

Trip report India: Gujarat, Madja Pradesh, Himalaya

20 November 2014 – 14 December 2014

This trip was done as a travel trip specially for Big Cats.

I will split this report in four sections:

- 1) Delhi a mid-day visit to Sultanpur
- 2) Gujarat for lions
- 3) Tiger parks
- 4) Himalayan foothills

Since photography is my passion I always try as best to make a good picture of any mammal I see during the trip.

I hope you will enjoy this report and feel free to commend or ask questions!

Specially I want to thank www.mammalwatching.com for presenting such worth full trip reports. For me it was of great use and guidance and more or less I followed advice from previous trip reports.

Best regards,

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Places visited for wildlife:

Gujarat

- Velavadar/ Blackbuck NP
- Gir sanctuary NP
- Little Rann of Kutch

Madhya Pradesh

- Tadoba NP
- Satpura NP
- Bandhavgarh NP
- Ranthambore NP

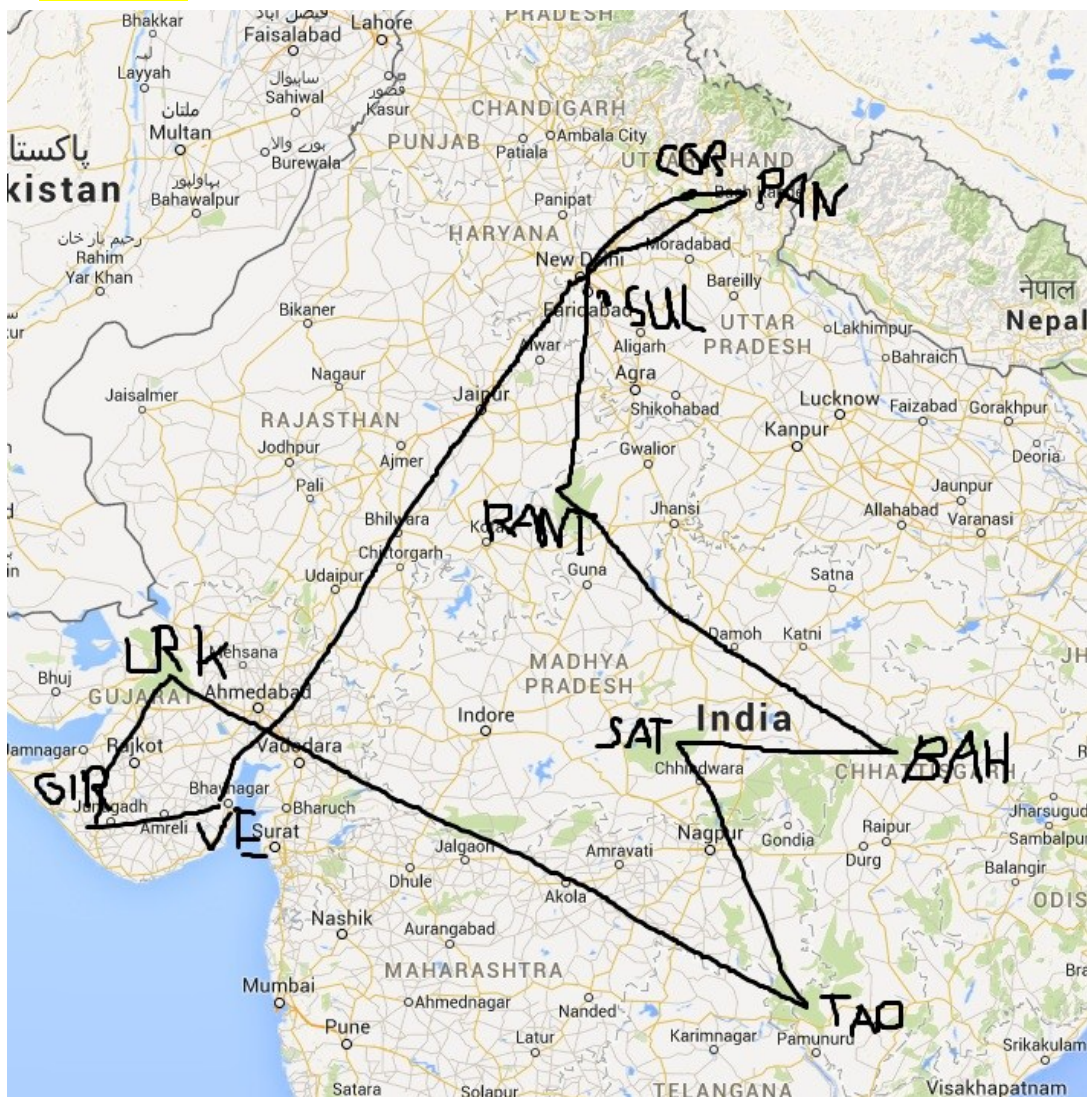
Uttar Pradesh/Aranal Pradesh

- Pangot
- Corbett NP

Delhi

- Sultanpur

trip route



DELHI and around

Day 15 Delhi, **house mouse** @ airport. We had an afternoon here and planned this day excursion to Sultanpur since we had some time left. This is a good start of your trip and the parks are pretty nice to hang out for half a day. It also gave an extra security in case of delay.

It is a very good park for birds and we saw some **Nilgai** and five-striped ground squirrels you can spend here some good hours.

Part one GUJARAT

Day 1-2 flying to Delhi and early flight to Ahmedabad arrive for lunch in Bhavnagar

Afternoon safari to Velavadar/ blackbuck national park. The last part before the park entrance the road already passes through the yellow grass fields of the park. From the roadside you can see **blackbuck** and **nilgai**. We missed the wolves here, which was a pity. Further the hyena had not been seen for months so also this target species was missed unluckily. We did see in the morning an **Indian fox** and had short glimpses of a **Jackal**.

In the park the herds of blackbuck were plenty and also a few mature 'black' black buck. Also some Nilgai here and there. A female with young was seen very well. Also there were many harriers, we were whiteness of the famous harrier roost in the evening. Indeed a very special experience. Hundreds of harrier fly in the fields for the night in the park!

The lake in the park was full of water birds like ducks, spoonbill, waders, flamingo and pelicans. (this was a total difference with the visit in march 2013 when it was completely dry.

Our last safari of the second day we finally got our first **jungle cat**. It walk out of the field in an more open strip of cut grassland at dusk we could see it for a while, for good photos it was already too dark.

