

## Trip Report – Sri Lanka, Dec 2019

We spent 5 days/nights mammal watching at the start of our holiday in Sri Lanka. We saw 33 species in total, 27 new for our life list. Everything we saw matches up with many other trip reports to the area, our highlights were sloth bear and a completely unexpected otter.



*Toque macaque, Wilpattu NP*

We arranged the trip with Bird & Wildlife Sri Lanka, who are excellent operators and our guide Diluk was great. We concentrated on 3 nights in Wilpattu NP and 2 nights in Sigiriya. December really is the wrong time of year: it's the wet season, so vegetation is high and animals aren't concentrated around water, plus the farmers set off huge firecrackers to scare elephants out of the crops which (so our guide says) also scares off the nocturnal predators. This might explain how we saw none of the small cats. Zero, zilch, nada, despite putting in 24 hours of night spotlighting over 5 nights. Wrong time of year. Also a full moon.

Wilpattu NP is dry zone forest with lakes (and lots of flooding when we were there!). Morning and afternoon game drives are by safari truck, and often done as whole-day drives because it's about an hour along the access road into the heart of the park – bit dull doing that four times in a day. It's all about the leopards, although as other species pop up almost anywhere that's not a problem. **Chital** are common, **sambar** and **muntjac** were also seen on every drive. **Indian hare**, **wild buffalo**, **wild boar**, **Indian palm squirrel** and **ruddy mongoose** are all fairly easy; we saw each on every drive too. After a long day of searching we finally got a **leopard**, and then a second one ten minutes later. We also saw two **sloth bears** on different drives, one a very good look. There's an Indian flying fox roost near the picnic site with a resident troop of **toque macaques**, but the roost was empty when we visited. **Grey langur** were spotted near the picnic site too, as was a single **grizzled giant squirrel**. We got one **Indian grey mongoose** and one **golden jackal** as well. No elephants; they are very widely distributed in the wet season. There was a **fulvous leaf-nosed bat** roost at our lodgings, Wilpattu Safari Camp.



*Sloth bear, Wilpattu NP*

The night drives are outside the park, on minor roads and tracks through semi-wild agricultural land. We got a single **grey slender loris**, a couple of **Asian palm civets**, an **Asiatic long-tailed climbing mouse**, several **Indian gerbils**, more chital and several **white-spotted chevrotain**. Thin pickings for three night drives.

At Sigiriya we did two all-night drives; 9pm 'til 4am. Again, it's roads and tracks through a mixture of wilderness and agriculture. Many chevrotain, more gerbils, lots of Indian hares, some chital, several palm civets, also 2 short views of **small Indian civet**, several jackals. Two more grey slender loris, and a handful of bats: **Indian flying fox**, **short-nosed fruit bat**, **painted bat**, **pygmy pipistrelle**. We also randomly found a **Ceylon spiny mouse**. At the major reservoir with the big bund (dam) we picked up a **Eurasian otter** fishing at the edge and followed it a while. This is apparently a good spot for fishing cats, but as noted we saw none.



*Grey slender loris, Wilpattu NP*

During the day we visited a couple of local bat roosts known to Bird & Wildlife Team, and saw **black-bearded tomb bat**, **lesser false vampire bat**, **Cantor's leaf-nosed bat** and **rufous horseshoe bat**. We scouted for **purple faced leaf monkey** in the forest between Sigiriya rock and Pidurangala and picked up a small troop of them. Grey langurs and toque macaque were more common, and palm squirrels were present too.

On the rest of our trip we were in holiday mode, but saw both ruddy and grey mongooses a couple of times crossing roads, and found troops of purple faced leaf monkeys in forest patches a couple of times near Galle. In terms of things we missed: Indian elephant would have been nice, also golden palm civet should have been possible along with the jungle cat, rusty spotted cat or fishing cat. 24 hours of night drives! Surely we deserved one little cat?



*Purple faced leaf monkey, near Galle*