

Tour Report

India – Nagarhole's Tigers, Wild Dogs & Leopards

19 – 28 February 2023

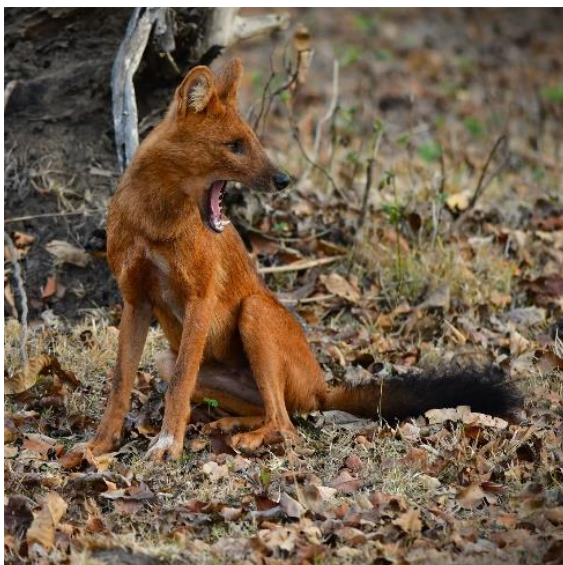
Tiger



Leopard



Asiatic wild dog



Smooth coated otters



Compiled by Yusuf Rizvi

Day 1: Monday 20 February 2023

The guests arrived on flight BA119 from London Heathrow to Bengaluru. We went straight to Taj Bengaluru for breakfast. After eating, we started our drive to Kabini River Lodge, arriving at 13:45. Once we had all checked in, we had lunch at Golghar.

At 15:00, we set off for our first safari. Filled with anticipation, we drove towards the park wondering what luck would have in store for us that evening.

Our first drive was in Zone B of the park; an area around the Kabini Reservoir. As this was our first game drive, we drove around slowly, stopping for spotted deer and black-footed grey langur. Checking the areas around the reservoir, we saw our first herd of elephants! There was also a kaleidoscope of interesting birds to see, like jungle myna, white-bellied woodpecker, lesser golden-backed wood pecker, white-rumped vulture, red-headed vulture, grey-headed fish eagle and Indian spot-billed duck, to name just a few.

We decided to check another area, stopping at a bridge on a perennial stream. Suddenly, we saw a crested hawk-eagle running around a bush. We assumed there must be something it wanted to catch hiding in the thicket. While we were watching the eagle, we got the news that a tiger had been spotted near the reservoir. We drove towards that area quickly and saw the tiger walking along the road, then disappearing into the thickets. We were lucky to have such good sightings on our first drive. Since it was a long day, we decided to do the checklist the next day.

Day 2: Tuesday 21 February 2023

This morning was our first sortie into Zone A of Nagarhole National Park. The conditions were foggy and reasonable misty, and as we approached the entrance, we heard the distress calls of spotted deer. We waited there for almost 10 minutes before moving on to explore other areas.

We saw a herd of gaur near the tiger tank area. While waiting to look and listen, we saw various interesting birds like grey jungle fowl, crested hawk-eagle, Indian spotted eagle, great egret, intermediate egret, red-headed vulture and green imperial pigeon. In the afternoon, we also saw two female elephants with a young calf.

That evening we met at the bar for the checklist, followed by dinner at Golghar.

Day 3: Wednesday 22 February 2023

We had an early start, meeting at 05:45 at Golghar for some hot beverages before leaving the lodge. The morning was clear and cold, without any mist. We had been assigned Zone A, so we checked a few areas, then decided to visit one of the water holes on the north side of the park. As we reached the spot, we heard the frantic distress calls of spotted deer, so I asked our driver to move a little closer.

Suddenly, I spotted the tigress moving in the thickets. We quickly repositioned our vehicle and were rewarded with breathtaking sighting. The tigress approached us head on, then crossed the road. Everyone was excited. After a while, she vanished into the undergrowth on the other side of the road. Later we got lucky with another sighting of dhole, or Asiatic wild dogs. It was a pack of four. This exclusive sighting and was the icing on the cake of a fantastic game drive.

Back at the lodge we had a scrumptious breakfast, then had an hour of birding, walking in the grounds around the lodge. We saw purple-rumped sunbirds, grey wagtail, Oriental magpie-robin and coppersmith barbet. There was also a beautiful variety of trees to enjoy, like jacarandas, java plum, gulmohar and a princess tree which was planted under the guidance of Papa John Wakefield (the legend who helped the forest department setup ecotourism here).

Our afternoon drive was in Zone B. We checked the areas near the reservoir, then decided to check the president corner. As soon as we reached it we saw a tusker coming towards the water body, which proceeded to cross the road in front of us. Before leaving the park, we were also lucky enough to spot a sloth bear foraging on the side of tarmac road.

Day 4: Thursday 23 February 2023

It was a clear and cold morning. We had high hopes of seeing another apex predator. As we were driving on the Bisalwadi Road, we saw a leopard patrolling his territory. It was a bold leopard and we watched it for good 15 minutes before it disappeared into the undergrowth.

