

KERALA..7th - 28th April 2009,  
Elizabeth and Fred Hodgson, Ramsey, Isle of Man.

### "On the Road to Malabar."

This trip was put together with little of our usual forward planning due a strange set of coincidences. In January we watched a TV Documentary on the Western Ghats. There was mention of wild Asian Elephants and Tigers plus of course birds. So our ears pricked up and we thought "maybe one day". Two days later our man in India Emailed to say he was now setting up his own tour company and for us to remember him. We did and asked about Western Ghats. He said no problems. Then KLM launched their sale. We checked flights to Bangalore and grabbed two seats for 8th April and advised Vinod to get moving with an Itinerary. The rest is as follows:-

**Indian Visas** can be applied for On line but it is a messy business. However they eventually came after wasting time querying the date of my photograph!! Did they expect my hair to grow back or my skin pigmentation to vary?? My query to this effect got no reply but the visa was approved which was nice as we had tickets to go by then. Vinod put together a suggested Itinerary which we liked and after some fine tuning we firmed this up and that was that. We had a car and driver for the duration of our trip and beds and food in several stopping places. There was not much else to do. We packed warm climate clothes, our Fuji Cameras, Helm's "Birds of Northern India" (I know we were going to the south but they can't be all that different surely? Bad idea!) We also took Mal Jenkin's check lists along with our Minox 10x42 binoculars, and plenty of spare rechargeable batteries.

**Money.** Indian Rupees are around 72 / £1.

**Weather.** Kerala is in the Tropics and was enjoying the northern spring ahead of the Monsoons due in June. We enjoyed mostly fine and hot weather with some short sharp rainstorms on three occasions. In addition the Western Ghats rise to around 9,000' so trap a lot of cloud and of course are much cooler than the plains. These hills are cloaked with lovely green forests where they have not been cleared for plantations of Tea, Coffee, Rubber, Cardamom etc.

**Bugs, bites and Bowels.** Mosquitoes are present low down but we did not use anything for Malaria as the risk was deemed low. We were warned that there was a risk of Leeches in some Forests. We both met some Leeches in Periyar but Fred went one better and got a bite from something that looked like a black Ladybird which hit him right through his sock and then flew off before he could bite it back. Also coming back from Salim Ali sanctuary there was blood oozing from his boot. No leech could have done this but a thorough search failed to find the culprit. Water is unsafe so we stuck to Bottled water (and the odd Beer) and applied our usual "Peel it, boil it or forget it" maxim. We did eat some strange things in some strange places but were not unduly troubled by any upsets.

So to the trip.

**Tuesday 7th April.** From home to Manchester airport. Our International flight via Paris left Manchester at 6.35 next day so this meant an overnight stay. We booked Bewleys and it was fine. So we arrived, checked in and after a nice 'farewell' (last) supper we retired to bed for the early start next day.

**Wednesday 8th April.** We rose and checked in for the Air France flight to Paris, Charles de Gaulle, which left on time. This was comforting as we only had 90 minutes to change planes. Paris CDG is a nice new airport with a bad reputation but we navigated it relatively easily and made the connection to the Airbus 330 to Bangalore. The rear was almost empty so after take off I moved over to a bank of four seats and stretched out. Food and drink were fine and I was soon asleep. We landed on time at 23.50, cleared Immigration and were outside with our luggage in 15 minutes from landing. We were met and whisked to a short night stop at **Clark's Exotica**.

**Thursday 9th April.** India is 5.30 hours ahead of GMT so we slept well and before breakfast Fred had given the Check list a good start with Kite, Crow, White-browed Wagtail, Purple Sunbird, Indian Robin, Common Mynah and Red-vented Bulbul. Breakfast was very pleasant and our driver and car turned up at the appointed hour of 9.00 for the drive to Nagarhole. The car was the 'favourite' Hindustan Ambassador based on the Morris Oxford of yesteryear updated with Air conditioning and Diesel engine. This was fine as an idea but nostalgia comes at a price and whilst the car was 'State of the Art' the Art was fifty years old. The suspension and seating had severe shortcomings on long trips. Our Driver was called Achmul Khan and very friendly. When we got to know him better he told me this was the same name as the Mumbai Bomber and

it had caused him difficulties at Police check points so he dropped the 'Khan' now.

