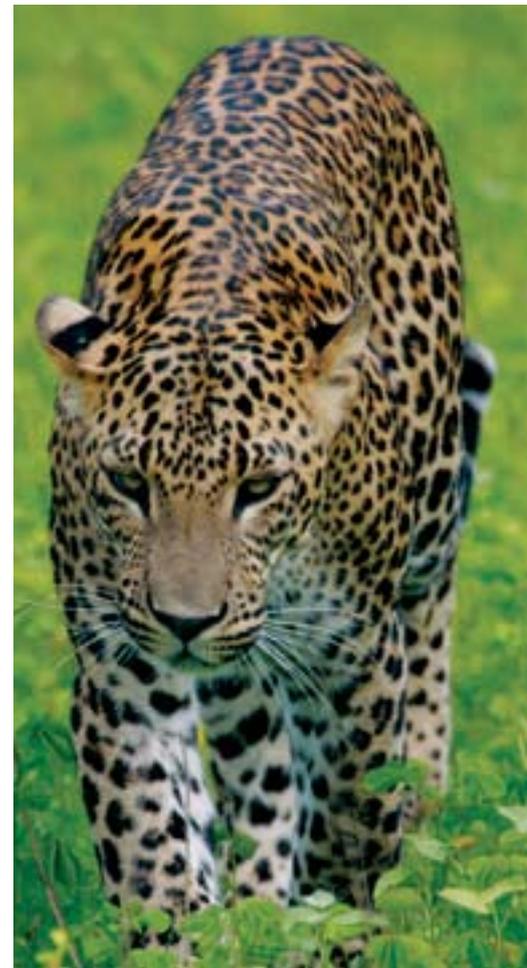


# Sri Lanka Wildlife Itineraries

A Guide for EcoTravellers



Sri Lanka Tourism

July 2008

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# Sri Lanka Wildlife Itineraries



Photography

**Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne**



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# Introduction



Sri Lanka is one of the best wildlife watching destinations in the world. The objective of this book is to enable wildlife enthusiasts to plan a holiday which makes the best use of their time in line with their particular interests. Foreign visitors as well as residents, will find the suggested wildlife itineraries and the recommended reading useful.

Sri Lanka can claim to be one of the world's best nature destinations. A broad range of factors influence this judgment. Some of the key factors are the island's bio-diversity, the availability of field guide type literature, the presence of specialist guides and specialist tour operators, a mature tourism industry with a broad range of accommodation and other facilities for tourists and a good network of roads and reserves. Ethical travelers will also find Sri Lanka Tourism environmentally conscious and the destination as a whole committed to be carbon neutral.

hot spots. It has a high rate of endemism (species found nowhere else in the world). In terms of species density (species per square kilometer) it is amongst the highest in the world for many faunal groups including birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians. It is also the best place in Asia for seeing the leopard and the best in the world for the Asian Elephant. The Gathering of Elephants, the largest concentration of wild Asian Elephants takes place every year in August and September in Minneriya. It is a great destination for cultural tours combined with primate safaris. Its primates have been studied in the world's longest continuous field study. Blue Whales, the largest animal to have ever lived on this planet, is seen off the shores of Galle (the island's 'rainforest capital') during January to April. The Sinharaja Bird Waves are claimed to be the largest mixed species bird flocks in the world and have been subject to one of the longest field studies.

