

India - Just Tigers!

Naturetrek Tour Report

27 March - 8 April 2009



Leaping Tiger by Mark Sulway

Report compiled by Karan Modi

Image by kind courtesy of Mark Sulway



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: Karan Modi (Local Guide)

Participants: Colin Dunn
Sharon Dunn
Duncan Matheson
Mary-Anne Matheson
Mark Sulway
Kim Sulway
Arturo De Frias

Day 1

Friday 27th March

Outbound from UK

Group members departed from various UK airports on Emirates Airlines flights to Dubai from where there was an onward connection to New Delhi Airport, India.

Day 2

Saturday 28th March

Visit to Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary. Weather: sunny then cloudy and pleasant

The inbound flight from Dubai arrived approximately on time and we were in the arrivals hall at Indira Gandhi International Airport to greet the group and escort them by bus to the Trident Hilton Hotel nearby.

The afternoon was spent visiting the Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary where we saw great numbers of water birds and some fantastic action of a Marsh Harrier trying to get some ducks on the lake there, in which the harrier had not much luck at least while we were there. We saw around 67 species in couple of hours here.

Day 3

Sunday 29th March

Visit to Monuments in Delhi and further to Jabalpur by Train, Weather: sunny, humid and slight drizzles

After a morning of leisure at the hotel we checked out at 09:30 and made our way to The India Gate, had a nice walk and introduction to it and drove further to explore the Qutub Minar. We spent a good hour at the Qutub complex exploring the ruins and appreciating the artworks in the complex and eventually drove to Nizamuddin Station where we had an excellent buffet lunch in the station restaurant before boarding our overnight sleeper at 15.00. The train left on time at 15.25 and we began to chug south through Delhi suburbs. Packed dinners were eaten on board before we retired to our bunks for the night.

Day 4

Monday 30th March

Arrival at Jabalpur; transfer to Royal Tiger Resort near Mukki Gate in Kanha NP,

Weather: sunny and hot

Our train pulled into Jabalpur station almost on time at 08.20 and we quickly boarded 2 vehicles that delivered us to Narmada Jackson's Hotel where rooms were available for a quick wash and change before we sat down to a buffet breakfast. Back in the vehicles we commenced the four hour drive to Kanha at 09.30. Arriving at Royal Tiger Resort we checked-in quickly and soon settled down to a buffet lunch and headed with lots of expectations and excitement towards the reserve for our first drive in Tiger country.

By the time we exited at the closing time of 18.30 all had had encounters with some of the commoner species of mammals in the park such as Chital (Spotted Deer), Sambar Deer and Grey Langur Monkeys and both of the jeeps had a beautiful encounter with a Jungle Cat crossing the road, spray marking and walk away from the jeep. Throughout our time on the drives the Sal Trees were in flower and their aroma filled the air with sweet scent everywhere we went – it was almost intoxicating and it was as if the forest is made us a carpet of sal flowers to drive on.

Day 5

Tuesday 31st March

Kanha NP, Weather: sunny and hot

A knock on the door at 05.00 preceded tea and coffee at 05.15 and departure for the park at 05.45, the park technically opens at 06.00. We saw some great birds as we started to drive and the sun started to fill the woods. We had some fantastic sights of the Scarlet Minivets, Honey Buzzard, Grey Nightjar and Serpent Eagle. As we reached the Kanha head quarters we were told that the Tiger viewing from the elephant back is possible and we excitedly bought our tokens to mount the elephants, where we saw a huge majestic male Tiger resting and cooling himself in a stream and he was quite oblivious to our presence.

Back at the resort there was time to rest and reflect on the events of the morning before lunch at 14.30 hrs and a return to the park at 15.15 hrs.

Our evening drive resulted in no tiger sightings though one jeep did have a surprise encounter with a huge herd of the largest bovine on earth, The Gaur or the Indian Bison grazing in beautiful grassland. Everyone else contented themselves with views of the numerous herbivores on show (including several Wild Boar) and enjoyed the scenic delights of the park with some more new bird species and a small Rat Snake as a highlight.

