



My Big Cat Year – Visit to Sri Lanka for the Fishing Cat and other amazing wildlife – 01/07/26 to 25/07/26

From Borneo, the quest continued to **Sri Lanka**, for a **14-day mammal-watching trip**, followed by a **12-day family trip**. The key target was the **Fishing Cat** as I had seen the other three Wildcat species (Leopard, Jungle Cat, Rusty-spotted Cat) already earlier in the year. Sri Lanka is probably one of the best places in the world for the Fishing Cat but it proved to be much more difficult than expected ...

The main areas during the Mammal Trip were Kitulgala, Sigiriya and Wilpattu National Park.

All in all, we managed to see **36 mammal species**, around **82 bird species** and **28 Reptiles and Amphibians!**

With regard to the mammals, the highlights for me were **Fishing Cat, Sloth Bear, Leopard, Jungle Cat, Golden Palm Civet, Eurasian Otter, Purple-faced Langur, Toque Macaque, Gray Slender Loris, Red Slender Loris, Indian Crested Porcupine, Small Indian Civet and Spinner Dolphin.**

Bird highlights for me were **Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Brown Fish Owl, Indian Scops Owl, Spot-bellied Eagle Owl, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Black-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher, Malabar Trogon, Southern Hill Myna.**

Reptile and Amphibian highlights for me were **Commun Kukri Snake, Sri Lankan Longsnouth Tree Frog, Sri Lankan Green Garden Lizard, Sri Lankan Lowland Hump-nosed Pit Viper, Termite Gekko and Green Turtle.**

Top 5 Mammals	Top 5 Birds	Top 5 Wildlife moments
Fishing Cat	Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher	Fishing Cat resting on a wall
Golden Palm Civet	Indian Scops Owl	Nelum, the largest Male Leopard in Wilpattu
Sloth Bear	Brown Fish Owl	4 Sloth Bears in 2 days in Wilpattu
Leopard	Spot-bellied Eagle Owl	Eurasian Otter taking a Green Pond Frog
Eurasian Otter	Malabar Trogon	Asian Elephants chased away out a rice field

Please find hereafter the journal and pictures as shown in the Blog section on the website www.mybigcatyear.com





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The Fishing Cat in Sri Lanka was not easy ... but we got it!

July 25, 2026

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Finishing off the incredible 30-day trip in Borneo, on the 29th of June, I had one day for myself at Sepilok before going to **Sri Lanka for the continuation of the quest**. In Sri Lanka I would join a small 4-person group for 2 weeks with three main areas: **Kitulgala, Sigiriya** and **Wilpattu National Park**. The **biggest target** for me would be the **Fishing Cat** as I missed it in Kaziranga NP in India. **All 3 other Wildcat species I had seen before; Leopard, Rusty-spotted cat and Jungle Cat**. In addition to the Fishing Cat, Sri Lanka harbours some other nice (endemic) mammals and birds so all in all it should be a promising trip. Best of all was that after the trip, I would meet up with my wife Bea and our three kids Daan, Florent and Robine for a 2-week family holiday!

So, on the 29th of June, they dropped me off at around 11 AM at the Tanini nature lodge at Sepilok, Borneo, and I said goodbye to Chun and my fellow travellers Esther, Steve, Jens and Mattanja. The Tanini Lodge had a nice restaurant with good Wi-Fi so for me an excellent place to do some much needed work at the laptop. i.e., adding the images to the site and finishing off the latest blog for Borneo. In the afternoon I walked 800 meters to the Rainforest Discovery Centre at Sepilok with the famous canopy walk. As I went in, it started raining and I basically was washed away ... totally soaked I returned to the lodge, had a warm shower, went into the restaurant again and continued my laptop work.

