

Sri Lanka

Naturetrek Tour Report

16 December 2006 - 1 January 2007

Report compiled by Chris Kehoe



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Days 0 & 1

Saturday 16 & Sunday 17 December

Outbound from UK; en route to Anuradhapura;

Weather: dry, overcast and warm in Sri Lanka

A delayed departure from Heathrow on the morning of December 16th resulted in us arriving in Colombo at 04.00 next morning rather than the scheduled time of 02.30 but we quickly negotiated the airport formalities, changed some money, and met Upali in the arrivals hall. A few minutes later we arrived at the Airport Garden Hotel where we had an hour to freshen up and have some hot drinks before commencing the journey towards Anuradhapura around dawn. After just over an hour we pulled off the main road and spent 30 minutes birding at Navadam Kulama, a large tank or reservoir covered in emergent vegetation. A good selection of commoner species such as spectacular Pheasant-tailed Jacanas and Whiskered Terns was soon notched up but scarcer fare appeared in the shape of Cotton Pygmy Geese. Half an hour later we arrived for a filling breakfast at Puttalam Rest House, where a couple of Ruddy Mongooses were on show, before turning east along a more minor road towards Anuradhapura.

Before arriving at the Meridya Hotel a couple of hours later, brief stops along the way provided us with both White-bellied and Grey-headed Fish Eagles and an abundance of waterbirds. Lunch was punctuated by a phone call from our driver who had found a couple of Indian Scops Owls roosting in the hotel car park trees! Later on we spent a little while scanning the adjacent tank where masses of waterbirds included both Asian Openbill and Painted Storks and a handful of Pink-backed Pelicans. We then took a short stroll nearby which produced all three of the sunbirds found in Sri Lanka, several Black-hooded Orioles, Brown-headed Barbets and a couple of White-bellied Drongos. As the light began to fade Indian Flying Foxes started to congregate at fruiting trees in the hotel garden.

Day 2

Monday 18 December

Old Anuradhapura & Mihintale

Weather: bright at first, overcast later, rather warm, dry

Most of the group took part in a pre-breakfast birding session in the garden where abundant waterbirds on the tank included seven species of herons and egrets and a perched Crested Hawk Eagle was a surprise find. After breakfast we drove the short distance to Old Anuradhapura, the ancient capital of Sri Lanka, where a visit was made to the Bodhi Tree, one of the most sacred sites in the country and the oldest documented tree in the world, having been grown from a cutting from the Buddha's Tree of Enlightenment. In the pleasant parkland setting we also found plenty of birds against a backdrop of spectacular dagobas (stupas), highlights being a Large Cuckoo-shrike, several Small Minivets and Common Ioras; our first endemic was seen in the form of several Ceylon Swallows. Endemic mammals in the shape of Toque Macaques and Tufted Grey Langurs were abundant and a nearby tank held a couple of White-winged Terns and a Pintail Snipe. A short visit was made to the mysterious moonstone, a temple doorstep ornately carved with poorly understood symbolic images, before we returned to the Meridya for lunch and a rest.

An overcast and pleasantly mild afternoon was spent at nearby Mihintale where a couple of Sri Lanka Junglefowl showed well, as did a pair of Sri Lanka Grey Hornbills. Also seen were Large-billed Leaf Warblers, several Jerdon's Leafbirds and Ceylon Small Barbets while three Booted Eagles soaring together came as a surprise as this is quite a scarcity in Sri Lanka. A couple of people accompanied Upali towards the hilltop dagoba before meeting up later with the rest of the group birding along the road below. Being the only guests at the Meridya tonight meant we felt an obligation to overindulge at the huge buffet.

Day 3

Tuesday 19 December

Anuradhapura to Sigyria; Sigyria Forest

Weather: dry and bright at first but intermittent rain or drizzle for much of the rest of the day, warm

Birding in the garden before breakfast produced a Tawny-bellied Babbler and a Blyth's Reed Warbler amongst the now familiar assemblage of wetland species. After breakfast we began the journey to Sigyria with stops along the way to look at some excellent roadside birds such as Ashy Woodswallows, a showy Blue-faced Malkoha and a Black-shouldered Kite. We also stopped for a little while at Kekirawa Tank where a single Black Bittern was briefly seen in flight before rain set in and we retired to the bus and arrived at the very pleasant Sigyria Hotel at 11.30

After lunch, and with rain still threatening, we began to explore the forest below the imposing Sigyria Rock. Rewards came quickly in the shape of our first Ceylon Woodshrike and Black-headed Cuckoo Shrike amongst others before we moved on to a more remote area where rain finally began to fall. Undaunted, we took up position to view some rainwater pools in the road below a denser area of forest where birds emerged to bath; in short order Orange-headed Ground Thrushes, White-rumped Shama, Indian Blue Robin and Brown-capped Babbler all put in an appearance and Upali called-in a Drongo Cuckoo. With rain still falling and gloomy light we returned early to the hotel bar, more than satisfied with our haul. After dinner, an even bigger buffet, a surprise birthday cake arrived for Jeff.

Day 4

Wednesday 20 December

Sigyria Forest

Weather: Warm. Overcast but dry in the morning, brighter in the afternoon but heavy rain for a while in the evening.

Most people were up at dawn exploring the hotel garden and were rewarded with a couple of Indian Pittas in the half-light and a small flock of Brown-capped Babblers in the thicket opposite. After breakfast we returned to the forest below the rock where highlights included a showy Drongo Cuckoo, a Gold-fronted Leafbird, Jungle Prinia and several Woolly-necked Storks.

After lunch Elizabeth and Hazel undertook an excursion to Pollonurawa; Margaret, Tim and Catriona opted to scale Sigyria Rock while the rest of us birded around its base and moat once more. A particular highlight this afternoon was a pair of Shaheen Falcons that gave decent telescope views, another Indian Pitta showed briefly and our first Grey-bellied Cuckoo and only Grey-breasted Prinias were found. Rain set in once more about an hour before dark ensuring that some got a bit of a soaking.

Day 5

Thursday 21 December

Sigyria to Kandy, Peradeniya Botanical Gardens

Weather: Dry and mostly bright, warm

Two Indian Pittas, a couple of Orange-headed Ground Thrushes, Tickell's Blue Flycatchers and Brown-capped Babblers were the pre-breakfast highlights at and near the hotel garden but straight after breakfast we were on the move. Our route took us south to Kandy via an hour long leg stretch at a spice garden near Matale where a guided tour was on offer and the shop did some good business. We arrived at Peradeniya Rest House just west of Kandy in time to enjoy a leisurely lunch before eventually setting off to explore the extensive Botanical Gardens opposite. It took less than half an hour to find our target species here: Southern Hill Myna and Common Hawk Cuckoo, and after admiring the large roost of Flying Foxes and a few other birds, including a couple of obliging Forest Wagtails, we were on our way to colonial splendour of the Suisse Hotel. A few people went on an excursion to see a performance of Kandian dancing before we all met up for dinner. The elegant surroundings of the dining room, and a moderately huge buffet, were tempered somewhat by the appearance of a strange musical ensemble!

