



North-East India  
March - April 2023  
16 days

**Sophie, Manuel and Sam Baumgartner**

At the end of 2022, Vivek Menon invited us to our joint project between Felis and WTI (Wildlife Trust of India) in North-East India. We declined at first as we couldn't imagine doing it with our 2-year-old son. After sleeping on it, we decided to go for it. It was definitely the right decision for us, even though countless acquaintances looked on with raised eyebrows. Sam was a great travel companion and little mammalwatcher. Even though he won't remember this trip, we are convinced that the experience will have left its mark on him.

Arunachal Pradesh in particular is a great region of India: authentic and pristine. It continues to be full of beautiful primary forests and we met the most amazing people who are working to preserve them. As Arunachal Pradesh borders China, a special visa is needed and some paperwork has to be done. We recommend fellow mammalwatchers to take several passport copies with them.



Trip overview: We have mainly been in Arunachal Pradesh (red dot on the map). It took us about 10 hours de get from Guwahati to Shergaon by car and then from there it's about 1-2h drive to Lama Camp (Eagles Nest) or Mandala. March / April is the best period to visit this area as it is shortly before the monsoon and the hottest season (still very cold especially at night because it's a mountainous area). At the end of the trip, we visited Raimona and Manas NP in Assam (blue on the map). It took us again about 10 hours to get from Shergaon to Raimona, from Raimona to Manas about 3 hours and from Manas to Guwahati about 4 hours. When we were there, it was very hot and dry (about 35° in the day).

## Eagles Nest

25.03-29.03.23



With: Vivek Menon

Eagles Nest needs no introduction, it is now well known to Birdwatchers in particular, but is also rightly becoming increasingly well known in this community due to the Asiatic Golden Cat and Marbled Cat sightings.

It is a beautiful and protected region, which is managed by the community. It is a mountainous region consisting of dense primary forest. Mammalwatching here is not easy: we only saw a few mammals, but we knew that a great mammal could appear on the road at any time. There are two places to stay: The less high Bhompu camp near which most cat sightings were made and the higher Lama camp. Both camps are very basic, and it might look like “glamping” in the picture, but it is not. There are not very comfortable beds in the tents and no running water. It is in the mountains and very cold, but you don't have to bring a sleeping bag, there are enough warm blankets. You will want to bring warm clothes though. Nevertheless, it was great for us to be able to stay overnight in this environment and under the difficult conditions of such a remote place the team does a great job and especially in Bhompu Camp the food was great. An overnight stay for two people in a tent cost about 75\$, all meals and the driver's accommodation included. Part of the cost goes directly to the community. Most people go from Lama Camp to Bhompu Camp and from there you could drive back down. These are the roads that are passable. Most of the great mammal sightings are between Bhompu and Lama, near Bhompu. That was also our experience.

We were in Bhompu for 3 nights and in Lama for one night. We didn't expect anything, and we also always had to consider Sam. We were therefore not out mammalwatching as often as usual, but we were still able to do a night drive every evening and every night until about midnight. In the [info@projectfelis.org](mailto:info@projectfelis.org)



*The youngest visitor of Eagles Nest.*



morning we slept in. We did two night drives down from Bhompu and did not see any mammal. Vivek came back up the road at dusk the same evening and his team was able to observe a glimpse of a Marbled Cat. They were able to see the end of the body and the tail. Vivek was able to confirm the sighting by excluding all other possibilities. Between Bhompu and Lama, Vivek's team saw a Yellow-throated Marten and two Hairy-footed flying Squirrel crossing the road during the day. We did not see any mammal during the day except for many tracks. There were a lot of elephant tracks, some of them very fresh, and they sometimes cause trouble: They seem to appear out of nowhere and then suddenly they are there on this narrow road. There is not a lot of space to turn the car around quickly or to avoid them somehow, for this reason it is important to keep the car close when walking. If you stay calm and get some space for the first time and reverse, then it usually goes well.

