

Sri Lanka Mammal Tour: 19 February – 1 March, 2017

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Sri Lanka has a lot to offer the mammal enthusiast and over the years I have read a number of reports from some very productive trips on mammalwatching.com. The majority of people have enjoyed considerable success using Bird and Wildlife Team, in particular a guide named Udithe Hettige. In February 2017, I embarked on my own eleven day trip, joined by Karen and Simon Spavin, and John Sadler. We had secured Udithe as our guide so our expectations were high.



Indian Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) – John Sadler

Our trip was immensely successful and we recorded over 70 mammal species including most of our targets. Unlike the majority of my trip reports, I have not provided accurate site details for obvious reasons. Instead I've aimed to provide an idea of what can be seen on a dedicated mammal watching trip to Sri Lanka with little sleep and an outstanding guide.

The Bird and Wildlife Team www.birdandwildlifeteam.com

The Bird and Wildlife Team were extremely professional and a pleasure to deal with. The vehicle and driver they supplied were to an exceptional standard and all the accommodation and meals were excellent. We met several other guides from the company at various sites around the island. All were extremely friendly, knowledgeable and took an interest in our progress.

Udithe certainly lived up to his reputation as a world class guide and naturalist. He went out of his way to make sure we had a memorable trip, managing to find the majority of our target species along with a few unexpected surprises. His knowledge of the local wildlife is limitless and he was always happy to explain the identification features of the bats and various other creatures we encountered. Although our trip was designed around mammal watching, once Udi found out three of the group were avid birders, he went the extra mile to find as many bird species as possible. He was also pleased to point out reptiles, amphibians, fish, butterflies and all other wildlife.



Indian Hare (*Lepus nigricollis*) and Asian Elephants (*Elephas maximus*) – Mike Richardson

Itinerary

19 February	Early morning pick-up from Colombo arriving at Sigiriya late morning. Afternoon birding. Long night drive lasting into the early hours.
20 February	Whole day in and around Sigiriya, long night drive lasting into the early hours.
21 February	Whole day in and around Sigiriya, long night drive lasting into the early hours.
22 February	Early morning departure to Kitulgala. Afternoon and evening walks in rainforest.
23 February	Morning spent birding in village. Afternoon and late night walks in rainforest.
24 February	Very early departure to Sinharaja Forest Reserve arriving in time for breakfast. Birding around reserve before heading to Wawulpane Cave in time for dusk. Evening drive around Embilipitiya where we spent the night.
25 February	Morning drive in Udawalawa National Park. Depart for Yala National Park arriving in time for afternoon game drive.
26 February	Full day in Yala. Evening night drive around Tissa area.
27 February	Early morning drive in Yala. Afternoon spent driving to Mirissa, birding en route. Late night walk around Mirissa.
28 February	Whale watching trip. Late night walk around Mirissa.
1 March	Second whale watching trip turned back due to bad weather. Drive back to Colombo.



Fishing Cat (*Felis viverrina*) – John Sadler

Note on bats

We saw a lot of bats! Many species were identified at day roost sites, the majority in private buildings and temples that Uditha had permission to access. At several places Udi was working directly with the landowners in order to preserve the bat roost long term. Other bat species were identified by a combination of size, colour, behaviour, flight pattern and proximity to known roosting sites.

Stuff we missed

The trip pretty much went like clockwork and thanks to Udi we had great views of most of our 'must see' mammals. It would have been nice to get a better view of the Travancore Flying Squirrel but it was high up in the canopy and very nervous. Sloth Bear was the only main target we missed but this species is much easier to see later in the year when they become more diurnal to feed on fruiting trees.

Unfortunately the boat had to turn back on our second whale watching trip due to bad weather. This was a shame as we had planned to search for a probable Bryde's Whale that Udi had briefly spotted the previous day. Various other cetaceans were also possible. To be honest though, we were all just happy to get back to dry land, especially considering the fantastic whale watching we had enjoyed the day before.



Blue Whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*) – Karen and Simon Spavin

Other wildlife

Considering it was a mammal trip we did very well with other wildlife. I was especially happy to see some fantastic reptiles including Sri Lankan Green Pit Viper, Green Vine Snake and Marsh Crocodile. The birders in the group were more than satisfied with over 200 bird species including the majority of endemics within range. Long nights spotlighting meant we saw lots owls and nightjars, including Serendib Scops Owl and Spot-bellied Eagle Owl.



Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) – Mike Richardson

Mammals recorded

1.	Indian Hare <i>Lepus nigricollis</i>	-Several animals seen on each night drive in Sigiriya. -A couple observed late evening around Embilipitiya. -Occasional daytime sightings in Yala.
2.	Sri Lankan Giant Squirrel <i>Ratufa macroura</i>	-Dry Zone subspecies reasonably common in Sigiriya and surrounding area. -Wet zone subspecies seen in Kitulgala.
3.	Indian Palm Squirrel <i>Funambulus palmarum</i>	-Pleasingly common at all locations and recorded every day.
4.	Sri Lankan Flameback Squirrel <i>Funambulus layardi</i>	-Two individuals observed in Sinharaja Forest Reserve.
5.	Sri Lankan Dusky-striped Squirrel <i>Funambulus obscures</i>	-Just one sighting early morning in Sinharaja Forest Reserve.
6.	Indian Giant Flying Squirrel <i>Ptaurista philippensis</i>	-One individual spotted on night drive in Sigiriya.

7.	Travancore Flying Squirrel <i>Petinomys fuscocapillus</i>	-Poor views of this elusive species in Kitulgala.
8.	Greater Bandicoot Rat <i>Bandicota indica</i>	-Fantastic sighting of this huge rodent while spotlighting overgrown wasteland near Mirissa. -Fresh road-killed specimen found on main road near Sigiriya.
9.	Lesser Bandicoot Rat <i>Bandicota bengalensis</i>	-A rat seen only by Simon at dusk near Sigiriya was most likely this species.
10.	Blanford's Rat <i>Cremnomys blanfordi</i>	-Two sightings while spotlighting around Sigiriya and surrounding areas.
11.	Little Indian Field Mouse <i>Mus booduga</i>	-A couple of these small mice were photographed around the waste treatment area of our hotel in Sigiriya.
12.	Asiatic Long-tailed Climbing Mouse <i>Vandeleuria oleracea</i>	-One or two seen each evening while spotlighting around Sigiriya.
13.	House (Black) Rat <i>Rattus rattus</i>	-Two young animals seen along riverbank behind our hotel in Kitulgala.
14.	Brown Rat <i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	-Uditha saw one individual while we were spotlighting wasteland in Mirissa.
15.	Indian Gerbil <i>Tatera indica</i>	-A single sighting of animal crossing road in Sigiriya. -Several more seen on night drive around Embilipitiya.
16.	Indian Crested Porcupine <i>Hystrix indica</i>	-Very brief sighting of this very timid rodent in waste disposal area of hotel in Sigiriya. -Better views of individual late at night in overgrown garden in Mirissa.
17.	Small Indian Civet <i>Viverricula indica</i>	-Seen several times while spotlighting around Sigiriya. -Two observed on night drive around Embilipitiya. -One seen on drive to Yala.
18.	Asian Palm Civet <i>Paradoxurus hermaphroditus</i>	-Total of three recorded on night drives around Sigiriya. Interestingly all were found around human habitation.
19.	Sri Lankan Brown Palm Civet <i>Paradoxurus montanus</i>	-Good views of this species shortly after dusk on our first night in Sigiriya.

