

After 17 years I was overdue for a return trip to India and I suspect I'll be back again in the future as the ecological diversity of this vast country makes it a premier mammal watching destination. My daughter chose India as the destination for her 15-year-old trip (our family tradition is that each kid picks a trip anywhere in the world to go on with a parent for their 15th b-day...gratefully 2 of the 6 are mammal enthusiasts!) and I wasn't going to argue with her. Of course, seeing a tiger was on the top of her list. Because I previously saw tigers in Kanha and Bandhavgarh we planned to see some different parks and regions. We debated long and hard about going to Gujarat and searching for some of the unique species in that region but ultimately settled on Kaziranga to tick off Indian Rhino, Asiatic Elephant and Asian Wild Buffalo and then added Tadoba to see Tigers and hopefully Dhole and Sloth Bear. When I first visited India I purchased a copy of Mammals of India which includes a map noting dozens of parks and preserves considered the top destinations for wildlife watching—the map didn't even include Tadoba so as I read recent trip reports I was a little sceptical how Tadoba had been entirely off of my radar. It is a fascinating story that shows the tiger may well be the world's greatest economic animal—sadly in more ways than one.

I booked our trip through Ficus Tours <https://ficustours.in/>. Ravi Kailas was responsive throughout the planning, preparation, and execution of the trip via email and WhatsApp. Ficus organized the lodge reservations including the transfers to and from the airports but I booked the internal and international flights as well as the hotels in Delhi at the beginning and end of the trip.

I've traditionally just travelled with 1 camera but recently bought a mirrorless Nikon Z6ii so had my daughter bring my D7500. Due to lens options and compatibility I also bought the Z 180-600mm lens and my daughter shot with a 1.4 teleconverter and 70-200mm lens which with the cropped sensor gave effectively 147-420mm coverage. Those combinations meant we often struggled with just how close some of the animals were for close pictures. We could have taken her teleconverter on and off but this was her first time really taking pictures and with the pervasive dust and bumpy roads she left it on the entire time. I've got a lot to learn about photography in general and need to learn the control differences of my new camera but that didn't slow us down from taking pictures. There were definitely times when I missed the speed of my 200-400mm lens but I didn't miss the extra few pounds it weighs compared to the 180-600mm. It's hard to know how much I lost with sharpness with the cheaper lens but I'll keep practicing. After taking every bit of electronics and camera gear out of my bag each time we went through security in India I was glad not to have had anything else with me. Carrying all of my gear and my daughter's in one pack was a load as it was. Having two photographers helped us capture different angles and animal interactions and movements which increased the overall quality of the images.

We booked through Delta from Boise to Seattle to Paris to Delhi with the international legs on Air France. On the way home our route was Delhi to London to Seattle to Boise on Virgin Atlantic. The connections went smoothly and Air France surprised with below average airline food and better than expected toilet paper...I guess that's what you get in Economy. We landed just before midnight and caught a taxi to the Holiday Inn nearby at AeroCity. We had considered staying at the Holiday Inn located in the terminal but it did not appear that was an option as we hadn't booked a through ticket that included our domestic flight. A few notes: as usual there were hordes of folks trying to escort you to a taxi as you exited from baggage claim. We walked along with one and I asked how much—1,200 Rupees...As he

directed us across a couple of lanes of traffic I noticed a sign warning to only use pre-paid taxis so we hung a left and he just kept walking...At the kiosk I showed our hotel address and they said it would be 400 Rupees...good call. However, they didn't take credit card. Back across the street we went but realized without a boarding pass we couldn't get back inside to the currency exchange desks we had passed. We found another outside and after waiting in line for a few minutes decided each minute of sleep counted so I used an ATM to get some Rupees. We were at our hotel less than 20 minutes later and in bed for almost 5 hours before we returned to the airport the next morning.