Next morning I was up at 05:30 AM for a visit again to the Rainforest Discovery Centre. It was a nice walk but I did not manage to see a lot so around 07:00 AM I was back again in the restaurant for a breakfast and some laptop work. That night the **Netherlands played their knock-out game against Morocco**. I still don't have a VPN so I could not watch the game on my phone but 20 minutes before the end of the game I saw one of the waiters was watching the game ... He loaned me his phone and I was able to see the penalties ... which we lost ... again ... it is what we call a Dutch penalty trauma!

At around 12 PM I left for the airport to get the flight from **Sandakan to Kuala Lumpur**. There I had a stopover for four hours which was good and relaxed and around 19:00 I took the flight to **Colombo, Sri Lanka**, where I arrived around 22:00 and they picked me up to go to the Covanro Courtesy Hotel in Colombo. Next day I relaxed, walked a bit around the hotel and did some work. The others arrived late that evening and we would meet at 9 AM the





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next morning for breakfast.



So the next morning at breakfast I met my **fellow travellers, Cory Cravata, Polly Martin (both American) and Sjef Ollers (Dutch)**. I travelled last year with **Sjef** and his wife Anja in West Papua and when Sjef informed me he would join the Sri Lanka trip, I was really pleased as we get along very well and we both enjoy the wildlife

out there. In addition, just like me, Sjef is into the Wildcat species and had seen around 30 Wildcat species already in his life. He is a great mammal and bird watcher, very experienced and a great guy to travel with. For this trip, we had the same major target, the **Fishing Cat!!!**

Polly is a retired chemistry teacher and had travelled already to many places on the earth. She is from the Washington DC area, has a positive attitude and is cheerful. In my opinion, it is always good to have a woman on the trip! **Cory** is from Illinois and was the one who posted the trip in Mammalwatching.com and requested people to join. He partly works in the National Parks in the US and also works as a subcontractor for Nuclear Power plants. His passion is travelling and photographing Wildlife.

Our guide Chinthaka De Silva from Wildlife Expeditions was also there ... but he was in a wheelchair! I said hello and I was obviously surprised as I had never met a disabled wildlife guide. Then I noticed his leg was in a brace. So he wasn't disabled, as I initially thought, but he obviously had an accident! They then told me the whole story ... The night before, Chinthaka was at the airport to pick up both Cory and Polly. They met and Chinthaka asked them to wait with their luggage so that he would pick up his car. They waited and waited ... but Chinthaka did not return. So Cory texted him to ask if he was all right ... 5 minutes later he got a message that he would be coming soon. **It turned out that he broke his shinbone, the largest weight-bearing bone in the lower leg.** What bad luck ... first and foremost for Chinthaka ... and second to all of us, as we were looking forward to traveling with him as he is one of the best wildlife guides in Sri Lanka!

However, Chinthaka told us that he already had **arranged last night a good replacement for himself. i.e., Dileepa**. During the coming 2 weeks, Dileepa turned out to be a great guy, a well-experienced wildlife guide, very knowledgeable about the mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians. And above all, a very nice personality!





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After breakfast, the four of us left for a 3-hour drive to **Kitulgala, our first destination**. We stayed at Seravelle, a basic but nice place, next to the river. It had 4 little cabins and we occupied them all. Food was good and the people were extremely nice and took good care of us. That evening we met Dileepa during dinner and after dinner we went out for our first Night Walk in the jungle of Kitulgala. We got into the car and it dropped us off a kilometre further down the road. There we went through the dining room of a hotel, into the backyard where we descended to the river. There the local ferryman was waiting for us and we crossed the river, standing on a very small ferry platform.

Upon arriving at the other side of the riverbank, we walked about 500 meters through a local village uphill to the entrance point for the jungle walk. As soon as we arrived at the last house of the village, Dileepa explained to us that we had to be extremely quiet as this was the house of the warden. Although the warden was probably sleeping, we did not want to wake him up in order to avoid all kinds of difficult questions, i.e., what are you up to in the jungle? Why all the spotlights and thermals? Etc, etc ... We managed well, were extremely quiet and passed the warden's house without waking him up!!

