

WildWings

SRI LANKA: Mammals and Birds

4-17 March 2023



Fishing Cat © Mukesh Hirdaramani

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Leader: Nigel Goodgame

Local Guide: Mukesh Hirdaramani

Participants: Raymond Klarik, David Knaggs, Fiona McHugh, Katie Waldron, Sheila Wright

Introduction

After a four-year absence, WildWings returned to Sri Lanka which is home to some fantastic wildlife, as well as being a very friendly and beautiful country, with great food and culture.

Wildlife highlights of our tour included prolonged views of Fishing and Jungle Cats, both Lorises, the three endemic mammals and amazing encounters with Leopard and Sloth Bear. We saw a total of 36 mammal species and over 140 birds with a good selection of the Sri Lankan endemics.

The food was excellent throughout as was the great network of hotels we stayed in. As with most countries, Sri Lanka is still recovering after covid and rampant inflation but to their credit they have done a great job with nothing too much trouble.

I would like to thank the group for their company throughout the trip. Special thanks also to Mukesh Hirdaramani for his guiding and knowledge of Sri Lankan history and culture and to Fiona, Katie and Sheila for the photos used in this report.

Nigel Goodgame

March 2023

Daily Diary

4 - 5 March

The team met at the airport after the direct flight with Sri Lankan Airways from Heathrow Airport. After a quick introduction, we boarded the minibus for the 2.5-hour drive to our hotel at Kanneliya where we were greeted with our first mammal, a very confiding Ruddy Mongoose.

We were able to check in early and then had a walk around the hotel gardens finding our first endemic mammal, the Purple-faced Langur.

After dinner, we made the short drive to Kanneliya Rainforest, spotlighting for Red Slender Loris. We explored on foot and this gave us a great introduction to the mammals of Sri Lanka. It did not take long to find the endemic Golden Palm Civet, and not long afterwards, we had very good views of Red Slender Loris meaning we had seen all three endemic mammals on the first day of our trip!!

On the way back to the hotel, Shelia found a few Blue Forest Scorpions using an ultraviolet touch.



Red Slender Loris Photo: Katie Waldron

6 March

The day began with a leisurely breakfast with Purple-faced Langurs and Common Palm Squirrel from the breakfast table.

After breakfast, we drove back to Kanneliya Rainforest where our main goal was to visit a bat cave to see the Schneider's Leaf-nosed Bat colony, also finding a very confiding Sri Lankan Green Pit Viper on the way there.



Sri Lankan Green Pit Viper Photo: Sheila Wright

After several very enjoyable hours in the forest, we headed back to the minibus and drove to our next location, Katragama, via the Galle Fort for a quick history tour around this ancient city and the world famous (for some) cricket ground!

We arrived at our hotel late in the afternoon and after dinner set off on our second spotlighting session. This started at 21.30 and we found a good number of Indian Hares, however the main highlight was some great views of Jungle Cat. On the bird front, Indian Nightjar, Great Stone-curlew and Collared Scops Owl were all seen and we arrived back at our hotel at 03.00am....



Indian Hare Photo: Sheila Wright

7 March

A 05.30am start found us on our way to Lunugamvehera National Park ready for when it opened at 6.00am for what would be the first of many jeep safaris. The first mammals we encountered were Toque Macaque and Tufted Grey Langurs and there were also good numbers of Chital which posed nicely for photos. Asian Elephant, Wild Boar, Asian Buffalo and an array of birds including several Sri Lankan endemics were also seen.

We left the park at 11.30am and headed back to our hotel seeing Sambar Deer. After lunch, we took a well-earned rest and then after dinner, set off on our next spotlighting session.

Our target mammal was Fishing Cat but it was obvious that this would prove difficult as the rice fields had not yet been cut due to a late rainy season. Despite this, we did see Golden Jackal, Jungle Cat, Asian Elephant, Indian Gerbil and Small Civet and after 5.5 hours spotlighting, we called it a night and headed back to the hotel.

8 March

After a morning relaxing around the hotel and gardens, we took an afternoon game drive in Lunugarmvehera National Park. Along the road, we had some excellent elephant encounters with these acting as very effective roadblocks!

Mukesh also saw Stripe-necked Mongoose which, unfortunately, we were unable to relocate.

We headed back to hotel for dinner and afterwards another spotlighting session. It was very productive with some good looks at a Jungle Cat, as well as many of the species we had seen previously.

9 March

An early morning start for our last jeep drive in Lungamvehera National Park which is always a pleasure to visit especially as there are very few other tourists.

