

Sri Lanka - Elephants & other Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 - 30 October 2015



Indian Pitta



Asian Elephants



Rhino-horned Lizard



Ruddy Mongoose

Report & images compiled by Chaminda Dilruk



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Tour participants: Chaminda Dilruk (leader) with two Naturetrek clients

Summary

This was an all-round wildlife experience and sightings of almost 100 Elephants and the early arrival of Indian Pitta were highlights of this tour. There were close encounters for some superb photographic opportunities, and the sighting of the rare Stripe-necked Mongoose elevated the experience of this tour

Day 1

Friday 17th October

The tour started for group members with a flight from the UK to Sri Lanka.

Day 2

Saturday 18th October

Sigiriya

After an overnight flight from the UK, we landed in Sri Lanka and met Chaminda. We were on our way from the airport by 1.45pm and our onward journey to Sigiriya took about three hours. We reached the hotel early, but the gloomy skies turned to showers leaving us with no way of getting out for the evening; so we had an early night.

Day 3

Sunday 19th October

Kaudulla

The showers of yesterday were soaked up by the sun as we headed to Kaudulla National Park for our first safari. The morning was spent looking at birds including Indian Peafowl, Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Woolly-necked Stork, Cattle, Intermediate, Little and Great Egrets, Spot-billed Pelican, Little Grebe, Brahminy Kite, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Little Ringed Plover, Gull-billed Tern, Saunders's Tern, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Green Bee-eater, White-throated Kingfisher, Common Kingfisher, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Black-rumped Flameback, Crimson-backed Woodpecker, Brown Shrike, Barn Swallow, Paddyfield Pipit, Jerdon's Bushlark, Red-vented Bulbul, Gray-breasted Prinia, Plain Prinia, Greenish Warbler, Common Myna, and Baya Weaver. The most exciting part of our birding session was the early and first recorded sighting of the season of Indian Pitta, and a fantastic close encounter with a Drongo Cuckoo which gave us some good photographic opportunities.

After having our picnic lunch at a scenic location we continued with Elephants on our mind. We were fortunate to see a herd of about 80 Elephants gathered at the lake for their evening drinks, and six or so calves were beside their mother's protective legs. Torque Macaque, Grey Langur, Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Ruddy Mongoose, Land Monitor and Grizzled Indian Squirrel also delighted us with their appearances. As the rain started to fall we headed back to the hotel where we did our checklist at 7pm before dinner at 7.30pm.

Day 4

Monday 20th October

Kaudulla

Another early start after breakfast yielded us some good sightings including Lesser Adjutant, Eurasian Spoonbill, Little, Indian and Great Cormorants, Great Thick-knee, Black-winged Stilt, Red-wattled Lapwing, Common Sandpiper, Rock Pigeon, Dollarbird and Oriental Skylark. We also saw Spotted Deer and Indian Palm Squirrel.

Once again in the evening we encountered a few Elephants but the rain started to fall which caused bad visibility. We returned to the hotel at 4pm and later met at 7pm for the checklist before having dinner at 7.30pm.

Day 5

Tuesday 21st October

Kandy

After breakfast we checked out of the hotel and headed to our next stop; Kandy. En route we visited a spice garden in Matale where we identified different types of plants with medicinal and culinary purposes. After spending an hour there we proceeded to a restaurant in Peradeniya for lunch. During our journey we spotted Black-headed Ibis, Spotted Dove and Indian Swiftlet. Toque Macaque and Grey Langur were also encountered.

The rest of the drive was through heavy rain and we reached our hotel by 3pm. Due to the continuing rain there was no opportunity for us to venture out so we met at 7pm to do the checklist and had dinner at 7.30pm.

Day 6

Wednesday 22nd October

Nuwara Eliya

After breakfast we checked out of the hotel and then visited Peradeniya Botanical Gardens. We then proceeded to Nuwara Eliya central highlands, en route stopping at a working Tea Factory to witness the production process of the world's finest tea.

