

Tour Report

India – Nagarhole's Tigers, Wild Dogs & Leopards

28 March – 4 April 2022

Tiger



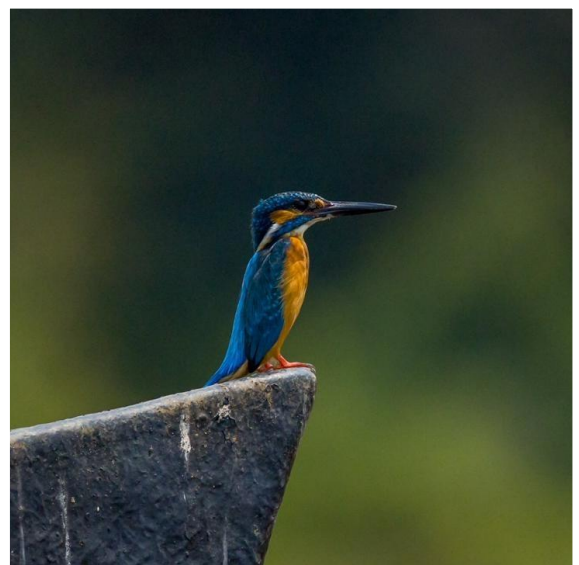
Indian wild dog



Asian elephant



Common kingfisher



Compiled by Varun Devaraj
Images by Richard Denyer

Day 1: Monday 28 March 2022

After our flight arrived we were transferred to the Goldfinch resort for breakfast, half an hour from the airport. After a hearty breakfast we drove south to Kabini River Lodge. With a comfort stop en route we arrived at 13:30, just in time for a quick lunch after the guests were checked into their rooms.

Our first safari was into zone B, one of two zones in the park, a scenic area along the northern shores of the Kabini river. Half an hour into our drive, we came across Asiatic elephants. Two tuskers play fighting in the water near a herd of eight elephants. After spending some time with the elephants, we continued onward to check a couple of bays that are great areas for aquatic birds. As we got there, we saw a ruddy mongoose scurrying away, just in time for the guests to get a quick look. At a bay called President's Corner, we watched six smooth-coated otters as they bobbed in and out of the water. Appearing on a mud island fairly close to where we were parked. On this first evening, we also saw the stunning stripe-necked mongoose, a large rufous coloured mongoose with a black stripe running along its neck. The bird life this evening was spectacular. The guests had good views of the grey-headed fish eagle, Brahminy kite, woolly-necked stork and many more. A great start to the week in Kabini.

Day 2: Tuesday 29 March 2022

On our first morning safari, we drove to zone A, leaving camp at 06:00. The morning was slightly overcast. The previous evening, we were told that a tiger had been seen at one of the watering holes in the southeast corner of the park. We drove there in the hope that we may be able to pick up on some alarm calls or pug marks. We stopped at certain junctions that were frequented by tigers and watched some spectacular bird species. The guests enjoyed good views of white-bellied woodpecker, lesser goldenback and streak-throated woodpecker.

The Indian giant squirrel was another stunning mammal that we spent time watching, as it bounded from one branch to another. We drove to one of the watering holes nearby, only to be told by people in other vehicle that we had missed the tiger by a mere five minutes. The tiger had stopped for a drink and disappeared into the surrounding thicket. Our only consolation was that we had an entire week ahead of us. We watched an osprey as we waited but had no luck with the tiger. The rest of our morning we spent time with herds of spotted deer and troupes of black footed langur.

On our evening safari we were back in zone A. We decided to drive to the north-western part of the park, the area where the famed black leopard had been last seen. We drove along the Barballe stream and scanned in the evergreen patches on the banks. Having spent well over an hour in the area, we decide to head back to the south-western corner, where we had missed seeing the tiger earlier in the day.

