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Tadoba

DIARIES

The official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve



ANIL KHAPRE

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

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Celebration of A Success Story



Dear Reader,

It gives me great pleasure to connect with you as we celebrated TATR's 28th Foundation Day on the 23rd of February. It is a matter of pride that Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve is amongst the most successful reserves in the country that has increased its tiger population and community development simultaneously. Today it is befitting that we look back on Tadoba's history, celebrate our success, learn from our failures, and plan the way forward.

Established in 1955, Tadoba National Park is one of the oldest national parks in the country. At the time it was only 116.55 km², over the years it has not only gained in the area but also in ecological importance, due to its connectivity with other protected areas of the central Indian landscape, the stronghold of tigers in India, and globally. The Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) became part of the Project Tiger network in 1995 when the Government of Maharashtra notified an area of 625.82 km² comprising Tadoba National Park and Andhari sanctuary, making it the second tiger reserve to be notified in the state of Maharashtra.

Since then Tadoba has taken major steps in line with the objectives of Project Tiger, to make it one of the most secure havens for tigers in India. The core area of the reserve is well on the way to becoming inviolate and free from anthropogenic pressures, with the last village in the process of shifting out. Simultaneously, we have been conscious of the emphasis on co-existence in the buffer area which has around 100 villages. The park management and the Government of Maharashtra have earned the goodwill of the communities living in the 1100 km² buffer zone of the Tiger Reserve.

At Tadoba, we have been able to earn the support of local communities through painstaking work over the last two decades to reduce forest dependence of communities by providing them livelihood through non-extractive activities such as responsible wildlife tourism.

The reserve's management has carried out voluntary relocation of all villages from the core area, and the extensive habitat restoration activities in the vacated sites have resulted in large diverse meadows with abundant prey populations. Most importantly, the community-driven wildlife tourism model in the buffer area which was started in 2013 is now an economic lifeline for the villages located in the

buffer area. Starting from Agarzari village, Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve currently has 16 different buffer zones where wildlife tourism provides direct livelihood to more than 1,000 families and indirect benefits to even more families and other stakeholders.

The tiger population in the reserve has increased from less than 40 to more than 100 in the last decade and is contributing to the dispersal of several tigers to the adjoining landscape and protected areas in Maharashtra, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. The reserve is today fulfilling its role as an important source population of tigers for the larger central Indian landscape and balancing the source-sink dynamics, which is critical for the long-term conservation of tigers as a species.

This success has also led to an associated increase in interaction with human communities in the landscape, leading to severe escalation of cattle depredation and tragic incidences of the accidental killing of human beings. In recent years, the number of people killed by wild tigers has increased to such proportions, that current efforts to mitigate the conflict are found inadequate and unless addressed immediately, it can erode the goodwill that the tigers and park management enjoy.

Securing and managing the tiger populations, and containing the conflict while retaining the support of the people will be a key challenge for reserve management. The forest department will need to enhance its capacity to actively monitor and manage the tiger population in real-time, capture and rehabilitate problem animals, translocate healthy breeding animals to potential new areas, and create employment and livelihood opportunities for a new aspirational generation so that they do not depend only on forest-based activities or subsistence agriculture for their livelihood.

I will take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my predecessors, frontline forest guards who have served the reserve with utmost commitment, to NGOs working in the landscape, and to the people of the landscape whose resilience and goodwill have made Tadoba a success.

Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar

Field Director, TATR
and Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation



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Master Blaster in Tadoba

Cricket Legend Sachin Tendulkar who has a huge fan following across the world is himself a big fan of TATR. His wife Anjali is a wildlife lover. Although they have visited TATR multiple times in the past, their love for wildlife pulled them to Tadoba once again recently.

During their stay here from 19th - 21st of February, the couple enjoyed five safaris with their friends. Sachin was really excited and delighted with the sightings. On the Sunday morning safari, he could see tigress T-7 Tara with her two cubs and a sloth bear pair. During the evening safari, the Queen of Tadoba T-12 Maya appeared before the King of Cricket with her cub! Another tigress Bijali also showed up. Sachin was lucky to sight Blackie- the black leopard on the same safari!