We reached our next hotel at 1.30pm and had our lunch before heading out to Victoria Park. The new species we encountered today included Green Forest Lizard, Indian Pond Heron, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Asian Palm Swift, Black-hooded Oriole, House Crow, Large-billed Crow, Hill Swallow, Grey Wagtail, Yellow-billed Babbler, Lesser Hill Myna, Oriental Magpie Robin, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Oriental White-eye, Great Tit, House Sparrow and Scaly-breasted Munia. Once again we met at 7pm for the checklist and proceeded for dinner thereafter.

Day 7

Thursday 23rd October

Yala

After breakfast we checked out of the hotel and then visited the Bomuru Ella forest area where we encounter Sri Lanka White-eye, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Rhino-horned Lizard and the hill race of Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, also known as Bear Monkey.

Our next stop was for lunch at a restaurant overlooking a picturesque valley in Ella. After some time spent photographing the surroundings we had lunch and relaxed till around 2pm. We then continued to our next destination, stopping en route at Tissa Lake for some birding where we encountered Oriental Honey-buzzard, Black-tailed Godwit, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Scarlet Minivet, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Yellow-eared Bulbul and Asian Brown Flycatcher. We also saw Torque Macaque, Ruddy Mongoose and the rare Stripe-necked Mongoose.

Later in the evening we were able to witness a colony of Flying Foxes gradually leaving their roost for their night-time activities. We reached our hotel by 5.30pm and met up again at 7pm for the checklist and subsequent dinner.

Day 8

Friday 24th October

Yala

We had an early start at 5.30am, heading to Yala National Park with our picnic breakfast and lunch packs. Our sightings today included Elephants, Indian Hare, Wild Boar, Golden Jackal, Crocodile, Water Buffalo, Bronzeback Tree Snake, Indian Cobra, Fan-throated Lizard, Garden Lizard and Parker's Black Turtle. Bird sightings included Barred Buttonquail, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Lesser Whistling-duck, Black-necked Stork, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Lesser Sand Plover, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Jacobin Cuckoo, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Asian Koel, Sirkeer Malkoha, Pied Kingfisher, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Common Tailorbird, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Brahminy Starling, White-rumped Shama and Black-headed Munia. Towards 3pm it started raining quite heavily and by the time we reached the hotel we were all soaking wet but happy with the day's sightings, although the rain had left us without sight of the elusive Leopard.

We ended the day with our usual routine of checklist at 7pm before dinner.

Day 9

Saturday 25th October

Embilipitiya

We checked out of the hotel at 8.30am amidst slight rain and proceeded to Tissa tank to witness the Indian Flying Fox roost. We also visited Debara tank and managed to take some photographs of birds from inside the vehicle as it was raining heavily and wasn't suitable to step out and walk around. We then drove to another tank called Nelum Pokuna in Thanamalvilla before reaching our next hotel by 1.30pm.

After lunch we visited the roosting site of an Indian Scops Owl and were able to take some photographs before the rain set in again, forcing us back to the hotel. Our day yielded sightings of Black-crowned Night Heron, Shikra, Besra, White-breasted Waterhen, Purple Swamphen, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Whiskered Tern, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, Common Hoopoe, Jerdon's Leaf Bird, Black-capped Bulbul, Purple-rumped Sunbird and Water Monitor.

Day 10

Sunday 26th October

Udawalawe

With a picnic breakfast, we checked out of our hotel at 5.30am and proceeded to Udawalawe National Park for a half-day safari where we encounter Montagu's Harrier, Green Imperial Pigeon, Brown Fish Owl, Indian Roller, White-bellied Drongo, Forest Wagtail, Jungle Prinia, Zitting Cisticola and White-rumped Munia.

We left the park around 12.30pm and proceeded to the Udawalawe transit home in time to witness the feeding of the Elephant calves. We had our lunch in a local restaurant nearby and then left for Singharaja amidst heavy rains. We reached the hotel by 4.30pm and later did the checklist before dinner at 7.30pm.

