

India 2007 Tigers, Taj and Himalayan birds

I booked our tailor-made trip with Wild About India and I have to say that the amount of support and help that Jo provided in guiding us on where to go and what to see was more than I could have hoped for. She even went so far as to personally obtain our visas from the Indian High Commission when we fell foul of their brief attempt at outsourcing their postal visa application services.

15th November

We left Norwich on the 07.30 coach to Heathrow, having booked onto the 15.15 British Airways flight direct to Delhi. Luckily, I was able to check in on-line and pre allocate our seats so that we got extra leg room on the flight. Whilst I am not too fussed, being short, Ian, my partner, is on the large size and finds normal airline and coach seating to be very cramped. At least he would be comfortable. Unfortunately, I couldn't do much about the screaming child next to us, so unfortunately Ian and I got little sleep on the way over. Our flight was slightly delayed leaving Heathrow because some bright sparks forgot to board the plane and had to have their bags offloaded. Thankfully, we made up some time on the way.

16th November

We arrived into Delhi at 05.20, local time and were a bit concerned by the length of the queue for immigration control. However, this soon speeded up once all of the Indian nationals had been processed. After collecting our bags we stopped off at the bureau de change to change some money over. We asked for small notes and were given four large, stapled bundles of 100 rupee notes, along with some other loose change. We were met in arrivals by Sadat, a rep from Asian Adventures and Sandeep who would be our driver for the first part of the trip. Sadat handed over all of our documents, explaining that our other train ticket was with another of the guests who we would meet at Bharatpur.

Sandeep spoke good English and was very chatty. As a budding ornithologist he was keen to get our lists off to a good start, stopping off en route whenever we spotted something interesting. Ian scored early with a sighting of what we believe was a **Booted Eagle** at a dried up reservoir. We also caught some nice snapshots of a juvenile **Black-shouldered Kite**. We quickly added some of the commoner birds including **White-throated Kingfisher**, **Black Drongo**, **House** and **Large-billed Crow**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Red-wattled Lapwing**, **Common** and **Bank Mynahs** along with a selection of doves and pigeons. Arriving into Bharatpur we spotted two **Painted Storks** as they flew over as well as a **Purple Heron**. We arrived at Hotel Sunbird around lunchtime and were out in the park at 3 pm with our guide Rattan Singh and new travelling companion, Mike Vickers, who would be with us until we left Sikandra.

I visited Keoladeo Ghana National Park on my previous trip to India in 1995 with the YOC, when it was a haven for a multitude of wetland species. I was well aware that the area had suffered with a lack of water for the past few years. Nevertheless I was still

shocked by the state of it. Where once there were lakes teeming with wildfowl, herons and storks, there is now only scrub. Despite this, we still found enough to keep us entertained for the afternoon. Some of the old favorites were still there, including the **Spotted Owlets**, **Dusky Eagle Owl**, **Brown Hawk Owl**, and **Long-tailed Nightjar**. We also got some nice views of a **Coppersmith Barbet** and a **Golden Jackal** (a first for me) posed for a photo. We also got **Rhesus Macaques**, **Sambar** and **Nilgai**. Of water birds there were very few: **White-breasted Water Hen**, a few egrets, **Indian Pond Heron**, two **Black-necked Storks** and a single pair of **Sarus Cranes**. No ducks were to be found. There were also some large turtles in the small areas of wetland.

Soon it got dark and we had an exciting ride back in a cycle rickshaw into oncoming traffic! I think any sense of fear Ian and I had has now been cured! Rattan advised us to try for Bund Baretha the next day, as we would get to see more birds. The three of us agreed to this plan and settled in to get acquainted over a few beers, or in my case a bottle of wine (which cost 800 rupees). A word of note on the administration, anyone planning a similar tailor-made trip to India might wish to be aware that you will be handed a pack containing your vouchers, one for each hotel. You will need to present each voucher together with your passports when you check in. You will also be expected to fill in a log book with the details of your passports, where you are arriving from and where you are moving on to. Some hotels also had guest books for general comments which they usually ask you to contribute to.