Day 6

Wednesday 1st April

Kanha NP, Weather: sunny and hot

We headed towards the park we had the wonderful sight of a bees nest at the gate which almost had taken over the whole Red Silk-Cotton tree. As we drove in the bird life was stunning in the first morning light.. When we got towards the meadows we saw some mahouts on the elephants and we were told we could mount them to have a look at a male tiger in the grassland. So we excitedly got on top the elephants and moved in towards the tiger which was enjoying his breakfast of a Sambar fawn.

Just after we left the other jeep got there and the tiger left its kill, and started to move towards the road from the grassland.

The male tiger crossed the road, walked around a few yards and eventually went back near the woodlands and stopped next to a tree, before moving further on where he picked up the remaining kill and walked into the stream nearby. We had by now spent almost an hour with this majestic mammal. Everyone was more than happy with this sighting!

During our evening drive one jeep came across a pack of Dhole near the meadows not very far from the Mukki gate. The other jeep had seen some beautiful birds and said the highlight was to see a Shikra with a kill of a rat at eye level on a dry bamboo, and another Shikra with another kill of some unidentifiable bird. Everyone had, had another good day!

Day 7

Thursday 2nd April

Kanha NP, Weather: sunny and hot

We once more concentrated on the Kanha and Kisli areas of the park and had breakfast at Kanha. Our morning drive resulted in sightings of tigers for one jeep (which looked like a mating pair, though not the right season now) and a single tiger which walked along the grass alongside the elephant for about 5 minutes before detouring off into the jungle.

During the evening drive we saw two Jungle Cats at different locations, Barking Deer at a watering hole, and the best highlight was to see another Rat Snake which was at least 7-8 feet long, getting inside a termite mound!

Day 8

Friday 3rd April

Kanha NP, Weather: sunny and hot

Today was a birding day and a visit to the other end of the reserve to see its vastness and its diverse habitats. We managed 15 new species of birds and had a wonderful view of a Monitor Lizard run across the road and get into a small hole next to the road. The evening was rather quiet but everyone was happy to have one quiet evening and enjoy the scenic beauty of the reserve, although one jeep had a troop of monkeys giving a great show of entertainment.

Day 9

Saturday 4th April

Kanha NP, Weather: mainly sunny and hot but with rain during our afternoon drive when rather cool

For a bit of a change we headed towards the Kisli Gate to see more areas and eventually landed up in Kanha Meadows, we did not see many mammals in Kisli besides the common deer, monkeys, Barking Deer and a Jackal which was special. As we reached Kanha we were hurried to an area a Tiger had been spotted. As soon as we got there we saw the male Tiger from the jeep which was moving and eventually it settled under the shade of a tree.

Later we drove towards an area where we often have seen Wild Dogs, and luckily we spotted a pack of 11 Wild Dogs with pups in a stream on a kill which we could not see. We were sure there was a kill as there were vultures and crows coming down from the trees hoping to get their share of meat. As the pack settled in the tall grass after feeding and we could not see them any longer so we headed towards the Lodge.

Our evening drive commenced with a drive through the Baiga Village near the park allowing an insight into the simple but in many ways rather pleasant and content lives of the tribes in this fertile part of Madhya Pradesh. It was a rather quiet evening and though we did not see many mammals we had some interesting birds. We all went to the elephant camp and spent quality time with these wonderful animals feeding them and trying to understand their diet and more about them which was really special to all. Everyone was really happy to get to be so close to these wonderful creatures. Back at the Lodge we had a wonderful evening with a tribal dance around a campfire and everyone shook a leg before eating and retiring to their rooms!

Day 10

Sunday 5th April

Kanha NP, Weather: sunny and hot

We were told that there might be a good chance of a tigress in a particular area and so we thought it would be a good idea to go there where the mahouts had found a tigress and we were able to mount the elephants to have a look at her. The tigress started to move and in fact was calling her cubs which must have been close by in the same area. She was a really beautiful tigress and was kind enough to let us be around her as she walked the thickets of bamboo.

The evening drive was a drive to sit and calm our senses with the sounds of the jungle and then visit the sunset point at 870mts. The good part here is that one gets to be in the park until almost 7 pm as getting out after sunset is always special. We encountered a herd of Bison who did not leave the road for us to pass and we also saw some small Pipistrelle Bats on our way back to the lodge.

