

Sri Lanka

January 22nd – February 4th 2004

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I don't know why more Americans don't visit Sri Lanka. The food was very good.
We managed to avoid curry almost every day.
An American, writing in a trip report on the Internet

Itinerary

Jan.22nd 14 hours after leaving London, we touched down in Colombo, making a welcome re-acquaintance (for those of us who were at the 2003 Bird Fair) with Amila Salgado, our guide for the next two weeks. We headed for a well-deserved rest at our first hotel and although six Eurasian Thick-knees stopped us for a while at a park near the airport, we soon rejoined the mêlée of Colombo's morning rush hour, the traffic mostly driving on the left in horn-blaring, tangled confusion. The attendant blur of Buddhist stupas and shrines mingled with the more familiar artefacts of Christianity, rough-and-tumble roadside shops and obligatory advertising hoardings, some in Arabic script, some in the looping script of Sinhala. Like twisted coat hangers hung like washing on wires, close inspection reveals a more amphibious quality, some characters recalling frogs, others Toby Jug frogs and frogs in mustard pots.

It was difficult to avoid the feeling that the very plush Galadari Hotel was a touch inappropriate, particularly as a wedding reception with all its trimmings greeted our arrival, the photographer arranging the bride with the eternal precision of a White-tailed Plover and bridesmaids and guests looking resplendent, while we looked and felt like extras from a Bruce Willis post-devastation film set.

Still, 'tis wondrous what lunch can do, and we metamorphosed brightly into the afternoon and our first birding excursion of the trip, to Talangama Tank, on the outskirts of the city, where many of us supped our first Sri Lankan birds, then tea and cakes at a rest house overlooking the lily-covered lake. Though the similarity to Goa was striking, the abundance of Cotton Pygmy-geese and Yellow and Black Bitterns, with full-tailed Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, Spot-billed Pelicans and Forest Wagtails flying to roost underlined that we were somewhere very different.

Little and Indian Cormorants, Spot-billed Pelican; Yellow and Black Bitterns, Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Lesser Whistling Duck, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Brahminy Kite, White-bellied Sea-eagle, Shikra, Purple Swamphen, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Eurasian Thick-knee; Pacific Golden and Red-wattled Plovers, Whiskered Tern, Spotted Dove, Alexandrine Parakeet; Stork-billed, White-throated, Pied and Common Kingfishers, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Forest Wagtail; Red-vented and White-browed Bulbuls, Zitting Cisticola, Plain Prinia, Asian Paradise Flycatcher; Purple-rumped and Loten's Sunbirds, Black-hooded Oriole, Brown Shrike, White-bellied Drongo, Black-headed Munia.

Jan.23rd Well, it's good to get a good night's sleep after a long journey, but no such luck. Instead we were up at 4.45 to begin our tour of this lush, green island that lies at the tip of the Indian subcontinent. Passing rice paddies and date palms we headed for the forest at Bodhinagala, a small tract of secondary lowland rain forest south-east of Colombo, where Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot became the first of Sri Lanka's endemics to succumb to our prying eyes. The lovely crimson race of Black-rumped Flameback and the local race (or endemic if you follow the Ceylon Bird Club's view) of Black-crested Bulbul competed for our attention with Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, Brown-headed Barbets, Black-naped Monarch, Crested Treeswifts and a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, while nosy gangs of Black-fronted Babblers tried to pretend they weren't looking at us and a couple of handsome Sri Lanka Junglefowl made it two endemics for the day thus far.

We progressed steadily through the hot and humid forest in search of the endemic Green-billed Coucal, but the dry litter on the forest floor made it difficult to move inconspicuously and it was some time and a couple of diversions before Amila heard one calling close to the track. Hearing and seeing are two entirely different kettles of coucals, however, and although we were very close to one for some time, only a couple of us managed good views as it flew into view in low vegetation near a clump of bamboo and almost immediately down again on to the forest floor and out of sight. However, almost immediate compensation came in the form of a party of Sri Lanka Grey Hornbills, endemic to the island, some red-faced, almost embarrassed-looking Toque Macaques and impressive Giant Squirrels. We wove our way steadily back to the bus and to lunch, passing Crested Serpent Eagle and Oriental Honey-buzzard on the way, and a perched Besra that gave almost as much cause for deliberation than the average case of multiple fraud in the High Court before it was adjudged guilty.

Moving on eastward, we arrived beneath the imposing forested ridges of Sinharaja in late afternoon. Piling into jeeps for the rickety journey up the rutted forest track, we stopped as a bunch of Orange-billed Babblers hove into view and quickly added our first Layard's Parakeets and Legge's Flowerpecker at the same spot; three more endemics, making no fewer than seven for the day – eight if you count the Black-crested Bulbul, still regarded as an endemic race by the Field Ornithological Group of Sri Lanka (FOGSL in future to save on depletion of the world's forests).

Martin's Simple Lodge is, well, simple. Fortunately, his insects are also of a similar persuasion and we saw no mosquitoes in our well-ventilated rooms, nothing more linguistically complicated than fly or flea being allowed in. The basic nature of the lodge was to be more than compensated for by its proximity to the forest, saving a long drive from the nearest town and the dreadful last leg up the track. The food was good and, frankly, we were all so tired by now that sleep was a foregone conclusion for most of us, especially after liberal helpings of arrack and soda.

Oriental Honey-buzzard, Crested Serpent Eagle, Besra, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Emerald Dove, Green Imperial Pigeon, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Layard's Parakeet, Green-billed Coucal, Crested Treeswift, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Brown-headed Barbet, Black-rumped Flameback; Black-crested, Yellow-browed and Black Bulbuls, Blue-winged Leafbird, Common Iora, Oriental Magpie Robin, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Black-naped Monarch; Dark-fronted and Orange-billed Babblers, Velvet-fronted Flowerpecker, Legge's Flowerpecker, Oriental White-eye, Scaly-breasted Munia.

Jan.24th Sinharaja is probably Sri Lanka's most important reserve, internationally significant for its biodiversity and encompassing some of its few remaining tracts of undisturbed primary lowland rainforest. We made the most of our on-site accommodation, rising early to catch the first Black Bulbuls of the day as they perched noisily on bamboo stems outside the lodge and our first Sri Lanka Blue Magpies, moving rather furtively about the branches below. As we enjoyed the waking morning from the road above the lodge, the sun rose slowly in the cleft between ridges, breaking into a beautiful dawn, full of Scarlet Minivets, Yellow-fronted Barbets and Crested Drongos.

Dropping down the access road from the lodge, we were soon enjoying wonderful views of Malabar Trogons and our first Spot-winged Thrush, Brown-breasted Flycatcher and Large-billed Leaf Warbler, the latter distinctively tail-flicking in the undergrowth not unlike a fantail. Moving up and on, along the wide and sandy trail that runs from the lodge through the forest, this was the first encounter for many of us with the terrestrial leech. Although the little devils were largely confined to the low leafy vegetation at the trail edges it was not long before everyone realised that we had been provided with leech socks for good reason. Still, we progressed watchfully, flushing a Cinnamon Bittern from fields below us, and after a fairly quiet spell with few feeding flocks in evidence, two Indian Scimitar-babblers and an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher that flashed across the trail in front of us. Diligent work located the tiny pink and blue apparition in the forest and everyone was treated to excellent views as it sat in quiet contemplation of its dappled, shadowy world.

The forest trail was also alive with spectacular butterflies. Above us, paper-thin Ceylon Tree Nymphs drifted flimsily over the treetops and great Ceylon Birdwings sailed across clearings, while lower down Blue Glassy Tigers and striped Clippers flitted across the trails, Grass Yellows danced along the verges and the warm brown eye on the closed wing of a Glad-eye Bushbrown peered back evenly at whatever it might distract.

The morning ended with fabulous views of a male Sri Lanka Frogmouth, incubating what appeared to be a fluffy white chick in a shallow lichen-lined nest on a narrow branch and Graham and Brian demonstrated their digi-scoping skills, producing some memorable images of this enigmatic and much sought-after species.

Thunder rolled about us throughout a hot and humid afternoon, but it remained more or less dry as we headed into the forest around the research station after finding a couple of White-faced Starlings in the trees above the trail. A party of Ashy-headed Laughingthrushes slipped unobtrusively through low vegetation in the enclosed and rather gloomy forest, then careful work by Amila and some patience from the rest of us allowed excellent views of a Scaly Thrush, close to another Spot-winged Thrush on the forest floor. Very different from the much shorter billed individuals some of us have seen in Nepal and China, it has more in common with Dark-sided and Long-billed Thrushes and provoked a good deal of discussion on the subject of splitting and lumping. At least six Sri Lanka Blue Magpies were clambering about at the rear of the research station cookhouse as we stopped for tea and, emerging into the open, we found a couple of groups of Sri Lanka Mynas, making a total of six more endemic species today.

Back at the lodge, we discovered that Sheila had interrogated Martin Wijesinghe at length over lunch, discovering his skills as an accomplished field biologist, to the extent that he has an endemic species of yam named after him. Still sounds like a leg-spinner to me, though.

Cinnamon Bittern, Pompadour Green Pigeon, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Indian Swiftlet, Brown-backed Needletail, Malabar Trogon, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Lesser Yellownape, Scarlet Minivet; Spot-winged and Scaly Thrushes; Greenish and Large-billed Leaf Warblers; Brown-breasted and Asian Brown Flycatchers, Indian Scimitar-

babbler, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Crested Drongo, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, White-faced Starling, Sri Lanka Myna.



