# Sri Lanka - Endemic Birds

Naturetrek Tour Report

25th October – 3rd November 2025



Sri Lanka Blue Magpie



Red-faced Malkoha



Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill



Spot-winged Thrush

Tour report by Dhanushka Perera



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

Tour participants: Dhanushka Perera (leader) with three Naturetrek clients

# **Summary**

The tour opened with smooth travel from the airport to Kitulgala, introducing the group to the island's lowland rainforest and its early highlights, including Orange-billed Babbler, Orange Minivet, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, and later, key endemics such as Green-billed Coucal and Chestnut-backed Owlet, and Indian Pitta. Birding sessions across the Kitulgala village, Makandawa Forest Reserve, and river-edge habitats produced a strong list of species, with memorable sightings of Three-toed Kingfisher, Layard's Parakeet and Brown-capped Babbler. By the time the group departed Kitulgala, the tour had already established an excellent pace, with a wide range of lowland specialities and rainforest wildlife, including the Sri Lankan Kangaroo Lizard.

As the journey moved into the highlands, the group added characteristic montane species during stops in Nuwara Eliya and Horton Plains. Sightings included Dull Blue Flycatcher, Yellow-eared Bulbul, Sri Lanka White-eye, Sri Lanka Scaly Thrush and Kashmir Flycatcher, along with others such as Sri Lanka Junglefowl encountered inside Horton Plains. The Surrey Estate added Brown Wood Owl, while the descent into the dry zone brought species like Asian Green Bee-eater, White-bellied Sea Eagle, and sightings of wild Asian Elephants. Udawalawe National Park contributed a strong mix of birds and wildlife, including Malabar Pied Hornbill, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Orange-headed Fish Eagle, and several Asian Elephant herds.

The final stretch of the tour was centred on Sinharaja Rainforest, where the group completed the full suite of key endemics. Highlights included Red-faced Malkoha, Sri Lanka Myna, Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, and rare species such as Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Serendib Scops Owl, and Sri Lanka Bay Owl. The tour closed with relaxed buffer-zone birding in Ketalapattala, adding Asian Woolly-necked Stork and Asian Openbill on the final transfer. With all target species seen and several exceptional wildlife encounters along the way, the trip concluded as a highly successful and comprehensive endemic birding experience.

#### Day 1

Saturday 25th October

Clients departed from London for the long overnight flight to Sri Lanka.

# Day 2

Sunday 26th October

The tour commenced with the pickup of clients from the airport, after which we departed for Kitulgala at 2.00pm. The drive was smooth and scenic, gradually transitioning into the lush lowland rainforest zone.

We arrived in Kitulgala at 5.00pm and proceeded to begin our first birding session around the Kitulgala Police Station area, a well-known hotspot for lowland endemics. The group enjoyed a productive introduction to Sri Lanka's birdlife, with notable sightings including Orange-billed Babbler, Orange Minivet, Asian Brown Flycatcher and Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, among other species.

By 6.00pm, we had checked in to the hotel. We gathered for the daily checklist session and dinner at 7.30pm. It had been a smooth and engaging first day, setting a positive tone for the journey ahead.

## Day 3

# **Monday 27th October**

The day began with pre-breakfast birding around Kitulgala village, focusing particularly on two highly sought-after species: Green-billed Coucal and Chestnut-backed Owlet. We were rewarded early when a Green-billed Coucal showed exceptionally well, offering the group excellent views. The session continued productively with sightings of several other species, including Yellow-fronted Barbet, Red-backed Flameback, Square-tailed Bulbul and White-bellied Drongo, adding great momentum to the morning. Indian Pitta was the highlight of the morning.

We returned to the hotel for breakfast at 8.30am and later, at 10.00am, departed for the Makandawa Forest Reserve, crossing the river by boat; it was a scenic and enjoyable experience for the clients. Inside the reserve, we observed a Sri Lanka Kangaroo Lizard alongside a number of bird species already recorded earlier in the trip, contributing to a relaxed mid-morning walk through the forest.

After returning to the hotel for lunch, we embarked on another afternoon birding session near the Kitulgala Police Station. This turned out to be particularly rewarding, highlighted by an excellent sighting of a Three-toed Kingfisher, and two Chestnut-backed Owlets. Additional species included Layard's Parakeet and Brown-capped Babbler, rounding off the day with an impressive list of sightings.