We headed to a water hole where we had received information from another vehicle that a tiger was sitting in the water, cooling off in the afternoon heat. When we arrived, there were a couple of vehicles watching a magnificent male tiger. This was our first tiger of the tour and one of the guests had never seen a tiger before. A moment to cherish. After a couple of minutes, the tiger walked over the bund at the edge of the water hole and disappeared into the undergrowth. We decided to wait and see how the situation played out. After a few minutes a tigress entered the water hole and started calling towards the male. This was a mating pair. The tigress continued to call and eventually decided to join the male in the undergrowth. As it was approaching dusk, we heard the spine tingling sounds of the mating pair. We had to leave them there as it was time for us to leave the park. A fantastic end to the evening.

Day 3: Wednesday 30 March 2022

On our second morning drive, we drove to the backwaters in zone B. We drove towards the nearest bay passing a few tribal hamlets on the periphery of the park. We came across our first herd of gaur. The herd consisted of a few female gaur and calves, that were grazing on fresh grass growing all along the banks of the Kabini river and surrounds. A lone makhna (tuskless Asiatic elephant) was also grazing near the herd.

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As we were spending time with the gaur, we received some information that a male tiger had been seen in one of bays. We drove to President's Corner a scenic bay teeming with wildlife and saw a magnificent male tiger sitting on the far bank amidst some bamboo clumps. Although it was at a distance it was quite an evocative sight. The morning was also good on the bird watching front. Great views of a grey headed fish eagle, open-billed storks, streak-throated woodpecker and great cormorants.

In the evening we left the camp at 15:30 and drove into zone A, through the elephant camp at Balle. The quickest route to the north-western part of the park, the domain of the black leopard. The plan was to drive along the Barballe stream heading in a north-western direction which seemed like ideal leopard habitat. Boulder strewn and patches of evergreen woodland.

Along the way we came across a herd of three sambar deer. The deer seemed to be intently looking into the lantana thicket along a dry stream. We waited to see if this would lead to anything. About five minutes later, the sambar gave out a loud trumpet, the classic sambar alarm call and stomped its fore legs. A clear indication of the presence of a carnivore. The herd then shot off in the opposite direction. A few seconds had passed and a young tigress slowly appeared through the thicket and crouched down on seeing our vehicle. The guests managed to get a brief glimpse of the tigress. On seeing another vehicle, she disappeared into the undergrowth. We waited for a little longer, but the tigress did not reappear.

After about 20 minutes we continued our search for the elusive black leopard. No luck on the leopard front but it was great to see the behaviour of the sambar and the tigress. Just as we were leaving the park it started to rain and we quickly drove back to camp to avoid the deluge.

Day 4: Thursday 31 March 2022

This morning we tried a different approach and decided to drive through the south-eastern corner of zone B. The area has more open scrubland and adjoins the surrounding villages, increasing the possibility of seeing leopards and dhole. Half an hour into our drive, we came across a magnificent tusker, who obliged us with some nice viewing. The rest of the drive the guests enjoyed some decent birdlife. Some of the species we saw were, blue-faced malkoha, green imperial pigeon, flock of the stunning lesser hill myna and a crested serpent eagle.

In the evening we were back in zone A. The drive started off really quiet, as was expected for this time of the afternoon. We drove towards two waterholes in the south-eastern part of zone A, as a pair of dhole were seen in the area earlier in the day. We spent some time looking for them with no luck. We then drove across the park to the north-western side where there was news of two leopards being seen in the morning. We did hear alarm calls near the Barballe stream but did not manage a view of the leopards. As it was nearing dusk, we drove back to camp.

Day 5: Friday 1 April 2022

Early this morning we set off from camp and decided to head to the backwaters of Kabini river in zone B. The idea was to explore the inlets near President's Corner and the open seasonal meadows of Sunset Point. We waited in a couple of areas where we heard alarm calls but decided to drive on as they we did not see any carnivores. As we were driving around, we came across a crested serpent eagle stomping the ground with its talons. A few moments later it flew to a tree nearby, in its talons it had a green snake. Possibly a green keelback, as its face was hidden from view. We watched as the eagle devoured the snake, skinning it with precision and then consuming the snake. An amazing moment of natural history behaviour.

