



A [Tropical Birding](#) SET DEPARTURE tour

SRI LANKA: Ceylon Sojourn

15th - 28th January 2016



A pair of **White-naped Woodpeckers** was seen several times in Tissa, one of several bold and beautiful woodpeckers recorded on the tour

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All photos in this report were taken on this tour by Sam Woods

INTRODUCTION



Sri Lanka is, or has been, many different things to different people; to the Persians and Arabs it was "Serendib", a name that dates back to AD361; to the Portuguese of the 16th Century it was "Ceilao"; to the Dutch that followed them a century later, it was "Zeilan"; and to the British, who enjoyed colonial sway on this Indian Ocean island for nearly half of the 20th Century it was "Ceylon"; a name which has now become synonymous with the World's finest teas. Since 1972 the island has been called Sri Lanka, meaning "Resplendent Island". For us, it was primarily the home of many endemic birds that we were after. On this front, the tour was a complete success, with the entire set of **34 endemic bird species** completed by our final morning of the tour, which included excellent looks at the toughest of these, **Sri Lanka Thrush**, and likewise, good looks at **Sri Lanka Spurfowl**. Among the other top draw endemics seen were **Red-faced Malkoha**, the dramatic **Sri Lanka Blue-Magpie**, (photo left), **Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrot**, **Crimson-fronted Barbet**, and **Crimson-backed**

Flameback. A special mention should also be made for the owls on the tour; we managed to see **7 species of owl**, 6 of which were during the daytime, meaning minimal time was needed to search for these by night. Fittingly, the tour therefore ended with a spotlight **Brown Boobook** near Colombo airport shortly before our international departures. Among the owls was Sri Lanka's most famous bird of recent years, the recently described (2004) **Serendib Scops-Owl**, skillfully found snoozing during the daytime by our local guide, Chaminda. But, Sri Lanka gave us much more than only a list

of birds found nowhere else; we also enjoyed **23 species of mammals**, (including an unexpected **Sloth Bear** at Yala), and nearly twenty species of reptile, plus plentiful butterflies too, which led to a great all round natural history experience on this teardrop-shaped island.

The tour took the form of three distinct stages; starting out in the humid Wet Zone of southwestern Sri Lanka, where the majority of the endemic birds are located; then moved east to the Dry and Arid Zones of the southeast, before moving into the tea-covered slopes of the cooler Hill Country, where the final, higher elevation endemic species were added. Sri Lanka is an island country steeped in history; it's culture and history is old, dating back two thousand years, and the country lays claim to the oldest Buddhist culture in the World. The Buddha is ubiquitous and was seen everywhere on this tour, although nowhere more memorably than within the nation's premier cultural and religious attraction, the Temple of the Tooth in Sri Lanka's cultural heartland, Kandy, which is the sanctuary of a tooth relic, said to have come from the Buddha. To compliment the birding we also enjoyed short tours of a gem museum, (for precious gems are one of Sri Lanka's other natural treasures); and also visited a tea factory to sample various Ceylon teas, revered as some of the finest on Earth.



Sri Lanka's national bird: **Sri Lanka Junglefowl**

Day 1

Colombo to Kitulgala

By early morning the last of the group had arrived in Sri Lanka's capital *Colombo*, and we quickly set off for our first birding of the tour, by a small area of marshland near the international airport. While this provided us with a flurry of widespread birds, to be seen time and again later on the tour (like **Blue-tailed Bee-eater**, **White-throated Kingfisher**, **Black-hooded Oriole**, (*photo below*), and **Rose-ringed Parakeet**); it also offered us the chance to track down three species of bittern. With persistence from our local guide throughout, Chaminda, we managed to find two of these; first a long look at a **Yellow Bittern** frozen in the scrub, and then a **Black Bittern** perched in the open.



After this short period we took breakfast back at our Colombo hotel, and our first taste of legendary Ceylon Tea, for which the island became famed for following British colonisation in the 20th Century. Post-breakfast we headed to our first main destination of the tour, *Kitulgala*, three hours to the east of the capital. Kitulgala is located within the Wet Zone, in the southwest corner of the island. It is great site to start out at, as the plantations, gardens, villages, and deep rainforest offer a long list of endemic birds. In particular, the more open habitats in the area are good for quickly picking up many of these that can otherwise be hard to track down in denser jungle.



After lunch at our hotel, we visited a rubber plantation in the hills nearby. A gently rising track gave us great views of the surrounding treetops, helping us in locating endemic species like **Crimson-fronted** and **Yellow-fronted Barbets**, as well as superb views of some **Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters**, a single vocal male **Black-headed Cuckooshrike**, as well as a handful of raptor species, with **Black Eagle** seen in flight, and both **Oriental Honey-Buzzard** and **Crested**

Serpent Eagle seen perched in the plantation trees. However, the afternoon, and the first day belonged to another bird, which was found in one of the local tea plantations; **Indian Pitta**, (*photo page 5*). The calls of several birds were heard emanating from the nearby hills in the late afternoon, and the shortest of bursts of playback brought this jewel-like bird into a tree, where we could scope it for as long as we wanted, making for a memorable close to only our first day on the island.

Days 2 & 3 **Kitulgala**

(Ingoya Plantation, Kitulgala Village and Makandawa Forest Reserve)

We had two full days in the **Kitulgala** area, where we visited birding areas around the village, where gardens and plantations were rich picking grounds for birds, as well as spending part of a morning within the dense jungle of **Makandawa Forest Reserve**.

Our first full day will best be remembered as the “Day of the Owl”, not only because our guide managed to find a remarkably well-hidden **Serendib Scops-Owl** sleeping during the daytime within the verdant rainforest of Makandawa, but also because three other owls featured that day; the day was virtually bookended by **Chestnut-backed Owlets** (one in the morning, and another in the afternoon-*photo*



right), and during Chaminda’s long search for the Serendib, Robert noticed a **Brown Fish-Owl** sleeping nearby! Birding the areas around the village were very productive with an ivory-white male **Indian Paradise-Flycatcher** found there, a treetop calling **Banded Bay-Cuckoo**, **Tickell’s Blue-Flycatcher** (*photo next page*), **Golden-fronted Leafbird**, **Common Iora**, and a series of

endemics, like **Brown-capped** and **Orange-billed Babblers**, **Spot-winged Thrush**, **Sri Lanka Green-Pigeon**, **Sri Lanka Gray-Hornbill**, and our first encounter with the furtive **Green-billed Coucal**, which was to be seen much better later on the tour. Return visits to a nearby rubber plantation also allowed us to add the endemic **Layard's Parakeet**, handsome **Small and Orange Minivets**, a nesting **White-browed Bulbul**, and **Brown-capped Woodpecker**. This area also brought us our first sightings of both the island's national bird, **Sri Lanka Junglefowl**, and Sri Lanka's national mammal, the **Grizzled Giant Squirrel**.



Day 4 **Kitulgala to Sinharaja**

On this day we started out in *Kitulgala* in one part of the Wet Zone, before traveling three hours south to *Sinharaja*, in another area of the southwest of the island. Nothing new was found during a last visit to the Ingoya Plantation before we hit the road for Sinharaja. On arrival at the famed birder's hangout of *Blue-Magpie Lodge*, a few of us noted **Emerald Dove** and **Indian Paradise-Flycatcher** behind the guesthouse, while a large tree with vivid red blooms alongside attracted birds like our first **Sri Lanka Mynas**, and half a dozen **Golden-fronted Leafbirds** and **Pale-billed Flowerpeckers**. In the wet fields out front from the lodge a small group of **Black-throated Munias** were also located. A few raptors also glided over the hills visible from the lodge, which featured our first **Legge's Hawk-Eagle** and **Rufous-bellied Eagle**. Our afternoon search for *Sri Lanka Spurfowl* and *Crimson-backed Flameback* left without either of those, but did produce a small squadron of **Brown-backed**



Needletails, a further **Chestnut-backed Owlet**, and **Crimson-fronted** and **Yellow-fronted Barbets**. It was also good for parrots, with good views of a spectacular male **Plum-headed Parakeet**, and repeated looks at more **Layard's Parakeets** and perched **Sri Lanka Hanging-**

Parrots. Happy and Sam went in search of frogs in the evening after dinner, finding few frogs but being surprised by a **Fishing Cat** and kitten seen close to the lodge instead!



Days 5 & 6 **Sinharaja**

We had two full days to explore this rich area, which not only offered us many of the endemic species we may have missed at Kitulgala earlier on the tour, but also some new forest endemics only available at this site. Our first full day was spent entirely inside the national park at **Sinharaja**, accessed by way of a very bumpy jeep ride, along a very rutted track, chasing after many of the deep forest species, while the second day was spent in forest and edges outside of the park itself.

