

## Central India

5-17 April 2014

by Mattia Altieri

I am Mattia Altieri, an Italian wildlife-lover. India was high on my wish-list since long time, but for some reasons I always delayed this trip in favour of other destinations (Galapagos, Brazil, Tanzania, New Zealand, Svalbard). This year, after some planning, I finally went to India, with Tiger as main target. I chose two well managed Tiger Reserves: Pench and Tadoba-Andhari, reserving 3 game drives in Pench and 12 game drives in 6 full days in Tadoba. At the end I visited the town of Nagpur, a quiet town, at least for Indian standards! Indian people are very friendly and helpful, and food is delicious. Traffic is absolutely chaotic, and you really need a local driver.

My trip was perfectly organized by the local agency Cenin Travels, based in Nagpur <http://cenintravels.com/>. I strongly recommend Cenin Travels, their work was very good and I had no problems during the whole trip.

Pench is a nice Tiger Reserve, with a beautiful jungle and very common hoofed mammals. I had the bonus of two Indian Wolves, a Jungle Cat and two Common Palm Civets. Tiger is not easy to see, as are the other big carnivores. Birds were well represented, with Mottled Wood Owl, Grey-headed Fish Eagle and Malabar Pied Hornbill among the others.

Tadoba is now “the place” for Tigers. I had 6 sightings, 3 of them very near, of 4 different individuals. With the new rules only 20% of core area is open to tourism, and Tigers are not so visible as in the past years. Now you need to stay at least 4-5 days, in order to be quite sure to see well a Tiger and obtain good pictures.

The situation of Tigers looks quite bleak. Tiger is not an “easy” mammal: only in Tadoba buffer area Tigers kill ten-twelve local people every year, and the black market of Tiger bones and other body parts for Chinese market is still flourishing. The only hope for Tigers is ecotourism, and to get an income for local people. I really suggest you to organize your trip to India with a local agency, and not through British or US companies. The new rules are reducing a bit the chance to spot Tigers, but there are requests to close all Tiger Reserves for tourism. That would mean only one thing for Tigers: extinction. On the other hands, people living near Tiger Reserves are requesting the opening of whole core areas, or at least 50%.

In Tadoba I saw even a pack of 6 Dhole (Asiatic Wild Dogs) hunting a Spotted Deer. Than a Sloth Bear near a drinking pool, a Leopard on a tree, and many good and colourful birds (Brown Fish Owl, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Tickell’s Blue Flycatcher, Orange-headed Thrush, Asian Paradise Flycatcher and many others).

The mammal list (22 species, not bad outside Africa):

1. **Hanuman Langur** (*Semnopithecus entellus*) - Very common in Pench and Tadoba;
2. **Rhesus Macaque** (*Macaca mulatta*) - Common in Pench, absent in Tadoba;
3. **Spotted Deer** (*Axis axis*) - Abundant in Pench, many in Tadoba;
4. **Sambar Deer** (*Cervus unicolor*) - Common in Pench and Tadoba;
5. **Indian Muntjac** (*Muntiacus muntjac*) - A few pairs in Tadoba;
6. **Nilgai** (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) - Not rare in Pench, only singletons in Tadoba;

7. **Gaur** (*Bos gaurus*) - Small groups, and huge solitary males in both Pench and Tadoba. Easier in Tadoba;
8. **Wild boar** (*Sus scrofa*) - Common in Pench and Tadoba;
9. **Sloth Bear** (*Melursus ursinus*) - One adult male in Tadoba, where it is not difficult to see;
10. **Jackal** (*Canis aureus*) - Common in Pench, none in Tadoba;
11. **Indian Wolf** (*Canis lupus pallipes*) - Usually very difficult to see. Two adults patrolling their territory in Pench were a real bonus!
12. **Dhole** (*Cuon alpinus*) - A pack of 6 dogs in Tadoba, playing and hunting a Spotted Deer;
13. **Tiger** (*Panthera tigris*) - 6 sightings in 6 days in Tadoba, of 4 different individuals. Firstly a young female walking towards us and marking territory, than an adult male on a drinking pool, the same adult male walking in a clearing the following day, an adult female crossing our road, another adult female seen briefly in dense bamboo forest, and finally the same adult female on a kill, drinking water and bathing in a pond;
14. **Leopard** (*Panthera pardus*) - One adult male in Tadoba on a tree dozing and climbing;
15. **Jungle Cat** (*Felis chaus*) - One hunting small rodents in Pench;
16. **Common Palm Civet** (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*) - A pair in Pench. Another unexpected bonus;
17. **Grey Mongoose** (*Herpestes edwardsii*) - A few in Tadoba, mostly in open areas;
18. **Ruddy Mongoose** (*Herpestes smithii*) - Three in Tadoba, in bamboo forest;
19. **Indian Hare** (*Lepus nigricollis*) - Two along the road outside Tadoba Tiger Reserve at dusk;
20. **Three-striped Palm Squirrel** (*Funanbulus palmarum*) - Common in Pench and Tadoba;
21. **Indian Giant Flyng Squirrel** (*Petaurista philippensis*) - One at Mahua Vann Resort in Pench at dusk;
22. **Indian Three Shrew** (*Anathana elliotti?*) - Two of this enigmatic mammal in Tadoba.

I did not count bats and small rodents. Among reptiles I saw Marsh Mugger Crocodiles in Tadoba and Flapshell Turtles in Pench.

Thanks for reading, and sorry for my poor English!

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