

Sri Lanka NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES



Sri Lanka Tourism

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Sri Lanka is truly a wondrous place, a subcontinent's diversity packed into one tiny island. There aren't many places in the world where one can be snorkeling in the morning in warm seas with rich coral reefs and be in the mist draped coolness of a cloud forest by evening, listening to the alarm calls of sambar warning against a hunting leopard.

In the lowlands on the south-west, rainforests are a cathedral of bio-diversity. These are amongst the richest rainforests of South Asia. In the dry lowlands, the largest terrestrial mammal, the elephant roams. The largest concentration of Asian Elephants in the world occurs seasonally in Sri Lanka during 'The Gathering'. The island is also the best chance in Asia for seeing leopard and sloth bear. No less than thirty three species of birds are found only in Sri Lanka. In Sinharaja, the 'Sinharaja Bird Waves' can be seen, the mixed species feeding flocks, which are the largest of its kind in the world.

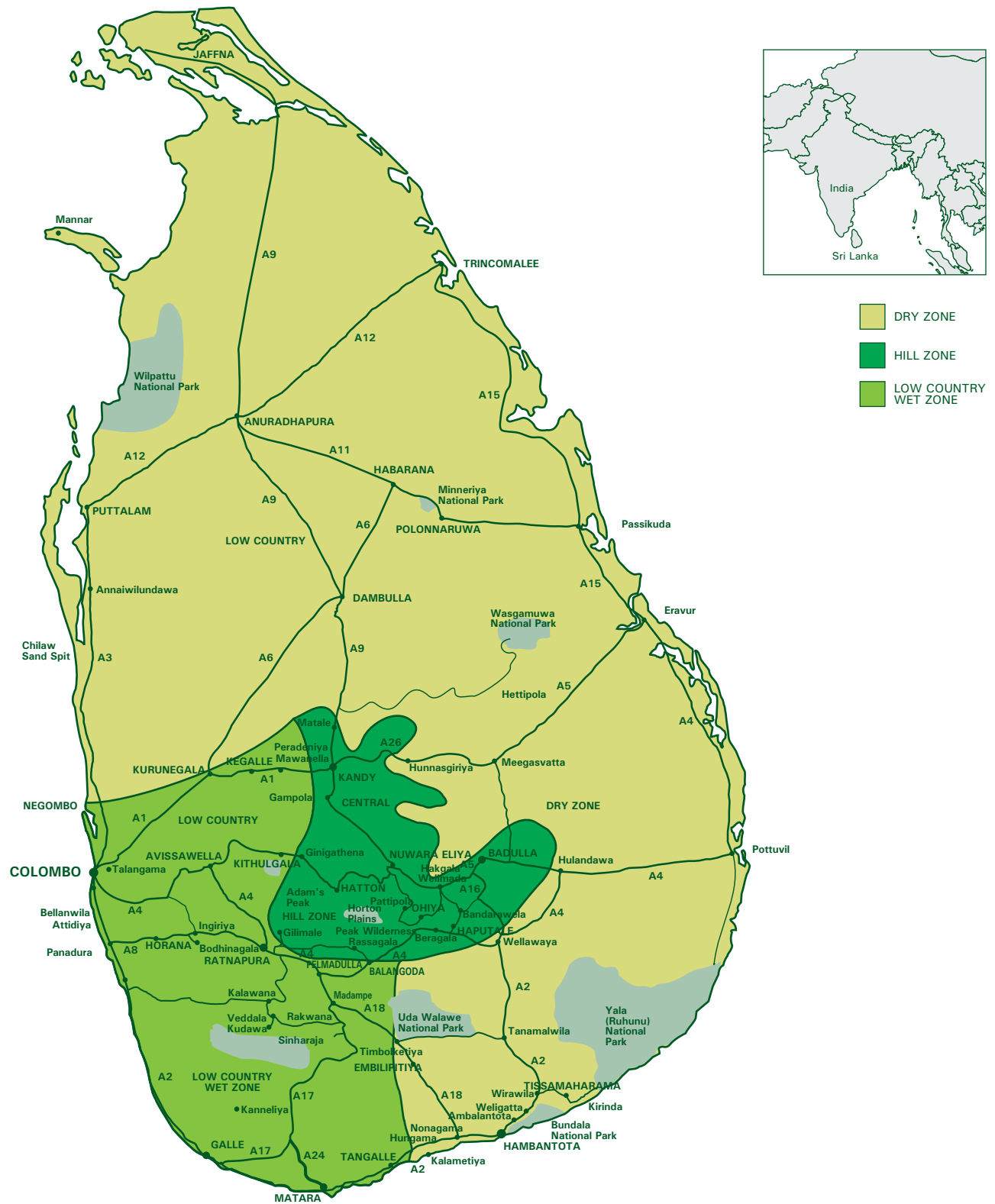
Sri Lanka is one of the most bio-diverse places in the world. It has a phenomenally high number of species of plant and animals in terms of density of species and their endemism. This together with the relative ease of access and the availability of good facilities for travellers make it an excellent destination for eco-tourists. The Sri Lanka Tourist Board hopes that this book will give an useful introduction to this magical island's national parks and reserves.