Sri Lanka Frogmouth by Graham Crick

Jan.25th Missing Red-faced Malkoha from yesterday's list of endemics, we made fairly rapid ground (for a change) along the main forest trail to a patch of high forest, close to a fish-filled pool, where I saw the species on my previous visit. Amila soon heard a couple calling and we were soon enjoying prolonged views as they moved about the trees above, with two more Malabar Trogons close by and, for some of the group, a party of Sri Lanka Spurfowl crossing the track. Several more malkohas and Crested Drongos later and it was time to go, so we bade farewell to Martin and his Simple Insects, clattered down the access road one more time and rejoined our bus to head back into the dry zone once again.

Our goal was Udawalawe NP, a mix of abandoned teak plantation, grassland and scrub jungle, roughly half way to our next destination at Yala NP. Dark clouds decorating the hills we had just left, Black Eagle and Black-shouldered Kite over the grassy lowlands, villages with small shops and waving children in bright sunshine, people standing and talking on a bright Sunday morning; just some of the images along the way. In fact, we had some time to take them in, as the journey proved to be particularly convoluted as a result of road works and diversions, confirming the general impression that in Sri Lanka time is more of an illusion than in most other places; lunchtime doubly so.

We eventually reached Udawalawe at 4pm, boarding jeeps for a drive into the open savannah with its wonderful backdrop of serried hills, stretching away towards the pinnacle of Adam's Peak that we would see again from the north in a few days time. Wind in our hair, we set out past Malabar Pied Hornbills in the scattered trees, Rufous-winged Bushlarks and Paddyfield Pipits on the dusty track and a female Pallid Harrier drifting over the open grass; redolent of an African landscape that added to the list of images rapidly accumulating from this land of constant surprises. Grey-bellied Cuckoo and Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike in low branches, lovely Orange-breasted Green Pigeons, Ashy and Jungle Prinias and a party of Tawny-bellied Babblers in trackside bushes and a Blue-faced Malkoha moving away from us into deep cover, then a Pied Cuckoo and our first Indian Pitta, low down in the undergrowth. All were eagerly digested as the afternoon wore on and white clouds nestled in the valleys of the hills that overlook the plain, the last pink lines of daylight diminishing into a beautiful sunset, illuminating the cone of Adam's Peak beneath the leaden sky.

We arrived at TASKS jungle camp well after dark and the chance to chill out over a beer was most welcome. It had been a long day.

Pallid Harrier, Black Eagle, Changeable Hawk-eagle, Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Plum-headed Parakeet; Pied and Grey-bellied Cuckoos; Blue-faced and Red-faced Malkohas, Green Bee-eater, Indian Roller, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Indian Pitta, Rufous-winged Bushlark, Paddyfield Pipit, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Indian Robin; Ashy, Grey-breasted and Jungle Prinias; Tawny-bellied and Yellow-eyed Babblers, White-rumped Munia.

Jan.26th TASKS jungle camp lies about 35km south-east of Udawalawe, and we spent the morning in the camp and the surrounding scrub and secondary growth that recalled the camp at Chitwan in Nepal, where several of us were only a year ago. An Orange-headed Ground Thrush in the camp grounds was possibly taken too lightly by those of us who have seen it on numerous occasions in Goa, but it proved to be the only one of the trip, while White-browed Fantail, White-rumped Shama, Besra, Oriental Honey-buzzard, Small Minivet and at least four Indian Pittas were seen between us.

A Jungle Owlet appeared in the trees above one of the huts before we moved on from the camp towards our next base at Yala NP, where we would spend the next three nights in the hope of seeing the park's

speciality, leopard, of which there are probably 35 in an area comprising 14,000 hectares. On the way, we stopped at the tanks at Pannegamuwa and Weerawila, finding Watercock and Gull-billed and Little Terns at the first and, as it began to rain, a large flock of Garganey and Black-tailed Godwits, Caspian Tern, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Greater and Lesser Sandplovers, Oriental Skylarks and Painted Storks at the second.

We arrived at Yala in time for lunch and an afternoon jeep drive, during which it was overcast with heavy rain. The richness of the park was immediately apparent as we ticked off Great Thick-knee, Eurasian Spoonbill, several Indian Pittas, Barred Buttonquail, a large flock of Rosy Starlings, with a few Brahminy Starlings nearby, a superb Black-necked Stork and a rain-drenched Sirkeer Malkoha, just about identifiable as it wiggled away into tree near the track. Some excellent mammals included numerous Black-naped Hares, the ubiquitous Black-faced Langur, Indian Grey and Stripe-necked Mongooses and a male Elephant with magnificent tusks, just a few yards from us at the track edge. Large groups of Spotted Deer and a quite magnificent stag Sambar left us well satisfied with an excellent introduction to this excellent place.

Until the evening log, that is.

In one of those unforgettable moments of timing, like Donald Pleasance reading Edgar Allan Poe, as we came to the end of the mammals section, Fran announced that she, Sandy, Alan and Sheila had been the crew in the jeep that had seen a Leopard. Yes, a Leopard. A Leopard? Yes, a Leopard.

Painted and Black-necked Storks, Eurasian Spoonbill, Garganey, Barred Buttonquail, Watercock, Great Thick-knee; Lesser and Greater Sandplovers, Yellow-wattled Plover; Gull-billed and Caspian Terns, Sirkeer Malkoha, Jungle Owlet, Oriental Skylark, Small Minivet, White-rumped Shama, White-browed Fantail, Thick-billed Flowerpecker; Brahminy and Rosy Starlings.

Jan.27th Our game drive was in the morning today, though it has to be said that many of us were pretty tired and things meandered on somewhat, to rocky outcrops and likely areas where leopards might be found, though the nearest we got to the magic beast was feeding our sausages (in the vegetarian packed breakfast!) to a couple of cats by the beach. We added a couple of Yellow-crowned Woodpeckers, Woolly-necked Stork, Drongo Cuckoo, Grey-headed Fish-eagle and a few Indian Silverbills and returned for lunch, prior to leaving for Bundala in the afternoon.

Three Jackals crossed our paths as we left Yala (if black cats mean good luck, what does that mean – ten years of shoplifting?), but lunch did not help the soporific effect of our luxurious accommodation and we drifted around the ponds and pans of Bundala until woken by an excellent tern flock, in which Great and Lesser Crested Terns stood side by side with others of a Caspian, Little and Whiskered persuasion. Amila waxed lyrical at a party of five Sand Martins – a good record for Sri Lanka – and we spent some time over a whirling flock of marsh terns that included two White-winged Blacks, both tatty individuals in a plumage unfamiliar to any of us.

Decamping in late afternoon to a palm grove at Tissamaharama, where we had tried unsuccessfully for White-naped Woodpecker a couple of days before, we were treated to excellent views of at least one in the trees above the track, as well as some puzzled looks from the locals, probably wondering what all the coconut-spotting was about.

And so to bed, as fireflies danced along the beach

Woolly-necked Stork, Grey-headed Fish-eagle, Grey-headed Gull; Great and Lesser Crested Terns, White-winged Black Tern, Drongo Cuckoo; Yellow-crowned and White-naped Woodpeckers, Baya weaver, Indian Silverbill.

Jan.28th Our rehabilitation was completed by a late breakfast (well, it's all relative, we were earlier than any of the other punters) and a walk along the beach, passing Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Indian Pitta and White-rumped Shama, until Amila, playing his cards very close to his chest, surprised us with three gorgeous Small Pratincoles at a rolling, gravelly section of the beach. For me, these gentle little creatures have magical connotations, from the evocative location where I first encountered them, on sandbars in the Mekong between Thailand and Laos, to ghostly apparitions flying with soft, fluid quietness over green paddies on late Goan afternoons. Here, though, on the stark, bare gravelly humps of a Sri Lankan beach, were the best views I have ever had.

Several of us – names have been omitted to protect the innocent – decamped to the hotel swimming pool, prior to our afternoon jeep ride and our last chance of seeing the big cat. Our driver gave it a good shot, arriving back at the camp gates well after the deadline of 7pm and attracting a good deal of flak in the process, but we were not to see leopard on this trip. We probably knew the outcome in advance – Yala might be a great place to see it, but it remains an elusive animal and, like all cats, you get what they want to give you and when they feel like giving it, all of which preserves its mystique, of course. The 5½ hours of being mercilessly bumped about did have its compensations, however, none better than a herd of elephants with two calves, protected from their inquisitiveness by the surrounding adults, while birds included Indian Nightjar, Watercock, Grey-headed Fish-eagle and a party of 31 European Bee-eaters, which would have been a tick for Amila had he been in the right jeep.

Small Pratincole, Indian Nightjar, European Bee-eater.

Jan.29th Departing from Yala after breakfast we called in at Palatupana saltpans, where highlights included a full house of terns and seven pale, streaked Red-rumped Swallows of the Himalayan race *H.d.nipalensis*, very different from the brick-red Sri Lankan *H.d.hyperythra* – all credit again to Amila for his unflagging interest in pointing out variations in species that helped make our trip so rewarding.

The remainder of the journey to the highlands of Nuwara Eliya was largely one of impressions as we passed from the arid scrub of Yala into a country of rice paddies, palm groves and houses nestling beneath the shade of rain trees along the roadside, those under construction bearing effigies to ward off evil spirits. The body part seems fairly universal – a cloth-draped figure with arms outstretched – but the head of each is highly variable, from pumpkin-like affairs that wouldn't have fooled the sort of evil spirit that might hang around Andy Pandy to buffalo skulls that would worry a Millwall supporter. The head made from a grey oil can with eyes painted on the side was simply surreal, probably most effective on evil spirits that themselves had partaken of too much evil spirit, not that we would know anything about that sort of thing.

Bright white-uniformed schoolchildren, playing with a happy gaiety that we see so infrequently, a woman drawing water from a well, slow brown buffalo padding steadily through just-flooded terraces; all were images of a country that was growing on us by the day, one in which we were becoming increasingly happy to be.

We reached the edge of the high plateau after two hours, climbing up winding roads past a spectacular waterfall, the largest trees we had seen since leaving Sinharaja and signs of reforestation where slash-and-burn agriculture had begun to be replaced with regenerating forest. The spectacular view through the cleft in the escarpment to the lowlands we had just left was accompanied by our first Crimson-fronted Barbet – endemic species or subspecies depending on whether your point of view corresponds with FOGSL or Ceylon Bird Club – and a welcome cup of tea, appropriate to the plantations we began to drive through as we climbed on, eventually stopping at Surrey Estate, about half an hour from Nuwara Eliya. Here, the narrow track through the forest produced close views of the endemic Brown-capped Babbler, then Southern Hill Myna at a nest hole, though attempts to see Brown Wood Owl proved to be nebulous at best for most of us.

Audible gasps could be heard as we emerged from the bright bustle of Nuwara Eliya's shops and traffic and drove through the gates of St.Andrew's Hotel, seeing its half-timbered colonial façade and manicured gardens for the first time – the archetypical hill retreat of the British, scattered across Asia from Simla in India to Fraser's Hill in Malaysia. A fine dinner and a good red wine in the wood-panelled dining room, high ceilings, wide stairs and photographs of the Nuwara Eliya valley from around the late 1800s and we were in another world, though heavy legs reminded us that it was one that was situated at an altitude of 6,200 feet.

Brown Wood Owl, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Brown-capped Babbler, Southern Hill Myna.

Jan.30th Two minibuses arrived for us at some unearthly hour and we trundled off along undulating, winding roads to Horton Plains, arriving at the famous Arrenga Pool just after 5.30, under a sparkling blanket of a cold night sky, shooting stars zipping across the twinkling blackness like tracers as dawn waited out of sight below ink-black hills.

The contents of the minibuses piled out into the empty road as first light promised long-awaited warmth and although Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush was silent, a Blackbird began to sing from the low ridge above us and the first Sri Lanka Woodpigeon tumbled across the sky, as subtly as our own. Yellow-eared Bulbul and Sri Lanka White-eye made it three endemics in quick succession and, at last, a whistling thrush began to call at around 6.15, its thin, even whistle coming from gnarled, moss-covered trunks just below the road. It began to come steadily closer but at the critical moment, half an hour later, headlights appeared along the road and a couple of tourists climbed out of their transport and walked down the road past the pool. The calling stopped and shadows shortened as the sun began to climb, warming us at last and bringing a Dull-blue Flycatcher into sunlit bushes by the road; four endemics thus far. Passing vehicles and stubborn silence from the whistling thrush began to make it look as if we might be unlucky – they are probably the most unpredictable of the world's small band of *Myophonus* species – but at 7.15 it started calling again, very close to the road this time. Nerves taut, alert to every movement, we waited as it continued to call and on the dot of 7.30 a small dark blue thrush flew low over the road and across the pool, named after the bird itself, followed shortly after by a female. The magic continued with a furtive Sri Lanka Bush Warbler moving low down at the water's edge, skulking like a Cetti's, and fine views of an Indian Scimitar-babbler in the sunlit trees above the road, the warm orange quality of the light emphasising that the morning was still in its infancy. For some reason, I found myself alone at the pool when Sheila attracted my attention, suggesting that I should come closer, but very slowly, and very quietly. Very slowly, very quietly. What is that bird, sitting there, she asked? Where, I wondered. There, just in the leaves opposite, sat a Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, sunning itself! Of all the things I could have said, my response was fortunately one of the more polite alternatives, but as I frantically tried to attract the attention of the others it began to move up and away into the bushes and out of sight. A bit of persistence and cuckoo-like thinking located it again as it moved

unobtrusively through the trees above the road but only one or two of us were fortunate to get views of a species that is notoriously difficult to see and which, for me, concluded one of the most memorable couple of hours birding I have experienced anywhere in the world. A still morning, the sun coming up, bringing the birds with it. The hunter knows it, the cat and the sparrowhawk; concentration so tight that nothing else can get in. An insight into a secret world that few humans bother with.

Walking on along the road, the trees with their lichen-covered branches suddenly opened out into rolling grassland, and we were transported from cloud forest into an upland landscape that could have been Wales or Scotland, small thin streams winding along narrow rush-filled gullies through dew-sparkled grass hummocks, with only occasional Pied Bushchats to suggest that might not be Europe, after all. Paddyfield Pipits and Zitting Cisticolas and more Indian Scimitar-babblers at the forest edge stressed the point and some forest workers stopped in contemplation of all that was strange about them, then realised that perhaps we were not quite so odd, after all, as we stopped to say hello.

A Steppe Buzzard appeared overhead as we walked back to the pool, inducing some discussion with Amila, since Steppe Buzzards are not supposed to occur this far south, but this individual was as close to the classic fox-red morph depicted in plate 342 of Dick Forsman's *Raptors of Europe and the Middle East* as makes no difference. Back at the pool, some loud crashing about in the trees above the road revealed two huge and obviously not very happy Bear Monkeys, the woolly-coated upland race of Purple-faced Leaf monkey but so different that it was like seeing another species.

Suddenly, it was time to go, and we slipped reflectively away, downhill to Pattipola railway station where, as if in a time warp, we wandered on to the platform like kids in the 1950s. We had come to check out reports of a pair of Jerdon's Baza in a eucalyptus plantation by the station and there, said Fran, they were, the female first, then the male, collecting some very fetching sticks for her in an ultimately successful pre-copulatory offering. Both gave fabulous views, captured by the digi-scopers before we moved on again, heading back towards Nuwara Eliya and its famous Victoria Park, passing a party of three Oriental Honey-buzzards in a staggering variety of plumages en route.

Mingling with afternoon strollers, many in Muslim garb, we began a circuit of the park and John soon found a first winter male Kashmir Flycatcher in trees by the roofless toilet block, though it proved very elusive, even when it was located again later. Some clearing of the undergrowth in the park has taken place and as a result it seems to be less productive than it was three years ago – we failed to find a single pitta – but a Shaheen Falcon (the Sri Lankan race of Peregrine) circled overhead and in a corner of the park where Amila had found Pied Thrush on his pre-tour recce we were treated to three of these almost mythical birds. Difficult to find away from where they breed in the Himalaya and northern India and their high altitude wintering areas in southern India and Sri Lanka, they fed in a mimosa that would be familiar on their breeding grounds. They didn't disappoint, a female setting the scene for the appearance of a superb male, like a black and white Siberian Thrush with powerful greenish-yellow bill that was quite simply stunning.

It was difficult to keep up the pace of this wonderful day, so we didn't, retiring to a corner of the lake at Nuwara Eliya where we tried in vain to find Black-throated Munia, suspected by Amila to have undergone an altitudinal migration to paddies lower down, where we might be lucky enough to find them in a couple of days time. However, we did see several Pintail Snipe and our White-breasted Waterhen numbers took a boost before we returned to the hotel for another very welcome meal at the end of what, for me, had been the best day of the trip.

Jerdon's Baza, Shaheen Falcon (Peregrine), Sri Lanka Woodpigeon, Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Yellow-eared Bulbul, Pied Bushchat, Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush, Pied Thrush, Sri Lanka Bush Warbler, Dull-blue Flycatcher, Sri Lanka White-eye, Kashmir Flycatcher.



Bamboo Orchid by Graham Crick

Jan.31st We wandered, pre-breakfast, into the hills immediately behind St. Andrew's Hotel, finding leeks, potatoes, brassicas, carrots and beetroot in small patches of cultivation and three Grey-headed Canary Flycatchers around a sunlit snag low down in the forest. These crops are sent to the lowlands in exchange for fruit that cannot be grown up here, in an exchange that has probably been taking place for centuries. Bidding farewell to Nuwara Eliya, one of the high points of the tour in more ways than one, we stopped briefly at the lake again as we departed for Kitulgala, to be treated to a Black-shouldered Kite, but no munias.

We wound our way slowly down into the lowlands, to our next base, at Rafter's Retreat, near Kitulgala, enclosed in forest-clad valleys that spilled down to the river overlooked by our accommodation, a series of cabins in an old palm plantation. We were nearing Sri Lanka's Independence Day and the river was full of bathers, several of whom came up to us to say hello. A group of males from Colombo were partying as we sat for lunch, apparently singing love songs to an accompanying guitar and drinking quite happily, just like they don't do at home.

Crossing the river through hordes of bathers in a dugout that took three journeys to take us all, we trudged through the hot and humid forest to a small patch of cultivation, finding a green pit viper in trees at the water's edge on the way. The mix of birds was similar to Sinharaja in some ways; Orange-billed Babblers, Layard's Parakeets, Black Bulbuls, pittas and hanging parrots, but in addition to three Crested Drongos the fields held at least 11 Emerald Doves, more than any of us had ever seen together. A Crested Goshawk soared briefly over the forest and a couple of Lesser Yellownapes showed well, but the light had all but faded as we walked back, illuminating only a couple of Spot-winged Thrushes on the way.

Crested Goshawk, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher.

