Trip report Sri Lanka, 31. December 2012 – 18. January 2013





After having explored the birds of India on several occasions, the endemic species of Sri Lanka finally called for me. I ended up seeing all of them and many other bird species and some great mammals. I can absolutely recommend this beautiful island: good birds, good food, nice people and very easy to organise.

Itinerary

31.12.2012	Flight from Chennai to Colombo, transfer to Kitulgala, some birding
01.01.2013	Full day birding around Kitulgala
02.01.2013	Morning birding at Kitulgala, drive to Nuwara Eliya, some birding around
	Nuwara Eliya
03.01.2013	Morning birding at Horton Plains NP, evening birding at Victoria Park
04.01.2013	Morning birding for the Whistling Thrush, drive to Tissamaharama, birding
	around Tissa
05.01.2013	Full day at Yala NP
06.01.2013	Morning birding at Tissa, drive to Sinharaja, birding from Martin's Lodge
07.01.2013	Full day birding at Sinharaja
08.01.2013	Full day birding at Sinharaja
09.01.2013	Drive from Sinharaja to Mirissa, start of leisure part of holiday
11.01.2013	Whale-watching tour from Mirissa
15.01.2013	Morning birding in Udawattakele Forest Reserve, Kandy
18.01.2013	Flight from Colombo to Zürich

Organisation

There are several local agents doing birdwatching tours. I chose "Walk with Jith" (see: http://www.walkwithjith.com) and was not disappointed. The organisation was really good and everything worked out fine. My guide and driver Upali was very helpful and was able and ready to adapt the itinerary according to my wishes.

Accomodation

Most of the accommodation was a bit posh, but usually quite pleasant:

- **Plantation Hotel Kitulgala**: A very nice place, very good birding on the hotel grounds. Unfortunately not much vegetarian choice on the menu.
- **Binota Residency Nuwara Eliya**: Friendly staff and good food. Unfortunately awful rooms and very noisy. Free Wifi.
- **Hibiscus Garden, Tissa**: A perfect place. Very nice rooms, good food and good birding just behind my bungalow. Free Wifi.
- Martin's Lodge: Simple rooms, but an excellent location, very friendly people and good food.
- Paradise Beach Club, Mirissa: A nice place to spend some days at the beach.
 Good food. Free Wifi.
- **Hilltop, Kandy**: A rather posh hotel in Kandy, good food and friendly people. Why is there always a live band at diner?
- **Tamarind Tree, Negombo**: Our last stay on the night before the flight. Nice hotel grounds but that's about it. Much to expensive for what it offers.

Birding Sites

The mentionend birding sites are also found on this Google Map: https://maps.google.ch/maps/ms?msid=216430351851743931321.0004e26de8d452 c3c66b1&msa=0&ie=UTF8&II=7.226249,81.941528&spn=3.999158,5.817261&t=h&z =8&vpsrc=6>

Kitulgala

Here we did some birding on the hotel grounds of the Plantation Hotel, especially down at the river. Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, Sri Lanka Swallow, Green-billed Coucal and many other birds were found there. A small tea farm further west holds Chestnut-backed Owlet, Spot-winged Thrush, Indian Pitta and Layard's Parakeet. Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher can also sometimes be seen, however, we didn't locate any bird. Ask for permission to bird on the grounds of the farm and give the farmer a tip. He doesn't make much money! The Makandawa Rainforest Sanctuary is located on the south of the river. There is a small ferry crossing the river just beside the Kitulgala Rest House. However, birding in the forest here is not easy and we failed to locate the Serendib Scops Owl here. More information (written by me) here: http://www.birdforum.net/opus/Kitulgala

Nuwara Eliya and Horton Plains National Park

Victoria Park in the centre of the mountain station Nuwara Eliya is famous for Kashmir Flycatcher and Pied Thrush. The park is open from 6am to 6pm (however, it may open later in the morning). We went in the evening and despite the rain we found Kashmir Flycatcher after some minutes, left from the entrance. The search for Pied Thrush was much more difficult. We eventually located a bird on the right side of the park, near to the toilets. This is also a nice place for Indian Pitta. Along a road near the Bomburella Reservoir we found Sri Lanka Bush Warbler (see

Along a road near the Bomburella Reservoir we found Sri Lanka Bush Warbler (see map).