On Monday, Sachin visited a protection hut at Nimdela. He was very impressed with the neatness and cleanliness in the hut and wrote an appreciation note in the register. During his safari at Alizanza, he sighted T-126 Chota Matka and a leopard. On his way to safari, Sachin took an unscheduled halt at a government school and interacted with the students. The students were in awe of his humbleness.

While talking to the senior forest officials Sachin appreciated the discipline being maintained in the tourist zone. He was impressed with the 'no plastic policy' of TATR. He also wrote a special note and handed it over to the officials. The hand-written note says, "Managed to see the 'Big Five' here at Tadoba- what a thrilling experience it has

20th Feb 2019

Managed to see the 'Big Five' here at Tadoba- what a thrilling experience it has been! Excellently managed forest! We stopped at a small Kuti and were pleasantly surprised by the spotlessly clean toilets. Congratulations to the management. Everyone from the Deputy Director to the guards and staff at the Kutis are doing an amazing job. It all contributes to helping conserve the forest and thus helping us directly by increasing chances of tiger sightings, and indirectly by improving rainfall, etc...Thank you!!!

Sachin Tendulkar

Anjali Tendulkar



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Feathered Guests of Tadoba



Peregrine Falcon

This winter migrant was sighted at Moharli gate in February. Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is usually found flying alone around lake area. It flies fast and pounces on its prey with a great speed. Small birds, ducks and other water birds are its primary prey. Female is bigger in size than male.

Grey-headed Lapwing

I was the first to register the sighting of this lapwing at Kolsa lake in 2014. This winter migrant has grey head and neck. Beak is pale yellow-orange. It has a dark grey patch on its chest. One can see this lapwing near Kolsa, Pangdi, Moharli lakes and Irai Dam.

- Rundan Katkar
Range Forest Officer, Kolsa, TATR



THE GIANT MONK

When I joined Tadoba as a Wildlife Biologist, apart from the tiger, leopard, and gaur, I was curious to see the Crocodiles (*Crocodylus palustris*). One winter morning, I was at Tadoba lake looking for Crocodiles when Rama Kaka, the forest labourer said, "They will come out soon for basking in the sun near the big Jamun tree." Later I indeed saw a huge crocodile basking a few meters away from me!

Once upon a time, Tadoba had a crocodile breeding centre on the hill road. Today the remains of the cages and water tanks tell the story of these giant monks. Tadoba has got a healthy population of Marsh Crocodiles or Muggers. The most common of the three types of crocodiles, Marsh Crocodiles can be identified by their broad snouts. They inhabit freshwater rivers, lakes, and marshy swamps. They lay eggs in burrows or holes on the banks of Tadoba lake, Irai dam, and other perennial water bodies. Being opportunistic predators, they feed on a variety of available prey like fish, other reptiles, and small mammals such as monkeys. Large adult crocodiles sometimes prey on larger mammals such as deer.

At night they hunt on land. Muggers use the element of surprise and well-thought strategies to hunt efficiently. Marsh crocodiles have the ability to remain still for a long time and wait for the precise time to strike. Their tough keratin scales are known to be sensitive to even the slightest motion in the water and this helps them detect prey easily.

Muggers are facing threats due to habitat destruction on account of land conversion for agriculture and development, fishing nets, egg predation, illegal poaching, and conflicts with humans. Today, the species is listed as 'vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List. They are protected under Schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Their population in Tadoba is monitored under the strict protection provided by the forest department.

- Prajakta Hushangbadkar
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



BEAST IN BEAUTY

Tadoba has one spectacular form of plant that is absolutely dangerous. Among the most beautiful creations of nature include the seeds of Gunja, also known as the Rosary pea (*Abrus precatorius*). It is a slender, perennial climber with long, pinnate-leafleted leaves that twines around trees, shrubs, and hedges. It has a tendency to become weedy and invasive where it has been introduced.

The bright red seeds have always attracted the creative human mind. Many tribes like the African Zulus make attractive bracelets and jewellery from these seeds to earn livelihoods. Those from Trinidad in West Indies use these bracelets to ward off the 'Jumbi' i.e. evil spirits.

