

Sri Lanka

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 December 2005 - 2 January 2006

Report compiled by Chris Kehoe



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Itinerary at a glance:

Day 1 Saturday 17 December 2005

AM: Departed London Heathrow at 11:05 GMT

PM: in flight

Day 2 Sunday 18 December 2005

AM: Arrived Colombo at 0410 (local); en route to Anuradhapura via Airport Garden Hotel, Navadan Kulama, Puttalam Rest House and Tabbowa wetland

Lunch: Meridya Hotel, Anuradhapura

PM: Meridya Hotel garden and Nuwara Wewa (adjacent tank)

Night: Meridya Hotel, Anuradhapura

Day 3 Monday 19 December 2005

AM: Meridya Hotel garden; Old Anuradhapura

Lunch: Meridya Hotel, Anuradhapura

PM: Mahakanadayawa Wewa and Mihintale

Night: Meridya Hotel, Anuradhapura

Day 4 Tuesday 20 December 2005

AM: Meridya Hotel garden; en route to Sigyria via Kekirawa Tank

Lunch: Sigyria Hotel

PM: Sigyria Forest

Night: Sigyria Hotel

Day 5 Wednesday 21 December 2005

AM: Sigyria Forest

Lunch: Sigyria Hotel

PM: Sigyria Forest

Night: Sigyria Hotel

Day 6 Thursday 22 December 2005

AM: Sigyria Hotel garden and adjacent thicket; en route to Kandy/ Peradeniya via Matale Spice Garden

Lunch: Peradeniya Rest House

PM: Peradeniya Botanical Gardens

Night: Suisse Hotel, Kandy

Day 7 Friday 23 December 2005

AM: Udawattakele Reserve

Lunch: Suisse Hotel, Kandy (optional visit to the Temple of the Tooth)

PM: Hantane Tea Estate

Night: Suisse Hotel, Kandy

Day 8 Saturday 24 December 2005

AM: En route to Nuwara Eliya via Glenloch Tea Factory

Lunch: Galway Forest Lodge, Nuwara Eliya

PM: Victoria Park

Night: Galway Forest Lodge

Day 9 Sunday 25 December 2005

AM: Horton Plains National Park

Lunch: Galway Forest Lodge

PM: Victoria Park

Night: Galway Forest Lodge

Day 10 Monday 26 December 2005

AM: En route to Tissamaharama via Surrey Tea Estate, Welimade

Lunch: Ella Rest House

PM: en route to Tissamaharama; Deberawewa Tank

Night: Tissamaharama Rest House

Day 11 Tuesday 27 December 2005

AM: Bundala National Park

Lunch: Tissamaharama Rest House

PM: En route to Yala; Yala NP buffer zone

Night: Yala Village Lodge

Day 12 Wednesday 28 December 2005

AM: Yala NP (jeep safari)

Lunch: Yala Village Lodge

PM: Yala NP buffer zone

Night: Yala Village Lodge

Day 13 Thursday 29 December 2005

AM: En route to Uda Walawe NP; Uda Walawe NP (jeep safari);

Lunch: packed at Uda Walawe

PM: En route to Sinharaja; Blue Magpie Hotel area

Night: Blue Magpie Hotel, Sinharaja

Day 14 30 December 2005

AM: Sinharaja NP

Lunch: Blue Magpie Hotel

PM: Sinharaja NP

Night: Blue Magpie Hotel

Day 15 31 December 2005

AM: Blue Magpie Hotel area; en route to Ratnapura via Sinharaja approach road

Lunch: Ratnaloke Tour Inns, near Ratnapura

PM: Ratnaloke Tour Inns garden and adjacent rubber plantation

Night: Ratnaloke Tour Inns

Day 16 1 January 2006

AM: Bodhingala Forest

Lunch: Citizen Rest, Ingiriya

PM: En route to Colombo/ Airport Garden Hotel, Negombo

Night: Airport Garden Hotel/ in flight

Day 17 2 January 2006

AM: Departed Colombo at 0745 (local); arrived London Heathrow at 1300 GMT

Days 1 and 2

Saturday 17 and Sunday 18 December

Dry, bright and chilly in London; warm and rather wet in Colombo but dry and overcast by afternoon

A fuel shortage at Heathrow due to a depot fire at Hemel Hemstead led to our Sri Lankan Airlines flight making an enforced refueling stop at Abu Dhabi. Coupled with a slightly late departure this delay resulted in us arriving in Colombo an hour and a half late at 0420 (local) but we were soon met by representatives from Baur's, our excellent ground agents and Upali who would accompany us throughout the tour. A quick visit to the Airport Garden Hotel allowed for a wash, change and tea or/coffee and biscuits before we set off at dawn in overcast and sporadically wet weather on our way north towards Puttalam, our breakfast destination. We stopped after an hour and a half for some introductory birding at Navadan Kulama, the first of many attractive and bird-rich tanks (ancient reservoirs) visited on the tour. This produced, amongst others, a group of Ashy Woodswallows and a handful of Cotton Teal (the only ones we saw) as well as numerous brightly coloured tropical butterflies including the common but very spectacular Crimson Rose. The weather may have been somewhat drizzly but any other resemblances to Britain in December were few. Soon afterwards we were tucking into breakfast at Puttalam Rest House. From here we turned inland for the final leg of our journey to Anuradhapura but soon

stopped at some bird-rich roadside rice fields and then the extensive wetland area at Tabbowa nearby where numerous new species were found. We finally arrived at the Meridya Hotel in Anuradhapura in the early afternoon and had a fine buffet lunch, the first of many! The remainder of the day was spent birding at and around the hotel (which overlooks an excellent tank, Nuwara Wewa) with highlights including a very obliging Indian Pitta called out of the undergrowth by Upali and a wide array of wetland and open woodland species, most of which would become familiar sights in the coming days such as abundant Whiskered Terns, Brahminy Kites, Painted and Asian Openbill Storks and numerous Herons and Egrets. Attractive Ceylon Swallows hawking overhead represented our first Sri Lankan endemics of the tour. As dusk came, numerous Black-crowned Night Herons flew onto the tank from adjoining trees and Indian Flying Foxes winged into the fruiting trees in the hotel garden.

Day 3

Monday 19 December

Overcast but dry in the morning, brighter in the afternoon, warm

Those who chose to did some pre-breakfast birding at the hotel and after breakfast we all visited Old Anuradhapura, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka. Our explorations began at the famous Bodh Tree, reputedly grown from a cutting from the Buddha's Tree of Enlightenment and the oldest documented tree in the world. Various Dagobas (Stupas) in differing states of repair, but some still very spectacular, dotted the landscape and we paid a short visit to the mysterious moonstone, a temple doorstep rich in symbolic images that remain imperfectly understood. Throughout we were in attractive parkland settings where birds were abundant, these included the newly split endemic Ceylon Woodshrike and Ceylon Green Pigeon with Asian Paradise Flycatchers, Small Minivets, Common Ioras and Black-rumped Flamebacks as just some of the supporting cast. Mammals here included our first Toque Macaques and Tufted Grey Langurs and a Sri Lankan Giant Squirrel posed well for the scope. A leisurely lunchbreak at the Meridya Hotel was followed by a visit to nearby Mihintale via a large tank, Mahakanadayawa Wewa, where a pair of White-bellied Sea Eagles put on a fine performance. At Mihintale itself some of the group opted to climb the 1840 steps to the Dagoba on top of the hill while the rest spent an hour or so birding in the attractive gardens below. Having regrouped we set off back to Anuradhapura but stopped for a few minutes to admire a showy but rather confusing Hawk Cuckoo along the approach road.

