India: Tiger and Wildlife Spectacular Tour Report 2026

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“It’s my childhood dream to see a Tiger in the wild,” confided tour-member Mario on our first morning in India. A sentiment and desire that echoed around the group.

For there’s no denying the elemental pull that Tigers – perhaps more than any other creature on Earth – exert on the collective imagination. Few animals are so utterly emblematic of stealth, power and violent elegance. Few apex predators are so compellingly beautiful and simultaneously lethal.

So palpable was this anticipation in our group that I found myself holding my breath on our first wildlife drive in the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. The first two hours in the jungle, although humming with bird and animal life, were, predator-wise, relatively slow.

We pulled over at a river, drawn by a raptor near the bankside. Then we saw him: a Tiger emerging from the bamboo, padding along the road and towards the water, broad-pawed and unhurried; carrying the absolute confidence of an animal with nothing to fear in the forest around him.

He knelt to drink, his reflection – all velvet fur, anvil and muscle – staring back like a mirror. I looked over at the group and exhaled. All childhood dreams now conquered. Our Tiger days had begun!

And so continued what turned out to be an absolute powerhouse of a Wild Images tour. By the end of our nineteen-day India journey, we’d notched up thirty-six Tiger encounters, of twenty-one different individuals. Together with sixteen Wolf sightings and a roll-call of thirty different mammal species.

Yet, the truth is, for the most part, these numbers become meaningless in India: a country that works less as a checklist and more as an accumulation of impressions. Dust, alarm calls, cardamom, wingbeats, Tiger roars.

We saw Tiger mothers with still-juvenile cubs relaxing in a mud pool; young newcomers leaping rivers, and battle-scarred dominant males stalking the jungle trails. There were young males hunting and Tigresses bathing in forest pools lit by the golden tones of the setting sun.

And Tigers were far from the only highlights. We saw Wolves hunting in the grasslands at dawn and Striped Hyenas carrying prey to their dens. There were Sloth Bear cubs clinging to their mother in the Sal forests, Desert Foxes playing in the dried saline marshes of Kutch, and mist rising from the Chambal River around prehistoric-looking Gharials, River Dolphins and Skimmers.

India changed quickly as we moved through our tour. Teak Forest to Salt Desert to Wetland; Tigers to Wolves; blush-pink temples to crumbling havelis; never settling into a single mood for long. Each evening, we shared long tables of regional dishes fragrant with saffron, rose, smoke and spice.

And for birders, this year’s tour was exceptional. We recorded 186 species, including five species of Nightjar and eighteen species of raptor. Plus rarities like the Indian Skimmer and Black-bellied Tern.

Yes, India can be confronting and contradictory. There’s Delhi’s crazy traffic and wildlife living cheek-by-jowl with humans; the sheer vibrance of life jangling with chaos and clutter. But while the streets were overwhelmed, the Tigers we saw did the opposite. They reduced the world – and us – to awed silence.

The Tour Begins: India’s Megacity of Delhi and the Taj Mahal

It may seem somehow wrong-footed to kick off a wildlife tour with a visit to a mausoleum. But when that monument is the Taj Mahal, not only one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World but one of its most beautiful (and frankly, we were headed in that direction, anyway), it would be remiss not to make a proper stop.

Our 2026 Wild Images tour had begun that morning in Delhi, with our group hopping onto a private bus and heading out of the sprawling megalopolis that comprises India's capital. Although undeniably fascinating, Delhi can be 'a lot'.

Typical Delhi sightings include a herd of cows sat defiantly in the middle of a terrifyingly busy intersection; car horns blaring, street dogs sniffing, India's famed Black Kites swooping overhead, and a family of four crowded onto the back of a single moped.

Clearing the traffic, we stopped for the first of many hot Masala Chais: sweet warm tea with ginger, cardamom and cloves, often served in disposable earthenware cups. After a few hours of driving, we pulled up beside the Taj Mahal in Agra, transferring into golf buggies for a lift to the entrance.

For most of our group, this was their first visit to Emperor Shah Jahan's monument to love and architectural excess. The Taj Mahal is justly revered for its gleaming white marble, set with precious gemstones that absorb and mirror the shifting sky. Built between 1632 and 1653, it took the labour of 20,000 artisans and sculptors from across Asia to translate royal heartbreak – from the loss of the Shah's favourite wife Mumtaz – into permanent stone, as her tomb.

