

## Three Wildlife Safaris to India with Wild World India

“I’d like to get to India once in my life to see a tiger and the Taj Mahal.” That simple wish blossomed into three fantastic trips that expanded well beyond a tiger and the Taj, all in the span of just four years, with the expert guidance of Vikram Singh of Wild World India.

### Trip #1 as a Solo Traveler, Departure March 26, 2011

- 1 nt Delhi, Ahuja Residency, followed by a day of Delhi sightseeing and overnight train
- 4 nts Kisli section of Kanha National Park, Tuli Tiger Resort
- 2 nts Mukki section of Kanha National Park, Royal Tiger Resort
- 4 nts Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Nature Heritage Resort
- 1 nt Delhi, Ahuja Residency after Overnight train to Agra to see Taj Mahal and Agra Fort, day room at Mansingh Palace
- 2 nts Jim Corbett National Park-Biranji section, Camp Forktail Creek
- 2 nts Jim Corbett National Park-Dhikala section, Dhikala Forest Rest House

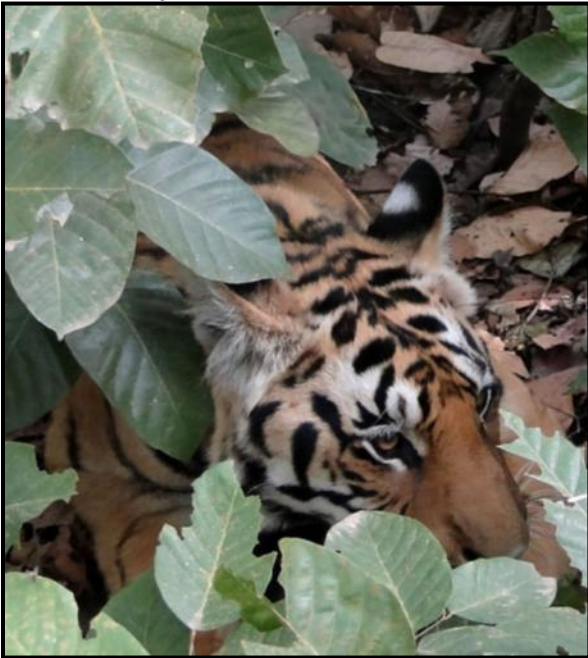
Naturalist Rajendra assured me I would see a tiger before the end of our first day in the **Kisli section of Kanha**, and he was right. Not only a tiger, but a tiger surrounded by peacocks—two iconic species of the Indian jungle! What a welcoming committee.



Tigers presented themselves in numerous other attractive settings and poses, such as this large male cooling off on a sweltering afternoon...



...and this juvenile in the shaded forest...



...in this case, a well camouflaged cat who demanded privacy...



...plus a more obliging subject that resulted in several expressive portraits.



Though the tiger is not visible just out of camera range, it chased this leopard up a tree.



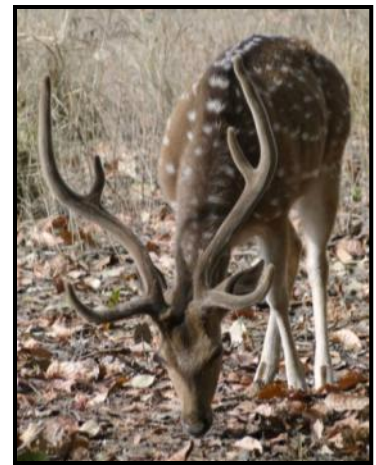
Kanha had a magical feel to it, perhaps because of the variety of species that inhabited the diverse and lush environment. At times the landscape was the focus, even over the tiger. Resting on a distant bluff, a tiger is visible, below.



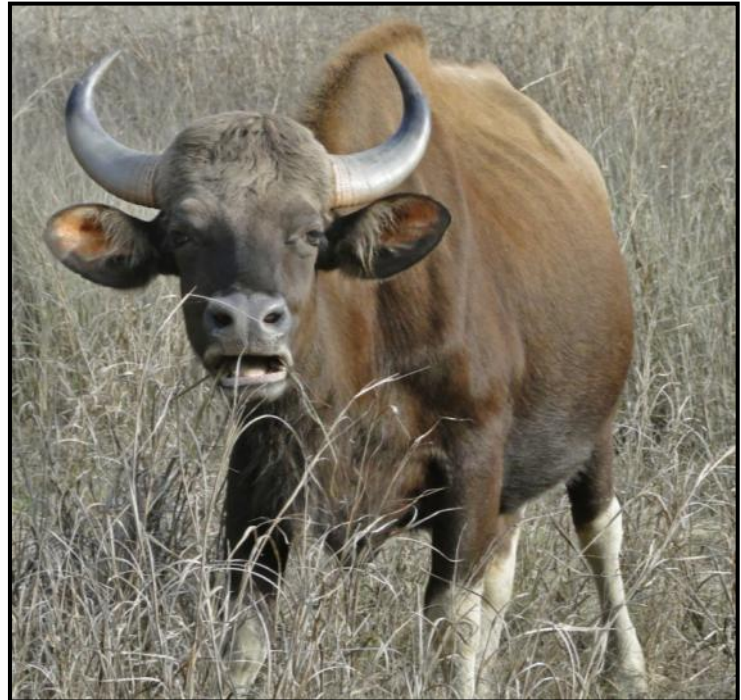
The Hard Ground Barasingha (deer) make their home only in Kanha and their growing numbers are a conservation success story. They were fairly easy to see because Rajan knew where to look.



Even easier to see were the Chital. These spotted deer were everywhere.



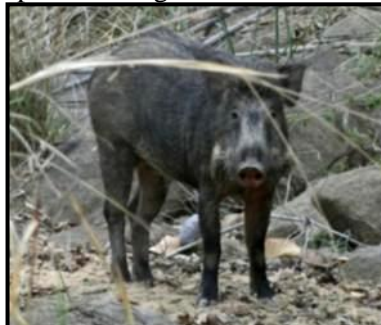
In contrast to the delicate stature of the chital, stood the formidable Gaur or Indian Buffalo. I found it challenging to get appealing pictures of these bovines, though I did find their white stockings attractive.



Rajan made sure I had ample opportunity to appreciate the many species that made up Kanha's Kisli sector. We were not in constant pursuit of tigers.



*Crow*



*Wild Boar*



*There are 3 monkeys in this photo*

The Common Langurs provided hours of entertainment. A front row seat to their antics was easily arranged because they were so relaxed around the vehicles/Gypsies.



Each early morning our departure started off with a chance to see Spotted Owlets chicks in their tree cavity nest, located near the queue.



Even those without a birding life list could appreciate the avian diversity of Kanha, such as the Green Bee-Eater or my personal favorite, the Eurasian Hoopoe, with its tiger-like crest.



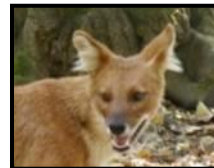
But the bird that always stole the show was the Peafowl, the male being the Peacock.

After four nights I traded the Kisli sector of **Kanha** for the **Mukki** sector and I also traded brothers. Rajan's brother, Ashok, became my guide in Mukki.

On the journey between Kisli and Mukki we saw the rare and elusive Chousingha antelope, which has four horns on its head, although two are not much more than bumps.



While the tigers proved more prolific in the Kisli sector, Mukki would shine when it came to Dhole (Indian Wild Dogs.) A pack can contain dozens of dogs, but the pack we saw consisted of two dogs.



