

## Sri Lanka, 2.–19. January 2012

By David Marques & Fabian Ducry

### Overview

33 doable endemic birds, Leopard & Blue Whale, these are three strong arguments to go birding in Sri Lanka! We were very lucky to see all these targets and some more and ended up with 248 bird species, many great mammals and reptiles on a largely self-guided tour. However, as most people go with organized tours, it is hard to get details on birding locations – a gap that I hopefully help to close with this trip report and the Google map attached to it.

### Itinerary

- 02.01.2012 transfer from airport to Sigiriya
- 03.01.2012 birding around Sigiriya, night drive / walk
- 04.01.2012 visit to Sigiriya rock & birding around Sigiriya, night drive / walk
- 05.01.2012 early-morning birding in Sigiriya, drive to Kandy, afternoon / evening in botanical garden in Peradeniya near Kandy
- 06.01.2012 morning visit to Udawattakele sanctuary Kandy, drive to Nuwara Eliya with stop-over in tea-factory, Victoria park Nuwara Eliya
- 07.01.2012 early-morning to Horton Plains NP, Victoria park Nuwara Eliya in the afternoon, Whistling-thrush site towards Hakgala in the evening
- 08.01.2012 early-morning to Horton Plains NP, Victoria park Nuwara Eliya in the evening
- 09.01.2012 Whistling-thrush site towards Hakgala in the morning, travel to Kithulgala, afternoon / evening birding in the forest
- 10.01.2012 birding around Sisira's lodge, late morning and afternoon / evening in the forest, Kithulgala
- 11.01.2012 birding in the Kithulgala forest, drive to Sinharaja, successful evening birding in the forest Sinharaja
- 12.01.2012 morning to Sinharaja forest, afternoon / evening towards village, night walk along the jeep track outside the park
- 13.01.2012 morning birding along the jeep track, drive to Udawalawe NP, afternoon game drive there
- 14.01.2012 drive to Tissa, afternoon birding in Yala NP
- 15.01.2012 morning birding in Bundala NP, late afternoon / evening drive to Yala entrance area
- 16.01.2012 full-day Yala birding trip
- 17.01.2012 morning around Tissa, drive towards Mirissa with a stop-over in Kalametiya Bird Sanctuary, afternoon at the beach in Mirissa
- 18.01.2012 morning pelagic, afternoon at the beach
- 19.01.2012 transfer to airport, return flight

### Organization

Ground logistics and transport were organized by Bird & Wildlife Team (Pvt) Ltd. ([www.birdandwildlifeteam.com](http://www.birdandwildlifeteam.com)), which we can highly recommend! We had phone contact to Deepal Warakagoda (famous discoverer of the Serendib Scops Owl). We met Chinthaka De Silva in Nuwara Eliya & Horton Plains NP. He helped us very much and even called Uditha Hettinge, another guide, to join us on Horton Plains NP. Who in turn told us a lot about his field work there and his current work on frogs. All three are excellent guides and I can highly recommend their services like many other clients before us.

We were also very happy with our driver Christie, who knew all the important birding sites and organized everything on the spot, so that we could fully enjoy our holidays. The hotels booked by the Team were very comfortable – almost a bit too luxurious compared to what we are used to. Our most appreciated hotels were

Martin's Lodge in Sinharaja with its great view and Sri Lanka Blue Magpies feeding at dawn on the veranda, and Sisira's Lodge under some nice trees, with hand-fed Emerald Doves and Chestnut-backed Owlets on its grounds.

## Birding sites

### Google map

We tried to do some preparation on Google maps, which was not very easy due to very few annotations on Sri Lanka and only few trip reports with exact localities. That's why we took some waypoints in the field including some annotations and hints, which can now be seen under the following link:

<http://maps.google.ch/maps/ms?msid=202769131798868517437.0004b53fa78a55dd226ab&msa=0>

### Sigiriya

The main birding areas are the forest N and NE of the impressive rock, the open bushy habitat a few kilometers NE of the complex (see waypoints) and a few lakes in the area. The lake next to the hotel was the best (Black Bittern in the bushes at the northern corner). Night drives/walks are possible on the roads around the rock fortress, although signposts do not recommend it because of potential danger by elephants. Stay close to the car and you should be fine. An Oriental Scops-owl was heard by others in the dark part of the mentioned forest. At the northern entrance gate of the Sigiriya compound we heard a Spot-bellied Eagle Owl calling from inside. Jerdon's Nightjar is common in the area. We saw a Brown Fish Owl on two nights along the open trench surrounding the main entrance gate. Next to the road a thicket held a Grey Slender.

### Kandy

Some trip reports wrote something about "Kandy botanical garden", so we headed to the botanical garden at Peradeniya - a small City near Kandy. There is a great Flying Fox roost. We also saw a Brown Fish Owl at dusk in the bamboo near the little lake, Hanging-Parrots, both Flamebacks and a confiding Common Hawk-cuckoo.

But Udawattakele sanctuary would have been the place to be. According to others Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl can be found in the trees around the lake. Though we heard from another group, that it is difficult to see the big owls in the evening because the sanctuary closes at 6 pm. The next morning we headed to the sanctuary. Birding there was better. Although we did not find the Eagle-Owl, SL Hanging-Parrots and Plum-headed Parakeets gave great views.