For our forest day inside the park, our avian targets were clear; it offered our only realistic chance of the shy and retiring *Sri Lanka Thrush*, traditionally the toughest of the endemic birds; our only place to see *White-faced Starling* and *Ashy-headed Laughingthrush*; and our best opportunity to see both *Sri Lanka Frogmouth* and *Red-faced Malkoha*. By carefully scouring mixed feeding flocks along the

flat main trail through the park, we quickly found **Ashy-headed Laughingthrush**, **White-faced Starling**, and **Malabar Trogon**, (*photo page 30*), which all gave good and long looks within one of our first feeding flocks, which was mainly dominated by **Orange-billed Babblers** and **Sri Lanka Drongos**. The endemic **White-throated (Legge's) Flowerpecker** was also seen well for the first time too. The frogmouth was straightforward (as always), as our local ranger had been keeping track of them of late, and soon found a sleeping pair of **Sri Lanka Frogmouths** hiding in a dark vine tangle within the rainforest. It took more time, and flocks, to finally track down the striking **Red-faced Malkoha**, which eventually showed to all in the afternoon of our day there. Wedged in between all of these sightings were great looks at first a habituated pair of **Sri Lanka Junglefowl**, (*photo page 9*), the country's national bird, and a tame group of wild **Sri Lanka Blue-Magpies** (*photo page 8*), around the research center in the park.



As usual, the trickiest of the targets to find was the **Sri Lanka Thrush**, a shy denizen of the shady forest floor (*photo page 10*). Our local guide Chaminda, and local tracker from the park, Some, both worked tirelessly in the afternoon to find this much sought-after endemic, which is the most frequently missed of the 34 species. Late in the afternoon, after having but a few short fly by views, one thrush landed on a rock in front of all present, giving us rare close ups of this bird, which capped off a great day within the park.



On the other day we remained outside of the park, and by this point our list of target birds had dwindled, so we took another bumpy jeep ride to the house of a local ranger, whose garden played host to a pair of **Sri Lanka Spurfowl**, (*photo above*), which jostled with the local **Sri Lanka Junglefowl** and **Spot-winged Thrush** for a place (*photo next page*), as the house owners sprinkle unwanted rice in their garden, which attracts these birds daily.



Day 7

Sinharaja to Udawalawe

We started our final day at Sinharaja in the garden of a local person, watching for another special bird. A quick burst of playback revealed our quarry was close, and soon after a **Slaty-legged Crake** walked out twice across a close gap in the rainforest. The few in the best position got superb looks at this forest skulker, although only half of the people present got to see it, as it never returned thereafter. The same area also produced very prolonged looks at a pair of **Green-billed Coucal**, giving us the best possible looks at what can be a difficult endemic bird to see well (*photo page 13*). Better luck for the group all round, came when we returned to a nesting site of the endemic, and spectacular **Crimson-backed Flameback**, a red-backed woodpecker, and found the female present, while a male was seen a little later too.

By lunchtime (via a pair of confiding roadside **Wooly-necked Storks**, *photo page* and a pair of low-flying **Legge's Hawk-Eagles**), we were in a very different area, and zone, the Dry Zone near

Udawalawe National Park. Our very different birding in this distinct region of the island opened with a **Spot-billed Pelican** drifting past our hotel restaurant over lunch, and a sleeping pair of **Indian Scops-Owls** was found in a favored tree in our Embilipitiya hotel garden (*photo page 14*).



Thereafter, we enjoyed an exhilarating afternoon's birding just outside the national park, which is centered on a large ancient reservoir. What this meant was a flood of wetland birds to join our lists, including **Painted Storks** and **Eurasian Spoonbills**, while our first **Indian Peafowl** paraded around in the open nearby. The rare **Citrine Wagtail** was found hiding out among the more common **Western Yellow Wagtails**, and the scarce **White Wagtail** also featured too. Three of

the best sightings of the afternoon were reserved for the nearby scrub, where we latched on to the only endemic bird confined to the dry country, **Sri Lanka Woodshrike**, and also encountered our first **Marshall's loras**, and got stellar looks at the often tough **Blue-faced Malkoha**. Other good birds seen in the same area of scrubland included the only **Yellow-crowned Woodpecker** of the trip and an **Indian Nightjar** calling from a fencepost at dusk.



Day 8 **Udawalawe National Park to Tissamaharama**

We started out the day taking a jeep drive through *Udawalawe National Park*, where peacocks were everywhere (**Indian Peafowl** to give it, its more formal name), as were **Jerdon's Bushlark**, singing from many of the surrounding bushes. An early pair of **Marshall's loras** showed even

better than the ones the evening before, providing us with a brace of sightings of this scarce species (*photo below*). **Crested Hawk-Eagles** were conspicuous in the park (*photo page 16*), with ten different sightings, and both adults and young birds involved. A couple of **Black-shouldered Kites** there also turned out to be the only ones of the entire tour. We also became acquainted with the extraordinarily tame bee-eaters of the Sri Lanka's southeast game parks, with both **Blue-tailed and Green Bee-eaters** giving the first of many photogenic looks during our three days in the parks of the Dry Zone. A single **Eurasian Hoopoe** also put in an appearance, one of only two seen during the entire tour. As we bumped our way along the dirt tracks through the park, our local driver pointed out our second daytime **Brown Fish-Owl** of the tour, which barely registered our presence as it sat serenely in a tree alongside. We also picked up one of our major targets of this park, when both of our jeeps got a single **Sirkeer Malkoha**. Perhaps the biggest surprise of our first game drive was the distinct *lack of elephants*, for this is what the park is most famous for, although we would redress that in the following days...



In the afternoon, we moved on south to the city of *Tissamaharama*, more easily referred to as just “Tissa”. The city is centered around an area of ancient tanks or reservoirs, and it was here we got to see more than half a dozen of our first **Pheasant-tailed Jacanas** of the trip, a handsome species that always vies for a position among the most popular ones of the trip. A cracking look at a close **Stork-billed Kingfisher** there was one of precious few seen on the trip, and so much appreciated too. The standout bird of the afternoon, and one of the most admired of the tour, was a **White-naped Woodpecker** that dropped on to the trunk of a coconut palm; the usual *Jungle Owlet* that lives in the same garden however was *not* around, and would have to wait for another day. We spent the first of three nights in Tissa, a good location to access the nearby parks of *Bundala* and *Yala*.



Day 9

Tissamaharama and Bundala National Park

Our day opened shortly after dawn, at a marshy area on the edge of the massive *Tissa* tank, searching for crakes. After quite some time a couple of **Watercocks** emerged from the reeds and gave us prolonged views in the open. However, the hoped for *Ruddy-breasted Crake* was a no show. The birding in this area was fantastic all the same, a pair of **Great Thick-knees** stood at the edge of the marsh, as did a group of nearly a dozen **Indian Thick-knees** too. At the edge of the reed beds a **Yellow Bittern** stood frozen, and a **Cinnamon Bittern** was seen perched within the reeds; also in the reedbeds, **Streaked Weavers** busied themselves, and in the trees alongside several **Baya Weavers** visited their hanging woven nests. We also inadvertently flushed up a pair of roosting **Indian Nightjars**, one of which was later seen sitting on the ground (*photo below*).



After breakfast, we visited the same local garden that we'd seen a female **White-naped Woodpecker**, and got an upgrade this time, with a male woodpecker seen, and also managed to

see a pair of **Jungle Owlets** as hoped. Again though, another visit to a roosting site for the rare *Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl* came up empty-handed.

In the afternoon we visited the wonderful **Bundala National Park**, most known for its large concentration of waterbirds and shorebirds, which has led to its designation as a RAMSAR site. Therefore, it was only natural that much of our jeep drive within the park focused on finding the myriad shorebirds available; we racked up 24 shorebird species through this day (including **Red-necked Phalarope**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Little Stint**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Small Pratincole**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Kentish Plover**, and **Yellow-wattled Lapwing**); and 7 species of tern (including **Greater and Lesser Crested**, and **Little Terns**). Other notable birds on site were the scarce **Osprey**, plentiful **Gray-headed Swamphens** (recently part of a six-way split of Purple Swamphen-*photo below*), **Pied Kingfisher**, a raft of **Garganey**, and a rare sighting in the south of Sri Lanka of **Green-winged Teal**. As expected we also got cracking looks at both **Green** and **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters**, which provided endless photo opps in doing so. We also enjoyed some great looks at **Gray Tufted Langur** bathed in the late afternoon sun.





Day 10 **Yala National Park**

For the third day running we spent time taking jeep-based game drives within a national park, but this time within the most popular of them all, **Yala**, located on the coast of southeastern Sri Lanka. The insertion of this park into the itinerary was not entirely for birding reasons, as it boasts one of the highest densities of Leopards in the world, giving a decent chance of seeing one in just a single day inside the park. Sadly though, on this day leopard sightings were non-existent. Compensation was provided by a distinctly rarer find, in the form of a **Sloth Bear**, which was seen early into our full day inside the park (*photo next page*).

