

A walk on the wild side

Illustrated throughout with more than a hundred stunning photographs, *Tracking the Tiger* is a celebration of the splendour and diversity of India's natural history for wildlife enthusiasts and travellers alike.

Text Pooja Mujumdar



It is late afternoon; a herd of chitals emerges onto the grassland—surrounded by a hardwood forest—to feed on the grass, forbs and fat red flowers. Hunkering in the tall prairie grass, a tiger creeps up on a deer grazing along the forest edge. He tenses up, all senses focused at the deer, waiting intently as they move closer. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, he rises to a half crouch and slinks into the thicker grass with slow, silent steps for the final rush. Suddenly, a deer ventures too near; the tiger springs up, and attacks.

That jolt of adrenaline, the fear and drama, and the ever-changing, breathtaking kaleidoscope of a forest are observed keenly through the lens of wildlife photographer Dhritiman Mukherjee as he accompanies automotive journalist and wildlife enthusiast Bob Rupani on a trail of 13 of India's tiger reserves. Their experiences are brought to life and passed on to the reader in the book *Tracking the Tiger*, authored by Rupani.

The impressive images of wildlife in the book—deftly captured in that fleeting, crucial instance—are visual evidence of the patience and planning that would have gone into taking the reader behind the scenes to show India's 'wild' wealth in all its glory.

In her foreword, Virginia A McKenna, actor, author, wildlife campaigner and Founder and Trustee of the Born Free Foundation (an organisation that works to stop animal suffering and protect threatened animal species), sums up what makes Rupani's book different from other coffee-table books on wildlife photography: "This is not a scientific book. It is a book for you and me, written and photographed by two people whose deep interest in and love of wild animals is infectious."

And it is to provide the reader this 'general' perspective on wildlife—one



that taps into the ordinary, the mundane, the normal and the commonplace in and around an Indian forest—that the duo travelled as regular tourists.

Over the course of 50 days, both Rupani and Mukherjee made several excursions to tiger reserves, including those at Bandhavgarh, Corbett, Kanha, Kaziranga, Nagarhole, Pench, Ranthambore and the Sunderbans, on the regular wildlife safaris arranged for all tourists, to click photos in real-time. In addition, no special permission was sought to visit parts of the reserve not accessible to tourists and no help with photo shoots was solicited from any official authority.

Their journey began in April 2013 at the Jim Corbett National Park—home to tigers, hog deer, Asian elephants, long-snouted gharial crocodiles, wild boar, langur monkeys, otters, birds of prey, cobras, and lizards. In the section of the book devoted to Corbett, you will see



wildlife at its natural best—for instance, there are photographs of an elephant languorously throwing mud on its back (pictured above), oriental dollarbirds resting on the road and even a kingfisher catching fish.

The slew of photographs from national parks across India elicit a mosaic of emotions from the reader—be it the



heart-warming scene of a tigress gently carrying her young one at Ranthambore, a herd of Asian elephants gathered at Corbett in a show of harmony, or rose-ringed parakeets playing at Kaziranga.

These sojourns have also helped Rupani provide interesting insights into the behaviour of the magnificent tiger. For one, did you know that unlike most other national parks, tigers in Bandhavgarh, Ranthambore and Tadoba are not shy of visitors? Or that, out of all the members of the cat family, the tiger protrudes its tongue to the highest degree, wrinkling its nose in response to another tiger's scent or marking in the area, in a response known as flehmen?

With large, vibrant photos bringing the words to life, *Tracking the Tiger* also chronicles the history of the national park and efforts to preserve the area, besides offering advice on the best time to visit, the nearest airports, the locations, sights and activities to do while visiting the area.

With its myriad glimpses of animals in the wild, *Tracking the Tiger* gives us an insight into a world that not many of us know about: that of the remarkable 'Kings of the Jungle'.



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