Day 11

Monday 27th October

Singharaja

We had breakfast at 6.30am before going in a jeep to the Singharaja Rainforest entrance gate. Our trek inside the forest yielded sightings of Kangaroo Lizard, Layard's Parakeet, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, Red-rumped Swallow, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Greenish Warbler, Dark-fronted Warbler, Spot-winged Thrush, Brown-breasted Flycatcher and Black-throated Munia.

We returned to the hotel at 1.30pm for lunch. Afterwards the heavy rain stopped us from doing any walking around the hotel gardens during the afternoon. The checklist was at 7pm followed by dinner.

Day 12

Tuesday 28th October

Once again we left after an early breakfast and headed to the Singharaja Rainforest. We added more new species to our list which included Green-billed Coucal, Black Bulbul, Tawny-bellied Babbler, Orange-bellied Babbler and Ashy-headed Laughingthrush.

The rain started to pour after lunch which hindered our plans to visit the nearby forest and village areas. In the evening we followed our usual routine of the checklist followed by dinner at 7.30pm.

Day 13

Wednesday 29th October

After breakfast we went to a nearby forest and did a little birding around the area. We encountered two more new birds for the tour: Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot and White-browed Bulbul.

We returned to the hotel for lunch and then did our checklist before checking out. We then drove to our final hotel for the tour in Katunayake, arriving at 6.30pm.

Day 14

Thursday 30th October

At 7am we left for Muthurajawela Bird Sanctuary where we saw many of the birds we had encountered during our tour but still managed to see one last new bird: Black Bittern. We returned to the hotel by 9am, checked out

by 10am and then proceeded to the airport for a flight back to London where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

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Species Lists

Birds (Bold text = endemic or near endemic)

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Barred Buttonquail	<i>Turnix suscitator</i>
2	Sri Lanka Junglefowl	<i>Gallus lafayetii</i>
3	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
4	Lesser Whistling-duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
5	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
6	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
7	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
8	Black-necked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>
9	Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
10	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
11	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
12	Black Bittern	<i>Dupetor flavicollis</i>
13	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
14	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
15	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
16	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
17	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
18	Great Egret	<i>casmerodius albus</i>
19	Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
20	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
21	Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
22	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
23	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
24	Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
25	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
26	Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
27	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
28	White-bellied Sea Eagle (White-bellied Fish Eagle)	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
29	Gray-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Lcthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>
30	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
31	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
32	Besra	<i>Accipiter virgatus</i>
33	Oriental Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
34	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
35	Changeable Hawk Eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>
36	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amauornis phoenicurus</i>
37	Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
38	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
39	Great Thick-knee	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>
40	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
41	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>
42	Red-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
43	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
44	Lesser Sand Plover (Mongolian Plover)	<i>charadrius mongolus</i>
45	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
46	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
47	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
48	Saunders's Tern	<i>Sternula saundersi</i>
49	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>