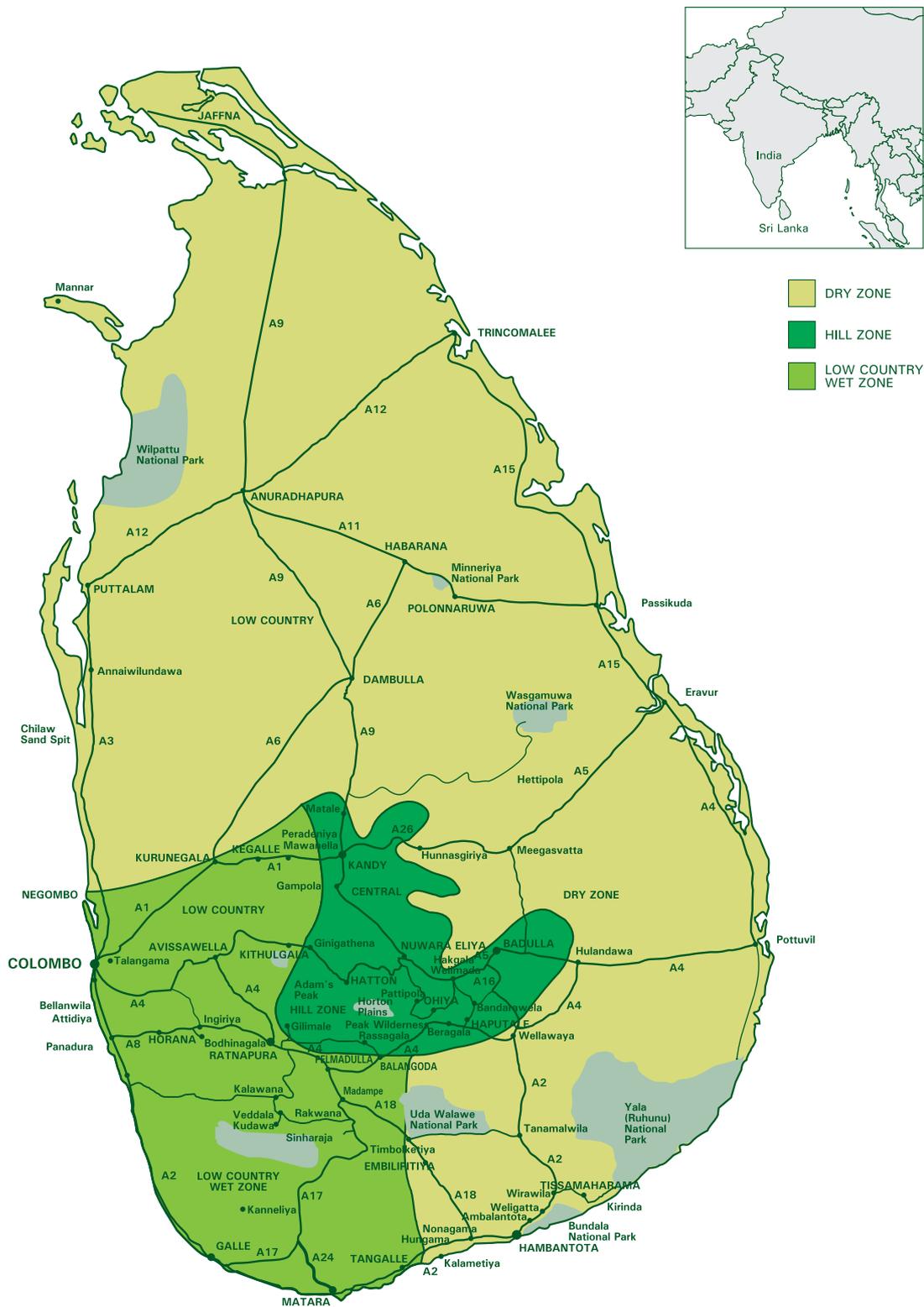
Another key aspect which makes Sri Lanka a favourite with photographers, naturalists and nature enthusiasts is the availability of expertise. Authoritative illustrated field guides as well as simpler photographic guides, booklets and posters to the key wildlife groups such as birds, mammals, butterflies, dragonflies, snakes and other reptiles, amphibians and flora are available. This is coupled with one of the most sophisticated nature tour operators markets in the world. There very good naturalist guides available from a number of companies. The companies vary from long established, large companies to small specialists. The all round natural history guiding skills of professional Sri Lankan guides are unrivalled in Asia.

Travel on Sri Lankan roads can be slow. However this is compensated by a wide network which allows key sites to be reached. With English being widely understood and accommodation available at many of the key sites, the country can be toured by independent travellers using public transport. However packaged tours are relatively inexpensive in the context of the quality of accommodation, guiding, transportation and tailored tour arrangements on offer. Most travellers will find having their tour organised by one of the specialist tour operators a sensible option.





# Key Roads, Nature Sites and Climatic Zones



# Topography and Climate

The island of Sri Lanka has lowlands along the coast that give rise within a short distance to the central hills. These rise to an altitude of more than 2,400 m above sea level. Close examination of the topography reveals that the island can be divided into three peneplains or steps, first described by the Canadian scientist Adams in 1972. The lowest peneplain lies from sea level to 30 m, the second rises to 480 m and the third reaches 1,800 m.

Sri Lanka can be divided into three regions: hill zone, low country wet zone and dry zone. The regions result from the interactions of rainfall and topography. Rainfall is affected by monsoons that bring rain during two seasons: the south-west monsoon (May–August) and the north-east monsoon (October–January). Precipitation is influenced heavily by the central hills. The monsoons deposit rain across the country and contribute to the demarcation of climate regimes. The humid, lowland wet zone in the south-west of the island does not show marked seasons, because it is fed by both the southwest and north-east monsoons.

