



Issue 58 / Sep. 2026

Tadoba

D I A R I E S

The Official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve



Mahavir Surana

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

MEE: THE CONSERVATION REPORT CARD

Dear Reader,

While the tiger estimation process is underway at Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR), another important exercise is also taking place—the Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE). Conducted once every four years, MEE is an independent assessment of how effectively a Tiger Reserve is being managed to achieve its conservation objectives. While tiger estimation tells us about the status of tigers, their prey and habitat, MEE looks at the larger picture: how well the reserve is being planned, protected and managed, and whether its conservation interventions are delivering the desired outcomes.

India's MEE journey began in 2006, when 28 Tiger Reserves were assessed. The initiative emerged from the growing recognition that simply declaring an area as a protected area does not automatically ensure effective conservation. The framework was developed by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in collaboration with global experts and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), drawing on the internationally recognised framework of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas. Since then, the exercise has evolved through successive cycles—39 reserves in 2010, 43 in 2014, 50 in 2018 and 51 in 2022. The four-year cycle allows management performance to be reviewed periodically and improvements to be measured over time.

So, what exactly does MEE examine? It follows six broad elements—context, planning, inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes. Evaluators look at the values and threats facing a reserve, the quality of its management planning, adequacy of staff and financial resources, infrastructure and protection systems, implementation of management actions,

and ultimately the results achieved on the ground. The assessment is not merely about finding shortcomings or assigning a score. It is intended to identify strengths, understand gaps, improve resource allocation and encourage adaptive management. Independent Regional Expert Committees conduct field-based assessments, examining evidence and interacting with managers and stakeholders. The exercise therefore provides an opportunity for a reserve to pause, reflect and ask an important question: Are our conservation efforts producing the outcomes we seek?

For TATR, the ongoing MEE is an opportunity to showcase the considerable work undertaken over the past four years—from wildlife protection and habitat management to scientific monitoring, community engagement, conflict mitigation and landscape-level conservation. At the same time, every evaluation brings an opportunity to learn and improve. MEE is ultimately about strengthening the systems that allow a protected landscape to thrive. Tadoba has built a strong reputation as one of India's foremost tiger landscapes, supported by dedicated frontline staff, scientific management and growing community participation. As the evaluation unfolds, there is every reason to look forward to the findings with confidence and optimism—and hope that TATR will once again emerge with a strong MEE rating that reflects its continuing commitment to conservation.

Dr. Prabhu Nath Shukla (IFS)

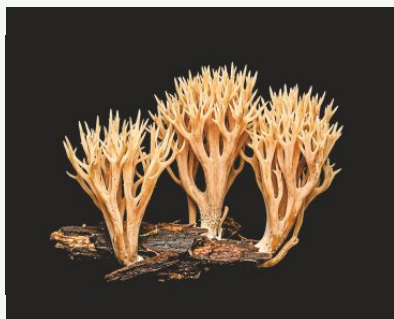
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THE FUNGAL WONDERS OF TADOBA

Long before the first monsoon cloud breaks over Tadoba, something already knows it's coming. Beneath the leaf litter and cracked summer soil, a vast, invisible mesh of mycelium, the thread-like body of fungi, begins to stir, sensing moisture and pressure changes deep underground. Days later, as the rains finally arrive, this silent network erupts into one of India's most spectacular, least-celebrated shows: a mushroom bloom.

Tadoba- Andhari Tiger Reserve is famous for its tigers, but it is quietly one of central India's richest fungal hubs, home to more than 120 recorded mushroom species. Each one is a small sculpture stars, corals, cups, umbrellas, and orbs, in colours ranging from ghost-white to fire-orange to jet-black.

The Termite Farmers: Among the most beloved are *Termitomyces*, locally called tekhode, which grow in a remarkable partnership with termite colonies. The termites cultivate fungal gardens underground for food, and when conditions are right, the fungus sends up prized, delicious mushrooms above ground - a relationship villagers have foraged for generations.

The Hunters and the Hunted: Not all fungi are passive decomposers. Tadoba also hosts entomopathogenic "zombie fungi" that infect insects, hijack their behaviour, and sprout fruiting bodies from their bodies, nature's eeriest recyclers.