Yala, is a park comprised of wooded areas, scrubland, and wetland areas, which has a high diversity of both birds and mammals. The wetter areas of the park provided great views of birds that had become familiar to us in recent days, like **Painted Storks**, and **Asian Openbill**. Indeed, this

proved to be a good day for storks, with the ugly **Lesser Adjutant** finally providing decent looks, as it paced around in full view of our jeeps. Shorebirds were also prominent with many of the same, expected, species lending to a good day list of 20 species. Less expected were the scarce **Long-toed Stint**, and only one of two **Pin-tailed Snipe** recorded on the tour.



All three species of Sri Lankan larks (**Oriental Skylark** and **Jerdon's Bushlark**) were also seen, which included our best looks at handsome male **Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Larks**. The game parks of the southeast are superb for photographers in the group, as was proved by many photogenic species seen through the day, including **Green and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters**, a super **Indian Roller**, and several **Pied Cuckoos**. Two separate encounters with Barred Buttonquails through the

day (one for each of our jeeps) brought relief all round, after missing the species in Udawalawe and Bundala earlier on the tour. Over lunch, we fought off a devious, predatory group of **Toque Macaques**, one of which robbed us of several bananas; and had a long observation of a male **White-rumped Shama**, one of Sri Lanka's most beautiful songsters.



Other stellar birds seen through the day included **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon**, a cryptically patterned female **Asian Koel**, and a pair of **Gray-headed Fish-Eagles**. We returned to Tissa for one final night, before we would make our way into the Hill Country...



Day 11 **Tissamaharama to Nuwara Eliya**

The morning was spent trying to track down some of our final Dry Zone birds, before we left and headed north into the hills of Sri Lanka; an area where tea plantations carpet the hillsides, and a last handful of endemic birds were on offer...

At dawn we re-visited a marshy area hoping for *Ruddy-breasted Crake*, but in spite of Chaminda getting two brief sightings, Sam and the group left with none. The marsh did hold a **Shikra**, **Cinnamon Bittern**, **Watercock**, both **Indian** and **Great Thick-knees**, and a single **Pin-tailed Snipe**. Our final time around the *Tissa* tank got us good looks at several **Coppersmith Barbets**, another small party of **Sri Lanka Woodshrikes**, and our only lime green **Jerdon's Leafbirds** of the tour. We also returned once more to a local garden, where **White-naped Woodpecker** was seen for one final time, and this time all got to see a **Jungle Owlet** sitting quietly in the garden. A

huge colony of **Indian Flying-Foxes** (a large fruit-eating bat) also provided some entertainment on the edge of the tank, where we got our final looks at the always-popular **Pheasant-tailed Jacana**.



After breakfast we packed up and left the Dry Zone, heading into the hill country of the Wet Zone, and the town of **Nuwara Eliya**. En-route we clocked a pair of **Malabar Pied-Hornbills** cross over the road, and admired the impressive **Rawana Falls** near Ella, where the **Ella Rest House** provided a scenic place to have lunch and see a couple of **Southern Hill-Mynas** in the garden. After lunch, we made a planned stop at the **Surrey Bird Sanctuary**, where Chaminda wasted no time in finding a pair of sleeping **Brown Wood-Owls**, (*photo next page*), which gave some great looks through some ingenious repositioning. We also added an endemic we had thus far avoided us at the same estate, in the form of a pair of **Sri Lanka Scimitar-Babblers**.

Day 12 **Horton Plains National Park and Victoria Park**

This day of the tour is always the one which the guide greets with some trepidation; as it visits the highest site of the tour-**Horton Plains**-which at 2300m/7545ft is subject to its own unpredictable mountain weather; and it targets some of the toughest of the endemic birds-*Sri Lanka Whistling-Thrush* and *Sri Lanka Bush-Warbler*. The weather was indeed inclement during the first hours of the morning, with drizzle making the birding difficult for the most part. Eventually though we managed to eek out some birds; while the *Sri Lanka Whistling-Thrush* was only heard, we did get repeated looks at the common **Sri Lanka White-eye**, and also tracked down a few more **Sri Lanka Scimitar-Babblers**, and a typically furtive **Sri Lanka Bush-Warbler** with some work.



However, perhaps the start sighting of the morning was another more handsome endemic, the **Dull-blue Flycatcher**. We enjoyed some looks at the surrounding scenery, once the sun emerged mid-morning, with the view of the distant **Adam's Peak**, particularly memorable, and we also noticed a number of vibrant red *Rhododendron* flowers littered the forested slopes. The open grassy plains themselves were home to birds too, like **Himalayan Buzzard**, **Pied Bushchat** and **Hill Swallow**. Our final birding of the morning saw us see a few **Black-cheek Lizards** (*photo next page*) in an area that also held some **Yellow-eared Bulbuls**, **Cinereous Tits**, and a pair of **Indian Blackbirds**.

After lunch, we visited a royal park in the heart of Nuwara Eliya, *Victoria Park*, named in 1897 to commemorate the United Kingdom's Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The main reason for visiting this town park was to search for some of the wintering species found there. We had some early success with this, when we got cracking looks at a red, white and blue male **Indian Blue Robin**. Several **Forest Wagtails** were also seen foraging on the park floor, but a pair of **Pied Thrushes** was only seen poorly as they sat concealed high in the trees.



Day 13 **Nuwara Eliya to Kandy**

With only part of the day remaining in this part of the Hill Country, before we needed to move on to our final destination, the city of *Kandy*, one glaring gap needed to be plugged: **Sri Lanka Whistling-Thrush**. Over the previous few days five different attempts had failed, but after another two tries in the morning (by which time only three people were still present!), we finally managed

close, though brief views of this tough endemic. We also finally tracked down **Kashmir Flycatcher**, with a male and female seen in the area, although only a few managed to get views of the male, which was far from cooperative! Numerous **Gray-headed Canary-Flycatchers**, and a regular flow of **Sri Lanka White-eyes** were more readily seen. A **Legge's Hawk-Eagle** put in a brief, final appearance, before we took a lunch in Nuwara Eliya, and made one final visit to **Victoria Park**. Our main goals in the park were to try and see a male *Kashmir Flycatcher* for all, which did not oblige;

although our second objective was achieved with great looks at a male **Pied Thrush** to round out our time in Nuwara Eliya (*photo right*). On our journey north to **Kandy**, we made a stop off at Glenloch Tea Factory for a short though fascinating tour and to sample some of their legendary Ceylon Teas, some of which are specially produced



for the Royal Family of the United Kingdom. In the evening we checked into our final hotel of the tour, perched on the edge of Kandy Lake, in Sri Lanka's cultural heartland, and former capital. Its cultural position was clear from the festivities in our hotel, where a local band sung traditional Sri Lankan songs over dinner.

Day 14 **Kandy Hills to Colombo**

By this, our final morning, we had one major target left, for *Sri Lanka Woodpigeon* was now the only endemic species we had not seen. Chaminda had a plan for this and so we left our hotel under darkness, and climbed up into the hills near **Kandy**. Our session of pre-breakfast birding there served to enjoy the heat of the day, observe the best activity of the day, before too many people were around.



The grounds of a Buddhist temple were home to several calling **Sri Lanka Woodpigeons**, which were eventually seen well, and at length, in our scope to quietly complete our endemic list of birds for the tour. This final birding session will be remembered to some great, last looks at many of the best birds of Sri Lanka. The area was particularly rich in parrots, and we got great looks at **Alexandrine Parakeets** perched, along with **Layard's Parakeets** and **Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrots**. We also observed another bright male **Indian Blue Robin** creeping through the undergrowth, and got some great looks at a pair of confiding **Velvet-fronted Nuthatches**. We also saw yet another **Black-rumped Flameback**, a large and spectacular woodpecker that had featured many times on the tour; the particular, and endemic, red-backed subspecies is said to have been the subject of recent taxonomic research

and so is soon to be revealed and the latest and 34th, endemic bird species on the island...

Following the wrapping up of our main birding on the island, we found ourselves with enough time to take in the chief cultural attraction in the area, Kandy's **Temple of the Tooth**. The temple holds great significance in Buddhist culture, as it houses a golden casket, where the relic of the tooth of the Buddha is kept under lock and key. It was an absorbing visit to the country's most sacred site, when we were accompanied by the most senior guide in the area, who can list Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Charles among the long list of dignitaries that he has shown around the temple.

After lunch, we packed up and headed west back to Colombo (via a quick stop at a local gem museum), shopping for local cashew nuts along the way, and stopping to add **Ashy Woodswallow** to the list too. Finally, just after dark, before the majority of flights left that night, we made an attempt for one final bird, when we managed to add one more owl to the list: **Brown Boobook**, a fitting end to what had been a good tour for owls, with seven species seen.

In addition to the wonderful Sri Lankan birds and mammals, many of which are unique to the island, we had also enjoyed a vibrant Buddhist culture, dating back hundreds of years, and also sampled time and again the delicious cuisine of this island that is rich in spices and steeped in ancient history.