The low country wet zone receives 200–500 cm of rain from the south-west monsoon and afternoon showers from the north-east monsoon. Humidity is high, rarely dropping below 97 per cent. Temperatures range between 27°C and 31°C over the year. The mountainous interior lies within the wet zone. Rainfall is generally well distributed, except in Uva Province, which gets very little rain from June to September. Temperatures in the mountains are cooler than in the lowlands and vary from chilly in the mornings to warm by noon. In the mid elevations – such as the area around Kandy – the temperature varies between 17°C and 31°C during the year. The temperature variations during the course of a 24-hour cycle are far less varied in the mid-elevations than in the mountains. The mountains are cooler, within a band of 14°C and 32°C during the year. There may be frost in the higher hills in December and January, when temperatures fall below 0°C at night. The rest of the country – three-quarters of Sri Lanka's land area – consists of the dry zone of the northern, southern and eastern plains. This region receives 60–190 cm of rain each year, supplied mainly by the north-east monsoon. The dry zone comprises the arid zones of the north-west and south-east, which receive less than 60 cm of rain because they are not in the direct path of the monsoonal rains.

# Wildlife Calendar

*Sri Lanka is good for wildlife watching and photography all year-round. This is a brief overview to seasonal highlights*



Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*)

## January & February

The Whale Watching season runs from December to April, when the southern seas are relatively calm. The numbers of Blue Whales and Sperm Whales peak in December and again in April. They travel between feeding areas in the Bay of Bengal and up wellings off Somalia in Africa. On their migration they pass close to shore at Dondra Head, the southernmost point of Sri Lanka.

Around February the North-east monsoon begins to subside. By mid February, the mud puddles on the jeep tracks in the north-central province are already swarming with newly emerged butterflies which can feed on the luxuriant foliage which has been fed by the monsoon rains. Clear days and freezing nights are experienced in the highlands. A good time of year to visit Horton Plains National Park for spectacular views from World's End and to see montane endemics.



Ceylon Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrocus gingalensis*)

## March and April

The south-west zone where the bio-diversity rich rainforests are, is relatively free from rain. A window of opportunity for extended rainforest safaris before the start of the south-west monsoon. The mixed species feeding flocks of birds in Sinharaja are special. One of the longest running field studies of mixed species flocks have shown them to be the largest in the world. It is not unusual to encounter flocks with over twenty species of birds. On many occasions over half a dozen endemic birds can be seen in a flock. Small mammals such as the Dusky Squirrel, Layard's Squirrel and Giant Squirrel also join these feeding flocks.



Leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*)

## May

The grass is down and leopard sightings are up. Leopards are seen regularly throughout the year. But the die-back of the ground cover with the onset of the dry season provides better viewing opportunities for finding and photographing them. Ruhuna National Park, known simply as Yala is the best chance in Asia for seeing Leopard. This is due to a number of factors. The leopards have an average density of one per square kilometer, the terrain is fairly open with grasslands and they do not face threats from larger terrestrial predators.



Sloth Bear (*Melursus Ursinus*)

## June & July

The Sloth Bear is generally a nocturnal mammal with occasional day time sightings possible in well visited national parks such as Yala. In late May, the Palu tree begins to bear fruit. The Palu (Ironwood Tree) is a beautiful tall tree with a bark textured with reticulations. The bears take a temporary absence of leave from their role as a semi-specialist in termites. With berries a plenty, they go on a feeding spree with some reportedly showing signs of inebriation from gorging themselves on the Palu.



Elephant (*Elephas maximus*)

## August, September and October

In August and September, 'The Gathering' peaks in the north central province. The elephants, sometimes numbering over an awe inspiring three hundred, converge onto the receding shores of Minneriya Tank. Nowhere else in the world will one find such a high concentration of wild Asian Elephants concentrated into a few square kilometers. 'The Gathering' is a wonderful opportunity for wildlife enthusiasts and casual travellers to observe the social dynamics of elephants.

Starting from September and intensifying in October, numbers of Olive Ridley Turtles come ashore to nest. The Olive Ridley is the smallest of the five marine turtles to nest in Sri Lanka. Induruwa and Kosgoda see the arrivals of Olive Ridley continuing through to January.



Toque Monkey (*Macaca sinica*)

## November & December

The North central plains are cooler and it is a good time to observe the Hanuman Langurs, the endemic Toque Monkeys and the endemic Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys around the archeological sites of Polonnaruwa and Sigiriya.

The migrant birds have arrived in force. Every bush in Yala seems to have a Brown Shrike perched atop it. Every shaded copse seems to have an Indian Pitta screeching in the evening. Migrant waders are stopping over in the freshly ploughed paddy fields of Talangama en route down south to the rich wader habitats of reserves such as Kalametiya, Bundala and Palatupana. The coastal flats teem with tens of thousands of Curlew Sandpipers, Lesser Sand Plovers, Little Stints, Black-winged Stilts, Common and Wood Sandpipers, etc.

