

# Realm of the Black Panther

Naturetrek Tour Report

30th November – 9th December 2025



Osprey



Sambar



Smooth-coated Otter



Asian Elephant

Tour report by Jesan T Das



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Tour participants: Jesan T Das (leader) with four Naturetrek clients

## Summary

This was an exhilarating wildlife tour through the Bhadra Tiger Reserve, Karnataka, spanning nine nights and ten days. From start to finish, the journey was filled with remarkable wildlife encounters, most memorably a female Leopard gliding swiftly through dense undergrowth, repeated sightings of Elephant herds engaged in diverse behaviours, and the magical light of dawn and dusk reflecting off the forests and the expansive Bhadra Reservoir.

The reserve's rich avifauna added constant excitement, with notable bird sightings including Lesser Adjutant, Malabar Starling, and an unforgettable moment with an Osprey carrying a large fish, bringing vivid colour and drama to each safari.

Daily checklist sessions fostered a strong sense of camaraderie among the group, while hearty meals, well-planned logistics, and seamless coordination ensured a comfortable and enriching experience throughout. The clients left with lasting memories of Bhadra's extraordinary wildlife, tranquil landscapes and raw natural beauty.

### Day 1

**Sunday 30th November**

The group took an overnight flight from Heathrow to Bangalore.

### Day 2

**Monday 1st December**

The clients' flight landed at 4.15am, and we welcomed them at Bangalore International Airport. Soon after, we drove to Taj Yeshwantpur for breakfast, a journey of approximately forty-five minutes. After breakfast and a short refresh, we departed for Bhadra Tiger Reserve at 8.15am. We made a brief stop en route before continuing to River Tern Lodge, where we checked in.

Lunch was served at 2.00pm, followed by our afternoon safari at 3.15pm. During the drive, we encountered Bengal Sacred Langurs and Chital, along with several bird species including Black Drongo, Jungle Babbler, and Grey Junglefowl. We returned to the lodge by 7.00pm, and gathered for dinner and the checklist session at 8.15pm.

### Day 3

**Tuesday 2nd December**

Our day began early, assembling at the reception at 6.15am for tea, coffee, and biscuits. At 6.30am, we departed for a boat safari. The morning was cool and pleasant, with a gentle breeze. Chital were abundant along the banks. We soon heard alarm calls from langurs and Sambar, indicating the presence of a predator. As the alarm calls moved closer, our patience was rewarded with an exciting sighting of a female Leopard. She walked briefly along the open bank before disappearing into the bushes! Continuing the safari, we observed nesting Great Cormorants, a few River Terns, and a Great Stone-curlew resting on the riverbank.

The afternoon jeep safari began with a dramatic encounter: a bull Elephant in *musth* stood on the road, temporarily blocking all safari vehicles. After a short wait, the elephant slowly moved away and vanished into the forest. Further into the safari, we came across a herd of Gaur comprising nine individuals, including a fully-grown male. He offered

an excellent view, clearly displaying his prominent dewlap, powerful ridge muscles, and oily bare skin. Another highlight of the evening was the sighting of Legge's Hawk-Eagle, one of India's rarer raptors, with a limited distribution.

## Day 4

**Wednesday 3rd December**

This morning, we headed out for a jeep safari under dry, overcast conditions. Overall, bird activity was comparatively low. The major mammal sighting of the drive was a large herd of Elephants gathered around a bamboo clump, actively feeding. The herd consisted of ten to fifteen individuals, including several females and calves. The tusker in *musth* seen the previous day was also present. The forest was filled with the sounds of bamboo cracking, chewing, and the rhythmic flapping of their ears.

We returned to the lodge at 9.30am. After breakfast, we went for a nature walk around the lodge premises. Although the sun was out, we were able to spot some interesting birds and butterflies. Notable sightings included Blue-faced Malkoha and the Common Lascar butterfly, which were the highlights of the walk.