This **Velvet-fronted Nuthatch** thrilled us on our final morning near Kandy.

Some other photos from this tour...



Green Forest Lizard *Kitulgala*



Malabar Trogon *Sinharaja* & Crimson-backed Flameback *Sinharaja*





Indian Roller Yala



Indian Blackbird Horton Plains & Great Thick-knee Bundala





Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrot *Sinharaja* & **Green Bee-eater** *Bundala*





Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Bundala*

CHECKLISTS

The taxonomy of the bird list follows: Clements, James F., White, Anthony W., and Fitzpatrick, John W. *The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World*. Cornell, 2007.

This list is up to date with the major changes published by Cornell up until August 2015.

Sri Lankan Endemic BIRD species are indicated in BOLD, in RED, and with (ES).

Sri Lankan Endemic BIRD subspecies are indicated in BOLD with (ESS).

H indicates a species that was HEARD only.

GO indicates a species recorded by the GUIDE ONLY.

Numbers: 250 species recorded on the tour; 246 seen.



Brown-capped Babbler a Sri Lanka endemic, Sinharaja

BIRDS:

DUCKS, GEESE & WATERFOWL: ANATIDAE

Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*

Recorded on five days in the Dry Zone section of the tour.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

One large group was seen in Bundala.

Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca*

Also known as Common or Eurasian Teal. A male at Bundala was a rare find in southern Sri Lanka.

PHEASANTS, GROUSE & ALLIES: PHASIANIDAE

Sri Lanka Spurfowl (ES) *Galloperdix bicalcarata*

A pair was seen coming to rice in a local garden in Sinharaja.

Sri Lanka Junglefowl (ES) *Gallus lafayetii*

Sri Lanka's national bird was seen at Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

Indian Peafowl*Pavo cristatus*

This classic and conspicuous bird was seen daily in Sri Lanka's Dry Zone (5 days of the tour).

GREBES: PODICIPEDIDAE**Little Grebe***Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Two were seen on Tissa Tank in the Dry Zone.

STORKS: CICONIIDAE**Asian Openbill***Anastomus oscitans*

Seen well in Tissa, Bundala and Yala.

Woolly-necked Stork*Ciconia episcopus*

Seen three times, in and around Udawalawe in Sri Lanka's Dry Zone.

Lesser Adjutant*Leptoptilos javanicus*

Two were seen poorly in flight at Udawalawe, but one was seen well on the ground in Yala.

Painted Stork*Mycteria leucocephala*

Many good looks were had in the game parks of the southeast (Udawalawe, Bundala and Yala).

CORMORANTS & SHAGS: PHALACROCORACIDAE**Indian Cormorant***Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*

Seen on seven days of the tour, including near Colombo, but most often in Sri Lanka's Dry Zone.

Great Cormorant*Phalacrocorax carbo*

Seen on just one afternoon, in Udawalawe.

Little Cormorant*Phalacrocorax niger*

Seen on six days of the tour, including at Udawalawe, Bundala, and Yala.

ANHINGAS: ANHINGIDAE**Oriental Darter***Anhinga melanogaster*

Recorded on four days in the Dry Zone; at Udawalawe, Bundala, and Yala.

PELICANS: PELECANIDAE**Spot-billed Pelican***Pelecanus philippensis*

Our first came from a restaurant table in Embilipitiya, with others seen at Tissa, Yala and Kandy.

HERONS, EGRETS & BITTERNS: ARDEIDAE**Yellow Bittern***Ixobrychus sinensis*

Singles were seen near Colombo airport, and another was seen near Tissa Tank.

Cinnamon Bittern*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*

Seen twice in Tissa.

Black Bittern*Ixobrychus flavicollis*

One was seen well on our first morning, near Colombo airport.

Gray Heron*Ardea cinerea*

Seen on five days in the parks of the Southeast.

Purple Heron*Ardea purpurea*

Seen daily in southeastern Sri Lanka, and also at a small marsh near Colombo airport.

Great Egret*Ardea alba*

Regularly encountered in the Dry Zone of the southeast.

Intermediate Egret*Mesophoyx intermedia*

Small numbers were seen in the Dry Zone of the southeast, and also seen at a marsh near Colombo.

Little Egret*Egretta garzetta*

Recorded on 8 days of the tour, most regularly in the wetlands within the southeast game parks.

(Eastern) Cattle Egret*Bubulcus ibis*

Regularly recorded throughout; seen on all but a few days.

Indian Pond-Heron*Ardeola grayii*

A common bird in Sri Lanka, recorded on all but a few of the days.

Black-crowned Night-Heron*Nycticorax nycticorax*

Seen twice on the tour; at a small marsh near Colombo airport, and in Bundala National Park.

IBISES & SPOONBILLS: THRESKIORNITHIDAE**Black-headed Ibis***Threskiornis melanocephalus*

Recorded daily during our time in the southeast of the island, and also seen near Colombo.

Eurasian Spoonbill*Platalea leucorodia*

Only seen on three days of the tour; inside Udawalawe, Bundala and Yala.

OSPREY: PANDIONIDAE**(Western) Osprey***Pandion haliaetus haliaetus*

One was seen perched at Bundala; this is a scarce raptor on the island.

HAWKS, EAGLES & KITES: ACCIPITRIDAE**Black-shouldered (-winged) Kite***Elanus caeruleus*

Two birds seen during our morning within Udawalawe National Park were the only ones seen.

Oriental (Crested) Honey-buzzard*Pernis ptilorhynchus*

Seen on six days of the tour; at Kitulgala, Udawalawe and Horton Plains.

Crested Serpent-Eagle (ESS)*Spilornis cheela spilogaster*

One of the most regularly encountered raptors on the tour, seen on 10 different days.

Crested (Changeable) Hawk-Eagle (ESS) *Nisaetus cirrhatus ceylanensis*

Recorded on 3 days; seen 10 different times in Udawalawe National Park; and also seen in Yala.

Legge's Hawk-Eagle*Nisaetus kelaarti*

Seen 4 times; at Kitulgala, Sinharaja, a pair between Sinharaja and Embilipitiya, and in Nuwara Eliya.

Rufous-bellied (Hawk-) Eagle*Lophotriorchis kienerii*

An adult was seen from the lodge at Sinharaja, and another immature bird was seen near there.

Black Eagle*Ictinaetus malaiensis*

Seen on four occasions, around Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

Pied Harrier*Circus melanoleucos*

An immature bird was seen by one vehicle near Horton Plains in Sri Lanka's Hill Country.

Shikra*Accipiter badius*

Seen just 3 times; at Kitulgala, and twice in Tissa.

Besra*Accipiter virgatus besra*

One was seen perched in Sinharaja.

Brahminy Kite*Haliastur indus*

One of the most often recorded raptors, seen on 10 days of the tour.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle*Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Seen on five days of the tour; including at Udawalawe, Tissa, and Yala.

Gray-headed Fish-Eagle*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*

Two were seen in Udawalawe and another pair was seen in Yala.

Himalayan Buzzard*Buteo refectus*

One was seen at Bundala (where it was not expected), and also at Horton Plains.

RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS: RALLIDAE**Slaty-legged Crake***Rallina eurizonoides*

This skulking species was seen well at Sinharaja, but only by some who were positioned to see it.

White-breasted Waterhen*Amaurornis phoenicurus*

Recorded regularly throughout, only not seen on 3 days of the tour.

Watercock*Gallicrex cinerea*

Good views were had on two different days in Tissa.

Gray-headed Swampen*Porphyrio poliocephalus*

This was recently split from Purple Swampen, which was divided into 6 different species. Recorded regularly in the Dry Zone areas, and also at a marsh near Colombo airport.

Eurasian (Common) Moorhen*Gallinula chloropus*

Just the one was seen by one or two people, in Tissa.

THICK-KNEES: BURHINIDAE**Indian Thick-knee (Stone-curlew)***Burhinus indicus*

A group of nearly a dozen birds was seen beside Tissa Tank, on two separate days.

Great Thick-knee (Stone-curlew)*Esacus recurvirostris*

Seen at Tissa, and also inside the parks at Bundala and Yala.

STILTS & AVOCETS: RECURVIROSTRIDAE**Black-winged Stilt***Himantopus himantopus*

Seen in all three parks we visited in southeastern Sri Lanka.

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS: CHARADRIIDAE**Black-bellied (Gray) Plover***Pluvialis squatarola*

Seen in Bundala and Yala.

Pacific Golden-Plover*Pluvialis fulva*

Recorded three times; at Bundala, Yala, and Tissa.

Yellow-wattled Lapwing*Vanellus malabaricus*

Seen in Udawalawe, Bundala and Yala.

Red-wattled Lapwing (ESS)*Vanellus indicus lankae*

Recorded on half of the days of the tour, including within our hotel grounds near Colombo airport.

Lesser Sand-Plover*Charadrius mongolus atrifrons*

Small numbers were seen in Yala, and greater numbers in Bundala.

