

India's Wild West

Mammal Watching

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

Depart UK

We'll depart in the evening from London arriving the next morning in Mumbai.

Days 2 – 4(am)

Jawai Leopard Conservation and Bera Sarai Lodge

After lunch at Mumbai Airport we'll connect with our flight up to Udaipur where we'll arrive late afternoon. From there it is an increasingly arid two hours drive to the Bera Sarai Lodge.

Nestled in the hills of the Aravalli Range halfway between Udaipur and Jodhpur the Bera Sarai Lodge is in the midst of fine Leopard country. The lodge itself nestles in the hills of the Aravalli Range halfway between Udaipur and Jodhpur, the ten acres of land with lovely large-windowed cottages is in such fine Leopard country that you've a decent chance of seeing them from the window of your room! In fact this lodge guarantees you a sighting if you stay two nights and apparently has always delivered!

The lodge centres on the work of Shatrunjay Pratap who for years has learned about, loved and worked hard to conserve, the Leopards of this area. His knowledge allows us all to enjoy these wonderful cats without disturbing their daily lives. We'll spend some time in the cooler parts of the day and at night looking for the Leopards and we've a decent chance of also coming across the lovely little Desert Wild Cat here. Sometimes included under Wild Cat this desert form is very slight and the markings of course are designed to make it difficult to see in the predominately pale environment. Sloth Bears and Caracals are also seen from time to time on the night drives here but a sighting of either would be a significant bonus.

Days 4(pm) - 6

Siana

Siana is also famous for its Leopards however we will be concentrating here more on its smaller brethren. Jungle Cat are tolerably common and so too the little Desert Wild Cat and we've more chances to try and connect with Caracal and even the diminutive Rusty Spotted Cat.

Days 7 & 8

Little Rann of Kutch Wildlife Sanctuary: Rann Riders & the Wild Ass Sanctuary

Next we'll explore the amazing landscape of the Little Rann of Kutch, a name redolent of 'somewhere else-ness'. One of the largest sanctuaries in India, the Little Rann of Kutch wildlife sanctuary spreads over 4950 square kilometres and safeguards a range of habitats from saline desert plains, arid grasslands, rocky and thorn scrub to lakes and marshes. It is home to millions of waterfowl along with desert birds such as bustards and sandgrouse and is the last refuge of the Khur, the Indian subspecies of Asiatic Wild Ass. These have been doing rather well of late and we are sure to see small herds of these charismatic and speedy animals during our stay.

For much of the year the area is a vast swamp, drying out to a desert-like scene interrupted by lagoons and small islands of vegetated land known as 'baits'. These provide cover for scarcer or more difficult to see animals such as Indian Hedgehog and Desert Hedgehog. Both Large and Small Salmon Arabs, pretty little butterflies both, flutter about the *Salvadora* bushes and we'll see a Common Grey Mongoose out on the hunt. At night we'll search areas adjacent to the reserve for Desert Cat and Striped Hyena.

Though the Wild Ass is the best known of the Rann's mammals there are thriving populations of Indian Gazelle and Blue Bull and this is one of the best places to seek out the globally threatened Indian Wolf, recently split from other wolves as a distinct species. Indian (Bengal) Foxes, Golden Jackals and Jungle Cats seek prey at dawn and dusk as Indian Coursers scurry across the cool ground and flocks of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse fly in to drink.

Days 9 – 11(am)

Velavadar National Park

We'll explore the beautiful savannah grasslands of Velavadar, popularly known as Blackbuck National Park. Over 3500 of these elegant creatures inhabit just thirty-four square miles so our chances of seeing them are good! The males are splendid creatures all dressed in black and tan and with sinuous twisting horns. Early morning will offer the best chance of encountering Indian Wolf and Striped Hyena – night drives are not allowed here.

After breakfast on Day 11 we'll travel straight to the Birder's Lodge at Gir and settle in for a four night stay.

Day 11(pm) – 15(am)

Gir National Park

World-famous as the last stronghold for the critically endangered Asiatic Lion Gir is also home to a rich community of mammals. For most visitors the Lions do take centre-stage, however visitors are still relatively few so we'll have plenty of chance to get to know these impressive cats without having to jostle for space. Maldhari cattle herders have several settlements inside the park and graze many thousands

of cattle within Gir's confines and these cattle are a significant source of food for the Lions. Not surprisingly there is an uneasy truce between the lions and the herders and any increase in people and cattle in the park is likely to have a detrimental impact on what is currently the healthiest population for a century. A hundred years ago there were just twenty left and now there are over six hundred. There are also good numbers of Leopards and chances of a sighting of these powerful cats are quite high.

Of course with such high predator numbers one needs lots of herbivores. Sambar and Spotted Deer are common and very visible whilst Wild Boar are positively abundant. There are also good populations of Nilgai, Indian Gazelle, and Porcupines, the latter a favourite target of the Leopards. We'll also hope to see Jungle Cats and Golden Jackals, Northern Plains Gray Langurs and Black-naped Hares, as well as the reserve's large populations of Mugger Crocodiles.

Honey Badger might be spotted energetically scampering through the nullahs though more certainly we'll come across Common Palm Civet and Ruddy Mongoose. Hares are common and we'll look for a variety of rodents including Indian Bush Rat, Bandicoot Rat, and various Gerbils and Jirds. This is a good place to look for the strange Chousingha, or Four-horned Antelope, unique amongst its kindred in having four rather than two horns. Though not uncommon here it is a shy wary creature so sightings are often brief!

Day 15(pm) to Rajkot and flight to Mumbai

After lunch we'll drive to Rajkot and take a late afternoon flight to Mumbai where we'll settle into a hotel close to the airport for the night.

Day 16 Departure

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