

FACE TO FACE WITH INDIA'S ICONIC FELINE

# THE TIGERS OF TADOBA

A successful expedition to one of the world's best destinations to encounter and photograph the endangered Royal Bengal Tiger







Royal Bengal or Indian tiger ■  
Panthera tigris, female.  
On the previous page, a large male  
relaxes in a nullah.





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PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

*T*adoba Andhari Tiger Reserve is a tiger reserve in the Chandrapur district of the State of Maharashtra in central India. Together with several other well-known "crown jewels" among India's National Parks - notably the celebrated and often crowded Ranthambhore, Bandhavgarh, Kanha and Corbett - it is also one of the best spots anywhere in the world to encounter and photograph the Royal Bengal (or Indian) tiger in its environment. Many jokingly say that when in Tadoba it's not a matter of "if" one will see a tiger - but "how many" tigers will be spotted during the trip.

That might be a slight exaggeration, but it is a fact that our trip there - fueled by some wild tales we had repeatedly been hearing from several Indian wildlife photographers and personal friends - has been a complete success, with many repeated sightings of the iconic and severely threatened feline at close quarters. Indeed, Tadoba has much to be recommended for, besides tigers: being located in Maharashtra, it still is relatively affordable compared to the Tiger Reserves of Rajasthan, where high fees and taxes are commonly charged; it offers excellent accomodation near the protected area,

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*Male Royal Bengal or Indian tiger Panthera tigris.*





*Female Royal Bengal or Indian tiger Panthera tigris on the prowl.*



with very good Gypsy drivers and experienced guides permanently available; it features loving, rolling Central Indian landscapes of hills and forests; and it is spectacularly rich in other species of great interest to the wildlife photographer, from mammals to birds and reptiles.

### THE TADOBA ANDHARI TIGER RESERVE

Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (commonly known among its aficionados as TATR) is the largest National Park in Maharashtra, with a total area of the reserve of 1,727 km<sup>2</sup>. This includes Tadoba National Park itself, created in 1955 and notable as Maharashtra's oldest and largest National Park. It is one of India's 43 "Project Tiger" tiger reserves. There are more than 80 tigers (as of Dec 2015) in the reserve, one of the highest densities in all of India. The name "Tadoba" is the name of the God "Tadoba" or "Taru", praised by the tribal people who live in the dense forests of the Tadoba and Andhari region, while the Andhari River that meanders through the forest, gives the "Andhari" name. Legend says that Taru was a village chief who was killed in a

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*A massive male  
Royal Bengal or Indian  
tiger Panthera tigris  
patrols its range in a dry  
riverbed or nullah.*





■ The unmistakable squinting of a female Indian tiger *Panthera tigris* walking in the sun. Tigers often close or narrow their eyes when prowling in full light - to the dismay of the unaware photographer.



mythological encounter with a tiger. A shrine dedicated to the God Taru now exists beneath a huge tree, on the banks of the Tadoba Lake. The temple is frequented by *adivasis*, especially during the fair held every year in the Hindu month of Pausha, between December and January. The Gond kings once ruled these forests in the vicinity of the Chimur hills, and hunting in the area was completely banned in 1935. Two decades later, in 1955, an area of 116.55 km<sup>2</sup> (45.00 sq mi) was declared a National Park. The Andhari Wildlife Sanctuary was later created on the adjacent forests in 1986, and in 1995 both the Park and the Sanctuary were merged to establish the present tiger reserve. Tadoba Andhari Reserve is the largest national park in Maharashtra. Total area of the reserve is 625.4 square kilometres (241.5 sq mi). This includes Tadoba National

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Sloth bear *Melursus ursinus*, a relatively common sighting in Tadoba.





Left, Crested serpent eagle *Spilornis cheela* (notice the red ants cleaning its talons!); top right, Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*; bottom right, White-eyed Buzzard *Butastur teesa*.







Southern plains  
Indian grey langur  
*Semnopithecus*  
*dussumieri*, feeding  
on Flame-of-the-forest  
*Butea monosperma*.



