



Intention: see and document Himalayan Goral and other indian wildlife; visit zoos on the way.

Locations visited: Delhi Zoological Garden; Shimla, Himachal Pradesh; Kufri/Zoo; Majathal Sanctuary; Nainital/Zoo; Jim Corbett Museum; Jim Corbett National Park

Mammals seen/heard or tracks found (14):

Five-Striped Palm Squirrel (*Funambulus pennantii*), **Himalayan Goral** (*Naemorhedus goral*); **Rhesus Macaques** (*Macaca mulata*), **Turkestan rat** (*Rattus turkestanicus*), **Common Langur** (*Semnopithecus entellus*), **Barking Deer** (*Muntiacus muntjak*), **Dhole** (*Cuon alpinus*), **Indian fox** (*Vulpes bengalensis*), **Indian Hare** (*Lepus nigricollis*), **Spotted deer** (*Axis axis*), **Asian Elephant**, domesticated, (*Elephas maximus*), **Wild Boar** (*Sus scrofa*), **Leopard**, track (*Panthera pardus*), **Tiger**, track (*Panthera tigris*)

21st of october: Delhi

Arrive at Delhi 00:05 am; later in the hotel open the curtains of my room and see my first **Five-Striped Palm Squirrel** (*Funambulus pennantii*);



Spent the afternoon in the zoo (Delhi Zoological Park): huge area; many animals have spacious enclosures. Some enclosures with dense plantcover, for example tiger, asiatic lion, sloth bear, nilgai – and therefore good opportunity for photography.



My first sight of Himalayan Goral (*Naemorhedus goral*) at the zoo; very fine enclosure: spacious, meadows, huge artificial rock with caves and opportunity for the animals to get away from visitors. Gorals in very good shape (agile climbing, no deformation of horns, no prolonged hooves).



Himalayan Goral (*Naemorhedus goral*)

22nd of october: Delhi

Again in the zoo; at 8:30pm take the bus to Shimla

Numerous wild, free ranging birds in Delhi Zoological Garden

Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*), german: Schwarzer Milan
 Roseringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), german: Halsbandsittich
 White Breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), german: Braunliest
 Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), german: Eisvogel
 Spot-Billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), german: Fleckschnabelente
 Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*), german: Buntstorch
 Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), german: Hirtenmaina
 Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), german: Seidenreiher
 Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), german: Zwergtaucher
 Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*), german: Mohrenscharbe
 Common Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), german: Kormoran
 House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), german: Glanzkrähe
 Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides striata*), german: –
 Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), german: Pfau
 Red-Wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*), german: Rotlappenkiebitz
 Rufous Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*), german: Wanderbaumelster
 White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*), german: Rosapelikan
 Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), german: Wiedehopf
 Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), german: Teichhuhn

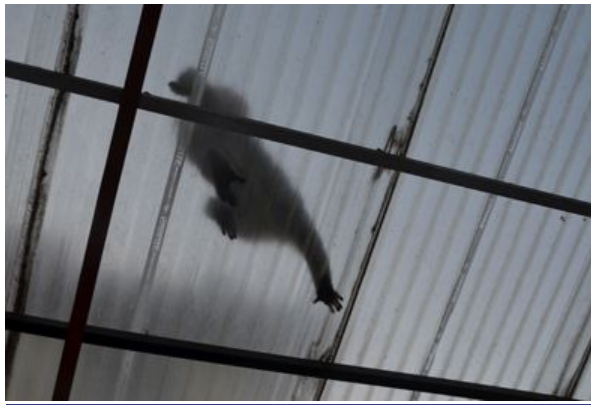
23rd of october: Shimla

Arrive at Shimla at 5:00am; take a taxi to YMCA up the hill; the driver can't point me out where exactly the hotel is; steep steps, not enough light, stumble around to find my hostel; I finally arrive there, but nobody at the reception; I decide to wait in the entrance hall and enjoy the awaking city: **Rhesus Macaques** (*Macaca mulata*) awake as well, descending from deodar cedars where they have probably spend the night.

