

Sri Lanka

Jewel of the Indian Ocean

Thu 19th Nov – Thu 3rd Dec 2015



Photos (clockwise, from top left): Superb views of Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush at Horton Plain • The local race of Indian Paradise Flycatcher is rufous with a white belly • A snuggling couple of Indian Scops Owls at Embilipitiya • We had at least six Red-faced Malkohas at Sinharaja • Sri Lanka Spurfowls were seen well • Another fine bird was this Legge's Hawk-eagle above our heads at Nuwara Eliya © tour participants Nick & Stella Laughton

report compiled by tour leaders:
Brian Small & Gary Elton



Photos (clockwise, from top left): Bird of the trip – probably – Indian Pitta at Sigiriya • Banded Bay Cuckoo was a nice surprise at Kithulgala • Endemic Layard's Parakeets were very showy • A fine portrait of Crested Hawk-eagle in Udawalawe • Crested Serpent Eagles are rather common throughout the island • Another endemic, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill - immature © tour participants Nick & Stella Laughton (Indian Pitta) and Rupert Pye (the rest)

SRI LANKA | Jewel of the Indian Ocean

Tour Leaders: Tharanga Herath, Brian Small & Gary Elton
with Graham Allatt, Nick & Stella Loughton, Bert May, Lee & Gill Pilkington, Rupert & Mandy Pye, Geoff Stratford, Harry Rutherford and Tricia Wood

As ever Sri Lanka proved itself to be a beautiful and a welcoming country to visit and there is no doubt that we certainly enjoyed the many aspects it offers. The birds we saw were wonderful and we saw most of them really well (thigh-rubbingly well, at times) and a lot of times down to Tharanga's great skill and perseverance. It would be hard to list all of the highlights, but let's have a go.

At Kithulgala it would almost certainly be the Chestnut-backed Owlet, but also fine views of Loten's Sunbird, Legge's Flowerpecker, Sri Lanka Swallow. Moving on to Sinharaja, the list could be endless, and though Sri Lanka Blue Magpie is emblematic, we also enjoyed Red-faced Malkoha, both Sri Lanka Spurfowl and Junglefowl, Serendib Scops Owl, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Sri Lanka Hill Myna and how about that white Indian Paradise Flycatcher that grace the Blue Magpie Lodge grounds? At lower elevations, we saw Indian Roller, Crested Hawk-eagle, Greater Thick-knee, Painted Stork, Barred Buttonquail and Malabar Pied Hornbills. Moving up to Nuwara Eliya, it was Kashmir Flycatcher, Sri Lanka White-eye, Pied Bushchat, a sweeping Pallid Harrier, but perhaps best of all Indian Pitta! It was not yet over and we picked up yet more at Sigiriya, including Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Jerdon's Nightjar, but the jewel in the woods was the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher. And, of course, who could forget Cinereous Tit and that other 'jewel' Pale-billed Flowerpecker...

Our tour focuses on the southern part of the Sri Lanka. We started in the 'Wet Zone', where the forests are important areas for many of the endemic birds, here we spent the first five days of the tour at Sinharaja and Kithulgala in an attempt to find them all. We then moved southeast to the 'Dry Zone' savanna and coastal scrub at Udawalawe, Yala, Bundala, Kalametiya, and the large wetland areas near Tissa. Passing north into the highlands at Nuwara Eliya, we enjoyed the cooler weather and the national park at Horton Plains, before finally dropping down to Kandy and Sigiriya, both rich in birdlife.

Wherever we went, we were met with friendly smiles and attentive staff. The spicy Sri Lankan food was very much enjoyed - there was some disappointment whenever we were served with more western-style food, and we all tucked in. Many thanks must go to Tharanga, who was an excellent leader; to Sunil the driver who was very safe in some tough conditions; and to Jayalath who was especially helpful on the bus.

Trip Diary**Thursday 19th November**

We departed early evening for our flight to Colombo.

Friday 20th November

Having arrived in Colombo from the UK on a direct flight with Sri Lankan Airways, we picked our way through passport control, baggage collection, a huge array of washing machines (resisting the temptation of a top-loader) and money exchange, we finally met up with Tharanga and the team for the week. Our first proper species were Common Myna and House Crow.

We set off for Kithulgala to the east, stopping a couple of times en route: the first for lunch and the second for a small paddyfield. Before, during and after lunch our eyes were distracted by a variety of new species around the restaurant: Loten's Sunbird, Yellow-billed Babbler, Ring-necked Parakeets and Brown-headed Barbet. Sadly we were quite late by now, so had to push on, passing numerous paddyfields covered in egrets, the odd Openbill, Purple and Chinese Pond Herons. We only had time to make one more 'proper' stop before reaching Kithulgala – one stop but we made it count. Our first (and sadly only) Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, Sri Lanka Swallows, Scaly-breasted and White-rumped Munias and Ashy Woodswallows. Cinereous Tit and Brown Flycatcher – all perched in the same dead tree!

We arrived at Kithulgala just as it got dark and decided to make one quick attempt for Chestnut-backed owl in the garden next door. Permission granted (and a fee paid) we entered the woods but all was quiet; hey ho! Still, once settled into our rooms, we had our first Sri Lanka dinner - with lots of nice local food for those wanting it, discussed plans for the following day and then off to bed!

Saturday 21st November

An early start found most of us up and ready at the front of the hotel. Even before the group had gathered a Chestnut-backed Owllet was calling away in trees along the drive. As it got lighter we tracked it down to a single tree and in the half-light most were able to get reasonable views before it flew back over our heads and away. In our 90 minutes before breakfast we decided to head up the road to the footbridge that crosses the Kelani River. Virtually everything we saw was new: Little Cormorants perched on rocks edging the river below; Orange Minivets, Black-capped and Yellow-browed Bulbuls fed in bushes; Green warblers continuously called from the trees (what must their population be?) and you simply had to choose the one you were going to see first. Mandy and Rupert saw a Stork-billed Kingfisher on wires over the river. After a short walk, we returned to the bus, where a group of bulbuls by the road also attracted a Black-hooded Oriole that perched in the open. A Brown-capped Babbler started calling from by the road and with a bit of manoeuvring a number of people managed to see it in the undergrowth down a slope.

Our Kithulgala hotel overlooks the Kelani River and is known as one of the locations for the filming of 'Bridge on the River Kwai'. Even today, photographs of Alec Guinness, Jack Hawkins, William Holden and their fellow co-stars decorate the walls. Outside the restaurant area there is a viewing area across the river and even during breakfast it was hard to concentrate on the food when birds sang and mooched about. With omelettes (some three-egged) inside, we gathered by the crossing – now with larger and safer transport – and made our way into the Makandawa forest reserve area. For the next couple of hours or more we strolled along the forest trail, crossed rivers and checked out the forest for a variety of wet-zone species, though in reality it was not until we were on our way back that we came across a sizeable flock comprising a good variety of species. Our highlights of the morning were glimpses of Crimson-backed Flameback, Orange-billed Babblers, Sri Lanka Crested Drongo, Malabar Trogon, Black-naped Monarch, Lesser Yellownap and lots and lots of Square-tailed Bulbuls.

Before, during and after lunch we watched the trees and bushes around the hotel. We got good views of Sri Lankan Green and Green Imperial Pigeons, the usual Purple-rumped and Loten's Sunbirds, Jerdon's and Golden-fronted Leafbirds, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrots, Common Iora and Sri Lanka Grey Hornbills. A couple of Oriental Honey-buzzards were joined by a Black Eagle above the hills. Here we also saw many Orange Minivets, Legge's and Pale-billed Flowerpeckers and Oriental White-eyes – so good we did not want to leave.