The night walks in the jungles of Kitulgala were difficult and very slow. The first night we were in there from 21:00 to 03:00 and managed only a **Yellow-striped Chevrotain (Mouse Deer)** and some birds. The other nights were difficult as well and only once did we manage to observe the **Red Slender Loris**. In addition, we got a **Sri Lankan Lowland Hump-nosed Pit Viper**, quite a **few different lizards** and **many frog species**.



During the days, we visited one spot nearby for the endemic **Brown Mongoose**. We tried 3 times but unfortunately it did not show up. At that spot, we did have good views of the **Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher**, a bird high on the wish list of birders and many times very difficult to observe.

Along the riverbanks, we got our first **Toque Macaques** and **Purple-faced Langurs**. We also visited a **bat cave** which was good fun and we could identify quite a few Bat species, good for our mammal trip list!





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The second day we were in Kitulgala it was my birthday, the 4th of July! It rained the whole day and worst of all, I really felt sick! So for the first time in 1 ½ years, I skipped the afternoon and night session and tried to sleep. Next day I felt better and all was okay. During lunch, they surprised me with a birthday cake which Chinthaka had organized. Thanks again Chinthaka, well appreciated!

After 3 nights in Kitulgala, we left for **Sigiriya** where we would spend 5 nights and which is supposedly very good for the **Fishing Cat** and the **Thick-tailed Pangolin**, two species which were high on our list! We stayed at a very touristic hotel, Oak-Rey Fresco Water Villa. My experience with these kinds of hotels that the first night I really like it, a comfortable room, hot shower, etc.. But after the first night I always long for a basic place in nature. Back in 1995 I stayed one or two nights in Sigiriya with Bea but I hardly recognized the place. Very touristy nowadays but still worth visiting, the Lions Rock is a great climb and provides a stunning view over the landscape.



At night we went out with Dileepa but also with the local guide, Shantha. We went out every night from 21:30 to 03:00. One night we made it even close to 05:00. During the night drives, the **main targets** were the **Fishing Cat**, **Jungle Cat**, the **Thick-tailed Pangolin** and different species

of **Civets and Rodents**. During the day we rested and in the afternoon we mostly went for a game walk in the surroundings, looking for the different species of Monkeys.





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Although we put all our energy into it and spent many, many hours looking for our targets, **we missed the Fishing Cat and the Thick-tailed Pangolin. We once got the eyeshine of the Fishing Cat but it disappeared before we could have views in our binoculars.** It proved once more that we all had to be extremely quiet in the car, no voices, no sudden movements and leave the spotlighting to Shantha and Dileepa. Dileepa rightfully reminded us that this is really needed to get a chance for the **Fishing Cat**. Also, to optimize our chances for the Fishing Cat, we should not call out everything we see in our thermals and therefore losing valuable time. We all agreed we have to do better!

Every night we went to one specific spot where we searched for close to **2 hours for the Thick-tailed Pangolin**. Despite our hard work, we missed it and it seemed the conditions were not in our favour. We only had very dry and hot weather during all those days and the Pangolin prefers to come out after rain. So a bit unlucky but another reason to come back again to Sri Lanka.

On our way to the Pangolin Spot deep in the forest, we always passed some rice fields with around 10 tree huts in different trees surrounding the rice fields. There always were one or two persons sleeping in there. They basically try to scare and chase off the elephants when they feed on the fields. During two nights, we could see this spectacle, with **Asian Elephants in the fields** and people trying to scare them away with loud noise and lights. Fascinating to see and again a warning that those elephants are seriously dangerous. Last February a Hungarian tourist was killed by an elephant, see [Tourist killed in wild elephant attack in Pidurangala - TimesOnline](#) .



