

## Tour Report Wild Karnataka 06 – 14 January 2025

Bengal tiger



Leopard



Jungle cat



Osprey



Compiled by Varun Devaraj

**Day 1:****Thursday 6 January 2025**

The guests arrived on British Airways, flight BA-119, from Heathrow, London to Bengaluru at 5:00 am India Time. Four guests managed to catch the flight from London, but two missed their flight. We drove to the Taj Yeshwantpur at 6:00 am and arrived at the hotel for breakfast at 6:45 am. We went straight to breakfast and then headed for Bandipur. We arrived at the lodge at 11:30 am and had to wait for our rooms.

At 12:30 pm we checked in and took a short break before lunch. We met for lunch at 01:30 pm. After lunch, we got into our jeep for our first safari. We entered the park at 3:30 pm and drove to a hilly area with many water bodies since it was blisteringly hot. After driving around for the better part of an hour, one of the other Jeeps informed us that they had seen a tiger near a water body. We waited for over half an hour but had no luck. We decided to drive around and saw a couple of elephants and herds of spotted deer.

At about 5:00 pm, we received information that a male tiger had been spotted a short distance away. Upon getting there, we realised we were late once again. As we resigned ourselves to the thought that maybe today wasn't our day, we decided to do our last loop. At last, a kilometre away we saw a couple of Jeeps waiting around a waterhole. We decided to try our luck one last time. Ten minutes into our wait we saw some ripples in the water, which were unmistakably made by a tiger. Although we didn't have a view, we knew the tiger was there. After an agonising five minutes, the tiger slowly walked across the entire pond. He was a magnificent male, who was the dominant tiger in the area. The guests were over the moon. It was the first tiger sighting for two of the guests. We couldn't believe our luck. Once the tiger vanished into the undergrowth, we made our way back to the lodge as the light was fading. A fantastic first day of our Wild Karnataka Tour.

**Day 2:****Friday 7 January 2025**

This morning we entered the park at 6:30 am. It was still relatively dark and we were the first Jeep to enter. There was a sense of anticipation after yesterday evening's tiger sighting. We looked around all the frequented water bodies with no luck. It turned out to be a quiet morning. The bird watching was good with a view of a crested serpent eagle, white-bellied woodpeckers and white-eyed buzzards. Just when we had given up all hope of seeing a cat, we noticed a small, brown animal on the road. On going closer we realised it was a jungle cat. A notoriously difficult animal to see. We watched as the cat attempted to catch field mice and was eventually successful in catching one. A fantastic way to end our morning drive.

In the evening, the two guests who had missed their flights joined us and we were a full group of 6. We drove into the park at 3:20 pm and checked all the water holes as one of the other Jeeps had seen a tiger in the morning. An hour into our drive, we received information that one of the Jeeps had seen a tigress with four cubs. This was fantastic news and we drove straight to the water hole where she was last seen and waited for an hour in anticipation. Unfortunately, it was not our day and we decided to drive around and check a few areas before leaving the park. With dusk soon approaching, we decided to head back and try again tomorrow.

**Day 3:****Saturday 8 January 2025**

Today, we started early from the camp and were, yet again, the first Jeep to enter. It was still dark when we entered and we had to use our headlights for the first ten minutes. We drove our usual route and checked all water bodies in the hope of finding the tigress with the four cubs. An hour into the drive with no sign of the cats, we decided to check some less frequented areas of the park. It was an overcast morning overall. We did come across some tiger pug marks and followed them for a while with no luck.

Halfway through our drive, we were informed that one of the Jeeps had seen a tiger. We drove to the area and realised that we were five minutes late. We waited around for ten minutes and then decided to check the parallel road. On arriving there, we saw a few other Jeeps and decided to wait. After about ten minutes,

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a beautiful male tiger walked out of the bushes to our left and crossed the road ahead of us. The tiger was perfect and the coat shined a bright orange. The guests had a good look and took some photos. It was the first tiger sighting ever for one of the guests. Although the sighting was brief, it was well worth the wait. After the tiger vanished into the dense undercover, we decided to check a few more areas and drove back to camp for breakfast.

