



Sri Lanka: Birds & Wildlife

Fondly described as the tear drop of India and one of South Asia's most biodiverse regions, Sri Lanka is home to an exceptional variety of birds and iconic wildlife. Experience the vibrant fauna in national parks, immerse yourself in the enchanting local culture, and savor delicious cuisine while enjoying comfortable lodgings on this unforgettable birding adventure. You'll learn about threats to native species and the ways local organizations are working to conserve them, and even take a cooking class, allowing you to take home the unforgettable flavors from this vibrant country.

Dates: 5- 20 November, 2025

Group Size: max. 10 travelers

Locations: [MAP](#) (interactive)

Price: from \$4,560pp

Potential Bird Species: 235

TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

- ✿ Visit the Sinharaja Forest Reserve and Horton Plains National Park where we will find many of Sri Lanka's 35 endemic bird species
- ✿ Learn about Elephant-Human Conflict from local researchers and efforts to curb the problem
- ✿ Visit a primate conservation and research center to hear about their important work
- ✿ Take safari drives in search of Leopard, Sloth Bear, Asian Elephant and Purple-faced Langur
- ✿ Search for the newly discovered Serendib Scops-Owl, striking Red-faced Malkoha, iconic Sri Lanka Blue-Magpie, stately Lesser Adjutant, and exotic Malabar Pied-Hornbill

Day 1: Wednesday, November 5

Arrival, Wilpattu, and Anawilundawa Bird Sanctuary

On arrival you'll be met with a warm *paiḷaigaænāīmae* (welcome) in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo. Once assembled, we'll embark on a scenic journey through this beautiful island by traveling north through local towns and paddy fields to the village of Wilpattu (4hr drive). En-route, we'll stop at one of the country's six RAMSAR wetlands - Anawilundawa Bird Sanctuary, our first wetland of the trip. The uniqueness of this sanctuary is its immediate proximity to three different ecosystems; the coast, an area of mangrove forest, and a man-made system of tanks (reservoirs) dating back to the 12th century. The benefit of these differing ecosystems is they are a refuge for migratory and threatened species, attracting hundreds of birds during nesting season. We'll be on the lookout for **Lesser Whistling-Duck**, **Cotton Pygmy-Goose**, **Asian Openbill**, **Black-headed Ibis(NT)**, **Spot-billed Pelican(NT)**, **Gray and Purple Herons**, **Little Cormorant**, **Gray-headed Swamphen**, **Little Grebe**, **White-bellied Sea-Eagle**, **Greater Coucal**, **Indian Roller**, **Sri Lanka Woodshrike***, **Indian Cuckooshrike^**, **Brown Shrike**, **Rose-ringed Parakeet**, **Brown-headed Barbet^**, and **Sri Lanka Swallow***.



Asian Openbill © Tareq Uddin Ahmed



Lesser Whistling-Duck © Hari Patibanda



Cotton Pygmy Goose © Francesco Veronesi

Once we've had our fill of birds at the sanctuary, we'll continue on to Wilpattu and check into our hotel nearby the National Park. After a delicious lunch we'll head to the park for our first safari drive of the trip. Wilpattu is the largest National Park in the country with a variety and density of wildlife only surpassed by Yala NP, a destination we'll visit later in the trip. Although Wilpattu NP is located within lowland dry zone habitat, it incorporates a large number of *villus* or natural lakes that provide excellent habitat for wildlife – the park's name is actually derived from villu-pattu or "land of 10 lakes". Wilpattu is best known for its high **Leopard(VU)** and **Sloth Bear(VU)** populations and is second only to Yala for finding these elusive species. The park also contains a variety of other mammals, including **Asian Elephant(EN)**, **Water Buffalo(EN)**, **Chital**, **Sambar(VU)**, and **Toque Macaque*(EN)**. With few tourists and an immense area open to visitors (around 8x larger than at Yala) the park is also supremely peaceful compared to many other reserves in the country. As we drive around, we'll be keeping an eye out for iconic mammals, but also **Indian Peafowl**, **Sri Lanka Junglefowl***, **Little Grebe**, **Asian Emerald Dove**, **Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon**, **Green Imperial-Pigeon(NT)**, **Crested Treeswift**, **Asian Palm Swift**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Indian Pond-Heron**, **Oriental Darter(NT)**, **Red-wattled Lapwing**, **Whiskered Tern**, **Crested Serpent-Eagle**, **Brahminy Kite**, **Blue-tailed Bee-eater**, **Black-headed Oriole**, **Small Minivet**, **Sri Lankan Shama***, and **Purple Sunbird**. As dusk approaches, we'll return to the lodge, have dinner, and while reviewing our bird checklists, reflect on our first day in Sri Lanka.

Accommodation: **Cloughton Wild Hotel**, Wilpattu
 - rice grown on property's own paddy field, and
 on-site water and sewage treatment



Small Minivet © Vivek Puliyeri

Day 2: Thursday, November 6

Wilpattu National Park

Today we will spend a full day in Wilpattu National Park. A boxed breakfast will allow us to see sunrise and experience the dawn chorus in the reserve. We'll spend the morning on safari with open-sided vehicles, perfect for wildlife viewing. Lunch will be served in the field with a short break to digest. In the afternoon we'll continue searching for wildlife from our safari jeeps, returning to the lodge in the late afternoon for dinner and checklist review. Some species we might add to our bird lists today include **Sri Lanka Green-Pigeon***, **Indian** and **Jerdon's Nightjars**, the striking **Asian Koel**, **Gray-bellied** and **Indian Cuckoos**, **White-breasted Waterhen**, **Great Thick-knee**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Little-ringed** and **Kentish Plovers**, **Tibetan Sand-Plover**, **Yellow-wattled Lapwing**, **Greater Painted-snipe**, **Common** and **Marsh Sandpipers**, **Common Redshank**, **Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl**, **Asian Green**, **Blue-tailed**, and the beautiful **Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters**, **Stork-billed** and **Common Kingfishers**, **White-bellied Drongo^**, and **Scaly-breasted Munia**. There might



Stork-billed Kingfisher © Francesco Veronesi

also be chances to glimpse some new mammal species: **Red Muntjac**, **Tufted Gray Langur(NT)**, **Purple-faced Langur*(EN)**, **Wild Boar**, **Golden Jackal**, and **Indian Hare**. At the end of the day, we'll head back to the hotel for a delicious dinner and checklist review.

