

# Sri Lanka – Wilpattu National Park & Kalpitiya with Blue Whale Extension.

Naturetrek Tour Report

11 - 25 November 2017

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Indian Roller



Terek Sandpiper



Black-naped Hare



Leopard

Report & images compiled by Mukesh Hirdaramani



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Tour participants: Mukesh Hirdaramani, Pradeep Rathnasiri & Jay Jinasena (leaders) together with 11 Naturetrek clients

## Highlights

Our sightings of Spinner Dolphins and many rare birds at Kalpitiya, including Sooty Gull, Western Marsh Harrier, Terek Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit and Heuglin's Gull, made the first location of the trip very successful and enjoyable, with the secluded beach hotel all to ourselves. Our long journey to Wilpattu National Park was equally successful with many bird and mammal sightings, including Leopard. Overall an impressive 21 species of mammal and 146 bird species were recorded on the tour. The extension for Blue Whales was also successful with good sightings of Blue Whales, Spinner Dolphins and Green Turtle.

### Day 1

**Saturday 11th November**

The tour started with a flight from the UK to Sri Lanka.

### Day 2

**Sunday 12th November**

#### Kalpitiya

The flight arrived in Sri Lanka at 12.25pm. After meeting the leaders, we left the airport at 1.35pm. En route to Kalpitiya we visited the Anawilundawa RAMSAR Sanctuary where sightings included Lesser Whistling Duck, Asian Openbill, Eastern Cattle Egret, Great Egret, Intermediate Egret, Little Egret, Little Cormorant, Oriental Darter, Brahminy Kite, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Red-wattled Lapwing, Pacific Golden Plover, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Gull-billed Tern, Lesser Crested Tern, Caspian Tern, Whiskered Tern, Rock Dove, Spotted Dove, Crested Treeswift, Asian Palm Swift, Indian Roller, White-throated Kingfisher, Green Bee-eater, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Brown-headed Barbet, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Black-hooded Oriole, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Red-vented Bulbul, Yellow-billed Babbler, Common Myna, Oriental Magpie-Robin and Purple-rumped Sunbird.

We arrived at the Welle Wadiya Hotel and met for the checklist at 7pm, which was followed by the next day's briefing and dinner

### Day 3

**Monday 13th November**

#### Kalpitiya

While we were waiting on the beach for our boats to arrive, we spotted a Heuglin's Gull amongst many Lesser Crested and Whiskered Terns. We boarded our boats and set off to sea on our first day of dolphin watching. Unfortunately an hour into our journey the ocean got very rough and we had to turn back to shore. We returned to the hotel and had our lunch and relaxed until 4pm.

Our afternoon birding session was near a small salt pan and we encountered Garganey, Striated Heron, Indian Pond Heron, Shikra, Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Marsh Sandpiper, Greater Crested Tern, Rose-ringed Parakeet and a very rare sighting of a Dunlin.

We returned to the hotel at 6pm and met for the checklist at 7pm, which followed by the briefing for the next day and dinner.

## Day 4

**Tuesday 14th November**

### Kalpitiya

We woke to some unpleasant weather and had to cancel our boat trip to sea. After breakfast we decided to visit the lagoon area for birding. During our birding session we witnessed a group of fisherman pulling in their nets from the sea and with it the massive flocks of terns and gulls overhead. All we had to do was sit tight until the nets came in and we kept identifying the birds one by one. We returned to the hotel at 11am and had lunch and relaxed until 3pm before setting out again for birding.

Our sightings for the day included Western Marsh Harrier, Grey Plover, Terek Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-headed Gull, Greater Coucal, Pied Kingfisher, Ashy Woodswallow, Purple Sunbird, White-rumped Munia, Richard's Pipit and a very rare sighting of a Sooty Gull.

We returned to the hotel and gathered in the restaurant to do the checklist, which was followed by dinner.

## Day 5

**Wednesday 15th November**

### Kalpitiya

We had much better weather this morning and were able to have a very successful dolphin encounter with a pod numbering over 200. We saw Spinner Dolphins spinning out of the waters many times. We spent a good time with the dolphins before heading back to shore with the rain clouds following us.