We set off through the horrendous Bangalore Traffic and it seemed to take forever to get clear of this city and on to the open road. That in itself is a misnomer in India. **There is NO such thing as an open road.** It is full of Cars, Trucks, Motor bikes and cows all hell bent on self destruction. If there is a temporary 'clear' bit it instantly fills up with pedestrians all keen to try the afterlife ahead of schedule. Achmul knew the width and length of his car down to the thickness of the paint finish and we actually hit nothing. Awesome stuff.

We got snarled up once behind a huge Low loader carrying marble for some statue or other and the cars just careered off the road and across the grass. Traffic was often met coming the 'wrong way' on dual carriageways if their desired intersection was nearer in that direction. We stopped for comfort and snack at a nice little place by a river and notched up Little Cormorant, Little and Cattle Egrets, Indian Pond Heron, Bank Mynah and Common Sandpiper.

We had 90kms to run for our Lodge where we were due to take a Safari at 4pm so he got a move on and we made it just. Checked into our home for the next three nights at **Kabini River Lodge**, a quick sluice and off into the Park where we saw our first mammals. Chital, Sambar and the first of many Indian Elephants of the trip. There were also Wild Boar, Langurs, and Malabar Giant Squirrels. These latter are the size of a domestic cat and supremely agile. Birds included Flamebacks, Streak-throated Woodpecker, Spotted Owlet and Grey Jungle Fowl. Back at dark for excellent buffet dinner and bed ready for the 5.45 start in the morning.

**Friday 10th April.** Early morning call and away at 6.30. Lots of Elephant, Deer and Wildboar. Nagarhole is a nice Park with fine scenery. Raptors were strangely absent but more birds were added to the list such as Parakeets etc., The Driver was not too keen on birds and had to be made to stop. On our way out having stood our eyes down from 'Red alert' we skidded to a halt beside a fine Tigress just lying by the road. Amazing. She allowed a few pictures before rising and crossing into cover. Just ahead another track joined ours and we guessed she may try to cross that also, so headed round there. Sure enough she emerged, saw us, and went back a few feet and lay down. We got more pictures but she was very hard to see through the viewfinder but quite apparent to the naked eye. We heard a bus draw up and people got off. (Yes it was a bus route!) The passengers made their way to us and we pointed out the Cat. Two kids climbed up onto our car and took a look, the rest just walked on by. Amazing again! Our photos show the cat looking at us and then looking at the people on foot very keenly. Was this the daily norm in Nagarhole? See report "A Tiger at the Bus stop."

Back for lunch after which we endured the obligatory boat trip on the lake. I say endured as the boat was full and people just stood up if there was anything to see and cheerfully obscured the view of anyone behind. Not my idea of fun. However we did get lucky and see more Elephants and another Tiger just sitting on the lake shore in the evening sun. Two tigers on day one. Very nice thanks. We also picked up several birds such as an Osprey, various Egrets, Spot-billed Ducks, Spoonbills, Black Ibis etc., etc., To dinner and to bed.

**Saturday 11th April.** Now things took a turn for the worse. We had not realised Easter was celebrated in India. There were crowds and we had to share cars. The guests had no concept of 'quiet' and kept up a continual chatter. The driver only stopped for red or blue birds. (Peacock, Roller, Kingfisher or Woodpecker.) Anything else was brushed aside in his headlong dash. OK. The Elephants were fun as they do NOT like people (sympathy vote from us here!) Back at Camp I took myself off for a walk after lunch and ticked more in that hour than we did the rest of the day. Such highlights as Fantails and Indian Pitta made up for the drives. In the afternoon we did get lucky and find a nice Leopard in the long grass but the jumping around in the car made real observation difficult. And so it went on with us trying to make the best of a bad job. Time to move on.

**Sunday 12th April.** Another early start. This time sharing with wife, husband and small child that snored. Father redeemed himself when he called "Cheetah" and we backed up to find a young female Leopard under a bush. You can forgive most things for that. After breakfast we moved on to Bandipur which is a contiguous park with Nagarhole. We got there after an interesting drive through rural India and were disconcerted to see the '**Jungle Lodge**' was right next to the road. So much for rural tranquillity. As it turned out our fears were negated as the bungalows were set well back and noise, from the road at least, was not a problem. Again the place was full and we were all squeezed into one small Gypsy with the driver auditioning for Force India's F1 team. You just hung on and got very friendly with the other folk in the car. The crowds at the park gate did nothing to dispel the Bank Holiday illusion. Not so many elephants in here

but one lady gave us a good charge. Birds? Forget it!

