

Bird-watching in Sri Lanka January 2013

Trip Report by Morten Brendstrup-Hansen

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Introduction

My wife and I visited Sri Lanka for bird-watching in January 2013. We made the planning of the trip with useful assistance from *Eco Team* (<http://www.srilankaecotourism.com/>) and *Eco Team* took care of all practicalities such as transport, hotel reservations, entrance fees and guides. We had a car with driver during the whole trip and our driver, Anil, also served as a valuable guide. Anil is an experienced guide with a good command of English and excellent knowledge of Sri Lankan society and history and, although he is not primarily a bird guide, he did a brilliant job with spotting birds and he collected much useful information from fellow guides who had more ornithological knowledge.

The arrangement worked out very well and we can whole-heartedly recommend the services of *Eco Team* as well as those of Anil (kttanil@gmail.com or phone 0094 (0) 718012259)

Jetwing Eco Holidays is another major tour operator in Sri Lanka with a good reputation, but, for unknown reasons, that company did not reply to my emails.

Sri Lanka is a well known and much visited birding destination and there are good introductions to the country and its birding localities in the following trip reports available on the Internet:

Sri Lanka 23. January - 5. February 2011 / by Erling Krabbe, Morten Heegaard, Niels Riis and Sri Lanka 12-31/1 2010 / by Uffe Gjøl Sørensen & Jørgen Bech

The fieldguide *Birds of Sri Lanka / by Deepal Warakagoda et al. - London: Helm, 2012* also contains introductions to localities.

Birds, especially wetland birds, are extremely abundant in Sri Lanka. This, of course, makes a visit to the country an unforgettable experience for the bird-watcher, but it also means that attempting to identify and count, say, all the white egrets, terns or cormorants seen would be a waste of time considering all the other interesting birds present. Therefore, the species account of this report is basically just a list of the species encountered on the trip. Many species have been marked with a W indicating that they were widely seen. For other species encountered more locally, localities are summarized and for a minor selection of species, details of number, locality and date are given.

Itinerary

10.01 Arrival Bandaranaike International Airport (Colombo). Drive to Anuradhapura via Anawilundawa (Ramsar Site). Two nights in Palm Garden Village Hotel.

11.01 Historical sites near Anuradhapura.

12.01 Drive to Sigiriya via Dambulla. Two nights in Sigiriya Village Hotel.

13.01 Villages and lake N of Sigiriya.

14.01 Sigiriya Rock Fortress. Drive to Giritale via Minneriya National Park. Two nights in Giritale Hotel.

- 15.01 Historical Sites of Polonnaruwa.
- 16.01 Drive to Hunas Falls via Sigiriya. Two nights in Hunas Falls Hotel.
- 17.01 Hunas Falls.
- 18.01 Drive to Kandy. One night In Mountain Breeze Hotel.
- 19.01 Kandy, Unawatakele Forest. Drive to Nuwara Eliya. Two nights in the Rock Hotel.
- 20.01 Horton Plains
- 21.01 Drive to Kitulgala. One night in the Plantation Hotel.
- 22.01 Kitulgala, Sisira's Lodge etc.. Drive to Sinharaja. Three nights in Blue Magpie Lodge.
- 23.01 Sinharaja Forest Reserve
- 24.01 Sinharaja Forest Reserve
- 25.01 Drive to Udawalawe. Two nights in Kalu's Hideaway.
- 26.01 Udawalawe
- 27.01 Drive to Tissa via lake at Thanamalwila. Two nights in Taprospa Resort.
- 28.01. Yala National Park, Bundala National Park
- 29.01 Bundala National Park. Drive to Mirissa via coastal wetlands. Two nights in Palace Mirissa
- 30.01 Whale safari, visit to Kirala Kele wetlands.
- 31.01 Drive to Bandaranaike International Airport via Galle, Bentota and Colombo. Departure.

In general, the hotels were excellent and some, like the Palm Garden Village Hotel and the Hunas Falls Hotel were decidedly luxurious. The Mountain Breeze Hotel of Kandy was OK, but dull. Kalu's Hideaway appeared to be badly managed. Better alternatives should be available in Kandy as well as at Udawalawe.

Thanks

Warm thanks are due to Lakshi of *Eco Team's* office and not least to Anil for excellent company and brilliant guidance on the trip.