Coral Gardens of the Forest Floor: Look closer and the ground resembles a reef: *Ramaria*, *Pterula*, and *Tremellodendron* branch upward like underwater corals, delicate and easily missed by anyone not looking down.

Beauty with a Warning: Not everything glowing or gorgeous is safe. *Amanita*, *Saproamanita*, and

Clarkeinda trachodes are among Tadoba's poisonous species, reminders that this kingdom demands respect, not just admiration.

Lights in the Dark: As night falls, parts of the forest floor and tree bark quietly glow, bioluminescent species like *Lactocollybia epia* and the jack-o'-lantern mushroom *Omphalotus olearius* cast a faint green light, a phenomenon still not fully understood by science.

The Tiny Artillery: Hidden in moss patches on tree bark lives *Sphaerobolus*, the "artillery fungus", barely a millimeter wide, yet capable of catapulting its spore mass over a meter away.

Nature's Cupcakes: Round, soft, and almost edible-looking, puffballs like *Calvatia* dot the forest like little frosted cupcakes, releasing clouds of spores when disturbed.

Village-edge Decomposers: Even the humble cow-dung heaps near forest villages host their own fungal drama, shaggy mane and various dissolving inky cap mushrooms (*Coprinus* and relatives), which liquefy themselves into ink within hours of maturing.

Fungi rarely make it into conservation conversations, overshadowed by the "charismatic" flora and fauna around them. Yet they are the recyclers, the underground internet, and the hidden engineers of Tadoba's forest, breaking down dead wood, cycling nutrients, and forming partnerships that keep trees and termites alive.

Tadoba's tigers may draw the crowds, but its fungi are quietly running the forest. This monsoon, look down as often as you look up, the kingdom beneath your feet is putting on a show of its own.

Muhammed Suhail N A
Wildlife Biologist, TATR

MY MOMENT IN TADOBA

It was almost dusk and we were bumping along the red road. The hot air was dusty on my face and we were nearing the end of our last safari following a full week of safaris in Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve.

We could hear the barking deer's alarm calls in the distance. We followed the sounds and arrived to find a group of about 15 gypsies- all waiting quietly, excitedly, and hopeful.

As we pulled up, we heard a roar and soon after, deer were running through the bushes. Then, I saw orange and black stripes through the brush. "Tiger!" I whispered loudly- the type of voice you use when you want to be heard and be quiet at the same time. Everyone else was still searching, but I was sure.

And shortly after, there she was -tigress T-163 also known as Collarwali, appeared from the bushes.

I quickly grabbed my camera, knowing this was a good opportunity. I am a 9-year old budding wildlife photographer, having photographed wildlife in 10 countries and this was my moment! Collarwali followed right behind our Gypsy for 10-minutes,



making her way from the bushes to an open grassy area. Our gypsy was right in front of her.

I was scared with how close she was but also thrilled. This is my best shot of her and I was right, this had been my moment!

Aeralyn Winiewski
Age- 9 years, Canada

THE UNHURRIED ELEGANCE

As a wildlife photographer, there is a quiet magic in setting out on an afternoon safari through Tadoba, especially right after the monsoon. The forest had completely renewed itself-washed clean by the rains, wrapped in a blanket of vibrant emerald green, with every leaf glowing fresh under the gentle canopy light. Driven by the deep passion, we set out into the Alizanza buffer zone, hoping for a moment of connection with the wilderness.

The afternoon turned unforgettable as the tracks yielded to a tranquil waterbody nestled quietly within the dense undergrowth. And there he was - a grand male tiger of Alizanza, lovingly called Balli, resting peacefully in the cool water. Submerged to his chest, he seemed to have merged completely with his lush green surroundings. Framed naturally by fresh foliage, Balli was the picture of unhurried elegance. Every now and then, he would lick his paw with calm deliberation, his ears twitching gently to the soft rustle of the forest, before settling his gaze into the distance with an aura of supreme composure.

Watching Balli sit there in complete stillness for well



over an hour was an experience that went far beyond taking pictures. As the minutes drifted by, a profound sense of peace settled over us. Absorbing the deep serenity of that scene- the majestic tiger sitting in undisturbed calm amidst nature's greenest palette- brought a surge of pure, overwhelming joy. There was no rush, no frantic movement; only the quiet grandeur of a magnificent creature enjoying his sanctuary. His cool demeanour and commanding aura were mesmerizing, leaving an indelible sense of happiness and serenity that will stay with me for a long time.