In the evening, the weather seemed a bit muggy and there were a few clouds around. The forest was still and there was barely any bird activity except for a crested serpent eagle with a lizard kill and a few W. T. kingfishers. We drove around all the water holes and waited in some areas frequented by the cats. But it turned out to be a very quiet drive. None of the other vehicles spotted any cats either. With the light fading, we decided to drive back to the camp for dinner.

#### **Day 4:**

**Sunday 9 January 2025**

This was our last morning in Bandipur and the focus was once again on trying to see some cats. We drove to the area with three water bodies close to each other and searched the area. It was where the tigress with the four cubs was last seen. We spent the better part of the hour waiting around and listening for deer calls with no luck.

Our driver suggested we check the area on the other side of the highway near the dam for any sign of a leopard. We drove there and looked around. As we came towards the dam, a herd of six elephants trumpeted and charged across the road. We soon realised that they were being driven out by some people in the nearby village. The commotion was intense but brief, as they disappeared into the bush. We drove on and after we crossed the dam we came across a small water hole and watched a pair of spot-billed ducks. We spent the better part of 15 minutes photographing them.

Just as we were about to leave, a huge male leopard appeared on the road ahead of us and walked towards the Jeep. It seemed not to be disturbed by our presence. The leopard paused briefly a few feet away from us as we backed up slowly. The leopard followed us for a good 100 metres and slowly walked down towards the water. The guests got some amazing views and some nice photos. The leopard appeared once again and dashed across the road into dense cover. We could not believe our luck. We waited around for some time and slowly made our way back to the area with the three water bodies. We spent some time looking for the tigress, but no luck. We decided to drive back to the camp for breakfast.

After breakfast, we packed our bags and left Bandipur for our camp in Wayanad. Fringe Ford, a beautiful, private estate was three hours by road and we arrived in time for a late lunch. The camp was very remote and we had to get into 4x4 vehicles to cross the last ten kilometres. After lunch, we rested for a couple of hours. At around 4:30 pm, we met our local guide and set off for a short walk. The estate grounds were forested and several streams cut across the property. We saw a few birds and came across a lot of tiger and leopard markings and scat. It was an exciting end to our day and we wound up hitting the bed early.

#### **Day 5:**

**Monday 10 January 2025**

The next morning after an early breakfast at 7:30 am, we set off for a long walk to a nearby waterfall. We traced our way through the dense forest and once again came across fresh tiger markings and scat from the night before. There were a lot of birds but the thick forest made it very difficult to see them. We walked around 3 kilometres to the waterfall and spent some time sitting around the falls. It was a beautiful sight.

We then decided to walk back towards camp and looked for the lion-tailed macaque and Nilgiris langur. Our guide informed us that the presence of the tiger may have driven them deeper into the jungle. With no luck on the primate front, we decided to head back to camp for lunch. After an early lunch, we rested for a couple of hours.

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At 4:30 pm we set off towards a couple of water holes that were frequented by elephants. It was a short walk after a dirt road. We could hear a lot of birds but found it hard to see them. We walked for a couple of kilometres and as we were losing light we decided to get back to the camp. We had an early dinner and exchanged stories around a campfire.

**Day 6:**

**Tuesday 11 January 2025**

The next morning after an early breakfast at 7:30 am we bid farewell to our lovely hosts and drove towards Kabini Jungle Lodge. We arrived at 10:30 am and we were early for our check-in, so we waited at the bar. At 11:30 am we checked into our rooms and met for an early lunch at 01:00 pm. After a short siesta, we got into our Jeep at 03:00 pm for our first drive into Nagarholle National Park. We were in Zone A, an area of mainly forests with several water holes. We drove around for the entirety of an hour and saw herds of spotted deer, a few sambar and several birds. The highlight was a lovely golden oriole in perfect light. We received news that a tiger had been spotted near a water hole and drove there. Upon arriving there, we realised we were too late. We waited around and checked the surrounding areas with no luck. As the light was fading we decided to head back to the camp for an early dinner.

**Day 7:**

**Wednesday 12 January 2025**

This morning we were in Zone B, an area along the backwaters of the Kabini reservoir. Our aim this morning was to look for elephants. We drove around covering all the familiar roads frequented by elephants, without any luck. After the morning mist lifted we checked some of the hilly outcrops for any sign of leopard movement, but the forest seemed to be quiet. Just as we were about to leave the park, we came across a female elephant with a young calf. Running out of time we decided to head back for breakfast.