Accommodation: **Cloughton Wild Hotel**, Wilpattu 

- rice grown on property's own paddy field, and on-site water and sewage treatment



Sigiriya/Lion Rock © Danyaja Chathuranga

Sigiriya, also known as Lion Rock, is a 650ft tall rock outcrop towering above the surrounding landscape. On the rock's summit King Kassapa (AD 477-495) built a palace for his new capital with a lion guarding its gateway and 100s of frescoes painted on the walls. It is said that the palace functioned as a fortress, enabling views of approaching enemies, specifically his brother Mogallana who wished to overthrow his brother. After Kassapa's death the palace was turned into a monastery for which it has been used ever since. It is a place of historical and archaeological significance and in 1982 was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Day 3 : Friday, November 7

Travel to Sigiriya

After breakfast we'll pack our things and board our transport for the journey east to Sigiriya (3hr drive) stopping for any important birds seen along the way. After checking into our hotel, we'll have lunch and then head out to some nearby birding spots. Specific locations will be determined on the day based on what species have been seen recently. For those interested in climbing Lion Rock, we can make arrangements with a local guide to escort you (at additional expense). Some sites include the Sigiriya Bird Sanctuary which includes the forests and gardens surrounding the Sigiriya outcrop. This is an excellent birding destination that's quiet and undisturbed. With over 5000 hectares of dense forest and many natural reservoirs and ponds it offers the perfect environment for resident and migrant birds. Some species that we might find here are **Spotted Dove**, **Indian** and **Jerdon's Nightjars**, **Blue-faced Malkoha^**, **Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo^**, **Asian Wooley-necked Stork(NT)**, **Oriental Scops-Owl**, **Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl**, **Brown Fish-Owl**, **Sri Lanka Gray-**

Hornbill*, the stunning **Black-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher(NT)**, **Crimson-backed (Greater Sri Lanka) Flameback***, **Lesser Yellownape**, **Sri Lanka Woodshrike***, **White-browed Fantail**, **White-bellied Drongo^**, gorgeous **Black-naped Monarch**, **Ashy**, **Gray-breasted**, **Jungle**, and **Plain Prinias**, **Red-vented Bulbul**, the beautiful **Orange-headed Thrush**, **Indian (Black) Robin**, **Sri Lankan Shama***, **Golden-fronted** and **Jerdon’s Leafbirds**, **Streaked Weaver**, and **Paddyfield Pipit**.

Another site for great birding is Pidurangala rock, a nearby outcrop on a much smaller scale than Sigiriya, but with great forest habitat for birding. There are many birds in common between the two sites, but new species we might find here include **Little Swift**, **Malabar Pied-Hornbill^(NT)**, **Rose-ringed Parakeet**, **Common Iora**, **Brown Shrike**, **Common Tailorbird**, **Dark-fronted Babbler^**, and **Asian Brown Flycatcher**, the very colorful **Purple-rumped Sunbird**.

Accommodation: **Sigiriya Village Hotel**, Sigiriya 

Day 4: Saturday, November 8
Polonnaruwa World Heritage Site and Primate Conservation

This morning, after breakfast, we’ll head east to the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Polonnaruwa (1hr drive). The ancient royal city of Polonnaruwa was the former capital of Sri Lanka in the 10th century and is the undisputed highlight of the Cultural Triangle and arguably the entire country. The site includes a reclining buddha, tiger rock carvings, royal palace, water tanks (reservoirs), animal frescoes, stupas, and statues from important cultural sites. Quiet cultural sites like these often harbor wildlife, and we’ll be keeping an eye out for birds like **Asian Woolly-necked Stork(NT)**, **Eastern Barn Owl**, **Shikra**, **Red-backed Flameback***, **Eurasian Kestrel**, **Ashy Woodswallow**, **Indian Paradise-Flycatcher**, **Large-billed Crow**, **Yellow-billed Babbler^**, **Common Myna**, and **Indian (Black) Robin**. This is also an excellent location to see endemic and endangered **Toque Macaques*(EN)** that have made the ruins their home.



Golden-fronted Leafbird © Koshy Koshy



Toque Macaque © Eugene Ward

After lunch in town, we’ll head back to Sigiriya with birding stops along the way and then revisit birding hotspots that have proven productive over the last few days; or based on recent sightings, visit some new birding locations.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITY






Later in the afternoon we’ll visit a Primate Conservation & Research Center where we’ll learn about the important and interesting research being done on Sri Lanka’s three primate species – **Toque Macaque*(EN)**, **Purple-faced Langur***, and **Gray Langur**.

