

India - Tiger Marathon

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 20 November 2009



Rhesus Macaques - Bandhavgarh N.P., by Sam Chippington



Royal Bengal Tiger – Kanha N.P., by David Allison



Royal Bengal Tiger - Pench N.P., by Sam Chippington



Hanuman Langurs - Kanha N.P. by Sam Chippington



Dhole (Asiatic Wild Dog) – Kanha N.P., by David Allison

Report compiled by Bharat Mandhyan
Images by courtesy of David Allison & Samantha Chippington



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Leader: Bharat Mandhyan (Bunty)

Participants
Samantha Chippington
Carol Chippington
Ian Bruce
Kathleen Bruce
David Allison
Alastair Stewart
Vivienne Stewart
Colin Johnson
Jean Johnson
Peggie Rimmer

Day 0

Wednesday 4th November

Departure from the UK

Day 1

Thursday 5th November

Open, bright and sunny day, moderately cold weather

The group arrived by Jet Airways at Nagpur International Airport. It took us two hours to reach Pench and the group checked into the comfortable rooms of the hotel for some much needed rest after a long flight. On the lawns of the hotel some of the hotel staff started showing guests the resident Olivaceous Keel-backed Snake (*Atractium schistosum*) which was quite cosy in one of the hotel ponds, and the garden was full of butterflies and dragonflies, as well as Red-wattled Lapwings, Red-vented Bulbuls and Brown Rock Chats. After lunch we did an afternoon game drive in three jeeps, and the highlights were Sambar, Chital, and Common Langur.

Day 2

Friday 6th November

Open, bright and sunny day mostly, moderately cold, with traces of clouds

If yesterday had been the starter, today was to be the main course as we headed into Pench NP. Once through the gates we entered a different world, one where the sound of the honking horn became a distant memory. This year a female Tiger with three large cubs had taken up residence near the Jamun Nala and they were being seen regularly. As there had been no Tiger sightings the previous day, our guides felt confident that there would become activity this morning as it was likely they would have been hunting the previous night, and we were not to be disappointed. After following various alarm calls from the Chital Deer, some managed to glimpse the back of one of the cubs as it walked into the distance. At least we knew where to look and were guided by the alarms of the Peacocks so we opted to sit and wait by a likely-looking section of the track.

As we waited, a Large Cuckoo-shrike flew over calling, and after what seemed like hours but wasn't more than 10 minutes, one of the larger cubs (i.e. bigger than a Leopard!) emerged onto the track and showed its hind quarters off very nicely and wandered along the track with complete indifference, before looking over its shoulder and turning into deep cover.

A few minutes later, the other two jeeps could see the mother and her nearly full grown cubs crossing the track and disappearing into the undergrowth, so our luck had been outstanding! For all that saw them it was a very exciting experience, one that will last a life time! This was followed by good birding by the dammed Pench River on the southern boundary of the reserve.

Day 3

Saturday 7th November

Bright sunny morning, warm afternoon and cloudy evening

We rose before dawn for tea, coffee and biscuits and after taking our early morning drive we traversed the scenic Vindhya Hills as we transferred to Kanha, which took us approx. five hours. We were looking forward to being in the moist deciduous Sal and Bamboo dominated forest habitat of Kanha. On arrival we checked in at the Tuli Tiger Resort

Day 4

Sunday 8th November

Windy, more clouds gathering.

After having our tea, coffee and biscuits we started for the early morning drive at 5am, aiming to be first going into the park, and we entered through kisli gate at 6am. Since it was Sunday the park was crowded, and when we got the information that there had been a tiger sighting in the area we rushed to find many jeeps already lined up at the place where a tigress had crossed the tracks earlier...we decided instead to queue up for the elephant ride, since the mahouts were following the same tigress, and this proved to be a good idea as everybody managed to see the tiger at close range. The experience was fantastic and enabled the clients to have great photo opportunities! This was followed by picnic breakfast which was served in the park at the Kanha canteen. Our afternoon drive was pleasant and the highlight of the day was the sighting of Dhole (Wild Dog) at the famous Kanha Meadow – a pack of six were walking through the woods their bellies full, just leisurely and playfully wandering, and headed by the alpha female.