Day 11

Monday 6th April

Final morning at Kanha; overnight train to Agra

A final game drive this morning resulted in one group who wanted to see a Leopard and hopefully a Bear and the other a pack of Indian Wild Dogs, so we split in 2 jeeps and headed with these two objectives in mind - the jeep hoping for Wild dogs got to see a great sighting of a pack of 8 dogs, whereas the group hoping for leopards and bears had an unbelievable sighting of a male tiger with a male cub around 3 months old walking the length of the road.

By now were really content with all we had seen and got back early to the lodge for a quick brunch and drive to Jabalpur station for an overnight train to Agra. Everything ran on time and we had dinner on the train and retired to our beds early.

Day 12

Tuesday 7th April

Sightseeing in Agra; drive to Delhi or Bharatpur

Our train pulled into Agra Cant Station a little late at 09.00 but we were soon on our way to the nearby hotel where we had rooms for wash and change with breakfast waiting. After a leisurely breakfast we visited the nearby Taj Mahal in the company of local guide Bobby who explained some of the history behind the Taj and took the group inside to see the tomb.

After taking plenty of photos we made our way to a large shop where a demonstration of marble inlay work was watched before we spent some time admiring, or purchasing, some of the merchandise on offer.

We made our way to Agra Fort and then settled in for a leisurely lunch at a restaurant. After lunch we had half an hour or so to freshen up before saying our goodbyes to those group members who were undertaking an extension to Bharatpur and Chambal for an overnight stay.

At 15.30 we boarded our vehicle for the drive to Delhi where we arrived at the Ashok Country Resort near the airport soon after 21.00. Rooms were available for a wash and change and time available for some final packing before the guests made their way to the airport soon after midnight...

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

Species Lists

All records refer to Kanha National Park unless otherwise stated

Mammals

Royal Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris tigris*

Sightings were very good on this tour with a total of at least four different individuals seen and multiple sightings of some animals. Everybody managed to see tigers from elephant back at least twice (including a particularly obliging male eating a fawn of a sambar) and everyone also saw one or more from the jeeps. A surprising proportion of the tigers seen were males (females being more usually encountered), perhaps as a result of some recent changes that have seen a couple of old, long established males usurped by younger animals.

Jungle Cat *Felis chaus kelaarita*

There were a total of three sightings, the whole group seeing at least one.

Dhole (Asiatic Wild Dog) *Cuon alpinus dukhunensis*

Everyone managed some good views of these often very elusive animals which were seen on four dates. Probably two packs were involved as seven individuals near Mukki contained several pups while groups of 8-11 at Kanha did not come out of the grassland after finishing their kill.

Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*

Everyone had encounters with at least a couple of animals

Indian Grey Mongoose or Common Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii*

Mongoosees were seen on about half of our days at Kanha NP

'Northern Plains' Grey Langur *Semnopithecus entellus*

Very common

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta*

A few along the road from Jabalpur to Kanha were the first, thereafter this largely urban species was found in small numbers at Agra and also at Sultanpur NP.

Barasingha or (Kanha) Swamp Deer *Cervus duvaucelii branderi*

A fenced enclosure at Kanha NP contained small numbers but we had regular encounters with wilder looking groups including an impressive gathering of over 30 at Mukki. Kanha NP was initially set up to protect this very rare and localised species, the subspecies *branderi* now occurs nowhere else besides here.

Sambar *Cervus unicolor*

Although seen everyday, numbers were much lower than for the next species and most animals were spotted lurking in quite dense forest, probably a shrewd move as this is the preferred prey of tigers

Chital or Spotted Deer *Cervus axis*

Very common, an open country species

Indian Muntjac or Barking Deer *Muntiacus muntjak*

A handful were encountered, this species is much more retiring than its larger cousins, often seen only briefly before disappearing into dense jungle and we were lucky to see even a young one of this animal.

Nilgai *Boselaphus tragocamelus*

A couple were seen at Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary.

Gaur (Indian 'Bison') *Bos gaurus*

Large numbers of this spectacularly huge bovine were seen on a daily basis, the animals being attracted to lower areas of the park this late in the season

Eurasian Wild Boar *Sus scrofula*

Quite common at Kanha NP where up to dozen were seen most days, and on 2 occasions were also feeding on a deer carcass.

