

Sri Lanka - Blue Whales & Leopards

Naturetrek Tour Report

22 - 29 November 2015



Torque Macaque



Spinner Dolphin



Red-wattled Lapwing



Grey Langur

Report compiled by Chaminda Dilruk & Devaka Jayamanne
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Highlights

The first day of whale watching yielded sightings of the Blue Whale, and we were lucky with sightings of Bryde's Whales, Spinner Dolphins, Bottlenose Dolphins and Flying Fish on all three sea excursions. As the group left the ocean and ventured in to the Jungles, a pair of mating Leopards was spotted on the first day in Yala, during an evening walk, and then a second Leopard the following day, during safari. Overall, the group saw 19 species of mammals, 155 bird species and a good number of reptiles, fish and other species.

Day 1

Saturday 21st November

The group met at the airport and boarded a flight to Sri Lanka for their 10-day Blue Whale & Leopard watching tour.

Day 2

Sunday 22nd November

The flight arrived at Colombo airport at 1.15pm and the group left the airport at 2pm. Before entering the expressway, we passed by the Talangama tank where we encountered Black-headed Ibis, Indian Pond Heron, Cattle Egret, Intermediate Egret, Little Cormorant, Brahminy Kite and Red-wattled Lapwing. On the highway we witnessed Indian Pea Fowl, Black-winged Stilt, Common Sandpiper, Rock Pigeon, Spotted Dove, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, White-throated Kingfisher, House Crow, Barn Swallow, Red-vented Bulbul and Common Myna.

We reached our hotel at 4.20pm and, after checking-in, some of the group joined in for an evening birding session around the hotel where we encountered Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Yellow-billed Babbler, Common Tailorbird, White-bellied Drongo, Large-billed Crow, Black-hooded Oriole, Indian Swiftlet, Asian Koel, Green Imperial Pigeon, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Little Tern and Greater Crested Tern. We also saw Indian Flying Fox, House Gecko, Land Monitor, and Common Jezebel, Plain Tiger, and Common Crow butterflies. We came back to the hotel by 6.15pm and met again in the restaurant at 7.30pm for dinner.

Day 3

Monday 23rd November

We started the day at 6am with tea/coffee and then went to Mirissa pier for a whale watching tour, taking our picnic breakfast with us. At the pier and in to the boat ride we encountered Striated Heron, Gull-billed Tern and Whiskered Tern. An unfortunate dead Green Turtle caught in a fishing net was a sad sight for the group, but after about an hour and a half into the journey, we spotted our first Bryde's Whale, followed by a pod of about 20 Spinner Dolphins. A majestic Blue Whale broke the surface many times and displayed its signature tail flip before diving in to the deep.

We witnessed a Common Garden Lizard on our way from the pier to the hotel. After lunch in the hotel, we visited the Galle Fort and enjoyed views of the old colonial architecture, still standing to this day, while enjoying the sunset from the ramparts. We encountered Asian Palm Swift, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Paddyfield Pipit, Ashy Crowned Sparrow-Lark, Rosy Starling, House Sparrow and Scaly-breasted Munia.

We headed back to the hotel at 6.25 pm and met for the checklist at 7.15pm. We had our dinner at 8pm, after the next day's briefing.

Day 4

Tuesday 24th November

Once again we had tea/coffee at 6am before going to the pier for our second day of whale watching. At the pier we encountered Painted Francolin, Bridled Tern, and Brown Noddy before setting off on the boat. Once again we encountered Bryde's Whale very close to the boat, two pods of Spinner Dolphins and also Bottlenose Dolphins. We also encountered a pair of mating Green Turtles, Flying Fish and Tuna.

We reached the hotel at 1.35pm for lunch and after lunch the group were invited to participate in the hotel's Christmas-cake-mixing event. At 3.30pm we left for Kirala Kele forest patch. We encountered Lesser Whistling Duck, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Little Grebe, Darter, White-breasted Waterhen, Purple Swamphen, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Greater Coucal, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Sri Lankan Swallow, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Palm Squirrel and a Water Monitor. Glassy Tiger, Common Tiger and Three-spot Glass Yellow butterflies were also seen here.

We headed back to the hotel by 5.50pm and did the checklist at 7pm, followed by a special cocktail party leading to dinner.

Day 5

Wednesday 25th November

Today we had tea/coffee at 6.00am and reached the pier at 6.20am to board our boat. At the pier, we saw many coral fish along with an Angel Fish. Indian Cormorant and Lesser Crested Tern were also spotted here. In the ocean we once again saw Bryde's Whales and many Spinner Dolphins, along with Flying Fish and Tuna.

