

Sri Lanka ... by Night

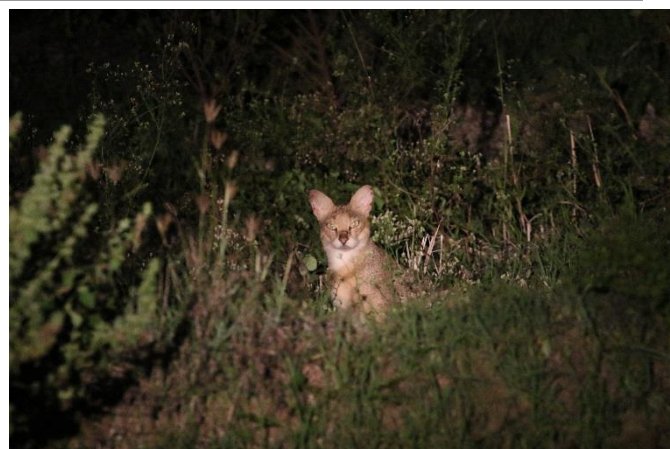
Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London.
Day 2/3/4	Wilpattu
Day 5/7	Sigiriya.
Day 8	Kandy.
Day 9	Nuwara Eliya – Hakgala Botanical Gardens.
Day 10	Horton Plains National Park, Kataragama.
Day 11	Lunugamwehera National Park.
Day 12	Lunugamwehera National Park – Udawalawe.
Day 13	Udawalawe National Park – Sinharaja.
Day 14	Sinharaja Rainforest – Colombo.
Day 15	Fly London.

Pre-tour Whales extension

Day 1	Depart London.
Day 2	Arrive Colombo; transfer to Koggala.
Day 3/4	Whale-watching excursions from Mirissa.
Day 5	Drive Wilpattu (join Day 2, above).



Jungle Cat, Sloth Bear & Lesser Woolly Horseshoe

2026

Pre-tour Whales extension: from Wednesday 18th March
Sat 21st March to Sat 4th April 2026

Cost: £895
Cost: £3,995

2027

Pre-tour Whales extension: from Wednesday 17th March
Sat 20th March to Sat 3rd April 2027

Cost: £895
Cost: £3,995

Single room supplement

£995 (£295 for extension)

Grading

A/B. Mostly gentle birdwatching walks but a couple of longer walks included.

Focus

Sri Lanka's nocturnal wildlife.

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Sri Lanka is a superb destination for birds and mammals, and you can hardly miss some of the residents, such as Indian Elephants and Toque Macaques. However, while the island's forests and savannahs swarm with wildlife during the day, they also harbour special treasures at night, and this tour has been specially devised to track down some of the most elusive nocturnal gems. Featuring spotlighting drives and walks taking place in the evening, and sometimes also into the dead of night, we will hope to find such mammals as Rusty-spotted Cat, Red and Grey Slow Loris, Palm Civet and, with much luck, Indian Pangolin. Birds will inevitably include owls, perhaps including the amazing Spot-bellied Eagle Owl. We will also enjoy many daytime highlights, not just wildlife, but also the fabulous scenery and cultural delight of this unique island.

- 15-day tour to many of the best sites for mammals in Sri Lanka
- Special emphasis on evening and night excursions for many of the more elusive species
- Nocturnal trips on foot and vehicle
- Chance of 4 species of cat – Leopard, Jungle Cat, Rusty-spotted Cat and Fishing Cat
- Special effort to see critically endangered Indian Pangolin
- Good chance of Grey Slow Loris and Red Slow Loris
- Other iconic mammals such as Asian Elephants and Sloth Bear
- Superb scenic locations all over island
- Cultural marvels at Sigiriya and Kandy

How does this tour benefit the local community and wildlife?

On this tour we will visit many interesting historic and cultural places; everywhere we go we will be met with smiling faces of the locals going about their day to day activity or providing a service in an area we visit. Tourism is the main income for many of these local communities and life has evolved around the people who come to visit this beautiful island. We will also spend time in local villages searching for wildlife that has been looked after by young wildlife enthusiasts who ensure that the habitat that these birds, mammals and reptiles live in are protected for the future of the species and viewing pleasure of wildlife lovers.

Many research and conservation projects are launched every year in Sri Lanka that help students to learn about the island's flora and fauna. These projects are collaborations between the wildlife departments and the tourism departments of Sri Lanka as tourists visiting National Parks and forests generate a large income for the country.

With the increasing interest in Whale watching around our waters, many Sri Lankans have now diverted their attention to studying marine biology, and the feedback and recommendations coming from these new minds are helping to shape policies about the subject, and learning more about these animals. The most recent outcome of this was to change the shipping lanes further into international waters, thereby decreasing the fatalities and injuries caused to whales due to collisions with vessels.



Common Palm Civet



Giant Flying Squirrel



Jungle Cat



Red Slender Loris

Introduction

Many of Sri Lanka's exciting variety of mammals are at their most active during the hours of darkness, indeed several of the rarest species are exclusively nocturnal in their habits. Whilst conventional wildlife tours might very occasionally observe one of these night foragers we have decided to greatly increase the odds by the introduction of a new tour which offers a number of evening excursions, on foot and in vehicles, to the habitats frequented by some of the most elusive residents. With the evening sightings supplemented by day-time visits to some of Sri Lanka's superb Wildlife Reserves this tour is our most comprehensive introduction yet to the island's mammals but the itinerary also promises an abundance of colourful birds and visits to world-famous historical sites.