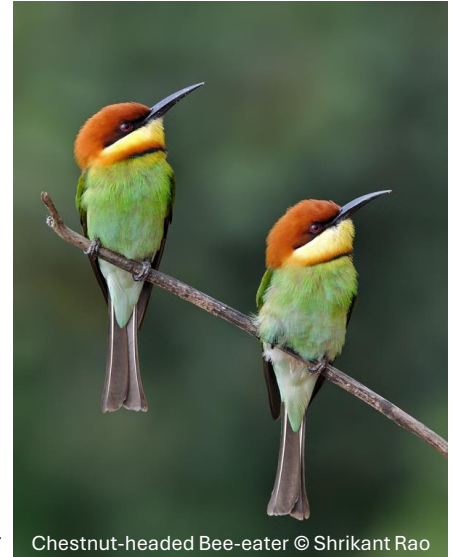
Accommodation: **Sigiriya Village Hotel**, Sigiriya



Day 5: Sunday, November 9 Sigiriya to Kandy

This is mostly a travel day with birding along the way. This morning, after we've packed and had breakfast, we'll leave for Kandy (3-4hr drive). With stops along the way for birding, we'll arrive in Kandy in time for lunch and check-in. After a brief siesta we'll spend the remainder of the day birding around the hotel's grounds and trails focusing on **Common Hawk Cuckoo**[^] and **Brown Wood-Owl** which are easier here than other locations. We will also search for the gorgeous **Chestnut-headed Bee-eater**, **Crimson-fronted**^{*}, **Yellow-fronted**^{*}, and **Brown-headed Barbets**[^], **Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker**[^], **Alexandrine Parakeet**(NT), the flame-colored **Orange Minivet**[^], **Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike**, **White-browed Fantail**, **Asian Tit**, **Blythe's Reed Warbler**, **Green Warbler**, **Indian White-eye**, and **Southern Hill-Myna**[^].

Accommodation: **Tree of Life Hotel**, nearby Kandy     
- coffee and cinnamon produced on the property

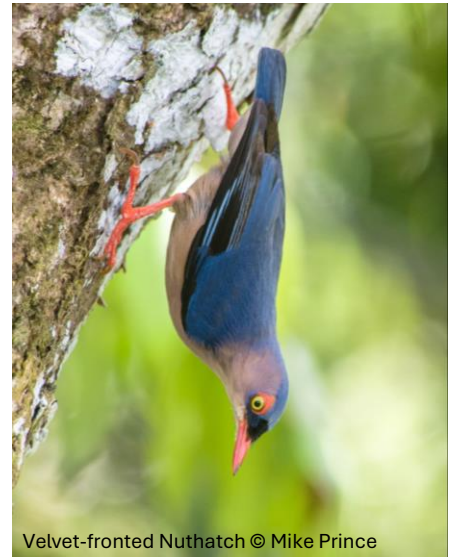


Chestnut-headed Bee-eater © Shrikant Rao

Day 6: Monday, November 10 Kandy to Nuwara Eliya

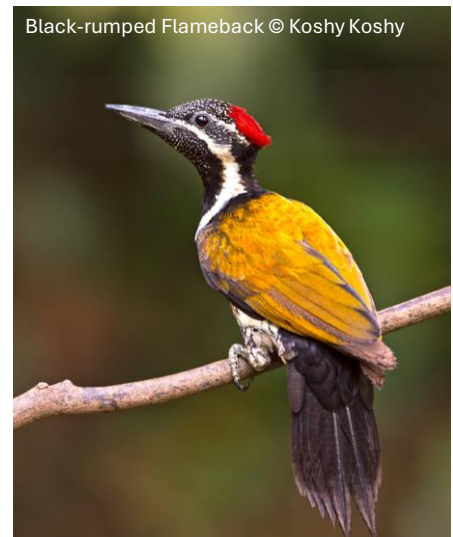
This morning we'll have breakfast at the hotel and make our way further south to the higher elevation of Nuwara Eliya (3-4hr drive) and check in to our hotel. This small town is located in the cooler highlands of central Sri Lanka, giving a respite from the heat of the lowlands. After lunch we'll bird various sites in the vicinity where a selection of localized endemics restricted to these higher elevations can be found.

Victoria Park is one location we may visit where we'll search the gardens and stream-side thickets for the secretive **Indian Pitta**, and shy **Pied Thrush**[^], both on their wintering grounds. Other noteworthy species include **Hill Swallow**[^], the stunning **Velvet-fronted Nuthatch**, **Kashmir Flycatcher**[^](VU), **Forest** and **Gray Wagtails**, and if we are very lucky, the secretive **Slaty-legged Crake**, and endemic **Sri Lanka Thrush**^{*}.





Velvet-fronted Nuthatch © Mike Prince

Surrey Bird Sanctuary is another option where we hope to find **Brown Wood-Owl** if they're still roosting in the area. Other species of interest that we may find here while searching for the owl include **Sri Lanka Wood-Pigeon**^{*}(VU), **Tickell's Blue**[^] and **Dull-blue**^{*}(NT) **Flycatchers**, **Yellow-fronted**^{*} and **Brown-headed**[^] **Barbets**, the bright **Orange Minivet**, and **Black-rumped Flameback**[^]. Other targets in the area include the uncommon **Legge's Hawk-Eagle**[^] soaring overhead, mixed species flocks containing **Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike**, **Common Iora**, **Gray-headed Canary-flycatcher**, **Asian Tit**, **Yellow-eared Bulbul**^{*}(NT), **Large-billed Leaf Warbler**, **Sri Lanka White-eye**^{*}, **Tawny-bellied Babbler**[^], **Sri Lanka Thrush**^{*}, **Indian Blackbird**[^], **Black-throated Munia**[^], and the skulking **Sri Lanka Bush Warbler**^{*}(NT) in the undergrowth.