One morning was spent in Horton Plains National Park. As the computer at the ticket office was not working, we had to wait quite some time to enter the park and were late for the Whistling Thrush. The spot here seems also to be played out. However we found other good birds like Himalayan Buzzard, Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, Crimson-backed Goldenback, Yellow-eared Bulbul and Dull-blue Flycatcher.

On the last morning we tried another spot for Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush, south of Nuwara Eliya on the PBC Highway to Hagkala. There is an abandoned fruit stall in a bend. Follow a small path behind it down to a stream. We had nice views of a couple of Whistling-Thrushes on the path on the other side of the stream in early morning. More information: http://www.birdforum.net/opus/Nuwara_Eliya

and here: http://www.birdforum.net/opus/Horton Plains National Park

Tissamaharama

Tissamaharama (or in short Tissa) is the starting point for safaris to Yala National Park. Furthermore it's surrounded by fine wetlands, which holds many bird species, including Black Bittern. I stayed in the Hibiscus Garden Hotel. Just behind the hotel are a small wetland and some paddyfields, holding various species. Other good spots around the town are marked on the map.

More information: http://www.birdforum.net/opus/Tissamaharama

Yala (Ruhuna) National Park

This park can only be visited with a safari jeep. Unfortunately it's rather crowded with tourists, usually driving around like crazy until they find a Leopard. We had our own car for a full day and saw many birds (102 species) and mammals. We also had a very cooperative Leopard, self found by us.

More information: http://www.birdforum.net/opus/Yala National Park

Sinharaja Forest Reserve

I stayed at Martin's Lodge, which is located in the forest. Sri Lanka Blue Magpie and Spot-winged Thrush were breakfast birds and White-faced Starling, Legge's Flowerpecker and Legge's Hawk-Eagle were all seen from the lodge. The forest is incredibly beautiful and most endemics of the island can be seen here. Serendib Scops Owl was hard to detect and all known roosting sites were abandoned. Finally a local guide found one down in the valley and we could see it at the roosting site. A guide is compulsory after the park entrance. Ask for a guide who knows the birds. More information: http://www.birdforum.net/opus/Sinharaja

Udawatta Kele

This small reserve is located very close to the centre of Kandy. I visited it at one morning. However, advised by a local tuk-tuk driver, I went there the day before and asked to be left in in early morning, which was possible. Otherwise the gate would have been closed. I found Brown Fish Owl at the Royal Pond and many other good species, walking the paths.

More information: http://www.birdforum.net/opus/Udawatta_Kele

Used books in the field:

- Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp & Tim Inskipp (2011): Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Helm Field Guides.
- Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne (2008): A photographic guide to Mammals of Sri Lanka.
 New Holland.

Contact

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Systematic list

Names and taxonomy follow IOC 3.2 (www.worldbirdnames.org). 194 species recorded. Endemic species in **bold**.

Sri Lanka Spurfowl Sri Lanka Junglefowl

Indian Peafowl Lesser Whistling Duck Cotton Pygmy Goose

Garganey Little Grebe Painted Stork Asian Openbill Woolly-necked Stork Black-headed Ibis Eurasian Spoonbill Yellow Bittern Black Bittern

Black-crowned Night Heron

Striated Heron Indian Pond Heron Eastern Cattle Egret

Grey Heron Purple Heron **Great Egret** Intermediate Egret Little Egret

Spot-billed Pelican Little Cormorant **Oriental Darter** Western Osprey **Brahminy Kite**

White-bellied Sea Eagle Crested Serpent Eagle

Shikra

Himalayan Buzzard

Black Eagle

Changeable Hawk-Eagle Legge's Hawk-Eagle Slaty-breasted Rail White-breasted Waterhen

Watercock

Purple Swamphen Common Moorhen **Eurasian Coot** Great Stone-curlew Black-winged Stilt Yellow-wattled Lapwing Red-wattled Lapwing Pacific Golden Plover

Grey Plover Little Ringed Plover Kentish Plover Lesser Sand Plover Pheasant-tailed Jacana

Pin-tailed Snipe Black-tailed Godwit Common Redshank Marsh Sandpiper Common Greenshank Wood Sandpiper

Galloperdix bicalcarata

Gallus lafayetii Pavo cristatus

Dendrocygna javanica Nettapus coromandelianus

Anas querquedula Tachybaptus ruficollis Mycteria leucocephala

Anastomus oscitans Ciconia episcopus

Threskiornis melanocephalus

Platalea leucorodia Ixobrychus sinensis Dupetor flavicollis Nycticorax nycticorax Butorides striata Ardeola grayii