Day 6

Friday 22 December

Kandy area

Weather: Dry and mostly sunny, warm

After an early breakfast we set off to nearby Udawattakelle Forest Reserve for a few hours birding, particularly notable here were our first Layard's Parakeets, Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters and Yellow-fronted Barbets while Sri Lanka Hanging Parrots showed well, as did a very obliging Emerald Dove, a species normally only seen hurtling past in flight.

During the afternoon we paid a visit to the Hantane Tea Estate above town where raptors were rather prominent. Displaying Black Eagles were the highlight but Crested Hawk, Crested Serpent and White-bellied Sea Eagles were also seen, as were a pair of displaying Oriental Honey Buzzards. Our first Plum-headed Parakeets completed the set of all four Sri Lankan Parakeet species seen today and a Layard's finally gave perched views after several fly-pasts. During the evening several group members accompanied Upali to the famous Temple of the Tooth nearby before we re-grouped for dinner and 'entertainment'. Another group in the dining room seemed to be strangely entranced by last night's minstrels who had failed to disguise themselves from us by the un-cunning use of matching hats; we were thus subjected to only two numbers at close range and some background warbling.

Day 7

Saturday 23 December

Kandy to Nuwara Eliya, Victoria Park.

Weather: bright at first but then mainly overcast with some light drizzle later, warm at first then cooler as the altitude increased

Straight after breakfast we began the journey south which took us higher and higher into the hill country along winding road through tea estates. The route was regularly marked by the remnants of landslides that indicated the severity of the recent (and seemingly ongoing) monsoon. After an hour or so we pulled into Glenloch Tea Factory where some took a short tour while everyone else did some birding from the car park. The hoped-for Hill Swallows showed well soaring around the building, several Oriental Honey Buzzards put on a good show and while watching Black-headed Cuckooshrikes and a Brown Shrike a White-browed Fantail appeared in the same tree. After a refreshing cuppa of the local brew we continued our journey and arrived at the Galway Forest Lodge on the outskirts of Nuwara Eliya in time for a leisurely lunch.

Later in the day we visited Victoria Park, a strange place for birding as it is in a busy and noisy urban setting. Historically this was a prime site for Pied Thrush but sightings have declined dramatically in recent years, probably as a result of much of the undergrowth bordering the stream having been cleared, and like others before us we were out of luck. However, decent compensation came in the form of three Kashmir Flycatchers and numerous Hill White-eyes and Yellow-eared Bulbuls while an Indian Pitta was as welcome as ever.

Day 8

Sunday 24 December

Horton Plains; Galwaysland NP; Boumeraella

Weather: Mist and heavy drizzle most of the day, somewhat drier around midday and just before dark after heavy afternoon rain. Cool on Horton Plains, mild at Nuwara Eliya

Tea and Coffee at 04.30 preceded our 04.50 departure for Horton Plains NP, high above the town and reached in minibuses due to the very steep and winding road. Just after dawn we arrived in decidedly murky weather conditions at the fabled Arrenga Pool, the best known site for the ultra rare but notoriously hard to see Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush. While waiting for the Thrush a male Kashmir Flycatcher showed briefly but a superb Dull Blue Flycatcher was rather more obliging. A Whistling Thrush then began calling and a few of the group

managed a brief view in the mist. Over the next hour or so this male Whistling Thrush was glimpsed a couple more times and a female also put in a brief appearance but with the mist and drizzle increasing viewing conditions were far from ideal. Setting off back along the road a Sri Lanka Bush Warbler teased us in the undergrowth but failed to give satisfactory views although another Dull Blue Flycatcher showed well, our first Ceylon Scimitar Babblers were seen and a nice mixed feeding flock contained several Orange Minivets and Velvet-fronted Nuthatches. Given the awful weather it was perhaps surprising that we saw as much as we did. The visibility deteriorated further while we had ate our packed breakfasts back at the minibuses and with rain increasing a retreat downhill seemed the better part of valour; there was really no point pressing-on to look at the wide plateau landscape in visibility of less than 20 metres!

The weather in Nuwara Eliya was only marginally better, though after lunch a jaunt to nearby Boumeraella did finally produce brief views of the hoped-for Sri Lanka Woodpigeons amongst commoner fare and a Purple-faced Leaf Monkey posed well for the scope, although heavy rain returned and hampered us somewhat later on. The final hour or so of daylight was dry and we visited the newly designated Galwaysland NP just around the corner from the hotel where a pair of Sri Lanka Whistling Thrushes (perhaps the first recorded here) came as a very welcome surprise (and reward for perseverance) and an 'Indian' Blackbird was new, although Sri Lanka Bush Warblers remained elusive. Tonight it was Ian's turn for a birthday cake, the band was surprisingly good and performed a rather skilful rendition of 'Hotel California' at Upali's request...the big softy.

Day 9

Monday 25 December

Nuwara Eliya; en route to Tissamaharama via Ella

Weather: Misty and drizzly till lunch then brighter until evening when heavy rain reached Tissamaharama as we did. Much warmer in the lowlands

A return visit to the Galwaysland NP before breakfast revealed that Santa had deposited no Bush Warblers there but an Indian Pitta and a pair of Kashmir Flycatchers came as compensation. After breakfast a short return visit was made to Victoria Park in a vain last attempt for Pied Thrush though another Kashmir Flycatcher, a couple of Forest Wagtails and an Indian Blue Robin were found before we began the long journey south to the coast...and hopefully some fine weather!

There was little let up in the grim conditions as we wound our way to Ella Rest House for lunch but it stopped raining and was clear enough to allow some birding in the grounds where Ceylon Scimitar Babbler, Black-rumped Flameback and a couple of Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters formed a decent diversion. From Ella we descended quickly out of the hill country and soon found ourselves back on the warm coastal plain and speeding southwards along the western border of Yala NP. Unfortunately the bad weather caught up with us by the time we reached Tissamaharama Rest House and our evening excursion from there was abandoned in the face of more heavy rain - Upali said it was the first time he'd been rained on at Tissa for nine years! However, we were able to witness the spectacle of a large heronry on a nearby island from the comfort of the simple but pleasant lodge and a couple of people went for a dip in the pool. Christmas Day had been declared a Poya day so no drinking in public places was permitted, though the terrible shock that accompanied this realisation soon subsided as we tucked into another fine buffet.