Although we missed those two big targets, we did see much other good stuff like the **Jungle Cat, Eurasian Otter, Golden Palm Civet, Small Indian Civet, Common Palm Civet, Indian Crested Porcupine, Indian Gray Mongoose, Gray Slender Loris, Sri Lankan Grizzled Giant Squirrel, White-spotted Chevrotain, Tufted Gray Langur**. In addition, we saw quite a **few good bat species, lizards, frogs and some nice birds like the Brown Fish Owl, Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl and the Indian Scops Owl**.





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After Sigiriya, we took off to **Wilpattu National Park**, in the north-west of Sri Lanka. It is **one of the best National Parks** and we stayed at the very nice Wilpattu Tree House. It is next to the entrance of the National Park and on one side it borders a river and in front the Tree House there is a big open field, many times visited by **Asian Elephants**. We stayed there for three nights doing both night drives as well as day drives. The night drives typically took from 21:30 to 02:00, focused at some areas outside the NP and **good habitat for the Fishing Cat**. The day drives were typically from 09:30 AM to 18:00 PM, i.e. almost a full day in the NP.

Especially for Sjef and myself the **Fishing Cat was a big thing** ... for me because of My Big Cat Year and for Sjef as he had missed this Wildcat species earlier in Sri Lanka and it would be his 31st Wildcat species in life. We noticed that we had difficulties in believing that we missed it in Sigiriya, the best place and in most cases much easier than in Wilpattu. However, we were still in relatively good spirit that we should have a good chance in Wilpattu. Big help was Dileepa which promised us to do all possible to have a chance for this Wildcat species.

Upon arrival the first day in Wilpattu, we went out for a nice afternoon game drive in the NP. We had a good time, had some nice sightings of **Asian Elephant, Asian Wild Buffalo, Ruddy Mongoose, Chital or Spotted Deer and best of all, a Sloth Bear!**



That evening we went on our first night drive and Sjef and myself were tense. The first few hours were a bit slow, Dileepa mainly spotlighting and we were using our thermals. Suddenly, as we were slowly driving on a road with quite a few houses, we passed a small pond and **Dileepa said with a soft voice 'Oh, Fishing Cat'!** And there it was!





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It was lying on a small stone wall in the pond. Sjef was focusing at the reed beds behind the



stone wall so he did not immediately spot it. As soon as I started explaining, he said 'Got it!'. A stunning Fishing Cat! We managed to take a few images and it stood up and moved backwards into the reed. We went with the car to the left onto a small road from where we could have a view at the reed beds. And

there it was, between the reed beds! We could watch it for a minute or two but then it vanished into the reed beds. We were all delighted and we silently made high-fives!



We left the whole scene and Dileepa explained we should give the cat some rest so that when we would return later, we would have another chance. And so we did. After an hour or so, we returned and there it was, again resting on the wall. We could observe it for 5 minutes or so and then it slowly moved downwards from the wall and disappeared in the gardens close to one of the houses. We could clearly

see it had been in a fight. One of its eyes was hurt and was milky and it had an open wound on its left shoulder. We finished the night drive and I had a great sleep, feeling very satisfied that we finally managed to see this beautiful Fishing Cat. Visit the [IUCN site](#) for more info on the Fishing Cat,

Next day we had a full day in the NP and we managed to see another 3 Sloth Bears and 2 Leopards!! It must be one of the best places in the world for seeing Sloth Bears and Leopards. The Sloth Bears were very used to the cars and we could follow one for several minutes. What a stunning mammal. Both Leopard sightings were very different. We came upon one young Leopard lying on the road, for twenty minutes or so we were the only car out there which was cool. The other Leopard was Nelum, the most famous and the biggest male of all 300 Leopards in Wilpattu.





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We were incredibly lucky to see **Nelum, the biggest Leopard in Wilpattu**. When you enter the NP, Nelum is shown on a big billboard. To see that specific Leopard half a day later in the wild, makes you feel very privileged. That evening we were out again for a Night Drive and when we left at the Tree House, we had a nice **Common Kukri Snake**. During the drive itself, we had a great observation of a **Slender Gray Loris**.



The last day in the NP was a very relaxed one with nice sightings **of Red Muntjac, Golden Jackal, Ruddy Mongoose**, a wounded **Grey Langur**, a **Monitor Lizard** cleaning itself and some sand bathing **Malabar Pied Hornbills** and **Changeable Hawk Eagle**. Best of all, we ran into another Safari Jeep with in there **Bea, Daan, Florent and Robine!!** It made me and **them very happy!!!** They stayed at a place close to the Tree House. That night during dinner I thanked Dileepa for his great guiding and my fellow travellers Sjef, Cory and Polly for a very nice and successful wildlife trip!

After dinner, I joined my family and would continue with them for another 12 days in Sri Lanka! We had a great time, visiting Trincomalee, Sigiriya again, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Ella, Tangalle and Galle. A true family holiday with not much wildlife, although we did see **Spinner Dolphins** at Trincomalee and **Green Turtles** at Tangalle. In Trincomalee, I had a Teams meeting with Jon Hall and Charles Foley for their inspirational Podcast on [Mammalwatching.com](https://mammalwatching.com). It is always nice to speak about your adventures and sightings. Hopefully it inspires others.





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For more photos and videos of the Sri Lankan trip, please see the [Gallery section on the website](#). Guide details Dileepa Rajaguru - dileepakelaniunirrk@gmail.com - +97 77813861 – Wildlife Expeditions – wildlifeteam@sltnet.lk

My Family left yesterday, the 24th of July, to the Netherlands. We had a great time and we



love spending time together. As such it is always sad to go separate ways again but I am sure they will be okay. With regard to myself, when I am at the airport tonight, to leave for a close to 3-week trip to China, to the Tibetan Plateau in the Qinghai Province, I will be fine. In China the key Wildcat species for me are the **Snow Leopard** (saw it this year already in Mongolia), **Pallas Cat**, **Eurasian Lynx** and the **Chinese Mountain Cat**. Also, we have a

slight chance for the **Mainland Leopard Cat**. Beside all the Wildcat species, there are many other unique mammals and birds out there so I am convinced it will be an interesting trip!

The Big Cat Year is not just about spotting wild cats. It is also about habitat and wildlife conservation. The aim is to support a project/organization in every country visited, see the [projects page on the website](#). With regard to Sri Lanka we have contributed to the [Small Cat Advocacy and Research project](#).

We have contributed over 10,000 USD now towards the different projects in the visited countries and have generated more than 30,000 USD for the year, [see the website](#). It would be great if we could generate over 50,000 USD to be donated towards conservation projects. With the remainder of the generated funding, we can do some big donations to to-be-determined organizations active in conservation.

Would you like to contribute to supporting these important projects and/or organizations in the world with regard to conservation and protection of nature and wildlife, please have a look at the funding page. All help is appreciated! Big and small, it all counts. You can already help by buying the projects a coffee, <https://buymeacoffee.com/mybigcatyear>





