



TRIP TO DUDHWA BANDHAVGARH AND RANTHAMBHORE 2010.

We departed for India on May 20th, travelling with me on this trip was Mandy Lockwood, from Leicester also, who is keen to learn more about our work, see Tigers in the wild and see how her donation is utilised. We departed Heathrow, London at 21.45pm, landing in Delhi at 09.55 hrs (IST). We collected our luggage and cleared customs, then we changed our currency into rupees, once having done this, I called a friend of mine Amit Khandewal, he lives in Gurgaon and he was to collect us. We met outside around 12.40, spending the afternoon at his flat. The weather was very hot, with the temperature around 47 degrees. We then went for a meal around 19.00hrs before we had to be at the station for our train that was due to depart for Shahjehanpur at 22.10. We thanked Amit for looking after us, our train departed on time and was due to arrive in Shahjehanpur at 04.00, we arrived eventually at 05.20 and was met by one of Vision India members in a taxi.

We then departed for Dudhwa in the taxi, we had one stop on the way, the journey took us around 2.5 hours. We were to stay the first night at a hotel called TIGER DEN, a government run hotel, which had some amenities, it is basic with fans, some a/c. It is situated about 10 minutes walk from Vision

Indias base area, 20 minute drive from the Dudhwa National Park itself. We met Anurag and some of his organisation there. We then after a short meet, I had a shower and changed some clothes, Mandy had a rest, I then went for a walk and met Anurag and his team at there base area. They took me for a drive round the area they are patrolling at present ,close to the railway line, there is a Tigress, with 2 cubs in this area, we met some villagers who are looking after their sugarcane fields and work with Anurag in communicating sightings, though also at this time, we noticed villagers encroaching with their cattle into the forest. We also went to Tiger Haven, this was the home of Billy Arjan Singh, who passed away in January, aged 92. He is to me and always will be the person ,that is an inspiration, his conservation work will I hope inspire others to get involved. He did not take no for an answer and the forest department would rarely support him, he did stand up for the Tiger more than anyone person I can think of .The buildings are being raised, I believe so that when monsoon comes, the floods will not cause the buildings to be 2 feet under water, as there runs a river at the back of them.

In the afternoon, we went on safari into Dudhwa, it has been 11 years since I last did this, the park is very rich in wildlife, sal trees and terai for the wildlife and Tigers.We were fortunate to sight a Tigress lying in the short grass at around 200 yds away.We also whilst in the forest observed forest guards patrolling on bicycles and camera traps for census.

Next morning we went on safari at 05.00. We had the first half by jeep and the second half by elephant, which for me is the best way to enjoy the forest and wildlife. We observed many birds, fish, rhino and other prey species. Later that day we moved upto Dudhwa forest rest house ,this is were I first stayed on my last trip here, we were to spend 2 days here .The food and accommodation was not so good ,as Mandy was suffering from a bad case of stomach pains and diarrhoea. On the afternoon safari, we observed again forest guards patrolling, one who had a SLR firearm, the other had a stick and again they were on bicycles. We once again spotted a Tigress ,this time in different place. We also observed that she had a cub that looked about 6-7 months old, this was back in the long grass, around 100 yards from the Tigress. We also observed more camera traps. In the evening we had our evening meal with the team from Vision India.

Next Morning, we went on safari, Mandy did not accompany us as she was not feeling well. We observed the forest guards on patrol on bicycles, also a team checking the camera traps. We observed many prey species, including wild boar, chital, marsh deer, though on this occasion no Tiger. The afternoon safari, we again observed many prey species, we also spoke to the Wildlife Trust of India team who were putting out and checking the camera traps. They told us they had caught many animals on camera, also Tiger and sloth bear. The traps will be in place for about a month, less if the monsoon comes sooner, they had not seen Tiger themselves. We had our evening meal with Vision India members, Tiger Awareness purchased some fleeces and Mandy also purchased some t-shirts for the team to wear in the winter months, as it gets cold in November through to February.

