

SRI LANKA

April 6th - April 11th 2026

I booked everything with Chinthaka de Silva. He was very responsive in the lead up, flexible on the trip and willing to put in the hours to find my main targets - Indian Pangolin, Rusty-spotted Cat, Fishing Cat and Jungle Cat.

The challenge was that I only had 5 days to see everything. The original plan was to spend all of the time in Sigiriya but as I'll outline later, we adapted as we went.

Sigiriya

I landed in Colombo at 10am. And we saw our first mammal within 10 seconds of leaving the arrivals halls - [Indian Palm Squirrel](#). We then headed straight to Sigiriya. It was an easy 3.5 hour drive and we saw some wet zone [Toque Macaques](#) from the car en route.

We stayed at the Fresco Water Villa which was comfortable and as soon as we checked in, Chinthaka found an absolutely tiny [Least Pipistrelle](#) hanging outside his room. We also saw [Indian Gray Mongoose](#) by the pool.



Night one set the tone for the rest of the trip. We headed out at 10pm with Chinthaka and his excellent driver/local guide Shantha for spotlighting and to look for pangolin at a specific site. We got off to a really solid start with both [Fishing Cat](#) and [Jungle Cat](#) seen in the first two hours. We also saw [White-spotted Chevrotain](#), [Black-naped Hare](#), [Common Palm Civet](#), [Golden Palm Civet](#), [Asiatic Climbing Mouse](#), [Chital](#), [Tufted Gray Langur](#), and [Fulvous Fruit Bat](#).



We then headed for the pangolin site and within 5 minutes we heard something scurry away through the dry leaves, but couldn't find it. That, and of the very recent pangolin diggings and burrows, convinced me we were looking in the right place. We got back to the hotel around 4am after picking up 13 mammals in the first day.

The next day we took it easy before heading out to see [Purple-faced Leaf Monkey](#). We found it, and some [Grizzled Giant Squirrels](#) fairly easily before watching the sunset over Lion Rock.



Night two we took a different route for the first half of the night before heading back to the pangolin site. I found a small cat in the thicket with the thermal but frustratingly it got away before we could ID, it could have been a rusty-spotted cat but we'll never know. We then went back to the pangolin site for a couple of hours with no luck. But we did get our first [Asian Elephant](#), [Golden Jackal](#), [Indian Crested Porcupine](#), [Lesser Large-footed Bat](#), [Brown Rat](#) and [Southern Red Muntjac](#).

The following afternoon we set out for some bat roosts at Pidurangala and managed to see [Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat](#), [Beddome's Woolly Horseshoe Bat](#) and [Greater False Vampire Bat](#). We then headed to Popham's Arboretum where we saw [Lesser False Vampire Bat](#) and [Rufous Horseshoe Bat](#) before waiting for the sun to set when the [Gray Slender Loris](#) would start to wake up. We got too brief glimpses of two high up in the trees before heading back to Sigiriya to get ready for another Pangolin search.

We decided to try a different approach and instead of going spotlighting first, we'd head straight to the Pangolin site and spend the first couple of hours looking for them. Shantha left no stone unturned, relentlessly scouring every pile of logs and crevasse for a pangolin. But sadly once again, no luck. We did get to see two [Sri Lankan Brown Civets](#), which I'm still not sure is a sub species or a full species (there seems to be conflicting info). We then headed back to the hotel with a couple of hours of spotlighting on the way, where we saw our first [Small Indian Civet](#), some [Wild Boar](#), and a couple more Jungle Cats.



The next day I finally gathered the courage to brave the unseasonably hot, 35 degree, extremely humid, weather and hike up the Lion Rock. I bought an ice cream on the way up which turned me into the Pied Piper of toque macaques, making it probably the only place in the world I wouldn't recommend getting an ice cream.

At dinner, we discussed the best pangolin strategy for the night. Chinthaka mentioned that the absolute best time is right after a short, light rain. Sadly for us, it hadn't rained in weeks and the

forecast showed no sign of that changing. Regardless, we decided to head straight to the site again and try again. On the way, out of nowhere it started drizzling rain. And then within 10 minutes of looking, right where we heard the scurrying the first night, an [Indian Pangolin](#)! I was honestly in shock at 1) the fact we were standing right in front of an actual pangolin and 2) how quickly it moved, which led to horrific photos on completely the wrong settings (it was the first animals we'd seen that night).



But we had a great sighting, 2-3 minutes of following it and a few moments within a couple of metres of it. When we debriefed after the sighting, Chinthaka and Shantha both agreed that over 4 nights you'd have a better than coin flips odds of seeing one. They think there are at least 2-3 pangolin at the site, which made sense given the thick surrounding forest and the evidence scattered throughout the area.

We then headed back out for some spotlighting to try to find our final cat species, and seeing more jungle cats, elephants, wild boar, black-naped hares, porcupines, civets. When we got back to the hotel at 330am, I asked Chinthaka if we could head to Wilpattu tomorrow given that we'd seen everything that Sigiriya is known for and we didn't seem to be having much luck with the rusty-spotted cat. By 7am I had a knock on the door saying it had all been sorted and we'd be heading to Wilpattu in a couple of hours.

Wilpattu

We got to the Wilpattu Tree House Hotel in time for a late lunch. It's a great setup with great views, right on the edge of the park. Hornbills, kingfishers, wild boar all visible from your room. I honestly much preferred it locationally than Sigiriya. In Sigiriya you feel like you're in a town/rural villages the entire time whereas in Wilpattu it felt more remote and wild.