Day 10

Tuesday 26 December

Bundala NP, Tissa Tanks

Weather: dry, bright and hot

The day dawned wonderfully clear and bright and after an early breakfast we set off to Bundala NP where we transferred into three jeeps for a morning's exploration of the salt pans, lagoons and coastal scrub of this very productive area. At the salt pans large numbers of waders and terns were gathered and we spent a good hour or so sifting through the massed ranks of Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints, Kentish and Lesser Sandplovers. We succeeded in finding a small group of wintering Red-necked Phalaropes while several Great Thick-knees and Little Pratincoles proved particularly popular. A hundred strong flock of Caspian Terns formed an impressive sight and mixed in with them were smaller numbers of Greater-crested Terns, a handful of Lesser-crested Terns and several Gull-billed Terns while the ubiquitous Whiskered and Little Terns were joined by a large flock of scarcer White-winged Black Terns dip-feeding over a pan at close range. Moving deeper into the park we succeeded in finding a hoped-for Watercock skulking about in an overgrown lagoon and a large and varied selection of other waterbirds, including our first Striated Heron and Yellow Bitterns, kept us very well occupied.

By lunchtime it was rather hot but as it started to cool down later on we visited nearby Weerawila Tank where, despite high water levels, we were able to enjoy good views of Indian Thick-knees and more Yellow Bitterns. A little later we pulled up at Deberawewa Tank where a couple of Black Bitterns were new to most, another Watercock was glimpsed and an acquaintance of Upali invited us into his garden where we savoured excellent views of a roosting Brown Fish Owl. A vigil for White-naped Woodpecker in a nearby Palm Grove went unrewarded and we finally arrived at our overnight digs at Yala Village well after dark, not least because of the terrible state of the approach road. Further delays were the result of having to be escorted to and from our rooms for fear we might be savaged by wild animals but we eventually settled down unscathed to a particularly large and varied buffet.

Day 11

Wednesday 27 December

Yala

Weather: dry bright and hot

An early start saw us clutching breakfast boxes as we drove to the Yala NP office at dawn and boarded three jeeps for a safari in the park. Stops were made at most areas of open water but the early highlight came as a Lesser Adjutant stalked through the grasslands. Soon afterwards a rare Black-necked Stork was seen but most memorable was the Malabar Pied Hornbill that shrieked its head off at incredibly close range in a low tree next to the road. Mammals seen included several Wild Boar and Spotted Deer until our drivers suddenly put on a turn of speed after hearing a Leopard had been located and soon after we were waiting our turn to get into a position from which the sleeping animal could be seen. It was quite close, and we all had two looks as it flopped casually over a large bough but its head was concealed. Nevertheless, we had plenty of time to savour its glorious spotted coat as its tail hung down and occasionally twitched. Another driver managed to land his vehicle in a deep muddy rut but despite all the associated hurly burling the Leopard slept on nearby. We left the chaotic but

strangely compelling scene and soon disembarked at our breakfast site on the beach, home to a simple but chillingly effective Tsunami memorial.

By now it was getting rather hot and bird activity was starting to diminish but before leaving the park a couple of hours later we had seen our first Asian Elephants and new birds included the localised Brahminy Starling. Back at the luxurious Yala Village there was ample time to enjoy the surroundings or have a swim before we set off in the cool of evening to explore an area of open scrub and a large lagoon near the park entrance. Plenty of waterbirds at the lagoon included a large and varied stand of roosting terns, many small waders, a large flock of Spoonbills, several Great Thick-knees and a couple of hundred Garganey and Pintail. Thousands of Black-tailed Godwits flew over. The scrub held a showy Indian Pitta and several Grey-bellied Cuckoos while the grassland was frequented by Larks and Pacific Golden Plovers, there was certainly plenty to look at! We remained till dusk in the hope of Nightjars but just before the light faded Barred Buttonquails began to appear on the road and gave decent scope views as they dust-bathed. A couple of Yellow-crowned Woodpeckers then appeared and a little while later the first Indian Nightjar settled on the road; before the light went completely several more were seen on the road or floating past, though a single Jerdon's Nightjar was rather brief. The Yala Village bar did good business at the end of another excellent day in the field.

Day 12

Thursday 28 December

Yala Village, en route to Embyliptiya via Hambantote

Weather: dry, bright and sunny, warm to hot

Some took part in a dawn vigil from the viewing platform above the restaurant which gives a commanding view of the whole area and allows birds to be seen in the canopy of the dense coastal scrub woodland. Orange-breasted and Green Imperial Pigeons both posed for the scope as a succession of smaller birds appeared in the treetops. Fly-by Red Rumped Swallows and Sand/ Pale Martins were the first we had seen and the lagoon produced Little Ringed Plover and Ruff to further bolster our list. We were also in poll position here when the lavish breakfast buffet was opened....After breakfast there was time for some final packing before we set off towards Embyliptiya at 09.45. A particularly bird rich lagoon en route soon demanded our attention, we worked our way through the large gathering of small waders present and were soon rewarded with prolonged views of a locally rare Long-toed Stint amongst the abundant Little Stints feeding along the shoreline. We eventually dragged ourselves away and a couple of hours later arrived at the rather grand Centauria Hotel on the outskirts of Embyliptiya and quickly settled down for lunch.

With an early start tomorrow, this afternoon's activities were rather low key and several people opted to relax at the hotel. However this proved rather productive as Black Bittern was seen and a spectacular fly-past by 25 Malabar Pied Hornbills occurred there. Malabar Pied Hornbills were also a major feature of an excursion northwards towards Udawalawe where a couple of roadside stops produced our only Baya Weavers and several waterbirds. As dusk descended we watched Indian Nightjars hawking over arid scrub while a termite hatch attracted a huge mixed flock of Bee-eaters (of all three species) and various swifts.

Day 13

Friday 29 December

Udawalawe, en route to Sinharaja

Weather: dry and bright, rather hot at Udawalawe

Breakfast at six was followed by a forty minute ride to Udawalawe NP where we boarded three open topped jeeps and began to explore the extensive savannah-like landscape. After just a few minutes we were watching our first Asian Elephant at close range and sightings then came regularly with no fewer than ten seen during the next few hours. A juvenile Pallid Harrier was the raptor highlight but perched views of several Black-shouldered Kites, Crested Hawk and Crested Serpent Eagles were also enjoyed. Every area of denser cover seemed to contain singing Ashy Prinias and a remarkable concentration of cuckoos resulted in us seeing no fewer than 10 Pied and eight Grey-bellied Cuckoos. Disembarking at a rocky bluff overlooking the reservoir we spent 40 minutes or so scanning the area and came up with an Osprey, a Booted Eagle and a pair of White-bellied Sea Eagles while a nearby dead snag was the perch of two Blyth's Pipits. Overhead a small gathering of Red-rumped Swallows also contained several Alpine Swifts. Soon afterwards a soaring Lesser Adjutant showed well before we made our way back to the entrance at 11.00 before the increasing heat became uncomfortable. Packed lunches were delivered from the Centauria and we began the drive to Sinharaja well before noon.

