

Sri Lanka - Blue Whales & Leopards

Naturetrek Tour Report

7 – 16 February 2015



Report compiled by Upul Wickremasinghe & Devaka Jayamanne
Images by Upul Wickremasinghe



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Leader: Upul Wickremasinghe
Devaka Jayamanne Co-Leader / Driver

Participants: James Moore
Helen Moore
David Fotherby
Lesley Fotherby
Andrew Moon
Alison Moon
Arthur Brown
Audrey Brown
Thomas Irons
David Irons
Timothy Pearce
Jennifer Pearce

Day 1

Saturday 7th February

The group met at the airport and boarded a flight from the UK to Sri Lanka for their 10-day Whale & Leopard watching tour.

Day 2

Sunday 8th February

The flight arrived at Colombo airport, Sri Lanka at 12.40pm and we left the airport at 1.15pm. On our way to Mirissa we stopped at Talangama tank for some birding and saw Lesser Whistling-duck, Indian Spot-billed Duck, Black-headed Ibis, Indian Pond Heron, Cattle Egret, Intermediate Egret, Brahminy Kite, Shikra, Red-wattled Lapwing, Rock Pigeon, Spotted Dove, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, Oriental Magpie Robin, Purple-rumped Sunbird and Long-billed Sunbird.

After visiting the tank we got on to the southern highway, passing the Kalu River and Bentota River before reaching our hotel at 5.30pm and checking into our rooms. After an early dinner we retired to our rooms to be ready for the next day's early morning whale watching.

Day 3

Monday 9th February

We started the day at 6.15am with tea and then proceeded to Mirissa pier for the day's whale watching tour, taking our picnic breakfast with us. At the pier we saw Whiskered Tern and Great Crested Tern. Our boat ride was nice and calm as we cruised into the Indian Ocean, and it was not too long before we had a close sighting of a Blue Whale. When we came back to the pier we encountered more birds including Large-billed Crow, House Crow and Rose-ringed Parakeet, and we also saw a Lemon Emigrant butterfly.

We returned to our hotel at midday for lunch, and then met again in the lobby at 3.00pm. We left for some birdwatching at a nearby forest where we encounter Little Grebe, Little Cormorant, White-breasted Waterhen, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Green Imperial Pigeon, Asian Koel, Indian Swiftlet, Little Swift, Crested Treeswift, Blue-

tailed Bee-eater, White-throat Kingfisher, Black-hooded Oriole, Barn Swallow, White-bellied Drongo, Red-vented Bulbul, Yellow-billed Babbler and Common Myna.

We headed back to the hotel at 6pm and met for the checklist at 7.30pm. After a briefing about the next day we had dinner.

Day 4

Tuesday 10th February

Once again we started the day with tea at 6.15am and then proceeded to the pier to board the vessel. After about an hour's journey into the ocean we spotted a Bryde's Whale and stayed to have a good look at it. After a couple of hours in the ocean we headed back to the pier and on our way we saw a pod of Spinner Dolphins which cruised with us towards the shore. At the pier we saw Gull-billed Tern.

We were back at the hotel by 1pm for lunch then afterwards, about 3pm, we left for Kirala forest. We encounter Little Egret, White-bellied Fish Eagle and House Sparrow among many other birds.

We were back at the hotel by 6pm, met for the checklist at 7.30pm and ended the day with dinner at 8pm.

Day 5

Wednesday 11th February

We again had our tea at 6.15am before we headed to the pier for our last day of whale watching. Today we again saw Bryde's Whale and a pod of Spinner Dolphins. Whilst we didn't see any Blue Whales, we were lucky enough to see a Whale Shark which stayed on the surface for some time. We returned to the pier around 12.30pm then headed back to the hotel for lunch.

After lunch we visited a Stilt Fishing community and watched the unique fishing style that is only seen in Sri Lanka. We encounter Northern Pintail, Common Tern, Little Tern, White-winged Tern and Brown Noddy on our way to Galle Fort. At a nearby patch, bird sightings included Indian Peafowl, Purple Heron, Great Egret, Indian Cormorant, Darter, Purple Swamphen, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Asian Palm Swift, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Common Kingfisher, Brown-headed Barbet, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Indian Robin and Pale-billed Flowerpecker; and we also saw Toque Macaque and Palm Squirrel.

We headed back to the hotel at 6pm and did the checklist at 8pm. After dinner we retired to our rooms for the night.

Day 6

Thursday 12th February

We left Mirissa at 8am and proceeded to Yala which was our next destination, on the way spotting Grey Langur.

We reach Yala in the afternoon and after lunch we went for a nature walk where we saw Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Lesser Adjutant, Eurasian Spoonbill, Grey Heron, Spot-billed Pelican, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover, Mongolian Plover (Lesser Sand Plover), Greater Sand Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Temminck's Stint, Caspian Tern, Green Bee-eater, Chestnut-headed

Bee-eater, Pied Kingfisher, Coppersmith Barbet, Brown Shrike, Common Iora, Richard's Pipit, White-browed Bulbul, Common Tailorbird and Thick-billed Flowerpecker. After a very successful walk we returned to the hotel, did the checklist and had dinner at 8.30pm.

