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Tadoba

DIARIES

The Official Newsletter of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve



Camilla Malvestiti

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Conservation Foundation, Chandrapur

₹ 30/-

HOW DO WE KNOW WILDLIFE AND THEIR NUMBERS?

Dear Reader,

Wildlife and forests in India are monitored very scientifically with the help of protocols that have evolved over a period of time and are proven to be one of the best examples of the most intensive and largest scientific surveys undertaken anywhere in the world. Our forests are surveyed every two years by the Forest Survey of India, Dehradun, and a four-yearly AITE (All India Tiger Estimation) exercise is carried out across the country to get an idea about the population of not only the tiger but all major wildlife species that inhabit our forests.

However, for the tiger reserves, it is even more intensive as this entire exercise is repeated every year. This year at Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve, we embarked on this exercise in March and completed our field survey in May 2023. Through this space in Tadoba Diaries, I would like to share the process and our findings to highlight the effort that goes into it every year not once but continuously to keep track of the dynamics of our wildlife population and its distribution within the vast area of the park.

It is mainly done by installing camera traps for about 55 days over the entire area of the park's core and buffer areas. For the sake of optimizing logistics, the exercise is divided into two phases. The first phase covered 387 grids, each of two km², while the second phase covered 238 grids.

The entire area is partitioned into a total of 625 grids demarcated across 11 different ranges within the reserve, with a pair of camera traps deployed in each grid. The grid-based camera trapping approach is chosen for its ability to maximize sampling efforts while making efficient use of available resources. This approach wasn't just about capturing photos of the tigers but also of all the different species of animals, estimating their abundance, comparing their numbers, and determining the status of their population.

Field Staff: The Pillars of This Project

The entire exercise wouldn't be possible without the dedicated field staff, who are the backbone of TATR's conservation efforts. Each grid is entrusted to a pair of trained staff members who embark on a mission to strategically deploy cameras at meticulously selected locations that promise to yield the most insightful data. The field staff doesn't rely merely on camera traps but uses their

keen observation skills to detect indirect signs of wildlife presence.

Results and Insights

The outcomes of this intensive effort in 2023 were nothing short of astonishing. A total of 900,000 pictures were captured with the assistance of 1,250 cameras. Among these, 144,586 images featured various wildlife species, from the chital and mongoose, to leopard, and the tiger and rare species like honey badger, and Indian pangolin.

Out of the 625 locations, 502 were able to capture 4,855 tiger images, and 389 locations captured 2,174 images of leopards. The most remarkable outcome of this endeavour was the successful identification of individual adult tigers based on their unique stripe patterns. Each tiger was assigned an official ID, such as "TATR-T04". The total number of adult individuals is 93 out of which 44 are males and 47 females, while the gender of two individuals could not be identified. The data collected on leopards is currently under processing, promising further insights into this enigmatic species.

This exercise, although annual, always offers uniquely valuable spatial and temporal data every year. This data not only documents the presence of wildlife but also facilitates the assessment of movement patterns, including overlaps between predators and prey. In areas close to human habitation, this data sheds light on the wildlife-human interaction and contributes to our management efforts by enabling the implementation of conflict mitigation measures in conflict-prone areas. The long-term collection of such data is an invaluable tool for monitoring tiger movements within TATR and the dispersal of sub-adults beyond protected areas.

Sometimes, as a tourist, you fail to see many animals and may feel disappointed. We want you to know in your heart that even though you failed to see them, they have felt your presence. It might make you happy to know that they have spaces to retreat into that are beyond our reach in a few hours drive. And as managers, we can guarantee that they have definitely seen you!

Dr. Jitendra Ramgaokar

Field Director, TATR
and Executive Director, TATR Conservation Foundation

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SHARE-A-GYPSY

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve is more than just a protected wildlife sanctuary; it's a testament to the delicate balance between environmental conservation, economic sustainability, and social inclusion. As a government body, the TATR administration has set objectives that encompass these three critical aspects. It is interesting to see how TATR has masterfully crafted its policies to achieve these multifaceted goals.

Environmental Conservation: A Paramount Objective

At the core of TATR's mission lies its steadfast commitment to environmental protection and wildlife conservation. The forest officials and field staff at TATR work relentlessly to protect the flora and fauna that call this reserve home. This includes combating issues like poaching, habitat destruction, and human-wildlife conflicts. The primary goal is to ensure the long-term survival and thriving of these species and their ecosystems.

