

# Southern India's Western Ghats w/ Andaman Islands Extension | Species List

## November 1 – 20, 2023 | with Naturalist Journeys



Compiled by: Naturalist Journeys host Greg Butcher with help from lead guide Avijit Sarkel of Vana Safaris; our wonderful guides Vic, Nara, and Danish; and participants Brenda and Tom, Alice and Art, Monna and Virginia, and Kay, Pam, and Reba.

**Summary:** It was Naturalist Journeys' first trip to South India and South Andaman Island. We started on South Andaman Island and saw 13 of the 18 species with "Andaman" in the name (and heard 3 of the others). The highlights of the trip were the safari expeditions into Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, where we saw tigers, dholes (wild dogs), elephants, gaurs, a sloth bear, Sambar and Chital deer, wild boars, langurs, and macaques, in addition to an amazing variety of birds.

We saw 21 bird species with "Indian" in the name, all ten "Malabar"-named bird species, 5 of the 7 "Niligiri" species, and both of the "Sri Lanka" species found in south India. In other words, we saw lots of endemics!

Here is the link to all the birds we saw on the main tour (225 species): <https://ebird.org/tripreport/174499>

And here is the link to all the birds we saw on the tour and the extension (284 species): <https://ebird.org/tripreport/174489>

Below is a summary of the mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and a few other interesting species from the trip:

**MAMMALS: — I learned a lot about Indian mammals from the book “Indian Mammals: A Field Guide” by Vivek Menon (2014). It’s an unusual book with a lot of extra information not found in most field guides.**

**Indian Flying Fox** *Pteropus giganteus* — This is the big fruit-eating bat. We saw at least one on several days and saw many from the boat near dusk at Nagarahole Tiger Reserve.

**Smooth-coated Otter** *Lutrogale perspicillata* — We had a group of 3 in the water at Nagarahole Tiger Reserve.

**Three-striped Palm Squirrel** *Funambulus palmarum* — I never should have said chipmunk! This small squirrel looks a lot like a chipmunk, but chipmunks are only found in North America. This squirrel species does fine near humans, and the first one we saw was on a rooftop. We saw them on six different days.

**Jungle Palm Squirrel** *Funambulus tristriatus* — This species is endemic to the western Ghats. We only had it on one day at Eravikulam National Park near Munnar, which is where we also had the Nilgiri Tahr.

**Indian or Malabar Giant Squirrel** *Ratufa indica* — These are among the largest squirrels in the world. We saw them on six different days and had relatively close, leisurely looks several times.

**Grizzled or Sri Lankan Giant Squirrel** *Ratufa macroura* — This species has a very small range in India, only a small portion of the western Ghats. We saw it on a travel day from Pollachi to Chinnar to Munnar.

**Nilgiri Langur** *Semnopithecus johnii* — We saw this species of monkey on three days, including two in the Periyar Tiger Reserve.

**Tufted Gray or South-eastern Langur** *Semnopithecus priam* — We had this species just once while driving from Nagarahole Tiger Reserve to Ooty.

**Malabar Gray or South-western Langur** *Semnopithecus hypoleucos* — This was the first langur we saw frequently in Nagarahole Tiger Reserve. The langurs have black faces and are more restricted to trees than the super-tame macaques.

**Bonnet Macaque** *Macaca radiata* — We saw these pink-faced monkeys essentially every day. They were super-tame, often eating food provided by humans.

**Stripe-necked Mongoose** *Urva* (formerly *Herpestes*) *vitticollis* — It was a similar color to the Wild Dogs (dholes), so I must admit I was a bit disappointed when I realized it was a mongoose. Nonetheless, a pretty interesting critter and a vicious carnivore for its size. We had good looks on two days in Nagarahole Tiger Reserve. This species is endemic to the western Ghats.

**Indian Gray Mongoose** *Urva* (formerly *Herpestes*) *edwardsii* — This is a much more common and widespread mongoose. However, we only saw it once. Mongooses are omnivorous, but eat eggs, birds, and mammals along with everything else.

**Tiger** *Panthera tigris* — We did it! We all had amazing looks at a female tiger in the afternoon and half of us also saw a male tiger the same morning. A female tiger is between 220 and 350 pounds. I first saw the female chasing away the pack of wild dogs, then she stood motionless, not caring a bit about us. Finally, she walked slowly across the track and into the brush. I will never forget! There may be only 1,600 tigers in all of India. Ours were at Nagarahole Tiger Reserve.