On the steep ascent from Kandy to Nuwara Eliya are many tea factories - famous tourist stop-overs. Hill Swallows are breeding in some of the factories or at side buildings.

### Nuwara Eliya

The smallish Victoria park is the ornithological highlight of the area. The remoter edges of the park - especially along the dirty river flowing through the park - are the places to find Kashmir Flycatcher and Indian Pitta as well as skulkers like Indian Blue Robin and Pied Thrush. A dark fruiting tree (see waypoints) in the middle of the park is another good place to find Pied Thrushes, especially in the evening. Keep your ears open for the high-pitched call of Pied Thrush. We saw Pied Thrushes only in the mentioned fruiting tree (3 males).

We also visited the golf court nearby, but it had less productive, dense edges.

Between Nuwara Eliya and Hakgala, there is one site reported for SL Whistling-thrush (see waypoints). When we were there, road construction work was going on and many power cables were lying in the river. We did not see any sign of the thrush. Maybe it left the site due to heavy disturbance. From the old huts at the outer edge of the road bend, a small footpath is leading to a concrete bridge over a little river, where the Whistling-thrush used to be seen. The only bird worth mentioning we saw was a nicely perched SL Wood Pigeon in the forest along the road above this site.

## Horton Plains NP

We did take some waypoints in the national park. The surroundings of the Arranga pool did not bring a Whistling-thrush on the first morning as the birds are obviously over-taped. On the second morning we were lucky to hear one bird calling very close and then had brief views of the female crossing the road to disappear into the forest on the other side. All the other targets were easily seen in that area, many of them in flocks. The SL Bush-warbler was rather easy and approachable, but most of the time under leafy cover. A surprise was a neat male Kashmir Flycatcher at the Arranga pool. More difficult were SL Wood Pigeons, which flew over from time to time but did not offer good views. In the open grasslands we saw Tricolored Munias.

## Kithulgala

We found this place to offer the toughest birding of our stay. The Sisira's lodge grounds are very open and offer easy birding. Close to the Lodge we saw Chestnut-backed Owlet on the morning we left. The previous day it was calling from the opposite river bank. Besides that, Brown-capped Babblers, extremely tame Emerald Doves and fly-over Hanging-Parrots were the highlights on the grounds – not very exciting after 5 days in the North. Maybe logging around the hotel grounds made some birds leave the area (Spot-winged Thrush, Green-billed Coucal?) as we did not find any sign of them.

We had spectacular views of a female Legge's Flowerpecker in the grounds of the Kithulgala Guest House just above the ferry landing.

The Kithulgala forest (sanctuary) on the other river side is a tough place to bird. There was hardly a bird visible or audible inside the forest. Forest edge / canopy views are only possible from the two agricultural areas (fields, rice fields) in the forest (see waypoints). Spot-winged Thrush was common in the forest interior and we luckily hit two flocks with many good endemics. Unfortunately, we did not hear SL Scrubfowl at any time or Green-billed Coucal, which we were looking for. The area seems over-taped, as not even Trogons responded to play-back.

THE highlight was our discovery of a Serendib Scops Owl day roost! Thanks to some trip reports, we carefully scanned the thickets surrounding the rice paddies inside the Kithulgala forest. The owl was roosting at around 3 m in a dense forest edge thicket, just a few meters left of a "guardian hut". The owl was at the same place for three days in a row.

## Sinharaja NP

This forest is simply incredible! Very beautiful forest, fully packed with the best endemic birds and other wildlife. And it is not allowed to use tape-playback, which was in our view an advantage compared to over-taped areas like Horton Plains and Kithulgala. Your success may depend much on the naturalist guide assigned to you. The assignments follow a strict schedule. We had the maximum of luck in this respect, as K. D. Thandula joined us. He's a smart, incredibly motivated and targeted guide. He asked which target species we were still missing (7 endemics & frogmouth). After just 2 hours afternoon birding, we had seen them all except for the SL Scaly Thrush. We heard it but it was already too dark to see it. Early in the next mornig we finally found one. Granted, the encounter with two Green-billed Coucals and one male SL Scrubfowl were very lucky events. But our guide really made the difference as he knew all hideouts and strategies to see every bird and also of some mind-blowing lizards.

We got all targets, most of them in several flocks along the road entering from the upper gate (from Martin's lodge), which goes almost straight at easy pace. For SL Scaly Thrush, the best locations are the dark and dense areas close to streams where the road makes a bend and before the research station. Listen for the same, difficult-to-hear call as for the Pied Thrush. The bird we saw flew up from the ground and sat beautifully on a branch before disappearing to the forest. SL Scrubfowl is very secretive, easy to hear, but difficult to see. In a dark and damp area we were lucky to see a male walking into the bushes.

The walk down to the headquarters / entrance office was also interesting, but less productive. According to our guide Thandula, Red Slender Loris occurs along that track, but it is not allowed to enter the park at night. The jeep track running to Martin's lodge outside the park is not very exciting since much of the forest consists of introduced pines. But we had a good night walk there with Golden Palm-civet and Giant Flying Squirrel. Furthermore, we heard a SL Bay Owl calling far away, possibly close to the park headquarter / gate area. We were standing in the open area with a few trees on the jeep track below the pine plantation when we heard its call. From the western side, a male SL Frogmouth was calling in the distance (in the pine plantation?). If you look for Serendib Scops Owl or SL Frogmouth, you need to get it during the day. Your best bet is a good guide who knows a day roost. Alternatively you can try to find it at the park entrance in the evening.

