

Trip Report - Nepal, Oct/Nov 2010

We spent six weeks in Nepal, with a week in Tibet in the middle. Although always on the lookout, our main wildlife locations were: 4 days in Bardia NP, 1 day in Chitwan NP, a 5 day trek to Poon Hill (Annapurna) and a 10 day trek to Langtang/Gosaikund where we hoped for a chance to see red panda.

Bardia NP is a far quieter and less touristed place than Chitwan. However, both share the same big problem: in October the elephant grass is high enough to hide an elephant, making spotting mammals very difficult. In both places the guides rely on animals coming to pools and riverside for water, and Bardia has better habitat for this. If you consider Chitwan or Bardia, coming in spring – the grass has been cut/burned and thus visibility is vastly better and the new shoots lure animals out of the forest.

At Bardia we saw many herds of chital deer in the forests, as well as swamp deer and hog deer at riversides. Troops of both rhesus macaques and terai grey langur were easily seen. There were also distant views of eurasian boar and small indian mongoose at the riverside. From a tower we got a good view of an asian elephant which might have come very close indeed if it wasn't for chattering Americans in the tower with us. We also got a very close view of mother and baby one-horned asian rhinoceros in a pool. We got no closer to a tiger than a fresh pugmark, but our target species for Bardia was the smooth-coated otter and we were delighted when a family of seven showed up after waiting an hour at a riverside. Unfortunately chattering Americans next to us caused the family to double-back and disappear when they might have crossed very close to us.

Spending a day in Chitwan we saw another one-horned rhinoceros (the guides specialise in this), more monkeys, chital and closer views of wild boar, and a glimpse of muntjac (aka barking deer). Not a particularly productive day.

Himalayan tea-house trekking isn't particularly good for mammal watching – the main routes have a constant stream of trekkers, there are almost no opportunities to get off the route, and the terrain and distance of the trek mean you spend a lot of time with your head down trudging uphill. On our Poon Hill trek we saw a single nepal grey langur and an orange-bellied squirrel. On the Langtang trek we saw plenty of langurs and rhesus macaques, more squirrels and muntjac, and in the upper valley a mupin pika and himalayan tahr on scree slopes. We dedicated a day in the most promising area to searching for red panda, but no luck.

We twice saw a small dark mongoose-like animal in hilly farmland, about the size of a polecat, but couldn't identify it from our Nepal mammal reference.

Our route through Tibet was the standard overland trip, and the Chinese authorities don't look kindly on people going off their itinerary, so we didn't have many chances. But at the more isolated Ralung Monastery we saw himalayan pika and tibetan gazelle.

Photos from this trip at www.otteradrift.com – the blog for our year-long round the world trip. The next trip report will be from 6 weeks in Thailand.

Complete list for the Nepal/Tibet leg of our year around the world

(17 mammals in 7 weeks, all new to our life list except muntjac)

Rhesus macaque

Chital

Tibetan gazelle

Himalayan pika

Small indian mongoose

Orange-bellied himalayan squirrel

Nepal grey langur

Swamp deer

Hog deer

Asian elephant

Smooth-coated otter

Wild boar

Terai grey langur

Asian one-horned rhinoceros

Barking deer

Himalayan tahr

Mupin pika