We spotlighted on the sides at night although we never saw far in because the forest is so dense. We saw a **Hudson's Flying Squirrel** in a tree next to the road between Bhompu and Lama on the Bhompu Camp side. Manuel also spotted a cat next to the road, but it was gone immediately and didn't stay long enough for him to identify it. Finally, we had a big surprise when we had a good sighting of a **Spotted Linsang** on top of the ridge. On the road we saw a **Muntjak** running twice. Between Bhompu and Lama on the side of Lama Camp we only saw the hybrid of the gaur and the cow, the Mithun, during the day. Our driver briefly reported seeing an Asiatic Golden Cat on the night drive, but it disappeared immediately. Neither Manuel nor Sophie could see it. Vivek's group spotted a Himalayan Palm Civet on the roadside on the way down from Lama.



Shergaon  
Felis project site  
29.03-04.04.23

With: Jens Hauser (joined us on the 02.04)

Shergaon is close to Eagles Nest and its forest is connected to that of Eagles Nest Wildlife Sanctuary. The Shergaon people, the Sherdukpen, are a small indigenous group whose attitude towards conservation is changing and who now want to protect their primary forest. In the past, they used to hunt a lot in their forests, but now the attitude is changing and there are more and more hunters who turn away from hunting and would rather become guides, for example. When Vivek (from the Wildlife Trust of India; WTI) visited us in May 2022, he told us about this project and the potentially 40 square kilometers of primary forest that could be protected. The Felis team was immediately interested in supporting this project. Potentially the Leopard cat, Jungle cat, Asiatic Golden cat, Marbled cat, Clouded Leopard and Leopard could be found in this forest. How could we say no?

We work together with the WTI but also with a small local NGO, Garung Thuk. Garung Thuk has been active in Shergaon for over 10 years and consists of 20 dedicated members who volunteer their time for the people of Shergaon and for nature conservation. As a first step, we plan to survey the proposed conservation zone using camera traps and have sent 30 camera traps to Shergaon for this purpose. The camera traps arrived when we were there, and we were able to set them up together with the WTI and instruct young dedicated Sherdukpen who will carry out the camera trap study.

Many changes are currently taking place in the project region and many things will continue to change. We assume that nature still has to recover from a hunting pressure. Furthermore, infrastructures are planned, which should facilitate mammalwatching (trails, forest camps etc.). Nevertheless, we have already tried to find mammals besides the project work, which also took a lot of time.

In Shergaon itself there are several home stays. These are not really “home stays” per se as you do not live with a family, but comfortable houses equipped with a comfortable bedroom, bathroom, living room and kitchen. During our visit we had a cook who cooked for us every day. We paid \$45/55 per day/per person for accommodation and food.

We stayed in the farmstay and from there you can see bear nests on trees (Asiatic Black Bear). In the evenings, the dog usually barked, and we once spotted a large round dot in the forest with the thermal scope. It is certainly useful to look now and then to see what exactly is being barked at. We were in the project area during the day but mainly at the river next to the main road as the primary forest is currently very inaccessible. We were there 3 times and our local guides once spotted a Himalayan Serow in the forest. We once saw a glimpse of a Squirrel but could not identify it. Our camera traps have photographed Arunachal Macaques, Yellow-throated Marten and Himalayan Palm Civet in this short time there.

During the night we tried different places at different times and again, due to our small son, we could not do too long night drives. We tried a logging road through the primary forest 3 times. There we saw a **Red Giant Flying Squirrel** and once a larger mammal, that we were not able to identify. Looking at the eyeshine, the movement and the size, it was most likely a carnivore. We also drove 3 times from Shergaon towards Mandala. This road goes mainly through a secondary forest, and we only saw a Shrew once which we could not identify. Locals told us that they had spotted Leopard cats on this road in the past. We finally tried the main road 2 times in the direction of Tenzigaon. The probability to spot a terrestrial mammal there seems rather low, especially in the early evening, but it was good for flying squirrels. We spotted again Red Giant Flying Squirrel but also **Grey-headed Flying Squirrel**, **Hudson's Flying Squirrel** and had one sighting of a **Bhutan Giant Flying Squirrel**.

