Naturetrek Tour Report

19th - 29th January 2020

Tour report by Sujan Chatterjee



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Sujan Chatterjee (leader) with five Naturetrek clients

## **Summary**

Go Slow – the most amazing way of exploring one of the most exclusive parks in central India.

We had great sightings, the highlights of the tour being the lone Wolf, a few Dholes (Wild Dogs) and several massive Gaurs, plus nearly 140 species of birds and various species of butterflies.

Some memorable moments of the tour included having great views of a Giant Squirrel for nearly half an hour and searching for the lone Indian Wolf. The birders enjoyed amazing views of special birds like the Malabar Pied Hornbills, Mottled Wood Owl and White-naped Woodpeckers, plus the flight of the Savanna Nightjar at dusk. Then there was the excitement of our search for the Dhole packs close to our lodge, the grazing Chital deer in the lodge grounds, the great food and hospitality of the Reni Pani Jungle lodge and the outdoor breakfast at fantastic locations. The playful baby Elephant gave everyone immense pleasure too.

Day 1

**Sunday 19th January** 

Group members departed from the UK by flight to India.

Day 2

**Monday 20th January** 

Arrive in New Delhi

The group arrived on a British Airways flight at 9am. We welcomed the group and headed for the very plush Claridges Hotel. We checked in and settled down for the day and some rest.

#### Day 3

# **Tuesday 21st January**

After a sumptuous breakfast we met up with our guide for the day Rahul Rathod. We boarded our waiting bus and drove through Delhi traffic to the massive Jama Masjid. We walked around the largest mosque in India, while Rahul explained to us the history of Delhi. We then came out and boarded local cycle rickshaws. The rickshaws dodged and dribbled through the crowded lanes and dropped us off at the nut and spice markets. We pushed through the crowded lanes and towards the old shops selling spices from all across the country. Piles of nuts, raisins and dates were also sold in the shops. We stopped at one place to have a cup of masala chai, made in a tiny twin storey shop. We then climbed up to the top floor of the building and got a bird's-eye view of the old buildings. It's so amazing how life has not changed in centuries in this older part of the city. On the terrace, a few men were exercising homing pigeons. The mosque nearby was calling for prayers, the overpowering smalls of spice everywhere...

Eventually we came down and boarded our rickshaws and headed back to our waiting bus. Next we drove to the Red Fort. There was preparation going on for the Republic Day functions. After all the security checks, we entered the gardens of the fort, which had the old quarters of the Moghul King. The beautiful red sandstone structures stood proud, witnessing the rich history of India. The beautiful marble courts, its lost jewels, its stolen

gold inlays...mutely watched us, as we walked past in awe. Our last stop was Rajghat, the memorial park for Mahatma Gandhi. We then stopped at Chor Bizzare Restaurant for a fantastic Kashmiri lunch. Thereafter we returned to our Hotel to retire for the day.

#### Day 4

## Wednesday 22nd January

Today was an early start: we left the hotel at 3am and headed for the airport. We had to catch a flight to Bhopal. We were a bit delayed due to fog, but we eventually made it. Bhopal greeted us with a light drizzle, which let off after a while and we set off in two vehicles. We drove on the busy highway, which is being widened, so construction work slowed us down. We stopped at Bhimbetka for a cup of tea and reached Reni Pani Lodge (our home for next seven days) at lunch time. Naren was to be our Guide for the next few days. After some rest we went for a short walk, to get familiar with landscape and the local birds. We met back in the evening for our checklist and some drinks followed by dinner.

## Day 5

## **Thursday 23rd January**

Today we left at about at 7am and, as we drove along the dirt track, I saw a red flash streaking across the road. It was a Wild Dog, so we stopped both the cars and we saw a few of them in the forest. They walked away from us and then eventually came back and ran across the road again behind us.