The journey to Sinharaja was punctuated by a roadside lunch stop south of Ratnapura and after boarding jeeps for the final seven km on bumpy roads we found ourselves at the Blue Magpie Lodge at about 15.30. The relatively basic accommodation here is more than compensated for by the superb setting and after a cup of tea we embarked on a short exploration of the surrounding area. An unexpected surprise came in the shape of a superb male Malabar Trogon in atypical habitat and numerous Black and Black-capped Bulbuls, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrots and Layard's Parakeets were seen as Oriental Honey Buzzards displayed over a ridge. A small group of calling Sri Lanka Mynas flew over and a Purple-faced Leaf Monkey gave scope views before we returned to the nearby lodge. After dinner a short walk took us to a nearby house where a Spot-bellied eagle Owl had been seen recently but it failed to appear. Numerous Fire-flies illuminated the way back to our rooms where we went to bed in expectation of a busy coming day in the core zone of the Sinharaja Rainforest, home to so many desirable endemics.....

Day 14

Saturday 30 December

Sinharaja

Weather: dry bright and sunny, warm

Breakfast at six was followed by a short admin visit to the park office to sign in and then we were on our way up a steep jeep track that leads to the main park gate; we arrived just as the sun began to warm the ridge opposite. At this time of the day dead snags are attractive to several species that enjoy a bit of early morning sun but nobody expected to see a Dollarbird of the incredibly rare endemic race that Upali located in a far off tree. Over the next thirty minutes a couple of White-faced Starlings and Legge's Flowerpeckers had also given reasonable scope views in the tree tops and a couple of elusive Ashy-headed Laughing Thrushes skulked past, we were off to a good start.

Our two trackers were sent off in pursuit of some of the trickier local specialities while we ambled along seeing a Sri Lankan Spurfowl in flight (yes, they really can fly!) and a fleeting Spot-winged Thrush. Soon afterwards the trackers lead us to a Spot-winged Thrush nest visible from the main trail and from an appropriate distance we were able to enjoy superb views of the male feeding the female on the nest. A little while later we came across our first feeding flock which contained the expected but still new Orange-billed Babblers along with Black-naped Monarch, Indian Cuckoo and various bulbuls. A larger flock around the corner contained the sometimes tricky Red-faced Malkoha, Ceylon Drongos and Malabar Trogons amongst others; the specialities were coming thick and fast.... At the Forest Research station, our turning round point, we were delighted to find Sri Lankan Blue Magpies performing very well, including a pair nest building right above the path.

An early packed lunch was delivered us to us soon afterwards. We made our way back to the gate with a showy pair of Malabar Trogons and our first exquisite Tree Nymph butterflies being particularly memorable. Some opted to return by jeep to the rustic charms of the Blue Magpie for the afternoon but most chose to hang on and retrace our route after a rest in the shade. We were soon rewarded when one of our trackers noticed two Chestnut-backed Owlets sitting quietly in the dense forest where they allowed great scope views for ages. Otherwise it was a relatively quiet session though several of the key species seen in the morning were seen again. We left the main forest rather earlier than normal at 16.00 as Upali had received word of an avian gem in the village below. A cloak and dagger operation then began as Upali's informant was concerned about the vulnerability of the bird's location and did not want its whereabouts widely known. Therefore we pretended to be looking in the opposite direction (with sentries posted at either end of the group) as one scope was trained on an incubating male Sri Lankan Frogmouth right next to the road and we surreptitiously took turns to have a look! Back at the lodge the drinks flowed freely at the end of a particularly successful and rewarding final full day in the field.

Days 15 & 16

Sunday 31 December & Monday 1 January

Sinharaja, en route to Colombo; Inbound to UK

Weather: dry, bright and sunny, rather warm

Those who had not seen the Frogmouth yesterday evening went on a pre-dawn commando operation to see it by torchlight before we returned to the lodge and watched birds appear in the treetops as the sun rose. Upali's tape elicited a response from a Green-billed Coucal and the bird was eventually located nearby before it then set up stall and called away from a treetop right next to the lodge, giving exceptional views for such a notorious skulker. Gold-fronted Leafbird, Hanging Parrots, Legge's Flowerpeckers and Yellow-browed Bulbuls were just a few of the other species seen well before breakfast at 07.30 and the freshly stocked bird tables at the restaurant pulled in Brown-headed and Yellow-fronted Barbets and others for stellar views and photo opportunities.

Jeeps took us back to our bus at 09.00 and we commenced the journey back to Colombo for our flight home. A brief stop was made for drinks in Ratnapura Rest House and an hour later we were enjoying a fine lunch at the Citizen Rest in Ingyria. From there we were just three hours from Colombo and after the excitement of a couple of hours in eccentric urban traffic we arrived unscathed at the Airport Garden Hotel at 17.00, just in time in fact to see a Black Bittern perched right out in the open on the fence around a small ornamental pond as we drove in.

We had the whole evening at our disposal to freshen up, share a final buffet meal and to enjoy a few drinks together before our 12.30 airport transfer, most chose to catch a few hours sleep before our overnight flight. The plane left a pleasant Negombo Airport almost on time and we landed in a sunny but cold London just ahead of time at 10.15 GMT on New Years Day after a smooth flight. Final farewells were said at the carousel before we dispersed to our respective corners of the UK at the end of a very productive and enjoyable Christmas break.

Species 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 particular 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* (1:15) E

Of two or three heard calling at Sinharaja one gave a fleeting flight view to some of the group

Ceylon Junglefowl *Gallus lafayetii* (8:15) E

After the first two along roadsides at Mihintale showed very well sightings were rather few though a total 15 were noted at various sites, many more were heard

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* (8:15)

Small numbers were seen or heard at most lowland sites with Yala and Udawalawe NP's providing most of the sixty or so encounters

Lesser Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna javanica* (9:15)

Present in variable numbers on many tanks in the lowlands

Cotton Teal *Nettapus coromandelianus coromandelianus* (3:15)

Three at Navadan Kulama on our first morning were followed by one at Kekirawa Wewa and three at Weerawila Wewa. This is quite a scarce species in Sri Lanka

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

After 30 were seen in the north, flocks at tanks and coastal lagoons near Yala and Bundala totalled over 100 birds

Garganey *Anas querquedula* (5:15)

A handful at Anuradhapura were followed by much larger numbers on tanks and coastal lagoons in the southeast where over 300 were noted

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

After one had been flushed nearby four showed well just before dusk as they emerged to dust-bathe on the road near the entrance to Yala NP

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

A pair showed fairly well near the entrance to Yala NP

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

One in a roadside tree just south of Kandy showed very well and a couple more were with mixed feeding flocks at Sinharaja.