17th November

We were up reasonably early for our trip to Bund Baretha. Bund Baretha Wildlife Sanctuary is located near the village Baretha, 45 kms. from Bharatpur. It covers an area of 199.50 Sq. kms. Declared a sanctuary in 1985, the habitat consists of a valley with a dam or man-made “Bund” at one end creating a mosaic of flooded areas and islands.

Rattan, a very knowledgeable guide, is clearly well respected in his field. He stopped the car often to search for birds en route and pointed out **Red Avadavats**, **Red Headed Bunting**, **Wryneck**, a pair of **Spotted Owlets**, **Sirkeer Malkoha** (which he got ever so excited about), **Ashy-crowned Finch Lark** and **Indian Silverbills**. Arriving at Bund Baretha my telescope came in very handy and we were able to add a variety of water birds to our list, including **Cotton Teal**, **Little and Great Crested Grebes** and **Indian Spotbill Duck**. We also got some great views of a **Crested Serpent Eagle** and brief views of **Painted Sand Grouse** and **Rosy Starling**.

18th November

After a leisurely start we checked out of Hotel Sunbird. Whilst waiting for Sandeep I spotted a female **Purple Sunbird**- so the hotel clearly lives up to its name, as well as **Yellow-footed Green Pigeon**. We were soon on the road to Fathepur Sikri. Today was not a birding day and all that was added to the list was an **Eurasian Thicknee** and the usual common birds including **Ring-necked Parakeets**, **Black Kites** etc.

We were given a tour of the city which presented many photo opportunities. **Fatehpur Sikri** was the political capital of India's Mughal Empire under Akbar's reign, from 1571 until 1585, when it was abandoned, ostensibly due to lack of water. It is located in what is now Uttar Pradesh. There is one particular area of the city which holds spiritual significance which is Salim Chisti's Mazar (tomb). This is located in the middle of The Emperor's Courtyard. **Shaikh Salim Chisti** (1418-1572) was one of the famous Sufi saints of the Chishti Order in India. Salim Chisti was the descendant of the famous Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti whose tomb is in Ajmer, Rajasthan. Salim Chisti was a greatly revered Sufi Mystic who, it was thought by many, could perform miracles. Childless women, particularly those without a male heir, still continue to pray on bended knees before his tomb.

Be aware that if you visit this part of the city outside the tomb you are encouraged (quite strongly) to donate money for a piece of cloth, which is given to you with a piece of string and a bag of rose petals. You are then told to go into the tomb, lay the cloth and scatter the petals on the bed in the middle and tie the piece of string to the latticework that makes up the windows, making a wish at the same time. It is said that Salim Chisti will look favorably on your wish. Apparently the cloth then gets sent to needy people. The tomb is worth a look but was very crowded so I would suggest anyone who is uncomfortable in such situations best avoids it (unfortunately easier said than done!).

After a quick stop for shopping and some lunch we headed on to Agra to catch our 2nd class sleeper train to Umeria. After a spot of negotiating with some Germans in our carriage, Ian managed to get a lower bunk (we had all been allocated top bunks which he wasn't too comfortable with) and we soon settled in for an uncomfortable night's sleep.

19th November

Despite what seemed like a long stop during the night we actually arrived on time into Umeria. We were met on the platform and taken to Mogli Jungle Resort, Bandhavgarh. We literally dropped our bags and headed off for our first game drive with our guide Dillip Chansoria. We soon discovered that all the drivers in Bandhavgarh could compete in the Paris –Dakar Rally the way they drove!