We drove on along the village road and reached the edge of the Tawa reservoir. We had a boat waiting for us to take us across. Here, open woodland, dense forest and grassy meadows rise from the shores of the Tawa reservoir in a series of hills, plateaux and sheer red sandstone cliffs to the Pachmarhi plateau and the peak of Dhoopgarh. We got on to our waiting safari vehicles (a routine we would be following everyday) and drove into the park. We saw a herd of Chital in the grassland and then, the odd Sambar Deer and troops of Northern Plains Langurs. Some of the birds spotted included Crested Serpent Eagle, Jungle Babblers, Drongos, Parakeets (three species), and Indian Peafowl. We stopped at the elephant camp for breakfast. We then carried on with our trip further until it was time to leave the park.

We headed back to our beautiful lodge for lunch and some siesta. Later in the afternoon, some of us went out for a walk and ticked off a few new birds around the village, like the Long-tailed Shrike, Brahminy Starling, Spotbreasted Fantail, Black Redstart etc.

## Day 6

## Friday 24th January

Today we left early again and drove to the Tawa Reservoir. After we started our Safari, we quickly found a pair of Wild Dogs. They posed well for photos and walked past the vehicles. Later we found a beautiful Indian Giant Squirrel. This three-foot-long monster was perched high on a Teak tree and was knawing on the hard seeds. We could hear its teeth going strong on the seeds, and the crunching noise. We later found a small herd of thirsty Gaurs or Indian Bisons at a pool. These magnificent creatures stood looking at us for a while until they decided to go on with their grazing. Our sharp-eyed guide also found an Indian Scops Owl. The bird sat in front of a tree hole, so well camouflaged.

We returned to our lodge for some lunch and siesta. Again, this afternoon, we went for a birding trundle. We ticked off Greater (Southern) Coucal, White-naped Woodpecker, Rosy Starling and Bay-backed Shrike. While returning from our walk we even saw a Wild Dog rush across the path. When we returned to our lodge, we got the news that a cow had been killed in a village by some predator. We had our hopes high and after dinner we dashed off in our jeeps to look for them. Unfortunately, by then the carcass had been decimated by a pack of 17 Wild Dogs. We just saw a pair of Wild Boars tugging at the skeleton.

#### Day 7

## Saturday 25th January

Today our scheduled plan was to go for an afternoon safari. But we did a pre-breakfast walk close to our camp. It was a bit slow to start with, but as the sun hit the trees, activity picked up. We ticked off Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher, Sulphur-bellied Warblers, Plum-headed Parakeet, Shikras and White-naped Woodpeckers. At the end of the walk, the incredibly beautiful Plum-headed Parakeets, gave us a great show. They dropped down into the shrubs and kept feeding on the seeds, giving us ample photo opportunities. We had some free time before lunch. At 11am a pottery session was held by the lodge. Everyone showed off their skills of mud-handling by producing some gems of modern art.

After lunch we went for our afternoon safari. We drove around in the park we reached a location where we found a big flock of swifts and martins hawking insects. They were mostly Dusky Crag Martin, but some were Crested Treeswifts. They glided with their long tails gracefully amongst the crag martins having their afternoon meals. We then stopped to look at the massive and most beautiful owl, the Mottled Wood Owl. The bird sat motionlessly as we tried to get a decent picture. The mottling was so very similar to the Crocodile-bark tree!

## Day 8

# **Sunday 26th January**

This morning we met at 5.30am and followed our usual routine. We drove off to the park, but not until we had seen two Indian (Black-naped) Hares on the tracks near our camp. After we entered the park, we quickly found a pair of Dholes who were feeding on the dead Sambar near the track. They walked past us softly calling to each other through the Teak forest. A good start. We stopped at a beautiful breakfast location, which also had a Brown Fish Owl roosting over the reservoir. Even though some of us were eyeing the eggs from another group's breakfast basket, we eventually left them alone and had another of our own grand field breakfasts.