We returned to the hotel at 6.00pm, followed by the daily checklist and dinner at 7.30pm. It had been a productive and satisfying day of birding in Kitulgala, rich with both target species and surprise encounters.

#### Day 4

# **Tuesday 28th October**

The day began with pre-breakfast birding, crossing the suspension bridge over the river to reach the nearby village. The morning atmosphere was calm and ideal for observation. We successfully recorded Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, along with several other species previously seen during earlier sessions. It was a pleasant and rewarding start, offering guests another opportunity to explore the lowland rainforest edge before we headed into the highlands.

We returned to the hotel for breakfast at 8.00am and checked out at 9.00am, beginning our journey toward Nuwara Eliya, ascending gradually into the cooler montane zone. Along the way, we encountered some characteristic high-altitude species, notably Cinereous Tit and Common Hill Myna, both welcome additions to the growing species list.

We arrived in Nuwara Eliya at 2.00pm and enjoyed lunch at the hotel. Later, at 3.30pm, the group departed for a nearby birding location within the town. Despite the cooler climate typical of the region, the session was productive, highlighted by sightings of Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher and Dull Blue Flycatcher, two attractive species often associated with highland forest patches.

The group returned to the hotel in the early evening and gathered for the daily checklist and dinner at 7.00pm, concluding another successful and engaging day of birding and travel.

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#### Day 5

# Wednesday 29th October

The day began with a very early 4.45am departure, carrying packed breakfasts, for our excursion to Horton Plains National Park, one of Sri Lanka's most important highland ecosystems. The drive through the misty montane landscape set the tone for an excellent morning of birding.

Upon arrival, we enjoyed a productive session, recording Indian Blackbird along with several key Sri Lankan endemics. Highlights included Yellow-eared Bulbul, Sri Lanka White-eye, Crimson-backed Flameback, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, and Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler. We also heard the call of the Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush, one of the island's most elusive birds, but despite careful scanning, it remained hidden from view.

We returned to the hotel at 2.00pm for a well-deserved lunch and some rest, before heading out again at 3.30pm to a nearby highland birding site. The afternoon proved exceptionally rewarding. We managed to observe several sought-after species, including Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, Sri Lanka Bush Warbler, and the standout highlight of the day: the Sri Lanka Scaly Thrush, a rare and highly prized sighting. Once again, we heard the Whistling Thrush calling very close by, though it remained frustratingly unseen.

The group returned to the hotel in the evening and gathered for the daily checklist session at 7.30pm, followed by dinner. It had been a long but deeply satisfying day in the highlands, rich in exceptional sightings and memorable experiences.

#### Day 6

# **Thursday 30th October**

The day commenced with pre-breakfast birding at 6.30am in Victoria Park. Conditions were favourable, and the group was rewarded with excellent views of one of the key target species: the Kashmir Flycatcher. The bird showed remarkably well, allowing clients fully to appreciate this sought-after migrant. It was also evident that another anticipated winter visitor, the Pied Thrush, had not yet arrived for the season.

We returned to the hotel for breakfast at 8.00am and checked out shortly after at 9.00am, beginning our journey toward Udawalawe. En route, we made a productive stop at Surrey Estate, where Brown Wood Owl was located roosting. Several familiar species were also seen, including Brown-headed Barbet and Red-backed Flameback.

Lunch was enjoyed at a scenic restaurant in Ella, a lively stop characterized by the numerous House Sparrows that frequent the building. As we continued descending into the dry zone, the avifauna shifted noticeably. A brief stop near a lake produced species characteristic of the lowlands, such as Asian Green Bee-eater, Indian Cormorant and White-bellied Sea Eagle. A special highlight was the sighting of three wild Asian Elephants feeding close to the main road.

We arrived at the hotel around 4.30pm and proceeded to a nearby spillway area for an afternoon birding session. This proved highly rewarding, with sightings of several dry-zone specialties. Notable birds included Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Marshall's Iora, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Tawny-bellied Babbler and Plain Prinia.

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As dusk approached, we returned to the hotel, followed by our routine checklist session and dinner at 7.30pm. The day concluded with a strong sense of accomplishment as the group transitioned successfully from the highlands to the dry lowlands, encountering an impressive diversity of species along the way.

#### Day 7

# Friday 31st October

The day commenced with a 6.00am departure, taking packed breakfasts for our morning safari in Udawalawe National Park. The park was active from the outset, offering excellent birding opportunities. Among the key species recorded were Coppersmith Barbet, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Orange-headed Fish Eagle, Blue-faced Malkoha and Yellow-wattled Lapwing. In addition to the rich avifauna, several Asian Elephants were encountered, providing memorable wildlife moments for the group.

