

SRI LANKA



BIRDING AND WILDLIFE TOUR JAN 30 – FEB 13 • 2013

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Introduction

This report summarizes our 15 days trip to Sri Lanka with notes on sites visited and a list of the species of birds and mammals seen.

As our first visit to South East Asia we chose Sri Lanka because of the country's rich nature with a great biodiversity within a rather small geographic area.

The tour was planned after contact to some of Sri Lanka's tour operators specializing in birding and wildlife tours. We chose WalkWithJith and agreed on a program staying only in 4 different lodges/hotels in order to make the tour easy without too much driving. The driver Senarath Bulathsinhala not only took us safely from place to place (from day 5), but he was also a very knowledgeable and helpful birding and wildlife guide. In some of the national parks local guides accompanied us, and they were helpful too. During the first days in Sinharaja Forest Reserve Sandun was our guide and he introduced us to many new species as well as cultural matters.

The tour introduced us to some of the main habitats of Sri Lanka: The rain forest in the south-west lowland wet zone (Sinharaja Forest Reserve, Hiyare Forest), the central highlands with montane grassland and cloud forest (Horton Plains National Park), highland tea country (e.g. Ella), freshwater wetlands (Tissamaharama tanks and paddy-fields, Yala National Park), coastal lagoons/saltpans (Bundala National Park, Yala National Park) and finally the ocean to the south with marine mammals.

Itinerary

Jan. 30: We arrived very early in the morning at Colombo Airport (from Copenhagen via Doha, Qatar), met with our guide and drove directly to Sinharaja (5 hours). Arriving here, we changed to a jeep and climbed up a very steep and rough track to Martin's Lodge at the border of the forest reserve. This rather basic accommodation is the ideal location for studying the fauna and flora of the rain forest. Endemic bird species are plenty around the lodge. Among them Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Spot-winged Thrush, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Layard's Parakeet and Sri Lanka Hill Myna.



View from Martin's Lodge

Jan. 31 – Feb. 3: Inside the park in the dense forest we furthermore enjoyed Red-faced Malkoha, Malabar Trogon, Scarlet Minivet, Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Asian Paradise-flycatcher (white morph), and Ashy-headed Laughingthrush among others. Serendib Scops Owl was heard ones near the gate. But we didn't find Sri Lanka Frogmouth. Toque Macaque and Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys were seen regularly, as were the many squirrels – Layard's, Palm, Dusky Striped and Giant Squirrel. It was also a pleasure to walk through hills with small tea plantations to an isolated village with a broad variety of fruits and different crops.

Feb. 3 – 4: We met with Senarath and drove to Haputhale, on the way we passed the Ratnapura area with many small gem mines and visited the gem museum in Ratnapura. A few new species were added to the list, like White-browed Fantail and Tickell's Blue Flycatcher.

The 4th of February we went to Horton Plains National Park early in the morning – good to come early because it was the national holiday and it became very crowded later on. We enjoyed the walk through the open highland to Worlds End (View over an 800 m deep valley). New species only seen here were Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Hill Swallow, Zitting Cisticola, Yellow-eared Bulbul, Green Leaf Warbler, Sri Lanka White-eye, Blackbird, Pied Bushchat, Dull-blue Flycatcher, and Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher. We also had very good views of Sambar and the montane subspecies of Purple-faced Leaf Monkey called Bear Monkey.



Horton Plains

Feb. 5: Before leaving the hills we visited Ella and the tea plantations in that area. We looked for Streak-throated Woodpecker without luck but saw Small Minivet here. Surprisingly we found both Layards Parakeet and Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot among others.