Another canine—the golden jackal—provided some of the most exciting memories of Kanha. When I reunited with Rajan several years later, he still recalled our sighting of a jackal with a kill.



**Bandhavgarh** was the second “tiger park” on itinerary and the unpredictability of tiger behavior was underscored here during my four night visit.

It was not until the final 2.5 hours of the final day that the tigers materialized, and then we had 6 sightings of 5 different tigers! Interestingly, it was not just me that temporarily had run out of tiger luck; the entire park had become tigerless for a few days, much to the chagrin of guests and naturalists alike. So when three 2-year old cubs appeared on the road, my naturalist and driver were thrilled. And so was I.





Our last tiger sighting on that eventful final morning was a female with one severely injured or missing eye.

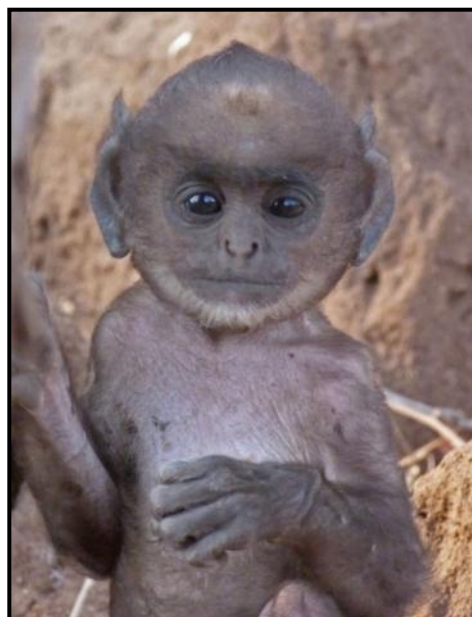
At the time I did not know the role this cat would play in a future visit to

Bandhavgarh. But I was pretty sure there would be a return the next year because word was out that most of the females in the Talek Zone in Bandhavgarh were pregnant and those that weren't were expected to be by the monsoons. That meant a decent chance of seeing cubs the next year.

During the three day tiger drought, there was plenty to see, though it took effort in some cases, such as this night jar, which is well camouflaged while it sleeps during the day. In contrast, the Indian Roller's brilliant blues couldn't be missed.

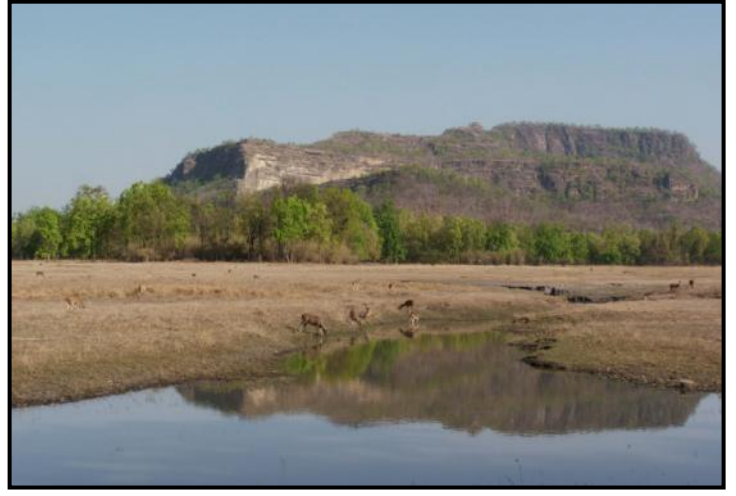


Always a delight were the Common Langurs, especially the babies. Who couldn't love those little faces?



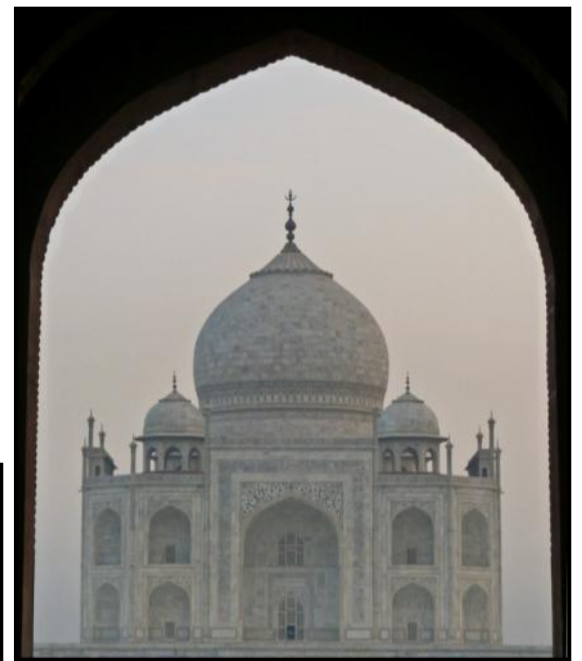
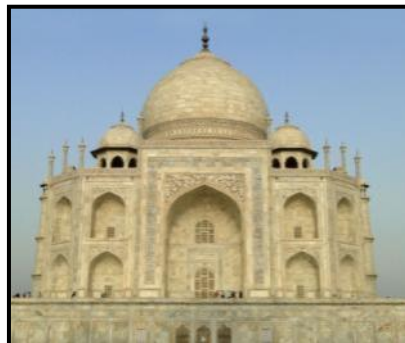


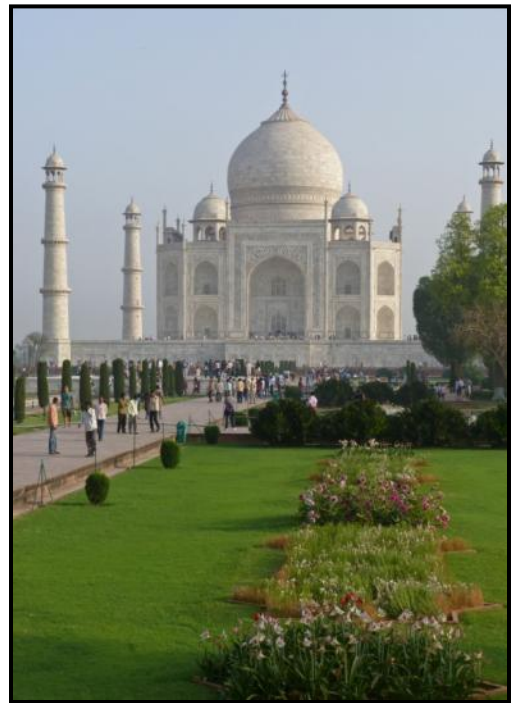
And then there was the beauty of Bandhavgarh's landscapes, whether embellished by animal life or not.



There was a lot about Wild World India to be impressed with: their fine guides, the fact that Vikram visits personally at some point with all clients (if possible), the excellent accommodations and fine food, but I was also especially pleased at how they were able to maximize transportation schedules to get the most out of the hours I had in India. For example, I took the Gondwana Express, the overnight train, which arrived in **Agra** just after 4:00 am, allowing ample time to arrive at the **Taj Mahal** when it opened (6:10 was opening time for me in April) for nice morning light.

To be sure I was well fed, rested, and could take advantage of that morning light, I was whisked from the train to a day room at Mansingh Palace, breakfast included. Then a professional Taj Mahal guide accompanied me and pointed out the best vantage spots for photos and even took my second camera to click away, making sure I was the subject of some of those shots. That's especially important when visiting the Taj Mahal alone.