Species Account

Sri Lanka Spurfowl (*Galloperdix bicalcarata*) 2 heard and seen well at the edge of the village close to the entrance to the Sinharaja Forest Reserve 24.01

Sri Lanka Junglefowl (*Gallus lafayetii*) W

Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) W

Fulvous Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) W

Cotton Pygmy Goose (*Nettapus coromandelianus*) W

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) ca. 100 Kirala Kele 30.01

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) 8 Yala 28.01

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) W

Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) W

Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) W

Woolly-necked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*) Minneriya, Polonnaruwa, Udawalawe

Black-necked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) 1 Yala 28.01

Lesser Adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*) 6 Polonnaruwa 15.01

Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) W

Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) Yala, Bundala

Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) Thanamalwila, Bundala, Kirala Kele

Cinnamon Bittern (*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*) 1 at small marsh near entrance to Sinharaja 24.01

Black Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*) 1 Kirala Kele 30.01

Striated Heron (*Butorides striata*) Bundala

Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) W

Eastern Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus coromandus*) W

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) W

Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) W

Eastern Great Egret (*Ardea modesta*) W

Intermediate Egret (*Egretta intermedia*) W

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) W

Western Reef Heron (*Egretta gularis*) 1 Bundala 28.01

Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*) W

Little Cormorant (*Microcarbo niger*) W

Indian Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*) W

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) Tissa

Oriental Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*) W

Western Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) 1 Udawalawe 27.01, 1 Bundala 28.01

Crested Honey Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*) Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa

Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus axillaris*) ca. 10 Udawalawe 26.01

Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*) W

White-bellied Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) W

Grey-headed Fish Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*) Sigiriya, Udawalawe, Bundala

Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) W

Crested Goshawk (*Accipiter trivirgatus*) 1 en route Bundala-Mirissa 29.01

Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) Sigiriya, Giritale, Bundala

Besra (*Accipiter virgatus*) Hunas Falls, Kitulgala, Sinharaja

Himalayan Buzzard (*Buteo burmanicus*) 1 Hunas Falls 16.01

Black Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*) W

Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) 2 Tissa 27.01

Rufous-bellied Hawk-Eagle (*Lophotriorchis kienerii*) 1 Hunas Falls 17.01

Crested Hawk-Eagle (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*) N of Sigiriya, Hunas Falls, Udawalawe, en route Bundala-Mirissa.

Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) Sigiriya, Horton Plains, en route Sinharaja-Udawalawe

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) 1 N of Sigiriya 13.01

White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) W

Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) Bundala

Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) W

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) W

Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*) 5 Thanamalwila 27.01

Barred Buttonquail (*Turnix suscitator*) Udawalawe, Yala

Indian Stone-curlew (*Burhinus indicus*) 3 Anuradhapura 11.01

Great Stone-curlew (*Esacus recurvirostris*) Yala, Bundala

Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) Udawalawe, Yala, Bundala, en route Bundala-Mirissa, Kirala Kele

White-headed Stilt (*Himantopus leucocephalus*) 1 Bundala 29.01

Yellow-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus malabaricus*) Yala, Bundala

Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) W

Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) Bundala

Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) Bundala

Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) Bundala

Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*) Bundala

Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) Bundala

Lesser Sand Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*) Udawalawe, Bundala

Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) W

Pin-tailed Snipe (*Gallinago stenura*) 4 Yala 28.01 probably this species

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) Yala, Bundala, en-route Bundala-Mirissa

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) 1 Bentota 31.01

Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) 1 Bundala 28.01

Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) Yala, Bundala, en-route Bundala-Mirissa

Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*) Udawalawe, Yala

Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) Udawalawe, Bundala

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*) 2 Udawalawe 26.01

Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) Udawalawe, Yala, Bundala

Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*) Yala, Bundala

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) Nuwara Eliya, Udawalawe, Yala, Bundala

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) Yala, Bundala

Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) Udawalawe, Yala, Bundala

Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) Bundala

Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) 2 Bundala 28.01

Oriental Pratincole (*Glareola maldivarum*) 4 Udawalawe 25.01

Small Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*) 9 Bundala 28.01

Brown-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*) Bundala

Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) W

Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) Bundala

Swift Tern (*Thalasseus bergii*) Bundala

Lesser Crested Tern (*Thalasseus bengalensis*) Yala, Bundala

Little Tern (*Sternula albifrons*) Bundala

Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*) W

Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon (*Columba torringtoniae*) 15 Hunas Falls 18.01

Spotted Dove (*Spilopelia chinensis*) W

Common Emerald Dove (*Chalcophaps indica*) Palm Garden Village, Sinharaja

Orange-breasted Green Pigeon (*Treron bicinctus*) Udawalawe, Yala

Sri Lanka Green Pigeon (*Treron pompadora*) Sigiriya, Kandy, Kitulgala

Green Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula aenea*) W

Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot (*Loriculus beryllinus*) Hunas Falls, en-route Nuwara Eliya-Kitulgala, Kitulgala

