

## **Pench National Park and Assam**



Hereby my trip report from 3,5 weeks of traveling through India. It was my first trip to India, and my first holiday where the main focus really laid on mammal watching. The photographs that I added in this trip report are mostly made by my girlfriend Colombe Mery, a dedicated wildlife photographer who, like me, has an interest in traveling to remote places to see the beautiful natural wonders that this world still has to offer. In total, we saw 41 mammal species on this trip, and I added 179 species of bird to my life list. Mammal species will be written in cursive.

### **About the trip**

As a young couple on a small budget, we could not afford to hire the best guides or go on organized wildlife trips, instead we planned almost our entire trip ourselves. This was a bit of a challenge, and very time consuming in a country as massive as India, but well worth it. In the end we managed to visit all the places that we wanted to visit, and saw all the mammals we wanted to see on our main targetlist. In total we spent 3,5 weeks in India. 6 days at Pench National Park in Madhya Pradesh. 3 days in Guwahati in Assam, 4 days in Kaziranga National Park, 3 days in Nameri National Park, 3 days in Hoollongapar Gibbon Reserve, and 1 day in Kakoijana Forest Reserve before flying back home to The Netherlands.

### **Pench National Park**

A mammal watching trip to India would not be complete without seeing the nation's national pride, the royal bengal tiger. There are plenty of national parks to choose from to see this magnificent beast, but in the end we opted for Pench National park. From what I could find on the internet, Pench is a lot more relaxed and tiger friendly in comparison to the more famous parks where you could see tigers, such as Bandhavgarh or Tadoba national park. This was confirmed to us by other tourists that we met in India that did go to these parks and told us about the traffic jams that can occur when a tiger is spotted. This is different to

Pench, where only a limited number of jeeps is allowed access to at every gate, and the jeeps have to stick to their assigned routes. The limited amount of jeeps does mean that you have to book your safaris months in advance.

In order to get to Pench national park we flew from New Delhi to Nagpur, a city that is best to be avoided. Yet as stubborn as I was, I decided to stay for one day in the city before heading to the national park. This was a big mistake, as people within the city are not used to seeing “tall foreigners” and really became needy when seeing us, holding on to us on the streets and pulling on our limbs to get us to go into their stores or restaurants. I have been to other big cities in my life, so I am used to some of the reactions that you can get as a tourist, but this was just a totally different experience.



### The resort

The next day we were picked up by our driver from Tiger N Woods resort from Nagpur and were brought to the resort, near the Turia gate of Pench National Park. I had been in contact with Tiger N Woods months before our departure and they arranged everything for us, pick up and delivery, safari's and of course our stay at their resort. The staff was really friendly to us and gave us honest prices, which were often far cheaper than the prices that I could find on the internet, and less than half of booking through an agency. We booked one of the wooden machaans of the resort, these are lovely wooden houses on poles with a balcony that looks directly into the tiger reserve. At the day of our arrival (20th of February) the environment was already starting to become quite dry, but the trees and plants within the resort's boundaries are watered by the staff. This turned the grounds of the resort into an oasis for local wildlife that was drawn into this lush green environment. Already upon our arrival, we spotted **Hanuman langurs** and **Rhesus macaques** near our Wooden Machaan, and in the evening light, **Chital deer** could be spotted from the balcony. As night set in, we could see **Indian flying foxes** leaving from a tree just next to the resort. The wooden



machaan itself was also full of surprises, an **Asian palm civet** was living in the roof of the wooden Machaan, together with some **Indian Palm Squirrels**. When spotlighting at night, **Indian gerbils** could be spotted in the climbing plants that were partly growing onto our balcony. However, having so many mammal species around your accommodation can also have its disadvantages as the **Asian palm civet** was quite noisy and woke us up multiple times. During the first night of our stay a male **Bengal tiger** could be heard calling for a female at night. The sound appeared to be coming close from our Wooden Machaan, something that I did not anticipate when I went out earlier in the afternoon to place my wildlife camera some 500 meters off-track near the resort in the general direction from where we could hear the tiger roaring now. In total we spotted 6 mammal species and 54 bird species from the balcony of the wooden machaan alone, making it an ideal stay for our trips.