# Birdwatching

*For an island of its size, Sri Lanka has a high density of species of birds. A total of 444 birds have been recorded including migrants. No less than 33 species of birds are endemic, found nowhere else in the world. The mixed species feeding flocks in Sinharaja (the 'Sinharaja Bird Waves') are the largest in the world. The birds are also relatively tame and easy to watch.*



Yellow-fronted barbet (*Megalaima flavifrons*)



Ceylon hanging-parrot (*Loriculus beryllinus*)



Serendib Scops-owl (*Otus thilohoffmanni*)

## *Itinerary*

**Day 01** Birding at Talangama Wetlands for the common water birds that include Black and Yellow Bitterns.

**Day 02** Visit Bodhinagala Forest Reserve, for Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Ceylon Hanging-parrot and if lucky, the scarce endemic Green-billed Coucal. Overnight at Sinharaja.

**Days 03-04** Visit Sinharaja Rainforest (A UNESCO World Heritage Site) for lowland endemics and mixed species bird flocks. Birding highlights include Red-faced Malkoha, Serendib Scops Owl, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie and Scaly Thrush.

**Day 05** Leave for Yala for two nights. Afternoon, visit Yala National Park for the dry-zone species.

**Day 06** Morning at Tissa wetlands and afternoon visit Yala once more.

**Day 07** Nuwara Eliya for two nights. Afternoon visit Victoria Garden for Himalayan migrants.

**Day 08** Predawn start for Horton Plains National Park for the endangered Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush and montane endemics.

**Days 09-10** Birding at Kelani Valley Forest Reserve, which is a lowland tropical rainforest rich in endemic fauna and flora.

**Day 11** Morning, leave for Dambulla for two nights. En route visit Kandy Temple.

**Day 12** Morning, visit Sigiriya Rock Fortress, which is also fantastic for dry-zone birding. Afternoon birding at Minneriya National Park.

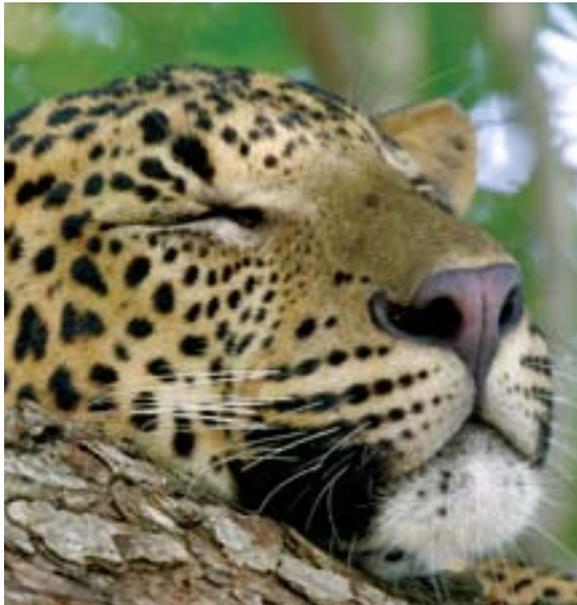
**Day 13** Morning birding at the hotel nature trail, afternoon leave for Negombo.

# Leopard Safaris

*Sri Lanka is the best place in Asia to see and photograph leopards. Research supported by tourism showed that the average density in Yala National Park is as high as one per square kilometer. The lack of other large carnivores means that the leopard is the top predator and adults and cubs are remarkably relaxed during the day, offering great opportunities for viewing and photography.*



Cub playing with pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*)



Leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*)



## *Itinerary*

**Day 01** First night in Colombo. Afternoon at leisure or do a city tour of Colombo. Photography in Talangama Wetland.

**Day 02** Drive to Yala for four nights. Late afternoon walk on a Nature Trail, which winds through a mixture of habitat types consisting of dry zone scrub forest, lagoon, mud flats, and sand dunes.

**Day 03** Morning game drive to Yala National Park. According to the Leopard Research sponsored by one of the leading hotel chains, Yala Block 1 has one of the highest densities of Leopards in the world. Yala therefore offers the best chance in Asia to see Leopards. Other large animals you may see include Elephant, Sloth Bear, Mugger Crocodile, Spotted Deer, Sambar, Barking Deer, Wild Boar, Wild Buffalo, Jackal, Grey Langur and Ruddy Mongoose. Birding highlights include Malabar Pied Hornbill, Painted Stork, Lesser Adjutant and Black-necked Stork. Return for lunch. Enjoy a dip in the pool / a beach combing walk /siesta before an afternoon game drive to Yala National Park once again.