Feb.1st Our attention first thing in the morning was devoted to the palm plantation beneath which our cabins nestled, as we scoured the trees for Chestnut-backed Owlet, accompanied by a couple of frisky horses. We eventually found an individual that tested our direction-giving skills to the absolute limit, but which then provided really good views in the telescope. After a couple of Tickell's Blue Flycatchers, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill and Giant Wood Spider, the tiny male keeping well out of the way of the huge female, we left the butterflies and river views of Rafter's Retreat and headed for Kandy, accompanied by some rather disconcerting talk from the back seat about needing to be focussed for shopping. As Amila suggested, there was a flock of Black-throated Munias at rice paddies on the way, though there was probably more to be learned from the form of a luckless fruit bat, hanging from the same wires that a squirrel scampered along, full of life, than from our visit to the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, where the temple guide rather offhandedly explained everything and nothing in a plethora of dates. We took lunch overlooking the city and headed off once again on narrow, winding forest roads and tea plantations to Hunas Falls, at an altitude of nearly 3,000 feet, accompanied so memorably by Sheila's new magic flute.

Paused in contemplation of the setting sun, close dark hills framing soft blue-grey ridges receding into the distance and smoke circling slowly over the flat, shadowed land in between, the view suddenly recalled the Kathmandu valley, seen from Phulchowki, just a year ago. How much has flowed by since then.

Chestnut-backed Owlet, Black-throated Munia.

Feb.2nd Our bus took us up the hill behind Hunas Falls to Simpson's Forest, which produced some very good birds, notably two Pacific Swallows, a Black Eagle, several Layard's Parakeets (how on earth did I miss them last time?), Hill Mynas, a brief Common Hawk-cuckoo and, as I was forced to depart from the group to a bend in the trail, a feeding flock that comprised 15 Yellow-fronted Barbets, Black Bulbuls, Oriental and Sri Lanka White-eyes and several hanging parrots, minivets and fantails. By the time the group caught up they had mostly dispersed, though a female Pied Thrush still remained. Further up, we had very brief views of a large raptor over the ridge, then better views, if not all we would have wished for, of a Mountain Hawk Eagle, gliding along the side of our ridge to the next patch of forest.

Then, like the Rolling Stones, it was time to move on to the next gig, at Dambulla Country Club, situated at the edge of Kandalama Tank, about half way between Kandy and the old capital of Anuradhapura. So, heading once more from the wet into the dry zone, we passed into plantation country, existing alongside paddies and habitation in a more gentle exploitation of the countryside than is evident in many such situations around the world, from the oil palm plantations of Borneo to the wheat fields of Kent. We made the obligatory stop at a spice plantation, for a session of massage, sniffing and defoliation that was actually quite entertaining. At least, they held our attention for a good deal longer than on my previous visit when we went

to a spice plantation on our second day and the demonstrator had to compete for our attention with several bird species that were new to us. I seem to recall that he gave up.

We left the plantation after lunch and arrived at Kandalama in late afternoon, where some brief birding in the hotel grounds produced several Great Thick-knees, a party of 18 Black-crowned Night Herons on an island in the lake, White-winged Black Tern and about a hundred Rosy Starlings.

Mountain Hawk-eagle, Common Hawk-cuckoo, Pacific Swallow, Common Woodshrike.

Feb.3rd Leaving Kandalama early, we headed to Anuradhapura, where part of the group stayed behind to frolic in the swimming pool and visit the old city, while the rest took the opportunity to visit Mannar, in the north-west of Sri Lanka, closed to visitors until about a year ago because of the political strife between Sri Lanka and Tamil separatists.

The avian highlight for the city dwellers was an Oriental Honey-buzzard, displaying in a series of steep undulations, clapping its wings together repeatedly over its body at the apex of each, looking for all the world like a giant dipterocarp seed in the sky. For our visit to the ancient city of Anuradhapura, dating back to the fourth century BC, we were accompanied by the infectiously enthusiastic R.B.Edirisinghe – 'Eddie' – whose tangle of white hair may well have last seen a pair of scissors at some similarly distant time in the past, as delicately observed by Mick. The Bo-tree, under which the Buddha sat in his search for enlightenment, said to have been brought to Sri Lanka from India around 250 BC, was planted in the grounds of the city, rendering Anuradhapura sacred to Buddhists the world over. The site was built to house over 11,000 monks and features four great stupas, including the brick-built Jetavana, at 360 feet high the tallest stupa (or dhageba, to use Eddie's preference) in the world. Now a World Heritage site, it is remarkable to realise that for years the site was embedded in the jungle; one of the stupas is still covered in earth and remnant vegetation and another, though largely restored, is still undergoing the process of being returned to its original condition. This site does not have the scenic magnificence of Macchu Picchu or the feeling of spiritual vibrancy of Bodhinath in Kathmandu, but there is a palpable calm serenity about the place that was brought to life by Eddie's passion for his subject; a far more edifying few hours than our scuttle around the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, which just goes to show that things are not always to be found where you search for them.

Mannar is no longer an island as a causeway now connects it to the mainland, either side of which is water and tidal mudflats, packed with waders, while the tip of Mannar is not unlike like Morjim Beach in Goa with roosting gulls, terns and waders. Highlights included uncountable number of waders and terns, including Heuglin's Gull, 300 Caspian Terns, five Crab Plovers, 14 Avocets, 20 Great Knots, the last two of which were seen from the causeway, 16 Greater Flamingos, Richards Pipits and Grey Francolins, while Black Drongos and Rollers were abundant on roadside wires. Spot-billed Ducks were found nesting on a small tank near the start of the causeway and a long-billed curlew had us wondering about the possibility of Eastern Curlew, though it seems most likely to have been a very long billed example of Eurasian Curlew. Although Mannar is now government controlled it has only just been opened up to visitors and evidence of fighting between government forces and Tamil Tigers was everywhere, from bullet holes in buildings to gun-emplacements and restricted areas that are still not accessible because of uncleared land mines. A visit to this area is not recommended without a Sinhala-speaking guide as soldiers are very much in evidence and are understandably very nervous about bins and especially scopes and cameras. Giantes Tank, visited on the way back, produced 250 Painted Storks, at least 1000 Openbills and uncountable numbers of egrets.

Back at the hotel, an evening bird walk produced a wonderful display from several Asian Paradise Flycatchers, all of the brown form, sallying out from their perches in the trees by the lake to dip in the water and back again. We had excellent views of the northern, golden-backed race of Black-rumped Flameback and a male Shikra so still by the path that I thought it was a plastic one!

Conscious of the fact that our time was fast running out, we took a last delicious dip in the pool under the sparkling night sky.

Feb.4th A last walk round the hotel grounds in the morning produced Large Cuckooshrike, among a good sprinkling of common dry zone species, then it was time to go and we headed off rather wistfully to Puttalam salt pans, on the coast to the north of Negombo, our last stop before the flight home, or so we thought. We found a couple of Terek Sandpipers on a small, disused area then spent a short while getting our eye in with a flock that consisted mainly of Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints and Broad-billed Sandpipers, of which there were at least 18, the largest flock I have seen.

Through coastal palm groves and increasing urbanisation, the journey onward was fairly unforgettable, though Indian Rollers were common along the roadside and even in the narrow streets of Chilaw people had the time and grace to stop, smile and wave as we passed. We also undertook a memorable diversion on to a rubbish-strewn sand spit just outside the town, passing through a fishing hamlet constructed from life's flotsam and jetsam; some dwellings built roughly from brick, while others teetered on the edge of existence in mud and rush-mat flimsiness. Past brightly painted boats pulled up on to the sand, small fish drying on

mats in the sun, fishermen mending nets, children smiling, laughing and gleefully waving, utterly mystified adults and then the cemetery; an eloquent commentary on the impermanence of life itself. Amila had brought us here to see Sanderling, a fairly local species on the island, and there they were; one group standing and wondering while others pattered along the tide line, skittering away from the intruding water, impelled by the moon like the sea itself.

We reached Negombo and piled into the swimming pool of what can be most tastefully described as a transit hotel, apparently originally designed as a multi-storey car park but which at least two people were capturing on video. Where on earth had they been and what had they seen in the last two weeks?

Intermediate Egret, Sanderling, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper.

Feb.5th Amila called at the appointed time, just before 4 am, to say that Colombo airport had been closed for ten hours because of an incident with a Russian freighter (an aircraft, presumably, though ship was not ruled out) that had crash-landed on the airstrip. It was anticipated that we would leave at around 10 am. However, we departed just after midday, reaching Abu Dhabi well after our onward flight, with the prospect of a 12-hour wait before us. However, Gulf Air arranged for us to stay in a hotel and we all piled into a bus and off to the Al Dubious Hotel, passing parties of Grey Francolins by the roadside and into the concrete and glass high rises of Abu Dhabi seafront. By the time we had consumed some rather forgettable sandwiches the light was too bad to make anything of some very interesting-looking gulls that had gathered on buoys inside a nearby jetty, though we did see Red-vented and White-cheeked Bulbuls either from the bus into town or in the park between the hotel and the sea. A couple of hours sleep and it was time to leave for the airport, away from the Al Dubious and its night life of western men and mostly oriental women, doubtless immersed in theories of reverse migration, eventually leaving for Heathrow at 2 am. By the time we got back to Sandwich it had been 37 hours since Amila's call to give us the glad tidings.

So, another trip done and dusted. As always, a host of memories crowd in for recognition, but are any more vivid than the people themselves? We rarely met anyone on this beautiful island who was not prepared to smile, to talk or to wave, just because they wanted to. Best bird? Well, Milky Pratincole is always great to see and these were the best views I have ever had, but it has to be Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, for the sheer mouth-opening moment of the event itself. Thanks, Sheila.

Ian Hodgson. February 2004

Systematic List

By John van der Dol

For the sake of consistency with previous reports on Goa and Nepal the nomenclature in the following list is mostly that used by Grimmett, Inskipp and Inskipp in Birds of the Indian Subcontinent, Helm 1999. The taxonomy is in a state of flux with so many endemic species and sub-species, and various species lists are therefore in existence. I have generally followed the one by Priyantha Wijesinghe in his "Checklist of the Birds of Sri Lanka" (Ceylon Bird Club, 1994) in terms of species but not necessarily in terms of English names.