Two dingo-like dogs enter the entrance hall, the one submissively baring it's teeth; I don't feel quite comfortable; hold my backpack in

front of me, shout at them and push them out of the hall; manage to close an iron gate behind them; decide to have a rest on a kind of shelf; as I turn towards it a ratlike rodent runs across the floor; I instantly notice a white belly and big ears; not really much time to identify it properly, but after having checked my „Field guide to Indian Mammals“ I suppose it must have been **Turkestan rat** (*Rattus turkestanicus*) – Himalayan and Sikkim Rat's distribution don't fit.

Around 7am I eventually get my room. Have a short rest after a night with hardly any sleep; have breakfast with Rhesus Macaques overhead on the transparent roof; hords of these monkeys fight and impress each other by leapfrogging on the corrugated metal and plastic roofs. Very noisy – and very funny. All rooms in the hotel are barred, nevertheless they tell you not to open the windows. Apparently the macaques come along with their kids which fit through the grates and steal your stuff!



24th of october: Shimla / Kufri

Drive to Kufri – along the Shimla Water Catchment Sanctuary. I am very impressed by the fact that Shimla is a very busy province capital with 250.000 inhabitants and the Sanctuary, so close by, seems to be an intact nature area. My guide tells me that leopards are seen on the road at night. Gorals reportedly occur also in the sanctuary.



Shimla Water Catchment Sanctuary seen from Kufri. Shimla in the background

Kufri-Zoo

Very fine compound – except for the birds.
Sambar, Barking Deer, Himalayan Brown Bear, Himalaya Thar, Goral have large enclosures; again very good opportunity to observe Goral (mating season!)





Have exceptional views of an adult Himalayan Brown Bear climbing a spruce, knocking off branches and feeding on the needles!



Free ranging, friendly group of Rhesus Macaques, which I can approach as close as five meters.

Wild, free ranging birds at Kufri Zoo

Bar-Tailed Treecreeper (*Certhia himalayana*), german: Himalaya-Baumläufer

Green-Backed Tit (*Parus monticolus*), german: Bergkohlmeise

Grey-Winged Blackbird (*Turdus boulboul*), german: Graüflügel-Drossel

Large-Billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*), german: Dickschnabelkrähe

Rufous Sibia (*Heterophasia capistrata*), german: Rotrücken-Timalie

25th – 27th of october: 3 days at Majathal Sanctuary

Make arrangements with Anil Kumar/Captivate Adventure Travels; have read of him in my Lonely Planet Guide; Anil is based at the Shimla YMCA. He is very interested in learning about animals. That makes him a very interesting travel companion. And he is a genius in organizing things.



Majathal Sanctuary

distance from Shimla: around 70 km / 2-3 h drive depending on the traffic around Shimla; very rough road up the hill; nearest village:

Kashlog

Altitude: 575-1985 m;

Rainfall: 1044 mm;

temperature: -1°C to 29°C;

vegetation: Himalayan Dry Temperate Forest

Mammalian fauna at Majathal includes

Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)

Asiatic Black Bear (*Ursus thibetanus*)

Golden Jackal (*Canis aureus*)

Common Palm Civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*)

Himalayan Palm Civet (*Paguma larvata*)

Yellow-throated Marten (*Martes flavigula*)

Jungle Cat (*Felis chaus*)

Sambar (*Cervus unicolor*)

Barking Deer (*Muntiacus muntja*)

Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*)

Goral (*Nemorhaedus goral*)

I had chosen to go to Majathal Sanctuary because in a study (www.faunalia.eu/pdf/JBombay92.pdf) the site was pointed out as the best location to observe Goral in Himachal Pradesh.

At our arrival Anil makes arrangements for our staying in the park. As it turns out, I am the first western visitor within 15 years or so. We had planned to camp within the park, but eventually end up in a temple which is situated on top of exactly that hill which harbors most of the gorals in the park. Ideal! On the way up we see diggings of **wild boar** (*Sus scrofa*).

Gorals are easy to be seen. The hill top has an altitude around 2000 m. Timberline is maybe 200 m lower. Gorals are observed above treeline, often in small groups up to 3 individuals, but are also quite shy (officially poaching is not a problem; according to Mishra 1996 poaching is „quite common“). The gorals except observers if they stay away as far as 200 m. If you encounter them at shorter distances they take off in flight and run until they have brought the 200 m between you and them.



One male had an injured left ear, torn into three pieces, what made him easily recognizable.

