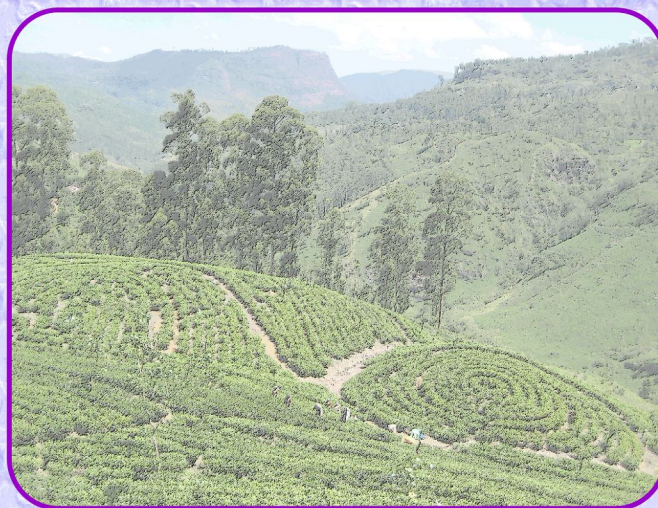


Sri Lanka



27th March to 2nd April, 2009



Friday, 27 th	Sinharaja Forest	15.00-17.30
Saturday, 28 th	Sinharaja Forest	6.00 - 14.00 16.00 - 18.00
Sunday, 29 th	Sinharaja Forest Sinharaja Village	7.00 - 13.00 14.30 - 17.30
Monday, 30 th	Sinharaja Village Hakgala Botanical Gardens	7.30 - 8.00 15.00 - 17.45
Tuesday, 1 st	Vegetable stall near Hakgala Nuwaraeliya Forest Victoria Park Hakgala Botanical Gardens	5.45 - 6.30 7.00 - 9.00 10.30 - 12.00 15.30 - 17.30
Wednesday, 2 nd	Vegetable stall near Hakgala Victoria Park Sisira's River Lounge Kitungala village Sisira's River Lounge	5.15 - 6.00 8.15 - 9.15 13.30 - 15.00 15.00 - 16.00 16.00 - 18.30
Thursday, 3 rd	Sisira's River Lounge Kitungala forest Sisira's River Lounge	6.00 - 7.00 7.00 - 12.00 15.30 - 18.30

SRI LANKA

27th March to 3rd April, 2009

Introduction

Located off the South-eastern tip of peninsula India, Sri Lanka offers a mix of typically Asian birds and some of its own endemics. The birding is of a high standard, not so much for the numbers of species to be seen, but the quality of the birds and the views they generally give. For many birders, it is the large percentage of endemic species which is the lure, but this misses a trick, since there are also some excellent non endemics as well. That being said, when birding the island, it is difficult not to get caught up in the chase for all the local specialities, some of which are exceptional in their own right (such as Blue Magpie, Red-faced Malkoha, and who could miss out Junglefowl?).



Sri Lanka is divided into two climatic areas - the wet zone of the South-west, and the dry zone of the rest of the country. With a week on the island, I chose to concentrate on the wet zone area, where the April timing meant comparatively less rain, since the monsoon in this area is towards the end of the calendar year. Focusing on one zone would tend to limit the amount of travel in the time available, and all but one or two of the endemics (Woodshrike and possibly Scarlet-fronted Barbet, if the latter is indeed a true species) are to be found here. Guidance both for locating the birds and navigating the generally unmarked roads means that a guide is almost essential - I chose Prasanjith Caldera, or Jith or short, (see below) who offered a superb service for a personal tour, and at a much more reasonable cost than some of the larger companies (where the birds usually have to be shared between a group). I travelled to Sri Lanka with Kuwait Airways from London Heathrow, refuelling at Kuwait, and Jith was at the airport to pick me up.



<http://www.walkwithjith.com/> is the website of Jith, who I used as the guide and organiser of the trip. Partly because I was on my own, but mainly due to the country being difficult to negotiate, and the speciality birds even more taxing to track down without local knowledge, I broke with a birding long habit and enlisted help with my trip. My friends and I had come across Jith at the Rutland Water Bird Fair in 2006, and they had subsequently used him the January following. It is difficult to imagine that he has only been organising tours as a business since 2005, even more so when you observe his excellent local knowledge and identification skills.

One of the beauties of Jith's trips is that he will tailor them to

your own needs, with a more than reasonable cost. This includes itinerary, driver, accommodation (half board), and entrance fees. He will even alter the itinerary as the trip is under way to react to local and/or bird conditions.

Sites visited

Sinharaja Man and Biosphere reserve



This is one of the jewels in the crown in nature terms within Sri Lanka. The reserve is set at around 300m above sea level, which is a moderate elevation. It contains mainly tropical rainforest, and this forms part of one of the only remaining tracts of primary forest on the island (although much of the birding is within the adjacent secondary growth). Entrance to the reserve itself is strictly controlled, this being through one port of entry about 2 km above Sinharaja village. A fee is payable, and walking the reserve must be accompanied by a guide. From a birding perspective, there is one main track which runs to and beyond a research station, although there appear to be one or two offshoots which climb through the forest (ascending 740m along a 1km hike).

There is also a walk down from the reserve entrance, which cuts through the forest for around 2 km, ending at the village, where the main reception to Sinharaja is located. The village is noted for being the more reliable spot for Green-billed Coucal, as well as one two of the more common species, such as Sri Lanka Swallow, which wasn't seen anywhere else in this area.

Nuwaraeliya

Located in the mountains at around 2000 metres, Nuwaraeliya is the town where we were based, and from which some of the higher elevation birds were sought. Temperatures were much more temperate here, being almost jumper cool in the morning and evening, although normal daytime was still quite hot:

Victoria Park

Situated within the town itself, this is a contained entrance fee park which is well used by the locals (and presumably tourists in season). It contains tracts of lawn, interwoven with paths, bushes, and a stream along its length. There is a reasonable selection of common birds within the park, but it can also offer Pied Thrush in the winter months.



Mixed forest

Found by taking a track from the head of the lake and past vegetable gardens, this is home to many of the higher elevation specialities, prime of which is Sri Lanka Bush-Warbler, which must be hunted for at ground level within the forest and with some patience. Really good news is that there are no leeches at this altitude!



Hakgala Botanical Gardens

These were kindly established in 1860 by the British who, with tremendous foresight, premonitioned the interest the site would engender for 21st Century birders. As with most other botanical gardens, these are a popular tourist and visitor spot. However, when we were there, most of these people congregated at spots not far from the entrance. The gardens are located on a slope, with footpaths meandering up along through the artificially created vegetation. The good news is that the birds do not necessarily favour a more natural environment, making this a particularly good spot for flycatchers amongst others.

Between the gardens and the town is a reliable spot for Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush. It is set on the corner of the road, adjacent to a vegetable stall. Just below this is a stream and poorly defined waterfall - ideal habitat for the birds, despite the constant comings and goings of the locals. Best views we had were at first light next to the stall - don't be put of by ghostly voices from within, since the stall seems to double as a home!

Kitungala

This village is situated at approximately the same altitude as Sinharaja, and offers a similar selection of birds, although one or two of the specialities are only really available at Sinharaja. The temperature seems to be slightly higher and more sapping at Kitungala, and with the rain showers less predictable. The forest is the main habitat, but the land around Sisira's River Lounge is varied and has an impressive selection of birds:

Sisira's River Lounge

The buildings are loosely connected, and are built in as more or less a part of the surrounding forest. This woodland, and ultimately forest, abuts both banks of the fairly impressive river flowing through. A walk up the track from the lodge finds a clearing next to the police station, and there are impressive views of the surrounding mountains from here. Diverting left on ascending the track through one of the driveways finds a small gate to the wetter small meadows/paddies, which are bisected by a rough path used by the locals. Within a stone's throw of my room, I saw



Chestnut-backed Owlet, Layard's Parakeet, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Brown-headed Barbet, and Lesser Goldenback amongst a host of other tasty birds.