There are about 80 endemic sub-species, many of which could eventually be elevated to full species level, but currently only three are under serious consideration and their elevation is imminent and therefore included as full species. These are Crimson-fronted Barbet (Ceylon Small Barbet), Black-capped Bulbul and Black-throated Munia (Ceylon Hill Munia). Others will be due for consideration in the near future and I will deal with these in the list itself.

The annotation **(E)** in the list denotes endemic status.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Up to ten on many of the tanks (reservoirs). Seen on five dates.

Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*

Seen in small numbers in most wetland areas.

Indian Cormorant *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*

Very common throughout in much larger numbers than the previous species.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

About a dozen at the lake by the Culture Club Resort near Dambulla and about 15 en route to Negombo on our last birding day.

Asian Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*

Between one and ten on five dates and 20 between Yala and Bundala.

Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*

A flock of 52 just along the road from our hotel Galadari in Colombo was the biggest count. Up to 20 on six other dates.

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*

An excellent series of records with seven on our first afternoon at Talangama Tank and then two singles and two twos on a further four dates. Superb views of a generally shy bird were obtained.

Cinnamon Bittern *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*

An uncommon resident and a new bird for our guide. Two were flushed in the paddies at Sinharaja.

Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis*

Superb views were had of four at Talangama Tank, a single at Yala and a further three together on our journey back from Mannar.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Three at Talangama Tank, one at Bundala and 18 at Kandalama Tank (Culture Club Resort).

Little Heron *Butorides striatus*

Five singles and three at Yala.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*

Common resident.

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Seen in very large numbers and never counted.

Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis*

Just one single of the white morph at Mannar Island.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Commonly encountered in all suitable areas.

Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*

A single at Gantes Tank was followed by three on our last day en route to Negombo.

Great Egret *Casmerodius albus*

Again commonly found throughout with perhaps as many as a hundred at Kandalama Tank.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Also good numbers throughout and perhaps 150 at Gantes Tank.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Small numbers in most wetland areas but never more than five in any one day.

Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*

This beautifully coloured stork is a common resident in Sri Lanka and good numbers were seen. Up to 20 on five dates in the south-east of the country while there were 75 were seen at Gantes Tank and 250 en route to Negombo.

Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*

This very common resident was seen in small numbers throughout but there were about 100 at Weerawila Tank in the south and perhaps a 1000 at Gantes Tank, while there were several thousand on a tank on the way back to the coast on our last day.

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*

Two adults with a chick on the nest at Yala were seen on two consecutive days while there was another single en route to Mannar.

Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*

A highly scarce resident in Sri Lanka and only one was seen on two dates at Yala.

Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*

Commonly seen in all suitable areas.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Up to 30 on three dates.

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*

The flock which in the last couple of years has been seen at Bundala had not returned this winter, but a small flock of 16 was seen from the causeway at Mannar.

Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*

Seen in small numbers throughout with a maximum of 50 at Talangama Tank.

Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*

About a dozen at Talangama Tank were followed by four at Pannegamuwa Tank en route to Yala.

Wigeon *Anas penelope*

A raft of many hundreds was seen from the causeway on the way to Mannar.

Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha*

Classed as a highly scarce migrant but recently, due to lack of disturbance because of the political trouble in the north-west, they have started to breed in very small numbers. Two broods and a number of adults totalling about 20 birds were seen on a small tank near the causeway to Mannar. Still from the army's point of view a highly sensitive area where binoculars, scopes and cameras are not very welcome. It is not advised to visit this area without a local Sinhala-speaking guide, as the young armed soldiers look very nervous indeed.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Thirteen birds from the Mannar causeway was the sole record.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Small numbers in most suitable areas with 200+ at Weerawila Tank.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

A scarce migrant; just one drake was seen at Weerawila.

Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni*

A scarce resident. A pair was watched mating and the male was noted passing sticks for nesting material to the female in the Eucalyptus plantation at Pattipola Railway Station near Horton Plains. Fantastic views were had of both birds.

Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*

Between one and four on five dates ranging from quite dark to almost white morphs.

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

Between one and six on four dates.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Just one single bird at Mannar.

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*

Probably the commonest raptor on the island and seen virtually daily with counts up to 20.

White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Also very common with up to four on most dates.

Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichhyaetus*

Two singles, at Bundala and Yala.

Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*

Between one and three on nine dates.

Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Just one male of this uncommon migrant was seen at one of the tanks en route to Yala.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*

A ringtail was seen in Udawalawe National Park and an adult male was noted on the way back from Mannar.

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*

An uncommon resident; we saw one in the jungle opposite Rafters Retreat near Kitulgala.

Shikra *Accipiter badius*
One or two on five dates.

Besra *Accipiter virgatus*
Two singles of this scarce resident were seen, at TASKS jungle camp near Udawalawe and near Bodhinagala, en route to Sinharaja.

Steppe Buzzard *Buteo (buteo) vulpinus*
A rufous form of this race/species of Buzzard was seen well at Horton Plains. If accepted by the Sri Lanka authorities this would be the first record of this race of Buzzard on the island. This was a typical Steppe of the plumage with which we are familiar from Eilat and South Africa where they winter, very similar to the classic fox-red morph depicted in plate 342 of Dick Forsman's *Raptors of Europe and the Middle East*.

Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*
Two at Martin's Lodge at Sinharaja were followed by a single on the road between there and Udawalawe and another two at Hunas Falls and Simpson's Forest.

Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatius*
An amazing seven birds, all perched, at Udawalawe NP gave stunningly close views, one of them just a few metres above our heads. Two more singles and a two were seen over the next three days.

Mountain Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis*
Two individuals of this magnificent eagle were seen at Simpson's Forest.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*
Just four singles were seen.

Shaheen Peregrine *Falco peregrinus perigrinator*
A single circling over Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya, took us by surprise, especially as we had not found any in the mountains where they are supposed to be. This beautiful race with its orange underparts is an uncommon resident in Sri Lanka but occurs throughout the Indian Subcontinent.

Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*
Fifteen were seen during the late afternoon, when they come out into the open, on the way back from Mannar. On our bus drive into the City of Abu Dhabi, also in the late afternoon, about 30 were noted on the grass verges of the main road.

Sri Lanka Spurfowl *Galloperdix bicalcarata* (E)
Heard on a couple of occasions and just one female was seen flashing across the road at Sinharaja. Not very satisfactory but it a very shy and elusive species.

Sri Lanka Junglefowl *Gallus lafayetii* (E)
Perhaps more often heard than seen particularly in forest situations. Most commonly seen at Yala with maximum counts of 15. A pair with two chicks was seen at Sinharaja.

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*
Very commonly encountered, especially at Udawalawe NP and Yala where they are out in the open.

Barred Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator*
A single at Udawalawe, four and two further singles, all at Yala.

Rain Quail *Coturnix coromandelica*
Two were seen by just a few people at Yala.

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*

Seen in single figures on most days while on a tank near Nuwara Eliya there was a count of 14.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Quite a few at Talangama Tank and two further singles.

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*

Commonly found on all lily-covered tanks with up to about 30 in any one place.

Watercock *Gallicrex cinerea*

Two at Pannegamuwa Tank were followed by two singles at Yala; probably the same bird.

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

Two on a small tank near the Mannar causeway was the only record.

Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*

Found in small numbers on lily-covered tanks but an estimate of 200 at Pannegamuwa was quite spectacular. Interestingly most birds were in breeding plumage whilst in Goa at this time of year we have never seen one in this plumage.

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Just one single from the Mannar causeway.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Commonly found in all suitable habitats.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

A scarce migrant. A flock of 14 was seen from the causeway leading to Mannar.

Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*

The main reason for going to Mannar was for this species, and it did not disappoint. A total of five birds gave good views and were extensively photographed.

Stone Curlew *Burhinus oedicnemus*

Six were found on the way to our first hotel after arrival in Sri Lanka, after which ones and twos were seen on seven dates.

Greater Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris*

Between three and ten at Yala, six at Kandalama Tank and another ten at Giant



Greater Thick-knee by Graham Crick

Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea*

Three on the beach just past Yala Safari Lodge were part of a small breeding population of about three pairs. An empty scrape/nest was found.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Two at Bundala was a good record for this scarce winter visitor.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Ones and twos at Yala and two en route to Dambulla.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Fairly commonly and found in all suitable areas.

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*

Common in all suitable areas but never really counted as this and the next species were always present and intermingling.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

As with the previous species, present but never really counted.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*

Three at Talangama Tank, up to six at Yala and uncounted numbers in the North-west region.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Up to half a dozen at Yala and uncounted but much bigger numbers at Mannar.

Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*

Seen in small numbers in all suitable areas.

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

Also small numbers seen in all areas but more widespread than the previous species.

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*

About 20 were seen from the causeway at Mannar, some in total winter plumage testing our identification skills for a few moments.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

An uncommon winter visitor; one was seen at Mannar while 53 were counted at Chilaw Sandspit, a site visited specifically for this species.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

One of the commonest waders, seen in all suitable areas.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Two at Mannar were the only birds seen.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Also very common. Seen in hundreds, particularly at Palatupana salt pans and Mannar.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

A loose flock of 18 was counted amongst many other waders at Puttalam salt pans on our last day.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Ten at Palatupana salt pans was the only record.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

A single at Talangama Tank was the only one specifically identified.

Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*

One to four on five dates, all in the second week.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

A common wader in large water areas with numbers of up to 300 seen.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

In contrast to the last species just three were seen at Mannar.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Three at Mannar and two at Puttalam Salt pans were the only birds seen



Group on safari by Graham Crick

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Five were seen at Mannar, one of which with an extraordinary long bill proved to be of the eastern race "*orientalis*".