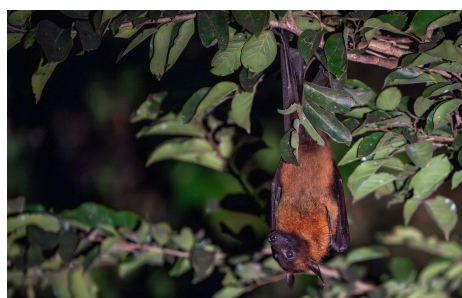
We headed in for our first afternoon drive in the park. It's a nice park with nice open pans surrounded by dense forest. In a couple of hours we managed to see many [Ruddy Mongooses](#), our first [Indian Hog Deer](#), a [Sloth Bear](#) with a cub, as well as macaques, langurs and chital.

Back at the hotel we had some really good Sri Lankan food (a nice change from the Western food at the hotel in Sigiriya) before setting off on what turned out to be one of the best and shortest night drives I've ever done. Two adjectives that usually don't go together when describing a night drive but let me explain. Within 5 minutes of leaving the hotel, while driving along the border of the national park, we saw a [Rusty-spotted Cat](#) within a couple of metres of the car.



It then walked into some bushes right on the side of the road, curled up and stayed put (apparently their typical behaviour). We then spent 10-15 minutes watching it, got some photos and left it at peace. It was a great sighting, by far the best of any of the cats we saw.

We continued on, adding [Indian Gerbil](#), [Indian Flying Fox](#) and [Painted Bat](#) to the list in the process. And then we all decided, given we'd had such a great, and highly efficient, night that it would be better to finally get a proper night sleep so that we could spend a full day inside the park the following day



Bright and early we headed into the park, it was a really nice, and warm, day. Unfortunately the roads to the coast were still unusable after the rainy season, so we stuck to the centre of the park. Lots of langurs, macaques, chital, muntjac, ruddy mongoose in the morning, and then right before lunch a very obscured [Leopard](#). After lunch we staked out the leopard in the hope it would come down from the tree giving us a better view but alas it didn't. We continued on and got a great sloth bear sighting for 30 minutes or so before heading out of the park, seeing a couple of golden jackals on the way. A quick shower in the hotel and we headed straight for my airport hotel in Colombo, via some delicious Kottu Roti.



Trip Summary

Overall, we managed to see the 4 main targets in just 5 days, and a total of 40 species (maybe 41 depending on how you count the Sri Lankan Brown Civet).

The only things we dipped on were:

- Red Slender Loris: Chinthaka has a reliable site close to Colombo we just didn't have time for
- Brown Mongoose: easier in the wet zone but possible at one hotel in Sigiriya
- Schneider's Leaf-nosed Bat: often possible in the roosts around Sigiriya
- Large Flying Squirrel: probably quite easy in both locations but I was mainly focusing my thermal towards the ground for cats

I highly recommend Chinthaka (and Shantha). He was proactive, flexible, knew all the best sites and locations, and I think is the only guide that has a couple of pangolin sites that are semi-reliable.

His email is wildlifeteam@sltnet.lk and whatsapp is +94 77 348 4828.

And feel free to message me on instagram @sampowerphoto with any questions.

#	Common Name	Latin Name	Sigiriya				Wilpattu	
			Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6
1	Indian Palm Squirrel	Funambulus palmarum	y	y	y	y	y	y
2	Toque Macaque	Macaca sinica	y	y	y	y	y	y
3	Least Pipistrelle	Pipistrellus tenuis	y					
4	Indian Grey Mongoose	Urva edwardsii	y					
5	White-Spotted Chevrotain	Moschiola meminna	y	y	y	y	y	
6	Common Palm Civet	Paradoxurus hermaphroditus	y			y	y	
7	Golden Palm Civet	Paradoxurus zeylonensis	y					
8	Asiatic Climbing Mouse	Vandeleuria oleracea	y					
9	Chital	Axis axis	y				y	y
10	Tufted Grey Langur	Semnopithecus priam	y		y		y	y
11	Fishing Cat	Prionailurus viverrinu	y					
12	Jungle Cat	Felis chaus	y		y	y	y	
13	Fulvous Fruit Bat	Rousettus leschenaultii	y					
14	Purple-faced Leaf Monkey	Semnopithecus vetulus		y				
15	Grizzled Giant Squirrel	Ratufa macroura		y	y		y	
16	Asian Elephant	Elephas maximus		y	y	y	y	
17	Golden Jackal	Canis aureus		y				y
18	Indian Crested Porcupine	Hystrix indica		y		y		

	Perupine								
19	Lesser Large-footed Bat	Myotis hasseltii							
20	Brown Rat	Rattus norvegicus		y					
21	Southern Red Muntjac	Muntiacus muntjak		y					y
22	Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat	Cynopterus sphinx			y				
23	Beddome's Woolly Horseshoe Bat	Rhinolophus beddomei			y				
24	Greater False Vampire Bat	Megaderma lyra			y				
25	Lesser False Vampire Bat	Megaderma spasma			y				
26	Rufous Horseshoe Bat	Rhinolophus rouxii			y				
27	Gray Slender Loris	Loris lydekkerianusont			y				
28	Sri Lankan Brown Civet	Paradoxurus montanus			y				
29	Small Indian Civet	Viverricula indica			y				
30	Wild Boar	Sus scrofa		y	y	y			
31	Indian Pangolin	Manis crassicaudata				y			
32	Black-naped Hare	Lepus nigricollis	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
33	Ruddy Mongoose	Urva smithii						y	y
34	Sloth Bear	Melursus ursinus						y	y
35	Rusty-spotted Cat	Prionailurus rubiginosus						y	
36	Indian Gerbil	Tatera indica						y	
37	Indian Flying Fox	Pteropus medius						y	
38	Painted Bat	Kerivoula picta						y	

39	Sambar	Rusa unicolor						y
40	Leopard	Panthera pardus						y
41	Indian Hog Deer	Axis porcinus					y	y