Just north of Kithulgala is another footbridge and late afternoon we had a brief adventure there and alongside a narrow stream. Though we had a couple of target species here, we picked up the usual culprits – pigeons, doves and barbets – but though the Brown-capped babbler called incessantly it did not show and a final throw of the dice for Green-billed Coucal also drew a blank. Mind you we were content with great views of many species that were new to us.

Sunday 22nd November

We had a slightly later walk in the hotel grounds and surrounds this morning and we rewarded with excellent views of Chestnut-backed Owllet. Also more Sri Lanka Grey Hornbills, Legge's Flowerpeckers, another Black Eagle, Brahminy Kites and a Crested Serpent Eagle graced the skies and a surprise in the form of a Banded Bay Cuckoo came in close to the watchpoint. Several endemic Layard's Parakeets flew about and perched in the sun out the front of the hotel, but eventually we had to eat then depart for Sinharaja, our next stop.

Sinharaja is a World Heritage site with much of the last remnants of Sri Lanka's once extensive rainforest and we were to stay for two nights, allowing for a whole day exploring its forest. There are many important species and it is the best place to see several. We arrived in fairly good time – much of the roadworks have now been completed, but rather than go for lunch Tharanga persuaded us to transfer to the jeeps as guides had discovered a Serendib's Scops Owl in the reserve! Too good an opportunity to miss, we got in the jeeps and took the very rough and bumpy track up to the reserve entrance; it was certainly nice to get out for a short walk to the spot. Here, having dodged round the Sri Lanka Junglefowl

that welcomed us, with a little bit of shuffling about to find just the right spot to view it we excitedly watched (through the 'scope) this tiny owl, partly hidden by a leaf. Amazing! Amazing that anyone had found it in the first place, but amazing as it was such a superb bird...

A Spot-winged Thrush (for some, but not all) delayed us further on the drive down and a little late for lunch we arrived at the refurbished Blue Magpie Lodge, enjoyed our meal and for most of the group made a stroll along the approach road. This area is rich for birds and we watched Crested Hawk-eagle, White-breasted Waterhen, Crested Treeswift, a magnificent white Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Emerald Dove, Black-throated Munia, but sadly only heard Green-billed Coucal – that one would have to wait another day. The staff served us up a wonderful meal and we retired to our new beds to rest ready for tomorrow, with more thoughts of that track to give us nightmares...

Mon 23rd November

Up and breakfasted early, we set off along the bumpy track with our first stop a search Sri Lanka Spurfowl at one of Tharanga's special sites. Though we heard them and they came closer we sadly did not see this, one of the most elusive of the island's endemics. We then moved up into the National Park, where the drivers manhandled the jeeps over very rocky terrain. Stopping briefly for a check of trees near some buildings for White-faced Starling, we parked and spent most of the rest of the morning walking to the Research Station and back.

The first species we saw well (apart from the junglefowl) were two Sri Lanka Frogmouths roosting in a hidden spot down a muddy bank. With some patience we worked out the best spots to view them from, then one at a time we managed to get all down the bank and into position for great views of the pair snuggling up to each other. Many of our target birds travel in mixed and noisy groups, and we eventually got views of Ashy-headed Laughingthrushes and Orange-billed Babblers, four White-faced Starlings flew about but did not show well at all. We made good progress to the research station and were welcomed by four relaxed Sri Lanka Blue Magpies that stole our attention for quite some time. Along the trail we had found other birds that included Sri Lanka Scimitar Babblers and after a couple of elusive Red-faced Malkohas, we eventually saw several well, including one that sunned itself in the branches above us. Small parties of the delightful Dark-fronted Babbler showed well and were photographed, too.

Having eaten lunch on the walk back down, we were able to relax at the lodge, have a cup of tea, then mooch about the grounds. Again there was plenty to see and the paradise flycatcher came in again for us to enjoy, as did many other species: a Besra perched hidden in a tree (and was luckily seen again in flight the next morning); Black-throated Munias fed in the paddy with other species; Tawny-bellied Babblers and Brown-breasted Flycatcher moved through. A walk along the road eventually got us great views of two Green-billed Coucals, Indian Pitta and a singing Spot-winged Thrush for those that had missed it the day before.

Tuesday 24th November

We chose to have a later breakfast to allow those that wanted to rise early and visit a new location for Sri Lanka Spurfowl; the rest stayed at the Blue Magpie and surroundings for a walk. Those choosing to go for the spurfowl were rewarded with good views of a pair and Spot-winged Thrushes. Those remaining walked c. 1km to view a large fruiting, resplendent in many Square-tailed Bulbuls, various barbets - including Crimson-fronted and Yellow-fronted, great views of Sri Lanka Hill Mynas – with white-eyed females and dark-eyed males, and on the return Green-billed Coucals - indeed the spurfowl group also saw these.

Departing at 09:00 we set off south, taking a different route to normal – avoiding more roadworks – but a very scenic and hilly route. A pit stop allowed a leg stretch and at least six Crested Serpent Eagles came over calling noisily and flying just overhead - ace views! We arrived at our revamped and upgraded Embilipitiya hotel for lunch, which was enjoyed, then gathered outside to view the large lake that surrounds it. First up was a pair of roosting Indian Scops Owls, then many Whiskered Terns, Spot-billed Pelicans, Indian and Great Cormorants, Painted Stork and finally a few waders from page 3 on the checklist. We then drove south to the fine wetland reserve at Kalametiya on the south coast and spent a most pleasant late afternoon birding in the scrub and wetlands of the sanctuary.

This was particularly enjoyable as it was in contrast to the rainforest, with birds abundant and easily seen. Highlights included numerous herons and egrets, our first Yellow-wattled Lapwings, Jerdon's Bushlarks,

Green and Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, several Lesser Sandpipers, Marsh Sandpipers, Little Stints, 3500+ Black-tailed Godwits, Greenshank and Great Thick-knees on the lagoon. Amongst the Lesser Whistling Ducks was single Fulvous Whistling Ducks and at least 10 Garganey. Driving a little further we came across Indian Stone-curlews, more waders and then parked to walk to the beach where we finally reached the Indian Ocean. Out on the rocks the colony of Greater Crested Terns was more sizeable than normal and dotted with Lesser Cresteds also. A very dark 'tern' sitting separately turned out to be a Brown Noddy – with straining eyes you could just see its white forehead, but the light was failing, so we departed. There were many Indian Peafowl on the grazed grass in the halflight.

Wednesday 25th November

The next day we left early, driving the short distance to Udawalawe National Park at first light – passing a very secretive Indian Elephant on the way hiding behind a blade of grass so some missed it! The park gave us a fantastic morning's safari, with many new bird species and the large mammals we saw were undoubtedly one of the highlights of the trip. We soon encountered our first Indian Rollers by the road, plus numerous Plain and Ashy Prinias, Indian Robins, Blyth's Reed Warbler and Orange-breasted Green Pigeons. Raptors provided many of the highlights: Crested Hawk-eagles, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Black-winged Kite, Booted Eagles of the light form, Oriental Honey Buzzard and Kestrel. Plum-headed Parakeets were also much admired, while one vehicle enjoyed a couple of tiny Barred Buttonquails and Marshall's lora; we all saw a number of Jacobin Cuckoos, a single Lesser Cuckoo, and Yellow-eyed Babblers. Elephants were much in evidence, as were Water Buffalo.

We enjoyed our picnic breakfast in the shade of a large tree looking out over the reservoir bedecked with huge numbers of wetland birds: Spot-billed Pelicans, Painted Storks, Indian Cormorants, and many herons and egrets. A single Lesser Adjutant soared beyond the lake and also a few distant Alpine Swifts were hard to pick out; one of the highlights of the day was the group of Malabar Pied Hornbills we came across. Sadly time pressed on, it was soon time to leave and we departed the reserve and made the short drive to Tissa for lunch at our next hotel.

