

# Sri Lanka – Blue Whales & Leopards

Naturetrek Tour Report

23 - 31 December 2018



Sloth Bear



Orca



Mugger Crocodile



Black-naped Hare

Report & images compiled by Indika Jayatissa



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Participants: Saman Kumara and Indika Jayatissa (leaders) with 09 Naturetrek clients

## Highlights

Despite no luck of sighting any Blue Whales on this tour overall marine wildlife sightings were at its optimal with a very rare sighting of the Fin Whale along with Bryd's Whales, Killer Whale, Spinner & Rissos's Dolphins and Green Turtle. Further inland at Yala fantastic sightings of a Sloth Bear with its cub delighted the group and as the day progressed the Leopards of Yala displayed themselves in all their grandeur by walking right in front our jeeps. The impressive Elephants of Yala also made their appearance along with Wild Boar, Sambar Deer and Golden Jackal. In total we saw 23 mammal species, 07 species of reptiles, amphibians and fish and 120 bird species to make another successful trip.

### Day 1

**Saturday 22nd December**

The tour started with an overnight flight from the UK to Sri Lanka.

### Day 2

**Sunday 23rd December**

Arrive Colombo; travel to Weligama

The flight arrived at Colombo airport at 12.30pm, where we met the group, we left the airport at 1.45pm and encountered the following birds on the way to our hotel: Indian Peafowl, Black-headed Ibis, Eastern Cattle Egret, Brahminy Kite, Rock Dove, Spotted Dove, House Crow, Indian Jungle Crow, Barn Swallow, We also spotted Purple-faced Leaf Monkey at the hotel premises after arriving at the hotel, Fisherman's Bay Resort at 4.40pm. We met for at 7.15pm for briefing and dinner and afterwards called it a night.

### Day 3

**Monday 24th December**

Weligama

We left the hotel at 6.00 am with packed breakfasts and reached Mirissa harbour at 6.45am for our first whale-watching trip. After about 1 hour and 30 minutes we saw our first marine mammal, a small pod of Spinner Dolphins. Further ahead we encountered around 10 Rissos's Dolphins and just after passing them, we were lucky to see a pod of Short-finned Pilot whales next to our boat and had some good sightings. While returning ashore we saw two Green Turtles. We were back at the hotel at 2.00pm for lunch and relaxed until 3.30pm.

In the afternoon we visited the Kirala Kele sanctuary where we encountered Lesser Whistling Duck, Indian Peafowl, Asian Open bill, Indian Pond Heron, Little Cormorant, Brahminy Kite, White-breasted Waterhen, Red-wattled Lapwing, Spotted Dove, Asian Palm Swift, Indian Swiftlet, White-throated Kingfisher, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Black-hooded Oriole, Red-vented Bulbul, Sri Lanka Swallow, Greater Coucal, Common Myna, Loten's Sunbird, Grey-headed Swamphen, Green Imperial Pigeon, Whiskered Tern.

We returned to the hotel at 6.15pm and did the checklist at 7.15pm, followed by the Christmas Eve dinner and a briefing for the next day.

**Day 4****Tuesday 25th December**

## Weligama

We left the hotel at 6.00am and once again set off for a whale-watching excursion. Today we had our first whale sighting at around 9.30 am. Two Bryde's Whales were seen. More sightings of Spinner Dolphins and Bryde's Whales continued. We were delighted with the sighting of a Fin Whale which is a rather rare sight. Two mating Green turtles were sighted on our way back to the shore. We had lunch back at the hotel at around 1.30 pm

In the afternoon we visited the historic Galle Fort. After visiting the fort we returned to the hotel at 7.30pm and dinner followed at 8.15 pm.

**Day 5****Wednesday 26th December**

## Weligama

Another whale-watching excursion yielded sightings of Spinner Dolphins and two Killer Whales. We returned to the hotel at 02.00 pm and had our lunch at 2.30pm.