With torch in hand we set out in search of Sri Lanka's seldom seen mammals, which on occasions occur in surprising places where you might least expect them! After nightfall we can attempt to find the islands lesser known cats which include Jungle Cat, Fishing Cat and the rather shy and elusive Rusty-spotted Cat. Rice-fields after harvest are a haven for many rodents such as Indian Gerbil, Lesser Bandicoot Rat and Indian Field Mouse, which provide easy prey for Jungle Cats, and as we drive through such cultivations in the dead of the night, we will be hoping to surprise one of these attractive felines as it stalks another rodent supper. Ring-tailed Civet, Black-naped Hare and Mouse Deer are also frequent visitors to the fields and from time to time we might catch a reflection of their eyes during our spotlighting sessions.



Red Slender Loris

Transferring attention from the ground to leaf-canopy we hope to find a Slender Loris, one of the smallest and rarest primates occupying this habitat, and will do so with red-filtered lights to safely catch the reflection given off from very sensitive eyes as the animal slowly moves from branch to branch. The Grey Slender Loris is often solitary but sighting two or three at the same vicinity is not unusual as this may indicate a high concentration of insects which are a large part of the Loris diet. High-pitched thin whistles lasting a few seconds are another indication of the Loris presence and all our senses will be used in locating these mysterious creatures of the night. Indian Nightjar, Brown Hawk Owl, Collared Scops Owl and Brown Fish Owl are all very likely to appear in our spotlight beams and many Indian Flying Foxes will be seen and heard throughout the night. We will also search for the Rusty-spotted and Fishing Cat along a network of canals and streams whilst also looking out for Indian Crested Porcupines and the rather more obvious Asian Elephants which are attracted to paddy fields much to the annoyance of farmers. There will be more opportunities to see the larger mammals during our day safaris when we aim to see large herds of Asian Elephants gathering at “tanks” within the Minneriya or Kaudulla National Parks. Spotted Deer, Toque Macaque and Grey Langur are also plentiful and often in close proximity to help raise the alert in case of an approaching threat. Indian Palm Squirrels will be plentiful and Grizzled Giant Squirrels can be seen scattering noisily from branch to branch with their long bushy tails trailing.



Fishing Cat

Our night patrol in Sigiriya will aim at surprising a Fishing Cat as it hunts for fish in the shallow waters bordering several reservoirs in the area. Rice fields adjoining these reservoirs also attract Jungle Cats. In-between our visits to the reservoirs we will remain vigilant for a glimpse of the extremely elusive and shy Indian Pangolin. Many bats will be seen throughout the night although identifying them will prove difficult however a few caves around the area are known to house Schneider's Leaf-nosed Bat and the Lesser False Vampire Bat.

Moving towards Kandy we will spend most of the evening in our hotel garden in search of the Giant Flying Squirrel which is a punctual visitor to a few favorite fruiting trees. It is also possible to come upon Muntjac, Wild Boar, Common Palm Civet and the endemic Golden Palm Civet during a stroll in this garden. Depending on the success of the previous day's sightings we may venture further out of the hotel environment in search of Fishing Cat and Indian Crested Porcupine.

As we travel higher in to the mountains we pass neatly trimmed tea bushes heralding arrival at Nuwara Eliya, which will be our stop for the next two nights. A visit to the nearby Hakgala Gardens will ensure sightings of the handsome Purple Faced Leaf Monkey, also known as the "Bear Monkey", and the montane race of the Toque Macaque. An early morning start is required to enter Horton Plains National Park where we will hope to see some of the endemic birds found there including; Dull-blue Flycatcher, the smart Yellow-eared Bulbul, Scimitar Babbler, Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, Sri Lanka Bush Warbler and the secretive Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush. While a decent population of Leopards are said to reside in this park sightings are very rare. The presence of many Sambar Deer approaching vehicles for food is an unfortunate consequence of ever increasing human visitor numbers, and with them we may observe Sri Lanka Jungle Fowl trailing behind the deer to pick up any droppings. Brown Mongoose and Black-naped Hare will be two other mammals we will try to spot here whilst the Dusky-striped Squirrel and the Layards Striped Squirrel should be encountered without difficulty.



Leopard

Our journey down to the southern part of the island will intensify our search for the apex predator of the island and we should be able to encounter the magnificent Leopards of the Lunugamwehera National Park during our full day safari here. With no threats or predators to fear from, the Sri Lankan Leopard is not as shy as its relatives elsewhere and it is

often possible to get great views of this somnolent cat either sleeping on a branch or patrolling its territory during the early morning or evening hours of the day. Another resident we hope to find here is the Sloth Bear, although sightings always depend on a certain amount of luck. Spotted Deer, Muntjac, Asian Elephant, Ruddy, Grey & Stripe-necked Mongoose, Golden Jackal, Black-naped Hare along with Toque Macaque and Grey Langur are a common sight within this park. On our late night drives we will try to continue our search for the Rusty-spotted Cat and the Fishing Cat once again.

Another safari in Udawalawe National Park will give us an opportunity to search for a variety of forest birds which reside here including the Sri Lanka Wood-shrike, Sirkeer Malkoha, Blue-faced Malkoha, Plum-headed Parakeet, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Barred-button Quail, Grey-breasted, Plain, Jungle and Ashy Prinias. This park is also one of the best for spotting a diurnal Jungle Cat and we will visit a number of locations to search for one.



