Sri Lanka -Blue Whales & Leopards

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 13 February 2017







Grey Langurs







Blue Whale

Report and images by Indika Jayatissa



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Tour participants: Wicky Wickramasinghe & Indika Jayatissa (leaders) with 13 Naturetrek clients

Highlights

In total we saw 20 species of mammals, 12 species of reptiles, amphibians and fish, and 159 bird species. Blue Whales were encountered on all three days of our sea excursions, which also included a sighting of a Bryde's Whale and many Spinner and Bottlenose Dolphins. The Leopards at Yala also graced our presence along with many other mammals including Asian Elephant, Samba and Spotted Deer, Wild Boar, Water Buffalo, Ruddy Mongoose, Grey Langurs and Toque Macaque.

Day 1

Saturday 4th February

The tour started with an overnight flight from the UK to Sri Lanka.

Day 2

Sunday 5th February

Arrive Colombo; travel to Weligama

The flight arrived at Colombo airport at 5.20pm, where Wicky and Indika met the group. We left the airport at 6.30pm and reached the Fisherman's Bay Resort at 9pm. After dinner we called it a night.

Day 3

Monday 6th February

Weligama

We left the hotel at 6.30am with packed breakfasts and reached Mirissa harbour at 6.45am for our first whale-watching trip. At 8.15am we saw our first Blue Whale and had some good sightings. We had no luck with any other species and returned to the hotel at 11.45am, where we had lunch and relaxed until 3pm.

In the afternoon we visited the Kirala Kele sanctuary where we encountered Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Water Buffalo, Indian Palm Squirrel, Indian Flying Fox, Bengal (Land) Monitor, Oriental Garden Lizard and Common House Gecko. Bird sightings included Lesser Whistling Dick, Indian Peafowl, Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Indian Pond Heron, Spot-billed Pelican, Little Cormorant, Oriental Darter, Shikra, Brahminy Kite, White-breasted Waterhen, Red-wattled Lapwing, Caspian Tern, Lesser Crested Tern, Spotted Dove, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, Greater Coucal, Asian Palm Swift, White-throated Kingfisher, Pied Kingfisher, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Common Iora, Brown Shrike, Black-hooded Oriole, White-bellied Drongo, House Crow, Large-billed Crow, Red-vented Bulbul, Sri Lanka Swallow, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Common Tailorbird, Yellow-billed Babbler, Common Myna, Oriental Magpie-Robin and Purple-rumped Sunbird.

We returned to the hotel at 6.30pm and did the checklist at 7.30pm followed by dinner and a briefing for the next day.

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Day 4

Tuesday 7th February

Weligama

After having tea/coffee, once again we left the hotel with a picnic breakfast at 6.30am. We encountered Blue Whales during our boat trip and returned to the hotel at 11.45am. En route we saw many Greater Crested Terns.

After lunch we relaxed in the hotel and set out for Galle at 3pm. We visited the Galle Fort and explored the UNESCO World Heritage site with its impressive ramparts, clock tower, lighthouse and many other architectural marvels.

We returned to the hotel at 7pm and did the checklist at 7.45pm followed by dinner and a briefing for the next day.

Day 5

Wednesday 8th February

Weligama

We left the hotel once again at 6.30am after tea/coffee amidst gloomy weather. Our sightings this morning included Blue Whales, Bryde's Whale, Bottlenose and Spinner Dolphins, Flying Fish and Green Turtle.

After returning to the hotel for lunch, we once again visited the Kirala Kele sanctuary where we encountered Black-crowned Night Heron, Wood and Common Sandpipers, Green Imperial Pigeon, Stork-billed and Common Kingfishers, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Plain Prinia, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Scaly-breasted Munia and a Brown Mongoose.

We returned to the hotel and did the checklist at 7.45pm, followed by the briefing and dinner.

Day 6

Thursday 9th February

Yala

We had our breakfast at 8am and checked out of the hotel at 9am. En route to Yala we encountered many birds seen before, along with Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Gull-billed Tern, Little Grebe, Little Egret and Green Bee-eater. We also saw Grey Langur and Toque Macaque. We reached the Cinnamon Wild Hotel by 12.30pm, had our lunch and relaxed.