Sadly, Shah Jahan's plans to build a black marble version for himself opposite the Taj on the banks of the River Yamuna were never realised. He was deposed and imprisoned by his son in Agra's nearby Red Fort, living out his last days, able only to see the Taj Mahal from a narrow window.

After a guided tour of the mausoleum, we had some wildlife encounters in the grounds of the Taj itself, with Rhesus Macaques, Five-striped Palm Squirrels, Rose-ringed and Alexandrine Parakeets and Cattle Egrets roaming the compound.

Following the first of many lovely lunches, on this occasion in Agra, and a visit to an artisan marble workshop, we pressed on south to our first wildlife destination: Chambal.

The National Chambal Sanctuary: Gharials, Skimmers and Gangetic River Dolphins

No sooner had we dropped our bags at the bougainvillaea-clad Mela Kothi eco-lodge than we were out exploring the grounds with our Chambal guide, Gajendra. Here we photographed our first Spotted Owlets and Indian Scops Owl, together with White-throated Kingfisher, Black-headed Ibis, Jungle Babbler and Black-crowned Night Heron.

While we waited for the Spotted Owlet to emerge from his Rosewood tree roost, we photographed a fascinating colony of Indian Flying Foxes – also known as Greater Indian Fruit Bats – hanging from branches above our heads. Some mating, wrapping their huge wings around one another like blankets. Come nightfall, they swooped over the outside dining area, dark forms occasionally requiring a double-take against the black sky.

Early the next morning, we embarked on our first boat trip on the Chambal River, which lies on the border between Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. So much of the wildlife here is endangered or critically endangered, with a national sanctuary established in 1979 to protect this river, the last relatively unpolluted major waterway left in northern India.

We spent our time at Chambal expecting the onslaught of heavy rain that had already caused flash floods in Agra and Delhi, creating headlines throughout India.

And we did indeed have rain on our first boat trip, with group members having to photograph beneath umbrellas or the canvas boat porch. But it was such a rush to see our first endangered Indian Skimmers skimming the water and our first Gangetic River Dolphins leap (good luck ever trying to catch them on camera) that we continued regardless.

By the end of our first morning, we'd had sightings of Mugger Crocodiles and distant Gharials, with Nilgai and Golden Jackal spotted along the banks.

Our bird sightings included the endangered Black-bellied Tern, Egyptian Vulture, Asian Woolly-necked Stork, Pied and White-throated Kingfisher, Pallas's Gull, Red-naped Ibis and the bizarre, huge-eyed Great Stone-curlew.

Later that morning, we wandered around the nearby heritage village of Holipura, a fascinating architectural settlement where dozens of abandoned but formerly grand mansions, known as 'havelis', are slowly crumbling to dust. With influences ranging from Mughal to Colonial, it is an otherworldly place to spend some time. In the ruins of the houses, we found some bird species: Indian Peafowl, Brown

Rock Chat, Black Redstart, Spotted Owlet and Green Bee-eater, to enjoy.

Determined to avoid further downpours, we headed out to our afternoon destination: the Bateshwar Temple Complex, as soon as we could after lunch. This architectural site features nearly 200 miniature sandstone Hindu temples, dating from the eighth century, many dedicated to the gods of Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti.

Normally, a breathtaking sunset spot, the clouds meant there was no chance of that today. But we still enjoyed rooftop coffee and Masala Chai over the temples, while watching Rhesus Macaques lark about, pulling each other's tails, in the ruins below.

Our final morning in Chambal delivered the thickest fog any of us had ever seen. Living in Edinburgh, I'm no stranger to sea fog, but this was something else entirely. A few in our tour group remarked that it felt like the kind of mist you only see in horror films. At one point, visibility appeared to be no more than two metres.

Nevertheless, we headed out on our boat trip, silently motoring into the white nothingness, while I prayed it would burn off soon, giving us a chance of seeing some Gharials at closer range.

Sometimes, adverse conditions can produce spectacular images. So, with this in mind, we photographed every species we could see through the fog, though we still came up short on Gharial sightings.

