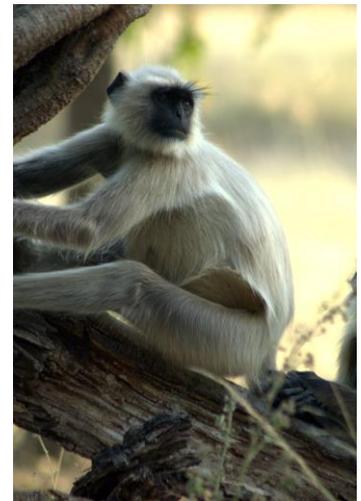


Tigers & Temples

Destination: Bandhavgarh NP, India **Duration:** 8 Days **Dates:** 6th – 13th Mar

-  Finding and watching a total of 4 Bengal tigers throughout the tour
-  Having the best Indian leopard sighting in Royle Safari history – 10m away!
-  Exploring the wonderful ancient Hindu temples of the Khajuraho Western Group
-  Seeing well over 100 different species of birds throughout the tour
-  Spotting 6 different jungle cats, one hiding in the grass and disturbed by chital
-  Having the temples of Khajuraho brought back to life by expert guides
-  Hearing the intimidating roars and growls of a mating pair of tigers around 150m
-  Spotting the newly reintroduced guar as well as rare Indian gazelles and nilgai
-  Seeing the spectacular sound and light show at the ancient Khajuraho Temples
-  Watching a jungle cat eating a squirrel it had only just caught next to the road



Tour Leader / Guides

Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)
 Vijay (Ground Agent in Khajuraho)
 Ravi (Temple Guide in Khajuraho)
 Ravi & Pradeep (Transfer drivers)
 Jagat (Bandhavgarh Naturalist / Driver)
 Arjeet (Bandhavgarh Naturalist / Driver)

Participants

Dr. Robert (Bob) Holmes
 Mrs. A. Caroline Holmes

Overview

Day 1:	Khajuraho
Days 2-7:	Bandhavgarh
Day 8:	Khajuraho
Day 9:	Delhi
Day 10:	Home



Day by Day Breakdown

Overview

It is hard to imagine a world without wild tigers, a world without the largest species of cat, a world without the majestic beauty of the orange and black predator. Unfortunately it is just as hard to imagine a world where tigers roamed from Turkey to Korea, Iran to Indonesia, a world where there were around 40,000 tigers in India alone! But this was the world only 100 years ago. For the vast majority of people alive today the tiger has always been a rare and endangered species. To try and think of the tiger as common or widespread is to think of a time when a hunter could easily kill 20 in a day!

We missed the boat with tiger conservation, no country took any steps to ensure their continued survival until a survey in the 1970's brought back worrying findings. With a population in India of only around 1,500 and extermination from 50% of their historic range the fate of the tiger was firmly hanging in the balance. India started the conservation work by initiating Project Tiger and by creating numerous Tiger Reserves around the country, fully guarding the parks and ploughing millions of dollars into the project the numbers increased. In fact the numbers peaked in 1989 to 4,334 in India. The project was working and tigers were coming back strong. This was of little surprise to scientists who predicted that with protection and an adequate prey base the tigers fast breeding, relatively large litters and high survival rate would mean they would repopulate quickly.

However the project and for the most part the conservation world took their eye of the ball and the flow of money to the parks and guards began to waiver and the same people who were once employed to protect the tiger were now having their heads turned by Chinese smugglers offering them massive paydays for dead tigers. A survey in 2006 found that the number of tigers had fallen to 1,411 a 60% decline since 2002, this data coupled with the fact that several 'Tiger Reserves' had no tigers left inside them and an independent study finding that the tiger's habitat globally had continued to decrease and was only 7% of its former range; left Project Tiger with no choice. The project began to plough money into the project again and in effect had to start from scratch. This time international agencies like WWF and TOFT were more heavily involved and the most recent survey suggests a 12% increase and tiger numbers of 1,706 in India.

The news for tigers is also good elsewhere with the Russian Far East increasing its population from 40 to over 400 since the 1940's, with tiger conservation in Burma, Thailand and Indonesia taking centre stage with large tiger preserves opening up as well increasing numbers in Nepal and the ambitious Terai Arc Landscape project (Tiger Corridor) in the Himalayan foothills taking form quickly.

The plight of the tiger is still precarious but at least things seem to be looking up. If we can get China on board then the fate of the tiger could be ensured for many more generations yet.

This tour would take us to one of the best (if not the best place in the world) to see tigers. Being one of Project Tiger's original 9 reserves and one of the highest densities of tigers in the world, the national park of Bandhavgarh in Madhya Pradesh is a remarkable and beautiful place. We arrived a couple of months after the death of B2, the male tiger who had dominated the park for 11 years after the death of his legendary father Charger. What we are due to see if any one's guess. There are around 23 tigers known from the area open to tourists and with counts of up to 17 cubs in the surrounding areas we were full of expectation as we headed into the park. Royle Safaris boasts an impressive 100% success rate with tiger sightings here in Bandhavgarh and we were all looking to keep that record going on this tiger tour.



Day 1 **Khajuraho**

Arrival & Sightseeing

The tour started at the entrance to Terminal 3 at Delhi airport as you met your zoologist escort and checked into the flight to Khajuraho via Varanasi. The check in process was as comprehensive as ever but there were no dramas with the flight and we got off pretty much on time. The flight too was ok and on arrival in Khajuraho we met our local guide Vijay Singh and off we went to the hotel. After checking in and relaxing for an hour we headed out to the temples which make this small rural town so popular. First off the Western Group and the largest and most complete set of temples here. They were all built between 950 – 1050AD by the 'Moon followers' the Chandela Dynasty. We were in the expert hands of Ravi as we explained the various carving and building techniques that created the thousands of exquisite carvings. From large mythical beasts polished from centuries of people paying respect by rubbing its sides, to the six inch high depictions of Ganesh, Siva or Parvati to the war scenes with elephants and soldiers to the stories of everyday life such as putting make up on, removing thorns from feet and of course the sexual desires of men and women. The temples here are probably most famous for the erotic carvings showcasing some of the Karma Sutra however they only account for around 5% of the total carvings; and it is often the



subtleties of other carvings which catch the eye more. For example the lace trim of a see-through sari wrapping its way around the legs of a dancing girl or the facial expressions on children and servants. All in all the temples here are beautiful reminders that even 1000 years ago everyday human life was just as mundane, complex and full of chores and jobs as ours are today. As well as exploring some of the 15 temples of the Western Group we got a good introduction to the more common species of birds. With a couple of colourful Indian rollers taking centre stage, with a supporting cast of tiny common tailorbirds, numerous Asian pied starlings, common mynahs, brahminy starlings, nosy Alexandrine parakeets, rose-ringed parakeets and nice close up views of a male and female plum-headed parakeet. But the best wildlife sighting was awaiting us as we neared the exit of the temple gardens when Martin spotted a small Indian mongoose scurrying along the ground close to some three-striped palm squirrels and a couple of common tailorbirds. We watched and hoped for a mini hunt but the mongoose ignored the squirrel on the ground and moved towards a tree which had a couple of squirrels in it and they made sure that every squirrel and bird around knew there was a threat with a loud squeaking alarm call.

After this great encounter we left the Western Group and headed around to the other side of Khajuraho and the Eastern Group, this group was built in the same era but has since been taken over by Jains (as opposed to continued Hindu worship) so there were some nice differences to notice amongst the temples and carvings. The most obvious difference is the presence of the multi-coloured Jainism flag mounted on top of each temple. Another key difference is that when the temples have been reconstructed (as most of the remaining temples have been reconstructed to some degree), as Jainism was established by Hindu priests (Brahmin) who began to worship prophets as opposed to gods they did not see the need in carving the detailed statues in tribute to the gods, instead the newer temples are whitewashed with very small symbols located around the doorways of each temple. These symbols are all different and represent one of the 24 prophets who are worshipped by the Jains. For example a bull represents the 1st prophet and a lion the 24th. As the prophets are identical these symbols are the only way of identifying the individual prophets and their temples.

After here we left for the hotel and a couple of hours of break before heading back to the Western Group for the spectacular hour sound and light show. Set in the gardens surrounded by the temples, a near full moon illuminating the night we were well positioned for the temples and their long history to be brought back to life. The show is very well done and the numerous different coloured spotlights and booming narrative echoing through the ruins is a great way to appreciate the 1000 year history of this place. Coupled with three species of bat fluttering around above us the whole evening experience was magical. Afterwards we headed to a nearby restaurant which overlooked the gardens to enjoy our evening meal and a couple of drinks.



Day 2 Bandhavgarh National Park

Travel & Rest

This morning we had a bit of a lie in and a late breakfast before meeting Vijay once again and being transferred to Bandhavgarh by the excellent driving of Pradeep. The scenery of this part of rural India is a mixture of agriculture with rice paddies interspersed with mustard fields, yellow lentils, assorted vegetables as well as brick factories with their many firing kilns and small villages built close to the side of the roads. Not long after leaving Khajuraho we drive through the bufferzone of Panna National Park (recently devoid of tigers there are now a breeding pair hoping to establish a new population). We did however see many southern-plains langur monkeys and a large troop (100 plus) Rhesus macaques on all sides of the road. These two groups of primate (langur and macaque) being amongst the most commonly seen mammals in all of the Indian Subcontinent and most of South East Asia too.

Continuing onward with the plains of the Deccan Plateau sprawling out either side of the road leave little to look at in the distance; which makes the large flat topped hills and hillocks as we approached Bandhavgarh all the more impressive. Their sides heavily eroding away with thousands of years of monsoon run off leaving the tops looking like oversized table tops precariously placed on top of tables too small to support their weight.

Other than the odd spectacular geological wonder to look at the rest of the journey was spent trying to spot some of the various birds who make the telegraph wires over the cultivated land their home. The lizards, mice, insects and other small creatures feeding off the grasses, seeds and roots make a veritable banquet for the dozens of Indian rollers, black drongos, paddyfield pipits, jungle babblers, common stonechats and pied bushchats which we spotted along the way. But by far the most impressive bird sightings we had were 5 vultures soaring close to the ground above an unseen carcass of some sorts (hopefully not a diclafenic infected livestock carcass – but probably so). The vultures were identified as 3 Egyptian vultures (once thought immune to the diclafenic epidemic which has reduced the Old World Vulture population in the Indian Subcontinent by 99% in 30 years, but now suffering a 40% decline since 1990) and 2 oriental white-backed vultures (one of the worst affected species) and a great sighting as their numbers seem to be making a sort of a comeback as diclafenic use is being limited more and more.

As we got closer to Bandhavgarh we started noticing a subtle change in the birdlife, less and less Indian rollers and black drongos and more and more spotted doves, black ibis, cattle & intermediate egrets and laughing doves. The



reason for this shift is species may be nothing more than an anomalous observation or it may be a sign of changing agricultural use of the land as the buffer zones of the park only permit subsistence and traditional farming techniques. Further into the sal forests of the bufferzone and we spotted our first chital, a herd of around 15 individuals on either side of the road and a nice welcome to tiger country. It wasn't long after this when we arrived at the resort and with lunch quickly followed by dinner (due to our late arrival) in our bellies we decided to hit the hay and get another good nights sleep.



Day 3 Bandhavgarh National Park

Holi Festival

We had our first trip into the park scheduled for today but the Hindu festival of colours (Holi) happens to fall on today. This 2- 16 day celebration in a springtime festival which changes every year depending on the ancient Sanskrit calendar and the position of the moon – it can be anytime from February to March and unfortunately for us the park is closed on the main day of the festival. The festival is to celebrate the overcoming of evil by good and revolves around a battle for power between the Lord Siva and the King of the Demons (Hiranyakashipu) and the death of his evil daughter Holika by decent. This story has evolved through the centuries to a stage where coloured powder and liquid is mixed up and thrown over people in massive drunken street parties throughout the country.

Well as we had the day off and Tala (the gateway village of Bandhvgarh) is not particularly big we decided to have a walk and see what we could see. Well we were walking for less than 10 minutes before a group of children approached us and wanted to wish us a happy Holi. Well this was a well constructed (although not well hidden) ploy to cover us in a rainbow coloured cocktail of powder and liquid! It was fun, the dye and powder is all made from natural products, lots of fruit extracts) so it was easy enough to wash off afterwards. We decided not to stay outside of the 'safety' of the resort walls for too long in fear of being embroiled in the festivities and not being able to recognise each other in a dense covering of colours. This is of course an exaggeration but at the same time it would be easy to get covered from head to toe with so many colours you turn a deep shade of purple.

They rest of the day was spent relaxing and resting around the grounds of the hotel. The expectation of entering the park tomorrow was beginning to feel the atmosphere and we got an early night in preparation for the first jeep safari early tomorrow morning.

Day 4 Bandhavgarh National Park

Wildlife Watching

This morning was our first trip into the park, we boarded our private jeep at 06:00am and headed to the gates for opening time at 06:30am. We were in the expert hands of Jagat Chadurvedi (head naturalist for Tiger's Den Resort and responsible for completing the mammal checklist for Bandhavgarh). Given route B & C in Zone 1 to start with was a good sign as we knew that there was a tigress with 3 cubs aged 5 months within this section of park, so we started off close to where she is usually seen and found her prints and those of her cubs fresh from this morning. We continued and found large adult male prints heading in the same direction. It is probably the presence of the male which is leading the tigress to move her cubs away. Males will kill another males cubs so that the female will come into oestrous again and breed with him. But a recent study has suggested that the fathering tiger will spend a large percentage of time in the vicinity (albeit not very close) to the tigress with his cubs. This maybe a rudimentary form of paternal care. More research is needed to establish the reasons for this behaviour but it would make sense that if the siring male was around scent marking that there is less chance of another male coming to kill the cubs.

We continued our safari and amongst the hundreds of chital and dozens of southern-plains langurs and Rhesus macaques we were treated to a whole host of bird sightings. From the common Indian peafowl, jungle babblers, rufous treepies, green bee-eaters and Indian robins we got good views of white-eyed buzzards, common hawk-cuckoo, European hoopoe, European golden oriole, large cuckoo-shrike, grey francolins, Tickell's blue flycatchers and crested serpent eagles. But the real avian gem of the morning safari were the vultures. Bandhavgarh is one of the last real strongholds for the vultures of the Indian Subcontinent and it is not unusual to see some individuals from many species however we saw 4 red-headed vultures close by a roost of 28 Indian vultures. This is a huge number and every time I come here I see more and more vultures which is such an encouraging sign for their recovery. Ordinarily this would be a highlight of the first safari in the absence of tigers, but as we left the ranger station (having received news that the tigress and three cubs has been spotted by the mahavats and that a Tiger Show (Der Shan) could be available), we were travelling through one of the large meadows (maidens) and Martin spotted a cat shape stealthily walking in along the tree line of the forest in front of us. 'Leopard, leopard, leopard straight ahead' was the cry and we watched in amazement as probably the rarest large mammal in the park walked in front of us and into the thick bush. We turned around and headed to the road we had just come from and there around 20m away the large bold male leopard crossed the road and headed to our right once again. Luckily this



section of road is shaped like a letter 'M' and so we had one more parallel road to try, as we reached it the leopard had already crossed but posed perfectly in the sun on a rock about 15m away from us; he then crossed the road for a third time and headed down and deep into the forest. All together we were within 25-30m of the leopard for around 3-4 minutes and this is the greatest leopard Royle Safaris has ever had outside of Africa or Sri Lanka. To see a leopard in Bandhavgarh is incredibly rare and to see one so close for so long is almost unheard of. There are two reasons for this unusual sighting, firstly he was a large male and so has seen many jeeps in his life and is quite used to them the second is that as the heat of summer draws in the leopards come down from the hilly areas of the park (of which they are confined after being displaced by tigers) and as they head down to reach water and more prey they quickly try to establish territories and are therefore more active during the day.

This nearly took our mind of the possible Der Shan but we remembered and carried on to the site where the elephants were taking people to see the tigress. We waited for a while but eventually news came back that she had moved on up the hill with her cubs and out of sight. We called it for this morning and went back to the resort full of excitement after a great cameo from the Jungle Prince often in the shadow of the mighty tiger but today playing the leading role.

After a much needed break in the heat of the day and a nice brunch we left for our afternoon safari of the park. We were very much looking forward to it and after the success of the leopard this morning we were hoping for a 2 cat day! We entered the park in zone 2 this afternoon and this is the zone where we know 3 different tigers were spotted, 1 lone female and a male and female (probably a mating pair), so we headed to their last known locations to see what we could see. Along the way to the site the lone female was last spotted (close to a water hole) we had a shikra (and Indian sparrowhawk) fly low in front of the vehicle and drop the unidentified bird from its talons just to the side of the road. We don't know if our presence spooked the shikra into dropping the bird but we didn't stay too long as the shikra may have come back to collect the carcass as it requires a huge energy expense for the shikra to secure each meal. Once we arrived close to the water hole we stayed a short while but thought it best to try where the male and female pair were seen; it was still very hot for a tiger to be up and about and mating pairs are always more active (well they have to mate every 15-20 minutes for 5 days!) so there is more chance of movement even in the heat of the day...if we could find them. As we arrived at the scene we heard from another jeep waiting there that they had heard growling around 100m away around some dense jungle and a dry river bed hidden from view from the road. We decided to wait and see what would happen, it wasn't long before our two jeeps turned into 4 and then 6 and then 16! This is the most I have ever known in the Bandhavgarh on the same routes at the same time, and we still hadn't seen the tigers. But the action was heating up as we heard them mate twice, the tell tale growls, moans and roars followed by the sounds of a little scuffle are the sounds of love in the world of the tiger. We stayed around here for the best part of an hour before we thought better of the wait, even if the tigers did move from their well concealed position they would probably walk in the opposite direction to the waiting blockade of noisy, smelly and unforgiving jeeps full of humans lined up along the road.

So we left and headed towards the rehabilitation enclosure for gaur. This huge section of the park was fenced in (with a good population of the native animals inside) and set aside as an acclimation pen for the new herds of gaur being moved from Kanha National Park around 700 miles away. The resident population of gaur (the world's largest species of cattle) all migrated out of Bandhavgarh in 1997 and never returned. They were always a migrating species but this time they never came back and the 200 or so gaur just disappeared. This reintroduction programme is working and the first herd of around 30 animals spent around 6 months in the acclimation pen before being released into the park proper and have been doing well since. As we drove past we didn't expect to see any as the pen is large the gaur shy of open areas; what we were looking for were 3 sub adult tigers which are being kept in the enclosure. There 3 siblings were captured ages 8 months when their mother became a man eater and was relocated to Bhopal zoo last year. The fear is that they saw their mother hunt, kill and eat humans, of course they probably ate some of the 4 people she killed as they are weaned at around 6-8 weeks, but whether they associate people with easy food is not known. So they were placed in the enclosure to be managed. They were supplied meat as they were still unable to catch their own food and will soon be reaching the age of independence and dispersal. What happens when they are released is any ones guess, but thank god the days of shooting man eaters and their cubs is over and other protocols are in place instead. We didn't see any of these tigers but we did see some of the 26 gaur as they fed and moved around the perimeter of the enclosure, this second herd is due for release soon and with a bit of luck a fully self sustaining population of gaur will once again flourish in Bandhavgarh.

As the afternoon wore on and we headed through one of the largest maidens in the park we noticed a couple of doe chital on edge. Their heads and eyes focused and fixed on something, their tails fully erect and even stamping the ground with their forelegs. They were well in the open and had 2 very young fawns with them, so we scanned the area looking for anything which was provoking this agitation. Then Martin spotted a curled up jungle cat, the same colour of the grass and around 1m away from the chital. The chital refused to loose ground and the jungle cat just stared in a tight curled ball. Then the chital finally spooked themselves and they bolted a short distance away, this spooked the jungle cat in turn which ran off into the longer, thicker grass around 20m away. It seemed to make sense that the jungle cat had been sleeping and resting in the grass and the chital had startled it, there was no hunting or aggressive behaviour on the part of the jungle cat, despite them being more than capable of taking down a fawn chital.

Well as we headed out of the park we got our 2 cat day, however we had seen the 2 harder to see species, well we guessed that the big one would be waiting for us tomorrow. But the excitement was not over, as we drove along the



buffer zone road back to Tala and the resort Martin spotted another jungle cat on the side of the road around 5m away. It didn't stay around very long after we screeched to a stop but another exceptional sighting to cap an exceptional day.



Day 5 **Bandhavgarh National Park**

Wildlife Watching

Today followed the same plan as yesterday, with an early start and a jeep safari once again led by the experienced Jagat. Back in zone 1 and with routes A & C we started with the territory of the tigress and 3 cubs and straight away we saw fresh prints of a sloth bear; with the luck we were having we half expected to see one walk right across the road. But it wasn't to be. However as we drove a little way further we heard the langur alarm calls, spotted two sambar with tails up and staring intently into the jungle. Sambar are the most reliable source of tiger presence in the jungle as they feel little threatened by anything else, even leopards seldom warrant alarm calls from sambar. So we waiting, a couple of jeeps also waiting and we split up to cover a large section of the road. We waiting and waiting and then the piercing whistle alarm call of the native Indian naturalist filled the air. There was a tiger down the road. We turned around and headed down the road and there on the other side of the road a large male tiger. Probably aged 4-5 years old he was walking purposefully through the jungle, Jagat explained that the prints of a female without cubs have been seen here recently and that he is probably looking for his first mate. We lost him from view after about one minute and so but continued to hear him roaring, this was a pretty clear signal that he is on the lookout for a mate. We waited a while longer but the lack of alarm calling meant he had probably walked too far from the road and out of earshot of the calls. So we left and continued on, but we quickly stopped again as a jeep ahead of us beckoned a tiger was in the jungle walking parallel to the road in the bamboo. We spotted him and recognised him as the same male and followed him for a 100m or so before losing him once again and this time for good.

The rest of the morning was actually pretty quiet the two notable sightings being an Indian grey mongoose coming down to a water hole and drinking and a pair of Indian grey hornbills flying over our jeep. After returning to the resort and bidding farewell to Jagat (we would be driven around by his younger brother Arjeet from now on) we breakfasted and then met up with Arjeet and headed out on our fourth journey into the park. The first thing we did when we entered the park was to visit the water hole we expected this morning's male tiger to visit. There were already a couple of jeeps there and after hearing that no alarm calls had been heard we decided to leave and drive around other areas for a bit and then come back when it begins to get cooler and stake out the water hole. The whole safari was actually pretty quiet, lots of the usual chital and langurs but we didn't seem to be finding anything of special interest. That was until a pair of Indian grey hornbills flew directly over our jeep, until then this usually common bird had remained unseen but defiantly heard. Their piercing screeches filling most of the safaris we had undertaken. The next excitement was not far off as we headed further along to a large maiden where vultures are sometimes seen; we spotted a pair of female sambar and a fawn looking very nervous. They were staring past us and over the road into the thick bamboo. Their tails erect and their gaze unflinching; we drove back down the road to see if we could spot what it was that they were looking at. Then Martin spotted it, whilst the guide and driver were looking deep into the bamboo, Martin noticed another jungle cat only 2-3m away from the road. It was sat down feeding on a three-lined palm squirrel. Usually sambar would not be bothered by a cat of this size but their view of the animal was obstructed and they presumably heard the noises of the chase and the squeals of the squirrel and got panicked. The sounds of death are fear evoking for all ungulates, even if the predator is incapable of bringing them down. We watched as the jungle cat fed on most of the squirrel before it got a bit wary about our presence and left for a more secluded spot with the rear half of the squirrel hanging down from its jaws.

We carried on to the maiden and sure enough there was many vultures, some in trees, some circling above (high and invitingly low for photography) and seven in a row on the ground. Together with a few Indian rollers, a pair of red-wattled lapwings, three lesser adjutant storks and flocks of spotted doves the vultures made a very nice spot for bird watching. We counted a total of 11 Indian vultures, one red-headed vulture, two Oriental white-backed vultures and most amazingly one very rare griffon vulture. All these birds is such a good sign and everyone at Royle Safaris gets excited when we see vultures in the Indian Subcontinent, long may their recovery continue against the ever present threat of diclafenic.

After this we headed back to the water hole and to wait for the male tiger, we were not alone, around 25 other jeeps were there and positioned all around the water hole. Unfortunately the best and worst of Indian wildlife watching can be experienced in Bandhavgarh. Being the most Tiger Reserve in India means lots of people and despite the route and zone system there are often many jeeps and noisy people surrounding every tiger when one is seen. The only plus side is that most of the tourists are Indian people, most with young children and at the end of the day it is the Indians and especially the children that will be the ones who will have to make the important decisions on tiger conservation in the future and ultimately it is the few tigers in Bandhavgarh which are subjected to much human scrutiny and excitement that could inspire conservation and end their threatening plight.



We were about to experience this in full force when after around 1 hour of waiting the tiger was spotted walking towards the water followed by a chorus of chital alarm calls. The tiger then proceeded to walk towards our jeep and at about 20m away turn and head parallel and around the growing throng of jeeps, across the road and down to the hidden water hole. A park official came and took the registrations and vehicle numbers of a few jeeps who were breaking the rules; getting too close, disturbing the tiger's route and going well off the road to get a view. With any luck these drivers and naturalists will be punished. Whilst everyone here wants to see the tiger more than anything, there are much bigger things at stake here for the tiger and rules must be abided. After the tiger had disappeared down the banks of the water hole we left and headed back to the accommodation, the tiger had nearly timed his movement to perfection, another 10 minutes and the park would be empty as sunsets and he could have been completely unencumbered by vehicles and loud people.



Day 6 **Bandhavgarh National Park**

Wildlife Watching

Today is our last full day in Bandhavgarh and we headed into the park via zone 2 in the morning hoping to continue our rich vein of luck in spotting cat species. The whole morning was by far the quietest we had seen the park, instead of the hundreds of chital we spotted a mere 34 and amazingly only 9 southern-plains langurs. Our most notable sighting of the first half of the safari was a very close Indian roller encounter. The colourful bird sat on a perch only 5m away and in the morning light the dazzling blues made for some great pictures. We also spotted nice tracks of a seldom seen mammal in India the Indian crested porcupine, later we would actually see the after effects of last nights foraging as a couple of trees were completely devoid of bark up to 1 foot above the ground, leaking fresh sap and covered in the tell tale pattern of porcupine teeth. After this we headed to the territory of a tigress currently with two cubs. As we searched her territory we came across very fresh (within 30 minutes as they were on top of vehicle tracks from this mornings jeeps) prints of a male tiger walking down the road. We followed these prints for about half a mile before losing them and after speaking to a couple of other jeeps we all assumed the tiger had gone into the jungle to the west of us. We then headed the long way around to the other side of this section of jungle, but didn't find any other promising signs of the tiger anywhere. We came across a large lake and enjoyed some great bird watching, dozens of little grebes, sprinklings of black drongos and groups of red-wattled lapwings as well as the ever present Indian rollers made up most of the birdlife. But we also spotted common sandpipers, Indian cormorants, a large flock of black ibis as well as a little egret, intermediate egret and great egret (almost in perfect size order in a line feeding). After leaving here we skirted the guar acclimation pen for about half a mile and once again Martin (who was well and truly on a cat spotting roll by now) spotted another jungle cat, this one standing tall facing us with large ears erect and staring right at us from just inside the acclimation pen. As another jeep arrived it curled up and melted into the grass like a tawny spectre. So no tigers this morning but we left knowing that anything can happen in Bandhavgarh and this afternoon would offer as good a chance as any to see tigers once again.



Day 7 **Bandhavgarh National Park**

Wildlife Watching & Transit

This morning we entered the park into zone 3 for the last time. A sloth bear had been spotted early one morning along this route so we thought we would try our luck here. The morning was very cloudy and there was even a light sprinkle of rain (which are both good for sloth bears) so we went in optimistic. As it was we didn't see a sloth bear however we did run into two different species of mammals which we had not seen yet and in fact two species that are not seen very often in Bandhavgarh. First a pair of mother nilgai and their offspring crossed the road in front of us. These large Indian antelopes rival the giant eland of Africa in size (well the slate-grey males do). We also saw a large male sambar close by. The true size of these huge deer apparent in this majestic male. We visited a watch tower and had a great view out over the park and the surrounding cultivated land; whilst here we heard alarm calls and we headed back down in pursuit of the panicked chital somewhere in the jungle. We stopped by a small stream (the true extent of this river only seen just after the monsoons) where we had an oriental honey-buzzard fly directly over us pretty low; we then visited another small waterhole and watched as a sounder of wild boar (5 in total) came down and drank right in front of us.

After this sighting we left and headed through some of the more open habitat on the look out for the few wolves that live around here. What we did find was a small group (4) of chinkara or Indian gazelles. They are in the same genus



as the typical African gazelles and they give the impression that you should expect to see a cheetah prowling the grasslands. Well as cheetahs were indigenous to the Gangetic plains until around 100 years ago it is not that bizarre a thought. There are also calls to reintroduce a population of cheetah back into India which would mean India have tigers, lions, leopards, cheetah and snow leopards, what an amazing collection of big cats for one country. As we watched the chinkara feeding and wandering the cultivated grasslands we noticed a small band of tiny jungle bushquails running through the undergrowth. The only other notable incident were some leopard tracks walking along the road from last night.

On our way out of the park we went and paid a visit to a large lake near a small village in the buffer zone of the park. Here we saw some new species for this tour such as a large flock of lesser whistling ducks, hovering pied kingfishers and the exquisite Eurasian kingfisher. Then as we left the park and were on the road back to Tala and heard news of a tiger growling just off the road, a couple of jeeps were waiting but in all likelihood the tiger would not come out into view in the middle of the morning onto a busy road. So we left and got back to the resort.

After we had breakfasted and packed back at the resort we left and headed the 250km back to Khajuraho. We arrived back in the late afternoon and after a few long days and early starts for the safaris we had nothing in particular planned for this afternoon or evening. So we relaxed in the rooms before having our evening meal.

As our plane back to Delhi doesn't leave until the early afternoon we had the opportunity to have a lazy morning tomorrow.

Day 8 Delhi

Transit

This morning we had a lie in and after a later breakfast we met in the reception of the hotel, checked out and were transferred to the airport in time to catch our return flight to Delhi. The flight was only just a little late so we managed to get back to the hustle and bustle of Delhi pretty much when we were scheduled to. Although the tour was over at this point we decided to stick together as Bob and Caroline checked into their hotel first and then Martin checked into his and then we headed to a gem of a restaurant hidden inside the chaos of the Paran Ganj. This was our last meal together and afterwards we sent our separate ways on the Delhi Metro and the tour was over.

Species List

Tigers & Temples March 2012

Mammals (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Chital	<i>Axis axis</i>
2	Gaur	<i>Bos gaurus</i>
3	Nilgai	<i>Boselaphus tragocamelus</i>
4	Golden jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
5	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
6	Jungle cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>
7	Northern palm squirrel	<i>Funambulus pennantii</i>
8	Chinkara	<i>Gazella bennetti</i>
9	Indian grey mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>
10	Small Indian mongoose	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>
11	Indian crested porcupine	<i>Hystrix indica</i>
12	Black-naped hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
13	Rhesus macaque	<i>Macaca mulatta</i>
14	Sloth bear	<i>Melurus ursinus</i>
15	Indian muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>
16	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
17	Tiger	<i>Panthera tigris</i>
18	Indian pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus coromandra</i>
19	Indian flying fox	<i>Pteropus giganteus</i>
20	Southern plains langur	<i>Semnopithecus dussumieri</i>
21	Wild boar	<i>Sus scofra</i>
22	Naked rumped tomb bat	<i>Taphozous nudiventris</i>

March							
06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13
	9		668	509	158	57	
			17				
						5	
				1			
			13	20	12	8	
			2	1	3		
8			1	1		1	
						4	
				1			
1							
					*	*	
			1(?)				
	~100		15		1	116	
			*	*	*		
					3		
			1			*	
			*	2	1		
17				3		1	
3							
	38	9	110	119	45	136	
			20	31	12	9	
3							

Birds (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
2	Eurasian kingfisher	<i>Acedo atthis</i>
3	Bank mynah	<i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>
4	Common mynah	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
5	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
6	Common iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
7	Red avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>
8	Asian openbill stork	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
9	Paddyfield pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
10	House swift	<i>Apus affinus</i>
11	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
12	Indian pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
13	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
14	Eurasian thick-kneee	<i>Burhinus oediconemus</i>
15	White-eyed buzzard	<i>Butastur teesa</i>
16	Striated heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
17	Greater coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
18	Pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
19	Greater flameback	<i>Chrysocolaptes lucidus</i>
20	Woolly-necked stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
21	Purple sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
22	Rock (feral) pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
23	Oriental magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
24	Indian roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
25	Large cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>
26	Jungle crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchus</i>
27	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
28	Tickell's blue flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
29	Asian house martin	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>
30	Rufous treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
31	Lesser whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
32	White-bellied drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>

March							
06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13
			1	1	1		
						2	
~25	7					~90	
100's	~100			1	2	~120	
					3		
					1		
					2		
						1	
	7					2	
~20							
			2		7	2	
	1						
	18	5	11	7		19	
					1		
			4	3	2		
						1	
			2	1	1	1	
						1	1
			2		1	1	
	1			3	7		
		4		1			
~100						34	100's
			2		3	2	
6	27		11	10	23	31	
			2			2	
~100	~35	17	84	8	9	100's	~50
100's	~20	~20	4	5		~100	100's
			2				
	10					1	
			3	2	1	7	
						~40	
			3		1		

33	Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
34	Greater racket-tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
35	Lesser racket-tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus remifer</i>
36	Black-rumped flameback	<i>Dinopium bengalense</i>
37	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
38	Black-winged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
39	White-capped bunting	<i>Emberiza stewarti</i>
40	Indian silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>
41	Red-throated flycatcher	<i>Ficedula parva</i>
42	Grey francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>
43	Red spurfowl	<i>Galloperdix spadicae</i>
44	Red jungle fowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
45	Jungle owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>
46	Asian pied starling	<i>Gracupica contra</i>
47	Indian white-rumped vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>
48	Griffon vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>
49	Indian vulture	<i>Gyps indicus</i>
50	White-throated kingfisher	<i>Halycon smymensis</i>
51	Common hawk cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>
52	Black-winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
53	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
54	Wire-tailed swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
55	Long-tailed shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
56	Grey-backed shrike	<i>Lanius tephronotus</i>
57	Lesser adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
58	Brown headed barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
59	Green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
60	Blue-tailed bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
61	Intermediate egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
62	Little cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>
63	Black kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
64	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
65	White-browed wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>
66	Asiatic brown flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>
67	Egyptian vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>
68	Changeable hawk-eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
69	Indian grey hornbill	<i>Ocyroceros birostris</i>
70	Eurasian golden oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>

1	4			5	9	5	
				1		1	
			2	1			
	1					5	
					1	4	
						2	
						12	
					4		
				1			
			3		4		
				4		2	
			6		5	5	
			*				
3							8
	2		11	2			
				1			
				22	14	1	
			1		8	3	
			1				
	1						
	~50						
					1		
1				1		3	
	2						
			2	4	4		
			1	1			
	7		5	12	3	1	
	2			2	2		1
	2				1	7	
				1		2	
~10							~30
			1				
				1		1	
		1					
	3					2	
					*	1	
			*	3	7	3	
			2		1		

71	Common tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
72	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
73	Indian peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
74	Jungle bush-quail	<i>Pedicula asiatica</i>
75	Oriental honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
76	Chestnut-shouldered petronia	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>
77	Indian cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
78	Hume's leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>
79	Grey-breasted prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
80	Plain prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
81	Black ibis	<i>Pseudibis papilosa</i>
82	Plum-headed parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>
83	Alexandrine parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
84	Rose-ringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
85	Dusky crag martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>
86	Red-vented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
87	White-throated fantail	<i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>
88	White-browed fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
89	Plumbeous water-redstart	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosa</i>
90	Sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
91	Red-headed vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>
92	Pied bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
93	Common stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
94	Indian robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus</i>
95	Spotted dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
96	Laughing dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
97	Crested serpent eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
98	Eurasian collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
99	Oriental turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
100	Red-collared dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
101	Brahminy starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>
102	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
103	Ruddy shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
104	Common woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>
105	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
106	Jungle babbler	<i>Turdoides striata</i>
107	Eurasian hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
108	Red-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indica</i>

4						1	
~100	4					62	~20
			50	53	87	11	
						3	
						1	
			1		4		
	~50				4	2	
			3		1		
					1		
			1		1		
	1			5	16		
2					8	18	
5	7		1	2		9	
1				1			
	~80		~50			~20	
3	10		8	5	9	10	5
			2	1			
				1		1	
						1	
	~130					~50	
			3	2			
	2					1	
	2						
			1			3	
	7		13	8	15	84	
	2				2	18	
			3	3	2	3	
						6	
			1	2			
	1		1				
8				3			
					40		
	6						
						2	
1	2		39	12	30	135	
			2		1	2	
6	2		3	1	24	7	

109	Yellow-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>
110	Orange-headed thrush	<i>Zoothera citrina</i>
111	Oriental white-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>

					1		
					1		
	5						

Reptiles (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Indian golden gecko	<i>Calodactylodes aureus</i>
2	Indian garden lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
3	Common Indian bronzeback	<i>Dendrelaphis tristis</i>

March							
06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13
1							
		1					
				1			