Day 4

Tuesday 20 December

Bright and sunny all day, very warm

Pre-breakfast birding at the Meridya produced our only Tawny-bellied Babblers and the now increasingly familiar range of waterbirds that thronged the tank. After breakfast we departed Anuradhapura, our journey to Sigyria taking until early afternoon with an hour-long birding stop at Kekirawa Tank. Pheasant-tailed Jacanas were conspicuous at Kekirawa, along with more subtle fair in the shape of Ashy and Jungle Prinias and our first Tricoloured Munias. After lunch at the splendid Sigyria Hotel, where Tickell's Blue Flycatchers and Asian Paradise Flycatchers were found in the gardens, we set off to explore the forest nearby. A fine White-rumped Shama posed for the scope and soon after we were enjoying good views of our first Drongo Cuckoo and a new endemic in the shape of Ceylon Grey Hornbill. Birds then came thick and fast as we walked along the moat below Sigyria Rock with Grey-bellied Cuckoos, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Ceylon Small Barbets and a Crested Hawk Eagle being just some of the avian highlights, strikingly mustachioed Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys also gave

good views. As dusk approached we set off back to the hotel but the bus soon came to a sudden stop so we could admire a superb Brown Fish Owl in full view on a tree on the far side of the moat, a fitting conclusion to a very bird-rich day in lovely surroundings.

Day 5

Wednesday 21 December

Mainly bright and sunny after very heavy overnight rain, one short shower in the afternoon, very warm

Hopes of an Orange-headed Thrush in the hotel garden before breakfast came to nothing but soon after breakfast we began another walk in the forest nearby; those who had previously anticipated climbing Sigyria Rock having thought better of it after seeing what it entailed. An early highlight this morning was excellent prolonged views of a group of endemic Brown-headed Babblers and before we returned for lunch a few hours later we had also seen our first Indian Pygmy Woodpeckers, Indian Cuckoos and Black-headed Cuckooshrikes amongst many other species. After lunch we explored a slightly different area of forest; an Ashy Drongo was a good find here and we were treated to multiple views of Small and Orange Minivets, Black-capped Bulbul and our first stunning white Paradise Flycatcher which showed to perfection as it splash bathed right in front of us. As evening wore on a couple of small birds bathing in puddles on the road under a shady area of forest proved to be more Brown-capped Babblers and by standing and quietly waiting near these puddles we were soon treated to lucky encounters with an Orange-headed Thrush and at least three Indian Blue Robins as they emerged from their dense forest home to bathe.

Day 6

Thursday 22 December

Sunny and warm

A final pre-breakfast session at the Sigyria Hotel produced good views of several previously seen species but just before we departed for Kandy a splendid Indian Pitta was seen bouncing through the flowerbeds. The journey to Kandy was punctuated by a short stop at a spice garden near Matale where we were given an insight into the spice growing industry and offered a few samples. Soon after we were on the outskirts of Kandy and grinding our way through the heavy traffic towards nearby Peradeniya where we had lunch in the resthouse opposite the Botanical Gardens before crossing the road and exploring the gardens themselves. A few hours here provided us with our first Southern Hill Mynas, three Common Hawk Cuckoos of the scarce local race and a selection of other species including both Minivets again and large numbers of roosting Indian Flying Foxes. As darkness began to fall we made our way back to nearby Kandy and the rather grand surroundings of the Suisse Hotel, our home for two nights.

Day 7

Friday 23 December

Sunny and warm

The day began with a visit to Udawattakele Reserve on a well-wooded hillside near our hotel. During a few hours here we succeeded in finding some more of the hoped-for endemics in the shape of Yellow-fronted Barbets and Layard's Parakeets while a good supporting cast included our first Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, Yellow-browed and Black Buleuls along with more Southern Hill Mynas and a couple of Forest Wagtails. During the lunch break

most of the group accompanied Upali to the nearby Temple of the Tooth and after lunch we drove uphill through tea plantations to Hantane where the day concluded with good views of 'Ceylon' Scimitar Babblers, more Layard's Parakeets, several Plum-headed Parakeets and, to Upali's delight, a pair of very obliging Streak-throated Woodpeckers (quite a rarity here in his old stamping ground) which, along with a throng of Yellow-billed Babblers were scolding something unseen in a hole in a dead tree, probably a snake of some description though it wisely remained hidden. Other birds attracted to the frenzy of activity included several Common Ioras and a Jerdon's Leafbird.

Day 8

Saturday 24 December

Sunny and warm

After breakfast we headed deeper into the central highlands along winding roads that took us higher and higher towards Nuwara Eliya and afforded spectacular views as we went. A short stop at The Glenloch Tea Factory at about the half-way point allowed some of the group to take a brief tour of the factory while the rest chose to do some birding from the car park. As it was prime time for raptors to be rising on thermals we were able to see a good selection including Mountain Hawk Eagles, Booted Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle and a Shikra while our first Hill Swallows and Indian Swiftlets hawked overhead. After a complimentary cuppa we resumed our journey and arrived at the Galway Forest Lodge in Nuwara Eliya in plenty of time for lunch. After lunch we drove the short distance to Victoria Park in the town centre. Being a public holiday the park was rather busy but we soon made our way to the quieter areas where the specialty birds are to be sought. An Indian Pitta and an Indian Blue Robin were seen quite quickly and we had our first encounters with two new endemics, Hill White-eye and Yellow-eared Bulbul, as well as several Forest Wagtails; but the hoped for Pied Thrushes and Kashmir Flycatcher remained well hidden with the former glimpsed briefly in flight and the latter merely heard at dusk. While searching for the latter a Slaty-legged Crake was seen briefly though sadly not by any group members.

Day 9

Sunday 25 December

Sunny and warm after a distinctly chilly dawn

Christmas morning began early with tea and coffee in the hotel lobby at 0445 before we set off in two minibuses for Horton Plains National Park, our route taking us up numerous steep hairpins. Arriving at the Arrenga Pool at first light our primary target, Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush ('Arrenga') was calling already and some had a brief view of the bird silhouetted in a bare tree. During the following thirty minutes it was glimpsed several more times as it called away from both sides of the road and almost everyone got some sort of view of this elusive and rare endemic. A Sri Lankan Bush Warbler, the first of four seen this morning, rummaged about on the edge of the pool and both Sri Lankan Woodpigeon and Crested Goshawk flew over. Indian Blackbirds, Grey-headed Flycatcher and, eventually, a couple of Dull Blue Flycatchers, yet another new endemic, provided further distractions before we returned to the minibuses for our packed breakfasts. Moving onto the more open plateau we were soon watching Oriental Honey Buzzards and Pied Bushchats while admiring a view of the characteristically shaped Adam's Peak in the distance. As we made our way to the main car park one minibus had a chance encounter with a Sri Lanka Junglefowl and everyone saw the herds of Sambar scattered about on the hillsides. Returning towards Nuwara Eliya we encountered a few raptors with Black Eagle being the highlight amongst a few 'Common' Buzzards and Oriental Honey Buzzards. A stop at Pattipole Station gave a few of the

group a brief encounter with the hoped-for Black-throated Munias before we pressed on to another site for this species though it remained similarly elusive there with just a couple seen calling in flight. After lunch a return to Victoria Park was undertaken in order to try once again for Pied Thrush and Kashmir Flycatcher but apart from Upali having a fleeting glimpse of the former we drew a blank once more though Indian Pitta, Indian Blue Robin and several Forest Wagtails were seen again.

