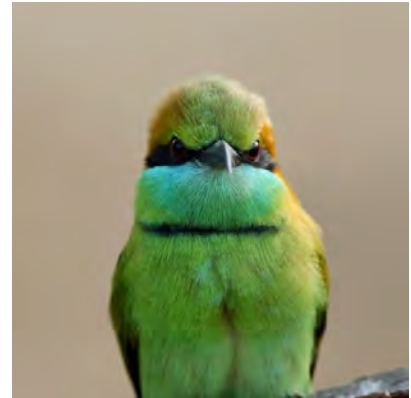


Birds & Nature of Sri Lanka | March 8 – 25, 2026

Trip Report by Greg Butcher



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.

I marked each of the Sri Lanka endemic bird species below with an (E).

Saturday, March 7

Arrivals at Tamarind Tree Garden Resort

Despite some unexpected travel changes along the way, the group arrived in Sri Lanka ready to begin the adventure. Any extra time spent in transit was quickly forgotten upon landing, as the incredible sights, sounds, and warmth of Sri Lanka made the journey well worth it.

Tamarind Tree Garden Resort was perfect, with large shade trees, extensive grounds, large casitas, and an onsite bar and restaurant. They had a large vegetable garden and two horses grazing the lawns. A few of us went birding just before dinner and met our first flock of Yellow-billed Babblers, a bunch of White-bellied Drongos, a few Green Imperial-Pigeons and Asian Koels, and our first endemic species: Red-backed Flameback (E). House Crows were everywhere! And we found our first Indian Palm Squirrels.

Sunday, March 8

Tamarind Tree and The Dump

More of us were available for a birding pre-trip this morning, and Tamarind Tree provided a great site for casually introducing ourselves to Sri Lankan birds. I found a Red-wattled Lapwing outside my window, with one bird sitting on a nest and one standing guard. (I would assign typical male-female roles to this arrangement, but these lapwings are monomorphic, so I can't be sure.) We were able to follow these birds throughout our trip! (More later.) A groundskeeper pointed out a pair of roosting Indian Scops-Owls, and we all got great photos. Unfortunately, they abandoned this spot, and we never re-found them. We found a nest-hole for our second Sri-Lankan endemic, a Crimson-fronted Barbet (E), which stuck around a bit longer for later arrivals. We enjoyed two of Sri Lanka's three species of sunbird, a pair of Oriental Magpie-Robins, a Black-hooded Oriole, and a Common Tailorbird. Three spectacular birds that proved to be common throughout the trip were Whitethroated Kingfisher, Rose-ringed Parakeet, and Indian Paradise-Flycatcher. The hotel is remote enough to support raptors: a Shikra and an Oriental Honey-buzzard. We had to wonder about our local guides when our first official trip was to the dump! (But we've all been birders long enough to not really be surprised.) I estimated 500 Eastern Cattle-Egrets on the mound next door with at least 10 Black-headed Ibises mixed in. We had lots of



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firsts this afternoon including the first of many Sri Lanka Swallows (E) and our only Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Larks and Eastern Yellow Wagtails. Our guides are Ashan and Tharaka. Ashan is the senior guide and Tharaka the junior. At dinner we met Rajiv, who is the head of the tour company that we are traveling with, Classic Wild, and operations manager Stefan. In addition to our bus driver, there was a helper who took care of cleaning the bus, helping us on and off, and other duties as required.

Monday, March 9

Wilpattu National Park

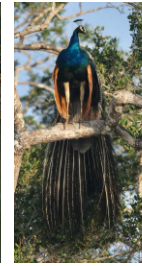
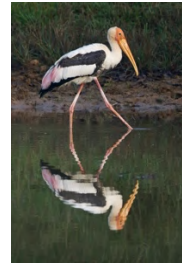
Our destination today was Wilpattu National Park where we did our first game drive to see large mammals. The drive to Wilpattu was supposed to be 3 hours, but we had to detour due to flooding left over from the huge monsoon rains. Between the November and March Naturalist Journeys trips, Sri Lanka endured one of its most intense monsoon storms ever, doing extensive damage throughout the country. The November trip experienced the onset of that storm and suffered through a lot more rain (and leeches) than we did.