We had just thirty minutes remaining of our three-hour river trip before the mist finally started to clear. Motoring at speed back up towards the jetty we spotted, not one, not two, but four Gharials in quick succession: one of the most elusive, ancient and prehistoric-looking crocodilians alive today.

With as few as 600 mature individuals left in the wild, and tails as jagged as a fictional Godzilla, we continued to see seven more in the last gasp of our river trip, including a small juvenile.

As we pulled into the jetty, a pair of Indian Softshell Turtles slipped into the water from the bankside – giving us the full complement of species I'd hoped we'd see here in Chambal. Phew!

After a last lunch at Mela Kothi – and a visit to the resident Indian Scops Owl – we started our long bus ride back into Delhi. With India feeling the bite of the US incursion into Iran, culminating in fuel shortages, I was initially worried by the number of shuttered gas stations.

But, as we neared the capital, with its hyper-chaotic traffic, my fears abated. Before long, we were tucking into pizza at an Italian restaurant dinner, back in our Delhi base hotel**.**

Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve: Into the Land of Tigers

After a very early start and an airport breakfast, we touched down in Nagpur, the capital of the central Indian state of Maharashtra. Our destination: the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve – Maharashtra's oldest and largest national park – which justly deserves its reputation as the 'Land of the Tigers'.

Named 'Tadoba' after a local tribal deity, and 'Andhari' for the meandering river slicing through its jungle, the reserve is special not only for maintaining one of India's largest Tiger populations, but also for its wealth of other wildlife, such as Sloth Bear and rare Asiatic Wild Dog.

At 625 square kilometres, its landscape is a tapestry of Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous forest, centred on Teak, Sal, Bamboo and white-barked 'ghost trees'. The forest intersects with grassy meadows and streams that flow into the vast Tadoba Lake.

Guides and workers in the reserve are drawn from members of the local communities, with the main tribal group being the Gond (also known as the 'Children of the Forest) and famed for their distinctive art.

Tiger-human conflicts in this part of central India are sadly inevitable. And the numerous 'Tiger god' statues – erected every time a human life is taken by the animal the Gond consider a deity – dotted on the local roads are a testament to this reality of life here.

"Most wildlife groups take eight or nine Tiger safaris," explained Shaheen, our highly talented female co-guide, when we arrived in Tadoba. "But your group is down for seventeen – the most of any wildlife tour we've had this year."

But this ‘time in the field’ factor was precisely why we were ultimately rewarded with such wonderful sightings in this Tiger-rich reserve – in a region that inspired Rudyard Kipling’s beloved tale, ‘The Jungle Book’.

No description of our time in Tadoba would be complete without mentioning our exceptional eco-lodge, Waghoba. The stand-out features that made us all adore it so much included the warm welcomes after each drive, the beautifully decorated rooms, and the outstanding regional thalis prepared each day.

Never before have I had ice cream as delicious as the homemade cardamom-and-chai flavour served here – and I’ve lived in Italy.

Once we’d had a night to settle, our Tiger-searching days followed a distinct pattern: early morning chai or coffee before a short drive to whichever zone – core or buffer – and forest guide we’d been allocated that day. Followed by a four-hour safari drive with a short, boxed breakfast break in between. Then lunch and rest at the lodge before heading out for another four-hour safari drive, returning home by dark for one of Waghoba’s exceptional dinners.

Our transport here was the iconic open-top Maruti Gypsy 4×4 jeeps – a vehicle now discontinued by Maruti Suzuki, but highly sought after by the Indian Army. Motoring through the forest trails in these elegant jeeps – clad with wood panels and painted British racing green – amid clouds of red dust gave our safaris the feel of something from another era.

Although we had many excellent sightings of both Tiger and other species here, here are some of the highlights:

Our first Tiger: The first time we saw a male ‘Collarwala’ pad down towards the river.

It had been quiet and unusually cold on our first morning in the Reserve. Everyone was anxious to see what, for many, would be their first-ever wild Bengal Tiger. We’d searched some of the more usual haunts, but nothing. And then Collarwala appeared as if from nowhere, his huge paws silent as he padded towards the river to drink.

Not only was this sighting special because it was our first, but to see him reflected in the water – before he disappeared once more into the bamboo – felt symbolic of the mythological depiction of Tigers as ghosts of the forest.

