

# India - India's Wildlife - A Photography Tour (Bandhavgarh)

Naturetrek Tour Report

19 - 30 March 2008



Male Tiger



Female Tiger with cub



Yellow-wattled Lapwing



Macaque

Tour report compiled by Chris Kehoe  
Images courtesy of Des Durkan



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

Tour Leaders: Chris Kehoe (Naturetrek leader)  
Hatsy Singh (Local guide)

Participants: Charlie Bullock  
Felicity Bullock  
Michael Bullock  
Des Durkan  
Tim Love  
Geoff Tweddle  
Carolyn Clements  
Simon Clements

## Day 1

**Wednesday 19th March**

Tour members departed from London, mostly on Emirates Airlines bound for New Delhi via Dubai

## Day 2

**Thursday 20th March**

New Delhi; en route to Katni

Weather: sunny and hot

The inbound flight from Dubai landed virtually on time at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi where Hatsy was waiting in the arrivals hall. At 11.00 everyone arrived at the Ashok Country Resort Hotel where Des and myself were waiting. There was time for a wash and change and a bite to eat before we transferred to nearby Nizarrudin Train Station and boarded an overnight sleeper bound for Katni. Dinner was delivered to us on board the train after which we soon settled into our bunks for the night.

## Day 3

**Friday 21st March**

En route to Bandhavgarh; Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve

Weather: sunny and hot

We arrived at Katni almost on time at 06.15 and quickly set off to the Nature Heritage Resort, close to the main entrance gate of Bandhavgarh NP, arriving at 09.15. After breakfast and freshening up some chose to explore the hotel gardens before lunch. At 14.45 we boarded three jeeps and made our way into the reserve for the first time.

Some time was spent admiring or photographing some of the species that would become familiar sights in the coming days such as Spotted Deer and a Crested Serpent Eagle before we converged on an area of meadows where a tigress and her two 10 month old cubs had been seen earlier in the day. We were not alone in staking out these animals and eventually about 30 other jeeps made their way to the area and lined up to ensure all of the meadow before us was properly watched. Eventually the cubs put in an appearance and we all enjoyed reasonable to good views and the first photographic opportunities as the cats moved around in longish grass about 50 metres away.

One jeep lingered after the others and saw the animals cross the road in fading light before dashing back to the gate to ensure exiting before the 18.30 closure time. Another tiger was seen briefly on route to the exit but the light by that time was fading fast.

We were all off the starting block, a good thing indeed as the park would be closed tomorrow due to the Holi Festival. Back at the resort dinner was accompanied by a few celebratory beers.

## Day 4

**Saturday 22nd March**

Holi Festival

Weather: sunny and hot until evening when increasingly overcast, rain overnight

Early risers did some birding in the hotel grounds before breakfast where birds were conspicuous in the flowering trees and included numerous Plum-headed Parakeets, Brown-headed and Coppersmith Barbets while a couple of stunning Orange-headed Thrushes bounced around the flowerbeds. Some then joined Hatsy on a walk outside the hotel before breakfast and a few brave souls later accompanied him into the nearby village for a customary covering in water and paint as part of Holi. Overall though today gave an opportunity to relax and acclimatise in the very pleasant setting of the hotel.

## Day 5

**Sunday 23rd March**

Bandhavgarh NP

Weather: sunny and hot

Game drives from 06.00 to 10.00 and from 15.00 to 18.30 (the usual hours) failed to provide anyone with a tiger encounter though signs in the shape of pugmarks and occasional alarm calls gave some hope. Avian highlight today was an Indian Spotted Eagle while good numbers of Spotted Deer and Sambar and several Wild Boar and various birds offered photo opportunities.

## Day 6

**Monday 24th March**

Bandhavgarh

Weather: Sunny and hot, some overnight rain

During our morning drive news came through that the elephants had located a tiger and our first jeep load on the scene succeeded in seeing it from elephant back quite quickly, though it was rather obscured by vegetation so no clear photos were possible. The other jeeps were well down the pecking order and all hope of getting on the elephants before closing time looked lost when the tiger decided to move and we quickly reverted from being at the back of a queue to being in pole position as she walked across the road right behind us, allowing some excellent, if rather brief, photo opportunities.

During the course of the evening drive another tiger was seen at some distance asleep on a hillside by one jeep while another jeep had a fleeting encounter with one in fading light.