### **Udawalawe NP**

The afternoon drive was nice, but we cannot recommend any particular location. Following Chinthaka De Silvas hint, we tried to tape Marshall's lora in semi-forested habitat. Two birds called back with their typical call and approached but we did not get good views. Yellow-eyed Babbler was also easily taped in. Unfortunately, we missed Sirkeer Malkoha here and did not see any quails. Blyth's Pipit was surprisingly common and we had many very close encounters. A night drive is not possible here as the park closes at 6 to 6.30 pm. Unfortunately the whole park is overgrown by the invasive pest Lantana, which leaves little open ground.

We were lucky enough to find a new bird for Sri Lanka: A Greater Short-toed Lark of the darkish, reddish subspecies *dukhunensis* was feeding between buffalos at the edge of Udawalawe lake. Deepal Warakagoda has seen the bird too a few days later. We handed in a report to the Ceylon Bird Club Rarities and Records Committee and will soon publish something on this country first if accepted by the Rarities Committee.

### **Tissa**

We found the coconut plantation (supposedly) mentioned in other trip reports (see waypoints). We did not see White-naped Woodpecker there, however Black-rumped Flamebacks were present. A very early morning start might help, according to local people. The lakes around Tissa were not very interesting: Better ones were on the route from Udawalawe or to Yala NP and Bundala NP.

### **Yala NP**

This park is nice, but very crowded with tourists - meaning many jeeps are around. We had a hard time to find Blue-faced Malkoha and Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, but were lucky to encounter two Leopards during our one and a half days in Yala. Destruction from the 2004 Tsunami was still visible inside the park, where destroyed buildings were not rebuilt.

A very birdy place was the saline / brackish lagoon before the park entrance: It was full with shorebirds including Broad-billed Sandpipers, terns, gulls, storks and pelicans. This area around the salt fabric was also good for finding Little Indian Nightjars at dusk (also at dawn): They sat on poles while singing. A night drive inside the park is not possible as it closes around 6 pm.

### **Bundala NP**

Bundala NP has many more birds, is much smaller and is less frequented by tourists than Yala NP. There are many lakes and lagoons in the park, teeming with shorebirds and other good stuff. Just drive around in the park, look to the lake below the visitor center and have a look at the lake which is visible from outside the park, along the main road.

### **Kalametia Bird Sanctuary**

We went to the shore side of this bird sanctuary comprised mainly of wet and mangrove forest. The tidal flats there were nice for Garganeys and many shorebirds. Some people visit it by canoe.

## Mirissa

Great beach, warm sea and cool waves. And another highlight were the Cetaceans: We got at least 3 Blue Whales, 1 Bryde Whale and a big group of Spinner Dolphins. Seabirds were not really seen besides a few Bridled Terns, some Lesser and Great Crested and Little Terns.

## Accommodation

Sigiriya: Sigiriya Hotel, a very luxurious & relaxing place.

Kandy: Hotel Suisse, a big, posh hotel famous with locals (2 weddings during our stay), free Wifi.

Nuwara Eliya: Leisure Village hotel, a simpler, but very pleasant place to stay, very friendly hotel staff.

Kithulgala: Sisira's lodge, a more basic, but very cosy place with a great hotel ground for birdwatching, also at night.

Sinharaja: Martin's lodge is the place to be! SL Blue Magpies visit the veranda at dawn, the view is incredible and the food great. The rooms are basic, but totally sufficient. Rewarding night walks around the lodge are possible.

Udawalawe: Kalu's Hideaway, a very luxurious & relaxing place.

Tissa: Priyankara hotel, a very luxurious place too, the hotel staff was a bit unfriendly, free Wifi.

Mirissa: Paradise Beach Club, a nice, posh place directly at the coast, free Wifi.

## References

John Harrison (2011): A field guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka. Oxford University Press.

Pamela C. Rasmussen & John C. Anderton (2005): Birds of South Asia. Vol. 1&2. Lynx Editions.

Indraneil Das & Anselm De Silva (2011): Snakes and other reptiles of Sri Lanka. New Holland Publishers.

Hadoram Shirihai & Brett Jarrett (2011): Whales, Dolphins and Seals. A&C Black Publishers.

Gehan De Silva Wijeyeratne (2008): Mammals of Sri Lanka. New Holland Publishers.

Some of our photos can be seen here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/marquesdavid/sets/72157629491206437/with/6944796321/>

Some of our recordings can be seen and downloaded here:

[http://xeno-canto.org/browse.php?query=cnt%3Asri+rec%3Amarques&species\\_nr=](http://xeno-canto.org/browse.php?query=cnt%3Asri+rec%3Amarques&species_nr=)

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## Abbreviations

NP = National Park

SL = Sri Lanka

SIG= Sigiriya area

KA = Kandy & Udawattakele sanctuary

BO = Botanical garden Peradeniya

KI = Kithulgala

NU = Nuwara Eliya

HO = Horton Plains NP

SIN = Sinharaja

UW = Udawalawe NP

TI = Tissa

BU = Bundala NP

YA = Yala NP

KM = Kalametiya birds sanctuary

MI = Mirissa

**Species (bold)** = bird species endemic to Sri Lanka

## Annotated Species list

### Birds (taxonomy after Rasmussen & Anderton 2005)

Little Grebe – several birds at different tanks in SI, NU, BU & YA

Spot-billed Pelican – the first was at the central lake in KA, common in YA and BU