Greater Sand-Plover*Charadrius leschenaultia*

One bird was found at Bundala National Park.

Kentish Plover*Charadrius alexandrinus*

Around half a dozen birds were seen at the shorebird stronghold of Bundala.

Little Ringed Plover*Charadrius dubius*

Four birds were seen in Udawalawe; others were seen at Bundala and Yala by some.

PAINTED-SNIPES: ROSTRATULIDAE**Greater Painted-Snipe***Rostratula benghalensis*

Two calling birds were briefly seen in flight near Tissa Tank.

JACANAS: JACANIIDAE**Pheasant-tailed Jacana***Hydrophasianus chirurgus*

This handsome bird was seen regularly around Tissa, with up to a dozen birds seen in a day there.

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES: SCOLOPACIDAE**Common Sandpiper***Actitis hypoleucos*

One of the most frequently encountered waders of the tour, seen on at least 6 different days.

Green Sandpiper*Tringa ochropus*

Singles were seen at Udawalawe, Bundala and Yala.

Common Greenshank*Tringa nebularia*

Just one bird was seen at Bundala.

Marsh Sandpiper*Tringa stagnatilis*

Good numbers were seen in Bundala, with smaller numbers seen in Yala and Udawalawe.

Wood Sandpiper*Tringa glareola*

Recorded on 4 days of the tour during our time in Sri Lanka's Dry Zone.

Common Redshank*Tringa tetanus*

Triple figures were seen at Bundala National Park; others were seen in Yala.

Eurasian Curlew*Numenius arquata*

Chaminda found a distant bird at Bundala.

Black-tailed Godwit*Limosa limosa limosa*

Triple figures were seen at Bundala, with smaller numbers seen at Yala too.

Ruddy Turnstone*Arenaria interpres*

10 birds were seen at Bundala, with small numbers also seen at Yala.

Curlew Sandpiper*Calidris ferruginea*

Seen in both Bundala and Yala.

Long-toed Stint*Calidris subminuta*

A rare winterer in Sri Lanka; we managed to find a single bird in Yala.

Little Stint*Calidris minuta*

Regularly recorded in Udawalawe, Bundala and Yala.

Pin-tailed Snipe*Gallinago stenura*

Just two were seen; a single at Yala and another single in Tissa.

Red-necked Phalarope*Phalaropus lobatus*

One was seen at Bundala.

BUTTONQUAIL: TURNICIDAE**Barred Buttonquail (ESS)***Turnix suscitator leggei*

Two pairs were seen in Yala.

PRATINCOLES & COURSERS: GLAREOLIDAE**Small Pratincole***Glareola lacteal*

5 or 6 birds were seen during our afternoon in Bundala.

GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS: LARIDAE**Little Tern***Sternula albifrons*

10 or more birds were seen in Bundala.

Gull-billed Tern*Gelochelidon nilotica*

Seen within Bundala and Yala National Parks.

Caspian Tern*Hydroprogne caspia*

Around a dozen birds were seen in Bundala, and 1 was also seen at the Tissa tank.

White-winged Tern*Chlidonias leucopterus*

Recorded regularly in the Dry Zone, including at Yala and Bundala.

Whiskered Tern*Chlidonias hybrid*

Regularly recorded in the Dry Zone of the southeast.

Great (Greater) Crested Tern*Thalasseus bergii*

10 or so birds were seen in Bundala National Park.

Lesser Crested Tern*Thalasseus bengalensis*

2 birds were seen resting with a large flock of terns in Bundala.

PIGEONS & DOVES: COLUMBIDAE**Rock Pigeon (Rock Dove)***Columba livia*

Commonly recorded throughout.

Sri Lanka Wood-Pigeon (ES)*Columba torringtoniae*

This had us sweating until the last morning, when it became the last endemic to join our list near Kandy.

Spotted Dove*Streptopelia chinensis*

A common bird in Sri Lanka, seen every single day.

(Common) Emerald Dove (ESS)*Chalcophaps indica robinsoni*

After some frustrating flybys at Kitulgala, the species was seen well at Sinharaja.

Orange-breasted (Green) Pigeon (ESS) *Treron bicinctus leggei*

Small numbers were seen on four of our days in Sri Lanka's Dry Zone.

Sri Lanka Green-Pigeon (ES)*Treron pompadora*

Seen just four times, but good views were had on two of these occasions.

Green Imperial-Pigeon*Ducula aenea*

A fairly common species in Sri Lanka, seen on at least 9 days of the tour.

CUCKOOS: CUCULIDAE**Pied (Jacobin) Cuckoo***Clamator jacobinus*

Only seen on one day, within Yala National Park, where at least 3 different birds were seen.

Common Hawk-Cuckoo (ESS)*Hierococcyx varius ciceliae*

H

Several birds were heard in Kitulgala and Kandy, but were never close to being seen.

Banded Bay Cuckoo (ESS)*Cacomantis sonneratii waiti*

A single calling bird was seen perched high in the treetops, one afternoon in Kitulgala.

Gray-bellied Cuckoo*Cacomantis passerines*

Seen 3 times, twice in Udawalawe, and again in Yala.

Asian Koel*Eudynamis scolopaceus*

After flight views only of a male in Sinharaja, two different females were seen at Bundala and Yala.

Blue-faced Malkoha*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*

Traditionally one of the toughest dry country birds to find; we managed good views at Udawalawe.

Sirkeer Malkoha*Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii leschenaultia*

A single bird was seen by all in Udawalawe.

Red-faced Malkoha (ES)*Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*

5 birds were seen in a large mixed flock at Sinharaja, which eventually gave us some great views.

Greater Coucal*Centropus sinensis*

Not as visible as they can be, with just a few seen in Kitulgala and Tissa.

Green-billed Coucal (ES)*Centropus chlororhynchus*

This often-difficult endemic was seen briefly at Kitulgala, then much better twice in Sinharaja.

BARN-OWLS: TYTONIDAE**Sri Lanka Bay-Owl (ESS)***Phodilus assimilis assimilis*

H

This extremely difficult bird was heard, but only distantly, during 2 attempts to find it, in Sinharaja.

OWLS: STRIGIDAE**Serendib Scops-Owl (ES)***Otus thilohoffmanni*

This species was only formally described in 2004; we had long looks at a sleeping bird in Kitulgala, thanks to the intense work put into to find it by our local guide, Chaminda.

Indian Scops-Owl*Otus bakkamoena*

A roosting pair was seen in the car park of our Embilipitiya hotel; and another was seen during near the Brown Boobook, close to Colombo airport on the final night of the tour.

Spot-bellied (Forest) Eagle-Owl (ESS)*Bubo nipalensis blighi*

H

Definitely one of the disappointments of the tour; in spite of visiting two roost sites, and searching at night, we only managed some distant calls.

Brown Fish-Owl (ESS)*Ketupa zeylonensis zeylonensis*

Two daytime birds were seen; one found by Robert at Kitulgala, and another at Udawalawe.

Jungle Owlet*Glaucidium radiatum*

A regular pair was seen in a garden that hosted White-naped Woodpecker too, after 2 attempts.

Chestnut-backed Owlet (ES)*Glaucidium castanonotum*

Two of these owls were seen in one day at Kitulgala, and another was seen in Sinharaja.

Brown Wood-Owl (ESS)*Strix leptogrammica ochrogenys*

An amazing pair was found by Chaminda during a daytime stop at the Surrey Bird Sanctuary.

Brown Boobook (Hawk-Owl)*Ninox scutulata*

One seen near Colombo airport was the last bird of the tour.

FROGMOUTHS: PODARGIDAE**Sri Lanka Frogmouth***Batrachostomus moniliger*

A regular roosting pair was located by our local tracker and Chaminda at Sinharaja.

NIGHTJARS & ALLIES: CAPRIMULGIDAE**Jerdon's Nightjar (ESS)***Caprimulgus atripennis aequabilis*

3 different birds were seen at dusk in Bundala, including one perched on an overhead cable.

Indian Nightjar (ESS)*Caprimulgus asiaticus eidos*

One was seen calling from a fencepost at dusk near Udawalawe; and others were seen at Bundala. Our best views came at Tissa, where a bird was seen resting on the ground during the daytime.

SWIFTS: APODIDAE**Brown-backed Needletail***Hirundapus giganteus*

5 birds flew over us at Sinharaja.

Indian Swiftlet*Aerodramus unicolor*

Recorded regularly during the first week of the tour in Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

Alpine Swift (ESS)*Apus melba bakeri*

3 birds were seen soaring above Horton Plains.

Little (House) Swift*Apus affinis*

Recorded on four days of the tour; at Kitulgala, Udawalawe, Bundala and Yala.

Asian Palm-Swift*Cypsiurus balasiensis*

Seen on five different days of the tour, including at Kitulgala, Sinharaja, and Tissa.