Bubulcus coromandus

Ardea cinerea Ardea purpurea Ardea alba Egretta intermedia Egretta garzetta Pelecanus philippensis Microcarbo niger

Anhinga melanogaster

Pandion haliaetus Haliastur indus

Haliaeetus leucogaster Spilornis cheela

Accipiter badius Buteo burmanicus Ictinaetus malayensis Nisaetus cirrhatus

Nisaetus kelaarti

Gallirallus striatus Amaurornis phoenicurus Gallicrex cinerea

Porphyrio porphyrio Gallinula chloropus

Fulica atra

Esacus recurvirostris Himantopus himantopus Vanellus malabaricus Vanellus indicus Pluvialis fulva

Pluvialis squatarola Charadrius dubius Charadrius alexandrinus Charadrius mongolus Hydrophasianus chirurgus

Gallinago stenura Limosa limosa Tringa totanus Tringa stagnatilis Tringa nebularia Tringa glareola

Sinharaja, one female seen, often heard

common

common Yala and around Tissa lowlands around Tissa and Yala lowlands around Tissa and Yala

one female Yala some around Tissa

common Yala and around Tissa Kitulgala, Yala and Tissa

2 Udawalawe

common Yala and around Tissa

some Yala some around Tissa several around Tissa some around Tissa

1 Mirissa common very common some lowlands some lowlands several Tissa. Yala several Tissa, Yala

common

some around Tissa and Yala

common around Tissa and Yala

1 Uduwalawe widespread

Kitulgala, Yala, Kandy

widespread some

1 Horton Plains 2 Kitulgala

some Yala and Uduwalawe

1 Sinharaja 1 Tissa common some Tissa

several around Tissa and Yala

1 Tissa

some around Tissa

some Yala common lowlands common Yala common lowlands some Yala some Yala some Uduwalawe

common Yala common Yala common lowlands 3 Tissa

common Yala some Yala several Yala some Yala some Uduwalawe Common Sandpiper Ruddy Turnstone Sanderling Little Stint Dunlin Ruff

Red-necked Phalarope Gull-billed Tern

Caspian Tern

Greater Crested Tern Bridled Tern

Common Tern Whiskered Tern White-winged Tern

Rock Dove

Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon

Spotted Dove Common Emerald Dove

Orange-breasted Green Pigeon Treron bicinctus
Sri Lanka Green Pigeon Treron pompado

Green Imperial Pigeon
Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot

Rose-ringed Parakeet
Layard's Parakeet
Green-billed Coucal

Greater Coucal Red-faced Malkoha

Blue-faced Malkoha Asian Koel

Grey-bellied Cuckoo

Indian Cuckoo
Serendib Scops Owl

Brown Fish Owl

Chestnut-backed Owlet

Sri Lanka Frogmouth Crested Treeswift Indian Swiftlet

Brown-backed Needletail
Asian Palm Swift

Alpine Swift Little Swift Malabar Trogon Indian Roller

Stork-billed Kingfisher White-throated Kingfisher Common Kingfisher

Green Bee-eater Blue-tailed Bee-eater

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater

Eurasian Hoopoe

Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill
Malabar Pied Hornbill
Brown-headed Barbet
Yellow-fronted Barbet

Crimson-fronted Barbet Lesser Yellownape

Black-rumped Flameback

Crimson-backed Flameback

Indian Pitta

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike

Sri Lanka Woodshrike Ashy Woodswallow Actitis hypoleucos common
Arenaria interpres some Yala
Calidris alba some Yala
Calidris minuta common Yala
Calidris alpina some Yala
Philomachus pugnax some Yala
Phalaropus lobatus 1 Yala

Gelochelidon nilotica common coast and lowlands

Hydroprogne caspia some Yala

Thalasseus bergii some Yala and Mirissa
Onychoprion anaethetus some off coast near Mirissa

Sterna hirundo some Yala
Chlidonias hybrida common lowlands
Chlidonias leucopterus min. 3 near Tissa

Columba livia common, in Yala probably the real thing

Columba torringtoniae several birds Horton Plains

Streptopelia chinensis very common
Chalcophaps indica several observations
Treron bicinctus some Yala

Treron pompadora Kitulgala and Sinharaja

Ducula aenea widespread

Loriculus beryllinus Kitulgala and Sinharaja Psittacula krameri common lowlands Psittacula calthropae Kitulgala and Sinharaja