Day 3-4-5 Gir early drive to Gir sanctuary, a quit long, but nice drive. Just before we reached Gir we saw our first **spotted deer** crossing the road. Also there was a group of **Southern plain Hanuman Langur** in the roadside. We arrived around 1pm in our Gir birding lodge which is a very comfortable and nice place just next to an official park entrance. Afternoon drive in the park. It was rather green with all trees full of leaves in the park at that period of the year. So all trees had leaves so you couldn't see quit far. But the park wasn't full of life.

Spotted deer are around and once in a while a **sambar** but most of the time the park is quit. We only saw one **wild boar** in 5 safaris. The morning safari we saw a **Common Mongoose** in the bushes for a while. During an evening safari we saw two **Ruddy Mongoose** with the black tale tip. But they were off quickly. A changeable hawk eagle got a gerbil and ate in a tree just a few meters from the car. In the park you get distinguished driving routes of which there are 8 in the park, they partly overlap. So your chances for lions also depend on luck of which route you get from the office. During our first safari no signs of lion or leopard... as time passed we thought it would become a hard job to find them. But at last in dusk we hit a line of jeeps and there was a poor young male lion laying in the bush. It's face was backwards and when we were in line to have a look it stood up and left... The animal seemed to have scabies. So our first sighting wasn't really a thrill. The next safaris we had more or less same experiences we did see 10 lions in total mainly 1 or two together. Most lions had scabies somewhere (mostly face) and or were severe scratched by fights. This was a bit disappointing for the photos but we got some good ones. The thing that is most annoying is that at almost all sightings park rangers control the sighting so you have to leave sometimes while you still want to watch... The idea is quit weird that the lions are more or less guided to some places. It is a procedure to make that there are no jams of cars but also gives a bit unnatural experience. But we were happy with our sighting since most of the park is quit. In the evening we spotlighted in the mango orchard around the lodge and found nothing. We had in the morning two times **Jackal** one was very relaxed and laid down for a bit. Two others were on the move. Our last evening safari I saw a **leopard** in the open in the forest, my should for 'leopard' scared the animal and it ran off quick so most of the group missed this cat.. unlucky for them.

One evening we made a night drive and we saw some wild boar. On our transfer to Kutch when we left a 5am and we did see in dark a **common civet** and a **porcupine** crossing the road that was a good bonus!