Mid-morning, we came across a herd of Asian elephants - two mothers with their five month old calves. We spent about 20 minutes with them as we watched the intimate behaviour of the herd. We had to leave them behind to make it back to camp on time.

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The plan this evening was to look for the dhole that were seen earlier this morning in zone A. We drove to the south-eastern part of the park and looked in all the possible areas they may have moved to. We were resigned to the fact that they may have moved to an area with no road network.

As we continued our drive, we stopped to look at a crested serpent eagle. We heard alarm calls from spotted deer further up the road as we watched the eagle. We checked the surrounding area with no luck. Further up the road near the Taraka reservoir, we stopped again to listen to alarm calls and to our amazement we heard a tiger growling. At first the guests were not convinced, but we heard them repeatedly as two tigers were fighting deep in the undergrowth. There was no possibility of a view but just to hear them was an exhilarating experience. After a while the clouds burst open, and we decided to head in the general direction of the camp. We decided to stop and check the area where we had heard the spotted deer alarm calls. There was another vehicle there and they were watching a leopard with her cub huddled on a tree to get away from the downpour. In spite of the fading light the sight was quite surreal. After watching them for a few minutes, we decided to drive back to camp as it was getting quite dark.

Day 6: Saturday 2 April 2022

This morning our objective was clear. We were back in zone A and managed to enter the park as the first vehicle and drove to the south-eastern part where we had left the leopards the previous evening. When we got there, the leopard and her cub were still on the same tree. The downpour the previous night had probably affected their movement. The guests got a better view of them as the light was much better than the evening before. The leopards moved around the tree trying to hide behind the little foliage that was present. After a few minutes they came down the tree and disappeared into the undergrowth. All the guests managed to get a decent view of them, always a concern with leopards in tiger dominated landscapes.

We decided to drive on and check the area where we heard the tigers fighting the previous evening. On getting to the area, we spent some listening for their presence but with no luck. We had received some information from another vehicle that the dhole were seen close to a perennial water body called Bisalwadi. We drove there only to find that they had just moved to an area where we did not have access. Dejected, we sat there wondering if we could have got there earlier. As we were about to leave the area, one of the guests saw the dhole came out of a bush and called out in excitement. Soon the entire pack magically appeared out of nowhere and all six dhole made an half-hearted dash towards a herd of spotted deer sending them scattering in different directions. A week of looking for them finally culminated in this moment and the guests were thrilled at what they had witnessed. We checked the Barballe stream on our way out of the park, hoping to get a glimpse of the black leopard. With no luck on that front, we drove back to camp. A thoroughly enjoyable morning.

In the evening we were back in zone B. We entered the park among the first few vehicles and drove straight to President's Corner. By now one of our favourite spots in the area. As luck would have it, a tigress was sitting in the water. We spent a good 15 minutes with the tigress and the guests managed to get good photographs as well.

The tigress had moved into the lantana thicket and we decided to drive on. We then decided to look for the dhole again, as two were seen in an area nearby. En route we came across another tiger sitting well hidden in the lantana thicket. The guests got a glimpse before it disappeared deeper into the bush. We waited for a while for the tiger to reappear. No luck there but we spent our time enjoying good views of plum-headed parakeets and crested treeswifts. A little later we decided to look for the dhole on our way back to camp, with no luck. A spectacular day overall.

Day 7: Sunday 3 April 2022

This morning we focused our efforts on trying to find the black leopard. We drove around the Barballe stream and other areas that the leopard frequented. After spending a fair amount of time and no sign of it, we decided to drive on and look for other animals.

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Close to a waterhole we came across an interesting interaction between a stripe-necked mongoose and a pair of red-wattled lapwings. The mongoose seemed to get close to the lapwing nest and that triggered a vociferous reaction from the pair. The mongoose seemed to eventually lose interest in the nest and settle for insects under a dead tree. Although brief, it was an interesting natural history moment. We once again combed the Barballe stream looking for the black leopard on our way back to camp but with no luck.

