

## N.E. INDIA – 2013 .

After many years thinking about a trip to this part of the World, we finally prepared an itinerary in conjunction with Jenny & Leio at India Nature, to explore some of the key sites hoping for a range of sought after birds and mammals. We decided to concentrate on the states of Assam & Arunachal Pradesh, and the key areas visited included Nameri, Dirang and the surrounding area, Eaglenest, Kaziranga and Hoollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary.

The timing of the trip was influenced by the weather, Leio's availability and the likely availability of some of the birds – too early in the Winter, and there would be a significant chance of problems accessing the higher regions due to snow, and later in the Spring, the temperature would increase markedly in the lowlands and many of the high altitude breeding birds may move to elevations where they would be difficult to find.

### **Flights.**

We flew to Kolkata via Dubai with Emirates, the aim being to all meet in Dubai from our London & Manchester flights and continue from there. Despite managing this easily in the past, Emirates had other ideas, and although we were both late arriving into Dubai, we were rushed through the airport and onto the connecting flight while Kenny & Cat were refused boarding, even though they were with us ! A farcical situation, and a warning about allowing sufficient time to make connecting flights – though in my opinion 1 hour 45mins should be long enough. From Kolkata we then took an internal flight to Guwahati (arranged by India Nature) where we met up with Leio. The others were stuck in Dubai, and eventually put on a flight to Kolkata the next day, although Emirates had no interest in their predicament with regard to their missed connecting flight... Jenny managed to re-book them onto another flight (at additional expense), and our driver had a long return drive to pick them up. Our return flights also had to be changed at the last minute, as the internal flight timings changed – again Jenny resolved all these issues with the minimum disruption to the trip. Internal flights were with Spicejet or Indigo, and the planes were modern and comfortable.

Note: it would be possible to fly to Delhi rather Kolkata to reach Guwahati if preferred.

### **Visas.**

Typically the price of a tourist visa increased in January 2013 to £ 92 – more than doubling at a stroke ! These visas are for 6 months, and the old 3 month visa seems to have been removed.

**Weather.**

During the trip we experienced a wide range of conditions, from warm and sunny at Nameri & Kaziranga to cold with frosts and even snow in the mountains near Dirang. At Hoollongapar we had heavy overnight rain and thunderstorms which brought out legions of leeches ! A good plan would be to prepare for all eventualities.



Foothills scenery.

**Insects etc.**

Apart from the Leeches mentioned already at the Gibbon Sanctuary after heavy overnight rain, which appeared in industrial quantities, there were hardly any insects noted that caused us any problems. Despite taking malarial drugs, we hardly saw any mosquitoes.

**Guides.**

We used Leio de Souza at India Nature ( [www.indianaturetours.com](http://www.indianaturetours.com) ) to arrange our trip. He guided us and was assisted for part of the trip by Rafiq, a young very proficient bird guide. Our driver Padam, was highly rated as well; effortlessly handling the at times demanding roads, and very considerate when it came to approaching wildlife without causing unnecessary disturbance. India Nature arranged the internal flights, all accommodation and permits to enter Arunachal Pradesh.

**Itinerary.**

17<sup>th</sup> March: Fly from UK to Dubai.

- 18<sup>th</sup> March: Fly Dubai to Kolkata and then to Guwahati. Drive 4 – 5 hours to Nameri N.P.
- 19<sup>th</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup>: Full days at Nameri N.P. including a morning rafting on the Jia Bhorelli river in search of Ibisbills etc. We had planned an excursion to a site near Tezpur to look for Ganges Dolphins, but very low water levels meant that they were not being seen, and this was reluctantly cancelled.
- 22<sup>nd</sup> March: Drive to Dirang crossing the border into Arunachal Pradesh. Late afternoon in Sangthi valley nearby.
- 23<sup>rd</sup> March: Pre-dawn drive to Sela Pass – at 4200m the highest point of the trip, and spectacular scenery if the weather is good, as it was for most of the day. Low cloud and drizzle can almost completely ruin the chances of seeing much here, so try to go to this site on a day with good weather, if possible.
- 24<sup>th</sup> March: Full day exploring the Mandala Road near Dirang.
- 25<sup>th</sup> March: Drive to Eaglenest via Tenga – a road with some spectacular sheer drops off the side ! Overnight a Lama Camp.
- 26<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> March: 4 full days exploring Eaglenest, on both sides of the pass, staying at Lama camp and Bompou Camp. We drove from one camp to the other ( 3 hours driven slowly) in the early hours in the hope of seeing mammals on the track, but were disappointed to not see any at all !
- 30<sup>th</sup> March; Drive to Kaziranga – 7 – 8 hours. Our first Greater One-horned Rhinos were seen from a viewing area on the main road !
- 31<sup>st</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> April: 3 full days in Kaziranga with visits to all 3 sections of the Park. Dawn Elephant ride on the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Nights at Wild Grass lodge.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> April; Early drive to Hoollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary – all day there. Night at the luxurious Thengal Manor hotel.
- 4<sup>th</sup> April Morning at the Gibbon Sanctuary, then drive back to Kaziranga and overnight at Wild Grass lodge.
- 5<sup>th</sup> April Drive to Guwahati airport via the city dump for Greater Adjutants ( Drive 5+ hours ) Fly to Kolkata and connect to international flights.