Day 10

Monday 26 December

Sunny and warm, hotter on the coastal plain later

Our departure from the hill country this morning was punctuated by a stop at the Surrey Tea Plantation where an hour or so produced some good birds in the shape of our first Chestnut-headed Bee-eater and Lesser Yellownapes while more Scimitar Babblers, Orange and Small Minivets and our first obliging Asian Koel kept the interest levels up. At 9:30 we observed a two minute silence in memory of those caught up in the devastating Tsunami that had struck the island exactly one year earlier. An early lunch stop at the delightful Ella Rest House gave us a commanding view down the valley leading to the lowlands that would be our destination later in the afternoon and while there we were able to see some good raptors in the shape of a couple of Black Eagles, a Shaheen Falcon and couple of Oriental Honey Buzzards while our first Crested Treeswift appeared overhead. About three hours later we were in the warm lowlands near the coast and checking into the Tissamaharama Rest House for a pleasant one night stay. No sooner had we had our bags delivered to our rooms than we were off again to explore nearby Deberawewa Tank where early highlights were a couple of Black Bitterns amongst the numerous other waterbirds present at this excellent site. Having gorged ourselves on the spectacle of massed waterbirds once more, and seeing a large Mugger Crocodile gorging on an unfortunate Soft-shelled Terrapin, we moved into an adjacent Palm Grove. This is The best site in Sri Lanka to see the scarce and localised White-naped Woodpecker and as we waited around to see if the local pair were still in residence a fine white Paradise Flycatcher put on a show but even this was surpassed by stellar views of first one then two Blue-faced Malkohas which uncharacteristically perched in the open for some time. As dusk began to fall we reluctantly gave up on the woodpeckers but when only a hundred yards away a shout from some locals alerted us to the fact that they had just arrived and after rushing back to the spot everyone, including what seemed like most of the local population, enjoyed scope views of these excellent birds.

Day 11

Tuesday 27 December

Sunny and warm/ hot

After an early breakfast we set off on a short drive to Bundala National Park and boarded three jeeps to explore the scrub, salterns and coastal lagoons where an excellent variety of waterbirds were found. Early highlights were a couple of Great Thick-knees (the first of several seen) and numerous small waders including Kentish and Lesser Sandpipers, Little Stints and Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers, though high water levels caused by recent rains meant that birds were well scattered with few large concentrations found. Delightful Small Pratincoles were a highlight here and several roosted along the jeeps tracks themselves. At the large coastal lagoon four Greater Flamingos were present amongst the much larger gatherings of herons and egrets and a few Eurasian Spoonbills while the beach held a couple of scarce Greater Sandpipers. After lunch back at the hotel we quickly transferred the short distance to Yala for a two-night stay at the fabulous Yala Village, just a hundred metres from the shore

and, miraculously, barely effected by last year's Tsunami that completely destroyed other hotels in the area. After lunch we planned to explore some of the rich habitats in the National Park buffer zone but before setting off there everyone assembled at the high lookout above the restaurant to see an Asian Elephant nearby, indeed some had seen it earlier in the hotel grounds while being escorted to their rooms! While up here a distant Falcon attracted attention and through the scope it was seen to be an Amur Falcon, a major rarity in Sri Lanka; and as we watched it soon became apparent that at least three birds were hawking dragonflies in the distance. As the temperature began to fall we finally set off to explore the buffer zone and were soon enjoying some excellent wader watching with large gatherings of birds inhabiting the shores of the lagoons in the area. Other than a few Ruff and Wood Sandpipers nothing new was found amongst the abundant Little Stints, Curlew and Marsh Sandpipers at the lake shores though nearby our first Yellow-wattled Lapwings and Pacific Golden Plovers put on a good show, as did some attractive Ashy-crowned Finch Larks. Other highlights were our only Yellow-eyed Babblers and excellent views of a Grey-bellied Cuckoo feeding along a fence line. As we returned to Yala Village a Sri Lankan Junglefowl emerged onto the road to give great views.

Day 12

Wednesday 28 December

Sunny and warm

At dawn we embarked on a jeep safari in Yala National Park. Inevitably, thoughts turn to Leopards during such events and with great good fortune our three jeeps rather soon found themselves parked next to a low tree where one of these magnificent big cats was lying on a branch about 20 metres away. During half an hour or so we were treated to unsurpassed views as it looked around, stretched, yawned and even cleaned its paws. When we returned to the area a little later it was seen slinking off into the jungle, perhaps disturbed by another jeep present or perhaps just fed up of the piercingly loud alarm calls of a nearby Peacock. After eating our packed breakfasts at the beach further Asian Elephants were seen and some excellent birds found included a pair of Grey-headed Fish Eagles, Malabar Pied Hornbills and Orange-breasted Green Pigeons while a young Crested Hawk Eagle was perched right next to the road, though there was no sign of the hoped-for Black-necked Stork at any of the usual locations for this rare and declining species. Lunch at the hotel was followed by a return to the buffer zone, though not before the Amur Falcons had been seen again. One particularly productive lagoon attracted most attention, on the short turf near the shore a couple of Jerdon's Bushlarks performed well and at the waters edge the usual gathering of waders included a Broad-billed Sandpiper. Scanning in the distance, Upali found a fine Black-necked Stork, a species we had been looking for all day, and as darkness began to fall we took up our places on the road near the bus and in response to a short burst of the tape at least three Indian Nightjars showed in flight or settled briefly on the road. As we returned towards Yala Village in the gathering gloom a small group of Elephants at the roadside were seen to contain an impressive tusker.

Day 13

Thursday 29 December

Sunny and hot

Clutching our packed breakfasts we set off pre-dawn on a two hour drive to Uda Walawe where another jeep Safari was in the offing. Breakfast duly consumed we set off and were soon seeing plenty of Elephants and birds including numerous Tricoloured Munias, abundant Prinias of all three species and having great views of Malabar Pied Hornbills. An hour spent overlooking the reservoir allowed us to watch Baya Weavers attending part-built

nests. Grey-headed Fish Eagles, an Osprey and a Booted Eagle were found here and a pair of White-bellied Sea Eagles were nesting in a nearby tree. Overhead large numbers of Red-rumped Swallows were hawking. The highlight of the return journey was Sirkeer Malkohas, one of which showed particularly well for such a retiring species. Arriving back at the tour bus we found that our packed lunches had been delivered and after eating them we set off on the rather long drive to Sinharaja. Fortunately the roads were mainly clear and we made good time, so much so that there was an opportunity to explore the immediate vicinity of our accommodation at the Blue Magpie Hotel before darkness fell.

Day 14

Friday 30 December

Sunny and warm

Everyone was up early for our full day exploration at Sinharaja, one of the richest rainforest tracts remaining in the whole of Asia and home to many very localised Sri Lankan endemics. We were quickly aboard jeeps and grinding up hill for half an hour to reach the best habitat. Almost as soon as we passed through the gate we came across a feeding party of Orange-billed Babblers and while waiting to see what other treasures this flock might contain the scope was trained on a bare tree across the valley where both Crested Drongo and White-faced Starlings (two more endemics) were basking in the early sun. Very soon after a couple of superb Red-faced Malkohas came flying over and amazingly for such a normally reclusive species landed in full view where they remained for a minute or so. The endemic show continued soon after when a couple of Blue Magpies were glimpsed before a calling Green-billed Coucal was coaxed into view. Things quickly quietened down once the flock had moved through but we eventually tracked down more species including a showy female Malabar Trogon while delightful Tree Nymph butterflies floated overhead. We returned to the Blue Magpie for a rest and some lunch before returning to the forest in the afternoon. Another feeding flock was found fairly quickly and although mostly consisting of the expected Orange-billed Babblers we eventually succeeded in seeing a Lesser Yellownappe, two more surprisingly showy Red-faced Malkohas and another female Trogon. A little further on another feeding flock contained our first Black-naped Monarchs and some people glimpsed a Crimson-backed Woodpecker. At the research station, Ceylon Blue Magpies finally gave themselves up properly and the walk back to the jeeps provided us with further views of the Crimson-backed Woodpecker and both Green-billed Coucal and yet another Red-faced Malkoha before our first Ceylon Hill Mynas appeared. At dusk back at the Lodge a Chestnut-backed Owlet called in the distance but couldn't be persuaded to show itself.

Day 15

Saturday 31 December

Sunny and warm

We had plenty of time to explore the area near the Blue Magpie Hotel before leaving the area and a dawn excursion soon produced a number of good birds, best of which were, appropriately enough, some splendid Blue Magpies. After breakfast, final packing was combined with birding in the grounds where, amongst others, a couple of brief Black-throated Munias and, better still, two Legge's Flowerpeckers were highlights, though Black-capped and Yellow-browed Bulbuls, Yellow-fronted Barbets and a couple of Emerald Doves were also notable. With the temperature rising rapidly bird activity soon ground to a halt by mid-morning and we made our way to Ratnapura in time for lunch at the plush Ratnaloke Tours Inn, our base for the night. After a busy few days the afternoon was free for rest and recreation but for most people this took the form of more birding in the

excellent hotel garden where some highlights were showy White-browed Fantails and Asian Paradise Flycatchers and a small flock of stunning Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters.

