also worth bringing as they replace the vital salts and minerals lost during a bout of diarrhoea.

It may be difficult to obtain any special medication during the tour, so bring all you are likely to need.

For further information on health advice refer to the Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad website [www.masta-travel-health.com](http://www.masta-travel-health.com)

**ACCOMMODATION:** In Ahmedabad, we will stay in a good hotel close to the airport. At Velavadar we will spend one night at a very comfortable, up-market lodge very close to the park entrance. After a night here we will travel on to Gir Lion Sanctuary and National Park. There is no accommodation inside Gir Park and we will stay outside the reserve at a safari camp. We will stay in another very comfortable lodge here. This and the Rann Riders lodge near Dasada on the edge of the Little Rann of Kutch are the two nicest places that we will stay and both are also quiet! Leaving Gir we will drive northwest to Jamnagar, a large coastal city on the western side of Saurashtra. We will stay in a hotel in the city and all rooms here have on suite bathrooms with western toilets and showers with hot water. All of the rooms also have air-conditioning and a ceiling fan and all are clean. However the hotel is in the city centre and it can be very noisy outside. Even though we will request rooms away from the front of the hotel there are few of these and they cannot be guaranteed. We suggest that you bring some ear plugs. Next we will drive to Bhuj and beyond where we will stay in a small guest house owned and run by our local guide. There are only eight rooms here and, while we expect to take them all, it might be that some single participants will be required to share. We will spend four nights here. This guest house, south of Bhuj, is clean and conveniently located fairly close to where we will look for both Grey Hypocolius and White-naped Tit. All rooms have two beds and all are on suite. Leaving Bhuj, we will drive back east to the Little Rann of Kutch. Our accommodation at Dasada on the edge of the Little Rann is a privately run hotel with attractive grounds and individual cottages built in the local style scattered around the compound. All these cottages are again clean, all have on suite facilities and all have western toilets. As at Velavadar all the rooms are air-conditioned, and a few also have ceiling fans, though the evenings are comfortably cool and it is unlikely that either will be used, except perhaps during a midday break. Our lodge at Dasada also has a centrally located dining room that's open on three sides. Leaving the Little Rann we will return to Ahmedabad for our final night.

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**LAUNDRY:** Laundry facilities are available at our lodge at Gir, at our hotel in Jamnagar, at our family-owned guest house near Bhuj and at the Rann Riders lodge near Dasada. These laundry services are quick and cheap, items dropped off in the morning will normally be returned the same evening. Note that at Jamnagar, near Bhuj and at Dasada the hotels do not supply laundry bags and you will be expected to provide your own. People should be wary of handing in delicate items as these are occasionally damaged. The quality of these laundry services varies and, on occasion, you might not get the clothes back completely dry!

**ELECTRICITY:** 220V AC 50 Hz. The sockets require a plug with two or three round pins, so an international adaptor is required. Some places use small 3-round pin plugs. Unlike most other places in India power cuts are rare in Gujarat but you should still **bring a torch**. An international travel plug is useful and can be bought in most airport departure lounges. You may find the following website helpful: <http://www.power-plugs-sockets.com>.

**FOOD:** Throughout the tour we are served a wide variety of good quality Indian food. Salads or salad garnishes are frequently offered but these should always be declined or left on the edge of your plate. The food we are served always includes a good selection of vegetarian dishes. In some of the places that we stay meals are buffet-style with several different dishes available while in other places set meals are provided. However a typical Indian set meal actually consists of a choice of three or four different dishes. We appreciate that not everyone likes to eat Indian food (which can occasionally be a little bit spicy) every day or even at all. However unfortunately 'western food' is not available at most of the places we will stay. Several of the other places we visit will, if requested, provide western food. If a buffet is being served this normally includes a western-style dish or two. However, if you require western-style food and cannot eat Indian food please advise the Sunbird Office in advance and the leader once you are on the tour. Even when a western-style meal is provided it must be said that obviously they are able to cook food they are familiar with i.e. Indian food, to a much better standard than they cook western food.

Sunbird tours are all-inclusive and no refunds can be issued for any tour meals participants choose to miss. While we will try to do all we can to accommodate the requirements of all participants, please note that we cannot guarantee all causes of food allergies can be avoided at every destination. Many restaurants offer set menus and are unable to accommodate all special requests within a group. Thus, participants with significant food allergies or special dietary needs should bring appropriate foods with them for those times when their needs can, regrettably, not be accommodated. Our tours are carefully scheduled to ensure the best possible birding experience and although the leaders will do all they can to make sure the group eats at a reasonable time, sometimes early or late lunches and/or evening meals cannot be avoided. Any participants who need to eat at specific times may need to take supplemental food with them.