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Commonly encountered.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

A common enough wader but at Palatupana Salt pans en route to Nuwara Eliya from Yala there must have been thousands.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Up to three in all suitable habitat.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

One or two on five dates.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Seen on most days in suitable habitat with a maximum of eight at Talangama Tank.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

Three at Mannar were followed by two at Puttalam Salt pans on our last day.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Between one and six on most days.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Between one and six on five dates and ten at Mannar.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

A single at Bundala was unfortunately only seen by a few people.

Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*

Six at Yala, common at Mannar and a single at Negombo were surprisingly the only records.

Heuglin's Gull *Larus (fuscus) heuglini*

Considered by some to be a separate species and by others a subspecies of Lesser Black-backed Gull. Either way, there were many at Mannar but no attempt was made to count them. All plumages were encountered.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Seen in small numbers on most tanks.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*

Up to 25 at Yala, odd ones elsewhere and 300 at Mannar.

Large Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*

Twenty at Bundala, at least 200 at Palatupana salt pans and another 15 at Kandalama Tank.

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*

Two at Bundala and 30 at Palatupana salt pans.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Three at Palatupana Salt pans were the sole record.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*

Apart from about 100 at Palatupana salt pans there were small numbers on many of the tanks visited and a few at Mannar.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*

Probably the commonest and most widespread tern of the region, seen both out at sea and on many of the tanks and wetlands visited.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Two at Bundala, 30 at Palatupana salt pans and six at Kandalama Tank presented a good exercise in winter plumage identification skills.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Apart from the ever-present street pigeons there are some "real" Rock Doves breeding on a rock in the lagoon at Yala Safari Lodge and about 20 were seen there. Interestingly they don't have white rumps.

Sri Lanka Woodpigeon *Columba torringtoni* (E)

Six were seen at Horton plains. One was perched low down by the Arrenga Pool for a long period, affording tremendous views.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

About 25 were seen en route to Mannar.

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

Common throughout.

Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica*

Between one and four on four dates but a dozen were counted in paddyfields in the middle of the jungle opposite Rafters Retreat giving fantastic views for a normally quite shy bird.

Orange-breasted Green Pigeon *Treron bicincta*

Seen in small numbers in all forest situations and 14 were counted on our morning walk at Palm Garden Village Hotel at Anuradhapura.

Pompadour Green Pigeon *Treron pompadora*

Up to ten most days in forested situations.

Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea*

This handsome giant was seen in good numbers throughout.

Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot *Loriculus beryllinus* (E)

Up to 20 in forested areas on at least six days.

Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*

A single at Talangama Tank, another Hunas Falls and about ten at Simpson's Forest.

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

Very common throughout.

Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*

One at Udawalawe NP, another at Hunas Falls and six the next morning at Simpson's Forest.

Layard's Parakeet *Psittacula calthropae* (E)

Twelve at Sinharaja were followed by half a dozen there next day, seven at Rafters retreat, five at Hunas Falls and about 20 at Simpson's Forest.

Pied Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*
Between one and five on six dates.

Chestnut-winged Cuckoo *Clamator coromandus*
Excellent views were had by just two or three people of a single bird at Horton Plains early in the morning.

Common Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius*
A single at Simpson's Forest above Hunas Falls afforded the usual rubbish views.

Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus*
Up to four a day at Udawalawe and Yala and a single at Palm Garden Village. Hepatic females were also seen on a couple of occasions. A winter visitor.

Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris*
An uncommon resident; just the one was seen at Yala.

Asian Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea*
As usual more often heard than seen but nevertheless up to four were noted on most days.

Blue-faced Malkoha *Rhopdytes viridirostris*
Singles on three dates and three were seen together at Yala giving fantastic views as they sat out in the open, which they are not supposed to do.

Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus* (E)
Considering their size, they were surprisingly hard to find. However we had fantastic views of seven birds in Sinharaja on just one day.

Sirkeer Malkoha *Taccocua leschenaultii*
A single at Yala was seen by just a few of the group.

Green-billed Coucal *Centropus chlororhynchus* (E)
This one is really difficult to see as it inhabits undergrowth we are not supposed to look into. Although two were heard on two days, just one was seen briefly by just three or four people. Wholly unsatisfactory really and an excuse for a return visit.

Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*
Between one and five every day.

Collared Scops Owl *Otus bakkamoena*
A single seen in torchlight somewhere near the Culture Club Resort at Dambulla was a very welcome addition to the author's world list of owls.

Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis*
Two singles at Hunas Falls gave the usual stunning views.

Jungle Owlet *Glaucidium radiatum*
Two at Tasks Camp near Udawalawe were the only record, but excellent views were obtained.

Chestnut-backed Owlet *Glaucidium castanonotum* (E)
One was heard at Bodhinagala Forest after which one was seen at Rafters Retreat and another two in the evening at Hunas Falls.

Brown Wood Owl *Strix leptogrammica*
Heard on three occasions at three different locations and one was glimpsed as it flew at Surrey Estate. All rather unsatisfactory compared with those at Saligao in Goa.

Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger*

A male sitting on a nest with one chick at Sinharaja was seen two days running allowing photographers infinite time to get some superb images.

Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus*

Four on the nightcrawl at Udawalawe, one or two of which gave fantastic views as they sat on the sandy tracks in front of the vehicles. A further two were seen on three more evenings.

Jerdon's Nightjar *Caprimulgus atripennis*

One at Yala was followed by another on our night drive from Culture Club Resort at Dambulla.

Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata*

Up to about a dozen seen on seven dates. Both male and female were seen sitting on a nest precariously perched on a bare branch in Yala.

Indian Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor*

Commonly seen throughout.

Brown-backed Needletail *Hirundapus gigantea*

Up to four were seen on three days at Sinharaja.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*

Three at Sinharaja and ten at Victoria Park at Nuwara Eliya.

House Swift *Apus affinis*

Small numbers throughout.

Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis*

Common in all areas.

Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus*

Two males and three females were seen associating with bird flocks in Sinharaja on our first full day there while on the following day another three were seen. Fortunately excellent views were obtained.

Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*

One or two on four dates, all affording excellent views.

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

Very common in open country; seen daily with an actual count of 80 birds, mostly on wires on the way to Mannar.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Between one and three on seven dates.

Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithacus*

A single at Bodhinagala Forest was probably only seen by our guide but this was made up for the cracker seen at Sinharaja the next day. Another was heard at Rafters Retreat.

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*

One or two on six dates.

Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*

This little beauty was seen in numbers of up to 40 in one day.

Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*

Very common with over 100 recorded in one day at Yala.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

A scarce winter visitor but nevertheless a party of 31 was seen at Yala.

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti*

Between two and six on six dates.

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*

One or two on three dates were followed by a count of 60 on wires en route to Mannar.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Up to five on six dates.

Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros gingalensis* (E)

Up to six on six dates in forested areas.

Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus*

Most records refer to Yala where 40 were seen one evening, but they were also noted in Sinharaja and Udawalawe NP.

Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica*

Up to six most days probably making this the commonest barbet of the island.

Yellow-fronted Barbet *Megalaima flavifrons* (E)

One of the endemic species of Sri Lanka. A bird of open forest seen in good numbers, particularly at Sinharaja and Hunas Falls with counts of ten and 15 respectively.

Crimson-fronted Barbet (Ceylon Small Barbet) *Megalaima rubricapilla rubricapilla* (E)

Likely to be elevated to full species status in the near future. Singles only at the escarpment en route from Yala to Nuwara Eliya and in the jungle at Rafter's Retreat.

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*

One to three on six dates, sometimes only heard, as is usually the case with this species.

Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopus nanus*

Singles in Bodhinagala Forest and Surrey Estate near Nuwara Eliya.

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker *Dendrocopus mahrattensis*

Two at Yala and another single there two days later.

Lesser Yellownappe *Picus chlorolophus*

One or two on five dates.

Black-rumped Flameback *Dinopium benghalense*

This is an interesting species. There are two endemic subspecies in Sri Lanka, both of which may well be split from the species on mainland India. In the north of the island there occurs the Golden-backed version *D.b.jaffense*, an uncommon resident of which we saw two at Palm Garden Village Hotel at Anuradhapura, while another two were seen en route to Mannar. The Red-backed version *D.b.psarodes*, which occurs in Southern Sri Lanka, was seen on four dates with counts of up to three.

Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes lucidus*

A pair was seen briefly and only in silhouette in the jungle at Rafter's Retreat.

White-naped Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes festivus*

A single at the Palm Grove at Tissamaharama gave stunning views.

Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*

One to three on five days and an astonishing ten birds between TASKS Camp near Udawalawe and Yala. A winter visitor to Sri Lanka but obviously much more common here than in the Western Ghats.

Rufous-winged Bushlark *Mirafra assamica*

Seen in small numbers in open country with a maximum of 20 at Udawalawe NP.

Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark *Eremopterix grisea*

Four at Yala and a single at Mannar were the only records.

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*

Three at Weerawila Tank and another three at Mannar.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

A scarce winter visitor; up to five were seen at Yala followed by a single at Weerawila Tank.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Commonly seen in all areas.

Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*

The same two birds were seen on the two days we were at Hunas Falls. There are eight sub-species; the one in Southern India and Sri Lanka is known as *H.t.domicola* and is classed as an uncommon resident. It breeds on cliffs high in the wet zone and after breeding disperses down to the foothills of the wet zone. The fact we only saw one pair in the high hills suggests that they were possibly breeding at this time. Its world distribution extends eastwards through south-east Asia, Indonesia, and New Guinea to the islands of the South Pacific. (Swallows and Martins of the World by Turner and Rose- Helm 1989).