Tissamaharama is located close to several large water-filled 'tanks' created to provide soil and water for the rice fields (a natural balance encouraged by the Buddhist religion) and the large domed 'stupors'. The wetlands are very picturesque, lily-covered, and the calm water mirrors the huge raintrees that grow out of them. This afternoon it abounded with birds, with highlights being Purple and Grey Herons, many Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, Black and Yellow Bitterns and Grey-headed Swamphens. A Stork-billed Kingfisher or two perched in trees and on wires, while out over the water many Whiskered Terns and a few White-winged Black Terns swooped. We all enjoyed the Moorhen, too, but as darkness came, 1000s of Flying Foxes departed their roosts radiating out across the landscape to feed.

Thursday 26th November

A very hot and sunny day dawned as we drove southeast out to the fine coastal spot at Bundala National Park. The unseasonable rainfall had caused high water levels, so we transferred to jeeps early and made our way into the park, but before even entering we picked up many good waders, including Pintail Snipe and Little Ringed Plovers, plus a young Watercock perched on the edge of some reeds. Warblers caught our eye: first were Clamorous Reeds but then Gary called he had seen a Lesser Whitethroat, which are quite unusual so far south. A small group was found out sat in the early sun, one at least was an obvious Hume's Lesser Whitethroat being very dark grey on the head, while others were paler and more like Asian birds - *halimodendri* most likely.

Having checked in at the entrance building and partaken of the facilities, we had a fine safari out through the scrub to the amazing series of pans that held hundreds of waders and terns. Sadly they were making a futile attempt to drain one of the pans meaning we had to walk in the full glare of the sun in order to approach the vast numbers of waders and terns more closely. Many shorebirds winter here and we started by watching Greater Thick-knees, Pacific Golden Plovers, but also Curlew and Marsh Sandpipers; Lesser Sandpipers were abundant and we found Kentish and Ringed Plovers, Turnstones and many Little Stints. The terns consisted of a large flock of Greater Crested and Lesser Cresteds, but also Common, Little, Gull-billed, Caspian, Whiskered and White-winged Black; a Brown-headed Gull was also picked out. We finally found the first of three Small Pratincoles and on our return also saw a couple of Red-necked Phalaropes and a distant Broad-billed Sandpiper – but the less said about that the better...

Back amongst the bushes and wetland, along the reed edges diminutive Yellow Bitterns chased, small numbers of nervous Pintail Snipe fed in the cropped grass as did Yellow-wattled Lapwings. Two Black-naped Hares hid in the undergrowth. As we left the park a perched raptor caused consternation as it flew before many had good views of it, but those that saw it well identified it as Himalayan Buzzard. It had been a very good morning's birding. We spent the afternoon back at Tissa tank, initially enjoying much of the same species, before Tharanga got the nod from a couple of local lads who had found a Brown Fish Owl roosting. Jumping into the bus, we had a short drive to one of the many drainage channels (into which one of the leaders nearly slid) and high in a large tree had nice views of this fine owl.

Friday 27th November

Our last whole day in the Tissa area was spent initially in the wetlands in the morning then on to Yala in the afternoon. It was hot and sunny in the morning, but cooled and became cloudy in the afternoon. We made a pre-breakfast walk in a search for White-naped Woodpecker in its favoured habitat of old palm trees, but despite seeing many Black-rumped Flamebacks we sadly failed – this seems to be one of the hardest species to find in Sri Lanka. We had nice views of a rufous Indian Paradise Flycatcher, sunbirds, perched Brahminy Kites, but returned to the hotel for breakfast 'white-napedless'.

After breakfast, we returned and saw Brown-headed and Coppersmith Barbets, Small Minivets, Sri Lanka Woodshrikes, another white Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Common Tailorbirds, a White-throated Kingfisher bashed the life out of a captured crab and many more. We also spent time sorting through some of the numerous dragonflies, seeing Asian Pintail, Variegated Flutterer, Green Skimmer and Spine-legged Redbolt; butterflies also were watched and included Common Jezebel, Blue Tiger, Peacock Pansy and Tailed Jay. Black-headed Munias, Baya Weavers, breeding Pygmy Cormorants all added to the spice. The final stop was to photograph the amazing Flying Fox roost at the raintrees before lunch.

And so to Yala NP on our last afternoon in the south: Yala still remains the best place to see Leopard in Sri Lanka. Peace was extremely difficult to find in the dust churned up by the jeeps that roar around, but our approach was to take our time and make sure we saw some birds as well as Chital and Sambar, Wild Boar and Buffalo, a couple of magnificent Mugger Crocodiles and a Ruddy Mongoose. Hoopoes were seen all over the place and gave good views (darker than ours) and we also saw Yellow-crowned Woodpeckers, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Crested Treeswift, four lovely Brahminy Starlings and a flock of Rosy Starlings. Barred Buttonquails and Indian Silverbills were also picked up. We joined a 'twitch' for a Leopard and joined the mass of vehicles also waiting, but it was well hidden in the trees and only a few saw glimpses of it. It was disappointing but we had still enjoyed ourselves. At dusk, just outside the park entrance, a couple of Indian Nightjars showed in the headlights.

Saturday 28th November

It was rather nice to have a lie-in and a little later than normal we breakfasted then departed en route to Nuwara Eliya, the former hill station situated at 2000 m on Sri Lanka's cool highlands. We paused near Ella at the Rawana waterfalls for a cup of tea and admired the waterfall – flowing well this year as all the rainfall was feeding it. Stopping at the Surrey Tea Estate was very productive: a good flock of small birds included Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, delightful Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, Cinereous Tits and the mis-named Dull-blue Flycatcher. We drew in a couple of Sri Lanka Scimitar Babblers for our best views and we also saw Small and Orange Minivets.

Having arrived at the hotel, greeted by the local pair of Pied Bushchats and Indian House Sparrows, we settled into the hotel and enjoyed lunch, then made for the town's renowned Victoria Park, home to winter migrants and montane endemics. In a couple of hours we focussed on trying to find a certain flycatcher, but we were not helped much by the weather that began to close in. Having luckily found Forest Wagtails feeding by the stream, a young male Kashmir Flycatcher appeared (phew!) and we all managed to see it eventually, but then the heavens opened and we sought shelter with the crowds as we waited. After an abortive attempt to get a Mexican wave going, the rain eased and so we ventured off to a quieter spot, where (as planned – ha ha!) we saw an Indian Pitta: it was a little shy and took a while to all see in the open, but when we did it was hard to tear ourselves away. Bird of the trip?

Sunday 29th November

No visit to the highlands would be complete without an early start to Horton Plains! This attractive region encompasses a patchwork landscape of wooded hillsides and grassy plains. Our superb driver Sunil drove through the clouds and got us to the entrance gate early - just after 05:45am and we were

rewarded with views of Indian Blackbirds feeding by the roadside. As dawn broke, we heard a Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush and a couple saw it silhouetted, but it was still quite dark. The weather stayed cloudy all day, but we still enjoyed many of the special birds of the park: Yellow-eared Bulbuls came by in small parties – occasionally perched in the open; many Sri Lanka White-eyes were conspicuous, and some showed at almost point-blank range. Sri Lanka's notoriously elusive Whistling Thrush called regularly, but we did not see it until later in the morning when one showed for 20 minutes in the open – simply superb! The other speciality was Hill Swallow and once again they performed superbly at the centre. Sri Lanka Bush Warbler was seen briefly – a female with a pale eye, and we also had good views of Crimson-backed Flameback, several close Green Warblers and a couple of Dull-blue Flycatchers, Sri Lanka Junglefowl and much more including a wonderful young male Pallid Harrier.