**DRINKS:** Bottled water and/or a soft drink or a beer is provided at lunch and dinner, as is coffee or tea. All other drinks or 'personal' drinking water for use in your room and during the day is the responsibility of the individual.

Please note that Gujarat is a dry state where the consumption of alcohol is prohibited. Special permits can be obtained but even then, alcoholic beverages are not widely available and cannot be drunk in public places – and this includes hotel restaurants!

**INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS:** Almost all our hotels have reasonably good Wi-Fi connections. These include the hotel that we will use in Ahmedabad, our lodge close to the Velavadar sanctuary, in Jamnagar, near Bhuj and at the Rann Riders lodge in the Little Rann. Wi-Fi use at all of these places is currently free. Mobile phone access can be intermittent when in the field. Mobile phones can be useful while on tour but keep in mind that many countries operate on a different cellular technology. Your phone may be incompatible with the local system, so please check with your local carrier. Fortunately, with the advent of smartphones, it is easy to download applications such as Skype or Google Voice, which can make calling home free or very inexpensive.

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Another option is to replace the data ("SIM") card in your phone in-country. The SIM cards, including data can be very cheap. If you wish to use this option you will need to check that your smart phone has a SIM card slot.

**FIELD CLOTHING:** Dress is informal throughout. Light, warm-weather wear is the general rule including a suitable hat and long-sleeved garments for protection against the sun. An umbrella for protection against the sun might also prove useful. A jacket and a sweater and possibly also gloves and a warm hat might be useful for the cool early morning drives. Light footwear will be adequate most of the time, but the occasional longer walks require comfortable walking shoes or boots. Rain is very unlikely on this tour but we might experience a very light rain shower. Footwear, such as flip-flops or crocs, for walking across a tidal beach would be useful.

**MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS:** Please bring the following:

Note book and pen	Alarm clock
Small day pack or rucksack	Handy wipes and paper tissues
Sunscreen and	Insect repellent
Water Canteen	Universal bath plug
Torch and spare batteries	Personal medication
Small folding umbrella	

**Optional:** Telescope and tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, film or memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide. You may find your own tripod-mounted telescope useful.

**Note:** The most effective insect repellents are those containing at least 35% of the active ingredient diethyltoluamide (DEET). The higher the percentage, the greater the effectiveness. However, care must be taken to avoid getting the repellent on to optical equipment as it dissolves rubber and plastic and can damage coated lenses. A reasonably effective alternative, which isn't corrosive, is Mosi-guard, produced by MASTA, and we recommend this. It is available in most high street chemist (including those at the airport). Camping supply stores sell a product containing permethrin 0.5%, which must be applied directly to clothing in advance of wearing and allowed to dry. This non-staining, odourless chemical is non-toxic to humans and protective on clothing through several launderings. Please make sure you never to spray insect repellent inside the vehicle or when you are standing close to other participants – it may drift on to their optical equipment.

**LEADER'S EQUIPMENT:** The leader will provide the following for group use:

Telescope and tripod	Small first-aid kit
Field guides and references	Playback equipment

**LUGGAGE:** Our Final Information document, which will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure, will give details about baggage weight and size restrictions imposed by the airline used for this tour.

If possible, please bring your luggage in soft-sided bags or cases (rather than large hard 'Samsonite'-type suitcases) as these pack more easily into our vehicles during the tour. Please note that on many tours there are no porters to carry your luggage so please ensure that **no bag is so heavy that you are unable to lift and carry it yourself**. As a general rule, in addition to using your luggage labels, it is a good idea to fix identification to the *inside* of each piece of luggage.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** Scenery and memory shots will be plentiful and simple to obtain. Although there will be occasions when bird photography is possible, a birdwatching tour is not normally the best means of pursuing this aim. Bring all your film or memory cards with you as it may be difficult to find precisely what you need during the tour.

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Camera equipment should be packed in moisture- and dust-proof bags, as a precaution. "Digiscoping" is perfectly compatible with the tour, though it is recommended you bring your own telescope as the leader's telescope is not available for this activity.