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

A total of eight were seen at various lowland wooded sites and at Sinharaja, all were of the strikingly red-backed subspecies *psarodes*

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

Very common and widespread with birds found, or at least heard, everywhere there were tall trees

Yellow-fronted Barbet *Megalaima flavifrons* (5:15) E

First seen at Udawattakele, thereafter most of the six or so others were seen at Sinharaja where one came to feeders containing at the restaurant

Ceylon Small Barbet *Megalaima rubricapillus* (3:15) E

Small numbers were seen at Mihintale, Sigyria and around Kandy, also heard at Sinharaja, much more often heard than seen, one was watched at a nest hole at Udawattakelle

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala indica* (2:15)

Quite common at Anuradhapura where over 40 flew past in succession at one point, heard but not seen at Sigyria and Sinharaja

Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill *Tockus gingalensis* (5:15) E

Two at Mihintale were followed by a fly-by en route to Tissamaharama from the hills and a couple of singles at Sinharaja, a rather poor tally of six individuals

Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* (3:15)

Superb views of two at Yala were followed by several more in the vicinity of Emblyptiya and Udawalawe were a remarkable total of 45 were seen in two groups on one evening

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops ceylonensis* (2:15)

One at Bundala was followed by three at Yala NP

Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus fasciatus* (2:15) e

A total of five, three males and two females were seen over two days at Sinharaja, unusually, one was seen just along the track from the Blue Magpie on our first evening, predictably the rest were in the higher rainforest

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis indicus* (10:15)

Modest numbers were found each day in drier lowland areas

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis irisi* (1:15) e

One that spent ages perched in bare branches in the early morning sun at Sinharaja was perhaps the first seen for three years of this very rare endemic subspecies

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis taprobana* (8:15)

Quite commonly seen in the lowlands with about 15 noted in ones and twos at various wetlands

Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis capensis* (7:15)

Singles were seen at Anuradhapura, Sigyria, Tissamaharama, Yala and Udawalawe but none of the 7 noted really lingered

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis fusca* (14:15)

Very common, at least ten per day were seen except in the higher hills, often on roadside wires as we passed

Lesser Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis leucomelanurus* (4:15)

Ones and twos were seen at a couple of wetlands in the south

Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis ceylonicus* (11:15) e

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

Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus javanicus* (12:15)

These stunning birds were very common and widespread but absent from the higher hills

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti leschenaulti* (6:15)

Up to a dozen at Udawatakelle were followed by smaller numbers at well scattered sites

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

A couple of briefly seen birds at Bundala and Yala were followed by very high numbers at Udawalawe were no fewer than ten were found

[Chestnut-winged Cuckoo *Clamator coromandus*

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

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

One at the regular site of Peradeniya Botanical Gardens was presumably of the scarce endemic race

Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus micropterus* (2:15)

One was glimpsed at Old Anuradhapura, a couple were heard at Mihintale and Sigyria and, finally, one gave prolonged scope at Sinharaja

Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus* (4:15)

One at Sigyria was followed by two or three at Yala and at least eight at Udawalawe. A couple of hepatic females were noted

'Fork-tailed' Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus (lugubris) stewarti* (2:15) e
Singles were 'whistled-in' for close views on consecutive days at Sigyria

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus scolopaceus* (10:15)
Very commonly heard at dawn and dusk in the lowlands with a few seen well

Blue-faced Malkoha *Rhopodytes viridirostris* (2:15)
One showed very well in a roadside tree just south of Anuradhapura, another was briefly seen at Bundala

Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus* (1:15) E
At least two were seen at Sinharaja on four occasions

'Southern' Greater Coucal *Centropus (sinensis) parroti* (11:15)
Very widespread in small numbers, more were heard than seen but several showed well

Green-billed Coucal *Centropus chlororhynchus* (1:15) E
One showed uncharacteristically well calling from a tree right next to the Blue Magpie hotel at Sinharaja

Ceylon Hanging Parrot *Loriculus beryllinus* (8:15) E
After the first at Peradeniya Botanical Gardens this species became a regular sight and sound around Kandy and in the hills at and near Sinharaja, most were seen hurtling over calling but several perched up for the scope, especially at Sinharaja

Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria eupatria* (4:15)
Good numbers were seen right throughout the lowlands after the first at Sigyria

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)
A handful were found at Hantane and Udawalawe

Layard's Parakeet *Psittacula calthropae* (1:15) E
A good haul: small numbers at Udawattakelle and Hantane were followed by rather larger numbers at Sinharaja; over 30 were seen in total

Indian Swiftlet *Aerodramus unicolor unicolor* (5:15)
A couple were seen at Anuradhapura with more in the hills at Kandy and Sinharaja

Brown-throated Needletail *Hirundapus giganteus indicus*
Up to eight soared around above Sinharaja with other swifts

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

Alpine Swift *Apus melba bakeri* etc (1:15) e

About six were over Udawalawe after a couple of probables were seen from the swimming pool at Tissamaharama. This is a scarce hill country species that descends to the plains in response to bad weather there

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

Quite common, small numbers were seen at most lowland sites and some highland sites

Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata* (9:15)

Perched birds showed well at Bundala but flying birds were found in small numbers at a wide range of wooded sites

Indian Scops Owl *Otus bakkamoena bakkamoena* (1:15) e

Our driver found two roosting in the car park of the Meridya Hotel in Anuradhapura where they showed well

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

A roosting bird was shown to us at Deberawewa by one of the Bours and Co. irregulars

Chestnut-backed Owlet *Glaucidium castanonotum* (1:15) E

Two showed well during the day at Sinharaja and a couple more were heard there at night

Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger* (2:15)

Birds were seen attending their roadside nest on successive days at Sinharaja

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 and a couple more behaved similarly near Udawalawe

Jerdon's Nightjar *Caprimulgus jerdoni*

One showed very briefly near the entrance to Yala NP

Rock Dove (plus Feral Pigeon) *Columba livia intermedia* etc (3:15)

Obviously feral stock was seen in several urban contexts. Birds at Yala over three dates, including those nesting in boulders in lagoons, showed a mostly consistent appearance and looked like wild birds of the grey-rumped local race, though whether any were really pure is open to question.

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

Two birds heard at Boumeraella were then seen very briefly in flight

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

Very common and widespread

Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica robinsoni* (7:15) e

After the first were seen in flight at Sigyria one showed superbly at Udawatakelle, others were at Sinharaja

Orange-breasted Green Pigeon *Treron bicincta leggei* (5:15) e

Good numbers were found in the southeast at Bundala, Yala and Udawalawe, most were seen in flight but a handful posed well in tree tops to reveal their brilliant plumage

Ceylon Green Pigeon *Treron pompadora* (7:15) E

Of the 40 or so seen several gave very good views at and Sigyria and Sinharaja

Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea pusilla* (7:15)

Mostly flight views were had at Tissamaharama, Yala and Sinharaja though a few posed for the scope

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

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

Watercock *Gallicrex cinerea* (1:15)

Singles were at Bundala and Deberawewa, the former showing rather well for such a skulking species

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

Locally common on tanks with plenty of emergent vegetation such as Kekirawa and Deberawewa. Sometimes split from birds in Europe and elsewhere

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)

Between one and four were at Old Anuradhapura, Sigyria, Bundala and Yala. This is the default snipe species in Sri Lanka; those seen and heard best were fully consistent with this species and were certainly not Common Snipes *G. gallinago*, the more closely similar Swinhoe's Snipe *G. megala* is probably only a vagrant to Sri Lanka

'Western' Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa* (4:15)

A flock of about 25 were over Tabbowa but several thousand were found in the south, most of which were flying over at Bundala and Yala

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* (2:15)

Two were noted at Bundala salterns

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 southeast at Bundala and Yala where well over 200 were seen

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* (2:15)

Small numbers were found at Yala and Bundala

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* (1:15)

A couple were seen at Udawalawe

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* (2:15)

Two over Bundala were followed by one at Yala

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (8:15)

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

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres interpres* (3:15)

Only found in the Bundala and Yala areas where about 20 were noted, a true globetrotter!

