

India – Tiger Marathon

Naturetrek Tour Report

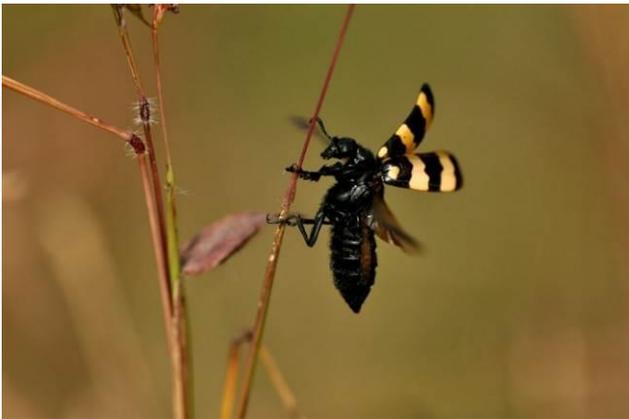
3 - 15 November 2016



Royal Bengal Tiger (female)



Royal Bengal Tiger (male)



Chinese Blister Beetle



Dhole (Asiatic Wild Dog)

Report and images by Yusuf Rizvi



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Tour participants: Yusuf Rizvi (leader) together with five Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Thursday 3rd November

The tour started with overnight flights from the UK to India

Day 2

Friday 4th November

It was clear and pleasant when our flight arrived at Nagpur airport around 4.45pm. We met Yusuf and went to our vehicle for the two-hour drive to Tuli Tiger Lodge in Pench Tiger Reserve. After reaching the lodge we went to our rooms to freshen up and later, at dinner, we discussed the next day's plan.

Day 3

Saturday 5th November

The morning was quite cold. We had an early start; woke at 5am and met at 5.30am for tea and coffee. We were in two safari vehicles and went to the queue at the park gate. It was our first drive and we were eager to experience Indian wilderness. During the safari we saw quite a few birds and mammals. People in one of our vehicles saw a pack of nine Dholes (Asiatic Wild Dogs). On the one hand we were happy to see Dholes but on the other hand, we were sad to see the condition of the dogs as six of them were suffering from mange. Mike and Sue were lucky to see their first Tiger on the drive. The Tiger swam across the Pench River from Mahadev Ghat towards the sand bank island in the river. It spray-marked a tree and after a few minutes, swam across the river.

The afternoon was quieter. We went for another safari where we heard a few distress calls, and were lucky to see a different pack of six Dholes. We also saw a few birds and mammals including Gaur and Sambar. Back at the lodge we did our checklist which was followed by dinner.

Day 4

Sunday 6th November

We met in the common area for tea and coffee before going on our last game drive in Pench. The morning was cold. We found the fresh tracks of a tigress. Everyone was excited and we followed the tracks for a few kilometres but we didn't hear any distress calls. One of our vehicles again got lucky with another sighting of Wild Dogs.

We returned to the lodge, had an early lunch and then set off on the five-hour journey to our next destination: Kanha National Park. It was interesting as we drove through the beautiful countryside of central India on undulating terrain, passing through numerous small villages. We had a great welcome at our next lodge by the manager and staff. After the check-in formality we went to our rooms to freshen up. Later we met for checklist and drinks followed by dinner. Dinner was a surprise bush dinner, done for the first time by the lodge and it was quite a success.

Day 5

Monday 7th November

It was quite cold and a bit misty as we gathered for tea and coffee around 5.15am. Kanha was a couple of degrees cooler than Pench. This morning we went to the Sarhi zone. The meadows in Kanha were magical with mist around. We saw quite a few birds including Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Red-wattled Lapwing, Indian Vulture, White-rumped Vulture and Green Bee-eater. On the way we saw the tracks of a courting pair of Tigers. We followed the tracks for a few hundred metres before they went into the thicket. We waited and heard the distress calls of Langur. The calls were quite frequent for a few minutes, but then they went further away, indicating the Tigers had moved away. On the way back we enjoyed driving through Sulkum Nala, a freshwater stream.

In the afternoon we went for another drive and again saw a few tracks made by big cats. We also saw Gaur and quite a few birds. In the evening we did our checklist followed by a delicious dinner.

Day 6

Tuesday 8th November

It was another beautiful misty morning in Kanha, and we started our day with hot, steaming cups of tea and coffee. Today we saw a lot of Tiger tracks, possibly made by a mother with sub-adults. We heard a few alarm calls and while waiting, we saw quite a few interesting birds like minivets, leafbirds and kingfishers. We waited for almost an hour but the calls stopped, so we headed for breakfast. On the way back we saw Red-headed Vultures soaring in the sky, and also some Indian Vultures.

The afternoon drive was quite. We did see a few birds but had no luck with big cats. In the evening we did the checklist which was followed by dinner.