We couldn't believe our luck when, soon after arriving in the park, word got out that there was a tiger sighting. Sure enough, what started off as a few stripes in the treeline soon coalesced into a large, powerful **Tiger**. He stopped for a drink and then started walking again, all the gypsy vehicles sped on a little way to get a better position as the tiger emerged from the forest and we got some amazing views as he crossed the road in front of us. This is not just any tiger, we are told; this is B2- a 12 year old male and the dominant tiger of Bandhavgarh! What a sight and on our first drive too!!

We took breakfast in the park and got our first sightings of **Lesser Adjutant Stork**, **Plum-headed Parakeet**, **Oriental Turtle Dove** and **Dusky Crag Martin**. We also watched the herds of **Cheetal** and **Sambar** and the troops of **Languars** as well as the occasional **Wild Boar**.

At 10.30 it was time to leave the park for lunch back at the lodge. We arrived to find that another group who were leaving that night and who had been there for three days had not been lucky enough to see a tiger!

A spot of birding around the lodge revealed several species including **Indian Magpie Robin**, **Black Redstart** and **Common Tailorbird**. Our afternoon game drive was less eventful, but we did get some good views of a **Crested Serpent Eagle**, and added **Slender-billed**, **Egyptian** and **White-backed Vultures** to our list. We stopped off at a water hole where we saw **Red-wattled Lapwing** and a **Common Sandpiper**. Too soon, it was time to leave as the light began to fail and we had a comfortable evening back at the lodge.

20th November

A 5 am wake up call saw us queuing at the park entrance by 05.45. It was just before dawn and freezing cold. Thankfully we came prepared with fleeces, Berghaus, hats and gloves. There is always a scramble to get into the park and it's reminiscent of the start of a rally- only more disorganized. Each group drives their "gypsy" along their own trails for about the first hour or so to check for pugmarks and listen out for alarm calls before then going on to the central checkpoint to pick up tokens for any elephant rides that may be on offer. At the same time as this, the Mahouts go off in search of tiger away from the trails on their elephants.

Soon after entering the park we had a good sighting of a **Changeable Hawk Eagle** and three **Malabar Pied Hornbills** flew over. The best was yet to come, as word soon got out that a tiger show was on. Mike and I waited patiently for our turn on the elephant, sadly Ian decided an elephant ride wasn't for him and waited in the gypsy. Getting on the elephant was easier than I thought it would be and we were soon trekking up some rocky outcrops in search of our **Tiger**. This young male was one of Chakradhara's 3 year old cubs, most likely sired by B2. He was sitting near some bushes and we got incredibly close to him. Too close, in fact, because the prospect of three elephants was just enough to unnerve him, so he decided he'd had enough and got up. We kept pace with him for a couple of minutes as he walked calmly away but soon it was time for someone else to have a go on the elephant and we sadly had to turn back.

Just as we were approaching the entrance to the park we spotted an **Indian Jungle Cat** as it ran across the track. We stopped off at a little shop just outside the park entrance as I was after a silk painting. After a spot of negotiating I bought a very beautiful one of a tigress with an older cub.

Over lunch I did a spot of birding/photography around the lodge and got some nice shots of **Little Green Bee-eater**, a male **Purple Sunbird** (non-breeding), **Large Cuckoo-shrike** and a female **Red-breasted Flycatcher**. The afternoon drive was again quiet but we did pick up a pair of **Brown Fish Owls**, **Alexandrine Parakeet**, **Common Kingfisher**, **Oriental White-eye**, **Chiffchaff**, **Asian Koel** and **Brown Shrike**. We also

visited the Fort where you can see "Sheshshaiya" the statue of lord Vishnu in reclining pose, which dates back to 10-11th Century A.D.

21st November

Another early start as it was our last day in the park. Sadly no tigers were seen in the morning. However, we stopped off to look at a cave where there were roosting **Pipistrelle** and **Indian Horseshoe Bats**. A **Shikra** flew over and whilst stopped at a Waterhole we were treated to the sight of **Tickell's Blue Flycatcher** – a stunning little bird. We also added **Oriental Honey Buzzard**, **Jungle Owlet** and **White bellied Drongo** to the list.

