

India's Wildlife - A Photography Tour

Naturetrek Tour Report

7 - 18 November 2007



Images and report compiled by Paul Marshall



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Tour leaders: Satyendra Tiwari (local guide)
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Tour participants Mark Phillips
Dennis Alden
Veronica Alden
Carrie Hands
Lisa Holmes
Neville Turton
Stephen Jones
Avis Whitlock Jones
Ian Warby
Sarah Warby

Tour summary

Wednesday 7 November – Friday 9 November

UK – Bandhavgarh

The majority of us flew from Heathrow and met the remainder of the group in Dubai in the early hours of Thursday morning. Our connecting flight to Delhi was on time and by mid morning we had cleared arrivals and met Satyendra. We headed through the chaos that is Delhi traffic to our hotel where we had chance to rest and freshen up. The hotel grounds gave us our first taste of Indian wildlife in the form of Indian Peafowl, Rose-ringed Parakeets and Black Kites. After a late lunch we made our way to Delhi station and boarded our overnight sleeper train to Katni. A surprisingly comfortable journey followed and we arrived in Katni on Friday morning. From the station we transferred by jeeps to our lodge on the edge of Bandhavgarh National Park. We settled into our rooms and there was chance to rest, eat lunch and soak in the atmosphere before heading out on the first of fifteen game drives.

Friday 9 November – Friday 16 November

Bandhavgarh National Park

Each day followed a pattern of early morning and mid afternoon game drives with a chance to rest or watch and photography wildlife around the lodge in between.

We would start at 0530 and head in Gypsies (four wheel drive jeeps) to the national park. Each jeep was assigned a route to follow (an attempt to control the number of jeeps using any one are of the park), so we would split up and follow our routes before returning to a central point to find out what sightings there had been. Looking for Tigers involved cruising the park listening for deer and monkey alarm calls and looking for pug marks on the tracks. It was always an exciting if somewhat frustrating experience. Finding them was by no means an easy task but at least one Naturetrek jeep managed to see Tigers on six of the seven mornings (see 'The Tigers' section).

Mid morning we would return to the lodge for a late breakfast. There was then several hours until the afternoon game drives where people could relax, look for wildlife, visit Bandhavgarh village or eat more food! During the course of the week we visited Satyendra's house in Bandhavgarh. This was a fascinating few hours spent looking at Satyendra's photos and Kay's (his wife) artwork, as well as learning about the Tigers of Bandhavgarh and the politics involved in their conservation. Another morning we visited White Tiger Lodge to photograph butterflies and another was spent at the river near the entrance to the national park photographing birds. Our lodge grounds themselves proved to be productive for birds.

The afternoon game drives would start at 1500 and were generally more relaxed with fewer jeeps in the park and no assigned routes. Satyendra, our drivers and guides would use their considerable knowledge to ensure we had the best chances of seeing and photographing Tigers. At least one Naturetrek jeep managed to see Tigers on six of the eight evenings and heard one on another (see 'The Tigers' section).

Friday 16 November – Sunday 18 November

Bandhavgarh – Agra – Delhi – UK

Following our last evening game drive we returned to the lodge for dinner. We then headed to Umaria via jeeps to catch on overnight train to Agra. Once in Agra we transferred to a plush hotel and took the opportunity to freshen up. We then headed to a local restaurant for lunch and then onto an afternoon's sight seeing. Our first stop was the Taj Mahal. Our local guide was excellent and the guided tour of this most impressive of monuments was highly interesting. We had planned to cross the river and photograph the Taj in the evening light but horrendous traffic and a bridge closure meant we had to give up on the idea. Instead we visited the Red Fort, the most important fort in India and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There was a chance for some souvenir shopping before returning to our hotel. Dennis and Veronica said goodbye to the group and set off on their short extension to Ranthambore. Lisa also said her farewells as she was joining another group for a two week tour of India. Later that evening the rest of us made our way to the train station for the short journey to Delhi and the airport. We thanked Satyendra for all his help, superb knowledge and company and settled down for the flight to Dubai. A slight delay to the flight made our connection to the UK rather tight but we made it (minus Ian and Sarah who were staying in Dubai for a few days rest) and were back in the UK by mid morning on Friday.

The Wildlife and photographic opportunities

The Tigers

As a group we did very well with our Tiger sightings and photographic opportunities. There were mixed fortunes within the group, with some people managing excellent multiple sightings. During the fifteen game drives we had a total of eighteen sightings consisting up of nine individuals (see summary of Tiger Sightings). We discovered that photographing Tigers is not easy and very different from photographing big cats in Africa! The combination of their scarcity and elusiveness, the dense jungle they live in and the low light levels at dawn and dusk when they are most active make them difficult subjects. After getting over the initial heart-stopping excitement of seeing a Tiger we all managed at least some reasonable images with several of the group getting some impressive results. Despite the difficulties few of us will forget the opportunity to see and photograph such a beautiful creature.