In the afternoon, we set out once again for a boat safari. The forest was alive with alarm calls from langurs and Sambar, immediately heightening our anticipation. The intensity and movement of these calls clearly suggested the presence of a predator, with panic sounds echoing from multiple directions. Although no predator emerged into view, the experience of listening to these warning calls was thrilling in itself.

Further along the river, we spotted a Marsh Crocodile basking on the riverbank. As sunset approached, the air cooled noticeably and the surroundings filled with the calls of Malabar Pied Hornbills. As they moved towards their roosting sites, flocks flew repeatedly over the canopy, creating a wonderful end to the safari.

## Day 5

**Thursday 4th December**

The morning jeep safari began with a spectacular sighting of a solitary bull Gaur, bathed in golden early-morning light, quietly grazing by the roadside. After spending time observing the animal, we continued the drive, stopping at intervals for birdwatching.

We shortly encountered a dead Gaur lying beside the road. Clear signs of a violent struggle were visible. The absence of flies indicated that the kill had occurred during the previous night. Interestingly, the carcass had not yet been fed upon. However, distinct and fresh pugmarks impressed in the muddy track unmistakably confirmed that the kill had been made by a Tiger. We positioned ourselves at a safe distance from the site and waited patiently for a considerable time, hoping the Tiger might return. Unfortunately, it did not reappear. We then returned to the lodge and had breakfast at 10.00am.

Later in the morning, we went for another nature walk around the lodge premises. During the walk, we recorded several new bird species for the trip, including Asian Brown and Verditer Flycatchers. The clear highlight of the walk, however, was the sighting of the Southern Birdwing, the largest butterfly species in India, providing a memorable feature of the day's wildlife experiences.

With the expectation of a Tiger sighting, we set out for the afternoon jeep safari. Although our primary objective was to reach the Gaur kill site, we also explored other areas where a Tiger sighting might be possible. En route, we were rewarded with sightings of two Stripe-necked Mongooses and a Northern Red Muntjac. Upon reaching the location where the dead Gaur lay, we parked at a safe distance and waited in complete silence. Although there were no fresh or direct signs of the Tiger's presence, the very act of waiting was an experience in itself. The stillness of the forest, the anticipation of a hidden predator somewhere within the dense bamboo thickets, and the gradual emergence of bird calls around us created a deeply immersive atmosphere.

During this quiet wait, we were fortunate to spot the otherwise elusive Malabar Whistling Thrush, a delightful and unexpected sighting. As the safari time drew to a close, we decided to leave the area and returned to the lodge. As usual, we gathered at 8.15pm for the checklist session and dinner.

## Day 6

**Friday 5th December**

Both the morning and evening sessions today were spent on boat safaris. The highlight of the morning boat ride was the sighting of two Smooth-coated Otters on the riverbank. They were engaged in fascinating activities, such as rolling in the soil, walking along the bank, and calling continuously, offering excellent views and prolonged observation.

During the evening boat safari, we encountered a herd of Elephants close to the riverbank. The air was heavy with their presence, filled with their unmistakable scent. A tusker stood near the water's edge, while the rest of the herd remained partially concealed behind dense bamboo. As our boat approached, the Elephants clearly expressed their displeasure through trumpeting calls and forceful splashes, banging their trunks against the water.

Adding a splash of colour to the scene, a Stork-billed Kingfisher flew across to the bamboo, its brilliant blue wings and bright red bill glowing beautifully in the soft light of the setting sun.

## Day 7

**Saturday 6th December**

We assembled at the reception at 6.15am and departed for the morning jeep safari. The highlight of the drive was the sighting of two tuskers feeding peacefully together, showing no signs of competition. These young males appeared to have separated from their natal herd and were beginning their independent lives. Observing the calm association between the two was a particularly interesting behavioural insight. In addition to the Elephants, we also saw two Stripe-necked Mongooses and a large herd of Chital during the drive.

After breakfast, we visited an ancient Hindu temple, the Sri Amritheswara Temple, a magnificent twelfth-century structure built in the Hoysala architectural style. The clients enjoyed the temple's age, design, and living traditions. The temple priest kindly explained the history of the shrine, worship practices, and the intricate stone carvings, further enriching the visit. We returned to the lodge by lunchtime.

