

# Sri Lanka's Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Report

6 –19 July 2018



Grey Slender Loris



Muntjac



Grizzled Giant Squirrel



Asian Elephant

Report & images by Saman Kumara Gamage



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Tour participants: Saman Kumara Gamage (leader) with two Naturetrek clients

## Highlights

We had good weather almost throughout the tour. Our mammal sighting of the tour was the spectacular Indian Flying Fox, followed by the Common Palm Squirrels. A good number of Asian Elephants were seen on our first jeep safari in Minneriya National Park. This park is famous for a congregation of many wild Asian Elephants coming together for mating, socializing and feeding. The endemic Purple-faced Leaf Monkey was also seen here, along with the more conspicuous Water Buffalo, Toque Macaque and Grey Langur. We were delighted with sightings of many Grey Slender Loris during our late evening drives in Sigiriya. Ring-tailed Civet, Black-naped Hare, White-spotted Mouse Deer and Indian Gerbil were creatures of the night that we enjoyed seeing.

Our visits to the historical sites gave us an insight into the country's glorious past, while giving us good opportunities to do some birding where we encountered Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Crested Serpent Eagle and many more. On our ascent to the central mountains of the island we made acquaintance with the mysterious Giant Flying Squirrel, the shy Muntjac and the friendly Sambar Deer of the Hortons Plains National Park. We recorded Brown Wood Owl, Collared Scops Owl, Brown Fish Owl and Jungle Owlet all in one day at their day roosts. On our safari at the famous Yala National Park we managed to see Leopard and Sloth Bear, making this another successful mammal tour. In total we saw 26 mammal species, 14 species of reptiles and amphibians, and 137 bird species.

## Day 1

Friday 6th July

The tour started with an overnight flight from the UK to Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka.

## Day 2

Saturday 7th July

The flight arrived at 1pm and after meeting Saman, we left the airport at 2pm. En route to Sigiriya we stopped for tea in a restaurant in Kurunegala. Our first mammal for the tour was Indian Flying Fox, followed by Common Palm Squirrel and Toque Macaque. Reptiles included Common House Gecko. Bird sightings were also plentiful with sightings of Ashy Woodswallow, Asian Koel, Black-headed Ibis, Red-wattled Lapwing, White-breasted Waterhen, White-throated Kingfisher, Common Kingfisher, House Crow and Common Myna.

We reached our hotel at 7.10 pm and had our dinner at 7.30pm. We did a night drive at 9pm which went on until 11pm.

## Day 3

Sunday 8th July

We had an early breakfast and then set out to scale the Sigiriya Lion Rock. At the site we encountered Grey Langurs and many birds including Crested Serpent Eagle, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Sri Lanka Woodshrike, White-browed Fantail, Red-vented Bulbul, Plain Prinia, Loten's Sunbird, Indian Robin, Brown-headed, Crimson-fronted and Coppersmith Barbets, Lesser Whistling Duck, Shikra, Paddyfield Pipit and Peregrine Falcon. We enjoyed the surrounding sights of this one-time citadel of King Kasyapa. We

visited the fresco room and also reached the summit to enjoy the clear views of the city below with a 360 degree view.

We returned to the hotel for lunch and then proceeded to Minneriya National Park. During our safari we encountered herds of Asian Elephants, Water Buffalo, Toque Macaque, Grey Langur and Purple-faced Leaf Monkey. Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Eurasian Spoonbill, Woolly-necked Stork, Spot-billed Pelican, Great and Little Egrets, Oriental Darter and Sri Lanka Junglefowl crowded the shores as Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Brahminy Kite, Indian Roller, Green Bee-eater, Malabar Pied Hornbill and Crested Treeswift soared over the waters.

We returned to the hotel at 6.30pm and did our checklist at 7pm, which was followed by dinner. At 9pm we did a night drive around the Sigiriya village and came across Ringed-tailed Civet, Black-naped Hare and Indian Gerbill. We returned to the hotel at 11.45pm and called it a night.

## Day 4

Monday 9th July

After breakfast we left to explore the Sigiriya sanctuary and Pidurangala forest. We saw a Schneider's Leaf-nosed Bat in a culvert and a few Langurs and Macaques.

We returned to the hotel for lunch and then set out to Dambulla Arboretum in search of the Grey Slender Loris. En route we had good sightings of Grey Mongoose and Grizzled Giant Squirrel. We reached Dambulla Arboretum at 5.30pm and after a cup of tea and an introduction of the centre, we set out in pursuit of the Loris. We managed to do the whole trail and see five different individuals at a distance before finally seen one just ten feet above our heads! We also came across a Mouse Deer. We returned to the hotel at 9pm and had a late dinner.