Kitungala Forest



Despite having the reputation for a similar array of birds to Sinharaja, the birding here is of a very different nature. To enter the forest proper, the length of the village has to be negotiated first, which can have its own avian rewards. The downside for the visitor is that an electricity supply has led to music and television - not a hearty background for the ardent naturalist. It does provide feeding and nesting for a variety of species, and they can be easier to see than in the denser forest. The latter is found by walking beyond and slightly upwards from the end of the village. Our

visit found it quiet for birds, but it would seem the usual rules of forest birding - patience, time and neck breaking observation - are needed for the best catch.

Accommodation

Martin's Lodge

This is the only accommodation which adjoins the Sinharaja Reserve, so much so that the entrance is only a 100 metre walk from the door of the bedroom. The next closest accommodation is at the main reception to the park, which is a 4x4 vehicle drive about 1 km down from the entry post. Martin has built the premises up more or less from scratch. There are 6 twin rooms, and a dormitory for 10 sharing.

My room was very basic but more than adequate for a birding stay, with shelves for gear, and a single socket for charging up the weight of equipment which seems necessary for 21st century birding. The food is naturally made on the premises, and was a great experience, if basic. They must have thought I needed feeding, if the number of dishes with varying contents just for me was an indication. Suffice to say that I thoroughly enjoyed the variety of fare on offer. They also tried palming me off with the western breakfast of omelette and toast, until I rapidly discovered that the kitchen could be raided for early morning curry. The room had one electricity socket which was of the Indian type D variety.



Alpine Lodge, Nuwaraeliya



There seems to be a profusion of accommodation in Nuwaraeliya, ranging from individual B&B's to the largest hotel which is the Indian Grand. The Alpine Hotel is more than adequate, being of a medium size, and having comfortable appointment. My room was actually quite large, with king sized bed and even a TV. There are no birds on the doorstep, since the building is in a loosely residential area, but the lake and Victoria Park are only a 5 minute walk away. Evening meal

seemed to have a set menu choice, which looked a little pan-European, but I asked for something more Sri Lankan and received a treat of a feast. The room had 2 types of sockets - UK square pin and South African round pin.

Sisira's River Lounge, Kitungala

The location of the lodge is ideal for birding - within an area of woodland, adjacent to a river on one side, and clearings with gardens and slightly marshy small meadows on the other. My room was standalone, and had a balcony which overlooked the river. There were 2 single beds in a reasonable sized room, but the best part was the bathroom - open air, with a shower that was more of a mini-waterfall. The restaurant is also open air, and the food Sri Lankan style and of good quality. I had two electricity sockets in the room, both taking type D Indian plugs.



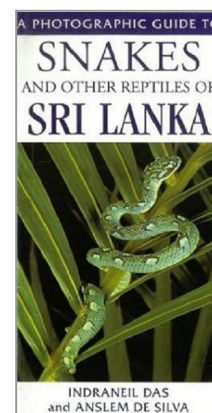
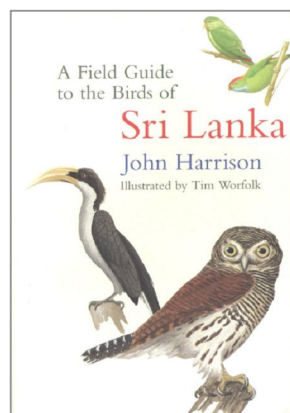
Tips

- Take leech socks - the little parasites are abundant on the lowland rainforest. I found that a combination of the socks, 50% deet gel on the exposed legs, and 50% deet spray around the shoes was sufficient to allow shorts to be worn, resulting in only one successful bite during the whole week
- Temperatures are generally high, but early morning and late afternoon in the mountains (such as at Nuwaraeliya) are cool enough for a jacket or fleece
- An umbrella and/or rain mac are essential. Despite being there in the dry season, the area I visited is the wet zone, which usually meant sunny mornings and partially wet afternoons
- For those with the modern plethora of rechargeable toys, such as digital cameras, mobile phones, etc, it is worth taking a variety of adapter plugs. I found a combination of Indian type D, UK square pin, and South African round pin to be used. The European two pin is also supposed to fit, but would need a larger earth pin included to unlock the females in the wall socket
- Sri Lankan food is very good, but some places try to adapt to the British palate. It is worth asking for a Sri Lankan meal - the Alpine Hotel tend to have a European menu as standard unless asked, and Martin's Lodge will proffer omelette and toast for breakfast unless the kitchen is raided for curry

References

For identification, "A Field Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka" by John Harrison (published by Oxford University Press) is ideal, with good illustrations and reasonable text. The island is also covered as part of "The Guide to the birds of the Indian Subcontinent" by Inskipp, Inskipp, and Grimmett, but it is not quite as easy to tease out the Sri Lankan birds from the larger numbers of the mainland.

"The Photographic Guide to the Snakes and other Reptiles of Sri Lanka" by Indraneil Das and Anslem de Silva (New Holland Publishers Ltd) is also useful, since some should be encountered during a trip.



Sites Diary

Friday

(Day 1)

The 2 leg journey via Kuwait City, following the overnight drive to London Heathrow and kip in the car, were uneventful, although I didn't trust to my research and judgement as to the visa requirements while shuffling slowly along in the immigration queue. The sign indicated the necessity for a valid visa, but this must have been the interpretation given to the embarkation card. No need to have been concerned, however, since I was eventually tucked up in the back of Jith's hired car (courtesy of Jaya, the driver).

Jith had decided on a change to the itinerary sent originally, with Sinharaja being first on the menu, apparently due to booking conditions. This meant a 5 hour journey along winding and particularly busy roads, with one or two enforced stops en route. First blood surprisingly went to Colombo itself, with a litter strewn mini marsh offering Whiskered Tern, a small collection of Little Cormorants on a wire, and Indian Pond Heron. Stopping at a bank to cash Jith's travellers cheques produced a circling trio of Shikras, matched by an Ashy Woodswallow opposite the supermarket provision pull in.



First birding proper was a mile or two before the entrance to Sinharaja. I woke up from a not so restful 40 winks to be ushered along a poorly defined track into the woods next to a village. This had been the site for Frogmouths recently, although not today, which made Jith's flippant remark about there being leeches here even more pointed. Back at the car, Jith's phone call allowed me to pick out a small offering of perched Pale-billed & Legge's Flowerpeckers, White-bellied Drongo, Black-hooded Oriole, Brown-headed Barbet, and Crested Serpent Eagle overhead.

The Sinharaja rainforest preserve seems to be very carefully managed and controlled, including signing in, paying an entrance fee, and leaving the hire car in the village where the reception is located to be transferred to a 4x4 for the trek up to Martin's Lodge. This was probably by design - no ordinary road car could have withstood the assault of the rough track through the forest. Martin's Lodge was the initial goal at the end, where we found a small collection of basic but adequate rooms a literal stones throw from the reserve entrance. No sooner had I put my luggage in the room, than the heavens opened for the first time. They continued to do this until just after three, when my guide was due to take me for an initial sortie into the forest.

Only sporadic trickles of rain followed, leaving a good 2 hours to be introduced to a handful of the local delicacies. The main track into the reserve is manned at its entrance by a small group of local lads entrusted with the task of signing visitors in. Both endemics and more widespread morsels were picked off, although many more were heard but not seen. The former bunch was headed by a Sri Lanka Junglefowl, parading and feeding on the path ahead. Sri Lanka Mynas & Woodpigeons preferred to keep a low profile, conversely keeping to the canopy cover. A Sri Lanka Blue



Magpie was glimpsed flying over the clearing. Chief star of the latter group was an Indian Pitta, picked out by Danu, the forest guide, in the undergrowth. In addition, appearances were made by a reluctant group of Dark-fronted Babblers, more obliging Yellow-fronted Babblers, and a Brown-breasted Flycatcher.