In the afternoon, we went out for another boat safari. We encountered a herd of Elephants in the water: some drinking, others swimming, while the remaining individuals grazed along the riverbank. Bird sightings included Great Cormorants, Grey Herons, and Indian Spot-billed Ducks. A special highlight was the remarkable number

of Malabar Pied Hornbills. Their loud calls echoed from the tops of *Terminalia* trees, and flocks were seen flying repeatedly across the lake, creating an unforgettable spectacle.

## Day 8

**Sunday 7th December**

A calm morning welcomed us as we entered the forest for our jeep safari. The surroundings were unusually quiet, so we focused primarily on birdwatching. Notable sightings included a Brown Fish Owl, Eurasian Hoopoe, Blue-tailed Bee-eater and a Lesser Adjutant, among other species. Familiar mammals such as Chital and Indian Giant Squirrels also made brief appearances.

In the afternoon, we chose a boat safari instead of a jeep drive. Initial sightings along the shoreline included Grey Heron, Great Egret and Little Cormorants. As we progressed further into the ride, we encountered Elephants, Gaur and a small herd of Sambar.

Additional waterbird sightings featured Ospreys, Indian Spot-billed Ducks, Eurasian Spoonbills and River Terns. Altogether, we observed nearly twenty Elephants, spread across different herds, making for a memorable final safari.

## Day 9

**Monday 8th December**

We set out for our final jeep safari at 6.30am, after tea and coffee at 6.15am. The morning began misty and cool, gradually turning warmer as the day progressed. Almost immediately we had entered the forest, we encountered a massive tusker standing calmly by the roadside and feeding on bamboo. Using his tusks, he snapped a large bamboo stem, dragged it out with his trunk, and then began to consume it slowly, bit by bit: it was an intimate and powerful sighting.

Continuing the drive, we visited the Gaur kill site, where we observed that the carcass had been dragged into nearby bushes, indicating continued predator activity. However, the Tiger itself remained out of sight. We returned to the lodge for breakfast, after which the minibus was loaded, and we departed at 11.00am, with packed lunches. A picnic stop was made at 1.30pm, and we reached Bangalore by 5.30pm.

The group gathered for the final checklist and farewell dinner at 8.00pm, bringing a memorable wildlife journey to a close.

## Day 10

**Tuesday 9th December**

Two members of the group departed early for Bangalore International Airport at 3.15am, bidding farewell with cherished memories of the diverse wildlife encounters and enriching experiences from the journey.

The remaining two clients departed at 6.00am, continuing their onward travel to Kerala, marking the conclusion of a memorable and rewarding wildlife tour.

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

E=endemic, N=near-endemic <b>English name</b>	<b>Scientific name</b>	<b>December 2025</b>							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>				2				
Indian Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>		4			4	6	6	
Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>		2	4	2	2	18	5	6
Red Spurfowl - E	<i>Galloperdix spadicea</i>				2				
Grey Junglefowl - E	<i>Gallus sonneratii</i>	1	3	1					3
Jerdon's Nightjar - N	<i>Caprimulgus atripennis</i>	2			1				
Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>							15	
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>		1		1				1
Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>			2					
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>				2		5	10	
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>						3	3	
Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>		1		2	2	2	2	2
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>			2					1
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>		1			1	1	2	1
Great Stone-curlew	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>		1				2	1	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		3	2					
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		2						
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>		3	2		7	4	6	2
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>					1		1	
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>						5		
River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>		6	3	2	15	10	5	2
Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>							1	
Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	2	4	5	2	6	8	7	
Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>	1	2	5	2	5	8	6	
Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>			3			1	1	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			10	5		17	10	15
Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>								8
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	2	2	2	1	5	5	8	
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>					1		2	2
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>		2	4		7	4	4	4
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		1	3		4	8	4	
Medium Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>			2				2	
Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea coromanda</i>	10						2	6
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		2	2		8	4	6	
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>			1					
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		1	1		3	2	4	
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	5							
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>		1		3			1	
Legge's Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus kelaarti</i>		1						
Shikra	<i>Tachyspiza badia</i>							1	1
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>								5
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>		4	8		7	5	4	
White-eyed Buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>						1		
Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>							1	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>				1	1	2	3	