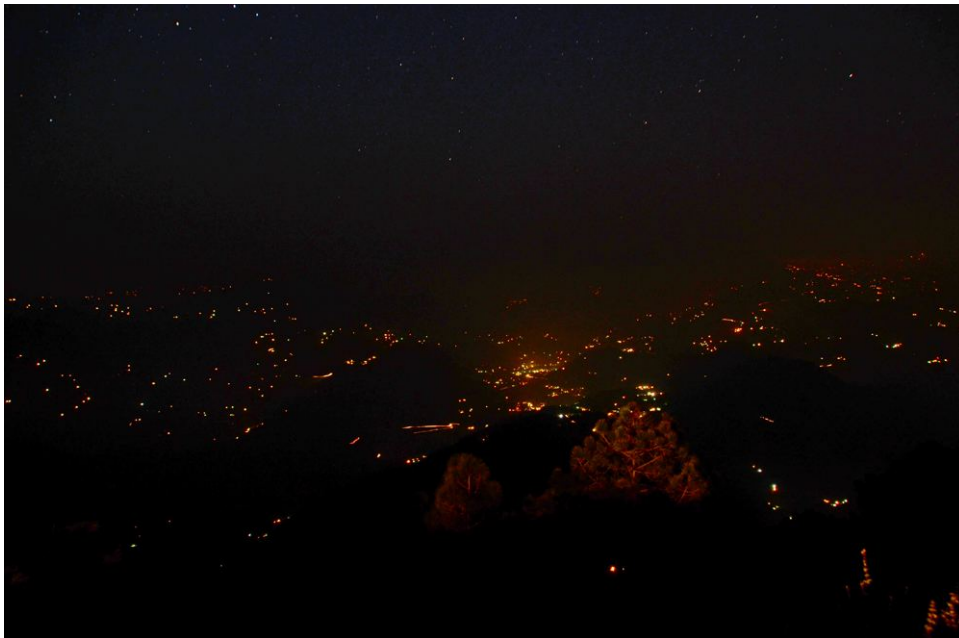
Mishra, C. (1996) Pheasants and other birds of Majathal Harsang Wildlife Sanctuary, Himachal Pradesh, India. *Forktail* 12: 1-8.

The temple is maintained by a 70 year old priest. He shares his kitchen and bedroom with us. What a privilege!



The priest at Majathal sanctuary with the cocoon of a mantis

At night the hills around us are illuminated with countless settlements, so you get an impression of how high the pressure through human encroachment is.



Down in the jungle we hear the voices of two **Barking Deer** (*Muntiacus muntjak*): very impressive. The priest tells us that calls of leopards are also to be heard – unfortunately not while we stay with him.



Paradise soon lost.

A dam will be built and drown the lower parts of the Majathal sanctuary. What a shame!

<http://www.tehelka.com/drowning-the-wildlife-in-majathal/>

Wild, free ranging birds of Majathal Sanctuary

which were seen during my three days there

Black Bulbul (*Hypsipetes leucocephalus*), *german*: Madagaskar-Fluchtvogel
 Himalayan Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucogenys*), *german*: –
 Blue Capped Redstart (*Phoenicurus caeruleocephala*), Blaukopf-Rotschwanz
 Himalayan Griffon (*Gyps himalayensis*); *german*: Himalaya-Geier
 Longbilled Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*); *german*: Dickschnabelkrähe
 Mountain Hawk Eagle (*Nisaetus nipalense*); *german*: Nepalhaubenadler
 Dark-Breasted Rosefinch (*Carpodacus nipalensis*); *german*: Dünnschnabelgimpel
 Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*); *german*: Habicht
 Scaly-Bellied Woodpecker (*Picus squamatus*); *german*: Schuppengrünspecht

The sanctuary is officially famous for its Cheer pheasants (*Catreus wallichii*). And there are also other Galliformes. None were seen.

28th of october: Shimla to Nainital

On the road between Shimla and Paonta Sahib (177 km, within the Himalayas) I see around 10 groups of **Rhesus Macaques** (*Macaca mulata*) and twice **Common Langur** (*Semnopithecus entellus*): one group of 3; once 1 solitary animal.