Our first game drive started at 3. We were split into two vehicles, and walkie-talkies are not allowed. So, not everyone saw everything. However, this first afternoon was just a teaser, so we enjoyed our first elephants, Spotted Deer, Ruddy Mongoose, and Grey Langurs. Our first reptiles included Mugger's Crocodile, Bengal Land Monitor, and Hard-shelled Terrapins. We enjoyed seeing Jezebel butterflies (*Delias eucharis*): black, white, yellow, and orange. Despite a short afternoon drive, we saw a number of significant bird species. It was our only Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, a small bird that almost escaped notice. Other small birds included our first Crested Treeswifts, Jerdon's Bushlarks, and Indian Robins. Much more impressive were the hornbills: both Sri Lanka Gray (E) and Malabar Pied. On the colorful side were our first Indian Roller and Sri Lanka Shama (E). On the odd side were Sri Lanka Woodshrike (E), a member of the same family as the vangas of Madagascar, and Ashy Woodswallow, one of only 4 members of its family found outside of Australia or New Guinea.

Tuesday March 10

Wilpattu National Park

Wilpattu is a large park and the only one where we scheduled an all-day safari. We packed both breakfast and lunch and headed off through the park in two vehicles. Wilpattu helped turn my iPhone into a wildlife camera (although I'm still not entering any contests). This morning I got good photos of Crested Serpent-Eagle, Water Buffalo, Spotted Deer, and great photos of Changeable Hawk-Eagle sunning. At lunchtime, I got Toque Macaques invading our vehicles and Sri Lanka Junglefowl (E) scrounging around underneath. In the afternoon, I added a big bull elephant. Unfortunately, I missed a photo of the large Sambar. Passengers in one of our vehicles

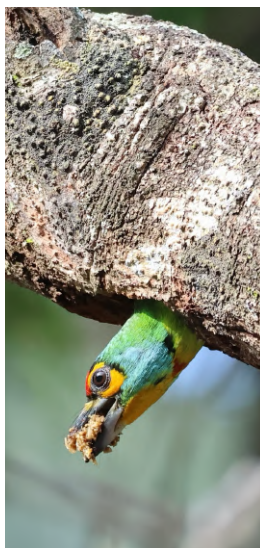


got great looks at a leopard passing in front; unfortunately, I wasn't one of them. Ashan and Tharaka often lead tours for people who are only interested in large mammals. The vehicle that missed the leopard acted like that for a couple of hours, and we all agreed: never again! We wanted to see a leopard, but we did not want to pass by other wildlife even if it increased our chance of seeing a leopard. Wilpattu has wonderful wetlands, so we added plovers, sandpipers, terns, herons, egrets, a pair of Great Thick-knees, and Asian Woolly-necked and Painted Storks. It was our first of two three-bee-eater days: Asian Green, Blue-tailed, and Chestnut-headed. One van got good views of the brilliantly blue Black-naped Monarch; the other matched with Tickell's Blue Flycatcher. Our second bulbul species was White-browed. Two special babblers for the day were Dark-fronted and Brown-capped (E). Our eBird checklist shows a beautiful photo of a Brown-breasted Flycatcher from today. We enjoyed our first Sri Lanka Green Pigeons (E) for the trip and played peek-a-boo with a Blue-faced Malkoha. We had our one-and-only encounter with a Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo – a very memorable species!

