

Sri Lanka – Endemic Birds

Naturetrek Tour Report

28th October – 6th November 2023



Sri Lanka Junglefowl



Brown-headed Barbet



Ashy-headed Laughingthrush



Sri Lanka Blue Magpie

Tour report and images by Chamil Perera



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Summary

A total of 33 out of 34 endemic birds were sighted during the tour and we managed to rack up a total of 165 Bird species, 12 Mammal species and seven reptile & other species.

The 10-day bird-watching tour of Sri Lanka embarked on an exciting journey, beginning with an overnight flight from the UK to Sri Lanka. The group's exploration started in Kitulgala, where they encountered a diverse array of bird species, including the Common Myna, Crested Serpent Eagle, and Painted Stork. The following days involved visits to Makandawa rainforest, Victoria Park in Nuwara Eliya, and Horton Plains, where sightings ranged from the Sri Lanka Bush Warbler to various mammals like Wild boar and Sambar Deer.

The tour continued to Udawalawe, with a stop at Surrey Bird Sanctuary and a jeep safari in Udawalawe National Park, resulting in sightings of the Sri Lanka Woodshrike and Asian Elephant. The journey concluded in Sinharaja Rainforest, where the group observed the vibrant avian life, including the Sri Lanka Blue Magpie. The final leg featured birding in the Ketlapatala area, spotting the Sri Lanka Spurfowl and other endemics.

The group's meticulous routine included daily checklists, briefings, and meals, providing a comprehensive and immersive birding experience. The adventure concluded with a visit to Katunayake and the sighting of the Brown Hawk-Owl before departing for the UK, marking the end of another Naturetrek adventure in the captivating landscapes of Sri Lanka.

Day 1

Saturday 28th October

The tour commenced with an overnight flight from the UK to Sri Lanka.

Day 2

Sunday 29th October

Kitulgala

Touching down in Sri Lanka at 1:35 pm, our journey unfolded seamlessly as we met the group and departed the airport by 2:30 pm. En route to Kitulgala, the diverse landscapes treated us to a magnificent display of avian wonders. From the elegant Common Myna and majestic Crested Serpent Eagle to the graceful Grey Heron and striking Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, our sightings were a testament to the rich biodiversity. The journey was adorned with encounters with Little Egret, Red-wattled Lapwing, Sri Lankan Swallow, and an array of other captivating species. The skies above revealed the beauty of Asian Palm Swift, Asian Openbill, and Indian Swiftlet, while the terrestrial landscape showcased the regal presence of Brahminy Kite, Painted Stork, and more.

As the clock approached 6:00 pm, we arrived in Kitulgala, where the day's adventures seamlessly transitioned into the evening. Following a delightful dinner, our group gathered for a checklist session, recounting the day's remarkable sightings. A comprehensive briefing about the upcoming day's program added anticipation to the night, creating a perfect conclusion to our first day in the vibrant landscapes of Sri Lanka.

Day 3

Monday 30th October

Kitulgala

Our day commenced at the early hour of 5:30 am with a captivating visit to Kitulgala village, where we navigated the terrain via a suspension bridge, immersing ourselves in the world of avian wonders. Notable sightings included the vibrant Sri Lanka Junglefowl, the regal Brahminy Kite, and the elusive Chestnut-backed Owlet. The skies were adorned with the graceful presence of the Oriental Honey-buzzard, while the trees echoed with the calls of the Sri Lanka Green Pigeon and the Green Imperial Pigeon. Our birding adventure continued with encounters with the Sri Lanka Red-backed Woodpecker, the charismatic Sri Lanka Hanging Parakeet, and the melodious White-bellied Drongo.

Returning to the hotel for a hearty breakfast, we then set our sights on the Makandawa rainforest. Crossing the river on a raft added an adventurous touch to our journey as we ventured into another village before reaching the rainforest entrance. Throughout the day, our sightings continued to impress, featuring the Black-capped Bulbul, the vibrant Layard's Parakeet, and the striking Golden-fronted Leafbird. The air was filled with the calls of the Stork-billed Kingfisher and the melodious tunes of the Common Tailorbird.