In my opinion, no Taj Mahal photo shoot is complete without the resident Rhesus Macaques.



My final destination was **Corbett**. CB was my driver and self taught birding expert who brought me to the park and then handed me off to Naturalist Harise. Enroute was a stop to look for the long-nosed Gharial crocs.



Corbett birds: Pied Kingfisher, Green Magpie, Blue-eared Kingfisher and the Scarlet Minivet. →





Though similar to the common rooster, the Red Jungle Fowl was an elusive prize that so often flitted into the underbrush with only a flash of briefly visible color. Fortunately, this guy hung around.

In addition to the spotted Chital, the large Sambar Deer, and the barking Muntjac Deer that can be found in many Indian parks, the Hog Deer of Corbett are not common elsewhere.



*Chital*



*Muntjac*



*Chital*



*Sambar*



*Sambar*



*Hog Deer*

Wild boar seemed to be more relaxed in Jim Corbett National Park than the other parks I had visited. This one was very engaged in digging his hole, ignoring our vehicle altogether.



Naturalist Harise's sharp eyes uncovered a Rock Python and a Monitor Lizard, both sunning themselves.



My spotting skills produced a lizard on the wall of Dhikala Forest Rest House.



**Corbett** was in my itinerary not so much for tigers--though I saw two briefly--but for the Indian Elephant. I still remember my first Indian elephant sighting. It was a single bull.



We found elephants in herds and other times roaming the forests alone.





In preparing for my first trip to India, I wanted to know about some of the past kings, such as the famous Ashoka who was transformed through Buddhism from a ruthless ruler to one of great virtue. In honor of this king, the Ashoka Chakra wheel graces the center of the Indian flag . Of course I learned about Shah Jahan, “King of the World,” who built the Taj Mahal in memory of his wife, who had died in childbirth with their 14th child.

What I didn’t know was that I’d be treated like a king (queen in my case) during my stay by Wild World India! I also didn’t know I’d be privileged to watch the Men in Blue win the Cricket World Cup!

**Trip #2, Teaming Up in Bandhavgarh, Going Solo in Gujarat, Departure March 11, 2012**

- 1 nt Agra Bear Rescue Facility inside Sur Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, 4 pm visit to Taj Mahal, The Retreat.
- 1 nt Chambal River morning boat ride, then overnight on Gondwana Express
- 4 nts Bandhavgarh, Tiger Lagoon
- 1 nt transit Mumbai, Hotel Transit
- 3 nts Sasan Gir National Park, Gir Birding Lodge
- 2 nts Velavadar Black Buck National Park, Black Buck Lodge
- 2 nts Little Rann of Kutch, Rann Riders

Home to 300 rescued sloth bears, and source of employment for many of the former dancing bear masters, The **Agra Bear Rescue Facility** offers hope to end a life of cruelty for captive sloth bears. The Kalandar are semi-nomadic people that for centuries had captured sloth bear cubs from the forest by killing the mother, and trained them to provide entertainment to passersby in exchange for money. This cruel practice was their livelihood, a tradition handed down over generations. To save the bears from this horrendous existence, the Kalandars had to be offered an alternative way to provide for their families, which is one of the goals of the rescue facility.

No photos/video can be posted online, though they can be taken for personal use and opportunities for sloth close-ups were plentiful. It was my travel buddy’s brilliant idea to include the Bear Rescue Facility.

Along the **Chambal River** mugger crocs (one shown below, left) as well as the long-nosed Gharial crocs can be seen, plus many birds, lots of local people and construction.

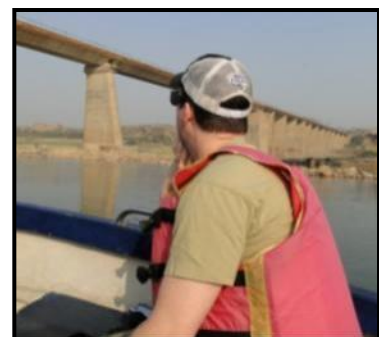


*Comb Duck*



*Ruddy Shelducks*

Life jackets were required for the boat on the Chambal River.





Indian Skimmers are often seen on the Chambal River and we briefly spied two sitting along the bank when we first arrived, but managed no photos.

A peaceful morning on the Chambal River was followed by an afternoon visit to the **Taj Mahal**. The same guide from my previous visit was arranged for us. He was eager to show off some new photo angles.



And then it was time to try our luck at tigers, and maybe even tiger cubs. We took the Gondwana Express to **Bandhavgarh**.

The first tiger we met was missing an eye. This was the last tiger I had seen the previous year. We learned this was Kankatee, who had lost the eye in a fight to the death with another female. Kankatee demonstrated her fierceness by consuming the flesh of the tiger she had just killed. Tigers rarely eat other tigers. Not only was Kankatee fierce, but she was a mother, and we would have the privilege of glimpsing her three 7-month old cubs.





*One of Kankatee's 7-month old cubs*



*Kankatee's damaged left eye (on right side in pic)*

The cubs were enjoying the remains of a kill their mother had made. There were still some bones to be gnawed, which is what the cub is doing directly below on the right. All three cubs are visible in the bottom photo.





*Same photo as bottom of previous page. The middle cub is hardest to see*

In the center of the road, it is much easier to see the tiger. This cub, below, is 13 months old.



Tigress Rajabehera came into view in the afternoon sun.



Naturalist Rajesh and driver Baloo suddenly became very animated. Sloth Bear!! We watched it chase a peacock in what could have been a scene from *The Jungle Book*. Only a quick, not particularly focused, photo was possible. We were thrilled to see a sloth bear in the wild after spending time with them at the sanctuary.



*Alexandrine Parakeet, Green Bee-Eater, Brown Fish Owl*



*Sikra*



*Crested Serpent Eagle*



*Sambar Deer in Scenic Bandhavgarh*

It had been a gamble to return to Bandhavgarh in 2012 in hopes of seeing tiger cubs, based on the previous year's projections of mass pregnancies. But the gamble had paid off. My travel buddy had a fifth night in Bandhavgarh, but it was time for me to head to the western state of Gujarat.



Driver and birder CB met me at the airport of the coastal city of Diu and accompanied me for the **Gujarat** portion of the trip. It was great to be reunited again with CB. Our first destination was **Sasan Gir**, best known for being the only national park with Asiatic Lions (at least the only park in 2012).

The odds of seeing some of those lions are high because in addition to your naturalist and driver, there are also roving rangers looking for lions (sometimes on foot.) The rangers radio their findings to the vehicles/Gypsies.

Lion viewing that is monitored by the rangers is somewhat frustrating because they limit each vehicle to about two minutes. Finding our own lions was a far superior experience to the ranger supervised viewings. But I completely understand and agree with regulating lion viewing for the good of the species.





The Gir photos have a smoky texture to them because burning was so prevalent this time of year. The haze accentuates this photo of a young Blue Bull, giving the scene a fairytale quality.



Mottled Owls! A nice note to end on for Sasan Gir.



**Velavadar** is the only tropical grassland in India to be given the status of a national park. And it is the world's largest communal roosting site for harriers. Three kinds of harriers are regularly seen, and we saw lots of each: Eurasian Marsh Harrier, Montagu's Harrier, and Pallid Harrier. Even though mid-March is not prime time for the largest harrier numbers, often at least one of the harrier species could be seen.

