

Sri Lanka

Teardrop of the Indian Ocean

Tuesday 09 January – Tuesday 23 January 2018

Leaders: Deepal Warakagoda and David Walsh

2018 Cost: £3,499 single room supplement £320



Sri Lanka was one of the most popular destinations for Ornitholidays' groups in the 70s and 80s and this will be our 25th visit to the island. There can be no more attractive destination in the middle of a British winter. An abundant birdlife flourishes in a great variety of beautiful tropical habitats, from palm-fringed coasts to relic patches of lowland rainforest, and from the cool, mountainous tea-estates to the sun-baked lagoons of the arid southeast. We will discover all these delights in an itinerary that is based upon our previous experiences plus up-to-date input from our experts on the island. Nature conservation has an ancient history in Sri Lanka, since King Devanampiya Tissa became a convert to Buddhism over 2,000 years ago and joyfully declared his hunting preserve a wildlife sanctuary. Now one-tenth of the island is set aside as national parks, nature reserves and other sanctuaries. There have been exciting taxonomic changes here recently, resulting in the island now having 34 endemic birds, and we have a good chance of seeing all of them. Many other species from northern climes visit the country during November to March, so we can be sure of an avian feast! In addition we hope to see some special mammals, including Asian Elephant and Leopard, as well as a range of colourful butterflies. The food on this tour has proved especially popular on previous holidays with both western and Asian cuisine to enjoy. We have been fortunate in obtaining the services of Deepal Warakagoda, the country's foremost ornithological guide (and author of the Field Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka); he has led our last nine holidays and is able to provide a wealth of background information on the birds as well as the culture and history of this wonderful island.

ITINERARY

Days 1 & 2

We leave London on a scheduled evening flight to Colombo, where we arrive in the afternoon of the next day. It is only a short drive to our hotel, where we have dinner and stay overnight. There may be time for some initial birding in the extensive grounds, with Yellow-billed Babblers common here; Black Bittern, Brown Hawk-Owl and Blue-tailed Bee-eater are amongst other possibilities.

Days 3 & 4

In the morning we head inland, hoping to see raptors such as Black Eagle during our journey, and transfer to our hotel at Kithulgala in time for lunch; we stay here for two nights. We are near to an area of remnant lowland forest, by the Kelani River where "Bridge over the River Kwai" was filmed. We make a special effort to find Serendib Scops Owl, first seen as recently as 2001 by Deepal, our leader. We also hope to find a host of other endemics such as Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Chestnut-backed Owllet, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Red-backed and Crimson-backed Flamebacks, Sri Lanka Drongo, Black-capped Bulbul, Brown-capped Babbler and Spot-winged Thrush. Other interesting birds include Brown-breasted Flycatcher, Square-tailed Bulbul and Southern Hill Myna and we have our first chance of seeing the beautiful Indian Pitta. We also hope to find Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Toque Macaque and Layard's Palm Squirrel, three endemic mammals.

Days 5 to 7

We ascend to Weddagala, close to the heart of the wet zone forests, for a three-night stay; en route we will look out for Rufous-bellied Hawk-Eagle and Chestnut-headed Bee-eater. Birding in the vicinity of our hotel should produce more endemics including Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, Legge's Flowerpecker, the diminutive Crimson-fronted Barbet and the impressive Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill. The next day we make an early start and head to Sinharaja which is one of the best remaining forests on the island. We spend the morning walking slowly along a wide trail and hope to find flocks of noisy Orange-billed Babblers and Ashy-headed Laughingthrushes as they forage low to the ground. Feeding groups higher up in the trees may include the colourful Red-faced Malkoha as well as Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler.

If we are very lucky we may encounter the elusive Sri Lanka Thrush, perhaps the hardest of all the endemics to find. We reach an open area where we can relax and enjoy our picnic, whilst keeping a close eye out for the spectacular Sri Lanka Blue Magpie and Malabar Trogon. After lunch we head back; the birds are likely to have quietened down by this stage but there should be plenty of butterflies to entertain us including Sri Lankan Wood Nymph fluttering past as well as Blue Glassy

Tiger, Cruiser, Common Bluebottle and Sri Lankan Rose, some great names to conjure with! On another morning our excellent local knowledge will give us a great chance of finding three more endemics, Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Green-billed Coucal and Sri Lanka Hill Myna as well as a pair of roosting Sri Lanka Frogmouths. Mammals in this area include Dusky-striped Squirrel whilst Sri Lankan Birdwing is one of many species of butterfly; both are endemic.



Sri Lanka Blue Magpie



Sri Lanka Spurrow



Serendib Scops Owl

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Day 2	Colombo
Days 3-4	Kithulgala
Days 5-7	Weddagala
Day 8	Udawalawa
Days 9-10	Tissamaharama
Days 11-12	Nuwara Eliya
Day 13	Kandy
Day 14	Colombo
Day 15	Depart Colombo, arrive London

Party Size

Maximum of 12 clients (two leaders with more than six clients).

