

ON THE WILD SIDE

The flora and fauna of Karnataka is diverse and with forests covering around 20 per cent of the state's geographic area, there are many secrets to uncover. **BY BINDU GOPAL RAO**

Do you know that Karnataka has one of the highest populations of tigers in the country? Well it is not just tigers but a variety of animals and birds that you can see in this state. With a plethora of wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, forest reserves, bird sanctuaries and conservation centres, Karnataka is a potpourri of experiences when it comes to experiencing all things in the wild. We list the places that you must definitely see if you are a lover of wildlife.

ANSHI NATIONAL PARK

Extending about 340 sq km, the Anshi National Park is 60 km from Karwar in Uttara Karnataka and is adjoining the Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary. A Project Tiger sanctuary, this is part of an eco-sensitive part of the Western Ghats and is also called the Kali Tiger Reserve. The forest here primarily has evergreen and semi-evergreen trees and is home to about 200 bird species including the Malabar pied hornbill, Ceylon frogmouth and Great hornbill. The animals seen here include elephants, Indian leopard, leopard cat, bonnet macaque, slender loris, gaur, wild boar, sambar, dhole, sloth bear, Malabar giant squirrel and several species of snakes. You also have set treks that also serve as vantage points and you can see some stunning grasslands here.

BANDIPUR NATIONAL PARK

Among one of the most well-known national parks in the state, the Bandipur National Park is located in Chamarajanagar district adjoining the Mudumalai National Park in Tamil Nadu, Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary in Kerala and the Nagarhole National Park in Karnataka. Located about 60 km from Mysore, this park was set up by the Mysore Maharaja in 1931. Located at the foot of the Nilgiri Hills, this place is home to many tigers, Asian elephants, leopards, dhole, gaur and sloth bears. Being part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, the topography is a mix of tropical mixed deciduous forests that support a large diversity of animal and bird life. There are close to 350 species of birds identified here and you can also see a vibrant reptile community including marsh crocodiles, Russell's viper, Indian pond terrapin, common Indian bronze back, starred tortoise, common Indian monitor, Indian chameleon and more. The Nugu River here has several aquatic animals and the highest point is Himavad Gopalaswamy Betta that has superb views too.