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* (3:15)

Many hundreds were at tanks and coastal lagoons in the southeast

Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta* (1:15)

One was found amongst Little Stints at Mahala Wewa between Yala and Tissamaharama

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* (3:15)

Quite common in the southeast at Bundala and Yala where well over 100 were seen

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* (1:15)

At least five were found in the Yala area

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* (5:15)

Five wintering birds were on the salterns at Bundala

Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* (7:15)

Good numbers were found at various well vegetated tanks throughout; most were in their spectacular breeding plumage

Indian (Eurasian) Thick-knee *Burhinus (oedicnemus) indicus* (3:15)

A total of about 10 were found around Yala and Tissamaharama

Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris* (3:15)

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*/ 'ceylonensis' (9:15)

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. Many birds were conspicuously white-headed, a characteristic of the

sometimes recognised race *ceylonensis*. Such birds resemble White-headed Stilts *H. leucocephalus* and some even regard them as possibly belonging to that Australasian species

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* (3:15)

About 25 were found in the Yala and Bundala region

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (3:15)

Small numbers were at Bundala and Yala

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

Three were found on the lagoon near Yala Village

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

Common in the southeast at lagoons at Yala and Bundala, over 200 were seen. Most birds in Sri Lanka should really be the local race *seebhomi* but most seen by us appeared to be dark-lored or rufous-capped migrants from further north

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius (mongolus) atrifrons* group (3:15)

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

Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus* (5:15)

Up to 20 were found on short grasslands in the southeast

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

Quite common and widespread, especially in the lowlands

Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea* (2:15)

About 20 were seen at Bundala and Yala

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

Four were at Bundala

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* (4:15)

Very small numbers at tanks in the north were followed by regular encounters with small numbers at tanks and lagoons in the southeast at Bundala and Yala, about 100 were seen in total

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* (3:15)

Up to 100 were roosting on the saltpans at Bundala formed an impressive sight, smaller numbers were at a couple of lagoons at Yala

Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis bengalensis* (3:15)

Up to thirty were at various sites in the southeast

Great Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii velox* (3:15)

At least 60 were in the tern roost at Bundala and similar number at Yala, also quite common offshore at Yala

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougalli* (1:15)

One offshore at Yala was a good find

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons sinensis* &/ or *albifrons* (8:15)

Small to moderate numbers (max 50 at Bundala and Yala) were at a wide variety of coastal and inland wetlands. The possibility that some Saunders' Terns *S. saundersi* were also seen cannot be discounted

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* (10:15)

Very common to locally abundant on many tanks, hardly any areas of open water didn't hold at least a few

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* (5:15)

Rather localised, a couple at Anuradhapura were followed by up to 50 at wetlands in the southeast, especially Bundala salt pans

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus haliaetus* (1:15)

One was at the reservoir at Udawalawe; perhaps a returning wintering bird as one seems to be there each winter

Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus ruficollis* (5:15)

After the first at Hantane a further 15 were seen in the central highlands and at Sinharaja, some were displaying

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

One near Anuradhapura was followed by at least 10 at Udawalawe

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

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

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* presumably *lineatus* (2:15)

One was seen on successive days at Yala Village, a scarce bird in southern Sri Lanka

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

Regularly seen in the lowlands after the first between Puttalam and Anuradhapura, others were seen at Anuradhapura, Hantane, Deberawewa, Yala and Uda Walawe

Grey-headed Fish-eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* (5:15)

A very good haul of this rare and declining species: one or two were near Tabbowa, Yala, Bundala (where a nest was active) and Uda Walawe

Crested Serpent-eagle *Spilornis cheela spilogaster* (7:15) e

Widespread at low densities with several giving very good views, 11 were noted

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* (1:15)

A juvenile was at Udawalawe

Shikra *Accipiter badius badius* (7:15)

Widespread in small numbers, eight were noted

Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis perniger* (4:15)

A displaying pair at Hantane, where one appeared right overhead, were followed by two at Ella and one at Sinharaja

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

Three at Mihintale were followed by one at Udawalawe

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

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

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus objurgatus* (5:15)

The six seen, a high total, were at widespread locations

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

The resident breeding pair at Sigyria Rock showed well and were seen mating

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis capensis* (6:15)

A total of over 40 were seen at Navadan Kulama, Anuradhapura and Weerawila

Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* (9:15)

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

Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* (12:15)

Common on all wetlands of any size

Indian Shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* (11:15)

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

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* (4:15)

Localised, only seen at Nuwara Wewa, Anuradhapura and Udawalawe, about a dozen were seen in total

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea 'rectirostris'* (8:15)

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

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea manilensis* (8:15)

Distribution was very similar to that of the previous species but numbers were slightly higher with up to 10 seen at a couple of tanks

Great Egret *Egretta alba modesta* (12:15)

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

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* (13:15)

Small numbers, amounting to several hundred, were present at most wetlands visited

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia intermedia* (9:15)

Ones and two were noted at several wetlands though others may have been overlooked amongst the numerous Egrets seen in passing, good comparisons could be made with other egrets at some sites

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* (9:15)

Large numbers were at tanks around Anuradhapura with smaller numbers mainly in the south-eastern wetlands

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis* (2:15)

Two at Bundala, three at Weerawila, one at Deberawewa and one at the Airport Garden Hotel represented a decent haul after a blank last year

Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis flavicollis* (4:15)

One seen briefly at Kekirawa Tank was followed by three at Deberawewa, one at Embilipitiya and one at the Airport Garden Hotel near Colombo on or final evening; incongruously for such a skulking species the latter was perched on the fence of an ornamental pond as we drove past

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus falcinellus* (2:15)

Two were seen near Tissamaharama

Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephala* (9:15)

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)

A high total of about 150 were found in the southeast at Bundala and Yala

Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* (9:15)

Several of the larger tanks in the lowlands held up to 20 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* (4:15)

Five at Sigyria were followed by two at Yala and three at Udawalawe

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

One of the long-standing resident breeding pair at Yala was seen quite well

Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* (2:15)

One at Yala was followed by another over Udawalawe

Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* (5:15)