**13th -14th April.** More of the same although after the morning drive we had the option to drive up to a local Temple on a Hill which we did. We ticked a couple of birds such as Oriental White-eye and Green BeeEater. On the last day, 14th, Acjmul and I went back this way to a lake I had spotted and ticked Hodgson's lora\*, Great White Pelican, Little Ringed Plover, Painted Storks etc., (\* Sadly no such species but I felt sorry that such a bonny bird was just "Common" so I gave it my name which I share with Brian Houghton Hodgson of course after whom many Indian birds are named!) At lunch we were also accosted by an Indian lady who opened the conversation with "you must be Fred?" Mrs Dixxa Patel from Port St. Mary. Small world.

During our final Game drive our driver excelled himself and broke the lap record in his rush to find a Tiger which when we got there had of course made itself scarce having picked up the sonic boom of our approach. To be fair, (must we?) we did cast around a bit, ticking White-breasted Waterhen and Nilgiri Green Pigeon in the rest periods and finally got a good view of our third and final tiger. Three Tigers and two Leopards. Lots of folk would envy us that. However **no way** am I going to share cars again no matter how much extra I have to pay. So to bed as we have a loong drive in the morning..

**Wednesday 15th April.** Early breakfast and on the road. Not many Kms but through the Hills so slow going. Even slower when the car conked out on a hill approaching Ooty. We let it cool and it went again. We had a nice Indian lunch in some town somewhere, saw a couple of minor road accidents where the scooter riders misjudged things, picked themselves up got back on and rode off. The scenery was beautiful as we crossed the border, Ooty was a tip, but we managed to see some wildlife including a fine Gaur bull by the side of the road. Another car screeched to a halt beside us and behaved in an Indian manner by throwing things at the animal till it moved off. Best bird of the day was Chestnut-headed BeeEater. Eventually after a drive of around 9 hours we arrived at Munnar which was a smaller version of Ooty. Our lodgings, **Ambady Estate**, was about 9km further on, which was nice, and set back in a Tea/coffee Plantation. Nice bungalow. Not much left of the day but we had a guide booked for tomorrow for the trek up to see some endangered Nilgiri Tahr in Erivikkulam National Park. These animals got themselves 'endangered' by walking into Colonial hunters camps and promptly getting shot for dinner. How stupid is that?

**Thursday 16th April.** We had expected an early start but no, our 'guide' was not due until 9.30. Eh? Then when we set off we ended up in a Tea Museum. Interesting? Hardly what we had come to see. After a decent interval, to show willing and full of knowledge on how PG Tips got its name, we rammed him back in the car and headed for the NP gate. It was crowded. Did I mention crowds before? Did I mention litter? There were people sitting on signs saying "No Plastic here" actually drinking from Plastic bottles!!! However we were walking were we not? Soon leave them behind. NOT! We got pushed into a communal bus and driven up the hairpins like a remake of "The Italian Job". We were played a nice video on the Tahr and the NP but as the voice over was in Tamil it was lost on us. After several interesting encounters with other buses coming down we got to the stop and dismounted with the golden hordes we were trying to escape. More 'Plastic Free Zone' signs. More Plastic Water bottles. We walked up the trail and knew how many folk were ahead of us by the bottle count! Did I mention the noise these people made? This was augmented by the guards shrill whistles when anyone stepped off the track. NO trekking here? We did meet several of the stupid endangered goats. Stupid for sticking around in this mayhem! To be fair our guide did know birds and we managed a few specials such as Black Eagle, Black Bulbul, Long-tailed Shrike, Nilgiri Pipit, Greenish Warbler, Rose Finch, Spectacled Finch and White-browed Shortwings which were quite common in the shrubs. Nilgiri Laughing Thrush was the highlight but quite what it found to laugh at up here with these people was not divulged. Whenever we stopped to look at birds we were surrounded by folk all craning past us to see what we were looking at. Some even tried to snatch the use of our binoculars! All too soon it was time to return down and get back in a bus and leave this delightful place. Despite being squeezed in I did manage to see a Black-shouldered Kite from the bus. On the way back to Munnar we stopped at a 'quiet' spot and found Velvet-fronted Nuthatch as well as both Nilgiri and Grey-headed Canary Flycatchers. Lunch was taken in town. After lunch we went back to the digs, overcome with the excitement of the morning. Later Acjmul and Fred went to a nearby "Viewpoint" to view the litter dumps and a couple of birds. Hill Mynah, Golden-Oriole, Common Tailor-bird, Raquet-tailed Drongo, Asian Fairy Bluebirds and some little black and yellow job which still eludes identification. Listed as "Hodgson's Little Black and Yellow Job". Should have bought the right book.

