

Sri Lanka Blue Whales & Leopards

Naturetrek Tour Report

19 - 28 November 2016



Golden Jackal



Leopard



Indian Pitta



Blue Whale

Report and images by Chaminda Dilruk



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Tour participants: Chaminda Dilruk with three Naturetrek clients

Highlights

In total we saw 18 species of mammals, 13 species of reptiles and others and 146 bird species. Our whale watching excursion yielded many Blue Whales, a Bryde's Whale and a large pod of Pilot Whales. Yala was teeming with wildlife as four different Leopards showed up for our group. The Cinnamon Wild Yala garden was packed with birds and we had some good sightings of the Indian Nightjar.

Day 1

Saturday 19th November

Group members met at the airport and boarded a flight to Sri Lanka to start their tour.

Day 2

Sunday 20th November

The flight arrived at Colombo airport at 12.50pm, and we left the airport at 1.30pm. We reached the hotel at 4.30pm and did some birding around the hotel garden and the town. We encountered Indian Peafowl, Painted Stork, Black-necked Stork, Eastern Cattle Egret, Purple Heron, Intermediate Egret, Little Egret, Little Cormorant, Brahminy Kite, Red-wattled Lapwing, Indian Swiftlet, White-throated Kingfisher, Crimson-fronted Barbet, White-bellied Drongo, House Crow, Red-vented Bulbul, Yellow-billed Babbler and Common Myna. We returned to the hotel and had a briefing at 7pm regarding the next few days' whale watching excursions, and had dinner afterwards.

Day 3

Monday 21st November

We left the hotel with picnic breakfast at 6.15am after having a cup of tea/coffee. Our boat put out to sea at 7.30am; by 8.15am we were able to see our first Blue Whale and immediately after there was another Blue Whale. We stayed with one Blue Whale and were able to see it surface and dive many times before we turned back to shore. Whiskered Tern and Greater Crested Tern were also seen. As we neared the shore suddenly a Bryde's Whale surfaced in front of our boat and gulped a shoal full of krill; it repeated this twice before disappearing in to the deep.

We were back in the hotel by 12.45pm and, after having lunch, we left for Galle Fort and enjoyed the views of the city within the ramparts which boasts much colonial architecture, well preserved up to this day. We encountered Indian Pond Heron, Great Egret, Gull-billed Tern, Greater Crested Tern, Whiskered Tern, Spotted Dove, Lesser Goldenback, Purple-rumped Sunbird, Lotens's Sunbird and Scaly-breasted Munia, along with a Purple-faced Leaf Monkey and Land Monitor during our journey.

We returned to the hotel at 5.30pm and did our checklist at 7.15pm, followed by the next day's briefing and dinner.

Day 4

Tuesday 22nd November

Once again we left the hotel with a picnic breakfast at 6.15am, after having a cup of tea/coffee. Although the weather was threatening rain, we had a very calm and clear day at sea. We had very good views of about 30 – 40 Spinner Dolphins and then close views of a Blue Whale. Our next sighting was a pod of more than 20 Pilot Whales which stayed close to our boat for a very long time. After a very successful whale-watching excursion we returned to the hotel and had our lunch.

After lunch we set out to Kira Kele forest reserve for some birding and encountered Lesser Whistling Duck, Northern Pintail, Garganey, Cinnamon Bittern, Grey Heron, Indian Cormorant, Oriental Darter, White-bellied Sea Eagle, White-breasted Waterhen, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Common Moorhen, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, Green Imperial Pigeon, Asian Koel, Asian Palm Swift, Little Swift, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Brown-headed Barbet, Black-hooded Oriole, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Large-billed Crow, White-browed Bulbul, Barn Swallow, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Zitting Cisticola and Plain Prinia along with Common Garden Lizard, Green Garden Lizard, Fan-throated Lizard and House Gecko.

We returned to the hotel at 6.30pm and did the checklist at 7pm, followed by the briefing and dinner.

Day 5

Wednesday 23rd November

We left the hotel once again at 6.15am after tea/coffee and were on our boat sailing into the ocean by 7.15am. We were able to see more Blue Whales but had to travel far out into the ocean as the Whales had travelled further out to sea in search of food.