Some of us took a private safari in the afternoon. We travelled to the buffer zone. As we entered, we got some footprints of a dog... a very big dog. Another car from our lodge mentioned they had seen a Wolf - an extreme rarity for that region. And the search began. We kept following the track which kept disappearing in the brush. We anticipated its route, but we were too impatient ... then we heard alarm calls of the langurs. We rushed again ... and we missed it again...

Then it was spotted on the track, galloping along... It kept on running along the track ahead of us, at times stopping to look at us and run again. What a beautiful creature! It eventually went away from the road... and we lost it. As dusk fell, we spotted Savanah Nightjars: they kept sallying around the pond sweeping down to get a drink on the wing. We later spotted Nilgais and a massive bull Gaur in our spotlights before heading back home.

#### Day 9

## **Monday 27th January**

We had a leisurely morning today. We met at the Gol Ghar for breakfast, but today breakfast was outdoors and very delicious. Some decided to carry on with some leisurely walks in the grounds or just sunbathing by the pool. Some of us spent some time in the library too!

Although we hadn't done much, we were hungry and ready for lunch, so we met back at 12.30pm and left on our afternoon safari at 2.15pm. A short boat ride across the reservoir brought us to the entrance of the park where we drove just enjoying the beautiful landscape and feeling blessed that we could be here. It was again a quiet evening with little or nearly no bird activity. We stopped at the Elephant camp for some coffee and cakes. At the same time, the Elephants were having a wash in the pool. They slowly lumbered out from the pool and headed towards the bread-making place. The big daddy was a mega tusker. Apparently, he was dangerous, so no one was to venture close. The mother and calf too were out-of-bounds for petting. But the calf, after a big bread, decided to roll over and go to sleep. He rolled around under the mother and eventually fell asleep.

We were back at the lodge at 6.30pm, headed to our rooms to freshen up and got back to have a lovely barbecue dinner set outside with small bonfires. We headed back to our rooms soon after dinner as we had our last morning drive tomorrow and a long day getting back to Delhi.

## **Day 10**

## **Tuesday 28th January**

This morning we met at 5.30am - we seemed to be getting a hang of the early mornings! This morning we decided to go to a completely different area for breakfast in the park. As we drove along we heard some alarm calls but after lot of trying, we didn't get anything. So we decided to head towards the new area. We enjoyed the change in scenery and the road got bumpier as we climbed steadily. We spooked a Muntjac along the track - a new animal for our trip. Soon we arrived at the plateau with the view of the Satpura Hills – the result of a rift valley. We drove on a little further and walked through the forest and got to the breakfast point. The views from here just put our minds into a trance. We ate breakfast and had our coffees looking at the expanse of the forest which was surrounded by the reservoir. On our way back, we spotted a pair of Malabar Pied Hornbill as a closure of our trip.

We got back to Reni Pani, headed straight to the rooms, packed and came back to have lunch. We left the lodge on the long drive to Bhopal airport, which took nearly five hours due to the road work and heavy traffic. On our way we stopped at Bimbhetka to walk around the ancient Rock Shelter painting from 9000 years ago. And we also stopped at the Jehan Numa Palace at Bhopal for a fantastic traditional dinner. We reached Delhi as planned, amidst lots of unseasonal rain, checked into the Pullman Hotel which was thankfully close enough to the airport and headed to our rooms for a much-needed rest.

## Day 11

# Wednesday 29th January

We were picked up at 7.45am by the local representative and headed to the airport to board our flights back to the UK. This is where another amazing Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

#### 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 <a href="www.naturetrek.co.uk">www.naturetrek.co.uk</a> to sign up.

#### Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers and exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



## **Species Lists**

#### Birds

Our tour checklist follows the names and taxonomy (including species order) of the International Ornithological Congress list of the birds of the world (version 10.1, January 2020) which seems destined to become the global standard in future. The species included are based on those thought most likely to be recorded together with what has been seen on previous tours

				January						
	Common name	Scientific name	TL	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
1	Grey Francolin	Francolinus pondicerianus	h				h		h	
2	Grey Junglefowl	Gallus sonneratii	h			h		h		
3	Indian Peafowl	Pavo cristatus	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
4	Bar-headed Goose	Anser indicus	1						1	
5	Knob-billed (Comb) Duck	Sarkidiornis melanotos	1			1				
6	Ruddy Shelduck	Tadorna ferruginea	1						1	
7	Indian Spot-billed Duck	Anas poecilorhyncha	1			1				
8	Jungle Nightjar	Caprimulgus indicus	1						1	
9	Savanna Nightjar	Caprimulgus affinis	1					1		
10	Crested Treeswift	Hemiprocne coronata	1				1	1		
11	Greater (Southern) Coucal	Centropus sinensis	1	1		1			1	
12	Asian Koel	Eudynamys scolopaceus	1			1				
13	Common Hawk-Cuckoo	Hierococcyx varius	1			1		1		1
14	Spotted Dove	Spilopelia chinensis	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
15	Laughing Dove	Spilopelia senegalensis	1		1	1		1		
16	Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	Treron bicinctus	1				1			
17	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	Treron phoenicopterus	1	1	1			1	1	
18	White-breasted Waterhen	Amaurornis phoenicurus	1		1	1				
19	Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	1		1	1				
20	Great Stone-curlew (Thick-knee)	Esacus recurvirostris	1							1
21	Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus	1			1			1	
22	River Lapwing	Vanellus duvaucelii	1		1	1	1	1	1	
23	Red-wattled Lapwing	Vanellus indicus	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	

			January									
	Common name	Scientific name	TL	22	23	24	25	26	27	28		
24	Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius	1			1						
25	Bronze-winged Jacana	Metopidius indicus	1		1	1	1	1	1			
26	Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos	1		1		1					
27	River Tern	Sterna aurantia	1		1	1	1	1	1			
28	Painted Stork	Mycteria leucocephala	1		1		1	1	1			
29	Asian Openbill	Anastomus oscitans	1		1	1	1	1	1	1		
30	Black Stork	Ciconia nigra	1					1				
31	Woolly-necked Stork	Ciconia episcopus	1	1		1	1	1				
32	Lesser Adjutant	Leptoptilos javanicus	1					1				
33	Little Cormorant	Microcarbo niger	1			1		1				
34	Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	1		1	1		1	1	1		
35	Oriental Darter	Anhinga melanogaster	1					1		<u> </u>		
36	Black-headed Ibis	Threskiornis melanocephalus	1				1					
37	Red-naped Ibis	Pseudibis papillosa	1					1		1		
38	Indian Pond Heron	Ardeola grayii	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	<u> </u>		
39	Eastern Cattle Egret	Bubulcus coromandus (split)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			
40	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea	1			1		1				
41	Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea	1			1	1		1			
42	Great Egret	Ardea alba	1	1	1	1	1	1	1			
43	Intermediate Egret	Ardea intermedia	1			1						
44	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	1	1					1			
45	Black-winged Kite	Elanus caeruleus	1	<u> </u>		1		1				
46	Indian (Long-billed) Vulture	Gyps indicus	1		1	1		<u> </u>				
47	Crested Serpent Eagle	Spilornis cheela	1		1	1		1	1	1		
	Changeable (Crested) Hawk	Nisaetus cirrhatus								<u> </u>		
48	Eagle		1			1						
49	Bonelli's Eagle	Aquila fasciata	1		1	1						
50	Shikra	Accipiter badius	1		1		1	1				
51	White-eyed Buzzard	Butastur teesa	1		1	1			1	<u> </u>		
52	Eastern Barn Owl	Tyto javanica (split)	1					1				
53	Indian Scops Owl	Otus bakkamoena	1			1						
54	Brown Fish Owl	Ketupa zeylonensis	1					1				
55	Mottled Wood Owl	Strix ocellata	1				1	1	1			