**Friday 17th April.** I rose early and did some birding in the grounds which kept the midges amused. Then

after breakfast we drove up into the Hills towards "Top Station." The scenery was nice and we passed Tea Plantations on our way to a Dam. Walking over the dam wall we ticked two "Common" Kingfishers. We passed up on the Elephant ride and "Echo Point" and the Speedboat ride on the lake. No prizes for guessing why! It became clear that our Guide simply had no idea what to do with us other than the standard Tourist traps. So we went back down to Munnar and amused ourselves trying to change Sterling for Rupees before heading back to Ambady for lunch to find our room had not been serviced and the promised Laundry not returned. Enquiries revealed that this was due to "The elections of yesterday". Staff had taken the day off to vote and forgotten to come back. Management simply had not noticed this strange absence. After lunch I took Achjmul up the valley to a spot I had noticed yesterday where we parked the car and walked into the nearby land. We immediately started to find different birds, including a European Blackbird, several Thrushes, a striking white Paradise flycatcher and Rufous Tree-pie. On our way out we flushed a Great Snipe. We actually did better here on our own than with the guide yesterday. By this time Achjmul was getting quite keen on birds and borrowed E's binoculars whenever he got the chance.

**Saturday 18th April.** Now another longish drive down to Periyar. We did not plan to come down here (Lake Palace being too touristy) but with Parambikulam closed due to fire risk we switched back to Periyar. Fortunately Vinod found us a nice private bungalow in the forest which was a highlight place. We had the place to ourselves, the cooking was superb and watching birds and Giant Squirrels from our Verandah positively idyllic. We MUST go back there. We also got to do night drives after dinner and found lots of animals including the diminutive Mouse Deer. The area was home to Lion-tailed Macaques, Black Langurs and Elephants. It is great walking country too with Gaur and Sambar Deer freely visible. Periyar is a Tiger reserve and they are out there but all we found were Pug marks. Ennervating while on foot though.

**Sunday/Monday 19th - 20th April.** We had 'lost' our car and driver up here as it was inaccessible to normal cars, even those in good condition, so he had headed back to Cochin to have the problem fixed. Experts said "Slipping clutch" I said "Injector Pump". I was right! So the next two days were spent in Baby's capable hands as driver of the Gypsy and Guide extraordinaire. We did walks for birds adding such beauties as the Great Hornbill, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Nilgiri Wood-pigeon and Imperial Green Pigeon plus Collared Tree-Pie. One day we hiked right to the top of the Watershed to a small lake where Baby and Anil indulged in a fishing match. It was a nil nil draw but we did see a nice Mongoose. This is where we got to feed the Leeches. We do our bit to live and let live but when we found some of the beggars had got inside our trouser legs and headed up for "The Industrial Zone" we felt they had overstepped the mark somewhat. They were summarily tried and executed.

**Tuesday 21st April.** We went down the hill to meet up with our car and Achjmul only to discover a replacement. The car was not fixed but he will join us at Thattekad. After a very nice drive we arrived at our new home which was **Hornbill Camp** just outside **Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary** which we were to visit next day. This afternoon we had a break from most things and just birded the river bank. This added both River and Black- Bellied Terns, Golden Oriole and White-eared Barbet. A large Black Scorpion at least 5 inches/12cms from head to its large red sting added to the tick list. A nice Tropical storm blew in to complete the scene. Hornbill was a tented Camp and very like the ones we are used to in Africa. Very comfortable.

**Wednesday. 22nd April.** This was an early start into the **Salim Ali Sanctuary** which despite being on the opposite bank to us necessitated a drive of 13km to get to a bridge. We met our guide and straight away started off with some nice ticks. Black-hooded and Black-naped Orioles, Heart-spotted Woodpeckers, Chestnut-tailed Starlings and the piece de resistance, Sri Lankan Frogmouths. First a solitary female and later on a pair. They sit very tight and spotting them without a guide would be well nigh impossible. As a finale to an interesting and worthwhile visit there were a pair of Brown Hawk Owls sitting over the gate on our exit. The rest of the day we took at leisure giving the replacement driver the opportunity to return to Cochin rather than hang around here. The butterflies were also a colourful and interesting sight in the flower garden. Hundreds of them and we got nice photographs. We wish we knew their names.

