

SRI LANKA

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INTRODUCTION

Participants:

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Strategy:

Our plan was to cram a normal 14-day trip to Sri Lanka into a 9-day intensive visit to all the key sites. A target list of 82 key species was drawn up including all the endemics & near endemics and all the sites where they occur identified. It was agreed that in order to maximise our success the services of a qualified bird guide would be required and local ground agents were engaged. We contacted A. Baur & Co. (Travel) Ltd. via email (tourism@baur.com) who were highly recommended to us and outlined a draft itinerary to them, leaving them to undertake all the bookings.

Flights:

We booked our Kuwait Airways flight from London Heathrow to Colombo via Kuwait with Wildwings (0117 984 8040) at a cost of £438.10 each including airport taxes. All of the flights were at relatively convenient times with us arriving in Colombo at around 7.00am ready for a full day in the field having left London at 10.30am the day before.

Ground arrangements:

On arrival at Colombo we were met by a representative of Baur & Co. then introduced to our guide, Uditha Hettige and our driver, Abeydeera. Both spoke excellent English & proved to be outstanding company during our tour. The cost per person of our package with Baur & Co. was US\$585 (£418) and covered all of the following:

Transport in an air-conditioned 7-seater minibus.

Services of our birdguide & driver including accommodation & subsistence.

Full board at Martins Bungalow & half board accommodation in 3 star hotels throughout.

All entrance fees, tipping & portorage.

Jeep hire where required.

Accommodation:

Sinharaja: Martins Bungalow (2 nights).

Basic accommodation but staying here allowed us to be next to the reserve ready for an early start. All food & drink has to be taken with you but is cooked by the owner.

Tissamaharama: Priyankara Hotel (3 nights).

A new, modern tourist hotel with excellent restaurant & facilities.

Nuwara Eliya: Rock Hotel (2 nights).

A reasonable standard hotel. The staff were understanding in our need to serve breakfast at 5.00am on both mornings.

Kandy: Queens Hotel (2 nights).

An old colonial hotel with an excellent bar that overlooked Kandy Lake.

Insurance:

Previous experience with insurance companies led us back to Viking Travelsafe on 0870 6060 522. The required cover worked out at £25 each.

Immunisations:

For the most up to date information on jabs required contact your own GP or MASTA (Medical Advisory Services for Travellers Abroad) on 09068 224 100 or www.masta.org who offer an excellent postal service. For Sri Lanka we were advised to have immunisation against Polio, Tetanus, Typhoid & Hepatitis "A" all of which carry a moderate or significant risk.

Also, we were advised to take an anti-malarial regime and choose to take Paludrine and Chloroquine to combat the disease one week before we travelled and up to 4 weeks upon our return to the UK. Boots the Chemist have a pack that will cover this regime at around £15. Your GP might prescribe Larium as an anti malarial but take careful advice, as the side effects of this drug are potentially horrific. A number of birders are now also using Doxycyclin as an effective anti-malarial. MASTA will also advise you on any other risks you might encounter. Leeches at Sinharaja, Kitulgala & Kandy Water Catchment area proved troublesome. Although generally quite small in size they can cause a lot of wounds if not very regularly removed either by hand or with insect repellent.

Reports & Map

Thanks go to John Martin who supplied us with a copy of his 1999 report. We also used several useful trip reports supplied by Steve Whitehouse including a comprehensive one by Mark Beevers. The best map found was the Berndtson & Berndtson Sri Lanka road map available from Waterstone's at £6.50.

Bird Guide

Other trips and bird tours have used the services of Deepal Warakagoda, Upali Ekanayake or Sunil Alwis who were all highly recommended but not available during our visit. Our guide, Uditha Suresh Hettige was frankly outstanding. Not only was he a superb birder, but also an excellent all round naturalist, with a special interest in reptiles & butterflies. We gave him some coaching on moths and to a lesser degree dragonflies. Our driver, Abeydeera was also an accomplished bird guide who knew all the sites, the key species and the calls. To have both of these guys with us was a real bonus.

Detailed itinerary:

Day 1: Arrived at Colombo International Airport from Kuwait, clearing customs at around 07.30. Met the Baur ground agent, Uditha our guide & Abeydeera our driver. Drove to through Colombo to Bellanwila Marsh for the rest of the morning in an unsuccessful attempt to find Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler. Then drove to the Citizens Rest for a late lunch before spending the rest of the afternoon in the forest at the Ingiriya Monastery between Panadura & Ratnapura. Drove to Sinharaja, arriving at Martins Bungalow well after dark. Overnight at Martins Bungalow.

Birding highlights:

Bellanwila Marsh: Spot-billed Pelican (27), Indian Cormorant (2), Black Bittern (2), Black-headed Ibis (2), Ruddy-breasted Crake, Loten's Sunbird, and Brown-headed Barbet.

Ingiriya: SL Junglefowl, Green Imperial Pigeon (10), SL Hanging Parakeet, Alexandrine Parakeet (2), Malabar Trogon, SL Grey Hornbill (3), Lesser Yellownape, Spot-winged Thrush
Day 2: In the field before first light. Spent the morning walking slowly toward the Sinharaja research station where we had a packed lunch. Afternoon spent along various tracks & trails before torrential rain set in late in the afternoon. Overnight at Martins Bungalow.

Birding highlights:

Sinharaja: SL Spurfowl (hd), SL Junglefowl (2), Green Imperial Pigeon (10), SL Hanging Parrot (30), Layard's Parakeet (5), Indian Cuckoo (female), Red-faced Malkoha, Green-billed Coucal, Brown-backed Needletail (12), Malabar Trogon, SL Grey Hornbill (2), Yellow-fronted Barbet, Lesser Yellownape, White-faced Starling (5), SL Hill Myna (7), SL Blue Magpie (5), Indian Scimitar Babbler (6), Brown-capped Babbler (3), Orange-billed Babbler (10), Ashy-headed Laughing-thrush (2), Black Bulbul (10+) Scaly Thrush, Spot-winged Thrush (4), Legge's Flowerpecker (4), Oriental White-eye.

Day 3: In the field before first light again. Spent the morning walking to the Sinharaja research station before returning to Martins for lunch. Spent the afternoon driving to Tissamaharama via Uda Wallawe. Overnight at the Priyankara Hotel.

Birding highlights:

Sinharaja: Green Imperial Pigeon (6), SL Hanging Parrot (35), Layard's Parakeet (2), Brown-backed Needletail (20), Malabar Trogon (4), SL Grey Hornbill (3), SL Hill Myna (2), SL Blue Magpie (2), Red-faced Malkoha, Ashy-headed Laughing-thrush (2), Black-capped Bulbul (2), Orange-billed Babbler (8), Legge's Flowerpecker.

Uda Wallawe: Rufous-winged Bushlark (3), Jungle Prinia (2), Rosy Starling (5000).

Day 4: Another day when we were in the field before first light, this time to see the nightjars near the entrance to Yala National Park. Transferred to jeeps then spent the rest of the morning in the park. The afternoon was spent at various sites around Tissamaharama and near Bundala with a visit to a well-known palm grove just before dark for the roosting White-naped Flameback. Overnight at the Priyankara Hotel.

Birding highlights:

Yala NP: Spot-billed Pelican (40), Indian Cormorant (100), Painted Stork (20), Black-necked Stork, Black-headed Ibis (40), SL Junglefowl (30), Barred Buttonquail, Great Thick-knee (14), Caspian Plover, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon (20), Green Imperial Pigeon (2), Pied Cuckoo, Jerdon's Nightjar, Indian Nightjar (2), Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (34), White-browed Fantail (3), Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Rufous-winged Bushlark (10), Grey-breasted Prinia (2), Yellow-eyed Babbler (2) Indian Pitta (3).

Marsh between Tissa & Bundala: Yellow Bittern (2), Black Bittern (2), Watercock (2), Blue-faced Malkoha, Streaked Weaver (40).

Tissa Tanks: Spot-billed Pelican (20), Indian Cormorant (200), Yellow Bittern (3), Black-headed Ibis (10) and Woolly-necked Stork (2).

Tissa Palm Grove: White-naped Flameback.

Day 5: For the first time we had breakfast in our hotel before heading to Bundala National Park for the morning. Back to the hotel for lunch and a rest. A productive late afternoon was then spent along a track at Lunugamwehra National Park north west of Tissamaharama.

Overnight at Priyankara Hotel.

Birding highlights:

Bundala NP: Spot-winged Pelican (150+), Indian Cormorant (50+), Painted Stork (120), Black-headed Ibis (50), Grey-headed Sea Eagle (2), Pallid Harrier, Brown-backed Needletail

(2), Pied Cuckoo, SL Junglefowl (2), Great Thick-knee (3), Orange-breasted Green Pigeon (4), Green Imperial Pigeon, Grey-bellied Cuckoo (2), Jerdon's Leafbird (4).

Lunugamwehra NP: Barred Buttonquail (3), Pied Cuckoo (4), Grey-bellied Cuckoo (3), Blue-faced Malkoha (3), Yellow-eyed Babbler (12), White-browed Fantail (3).

Day 6: Set off after breakfast for the hill country via a road that took us along the edge of Yala NP before stopping at Ella Rest House for lunch. We then spent an hour & half at the Surrey Tea Estate before reaching Nuwara Eliya in time to visit Victoria Park before dark. Overnight at the Rock Hotel.

Birding highlights:

Yala NP: SL Junglefowl (3), Orange-breasted Green Pigeon (4), Green Imperial Pigeon (3), Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Blue-faced Malkoha (2), SL Grey Hornbill (7), Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Rufous-winged Bushlark (5), Jerdon's Leafbird, White-browed Fantail (5), Jungle Prinia.

Ella Rest House: Rufous-bellied Eagle, SL Hanging Parrot, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Oriental White-eye (10).

Between Ella & Surrey Tea Estate: Greater Flameback.

Surrey Tea Estate: Indian Pitta, Dull-blue Flycatcher, Pied Thrush.

Victoria Park: Yellow-eared Bulbul (4), Pied Thrush (9), Indian Blue Robin (3), Black-throated Munia (2), Indian Pitta (2).

Day 7: Set off well before first light to be at the "Arrenga Pool" at dawn. Rest of the morning spent on Horton Plains and around Pattipola before going back to the hotel for lunch & a rest. Late afternoon spent in Victoria Park. Overnight at the Rock Hotel.

Birding highlights:

Arrenga Pool: SL Wood Pigeon (10), SL Bush Warbler (3), SL Whistling Thrush, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher (4).

Horton Plains: SL Junglefowl (3), Indian Scimitar Babbler (2), Dull-blue Flycatcher (2), SL White-eye (10).

Pattipola: Mountain Hawk Eagle, Pacific Swallow (5).

Victoria Park: Slaty-legged Crane, Yellow-eared Bulbul (20), Kashmir Flycatcher, Indian Blue Robin, Pied Thrush (5).

Day 8: Yet another day when we were up hours before dawn. We spent several hours driving to Kitulgala where we spent the rest of the morning before having a late lunch at the Rest House. Drove to Kandy in time to see the heron & cormorant roost assemble at Kandy Lake.

Overnight at the Queen's Hotel.

Birding highlights:

Kitulgala: SL Spurfowl (hd), SL Junglefowl (3), Green Imperial Pigeon (2), SL Hanging Parrot (20), Layard's Parakeet (3), Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Red-faced Malkoha, Green-billed Coucal, Hill Myna (2), SL Blue Magpie, Malabar Trogon, SL Grey Hornbill (4), Yellow-fronted Barbet (3), Lesser Yellownappe, Chestnut-backed Owlet (2), Black-capped Bulbul (3), Orange-billed Babbler (10), Spot-winged Thrush (3), Legge's Flowerpecker, Black-throated Munia (10).

Kandy Lake: Indian Cormorant (60).

Day 9: After breakfast at a reasonable hour we visited the Water Catchment Area along with the hills around Kandy. Midday we then visited the Royal Pradeniya Botanical Gardens where we had lunch, then the Kandy War Cemetery before a short visit to a local tea factory and

gem factory for some shopping. Following dinner we had a few hours sleep before leaving at around 01.00 to go to the airport.

Birding highlights:

Kandy Lake: Spot-billed Pelican (2).

Water Catchment Area: SL Hanging Parrot (6), Alexandrine Parakeet (40), Yellow-fronted Barbet (2), SL Small (Crimson-fronted) Barbet (70), Indian Scimitar Babbler (2), Brown-capped Babbler (2), Yellow-eyed Babbler (4), Large-billed Leaf Warbler, Oriental White-eye (23).

Royal Pradeniya Botanical Gardens: Mountain Hawk Eagle, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Hill Myna (6), Jerdon's Leafbird (2), Large-billed Leaf Warbler.

Kandy War Cemetery: Jerdon's Leafbird (2), Oriental White-eye (2).