

Just Tigers!

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 -28 March 2012



Tiger by Chris Brooks



Tiger by Wendy Schmitt



Changeable Hawk Eagle by Chris Brooks



Jackal by Wendy Schmitt

Report compiled by Bharat Madhyan
images courtesy of Wendy Schmitt and Chris Brooks



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Introduction

Our group set off on an Indian adventure where the tigers, birds, animals, general Indian life and quality of company that made the trip such an enjoyable and memorable one. We will all go away with our own special memories: the first male Tiger at Kanha, seen from elephant back; the Indian Rollers; Coppersmith Barbets, Black-naped Monarchs and the Taj. It is humbling to think that in seeing tigers at Kanha, we may have seen perhaps 1% of the world population in just seven days in the parks of central India.

Weather

Night temperatures were low, so that early morning and evening game drives in open-topped vehicles required warm clothes, though blankets were provided. Midday temperatures were pleasantly warm and it was generally very sunny though some mornings were briefly quite misty.

Day 1

Saturday 17th March

The flight to Delhi was on time, we received the guests and transferred to The Westin Gurgaon. After lunch and a couple of cups of massala chai, the team was fortified for our day's birding at Sultanpur Jheel – Delhi's traffic conspired to slow us down, as did a great stop at a reservoir, where amongst many wildfowl were Common Pochard and Spot-billed Ducks. Raptors were good too Indian and Greater Spotted Eagle.

Though we arrived a little later than expected at Sultanpur, we made a couple of brief but very interesting walks: the first initially in woodland, picking up our first Red-breasted Flycatchers, Hoopoes and Brown-headed Barbets, but later looking over the lake itself, where 1000s of Shoveler swam. It was not difficult birding as there were birds everywhere: highlights were perhaps the Greater Spotted Eagles, and Purple Swamphens, but there was also the White-throated Kingfisher and Little Green Bee-eaters, Large Grey Babblers, Ashy Prinia, Grey Francolin - and much more. On the animal front we also saw several large Nilgai sheltered under the trees. Our time passed too quickly and we soon headed back to the hotel. An early night was called for as the morning alarm would be all too soon.

Day 2

Sunday 18th March

With the long flight behind us, taking our packed breakfast from the hotel we headed for the short flight to Jabalpur at 6.30 am, and the flight arrived on time. We had a second breakfast at Jackson's hotel at Jabalpur – very fine it was too. We left Jabalpur and slowly drove south to Kanha. We made several interesting stops along the way and finally arrived at Tuli Tiger Resort. After having a quick lunch we headed for our afternoon park drive, our tiger dreams may not have come true today but for some there was their first Golden Jackal or Jungle Cat. It was time for early dinner and bed, to dreams of things to come...

Day 3

Monday 19th March

Another fine day, though rather chilly at the start. With the weekend over, the routes were a little less busy. We rushed to the centre point to queue up for the tiger show from the elephant back, which turned out fruitful as the mahout could track a male tiger called Munna. The excitement was palpable as we clambered up the ladders and onto the elephant's back. Rocking and rolling, the mahouts nudged the elephants along with their feet, through the scrub, towards this magnificent tiger settled majestically in the stream and the sight was enjoyed by us all. What an amazing animal! Some good birds were seen, notably another Indian Scops Owl. During the afternoon drive we did not see any tiger but it was good for birding. Later on we enjoyed our tasty dinner of Butter Chicken and Aloo Gobi.

Day 4

Tuesday 20th March

After having our tea, coffee and biscuits before dawn we started for the early morning drive at 5 am to be in first. After leaving the barrier at khatia at 5.30 am we entered through kisli gate on at 6 am. To our relief the park was less crowded than yesterday; we did the elephant safari to catch a glimpse of Munna again, after having our picnic breakfast at Kanha. Today was a good day as we managed to see a Sloth Bear with older cubs, hanging out with their mother feeding away unhindered by all the commotion of the tourists in the jeeps.

Day 5

Wednesday 21st March

Oh well, our tiger dreams may not have come true today; our fourth day, but we did enjoy two wonderfully productive drives in Kanha National Park. Too many highlights to mention, but it was great to see some fine stag Barasinghas (the local hard ground Swamp Deer, endemic to Kanha) with Common Mynas on their backs, many Chital, 'beefy', white-socked Gaur, and a few Sambar.