At 4.00 pm we visited a turtle hatchery in a nearby city to see the injured and rescued turtles. There we had a chance to see the Green turtles, Olive riddley turtle, logger-head turtle and hawksbill turtle at the conservation center.

We were back in the hotel at 5.45pm and our usual routine of checklist and dinner followed.

**Day 6****Thursday 27th December**

## Yala

We had our breakfast at 8.30 am and left for Yala. On our way we stopped at Bundala Wetland and encountered Great-thick knee, Black headed Ibis, Painted Stork, Grey Heron, Yellow Bittern, Water Cock, Common Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Wood sandpiper, Eurasian Spoonbill, Intermediate Egret, Little Egret and a Grey Langer.

We reached Yala at 2pm and had lunch. At 5pm we started birding around the hotel garden and saw Great Cormorant, Indian Pitta, Black crown night heron, lesser sand plover, Paddy field pipit, Pacific golden plover, and Indian Silver bill, Orange breasted Green Pigeon, Yellow billed babbler, Oriental white eye, Jacobin Cuckoo, White browed bulbul, Purple-rumped sunbird and Indian nightjar.

Wild boar, Black-naped hare, Brown mongoose, Giant squirrel were also seen with few Mugger Crocodiles and a Land monitor.

Checklist and dinner followed our return to the hotel at 6pm.

**Day 7****Friday 28th December**

## Yala

We had tea/coffee at 5.00am and then set out with packed meals for our first jeep safari at Yala National Park. Our first sighting was of a Sloth Bear mom with a cub. Afterwards, we saw many Spotted deer, Sambar Deer, and Water Buffalos. During breakfast we spotted another Sloth bear on top of a rock which was our third sloth bear sighting for the day. Ruddy Mongoose, Wild Boars, Golden Jackal, Asian Elephants, and two superb views of the apex predator of Yala, the Leopard. Birds included Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Eurasian Hoopoe, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, Crested Treeswift, Brown-backed Needletail, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Small Minivet, Jerdon's Bush Lark, Oriental Skylark, Paddyfield Pipit, Grey-bellied cuckoo, Yellow wattled lapwing, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Changeable hawk eagle. For reptiles, we saw few Land Monitors, Fan-throated lizard, and Mugger crocodiles.

We returned to the hotel at 6.00pm and did the checklist at 7.15pm, followed by the briefing and dinner.

**Day 8****Saturday 29th December**

## Yala

We had tea/coffee at 5am and then left the hotel at 5.15am with packed breakfast and lunch. We entered Yala National Park at 6.25am. Spotted deer, Grey Langurs, Wild boars, Sambar Deer, Water buffalos, Ruddy mongoose were seen. White-bellied sea eagle, Black rumped flameback woodpecker, White-napped woodpecker, Woolly necked stork, Kentish Plover, Brown fish owl, Common Iora, Little stint, Common Kestrel, Barred-button quail, Greater coucal, and Malabar pied hornbill was seen during the safari. After a rest at the beach before lunch, four group members returned to the hotel whilst the rest continued on a full day safari. We had further sighting of a Leopard as it decided to walk in front of our jeep. We returned to the hotel at 6pm and did our checklist before dinner.

**Day 9****Sunday 30th December**

## Katunayake

We had breakfast at 7.30am and left the Cinnamon Wild Hotel at 8.30am. En-route to Colombo we had a quick visit to Tissa temple. Then we had a chance to see a large colony of Indian flying foxes. Oriental darter, Indian cormorant, Jungle owlet, Brown fish owl, Indian scopes owls were also seen around this area. En-route to Colombo, we had lunch at 1.45 pm. After lunch the group proceeded to Katunayake for their final night's stay at the Gateway Airport Garden Hotel.

We arrived at the hotel bit late due to the heavy traffic on 31<sup>st</sup> day. We had a briefing about the next day's program before dinner.