Saurabh Dhanorkar
Former MD, Finolex Industries, Pune



THE ARMY AND THE ASSASSIN-2

Do you ever wonder why lions build prides and tigers walk alone? In the first part of the article we discussed two major reasons. One was the geographical difference in their habitat, while the other was protecting the kill from the massive mobs scavengers.

The third factor is motherhood. In the lion world, nomadic males are constantly trying to take over prides. If a new male wins, his first act is to kill all the existing cubs so the females will mate with him (infanticide). By grouping together, lionesses form a defensive "mafia." A group of sisters and aunties can successfully fight off a rogue male and save their cubs, even nursing each other's young in a shared nursery called a crèche.

A mother tiger, conversely, relies on the absolute secrecy of the jungle. She doesn't need an army of aunties; she hides her cubs in deep caves and rocky ravines, raising them entirely off the radar of rival males.

For decades, scientists debated which of the above factors the primary reason lions became social. Recently, researchers from the University of Minnesota's Lion Center proved that the ultimate driver of the pride is actually Real Estate.

In the dry African savanna, survival depends on water and shade. These vital resources are not spread out evenly; they are heavily clumped at specific "hotspots" (like river confluences). These spots are incredibly valuable. To hold onto the best piece of land, lions had to form a gang. A pride acts like a standing army, physically defending this prime, localized real estate from rival lions. The bigger the pride, the better the territory they can hold.

In a tiger's jungle, however, water, shade, and cover are relatively abundant and spread everywhere. A tiger doesn't need an army to hold a single waterhole. Instead, they use a "Chemical Bulletin Board", leaving scent marks and scratching trees, to establish massive, invisible boundaries, avoiding physical warfare whenever possible.

The Indian Exception: What About Gir's Lions?

This brings up a fascinating question for Indian wildlife lovers: India has the majestic Asiatic lion in Gujarat's Gir National Park. If they live in an Indian forest, why aren't they solitary like tigers?

The answer perfectly proves the rule of the landscape! The Gir Forest is a dry deciduous scrubland, it is much more open than the thick canopies of tiger reserves like Tadoba, but thicker than the open grasslands of Africa.

Because Gir is an "in-between" environment, Asiatic lions have evolved an "in-between" social life. Their prides are significantly smaller than African prides, usually consisting of just a few related females. Even more fascinating, male Asiatic lions are actually much more solitary than their African cousins! Unlike African males who live constantly with the pride, Gir's male lions generally live alone or in small coalitions, only joining the females to mate or share an exceptionally large kill. Nature perfectly calibrates sociability to the thickness of the bush!

Ultimately, the tiger isn't antisocial out of grumpiness or greed. It is a solitary creature because the math of the jungle demands it. The open plains require an army to survive, but the dense forest requires a lone assassin.

Shaillendra Singh Deora
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



CLASH OF SUPREMACY! When two tigers clash, the forest stands still. In a world where territory means survival and dominance is everything, every growl, charge and swipe carries a message. These rare moments of raw power and instinct unfold in seconds—leaving the forest to witness the battle, and camera traps to capture silently.

THE FOREIGN MENACE

Most of us may have seen this beautiful flower at some point. Known as the Mexican Poppy (*Argemone mexicana*) in English and Firangi or Pivla Kateri Dhotra in Marathi, it may look attractive but is actually a highly invasive and harmful weed. It spreads rapidly, and being a foreign invasive species, it is generally avoided by animals.

Moreover, its seeds can be mixed with other seeds, and consumption can cause serious health problems. This is why there is good reason to be cautious about introducing plants into environments where they do not naturally belong. No one can predict what consequences such introductions may have in the future.

Similar examples include Congress Grass, Lantana and Water Hyacinth.



A LESSON IN SURVIVAL

It has been four years since I started working as a safari guide in Tadoba. In these four years, I have witnessed many unforgettable moments in the forest—tigers on the hunt, leopards appearing from nowhere, fights for life and death. But one particular evening at Moharli Lake is a memory I know I will never forget.