As we left the park we got word that a tiger had killed a cow in the village. We were soon tearing off around the village looking for the culprit. We stopped at one of the lodges and the guides hastily ushered us out of the vehicle and told us to follow them. Without thinking about it we did and were soon standing around waiting expectantly whilst some of the Indians were scrambling up onto buildings and a mahout attempted to flush the potentially aggravated 500lb stripy killing machine into the open. At which point, Mike asks, "Are we safe here?" A moment which Ian would later refer to as the "Wile E Coyote" moment (i.e. those moments in the Roadrunner cartoons when Coyote holds up the board with the words "Dear God, what am I doing?!" written on them). Mike informed us that he was going back to the gypsy and we sensibly decided to follow him after grabbing our guide and driver. We later found out that the Forest Department removed the kill and that the villager would be compensated for his loss. As for the tiger, who knows where it went!

After lunch, having already seen two tigers and knowing the afternoons were usually quiet we decided to focus on birds for our last game drive. This message didn't seem to get through to the guides and they were as keen as ever to get us a tiger! We had stopped overlooking a grassland surrounded by trees as the guide had picked up on the alarm call of a Muntjac deer. The deer kept barking and then a shout of "Tiger!" issued from our guide. Just where the tree-line met with the long grass, we caught a glimpse of a **tigress**. She quickly disappeared into the long grass, but as with the first sighting, the guides drove round and jostled for position in the hope that she would cross the road. And sure enough, she didn't disappoint! Although we got a good sighting of her, we were not in a good position for photography and so sadly I couldn't get a shot of her and she was soon lost into the bush. This was a three year old female from the same litter as the male cub from the previous day. It was a joy to see a tiger on our last game drive and on the way out of the park we also picked up a pair of **Red-headed Vultures**. With buoyed spirits we said goodbye to Dillip and the lodge and prepared for our long trip back to Agra.

22nd November

Our train was delayed by two hours but at least we were all comfortable and we all managed to get some much-needed sleep this time. We were met on the platform by a familiar face, Sandeep, our driver from Bharatpur. Another friendly face was at Chambal

in the form of Rattan Sing, We were also introduced to his nephew Dholbeer who was obviously following in his Uncle's footsteps.

We were supposed to have the afternoon to relax at Chambal Safari Lodge and both Mike and Ian were looking forward to the change of pace. All plans for a lazy afternoon were dashed however as it was announced that we would take our boat trip, planned for the next morning, that afternoon. Personally, I was quite happy with this arrangement and after lunch we took the 45min drive down to the river. As Rattan was with us we of course stopped en route for **Crested Bunting**, but soon were on a boat cruising down the river. **Gharials**, **Marsh Muggers**, and numerous **turtles** were easy to spot and there was also a variety of wildfowl including **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Lesser Whistling Duck**, **Comb Duck** and **Bar-headed Goose**. Waders included **River Lapwing**, **Kentish**, **Little Ringed** and **Lesser Sand Plover**, We also saw **River** and **Black-bellied Tern** as well as a lone **Indian Skimmer**. On the way back a **Golden Jackal** could be seen on the bank taking a drink and we caught the briefest of glimpse of the **Gangetic Dolphin**. We retired to the Lodge for a relaxing evening. For those who are on the lookout for Souvenirs, Dholbeer does his own line of hand-painted t-shirts which are worth a look.

23rd November

I was up early for a morning bird walk but our guides were on a bit of a go-slow so all we really saw was a **Collared Scops Owl** and a **Brown Hawk Owl**. After breakfast we took a drive back to the river again stopping whenever Rattan saw something interesting. This included **Hoopoe**, **Bluethroat**, **Black-bellied Weaver**, and **Jungle Prinia**. Birding along the river gave us good views of **River Lapwing**, **Sand Lark** and **Greater Thicknee**, Having seen only the one skimmer yesterday we were keen to see more so Rattan worked his magic and scored us an unauthorized boat ride up to the island where we got good views of a dozen or so birds.