At least three in and around the hotel at Sigyria were followed by others at Victoria Park and Yala; others were heard at most sites, always a delight to see well

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

Up to four were found at Mihintale, Sigyria, Hantane and Sinharaja

Golden-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons insularis* (2:15) e

Singles were seen at Sigyria and Sinharaja

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

Small numbers of wintering birds were found at widely scattered sites; some, especially those in the hills, were distinctly paler and greyer on the head, thus more closely matching the eastern race *lucionensis* (or intergrades with *cristatus*)

Sri Lanka Blue Magpie *Urocissa ornata* (1:15) E

Four near the research station at Sinharaja included a showy nest building pair, another four were seen nearby. Always one of the highlights of a Sri Lanka tour

House Crow *Corvus splendens* (14:15)

Common in lowland areas, especially around habitations but virtually replaced by the next species at the highest elevations and not noted at Sinharaja

Large-billed Crow *Corvus (macrorhynchos) culminatus* (14:15)

Common, noisy and widespread though less prominent in built up areas than the previous species, not noted at Sinharaja

Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus* (1:15)

About ten on wires south of Anuradhapura were the only ones seen

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

Present in small numbers at virtually every wooded area visited

Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei layardi* (3:15) e

After one near Puttalam another at Anuradhapura was followed by two at Sigyria

Black-headed Cuckooshrike *Coracina melanoptera* (6:15)

A few showed well at Sigyria with others at Glenloch Tea Factory, Yala and Sinharaja, in total seven were seen

Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus cinnamomeus* (2:15)

Small flocks were noted at Old Anuradhapura and Sigyria

Orange Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus flammeus* (6:15)

Small numbers were found at very widespread wooded sites throughout

Pied (or Bar-winged) Flycatcher-shrike *Hemipus picatus leggei* (4:15) e

One or two at Udawattakelle were followed by a handful at Ella Resthouse and Sinharaja

White-browed Fantail *Rhipidura aureola compressirostris* (4:15)

Ones and twos were at Kandy, Glenloch Tea Factory, Nuwara Eliya and Yala

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* (3:15)

Very small numbers were found at and near Anuradhapura

Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus longicaudatus* (2:15)

At least three were seen at Yala

White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus 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 habitats such as Peradeniya and Sinharaja

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

A couple accompanied a feeding flock at Sinharaja

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

One at Sinharaja was surprisingly the only one seen though a couple more were heard there

Asian Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi paradisi* & *ceylonensis* (10:15) e

Quite widespread, white males of the migratory nominate race from India were seen on two occasions; rufous males, which may have been of either race, but which were probably mostly *ceylonensis*, were seen rather more often

Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia multicolour* (6:15)

Quite common, small numbers of this black-backed race were seen in several woodland contexts in the lowlands

Ceylon Woodshrike *Tephrodornis affinis* (3:15) E

After one was heard at Anuradhapura this newly split endemic was seen each day at Sigyria where at least five were recorded

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

A pair showed fleetingly to most group members at the traditional spot (the 'Arrenga Pool') on Horton Plains in the very early morning; more unusually another pair was found near our hotel in the recently designated Galwaysland NP during the evening

Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina citrina* (3:15)

At least four were found at Sigyria

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

A pair at the nest was one of the highlights of our visit to Sinharaja; the foraging male had been glimpsed earlier and then appeared and fed the incubating female

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

One or two were seen at Galwaysland NP in Nuwara Eliya. This form is sometimes regarded as a subspecies of Eurasian Blackbird *T. merula* or a subspecies of Indian Blackbird *T. simillimus* (itself a subset of Eurasian Blackbird) or a species in its own right. Who knows what the best treatment is?

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

Most of the 15 seen were at Anuradhapura and Sigyria with one at Sinharaja

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

Wintering birds were seen with some regularity at Sinharaja where about 5 were recorded, earlier one was at Udawatakelle

Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra*

More than usual were found though few gave prolonged good views. At least three birds (one male) were wintering in and around Victoria Park in Nuwara Eliya, another three (one male) were in the vicinity of the Galwaysland NP and a male was briefly at the Arrenga Pool on Horton Plains

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

Two or three were found near the Arrenga Pool at Horton Plains and showed well despite the murky conditions there; its name does this very smart species a disservice

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae jerdoni* (4:15) e

At least two pairs, and juveniles, 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* (3:15)

Ones and twos were at Victoria Park and Horton Plains but about eight were found at Boumeraella

Indian Blue Robin *Erithacus brunneus* (3:15)

Males were seen at Sigyria, the Arrenga Pool on Horton Plains, Victoria Park and Galwaysland NP

Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis ceylonensis* (14:15)

Very widespread and quite common

White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus leggei* (3:15) e

One of several heard at Sigyria was seen very well and a couple of others were glimpsed there, a couple more were seen quite well at Udawatakelle

Indian (Black) Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata leucoptera* (8:15) e

Occasionally seen in more arid lowland areas, especially in the north

Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata atratus* (3:15) e

Only seen around Nuwara Eliya where about five were noted

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

A total of four were found at Sinharaja, two perched in bare treetops early in the morning and two more were with a feeding flock. This is a rare, localised and mysteriously declining species

Brahminy Starling *Sturnus pagodarum* (1:15)

Up to eight were in two groups at Yala

Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus* (3:15)

Flocks totalling several hundred birds were found in the southeast at Yala, Bundala and Udawalawe

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

Ubiquitous; a dark subspecies

Ceylon Hill Myna *Gracula ptilogenys* (2:15) E

Only seen at Sinharaja where we had flight views of four calling birds on two occasions

Lesser or Southern Hill Myna *Gracula indica* (4:15)

Very large numbers were found this year; the forty or so noted were divided between Peradeniya Botanical Gardens, Udawattakelle, Hantane, Glenloch, Ella and Sinharaja

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

Good numbers were found in the highlands around Kandy and especially Nuwara Eliya with a few others at Sinharaja; over 15 were seen

Great Tit *Parus major mahrattarum* (3:15)

Quite common in the highlands around Nuwara Eliya. 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

[Sand Martin or Pale Martin *Riparia riparia* or *Riparia diluta*

One flew past at Yala but didn't allow sufficient views to establish which of these similar and quite recently split species it was]

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (14:15)

Very widespread in variable but rarely large numbers, not seen at the high rainforest at Sinharaja

Hill (Pacific) Swallow *Hirundo (tahitica) domicola* (1:15)

About eight showed well at Glenloch Tea Factory, a traditional site

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

One over Yala was followed by about 20 at Udawalawe

Ceylon Swallow *Hirundo hyperythra* (8:15) E

After the first showed very well perched on wires at Old Anuradhapura these very attractive birds proved rather widespread at low densities, though absent from the highest elevations in the Central Highlands

Black-capped Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus* (2:15) E

Only seen at Sinharaja, especially in the vicinity of the Blue Magpie Hotel, where about 10 were noted, heard but not seen at Sigyria

