

# Trip report India

*'A quest for cats from East to West'*

13 march – 3 April 2023



Dear reader,

To continue my search for all wild cats of the world this time India was the place to search for new targets.

India is the one country in the world that has the privilege to have not less than 15 species of the cat family in its territory. I have visited it four times and now would go for a fifth with a special focus on the smaller cats. Bringing a visit to India you should take the chance to see a(nother) majestic Bengal tiger. Tigers are impressive every time you get to see one. So I added a visit to a tiger park in this tour.

Andreas Jonsson (SW) had a plan to visit India for the golden cat and had a small tour planned via *World Wide India*. That sounded good to me and also Lennart Verheuvél (NL) had an interest in this tour. So we would try this part together. Andreas already published his trip report of (t)his part of the tour. He and Lennart also did a Snow leopard tour before the golden cat part. My trip report has overlap for the golden cat part.

Lennart also had an interest in tiger and a possible black leopard. Pench tiger reserve would give some chances for both since Kabini wasn't as good as before for black leopard. The leopard of Pench is only half-black. We also would try for a night drive if possible.

Besides this first two parts I had already long time the idea to visit Gujarat in the West of India to try for Asiatic wild cat or desert cat, Caracal & Rusty spotted cat. For this part I planned a tour via *Asian Adventures*. Jens Hausser (SW) who I met during an online mammalwatching zoom meeting was willing to join me for this part, so that was very nice!

In total it would be a tour of around three weeks for me in search of cats and everything else that is nice to see and photograph.

As always I try and hope for nice pictures of the wildlife & scenery.

I hope you'll enjoy this report. Feel free to commend or ask questions.

Many thanks to Andreas & Lennart for the pleasant and perseverance search in the 'eastern part' and the well organised trip and guiding by *WWI*!

Great thanks to Jens for the many hours searching for the Gujarat small cats and the culture photography we both enjoyed. Off course also many thanks for the well organise by *Asian Adventures* and the great guiding and flexible team of *CEDO camp* in Gujarat!

India was again a colourful interesting surprise!

At last always thanks to [www.mammelwatching.com](http://www.mammelwatching.com) for presenting such worth full trip reports.

Best greetings,

Janco van Gelderen

Utrecht, Netherlands (Holland), Europe

*info/contact:*

e-mail: [jancovg@hotmail.com](mailto:jancovg@hotmail.com)

Facebook: Janco van Gelderen, Utrecht area, the Netherlands (feel free to connect)

Instagram: Janco van Gelderen, Utrecht area, the Netherlands (feel free to follow)

## General information

### Preparation

Since Andreas already contacted Wild World India and had a program arranged for the golden cat part (which he had already previously done) [India2.pdf \(mammalwatching.com\)](#) I will not explain this further. I can only add that it was all well-arranged and we had a good guide and driver. The extension part with Lennart to Pench was also organised by *WWI* and also this work-out well. We added a night safari around Pench locally via our the resort owner who contacted *Abishek from WWI*.

For the Gujarat part I planned the tour and transfers with *Asian Adventures*. They arranged for us the whole program of 7 nights in *CEDO camp* and also for the day excursion (driver) in Mumbai. Most domestic flights we booked ourselves (mostly Indigo).

Applying for Visa and special permits is quite a challenge but if you fill in all the right information in the forms it all works well.

### Sleeping

We stayed in a tented camp in Eagle's Nest and a simple lodge. In Pench we had a pleasant resort some 15 minute drive to the park gate. In Gujarat we had a pleasant stay for 7 nights in *CEDO camp*. In Mumbai we stayed in the residence in hotel in the city centre (South of Mumbai).

### Logistics

I flew in and out to India via Mumbai. Further we had domestic flights to local airports and from here private taxi transfers to the destinations.

### Spotlighting

Was the main occupation of the tour both in Eagles Nest and Gujarat. In Pench we had one night safari where spotlighting is limited.

### Money

You can easily get rupees from the ATM (the drivers/guides know where they are).

### Roads/Safety

Since it was all organised well and all drivers were in time at the spoken places we had no problems. All drivers drove responsible. I didn't feel unsafe in Mumbai while visiting the attractions/scenery.

### Daily schedule

Daytime safaris/walks and night safaris, building up a huge sleep shortage 😊.

### Weather

In Eagles Nest it is mostly cloudy and rather cold and also sometimes rain. In Pench it was warm but not too hot. There was a rather wet period all over India this time which is uncommon mid-march. Luckily in Pench we only had a short rain just after one morning safari. In Gujarat we had warm and sunny weather.