Lunchtime around the lodge provided further opportunities for birding and I got a good view of a pair of **Black-rumped Flamebacks** on a tree by our lodge. Skimmer lodge, the one we stayed in sits under a tree that is the home of a rather noisy colony of **fruit bats**- so don't expect a lie in if you stay there! That afternoon we met another of Asian Adventure's guests, Richard, who I had been corresponding with on Bird Forum. We birded around the lodge and local fields, getting nice views of a **Brown-headed Barbet** amongst other things. After dark we searched the trees by our lodge for **Indian Palm Civet** and got some good views of about six of these cute little critters.

24th November

I was awoken early by the Fruit bats returning to their roost, so decided to get up for the early morning bird walk. This time we went out to the fields and added a **Greater Short-toed lark** and **Baya Weaver** to our list. We got a call from the lodge asking us to head back because we were due to leave for Agra. After a quick breakfast I finished packing and we were off on our way again. Again, Rattan didn't disappoint us with views of

Yellow-wattled Lapwing, three **Oriental Honey Buzzards** and best of all, a **Lesser Spotted Eagle** on the way.

We spent the rest of the day sightseeing, starting with Agra Fort. At Agra Fort we had to run the gauntlet of traders but once inside we weren't hassled further. The fort is a UNESCO World Heritage site and is also known as **Lal Qila, Fort Rouge** and **Red Fort of Agra**. It is about 2.5 km northwest of its much more famous sister monument, the Taj Mahal. The fort can be more accurately described as a walled palatial city. It is the most important fort in India. The great Mughals Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jehangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb lived here, and the country was governed from here. It contained the largest state treasury and mint. It was visited by foreign ambassadors, travellers and the highest dignitaries who participated in the making of history in India.

We then moved on to the **Taj Mahal**, that most iconic of India's monuments. The Taj Mahal is a mausoleum that was built under Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal. It is considered as the finest example of Mughal architecture, a style that combines elements from Persian, Turkish, Indian, and Islamic architectural styles. In 1631, Shah Jahan, emperor during Mughal's period of greatest prosperity, was griefstricken when his third wife, Mumtaz Mahal, died during the birth of their fourteenth child, Gauhara Begum. The court chronicles of Shah Jahan's grief illustrates the love story traditionally held as an inspiration for Taj Mahal. The construction of Taj Mahal begun soon after Mumtaz's death with the principal mausoleum completed in 1648. The surrounding buildings and garden were finished five years later.

After lunch we finished our day of sightseeing with a trip to Sikandra, the tomb of Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great, who ruled an empire that stretched across North India from 1556 to 1605. His reign is considered the pinnacle of Mughal rule in India. Akbar's tomb is located in the serene ambience of Sikandra 3 km away from Agra. Akbar began building it during his lifetime and his son, the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, completed it. Some of its design features are similar to the design of the Taj Mahal built later in Agra.

Akbar's tomb at Sikandra has a large arched entrance and green lawns, on which **Black Buck** can be seen grazing, surround the tomb. The entrance is decorated with marble inlay work around the arch, and the inner surface of the dome of the tomb is decorated with images of flowers, geometric designs and Islamic calligraphy. Built in the Indo-Saracenic style, Akbar's tomb at Sikandra is a peaceful setting for a ruler who led an eventful life. It is also a great place to see both **Languars** and **Rhesus Macaques** up close as they have little fear of humans.