Indian Pangolin

After our safari we will head to Sinharaja where our focus will be on finding the endemic Red Slender Loris. The Red Slender Loris unlike the Grey-Slender Loris is not widespread and occurs in wetter habitats. Smaller in size, the Red Loris has distinct round shaped eye mask compared to the tear-drop shaped mask of the Grey Loris and a reddish brown colouration becoming creamy yellow on the front. We once again hope to catch a reflection off this big eyed mammal during our spotlighting session and will hopefully be successful. Other mammals to look out for will include Golden Palm Civet and Common Palm Civet. The following day is dedicated to exploring the Sinharaja Rainforest, a final opportunity to seek out Sri Lanka's remaining endemics amid its lush and primeval canopy. Among the treasures of Sinharaja are many of Sri Lanka's most sought-after endemics: Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Layard's Parakeet, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Red-faced Malkoha, Green-billed Coucal, Malabar Trogon, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Brown-backed Needletail,

Chestnut-backed Owlet, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Black-capped, Square-tailed and Yellow-browed Bulbuls, Sri Lanka Drongo, Sri Lanka Scimitar-Babbler, Spot-winged Thrush, Sri Lanka Scaly Thrush, Orange-billed Babbler, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, White-faced Starling, Southern Hill Myna, Sri Lanka Myna, White-throated Flowerpecker, and Black-throated Munia.

As dusk settles over the forest, we depart late in the night for Katunayake to connect with our return flight the following morning.

As we journey back to Europe, we can reflect on a truly unique and rewarding itinerary—one that has not only revealed the vibrant diurnal life of Sri Lanka's wildlife but also offered rare insights into the island's secretive nocturnal world, a privilege few travelers experience.

For those who wish to stay longer on this beguiling island, we recommend a pre-tour extensions to Mirissa in search of Whales and other Cetaceans.



Indian Crested Porcupine

Day 1

In flight

We depart London in the evening at 8.40pm on a direct Sri Lankan Airlines scheduled flight to Colombo. We will be in-flight overnight. If you would prefer to fly on any other airline from London to Colombo, we can arrange this for you (availability permitting), though this is likely to involve extra cost. Call Rajan on 01962 733051 for details.

Day 2 - 4

Wilpattu National Park

Arrive Colombo at 12:35pm. On arrival, we will be met by our tour leader and transferred straight to Wilpattu. The next three days we dedicate to exploring Wilpattu area. Wilpattu National Park is the oldest and biggest park with an extent



Common Palm Civet

of 1312 square kilometers and ranges from 0 to 152 meters above sea level.

The unique feature of this park is the existence of "Willus" (Natural lakes) - Natural, sand-rimmed water basins or depressions that fill with rainwater. Nearly sixty lakes (Willu) and tanks are found spread throughout Wilpattu. Three types of vegetation can be distinguished within her borders: Littoral vegetation salt grass and low scrub immediately adjacent to the beach, a 5-10km coastal belt of monsoon scrub of very low stature and further inland, monsoon forest with tall emergent.

This mixed vegetation supports a diverse array of species and our main focus will be on the top predator the Sri Lankan Leopard. Although the exact population of the Leopards in this park is unknown there are enough and more sightings of this majestic animal recorded by many safari goers. Due to many years of closure and less human activity, thriving populations of Sambar Deer, Spotted Deer and Wild Boar has sustained the Leopard population and argued to be bigger in size compared to the other Leopards found on the island.

Another mammal on our focus will be the Sloth Bear which is frequently seen during its early morning or late evening prowls along open patches of land. Due to no particular mating season the chance of seen a mother with her cubs on a rocky outcrop or water hole is likely. Asian Elephants, Ruddy Mongoose, Barking Deer, Grey Langur, Toque Macaque and Golden Jackal are sure to cross our path during one of the safaris.

The colorful Indian Pitta, the singing White-rumped Shama and the noisy Malabar Pied Hornbill and Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill will get your heads turning whilst Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, Brown-capped Babbler, Sri Lanka Jungle Fowl, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle and Black-capped Bulbul lurk within and above the different vegetation. The two distinct owl species that are seen here are the Forest Eagle Owl and the Brown Fish Owl.

On day 3 & 4 spotlighting session will be organized after dinner where we will be able to see Collared Scops Owl, Rusty-spotted Cat, Small Indian Civet, Common Palm Civet, Jungle Cat, Asian Elephant, Spotted Deer, Sri Lanka Spotted Chevrotain, Sambar, Indian Gerbil, Brown Tree Frog, Jerdon's Nightjar, Indian Field Mouse, Common Palm Civet, Black-naped Hare and many other nocturnal species.



Mouse Deer

Day 5

Sigiriya / Minneriya

After a late breakfast we leave Wilpattu and drive to Sigiriya where we will check in to the beautiful Ehalagala Lake Resort.

After lunch in the hotel we drive to either Minneriya or Kaudulla National park for a jeep safari. The two parks are in close proximity to each other and depending on the movements of the Elephant herds we will decide which park to be visited.

Minneriya Reserve encompasses 8890 hectares of scrub and evergreen forest surrounding Minneriya Tank, a great reservoir constructed by King Mahasena approximately 1700 years ago. The reserve is teeming with wildlife, including large numbers of waterbirds and rare reptiles but is best known as perhaps the finest place in the world to observe Indian Elephants. During the Dry Season, which extends from June to September, Minneriya Tank assumes particular importance for the local elephant population as a source of both water and food as succulent vegetation revealed by the lower water level becomes available to graze. Elephants converge into the reserve from the surrounding districts to form an impressive daily assembly known colloquially as 'The Gathering'. Numbers fluctuate depending upon prevailing conditions but from 150 -300 elephants may congregate around the Tank. This creates a kind of African-style spectacle

rare to witness in a species that is much more of a retiring forest dweller than its Savannah loving African cousin. We will visit Minneriya in late afternoon to maximise our chances of seeing the largest numbers of elephants but will also pay attention to the other mammal residents of this fine reserve which include; Spotted Deer, Sambar, Golden Jackal, Grey Langur, Toque Macaque and Black-naped Hare.

