

Trip report Sri Lanka

*'in search of Fishing cat & Rusty spotted cat',
in a leopard paradise...*

6 june – 21 june 2018



Dear reader,

Since I have seen and photographed all the world's 6 big cats: lion, leopard, tiger, jaguar, snow leopard and clouded leopard (except the mainland split of clouded leopard). I started a new goal and try to see *all* of the 40 worlds wild cat species. This goal is quit a big thing and most of the 'to do' cats are also even more difficult to see... Anyway it is more easy to start new trips and gives new destinations to go look and for them.

Beside the cats my interest is also about most other mammals especially carnivores, primates and ungulates. So best new trip options are places where you can try for a new cat species and some other interesting mammals.

Sri Lanka offers the chance to see both rusty spotted cat and fishing cat, so this would give a chance to add two more cats to the list. Although a few years ago I might have seen a rusty spotted cat in Satpura, I am not really sure since the photo I than took, didn't convinced me and it looked more like a *small indian civet*.

Anyway I hoped to get a better view of this small cat. So I started reading the reports on www.mammalwatching.com. Most recent reports reported both cats: Fishing cat & Rusty spotted cat, although pictures of rusty spotted cat mostly were absent and pictures of fishing cat not very well.

Most people used 'bird and wildlifeteam' as their touroperator. But an inquiry from a friend gave from what I already expected that they are very, very pricy. A four day trip would be more than 2000USD even with 2 persons.

This was far above my limit, at least not for only 4 days. So I started looking around on the web and another friend gave the name of **Baurs ltd company**, e-mail: tourism@baurs.com, **A.Baur & Co. (Travel) Ltd.** No.05, Upper Chatham Street, Colombo 01. Sri Lanka. I had contact with a friendly woman *NerANJI Ravindra*.

Baurs answered quickly on my questions and were known to most places. I asked especially for nightsafari and also planned in a visit to some culture sites. I booked a 15 day tour with hotel, car and guide for around 2000 USD for *one* person (Excluding some safaris in national parks, since I wanted to be a bit flexible. In the end I paid around an extra 500 USD for all things like food en more safaris). I took the guess of not having the best experienced guiding (on mammals) for this, but hoped finding the cats by ourself.

In the end this guess worked out 50/50 with failing on *rusty* but getting two good **fishing cat**. I think the *rusty* is also a bit more difficult than fishing cat, at least also to get photos. But it might also be that we were not finding the right spots... Anyway in a bonus we got **8 leopard sightings**, that's why I added something in the trip title ☺. My guide and driver was *mr. Sunil de Alwis*. He is a very experienced guide, mainly for birding, but he also new most places of the mammals and he also had good contact with local safari guides who know the places. The experience with spotliting was a bit new to him but we managed to do this well. Mostly we arranged a local open 4*4 vehicle so we could scan all around for a few hours each night.

Photography is my passion and I always try as best to make a good picture of any mammal and most birds I see during the trip. I hope you will enjoy this report and feel free to commend or ask questions!

At last always thanks again to www.mammalwatching.com for presenting such worth full trip reports. For me it was of great use and guidance.

Best regards,

Janco van Gelderen

Utrecht, Netherlands (Holland), Europe

info/contact:

e-mail: jancovg@hotmail.com

Facebook: Janco van Gelderen, Utrecht area, the Netherlands (feel free to connect!)

internet: www.pbase.com/jancowildlifephotography but my **facebook photo albums** are mostly more up to date.

Trip itinerary & Places visited



Mammal tour 15 days:

- **Wilpattu** 2 nights (two full day safaris, two nightsafari)
- **Sigiriya** 3 nights, including **Minneriya** 1 afternoon (3 nightsafari)
- **Horton Plains** 1 morning
- **Udawalawa** 1 night (two half day safari)
- **Thissamarama/ Yala** 2 nights (1 afternoon and 1 full day safari) 1,5 nightsafari
- **Bundula** 1 morning
- **Mirissa** 1 morning whale boatsafari

Culture part (Previous 5 days before and 1 day after the mammal tour. I travelled by myself)

- **Anuradhapura** (culture) 1 afternoon
- **Trincomalee** (culture) half day visit fort+ pigeon Island snorkling
- **Sigiriya Rock** morning climbing the rock
- **Dambulla** (two hours visit)
- **Kandy temple** (afternoon, early evening)
- **Kandy botanical garden** (morning) > good for Flying fox colony
- **Nuwera Eliya** (botanical garden) (afternoon)
- **Weligama** (surfing) two nights
- **Galle** (1,5 hour visit)

Introduction

I arrived on June 6 at the international Colombo airport at night/early morning and was picked up by Mr Sunil who was waiting for me in the arrival hall. We drove in a very pleasant *Baurs* company jeep 'freelander' straight to Anuradhapura. On the way we had a short stop nearby a lake to look for some birds.