We flew Air India Express from Delhi to Guwati where we were met by a driver from the Diphlu River Lodge <https://www.diphluriverlodge.com/> where we would be staying in Kaziranga. Driving times in India can vary greatly and always felt exaggerated when we asked how long it would take and how early we needed to leave but the nature of the roads and driving create uncertainty. We were scheduled to stop for lunch in route and then do a river cruise to look for the Ganges River Dolphin about an hour west of the lodge but the lodge called the driver while we were on the road to let us know that the weather wasn't cooperating and it was too windy for a boat ride. Instead we proceeded directly to the lodge. As we neared the park we passed several marked wildlife viewpoints and when the vegetation permitted views you could see into the wetlands and grass that cover much of the park. Before reaching the lodge we were thrilled to have seen several Indian Rhinos, a Hog Deer, and Wild Water Buffalo. It's not fair to see spotted as the Rhino's stick out like bulking gray tanks on the green terrain. Upon arrival we met our guide Bumoni (Bu), checked in and had lunch. The Diphlu River Lodge is a fantastic property consisting of 12 units of varying sizes built around a central rice paddy. All units are raised off the ground with a table and chairs beneath for relaxing out of the sun or rain. About a 3rd of the units face a tributary or branch of the Diphlu River including #6 where we stayed. From our balcony we could sit and watch the waterway. In the morning locals were fishing in narrow boats within view. The lodge is sandwiched just off the "highway" and the park itself which begins across the river.



Burapahar/Gorakati Range—best for Gibbon & Langur, Western/Bagori and Central/Kohora Ranges—Rhino, Elephant, Buffalo, Barasingha, Eastern/Agaratoli Range—more birds

Breakfast and lunch at Diphlu are buffet style and each day at lunch you place an order for dinner from 4 Indian and International entrée options. The food was excellent throughout our stay and they were kind enough to pack a few of my daughter's favorite chocolate muffins for our road trip when leaving the lodge. They bring desert to your table after lunch and dinner so don't skip out after the buffet at lunch. We were worn out but the early trip enthusiasm had us anxious for our first safari. The park gates formally open at 2:00 each afternoon. So departure time depends on which range or gate you'll be entering. Ravi had recommended to focus our time in the Burapahar (far western) and Kohora (central) ranges, but Bu suggested we start with the Bogori (western) range and we decided to trust him. Bogori is less than 10 minutes east of the lodge so it meant the excitement was soon to start. As with other Indian parks, there's a bit of administrative bureaucracy but it generally works. Ravi had warned that Bogori is the busiest entrance but I was still surprised just how many jeeps were already in line when we got there 10 minutes before the park was to open. Along the drive from Guwahati we had passed dozens if not hundreds of people painted in bright colors in various forms of revelry. It turned out that our trip coincided with a local festival so the crowds were greater than normal. We parked in line and Bu went forward to check in and make the necessary payments. Each vehicle is tracked in and out of the park by hand on paper to insure the park is empty when the gates close at midday and in the evening. There's much jockeying for position among the drivers and eventually Bu returned and we surged forward. At the gate our bags were checked and we were officially in the park. Pretty much immediately we could see several Greater One-Horned or Indian Rhinos.

Kaziranga doesn't have many road options within each range. The Bogori range consisted of a path that turned west immediately and another that continued north. We drove the western route to its conclusion at a set of restrooms then retraced our course to take the northern road. It wasn't long before we had seen the most common Kaziranga mammals which were just about inescapable on each of our 5 safaris—Rhino, Water Buffalo, Hog Deer, Swamp Deer (Barasingha), Wild Boar, and Rhesus Macaque. While watching one distant Rhino, Bu held our driver back and after the initial wave of traffic passed it approached quite closely and we were able to watch it trudge through a muddy flat until it parked directly in front of us to graze—so close we struggled to fit its bulk entirely in the frame. Later we watched a large group of Rhesus Macaques and were entertained by the energy and play of the young. We added Sambar further into the park. Ultimately we saw several Sambar on 3 of our 5 drives but they were usually along the edges of the forest and reticent to graze in the open. Before we knew it time had passed and we were headed out. The gates close at 5:00, when the sun has hardly begun to set so there's not great chances for the nocturnal species.