SRI LANKA

KEY ROADS AND NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES



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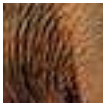
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INTRODUCTION



How many destinations in the world will allow a visitor to snorkel off golden sand beaches and by nightfall, be searching for leopard in the highlands? Probably, not many. Sri Lanka is one of those few places in the world with a breathtaking array of landscapes and wildlife packed into a relatively compact area.

The island, of just under 66,000 square kilometres, is unusual. Contrary to expectations of island bio-geographic theory, it has large mammals. It is the best place in Asia to see the Asian Elephant, the largest terrestrial mammal on the Asian continent. Visit, Uda Walawe National Park and one is virtually guaranteed to see elephants. During September and October, the 'Gathering' takes place. An annual migration of elephants to the receding shores of the Minneriya National Park. At times, up to three hundred elephants may be present on the exposed lake bed, by now a verdant meadow of lush grass.

Sri Lanka also has another eco-tourism trump card, the Leopard. Yala National Park has one of the highest densities of leopard anywhere in the world. The leopard is also the top predator on the island. This lends it an air of confidence, which together with the open nature of the park's terrain, allows for some fine Leopard watching.

Tree Frogs are an image most associated with Costa Rica. However, Sri Lanka



may challenge that perception. Ongoing research shows that Sri Lanka may emerge as the frog capital of the world, as a result of a unique species radiation which has been recently discovered by researchers. Many other species of animals await discovery in the biodiversity rich rainforests in the south west of the island.

The island's mountainous core, is topped with cloud forests. This harbours unique animals such as the Dwarf Lizard, which has a prehensile tail and an adaptation to give birth to live young.

The island has one of the highest species densities for some faunal groups (including reptiles and birds) per 10,000 square kilometres. However, its claim to be a top destination for eco-tourism lies in a blend of attributes; rich biodiversity, compactness, a good infrastructure of hotels and roads and wide understanding of English.

A complementary attraction in Sri Lanka is that the cultural sites are also good for eco-tourists. Many of the archaeological reserves double up as nature reserves, attracting birdwatchers and naturalists. The medieval capital of Polonnaruwa is worth a visit for seeing its ancient stupas and sublime stone sculpture. Birders may also see over a hundred species of birds, in a day, and mammal enthusiasts will find one of the richest densities of primates



(monkeys) in the world. Other key cultural sites such as Anuradhapura and Sigiriya also have good forest cover around them. This fantastic combination of culture, nature, relatively good logistics and a friendly people, endow Sri Lanka with all the ingredients to be one of Asia's and indeed one of the world's top eco-tourism destinations.







TALANGAMA



This wetland, on the outskirts of Colombo, is bordered by motorable roads, which makes access easy for wildlife enthusiasts. The complex of ponds, canals and paddy fields, make it a rich and varied wetland site.

Wildlife Over a hundred species of birds have been recorded. Highlights are the Water Cock, migrant Black and Yellow Bitterns, as well as Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys (the latter, an endangered endemic species). Talangama is also good for the commoner butterflies and dragonflies.

Getting there Get to Wewa Para (Lake Road) via Akuregoda Road or Sri Wickramasinghapura Road, both of which are off the Pannipitiya Road, a few kilometers from the Parliament. Free access on public roads.



Accommodation Villa Talangama overlooks one of the best stretches of wetland. City hotels in Colombo are only 30 - 45 minutes away.



BODHINAGALA

Bodhinagala is a relatively small tract of secondary lowland rainforest, with a Buddhist hermitage located centrally. It is surprisingly rich floristically and holds a number of endemic fauna within relatively easy reach of the commercial capital of Colombo.

Wildlife Bodhinagala's claim to fame with birders is as a reliable site for the endemic Green-billed Coucal. A number of other endemics such as Ceylon Spurfowl, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Ceylon Small Barbet, Black-capped Bulbul, Spot-winged Thrush and sub-continental endemics such as Ceylon Frogmouth and Malabar Trogon are present. Butterflies include the Tawny Rajah. The endemic Purple-faced Leaf and Toque Monkeys and Grizzled Indian Squirrel are the more visible of the mammals.