Alexandrine Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*) Hunas Falls, Udawalawe

Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) W

Layard's Parakeet (*Psittacula calthropae*) Hunas Falls, Sinharaja

Green-billed Coucal (*Centropus chlororhynchos*) 2 Sinharaja 25.01

Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*) W

Sirkeer Malkoha (*Taccocua leschenaultii*) 1 ad Yala 28.01

Red-faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*) 1 Sinharaja 23.01, 1 Sinharaja 24.01

Chestnut-winged Cuckoo (*Clamator coromandus*) 1 Minneriya National Park 14.01

Jacobin Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) 3 Yala 28.01

Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopaceus*) W

Plaintive Cuckoo (*Cacomantis merulinus*) 1 Tanamalwila 27.01

Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) 3 Udawalawe 26.01

Common Hawk-Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) 1 Kitulgala 22.01

Indian Cuckoo (*Cuculus micropterus*) 2 Sigiriya 12.01

Western Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) 2 Tivanka Image House (Polonnaruwa) 15.01

Serendib Scops Owl (*Otus thilohoffmanni*) 1 Sinharaja 23.01 difficult to find in dense forest stand close to the entrance gate, but allowed prolonged view when located

Brown Fish Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*) Lake N of Sigiriya, Unawatakele, Udawalawe

Chestnut-backed Owlet (*Glaucidium castanonotum*), 2 Sisira's (Kitulgala) 22.01

Sri Lanka Frogmouth (*Batrachostomus moniliger*) 2 (male and female) Sinharaja 23.01

Indian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*) 3 nightjars seen in the dim morning light at Yala 28.01 were probably this species

Crested Treeswift (*Hemiprocne coronata*) Kitulgala, Yala

Indian Swiftlet (*Aerodramus unicolor*) Hunas Falls

Asian Palm Swift (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*) W

House Swift (*Apus nipalensis*) Polonnaruwa, en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja

Malabar Trogon (*Harpactes fasciatus*) Sinharaja

Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*) W

Stork-billed Kingfisher (*Pelargopsis capensis*) Lake N of Sigiriya, Minneriya, Kitulgala, Tissa

White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) W

Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) W

Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*) 1 Udawalawe 26.01. (We were also shown a nest hole at Sinharaja outside the Fores Reserve, but did not see any birds there)

Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) Udawalawe, Bundala

Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*) W

Blue-tailed Bee-eater (*Merops philippinus*) W

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (*Merops leschenaulti*) Udawalawe

Eurasian Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) Udawalawe, Yala

Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros gingalensis*) Sigiriya, Giritale, Kitulgala

Malabar Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros coronatus*) Sigiriya, Udawalawe, Yala

Brown-headed Barbet (*Megalaima zeylanica*) W

Yellow-fronted Barbet (*Megalaima flavifrons*) W

Crimson-fronted Barbet (*Megalaima rubricapillus*) Sigiriya, Giritale, Hunas

Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) W

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos mahrattensis*) Yala

Lesser Yellownape (*Picus chlorolophus*) Sinharaja

Lesser Goldenback (*Dinopium benghalense*) Palm Garden Village, Udawalawe, Kalu's

Greater Goldenback (*Chrysocolaptes lucidus*) Hunas Falls

Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) Hunas, Sisira's, Udawalawe, Yala

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike (*Hemipus picatus*) Sigiriya, Horton Plains, en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja

Ashy Woodswallow (*Artamus fuscus*) W

Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*) Minneriya, Udawalawe, Kalu's, Bundala

Large Cuckooshrike (*Coracina macei*) Palm Garden Village, Minneriya

Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*) Minneriya, Hunas Falls

Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus speciosus*) Hunas, Horton Plains, en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja, Sinharaja

Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) Hunas Falls, Horton Plains, Sinharaja, en route Sinharaja-Udawalawe, Udawalawe, Kalu's, Yala, Bundala

Black-naped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*) en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja

Black-hooded Oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*) W

Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) Palm Garden Village, en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja

Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*) W

White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*) W

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*) 1 Sinharaja 25.01 (outside the Forest Reserve)