Velavadar is blessed with a fascinating variety of wildlife in addition to harriers. Blue Bull (Nilgai), Indian Wolves, Striped Hyena, and its signature Black Buck can all be found both in the park and the adjacent buffer zone. It is possible to drive off-road in the buffer zone.



*Montagu's Harrier*



I had CB to thank for all of the Velavadar sightings. His familiarity with the area and his willingness to maximize our time in the field really paid off, such as these sparring Black Bucks, with the younger male looking on (in the first of the four photos.)



Back at the Black Buck Lodge, a discussion about mosquitoes with the owner led me to explain that where I lived we had much larger and more menacing mosquitoes than any found in Velavadar. When the owner asked where my home might be, it turned out that he owned a gas station just a few miles away!



*Saurus Cranes spotted by CB enroute to Little Rann of Kutch*

While mosquitoes may have been a topic of conversation at Black Buck Lodge, at Rann Riders in **Little Rann of Kutch (LRK)**, the resident peacock that relaxed in the lounge was well versed on a myriad of topics. Here I am in an animated discussion with this fascinating bird.

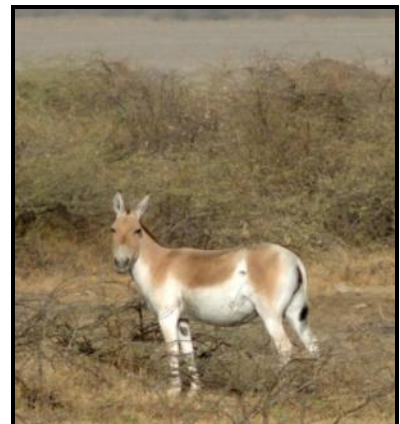


*Birder and Driver, CB, with a friendly resident, orphaned Nilgai calf that made its home at Black Buck Lodge.*



But I did not venture to Little Rann of Kutch to talk with a peacock; my main target was the Wild Asses. The herds always seemed to arrange themselves attractively, perhaps their uniform coloring added to their striking appeal.

I observed and photographed herds of wild asses at about 30 meters, while sitting or crouching low on the ground. As long as I kept my distance and remained still, the Wild Asses tolerated me outside of the vehicle.







When the Wild Asses had departed the rann to seek shade, Rann Rider's Naturalist, Babulal, decided we should also depart to seek a den with fox kits. CB drove us to the den location and we watched a single Desert Fox kit emerged from the den. The mother could be seen on the horizon in her search for food.





The Indian Fox is a different species than the Desert Fox. Babulala knew where their den was too and CB did the driving to take us there. We exited the vehicle and sat about 10 meters from the den. Three Indian Fox kits were visible briefly. Then we were treated to the antics of one or two of the kits.





The most visible difference between the Indian and the Desert Fox is the black vs. the white tip of the tail.

Greater and Lesser Flamingos were abundant, but there had been even bigger flocks the previous month or two.



*The gray-brown birds are the flamingo chicks.*



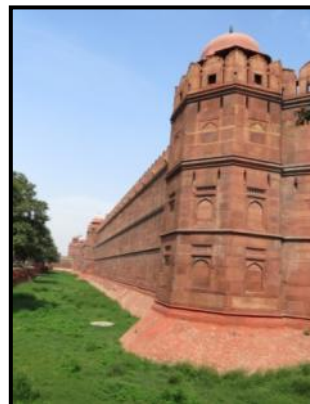
*Indian Courser*

When the sun set on the final evening of my second safari to India, I could make the claim: You bet your wild asses India has lions and tigers and bears, oh my!

**Trip #3 with Two Other Travelers, Departure March 12, 2015**

- 1 nt Sightseeing in New Delhi, Hotel Le Meridien
- 5 nts Kaziranga, including Hoollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary, Wild Grass Lodge
- 1 nt New Delhi in transit, 4 Points Sheridan
- 4 nts Kanha, Chitvan Jungle Lodge-Mukki Section
- 2 nts Pench, Tuli Tiger Corridor
- 3 nts Tadoba, Svasara Jungle Lodge

First, some **Delhi** sights.



*Moti Masjid at Red Fort*



*All from the Red Fort on bottom of page*

*Details at the Red Fort*



*Rose Ringed Parakeet*



*All are from Qutub Minar at top of page*



*Little Egret*



*Above 3 photos are from Lodhi Gardens*

Just like our naturalists in the jungle, our guide in the city that was arranged by Wild World India was knowledgeable, personable, and flexible, resulting in a pleasant outing for us all.

Nature's beauty pageant started when we looked through the window on the left hand side (thanks for the seat request by one of my travel buddies) of the plane to Guwahati (before our 4-ish-hour drive to Kaziranga.) And the beauty continued throughout the entire trip.

While our whole itinerary was well crafted and full of excellent wildlife potential it was **Kaziranga** that was our number one goal to try to see Indian Rhino and Elephants, and it lived up to its reputation our expectations! Thanks in good measure to our excellent guide Tarun, who works at Wild Grass Lodge.



The 3 zones of Kaziranga visited by tourists—east, west, and central, all produced memorable highlights. The first rhinos were often sighted while queuing up to enter the park. Below is our first photographable rhino sighting after entering the park in the Central Zone.



While thrilled with the rhinos, the Kalij Pheasant was very exciting to see as well. We heard it thrashing in the bush, like a crazed rhino, long before we saw it.

Red Jungle Fowl and Hog Deer, which we knew as shy creatures in other Indian parks, were more relaxed and willing to be photographed in Kaziranga.



*Hog Deer*



We wasted no time in booking the elephant back safari in search of rhinos and set off on the ele the next morning at 6:30 am. in the Central Zone. Lots of Swamp Deer (Soft Ground Barasingha) and Hog Deer.



*Swamp Deer*



*Hog Deer*



*Swamp Deer*



But then a rhino—mother and a calf! It would be the smallest calf of the trip. Elephant calves join their mothers on the outings and take advantage of a chance to nurse between the two shifts.



*Open Billed Stork  
(opening is noticeable)*

Water Buffalo and a Burmese Python made their homes in the Western Zone, along with the Malayan Squirrel, a creature that captivated us all with its weasel-like body and long tail.





*Red-breasted Parakeet*



*Gray-backed Shrike*



*Asian Pied Starling*



*Chestnut Tailed Starling*

Rhinos in the East, rhinos in the West and colorful birds everywhere--Kaziranga was keeping us busy!



Then it was elephant time in the Central Zone and the Eastern Zone, which had the largest herds.



We were delighted to catch rhino and elephant together. We saw this only in the Eastern Zone.





Also interesting, but not quite as exciting, was the elephant and water buffalo combo in the Eastern Zone.



The river was full of activity. A family of smooth coated otters was dining on catfish. They were on the opposite bank so photos were tough, but we were able to watch them for about 20 minutes.





Sharing the branch were three Assam Tent Turtles and one larger Indian Roof Turtle.

The river was inviting to rhinos and even the water buffalo took a swim, their horns protruding like snorkels.



*Rhino Reflection taken by Michael Ortner*





*Chestnut Headed Bee-Eater*



*Blue Bearded Bee-Eater*



*Lineated Barbet*

Each morning we passed the buffer area of the park containing farms.



*Tea workers*

Controlled burns were a common occurrence in Kaziranga in March.



