

# Realm of the Black Panther

Naturetrek Tour Report

8th – 20th February 2026

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Leopards



Dholes



Leopard



Leopards

Tour report by Akarsh Suresh



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Tour participants: Akarsh Suresh (leader) with five Naturetrek clients

## Summary

This journey through Bhadra, Bandipur, Mudumalai, and Wayanad proved to be an extraordinary wildlife experience, highlighted by multiple Leopard sightings, including the elusive black panther, and a rare mating pair. The forests consistently delivered thrilling encounters, from intimate moments with Dholes and their pups, to herds of Asiatic Elephants, and Gaur.

The tour offered exceptional birding, featuring species such as Malabar Trogon, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, White-bellied Woodpecker and several raptors and owls, showcasing the incredible biodiversity of the Western Ghats.

Blending scenic landscapes, peaceful forest walks, and unforgettable wildlife moments, the journey concluded as a deeply rewarding and memorable experience, leaving everyone with lasting connections to the wild.

### Day 1

**Sunday 8th February**

Clients departed from London Heathrow on a lunchtime flight to India.

### Day 2

**Monday 9th February**

Our journey began with an early morning arrival at Bengaluru Airport, followed by a relaxed breakfast at The Taj hotel in Yeshwantpur. Energised and ready, we set off toward the lush landscapes of Bhadra Tiger Reserve.

River Tern Lodge welcomed us with warmth, scenic views, and an excellent lunch: perfect preparation for our first game drive. The forest wasted no time in revealing its magic, and within the first five minutes, we were stunned by an extraordinary start, sighting a black panther along with three 'regular' Leopards, setting an incredible tone for the tour!

We returned to the lodge for hot coffee and tea, followed by our first checklist session. A delicious dinner rounded off the evening, and we retired for the night, filled with excitement for the days ahead.

### Day 3

**Tuesday 10th February**

With a refreshing cup of morning coffee in hand, we set off for our safari, and the forest delivered yet again. We encountered three Leopards, including an incredible sighting of a mating pair right along the riverbank: a rare and captivating moment to witness in the wild. We spent unforgettable time observing the mating pair, fully immersed in the moment as the forest came alive around us, making an already extraordinary sighting even more special.

The experience was further enriched by the surrounding birdlife, with sightings of Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Little Ringed Plover, Small Pratincole and Black-hooded Oriole adding to the scene.

Still buzzing with excitement, we returned to the lodge for our checklist session and a hearty dinner. With hearts full and cameras loaded, we called it a night, eagerly looking forward to another day in Bhadra.

**Day 4****Wednesday 11th February**

With a warm cup of coffee easing us into the morning, we set off for our drive, and the forest greeted us instantly. It turned out to be a fantastic day for owls, with wonderful sightings of the Brown Fish Owl and Jungle Owlet. The excitement continued with a majestic Bonelli's Eagle and the impressive White-bellied Woodpecker, adding to an already rewarding morning.

We returned to the lodge for coffee, wrapped up the day with our checklist session, and enjoyed a hearty dinner before heading to bed: it had been another fulfilling day in the realm of Bhadra.

**Day 5****Thursday 12th February**

Our final drive in Bhadra rewarded us with some excellent bird sightings, including Black-necked Stork, Black-winged Kite, Orange-headed Thrush and Malabar Pied Hornbill. We were also treated to the sight of a large herd of Asian Elephants, bringing a fitting close to our time here.

After returning to the lodge, we enjoyed a hearty breakfast, before checking out and beginning our journey towards Bandipur. En route, we stopped at a wonderful seafood restaurant to relish the regional cuisine. On arrival at Bandipur Safari Lodge, we checked in, did our checklists and enjoyed dinner, ready to begin the next chapter of the journey.

**Day 6****Friday 13th February**

In the morning, we ventured out for our first safari in Bandipur. The forest was lush, and we were immediately treated to the sights of the Western Ghats. We sighted several bird species, including Crested Serpent Eagle and Changeable Hawk-Eagle. Mammal activity was also high, with Chital and Sambar frequently seen browsing near the tracks. After a productive morning, we returned to the lodge for lunch and a brief rest. In the afternoon, we headed back into the reserve, where we encountered a large tusker Elephant and several troops of Bonnet Macaques. We concluded the day with our evening checklist and a pleasant dinner.

**Day 7****Saturday 14th February**

We set off towards the Mudumalai safari point, and the day began on a rather amusing note. Our journey was briefly halted by a "vegetable thief": a lone Elephant calmly blocking the road, causing quite a traffic jam until it eventually decided to move on.

Once we began our safari, the forest offered a rewarding mix of sightings. We recorded a variety of birdlife, including Heart-spotted and Yellow-crowned Woodpeckers, and Bronze-winged Jacana, along with sightings of Indian Palm Squirrel and herds of Elephants moving gracefully through the landscape.