Black-rumped Flameback © Koshy Koshy

Accommodation: **The Blackpool Hotel**     
- At around 6,000ft temperatures are cool: ~65°F daytime, ~55°F nighttime



Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush © Peter Edmonds

Day 7: Tuesday, November 11 Horton Plains National Park

This morning we'll head to the stunning Horton Plains National Park (1hr drive) where our target will be the endangered and highly secretive **Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush***(EN). This highly prized endemic, which inhabits the fringes of high-altitude forest pools, is tricky to pin down and we will be delighted with even a glimpse of this enigmatic species. Other exciting specialities of this stunted and twisted forest include the **Indian Peafowl**, **Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon***(VU), **Alpine Swift**, **Besra**, **Malabar Trogon**^, endemic **Crimson-backed (Greater Sri Lanka) Flameback***, **Streak-throated Woodpecker**, **Indian Blackbird**^, the reclusive and endemic **Sri Lanka Bush Warbler***(NT), the stunning **Kashmir Flycatcher**^(VU), here at its winter quarters and often associating with mixed flocks, **Dull-blue Flycatcher***(NT), **Sri Lanka White-eye***, the flashy **Indian Blue Robin**, **Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler***, **Yellow-eared Bulbul***(NT), and possibly **Legge's Hawk-Eagle**^, **Black Eagle**, and **Black-winged Kite**. In the grassland areas we'll likely encounter the near-

endemic **Hill Swallow**^, as well as **Pied Bushchat** and flocks of **Munias** that may include **Tricolored** and the rare and range-restricted **Black-throated**^.

Accommodation: **The Blackpool Hotel**     

- At around 6,000ft temperatures are cool: ~65°F daytime, ~55°F nighttime



Red Spender Loris © Alex Pryon

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: The **Red Slender Loris** is a small, primate found in the rainforests of Sri Lanka. It is one of two species, the other being the **Grey Slender Loris** found in both southern India and Sri Lanka. This small primate reaches 9-12", and has very large eyes, perfectly adapted for nocturnal vision.

The species is threatened with extinction due to habitat loss and the illegal pet trade. As such, it is listed as Endangered by the IUCN and identified as a 'Focal Species' by the Zoological Society of London's Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered (EDGE) project. One early conservation success has been the rediscovery of the virtually unknown Horton Plains Slender Loris subspecies. Originally documented in 1937, there have been only four known encounters in the past 72 years, all in Horton Plains National Park. The limited

available evidence suggests there may be only 100 individuals still in existence, making it among the top five most-threatened primates worldwide.

One unique feature of the slender loris is its ability to produce toxic secretions from glands near the elbow. These secretions are believed to serve as a defense mechanism and are sometimes licked off and spread on their fur. If a predator or person were to be bitten or scratched, these toxins could cause irritation or potentially more serious effects.

NOTE: Night walks are not permitted in Horton Plains National Park and so there will not be an opportunity to search for this species.

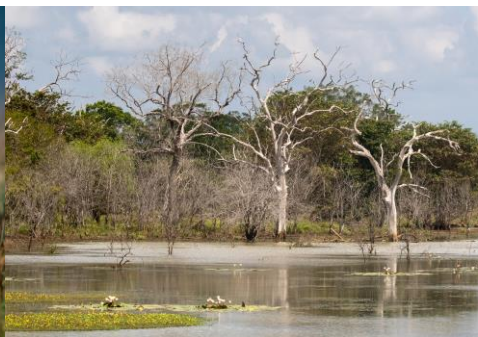
Day 8: Wednesday, November 12 Transfer to Yala National Park and afternoon safari drive

This morning we'll travel south, nearing the coast at Tissamaharama, (Tissa for short) (5-6hr drive). On arrival we'll check in to our hotel, freshen up, and meet for lunch. After another classic Sri Lankan meal, we'll head to Yala National Park where we'll board open safari jeeps for an afternoon of birding and game viewing.

Yala National Park is known as one of the best places in the world to see **Leopards(VU)** in the wild. Despite being classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN, some estimates suggest that the Leopard population in Yala is 300-350 individuals, making the park the reserve with the highest density (1 Leopard – 1.25 mile²) of this magnificent big cat in the world. Sri Lankan Leopards are one of 8 subspecies and the largest in Asia. Due to its fame, this park can be a hotspot of tourism and depending on our success at finding this cat at Wilpattu earlier in the trip, we may not spend a lot of time here. Additional mammals that we may see include healthy numbers of **Asian Elephant(EN)**, **Water Buffalo(EN)**, **Sambar(VU)**, **Chital**, **Wild Boar**, **Golden Jackal**, **Stripe-necked^** and **Ruddy Mongoose**, **Tufted Gray Langur(NT)**, **Toque Macaque*(EN)**, and **Indian Hare**. If we're extremely fortunate, we may even encounter a **Sloth Bear(VU)**.



Chital © Koshy Koshy



Yala National Park © Francesco Veronesi



Golden Jackal © Francesco Veronesi

Yala is also one of Sri Lanka's 70 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) with 215 recorded species, 7 of which are endemic to the country. Some species we're likely to see are **Indian Peafowl**, **Sri Lanka Junglefowl***, **Knob-billed Duck**, the beautiful **Asian Emerald Dove**, **Kentish Plover**, **Gray-headed Fish-Eagle**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Sri Lanka Gray Hornbill***, **Crimson-fronted Barbet***, **Oriental Skylark**, **Black-capped Bulbul***, and **Brown-capped Babbler***. Birding the woodlands of Yala should prove rewarding and we will search for the unobtrusive **Sirkeer^** and **Blue-faced Malkohas^**, **Barred Buttonquail**, the rare **White-naped Woodpecker^**, **Yellow-crowned Woodpecker**, **Black-headed Cuckooshrike**, **White-tailed Iora^**, **White-browed Fantail**, **Indian Paradise Flycatcher**, **Jerdon's Bushlark^**, **Rosy Starling**, **Jerdon's Leafbird**, **Streaked Weaver**, and **Blyth's Pipit**. As the sun sets, we'll head back to the hotel for dinner and checklist review.

Accommodation: **Oak Ray Wild Yala**, Tissa 

Day 9: Thursday, November 13

Yala or Bundala National Parks

Today we'll head to either Yala National Park, or Bundala National Park. The choice of park will depend on our success at encountering wildlife the previous day at Yala. If key species were missed, we may head there for another morning safari drive. However, if the previous day was successful, we'll turn our attention to the less crowded Bundala National Park where we'll spend time birding along the coastal wetland.