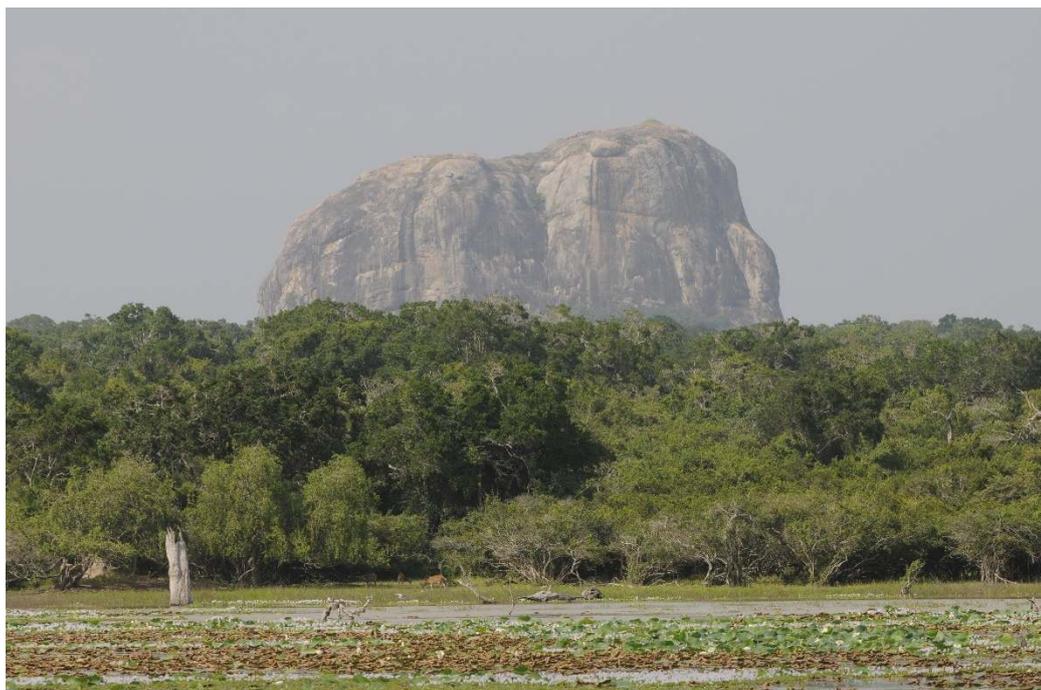
Feb. 5 – 8: We stayed at Hibiscus Garden Hotel in Tissamaharama, a nice bungalow hotel in old paddy fields and with quite many birds around. In the near surroundings we saw many new species like Blue-faced Malkoha, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Asian Drongo Cuckoo, Lesser and Crimson-backed Goldenback, Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike, White-browed Bulbul, Golden-fronted Leafbird, and Black-headed Munia.

The wetlands, Tissamaharama Tanks, were very rich in birds. The great trees on the shores of the lakes held colonies of Common Flying Fox, Rose-ringed Parakeet nested in holes and Crested Treeswifts were seen on their small nests glued to bare branches. In the densely vegetated tanks we saw no less than 15 species of storks, ibises, bitterns, herons and egrets. Ducks and geese are few, but it was very interesting to see the Cotton Pygmy-goose. Other species only observed here were Little Grebe and Yellow Bittern.



Tissamaharama Tanks

Feb. 6 -7: Two days jeep safaris were spend in Yala National Park. This area consists of both open and dense forest, tanks and coastal lagunes. Many tourists visit the park to see elephant and leopard, and sometimes it seem a little crowded when a leopard is found and all vehicles drive to the same spot. But there is also so much to see that you soon forget the other people.



The Elephant Rock, Yala

We saw 3 different Leopards – all were lying on big branches in trees. Around 10 Elephants, many Spotted Deer, few Sambar, many Wild Pigs, Ruddy Mongoose and Water Buffalo were all observed at close range. Also Toque Macaque and Hanuman Langur were seen. Land Monitor was common along the tracks and some crocodiles in the lakes.



Leopard in Yala Nat.Park

The wetlands were also here filled with storks, ibises and herons. A new species was the rare Black-necked Stork, 1 seen in a big lagoon. 20 species of wintering waders were found feeding here, many of them quite familiar to Scandinavian bird watchers. The raptors were well represented with White-bellied Sea Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Brahminy Kite, and Changeable Hawk-Eagle. In the forest we had many new species like Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Jacobin Cuckoo, Jungle Owlet, Indian Roller, Common Hoopoe, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Coppersmith Barbet, Indian Pitta, Brahminy and Rosy Starling, and White-rumped

Shama. White-throated Kingfisher was common and we also saw the less common Stork-billed, Common and Pied Kingfisher.



Wild Pig



Spotted Deer

Feb. 8: Bundala National Park is coastal lagoons, salt pans and scrubland. Here we watched very big mixed flocks of egrets, spoonbills, storks and pelicans fishing in the salt pans. New were Glossy Ibis, Cinnamon Bittern, Western Reef Egret, Eurasian Stone Curlew, Common and Little Ringed Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Marsh Sandpiper, Oriental and Little Pratincole, Brown-headed Gull, Lesser and Greater Crested Tern, and Common Tern. In the scrubs Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Ashy Woodswallow, and Clamorous Reed Warbler were new to us.



Mixed feeding flock in Bundala National Park.



Oriental Scops Owl

Feb. 9 – 13: On the way to Unawatuna Beach for the more relaxing last days of the tour we stopped in a village where Senarath showed us Oriental Scops Owl in a tree by the road.