Days 16 - 17

Sunday 1 – Monday 2 December

Sunny and warm in Sri Lanka; mild, grey and gloomy in UK

Our final day, and the first day 2006, commenced with some early birding in the hotel garden before an hour or so bus ride delivered us to Bodhingala. A couple of hours spent walking to and from the hill top Buddhist retreat produced a range of interesting birds but nothing new though a pair of calling Chestnut-backed Owlets would have been new had they chosen to honour us with a glimpse or two. A Green-billed Coucal was similarly elusive but a Ceylon Grey Hornbill gave excellent views as did a Giant Squirrel before we drove the short distance to the Citizens Rest House where we had lunch before commencing the three hour drive to Colombo. With a late afternoon and evening at our disposal at the Airport Garden Hotel there was ample time to catch forty winks, do a little shopping in the hotel shops or just relax before we had a final evening meal together and prepared for departure. Arriving at the airport at 0130 we were met with the unwelcome news that the flight would be delayed by two and a half hours but the time eventually passed and we finally arrived at Heathrow at 1300 GMT and dispersed to our respective corners of Britain.

Systematic Lists

Birds

Species order follows the widely used Grimmett and Inskipp's Birds of the Indian Subcontinent (Helm) 1997 but taxonomy and species names generally follow Rasmussen and Anderton's The Birds of South Asia (Lynx Edicions) 2005 which seems set to become the standard treatment for the region. In the case of likely confusion (for example when scientific names have also changed) alternative English names used by Grimmett et al are given. A number of Sri Lankan forms have recently been elevated to full species status (all endemic species are marked 'E'), while some forms occurring in Sri Lanka and southern India are now regarded as separate species from races occurring further north and east. When there is ongoing uncertainty about the specific status of a form the middle part of the trinomial scientific name is placed in brackets to indicate this uncertainty and the provisional new English name is presented in inverted commas. Endemic subspecies are marked with 'e'; some of these may be elevated to species status in the future while the subspecific status of others might be removed altogether. The number of days that each species was seen (but not just heard) is shown in brackets, i.e. (3:15).

[Ceylon Spurfowl] *Galloperdix bicalcarata* E

Although heard calling distantly at Sinharaja this extremely difficult to see species was predictably not seen]

Ceylon Junglefowl *Gallus lafayetii* (5:15) E

Much more often heard than seen, one was seen briefly at Sigyria where others were calling, another was seen on Horton plains but everyone had good views at Yala NP or at Sinharaja; these are very attractive birds when seen well

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* (7:15)

A couple seen as we approached Anuradhapura on day one were followed by one between there and Sigyria but this species became a frequent sight in the southern lowlands where several males were watched displaying to apparently disinterested females

Lesser Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna javanica* (8:15)

Present in variable numbers on many tanks in the lowlands

Cotton Teal *Nettapus coromandelianus coromandelianus* (1:15)

At least four at Navadan Kulama on our first morning were the only ones seen

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta acuta* (3:15)

A couple of flocks at tanks and coastal lagoons near Yala and Bundala totaled about 100 birds

Garganey *Anas querquedula* (2:15)

A flock of about 50 flew past the Meridya Hotel, Anuradhapura but did not settle; one was on a roadside pool near Bundala

Barred Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator leggii* (1:15) e

One that sped across the road in front of the bus near Yala Village was the only one seen

Indian Pygmy Woodpecker *Picoides moluccensis gymnophthalmus* (4:15) e

Four at Sigyria gave very good views while birds at Sinharaja and Ratnaloke Tours Inn were more fleeting

Yellow-fronted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos mahrattensis mahrattensis* (1:15)

One was seen briefly at Uda Walawe

[Rufous Woodpecker *Ceas brachyurus jerdoni*

One that flew across the road near Mihintale was unfortunately only seen by Upali who was riding shotgun]

Lesser Yellownape *Picus chlorolophus wellsi* (2:15) e

Three were found at the Surrey Tea Plantation and at least a couple more were with mixed feeding flocks at Sinharaja.

Streak-throated Woodpecker *Picus xanthopygaeus* (1:15)

A pair that showed very well at Hantane were the first Upali had ever seen in this area despite living in Kandy for over thirty years

Black-rumped Flameback *Dinopium benghalense psarodes* & *jaffinense* (5:15) e & e

Quite common around Anuradhapura where birds of both races, and apparent intergrades, were found, further south only red-backed psarodes was seen

Crimson-backed Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes stricklandi* (1:15) E

Heard drumming but not seen at Sigyria; a couple gave fleeting views to some of the group at Sinharaja

White-naped Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes festivus 'tantus'* (1:15) e

A pair that has been present near Deberawewa for many years eventually appeared and gave good views

Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica zeylanica* (12:15) e

Very common and widespread with birds found, or at least heard, everywhere there were trees except at the highest elevations

Yellow-fronted Barbet *Megalaima flavifrons* (4:15) E

First seen at Udawattakele, thereafter others were seen at Sinharaja and in the garden of Ratnaloke Tour Inns near Ratnapura where several came to feeders containing fruit

Ceylon Small Barbet *Megalaima rubricapillus* (4:15) E

Locally quite common in the Central Highlands after the first were seen at Sigyria, more often heard than seen as is usual with Barbets

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala indica* (3:15)

Several were seen and heard at Anuradhapura, Mihintale and Sigyria with a couple of others heard in the southern lowlands

Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill *Tockus gingalensis* (4:15) E

The first were at Sigyria where at least five were noted, thereafter ones and twos were found at Sinharaja and Bodhingala

Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* (2:15)

Two pairs of these stunning birds were seen at both Yala and Uda Walawe where they gave excellent views and were much appreciated; others were heard at Sigyria

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops ceylonensis* (1:15)

One was seen briefly at Yala NP during our jeep safari there

Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus fasciatus* (1:15) e

A total of four, three females and a stunning male, were found at Sinharaja

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis indicus* (7:15)

Locally common, most frequent in the drier lowland areas visited and largely absent from the uplands

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis taprobana* (5:15)

Quite common, encountered in ones and twos at several lowland wetlands, one was watched trying to consume and obviously too large fish at Sigyria

Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis capensis* (3:15)

After the first was seen on roadside wires north of Colombo this dramatic looking species was found again only at Old Anuradhapura and Sigyria

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrensis fusca* (15:15)

Very common, at least ten per day were seen except in the higher hills, often far from water; one was watched consuming a lizard

Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* or '*ceylonicus*' (10:15) e

Quite common in the lowlands but greatly outnumbered by the next species

Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus javanicus* (15:15)

These stunning birds were very common and widespread

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti leschenaulti* (3:15)

A single at the Surrey Tea Estate, Welimade, was eventually followed by several more in the vicinity of the Ratnaloke Tours Inn near Ratnapura and a handful at Bodhingala

Jacobin Cuckoo *Oxylophus jacobinus jacobinus* (3:15)

One on roadside wires near Puttalam was the first; others were at Kekirawa Tank and Yala

[Chestnut-winged Cuckoo *Clamator coromandus*

One of these scarce birds was seen at Sigyria but only by Upali]

Common Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococyx varius varius* & *ciceliae* (1:15) e

Three at Peradeniya Botanical Gardens were of the scarce endemic race *ciceliae*. An unusual, and rather large-looking, bird at Mihintale prompted some thoughts of Large Hawk Cuckoo *H. sparveroides* (a species not yet recorded in Sri Lanka); it seemed to fit neither of the occurring races particularly well but showed some inconsistencies with Large Hawk Cuckoo too!

Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus micropterus* (1:15)

Two showed well at Sigyria where others were heard

Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus* (2:15)

Two were at Sigyria and one showed very well on our first evening at Yala

'Fork-tailed' Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus (lugubris) stewarti* (2:15) e

At least three were seen well and several others were heard at Sigyria

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus scolopaceus* (6:15)

Very commonly heard, at least in the lowlands, but hard to get views of; a couple eventually showed well to all at the Surrey Tea Estate at Welimade

Blue-faced Malkoha *Rhopodytes viridirostris* (3:15)

Two gave great views right out in the open at Deberawewa while we waited to see if the White-naped Woodpeckers would appear, the other half a dozen encounters were more typically fleeting

Sirkeer Malkoha *Taccocua leschenaultii leschenaultii* (1:15)

Of three birds seen by the lead jeep at Uda Walawe one eventually remained in view long enough for everyone to see it foraging at the edge of the track

Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrocephalus* (1:15) E

A total of five seen at Sinharaja represented a good haul of this often difficult to find and charismatic endemic; more importantly most of the views were of unusually good quality with most birds perched right out in the open at reasonable heights

'Southern' Greater Coucal *Centropus (sinensis) parroti* (11:15)

Common and very widespread

Green-billed Coucal *Centropus chlororhynchus* (1:15) E

A couple seen fairly well at Sinharaja were followed by one heard only at Bodhingala

Ceylon Hanging Parrot *Loriculus beryllinus* (8:15) E

After the first at Peradeniya Botanical Gardens this species became a regular sight and sound in the Central Highlands and in the hills at and near Sinharaja, most were seen hurtling over calling but several perched for the scope

Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria eupatria* (4:15)

Small numbers were seen at Sigyria and Hantane

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri manillensis* (12:15)

Very common and widespread, only absent at the very highest elevations

Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala cyanocephala* (1:15)

After quite a wait up to half a dozen noisy birds eventually showed themselves at Hantane; a couple more were heard calling at Ratnaloke Tours Inn near Ratnapura

Layard's Parakeet *Psittacula calthropae* (1:15) E

At least five showed well on a couple of occasions at Udawattakele and a similar number were watched briefly at Hantane later the same day

Indian Swiftlet *Aerodramus unicolor unicolor* (5:15)

Present in modest numbers in the Central Highlands at and around Nuwara Eliya, Sinharaja and Ratnapura

Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis balasiensis* (11:15)

Common throughout the lowlands and in the hills at Sinharaja but absent from the higher reaches of the Central Highlands around Nuwara Eliya

Little Swift *Apus affinis singalensis* (12:15)

Quite common, particularly large numbers gathered around the Dagobas in the north where they were probably breeding

Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata* (4:15)

After the first at Ella Rest House this species was then found with some regularity in the Yala area in the following days

Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis zeylonensis* (1:15) e

One gave great views perched in the open in a tree beside the moat at Sigyria

Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus eidos* (1:15)

Three or four responded to Upali's tape at Yala by landing in the road nearby or hawking close overhead

Sri Lanka Woodpigeon *Columba torringtoni* (1:15) E

One was seen very briefly in flight at Horton Plains at first light and a couple of others were heard both there and at Sinharaja

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis ceylonensis* (15:15) e

Very common and widespread

Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica robinsoni* (3:15) e

A couple seen in flight at Sigyria were followed by several heard at Udawattakele, perched birds were eventually seen at Sinharaja and Ratnaloke Tours Inn near Ratnapura

Orange-breasted Green Pigeon *Treron bicincta leggi* (3:15) e

Small numbers were found at Bundala and Yala where a couple gave very good views

Ceylon Green Pigeon *Treron pompadora* (4:15) E

Several gave very good views at Anuradhapura and Sigyria with others more fleetingly seen at Sinharaja

Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea pusilla* (9:15)

Good views were enjoyed at Anuradhapura, Sigyria and Sinharaja with occasional birds found elsewhere

[Slaty-legged Crake *Rallina eurizinoides*

One at Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya was unfortunately not seen by any group members]

White-breasted Waterhen *Anaouornis phoenicurus* (11:15)

Ones and twos were found at a wide range of wetlands including ornamental ponds in hotel grounds

[Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla pusilla*

A bird glimpsed on several occasions from the hotel garden in Anuradhapura was almost certainly this seldom seen species]

[Watercock *Gallixes cinerea*

One was briefly on the tank next to the Meridya Hotel, Anuradhapura but was not seen by any tour members]

'Grey-headed' Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio (porphyrio) poliocephalus* (5:15)

Locally common on tanks with plenty of emergent vegetation such as Kekirawa and Deberawewa

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* (3:15)

A few at Navadan Kulama were followed by one or two at a couple of other lowland wetlands

Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura* (3:15)

Two in ricefields west of Tabbowa were followed by a couple of others at Bundala and Yala

'Western' Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa* (2:15)

A flock of about 25 were near Bundala with a smaller flock at nearby Yala

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata orientalis* (1:15)

One was at Bundala

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus ussuriensis* &/ or *eurhinus* (2:15)

A fairly common member of wader flocks at Bundala and Yala but not seen elsewhere

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* (3:15)

Common in the south east at Bundala and Yala, the only others recorded were near Tabbowa

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* (2:15)

Small numbers were found at Yala and Bundala

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* (1:15)

A couple seen briefly at Yala were, surprisingly, the only ones recorded

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* (2:15)

Small numbers were found at a few wetlands near Yala

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (9:15)

Small numbers were found at a wide range of wetlands, including the stream in Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres interpres* (2:15)

Only found in the Bundala and Yala areas where about 50 were noted

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* (3:15)

A handful in ricefields near Tabbowa were followed by many hundreds at tanks and coastal lagoons in the southeast

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* (3:15)

After a large flock was found near Tabbowa on day one we had to wait until we arrived at Bundala and Yala to see more though they were very common there

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus falcinellus* (1:15)

One was with Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints at Yala

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* (1:15)

A group of nine were on a lagoon near Yala

Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* (6:15)

These delightful birds, most of which were in breeding plumage, were found on most tanks with emergent vegetation, young juveniles were noted at Deberawewa

Indian (Eurasian) Thick-knee *Burhinus (oediceramus) indicus* (2:15)

Two were in the rather incongruous setting of the front lawn of a Colombo military academy as we drove past, and stopped briefly, on our final afternoon, earlier a couple had been glimpsed in passing near Uda Walawe

Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris* (2:15)

A total of about ten of these strange looking birds were found on coastal wetlands at Bundala and Yala

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus himantopus* (7:15)

Apart from a large gathering of several hundred on a couple of lagoons near Yala small numbers were found at a wide range of wetlands throughout

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* (2:15)

About half a dozen were found on grassy areas adjacent to coastal lagoons near Yala; often in the company of Yellow-wattled Lapwings

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (2:15)

Small numbers were at Bundala and Yala

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius jerdoni* & *auronius* (2:15)

A couple were on wetlands at Yala and Bundala

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus seebhomi* (3:15) e

Other than two briefly near Tabbowa the remaining records all came the south east where this species was quite common at Yala and Bundala; a couple of birds were seen that were probably of the race *seebhomi* but most appeared to be dark-lored migrants from further north

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius (mongolus) atrifrons* (group) (2:15)

Common at tanks and coastal lagoons near Yala and Bundala. Ringing recoveries indicate that most birds wintering in Sri Lanka are from Central Asian rather than East Asian populations but in the field the two groups (which may be split as two species) can only be reliably distinguished in breeding plumage

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii leschenaultii* &/ or *crassirostris* (1:15)

A couple were on the coastal lagoon at Bundala, this is not a very easy species to find in Sri Lanka

Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus* (3:15)

Up to 20 were found near lagoons in the Yala area

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus 'lankae'* (10:15)

Quite common and widespread, especially in the lowlands

Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea* (1:15)

About 30 were seen at Bundala, often perched on the jeep tracks or flying past at close range

Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus* (1:15)

A handful were found at Bundala and Yala

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* (3:15)