### **Turia Gate**

Turia gate is known as the main gate of Pench national park and is by far the most popular. 34 Jeeps are allowed to go on safari from this gate per safari slot (morning/afternoon). Jeep sharing is a possibility, which we often did to save cost, but getting to know other people that were going on safari was an added bonus. Right after entering the park, all jeeps get divided over 3 different routes (left, straight, right) and have to mostly stick to this route for the duration of the safari. The left route is famous for its leopard sightings, the middle route has good chances for seeing tigers and the right route is the best route for seeing tigers and dholes. In Pench national park, a guide is mandatory to accompany you for your safari. We did 5 safaris from Turia gate and we had a different guide everytime. I would say 2 out of 5 were good guides and 3 were decent but were not interested in speaking English much, sometimes spending most of the safari on their phones. In our 5 safari's (3 morning and 2 afternoon) from Turia Gate, we took the first left (leopard route) twice. On this route, we saw 3 **Indian leopards**, several **Golden jackals**, loads of **Chital**, **Sambar**, **Hanuman**

**langurs, Rhesus Macaque, Sambar, Gaur, Wild boar, Nilgai and Indian gray mongoose.** We were close to seeing a tiger a couple of times, but sadly they never came into view. The leopard route is by far the prettiest when it comes to the scenery. I was really happy with seeing the leopards on this route, as most people that come to Pench do see the tiger, but often miss out on the leopard. I was also told that the Nilgai buck that we spotted was a rarity to see from Turia gate.



On the next two safaris, our jeep got assigned to the straight route. I was excited at first, as our chances of seeing a tiger increased on this route, but this did not happen in the end. This route goes through a combination of hilly terrain, dry forest and rocky areas. We saw similar species as on the leopard route. Including a female **leopard** that came really close to the vehicle and gave us a private show in the high grass. Although we missed out on the tiger again (which caused us some stress as everyone in the resort was seeing tigers but us), we did see 2 new mammal species to our list. The **Madras threeshrew** and the **Small Indian civet**.





On our final safari from Turia gate we were finally assigned to the route that takes the first right (tiger route). We were both stressed out, as this could be our last chance to see a tiger and we kept missing out on them, and we were also really hoping for Dholes. Our safari did not start smoothly to say the least. Our guides overslept by 20 minutes, so although we were one of the first jeeps in line to go on safari, we watched all the jeeps behind us leave until we were the only ones left. I started to feel very unlucky, as everyone in the resort that we spoke to had seen a tiger at this point, but us. Everyone kept telling us that it is exceptional to see 4 different leopards, and we were basically the only ones that saw a leopard to begin with in the resort, but this trip really needed a tiger sighting. Fortunately, our late guide turned out to be the guide that really delivered. Within 30 minutes of starting the safari, he brought us to a spot where he said that there was a 100% chance that a tiger would cross the road. 5 minutes later, we could see a beautiful female **Bengal tiger** crossing the road up close. The guide then asked the driver to drive to another road, where we waited for about 40 minutes in absolute silence. The guide, who was on his phone the entire time, guaranteed us that the tiger would appear about 5 meters behind the jeep. He was right again, and this time she crossed the road even closer to us. It was an absolutely amazing sight and we were so relieved to have seen the tiger.



### Khursapar gate

Khursapar gate is famous for its forested landscape and good tiger spotting chances, so on our second day, we opted for a morning safari from this gate. This gate feels different in comparison to the Turia gate, as only 17 jeeps are allowed to enter the park from this gate, and they take away your phone before entering the park. Although the scenery at this gate is indeed beautiful, and we saw several new bird species, it was really disappointing for mammal watching. Our guide was really focused on getting us a tiger sighting, and quickly managed to get us up close to a **sambar** that saw a tiger, but the tiger was hiding in the bushes and we could not see it, shortly after we followed really fresh tracks of a mom with cubs, but also this tiger was nowhere to be found. After that we ended up following a third tiger track of a large male. During this tracking, we encountered a **herd of Nilgai** with a beautiful buck. We asked the guide to stop for a photo but he completely ignored our request. The tiger track eventually went off road and by that point our guide sort of gave up on the entire safari all together. By that I mean that he asked the driver to stop the car, after which the guide fell asleep on the dashboard of the vehicle.