TREESWIFTS: HEMIROCNIDAE**Crested Treeswift***Hemiprocne coronate*

Recorded on 7 days of the tour; in Kitulgala, Sinharaja, Udawalawe, and Yala.

TROGONS: TROGONIDAE**Malabar Trogon (ESS)***Harpactes fasciatus fasciatus*

4 birds were seen during our day inside the park at Sinharaja, with another seen outside the park.

KINGFISHERS: ALCEDINIDAE**Common Kingfisher***Alcedo atthis*

Singles were seen daily during our time in Southeastern Sri Lanka.

Black-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher*Ceyx erithaca*

H

One was heard while we were searching for Sri Lanka Thrush at Sinharaja.

Stork-billed Kingfisher*Pelargopsis capensis*

Just 2 were seen; one near Colombo airport, and another near Tissa Tank.

White-throated Kingfisher*Halcyon smyrnensi*

This stunning bird is common in Sri Lanka, and was seen on all but 2 days of the tour.

Pied Kingfisher*Ceryle rudis*

Seen at a marsh near Colombo airport, and later in Tissa and Yala in the southeast.

BEE-EATERS: MEROPIDAE**Green Bee-eater***Merops orientalis*

Seen regularly in the parks of Udawalawe, Bundala and Yala.

Blue-tailed Bee-eater*Merops philippinus*

First seen near Colombo, then regularly in Udawalawe, Bundala and Yala. Also seen in Sinharaja.

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater*Merops leschenaultia*

Great views were had around the plantations at Kitulgala, and also seen at Udawalawe and Yala.

ROLLERS: CORACIIDAE**Indian Roller***Coracias benghalensis*

Two birds were seen; at Udawalawe and Yala.

HOOPOES: UPUPIDAE**Eurasian (Common) Hoopoe***Upupa epops*

Recorded at two sites in the southeast, Udawalawe and Yala.

HORNBILLS: BUCEROTIDAE**Sri Lanka Gray Hornbill (ES)***Ocyrceros gingalensis*

Seen just twice; once at Kitulgala and once at Sinharaja.

Malabar Pied-Hornbill*Anthracoceros coronatus*

4 were seen in Udawalawe, and another pair was seen near Tissa.

ASIAN BARBETS: MEGALAIMIDAE**Crimson-fronted Barbet (ES)***Megalaima rubricapillus*

Also known as Ceylon Small Barbet. Seen twice at Kitulgala, and then again at Sinharaja.

Coppersmith Barbet*Psilopogon haemacephalus*

Seen well around Tissa, and also seen at Udawalawe.

Brown-headed Barbet*Psilopogon zeylanicus zeylanicus*

Strangely just the one was seen, in a garden in Tissa.

Yellow-fronted Barbet (ES)*Psilopogon flavifrons*

Seen regularly in both Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

WOODPECKERS: PICIDAE**Brown-capped Woodpecker (ESS)***Dendrocopos nanus gymnophthalmus*

A pair was seen in a rubber plantation near Kitulgala, and another was seen in Udawalawe.

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker*Dendrocopos mahrattensis*

One was seen just outside Udawalawe National Park.

Lesser Yellownappe (ESS)*Picus chlorolophus wellsi*

Recorded 5 times on the tour (at Kitulgala, Sinharaja, near Tissa, and near Kandy).

Black-rumped Flameback (ES?)*Dinopium benghalense psarodes*

Also known as Lesser Goldenback. Recorded at Kitulgala, Sinharaja, and near Kandy.

*Recent unpublished genetic research indicates the endemic, red-backed subspecies, which is confined to southern Sri Lanka, should best be treated as a full species.

Rufous Woodpecker*Micropternus brachyurus*

One was seen at Udawalawe.

Crimson-backed Flameback (ES)*Chrysocolaptes stricklandi*

A pair was seen at a nest site in Sinharaja, and another pair was seen in flight only at Horton Plains.

White-naped Woodpecker (ESS)*Chrysocolaptes festivus tantus*

A pair was seen very well in a local garden in Tissa.

OLD WORLD PARROTS: PSITTACULIDAE**Alexandrine Parakeet***Psittacula eupatria*

Seen regularly in Kitulgala, but we needed to wait until the final day in Kandy, for perched views.

Rose-ringed Parakeet*Psittacula krameri*

Recorded regularly at all of the lowland sites, seen on half of the tour days.

Plum-headed Parakeet*Psittacula cyanocephala*

3 were seen at Kitulgala, another was seen in Sinharaja, and a final group was seen at Udawalawe.

Layard's Parakeet (ES)*Psittacula calthropae*

Seen well perched in Kitulgala, Sinharaja and also in the hills near Kandy.

Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrot (ES)*Loriculus beryllinus*

Recorded regularly around Kitulgala and Sinharaja, and also seen well near Kandy.

PITTAS: PITTIDAE**Indian Pitta***Pitta brachyuran*

Two excellent views were had in a tea plantation near Kitulgala.

VANGAS, HELMETSHRIKES & ALLIES: VANGIDAE**Sri Lanka Woodshrike (ES)***Tephrodornis affinis*

5 birds were seen just outside the park at Udawalawe, and another pair was seen in Tissa.

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike (ESS)*Hemipus picatus leggei*

Seen several times in both Kitulgala and Sinharaja; also seen in Nuwara Eliya.

WOODSWALLOWS: ARTAMIDAE**Ashy Woodswallow***Artamus fuscus*

A few were seen near Colombo on our final day.

IORAS: AEGITHINIDAE**Common Iora***Aegithina tiphia*

Seen in Kitulgala, at Blue Magpie Lodge, in Udawalawe, Yala and Tissa.

White-tailed (Marshall's) Iora*Aegithina nigrolutea*

Two different pairs were seen around Udawalawe.

CUCKOOSHRIKES: CAMPEPHAGIDAE**Small Minivet***Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*

This handsome bird was seen in Kitulgala, Udawalawe, and Yala.

Orange (Scarlet) Minivet*Pericrocotus flammeus*

Seen at three sites on the tour; Kitulgala, Sinharaja, and near Kandy.

Black-headed Cuckooshrike*Lalage melanoptera*

A male was seen well in a rubber plantation near Kitulgala, and a female bird was seen in Sinharaja.

SHRIKES: LANIIDAE**Brown Shrike***Lanius cristatus*

Seen on 8 days of the tour, including near Colombo and Kandy, and in Kitulgala.

OLD WORLD ORIOLES: ORIOLIDAE**Black-hooded Oriole (ESS)***Oriolus xanthornus ceylonensis*

Recorded on half the days of the tour, including in Kitulgala and around our Colombo hotel.

DRONGOS: DICRURIDAE**White-bellied Drongo (ESS)***Dicrurus caerulescens leucopygialis*

Seen regularly during the first week of the tour around Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

Sri Lanka Drongo (ES)*Dicrurus lophorinus*

Seen regularly within mixed flocks in Sinharaja; and another was seen briefly in Kitulgala.

FANTAILS: RHIPIDURIDAE**White-browed Fantail***Rhipidura aureola*

Recorded at 3 sites, in the plantations near Kitulgala, at Blue Magpie Lodge, and in Udawalawe.

MONARCH FLYCATCHERS: MONARCHIDAE**Black-naped Monarch (ESS)***Hypothymis azurea ceylonensis*

One was seen at Kitulgala and another at Sinharaja.

Indian Paradise-Flycatcher (ESS)*Terpsiphone paradisi ceylonensis*

A white male was seen near Kitulgala village and at Blue Magpie Lodge; others were seen at Yala.

CROWS, JAYS & MAGPIES: CORVIDAE**Sri Lanka Blue-Magpie (ES)***Urocissa ornate*

This dramatic species was seen well in the park at Sinharaja.

House Crow (ESS)*Corvus splendens protegatus*

Recorded regularly in urban areas throughout.

Large-billed Crow*Corvus macrorhynchos*

Recorded regularly throughout; only not seen on a few days of the tour.

LARKS: ALAUDIDAE**Jerdon's Bushlark***Mirafra affinis*

Seen regularly in the parks at Udawalawe, Bundala and Yala.

Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark*Eremopterix griseus*

Seen just outside the park at Udawalawe, and also in Bundala and Yala.

Oriental Skylark*Alauda gulgula*

Good views were had of a small group in both Bundala and Yala.

SWALLOWS: HIRUNDINIDAE

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Recorded regularly, at multiple sites throughout.

Hill Swallow *Hirundo domicola*

Good views were had of perched birds at Horton Plains, and others were seen at a tea factory stop.

Sri Lanka Swallow (ES) *Cecropis hyperythra*

Recorded at three sites; Kitulgala, Udawalawe, and Yala.

FAIRY FLYCATCHERS: STENOSTIRIDAE

Gray-headed Canary-Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*

Seen on 2 days in the hill country; at Horton Plains and Nuwara Eliya.

TITS, CHICKADEES & TITMICE: PARIDAE

Cinereous (Great) Tit *Parus cinereus*

Seen regularly in the hill country.