At 3pm we visited the Debara Wewa reservoir and did some birding. We saw Eurasian Spoonbill, Yellow and Black Bitterns, Indian Cormorant, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Kentish Plover, Crested Treeswift, Brown-headed Barbet, Ashy Woodswallow, Small Minivet, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Streaked Weaver and Tricolored Munia. As we returned to the hotel we saw Estuarine and Mugger Crocodiles, Wild Boar and Black-naped Hare. We did the checklist at 7.45pm, followed by the next day briefing and dinner.

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Day 7

Friday 10th February

Yala

We had tea/coffee and left the hotel at 6am for our first jeep safari. The weather was hot and clear. The birds we encountered today included Woolly-necked Stork, Lesser Adjutant, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Watercock, Great Stone-curlew, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Pacific Golden and Mongolian Plovers, Pin-tailed Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, Marsh and Terek Sandpipers, Ruddy Turnstone, Little Stint, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Blue-faced Malkoha, Jerdon's Bushlark, Oriental Skylark, Brahminy Starling, Indian Robin, Loten's Sunbird, Indian Silverbill and Paddyfield Pipit. The elusive Leopard, Ruddy Mongoose, Asian Elephant, Spotted Deer, Sambar, Grizzled Giant Squirrel and Green Garden Lizard were also seen during our safari. We enjoyed our packed meals inside the park and leisurely returned to the hotel at 6pm, where we did our checklist at 7.30pm followed by the next day's briefing and dinner.

Day 8

Saturday 11th February

Yala

Once again we left the hotel at 6am after tea/coffee for our safari. Today we encountered Crested Serpent Eagle, Barred Buttonquail, Green and Curlew Sandpipers, Asian Koel, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, House Swift, Eurasian Hoopoe, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Coppersmith Barbet, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Ashy Drongo, White-browed Fantail, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark, White-rumped Shama, Purple Sunbird and White rumped Munia, along with Asian Elephant, Water Buffalo, Spotted Deer, Toque Macaque, Grey Langur, Mugger Crocodile and many more species we had encountered the day before. Afterwards we returned to the hotel, had dinner and called it a day.

Main Tour Day 9; Extension Day 1

Sunday 12th February

Katunayake (Main tour); Sinharaja (Extension)

We had breakfast at 9am and checked out of the hotel at 10am. We reached the Silver Ray restaurant in Ratnapura at 1.30pm and had our lunch. After lunch we split up as two members of the group departed for Sinharaja for the birdwatching extension, while the rest set off to Katunayake for their final night's stay.

The main group reached the Airport Garden Hotel at 6pm and enjoyed a leisurely dinner. Meanwhile, the Extension party reached the Blue Magpie Lodge at 4.45pm. Whilst birding around the lodge, sightings included Yellow-fronted Barbet, Emerald Dove, Indian Swiftlet, Plum-headed Parakeet, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Black Bulbul and Orange-billed Babbler. We had a briefing about the next day's program before dinner.

Main Tour Day 10; Extension Day 2

Monday 13th February

Return flight to the UK (Main tour); Sinharaja (Extension)

Those on the main tour checked out of the hotel and travelled to the airport in time for their flight back to UK, where the main tour ended.

Meanwhile on the extension, we left the hotel at 6am with our packed breakfast and lunch. We reached the Sinharaja Rainforest ticket counter and while there, we encountered Spot-winged Thrush. We had good weather

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and light as we entered the rainforest. During a walk we encountered Common Rat Snake, Black-cheek Lizard, Hump-nosed Lizard, Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Red-faced Malkoha, Malabar Trogon, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Lesser Yellownape, Sri Lanka Drongo, Black-capped and Yellow-browed Bulbuls, Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler, Darkfronted Babbler and Brown-breasted Flycatcher. We returned to the hotel at 4pm and did some birding around the hotel until 5pm. In the evening we did the checklist at 7pm and then had our dinner, followed by the briefing for the next day.

Extension Day 3

Tuesday 14th February

Sinharaja

We had a pre-breakfast birding session around the Sinharaja Rainforest buffer zone and encountered Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Green-billed Coucal, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush and many other birds seen before. We returned to the hotel for breakfast and then had time to relax.