We returned to the hotel late morning and checked out at 12.00 noon, followed by lunch before beginning our journey toward Sinharaja, Sri Lanka's most iconic rainforest. As we approached the Sinharaja region, bird activity picked up significantly. The group was delighted to spot the scarce endemic White-faced Starling, along with Crimson-fronted Barbet, near the forest border. A welcome break for a cup of coffee added a pleasant pause before we continued deeper into the rainforest zone.

Upon arrival at the hotel in Sinharaja, we were treated to yet another endemic highlight: Legge's Flowerpecker was observed feeding in a nearby tree. A few other familiar species were also recorded around the hotel grounds, marking a warm welcome to the rainforest.

The group gathered for the checklist session at 7.00pm, followed by dinner. With several key sightings and a smooth transition from the dry zone to the rainforest, the day concluded on a high note.

#### Day 8

# Saturday 1st November

We began the day with an early morning start, carrying our packed breakfast as we headed toward the Sinharaja Rainforest. A jeep transfer took us to the forest entrance, allowing us to watch the wildlife along the way. Bird activity was excellent from the outset, and we managed to record several key species, including Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Layard's Parakeet and Yellow-fronted Barbet, among others, during the drive.

As we continued deeper into the rainforest on foot, the experience became even more rewarding. Along the forest trails, we enjoyed sightings of Red-faced Malkoha, Sri Lanka Myna, and the well-camouflaged Sri Lanka Frogmouth. One of the major highlights of the morning was encountering the elusive and rare Serendib Scops Owl, a highly sought-after endemic, after much effort. Just outside the forest boundary, we were thrilled to add another exceptional species to our list: Sri Lanka Bay Owl, a remarkable and unexpected sighting.

We returned to the hotel around 2.00 pm, where the group enjoyed a relaxed and leisurely afternoon. At 6.30 pm, we set out again to a nearby location with hopes of observing the Spot-bellied Eagle Owl. The outing was a success, and witnessing this magnificent owl provided a spectacular end to the day's wildlife activities.

We met for our daily checklist session at 7.00 pm, followed by dinner, and concluded the day on a high note after an exceptional day of birding in and around Sinharaja.

## Day 9

# Sunday 2nd November

We began the day with another early start, departing at 6.00 am after an early breakfast. Our destination was Ketalapattala Village, located within the buffer zone of the Sinharaja Rainforest, for a final morning birding session. As we explored the area, we enjoyed repeated views of several species previously recorded during the tour, including Red-faced Malkoha, Green-billed Coucal, Orange-billed Babbler, and other familiar highlights. Since all target species had already been successfully observed, this outing offered an excellent opportunity to enjoy extended and more relaxed views of these remarkable birds.

We returned to the hotel afterward, completed the final checklist, and had lunch at 12.30 pm before checking out. We then proceeded toward the final hotel near the airport in preparation for the clients' departure to London the following morning. During the journey, we were pleased to add two new species to the trip list: Asian Woollynecked Stork and Asian Openbill.

The clients spent their final night at a hotel conveniently located near the airport, bringing to a close another successful endemic birding tour.

# **Day 10**

# **Monday 3rd November**

Clients departed Colombo at lunchtime, arriving back in the UK late evening local time.