**Day 04** Morning, visit Sithulpahuwa an ancient hermitage and the wetlands of Tissamaharama. Late afternoon game drive to Yala National Park for Leopards, Elephants and Sloth Bear.

**Day 05** Morning, visit Palatupana Salt pans for migrant shorebirds. Late afternoon game drive to Yala National Park.



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# Elephant Safaris

*The highest concentration of Asian Elephants occur during 'The Gathering' a seasonal event which takes place at Minneriya National Park during August and September. In other parks, elephant watching is good throughout the year. In Uda Walawe, elephants are guaranteed, a promise which no other park in Asia can make.*



Elephant (*Elephas maximus*)





Elephant calf

## *Itinerary*

**Day 01** Visit the Talangama Wetlands for the common water birds that include Black and Yellow Bitterns.

**Day 02** Habarana or Sigiriya for one night. Visit to Minneriya National Park, where elephants gather on the receding shores of the Minneriya Tank. 'The Gathering' of Elephants at Minneriya is one of those awesome spectacles which should rank alongside better-known wildlife spectacles such as the migration of wildebeest in Africa.

**Days 03-04** Visit Wasgamuwa National Park, where more than twenty-three species of mammals have been recorded in the park. The most important is the Asian Elephant.

**Day 05** Afternoon, visit Hakgala Botanical Garden for the bear monkeys.

**Day 06 - 07** Big Game safaris at Yala National Park. Yala is the best place to see both leopards and tuskers.

**Day 08** Visit Udawalawe National Park. On a visit to Udawalawe National Park around 50-60 Elephants can be seen.

**Day 09** More time in Uda Walawe National Park to observe elephant behaviour. The basic elephant family unit is a mother and calf, accompanied by aunts, sisters and sub-adult brothers, who make a clan.

**Day 10** Overnight at Negombo.

# Primates

*Sri Lanka has three species of diurnal primates (two are endemic) and two species of nocturnal primates (two lorises with one endemic). It is probably one of the best places in the world to observe the social dynamics of diurnal primates. The endemic Toque Monkeys have been studied in one of the longest running field studies in the world.*



Toque Monkey (*Macaca sinica*)



Toque Monkey (*Macaca sinica*)



Highland race of Purple-faced Leaf Monkey (*T. V. moticola*)

## *Itinerary*

**Day 01** Transfer to hotel in or near Colombo for two nights. Afternoon visit the Talangama Wetland area to look for the critically endangered western race of the Purple-faced Leaf Monkey.

**Day 02** Morning, leave for a nearby forest reserve, which holds the western race of the Purple-faced Leaf Monkey and Toque Monkey.

**Day 03** After breakfast, leave for Sigiriya for two nights. Afternoon, visit Sigiriya Rock Fortress for troops of Toque Monkeys and Hanuman Langurs around the Sigiriya moat.

**Day 04** Morning, visit Polonnaruwa, a UNESCO archaeological site, to watch troops of the dry lowland race of the Toque Monkey, the northern race of the Purple-faced Leaf Monkey and Hanuman Langur. Afternoon, safari to Minneriya National Park for Elephants.

**Day 05** After breakfast leave for Kandy for one night. Afternoon, visit Udawattekale for the wet zone race of the Touque Monkey known as the Dusky Toque.

**Day 06** Morning, visit the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Kandy before departing to Nuwara Eliya for two nights. Afternoon, visit the Hakgala Botanical Gardens for the montane races of both Purple-faced Leaf Monkey and Toque Macaque.

**Day 07** Morning, visit Horton Plains National Parks to see cloud forests and montane fauna, such as the endemic Rhino-horned Lizard, which was featured in Charles Darwin's monumental work on evolution. Mammal highlights include Bear Monkey, Giant Squirrel and Sambar. Afternoon, another visit to Hakgala Botanical Gardens.