We explored the grounds at the lodge, walking down to the river and around all of the units, trying to scope out where we could look for mammals in the dark later in the evening. We had dinner each night at 7:00. We were too tired to spotlight that first night but Bu said he would help us look for owlets the next evening though he didn't express much optimism. I would ask repeatedly during the trip if there were places we could spotlight but didn't get anywhere other than just on the property.

I was up way too early the next morning which proved a recurring issue for the length of the trip. I saw several Irawaddy or Hoary-Bellied Himalayan Squirrels in the trees and a few Rhesus Macaques working on some fruit scraps behind the dining area. The weather in

Kaziranga proved surprisingly comfortable for the duration of our stay ranging from the high 70's to 80's at midday and the mornings were refreshing. We started our first morning drive at 7:30 as we were headed to the Burapahar or far western range and would have our best chance for Western Hoolock Gibbons in route which don't get active until the sun draws the out of the deeper forest. The sun was up at 5:30 so we missed two hours of prime searching. I later realized the park gates don't open until 7:30 anyways so the system is set up to prevent you from seeing the nocturnal species, or perhaps I should say to give them peace, quiet and space from humans! From the highway headed west it is a 20-30 minute drive but it took us an hour and a half with extended stops to watch hornbills and to look for the Gibbons. After a couple of attempts we stopped along with a few other cars at a point where the forest came all the way to the road and were rewarded with a family of 3 Gibbons playing in the tree tops. This was my first ape species and I didn't previously appreciate just how different it is to watch these magnificent creatures move compared to either new or old world monkey species. Their arms are a special combination of length, strength and flexibility that allows them to swing easily through the forest in very fluid motions without the erratic leaping of most monkeys. The stunning Gibbons' genders are easily distinguished by color as the male's are all black with white or gray eyebrows and the females are a much lighter gray similar white eyebrows. The family consisted of mom, dad, and a precocious teenager. The lighting was horrible with milky skies behind and the typical poor light of the forest, but we stayed for more than 20 minutes and eventually they came far enough out of the trees and into the light to get decent pictures.

At another stop along the road we saw our first Orange-Bellied Himalayan Squirrel before we entered the park. I don't know how crowded it would have been at the opening, but by 9:00 traffic was pretty light. This was our only drive through this range which along with the eastern range which we didn't visit (it is known for prolific birding and limited mammal watching) have much more forest than the Bogori and Kohara ranges in between. We were thrilled to have seen the Gibbon before even entering the park and quickly added the Assamese Macaque and Capped Langur which we wouldn't see again. The Burapahar range offered many more routes to follow and much more varied terrain than the Bogori range and it was easy to simply enjoy the scenery. At the far western end of the road there's a restroom facility along the Diphlu River near where it merges with the larger Brahmaputra. This was the only place in the park where we could walk further than just to the restroom so we meandered a bit along the river and saw an Malabar? Hornbill and a few Rhesus Macaques.

Back in the jeep we backtracked a bit then headed east into the interior of the park. Water Buffalo were plentiful as well as Hog Deer. Ultimately we saw many hundreds of Hog Deer over the few days. There are numerous lakes in this range which were home to our other target species for the day, the Smooth Coated Otter. As we approached one of these lakes we were talking about the otters and Bu pointed to the far side where a family of 10+ were frolicking as only otters do. Several of them were eating fish. After a few minutes they disappeared into the shrubs and we continued. 20 minutes later on our way back out of the park we stopped at the lake again hoping for a closer view of the otters. Eventually we found them on the waters edge swimming in and out of some vegetation. When they all exited the water Bu told our driver to go and predicted they would end up crossing the road which must have been a hundred meters away or more. We sped that way and stopped in time to catch a few shots of them out in the open. On our return trip to the lodge our driver pulled off having spotted a Giant Black Squirrel high up in a tree. Despite the enormity of the squirrel it remained an impressive sighting from a moving vehicle.