Centropus chlororhynchos 1 Kitulgala
Centropus sinensis common

Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus some Sinharaja

Phaenicophaeus viridirostris 3 Yala

Eudynamys scolopaceus some lowlands Cacomantis passerinus 1 Tissa

Cuculus micropterus 1 heard Kitulgala
Otus thilohoffmanni 2 Sinharaja
Ketupa zeylonensis 2 Udawatta Kele
Glaucidium castanotum 1 Kitulgala, 1 Sinharaja

Batrachostomus moniliger 1 Sinharaja

Hemiprocne coronata Kitulgala, Yala, Sinharaja Aerodramus unicolor Kitulgala, Sinharaja Hirundapus giganteus 2 Sinharaja

Cypsiurus balasiensis widespread
Tachymarptis melba 1 Udawalawe
Apus affinis some Tissa

Harpactes fasciatus Kitulgala, Sinharaja

Coracias benghalensis 1 Tissa

Pelargopsis capensisKitulgala, Yala, TissaHalcyon smyrnensiscommonAlcedo atthiswidespread

Merops orientalis very common Yala
Merops philippinus common

Merops leschenaulti 2 on way to Nuwara Eliya

Upupa epops 2 Yala

Ocyceros gingalensis Kitulgala, Sinharaja Anthracoceros coronatus several Yala

Megalaima zeylanicaKitulgala, Tissa, Yala, KandyMegalaima flavifronswidespread, often heardMegalaima rubricapillusSinharaja, Udawatta Kele

Picus chlorolophus 1 Sinharaja Dinopium benghalense Kitulgala, Tissa

Chrysocolaptes stricklandi 2 Horton Plains, 1 Udawatta Kele Pitta brachyura Kitulgala, Nuwara Eliya, Yala Hemipus picatus Rawana Waterfalls, Udawatta Kele

Tephrodornis affinis 1 Tissa, some Yala
Artamus fuscus some Kitulgala and Tissa

Common Iora Aegithina tiphia some Black-headed Cuckooshrike Coracina melanoptera 1 Yala Small Minivet Pericrocotus cinnamomeus some Tissa and Yala Orange Minivet Pericrocotus flammeus Kitulgala, Horton Plains, Sinharaja Brown Shrike Lanius cristatus widespread Black-hooded Oriole Oriolus xanthornus widespread White-bellied Drongo Dicrurus caerulescens common lowlands Sri Lanka Drongo Dicrurus Iophorinus Kitulgala, Sinharaja White-browed Fantail Rhipidura aureola 1 Yala Black-naped Monarch Hypothymis azurea Kitulgala, Sinharaja, Udawatta Kele Asian Paradise Flycatcher Terpsiphone paradisi Tissa, Yala, Sinharaja, Udawatta Kele Sri Lanka Blue Magpie Urocissa ornata several Sinharaja House Crow Corvus splendens common Indian Jungle Crow Corvus levaillantii common Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher Culicicapa ceylonensis 1 Horton Plains Cinereous Tit Parus cinereus Nuwara Eliya, Udawatta Kele Jerdon's Bush Lark Mirafra affinis 3 Yala Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark Eremopterix griseus 1 Tissa Black-capped Bulbul Pycnonotus melanicterus some Kitulgala Red-vented Bulbul Pycnonotus cafer common Yellow-eared Bulbul Pycnonotus penicillatus some Nuwara Eliya, Horton Plains White-browed Bulbul Pycnonotus luteolus several lowlands, common Yala Yellow-browed Bulbul Acritillas indica Kitulgala, Sinharaja, Udawatta Kele Square-tailed Bulbul Hypsipetes ganeesa Kitulgala, Sinharaja, Udawatta Kele Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica common Hill Swallow Hirundo domicola 2 Bandarawela Sri Lanka Swallow Cecropis hyperythra 2 Kitulgala, 2 Sinharaja Green Warbler Phylloscopus nitidus some Kitulgala, Horton Plains, Negombo Clamorous Reed Warbler Acrocephalus stentoreus 1 Kitulgala Sri Lanka Bush Warbler Elaphrornis palliseri 1 Nuwara Eliya Grey-breasted Prinia Prinia hodgsonii 1 Tissa Ashy Prinia Prinia socialis 2 Tissa Plain Prinia Prinia inornata widespread Common Tailorbird Orthotomus sutorius widespread Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler Pomatorhinus melanurus Horton Plains, Sinharaja Tawny-bellied Babbler Dumetia hyperythra some Kitulgala, Yala Dark-fronted Babbler Rhopocichla atriceps Kitulgala, Sinharaja, Udawatta Kele **Brown-capped Babbler** Pellorneum fuscocapillus Kitulgala, Yala, Sinharaja Orange-billed Babbler Turdoides rufescens Kitulgala, Sinharaja Yellow-billed Babbler Turdoides affinis common Ashy-headed Laughingthrush Garrulax cinereifrons several Sinharaja Yellow-eyed Babbler Chrysomma sinense some Yala, Tissa Oriental White-eye Zosterops palpebrosus some Kitulgala, Udawatta Kele Sri Lanka White-eye Zosterops ceylonensis Nuwara Eliya and Horton Plains Velvet-fronted Nuthatch Sitta frontalis Sinharaja, Udawatta Kele Sri Lanka Hill Myna Gracula ptilogenys 4 Sinharaja Southern Hill Myna Gracula indica Kitulgala, Udawatta Kele Common Myna Acridotheres tristis common White-faced Starling Sturnornis albofrontatus 5 Sinharaja Rosy Starling Pastor roseus Tissa, Yala Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush Myophonus blighi a couple near Nuwara Eliya Pied Thrush Geokichla wardii 1 male Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya **Spot-winged Thrush** Geokichla spiloptera Kitulgala, Sinharaja Sri Lanka Thrush Zoothera imbricata 3 Sinharaja Oriental Magpie-Robin Copsychus saularis common White-rumped Shama Copsychus malabaricus heard Yala Indian Robin Saxicoloides fulicatus common Yala