After several minutes of awkwardness, our driver started driving to the breakfast area of the park, where everybody we talked to had seen tigers but us. We were eager to head out back into the park so we finished our breakfasts as fast as we could to go back on safari in the park again, but the guide just wanted to sleep. He again ordered the driver to park the jeep and he started sleeping again. As this situation was really awkward and rude, I asked after several minutes if we maybe could just drive around again to see if we could spot some other nice animal species. This resulted in the guide giving the order to the driver to drive back to the Gate and end our safari 45 minutes earlier than it was supposed to have ended. We tried arguing to get back into the park but this proved useless. All in all a really



disappointing experience, especially because other people from the resort saw many mammal species here that I would have loved to see, including Dhole and Sloth Bear.

### **Kwasaha gate**

Kwasaha gate is the only gate of the reserve that allows night drives. The safari does not take you into the Pench National Park, but into the surrounding buffer zone. As I was interested in doing a night drive in the hope of spotting a Sloth bear, we opted for 1 night safari and one morning safari from this gate. Again the scenery is amazing on this safari route, but the mammal watching was really poor. During the night safari, you are not allowed to use a flashlight, so you can often hear animals but not see them. For example, we heard a **Leopard** really close to our jeep, but could not see it in the darkness. Sometime later, we could hear **Indian porcupines** going through some leaves maybe 5 meters from our vehicle. I asked several times if I could use a flashlight, but the response was no everytime. In the end, the only mammal we could see on our night safari was a **Asiatic long-tailed climbing mouse**.

The morning safari was a bit better, as we were the first jeep of only 5 total jeeps entering the buffer zone. Minutes after the sun was up (and we were allowed access into the zone), we could see a herd of **Nilgai**, with a beautiful buck crossing the road right in front of us. We also saw a massive **Gaur** bull, which proved impossible to photograph as it crossed the road in front of us and then was hiding in vegetation. Our guide estimated the specimen at 1300 kg. Although other jeeps saw tigers (and we missed out again). We did get extremely lucky and spotted an **Indian wolf** crossing a field some 50 meters away. All in all you could see similar species in the buffer zone as in the park itself, but the densities of sightings is much, much lower.





### Missed species

My personal big 5 for Pench National Park consisted of Tiger, Leopard, Dhole, Four-horned antelope and Nilgai. I missed out on the Four-horned antelope, which according to all the guides is extremely difficult to see. During our stay in Tiger N Woods, nobody saw any Four-horned antelopes. We did meet people that saw Dholes, and had photos to back it up. One sighting came from the Turia Gate tiger route, and one sighting came from the Khursapar gate. Another species that I would have loved to see is the Sloth bear, which is also extremely rare in the park. We met only one person that saw one, at the Khursapar gate.

### Guwahati

After our stay in Pench we took a plane from Nagpur to Guwahati in Assam. We decided to spend one day here, to discover some Indian culture. The reason I include Guwahati in this trip report is because you could see a lot of mammals inside this city. We saw two species of **flying foxes** hanging on trees around the Brahmaputra river near Peacock Island and **Irrawaddy squirrels** are also common in the city parks.



### Kaziranga National Park

A mammal watching trip to India is not complete without a trip to Kaziranga national park. So the next day we got picked up by our driver for 4 days of Safari in Kaziranga. Although Kaziranga is absolutely amazing and I highly recommend everybody going, it can get really overcrowded with tourists and sometimes your driver really has to fight with his vehicle to



give you a proper sighting. This was not the case in Pench, and we really had to get used to it. Kaziranga has 4 different safari gates, the Central safari Zone, Western safari zone, Burapahar safari zone and Agaratoli safari zone. In total we did 6 safaris in Kaziranga National Park.

