

Sri Lanka- Blue Whales & Leopards including Sinharaja Extension

Naturetrek Tour Report

26 March - 7 April 2016



Sloth Bear



Blue Whale



Spinner Dolphin



Indian Pitta

Report compiled by Saman Kumara & Suminda Dodangoda
Images by Saman Kumara



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Tour participants: Saman Kumara & Suminda Dodangoda (leaders) with 12 Naturetrek clients

Highlights

The Blue Whales put on a great show during our sea excursion, along with many Spinner Dolphins. Very close encounters with Leopard and Sloth Bear made it a successful tour with all the big mammals showing themselves. In total we saw 21 species of mammals, 15 species of reptiles and 'others', and 137 bird species.

Day 1

Saturday 26th March

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

Day 2

Sunday 27th March

The flight arrived at Colombo airport at 1.15pm. We left the airport at 2.15pm and reached our hotel at 5pm. We met later for a briefing regarding forthcoming whale watching excursions, and afterwards had dinner.

Day 3

Monday 28th March

We left the hotel at 6.20am after a cup of tea/coffee and proceeded to the pier. We set out on a whale watching trip and around 8am we spotted many pods of 10 -15 Spinner Dolphins along with Flying Fish. Our first sighting of a Blue Whale was around 10am and it stayed with us for almost an hour. During this time we were able to see it dive six times, three with its tail up. It appeared to be feeding on krill in the vicinity. Everybody had very good views as it was very close to the boat.

We were back at the hotel at 1.30pm and after having lunch we had some time to relax. At 3.30pm we left for Galle Fort and enjoyed views of the city from within the ramparts where there was much well preserved colonial architecture.

We returned to the hotel at 7pm and completed our daily checklist and briefing for the next day before dinner.

Day 4

Tuesday 29th March

Today we left the hotel at 6.30am after having tea/coffee and reached the pier at 7am for our morning sea excursion. Again around 8am we saw a pod of more than 50 Spinner Dolphins spread across the ocean. They swam surrounding our boats as if we were in a race, and the crystal clear waters gave us some good views. Our Blue Whale for the day appeared at 10am and once again we enjoyed a show lasting over an hour.

We returned to the hotel at 1pm for lunch. After lunch we left for Kiralakele to do some birding. Sightings included Knob-billed (Comb) Duck, a very rare sighting in Sri Lanka, Lesser Whistling Duck, Grey-headed Swamphen, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Painted Stork, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher, Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater and Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot.

We returned to the hotel at 6.45pm and after our routine of checklist and briefing, we had dinner.

Day 5

Wednesday 30th March

We left the hotel once again at 6.30am and were on our boat sailing on the ocean by 7.45am. Our first sighting for the day was Flying Fish followed by three Blue Whales in the distance.

We returned to the hotel at 2.30pm and had lunch. After lunch we visited a tea factory and learned how tea is made. The rains that followed us to the tea factory set the ideal temperature for us to enjoy and sample different varieties of the tea produced there.

After our tea tour we visited a turtle hatchery which cares for injured turtles, usually rescued from fishing boats or washed up on the shore. Here we saw Green Turtle, Hawksbill Turtle and Leatherback Turtle been cared for. There were many eggs been incubated in a patch of sand within this premises and being cared for by the staff until they hatch. After leaving the turtle hatchery we went down to the beach and enjoyed the sunset and a leisurely walk on the beach.

We got back to the hotel at 7pm. After doing our checklist, the hotel organized a special cocktail for us which was followed by dinner.

Day 6

Thursday 31st March

We had an early breakfast and checked out of the hotel at 8.30am. En route to Yala we stopped at a farm and enjoyed some local sweets, and also had some king coconut water. We reached our next hotel at 1.30pm and had lunch. We then relaxed in the hotel enjoying its facilities.

At 5pm we did a nature walk around the hotel gardens and saw a very rare Flying Snake on the restaurant roof. We also saw Spot-billed Pelican, Indian Darter, Indian Cormorant and Great Egret along with many Mugger Crocodiles and a single Estuarine Crocodile which were absorbing the dying heat of the day. From the garden we went towards the beach and spent some time there before returning to the hotel at 6.30pm.

Later we did our nightly routine of checklist, briefing and dinner.

Day 7

Friday 1st April

After tea/coffee, we left the hotel at 5.30am for our first jeep safari. We entered the park at 6am and were lucky with a sighting of a Sloth Bear within half an hour of entering. We also encountered Spotted Deer, Sambar Deer, Golden Jackal, Ruddy Mongoose, Grey Mongoose, Asian Elephant, Grey Langur, Wild Boar, Water Buffalo, Giant Squirrel and Black-naped Hare.