The highlight of the day, however, was an unforgettable encounter with a pack of Dholes and their pups. Over time, they grew comfortable with our presence, allowing us quietly to move alongside them, almost as if our jeep had become a part of the pack. It was a rare and intimate wildlife experience which left everyone in awe. We concluded the day with our checklist session, followed by dinner, before calling it a night.

## Day 8

## Sunday 15th February

The day proved to be a rewarding one, with a fine mix of bird and mammal sightings. Highlights included Indian and White-rumped Vultures, Indian Scops Owl, Spotted Owlet, and the tiny yet striking Speckled Piculet.

Adding to the experience, we enjoyed wonderful sightings of a herd of Gaur and Elephants gathered around a waterhole, creating a classic and serene jungle scene.

## Day 9

## Monday 16th February

On our final morning safari, the forest was filled with anticipation as we heard a series of alarm calls, indicating a Tiger was close by. Despite being close, the elusive cat chose to remain hidden, adding a sense of intrigue to the morning. It turned out to be a rewarding session for raptors, with sightings of Crested Honey Buzzard, and both Booted and Tawny Eagles.

After returning to the lodge, we enjoyed brunch, and checked out of Bandipur, and those heading home drove off towards the airport. They safely flew home early the next day.

Those taking the post-tour extension began their journey towards Fringe Ford, Wayanad. Nestled away from the bustle of civilisation, the property offered a serene and refreshing change of landscape.

In the evening, we set out for a relaxed walk around the property, where we spotted birds such as Red-breasted Flycatcher, Little Spiderhunter and the striking Asian Fairy-bluebird. We then returned for our checklist session, had a delicious dinner, and turned in.

## Post tour-extension

## Day 1

## Tuesday 17th February

We began the day early with a cup of coffee, before setting out on a hike to catch the sunrise. The effort was well rewarded with a breathtaking view as the first light spread across the landscape. Along the way, we were delighted to spot an endemic Nilgiri Langur, adding to the charm of the morning.

After a relaxed afternoon, we headed out for an evening walk around the property. The forest came alive with Chital alarm calls, hinting at predator movement nearby, while the highlight of the walk was watching an Indian Giant Flying Squirrel gracefully glide between trees in the fading light.

## Day 2

## Wednesday 18th February

We spent the day exploring the surroundings, with both morning and evening walks around the property, soaking up the rich biodiversity of the region. A visit to a nearby waterfall added to the charm of the day, offering a refreshing and scenic break amid nature.

The birding was excellent, with sightings of Malabar Trogon, Painted Spurfowl, Oriental Imperial Pigeon, Rufous-bellied Eagle and Chestnut-headed Bee-eater. The highlight, however, was an incredible sighting of the Lion-tailed Macaque, a truly special and beautiful endemic primate of the Western Ghats. We wrapped up the day with our checklist session, followed by a delicious dinner, before calling it a night.

### Day 3

### Thursday 19th February

After breakfast, we departed early from Fringe Ford and reached Bengaluru by late afternoon, bringing to a close an enriching journey through the culture, wildlife, and biodiverse forests of the Western Ghats. The day concluded with a comforting dinner and a restful night's sleep, offering time to reflect on the incredible experiences and lasting memories gathered throughout the journey.

### Day 4

### Friday 20th February

We started early for Bengaluru Airport, marking the end of an incredible journey. As clients boarded their flight to London, they carried more than just photographs and checklists: they took with them lasting memories, unforgettable wildlife encounters, and a deeper connection to the wild that will remain with them forever.

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## Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic		February 2026									
Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	Cotton Pygmy Goose						✓		✓		
	Indian Spot-billed Duck		✓	✓			✓		✓		
	Indian Peafowl	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Painted Spurfowl - E										✓
	Grey Junglefowl - E		✓	✓	✓	✓					
	Little Grebe					✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Greater Coucal					✓	✓		✓		
	Asian Koel			✓					✓		
	Common Hawk-Cuckoo					✓					✓
	Spotted Dove	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Oriental Turtle Dove				✓				✓		
	Eurasian Collared Dove			✓							
	Rock Dove	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Common Emerald Dove									✓	
	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon					✓	✓	✓		✓	
	Mountain Imperial Pigeon										✓
	Common Moorhen					✓					
	White-breasted Waterhen		✓	✓							
	Great Stone-curlew		✓								
	Little Ringed Plover		✓								
	Red-wattled Lapwing	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
	Bronze-winged Jacana					✓					
	Common Sandpiper		✓	✓			✓				
	Small Pratincole		✓								
	River Tern	✓	✓	✓	✓						
	Brown-headed Gull		✓								
	Asian Openbill	✓									
	Lesser Adjutant		✓								

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic		February 2026									
Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Black-necked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>				✓						
Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>		✓	✓							
Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓	✓							
Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Little Heron	<i>Butorides atricapilla</i>			✓							
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓	✓							
Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea coromanda</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>					✓					
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓							
Jungle Nightjar - N	<i>Caprimulgus indicus</i>				H						
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>		✓	✓				✓			
Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>							✓			
Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>			✓		✓					
Indian Scops Owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>							✓	✓		
Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>			✓							
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			✓							
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>				✓						
Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>					✓			✓		
Red-headed Vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>								✓		
White-rumped Vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>							✓			
Indian Vulture - N	<i>Gyps indicus</i>							✓			
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>						✓				
Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malaiensis</i>									✓	✓
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>								✓		
Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>								✓		
Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>			✓							
Shikra	<i>Tachypiza badia</i>			✓							