One at Tabbowa was followed by regular encounters with small numbers at tanks and lagoons in the southeast

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* (2:15)

Up to 50 were found at Bundala with smaller numbers at a couple of lagoons at Yala

Great Crested Tern *Sterna bergii velox* (2:15)

At least 20 were in a rather distant tern roost at Bundala with a few others seen in flight at coastal sites in the southeast

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons sinensis* &/ or *albifrons* (3:15)

Small numbers at and near Tabbowa were followed by a few encounters in the southeast at Yala and Bundala

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* (8:15)

Very common to locally abundant on many tanks

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* (3:15)

Very localised, two or three were with hundreds of Whiskered Terns near Mihintale, about a dozen were at Deberawewa and up to 100 at lagoons near Yala

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus haliaetus* (1:15)

One at the reservoir at Uda Walawe was something of a Sri Lankan rarity

Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus ruficollis* (4:15)

Widespread at low densities, particularly prominent in the highlands near Nuwara Eliya

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus vociferus* (2:15)

One at Anuradhapura was followed by a handful at Uda Walawe

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus indus* (12:15)

Particularly common around Anuradhapura with smaller numbers at widespread sites elsewhere; scarce in the highlands

White-bellied Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* (5:15)

Regularly seen in the lowlands after the first at Anuradhapura, pairs were present at Mahakanadayawa Wewa, Deberawewa, Yala and Uda Walawe

Grey-headed Fish-eagle *Ichthyophaga ichhyaetus* (2:15)

Pairs were at Yala and Uda Walawe

Crested Serpent-eagle *Spilornis cheela spilogaster* (8:15) e

Widespread at low densities with several giving very good views

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus layardi* (1:15) e

One flew over at the Arrenga Pool on Horton Plains

Shikra *Accipiter badius badius* (4:15)

Widespread in small numbers

[Buzzard species *Buteo* sp.

Several buzzards were seen as we descended from Horton Plains and another was at Uda Walawe. There is great uncertainty about which species' occur in Sri Lanka, the only specimen apparently refers to the form now known as Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo burmanicus* (but is described as a dark phase individual which is at most a rare

variant of that species); most of the birds wintering in the Central Highlands may belong to that species. However, Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* of the migratory race *vulpinus* (Commonly known as 'Steppe' Buzzard) probably also occurs in Sri Lanka and at least one of the birds seen near Horton Plains appeared much more like that species (being a dark/ rufous phase individual – a colour variant perhaps never not recorded in Himalayan Buzzard). The bird at Uda Walawe was similarly perplexing, it appeared closest in appearance to either a Steppe or Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*, arguably much closer to the latter but that is believed to be only a very rare visitor to Sri Lanka. Pending clarification of what forms occur in Sri Lanka, and their relative numbers, a circumspect approach to identification seems best]

Black Eagle *Ichneutes malayensis perniger* (5:15)

One near Horton Plains was followed by a pair at Ella; at least four more were seen in the Sinharaja and Ratnapura areas

Booted Eagle *Aquila pennatus 'milvoides'* (2:15)

Singles were at the Glenloch Tea Factory and Uda Walawe

Crested (Changeable) Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus 'ceylanensis'* (5:15) e

After the first at Sigyria several showed very well at Yala and Uda Walawe

Mountain Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus (nipalensis) kelaarti* (1:15)

A pair were seen in flight at the Glenloch Tea Factory

Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* (2:15)

At least three, probably four, were watched hawking for insects rather distantly from Yala Village, this is quite a rarity in Sri Lanka; all appeared to be females and immatures

'Shaheen' (Peregrine) Falcon *Falco (peregrinus) peregrinator* (4:15)

One flew over Mihintale, a pair were seen on several occasions over Sigyria Rock and another was at Ella. Whether Shaheen Falcon warrants species status is open to debate

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis capensis* (1:15)

Only seen at Navadan Kulama on day one

Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* (7:15)

Locally fairly numerous at larger wetlands in the lowlands, many were nesting on Tissamaharama tank

Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* (7:15)

Common on all wetlands of any size

Indian Shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* (8:15)

Common on many wetlands in the lowlands with a large breeding colony at Tissamaharama tank

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* (2:15)

Only seen at Nuwara Wewa, Anuradhapura where about half a dozen were noted

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea 'rectirostris'* (7:15)

Present in generally small numbers at most tanks and lagoons in the lowlands

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea manilensis* (6:15)

Distribution was very similar to that of the previous species but numbers were slightly lower

Great Egret *Egretta alba modesta* (8:15)

Locally quite numerous on tanks and lagoons in the lowlands, some were in breeding plumage

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (9:15)

Small numbers were present at most wetlands visited

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia intermedia* (5:15)

Ones and two were noted at several wetlands though others may have been overlooked amongst the numerous Egrets seen

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus* (15:15)

Very common and widespread, especially in the lowlands.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii grayii* (14:15)

Very common and widespread though not seen at the very highest elevations around Nuwara Eliya

Striated Heron *Butorides striatus javanica* (1:15)

A handful were seen at Bundala and Yala

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax nycticorax* (5:15)

Large numbers were at tanks around Anuradhapura with smaller numbers in the southeastern wetlands

Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis flavicollis* (2:15)

Two were seen quite briefly at Deberawewa tank

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* (1:15)

Four were seen rather distantly on the coastal lagoon at Bundala, the most reliable site for this species in Sri Lanka. Birds in the Old World are now regarded as a separate species from New World forms (*P. ruber* etc)

Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephala* (6:15)

Widespread in fairly small numbers, one or two were often in the company of Cattle Egrets feeding in rice paddies and several were nesting at Tissamaharama tank

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia leucorodia* (3:15)

In total about 30 were found in the southeast at Bundala and Yala

Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* (7:15)

Several of the larger tanks in the lowlands held up to 40 birds and one was on the lake at Kandy

Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* (8:15)

Generally small numbers were at a wide range of lowland wetlands

Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* (9:15)

Distribution and numbers were very similar to the last species

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus episcopus* (2:15)

A couple seen briefly from the moving bus on day one were followed by three that showed well at Uda Walawe

Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus asiaticus* (1:15)

After a lot of searching one was finally found on a lagoon near the entrance to Yala NP

Indian Pitta *Pitta bradyura* (4:15)

After the first showed very well in the hotel garden in Anuradhapura others were seen in the garden of the Sigyria Hotel and at Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya; many more were heard but remained well hidden

Jerdon's (Blue-winged) Leafbird *Chloropsis jerdoni* (4:15)

Ones and twos were found at Anuradhapura, Sigyria, Hantane and Sinharaja

Golden-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons insularis* (6:15) e

Rather more frequently seen than the preceding species though at similar locations

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus cristatus* & *lucionensis* (13:15)

Small numbers of wintering birds were found at widely scattered sites; some of those in the hills were distinctly paler and greyer above, thus more closely matching the eastern race *lucionensis*

Sri Lanka Blue Magpie *Urocissa ornate* (2:15) E

Three near the research station at Sinharaja were followed next morning by six in trees near the Blue Magpie Lodge

House Crow *Corvus splendens* (15:15)

Common in lowland areas, especially around habitations but virtually replaced by the next species at the highest elevations

'Indian Jungle' (Large-billed) Crow *Corvus (macrorhynchus) culminatus* (15:15)

Common and widespread though less prominent in built up areas than the previous species

Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus* (3:15)

Up to six were in a tree at Navadan Kulama, a handful were over Deberawewa Tank and a couple were seen from the moving bus near Ratnapura

Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus ceylonensis* (13:15) e

Present in low densities at virtually every wooded area visited

Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei layardi* (2:15) e

At least four were seen at and near Anuradhapura

Black-headed Cuckooshrike *Coracina melanoptera* (4:15)

A few showed well at Sigyria and a couple more were found at the Surrey Tea Plantation and Sinharaja

Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus cinnamomeus* (5:15)

Regularly encountered in small flocks in more wooded areas such as Old Anuradhapura, Peradeniya and Yala