*Fire photo taken by Michael Ortnier*





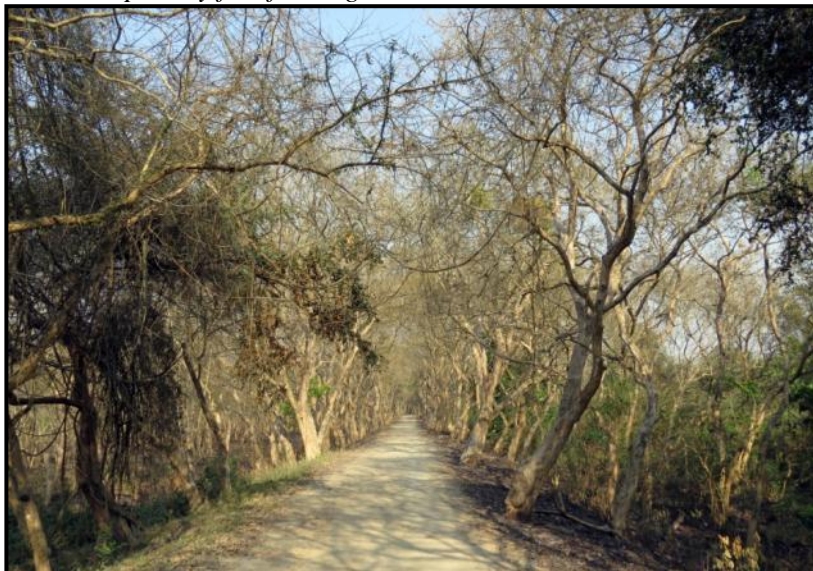
*Intense green in early morning light-Central*



*Hoopoe-my fav, fanning its crest*



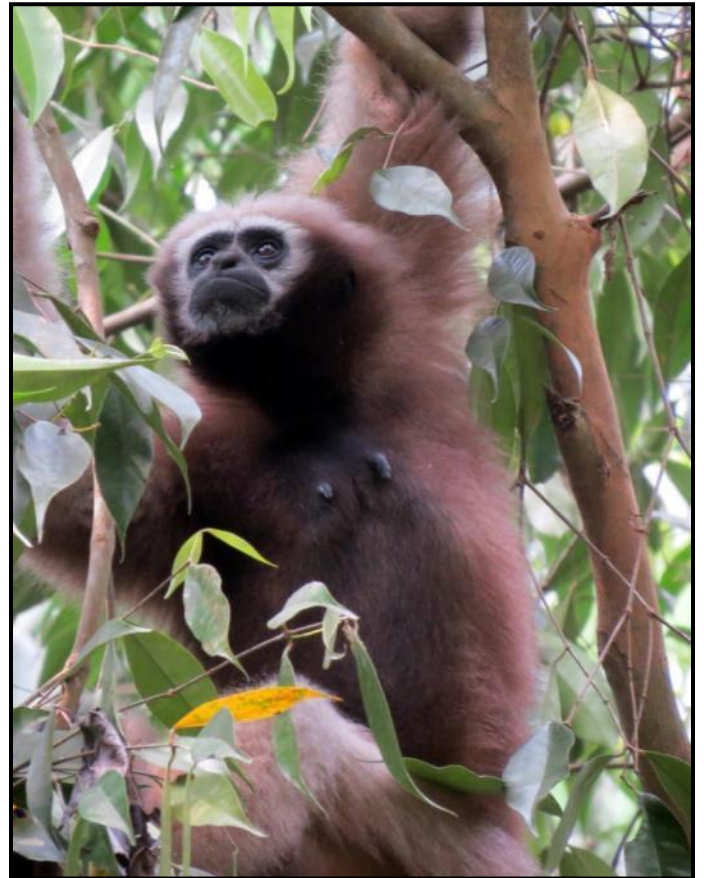
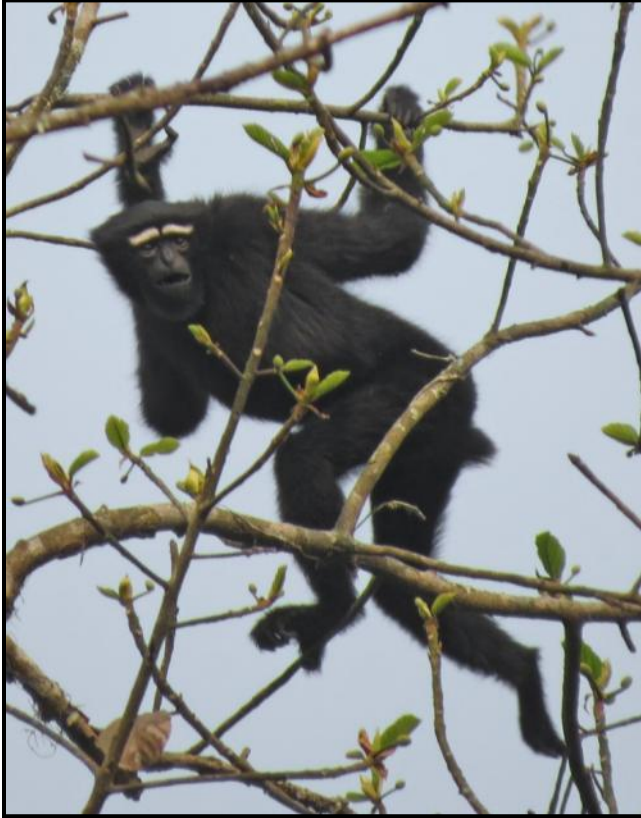
*Blossom Headed Parakeet*



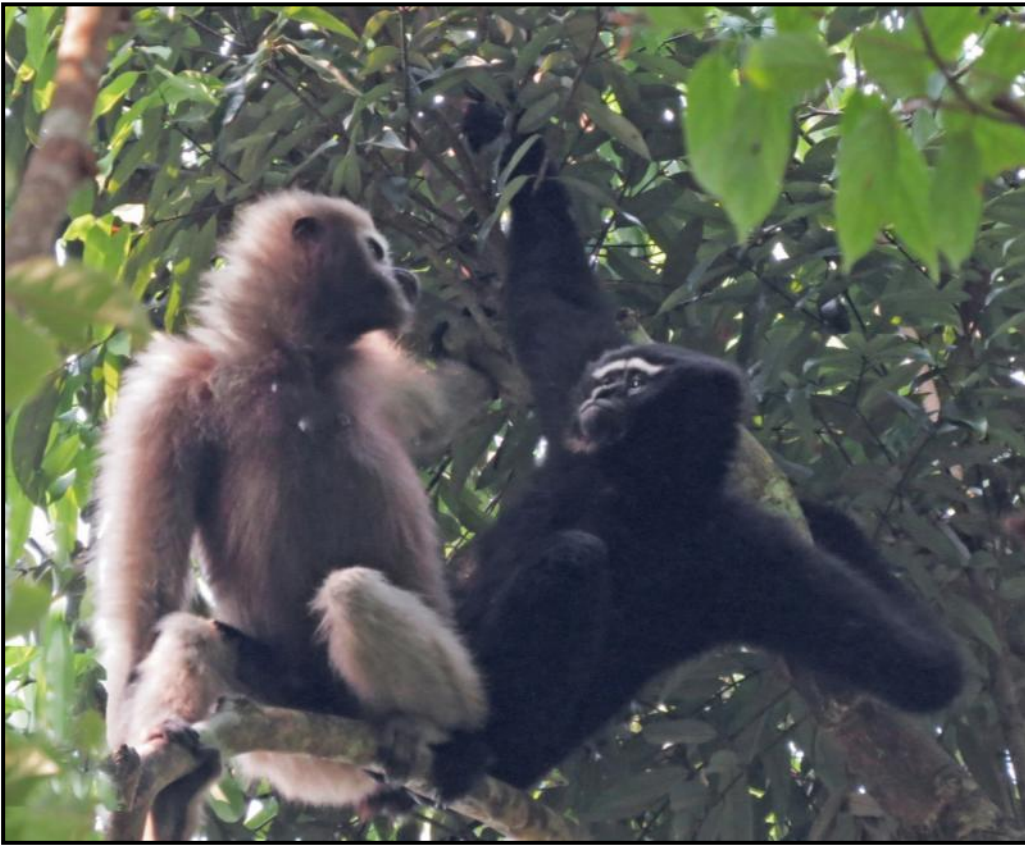
*Naturalist Tarun in the Tea Garden near Wild Grass Lodge.*