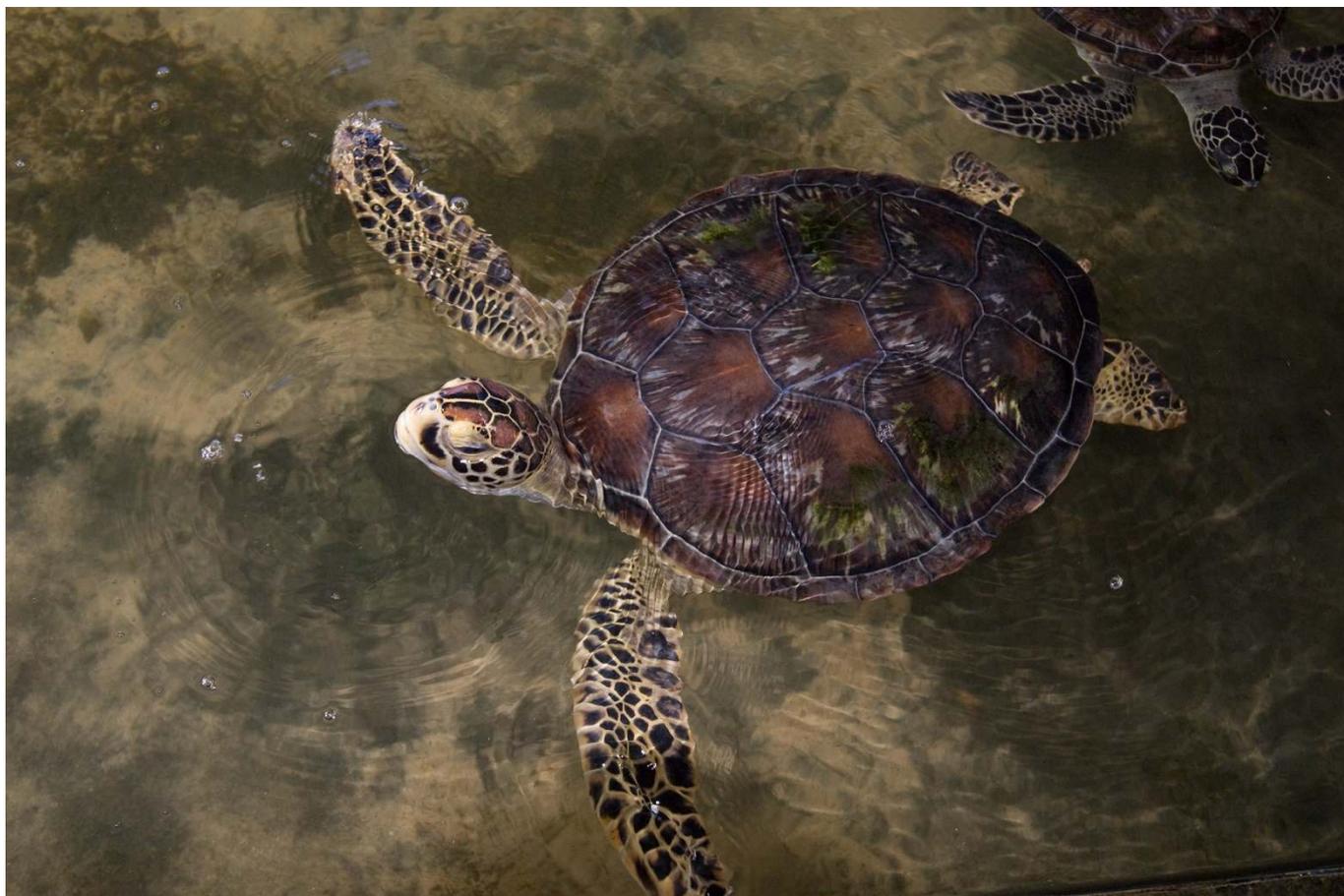
We stayed in Sri Gemunu Beach Resort, which is a highly recommendable hotel with a quiet beach behind coral reefs. This is not a hot spot for bird watchers but anyway we saw many of the more common birds. We actually also had 2 new species: Sooty Tern and Brown Noddy (the last one at Galle Fort).

Feb. 11: In Mirissa we joined a whale safari for a half day (Mirissa Watersports). We were successful in finding and observing several Blue Whale a good distance from the coast. These huge animals were quite breathtaking to watch at a close distance. They kept us company for a long time. We also met flocks of Spinner Dolphins. There were no sea-birds in view.



Blue Whale diving, notice fish attached to the tail

The same day we visited the Sea Turtle Farm & Hatchery in Habaraduwa. Here, sea turtle eggs are hatched and the young turtles are raised and put back to the sea. Also, injured sea turtles are helped here. It was interesting to see several species of these threatened species.