Sri Lanka Drongo (*Dicrurus lophorinus*) Sinharaja

White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*) W

Black-naped Monarch (*Hypothymis azurea*) Sinharaja

Asian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) W

Sri Lanka Blue Magpie (*Urocissa ornata*) 5 Sinharaja 23.01, 3 Sinharaja 24.01

House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) W

Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) W

Great Tit (*Parus major*) Hunas Falls, Unawatakele, Kandy, Horton Plains

Jerdon's Bush Lark (*Mirafra affinis*) Sigiriya, Udawalawe, Yala, Bundala

Oriental Skylark (*Alauda gulgula*) Bundala

Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark (*Eremopterix griseus*) Udawalawe, Bundala

Black-capped Bulbul (*Pycnonotus melanicterus*) Plantation Hotel, en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja, Sinharaja

Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) W

Yellow-eared Bulbul (*Pycnonotus penicillatus*) Nuwara Eliya, Horton Plains

White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) W

Yellow-browed Bulbul (*Acritillas indica*) Kitulgala, Sinharaja

Black Bulbul (*Hypsipetes leucocephalus*) Hunas Falls, Kitulgala

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) W

Hill Swallow (*Hirundo domicola*) Hunas Falls

Sri Lanka Swallow (*Cecropis hyperythra*) Hunas Falls, Sinharaja, Udawalawe

Green Warbler (*Phylloscopus nitidus*) Hunas Falls, en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja

Large-billed Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*) 1 Plantation Hotel 22.01

Clamorous Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*) Bundala

Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*) W

Grey-breasted Prinia (*Prinia hodgsonii*) Minneriya, Udawalawe, Kalu's

Jungle Prinia (*Prinia sylvatica*) Udawalawe

Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*) Udawalawe, Kalu's, Bundala

Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*) W

Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*) W

Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler (*Pomatorhinus melanurus*) Sinharaja

Tawny-bellied Babbler (*Dumetia hyperythra*) ca 20 Hunas Falls 15.01

Dark-fronted Babbler (*Rhopocichla atriceps*) Horton Plains, Sinharaja

Orange-billed Babbler (*Turdoides rufescens*) Horton Plains, Sinharaja, en route Sinharaja-Udawalawe

Yellow-billed Babbler (*Turdoides affinis*) W

Ashy-headed Laughingthrush (*Garrulax castanotis*) Horton Plains, Sinharaja

Yellow-eyed Babbler (*Chrysomma sinense*) Sigiriya, Minneriya

Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) W

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*) Hunas Falls, Horton Plains, Sinharaja

Sri Lanka Hill Myna (*Gracula ptilogenys*) Hunas Falls, Sinharaja

Southern Hill Myna (*Gracula indica*) Hunas Falls, Unawatakele, en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja

Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) W

Rosy Starling (*Pastor roseus*) ca 20 Udawalawe 26.01

White-faced Starling (*Sturnornis albofrontatus*) 5 Sinharaja 24.01 It took some time to get good views of this species

Spot-winged Thrush (*Zoothera spiloptera*) 2 Sisira's 22.01, 1 Sinharaja 23.01

Scaly Thrush (*Zoothera dauma*) 1 Sinharaja 24.01

Indian Blackbird (*Turdus simillimus*) 1 Nuwara Eliya (Victoria Park) 21.01, also noted en route Nuwara Eliya-Kitulgala

Oriental Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) W

Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*) W

Pied Bush Chat (*Saxicola caprata*) Horton Plains

Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*) 2 Kitulgala 22.01

Brown-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui*) Horton Plains, en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja, Sinharaja

Dull-blue Flycatcher (*Eumyias sordidus*) Unawatakele, Horton Plains

Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) W

Jerdon's Leafbird (*Chloropsis jerdoni*) 1 Sigiriya Rock 14.01, 1 en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja 22.01

Golden-fronted Leafbird (*Chloropsis aurifrons*) 1 Palm Garden Village 11.01

Thick-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum agile*) Sinharaja

Legge's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum vincens*) , en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja, Sinharaja

Pale-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*) Hunas Falls, en route. Kitulgala-Sinharaja

Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Leptocoma zeylonica*) W

Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) W

Loten's Sunbird (*Cinnyris lotenius*) W

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja, Yala

White-rumped Munia (*Lonchura striata*) Sigiriya

Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) W

Tricolored (Black-headed) Munia (*Lonchura malacca*) Minneriya, en route Kitulgala-Sinharaja, Udawalawe

Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*) Hunas Falls, Nuwara Eliya, Udawalawe

Western Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) Hunas Falls, Bundala

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) Hunas Falls, Nuwara Eliya, Horton Plains, Kitulgala

Richard's Pipit (*Anthus richardi*) Udawalawe

Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*) Horton Plains, Bundala