Park, created in 1955 with an area of 116.55 square kilometres (45.00 sq mi) and Andhari Wildlife Sanctuary created in 1986 with an area of 508.85 square kilometres (196.47 sq mi). The reserve also includes 32.51 square kilometres (12.55 sq mi) of protected forest and 14.93 square kilometres (5.76 sq mi) of other areas. Densely forested hills form the northern and western boundary of the tiger reserve: the elevation of the hills ranges from 200 m (660 ft) to 350 m (1,150 ft). To the southwest is the very scenic 120 ha (300 acres) Tadoba lake, which acts as a buffer between the Park's forest and the extensive farmland which extends up to the Irai water reservoir. This lake is a perennial water source which offers good habitat for Marsh crocodiles (or Muggers) to thrive. Other wetland areas within the reserve include the Kolsa lake and Andhari river. Tadoba reserve covers

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*A stunningly beautiful mature Chital or Spotted deer Axis axis stag.*





■ *Left, male Nilgai or Bluebull Boselaphus tragocamelus; right, male Indian muntjac or Barking deer Muntiacus muntjak.*





*Silently prowling  
the bamboo groves*

Indian or Royal  
Bengal tiger  
*Panthera tigris*  
crossing  
a bamboo thicket.







Far left,  
Brown Fish Owl  
*Ketupa  
zeylonensis*;  
left, Indian roller  
*Coracias  
benghalensis*.



the Chimur Hills, and the Andhari Sanctuary covers the Moharli and Kolsa ranges. It's bounded on the northern and the western side by densely forested hills. Thick forests are relieved by smooth meadows and deep valleys as the terrain slopes from north to south, where cliffs, talus and caves provide refuge for several animals. The southern part of the Park is less hilly.

### A BEAUTIFUL TROPICAL DECIDUOUS FOREST

Tadoba reserve is a predominantly southern tropical dry deciduous forest with dense woodlands comprising about 87 per cent of the protected area. Teak is the predominant tree species, and among several other deciduous species, the unmistakable *Palas* or Flame-of-the-Forest *Butea monosperma* adds a rich tone of vibrant color to the forest during the dry season. Black plum trees grow in the riparian habitat around the lake, and at the waterhole at Panchadhara huge *arjun* trees are seen. Patches of grasses and huge bamboo thickets are found throughout the reserve. The climber *kach kujali* (velvet bean) found here is a medicinal plant used to treat Parkinson's disease. The leaves of *bheria* are used as an insect repellent; *beheda* is also an important traditional medicine found in the area.

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Indian or Royal Bengal tiger **■**  
*Panthera tigris*, a large male cooling off in a pond. Notice how incredibly massive and powerful the front paws are.



*Death walks  
like a shadow  
in the grass*

*This is how a prey might  
see its well camouflaged hunter -  
an Indian tiger Panthera tigris  
prowling in the tall grass.*



Top left, Common Hawk-Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius*;  
top right, Spotted Dove *Spilopelia chinensis*;  
bottom left, Grey jungle fowl *Gallus sonneratii*;  
bottom right, nesting pair of Yellow-footed green pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera*.





■ A subadult Indian leopard *Panthera pardus sub.fusca*. In Tadoba leopards are commonly seen in full daylight despite the presence of tigers.