### **Birds.**

This area has long been considered a birding paradise, and did not disappoint. We recorded a total of 408 species, including sought after species such as Greater Adjutant, Jerdon's Baza, Pallas' Fish Eagle, Pied Harrier, Snow Partridge, Chestnut-breasted Hill Partridge, Blood & Kalij Pheasants, Ibisbill, Long-billed Plover, Red-headed & Ward's Trogons, Rufous-necked Hornbill, Yellow-rumped Honeyguide, 15 sp. of Woodpeckers, Long-tailed & Silver-breasted Broadbills, Fire-tailed Myzornis, 4 sp. of Scimitar Babblers, an astonishing 8 sp. of Wren Babblers and 3 sp. of Parrotbills !



Hoolock Gibbon.

#### **Mammals:**

Black Giant Squirrel *Ratufa bicolor* - Widespread in small numbers. Seen on 8 days.

Orange-bellied Himalayan Squirrel - *Dremomys lokriah* - Seen daily at Eaglenest, but shy and difficult to approach. Often seen feeding on sap low in large trees. Seen on 6 days.

Pallas' Squirrel *Callosciurus erythraeus* - Only seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Apr. at Hoollangapar Sanctuary, but easy to find there.

Irrawaddy Squirrel *Callosciurus pygerythrus* - Seen on 5 days in lowland areas; Nameri with 10 sightings being the easiest place to find them.

Himalayan Striped Squirrel *Tamiops macclellandi* - 12 individuals seen, most commonly at Eaglenest, though we found one at the Gibbon Sanctuary too... highly mobile and hard to photograph !

Small Indian Mongoose *Herpestes auropunctatus* - One seen at Nameri N.P. on 21<sup>st</sup> Mar.

Indian Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii* - Brief views of one on the 19<sup>th</sup> March.

Tiger *Panthera tigris* - Somewhat of a surprise to have superb views of 2 at Kaziranga,

both in the central sector – a huge male and a female on 31<sup>st</sup> Mar and 2<sup>nd</sup> Apr respectively. Both were within an hour of dusk. Sightings of Tiger here seem to be particularly good at present.



Male Tiger.

Smooth-coated Otter *Lutrogale perspicillata* - 11 individuals in two groups seen on 31<sup>st</sup> in the Eastern sector of Kaziranga – they gave excellent prolonged views.

Hog Badger *Arctonyx collaris* One of the mammal highlights of the trip. A female carrying a baby close to the main track, half an hour before dusk in the Central sector on the 1<sup>st</sup> Apr. Despite staking the area out again the following evening, we had no further views.

Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus* - At least 6 feeding on fruits in the garden of the Thengal Manor hotel were our only sighting.

Capped Leaf Monkey *Trachypithecus pileatus* - This smart monkey was seen on 6 days being most numerous around Nameri and Hoollangapar.

Stump-tailed Macaque *Macaca arctoides* - Having tried for a day and a half to track down these largely terrestrial macaques, we finally got lucky half an hour before we had to leave Hoollangapar. c.25 seen.

Assam(ese) Macaque *Macaca assamensis* - Quite difficult to tell from the widespread Rhesus Macaque - we saw 15 over 3 days.

Northern Pig-tailed Macaque *Macaca leonina* - 6 seen on 3<sup>rd</sup> Apr. at Hoollangapar sanctuary.

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta* - Widespread and numerous.

Hoolock Gibbon *Hylobates hoolock* - Seen both days at Hoollangapar sanctuary. Great views of at least a dozen, active and calling.

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* - Seen on 4 days; easiest to find at Kaziranga.



Indian Rhinoceros.

Indian Muntjac *Muntiacus muntjak* - Two seen at dawn at Nameri N.P. with others heard but not seen ( 21<sup>st</sup>).

Swamp Deer (Barasingha) *Cervus duvaucelii* - Good numbers seen at Kaziranga on all days

Sambar *Cervus unicolor* - Small numbers at Kaziranga.

Hog Deer *Axis porcinus* - The commonest deer at Kaziranga – over 100 seen.

Wild Water Buffalo *Bubalus arnee* - Most numerous at Kaziranga. Seen on 4 days.

Indian Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* - Numerous at Kaziranga; great views on every day

Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus* - Seen in good numbers at Kaziranga on each day.



Smooth-coated Otters.

**Additional notes** - whilst our trip was aimed at seeing both birds and mammals, if mammals were the only focus of a trip, then Eaglenest could probably be omitted, based on our experience. Although doubtless there are many sought after mammals there (including Red Panda) apart from the drivable track there are virtually no side trails that can be walked, and the slopes are extremely steep above and below making exploration off the track pretty impossible.