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica hyperythra*

One of eleven sub-species and endemic to Sri Lanka. Easily identified by its brick-red underparts and rump. A beautiful bird, seen in small numbers in most areas. The race *H.d.nipalensis*, which breeds from the central Himalayas to Yunnan, is a possible irregular winter visitor to the lowlands and low hills, according to Harrison in his "Field Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka". It is therefore extremely satisfying that we saw seven birds at close range in flight and perched on wires at the Palatupana Salt pans. A good record indeed.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*

A scarce migrant, but three were found at the end of the Mannar sandspit.

Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus*

Seen commonly in all suitable areas.

Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus*

Up to six on eight days were seen. It is nice to see these in the middle of the forest where they belong.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

A dozen at Talangama Tank and half a dozen and two singles at Yala were considered to be of the Grey-headed race *M.f.thunbergi*.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Up to four on six dates.

Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*

Between one and three on four dates.

Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei*

A single at Hunas Falls and another at Palm Garden Village Hotel at Anuradhapura.

Black-headed Cuckooshrike *Coracina melanoptera*

A male at Udawalawe was followed by four and two singles at Yala on three consecutive days.

Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*

This beauty was seen in numbers of up to a dozen on five dates.

Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*

Up to four on five dates and eleven at the Palm Garden Village Hotel at Anuradhapura.

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike *Hemipus picatus*

Just one bird in Sinharaja.

Black-crested Bulbul (Black-capped Bulbul) *Pycnonotus melanicterus* (E)

Classed as an uncommon endemic. Between six and 20 were seen at Bodhinagala Forest, Sinharaja and TASKS Camp. This has to be a favourite for species status; it has no crest like those found in northern India and the Himalayas and lacks the orange throat of the birds of the Western Ghats.

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*

Present.

Yellow-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus penicillatus* (E)

Sixteen at Horton Plains and the grounds of St Andrews Hotel in Nuwara Eliya followed another four at the latter location the next morning. This is a stunning bulbul and worthy of a good look.

White-browed Bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus*

Up to six on five days.

Yellow-browed Bulbul *Iole indica*

Most common in Sinharaja where up to six a day were seen while there were another two in the jungle opposite Rafters Retreat.

Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus humii*

The endemic race of Sri Lanka is darker than the races of northern areas. Common and noisy in the forests of Sinharaja and the upland areas round Hunas Falls. About ten were seen in the jungle opposite Rafters Retreat.

Blue-winged Leafbird *Chloropsis cochinchinensis*

Up to three on six days.

Common Iora *Aegithinia tiphia*

Up to six on eight days.

Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis*

Commonly found throughout, often near human habitation.

White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*

Eight birds were recorded from TASKS Camp and Yala combined, after which only two more were seen, also at Yala. A further single was heard at Surrey Estate near Nuwara Eliya.

Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*

One from the bus followed six in the grasslands of Horton Plains en route to Kitulgala.

Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata*

Commonly seen in open country particularly at Yala where one day 30 were estimated.

Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush *Myiophoneus blighi* (E)

Three were briefly glimpsed as they flew across the road soon after dawn at Arrenga Pool on the Horton Plains while another was heard at the back of St Andrews Hotel at Nuwara Eliya the following morning.

Pied Thrush *Zoothera wardii*

Three males and a female gave stunning views in Victoria Park at Nuwara Eliya and a further female was found in the hills above Hunas Falls.

Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina citrina*

One at TASKS Camp gave stunning views and was interesting in that it is a different race to the one found in the Subcontinent which is *Z.c.cyanotus* and which has black and white vertical face stripes. It is a scarce winter visitor from the Himalayas and northeast India.

Spot-winged Thrush *Zoothera spiloptera* (E)

Four were seen in Sinharaja, where a single was seen the next day, then another two in the jungle opposite Rafters Retreat. A truly spectacular thrush, which inhabits the darkest areas of the forest floor.

Scaly Thrush *Zoothera dauma*

This race *Z.d.imbricata* must be due for full species status. It has a really long bill looking more like the south east Asian Long-billed Thrush *Z.monticola* and the underparts are far more rufous than its northern compatriots. Two in Sinharaja were the only ones seen, but they were seen well on the forest floor.

Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula kinnisii*

This race is uniformly bluish-grey with a dull orange bill and very attractive indeed. It is very different from *T.m.nigropileus*, which occurs in Goa, or *T.m.maximus*, which we have encountered in the Himalayas. A single in Surrey Estate near Nuwara Eliya was followed by three the next day up on Horton Plains.

Sri Lanka Bush Warbler *Bradypterus palliseri* (E)

Surprisingly one gave excellent and, for this family, prolonged views at Arrenga Pool at Horton Plains. Another was heard behind St Andrews Hotel the next morning but this one was in no mood to show itself.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

Managed to find its way down here as well! Up to four on four dates in all in suitable grassland areas. Perhaps the most surprising site was high up on Horton Plains where four were present.

Grey-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii*

Was it really discovered by one of our crew? Six at the lunch-stop before Udawalawe gave excellent views and another was seen en route to Nuwara Eliya.

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata*

Small numbers throughout.

Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis*

Up to half a dozen on six dates was a nice set of records of this lovely bird.

Jungle Prinia *Prinia sylvatica*

Although two at Udawalawe and another two at Yala were the only records, it was probably overlooked.

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*

Commonly found throughout. There are two endemic races in Sri Lanka, *O.s. sutorius*, which inhabits gardens and scrub in the lowlands and hills up to 1500 m, while *O.s.fernandonis* ('Mountain Tailorbird', not to be confused with *O.cuculatus*) frequents the higher elevations. Both were seen and at least ten were noted up at Horton Plains where they had noticeably darker green upperparts and grey throat patches and flanks.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*

Found in small numbers with a maximum of ten on Horton Plains.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Between one and six on a few days but 15 were noted at Sinharaja on one of our days there.

Large-billed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris*

A single and three on two days at Sinharaja and another two at Horton Plains.

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae*

One or two on five dates.

Dull-blue Flycatcher *Eumyias sordida* (E)

Three of this lovely little endemic flycatcher were seen at Horton Plains followed by one that was heard behind St. Andrews Hotel at Nuwara Eliya the next morning.

Brown-breasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui*

Between one and six at Sinharaja and TASKS Camp were followed by one at Rafters Retreat.

Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*

One or two on four days at Sinharaja and a single at the Palm Garden Village Hotel.

Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*

One heard on Horton Plains was followed by three seen well behind the St Andrews Hotel at Nuwara Eliya the next morning.

White-browed Fantail *Rhipidura aureola*

Up to seven on seven dates.

Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*

Between two and four on three dates at Sinharaja and Bodhinagala.

Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*

Up to about half a dozen were seen on most days including a stunning adult male of the white form at Talangama Tank.

Brown-capped Babbler *Pellorneum fuscicapillum* (E)

Just a single at Surrey Estate near Nuwara Eliya, which gave excellent views.

Indian Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*

Two were seen and another two heard at Sinharaja while on the Horton Plains another four were seen. Excellent views of this lovely species were had.

Tawny-bellied Babbler *Dumetia hyperythra*

Six at Udawalawe were followed by eight and two at Yala on consecutive days.

Dark-fronted Babbler *Rhopocicla atriceps*

Small parties of up to ten were seen in thick undergrowth in forested locations on six dates but one of the days at Sinharaja about 20 were noted.

Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense*

This is an uncommon resident. A single at Udawalawe was followed by six at Yala and another four on our last morning there.

Orange-billed Babbler *Turdoides rufescens* (E)

An uncommon endemic. Up to 30 were seen on three days at Sinharaja and another ten in the jungle at Rafters Retreat. This is known as the “steering wheel” of the bird flocks which means that it is around these that the flocks begin to form.

Yellow-billed Babbler *Turdoides affinis*

A bird of open country and gardens and commonly encountered all over.

Ashy-headed Laughingthrush *Garrulax cinereifrons* (E)

Although about a dozen were seen in Sinharaja not many people managed to connect with them. They move through very dense undergrowth and it can be difficult to even get a glimpse.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Up to six on seven dates.

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis*

Not many records of a species that elsewhere is quite common. Two in Bodhinagala and four on Horton Plains and above Hunas Falls.

Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica*

Commonly found throughout. A nest with adults feeding young was found outside one of our chalets at Culture Club Resort, Dambulla.

Loten’s Sunbird *Nectarinia lotenia*

One and twos in most areas.

Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica*

We encountered twos and threes in low country dry zones, with six at Palm Garden Village Resort at Anuradhapura.

Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile*

A single in TASKS camp and another two just above Hunas Falls.

Legge’s Flowerpecker *Dicaeum vincens* (E)

A male at Sinharaja was followed by seven and two there over the next two days.

Pale-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*

The commonest flowerpecker on the island; seen in all areas with numbers of up to ten a day.

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa*

Just two on four days in the lowlands but there were ten at Hunas Falls on two days.

Sri Lanka White-eye *Zosterops ceylonensis* (E)

A dozen at Horton Plains, 20 behind St Andrews Hotel at Nuwara Eliya and Rafters Retreat combined and another ten above Hunas Falls where they were directly comparable with the previous species. Good views allow easy separation.

Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*

Between one and five most days.

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

Common throughout in open country.

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*

A scarce resident. Four were seen en route to Mannar.

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

Very common in the north west of the island but nowhere else, apart from two at Palm Garden Village Resort at Anuradhapura.

Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

An uncommon winter visitor. A single at Yala was followed by another two there a couple of days later.

White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens*

Up to six were seen on seven days of this common resident.