That evening, I entered the forest through the Dewada Gate with my guests. The safari route from this gate takes us through the Dewada–Adegaon–Junona zone. My guests were passionate bird-watchers, so instead of searching for big cats, I took them to Moharli Lake. It was a beautiful evening. The lake was alive with activity. Ducks moved across the water, different species of birds flew between the trees, and calls came from every direction. My guests were delighted, quietly pointing out one bird after another. A herd of Indian gaur was grazing peacefully along the bank. Everything felt calm.

Then suddenly, the mood changed.

From somewhere in the grass came the sharp alarm calls of spotted deer. As a guide, you learn to recognize these calls. Something was wrong. A predator—a tiger or leopard—was nearby. The gaur heard the alarm calls too. Their heads came up, their ears became alert, and the relaxed herd instantly became watchful.

I quietly alerted my guests. We all looked towards the direction of the alarm calls. But there was a problem: tall grass covered the area completely. If a predator was moving through it, we would never know until it was too late.

And then, without warning, a huge tiger burst out of the grass.

It was T84, popularly known as Chota Dadhial, a powerful tiger who had travelled from the core area into the buffer forest. Before we could even understand what was happening, he launched himself towards an adult female gaur. In one swift movement, he was on her. His claws dug into her hide and the gaur cried out in panic. For a moment, I thought we were about to witness the end of the hunt.



CCAI Generated

But the story had another twist.

The other gaurs in the herd did not run away. Instead, two adult members of the herd turned towards the tiger and charged. Chota Dadhial may have been a formidable predator, but even a tiger cannot easily take on two angry adult gaurs at once. Faced with their sudden counterattack, he lost his grip on the female. Within seconds, the hunter became the one being chased.

He turned and ran.

We watched in stunned silence as the massive tiger disappeared into the grass, pursued by the very animals he had intended to attack.

That evening, my guests had come to Moharli Lake hoping to see birds. They certainly did—but they also witnessed something far more dramatic: a lesson in courage, strength and collective defense.

In the forest, nothing is guaranteed. The hunter does not always win, and the prey does not always run. Sometimes, survival belongs to those who stand together.

Varsha Kumare

Guide, Dewada Gate, TATR (Buffer)

Contribute to 'Tadoba Diaries'

Are you a forest department staff, tourist, guide, driver, working with a resort, managing a home stay or a community member from TATR vicinity? Do you want to join our effort to spread awareness on forest and wildlife conservation through 'Tadoba Diaries'? Please share your interesting photographs (not less than 4 MB) and experiences (not more than 250 words) on tadobadiaries2021@gmail.com. Your photograph/experience must be related to TATR only. The best content will be published with due credit.





COMMON ROSE

The Common Rose (*Pachliopta aristolochiae*) is one of the most striking swallowtail butterflies found across India, including the Tadoba landscape. Its dark wings, vivid red markings and crimson abdomen make it instantly recognisable. Yet, beneath this delicate beauty lies a remarkable survival strategy—one in which the butterfly borrows its defence from the plants it feeds on.

A Chemical Shield from Plants

The female Common Rose lays her eggs on plants of the *Aristolochia* genus, including *Aristolochia indica*, a forest creeper locally known as Ishwarmul. After hatching, the caterpillar feeds on the leaves and passes through several stages before forming a pupa. When threatened, it pushes out a forked, fleshy structure called an osmeterium and releases a strong-smelling chemical that can deter predators. But its most powerful defence begins with its diet.

Protection That Lasts

Aristolochia plants contain toxic compounds called aristolochic acids. Caterpillars feeding on these plants accumulate these chemicals in their bodies, making them distasteful or toxic to many predators. Remarkably, this chemical protection can persist through metamorphosis and help protect the adult butterfly as well. The Common Rose offers a beautiful lesson in ecological relationships: survival can sometimes come from an unlikely partnership. Just as a rose has thorns, this butterfly has a chemical shield—borrowed from a plant and carried through its life.



 Wikipedia

KARMAL

While exploring the Agarzari forest, a beautiful Karmal tree (*Dillenia indica*), also known as the Elephant Apple, offers a glimpse into the intricate relationships between trees, wildlife and people. This medium- to large-sized semi-evergreen tree is often found along streams and in valleys. Its large, leathery, prominently veined leaves, serrated margins, striking white flowers and fleshy green fruits make it easy to recognise. Its leaves have traditionally been used to wrap and serve food.

