

Sri Lanka - Blue Whales & Leopards

Naturetrek Tour Report

19 - 28 December 2015



Indian Pangolin- Yala



Blue Whales - Mirissa



Malabar Pied Hornbill - Yala



Water Buffalo- Yala

Report compiled by Upul Wickramasinghe & Chaminda Dilruk
Images by Chaminda Dilruk



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 participants: Upul Wickramasinghe & Chaminda Dilruk (leaders) with 13 Naturetrek clients

Highlights

Blue Whale sightings were plentiful from the first day at sea, with one on our first day, two on the second, and a colossal twelve on the third day. A Bryde's Whale with its calf and many Spinner Dolphins were bonus sightings and made the sea excursions memorable. In Yala Park, although the Leopard eluded us, we were lucky with sightings of Sloth Bear, and recorded one of the first sightings of Indian Pangolin outside the park. Overall, the tour yielded some wonderful wildlife sightings in our short span of days.

Day 1

Saturday 19th December

Group members met at the airport and boarded a flight to Sri Lanka to start their tour.

Day 2

Sunday 20th December

The flight arrived at Colombo airport at 12.50pm, and we left the airport an hour later. We reached our hotel at 5.30pm and, after checking-in, everyone relaxed until 7pm when the leaders briefed the group on the activities for the next three days before going to dinner.

Day 3

Monday 21st December

We started the day at 6am with tea/coffee, and then went to the Mirissa pier for our first day of whale watching, taking our picnic breakfast with us. At the pier we encountered Greater Crested, Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns. At 10am we had our first encounter with the majestic Blue Whale, just 20 metres from our boat. We also encountered a pod of 20-25 Spinner Dolphins. We returned to the pier at 11.45am and then went to the hotel for lunch.

After the lunch we visited the Kirelakele forest where we encountered Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Little Grebe, Lesser Whistling Duck, Great Cormorant, Grey-headed Swamphen, and other garden birds. We returned to the hotel early as it started raining heavily. Upon our return we did the checklist and, after a briefing for the next day, we finished the day with dinner.

Day 4

Tuesday 22nd December

Once again we had tea/coffee at 6am and then left for the pier for our second day of whale watching. Our first encounter was a pod of around 60 Spinner Dolphins followed by a Bryde's Whale. After another 30 minutes we encountered two Blue Whales which stayed around for almost an hour.

We returned to our hotel at 1.45pm for lunch, and then relaxed until 3pm. A few of the group stayed at the hotel to enjoy the pool while the rest left for the Kiralakele forest. Garganey, Common Moorhen, and Grey and Purple Herons, along with Land and Water Monitors were seen.

We were back at the hotel by 6pm and later did the checklist and briefing, followed by dinner.

Day 5

Wednesday 23rd December

Today we had tea/coffee at 6am and reached the pier at 6.20am to board our boat. Our first sighting was a massive pod of around 150 Spinner Dolphins, followed by four Blue Whales and a Bryde's Whale with its calf. Due to a large swarm of Krill feeding on the algae in this area, many more Blue Whales were being attracted to the spot, and soon we were watching 12 Blue Whales in a feeding frenzy around the boats.

After a very exciting time at sea, we returned to the hotel by 12.30pm for lunch. We later visited a spice garden and then went to the Galle Fort to enjoy the old city and its surrounding moats and lighthouse.

Once back at the hotel we did our checklist and, after the briefing, had a small cocktail which was organized specially for us before dinner.

Day 6

Thursday 24th December

After breakfast we checked out of the hotel at 8.30am and proceeded to Yala for our next three nights. En route and during a brief stop near Bundala National Park, sightings included Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Northern Pintail, Asian Openbill, Eurasian Spoonbill, Great Stone-curlew, Pacific Golden Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Pin-tailed Snipe, Common Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, White-winged Tern, Indian Roller, Common Kingfisher, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Small Minivet and White-browed Bulbul.

We reached our next hotel by 12.30pm and had lunch. The group then relaxed until 4pm when we set out for a nature walk around the hotel premises.

We returned to the hotel by 6.15pm and did the checklist at 7pm. During dinner one of the hotel staff approached Chaminda and asked him to quickly come with her as she had seen an animal which she couldn't identify in the hotel garden. After seeing the animal, Chaminda hurried back to the group and took them to see one of the rarest and shy mammals in Yala: the Indian Pangolin. We spent a lovely 45 minutes watching it.

Day 7

Friday 25th December

We left the hotel at 5.30am after tea/coffee for our first safari at Yala, taking a picnic breakfast and lunch with us. Since it was a long holiday weekend the park was more crowded than usual so we had a bit of a waiting to get in. Once inside the park we spotted a number of mammals: Toque Macaque, Grey Langur, Ruddy Mongoose, Wild Boar, Water Buffalo, Spotted Deer, Indian Hare and Asian Elephant. We also saw lots of birds including Barred Buttonquail, Woolly-necked and Black-necked Storks, Grey Heron, Spot-billed Pelican, and Booted Eagle.

The group was a little disappointed that they hadn't seen Leopard and Sloth Bear, but that soon changed when we spotted a Sloth Bear roaming around the hotel premises on our way back from the park. We watched the bear for a good 15-20 minutes before returning to the hotel.

In the evening we completed our checklist before dinner.

Day 8**Saturday 26th December**

Today we left the hotel at 5.30am, again with a picnic breakfast, and entered Yala Park at 6am. We encountered many of the mammals and birds we had seen the previous day.

At noon we returned to the hotel for lunch, and afterwards had some time to relax. We met again at 4.30pm and had a nature walk around the hotel premises.

We did the checklist at 7pm followed by a briefing about the next day, and finished with dinner.

Day 9**Sunday 27th December**

We left the hotel at 8.30am after breakfast and proceeded to Colombo via Tissamaharama. During our journey we spotted Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Plum-headed Parakeet, Layard's Parakeet, Banded Bay Cuckoo, Brown-headed Barbet, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Yellow Wagtail, Orange-billed Babbler, Sri Lanka Hill Myna, Oriental White-eye and White-rumped Munia.

We reached our next hotel at 5.45pm and had dinner at 7pm.

Day 10**Monday 28th December**

After breakfast, we left the hotel at 9.45am and went to the airport for our flight back to the UK, where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

Species Lists

Mammals

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Toque Macaque	<i>Macaca sinica</i>
2	Grey Langur	<i>Presbytis entellus</i>
3	Purple-faced Leaf Monkey	<i>Presbytis vetulus</i>
4	Sloth Bear	<i>Melursus ursinus</i>
5	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>
6	Brown Mongoose	<i>Herpestes fuscus</i>
7	Indian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
8	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
9	Spotted Deer (Chital)	<i>Cervus axis</i>
10	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
11	Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus arnee</i>
12	Indian Pangolin	<i>Manis crassicaudata</i>
13	Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>
14	Grizzled Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa macroura</i>
15	Layard's Squirrel	<i>Funambulus layardi</i>
16	Indian Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
17	Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus giganteus</i>
18	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>
19	Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>
20	Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>

Reptiles & Others

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Land Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>
2	Water Monitor	<i>Varanus salvator</i>
3	Common Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
4	Green Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes calotes</i>
5	Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
6	Green Turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>

Birds (endemics in bold)

	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	Knob-billed Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>
6	Cotton Pygmy Goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>
7	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
8	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
9	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
10	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
11	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
12	Black-necked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>
13	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
14	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
15	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
16	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>

	Common name	Scientific name
17	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
18	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
19	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
20	Great Egret	<i>casmerodius albus</i>
21	Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
22	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
23	Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
24	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
25	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
26	Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
27	Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
28	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
29	White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
30	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
31	Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
32	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
33	Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malayensis</i>
34	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>
35	Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatu</i>
36	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amauornis phoenicurus</i>
37	Grey-headed Swampfen	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>
38	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
39	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
40	Great Stone-curlew	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>
41	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
42	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>
43	Red-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
44	Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
45	Gray Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
46	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
47	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
48	Lesser sand Plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
49	Pin-tailed Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>
50	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
51	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
52	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
53	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
54	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
55	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
56	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
57	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
58	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
59	Small Pratincole	<i>Glareola lactea</i>
60	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
61	Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
62	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
63	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
64	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
65	Bridled Tern	<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>
66	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
67	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
68	Common Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>

	Common name	Scientific name
69	Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>
70	Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
71	Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus beryllinus</i>
72	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
73	Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>
74	Layard's Parakeet	<i>Psittacula calthropae</i>
75	Jacobin Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
76	Banded Bay Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sonneratii</i>
77	Asian Koel	<i>Endynamys scolopacerus</i>
78	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
79	Indian Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia unicolor</i>
80	Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
81	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
82	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
83	Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
84	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
85	Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
86	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
87	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
88	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
89	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
90	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
91	Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
92	Yellow-fronted Barbet	<i>Megalaima flavifrons</i>
93	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
94	Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyroceros gingalensis</i>
95	Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>
96	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos mahrattensis</i>
97	Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
98	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
99	Orange Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
100	Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>
101	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
102	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
103	Jerdon's Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>
104	Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
105	Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
106	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
107	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
108	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
109	Sri Lanka Swallow	<i>Cecropis hyperythra</i>
110	Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
111	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
112	Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
113	Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
114	Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
115	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
116	Jerdon's Bushlark	<i>Mirafra affinis</i>
117	Oriental Skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>
118	Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>
119	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
120	White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>

	Common name	Scientific name
121	Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>
122	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
123	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
124	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
125	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
126	White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
127	Indian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
128	Orange-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides rufescens</i>
129	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
130	Sri Lanka Hill Myna	<i>Gracula ptilogenys</i>
131	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
132	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>
133	Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>
134	Oriental Magpie-robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
135	Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>
136	Brown-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa muttui</i>
137	Thick-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>
138	Legge's Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum vincens</i>
139	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
140	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
141	Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>
142	Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
143	Sri Lanka White-eye	<i>Zosterops ceylonensis</i>
144	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
145	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
146	Indian Silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>
147	White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
148	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>

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