There are numerous tea plantations in the region, some of which had electric fences to keep elephants and other unwanted visitors out. For our afternoon safari we explored the Kohora or Central range. Once again the lineup of jeeps was astounding. There's a parking lot near the gate where buses and other cars park for folks transferring into jeeps. It was well after the gates opened before we passed through them and within a few minutes we were again in standstill traffic. Could there be something that exciting to see already? Eventually it was our turn to pass the cause of the traffic—a stunning Burmese Python sunning on a rock just a few feet off the road. Several times that afternoon I got excited when seeing Asian Elephants only for Bu to identify them as domesticated. Several of the ranger stations scattered in the park keep elephants and plenty of people were taking pictures of them. Eventually we found a few distant wild ones to add another lifer. The next traffic jam was from a reported tiger sighting. We spent a decent portion of the afternoon parked on the side of the road in forested areas waiting for a tiger to appear but to no avail. The drivers and naturalists have cell phones so are in touch with other vehicles and communicate interesting developments but we weren't in luck. While there were a couple of tiger appearances during our time in Kaziranga it doesn't seem like a great option for tigers though it would have been nice for my daughter to see her first. We did see an Indian Muntjac near the road in the forest before our afternoon safari ended.

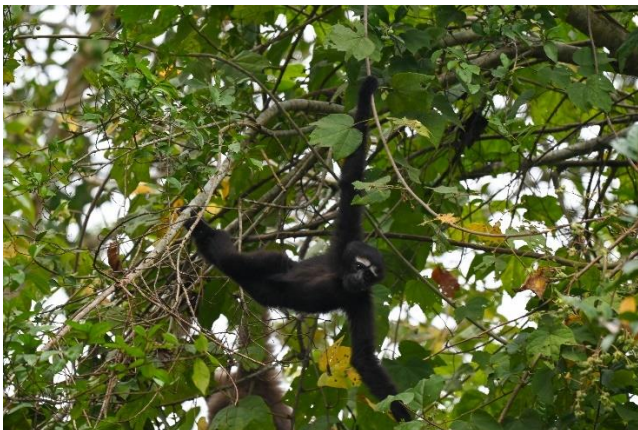
After the sun set Bu walked around the lodge property with us. We heard an owlet but didn't find anything with my thermal camera or spotlight until we got down to the river. Strict rules prohibit spotlighting in the park which began at the river edge so Bu was adamant we couldn't shine the light north. After a few minutes I found movement in the scope...A clear smallish cat shaped image was exploring the opposite shore. Bu confirmed it was likely a Fishing Cat but there would be no light shone its direction. We watched it for a couple of minutes then continued along our side of the shore and found a Rhino through the thermal camera grazing on the opposite riverbank. Short evening explorations the following night didn't produce anything.

Monday morning we were able to reschedule the missed river cruise. I was hesitant as we still hadn't had a true morning safari entering the gate as it opened and I wasn't sure how likely it would be to see Ganges Dolphins. We left at 8 and drove an hour west beyond the end of the park and boarded a small local boat along with a Slovenian couple from the lodge—they had been around the world to see mammals but wasn't familiar with mammalwatching.com so I shared the good news with them. We couldn't have gone more than ½ a mile or so out into the river and slightly downstream before we saw our first Dolphin. We put an anchor down and spent the next 90 minutes puttering around watching Dolphins and hoping to catch on with our cameras. My arms got tired holding the lens up in what seemed like a fruitless game. We saw so many Dolphins we eventually caught a couple of them in frame. On the drive back Bu saw a mongoose of some variety run across the road while passing through a tea plantation but I missed it.

Monday afternoon we returned to the Kohora range and enjoyed the reduced traffic after the holiday weekend had ended. We had excellent Asian Elephant, Rhino, and Water Buffalo sightings but at that point having seen everything we had expected to see we realized it was pretty unlikely to see anything else new. This time we made it around the entire loop which we had failed to do the previous afternoon due to traffic and tiger waiting. On our way out of the park we saw a Water Monitor swimming along the shore before disappearing.

Tuesday morning we returned for a shortened safari to the Kohora range. The highlight was another Giant Black Squirrel. We left the park before 11:00 to drive east for our flight out of Jorhat. During the trip planning we had tried to make it work to visit the Hollangar Wildlife Reserve to see more primates but it hadn't been feasible. In hindsight We probably would have been better off to drive to Jorhat the evening before and do our last safari at the reserve rather than a 5th safari in Kaziranga. We flew from Jorhat to Kolkata and after a 4 hour layover during which my daughter talked me into eating at KFC—beware the Peri Peri chicken if you can't handle spicy food—we connected to Nagpur. A driver was waiting for us to take us to our hotel on the south side of town. Kaziranga pictures below:





The next morning a driver from Tadoba Jungle Camp <https://www.tadobajunglecamp.com/index.html> picked us up at 9:00 for the 3 hour drive to Tadoba. Indian one lane roads...The area felt a bit more rural than Kaziranga. The lodge is considerably larger than Diphlu and I think is considered 3-star rather than 4-star. That said it was comfortable and met all of our needs. I believe they said it was built 6 or 7 years ago. Yash, the manager was constantly checking in to see if everything met our expectations. We had packed breakfasts every day that were eaten in the park so I'm not even sure if they offer breakfast in the dining room. Lunch and dinner were buffet style with typically one entrée that was more international in flavor. The best part of the meals were the fresh naan—garlic or butter that they brought to each table. The lodge is directly off the main road with views of the Irai Reservoir and less than 10 minutes from the Moharli Gate of Tadoba-Andhari National Park and Tiger Reserve. The weather was considerably warmer in

Maharastra than it had been in Assam with temperatures in the mid-nineties to just over one hundred each day. It was uncomfortably warm at the start of the afternoon drives at 2:30 but bearable by the end at 6:30 as the sun was setting. Morning drives went from 6:00 to 10:00 so the heat wasn't a factor until the last hour or so. The park hours were much more conducive for prime mammal watching but we still didn't see any of the nocturnal species on any of our 8 safaris. At the reception guests record on a white board the animals they see...tigers, tigers, more tigers, leopard, dhole, sloth bear, the mammals I was most keen to see! After checking in and meeting our naturalist Samrat, we had a quick lunch and then loaded up for our first safari. The yellow is the Core Zone and white is the Buffer Zone



Tiger Economics – The Role of Tourism in Wildlife Conservation

The beginning of a famous quote usually attributed to St Augustine is that “the world is a book”. Tourism/travel is part of the book and one particularly important story is about the role of tourism and conservation at Tadoba National Park.

A traveller does not only aspire to be just a traveller but also looks forward to contributing to nature, which is the true essence of travelling. This is especially true for wildlife tourism. So how does the traveller contribute? Does the traveller even know he/she is participating indirectly?

Tadoba and Maya best illustrate our point. Tadoba is a wildlife park in Central India and Maya is its premier or rather queen tigress. Maya was born in 2010 and during her 10 years there has been responsible for many wonders. In 2010 Tadoba had only 3 resorts accommodating tourists but today in 2020 it has more than 40 resorts. In 2010, only around 100 people were employed in the Tadoba tourism industry; today that has increased to around 4000 local stakeholders. With just 19 tigers in 2010, Tadoba is now booming with 106 tigers (2018 census) in its jungle territory which has increased in area from 625 Sq km to around 1726 Sq km. All of this has been possible due to the sudden escalation in tourism in the last decade. Central to this is the opportunity to catch a glimpse of Queen Maya. This captivating tigress alone has generated around 100 million dollars for the park during that time.

In this subtle way, the tourist contributes much to nature and thus becomes a conservationist. The wildlife tourism industry is most grateful to all tourists who have played a vital role in this understated project; expressed great interest in wildlife tourism and become a valued part of the enchanting wildlife family.

Thank You
Team Tadoba Jungle Camp.

In Tadoba each vehicle is required to have a driver and guide in addition to the naturalist provided by the lodge. If I understood correctly the drivers and guides are essentially contractors and are assigned by the park each day from a list so you get different folks on each drive and have no say. The entry process is more formal and structured than at Kaziranga. Each vehicle is given a cell phone that acts as your permit and tracker and is returned upon exiting. There's a large, paved parking area where the jeeps wait while the guide is assigned and you are checked in. The best part is the canopies in the parking lot to give shade while you wait. There's a visitors' center but we never went in it as we never had to wait long to get into the park. There is a 250 rupee fee per camera brought into the park each drive. That does not include cell phones because they are strictly prohibited in the park and there's a 5,000 rupee fine for using one in the park. Apparently there was an incident a few years back where a tourist was using their phone camera and the flash startled a tigress that was on the road and the video footage went viral...hence the no cell phone policy.

The Moharli Gate enters into the Core Zone of the national park but the main road leading to the gate that lodge is on is part of the Buffer Zone where there are protections for the animals but still residents carrying on normal life—as normal as it can be to live with tigers. The terrain and vegetation is dramatically different in Tadoba than Kaziranga. It was the middle of the dry season and the forest was parched which meant lots of leaf litter on the ground. Through much of the park bamboo has filled in the understory and limits visibility significantly. Where the soil isn't conducive to the bamboo there's a fair amount of grass but that's a much smaller portion of the terrain. The park provides a water source for every 2 square kilometers of park land. In the past they would truck water in tankers to fill the water holes but have transitioned to solar powered pumps. This reduces congestion at water holes and preserves life. I would suspect the man-made water holes also reduce traffic to the reservoir on the park edge which would help minimize human/wildlife conflict too.

The main road through Tadoba is paved as it used to lead to a village that was relocated several decades ago. It is nice to have the main thoroughfare not caked in dust like the rest of the roads that branch off throughout the park. We did 8 safaris at Tadoba and saw each of what I would call the Tadoba Big Six on 7 or 8 of the drives: Gaur, Cheetal, Wild Boar, Sambar, Grey Langur, and Bengal Tiger. It really is hard not to see each of those species on every drive. Sambar were much more plentiful than at Kaziranga and we saw a number of groups of 10+ individuals. The naturalists and guides have a pretty good idea where many of the resident tigers were last seen when we enter the park and we ended up seeing at least 2 tigers on 7 of the 8 drives. The only time we missed the tiger was a drive where we purposefully didn't go where we knew that had recently been so that we could focus on other wildlife. We had one drive with just those 6 species and each of the other drives had 7-10 species with 7 occurring on 5 of the 8. So basically we usually saw 1-2 other species beyond the Big 6.

The highlight of drive #1 was a pair of 10-month-old tiger cubs. Initially they were barely in view as they relaxed in the shade of some thick shrubs but as we waited and watched they walked to the water's edge to cool off after timidly placing their first paw into the water. We could hear their growling and see their snarling faces as they tried to warn off any curious Mugger Crocodiles as they entered the water. We watched them for a full 30 minutes. That tremendous encounter on our very first drive took the pressure off and helped us relax going into the rest of our drives.



We were one of the first 5 cars into the park for drive #2 the next morning. We headed to a new part of the park further north and explored the perimeter of a large lake where a large Sambar buck was grazing. As we came around the far side there was a jeep stopped in front of us and we quickly saw a tiger squatting on the road. As we pulled up it walked to the other side of the road and crouched in the dirt before the tall grass began. The Sambar we had been watching started walking right towards the tiger. We held our breath as it got closer and closer. I stopped taking pictures and began to video. The tiger leapt in what seemed like slow motion and then surged after the Sambar narrowly missing the fleeing deer. Once the tiger stopped pursuit it continued for another 50 yards then stopped, turned back and eyed the tigress warily. The tigress continued walking until it reached the road a couple hundred yards behind us and we drove that length quickly in reverse. By the time we got there jeeps had arrived in front of the departing cat and soon there were a dozen or more jeeps observing. We took lot of butt shots while the vehicles on the other end got face shots. By the time she disappeared it had been 20 minutes since we first encountered her. Later in the morning we saw distant male tiger lying in a pond and then caught a glimpse of a leopard deep in thick underbrush.



In the afternoon we saw the mother of the twins from the first morning with one of the twins lounging at a lake. A large male was occupying the other side of the lake but they never interacted. That night we saw Spotted Deer or Chital with our spotlight in the fields between the lodge and reservoir. We walked the property each evening with thermal camera and spotlights but those were the only wild mammals we saw.