We made a one-off day trip to Mandala. Mandala is about 2 hours away and at 3000-3500 meters altitude. We were told that 4 people can stay overnight and an extra accommodation is being built at the moment in Mandala. The region there is protected, and they are working closely with WWF India. The chance of a Red Panda sighting is quite high, but you have to stay there for several days. Unfortunately, we only spotted a Pika briefly with the thermal scope. It was most likely a Forest Pika, but we could not identify it for sure. On sunny days they can be found everywhere and are easy to photograph. The only disadvantage of the region in our opinion is that there is a lot of military there because it is a border region with China. We were not comfortable spotlighting there. However, if someone would be there for several days, the military could be informed, and it should not be a problem.

If interested after a visit to Shergaon, Garung Thuk can be contacted, they would organize everything: [garung.thuk@gmail.com](mailto:garung.thuk@gmail.com). With time, we think that Shergaon and the surrounding forests can become a very interesting mammalwatching area. Now that the hunting pressure is at least decreasing strongly and the community is getting more and more focused on conservation, we expect that the area will get better and better for mammalwatching over time. The infrastructure that is planned will also hopefully greatly facilitate mammalwatching. We hope more people will test the mammalwatching there in the future and are willing to help for better experiences.



Raimona NP

05-06.04.23

With: Jens Hauser




Raimona National Park is India's newest National Park and was established in 2021. It borders to the Manas National Park and Bhutan. Raimona National Park is known for good Golden Langur sightings, but we mainly visited it because night drives are (still) allowed in the park, but not in the core area. The area of the park has been heavily hunted for a long time and is currently still recovering from it, but there are signs that the recovery is taking place very quickly because the area is so well connected. We didn't know it at the time, but there are accommodation possibilities next to the park, for example in home stays. If someone would be interested then this can be organized with Tunu Basumatary, a guide of the park, at this number: +91 94351 60290. We stayed in the next town which was 1h away, Bongaigaon.

After a long day travelling from Arunachal Pradesh to Raimona, we wanted to try a night drive in the evening. Pretty much everything that could go wrong went wrong: When we arrived at the park, a thunderstorm started, and the cables of our car burnt after we had driven only a few meters into the national park. When the rain stopped, we heard elephants and were able to observe them with the thermal scope. There were about 10+ **Asiatic Elephants**. Suddenly something small ran in front of the elephant herd and it was a **Jungle Cat**.

After a long day and a much longer night than planned, we slept in the next day and went for an afternoon drive. We saw a group of **Rhesus Macaque** and had a bit later a good view of two **Golden Langur**. It is apparently easier to see them in the morning. Afterwards we saw many **Spotted Deer** and a **Sambar** resting by the river. Then, we encountered a herd of elephants during sunset, and it became clear that the park has not been protected for very long. The matriarch gave us a sign to keep our distance. We drove further away and waited until the herd was further away from the road. Obviously, however, the distance was not big enough and the whole herd charged us. The matriarch ran after us for quite some time, these huge animals are terribly fast! After this encounter it was already relatively late and we could already start spotlighting. We saw a **Leopard** and a **Mutjak** and after dinner two more Muntjak and a **Masked Palm Civet**.



A photograph of an Asian elephant standing in a field of tall green grass. The elephant is facing left, with its trunk slightly curved. Its skin is dark and appears to have some mud or dirt on its back. The background is a soft-focus forest.

Manas NP  
06-09.04.23

With: Jens Hauser



We were in Manas 8 years ago and loved it. Few people and great animals. A lot has changed in 8 years. At that time there was no Barasingha, they had to be reintroduced. We didn't see any Gaurs and far fewer Black giant squirrels and Elephants. The number of Rhinoceros and Tigers has also increased significantly and is now around 60 each. There are now more animals but also noticeably more visitors and stricter rules. This is good for the park and the animals but was not always easy for us with our young son. He doesn't yet understand the concept of the rules.

We spent most of our time at the main entrance doing morning and afternoon drives and one time river rafting in the afternoon. At the Grassland, **Asian Elephant**, **Barasingha** and **Hog Deer** were easy to see. We also saw **Indian Rhinoceros** and a **Wild Boar** there. In the forest we saw **Black Giant Squirrels**, **Hoary-bellied Squirrels** and **Muntjak** every day. We saw **Himalayan Striped Squirrels** once. At the river the **Wild Buffalo** are easy to observe. One morning a Grey Mongoose crossed the road, unfortunately it was super-fast and was only spotted by the driver. In the forest near the Bhutan border we could observe **Capped Langurs**. When river rafting, there is a chance of otter sightings, which we unfortunately missed. We saw Wild Buffalo, Sambar, Barasingha and Capped Langur on the river.