Saturday

(Day 2)

Breakfast overlooked the valley from the outside dining area of the lodge, with the last wisps of mist lifting to a clear blue sky. I feasted on some of yesternights rather good dahl and rice, some delicious toast, and a platter of Sri Lanka Blue Magpies. These fellows are fairly regular to the dining area on a morning, but far from guaranteed, munching on their own menu of moths seduced by the porch lights.

After donning the much needed leech socks and deet, since they were very much in evidence on the legs of Danu the guide previously, the three of us (including Jith this time) trekked the short distance uphill to a small clearing next to the information centre. Even before this, White-faced Starling, one of the more difficult and local of the endemics, was scoped at the top of one of the lonesome trees. Sri Lanka Mynas and Square-tailed Bulbuls were again very much the general backdrop of sound and movement here, with chipping Legge's Flowerpeckers closer to. The trees above us were magnets to Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrots on occasion - it would have been nice if they had been joined by the odd roving group of Layard's Parakeets circling overhead.



To the rear of the building, a large tree which rose above the low canopy hosted both Yellow-fronted Barbet and Lesser Yellownappe at one time. The former were heard and occasionally seen throughout the day.

We then rejoined the track towards the entrance to the reserve, spoiling to identify an *accipiter* which passed overhead - likely to be either Besra or Crested Goshawk. A highly mobile group of Orange-billed Babblers were much easier to put a name to.

The first few hundred metres of the track through the forest were covered very slowly, and this was rewarded by not only finding a Spot-winged Thrush in the undergrowth, but also its nest nearby. This is a very dapper and neatly marked little *Zoothera* thrush, sporting head markings similar to the South Indian race of Orange-headed Thrush. The collection of Sri Lanka Wood pigeons in this spot yesterday were replaced by a single bird, which obliged by sitting still for some time.



Just around the corner, Danu pointed out a Water Snake patiently waiting beside a small pool alive with fish - its dining intentions were obvious. The next goodie was only

steps away - I picked up a movement in the undergrowth which materialised into a pair of Sri Lanka Thrushes. This subspecies has quite recently been separated from Scaly Thrush as a species. One of the birds spent some time preening on a tree stump in the half light.

This short stretch was proving to have few birds, but the ones that it did throw up were all new to me. This continued with Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill. Jith picked up the call, which was from a dense tree just above the track. It remained elusive until flying over my head and into some more obligingly open foliage.



After we had passed the research station and crossed a wooden bridge, a semi open area hosted a very enjoyable bird wave, although that description was not entirely accurate, since most of the birds stayed in the vicinity for some time. First to be picked out was a dancing male white phase Paradise Flycatcher, trying to impress a couple of attendant females. A perched Malabar Trogon (one of an eventual pair) took very little notice of his flight dances. Sri Lanka Mynas & Drongos continued to keep high up in the trees, although patience was rewarded with some of the latter coming somewhat closer. A Black-naped

Monarch and pair of Yellow-browed Bulbuls passed through, stopping briefly. Amongst the familiar call of the close to Dark-fronted Babblers, the more resonant sound of Sri Lanka Scimitar-babbler was identified by Jith. This prize remained an audible memory until I eventually picked it up at eye level, having ventured from the more distant high canopy. My first Scimitar-babbler of any kind, this smart and clinically marked bird was worth the wait, moving along obligingly enough for cracking views.

It was now ten past lunchtime, so we made our way slowly back to base. The sky had by now started to cloud over, and the first spots of rain began to fall on the inward leg. Just as we were about to exit the reserve, Jith picked out the call of Ashy-headed Laughingthrush from a group of Orange-billed Babblers. He did well - the bird in question is a similar size and shape to its flock partners, but was found to have uniform grey head with white outers around its eye. The increasingly heavy rain left this as an excellent finish to the morning.

The mid afternoon break was spent drinking tea on the balcony of the restaurant, watching the grey clouds gather and form into a torrential downpour. It seemed that a late afternoon birding jaunt looked out of the question, until a tap on the shoulder from Jith, and the message "the Serendib Scops Owl is showing at the moment, we must go now to return before dark - wet weather clothing is a definite benefit" changed the mood. One of the park guides, who had been working on a project with the owls, was to be our guide. We waded through the growing pools on the well beaten track - my decision to stay with the leech socks and walking shoes looked a good one as the others continually plucked them from their legs.

Just before reaching the research station visited earlier, we turned off into the forest itself. This is where the skill of our guide became unbelievable. He had located the owl during the day by following its call, which was thoughtless enough to be well off track. He retraced this route through dense undergrowth with us in his expectant wake. A false alarm followed his pointing finger, but this wasn't a mistake, but a perched Malayan Night Heron which he had just disturbed. A short march further, and we had the Serendib Scops Owl in our sights. Just! It was at waist height, deep in a thick growth of vines. The continuing rain left the binoculars difficult to use, with lenses steaming from the sweat from my brow and the high humidity. Luckily, the guide shone his lamp at the bird, even its yellow eyes could be discerned with the naked eye. It is hard to appreciate that this species was discovered as recently as 2001, and that only 4-5 pairs are known.

Sunday*(Day 3)*

This morning's breakfast was to be without the Sri Lanka Blue Magpies, but the upside was that I was now wise to the feast of curry that was to be had from kitchen (in addition to the obligatory omelette and toast of course). Jith and I set off, at a snail's pace, to the information centre just up from the lodge. We didn't spend quite as much time here as yesterday, but enough to pick up singing Golden-fronted Leafbird above us, and perched White-bellied Drongo to the side.

Danu had called in sick earlier in the morning (or was a day and a half of me more than he could manage?) to be replaced by Kandula, the very person who inhumanly guided us to the Serendib Scops Owl the previous afternoon. As we ambled off, Jaya calmly mentioned to Jith that he had just seen a Green Vine Snake. Not much to him, but this was hovering around the top of my wish list. Regrettably, minutes of hard standing still next to the allotted tree proved fruitless.

We set off into the reserve, with Jith mumbling his wish list of local specialities missed up until now to Kandula. No pressure from me, I have to say, since all would be nice, but any missed would in no way detract from enjoyable birding. The initial part of the track was quiet, although I did manage to get slightly longer video shots of the frustratingly common yet skulking Dark-fronted Babbler clans. Then the nadir - Kandula pointed out a Green Vine Snake right next to the path. It was worth the wait, showing as an incredibly slender, lime green visage with a pointed face. Some time just had to be spent taking in this little beauty!



Next stop of note was the research station, where a collection of Orange-billed Babblers was found to contain 3 Red-faced Malkohas. Unfortunately favouring the canopy, they were still easy to discern - this is one of the endemics which is more or less a speciality of the reserve. A lone Malabar Trogon was also in attendance, but was more of a bystander than member of the gang of Babblers. Just over the stream adjacent to the station was a Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, with a further 2 in the minor track taken looking for additional species.

We rejoined the main track to a singing Golden-fronted Leafbird and agitated Scarlet Minivets. The object of their scorn was a perched and totally nonplussed Crested Goshawk. Faint drumming was heard further along, but it took some time, and a perched Malabar Trogon, before a pair of Crimson-backed Goldenbacks flew into view. They flitted back and forth and scaled trunks constantly within a small area before disappearing. A Sri Lanka Scimitar-Babbler was next to the track, but no less easy to pin down for any appreciable length of time.

The final stretch of the track back to the lodge was quiet, but good enough to introduce another of its endemics, yet another skulker par excellence in the form a rather warmly plumaged Brown-capped Babbler.

The afternoon session was to take us away from the reserve itself for the first time, and walk the 1.5 km to the village below. This was the very same which had housed Jaya's car for the last couple of days, but we forsake the rather easy if not bumpy 4x4 for

2xfeet. As is only expected for the afternoon, our descent was heralded by the onset of the day's rain, although it wasn't particularly heavy (yet).



The track down to the village was uneventful, save for a pair of Sri Lanka Grey Hornbills, one of which was directly over the track itself. Once at the bridge, a pair of White-throated Kingfishers were patiently weighing up the possibility of fish suppers, and a Little Cormorant was still on the same rock it had occupied during our arrival previously. The village started to darken with the thickening and threatening rain clouds, leaving the Greater Coucal and pair of roaming Sri Lanka Swallows to be perused in very poor light.