### Resort

Although I could read that pretty much everyone on this website is going to Diphlu River lodge, this was sadly a bit too expensive for us. We therefore opted for Nature Hunt Eco Camp. An excellent budget option, that was really everything we had hoped for. It is located between some rice paddies near the Kaziranga Central Zone entrance. The bamboo cottages are basic, but provide you with everything that you need. The meals were the best we had in India, and the staff was friendly and knowledgeable, with a good sense of humor. On the perimeters of the resort you could already spot some mammal species, including **Capped langurs** and **Rhesus macaques**. Although we initially were not planning on taking a guide on our safaris (It is not mandatory in Kaziranga) we ended up going on two safaris with Aovick Dasgupta from the resort. He was an excellent knowledgeable guide, who really knew everything there was to know about the animal species in the park. Often spotting animals that I would have never been able to find myself. He would make funny jokes during the safari and took us out to a local tea shop after safaris for a late afternoon chai. He also made sure that we were often the first jeep to enter the safari zone, which would increase our chances for rare mammal encounters. For everyone on a budget that wants to visit Kaziranga, I would really recommend staying at Nature Hunt Eco Camp with Aovick. His phone number is +917086906990.



**Agaratoli safari**

We started our safaris in Kaziranga with a drive through the Agaratoli safari range. Although this range is most famous for its birds, and I was initially hesitant to use a valuable morning safari on this range, our guide Aovick guaranteed us that we could see at least 4 out of Kaziranga's big five (Tiger, Rhino, Buffalo, Elephant, Barasingha) there, but he thought that we could see them all in one morning safari as he did the same the two days prior. Getting to this gate is quite the suicidal drive over the mainroad in your safari jeep, but I can really recommend this gate to any mammal watcher. We were one of three jeeps entering the park through this gate that morning. After about a one minute drive from the gate, you come to this open grassland landscape surrounded by jungle on three sides. From this spot, we could already see a large **Tusker elephant**, **One-horned rhinoceros**, **Several herds of Asian water buffalo**, **groups of Barasingha** and **Swamp deer**. You could literally make one photo that would capture all of this species in one shot! The safari would only get better after this, as we could get really close to several **One-horned rhinoceros** on our drive that were just grazing in the grassland. A bit later, when we entered more of a swamp area of the range, we could see several groups of **Smooth coated otters** hunting fish near the jeep. They were clearly enjoying themselves, but that made them a bit difficult to photograph. The safari ends on the bank of the Brahmaputra river after which the jeep turns around and takes the same route back. You are allowed to take a quick restroom break at the bank of the river, but in our case this might have been a bit ill advised as there were really fresh tiger prints over some jeep tracks of a jeep that we encountered heading back like 5 minutes earlier. My girlfriend spotted them first, and when we notified our guide, he told us to get back in the jeep immediately. We were surrounded by elephant grass and according to the guide, the tiger might have been watching us. We waited for a while, but although we could see the grass move, the tiger did not reappear. Besides mammals, we also saw several species of turtles on this safari, including the Assamese roof turtle, and a Burmese python. We also saw an incredible 112 species of birds!





### **Burapahar safari**

My favorite safari range in Kaziranga was the Burapahar range, it takes about 1.5 hours to get to this range from the central safari zone, and, due to this remote location, is barely visited by tourists. We shared the entire range with 2 other jeeps! Again, the drive over the main road in your safari jeep without a seat belt can feel a bit suicidal at times, but you can also see wildlife crossing the main road early morning, especially around the dedicated wildlife passing zones. Burapahar safari range consists of a mix of jungle, large grasslands and river swamps. Right upon entering the park, we could see a **Black Giant squirrel** climbing around in the trees, just a few meters further into the zone we encountered a large group of **Capped langurs** enjoying the morning sun in the trees. During our drive, we saw **Asian water buffalo, Elephants, Rhinoceros, Barasingha and Swamp deer**. We also saw two small groups of **Smooth coated otters**, and one large group of **Asian small clawed otters**. On our way back we encountered a large Rhinoceros, that was standing on the road and wouldn't let us pass, until our driver started making this subtle sound that somehow intimidated the rhinoceros. Right before leaving the park, we could see a group of **Assamese macaques** in the distance. These primates are apparently quite shy and so I was happy to stripe them off my bucketlist. Besides mammals, we also saw large groups of vultures resting in the trees and the grassland and we saw some green-billed malkoha.