### Brief day by day summary

1) Arrive in Guwahati, Assam late evening. Early morning walk around hotel and see some birds and the first mammal a **hoary-bellied squirrel**. Transfer 7 hours by car to Eagles Nest. On the way see a **Rhesus Macaque**.

2-7) Every day long night drives on different stretches up and down on the only mountain road. Mostly from 19 – midnight. Daytime walks and some shorter drives along the same mountain road. Spotlighting is rather slow. On average once an hour you hit, usually, a type of flying squirrel. But we were also out for a while not seeing anything. We lost some spotlighting hours because of rain. In daytime we mostly watched birds and with some luck see some other stuff, mainly squirrels. A good one to mention was a very nice **Yellow-throated marten** that's gave show for a while in a tree.

*All mammals seen this part noted in the trip list.*

8-10) Transfer back to Guwahati, flight onwards via Delhi to Nagpur. Transfer by car to lodge in Pench. Here we had six open gypsy safaris. Three afternoon (15.00-18.30) and three morning safaris (6.00-11.30). We had the same guide and driver on all safaris. Both were good and keen on spotting some nice animals.

On our first safari halfway there were many alarm calls from both **spotted deer** and **hanuman langur**. It was very close to our car so a leopard must be around. Our guide spotted the **leopard** behind our vehicle as it walked in the forest. Luckily the leopard decided to lay down on a rocky outcrop and we could see it posing nicely for a long time. All at some 60 meters distance from the gypsy. Since Lennart's main target was tiger we decided to continue the safari and look out for that. The next day we were lucky and saw our first **tigress**. The sighting wasn't very long. At first the tiger walked away from us deeper in the forest. So we were happy having seen it but also a bit disappointed that we didn't get the pictures we hoped for.... But somehow the tigress changed her route turned around and walked in the direction of the road. She crossed at some 25 meters from our jeep and we had a very nice view of it. She walked slowly further away in the forest.

The next day we saw a **second tiger**, this one walked at some 80 meters distance in the forest along the road-side for quite some time. It was not very clear to see because of all trees. That's why it is also hard to focus with the camera. But we felt lucky with another nice sighting. Another nice surprise was that we were lucky to see **dholes** twice.

We booked also a night safari. This is done in a special part of the buffer zone of Pench. It started a bit slow since we were driving in a line with other vehicles. These cars were focused on leopard and tiger while we were more interested in other stuff. So we asked the guides (you get a different driver and an extra guide) if we could drive some other stretches and that was ok and it turned out to be a good choice...

After at first some Indian hares Lennart spotted a 'different' animal. After a better look it was a **Rusty spotted cat**! Wow a new cat species for both of us 😊 We could see it very clear sitting in the leaves on the ground at some 25 meters distance. After some time it walked off but stopped and sat on a rock for a minute. We enjoyed this sighting and had a last look when it walked out of sight in the forest.

*All mammals seen this part noted in the trip list.*

11-18) taxi transfer to airport and flight Nagpur-Mumbai, flight to Bhuj and transfer to Nakhatrana (CEDO-camp, Great Rann of Kutch area).

Here we had each day for 7 days: morning, afternoon and night safaris. In total *21 safaris over 7 days*. Areas we explored were: *Banni grasslands*, different types of *thorn-scrub forest* and *rural farmland areas*.

We choose to bring a visit to *Mandvi beach* and *city* on the Gulf of Kutch coast. We had two keen drivers who shifted and two great guides: *mr. Tiwari* the owner of CEDO camp and a local guide *mr. Veer*. They shifted between safaris and *mr. Veer* was mostly our guide. Everyone knew the area very well and were very keen on finding our targets. We hoped to see *Desert cat (Asiatic wild cat)*, *caracal* and *rusty spotted cat*. And we put in many hours and find out it would be a very difficult job. However we did see quite some **jungle cats**, but failed on *caracal* and *rusty*. The good thing was we did see two **desert cats** on our 4<sup>th</sup> night and another sighting on the 7<sup>th</sup>, both in Banni grasslands. In this area we also saw **jungle cats** and **jackals**.

Besides **Indian hares** most spotlighting was rather slow although in the end we did see a lot of *different* mammals. It is not an area of many, but it is an area of *variety* in mammals. **Striped hyena** was one of the highlights.

*All mammals in this part presented in trip list*

19-20) visit Mumbai City, Global Vipassana Pagoda and Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

In Mumbai focus was on culture. The Sanjay Gandhi park however also offered some mammals.