Day 7

Wednesday 9th November

Today was our last safari in Kanha, and after tea and coffee, we started our drive. We checked the Indiri route. At Indiri twin waterholes we saw quite a few birds and while there, a Tiger growled behind the water body. We also heard a few distress calls made by Spotted Deer and Barking Deer. We waited for a while but the calls went further away. We found Tiger tracks almost everywhere. Some were fresh and some had been made the previous night, but we had no luck with sightings.

Back at the lodge we had enough time to clean and change and have lunch before travelling to Bandhavgarh, our next destination and about a five-and-a-half-hour drive away.

We reached our next lodge around 5.30pm. After checking in, we met in the common area for drinks and to do our checklist, which was followed by dinner.

Day 8

Thursday 10th November

We had wake-up calls and then met for tea and coffee before leaving for a game drive. Today we went to the Tala zone, the premium zone of Bandhavgarh. We were all keen to see the park, and we spotted Lesser Adjutant and quite a few other birds. On the way we saw a few jeeps lined up. Upon reaching the spot, we were rewarded with a Tiger sighting. Two sub-adult Tigers were on a kill, but we could only see them when they stood up. We possibly saw the mother as well as she moved a bit in the undergrowth.

For our afternoon drive we were in the Magdhi zone. After not too long we were rewarded by a big cat sighting. We saw a Tigress walking on the road for a few minutes before she disappeared in the thicket. She looked lean and hungry; on the lookout for a hunt. Everyone was thrilled!

Back at the lodge we met for drinks and to do the checklist. Everyone was happy and content.

Day 9

Friday 11th November

Today we got up at the usual time of 5am. After a refreshing cup of tea, we went on a game drive. We were in Tala zone. After driving for two to three kilometres, we spotted the tracks of a male Tiger. We followed the tracks for about a kilometre before they went off the trail. The tracks seemed to be fresh. We heard the faint alarm calls of Spotted Deer coming from the same direction were the Tiger possibly went. After analysing the distress calls, we moved further ahead. While driving, we again heard the distress calls of Sambar in the distance. We followed the calls and reached the spot in a couple of minutes. The calls were loud, and on our left Sambar were calling and from the right Spotted Deer were making distress calls. One of our vehicles with Mike and Sue on board was ahead on a narrow winding road and they saw a Leopard run across the road. Eventually the calls stopped so we moved on.

In the afternoon we went to the Magdhi zone. The first half of the drive was quiet, but later we got news about a Tiger sighting. We rushed to that area but the Tiger had moved on, so we followed the distress calls. Finally we intercepted the Tiger on another road. He was a good size and the dominant male of that area. We saw him walk across the road before we moved on. Our other vehicle containing Mike, Diane and Janet just missed another sighting in a different area by a few seconds.

In the evening we did the checklist which was followed by dinner.

Day 10

Saturday 12th November

Today was our last drive in Bandhavgarh. We started at the usual time after refreshing hot tea. We saw quite a few birds like Small Minivet, Red-vented Bulbul and Black-hooded Oriole, to name a few. There were fewer distress calls and we had no luck with a predator.

We returned to the lodge and had time to clean and change before an early lunch as we were travelling to Khajraho and Panna, a drive of about six hours. We reached Khajraho after sunset and checked into the Radisson Jass hotel.

Day 11

Sunday 13th November

We started at 5.15am from the hotel as we had to drive thirty kilometres to the park. We reached the gate on time. Everyone was keen to see Panna Tiger Reserve. After not too long we heard a Sambar distress call not very far away. We parked our vehicle for few minutes but the calls stopped. Further on we saw a two White-eyed Buzzards perched on different trees. The terrain was quite undulating as we drove to the Hinauta plateau. We received news that a collared sub-adult Tigress was on the move. One of our vehicles got there in time for the people to see her up close and they got some good photographs. Unfortunately the other vehicle missed the Tigress by a few minutes.

We went to Dhunwa Seha waterfall for breakfast. We were all spellbound by the beauty of the place. Mike, Diane and Janet had arrived first, and after breakfast they went to do some boating on the Ken River which they enjoyed. Mike and Sue were later to breakfast and ran out of time to go boating.

Next we checked the area of another collared sub-adult Tigress. We reached the area and saw the tracking vehicle ahead of us. She was hardly 50 metres from the road so we waited for her to come out. Suddenly we heard the distress calls of Sambar a little ahead from the other side. We drove forward and saw a good sized male Leopard walking parallel to the road. After a couple of minutes the Leopard disappeared so we returned to the spot we were waiting for the Tigress to come out. After a while she came a little closer to the track and we could partially see her in the thicket. We then realized that only half an hour of our allowed time was left so we drove towards the exit.

In the afternoon we returned to the spot where the second Tigress had been spotted this morning. She was still in the same area but has moved further inside. Off and on there were a few distress calls, but the Tigress was too smart and she swam across the Ken River without coming into visual contact with any of the vehicles; only the tracker saw her swam across. We did see some birds, and then came out of the park and returned to our hotel.