We also saw stripe-necked mongoose, black-footed grey langur, spotted deer and sambhar. On the afternoon drive around the Kabini Reservoir, a number of birds appeared, including Indian spot-billed ducks, woolly-necked stork, grey heron, great egret, white-bellied woodpecker and Indian peafowl. We also had a good sighting of stripe-necked mongoose close to edge of the water.

Day 5: Friday 24 February 2023

We were in Zone A again this morning. We heard a few distress calls initially, but they stopped. Then, while we were driving towards one of the waterholes, we came across a pack of five whistling hunters (dholes). It was a treat to watch them playing with each other. We followed the wild dogs for quite a distance, and they were very obliging to give us time to take some photos. We also saw Brahminy kites perched on a tree.

After breakfast, we opted for short boat ride and we were extremely lucky to see two smooth-coated otters near the edge of the reservoir. Another highlight was discovering the nesting site of a family of Indian cormorants, complete with chicks.

Our afternoon drive was also rewarding, with sightings of blue-faced malkoha, which were foraging in a mixed feeding flock with lesser golden-backed woodpecker, jungle babblers, greater racket-tailed drongo and jungle mynas.

Day 6: Saturday 25 February 2023

Saturday morning was quite misty. In Zone A, we came across a pack of five wild dogs (probably the same pack we had seen previously). We had another close encounter with these whistling hunters before they vanished into the mist.

A little later we received information that a tiger had been sighted by a vehicle near one of the waterholes. As we reached the waterhole, I noticed the tiger under one of the trees at a distance, unfortunately none of the guests were able to spot it before it vanished in the thickets.

We also encountered Malabar giant squirrels. We later got further information that someone spotted a tiger near the tiger tank area. However, upon reaching the spot, the predator had already gone in the thickets. All that remained were the distress calls of spotted deer and langurs. We had better luck with other species that morning though, spotting ruddy and stripe-necked mongoose, and Indian muntjac.

We spent the afternoon on a boat safari. We came across a few ospreys, one of which was perched on a dead tree in the reservoir grasping a wallago attu (catfish). A little further ahead, we saw other interesting birds, like oriental darter, grey heron, purple heron, common greenshank, marsh sandpiper, little and river tern, Eurasian spoonbill, painted stork and an Indian spotted eagle, which was scavenging on goonch fish.

A little later we came across a herd of elephants, including a female calf, a sub adult male and a tusker. The tusker was interested in mating with one of the young females, and was checking if the young female was in estrus (fertile). After a few failed attempts, the tusker successfully mounted her. The tusker and all the other elephants were vocalising very loudly, and it was once in a life time sighting. After an eventful day, all the guests were extremely happy.

Day 7: Sunday 26 February 2023

Every one was keen to see the tiger. We were in Zone A, and decided to check the areas which were known to have a higher chance of tiger sightings. We soon came to know that one tiger had been sighted near the tiger tank area, but unfortunately we missed it by a few minutes. We checked a few more areas but, despite hearing distress calls, the big cats remained elusive.

We were in Zone B for the afternoon and began with a great sighting of a herd of elephants taking a mud bath at the reservoir. Then a jungle owlet appeared, along with a few other interesting birds.

In the evening we did our checklist at the bar before dinner. I briefed the guests on the following day's programme before we all called it a night.

Day 8: Monday 27 February 2023

All too soon it was our last drive of the tour. We tried our best to find a big cats, but they remained hidden. Back at the lodge, we had our breakfast then set out to Bangalore to Taj Yeshwantpur. On the way we stopped as one of the guests wanted to buy a souvenir from a local community shop.

We reached Bangalore at around 14:00. After check-in, we decided to meet at Shimmer Bar to celebrate on our last night. I also briefed one of the guests who was going on a private extension to Kerala. After dinner we all said goodbye to him and wished him all the best for his extension tour.

Day 9: Tuesday 28 February 2023

We met at the lobby of Taj Yeshwantpur at 03:00. After settling our bills, we reached the airport to catch our flights and wished each other a safe journey. Our successful trip had come to an end.

Checklist



	Common Name	Latin Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9
	MAMMALS	<i>MAMMALIA</i>									
1	Indian leopard	<i>Panthera pardus fusca</i>				✓					
2	Bengal tiger	<i>Panthera tigris tigris</i>	✓		✓						
3	Rusty spotted cat	<i>Prionailurus rubiginosus</i>						✓			
4	Asiatic wild dogs	<i>Cuon alpinus</i>			✓		✓	✓			
5	Sloth bear	<i>Melursus ursinus</i>			✓						
6	Golden jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>						✓			
7	Spotted deer	<i>Axis axis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
8	Sambar deer	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
9	Gaur	<i>Bos gaurus</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
10	Indian muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
11	Asian elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
12	Wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Malabar giant squirrel	<i>Ratufa indica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Three striped palm squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>				✓	✓	✓			



15	Indian giant flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista petaurista</i>							✓		
16	Indian hare / black naped hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>		✓							
17	Ruddy mongoose	<i>Urva smithii</i>	✓				✓				
18	Stripe-necked mongoose	<i>Herpestes vitticollis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	Smooth coated otter	<i>Lutrogale perspicillata</i>					✓		✓		
20	Black-footed gray langur	<i>Semnopithecus hypoleucas</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
21	Bonnet macaque	<i>Macaca radiata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	REPTILES	REPTILIA									
1	Mugger crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓		