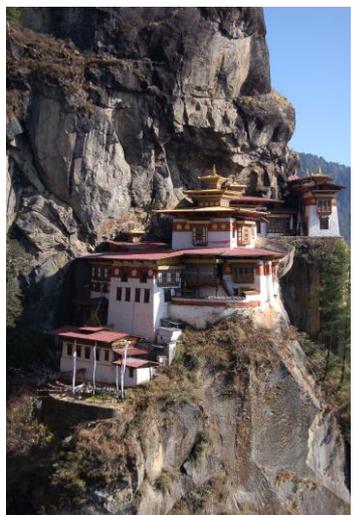
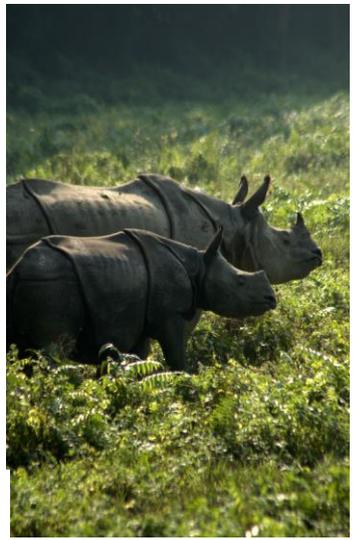


## Wild Nepal & Bhutan Extension

**Destination:** Nepal & Bhutan **Duration:** 22 Days **Dates:** 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct – 12<sup>th</sup> Nov

-  Tracking a female Tiger with 4 nearly full grown cubs on foot through Bardia NP
-  Having a record 28 different sightings of Asiatic One-Horned Rhinos
-  Observing over 140 different species of birds throughout the tour
-  Spotting a few of the Critically Endangered Gharial in Chitwan National Park
-  Encountering a wild bull Asiatic Elephant whilst on Elephant back in Bardia NP
-  Walking amongst the beautiful and endangered Blackbuck in the Bardia Sanctuary
-  Having a great sighting of a Sloth Bear in Chitwan National Park
-  Tracking down and getting within 25m of 3 Asiatic One-Horned Rhinos in Bardia NP
-  Climbing up to the 400 year old Taksang Monastery (Tiger's Nest) in Bhutan
-  Enjoying spectacular views over the Himalayas from Kathmandu to Paro



### Tour Leader / Guides

Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)  
 Dambar (Ground Agent in Nepal)  
 Binda & Hari (Guides at Chitwan National Park)  
 Pradeep & Arjun (Guides at Bardia National Park)  
 Stenzin (Guide in Bhutan)

### Participants

Mr. Joe Boyer  
 Mrs. Rhoda Boyer-Perkins

### Overview

<b>Day 1:</b>	Kathmandu
<b>Days 2-4:</b>	Sauraha
<b>Days 5-7:</b>	Chitwan
<b>Days 8-15:</b>	Bardia
<b>Day 16:</b>	Kathmandu
<b>Days 17-19:</b>	Bhutan
<b>Days 20-21:</b>	Kathmandu
<b>Day 22:</b>	Home



# Day by Day Breakdown

## Overview

Walking through the long grass of Nepal's Terai region in search of the elusive Tiger or majestic One-Horned Rhino is one of the most thrilling and adventurous things any wildlife enthusiast can do. This 3 week tour took ourselves deep into the Terai (the subtropical belt of forest from Uttarakhand in North West India through to Burma in the East), which is home to the last remaining Asian One-Horned Rhinos (a population split between Chitwan National Park in Nepal and Kaziranga National Park in India) as well as a large meta-population of Tigers and many other species of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. The region is so good for wildlife it boasts large populations of Sloth Bear, Asiatic Elephant, Hog Deer and other mammals which are endangered elsewhere in their range. In addition to the mammals the critically endangered Gharial is also present here in good numbers. With Chitwan holding the second largest population in the world and around 20% of the global total (only 50!)

Whilst exploring the Terai (principally in search of the very difficult to see Tiger) we would explore a section of Nepal's largest and most popular national park; Chitwan. We would enter these parks with the expert guidance of experienced naturalists from the local area and would experience the parks on foot, by jeep, on elephant back and by traditional dug-out canoe. This varied way of visiting the park increased the chances of seeing a huge range of wildlife and some of the fantastic mammal and bird sightings we had in a short amount of time testimony to that.

In addition to visiting the parks in search of the wildlife we were also treated to a couple of the local Tharu people's dances. Including the always comical Peacock Dance. Nepal has a long and good history of conservation in and around the Terai and it is through community projects like the dancing and local handicraft sales in a handful of the shops which enable the people to earn directly or indirectly from having plentiful wildlife nearby. As a result the level of poaching, illegal fishing, habitat encroachment, overgrazing, fire work collection and deforestation is lower here than anywhere else in South Asia.

There are still some aspects of Nepal's 'eco'-tourism and the way the park is used which are not quite there in terms of acceptability to a Western standard; but the fact that the park boast increasing Rhino, Tiger, Hog Deer, Leopard, Sloth Bear and stable Gharial numbers means that they are doing many things right and this needs to be focused on. In time all the other aspects of the park will fall into place, and hopefully other Tiger parks around India will begin to learn from the success that Chitwan is having by making all the local people feel involved in the conservation and responsible for the wildlife.



## Day 1 Kathmandu

### *Arrival & Sightseeing*

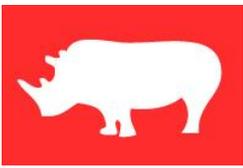
On arrival at Kathmandu International Airport you met your tour leader, Martin Royle and with the help of the local driver, you were transferred into the heart-beat of Kathmandu, the buzzing district of Thamel. After settling into the accommodation, we participated on an afternoon tour of some of Kathmandu's best sights. First we visited the largest Stupa in the world, Bodnath Stupa and after walking around the auspicious Buddhist site we had a relaxed lunch in the presence of the impressive building. Afterwards we visited the shared Hindu and Buddhist temple of Swayambunath (otherwise known as the Monkey Temple), this is partly due to the dedication to the Hindu monkey god Hanuman but also a reference to the large number of Rhesus Macaques which haunt the stair way to the top of the hill and the main shrines and temples. In fact it was a young male Macaque which snuck up on Joe and whipped his water bottle clean from his belt and made a hasty retreat into the bushes, no doubt to wash down his stolen peanuts with the unopened mineral water! From the top of the hill you have a stunning view down over the city and with the dozens of Black Kites circling and dive-bombing each other it is quite a sight to behold. The last stop on this whistle-stop tour of Kathmandu was the historic Durbur Square. With its hundreds of temples, shrines and monuments to an equally stunning array of gods and deities, you could get lost spending hours meandering around the winding streets. Needless to say after a long series of flights and with a 6 hour bus journey tomorrow, we didn't spend hours and hours picking our way through the dozens of temples and instead opted for a quick look around at some of the largest and most impressive ones before a quick freshen up back at the hotel and a good meal at the Kathmandu institution which is The Kathmandu Guesthouse. All this and a good nights sleep in time for tomorrow's journey to Chitwan National Park.

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## Day 2 Chitwan National Park

### *Travel & Wildlife Watching*

This morning we boarded the tourist bus from Kathmandu to Chitwan National Park. The journey takes you out of the Kathmandu Valley and through the Shivalik hills before entering the flat lowlands of the Terai. Here you transect the interspersed Tharu villages, industrial Indian border towns, rice paddies and community buffer zone forests. In



fact it is these community zone forests which have made the Nepalese Terai a real success with conservation. The wildlife (including Tigers, Rhinos and Elephants) can all move freely between the 9 protected areas in the Terai and this landscape will form a crucial part of Panthera's long term project for a Tiger Corridor linking North West Indian Tiger populations with ones through Nepal, North East India, Bhutan and Burma.

Well after around 5-6 hours of winding mountainous roads we reached the small and now very touristy village of Sauraha and after a very short jeep transfer we arrived at the accommodation. Lunch was promptly served and then our afternoon outing the park (via a jeep safari) was arranged. During the drive around the famous 20,000 Lake area we saw many species of birds, including great sightings of the colourful Himalayan Flameback as well as many Woolly-necked Storks, Lesser Adjutant Storks and very beautiful Crested Serpent Eagle and Changeable Hawk Eagle. We even saw a juvenile Crested Serpent Eagle honing its hunting skills on a snake which it hadn't quite disarmed and was struggling with on the ground. In addition to the birds we got good views of two of the 4 species of deer that Chitwan has to offer, the very common and elegant Spotted Deer (Chital) and the small and solitary Barking Deer (Indian Muntjac), as well as Wild Boar. We also saw a great Mugger Crocodile sunning himself in the last of the afternoon sun.



### **Day 3 Chitwan National Park**

### ***Wildlife Watching & Cultural Show***

This morning started with a dug-out canoe ride along a section of the Rapti River. The Rapti River forms the Northern border of the park and is home to the Mugger Crocodile and the Gharial as well as several bird species and the occasional bathing Rhino. Our canoe ride reaped plentiful birds including, Indian Pond Herons, Lesser Adjutant Storks, Cattle Egrets, Great Egrets, White-browed Wagtails, Painted Storks and a Black Eagle. We also got a close up view of a 2m plus Mugger Crocodile as it basked on the sand bank and we drifted silently past. Afterwards we paid a quick visit to the Elephant Breeding Centre where one of the mischievous calves was running riot, squeezing underneath the railings and evading the guides to play with the older Elephant calves. This was followed naturally by the daily Elephant bath time down by the sunset viewpoint along the Rapti River. Here for a small fee to the mahout you can climb aboard an Elephant and get well and truly hosed down and tossed into the water as the Elephants enjoy their bath. After lunch we boarded a couple of Elephants (Rhoda and I in one and Joe with an Indian family) and headed into the park in search of the Rhinos. We found 3, including a mother and calve (of around 4-5 years of age), we also got very close to the largest species of deer in the park, Sambar. But the real treat was an all too fleeting glimpse of a Jungle Cat as it darted into the thick bush. The mahout had seen the movement too and we tried to follow the small feline but there was no more sign and it just vanished into the jungle. Once we returned to the accommodation and after dinner we went to the Tharu Cultural Programme and were entertained by the local dances of the men. They performed 5 of the traditional dances, including the very funny Peacock Dance, which involves a 3ft tall Peacock suit and lots of pomp. Other dances include a very impressive fire dance and a bizarre funeral dance where a man dresses as a woman and spins around lots to avoid the advances of a boy dressed as a man (well that's a pretty basic premise, but I can never get my head around why it is deemed appropriate for funerals!). Well after the dancing we were well and truly ready for some sleep as the rather Elephant themed day had been a good and long one and tomorrow we re-entering the park again to try and find more wildlife and perhaps the king of the jungle, the Tiger himself.

### **Day 4 Chitwan National Park**

### ***Wildlife Watching***

This morning started with a jeep safari in which we stumbled across a Rhino very close to the road. It didn't stay around very long and we moved on, but it was the closest we had come to a Rhino so far, as he grazed his way along the side of the road and into the thicker forest. The other highlights of this jeep safari were the birdlife. We saw more Changeable Hawk Eagles, Crested Serpent Eagles and an Osprey carrying a large fish in its talons. We also spotted the rarest of the Chitwan kingfishers the large Stork-billed Kingfisher and had a very good sighting along the man-made canal which runs parallel to most of the road in this section of the park.

On our return to Gorkha Hamlet we had breakfast and a brief rest before heading into Sauraha village for a museum tour. As we approached the end of the Sauraha road and the sunset viewing point we noticed a congregation of people around the river, in a small section of forest. It turned out to be 2 Rhinos. As the number of Rhinos in Chitwan continues to increase (505 at the last count) they are becoming a more and more common sight close to and sometimes inside villages. The number of people who went far too close to the Rhino stunned me and I have to say I wouldn't be surprised to hear of someone being killed by a Rhino in this area in the near future. The biggest problem if that happens will be the Rhino will be somehow to blame and there could even be calls for a cull! Anyway we kept a respectable distance and observed the large female and near fully grown male calve for around 20mins. Due to the presence of the Rhinos it was deemed not safe enough to continue our walk to the local Tharu



village so we made do with the museum and then departed for our second Elephant-back safari. Once again we got close views of Chital, Sambar and Barking Deer but this time no more Rhinos.



## Day 5 Chitwan National Park

### *Travelling & Wildlife Watching*

This morning we headed out on an early morning bird watching tour along the banks of the Rapti River. However the fog was so thick that it made seeing anything other than the conspicuous Common Mynahs, Jungle & House Crows and Indian Pond Herons very difficult.

After this walk and our breakfast we packed up and headed towards our next accommodation. The luxurious Temple Tiger Resort deep inside the Core-Zone of the Chitwan National Park. Here we would experience the park with fewer people and have a much better chance of seeing some of the more elusive wildlife. Shortly after passing the entrance gate for Temple Tiger we had to wait on the banks of the Narayani River which forms the Western border of the park, for the boatmen to collect us and ferry us to the other side. From here we saw our first Gharial. It was a fairly small individual (around 2.7m) and probably just about reaching maturity, it didn't have the famous 'ghara' nose bump so it was a young female or an immature male.

Once we arrived at the accommodation, unpacked and had had lunch we headed out on another Elephant back safari. We saw a further 3 Rhinos, including getting very close to a large male in the long grass, we also saw one of the Rhinos swimming across a large lake which the lodge overlooked. The Indian One-Horned Rhino is the most aquatic of all the 5 Rhino species, and during the monsoon they will spend around 50% of their time in the water. Another highlight of the Elephant safari was getting very good close up shots of a large troop of Terai Tufted Langurs, many of which had young babies present.

After dinner we heard that one of the other groups of people had spotted a Leopard close to camp and that Sloth Bear are also being seen with some regularity around here, so we were very much looking forward to our next venture into the jungle. Later that evening we were treated to a local dance performance (from the mahouts and lodge staff) to celebrate the Hindu festival of Diwali, before heading to our cabins and enjoying the chorus of thousands of frogs and crickets as they called to each other deep into the night. The atmosphere for the Nepalese jungle at night is intoxicating and it fully whetted the appetite for more wildlife watching tomorrow.

## Day 6 Chitwan National Park

### *Wildlife Watching*

This morning we had another Elephant safari and this one was very quiet, with only the Chital, Sambar and Terai Tufted Langurs making an appearance. The trip was eventful as we were riding an Elephant who had a young calf in tow. The youngster delaying us as he went into the forest to explore every now and again, until his mother would give a cerebral rumble or trumpet and he would come bounding out of the bush and straight to her. The best part of the safari was seeing the calf swimming quickly alongside the mother and other Elephants as we crossed a fairly deep section of river. It must have been deep as my feet were only inches away from the water.

After the safari we had lunch and then went up to the Elephant stables and were introduced to the mahouts and the Elephants here and given a brief introduction to this wonderful animal. After feeding the Elephant with many 'Elephant Momos' (rice and sugar wrapped in palm leaves – each one weighing around 1kg and over 200 being fed to each elephant per day!) we left for a short jungle walk. Here we would have the chance of track Tigers and other wildlife on foot. We did come across many Tiger pugmarks, including some that were fresh from the last 12-24 hours. We also saw much evidence for Rhinos and also heard one foraging around 20-30m into the bush, but we couldn't see it and deemed it too dangerous to follow the Rhino into the dense jungle without having an idea of where it was. We did get close up to a male Wild Boar on foot as well as seeing a very fresh (and particularly large) Indian Rock Python track.

This evening we had a slide show after dinner which showcased the park and some of the more common species found inside it. After this it was time for bed once again and ready to prepare for tomorrow's activities.



## Day 7 Chitwan National Park

### *Wildlife Watching*

Today we had a short jeep safari towards the river, along the way we spotted Chital, Barking Deer, Wild Boar and a Grey-headed Fish Eagle. Once at the river we boarded a small boat and began to be punted down the river in search of birds and Gharials. We spotted a small Gharial basking amongst the pebbles as well as many Pied



Kingfishers, Small Pranticoles, Great, Intermediate and Cattle Egrets, hundreds of Sand Martins and the spectacularly coloured White-Breasted Kingfishers. We also saw some of the first Ruddy Shelducks which winter here from Siberia. After the boat safari we climbed aboard an Elephant and headed back to the camp, where we saw 2 more Rhinos in the long grass.

During the middle of the day there was some excellent bird watching from the observation deck (overlooking a large lake), Pied Kingfishers hovered and swooped down, Woolly-necked Storks, Asian Openbill Storks circled above, Little and Indian Cormorants swam and dove to catch fish and a large flock of migratory Black-Crowned Night Herons occupied every spare branch in the distance. In addition to the bird life we saw a Rhino ambling his way through the grass on the lakeside and a handful of Mugger Crocodiles glide silently past the Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas. We also had a very pretty Indian Garden Lizard perched on the platform which allowed us to get very good close-up photographs.

After lunch we headed out on a longer Elephant safari. With so many Rhinos around, fresh Tiger prints and a Leopard seen recently our hopes were high. It didn't take long for us to be justified in this feeling as a Sloth Bear crossed our path, in full view, turned and looked at us and then bounded off into the jungle ahead of us. We tried to find the shaggy bear again but it had vanished into the thick vegetation. We also saw a large number of Barking Deer, including many together which is unusual for this usually solitary species. Towards the end of the safari we headed through some very primeval looking forest and dense grassland and found 3 more Rhinos.

We arrived back at the accommodation and quickly told the management about the Sloth Bear and they confirmed that recently, for some unknown reason, they had been seeing them a couple of times a week. This is great news as the Sloth Bear is one of the more difficult mammals to see throughout the Indian Subcontinent.

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## Day 8 Chitwan National Park

## Wildlife Watching & Travelling

We enjoyed our last Elephant back safari of Chitwan this morning, in the thick fog we spotted 5 Rhinos as well as having very good sightings of Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpeckers, Black-headed Orioles and many other species of birds. We also came across a pack of 6 Golden Jackals on their morning patrol. This could have been made up of a monogamous male and female and their nearly fully grown pups, or a pack of near or closely related adults. Golden Jackals will often form small packs and are very capable hunters, although this encounter was more of a pack in transit as opposed to foraging or hunting and after a couple of minutes they moved off into the bush and we carried on.

After the safari we left Temple Tiger Resort and headed out of the park and back to the main road to catch our bus from Narayangarh. This would be a 12-15 hour bus through the Terai westward to Bardia National Park.



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## Day 9 Bardia National Park

## Cultural Tour

We arrived at the stop for Bardia (Ambasha) early in the morning and after a couple of phone calls to the resort we were collected and packed off for a few hours to fully rest up (sleeping on a Nepalese bus is not the best nights sleep in the world), but by midday we were bright and bushy-tailed and ready for a tour of the local Tharu village. Thakurdwara is a large Tharu village which still implements many of the traditional values and ways of life. During the walk around there was a large troop of Rhesus Macaques (who would be seen every day as they occupy the area around the national park entrance gate), as well as many species of birds, such as Black-headed Orioles, Olive-backed Pipits, Jungle Mynahs, Jungle Crows and Indian Pond Herons. We had a brief tour of one of the local houses. Everything is made from dried mud, they are extremely skilled in producing decorative shelves and wall art with the mud as well as housing all their rice and grain in huge mud containers which make up the walls to several of the rooms. We also visited the local Hindu temple and met the local Baba, who welcomed us and bade us good luck on our quest for Tigers and other wildlife.

After dinner we were once again entertained by some more local dancing, the same style of dance as we saw in Chitwan but different as the tharu people here allow their women to dance too and so the funeral dance made a little more sense as their was a man chasing around a women (although I still don't see the connection to death and mourning).

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## Day 10 Bardia National Park

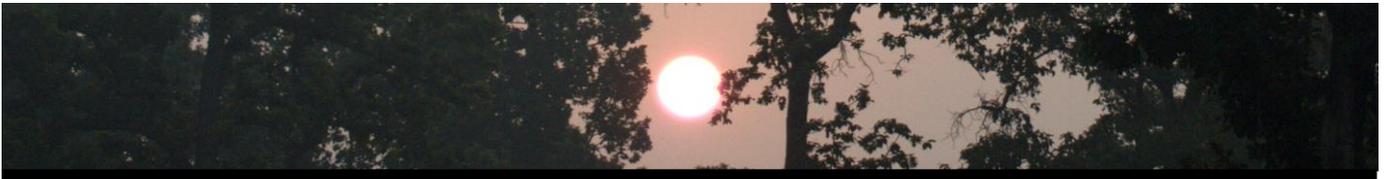
## Wildlife Watching

Today was our first experience inside Bardia National Park and we would spend the full day there (some 10 hours or so), in the capable hands of Pradeep our local guide and four strong 5ft sticks, in case we ran into any wildlife. The walk was interesting as you delve deeper into the wilderness than in jeeps or Elephant back, walking through the long grass is a fantastic, if not terrifying experience and tracking the many animals through the forest is one of the best ways to encounter Tigers. We stopped a couple of times near very promising places, often around a bend or confluence of rivers. These places are often frequented by Tigers and we spent almost the entire day on the



heals of one female with 4 nearly fully grown cubs. She is a famous Tiger here as Leonardo Di Caprio (a WWF ambassador) came here in 2010 and tracked her and photographed her for the WWF / Nepal government initiative to double Tiger numbers by 2020. A project which is already reaping rewards and Nepal is one of the few countries in the Tiger's range where numbers are on the rise.

At one of these particular view points we spotted a couple of Hog Deer on the far bank of the river. This small species of deer is very endangered throughout its range and is hard to see as they live deep in the grassland for most of their lives. We also saw a Rhino crossing the river and browsing on the other side. We lunched in one of the watch towers over looking the grassland and river. The bird watching from here was good and we got excellent views of Plum-headed Parakeets and a large flock of Oriental Pied Hornbills as they flew from one tree to another in search of ripe and juicy fruit. Unfortunately we didn't come across the female or her cubs, but we would certainly try again in the coming days. As we headed out of the park we walked past numerous salt licks, huge termite mounds (some half destroyed by Sloth Bears) and some of the most amazing root formations we had ever seen; the whole landscape looked like something from Lord of the Rings. When we got closer to the accommodation, you can actually see our resort from a road inside the park, we came across an old (possibly 4-6 week) Leopard scat (about 100m away from our accommodation). Pradeep told us that the Leopards here are sometimes seen inside the villages and that due to the high numbers of Tigers here the Leopards are pushed further and further to the peripheries of the park and therefore into contact with humans more. This is an unfortunate trend which is also reflected in India.



## Day 11 Bardia National Park

### *Wildlife Watching*

This morning we started with an Elephant safari before breakfast, it was fairly quiet this morning and the major highlights were another large flock of Oriental Pied Hornbills, many Chital and 2 stunning Changeable Hawk Eagles. Afterwards we visited the Crocodile and Freshwater Turtle Breeding Centre near the park entrance. Here they are breeding and reintroducing the Mugger Crocodiles, Gharials as well as some of the 10 species of freshwater turtles which should be found here. The Mugger Crocodiles (like most Crocodiles worldwide) do very well when they are breed and reintroduced and their numbers are very strong again, however for some unknown reason when the Gharials are released (even when they are released at the size and age of sexual maturity with very few if any natural predators) they do not survive very long. With only 5.5% recruitment to the population and 7.7% survival after the first 2 years of reintroduction their numbers are still dwindling. There are only around 250 breeding individuals in the world and with a total population around 1800, they are critically endangered and need all the help they can get.

After lunch we left for the park in a jeep safari and almost straight away we spotted a Jungle Cat crossing a road at a fork ahead of us, it caused some confusion at first but on reflection it was clearly a Jungle Cat. We carried on to a very good view point and were hoping for a Tiger coming down for a drink, however we (and any wildlife) were disturbed by the army moving through and illegally fishing the river. The army are employed as anti-poaching guards throughout Nepal and for the most part do a very good job, however in some bases they feel like they have free reign over the jungle and matters like illegal logging, small scale poaching and fishing are still a problem to be addressed; however on the other hand poaching, habitat loss, over grazing, livestock competition and other 'normal' human-wildlife conflict issues are all decreasing and they are all lower than in neighbouring India. The rest of the jeep safari found a very large herd of Chital as well as an impressive male Hog Deer in full antler.

## Day 12 Bardia National Park

### *Wildlife Watching*

This morning we walked through the community forest with borders the national park in order to bird watch. We saw many species including large mixed foraging flocks with Greater Racket-tailed Drongos, White-bellied Drongos, Golden Orioles, Jungle Babblers, Himalayan Flamebacks and others. We also got very close to another large troop of Rhesus Macaques which had many young babies with them. Afterwards we stopped briefly for some tea at the local Chai Wallah before moving onto the Tharu museum. After lunch we paid another visit to a local Tharu village home and found that the farm had lost a goat the night before. A Tiger was responsible and the farmer was in the process of chopping up the carcass for food. He explained that in the last 6 months 8 of his flock had been taken within 5m of his house, where his kids sleep. It was good that he was not poisoning the carcass (which happens a lot in India), but he did say that he would kill the Tiger if he came across it, although he wouldn't actively hunt it down. This is one of the many dilemmas facing conservation groups worldwide as there is a fine line between telling someone that they cannot defend their family and livelihood for the sake of an individual animal. There needs to be some sort of financial viable alternative; an insurance scheme is used in Nepal but the system has broken down over the years and most local people have lost all faith in ever getting reimbursed for the lost of livestock. The rest of the afternoon was spent tracking this Tiger (which seemed to have made a territory very close to the village in the buffer zone community forest; fresh tracks and scrapes were present everywhere), as well as Rhino.



We didn't find the Tiger but did get within 25m of 3 Rhinos. 2 adults and one calf, before we spooked them and they went crashing through the bush and we decided that we had stressed them out enough and to call it a day after 2.5 hours of careful tracking by myself and the local guides.



## Day 13 **Bardia Blackbuck Sanctuary**

## *Wildlife Watching*

Today we went to see a couple of the very endangered mammals of western Nepal. The Blackbuck (which are being bred back in a special sanctuary, with a view to reintroducing them back into Bardia in the near future) and the critically endangered Gangetic River Dolphin. So we first travelled to a section of the Karnali River where Gangetic River Dolphins are meant to frequent. However the entire plight of the Dolphins here was clear for all to see. We arrived at a large crossing, with the construction of a huge bridge being completed. The number of trucks and busses being ferried either side was staggering and the amount of pollutants entering the water was unbelievable. Coupled with this we witnessed mining of the sand banks surrounding the river, dredging of the river bed, fishing (which is illegal in this section of the Karnali River), over use of the water by boats, pollution (both noise and chemical) it is wonder that any fish survive here never mind a small population of Dolphins. Well we decided that the chances of seeing any Dolphins (other than at around 5:00am before people had started using the river and work on the bridge) was probably a lost cause we carried on to the Blackbuck Sanctuary; stopping for lunch along the way.

As we arrived at the sanctuary we saw a large herd of males, it was the beginning of the breeding season and whilst the mating strategies of Blackbuck varies throughout their range this population uses the lekking method. The males, were competed and jostling for the best area of land, the idea of the lek is that the best male chooses a section of the grassland as his territory, he will not feed or sleep much for the coming couple of weeks as he vigorously defends this section of land. When the females arrive they will show favour to the male they would like to mate with (how the females decide this is still unknown, as the male with the best land may not always be the largest or fittest male in the herd). But once the females have decided they will be mated with by the male in that lek. The females are free to move around (as long as the male doesn't keep rounding them up) and the whole system seems chaotic and flawed. However various African antelopes and the Blackbucks use the system and it repeated produces good levels of young. It is very easy to age male Blackbucks due to their colouration and spiralling horns, however as we found out there is a hue amount of overlap between some of them and many of the very pale males had very well developed horns and there were some very dark males which had horns which defied their age. Along with the jostling we were also treated to some fights, these are not as viscous as they would be in the height of the breeding season but they are used as a means of establishing a hierarchy ready for the lekking. Whilst we were engaged with the male tension in the Blackbuck herd we spotted an Indian Fox making a hasty retreat through the grass away from us as well as a wintering female Hen Harrier passing low over the grassland in search of rodents, fowl or maybe a small lizard. We also came across a couple of miniature toads and a beautiful Praying Mantis in the long grass, whilst keeping a sharp eye out for Cobras and Vipers.

Afterwards we boarded the vehicle again and began the long journey back to Thakurdwara and our dinner before a good nights sleep in preparation for second full day jungle walk to try and track down the Tigers of Bardia National Park once again.

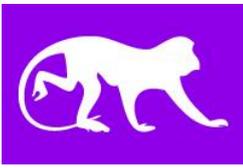
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## Day 14 **Bardia National Park**

## *Wildlife Watching*

This morning after an early breakfast we headed back to the park gates and began our second full day tracking inside the park. It started with a memorable sighting of a Scarlet Minivet feeding high in the canopy of one of the tree above the pathway. We saw many Chital, Rhesus Macaques and Terai Tufted Langurs on the walk through the jungle. We arrived at the first viewing spot on the banks of the river, with a large area of grassland to one side and a nice open Sal forest to the other. We found fresh Tiger tracks of the mother and at least 1 cub which were made within the last couple of hours. So we waited and staked out the grassland (where the tracks were heading). Eventually a large troop of Macaques (some 100 strong) and a small group of Chital emerged from the forest, crossed the river and began to move into the grassland. So we thought that it seems unlikely that there will be a Tiger and a cub or 4 in the grass if all these prey animals are moving so confidently towards the area, and we decided to go to another spot.

The second view point didn't bring us any Tigers either but we did get great views of Woolly-necked Storks, a large flock of circling Black Ibis and a couple of pairs of Red-wattled Lapwings. It wasn't long into the stake out at the second view point when we heard Chital and Rhesus Macaque alarm calling coming from around the first view point, so we headed back. We waited once again but the Macaques and Chital eventually calmed down and the best highlight from this stakeout was a great close up view of Changeable Hawk Eagle and another large flock of Oriental Pied Hornbills. On our trek back out of the forest we took a short cut and crossed over a shallow part of the



river bare foot, careful not to slip on the algae covered rocks; however it was a blessing in disguise as it allowed us a good chance to get our boots and socks off and de-leach our ankles and feet. The leaches had been out in force this morning and the cool water was a very welcome relief. On arrival back at the accommodation we tucked into a well deserved evening meal before hitting the hay.



## Day 15 **Bardia National Park**

### *Wildlife Watching*

Today was our last day at Barida National Park and we started it with an early morning Elephant back safari. We moved through some quite dense jungle and saw plenty of Red Jungle Fowl (the wild ancestor of the humble Chicken) as well as many Chital. But the undisputed highlight came when we saw a wild bull Asiatic Elephant. Our female Elephant froze on the pathway and the bull stared at her for what seemed like an age, the mahout was quickly trying to get our elephant to respond with feet commands as well as verbal commands; but it was only after the bull had flapped his ears and rumbled his approval that she did move anywhere and it was a hasty exit through the forest towards some grassland a couple of hundred meters away.

After lunch we visited the park for one last time and this time via a jeep safari. We went through some fantastic Sal forests and stopped near a river bank, where fresh leopard prints were present heading down into the river bank and over to some grassland on the far side. Whether or not they were from this morning or sometime in the last 24 hours was impossible for us to tell, but Arjun and Pradeep explored the sandy river banks and eventually decided that there where no fresh tracks heading anywhere we could realistically follow. We also paid a visit to the only accommodation inside Bardia, Tiger Tops Tented Camp. There was no one staying there at the time and we made the most of their viewing platform and spotted 2 more Hog Deer emerging from the grassland, we also saw many Rhesus Macaques and large herds of Chital but we would leave Bardia and the Nepalese Terai without seeing a Tiger. Despite being within an hour of 5 during our first jungle walk and convinced that at least a couple of Tigers have seen us during our time in Chitwan and Bardia.

Tomorrow was going to be a long day so we ate dinner and called it a night as our bus was arriving in the morning and with a whole day travelling on the Nepalese road system we wanted to be fully refreshed and rejuvenated.

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## Day 16 **Kathmandu**

### *Travelling*

Today was our last day at Bardia and we had to leave for Kathmandu on the 15hour bus in the early morning. The whole day was spent watching the Nepalese countryside pass us by. We arrived in the late evening and headed out for our dinner straight away. Tomorrow Rhoda and Joe would leave for Bhutan and the next stage of their tour.



## Days 17-20 **Bhutan**

### *Sightseeing*

During the time in Bhutan you were in the capable hands of my Bhutanese colleagues and I remained in Kathmandu for your return. The itinerary was to include visits some of the most important cultural and historical sights in this amazing and unique Himalayan kingdom. Arriving at the international airport in Paro you would first visit the National Museum, which was a 16<sup>th</sup> Century watch tower set high above the valley below and protecting the Dzong (fortress) beneath from raiding Tibetan forces. You should also have visited the Tashichhodzong (the Forests of the Auspicious Religion) as well as Wangchuk, which is located in the heart of the capital Thimpu. The drive from Paro to Thimpu is stunning and shows off some of the Bhutan's exceptional valleys, mountainsides and pristine forested hillsides. But the main event in Bhutan is of course Taksang Lhakang (Tigers Nest Monastery), which Joe walked up and Rhoda rode on one of the sturdy little ponies that are employed in the mountainous regions. The walk up is tiring and in the heat of the day it was feel like it will never end, as the pathways twist and turn further and further; and every time you feel like you can see the top of the ridge, its just a bend and on you climb. But eventually you will have reached the colourful sight of thousands of prayer flags fluttering in the wind and an enormous prayer wheel. This marks the beginning of the end of the trek and a short walk along level ground brings you to a small restaurant at eye-level with the monastery. The stunning building defies gravity and belief that anyone could or would even choose to construct a building of this elegance half way up a vertical cliff face. And the most amazing thing of all is that the building was originally built in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century; we would struggle to construct this today with all our modern machines and cranes etc but back then it beggars belief that it could be managed.



From here you would visit the monastery and going inside to see the shrine it is all in honour of, built around a cave in which the 'Divine Madman' Guru Rinpoche was said to have flown into on a flying Tigress to escape Tibetan hordes and establish the Drukpa school of Tibetan Buddhism in Bhutan. Afterwards you began the slow walk back down and back to your accommodation and in turn a return journey back to Kathmandu the next day. But not before Joe had found a golf course...the only one in Bhutan...and purchased a T-Shirt!

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**Day 21      Kathmandu*****Day of Rest***

Today is your last day in Nepal and the day was spent relaxing around Thamel and collecting a few souvenirs from the many shops here. Between the fantastic stories of your time in Bhutan and shopping around for paintings, books, CD's and other items, it seemed like the perfect way to finish this comprehensive wildlife watching tour of Nepal and cultural tour of Bhutan. Tomorrow you were transferred to the airport in time to catch your return flight to the USA.