At Paonta Sahib I change driver and continue until I reach Nainital at around 3 am. An overland night trip by taxi is not exactly what you would call car based spotlighting, but on the other hand the results concerning mammals are not that bad. While my indian driver dashes with 90 km/h on average, windows half down (for the oxygen to not fall asleep), punjab music deafening everything, notoriously ignoring

elephant-crossing-signs we see one group of **dholes** (*Cuon alpinus*; german: Rothund), 4 to 5 animals near the village of Nagina (close to Dahmpur). Cool! The driver breaks for them and shouts: „Forest dogs!“ Again we see 1 near Bazpur.

Furthermore we see twice an **Indian fox** (*Vulpes bengalensis*). Between 1 and 2 am, on the winding road to Nainital we run into one **Indian Hare** (*Lepus nigricollis*) and one **Himalayan Goral** (*Naemorhedus goral*).

29th of october: Nainital

Stay at the Palace Belvedere. Built in 1897, this was the summer palace of the rajas of Awagarh. Animal skins adorn the walls and lend a faded Raj-era charm.



I am the only guest in the hotel! But there are always five or six employees around.

I meet the owner, Mr. A.P. Singh, who is the grandson of the former raja, who keeps the world record in hunting tigers. Guess how many! 1200. 1200 tigers he shot in his lifetime. Unbelievable! It is a record for all times.

Mr. Singh is very much interested in wildlife, so we talk about various species, observation and hunting while having a cup of tea.

Mr. Singh recommends a site for watching goral near Nainital: „The Ghorals one could spy them early morning just on the opposite hill to the Kilbury Dak Bunglow, i.e. on the road to Pungot. Northwest of Nainital.“ (I don't find enough time to go there myself.)

Spend the day at Nainital Zoo. Again a fine zoo. Enclosure of goral one could almost call seminatural with a forested slope including a natural cliff.

30th of october: Nainital

Start at 5:30 am from the hotel to look at two other sides for goral; take Bhowali-Road towards the plains; after ca. 9 km: southfacing cliff on the left hand side, on the right hand side, below: Gethia Village. Within 1,5 h I see: 2 **Barking Deer** (*Muntiacus muntjak*), 2 **Langur** (*Semnopithecus entellus*) – but now Goral.

On the way back to Nainital, a bit further up the road, towards Nainital: another site, called Pines; on the right hand side is a flattend area, where people dump garbage. One can stop the car there; on the right hand side across the road: again a cliff. Could get a brief glimpse of a mammal, what the driver instantly identified as a Goral; but without binoculars and distance too far to identify it properly, I have my doubts; fur was redish, therefore I suspect in to be rather a barking deer instead of a goral; back at the hotel for breakfast around 8 am.

Birds seen on the morning trip

Common Stonechat (*Saxicola torquatus*), german: Schwarzkehlchen
White-Eared Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucotis*), german: Weißohr-Bülbül
Russet Sparrow, female (*Passer rutilans*); german: Rötelsperling

Spent rest of the day again in the zoo.

Again good oportunities to observe **wild birds**

Green-Backed Tit (*Parus monticolus*); german: Bergkohlmeise
Black-Lored-Tit (*Parus / Macholophus xanthogenys*); german: Kronenmeise
Rufous-Naped Tit (*Parus rufonuchalis*); german: Fichtenmeise
Black-Throated Tit (*Aegithalos concinnus*); german: Rostkappen-Schwanzmeise
Bar-Tailed Treecreeper (*Certhia himalayana*); german: Himalaya-Baumläufer
Grey-Hooded Warbler (*Phylloscopus xanthoschistos*); Graukopf-Laubsänger
Lemon-Rumped Warbler (*Phylloscopus chloronotus*); Goldhähnchen-Laubsänger
White-Throated Laughingthrush (*Garrulax albogularis*); Weißkehl-Häherling
White-Tailed Nuthatch (*Sitta himalayensis*); german: Weißschwanz-Kleiber
Redbilled Blue Magpie (*Urocissa erythrorhyncha*); german: Rotschnabelkitta
Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*); german: Steppenadler

31st of october: Nainital to Jim Corbett Nationalpark



Painting at Jim Corbett Museum

On the way to Corbett NP I stop at Jim Corbett Museum at Kaladhungi, Choti Haldwani. Small, but impressive museum. Here Jim Corbett, the „slayer of man eaters“ stayed during the winter and killed man eating tigers in the surrounding area. Later he stood up for the establishment of Indias first national park and the protection of tigers.