After lunch we set out to the ticket counter area and saw Crimson-backed Flameback, Layard's Parakeet, Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, Sri Lanka White-Eye, Sri Lanka Hill Myna, Dull-blue Flycatcher and Jerdon's Leafbird.

We returned to the hotel and did the checklist at 7pm, followed by the briefing and dinner.

Extension Day 4

Wednesday 15th February

Katunayake

After breakfast we checked out of the hotel and proceeded to Katunayake. We had lunch at Katunayake and reached our hotel at 2.30pm. We relaxed for the rest of the day.

Extension Day 5

Thursday 16th February

Return flight to the UK

We checked out of the hotel and travelled to the airport in time for our flight back to UK, where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

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Species Lists (Some previous names are noted in brackets)

Mammals

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Toque Macaque	Macaca sinica
2	Grey Langur	Semnopithecus (Presbytis) entellus
3	Purple-faced Leaf Monkey	Trachypithecus (Presbytis) vetulus
4	Ruddy Mongoose	Herpestes smithii
5	Brown Mongoose	Herpestes fuscus
6	Leopard	Panthera pardus kotiya
7	Asian Elephant	Elephas maximus
8	Wild Boar	Sus scrofa
9	Spotted Deer	Cervus axis
10	Sambar	Cervus unicolor
11	Water Buffalo	Bubalus Bubalis
12	Indian Palm Squirrel	Funambulus palmarum
13	Grizzled Giant Squirrel	Ratufa macroura
14	Dusky Striped Squirrel	Funambulus sublineatus
15	Indian (Black-naped) Hare	Lepus nigricollis
16	Indian Flying Fox	Pteropus gigantean
17	Blue Whale	Balaenoptera musculus
18	Bryde's Whale	Balaenoptera edeni
19	Bottlenose Dolphin	Tursiops truncates
20	Spinner Dolphin	Stenella mulla

Reptiles, Amphibians & Fish:

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Common Rat Snake	Ptyas mucosus maximus
2	Bengal (Land) Monitor	Varanus bengalensis
3	Asian Water Monitor	Varanus salvator
4	Oriental (Common) Garden Lizard	Calotes versicolor
5	Green Garden Lizard	Calotes calotes
6	Black-cheek Lizard	Calotes nigrilabris
7	Hump-nosed Lizard	Lyriocephalus scutatus
8	Estuarine Crocodile	Crocodylus porosus
9	Mugger Crocodile	Crocodylus palustris
10	Green Turtle	Chelonia mydas
11	Common House Gecko	Hemidactylus frenatus
12	A Flying Fish	Exocoetidae family

Birds (Endemics in bold)

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Lesser Whistling Duck	Dendrocygna javanica
2	Sri Lanka Spurfowl	Galloperdix bicalcarata
3	Indian Peafowl	Pavo cristatus
4	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis
5	Painted Stork	Mycteria leucocephala
6	Asian Openbill	Anastomus oscitans
7	Woolly-necked Stork	Ciconia episcopus
8	Lesser Adjutant	Leptoptilos javanicus
9	Black-headed Ibis	Threskiornis melanocephalus
10	Eurasian Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia
11	Yellow Bittern	Ixobrychus sinensis
12	Black Bittern	Dupetor flavicollis