We stopped beside the river around midday and had our packed lunch while enjoying sightings of Torque Macaques. Before long we were under attack by the intruding macaques which wanted our food, and Saman and Suminda had to stand guard to keep them at bay. After an exciting lunch we relaxed until 2.30pm as the temperature and humidity were very high.

On our way out of the park we spotted a Leopard which was ambushing a Sambar Deer and we watched it skilfully manoeuvre itself closer to the unsuspecting prey. Unfortunately it was closing time for the park so we had to leave before the Leopard got its dinner! It had been a very good safari and everyone was pleased with the day's sightings.

We returned to the hotel at 6pm and did the checklist at 7.15pm followed by the briefing and dinner.

Day 8

Saturday 2nd April

Once again we left the hotel at 5.30am for our safari. Today we encountered Spotted Deer, Grey Langur, Golden Jackal, many Ruddy Mongoose, Wild Boar, Giant Squirrel and Palm Squirrel. Bird sightings included White-bellied Sea Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Sirkeer Malkoha and Pied Cuckoo.

Around 11.45am seven of the group chose to return from the park with Suminda whilst Saman continued the safari with the other five group members. Many of the mammals and birds seen in the morning were again spotted, along with another sighting of a Leopard, this time at a distance, camouflaged amongst the bushes.

We all met back at the hotel at 7.15pm for our evening meeting followed by dinner.

Main Tour Day 9: Extension Day 1

Sunday 3rd April

We had breakfast at 8am before checking out of the hotel at 9am. We visited a colony of Indian Flying Fox in the Tissamaharama lake area, and also spotted a nesting Brown-headed Barbet, Rose-ringed Parakeet and Grey Heron.

We reached Silver Ray restaurant at 1pm and after having lunch, three of us left with Saman for the Sinharaja Forest Reserve extension while the rest of the group proceeded to Colombo for their last night's stay.

The Sinharaja party reached Blue Magpie Lodge at 5pm and had a cup of tea and time to relax. At 7.15pm we did our checklist followed by a briefing and dinner.

Main Tour Day 10: Extension Day 2

Sunday 4th April

Today the main tour party travelled to Colombo airport and caught a return flight back to the UK where their Naturetrek adventure ended.

Meanwhile the extension party had breakfast 5.30am, and at 6am left in the jeep for the rainforest. We encountered lots of birds including Layard's Parakeet, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, White-faced Starling, Black-throated Munia, Legge's Flowerpecker, Sri Lanka Crested Drongo, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, Orange-billed Babbler, Spot-winged Thrush, Black-capped Bulbul, Brown-capped Babbler, Malabar Trogon and Sri Lanka Frogmouth. There were also lots of interesting butterflies and other insects, and we spotted Sri Lanka Birdwing, Blue Mormon, Blue Bottle, Spot-swordtail, Sri Lanka Treenymph, Great Crow, Cruiser, Commander, Glad-eye Bush Brown and White Four Ring along with many Water Striders, Robber Fly, spiders, snakes and reptiles.

We returned to the hotel at 3pm just as it started to rain very heavily which kept us indoors for the rest of the day. We did the checklist at 7.15pm followed by a briefing before dinner.

Extension Day 3

Sunday 5th April

We had breakfast at 5.30am and then left for the rainforest with our picnic lunch. Today we encountered Sri Lanka Hill Myna, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, Black-headed Cuckooshrike and Brown-capped Babbler along with many other species.

We returned to the hotel at 3pm and once again it rained heavily in the evening. We met at 7.15pm for the checklist and after the next day's briefing we had dinner.

Extension Day 4

Sunday 6th April

Today we had breakfast at 7am and then visited the Sinharaja village. We encountered many birds, butterflies, dragonflies and reptiles during our walk.

We returned to the hotel at 10am and had lunch at noon. At 1.15pm we checked out of the hotel and set off for Colombo via the southern highway. We reached the Airport Garden Hotel at 4.30pm and later did our checklist and had dinner.