Little Cormorant – common everywhere

Indian Shag – singles at many tanks, common around Tissa and Yala & Bundala NP

Oriental Darter – common at tanks in SIG and in the south

Little Egret – common everywhere

Great Egret – common everywhere

Intermediate Egret – common everywhere

Grey Heron – singles at tanks and wetlands in SIG and the south

Purple Heron – singles at tanks and wetlands in SIG and the south

Eastern Cattle Egret – common everywhere

Indian Pond-Heron – common everywhere

Striated Heron – 1 at the KI river crossing

Black-crowned Night-heron – 1 at SIG tank, 1 at YA and 2 flying over TI

Yellow Bittern – 2 at BU

Black Bittern – 1 in mangrove-like inundated bushes at the northern edge of the SIG tank

Painted Stork – common in YA and BU

Asian Openbill – common in SIG and the south

Woolly-necked Stork – 8 birds around SIG on the first day

Lesser Adjutant – 1 flying over YA

Black-headed Ibis – 1 over SIG, common in the south

Eurasian Spoonbill – common in YA and BU

Lesser Whistling-duck – common on tanks throughout

Cotton Teal – some birds on SIG tanks and 4 more on tank between UW and TI

Northern Pintail – 9 in BU

Garganey – 40 at KM

Oriental Honey-buzzard – many birds seen from hills to HO

Black-winged Kite – 1 in NU and a few in UW

Brahminy Kite – very common everywhere

White-bellied See-eagle – a few around SIG and more in the south in BU, YA and KM

Grey-headed Fish-eagle – 1 around SIG and 1 between KI and SIN

Crested Serpent-eagle – a few birds around forests in hilly country

Shikra – some individuals, always close to human settlements

Himalayan Buzzard – 2 birds on HO

Black Eagle – 1 KA, 1 close to Hakgala forest reserve, 2 in hilly tea county and 1 in KI

Booted Eagle – 1 pale adult in hilly tea county

Crested Hawk-eagle – several birds in UW and YA

Hawk-eagle sp. – 1 juv in SIN we could not ID to species level, proof photos available

Common Kestrel – not uncommon in the dry zone

Shaheen (Peregrine Falcon ssp. peregrinator) – 1 seen from the SIG rock, 1 more or the same seen in the SIG open country

**SL Spurfowl** – 1 male seen SIN and at least 6 more heard in SIN forests, also around Martin's lodge

**SL Junglefowl** – very common throughout, from YA to HO, everywhere it was calling. Also not too shy, easy to see

Indian Peafowl – common in dry zone

Barred Buttonquail – several birds seen in YA, they are not too shy and walked quite relaxed across the road or in the nearby grass.

White-breasted Waterhen – rather common everywhere

Purple Swampphen – common in marshy tanks

Common Moorhen – common in BU only

Pheasant-tailed Jacana – very common in marshy tanks

Pacific Golden Plover – common in YA, BU and KM

Grey Plover – rather scarcely seen in YA, BU and KM

Common Ringed Plover – 2 birds seen in BU

Little Ringed Plover – not uncommon in YA and BU areas

Kentish Plover – very common in YA and BU

Lesser Sand Plover – very common YA and BU and along the coast; we did not specifically look for Greater and did not find any

Caspian Plover – surprisingly one bird was sitting in a saline in BU among Kentish and Lesser Sand Plovers

Yellow-wattled Lapwing – rather common in BU and YA and also a few in KM

Red-wattled Lawping – common in dry zone

Pintail/Swinhoe's Snipe – around 20 unidentified birds in YA, BU and KM, one seen in flight on HO

Black-tailed Godwit – common along the coast in KM, YA and BU

Whimbrel – one bird in KM

Eurasian Curlew – two birds in YA

Spotted Redshank – one bird in YA

Common Redshank – common in YA, BU and KM

Common Greenshank – several birds in YA; BU and KM

Marsh Sandpiper – common in YA, BU and KM

Green Sandpiper a few birds in YA and BU

Wood sandpiper – a few birds in YA and BU

Common sandpieper – some birds everywhere

Ruddy Turnstone – quite some birds in BU, YA and KM

Sanderling – one bird in BU saline

Little Stint – very common in saline tanks along the coast, especially BU, YA and KM

Curlew Sandpiper – very common in BU, YA and KM

Broad-billed Sandpiper – 5 in saline before YA and 6 in BU

Ruff – some birds in BU, YA and KM

Black-winged Stilt – common in southern tanks and wetlands, also in SIG

Indian Thick-knee – two at saline tank before YA

Great Thick-knee – rather common in BU and YA

Small Pratincole – 3 birds in and around YA

Brown-headed Gull 1 in YA, 20 in BU

Gull-billed Tern – common along the coast

Caspian Tern – common along the coast and in YA, BU

Lesser Crested Tern – great views in BU, KM and MI

Great Crested Tern – one bird in YA and more at the coast in MI

Little Tern – one breeding plumaged adult in BU

Little/Saunders's Tern – very common in YA, BU and the southern coast. Unfortunately, no breeding plumage  
Saunders's.