Feb. 12: We took a short trip to Hiyare Forest about 10 km from Galle. This area reminds a little of Sinharaja, only it is degraded, secondary forest. Here, we heard Sri Lanka Spurfowl and Chestnut-backed Owlet, saw Alexandrine Parakeet, Sri Lanka Swallow, Crimson-fronted Barbet, and Black-naped Monarch. A fine area to visit on a short trip.

Of course we also visited Galle Dutch Fort and learned more about the history and culture of southern Sri Lanka.

Feb. 13: On the way back to Colombo Airport we got a good impression of the normal cultivated landscape and of the densely populated area around Colombo. Considering the driving culture here, we are glad that we shouldn't drive ourselves, and we really appreciate all the help from our driver and guide Senarath.

Practical information

- The travel Copenhagen – Colombo via Doha with Qatar Airways is a good route and the travel time is not extreme.
- Our tour in Sri Lanka was arranged by Prasanjith Caldera, WalkWithJith, one of several tour operators specialized in arranging birding and wildlife tours for small groups or couples like us. It is our impression that these guides in general are highly qualified and offers good value for money.

- The climate in Sri Lanka is perfect for a bird and wildlife tour (at least this time of the year). We didn't have trouble due to rain – and we only experienced few mosquitoes. The only animals to worry about are the leaches in the wet forest. Leach socks are recommended!
- Handbooks are essential but heavy to carry. We were actually quite happy, only with two books: Warakagoda et al.: Birds of Sri Lanka, Helm Field Guides 2012 and de Silva Wijeyeratne: A Photographic Guide to Mammals of Sri Lanka, New Holland Publishers 2008. Be aware that English species names vary and are used different in the different books and checklists.
- Sri Lanka offers really many photo opportunities. The animals and birds are not shy as we know from Europe (there is no hunting in Sri Lanka!), sometimes it is a problem that you get too close for your big lens. I used a Nikon 200-400mm/f4 which is flexible to use on such a tour. I brought a tripod, but didn't actually use it due to the conditions of driving on rough roads or walking between trees and bushes. The VR function was appreciated.
- More photos from our tour can be seen here: www.natur-foto.dk click "Rejser".
- We will be happy to receive questions or remarks by mail: bisschop@natur-foto.dk.



Malabar Pied Hornbill

Birds and mammals observed



The main locations of our tour:

1. Sinharaja Man and Biosphere Reserve
2. Horton Plains National Park
3. Highland around Haputale and Ella
4. Tissamaharama and nearby wetlands
5. Yala National Park
6. Bundala National Park
7. Unawatuna Beach and Galle
8. Hiyara Forest