## Day 7

Tuesday 25th March

### Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve

Weather: sunny and hot

During the morning drive two jeeps quickly came across a tiger after being alerted by alarm calls and one of these succeeded in remaining with the animal on and off for about one hour. During this time a similar scenario to yesterday played out as we went from being at the back of a line of jeeps to being at the front as the tiger changed direction and crossed the road right behind us in perfect morning light. Although the elephants later tracked this tiger down it wasn't in the mood for lingering so today's tiger show was very short-lived with none of our group getting on elephant back. During the Afternoon drive one jeep came across a tigress late on but the light was too dull for photography.

## Day 8

Wednesday 26th March

### Bandhavgarh NP

Weather: sunny and hot

For a change of scene, and to avoid the crowds at the main gate, we decided to make an early start and enter the park through a lesser used gate 40 minutes away, indeed our vehicles were the only ones there so we had a very pleasant dust free ride to the centre point where we waited for news. The elephants had not located a tiger but word came through that a Tigress with three small cubs had been seen quite nearby and we rushed to the spot to find a few other vehicles already present. The animals had gone to ground in long grass on the other side of a small lake so a stake-out then ensued. Just as we were beginning to wonder whether the family had somehow slipped away unseen a loud roar was heard and the mother appeared suddenly, clearly peeved by an overflying Vulture - evidently she was defending a kill. Over the next forty minutes or so we had repeated views of the mother and her five month old cubs before they began to move off through woodland. Those jeeps that succeeded in following the family found themselves in prime position to watch the whole group walk towards them through the forest and then cross the road a few metres away.

At 11.00 everyone set off from the lodge with Hatsy (and packed lunches) to visit Bandhavgarh Fort where several Indian Vultures were seen, along with a Peregrine at a nest, and some time was spent sightseeing around the fort itself. For our afternoon drive we concentrated on lesser visited areas of the park but despite some alarm calls failed to locate any tigers; one jeep did however succeed in seeing this morning's family group again, albeit briefly.

## Day 9

Thursday 27th March

### Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve

Weather: sunny and hot; overnight rain

We once more entered the park through the same gate as yesterday and quickly located the same family group of Tigers; they were on the move and again crossed the road right next to us though the light was still a little dull at

the early hour. As no tiger show was on today the rest of the morning was spent driving the park roads admiring the various birds and mammals that came our way.

During the midday break four people took the opportunity of a return visit to the fort. Our evening drive failed to produce any tigers though there was, as usual, plenty of other wildlife to see.

## Day 10

Friday 28th March

Bandhavgarh NP

Weather: sunny and hot

Our final day saw us head quickly to centre point in the hope of getting early tickets in the event of a tiger show and sure enough word eventually came through that the elephants had located a tiger; prior to this one jeep had the good fortune to see the two cubs we had seen on our first drive. As it turned out the tiger show tiger remained in place just long enough for everyone to get a view from elephant back before it moved off. Some of our jeeps managed to get ahead of the moving tiger and had a series of good views of it walking towards us through the jungle and crossing the road. During our evening drive one jeep had a close encounter with a tiger crossing the road and also a Jungle Cat. Leaving the hotel after an early dinner at 19.30 we arrived at Umariya station forty minutes later and were soon boarding the train to Agra and settling into our bunks for the night.

## Day 11

Saturday 29th March

Sightseeing in Agra; evening train to Delhi

Weather: sunny and hot

The train pulled into Agra Cant station about 20 minutes late at 08.30 but we were soon onboard a bus for the short journey to the Mughal Hotel where we had breakfast and rooms were available for a wash and change. At 11.00 we set off to a nearby restaurant for a leisurely lunch followed by a visit to a shop where we were given a demonstration of how the city's famous marble work is done before there was time to browse some of the merchandise on offer. As the temperature began to subside we finally paid a visit to Agra Fort and the fabled Taj Mahal in the company of a local guide. Sightseeing done we returned to the Mughal for a bit of final packing before saying goodbye to Des, who was going on an extension to Ranthambore, and making our way to the station where a fast commuter train delivered us the New Delhi soon after 22.00. Raj from Travel Inn was waiting to meet us and after organising some porters led the group to the bus for a transfer to the airport for the early hours' flight home via Dubai.

## Day 12

Sunday 30th March

Inbound to UK via Dubai

## Species Lists

All reports refer to Bandhavgarh NP unless otherwise stated

### Mammals:

#### Royal Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris tigris*

In total we logged 23 encounters with Tigers during our time at Bandhavgarh. Establishing exactly how many individuals were involved is very difficult but it seems likely that at least five different adults (all females) and five cubs - two 10 month old siblings (seen twice) and three five month old siblings with their mother (three times) were seen. Everyone enjoyed close encounters with animals from jeeps that afforded good or excellent photographic opportunities (largely thanks to the skill of our drivers in positioning the vehicles precisely where animals emerged at close range). Everyone participated in at least one elephant ride ('Tiger show') though on each occasion the Tigers were somewhat less obliging due to being concealed by vegetation or soon on the move.