We return to the hotel late in the evening.



Baby Elephant with mother



Stripe-necked Mongoose

Day 6

Sigiriya

King Kasyapa was responsible for the building of a city fortress on Sigiriya rock in 477 AD. Standing at the foot of the rock today it seems a staggering achievement but a palace and complex of gardens were constructed on the 3-acre summit and for 18 years served as a royal citadel. Visitors can reach the site by ascending flights of steps hewn into the rock but it is a stiff climb and not recommended for anyone with a fear of heights. A few frescoes are all that remain of some 500 paintings that formerly graced the rock walls and these can be viewed during the ascent (time permitting, a visit to climb the rock could be organised at an extra cost paid locally). Shahin Falcons nest on the rock and the surrounding primary forest is superb for birds, containing many interesting species which keen birders may find an attractive alternative to scaling the rock. Birds to look for include Woolly-necked Stork, Crested Serpent-Eagle, Emerald Dove, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Alexandrine Parakeet, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Racket-tailed Drongo, Black-crested Bulbul, Paradise Flycatcher, White-browed Fantail, White-rumped Shama, Forest Wagtail, Oriental White-eye, Brown-capped Babbler and Pale-billed Flowerpecker.

Troupes of the endemic Toque Macaque might well be seen in the vicinity of the hotel and possibly also the elegant Grey Langur as both species have learnt to loiter around tourist or religious sites in the hope of hand-outs. Palm Squirrels will certainly be seen and heard scuttling around the gardens or chasing each other across the buildings.

We return to our hotel for lunch and the rest of the afternoon will be available for relaxing before we once again set out after dinner for a spotlighting excursion to the surrounding Sigiriya forest. Here we have a chance of locating the Slender

Loris while other mammals which may present themselves include the Ring-tailed Civet, Common Palm Civet, Spotted Deer, Sambar Deer, Fishing Cat and Indian Gerbil. Much harder to predict, but a constant possibility on these night forays are the endangered Indian Pangolin, or Scaly Ant-eater and the diminutive White-spotted Mouse Deer. The latter is reasonably widespread in forests but extremely timid and very hard to observe, whilst if we do have the good fortune to come upon a Pangolin the views are likely to be somewhat easier! Another mammal we will focus on will be the Asiatic otter and often it is possible to see them in roadside canals or isolated tanks where fish are abundant. Sigiriya forest has long been notorious for mysterious haunting calls of the “devil bird”, a noise shrouded by the darkness of the night which strikes fear in adults and children alike. The source of these calls is the magnificent Forest Eagle Owl, long regarded in folklore as a symbol of death and misfortune. It is the largest owl species on the island and we will hope for an encounter with this bird during our drive around.

A quick visit to a nearby temple cave complex is likely to delight us with Schneider’s Leaf-nosed and Lesser-false Vampire Bats. Although there will many bats sighted during our excursions identifying them on the wing is always a challenge although sometimes our task is made easier by discovering diurnal roosts in unlikely locations such as roadside drains.

Day 7

Sigiriya

Another late breakfast and optional day of relaxation in preparation for another night drive around the Sigiriya village and forest area.

The Ehalagala resort garden is a haven for many forest and wetland birds. It is possible to enjoy great views of Shikra, Brahminy Kite, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Painted Storks, kingfishers and the beautiful Green Imperial Pigeon from the comfort of the outdoor restaurant. A pair of Brown Fish Owls is known to roost in nearby trees and a Grey Mongoose is often sighted in the hotel garden.

We will undertake an evening bird walk around the Sigiriya sanctuary and look out for Alexandrine Parakeet, White-rumped Shama, Orange-headed Thrush, Indian Pitta, Pied Cuckoo, Asian Koel, Brown-capped Babbler, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, White-browed Flycatcher, Dark-fronted Babbler, Indian Robin, Oriental Magpie Robin, Scarlet and Small Minivets, Large Cuckoo-shrike, Crimson-backed Goldenback, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Crimson-fronted and Brown-headed Barbets, Greater Coucal, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon and Emerald Dove.

After our dinner we once again will explore the Sigiriya forest and village area by jeep and will hope for further sightings of nocturnal mammals.

Day 8

Kandy

We leave Sigiriya after breakfast and drive south towards Kandy where the vegetation becomes very luxuriant and green, signifying our departure from the Dry Zone into the edge of the Hill Country.

Kandy is steeped in history and was the capital for a succession of Kandyan kings until captured by the British in 1815. The famous ‘Temple of the Tooth’ beside Kandy Lake is one of the best known Buddhist temples in the country and attracts thousands of visitors every year.

We reach the Hotel Tree of Life set amidst a 700 acre tea plantation and forest. The hotel gardens have long been a favourite location for birders and wildlife enthusiasts and it is possible to identify at least 50 species of birds during a brief walk around the estate.

After lunch we plan a leisurely afternoon but those who wish to visit the Temple of the Tooth, may do so at this time and your leader will be happy to organise this optional activity at an extra cost, which you could pay directly.

Our objective for the evening will be to spot the Giant Flying Squirrel as it enters the hotel gardens from the surrounding forest. This mammal is a creature of habit and is often sighted on its favorite Jak and Rambutan trees within this hotel garden. The appellation 'flying' is a misnomer as they do not actually fly but glide with the use of a thick membrane extending between the front and back legs used in a similar manner of that of a parachute. We return to the restaurant for dinner then once again undertake a night foray in search of the Golden Palm Civet, Muntjac, Porcupine and Wild boar.

Depending upon the success of the preceding evening safaris, we may undertake a night drive to the Mahaweli river in search of the Fishing Cat and the Crested Porcupine and your leader will decide on this excursion based on the latest information available.

Day 9

Nuwara Eliya

In The 70-kilometre drive from Kandy to Nuwara Eliya will take us deeper into the Hill Country, passing through a succession of tea estates. We will stop at one of these to join a tour of the factory, where we can see the various processes leading to the production of top quality Ceylon tea and sample the finished product.

Nuwara Eliya is the capital town of the Hill Country and a delightful place to stay for one night. A golf course and racecourse are reminders of its popularity as a resort for the British during the days of the Raj and there are other resonances of a bygone era in the quaint Hill Club and the Victorian style of architecture. Stands of pines are a feature of the area and there is a distinctly cooler feel to the air as might be expected at an altitude of 1,890 metres.

In the afternoon we will pay a visit to Hakgala Botanical Gardens 7 kilometres from the town. The gardens are another fine example of Victorian garden design set below a craggy escarpment at the edge of hills. The long-coated highland race of Purple-faced Leaf Monkey known as the 'Bear Monkey' can often be found either inside or close-by Hakgala and here they have become accustomed to people thus allowing close views. They are extremely attractive animals found only in Sri Lanka and represent one of the highlights of the hill country. The males have a blood-curdling roaring cry which if heard resonating around the forested hills could certainly convince travellers that a fearsome predator was at large!

Day 10

Horton Plains / Kataragama

With packed breakfast and a very early start we'll spend today on the Horton Plains, Sri Lanka's highest and most isolated



Rhinoceros-horned Lizard

plateau. Although only 28 kilometres from Nuwara Eliya, the road is in poor condition and the final ascent to the plateau involves some steep inclines. This is a fascinating place, a mixture of open grassy expanses and patches of forest, much of the latter festooned with epiphytes. The scenery is spectacular and on clear days it is possible to see the distant summit of Adam's Peak. At 'World's End', the plateau drops steeply to the plains over 1,000 metres below and this becomes a swirling cauldron of cloud as the day progresses. We should certainly hear, and hopefully see Purple-faced Leaf Monkey in the forests which are also inhabited by Tennant's Giant Squirrel and the smaller Dusky Squirrel, all three mammals characteristic of the hills. In the open plains we may see

a distant herd of Sambar Deer and these are a prey species of the resident Leopards although it is rare to see one of these by day. Somewhat unexpectedly the Horton Plains boasts several rare endemic reptile species although none of these is easy to locate. The wild expanses of Horton Plains are a paradise for natural history including several of the island's endemic birds. The area is home to a splendid variety of mammals but perhaps it would not be realistic to expect too many encounters during our brief visit.

Upon returning to our hotel we will have our lunch and proceed to Kataragama, where we will stay at the picturesque Tamarind Lake hotel, which overlooks Detagamuwa tank. Our 3 ½ hour journey will take us through hot, dry southern plains, and as we continue south, the dominant scrub jungle is gradually replaced by increasingly frequent palms and vast open paddy fields.

A spotlighting session around the Buttala-Kataragama road will be organized after dinner. The possibility of sighting a Leopard or Sloth Bear are greater here as the Lunugamvehera National park is situated just 30 km away from the hotel.



Leopard

Day 11

Lunugamvehera National Park

In the morning we will drive for half an hour to the impressive Lunugamvehera National Park with our packed breakfast and lunch for a full day safari. This National Park was declared in 1995 with the intention of protecting the catchment area of the Lunugamvehera reservoir. Ghostly white dead trees decorate the reservoir and these rotting remains make

perfect watch towers for nesting White-bellied Sea Eagles. The recent spike in Leopard populations in this park has made it a sought out alternative to Yala National Park. Mosaic of scrubland and grassland make up the forest which is home to Sloth Bear, Muntjac, Mouse Deer, Stripe-necked Mongoose and an array of birds including the rare Racket-tailed Drongo and common water birds such as the Grey Heron, Black-headed Ibis, Asian Openbill, Painted Stork and Spot-billed Pelican.

Upon returning to the hotel, another spotlighting session will be organized after dinner.

Day 12

Lunugamvehera National Park – Udawalawe

With packed breakfast we will have another half day safari in Lunugamvehera National park and return to the hotel for lunch.

After lunch we will drive to Udawalawe, where we will be based for one night at the Centauria Wild hotel in Udawalawe.

Day 13

Udawalawe National Park – Sinharaja

With packed breakfast we will have a half day safari in Udawalawe National Park.

This mixture of teak plantation, grassland, scrub jungle and wetlands will provide our best opportunity to see many birds with ranges restricted to the 'Dry Zone' of the island, a faunal region which is barely entered anywhere else on the tour. A morning's drive in the park will ensure plenty of additions to our list as we encounter a representative selection of residents which could include; Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Plum-headed Parakeet, Barred Button-Quail, Changeable Hawk Eagle, White-bellied Fishing Eagle, Brown Fish Owl, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Sirkeer & Blue-faced Malkohas, Black-headed and White-throated Munias. Uda Walawe is also an excellent reserve for mammals, particularly famous for its population of several hundred elephants which make it one of the best places in Asia to observe these impressive creatures. An average visit should produce sightings of 40-50 animals and a close encounter with a nursery herd escorting tiny youngsters is a never to be forgotten highlight of any holiday. In many respects Uda Walawe is a smaller version of the well-known Yala Reserve in the south of the island.