**Thursday 23rd April.** We set off on the penultimate leg of our trip way back north to Wayanad. At first we stuck to the coast without seeing the Arabian sea at all. Indian Holidays appear to be over as the roads are not jam packed just crowded. I think it is always like this. After Calicut, check spelling, we take lunch in a small bar by the airport road. Much speculative building going on here very like the Spanish Costas of twenty years ago. After lunch we head into the hills that are growing larger on the horizon and climb steadily round many hairpin bends for around 3,000 feet. The air is much cooler again and the forests full of Macaques begging by the road side despite signs not to feed them. We eventually turn off the main road

and enter the Lodge Gates of **Tranquil Lodge at Kolagapara**. A climb up through coffee plantations to the Bungalow where we are warmly welcomed by our host Victor. His wife is in Bangalore but will be back later to welcome us too. We immediately feel most at home and the rooms are beautifully furnished. This is a homestay with a difference. After settling in, Fred heads out for some birds and finds Scarlet Minivets and Flamebacks everywhere. The grounds are very extensive and include some large rocky hills with a resident pair of Black Eagles.

As dinner beckons we are invited to partake of a drink or two and these are the first G&T's we have had since our arrival. I said he was a good host. We are joined by the lady of the house, Gina, and her daughter and son-in-law before we all go into dinner. They really are making us part of the family. The dinner did have some 'western' style dishes but the Indian table was superb. Lots of delicious dishes to indulge in. Son in Law had brought back some burgers and he ate them. It is most odd what constitutes a treat around the world.

**Friday 24th April.** An early rise for Fred as he was to take Achmul birding in the grounds. We find more Flamebacks, some White-eyes a Greater Coucal and several Minivets. After breakfast we go up to the Eddakal caves which is quite a stiff climb and we 'whites' were more coloured in the face than the locals. The caves are accessed via wooden walkways and stone steps and the climb seems to go on forever. Once inside the caves there are some carvings said to be 5,000 years old. We are asked to take pictures for two young girls and their family and are promptly adopted as Auntie and Uncle. I do wish Elizabeth would stop finding us more nieces and nephews to look after. Actually they were very nice and really quite sweet.

After Fred reluctantly agreed to replace his ageing sun hat at Elizabeth's insistence, it was back down for lunch. In the afternoon Victor had put his Gypsy Safari Car complete with driver at our disposal to take us into the **Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary**. The gate was only some 10km away along the main road through Sultan's Battery. Once in the park we found lots to see, Sambar, Chittal, Gaur, Barking Deer (Muntjac) and a few Elephant. Pompadour Green Pigeon headed the bird list. This park is contiguous with Nagarhole and Bandipur and the name just changes depending upon which State you are in, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu or Kerala. After leaving the park we stopped for reasons unknown at a small roadside Bar for refreshments. Then it was back in the dark to our Bungalow and drinks and dinner with the family once more.

**Saturday 25th April.** All three of us decided to take a long walk around the estate along the aptly named Indiana Jones trail. This went on a bit further than we thought but we did get to see some nice birds including the resident Black Eagles and two Giant Eagle Owls. Given the hard yellow stare I would claim these as Dusky Eagle Owls but not sure if they occur this far south. Should have bought the right book. We also found the resident Peacock who is more often heard than seen. Then we took a wrong turn and walked about an hour longer than we should have which made us late for breakfast. Later on we went into the local town of Sultan's Battery for some colour. A nice enough little place not nearly as bad as larger towns and full of interest. There is a 13th.C Jain Temple here that was captured by Sultan Tippu and used as his armoury. Hence Sultan's Battery.