Common name	Scientific name
50 Common Pigeon (Rock Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>
51 Spotted Dove	<i>Stigmatopelia chinensis</i>
52 Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>
53 Sri Lanka Green Pigeon	<i>Treron (Pompadora) pompadora</i>
54 Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
55 Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus beryllinus</i>
56 Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
57 Layard's Parakeet	<i>Psittacula calthropae</i>
58 Jacobin Cuckoo (Pied Cuckoo)	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
59 Grey-bellied Cuckoo (Plaintive Cuckoo)	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>
60 Drongo Cuckoo	<i>Surniculus lugubris</i>
61 Asian Koel	<i>Endynamys scolopacerus</i>
62 Sirkeer Malkoha	<i>Taccocua leschenaultii</i>
63 Green-billed Coucal	<i>Centropus chlororhynchos</i>
64 Sri Lanka Frogmouth	<i>Batrachostomus moniliger</i>
65 Collared Scops Owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>
66 Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>
67 Indian Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia unicolor</i>
68 Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
69 Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
70 Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>
71 Green Bee-eater (Little Green Bee-eater)	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
72 Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
73 Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
74 White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
75 Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
76 Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
77 Common Hoopoe (Eurasian Hoopoe)	<i>Upupa epops</i>
78 Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
79 Yellow-fronted Barbet	<i>Megalaima flavifrons</i>
80 Crimson-fronted Barbet	<i>Megalaima rubricapillus</i>
81 Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros gingalensis</i>
82 Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthraceroceros coronatus</i>
83 Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos nanus</i>
84 Lesser Goldenback (Black-rumped Flameback)	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
85 Crimson-backed Goldenback (Crimson-back Woodpecker)	<i>Chrysocolaptes(lucidus) stricklandi</i>
86 Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
87 Sri Lanka Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis (pondicerianus) affinis</i>
88 Black-headed Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>
89 Scarlet Minivet (Flame Minivet)	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
90 Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>
91 Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
92 Jerdon's Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>
93 Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
94 Sri Lanka Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa ornata</i>
95 House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
96 Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
97 Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
98 Hill Swallow	<i>Hirundo(tahitica) domicola</i>
99 Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
100 White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
101 Forest Wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>
102 Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>

Common name	Scientific name
103 Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
104 Jerdon's Bushlark	<i>Mirafra affinis</i>
105 Oriental Skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>
106 Black-capped Bulbul (Black-headed Yellow Bulbul)	<i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>
107 Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
108 Yellow-eared Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus penicillatus</i>
109 White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
110 Yellow-browed Bulbul	<i>Acritillas indica</i>
111 Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>
112 Gray-breasted Prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
113 Jungle Prinia	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>
114 Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
115 Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
116 Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
117 Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
118 Asian Paradise-flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
119 Dark-fronted Babbler	<i>Rhopocichla atriceps</i>
120 Tawny-bellied Babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>
121 Yellow-eyed Babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>
122 Orange-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides rufescens</i>
123 Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
124 Ashy-headed Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax cinereifrons</i>
125 Lesser Hill Myna	<i>Gracula (religioosa) indica</i>
126 Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
127 Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>
128 Spot-winged Thrush	<i>Zoothera spiloptera</i>
129 Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
130 White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
131 Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>
132 Brown-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa muttui</i>
133 Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
134 Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
135 Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
136 Sri Lanka White-eye	<i>Zosterops ceylonensis</i>
137 Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>
138 Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
139 Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
140 House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
141 White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
142 Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
143 Black-throated Munia	<i>Lonchura kelaarti</i>
144 Black-headed Munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>

Mammals

1 Toque Macaque	<i>Macaca sinica</i>
2 Grey Langur	<i>Presbytis entellus</i>
3 Purple-faced Leaf-Monkey	<i>Presbytis vetulus</i>
4 Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
5 Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>
6 Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
7 Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
8 Chital (Spotted Deer)	<i>Cervus axis</i>
9 Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus arnee</i>

	Common name	Scientific name
10	Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>
11	Grizzled (Giant) Indian Squirrel	<i>Ratufa macroura</i>
12	Indian Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
13	Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus gigantea</i>
14	Stripe-necked Mongoose	<i>Herpestes vitticollis</i>

Reptiles & Other

1	Giant Wood Spider	<i>Nephila pilipes</i>
2	Bronzeback Tree Snake	<i>Dendrelaphis tristis</i>
3	Indian Cobra	<i>Naja naja</i>
4	Land Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>
5	Water Monitor	<i>Varanus salvator</i>
6	Green Forest Lizard	<i>Calotes calotes</i>
7	Rhino-horned Lizard	<i>Ceratophora stoddartii</i>
8	Fan-throated Lizard	<i>Sitana ponticeriana</i>
9	Kangaroo Lizard	<i>Otocryptis wiegmanni</i>
10	Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
11	Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
12	Flapshell Turtle	<i>Lissemys punctata</i>
13	Parker's Black Turtle	<i>Melanochelys trijuga parkeri</i>