

THE DANGS

WHERE NATURE CELEBRATES HERSELF



Bamboo-Forest-Kyoto

The forests of the Dangs in South Gujarat are one of Nature's treasure troves. Here the green has survived the onslaught of time & circumstance & preserved to some extent the amazing variety that is the hallmark of this region & creatures of the wild have developed the unusual ability to go quiet & become virtually invisible to protect themselves.

Every forest in the Indian sub-continent has its own special personality – Shivpuri with its multiple rhythms of tree cover, grassland & water bodies, Bharatpur with its mirroring jheels, Mudhumulai with its dense green & brown, the Sundarbans with its dramatic mangrove world...and others too, the variety is awe-inspiring.

However, there is a lesser known, yet equally spectacular, natuescape flourishing in the south of Gujarat – the forests of the Dangs – which offer an unforgettable experience that the patient & strong hearted can savour if they are willing to put themselves through the power of the encounter. This is because one is faced with an energetic ebullience that verges on the challenging when one enters these forests. Despite the fact that human habitations have their places & spaces within this world & the familiar security of homesteads reassures the visitor, nature here displays her own wildness. In season, the roar of the rivers echoes through the wooded hills, pathways become streams, the green darkness is alive with mysterious creepers, flowers & a fruit...bamboo groves & thickest release a horde of insects & reptiles & the very air is laden with presentiment.

These forests are the way they are because of the geographical location of the area, the location of the area, the geological make up, the soil & climatic conditions.



Waterfall-at-Mongaup

One end of the Dangs falls from the range of the Sahyadris in the east, towards the plains of Gujarat in the west. From rugged mountains, the land slopes towards low plateaus before it finally sinks to the plains, carrying river waters of the Khapri, Purna, Ambika & their tributaries seawards. This land is covered by lava flow from the Deccan, cooled over the ages. The traps are Plateau Basalt – dark grey, on the verge of green...some hard, compact & others soft & crumbly. In the valleys & lowlands there's black cotton soil that is rich, ranging from clay – like to a loam like texture of one holds a piece between the fingers. It is very fertile & has a lot of alumina, lime & magnesia with varying amounts of low nitrogen & phosphorus. And, in the uplands, there's red soil that is light, porous & moderately fertile. But then, the divisions don't stand so firm. Because of the undulating surface of the land, varying composition of parent rock & the extent of erosion, there is often a mixture of both red & black soils, making it possible for an incredible variety of trees & shrubs to be neighbours.

Summer stretches from March to the middle of June & then the monsoons take over, watering the land till late October. The months that follow bring in a mild winter.

There are two forest types here – South Indian Moist Deciduous Forests & Southern Dry Deciduous Forests.



Dry Deciduous

The main feature of the moist deciduous forests is a leafless period in the dry season. The Dangs forests start becoming leafless from winter, the moment the climate becomes dry, & the upper canopy of the forests becomes leafless whilst down below them there is a reasonably good spread of evergreen trees in underwood & shrub cover. Quite a number of the moist deciduous trees sprout new leaves long before the monsoons – as if it's an invitation to the coming rains. Teak is almost evergreen in these parts.

On the other hand, the dry deciduous forests in Dangs have a lower canopy which is made up of deciduous cover with a faint sprinkle of evergreen trees where it is sheltered & moist. There are few creepers in this sort of cover & the bamboo is sparse, dry & spiny.

These two categories of forest have as many as 8 types – very moist teak forests, moist teak forests, slightly moist teak forests, southern moist mixed deciduous forests, dry teak forests, dry mixed deciduous forests, dry bamboo clumps & dry tropical riverain forests. But the nature of the forest being richly gregarious, these types don't exist like islands but are intermingled & in close proximity with one another.



Green Bamboo Growing

The larger trees include Teak, Sadad, Haldu, Kalam, Modad, Kakad, Bahedo, Bondaro, Sisam, Tiwas, Khair & a wealth of others whilst the trees growing beneath their canopies are the Ambado, Kumbhio, Kusum, Kudi, Timru, Amla, Asitra, Aledi, Garmalo & many more.



The undergrowth is made up of the Antedi or Murdasing, Karvi, Dhayati, Karvand, Nigodi, Ukshi & others and the ground cover includes Pular, Fulari, Sevra, Sonero or Zinzudo, to name a few. The climbers are Vela Bivla, palasvel, Nandanvel or Panivel, Kangvel, Medhvel, Vaghatvel, Gharvel & a host of others.

There are several types of Grasses. Among them are Polada, Tokarbund, Bhatado, Dabor Dhruvo, Sukli or Kasur & Rosha. Many of the trees, shrubs, smaller plants & climbers have known medicinal properties.

Although two dozens Mammals have been spotted in the past, a visitor may encounter Wild Boar, Hyena, Ruddy Mongoose, Hare, Jackal, Spotted Deer or Chital, Honey Badger, Jungle Cat, Common Palm Civet, Indian Grey Mongoose, Four Horned Antelope, Barking deer & Rhesus Macaque. The Tiger is rare in these parts & the Leopard is elusive.

Among the Reptiles are the Common Garden Lizard, Common Monitor Lizard, Common Wolf Snake, Trinket Snake, Rat Snake, Common Krait, Indian Spectacled Cobra, Russells Viper & Vine Snake.



Gujarat Fauna

Birds, unlike Mammals & Reptiles, are relatively more visible. Apart from the Common ones like Crows, Sparrows, Bulbuls (Red Vented, Red Whiskered, White Cheeked), Mynas (Indian Myna, Pied Myna, Jungle Myna, Bank Myna & Brahminy Myna), Cattle Egrets & Pond herons, there are a number of smaller Birds like Wire Tailed Swallows, Spotted Munias, Small Green Bee Eaters, Weaver Birds, White Eyes, Tailor Birds & Purple Sunbirds. There were 4 types of Doves too (Emerald Dove, Ring Dove, Red Turtle Dove & Spotted Dove), 2 types of Kingfishers (White Breasted & Pied), 2 types of Jungle Fowl (Red & Grey) & Grey Partridge. Apart from this, one may see the Ashy Wren Warbler, a number of types of Hawks, Kites & Eagles, Blossom Headed Parakeet, Black Headed Oriole, Black Drongo, Black Ibis, Common Pheasant, Cormorant Hawk Cuckoo, Curlew, Crow Pheasant, Cormorant, Indian Roller, Golden Backed Woodpecker, Indian Tree Pie, Jungle Crow, Magpie Robin, Hoopoe, Red Wattled Lapwing & Spotted Owlet (apart from other Owls.)