After a rejuvenating lunch, our exploration of Kitulgala village resumed at 3:30 pm, extending our birding expedition. Returning to the hotel by 7:00 pm, we reconvened for a delightful dinner at 7:30 pm, followed by a comprehensive checklist session and a briefing for the adventures awaiting us on the morrow.

Day 4

Tuesday 31st October

Nuwara Eliya

Embarking on a pre-breakfast bird walk in the enchanting surroundings of Kitulgala, our keen eyes were rewarded with the sighting of the striking Chestnut-backed Owlet, adding a touch of elegance to our morning. The vibrant avian display continued with the presence of the Indian Swiftlet, the colorful Yellow-fronted Barbet, the diminutive Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, the elusive Brown Shrike, and the charming White-browed Fantail.

After a fulfilling breakfast back at the hotel, we set forth on the next leg of our journey, heading towards Nuwara Eliya for a two-night sojourn. Arriving at our new abode around noon, we indulged in a delicious lunch before venturing to the nearby Victoria Park. In this verdant haven, our birdwatching pursuits unveiled treasures such as the Common Sandpiper, the elusive Indian Blue Robin, the Cinereous Tit, the captivating Sri Lanka White-Eye, the Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher, the enchanting Kashmir Flycatcher, and the lively Forest Wagtail. Among the branches, the melodious notes of the Yellow-eared Bulbul added to the symphony of nature.

Returning to our accommodation, we convened in the restaurant to conduct a thorough checklist session, recounting the day's sightings. The evening concluded on a delightful note with a shared dinner, setting the stage for more avian adventures in the days to come.

Day 5

Wednesday 1st November

Nuwara Eliya

Embarking on an early morning adventure at 4:45 am, we set out for Horton Plains, armed with packed breakfasts to fuel our explorations. Prior to entering the park, our journey led us to some birding around the entrance, revealing a captivating array of species. Notable sightings included the elusive Sri Lanka Bush Warbler, the melodious Indian Blackbird, the elegant Grey Wagtail, the vibrant Dull-blue Flycatcher, the enchanting Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush, the elusive Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler, the swift Hill Swallow, the majestic Himalayan Buzzard, the regal Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, the lively Pied Bush Chat, the soaring Black Eagle, and the graceful Paddyfield Pipit.

Our wildlife encounters extended beyond the avian realm, as we were treated to glimpses of Wild Boar, Sambar Deer, Dusky Striped Squirrel, Stripe-necked Mongoose, and the endearing Purple-faced Leaf Monkey.

Returning to the hotel for lunch, the onset of rain encouraged us to stay indoors, providing an opportunity to gather for a relaxed dinner and complete our checklist. Despite the weather, the day's rich array of sightings lingered in our memories, promising more exciting adventures in the days ahead.

Day 6

Thursday 2nd November

Udawalawe

Engaging in an early morning quest, we returned to Victoria Park before breakfast, eagerly seeking the elusive Pied Thrush. Post a satisfying morning meal, we concluded our stay and set our course for Udawalawe. En route, our journey included a stop at Surrey Bird Sanctuary, where we hoped to spot the elusive Brown Wood Owl. Unfortunately, the owl remained elusive, possibly disturbed by the firecrackers from a nearby wedding ceremony. Nevertheless, the Flameback made its presence known, offering a glimpse of vibrant plumage.

Our lunch break unfolded against the picturesque backdrop of Ella, surrounded by the playful antics of Torque Macaques. En route to our destination, Ella Falls treated us to sightings of the majestic Malabar Pied Hornbill, the elegant Woolly-necked Stork, and a tusker, adding to the day's wildlife encounters.

As the evening descended, we adhered to our customary routine, gathering for dinner, engaging in a comprehensive checklist session, and receiving a briefing for the adventures awaiting us on the morrow, culminating in a peaceful night's rest.