In India, for a very long time, the consistent weight of these seeds has been used as a measure.

The seeds of Gunja are very consistent in weight, even under different moisture conditions due to the water-impermeable seed coat. Hence they are used to weigh gold in a unit called a Ratti, where 8 Ratti = 1 Masha; 12 Masha = 1 Tola (11.6 grams).

However, its ingredient Abrin - has brought the seeds into disrepute throughout the rural India. Abrin makes the seeds terribly poisonous. Some of the native cattle skimmers have long been suspected to use Gunja powder rolled into a small spike-Sui (needle) of Sutari (awls) to prick the skins of animals. The animal would soon die without leaving any signs of injury. Thereby, gifting an unscrupulous person wrongful income.

The seeds have been used in Siddha medicine for centuries in South India. The white variety is used to prepare oil that is said to be an aphrodisiac. A type of tea is made from leaves and is used for fevers, coughs, and colds. As the seeds are poisonous, they are only consumed after specific heat treatment.

- Anirudh Chaoji
Senior Naturalist

First Sighting of Black Cubs

My family (daughter, husband, and myself) enjoy road travel to explore the beauty of our country. Generally, our tourism involves places of architectural marvels, rich history, and amazing scenery.

A visit to Tadoba in the first week of February this year was an 'out of the box' trip for us.

It was only after reaching the resort that we realized our close proximity to the animal kingdom. We had booked a morning safari from the Madnapur gate and an evening safari from the Alizanza gate.

During both safaris, we couldn't help admiring the skills of the gypsy driver in maneuvering with great ease on the untrodden routes of the jungle. The 'hawk eyes' of the guide in spotting the various animals and birds deserved special applause! The dense forest and the variety in its fauna were interesting as well as intimidating. The efforts of the forest personnel in ensuring the maintenance of bio-diversity in Tadoba are commendable.

The slow gait of the Sloth bear, the gigantic build of the Indian Gaur, the welcoming look of the Barking Deer, the strolling Sambhar followed by its young ones, the Rose-Ringed Parakeet peeping from its tree hole, the petite Thrush bird, the beautiful peacocks with their partners, the lazy crocodile... all seemed so much at home in their natural



CHANDRUPATI DANDWATE

habitat! The best treat to our eyes was the sight of a leopardess with two black cubs! The forest guide and driver too were astonished to see it. They informed me that there was just one black male leopard in Tadoba and these two black cub leopards had to be its offspring. I believe it was the first time that these cubs had been spotted. We felt honoured and privileged! The Tiger did not make its appearance during both of our safaris. However, we were not disappointed at all. In fact, we were completely in awe of the wildlife in Tadoba.

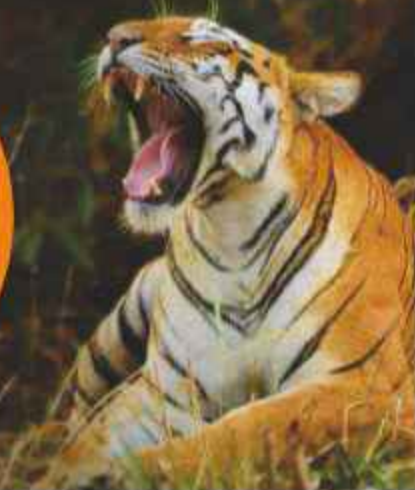
We had not carried a camera with us, but we captured those images in our heart, and mind for eternity!

- Shobha Sumil Iyer
Tourist, Mumbai

It was a beautiful winter morning last year. As usual, I was on the safari ride with my guests who had come all the way from Hyderabad. Like most of the guests, they were desperate to see a tiger. I told them that we can only try to track the tiger, but we can get to see him only if luck favour us. For the first one hour we had no great sighting. Then I asked driver to take the vehicle to Ambabudi. Now we were on the dam road. I was keeping an eye on both the sides of the road to check if there was any movement of the tiger. At one point, our vehicle took a right turn and the driver had to apply breaks unexpectedly! I looked ahead and I was stunned! A tiger was standing right in front of our vehicle! Hardly ten feet away!