We returned to the hotel for lunch at 12.15pm, and then at 3.15 pm we left for some birding at Kirala Forest. Here we encountered Garganey, Eurasian Spoonbill, Baya Weaver, White-rumped Munia, Oriental Honey-buzzard and a Grey Mongoose.

The group also witnessed the traditional fishing style of Stilt Fishing in the Weligama area.

We returned to the hotel 6.45pm and, after the checklist, had dinner at 7.45pm.

Day 6

Thursday 26th November

At 6.30 am we did a little pre-breakfast birding around the hotel garden where we saw many of the birds encountered before, along with a Purple-faced Leaf Monkey. After breakfast, we checked out of the hotel at 8.30am and proceeded to Yala for our next three nights' stay. En route to Yala we encountered Northern Pintail, Black-Crowned Night Heron, Grey Heron, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Himalayan Buzzard, Greater Thick-knee, Grey Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper and a Green Forest Lizard.

We did more birding in the Bundala National Park area and also visited a Buddhist Temple where we had the opportunity to take a few photos. We reached the hotel at 2.40pm and, after a late lunch, once again did a small

walk around the hotel. We saw Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Indian Pitta, Spot-billed Pelican and Jerdon's and Indian Nightjar.

We were fortunate enough to get a view of a pair of mating Leopards at a distance, along with Ruddy Mongoose, Black-naped Hare, Wild Boar, Wild Buffalo, Rock Python and Mugger Crocodile.

We did the checklist at 7.30pm and concluded the day with dinner.

Day 7

Friday 27th November

We left the hotel at 5.15am after tea/coffee, for our first safari. We took a picnic breakfast and lunch with us. Today we encountered Barred Buttonquail, the very rare Black-necked Stork, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Pacific Golden Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Pin-tailed and Common Snipe, Wood Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, White-winged Tern, Jacobin Cuckoo, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Blue-faced Malkoha, Sirkeer Malkoha, Crested Treeswift, Coppersmith Barbet, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Jerdon's Bush Lark, Oriental Skylark, White-browed Bulbul, White-browed Fantail, Yellow-eyed Babbler and Oriental White-eye. Torque Macaque, Grey Langur, Golden Jackal, Ruddy Mongoose, Leopard, Elephant, Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, Samba Deer, Water Buffalo and Black-naped Hare were also encountered.

We returned to the hotel at 6.50pm and did the checklist at 7.45pm, followed by dinner.

Day 8

Saturday 28th November

We left the hotel 5.30am, again with picnic breakfast, and entered the Yala park at 6am. We encountered Brown-headed Barbet, Jungle Prinia, Ashy Prinia, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Brahminy Starling, Loten's Sunbird and also a Fan-throated Lizard, along with many mammals which we had encountered the previous day. Large Orange Tip, White Orange Tip, Eggfly and Blue Glassy Tiger were some of the butterflies we encountered today.

We returned to the hotel at 1.30pm for lunch. After relaxing until 4.30pm, we did another walk around the hotel premises and encountered most of the species seen before. We did the checklist at 7pm and proceeded for dinner at 7.30pm.

Day 9

Sunday 29th November

We left the hotel at 8.15am after breakfast, and proceeded to Colombo via Tissamaharama. We encountered many Indian Flying Foxes roosting in a tree and we also saw a few ancient temples in the vicinity. In the Debarawewa area we encountered Yellow Bittern, Eurasian Thick-knee, Lesser Goldenback, Crimson-backed Goldenback, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Jerdon's Leafbird, Zitting Cisticola, Tawny-bellied Babbler, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Thick-billed Flowerpecker and Stork-billed Kingfisher.

We reached the airport hotel at 6.45pm and had dinner soon afterwards.

Day 10

Monday 30th November

After breakfast the group left the hotel at 9.45am in time to catch their flight back to the UK.

Species Lists

Mammals

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Toque Macaque	<i>Macaca sinica</i>
2	Grey Langur	<i>Presbytis entellus</i>
3	Purple-faced Leaf Monkey	<i>Presbytis vetulus</i>
4	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
5	Indian Grey Mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>
6	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>
7	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
8	Indian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
9	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
10	Spotted Deer (Chital)	<i>Cervus axis</i>
11	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
12	Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus arnee</i>
13	Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>
14	Indian or Black-naped Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
15	Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus gigantea</i>
16	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>
17	Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>
18	Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>
19	Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>

Reptiles & Amphibians

1	Land Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>
2	Water Monitor	<i>Varanus salvator</i>
3	Fan-throated Lizard	<i>Sitana ponticeriana</i>
4	Common Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
5	Green Forest Lizard	<i>Calotes calotes</i>
6	Common House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>
7	Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
8	Rock Python	<i>Python molurus</i>
9	Green Turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
10	Flying Fish	<i>Cheilopogon spilopterus</i>
11	Tuna sp.	Tribe Thunnini
12	Regal Angel Fish	<i>Pygoplites dicanthus</i>

