

Crested Hawk-eagle *Nisaetus cirrhatus* feeding on Madras Treeshrew *Anathana ellioti*

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Monsoon had just set in, when my friend and fellow wildlife photographer, Max Ali of Hyderabad asked me to accompany him to Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra, India). He had heard that for the first time, Tadoba would be closed for tourists during the monsoon. I readily accepted, and off we went on the morning of 24 July 2011, reaching Moharli at around 1400 hrs. We had enough time to freshen up and get our gear, before we set off into the jungle by 1430 hrs for the evening safari.

We drove through Moharli range; there were no signs, smells or signals of tiger *Panthera tigris*, nor any of the 'big four,' so we decided to go to Tadoba range. As we crossed through Khatoda gate into Tadoba range, within two minutes a leopard *P. pardus* appeared briefly before dissolving into the monsoon greens. I was so overjoyed to see my first wild leopard that I forgot to take photographs! Nevertheless it was more fun watching, and the best part was, it was the end of a long drought, of not having seen a wild leopard despite so many visits over several years.

The next day was a total wash out and so we cut short our morning safari. In the evening we decided to take our own vehicle instead of the 'Gypsy,' which had an open top. We just drove around in the wilderness, savouring the atmosphere, and returned to our respective rooms.

The morning safari on 26 June was to be our last before heading back home. MSR Shad, a friend and an ardent birder from Chandrapur, joined us. It was drizzling, and reluctantly, we got into the vehicle. Expecting nothing, we decided to enjoy a rainy drive and soak up the jungle aromas, watch freshly washed greens, etc. We reached the far end of the jungle, the Navegaon entry gate, and after a long halt there, started back.

On the way back we spotted a Changeable Hawk Eagle *Nisaetus cirrhatus* swoop down from a tree on our right and successfully grab a Madras treeshrew *Anathana ellioti* on the ground. It landed on a branch to our left, and perched there with a live treeshrew, c. 25–30 m above the ground. A few moments later a female Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, and a Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* started to mob the raptor. The complete pulsating action lasted for 15–18 min.

The most fascinating facts of the whole action was the chivalry of the passerine bird's in taking on a raptor, the tolerance of a formidable hunter which the Changeable Hawk Eagle is and rarity being the treeshrew as its food.

Having taken a few repeated and well coordinated strikes on the head by the flycatcher and drongo and with a treeshrew still alive well nailed in its talons the raptor finally decided to put the treeshrew out of misery, turned facing towards us and pierced its upper mandible into the treeshrew right behind its ear, in a few seconds the tongue of the victim dropped out, ready to be consumed. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first record of a Madras treeshrew in the diet of a Crested Hawk-eagle (Naorji 2006).



15. Crested Hawk-eagle *Nisaetus cirrhatus* with Madras treeshrew *Anathana ellioti*.

Photo: V. Sirdesai

The consistently harried raptor then decided to go elsewhere and flew away to another tree with some thick foliage to peacefully enjoy its snack. It had given us an unforgettable photographic opportunity, and we felt blessed. We would like to thank Bandu Manker, our driver, and Dashrat, our guide.

Reference

Naorji, R., 2006. *Birds of prey of the Indian Subcontinent*. 1st ed. Pp. 1–692. New Delhi: Om Books International.