20.	Jungle Cat <i>Felis chaus</i>	-Surprisingly only one pure specimen seen on trip, early morning in Udawalawa National Park. - Hybrid with domestic cat noted in Sigiriya.
21.	Rusty-spotted Cat <i>Felis rubiginosa</i>	-Frustratingly brief views of two different individuals at forested site near Sigiriya. -Excellent, but brief views of young animal while spotlighting area around Tissa.
22.	Fishing Cat <i>Felis viverrina</i>	-One of the trip highlights. A pair of Fishing Cats observed for several minutes as they hunted along edge of wetland near Sigiriya.
23.	Leopard <i>Panthera pardus</i>	-Another trip highlight. Time spent alone with a hunting female Leopard. Unfortunately after 30 minutes several other safari trucks turned up while the animal was stalking a Chital and the hunt was ultimately unsuccessful.
24.	Indian Grey Mongoose <i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>	-Our only sighting was a pair at Udawalawa.
25.	Ruddy Mongoose <i>Herpestes smithii</i>	-One crossed the road between Udawalawa and Tissa early afternoon. -Common in Yala with a number of sightings.
26.	Brown (Short-tailed) Mongoose <i>Herpestes brachyurus</i>	-Two seen in private garden near Mirissa.
27.	Striped-necked Mongoose <i>Herpestes vitticollis</i>	-Single sighting of this large, long-legged mongoose as it crossed road in front of our vehicle in Yala, early morning.
28.	Golden Jackal <i>Canis aureus</i>	-A pair seen a couple of consecutive nights while spotlighting in Sigiriya. -Two seen during the day at Udawalawa. -Several sightings in and around Yala.
29.	Eurasian Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i>	-Outstanding views of this animal hunting fish and turtles around the ornamental ponds of our hotel in Sigiriya. The same Otter was seen resting on island in middle of main pond on a couple of nights.
30.	Asian House Shrew <i>Suncus murinus</i>	-One animal found in the grounds of our hotel in Sigiriya.
31.	Indian Flying Fox <i>Pteropus giganteus</i>	-Large roost seen near Negombo Lagoon on our first day. -Several other roosts seen throughout island including one at Tissa Tank.

32.	Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat <i>Cynopterus sphinx</i>	-Several individuals of this species seen roosting in palm near Kitulgala.
33.	Lesser Short-nosed Fruit Bat <i>Cynopterus brachyotis</i>	-A couple of bats observed at night visiting a fruiting tree near Sigiriya. -Good numbers seen exiting Wawulpane Cave near Embilipitiya.
34.	Fulvous Fruit Bat <i>Rousettus leschenaulti</i>	-A single bat observed at night visiting a fruiting tree near Sigiriya. -Good numbers seen exiting Wawulpane Cave near Embilipitiya.
35.	Long-winged Tomb Bat <i>Taphozous longimanus</i>	-Two animals seen roosting in rocky crevice at Buddhist temple near Sigiriya.
36.	Black-bearded Tomb Bat <i>Taphozous melanopogon</i>	-One found at Buddhist temple near Sigiriya.
37.	Naked-rumped Pouched Bat <i>Saccolaimus saccolaimus</i>	-One seen at dusk in Sigiriya. -Several seen exiting Wawulpane Cave near Embilipitiya.
38.	Greater False Vampire Bat <i>Megaderma lyra</i>	-Small numbers found roosting in private outbuilding in Kitulgala.
39.	Lesser False Vampire Bat <i>Magaderma spasma</i>	-Small roost found roosting in private building near Dambulla. -Several bats of this species found in abandoned house near Embilipitiya.
40.	Indian Woolly Horseshoe Bat <i>Rhinolophus beddomei</i>	-Found roosting in several abandoned buildings and caves around Sigiriya.
41.	Great Woolly Horseshoe Bat <i>Rhinolophus luctus</i>	-Single animal found in private outbuilding near Sigiriya. The roost was shared with two other <i>Rhinolophus</i> species.
42.	Rufous Horseshoe Bat <i>Rhinolophus rouxii</i>	-Very common around Sigiriya and found roosting in several buildings.
43.	Dusky Roundleaf Bat <i>Hipposideros ater</i>	-Several seen around Sigiriya.
44.	Fulvous Roundleaf Bat <i>Hipposideros fulvus</i>	-Several seen around Sigiriya.
45.	Dekhan Roundleaf Bat <i>Hipposideros galeritus</i>	-Found roosting in several abandoned buildings around Sigiriya.