Economic Sustainability through Responsible Tourism

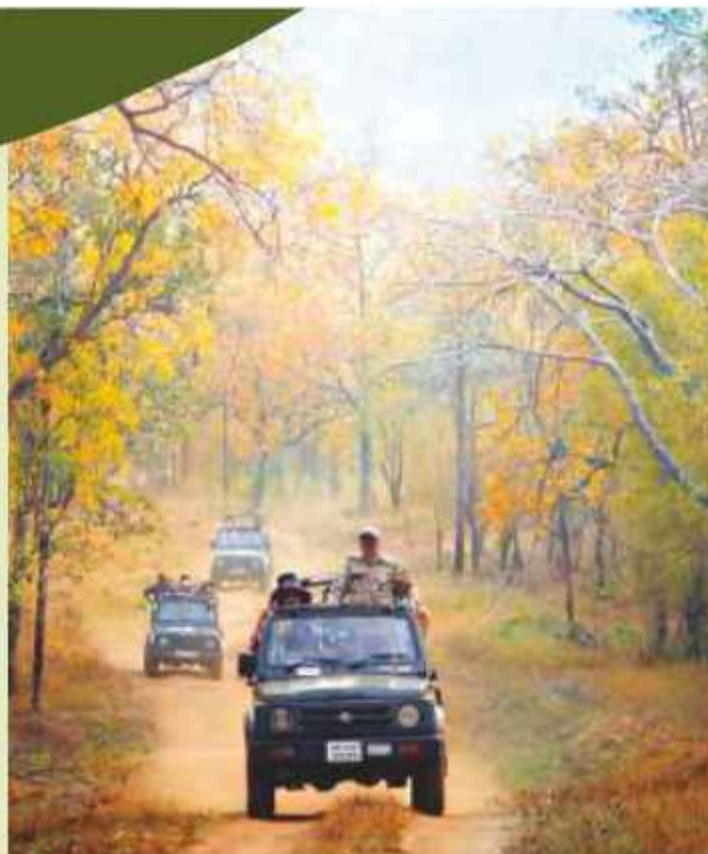
To meet its economic objectives, TATR has embarked on a responsible tourism initiative. This initiative opens the doors of the Tiger Reserve to visitors in the form of safaris, generating revenue that is invaluable for local development and administrative operations. Responsible tourism enables a unique opportunity for tourists to witness the mesmerizing wildlife in their natural habitat.

TATR's economic strategy is a win-win. Not only does it generate income to support conservation efforts, but it also creates employment opportunities for the local communities and boosts the economy in the region. This synergy between environmental conservation and economic growth is a model that many other protected areas aim to replicate.

Social Inclusion: Making Wildlife Accessible to All

TATR administration understands that responsible tourism should not solely focus on revenue generation but also prioritize accessibility for all strata of society. Hence, the social objective is to ensure that everyone, regardless of their economic background, can experience the wilderness that TATR offers.

In the core area of the reserve, an innovative approach was taken. Canter was introduced, offering an affordable option for tourists to enjoy a safari. For only Rs. 500, anyone could be a part of this thrilling experience. However, in the buffer area, challenges arose as the roads were not suitable to accommodate Canter alongside the traditional gypsies.



Samruddhi Dandvate

To bridge this gap, the TATR administration introduced the concept of shared gypsies. This model allows tourists to experience the buffer area at a reduced cost, with a safari ticket available for just Rs. 1,500. Furthermore, for groups of three or more, a discounted rate of Rs. 4,000 is offered, compared to the standard rate of Rs. 4,500.

This innovative approach eliminates the need for individuals to book an entire gypsy and pay the full amount, making buffer safaris far more accessible. Bookings can be easily made online through the official website, streamlining the process for visitors. On the day of the safari, travellers need to arrive only 15 minutes before the scheduled start time. Since the gypsy is shared among visitors, the waiting period for others is a mere 15 minutes beyond the official safari commencement.

By introducing shared gypsies, the TATR administration has not only made buffer safaris more affordable but has also made them more inclusive. This approach not only allows the economically disadvantaged to enjoy the wonders of Tadoba but also reduces the ecological footprint by decreasing the number of vehicles within the reserve.

