



TOUR INFORMATION NOTE FOR FOREST OWLET, INDIA

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. If you are using one of nine specific ports of entry, 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. 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.

Citizens of other nations may be able to use the E-visa system too; however, we recommend that you contact your nearest Indian High Commission for full details.

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. The leader has used another UK based visa service, VisaGenie, <https://visagenie.co.uk/home> and has found them to be quick and efficient.

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.

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.

CURRENCY: Indian rupees (INR) may not be brought in to or taken out of the country, but there are currency exchange services at the airport in Mumbai (Bombay). We will not see any more currency exchange facilities anywhere else in Maharashtra.

Visa and Master Credit cards are accepted in Indian but again nowhere that we will be going. Our simple guest house near Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary will not accept foreign credits cards and will only take Indian rupees. As the tour price includes all travel, hotel and main meal costs, and drinks with meals. You need only bring enough money to cover purchases of a purely personal nature.

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Despite what many travel guide books say there are very few ATM machines that accept foreign cards anywhere in India and we strongly recommend that people do NOT rely solely on these and bring cash and/or travellers' cheques instead.

LANGUAGE: There are 15 officially recognised languages in India and many more tribal languages and dialects. The national language is Hindi, while in Maharashtra Mahrati is the official state language. Fortunately, English is fairly widely widely spoken and our local guide, drivers and some of the restaurant staff can speak and understand some of it.

ALTITUDE: All the sites that we visit are at a low altitude – none are above 200 metres.

CLIMATE: The areas that we will visit in Maharashtra will be hot. Mid-day temperatures between November and the end of February are frequently range from about 18-31°C (64-88°F) Rain at this season is rare. Any rain that does fall is usually as a brief convectional thunderstorm lasting only a few minutes. Rainwear is not necessary on this tour. Night-time temperatures hardly ever drop below a comfortable 18°C (65°F). All our hotel rooms have ceiling fans and can be kept comfortably cool. With the temperatures and near coastal location Maharashtra is also fairly humid. Away from the coast, particularly around Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary, night-time temperatures are a few degrees cooler than it will be in Mumbai (Bombay). That said it will still be quite hot there much of the day.

PACE OF TOUR AND DAILY ROUTINE: We will start early every day as birds are most active in the early morning. That said sunrise in late November isn't until just before 07h00 and sunset will be around 18h00 and, while there will be some optional night-birding, the days will not be unbearably long. The aim of this short trip will be to see Forest Owlet – and as playback for this endangered species is forbidden, we will not see it during the night and instead will confine ourselves to searching for it during the morning and later afternoon/early evening. There are quite a number of other species that we would like to see at Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary and these include Indian Jungle Nightjar, Mottled Wood Owl and Sulphur-bellied Warbler but we will focus first on seeing Forest Owlet. We will not have any breakfasts at our own hotel preferring instead to head off birding for a few hours before having a simple picnic breakfast in the field. Our morning excursions will often mean us leaving the hotel between 05h00 and 05h30 and not having breakfast until 09h30.

We do not anticipate returning to our hotel for lunch or a break during the heat of the day and instead will ask some forest park staff to cook a simple, vegetarian Indian meal for us. This will probably consist of boiled white rice, dal, chapatis and some subji (cooked, mixed vegetables). Most days we aim to be back at our hotel shortly after dusk. We usually manage to have about a one-hour break before dinner. We will have dinner together each evening and complete our checklist at that time.

Despite the relatively short days this is not a particularly easy-going tour. It will be hot and while we do not anticipate doing very much walking (perhaps not more than five kilometres in an entire day) the heat will make it feel tiring. None of the walks are particularly strenuous and some of them will involve birdwatching from poorly used, paved roads. Our other walks will be on trails through dry deciduous and rather open forest. While most of our walks will be of one or two hours in duration some will be and might last three hours or more. Most of these walks will be flat and over good terrain but we don't anticipate doing any strenuous uphill walking.

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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.

A malaria preventative and up-to-date inoculations against hepatitis A, polio, tetanus and typhoid are strongly recommended. Hepatitis is reasonably common in India and a relatively new inoculation, which protects you for up to three years, is now available. Useful information on all aspects of malaria, including how to reduce your chances of being bitten can be found at the website <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/malaria/prevention>

Biting insects are not numerous but may occur locally particularly along the streams: 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 unpeeled fruit.

Upset stomachs are not uncommon 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

ACCOMMODATION: We stay at just one place during the tour - a small, privately owned guest house near Atgaon in Maharashtra. The guest house is about a one-hour drive from where we expect to look for Forest Owlet. All the rooms have electricity and air-conditioning unit as well as a ceiling fan. All the rooms are clean but simply appointed - all have en suite bathrooms with a wash basin, western toilet and shower. Hot water is only supplied to the shower, and not to the wash basin, and is heated by a combination of solar power and a small hot water geyser or heater. The guest house has its own restaurant where Indian food, and only Indian food is served. It will be a buffet.

LAUNDRY: No laundry service is available at our guest house.