Wednesday, March 11

Mannar Island

In the morning, we had an in-house breakfast and a leisurely start. We were off farther north to Mannar Island. We enjoyed watching the rice dry on the roads, except when two cars wanted to pass on what were now one-lane roads. Before lunch, we stopped at a cacophony of a rookery. The main breeders were Asian Openbills (storks), Little Cormorants, and Black-headed Ibises, but many other species added to the action, including a beautiful pair of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas. Black Kite was a first for the trip. Less than an hour later, we stopped for a flock of 200+ flamingos and 9 species of shorebirds, including Little Ringed Plover, Common Greenshank, and Great Knot. Lunch at the Palmyrah House (our hotel) was interesting. Many of us ordered crab curry, only to discover that the curry was poured on the crabshell, and we needed to cover our hands and fingers in curry to extract the crab meat. It may be the messiest meal I've had as an adult! After lunch, we drove a tiny distance opposite the entrance road to a productive marsh with 42 species. It was our first big flock of Brown-headed Gulls, our only pair of Garganeys, and our first day with five tern species (including a White-winged Tern). We enjoyed both Eurasian Moorhens and 8 Gray-headed Swamphens. We covered the little birds with a dozen each of Little Stints and Little Terns. We buffed up our list of long-legged waders with a Glossy Ibis and a pair of Eurasian Spoonbills. A bit more driving around paid off with 4 Gray Francolins, a Pin-tailed Snipe, and a Common Hoopoe. We were pleased with a small flock of birds back at the hotel, especially when it produced all 3 sunbird species.



Thursday, March 12

Mannar Island and Points South

We started the day at the edge of the Indian Ocean along a huge sandy shoreline, filled with plovers, sandpipers, and terns. We looked, but we couldn't quite see India. We enjoyed the spectacle of 100+ Brown-headed Gulls and 100+ Great Crested Terns. Amid the spectacle, we were able to pick out Greater Sand-Plover, Terek Sandpiper, 10 Lesser Crested Terns, and 10 Crab-Plovers. Although resembling a big plover, Crab-Plovers are actually a unique shorebird in their own family. A Booted Eagle flew by but didn't disrupt the flock as much as the three White-bellied Sea-Eagles. The sandy path to and from the shoreline was productive with Gray Francolins, Asian Koels, Pied Cuckoo, Blue-faced Malkoha, and a pair of Brahminy Starlings. The bus drove by a nearby piece of shoreline with 40 or more Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

After a siesta, we toured various nearby wetlands, picking up a number of species we'd been missing, such as Watercock, Yellow-wattled Lapwing (to compare to all the Red-wattled Lapwings we'd been seeing), and two pairs of Little Grebes. From the windows of the bus, we watched both a Black and a Yellow Bittern fly by, then got to enjoy a nearby Yellow Bittern walking in the reeds. It wasn't all waterbirds, as we added Black Drongo and a nest tree of Baya Weavers, plus two crowd favorites: Common Hoopoe and Indian Roller.

Friday, March 13

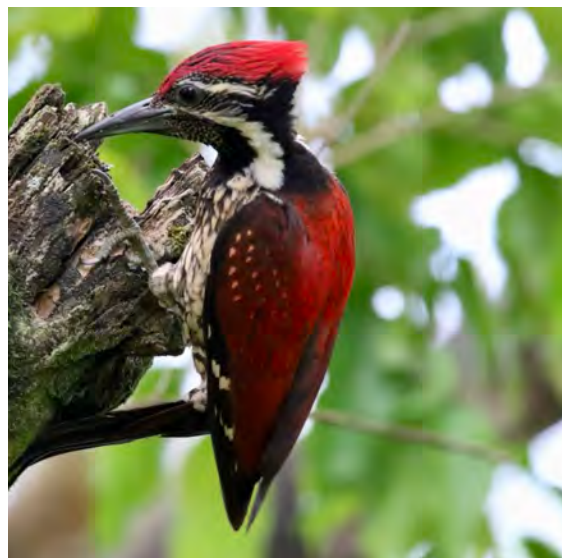
Tamarind Tree Resort

It was time to abandon northwestern Sri Lanka coastline and the pre-tour extension. The drive back to the Tamarind Tree Garden Resort was the longest drive of the trip, but on good roads. We stopped again at the rookery to enjoy the mayhem (Asian Openbills, Little Cormorants, Black-necked Ibises, and their hangers-on). At the hotel, we met Pam, unique among us since she was coming from Australia and since she started after the pre-extension. As we were spreading out to our rooms, we noticed that the Red-wattled Lapwings had four chicks! Our Welcome Dinner was at a popular local restaurant on Negombo Lagoon called Dutch Trails, known for its seafood menu and tanks full of fish and shellfish.

