



Sri Lanka –  
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## **A mammal watching trip without a tour operator nor driver...**

We loved our time in Sri Lanka: Amazing mammals, the friendliest people, excellent food and a beautiful green and colourful country.

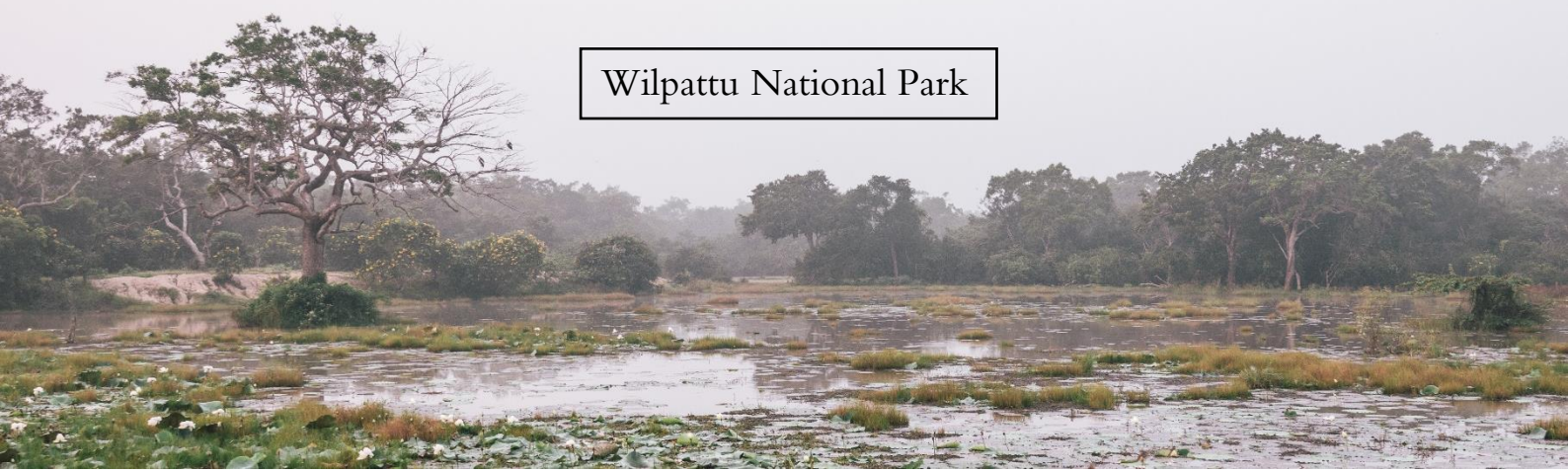
Since we like to organize our travels in a flexible way and discover a country on our own, we decided not to plan our trip with any tour operator. We think that this report might help others to organize their Sri Lanka trip on their own and travel on a low budget.

We rented a car with 'Kings Rent a car' and the service was good. They organised our driver license and brought us our car to the airport. We were gone within 15 minutes and met them again shortly before our flight at the airport. Unfortunately, every 4x4 car was already booked and we rented a very small car. We might have been able to drive into national parks on our own with a 4x4 but were very happy to have a small car to travel around in the end (we could easily overtake a tuk-tuk with another one on the other side). Anyway: The traffic is certainly different, and it needs continuous attention while driving, but it worked out fine for us. We don't think it would be a good idea to drive around at night in a busy place nor did we try to drive around in Colombo but other than that it was all fine.

We think that because we didn't book with a tour operator, we were able to support many different amazing people who helped us in our trip (in nearly every place we met competent local people, who had good knowledge of mammals).



## Wilpattu National Park



*Accommodation:* We stayed one night in a place called 'Thimbiriwewa Ecoresort Wilpattu'. The owners were friendly the room very big and with everything you need.

The beds might not have been the softest but when you do night and full day safari it doesn't matter anyway. The food was one of the best we had on the entire trip and the lunch boxes were also perfect. We stayed in the Wilpattu Tree House after that and wished we had stayed in the Ecoresort. It was also very nice but 6 times the price and the only thing that surpassed the other place were more comfortable beds and it was closer to the park.



*Night and Day Safari:* We organised everything through 'Bobby' which was about the same price as organised through a hotel. His guys were always very motivated and kind. The entry ticket to the park costs 8000 roupies and we paid 8000 roupies for the car full day and 4000 half days.