The following morning we explored an elevated grassy ridgeline in hopes of finding a sloth bear but found a large male tiger instead who let us take pictures for 20 minutes as he marked his territory and walked down the road. We went all the way to the far north end of

the park where there's a large open grassland in hopes of finding a Nilgai or Jungle Cat but were unsuccessful. On the way back we drove by the largest lake in the park and saw a female Mugger Crocodile on her nest on the shore.



On our 5th drive we saw a jeep stopped in the distance on the main paved road and began to guess what it was they might be watching—hopefully not a bird! When we stopped behind them we saw a furry black beast deep in the underbrush—finally my Sloth Bear! The adolescent male seemed entirely unconcerned by our presence but also entirely uninterested to pose for pictures where we might see him clearly. A few other cars stopped but most moved on as there wasn't much to see. A quarter mile down the road was a clearing with tall grass and we hoped he'd eventually make a showing there. 23 minutes after we stopped the bear emerged from the undergrowth and crossed the road directly in front of us. On the other side of the road he went behind the nearest tree and stuck his snout into the earth in search of termites. We could hear him breathing and see his sides heave as he repeatedly blew into the termite mound. Our guide explained that the bear could then essentially suck up the termites who were suspended in the air by the wind of his breath. After a few minutes he came back to the roadside, so close we could see his long claws as he dug up the ground in his quest for lunch. We could see termites all over his face as he gorged himself though he was a bit too close for ideal photos. After exhuming the colony he wandered back into the woods and we drove on. This would be the only drive in Tadoba where we didn't see tigers as the afternoon was far gone at this point and we weren't near the tiger hotspots so we just explored the nearby roads until exit time.



The following morning we went south into the Buffer Zone through the Junona Gate. We didn't realize it at the time, but we were done visiting the Core Zone. Each session's entry pass is good for either the Core or Buffer Zone and you can't crossover during a drive.

Samrat said the Buffer Zones were usually good for tigers but we may see less other wildlife. Along the edge of the Buffer Zone we meandered through grasslands that bordered a marshland. We heard Chital alarm calls but couldn't find the cause of their disturbance. My daughter spotted a Sloth Bear at an intersection as we turned the other way. We had a close-up view but he disappeared into the thick underbrush before we got any good pictures. The road passed through a small village and as we approached the adjacent fields we met a number of cars watching three nearly year old tiger cubs. In the Buffer Zones the rules are not so strictly enforced so we learned that the guides use phones to share sightings and that's what led us to this field. We could see the village only a few hundred yards away where livestock grazed and men and women worked and children played. In front of us was tall dry vegetation that easily hid a lying tiger but cubs began to play and periodically they would emerge above the grass in full view. They began to wrestle while standing on their hind legs and swung their massive paws with tremendous force. You never knew exactly where or when they would come into view and focusing so quickly amidst the grass was a challenge but I was later thrilled to see some of the images I captured.



From there we returned to another lake near where we had been earlier in the morning to see a tigress with 2 cubs. They were a bit distant but the contrast of the Tigers in verdant green grass and water compared to the earlier setting of dry grass was striking. We headed back to check in on the cubs that had been playing in a field and ran into a jeep that managed to video the cubs mother attack a bull in a nearby field only to have the villagers chase it off and save the bull. Life is precarious in the Buffer Zone!





