

## Wader Quest: Rick-Elis Simpson Tour Report

India was the last of our multiple journeys across the globe during fifteen months in search of waders (*Charadrii*). The basic idea was to see as many species as we could in that time, but under the surface there were two underlying ulterior motives; to raise funds for, and awareness about, wader conservation.

The original idea was to do this over just twelve months, but the illness and subsequent death of my brother saw us extending the finishing date by three months, and it was also simply to raise money, the recipient of which was to be the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) in the UK in support of their captive breeding programme for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Later on we also started to collect for the Hooded Plovers of Australia when BirdLife Australia lost their government funding.

In April this year we handed over £3,260.52 to the WWT and last year when we visited Australia we handed 350AUD to BirdLife Australia in Melbourne and we continue to collect on their behalf today. The raising of awareness was carried out through a series of lectures and talks carried out during our travels to over seven hundred people in total. We were unable to arrange a talk in India however due to the short notice of our visit but we hope to rectify this on our next visit.

Our travels took us across six continents; we travelled to Australia and New Zealand, in the Americas we visited the USA, Brazil, Peru and Chile, Africa saw us in The Gambia, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, Europe was represented solely by the UK and the only Asian country other than India was Thailand from where we stopped in the UAE on our way back to the UK.

Thailand was the place where we looked for, and happily found, Spoon-billed Sandpiper, but there were many other highlights during our world travels, in the end we saw some really fascinating species like the Diademed Sandpiper Plover that lives high in the Andes, the Magellanic Plover that lives at the end of the world in Tierra del Fuego, the peculiar Wrybill and the rarest wader in the world, Black Stilt, in New Zealand. Everywhere we went we saw a great variety of species showing the diversity of this interesting sub order of birds.

Our trip to India was expertly organised by Manoj Vardhan of IGT (Individual and Group Tours; [www.ourindiantours.com](http://www.ourindiantours.com); email: [birdfair1@hotmail.com](mailto:birdfair1@hotmail.com) & [manojvardhan970@yahoo.in](mailto:manojvardhan970@yahoo.in) ; and he was at New Delhi airport to meet us and transfer us to our train to Bharatpur. We had a pleasant journey with a group of young ladies entertaining the carriage with a game involving the singing of the first line of a variety of songs. At Bharatpur we were met by our guide Satya and driver Vishpal.

On our first morning it was a complete surprise when we awoke to fog, it was damp and cold and not what we had expected. Being the final trip we arrived in India with a list of just seven possible species that we were looking for. On this first morning Satya and Vishpal took us to Jatoli Ghana where, peering through the fog, Satya found our first target bird, Yellow-wattled Lapwing although getting photographs for our files was not very successful. The fog prevented us from scanning fields for other target birds so we headed out about thirty minutes by car allowing the fog to lift to another spot. Here we started checking fields and although we found many birds including a small group of sandgrouse, we did not spot any wader

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species. Quite suddenly a flock of birds flew over, I glanced up and identified them quickly as Rock Doves, but wait a minute, what about that one at the back? That looked like a courser and through my binoculars I could see that indeed it was, I drew the others attention to it and we pursued it to where it landed and got some lovely views of Indian Courser. We then drove to the Khone Dam and there Satya soon found our next wader, Indian Stone-Curlew. He had done marvellously well and got us three of our seven species in the first day!

The following day took us to the Chambal River and a boat trip. Elis and I had been looking forward to this very much, mostly because there was the possibility of seeing a species that we had wanted to see since beginning the quest. Elis and I are very fond of lapwings and the River Lapwing was one that had caught our eye from the outset and here we were fifteen months later and facing our first chance to see one. We couldn't wait, nor indeed did we have to as the first bird we saw when we arrived at the river was a River Lapwing that flew across in front of us. Elis and I couldn't have been happier. Sadly the river trip did not come up with the other two species we had sought there, Great Thick-knee and Small Pratincole.

We now just had one species left to look for and this was a long shot, could it be that the end of our quest was to end with a series of missed species? We made the obligatory, for a tourist, visit to see the Taj Mahal and then returned to Delhi where we were put on a train to Ramnagar overnight.

Indian sleeper trains are a bit of an education if you are not accustomed to them, we both slept fitfully and by early morning we were in Ramnagar. We were picked up by our guide Anil and driver Musheer and we set off in search of our last potential species of our marathon quest. We headed for the Kosi River. We made a stop at the barrage but there was no sign of our bird, we then went up to the bridge over the river and from there could also see none. Anil suggested we walk the river up to the Garjiya Temple. Elis was thrilled when she found her very first Wallcreeper, but my mind was focussed on one thing. As we approached the temple a River Lapwing flew across the water and landed. I was still keen to look at this species as much as possible as it may be some time before I could again, so looked at it through my binoculars. When I did so I noticed another bird by its side, it was an Ibisbill, the bird we had come all this way to see and it had been shown to us by a River lapwing, life doesn't get much better than that!

I couldn't think of a more lovely setting to see our last Wader Quest bird in the tranquil surroundings of the Himalayan foothills, a great sense of relief, happiness, contentment and yes, achievement swept over me as I sat on a rock watching these attractive and rare birds go about their business. Wader Quest had been a long journey and we had enjoyed every step of the way, but few more than that pivotal moment in our lives.

Since returning to the UK we have converted our travelling adventure into a permanent charity of the same name, our remit has not changed just the way we hope to achieve our goals. Wader Quest the charity will continue to raise funds and awareness in support of wader conservation projects and we hope that you will join us and make our contribution more significant.

**-Rick and Elis Simpson in Britain**  
*Chair of Board of Trustees*

**Wader Quest - A BirdLife Species Champion:** [www.waderquest.org](http://www.waderquest.org),  
& [rick@rick-simpson.com](mailto:rick@rick-simpson.com), [07birding@gmail.com](mailto:07birding@gmail.com), <https://twitter.com/waderquest>,  
<https://www.facebook.com/WaderQuest>,

**Rick Simpson Birding blog:** [www.rick-simpson.com](http://www.rick-simpson.com)

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Ibisbill - *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*



Indian Courser - *Cursorius coromandelicus*



Indian Thick-knee - *Burhinus indicus*



River Lapwing - *Vanellus duvaucelii*



Yellow-wattled Lapwing - *Vanellus malabaricus*