

Sri Lanka-Blue Whales & Leopards

(including Sinharaja Forest Reserve extension)

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 - 29 December 2016



Leopard



Brahminy Kite



Glossy Ibis



Blue Whale

Report & Images compiled by Indika Jayatissa



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Tour participants: Indika Jayatissa (leader) together with four Naturetrek clients

Highlights

During the tour and extension we saw 22 Mammal species, 13 species of Reptiles & Amphibians and 158 Bird species. Our Whale watching excursion yielded Blue Whale, Fin Whale, Spinner Dolphin and Bottlenose Dolphin. A rare sighting of Amur Falcon in flight was special. The Leopards didn't keep away during our Yala Safaris and we were entertained by a live-action hunt when a Leopard caught a Bengal Monitor. We also saw Sloth Bear, making it a fantastic all round tour.

Day 1

Saturday 17th December

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

Day 2

Sunday 18th December

The flight arrived at Colombo airport at 1.50pm, where we met Indika. We left the airport at 3.30pm and reached our hotel at 5.30pm. En route we saw Black-headed Ibis, Rock Pigeon and Spotted Dove. In the evening we had dinner and then retired for the night.

Day 3

Monday 19th December

Weligama

We had an early tea/coffee before leaving the hotel with a picnic breakfast at 6.15am. Our boat set out to sea at 7am and our first encounter of the day was a Fin Whale. Gradually we started to see pods of Spinner Dolphins, until finally we spotted the great Blue Whale along with a few Flying Fish.

We were back at the hotel by 12.30pm for lunch, after which we had time to relax before going to the Kirala Kele sanctuary. Here we encountered over 50 different species of birds which included Yellow and Black Bitterns, Striated Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Indian Pond Heron, Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets, Stork, White-throated, Common, Stork-billed and Pied Kingfishers, and Sri Lanka Swallow.

We returned to the hotel at 5.30pm and did our checklist at 7.30pm followed by a briefing and then dinner.

Day 4

Tuesday 20th December

Weligama

Today was clear and sunny, and once again we had tea/coffee before leaving the hotel with a picnic breakfast at 6.15am. We had to travel further out into the ocean to see the Blue Whale, and we saw a Loggerhead Turtle too.

We returned to the hotel at 2.30pm and after lunch, we set out to see the Galle Fort. En route we saw Shikra, Red-wattled Lapwing, Greater Crested Tern, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Common Iora, Rosy Starling, Loten's Sunbird and House Sparrow. We also visited a Turtle hatchery where Loggerhead, Hawksbill and Green Turtles were seen.

We returned to the hotel at 6.30pm and in the evening did our routine of checklist, briefing and dinner.

Day 5

Wednesday 21st December

Weligama

Once again we left the hotel at 6.15am after tea/coffee and were on the ocean by 7.15am. It was another clear and sunny day and we saw the Blue Whales again.

After returning to the hotel and having lunch, we visited the Kirala Kele sanctuary again and encountered many of the birds seen before including Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Common Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Asian Koel, Indian Swiftlet, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater and Indian Robin.

We returned to the hotel and started our evening routine at 7pm.

Day 6

Thursday 22nd December

Yala

After breakfast we checked out of the hotel and set off on our drive to Yala. En route we stopped outside the Bundala National Park and encountered Painted Stork, Glossy Ibis, Great Stone-curlew, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Pin-tailed Snipe, Common Greenshank, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Tern, Green Imperial Pigeon, Crested Treeswift, Green Bee-eater, Brown-headed Barbet, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Zitting Cisticola, Grey Wagtail and Paddyfield Pipit, along with Grey Langur, Grizzled Giant Squirrel and Indian Hare.

We reached our next hotel, the Cinnamon Wild Hotel at 1.30pm in time for lunch. After relaxing until 3pm, we did a bird walk around the hotel and encountered many birds already seen. The lake in front of the hotel was teeming with Muggers Crocodiles, and the trees around the hotel were full of Grey Langurs.

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

Day 7

Friday 23rd December

Yala

After tea/coffee, we left the hotel at 5.30am for our first jeep safari. The weather was clear and sunny. Among the many birds seen, the new ones included Sri Lanka Junglefowl, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Pacific Golden Plover, Jacobin Cuckoo, Indian Roller, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, White-browed Fantail, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Jerdon's Bushlark, Brahminy Starling and Indian Silverbill.

We had a very early encounter with a Leopard near a waterhole. It lay under a shady bush and was taking a long nap. Since there was no movement from the Leopard, we moved on and had our picnic breakfast near the beach. After breakfast we encountered two big tusker Elephants on our path confronting a jeep. Fortunately the driver and the passengers were able to escape without incident.

After more birdwatching, we had our picnic lunches and relaxed near a cool river. After lunch we returned to the place where we had first seen the Leopard, and were lucky to see it coming out from the bushes. It slowly walked along the banks of the waterhole and suddenly pounced on a big Bengal (Land) Monitor. That was lunch for the Leopard! We moved on to let it enjoy its meal. Another interesting sighting was of a Wild Boar eating a Spotted Deer carcass, when suddenly a herd of Elephants raced towards the Boar and chased it away. A hungry Golden Jackal seized the opportunity and tried to steal the carcass, only to be chased by the Wild Boar that returned for its meal. While exiting the park we saw another Leopard at a distance.