Getting there The turn-off to Bodhinagala is just before the 29 km post on the A8 (Ratnapura Road).

Accommodation The Citizens Rest at Ingiriya is used by serious birders. Colombo with a wide choice of accommodation is within an hour and a half to two hours drive.



ANNAIWILUNDAWA



Annaiwilundawa refers to a cluster of freshwater tanks (including the Annaiwilundawa Wewa) that was declared a sanctuary in 1997. The second Ramsar site in Sri Lanka, it is one of the finest wetlands in the island for waterbirds.

Wildlife Waterfowl include Little Grebe, Lesser Whistling-duck and Cotton Teal. Migrant birds include Pintail, Garganey Common and Pintail Snipe. Large numbers of Asian Openbill and Little Cormorants nest here. Endemics include Ceylon Woodshrike and Ceylon Swallow. Mammals include the Grey Mongoose. After the North-east Monsoon, the herbaceous edges are good for butterflies. Common and Plain Tigers, Lemon Pansy, The Joker, Crimson Rose, Common Sailor, Chocolate Soldier etc. can be seen.



Getting there At the 91 km post on the A3, 5 km past Arachchikattuwa town, is a turn-off to the left. Approximately 1.2 km down this road is Suruwila tank on your left and to your right is the main Annaiwilundawa tank.

Accommodation Negombo near the 31 km post on the A3 has a wide choice of accommodation.

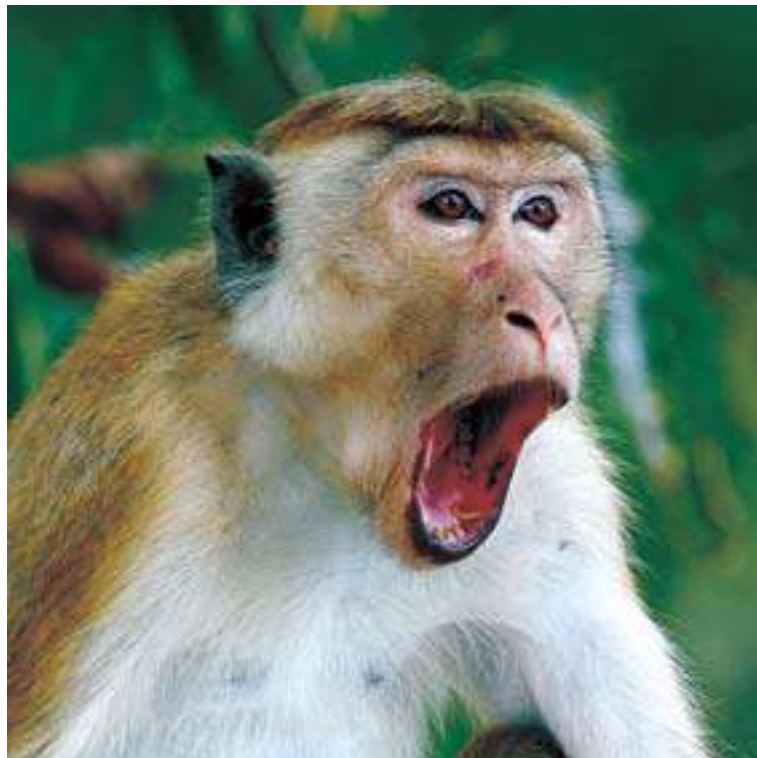


WILPATTU NATIONAL PARK

Wilpattu National Park comprises of a complex of lakes called *villus* surrounded by grassy plains, set within scrub jungle. The biggest draw here are Leopards.

Wildlife Endemic birds include the Ceylon Junglefowl, Brown-capped Babbler, Ceylon Woodshrike and Black-capped Bulbul in riverine habitats. Muntjac or Barking Deer are more easily seen in Wilpattu than any other national park. Butterflies recorded include the Great Eggfly, Great Orange Tip, Glad-eye Bushbrown, Blue Mormon, Common Mormon, Common Rose and Crimson Rose.

Getting there The turn off to the Wilpattu National Park is near the 45 km post of the A12. From here, follow the B028, for about 8 kilometers.



Accommodation Near the turn off to Wilpattu off the A12 (Puttalam to Anuradhapura road) is the simple, Preshamel Safari Hotel. The nearest, for a choice of accommodation is

Anuradhapura which includes the comfortable Palm Garden Village. Wilpattu is also accessible from hotels in Negombo.