46.	Indian Roundleaf Bat <i>Hipposideros lankadiva</i>	-Good numbers seen exiting Wawulpane Cave near Embilipitiya.
47.	Schneider's Roundleaf Bat <i>Hipposideros speoris</i>	-Found roosting in several abandoned buildings around Sigiriya.
48.	Wrinkle-lipped Free-tailed Bat <i>Chaerephon plicata</i>	-Good numbers seen exiting Wawulpane Cave near Embilipitiya.
49.	Kelaart's Pipistrelle <i>Pipistrellus ceylonicus</i>	-A couple seen at dusk in Mirissa.
50.	Indian Pipistrelle <i>Pipistrellus coromandra</i>	-Common in Sigiriya.
51.	Least Pipistrelle <i>Pipistrellus tenuis</i>	-Several seen in Sigiriya. -Small numbers seen at dusk in Mirissa.
52.	Tickell's False Serotine <i>Hesperoptenus tickelli</i>	-Occasional sightings in Sigiriya.
53.	Greater Asiatic Yellow Bat <i>Scotophilus heathi</i>	-A couple seen on night drive near Tissa.
54.	Lesser Asiatic Yellow Bat <i>Scotophilus kuhlii</i>	-Several seen on night drives in Sigiriya.
55.	Brown (Hasselt's) Myotis <i>Myotis hasseltii</i>	-Commonly seen hunting over water in Sigiriya.
56.	Painted Bat <i>Kerivoula picta</i>	-One sighting of this beautiful bat near Sigiriya.
57.	Indian Pangolin <i>Manis crassicaudata</i>	-The highlight of our trip was finding this near mythical creature in the early hours of the morning on a back road near Sigiriya.
58.	Red Slender Loris <i>Loris tardigradus</i>	-Good views of one after considerable effort in Kitulgala.
59.	Grey Slender Loris <i>Loris lydekkerianus</i>	-Fantastic views of two individuals in Sigiriya. Several more found but with brief or distant views.
60.	Toque Macaque <i>Macaca sinica</i>	-Very common in Sigiriya. -Conspicuous at several other sites visited.
61.	Tufted Grey Langur <i>Semnopithecus priam</i>	-Common in Sigiriya. -Also seen in Yala, Mirissa and some other sites in the dry lowlands.

62.	Purple-faced Leaf Monkey <i>Trachypithecus vetulus</i>	-A troop of northern subspecies observed several times in Sigiriya. -Southern race found in Sinharaja. -Also seen in forest next to Mirissa harbour.
63.	Eurasian Wild Boar <i>Sus scrofa</i>	-Common in and around Yala.
64.	Sri Lankan White-striped Chevrotain <i>Moschiola meminna</i>	-Several seen on each night drive in and around Sigiriya. -A couple seen while spotlighting around Embilipitiya.
65.	Sri Lankan Yellow-striped Chevrotain <i>Moschiola kathygre</i>	-Three seen while spotlighting in Kitulgala.
66.	Sambar <i>Cervus unicolor</i>	-Small numbers seen daily in Yala.
67.	Chital <i>Axis axis</i>	-Small group seen on hill behind moat in Sigiriya on every night drive. -Common in Udawalawa. -Numerous in and around Yala.
68.	Wild Water Buffalo <i>Bubalus arnee</i>	-A number of the buffalo seen in Udawalawa appeared to be pure <i>arnee</i> based on a number of criteria such as colour, horn shape and thickness of neck. -At least half of the buffalo observed in Yala showed the characteristics of Wild Water Buffalo.
69.	Feral Water Buffalo <i>Bubalus bubalis</i>	-Some of the animals seen in Udawalawa were obviously feral domesticated Water Buffalo. -Several herds of Feral Water Buffalo noted in Yala.
70.	Asian Elephant <i>Elephas maximus</i>	-A lone 'tusker' seen crossing fields late afternoon near Dambulla. -Several excellent sightings in Udawalawa. -Relatively common in and around Yala.
71.	Blue Whale <i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>	-Another trip highlight was spending time watching three Blue Whales. Blows from another three individuals were recorded.

-	Bryde's Whale <i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>	-Uditha briefly saw the blow and back of what was most probably a Bryde's Whale. Unfortunately it did not reappear.
72.	Long-snouted Spinner Dolphin <i>Stenella longirostris</i>	-Excellent views of a pod of over 150 dolphins on our first boat trip out of Mirissa.



Little Indian Field Mouse (*Mus booduga*) – Mike Richardson

Our Sri Lanka trip greatly exceeded all our expectations. Friendly people, delicious food and fantastic wildlife made for a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Of course the main highlight was the mammal watching and although we amassed an impressive species list, much more importantly we had prolonged and memorable views of the majority of animals we came across. Our success was almost entirely down to Uditha who didn't rest until we were happy with each sighting.



Karen, Simon, Uditha, John and Mike