Saturday, March 14

Plantation House, Kitulgala

We enjoyed the buffet breakfast at Tamarind and a leisurely departure to The Plantation House on the Kelani River in Kitulgala. The route was through quite a few busy "cities" with a good amount of traffic, which slowed us down a bit. Meals in the hotel were in an open-air restaurant overlooking the river. A White-browed Fantail



displayed between the hotel and the river, and a Black Eagle flew close by. We were able to add quite a few bird species during our afternoon introduction to the area, including Yellow-fronted Barbet (E), Square-tailed and Black-capped Bulbuls (E), and Orange-billed Babbler (E). It was a good day to practice keeping our barbets, bulbuls, and babblers in order! It was our first three-parrot day with Layard's and Alexandrine Parakeets and Sri Lanka Hanging-Parots (E). We had our only Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike this afternoon and our first Golden-fronted Leafbird. And we got a leisurely look at a Black-naped Hare on the path ahead. In addition to all these, the highlights of the day were great close-ups of a pair of roosting Chestnut-backed Owlets (E) and 4 Sri Lanka Gray Hornbills (E).

Sunday, March 15

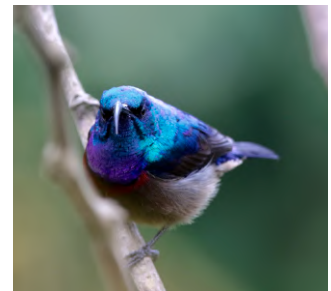
Kitulgala Birding Hotspots

The next morning we walked the pedestrian bridge to the other side of the river. We found 3 different Indian Pittas, and most of us got good looks at at least one of them. We found our only Green-billed Coucals (E) of the tour and our first Lesser Yellownappe (woodpecker), Spot-winged Thrush (E), Sri Lanka Drongo (E), and Yellow-browed Bulbul. It was a 3-eagle morning: Crested Serpent-Eagle, Black Eagle, and Rufous-bellied Eagle. As we were gathering for our post-lunch outing, we were excited to see a pair of Banded Bay Cuckoos from the parking lot! Then we were off to the historic Kitulgala Rest House, built for British officers on the Kelani River. It was adopted by the crews and actors during the filming of "The Bridge Over the River Kwai" here. (The original bridge is in Thailand.) This might be the most relaxing birding spot of the whole trip, but it was very productive, given its location so close to the river. We found our only Brown-backed Needletail and Southern Hill Myna here, and we had great looks at both Small and Orange Minivets.

Monday, March 16

Lovers' Leap Tea | Victoria Gardens

This day was our drive to the highlands of Sri Lanka. We topped out at about 7,000 feet, while the highest point - Pidurutalagala or Mount Pedro -- stands at 8,281 feet. It was a good drive for raptors -- Oriental Honey-Buzzard, Crested Serpent-Eagle, and Rufous-bellied Eagle. We were in tea country most of the way. Miles and miles of tea plantations covered the hillsides. Tea has been grown in Sri Lanka since 1867. We toured the Lovers' Leap Ethical Tea Boutique. A special treat just outside the tea factory was a Kashmir Flycatcher, a species with one of the smallest ranges in the world -- except that its wintering ground is a thousand miles from its breeding ground! Our afternoon birding destination was Victoria Park in the center of Nuwara Eliya with lots of water and flowers.



We found some great songbirds here, including our only Pied Thrush and Indian Blue Robin and our first Sri Lanka White-eye (E) and Yellow-eared Bulbul (E). It was our only two-wagtail day with both Forest and Gray Wagtails. The Blackpool Hotel presents as another British legacy. Like many of the hotel restaurants we visited, it offered full British and Sri Lankan options (including lots of desserts!).

Tuesday, March 17

Nuwara Eliya | Horton Plains National Park

We were up early to head to Horton Plains National Park, a high open mountain plateau, in two four-wheel-drive vehicles due to the poorer and steeper roads. It was an important day because many of the target birds could only be found here. Fortunately, luck was with us – well, I think our success was more due to Ashan and Tharaka than luck. We started picking up new species before reaching the park – good views of 3 Sri Lanka Wood-Pigeons (E) and Purple-faced Leaf-Monkeys and better-view-desired of Sri Lanka Blue Magpie (E). Then we had success at a small pond right next to the park entrance. While listening to Jerdon's Bullfrogs, almost all of us got great looks at the Sri Lanka Whistling-Thrush (E) and then the Sri Lanka Bush-Warbler (E), two species for which "great looks" can't be expected. I think as soon as we found a Dull-blue Flycatcher (E), Ashan and Tharaka started to relax. We added our only Indian Blackbird and a few of us glimpsed a Peregrine Falcon zooming by at top speed. I'm still not completely sure if Zitting Cisticola was named for its flight or its song, but Wikipedia is crediting the song (often done in flight!) We got multiple views of Hill Swallows and Pied Bushchats, but only here at elevation. It was a great park for Giant Squirrel, Sambar (deer) and reptiles: Rhinoceros-horned and Black-cheeked (or Dark-lipped) Lizard. The Rhino-horned Lizard was laid-back enough for iPhone photos, even though it's only 3 ½ inch long. Afterwards, we went to Africa for lunch, or rather to the home of a Sri Lankan who had spent decades in Africa and brought back wonderful masks, carvings, and tapestries. Having seen everything we expected at Horton Plains, we took the afternoon off!

Wednesday, March 18

Tissamaharama | Debarawewa Wetlands

Having seen the heights of Sri Lanka, it was time to head to the southern coast. We stopped en route to pick up several new species: Streak-throated Woodpecker, Common Hawk-Cuckoo, and Sri Lanka Scimitar-Babbler (E). While there, we were adopted by two pairs of Asian Tits (formerly known as Cinereous Tits). For lunch, we went to the Zelona Kitchen, a family-run eating and gardening spot that was more like a family home. They have been open for less than a year. We were greeted with green necklaces with a marigold and a warm coriander drink.



We were each dressed in a sarong for lunch. For the first time for most of us, we ate with our hands, Sri-Lankan style. For dessert, we had curd and treacle, not for the first time. This curd was made from buffalo milk, and the treacle came from fish-tail palms. For the afternoon birding, the locals had located three species of roosting owls: Brown Boobook (formerly Brown Wood-Owl), Jungle Owlet, and Indian Scops-Owl. The woods also produced our only Black-headed Cuckooshrike for the tour. Debarawewa Lake was very productive. We had two pairs of Cotton Pygmy-Geese and an impressive Stork-billed Kingfisher. Most of the cormorants were Great Cormorants. It was one of the few nights we stayed out late, and for good reason! We went to an area close by where there were huge trees with literally thousands of Indian Flying Foxes (also known as megabats) coming and going. At dusk, these huge fruit bats started flying to forage for the night. They can fly up to 50 km for food, though most stay within 20 km of their roost. I was a bit surprised when we left the bats before dark, but Ashan and Tharaka had another target for us: an Eastern Barn Owl emerging from its roost for the night. Great timing – and finally we could be off for our dinner.

Thursday, March 19

Bundala & Yala National Parks

We started our morning at Bundala National Park that featured a very productive series of wetlands. It produced our longest half-day species list of 88 birds! Many of those were plovers and sandpipers (17 species), as it was our best shorebird day since the extension. Our only Small Pratincole of the tour was a bird in flight. It was also a good day for long-legged wading birds with 13 species, including our only Black-necked Stork (the tallest bird in Sri Lanka!), Painted Storks, and a pair of Eurasian Spoonbills. Continuing the aquatic theme, we picked up an Osprey and a Pied Kingfisher. For songbirds, we added three species of sunbirds, three individual Lesser Whitethroats, and 6 Brahminy Starlings. In the afternoon, we headed out for the first of several safaris to Yala National Park, the most visited park in Sri Lanka. It consists of five distinct blocks, only three of which are open to the public. It was a great afternoon for Malabar Pied-Hornbill; we counted 17! We had a pair of Golden Jackals hanging out close to us for quite a while. On our way out of the park, we encountered evening clusters of mammals: Sambars, Spotted Deer, Wild Pigs, and Asian Elephants. We ended the day by driving by an Indian Nightjar.



Friday, March 20

Yala National Park

Yala is the most visited national park primarily because it is the best park to see leopards, and we did! All the safari drivers stay in touch, and they all heard about a leopard lying in tall grass near the road. All the vehicles lined up on both sides of the road, and we patiently waited our turn for a view. Today was our only four-stork day! We added Lesser Adjutant to Asian Openbill, Asian Woolly-necked Stork, and Painted Stork. It may be a "Lesser" Adjutant, but it is 4 feet tall with an 8-foot wingspan, almost as big as the Black-necked Stork we saw yesterday. One of the vans picked up a Rufous Woodpecker, and it was a good morning for social species, with a flock of Indian Silverbills and a breeding colony of Streaked Weavers, with at least one adult feeding young. We moved to a different section of the park for the afternoon and picked up what many thought was the prettiest bird of the trip: Black-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher. The bird is blue, orange, and magenta, so it makes me want to scream at the guy who decided to call it "Black-backed". We added species to two of the typical Asian bird families of Sri Lanka: We added our 4th species of Drongo (Ashy) and our 5th species of Prinia (Gray-breasted).

Saturday, March 21

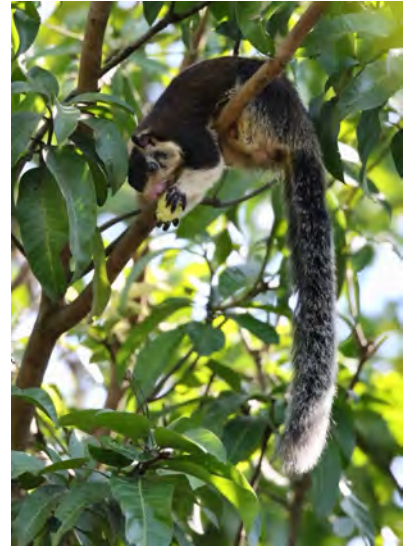
Udawalawe National Park

We had a leisurely start, then stopped by to visit one of the many Buddhist Stupas. Afterwards, we headed out to our next national park, Udawalawe, which is most famous for its Asian Elephants. After lunch, we enjoyed the elephants, except for the one that blocked half the road and terrorized slow-driving cars by trying to steal any food inside. In addition to elephants, we picked up a number of new species for the trip, including our second of three flowerpeckers, Thick-billed. We added two new cuckoos: Sirkeer Malkoha and Gray-bellied Cuckoo. We had gotten used to seeing pairs of Great Thick-knees, but today we added a pair of Indian Thick-knees. Most of us got good looks at a flying Black-winged Kite, and we had several chances at a Yellow-crowned Woodpecker near what appeared to be its nest hole. Probably the most unexpected birds of the trip were a pair of Daurian Starlings since most winter records are from Thailand and Malaysia and even farther east. As usual for this tour with 8 accomplished photographers, we got photographic evidence.

Sunday, March 22

Udawalawe National Park / The Wet Zone

We rose early again for our second safari drive in Udawalawe. We had a nice sampling of cuckoos here – Greater Coucal, Blue-faced Malkoha, Pied Cuckoo, and Asian Koel – and another 3-bee-eater morning – Asian Green, Blue-tailed, and Chestnut-headed. We counted 50 Rosy Starlings and 10 Baya Weavers. From here, it was time

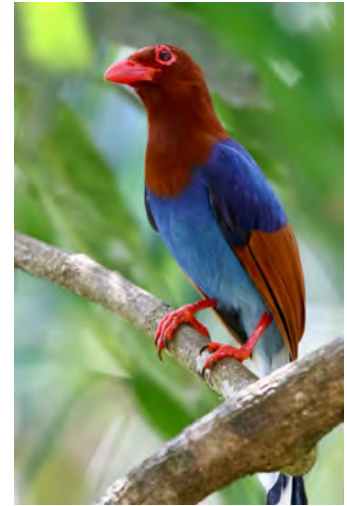


to drive into the Wet Zone. We had all been regaled by tales of leeches, but had seen few until now. We all got a few over the next three days, but Ashan and Tharaka had found that a squirt of hand-sanitizer diminished and released them at once. The power of the leech has been subdued! We thought we were headed for lunch at Jansen's Bungalows, but it was not to be. Instead, we were forced to see the two rarest birds in Sri Lanka that are not endemics – first Sri Lanka Frogmouth, then Sri Lanka Bay Owl. Both had been staked out by local birders who keep track of them daily, and we reaped the reward! We tempted fate by skipping one of the world's most recently discovered bird species, but our faith was rewarded the next day. Jansen's Bungalows was probably the most interesting place we stayed (and there was a lot of competition!). Our van couldn't make it to the door, so we switched to Jeeps. Meals were a hundred-yard walk downhill from our rooms. The setting was divine, with a river below, a small pool near the rooms, and lots of flowers. The last indignity before lunch was our first Sri Lanka Spurfowl (E), seen best from the kitchen, where our late lunch had long been prepared. We were here because of the Sinharaja Forest Reserve, but most of our birding was in the surrounding neighborhood. Almost all the staked-out birds behaved like clockwork on this trip, but Red-faced Malkoha was the exception. We kept returning to a known nest site (three days in a row!), but it was not to be seen this afternoon. Our best birds this afternoon were a Sri Lanka Green-Pigeon (E) and a White-throated Flowerpecker (E) feeding young.

Monday, March 23 Neighborhoods

Sinharaja Forest Reserve / Wet Forest

This was the morning for the Sinharaja Forest Reserve, but we had barely gone a hundred years before we found our target – a pair of Sri Lanka Thrushes (E). We spent the rest of the morning close by, on a road and in a private yard where they feed birds and squirrels. Some of us got a Red-faced Malkoha and a pair of Malabar Trogons from the road. We were all excited to see a pair of Ashy-headed Laughingthrushes (E), but pretty confused to learn that a study published in 2018 determined that the birds we saw are actually more closely related to babblers than to other laughingthrushes. We all agreed that there was nothing "Large" on the Large-billed Leaf-Warbler we saw. Some of us got a close-up view of a Green Pit Viper. One feeder attracted Asian Emerald Doves and our only Flame-striped Squirrel (that confused me by alternating visits with a Dusky-striped Squirrel). The closer feeder attracted Sri Lanka Blue Magpies (E), fulfilling all our dreams of close views and photographs of this gorgeous bird. Those who looked up saw a 10-foot-long Common Rat Snake with a mouse in its jaws! It wasn't in any hurry to either swallow the mouse or to slither away. A couple of the butterflies here



were Blue Mormon (*Papilio agenor polymnestor*) and Crimson Rose (*Pachliopta hector*). After lunch came my most anticipated event for the entire trip. Very few bird species survived into the 21st century without being described for science, but Serendib Scops-Owl (E) is one. Thilak is a local guide who keeps track of this and other species on a daily basis. We had had few physical challenges on this trip, and this hike was a short one, but steep and slippery. All but two of us made it, and I was rewarded with close-up iPhone photos! Thank you Thilak! Some of us saw the Red-faced Malkoha near the nest today, and Sri Lanka Hill Myna was an added bonus.

Tuesday, March 24

Wet Forest Neighborhoods

Our destination was a small home up in the mountains where they have been feeding Sri Lanka Spurfowl (E), an extremely shy bird, so this was our best hope to get better views than we had at Jansen's Bungalows. Once again, we had our best views from the kitchen. The spurfowls (male and female) scurried in and out of view, but eventually all got good looks at it. Much to our surprise (and pleasure!), a Slaty-legged Crake showed up for the feast as well. We found three Crimson-backed Flamebacks (E) and a Lesser Yellownappe in the vicinity, with a Red-backed Flameback (E) for comparison. Ashan started the tour with a list of 35 Sri Lankan endemics, and he checked each species off when we saw them. When a group of 4 White-faced Starlings (E) flew by (and landed briefly), he checked off #35 and visibly relaxed – we had done it! But of course, we weren't done finding new birds. After lunch, we headed to a field for a flock of 10 Black-throated Munias (plus 4 White-rumped Munias). And finally – Velvet-fronted Nuthatch – 3 of them! And another Orange-billed Babbler, Sri Lanka Drongo (E), Black-hooded Oriole, Indian Pitta, Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrot (E), Layard's Parakeet (E), and by far the best look we had of Plum-headed Parakeet – like a greatest hits review! And on our third (fourth?) trip to the Red-faced Malkoha (E), we got good looks at the male and the female!

Wednesday, March 25 Resort

Jansen's Bungalow / Tamarind Tree

We had a leisurely breakfast and finally walked down to the river. It wasn't as birdy as I expected, but still a beautiful valley setting. We had an early lunch and chose again among curd with treacle or chocolate or vanilla ice cream for dessert. Then we were off to Tamarind Tree Garden Resort where we were relieved to see that 3 of the 4 baby Red-wattled Lapwings were still wandering the lawn with their parents. My friend Gary Allport from Birdlife International joined us for dinner and introduced us to BirdLife, a partnership of 123 national bird



conservation organizations, one per country. (I used to work for National Audubon Society, the national partner for the United States, now a joint partner with the American Bird Conservancy.) Gary and others at BirdLife work with the World Bank and regional development banks to support bird and habitat conservation worldwide. We enjoyed our last meal together. Kay, Kate, Nancy, Jan, and Pam all headed to the airport at 9:30 pm for early post-midnight flights. Robyn, Felicia, Judy, and Greg left at 4:15 am the next morning for 7:30 am flights, and Leslie and Blaise stayed on a couple of extra days for a cultural tour. Their last message to us was that Tamarind Tree Resort was practically deserted because so many tours had canceled due to the Middle Eastern war and the disrupted fuel supplies. It made us all grateful that we had all made it to our tour and that it went off without a hitch – and with highlights galore!

Photos: Group (Greg Butcher - GB), Asian Green Bee-eater (Leslie Clapp - LC), Asian Elephant (GB), Crimson-fronted Barbet (Judy Gallagher - JG), Indian Scops-Owl (Kay Simmons - KS), Malabar Hornbill (LC), White-rumped Shama (LC), White-throated Kingfisher (LC), Gray Langur (LC), Common Leopard (LC), Painted Stork (LC), Indian Peafowl (LC), Sri Lanka Junglefowl (LC), Asian Elephant (LC), Black-naped Monarch (LC), Pheasant-tailed Jacana (LC), Crimson-fronted Barbet (Kathryn Cleland-Sipfle - KC), Alexandrine Parakeet (LC), Black-rumped Flameback (LC), Enjoying Tea (LC), Sri Lanka White-eye (LC), Loten's Sunbird (LC), Jungle Owlet (LC), Coppersmith Barbet (LC), Indian Flying Fox (LC), Lunch (KS), Asian Green Bee-eater (LC), Spot-billed Pelican (KS), Indian Paradise Flycatcher (JG), Pied Kingfisher (KS), Grizzled Giant Squirrel (LC), Sri Lanka Frogmouth (LC), Sri Lanka Blue Magpie (LC), Serendib Scops-Owl (LC), Square-tailed Drongo (KS), The Group! (LC), Sri Lanka Spurfowl (LC)