After returning to the hotel for lunch, we did a birding session in the Weligama town and encountered Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Common Tailorbird, Oriental White-eye, Indian Robin, Oriental Magpie-Robin, Asian Brown Flycatcher and Wilson's Storm Petrel along with a Water Monitor.

We returned to the hotel and did the checklist at 7pm, followed by the briefing and dinner.

Day 6

Thursday 24th November

We did a pre-breakfast bird walk around the hotel and encountered Brown Mongoose along with many birds seen before. We had breakfast at 8.30am and checked out of the hotel to proceed to the Yala Cinnamon Wild hotel. En route we stopped for birding at Bundala Park out zone, Kalametiya and Hambantota Lagoon.

We reached the hotel at 1.30pm for lunch and, after relaxing until 3pm, we did a bird walk around the hotel and encountered Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Black-crowned Night Heron, Spot-billed Pelican, Great Stone-curlew, Black-winged Stilt, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Common Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Greater Sand Plover, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Green Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff, Caspian Tern, Little Tern, White-winged Tern, Rock Dove, Indian Nightjar, Green Bee-eater, Indian Pitta, Brown Shrike, Purple Sunbird, Richard's Pipit and Paddyfield Pipit, along with Spotted Deer, Water Buffalo and Land Monitor.

We returned to the hotel at 7pm and did the checklist at 8pm, followed by the briefing and dinner.

Day 7

Friday 25th November

We had tea/coffee and left the hotel at 5.30am for our first jeep safari. The weather was hot and clear. The birds we encountered today included Crested Serpent Eagle, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Barred Buttonquail, Pacific Golden Plover, Pin-tailed Snipe, Small Pratincole, Oriental Turtle Dove, Greater Coucal, Sirkeer Malkoha, Blue-faced Malkoha, Jacobin Cuckoo, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Common Kingfisher, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Common Hoopoe, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, White-browed Fantail, Jerdon's Bush Lark, Oriental Skylark, Brahminy Starling, Rosy Starling, House Sparrow and Baya Weaver.

We had our picnic breakfast near the beach and relaxed a bit before setting out again in search of the Leopard. We were lucky, with four different sightings. We also saw Grey Langur, Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Wild Boar, Black-naped Hare, Mugger Crocodile and Water Buffalo.

We returned to the hotel at 6.30pm and did the checklist at 7.15pm, followed by the briefing and dinner.

Day 8

Saturday 26th November

Once again we left the hotel at 5.30am after tea/coffee for our safari. We encountered Toque Macaque, Grey Langur, Golden Jackal, Ruddy Mongoose, Asian Elephant, Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, Sambar Deer, Water Buffalo, Indian Palm Squirrel and Black-naped Hare. Birds included Brown Fish Owl, Crested Tree Swift, Coppersmith Barbet, White-naped Woodpecker, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Common Iora, Small Minivet, Ashy Drongo, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark, Jungle Prinia, Jerdon's Leafbird, Black-headed Munia and Blyth's Pipit. We also saw Grey-headed Swamphen, which is a recent split from Purple Swamphen, which does not occur here.

We had our picnic breakfast and lunch inside the park and had a leisurely return to the hotel at 6.30pm. We did the checklist at 7.15pm, followed by the next day's briefing and dinner.

Day 9

Sunday 27th November

We did a pre-breakfast birding session in Tissamaharama tank and encountered many of the birds seen before. We returned to the hotel at 9.30am and, after having breakfast, we checked out of the hotel and proceeded to Udawalawe where we did a little birding and had lunch in a local restaurant.

We reached the Airport Garden hotel at 6pm and enjoyed our leisurely dinner.

Day 10

Monday 28th November

After breakfast, we left the hotel at 9.45am and went to the airport for our flight back to the UK, where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

Species Lists

Mammals

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Toque Macaque	<i>Macaca sinica</i>
2	Grey Langur	<i>Semnopithecus (Presbytis) entellus</i>
3	Purple-faced Leaf Monkey	<i>Trachypithecus (Presbytis) vetulus</i>
4	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
5	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>
6	Brown Mongoose	<i>Herpestes fuscus</i>
7	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus kotiya</i>
8	Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
9	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
10	Spotted Deer	<i>Cervus axis</i>
11	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
12	Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus Bubalis</i>
13	Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>
14	Indian Hare, Black-naped Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
15	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>
16	Bryde's Whale	<i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>
17	Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella mulla</i>
18	Pilot Whale	<i>Globicephala</i>