**Dhole or Asian Wild Dog** *Cuon alpinus* — We spent a lot of time with presumably the same pack of dholes at Nagarahole Tiger Reserve. Half our group saw the pack stalk a Sambar. When they gave up on the Sambar, they strolled past our vehicles and headed down the track until they encountered the female tiger. They retreated quickly and let out quite a scream, presumably to reform the pack. The next day we found the pack idling near the water and engaging in a lot of social play. It is rare to share so much time with social predators like these!

**Sloth Bear** *Melursus ursinus* — Half of our group saw this bear at Nagarahole Tiger Reserve. Unfortunately, I was not in that group, so I don't know much about the sighting, but I wish I had been there! Kay says: "The sloth bear came from our left and crossed the road in front of the Jeep. He ambled off through the lantana hedgerow to the right. He seemed unaware of/unconcerned with our presence."

**Asian Elephant** *Elephas maximus* — At Nagarahole Tiger Reserve, we saw mothers and calves and males with big tusks. We saw wild and domestic elephants. We didn't see large numbers, but we had quite a variety.

**Wild Boar or Indian Wild Pig** *Sus scrofa* — I've been on tours where Wild Boars were a big deal, but they were pretty much over-shadowed by other mammals on this tour. We saw them every day in Nagarahole Tiger Reserve.

**Gaur** *Bos gaurus* — Gaurs are massive wild cows (related to, but a different species from, domestic cows). We saw them in Nagarahole Tiger Reserve. While half of us were seeing a bear, the rest of us saw a group of about 10 Gaurs with calves, cows, and bulls all mixed together. We also saw a smaller group of Gaurs at dusk the night before.

**Nilgiri Tahr** *Nilgiritragus hylocrius* — We saw several of these wild goats in Eravikulam National Park near Munnar, including several that were very tame. The park was established specifically to protect this species, which has a small range in the western Ghats.

**Northern Red Muntjac or Barking Deer** *Muntiacus vaginalis* — I'm not sure if anyone saw this species, but Danish called one out from the van at dusk, and I missed it in the dark.

**Sambar (Deer)** *Rusa unicolor* — What a contrast between Sambars and Chitals! Sambars are large and solitary, while Chitals are small and social. We saw hundreds of Chitals, but only a handful of Sambars. The field guide says that Sambars are the preferred food of tigers. We saw that they can defend themselves against wild dogs. Sambars are similar in size to a North American elk.

**Chital or Spotted Deer** *Axis axis* — Both species of deer were in Nagarahole Tiger Reserve. I was surprised to see all stages of antlers in the herds: small antlers with velvet, full racks, a male with just one rack, and another that had just lost its rack. One of the drivers confirmed that the females breed throughout the year, so I guess it makes sense that males would be in peak condition at different times of the year. I think the largest group we saw might have had 200 animals, including bucks, does, and fawns.

**REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS: — The reference I have is “A Naturalist’s Guide to the Reptiles of India” by Indraneil and Abhijit Das (2017).**

**Asian Common Toad** *Duttaphrynus melanostictus* — We had some of these on our first couple of days.

**Mugger Crocodile** *Crocodylus palustris* — Great looks at a large crocodile from the boat at Nagarahole Tiger Reserve.

**Indian Black Turtle** *Melanochelys trijuga* — One of several turtles we saw at Nagarahole Tiger Reserve.

**Asian House Gecko** *Hemidactylus frenatus* or **Spotted House Gecko** *Hemidactylus parvimaclatus* — We had a gecko, but aren’t sure which one.

**Bengal Monitor** *Varanus bengalensis* — We saw this on Andaman Island. It can grow up to 5 feet long.

**Indian Trinket Snake** *Coelognathus helena* — We had this snake at Nagarahole Tiger Reserve. It is a slender nonvenomous constrictor that can grow to as long as 5 feet.

**Black Snake** — We had a black snake in the Periyar Tiger Reserve, but I’m not sure which species it was.

**OTHER INTERESTING CREATURES:**

**Leech!** — No animal on our trip created more conversation than the leech, not even the tiger. Here’s what Wikipedia has to say: “Leeches are segmented parasitic or predatory worms that comprise the subclass Hirudinea within the phylum Annelida. They are closely related to the oligochaetes, which include the earthworm. The best-known species are hematophagous, attaching themselves to a host with a sucker and feeding on blood, having first secreted the peptide hirudin to prevent the blood from clotting.” Several of us attracted leeches that drew blood, but thanks to the leech socks we wore, we were able to remove most leeches before they reached our skin.

**Giant Wood Spider or Northern Golden Orb Weaver** *Nephila pilipes* — We saw these large spiders with large webs everywhere. They are found all over East and Southeast Asia and Australia.