New birds came thick and fast, with 'Rocket-tailed Drongos', Rufous Treepies, Long-tailed and Scarlet Minivets, White-naped Flamebacks, grumpy Crested Serpent-eagles, Spotted and Jungle Owlets and Indian Stone-curlews. The list could go on...

Day 6

Thursday 22nd March

After having our tea, coffee and biscuits before dawn we started for the early morning drive at 5 am to be in first. We entered through kisli gate at 6 am, and experienced yet again seeing a tiger - the Omarpani female, which later was seen again on the tracks by the jeep! The afternoon game drive remained very quiet

Day 7

Friday 23rd March

During the morning game drive we experienced some lovely birding, but the highlight of the tour was the afternoon game drive when we saw a tigress for at least two hours! As soon as we entered from the kisli gate about 1 km into the park, we stopped to look at a Crested Serpent Eagle which was very well posed for photography when suddenly we heard a frantic alarm call of a sambar deer and soon we could see a tigress moving in the distance! She just sat down low in the grass, we could hardly see her, but we kept waiting for her to get up and move, and got rewarded for the patience showed, the tigress got up and started moving in the grass - what a perfect setting, she kept coming close to us, we could hardly believe our eyes, she kept walking elegantly for some distance before disappearing into the thicket of the forest, this was the perfect sighting of a tiger in the wild!

Day 8

Saturday 24th March

Today we decided to do something really different and so take the longest route to the plateau. We traversed through the various different areas of the park, stopping for birds along the way and reached the highest point in the park. Once at the top we had a delightful breakfast on the plateau at Bhamni Dadar, overlooking the forests and grasslands. We spent some time looking at the landscapes below which gave us an overall view of the expanse of this park.

Day 9

Sunday 25th March

Our final day for game drives, which turned to be another successful day, we could see the tiger Munna again, thus satisfying our Tiger thirst - what a way to say our final goodbye!

We spent the afternoon driving to Jabalpur and taking our packed dinner, then took the night train to Agra.

Day 10

Monday 26th March

Late (at around 9.15am), the train eventually pulled into Agra station, some having done a little birding from open carriage doors on the way, finding Marsh Sandpiper and Common Redshank. The chaos of Agra station was left behind, and we headed to our hotel Rajmahal. After lunch we did the magnificent Mougul Agra Fort built by the great Akbar. Later we went to see the Baby Taj on which it is said that the Taj Mahal was designed.

Day 11

Tuesday 27th March

Our final day in India, visiting the Taj Mahal at sunrise itself was wonderful, experiencing the magnificent building devoted to love. After breakfast we visited the Fatehpur Sikri, another fine and grand exhibit of the great Mogul Emperor Akbar.

After lunch at the Only Restaurant we said our goodbyes to the guests who were going on any extensions to the holiday, and the rest of us headed by road to Delhi. It took us about 5 ½ hrs to reach at the Westin Hotel where after a wash and change and a little rest, we transferred to the airport for the early morning flight.

Day 12

Wednesday 28th March

The clients had an early morning arrival back at London Heathrow.

I hope you all enjoyed your Indian visit as much as I did your company.

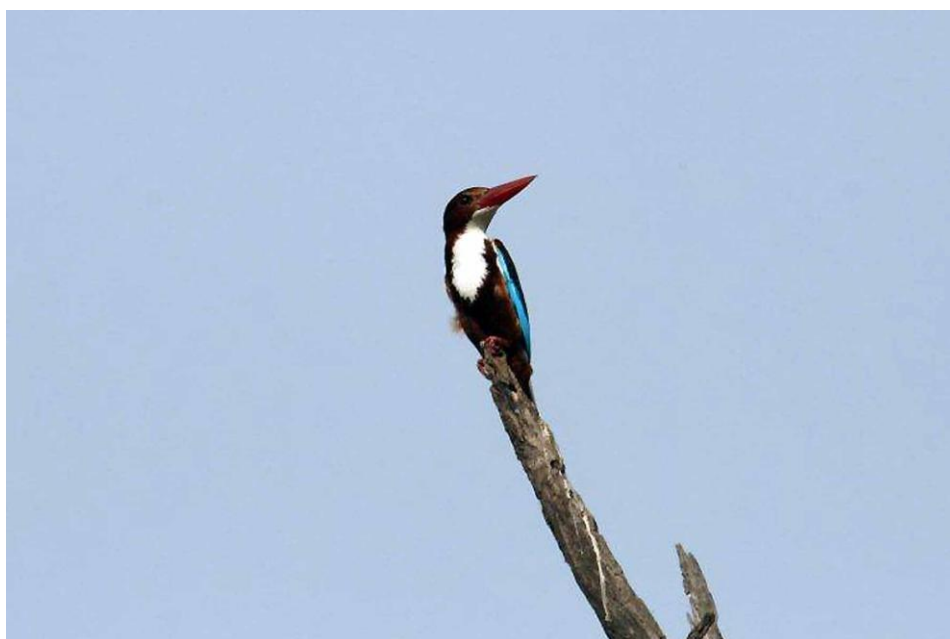
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White-throated Kingfisher by Wendy Schmitt

Species List

Birds

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.