A Tree with Many Connections

Karmal produces round, greenish, fleshy fruits enclosed by enlarged sepals. Their sour, acidic flavour makes them valuable to local communities, who use them in pickles, chutneys, curries and preserves. The fruits have also traditionally been used for digestive complaints, while various parts of the tree have featured in traditional remedies for inflammation and pain. The flowers, with their numerous yellow stamens, provide resources for insects, adding another ecological connection.

A Gift to the Forest

Although Tadoba has no resident elephants, Karmal remains connected to large herbivores through seed dispersal. Elephants, langurs and deer carry its seeds away from the parent tree in their dung, helping the species regenerate and spread. Its fruits also contribute to the wider forest food web. From its flowers that support insects to its fruits that nourish wildlife and people, Karmal is a reminder that a single tree can sustain many lives.



ARTILLERY FUNGUS

Tucked into damp, moss-covered bark, this tiny fungus is easy to overlook, yet it performs one of nature's most dramatic tricks. Commonly known as the Artillery Fungus, *Sphaerobolus* belongs to a small group of fungi famous for launching their spore masses into the air. Its unusual method of reproduction has earned it a name more suited to a battlefield than a forest floor.

A Tiny Natural Cannon

The fungus begins as a tiny, pale, star-shaped structure that eventually splits open into curled arms, revealing a small, dark, jelly-coated ball called a peridiole. As it matures, internal pressure builds within the fruiting body. Suddenly, the structure everts and catapults the sticky spore ball several metres away. This remarkable mechanism helps the fungus reach fresh patches of decaying wood and explains its artillery-inspired name.

Recycling the Forest

Artillery Fungus plays an important ecological role as a saprotroph, breaking down rotting bark, twigs and other plant debris and returning nutrients to the forest floor. It favours cool, humid microhabitats and is often found growing alongside moss on decomposing logs. During a recent forest walk in Tadoba, clusters of this tiny fungus were spotted nestled in moss-covered bark—a quiet reminder that beneath the feet of every forest visitor lies a world of hidden biodiversity, where even the smallest organisms play a vital role in keeping the forest alive.

- Muhammed Suhail N A
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



YELLOW-THROATED SPARROW

The Yellow-throated Sparrow (*Gymnoris xanthocollis*), also known as the Chestnut-shouldered Petronia, is a small, familiar passerine found across the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. Its understated greyish-brown plumage often makes it easy to overlook, but breeding males reveal a more colourful side, with a distinctive yellow throat, chestnut shoulder patch and two white wing bars. The species is widely distributed across South Asia and parts of the Middle East.

A Familiar Forest Neighbour

The Yellow-throated Sparrow is an adaptable bird, occurring in a variety of habitats and often living close to human settlements. It feeds mainly on seeds and grains, while berries and small insects also form part of its diet. For nesting, it uses tree hollows, old woodpecker holes and cavities in buildings, lining these cosy spaces with grass and feathers. Its adaptability helps explain why this small bird remains common across the Tadoba landscape.

A Sparrow That Inspired a Legend

The Yellow-throated Sparrow holds a special place in the history of Indian ornithology. In 1906, when he was just ten years old, Dr Salim Ali, later revered as the "Birdman of India", had a memorable encounter with one of these birds. That seemingly ordinary moment sparked a lifelong fascination with birds. His systematic surveys and pioneering work went on to transform the study of birds and natural history across the Indian subcontinent.

- Rundan Katkar
Range Forest Officer, Kolsa, TATR

LepiScan–Butterfly ID App Launched



Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve launched LepiScan–Butterfly ID, an AI-powered offline application enabling identification of over 1,000 butterfly species across India and promoting biodiversity documentation, research, education and citizen science. A hands-on training to use this app was conducted for the departmental staff.

Star Tortoises Rehabilitated



TATR provided a new beginning to 216 rescued Indian Star Tortoises following an 800-km journey from Mumbai. The successful rehabilitation marks an important step towards wildlife conservation, offering the rescued tortoises a safe return to their natural habitat.

Tiger Face Painting Programme



On World Tiger Day, TATR organised a Tiger Face Painting Programme at Zilla Parishad Upper Primary School, Varvat. The programme intended to increase awareness about tiger conservation, forests, biodiversity and wildlife protection among the students. 50 students participated in the programme.