Reptiles & Others

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Yellow-spotted Keel Back Snake	<i>Xenochrophis flavipunctatus</i>
2	Bengal (Land) Monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>
3	Asian Water Monitor	<i>Varanus salvator</i>
4	Oriental (Common) Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
5	Green Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes calotes</i>
6	Fan - throated Lizard	<i>Sitana ponticeriana</i>
7	Hump - nosed Lizard	<i>Lyriocephalus scutatus</i>
8	Estuarine Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>
9	Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
10	Common House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>
11	Common Skink	<i>Eutropis carinata</i>
12	Round-Snout Pygmy Frog	<i>Pseudophilautus femoralis</i>
13	Spotted Tree Frog	<i>Polypedates maculatus</i>

Birds (endemics in bold)

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
2	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
3	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
4	Sri Lanka Junglefowl	<i>Gallus lafayettii</i>
5	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
6	Wilson's Storm Petrel	<i>Oceanites oceanicus</i>
7	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
8	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
9	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
10	Black-necked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>

11	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
12	Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
13	Yellow Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>
14	Cinnamon Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>
15	Black Bittern	<i>Dupetor flavicollis</i>
16	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
17	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
18	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
19	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
20	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
21	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
22	Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>
23	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
24	Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
25	Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>
26	Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
27	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
28	Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
29	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
30	Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
31	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
32	White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
33	Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus ichthyaeus</i>
34	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amauornis phoenicurus</i>
35	Ruddy-breasted Crake	<i>Porzana fusca</i>
36	Watercock	<i>Gallicrex cinerea</i>
37	Grey-headed Swamphen (split from Purple S.)	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>
38	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
39	Eurasian Coot, Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
40	Barred Buttonquail	<i>Turnix suscitator</i>
41	Great Stone-curlew, Great Thick-knee	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>
42	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
43	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>
44	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
45	Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
46	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
47	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
48	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
49	Lesser Sand Plover, Mongolian Plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
50	Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>
51	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
52	Pin-tailed Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>
53	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
54	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
55	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
56	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
57	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
58	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
59	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
60	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
61	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
62	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>

63	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
64	Small Pratincole	<i>Glareola lactea</i>
65	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
66	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
67	Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
68	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
69	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
70	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
71	Rock Dove, Common Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
72	Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
73	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
74	Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>
75	Sri Lanka Green Pigeon	<i>Treron pompadora</i>
76	Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
77	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
78	Sirkeer Malkoha	<i>Taccocua leschenaultii</i>
79	Blue-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>
80	Jacobin Cuckoo, Pied Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
81	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
82	Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>
83	Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>
84	Indian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>
85	Crested Treeswift, Gray-rumped Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
86	Indian Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus unicolor</i>
87	Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
88	Little Swift, House Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
89	Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
90	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
91	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
92	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
93	Green Bee-eater, Little Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
94	Blue-tailed Bee-Eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
95	Chestnut-headed Bee-Eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
96	Eurasian Hoopoe, Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
97	Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>
98	Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Psilopogon zeylanicus</i>
99	Crimson-fronted Barbet	<i>Psilopogon rubricapillus</i>
100	Coppersmith Barbet	<i>Psilopogon haemacephalus</i>
101	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos mahrattensis</i>
102	Black-rumped Flameback, Lesser Goldenback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
103	White-naped Woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>
104	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
105	Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
106	Sri Lanka Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis affinis</i>
107	Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
108	Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
109	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
110	Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>
111	Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
112	White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
113	White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
114	Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Asian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>

115	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
116	Indian Jungle Crow, Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>
117	Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>
118	Jerdon's Bush Lark	<i>Mirafra affinis</i>
119	Oriental Skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>
120	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
121	White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
122	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
123	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
124	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
125	Jungle Prinia	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>
126	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
127	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
128	Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
129	Oriental White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
130	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
131	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>
132	Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>
133	Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>
134	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
135	Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>
136	Jerdon's Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>
137	Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>
138	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
139	Loten's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>
140	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
141	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>
142	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
143	Tricolored Munia, Black-headed Munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>
144	Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
145	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
146	Blyth's Pipit	<i>Anthus godlewskii</i>

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