No trip to Kaziranga is complete without a visit to the **Hoollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary**, with the highest concentration of Western Hoolock Gibbons anywhere. This “small” or “lesser” ape is the only ape found in India. Male and juvenile gibbons are black, while females are brown. It is necessary to hike with a local ranger to find the gibbons. Populations of Western Hoolock Gibbons have declined by almost 90% over the last 30 years, and it is now considered to be one of the most endangered 25 primate species in the world. The sanctuary has about 100.



Western Hoolock Gibbons are monogamous and we miraculously found a mating pair. Even the ranger was astounded to witness this behavior.



The juvenile, below, is hanging on to its parents as they mate. Females give birth every 2-3 years and the offspring stay with the family up to 10 years.





The sanctuary is also home to Black Capped Capuchins (on the left). Near the entrance gate and offices was a domestic calf.



*All of us at the Hoollingapar Gibbon Sanctuary*

Returning to Kaziranga from the gibbon sanctuary, we encountered a celebration of a holy time.



A feisty male rhino gave us a little charge. Nothing too close or frightening, thanks to Tarun's level headed response and retreat. But the rhino made it clear he viewed our departure as good riddance.



In contrast, this gal below was not annoyed, merely curious.



During our stay in Kaziranga, we did not see any tigers, and had not expected them, even though the population of tigers is high. A good place to look for tigers is from the watch tower in the Central Zone.



*Sunset from Central Watch Tower by Michael Ortner*



*Sunset from Central Watch Tower by Andreas Schmidt*

We said good bye to our Naturalist Tarun and thanked him for our marvelous time, then departed Kaziranga. But one more bonus was in store—fruit bats. Not far from the park boundary was a tree that had been home for many years to hundreds of fruit bats.

Did we want to stop and have a look? But of course.



*Flying bat by Michael Ortner*

All three of us had been to **Kanha** previously and were eagerly awaiting a return. Rajendra, my guide from my first trip was awaiting the three of us. Let the Kanha adventure begin!

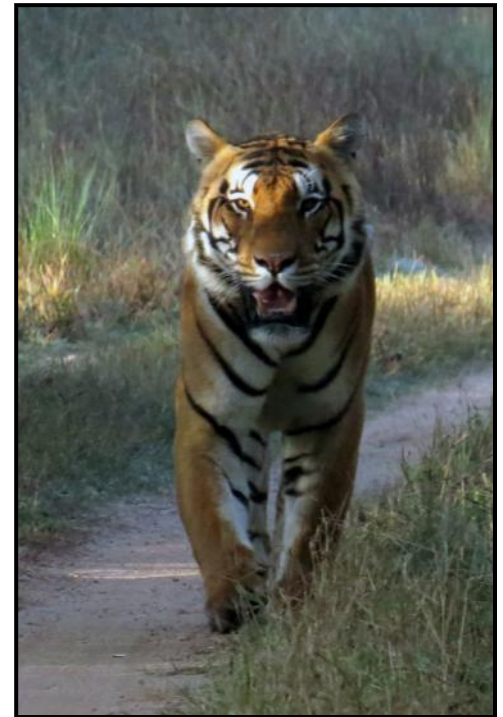


Dawn was routinely misty and mysterious, inviting our speculation of what the day might bring.



A hidden sambar, a preening peacock, a pair of sparring hard ground barasingha, an embracing mother and baby langur, or maybe even a tiger!





Appropriately named Big Male, we came upon this handsome tiger strolling down the road and had him all to ourselves for a few moments until another vehicle arrived and Big Male decided to meander into an inaccessible area.

“Aap Ne Baagh Dekha?” was a useful Hindi phrase we learned on the trip.

Translated: Have you seen the tiger? We could answer that question in the affirmative many times over due to the skills and expertise of our Naturalist Rajendra (Rajan for short).

Despite our passion for the tiger, we continued to be fascinated by the langurs and challenged by bird photography.

Heck, we were enthused by everything!





Managing to capture this Indian Roller in takeoff was a first for me. When there is a breeze, the Little Egret's feathers take on an elegant look.



*Sikra*



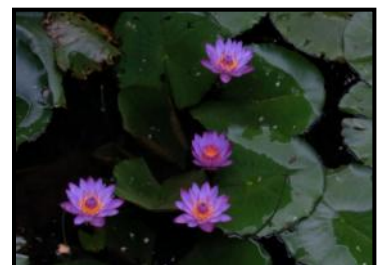
*Jungle Babbler in the leaves, which are the star of the photo*



*Rufous Treepie, also known as the tiger bird because of its color and because it has been seen picking meat out of the tiger's teeth.*



*Oriental Honey Buzzard*





*Woolly-Necked Stork with an eye toward the sky*

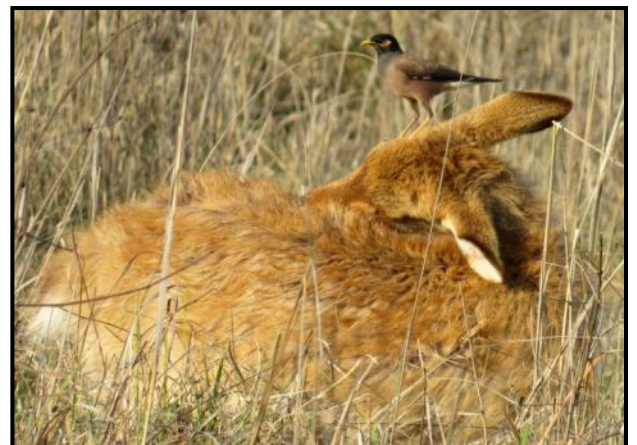


*Indian Grey Hornbill*



Sometimes bird watching included mammal watching as well, depending where the birds decided to land.

The Indian Pond Herons seemed to enjoy perching on the Barasingha in a symbiotic relationship. The birds get a meal of insects and the Barasingha are rid of pesky bugs that burrow into their coats.