Forest Guards Honoured



TATR felicitated the top three Forest Guards under the Monthly Performance Evaluation (July 2026) for their exemplary contribution to forest and wildlife protection. Shri N. D. Shahare secured first place, followed by Shri M. S. Date and Shri P. P. Kshirsagar. They are inspiration to all the frontline staff at Tadoba.

English & German Training for Guides



TATR is conducting an English Training Programme for female guides and German Training Programme for the guides to strengthen their communication with domestic and international tourists and enhance professional confidence. These programmes promote guides', especially women's empowerment in wildlife tourism.

Fruit Tree Plantation



A fruit tree plantation programme was organised at Taru Udyan in Haldi village. Students, forest staff, villagers and community members actively participated in the programme, promoting ecological restoration, environmental awareness and a greener future.

Free Eye Check-up and Cataract Camp



TATR, Samata Foundation and Mahatma Netra Rugnalaya, Nagpur organised a free eye check-up and cataract camp at Maroda. A total of 145 citizens were examined, 50 received spectacles, and 49 patients were identified for free cataract surgery.

STAR OF THE MONTH JULY 2026

Let's celebrate the dedication and impact of our frontline staff who go above and beyond to protect our forests and wildlife. It is a token of appreciation for their outstanding service, vigilance, and commitment to conservation on the ground.



Ramkrishna Prakash Hajare
Forest Guard, Range: Karwa (Core)

- Maximum foot patrolling according to M-Stripe data
- Stopped illegal bamboo cutting, consistent monitoring to prohibit poaching
- Ficus stump and fruit tree plantation
- Completed all works in the KRAs



N. D. Shahare
Forest Guard, Range: Shivani (Buffer)

- Protected forests and wildlife in the beat
- 121.975 Km patrolling as per M-Stripe
- Public awareness to avoid man-wildlife conflict
- Completed all assigned tasks in time

THE LESSER KNOWN **KHAKI** #18

The **MIRACLE GRASS - BAMBOO** can be used as wonderful alternative to plastics & make great material to build everything from tooth-brushes to buildings...

WE PROMOTE...

Bamboo planting with different species

Its sustainable harvest using Scientific methods ...

Training To make the products...

Sale & Manufacture of Bamboo Based products!



(Piyusha Jagtap (IFS))

LESSER KNOWN KHAKI

Do you want to know what work the foresters do?

This series will take you to the world of forest warriors in Khaki.

Piyusha Jagtap (IFS)

Get 'bamboosed' ... de-regulating it's production and use we try to promote it's cultivation-harvest-utilization ... And of course skill development to encourage sustainable livelihoods!



Ready for a jungle challenge?

Take this quiz and see how much you know about forests and wildlife?

- Which owl is commonly seen during daytime in India?
 - Barn Owl
 - Eagle Owl
 - Spotted Owlet
 - Brown Fish Owl
- Which animal is known for its loud alarm call in forests?
 - Sambar
 - Porcupine
 - Pangolin
 - Jackal
- Which butterfly is Maharashtra's state butterfly?
 - Blue Mormon
 - Common Jezebel
 - Plain Tiger
 - Southern Birdwing
- Which mammal can fly?
 - Flying Squirrel
 - Bat
 - Cat
 - Gliding Lizard
- Which fungi infect insects and hijack their behaviour?
 - Tekhode
 - Ramaria
 - Amanita
 - Zombie Fungi

Check page no. 14 for correct answers.

JUNGLE DETECTIVE

Do you want to be a Jungle Detective?
Solve the following puzzles and check your knowledge.

GUESS WHO?

THE GENTLE ACROBAT

Tiny in size but fierce at night,
Yellow eyes shining bold and bright.
Spotted feathers, silent flight,
Perched on branches out of sight.

I hunt for insects after dusk,
With sharp little calls and woodland husk.
A charming owl small as can be,
Can you guess who I might be?

TRACK THE TRAIL

Who Walked This Way?

Five-clawed footprints mark the edge of the streambed.
Termite mounds nearby have been ripped apart.
The earth smells strong and freshly disturbed.
Long snout marks appear beside fallen logs.
A shaggy wanderer searched patiently through the night.
Even honeycombs were not spared along the trail.



MATCH-UP

WHOSE FOOTPRINT IS IT?