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# **Species lists**

# Birds

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Common name	Scientific name
Lesser Whistling Duck	Dendrocygna javanica
Indian Peafowl	Pavo cristatus
Sri Lanka Junglefowl - E	Gallus lafayettii
Crested Treeswift	Hemiprocne coronata
Indian Swiftlet - N	Aerodramus unicolor
Asian Palm Swift	Cypsiurus balasiensis
Little Swift	Apus affinis
Green-billed Coucal - E	Centropus chlororhynchos
Greater Coucal	Centropus sinensis
Red-faced Malkoha - E	Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus
Asian Koel	Eudynamys scolopaceus
Grey-bellied Cuckoo	Cacomantis passerinus
Rock Dove	Columba livia
Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon - E	Columba torringtoniae
Spotted Dove	Spilopelia chinensis
Common Emerald Dove	Chalcophaps indica
Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	Treron bicinctus
Sri Lanka Green Pigeon - E	Treron pompadora
Green Imperial Pigeon	Ducula aenea
Grey-headed Swamphen	Porphyrio poliocephalus
Slaty-legged Crake	Rallina eurizonoides
White-breasted Waterhen	Amaurornis phoenicurus
Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis
Great Stone-curlew	Esacus recurvirostris
Indian Stone-curlew	Burhinus indicus
Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus
Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius
Yellow-wattled Lapwing	Vanellus malabaricus
Red-wattled Lapwing	Vanellus indicus
Tibetan Sand Plover	Anarhynchus atrifrons
Kentish Plover	Anarhynchus alexandrinus
Greater Painted-snipe	Rostratula benghalensis
Common Sandpiper	Actitis hypoleucos
Marsh Sandpiper	Tringa stagnatilis
Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola
Little Stint	Calidris minuta
Gull-billed Tern	Gelochelidon nilotica
Whiskered Tern	Chlidonias hybrida
Lesser Adjutant	Leptoptilos javanicus
Painted Stork	Mycteria leucocephala
Oriental Darter	Anhinga melanogaster
Little Cormorant	Microcarbo niger
Black-headed Ibis	Threskiornis melanocephalus
Eurasian Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta
Indian Pond Heron	Ardeola grayii

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic	
Common name	Scientific name
Great Egret	Ardea alba
Medium Egret	Ardea intermedia
Eastern Cattle Egret	Ardea coromanda
Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea
Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea
Spot-billed Pelican	Pelecanus philippensis
Crested Honey Buzzard	Pernis ptilorhynchus
Crested Serpent Eagle	Spilornis cheela
Changeable Hawk-Eagle	Nisaetus cirrhatus
Black Eagle	Ictinaetus malaiensis
Crested Goshawk	Lophospiza trivirgata
Brahminy Kite	Haliastur indus
White-bellied Sea Eagle	Icthyophaga leucogaster
Sri Lanka Bay Owl - N	Phodilus assimilis
Chestnut-backed Owlet - E	Glaucidium castanotum
	Otus thilohoffmanni
Serendib Scops Owl - E	
Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl	Ketupa nipalensis
Brown Wood Owl	Strix leptogrammica
Malabar Trogon - N	Harpactes fasciatus
Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa epops
Malabar Pied Hornbill - N	Anthracoceros coronatus
Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill - E	Ocyceros gingalensis
Indian Roller	Coracias benghalensis
Stork-billed Kingfisher	Pelargopsis capensis
White-throated Kingfisher	Halcyon smyrnensis
Common Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis
Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher	Ceyx erithaca
Pied Kingfisher	Ceryle rudis
Asian Green Bee-eater	Merops orientalis
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	Merops philippinus
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	Merops leschenaulti
Brown-headed Barbet	Psilopogon zeylanicus
Yellow-fronted Barbet - E	Psilopogon flavifrons
Crimson-fronted Barbet - E	Psilopogon rubricapillus
Coppersmith Barbet	Psilopogon haemacephalus
Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	Yungipicus nanus
Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	Leiopicus mahrattensis
Lesser Yellownape	Picus chlorolophus
Red-backed Flameback	Dinopium psarodes
Crimson-backed Flameback - E	Chrysocolaptes stricklandi
Layard's Parakeet - E	Psittacula calthrapae
Alexandrine Parakeet	Psittacula eupatria
Rose-ringed Parakeet	Psittacula krameri
Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot - E	Loriculus beryllinus
Indian Pitta	Pitta brachyura
Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	Hemipus picatus
Sri Lanka Woodshrike - E	Tephrodornis affinis
Common lora	Aegithina tiphia
Marshall's Iora	Aegithina nigrolutea

