

Island of Wonder: Birds & Nature of Sri Lanka Species List | March 8 – 25, 2026 with Naturalist Journeys



Compiled by guide Greg Butcher with expert local guides Ashan Piyasinghe and Tharaka Dhananjaya. Travelers: Blaise, Leslie, Robyn, Felicia, Judy, Kay, Kate, Nancy, Jan, and Pam

We found Sri Lanka to be a delightful slice of Asia and learned many fun facts while enjoying beautiful birds and interesting mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. We were in the Northern Hemisphere by 5 to 9 degrees, but there was nothing between us and Antarctica but ocean. As a result, we were at the southern migration limit for a wide variety of Asian birds. Our timing was good to watch them fattening up to return north while also successfully finding all 35 Sri Lankan endemics, plus two species with Sri Lanka in their name that barely make it into India – a Frogmouth and a Bay Owl. The hotels and lodges were very comfy, all with air conditioning, and most meals offered both Sri Lankan and British options (often translating to spicy or non-spicy). The roads were good and mostly paved. We had many fun safaris -- most half-day – and we found leopards, elephants, water buffalo, big (Sambar) and small (Spotted) deer, monkeys (endemic Toque Macaques and Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys and more widespread Grey Langurs). For big birds, we had hornbills, flamingos, storks, and eagles (7 species!). For small birds, we had 3 species of sunbirds, Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrot, flowerpeckers, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, and Golden-fronted Leafbird. And for colorful birds, we had Sri Lanka Blue-Magpie, minivets, ioras, barbets, bee-eaters, Indian Pittas, and flamebacks (Asian woodpeckers). Sri Lankans follow a diversity of religions, so we were exposed to Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian statues and buildings. We visited a stupa (Buddhist) and a tea factory. I don't think that tea is considered a religion, but it was often hard to be sure. Sri Lanka is slightly larger than West Virginia and slightly smaller than Tasmania, so it is very easy to get around. We spent a lot of time in the Dry Zone and enough time in the Wet Zone to pick up the specialty birds there.

BIRDS: 253 species were recorded. Details are included in the eBird link below which documents all the species of birds our group observed during the tour. If you're new to eBird, be sure to click "Show All Details" on the right side of the list to expand the report and reveal where and when each of the birds were seen and how many.

[Island of Wonder: Birds & Nature of Sri Lanka | March 8-25, 2026 | eBird Trip Report](#)

Following is a list of the mammals, reptiles and amphibians we were fortunate to observe during the trip.

MAMMALS (20):

Black-naped Hare *Lepus nigricollis* – This species popped up several times during the tour.

Grizzled Giant Squirrel *Ratufa macroura* – It was definitely a surprise to see such a large squirrel. It showed up on 3 widespread days, always overhead in a big tree.

Dusky Striped Squirrel *Funambulus sublineatus* – This species is confined to the wet zone of Sri Lanka, so we were lucky to see it twice.

Indian Palm Squirrel *Funambulus palmarum* – This species seemed to be everywhere, sometimes near civilization and sometimes in the wild.

Flame-striped Squirrel *Funambulus layardi* – When we could take our eyes off the Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, we

noticed this species at the birdfeeder, but it alternated places with an Indian Palm Squirrel, so it was now-you-see-it, now-you-don't. The stripe was the only obvious difference, but it was distinctive.

Asiatic Water Buffalo *Bubalus bubalis* – This species was seen in Wilpattu and Yala NPs. We had one group of 9 – that's a lot of flesh!

Sambar *Cervus unicolor* – A very impressive deer! We only saw it on 3 days, but it made an impact. We had a young male with spikes one day and an adult male with a full rack another day.

Spotted Deer *Cervus axis* – This was the common deer, much smaller than the Sambar. Some of the male racks were very impressive, and the size of some of the herds was impressive as well.

Wild Pig *Sus scrofa* – We came upon a group of these heading back to the hotel from Udawalawe NP after having seen one or two on previous days.

Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus* – We had good luck with elephants on 6 different days. We saw bits of tusk, but learned that Sri Lankan elephants have small tusks because of past hunting pressure on the tuskers. We had babies too. Our most interesting experience was watching an elephant standing on half the road while cars zoomed by on the other half. The story is that this elephant has a habit of marauding cars in search of food. (One more reason not to feed wildlife!)

Sri Lankan Leopard *Panthera Pardus kotiya* – We all got to see a relaxed leopard in the grass at Yala NP, but half of us had great views of one crossing the road close to the safari vehicle.

Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii* – This was the most common mongoose, seen on many days. One of the most grisly scenes was seeing 3 of them gnawing on a large carcass.

Stripe-necked Mongoose *Urva vitticollis* – We drove by a couple of these. Remember how we identified it?

Indian Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii* – I like the mongooses – their identification criteria are in their names! This was the second most common species, seen on 4 different days.

Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* – We had good luck with jackals at Yala NP. We had a pair hang out for quite a while out in the open.

Purple-faced Leaf Monkey (E) *Trachypithecus vetulus* – These are high elevation mammals, so we got views of a troop in misty trees on our drive up to Horton Plains, and we saw them again in the vicinity of Jansen's Bungalows. They are endemic to Sri Lanka; they are a type of langur. (Don't tell anyone, but I was so distracted by the white mutton chops that I never noticed the purple face.)

Grey Langur *Seminopithecus priam* - Common and widespread, tolerant of human settlements. We had them on 8 different days! These are the black-faced monkeys.

Toque Macaque (E) *Macaca sinica* – These are the red/pink-faced monkeys. Believe it or not, this species is endemic to Sri Lanka, an Endangered species, and only locally common. Why then did they drive everyone crazy, especially at Wilpattu? (I did get some cute photos.) We saw them on 5 different days.

Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus* – Incredible numbers seen at the roost site, we watched as they filled the sky! They are huge! I had a terrible time estimating the numbers, so I will go with Ashan's estimate of 3,000, and I will not quarrel with your estimate, no matter what it was. (Mine was lower.)

Small Bat *Pipistrelle* – There were a few small bats at the flying fox roost, but our attention was quickly diverted away!

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS (17):

Bengal Land Monitor *Varanus bengalensis* – We had this species at Wilpattu and Yala NPs. They can grow up to 7 feet long!

Asian Water Monitor *Varanus salvator* – So what! This species can grow to 10 feet long – only the Komodo Dragon is larger! Both monitors are carnivorous with quite varied diets. We saw this species along the Kilani River, near the Plantation Hotel.

Mugger Crocodile *Crocodylus palustris* – Another size increase: a Mugger Crocodile can reach 13 (or 18!) feet long. The Mugger is a scavenger in addition to being a carnivore.

Hard-Shellled Terrapin or Sri Lanka Black Turtle *Melanochelys trijuga* – Many of the turtles we saw were this species of the next. This one is omnivorous.

Soft-Shell Terrapin or Sri Lankan Flapshell Turtle *Lissemys ceylonensis* – This species eats both vertebrates and invertebrates.

Hump-nosed Lizard *Lyriocephalus scutatus* – This is a 7-inch lizard. It eats plants and invertebrates.

Green Garden Lizard *Calotes calotes* – This is a 5-inch-long insect-eating lizard.

Common Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor* – This lizard is 5 ½ inches long. It eats invertebrates and seeds.

Black-cheeked or Dark-lipped Green Lizard (E) *Calotes nigrilabris* – This endangered species was found at Horton Plains NP. It's only 4 inches long.

Rhinoceros-horned Lizard *Ceratophora stoddartii* – We got some great photos of this one at Horton Plains NP. It is a small (3 ½ inches) insectivore found only in Sri Lanka.

Common House Gecko *Hemidactylus parvimaclatus* – There are many geckos in Sri Lanka, so it isn't certain that every one we saw was this one.

Common Rat Snake *Ptyas mucosa* – We saw predation! The rat snake looked like he could have been 10 feet long, and he efficiently captured and swallowed a mouse. Would you like one at your house or not?

Sri Lankan Green Pit Viper *Trimereurus* or *Craspedocephalus trigonocephalus* – It was a two-snake day. This one was much smaller (4 feet), but potentially more dangerous to us. Its bite can be severe, but is rarely fatal, especially if antivenom is available.

Jerdon's Bullfrog *Hoplobatrachus crassus* – Females (5 ½") are larger than males (3 ½"), and the tadpoles love to eat other tadpoles.

Indian Skipper or Common Skittering Frog *Euphlyctis cyanophlyctis* – This is probably the frog we saw in the well.

Rohan's Globular Frog *Uperodon rohani* – Only recognized as a Sri Lankan endemic in 2018. We had it on Mannar Island.

Common Hourglass Tree Frog *Polypedates cruciger* – This species is a Sri Lankan endemic.

Notable invertebrate: Leech *Haemadipsa sylvestris*