Summary of Tiger Sightings

Day	Period	Tigers	Notes	Seen by
Saturday 10 November	morn	B2	seen well crossing the road	DA, VA, IW, SW
Saturday 10 November	morn	P10	seen briefly	DA, VA, IW, SW
Saturday 10 November	morn	L1	resting, seen from elephant	All
Sunday 11 November	morn	Pyari + P10	both resting, seen from elephant	All
Sunday 11 November	eve	P10 + P12	crossing road near	All
Monday 12 November	morn	B2	seen briefly	DA, VA, IW, SW
Monday 12 November	eve	Lakshmi	seen well	DA, VA, IW, SW
Tuesday 13 November	morn	P12	seen briefly	SJ, AWJ, MP, LH
Tuesday 13 November	eve	P12	seen drinking/resting	DA, VA, PM
Wednesday 14 November	morn	Indriana + cub	seen distantly in long grass	SJ, AWJ, MP
Wednesday 14 November	morn	P10	seen crossing the road	All
Thursday 15 November	eve	P10	seen briefly	SJ, AWJ, MP, PM, IW, SW, CH, LH
Thursday 15 November	eve	P11	seen well on or crossing road	SJ, AWJ, MP, PM, DA, VA, NT
Friday 16 November	morn	Lakshmi	tracked on elephant for two hours	IW, SW, CH, LH
Friday 16 November	morn	Lakshmi	seen well from jeep	DA, VA, NT
Friday 16 November	morn	Lakshmi	seen briefly from jeep	SJ, AWJ, MP, PM
Friday 16 November	morn	Indriana	seen well from jeep	DA, VA, NT
Friday 16 November	morn	P11	seen briefly from jeep	SJ, AWJ, MP, PM



L1 from elephant back on Sunday 11 November



P12 from jeep on Tuesday 13 November

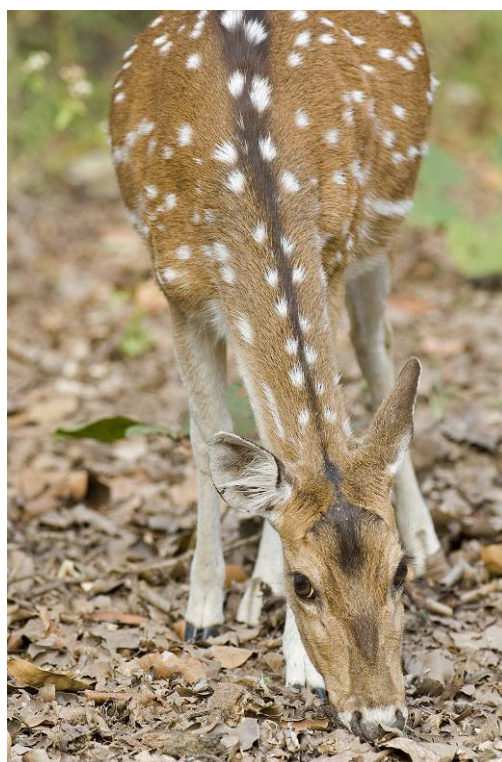
Other mammals

Each game drive was different with species seen in varying numbers and in different locations. Although there were quiet periods (as there always is with wildlife viewing) this gave plenty of opportunity for photographing subjects in different situations. Common Langur, Sambar, Spotted Deer and Indian Wild Boar were seen on almost every game drive. With so many hours spent in the national park and lots of time spent patiently watching and listening for Tigers there were some great photographic opportunities for these species.

Indian Muntjac, Golden Jackal, Blue Bull, Indian Gazelle, Rhesus Macaque were much more scarce and were either seen at a distance, seen briefly or in such dense vegetation that photography was not possible. Stephen, Avis and Mark were even lucky enough to see a Leopard briefly on a late morning visit to Bandhavgarh Fort.



Common Langur



Spotted Deer



Indian Wild Boar

The Birds

Owing to their relatively small size and skulking habits birds are often the most difficult group of animals to get decent images of. During the holiday we were fortunate enough to see nearly 100 species of birds in and around the national park. Some species proved to be particularly photogenic, including Woolly-necked Stork, Lesser Adjutant, Indian Peafowl, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Indian Scops Owl, White-throated Kingfisher and Long-tailed Shrike.



Long-tailed Shrike



Changeable Hawk Eagle



Lesser Adjutant



Indian Scops Owls

Species lists

Mammals

Royal Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris*

Seen daily in Bandhavgarh NP (see 'The Tigers' section)

Leopard *Panthera pardus*

One seen briefly crossing the track near Chakradhara Meadows on 15th November by members of the group traveling to the fort in the late morning.