Our driver, arranged by Nature Hunt Ecocamp, kept us in the safari zone far longer than was legally allowed, but he seemed to know the guards so this did not cause any problems. He really went all in, as on our return trip over the main road, he spotted the famous **Hoolock gibbons** along the highway. Although I can honestly say that I am completely fascinated by Gibbons, and that a big reason for going to India was seeing another species of Gibbon in the wild, this was not the way that I imagined seeing them. In a tree, above the main road, with the smoke of a local temple going up into the canopies, with cars and buses honking all the time. It really made me pity these poor apes.

### **Western zone**

The western safari zone is one of the more popular safari zones of the park, and it is famous for its rhino-sightings, which you will have in abundance upon entering this zone. The zone feels smaller than the Burapahar zone, and it is far more busy, making it sometimes more crowded than I would have liked. We saw similar species as in the other two zones, but by far the most **One-horned rhinoceros** out of all the zones. Including mating Rhinos, and several young, including a 2 week old baby Rhino up close. We waited for a while at a famous spot for a tiger crossing, but it did not happen. As we were departing from the safari zone, we did see loads of **Sambar deer**, which apparently become more active at dusk in

Kaziranga.



### Central zone

We went on safari in the central zone of Kaziranga three times, for one morning, and two afternoon safaris. If you are coming to Kaziranga for the big mammals and a general summary of the landscapes, then this zone has it all. The disadvantage of this is the amount of jeeps in this zone of the park, as it sometimes just feels as if you are in traffic on a highway. All these jeeps driving around also creates a lot of dust, which is not nice for your camera gear, your eyes and your throat. Again we pretty much saw the same species as in the other zones. But our driver gave us a 100% guarantee for seeing a tiger if we would spend a whole day with him in the central zone and so we took him up on that challenge on our last day in Kaziranga. The morning safari started rather exciting, as we were one of the first jeeps to enter the park, and we quickly discovered some extremely fresh sloth bear tracks on the road. We followed them for a while, but sadly the sloth bear was no longer around. If you are doing a tiger safari in the central zone, then the driver basically parks the jeep along the road on a spot where tigers are known to cross and you just sit there for hours waiting for those 10-15 seconds that the animal crosses the road. Now I have plenty of experience in the waiting game for some animal species to show itself, but I had to say that it hits differently when you are waiting along a safari road and there are other jeeps driving by constantly. It takes away the feeling of being in nature, and it really made me annoyed at times to see jeeps making a U-turn on the place where we were hoping a tiger would show up. This however, did not happen for the entire day, so we basically spent a whole day waiting at an animal crossing for nothing. We did see some other animals crossing the road at our crossing though, including several **Rhinoceros (one almost charging the jeep)**, an **Elephant** and some **Barking deers**. Our guide however, did deliver on his tiger promise, as he got a whatsapp message that a tiger was spotted nearby. We drove there as quickly as we could, but by the time we arrived, it was total chaos, with about 80 other jeeps fighting for



a spot. It was total chaos, and people on jeeps started yelling to other jeeps to move so that they could also see something. This completely ruined the experience. We did see the **Tiger** though, but it was a good 200 meters away... Even our guides told us, "Yes you can see Tiger in Kaziranga, but it is not a good park to see tiger". And I think that he is absolutely right.



### **River dolphin safari**

While driving from Kaziranga to Nameri national park, we made a stop at the Brahmaputra river bridge near Tezpur to go on a boat safari to watch Ganges river dolphins. The whole experience was a bit of a disappointment. I was envisioning this ideal boat ride on the river with some (pretty much guaranteed) dolphin fins popping up around us. Instead upon arrival we found out that it was more like a zoo. Upon arriving at the river bank, the boat was just returning with other tourists that saw the dolphins. As they were leaving the boat, we could board. However, during our upstream drive to see the dolphins, the engine broke down completely, causing us to drift downstream again. This took a good 45 minutes of the 1 hour dolphin tour. When we arrived at the spot where we could see the dolphins we quickly saw one **Ganges river dolphin**. The boat, with a loud engine decided to pursue the dolphin upstream and this pretty much went on for 20 minutes. In total we only saw two **Ganges river dolphins**. The "captain" of the ship then told us that the amount of dolphins had declined recently in the area, and that they do not know what caused it. I wonder if he knows that cetaceans are extremely sensitive to underwater noise and that pursuing dolphins by boat with a loud engine is not ecologically responsible tourism. When we arrived back at the river bank where we started, the next group of tourists was waiting to go on the dolphin tour. My suspicion is that the dolphins are locally disappearing because of overdisturbance, and if I would have known that this is how the boat trip would go I would not have gone on it.