Our strategy for this evening was to check the south-eastern corner of the park near the Tarakka reservoir. In the morning a tigress with her cubs were seen in the vicinity of the reservoir. After an hour of driving looking for the tigress, we received some information from another vehicle that a tiger was seen in a waterhole near us. We reached the waterhole to find a few vehicles watching her as she lay on a bund overlooking the water. Oblivious to the vehicles around her, she slowly walked into the water. Pausing briefly on a mound in the water as she struck a majestic pose and slowly settled in the water with her paws resting on the mound. A regal sight as the guests clicked away on their cameras. After a few minutes she casually got out of the water and skirted the water's edge and sauntered by our vehicle. The guests could not believe their luck and how close the tigress was to our vehicle. Paying no heed to the vehicles she slowly disappeared into the undergrowth.

With beaming smiles, we decided to cash in on our luck and went looking for the tigress with her cubs. We came up on an arrow straight track in the area and were driving towards the south-east corner, when a male tiger appeared out of nowhere. We followed him at a safe distance as he spray-marked along the track, a method of marking territory. A brief insight into the life of a tiger. He disappeared into the thicket as stealthily as he shown up.

It was approaching dusk and we decided to drive back to camp, discussing the splendid day we had when in the last waterhole near the park gate another tiger was sitting on a bund overlooking the water. It almost seemed like this was a dream. It was certainly a splendid day of wildlife viewing.

Day 8: Monday 4 April 2022

This was our last day in Nagarhole and given the previous day's sightings, we were eager to get into the park early. The drive was fairly quiet to begin with. We combed all the inlets along the Kabini reservoir with no signs of any carnivore.

We arrived at President's Corner just as the mist was lifting and we stopped to listen as the visibility was rather poor. After a few minutes we noticed that the sambar deer in the area were alert and looking into the bamboo thicket, focussing in one particular direction. We waited for a couple of minutes, and we heard alarm calls from spotted deer from the water's edge near the far bank. There was a high likelihood of a carnivore in the area and the sambar continued to remain alert. A few seconds later we heard the snort of a gaur - a clear sign that it had seen a carnivore, possibly a tiger. This was followed by a low-pitched moan from the gaur. There was possibly a confrontation between the gaur and the carnivore. Although there was no visual evidence to suggest the same, it was exhilarating just to listen to the sounds echo from the woodland. After driving around the area for a while, we headed back to camp. This was a great way to finish our tour and bid farewell to Nagarhole.

After a hearty breakfast and bidding farewell to the lodge staff, the guests were driven back to their hotel in Bangalore for the night.

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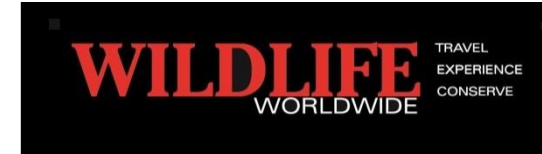
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Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	BIRDS	<i>AVES</i>								
1	Lesser whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	✓						✓	
2	Bar-headed goose	<i>Anser indicus</i>					✓			
3	Knob-billed duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>						✓		
4	Ruddy shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	✓							
5	Cotton pygmy goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>			✓		✓			
6	Indian spot-billed duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
7	Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>			✓					
8	Indian peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	Red spurfowl	<i>Galloperdix spadicea</i>				✓				
10	Gray junglefowl	<i>Gallus sonneratii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Rock pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓	✓		✓		
12	Oriental turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>				✓				
13	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓					

14	Spotted dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
15	Laughing dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>		✓						
16	Yellow-footed green pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicopterus</i>				✓			✓	
17	Green imperial pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>					✓			
18	Greater coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>				✓				
19	Blue-faced malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>		✓		✓				
20	Common hawk cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>	✓		✓		✓			✓
21	Crested treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>				✓				
22	White-breasted waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>				✓				
23	Black-winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			✓		✓			
24	Yellow-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>	✓		✓					
25	Red-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>					✓			
27	Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			✓					
28	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				✓				
29	Green sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>					✓			
30	Common greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>						✓		
31	Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>				✓				