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic		February 2026									
Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>			✓							
White-eyed Buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>						✓		✓		✓
Malabar Trogon - N	<i>Harpactes fasciatus</i>										✓
Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓		
Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyceros birostris</i>					✓					
Malabar Grey Hornbill - E	<i>Ocyceros griseus</i>									✓	✓
Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>		✓	✓	✓						
Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Blue-bearded Bee-eater	<i>Nyctornis athertoni</i>								✓		
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>										✓
Asian Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		✓	✓							
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Malabar Barbet - E	<i>Psilopogon malabaricus</i>										✓
Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Psilopogon haemacephalus</i>							✓			
Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Psilopogon zeylanicus</i>					✓			✓		✓
White-cheeked Barbet - E	<i>Psilopogon viridis</i>								✓	✓	✓
Speckled Piculet	<i>Picumnus innominatus</i>							✓			
Heart-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Hemicircus canente</i>					✓					
Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>					✓	✓	✓			
Lesser Yellownappe	<i>Picus chlorolophus</i>							✓			
Streak-throated Woodpecker	<i>Picus xanthopygaeus</i>						✓				
White-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus javensis</i>			✓		✓					
Greater Flameback	<i>Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓
Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Leiopicus mahrattensis</i>					✓	✓				
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	✓					✓				
Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Blue-winged Parakeet	<i>Psittacula columboides</i>						✓	✓			
Vernal Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus vernalis</i>							H			✓

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic		February 2026									
Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓			
Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>					✓				✓	
Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>			✓							
Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>		✓							✓	✓
White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>						✓				
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>					✓	✓	✓			
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>						✓				
Bay-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius vittatus</i>				✓	✓					
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>						✓				
Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>										✓
Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
White-bellied Treepie - E	<i>Dendrocitta leucogastra</i>				✓					✓	✓
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	✓			✓						
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	✓						✓		✓	✓
Indian Bush Lark	<i>Plocealauda erythroptera</i>		✓								
Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>		✓								
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			✓	✓						
Green Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i>									✓	
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>			✓							
Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>			✓					✓	✓	✓
Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Yellow-browed Bulbul - N	<i>Acritillas indica</i>			✓							
Square-tailed Bulbul - N	<i>Hypsipetes ganeesa</i>								✓	✓	✓
Rufous Babbler - E	<i>Argya subrufa</i>										✓
Jungle Babbler	<i>Argya striata</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓			
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>						✓			✓	✓
Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Southern Hill Myna - N	<i>Gracula indica</i>									✓	
Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>	✓	✓								

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic		February 2026									
Common name	Scientific name	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓			
Chestnut-tailed Starling	<i>Sturnia malabarica</i>					✓		✓			
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			
Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Geokichla citrina</i>				✓		✓	✓			
Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>					✓	✓				
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>						✓				
Malabar Whistling Thrush - E	<i>Myophonus horsfieldii</i>									✓	✓
Red-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>			✓	✓				✓	✓	✓
Blue-capped Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola cinclorhyncha</i>										✓
Thick-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Pachyglossa agilis</i>			✓							
Little Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>								✓	✓	✓
Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>										✓
Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>	✓						✓			
Jerdon's Leafbird - N	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>					✓				✓	✓
Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>									✓	✓
Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>								✓	✓	✓
Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>				✓						
Black-throated Munia - N	<i>Lonchura kelaarti</i>		✓								
Tricoloured Munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>		✓								
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓		
White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>				✓						

### Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026									
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Bonnet Macaque	<i>Macaca radiata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lion-tailed Macaque	<i>Macaca silenus</i>										✓
Bengal Sacred Langur	<i>Semnopithecus entellus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Nilgiri Langur	<i>Semnopithecus johnii</i>										✓
Indian Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>				✓						
Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>		✓								
Jungle Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus tristriatus</i>					✓					
Indian Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa indica</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Indian Giant Flying Squirrel	<i>Petaurista philippensis</i>									✓	
Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus medius</i>			✓							
Sloth Bear	<i>Melursus ursinus</i>			✓							
Dhole	<i>Cuon alpinus</i>							✓			
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	✓	✓								
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	✓									
Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Urva smithii</i>			✓	✓			✓			
Stripe-necked Mongoose	<i>Urva vitticollis</i>								✓		
Gaur	<i>Bos gaurus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chital	<i>Axis axis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sambar	<i>Rusa unicorn</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Northern Red Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus vaginalis</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Eurasian Wild Pig	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓					

### Reptiles

Common name	Scientific name	February 2026									
		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Marsh Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>			✓							
Indian Black Turtle	<i>Melanochelys trijuga</i>					✓	✓	✓			
Bengal Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>				✓	✓					
House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓			