

Birding the Paradise Island

Sri Lanka is a large island situated off the coast of India and is often referred to as India's "tear drop". The island itself has a diverse variety of habitats including pristine rain forest, highland grasslands, virgin jungle, mangrove swamps, mud flats and several internationally important national parks. Sri Lanka is a truly beautiful island with a wealth of resident and wintering species, including over twenty five endemics. We have modified the itinerary slightly in order to observe the recently described Serindib Scops Owl

Day 1: Morning flight to Colombo with arrival early the next day.

Day 2: Transfer to an Eco-friendly hotel to the north of Colombo which is reached by a small ferry. In the afternoon, we visit a canal and shore area by boat. Riverside vegetation gives us the opportunity to observe Yellow Bittern. Passerines we can expect are Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Brown Shrike, Black-hooded Oriole and Long-billed Sunbird.

Day 3: We leave Colombo for Kitulgala. The road climbs as we leave Colombo, passing villages, rice paddies and pockets of palm trees. The rest house at Kitulgala is attractively situated above a river overlooking the rain forest. After lunch, we cross the river by dugout canoe to visit Kelani Forest Reserve with its endemics: Green-billed Coucal, Orange-billed and Dark-fronted Babblers and, perhaps, the secretive Sri Lanka Spurfowl.

Day 4: Return visit to Kelani Forest Reserve and adjacent village gardens for Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Black-rumped Flameback, Blue-winged and Golden-fronted Leafbirds which visit flowering shrubs and trees. After lunch, we drive to Ratnapurna for a two-night stay. Gilimale Forest Reserve is en route and hosts Indian Black Eagle, White-browed Bulbul, Brown-capped Babbler and Tickell's Blue Flycatcher.

Day 5: We have to start before dawn today to reach Sinharaja Forest Reserve, one of the best remaining areas of rain forest left in Sri Lanka. Sinharaja holds all but two of the island endemics. Bird activity is at its height

Dates

**Friday December 15th – Friday
December 29th 2017**

Leaders: Mark Finn and local guides
Group size: 8
Birds: 210 -235

at dawn with mixed flocks of birds offering us our best opportunities for endemic Spot-winged Thrush and Ashy-headed Laughingthrushes. Sinharaja also has the enigmatic Red-faced Malkoha, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Chestnut-backed Owlet, White-faced Starling, Malabar Trogon and Sri Lanka Blue Magpie. Late afternoon sees us visit another remote section of Sinharaja for Serendib Scops Owl.

Day 6: We leave Ratnapurna for Embilipitiya which is situated near a large tank (water reservoir). In the afternoon, we embark on a safari to Uda Walawe National Park. Birds of prey are a speciality and include Changeable Hawk and Grey-headed Fish Eagles. Tracks attract Barred Buttonquail, Indian Robin, and Yellow-wattled Lapwings. Rotten trees hold Malabar Pied Hornbills. Water holes are an important habitat for kingfishers and waterbirds whilst scrub hosts Plaintive Cuckoo and Blue-faced Malkoha.

Day 7: The south-east coast at Hambantota is a short drive away and our base for three nights. Kelametiya Sanctuary, an extensive coastal reserve of scrub, lakes, woodland, grassland and estuarine habitats, is particularly good for water birds. The grasslands hold Pacific Golden Plover. A flooded marsh has Pintail Snipe, Greater

Thick-knee, and Streaked Weaver. As Kelametiya is so diverse in its habitats, we can make more than one visit.

Days 8-9: Hambantota is close to the national parks of Bundala and Yala. We are making two safaris into these famous reserves. Also of interest, within a short distance, are salt pans and large tanks with muddy margins. Shorebirds include Greater and Lesser Sandpipers, Temminck's Stint, Marsh, Terek and Broad-billed Sandpipers and Collared Pratincole. A dawn start on one day to visit Bundala, a birdwatcher's paradise. Bundala holds Indian Peafowl which occur here in their natural habitat. We should get close views of Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater and Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks. On the other day, we visit Tissamaharama Tank on the way to Yala. The former has the impressive White-naped Woodpecker. Yala is an exceptional area for mammals. We should see Indian Elephant, Spotted Deer and Sambar and there is a good chance of Leopard at dusk. The birds are similar to those at Bundala and Kelametiya but with the added attraction of the huge Black-necked Stork.

Day 10: Today we travel to the highest town in Sri Lanka, Nuwara Eliya, at an elevation of 2000 metres. An isolated stand of rain forest surrounding a monastery has Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, Black-throated Bulbul and Yellow-eared Bulbul. Hakala Estate is an area of woodland holding Brown Wood Owl and Sri Lanka Woodpigeon. Two-night stay at Nuwara Eliya.

Day 11: Today we visit Horton Plains National Park. Before we reach the park, a stop will be made to try and locate the rare Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush. The road climbs high above wooded valleys where endemic Sri Lanka Bush-warbler, Dull-blue Flycatcher and Sri Lanka White-eye occur. Forest areas attract Mountain Hawk Eagles. After lunch, a visit to Victoria Park may be productive for Pied Thrush, Kashmir Flycatcher and Indian Blue Robin.

Day 12: The road winds its way through tea

plantations where we stop and make a short visit to a tea factory for Hill Swallow. On the outskirts of Kandy are botanical gardens, a birdwatcher's delight. On arrival, we can look for Greater Flameback, Layard's Parakeet, Asian Brown Flycatcher, and Indian Pitta. Kandy, where we have an overnight stay, is soon reached.

Day 13: Today we travel to Habarana in the dry zone for a two-night stay. Before we arrive, a roadside wetland may be productive for Brown-capped Woodpecker. Our base is set amongst mature woodland next to a lake and has well-marked nature trails. The grounds are a regular haunt of Brown Fish Owl.

Day 14: Sigiriya is a huge rock which rises nearly 200 metres out of the plain. The surrounding jungle and scrub have many species including Chestnut-winged and Bay-banded Cuckoos and White-rumped Sharma. Our final safari takes place to Kawdulla in the afternoon. Apart from the huge numbers of herons and egrets, we can expect White-bellied and Grey-headed Fish Eagles and, at dusk, Indian Nightjar.

Day 15: Birding at Habarana before we head back to Colombo for our flight to London, arriving early the following morning.

Prices

Ground Price: £2,495
 Single room: £275
 Deposit: £250
 *Air Fare: £950

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance and items of a personal nature. Visa to enter Sri Lanka

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*