The rest of the day was at leisure until 4pm when we went out birding again. Our bird sightings for the day included Bar-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Curlew, Brown-headed Gull, Roseate Tern and Paddyfield Pipit, among many other birds seen before. An Oriental Garden Lizard was also seen.

We came back to the hotel at 6pm and, after the checklist, we had dinner and then went to bed.

## Day 6

**Thursday 16th November**

### Anuradhapura

Having missed a day's dolphin watching, we decided to head out to sea today owing to calm conditions, and once again saw over a hundred Spinner Dolphins and a Brown Noddy. We returned to the hotel by 9.30am and after having our breakfast, we checked out of the hotel and proceeded to Anuradhapura. En route we did some birding and encountered Woolly-necked Stork and Black-headed Ibis.

We reached the Rajarata Hotel at 1.30pm and had our lunch. At 5pm we did a bird walk around the tank and encountered Purple Heron, Oriental Darter, Green Imperial Pigeon, Asian Koel, Indian Swiftlet and Little Swift, together with Toque Macaque and Common Palm Civet.

We returned to the hotel and did the checklist at 7pm, followed by a briefing for the next day and dinner.

## Day 7

Friday 17th November

### Wilpattu National Park

We left the hotel at 5.30am with our packed breakfast and lunch and reached Wilpattu at 6.15am, where we got into our safari jeeps. At 9am we stopped for breakfast and again drove leisurely in search of the Leopards and Sloth Bears, but didn't have any luck. At 12.30pm we had our lunch overlooking a tank watching an Asian Elephant grazing.

Sightings today included Sambar, Spotted Deer, Muntjac, Golden Jackal, Grizzled Giant Squirrel, Indian Palm Squirrel, Water Buffalo, Wild Boar, Ruddy Mongoose, Grey Mongoose, Grey Langur, Toque Macaque, Mouse Deer, Indian (Black-naped) Hare, Land Monitor, Mugger Crocodile, Soft-shelled Terrapin and Indian Star Tortoise, along with Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Eurasian Spoonbill, Indian Cormorant, Crested Serpent Eagle, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Great Stone-curlew, Pin-tailed Snipe, Common Snipe, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, Blue-faced Malkoha, Brown Fish Owl, Common Kingfisher, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Indian Pitta, Small Minivet, Brown Shrike, White-browed Fantail, Black-naped Monarch, Jerdon's Bush Lark, White-browed Bulbul, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, Common Tailorbird, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Indian Robin, White-rumped Shama, Tricolored Munia and Forest Wagtail.

We returned to the hotel at 7.15pm, met for dinner at 7.45pm and did the checklist thereafter.

## Day 8

Saturday 18th November

### Wilpattu National Park

Once again we started the day at 5.30am and set off to Wilpattu. We spent most of the day following the alarm calls of Grey Langurs and Muntjac, and finally came across a Leopard which crossed our path and disappeared into the forest. We had our packed meals and set out again in the afternoon. We were soon on a hot trail of another Leopard, which was just 10 feet away from our jeep! We saw it walk to the edge of a tank and slowly enter the forest before losing sight of it. Other sightings for the day included Besra, Black-tailed Godwit, White-bellied Drongo, Large-billed Crow, Dark-fronted Babbler, Brown-capped Babbler, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Spotted Deer, Sambar and Indian Flying Fox.

We returned to the hotel at 6.30pm, did the checklist and finished the day with dinner.

## Day 9

Sunday 19th November

### Wilpattu National Park

We repeated the previous day's schedule and revisited Wilpattu for our third and final safari. We spent most of the day in search of Leopard and Sloth Bear, but didn't have any luck today. The weather turned against us in the afternoon so we had to retreat from the park early as visibility was very poor. New species seen today included White-breasted Waterhen, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Black Drongo, Sri Lanka Swallow, Zitting Cisticola, Jerdon's Leafbird and Bark Gecko.

At 7pm we did the checklist followed by dinner.