It was a blind turn. Hence the driver could not have seen the tiger sitting on the road. However, the tiger had sensed the approaching vehicle and gotten up. It was a sub-adult cub of the tigress Aishwarya. He was so close that we could see his big and sharp nails! The tiger looked at us for a few seconds and suddenly roared! His roar was so loud that my colleagues who were at the gate three to four kilometres away, could hear it! My guests were very afraid. I requested them not to make noise and to keep calm. The tiger stared at

The Roar and Fear



us for a few more seconds and went into the forest calmly. My guests felt relieved as soon as he left.

We named that sub-adult tiger as Charger who is now ruling its own territory.

-Pradunya Kulsange
Guide, Sirkada Gate

28th Foundation Day of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve celebrated its 28th Foundation Day of TATR on 23rd February 2023 in a grand ceremony at Priyadarshini Indira Gandhi Auditorium, Chandrapur. It was indeed a celebration of the TATR's success in tiger conservation and the active participation of local communities in the conservation process. Here are the highlights of the mega event.



The Eco Development Committees (EDC) in five villages were felicitated for best performance in forest conservation. Each committee was handed over Rs. 25,000 cheque, and a memento. All 95 EDCs were given Rs.3.50 lakh for each. The fund is a part of the revenue generated by tourism in TATR. The EDCs are expected to use this fund for the development of basic facilities in their villages.



Total 40 Primary Response Teams (PRT) are working in and around TATR for preventing and minimizing human-wildlife conflicts. Five PRTs were honoured with the Best PRT Award which included Rs. 25,000 and a memento.



TATR has consistently invested in knowledge and skill up gradation of its eco-guides. Some of these eco-guides have excelled in their work. Five such best eco-guides were felicitated with a memento and a binocular.



A special collector's edition of the official newsletter of TATR- Tadoba Diaries was published at the event. It is a collection of all the articles and photographs published in Tadoba Diaries' 15 issues till date. The screening of a special documentary on Tadoba was also organized.



Responsible tourism plays an important role as a tool for the process of conservation. The resorts and home stays have positively contributed to this process. Two home stays run by local people and a resort were awarded for their environment-friendly facilities and services.



NGOs and corporate companies support TATR in various areas like habitat management, capacity building for forest personnel, employment for local communities, nature education & awareness campaigns, primary facilities in villages and forest areas, health facilities for forest personnel and villages, etc. Twenty such entities were felicitated for their contribution to conservation.



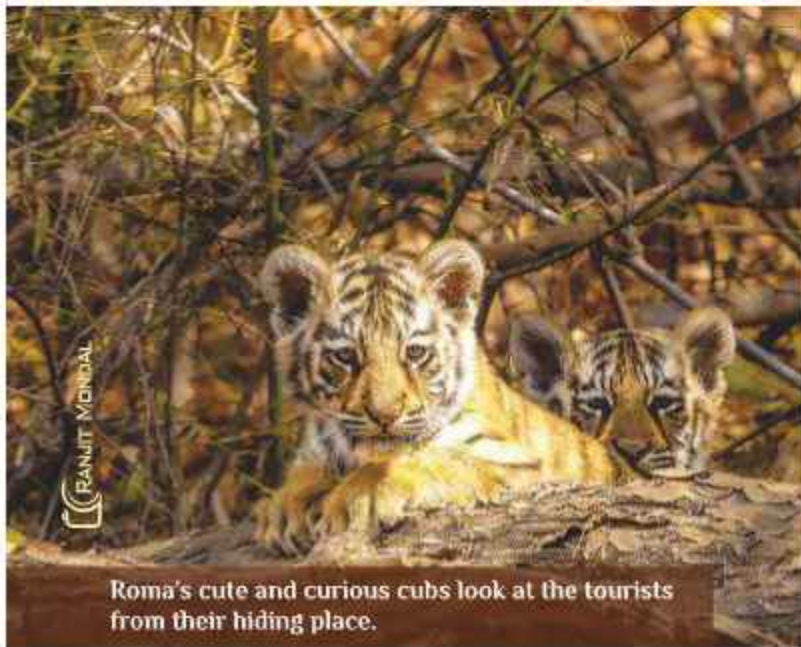
As a social responsibility, TATR helps the students in the villages around TATR to achieve excellence in academics. Total 35 students (class 10 and 12) who scored the highest marks, were appreciated with a gift of tablets and laptops. Also, 26 students were gifted with a bicycle as they have to travel six to eight kilometers daily to reach school.