So in the end we saw **10 different lions** in five safaris, a good score since we heard not all drives are successful, but with help of the rangers sightings are more guaranteed.

Day 6 a long drive to Little Rann of Kutch. The Rann Riders lodge is very comfortable. We walked a bit around the lodge in the agricultural fields and saw some birds. We drove to park in the afternoon for our first safari. Since it is a more moist period of the year the area is rather green and there are ponds and lakes in some parts. These are full of water birds like ducks, flamingos and waders. So we had a look at them. While watching birds **three small Indian mongooses** passed quickly the open lakeside and disappeared in some bushes. I thought we would visit the area of the wild-ass but it seemed we were just doing birdwatching. That was a bit disappointing. But what we did do was some spotlighting since we would try for desert cat. We drove a bit along area with crops on one side and on the other side the lake with some swamp. In dusk I saw a **jungle cat** walking aside the crops but it ran off. When it was complete dark we saw another **jungle cat** in the crops it was clearly visible in the spotlight also we saw some **wild boar** and a herd of **nilgai**. Also we saw an **Indian hare**. No desert cat. I thought it was not yet the right area and here would be most jungle cat around. But we had our jungle cats so that was a nice start.

Day 7 The next morning and afternoon we went out again and spotted the **wild ass**, quite easy. They are scared easily and ran off so most you see them running or at distance. The local more tame herd I saw a few years ago in the other trip was fallen apart so there are not really easy approachable wild-ass anymore. But we had good views. We also saw nilgai mother and fawn. Further we found Macqueen's bustard (very shy) and lesser spotted eagle. Also we saw a desert fox but this one flushed and we could not find it again.

In the afternoon we drove further in the Rann and found a lone black stork in an almost dried lake. Around dusk we searched for the desert fox and found it sleeping under some bushes. We could see it very well for a while. We waited until dark and tried again for some spotlighting in search for desert cat. We didn't find any but I had a feeling we were close... We did see **wild boar**, and **Indian hare** in spotlight.

Part two: TIGER PARKS

Day 8 Next morning we had our transfer drive and flight to Tadoba.

Day 9 Tadoba

We stayed in Svasavara lodge a very pleasant resort. We had planned 5 safaris in the park. The park is nice and has a combination of forest and fields and also a few rocky slopes around the hills. We tried obviously for tiger here and heard from previous guests that chances were quite high since one female tiger usually showed herself every day (her name is P2). Our first safari we didn't see tiger although we heard alarm calls of spotted deer. We did see **hanuman langur, spotted deer, sambar and wild boar**. Also we saw a **leopard** in a tree which was at first difficult to see but later on was more open, still it was quite far away from the road. Our second safari we finally found a **tiger** and it was the famous P2... so we could wait in line to see her walking on the road with 30 jeeps behind and 10 in front... But still it was our first tiger! Maybe not a satisfying view, but you never know. The tiger ignored the jeeps and after 300 meters left the road into the forest.

day 10 The next morning was quiet so we were a bit bored at our stop for breakfast. While just stepping from the jeep our guide heard alarm calls and so we quickly moved to that place. Spotted deer and langur shouted continuously and after 20 seconds or so a **leopard** crossed the road just close! We were happy seeing a second leopard but to our surprise not more than 15 seconds later a **tiger** crossed the road the other way!!!! Just twenty meters further than the leopard had crossed!?! Couldn't get the picture of the tiger. It seemed a male tiger that was more shy. Our guide never seen this situation before, what a luck.

In the afternoon we went out again and we found my first **dholes**. Two were playing and mating on the road. They stayed only 30 seconds to disappear in the forest. Finally we also got our best **tiger** sighting a female tiger walked on the road. She walked in the forest to step out near a lake we changed position and could see from distance how she walked into the lake. She laid herself down for 5 minutes and then walked further in the water to the side into the bushes. Somewhere further from the lake she crossed a field so we could see her coming and passing us close. After that we lost her in thick grasses. The whole sighting was for about 45 minutes ☺

On the way back to the lodge we saw another **tiger** in dusk in a field but this one had a collar and we could only wait for a minute since we had to leave the park. Also to our luck we found a **sloth bear** but this one stayed in the bushes so it was not clearly visible. Dinner tasted good that night ☺.

Day 11 Our final morning safari we had glimpse of our third **leopard**. Unluckily it walked off as we came in. Another car in front had seen it very well... but we saw it only moving of.