This evening, we were back in Zone A, and just as we were entering the park we came across a few Jeeps looking intently into a set of trees. We waited for some time as we couldn't see anything and then finally our driver spotted a leopard well camouflaged high up in a tree. We spent some time trying to get good views of the leopard and after all the guests managed to see it, we decided to drive on to see what else was in store for us. After looking around for a while, we finally came across this leopard sitting low on a tree. We waited around for some time hoping that it would come down. As we waited, we realised that the leopard seemed to be really nervous and quickly jumped up a couple of branches. While we watched, we heard some rustling in the bushes below the trees. Initially, we thought they were elephants but on waiting for a couple of minutes we realised a tiger was hiding in the bush. The tiger looked up at the leopard and finally decided to come out of the thicket and grace us with his presence. It turned out to be a young male who was seldom seen. A fantastic end to our first full day in Kabini.

**Day 8:**

**Thursday 13 January 2025**

This morning we were back in Zone B. We decided to check an area called the Old MM road which is an unused highway from the 1990's. The area had recently seen a lot of tiger activity. We combed the area, carefully checking all the water holes and as the day was warming up, we waited near a couple of water holes watching the bird life. We saw white-bellied woodpeckers, an Asian paradise flycatcher and a host of other stunning birds. As it was approaching the mid-point of our safari and with no luck with the cats, we decided to go look for elephants. We searched the backwaters and apart from deer and a few species of birds, there was no sign of elephants. With the day warming up and time running out, we decided to head back to camp for breakfast.

This evening we decided to change things up and do a boat ride on the Kabini reservoir. We were on the lookout for smooth-coated otters. The first hour was really warm but we did see an osprey, a grey-headed fish eagle and a host of other waders. As we approached the narrow stretch of the river, the mammal activity picked up and we saw herds of chital, sambar, and a couple of elephants who'd come down to the water to

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beat the day's heat. We looked everywhere but had no luck with the otters. As the light was fading, we decided to head back to camp for our last dinner.

**Day 9:**

**Friday 14 January 2025**

This morning was our last safari in Nagarhole and we were back in Zone A. The guests wanted to see elephants and we checked all the water holes, although the day was warm there was no sign of any elephants. We did come across a couple of stripe-necked mongoose (a first for our trip). As we drove along, we came across a huge male elephant with medium-sized tusks. The guests were really thrilled as we had finally seen a tusker. The rest of the drive was fairly uneventful, so we headed back to camp for an early breakfast, packed our bags, checked out and bid farewell to the staff at Jungle Lodges, Kabini.

We drove to our hotel in Bengaluru for an early dinner as the guests had to catch an early morning flight back to Heathrow. A brilliant holiday with some stunning mammal and bird life.

Images by Cliff Buckton

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# Checklist for Wild Karnataka

Checklist compiled by Cliff Buckton



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9
	<b>BIRDS</b>										
1	Grey francolin	<i>Ortygornis pondicerianus</i>			✓						
2	Red spurfowl	<i>Galloperdix spadicea</i>		✓							
3	Painted bush quail	<i>Perdica erythrorhyncha</i>		✓					✓	✓	
4	Grey jungle fowl	<i>Gallus sonneratii</i>									
5	Indian peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
6	Indian spot billed duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>		✓		✓			✓	✓	
7	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓		✓					
8	Painted stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>								✓	
9	Asian openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>								✓	
10	Wolly-necked stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>				✓			✓	✓	
11	Red-naped Ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>						✓		✓	
12	Indian pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
13	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>							✓		
14	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓	
15	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>							✓	✓	
16	Intermediate egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>				✓		✓		✓	
17	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	✓					✓	
18	Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>							✓		
19	Little cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>	✓		✓				✓		
20	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				✓					
21	Black kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓			✓					
22	Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>			✓			✓			
23	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>								✓	
24	Red-headed vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>							✓		
25	Crested serpent eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓		