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sightings	Comments
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	4	
2	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	4	
3	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	8	
4	Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	1	
5	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	
6	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	1	
7	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	2	
8	Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>	4	
9	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	5	
10	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	5	
11	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	6	
12	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	2	
13	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	1	
14	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	2	
15	Wolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	5	
16	Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>	2	
17	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	2	
18	Red-naped Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>	2	
19	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	1	
20	Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	4	
21	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	1	
22	Comb Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>	1	
23	Cotton Pygmy Goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>	1	
24	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	1	
25	Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	1	
26	Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>	1	
27	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	1	
28	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	1	
29	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	1	
30	Oriental Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhyncha</i>	3	
31	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	4	
32	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
33	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	3	
34	White-rumped Vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	2	
35	Long-billed Vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>	5	
36	Red-headed Vulture	<i>Sacrogyaps calvus</i>	3	
37	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela cheela</i>	4	
38	Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus cyaneus</i>	1	
39	Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>	1	
40	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	2	Quite common and widespread

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sightings	Comments
41	White-Eyed Buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>	4	
42	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1	
43	Indian Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila hastata</i>	1	
44	Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>	1	
45	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciatus</i>	1	
46	Booted Eagle	<i>Aquila pennatus</i>	1	
47	Changeable Hawk Eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatu</i>	2	
48	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	3	
49	Jungle Bush Quail	<i>Perdica asiatica</i>	1	
50	Painted Spurfowl	<i>Galloperdix lunulata</i>	1	
51	Red Jungle fowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	3	
52	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	7	
53	Brown Crake	<i>Amaurionis akool</i>	1	
54	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurionis phoenicurus</i>	2	
55	Purple Swampphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	1	
56	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	1	
57	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	1	
58	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	1	
59	Bronzed-winged Jacana	<i>Metopidius indicus</i>	1	
60	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	4	
61	Stone Curlew	<i>Burhinus oedicephalus</i>	4	
62	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>	4	
63	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus indicus</i>	6	Very common, widespread and noisy
64	White-tailed Lapwing	<i>Vanellus leucurus</i>	1	
65	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	1	
66	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	1	
67	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	4	
68	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	2	
69	River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	1	
70	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia neglecta</i>	3	
71	Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	2	
72	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	3	
73	Red-collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	1	
74	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	5	Fairly common
75	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	2	Common and very widespread
76	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>	4	
77	Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>	4	
78	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	6	Common and widespread, one of very few species seen every day
79	Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>	3	
80	Common Hawk cuckoo	<i>Cuculus varius</i>	4	
81	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	2	Regularly encountered in a range of scrubby and grassland settings
82	Indian Scops Owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>	3	
83	Brown-fish owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>	1	
84	Mottled Wood Owl	<i>Strix ocellata</i>	1	
85	Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium</i>	2	
86	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama indica</i>	2	
87	Asian palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasensis</i>	1	
88	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	2	
89	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	3	