Afternoon lunch we had a long drive to Satpura (9 hours) so we arrived at night. We saw a herd of 40 **wild boar** crossing the road and also some **gerbils** running on roadsides just before reaching the lodge..

day 12 -13-14 Satpura

We stayed in a very nice place the Reni Pani Lodge. From here you drive in 25 minutes to the river, from there you cross it with a boat and then the safari jeeps are there for your safari. Our first safari we drove to the park. We were told tiger would be no chance, so focus was on **Sloth bear**, and after a while we found our first. A mother bear and cub walked in the forest. The forest is quit open so you can see quit far which helps. Actually the whole park has a pleasant and nice scenery. **Sloth bears** are quite easy to spot and in total we did see six in only three safaris. Also leopard would be good chances. Our third safari we were very lucky since a **leopard** was sleeping on a rock not far from the road. We could see it very well. After a while it walked around and even came close to the vehicle and it sat down just a few meters and after that crossed the road. Now the weird part started: The leopard laid down in high grass 20 meters down. So we thought 'show is over'... somebody said I can see something beneath the leopard and it looks like a **PANGOLIN!**? So we tried hard to see and yes it was! So now we waited what to happen.. after a while the pangolin moved and the leopard 'chased' it. Since dark fell in we had to leave this spectacular scene. The photos will show the story.

Our last safari we spotted the **Malabar giant squirrel**. In this park **sambar, wild boar and spotted deer** are also good to see just as **hanuman langur** and **rhesus macaque**.

Day 15-16-17 Bandhavgarh

We had 5 safaris in the park and stayed in monsoon forest lodge. The same place as I was two years ago. Our safaris were in Dikkala and Magdi zone (not sure name). Dikkala was not as good anymore since a famous tiger left the area.

We spotted our first tiger in the third safari a nice female we could see her for a short while.

In our last safari we did see another big male tiger which was hunting for spotted deer but was seen so only focussed. After that it crossed the road. In the park we saw **Sambar, spotted deer hanuman, rhesus macaque** and a **jackal**. Also we saw two different **barking deer**.

Day 18-19-20 Ranthambore

In Ranthambore your luck depends on which zone you get for your safari. We were a bit disappointed with our zone one. It was not very good as people told us. So we started with a feeling of not to be lucky...

The zone is on the side of the park borders and we were close to a village. It was a very bushy part with sticky bushes, not real tiger territory it looked. But there was a small pond and there were tiger tracks around. Just as we continued a big **male tiger** was sleeping on the road, what a luck. We could see it for a long time and finally it moved. The whole thing was great! This sighting was one of the best you can get.

Obviously our next three safaris we didn't see any more tiger...

The scenery and variety is very nice in Ranthambore

Other stuff here was: **wild boar, sambar, one ruddy mongoose, spotted deer and one jackal**

Part three: HIMALAYAN FOOTHILLS

Day 21-22-23

In **Pangot** we tried for leopard cat. But this was a bit disappointing We had some night safaris but since the slopes are steep you have no good view. Although we tried two nights I had no feeling that we had a serious chance. This place is good for birds though. Here we found **Himalayan langur**, they look different with more fur around the face. We did see **ghoral** and **muntjac** what was a nice extra.

Corbett Our last afternoon we added a safari in Corbett just to try for tiger again. Al good zones were booked so we stayed in a more outer zone. Here we only found rather shy **spotted deer** and a not so shy **jackal**, also **wild boar**. Just when we left we saw an **elephant** that was a nice bonus for the trip.

Day 24 Delhi – Amsterdam

Total trip list at end of this report

Utrecht, Netherlands February 2014

Janco van Gelderen



blackbuck





Male blackbuck



Wild boar

Wild boar



Indian fox



Jungle cat (above) jackal (under (GIR))