E=endemic, N=near-endemic	English name	Scientific name	December 2025							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>		2	25	2			2	4
	Malabar Grey Hornbill - E	<i>Ocyceros griseus</i>			1					
	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyceros birostris</i>		2						
	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>			1					
	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	3	4	8	5	8	6	9	3
	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		1	1		2			
	Asian Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	3	5	6	4	8	7	7	
	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>	10	5		9	5	10	7	
	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Psilopogon haemacephalus</i>					2			
	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>					1			
	Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>						5		
	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>		2	3					
	Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>						1		
	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>		2					1	
	Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>				1			2	
	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	2	2	2	2		7	10	2
	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>				1		1	2	
	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>		1					2	
	Indian Jungle Crow	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>					2			
	Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>			2	6		5	4	2
	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>		2						4
	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>						2		
	Asian House Martin	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>						100		
	Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>					1		2	
	Green Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i>				1				
	Clamorous Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>		1		1				
	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>			1					
	Rufous Babbler - E	<i>Argya subrufa</i>			1					
	Jungle Babbler	<i>Argya striata</i>	5		5	8		10	10	2
	Jungle Myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>	3	3		10	15	10		4
	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>						2		
	Chestnut-tailed Starling	<i>Sturnia malabarica</i>							2	
	Malabar Starling	<i>Sturnia blythii</i>						6		
	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>				3				
	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	2	2				2		
	Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>	2				1			
	Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>				1				
	Verditer Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias thalassinus</i>				1				
	Malabar Whistling Thrush - E	<i>Myophonus horsfieldii</i>				2				
	Pied Bush Chat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>							2	
	Jerdon's Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>				1				
	Nilgiri Flowerpecker - E	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>						1		
	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>			2			2		
	Indian Silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>		1						
	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>							1	
	White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>				6				
	Forest Wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>			1					
	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>			1					
	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1		1	1				
	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>		4				6	6	

## Mammals

E=endemic	Common name	Scientific name	December 2025							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>	4	6	20	1	7	7	20	6
	Bonnet Macaque	<i>Macaca radiata</i>		10					6	9
	Bengal Sacred Langur - E	<i>Semnopithecus entellus</i>				1	10	19	10	2
	Indian Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa indica</i>	1	2	2				1	4
	Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>			1				1	
	Northern Red Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus vaginalis</i>		1				2		
	Chital	<i>Axis axis</i>	10	10	25	16	14	20	10	5
	Sambar	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>	3		1	6		4	5	2
	Gaur	<i>Bos gaurus</i>	8	10	2	10		8	6	5
	Eurasian Wild Pig	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	9	2	1	5			7	
	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>		1						
	Stripe-necked Mongoose	<i>Urva vitticolla</i>				2	2	2		
	Indian Grey Mongoose	<i>Urva edwardsii</i>			1					
	Smooth-coated Otter	<i>Lutrogale perspicillata</i>			1		2			

## Reptiles

	Common name	Scientific name	December 2025							
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Oriental Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>			✓					
	Common House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>			✓					
	Bengal Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>		✓				✓		
	Indian Mud Turtle	<i>Lissemys punctata</i>			✓					
	Marsh Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>			✓					

## Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name
Southern Birdwing	<i>Troides minos</i>
Striped Tiger	<i>Danaus genutia</i>
Common Sailor	<i>Neptis hylas</i>
Common Lascar	<i>Pantoporia hordonia</i>
Chocolate Pansy	<i>Junonia iphita</i>

## Selected plants

Common name	Scientific name
Teak	<i>Tectona grandis</i>
Crocodile Bark Tree	<i>Terminalia elliptica</i>
Flowering Murdah	<i>Terminalia paniculata</i>
Indian Kino	<i>Pterocarpus marsupium</i>
Male Bamboo	<i>Dendrocalamus strictus</i>
Thorny Bamboo	<i>Bambusa arundinaceae</i>