It is important to note that there are quite high fees for foreigners using their cameras in several reserves we visit on this tour – these fees are 1400 rupees (approximately £15.00 or \$20 US) per visit and are currently that same price at Velavadar Black Buck National Park, Gir Lion Sanctuary, Khijadiya near Jamnagar and in the Little Rann of Kutch Wild Ass Sanctuary. These fees are not included in the tour price and participants wishing to use their camera in these reserves will be expected to pay the relevant fees. Only Indian rupees are accepted.

There will be plenty of opportunities to take photos of birds, mammals and scenery and the leaders will do all they can to accommodate anyone wishing to take photographs. However if you are a serious photographer please bear in mind that this is first and foremost a birdwatching tour. Please do not allow your photographic desires to conflict with other participants' birdwatching activities.

**TRANSPORT:** We will use a fleet of (up to four) comfortable small vehicles – such as a Toyota Innova or similar. Three people plus the driver will ride in each of these vehicles and there's room for their carry-on luggage at the rear and checked luggage on the roof rack. In Gir Lion Sanctuary and National Park and again in the Little Rann of Kutch we will use a fleet of open-topped jeeps. These invariably have poor suspension and the unpaved tracks inside the reserve are rough and often strewn with large boulders. An inflatable cushion might prove useful and in the past, in similar circumstances elsewhere, people have occasionally borrowed a pillow from their hotel bedroom. The leader will arrange a seating rotation. Participants should be able to ride in any seat in tour vehicles.

During the longer drives bottled mineral water will be provided in the vehicles.

**SMOKING:** Smoking is not allowed in the vehicles or when the group is gathered for meals, checklists etc. If you are sharing a room with a non-smoker, please do not smoke in the room. If you smoke in the field, we ask that you do so well away and downwind from the group if possible.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE:** Travel insurance is essential and we insist that you take out suitable cover as soon as your tour is booked. If you are bringing expensive optical equipment or other valuable items, please make sure they are also adequately insured on your home contents policy, as most travel insurance policies do not cover very expensive individual items. You may wish to consult your insurance broker regarding coverage. Please also ensure that your policy covers you in the event of a medical emergency, cancellation of a trip or severe delays. Medical costs abroad can often be extremely expensive. Please note that Sunbird is not liable for any medical or repatriation costs resulting from injury or illness during a tour or for covering any costs resulting from a flight delay such as extra hotel accommodation.

If you wish, insurance can be arranged by Helen Fisher, Bullerwell Independent Insurance Brokers, 13 Goldington Road, Bedford, MK40 3JY. Tel: 01234-866964. Please contact Helen for a quote and she will send the schedule directly to you.

**TIPPING:** All tour-based tips are included in the Sunbird brochure price. These include tips to local guides, drivers, hotel porters, and waiters and waitresses when we have group meals together in restaurants. You only need to pay tips for personal services such as room service or drinks from the bar.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and Inskipp, T. Second edn. 2012. Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Christopher Helm, London. (ISBN: ISBN-13: 9781408127636). An excellent paper back field guide with good illustrations and useful text.

## WEST INDIA: Tour Information...7

Grimmett, R. and Inskipp, T. 2003. Birds of Northern India. Christopher Helm, London. (ISBN 0-7136-5167-9). An excellent, abridged version of the authors' *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. This one covers all the birds that we are likely to encounter on the tour but it has now been out of print for some time.

Kazmierczak, K. 2000. A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Another excellent and compact guide. **Recommended**. Perhaps the better of the two portable field guides.

Rasmussen Pamela C. and John C Anderton. Second Edn 2012. Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide. Lynx Edicions. (ISBN 13: 9788496553859). Volumes I and II: The most complete and up-to-date guide to the birds of the region. Includes much previously unpublished data on identification, distributions, vocalizations and taxonomy, along with critical re-appraisal of historic information. **Recommended**. Our daily checklist will follow the order used in this field guide.

### Other references:

Abram et al. India The Rough Guide. London. Rough Guides. 1999.

Ali, Salim and S. Dillon Ripley. 1983. Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan - Compact  
Clarke, R., Prakash, V., Clark, W.S., Ramesh, N. and Scott, D. World record count of roosting harriers Circus in Blackbuck National Park, Velavadar, Gujarat, north-west India. Forktail 14 (1998)

Daniel, J.C. 2002. The book of Indian Reptiles. Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay. An excellent guide to the reptiles of India with many good colour plates.

Das, Indraneil. 2002. Snakes and other Reptiles of India. New Holland, U.K. (ISBN 1 84330 125 3). A useful and well-illustrated guide to India's reptiles.