After lunch at the hotel, we check out and proceed to Sinharaja where we will spend 1 night at the Blue Magpie Resort. After checking into the hotel, we venture into Sinharaja in search of the elusive endemic Red Slender Loris. We return for dinner, and depending on the success of our sightings, another excursion may be arranged during the pre-dawn hours.

Day 14

Sinharaja Rainforest – Colombo

Following an early breakfast, our exploration leads us to the enchanting Sinharaja rainforest, Sinharaja is something of a stronghold for endemic birds and its importance was acknowledged by recognition as a World Heritage Site in 1988. Old logging trails facilitate access into the primary forest and from these we will be looking for such species as Legge's Hawk-Eagle, Crested Goshawk, Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Layard's Parakeet, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Red-faced Malkoha, Green-

billed Coucal, Malabar Trogon, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Brown-backed Needletail, Chestnut-backed Owlet, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Black-capped, square-tailed & Yellow-browed Bulbuls, Sri Lanka (Crested) Drongo, Sri Lanka Scimitar-Babbler, Spot-winged Thrush, Sri Lanka (Scaly) Thrush, Orange-billed Babbler, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, White-faced Starling, Southern Hill Myna, Sri Lanka Myna, White-throated Flowerpecker and Black-throated Munia.



Blue Magpie

Post our rainforest adventure, we retreat to the hotel for a leisurely lunch, allowing the afternoon to unfold at a relaxed pace. Based on the success of our previous night's endeavors, an additional excursion may be arranged if deemed necessary. Alternatively, we shall proceed towards Katunayake for our final night, finding respite at the Gateway Airport Garden Hotel.

Day 15

London

We have a mid-morning transfer to Colombo airport to catch our afternoon Sri Lankan direct flight to London. We are due to arrive in London by early evening.

Whales extension

Cost: from £895

Single room supplement: £295

(The minimum number of people required to run this extension is five; however, we may decide to operate it with fewer people, at our discretion, with local guides.)

Introduction

The Great Whales are a source of wonder and fascination to land-based humans as we struggle to comprehend their alien, unfettered existence roaming the mysterious depths of the world's oceans. There is a seemingly insatiable desire to savour the experience of being close to these magnificent creatures and wherever feeding or breeding imperatives bring numbers of whales to congregate in a particular area there will invariably be local boatmen taking visitors to enjoy a few precious moments sharing the ocean with these leviathans.

The waters around Sri Lanka are a haven for an extraordinary variety of cetaceans, offering a rare opportunity to observe these magnificent marine mammals in their natural habitat. Sperm Whales, Fin Whales, and Bryde's Whales captivate with their deep-diving prowess and awe-inspiring presence, while Spinner Dolphins and Bottlenose Dolphins provide endless delight with their playful leaps and acrobatics alongside boats. Occasionally, the unmistakable silhouette of a Blue Whale emerges, adding an unforgettable highlight to the experience, and sightings of the elusive Orca or Pilot Whale lend an air of mystery to the encounters. Between November and April, the southern coastline becomes a prime location for observing these creatures, drawn to its nutrient-rich waters. This seasonal gathering offers a fascinating glimpse into their lives and makes Sri Lanka a truly special destination for marine wildlife enthusiasts.

Day 1

In flight

We depart London in the evening on a direct Sri Lankan Airlines scheduled flight to Colombo. We will be in-flight overnight. If you would prefer to fly on any other airline from London to Colombo, we can arrange this for you (availability permitting), though this is likely to involve extra cost. Call Rajan on 01962 733051 for details.

Day 2

Koggala

We arrive in Colombo around midday and will be met at the airport by our Sri Lankan naturalist guide, who will be with us throughout the tour. As we head towards Koggala, a light meal stop will no doubt be welcome after the overnight flight and will give us an opportunity to become acquainted with some characteristic Sri Lankan birds. We will travel by road to our delightful accommodation, the Koggala Beach Hotel. Areas of Sri Lanka's south-western coastline were devastated by the 2004 tsunami. However, the Sri Lankans are resilient people and much reconstruction has taken place since the tragedy. Fortunately, the Koggala Beach Hotel was only partially affected and this resort hotel will be our base for all three nights of our extension tour. The drive from Katunayake will probably take 3 hours and, after settling into our rooms, a period of relaxation will no doubt be welcome. There will be time to sample the resort's amenities or simply



Blue Whale

sit on the sandy beach watching the waves breaking on the sand with binoculars at the ready in case a huge White-bellied Sea Eagle should appear overhead or terns begin fishing offshore. Sri Lanka is a remarkably lush, verdant tropical island and trees surrounding the hotel offer further birdwatching opportunities (even from the comfort of a lounge beside the swimming pool!). Typical forest edge species such as Magpie Robin, Yellow-billed Babbler, three species of sunbird, Koel, Coppersmith Barbet and Flameback Woodpecker are among the birds seen here. The local bird list is sure to grow with each day spent at Mirissa.

Day 3

Mirissa

Thirty minutes' drive from the hotel is the small fishing port of Mirissa and it is here that we board a whale-watching vessel for a four hour morning excursion in search of Whales. The distance sailed will very much depend on whale sightings and sea conditions but we may go up to ten kilometers offshore although it is more likely that most observations will be much closer to land. The seas off Sri Lanka are rich in marine life but it is only comparatively recently that scientists have discovered the regular appearances of Whales between November and early April.



Mirissa Harbour

Following days. Whilst Whales will be our principal quarry, many other cetacea occur in these waters and species observed during the recent seasons included; Short-finned Pilot Whales, Bottlenosed Dolphins, Risso's Dolphins and Spinner Dolphins, the latter sometimes in pods numbering several hundred animals. Birdlife is less plentiful at this time of year but possibilities include Flesh-footed and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, Wilson's & Swinhoe's Storm-Petrels, Pomarine & Arctic Skuas, White-tailed & Red-billed Tropicbirds, Great & Lesser Crested, Bridled, Sooty and White-winged Terns.

