

# SRI LANKA Dec 24 – Jan 02, 2020

40 mammals, 213 birds, assorted reptiles and inverts!

Tour operator: Bird and Wildlife Team (<https://www.birdandwildlifeteam.com/>)

Species list key: SS = single sighting MS = multiple sightings SI = single individual MI = multiple individuals

P0 = no photo opportunity P1 = poor photo opp P2 = average photo opp P3 = excellent photo opp

Species		Notes	Lifer?
Indian Hare	MS/MI/P2	Mostly on night drives	N
Sri Lankan Giant Squirrel	MI/MS/P1	Only 2 seen	Y
Three-striped Palm Squirrel	MI/MS/P3		N
Layard's Palm Squirrel	MI/MS/P2	Endemic	Y
Dusky Striped Squirrel	MI/MS/P2	Endemic	Y
Asiatic Long-tailed Climbing Mouse	MI/MS/P2	Night drives only	Y
Black Rat	MI/SS/P1		Y
Indian Gerbil	MI/MS/P1	Night drives only	Y
Indian Crested Porcupine	MI/MS/P1	Night hike	Y
Small Indian Civet	SI/SS/P0	Night drive	Y
Asian Palm Civet	SI/SS/P1	Night drive	N
Jungle Cat	SI/MS/P2	Daytime!	Y
Fishing Cat	SI/SS/P0	Night drive	Y
Leopard	MI/MS/P1		N
Ruddy Mongoose	MI/MS/P3		N
Short-tailed Mongoose	MI/MS/P3		Y
Golden Jackal	MI/MS/P1		Y
Sloth Bear	SI/SS/P0		N
Asian House Shrew	SI/SS/P0	Seen by LVN and DVN	N/A
Indian Flying Fox	MI/MS/P3		N
Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat	MI/MS/P0		Y
Fulvous Fruit Bat	MI/SS/P0		Y
Dusky Roundleaf Bat	MI/SS/P0		Y
Schneider's Leaf-nosed Bat	MI/MS/P2		Y
Lesser Large-footed Myotis	MI/SS/P0		Y
Kelaart's Pipistrelle	MI/SS/P0		Y
Pygmy Pipistrelle	MI/SS/P0		Y
Red Slender Loris	SI/SS/P0	Endemic	Y
Toque Macaque	MS/MI/P3	Endemic	Y
Tufted Grey Langur	MS/MI/P3		N
Purple-faced Leaf-monkey	MS/MI/P3	Endemic	Y
Sri Lankan (White-striped) Chevrotain	MS/MI/P1	Endemic	Y
Eurasian Wild Boar	MS/MI/P2		N
Sambar	MS/MI/P3		N
Chital	MS/MI/P3		N
Indian Muntjac	SS/SI/P0		N
Wild Buffalo	MS/MI/P3	But were they????	Y
Feral Water Buffalo	MS/MI/P3		Y
Asian Elephant	MS/MI/P3		N
Blue Whale	MS/MI/P2		N

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My wife, adult daughter and I arranged a bird and mammal tour through the highly recommended Bird and Wildlife Team. I can honestly say that this trip exceeded all of our expectations. Every detail was arranged perfectly, accommodations and food were fantastic and the driving and guiding were of the highest quality. Our guide for the entire trip was Diluksha Soysa and I cannot recommend him enough!

I recognize there are already numerous Sri Lanka trip reports posted on mammalwatching, and I am not sure this one will add much. But it may prove useful to those of you that are either not hard core listers or are traveling with family or friends that meet that description.

For example, Dilu (and often local guides) and drivers were always willing to stay out on night drives or hikes much longer than I was. I never lasted past 1am and sometimes packed it in much earlier. In addition, we set no live traps and the only roosting bats we searched out were the obvious fruit bats. So I guess what I am saying is that the mammal list in particular could have been larger if I had been willing to put in the effort that Dilu was offering.

We arrived in Colombo, Sri Lanka via Korean Air at about 4am on Dec 24<sup>th</sup>. On advice, we exchanged money at the airport. Sri Lanka has what is known as a "closed currency" and it cannot be found outside of the country. We met Dilu as planned and were whisked off to our first destination, Nuwara Eliya. Along the way, we managed to identify **Kelaart's Pipistrelle** in flight. We stopped as the sun was rising to catch the bird activity. In addition to birds such as Sri Lankan Hanging-parrot and Asian Palm-swift, we found our second mammal, the endemic **Purple-faced Leaf-monkey**. We managed **Sri Lankan Giant Squirrel** while driving and **Three-striped Palm Squirrel** at our breakfast stop. Our fifth mammal came when we stopped for tea. My wife spotted an **Indian Muntjac** from our open-air seating. The view was fleeting but long enough for me to raise my binoculars and gain a clear look. This turned out to be our only Muntjac of the trip. We stopped at the two **Indian Flying Fox** roosts we encountered and I was able to photograph them well.

Our hotel for the next two nights was amazing. We checked in and headed out for some birding. Dinner that evening was a huge buffet in honor of Christmas Eve. No night activities, thank goodness!

Day 2 (Dec 25) included a 430 am start to drive up to Horton Plains National Park. We arrived at a roadside location before sunrise to specifically look for Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon. In the process, we encountered more Leaf-monkeys and heard our first **Toque Macaques**. We saw Toques several times over several days but always as roadside beggars.