Day 7

Friday 3rd November

Udawalawe National Park

Commencing our day with the anticipation of wildlife encounters, we departed the hotel at 5:45 am, armed with

a packed breakfast, en route to Udawalawe National Park for an exhilarating jeep safari. The avian spectacle was nothing short of impressive, with sightings that included the striking Sri Lanka Woodshrike, the vibrant Green Bee-eater, the graceful Barn Swallow, the regal Indian Roller, the majestic White-bellied Sea Eagle, the melodious Jungle Prinia, the Grey-breasted Prinia, the lively Tawny-bellied Babbler, the agile Jerdon's Bush Lark, the elusive Grey-bellied Cuckoo, the Crested Hawk Eagle, the Black-winged Kite, the elegant Eurasian Spoonbill, the Indian Thick Knee, the Great Thick Knee, the Barred Buttonquail, and the charismatic Blue-faced Malkoha. Among the mammals that graced our journey were the awe-inspiring Asian Elephant, the elusive Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, and the Ruddy Mongoose.

Post an invigorating safari, we returned to the hotel for a leisurely lunch before embarking on the next leg of our adventure to Sinharaja. Checking into the Blue Magpie Lodge at 4:30 pm, we indulged in a well-deserved hot cup of tea before setting out to observe the diverse birdlife surrounding the hotel. As the day waned, we reconvened at 7:30 pm for our evening routine, engaging in a checklist session, receiving a briefing, and culminating the day with a delightful dinner, poised for the enchanting experiences the upcoming days would bring.

Day 8

Saturday 4th November

Sinharaja Rainforest

The day unfolded at 5:20 am, greeted by the aroma of tea and coffee, signaling the beginning of our exploration. Setting out to the Sinharaja rainforest in a jeep, armed with packed breakfasts, we were welcomed by clear blue skies, a fitting backdrop for the splendid sightings that awaited us. A highlight of the morning was the early encounter with the mesmerizing Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, just before entering the rainforest.

Our journey through the lush terrain continued, revealing captivating species such as the Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, the elegant Sri Lanka Drongo, Legge's Flowerpecker, the colorful Red-faced Malkoha, and the graceful White-faced Starling. Returning to the hotel around 2 pm, we indulged in a leisurely lunch, recharging for the evening's activities.

As the day transitioned to evening, we embarked on a bird-watching walk around the hotel area, immersing ourselves in the diverse avian life. Convening again at 7:30 pm, our evening routine commenced with a comprehensive checklist session, followed by a briefing that set the stage for the upcoming adventures. The day concluded on a delightful note with a shared dinner, fostering anticipation for the wonders that awaited us in the vibrant landscapes of Sinharaja.

Day 9

Sunday 5th November

Katunayake

Commencing our day at 5:00 am with a refreshing cup of tea and coffee, we set out for the Ketlapatala area, where the elusive Sri Lanka Spurfowl awaited us. Engaging in a birding session around the vicinity, we encountered familiar species, including endemic treasures such as the Sri Lanka Myna, the striking Green-billed Coucal, the elegant Spot-winged Thrush, and the charming Emerald Dove.

Returning to the hotel, we indulged in a satisfying lunch before embarking on the next leg of our journey to Katunayake. Arriving at the Airport Garden hotel around 4:30 pm, we took a leisurely walk around the hotel grounds, where the elusive Brown Hawk-Owl graced us with its presence. Concluding the day on a delightful note, we gathered for a shared dinner before bidding the night farewell, marking the end of our captivating bird-watching adventure.

Day 10.

Monday 6th November

Fly back to UK

Following a satisfying breakfast, we completed the check-out process at the hotel and made our way to the airport for our return flight to the UK, marking the conclusion of yet another remarkable Naturetrek adventure.

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Species lists

Birds (bold text denotes endemic or near endemic; some previous/alternative names provided)