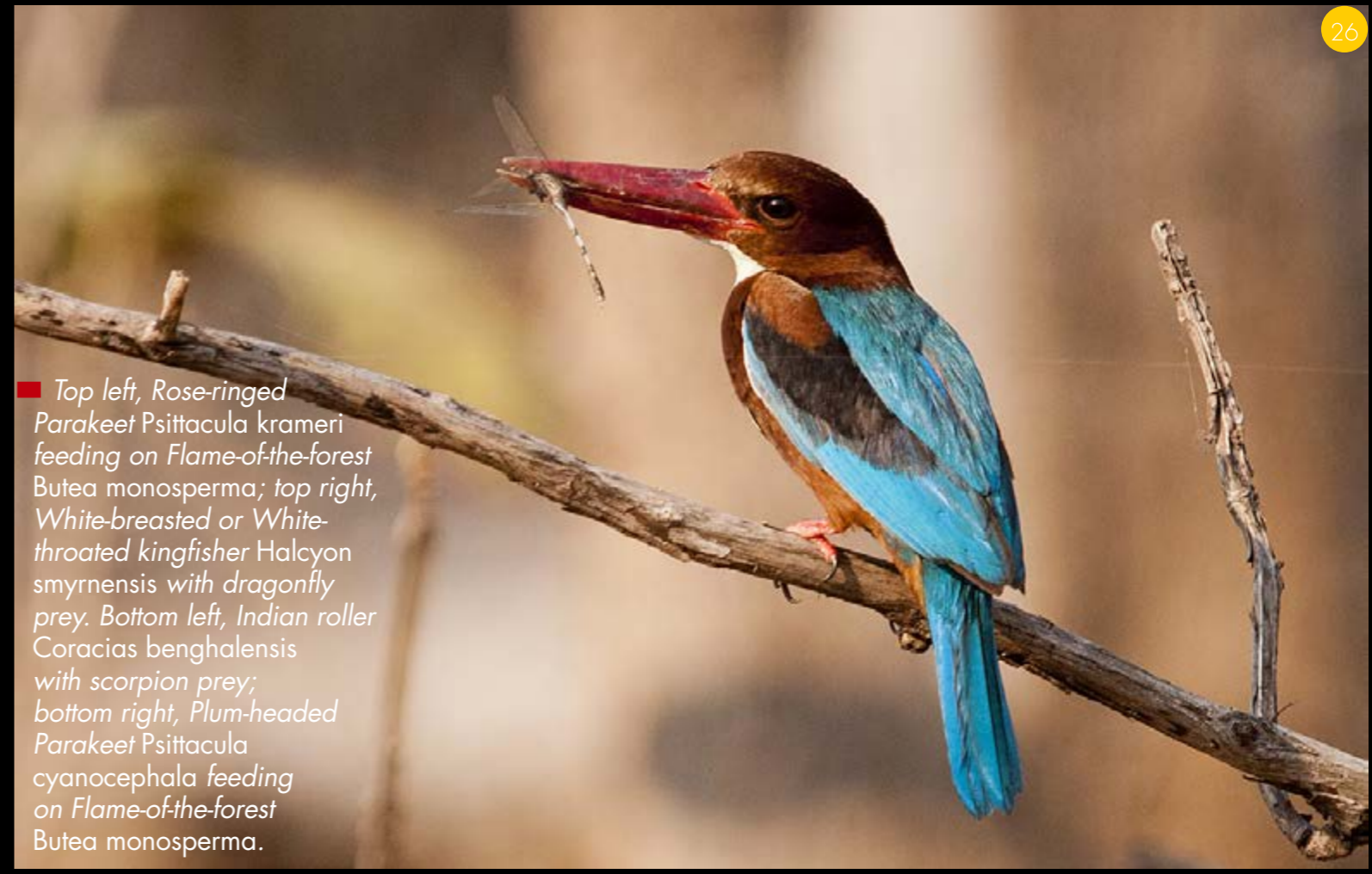
Male Indian Shikra  
*Accipiter badius*  
*sub. dussumieri.*

### AN IMMENSE VARIETY OF WILDLIFE

Aside from the flag species - the Royal Bengal tiger, which everybody wants to see and around which all tourist activity revolves - Tadoba is home to many other mammals, including Indian leopards (this is possibly the only place on Earth where leopards sharing the same environment with tigers can be regularly sighted during daytime - a unique occurrence whenever two apex predators are involved. Everywhere else leopards become strictly nocturnal whenever tigers - which are much more powerful - are present in the area), Sloth bears (another regularly sighted species), gaur, nilgai, dhole, Striped hyena, Small Indian civet, Jungle cat, sambar, Spotted deer, Barking deer, chital, chowsingha and Honey badger. Tadoba lake sustains a sizeable population of the Mugger or Marsh crocodile, which was once common all over Maharashtra. Other reptiles here include the endangered Indian python and the common Indian monitor. Terrapins, Indian star tortoise, Indian cobra and Russell's viper also to be found in Tadoba. The lake is an ornithologist's paradise with a wide diversity of water birds, and raptors. 195 species of birds have been recorded, including three endangered species. The Grey-headed fish eagle, the Crested serpent eagle, and the Changeable hawk-eagle are some of the most commonly observed raptors.

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■ Top left, Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* feeding on Flame-of-the-forest *Butea monosperma*; top right, White-breasted or White-throated kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* with dragonfly prey. Bottom left, Indian roller *Coracias benghalensis* with scorpion prey; bottom right, Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala* feeding on Flame-of-the-forest *Butea monosperma*.





Other interesting species include the Orange-headed thrush, Indian pitta, Crested treeswift, Stone curlew, Crested honey buzzard, Paradise flycatcher, Bronze-winged jacana and Lesser goldenbacked woodpecker. Warblers and the Black-naped blue flycatcher live here and the call of the Indian peacock is often heard. Up to 74 species of butterflies have been recorded in the area.