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve sets a remarkable example of how a government body can harmonize environmental preservation, economic sustainability, and social inclusion. By embracing responsible tourism and innovative measures, TATR is not just protecting its natural treasures but also sharing them with the world.

- **Kushagra Pathak**
Deputy Director, TATR (Buffer)

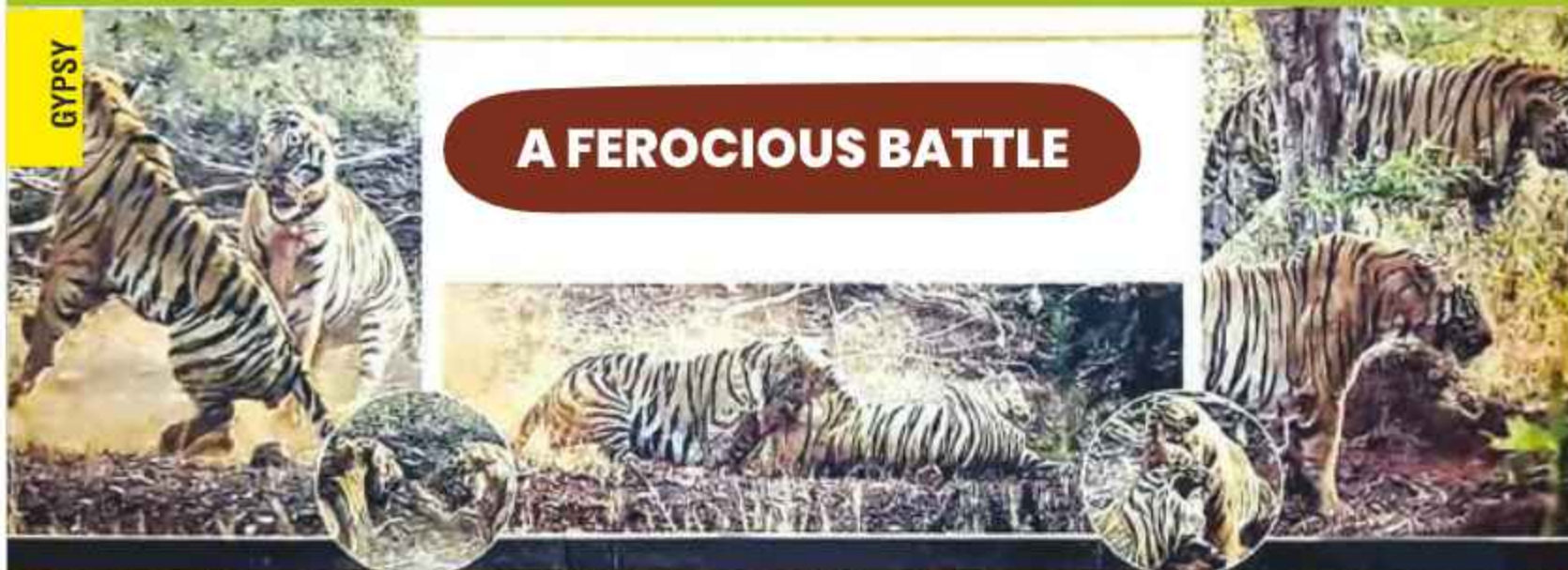


Dividing Spaces

Observing Sambar deer is a mindful exercise. Their movements and activities seem more monotonous than others and they are the most docile prey species, in fact, a favourite of tigers. But watching a male Sambar, resplendent with fully grown, velvety antlers is a thing of joy! These antlers grow and fall off and have a lot of practical functions, like mating fights and territory marking. Against the dispersed sunlight, a Sambar's antlers shine with an almost halo-like glow, a treat for a dry jungle safari. The otherwise stationary antlers add a fascinating visual dimension as they move in perfect tandem with the deer's body, thus adding a lot of volume and character to even the littlest of movements, resulting in a beautiful silhouette which so effortlessly divides the space around it!

- Shreya Khadilkar
Visual Designer

A FEROCIOUS BATTLE



On November 23, 2013, I encountered a thrilling spectacle on the Kose Canal road during my morning safari with a guest. As we drove, our eyes were drawn to the right side of the road, where we spotted a massive male tiger we affectionately called Gabbar. He was indulging in a hearty meal. We watched in awe from a distance.

However, the real excitement unfolded when another formidable male tiger, known as Namdev, appeared from the left side of the road. It was evident that we were about to witness a remarkable event in the jungle. Paying no heed to our presence, Namdev strolled across the road and headed straight for Gabbar's dining spot.

In the blink of an eye, these two jungle monarchs engaged in a ferocious battle. Their roars sent shivers through the jungle, and the clash between these equally powerful creatures was a sight to behold. For several intense minutes, they exchanged blows and roars, neither willing to concede defeat.

As the epic struggle continued, exhaustion overcame them both. Eventually, they disengaged and retreated in separate directions, bringing an end to their remarkable confrontation. My guest managed to capture incredible photographs of this encounter, which later found their way into a newspaper.

- Amar Dekate
Guide, Kolaru Core Gate



EXTRAORDINARY LEGACY

After spending three years in Tadoba it is truly challenging for me to put into words the beauty and enchantment that this place holds. However today I wish to share a tale that stands out among all others – a story that revolves around the bond between a magnificent tigress and her mother's cub.

Deep, within the heart of Tadoba's wilderness dwelled an awe-inspiring tigress T-7 popularly known as Choti Tara. In 2021 she gave birth to two cubs who were named T-114 and T-115; these cubs would soon become central figures in an enthralling new chapter of Tadoba's story. Over time, the cubs affectionately called Bijali and Roma grew into formidable tigresses under their vigilant mother's guidance. Choti Tara nurtured them with unwavering affection and commitment, teaching them the ways of the forest, the skill of hunting, and the significance of protecting their homeland.

By 2023 Bijali and Roma had come of age, their captivating eyes reflecting their mother's essence, a testament, to the strength and grace passed down through generations. They also occupied part of their mother's territory. They had their cubs too. However, what truly stirred the hearts of visitors and conservationists was not just the awe-inspiring sight of the two young tigresses leading their cubs through the lush wilderness, but the astonishing revelation that followed.

One day a senior officer spotted Choti Tara with her new cub. Soon, we received news that Choti Tara's cub was missing! The next news we heard was that her cub was found with T-114 Bijali and her cub! This instance was something truly extraordinary and extremely puzzling. Was Bijali actually raising two generations, her own cub, and her brother? The more you delve into a tiger's life, the more you become entangled in its secrets and remarkable behaviours.

Recently, while checking camera traps in the forest, we spotted T-114 leading the way and emitting soft chuffing

sounds, typically used to call cubs. We were certain that the cubs were nearby. We eagerly followed her. Soon, two heads popped up from the grass and started walking toward her. Both cubs affectionately pounced on her, while one was playing with the tail another was busy grooming his mother's face.

The significant size difference between the two cubs told us a heart-warming story! We witnessed their bond with Bijali for almost an hour before they strolled down to the stream. It was heartening to see that an animal often labelled as ferocious could have such pure love and a kind relationship with a young one who was, in fact, her mother's cub. We saw both cubs suckling on her, and she was grooming them gently.

Sometimes, to truly understand the forest, you need to set aside scientific perspectives and simply revel in its presence, whether you fully comprehend it or not. After returning to the base camp, I called the wildlifer Nikhil Abhyankar to get a few photos of Choti Tara and Bijali with the cubs, confirming the truth of what we had witnessed. He provided me with beautiful pictures captured by Juhili Wankar. From tiny cubs to healthy growing individuals these two cubs have come really far.

One thing is certain: no one can claim to know everything about nature. The behaviour of wild animals changes according to survival strategies and such behaviours are not always scientifically encoded. As humans, it is our duty to provide them with a safe space to flourish. It was heartening to see that Choti Tara's lineage hadn't just survived; it had thrived. Visitors flocked to witness this rare and heart-warming sight – three generations of tigresses, each with their cubs, strolling through their territory.

- **Prajakta Hushangabdkar**
Wildlife Biologist, TATR

HUNTER PRINCE

While the numerous vehicles entering the Tadoba core from various gates on 16th October 2023 were busy looking for female tigresses with cubs (without any luck on that day), we strayed on some other road.

Moving around a bit aimlessly, we suddenly noticed a male tiger T-164 lovingly called Yuvraj- which means Prince- walking on the road. He walked majestically some distance as we followed him. As he went off the road and entered the adjacent bush sniffing, we moved ahead and waited for him to get back on the road.