*Common Myna is the bird*



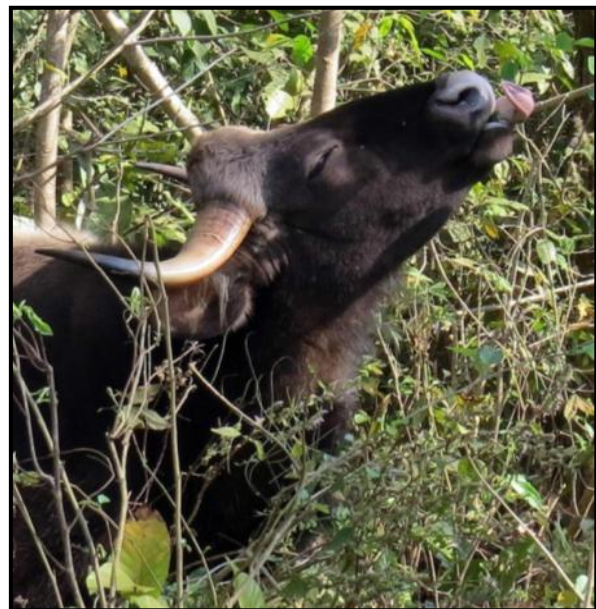
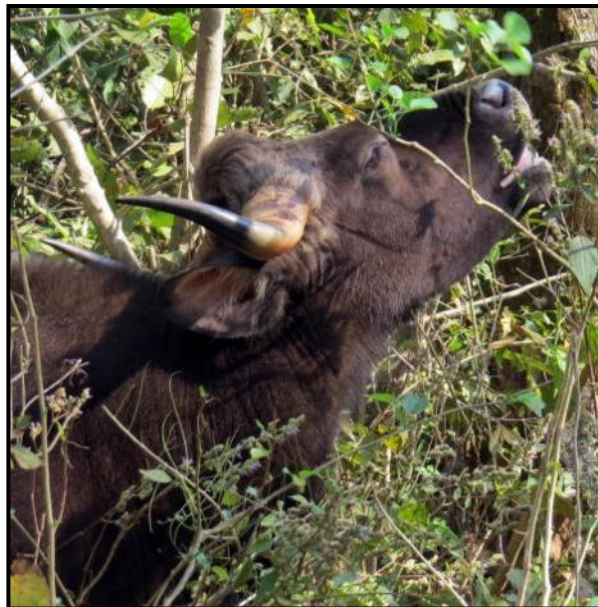




*Pond Heron is checking the rear flank.*



*Indian Scops Owl, White-Throated Kingfisher, Brown Fish Owl, Jungle Owlet*





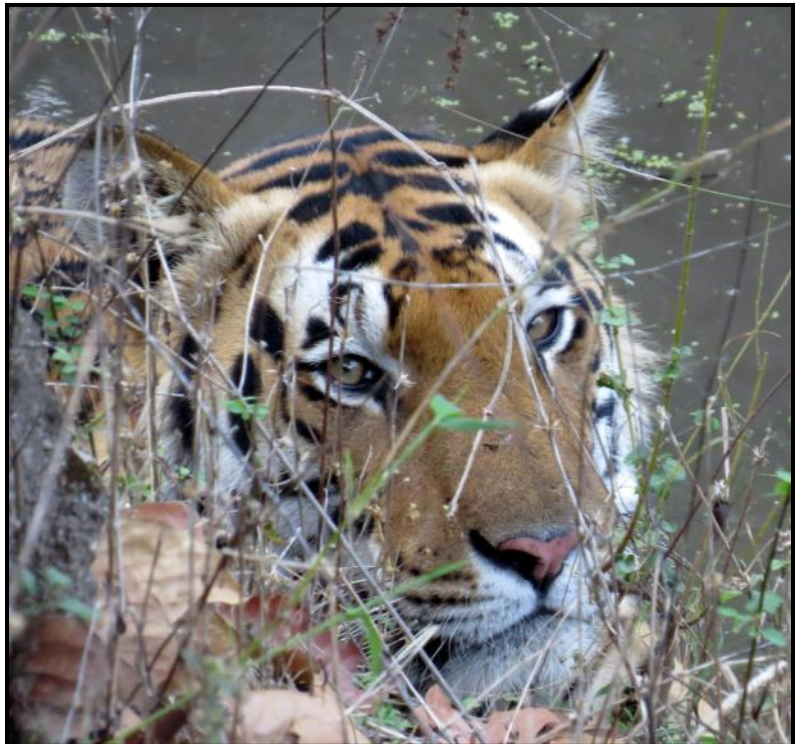
Chital were abundant in Kanha as they were in all the parks. The fawns were always a nice find.

Back at Chitvan Lodge we appreciated the frogs and butterflies.



We still had more tiger viewing in store at Kanha. A tiger known as New Male at his waterhole was the most photogenic of the remaining cats.





When our four nights at Kanha came to an end, we did not have to bid farewell to Rajan; we had arranged with Wild World India to have him come with us to Pench and Tadoba!

**Pench** was in our itinerary for scenic beauty and for logistics so we did not expect the abundance of tiger activity that ensued. But first, some Pench's spectacular scenery, with a few birds here and there.





*Indian Roller*



*White throated Kingfisher*



*Magpie Robin*

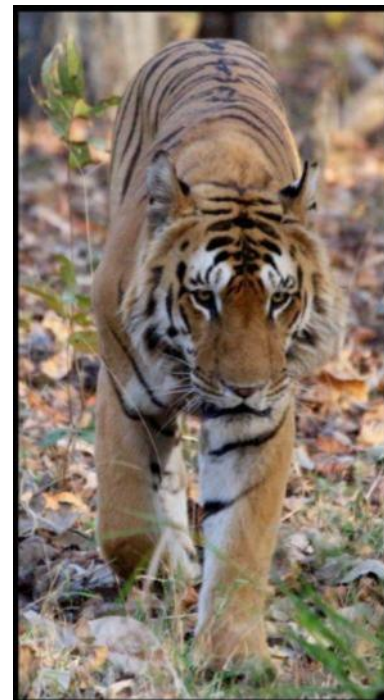




*Common Myna in Flame of the Forest Tree*



*Alexandrine Parakeet*



*Taken by Andreas Schmidt  
Male known as Rajakasha*



*One of three 18-month old cubs. We could get a photo of the 3.*





Limping female was the name given to a tigress with an abundance of white on her chest, who of course limped. The limp did not seem to impair her significantly.



*The white fur is almost blinding when the sun hits it*



*By Michael Ortner, Limping Female*



Limping Female enjoyed the same pool as Rajakasha, within half an hour of his dip.



*Limping Female*



*Painted Storks*



*Running Golden Jackals by Michael Ortner*



*Handing Off the Baby*





Pench had really come through for us. What more could we ask for in our remaining days in **Tadoba**? Picking a very farfetched sighting, we jokingly declared that we wanted to see a honey badger in Tadoba. In his 20 years of guiding, Rajan had not seen one, so he got a laugh out of our request. The joke was on us! Another group reported seeing a honey badger during our stay. We couldn't believe it. Then it crossed our path as well, but for only a moment in low light.



*Honey Badger photos shot quickly and in focus by Michael Ortner*

Our first morning we found Dhole (Indian wild dogs) getting a drink and some Sambar posing nicely.



On two occasions we saw a sloth bear. We found being first in the queue helped with sightings of this shy creature. Our first bear was timid and hid behind foliage. Our second sighting was quite by surprise, as we were waiting for a tiger to emerge from the brush. We ended up with both a tiger and a sloth bear within minutes and meters of each other, though the tiger was not photographable.



The Ruddy Mongoose had eluded us throughout the trip, so when it briefly appeared from the underbrush and scampered into the light, we quietly cheered.



Maya the tigress washing her face caused a sensation.