Bridled Tern – 5 off MI

Whiskered Tern – very common throughout at tanks and close to the coast

White-winged Tern – less common, seen mainly in the south in BU, YA and around TI

Rock Pigeon – common in villages

**SL Wood Pigeon** – several heard on HO and between NU and Hakgala, several seen fly-over in HO and one nicely  
perched close to the Hakgala Whistling-thrush site

Spotted Dove – very common, daily.

Emerald Dove – common in forests, the completely tame and photogenic birds at Sisira's lodge are worth a note

Orange-breasted Green Pigeon – 2 near SIG, common in the dry south as YA and BU

**SL Green Pigeon** – 7 identified around SIG, more in KI area

Green Imperial Pigeon – rather common in some hilly places, but also in the south as YA, BU & KM

**SL Hanging-parrot** – common in BO and KA as well as in KI and SIN

Alexandrine Parakeet – many birds in SIG and KI

Rose-ringed Parakeet – common in dry zone and hilly country



Plum-headed Parakeet – one group heard in the village of Sinharaja

**Layard's Parakeet** – 10+ nicely seen in KA, afterwards we did not pay close attention to Parakeets, some more seen  
SIN

**Green-billed Coucal** – 2 birds seen and heard on the first afternoon in SIN, then another bird seen the next morning

Greater Coucal – heard and sometimes seen almost daily, from sea-level to HO

**Red-faced Malkoha** – 3 in a flock in KI forest, around 7 seen in SIN forest, always in flocks

Blue-faced Malkoha – after a lot of searching, two birds were seen, one of them very nicely, in YA

Chestnut-winged Cuckoo – an unexpected, close encounter at SIN as part of a flock, then a fly-by in YA

Jacobin Cuckoo – 1 bird in UW and 4 birds in BU

Asian Koel – daily heard in the south, near villages, 3 birds seen in SIG

Banded Bay Cuckoo – heard daily in SIN, also once in KI and SIG

Grey-bellied Cuckoo – 2 in SIG open country and two males each in UW and YA

Fork-tailed Drongo-cuckoo – 2 heard in SIG, one in KI

Common Hawk-cuckoo – several heard in BO, KA and NU, one bird gave great views in BO

Unidentified Cuckoo – a Cuculus sp. bird was photographed in SIG, another mystery cuckoo was seen in KIT

SL Bay Owl – one bird was heard from the jeep road halfway from the village to Martin's lodge, it was calling from  
the other side of the valley; due to the distance we did not make any recordings of it

**Serendib Scops-owl** – one bird for three consecutive days at the day roost in the forest edge scrub surrounding a  
rice field in the middle of the KI forest, 3 meters above ground and a few meters left of the "guardian"  
hut

Spot-bellied Eagle-owl – 1 bird heard from inside the SIG compound, recordings were made and will be loaded to  
xeno-canto.org

Brown Fish-owl – 1 bird on two nights at the SIG main entrance ditch and 1 bird sitting in the giant bamboo at the  
little lake in BO; this owl seems to be very common where trees meet a river or pond

**Chestnut-backed Owlet** – daily heard in KI from the opposite river side of Sisira's lodge and once seen near the  
hotel ground; very often heard during all day times in SIN

Brown Hawk-owl – 1 bird called from the forest behind the Serendib Scops Owl rice paddy

SL Frogmouth – two birds seen at the day roost in SIN, the roost was known by our guide Thandula

Jerdon's Nightjar – 3-4 birds heard nightly in SIG, this Nightjar likes to sing on tree tops and was in the forest /  
forest edge area

Indian Little Nightjar – 1 bird spotted in UW at day roost, several seen YA while driving out at dusk and 10  
seen/heard on a walk near the entrance area of YA

Indian Swiftlet – common in the hills, we first saw it at HO, but then regularly down to SIN

Swiftlet sp. – 1 swiftlet was flying over the ocean during the whale watching trip in MI; seems quite low for Indian  
Swiftlet

Brown-throated Needletail – 1 seen in BU

Asian Palm Swift – common in lowlands to hills

Little Swift – common in dry lowlands

Crested Treeswift – common in dry lowlands

Malabar Trogon – several seen in KI and more in SIN

Common Kingfisher – common at tanks

Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher – one seen at the river flowing through SIN village

Stork-billed Kingfisher – 1-3 birds seen around SIG, 1 bird in KM

White-throated Kingfisher – common everywhere except HO

Pied Kingfisher – 8 birds in BU

Little Gree Bee-eater – commonly seen in the dry zone (SIG and south)

Blue-tailed Bee-eater – commonly seen in the dry zone (SIG and south)

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater – only one sighting of two birds in KI

Indian Roller – 2-3 birds seen daily around YA, BU and KM

Common Hoopoe – 1 bird at high altitude in HO, 1-2 birds in YA and BU

**SL Grey Hornbill** – common in SIG forest, also a few birds in SIN

Malabar Pied Hornbill – 2 birds daily in SIG forest and several birds seen in YA and KM

Brown-headed Barbet – common around SIG forest, also at KI and YA / TI area

**Yellow-fronted Barbet** – very common in wet zone, hill forests as KA, KI and SIN

**SL Small Barbet** – very common in SIG forest, where several nest-holes were seen, again heard in the SIN village

Coppersmith Barbet – common around SIG and around YA and BU

Indian Pygmy Woodpecker – 2 birds in SIG forest, another one in a flock in SIN

Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker – 2 birds in YA, after a lot of searching, we found one in a large tree and one in a smaller, thorny tree

Rufous Woodpecker – one bird in a flock in SIN

Lesser Yellownape – 1 male in the village of KI, then two birds in a SIN flock

Black-rumped Flameback – 1 in BO, another one in KA, one more in SIN forest and 3 birds in TI coconut plantation, all were of the red-mantled subspecies

**Crimson-backed Flameback** – two birds in SIG, a group of 4 in KA, several nicely showing at HO and two more in SIN

Indian Pitta – around 4 birds in SIG with great views, one seen in NU victoria park and more heard in the dry scrub of YA

Jerdon's Bushlark – several birds in the dry SIG open country, very common in similar habitat in UW, YA, BU and KM

Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark – many at UW lakeshore, common and sometimes in big groups in YA and BU

Oriental Skylark – 2 birds in BU saline

Barn Swallow – common everywhere, including some winter visitors with red underparts in the south (UW, YA)

Hill Swallow – common in tea-plantation country, also in HO and around NU

Red-rumped Swallow – a group of 4 birds in UW

**SL Swallow** – singles to groups encountered in SIG, BO, KA, SIN and UW

Forest Wagtail – many individuals seen in botanical gardens as BO and Victoria park in NU

White Wagtail – one winter plumage bird seen south of UW tank

Western Yellow Wagtail – singles seen close to UW and YA

Grey Wagtail – rather common around rivers and tanks in wet zone and highland

Paddyfield Pipit – very common in south (UW, BU, YA, KM), also around NU and in HO and SIG

Blyth's Pipit – two birds on field in NU, at least 6 certainly identified ones in UW and one daily in BU and YA

Large Cuckooshrike – one fly-by in YA

Black-headed Cuckooshrike – one singing bird taped in at the open country in SIG, another one heard in YA

Small Minivet – from time to time a flock of these in dry zone forests

Orange Minivet – rather commonly seen in SIG, BO, KA, SIN forests, but missing in the south

Pied Flycatcher-shrike – singles seen and heard in KA, HO and SIN

**SL Woodshrike** – commonly seen in SIG forest and also several seen in YA and BU

Asian Paradise Flycatcher – common in dry and wet zone forests

Black-naped Blue Monarch – several seen in SIG forest, KA and SIN

Greater Short-toed Lark – one bird of the subspecies *dukhunensis* was seen south-east of the UW tank; this is the first record of this species for the country and a report was submitted to the Ceylon Bird Club Rarities and Records Committee; an account on this observation will be published if accepted by the authorities.

White-browed Fantail – several birds in dry zone forests and open country in SIG, UW, YA, BU and KM

**Black-capped Bulbul** – common in SIG forest, also seen in KI and SIN forests

Red-vented Bulbul – the “bullshit” of the trip (a name we usually give to the most common and therefore not at all interesting bulbul of a certain area)

**Yellow-eared Bulbul** – 2 birds in Victoria park NU and many birds on HO plains

White-browed Bulbul – several birds near SIG, on the way to KI and in the dry south at UW and YA

Yellow-browed Bulbul – common in KA, KI and SIN forests

Square-tailed Black Bulbul – 1 bird in KA and very common in KI and SIN

Common lora – commonly seen in dry zone forests at SIG and in the south

Marshall's lora – two birds taped out in UW where the typical call was heard, one bird seen in YA did unfortunately not call, but did clearly show white edges to the tail and broad white edges to the tertials

Golden-fronted Leafbird – 1 in SIG forest, two males at KI forest and many more left unidentified

Jerdon's Leafbird – 2 birds in SIG forest, 1 bird in KI forest and many more left unidentified

Brown Shrike – commonly seen in dry and wet zone agricultural and open country area, in fact most of them with grayish crown and whitish front as it would be for *lucionensis*

Pied Ground-thrush – 3 males in Victoria park NU; we had a really hard time to find this species as we carefully search all remote corners of the park for 3 consecutive afternoons, but only found Indian Blue Robins and Indian Pittas skulking around; on these days there were also a lot of people in the park, which did not help; we finally managed to see them in the fruiting tree in the middle of the park and found out that searching that tree and listening for the call would have been the best strategy from the start

Orange-headed Thrush – 1-2 birds seen on two days in the dark forest part in SIG, once together with an Indian Pitta; they were not too shy, especially at dawn, when they walked on the road

**Spot-winged Ground-thrush** – 1-2 birds seen in the KI forest interior and more in the SIN forest; this thrush is not too shy, but hops away silently on the ground; one bird was seen singing, perched 4 meters above the ground and like Song Thrushes in Europe, it was very easy to spot and it stayed there even at close range to us

**SL Scaly Thrush** – 1 bird nicely seen in the first big bend along the upper SIN forest track, also heard there the day before and in a close-by place; this thrush is very difficult to see as it keeps the distance to the observer;

we were lucky, we flushed the bird in the early morning and it sat on a branch on eye-level, giving excellent views

Indian Blackbird – commonly hopping around the HO entrance gate at dawn – even at close range, but as soon as the light would give nice views, they return to the dense forest and skulk

**SL Whistling-thrush** – the most difficult bird of our trip! We planned 2 days in HO to be flexible with the weather and this difficult endemic; the weather was fine on both days but for the Whistling-thrush, this was the perfect strategy. On the first morning at HO, when two other birding groups were present, we did neither see nor hear any sign of it, despite others heavily taping with calls and songs. On the second morning at HO, we profited from the taping locations chosen by the other bird guides and were lucky above the Arranga pool, where a female called in the dense forest and crossed the road a few meters besides us. We had no luck with this bird at other sites, in particular the one between NU and Hakgala (see waypoints), which is presumably too impacted now for that species?