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sightings	Comments
90	Crested Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocyne corona</i>	3	
91	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	3	
92	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>	1	
93	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	5	Common and very widespread, a frequent sight on roadside wires
95	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	1	
95	Green Bee-Eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	5	
96	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis benghalensis</i>	5	Frequently seen, often along roadsides
97	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	1	
98	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyroceros birostris</i>	3	Small numbers were seen at most wooded or parkland sites
99	Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>	1	
100	Brown-Headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>	2	
101	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	2	Quite common, though much more often heard than seen,
102	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos canicapillus</i>	1	
103	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>D. mahrattensis pallescens</i>	2	
104	Streak-throated Woodpecker	<i>Picus xanthopygaeus</i>	1	
105	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	4	The commonest and most widespread woodpecker with records coming from all wooded locations
106	White-Naped Woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>	2	
107	Ashy-crowned sparrow-lark	<i>Eremopterix grisea</i>	1	
108	Plain Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	1	
109	Dusky Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>	1	
110	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundu rustica</i>	2	
111	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundu smithii</i>	4	
112	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	2	
113	White Wagtail	<i>Motallica alba</i>	3	
114	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motallica madaraspatensis</i>	1	
115	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motallica flava</i>	2	
116	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motallica cinerea</i>	4	
117	Oriental Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>	4	
118	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	2	
119	Large Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina macei macei</i>	4	
120	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	2	
121	Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>	1	
122	White-bellied Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus erythrogygius</i>	1	
123	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	6	Very common and widespread
124	Golden-Fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>	1	
125	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	2	
126	Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Zoothera citrina</i>	1	
127	Tickell's thrush	<i>Turdus unicolor</i>	2	
128	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	2	
129	Jungle Prinia	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>	1	
130	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	1	
131	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inomata</i>	1	
132	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	3	Widespread in small numbers with birds recorded at all sites
133	Sulphur-bellied warbler	<i>Phylloscopus griseolus</i>	1	
134	Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	3	

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sightings	Comments
135	Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>	4	
136	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickellae</i>	1	
137	Grey-headed canary Flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>	1	
138	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	4	
139	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulica</i>	3	
140	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	1	
141	Black Redstart	<i>Phoeicurus ochruros</i>	2	
142	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	1	
143	Grey Bushchat	<i>Saxicola ferrea</i>	1	
144	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	2	
145	Indian Chat	<i>Cercomela fusca</i>	1	
146	White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>	1	
147	Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	3	
148	Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum fuficeps</i>	1	
149	Indian scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus horsfieldii</i>	1	
150	Yellow-eyed babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>	1	
151	Large Grey Babbler	<i>Turdoides malcolmi</i>	1	
152	Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>	6	Generally common and widespread
153	Brown-cheeked Fulvetta	<i>Alcippe poiocephala</i>	4	
154	Great Tit	<i>Parus major(cinereus group)</i>	3	
155	Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>	2	
156	Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	5	Present throughout at low densities
157	Thick-Billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>	3	
158	Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>	4	
159	Black-Hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>	4	
160	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	1	
161	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	4	
162	Common Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>	4	
163	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	5	Very common, a frequent site on roadside wires
164	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>	2	
165	Hair-crested Drongo	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>	2	
166	Greater Racket-Tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	2	
167	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta agabunda</i>	5	Widespread at fairly low densities
168	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens splendens</i>	3	common around settlements, but less frequently seen in wooded areas
169	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
170	Bank Myna	<i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>	2	Rather localised, sometimes the dominant myna but generally scarce and heavily outnumbered by Common Mynas
171	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis tristis</i>	6	Ubiquitous
172	Asian Pied Starling	<i>Sturnus contra</i>	2	Common in the vicinity of water
173	Brahminy Starling	<i>Temenuchus pagodarum</i>	3	
174	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus (indica group)</i>	3	Fairly common in most urban settings and in some more rural areas

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sightings	Comments
175	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>	4	
176	Red Avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>	1	
177	White-throated Munia	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>	1	

Mammals

1	Royal Bengal Tiger	<i>Panthera tigris</i>	5	
2	Jungle Cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>	4	
3	Rhesus Macaque	<i>Macca mulatta</i>	4	Fairly common and widespread
4	Common Langur	<i>Presbytis entellus</i>	5	Fairly common and widespread, commoner in heavy woodland than the previous species
5	Common mongoose		1	
6	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>	3	
7	Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>	3	
8	Sloth Bear	<i>Merursus ursinus</i>	1	
9	Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus giganteus</i>	3	
10	Three-striped Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus pennarum</i>	3	
11	Five-Striped Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus pennantii</i>	6	
12	Indian gaint flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista philipenses</i>	1	
13	Gaur(Indian Bison)	<i>Bos guarus</i>	4	
14	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>	5	
15	Barasingha (Swamp deer)	<i>Cervus duvauceli branderi</i>	2	
16	Indian Muntjac (Barking Deer)	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>	3	
17	Chital (Spotted Deer)	<i>Cervus axis</i>	5	
18	Khincara (Indian Gazelle)	<i>Gazelle bonnetti</i>	1	
19	Nilgai	<i>Boselaphus tragocamelus</i>	2	
20	Indian Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	5	
21	Indian palm Civet	<i>Paradoxurus niger</i>	1	

Amphibians

1	Flap-shelled Turtle	<i>Lissemys punctata</i>	1	
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Sloth Bear by Wendy Schmitt