*Night safari:* The night safari (about 4-5 hours) costed 5000 roupies. We started our 4-night safari circuits by going left before the park entry following the lake (do not spotlight into the park) and went to a pond which is very good for Fishing and Rusty-spotted cats. It was just after the rainy season and there was very high grass everywhere besides the rice fields. The drivers said that it's much easier to spot mammals around august. We



We managed to spot a **fishing cat** anyway. When this loop ended, we were on the main road again and drive back away from the park. Just after passing an accommodation called 'Wild Lover Resort' we turned right and did another loop there. We saw many **jungle cats** as well as one **gray slender loris** there. We would see **sri lanka spotted chevrotains**, **indian hares**, **small Indian civets** as well as **chitals** on every night. One time we had an **asian palm civet** crossing the main road while driving back and spotted an **indian field mouse** next to the road. We definitely needed a 4x4 for the



night drives as the roads were wet and bumpy. Also we were asked twice what we were doing by locals and the answer 'night safari' was always fine.

*Day safari:* We saw many **leopards** (5 in two full day safaris) during the day and some drivers said that they see them on 90% of the days. They are generally quiet focussed on them if you don't say anything. If you ask to see other animals they will try for others. **Sloth bears** are more difficult, they said to see one about once every week, we were lucky to see one on the second day. If you go during the weekend it will be much more crowded as local people will visit the park as well. We saw one **asian elephant** in a lake which was lucky since there is a good spot in the park for them but elsewhere.



During the day both **ruddy** and **indian gray mongoose** crossed our way about 5 times. There are also Indian brown and striped-necked mongooses around, but they are less common, the latter seems to be very rare to see. There are **toque Macaque** around the breakfast/lunch area, sadly because tourists feed them. We also saw some **tufted gray langurs** around the park. **Grizzled giant squirrel** and **indian palm squirrels** are common and around, also outside of the park. **Golden jackals** seem to be quite rare in the park and we had one sighting going out of the park on the second day in late afternoon. We saw a couple of **wild boars**, **Indian muntjaks** and **sambars** had one sighting of **sri lankan**

**spotted chevrotain** found twice a heard of **wild asian buffalos** and saw many **chitals**.





*Contact:* We met Sunil in Sigiriya ([sunilbandara54@gmail.com](mailto:sunilbandara54@gmail.com); +94 77 275 25 50). He is a very passionate naturalist and guided us around the jungle of Pindurangala Rock and we saw some very exciting stuff (**rufus horseshoe bat**, **lesser woolly horseshoe bat**, one **tickell's bat** pangolin and porcupine tracks ect.). We organised our second excellent night drive through him with Thusitha (+94 77 355 86 19) from the lodge 'Back of Beyond'. They might not be always available for night drives as they don't organise too many night drives to respect the wildlife.

During the day we spotted both **toque macaque** and **tufted gray langur** as well as **grizzled giant squirrel** and **indian palm squirrel**.

*Night safari:* One the first night we went spotlighting on our own. We spotlighted on the road from Sigiriya to the Rocks and on the road around the rocks. Next, we spotlighted on the road from the rocks to Moragaswewa and checked the two ponds shortly before Moragaswewa. We also did the area of 4 ponds just north of the rocks. There is not really need of a 4x4 for these roads.

We saw 4 **asian elephants**, a couple of **indian hares**, **sri lanka spotted chevrotains**, **chitals** and **small indian civets**, one **jungle cat**, one **golden jackal** and one **sambar**. We were not able to correctly identify a couple of more animals because many were easily scared and quickly gone when they were in the bushes very close to us.

As previously mentioned, we went on the second night drive with Thursitha and Sunil. They use red lights for the bushes nearby and the white light for longer distances which was a very meaningful combination to us. Animals close by seemed not to be scared of the red light and didn't have to half-close their eyes. Therefore they seemed to stay longer and we were able to identify them. We saw one **fishing cat** by foot and two others with the car. We spotted seven **grey slender loris**, one **asiatic long-tailed**



**climbing mouse** in the bushes, two **indian porcupines** (our porcupine curse is definitely broken), one **sri lanka spotted chevrotain** and as a great last gift from Sigiriya a **rusty-spotted cat** next to the 'Back of Beyond' lodge!





We were in Gal Oya to start a research about the small cats of Sri Lanka (population density estimation of fishing cat and rusty-spotted cat). It is a lovely, quite luxurious, very calm and not much crowded place. We met Jayaba through the study (Jayaba Jinasena on Facebook or +94 77 390 44 93). He is also a freelancer guide and accompanied us in Wilpattu. We can really recommend him: He has a great knowledge about wildlife, is very passionate and will try very long and hard to spot the targets. He is also a great company: A funny, kind and calm guy.

Unfortunately, we didn't manage to go to the national park during the day besides the lakeside.