A short description of places visited for the mammals:

Wilpattu

This national park is very big. To get in the core zone you first drive about an hour on a long straight way into the park mainly through forest and a few lakes. I was surprised the few mammals you see actually on the track. Even spotted deer are quite rare and sambar I haven't seen here at all. In the core zone you'll see most animals. Also here you have a bit more variety in landscapes. Leopards are rather good here. We saw 5 in this area and one on the way out. The park is mostly about leopards, we managed to get 6 sightings in 2 full-day safaris not a bad score! Also we had a very short sighting of slothbear on our way in the second day. Others talked about 5 in previous days..

Around Wilpattu we focussed during spotlitng on fishing cat and jungle cat. The guys from the big game camp arranged a jeep and guide. We were out for 2-3 hours. We got a few jungle cats and one good fishing cat. Unlucky we could *not walk* around the camp at night since elephants were around (we saw one during spotlitng)

Sigiriya

Around the rock are large forests where we had daily spotlite sessions for some 3 hours. I was surprised the small numbers of animals you see here. In the end you'll get a few of most, but total numbers are low. We didn't see any cats here in three nights ☹. But we got palm civet, mouse deer, slow lori, wild boar, small indian civet, gerbil, hare and porcupine.

Minneriya

From Sigiriya made a half day safari in Minneriya where we saw many elephants. Also here a few jackal and one sambar. On our way we saw two elephants walking on the main road. The views around the lake are very good in this park.

Horton Plains

A nice 'cool' but mostly foggy place where sambar are easy to find in the fields, if the fog clears out. On the hike to 'little worlds end' two groups of purple faced leaf monkey quite close to the track. Also a small very dark mole-like rodent crossed the path in the grassy part but unlucky could not identify this. Tried for squirrels but could not find any in the three hours we were here.

Udawalawa

Not a very interesting place beside the scenery around the lakes. You see quite some elephants but not many other wildlife. Spotlitng around the park brought one jungle cat, some hares and small indian civet.

Yala

This is a good park where you'll see quite a variety of wildlife. The scenery is also very nice. Besides that the park is also far more busy than the others with many jeeps around. But I enjoyed myself very well and we got two fabulous leopards and a sloth bear. Spotlitng in this area was also good with a fishing cat and quite some jungle cats. Unlucky we missed rusty. It is difficult to spotlite in the right area because it is forbidden, we had to quit one of the safaris for this unlucky. Best is to arrange 'permits' in advance... but I have no idea how to arrange that.

Bundula

This is more a birding place, wetlands around a big lake. We do got an elephant and a grey mongoose here.

Mirissa

This is the place for whales but it was not the real whalewatching season. A rather rough boat tour delivered two Blue whales and a group of spinner dolphins. In a nearby village purple faced leaf monkeys are around in the gardens.

Total trip list and pictures from next page.