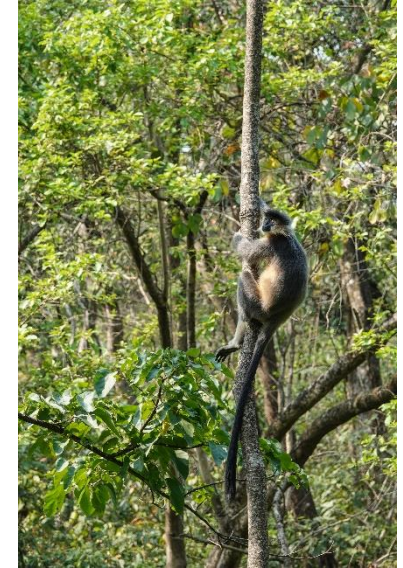
Unfortunately, we only got to know the eastern zone of Manas on the last afternoon. We were the only jeep and it looked very promising. There was also no control at the exit and we were able to spotlight a bit, it seems, at least for the moment, that this region is not really regulated in this respect. Unfortunately, we still had to leave because of the planned night drive. We focused on the forest in the late afternoon. So, as we crossed the plain in the hot afternoon, we saw Asian Elephants and Indian Rhinoceros. I

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assume that in the morning it looks like the other plain. In the forest we heard an alarm call from a Muntjac relatively close by, but unfortunately missed the predator. We also saw **Rhesus Macaques**, Capped Langurs, several Sambars and a Gaur. There are several roads and water holes in the forest and we would have loved to spend more time there.

We also always did our night drives on the eastern part of the park, in the buffer zone. For two nights we drove on a dry river and also a bit in the forest and for one night we spotlighted from the highway to Bhutan that crosses the park. Both looked very promising and there could have been a great surprise at any time, we are convinced. Along the river and in the forest, we always saw many **Indian Hares**, Asian Elephants, Muntjak and Sambar. Unfortunately, from the Bhutan road we only discovered Sambar and Muntjak. We have to mention that we did not do long night drives because our lodge at the main entrance was 1h away from the eastern part. It would be very exciting to see what it would look like to go later at night and longer. Another group had seen a Leopard at the river shortly after us. The night drives were organized through the guide Rustom Basumatary ([rustommes80@gmail.com](mailto:rustommes80@gmail.com); +91 7896 946621). He only accompanied us at night but we got an excellent impression of him and can recommend him as a guide.



## Mammal list:

		Eagles Nest	Shergaon	Raimona National Park	Manas National Park
		4 nights	6 nights	2 nights	3 nights
Rhesus macaque	<i>Macaca mulatta</i>			X	X
Capped langur	<i>Trachypithecus pileatus</i>				X
Golden langur	<i>Trachypithecus geei</i>			X	
Asian elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>			X	X
Greater one-horned rhinoceros	<i>Rhinoceros unicornis</i>				X
Indian muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>	X		X	X
Sambar	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>			X	X
Barasingha	<i>Rucervus duvaucelii</i>				X
Spotted deer	<i>Axis axis</i>			X	
Hog deer	<i>Axis porcinus</i>				X
Gaur	<i>Bos gaurus</i>				X
Water buffalo	<i>Bubalus arnee</i>				X
Wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>				X
Common leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>			X	
Jungle cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>			X	
Spotted linsang	<i>Prionodon pardicolor</i>	X			
Masked palm civet	<i>Paguma larvata</i>			X	
Indian hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>				X
Black giant squirrel	<i>Ratufa bicolor</i>				X
Red giant flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista petaurista</i>		X		
Bhutan giant flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista nobilis</i>		X		
Hudgsons flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista magnificus hodgsoni</i>	X	X		
Grey-headed flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista caniceps</i>		X		
Hoary-bellied squirrel	<i>Callosciurus pygerythrus</i>				X
Himalayan striped squirrel	<i>Tamiops macclellandi</i>				X
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>15</b>