#### Jungle Cat

Two singles were seen briefly on one date

#### Spotted Deer

Very common, dozens were seen on each drive

#### Sambar

Small numbers were seen each day with several photographic opportunities most days

#### Wild Boar

Seen daily in variable numbers, most people had decent photo opportunities

#### Ruddy mongoose

One was seen on one date

#### Mongoose species

a couple of briefly seen Mongooses didn't linger long enough to be identified

#### Bat species

Small unidentified bats were regularly seen at dusk

#### Horseshoe Bat species

A cave contained several bats identified as Horseshoe Bats by locals

#### Five striped Palm Squirrel

Common in Delhi and Agra with a few at and around Bandhavgarh NP

#### Golden Jackal

Singles were seen on four occasions

Grey Langur

Common

Rhesus Macaque

A few were seen inside Bandhavgarh NP with larger numbers in more urban contexts

Birds:

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*

Fairly common, seen during most jeep safaris, especially in the mornings

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*

Commonly seen in the meadows. a couple were seen displaying

Painted Spurfowl *Galloperdix lunulata*

Two were seen on one date

Lesser Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna javanica*

About 30 gathered on one of the waterbodies

Barred Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator*

One was seen briefly on one date

Streak-throated Woodpecker *Picus xanthopygaeus*

Singles were seen on three occasions

Black-rumped Flameback *Dinopium benghalense*

Fairly common with at least a couple seen and others heard each day

Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica*

Frequently heard and occasionally seen throughout

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*

Frequently heard and occasionally seen throughout

Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyroceros birostris*

Fairly common

Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus*

One or two were seen or heard on several occasions

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

One was seen on one date at the main gate

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*

Fairly common

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

One or two were seen on several dates

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

Commonly seen

Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*

Fairly common, seen most days

Common Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius*

Occasionally heard

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*

Frequently heard and occasionally seen

Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*

One or two were seen most days

Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*

A handful were seen or heard most days

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

Fairly common; large numbers were also in urban Agra and Delhi

Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*

Common in the grounds of the Nature Heritage Resort with smaller numbers at Bandhavgarh NP

White-rumped Needletail *Collocalia esculenta*

Two were seen on one date

House Swift *Apus affinis*

Common over Agra and Delhi

Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata*

Up to half-a-dozen were occasionally seen soaring over

Indian Scops Owl *Otus bakkamoena*

A roosting bird was regularly to be found in a tree hole near the entrance to the Nature Heritage Resort but had been replaced by a Jungle Owlet at the end of our stay

Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis*

One was seen on one date only

Mottled Wood Owl *Strix ocellata*

Birds were heard but not seen in the vicinity of the Nature Heritage Resort on several nights

Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum*

One or two were seen on several occasions during jeep safaris and singles were twice seen at the entrance to the Nature Heritage Resort

Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*

One was seen at the entrance on one date

Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus*

Calling birds were heard near the Nature Heritage Resort and one was seen in the headlights one morning as we drove to the gate; a roosting bird was located at Bandhavgarh Fort during the second visit there

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

One or two were seen on a couple of occasions

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

A handful were around the Nature Heritage Resort with others in Delhi and Agra

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

Very common

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Regularly seen in small numbers

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera*

Occasionally seen, especially in flowering and fruiting trees at the Nature Heritage Resort

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*

One was seen on one date

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

singles were seen on a couple of dates

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

A couple were seen

Eurasian Thick-knee *Burbinus oedipnemus*

Two were seen on one date

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Several were seen from the moving train near Agra

Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malarbaricus*

Two or three were seen on one date

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

Quite common, a few were seen each day

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

Singles were seen on two dates

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Abundant in the urban contexts of New Delhi and Agra but absent in rural areas

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*

A handful at Bandhavgarh NP were followed by several more over Agra

White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*

Five or six were recorded soaring over Bandhavgarh NP, until just over a decade ago this species had a population estimated at about 40 million individuals (making it the commonest bird of prey in the world) but the current population is just a few hundred birds; the use of the anti-inflammatory drug Diclofenac in veterinary medicine was the cause of the decline and has now been banned but this species teeters on the brink of extinction

Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus*

Up to 20 per day were soaring over Bandhavgarh NP and nesting on the cliffs below the fort there; the National Parks of Madhya Pradesh represent one of the last remaining strongholds for this once abundant species

Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*

The total of about 10 included four together at a Tiger kill

Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*

One or two were recorded on a daily basis

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*

A displaying pair were seen on one date

Shikra *Accipiter badius*

Four were recorded

White-eyed Buzzard *Butastur teesa*

Singles were seen on two occasions

Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata*

An immature of this little known species was seen and photographed on one evening

Crested Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus limnaeetus*

A total of six were recorded over three dates; formerly regarded as a subspecies of Changeable Hawk eagle *S. cirrhatu*s

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

One was on a nest visible from the fort

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

A pair and their full grown youngster were on one of the lakes

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

A handful were seen

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

A couple were seen

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Small numbers were seen

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*

Most waterbodies held a few

Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa*

Singles were seen in flight on two occasions

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*

A couple were seen on several occasions

Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*

A couple were seen on most drives

Jerdon's Leafbird *Chloropsis jerdoni*

Half-a-dozen were seen at the Nature Heritage Resort

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

One was seen on two dates

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*

A couple were recorded

Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*

Small numbers were seen on most drives

House Crow *Corvus splendens*

Common in New Delhi, Agra and Katni but replaced by the next species in rural contexts

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Fairly common

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

One was seen on one date at the Nature Heritage Resort

Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*

Rather common with several seen well in the grounds of the Nature Heritage Resort

Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei*

A handful were seen each day

Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*

Small numbers were regularly in the grounds of the Nature Heritage Resort

White-browed Fantail *Rhipidura aureola*

Singles were seen on two dates

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

Small numbers were seen daily

Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*

A couple were regularly found at the Nature Heritage Resort

Asian Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*

A white male was seen on one date

Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*

Small numbers were regularly seen or heard, especially at the Nature Heritage Resort

Orange-headed Thrush *Zosterops citrina cyanocephala*

A pair were regularly found in the grounds of the Nature Heritage resort and a few more were seen inside Bandhavgarh NP

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

Small numbers were seen or heard each day

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae*

At least one pair were regularly in the grounds of the Nature Heritage Resort with a few more at Bandhavgarh NP

Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis*

Small numbers were frequently seen

Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata*

One or two pairs were regularly seen in the grounds of the Nature Heritage Resort and a couple more were noted inside Bandhavgarh NP

Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus*

A handful were seen at the Nature Heritage Resort

Brahminy Starling *Sturnus pagodarum*

Regularly attended flowering trees in the grounds of the Nature Heritage Resort, a few more were seen elsewhere

Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus*

Six were seen by Holi Festival revellers near the village

Asian Pied Starling *Sturnus contra*

A few were occasionally seen in and around Bandhavgarh NP or from the train

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Common around habitation

Bank Myna *Acridotheres ginginianus*

A dozen fed on lawns at the Taj Mahal

Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *Sitta castanea*

Two or three were occasionally seen or heard in and around the Nature Heritage Resort

Great Tit *Parus major*

One or two were occasionally seen at the Nature Heritage Resort

Dusky Crag Martin *Hirundo concolor*

Small numbers were occasionally seen foraging

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Small numbers were occasionally seen

Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*

About six were seen

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*

Very common throughout

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*

Flowering trees at the Nature Heritage Resort attracted a few

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*

A handful were seen and heard in the grounds of the Nature Heritage Resort with a few more heard

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*

Often heard and occasionally seen

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*

Often heard and occasionally seen, especially around the Nature Heritage Resort

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Often heard and occasionally seen, especially around the Nature Heritage Resort

Tawny-bellied Babbler *Dumetia hyperythra*

Small numbers were regularly seen in the grounds of the Nature Heritage Resort

Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus*

Common and widespread

Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile*

A handful were found around the Nature Heritage Resort

Pale-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*

A handful were found around the Nature Heritage Resort

Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica*

Common at the Nature Heritage Resort with several more elsewhere

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

A few were seen in built up areas

Chestnut-shouldered Petronia *Petronia xanthocollis*

Rather common, seen on all drives and around the lodge

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

A couple were seen each day

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

A few were seen near the Nature Heritage Resort

White-rumped Munia *Lonchura striata*

Two were seen at the Nature Heritage Resort on one date

### Selected other fauna:

Reptiles were represented by Indian Flapshell Turtles on some of the ponds, a Rat Snake was seen by one jeep and several House Geckos were at the lodge. A small number of unidentified lizards were also noted.

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