## Day 5

Tuesday 10th July

We did a pre-breakfast birding walk around the hotel premises and saw Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Black-rumped Flameback, Brown-capped Babbler, Alexandrine Parakeet, Common Iora, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Small Minivet, Black-hooded Oriole, Jungle Prinia, Asian Palm Swift, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Oriental White-Eye and Tickell's Blue Flycatcher.

We returned to the hotel for breakfast and then again set out to explore Sigiriya sanctuary, where we encountered Brown Fish Owl, Stork-billed Kingfisher, White-rumped Munia and Pale-billed Flowerpecker.

After lunch we left for Polonnaruwa to visit the ancient city. We first visited the famous Gal Vihara, where we saw the rock-cut Buddha statues from the Polonnaruwa period. Our next visits were to Image House, Vatadage, Nissankalatha Mandapa and the Gal Potha inscription, and the Palace compound followed by the Kings Council and the Royal Baths. We saw Purple-faced Leaf Monkey as we were exiting the ancient city, and Indian Pond Heron, Intermediate Egret, Pheasant-tailed Jacana and Alexandrine Parakeet were among the other wildlife we saw there.

We returned to the hotel and had dinner at 8.30pm. Afterwards we again set out for a night drive, during which we encountered Jungle Cat, three Grey Slender Loris and three White-spotted Mouse Deer. We returned to the hotel at 11.45pm and called it a night.

## Day 6

Wednesday 11th July

We checked out of the hotel after breakfast and then visited Dambulla Rock Cave Temple. This cave complex contains various paintings and statues dating back from the 1st century BC. After exploring the surroundings we continued, reaching a Spice Garden in Matale where we had our lunch, followed by a Spice tour.

Upon reaching Kandy we visited Udawattakele forest reserve. Toque Macaques were plentiful around the entrance of the reserve. We managed to see a Muntjac in the reserve and new bird sightings included the beautiful White-rumped Shama and the noisy Southern Hill Myna.

We reached our next hotel, The Tree of Life, in Kandy at 5.30pm. At 6.15pm we started our evening walk in the hotel garden and found Giant Flying Squirrel. After a successful evening and a hot dinner, we retired to our rooms.

## Day 7

Thursday 12th July

Our pre-breakfast walk yielded sightings of Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, Southern Hill Myna, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Common Hawk-Cuckoo and Rufous-bellied Hawk-Eagle.

The Botanical Gardens in Peradeniya was fruitful with large colonies of Giant Fruit Bats (Indian Flying Foxes) and Purple-rumped Sunbird. We left the Botanical Gardens at 11am and visited the Temple of the Tooth. This temple is a sacred place for Buddhists the world over as it houses the left canine tooth of the lord Buddha.

We returned to the hotel and enjoyed some down time before once again exploring the hotel garden, where we again encountered Giant Flying Squirrel. Another walk after dinner proved fruitless so we called it a night at 10pm..

## Day 8

Friday 13th July

On our pre-breakfast bird walk we saw Yellow-fronted Barbet and Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot. After breakfast we checked out of the hotel and proceeded to Nuwara Eliya. En route we visited a working tea plantation and enjoyed a tour of the factory, which was followed by a tea tasting session. At the factory we saw a couple of Hill Swallows flying by.

We reached our next hotel, The Heaven Seven, at 1pm and had a hot meal. At 2pm we set off to visit the Hakgala Botanical Gardens, home of the handsome Purple-faced Leaf Monkey montane race; the Bear Monkey. Before long the trees started shaking with each member of the Bear Monkey troop making its way closer to the flower plots. We were able to observe over 15 monkeys with around three mothers with young clutched around their bodies. Yellow-eared Bulbul, Sri Lanka White-Eye, Dull-blue Flycatcher and Great Tit were also seen.

The rains came in evening and we had to return to the hotel before it became very cold. We did our checklist and finished the day with an early dinner.

## Day 9

Saturday 14th July

With a hot cup of tea at 5am and our packed breakfast, we set off to Horton Plains. The morning was misty and cold and visibility was down to zero as we climbed up to Horton Plains National Park. We saw Sambar Deer, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Sri Lanka Bush Warbler, Pied Bush Chat, Indian Blackbird and Paddyfield Pipit during our walk. We also visited the World's End viewpoint and enjoyed the sights.

