

NAGARHOLE NATIONAL PARK

KARNATAKA, INDIA



Area : 643 sq km

Temperature Range : 14 degrees C in winter to 33 degrees C in summer

Best time to visit : Year round



93 kms from Mysore City is an expanse of lush tropical forest covering an area of 643 sq kms. Nagarhole, once the Maharaja's reserved forest, is now a National Park and has been lately rechristened as Rajiv Gandhi National Park after the late Prime Minister of India. The park derives its name from the river Nagarhole (meaning serpent stream) that winds through the forests in a serpentine fashion. Covering gentle hills bordering Kerala, the park includes swampland, streams, deciduous forest, stands of bamboo, and dense thickets of teak and rosewood trees.

The reserve sprawls over 643 sq.kms and derives its name from a small river called "Nagarahole", which means "serpentine river". To the south, the Brahmagiri Mountains, an integral part of the Western Ghats form a permanent backdrop. The Wynad Wildlife sanctuary of Kerala also shares its boundary with the southern part of Nagarahole. The river Kabini forms a natural boundary for the Park in the east, beyond which is the Bandipur National Park. The moist, deciduous forests of Nagarahole merge with the coffee plantations of Kodagu in the west.

The Reserve is situated at an average elevation of 800 - 850m above MSL, and the terrain is gently undulating. The highest peak is the Masalabetta (959 m) and the lowest point is the Kabini, the largest river that drains this Park. The Lakshmanatheertha, Hebballa, Taraka and Nagarahole are the other rivers that criss-cross the National Park. The bountiful water is also a factor that renders the Park so rich in animal life.

Nagarahole has emerged as one of the last safe asylums for the Asian Elephant. With about 1500 elephants, Nagarahole has the highest density for the Asian Elephant. The complex of Nagarahole, Bandipur, Wynad and Mudumalai, covering over 2000 sq.kms, is probably the last hope for the wild elephant. The banks of the river Kabini during summer are the best place for sighting, studying and photographing wild elephants. Elephants congregate here in small and big groups. They seldom take notice of close approach on vehicles as they seem to realize that they are absolutely safe here from poachers.

The Tiger, largest and the grandest feline in the world is unique to Asia, is also present here. There are 65-70 of these magnificent cats in the Park. As tigers are solitary animals and hunt primarily between dusk and dawn, they are seldom seen. However, the sounds in the forests of Nagarahole tell a chilling story - the Tiger is on the prowl. The Leopard is equally elusive. There are about 150 of these animals in the Park, and many more in the reserved forests surrounding the Park. The rusty Spotted Cat and the Leopard cat are the other felines of the Park.

Stable populations of the Wild Dog or Dhole occur with other carnivores of the Park. They hunt in packs and in a Dhole pack only the dominant male and female breed.



Morning Jeep Safari through the park



The elusive Tiger



Morning walk

A herd of spotted Deer



Crocodile and a Painted Stork



Magnificent Sambar on high alert



The Sloth Bear is one of the attractions of Nagarahole. The bear neither has acute hearing nor sharp eye sight, but is led by the nose. Many times the bear remains unaware of human approach and a close encounter could only be dangerous to man. The Stripenecked Mongoose, Ruddy Mongoose, and the Common Mongoose are easily seen in Nagarahole. A foray into the jungle at night may reveal the Small Indian Civet and the Common Palm Civet. Near the waterholes and the river banks the Common Otter and the Clawless Otter could be sighted. The Indian Pangolin, the common Giant Flying Squirrel, Indian Giant Squirrel, the Flying Fox, Indian Porcupine, the jackal and the Black Naped Hare are also present.

Of the other ungulates, the Barking Deer, Sambar and the Four-horned Antelopes occur in small parties. All the three species are selective feeders. Unusually large groups of Gaur (wild buffalo) are often sighted in the Park, especially during the summer months. Small groups of wild boar are also common throughout the Park. The Mouse Deer, found only in South India and Sri Lanka, is an extremely rare animal of the Park. This miniature deer differs from other cervids in many ways. A solitary and nocturnal animal, it has four-toed feet, with well developed canines, and eats small animals.

Nagarahole is home to common as well as rare and reptiles. The Indian Rock Python, Bamboo Pit Viper, Russel's Viper and the Common Cobra are frequently encountered. Every water hole in Nagarahole offers shelter and breeding grounds to the Soft-shelled Turtles and the Indian Pond Terrapins. The Brahmagiri mountains harbor endemic tortoises like the Travancore Tortoise and the Cane Tortoise. What was once considered to be extinct along with the dinosaurs - the Flying Lizard- is still alive and active in Nagarahole. As they are incapable of flying, they do the second best thing - they glide from tree to tree. The Flying snake or the Golden Tree Snake also does not have wings, but this colorful snake can leap from a tree top and glide in the air. The Marsh Crocodile is sighted regularly, sun-bathing on the banks of the river Kabini.

A preliminary checklist records 270 species of birds. The Hill Myna, various species of Drongos and babblers are the most vociferous birds during the day. During the night several species of Nightjars, Barred Jungle Owlet and the Great Horned Owl keep the forest alive with sounds. The rare 'Forest Eagle-Owl', contributes an extremely weird and terrifying call in the night. Other rare birds include The Malabar Trogon, Blubearded Bee-eater, and the Lesser Coucal.