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic	
Common name	Scientific name
Small Minivet	Pericrocotus cinnamomeus
Orange Minivet - N	Pericrocotus flammeus
Black-headed Cuckooshrike	Lalage melanoptera
Black-hooded Oriole	Oriolus xanthornus
Sri Lanka Drongo - E	Dicrurus lophorinus
Ashy Drongo	Dicrurus leucophaeus
White-bellied Drongo	Dicrurus caerulescens
White-browed Fantail	Rhipidura aureola
Black-naped Monarch	Hypothymis azurea
Indian Paradise Flycatcher	Terpsiphone paradisi
Brown Shrike	Lanius cristatus
Sri Lanka Blue Magpie - E	Urocissa ornata
House Crow	Corvus splendens
Indian Jungle Crow	Corvus culminatus
Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher	Culicicapa ceylonensis
Cinereous Tit	Parus cinereus
Jerdon's Bush Lark - N	Plocealauda affinis
Yellow-browed Bulbul - N	Acritillas indica
Square-tailed Bulbul - N	Hypsipetes ganeesa
Black-capped Bulbul - E	Rubigula melanictera
White-browed Bulbul - N	Pycnonotus luteolus
Yellow-eared Bulbul - E	Pycnonotus penicillatus
Red-vented Bulbul	Pycnonotus cafer
Hill Swallow - N	Hirundo domicola
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica
Sri Lanka Swallow - E	Cecropis hyperythra
Green Warbler	Phylloscopus nitidus
Large-billed Leaf Warbler	Phylloscopus magnirostris
Blyth's Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus dumetorum
Sri Lanka Bush Warbler - E	Elaphrornis palliseri
Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis
Grey-breasted Prinia	Prinia hodgsonii
Jungle Prinia	Prinia sylvatica
Ashy Prinia	Prinia socialis
Plain Prinia	Prinia inornata
Common Tailorbird	Orthotomus sutorius
Yellow-eyed Babbler	Chrysomma sinense
Sri Lanka White-eye - E	Zosterops ceylonensis
Indian White-eye	Zosterops palpebrosus
Tawny-bellied Babbler	Dumetia hyperythra
Dark-fronted Babbler - N	Dumetia atriceps
Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler - E	Pomatorhinus melanurus
Brown-capped Babbler - E	Pellorneum fuscocapillus
Ashy-headed Laughingthrush - E	Argya cinereifrons
Orange-billed Babbler - E	Argya rufescens
Yellow-billed Babbler - N	Argya affinis
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	Sitta frontalis
Sri Lanka Hill Myna - E	Gracula ptilogenys
<u> </u>	Gracula indica
Southern Hill Myna - N	Gracula Inulca

E=Endemic, N=Near-endemic	
Common name	Scientific name
Common Myna	Acridotheres tristis
White-faced Starling - E	Sturnornis albofrontatus
Sri Lanka Thrush - E	Zoothera imbricata
Spot-winged Thrush - E	Geokichla spiloptera
Indian Blackbird - N	Turdus simillimus
Oriental Magpie-Robin	Copsychus saularis
Indian Robin	Copsychus fulicatus
Brown-breasted Flycatcher	Muscicapa muttui
Asian Brown Flycatcher	Muscicapa dauurica
Dull-blue Flycatcher - E	Eumyias sordidus
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	Cyornis tickelliae
Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush - E (heard)	Myophonus blighi
Indian Blue Robin	Larvivora brunnea
Kashmir Flycatcher	Ficedula subrubra
Pied Bush Chat	Saxicola caprata
Golden-fronted Leafbird	Chloropsis aurifrons
Legge's Flowerpecker - E	Pachyglossa vincens
Thick-billed Flowerpecker	Pachyglossa agilis
Pale-billed Flowerpecker	Dicaeum erythrorhynchos
Purple-rumped Sunbird	Leptocoma zeylonica
Purple Sunbird	Cinnyris asiaticus
Loten's Sunbird - N	Cinnyris lotenius
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus
Scaly-breasted Munia	Lonchura punctulata
White-rumped Munia	Lonchura striata
Tricolored Munia	Lonchura malacca
Forest Wagtail	Dendronanthus indicus
Western Yellow Wagtail	Motacilla flava
Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea
Paddyfield Pipit	Anthus rufulus

#### Mammals

Common name	Scientific name
Asian Elephant	Elephas maximus
Toque Macaque	Macaca sinica
Tufted Grey Langur	Semnopithecus priam
Purple-faced Langur	Semnopithecus vetulus
Sri Lankan Giant Squirrel	Ratufa macroura
Dusky Striped Squirrel	Funambulus sublineatus
Layard's Striped Squirrel	Funambulus layardi
Indian Palm Squirrel	Funambulus palmarum
Chital	Cervus axis
Sambar	Rusa unicolor
Water Buffalo	Bubalus bubalis
Eurasian Wild Pig	Sus scrofa
Indian Brown Mongoose	Urva fusca
Indian Grey Mongoose	Urva edwardsii
Golden Jackal	Canis aureus

# Reptiles

Common name	Scientific name
Green Forest Lizard	Calotes calotes
Sri Lankan Kangaroo Lizard	Otocryptis wiegmanni
Common House Gecko	Hemidactylus frenatus
Estuarine Crocodile	Crocodylus porosus
Sri Lanka Keelback	Rhabdophis ceylonensis