Collarwala was our first of three long-term dominant male Tigers we saw in Tadoba. ‘Mowgli’, the bruiser, was another, with the hulking ‘Shambu’ our third.

Tigress ‘Kajri’ bathes in the river as the setting sun turned the water differing shades of green and gold.

My personal favourite Tiger moment was watching the pretty Tigress Kajri enjoy her evening bath.

Our visit to the Jumona buffer zone came after a rare morning where we’d seen no Tigers – just flashes of two Asiatic Leopards, which we’d continued to track. But from the moment we climbed into our Gypsy jeeps in the afternoon, with forest guides of renowned skill, we had luck on our side.

We spent the first hour of our drive watching female ‘Madhu’ (known as ‘Queen of the Buffer Zone’ for her bold demeanour) snooze in the Tadoba Lake, occasionally rolling upside down behind reeds. After another hour of barely any movement, Shaheen and I made the call to try for another Tiger before circling back.

Our timing was perfect. A particularly beautiful young female, known to the guides as ‘Kajri’, suddenly strolled out in front of us and headed down to a small river on the left of the road.

Our driver reacted like lightning, positioning the jeep as close to the riverbank as possible without tipping us into the water below. I encouraged as many of the group as possible to carefully lean out of the left side of the vehicle, to avoid the thick grass and get clear views of Kajri sipping water and staring directly at us, while the river turned shades of green and gold.

After only a few minutes, she waded out, passing so close I could almost have reached down and stroked her. Kajri padded directly towards our second jeep before sitting in the middle of the road, stretching and flexing her paws, seemingly without a care in the world.

As if that wasn’t enough of a good sighting, we returned to sleeping Madhu just before she woke, strolling so close to our second vehicle that I genuinely thought she might leap up inside. It was a stunningly beautiful evening of Tiger encounters.

Matriarch ‘Collarwali’ and her two Juvenile Cubs Relaxing in a Mud-Bath by the Shady Pool

We had been searching for Sloth Bear in the Morharli core zone – with no luck – when we came upon matriarch 'Collarwali' and her two sub-adult daughters resting in a mud bath beside the forest road.

There was an almost sepia tone to the scene beneath the shady trees, creating lovely photographic conditions. Before long, the juveniles became restless. One female rose from the mud like some swamp creature, before greeting her mother and sibling and strolling up a bank towards the trees.

Collarwali later followed, while the remaining juvenile Tigress – still displaying the youthful blue eyes that all tiger cubs are born with (and caked in wet mud) – leapt onto a small bridge beside us, before collapsing asleep once again, in a heap of lethargy and striped fur.

The Young Tigress Hunting, Leaps over the River – But Smashes Her Head on the Rocks

We'd just arrived in the Khutwanda core zone when we spotted a Tigress in the distance. Speeding around the river area, we saw that this tiger was one of Collarwali's daughters, an as-yet unnamed female sub-adult.

She suddenly became aware of nearby Sambar Deer, shifting from casual interest to intense interest. We then saw her begin her hunt, winding her way carefully through river weeds towards her prey. We ourselves could barely see her, but occasional movement in the grass betrayed her location.

After a while, the Tigress lay down; lethargy seemingly winning over hunger. But then, spotting the deer again, she rose like a wound coil and crouched to leap the five-metre stretch of river separating her from her prey.

Alas, she misjudged the landing completely and came crashing down, belly-flopping into the water and smashing her head against the rocks.

Undeterred – or perhaps embarrassed – she resumed the hunt moments later, sprinting after the deer for several hundred metres before eventually giving up. For now, anyway.

Asiatic Wild Dogs (Dhole) vs The Sambar Deer – a Masterclass in a Prey's Retreat

It was a particularly dusty morning, and we rounded a corner after photographing a Grey-headed Fish Eagle to find a small pack of Dhole (Asiatic Wild Dogs) trotting to greet each other in one of the reserve's quieter roads.

These charismatic canines are a real treat to see at any time. Especially as fewer than 2,500 individuals remain globally, with India as the last remaining stronghold. As we observed the pack, a small herd of Sambar Deer emerged from the trees. Literally almost stumbling onto the pack of dogs.