NUTHATCHES: SITTIDAE

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis*

Seen first in Sinharaja, although our best views came near Kandy on our final day.

BULBULS: PYCNONOTIDAE

Black-capped Bulbul (ES) *Pycnonotus melanicterus*

Seen a handful of times around Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

Red-vented Bulbul (ESS) *Pycnonotus cafer cafer*

A very common species in Sri Lanka; seen every day.

Yellow-eared Bulbul (ES) *Pycnonotus penicillatus*

A few were seen around Nuwara Eliya, although they were best seen inside the park at Horton Plains.

White-browed Bulbul (ESS) *Pycnonotus luteolus insulae*

A nesting bird was seen well in a tea plantation at Kitulgala.

Yellow-browed Bulbul (ESS) *Iole indica guglielmi*

Recorded regularly during the first week of the tour around Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

Square-tailed (Black) Bulbul (ESS) *Hypsipetes ganeesa humii*

A common species, seen regularly at Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

LEAF-WARBLERS: PYLLOSCOPIDAE

Green Warbler *Phylloscopus nitidus*

Many were heard, and several were seen around Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

A calling bird was seen at Sinharaja.

Large-billed Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris*

Regularly heard, and seen at Kitulgala and in Sinharaja.

REED-WARBLERS & ALLIES: ACROCEPHALIDAE

Blyth's Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*

Singles were seen on both of our visits to Victoria Park in Nuwara Eliya.

Clamorous Reed-Warbler (ESS) *Acrocephalus stentoreus meridionalis*

One was seen a few times near Tissa Tank.

GRASSBIRDS & ALLIES: LOCUSTELLIDAE**Sri Lanka Bush-Warbler (ES)** *Elaphrornis palliseri*

Two were seen well; one at Horton Plains by most, and another at Nuwara Eliya.

CISTICOLAS & ALLIES: CISTICOLLIDAE**Zitting Cisticola (ESS)** *Cisticola juncidis omalurus*

Seen on 3 days; near Colombo, in Udawalawe and in Bundala.

Common Tailorbird (ESS) *Orthotomus sutorius sutorius*

A common and vocal species recorded on all but a few days of the tour.

Gray-breasted Prinia (ESS) *Prinia hodgsonii pectoralis*

One seen inside Udawalawe was the only sighting of the trip.

Jungle Prinia (ESS) *Prinia sylvatica valida*

Seen very well at the Ingoya Estate near Kitulgala, and then another was seen inside Udawalawe.

Ashy Prinia (ESS) *Prinia socialis brevicauda*

First seen near Colombo airport, then again in Udawalawe, Tissa and in Victoria Park.

Plain Prinia (ESS) *Prinia inornata insularis*

A few were scoped up around the marsh near Colombo airport; others were seen in Udawalawe.

PARROTBILLS, WRENTIT & ALLIES: PARADOXORNITHIDAE**Yellow-eyed Babbler (ESS)** *Chrysomma sinense nasale*

This striking babbler was seen on two occasions at Udawalawe.

WHITE-EYES, YUHNAS & ALLIES: ZOSTEROPIDAE**Sri Lanka White-eye (ES)** *Zosterops ceylonensis*

2 small groups were seen in Sinharaja; then they were frequently encountered in the hill country.

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*

Recorded on 5 days in the lowlands, including at Kitulgala, Sinharaja, and Tissa.

TREE-BABLERS, SCIMITAR-BABLERS & ALLIES: TIMALIIDAE**Tawny-bellied Babbler (ESS)** *Dumetia hyperythra phillipsi*

Seen first at the marsh near Colombo; others were seen near Kitulgala, and in Udawalawe.

Dark-fronted Babbler (ESS) *Rhopocichla atriceps nigrifrons*

Two groups were seen; one at Kitulgala, and another along the main trail in Sinharaja.

Sri Lanka Scimitar-Babbler (ES) *Pomatorhinus melanurus*

Good views were had at the Surrey Estate, and others were seen at Horton Plains and Kandy.

GROUND BABBLERS & ALLIES: PELLORNEIDAE**Brown-capped Babbler (ES)** *Pellorneum fuscicapillus*

Seen at 3 sites; Kitulgala, Sinharaja, and near Kandy.

LAUGHINGTHRUSHES & ALLIES: LEIOTHRICHIDAE**Orange-billed Babbler (ES)*****Turdoides rufescens***

Big flocks of these vociferous babblers were seen at Kitulgala, and (especially) Sinharaja.

Yellow-billed Babbler (ESS)***Turdoides affinis taprobana***

One of Sri Lanka's most abundant and conspicuous birds, recorded almost every day.

Ashy-headed Laughingthrush (ES)***Garrulax cinereifrons***

Last year troublesome; this year straightforward, a small party located in our first flock at Sinharaja.

OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS: MUSCICAPIDAE**Asian Brown Flycatcher*****Muscicapa latirostris***

Regularly recorded during the first half of the tour around Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

Brown-breasted Flycatcher***Muscicapa muttui***

Recorded at 4 major sites: Kitulgala, Sinharaja, Udawalawe, and Victoria Park.

Indian Robin (ESS)***Copsychus fulicatus leucopterus***

A very common, frequently encountered bird in the game parks of the southeast. Also in Kitulgala.

Oriental Magpie-Robin***Copsychus saularis***

Another common Sri Lankan bird, recorded on at least 10 days of the tour.

White-rumped Shama (ESS)***Copsychus malabaricus leggei***

Long looks at this beautiful songster were had in Yala National Park.

Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher (ESS)***Cyornis tickelliae jerdoni***

Regularly heard giving its melodious song in Kitulgala, where several stunning males were seen.

Dull-blue Flycatcher (ES)***Eumyias sordidus***

One of the final endemics to be found in Sri Lanka's hill country; at Horton Plains and Nuwara Eliya.

Indian Blue Robin***Larvivora brunnea***

2 stunning males were seen, at Victoria Park and near Kandy. A female was also seen in Sinharaja.

Sri Lanka Whistling-Thrush (ES)***Myophonus blighi***

This proved the most difficult endemic for us, needing 6 tries; 1 was finally seen in Nuwara Eliya.

Kashmir Flycatcher***Ficedula subrubra***

The hill country birds proved difficult this year, and this was no exception; a male and a female were seen in Nuwara Eliya, but not all of the group got to see them in these brief showings.

Pied Bushchat (ESS)***Saxicola caprata atratus***

Encountered on multiple occasions at Horton Plains and in Nuwara Eliya.

THRUSHES & ALLIES: TURDIDAE**Pied Thrush*****Geokichla wardii***

Arguably one of the World's best looking thrushes; one particular male showed well in Victoria Park.

Spot-winged Thrush (ES)***Geokichla spiloptera***

Seen at Kitulgala and Sinharaja, with especially good looks at the scrubfowl site at the latter.

Sri Lanka Thrush (ES)***Zoothera imbricate***

As usual, an epic search was required to find this skulker. After 3 hours, we got unbeatable views of it perched on a near rock, in full view of all present; *one of the moments, and birds, of the tour.*

Indian Blackbird (ESS)***Turdus simillimus kinnisii***

A gloomy first showing in the mist at Horton Plains was followed by better looks later that morning.

STARLINGS: STURNIDAE**Southern (Lesser) Hill Myna** *Gracula indica*

Seen around Kitulgala several times, at the scenic Ella Rest House, and also near Kandy.

Sri Lanka (Hill) Myna (ES) *Gracula ptilogenys*

Seen on at least 3 occasions in Sinharaja, including in the garden of the Blue Magpie Lodge.

Common Myna (ESS) *Acridotheres tristis melanosternus*

Common and conspicuous at many areas throughout the tour.

White-faced Starling (ES) *Sturnia albofrontata*

Seen twice in one morning at Sinharaja, including prolonged good looks in a flock along the trail.

Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus*

A single flyby flock of 5 birds at Udawalawe was the sole sighting of the tour.

LEAFBIRDS: CHLOROPSEIDAE**Jerdon's Leafbird** *Chloropsis jerdoni*

A single bird was seen very well during our final few hours in Tissa.

Golden-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons*

Seen on 5 days, including at least half a dozen birds visiting a tree in the garden of Blue Magpie Lodge.

FLOWERPECKERS: DICAIDAE**White-throated Flowerpecker (ES)** *Dicaeum vincens*

Also known as Legge's Flowerpecker. Several good views were had at Sinharaja.

Pale-billed Flowerpecker (ESS) *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos ceylonense*

Seen a number of times at Kitulgala and Sinharaja, including in the garden of Blue Magpie Lodge.

SUNBIRDS & SPIDERHUNTERS: NECTARINIIDAE**Purple-rumped Sunbird (ESS)** *Leptocoma zeylonica zeylonica*

The most regularly recorded sunbird, seen on half of the days, including in Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*

Just a couple of male were seen around Udawalawe.