Common name	Scientific name
Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
Sri Lanka Spurfowl	<i>Galloperdix bicalcarata</i>
Sri Lanka Junglefowl	<i>Gallus lafayettii</i>
Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>
Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Crested Honey Buzzard, Oriental Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
Crested Hawk Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malaiensis</i>
Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
Himalayan Buzzard	<i>Buteo burmanicus</i>
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
Barred Buttonquail	<i>Turnix suscitator</i>
Indian Thick Knee	<i>Burhinus indicus</i>
Great Thick Knee	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
Bridled Tern	<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
Common Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba torringtoniae</i>
Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>
Sri Lanka Green Pigeon	<i>Treron pompadora</i>
Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
Green-billed Coucal	<i>Centropus chlororhynchos</i>
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
Red-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus</i>
Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>
Jacobin Cuckoo, Pied Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
Banded Bay Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sonneratii</i>
Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>
Serendib Scops Owl	<i>Otus thilohoffmanni</i>
Chestnut backed Owlet	<i>Glaucidium castanotum</i>
Brown Hawk-Owl	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>
Sri Lanka Frogmouth	<i>Batrachostomus moniliger</i>
Crested Treeswift, Gray-rumped Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
Indian Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus unicolor</i>
Brown-backed Needletail	<i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>
Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
House Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
Blue-tailed Bee-Eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>
Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyroceros gingalensis</i>
Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Psilopogon zeylanicus</i>
Yellow-fronted Barbet	<i>Psilopogon flavifrons</i>
Crimson-fronted Barbet	<i>Psilopogon rubricapillus</i>
Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Psilopogon haemacephalus</i>
Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus nanus</i>
Sri Lanka Red-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dinopium psarodes</i>
Crimson-backed Goldenback	<i>Chrysocolaptes stricklandi</i>
Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>
Layard's Parakeet	<i>Psittacula calthrapae</i>
Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus beryllinus</i>
Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>
Sri Lanka Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis affinis</i>
Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
Marshall's Iora	<i>Aegithina nigrolutea</i>
Black-headed Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>
Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
Orange Minivet, Scarlet Minivet, Flame Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
Sri Lanka Drongo	<i>Dicrurus lophorinus</i>
White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>
Sri Lanka Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa ornata</i>
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>
Cinereous Tit	<i>Parus cinereus</i>
Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>
Jerdon's Bush Lark	<i>Mirafraga affinis</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Black-capped Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>
Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
Yellow-eared Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus penicillatus</i>
White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
Yellow-browed Bulbul	<i>Acritillas indica</i>
Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Hill Swallow	<i>Hirundo domicola</i>
Sri Lanka Swallow	<i>Cecropis hyperythra</i>
Green Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i>
Sri Lanka Bush Warbler	<i>Elaphornis palliseri</i>
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Grey-breasted Prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
Jungle Prinia	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>
Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus melanurus</i>
Tawny-bellied Babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>
Dark-fronted Babbler	<i>Rhopocichla atriceps</i>
Brown-capped Babbler	<i>Pellorneum fuscicapillus</i>
Orange-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides rufescens</i>
Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
Ashy-headed Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax cinereifrons</i>
Yellow-eyed Babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>
Oriental White-Eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
Sri Lanka White-Eye	<i>Zosterops ceylonensis</i>
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>
Sri Lanka Hill Myna	<i>Gracula ptilogenys</i>
Lesser Hill Myna	<i>Gracula indica</i>
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
White-faced Starling	<i>Sturnornis albofrontatus</i>
Spot-winged Thrush	<i>Geokichla spiloptera</i>
Indian Blackbird	<i>Turdus simillimus</i>
Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>
Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Brown-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa muttui</i>
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
Dull-blue Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias sordidus</i>
Indian Blue Robin	<i>Larvivora brunnea</i>
Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush	<i>Myophonus blighi</i>
Kashmir Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula subrubra</i>
Pied Bush Chat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>
Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
Legge's Flowerpecker, White-throated Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum vincens</i>
Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>
Loten's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
Black-throated Munia	<i>Lonchura kelaarti</i>
Black-headed Munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>
Forest Wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name
Toque Macaque	<i>Macaca sinica</i>
Grey Langur	<i>Semnopithecus (Presbytis) entellus</i>
Purple-faced Leaf Monkey	<i>Trachypithecus (Presbytis) vetulus</i>
Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>
Stripe-necked Mongoose	<i>Herpestes vitticollis</i>
Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
Spotted Deer	<i>Cervus axis</i>
Sambar	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>
Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>
Grizzled Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa macroura</i>
Dusky Striped Squirrel	<i>Funambulus sublineatus</i>
Indian Hare- Black-naped Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus gigantea</i>

Reptiles & Amphibians

Common name	Scientific name
Green Vine Snake	<i>Ahaetulla nasuta</i>
Asian Water Monitor	<i>Varanus salvator</i>
Oriental (Common) Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
Green Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes calotes</i>
Sri Lanka Kangaroo Lizard	<i>Otocryptis wiegmanni</i>
Hump - nosed Lizard	<i>Lyriocephalus scutatus</i>
Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
Common House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>
Common Skink	<i>Eutropis carinata</i>