nilgai





Asiatic lion



Red fox



Common mongoose



Ruddy mongoose



Hanuman langur



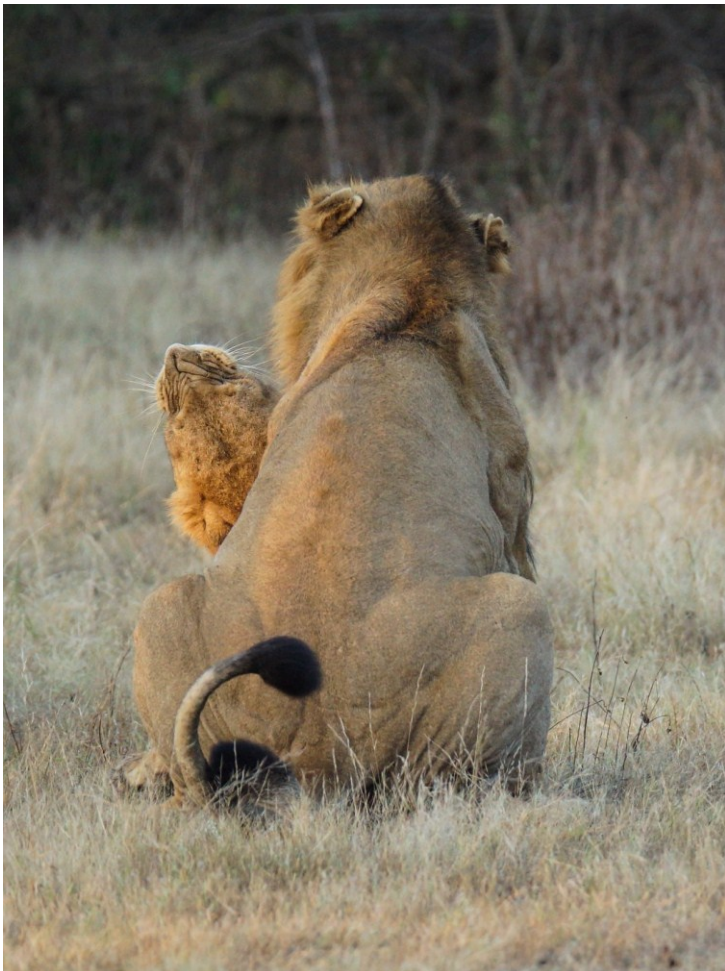
Palm squirrel



lion



Lions mating





lion



Asiatic wild ass





Asiatic wild ass



Wil ass



nilgai



Desert fox





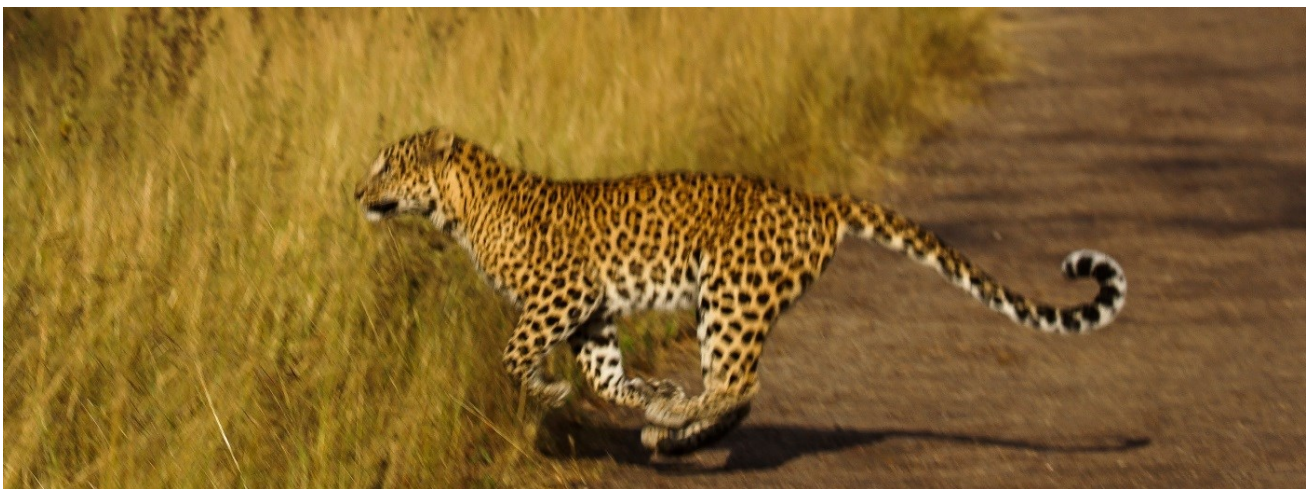
Male gaur



Female gaur



Leopard in tree



Leopard crossing



tiger





dhole





Second tiger tadoba



muntjac



Fourhorned antelope



Spotted deer



Spotted deer



sambar



sambar



Sloth bear

Elephant (Corbett)



Indian hare





Leopard





Leopard very well seen



Pangolin!!!