The prime objective of the walk was for Green-billed Coucal, which is reputed to be a better bet here than the forest further up. Time needs to be devoted to this task, so the deluge that welcomed our search did not help at all. Suffice to say that we abandoned this fruitless soaking after only a cursory look along the road.

Monday

(Day 4)

Today was moving on day, but not until breakfast time had handed Crested Treeswift over the valley. With all bags stowed into the back seating area of Martin's Land Rover, he again drove us gingerly down the wonderfully uneven track towards the village. This was just as bumpy as the ride up, but conducted in brilliant warm sunshine. We did stop on the way to pick up a trio of Sri Lanka Green Pigeons, in the company of a couple of Sri Lanka Hanging Parrots.



Once at the village, Jaya fetched his car while Jith and I made a second attempt at Green-billed Coucal. This could have been a different place from the rain lashed torrent we paddled through the previous afternoon, with sun instead splashing the leaves on the trees. This may have been the reason for the Green-billed Coucal we saw to be found so easily. It was sunning itself on the outer branches of a nearby tree, and just above eye level for good measure.

Back on the road again, and another stop was made a short distance from the village, ostensibly to identify an overhead raptor. This turned out to be Crested Honey Buzzard, but also unveiled a few extra tantalising birds. A dapper White-bellied Drongo showed no fear on the wires above, as did a calling Yellow-fronted Barbet and Purple-rumped Sunbird. We watched these birds to the bemusement of a couple of the locals, one a horrendously elderly fellow who seemed more intent on trying to stay upright. Overhead were Indian Swiftlets, whose identification from Asian Palm Swifts seemed new to Jith. Thankfully, they obliged by displaying their tail shape convincingly. With them was a Barn Swallow and separate Ashy Woodswallow. The Yellow-fronted Barbet calls were added to by a pair of Brown-headed Barbets, set in trees above the impressive cultivated valley below.



We actually managed a further 10 minutes or so of driving before the next stop. On the left of the road were some quite extensive paddy fields, and I wanted to grab some video of some of the Indian Pond Herons wading around. Once finished, Jith pointed out a pair of Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, and while following these, a Brahminy Kite glided into view. The temperature was climbing rapidly by now, but I postponed the return to the comfort of the air-conditioned car to track down some singing Plain Prinias.



Two brief stops were subsequently made before our 5 hour journey to the mountains began in earnest. The first was for a crane which had flapped its way in front of the car to a bank on the opposite side. A short wait pinned down Slaty-legged Crane. The second was for a distant raptor circling over the hills - a Black Eagle is always worth some time.

Just before 3pm, and after countless hundreds of twists and turns on the way to Nuwaraeliya, Jith turned and asked me if we should head for the hotel, or would I mind terribly if we did some birding at Hakgala Botanical Garden first. Sorry, the answer is too



obvious! We pulled up alongside a stretch of market stalls and throng of people, with the entrance to the gardens opposite. The fee paid and the guards bypassed, we spent an enjoyable couple of hours walking the manicured paths (well, not always on the paths) and gardens. Most of the visitors seemed to prefer to gather and sit near to the entrance gate, such is the flock mentality of human populations. However, it was here that the first Sri Lanka White-eyes and Cinereous Tit (now separated from Great Tit) were located. Both were to prove common throughout the gardens.

When we ascended the paths a short way, we lost most of the people and started to gain birds. Amongst the first group were Forest Wagtail, Kashmir Flycatcher, and a small party of squabbling Dull-blue Flycatchers. The latter turned out to be numerous today, but the Kashmir Flycatcher was more difficult to track down. Onward and upward, and we added Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, Scarlet Minivet, and a trio of calling Yellow-fronted Barbets (in the same tree).

The small area where we had first seen the flycatchers seemed to be one of the most active for the birds, and this thought was verified on return to that spot, adding a small group of Grey-headed Canary-Flycatchers and Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrikes.



Before the light had abandoned us totally - the afternoon seemed to get visibly murky at around 4.30 - we drove a short way further towards Nuwaraeliya to stop at a favoured location for Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush. This is an odd spot for such a shy bird. The running water and accessibility of cover ticked the boxes, but the busy road is only a few metres away, and a path next to the stream and waterfall is often in use by noisy locals. Suffice to say, a couple of false alarms of movement within the dense bushes failed to find the target bird, although my first Indian Blue Robin wasn't a bad substitute.

Tuesday

(Day 5)

The earliest start so far - a 5.30am departure from the hotel - was with the intention of springing a surprise on the early rising Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush. So, back to the road corner with vegetable stall we headed, and peered into the morning gloom. Thankfully, this was worth the effort, since we did glimpse the bird in the open for a few seconds, albeit in the still rising light. Further searching down at the stream failed to provide a better look. While standing at the corner, the first of what proved to be many Yellow-eared Bulbuls put in an appearance. The stall also proffered its own little surprise - it doubled as a home, since a pair of folk emerged from it. A curious Mountain Squirrel found this to its taste, since it tried to venture a nose around the shack before common sense prevailed.

A short drive towards the hotel took a sharp right before the head of the lake in town. The target was the forest beyond, but the vegetable gardens en route provided a few interesting tidbits. Some of the more common birds find the mix of cultivated carrots, beetroot and other edible goodies much to their liking, and we were stopped initially by a pair of Pied Bushchats on wires. Underneath, an active Ashy Prinia was both feeding and singing in rotation. 2 to 3 Scaly-breasted Munias, shared the lines at one time with the Bushchats.



After this short interlude, Jaya parked up at the start of the forest, and we proceeded along the tarmac track. Some of the birds from the botanical gardens the previous afternoon proved common here as well - Cinereous Tit, Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher and White-eyes (although the majority here looked to be Oriental) were joined by Yellow-eared Bulbuls.



We took a cut up into the forest, disturbing an impressive stag Sambar Deer in the process. His wallow holes would be found during our wanderings here. The objective was to locate Sri Lanka Bush-Warbler, which is a task not to be taken lightly, due to its skulking habits and general silence. We wandered the forest looking close to the ground for some time without good fortune, but adequate recompense came in the form of Crimson-backed Goldenback and Chestnut-winged Cuckoo. Both were frustratingly brief, but much closer encounters were to be had with Grey-headed Canary-Flycatchers and Dull-blue Flycatchers, not to mention the multitude of busy Mountain Squirrels and small troop of Purple-faced Leaf-monkeys. We seemed to be out of luck with the target bird, so Jith decided to start back down and out of the forest. Providence prevailed - a pair of Sri Lanka Bush Warblers showed themselves, one in particular was on a log not far from us for enough time to scour

its details, before reverting back to standard behaviour and appearing under cover occasionally.

A trip to Victoria Park followed breakfast - trip being an inadequate description of the few hundred metres to this next site. The park is a recreational garden, so we were to follow the paths through cut lawns and imported vegetation. Much of the birdlife here is of common species, even though there were one or two new to the trip, but the reason for the visit was to find Pied Thrush, a winter visitor which seems to have a sweet bill for some of the berry bushes. It was in one of these that we found our quarry, well hidden in the branches and leaves, sharing its doorstep feast with Red-vented Bulbuls and Common Mynas. A Brown Shrike on the way here was difficult to approach. A litter strewn stream through the park proved surprisingly good for one or two extra birds, notably an unexpected pair of Common Sandpipers, and 1-2 Forest Wagtails. Indian Pond Herons and Grey Wagtails found equal delight in this environment.



The intention of the afternoon session was to try to get better views of two species already seen - Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush and Kashmir Flycatcher. This was in the main due to our good fortune in seeing all the highland specialities by this morning.

So off we waltzed back to Hakgala Botanical Gardens for a second visit. Population distribution was as before, with a healthy number of humans frequenting the habitat, but with a bias towards the lower elevations. So we quickly circumvented them to find some peace and hopefully birds. At first, there seemed a lot fewer than yesterday, until a party consisting of Sri Lanka White-eyes, Grey-headed Canary-Flycatchers, Velvet-fronted Nuthatches, and Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrikes were chanced upon. But oddly, no Dull-blue Flycatchers amongst them (until a couple were seen later). Wandering to the top of the gardens only found a single Sri Lanka Junglefowl, so we headed diagonally over to a newer section. This was rewarded with a feeding band of Purple-faced Leaf-monkeys, spread in the middle canopy above. At least one Toque Monkey was with them.



We rounded a hut to a smallholding, where a young boy was sat on the top of a hut, apparently commissioned by his parents to keep the monkeys from thieving the crop of carrots. At the rear of the plot, a Greater Coucal flew in, and fed in the shade (and from view) until departing the scene. Jith called me over to pick out an Indian Blackbird, now separated from Eurasian Blackbird, and a scarce individual in these highlands.

But still no sign of Kashmir Flycatcher, but heading back towards the exit, a case of *deja* Bush-warbler *vu*, when I picked out the self same species just down from us, initiating a short feeding session around the small footbridge.

And so it was back to the Whistling Thrush location, with the usual band of brothers congregating around the vegetable stall. The hour before last light is reputed to be about the best for an appearance, but this didn't prove to be the case this time. Recompense in the form of Indian Blue Robin, this time with more prolonged views, was had.

Wednesday

(Day 6)



For some reason, Jith had decided that a 5am start would be better to try for good views of Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush, rather than the 5.30 of yesterday. He reckoned that the half light of morning was the ideal time, so off we went with the stars shining down on us. This turned out to be a good decision, since, after the false alarm of a Dull-blue Flycatcher on the ground next to the vegetable stall, 5.40am witnessed the emergence of the female Whistling Thrush, who then spent a few minutes rummaging around in the discarded rubbish behind the stall.

Before departing Nuwaraeliya, Jith had the important task of picking up his laundry, and the establishment tasked with this didn't open until 9am. Hence an excuse to spend a short time more in the park, with the specific aim of trying for better views of the Pied Thrush. When we first passed the seemingly favourite fruiting tree, only Common Mynas and Red-vented Bulbuls were seduced by its delicacies. However, on the return visit, and on the way out of the park, the bird neatly positioned itself in an opening next to the main trunk.

One or two new birds were also added to the trip tally. A singing Sunbird at the very top of a tall tree proved to be male Purple, and a Warbler singing a subsong next to the stream was a Blyth's Reed.



The journey from Nuwaraeliya to Kitungala was a mere 3 hours, with the odd stop on the way to admire tea plantations, waterfalls, and Loten's Sunbird. When I was finally ensconced in my room at Sisira's River Lounge, I decided to make some notes on my rather pleasant river view balcony, wandering the environs of the lodge. This was smartly interrupted by Jaya, beckoning me to the restaurant area where the usually shy and retiring Brown-capped Babblers were slowly parading in the leaf litter below. This kicked off a change in plan, with the new rota consisting of immediately birding the lodge grounds until Jith and I went elsewhere for the afternoon session.

The lodge is ideally placed in a wooded spot, adjacent to the river on one edge, and more open clearings the other. The staff at the lodge are obviously used to birders, being eager to point out most things that fly. This miscellany included Imperial Green Pigeon, Brown-headed Barbet, and then, by no less than Sisira himself, the near holy grail of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher. This was apparently no huge feat, since a pair of birds are regularly seen in the vicinity of the finder, but welcome fair to the avian feast. Yellow-billed Babblers seemed to have a penchant for the rubbish tip, whereas the more selective endemic Orange-billed cousins were more choosy with the fruits on the trees being selected. In the clearing at the head of the track to the lodge, Layard's Parakeets were regular and more obliging than the fly-bys at Sinharaja.



We then drove the short distance to the village, which necessitated passing the location for the filming of the film "The Bridge Over the River Kwai" (how the tourists must marvel in the splendour of this!), parking at the roadside, and then crossing a sturdy rope designed bridge to the village on the other side. We spent an hour making our way towards the forest beyond, in heat that seemed more sapping than at Sinharaja, picking off a few choice birds on the way. Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrots were perhaps closer than at any other time on the trip, accompanied by Legge's Flowerpeckers. A Lesser

Yellownape was also as close as perhaps possible, as opposed to a group of White-rumped Munias which were more distant as they flew into the cover of the trees.

With sweat pouring down our brows and the thunder in the distance constantly threatening a downpour, which thankfully never materialised, we returned to the clearing just above the lodge. Layard's Parakeets were much more obliging now, unperturbed by our presence as they fed on the small fruits in the low canopy next to the track. A Lesser Goldenback left the same group of trees to ascend a stand of tall, bear trunks, right out on the open. A pair of Southern Hill Mynas appeared at the top of one of the trees, adding to the many Common Mynas.



Jith then branched us off through the yard of a house, to then overlook an open marshy area of paddies. The constantly barking dog couldn't detract from the Openbill Stork calmly pacing this small meadow. A family party of 2 adult and 1 immature Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters were somewhat less accommodating to the presence of one of the locals passing under their telegraph wire hunting perch. A pair of Black-hooded Orioles posed for some time, before perhaps the action moment of the trip. A White-throated Kingfisher was swaying to and fro on its wooden perch, when it dived to the ground with a thud. It returned to view with a small snake in its bill, which it proceeded to mercilessly hammer against its perch, before deciding enough violence had been committed, and it flew off with its meal.



It was now beginning to darken, but two more sightings before retiring to the novel shower cum waterfall were noteworthy. Jith had already reached the lodge, when I spotted a characteristic outline to my right. Binoculars confirmed Chestnut-backed Owlet, perched on a short branch from the trunk of a tree. It flew off, to be relocated with the assistance of a mobbing party of mixed passerines in the canopy. Flying off when it had had enough, it was found for a third time lower down, staring back at me with yellow eyes.

The second was a Rat Snake, making its way across the track into one of the gardens, being seen only too briefly before disappearing into the vegetation.

Thursday

(Day 7)

First task of the day, following the early morning cup of tea, of course, was to track down and obtain good views of Indian Pitta. One or two of these set up a small camp within Sisira's Lodge grounds for the winter, so they are regularly seen. One was duly found within a few sips of tea, although the light was still in its infancy.

The rest of the morning was spent wandering through the village to the forest beyond. Incredibly, the village stretches for some way into the forest, which must make receiving

supplies a nightmare, although there is a canoe "ferry" service for small goods and people. The positive aspect for birding is that the presence of the village and the small cultivations has opened up the habitat for a greater variety of birds, even though they are the more common suspects. For the Sri Lankan specialities, the secondary growth forest beyond the habitation is preferred.



Many of the birds around the village had been seen yesterday - Lesser Yellownappe, Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrots, White-rumped Munias, and the usual plethora of Bulbuls and Babblers (both Yellow- and Orange-billed of the latter). Additional gems were a handful of Black-hooded Orioles, one of which took a dislike to a seemingly innocent immature Yellow-browed Bulbul. Greater Coucal and Lesser Goldenback proved hard to separate from the leaves, but a preening Common Tailorbird was nowhere near as shy. Early raptors were a Shikra and Crested Hawk-Eagle passing over in unison, with a circling brace of Black Eagles over the hills later.



Once replenished with a packed breakfast at the end of the village, we headed into the forest proper, which in size is only a fraction of Sinharaja. Despite donning the leech socks, the ground appeared far too dry for the little blighters, so the discomfort could have been avoided. The forest proved to be very quiet, and after a little while we crossed a stream to enter some semi-derelict paddy fields. Sri Lanka Spurfowl, one of the last of the endemics still to fall, were calling tantalisingly from the nearby cover, but would not give away their location. The small open glades of the disused paddies were apparently sometimes good for passing flocks - our haul was



Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, White-throated Kingfisher, Sri Lanka Drongo, and Black Bulbuls.