We returned to the hotel at 6.30pm and later followed our usual evening routine.

Day 8

Saturday 24th December

Yala

Once again we left the hotel at 5.30am after tea/coffee for a safari. The new birds we encountered today included Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Gull-billed Tern, Common Hoopoe, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Brown-capped Babbler, Asian Brown Flycatcher and a very rare Amur Falcon. A Sloth Bear walked ten metres away from our jeep as Ruddy Mongoose and Spotted Deer looked on from the sides of the road. We had another good sighting of the Leopard resting on a tree branch before we returned to the hotel for our lunch.

Later we had a bird walk around the hotel and encountered many of the birds and mammals seen before.

As it was Christmas Eve, we enjoyed a gala dinner at the hotel and had a late night.

Main Tour Day 9; Extension Day 1

Sunday 25th December

After breakfast we checked out of the hotel and drove towards Sinharaja. En route we stopped at Tissamaharama for some birding and encountered a large colony of Indian Flying Foxes, along with many other birds seen before.

We had lunch at a local restaurant and then the group split. Two on the main tour drove to the Airport Garden Hotel at Katunayake, reaching it at 6pm. In the evening they enjoyed a leisurely dinner.

Meanwhile the two staying for the Sinharaja Forest Reserve Extension continued their journey and reached the Blue Magpie Lodge at 4.30pm. We did some birding around the hotel gardens and encountered Emerald Dove, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Spotted Dove and Black Bulbul. In the evening we did the checklist at 7.30pm which was followed by dinner.

Main Tour Day 10; Extension Day 2

Sunday 26th December

For the main tour members, 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.

For the Sinharaja Extension members, we had an early breakfast at 5.30am and then set out to the Sinharaja Rainforest with a packed lunch. Sightings included Asian Brown Flycatcher, Brown-breasted Flycatcher, Sri

Lanka Drongo, Malabar Trogon, Spot-winged Thrush, Legge's Flowerpecker, Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler, Black-capped Bulbul, Dark-fronted Babbler, Black-naped Monarch, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Asian Palm Swift and White-breasted Waterhen. We also encountered Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Toque Macaque, Asian Water Monitor, Green Garden Lizard and Sri Lanka Kangaroo Lizard. As we were making our way to the exit, we were welcomed by the familiar noisy call of the Sri Lanka Blue Magpie and enjoyed the display they gave.

After returning to the hotel, we did our checklist at 7.30pm followed by dinner.

Extension Day 3

Tuesday 27th December

Sinharaja

We had a pre-breakfast birding session around Sinharaja village and encountered Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Red-faced Malkoha, Green-billed Coucal, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, Orange-billed Babbler, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Spot-winged Thrush and Indian Blue Robin. We returned to the hotel for lunch.

Later in the afternoon we walked to the Sinharaja rainforest entrance and encountered Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Sri Lanka White-Eye, Dark-fronted Babbler, Black-capped Bulbul, Plum-headed Parakeet and Yellow-fronted Barbet.

There were heavy showers in the evening so we had to cancel the evening bird walk. At 7.30pm we did our checklist which was followed by dinner.

Extension Day 4

Tuesday 28th December

Katunayake

We had a pre-breakfast birding session around the Sinharaja village again. Today we encountered White-rumped Munia, Crested Serpent Eagle, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Rose-ringed Parakeet, Chestnut-backed Owlet, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Orange Minivet, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot and Layard's Parakeet.

After lunch in the hotel we did another bird walk and encountered Golden-fronted Leafbird, Black Eagle and Yellow-fronted Barbet. We then checked out and proceeded to a hotel near the airport for our final night's stay. We reached the hotel at 6.30pm and later did our checklist and had dinner.

Extension Day 5

Wednesday 29th December

After breakfast we drove to the airport in time for our flight back to London, where the tour and extension ended.

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Species Lists: (previous names in brackets)

Mammals:

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Toque Macaque	<i>Macaca sinica</i>
2	Grey Langur	<i>Semnopithecus entellus</i>
3	Purple-faced Leaf Monkey	<i>Trachypithecus vetulus</i>
4	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
5	Sloth Bear	<i>Melursus ursinus</i>
6	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</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	Grizzled Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa macroura</i>
15	Layard's Striped Squirrel	<i>Funambulus layardi</i>
16	Dusky Striped Squirrel	<i>Funambulus sublineatus</i>
17	Indian (Black-naped) Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
18	Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus gigantea</i>
19	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>
20	Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>
21	Spinner Dolphin	<i>Stenella mulla</i>
22	Fin Whale	<i>Balaenoptera physalus</i>

Reptiles & Amphibians:

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Common Rat Snake	<i>Ptyas mucosus maximus</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	Sri Lanka Kangaroo Lizard	<i>Otocryptis wiegmanni</i>
7	Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
8	Soft-shelled Terrapin	<i>Lissemys punctata</i>
9	Loggerhead Turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</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	Sri Lanka Flying Snake	<i>Chrysopelea taprobanica</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	Sri Lanka Spurfowl	<i>Galloperdix bicalcarata</i>
4	Sri Lanka Junglefowl	<i>Gallus lafayettii</i>
5	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
6	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
7	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
8	Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
9	Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
10 Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
11 Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
12 Yellow Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>
13 Black Bittern	<i>Dupetor flavicollis</i>
14 Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
15 Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
16 Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
17 Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
18 Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
19 Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
20 Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
21 Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
22 Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
23 Spot-billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
24 Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>
25 Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
26 Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
27 Oriental Darter (Darter)	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>
28 Crested Honey Buzzard (Oriental Honey-buzzard)	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
29 Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
30 Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
31 Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malaiensis</i>
32 Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
33 Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
34 White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
35 Grey-headed Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus ichthyaetus</i>
36 White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
37 Watercock	<i>Gallicrex cinerea</i>
38 Great Stone-curlew (Great Thick-Knee)	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>
39 Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
40 Yellow-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>
41 Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>
42 Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
43 Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
44 Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
45 Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
46 Pin-tailed Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>
47 Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
48 Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
49 Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
50 Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
51 Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
52 Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
53 Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
54 Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>
55 Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>
56 Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
57 Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
58 Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
59 Rock Dove (Common Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>
60 Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
61 Common Emerald Dove (Emerald Dove)	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
62 Orange-breasted Green Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
63 Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>
64 Green-billed Coucal	<i>Centropus chlororhynchos</i>
65 Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
66 Red-faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus</i>
67 Jacobin Cuckoo (Pied Cuckoo)	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
68 Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
69 Chestnut-backed Owlet	<i>Glaucidium castanotum</i>
70 Sri Lanka Frogmouth	<i>Batrachostomus moniliger</i>
71 Crested Treeswift (Gray-rumped Treeswift)	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
72 Indian Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus unicolor</i>
73 Asian Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>
74 Malabar Trogon	<i>Harpactes fasciatus</i>
75 Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
76 Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
77 White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
78 Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
79 Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
80 Green Bee-eater (Little Green Bee-eater)	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
81 Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
82 Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>
83 Eurasian Hoopoe (Common Hoopoe)	<i>Upupa epops</i>
84 Malabar Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthraceroceros coronatus</i>
85 Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros gingalensis</i>
86 Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Psilopogon zeylanicus</i>
87 Yellow-fronted Barbet	<i>Psilopogon flavifrons</i>
88 Crimson-fronted Barbet	<i>Psilopogon rubricapillus</i>
89 Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos mahrattensis</i>
90 Black-rumped Flameback (Lesser Goldenback)	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>
91 Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephala</i>
92 Layard's Parakeet	<i>Psittacula calthrapae</i>
93 Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
94 Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus beryllinus</i>
95 Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
96 Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>
97 Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
98 Marshall's Iora	<i>Aegithina nigrolutea</i>
99 Small Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
100 Orange Minivet (Scarlet Minivet)(Flame Minivet)	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
101 Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
102 White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
103 Sri Lanka Drongo (Sri Lanka Crested Drongo)	<i>Dicrurus lophorinus</i>
104 White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
105 Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>
106 Indian Paradise Flycatcher (Asian Paradise Flycatcher)	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
107 Sri Lanka Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa ornata</i>
108 House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
109 Indian Jungle Crow (Large-billed Crow)	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>
110 Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>
111 Jerdon's Bush Lark	<i>Mirafra affinis</i>
112 Black-capped Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>
113 Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
114 White-browed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>
115 Yellow-browed Bulbul	<i>Acritillas indica</i>

Common name	Scientific name
116 Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>
117 Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
118 Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
119 Sri Lanka Swallow	<i>Cecropis hyperythra</i>
120 Green Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i>
121 Large-billed Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus magnirostris</i>
122 Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
123 Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
124 Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
125 Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
126 Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus melanurus</i>
127 Grey-headed Swamphen (Purple Swamphen)	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>
128 Dark-fronted Babbler	<i>Rhopocichla atriceps</i>
129 Brown-capped Babbler	<i>Pellorneum fuscicapillus</i>
130 Orange-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides rufescens</i>
131 Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>
132 Ashy-headed Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax cinereifrons</i>
133 Oriental White-Eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
134 Sri Lanka White-Eye	<i>Zosterops ceylonensis</i>
135 Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>
136 Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
137 Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>
138 Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>
139 Spot-winged Thrush	<i>Geokichla spiloptera</i>
140 Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulcatus</i>
141 Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
142 Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>
143 Brown-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa muttui</i>
144 Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>
145 Indian Blue Robin	<i>Larvivora brunnea</i>
146 Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
147 Legge's Flowerpecker (White-throated Flowerpecker)	<i>Dicaeum vincens</i>
148 Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>
149 Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>
150 Loten's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>
151 House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
152 Indian Silverbill (White-throated Silverbill)	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>
153 White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
154 Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
155 Black-headed Munia (Tricolored Munia)	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>
156 Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
157 Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>
158 Amur Falcon	<i>Falco amurensis</i>

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