

Sri Lanka

13–28 February 2020

Participants

Gerard Elliott

Chris and Amanda Farman

Rachel Fisher

Roger and Janet Hammond

Max and Tessa Harrison

David Jefferies

Ray O'Reilly and Linda Griffiths

Roger and Jean Staples



Leaders Saman Kumara and Indika Jayatissa

Chestnut-backed Owlet

Day 1 The tour started with an overnight flight from the UK to Sri Lanka.

Day 2 After meeting at Kitulgala, we all had breakfast and then started birding around the village where we encountered Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Square-tailed Bulbul, Asian Emerald Dove, Black-backed Dwarf-kingfisher, Long-billed (Loten's) Sunbird, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, White-breasted Waterhen, Sri Lanka Green-pigeon and Sri Lanka Hanging-parrot. We returned to the hotel for lunch, after which we checked out another location in the village. The highlights from this afternoon were Spot-winged Thrush, Chestnut-backed Owlet, the distinctive Sri Lankan red-backed form of Black-rumped Flameback, Shikra and Crimson-fronted Barbet. We did our checklist and had a briefing about tomorrow's plans before calling it a night.

Day 3 We started our day at 06.00 with a cup of tea and then visited Kitulgala village for some early morning birding. Our sightings included Yellow-fronted Barbet, Black-naped Monarch, Greater and Green-billed Coucals, Orange-billed Babbler, Crimson-fronted Barbet, Layard's Parakeet, Sri Lanka Hanging-parrot, Indian Swiftlet, Little Swift, Brown-capped Woodpecker and Sri Lanka Drongo. We then returned to the hotel for breakfast and subsequently headed to the Makandawa rainforest. We crossed the river on a raft and entered another village before making our way to the rainforest entrance. Sightings within the rainforest included Black-hooded Oriole, Yellow-billed Babbler, Oriental Magpie-robin, White-rumped Munia, Dark-fronted Babbler, Sri Lanka Swallow and Asian Brown Flycatcher. After returning to the hotel for a late lunch at 14.15, bad weather gave us the opportunity to spend some time at leisure. We met again for dinner at 19.00, which was followed by the checklist and a briefing for the next day.

Day 4 We had a pre-breakfast birding session, encountering many of the birds that we saw yesterday. However, we also added Black-capped Bulbul, Brown-capped Babbler, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher and White-browed Bulbul. We returned to the hotel for breakfast and then set off for Sinharaja for our next two-night stay. We reached our next hotel at 14.15 and then, after having lunch, set out to see Serendib Scops-owl. We were lucky enough to get some wonderful sightings of this recently-discovered owl, and also had good views of a Sri Lanka Blue-magpie's nest at the forest entrance and a Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill. Returning to the hotel, we gathered in the restaurant to do the checklist and have dinner.

Day 5 At 05.00 we had tea/coffee with an early breakfast and then made our way to the rainforest. Before entering, we went to the back yard of a house where we had good views of Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Asian Emerald Dove and Sri Lanka Wood-pigeon. We also encountered White-faced Starlings en route. Within the rainforest, we encountered many birds that we had already seen and some new ones, such as Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, Red-faced Malkoha and the elusive Sri Lanka Thrush. The red-backed form of Black-rumped Flameback, Lesser Yellownappe and Malabar Trogon were also seen in the forest.

Day 6 We had a pre-breakfast birding session around Sinharaja village and encountered Sri Lanka Hanging-parrot, Crested Treeswift, Layard's Parakeet, Sri Lanka Myna, Black-headed Cuckooshrike and some stunning views of Plum-headed Parakeets. After lunch we checked out of the hotel and proceeded to Udawalawa. After reaching our next hotel we did some birding in a small area of nearby scrub. Here we encountered Sri Lanka Woodshrike, White-tailed (Marshall's) Iora, Scaly-breasted Munia, Brown Shrike, Purple Sunbird, Indian Robin, Coppersmith Barbet, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Jungle and Ashy Prinias, Forest Wagtail, Indian Peafowl, Indian Scops-owl and Yellow-eyed Babbler.