Bundala is one of Sri Lanka's foremost birding destinations, protecting an important area of coastal wetland, famous for its abundant birdlife as well as being home to significant populations of **Asian Elephant(EN)**, **Saltwater Crocodiles**, turtles and other fauna. The park stretches for 10+ miles along the coast enclosing shallow, brackish lagoons separated by thick low scrubby forest that runs down to the coastal dunes.

Just over 200 species of bird have been recorded within Bundala National Park, with the diversity peaking from September to March when birds migrate south from winter in northern Asia. The lagoons attract an impressive variety of wetland birds, including **Lesser-whistling Duck**, **Garganey**, **Cotton Pygmy Goose**, **Painted** and **Black-necked(NT) Storks**, **Asian Openbill**, **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Glossy** and **Black-headed(NT) Ibis**, **Purple Heron**, **Spot-billed Pelican(NT)**, **Little**, **Indian** and **Great Cormorants**, **Oriental Darter(NT)**, and if we are fortunate, **Lesser Adjutant(NT)**, and the spectacular **Pheasant-tailed Jacana** in open areas of lily-covered wetland. There are an impressive number of shorebird species here too - **Great** and **Indian Thick-knees**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Tibetan Sand-Plover**, **Greater Painted-Snipe** and **Pin-tailed Snipe**, **Little Stint**, **Curlew(NT)**, **Terek**, and **Wood Sandpipers**, **Common Redshank**, **Common Greenshank**, the uncommon **Small** and **Oriental Pratincoles**. Scarcer shorebirds include **Common Ringed Plover**, **Great Knot**, **Broad-billed Sandpiper**, and both **Red-necked(NT)**, and **Temminck's Stints**. Seven tern species have been recorded here, **Bridled**, **Little**, **Gull-billed**, **Caspian**, **Whiskered**, **White-winged**, **Common**, **Lesser Crested**, and **Great Crested**. There will also be chances for a few raptors including the impressive **Oriental Honey-buzzard**, **Changeable Hawk-Eagle**, **Booted Eagle**, **White-bellied Sea-Eagle**, and **Gray-headed Fish-Eagle(NT)**. Passerines are also prevalent, **Jerdon's Bushlark^**, **Blyth's Pipit**, **Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark**, and **Clamorous Reed-Warbler**.



Lesser Adjutant © Aardwolf6886



Pheasant-tailed Jacana © Francesco Veronesi

After lunch we'll visit other birding locations around Tissa depending on how our morning of birding went. We'll also visit several potential day roosts for various owl species that could include **Eastern Barn Owl**, **Brown Boobook**, the tiny (8" tall) **Jungle Owlet**, **Indian Scops-Owl**, and the impressive (23" tall) **Brown Fish-Owl**. In the late afternoon we'll stake out an area of coconut palms where we hope to find a pair of the scarce **White-naped Woodpecker^**.

Accommodation: **Oak Ray Wild Yala**, Tissa 

Day 10: Friday, November 14

Transfer to Uda Walawe and Safari Drive

This morning we journey west to Uda Walawe (2hr drive) with stops along the way for opportunistic birding. We'll check in to our hotel and have lunch. This afternoon we'll drive a short distance to Uda Walawe National Park, one of Sri Lanka's most popular parks due to its large and easily observed population of wild **Asian Elephants(EN)**. We'll enjoy another safari in open-sided jeeps in search of more amazing wildlife and birds. This extensive reserve of open grassland and scattered scrub woodland is home to over six-hundred elephants and some scarce bird species, including the impressive and localized **Malabar Pied-Hornbill ^**(NT),

near-endemic **Blue-faced[^]** and **Sirkeer[^] Malkohas**, and **Grey-headed Fish-Eagle(NT)**. **Barred Buttonquail** sometimes make an appearance at the road-edge, and we also hope to find **Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon**, **Changeable Hawk-Eagle**, **Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark**, **Jungle Ashy** and **Gray-breasted Prinias**, **Tawny-bellied[^]** and **Yellow-eyed Babblers**, flocks of migratory **Rosy Starling**, and the spectacular **Indian Roller**. Although highly unlikely, this area also offers the greatest chance of observing the rarely seen **Jungle Cat!**

Accommodation: **Centauria Wild Hotel**, Uda Walawe 

Day 11: Saturday, November 15 **Elephant Conservation & transfer to Sinharaja**

Today, after an early breakfast in the hotel's restaurant, we'll return to Uda Walawe National Park for some birding and wildlife watching. We will then meet with some conservationists who will explain the issues facing the resident elephant population. In addition to elephants, the park is home to **Sloth Bear(VU)**, **Golden Jackal**, and the occasional **Leopard(VU)**.



Asian Elephant © Amila Tennakoon

CONSERVATION ACTIVITY

Dahaiyagala Wildlife Sanctuary links Uda Walawe National Park with several wilderness areas and serves as an important corridor for **Asian Elephants**. With a population of around 600 individuals, Uda Walawe alone cannot support such a large number of elephants which is why the Dahaiyagala Wildlife Sanctuary corridor is so important. The pachyderm population moves seasonally through the sanctuary to adjoining protected areas however, a recent attempted land grab has raised concerns that this lifeline for the region's elephants could soon disappear. Blocking the corridor could increase human-elephant conflict (HEC) and could create socio-economic problems for hundreds of families who depend on nature-based tourism around Uda Walawe. At the Park we'll learn about research examining HEC and solutions being tested to alleviate the issue.