				Janı	uary					
	Common name	Scientific name	TL	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
56	Jungle Owlet	Glaucidium radiatum	1					h	1	
57	Spotted Owlet	Athene brama	1			1	1			
58	Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa epops	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
59	Malabar Pied Hornbill	Anthracoceros coronatus	1							1
60	Indian Grey Hornbill	Ocyceros birostris	1			1		1		
61	Indian Roller	Coracias benghalensis	1		1	1	1	1	1	
62	Stork-billed Kingfisher	Pelargopsis capensis	1			1				
63	White-throated Kingfisher	Halcyon smyrnensis	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
64	Common Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis	1		1			1		
65	Pied Kingfisher	Ceryle rudis	1					1	1	
66	Green Bee-eater	Merops orientalis	1		1			1	1	
67	Brown-headed Barbet	Psilopogon zeylanica	h				h	h		
68	Coppersmith Barbet	Psilopogon haemacephala	1	1		h		h		
69	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	Leiopicus mahrattensis	1						1	
70	Black-rumped Flameback	Dinopium benghalense	1			1		1	1	
71	White-naped Woodpecker	Chrysocolaptes festivus	1		1	1	1	1		
72	Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus	1		1					
73	Plum-headed Parakeet	Psittacula cyanocephala	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
74	Alexandrine Parakeet	Psittacula eupatria	1		h	1	1	1	1	
75	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Psittacula krameri	1		1	1	1	1	h	
76	Common Woodshrike	Tephrodornis pondicerianus	1			1				
77	Common Iora	Aegithina tiphia	1			1				
78	Small Minivet	Pericrocotus cinnamomeus	1			1				
79	Large Cuckooshrike	Coracina macei	1		1	1	1	1		
80	Bay-backed Shrike	Lanius vittatus	1		1	1		1	1	
81	Long-tailed Shrike	Lanius schach	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
82	Indian Golden Oriole	Oriolus kundoo	1			h			1	
83	Black-hooded Oriole	Oriolus xanthornus	1					1		
84	Black Drongo	Dicrurus macrocercus	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
85	White-bellied Drongo	Dicrurus caerulescens	1			1		1	1	
86	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	Dicrurus paradiseus	1					1		
87	White-spotted (Spot-br) Fantail	Rhipidura albogularis	1		1	1			1	

				Janu	uary					
	Common name	Scientific name	TL	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
88	White-browed Fantail	Rhipidura aureola	1			1			1	
89	Black-naped Monarch	Hypothymis azurea	1	1		1				
90	Indian Paradise Flycatcher	Terpsiphone paradisi	1		1	1				
91	Rufous Treepie	Dendrocitta vagabunda	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
92	Indian Jungle Crow	Corvus culminatus	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
93	Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher	Culicicapa ceylonensis	1			1				
94	CinerousTit	Parus cinereus	1	1					1	
95	Rufous-tailed Lark	Ammomanes phoenicurus	1			1		1		
96	Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark	Eremopterix griseus	1			1				1
97	Red-vented Bulbul	Pycnonotus cafer	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
98	Grey-throated Martin	Riparia chinensis (split fr Plain)	1		1					
99	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	1		1			1		
100	Wire-tailed Swallow	Hirundo smithii	1		1	1		1		
101	Dusky Crag Martin	Ptyonoprogne concolor	1				1	1		
102	Red-rumped Swallow	Cecropis daurica	1		1	1	1	1		
103	Hume's Leaf Warbler	Phylloscopus humei	1			1				
104	Yellow-browed Warbler	Phylloscopus inornatus	1			1				
105	Sulphur-bellied Warbler	Phylloscopus griseolus	1			1				
106	Common Chiffchaff	Phylloscopus collybita	1			1				
107	Greenish Warbler	Phylloscopus trochiloides	1	1						
108	Blyth's Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus dumetorum	1			1				
109	Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis	h					h		
110	Grey-breasted Prinia	Prinia hodgsonii	1		1	1	1			
111	Plain Prinia	Prinia inornata	1					1	1	
112	Common Tailorbird	Orthotomus sutorius	1	1		1			1	
113	Tawny-bellied Babbler	Dumetia hyperythra	1						1	
114	Puff-throated Babbler	Pellorneum ruficeps	h				h			
115	Common Babbler	Turdoides caudatus	1			1	1	1		
116	Jungle Babbler	Turdoides striatus	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
117	Lesser Whitethroat	Sylvia curruca	1					1		
118	Yellow-eyed Babbler	Chrysomma sinense	1						1	
119	Indian (Oriental) White-eye	Zosterops palpebrosus	1	1		1				