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Common name

- 13 Black-crowned Night Heron
- 14 Indian Pond Heron
- 15 Eastern Cattle Egret
- 16 Grey Heron
- 17 Purple Heron
- 18 Great Egret
- 19 Intermediate Egret
- 20 Little Egret
- 21 Spot-billed Pelican
- 22 Little Cormorant
- 23 Indian Cormorant
- 24 Oriental Darter (Darter)
- 25 Crested Serpent Eagle
- 26 Shikra
- 27 Brahminy Kite
- 28 White-bellied Sea Eagle
- 29 Grey-headed Fish Eagle
- 30 White-breasted Waterhen
- 31 Watercock
- 32 Common Moorhen
- 33 Barred Buttonquail
- 34 Great Stone-curlew (Great Thick Knee)
- 35 Black-winged Stilt
- 36 Yellow-wattled Lapwing
- 37 Red-wattled Lapwing
- 38 Pacific Golden Plover
- 39 Little Ringed Plover
- 40 Kentish Plover
- 41 Lesser Sand Plover (Mongolian Plover)
- 42 Pheasant-tailed Jacana
- 43 Pin-tailed Snipe
- 44 Black-tailed Godwit
- 45 Common Redshank
- 46 Marsh Sandpiper
- 47 Green Sandpiper
- 48 Wood Sandpiper
- 49 Terek Sandpiper
- 50 Common Sandpiper
- 51 Ruddy Turnstone
- 52 Little Stint
- 53 Curlew Sandpiper
- 54 Gull-billed Tern
- 55 Caspian Tern
- 56 Greater Crested Tern
- 57 Lesser Crested Tern
- 58 Whiskered Tern
- 59 Rock Dove (Common Pigeon)
- 60 Spotted Dove
- 61 Common Emerald Dove
- 62 Orange-breasted Green Pigeon
- 63 Sri Lanka Green Pigeon
- 64 Green Imperial Pigeon
- 65 Green-billed Coucal
- 66 Greater Coucal

Scientific name

Nycticorax nycticorax

Ardeola grayii

Bubulcus coromandus

Ardea cinerea

Ardea purpurea

Ardea alba

Egretta intermedia

Egretta garzetta

Pelecanus philippensis

1 (iccunus pisiupper

Microcarbo niger

Phalacrocorax fuscicollis

Anhinga melanogaster

Spilornis cheela

Accipiter badius

Haliastur indus

Haliaeetus leucogaster

Haliaeetus ichthyaetus

Amaurornis phoenicurus

Gallicrex cinerea

Gallinula chloropus

Turnix suscitator

Esacus recurvirostris

Himantopus himantopus

Vanellus malabaricus

Vanellus indicus

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Pluvialis fulva Charadrius dubius