Day 7

Friday 13th February

We left the hotel at 5.20am with a picnic breakfast and lunch for our first day of Safari. The early morning start usually guarantees sightings of Leopard which is active during this time. Our luck was so good that as we entered the park we spotted a Leopard perched in a tree while Spotted Deer, Sambar and Water Buffalo stood alert on the ground for an imminent ambush attack. As we proceeded further in to the park we saw Asian Elephant, Golden Jackal, Ruddy Mongoose, Water Buffalo, Wild Boar, Indian Hare and Indian Flying Fox. The number of birds we saw was also high with sightings of Barred Buttonquail, Woolly-necked Stork, Common Kestrel, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Great Thick-knee, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Pacific Golden Plover, Green Sandpiper, Jacobin Cuckoo, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Sirkeer Malkoha, Greater Coucal, Indian Roller, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Oriental Skylark, Plain Prinia, White-browed Fantail, Asian Paradise-flycatcher, Brahminy Starling, White-rumped Shama, Black-throated Munia, and Black-headed Munia. We had our picnic breakfast and lunch at scenic locations inside the park and returned to the hotel late evening.

We did our checklist at 7.30pm, then after a briefing about the next day we had dinner and headed to our rooms for the night.

Day 8

Saturday 14th February

Valentine's Day started early for our group at 5.15am with the love for wildlife seen in everyone's eyes. We once again headed to the park in search of more action and again saw Leopard, Asian Elephant, Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, Sambar, and Rudy Mongoose. We also saw Mugger Crocodile and Land Monitor. The new birds we encounter today were Common Snipe, Blue-faced Malkoha, Gray Nightjar, European Bee-eater, Common Hoopoe, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Indian Pitta, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Small Minivet, Purple Sunbird and Baya Weaver.

We got back to the hotel at 6.30pm and did the checklist at 8.00pm before dinner.

Day 9

Sunday 15th February

After breakfast we left the hotel at 8am and proceeded to Colombo via Tissamaharama where we visited a few ancient temples and saw the paddy fields being tendered by farmers. We then stopped at Bundala National Park for some birding and sightseeing.

At 1pm we stopped at a restaurant in Udawalawe, also enjoying the surrounding environment which was full of birdlife. After lunch we headed straight to the final hotel of our tour which is situated close to the airport. We reach the airport hotel by 7pm and had our last dinner.

Day 10

Monday 16th February

At 7.30am we met in the restaurant for breakfast and did the last checklist for the tour. We counted a total of 124 species of birds and 16 of mammals. We left the hotel at 9.30am and headed to the airport where thanks were said to Upul and Devaka before the group caught a flight back to the UK.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!

Species Lists

Birds (bold text =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	Indian Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
6	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
7	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
8	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
9	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
10	Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
11	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
12	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
13	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
14	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
15	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
16	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
17	Great Egret	<i>casmerodius albus</i>
18	Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
19	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
20	Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
21	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
22	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
23	Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
24	Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
25	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
26	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
27	White-bellied Sea Eagle, White-bellied Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
28	Gray-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Lcthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>
29	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
30	Changeable Hawk Eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>
31	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amauornis phoenicurus</i>
32	Purple Swampfen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
33	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
34	Great Thick-knee	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>
35	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
36	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>
37	Red-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
38	Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
39	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrus alexandrinus</i>
40	Lesser sand Plover, Mongolian Plover	<i>charadrius mongolus</i>
41	Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>
42	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
43	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
44	Common Red shank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
45	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
46	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
47	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>

	Common name	Scientific name
48	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
49	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
50	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
51	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
52	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
53	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
54	Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
55	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirunda</i>
56	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
57	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
58	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
59	Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>
60	Common Pigeon, Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
61	Spotted Dove	<i>Stigmatopelia chinensis</i>
62	Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>
63	Sri Lanka Green Pigeon	<i>Treron (Pompadora) pompadora</i>
64	Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
65	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
66	Jacobin Cuckoo, Pied Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
67	Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>
68	Asian Koel	<i>Endynamys scolopacerus</i>
69	Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Rhopodytes viridirostris</i>
70	Sirkeer Malkoha	<i>Taccocua leschenaultii</i>
71	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
72	Gray Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus indicus</i>
73	Indian Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia unicolor</i>
74	Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
75	House Swift, Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
76	Crested Treeswift, Gray-rumped Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
77	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
78	Green Bee-eater, Little Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
79	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
80	Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
81	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
82	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
83	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
84	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
85	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
86	Common Hoopoe, Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
87	Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
88	Crimson-fronted Barbet	<i>Megalaima rubricapillus</i>
89	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
90	Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>
91	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos mahrattensis</i>
92	Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
93	Sri Lanka Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis (pondicerianus) affinis</i>
94	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
95	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
96	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
97	Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
98	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>

	Common name	Scientific name
99	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
100	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
101	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caeruleus</i>
102	Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
103	Oriental Skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>
104	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
105	White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
106	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
107	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
108	White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
109	Asian Paradise-flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
110	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
111	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
112	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>
113	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
114	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
115	Indian Robin, Black-backed Robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus</i>
116	Thick-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>
117	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
118	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
119	Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>
120	Loten's Sunbird, Long-billed Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia lotenia</i>
121	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
122	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
123	Black-throated Munia	<i>Lonchura kelaarti</i>
124	Black-headed Munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>

Mammals

1	Toque Macaque	<i>Macaca sinica</i>
2	Grey Langur	<i>Presbytis entellus</i>
3	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
4	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>
5	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
6	Indian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
7	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
8	Spotted Deer (Chital)	<i>Cervus axis</i>
9	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
10	Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus arnee</i>
11	Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>
12	Indian Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
13	Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus giganteus</i>
14	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>
15	Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>
16	Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>

Reptiles

1	Land Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>
2	Common Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
3	Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>