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A search for Red Panda and Tiger

**Dobate, Koshi Tappu, Suklaphanta and Bardia
National Park**

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Organised through

Nature Safari Tours (www.birdingnepal.com)

Over the last couple of years, eastern Nepal has become one of the best places in the world to see Red Panda. Work by organisations such as the Red Panda network is helping to protect this vulnerable population. This was my fifth trip to Nepal. Although I have seen lots of panda scats while trekking the nearby Singalila Ridge along the Nepal/Indian border five years ago, the aim of this trip was to try again and also to spend a bit of time on the lowlands looking for Tiger.

4th February : Arrive Kathmandu

5th Feb: Flew to Bhadrapur. Met up with Badri Chaudhary my guide for the first part of the trip. We then took public transport to Ilam, staying at [Chiyabari Cottage](#) overnight.

6th Feb: Met up with Pingu, who doesn't speak much English but used to work for the Red Panda Network and knows the location of the territories very well. We then started the 4 hour rather steep and dumpy drive to Dobate. After arriving for lunch at our lodge we took



an afternoon walk doing a spot of birding. The forest was fairly quiet at this time of year as most species had retreated to the lowlands for the winter. We saw Solitary Snipe and a few species of Laughing Thrush. The forests in the area much be fantastic an April and May when the rhododendron is out in bloom. Tomorrow we would start looking for Red Panda.

7th Feb. We woke early to mist and light rain. After breakfast we walked back west along the track for about a mile and then worked our way downhill; zig-zagging across the steep (45 degree) bamboo slopes looking for fresh scats. It was fairly hard going doing in places, but in less than an hour Pingu pointed to some scat. He then suddenly realised that a Panda was looking down at us from the same tree. After a frantic second or two we had all seen it and were shaking with the excitement.



It soon became evident that the panda was sleeping, so we just sat down and watched it at a range of 4 metres for the next three hours. After which point it got up and slowly made it way down to feed. The views couldn't have got any better, so we decided to head back for lunch ourselves. The afternoon was spent looking for Satyr Tragopan, but with no luck.



8th Feb: With the pressure off we decided to spend the day slowly walking to the village of Hangetham, having lunch on the Indian border. Although pandas are also regularly seen in this area, we didn't connect with any, but it was a very pleasant walk and we saw Hoary-bellied Squirrel and lots of birds including plenty of Kalij Pheasants and a pair of Black Eagle. Looking back at it I would have probably spent an additional day around Dobate and then do this walk.



9th Feb: Travelled to Koshi Tappu.

10-11th Feb: Koshi Tappu stayed at Koshi Camp (<http://www.kosicamp.com>). Always a relaxing place to stay with Jungle Cats breeding in the grounds. Although they were seen three times they didn't show as well as previous visits (see photo). Fishing Cats are also regularly seen around

the camp but no luck this time: however, we did see eight Wild Elephants, Golden Jackals, Nilgai and lots of wild Water-buffalo.



12th Feb: Two internal flights were taken to reach Suklaphanta in the far west of Nepal.

13-15th Feb: Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve covers 305 km² (118 sq mi) of open grassland, forests, riverbeds and tropical wetlands. This seldom visited park (only one other tourist

vehicle seen), is well known for its population of Tiger, Swamp Deer, Bengal Florican and Jerdon's Bushchat. The tiger population has started to build up again from a low of four, due to poaching during the Maoist problems, to over twenty. A census, using camera traps was being carrying out when I was present.

The three days were spent driving and walking through the Sal forest and grassland looking for mammals and birds. Plenty of Swamp, Spotted, and Hog Deer were encountered as well as Wild Boar and the footprints of Asian One-horned Rhino. On day two we finally managed to connect with a tiger, when I spotted a large male from an observation tower, crossing a track 1km away. Although it was only for 15 seconds, and not the best view in the world, it was still a very impressive and my first Nepalese Tiger.



16-19th Feb: Bardia National Park.

Keen to improve on my distant view of Tiger, I then moved on to Bardia National Park; however two days of continuous heavy rain dampen things a bit. This reduced the amount of time in the field to a half-day walk and one-day drive. Again lots of the more common mammals were seen, but no cats. The highlight was a large family

group of 17 Smooth-coated Otters.

All in all, a very successful trip which has cleared up a few of my target mammals I had missed on previous trips. Thanks go to Badri Pudasaini from Nature Safari Tours (www.birdingnepal.com) for organising it.