Charadrius alexandrinus

Charadrius mongolus

Characitus mongotus

Hydrophasianus chirurgus

Gallinago stenura

Limosa limosa

Tringa totanus

Tringa stagnatilis

Tringa ochropus

Tringa glareola

Xenus cinereus

Actitis hypoleucos

Arenaria interpres

Calidris minuta

Calidris ferruginea

Gelochelidon nilotica

Hydroprogne caspia

Thalasseus bergii

Thalasseus bengalensis

Chlidonias hybrida

Columba livia

Spilopelia chinensis

Chalcophaps indica

Treron bicinctus

Treron pompadora

Ducula aenea

Centropus chlororhynchos

Centropus sinensis

	Common name	Scientific name
67	Red-faced Malkoha	
68	Blue-faced Malkoha	Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus Phaenicophaeus viridirostris
69	Asian Koel	Eudynamys scolopaceus
70	Grey-bellied Cuckoo (Plaintive Cuckoo)	Cacomantis passerinus
70	Crested Treeswift (Gray-rumped Treeswift)	Hemiprocne coronata
72	Indian Swiftlet	Aerodramus unicolor
73	Asian Palm Swift	Cypsiurus balasiensis
74	Little Swift (House Swift)	Apus affinis
75	Malabar Trogon	Harpactes fasciatus
76	Stork-billed Kingfisher	Pelargopsis capensis
77	White-throated Kingfisher	Halcyon smyrnensis
78	Common Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis
79	Pied Kingfisher	Ceryle rudis
80	Green Bee-eater (Little Green Bee-eater)	Merops orientalis
81	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	Merops philippinus
82	Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	Merops leschenaulti
83	Eurasian Hoopoe (Common Hoopoe)	Ирира ерорs
84	Malabar Pied Hornbill	Anthracoceros coronatus
85	Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill	
86	Brown-headed Barbet	Ocyceros gingalensis Psilopogon zeylanicus
87	Yellow-fronted Barbet	Psilopogon flavifrons
88	Crimson-fronted Barbet	Psilopogon rubricapillus
89		Psilopogon haemacephalus
90	Coppersmith Barbet Brown general Promy Woodperker	
91	Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker Volloys growned Woodpecker	Dendrocopos nanus
92	Yellow-crowned Woodpecker	Dendrocopos mahrattensis
93	Lesser Yellownape Rlack gumped Flomeback (Lesser Coldenback)	Picus chlorolophus
93 94	Black-rumped Flameback (Lesser Goldenback)	Dinopium benghalense
95	Crimson-backed Flameback (Crimson-backed Goldenback) Plum-headed Parakeet	Chrysocolaptes stricklandi
96	Layard's Parakeet	Psittacula cyanocephala Psittacula calthrapae
90 97	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Psittacula krameri
98	Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot	Loriculus beryllinus
99	Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike	Hemipus picatus
100	Sri Lanka Woodshrike	Tephrodornis affinis
101	Ashy Woodswallow	Artamus fuscus
101	Common Iora	Arumus juscus Aegithina tiphia
102	Small Minivet	Pericrocotus cinnamomeus
103	Orange Minivet (Scarlet Minivet)(Flame Minivet)	Pericrocotus flammeus
104	Brown Shrike	Lanius cristatus
105	Black-hooded Oriole	Oriolus xanthornus
107	Ashy Drongo	
107	, 0	Dicrurus leucophaeus Dicrurus caerulescens
109	White-bellied Drongo Sri Lanka Drongo (Sri Lanka Crosted Drongo)	
	Sri Lanka Drongo (Sri Lanka Crested Drongo) White-browed Fantail	Dicrurus lophorinus
110		Rhipidura aureola
111	Indian Paradise Flycatcher (Asian Paradise Flycatcher)	Terpsiphone paradisi Urocissa ornata
112	Sri Lanka Blue Magpie	
113	House Crow Ladier Lynds Crow (Lorge billed Crow)	Corvus splendens
114	Indian Jungle Crow (Large-billed Crow)	Corvus culminatus
115	Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark	Eremopterix griseus
116	Jerdon's Bush Lark	Mirafra affinis
117	Oriental Skylark	Alauda gulgula
118	Black-capped Bulbul	Pycnonotus melanicterus
119	Red-vented Bulbul	Pycnonotus cafer
120	White-browed Bulbul	Pycnonotus luteolus

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	Common name	Scientific name
121	Yellow-browed Bulbul	Acritillas indica
122	Black Bulbul	Hypsipetes leucocephalus
123	Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica
124	Sri Lanka Swallow	Cecropis hyperythra
125	Clamorous Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus stentoreus
126	Blyth's Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus dumetorum
127	Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis
128	Plain Prinia	Prinia inornata
129	Common Tailorbird	Orthotomus sutorius
130	Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler	Pomatorhinus melanurus
131	Grey-headed (Purple) Swamphen	Porphyrio poliocephalus
132	Dark-fronted Babbler	Rhopocichla atriceps
133	Orange-billed Babbler	Turdoides rufescens
134	Yellow-billed Babbler	Turdoides affinis
135	Ashy-headed Laughingthrush	Garrulax cinereifrons
136	Sri Lanka White-Eye	Zosterops ceylonensis
137	Sri Lanka Hill Myna (Sri Lanka Myna)	Gracula ptilogenys
138	Common Myna	Acridotheres tristis
139	Brahminy Starling	Sturnia pagodarum
140	Spot-winged Thrush	Geokichla spiloptera
141	Indian Robin	Copsychus fulicatus
142	Oriental Magpie-Robin	Copsychus saularis
143	White-rumped Shama	Copsychus malabaricus
144	Asian Brown Flycatcher	Muscicapa dauurica
145	Brown-breasted Flycatcher	Muscicapa muttui
146	Dull-blue Flycatcher	Eumyias sordidus
147	Jerdon's Leafbird	Chloropsis jerdoni
148	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	Dicaeum erythrorhynchos
149	Purple-rumped Sunbird	Leptocoma zeylonica
150	Purple Sunbird	Cinnyris asiaticus
151	Loten's Sunbird	Cinnyris lotenius
152	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus
153	Streaked Weaver	Ploceus manyar
154	Indian Silverbill (White-throated Silverbill)	Euodice malabarica
155	White-rumped Munia	Lonchura striata
156	Scaly-breasted Munia	Lonchura punctulata
157	Tricolored Munia (Black-headed Munia)	Lonchura malacca
158	Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea
159	Paddyfield Pipit	Anthus rufulus

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