Some species of bird we may see in Uda Walawe NP include **Crested Treeswift**, **Brown-backed Needletail**, **Pied (Jacobin) Cuckoo**, **Asian Green Bee-eater**, the beautiful **Coppersmith Barbet**, the gorgeous **Plum-headed Parakeet**, **Common Tailorbird**, **Lesser White-throat**, **Oriental Magpie-Robin**, **Indian (Black) Robin**, **Pale-billed Flowerpecker**, **Loten's[^]**, **Purple**, and the colorful **Purple-rumped Sunbirds**, **Baya Weaver**, and **Paddyfield Pipit**.

Later in the morning we'll leave for the drive west to the Sinharaja Forest Reserve (3.5hr drive). The largest surviving tract of undisturbed lowland rainforest in Sri Lanka, Sinharaja is one of the island's outstanding natural wonders and a biodiverse treasure box of global significance. This UNESCO World Heritage Site was formerly a royal reserve and attempts to preserve the area go back as far as 1840.

En route to our hotel we will look out for birds to add to our growing list. After checking in for the next three nights we'll have lunch and then spend the remainder of the day exploring the Sinharaja Forest Reserve in search of some of its wildlife.

Accommodation: **Blue Magpie Lodge**, Kudawa Weddagala 



Purple-faced Langur © Chien Lee



Rusty-spotted Cat © Olaf Pronk



Grizzled Giant Squirrel © Susan Myers

Days 12 & 13: Sunday, November 16 - Monday, November 17

Sinharaja Forest Reserve

These next two days we'll make the most of this special place by heading out early to the park for full days of birding and wildlife watching. Breakfast and lunch will be packed for us to maximize our time in the field.

A staggering 830 endemic species of plants and wildlife are found within Sinharaja, including a myriad of birds, reptiles, and insects; while no less than 60% of the reserve's trees are country endemics. With its bushy white beard, Sinharaja's most common mammal is the endemic **Purple-faced Langur***(EN) or Leaf-monkey, and there will be ample opportunities to see three species of squirrel – **Dusky-striped Squirrel***(EN), **Flame-striped Jungle (Layard's Palm) Squirrel***(VU), and **Grizzled Giant Squirrel**^(NT). Present but rarely seen are **Rusty-spotted Cats**^(NT), **Fishing Cats**(VU), and **Asian** and **Golden*** **Palm Civets**. Nearly half of Sri Lanka's endemic reptile species can also be found in the park and new species of gecko have been identified as recently as 2021.

The bird diversity in Sinharaja is also one of the highest in Sri Lanka, with 29 of the country's 35 endemics recorded in the park – although some are restricted to difficult to reach areas. But not to worry, we'll have other opportunities to see these. Noteworthy species we might encounter include **Sri Lanka Green-Pigeon***, the beautiful **Plum-headed Parakeet**, **Crimson-fronted*** **Barbet**, **Red-backed Flameback***, **Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker**^, **Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot***, **Small Minivet**, **Indian Paradise Flycatcher**, **Sri Lanka Swallow***, 6 species of **Bulbul** - **White-browed**^, **Red-vented**, **Square-tailed**^, **Yellow-eared***, **Black-capped***, and **Yellow-browed**^, **Southern Hill**^ and **Sri Lanka***(NT) **Mynas**, **Asian Brown Flycatcher**, **Scaly-breasted**, **White-rumped**, and the rare and elusive **Black-throated**^ **Munias**, and the scarce and endemic **Green-billed Coucal***(VU). We'll spend time inside the park looking for the rare and very secretive **Sri Lanka Spurfowl***(usually tracked down by its call), the scarce **Red-faced Malkoha***(VU) striking **Malabar Trogon**^ - often perch



Sri Lanka Spurfowl © Francesco Veronesi

-ed motionless high overhead, **Layard's Parakeet*** screeching overhead, **Large-billed Leaf Warbler**, **Brown-capped*** and **Dark-fronted**^ **Babblers**, flocks of **Ashy-headed Laughingthrush***(VU), **Spot-winged***(NT) and shy **Sri Lanka*** **Thrushes**. Forest clearings will afford us views of the canopy and it is here where we will scan for the scarce and very localized **White-faced Starling***(VU), while watching the forest fringes we will keep our eyes peeled for, the fearless **Sri Lanka Drongo***, the magnificent **Sri Lanka Blue-Magpie***(VU), **Sri Lanka Scimitar-Babbler***, noisy **Orange-billed Babbler***, and **White-throated Flowerpecker***(NT). We'll also keep an eye out for the endemic **Sri Lankan Birdwing Butterfly*** that calls this forest its home.

Sinharaja Forest Reserve is biologically the most unique wet evergreen rainforest in Sri Lanka with an exceptionally high degree of endemism. It is an ancient forest that established well before humans arrived on the island and 8,864 hectares of this once vast forest was declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1978, and then a World Heritage Wilderness Area in 1988. Over 60% of the trees are endemic, many of them considered rare. However, the Sinharaja Rainforest area was selectively logged historically but has recovered well since its protection.

The birding around our lodge consists of forest edge and secondary scrub, which sometimes can be excellent for birds. Night walks are strictly prohibited inside the park, but we'll try to find the rare and endemic **Serendib Scops Owl***(EN), elusive **Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl**, and **Sri Lanka Bay-Owl**^, as well as **Sri Lanka Frogmouth**^ outside the reserve. Our local guides are amazing at finding day roosts for these species, and if we're lucky, we may not even need to venture out at night!

Accommodation: Blue Magpie Lodge, Kudawa Weddagala



Sri Lanka Blue-Magpie © Koshy Koshy

Day 14: Tuesday, November 18

Sinharaja to Kitulgala

After a hearty breakfast we depart Sinharaja and begin our journey north through local towns and rubber plantations to the village of Kitulgala (3.5hr drive). Along the way, we'll keep a lookout for some of the region's more common species such as **White-throated Kingfisher**, **Indian Swiftlet**, **Blue-tailed Bee-eater**, **Greater Coucal**, **Crested Serpent-Eagle** and **Indian Pond Heron**. On arrival we'll check in to our rest house and have lunch.