Day 5

Monday 9th November

Dry and bright, cool, cloudy later

After having our tea, coffee and biscuits we started for the early morning drive again and to our relief the park was less crowded than yesterday, and we experienced some wonderful sightings of the tiger cubs wandering in the thickets just the way one would expect to see them in their natural environment. Later we did an elephant safari to catch a glimpse of the same tigress seen yesterday, and after having our picnic breakfast we decided to go and look in the museum at Kanha. The highlight of the day however came in the afternoon safari when we saw a Sloth Bear scurrying away across the track into some undergrowth.

Day 6

Tuesday 10th November

Thunder and raining

After having our tea, coffee and biscuits, we decided since it was raining to wait for a while but the weather did not improve so we set off as planned to the highest point in the park (Bhamni Dadar).

However, only my jeep could stick handle the conditions, the other two jeeps decided against it...it was cold and windy on the plateau so we hurried back to lower ground, and eventually returned to the hotel. After taking our packed lunch we left the hotel at 1200hrs to drive towards Bandhavgarh. On arrival at 1800 we checked in to the Tiger Trails Resort and had an early dinner before everyone went to bed to get up early next morning.

Day 7

Wednesday 11th November

Pleasant morning, warm afternoon, cool at night

After having our tea, coffee and biscuits we drove from the hotel and queued up at the park entrance to enter at 6.15am, and experienced some lovely sightings of tiger on both the game drives. Other mammals seen were Sambar, Chital, Wild Boar and Jackal. Breakfast, lunch and dinner were served at the hotel

Day 8

Thursday 12th November

Pleasant morning, warm afternoon, cool at night

We entered the park today at 6.15 am, and experienced again some lovely sightings of tiger on the afternoon game drive, and also saw Sambar, Chital, Wild Boar and Jackal. Breakfast, lunch and dinner were served at the hotel once again, and the highlight of the day was later in the evening when we watched a melodious folkdance and lore performed by the Gond tribesmen and women (accompanied by kingfisher beer and barbequed chicken, vegetables etc).

Day 9

Friday 13th November

Windy and cloudy morning, hazy conditions, sunny afternoon and cool and cloudy evening

We rose before dawn for tea, coffee and biscuits and after taking our early morning drive, we traversed the scenic Vindhya Hills as we transferred by road to Panna. We reached Panna in about six hours and were looking forward to seeing yet another habitat - the dry deciduous Teak dominated forest of Panna. On arrival we checked in to our spacious comfortable rooms at the Ken River Lodge which is located within a great expanse of woodland. As we entered the hotel grounds the first thing we could hear was the grunting eerie call of the Brown Fish Owl which put your hairs standing on end on a dark night! We had an early dinner before retiring in preparation for an early start.

Day 10

Saturday 14th November

Rain and thunder in the morning, sunny afternoon, cool night

After having our tea, coffee and biscuits before dawn the bad news came that the park would remain closed for the day since the tracks in the national park were too muddy and with the heavy rains the tracks had become slippery and inaccessible on the slopes. As soon as we got some relief from the rain we walked around the hotel grounds to see the resident Mottled Wood Owl and other birds. After having breakfast we settled into our rooms to do some packing. At about 12 mid-day the rain stopped and all the clouds suddenly cleared allowing us to do the boat ride on the River Ken (which is the lifeline of the Panna Tiger Reserve). We went on two boats, and highlights were the Eurasian Eagle Owls which had a nesting site on these river islands, Black Ibises basking after the deluge, and a Crocodile (Marsh Mugger) swam close to the boat (everybody thought I was joking when

I mentioned it!). Since the park remained closed for the afternoon game drive we took a drive instead into the nearby Gangau Sanctuary which turned out to be successful as we had a sighting of the Indian Gazell (Chinkara).

Day 11

Sunday 15th November

Cool sunny morning, sunny afternoon, cool evening

After having breakfast at the hotel we drove to Khajuraho which took us around half an hour, and visited the famous Chandela Dynasty Temples (the western group of temples - Lakshmana Temple, Kandariya Mahadev Temple, Jagdambe Temple) starting at 0830am until about 10.00am. Since this was the official end of the tour, and Carol and Samantha were on a private extension tour to Agra, we said our goodbyes to them before being transferred to the airport to board the flight to Delhi departing at 1220 hrs. On arrival at Delhi at 1500 hrs we checked in to the Hans Plaza.

Tiger Marathon - Ranthambhore Extension

Day 12

Monday 16th November

Bright and sunny day, cloudy evening

After breakfast at the hotel, we checked out and transferred to the railway station to board our train to Swai Madhopur - another famous tiger reserve encircled by a series of high escarpments, forest, lakes and dry scrub which is also lined with ancient forts and temples. On arrival we checked in to The Pugmark, and after having our lunch we decided to take a walk in the village around the hotel, where everybody was enthralled by the day to day life of the village and its people. A highlight of the day was pair of Common Mongoose seen disappearing into the hedge around a farming field.

Day 13

Tuesday 17th November

Cloudy, raining during the middle of the day, cool evening

What a day to begin with at Ranthambhore National Park, we were on route number three, meandering and birding along the Rajbagh Lake when suddenly we heard alarm calls of a Spotted Deer and as we closed in the calls became more frantic with Sambar and Langur also joining in the melee. We rushed to find a beautiful tigress named Machli (The Fish) walking towards the track, and followed her for about half an hour and at one point we came so close that her breathing could be heard, and then she just walked away into the woods - our day was made complete and we headed back to the hotel feeling excited at what we had experienced!

Day 14

Wednesday 18th November

Sunny morning with some cloudy patches during the day, cool evening

After having our tea, coffee and biscuits at dawn we started our morning drive at 630am today on route two which was a pleasant ride into the park but remained quiet all the way. During our afternoon drive we were back on route three and the adrenaline rush was back, as the same tigress was seen again chasing away deer at a distance.

The highlight of the day was yet to come though, and it happened as we came out of the park and were driving towards the hotel...we could see two jeeps parked along the road, so we slowed down our vehicle and our eyes could not believe the sight of a leopardess walking in the woods! We followed it for about twenty minutes as it crossed the road and stopped for a drink and then disappeared into the abyss, unbelievable...

Day 15

Thursday 19th November

Bright and sunny day, warm during the middle of the day and cool evening

After our final morning game drive, we were transferred to Swai Madhopur to catch the train leaving at 1240 hrs, and on arrival at Delhi at 1845 hrs we checked in to the Hans Plaza in preparation for the departure home...and despite uncharacteristic bad weather (due to a cyclone crossing India from east to west and back again), we still had an enjoyable and successful tour...

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Long-billed Vulture – Bandhavgarh N.P., by Sam Chippington



Changeable Hawk Eagle – Kanha N.P., by David Allison

Species Lists

Bird Species

Nomenclature and taxonomy generally follows Grimmett and Inskipp's *The Birds of Northern India* (2003) which follows the treatments in *The Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* (1999) by the same authors. Figures refer to the number of days the species was recorded out of the 7 days of the main tour.

Bird species	Scientific Name	No. of Sightings	Remarks
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	3	
Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>	3	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	4	
Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	8	
Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	1	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	2	
Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>	2	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	5	
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	5	
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	6	
Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	2	
Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	2	
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	2	
Wolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	5	
Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>	5	
Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	2	
Red-naped Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>	2	
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	2	
Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	1	
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	2	
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	2	
Cotton Pygmy-goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>	1	
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas Penelope</i>	1	
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	1	
Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	2	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	1	
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	2	
Oriental Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	3	
Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	4	
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	3	Often abundant in urban settings, especially common in Delhi, but much scarcer or even absent in more rural areas
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur Indus</i>	1	
Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>	2	

Bird species	Scientific Name	No. of Sightings	Remarks
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	3	
Black-rumped Vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	4	
Long-billed Vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>	5	
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela cheela</i>	4	
Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	2	Quite common and widespread
White-Eyed Buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>	1	
Changeable Hawk Eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>	2	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	3	
Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	1	
Jungle Bush-quail	<i>Perdica asiatica</i>	1	
White-Breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	1	
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	2	Reasonably common at suitable waterbodies
Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	2	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	4	
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus indicus</i>	6	Very common, widespread and noisy
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	4	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	2	
River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	1	
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia neglecta</i>	3	
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	2	
Eurasian Collard Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaoto</i>	3	
Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	5	Fairly common
Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	2	Common and very widespread
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>	4	
Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>	4	
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	6	Common and widespread, one of very few species seen every day
Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	3	
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	2	Regularly encountered in a range of scrubby and grassland settings
Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium</i>	2	
Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama indica</i>	2	
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	3	
Crested Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne corona</i>	3	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	3	
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	5	Common and very widespread, a frequent sight on roadside wires
Green Bee-Eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	5	
Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis benghalensis</i>	5	Frequently seen, often along roadsides
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	1	