TRIPLIST MAMMALS

1. **Indian Hare** *Lepus nigricollis* -Several animals seen on each night drive in Sigiriya, Udawalawa and Yala. A daytime sighting in Yala.
2. **Sri Lankan Giant Squirrel** *Ratufa macroura* - Three in Wilpattu. One in Yala, not very common to see.
3. **Indian Palm Squirrel** *Funambulus palmarum* - Rather common at all locations also at the cultural places and mostly seen every day.
4. **Greater Bandicoot Rat** *Bandicota indica* - Uncertain if it was this specimen seen, but in Sigiriya crossing the road, also around Yala during spotliten.
5. **Indian Gerbil** *Tatera indica* – One crossing the road in Wilpattu and probably one in sigiriya on the photo.
6. **Indian Crested Porcupine** *Hystrix indica* – Two seen in Sigirya on two different nights in same place and another one in Yala, not enough time for pictures.
7. **Small Indian Civet** *Viverricula indica* –Two seen in Sigirya and two in Udawalawa while spotliten.
8. **Asian Palm Civet** *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus* -Two sightings in Sigirya and one far in a ricefield on a edge around Yala all during night.
9. **Jungle Cat** *Felis chaus* - Only seen during spotliting, 5 around Wilpattu, 5 around Yala.
10. **Fishing Cat** *Felis viverrina* - trip highlight. A nice cat in a wetland in Wilpattu and anotherone around Yala in a ricefield, running away quickly.
11. **Leopard** *Panthera pardus* –Very lucky with 8 sightings of which 6 in Wilpattu during two full-day safaris. One crossing closeby the road and one climbing a tree at close range. In Yala two good sightings, a nice young leopard on the ground for 10 minutes and one sleeping on a rock at 5 meters giving a brief, fabulous, *eye to eye* moment.
12. **Indian Grey Mongoose** *Herpestes edwardsii* – One in Bundala.
13. **Ruddy Mongoose** *Herpestes smithii* –Often crossing the main road while driving to other places. Also a few in Udawalawa and Yala.
14. **Golden Jackal** *Canis aureus* – Three different animals in Minneriya, 4 together in Wilpattu, 4 together just outside Yala.
15. **Indian Flying Fox** *Pteropus giganteus* – Very Large roost in the botanical garden of Kandy near the big round grasfield inside. It was early morning and a lot of them were still flying around. Another large roost in the hotelgarden in Tissa (Yala).
16. **Grey Slender Loris** *Loris lydekkerianus* – Two in Wilpattu and two in Sigirya , not able to take photos.
17. **Toque Macaque** *Macaca sinica* – Rather common in most places but mostly seen near the touristic temples.
18. **Tufted Grey Langur** *Semnopithecus priam* – Rather common in Sigiriya. And seen in most places but mostly around the temples.
19. **Purple-faced Leaf Monkey** *Trachypithecus vetulus* – Two small groups in Horton Plains in trees next to the walk two little worlds end. Two animals in Polonnaruwa culture site and three near Mirissa in a garden with palm trees.
20. **Eurasian Wild Boar** *Sus scrofa* - Two in daytime Wilpattu, one in Sigirya at night, a group of 6 in Udawalawa daytime and a large herd of 20 while spotliten there near the lake, rather common in Yala in daytime.

21. **Sri Lankan White-striped Chevrotain** *Moschiola meminna* - Several seen on each night drive in and around Sigiriya. A few seen while spotlighting around Yala.

22. **Sambar** *Cervus unicolor* -One female in Minneriya, three in daytime in Yala, uncommon to see, easy to see in Horton Plains.

23. **Chital** *Axis axis* – Common in Wilpattu and Yala not so common in Udawalawa, also seen in and around the fort of Trincomalee (not sure of these are wild).

24. **Wild Water Buffalo** *Bubalus arnee* –A few in Udawalawa and a few in Yala, uncertain if wild ones were seen in Wilpattu.

25. **Asian Elephant** *Elephas maximus* –Two singles in Wilpattu and 1 at night outside the park, many in Minneriya and Udawala and also quit some in Yala, finally a single large bull in Bundula.

26. **Blue Whale** *Balaenoptera musculus* - Another trip highlight, not seen very well while out in a rough ocean, but seen very well the spray and a few times the body just above water. Very difficult to keep your camera straight (and dry) in the waves.

27. **Long-snouted Spinner Dolphin** *Stenella longirostris* – Another lucky one, a group of around 10 passing the boat, but difficult to take photos because of the big waves.

28. **Unidentified rodent** - A dark coloured near black mole type rodent crossed the footpath in Horton Plains crossing in the grassland.

29. *some 3 unidentified types of bat*



Wilpattu spotted deer, a bit nervous because of four jackals nearby



Male(s) spotted deer in Yala



Jackal, Wilpattu



Wilpattu: above first leopard crossing in front of the jeep & sleeping in the forest beneath





Wilpattu leopard sighting in a tree (above) and on the ground in Yala (under)



Amazing leopard sighting in Yala, just a few meters away from the jeep 😊





Wild water buffalo in Yala (above) & in Uduwalawa (under, maybe domestic?)





Asian elephants in Minneriya





Grey mongoose, Bundula



Ruddy mongoose, Yala



Tufted grey langur common in one of the culture sites





Indian hare spotlighting in Sigirya



Indian hare daytime view Yala



Indian palm squirrel in the garden of Sigirya rock



The only sambar seen in Minerya



Purple-faced leaf monkey, Horton plains



Sambar common seen in Horton Plains (if the fog clears out)





Male and female sambar in Horton Plains



Toque Macaques common around the culture sites



Sloth Bear in Yala



Toque macaque, Wilpattu



Giant squirrel, Yala



Wild boar, Udawalawa



First Fishing cat around Wilpattu



Flying fox, Kandy botanical garden



Small indian civet, Udawalawa spotliting



Probably a Gerbil (Sigirya)



Mouse deer (above) & palm civet (under) in Sigiriya forests





Jungle cat around Yala



Second Fishing cat of the trip around Yala



Jungle cats around Wilpattu





Purple-faced leaf monkey, Polonnaruwa culture site



Spinner dolphins



Blue whale