The forest of TATR is currently resounding with the soft chirping calls of little fur balls running behind their mothers. More than half a dozen tigresses in the tourism zone are seen with their cubs. What more can a wildlife photographer wish for?



MAHAVIR SURANA

T-16 Bhanuskhindi tigress with her cubs striking a perfect pose for photographers at Nimdela



PANJIT MONDAL

Roma's cute and curious cubs look at the tourists from their hiding place.



HIMANSHU SARADE

Queen of Pandharpauri T-12 Maya feeding her cub

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The Change is Visible

Vivek Menon, Executive Director of Wildlife Trust of India was recently on a brief visit to Tadoba. In an exclusive interview with Tadoba Diaries, he expressed his thoughts on the visible changes in Tadoba and also on the overall wildlife conservation in Maharashtra.

Excerpts from his interview:

Q: You have been working in the field of wildlife conservation for the last 25 years. How was your experience at Tadoba?

A: I have visited Tadoba six times. However, I have never visited a forest to see a tiger. Not even before I came into the field of conservation. In fact, I started bird-watching in the '80s. Even by watching birds, you can tell something about the health of the forest. At Tadoba, from my safari vehicle, I could record more than fifty birds! I saw four species of woodpecker. It shows that the proportion of canopy and large trees in this forest is really good. I saw a lot of fowls and quails during my two visits to buffer and I was happy to note that the habitat was healthy. Of course, it is not my well-studied conclusion or an estimate, but an impression that I had after the little time I could spend in the limited area.

Q: Usually when we talk about the health of the forest we look at the count of the herbivores...

A: Yes. That is because our thought process is tiger centric. There are different ways of looking at the forest. Tiger is just one of them. For white-necked woodpeckers, you don't need herbivores, but you need large trees with a certain size of gut. If you don't have such trees, the entire forest will die. The presence of such trees indicates that the forest is healthy.

Q: One of the most talked about topics is the pressure of tourism in tiger reserves. What are your thoughts on it?

A: Many years ago when I visited Tadoba, I witnessed that pressure. It was one of my bad experiences. However, this time, I am glad to see the change. Tourism is being managed properly. The guides and drivers are more disciplined. They knew their job well. I saw the guides wearing the tag 'Star Guide'. Later the Field Director explained to me how the guides are being trained continuously and how they are graded every year according to their knowledge and skills. Such healthy competition among the guides to get a five-star grading is indeed an appreciable initiative.

Another thing I was very impressed with was the number of female guides I saw here. My guide Shehnaz seemed like a tigress to me! Also, I noticed that the number of women within the forest staff is very good. The best part is that



they are actively doing their job of protecting and monitoring wildlife and forest.

Talking about tourism, I am aware that the number of tourism zones and gates here have been increased. It is a good development. I strongly believe the best strategy is to maximize the area where tourists can go, minimize the number of tourists in an area at a given time and keep those areas rotating. This way people will get to see different parts of the forest, animals get their rest time, and the zones closed to tourism get time to regenerate. Automatically the pressure of tourism also shifts from one zone to the other. I don't think any tiger reserve in India is doing it.

Q: How important do you think is the local communities' participation in conservation?

A: There is no other way, especially in a country like India having a population of 140 crore people. One-third of poor people are in India. Hence no conservation can happen unless you involve people. We must provide them with livelihood opportunities. As a government agency, it is the duty of the forest department to take care of the people while protecting the forests and wildlife. Maharashtra has always been good at that compared to many other states. I believe, Maharashtra provides the highest ex-gratia payment in case of human death in a wild animal attack. That is extraordinary! Similarly, schemes like providing cooking gas and eliminating the dependence on forests for firewood are also very practical and progressive ways of involving local communities.