At the national park I book the afternoon safari from 2 to 6 pm – only 4 hours. But it's absolutely worthwhile.

Behind the information center I detect a Common Langur (*Semnopithecus entellus*). I go down my knees to get a better angle with my camera. As soon as the monkey sees me focussing at him he bares its teeth and jumps towards me. At the same time I hear a suspicious noise behind me, turn and see five adult indians hiding themselves behind a car. I figure out at once that they don't do it for the fun of it and back down immediately. Fortunately the Langur keeps cool.

Until 2 pm there is still some time left. So my driver drops me off at the **Kosy-River** dam, where **birds** gather.

Birds at Kosy-River dam

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*); german: Kormoran
Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*); german: Mohrenscharbe
Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*); german: Paddyreiher
Crested Kingfisher (*Megaceryle lugubris*), german: Trauerfischer
Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), german: Seidenreiher
Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*); german: Flussregenpfeifer
Plain Martin (*Riparia paludicola*); german: Braunkehluferschwabe
Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*); german: Rostgans
White Browed Wagtail (*Motacilla maderaspatensis*); Mamulastelze
Wolly-Necked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*); german: Wollhalsstorch

Jim Corbett NP

Even though I have only an afternoon, it is definitely worthwhile. Get a good impression of the landscape in one part of the park, the Bijrani Tourism Zone, of natives living in the buffer zone and of quite a few birds and mammals.



Spotted deer (*Axis axis*)

Mammals/mammal signs at Jim Corbett NP (seen within 4 hours)

Spotted deer (*Axis axis*)

Asian Elephant, domesticated, (*Elephas maximus*)

Common Langur, (*Semnopithecus entellus*)

Rhesus Macaque (*Macaca mulatta*)

Indian Muntjak (*Muntiacus muntjak*)

Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*)

Leopard, track (*Panthera pardus*)

Tiger, track (*Panthera tigris*)



Common Langur, (*Semnopithecus entellus*)

While I lean out of the jeep to photograph tracks of a tiger and a tigress on the road, another car passes by and drives into the track in front of us, thereby erasing the paw prints in front of us. Two minutes later we follow and a few 100 meters further we detect again fresh tiger tracks, this time a tigress with a cub coming towards us. The guide decides to go on a little further, turn the car, then kill the engine and wait. He explains that tigers have the habit to travel on the road, then leave it when a car approaches and turn back on the road when they feel safe again. – After one or two minutes the driver starts to drive back. The tigers were not seen, but the whole event was exciting anyways.



Tiger pawprints (my wedding ring for scale)

Birds seen at Jim Corbett NP

Blue Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*), german: Purpurfeifdrossel
Changeable Hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*), german: Einfarb-Haubenadler
Common Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*), german: Schwarzkehlchen
Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*), german: Doppelhornvogel



Gray Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*), german: Gebirgsstelze
Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), german: Wiedehopf
Kalij-Pheasant (*Lophura leucomelanos*), german: Kalifasan



Red Junglefowl (*Gallus gallus*), Bankiva-Huhn
River Lapwing (*Vanellus duvaucelii*), german: Flusskiebitz
Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) Felsentaube
Rufous-Bellied Niltava (*Niltava sundara*), german: Rotbauch-Blauschnäpper

After the safari I invite my driver for dinner, then we head towards Delhi. Arrive there at around 2 am. No wildlife was seen on the road. Next day fly back to Frankfurt.

Final considerations

India is still a great place to be, especially for wildlife enthusiasts. But there are many sad examples, where wild animals vanish. Majathal Sanctuary is likely to become such a case.

Ecotourism has potential to support conservation. As the World Bank points out in a study: Ecotourism can be a source of financing for protected areas. It can give economic justification for park protection. It offers economic alternatives for local people to reduce exploitation of conservation areas and biological resources. Furthermore it is constituency-building which promotes conservation and it is an impetus for private conservation efforts. On the other hand it has also been shown that ecotourism has had adverse impacts on the resource base.

Personally I would prefer not to turn places like Majathal into a tourist attraction. But I see it as a matter of urgency to draw attention to this location since it will be partly sacrificed to a river dam project. Only if people get to know a place and locals realize that they can make a living with the beauty of the landscape and the animals living there, they have a motivation to commit themselves for the conservation of the area.