# Species List

Wild Nepal & Bardia / October & November 2011

## Mammals (\* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Blackbuck	<i>Antilope cervicapra</i>
2	Chital	<i>Axis axis</i>
3	Hog Deer	<i>Axis porcinus</i>
4	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
5	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
6	Asiatic Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
7	Common Serotine	<i>Eptesicus serotinus</i>
8	Jungle Cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>
9	Indian Grey Mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>
10	Great Himalayan Leaf-nosed Bat	<i>Hipposideros armiger</i>
11	Striped Hyena	<i>Hyeana hyeana</i>
12	Indian Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
13	Rhesus Macaque	<i>Macaca mulatta</i>
14	Lesser False-Vampire Bat	<i>Megaderma spasma</i>
15	Sloth Bear	<i>Melurus ursinus</i>
16	Indian Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>
17	Hodgson's Bat	<i>Myotis formosus</i>
18	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
19	Tiger	<i>Panthera tigris</i>
20	Indian Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus coromandra</i>
21	Himalayan Rat	<i>Rattus nitidens</i>
22	One-Horned Indian Rhino	<i>Rhinoceros unicornis</i>
23	Terai Tufted Langur	<i>Semnopithecus hector</i>
24	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scofra</i>
25	Indian Fox	<i>Vulpes bengalensis</i>

October										November					
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34	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
35	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
36	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
37	Nepal House Martin	<i>Delichon nipalense</i>
38	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
39	Stripe-breasted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus atratus</i>
40	Brown-fronted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus auriceps</i>
41	Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus canicapillus</i>
42	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus nanus</i>
43	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
44	Spangled Drongo	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>
45	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
46	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>
47	Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus remifer</i>
48	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
49	Himalayan Flameback	<i>Dinopium shorii</i>
50	Mountain Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula badia</i>
51	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
52	Yellow-breasted Bunting	<i>Emberiza aureola</i>
53	Oriental Hobby	<i>Falco severus</i>
54	Snowy-browed Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hyperythra</i>
55	Slaty-blue Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula tricolor</i>
56	Little Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula westermanni</i>
57	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
58	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula porphyrio</i>
59	Red Jungle Fowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
60	Asian Barred Owlet	<i>Glaucidium cuculoides</i>
61	Small Pranticole	<i>Glerola lactea</i>
62	Asian Pied Starling	<i>Gracupica contra</i>
63	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon capensis</i>
64	Red-headed Trogon	<i>Harpactes erythrocephalus</i>
65	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
66	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
67	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
68	Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>
69	Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malayensis</i>
70	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
71	Pallas's Gull	<i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>

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110	Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittcaaula eupatria</i>
111	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
112	Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
113	White-eared Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucotis</i>
114	White-throated Fantail	<i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>
115	White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
116	Plain Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
117	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
118	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
119	Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
120	Indian Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>
121	Spotted dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
122	Crested Serpent eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
123	Changeable Hawk-eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatius</i>
124	Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
125	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
126	Red Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia traquatarica</i>
127	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
128	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>
129	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
130	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
131	Striated Babbler	<i>Turdoides earlei</i>
132	Jungle Babbler	<i>Turdoides striatus</i>
133	River Lapwing	<i>Vanellus duvaucelii</i>
134	Red-Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
135	White-rumped Needletail	<i>Zoonavena sylvatica</i>

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## Reptiles (\* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Olivaceous Keelback Water Snake	<i>Atretium schistosum</i>
2	Asian House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>
3	Indian Forest Skink	<i>Sphenomorphus indicus</i>
4	Yellow-green House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus flaviviridis</i>
5	Indian Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
6	Common Skink	<i>Eutropis carinata</i>
7	Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
8	Gharial	<i>Gavialis gangeticus</i>
9	Common Wolf Snake	<i>Lycodon aulicus</i>
10	Bronze Grass Skink	<i>Mabuya macularia</i>
11	Common Grass Skink	<i>Mabuya carinata</i>
12	Brahminy Blind Snake	<i>Ramphotyphlops braminus</i>

October										November					
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6
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	1							2	1	1	1	1	1	1	
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## Amphibians (\* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Indian Skittering Frog	<i>Euphlyctis cyanophlyctis</i>
2	Common Indian Toad	<i>Bufo malenostictus</i>
3	Indian Bullfrog	<i>Hoplobatrachus tigerinus</i>
4	Indian Pond Frog	<i>Euphlyctis hexadactylus</i>
5	Ornate Microhylid	<i>Microhyla ornata</i>
6	Asian Grass Frog	<i>Fejervarya limnocharis</i>
7	Long-legged Cricket Frog	<i>Fejervarya syhadrensis</i>
8	Pierre's Wart Frog	<i>Fejervarya pierreii</i>

October										November					
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6
		~20								26	~20	100's	100's		
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										15					
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		1													

## Freshwater Fish (\* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1		<i>Labeo boga</i>

October										November					
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6
	~10		~20												