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26	White-eyed buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>		✓							
27	White-breasted waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>		✓		✓					
28	Yellow-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>	✓								
29	Red-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
30	Little-ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>							✓		
31	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>							✓		
32	Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>							✓		
33	Green sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>								✓	
34	River tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>								✓	
35	Small pratincole	<i>Glareola lactea</i>								✓	
36	Mountain imperial pigeon	<i>Ducula badia</i>							✓		
37	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>				✓					✓
38	Spotted dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
39	Yellow-footed green pigeon	<i>Treron phonyceptaurus</i>		✓							
40	Vernal hanging parrot	<i>Loriculus vernalis</i>					✓	✓			
41	Rose-ringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
42	Plum-headed parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>		✓	✓	✓					
43	Common hawk cuckoo	<i>Hierococyx varius</i>							✓		
44	Asian koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>						✓			
45	Lesser coucal	<i>Centropus bengalensis</i>							✓		
46	Spotted owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>				✓					
47	Brown fish owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>							✓		
48	Common hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓		
49	White-throated kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
50	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓							✓	
51	Green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	✓	✓					✓	✓	
52	Blue-bearded bee-eater	<i>Nyctornis athertoni</i>					✓				
53	Chestnut-headed bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>	✓		✓		✓				
54	Indian grey hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>							✓		
55	Malabar pied hornbill	<i>Anthracosceros coronatus</i>							✓	✓	
56	White-cheeked barbet	<i>Psilopogon viridis</i>				✓	✓		✓		
57	Malabar barbet	<i>Psilopogon malabaricus</i>				✓					
58	White-bellied woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus javensis</i>		✓							
59	Common goldenback	<i>Dinopium javanense</i>		✓				✓	✓		
60	White-naped woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>			✓						

61	Brown-capped pygmy woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos nanus</i>									✓	
62	Large cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>								✓		
63	Orange minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>					✓					
64	Long-tailed shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>		✓		✓						
65	Greater racket-tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
66	Ashy drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
67	White-bellied drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>		✓								
68	Indian golden oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓	
69	Black-hooded oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>			✓				✓	✓	✓	
70	White-browed fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>		✓								
71	Asian paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>							✓	✓		
72	Indian jungle crow	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
73	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	✓									
74	Red-whiskered bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>		✓			✓	✓				
75	Red-vented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>		✓	✓	✓						
76	Yellow-browed bulbul	<i>Acritillas indica</i>					✓					
77	Black bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>						✓				
78	Greenish warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>		✓	✓							
79	Rufous babbler	<i>Argya subrufa</i>					✓					
80	Jungle babbler	<i>Turdoides striata</i>		✓				✓	✓			
81	Yellow-eyed babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>		✓								
82	Indian nuthatch	<i>Sitta castanea</i>					✓					
83	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
84	Blyth starling	<i>Sturnia blythii</i>			✓					✓		
85	Brahminy starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>		✓								
86	Oriental magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>							✓	✓		
87	Orange-headed thrush	<i>Geokichla citrina</i>									✓	
88	Pied bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>			✓	✓						
89	Asian fairy bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>					✓					
90	Golden-fronted leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>					✓					
91	Purple sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>		✓	✓							
92	Crimson-backed sunbird	<i>Leptocoma minima</i>				✓	✓					
93	Purple-rumped sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>			✓				✓	✓	✓	
94	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	

95	Forest wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>						✓			
96	White-browed wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>					✓		✓	✓	
97	Common rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>					✓				
98	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			✓						
	<b>MAMMALS</b>										
1	Indian leopard	<i>Panthera pardus fusca</i>					✓		✓	✓	
2	Royal bengal tiger	<i>Panthera tigris tigris</i>	✓		✓				✓	✓	
3	Jungle cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>		✓						✓	
4	Spotted deer	<i>Axis axis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Sambar deer	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
6	Gaur	<i>Bos gaurus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			
7	Indian muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>									✓
8	Asian elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>						✓	✓	✓	
10	Malabar giant squirrel	<i>Ratufa indica</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
11	Indian Grey mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>							✓		
12	Striped-neck mongoose	<i>Urva vitticollis</i>			✓	✓				✓	✓
13	Ruddy mongoose	<i>Urva smithii</i>		✓							
14	Northern plains gray langur	<i>Semnopithecus entellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
15	Bonnet macaque	<i>Macaca radiata</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
16	Indian flying lizard	<i>Draco dussumieri</i>						✓			
17	Indian monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>							✓		
18	Black pond turtle	<i>Melanochelys trijuga</i>								✓	