House Crow	Corvus splendens	Huskrage					X	X	X	X
Large-billed Crow/Jungle Crow	Corvus macrorhynchos	Stornæbbet Krage		X	X	X	X	X		
Great Tit	Parus major	Musvit		X	X					
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	Landsvale	X	X	X		X	X		
Hill Swallow	Hirundo domicola			X						
Sri Lanka Swallow	Cecropis (daurica) hyperythra	Rødrygget Svale								X
Jerdon's Bushlark	Mirafr affinis	Tamilbusklærke						X		
Oriental Skylark	Alauda gulgula	Lille Sanglærke					X		X	
Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark	Eremopterix griseus	Gråisset Lærke						X	X	
Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis	Cistussanger		X						
Jungle Prinia	Prinia sylvatica	Jungleprinia							X	
Plain Prinia	Prinia inornata	Orientprinia						X	X	
Common Tailorbird	Orthotomus sutorius	Indisk skrædderfugl	X	X	X	X				
Black-crested Bulbul	Pycnonotus melanicterus	Sri Lanka-bulbul	X			X				x
Red-vented Bulbul	Pycnonotus cafer	Rødgumpet Bulbul	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Yellow-eared Bulbul	Pycnonotus penicillatus	Pragtbulbul		X						
White-browed Bulbul	Pycnonotus luteolus	Indisk Bulbul					X	X		
Yellow-browed Bulbul	Acritillas indica	Gulgrøn Bulbul	X							
Black Bulbul	Hypsipetes leucocephalus	Sortbulbul	X	X						X
Clamorous Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus stentoreus	Papyrussanger							X	
Green Leaf Warbler	Phylloscopus nitidus	Kaukasisk Lundsanger		X						
Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler	Pomatorhinus melanurus	(Segltimalie)	X							
Dark-fronted Babbler	Rhopocichla atriceps	Sorthovedet Timalie	X							
Yellow-eyed Babbler	Chrysomma sinense	Ildøjesimalie								
Orange-billed Babbler	Turdoidea rufescens	Sri Lanka-larndrossel	X							
Yellow-billed Babbler	Turdoidea affinis	Lyshovedet Larndrossel	X			X	X	X	X	
Ashy-headed Laughing-thrush	Garrulax cinereifrons	Sri Lanka-skadedrossel	X							
Sri Lanka White-eye	Zosterops ceylonensis	Sri Lanka-brillefugl		X						
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	Sitta frontalis	Fløjlsåndet Spætmejs	X							
Sri Lanka Myna	Gracula ptilogenys	Sri Lanka-beo	X							
Hill Myna	Gracula religiosa	Beo	X							
Common Myna	Acridotheres tristis	Maina				X	X		X	x
White-faced Starling	Sturnus albofrontatus	Hvidhovedet Stær	X							
Brahminy Starling	Sturnus pagodarum	Pagodestær						X		
Rosy Starling	Sturnus roseus	Rosenstær						X		
Spot-winged Thrush	Zosterops spiloptera	Sri Lanka-drossel	X							
Eurasian Blackbird	Turdus merula	Solsort		X						
Oriental Magpie-Robin	Copsychus saularis	Dayal	X		X	X	X			x
White-rumped Shama	Copsychus malabaricus	Shamadrossel						X		
Indian Robin	Saxicoloides fulicatus	Hvidvinget Sortstjert					X	X	X	
Pied Bushchat	Saxicola caprata	Sort Bynkefugl		X						
Asian Brown Flycatcher	Muscicapa dauurica	Brun Fluesnapper	X							
Dull Verditer Flycatcher	Eumyias sordidus	Sri Lanka-irfluesnapper		X						
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	Cyornis tickelliae	Hvidflanket Niltava				X				
Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher	Culicicapa ceylonensis	Gråhovedet Fluesnapper		X						
Jerdon's Leafbird	Chloropsis jerdoni	(Jerdons Bladfugl)	X							
Golden-fronted Leafbird	Chloropsis aurifrons	Gulpandet bladfugl					X			

Legge's Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum vincens</i>	Sri Lanka-blomsterpikker	X				
Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>	Blegnæbbet Blomsterpikker	X		X		
Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>	Indisk Solfugl	X				
Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>	Purpursolfugl			X	X	
Loten's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>	Langnæbbet Purpursolfugl	X				
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Gråspurv		X	X	X	
Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	Bayavæver			X	X	
White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>	Spidshalet Bronzefinke	X		X		
Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	Muskatfinke		X		X	X
Black-headed Munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>	Trefarvet Nonne			X		
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Gul Vipstjert		X		X	
Richard's Pipit / Blyth's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi / godlewskii</i>	Storpiber / Mongolsk Piber					X
Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>	Asiatisk Storpiber	X				

Species list based on <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org/checklist.jsp?region=lk&list=clements>.

MAMMALS

The notes on mammals are less accurate than the notes on birds. But here is an overview:

<i>Pteropus giganteus</i>	Common flying fox	Common in lowland
Microchiroptera	Several species	Bats were common
<i>Semnopithecus priam</i>	Ceylon Grey Langur	Common in lowland
<i>Trachypithecus vetulus</i>	Purple-Faced Leaf Monkey	Sinharaja and Horton Plains
<i>Macaca sinica</i>	Toque Monkey	Common
<i>Lepus nigricollis singhala</i>	Ceylon Black-Naped Hare	Few in Yala
<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>	Ceylon Palm Squirrel	Common
<i>Funambulus layardi</i>	Flame-Striped Squirrel	Sinharaja
<i>Funambulus sublineatus</i>	Dusky-Striped Squirrel	Sinharaja
<i>Ratufa macroura macroura</i>	Ceylon Giant Squirrel	Common Sinharaja and Yala
<i>Hystrix indica</i>	Indian Porcupine	1 captive in Hiyare
<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	Great Blue Whale	App. 10
<i>Stenella longirostris</i>	Long-Beaked Dolphin	3-4 flocks
<i>Herpestes fuscus</i>	Ceylon Brown Mongoose	Few Sinharaja
<i>Herpestes smithi</i>	Ceylon Ruddy Mongoose	Common Yala
<i>Panthera pardus</i>	Ceylon Leopard	3 in Yala
<i>Elephas maximus</i>	Asian Elephant	App.10 in Yala
<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Wild Pig	Common
<i>Axis (axis) axis ceylonensis</i>	Ceylon Spotted Deer	Common Yala
<i>Cervus unicolor</i>	Sambhur	Common Horton, few Yala
<i>Bubalus bubalis</i>	Indian Water Buffalo	Common Yala