We watched as the largest deer started stomping the ground, refusing to stop his rhythmic drumming until the rest of his herd had slowly backed away. And melted back into the undergrowth.

Zoologists think the reason Sambar Deer do this hoof-beating is threefold. One, it serves as a threat-verification technique and a warning signal for nearby wildlife. Two, it serves as a clear 'pursuit deterrent' to the Dholes, signalling that the element of surprise is now lost.

And three – and most interestingly – Sambar Deer possess specialised interdigit scent glands, located between their hooves. Slamming their foot into the ground deposits concentrated alarm pheromones onto the soil, leaving a persistent chemical marker to warn other deer to avoid the area – long after the initial interaction.

To watch this strategy unfold before us was fascinating. A few days later, we watched a Sambar Deer conduct the same defence mechanism when they could smell – but not see – an Asiatic Leopard, hidden behind an ancient-looking tree

The Sloth Bear Mother and her Cubs, Riding Her Back all the way to the Watering Hole

As our time in Tadoba neared its end, so did the window of opportunity for a much-desired Sloth Bear sighting. We'd put in so much time searching for one – so keen we were, as a group, to find this elusive and secretive mammal; the inspiration for 'Baloo' in Kipling's 'The Jungle Book.'

We'd scoured the known haunts and den-sites and followed endless fresh scat and footprints. All of which came to nothing.

But on the last evening of our tour, we pulled in at a watering hole and waited – thanks to a tip from a nearby forest guide that a female Sloth Bear had been visiting this spot at 3 pm every day to drink.

The time came, and passed. Just as we were considering moving on, a head poked out of the bushes, stared at us, then just as quickly vanished.

A minute later, a mother Sloth Bear ambled down the bank to the pool, her cubs riding on her back, like kids on a lumbering all-terrain vehicle crossed with a black shaggy-piled carpet, holding on with tiny claws and rocking side to side with every one of her steps.

If a mother Sloth Bear has two cubs – like this one – the infant bears are known to fight fiercely for the dominant riding positions. With luck, the dominant cub secures the 'first-class spot' on her shoulders, while the submissive one is forced to ride on her rear end, where it frequently tumbles off.

As our bear neared the water's edge, her cubs slipped off to drink themselves, before then finding themselves in a race to try and pull themselves back up onto her back again, as she ambled back up the bank and disappeared into the thick reeds.

We paused for a moment or two before I looked over at Shaheen in our second vehicle, and we both silently punched the air in triumph. There were even some client tears at the beauty of it all. We'd seen our Sloth Bear!

Tadoba's Birding Highlights: Owls, Nightjars, Eagles and Waterbirds

We had so many bird encounters in Tadoba that every tour-member seemed to have a different favourite. For owl-lovers, there was the Mottled Wood Owl (although distant) and strong sightings of Jungle Owlet, Scops and Brown Fish Owl.

Other raptors included the Osprey, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Crested Serpent Eagle and Crested Hawk Eagle. And my favourite – a secretive Shikra devouring a lizard in front of us.

Then there were our Nightjars (Indian, Jungle and Savanna); three species of Kingfisher: Stork-billed, Pied and White-throated. Other birding favourites included the Indian Roller, Coppersmith and Brown-headed Barbets, Black-hooded and Golden Orioles, Orange-headed Thrush and the strikingly-coloured Grey-headed Swamphen.

On our last morning in Tadoba, we went for gold; waiting by the deep forest bridge where there'd been the briefest of sightings of very young Tiger cubs – the newest in the reserve. Despite circling back frequently, there was no further sign of them.

But after 36 Tiger encounters – some of them very strong sightings and more images than most of us had hard drive space for – we were unanimously delighted with our time in the Tadoba-Anhari Tiger Reserve.

One final sighting, however, was that of retired cricketer Sachin Tendulkar – often referred to as the 'God of Cricket' and regarded as perhaps the greatest player of all time. We found ourselves alongside Tendulkar several times during our Tiger searching days, as he also enjoyed safaris in the park.

Although no one in our group was a cricket fan, when I texted my Aussie friends at home that Tendulkar was here, they replied: 'Sod the Tigers, get a photo with Tendulkar. He's an absolute legend!' Who says Wild Images doesn't do celebrities?