Match each animal with the type of footprint it leaves behind!

Animals

1. Tiger



2. Wild Dog (Dhole)



3. Sloth Bear



4. Sambar Deer



5. Mugger Crocodile



Footprint

A. Four toes with claw marks

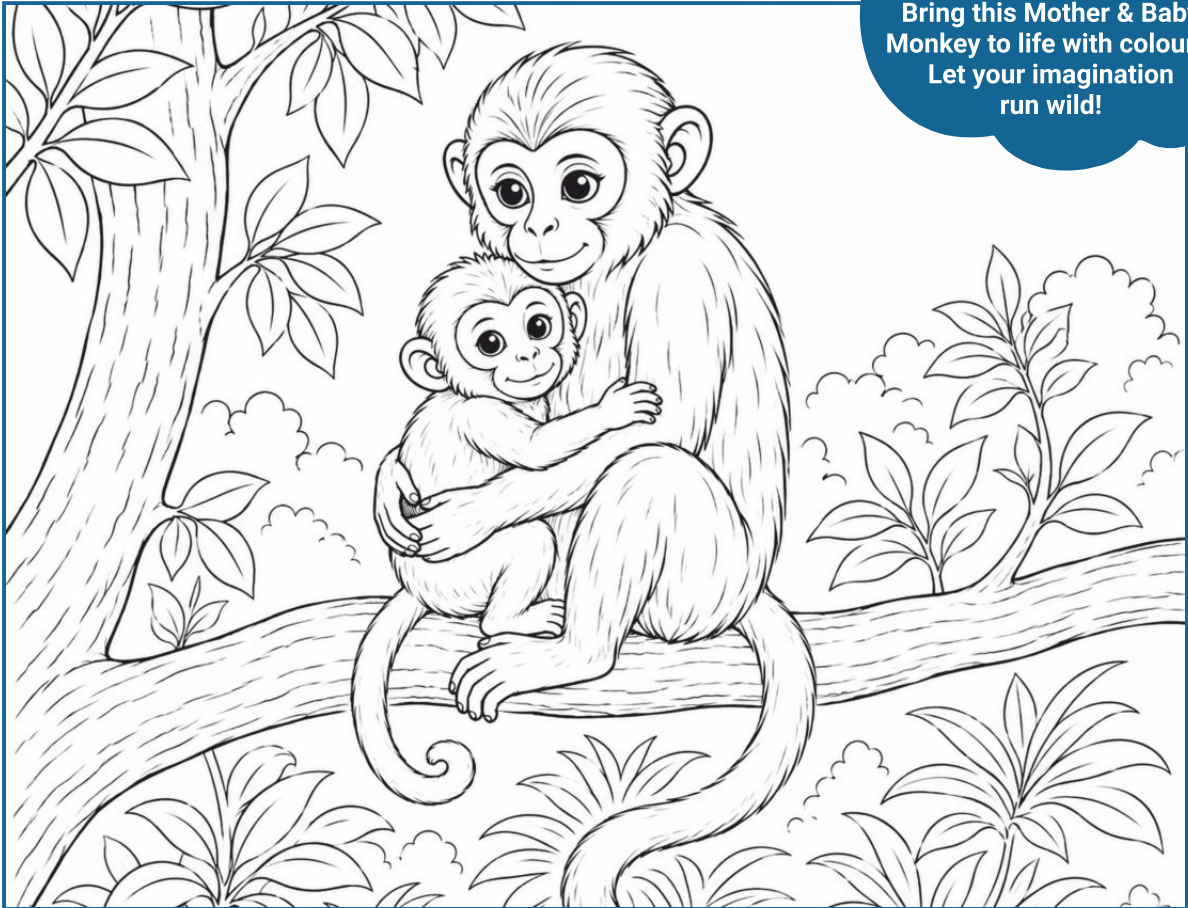
B. Four toes with large pad, no claw marks

C. Five toes with long claw impressions

D. Webbed foot with claw marks

E. Split hoof print

Check page no. 14 for correct answers.



Bring this Mother & Baby Monkey to life with colours!
Let your imagination run wild!

WILD WISDOM

1-C, 2-A, 3-D, 4-B, 5-D

GUESS WHO?

