

Sri Lanka: cats and birds – Feb 16 to Feb 26, 2020

Daniel Heintz – dan.heintz@laposte.net

In the nick of time

My wife and I got lucky and were able to travel to Sri Lanka to try and see small cats, and incidentally endemic birds just before lockdown.

Local company and guide

We made arrangements with the well-known local company Bird and Wildlife Team. And we are glad we did so. They were responsive and gave us a tailored-made trip that exceeded our expectations.

Our guide was Diluksha Soysa, who is a mammal specialist and has done mammal surveying. His primary interest is in bats, but he seems to know so much with regards to mammals and birds in Sri Lanka. He has very keen eyes and ears—he seems to know all the bird calls in Sri Lanka! All in all he was thoroughly reliable and incredibly hard working. We have never had a guide who has worked so hard for us. We were out most nights spotlighting and the next day bird watching. Once we ended the night drive around 4 a.m. and were back in the field at 10 a.m.! Not only does he know about mammals and birds, but he seems to be a polymath: standing next to a shallow lake I pointed to a type of flower I thought I recognized and he said it was an *Utricularia* (though I had the name on the tip of my tongue, I couldn't remember it—he knew). He has lots of contacts with local people who know places where owls and bats roost. He is very friendly and was nice company throughout. He knew when to give us breathing space and his English is superb—we had very interesting discussions on drawing comparisons between gods and superheroes.

Driver

Herath was a great driver. His driving was conservative and very safe. His car was clean, modern, and comfortable.

Results

Cats

We had set out to see three small cats and we saw two:

- Jungle Cat (seen on three nights at least, one 'pure' individual seen very well less than 15 yards away).
- Fishing Cat, after much searching, a male and then a female coming to the male (!), seen within 30 yards for 20 minutes on the edge of a lake. Magic!
- We dipped on Rusty-spotted cat, but it is not for lack of trying (5 night drives). Diluksha worked especially hard on this one, but the cat just wouldn't show.
- We had not asked to see Leopard, but heard one growl and make an attack and, apparently, a kill.

Other mammals

- Indian Pangolin was unexpected and quite a thrill to see—our first one.
- Eurasian Otter, porcupine, civet cat, palm civet, Loris, elephant.
- Lots of deer and monkeys (all the species and all but one sub-species).
- Lots of bats seen flying and more often than not at their roost and once even at their night-time resting place. We are not familiar with bats, but seeing many of them so well was quite a treat and an eye-opener.
- Flying squirrel once and some giant squirrels.

At the end of the report is a full list of all mammals seen.

Reptiles

- No fewer than 5 species of snakes, seen mostly very well!
- Lizards, etc. Diluksha had a name for them all.

Birds

We were shown all the endemic species (!) and saw some great Southern Indian specialities. My interest is primarily in birds and achieving this is a quite a feat given that

the primary focus was cats! I can only marvel at Diluksha who was able to shoe-horn this into the program. It can't have been an easy thing to manage. Again our thanks to our guide: superb local knowledge!

Places visited

Sigiriya – Nuwara Eliya – Horton Plains N.P. – Bundala N.P. & Bird Sanctuary – Sinharaja Forest Reserve

Tea

Afternoon tea at the Grand Hotel in Nuwara Eliya was a highlight for both of us.

	Common Name	Scientific Name		
1	Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>	Resident	Seen
2	Grey Slender Loris	<i>Loris lydekkerianus</i>	Resident	Seen
3	Red Slender Loris	<i>Loris tardigradus</i>	Endemic	Seen
4	Toque Macaque	<i>Macaca sinica</i>	Endemic	Seen
5	Tufted-Grey Langur	<i>Semnopithecus priam</i>	Resident	Seen
6	Purple-faced Leaf Monkey	<i>Semnopithecus vetulus</i>	Endemic	Seen
7	Sri Lanka Flameback Squirrel	<i>Funumbulus layardi</i>	Endemic	Seen
8	Sri Lanka Dusky-striped Squirrel	<i>Funumbulus obscurus</i>	Endemic	Seen
9	Indian Palm Squirrel	<i>Funumbulus palmarum</i>	Resident	Seen
10	Indian Giant Flying Squirrel	<i>Ptaurista philippensis</i>	Resident	Seen
11	Sri Lanka Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa macroura</i>	Resident	Seen
12	Indian Gerbil	<i>Tatera indica</i>	Resident	Seen
13	Little Indian Field Mouse	<i>Mus booduga</i>	Resident	Seen
14	Black Rat	<i>Rattus rattus</i>	Resident	Seen
15	Asiatic Long-tailed Climbing Mouse	<i>Vandeleuria oleracea</i>	Resident	Seen
16	Indian Crested Porcupine	<i>Hystrix indica</i>	Resident	Seen
17	Indian Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>	Resident	Seen
18	Greater short-nosed Fruit Bat	<i>Cynopterus sphinx</i>	Resident	Seen
19	Indian Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus medius</i>	Resident	Seen
20	Fulvous Fruit Bat	<i>Rousettus leshenaulti</i>	Resident	Seen
21	Lesser False Vampire Bat	<i>Megaderma spasma</i>	Resident	Seen
22	Great Horse-shoe Bat	<i>Rhinolophus beddomei</i>	Resident	Seen
23	Rufouse horse-shoe Bat	<i>Rhinolophus rouxii</i>	Resident	Seen
24	Long-armed Sheath-tailed Bat	<i>Taphozous longimanus</i>	Resident	Seen
25	Black-bearded Tomb Bat	<i>Taphozous melanopogan</i>	Resident	Seen
26	Dusky Roundleaf Bat	<i>Hipposideros ater</i>	Resident	Seen
27	Fulvous Leaf-nosed Bat	<i>Hipposideros fulvus</i>	Resident	Seen
28	Dekhan Leaf-nosed Bat	<i>Hipposideros galeritus</i>	Resident	Seen
29	Schneider's Leaf-nosed Bat	<i>Hipposideros speoris</i>	Resident	Seen
30	Painted Bat	<i>Kerivoula picta</i>	Resident	Seen
31	Van Hasselt's Mouse-eared Bat	<i>Myotis hasseltii</i>	Resident	Seen
32	Indian Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus coromandra</i>	Resident	Seen
33	Pigmy Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus tenuis</i>	Resident	Seen
34	Lesser Yellow Bat	<i>Scotophilus kuhlii</i>	Resident	Seen
35	Indian Pangolin	<i>Manis crassicaudata</i>	Resident	Seen

36	Jungle Cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>	Resident	Seen
37	Fishing Cat	<i>Prionailurus viverrinus</i>	Resident	Seen
38	Golden Palm Civet	<i>Paradoxurus ceylonensis</i>	Endemic	Seen
39	Asian Palm Civet	<i>Paradoxurus hermaphroditus</i>	Resident	Seen
40	Small Indian Civet	<i>Viverricula indica</i>	Resident	Seen
41	Indian Grey Mongoose	<i>Herpestus edwardsii</i>	Resident	Seen
42	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestus smithii</i>	Resident	Seen
43	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>	Resident	Seen
44	Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>	Resident	Seen
45	Eurasian Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Resident	Seen
46	Sri Lanka White-striped Chevrotain	<i>Moschiola meminna</i>	Endemic	Seen
47	Chital	<i>Axis axis</i>	Resident	Seen
48	Sambar	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>	Resident	Seen
49	Wild Buffalo	<i>Bubalus arnee</i>	Resident	Seen
50	Feral Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus bubalis</i>	Resident	Seen