**Day 10****Monday 31st December**

## Return to UK

After breakfast the group checked out of the hotel and proceeded to the airport in time for a return flight to the UK, where their Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

## Species Lists (Endemic species in bold; some previous/alternative names in brackets)

### 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	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>
7	Brown Mongoose	<i>Herpestes fuscus</i>
8	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus kotiya</i>
9	Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
10	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
11	Spotted Deer	<i>Cervus axis</i>
12	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
13	Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus Bubalis</i>
14	Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>
15	Grizzled Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa macroura</i>
16	Indian Hare- Black-naped Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
17	Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus gigantea</i>
18	Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>
19	Fin Whale	<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>
20	Orca ( Killer Whale)	<i>Orcinus orca</i>
21	Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncates</i>
22	Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella mulla</i>
23	Risso's Dolphin	<i>Grampus griseus</i>

### Birds

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
2	<b>Sri Lanka Junglefowl</b>	<i>Gallus lafayettii</i>
3	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
4	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
5	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
6	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
7	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
8	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
9	Yellow Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>
10	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
11	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
12	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
13	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
14	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
15	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
16	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
17	Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
18	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
19	Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
20	Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>
21	Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
22	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>

Common name	Scientific name
23 Oriental Darter - <a href="#">Darter</a>	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
24 Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
25 <a href="#">Changeable Hawk Eagle</a>	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
26 Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
27 White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
28 White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
29 Watercock	<i>Gallicrex cinerea</i>
30 Barred Buttonquail	<i>Turnix suscitator</i>
31 Great Stone-Curlew - <a href="#">Great Thick Knee</a>	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>
32 Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
33 Yellow-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>
34 Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
35 Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
36 Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
37 Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
38 Lesser sand Plover, Mongolian Plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
39 Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
40 Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
41 Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
42 Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
43 Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
44 Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
45 Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
46 Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
47 Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
48 Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
49 Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
50 Rock Dove - <a href="#">Common Pigeon</a>	<i>Columba livia</i>
51 Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
52 Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>
53 <b>Sri Lanka Green Pigeon</b>	<i>Treron pompadora</i>
54 Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
55 Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
56 Jacobin Cuckoo, Pied Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
57 Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
58 Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>
59 Indian Scops Owl- <a href="#">Collared Scops Owl</a>	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>
60 Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>
61 Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>
62 Indian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>
63 Crested Treeswift , Gray-rumped Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
64 Indian Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus unicolor</i>
65 Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
66 Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
67 Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
68 White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
69 Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
70 Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</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 Eurasian Hoopoe - <a href="#">Common Hoopoe</a>	<i>Upupa epops</i>
75 Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
76 <b>Crimson-fronted Barbet</b>	<i>Psilopogon rubricapillus</i>
77 Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos mahrattensis</i>
78 Black-rumped Flameback, Lesser Goldenback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
79 White-naped Woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>
80 Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
81 Alexandrine Parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>
82 Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
83 Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
84 <b>Sri Lanka Woodshrike</b>	<i>Tephrodornis affinis</i>
85 Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
86 Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
87 Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
88 Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
89 White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
90 White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
91 Indian Paradise Flycatcher - <a href="#">Asian Paradise Flycatcher</a>	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
92 House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
93 Indian Jungle Crow (Large-billed)- <a href="#">Large-billed Crow</a>	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>
94 Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>
95 Jerdon's Bush Lark	<i>Mirafra affinis</i>
96 Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
97 White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
98 Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
99 <b>Sri Lanka Swallow</b>	<i>Cecropis hyperythra</i>
100 Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
101 Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
102 Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
103 Purple Swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
104 Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
105 Oriental White-Eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
106 Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
107 Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>
108 Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>
109 Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
110 White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
111 Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
112 Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
113 Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
114 Loten's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>
115 House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
116 Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
117 Indian Silverbill, White-throated Silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>
118 Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
119 Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
120 Blyth's Pipit	<i>Anthus godlewskii</i>

## Reptiles & Amphibians

Common name	Scientific name
1 Bengal (Land) Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>
2 Asian Water Monitor	<i>Varanus salvator</i>
3 Oriental (Common) Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
4 Fan - throated Lizard	<i>Sitana ponticeriana</i>

Common name	Scientific name
5 Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
6 Common House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>
7 Russele's Viper	<i>Daboia russelii</i>

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