Nothing happened for about two minutes and suddenly we heard a screeching call followed by a frightened call of a Sambar. The sound told us that the tiger had caught prey! Holding our breath, we waited for the drama to unfold. Soon, we saw Yuvraj in the bushes, holding a fawn in his jaws. Within a minute, he emerged from the bushes and carried the fawn across the road.

Interestingly, he had not killed the fawn and was holding it



around the ear and cranium and the fawn was alive till he carried it inside. He possibly would have finished it later.

We felt sorry for the young one and its mother, who was nearby and came later to the road smelling the track where the tiger carried it off.

For us, it was an exciting experience and an unforgettable sighting.

- Nitin Ghate

Consultant, Alcobev Industry, Nagpur

A BREATH-TAKING STARE

It has become an annual tradition for my family to visit Tadoba once a year. Jungle Calling! We have a deep affection for this place, where I find solace. With no mobile network, it provides an opportunity to connect with nature and reflect. It feels like a second home to me.

This marks the first safari of our second tour - the Night Safari. We arrived at the Junona gate. Peering inside, we were greeted by impenetrable darkness, even though it was only 6:30 PM.

We were the first to enter the gate, and our guide was very friendly. Our vision was limited to the gypsy's headlights, and our ears were tuned to the sounds of nocturnal birds and insects. Approximately 30 minutes into the safari, we heard dogs barking in the distance, likely from a village within the buffer zone. Our guide confidently suggested that this might indicate the presence of a leopard.

From a distance, around the bend in the road, we spotted an animal slowly approaching us. We observed in silence, our anticipation building. Gradually, the blurry figure became clear, revealing a tiger taking a leisurely night stroll. It was a tigress T-7, affectionately known as Collarwali or Choti Tara. Our excitement was palpable as we swiftly readied our DSLR cameras to capture photographs and videos.

As the tigress came closer, we retreated to give her the space she deserved. Being in the first gypsy, we were treated to an extraordinary sighting. She moved with regal grace, marking her territory by spraying and scratching tree barks. At times, she paused, gazing at us as if she were stalking us, a stare that sent shivers down our spines. She gently ushered us backward, covering a distance of approximately 1-1.5 kilometers.

Eventually, she disappeared into the jungle and settled down. We patiently waited to see if she would resume her journey, but it appeared she had no intention of moving further and perhaps wanted to rest. We then proceeded to complete our safari, but our hearts were already filled with the incredible sighting we had just experienced. It was truly the most remarkable experience of a lifetime!

- Tejashree Mahadeo Kamthe

IT Professional, Mumbai



THE HUNT (Part-I)

During my month-long stay in Tadoba in May 2021, I made it a daily ritual to embark on a morning walk, accompanied by TATR's Chief Naturalist at the time, Anirudh Chaoji. My base was Telia Kuti, nestled near the MTDC resort in Moharli village. With the reserve temporarily closed to tourists due to the nationwide lockdown caused by the Corona pandemic, the roads were blessedly free of traffic, offering us a front-row seat to wildlife activity.

One particular morning, Chaoji Sir had headed to his hometown, leaving me to explore the wilderness on my own. I returned by around 6:30 a.m., finding my colleague Sudhendra (Sidh) up and about, brushing his teeth near the window. Intrigued by something near our compound, I ventured to the back door of our house and flung it open. "Sir, jackal!" Sidh exclaimed. I shouted in excitement, "It's a wild dog, Sidh!" Both of us had seen it at the same time.

There was a small road running behind our house, a well-trodden path for wildlife heading to Moharli Lake. I had never imagined encountering a wild dog on this trail. In an instant, Sidh dashed to grab his camera, while I hurriedly fetched my binoculars. By the time I returned to the door, another wild dog had appeared, followed shortly by a third one. Sidh, with camera in hand and toothbrush still in his mouth, rushed to the compound wall.

The trio of wild dogs made their way to a grassy field about 100 meters from our compound. Sidh clambered up the compound wall and began capturing shots. As the dholes vanished into the tall grass, I thought they had headed toward the Junona buffer jungle. To our surprise, they reemerged on the other side of the lake, where a herd of spotted deer was grazing. I urgently called out, "They're in hunting mode, Sidh. Stay put."

I rushed to the Machan in our backyard, from where I had a clear view. The wild dogs began chasing the deer, driving them into the water. The entire herd, in a state of panic, ventured into



Wildlife Conservation

the lake. The dogs pursued them for a brief stretch in the water and then withdrew. The deer, now drenched, ventured out of the water and commenced running in our direction. Their path led them along the very road where we had first spotted the dholes.

Quickly, I descended from the Machan and scaled the compound wall. The deer sprinted past us at full tilt. Meanwhile, we observed one of the wild dogs chasing water birds. It targeted a Bittern but narrowly missed. Next, it lunged at a Purple Moor Hen, which also managed to escape.

From our perch on the compound wall, we anticipated that the wild dogs might pursue the deer in our direction. However, they veered toward the rear of the MTDC resort. Without a word, Sidh and I sprinted toward the gate, inadvertently leaving our house doors wide open. We reached the concrete road outside, sat down, and awaited their crossing.

Within seconds, a high-pitched, barking-like sound reached our ears. I immediately recognized it, having heard a similar sound a few years ago during a skirmish between wild dogs and the dominant male tiger, Waghdoh, in Tadoba. I shouted, "Get up, Sidh. They've made a kill!"

- Anant Sonawane
Communications Officer, TATR



Priyadarshan Gajbiye

FAMILY SHOW! Tigers in the tourism zones of Tadoba are known for their bold and captivating roadside strolls, often making awe-inspiring appearances in front of tourist vehicles. A fearless tigress T-114 popularly known as Roma recently made a spectacular appearance near Chital Road in TATR along with her two adorable cubs. This majestic family show left tourists truly spellbound!

EURASIAN HOBBY

I spotted this bird at the entrance of Junona Buffer on 23rd October 2023. The Eurasian Hobby is a tiny falcon with exceptionally skilled aerial hunting abilities that it uses to capture its prey in the air. Despite being much smaller and having a thinner, narrower body and tail, the European Hobby shares dimensions with the Peregrine Falcon. It is the only preying bird in Europe that can consistently catch Common Swifts, which can outfly all other raptor species combined.

The breeding grounds of Eurasian Hobbies are in Europe, and they migrate almost 10,000 km to their wintering habitats in Africa. With the exception of the northernmost regions of Scandinavia, Ireland, and Russia, the Eurasian Hobby is widespread across Europe. Its range stretches eastward beyond Europe to the Pacific and Japanese coasts.

A strictly migratory bird, the Eurasian Hobby spends the winter in Africa, south of the Sahara desert. Considering that insects make up the majority of their food while they are not reproducing, this makes perfect sense.

Hobbies steer clear of thick woods and choose open areas both during migration and throughout their wintering season. They like termites as a food source, as was already indicated, and they frequently spend the winter in areas where termites are abundant.

As Tadoba has a high density of tiger population, most of the tourists are keen on tigers and these beautiful rare birds go unnoticed.



- Monthung Ezung
Naturalist, Tadoba Jungle Camp



Prashant Singh

I CAN CLIMB!

The activities of tiger cubs are incredible to watch. A tiger cub trying to climb a tree in Alizanza buffer zone of TATR.



WHISTLING SCHOOLBOY

It was in 2014 when I first documented the beautiful Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus horsfieldii*) in Tadoba. Since then, I have been fortunate to regularly spot this elegant bird in the Kolsa range during the winter months. This avian species is a winter migratory visitor to Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) and finds its year-round home in North-East India, the Himalayas, the Western Ghats, and North Baluchistan.

Once popular as a cage bird, the Malabar Whistling Thrush is renowned for its distinctive, almost human-like whistling call. The male treats us to a varied and melodious whistling serenade during the early hours of the morning and evening. Listening to these songs in the heart of the forest is an enchanting and magical experience. It is also called Whistling Schoolboy for its whistling calls.

The Malabar Whistling Thrush boasts a deep blue body with glistening forehead and shoulder patches. The blue hue is so intense that it is often mistaken for black. However, when the sunlight bathes its plumage, the iridescent blue colour becomes simply mesmerizing.

These melodious birds primarily inhabit foothills and montane forests, where they maintain a close association with water bodies, particularly rocky streams, smaller rivers with overhanging vegetation, and rocky ledges. They are also known to dwell near human settlements and sustain themselves by feasting on insects, snails, worms, crabs, small frogs, figs, berries, and occasionally, small snakes.

- Rundan Katkar
Range Forest Officer, Kolsa, TATR



GOLD FOR DUSSEHRA

We are all familiar with the tradition of distributing gold symbolically in the form of Apta (*Bauhinia racemosa*) leaves on Dussehra to commemorate Lord Rama's victory over Ravana. However, it may come as a surprise that many people inadvertently distribute copper instead of gold!