Little Rann of Kutch: Gujarat's Salt Desert Wildlife Wonder

Although leaving Tadoba and Waghoba Ecolodge was a wrench, we had to press on with our tour. We reluctantly headed back to Nagpur, with a few tour members joining me to visit a local cafe in the city. The next morning, we flew west to Ahmedabad, in Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat.

Our destination: the unique, vast salt marsh of the Little Rann of Kutch – a refuge for some wonderful and unusual bird and mammal species. Spanning nearly 5,000 km, the Rann was originally part of the Arabian Sea. Yet geological forces separated this land, leaving behind a stark, cracked-earth wilderness, punctuated by small, scrubby islands of higher ground, known as 'beyts.'

During the monsoon season, the Rann floods create wetlands and shallow lagoons that are a paradise for many birds. In particular, this region is one of the largest and most critical breeding grounds for both the Lesser and Greater Flamingo in Asia.

Despite salt production being illegal in the Rann, the area produces 75% of India's table salt, with competition for resources, and the need to eke out a living in this desolate landscape, competing with the desire to keep this saline desert as a refuge for species like the Indian Wild Ass.

Heading to the remote village of Zainabad, our home in the Little Rann was the family-run, peaceful and beautifully rustic Desert Coursers Lodge, owned by long-time Wild Images friend, the wonderful Danraj, his wife Zahida and son Armaan.

A wonderful character to share a glass of gin and swap stories with, Danraj is technically a prince; the son of King Malek Shri Azizkhanji, one of the last 'kings' of India. Although legally, his title has depreciated, Danraj still reigns as prince of the state, settling local disputes and dedicating his life to conservation and funding local orphanages and schools.

Rather than using safari jeeps, the Rann is best explored on the back of large flatbed farm trucks, which serve as a kind of mobile viewing platform with seats. We'd pile in and race over this saline desert, with nothing but the horizon stretching out for miles around us.

At times, we travelled at great speeds, with this desert-driving like something out of a Mad Max movie. It wasn't for everyone, but for most of us, this landscape was so otherworldly it was a breath of fresh air after so many days in the forest.

Our highlights in the Rann, overwhelmingly, were the two separate encounters we had with a pair of young Desert Foxes playing and scampering outside of their den.

We loved this cute pair – estimated to be just a month old – so much that we returned several times, photographing them in lovely early-morning light and again in the late afternoon.

Desert Foxes are a small subspecies of the Red Fox found primarily in the deserts of Rajasthan and the saline flats of the Rann. Their large ears help regulate body temperature in this harsh environment.

Another target species here was the iconic Indian Wild Ass. Also known as Indian Onagers, Ghudkhars or Wild Donkeys, these equines are almost exclusively found in the Rann, with fewer than 7,000 left in the wild. Surprisingly speedy – and capable of sprints of up to 80 km/hr – they are recognised as resolutely untameable.

We tried to keep up with running herds of Wild Asses, photographing them mid-gallop or atop one of the few higher-ground islands.

But our hopes of the classic sunset shot of Wild Asses silhouetted by the fiery desert sun were mostly dashed by the surprisingly overcast weather. However, we had a few minutes where the sky turned mauve around a half-moon-shaped sun melting below the horizon, while Wild Ass frolicked in front. Enough to produce a few interesting images, anyway.

Other sightings in the Rann included Striped Hyena, a night-time Indian Fox (distinguished from the Desert Fox by its black tail tip) and an Indian Crested Porcupine that visited our lodge after dark.

Our birding encounters included the lovely Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Grey Francolin, both Montagu's, Western Marsh and Pallid Harriers, the coveted resident Sykes Nightjar and an unseasonal sighting of an Egyptian Nightjar.

Danraj informed us that unusual weather patterns this year had led to overall bird numbers in the Rann being abnormally low. So instead of persevering in our usual Rann location, we visited a wetland area.

Here we photographed Great White Pelicans and captured some creative shots of Lesser and Greater Flamingos, engaged in the curious mating practice in which males bunch together in a mutual dance-off to impress females.

Before leaving the Rann, we had a visit by the Mir ladies – women from the now-resident Mir tribe, who are descended from the Butt tribe in Kashmir. These formerly nomadic people are highly regarded for their handicrafts and intricate beadwork, selling us bags and jewellery and showing us their traditional homemade dresses.