## Day 10

## Monday 20th November

### Anuradhapura / Katunayake

At 8.30am, after having our breakfast, we visited the Anuradhapura Ancient City and explored the monuments. We visited the Ruwanweli Maha Seya, Sri Mahabodi Tree and other sites. We returned to the hotel at noon and checked out of the hotel at 1.30pm after lunch.

On our drive to Katunayake it was raining heavily, yet we managed to see many Indian Flying Foxes as it got darker. We did the checklist at 7pm and had our dinner at 7.30pm.

## Main Tour Day 11/ Extension Day 1

## Wednesday 22nd November

At 6.30am one client left the group and proceeded for a private tour, while the rest of the group continued to Mirissa for their whale-watching extension.

After breakfast the extension group checked out of the hotel and proceeded to Weligama via the Southern expressway. We reached our next hotel in Weligama at 12.30pm and had lunch.

At 3pm we set off to visit the Galle Dutch Fort. Before long we were caught in a heavy thunderstorm and had to return to the hotel. We arrived back at the hotel at 6.30pm and our usual routine of checklist and dinner followed.

## Extension Day 2

## Wednesday 22nd November

### Mirissa / Kirala Kele

With a packed breakfast, we left the hotel at 6.15am and reached the boat company office, where we got into Tuk Tuk's which took us to Mirissa Pier. We boarded our boat and set off to sea in search of Blue Whales. Our first sighting for the day was a pod of Spinner Dolphins. After sailing for about an hour and a half we had our first view of the Blue Whale. We stayed with it for the rest of the morning and enjoyed good views.

We returned to the hotel for lunch and relaxed until 3pm, before setting out to Kirala Kele sanctuary. Although we had a few showers, it cleared up just enough for us to do some good birding. We encountered Stork-billed Kingfisher, Yellow Bittern, Black Bittern, Grey-headed Swamphen, Northern Pintail and Black-crowned Night Heron.

We returned to the hotel at 6.45pm, did the checklist and had our dinner.

## Extension Day 3

## Thursday 23rd November

### Mirissa / Kirala Kele

Once again with a packed breakfast we left the hotel at 6.15am and reached Mirissa Pier by 6.45am. We saw three different Blue Whales today and got sightings of them doing a fluke dive. We also came across a Green Turtle when we were heading back to the pier.

We had lunch and once again visited the Kirala Kele sanctuary to do some birding, but had to return early due to the rains. We returned to the hotel at 6.15pm, did the checklist and had dinner.

## Extension Day 4

Friday 24th November

### Weligama / Katunayake

At 6am we did a pre-breakfast bird walk in Weligama village and encountered many birds seen before, and new sightings of Loten's Sunbird and Thick-billed Flowerpecker. We returned to the hotel at 7.15am and had our breakfast at 7.30am.

We had lunch at 12.30pm, checked out of the hotel and proceeded to Katunayake via the southern highway. En route we saw our first House Sparrow. We reached the Airport Garden Hotel at 4.30pm. At 6pm we did a bird walk in the hotel garden and encountered three Indian Scops Owls and a Crested Honey Buzzard.

Our checklist was completed at 7.30pm and we had dinner thereafter before calling it a night.

## Extension Day 5

Saturday 25th November

After breakfast we proceeded to the airport in time to catch our flight back to the UK, where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

**Species Lists:** (bold indicates endemic species; some previous/alternative names in brackets)

## Mammal List

	<b>Common name</b>	<b>Scientific name</b>
1	Toque Macaque	<i>Macaca sinica</i>
2	Grey Langur	<i>Semnopithecus entellus</i>
3	Purple-faced Leaf Monkey	<i>Trachypithecus vetulus</i>
4	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
5	Grey Mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>
6	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>
7	Brown Mongoose	<i>Herpestes fuscus</i>
8	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus kotiya</i>
9	Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
10	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
11	Mouse Deer	<i>Tragulus meminna</i>
12	Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjac</i>
13	Spotted Deer	<i>Cervus axis</i>
14	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
15	Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus Bubalis</i>
16	Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>
17	Grizzled Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa macroura</i>
18	Indian Hare (Black-naped Hare)	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
19	Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus gigantea</i>
20	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>
21	Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella mulla</i>