Five-striped Ground Squirrel *Funambulus pennanti*

Abundant everywhere away from the densest natural forests, even in the centre of Delhi and Agra

Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus*

Small numbers were seen on a couple of occasions near the entrance gate to the park.

Birds

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis capensis*

A couple were seen on one location

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta garzetta*

Common and widespread at most wetlands

Great Egret *Egretta alba modesta*

Common and widespread at suitably large wetlands

Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia intermedia*

One or two were often seen on one particular pool

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea cinerea*/'*rectirostris*'

A couple of singles were seen occasionally

'Eastern' Cattle Egret *Bubulcus (ibis) coromandus*

Good numbers were in agricultural land adjacent to the park with many more seen from moving trains

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii grayii*

A few were seen on most ponds and small lakes

Striated Heron *Butorides striata javanica*

One was seen on two dates

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus episcopus*

Three or four were noted

Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*

Singles were seen on a couple of occasions

Indian Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosus*

One or two were occasionally seen or heard

Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor*

Up to 50 were seen regularly

Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus ruficollis*

Three or four were seen on different locations

Black-winged or Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus vociferus*

One or twos were seen on several occasions

Black Kite *Milvus migrans govinda*

Although abundant in urban Delhi and, to a lesser extent, Jabalpur and Agra none were seen in more rural areas

White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*

One or two were seen on a couple of occasions

Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus*

Singles were on three occasions

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*

A couple flew over at the Taj Mahal

Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela cheela*

Were seen and heard most days

Shikra *Accipiter badius cenchroides/ dussumieri*

Up to 15 per day were seen, a surprisingly large number and even with kills

Crested (Changeable) Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus (cirrhatu)s cirrhatu)s*

One or two birds were seen on several dates

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus*

Just one was seen

Jungle Bush Quail *Perdica asiatica asiatica*

A small group were seen on one date

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus murghi*

At least a couple were seen on each drive, many more were heard

India or Blue Peafowl (Peacock) *Pavo cristatus*

Quite common, some males were displaying

Sarus Crane *Grus antigone*

A couple more were seen from the passing train between delhi and jabalpur.

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus phoenicurus*

A couple were seen at various wetlands

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus indica*

Small numbers were at a couple of wetland areas

Indian (Eurasian) Stone Curlew *Burbinus (oediconemus) indicus*

Two or three were regularly seen in the meadows

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus indicus*

Quite common in the meadows, a rather noisy species

Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*

A small handful of these localised arid country specialists were found in the meadows

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Singles were seen occasionally at a couple of wetlands

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus himantopus*

A few were seen from the train

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*

Feral pigeons were seen in all urban areas

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis erythrocephala*

Up to 10 per day (but more normally just one or two) were seen

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis suratensis*

Common everywhere

Eurasian Collared-dove *Streptopelia decaocto decaocto*

Small numbers were recorded daily

'Southern' Yellow-footed Green Pigeon *Treron phoenicopterus chlorigaster*

Small numbers were seen most days

Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria eupatria/nipalensis*

A handful were seen and heard

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri borealis/manillensis*

Common in Delhi and Agra but rather scarce at Kanha

Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala cyanocephala*

Commonly seen during game drives

'Southern' Greater Coucal *Centropus (sinensis) parroti*

A handful were recorded most days

Common Hawk-Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius varius*

Far more often hear than seen but a couple were observed

Sirkeer Malkoha *Taccocua leschenaulti leschenaulti*

One was seen on one date

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus scolopaceus*

Far more often heard than seen but several showed well at various sites, a particularly noisy individual called each morning near our rooms

Indian (Collared) Scops Owl *Otus (letitia) bakamoena gangeticus/marathae*

One was seen on one date

Brown Fish Owl *Bubo zeylonensis leschenault*

One was seen one evening by a couple of jeeps

Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum radiatum*

At least one or two were seen on most drives

Spotted Owlet *Athene brama brama/indica*

One or two were present near the entrance on several occasions

Crested Tress Swift

Quite common over Delhi and Agra

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis atthis* (*pallasi*)/*bengalensis*