Orange Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus flammeus* (8:15)

Small numbers were found at widespread wooded sites throughout

Pied (or Bar-winged) Flycatcher-shrike *Henipus picatus leggit* (3:15) e

One or two at Udawattakele were followed by a couple at the Ratnaloke Tours Inn near Ratnapura

White-browed Fantail *Rhipidura aureola compressirostris* (5:15)

Ones and twos were at Sigyria, Uda Walawe and in the garden of the Ratnaloke Tours Inn near Ratnapura

Black Drongo *Dicurus macrocerus* (2:15)

Very small numbers were found at and near Anuradhapura

Ashy Drongo *Dicurus leucophaeus longicaudatus* (1:15)

One at Sigyria was the only one seen

White-bellied Drongo *Dicurus caerulescens leucopygialis* & *insularis* (9:15) e & e

D. c. insularis was seen occasionally in the lowland dry zone, for example at Sigyria; *D. c. leucopygialis* (with a much more restricted white belly) was quite common in wet zone forest at Sinharaja

Ceylon Crested (Greater Racket-tailed) Drongo *Dicurus lophorhinus* (1:15) E

Quite numerous at Sinharaja, often in mixed species feeding flocks

Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea ceylonensis* (1:15) e

Only seen at Sinharaja where three or four were mixed in with feeding flocks during the afternoon excursion

Asian Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi paradisi* & *ceylonensis* (9:15) e

Quite widespread, white males of the migratory nominate race from India were seen on four occasions, rufous males, which may have been of either race, were seen rather more often

Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia multicolour* (9:15)

Quite common, small numbers were seen in most woodland contexts

Ceylon Woodshrike *Tephrodornis affinis* (6:15) E

After the first at Anuradhapura this newly split endemic was seen quite frequently at Sigyria and others were at Yala Village

Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush (or Arrenga) *Myophonus blighi* (1:15) E

A male showed fleetingly to most group members at the traditional spot (the Arrenga Pool) on Horton Plains in the very early morning but had predictably stopped calling soon after dawn and nothing more was then seen of it

[Pied Thrush *Zoothera wardii*

Singles were glimpsed on two successive evenings at Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya but this species, though never actually easy to catch up with, seems to be getting harder to find each year]

Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina citrina* (1:15)

One bathed in a puddle at Sigyria

Spot-winged Thrush *Zoothera spiloptera* (1:15) E

One was watched on the path at Sinharaja

'Ceylon' (Indian) Blackbird *Turdus (simillimus) kinnisii* (1:15) e/E

Two or three were seen early in the morning near the Arrenga Pool on Horton Plains and another was briefly seen at Victoria Park later the same day. Sri Lankan birds may warrant specific status although, conversely, all birds from S Asia are sometimes regarded as subspecies of Common Blackbird *T. merula*

Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* (6:15)

Widespread in wooded contexts but with most seen at or near Anuradhapura and Sigyria

Brown-breasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui* (4:15)

Wintering birds were seen with some regularity at Sinharaja where no fewer than ten were recorded, another was at Bodhingala

[Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra*

Although one was heard at dusk at Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya the bird could not be found]

Dull-blue Flycatcher *Eumyias sordida* (1:15) E

A singing bird and what may have been its mate were eventually seen quite well near the Arrenga Pool on Horton Plains

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae jerdoni* (3:15) e

At least two pairs were resident in the garden of the Sigyria Hotel with a couple of others seen and heard in forest nearby

Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis ceylonensis* (1:15)

One was seen at Horton Plains

Indian Blue Robin *Erithacus brunneus* (4:15)

Three, including one male, were seen at Sigyria, one was at the Arrenga Pool on Horton Plains (with others heard calling near there) and a female was in Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya

Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis ceylonensis* (15:15)

Very widespread and quite common

White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus leggii* (4:15) e

One of several heard at Sigyria was seen very well and a couple of others were glimpsed

Indian (Black) Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata leucoptera* (6:15) e

Occasionally seen in more arid lowland areas

Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata atratus* (2:15) e

Only seen in the highlands around Nuwara Eliya, especially on Horton Plains, where two or three pairs were found

White-faced Starling *Sturnus senex* (1:15) E

About eight were seen perched in bare trees early in the morning at Sinharaja and another was seen with a feeding flock in the afternoon

Brahminy Starling *Sturnus pagodarum* (1:15)

Two seen briefly in flight at Yala were the only ones recorded

Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus* (3:15)

Small flocks totaling about 60 birds were found at Bundala, Yala and Uda Walawe

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis melanosturnus* (1:15) e

Very widespread and rather common

Ceylon Hill Myna *Graula ptilogenys* (1:15) E

Only seen at Sinharaja where about six were found in the evening though views were mostly quite distant

Lesser or Southern Hill Myna *Graula indica* (2:15)

Up to eight were at both Peradeniya Botanical Gardens and Udawattakele

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis* (6:15)

Small numbers were found in the highlands around Kandy and Nuwara Eliya with others at and near Sinharaja and Ratnapura

Great Tit *Parus major mahrattarum* (5:15)

Quite common in the highlands around Nuwara Eliya and Kandy. Grey and white birds in South Asia belong to the minor subspecies group that some authors regard as a separate species (Cinereous or Asian Grey Tit *P. cinereus*) from more colourful northern forms

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (15:15)

Very widespread, including on Horton Plains, and overall quite common

Hill (Pacific) Swallow *Hirundo (tahitica) domicola* (2:15)

Small numbers were at Glenloch Tea Factory and on Horton Plains

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* (2:15)

One over Anuradhapura was followed by a large gathering, probably involving well over 100 birds, at Uda Walawe

Ceylon Swallow *Hirundo hyperythra* (13:15) E

These attractive birds were rather widespread at low densities though absent from the highest elevations in the Central Highlands

Black-capped Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus* (3:15) E

One at Sigyria was followed by fairly regular encounters at Sinharaja, especially in the vicinity of the Blue Magpie Hotel

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer cafer* (15:15)

Very widespread and very common

Yellow-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus penicillatus* (2:15) E

This very striking endemic was only seen in Nuwara Eliya and on Horton Plains

White-browed Bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus insulae* (5:15)

Small numbers were found at widespread wooded sites after the first in the hotel garden in Anuradhapura

Yellow-browed Bulbul *Iole indica guihelmi* (1:15) e

After the first at Udawatakele this species was not seen again until Sinharaja where it was reasonably common, a few birds visited the trees right in front of the restaurant area at the Blue Magpie Lodge

Square-tailed Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes ganeesa humii* (4:15)

Quite common at Udawattakele Reserve, Kandy and at and near Sinharaja

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis omalura* (1:15)

Occasionally seen in areas of cultivation in the lowlands and on the treeless high plateau on Horton Plains

Grey-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii pectoralis* (1:15) e

Rather surprisingly one on our first afternoon was the only one seen

Jungle Prinia *Prinia sylvatica valida* (2:15) e

Only seen at Kekirawa Tank and Uda Walawe (where it was quite common) though others were heard at a couple of sites

Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis brevicauda* (5:15) e

About eight were recorded at very widespread locations

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata insularis* (9:15) e

Small numbers were present in most grassy or scrubby areas

Sri Lanka (Hill) White-eye *Zosterops ceylonensis* (2:15) E

After the first in Victoria Park this species proved very common on Horton Plains but was not found elsewhere

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa* (8:15)

Encountered quite frequently in the lowlands and lower hills but replaced by the previous species at the highest elevations

Sri Lanka Bush Warbler *Bradypterus palliseri* (1:15) E

Four were seen, some rather well for such a skulker, in the vicinity of the Arrenga pool on Horton Plains

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (6:15)

Far more often heard than seen though present almost everywhere at low densities

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius sutorius* & *fernando* (13:15) e & e

Common and widespread but more often heard than seen

(Bright) Green Warbler *Phylloscopus (trochiloides) nitidus* (15:15)

Very common and widespread though much more often heard than seen

Large-billed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris* (2:15)