### Nameri National Park

Nameri National Park is a jungle pearl in Northern Assam. The park, which is connected to Pakke Tiger reserve in Arunachal Pradesh is a beautiful lush jungle with limited access. Inside the park, you can only do safaris on foot, and the park is more famous for its birding than its mammals. Nameri really feels as an underdeveloped tourist destination, and it is not visited by many tourists. Although I would definitely recommend Nameri for nature or birdlovers, I will not recommend it for mammal watchers.

### Resort

We stayed at Nameri Baligora Eco Camp, a location that I would not recommend to others. Its location is quite remote, despite looking really close to Nameri National park on google maps. The staff is not friendly and overcharged us on everything, and there is nothing "eco" about this place, as they dump their plastic trash in nature in the back of the camp. The only thing that makes visiting this place worthwhile was the fact that several large (up to 2m+) banded kraits were crawling around the camp at night.



### Safaris

In Nameri national park, there are two ways to visit the park. By raft on the river or by foot. In the end we only did two morning safaris on foot, as our resort tripled the costs for rafting that was initially agreed upon and it felt too much like an obvious scam. On the early morning hikes we saw loads of birds, **Asian Waterbuffalo, Rhesus Macaques, Black giant squirrels, Irrawaddy squirrel, Himalayan striped squirrel and Barking deer**. We also saw the White winged wood duck, a species that many birders come to see. There are two different paths that you could walk and both have beautiful jungle scenery. I asked our guide, who was really good in bird identification about mammal sightings in the park, but in general they do not see much.



Poaching is a problem in the area, and Nameri and Pakke combined only have around 19 tigers left. Elephants are occasionally seen, and our guide saw a Clouded leopard in a tree recently, but that was the only one he ever saw in his life. He had never seen an Asiatic black bear, but he did encounter tracks of this species from time to time in the park.

### Hoollongapar

From Nameri we took a long taxi drive to Hoollongapar Gibbon Reserve, a place that I was looking forward to for the entire trip. As mentioned earlier, Gibbons are probably my most favorite mammals and although I had seen 3 species of gibbon before this trip to India, I had never seen them up close. Our goal was to see the remaining species of primates we had missed out upon on our trip so far, the Stump-tailed macaque and the Bengal slow loris, and ofcourse the Gibbons! There are currently 26 gibbon families in Hoollongapar, with a grand total of 128 Gibbons, impressive for an only 20 square kilometer park!

Sadly, I have to report that the future of Hoollongapar is uncertain. Recently permits have been granted for exploratory oil drilling within the ecological zone (but outside of the reserve). There are also plans to double the tracks on the train connection that runs through the reserve and electrify the tracks so that they could stop using diesel trains. During our stay we met a group of biologists from Sri Lanka, who told us that they visited Hoollongapar about 10 years prior, and that the forest density had greatly declined and that there were more paths through the jungle than before. When talking with locals from the village, we could hear similar things, with some of them expressing deep concern about the future of this place. For all the readers planning on visiting Assam, please visit Hoollongapar! (Eco) tourism can go a long way in protecting a unique place like this from further destruction, and the Gibbons have literally nowhere to go.

### Homestay

For our three day stay at Hoollongapar we stayed at Gibbon Eco Camp, a local homestay just 5 minutes walking from the entrance to Hoollongapar. The place is a basic accommodation but it has everything that you need and the family is very welcoming and makes tasty local food for you. They also arranged our trips into Hoollongapar and even took us to a local tea factory. The only disadvantage is the train, which drives by at night and makes a lot of noise.