MANNAR

Mannar Island and the strip on the mainland from around Giant's Tank has become a magnet for birders, in search of species who are not found regularly in the southern half of the island. These include Deccan avi-faunal species such as the Long-tailed Shrike (Rufous-rumped Shrike), Black Drongo, Crab Plover, Indian Courser, etc. A few key sites in this area are described below.

Thalladi Pond Past the 80 km post, on the A14, a few hundred meters before the Mannar Causeway, on the right is a large freshwater pond. Star birds in Mannar, such as the Spot-billed Ducks often chose to occupy this pond, which is unfortunately besides a high security zone.



Periyar Kalapuwa (lagoon) A finger of this lagoon crosses the A14, about 4 km before the Mannar Causeway, near the 78 km post. Look for Garganey, Common Teal and Ringed Plover.

The seasonal wetland holds thousands of Wigeon and a few hundred Shoveller. The plains are also good for Harriers.

Mannar Causeway The star birds here are Oystercatcher, Pallas's Gull and Heuglin's Gull. All three species are rare in the south. The causeway also allows close views of Whimbrel, Eurasian Curlew and at times Avocet and Crab Plover.

Talaimannar About a kilometer from the now defunct Talaimannar customs post, is a 'fishing port'. Large flocks of gulls gather here.

Sand Banks (Adam's Bridge) A series of islands, form what is known as Adam's Bridge, connecting Talaimannar to Rameswaran in the south west of India. During the breeding season, take care not to disturb the hundreds of nesting Terns.

Accommodation Manjula Inn run by Sam and Sinnatamby's Restaurant offer simple accommodation. Further afield is the Medawachchiya Rest House.



WASGOMUWA NATIONAL PARK



Wasgomuwa National Park is located south of Polonnaruwa and north of the Knuckles Range and the Matale foothills. The habitat consists of riverine gallery forest along the Mahaveli and dry monsoon forest in the low foothills.

Wildlife Birds include the Ceylon Junglefowl, Ceylon Grey Hornbill, Brown-capped Babbler, Blue-faced Malkoha, Lesser Adjutant, Grey-headed Fish-eagle and Brown Fish Owl. Mammals found include Elephants, Leopards, Sloth Bears, Jackals, Spotted Deer, Sambar, Mongooses and Civets as well as the Slender Loris and Hanuman Langur.

Getting there From Kurunegala to Habarana. Turn off beyond Galewela, onto the Naula road, towards Hettipola. Or from Kandy via Hadawaka. From Hasalaka take a minor road north through Handungamuwa.



Accommodation Dunvila Cottage, Willy's Safari Hotel and Wasgomuwa Safari Village are the best known properties.





MINNERIYA NATIONAL PARK

The 'Gathering' takes place every year between August and September. The largest concentration of Elephants in Asia, happens when over 300 gather on the grassland that sprouts on the receding shores of Minneriya Lake. It is one of the greatest wildlife spectacles in the world.

Wildlife In the scrub jungle around the lake, endemic birds found include the Ceylon Junglefowl, Brown-capped Babbler, Ceylon Grey Hornbill and Black-capped Bulbul. The open areas around the lake are good for raptors including



Brahminy Kite, Grey-headed Fish Eagle and the majestic White-bellied Sea Eagle. Mammals include the endemic Toque Monkey, Hanuman Langur, Grizzled Indian Squirrel, Jackal and Spotted Deer.

Getting There The National Park entrance is near the 35-kilometer post on the A11 running between Habarana and Polonnaruwa.

Accommodation Good hotels at Habarana and Giritale and further afield at Sigiriya and Kandalama.







HORTON PLAINS NATIONAL PARK

Sri Lanka's second and third highest peaks, Kirigalpotta (2,395 m) and Thotupola Kanda (2,357 m) are found here. Three important rivers, the Mahaveli, Kelani and the Walawe originate from Horton Plains. The highlight for walkers, is visiting World's End or Baker's Falls.

Wildlife Endemic birds include the Ceylon Whistling Thrush, Ceylon White-eye, Ceylon Wood Pigeon and Dusky-blue Flycatcher. The trees are dominated by *Keena*, *Syzygium rotundifolium* and *Syzygium sclerophyllum* and species from the Lauraceae family. Tree Ferns are a conspicuous feature. Butterflies include the Indian Red Admiral, Common, Tamil and Ceylon Treebrowns. Numbers of Sambar, the island's largest deer, have soared in the last decade, with a corresponding increase in their main predator, the Leopard. Other mammals include Wild Boar, Dusky Squirrel and the highland races of Grizzled Indian Squirrel, Toque Monkey and Purple-faced Leaf Monkey.