Long-billed (Loten's) Sunbird (ESS) *Cinnyris lotenius lotenius*

Surprisingly few seen on the tour this year, with some seen at Kitulgala, and also near Yala.

WAGTAILS & PIPITS: MOTACILLIDAE**Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*

Small numbers were seen at Udawalawe and Bundala in the southeast of the island.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*

A single bird was found at Udawalawe; this is a rare visitor to Sri Lanka.

Gray Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

One was seen at Kitulgala, and others were seen in Victoria Park in Nuwara Eliya.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba dukhunensis*

One was found by Chaminda on the edge of the park at Udawalawe.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*

Chaminda showed us one of these birds in Bundala.

Oriental (Paddyfield) Pipit*Anthus rufulus*

The most abundant pipit in Sri Lanka; recorded daily in the Dry Zone parks.

Blyth's Pipit*Anthus godlewskii*

Calling birds were seen in Udawalawe and Yala.

Forest Wagtail*Dendronanthus indicus*

One was seen inside the park at Udawalawe, with better views had of several birds in Victoria Park.

OLD WORLD SPARROWS: PASSERIDAE**House Sparrow***Passer domesticus*

Recorded commonly at a number of urban areas.

WEAVERS & ALLIES: PLOCEIDAE**Streaked Weaver***Ploceus manyar*

20 or so birds were seen near the edge of Tissa Tank, and others were seen inside Yala.

Baya Weaver*Ploceus philippinus*

A dozen birds were seen near Tissa Tank, and another was seen at Yala.

WAXBILLS & ALLIES: ESTRILIDAE**Indian Silverbill***Euodice malabarica*

A flock of around 20 birds was seen coming down to a small pool in Yala.

White-rumped Munia*Lonchura striata striata*

The most regularly encountered munia species, seen on 10 days of the tour.

Black-throated Munia (ESS)*Lonchura kelaarti kelaarti*

Just seen the once, from Blue Magpie Lodge.

Nutmeg Mannikin*Lonchura punctulata*

Also known as Scaly-breasted Munia. Recorded at Kitulgala, Tissa, Yala and near Kandy.

Tricolored (Black-headed) Munia*Lonchura malacca*

Good numbers were seen on just a few days; around Udawalawe and Tissa.

MAMMALS:**ELEPHANTS: ELEPHANTIDAE****Asian Elephant***Elephas maximus*

1 was seen at Udawalawe, 2 at Bundala, and 3 were also seen in Yala.

OLD WORLD MONKEYS: CERCOPITHECIDAE**Toque Macaque***Macaca sinica*

Seen on half of the days, including a mischievous group that stole some of our bananas in Yala.

Tufted Gray Langur*Semnopithecus priam*

A regular companion during our days in the Dry Zone parks.

Purple-faced Langur*Trachypithecus vetulus*

Seen several times in Kitulgala and Sinharaja, and also at Horton Plains.

SQUIRRELS: SCIURIDAE**Grizzled Giant Squirrel***Ratufa macroura*

Sri Lanka's national mammal was seen in Kitulgala, and also in Tissa.

Layard's Palm Squirrel*Funambulus layardi*

Just the one was seen in the park at Sinharaja.

Indian Palm Squirrel*Funambulus palmarum*

A very common Sri Lankan mammals recorded on almost every day of the tour.

Dusky Palm Squirrel*Funambulus sublineatus*

A few were seen in and around Nuwara Eliya.

RABBITS, HARES: LEPORIDAE**Indian Hare***Lepus nigricollis*

A few were seen around Yala and Tissa.

FLYING FOXES, OLD WORLD FRUIT BATS: PTEROPODIDAE**Lesser Short-nosed (Dog-nosed) Fruit Bat** *Cynopterus brachyotis*

One was seen in Sinharaja.

Indian Flying-fox*Pteropus giganteus*

A massive colony of these large bats was admired beside Tissa Tank.

Schneider's Leaf-nosed Bat*Hipposideros speoris*

One was seen during a short session of nightbirding for nightjars in Bundala.

CATS: FELIDAE**Fishing Cat**

A surprise find for Happy and Sam on our first night at Blue Magpie Lodge.

CIVETS, GENETS etc.: VIVERRIDAE**Golden Palm Civet***Paradoxurus ceylonensis*

Chaminda found one of these at night in Sinharaja.

MONGOOSES: HERPESTIDAE**Indian Gray Mongoose***Herpestes edwardsii*

One was seen in Tissa.

Indian Brown Mongoose*Herpestes fuscus*

One was seen on the journey between Colombo and Kitulgala on our first morning.

Ruddy Mongoose*Herpestes smithii*

Half a dozen were seen during our full day inside Yala National Park.

DOGS, FOXES: CANIDAE**Golden Jackal***Canis aureus*

Two were seen on the edge of Udawalawe National Park one afternoon.

BEARS: URSIDAE**Sloth Bear***Melursus ursinus*

A surprise find for the first vehicle at Yala.

PIGS: SUIDAE**Boar** *Sus scrofa*

At least 5 were seen inside Yala.

DEER: CERVIDAE**Sambar Deer** *Cervus unicolor*

A group of 15 animals was seen inside Yala, and another group was seen on Horton Plains.

Chital (Spotted Deer) *Axis axis*

Small numbers were seen in Udawalawe, with greater numbers observed in Yala.

BUFFALO, ANTELOPES, GOATS etc.: BOVIDAE**Wild Asian Water Buffalo** *Bubalus arnee*

A few were seen in Udawalawe and others were seen in Yala.

REPTILES:**COLUBRIDS: COLUBRIDAE****Common Bronzeback Tree Snake** *Dendrelaphis tristis*

One was seen in Tissa.

Indian Rat Snake *Ptyas mucosa*

One was encountered in Tissa.

Checkered Keelback Water Snake *Xenochrophis piscator*

One was seen inside the park at Sinharaja.

VIPERS & PIT VIPERS: VIPERIDAE**Sri Lanka Green Pit Viper** *Trimeresurus trigonocephalus*

One was seen at the start of the main trail in Sinharaja.

AGAMID LIZARDS: AGAMIDAE**Green Garden Lizard** *Calotes calotes*

This gorgeous lizard was seen in Kitulgala and Sinharaja; a male with its head lit up bright red was seen at the latter site.

Black-cheek Lizard *Calotes nigrilabris*

Several of these handsome lizards were seen in the hill country, at Horton Plains and Nuwara Eliya.

Common Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor*

Several were seen in the garden of Blue Magpie Lodge.

Rhino-horn Lizard *Ceratophora stoddartii*

This odd and extraordinary lizard was seen at Nuwara Eliya in the hill country.

Kangaroo Lizard *Octocryptis wiegmanni*

Singles were seen at both Kitulgala and Sinharaja.

Fan-throated Lizard *Sitana ponticeriana*

One was seen during a stop inside the park at Yala.

GECKOS: GEKKONIDAE**Asian House Gecko***Hemidactylus frenatus*

Commonly recorded at all lowland sites.

TURTLES, TERRAPINS etc. : GEOMYDIDAE**Hard-shelled Terrapin***Melanochelys trijuga thermalis*

One was seen at Bundala.

Soft-shelled Terrapin*Lissemys punctate*

One was seen at Udawalawe and another near Kandy.

TORTOISES: TESTUDINIDAE**Star Tortoise***Testudo elegans*

One was seen crawling across the road near Tissa.

CROCODILES: CROCODYLIDAE**Estuarine Crocodile***Crocodylus porosus*

2 rather large individuals were seen at Bundala.

Marsh Crocodile*Crocodylus palustris*

Also known as Mugger Crocodile. One was seen by Tissa Tank, and another was seen inside Yala.

MONITORS: VARANIDAE**Land Monitor***Veranus bengalensis*

1 was seen at Udawalawe, with others seen in Tissa and Yala.

Water Monitor*Veranus salvator kabaragoya*

One was seen at a marsh near Colombo, and another was seen in Yala.

BUTTERFLIES:**Common Birdwing***Troiders darsius***Crimson Rose***Pachliopta hector***Ceylon Rose***Pachliopta jophon***Common Rose***Pachliopta aristolochiae ceylonica***Red Helen***Papilio helenus***Blue Mormon***Papilio polymnestor parinda***Bluebottle***Graphium sarpedon***Common Jay***Graphium doson***Jezebel***Delias eucharis***Common Grass Yellow***Eurema hecabe***Tree Nymph***Idea iasonia***Blue Glassy Tiger***Ideopsis similis***Glassy Tiger***Parantica aglea***Ceylon Tiger***Parantica taprobana***Plain Tiger***Danaus chrysippus***Common Crow***Euploea core***Chocolate Soldier***Junonia iphita*

Common Sailor
Clipper
White Four-ring
Baron
Leopard Butterfly

Neptis hylas
Parthenos Sylvia
Ypthima ceylonica
Euthalia aconthea
Phalantha phalantha