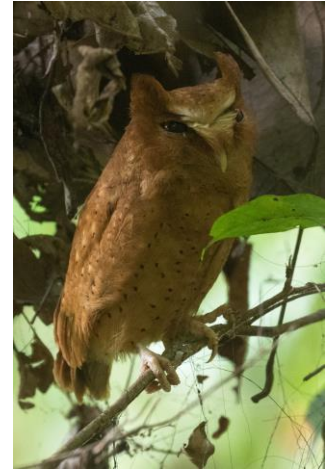


Chestnut-backed Owlet © Francesco Veronesi

Despite being set in Thailand, the scenic and peaceful Kelani Ganga River was the location where the classic film, 'Bridge over the River Kwai' was filmed – winner of 7 Oscars. This afternoon, we will cross the Kelani Ganga River by ferry and spend time walking in the Makandawa Forest Reserve. The reserve covers nearly 1,200ha and is one of the richest and most untouched rainforests in the country. We'll search for **Sri Lanka Junglefowl***, the shy **Green-billed Coucal***(VU), the diurnal (6.5" tall) **Chestnut-backed Owlet***(NT), **Sri Lanka Gray Hornbill***, **Alexandrine**(NT) and **Layard's*** **Parakeets**, **Brown-capped*** and noisy flocks of **Orange-billed*** **Babblers**, **Spot-winged Thrush***(NT), and **Brown-breasted Flycatcher**. The stunning **Sri Lanka Blue-Magpie***(VU) gives itself away by its striking call and may be found feeding at eye-level, sometimes allowing very close looks and excellent photographic opportunities. We will have chances for **Sri Lanka Spurfowl*** and **Red-faced Malkoha***(VU) here too, but we will need a lot of luck. **Brahminy Kite**, **Oriental Honey-Buzzard**, and **Black Eagle** may be viewed soaring over the surrounding forest, while large numbers of **Swifts** can sometimes be seen skimming the river. These include **Indian Swiftlet**, **Asian Palm Swift**, and the huge **Brown-backed Needletail**.

The enigmatic **Serendib Scops Owl***(EN), also occurs here, and we will try hard to find this elusive endemic. The near-endemic and highly elusive **Sri Lanka Bay Owl**^ also occurs in the forest-proper and we might see this rarity during our time in the area if we are extremely fortunate.

We'll also bird the more open, secondary forest where the birding is easier and more rewarding than the forest interior. Although a few of the rarer and more secretive species are absent from this forest, the habitat does support most of the area's specialties and endemics, and the birds that do occur here do so in much higher densities than in the forest interior. We'll keep a lookout for noteworthy species such as **Sri Lanka Green Pigeon***, **Sri Lanka Gray Hornbill***, the low-density **Crimson-fronted Barbet***, wintering **Indian Pitta**, **Black-hooded Oriole**, **Black-headed Cuckooshrike**, **Yellow-browed**^ and **Black-capped*** **Bulbuls**, **Sri Lanka Hill***(NT) and **Southern**^ **Mynas**, and **Tickell's Blue Flycatcher**^. **Banded Bay Cuckoo**, **Crested Goshawk**, and **Shikra** are also often seen here and there's even a chance of finding one of the island's rarer species such as **White-faced Starling***(VU), the stunning **Black-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher**(NT), the quite distinctive and endemic subspecies of **Common Hawk-Cuckoo**^, and **Slaty-legged Crake**.



Serendib Scops-Owl ©
Francesco Veronesi

Accommodation: **Kitulgala Rest House**, Kitulgala 

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: The prominent Sri Lankan ornithologist Deepal Warakagoda was first alerted to the **Serendib Scops-Owl***(EN) by its *poo-ooo* call in the rainforests of Kitulgala in 1995. Six years later, the owl was observed for the first time in Sinharaja, again by Warakagoda, and formally described new to science in 2004. The previous new bird species was described in 1868 – **Sri Lanka Whistling-Thrush***(EN). One of the rarest owls in the world at between 150-700 individuals, the new owl species is tiny, at only 6.5" tall, and is known locally as පාඨුවන් බස්සා (panduwan bassā or small rufous-colored owl) in the Sinhala language.

Day 15: Wednesday, November 19 **Kitulgala**

Today the group can spend the whole day birding in locations near the rest house and forests across the river. Our rest house is surrounded by lush gardens, frequented by **Green Imperial Pigeon**(NT), the impressive **Stork-billed Kingfisher**, **Yellow-fronted Barbet***, **Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot***, **Square-tailed Bulbul**^, **Yellow-billed Babbler**, **Oriental Magpie-Robin**, **Golden-fronted Leafbird**, the colorful **Purple-rumped** and **Loten's**^ **Sunbirds**, **Pale-billed Flowerpecker**, and **White-rumped Munia**. Alternatively, you can spend a half day birding and then take an optional cooking class given by one of the local communities where you'll master authentic traditional Sri Lankan cuisine.

Accommodation: **Kitulgala Rest House**, Kitulgala 

Day 16: Thursday, November 20 **Kitulgala and Transfer to Airport**

After breakfast we will spend the morning searching for species we've still yet to see or enjoy those that we've become familiar with. After lunch at the rest house, we'll make the journey back to Colombo (3hr drive) ready for departures later that evening. For those leaving the following day we can arrange hotel rooms, but please note that this extra night would be at additional expense.