### TIGER AND MAN SIDE BY SIDE

We have already had occasion to write about the difficult but occasionally successful coexistence side by side of man and tiger in Tadoba (see the stunning Parting Shot at the conclusion of *Anima Mundi - Adventures in Wildlife Photography*

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A large Indian tiger  
*Panthera tigris* male  
patrolling its territory.







A splendidly camouflaged male  
Indian leopard *Panthera pardus*  
*sub.fusca* resting in a bamboo grove.



Left, Indian roller  
*Coracias benghalensis*;  
center, Savanna Nightjar  
*Caprimulgus affinis*;  
right, Asian  
paradise flycatcher  
*Terpsiphone paradisi*.








■ A small herd of Spotted deer or Chital *Axis axis*, with a lone Flame-of-the-forest *Butea monosperma* in the background.





Left,  prowling female  
Indian tiger  
*Panthera tigris*;  
right,  
Spotted deer  
or Chital  
*Axis axis*  
stag.





An iconic and highly symbolic image as a stunning female Indian tiger *Panthera tigris* stealthily crosses the tarmac road which bisects Tadoba, linking several villages inside the reserve.



issue 16). It is a difficult situation which most protected areas in India have to live with, given the nation's high population density and the powerful impact of many of its wild species (tigers, elephants, leopards). In 2013 there were 41,644 people living in and around the reserve in 59 villages of which 5 were inside the core zone, and these still were doing farming activity inside the core area. The process of rehabilitation is going on but the Indian bureaucracy has been at its slowest in the forest department. Recently the Navegaon village was rehabilitated and a grassland is now growing on the place where the village existed. There are 41,820 cattle with the villagers in the core and buffer zone. While cattle grazing is not allowed in the core zone, regulated grazing in the buffer zone is allowed to cattle of the village inhabitants. However, cattle of peripheral villages sometimes sneak into the reserve and

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Top left, Indian wild boar *Sus scrofa cristatus*; top right, Southern plains Indian grey langur *Semnopithecus dussumieri*. Bottom left, Sambar deer *Cervus unicolor*, fawn; bottom right, Red-naped or Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa*.





Marsh crocodile  
or Mugger crocodile  
*Crocodylus palustris*.



Left, Indian Grey  
Mongoose  
*Herpestes edwardsii*;  
center,  
Flame-of-the-forest  
*Butea monosperma*;  
right, Southern plains  
Indian grey langur  
*Semnopithecus  
dussumieri*.





■ A splendid male Indian leopard *Panthera pardus sub.fusca* crosses our path in full daylight.