ELECTRICITY: 220V AC 50 Hz. The sockets require a plug with two or three round pins, so an international adaptor is required. These are readily available in airport shops and in most large department stores. Please note that in Maharashtra, as throughout India, there are frequent power cuts. There are also frequent power surges, so you may wish to avoid using fragile electrical equipment in your room. 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 likely to be offered but these should always be declined or left on the edge of your plate. The food we are offered always includes a good selection of vegetarian dishes. We will eat all of our evening meals in our hotel where it is likely to be a buffet. We expect to have picnic breakfasts in the field and, on one or two days, a sit-down lunch cooked for us by the Forest Department staff.

We appreciate that not everyone likes to eat Indian food (which can occasionally be a little bit spicy) every day or even at all but once away from Mumbai (Bombay) Indian food will be all that is available.

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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 insure 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 bring supplemental food with them.

DRINKS: Bottled water or a soft drink will be provided at our sit-down meal. As will coffee or tea. In addition, we keep a supply of bottled water on the tour vehicles. No complementary bottled mineral water will be provided in our hotel rooms. Instead filtered water is given and we do not recommend drinking this so participants will be encouraged to take some mineral water from our vehicles or from the dining table after dinner.

INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE ACCESS: Our guest house has no Wi-Fi connection and mobile phone access can be intermittent when in the field.

FIELD CLOTHING: Dress is informal throughout. Light, warm-weather wear is the general rule including a broad-brimmed hat and long-sleeved garments for protection against the sun. A light-weight sweater might be needed at night and for the early mornings away from the coast. Light-weight footwear will be adequate most of the time, but occasional longer walks will require comfortable walking shoes or light-weight boots.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS: Please bring the following:

Notebook and pen	Sun block or sun screen
Alarm clock	Sun hat and/or umbrella
Universal plug adaptor	Torch with spare batteries
Water bottle	Insect repellent
Shoulder bag/small rucksack	Universal wash basin plug
Personal medication	

Optional: Telescope and tripod (recommended if you have them), camera, memory cards, spare binoculars and spare spectacles (in case of loss or damage), field guide, swimwear.

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.

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

Telescope and tripod

Basic first-aid kit

Field guides and references

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.

Please note that while porters are available in our hotel they are sometimes busy with other guests 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: India offers abundant photographic opportunities. Since dust may be a problem, particularly along some of the bumpier back roads, equipment should be packed in plastic bags. If you wish to 'digiscope' please ensure that you bring your own telescope.

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. 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 tour 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.

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SHOPPING: We are frequently asked about the opportunities to go shopping in India. Unfortunately, on this short trip there will be no opportunity for shopping.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Ornithological Field Guides:

Grewal, Bikram et al 2016. A Pictorial Guide to Birds of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Om Books International. A superb book well-illustrated with some excellent photographs. (ISBN-13: 9789380070223).

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and Inskipp, T. 2012. Second edn. Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Christopher Helm. London. A useful book with excellent plates and comprehensive text and now available as a paperback.

Kazmierczak, K. 2000. A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Another excellent and compact guide.

Rasmussen Pamela C. and John C. Anderton. Second edn. 2012. Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide. Lynx Edicions. (ISBN: 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. Published in two parts – one of the books containing detailed information on ranges, identification, vocalisations, habits and habitat preferences etc. while the other, and slimmer volume, contains all the maps and plates with captions. Now available as a paper back.

Bird and other general natural history references:

Daniel, J. C. 1983. 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 Indians reptiles.

Israel, S. and T. Sinclair. 1987. Indian Wildlife. APA Productions, Singapore. (ISBN 9 62421 044 6) An excellent guide to Indian wildlife illustrated with many colour photographs. Good background reading.

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.

Papers specifically relating to Forest Owlet:

Ishtiaq, F., and Rahmani, A. R., 2000. Further information on status and distribution of Forest Owlet *Athene (Heteroglaux) blewitti*. Forktail 16: 172–173.

King, B., and Rasmussen, P. C., 1998. The rediscovery of the Forest Owlet *Athene (Heteroglaux) blewitti*. Forktail 14: 53–55.

Laad, S., and Dagale, R., 2015. First report of Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* from Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary (Western Ghats), Maharashtra, India. Journal of Bombay Natural History Society 111 (2): 134.

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Mehta P., Kulkarni, J., and Patil, D., 2008. A survey of critically endangered Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*) in Central India. *Birding Asia* 10: 77–87.

Mehta, P. et al. 2017 A distribution survey of the Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* in north-western Maharashtra. *Indian BIRDS* Vol. 13 No. 4 (Publ. 30 August 2017)

Rasmussen, P. C., and Collar, N. J., 1998. Identification, distribution and the status of the Forest Owlet *Athene (Heteroglaux) blewitti*. *Forktail* 14: 43–51.

Sound Guides:

Jannes, Hannu. 2002. *Bird Sounds of Goa and South India*. Privately published, Helsinki, Finland. An excellent CD with recordings of 99 species including a good number of common and not so common Indian birds. Available from WildSounds (see below).

MAPS: Local maps are cheap but difficult to obtain in India. The one we recommend is - [India 4: Southern India](#), published by Nelles Verlag, Munich, at a scale of 1:1 500,000. Covers all peninsular India, south of Bombay. This and other maps are available from:

The Map Shop
Tel: 01684 593146
www.themapshop.co.uk

Stanfords
Tel: 020 7836 1321
www.stanfords.co.uk

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

WildSounds
Tel: 01263 741100
www.wildsounds.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

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.