Jungle Cat *Felis chaus*

One seen briefly crossing the road out of Bandhavgarh on a night drive on the 14th November.

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta*

In Bandhavgarh one or two seen on 12th and 15th November. More common in Delhi and Agra.

Common Langur *Presbytis entellus*

Common in Bandhavgarh NP and seen daily in varying numbers.

Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii*

Single animals seen in Bandhavgarh NP on 10th, 12th and 15th November.

Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*

One or two individuals seen in Bandhavgarh NP on 11th, 13th, 14th and 15th November.

Three-striped Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennarum*

Squirrel species confirmed as this species in Bandhavgarh NP on 13th, 14th and 15th November.

Sambar *Cervus unicolor*

Common in Bandhavgarh NP and seen daily in varying numbers.

Spotted Deer *Cervus axis*

Common in Bandhavgarh NP and seen daily in varying numbers.

Indian Muntjac *Muntiacus muntjak*

Uncommon in Bandhavgarh NP with up to five seen on 11th, 13th, 14th and 15th November.

Indian Gazelle *Gazella bennetti*

Three seen just outside Bandhavgarh NP returning in the dark from the Gohri Gate on 14th November.

Blue Bull *Boselaphus tragocamelus*

Two seen in Bandhavgarh NP on 14th November.

Indian Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*

Common in Bandhavgarh NP and seen daily in varying numbers.

Birds

Common name	Scientific name	November 2007										
		8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>											✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>											✓
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>					✓						
Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>											✓
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>		✓	✓								
Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>										✓	
Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓										✓
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>						✓					✓
Indian White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>									✓		
Long-billed Vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Red-headed Vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>			✓			✓		✓			
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>				✓							
Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>										✓	
White-eyed Buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>						✓					
Changeable Hawk-eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				✓		✓					
Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Sarus Crane	<i>Grus antigone</i>				✓		✓		✓			
Bronze-winged Jacana	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>					✓						
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	✓										✓
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>											✓
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>											✓
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		✓					✓	✓			
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>							✓	✓			
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>											✓
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>											✓
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>				✓			✓	✓			
Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓				✓	✓
Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>									✓		
Indian Scops Owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>				✓			✓	✓			
Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>			✓		✓			✓			
Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>				✓							
Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>				✓				✓			
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>					✓		✓				
Crested Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>				✓							
Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>				✓	✓						
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓				✓			

Common name	Scientific name	November 2007									
		8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Little Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>					✓	✓		✓		
Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>			✓	✓		✓		✓		
Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoeros coronatus</i>					✓					
Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓			
Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓				
Brown-capped Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos moluccensis</i>				✓						
Streak-throated Woodpecker	<i>Picus xanthopygaeus</i>				✓						
Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>						✓		✓		
Dusky Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>				✓				✓		
White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla madaraspatensis</i>										✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Large Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓				
Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>							✓			
Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Oriental Magpie-robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus</i>				✓	✓	✓		✓		
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>									✓	
Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>				✓						
Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ultramarine Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula supercilialis</i>				✓						
Verditer Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias thalassina</i>			✓							
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grey-h Canary-flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>				✓						
Asian Paradise-flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>									✓	
Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Jungle Prinia	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>									✓	
Sulphur-bellied Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus griseolus</i>					✓		✓		✓	
Hume's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tawny-bellied Babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>			✓					✓	✓	
Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>			✓			✓				
Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>			✓	✓						
Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>			✓		✓	✓		✓		
Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>							✓			
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caeruleus</i>							✓			
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	✓									✓
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓					✓				✓

Common name	Scientific name	November 2007									
		8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Asian Pied Starling	<i>Gracupica contra</i>						✓				
Brahminy Starling	<i>Temenuchus pagodarum</i>			✓			✓				
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓									
White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>			✓		✓					
Nutmeg Mannikin	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>			✓							

Butterflies

Lemon Pansy
 Grey Pansy
 Blue Pansy
 Peacock Pansy
 Dark Grass Blue
 Pale Grass Blue
 Zebra Blue
 Gram Blue
 Baronet
 Common Rose
 Emigrant
 Great Eggfly
 Large oakblue
 Tawny Rajah
 Common Sailor
 Plain Tiger
 Baron
 Common Grass Yellow
 Common Cerulean
 Common Mormon
 Lime Blue
 Commander
 Chocolate Soldier
 Lime Butterfly
 Common Gull
 Rice Swift
 Dark Palm Dart
 Danaid eggfly
 Brown Awl
 Striped Tiger
 Small Oakleaf
 Conjoined swift
 Common crow

+ 2 unidentified swift species

(butterfly list courtesy of Satyendra Tiwari)