The afternoon, and thus last, session of the trip was to be a wander around the River Lounge area, but was greeted by a deluge from the skies - the first rain I had seen here since arriving yesterday. Unperturbed by this minor setback, Jith and I soldiered on with umbrellas deflecting the pouring rain. Some of the birds seemed to be enjoying the opportunity for a wash and brush up, with both White-bellied Drongo and Yellow-billed Babbler showering and rinsing. In the clearing at the top of the track to the lodge, a pair of Lesser Goldenbacks doubled into four, with 3 on the same trunk at one time.

The rain didn't last long, which increased the showing birdlife, despite the lingering dark thunderclouds and occasional lightning. Layard's Parakeets were as yesterday, with constant flypasts and some feeding on the fruiting trees. A quartet of overflying Parakeets were Alexandrine - much slower wingbeats than the other congeners, with an elongated if not pointed crucifix shape. A trio of Southern Hill Mynas kept to the tops of the palm trees.

We ambled down to the open rice paddy meadows, where an Openbill Stork was joined by a single Yellow-billed Egret. This was the first of the white egrets that I had bothered to give any consideration to! A Brown Shrike watched over the marsh as a Cinnamon Bittern gradually emerged from a clump clump of grasses, and this eventually also proved to be the hideout of a family of White-breasted Waterhens, with a single chick in tow.

Returning to the lodge grounds failed to turn up the Chestnut-spotted Owlet or Indian Pitta, but the comical vision of a Sri Lanka Junglefowl in the canopy, apparently a favoured roosting site, perhaps made some amends. I had just thought that the only Spot-winged Thrushes seen in the area was the pair in the twilight the previous evening outside of my room, when another appeared, again in the sinking light. A Brown-breasted Flycatcher was the only one seen since we had left Sinharaja. Last bird of the trip was Stork-billed Kingfisher, seen flying along the edges of the river after we had followed the calls.



SPECIES SEEN

Sri Lanka Junglefowl

Gallus lafayetii

Contrary to the image portayed by its domesticated Red Junglefowl cousin, this bird is a lover of forest cover, and so was not usually seen far from trees. The call is also a lot different to that of a "rooster". Most unusual sight was of a male perched in the canopy early evening near to the reception area of Sisira's River Lounge. Sinharaja 1 male, 2 separate males, 4 females with young; Sinharaja 1; Hakgala 1; River Lounge 1



Little Grebe

Tachybaptus ruficollis

2 Nuwaraeliya lake

Asian Openbill

Anastomus oscitans

The first was seen on the paddies/wet meadow near to the River Lounge. A second bird appeared in flight when the first took off. What may have been the same bird was present on the second day



Cinnamon Bittern

Ixobrychus cinnamomeus

A single male was seen emerging from a small thicket of grass within the rice paddies near to the River Lounge. It spent most of the time in the half cover, creeping out of the rear for a short time before sneaking back into safety

Malayan Night Heron

Gorsachius melanolophus

A single bird was disturbed by our guide within the dense forest as we approached the location of the Serendib Scops-Owl. It was then seen perched high up not far from its original spot

Indian Pond Heron

Ardeola grayii

A common bird in most marshy or wet areas



Eastern Cattle Egret

Bubulcus coromandus

An abundant bird almost everywhere

Yellow-billed Egret

Egretta intermedia

The larger white egrets were not generally checked during the trip, although a single bird slowly patrolling the paddies near to the River Lounge allowed close scrutiny

Little Cormorant

Phalacrocorax niger

10 together on wires in Colombo while still within city limits; 1 Sinharaja reception; 1 Sinharaja village; 3 in rice paddies on the journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya; 1 Nuwaraeliya lake

Crested Honey Buzzard

Pernis ptilorhynchus

1 over the village below Sinharaja on the journey to Nuwaraeliya

Brahminy Kite

Haliastur indus

1 over rice paddies on the journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya

Crested Serpent Eagle*Spilornis cheela*

1 flew over the small tract of forest before Sinharaja reception, while looking for Sri Lanka Frogmouth

Crested Goshawk*Accipiter trivirgatus*

A perched bird was directly over us in Sinharaja. Its presence was initially given away by the small band of mobbing passerines in attendance

Shikra*Accipiter badius*

3 together over financial bank where we stopped to cash travellers cheques on the journey from the airport to Sinharaja; 1 over Sisira's River Lounge; 1 Kitungala forest

Black Eagle*Ictinaetus malayensis*

1 on journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya; 2 circling together over Kitungala forest

Crested Hawk-Eagle*Spizaetus cirrhatus*

1 over Kitungala forest in the company of a Shikra

Slaty-legged Crake*Rallina eurizonoides*

Jith asked Jaya to stop the car on the journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya when a small bird had fluttered across the road in front of us. Minutes later, we briefly watched this crake above the bank next to the road

White-breasted Waterhen*Amaurornis phoenicurus*

1 Sinharaja in the distance; 2 on journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya; 1 Victoria Park; 1 River Lounge paddies, with 2 the following day with chick at the same location

**Red-wattled Lapwing***Vanellus indicus*

3 in fields on the journey from airport to Sinharaja

Common Sandpiper*Actitis hypoleucos*

2 at the stream in Victoria Park

Whiskered Tern*Chlidonias hybrida*

1 within the city limits of Colombo

Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon*Columba torringtoni*

The main breeding area of this endemic is within the mountains, but they do have an altitudinal migration during the non-breeding season. More were seen at the wintering grounds: at least 15 in Sinharaja forest on the first visit, followed by 1 and 3; 2 Nuwaraeliya forest

**Spotted Dove***Streptopelia chinensis*

A common bird throughout: Sinharaja - 1; 3-4 Hakgala; 1 Victoria Park; 3 Hakgala on second visit; quite common Kitungala area, with ~20 in Kitungala forest

Common Emerald Dove*Chalcophaps indica*

1 on the journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya; 1 Sinharaja on the track to the information centre; Sinharaja forest - 1; 3 Sinharaja village; 2 Kitungala village; 2, 1 River Lounge; 1 Kitungala forest



Sri Lanka Green Pigeon*Treron pompadora*

These had been missed during the stay at Sinharaja, but 3 were picked up on the descent from Martin's Lodge (in his jeep) while leaving the area

Green Imperial Pigeon*Ducula aenea*

Quite common at Sinharaja, where all the birds seen were in flight. 1 was perched close to at the River Lounge area, with another 3 in flight

**Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot***Loriculus beryllinus*

These were more of a common sound and flypast than grounded sighting, but quite a few were eventually seen feeding: 4 Sinharaja; 2 Sinharaja descent; 3 Kitungala village; ~8, ~15 River Lounge; ~8 Kitungala forest

Alexandrine Parakeet*Psittacula eupatria*

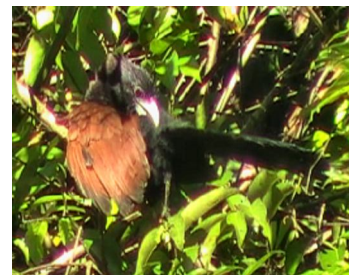
These were only seen in flight, with 4 over the River Lounge paddies, and 2 over Kitungala forest. They are very characteristic, being much larger than any of the other parakeets in the area, and having a thin elongated crucifix shape

Rose-ringed Parakeet*Psittacula krameri*

1 screeching individual perched near to the reception of River Lounge; 2 flew into a tree briefly at the River Lounge paddies

Layard's Parakeet*Psittacula calthropae*

Small numbers only were seen at Sinharaja (6, ~10), but all were in flight, so the plumage characters could not be seen. All of those at this location were seen from the restaurant of Martin's Lodge. They were very much more obliging at Kitungala, particularly in the vicinity of Sisira's River Lounge, where they regularly landed after noisy flypasts to feed on the fruit trees. ~15-20 were seen during any one birding session

