

Madhya Pradesh: Kanha reserve trip report

February 17 to 19, 2019

*With Narendra Malik
from Chitvan Jungle Lodge
www.chitvan.com*



Bengal Tiger (*Panthera Tigris Tigris*)

Introduction

My wife and I planned a trip in India to try to complete the decade of annual holidays spent on a list of “bigger cats”, having previously seen the Puma and Jaguar in Bolivia, the Cheetah, Leopard and Lion in Tanzania and the Sunda Clouded Leopard in Borneo. A week before arriving in Kanha, we saw the Snow Leopard in Hemis National Park.

She made an excellent choice by selecting Chtivan Jungle Lodge, which had incredibly comfortable amenities. We spent 3 days doing safaris in Kanha during the mornings and afternoons, with our objective being mostly mammals, but we did some birding as well.



Here are the mammals we saw:

- **Tiger:** one close sighting on morning 1, one well hidden on the end of day 2, two walking in the bush on the morning of day 3 and one sitting in the bush at the end of day 3;
- **Sloth Bear:** one running away after seeing a tiger on day 3;
- **Golden Jackal:** two crossing the road near the ranger station;
- **Gaur:** two close sightings;
- **Blackbuck:** two, quite far;
- **Barking Deer:** one hiding in the bush;
- **Barasingha, Sambar, Chital (Spotted Deer):** very common;
- **Three-striped palm squirrel:** very common;
- **Wild pig:** very common;
- **Northern Plains Langur:** very common;
- **Rhesus Macaque:** quite common.

- About Kanha -

The safaris start at 6:00 until 11:00 in the morning, then from 3:00 to 6:00 in the afternoon. We always arrived around half an hour before the park opens to get in line. The park was very well organized, with rangers arriving in advance to verify the visitor's IDs, allowing everything to flow well once the park opens. I think there is a maximum of 25 vehicles in the park. A ranger also joins in every Gypsy, carrying an app on his phone that ensures that drivers respect park rules (such as the speed limits).



Mahesh Gop (driver), Narendra Malik (naturalist), my wife and I, with the Gypsy

While there were no radios or walkie-talkies, a concentration of tiger signs normally meant around 10 cars circling the same perimeter. When a tiger is seen, you won't be alone. We were happy to see that drivers would move to leave space to the tiger and also make sure that other cars had a clear view. It was a bit complicated at times, when the roads were narrow, but I felt like they were good in balancing respect for the animal and allowing a good sighting. Seeing cars move back when the tiger takes a step was better than what I saw on Youtube in most Indian tiger reserves.



- Day 1, February 17, 2019 -

On a chilly morning, we entered the park to see mist still hanging over the fields. A great sight welcomes us: the emblematic **Barasingha**, peacefully grazing. We also saw plenty of **Langurs**, **Chital** and many bird species (see the annex).



Barasingha



Northern Plains Langur

Narendra quickly spotted Tiger scraps on the side of the road. We started circling around the area, followed by incoming vehicles. We then heard Tiger growls and shortly after, a magnificent female came out of the trees. Unimpressed by the cars, she quietly sniffed the road, sat, laid down, then disappeared back in the trees. Narendra quickly indicated to our driver the road to take to see her again at a crossroads, which worked like magic, allowing yet another great sighting.



Tiger (female called T27), in Mukki Zone

The rest of the day was quieter, but we have many bird sightings and a really intimate sighting of a big Sambar Deer drinking in a pool.



Sambar Deer



Barking Deer

On the second day, we had a great sighting of two **Golden Jackals** before breakfast. Other highlights were a male **Gaur** near the end of the day and again, many deer and birds.

We spent a lot of time tracking a shy male **Tiger**, called T46. He eluded us until the very end of the day and even then, we could barely make out his face in the dense vegetation. It was a great way to finish the day.



Golden Jackal

Day 3 started really strong, in the Kanha Zone: many Tiger signs, completed by a growl, pointed our guide in the right direction, allowing for the sighting of a subadult male **Tiger** lying in the bush. He eventually got up, and when he disappeared, we were surprised to see a second young male **Tiger** following right up.

As we tried to follow their trajectory from the road, we were surprised once more by the no2 on our wish list: a **Sloth Bear**. The bear probably saw the **Tigers** a bit late and he was now running full speed in the opposite direction, making it quite hard to get a good picture, but the sighting was incredible.

Just a few minutes later, we saw the beautiful Blackbuck, and then we went back to the Mukki zone, where we had a close sighting of a resting **Gaur**, **Wild Pigs** and more deer.



Gaur

As our third and last day was ending, we were joking that we needed one more tiger sighting, and just a few minutes later, we saw a group of 5 cars on the road and spotted a **Tiger** about 40 metres away. It was the perfect ending for our trip!



Female **Tiger**, called T32, in Mukki zone

- Annex: Birdwatching -

Kanha is an excellent place for birdwatching and we enjoyed the knowledge of both our guide and driver. Here is a list of birds we have seen in our 3 day trip:

- Indian Peafowl;
- Red Junglefowl;
- Yellow-Legged Green Pigeon;
- Greater Coucal;
- Lesser Adjutant;
- Black Stork;
- Cinnamon Bittern;
- Indian Pond Heron;
- Indian Black Ibis;
- Little Cormorant;
- Great Cormorant;
- Green Sandpiper;
- Oriental Honey Buzzard;
- Crested Serpent Eagle;
- Shikra;
- Grey-Headed Fish Eagle;
- Jungle Owlet;
- Collared Scops Owl;
- Indian Grey Hornbill;
- Common Hoopoe;
- Indian Roller;
- Common Kingfisher;
- Pied Kingfisher;
- Stork-Billed Kingfisher;
- White-Throated Kingfisher;
- Greater Racket-Tailed Drongo;
- Long-Tailed Shrike;
- Purple Sunbird;
- Jungle Prinia;
- Siberian Stonechat.



Indian Peafowl



Indian Grey Hornbill



Two closely huddled **Collared Scops Owl (Indian Scops Owl)**



Brown Hawk-Owl



Stork-Billed Kingfisher



Grey-headed Fish Eagle



Crested Serpent Eagle



Common Kingfisher



Shikra

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