LAND PRICE

\$5,040 per person, group size 6-7
 \$4,720 per person, group size 8-9
 \$4,560 per person, group size 10

REGISTER

To reserve your place on this trip, please contact:
Toby Ross alighttours@gmail.com or (206) 552-3834
 A \$500 per person deposit is needed to secure your spot

THE FINE PRINT

Price includes full-time wildlife guide, accommodation in standard rooms, all meals and non-alcoholic drinks, park entrance fees, and activities outlined in this itinerary, private transportation (with A/C), jeep safaris, arrival and departure airport transfers, donations to local conservation organizations, and a Sri Lanka Bird & Wildlife Checklist. The price does not include international flights, travel visas, travel insurance, alcoholic drinks, gratuities, camera permits (if required), and fees and additional guides required to visit cultural monuments. Price is based on double occupancy. Single rooms may be available for an additional cost of \$775pp. We will make every effort to match people who request to share with others seeking a roommate.






The deadline for **final payment is August 1, 2025**. If the trip has not met the minimum number of travelers (6) by the deadline, you will be refunded 100% of your deposit and the trip will be canceled. If you cancel your participation in the trip before the final payment deadline, there is a \$150 cancellation fee that will be deducted from your deposit. If you cancel after the August 1, 2025 deadline, you will forfeit 100% of your deposit and any trip-related costs that have already been expended by Alight Tours and travel partners. Alight Tours will not be held responsible for any lost expenses or fees paid by the traveler should the trip not depart; these include, but are not limited to flights, additional hotel bookings, travel visas, and travel insurance.

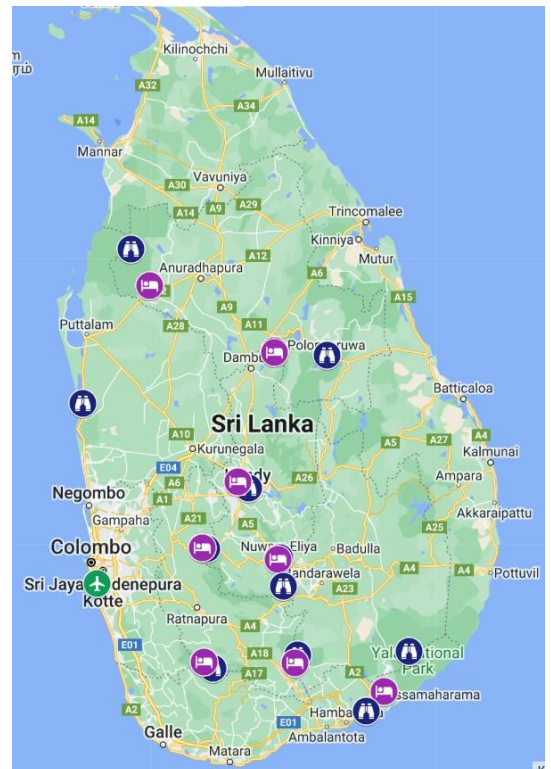
MAP

Map shows the locations of birding sites and lodging during this program. Interactive map can be found [HERE](#)




CONSERVATION CONNECTIONS

Your trip to Sri Lanka will support conservation, community engagement, and sustainable development in numerous ways:

-  Employ expertly trained and knowledgeable Sri Lanka wildlife guides and drivers
-  Meet conservationists working to alleviate human-elephant conflict and groups researching Sri Lanka's endemic primate species
-  Support local economies by creating a demand for wildlife guides, tourist activities, high quality lodging, restaurants, and staff - demonstrating that birds can literally "mean business"
-  Alight Tours will offset the CO₂ from your in-country ground transportation across a portfolio of forest, biodiversity, clean energy, and blue carbon projects.
-  Alight Tours will donate 3% of all profits from this trip to a Sri Lankan NGO that works to conserve birds, wildlife and the habitats on which they depend



KEY

-  Habitat surrounding hotel/lodge suitable for birding
-  WiFi internet available
-  Swimming pool on site
-  Ceiling or floor fan in room
-  Air conditioning in room
-  Restaurant on-site
-  Spa and/or gym facilities available (at additional cost)

Note: the amenities listed for each hotel in this itinerary are for guidance only and may be incomplete.

* Endemic – a species only found in Sri Lanka and nowhere else

^ Regional Endemic – restricted to Sri Lanka plus neighboring India and one other country

NT – Near Threatened – IUCN classification: a species that is nearly threatened with extinction

VU – Vulnerable – IUCN classification: a species that faces a high risk of extinction in the wild

EN – Endangered – IUCN classification: a species that faces a very high risk of extinction

CR – Critically Endangered – IUCN classification: a species that faces an extremely high risk of extinction

CARBON OFFSET

Climate change threatens all life on the planet, as well as the very destinations that ecotourism relies upon. Tourism is responsible for roughly **8% of the world's carbon emissions**, making it a significant contributor to climate change. A single return flight from Seattle to Colombo, Sri Lanka produces about 3.7 metric tons of carbon emissions per passenger. That's nearly **3/4** of the [amount of carbon](#) the **average person worldwide produces each year** – just from one round trip flight.

Every time we fly, stay in a hotel, or ride in a car, carbon emissions are being generated. While there are many ways you can, and should, minimize your carbon footprint while traveling (e.g. turning off the A/C and lights when not in your room), no matter how sustainable our travel habits are, certain CO₂ emissions are unavoidable. That's where carbon offsetting comes in. By calculating your carbon footprint, you can pay a small amount to an organization that supports a portfolio of forest, biodiversity, clean energy, and blue carbon projects that focus on capturing carbon and locking it away in the environment where it belongs.

Alight Tours is committed to reducing the negative impact its tourism activities have on the environment. We are partnering with [Sustainable Travel International](#) to offset the in-country ground transportation carbon emissions each passenger has on every Alight Tours trip.



Black-headed Ibis © Hari Patibanda



Malabar Pied-Hornbill © Rohit Varma