Crested Drongo (Greater Racket-tailed Drongo) *Dicrurus paradiseus lophorhinus*

This race of the Greater Racket-tailed Drongo is visibly very different from *D.p. paradiseus* and is likely to be split in the near future. This in turn may well be split into two itself with *D.p. ceylonicus* making up the Sri Lankan counterpart. There could therefore be two new species in Sri Lanka leaving *D.p. paradiseus* in the rest of the Subcontinent. Unfortunately we never saw any birds with “rackets”, but Crested Drongo was seen in Sinharaja and Rafters Retreat with five or six birds on three days.

These are considered to be the second species involved in bird flocks after the Orange-billed Babblers and they are noisy, attracting other species and acting as good look-outs.

Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus*

Three at Hunas Falls were followed by 15 en route to Mannar and another single at Palm Garden Village Resort at Anuradhapura.

Sri Lanka Blue Magpie *Cissa ornata* (E)

Nine were seen in Sinharaja on our first full day there and one on the next day. A bird was also seen sitting on a nest.

House Crow *Corvus splendens*

Ubiquitous.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Also common and widespread.

White-faced Starling *Sturnus albobfrontatus* (E)

This highly scarce endemic was found in Sinharaja only with three on the first day and two on the second. They were feeding very high up in the canopy.

Brahminy Starling *Sturnus pagodarum*

Ten at Yala were followed by four and two over the next two days at the same site. It is a winter visitor.

Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus*

Another winter visitor but in much larger numbers. Flocks combining up to 300 maximum were seen at Yala on four days and another 100 at Kandalama Tank.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

A common resident seen daily.

Sri Lanka Myna *Gracula ptilogenys* (E)

An uncommon endemic. Nine were seen in Sinharaja and six there the next day while another was heard only at Rafter's Retreat.

Southern Hill Myna *Gracula indica*

Two at a nest hole at Surrey Estate near Nuwara Eliya and ten at Hunas Falls on two days.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

One has to go further east to stand a chance of avoiding these.

Streaked Weaver *Ploceus manyar*

Five on the edge of a paddyfield on the way back from Mannar only just made the list.

Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*

Six at Yala were the sole record.

Indian Silverbill *Lonchura malabarica*

Six at Yala and another two en route to Anuradhapura with a load of other munias.

White-rumped Munia *Lonchura striata*

Six at Udawalawe, two at Yala and ten at Rafter's Retreat.

Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*

The most widespread but not necessarily the most numerous of the family. Seen virtually daily in small numbers up to 25.

Black-throated Munia (Ceylon Hill Munia) *Lonchura kelaarti* (E)

An uncommon endemic and awaiting to be split from *L.k.jerdoni* which occurs in South west and Eastern India, although here it is being considered a full species already. About 30 were found in a mixed munia flock en route to Anuradhapura from Dambulla.

Black-headed Munia *Lonchura malacca*

Seen on five dates with maxima of 60 at the paddies at Sinharaja and 150 in the mixed flock mentioned above.

Mammals

Toque Macaque *Macaca sinica* (E)

Seen commonly on seven dates with a maximum of 50 at Yala.

Black-faced Langur *Presbytis entellus*

Small numbers in Yala on three days.

Purple-faced Leaf Monkey *Presbytis senex* (E)

Small numbers in Bodhinagala and Sinharaja. Both these areas have different sub-species, the ones at Sinharaja have grey patches on the rumps but apart from that are mostly black as opposed to the grey colouration of the ones in the lowlands. A third subspecies, colloquially known as "Bear Monkey", is a heftier and much hairier animal and three of these were seen at close range at Horton Plains. We did not see the fourth subspecies.

Jackal *Canis aures*

A single and a family party of three at Yala gave fantastic daytime views, the latter on two occasions.

Common Palm Civet *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*

One briefly visited the bar at Yala, but did not stay long enough for a drink!

Small Civet *Viverricula indica*

One was seen in the evening at Yala.

Indian Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsi*

Common at Yala.

Indian Brown Mongoose *Herpestes fuscus*

Four different ones were seen.

Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii*

Two singles on the last two days.

Stripe-necked Mongoose *Herpestes vitticollis*

A single at Yala.

Leopard *Pantera pardus*

One of our jeeps was fortunate to have close and prolonged views of this beautiful looking cat. The rest of us will have to make a return visit.

Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*

Two at Udawalawe NP were followed by four more at Yala, then a tusker the next day, followed by two more males and then a dozen on our last day there including a family party with two very young animals.

Asian Wild Ass *Equus hemionus*

About 50 near the causeway to Mannar by the side of the road.

Wild Pig *Sus scrofa*

Common at Yala.

Water Buffalo *Bubalus bubalus*

Common at Yala.

Spotted Deer *Cervus axis*

Commonly seen at Yala.

Sambar Deer *Cervus unicolor*

One and four at Yala and another on the road before dawn at Horton Plains.

Layard's Striped Squirrel *Funambulus layardi*

One at Sinharaja and about 15 at Horton Plains.

Palm Squirrel *Funambulus palmarium*

Commonly encountered throughout.

Grizzled Indian Squirrel (Giant Squirrel) *Ratufa macroura*

One or two most days in the forest and at Yala.



Wild Elephant at Yala by Graham Crick

Black-naped Hare *Lepus nigricollis singala*

Seen mostly at Yala with up to ten a day, mostly in the early evening. One was seen on Horton Plains.

Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus*

Seen on several occasions in all areas. One colony had some thousands but the colony just outside of Kandy has no less than 100,000 individuals. Many were seen flying here in full sunlight.

Butterflies

Ceylon Tiger *Parantica taprobana*

This large black and white butterfly was seen on Horton Plains.

Blue Glassy Tiger *Idiopsis similis*

Recorded at Sinharaja, Yala, Kitulgala and Anuradhapura, this large blue-flushed butterfly was undoubtedly one of the most widespread and familiar of those seen on the trip.

Dark Blue Tiger *Tirumala septentrionis*

Similar to the previous species, we recorded it only at Yala.

Common Tiger *Danaus genutia*

Recorded only at Yala, but probably overlooked, although Plain Tiger was evidently more numerous and widespread.

Plain Tiger *Danaus chrysippus*

Only recorded from Weerawila and Yala, but undoubtedly more widespread and more numerous than the previous, rather similar species.

Great Crow *Euploea phaenareta*

One or two of this large brown butterfly with small white dots on the underwing were seen in Sinharaja.

Common Indian Crow *Euploea core*

Superficially similar to the previous species, but with a broad white band on the under hind wing, it was seen in the forests at Bhodinagala and Sinharaja.

Ceylon Tree Nymph *Idea iasonia*

A large, flimsy, paper-like black and white butterfly that sailed about at treetop level in the forests at Bhodinagala and Sinharaja.

Glad-eye Bushbrown *Nissanga patnia*

Seen perched by the minnow-pool on the track at Sinharaja.

Nigger *Orsotriaena medus*

This species was quite numerous along the river at Kitulgala, with at least one at the paddies in the forest.

Common Leopard *Phalanta phalantha*

At least one of these fritillary-like butterflies was seen by the swimming pool at Anuradhapura.

Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*

We saw at least two at Kitulgala.

Peacock Pansy *Junonia almana*

A medium-sized pale orange butterfly with eyes on its fore and hind upper wings; at least one was seen at Kitulgala.

Grey Pansy *Junonia atlites*

A greyish-brown butterfly with eye spots around the edges of the upper hind wings. One was seen en route to Kandy, at the Black-throated Munia stop.

Great Eggfly *Hypolimnys bolina*

A large brown butterfly with pale spots along the upper hind wing and a subterminal purple suffusion near the tips of the upper wings; one was seen at the gap in the escarpment as we headed to Nuwara Eliya from the lowlands.

Common Sailor *Neptis hylas*

In the same family as the 'gliders' of Eastern Europe and Asia, several were seen by the river at Kitulgala.

Clipper *Parthenos sylvia*

Recorded in the forests at Bhodinagala and Sinharaja, though undoubtedly more widespread.

Common Jezebel *Delias eucharis*

A large white, black-lined butterfly with yellow suffusion and red 'teardrops' around the edges of the under hind wings, we saw several at Yala, Kandalama and Anuradhapura.

Psyche *Leptosia nina*

There were several of these rather delicate white butterflies at the track edges at Kitulgala.

Small Salmon Arab *Colotis amata*

We saw one of these Clouded Yellow-like butterflies, but I failed to record the locality.

Grass Yellow sp. *Eurema sp.*

There are, apparently, numerous variations on the theme of deep bright yellow butterfly with black spots. We saw such insects almost everywhere we went, usually flitting along verges in open situations in forests and woodland edges.

Common Bluebottle *Graphium sarpedon*

This large brown and emerald butterfly with distinctive sickle-shaped wings was seen on a few occasions in the forest at Sinharaja.

Spot Swordtail *Pathysa nomius*

One was seen nectaring on flowers in the garden of our tea stop at the gap in the escarpment as we headed to Nuwara Eliya from the lowlands. A medium-sized swallowtail-like butterfly.

Blue Mormon *Papilio polymnestor*

This fabulous, large dark brown butterfly with pale blue patches on its wings was seen at several places, including Sinharaja, Udawalawe and Kitulgala.

Common Rose *Pachliopta aristolochiae*

Crimson Rose *Pachliopta hector*

Fairly widespread, these dark brown to black butterflies both exhibit crimson patches at the rear edge of the upper hind wings and motor furiously through open garden-type situations, making specific identification tricky. Nevertheless, we saw each at several localities throughout the trip.

Common Birdwing *Troides darsius*

This spectacular birdwing, the largest butterfly seen on the trip, was seen gliding about the treetops at Sinharaja and also at Kitulgala.