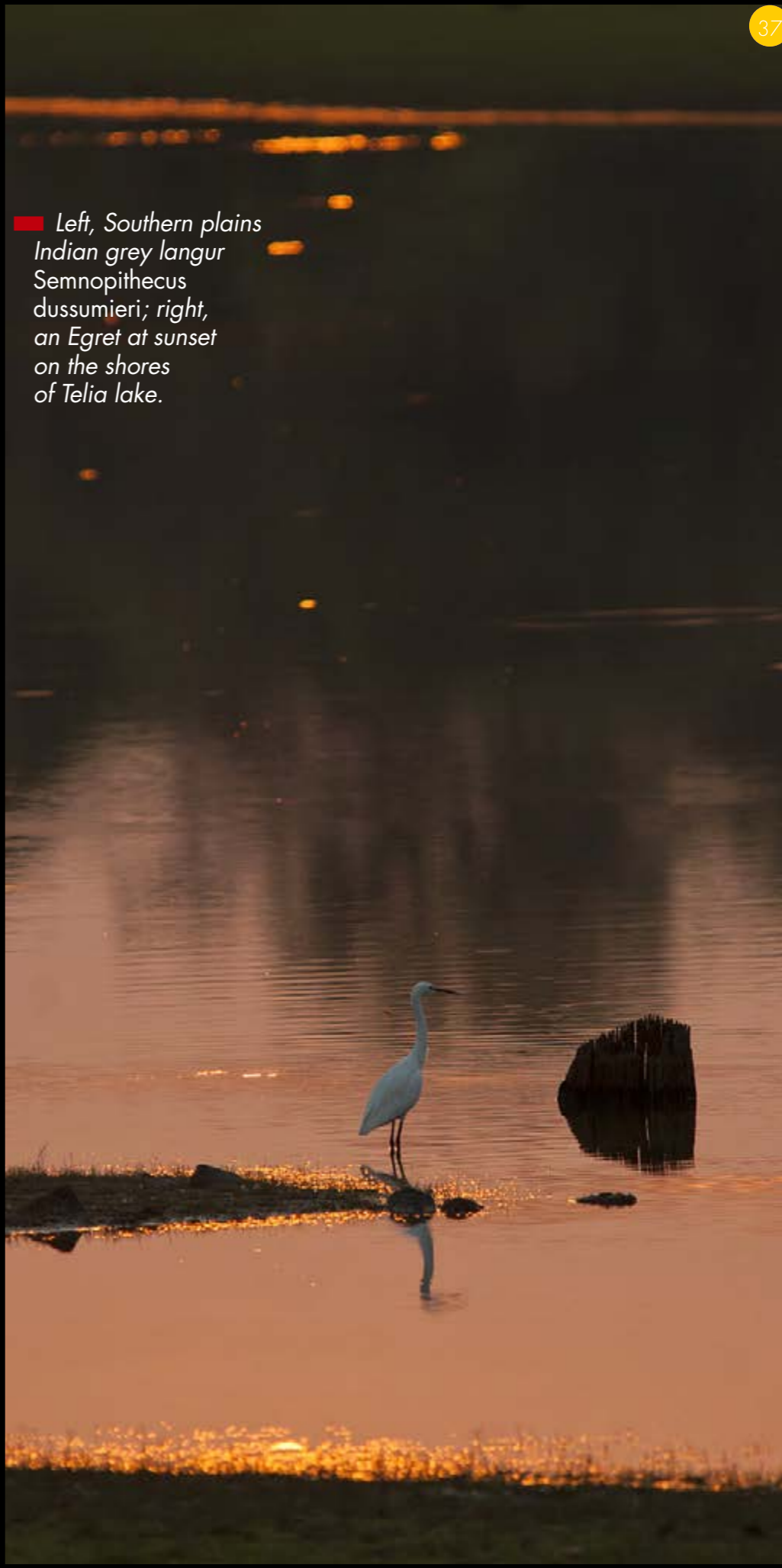


cause additional damage to the habitat. Forest fires are a constant problem in the dry season, consistently burning between 2% and 16% of the Park each year. With killing of domestic livestock by tigers and leopards as a frequent phenomenon in the neighboring villages, this has an adverse impact on the economic condition of the local people and results in antagonism towards the management. In the year 2013 - the date of last statistical information available to us - there have been up at least 4 people and 30-50 cattle heads killed by leopards, tigers or sloth bears.

**A PARADISE FOR WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY**

We deeply love India and its spectacular wildlife, and we have travelled across the Indian sub-continent far and wide, having visited a great number of its National Parks and tiger reserves. Several of these, such as Kanha, Ranthambhore, Bandhavgarh, Corbett and Kaziranga are quite possibly some of the whole world's most beautiful protected areas - but India's wildlife can be occasionally wary, cautious, and difficult to see. In Tadoba the wildlife - even the Royal Bengal tiger itself - is easier to see and approach than in many other places: for those interested in observing and photographing India's great natural heritage, it is a destination which cannot be missed. ●

■ *Left, Southern plains Indian grey langur Semnopithecus dussumieri; right, an Egret at sunset on the shores of Telia lake.*





■ *Yawning Indian tiger  
Panthera tigris - this huge  
male was resting in the  
middle of the dirt road as  
we were forced to change  
a burst tyre less then 20  
meters away from it. It never  
showed any signs of  
aggression.*







■ Left, a huge Gaur or Indian bison *Bos gaurus* - the world's largest bovid and a truly massive animal. Right, Southern plains Indian grey langur *Semnopithecus dussumieri*.







Marsh crocodile ■  
or Mugger crocodile  
*Crocodylus palustris*.






■ Left, Indian leopard *Panthera pardus sub.fusca*; right, close-up portrait of a Dhole or Indian Wild Dog *Cuon alpinus*, one of India's most efficient and relentless predators.







Royal Bengal or Indian   
tiger *Panthera tigris*  
female at dawn.



■ A large male Indian tiger *Panthera tigris* on the hunt - notice the incredibly powerful neck, shoulders and forelegs.








■ *Left, a rare sight: an exquisitely camouflaged Savanna Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis* on the nest, protecting its chick under its chest; right, male Indian tiger *Panthera tigris* cooling off in a seasonal pool.*






Royal Bengal   
or Indian tiger  
*Panthera tigris*  
female on the move.





*India's relentless and highly sociable hunter*



Dhole   
or Indian Wild Dog  
Cuon alpinus.



Top left, Gaur  
*Bos gaurus*; top right,  
Spotted deer or Chital  
*Axis axis*.  
Below left, Sambar  
deer *Cervus unicolor*;  
below right, Gaur or  
Indian bison  
*Bos gaurus*.





*Gaur Bos gaurus  
at sunset by one  
of Tadoba's beautiful and  
very scenic lakes.*







Very few encounters in the wild can rival meeting an Indian tiger *Panthera tigris* walking straight at you!





Left, Crested serpent eagle *Spilornis cheela*;  
middle, typical TATR forest trail across bamboo groves;  
right, Indian Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii*.







A beautiful and splendidly camouflaged female Indian leopard *Panthera pardus sub. fusca*.



Left, Park wardens on elephant back as they monitor a tiger's whereabouts; right, Southern plains Indian grey langur *Semnopithecus dussumieri*.