Spotted Owlet



TRACK THE TRAIL



Sloth Bear

MATCH-UP:

Animals

Footprints

- | | | | |
|---------------------|---|---|--|
| 1. Tiger | ● | → | A. Four toes with claw marks |
| 2. Wild Dog (Dhole) | ● | → | B. Four toes with large pad, no claw marks |
| 3. Sloth Bear | ● | → | C. Five toes with long claw impressions |
| 4. Sambar Deer | ● | → | D. Webbed foot with claw marks |
| 5. Mugger Crocodile | ● | → | E. Split hoof print |



A WHISPER FROM THE CANOPY

Deep in the forests of Tadoba, where ancient trees stretch toward the sky and sunlight filters through layered leaves, lives a remarkable creature known as

Tetraponera rufonigra—the arboreal bicoloured ant. First noticed by the keen eyes of Thomas C. Jerdon in the sun-baked regions of southern India back in 1851, this slender ant has since woven its story across the landscapes of Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and onward to Indonesia.

Picture a worker ant, elegant and elongated at 10–12 mm, gliding along a branch like a living shadow. Her head and gaster gleam jet black, contrasting sharply with the warm reddish-brown of her thorax—a striking bicoloured uniform that earned her the name *rufonigra*. With a head slightly longer than broad and powerful mandibles lined with five or six sharp teeth, she is perfectly built for life among the twigs. Colonies make their homes in pre-existing cavities inside living or dead wood-hollow twigs, tree crevices, or even the sturdy trunks of favourite hosts like *Cassia fistula* and *Azadirachta indica* (Neem).

Life in the colony pulses with quiet order. Most nests house a single queen ruling over 200–500 workers, though some established colonies welcome multiple queens for added resilience. The queen lays her eggs in the heart of the wooden chamber, while workers bustle about tending the legless, grub-like larvae and naked pupae. From egg to adult takes roughly 6–8 weeks. Young queens and males take to the skies during nuptial flights, mating amid the canopy before new queens shed their wings and found fresh colonies alone in unoccupied hollows.

By day—especially from 8 in the morning until 6 in the evening—the workers venture out. Their activity rises with the temperature and falls as humidity

climbs. Foraging across territories that can span over 2,000 square meters, these opportunistic hunters search for small insects, particularly tender early-instar larvae like those of the Tasar silkworm. With swift mandibles they tear into prey, drinking hemolymph and carrying bits back to share via trophallaxis. They also sip nectar, harvest honeydew from tended hemipterans, and scavenge protein-rich finds. Aggressive and territorial, they fiercely defend their arboreal domain, delivering rapid stings to intruders.

Yet their most potent weapon is their venom. This complex brew, rich in proteins like phospholipase A2 (the dominant player) and 5' nucleotidase, delivers intense pain, swelling, and inflammation. On insect prey, it paralyzes the nervous system and aids digestion. For unlucky humans who disturb their nests—especially in urban edges or plantations—the sting brings burning pain, redness, and sometimes severe allergic reactions, even life-threatening anaphylaxis.

In the broader story of the forest, *T. rufonigra* plays a dual role: a helpful predator that curbs pest populations by hunting small arthropods, yet also a pest itself when it raids economically important silkworms. As an adaptable species that has even reached places like the Seychelles through human activity, it reminds us how resilient life can be in the ever-changing tropics.

From Jerdon's first observations to modern studies of its venom and behaviour, the bicoloured ant continues its ancient dance among the branches—aggressive defender, skilled hunter, and quiet shaper of its woodland world. A small but vivid thread in the vast tapestry of tropical biodiversity.

Priyanshu Chowdhary
Naturalist, Trees and Tigers

LIFE AT THE FRINGES!

Where forests meet farmlands, life unfolds in shared spaces. Farmers work their fields while wildlife moves through the surrounding landscape, each adapting to the presence of the other. Along Tadoba's fringes, coexistence is not just an idea-it is part of everyday life, shaped by nature, livelihoods and the delicate balance between them.



Hemangi Vartak

THE FOREST SENTINEL!

Perched silently among the branches, the Brown Fish Owl watches over the forest with its piercing golden eyes. In the quiet stillness of Tadoba, this powerful nocturnal hunter reminds us that the forest never truly sleeps-there is always a watcher waiting in the shadows.



Mihir Dahat