In the morning May 25th, at 06.00, we visited Tiger Haven again to pay my last respects, at Billy Arjan Singhs grave. We had the opportunity to have a good look around. The buildings are in need of sorting out, you could see antlers, Billy weights that he would train with in the mornings. I believe they are going to make it into museum / learning institute, which I hope will work out, as it would be a big loss to Tiger people. We then went to Palia, a town 10 kms from the forest to confirm our booking in the forest rest house at Sonaripur. We spent 1.5 hours waiting for the deputy director of the park to arrive, he apologised for being late and asked about our visit. It took a further 1 hour or so to sort all the paperwork, the forest department bureaucracy gone mad. I made some calls to let other know about our plans, also to confirm details for later on the trip. On the way to the rest house in Sonaripur, we visited a village called Sumar, which is situated in the middle of Dudhwa national park. The population of this village is 3000 plus people, they have taken up a lot of forest area, they have many cattle also. I believe also there has been a court ruling to move them since 2005. We had a cup of chai with the village principal, many young lads were about, one of the ladies showed us a traditional dress. He explained the night before elephant had been there, at the waterhole they have, though no Tiger, they had been seen a couple of kms away from the village. Though on my return to the UK, I watched footage on a t.v station, where the same principal admitted to giving bribes to forest department for wood from forest. I hope they can accommodate the villagers somewhere more suitable, thus returning the forest to the wildlife.

We eventually arrived at Sonaripur at around 16.00 hrs, tidy rest house, one of the Vision India members works there also with forest department ,he looked after all our needs. We were about to go into the forest about 17.00 and a herd of wild elephants came very close to our camp, there were about 20 plus in the herd. We observed them for about 20 minutes. We went into the forest and observed prey species though no Tiger on this visit.



Next morning, we went into the forest, Mandy was not feeling well, she stayed behind to get some rest and hopefully get over her ailments of the stomach. We observed 2 male elephants at a waterhole close to camp. The rest of the time in the forest we observed prey species such as chital, marsh deer. The weather was still hot, after some breakfast we later in the morning went to Pail to purchase some items to help Vision India in there work. We also needed to get Mandy a new suitcase, as her one from auk, the handle was falling off. We purchased 5 cycles for Vision India to use, they were mountain bikes with off road tyres, which would be better

for the terrain they work in, also some pumps and baskets for the cycles. We also purchased a solar panel, which would be erected at the office. We left to go to the office, the solar panel was erected in a temporary position, allowing them to use it, until they could get a more permanent pole for this to go on the roof. Some of the cycles were also delivered at this time, with the rest being built up and delivered next morning. Mandy also gave a donation of 5000 Rupees to help with the teams work , Tiger Awareness also did the same. After this we went into the forest, we observed a young male elephant grazing. We then went to one of the machans , that are situated around the forest. 10 minutes passed, a couple of vehicles came and went , patience for our part paid off, as I asked all to be quiet as I observed a Tiger stalking through the long grass, though in some parts there was gaps, there was also a water pool to our front. The Tigress was very wary, which is good for there survival, there was some noise in our area, with people also going up and down the stairs, this made the Tiger go back from the direction it had come. We waited a while longer, though we had no further sightings of her, also it was getting dark . We had our evening meal with the Vision India team .The next morning into the forest, we went at 05.00, and we observed a male elephant at the waterhole close to camp again, though nothing else at this time. We were not in the forest long on this occasion, as we had to make our way to meet the taxi for Lucknow. This picked us up at 11.00, on the way to Lucknow, were to stop of at Anurags family house at Lakhimpur. The family made us chai and cold drinks. We also had some sweets, which were very nice ,so Anurag had a friend go out and buy me a box of them. We arrived at Lucknow train station around 16.30. We were to catch the Chitrakut Express at 17.30 , we departed 10 minutes late. We arrived in Katni, just over an hour late at 07.20 next morning.

We were met by a taxi as usual, to take us to Tala, Bandhavgarh. The journey is a 2 hour drive, some of the roads are rough, though for most part generally in good condition. On arrival at Wild Haven resort and getting our accommodation sorted, I had a good talk with my friend Aqeel Farooqi on Dudhwa. The Dudhwa leg of the trip was very good, Anurag and his team looked after us very well, we will be supporting their work more this year and further on . They are doing valuable work in the area and looking to build their network and area covered.

After lunch, we went into Bandhavgarh National Park. This is where on May 19th, the Jhujhura Tigress had been killed by a park vehicle illegally entering the park , she died a few hours later, leaving behind 3 young cubs On this issue, we are pressing for a CBI inquiry. The safari, we went into Magdhi zone, we observed many prey species and heard alarm calls of chital, though no Tiger sightings .

Next morning, we went into Magdhi zone again, there were no Tiger sightings , though many prey species. After some breakfast, around 10.00 I went to meet Micheal Vickers at Jungle Lodge, 15 minute walk from Wild Haven resort, 2 minutes from Tala gate. On arrival, I met Mikes friend Vivek, who then went to let Mike know that I had arrived. We talked for a few hours on Tiger matters and then I arrived back at Wild Haven around 14.00. Shortly after Avantika Chandra and her friend arrived, we all then went into the forest at Tala zone. On this trip into the forest, we observed 5 Tigers, all at the later part of the safari, which is when it starts to cool down for the cats. We had good close up of my friend B2, he looked in good condition, it was great to see him so close , though some of the jeeps were jostling for a better position, I asked our driver to give him some space, all could still get there photos. He then went into a nallah and we left for camp, which is were we spotted the other 4

Tigers stalking. We went to camp in high spirits, seeing the Tiger in the wild, causes excitement among people, which is so good to see. On arriving back, I checked on Mandy, as she had not come on the afternoon safari as she was still not feeling to well.

In the evening I had a meeting with some of the Save The Stripes team, Avantika was also present. We had a constructive meeting, talking about ways to go forward and help in the future in the Bandhavgarh area, one of these ways is in solar panel fencing. I said that Tiger Awareness would support them were we could. We would also talk to others that could help their work in the area.

Next morning we went into the Tala zone, Avantika and friend went into Magdhi zone, due to the restrictions of only 20 vehicles being allowed in Tala zone. There had been 2 zones closed, due to the death of the Jhujhura Tigress, as previously mentioned. On our visit we had sighting of 2 cubs, one male and one female cub. Sorry for not mentioning areas, as I feel it might be helpful to the poaching network. Towards the end of our time, the male cub crossed the road about 30 yds from the back of our vehicle.

After having my breakfast, I was made aware of one of the guides who had come to camp with about 10 villagers that were looking for compensation for loss of cattle. On recent trips, I have compensated cases, I told them that the cases would be looked into, I did not pay for any of these cases, as when they were looked into, the cases were already paid by forest department. On our visit to the forest in the afternoon, we first of all went to where we had observed the cubs earlier in the day. The cubs were there, though could only be partially sighted. A forest official vehicle came to join the 7 vehicles already there, a man got out the jeep with a forest guard to get a better look. He then proceeded to walk with the guard a further 200

to 300 yards into the forest to get a better look. He got so close that there was a roar, which was the Tigress warning them off, only then did they come back to the vehicle, we found out this person was the DEPUTY DIRECTOR of the park, this was a foolish act and totally unacceptable abuse of authority. After this we went into a different area, where we watched a large male Tiger lying next to the road. After safari, we went back to Jungle Lodge to make Mike Vickers and others, aware what had happened. I also just before going back to Mike's, spoke to a person who was going to report the incident to the Field Director of the park. Next morning in the park, we observed Tigress with one of her cubs by the stream. We then spent just over an hour observing a male Tiger, there was only one other jeep with us at the time. After, we then went to the centrepoint, an area where you can get a cup of chai, coffee and other food items. It also where you can gain more information on sightings. On the way back to camp, the guide spotted a Tigress in a nallah, we observed her for about 10 minutes, then went back to Wild Haven. We also observed on this trip good prey base, including wild boar. The wind was picking up, the clouds were gathering, feeling the monsoon is not far away. This helped as the temperatures are still in the mid 40s.

The afternoon safari, Aqeel and his son accompanied us into the park, we spent a lot of time waiting in an area of the park, where we had observed a male Tiger going to rest earlier in the day. He came out after about an hour or so of waiting. After getting a few photos, we departed the area, as many vehicles were acting in the wrong manner for the forest. We then left the park. At the gate there was a film crew from NDTV, who were asking people's opinion on the way Bandhavgarh National Park is being run. I gave my opinion, also mentioning that the previous day's incident with the deputy director walking into the forest. We also met Rajesh, One of the guides who

had become unemployed due to this cut in vehicles into Tala zone. We mentioned to him that we would come and meet him and his family after next mornings visit to the park.



Next morning, we entered into the park, after 5 minutes of entering, there was a close up sighting of the Bamera male, he is trying to take over the Tala zone as the dominant male, this has been for the last 5 – 6 years the position of B2, who still patrols were he likes. This is my first sighting of him, he is a big Tiger weighing in around 300 kgs. He stopped for a drink of water, we also observed 2 young cubs in the area , he would be the father, they were in no danger. We then a short time after spotted a Tigress resting in the long grass. We had no further sightings on this visit. After some breakfast, I went to visit Rajesh Travedi at his house, one of his relatives told me that he had gone to meeting at the interpretation centre with Rajesh Ghopal of National Tiger Conservation Authority.

I went to the Interpretation centre, there were many people there, local villagers, drivers, guides, forest officers and media. I asked Rajesh if I could be present, he said that this would be a good . Mr Ghopal and Mr Patil, Field Director of Bandhavgarh National Park arrived at the meeting about 15 minutes later. Mr Ghopal firstly apologised for being late, he explained the reason for the meeting. This was to learn and discuss the issues of the way that Bandhavgarh National Park is being run. Many points were raised, the death of the Jhujhura Tigress, last years death of the cub from burns under a vehicle. The restriction of the vehicles into Tala zone, the future of the Jhujhura Tigress cubs. I also mentioned about the deputy director getting out of the car and going into the forest to get a closer look at the Tigress with cubs. He made many notes, listened to all points and said that an enquiry would be taken up by the authority deemed best to get answers and transparency to all the issues. He also expressed that the 3 cubs from Jhujhura Tigress that have been left behind are of most critical importance .They don't want Bandhavgarh to become a zoo. He also stated that forest officials should not be abusing there position of authority. After the meeting I said my good byes, though did not get a chance to do so to Mr Patil, as he was being interviewed by NDTV. I sincerely hope that a CBI inquiry will be held, to allow transparency and the issues dealt with. The park is a great park, though need stronger management in my opinion, as Mr Patils staff does not always do as he asks.

The afternoon visit to the park, we observed 2 young cubs, about 8/9 months old. We then went straight after to meet Rajesh and family. We had some chai, talked about the meeting and then went back to Wild Haven.

Next morning, was to be our last visit to the park. We had no sightings of Tiger, though we did observe a sloth bear for some time, also took some photos, as this is closest I had been to one . We also observed a couple of forest guards on patrol. The Bandhavgarh leg of the trip we did not help with any charity funds, as it was not possible to set up the children to visit, as they were on holiday and lived a distance from Wild Haven. We were looking to have a wildlife programme for them. It was good to see local local children being taken into the park for free. This is a programme that should be rolled out across the country. We left for Katni at 18.00m changing taxis , we arrived in Katni at 20.30, Mandy went to the cashpoint and we then departed for Sawai Madhophur at 22.00, 15 minutes late. We arrived at Sawai at 09.45, were Vipul , a friend of mine was waiting to take us the short trip to our hotel, the Regency.

We had some breakfast, checked some emails, as I had not used the computer for 10 days or so. We then went into the Park at 15.30, we also had a couple of American people in the jeep with us, this was there first trip to Ranthambhore . At the main gate to Jogi Mahal, I went over to a friend and person I work with Dharm Khandal, he is leading Tigerwatch, a local NGO, that rehabilitate Mogiya hunting families, they also have an anti- poaching and research team. We spoke for a couple of minutes, confirming our meeting the next day. About 30 minutes into the safari, a male Tiger was spotted, we observed the Tiger for a good one and a half hours. We then moved on and spotted a Tigress, believed to be his sister in the same area, they are about 2.5 years old, though our sighting of her was very short, as she shot out of a bush into new cover. We then went back to see if the male Tiger was there, he was, some chital came into sight, they had not spotted the male Tiger. He was very alert ,though they came close and made alarm calls , nothing further happened

and we left the park. After the safari, had some food and then went to meet Aditya Singh at his hotel, the Ranthambhore Bagh, though he was not back from Sri Lanka. I asked the staff to let him know, I had been, though he made no contact. I went back to the Regency, let Avantika and friend know the programme for next day .

Morning visit to park, we observed a 3 year old male Tiger in water, we spent about an hour watching him. It was a great site to see Tiger cooling off in the heat of the day. After leaving the park , I had some food and was dropped off at Tigerwatches office. I initially met Fateh Singh Rathore, as Dharm was in the village, Fateh called him and had someone make me some chai, we spoke for about 10-15 minutes and Dharm arrived. We talked for a short while longer, then went to his house to meet Divya his wife who, leads DHONK, which is an alternative way of employment in craftwork and embroidery for Mogiya people, this is then sold at local markets, they are looking to expand on this. It is good quality workmanship, having seen it and been given articles, on more than one occasion. We then spoke for about an hour, then went onto visit mogiya villages in Balas and Sawai Mansingh sanctuary. After that we went to purchase a motorbike that I promised Tiger Awareness would give for the anti poaching and research team. We purchased a 150 Pulsar Motorbike. It will be a big help for Tigerwatches work. We also donated some funds to help with a study of villages in Keladevi sanctuary, this will go to the government as a proposal to make Keladevi a natural corridor to Ranthambhore national Park. The study should be completed in 2 / 3 months time. The motorcycle was collected a little while later and we had some Tiger Awareness stickers put on it and we took some photographs . It was then ridden by Dharm to the Tigerwatch offices, to show other people, including Fateh Singh Rathore, who said thank you for the motorcycle.

After arriving back from the meeting, we went on safari. We observed a collared Tigress, who does not have any range area, she from information, wanders around where she pleases. We also observed the male and female Tiger, we had spotted the day before. After the safari, I had a meeting with Yadvendra Singh, President of the guides association in Ranthambhore, we talked about ways to help in going forward, one of those ways is to collect plastic inside the park, working with the forest department.

In the evening we watched a slideshow of wildlife by Vipul.

Next morning, we observed many prey species, especially Sambar and nilgai. The visit to the park was nearly over, when the dominant Tiger of the area was spotted, resting in the thickets. He could be recognised by the fact that he has a broken right canine. We had 10 – 15 minutes observing him, then went out of the park. We also on this safari picked up a lot of plastic. This I have not seen before on past trips. After some breakfast, we went to visit a village called Ranwal, I have visited here before and had promised a power converter to help keep the 3 computers in the village running. This village is around 2-3 kms from the edge of the national park. Mandy and Avantika, gave some items to the children. I had a look around, the roof needed some repair, I have promised some funds to help with this. We then went back to the Regency, we were to give 100 mosquito nets and some footwear that Mandy and Avantika had purchased to the forest guards, though we could not do this due to Tiger politics. The nets were to be given by Vipul a few days later.

Ranthambhore had been a successful leg of the trip, we helped with charity funds to local NGOs, also had great Tiger sightings and met some great people. We took the train at 06.30 to Delhi, arriving at 11.00 hrs. We then took a 30 minute taxi drive to our hotel. Mandy

had some rest, I made contact with Ambar Sharma , who runs Project Era Foundation in Bandhavgarh, we agreed to meet at 16.30 hrs. We had a meet for an hour, talking about our work; also I gave him a cheque for £600, which was from a person called Andy Watts in the UK. I was to send him further funds from Andy on my arrival back in UK.

Next day June 7th, we flew back to UK, after a 16 day trip, this was very successful in supporting organisations on the ground for Tiger conservation and villagers. We had great sightings of Tiger; I do not mention Tigers names unless, they roam areas, so as not to give information to people that may harm them. Tigers are the most majestic animal on this planet, we will and must support organisations on the ground, support villagers who support Tiger conservation, also helping forest guards that work with transparency and look to encourage others to get involved.

It is also important to add that without the support and organisation of friends from Wild Haven, Vision India, Vipul Jain, Tigerwatch this trip would be so much more difficult.

P. Davis

Tiger Awareness.