In many cities, the leaves of Kanchan (*Bauhinia purpurea*) or Cham-vel (*Bauhinia vahlii*) are more commonly distributed as Apta leaves. In fact, these leaves are four to five times larger in size than Apta leaves. Although Kanchan or Cham-vel leaves share a similar hoof-like shape, the resemblance stops there. These are entirely different trees, and Apta is relatively rare. Apta's small, unassuming white flowers are nothing like the spectacular blooms of Kanchan.

As you embark on a safari drive in TATR, keep an eye out for this exceptional tree. In some regions, the small leaflets of Apta were even used to roll bidis instead of Tendu leaves.

Apta's Sanskrit name, 'Ashmantak,' translates to 'destroyer of rocks'. Its roots grow through crevices in boulders, further breaking them apart to create underground water storage spaces. True to its name, Apta is also believed to help eliminate kidney stones and is used in the early stages of cancer treatment.

Given its unique properties, our ancestors bestowed religious protection upon this remarkable tree.

Next Dussehra, let's pledge to plant an Apta sapling instead of distributing the wrong or plucked leaves.

- Anirudh Chaoji
Senior Naturalist



TRAPPED BETWEEN TIGERS

I served as a Forest Range Officer in 2013, overseeing the Tadoba's Moharli Core range. During my tenure, I had a helper named Bhaurao Meshram as a valuable member of my team. Bhauraoji accompanied me like a faithful shadow, right from my first day in Tadoba until the day I was transferred. He played a crucial role in teaching me how to decipher the secrets of the jungle, and how to interpret pugmarks and other signs left by wildlife as we ventured through the forest. In many ways, he was my first mentor in the world of wildlife.

Fast forward to today, where I find myself back at TATR as a Divisional Forest Officer, and Bhauraoji has retired. Our recent reunion rekindled countless old memories, but one particular recollection stands out as truly remarkable.

On one routine patrol, Bhauraoji and I found ourselves at a waterhole accessible by vehicle. This particular waterhole spanned an area of approximately an acre. As we descended to inspect the water, we meticulously tracked the pug marks left behind by wild animals, with Bhauraoji providing me valuable insights on how to discern the fresh ones. Engrossed in our task, we ventured further.

Beyond the boundary of the waterhole, a small stream meandered. The channel was nearly as deep as my height. Wading through the stream, we proceeded a fair distance. Suddenly, Bhauraoji's keen instincts alerted him to the presence of a tigress! She was concealed within the dense

undergrowth behind us. It was a startling realization that we had unknowingly passed her. Before the gravity of the situation fully sank in, we spotted two tigers approaching us from a distance! These were the sub-adult cubs of the tigress hidden in the thicket, and they were calling their mother as they advanced. We were trapped between a tigress behind us and two tigers ahead!

Bhauraoji's extensive experience in dealing with wildlife was our most significant advantage at that moment. We communicated in hushed tones, making no abrupt movements, and decided to progress cautiously, one step at a time. Our movements were slow and deliberate as we inched towards a relatively open area. Our eyes were fixed on the tiger cubs approaching us, while our ears remained attuned to any indication of the tigress lurking behind. With great care, we managed to reach the safety of the waterhole's periphery. Thankfully, neither the cubs nor the tigress showed any aggression or pursued us.

This harrowing incident imparted a crucial lesson – wild animals do not resort to aggression without provocation.

- Sachin Shinde
Divisional Forest Officer, TATR



A FEARLESS TIGRESS

Kajal Nikode's journey from a shy little girl, a struggling farm labourer to a popular guide in Tadoba is nothing short of inspiring. Born in Chandrapur and orphaned at an early age, Kajal found herself under the care of her maternal aunt, along with her three siblings. They settled in Moharli village near the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve when Kajal was just ten years old. Despite facing numerous challenges, she managed to complete her education up to the 10th standard.

In 2013, Kajal tied the knot with Ajay Nikode, a Gypsy driver at TATR. Supporting a family on a single income was an uphill task. In those difficult times, Kajal took up work as a daily wage labourer on nearby farms. There were days when the family went without food, and Kajal endured the pangs of hunger.