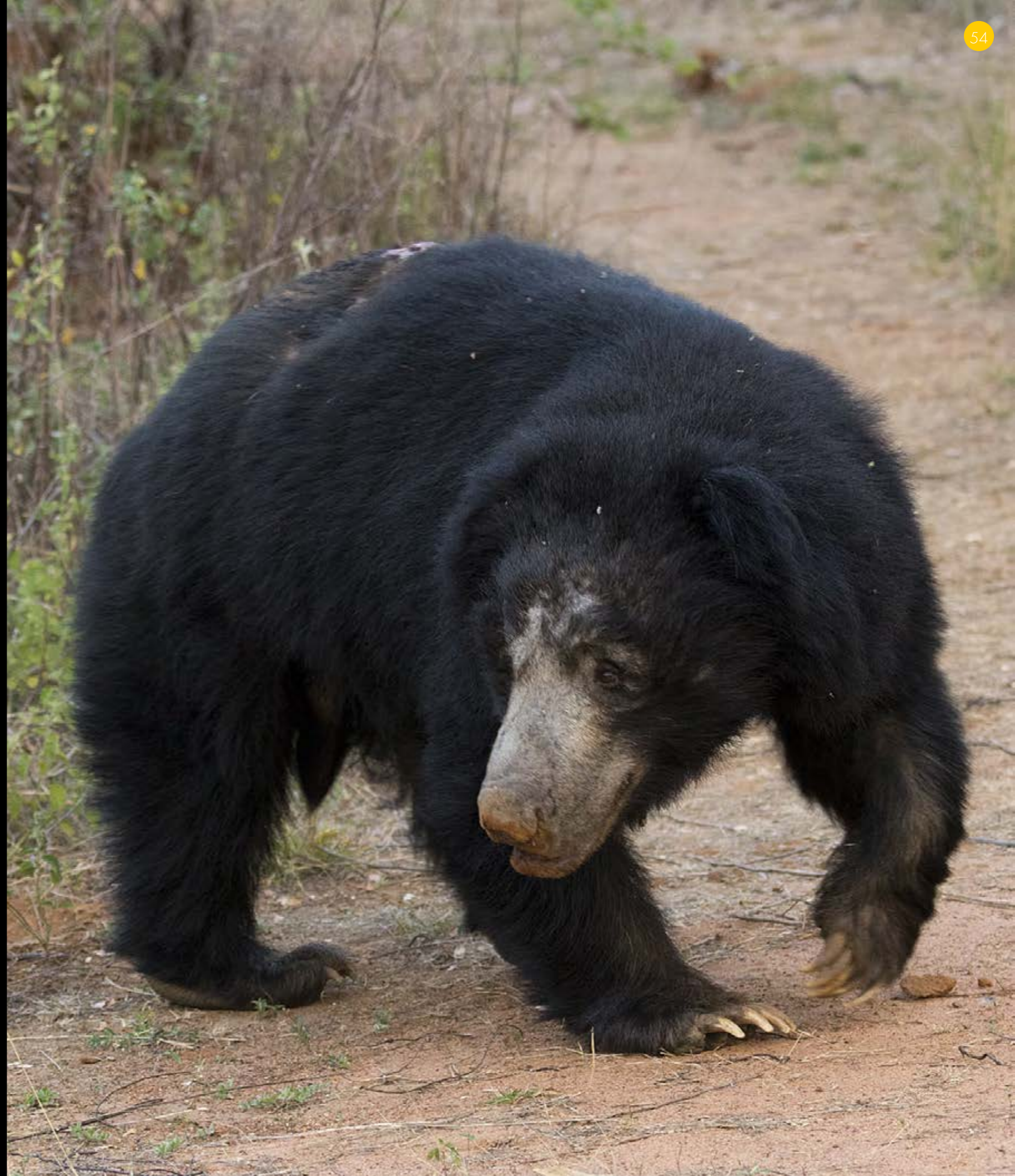


■ A very large Indian leopard *Panthera pardus sub. fusca* approaches closely. This male has a slightly crooked and drooping lower lip, probably due to an old wound.





■ Left, male Indian muntjac or Barking deer *Muntiacus muntjak*; right, Sloth bear *Melursus ursinus* - the fresh wound from an unsuccessful tiger attack is faintly visible on its back, complete with deep canine teeth punctures. Quite uniquely, the tigers of Tadoba seem to hunt Sloth bears even if usually this would not be considered a tiger prey species.







Indian leopard  
*Panthera pardus sub. fusca.*





A male Indian tiger is captured in profile, walking through a dense thicket of trees and branches. The tiger's orange and black stripes are clearly visible, blending with the dappled light and shadows of the forest. The tiger is moving from left to right across the frame. The background shows a blurred landscape with more trees and a hazy sky.

 Hunting male Indian tiger *Panthera tigris*, showing to advantage its striped camouflage.





■ A truly enormous male Gaur or Indian bison *Bos gaurus* - note the powerful musculature and the greatly developed vertebral ridge.





■ Left, Indian tiger *Panthera tigris*; right, Sloth bear *Melursus ursinus* female with two very young babies.





*Nature's masterpiece of raw power  
and supreme elegance*



Male tiger *Panthera tigris* - notice the enormously powerful front legs and the massive paws.





Left, close-up ■ portrait of a stunningly beautiful female Indian tiger *Panthera tigris*; right, the same individual faces an approaching tourist vehicle. Tigers often use forest tracks and dirt roads to move around the forest.





A large crowd of tourists is gathered in a forest, with a tiger in the foreground. The scene is set on a dirt road lined with trees. In the foreground, a tiger is walking towards the camera. Behind it, a line of green Mahindra SUVs is parked, with people leaning out of the windows and doors. A white van is also visible. Two men in uniform are walking on the right side of the road. The background is filled with tall, thin trees and a dense crowd of people.

A controversial but rather typical TATR image - while some hard-liners think of it in negative terms, we like to think it actually conveys a very positive image, with a crowd of local tourists awed by India's most iconic and endangered animal.



# The Tadoba Inheritance

by Bittu Sahgal and Lakshmy Raman

For those interested in reading and finding out more about Tadoba and its wildlife-rich environment, we can safely recommend *Sanctuary Asia Magazine's* stunning coffee-table book *The Tadoba Inheritance*, edited by Sanctuary's own legendary creator (and staunch activist) Bittu Sahgal and by Lakshmy Raman. The volume is illustrated with hundreds of truly beautiful images of the Reserve's wildlife and habitats and is packed to the brim of its well laid-out 160+ pages with in-depth, accurate, up-to-date information about TATR, its present, its future and the problems it has to face. *The Tadoba Inheritance* is the latest volume in a series wholly dedicated to India's spectacular and threatened natural heritage - other titles in the series are devoted to Kaziranga, Bharatpur, Corbett, Bandhavgarh, Periyar and the Sundarbans National Parks. *The Tadoba Inheritance* and its companion volumes in the series (some sadly out of print) can be ordered online from [www.sanctuaryasia.com](http://www.sanctuaryasia.com), the website of India's premier wildlife and natural history magazine.



■ Sloth bear *Melursus ursinus*; below, left, the cover of *Sanctuary Asia Magazine's* beautiful coffee-table book *The Tadoba Inheritance*.