Day 7 With a packed breakfast, we left the hotel and proceeded to Udawalawe National Park for a jeep safari. We racked up a large number of birds here including Crested Hawk-eagle, White-bellied Sea-eagle, Indian Cormorant, Black-winged Kite, Barred Buttonquail, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Wood Sandpiper, Gull-billed Tern, Orange-breasted Pigeon, Blue-faced Malkoha, Brown Fish-owl, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Coppersmith Barbet, Small Minivet, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, White-tailed Iora, Jerdon's Bushlark, Plain, Jungle and Ashy Prinias, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Western Yellow Wagtail, Malabar Pied-hornbill and Indian Roller. Mammal sightings included Asian Elephant and Spotted Deer. After a successful morning's safari, we had our lunch back at the hotel and proceeded to Nuwara Eliya. On the way we visited the Surrey Bird Sanctuary, where we saw Brown Wood-owl. We also birded around Seetha Eliya, picking up Indian Blackbird. After checking in to our hotel, we met up at 19.30 to do the checklist and have dinner.

Day 8 We set off for Horton Plains with a packed breakfast at 05.00. Before we entered the park, we did some birding around the entrance and came across Sri Lanka Whistling-thrush, Sri Lanka Wood-pigeon, Sri Lanka Bush-warbler, Dull-blue Flycatcher, Sri Lanka White-eye, Yellow-eared Bulbul, Green Warbler, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, Hill Swallow, Pied Bushchat, Grey Wagtail and Large-billed Crow. Our journey through the park yielded sightings of Zitting Cisticola, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Long-legged Buzzard and Paddyfield Pipit. Mammal sightings included Sambar Deer and Dusky-striped Squirrel. We had lunch back at the hotel and in the afternoon visited the nearby Victoria Park. Here, we saw Pied Thrush, Indian Blue Robin, Common Sandpiper, Cinereous Tit, Yellow-eared Bulbul, Sri Lanka White-eye, House Sparrow, Forest Wagtail and Indian Pond-heron.

Day 9 After breakfast we checked out from the hotel and visited Victoria Park again before heading to Kandy. We arrived at the Thilanka Hotel for lunch and in the afternoon visited Udawatta Kale. Here, we encountered White-rumped Shama and Orange-headed Thrush. We did our checklist and had a briefing about tomorrow's itinerary before calling it a night.

Day 10 After breakfast we checked out of the hotel and headed to the Tamarind Tree Hotel in preparation for the flight back to the UK for those not taking the extension.

Extension

Day 11 We had breakfast at 07.30 and checked out at 09.00, subsequently setting off for our next port of call. We reached the Koggala Beach Hotel at 13.00 and had our lunch. Afterwards we visited Kirala Kele Wetland Sanctuary and saw Knob-billed Duck, Eurasian Spoonbill, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Common Snipe, Common Redshank, Little Tern and Pied Kingfisher. We returned to the hotel at 19.00 for the checklist and dinner.

Day 12 We started the day at 06.00 and, after a cup of tea, we set out for Mirissa with our packed breakfasts in search of Blue Whales. During our cruise, we had very good sightings of one of these majestic creatures. Bird sightings included Great Crested Tern and Bridled Tern. After our whale-watching trip we proceeded to our next hotel – the Raintree in Tissamaharama – and enjoyed our lunch. Subsequently, we took a walk around the Debarawewa tank and encountered Yellow Bittern, Streaked Weaver, Pacific Golden-plover, Marsh Sandpiper, Jungle Owllet and Barn Owl.

Day 13 Another early morning, as we left the hotel at 05.00 with packed breakfasts and lunches to take a full-day safari inside Yala National Park. Our new sightings included Leopard, Sloth Bear, Little Grebe, Garganey, Great Thick-knee, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Pied Cuckoo, Indian Nightjar, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark, Oriental Skylark and Brahminy Starling.

Day 14 Once again we left the hotel with a packed breakfast, this time to visit Bundala National Park for another jeep safari. New sightings today included Cinnamon Bittern, Black Bittern, Yellow Bittern, Watercock, Cotton Pygmy-goose, Collared and Oriental Pratincoles, Black-bellied (Grey) Plover, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Common and Pin-tailed Snipes, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Saunders's Tern, Caspian Tern, White-winged Tern, Common Tern, Bank Swallow (Sand Martin), Bay-backed Shrike, Hume's Whitethroat and Eurasian Collared-dove. After returning to the hotel we took a little time out and relaxed until 15.30. Subsequently, we walked around the Tissa tank and encountered Grey-headed Fish-eagle, Yellow Bittern and Clamorous Reed Warbler. We returned to the hotel at 18.00 for the checklist.

Day 15 We did a final pre-breakfast birding session around the Tissa tank this morning and enjoyed sightings of many birds seen before. After breakfast we checked out of the hotel at 10.00 and set off for the airport. We took lunch at a service station en route before arriving at the airport in time for our flight back to the UK and to say our goodbyes at the end of the tour.

Day 16 Arrival back in the UK at the end of the tour.