**Day 08** Transfer to Negombo for one night.



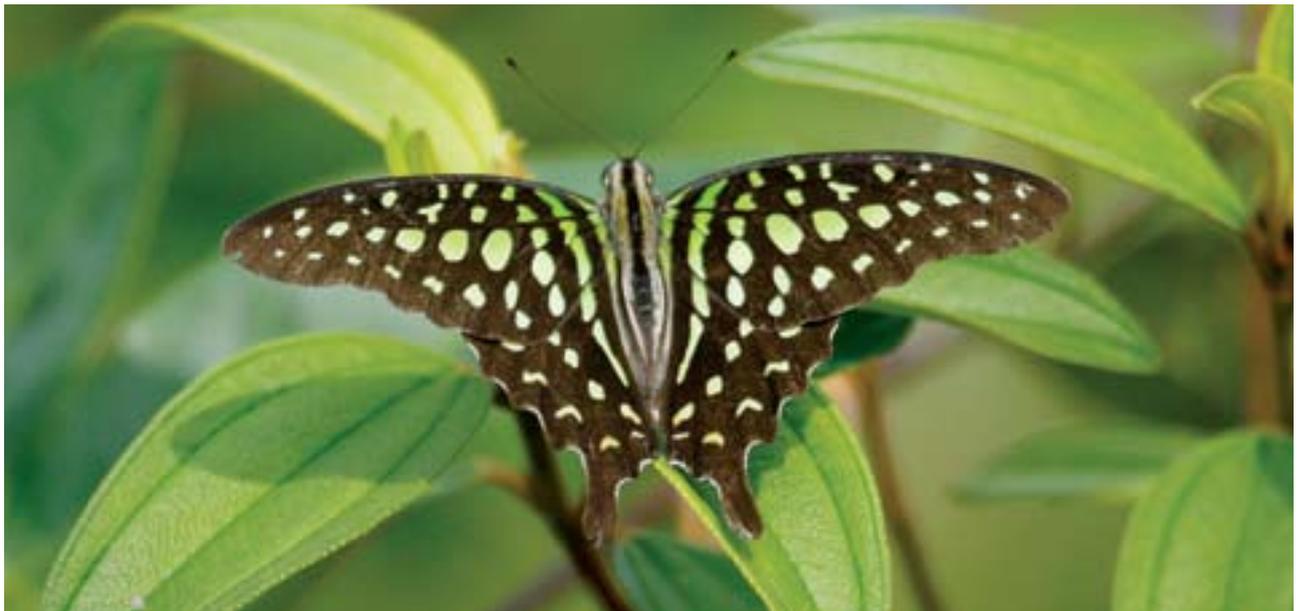
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# Butterflies

*Sri Lanka is a paradise for butterfly enthusiasts with 243 species of butterflies and skippers. Even the wetland reserves near the capital of Colombo will hold as many as fifty different species. Seasonally, large migrations of whites and yellows take place. All year round a breathtaking array of species can be seen.*



Blue Mormon (*Papilio polymnestor*)



Tailed Jay (*Graphium agamemnon mendis*)

## *Itinerary*

**Day 01** Visit Bellanwila Attidiya marshes or Talangama Wetland. This will be an introduction to the commoner butterflies of Sri Lanka.

**Day 02** Day visit to Bodhinagala Forest Reserve. Look for Ceylon Tree Nymph, Cruiser, Tawny Rajah and Red-spot Duke.

**Day 03** Morning, leave for Sinharaja for two nights. Afternoon at Sinharaja. If lucky, we may see Blue Oakleaf, Spot Swordtail, Southern Duffer and Painted Sawtooth.

**Day 04** Full day visit to Sinharaja forest with picnic lunch.

**Day 05** Visit Sinharaja Rainforest before leaving for Kitulgala for two nights.

**Day 06** Full day visit to Kelani Valley Forest Reserve. Species to look out for include Tamil Lacewing, Rustic, Common Bluebottle and Common Jay.

**Day 07** After breakfast leave for Nuwara Eliya for two nights. Late afternoon, visit to Victoria Park for common highland wildlife.

**Day 08** Visit Horton Plains National Park to see Cloud Forests and rare montane fauna, including montane butterfly species. Butterflies to look for include Ceylon Tiger, Ceylon Tree Brown, Ceylon Forester and Indian Fritillary.

**Day 09** En route to Kandy, visit a tea factory. Afternoon, nature walk to look for butterflies including Blue Admiral, Blue Pansy and Danaid Eggfly.

**Day 10** Morning, visit Knuckles area for Butterflies. Butterflies to look for include Autumn Leaf and Common Banded Peacock. After a late lunch leave for Colombo for one night.

# Dragonflies

*At least 118 species of dragonflies have been described with more awaiting description by science. The whole of Sri Lanka is like a giant wetland complex with thousands of man made lakes and vast areas of paddy fields and irrigation networks. The abundance of habitat make the island very good for dragonfly watchers.*



Pruinosed Bloodtail (*Lathrecista asiatica*)



Pied Parasol (*Neurothemis tullia tullia*)



Scarlet Basker (*Urothemis signata signata*)

## *Itinerary*

**Day 01** Afternoon, visit Talangama Wetland for an assortment of colourful Libellulidae Dragonflies.

**Day 02** Drive to Kitulgala for two nights. We look for river and stream Dragonflies and a few more secretive forest species in a nearby forest.

**Day 03** Spend a full day visiting rivers and streams around the Kitulgala area looking for damselfly and dragonfly adults and larvae. We should find Blurry Forest Damselfly, beautiful Gossamerwings and some secretive endemic forest species.