Singles were at Horton Plains and Sinharaja with another heard at Sigyria

Brown-capped Babbler *Pellorneum fuscicapillum fuscicapillum* & *babaulti* (1:15) E

Only seen at Sigyria where up to six showed very well opposite the Sigyria Hotel and a couple more appeared when bathing in a pool in the road later in the evening

'Ceylon' (Indian) Scimitar-babbler *Pomatorhinus [schisticeps] melanurus* (4:15) e/E

After the first at Hantane this attractive species was seen in small numbers at the Surrey Tea Plantation, Welimade and Sinharaja, the jury is still out in whether birds in Sri Lanka warrant endemic species status

Tawny-bellied Babbler *Dumetia hyperythra phillipsi* (1:15) e

Only seen at Anuradhapura where a couple were in and around the garden of the Meridya Hotel on our final morning there

Dark-fronted Babbler *Rhopocichla atriceps nigrifrons* and *siccatus* (3:15) e & e

Small numbers were found at Sigyria (*R. a. nigrifrons*) and Sinharaja (*R. a. siccatus*)

Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense nasale* (1:15) e

A couple showed well at Yala where one obligingly sang from the top of small bushes

Orange-billed Babbler *Turdoides rufescens* (1:15) E

Only seen in the higher forests at Sinharaja where this was the predominant member of mixed feeding parties

Yellow-billed Babbler *Turdoides affinis taprobanus* (15:15) e

Common and very widespread, often in hotel gardens; absent at the highest elevations and replaced by the previous species in the higher rainforest at Sinharaja

Jerdon's Bush Lark *Mirafra affinis* (1:15)

Only found at Yala and Uda Walawe where several were seen well

Ashy-crowned Finch Lark *Erenopterix grisea* (2:15)

Small numbers of these subtly attractive larks were seen in the Yala area

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula australis* (1:15)

Only seen at Bundala where one showed very well and a couple of others were heard singing

Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile zeylonicum* (1:15) e

Singles were seen well at Sigyria on two occasions, others were heard or seen only poorly in flight

Legge's Flowerpecker *Dicaeum vincens* (1:15) E

A pair were at the Blue Magpie Hotel just before we left there, the female showed very well but the male was more fleeting and distant

Pale-billed (or Tickell's) Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos ceylonense* (12:15) e

Very common and widespread though most were seen flying over calling

Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica zeylonica* (12:15) e

Common and very widespread

Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* (12:15)

Fairly common away from the higher hills

Loten's Sunbird *Nectarinia lotenia lotenia* (10:15) e

Rather common and widespread, seen at higher elevations than the last species in the Central Highlands

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus indicus* (5:15)

Very localised, small numbers were found in larger towns such as Anuradhapura and Kandy

Forest Wagtail *Dendromanthus indicus* (3:15)

After the first at Udawattakele this attractive species proved quite common in Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya where at least half a dozen showed well but was not seen elsewhere

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (3:15)

A handful at and around Nuwara Eliya were followed by a couple more at Sinharaja

Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus malayensis* (6:15)

Widespread and locally quite common, birds gave particularly good views at Horton Plains and Yala

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlevski* (1:15)

A couple were heard and seen briefly or in flight as we drove around Uda Walawe but none settled to allow prolonged views

Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* (2:15)

A couple were seen briefly in the distance near Tabbowa so it was not until we arrived at Uda Walawe where birds were attending part built nests that most people caught up with them

Indian Silverbill *Lonchura malabarica* (2:15)

A handful were found at Yala

White-rumped Munia *Lonchura striata striata* (7:15)

Widespread and fairly regularly seen in small numbers

Black-throated (Hill) Munia *Lonchura (kelaarti) kelaarti* (2:15) e/E

A traditional site at Pattipole Station near Horton Plains provided very brief views to a few people while another site nearby produced just a couple of brief flight views. At Sinharaja a couple briefly perched in a bare tree above our rooms at the Blue Magpie Lodge

Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* (10:15)

Widespread in fairly small numbers, the most frequently seen Munia species

Tricoloured Munia *Lonchura malacca malacca* (3:15)

Very small numbers at Kekirawa Tank and Yala were followed by large gatherings in the rich grasslands of Uda Walawe

Mammals

Species order, taxonomy and nomenclature follows Duff and Lawson's Mammals of the World: A Checklist (A&C Black) 2004

Indian or Black-naped Hare *Lepus nigricollis* (2:15)

Singles were seen briefly as we drove to Horton Plains and at Yala

Indian Palm Squirrel *Funambulus palmarum* (15:15)

Very common and widespread away from the central highlands where it was replaced by the next species

Dusky Palm Squirrel *Funambulus sublineatus* (2:15) E

Small numbers were seen in and around Nuwara Eliya; this species was previously regarded as a small, dark and short-tailed subspecies of *F. palmarum*

Sri Lankan (or Grizzled) Giant Squirrel *Ratufa macroura* (5:15)

After the first at Anuradhapura others were seen at Sigyria, Sinharaja and Bodhingala, despite its English name this species is not an endemic and is also found locally in SE India

Rat species *Rattus* sp. (2:15)

A couple of Rats were seen in Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya; although not specifically identified they were probably Black Rats *Rattus rattus*.

Leopard *Panthera pardus* (1:15)

Undoubtedly one of the major highlights of the tour. About an hour into our jeep Safari at Yala we found ourselves on a quiet sidetrack where a Leopard was spotted at close range on a low branch of a trackside tree. It remained in good view for about half an hour. Unlike most Leopards in trees this one was awake for most of the time and was watched stretching and grooming itself.

Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii* (5:15)

A total of seven were found at very widespread locations

Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* (2:15)

At least 15, a high total, were seen at Bundala and Yala

Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus* (6:15)

A huge roost was at Peradeniya Botanical Gardens, otherwise this species was prominent at Anuradhapura and Tissamaharama with occasional live animals, and plenty of corpses on powerlines, elsewhere

Bat species various genera (10:15)

Bats of various shapes and sizes were seen around most hotels we used but none were identified to species

Toque Macaque *Macaca sinica* (9:15) E

Quite common, especially in association with Humans

Tufted Grey Langur *Semnopithecus priam* (10:15)

Quite common, found at many sites in the lowlands, sometimes in association with the next species

Purple-faced Leaf Monkey *Trachypithecus vetulus vetulus* & *senex* (5:15) E

Much more often heard than seen: a small troop at Sigyria showed quite well, as did one in particular at Sinharaja. At Horton Plains one of the long-haired upland race ('Bear Monkey' *T. v. senex*) was briefly seen and several others heard

Eurasian Wild Boar *Sus Scrofa* (3:15)

Several were seen at Yala including one in the grounds of Yala Village on occasion

Chital (Spotted Deer) *Cervus axis* (1:15)

About a dozen were seen at Yala

Sambar *Cervus unicolor* (1:15)

At least 20 were on Horton Plains

[Water Buffalo *Bubalus arnee* (2:15)

Although looking wild the animals present at Yala and nearby areas are all believed to be the descendants of domesticated stock rather than truly wild natives]

Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus* (4:15)

Footprints and dropping were seen at Sigyria (where we were warned against visiting certain areas because of the presence of volatile animals) but the first actually seen was one in and around the grounds of the Yala Village! Thereafter at least 10 more were seen at Yala and a further 30 or so at Uda Walawe which is probably the best place for seeing Asian Elephants anywhere

Reptiles**Marsh or Mugger Crocodile *Croodylus palustris* (6:15)****Gecko species *Cnemaspis spp.* (10:15)****Green Garden Lizard *Calotes calotes* (5:15)****Common Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor* (4:15)****Common Indian (or Land) Monitor *Varanus bengalensis* (8:15)****Water Monitor *Varanus salvator* (3:15)****Common Rat Snake *Ptyas mucosus* (1:15)****Star Tortoise *Geochelone elegans* (2:15)****Soft-shelled Terrapin (Flap-shell Turtle) *Lissemys punctata punctata* (2:15)**