**Sunday 26th April.** Sadly we now had to leave Victor, Gina and family, after the by now obligatory photo call, and make our way to Mysore and our last stop. On the way we stopped by a large lake and defying the traffic I was at last able to add Purple Swamp Hen and Bronze-winged Jacana to the list. Then into Mysore and the **Metropole Hotel**. After settling in we were guided by Ragu to the Mysore Palace the highlight of which was me spotting the only Egyptian vulture of the trip up on the Battlements. The palace whilst looking impressive is in fact a replica only dating as far back as 1912. That's less than 30 years older than me! Then we went up Chamundi Hill where as well as a great view looking down on Mysore (it is much better at this distance) there is a Temple to the Goddess Chamundeswari who defeated demon Mahishasura. Statues abound of both deities but the queue at the temple was so long that we did not bother going in. Instead we went and admired the 15 foot tall statue of 'Nandi' the bull and favourite mount of Lord Shiva. This is carved from a single piece of black Basalt type rock. We then paid the obligatory visit to some carpet and souvenir shops at the behest of our guide even though we had said we did not wish to. This Ragu was not a Guide but a Guard! Dinner in the Metropole was a total disaster with the dining courtyard overpowered by a large 12 foot screen with TV going at ear numbing decibels. Even moving to the quietest corner was relative and I am still waiting for my order to be completed. There was also no Beer for sale due to some stupid ban "because of the elections!" 'Don't drink and vote' was a new one on me!

**Monday 27th April.** We had arranged to go to Ranganathitta bird sanctuary at first light and on arrival paid

our entrance fee and extra boat fee for a solo boat. But no one told the boat man who normally starts at 8.30. We broke it to him gently when we found him asleep in his hut and we set off to see some birds. Large Crocodiles followed in our wake and my thoughts turned to Peter Pan and Captain Hook. This is a splendid and under visited place with Black-headed Ibis, Black-crowned Night Herons, Painted and Open-billed Storks and Spot-billed Pelicans all busy nesting. Cormorants, Darters and River Terns were everywhere. Even our one and only Shikra of the trip put in an appearance here. After the boat ride we had time to walk the grounds where I got the chance to photograph two nice Common Kingfishers. Whilst I was doing this I looked up and there above me was a fine Stork-billed Kingfisher who also posed nicely although the light was not good. Some nesting Baya Weavers and Pale-billed Flowerpeckers added to our total nicely. This place is well worth a visit even if not bird minded as it is a welcome change for Mysore. Back to the Metropole for a better breakfast than last evening's dinner and the TV was off too. We checked out after trying in vain to contact Air France to check in and the girls in reception were so helpful that I could almost forgive this place but not quite. It was a dump and I refused to take my lunch there. We went back towards Chamundi Hill and to a very nice place called the Olive Garden where we had an excellent lunch for IR.1,000

After lunch and once out of Mysore we turned off the main road and went back to the gates of the Bird reserve to kill some time. I am glad that we did as we saw and photographed some very nice Blue-tailed BeeEaters by the canal.

Then it was back on the road to Bangalore and our plane home. We got into Bangalore proper as it was getting dark and met the usual chaotic traffic which was down to a slow crawl in many places. Our progress was not helped by the number of vehicles without lights of any kind. We still had time in hand as our plane was not until 1.40am so we called in to **Clark's Exotica** to rest up and pass sometime. This is a lovely place quite near the airport and they made us welcome despite not being resident.

Then it was off to the airport and time to say goodbye to our driver and friend of the last three weeks. External Security was tight but the check in queue was not more than five people so this was done quite smoothly. Through Security was very streamlined and efficient. London and Manchester please note. We had a mini fright when the board showed our flight as 'cancelled' but this was a left over from yesterday.

**Tuesday 28th April.** We boarded efficiently into our requested seats, sat back and enjoyed the flight to Paris where we landed on time in the rain! We had a three hour layover here but declined to eat as we had a further stop in Manchester around lunch time and felt we could eat there. CDG is quite a large and very modern shopping precinct. So modern that they have thoughtfully provided parking spaces for aeroplanes to bring you in and take you out. We found some very comfortable chairs to relax on while waiting for our next flight. This also left on time and we arrived in Manchester to sunshine. We looked around for somewhere to have the promised meal but it is a total and utter gastronomic desert. Security told us there was a nice restaurant in Departures. They lied. There was the ubiquitous Costa Coffee place and a couple of Greasy spoons. We chose the more attractive of the two only to find they did not sell alcohol. Nevertheless their dishes looked acceptable so after purchasing Fred went off to a Bar to seek Red wine. They only had it by the glass so he pushed a tenner over the counter and took the unopened bottle and two clean glasses. This was our final holiday meal and he knows how to treat a girl.

Then it was time to board our flyBe flight home to the Isle of Man where our driver was waiting to take us home. Despite the early hour we washed and took to our bed.

So the final score was Three Tigers, Two Leopards, plus numerous other large Mammals and 194 species of bird not counting the Hodgson's Little Black and Yellow Job in Munnar.