- Prajakta Hushangabadkar
Wildlife Biologist, TATR



NIGHT WATCHMEN! A porcupine and a civet silently walked through the jungle in the dark of the night. However, their movement couldn't escape the camera trap installed by the forest department and both got captured in the same frame.

THE ACHIEVERS - January 2023

Please join us in celebrating the achievements of the best-performing forest guards at TATR. These frontline soldiers of the forest department have done the maximum foot patrolling in their respective divisions. We are happy to announce the top two achievers in January 2023

Forest Guard - Miss. S. D. Patil
Beat - Mamla-2
Round - Mamla
Range - Chd. (Buffer)
Division - Buffer TATR
Duration - 22 Days
Target - 125 km/Month
Actual Patrolling - 267.88 km



Forest Guard - Miss S. M. Mattam
Beat - Ashtakoni
Round - Moharli
Range - Moharli (Core)
Division - Core TATR
Duration - 19 Days
Target - 125 km/Month
Actual Patrolling - 164.78 Km



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Inner Beauty of Tadoba

This was my first visit to Tadoba. During my safari in the core zone, our Guide Sarika informed me that the origin of the name Tadoba is in the name of the God 'Taru' worshipped by the tribes who live in the dense forest. She also told me that 'Andhari' refers to the Andhari River. I got some beautiful clicks of birds at the Andhari River.

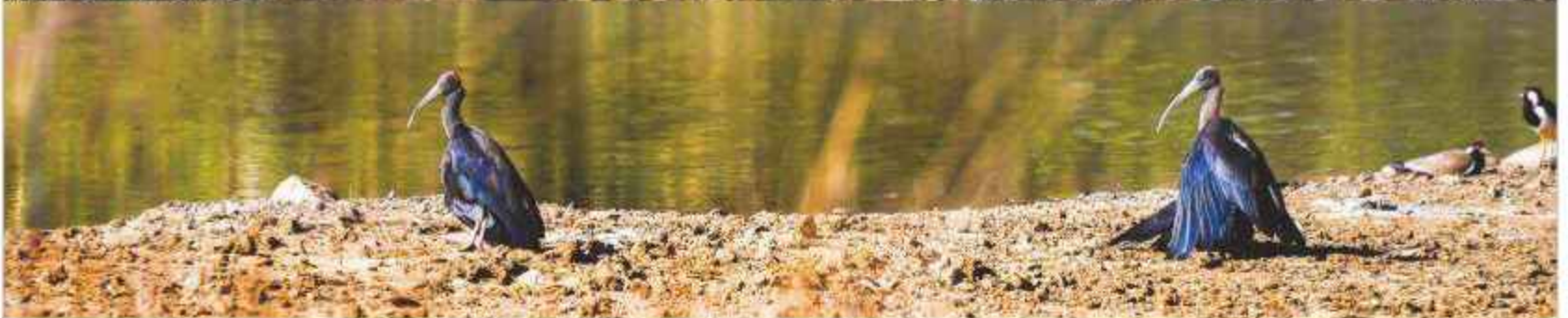
On my very first safari, I got to see a Grey Jungle Fowl. He was in search of Bamboo seeds as lots of Bamboo plants were in their flowering phase. I also got a glimpse of a Purple Heron in the Andhari River. The reflection of the heron was so perfectly caught in the image that I fell in love with it.

There was also a beautiful Peacock searching for insects on the bank of the river. At one moment, he spread his feathers. Though he was in the tall grass, it was worth watching!

I also saw a few crocodiles at Tadoba lake. They were lying down without any moment like a statue until one of them moved. At other water bodies, I caught snaps of mongoose, sambar deer, spotted deer, greater coucal and ibis.

The cool breeze, fresh air, and the bio-diversity made me fall in love with Tadoba. It was indeed a great escape from our polluted, dirty, and mechanized cities!

- Ajinkya Chavare
Age- 17 Years



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.






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