**Day 04** We leave for Nuwara Eliya for two nights. Afternoon, a walk in the nearby wetlands should give us some montane species.

**Day 05** Morning, leave for Horton Plains National Park to see Cloud Forests and rare montane fauna. Afternoon, visit Hakgala Gardens.

**Day 06** Morning, leave for Kandy for two nights. En route visit the world famous Temple of the Scared Tooth Relic in Kandy. Afternoon, stroll around the hotel's gardens and ponds, which have species like the Elusive Adjutant, which went unrecorded for over a hundred years.

**Day 07** Morning, a walk on the nature trail should produce Gossamerwings, Emeralds, Jewels, Skimmers and other stream species.

**Day 08** Leave for Dambulla for two nights. Afternoon, visit Sigiriya Rock Fortress. Sigiriya Sanctuary is also fantastic for dry zone dragonflies that occupy the ancient water gardens and surrounding tanks. We look for Stripe-headed Pinfly, Featherlegs, Skimmers, Gliders and Darters.

**Day 09** We spend the morning by the tank at the hotel and observe dry zone species. Afternoon, optional visit to Dambulla Caves.

**Day 10** Leave for Negombo for one night.

# Wildlife Photography

*The combination of a varied topography from sandy beaches to mountains, paddy fields and forests, temples and ancient cities, friendly people, a good network of roads, village life not far from the hustle bustle of modern cities, etc makes Sri Lanka a very good destination for photographers.*



Elephant (*Elephas maximus*)



Lesser Adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*)



Leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*)

## *Itinerary*

**Day 01** Photograph the common water birds at Talangama.

**Day 02** Visit Polonnaruwa (A UNESCO World Heritage Site), to photograph troops of Toque Macaques, who were famously featured in both the BBC's 'Temple Troop' and David Attenborough's 'Life of Mammals'.

**Day 03** Afternoon, visit Minneriya National Park to photograph the Gathering of Elephants.

**Day 04-05** Visit Wasgomuwa National Park to photograph herds of elephants and other mammals.

**Day 06** Photography at Knuckles Wilderness Area, which is one of the most rugged and picturesque terrains in Sri Lanka.

**Day 07** Visit Hakgala Botanical Gardens. Here we photograph the highland races of Purple-faced Leaf Monkey and Toque Macaque.

**Day 08** Morning, visit Horton Plains National Parks for montane endemics and stunted Cloud Forests.

**Day 09-10** Visit Yala National Park. Yala Block 1 has one of the highest densities of Leopards in the world. Yala therefore offers one of the best chances in Asia to see Leopards.

**Day 11** Visit Udawalawe National Park. On a visit to Udawalawe National Park, Elephants are virtually guaranteed.

**Day 12** Overnight at Negombo.





# Rainforests, Big Game & Whales

*The rainforests situated in the south-west of the island are amongst the richest in South Asia and make Sri Lanka one of the world's bio-diversity hyper hot spots. The relatively small size and varied topography of the island makes it possible to be in a rainforest in the morning and be watching big game like elephants, leopards and whales by evening.*



Sinharaja Rainforest



Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*)



Black-lipped Lizard (*Calotes nigrilabris*)



## *Itinerary*

**Day 01** Visit Talangama Wetland for the common water birds that include Black and Yellow Bitterns, Watercock & other specialties.

**Day 02-03** Visit Sinharaja Rainforest (A UNESCO World Heritage Site) for lowland endemics, mixed species bird flocks and sub continental specialties.

**Day 04** Morning, more time in the rainforest for children to complete Rainforest Education fact sheets. Overnight at Galle.

**Day 05** Visit Kanneliya forest reserve, an excellent forest reserve of logged secondary forest and virgin forest in the interior and forest ridges. Alternatively, whale watching during season.

**Day 06** Visit Kottawa Arboretum, which is a lowland tropical rainforest rich in biodiversity. Alternatively, whale and dolphin watching during season. Overnight at Yala.

**Day 07** Morning and afternoon safari at Yala National Park. Yala Block 1 has one of the highest densities of Leopards in the world. Yala therefore offers one of the best chances in Asia to see Leopards

**Day 08** Visit Udawalawe National Park. On a visit to Udawalawe National Park, Elephants are virtually guaranteed.

**Day 09** Overnight at Negombo.



Ranawara (*Cassia auriculata*)



Korakaha (*Memocylon umbellatum*)

# Whales and Dolphins

*The seas South of Sri Lanka may be the best place in the world for seeing the elusive Blue Whale. For seeing both Blue Whales and Sperm Whales together, it is almost certainly the best in the world. In December and April, the numbers of whales peak as they engage in a migration between the Bay of Bengal and upwellings off Somalia in the Arabian Sea.*



Sperm Whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*)



Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*)



Long-snouted Spinner Dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*)

## *Itinerary*

**DAY 01** Arrival and transfer to the south (the strip from Hikkaduwa-Galle-Mirissa to Tangalle) for five nights.

**DAY 02-03** Mirissa for marine safaris. Blue Whales in concentrations not seen elsewhere in the world would be the highlight. Whales are seen relatively close to shore as the continental shelf is narrow to the South of Dondra Head. A bonus is the presence of Sperm Whales and pods of dolphins. Some whale watchers have seen Blue Whales, Sperm Whales and Long-snouted Spinner Dolphins, simultaneously in their field of view.