Birds (Bold = endemic or nearly endemic)

1	Painted Francolin	<i>Francolin pictus</i>
2	Barred Buttonquail	<i>Turnix suscitator</i>
3	Sri Lanka Junglefowl	<i>Gallus lafayetii</i>
4	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
5	Lesser Whistling-duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
6	Cotton Pygmy-goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>
7	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
8	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
9	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
10	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
11	Black-necked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>
12	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
13	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
14	Yellow Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>

Common name	Scientific name
15 Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
16 Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
17 Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola greyii</i>
18 Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
19 Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
20 Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
21 Great Egret	<i>casmerodius albus</i>
22 Intermediate Egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>
23 Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
24 Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
25 Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
26 Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
27 Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
28 Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
29 Darter	<i>Anbinga melanogaster</i>
30 Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
31 Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
32 White-bellied Sea Eagle, (White-bellied Fish Eagle)	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
33 Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
34 Oriental Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
35 Himalayan Buzzard, (Common Buzzard)	<i>Buteo(buteo) burmanicus</i>
36 Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatu</i>
37 White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
38 Purple Swampphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>
39 Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
40 Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
41 Indian Thick-knee, (Eurasian Thick-knee)	<i>Burhinus(oedicephalus) indicus</i>
42 Great Thick-knee	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>
43 Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
44 Yellow-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>
45 Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
46 Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
47 Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
48 Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
49 Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
50 Lesser Sand Plover, (Mongolian Plover)	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
51 Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>
52 Pin-tailed Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>
53 Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
54 Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
55 Common Red shank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
56 Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
57 Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
58 Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
59 Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
60 Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
61 Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
62 Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
63 Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
64 Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
65 Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
66 Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bengalensis,</i>
67 Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>

Common name	Scientific name
68 Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
69 Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
70 White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
71 Bridled Tern	<i>Onychoprion anaethetus</i>
72 Brown Noddy	<i>Anous stolidus</i>
73 Common Pigeon, (Rock Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>
74 Spotted Dove	<i>Stigmatopelia chinensis</i>
75 Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>
76 Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
77 Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
78 Jacobin Cuckoo, Pied Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
79 Grey-bellied Cuckoo, (Plaintive Cuckoo)	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>
80 Asian Koel	<i>Endynamys scolopacerus</i>
81 Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Rhopodytes viridirostris</i>
82 Sirkeer Malkoha	<i>Taccocua leschenaultii</i>
83 Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
84 Jerdon's Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus atripennis</i>
85 Indian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>
86 Indian Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia unicolor</i>
87 Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
88 House Swift, Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
89 Crested Treeswift, (Grey-rumped Treeswift)	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
90 Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
91 Green Bee-eater, (Little Green Bee-eater)	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
92 Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
93 Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
94 Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
95 White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
96 Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
97 Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
98 Common Hoopoe, (Eurasian Hoopoe)	<i>Upupa epops</i>
99 Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
100 Crimson-fronted Barbet	<i>Megalaima rubricapillus</i>
101 Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
102 Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>
103 Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos mabrittensis</i>
104 Lesser Goldenback, (Black-rumped Flameback)	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
105 Crimson-backed Goldenback, (Crimson-backed Flameback)	<i>Chrysocolaptes(lucidus) stricklandi</i>
106 Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
107 Sri Lanka Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis (pondicerianus) affinis</i>
108 Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
109 Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
110 Long-tailed Shrike (Rufous- backed Shrike)	<i>Lanius schach</i>
111 Common Iora(<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
112 Jerdon's Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>
113 Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
114 House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
115 Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
116 Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
117 Sri Lanka Swallow	<i>Cecropis (daurica) hyperythra</i>
118 White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
119 Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
120 Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
121 Jerdon's Bushlark	<i>Mirafra affinis</i>
122 Oriental Skylark	<i>Alauda gulula</i>
123 Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>
124 Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
125 White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
126 Jungle Prinia	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>
127 Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
128 Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
129 Common Tailorbird	<i>Ortbotomus sutorius</i>
130 Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
131 Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
132 White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
133 Asian Paradise-flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
134 Tawny-bellied Babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>
135 Yellow-eyed Babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>
136 Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
137 Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
138 Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>
139 Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>
140 Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
141 Indian Robin, (Black-backed Robin)	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus</i>
142 Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>
143 Thick-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>
144 Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
145 Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
146 Purple Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>
147 Loten's Sunbird, (Long-billed Sunbird)	<i>Nectarinia lotenia</i>
148 Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
149 Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
150 House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
151 Indian Silverbill, (White-throated Silverbill)	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>
152 White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
153 Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
154 Black-throated Munia	<i>Lonchura kelaarti</i>
155 Black-headed Munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>

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