*All mammals of Mumbai presented in trip list.*

21) flight home

## **TRIP LIST MAMMALS per area visited**

### ***EAGLES NEST WILDLIFE SANCUTUARY***

**Asian elephant** – one surprising animal at night on the road, quit impressive how fast it can run and also how suddenly it can disappear on very steep terrain. Also surprisingly high in the mountains.

**Arunachal macaque** – first only heard in misty forest near the highest part of Eagle Nest pas just after seen one close by jumping from a branch.

**Rhesus Macaque** – one along the way to Eagles Nest in de lowlands, on the return large groups along Nameri forest.

**Northern red muntjac** – three individuals during night drives

**Bhutan giant flying squirrel** –8 individuals seen in total, all at night. one night 5, one night one, one night 2.

**Spotted giant flying squirrel** – 4 individuals seen in total, all at night

**Himalayan striped squirrel** – 3 singles in daytime

**Particolored flying squirrel** – 3 individuals seen, all at night.

**Pallas's squirrel** – 2 individuals seen in daytime.

**Hoary bellied squirrel** – a single animal in a three right in front of the airport-hotel in Guwahati.

**Orange bellied squirrel** – two singles in daytime in.

**Yellow-throated marten** – one seen very well for while in a large tree. A second animal crossed the road. Both in daytime and down from the camp.

**Masked Palm civet** – one animal showed itself very well in tree and later had a quit riot with a second in the same three. Further an individual from far. All at night.

**Leopard cat** – one sat on the track to half way to Eagles Nest pass, but unlucky directly walked off in the bush.

**(some) Brown Rat** – one rather large individual crossed the road at night

**(some) two size of bats: small and large** – both seen only one

### ***PENCH TIGER RESERVE***

**Gaur** – one male and a herd of females and calves near the great lake in Pench.

**Indian hare** – a few in daytime and quit many in the night safari.

**Spotted deer** – common in Pench.

**Sambar deer** – individuals and small groups of up to three animals in Pench. But by far more uncommon than spotted deer.

**Hanuman langur** – common in Pench, also seen on the way to Nagpur in the fields.

**Rhesus Macaque** – common in groups in Pench and an animal walked in the lodge garden

**Golden Jackal** – 15 seen in 6 safaris in Pench, sometimes in pairs and more common in dusk. Also one pair that had very small cubs in a den under a tree. It was close to the 'breakfast point'.

**Indian grey mongoose** – 4 in Pench

**Ruddy mongoose** – 1 in Pench

**Leopard** – 4 individuals seen in Pench, all sightings very well and for some time. One large male sleeping on a branch.

**Tiger** – 2 animals seen, a nice female first seemed to walk off but later crossed the track and walk aside for some time. The second animal walked sideways of the road at some 100 meters distance in the forest for a stretch of kilometre. It just had laid in the mud since it was half dark of the fresh mud.

**Rusty spotted cat** – The very nice surprise of this tour. Our night safari suddenly got very exciting because of a different animal than a hare.. It was a small cat! We could see it for 1-2 minutes, first sitting on the ground and later on for a short while on a rock after it walked away deeper in the forest.

**Flying fox** – a lot of them came to some special tree in dusk on the way to the park.

**Wild boar** – several small groups and one time a very large group of 30+ animals. Not as common as spotted deer.

**Dhole (Indian wild dog)** – a group of 7 just walked away in the forest after drinking, we just missed this. At the end of our last safari a family of 5-7 with some rather small pups were resting under some trees at 60 meters distance.

**Five-striped palm squirrel** – In the ground on the lodge and here and there seen.

**Nilgai** – a few near the lake and, large male near the Pench river and a single female in the park, not very common here.

## ***GUJARAT - GREAT RANN OF KUTCH***

**Porcupine** – 1 animal seen on the first night-drive in thorn scrub.

**Jungle cat** – 17 seen, most seen cat. Both in Banni grassland area as in Thorn scrub and agricultural fields. Best sightings were in Banni where it was sometimes more open, mostly very skittish.

**Asiatic wild cat (desert cat)** – one night 2 different animals very well seen both for some time in Banni. Last night one animal seen brief also in Banni area.

**Desert fox** – 7 seen in total. An adult and two cubs on 'bird-rock' and further seen in Banni grassland area.

**Indian fox** – 3 animals seen, there were two different dens where they hang-out in dusk.

**Striped hyena** – 1 animal in roadside at night in mixed scrub/agricultural area. It flushed and ran through a large crop field, impressive how fast it is!

