

**Voyage to India observing and photographing wildlife
February–March 2015**



With 3.3 million square kilometers is India a huge country for a nature-photographer. It is just impossible to cover the nature of this country in one or two voyages. So far, I am concentrating on the northern part of the country and my second Indian voyage lead me to Keoladeo, Chambal, Corbett, Pangot, Gibbon WS, Kaziranga and Manas. Quite a few places – but more than 5 weeks allowed enough time to observe and photograph wildlife with ease.

Keoladeo Ghana near Bharatpur was a former duck-shooting reserve and became a National Park in 1981. It is at all times of the year a very interesting place - particularly to observe birds. But during winter months the number of birds is at their peak as they use Keoladeo Nat.Park as a wintering ground. But beside birds you may encounter Python, Antelopes and small cats. You visit the place by rickshaw and the drivers and guides are very knowledgeable in spotting and identifying the birds.

Chambal is just three hours by car away from Keoladeo, southeast of Agra. Chambal Safari Lodge is a comfortable place to stay and a short drive brings you to the Chambal River with a memorable boat ride to observe Gangetic Dolphin, Garials, Marsh Crocodiles and innumerable water-birds.

Besides Ranthambore and Bandhavgarh, Corbett is certainly one of the best places to observe the most charismatic animal of India – the majestic tiger. A day's drive from Chambal through Indian traffic brings you to Corbett Nat.Park in the state of Uttarakhand, northeast of Delhi. But of course there are quite a few other mammals, reptiles and lots of birds to encounter. An interesting alternation to observe wildlife by Jeep is the possibility to ride on elephant back. Even photographers get a different angle from the top of an elephant.

Being now at the foothills of the Himalaya we continued east to Nainital/Sattal for birding in mountainous habitat in an area called Pangot with the majestic Himalayan Mountains in sighting distance. The nights were cold and I appreciated the heat of a log fire. Birding was excellent and I added a great number of new birds to my life-list. My personal highlight was the sighting of Bearded Vultures circulating high above in the sky.

The first part of the voyage came to an end, and for the second part scheduled in the state of Assam I had to use the plane from Delhi to Kolkata and further to Jorhat, the tea-capital of the world. A short drive by car and I was in the luxury Hotel Thengal Manor which reminded me a bit at "former colonial style". This Hotel was starting point for excursions to explore Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary. You hear the Gibbons long before you see them. But with knowledgeable guides it took only a short walk through the forest to see the Hoolock-Gibbons high up in the trees above. But I must admit, good photos were difficult to take. But beside Gibbons there are a number of other primates in that sanctuary such as Stump-tailed Macaque, Pig-tailed Macaque and Capped Langur and the guides were able to find them all.

A three-hour drive brought us from Thengal Manor to Kaziranga. Kaziranga National Park is very special as it is the area where 80% of the world-population of the Greater one-horned Rhinoceros is living. They share the place with Asian Elephants, Asiatic Wild Buffalo and numerous deers, antelopes, big and small cats, including tigers and an unbelievable number of bird-species among them an impressive variety of raptors.

Last place I visited on this voyage was Manas Nat.Park just at the border to the kingdom of Bhutan. This park has fantastic biotopes and good chances to observe three species of big cats, bears, elephants, rhinos, buffalos, gaurs etc. And the variety of birds is impressive as well. But in March, the forest service is burning off grass in order to give way for new grass to grow. I had the impression that all of India is burning. But a last highlight was sighted – a black leopard, called Black Panther. But photographers are never satisfied with the pictures they get. The animal was too far away for a good shot!

A great compliment at the end: The voyage was perfectly organized by Wild World India. The guides were very knowledgeable and friendly, the drivers careful and with great skill. To make it short: it was a perfect voyage and the next voyage to India is already in the planning.

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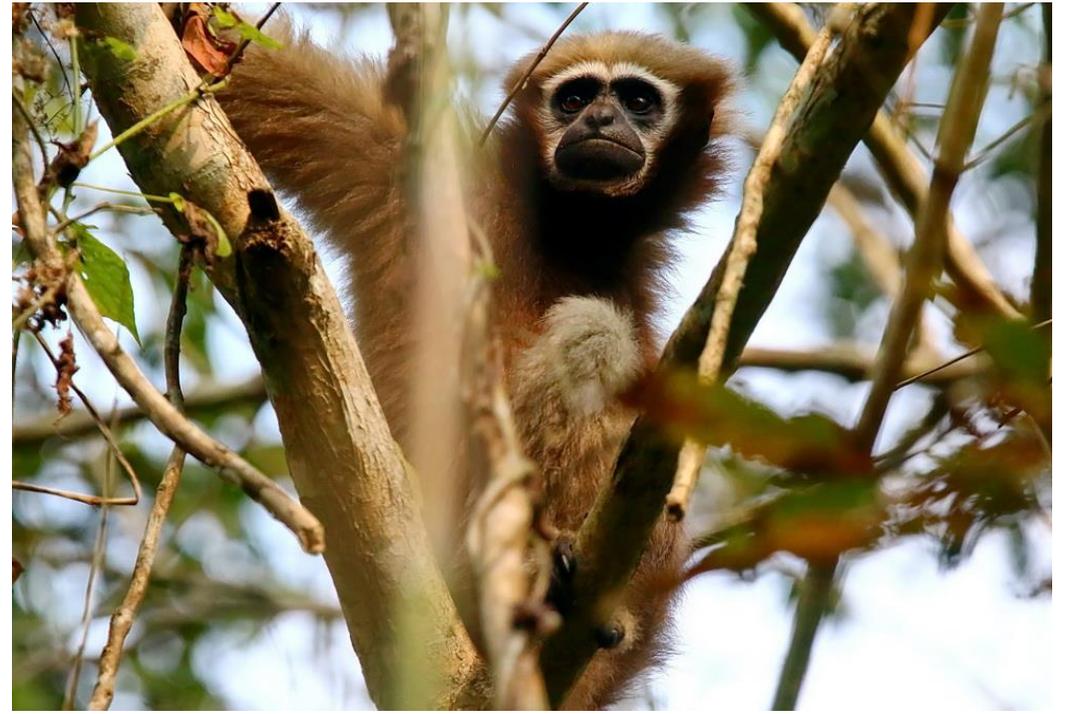


















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