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Sri Lanka - 1 to 25 July 2026								
Type	Mammal	Seen	New/Before	Colombo (2N)	Kitulga (3N)	Sigiriya (5N)	Wilpattu (3N)	Family
Bats	Black-bearded Tomb Bat	1	New		1x			
Bats	Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat	1	New		1x			
Bats	Indian Rufous Horseshoe Bat	1	New		1x			
Bats	Kellards Pipistrelles	1	New		1x			
Bats	Schneiders Leaf Nosed Bat	1	New		1x			
Bats	Indian Flying Fox	1	Before			2x	1x	1x
Bats	False Vampire Bat	1	New			1x		
Elephants	Asian Elephant	1	Before			3x	5x	
Hares and Rabbits	Indian Hare	1	Before			10x	1x	
Rats	Roof Rat	1	Before		1x	1x	1x	
Bandicoot Rat	Lesser Bandicoot Rat	1	New			1x		
Porcupine	Indian Crested Porcupine	1	New			5x		
Ground Squirrel	Indian Palm Squirrel	1	New	2x	> 20x	> 20x	1x	> 10x
Deer	Red Muntjac	1	Before				2x	
Deer	Chital	1	Before			2x	11x	
Hollow-horned Ruminants	Asian Wild Buffalo	1	Before				6x	
Cats	Leopard	1	Before				2x	
Cats	Rusty-spotted Cat							
Cats	Fishing Cat	1	New			(1x)	1x	
Cats	Jungle Cat	1	Before			2x		
Civets and Genets	Small Indian Civet	1	Before			4x		
Civets and Genets	Common Palm Civet	1	Before		1x	1x		
Mongoose	Indian Gray Mongoose	1	Before			1x		
Mongoose	Ruddy Mongoose	1	Before		2x		5x	
Dogs	Golden Jackal	1	Before			7x	5x	
Bears	Sloth Bear	1	Before				4x	
Weasels and Relatives	Eurasian Otter	1	Before			2x		
Dolphins	Spinner Dolphin	1	New					1x
Loris	Gray Slender Loris	1	New			3x	3x	
Loris	Red Slender Loris	1	New		1x			
Old World Monkeys	Toque Macaque	1	New		4x	3x	6x	3x
Old World Monkeys	Tufted Gray Langur	1	New			2x	3x	1x
Old World Monkeys	Purple Faced Langur	1	New		3x	1x		1x
Tree Squirrel	Sri Lankan Grizzled Giant Squirrel	1	New		2x	1x	1x	1x
Chrevotains	White-spotted Chrevotain	1	New			8x		
Chrevotains	Yellow-striped Chrevotain	1	New		2x			
Civets and Genets	Golden Palm Civet	1	New			1x		
Total		36						

Reptiles and Amphibians	Type	Seen	New/Before	Colombo (2N)	Kitulga (3N)	Sigiriya (5N)	Wilpattu (3N)	Family
Corrugated Water Frog	Amphibian	1	New		1x			
Sri Lankan Longsnouth Tree Frog	Amphibian	1	New		2x			
Asian House Toad	Amphibian	1	New		1x			
Common Paddyfield Frog	Amphibian	1	New		1x			
Reticulated Shrub Frog	Amphibian	1	New		1x			
Hollowsnouted Shrub Frog	Amphibian	1	New		1x			
Green Pond Frog	Amphibian	1	New			1x		
Indian Skipper Frog	Amphibian	1	New			1x		
Spotted Tree Frog	Amphibian	1	New			1x		
Hourglass Tree Frog	Amphibian	1	New			1x		
Mugger Crocodile	Crocodile	1	Before			1x	3x	
Sri Lankan Benthoad Gekko or Great Fore	Lizard	1	New		1x			
Sri Lankan Hump-nosed Lizard	Lizard	1	New		1x			
Water Monitor Lizard	Lizard	1	Before		1x			3x
Sri Lankan Kangaroo Lizard	Lizard	1	New		3x			
Sri Lankan Green Garden Lizard	Lizard	1	New		1x	1x		
Sri Lanka Leaf Toad Gekko	Lizard	1	New			1x		
Sri Lankan Lowland Hump-nosed Pit Vip	Snake	1	New		1x			
Indian Black Turtle	Turtle	1	New			1x	1x	
Peters Tree Skink	Lizard	1	New			1x		
Termite Gekko	Lizard	1	New			1x		
Common Garden Lizard	Lizard	1	New			1x		
Monitor Lizard	Lizard	1	New				3x	1x
Sri Lanka Flapshell Turtle	Turtle	1	New				1x	
Rohans Narrow Mouth Frog	Amphibian	1	New				1x	
Common Kukri Snake	Snake	1	New				1x	
Leschensaut leaf nosed Gekko	Lizard	1	New				1x	
Green Turtle	Turtle	1	Before					1x
Total		28						