Bird species	Scientific Name	No. of Sightings	Remarks
Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>	3	Small numbers were seen at most wooded or parkland sites
Brown-Headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>	2	
Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	2	Quite common, though much more often heard than seen,
Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos canicapillus</i>	1	
Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos mahrattensis pallescens</i>	2	
Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	4	The commonest and most widespread woodpecker with records coming from all wooded locations
White-Naped Woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>	2	
Dusky Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>	1	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundu rustica</i>	2	
Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundu smithii</i>	2	
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	2	
White Wagtail	<i>Motallica alba</i>	3	
White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motallica madaraspatensis</i>	1	
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motallica flava</i>	2	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motallica cinerea</i>	4	
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	1	
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	2	
Large Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina macei macei</i>	4	
Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	2	
Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	6	Very common and widespread
Golden-Fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>	1	
Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	2	
Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Zosterops citrina</i>	1	
Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>	1	
Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	3	Widespread in small numbers with birds recorded at all sites
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	3	
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	2	
Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	4	
Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulica</i>	3	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoebastria ochruros</i>	2	
Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	1	
Indian Chat	<i>Cercomela fusca</i>	1	
White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	1	
Puff-throated babbler	<i>Pellomeum ruficeps</i>	2	
Large Grey Babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>	1	
Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>	6	Generally common and widespread

Bird species	Scientific Name	No. of Sightings	Remarks
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i> (<i>cinereus</i> group)	3	
Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	5	Present throughout at low densities
Thick-Billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>	3	
Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>	4	
Black-Hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>	4	
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	4	
Common Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>	4	
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	5	Very common, a frequent site on roadside wires
White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>	2	
Greater Racket-Tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	2	
Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta agabunda</i>	5	Widespread at fairly low densities
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens splendens</i>	3	common around settlements, but less frequently seen in wooded areas
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos culminatus</i>	6	Generally found in more wooded settings than the last species, though with some habitat overlap, and never in such large concentrations
Bank Myna	<i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>	2	Rather localised, sometimes the dominant myna but generally scarce and heavily outnumbered by Common Mynas
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis tristis</i>	6	Ubiquitous
Asian Pied Starling	<i>Sturnus contra</i>	2	Common in the vicinity of water
Brahminy Starling	<i>Temenuchus pagodarum</i>	3	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus (indica group)</i>	3	Fairly common in most urban settings and in some more rural areas
Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>	4	
Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	6	Rather common and widespread though some of those seen in more urban areas were presumably of semi-feral origin
Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	3	
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>	4	
Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	2	

Reptiles

Reptile Species	Scientific name	No. of sightings	Remarks
Flap-shelled Turtle	<i>Lissemys punctata</i>	1	
Marsh Mugger	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i> Lesson	2	

Mammals

Mammal Species	Scientific name	No. of sightings	Remarks
Royal Bengal Tiger	<i>Panthera tigris</i>	5	
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	1	
Jungle Cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>	1	
Rhesus Macaque	<i>Macca mulatta</i>	6	Fairly common and widespread
Common Langur	<i>Presbytis entellus</i>	15	Fairly common and widespread, commoner in heavy woodland than the previous species
Common Mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsi</i>	2	
Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>	2	
Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>	2	
Dhole (Asiatic Wild Dog)	<i>Cuon alpinus dukhunensis</i>	2	
Sloth Bear	<i>Merursus ursinus</i>	1	
Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus giganteus</i>	2	
Three-striped Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus pennarum</i>	3	
Five-Striped Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus pennantii</i>	6	
Gaur(Indian Bison)	<i>Bos guarus</i>	4	
Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>	5	
Barasingha (Samp deer)	<i>Cervus duvauceli branderi</i>	2	
Indian Muntjac (Barking Deer)	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>	2	
Chital (Spotted Deer)	<i>Cervus axis</i>	5	
Khincara (Indian Gazelle)	<i>Gazelle bonnetti</i>	1	
Nilgai	<i>Boselaphus tragocamelus</i>	2	
Indian Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	5	
Common Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>	3	