As we departed, we stopped en route at Pattipola (the highest railway station in Sri Lanka), but the cloud came and went and we began to think we might not find the wood pigeon. However, as we left the village a large pigeon characteristically perched in a eucalypt drew our attention and proved to be Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon – and getting out we soon found four more! After lunch we had a look along a narrow valley for blue magpies to no avail, though Tharanga saw a Kashmir Flycatcher and the bird of the moment was a superb Legge's Hawk-eagle just above our heads – the best views I have ever had of this species and one of the best birds of the trip. The rain closed in again and so we drew a line under the day's activities.

Monday 30th November

A day of travel, and rising to more rain our next destination was Kandy, though we paused along the way firstly for a photo opportunity (seeing a good flock of Sri Lanka White-eyes) then at a tea factory for a very interesting tour of the factory and a quick cuppa and cake. The factories are also reliable sites for Hill Swallows, which again showed to perfection. We left laden down with tea of all shapes and tastes. The weather threatened to close in, and having lunched at our hotel, the Suisse (an old building used by Lord Mountbatten during the Second World war), we set off for the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens.

We spent much of the afternoon exploring the extensive grounds, seeing Crimson-fronted Barbet, Alexandrine Parakeets, two Brown-backed Needletails and Southern Hill Mynas. However, again the heavens opened and we left for the Temple of the Tooth in a torrential downpour. Those that chose to visit the temple walked off into the rain, others relaxed back at the hotel.

Tuesday 1st December

After breakfast, as we waited for our bags to arrive at the vehicle we enjoyed several species out the front of the Suisse hotel: Great Cormorants were nesting (surprisingly well inland), White-bellied Sea Eagles flew over as did several Night Herons before we eventually set off for Udewattakele. Well protected against the leeches, we strolled the trail for over a couple of hours and saw a few birds – White-rumped Shama was new – but also others like Brown Fish Owl, Tickell's Blue and Brown-breasted Flycatchers, Brown-capped Babblers lurked secretively and most enjoyed their first good view of Large-billed Leaf Warbler. I think the leeches drove us out eventually.

Our final destination today was Sigiriya, but we also made a couple of stops en route: firstly for lunch at a herbal remedy/spice garden; secondly at the huge gold-covered Buddha at Dambulla - above the temple a large flock of Alpine Swifts gathered, maybe 300 strong! Our arrival at Sigiriya, a designated World Heritage site protecting a large granitic outcrop with an ancient settlement built on the summit, was mid afternoon and rather than go straight to the hotel, we had a quick check of the fields beneath it. This produced numerous species: White-browed Fantail, Indian Robins, Sri Lanka Green Pigeons, Indian Paradise Flycatchers, all came quickly. Sri Lanka Swallows, more barbets, Black-headed Cuckooshrikes, White-browed Bulbul, Common lora, etc. – it was very good birding, but we thought we would quickly book into the hotel then go out later for a check of the forested area.

Popping round the back of the inselberg, we initially searched for Orange-headed Ground Thrush, and were eventually rewarded with fine views of two, plus a couple of Indian Pittas. Perhaps the real highlight here was the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher that perched at eye level in the trees – glowing like a rainbow-coloured jewel in the gloom – another contender for bird of the trip. Then as we waited and the dusk arrived a Jerdon's Nightjar started calling and with a bit of coaxing flew right over our heads spotlighted by a torch; a great way to end the day!

Wednesday 2nd December

The hotel was very good and welcoming, and a gentle stroll this morning around the perimeter of the complex was very enjoyable: a Drongo-cuckoo called but did not show; a White-rumped Shama was much more obliging. Down at the village by the lake we had an exciting 30 minutes, with lots of barbets, including many Crimson-fronted, fantails, paradise flycatchers, Tawny-bellied Babblers and a fine pair of *Shaheen* Peregrine Falcons, circling the rock. After breakfast we visited the forest in an attempt to find Orange-headed Thrush for those that did not come out with the group last evening, but to no avail. In a more arable area we saw our last new species for the trip, a pair of Streaked Weavers. It had become warm and we returned in good time to pack ready to start our long journey home.

Following lunch, we journeyed back to the coast in preparation for our flights to the UK, in torrential rain at times – making the driving even more exciting. We eventually arrived at the local hotel at Colombo, close to the airport, said farewell to Sunil and Jayalath, ate a fine meal and settled down early in readiness for the flight tomorrow.

Thursday 3rd December

An early stroll around the hotel grounds produced a few species, the best being good views of Asian Koel, but all too soon it was time to leave for Degombo. At the airport we said our goodbyes to Tharanga, passed through security, and before too long were on our way to Heathrow.

We hope you all enjoyed the tour as much as we did. Between us we had seen or heard all but one of Sri Lanka's currently recognised endemic bird species, with many highlights. By the end, we had recorded a very respectable 247 bird and many butterfly species. However, for us it was the fun we had enjoyed, with lots of laughs, great food and lots of shared experiences not to be forgotten. Thank you.

There is a gallery of photos from the tour on our Facebook page:-

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1141475702531473.1073741855.629771357035246&type=3>

Brian Small & Gary Elton**ITINERARY**

20 th November:	am arrive Colombo, drive to Kithulgala; pm Kithulgala
21 st November:	All day Kithulgala
22 nd November:	Early am Kithulgala, drive to Sinharaja; pm Sinharaja
23 rd November:	All day Sinharaja
24 th November:	am Sinharaja, drive to Embilipitiya; pm Kalametiya
25 th November:	am Udawalawe NP, drive to Tissamaharama; pm Debarawewa tank
26 th November:	am Bundala NP; pm Tissamaharama tank
27 th November:	am Debarawewa and Tissamaharama tank; pm Yala NP
28 th November:	am drive to Nuwara Eliya; pm Victoria Park
29 th November:	am Horton Plains; pm Nuwara Eliya
30 th November:	am drive to Kandy; pm Royal Botanical Gardens & Temple of the Tooth
1 st December:	am Udewattekele Forest Reserve, drive to Sigiriya; pm Sigiriya
2 nd December:	am Sigiriya; pm drive to Negombo
3 rd December:	Return to London.

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRD SPECIES RECORDED (n=247)**Sri Lanka Spurfowl *Galloperdix bicalcarata* ENDEMIC**

Our first were heard at Sinharaja on the morning of 23rd, with an early morning visit the next day to another section of the forest producing good views of a pair.

Sri Lanka Junglefowl *Gallus lafayetti* ENDEMIC

Seen and heard on 11 dates. Actually a fine bird and we saw a couple of lovely males at Sinharaja and Horton Plains

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristata*

Common in dry wooded grasslands.

Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*

Common, and seen at all wetland sites – our first at Kalametiya.

Fulvous Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor*

One found in amongst its commoner relatives at Kalametiya sanctuary.

Cotton Pygmy Goose *Nettapus coromandelianus*

Up to ten at Tissamaharama tank.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

A flock of 20 flew over during our morning at Bundala National Park.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

Around 20 at Kalametiya Sanctuary

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Five at Bundala National Park and three at Tissamaharama tank.

Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*

Fairly common in the south; our first was at Embilipitiya.

Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*

Fairly widespread in small numbers noted on eight dates.

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*

Roadside birds were seen on our travels on two dates. One en route to Nuwara Eliya and four seen around Sigiriya on our last morning there.

Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*

One soaring distantly at Udawalawe National Park on the 25th. Uncommon in Sri Lanka.

Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephala*

A widespread and fairly common species.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Recorded on five dates around wetland areas in the south.

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*

A maximum of three on three occasions at Tissamaharama tanks.

Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis*

Great views of one in a small reed clump at Tissamaharama tanks

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Best counts of six at Udawalawe National Park and Tissamaharama tanks.

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*

One seen briefly by Harry at Kalametiya was sadly the only one seen.

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*

Common and widespread.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus*

Widespread and abundant.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Fairly common and widespread.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Common and widespread.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Fairly common and widespread.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*

1-2 were noted on four dates during the trip.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Common and widespread.

Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*

Quite common in the south seen on five dates.

Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger*

Common.

Indian Cormorant *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*

Much less widespread than Little Cormorant and we had good views at Bundala, where we noted the aquamarine eyes.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Two nesting pairs on the hotel Lake at Embilipitiya and at least 20 birds, again with unusually several on nests at Kandy.

Oriental Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*

Quite common in the south and two Sigiriya on 2nd.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Singles on two dates, one Udawalawe National Park and one at a roadside stop on 1st.

Peregrine Falcon (Shaheen) *Falco peregrinus peregrinator*

A pair around the rock at Sigiriya on our pre-breakfast walk.

Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*

Several seen through out the tour and noted on eight dates.

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

Three at Udawalawe National Park, one Horton Plains and a roadside bird on the 1st.

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*

Fairly common and widespread.

White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster*

Noted on eight dates, with some nice views had by all.

Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus ichthyaetus*

A perched adult was seen well at Tissamaharama tank, with a flyover immature at Sigiriya on 2nd with another adult seen later in the day as we travelled to Negombo.

Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela spilogaster*

Fairly common, with at least ten individuals noted on the 24th on our way to Embilipitiya, when several flew over calling loudly as we made a pit stop. Endemic subspecies *S. c. spilogaster*.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*

A pale and faded juvenile male was seen well in flight at Horton Plains.

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*

A displaying bird was seen over Sinharaja Forest Reserve.

Shikra *Accipiter badius*

Ones and twos noted daily.

Besra *Accipiter virgatus*

One briefly perched and in flight at Sinharaja on a couple of days.

Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo burmanicus*

A perched bird unfortunately all to briefly as we left Bundala National Park.

Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*.

Single birds were seen well on five occasions in total.

Rufous-bellied Hawk-eagle *Lophotriorchis kienerii*

Immature birds were seen en route to Nuwara Eliya and en route to Kandy.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*

Two dark phase and one pale phase at Udawalawe NP and two pale phase birds at Yala NP.

Changeable [Crested] Hawk-eagle *Nisaetus cirrhatu ceylanensis*

Best views Udawalawe National Park, where at least ten birds were seen, Bundala National Park and Yala National Park. Sri Lanka and southern Indian birds display a prominent long crest, quite different to races of Changeable Hawk-eagle inhabiting the remainder of the species' range.

Endemic subspecies *N. c. ceylanensis*.

Legge's Hawk-eagle *Nisaetus kelaarti*

An adult seen as we travelled to Nuwara Eliya was followed by another stunning perched adult bird at Nuwara Eliya the following day. Now 'split' from Mountain Hawk-eagle

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*

Widespread and fairly common in wetland areas.

Watercock *Gallicrex cinerea*

One immature was seen at Bundala on 26th.

Grey-headed Swamphen *Porphyrio poliocephalus*

Fairly common in the wetland habits we visited. Now treated as a separate species by IOC.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Not very common, with birds only recorded on three dates.

Barred Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator leggei*

Seen at Udawalawe (two), Bundala and Yala (three) National Parks. Endemic subspecies *T. s. leggei*. The distinctive 'song' resembles the noise made by a small motorbike.

Indian Stone-curlew *Burhinus indicus*

Ten at Kalametiya Sanctuary and two at Yala NP.

Great Thick-knee *Burhinus recurvirostris*

Four at Kalametiya Sanctuary, with around 20 at both Bundala and Yala National Parks.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Common in freshwater and coastal wetlands in the southeast.

Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*

Fairly common in dry habitats in south.

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus lankae*

Common and widespread. Endemic subspecies *V. i. lankae*.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*

50+ at Bundala National Park and 10 at Yala National Park.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

One Kalametiya Sanctuary, several Bundala National Park and Yala.

Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

At least two at Bundala National Park.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Several at Bundala and Yala National Parks.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus seebohmi*

One at Kalametiya sanctuary, was followed by larger numbers at Bundala and Yala National Parks.

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*

Seen in large numbers at Bundala and easily seen at Yala National Park.

Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*

Fairly common.

Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*

Several seen at Kalametiya Sanctuary and Bundala National Park. A bird thought to be Common Snipe at Bundala was later identified from photos as Pintail Snipe.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

An estimated 3500 at Kalametiya Sanctuary, with many large *limosa*-like birds amongst the eastern *melanuroides*.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

A single at Bundala .

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Easily seen at Kalametiya sanctuary, Bundala and Yala National Parks.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

Common in and near coastal wetlands.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Seen at Kalametiya Sanctuary, Bundala and Yala National Parks.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Three at Udewalawe National Park and singles at Bundala and Yala.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Two at both Bundala and Yala.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Fairly common at fresh water wetlands in the southeast.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Small numbers at Bundala and Yala National Parks.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

A single bird was found amongst large numbers of Lesser Sand Plovers at Bundala NP.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Three at Kalametiya Sanctuary, many Bundala National Park and two at Yala National Park.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Easily seen at Bundala and Yala National Parks.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

A very distant bird at Bundala was followed by two more at Yala.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

Two were seen at Bundala National Park.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Two at Kalametiya Sanctuary.

Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea*

Three Bundala National Park.

Brown-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*

Two were seen at Bundala.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

Small numbers were noted in amongst the large tern species at Bundala National Park.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Three at Kalametiya Sanctuary and were followed by others at Bundala and Yala National Parks.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Seen initially at Kalametiya sanctuary, with much larger numbers present at Bundala NP.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

The most numerous and widespread tern.

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Birds were seen on four dates in amongst the commoner Whiskered Terns.

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*

Easily seen offshore during our visit to Kalametiya Sanctuary and at Bundala National Park.

Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis*

Noted and easily seen in amongst the larger tern species at the above sites.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

One was noted on the lake at Embilipitiya with several noted in amongst the other tern species at Bundala National Park.

Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*

A distant bird on the offshore rocks at Kalametiya was a great find, its distinctive dark profile and posture identified it readily as a noddy, with its large size ruling out Lesser Noddy.

Feral Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Present and seen daily.

Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon *Columba torringtoniae* ENDEMIC

Six in the trees around Pattipola Station were a much appreciated addition and reward for our searching in the rain and cloud.

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis ceylonensis*

Common and widespread. Endemic subspecies *S. c. ceylonensis*.

Common Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica robinsoni*

Fairly common in wet zone, with a single bird also seen at Sigiriya on our last day. Endemic subspecies *C. i. robinsoni*.

Orange-breasted Green Pigeon *Treron bicincta leggei*

Fairly common in the dry zone. Endemic subspecies *T. b. leggei*.

Sri Lanka Green Pigeon *Treron pompadora* ENDEMIC

Common in wet zone and around Sigiriya. Formerly, this taxon was the nominate race of Pompadour Green Pigeon, restricted to Sri Lanka.

Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea*

Fairly common.

Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot *Loriculus beryllinus* ENDEMIC

Common in wet zone.

Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*

Common Kithulgala Forest Reserve and also seen at Udewattekele Forest Reserve and Sigiriya.

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

Common and widespread throughout the dry zone.

Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*

Ten Udawalawe National Park.

Layard's Parakeet *Psittacula calthropae* ENDEMIC

Seen at Kithulgala, Sinharaja and Udewattekele Forest Reserve.

Jacobin Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*

Several were seen at Kalametiya sanctuary and Udawalawe National Park, with a young bird seen being fed by a Yellow-billed Babbler at Yala.

Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus*

A young bird was seen at Udawalawe National Park and an unusual find.

Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonneratii*

One seen very well by the group outside our Kithulgala hotel on the morning of the 22nd.

Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus*

Seen at Udawalawe NP (3), Bundala NP (2) and Sigiriya. These grey-bellied birds are now treated as specifically distinct from the rufous-bellied Plaintive Cuckoo *C. merulinus* of southeast Asia.

Fork-tailed Drongo-cuckoo *Surniculus dicruroides stewarti*

Two were heard calling at Sigiriya but unfortunately remained hidden from view. Endemic subspecies *stewarti*.

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*

Fairly common and widespread, with best views had of a pair in the grounds of our hotel on the last morning.

Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus* ENDEMIC

Brief views by some the group at Makandawa reserve were followed with good views for everyone of six birds at Sinharaja.

Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*

Ones and twos here and there and recorded on nine dates.

Green-billed Coucal *Centropus chlororhynchus* ENDEMIC

Heard daily during our time in Sinharaja with good views eventually had by everyone.

Serendib Scops Owl *Otus thilohoffmanni*

A well-hidden individual was seen well eventually by the group at Sinharaja, with two birds present the following day, though unfortunately not on this second occasion seen by us.

Indian Scops Owl *Otus bakkamoena*

A pair of roosting birds in the hotel grounds at Embilipitiya.

Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis*

One near Tissamaharama tanks and another at Udewattekele Forest Reserve.

Chestnut-backed Owlet *Glaucidium castanonotum* ENDEMIC

One heard on our first evening at Kithulgala, with one seen well there the following morning. In the past, this species has been treated as a race of Asian Barred Owlet *G. cuculoides*.

Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger*

A confiding pair at Sinharaja Forest Reserve was eventually seen well – a moment to remember as we one-by-one scrambled down the bank to get into a position to see them! Despite its name, this species also occurs in the mountains of southwestern India and is not endemic to Sri Lanka. The male is greyer and the female more rufous.

Jerdon's Nightjar *Caprimulgus atripennis*

One heard and seen at Sigiriya – ace!

Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus*

Two seen by the passengers of one of the jeeps at dusk as we were leaving Yala National Park.

Indian Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor*

Widespread. The nests are still harvested in some areas.

Brown-backed Needletail *Hirundapus giganteus*

Ten at Sinharaja Forest Reserve, singles en route on two dates and two at the Royal Botanical Gardens.

Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis*

Recorded daily.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba*

Noted on four dates, with an impressive flock of around 300 birds seen en route to Sigiriya

Little Swift *Apus affinis singalensis*

Birds were seen on eight dates at various sites. Sri Lanka birds belong with Little Swift of the race *A. a. singalensis* which is considered to be closest to the African and Indian races of Little Swift *A. affinis* but, in truth, it shows features associated with House Swift *A. nipalensis* from northeast India and southeast Asia.

Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata*

Ones and twos seen here and there. Best views were of perched birds at Yala.

Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus fasciatus*

A pair at Kithulgala Forest Reserve and four at Sinharaja Forest Reserve. Endemic subspecies *H. f. fasciatus*.

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*

Our first were roadside birds on day one, then three at Udewalawe NP and one Sigiriya.

Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*

The first at Kithulgala was only seen by Rupert and Mandy, with the rest of the group catching up with this species at Tissamaharama tank.

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

Widespread throughout the country.

Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca*

Bird of the trip for at least one person in the group! With nice views had of a bird at Sigiriya on the evening of the 1st with it or another bird heard in the area the next day – it positively glowed in the gloom!

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Fairly common, noted on six dates.

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis travancorensis*

One sand twos at Udawalawe, Bundula and Yala National Parks and Kalametiya Sanctuary.

Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis ceylonicus*

Regularly encountered throughout the dry lowland regions of Sri Lanka. The race *M. o. ceylonicus* is endemic to Sri Lanka.

Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*

A common and widespread winter visitor.

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaultii*

One en route to Kithulgala was the only one seen.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops ceylonensis*

Singles at Udawalawe and Bundula and at least six at Yala National Parks.

Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros gingalensis* ENDEMIC

Common Kithulgala and Sinharaja Forest Reserves, with smaller numbers at Sigiriya.

Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthraceros coronatus*

Three pairs at Udawalawe National Park, four Yala National Park with several others noted on our travels.

Brown-headed Barbet *Psilopogon zeylanic zeylanica*

The commoner of the barbets and widely recorded throughout.

Yellow-fronted Barbet *Psilopogon flavifrons* ENDEMIC

Heard much more frequently than it was seen. Common at Kithulgala and Sinharaja in the Wet Zone, but absent from the Dry Zone.

Crimson-fronted Barbet *Psilopogon rubricapillus* ENDEMIC

Our first en route to Embilipitiya was followed by good views of several at Sigiriya.

Coppersmith Barbet *Psilopogon haemacephala*

Recorded on six dates with best views had at Sigiriya.

Indian Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopus nanus gymnophthalmos*

A pair seen well at Sigiriya. The race *D. n. gymnophthalmos* is endemic to Sri Lanka.

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker *Dendrocopus mahrattensis*

One at Udawalawe National Park and a pair at Yala.

Lesser Yellownappe *Picus chlorolophus wellsi*

One at Kithulgala Forest reserve and two at Sinharaja. Endemic subspecies *P. c. wellsi*.

Black-rumped Flameback *Dinopium benghalense psarodes*

Seen on five dates, with a maximum of five individuals around Tissamaharama Tank on 27th. The endemic subspecies *D. b. psarodes* which we encountered shows a red, rather than golden orange, wings and mantle. This southern race in Sri Lanka is split by some (but not IOC), though its call is identical to northern birds and this seems tenuous.

Crimson-backed Flameback *Chrysocolaptes stricklandi* ENDEMIC

One Makandawa Reserve and two at Horton Plains. This bird differs from Greater Flameback in showing red, rather than golden-orange wings and mantle.

Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*

One perched on roadside wires was a surprise find for a fortunate few at Sinharaja. This was followed by two at Victoria Park and three at Sigiriya, which enabled everyone to get good views. Birds were also heard on a further three dates.

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike *Hemipus picatus leggei*

Recorded on four dates with a maximum of three at Victoria Park. Endemic subspecies *H. p. leggei* differs subtly from other races in having a blacker cap/back and a slightly brighter grey-pink wash to the chest

Sri Lanka Woodshrike *Tephrodornis affinis* ENDEMIC

Three at Tissamaharama tank, two at Yala and singles on two dates at Sigiriya.

Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus*

Three en route to Kitulgala and three at Tissamaharama Tank.

Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*

Fairly common, recorded on eight dates.

Marshall's Iora *Aegithina nigrolutea*

One seen at Udawalawe National Park. Only recently discovered on Sri Lanka.

Black-headed Cuckooshrike *Coracina melanoptera*

A pair at Sigiriya.

Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*

Fairly common and extremely smart !

Orange Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus*

Fairly common and equally smart. Now split from Scarlet Minivet *P. speciosus* of northern India and southeast Asia.

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

Widespread; most birds looked like *lucionensis* or possibly intergrades.

Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus ceylonensis*

Fairly common and regularly seen. Endemic subspecies *O. x. ceylonensis*.

White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens*

Fairly common. Endemic subspecies *D. c. leucopygialis* in which only the undertail-coverts are white is restricted to the Wet Zone. A second endemic race, *D. c. insularis* in which the entire belly is white also occurs in Sri Lanka where it is restricted to the Dry Zone.

Sri Lanka Crested Drongo *Dicrurus lophorinus* ENDEMIC

Seen daily at Kithulgala and Sinharaja Forest Reserves.

White-browed Fantail *Rhipidura aureola*

Brief singles at Udawalawe and Yala National Parks with good views finally had by everyone of several birds at Sigiriya.

Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea ceylonensis*

Seen on six dates at Kitulgala and Sinharaja Forest Reserve, Surrey Tea estate and Sigiriya. Endemic subspecies *H. a. ceylonensis* differs little from other races.

Indian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*

Fairly common and recorded on eight dates. Two races occur in Sri Lanka. Males of the endemic race *ceylonensis* are not known to attain the white plumage, so those stunningly beautiful white males we saw would be migrants of the nominate form. 'Asian Paradise Flycatcher' has now been split into three species by IOC: Indian, Oriental and Amur Paradise Flycatchers – some of us have seen all three...

Sri Lanka Blue Magpie *Urocissa ornata* ENDEMIC

Four at Sinharaja Forest Reserve at the research centre, confiding and equally impressive.

House Crow *Corvus splendens*

Widespread and extremely common.

Indian Jungle Crow *Corvus culminatus*

Widespread and fairly common. Formerly part of the Large-billed Crow complex, Sri Lanka and peninsular Indian birds are now part of a three-way split as *C. culminatus*.

Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis ceylonensis*

Four Surrey Tea Estate and one near Nuwara Eliya and also Blue Valley Tea Plantation. Endemic subspecies *C. c. ceylonensis*.

Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus mahrattarum*

A single en route to Kithulgala, up to ten in the vicinity of Nuwara Eliya and several roadside birds on the way to Kandy. These grey-and-white birds are now separated by IOC from Great Tit.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Four at Bundala.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Common.

Hill Swallow *Hirundo domicola*

At least 20 at Horton Plains, which were amazingly confiding plus several around our hotel at Nuwara Eliya. Formerly included in Pacific Swallow *H. tahitica*, and restricted to Sri Lanka and the Western Ghats region of southern India.

Sri Lanka Swallow *Cecropis hyperythra* ENDEMIC

Common where found – a nice deep burnt orange below

Jerdon's Bushlark *Mirafra affinis*

Seen well in dry zone. A recent change in the taxonomy of *Mirafra* bushlarks resulted in this taxon being split from the Rufous-winged or Bengal Bushlark *M. assamica*.

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*

Three seen well at Bundala National Park.

Black-capped Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus* ENDEMIC

Up to five around Kithulgala Forest Reserve and two Sinharaja Forest Reserve.

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*

Common and widespread.

Yellow-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus penicillatus* ENDEMIC

Easily seen during our time at Horton Plains – a fine-looking bird.

White-browed Bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus insulae*

Seen at Bundula, Yala, Victoria Park and Sigiriya. Endemic subspecies *P. l. insulae*.

Yellow-browed Bulbul *Iole indica guglielmi*

Several Kitulgala, Sinharaja and Udewattekele Forest Reserves.

Square-tailed Bulbul *Hypsipetes ganeesa humei*

Common Kitulgala and Sinharaja Forest Reserves. Endemic subspecies *H. g. humei*.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

Ones and twos in the dry zone – different voice to European birds. Two subspecies occur in Sri Lanka: *cursitans* in the dry lowlands and *omalurus* elsewhere.

Grey-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii pectoralis*

One Udawalawe National Park and Sigiriya and three at Tissamaharama tank.

Jungle Prinia *Prinia sylvatica valida*

Several at Udawalawe National Park.

Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis brevicauda*

Several Udawalawe National Park.

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata insularis*

Several Udawalawe, Bundula, Yala National Parks and Sigiriya.

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*

Widespread. Endemic subspecies *O. s. sutorius* occurs in the lowlands and *O. s. fernandornis* in the hills.

Sri Lanka Bush Warbler *Elaphrornis palliseri* ENDEMIC

One female at Horton Plains, but seen briefly and by only a few.

Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus meridionalis*

Several seen and others heard Bundala National Park. Endemic subspecies *A. s. meridionalis*. Sometimes called 'Indian Reed Warbler'.

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*

Several seen and heard at Udawalawe National Park and one at Sigiriya.

Hume's Whitethroat *Sylvia althaea*

One at Udawalawe National park alongside several notably paler *halimodendri* for comparison.

Asian Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia [curruca] halimodendri*

Three at Udawalawe National Park. Lesser Whitethroat taxonomy is in a state of flux...

Green Warbler *Phylloscopus nitidus*

Common, seen and heard daily.

Large-billed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris*

One seen at Mankandawa Forest Reserve with several more seen at Sigiriya.

Brown-capped Babbler *Pellorneum fuscicapillum* ENDEMIC

Seen at Kithulgala and Sinharaja Forest Reserves.

Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus melanurus* ENDEMIC

One Kithulgala Forest Reserve, four Sinharaja Forest Reserve, two Surrey Tea Estate, one Udewattekele Forest Reserve and heard Horton Park.

Tawny-bellied Babbler *Dumetia hyperythra*

Four Sinharaja Forest Reserve, two at Udawalawe National Park and two at Sigiriya.

Dark-fronted Babbler *Rhopocichla atriceps nigrifrons*

Up to four at Sinharaja Forest Reserves. Endemic subspecies *R. a. nigrifrons* occurs in the Wet Zone and *R. a. siccatus* in the Dry Zone and hills.

Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense nasalis*

Four Udawalawe National Park.

Orange-billed Babbler *Turdoides rufescens* ENDEMIC

Seen well at Kitulgala and Sinharaja Forest Reserves.

Yellow-billed Babbler *Turdoides affinis taprobanus*

A common species. Endemic subspecies *T. a. taprobanus* is restricted to Sri Lanka where it occurs from sea level to the highest mountains.

Ashy-headed Laughingthrush *Garrulax cinereifrons* ENDEMIC

Ten Sinharaja Forest Reserve.

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa egregia*

Noted on eight dates in total.

Sri Lanka White-eye *Zosterops ceylonensis* ENDEMIC

Easily seen at Horton Plains, and a flock of around 30 seen en route to Blue Valley Tea estate.

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis*

Four at Sinharaja Forest Reserve, Surrey Tea Estate, Horton Park and Sigiriya.

Sri Lanka Hill Myna *Gracula ptilogenys* ENDEMIC

A maximum of ten and seen on three occasions at Sinharaja Forest Reserve.

Southern Hill Myna *Gracula indica*

One at Sinharaja Forest Reserve and three at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kandy.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis melanosturnus*

Widespread and abundant.

White-faced Starling *Sturnornis albofrontalis* ENDEMIC

Four briefly at Sinharaja Forest Reserve

Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum*

Four at Yala National Park.

Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus*

Around 15 at Udawalawe National Park and ten at Yala National Park.

Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush *Myophonus blighi* ENDEMIC

Four heard and two seen at Horton Plains, one of which showed unbelievably well for such a secretive species.

Orange-headed Thrush *Geokichla citrina citrina*

Two were seen well at Sigiriya.

Spot-winged Thrush *Geokichla spiloptera* ENDEMIC

Up to six Sinharaja Forest Reserve.

Indian Blackbird *Turdus simillimus kinnisii*

Two Horton Plains. Birds in Sri Lanka are of the endemic subspecies *T. s. kinnisii* and may warrant specific status as 'Sri Lanka Blackbird'.

Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea*

Three Victoria Park and one Sigiriya. This species is a winter visitor to Sri Lanka from the forests of the Himalayas and western China.

Oriental Magpie-robin *Copsychus saularis*

Widespread throughout.

White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus leggei*

Two (adult and juvenile) at Udewattekele Forest Reserve and several seen and heard at Sigiriya.

Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata leucoptera*

First seen at Kalametiya then easily seen at Udawalawe, Bundula and Yala Parks and Sigiriya.

Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata atrata*

Seen both days at Nuwara Eliya and Horton Plains - the largest and darkest race

Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*

Several seen daily at Kithulgala and Sinharaja Forest Reserves, with others noted at Tissamaharama Tank, Surrey Tea Estate and Sigiriya. A winter visitor from northern Asia.

Brown-breasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa muttui*

Ones and twos seen at Kithulgala and Sinharaja Forest Reserves and singles at Udewattakele, Victoria Park and Sigiriya.

Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra*

Singles Victoria Park and Nuwara Eliya. This enigmatic species breeds in the northwestern Himalayas centred on Kashmir, and winters exclusively in the highlands of Sri Lanka.

Dull-blue Flycatcher *Eumyias sordida* ENDEMIC

Two at the Surrey Tea Estate and at least two at Horton Plains. Hardly 'dull-blue'...

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae jerdoni*

Singles Kithulgala and Surrey Tea estate, with several noted daily during our time in Sigiriya.

Jerdon's Leafbird *Chloropsis jerdoni*

Six dates in total during the trip at a variety of sites. Now treated as a distinct species, separate from Blue-winged Leafbird.

Golden-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons*

Up to three in the hotel grounds at Kithulgala.

Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile*

Two at Udawalawe National Park.

Legge's Flowerpecker *Dicaeum vincens* ENDEMIC

Seen well and daily during our time at Kithulgala and Sinharaja Forest Reserves.

Pale-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos ceylonensis*

Fairly common and regularly seen. A lovely bird...bird of the trip?

Purple-rumped Sunbird *Leptocoma zeylonica zeylonica*

Fairly common.

Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*

A few seen in the southeast at Kalametiya and at Sigiriya.

Loten's Sunbird *Cinnyris lotenia lotenia*

Seen on eight dates in total and seen particularly well around our Kithulgala Hotel.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Easily seen especially around towns as would expected. Treated by some as a distinct species, Indian House Sparrow *Passer indicus*.

Streaked Weaver *Ploceus manyar*

An elusive pair in roadside fields at Sigiriya

Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*

A pair seen well at Tissamaharama tank, with a female also seen at Yala National Park.

Indian Silverbill *Euodice malabarica*

Around 20 seen by some of the group at Yala National Park.

White-rumped Munia *Lonchura striata*

Easily seen and recorded on eight dates.

Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata*

Seen virtually daily in small numbers.

Black-throated Munia *Lonchura kelaarti*

Up to four at Sinharaja Forest Reserve.

Black-headed Munia *Lonchura malacca*

Several seen at Udawalawe and Bundula National Parks, Tissamaharama tank and in roadside fields at Sigiriya.

Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus*

Five Victoria Park.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Birds were noted on four dates, the largest number, around 15, at Yala National Park – most likely of the race *thunbergi*.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Seemingly quite common, with birds recorded on nine dates.

Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus malayanus*

Fairly common where found.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*

One at Kalametiya, with another briefly at Udawalawe National Park.

MAMMALS

Black-naped Hare *Lepus nigricollis*

Sri Lanka Giant Squirrel *Rafula macroura* (both the black-and-tan and grey-and-white forms)

Layard's Palm Squirrel *Funambulus layardi*

Indian Palm Squirrel *Funambulus palmarum*

Dusky Striped/Palm Squirrel *Funambulus sublineatus*

Black Rat *Rattus rattus*

Indian Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii*

Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii*

Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*

Leopard *Panthera pardus*

Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus*

Tufted Grey Langur *Semnopithecus priam thersites*

Purple-faced Leaf Monkey *Presbytis vetulus vetulus*

Bear Monkey *Presbytis vetulus senex*

Toque Macaque *Macaca sinica*

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*

Indian/Red Muntjac *Muntiacus muntjak*

Sambar *Cervus unicolor*

Spotted Deer [Chital] *Axis axis*
 Water Buffalo *Bubalus bubalis*
 Asian (aka Sri Lankan) Elephant *Elephas maximus maximus*

DRAGONFLIES

Malay Lilytanager *Paracercion malayanum*
 Painted Waxtail *Ceriagrion cerinorubellum*
 Yellow Waxtail *Ceriagrion coromandelianum*
 Pink Skimmer *Orthemtrum pruinosum neglectum*
 Green Skimmer *Orthemtrum sabina sabina*
 Asian Pintail *Acisoma panorpoides panorpoides*
 Oriental Scarlet *Crocothemis servilia servilia*
 Variegated Flutterer *Rhyothemis variegata variegata*
 Sapphire Flutterer *Rhyothemis princeps*
 Restless Demon *Indothemis limbata sita*
 Orange-winged Groundling *Brachytemis contaminata*
 Pied Parasol *Neurothemis tullia tullia*
 Spine-legged Redbolt *Rhodothemis rufa*
 Wandering Glider *Pantala flavescens*

BUTTERFLIES

Common Gull *Cepora nerissa*
 Common Jezebel *Delias eucharis*
 Common Albatross *Appias albina*
 Psyche *Leptosia nina*
 Great Orange-Tip *Hebomoia glaucippe*
 Lemon Emigrant *Catopsilia Pomona*
 Common Grass Yellow *Eurema hecabe*
 Three-Spot Grass Yellow *Eurema blanda*
 Common Bluebottle *Graphium sarpedon*
 Tailed Jay *Graphium agamemnon*
 Blue Mormon *Papilio polymnestor*
 Red Helen *Papilio helenus*
 Common Mormon *Papilio polytes*
 Lime Butterfly *Papilio demoleus*
 Common Mime *Papilio (Chilasa) clytia*
 Common Rose *Pachliopta aristolochiae*
 Crimson Rose *Pachliopta hector*
 Ceylon Rose *Atrophaneura hector*
 Sri Lankan Birdwing *Troides darsius*
 Glassy Tiger *Parantica aglea*
 Blue Tiger *Tirumala limniace*
 Common Tiger *Danaus genutia*
 Plain Tiger *Danaus chrysippus*
 Great Crow *Euploea phaenareta*
 Common Indian Crow *Euploea core*
 Ceylon Tree-nymph *Idea iasonia*
 Medus Brown *Orsotriaena medus*
 White Four-ring *Ypthima ceylonica*
 Glad-eye Bushbrown *Nissanga patnia*
 Tawny Coster *Acraea terpsicore*
 Common Leopard *Phalanta phalantha*
 Chocolate Soldier *Junonia iphita*
 Lemon Pansy *Junonia lemonias*
 Peacock Pansy *Junonia almana*
 Great Eggfly *Hypolimnas bolina*
 Common Sailer *Neptis hylas*

Common Lascar *Pantoporia hordonia*
Commander *Moduza procris*
Common Pierrot *Castalius rosimon*
Lime Blue *Chilades lajus*
Pea Blue *Lampides boeticus*
Yamfly *Loxura atymnus*
Chestnut Bob *Iambrix salsala*
Pale Palmdart *Telicota colon*

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Mugger Crocodile *Crocodylus palustris*
Sri Lankan (aka Spectacled aka Indian Cobra) Cobra *Naja naja naja*
Boulenger's [Sri Lanka] Keelback *Xenochrophis asperrimus*
Southern House Gecko *Hemidactylus frenatus*
Green Garden Lizard *Calotes calotes*
Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor*
Sri Lankan Kangaroo Lizard *Otocryptis wiegmanni*
Common Indian (Bengal) Monitor *Varanus bengalensis*
Water Monitor *Varanus salvator*
Indian Black Turtle (Indian Pond Terrapin) *Melanochelys trijuga*