Up to a dozen or more of these enigmatic ocean wanderers may be lingering off the coast and we will rely on our skipper's expertise to locate as many individuals as possible during each excursion. The captain will take the boat as close as he can without causing disturbance to the whales and we will hope that by drifting with the current we can allow the creatures to approach alongside the vessel, hopefully near enough to be able to smell their distinctive pungent breath! We may have to content ourselves with longer distance views on this first outing but there will be more chances for close-ups on the

The sailing will last about 3-4 hours and on return to land we will retire for a leisurely lunch before enjoying the birding around the resort. There are no boat rides in the afternoon as outings are less productive and the sea can be rough, please note boat rides are weather dependent and can be cancelled without prior notice. At the end of our boat trip as we return to the Koggala Beach Hotel we will hope to be celebrating some memorable encounters with some of the largest creature on earth.

On one of the afternoons in Mirissa we will enjoy an excursion to Galle, which was a thriving port long before colonial times; on the southwest of the country, it attracted Arabs, Persians, Romans and Greeks on their way across the Indian Ocean. In 1505 the Portuguese attacked and settled the town, 135 years later conceding it to the Dutch, who built the famous fort. In 1796 the British took over and used the fort as their headquarters. Today, Galle Fort is the old part of the city, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the best preserved colonial sea fortress in Asia. It is a cosy little town in its own right with narrow streets, churches, cloistered courtyards and shuttered mansions standing testament to their colonial

past. Galle Fort has recently received a lot of investment from expatriates living in South East Asia and is now bristling with boutique hotels, art galleries, tiny shops, cafes and restaurants. There are several museums as well as the Dutch Reformed Church and the lively Arab Quarter. The entrances to Galle National Maritime Museum and Fort are not included and can be paid locally. At the time of writing there is no entrance fees to visit Galle Fort and £8 to visit Galle National Maritime Museum.



The beach at Mirissa

Day 4

Mirissa

Today in the morning we will repeat the whale-watching excursion from Mirissa and with the ever-changing ocean will hope for further Whale sightings as well as appearances by dolphins and many types of birds. In characteristic fashion, the dolphins often swim in the bow-wave of the vessel offering spectacular views as they do so. The huge pods of Spinner Dolphins are not a predictable phenomenon but if we are fortunate enough to witness one of these there will be plenty of employment for cameras as the seas become a turmoil of activity and scores, or even hundreds, of dolphins progress across the ocean

in a loose assembly, leaping out of the water at great speed as they pursue their prey. Sea conditions in March and early April are usually calm allowing the best chances for observations and making whale 'spouts' visible over a long distance. Seas may however be a little rougher in November and December.



Blue Whale and remoras



Koggala Beach Hotel

After lunch at the hotel we will spend the cooler end of the afternoon birdwatching. A wide range of species is possible including Red-wattled Lapwing and White-breasted Waterhen, Purple Swamphen, terns and waterbirds as well as more forest inhabitants. Alternatively, you may choose to relax or swim off the beach. Later in the day we can look for Indian Flying Foxes as the night settles and maybe witness enormous Indian Flying Foxes flapping off from their roost site to begin some nocturnal foraging. These huge, fruit-eating bats are widespread on the island (though declining in numbers) and colonies are always a welcome sight on our tours.

Day 5

Wilpattu

After breakfast we set off to Wilpattu where we will meet our group (day 2 above).

Climate

Generally hot and sunny with temperatures in the low country ranging from 25-35°C with high humidity, particularly in the Wet Zone. Temperatures decrease in the hills to a range of 10-16°C around Nuwara Eliya. Rain can occur at any time but is not usually prolonged outside the monsoon seasons.

Grading and Focus

This tour is graded A/B. Most of the walks are gentle and suitable for any age and level of fitness. There are also a couple of slightly more strenuous longer walks included in the itinerary.

You will need to appreciate that mammals are largely shy and retiring, present in low densities and often crepuscular or nocturnal in nature. Although this tour spends time and effort in looking for exciting and iconic mammal species such as Leopards, Sri Lanka Giant Squirrel, Indian Flying Fox, Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Asian Elephant and other mammals, potential participants should be aware that mammals will be on view for only a small percentage of our time in the field. Anybody wishing for and expecting an East Africa safari-type experience full of animals should look elsewhere on our website for a holiday. Time between mammal encounters will be spent largely birdwatching (alert to mammals at all times of course), as birds are the most conspicuous members of the local fauna. Anybody who does not

enjoy birdwatching as well as mammal-watching needs to consider whether this is the right holiday for them. If this does not put you off, you will hopefully be rewarded with a fantastic collection of mammal sightings as well as a wealth of fabulous birds.

This is a conventional wildlife holiday with a focus on mammals, birds and general natural history. No trekking or great hardship is involved (although long, potentially cold hours will be spent out in the mountains at Horton Plains), and the holiday is generally suitable for those of all ages and degrees of fitness. Some of the optional walks in the Sinharaja will be on undulating trails, sometimes muddy. It must be remembered that all activities are optional and there is always the opportunity to stay and relax at the lodges and dip in and out of activities should you wish.

Please do not hesitate to talk to the Operations Manager if you have any doubts about the suitability of this tour.

Accommodation & food

Accommodation will be in very comfortable tourist hotels, each room will have private facilities. All meals are included in the tour cost although any snacks or meals eaten in transit at the airports are not included.

