

# Wheels for claws

**A wondrous window to India's 'wild world' and the best places to see the tiger**

**I**t is good fortune indeed to live by one's passion. And, by that yardstick, Bob (Narayan) Rupani (right) is undoubtedly a happy man. The executive editor of *Auto India*, who is a pioneering automotive journalist, who started out with the *Indian Auto Journal* in 1986, is passionate about, well, cars, as well as travelling, and is also a wildlife enthusiast.

He believes the world is divided between people who have seen a tiger in the wild and those that have not. "Seeing a tiger roaming free in India's jungles is an unforgettable sight," he says in his foreword. "What's also special is that our forests are inhabited by a large variety of other animals and birds; India's tiger reserves are spectacularly beautiful and just being in them is a richly rewarding and rejuvenating experience."

Within a year of the release of his *More driving holidays in India*, a book Rupani wrote on the cultural and geographical diversity that India is and which was a sequel to his critically acclaimed *Driving holidays in India* of 2005, he has now come out with the equally absorbing and brilliantly illustrated *Tracking the tiger: 50 days in India's best tiger reserves*.

Before one is inclined to see Rupani's work as one more portrayal of Indian wildlife jostling to find space among the myriad others, usually engagingly authored, his contribution is in a niche of its own. Each photograph in this 144-page coffee table book, published by his family-owned Rupani Media, carries the date, time and on which it was taken. In a way, the photography was done in real time and the entire pictorial content compiled in just 50 days.

Almost all other wildlife books have photographs taken or compiled over a period of time, with the photographers often spending months, if not years, pursuing and photographing their subjects. Most secure special permissions, access, facilities,



etc, and almost all are assisted by various government authorities for the photo shoots and the tracking of animals. But no special arrangements were made or sought for this book. The photographs were taken on paid wildlife safaris in the regular vehicles used by tourists, in line with Rupani's intent to make his book as 'real and authentic' as possible so as to convey a fair idea of what a tourist can hope to sight in the featured 'Tiger Reserves'.

The photographic contribution was by Dhritiman Mukherjee, one of India's most respected nature and wildlife photographers, who recently got the prestigious Carl Zeiss Award for Conservation. He has photographed most of the important bird

areas in India and almost all the wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. He has the conviction that to be a better wildlife photographer, one has to be a better naturalist.

With *Tracking the tiger*, Rupani's aim is to create more 'friends of forests' by converting average nature fans into avid ones, those who would be committed to conservation. That was one reason why he was keen that his book provide a wondrous window to India's 'wild world' and highlight the best places to see the tiger – that is at the vortex of the jungle pyramid – and all the other wildlife that lives alongside it.

An imbalance in nature can prove devastating for the nourishing splendours that sustain us. And in the Indian context where the tiger is at the apex of our natural world, his status reflects the state of our environment. India holds over half the world's tiger population of about 3,200, the last tiger census report of 2011 by the National Tiger Conservation Authority pegging the country's tiger numbers at 1,706 (ranging between a minimum of 1,571 to a maximum of 1,875). At the turn of the century, however, tigers had numbered around 40,000, but a burgeoning human population grew increasingly intolerant of co-habitation with other God's creatures.

*Tracking the tiger* is supported by Land Rover and the Born Free Foundation, the relationship of these two agencies stretching back to 1966 when Land Rover vehicles were featured in the film *Born free*. It was in 2002, however, that an official partnership was launched, with Born Free being chosen as one of Land Rover's Global Sponsorship Partners under its Fragile Earth policy. And in 2013, Born Free was announced as Land Rover's primary global conservation partner, extending and increasing support for a further five years with a particular focus on Born Free's work with lions in Africa and tigers in India.

Rupani's book is available on [www.amazon.in](http://www.amazon.in) and [www.flipkart.com](http://www.flipkart.com) and also in leading bookstores.

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