We returned to the hotel for lunch and then visited Victoria Park, where we encountered Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler and Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher. Our evening routine of drinks, checklist and dinner followed on our return to the hotel.

## Day 10

Sunday 15th July

We had a leisurely breakfast and checked out of the hotel at 8.30am. En route to Yala we visited Surrey Estate Bird Sanctuary where we saw Brown Wood Owl.

During our lunch stop in Ella we saw the bold Stripe-necked Mongoose. After taking in the scenery of the picturesque Ella town we drove to Debara Wewa tank where we encountered Brown Fish Owl, Collared Scops Owl and Jungle Owlet, along with more than 1,000 Flying Foxes.

We reached the Cinnamon Wild hotel at 7.30pm and after freshening up, met for dinner at 8pm.

## Day 11

Monday 16th July

We left the hotel at 5am with our packed meals and reached Lunugamvehera National Park at 6.30am. We saw many Spotted Deer as we entered the park. White-bellied Sea Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle and Crested Serpent Eagle circled the skies above us as we continued our journey. White-throated Kingfisher and Common Kingfisher were seen beside the Menik River as we drove across it. Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Yellow-wattled Lapwing and Lesser Adjutant were also seen as we drove near the river. Our drive continued with more Deer, Wild Boar and Water Buffalo sightings. A Muntjac was spotted near a waterhole with the very rare Rufous Woodpecker flying above it.

We left the park at 6pm and on our drive back encountered a huge Asian Elephant on the road. We reached the hotel at 8pm and went straight for dinner.

## Day 12

Tuesday 17th July

We reached Yala National Park by 6.20am and were welcomed by Wild Boar, Grey Langur, Toque Macaque, Ruddy Mongoose, Spotted Deer, Water Buffalo and Indian Palm Squirrel. At 6.30am we saw Sloth Bear on a path about 50 metres away from us. In the afternoon we saw a Leopard about 15 metres away! Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Blue-faced Malkoha, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Ashy Prinia, Indian Silverbill, Jerdon's Bush Lark, Plain Prinia, Pied Kingfisher, Whiskered Tern and Black-necked Stork were a few of the birds seen today.

We returned to the hotel at 6.30pm and met for dinner at 8pm. Later, at 9pm, we did a night drive and saw three Ringed-tailed Civets, many Black-naped Hares and Indian Gerbil.

## Day 13

Wednesday 18th July

We did a pre-breakfast bird walk around the hotel garden from 6.30am till 7.30am. We encountered four new birds which were Brown-backed Needletail, Alpine Swift, Gull-billed Tern and Little Ringed Plover. After breakfast we checked out of the hotel and proceeded to a restaurant in Ratnapura, where we had our lunch. We reached the Airport Garden Hotel at 5.30pm and did a bird walk in the hotel garden until 7pm. Our search focused on the Brown Hawk Owl but it we didn't see it. We retired to the restaurant and had dinner, followed by the checklist.

## Day 14

Thursday 19th July

After breakfast we left for the airport in time to catch our flight back to London, where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

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## Species Lists (some previous/alternative names in brackets)

### Mammals (26 species)

Grey Slender Loris, *Loris lydekkerianus*  
 Grey Langur, *Semnopithecus priam*  
 Sloth Bear, *Melursus ursinus*  
 White-spotted Mouse Deer, *Moschiola meminna*  
 Ruddy Mongoose, *Herpestes smithii*  
 Jungle cat, *Felis chaus*  
 Asian Elephant, *Elephas maximus*  
 Muntjac, *Muntiacus muntjac*  
 Sambar, *Cervus unicolor*  
 Common (Indian) Palm Squirrel, *Funambulus palmarum*  
 Giant Flying Squirrel, *Petaurista philippensis*  
 Indian Flying Fox, *Pteropus gigantea*  
 Schneider's Leaf-nosed Bat, *Hipposideros speoris*  
 Toque Macaque, *Macaca sinica*  
 Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, *Trachypithecus vetulus*  
 Small Indian Civet (Ring-tailed Civet), *Viverricula indica*  
 Grey Mongoose, *Herpestes edwardsii*  
 Stripe-necked Mongoose, *Herpestes vitticollis*  
 Leopard, *Panthera pardus kotiya*  
 Wild Boar, *Sus scrofa*  
 Spotted Deer, *Cervus axis*  
 Water Buffalo, *Bubalus Bubalis*  
 Grizzled Giant Squirrel, *Ratufa macroura*  
 Indian Hare (Black-naped Hare), *Lepus nigricollis*  
 Lesser False Vampire Bat, *Megaderma lyra*  
 Indian Gerbil, *Tatera indica*