Horton Plains NP is most famous for the World's End trail. We did not hike the trail and perhaps were the only ones visiting the Park that morning that did not. This was going to be our only high elevation experience. We had **Sambar Deer** in the distance and a close encounter with a foraging **Brown Mongoose**. Later, another Sambar approached our vehicle obviously hoping for a handout, but left disappointed. On a short hiking trail, we encountered our first **Sri Lankan Dusky-striped Squirrel**.

After lunch, we visited two locations in search of birds. One was Victoria Park in the center of town. We found our target birds along with several **Black Rats** in the vegetation behind some food stands. It was Christmas day and the park was full of families enjoying the nice weather.

Day 3 was our longest driving day as we headed to the rainforest lodge in Sinharaja. This new ecosystem offered new birds and mammals. The beautiful **Layard's Squirrel** was our first new mammal, followed by a **Ruddy Mongoose** crossing the road a few minutes later. The rainforest ecosystem was very different. Here, we wore leech socks and tucked in our shirts (and still managed to get bit). The lodge we stayed in was nice, but basic. There is also a 35 minute ride to the lodge on a very bumpy road. For anyone that has ever experience the "Maasi massage" in Kenya, this could be called the "Sri Lanka shake" or something more creative. The ride was certainly tolerable, but it meant that any night drive would have to include the ride down and then back up again. Our first night drive in the rainforest was met with a steady rain for hours until I finally called it off. We saw nothing.

Day 4 brought better weather and some great Sri Lanka Junglefowl sightings. Purple-faced Leaf-monkeys showed up at the lodge and put on a great show. That night, we added **Indian Hare** to our list of mammals rather easily and **Red Slender Loris** with some difficulty. We were hearing two different individuals but they proved elusive. I managed a brief view in the head torch and was grateful for it. We did not find civets or the other loris species.

Day 5 found us on the road again headed to Udawalawa National Park. On the way we stopped at a reservoir for some birding. After lunch, we headed into the park for a four-hour game drive. **Asian Elephants**, a family favorite, were spotted numerous times and close to the road. We also added **Feral Water Buffalo**, **Asian House Shrew** (unseen by me), and a daytime **Jungle Cat**! My daughter spotted the cat and we all were on it quickly. We got good views at perhaps 15-20 meters and I was able to get a few photos. A night drive to areas around the park (not in it) produced new species: **Asiatic Long-tailed Climbing Mouse**, **Golden Jackal**, **Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat**, **Fulvous Fruit Bat**, **Dusky Roundleaf Bat**, **Brown Bat**, and **Sri Lankan (white-striped) Chevrotain**. We were out until 1am before I had to call it quits. I was sleeping in the vehicle! This was one of two very productive night drives of the trip.

Day 6 saw us on the road again. We left at 9am and headed to Tissa. We were led to several species of roosting owls by two young men on a motorbike who have created a business out of leading birders to these spots. Our best mammal sighting of the morning was the large flying fox roost near Tissa. The sign claims 10,000 individuals but I believe that is currently a huge overestimate. Still, it was impressive and I had to be dragged away to continue our journey.

After checking into our hotel, we headed to Yala National Park for a four-hour game drive. New species of mammal were **Leopard**, **Chital**, **Tufted Grey Langur** and **Eurasian Boar**. Leopard was clearly the prize here and the crush of vehicles seemed somehow more disorganized than what we have experienced in any of the African countries we have been to as well as India. Our night drive went to 1am and produced **Pygmy Pipistrelle**, **Schneider's Leaf-nosed Bat**, **Asian Palm Civet**, **Indian Gerbils**, **Small Indian Civet** and **Fishing Cat**. We had some excellent snake encounters that night as well including Sand Boa and Verigated Kukri Snake.

Day 7 began before dawn as we headed into Yala National Park for another game drive. Again we found Leopard but our best sighting was a **Sloth Bear** that quickly crossed the road in front of us and another vehicle. No chance for a photo but a memorable encounter none the less. We also found what we thought were **Wild Buffalo**. Can someone help me with this? Other sources say no Wild Buffalo in Sri Lanka. THANKS!

We spent the afternoon walking, looking for birds. We ended at the flying fox roost where I was able to get more photos. Night drive produced no new species and I called it off early in favor of sleep.

Day 8 saw us leaving at 5am for Bundala National Park. We walked the road at sunrise for birds. Notably, we found three species of bittern. Bundala was beautiful and our rarest bird, the Bay-backed Shrike, was found there. No night drive. No new mammals this day. It was New Year's Eve and our hotel had a large party. We did not make it anywhere close to midnight 😊.

Day 9 was our last true wildlife day. We had an early morning whale watch scheduled. **Blue Whales** were our only cetacean on the tour but we also had a close encounter with a Ridley's Olive Sea Turtle. It was a beautiful day to be on the water and we did manage some close views of Blue Whale before we had to head back.

Birding in the afternoon was productive and we found signs of porcupine several times. We decided to head back to this spot (Kilavakale) for a night hike. However, we never made it there because we found two different **Indian Crested Porcupines** at a closer location.

Day 10 found us traveling back to the airport in Colombo. We stopped at the Dutch fort in Galle on our way and added one final bird species to the list.

Indian Palm Squirrel



Indian Flying Fox















Daytime Jungle Cat!









Blue Whale