By the time we left Sikandra it was getting dark and sadly it was time to part company with Mike, Rattan and Sandeep who were all heading up to Delhi. Our train from Mathura wasn't due to leave until 23.15 so we had some time to kill. We had hoped to visit Keetham Bird Sanctuary but it was too late, so we went on to Mathura instead. Mathura is reputed to be the birthplace of Krishna. It was the capital of the Surasena

Kingdom, ruled by Kansa the maternal uncle of Krishna. The first temple we visited was on the outskirts of Mathura and was very modern looking. In fact it was lit up like a chapel of love in Las Vegas. The temple was free to enter and we couldn't even give a donation if we wanted to because we ate meat.

The second temple we visited we were told was a refuge for widows. According to some Hindu traditions, upper-caste widows may not remarry, so many of those abandoned by their families on the death of their husband make their way there. In exchange for singing *bhajan* hymns for 7-8 hours in *bhajanashrams*, women are given a cup of rice and a pittance of money (around Rs.10), which they try to supplement by begging on the streets or in some instances, even through prostitution. The disappointing thing in our view was that this was only open to widows who were undamaged. Which to our western viewpoint seemed to be quite hypocritical, as surely disabled and infirm widows need the care more than the healthy ones?!

The final temple we visited was one dedicated to Krishna. All around the walls of the temple were marble stones inscribed with names. We were told that for a donation of \$50 we could have our names inscribed on a stone. The money they said would go towards a sanctuary for cows which had come to the end of their useful lives. In India, although the cow is sacred, unfortunately, they still don't have much of a life. Every village you drive through you will see cows tethered to very short chains where they can barely move, and then once a cow cannot produce any more milk, it is usually sold to the Muslims for food.

So anyway, we were invited to sit in front of an affectation of Krishna and were asked to fill in a form with our names, and names of our immediate family. Then came the hard sell, trying to persuade us to donate. I said that I wasn't interested. But they insisted we accept a blessing which involved a dab of henna on our foreheads, the taking of a small sweet, a bag of beads and a flower garland each before we left. We therefore felt obliged to make a small donation of 100 rupees. Whilst the whole experience was like a bizarre combination of a time-share pitch and Holy Communion, to be honest, I felt very uncomfortable in this situation as I personally don't like participating in religious type ceremonies that I don't believe in. This was our last stop before we headed on to the station to catch our train to Lal Kuan.

25th November

We arrived into Lal Kuan on time and were a little concerned that there wasn't anyone to meet us on the platform this time. Our concerns were allayed, however, when I spotted a guy waving a piece of paper from the car park. We found it very difficult to communicate with this driver- the only real difficulty of the trip, because unlike everyone else he didn't speak much English. The drive to Jungle Lore Birding Lodge in Pangot took three hours as we wound our way up into the Himalayan foothills. Having not slept at all well I took the opportunity to get a bit more kip. We got some passing views of Nainital lake and the distant Himalayas on the way. We received a warm welcome at the lodge and were soon tucking into lunch and a nice cup of tea. We also took the opportunity to freshen up with a hot shower before heading out on an afternoon of birding. Unfortunately the weather

was a bit cloudy and the birds were keeping a low profile but we still added **Rock Bunting, Streaked, White-throated and Striated Laughing-thrush, Himalayan Griffon, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Green-backed Tit, Great Hill Barbet, Black-headed Jay, Blue Whistling Thrush, Brown-fronted Pied, Himalayan Pied** and **Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers, Himalayan Black Bulbul, Rufous Sibia, Brown Bullfinch, Blue-fronted Redstart, Himalayan Bulbul, and Long-legged Buzzard.**

We arrived back at the lodge to discover the power was out. Thankfully the lights had battery back up but there was no heating and therefore no hot water. Not a problem for us as we'd had showers earlier. We were quite comfortable however, as we sat drinking tea by a roaring log fire. We met some of the other guests, a group of Finnish birders and compared our lists. They'd been out all day so had about double the species we saw including one I had hoped to see which was Lammergeir. We did have two that they didn't though, those being the **Long-legged Buzzard** and **Brown Bullfinch.**

We also spoke to another pair of birders who had just arrived from Bandhavgarh- they had a bit of an exciting encounter with a tigress who decided to charge their gypsy! She apparently pursued them for about a kilometer before finally giving up!