Accommodation

Comfortable accommodation in twin/double and single rooms, with private facilities.

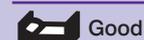
Transport

By coach.

Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, airport taxes and tips.

Gratings



Good



230



Warm to Hot



Low



Special



Relaxed



Good



Moderate



Scheduled

Day 8

We will break our journey this morning to do some final wet zone birding, perhaps finding Sri Lanka Swallows, White-faced Starlings or Layard's Parakeets, before descending to Udawalawa in the dry zone; we stay here for one night. After lunch we visit Udawalawa National Park, an area of grassland and water-associated forest, for the first of three jeep rides around lowland reserves. Here we may find the endemic Sri Lanka Woodshrike as well as Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Jerdon's Bushlark, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark, Blyth's Pipit, Indian Robin and, if we are lucky, Marshall's Iora. The park is especially good for Asian Elephant. At dusk we will look for Indian and Jerdon's Nightjar before returning for another fine Sri Lankan dinner.

Days 9 & 10

After breakfast we move on to Tissamaharama for a two-night stay. After lunch at our hotel we visit Yala National Park which comprises scrubland, grass flats, rock outcrops and water-holes. We shall search for Indian Peafowl, Lesser Whistling Duck, Great Stone-curlew, Jacobin Cuckoo and Tricoloured Munia and will hope to stumble across Sirkeer or Blue-faced Malkohas. If we are very lucky we may see a Leopard; in Sri Lanka this species is less nocturnal than in Africa. The next morning we visit Bundala National Park where the salt pans are a haven for birds. Amongst the more familiar shorebirds we hope to find Lesser Sand Plover and Small Pratincole as well as Indian Stone-curlew on the adjacent grassland, whilst Greater and Lesser Crested Terns might sit side-by-side for comparison. Near Tissa there are many interesting 'tanks', irrigation reservoirs which are a prominent feature of the island's landscape. Those with reedy margins are suitable for Streaked Weaver as well as Yellow and Cinnamon Bitterns, Grey-headed Swamphen and Watercock. Other birds in the area include Painted Stork, Lesser Adjutant, Black-headed Ibis, Spot-billed Pelican and Oriental Darter. In stands of palm trees we will look for the elusive White-naped Woodpecker as well as Indian Scops Owl.

Days 11 & 12

This morning we head out of the dry lowlands to the completely different setting of Nuwara Eliya, a town at a cool 1,800 metres; we stay here for two nights. The endemic Sri Lanka White-eye is likely to be seen close to our rooms alongside Cinereous Tit and Pied Bush Chat. After lunch we visit Victoria Park, perfect for an afternoon stroll, where the bird list includes more endemics including Yellow-eared

Bulbul and Dull-blue Flycatcher as well as a number of sought-after species including Pied Thrush, Kashmir Flycatcher, Indian Blue Robin, Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher and Forest Wagtail. The following morning we make an early start and head to Horton Plains National Park, stopping en route to look for Sri Lanka Wood Pigeons as they make their first flights of the day. Once inside the Park we will concentrate our efforts on the remaining endemic species, Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush and Sri Lanka Bush Warbler; neither are easy to find, so we will need to be patient! There are a number of other interesting birds in the area including the elusive Sri Lanka race of Indian Blackbird. We return to the hotel for lunch before having a second chance to birdwatch locally, trying for any species we may have missed the previous day.

Day 13

After breakfast we descend from Nuwara Eliya towards Kandy, stopping en route to visit a tea factory where, in addition to receiving a fascinating short tour and having a chance to buy some tea, we should get good views of Hill Swallows around the buildings. We arrive at our hotel in time for lunch; the gardens are expansive, and we have the afternoon and a full morning to explore its secondary rainforest with vast liana-covered trees. It will be really good to have a second chance to catch up with the wet zone forest birds seen during the first few days of the tour including Golden-fronted Leafbird, Orange Minivet, Yellow-browed Bulbul, Green Warbler and both white and rufous phases of Indian Paradise Flycatcher; we may add a number of new species too such as Common Hawk-Cuckoo, Brown Fish Owl, Brown Wood Owl, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike and Large-billed Leaf Warbler.

Day 14

We enjoy a relaxing morning exploring the hotel grounds with its impressive range of forest birds. Venturing a short distance outside should produce Tawny-bellied Babbler in the grasslands and give us a final chance to watch by now familiar species such as Greater Coucal, Brown Shrike and Blyth's Reed Warbler. After lunch, we make the journey to Colombo where we stay overnight in the hotel where we started our tour, and have our farewell dinner together.

Day 15

In the morning we transfer to the airport and catch our flight to London, which arrives later the same day.



Spot-winged Thrush