A glimmer of hope entered her life through Shahnaz Baig, a native woman fighting to allow women to become safari guides in Tadoba. Her relentless efforts to make this a reality began in 2008. The then CCF G. P. Garad suggested forming a group of women for guide training, and Shahnaz approached Kajal, who seized the opportunity. She vividly recalls the day she and her group stood before the CCF for the first time. Kajal collapsed during that meeting as she hadn't had a meal in the last three days.

The group of six women, including Kajal, received training and were formally designated as the first female safari guides in 2015. Despite facing resistance from male guides, the forest department introduced canters for female guides.



Kajal began earning Rs. 350 per safari, leading to an improvement in her family's financial situation. Still, her struggle was far from over. Her group had to fight to secure spots on Gypsy safaris like their male counterparts, along with equal opportunities in the duty rotation, after facing numerous challenges and battles.

Now, eight years later, Kajal embodies the spirit of the fearless tigresses of Tadoba. She stands as a confident young woman who effortlessly interacts with tourists, including foreigners. Her family's financial situation has significantly improved, and she proudly shares that her only daughter attends a CBSE English medium school in Chandrapur.

Recently, Kajal, along with other female guides from Tadoba, embarked on a memorable trip to Goa and funded it themselves. Her eyes glistened with joy as she exclaimed, "Hum apne kharche pe Goa gaye!" (We went to Goa at our own expense!) Grateful for the transformation in her life, Kajal gives credit to Tadoba for making her incredible journey from Tadoba to Goa a reality.

- Anant Sonawane
Communications Officer, TATR

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.





CROC ON THE ROAD! While you may have witnessed a Crocodile gracefully navigating the waters or basking on the banks of Tadoba Lake, have you ever imagined it taking a leisurely walk on the road? Well, our camera trap managed to capture a rare sight of a Crocodile going for a nocturnal stroll through the forest.

THE ACHIEVERS (September-2023)

Please join us in celebrating the outstanding accomplishments of TATR's most dedicated forest guards. These front-line champions of the forest department have conducted extensive foot patrols in their respective divisions, going above and beyond their target to protect our precious wilderness.

We are delighted to announce the top two performers for the month of September 2023.



Forest Guard - M. I. Gedam
Beat - Parna
Round - Karwa
Range - Karwa
Division - Core TATR
Duration - 16 Days
Target - 125 km/Month
Actual Patrolling - 226.79 Km.



Forest Guard - P. P. Kshirsagar
Beat - Karwa 1
Round - Karwa
Range - Palasgaon (Buffer)
Division - Buffer TATR
Duration - 25 Days
Target - 125 km/Month
Actual Patrolling - 371.08 Km.

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Adventure
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HOPE: MOTIVATOR TO SEE THE GHOST

The forests of Tadoba have never ceased to amaze me, consistently delivering delightful surprises. For years, every time I came across a photograph of a leopard walking confidently, staring directly into the camera on social media, I couldn't help but wonder when I might have the chance to witness such a captivating sight myself, let alone capture such remarkable images. I was well aware that spotting a leopard, especially in a forest where tigers outnumber them, is a rare occurrence. The presence of tigers makes leopards exceedingly cautious while navigating through the woods, making it a truly unique sight to see a male leopard strolling leisurely in Tadoba.

Recently, I found myself in a buffer zone characterized by dense forests and narrow winding roads. In contrast to the core areas of the forest, there are very few stretches with clear visibility over a significant distance, which makes spotting a leopard even more challenging. Although there have been recorded leopard sightings in the buffer zones, most of them are fleeting, hardly allowing for clear and detailed photography. So, I didn't hold high hopes for my long-standing wish to be granted – witnessing a male leopard walking directly towards me.

Yet, hope is a powerful motivator that keeps us going, and during my most recent monsoon trip to Tadoba, luck smiled upon me once more. On a morning drenched in rain, when the entire jungle seemed hushed and still, an unusual sight unfolded. A small figure slowly approached us from a distance. To my amazement, it was "the Ghost," emerging from the mist. With no signs of tiger activity in that zone, we were granted an extensive sighting that left me so captivated by the leopard's beauty that I momentarily set my camera aside. A young male leopard is a truly exquisite creature, and once again, Tadoba has granted my wish, reminding me of the enchanting surprises this forest has to offer.

- Sanjay Deshpande
Wildlife Enthusiast,
Sanjeevani Developers, Pune

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