Maya settled in for a nap, sitting on a fragrant flower she just had to sniff. Very catlike.



*Bronze Winged Jacana, Golden Oriole, White throated Kingfisher, very elusive Grey Jungle Fowl (male)*

Waiting for Namdeo the tiger to take an afternoon dip paid off. He dipped, sipped, and napped. He even took a swim and then proceeded to mark his territory under the flame tree. Now that's classic shot! On another occasion we watched Namdeo chase after some Sambar drinking at the waterhole, but his heart was not in the hunt.



*Both swimming tiger shots by Michael Ortner*





*Looks like a Langur Convention*



*Common Hawk Cuckoo*



Night Jar Study:



*Indian Night Jar*



*Savanna Night Jar*



*Tadoba Lake*

Birdlife along Tadoba Lake includes



*Grey Headed Fish Eagle*



*Wattled Lapwing*

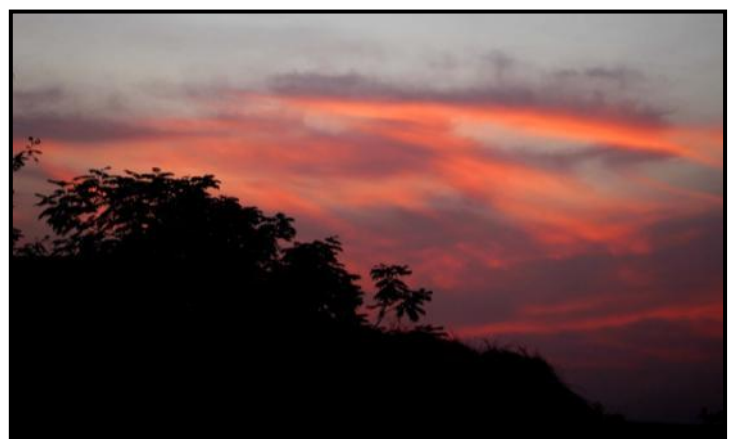
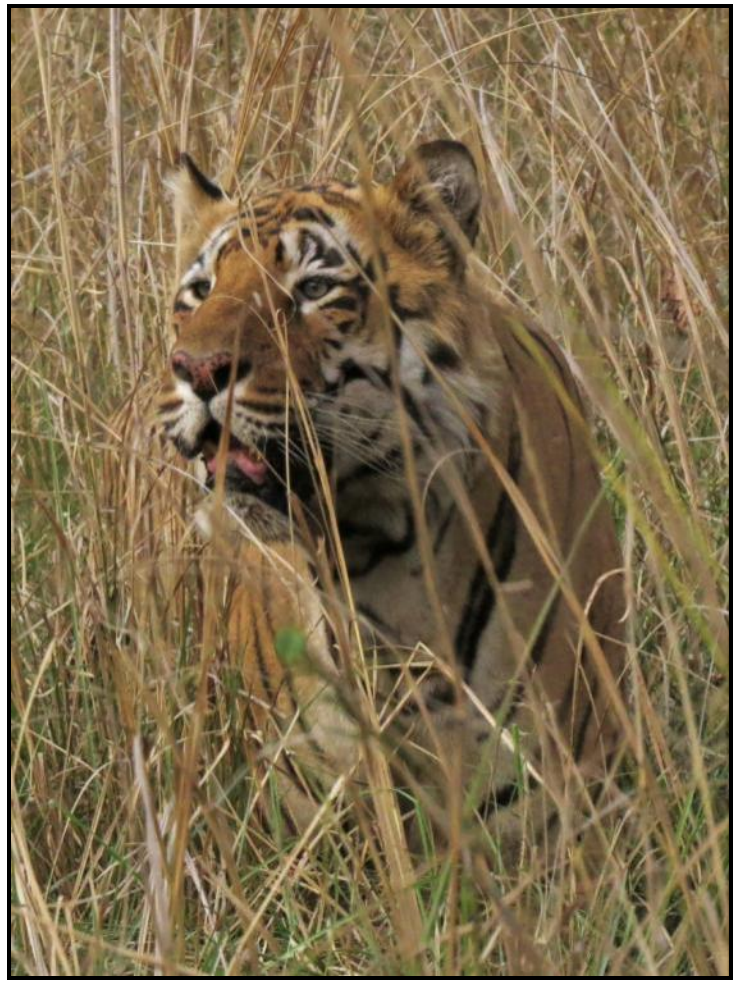
Tadoba Lake is habitat for Muggers. Below, left: just a part of the head and the eye is visible.



Namdeo, back on dry land after his swim, walked through tall grass:







*Sunset by Andreas Schmidt*

We saw the Dhole pack from our first morning two more times in Tadoba.



*Dhole photo by Andreas Schmidt*





*Pups is visible to the left.*





*The whole pack is included in the final shot—3 adults and 2 pups.*

As tiger populations improve, the pressure on wild dogs increases and their pack sizes shrink. In years gone by dog packs could number in the 20s, 30s, even up to 60. A sizeable pack of dogs is a formidable opponent to a tiger or leopard, so these cats avoided dhole territory when pack sizes were so big. That left more prey for the dogs and a safer environment for them to raise their pups.

When packs are smaller, overall more habitat is needed. For several small packs to establish a sufficiently large territory (40-48 sq km), some of the packs may need to leave the rich core areas of the park. As dhole enter into the buffer zones, not only is there less prey, but the odds of contracting domestic dog diseases increase.

Wild dogs that contract diseases further decrease pack sizes. It is a vicious circle.

Returning to tigers one last time, as Maya strutted across the field; she attracted the undivided attention of all the Chital.



Aap Ne Baagh Dekha? Have you seen the tiger? Not only had we seen the tiger, but we were privileged to have viewed numerous cats in a variety of habitats, engaged in interesting behaviors.



The kind of excitement and variety like we had in Tadoba has earned the place quite a reputation, and as a result there were seemed to be more people/Gypsies in Tadoba than other parks. All the more reason to have Rajan accompany us to be sure we had an early start and to be able to take advantage of his uncanny ability to predict animal behavior—especially that of tigers.

Namdeo was causing a traffic jam in Tadoba.  
It is good that tigers get the right of way.

Not much was included here on **lodging and food**. That's because I go for what's "out there." But all accommodations on each trip ranged from good to spectacular. Temperatures were cool inside even when it was hot outside, due to building materials, fans, A/C, shade or all of the above. Most importantly, the lodging was ideally located. Food was consistently great and not too spicy! I am a wimp with hot spices. In sum, the food and shelter always contributed to my enjoyment of each area.

The photos for which credit is given to the photographers were taken with DSLR **cameras**. For all the rest, I used various super zoom bridge **cameras**, always with a fixed lens. Zoom ranged from 20 to 50 times optical. I always take more than one camera on safaris. I usually used a **monopod**. The DSLRs had "**The Pod, bean bag with a bolt,**" attached to the bottom of the camera body. That's now my favorite stabilization device too. But in the Gypsies there often is not a frame on which to place a bean bag—something to consider. Rajan was always keen to take charge of any spare cameras and shoot. His intimate knowledge of the environment showed in his photography. My advice: bring a spare camera and hand it off to Rajan!



Here's Rajan on the right of this group shot.

The only disappointment in any of the trips was that The Men in Blue were not victorious in the Cricket World Cup that took place during the third trip. But like nature, some things are just out of our control.



**The End**