**DAY 04** Visit the Galle Dutch Fort (a UNESCO World Heritage Site). Take a nature walk at Hiyare Forest Reserve, near Galle.

**DAY 05** Marine safari for whales and dolphins. Some pods contain more than five hundred dolphins, including the Long-snouted Spinner Dolphin, which engages in spectacular leaps.

**DAY 06** Another day out in the sea for marine mammals and sea bird watching. Some of the birds include skuas, shearwaters, terns and tropicbirds.

Whale watching is seasonal, between December and April when the seas are calm.

# The Gathering of Elephants

*Between July to early October, peaking in August and September, The Gathering of Elephants is the highest concentration of wild Asian Elephants. It offers an unparalleled opportunity to observe large numbers of wild Asian Elephants.*



Young elephants at Minneriya



Calf under a year old



Kandy Perahera



## *Itinerary*

**DAY 01** Arrival and transfer to hotel in or near Colombo. Excursion to Talangama Wetland for wet zone wildlife including the critically endangered Western Purple-faced Leaf monkey.

**DAY 02** After breakfast leave for the Cultural Triangle area of Sigiriya/Habarana/Dambulla for for three nights. Afternoon, safari with your naturalist guide, at Minneriya National Park. Between July and October elephants are gathered with a peak in August and September. A one kilometer quadrat can have over 300 elephants gathered on the receding shores of the Minneriya Tank. 'The Gathering' of Elephants at Minneriya is one of those awesome spectacles, which rank alongside better-known wildlife spectacles such as the migration of wildebeest in Africa.

**DAY 03** Morning, visit Polonnaruwa (A UNESCO World Heritage Site), the medieval capital of Sri Lanka. You will encounter troops of Toque Macaques, who were famously featured in both the BBC's 'Temple Troop' and David Attenborough's 'Life of Mammals'. Afternoon, another safari at Minneriya National Park for Elephants.

**DAY 04** Morning, visit Sigiriya Rock Fortress, which was the pleasure capital of a single king called Kashyapa in the 5th century A.D. Afternoon, photography at Minneriya National Park once more.

**DAY 05** Transfer to the highlands or for a break on the beach. Depending on the movements of the elephants, your naturalist guide will take you to either Minneriya or Kaudulla National Park. The spectacular Kandy Perahera takes place between the last few days of July and first few days of August. Dozens of caparisoned elephants are accompanied by dancers, drummers and torch bearers in this wonderful pageant.



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# Recommended Reading

## Birds

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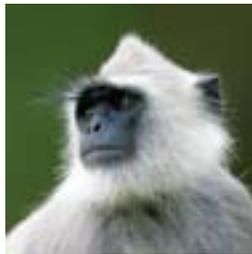


With frequent appearances in the press, Gehan is a local wildlife celebrity. He is also known to international audiences through appearances on programs broadcast on National Geographic, Animal Planet, Discovery Channel and his photographs and articles which have appeared in books and magazines internationally. Gehan is the lead author of *A Birdwatchers Guide to Sri Lanka* (Oriental Bird Club, UK), *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka*, *A Photographic Guide to the Mammals of Sri Lanka*, *Magic of Sri Lanka*, *Portrait of Sri Lanka* (New Holland, London) and *Sri Lankan Wildlife* (Bradt Travel Guides). He has had over fifteen books and over two hundred articles published, locally and internationally. He has trekked, birdwatched and photographed around the world from the Nepali Himalayas and Peruvian Andes to the rainforests of Borneo.

In the UK, he graduated in Civil Engineering from Imperial College, London. He qualified as a Chartered Accountant with Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu specializing in financial sector clients such as stockbrokers, banks and derivatives traders. He then worked in Financial Derivatives and Banking in the city with the London International Financial Futures Exchange (LIFFE), Sumitomo Finance International & Abbey National in what was then the newly emerging discipline of financial risk management, especially from exposure to derivative instruments.



Sri Lanka is one of the best wildlife travel destinations in the world. This book gives an introduction to some of the travel options available in this biodiversity rich island.



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