The lodge gave us hot water bottles and we pinched the duvet from upstairs, so were lovely and cozy despite the lack of heating. Ian and I both agreed that if and when we come back to India we'd love to spend some more time in this area, it was just so peaceful after the hustle and bustle of the tourist areas.

26th November

Sadly, with so much to fit in to our trip we were up and out on the road again after breakfast. The driver had been told to stop en route for birds and we spotted some more Himalayan specialties on the way to Corbett. These included **Blue-throated Barbet, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Grey Francolin,** and a **Steppe Eagle** soaring with some griffon and Egyptian Vultures. We Arrived at Tiger Den Resort by lunchtime and after lunch, whilst Ian was relaxing, I went for a walk down by the river with a guide. We then collected Ian and took a drive along the river to see what we could find. We were not disappointed as we saw lots of Corbett specialties including **Wallcreeper, Plumbeous Water Redstart, White-capped River Chat, Collared Falconet, Red-whiskered and black-crested Bulbul, Lineated Barbet, Brown Dipper, Himalayan Pied, Crested and Common Kingfishers, White-throated Fantail, Chestnut Bellied Nuthatch, Black-faced Warbler, Black Redstart, Kaleej Pheasant, Blossom-headed Parakeet and Green Sandpiper.** Around the lodge there were also **Great Tits.**

We had a nice evening around a campfire and chatted to another group of birders who said they had seen Pallas's fish eagles that day at a place in the park called Dikhala. Ian got quite excited at the prospect of seeing the eagles and our guide at Pangot had also mentioned that they were in the park. We also chatted to a pair of bikers who, on their first trip to India had decided to hire a motorbike and ride their way around- good luck to them I say!

27th November

We were up early to make the most of our last full day in Corbett but to Ian's disappointment unfortunately the area of the park that was accessible from Tiger Camp was not an area where the eagles were found (Dikhala being a special area 60km away where you can stay inside the park close to the river). Whilst they sometimes breed along the river outside of the park, we were not lucky enough to see any. Having already seen tigers in Bandhavgarh we had hoped to just focus on the birds for this day and we started well with sightings of **Oriental Pied Hornbills, Pied and Grey Bushchats, Variable Wheatear, Indian Pond Heron, Egyptian, White-rumped and Cinereous Vultures, Shikra, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Red Jungle Fowl, Slaty-headed, Plum-headed and Blossom-headed Parakeets, Crested Treeswift, Blue Rock Thrush, Black-hooded Oriole, White-browed Fantail, White Eared Bulbul, Long-tailed Shrike, Indian Pygmy, Grey-capped Pygmy, Brown-fronted Pied, Fulvous-breasted Pied, Streak-throated and Grey-Headed woodpeckers.**

However, in this area, the focus for the guides tends to be tigers and they were constantly on the alert for alarm calls and pugmarks. Unfortunately we weren't lucky enough for Tiger, but we were treated to the sight of a large bull tusker **elephant** which followed us along the road, allowing us to take some great photos.

The day should have ended on a high; but unfortunately, as we stopped at the office in town to pay our park fees, (and despite assuring us that it would be okay for us to leave our stuff with him) our driver wandered off leaving all of our gear unattended in the gypsy. Ian returned to discover his binoculars were gone. Thankfully they were a cheap pair and easily replaced and of course at least it happened at the end of the trip, rather than at the beginning but still it was very frustrating for it to happen after the driver assured us that he would be there to look after it. We retired to the lodge for dinner and a few drinks around the campfire.

28th November

After a leisurely get together and a spot more birding it was time to leave for our eight-hour drive back to Delhi. The journey back was fairly uneventful and we spent a comfortable few hours in our hotel room before heading home on an early flight. All in all an incredible trip with some amazing wildlife and a diverse culture.