## Bird List

	<b>Common name</b>	<b>Scientific name</b>
1	Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
2	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
3	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
4	<b>Sri Lanka Junglefowl</b>	<i>Gallus lafayettii</i>
5	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
6	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
7	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
8	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
9	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
10	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
11	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
12	Yellow Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>
13	Black Bittern	<i>Dupetor flavicollis</i>
14	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
15	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
16	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
17	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
18	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
19	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
20	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
21	Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
22	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
23	Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
24	Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>
25	Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>

Common name	Scientific name
26 Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
27 Crested Honey Buzzard (Oriental Honey-buzzard)	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
28 Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
29 Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
30 Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
31 Besra	<i>Accipiter virgatus</i>
32 Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
33 Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
34 White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
35 Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus ichthyaetus</i>
36 White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
37 Watercock	<i>Gallixrex cinerea</i>
38 Great Stone-curlew (Great Thick Knee)	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>
39 Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
40 Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
41 Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
42 Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
43 Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
44 Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
45 Lesser Sand Plover (Mongolian Plover)	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
46 Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
47 Pin-tailed Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>
48 Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
49 Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
50 Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
51 Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
52 Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
53 Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
54 Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
55 Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
56 Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>
57 Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
58 Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
59 Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
60 Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
61 Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>
62 Brown-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus</i>
63 Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
64 Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
65 Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
66 Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
67 Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i>
68 Roseate Tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>
69 Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
70 Rock Dove (Common Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>
71 Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
72 Common Emerald Dove (Emerald Dove)	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
73 Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>
74 <b>Sri Lanka Green Pigeon</b>	<i>Treron pompadora</i>
75 Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
76 Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
77 Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>
78 Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>



Common name	Scientific name
79 Grey-bellied Cuckoo (Plaintive Cuckoo)	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>
80 Indian Scops Owl (Collared Scops Owl)	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>
81 Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>
82 Jerdon's Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus atripennis</i>
83 Crested Treeswift (Gray-rumped Treeswift)	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
84 Indian Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus unicolor</i>
85 Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
86 Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
87 Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
88 White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
89 Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
90 Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
91 Green Bee-eater (Little Green Bee-eater)	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
92 Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
93 Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
94 Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>
95 <b>Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill</b>	<i>Ocyrceros gingalensis</i>
96 Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Psilopogon zeylanicus</i>
97 <b>Crimson-backed Flameback (Crimson-backed Goldenback)</b>	<i>Chrysocolaptes stricklandi</i>
98 Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
99 Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
100 Ashy Woodswallow	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>
101 Black-headed Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>
102 Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
103 Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
104 Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
105 Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
106 Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
107 White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
108 White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
109 Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>
110 Indian Paradise Flycatcher (Asian Paradise Flycatcher)	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
111 House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
112 Indian Jungle Crow (Large-billed Crow)	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>
113 Jerdon's Bush Lark	<i>Mirafraga affinis</i>
114 Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
115 White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
116 Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
117 <b>Sri Lanka Swallow</b>	<i>Cecropis hyperythra</i>
118 Large-billed Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus magnirostris</i>
119 Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
120 Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
121 Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
122 Grey-headed Swamphen (Purple Swamphen)	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>
123 Dark-fronted Babbler	<i>Rhopocichla atriceps</i>
124 <b>Brown-capped Babbler</b>	<i>Pellorneum fuscicapillus</i>
125 Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
126 Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>
127 Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
128 Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>
129 Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
130 White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
131 Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>

	<b>Common name</b>	<b>Scientific name</b>
132	Jerdon's Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>
133	Thick-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>
134	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
135	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
136	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
137	Loten's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>
138	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
139	White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
140	Tricolored Munia (Black-headed Munia)	<i>Lonchura Malacca</i>
141	Forest Wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>
142	Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
143	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
144	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
145	Heuglin's Gull	<i>Larus heuglini</i>
146	Sooty Gull	<i>Larus hemprichii</i>

### Reptile List

	<b>Common name</b>	<b>Scientific name</b>
1	Bengal (Land) Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>
2	Oriental (Common) Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
3	Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
4	Soft-shelled Terrapin	<i>Lissemys punctata</i>
5	Green Turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
6	Common House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>