We had great views of Brown Fish Owl, along with numerous other birds but no new mammals were recorded.

We left around 11.30am, went back to the hotel for lunch and then departed for Nuwara Eliya which was 4-hour drive. After checking in, a few of us made the short drive into town to a 'nailed on spot' for Black Rat. This species is comparatively difficult to see in UK so was a 'tick' for most of the group. We located the rats very quickly and satisfied with our views, went back to the hotel for dinner and an early night....

10 March

After breakfast, we enjoyed a relaxing walk around the Hakgala Botanical Gardens. This is the best place to see the 'highland races' of both Purple-faced Langur and Tufted Grey Langur with both proving very reliable.

This site is also a great birding location, especially for endemic species, and those seen included Dull-blue Flycatcher, Yellow-eared Bulbul, Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler, Sri Lanka White-eye and Sri Lanka Swallow.

After a very pleasant couple of hours, we went back to the minibus and headed on to Kandy. Arriving at our hotel, we were greeted by the staff with a necklace of flowers. We checked in to our rooms and spent an hour exploring the hotel gardens looking for birds and Indian Giant Flying Squirrel as this was the best location on our itinerary for this species. Pleasingly, it did not disappoint and gave excellent views.

Since we had not seen Fishing Cat, we decided to try another location that we had not visited before. Mukesh had not seen it there either but despite this, we decided to give it a go and a few of us took the plunge and set off in the minibus to try along the river. We parked the minibus and started to scan for eyeshine along the riverbank.

After a few minutes we saw something but needed the scope to identify it. After what seemed like ages, the eyeshine turned out be a Fishing Cat – at last !! Unfortunately, it soon disappeared, so we moved further down the river and after a few frustrating minutes of clambering over rocks, we relocated it.

Much to our relief, it was lying very close to the river about 75 metres away and we had good views for 20 minutes or so as it yawned, lay down, sat up and just generally took it easy. It then moved out of sight so highly satisfied with our views, we headed back to our hotel.

11 March

After a leisurely breakfast, we drove to Sigiriya arriving at our hotel at lunchtime. We had a relaxed afternoon before a long spotlighting session from 21:30 until 03.00am the following morning.

This was highly successful and the new mammal species included Northern Palm Civet, White-spotted Chevrotain and Sri Lankan Spiny Mouse.



Jungle Cat Photo: Sheila Wright

12 March

After a well-earned morning rest, we had lunch and then took a jeep safari at Hurulu Eco Park to search for elephants. It did not take long to find a small family group and we had very close views of these amazing animals.

Satisfied with our looks, we decided to visit some nearby water tanks to see what was on offer, however, we soon had to move away from the first of these, as there was an Elephant which was getting a little too close.

We, therefore, moved on to another tank where we found an Indian Grey Mongoose as well as a variety of birds. After a pleasant couple of hours, we returned to our hotel for dinner and then set off on our next spotlighting session.

Heading out at 21:30, we found several Northern/Small Indian Civets, a Grey Slender Loris (which was the first for the trip), as well as a couple more Jungle Cats. At 03.00am, we called it a night and headed back to our hotel.



Asian Elephant and Chital Photo: Sheila Wright

13 March

After a morning lie-in and then lunch, we headed out to Pidurangala Forest and Rock Temple looking for bats where we found both Schneider's Leaf-nosed and Large Leaf-nosed Bats. We headed back to the hotel for dinner and another spotlighting session which was very successful, although no new species were added to the list. We finished at 03.00am.

14 March

After a late breakfast, we drove three hours to our next destination, Wilpattu National Park, arriving for lunch. Our hotel was located just a few metres from the entrance and gave us easy access to the park.

After eating, we had a very enjoyable walk along the park boundary which was followed by another spotlighting session that night, with good views of several more Jungle Cats and an all too brief encounter with an Indian Crested Porcupine. We finished at 02.00am.

15 March

A 6.15am start due to the close proximity to the park entrance and a full day of exploring. We took breakfast and lunch with us which gave us the flexibility to stay inside park without needing to leave for meals and this proved to be a real winner.

As this park had been closed to the public for a couple of years, the birds and mammals were very approachable and photographic, however, having breakfast proved to be an 'entertaining' experience as we attempted not to lose our food to the rather persistent monkeys.....



Purple-faced Langur Photo: Sheila Wright

After breakfast, we headed on and found a Peacock alarm calling in a tree so decided to stop to see what was happening. To our surprise and delight, a young male Leopard walked out of the long grass close to our jeep and sat down just a couple of metres away. It then started to groom itself, yawning and just staring into the trees. We had this whole experience to ourselves for over 30 minutes before it got up and went off.