That afternoon in our 7th drive we entered the Buffer Zone through the Dewada Aegaon Gate. I made it clear that we wanted to focus on looking for Dhole, however low the odds. Samrat said no one had seen Dhole in the Buffer Zone that week and took us back to the lake from the morning where we saw the Tigress with the other of her 3 cubs. We had front row parking at the waters edge but after a few minutes asked him to please let us go look for Dhole. He struggled to accept that we really wanted to leave the Tigers that he was sure would soon be playing. He acquiesced and we left the hordes and tigers behind and went to explore some other dusty roads in the Buffer Zone. The temperature was pushing 100 and I was tired and a bit discouraged. The only thing going for us was the lack of dust as there was no traffic in the area. We had joked all week, “No Tigers, no dust, and no dust, no Tigers.” It got slow enough we even stopped to take a picture of a bird—a drongo. Almost two hours after we left the Tigers we rounded a bend in the later afternoon and there ahead of us were several Dhole ahead in the distance! We stopped for an initial picture and then eased forward trying not to disturb them. They crossed the road back and forth seemingly trying to decide where to go and what to do. We pulled past them so we could look back at them and get face shots as they continued on the road. There were 5 in all including 1 that was clearly much younger and smaller than the rest. Just as they approached close enough for some full frame shots Samrat instructed the driver to pull ahead to our chagrin. He explained that if we kept our distance in front of them they would continue to follow us down the road and increase our time watching them which is exactly what happened. We spent a magical 20 minutes as the only vehicle with the pack of Dholes.



Our last safari was again through the Junona Gate into the Buffer Zone. The only thing I really had hoped to see at this point but hadn't was a Jungle Cat so we returned to the grasslands along the marsh. We had no luck with small cats but soon a massive male Tiger emerged from the tall dry grass. His coat was pale and he blended in extremely well with

the grass. Just three minutes later and only a few hundred yards away the same Tigress we had seen attempt to kill the Sambar in the Core Zone walked out from the grass with all 3 of her young cubs in tow. These cubs were about 5 months old and looked much more like cubs than the young adolescents we had seen to that point. There were jeeps every where positioning to give their clients the best views and it was a good moment to reflect on how difficult it is to be a good driver with so many different opinions of how and where to park and drive all while dealing with the other vehicles and their frustrated passengers if you pull in front or crowd to close. Over the week there were several incidents where bumpers met and a few scratches left. Over the next hour we watched them until they disappeared and then tried to guess where they would next surface. Sometimes we were right and others wrong but we kept moving until we found them again and took hundreds of pictures of this celebrity family.

Our final Tiger sighting of the trip was back at the lake where one of the older cubs was resting and then we spent the last hour trying to capture video footage of Sambar, Chital, Gaur, and Boar that I had not bothered to take previously. Our last safari ended as each other had with a moist towel to wipe the red dust off of our face and gear. After cleaning up and packing we began what was scheduled to be a 46 hour trek home to Idaho. We slept for 4 hours at the hotel in the airport and learned at the ticket counter at 3:00 AM that our flight had been delayed two hours and we should have slept in. Our delayed flight from Delhi to London took an unplanned 2 hour pit stop for a passenger's medical emergency in Istanbul which led to a missed connection and an overnight in London. We filled the time with sightseeing and got last minute tickets to Phantom of the Opera. At last we made it home the following evening a full 64 hours after we had left Tadoba Jungle Lodge. In the end we spent far more time in transit to and from India and between parks then actually on safari but when you add up the list of sightings it all seems well worth it.



Mammal List:

Kaziranga 20 species (14 lifers), Tadoba 14 species (3 lifers), 30 total mammal species

Mammal (Lifer)	<u>Kaziranga</u>	<u>Tadoba</u>
Tiger (23 sightings of 17 individuals!)		x
Leopard (1)		x
Fishing Cat (1)	x	
Sloth Bear (3)		x
Smooth Coated Otter	x	
Ruddy Mongoose (6)		x
Indian Gray Mongoose (9)		x
Dhole (5)		x
Ganges Dolphin	x	
Indian Rhino	x	
Asian Elephant	x	
Asian Water Buffalo	x	
Gaur		x
Barasingha/Swamp Deer	x	
Hog Deer	x	
Sambar	x	x
Chital/Spotted Deer		x
Muntjac/Barking Deer	x	x
Indian Boar	x	x
Hoolock Gibbon	x	
Assamese Macacque	x	
Rhesus Macacque	x	
Grey Langur		x
Capped Langur	x	
Black Giant Squirrel	x	
Orange Bellied Himalayan Squirrel	x	
Hoary Bellied Himalayan Squirrel	x	
House Rat	x	
3 Striped Palm Squirrel		x
Indian Flying Fox	x	x