

INDIA. Tadoba-Andhari Reserve. 9 nights.

16 species including tiger, leopard, sloth bear, dohle, chausingha, nilgai, chital, sambar, wild pig / boar, Ruddy mongoose, Indian tree shrew etc. Plus numerous birds.

Dates	28.03.19 – 05.04.19 inclusive
Participants	Miles Foster and Ingrid Statman
Tour organiser	Self
Guide	Tadoba: Prasun Majumdar.
Target Species	Tiger, dhole, leopard, sloth bear.
Report author	Miles Foster

Schedule

28th March – pick-up from Nagpur Airport and transfer to Svasara Lodge, Tadoba

29th March – am and pm – Core Zone

30th March – am and pm – Core Zone

31st March – am and pm – Zone 2 / Buffer Zone

1st April – am and pm – Core Zone

2nd April – am and pm – Kolsa Zone – packed bkfst and lunch

3rd April – am and pm – Core Zone

4th April – am and pm – Core Zone

5th April – am – Zone 2 / Buffer Zone – pm - Core Zone

Sat. 6th April – 8.00 am pick-up at Svasara Lodge, Tadoba, and transfer by road to Pench Jungle Camp

About us

We are reasonably experienced amateur wildlife watchers and quite widely travelled. Although we are generalists and fascinated by all aspects of ecology and ethology, we are mainly interested in predators, particularly mammals and more particularly cats. The quality rather than quantity of sightings is important to us and we particularly like the chance to observe behaviour.

Travel

Indigo Airlines from Sri Lanka (Bandaranaike International Airport) to Chennai and onward to Nagpur. Flights were fine but Chennai airport was a nightmare - we'll do our best to avoid it in future.

Transfer by car from Nagpur to Svasara Jungle Lodge, Tadoba, and from Svasara to Pench Jungle Camp arranged by the lodges – all smooth and efficient.

Although we arranged the trip ourselves and everything went smoothly local knowledge in India is invaluable and we bumped into an Indian travel agent at Svasara Lodge who was a great help in arranging transfer between terminals at Mumbai for our homeward flight – without him we may have missed our connection. He would be definitely worth contacting if you are looking for a good ground agent: Vinod Goswami, Babita Tours - vinodkgoswami@gmail.com

About Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve

The Reserve gave the impression of being well managed with a happy and motivated staff and good relations with the local community.

We had numerous sightings of a range of fauna, many of which under conditions which allowed a chance to observe the animals in detail, including their behaviour, and made for a fascinating and satisfying trip.

The Reserve has one of the highest densities of tigers in India making it an excellent place to see them but raising issues of other kinds.

There could be upwards of 20 vehicles at a sighting around the principal waterholes and perhaps 6 or 8 elsewhere. For the most part everyone was quiet, sensible and well behaved but the dust and engine noise as drivers jostle for position, with only inches to spare, is all part of the experience. And once you get away from the more popular spots you may often be the only vehicle in sight.

As elsewhere in India the Forest Dept. is inclined to alter regulations, entry times etc. without notice and, though it did not happen to us, it can potentially have a detrimental effect on your carefully planned, long-anticipated and expensive trip.

Location – Chandrapur district, Maharashtra, India

Nearest city – Chandrapur 28 miles / 45 kilometres

Nearest airport – Nagpur

Core Zone area – 625 sq. kms.

Habitat – 87% dry deciduous forest, mainly teak, giving way to mixed forest in the hills, expanses of grassland and bamboo to the north. Tadoba reserve covers the Chimur Hills, ave. altitude 200 - 350m., and the Andhari sanctuary covers the Moharli and Kolsa ranges. Bounded on the northern and western sides by densely forested hills. Terrain slopes from north to south.

3 Ranges – from north to south, Tadoba, Moharli and Kolsa.

Svasara Jungle Lodge, Tadoba

We booked the accommodation and safaris directly with the lodge by email and dealt with the lodge's General Manager, Ranjit Mandal, throughout. He was a pleasure to deal with.

Catering Manager, Megnut, and his team produced a varied buffet of regional Indian dishes which changed each day. They catered superbly for Ingrid's wheat intolerance, preparing alternative dishes when necessary, and the overall standard of service was exemplary. The whole area is 'dry' – no alcohol is served – but local people make their own, see below.

The lodge is 300 m / 2 mins from Kolara Gate.

Svasara Jungle Lodge, Tadoba - <https://svasararesorts.com/> or www.facebook.com/svasararesorts

Prasun Majumdar, Guide

We have no hesitation in recommending our naturalist at Svasara, Prasun Majumdar. Though his background is in IT, he has a lifelong passion for wildlife, has worked extensively in the Sundarbans and also leads regular trips to Sri Lanka. He took up his post at Svasara in 2016 and has acquired a detailed knowledge of the Reserve and its inhabitants that gives him the all-important knack of putting his guests in the right spot at the right time.

We were equally impressed by Rishin and Bhautik, two of Prasun's fellow naturalists at Svasara.