Extension Day 5

Monday 7th April

After breakfast, we left the hotel at 9.45am and went to the airport. We caught 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>Semnopithecus (Presbytis) entellus</i>
3	Purple-faced Leaf Monkey	<i>Trachypithecus (Presbytis) vetulus</i>
4	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
5	Sloth Bear	<i>Melursus ursinus</i>
6	Indian Grey Mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>
7	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>
8	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
9	Indian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
10	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
11	Spotted Deer (Chital)	<i>Cervus axis</i>
12	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
13	Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus arnee</i>
14	Layard's Striped Squirrel	<i>Funambulus layardi</i>
15	Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>
16	Grizzled Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa macroura</i>
17	Indian Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
18	Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus gigantean</i>
19	Lesser False Vampire Bat	<i>Megaderma spasma</i>
20	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>
21	Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>

Reptiles & Others

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Bengal (Land) Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>
2	Asian Water Monitor	<i>Varanus salvator</i>
3	Black-cheeked Lizard	<i>Calotes nigrilabris</i>
4	Sri Lanka Kangaroo Lizard	<i>Otocryptis wiegmanni</i>
5	Oriental (Common) Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
6	Green Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes calotes</i>
7	Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
8	Estuarine Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>
9	Round-Snout Pygmy Frog	<i>Pseudophilautus femoralis</i>
10	Flying Snake	<i>Chrysopelea taprobanica</i>
11	Brown Vine Snake	<i>Oxybelis aeneus</i>
12	Green Vine Snake	<i>Oxybelis fulgidus</i>
13	Indian Cobra	<i>Naja naja</i>
14	Green Turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
15	Flying Fish	<i>Cheilopogon sp</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	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
7	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
8	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
9	Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
10	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
11	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
12	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
13	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
14	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
15	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
16	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</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 Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
22	Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
23	Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
24	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
25	White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
26	Gray-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Lcthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>
27	Crested (Oriental) Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
28	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
29	Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>
30	Watercock	<i>Gallicrex cinerea</i>
31	Grey-headed Swampphen	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>
32	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
33	Indian Stone-curlew (Thick-knee)	<i>Burhinus(oedicnemus) indicus</i>
34	Great Stone-curlew (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	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
40	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrus alexandrinus</i>
41	Lesser Sand (Mongolian) Plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
42	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
43	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
44	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
45	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
46	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
47	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
48	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
49	Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
50	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
51	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
52	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
53	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
54	Spotted Dove	<i>Stigmatopelia chinensis</i>
55	Common Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>

56	Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>
57	Sri Lanka Green Pigeon	<i>Treron (Pompadora) pompadora</i>
58	Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
59	Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus beryllinus</i>
60	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
61	Layard's Parakeet	<i>Psittacula calthropae</i>
62	Jacobin Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
63	Asian Koel	<i>Endynamys scolopacerus</i>
64	Sirkeer Malkoha	<i>Taccocua leschenaultii</i>
65	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
66	Sri Lanka Frogmouth	<i>Batrachostomus moniliger</i>
67	Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>
68	Indian Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia unicolor</i>
69	Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
70	Crested Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
71	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	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
75	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
76	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
77	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
78	Malabar Trogon	<i>Harpactes fasciatus</i>
79	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
80	Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
81	Yellow-fronted Barbet	<i>Megalaima flavifrons</i>
82	Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>
83	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos nanus</i>
84	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos mahrattensis</i>
85	Lesser Yellownape	<i>Picus chlorophus</i>
86	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
87	Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
88	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>
89	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
90	Orange (Scarlet/Flame) Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
91	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
92	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
93	Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
94	Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
95	Sri Lanka Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa ornata</i>
96	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
97	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
98	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
99	Sri Lanka Swallow	<i>Cecropis (daurica) hyperythra</i>
100	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
101	Sri Lanka Drongo	<i>Dicrurus (paradiseus) lophorhinus</i>
102	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
103	Jerdon's Bushlark	<i>Mirafra affinis</i>
104	Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>
105	Black-capped Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>

106	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
107	Yellow-browed Bulbul	<i>Acritillas indica</i>
108	Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>
109	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
110	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
111	White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
112	Indian (Asian) Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
113	Brown-capped Babbler	<i>Pellorneum fuscicapillus</i>
114	Dark-fronted Babbler	<i>Rhopocichla atriceps</i>
115	Orange-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides rufescens</i>
116	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
117	Ashy-headed Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax cinereifrons</i>
118	Sri Lanka Hill Myna	<i>Gracula ptilogenys</i>
119	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
120	White-faced Starling	<i>Sturnornis albofrontatus</i>
121	Spot-winged Thrush	<i>Zoothera spiloptera</i>
122	Sri Lanka Thrush	<i>Zoothera imbricata</i>
123	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
124	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
125	Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus (Saxicoloides) fulicatus</i>
126	Legge's Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum vincens</i>
127	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
128	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma (Nectarinia) zeylonica</i>
129	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris (Nectarinia) asiaticus</i>
130	Loten's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris (Nectarinia) lotenius</i>
131	Oriental White-Eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
132	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
133	Indian Silverbill	<i>Euodice (Lonchura) malabarica</i>
134	White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
135	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
136	Black-throated Munia	<i>Lonchura kelaarti</i>
137	Black-headed Munia	<i>Lonchura Malacca</i>

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