One was seen occasionally at the meadows

White-breasted or White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis smyrnensis/fusca*

Quite common, seen on all drives

Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis orientalis*

Seen during each drive in small numbers

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis benghalensis/indica*

Several were seen on all drives

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops epops/ceylonensis*

Three were seen and others heard

Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus*

Singles were seen on two occasions

Indian Grey Hornbill *Tockus birostris*

A handful were seen most days

Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica inornata*

Very common, though much more often heard than seen, also heard in Agra

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima aemacephala indica*

Quite common and widespread, many more were heard than seen though several gave good views

Rufous Woodpecker *Ceonus brachyrus*

Singles were seen on two occasions

Streak-throated Woodpecker *Picus xanthopygaeus*

Three of four were seen

Black-rumped Flameback *Dinopium benghalense benghalense/dilutum*

A couple were seen most days

White-naped Flameback *Chrysocolaptes festivus festivus*

Up to three or four were seen on three dates

Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii filifera*

A pair were regularly seen at the meadows

Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus*

One was with Red-rumped Swallows over the meadows one evening

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica erythrogygia*

Three or four were seen on one date

Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus rufulus*

Small numbers were around the meadows

Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina novaehollandiae novaehollandiae*

At least a couple were seen most days

Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus cinnamomeus*

A couple were briefly in trees at Tuli Tiger Resort

Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*

A handful were seen, mainly in flight

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer cafer*

Very common and widespread

Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*

A noisy pair were regularly seen Tuli Tiger Resort, others were heard

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

A couple of late migrants were heard

Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis saularis*

Common and quite widespread

White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*

Singing birds were seen on four occasions, others were heard

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata indicus/maurus*

A handful were seen in the meadows

Brown Rock Chat *Cercomela fusca*

A couple were noted at the Taj Mahal

Indian Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus horsfieldii horsfieldii*

Although heard with some regularity in bamboo thickets this rather skulking species often proved hard to see well

Tawny bellied Babbler

Two were seen on one occasion

Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus striatus/sindiana/orientalis*

These busy and characterful birds were very common and widespread

Brown-cheeked Fulvetta *Alcippe poioicephala brucei*

Quite common in the bamboo areas though not always easy to see well

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis cursitans*

A handful were seen in the meadows

Grey-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii hodgsonii*

Small numbers were seen quite regularly

Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis socialis*

One or two were seen

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata inornata*

Overall this was the commonest Prinia with daily encounters in the meadows

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius guzuratilis*

Quite common and widespread

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus*

Another species heard more often than seen though several showed well in the grounds of Tuli Tiger Resort

Great Tit *Parus major stupae*

Small numbers were seen most days

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis*

Two or three were seen briefly

Pale-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos erythrorhynchos*

Rather common, though the large majority of those seen were hurtling overhead calling

Purple Sunbird *Nectarina asiatica asiatica*

Very common and widespread

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa palpebrosa*

Quite common and widespread, easiest to see at Tuli Tiger Resort

Indian (House) Sparrow *Passer (domesticus) indicus*

Small numbers were found in urban contexts

Chestnut-shouldered Petronia *Petronia xanthocollis*

Small numbers were found in drier areas

Brahminy Starling *Temenuchus pagodarum*

This attractive species was seen regularly in the grounds of Tuli Tiger Resort and elsewhere

Asian Pied Starling *Gracula contra contra*

Just a few were seen, mostly at Tuli Tiger Resort

Common Mynah *Acridotheres tristis tristis*

Common and widespread

Bank Mynah *Acridotheres ginginianus*

Small numbers were on the lawns at the Taj Mahal

Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*

At least a couple were seen each day

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

Common and widespread away from denser forest

White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caeruleus caeruleus*

A handful were seen

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus paradiseus*

Common, a few were seen on all drives and many more heard

Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda vagabunda*

Quite common, seen daily

House Crow *Corvus splendens splendens*

Common to abundant in urban areas but replaced by the next species in rural contexts

'Indian' Jungle Crow or Large-billed Crow *Corvus (macrorhynchos) culminatus*

Common at Kanha but scarce elsewhere

Crimson sunbird

Seen on one location briefly

Blue-bearded Bee eater

One short glimpse