Prasun: <https://www.facebook.com/prasun4c>

Sundish, Forest Guard



Except for the trip to Kolsa, we had the same Forest Guard throughout. Every vehicle entering the Reserve must be accompanied by a Forest Guard and they are allocated in strict rotation... in theory. Anyway, Prasun prefers to work with Sundish and we were very happy with that – he has a genuine love of nature, extensive local knowledge, is an excellent spotter and good company.

Strategy

This was not a hard-core mammal-watching trip and we were not looking for anything particularly rare or unusual or trying to see as many species as possible. Our main objective was to spend as long as possible looking for and observing tigers. The best tiger sightings at Tadoba tend to be in the Core Zone, especially around the Ainbodi, Pandherpauni 1 (PP1) and Pandherpauni 2 (PP2) waterholes.

Accordingly, based on extensive online research, including various mammalwatching reports, as well as email discussions with Ranjit, we arranged our schedule to concentrate on the Core Zone but also to take in the Buffer (Zone 2) and Kolsa Zones to give us the opportunity to experience the varying habitats of the Reserve and to look for the individual tigers that live in them. So we were always looking for specific tigers in their known haunts.



The Tadoba Range showing principal waterholes etc. (From map at Svasara Lodge)

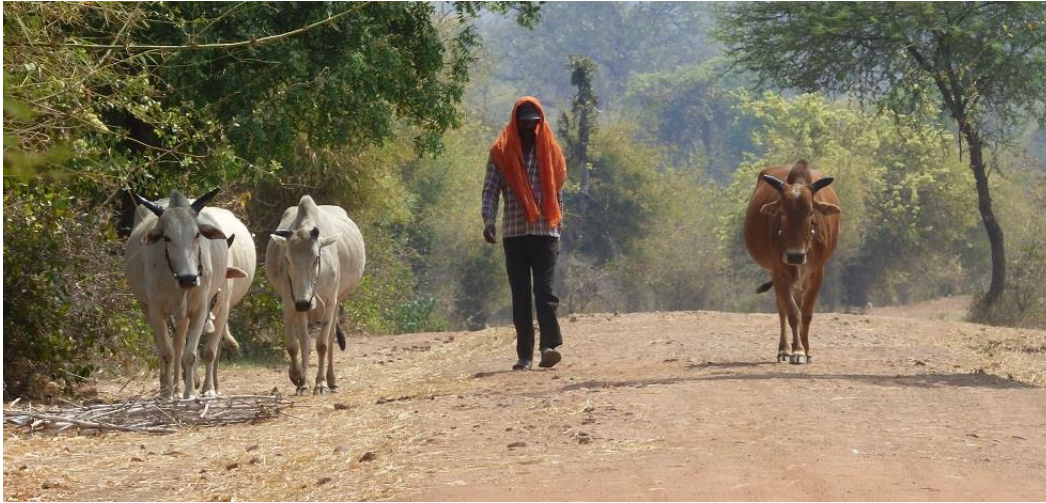
The Kolsa Zone was not so productive for us. Though we had good sightings of gaur, nilgai, red muntjac and chausingha and some nice birds we failed to find any of our target species. The local tigress, the Shivanzari female, [had been injured](#), apparently by a snare, and the Forest Department, backed by a darting team from WWF, were out in force looking for her. They were particularly concerned as she had cubs.

Entry permits must be arranged far in advance and are valid for particular zones, dates and times.

We booked a private vehicle with lodge naturalist for all game drives.

If possible, we like to be first through the gate for game drives. There are pros and cons; it means getting up a bit earlier and you don't necessarily have better sightings but once in a while it does pay off and you get to enjoy something that you might not if there had been another vehicle in front of you. But best of all is being able to enjoy the forest without driving through a cloud of dust thrown up by a convoy of speeding jeeps and the illusion that if only for a few minutes you have the place to yourselves. Prasun was happy to oblige and most mornings and afternoons we were the first vehicle in the Reserve and one of the last to leave.

Human-Tiger Conflict



The Kolara buffer zone (above) is an important resource for local people; as well being intensively farmed and used for grazing, it is a source of wild foods, such as mahua flowers. It is also tiger territory.

At dawn on each day of our stay, while it was still dark and we waited to enter the Reserve, a group of villagers entered the buffer zone inside the Kolara Gate to gather mahua flowers. The mahua tree, *Madhuca longifolia*, has a variety of uses and its pale green, fruit-like flowers are used, among other things, to distil an alcoholic drink and to make jam and syrup. The ground beneath the trees is thickly covered by these flowers which are also favoured by deer and monkeys. To a leopard or tiger, of course, a person crouching under a mahua tree to collect the flowers looks pretty much like a langur doing the same thing and the notoriously dangerous sloth bear also enjoys mahua. One afternoon we found a young tigress lying up in a dense bamboo brake in the buffer area. She was difficult to see but appeared to be interested in something on the other side of the cover and was looking in that direction. Trying for a better view we came round a bend and encountered an elderly lady walking along the track maybe 50 yards / 45 metres from the tiger – a distance the cat could cover in about 3 seconds. Interestingly, the lady did not seem too concerned about this but the Forest Guard insisted she should leave the area and she strolled off.