### Reptiles & Amphibians (14 species)

Green Vine Snake, *Ahaetulla nasuta*  
 Asian Water Monitor, *Varanus salvator*  
 Common Rat Snake, *Ptyas mucosus maximus*  
 Fan-throated Lizard, *Sitana ponticeriana*  
 Soft-shelled Terrapin, *Lissemys punctata*  
 Common House Gecko, *Hemidactylus frenatus*  
 Bark Gecko, *Hemidactylus leschenaultii*  
 Bengal (Land) Monitor, *Varanus bengalensis*  
 Oriental (Common) Garden Lizard, *Calotes versicolor*  
 Sri Lanka Kangaroo Lizard, *Otocryptis wiegmanni*  
 Mugger Crocodile, *Crocodylus palustris*  
 Hard-shelled Terrapin, *Melanochelys trijuga parkeri*  
 Common Skink, *Eutropis carinata*  
 Kandyan Gecko, *Cnemaspis kandiana*

### Birds (bold = endemic or near endemic – 137 species)

Lesser Whistling Duck, *Dendrocygna javanica*  
 Indian Peafowl, *Pavo cristatus*  
 Painted Stork, *Mycteria leucocephala*  
 Woolly-necked Stork, *Ciconia episcopus*  
 Black-headed Ibis, *Threskiornis melanocephalus*  
 Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*  
 Eastern Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus coromandus*  
 Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea*  
 Great Egret, *Ardea alba*  
 Intermediate Egret, *Egretta intermedia*  
 Little Cormorant, *Microcarbo niger*  
 Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*  
 Black-winged Kite, *Elanus caeruleus*  
 Changeable Hawk-Eagle, *Nisaetus cirrhatous*  
 Shikra, *Accipiter badius*  
 White-bellied Sea Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucogaster*  
 White-breasted Waterhen, *Amaurornis phoenicurus*  
 Black-winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*  
 Red-wattled Lapwing, *Vanellus indicus*  
 Pheasant-tailed Jacana, *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*  
**Sri Lanka Junglefowl**, *Gallus lafayetii*  
 Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis*  
 Asian Openbill, *Anastomus oscitans*  
 Lesser Adjutant, *Leptoptilos javanicus*  
 Eurasian Spoonbill, *Platalea leucorodia*  
 Indian Pond Heron, *Ardeola grayii*  
 Black-necked Stork, *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*  
 Purple Heron, *Ardea purpurea*  
 Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*  
 Spot-billed Pelican, *Pelecanus philippensis*  
 Indian Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*  
 Oriental Darter, *Anhinga melanogaster*  
 Crested Serpent Eagle, *Spilornis cheela*  
 Rufous-bellied Hawk-Eagle, *Lophotriorchis kienerii*  
 Brahminy Kite, *Haliastur indus*  
 Grey-headed Fish Eagle, *Haliaeetus ichthyaeus*  
 Great Stone-Curlew (Great Thick Knee), *Esacus recurvirostris*  
 Yellow-wattled Lapwing, *Vanellus malabaricus*  
 Little Ringed Plover, *Charadrius dubius*  
 Gull-billed Tern, *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Whiskered Tern , *Chlidonias hybrida*

**Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon**, *Columba torringtoniae*

Common Emerald Dove , *Chalcophaps indica*

**Sri Lanka Green Pigeon** , *Treron pompadora*

Greater Coucal , *Centropus sinensis*

Asian Koel , *Eudynamys scolopaceus*

**Collared Scops Owl**, *Otus bakkamoena*

Brown Wood Owl , *Strix leptogrammica*

Indian Nightjar , *Caprimulgus asiaticus*

Brown-backed Needletail , *Hirundapus giganteus*

Alpine Swift , *Tachymarptis melba*

Stork-billed Kingfisher , *Pelargopsis capensis*

Common Kingfisher , *Alcedo atthis*

Green Bee-eater (Little Green Bee-eater), *Merops orientalis*

Malabar Pied Hornbill , *Anthracoceros coronatus*

Brown-headed Barbet , *Psilopogon zeylanicus*

**Crimson-fronted Barbet**, *Psilopogon rubricapillus*

Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker , *Dendrocopos nanus*

Black-rumped Flameback (Lesser Goldenback), *Dinopium benghalense*

Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*

Rose-ringed Parakeet , *Psittacula krameri*

**Sri Lanka Woodshrike** , *Tephrodornis affinis*

Common Iora , *Aegithina tiphia*

Small Minivet , *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*

Black-hooded Oriole , *Oriolus xanthornus*

White-browed Fantail , *Rhipidura aureola*

Indian Paradise Flycatcher (Asian Paradise Flycatcher), *Terpsiphone paradisi*

Indian Jungle Crow (Large-billed Crow), *Corvus culminatus*

Great Tit, *Parus major*

**Black-capped Bulbul** , *Pycnonotus melanicterus*

**Yellow-eared Bulbul** , *Pycnonotus penicillatus*

Yellow-browed Bulbul , *Acrithias indica*

**Sri Lanka Swallow**, *Cecropis hyperythra*

Zitting Cisticola , *Cisticola juncidis*

Ashy Prinia , *Prinia socialis*

Common Tailorbird , *Orthotomus sutorius*

Grey-headed Swamphen (Purple Swamphen), *Porphyrio poliocephalus*

Yellow-billed Babbler , *Turdoides affinis*

**Sri Lanka White-Eye** , *Zosterops ceylonensis*

Common Myna , *Acrideres tristis*

Indian Robin , *Copsychus fulvatus*

White-rumped Shama , *Copsychus malabaricus*

**Dull-blue Flycatcher**, *Eumyias sordidus*

Rock Dove (Common Pigeon), *Columba livia*

Spotted Dove , *Spilopelia chinensis*

Orange-breasted Green Pigeon , *Treron bicinctus*

Green Imperial Pigeon , *Ducula aenea*

Blue-faced Malkoha , *Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*

Common Hawk-Cuckoo , *Hierococcyx varius*

Brown Fish Owl , *Ketupa zeylonensis*

**Jungle Owlet**, *Glaucidium radiatum*

Crested Treeswift (Gray-rumped Treeswift), *Hemiprocne coronata*

Asian Palm Swift , *Cypsiurus balasiensis*

Indian Roller , *Coracias benghalensis*

White-throated Kingfisher , *Halcyon smymensis*

Pied Kingfisher , *Ceryle rudis*

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater , *Merops leschenaulti*

**Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill**, *Ocyroceros gingalensis*

**Yellow-fronted Barbet**, *Psilopogon flavifrons*

Coppersmith Barbet , *Psilopogon haemacephalus*

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker , *Dendrocopos mahrattensis*

Rufous Woodpecker , *Micropternus brachyurus*

Alexandrine Parakeet , *Psittacula eupatria*

**Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot**, *Loriculus beryllinus*

Ashy Woodswallow , *Artamus fuscus*

Black-headed Cuckooshrike , *Coracina melanoptera*

Orange Minivet (Scarlet Minivet/Flame Minivet), *Pericrocotus flammeus*

White-bellied Drongo , *Dicrurus caerulescens*

Black-naped Monarch , *Hypothymis azurea*

House Crow , *Corvus splendens*

Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher , *Culicicapa ceylonensis*

Jerdon's Bush Lark , *Mirafra affinis*

Red-vented Bulbul , *Pycnonotus cafer*

White-browed Bulbul , *Pycnonotus luteolus*

Hill Swallow , *Hirundo domicola*

**Sri Lanka Bush Warbler**, *Elaphornis palliseri*

Jungle Prinia , *Prinia sylvatica*

Plain Prinia , *Prinia inornata*

**Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler**, *Pomatorhinus melanurus*

**Brown-capped Babbler**, *Pellorneum fuscocapillus*

Oriental White-Eye , *Zosterops palpebrosus*

Southern Hill Myna (Lesser Hill Myna), *Gracula indica*

Indian Blackbird , *Turdus simillimus*

Oriental Magpie-Robin , *Copsychus saularis*

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher , *Cyornis tickelliae*

Pied Bush Chat , *Saxicola caprata*



Golden-fronted Leafbird , *Chloropsis aurifrons*

Purple-rumped Sunbird, *Nectarinia zeylonica*

House Sparrow , *Passer domesticus*

Scaly-breasted Munia , *Lonchura punctulata*

Paddyfield Pipit , *Anthus rufulus*

Indian Silverbill (White-throated Silverbill), *Euodice malabarica*

Pale-billed Flowerpecker , *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*

Loten's Sunbird , *Cinnyris lotenius*

White-rumped Munia , *Lonchura striata*

Tricolored Munia (Black-headed Munia), *Lonchura malacca*

Little Swift (House Swift), *Apus affinis*