Saxicola caprata

Muscicapa muttui

Ficedula subrubra

Eumyias sordidus

Cyornis tickelliae

common around Nuwara Eliya

1 male Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya

Kitulgala, Sinharaja, Udawatta Kele

1 Sinharaja

some Horton Plains

Pied Bush Chat

Kashmir Flycatcher

Dull-blue Flycatcher

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher

Brown-breasted Flycatcher

Jerdon's Leafbird Thick-billed Flowerpecker Legge's Flowerpecker Pale-billed Flowerpecker Purple-rumped Sunbird Purple Sunbird Loten's Sunbird House Sparrow Indian Silverbill White-rumped Munia Scaly-breasted Munia Tricolored Munia Forest Wagtail Grev Wagtail Paddyfield Pipit

Chloropsis jerdoni Dicaeum agile Dicaeum vincens Dicaeum erythrorhynchos Leptocoma zeylonica Cinnyris asiaticus Cinnyris lotenius Passer domesticus Euodice malabarica Lonchura striata Lonchura punctulata Lonchura malacca Dendronanthus indicus Motacilla cinerea Anthus rufulus

some Tissa and Negombo some Sinharaja common common lowlands 2 Tissa 1 Kitulgala, 1 Kandy widespread some Yala widespread some some Tissa and Yala 1 Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya 1 Kitulgala, 1 Horton Plains some Horton Plains and Yala

Kitulgala, Tissa

Mammals

Indian Flying-fox **Toque Macaque** Hanuman Langur **Purple-faced Leaf Monkey**

Golden Jackal Indian Grey Mongoose Ruddy Mongoose

Leopard Asian Elephant Wild Pig Spotted Deer Sambar Water Buffalo

Layards's Striped Squirrel

Palm Squirrel

Dusky Striped Squirrel Giant Squirrel

Black-naped Hare Blue Whale

Pteropus giganteus Macaca sinica Semnopithecus priam Trachypithecus vetulus Canis aureus Herpestes edwardsii Herpestes smithii Panthera pardus

Sus scrofa Cervus axis Cervus unicolor Bubalus bubalis Funambulus layardi Funambulus palmarum Funambulus sublineatus Ratufa macroura

Elephas maximus

Lepus nigricollis Balaenoptera musculus big colony near Tissa and near Kandy seen several times, eg. Rawana

several Yala NP

Kitulgala, Nuwara Eliya, Sinharaja

3 Yala NP 1 Yala NP 2 Yala NP 2 Yala NP

3 Uda Walawe NP Several Yala NP very common Yala NP 7 Horton Plains NP, 1 Yala NP common Yala NP, wild?

1 Sinharaja

some, eg. Mirissa, Yala NP

1 Sinharaja

1 Yala NP, 1 Sinharaja 1 Horton Plains, 3 Yala NP

2 Mirissa