**Small Indian civet** – three times seen, mostly in the thorn-forest area, too quick for photo.

**Indian grey mongoose** – quite common seen in roadside and crossing road

**Pale Indian hedgehog** – one on the road night time.

**Long-eared hedgehog** – one on the road night time.

**Small Indian field mouse** – during night-drive.

**Chinkara** – a few animals seen in the thorn-forest in the morning, very skittish,

**Nilgai** – a few small groups of females and a few single males. Also seen in the coastal bush-forest near Mandvi beach.

**Wild boar** – several groups at night, also a daytime sighting of a small group in the thorn-scrub forest.

**Long-tailed tree mouse** – one at night.

**Gerbil** – crossing roads at night.

**Lesser bandicoot rat** – one seen in some bush.

**Indian hare** – most seen animal during spotlighting mostly in the thorn-scrub and agricultural areas.

**Brown rat** – ran in the lodge garden at night

### ***MUMBAI - SANJAY GANDHI NATIONAL PARK***

**Rhesus Macaque** – Common around the Gandhi park entrance.

**Bonnet Macaque** – hangout at cliffs of 'the caves' in Gandhi park.

**Spotted deer** – a few seen in Gandhi park on the way to 'the caves'.

**Brown rat** – a few animal seen from the window in the evening on the streets while dining in the City centre hotel restaurant. Also a single animal in a city park

**Total mammals seen 40+**

## EAGLE'S NEST WILDLIFE SANCTUARY



Cloud forest of Eagle's Nest







Yellow-throated marten gives a show



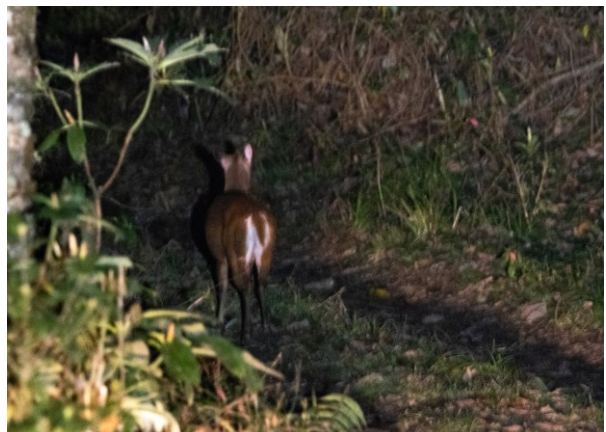
**Buthan giant flying squirrel**



**Parti-coloured  
flying squirrel**

**Spotted flying squirrel**

**Muntjac**





**Pallas's squirrel**



**Himalayan striped squirrel**



**Hoary bellied squirrel in hotel tree (Guwahati)**



**Pallas's squirrel or Orange-bellied Himalayan squirrel?**



**Masked palm civet curious for some tree juices**



**A second one in the same tree means fight!**



**Curious yellow-throated marten**



**A family of rhesus macaques in the roadside near Nameri National park**

## PENCH TIGER RESERVE



Typical Pench safari roads



Pench little lake view



**Sambar male**



**Hanuman langur grooming session**



**Leopard 'on the rocks'**



**Spotted deer always on the lookout for danger**





**Gaur, only seen in the area close to the large lake of Pench**





**Majestic tigress shows herself**



**spotted deer alert for danger**



**Leopard on a stroll**



**Alarmed wild boar**



**A second tigress taking a walk after a nice mud bath**



**Alarmed spotted deer**



**Tigress on the hunt - Sambar  
&  
Rhesus macaques**





**A male leopard relaxing on a tree branch**



**Flying fox fly by**



**The trip-surprise: Rusty spotted cat!**





**Indian hare**

**Five-striped  
palm squirrel**



**Ruddy mongoose**





**A family of dholes relaxing under the trees**



## GUJARAT - GREAT RANN OF KUTCH



**Banni Grasslands, Great Rann of Kutch**



**Thorn-scrub forest of Gujarat**



**Nilgai females (above)  
&  
Nilgai bull (beneath)**





**a very skittish Chinkara**



**Golden jackal on the move at sunset**



**Indian foxes around the den at sunset**





Desert fox 'on bird rock'





**Asiatic wild cat or desert cat on the hunt**





**Another Asiatic wild cat – desert cat**



**Golden jackal in the spotlight**





**Jungle cats  
&  
A serious jungle cat 'stand-off'**





**Indian Hedgehog**



**Collared or Desert Hedgehog (dark spines)**

## MUMBAI - SANJAY GANDHI NATIONAL PARK



Hanuman langur with Mumbai city overlook





**Bonnet macaques**



**Brown rat in a Mumbai city park**

Some birds & reptiles