Grewal, B. A Photographic Guide to Birds of India and Nepal. London. New Holland. 1995.

Gurun K.K. and Raj Singh. 1997. Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent and where to watch them. This guide contains good colour plates of the vast majority of the mammals which occur in the Indian Subcontinent and is a much more portable paperback volume than Slater. The guide has been published privately in Great Britain to a very high quality but is not available for sale to the general public as yet. We have a limited supply of the guides in the Sunbird office should you wish to order a copy to take on the tour. The cost is £16.30 per copy (including postage and packing).

Insight Guides. Indian Wildlife. Apa Productions. 1987.

Inskipp, T., Lindsey, N. and Duckworth, W. An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region. (1966) Oriental Bird Club. (ISBN 0-9529545-0-8). An excellent and authoritative list of all the birds of the Oriental region giving preferred English and scientific names, pseudonyms and a wealth of information on recent, not so recent and potential taxonomic changes.

Israel, Samuel and Toby Sinclair. 1987. Indian Wildlife. APA Productions, Singapore. An excellent guide to Indian wildlife illustrated with many colour photographs. Good background reading before the tour.

Kazmierczak, K. and Singh, Raj. 1998. A Birdwatchers' Guide to India. Prion, U.K. (ISBN 1 871104 08 4). Although now quite dated this site guide contains a wealth of, still useful, information on many of the places we'll visit. Interesting background reading before the tour

Lonely Planet India. 12<sup>th</sup> edn. 2007. Melbourne. (ISBN 978 1 74104 308 2). Another edition on an excellent and truly comprehensive travel guide.

## WEST INDIA: Tour Information...8

Menon, Vivek. 2003. *A Field Guide to Indian Mammals*. Dorling Kindersley, New Delhi. (ISBN 0-14-302998-3). An excellent, comprehensively illustrated informative book and easily the best mammal guide to the subcontinent.

Prater, S.H. 1980. *The Book of Indian Animals*. 4th Edition. Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay. An excellent guide to India's mammals with good quality colour illustrations.

Tiwari J. K. and Rahmani A.R. *Notes on the current status and ecology of the White-naped Tit, Parus nuchalis, in Kutch, Gujarat, India*. Forktail 12 (1997)

Tiwari, J.K., Varu, S.N and Himmatsinhji, M.K. *The occurrence of Grey Hypocolius, Hypocolius ampelinus, in Kutch, Gujarat, India*. Forktail 11 (1996)

Whittaker, R. and A. Captain. *Snakes of India. The Field Guide*. Draco Books. Chennai. 2004.

### General:

*The Last Lions of India*. 2006 A BBC Natural World wildlife documentary that first aired in 2006 details the fall & rise of the magnificent Gir Lions. Available to watch on-line at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hrjb2wg25SA> or to purchase elsewhere.

**OBTAINING BOOKS:** Most of the field guides and the major ornithological references in print are available by mail order from booksellers specialising in natural history titles.

Natural History Book Service Ltd  
Tel: 01803 865913  
[www.nhbs.co.uk](http://www.nhbs.co.uk)

WildSounds  
Tel: 01263 741100  
[www.wildsounds.co.uk](http://www.wildsounds.co.uk)

**MAPS:** Two reasonable maps covering all the areas we will visit on our West India tour are:

Nelles: Western India. 1:1,500,000. Nelles Verlag GmbH, Munich, Germany. 2004. (ISBN 3-88618-687-3).

World Map India: North Western Region. 1:2,000,000. GeoCenter International. 1998. (ISBN 3-575-33263-0).

These and other maps are available from:

The Map Shop  
15 High Street  
Upton upon Severn  
Worcestershire  
WR8 0HJ

Tel: 01684 593146  
[www.themapshop.co.uk](http://www.themapshop.co.uk)

Stanfords  
12-14 Long Acre  
London  
WC2 9LP

Tel: 020 7836 1321  
[www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk)

**ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB:** Please support this charity which aims to raise money to support conservation projects, encourages an interest in the conservation of birds, and liaises with and promotes the work of existing societies within the region. You will find their contact details and further information about the Club at [www.orientalbirdclub.org](http://www.orientalbirdclub.org)

**FINAL INFORMATION:** Final information with instructions for meeting the group, hotel addresses etc., and your international air tickets will be sent out about three weeks before the start of the tour. If you have any questions, please contact us.