**Green-billed Coucal***Centropus chlororhynchos*

This species is one of the more difficult to pin down, due mainly to its low numbers (it is endangered) and retiring habits. One of the best spots to see it is in the woodland just up from the Sinharaja reception. We were out of luck on the very first rainy afternoon hunt, but fortunate with a sunning bird the next morning. A second bird was heard calling near to Sisira's River Lounge

Greater Coucal*Centropus sinensis*

This is quite a hard bird to get good views of, despite its size and colour against the foliage. 1 was on the journey from the airport just before Sinharaja; 1 Sinharaja village; 1 Hakgala; 1 Kitungala village

Red-faced Malkoha*Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*

Sinharaja Forest is the prime location for these birds, and they are far from easy to find. They are reputed to roam with Babbler flocks, and it is with a group of these that we saw the 3 birds at the Sinharaja research station. They were at the top of the canopy, but could easily be seen due to their size and habit of staying in one tree for a few minutes at a time

Chestnut-winged Cuckoo

Clamator coromandus

1 Sinharaja; 1 Nuwaraeliya forest

Asian Koel

Eudynamys scolopaceus

1 male Sinharaja, several heard; female River Lounge

Serendib Scops Owl

Otus thilohoffmanni

It is strange notion that this is one of the most newly discovered species, and doesn't even appear in the popular field guide. 4-5 pairs are now known on the island, and each take some tracking down. I was led through the pouring rain and leech infested dense forest to make eye contact in poor light with one of these birds. Kandula, the guide, had heard its call earlier, and skillfully managed to retrace his steps to the exact branch where he had located the bird

Chestnut-backed Owlet

Glaucidium castanonotum

After the first afternoon's birding session around the Sisira's River Lounge area, we were returning in the weakening light towards the reception area when I caught sight of an owlet perched near the rubbish hole. It flew into the canopy to be accosted by mobbing passerines, flew off again, and was then relocated a behind the wire fence nearby



Crested Treeswift

Hemiprocne coronata

1 in front of Martin's Lodge; 1 on journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya

Indian Swiftlet

Aerodramus unicolor

~10 over Sinharaja village; 3-4 over River Lounge on both days in general area of the paddies

Asian Palm Swift

Cypsiurus balasiensis

~6 over Martin's Lodge; 2 Sinharaja village; 3-4 on journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya; 1 over Kitungala forest; 2 over River Lounge paddies

Malabar Trogon

Harpactes fasciatus

A total of 4 were seen in Sinharaja forest. The first 2, seemingly a pair, were amongst a mixed flock beyond the research station. The next day, another male was directly above the research station, and a second male was above the track on return to Martin's Lodge, while pinning down a Scimitar-babbler



Stork-billed Kingfisher

Pelargopsis capensis

1 flew across the river at Kitungala while at the "ferry canoe". A second was first heard calling from the river beside Sisira's River Lounge, and then seen flying into cover. Given the short distance between the lodge and the ferry, these could have been the same bird

White-throated Kingfisher

Halcyon smyrnensis

This species provided the best action sequence of the trip, when a perching bird near to the River Lounge paddies dived to the ground with a thud, and returned with a small snake in its bill, which it then started to smash against the branch. They were generally quite regularly seen: 4 on the journey from the airport to Sinharaja; 2 Sinharaja village; 3 on the journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya; 1 River Lounge paddies; 2 Kitungala forest



Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher*Ceyx erithaca*

This has to be one of the stars of Sisira's River Lounge. It was pointed out to me by the lodge staff almost on arrival, where it is a bit of a regular. The next day, it reappeared just below the restaurant, quite unmoved by our presence

Common Kingfisher*Alcedo atthis*

1 flew past during our packed lunch break in Kitungala village

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater*Merops leschenaulti*

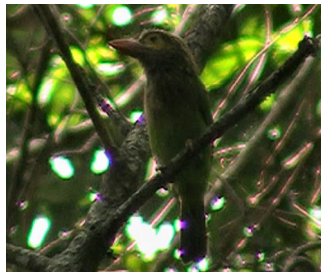
2 hunting around the rice paddies on the journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya; 1 Kitungala village; ~ 8 at the River Lounge paddies, including two adults feeding a single immature; 1 Kitungala forest

**Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill***Ocyrceros gingalensis*

These birds reputedly usually travel around in pairs, but the 4 that I saw included only one such brace. First took a bit of locating along the track of Sinharaja forest before giving itself away by flying over our heads; the pair were over the track descending to Sinharaja village; 1 near to the reception of the River Lounge

Brown-headed Barbet*Megalaima zeylanica*

The first was seen when we stopped to look for Sri Lanka Frogmouth just before Sinharaja; 2 at Sinharaja village; 4 in the River Lounge area; 2 Kitungala village

**Yellow-fronted Barbet***Megalaima flavifrons*

This bird produces one of the characteristic sounds of the lowland forest: Sinharaja - 4, 1; 2 at Sinharaja village; 3 Hakgala; 2 Kitungala village

Lesser Yellownappe*Picus chlorolophus*

Sinharaja - 1, 1; 1 which may have been the same bird was seen on consecutive days at the same spot in Kitungala village

**Lesser Goldenback***Dinopium benghalense*

A group of 4 were at the clearing just above Sisira's River Lounge, and another bird was at Kitungala village

Crimson-backed Goldenback*Chrysocolaptes stricklandi*

A pair at Sinharaja, along the track, were first noticed due to a very soft drumming nearby. Both birds eventually flew into the trees alongside the track. Another bird was in Nuwaraeliya forest

Indian Pitta*Pitta brachyura*

This is a wintering bird on the island, and they are only easy to see if one of the small favoured wintering patches is known. The first bird, in the semi-light next to the track at Sinharaja was seen twice, but this may have been more through luck than judgement. The bird seen early morning at Sisira's River Lounge is a known visitor

**Ashy Woodswallow***Artamus fuscus*

1 on the journey from the airport to Sinharaja, opposite a supermarket while stopping for provisions; 1 over village on the journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya

Common Iora*Aegithina tiphia*

1 Martin's Lodge; 1 River Lounge

Scarlet Minivet*Pericrocotus speciosus*

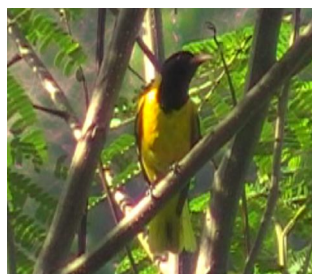
8 playing in rain from the restaurant at Martin's Lodge; Sinharaja - 2, 2; 1 Hakgala

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike*Hemipus picatus*

2 in mixed flocks at Hakgala on both visits

Brown Shrike*Lanius cristatus*

1 Victoria Park; 1 River Lounge paddies

**Black-hooded Oriole***Oriolus xanthornus*

1 at the stop just before Sinharaja; 4 Kitungala village, one of which was harrassing an immature Yellow-browed Bulbul; 2 in the clearing at Kitungala forest; 8 in the River Lounge area

White-bellied Drongo*Dicrurus caerulescens*

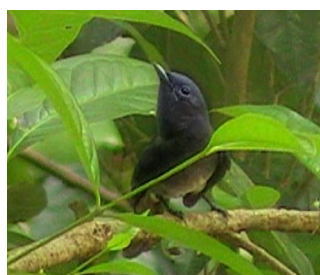
The amount of white on the belly of these birds varies, and can sometimes appear all dark. 2 on journey from the airport to Sinharaja; 2 at the stop just before Sinharaja; pair building nest Sinharaja reception; Sinharaja - 2 separate birds; 1 Martin's Lodge; 1 Sinharaja village; ~6 River Lounge, 4 Kitungala village, 2 Kitungala forest