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

Very widespread and very common

Yellow-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus penicillatus* (3:15) E

This very striking endemic was only seen in around Nuwara Eliya where it was rather common

White-browed Bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus insulae* (85:15)

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

Yellow-browed Bulbul *Iole indica guglielmi* (3:15) e

After the first at Udawatakelle this species was not seen again until Sinharaja where it was reasonably common and 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)

After about eight were seen at Udawattakelle Reserve this species proved to be rather common at Sinharaja where it was one of the predominant species around the Blue Magpie Lodge

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis omalura* (3:15)

Small numbers were found at grassier sites near Anuradhapura and Udawalawe

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

A couple at Sigyria were the only ones seen, Sri Lankan *pectoralis* differs from the mainland races in lacking a non-breeding plumage and is therefore easy to identify year round

Jungle Prinia *Prinia sylvatica valida* (1:15) e

Only seen at Sigyria where a singing bird posed well, others were heard at a couple of sites

Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis brevicauda* (8:15) e

Very common and widespread this year, every other bush at Udawalawe seemed to contain a singing bird

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata insularis* (8:15) e

Small numbers were present in most grassy or scrubby areas in the lowlands

Sri Lanka (Hill) White-eye *Zosterops ceylonensis* (3:15) E

This very localised species proved to be very common in and around Nuwara Eliya

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa* (9:15)

Small groups were encountered quite frequently in the lowlands and lower hills; replaced by the previous species at the highest elevations

[Sri Lanka Bush Warbler *Bradypterus palliseri* E

Birds were heard and vegetation seen moving at Horton Plains but none showed properly, also heard at Galwaysland NP but similarly elusive there; we were beaten by the weather with this one]

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (7:15)

Much more often heard than seen though about eight were seen altogether at widespread sites

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius sutorius* & *fernando* (12:15) e & e

Rather small numbers were seen and more often heard though most areas of secondary growth seemed to hold a few birds

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

Very common and widespread though much more often heard than seen, commoner in the north and the hill country than the arid south. A couple of potential Greenish Warbler *P. t. trochiloides*, *viridanus* etc were noted.

Large-billed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris* (3:15)

Good numbers were seen and heard after the first two at Mihintale, all woodlands in the hill country and Sinharaja contained some, though often only heard, and good views were enjoyed at Horton Plains and Boumeraella in particular

Ashy-headed Laughingthrush *Garrulax cinereifrons* (1:15)

A couple were seen rather briefly at Sinharaja

Brown-capped Babbler *Pellorneum fuscicapillum fuscicapillum* or *babaulti* (3:15) E

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

Ceylon Scimitar-babbler *Pomatorhinus melanurus* (3:15) E

About six at Horton Plains were one of the highlights of our weather affected morning there and other were found at Ella Rest House and Sinharaja

Tawny-bellied Babbler *Dumetia hyperythra phillipsi* (3:15) e

One at Anuradhapura was followed by four at Sigyria and a couple of others at Yala and Emblyptiya

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

Small numbers of these busy little Babblers chattered to each other at Sigyria (*R. a. nigrifrons*) and Sinharaja (*R. a. siccatus*)

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

One at Anuradhapura was followed by three at Yala

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

Only seen in the higher forests at Sinharaja where about 10 were noted, typically but not invariably in mixed feeding flocks

Yellow-billed Babbler *Turdoides affinis taprobanus* (12:15) 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* (7:15)

Several were seen at Mihintale and Sigyria with more still in the dry southeast, over 20 were recorded

Ashy-crowned Finch Lark *Eremopterix grisea* (4:15)

Flocks of up to thirty were found in the Yala area

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula australis* (2:15)

Only seen at Bundala and Yala where a couple showed very well and others were seen calling their buzzy call in flight or heard singing

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

Heard but not seen at Sigyria, a rather surprising omission from our list]

Legge's Flowerpecker *Dicaeum vincens* (2:15) E

A very good haul at Sinharaja consisted of at least five individuals seen on about eight occasions, including a couple at close range and at eye level which is unusual as this species is normally seen at greater distance atop a large tree

Pale-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos ceylonense* (12:15) e

Very common and widespread, most were seen flying over calling but several showed well

Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica zeylonica* (13:15) e

Common and very widespread but absent at the highest elevations

Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* (10:15)

Fairly common away from the higher hills

Loten's (or Long-billed) 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* (9:15)

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

Forest Wagtail *Dendromanthus indicus* (3:15)

After the first two at Peradeniya a couple more were watched at Victoria Park in Nuwara Eliya

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava ssp* (1:15)

A couple were seen near Udawalawe

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* (5:15)

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

Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus malayensis* (9:15)

Widespread and locally quite common, this is the default 'large' Pipit in Sri Lanka

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

Up to four were seen and occasionally heard at Udawalawe, this is the best site for the species in Sri Lanka and birds are most often found when perched in trees, a habit that seems to be at least very rare in Paddyfield Pipit.

Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* (1:15)

Two were found at a roadside wetland a few km north of Embilipitiya

Indian Silverbill *Lonchura malabarica* (3:15)

A handful were found at Yala and Bundala

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

Widespread and fairly regularly seen in small numbers

Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* (8:15)

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

Tricoloured Munia *Lonchura malacca malacca* (4:15)

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

Mammals

Species order, taxonomy and nomenclature generally follow 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 near Pollonurawa and at Yala

Indian (Three-striped) 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* (3:15) 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*

Layard's Squirrel *Funambulus layardi* (1:15) E

A couple were noted at Sinharaja

Sri Lankan (or Grizzled) Giant Squirrel *Ratufa macroura* (7:15)

After the first at Anuradhapura another 10 were found at various wooded sites from Nuwara Eliya to Yala, despite its name this species also occurs locally in SE India

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

A couple of rats seen around Nuwara Eliya were not specifically identified

Leopard *Panthera pardus* (1:15)

An individual slumbering in a tree at Yala, and showing only its rear end, seemed oblivious to the hurly burly of jeeps nearby

Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii* (5:15)

A total of 13 were found at very widespread locations

Brown Mongoose *Herpestes fuscus* (2:15)

Up to three were around the Blue Magpie Lodge at Sinharaja

Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsi* (5:15)

About 10 were seen at scattered sites

Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* (1:15)

At least six were seen at Yala

Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus* (8:15)

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

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

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

Individuals of the long haired upland race *senex* were twice seen well near Nuwara Eliya with others heard at Horton Plains. Short haired *vetulus* showed well at Sinharaja.

Eurasian Wild Boar *Sus Scrofa* (4:15)

Over 50 were seen at Yala including several in the grounds of Yala Village on occasion

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

Four at Mihintale were followed by about 30 at Yala

Sambar Deer *Cervus unicolor* (1:15)

At least 2 were glimpsed at Yala

[Water Buffalo *Bubalus arnee*

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* (2:15)

Four in and around Yala were followed by close encounters with at least ten at Udawalawe