Leopard vs pangolin!!!!!!!!!!





Sloth bear mother and cub



Himalayan langur Pangot area



Jackal Bandhavgahr



Flying fox



Tiger hunting



Spotted deer



First tigress bandhavghar



Tiger



Crossing road



Majestic view of tiger





Malabar giant squirrel

TRIPLIST & Notes on the mammal sightings

Tad = Tadoba NP

Sat = Satpura NP

VE = Velavadar/Blackbuck NP

GI = Gir sanctuary

LRK = Little rann of Kutch

BH = Bandhavgarh NP

Ranth = Ranthambore NP

Pan = Pangot

Cor = Corbett NP

SU = Sultanpur bird sanctuary

Rhesus macaque: BH) at the park borders, SAT) in the forest around lodge along roadside during transfers in forest areas **# easy to see**

Indian hare: LRK) and SAT) during night safari **# possible to see**

Blackbuck: VE) many **# easy to see in VE**

Gaur: Tad, a group of females and calves inside parks near grass field. A male bull crossing forest road. Sat) in forest on road a herd of 5 **# possible to see**

Sambar: GIR), BH), Tad), Sat), Ranth) several individuals in all parks **# good possibilities to see**

Spotted deer: GIR), BH), Tad), Sat), Ranth), Cor) everywhere seen easily **# good possibilities to see**

Wild boar: VE), GIR), LRK) BH), Tad), Sat), Ranth), Cor) everywhere seen sometimes not easily **# good possibilities to see**

Barking deer: BH) two individuals one good short view, Pan) 1 during spotlighting **# not easy to see**

Jackal: Ve) 1 Gir) 3 BH) 1 Rant) 1, Cor) 2 **# possible to see, not easy**

Asiatic Lion: GI) We managed to see 10 different Lions in a total of five jeep safaris. But in our opinion it was not easy to see, it's more long driving with nothing, but with the park rangers chances are good **# possible to see**

Leopard: GI) one individual very short and then flushed. Tad) 3 one in tree, one crossed road, one on rocks walking off quickly. Sat) 1 very well long view of two hours. One seen in dusk hunting for a fawn of sambar deer. **# difficult to see**

Tiger: We managed (finally) to see tiger in all three tiger reserves we visited. TAd) three different tiger, 1 crossing road, one long view, one in dusk laying in field. BH) one along road, one big male hunting and crossing road. Ranth) one male seen very well on road, sleeping and finally walking **# possible to see, if you have time**

Jungle Cat: VE) one seen, LRK) 3 night drive, Tad) 1 flushing from road **# possible to see, not easy**

Asiatic Wild Ass: LRK) many seen. **# easy to see**

Asiatic Elephant: Cor) one just outside park in forest, not seen well. **# difficult to see**

Hanuman langur: GIR) many seen but not very common, SAT) common, BH) common, Tad) common, Rant) common, Pan) common **# easy to see**

Malabar Giant squirrel: SAT) two individual seen **# difficult to see**

Five striped squirrel: everywhere seen near lodges # *easy to see*

Three striped squirrel: difficult to see the difference with 5 # *possible to see (probably also easy)*

Desert fox: LRK) three seen. # *possible to see (depend on guide)*

Indian fox: Ve) one seen. # *difficult to see*

Flying fox: BAH), many roosting in big tree near road, ask driver to stop for it # *easy to see*

Small Indian Civet: GIR) one seen spotlighting on road. # *difficult to see (night)*

Porcupine: GIR) one seen spotlighting on road. # *difficult to see (night)*

Pangolin: SAT) one seen because leopard hunted it. # *very rare*

Sloth bear: Tad) one seen in dusk in bushes, SAT 6 seen mostly mother and young. # *possible to see*

Dhole: Tad) two on road. . # *difficult to see*

Common mongoose: GIR), TAD), COR), LRK) usually one individual # *possible to see*

Small Indian mongoose: LRK) 3 running on flat towards bushes. # *difficult to see*

Ruddy mongoose: GIR), two together roadside in forest, RANTH one crossing road . # *difficult to see*

Indian Gerbil: Sat) running over the road at night, burrows on roadsides # *possible to see*

House mouse: Delhi at airport in bush next to parking

Other small bats: undefined (GIR, BH, KNH, KAZ)