32	Small pratincole	<i>Glareola lactea</i>				✓				
33	Little tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>			✓					
34	River tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>		✓			✓		✓	
35	Asian openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Black stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>				✓				
37	Woolly-necked stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
38	Painted stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>						✓		
39	Oriental darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
40	Little cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>					✓			✓
41	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
42	Indian cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>		✓			✓			
43	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
44	Purple heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>					✓			✓
45	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
46	Intermediate egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>	✓					✓		
47	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓					
48	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>		✓				✓		
49	Indian pond-heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓

50	Black-headed ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>			✓			✓		
51	Red-naped ibis	<i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>					✓			✓
52	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		✓			✓			
53	Oriental honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	✓			✓		✓		
54	Crested serpent-eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
55	White-eyed buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>					✓			
56	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>				✓				
57	Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
58	Gray-headed fish eagle	<i>Haliaeetus ichhyaetus</i>			✓		✓		✓	✓
59	Brown fish-owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>				✓				
60	Eurasian hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>			✓		✓			
61	Indian gray hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>				✓				
62	Malabar pied hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>				✓				
63	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>					✓			
64	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>								
65	White-throated kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>			✓				✓	
67	Chestnut-headed bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>			✓			✓		

68	Indian roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
69	White-cheeked barbet	<i>Psilopogon viridis</i>			✓					
70	Greater flameback	<i>Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus</i>				✓				
71	Black-rumped flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
72	Streak-throated woodpecker	<i>Picus xanthopygaeus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
73	White-bellied woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus javensis</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Rose-ringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>					✓			
75	Plum-headed parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>				✓				
76	Malabar parakeet	<i>Psittacula columboides</i>						✓		
77	Small minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>			✓					
78	Large cuckoo shrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>			✓					
79	Black-hooded oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>					✓			
80	Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
81	Greater racket-tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
82	Indian paradise-flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>				✓				
83	Long-tailed shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>							✓	
84	Rufous treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>			✓			✓		
85	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>		✓		✓			✓	

86	Large-billed crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>						✓		
87	Cinereous tit	<i>Parus cinereus</i>		✓						
88	Common tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>							✓	
89	Red-rumped swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>					✓			
90	Red-vented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>		✓			✓		✓	
91	Red-whiskered bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>		✓						✓
92	White-browed bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>					✓			
93	Greenish warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>					✓			
94	Jungle babbler	<i>Argya striata</i>		✓	✓					
95	Indian nuthatch	<i>Sitta castanea</i>			✓					
96	Southern hill myna	<i>Gracula indica</i>					✓		✓	
97	Brahminy starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
98	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
99	Indian blackbird	<i>Turdus simillimus</i>					✓			
100	Oriental magpie-robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
101	Tickell's blue flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>						✓		
102	Gray wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓				
103	White-browed wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>			✓					

104	White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>					✓			
	MAMMALS	MAMMALIA								
1	Spotted deer	<i>Axis axis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Sambar deer	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Barking deer	<i>Muntiacus muntjac</i>						✓		
4	Gaur	<i>Bos gaurus</i>			✓	✓	✓			✓
5	Bengal tiger	<i>Panthera tigris</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	
6	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>					✓	✓		
7	Dhole	<i>Cuon alpinus</i>						✓		
8	Ruddy mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>	✓					✓		
9	Stripe-necked mongoose	<i>Herpestes vitticollis</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
10	Indian grey mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>						✓		
11	Black-footed grey langur	<i>Semnopithecus hypoleucos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Bonnet macaque	<i>Macaca radiata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
13	Wild pig	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Smooth-coated otter	<i>Lutrogale perspicillata</i>	✓							
15	Indian giant squirrel	<i>Rutufa indica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
16	Asian elephant	<i>Elephus maximus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

17	Three-striped palm squirrel	<i>Funanbulus palmarum</i>			✓	✓		✓		✓
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