And, as a last treat for anyone who enjoys photographing horses, Danraj's son, Armaan (a gifted event rider and breeder of India's beautiful Marwari horses; a rare breed famed for their distinctive inward-curving ears) brought a stallion into the lodge to pose for portraits. It was a lovely end to a memorable few days in the desert.

Blackbuck National Park: To India's Grasslands for Wolves, Jungle Cat and Raptors

For the final stop in our Indian wildlife adventure, we headed south to Velavadar, a unique savannah-like grassland renowned for its large population of Blackbuck Antelope, wintering migratory harriers, Jungle Cats and Indian Wolves.

India's grasslands are often overlooked in favour of its famous Tiger reserves, but they possess a beauty entirely of their own. Velavadar's wide-open plains – in the 34 square km Blackbuck National Park – support one of the highest densities of Indian Wolves anywhere in Asia, with Striped Hyena and Nilgai common sightings here too.

Our home here was the – frankly – spectacular Blackbuck Lodge. Run by the charismatic conservationist Mickey Desai, Blackbuck Lodge has deservedly earned a reputation as one of India's finest eco-lodges. The hospitality was exceptional throughout our stay. After long days in the field, returning to superb Gujarati cuisine, fresh breads, fragrant curries and candlelit dinners felt deeply restorative.

Added to that, there was plenty of wildlife to explore in the grounds of the lodge in our downtime. We notched up sightings of the large Bengal Monitor Lizard (one of Asia's biggest lizards); Spotted Owlet, Sunbirds, and Indian Softshell Turtles, Rufous Treepie and both Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark and Sykes Lark while barely even walking a few steps from the restaurant.

Over our five safari drives in Blackbuck National Park, we had some astonishingly good mammal sightings. Our first morning belonged to the Jungle Cat kittens, nestled and playing in straw-like grass by the side of the road. These tiny cats – while cute now – grow up to be surprisingly fierce hunters. But the adult versions can be very skittish indeed.

Our highlight of Blackbuck Park was, undoubtedly, our several sightings of hunting Indian Wolves. On our first encounter – first thing in the morning – we almost drove past the pair of wolves as they ran towards us, crossed the road and disappeared into a distant meadow.

We caught up with them, able only to watch for a distance as they gave chase to a herd of Blackbuck antelope, loping low and purposefully through the scrub. There is something very different about Wolves in India compared with their northern counterparts. These were lean, long-legged and heat-adapted animals; pale-coated ghosts of the grassland rather than creatures of forest or snow.

The wolf pack slowed and – at the same time – a Blackbuck Antelope calf ran past us at speeds I can only describe as breakneck, wide-eyed and frantic, but a lucky escape. The wolves, on the other hand, climbed into a nearby water-trough, temporarily defeated and exhausted. On this occasion, it was Antelope: 1, Wolf: 0.

This was the first of several failed wolf hunts we witnessed in the park. On our last morning, we caught up with the pack after the prey had already been caught and dispatched, witnessing one Indian Wolf carrying just the blood-soaked head of an antelope that had been torn apart.

Another strong sighting in our time in Blackbuck National Park was that of the Indian Striped Hyena, which stumbled across a newborn antelope calf in the grasslands in front of us. One minute, the Hyena was trotting through the grass, the next, dangling carefully from her jaws was the tiny body of a newborn Blackbuck calf.

The nursing Hyena carried the fallen calf almost delicately – rather than savagely – as she transported it back towards her cubs concealed deep within the scrub. There was something unexpectedly tender in the scene despite its brutality; another reminder that predators exist not out of cruelty but out of necessity.

Whether the calf was hidden by its mother or left behind due to frailty or stillbirth, we will never know.

Among our birding highlights in Blackbuck National Park were the Greater Spotted and Indian Spotted Eagles, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Steppe Eagle and Short-toed Snake Eagle.

Finally, after a last incredible meal at the Blackbuck Lodge, our taxis arrived to take us to Ahmedabad and start our journeys home. I loved every moment of our 2026 India Wildlife Spectacular Tour. It was, simply, one of the best Wild Images tours I have ever had the pleasure of leading.