Extremely satisfied with our views and the experience, we spent the rest of the morning exploring the park. We headed back to our meal location, this time better prepared for the monkeys....

After lunch, we were back at the jeep when a Sambar Deer hobbled past panting with blood on one of its flanks. A couple of minutes later, we heard alarm calls and a Leopard walked by where we had just been eating, also out of breath.

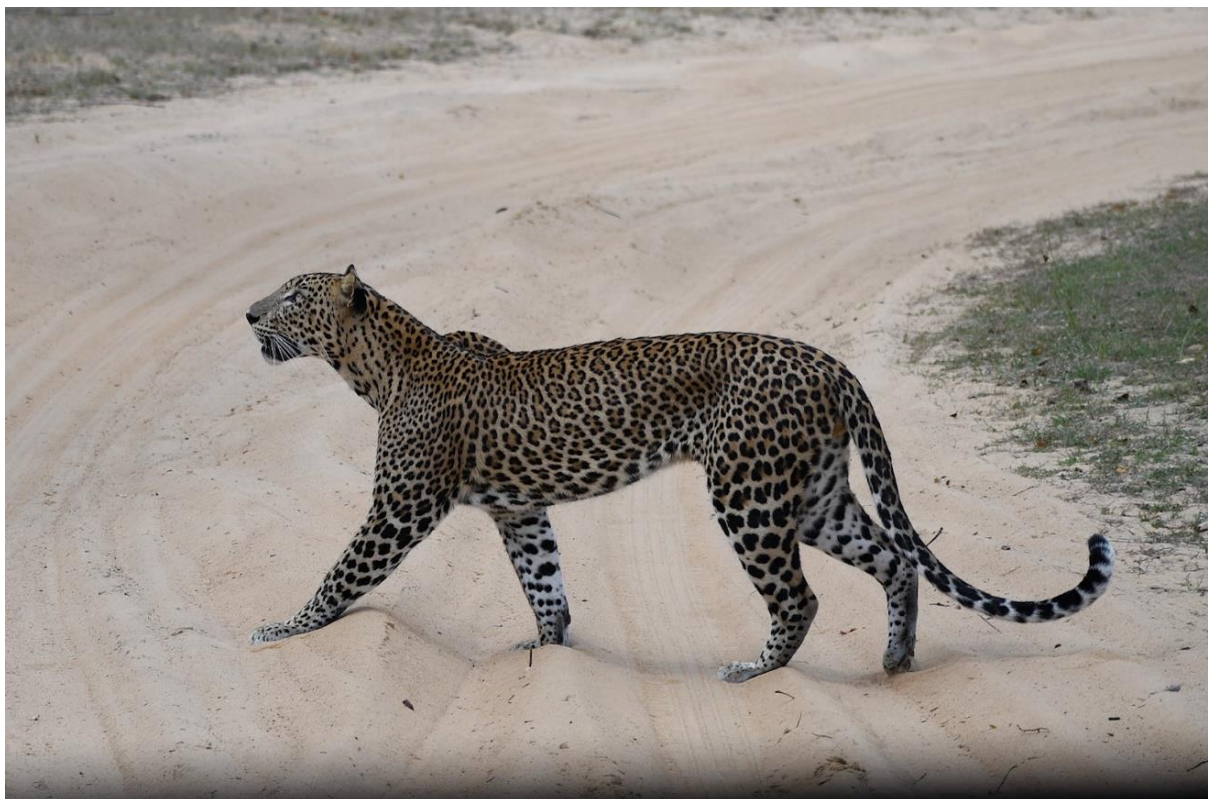
We assumed there had been a chase and the Leopard had wounded but not managed to kill the Sambar. We watched the Leopard for a few minutes before losing it in the undergrowth. We got back into the jeep excited and with high anticipation as to what we might find next.

We then got news of a nearby Sloth Bear and soon relocated it. It was a young male, and it was scratching and eating termites really close to the jeep. Once again, we had the experience to ourselves for twenty minutes before it too wandered off.

We then decided to wait at a small water hole to see what might arrive and after a few minutes it was 'bingo', when the Sloth Bear wandered out of the forest to have a drink and scratch around for more food. Another ten minutes of watching it and this time down to five metres. Absolutely perfect!!

Very satisfied with our day, we slowly drove the twenty kilometres back out of the park, stopping and looking as we travelled.