Asian Brown Flycatcher – common in SIG forest and also outside the forest in SIN

Brown-breasted Flycatcher – common in KA and BO as well as in SIN forest

Kashmir Flycatcher – 1 neat male at the Arranga pool in HO, up to 3 birds on every visit in Victoria park NU (1 female, 1 immature male and 1 adult male); listen for the distinctive, Red-breasted Flycatcher-like call.

**Dull-blue Flycatcher** – rather commonly heard and 2-4 seen in HO; some birds even reacted on tape-playback

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher – very common in SIG area, forest and hotel garden, also common in Kandy and Kithulgala

Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher – 1 in SIG forest, 4-6 on both days at HO

Indian Blue Robin – by song, it seems to be an abundant winter visitor, although views of it are rather difficult; we had 2 female-types in SIG forest, several males in KA and NU Victoria park and heard many at HO, with one female stalking at dawn around the headquarter, two more males were seen in SIN

Oriental Magpie-robin – very common throughout

White-rumped Shama – very common in SIG forest and also in foresty parts of UW, YA and BU

Indian Black Robin – commonly seen in dry zone, especially in the south (UW, YA, BU) and also close to human settlements

Pied Bushchat – common in grassland and agriculture in the highlands from NU to HO

**Ashy-headed Laughingthrush** – common in flocks at SIN, not at all shy contrary to my expectation from Laugher

**Brown-capped Babbler** – commonly seen in SIG, KA, KI and SIN forests, notable is a completely tame bird at Sisira's lodge in KI

**SL Scimitar-babbler** – common in flocks at HO and SIN, also once in a flock in KI

Tawny-bellied Babbler – only once 3 birds in open bush country in SIG

Dark-fronted Babbler – flocks on both days at HO and daily in SIN, where birds were very approachable, although almost always keep close to cover

Yellow-eyed Babbler – a group was seen in UW, where we used playback to find them; we also stumbled over a few birds in BU

**SL Rufous Babbler** – common in flocks in HO, in the village in KI and in every flock in SIN

Yellow-billed Babbler – very common everywhere except the NU region and higher

Zitting Cisticola – common in HO grassland and in UW and YA

Grey-breasted Prinia – 2 birds at our hotel in UW; after this sighting, we had all prinias and did not pay attention anymore to their songs, so it must have been much more common in the area

Ashy Prinia – 2 birds around our hotel in NU and some more in UW and YA, but maybe more as we did not pay attention on Prinias after UW

Jungle Prinia – common in dry open country in SIG and UW, maybe elsewhere in the south too

Plain Prinia – common in dry open country in SIG and in YA, BU and KM

Common Tailorbird – common in forests and gardens throughout

**SL Bush-warbler** – around 5 on the first morning at HO and 2 on the second, shorter morning; we also saw one bird at the Whistling-thrush site between NU and Hakgala

Blyth's Reed-warbler – 1 near SIG, more in KA and NU and one in UW

Indian Reed-warbler – common in reedbeds in BU, nowhere else seen and heard

Sykes's Warbler – 1 bird in Victoria Park NU gave prolonged views as did another one in SIN forest and two birds in UWA

Bright-green Warbler – very common and daily seen and heard in forests from SIG to SIN

Large-billed Leaf-warbler – daily seen and especially heard in forests from SIG to SIN, maybe half or 2/3 as common as Bright-green Warbler

Great Tit – several birds in BO, KA, NU and HO

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch – few birds seen in KA, HO and SIN forests

**Legge's Flowerpecker** – 1 bird in a flock in KI, another one in the garden of Kithulgala Rest House and at least 2 more birds seen in SIN

Pale-billed Flowerpecker – commonly seen in forests and gardens in SIG, BO, KA, NU, HO, KI and SIN

Purple-rumped Sunbird – the most common Sunbird, seen almost daily except around NU and HO

Purple Sunbird – rather common in dry open forest, but also in NU

Loten's Sunbird – not uncommon in dry open forests, but also in KA

**SL White-eye** – very common in HO, where you constantly hear this species in the morning; very approachable

Oriental White-eye – commonly seen around SIG, also in SIN and UW

Indian Silverbill – very commonly seen in open UW habitat, also in YA

White-rumped Munia – commonly seen in lowland and hills to KI and SIN

Black-throated Munia – 2 and 1 bird fly-by near fields and paddyfields inside KI forest, then 2 birds fly-by at Martin's lodge SIN and one bird seen at the rice paddy in SIN village adjacent to the Blue Magpie lodge; a tricky and rather shy bird with largely distinctive (but identical to Tricoloured Munia) call

Scaly-breasted Munia – commonly seen in lowlands and hills, also in dryer UW, YA and BU habitats

Tricoloured Munia – many big groups seen at HO grasslands, including some drab juveniles, more birds seen in UW and YA dry open habitats

House Sparrow – common everywhere near humans

Baya Weaver – several nests with nest-building males in YA

**White-faced Starling** – 2 and 1 birds seen in SIN forest; listen for the distinctive, very loud call of this bird which is not so easy to spot in the canopy

Brahminy Starling – 2 birds fly-by before the YA entrance gate

Rosy Starling – big flocks of these in UW and also in BU

Common Myna – common throughout

**SL Hill Myna** – 3 and 7 birds in SIN forest; they are not easy to spot and ID without a scope as they fly large distances over the forest but then sit very exposed and often in groups on bare trees

Lesser Hill Myna – common in the BO and KA area, where no SL Hill Myna was found

Black-hooded Oriole – common in hill (KI, KA, SIN) and lowland habitats (YA, UW) with trees

Black Drongo – many around the Bandaranaike airport

White-bellied Drongo – very common in hill area, mainly at forest edge and settlements (KA, KI, SIN), but not penetrating forest as SL Crested Drongo

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo – common in SIG forest, not seen elsewhere

**SL Crested Drongo** – 4 in a flock in KI and up to 10 daily in SIN forest, all birds were seen in bird waves

Ashy Woodswallow – only one bird spotted in BU

**SL Blue Magpie** – 2 birds seen daily either in SIN at Martin's Lodge's veranda at dawn, collecting dead insects from the night lamps, or in the SIN forest once and once in the pine plantation along the jeep track

House Crow – common in lowlands

Indian Jungle Crow – common throughout

### **Mammals (taxonomy after De Silva Wijeyeratne 2008)**

Indian Hare – 1 in SIG, 2 between NU and HO, 2 in YA

SL Giant Squirrel – rather commonly seen in SIG, HO, KI and SIN forests

Indian Palm Squirrel – very common throughout (except HO), to get to know its call is very helpful while birdwatching

Layard's Striped Squirrel – one in a bird flock in KI, one more seen in SIN forest

Dusky-striped Squirrel – common in HO, also in SIN

Indian Giant Flying Squirrel – 1 below Martin's lodge at night along the Jeep track in SIN

Eastern House Mouse – 1 in NU Victoria park

House Rat – several in KA

Golden Palm-civet – 2 below Martin's lodge at night along the Jeep track in SIN

Leopard – 1 on the first day sleeping on a tree in YA, 1 on the full-day trip to YA crossing the road 10 meters in front of our car; this Leopard was silently following an Elephant family consisting of a young elephant and two females

Indian Grey Mongoose – 1 in SIG, more around SIN

Ruddy Mongoose – 2 and 4 in YA

Indian Brown Mongoose – 1 in SIG dry land 2 in NU/HO

Stripe-necked Mongoose – a lucky encounter with 1 individual in UW

Golden Jackal – 2-3 groups in YA and one pair in BU

Sloth Bear – one of us had a short glimpse of this shy bear, seeing only a long-haired black furry thing with a whitish muzzle walking through the bushes; it's quite a small bear!

Indian Flying Fox – big colony in BO and near TI, many more were seen dead, hanging in power cables along the road

Grey Slender Loris – one individual in dense scrub between the road around the SIG complex and rice fields (see waypoints)

Toque Macaque – common in SIG forest, UW, YA and BU; we did not go to Hakgala botanical garden for the highland subspecies

Grey Langur – common in SIG, UW, YA, BU and KM area

Purple-faced Leaf Monkey – some groups seen at HO of the highland race, then daily encounters in KI and SIN

Wild Boar – 1 in SIN below Martin's lodge, more in YA

White-spotted Mouse Deer – 1 at night between SIG compound road and rice fields

Sambar – very common in HO grassland (11 and 55 on the two days), also seen SIN and YA

Spotted Deer – several at night in the SIG compound, many seen at UW and YA

Indian Muntjac – 1 in SIG forest and KA forest each

Wild Buffalo – hard to tell, which ones are wild and which ones domestic as everything seems to interbreed, nevertheless, there may have been a few rather wild ones in YA

Domestic Water Buffalo – many in UW, YA and BU

Asian Elephant – around 20 in UW, 4 and 10 in Yala on the two days

Blue Whale – 3-5 individuals seen at close range off MI

Bryde Whale – 1-2 individuals seen at close range off MI

Spinner Dolphin – a big school of at least 40 individuals crossed our way several times

### **Reptiles (taxonomy after Das & De Silva 2011)**

Common Rat Snake – 1 big individual in KA, unfortunately the only snake encounter on our trip!

Green Forest Lizard – common in gardens and forests at KI and SIN

Common Garden Lizard – common in dry zone open country

Rough-horned Lizard – very lucky and thanks to Thandula, we saw this tiny, really cool lizard in SIN

Hump-nosed Lizard – 1 female near the nest found by Thandula in SIN

Sri Lankan Kangaroo Lizard – common in KI and SIN, also a very beautiful animal

Day Gecko sp. – two seen in SIN, too shy to identify to species level

Asian House Gecko – everywhere common

Leschenault's Snake-eyed Lizard – on SIG rock fortress

Common Skink – commonly encountered

Rock Skink – 1 in KI

Land Monitor – rather common in lowlands and hill (KI) areas

Water Monitor – only very close to water in SIG and UW, but one big animal near SIN Martin's lodge

Mugger Crocodile – common in YA and BU, but also in SIG trench; we couldn't tell it apart from Saltwater in BU

Black Turtle – one in the SIG hotel, two more in YA

Star Tortoise – definitely the star among the turtles, we saw 2 in YA along the road or crossing it, how beautiful!