				Janu	uary					
	Common name	Scientific name	TL	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
120	Common Myna	Acridotheres tristis	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
121	Pied Myna (Asian Pied Starling)	Gracupica contra	1			1	1		1	
122	Brahminy Starling	Temenuchus pagodarum	1		1	1	1		1	
123	Rosy Starling	Pastor roseus	1			1				
124	Scaly Thrush	Zoothera dauma	1					1		
125	Indian Robin	Copsychus fulicatus	1	1			1	1		
126	Oriental Magpie-Robin	Copsychus saularis	1		1	1		1	1	
127	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	Cyornis tickelliae	1		1	1			1	
128	Red-breasted Flycatcher	Ficedula parva	1	1	1	1		1	1	
129	Black Redstart	Phoenicurus ochruros	1	1	1	1	1		1	
130	Siberian Stonechat	Saxicola maurus	1				1	1	1	
131	Pied Bush Chat	Saxicola caprata	1		1	1				
132	Purple Sunbird	Cinnyris asiaticus	1		1	1	1	1	1	
133	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	1		1	1	1	1		
134	Yellow-throated Sparrow (Ch-sh.Petr)	Gymnoris xanthocollis	1			1	1	1	1	
135	Indian Silverbill	Euodice malabarica	1			1				
136	White-browed Wagtail	Motacilla madaraspatensis	1		1	1	1	1	1	
137	Paddyfield (Oriental) Pipit	Anthus rufulus	1		1	1		1		
138	Tree Pipit	Anthus trivialis	1		1			1		
139	Red-headed Bunting	Emberiza bruniceps	1					1		
	Mammal Species	Scientific name								
1	Rhesus Macaque	Macaca mulatta	1	1	1	1				1
2	'Northern Plains' Grey Langur	Semnopithecus entellus	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
3	Common Mangoose	Herpestes edwardsi	1		1					
4	Dhole (Asiatic Wild Dog)	Cuon alpinus dukhunensis	1		1	1			1	
5	Indian Wolf	Canis lupus pallipes	1					1		
6	Indian or Black-naped Hare	Lepus nigricollis	1			1		1		
7	Three-striped Palm Squirrel	Funambulus pennarum	1				1		1	
8	Five-striped Palm Squirrel	Funambulus pennanti	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
9	Indian Giant Squirrel	Ratufa Indica	1			1				
10	Gaur (Indian Bison)	Bos guarus	1				1	1	1	

				January										
	Common name	Scientific name	TL	22	23	24	25	26	27	28				
11	Indian Muntjac	Muntiacus muntjak	1							1				
12	Sambar	Cervus unicolor	1		1	1	1	1	1					
13	Chital (Spotted Deer)	Cervus axis	1	1	1	1	1	1	1					
14	Nilgai (Blue Bull)	Boselaphus tragocamelus	1		1	1	1	1						
15	Indian Wild Boar	Sus scrofa	1		1	1	1	1	1					
	Reptiles	Scientific name												
1	Indian Flapshell Turtle	Lissemys punctata	1			1	1		1					
2	Marsh Mugger Crocodile	Crocodylus palustris	1		1	1	1	1	1					
3	House Gecko species	Hemidactylus or Gehyra etc sp	1		1									
	Butterflies	Scientific name												
1	Great Eggfly	Hypolimnas bolina	1											
2	Common Grass Yellow	Eurema hecabe	1											
3	Common Sailor	Neptis hylas	1											
4	Common Jezebel	Delias eucharis	1											