

BIRDFORUM – Northern India**11th – 24th January 2003**www.birdforum.net/archive/index.php/t-2362

Late but rested we arrived at Agra Fort railway station and met our guides for the day and a 3 hour drive to the Chambal River NP, although the drive was long and hot the final destination was superb. The Chambal River is permanent waterways although the poor monsoon has left it a little lower than usual. Late but undeterred we set off in the early afternoon heat in search of river dolphins and crocodiles, and the odd life bird. The sanctuary delivered everything, 5 dolphins, one huge Muggler crocodile and lots of gharials (fresh water, fish eating alligators), on the bird front, River and Black-bellied Terns, Painted Storks, 3 species of cormorant, lots of wild fowl and waders and best of all Indian Skimmer.

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Next morning, we drove to the National Chambal Sanctuary, a wide river with equally wide sandy areas to each side. We soon had Indian Skimmer, Steve's first lifer for the trip! Then Black-bellied and River Tern, Comb Duck, Greater Flamingo and 4 species of cormorant. Negotiating the sand was no mean feat for those using wheelchairs but with lots of manpower we were all able to get aboard the boats and no one missed out on the fascinating site. The boat trip with views of the highly endangered Gangetic Dolphins was most enjoyable, except for one of our number who was overcome by heat, spending the return journey under a collapsing umbrella, and the next couple of hours recovering in the air-conditioned coach. On the river were a number of small islands with cormorants and, in one case, several hundred Small Pratincoles. After a picnic lunch under canvas and further birding we went on to Agra, where we were booked into the luxurious Sheraton Hotel.