Day 12

Monday 14th November

Today we had a later start. After breakfast we went to see some temples with a cultural guide who was very knowledgeable.

After lunch we drove to Khajraho airport for our return journey back to the UK, starting with a flight to Delhi.

Day 13

Tuesday 15th November

Our last flight landed back in the UK and another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

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Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	November											
			5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓					✓						
2	Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>		✓										
3	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓		
4	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓								✓		
5	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		✓										
6	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓				✓				✓		
7	Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>	✓	✓				✓			✓	✓		
8	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓		
9	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓		
10	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
11	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	✓											
12	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>		✓							✓	✓		
13	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	✓	✓							✓	✓		
14	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓		
15	Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>							✓		✓			
16	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	✓				✓							
17	Red-naped Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>			✓	✓	✓				✓			
18	Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>						✓			✓	✓		
19	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	✓	✓										
20	Cotton Pygmy Goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>						✓						
21	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		✓										
22	Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>		✓										
23	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		✓							✓	✓		
24	Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>	✓											
25	White-rumped Vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>			✓			✓						
26	Indian Vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>			✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		
27	Red-headed Vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>						✓			✓	✓		
28	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓			
29	White-eyed Buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>		✓	✓							✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	November										
			5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
30	Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
31	Jungle Bush Quail	<i>Perdica asiatica</i>						✓					
32	Red Spurfowl	<i>Galloperdix spadicea</i>								✓	✓		
33	Painted Spurfowl	<i>Galloperdix lunulata</i>								✓	✓		
34	Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>			✓			✓		✓	✓		
35	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
36	River Lapwing	<i>Vanellus duvaucelii</i>	✓									✓	
37	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>			✓	✓	✓						
38	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
39	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	✓										
40	Pin-tailed Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>										✓	
41	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓	✓									
42	River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	✓	✓									
43	Common Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>									✓	✓	✓
44	Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>			✓					✓	✓		
45	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓						✓	✓	✓	
46	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
47	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>			✓	✓					✓	✓	
48	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
49	Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
50	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
51	Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	
52	Common Hawk-Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus varius</i>	✓										
53	Sirkeer Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii</i>								✓			
54	Southern Coucal	<i>Centropus {sinensis } parroti</i>	✓		✓				✓				
55	Indian Scops Owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				✓	
56	Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>			✓				✓		✓		
57	Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
58	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>							✓		✓		
59	Crested Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>	✓		✓								
60	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				✓							
61	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	November									
			5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
62	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>		✓								
63	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>			✓							
64	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
65	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
66	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyroceros birostris</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
67	Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
68	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>		✓		✓			✓	✓		
69	Black-rumped Goldenback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	
70	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	✓									
71	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>								✓		
72	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓						✓		
73	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla madaraspatensis</i>	✓							✓		
74	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	✓									
75	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
76	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	
77	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>							✓	✓	✓	
78	Orange Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>				✓	✓					
79	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
80	Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>				✓						
81	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>				✓						
82	Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Zoothera citrina</i>	✓									
83	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>			✓				✓	✓		
84	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
85	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>					✓					
86	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>						✓	✓	✓		
87	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓
88	White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>									✓	
89	Large Grey Babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>									✓	
90	Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	
92	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>							✓			
93	Thick-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>				✓						

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			5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
94	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓						
95	Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
96	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>		✓									
97	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>		✓					✓				
98	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
99	Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>		✓									
100	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>	✓	✓	✓					✓		✓	
101	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
102	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
103	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>								✓	✓	✓	
104	Indian Jungle Crow	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
105	Bank Myna	<i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>									✓	✓	
106	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
107	Asian Pied Starling	<i>Gracupica contra</i>		✓				✓					
108	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>						✓			✓	✓	✓
109	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>	✓							✓			

Mammals

1	Royal Bengal Tiger	<i>Panthera tigris tigris</i>	✓						✓	✓		✓	
2	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>								✓		✓	
3	Rhesus Macaque	<i>Macaca mulatta</i>	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Common Langur	<i>Presbytis entellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
5	Common Mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsi</i>							✓				
6	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>	✓						✓	✓			
7	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
8	Dhole (Asiatic Wild Dog)	<i>Cuon alpinus dukhunensis</i>	✓	✓									
9	Three-striped Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus pennarum</i>	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
11	Barasingha (Swamp Deer)	<i>Cervus duvauceli branderi</i>			✓	✓	✓						
12	Chital (Spotted Deer)	<i>Cervus axis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Indian Muntjac (Barking Deer)	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>						✓	✓				
14	Nilgai (Blue Bull)	<i>Boselaphus tragocamelus</i>		✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	November									
			5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	Gaur	<i>Bos gaurus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
16	Indian Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
17	Asian Palm Civet	<i>Paradoxurus hermaphroditus</i>							✓			

Other Fauna

1	Indian Flapshell Turtle	<i>Lissemys punctata</i>					✓					
2	Chinese Blister Beetle	<i>ban mao</i>										