Mammal, bird & plant lists

Where available these are automatically provided on booking, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Sri Lanka. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.fco.gov.uk regularly prior to travel.

Entry requirements

All UK passport holders and most other nationalities require an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) visa for Sri Lanka, which is obtainable in advance by filling the ETA form on <http://www.eta.gov.lk/slvisa/>. We recommend that you contact your doctor for the latest up-to-the-minute advice on the relevant vaccinations needed for Sri Lanka. Updated information on vaccinations is also available on <http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/>.

Flights

We use scheduled Sri Lankan Airlines direct flights for all our tours to Sri Lanka. All these flights depart from London Heathrow. If you wish to travel from Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen there will be an additional charge of around **£295** and these flights will be with British Airways.

If you would prefer to fly with Emirates or Qatar Airways please note that these flights are not direct. If you wish to fly with Emirates or Qatar Airways we will gladly arrange it for you, but please give us plenty of warning and you can expect

to pay between £200 and £300 extra for these indirect flights. Due to a difference in arrival and departure times, you will also be expected to pay an extra £295 per person (minimum two people are required) for the additional transfer fees. These prices are only approximate and may vary according to availability and season. We will be pleased to approach the respective airline for you and offer a quote on request.

Return flights with Sri Lankan Airlines are scheduled to arrive at London Heathrow in the evening. Please note that, your return flight might not connect with British Airways flights to regional airports, and you may require an extra night in London. If you would like to travel from one of the above regional airports, please let us know at the time of booking so that we can make the necessary arrangements and obtain a competitive fare.

If you would prefer to travel in Business class (normally available at a supplement charge of around **£3,995**). If you would like to travel from one of the above regional airports and/or book business class flights, please let us know at the time of booking.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking. Please note that our Sri Lanka's Mammals departures tend to book up a long time in advance. Please book as early as possible to avoid disappointment.



Wild Boar



Common Palm Civet



Leopard

Giant Flying Squirrel

Highlights from a previous tour.

This excellent trip started with a Grey Slender Loris mother, with her baby clutching on to her stomach, merely inches above our head. Our nights spent in Anamaduwa and Wilpattu yielded some superb sightings of Indian Crested Porcupine, White-spotted Chevrotain and Jungle Cat. At Sigiriya we added good sightings of Golden Jackal, Common Palm and Small Indian Civets, and finally a very good view of a Fishing Cat that had come to a pool of water. Rufous Horse-shoe Bat and Schneider's Leaf-nosed Bat were seen well in their roosts, while daytime encounters included many Toque Macaque, Grey Langur and Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys. Asian Elephants were plentiful in Minneriya, with over 300 counted during our evening safari.

In the hills, we made acquaintance with the nocturnal Giant Flying Squirrel, Yellow-striped Chevrotain and Muntjac all within reach of each other, among the other species, while our outings in the southern plains yielded some of the best sightings of Leopards, Jungle Cat and Sloth Bear in the area. To finish off a successful journey, our visit to Kanneliya brought us so close to the rare and elusive Red Slender Loris that we were amazed to see in full, uninterrupted view, clinging on to a bare vine.

Highlights from a previous tour.

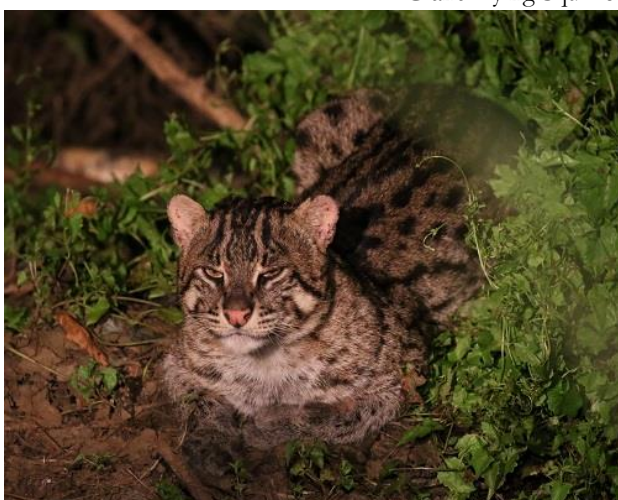
A total of 35 species of mammals, 128 species of birds and 16 species of reptiles and amphibians were seen throughout this wonderful tour. This tour saw some major changes to the program by including a three night stay in Wilpattu which turned out to be successful to finding the rare and elusive Rusty Spotted Cat. During the first three nights, alone most of the target nocturnal mammals and other mammals were sighted with ease. On our first night at Wilpattu we saw the Rusty Spotted Cat just by the hotel garden which is situated five minutes away from the Wilpattu National Park. The cat was so obliging that all clients went home with clear photos of this tiny cat. All of the four cat species Jungle Cat, Fishing Cat, Rusty Spotted Cat and Leopard were seen on this tour along with all the Civet species; Golden Palm Civet, Common Palm Civet and Small Indian Civet. Ruddy Mongoose, Stripe-necked Mongoose, Brown Mongoose and Grey Mongoose were also seen. The Giant Flying Squirrel was beautifully captured during our stay in Kandy and the Fishing Cat showed well during our night drives in Sigiriya. We had many sighting of snakes as well and a rare sighting of a Painted Bat. During our safari in Wilpattu we had outstanding views of three separate Leopards, one on the hunt, one at a water hole and one just been a cat and lazing around. The Grey Slender Loris didn't disappoint with its presence either. A total of 36 species of mammals, 156 species of birds and 27 species of reptiles and amphibians were seen throughout the tour.



Giant Flying Squirrel



Jungle Cat



Fishing Cat



Rusty Spotted Cat