We did one night drive and spotted two **indian porcupines**, a couple of **indian hares** as well as **chitals**, one **golden jackal**, one **small indian civet**, one **jungle cat** and one **golden wet zone palm civet**.

We also did a boat tour on the next morning and spotted a swimming **asian elephant** and a couple more of them on the shore. We also saw a **wild boar** and a couple of **chitals**.

We saw a **grizzled giant squirrel** around the lodge and a **lesser woolly horseshoe bat** hanging on the roof of the restaurant.



## Horton Plains

We went to Horton Plains for one day and two nights. We stayed in a homestay in Ohiya (forest cyniciam holiday bungalow – where we had the best rice and curry).

*Night safari:* We did two night drives. We drove from Ohiya to the National Park and took the road from there to Rahangala. The road from Ohiya to Rahangala was not very productive for us, we saw one **sambar** and one **small indian civet**. We saw two **wild boars** as well as one **sri lanka bi-coloured rat** in the village of Ohiya. On the road from Ohiya to the National Park we saw many **sambars**, three **small indian civet** and one beautiful sighting of a **red slender loris**.

*Day safari:* We didn't see anything new in park that we didn't see in the forest outside of it besides many many homo sapiens tornacense. The entrance costs about 8100 roupies and you can easily enter with any car (most tourists visit by tuk-tuk). We didn't expect that at all and tried to escape to the only other trail possible. It was really hot when the crowd started to go away from the 'World's End'. It seems that this is midway between Kandy and Udawalawa and this hike is the thing to do. Anyway.

We spotted one **muntjac** and three groups of **purple-faced monkeys** outside the park. When driving away from Ohiya we finally spotted our first **dusky palm squirrel** which are apparently very common.







Udawalawa was also very crowded. Many tourists visit this park to see elephants. We heard that in the morning about 500 jeeps enter the park but it's nearly empty in the afternoon. Apparently, you have to be there at 4:30 am and then you are about the 100<sup>th</sup> car which means that you will be in the park at around 7:45 am because only one person is working at the ticket counter. We decided to go only in the afternoon and did one night drive.

*Day safari:* As expected we saw many **asian elephants** in the park. We told the driver to focus on other mammals and he was very happy to do so. **Jungle cats** seem quite easy to spot there and we spotted two on every afternoon we were there. Brown mongoose seemed to be pretty common there as well but we didn't see any. We saw a couple of **chitals**, lots of domestic water buffaloes that illegally graze there, **toque macaque** at the break stops were tourists feed them, one group of **tufted gray langurs**, five **indian palm squirrels**, three **indian hares** and two **golden jackals** which are apparently also common in this park.



*Night safari:* We don't know where exactly we drove around, but we definitely took the road next to the big dam on the way to the national park to start and drove around in that region (alongside rivers and next to ponds). On that one night drive we saw two golden jackals, one **fishing cat**, a couple of **indian hares**, one **blanford's rat** running over the road and one **indian field mouse** running next to the river.



## Mirissa

The last stop of our trip was in Mirissa where we did two boat tours.



We were a bit lost with the choice of the hundred of operators that all claim to respect the animals and their environment. We decided to go with the 'Whale Watching Club' in the end and were very happy with their service. They were obviously very focused on the blue whale because it's the animal that the great majority of tourists want to see. They restrict the amount of people to 35 persons which was totally fine and don't

define a duration of the trip: They will look for blue whales as long as it takes (or until people want to go back). Also, the crew were all former fishermen which seemed to be very passionate at what they were doing and seemed to respect the ocean and their inhabitants very much. They had a great knowledge about pretty much everything around from krill to whale. Finally, they seemed also to be aware of environmental issues and made sure that no tourist would throw out anything of the boat (they even tried to give bamboo straws but got reclamations). We payed 5000 roupies each (breakfast, king coconut and roti included) which is a bit more expensive that the 50+ people boats (3000 roupies I think).

The first day we were out for four hours since it didn't take long until we stopped our first **blue whale**. But before that a group of **spinner dolphins** crossed our path and stayed with us for a while. We saw four blue whales in total. The captain advised us not to come back the next day as he was pretty sure to see the same animals again. Luckily, we decided to come again...



The next day we spotted **bottlenose dolphins** and found nothing else for a more than 3 hours. We started to secretly hope for **killer whales** but would have never thought that we were really lucky enough to have an amazing view of a group of four: What an



amazing mammal and moment! We couldn't believe it and neither did the crew: They told us that they have about 5 to 6 sightings per year.

Later we were still able to spot a blue whale and again a group of spinner dolphins. In total we were out for 8 hours but the captain had great difficulty to stay out this long as the people were sadly getting impatient despite this amazing day.

We hope that this report is going to be useful to some of you and don't hesitate to contact us for further questions.



## Mammals

| Name                               | Scientific name                  | Wilpattu               | Sigiriya | Gal Oya | Horton Plains | Udawalawe |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|----------|---------|---------------|-----------|
| Asian elephant                     | <i>Elephas maximus</i>           | X                      | X        | X       |               | X         |
| Grey slender loris                 | <i>Loris lydekkerianus</i>       | X                      | X        | X       |               |           |
| Red slender loris                  | <i>Loris tardigradus</i>         |                        |          |         | X             |           |
| Rufus horseshoe bat                | <i>Rhinolophus rouxii</i>        |                        | X        |         |               |           |
| Lesser woolly horseshoe bat        | <i>Rhinolophus beddomei</i>      |                        | X        | X       |               |           |
| Tickell's bat                      | <i>Hesperoptenus tickelli</i>    |                        | X        |         |               |           |
| Indian Flying Fox                  | <i>Pteropus giganteus</i>        | On the way to airport. |          |         |               |           |
| Toque macaque                      | <i>Macaca sinica</i>             | X                      | X        |         |               | X         |
| Tufted gray langur                 | <i>Semnopithecus priam</i>       | X                      | X        |         |               | X         |
| Purple-faced langur                | <i>Trachypithecus vetulus</i>    |                        |          |         | X             |           |
| Indian porcupine                   | <i>Hystrix indica</i>            |                        | X        | X       |               |           |
| Grizzled giant squirrel            | <i>Ratufa macroura</i>           | X                      | X        | X       |               |           |
| Indian palm squirrel               | <i>Funambulus palmarum</i>       | X                      | X        |         |               | X         |
| Dusky palm squirrel                | <i>Funambulus obscurus</i>       |                        |          |         | X             |           |
| Indian hare                        | <i>Lepus nigricollis</i>         | X                      | X        | X       |               | X         |
| Blanford's rat                     | <i>Cremnomys blanfordi</i>       |                        |          |         |               | X         |
| Indian field mouse                 | <i>Mus booduga</i>               | X                      |          |         |               | X         |
| Asiatic long-tailed climbing mouse | <i>Vandeleuria oleracea</i>      |                        | X        |         |               |           |
| Sri lanka bi-coloured rat          | <i>Srilankamys ohienensis</i>    |                        |          |         | X             |           |
| Jungle cat                         | <i>Felis chaus</i>               | X                      | X        | X       |               | X         |
| Rusty-spotted cat                  | <i>Prionailurus rubiginosus</i>  |                        | X        |         |               |           |
| Fishing cat                        | <i>Prionailurus viverrinus</i>   | X                      | X        |         |               | X         |
| Leopard                            | <i>Panthera pardus</i>           | X                      |          |         |               |           |
| Asian palm civet                   | <i>Paradoxurus heraphroditus</i> | X                      |          |         |               |           |
| Golden wet zone palm civet         | <i>Paradoxurus aureus</i>        |                        |          | X       |               |           |
| Small indian civet                 | <i>Viverricula indica</i>        | X                      | X        | X       | X             |           |
| Indian gray mongoose               | <i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>       | X                      |          |         |               |           |
| Ruddy mongoose                     | <i>Herpestes smithii</i>         | X                      |          |         |               |           |
| Golden jackal                      | <i>Canis aureus</i>              | X                      | X        | X       |               | X         |
| Sloth bear                         | <i>Melursus ursinus</i>          | X                      |          |         |               |           |
| Wild boar                          | <i>Sus scrofa</i>                | X                      |          | X       | X             |           |
| Sri lanka spotted chevrotain       | <i>Moschiola meminna</i>         | X                      | X        |         |               |           |
| Sambar deer                        | <i>Rusa unicolor</i>             | X                      | X        | X       | X             |           |
| Chital                             | <i>Axis axis</i>                 | X                      | X        | X       |               | X         |
| Indian muntjac                     | <i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>         | X                      |          |         | X             |           |
| Wild asian water buffalo           | <i>Bubalus arnee</i>             | X                      |          |         |               |           |

...and in Mirissa

|                    |                              |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Blue whale         | <i>Balaenoptera musculus</i> |
| Bottlenose dolphin | <i>Tursiops truncatus</i>    |
| Spinner dolphin    | <i>Stenella longirostris</i> |
| Killer whale       | <i>Orcinus orca</i>          |