### Safaris

We did two half day walking safaris into Hoollongapar. Despite it only being a small reserve, it still feels like a big jungle when you are inside! On our first walking safari, we quickly saw an all male group of **Hoolock gibbons**, that were not shy and quite approachable, this was followed by a Gibbon family of 6, that we could also see from up close for quite a while. After seeing other Gibbon species in Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia that usually flee away from people, it was nice to see that these Gibbons were not afraid of humans. Poaching, we were told, does not occur in Hoollongapar. Locals see the value of the Gibbon as a living creature. We also saw **Rhesus macaques**, **Pallas squirrels** and **Black giant squirrels** on our first day of safari as well as a **Barking deer**.



In the evenings I wanted to go out and do some spotlighting, looking for the Bengal slow loris. This was however not something that seemed possible. Leopards and Elephants are out and about at night and apparently recently a woman was killed by a leopard on the forest edge. I sneaked out anyway in an attempt to spot some wildlife, but people in cars or on scooters would come to me and tell me that I should go back as it was not safe to walk around at night alone. On my second attempt, I managed to spot a **leopard** for a split second in a ditch between some tea gardens. I initially thought that my mind was playing tricks on me, but then I could see the bushes move and decided that maybe it was best to follow the advice of the villagers and headed back to the homestay.

On our second morning safari I asked our guide if we could target Stump-tailed macaques. He told me that there are only three groups of stump-tailed macaques in Hoollongapar, and that they had not been seen for weeks. He would see what he could do, but we should not get our hopes up. Our day started with a group of **Rhesus macaques**, followed by a group of **Capped langurs** and three different families of **Hoolock gibbons**. We had already left the reserve and were walking back to the homestay when our guide got a phone call that a group of **Stump-tailed macaques** was spotted by another guide. We rushed back into the reserve and after 20 minutes of walking we suddenly went off-track. Before we knew it, we were surrounded by Stump-tailed macaques in the bushes around us. There must have been 60+ individuals on the forest floor. It was a very impressive sight.





### **Kakoijana**

From Hoollongapar we took a long cab drive to Guwahati, where we met up with Imran Ali from Jungle travels. Together with Imran we traveled to Kakoijana forest reserve to see the Golden langurs. Imran was a knowledgeable guide, who really made us feel comfortable. We had never really traveled with a guide before, so having someone that speaks English well and helps you "blend in" goes a long way. We stayed at a basic homestay at the entrance of Kakoijana and the next morning went out looking for the Golden langurs. They were not difficult to find, as one group of **Golden langurs** was feeding in Kakoijana village. Again, these primates were not shy and would come relatively close which allowed us to take some nice photos. After seeing this group of Langurs, we went into Kakoijana forest to look for another group that we eventually found on a hill. This group was considerably bigger, and quite shy, keeping their distance from us. We saw no other mammal species in Kakoijana national park but we came for the Golden langur and we saw what we came for. I am glad that we did the final part of the trip with Imran, as I do not think that we would have found the Golden langurs by ourselves.



Species	Pench NP	Kaziranga NP	Nameri NP	Hoollongapar	Kakoijana
Rhesus Macaque	x	x	x	x	x
Assamese Macaque		x			
Stump-tailed macaque				x	
Hanuman langur	x				
Capped langur		x		x	
Golden langur					x
Hoolock Gibbon		x		x	
Tiger	x	x			
Leopard	x			x	
Sambar	x	x			



Chital	x				
Barasingha		x			
Barking deer		x	x	x	
Hog deer		x	x		
Gaur	x				
Asian waterbuffalo		x	x		
Golden jackal	x				
Indian wolf	x				
Asian elephant		x			
One-horned rhinoceros		x			
Wild boar	x	x	x		
Asian palm civet	x				
Small indian civet	x				
Smooth coated otter		x			
Asian small clawed otter		x			
Grey mongoose	x				
Indian gerbil	x				
Indian palm squirrel	x				
Black giant squirrel		x	x	x	
Irrawaddy squirrel		x	x	x	
Madras threeshrew	x				
Pallas				x	

squirrel					
Asiatic long-tailed climbing mouse	x				
Himalayan striped squirrel			x		
Nilgai	x				
Ganges river dolphin		x (Brahmaputra river bridge)			
Indian flying fox	x	x (Guwahati)			
Flying fox spec		x (Guwahati)			