The day before we arrived two men were killed by tigers in [separate incidents](#) in the district while collecting mahua flowers and just inside Kolara Gate are the shrines of three villagers who have died in tiger attacks. The previous December a young male tiger, Tarachand, was [killed by an electric fence](#) that had been wired up to the mains. Several tigers have been [electrocuted in the area](#) in the same manner in recent years and this is seen as 'one of the major threats to tiger conservation in central India'. Although farmers are provided with non-lethal solar-powered fences, they are not considered powerful enough to deter large herbivores such as wild pig / boar. Mains-wired fences are also used by poachers and as we were flying home on April 10th a [sub-adult tigress was killed](#) in a poacher's snare actually inside the Reserve.

There were 43 tigers in Tadoba-Andhari in 2010, in 2019 there are around 90 and as Prasun observed every inch of the Reserve is the territory of one tiger or another and though these are not, of course, habitual man-eaters, they are opportunists, blessed with proverbial feline curiosity and nowhere can be considered safe from the possibility of an attack. Of course, people have lived alongside tigers in India for thousands of years but there are over 40,000 people and a similar number of livestock living

around Tadoba-Andhari and as pressure grows on natural habitat the [consequences can be distressing](#) for all concerned and incidents of villagers deliberately killing tigers in India are not infrequent.

We also learned that Dohle numbers in the Reserve are down, partly due to the number of tigers but also due to distemper spread by feral or stray dogs.

Sightings included:

Chausingha – 1 in Kolsa Range (below)



Dhole (Wild Dog) – about 14 in all – between area round PP1 waterhole and the site of the former village of Jamni, which are in close proximity, and also by Tadoba Lake. We were lucky enough to see the whole Jamni pack, 10 individuals including 4 pups and to observe scent-marking etc. Dohle killed an adult chital near PP1 during our stay.

Right: Alpha pair at PP1





Leopard – 2 sightings both near PP2. Probably both same individual, male about 6 to 8 years old who has a territory in the forest between PP1 and PP2 in the heart of tiger territory. Avoiding tigers must be a major preoccupation for leopards in Tadoba.

Left: Leopard avoiding Maya and her cubs

Sloth bear – 4 sightings, including a bear splashing water on itself to cool off

Tigers - every day, mainly at the waterholes mentioned above, clear, close and for long periods.



Jungle Cat – 3 (2 good sightings in daylight and 1 near the road early morning). One of these was a rare sighting in daylight of a cat warily drinking at a waterhole frequented by tigers (left).

Also Nilgai, Ruddy mongoose, Indian tree shrew and numerous chital, wild pig / boar and sambar – right.



Notes on Individual Tigers

Maya – numerous sightings – female, about 8.5 to 9 years old, a legendary tigress and a great favourite with visitors.



Maya (centre) and her cubs

Maya's cubs – 2 x 15-month-old cubs – numerous sightings. We observed the male cub beginning to stalk deer, peafowl and quails. His mother deterred him from pursuing a peafowl – as Prasun pointed out, a kick from their spurs can be dangerous to an inexperienced tiger. We also saw both cubs chasing some gaur – and shortly afterwards saw the gaur chasing the cubs...



Matkasur / T54 – numerous sightings – male, about 8 years old, a truly impressive dominant male tiger and something of a legend. On one occasion he suddenly appeared by the track near Ainbodi, his favoured waterhole, when ours was the only vehicle in sight. Although we were quite close enough for comfort our driver decided that was still not close enough and accelerated towards the tiger with everyone in the vehicle – me, Ingrid, Prasun and the Forest Guard all shouting 'Stop!' Fortunately he did stop just

short of parking on Matka's foot. Just as well as he is very large and has a reputation for charging solo vehicles. However, on this occasion he completely ignored us and we watched him scent-marking at very close quarters – a truly impressive animal. Prasun has witnessed him dispatch a full-grown, bull gaur which had charged him. He caught it by the throat and fed on it for three days. He was joined at the kill by one of his mates, Chotitara, who did not feed however.



Above: Chota Matka in his favourite spot at PP2

Chota Matka – numerous sightings – male, about 3 years old, collared, son of Matkasur and Chotitara and brother of the tiger that was killed by the electric fence. They had hunted together and Chota Matka was not yet thought to be a very successful solo hunter when we were there, though one day he managed to kill a small wild pig / boar. He has had a number of scuffles with his father but they were sharing the PP2 waterhole more or less amicably at the time. However, Chota Matka was already showing interest in Matkasur’s mate, Maya, who was using the nearby PP1 waterhole with her two cubs and the consensus was that sooner or later there would be a showdown between the father and son. A pair of young gaur were able to drive Chota Matka from his resting place beside PP2 as, unlike his father, he was not yet able to stand up to them.



Choti Tara / T7 – legendary tigress with a huge home range, collared, seen on tar road within the Reserve between Tadoba and Moharli (left).

1 of Sonam's cubs – female, about 16 months old, by lake in Moharli Range – right.



Three 15/16-month-old cubs of tigress Zunabai in Zone 2. Two together at waterhole and one separately.

Map of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve