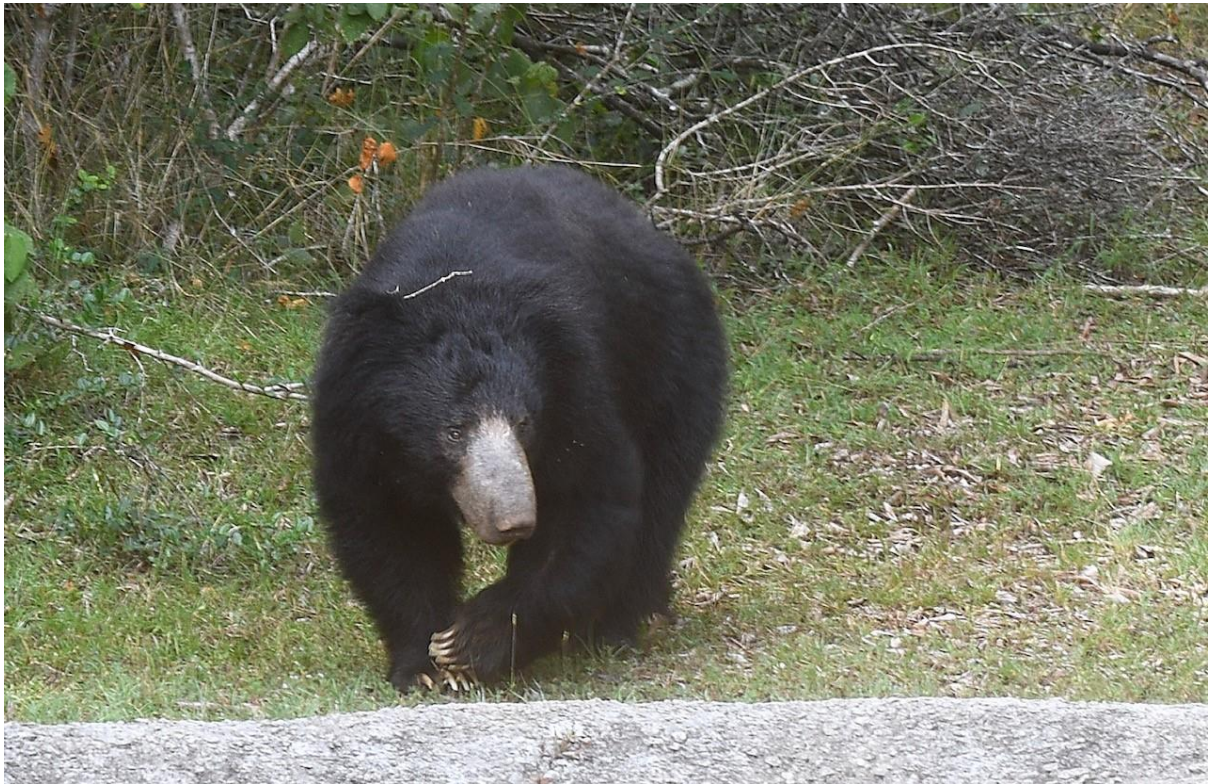
Back at our hotel, we had a celebratory coffee and tea before dinner and then went out on our last spotlighting session. We found nothing new on the mammal front but had good views of a Jungle Cat, three civet species and Elephant before heading back to our hotel at 02.00am.



Leopard Photo: Fiona McHugh



Leopard Photo: Sheila Wright



Sloth Bear Photo: Fiona McHugh



Alexandrine Parakeet Photo: Fiona McHugh

16 March

After a hectic few days, we had a leisurely morning before setting off for our last location, the Anawilundawa RAMSAR Sanctuary. We arrived mid-afternoon but it was the heat of the day, so we did not stay long. Although this site holds loads of great birds, we added nothing new to our list, so decided to drive on to our hotel which was just a few minutes from the airport. We checked in and headed to the bar for farewell drinks and dinner.

17 March

We ended the trip with a relaxing breakfast before packing for the midday flight departure to Heathrow.

Amphibians



Asian Common Toad Photo: Sheila Wright



Common Skittering Frog Photo: Sheila Wright



Gravenhorst's Golden-backed Frog Photo: Sheila Wright



Asian Water Monitor Photo: Sheila Wright



Rohan's Globular Frog Photo: Sheila Wright



Gunther's Golden-backed Frog Photo: Sheila Wright

Invertebrates



Common Meme Swallowtail larva Photo: Sheila Wright



Giant Millipede Photo: Sheila Wright



Rhinoceros Beetle sp. Photo: Sheila Wright



Swinhoe's Striated Hawk-mot Photo: Sheila Wright