

Sri Lanka - Blue Whales & Leopards

Naturetrek Tour Report

22 November - 1 December 2014



Blue Whales



Spinner Dolphins

Report compiled by Upul Wickremasinghe & Saman Kumara Gamage



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Day 1

Saturday 22nd November

In transit to Sri Lanka

Day 2

Sunday 23rd November

The group arrived at 2.00pm and before leaving the airport we saw Indian Palm Squirrel and Common Myna. We then proceed to Talangama tank where we saw Black-headed Ibis, Asian Openbill, Indian Pond Heron, Little Egret, Red-wattled Lapwing, Barn Swallow, Blue-tailed Bee-eater and White-throated Kingfisher. After 15 minutes at Talangama we proceed to Mirissa via the Kottawa highway where we saw White-bellied Drongo, Painted Stork, Sri Lanka Swallow and House Crow. After exiting the highway at Galle we continued to Mirissa via the Galle Road where we saw Little Cormorant, Indian Flying Fox, Brahminy Kite, Rock Pigeon and Rose-ringed Parakeet. Between Galle and Mirissa, but mainly in the town of Weligama, we saw the unique fishing technique known as Stilt Fishing.

We reached our hotel at 5.15pm and checked in. We met again in the restaurant at 7.30pm for our first evening meeting and to do our checklists. Dinner followed at 8.00pm and then we went back to our rooms for the night.

Day 3

Monday 24th November

We started the day at 6.15am with tea, before heading to Mirissa pier for our whale watching tour. Before we boarded the vessel we saw Black-rumped Flameback in the boatyard. At 7.30am we left for the open ocean and around 9.00am we saw our first and only Blue Whale of the day. With the sea being very rough we didn't have much luck spotting whales but we did manage to see a few Flying Fish amongst the white waves. We were back at the dock by 12.00pm where we saw Large-billed Crow, Gull-billed Tern and Whiskered Tern.

We headed back to the hotel for lunch and some leisure time. At 4.00pm we went to the nearby Kirala forest for some birdwatching. Before we reached the forest we saw Cotton Pygmy-goose on a nearby stream, and Purple-faced Leaf Monkey. In the forest and surrounding area we saw Lesser Whistling-duck, Garganey, Purple Heron, Intermediate Egret, Little Grebe, Indian Cormorant, White-bellied Sea Eagle, White-breasted Waterhen, Purple Swamphen, Pleasant-tailed Jacana, Green Imperial Pigeon, Black-headed Oriole and Scaly-breasted Munia. We headed back to the hotel at 6.30pm and met for the checklist at 7.30pm before dinner and lights out.

Day 4

Tuesday 25th November

Once again we started the day with tea at 6.15am before heading to the pier to board our vessel. As we headed out to the ocean we saw a pod of Spinner Dolphins which gave us a spectacular display of their ability to spin. We saw a few Flying Fish break the water surface and take flight, and we managed to spot a Blue Whale travelling at a rapid speed. We gave chase and followed the whale until we had almost reached the town of Galle. A good experience for our tour.

We headed back to the harbour at 11.00am and in the area around the pier we saw many butterflies including Crimson Rose, Tawny Coster, Lime Butterfly and Lemmon Immigrant, and we also saw Variegated Flutterer and Pied Parasol dragonflies. We had lunch at the hotel, and then at 3.00pm we headed back to Kirala forest for more birding. We saw Stork-billed Kingfisher, Yellow Bittern, Spot-billed Pelican, Shikra, White-winged Tern, Sooty Tern, Spotted Dove, Alexandrine Parakeet, Asian Koel, Greater Coucal, Indian Swiftlet, Brown-headed Barbet, Common Iora, Red-vented Bulbul, White-browed Bulbul, Yellow-billed Babbler, Oriental Magpie Robin, Purple-rumped Sunbird, Purple Sunbird, Parasitic Jaeger, Purple Swamphen, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Common Tailorbird and Asian Paradise-flycatcher.

We headed back to the hotel at 6.30pm and again did our checklists at 7.30pm before dinner.

Day 5

Wednesday 26th November

We started the day once again with tea at 6.15am before we headed to the pier to board our vessel. Today we manage to see another Blue Whale, and in the distance we saw a turtle which unfortunately disappeared as soon as we got close to it.

We headed back to the hotel at 11.00am and the group had a little free time before lunch. One member of the group took the opportunity to go to the beach for some surfing where he had an accidental fall resulting in him being rushed to hospital. The rest of the day was spent at leisure before we met at 7.30pm to do our checklists before dinner.

Day 6

Thursday 27th November

After breakfast we headed to Yala, stopping at Galle Fort for some birding. We saw Black-crowned Night Heron, Grey Heron, Black-winged Stilt, Marsh Sandpiper, Little Stint, Crested Treeswift, Green Bee-eater, Plain Prinia, Indian Robin and House Sparrow.

We reached our hotel at Yala in time for lunch and then some birding around the hotel gardens.

The checklist was done at 7.30pm followed by dinner.

Day 7

Friday 28th November

We started the day at 5.15am, and after tea we took our picnic lunch and headed to Yala National Park for a jeep safari. We reached the entrance at 6.00am and encounter Lesser Sand Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Common Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Woolly-necked Stork, Great Egret, Darter, Grey-headed Fish

Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Greater Thick-knee, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Jacobin Cuckoo, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Brown Fish Owl, Indian Roller, Pied Kingfisher, Common Hoopoe, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Indian Pitta, Brown Shrike, Paddyfield Pipit, Jerdon's Bushlark, White-browed Fantail, Brahminy Starling, Baya Weaver and Ashy-headed Sparrow Lark.

We also saw Leopard, a target species for the tour, and some other mammals including Grey Langur, Ruddy Mongoose, Leopard, Indian Elephant, Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, Sambar, Water Buffalo and Indian Hare.

Day 8

Saturday 29th November

After our early morning tea we left the hotel with a picnic breakfast and lunch for another jeep safari in Yala National Park. This time we encounter Barred Buttonquail, Eurasian Spoonbill, Striated Heron, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Pin-tailed Snipe, Common Greenshank, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Blue-faced Malkoha, Sirkeer Malkoha, House Swift, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Small Minivet, Jungle Prinia and Tawny-bellied Babbler. We also saw Grizzled Giant Squirrel, Painted Lip Lizard and Bark Gecko.

We returned to our hotel at 5.00pm and met for the checklist at 7.30pm before dinner.

Day 9

Sunday 30th November

After breakfast, we left the hotel at 9.00am and went to Colombo via Tissamaharama where we stopped to look at some of the temples. Once again, we saw many birds on the way. We stopped in Udawalawe for lunch, had another stop enroute for tea, were at Kuruvita at 4.00pm and we reached the Airport Garden hotel by 7.00pm. We were welcomed by Perry, and we had dinner soon after.

Day 10

Monday 1st December

We met in the restaurant at 7.30am for breakfast and did the last checklist for the tour. We had seen well over a hundred bird species and nearly 20 species of mammal. We left the hotel at 9.00am and headed to the Airport in time to catch our flight home.

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Species List

Birds

Common name	Scientific name
Barred Buttonquail	<i>Turnix suscitator</i>
Sri Lanka Junglefowl	<i>Gallus lafayetii</i>
Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
Lesser Whistling-duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
Cotton Pygmy-goose	<i>Netta puscoromandelianus</i>
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia piscopus</i>
Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Yellow Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeo lagrayii</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea albus</i>
Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliaeetus rindus</i>
White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Icthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>
Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
Changeable Hawk Eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatius</i>
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
Purple Swampphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
Great Thick-knee	<i>Esacus curvirostris</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Yellow-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>
Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
Lesser Sand Plover, (Mongolian Plover)	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
Pin-tailed Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirunda</i>
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
Sooty Tern	<i>Onychoprion fuscatus</i>
Common Pigeon, (Rock Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>
Spotted Dove	<i>Stigmato peliachinensis</i>
Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>
Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Jacobin Cuckoo, (Pied Cuckoo)	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
Grey-bellied Cuckoo, (Plaintive Cuckoo)	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>
Asian Koel	<i>Endynamys scolopacerus</i>
Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Rhopodytes viridirostris</i>
Sirkeer Malkoha	<i>Taccocuale schenaultii</i>
Greater Coucal	<i>Centro pussinensis</i>
Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>
Indian Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia unicolor</i>
House Swift, (Little Swift)	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Crested Treeswift, (Grey-rumped Treeswift)	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
Green Bee-eater, (Little Green Bee-eater)	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
Common Hoopoe, (Eurasian Hoopoe)	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthraceroceros coronatus</i>
Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos nanus</i>
Lesser Goldenback, (Black-rumped Flameback)	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
Common Iora	<i>Aegithinati phia</i>
Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Sri Lanka Swallow	<i>Cecropis (daurica) hyperythra</i>
White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caeruleus</i>
Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
Jerdon's Bushlark	<i>Mirafra affinis</i>
Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
Jungle Prinia	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>
Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>

Common name

Asian Paradise-flycatcher
 Tawny-bellied Babbler
 Orange-billed Babbler
 Yellow-billed Babbler
 Common Myna
 Brahminy Starling
 Oriental Magpie Robin
 Indian Robin, (Black-backed Robin)
 Thick-billed Flowerpecker
 Pale-billed Flowerpecker
 Purple-rumped Sunbird
 Purple Sunbird
 Baya Weaver
 House Sparrow
 Scaly-breasted Munia

Scientific name

Terpsiphone paradisi
Dumetia hyperythra
Turdoides rufescens
Turdoides affinis
Acrido theeristris
Sturnia pagodarum
Copsychus saularis
Saxicola idesfulicatus
Dicaeum agile
Dicaeum erythrorhynchus
Nectarini azeylonica
Nectarini asiatica
Ploceus philippinus
Passer domesticus
Lonchura punctulata

Mammals

Toque Macaque
 Purple-faced Leaf Monkey
 Golden Jackal
 Ruddy Mongoose
 Leopard
 Indian Elephant
 Wild Boar
 Spotted Deer (Chital)
 Sambar
 Water Buffalo
 Indian Palm Squirrel
 Grizzled Giant Squirrel
 Indian Hare
 Indian Flying Fox
 Blue Whale
 Spinner Dolphin

Macac asinica
Presbytis vetulus
Canis aureus
Herpestes smithii
Panther pardus
Elephas maximus
Sus scrofa
Cervus axis
Cervus unicolor
Bubalus arnee
Funambulus palmarum
Ratu famacroure
Lepus nigricollis
Pteropus gigantea
Balaenoptera musculus
Stenellalon girostris

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