**Sri Lanka Drongo***Dicrurus lophorinus*

Sinharaja - 4, 5; 1 Martin's Lodge; 1 Kitungala forest

Black-naped Monarch*Hypothymis azurea*

Sinharaja - 1; River Lounge - 2

**Asian Paradise Flycatcher***Terpsiphone paradisi*

2 amazing white males were seen, one with the mixed flock just up from Sinharaja research station, the other further back along the track the next day. At least 2 females

were in attendance Tit on the first occasion, and another 2 on the second

Sri Lanka Magpie

Urocissa ornata

First sighting was one not to miss - 3 birds at the breakfast table at Martin's Lodge on the first morning. They seemed to be feeding on the insects which had collected during the night. They didn't return on the two subsequent mornings. Other birds were 1 flying over Sinharaja clearing; and 3 Sinharaja around the Sinharaja research area



House Crow

Corvus splendens

Abundant in the lowlands, mainly in the vicinity of towns

Indian Jungle Crow

Corvus culminatus

Common in mountains; 1 Kitungala village



Cinereous Tit

Parus cinereus

This pale looking version of the Great Tit has recently been split from that congener as a separate species. ~6 were in Hakgala

Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

1 over village stop after leaving Sinharaja reception

Sri Lanka Swallow

Cecropsis hyperythra

2 Sinharaja village; 2 over paddies on the journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya; 2 River Lounge paddies; 2 Kitungala village

Ashy Prinia

Prinia socialis

1 Nuwaraeliya vegetable gardens



Plain Prinia

Prinia inornata

3, with 2 singing birds, at the roadside of the paddies stopped at on the journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya

Common Tailorbird

Orthotomus sutorius

3 Victoria Park; 2 Kitungala village



Black-capped Bulbul*Pycnonotus melanicterus*

Sinharaja - 5, 1; River Lounge - 2

Red-vented Bulbul*Pycnonotus cafer*

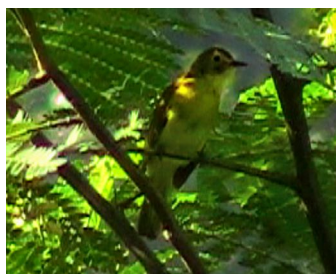
Very common throughout

**Yellow-eared Bulbul***Pycnonotus penicillatus*

This endemic is a speciality of the highlands. The first 4 were seen at the Whistling Thrush site during first light, then 6 Nuwaraeliya forest; 4 Victoria Park

Yellow-browed Bulbul*Acritillas indica*

3-4, 4, ~8 Sinharaja; 5 Kitungala village; 3 River Lounge

**Square-tailed Bulbul***Hypsipetes ganeesa*

Very common throughout

Sri Lanka Bush Warbler*Elaphrornis palliseri*

This is a very skulking bird which takes some time, patience, and leg work to see. It favours low scrub within woodland, and the forest at Nuwaraeliya is one of the better sites to find them. We were in the forest without luck for a hour or so before locating a quiet pair on the way out

Blyth's Reed Warbler*Acrocephalus dumetorum*

A single bird was initially picked up by its subsong, in the corner of Victoria Park, in trees alongside the stream

Green Warbler*Phylloscopus nitidus*

1 Sinharaja village; 1 Nuwaraeliya forest; 2 River Lounge

Large-billed Leaf Warbler*Phylloscopus magnirostris*

2 separate birds at Sinha

Brown-capped Babbler*Pellorneum fuscicapillus*

Yet another of the frustrating skulkers. Tandula caught sight of one as we were leaving Sinharaja forest for the final time, and it was difficult to see for any length of time. The 2 at the River Lounge completely turned the tables on this, where they were slowly working their way along the leaf litter directly below the restaurant

**Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler***Pomatorhinus melanurus*

Patience again finally resulted in decent views of 2 separate birds in Sinharaja forest

Dark-fronted Babbler*Rhopocichla atriceps*

This is not an uncommon bird in Sinharaja, and the soft calls are usually a giveaway. But they do have a habit of feeding under cover! Groups of 4, 6 and 6 at Sinharaja; 2 Nuwaraeliya forest



Orange-billed Babbler

Turdoides rufescens

These birds always give away their presence with noisy and constant chatter. They tend to favour feeding and progressing in a tight flock in the branches of trees: Sinharaja - 15, 10, ~12; Sinharaja research area - ~10; River Lounge ~12, ~8; Kitungala village ~20

Yellow-billed Babbler

Turdoides affinis

These are almost as noisy as Orange-billed, but can be found on the ground feeding as often as in the trees: pair feeding young on journey stop from airport to Sinharaja; 4 at village before Sinharaja; ~20, ~30 River Lounge; ~10 Kitungala village



Ashy-headed Laughingthrush

Garrulax cinereifrons

Sinharaja - 1 with Orange-billed Babblers

Oriental White-eye

Zosterops palpebrosus

1 Sinharaja reception: common Nuwaraeliya forest; common Victoria Park

Sri Lanka White-eye

Zosterops ceylonensis

A larger and darker bird than Oriental, the width of the black separating the front of the eye ring is difficult to see in the field. Hakgala was the place to see them, where they were common



Velvet-fronted Nuthatch

Sitta frontalis

Sinharaja - 2 with the mixed flock just up from the research station; 1 Sinharaja research station; 4, 2 Hakgala; 4 Nuwaraeliya forest

Sri Lanka Hill Myna

Gracula ptilogenys

Small groups were throughout Sinharaja, mainly being heard, with ~20 seen on any one day

Southern Hill Myna

Gracula indica

2, 3 River Lounge

Common Myna

Acridotheres tristis

Quite common throughout



White-faced Starling

Sturnus albofrontata

This was picked up on call on two consecutive mornings on the track from Martin's Lodge to the information centre, they may have been the same bird

Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush

Myophonus blighi

4 visits were made to track this bird down, 2 early morning (arriving before first light) and 2 in the evening. First blood was a ghostly image in the murk on the first morning. Then one was heard to call once only on the second evening. Triumph came on the last morning, when the female was feeding around the vegetable stall for some time (for a Whistling Thrush!)

Pied Thrush

Zoothera wardii

This winter visitor to the country seems to have a liking for a specific type of fruiting tree, since it was on almost the same branch on successive visits in Victoria Park. This belies the fact that it is still difficult to see, even when its presence in the tree is known



Spot-winged Thrush

Zoothera spiloptera

Sinharaja - a bird was seen tending a nest on the first morning visit. A brace and then a singleton were feeding on the wet track when returning from seeing the Serendib Scops Owl. 3 birds were hopping around the grounds of Sisira's River Lounge on successive evenings (2 together and then a lone bird, the latter of which may well have been one of the former birds)

Sri Lanka Thrush

Zoothera imbricata

This is one of the more difficult thrushes to find, due to it being a shy bird, preferring to keep to the forest floor. A pair were picked up in this very environment, thankfully fairly close to the track at Sinharaja



Indian Blackbird

Turdus simillimus

1 Hakgala

Indian Blue Robin

Luscinia brunnea

While waiting beside the stream for the Whistling Thrush to make an appearance, what was probably same bird was seen on both occasions. The first was a fleeting glimpse, but the second multiple sightings at the base of the cascade

Oriental Magpie-Robin

Copsychus saularis

Common, mainly in the highlands where there were always birds around the gardens



Pied Bush Chat*Saxicola caprata*

Pair at Nuwaraeliya vegetable gardens

Brown-breasted Flycatcher*Muscicapa muttui*

1 at the stop before Sinharaja; 1, 3, 1 Sinharaja; 1 Hakgala; 1 River Lounge

**Kashmir Flycatcher***Ficedula subrubra*

1-2 birds were picked up quite quickly on the first visit to Hakgala, but it took to almost leaving time to see even 1 on the next visit

Dull-blue Flycatcher*Eumyias sordidus*

~6, 2 Hakgala; ~6 Nuwaraeliya forest

**Tickell's Blue Flycatcher***Cyornis tickelliae*

This bird is incredibly tame, one male which was singing could almost be touched: a pair and then a single male at the River Lounge; 1 Kitungala village

Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher*Culicicapa ceylonensis*

3-4, 6 Hakgala; ~ 10 Nuwaraeliya forest

**Golden-fronted Leafbird***Chloropsis aurifrons*

1 Sinharaja information centre, 1 Sinharaja forest; 1 Kitungala village

Legge's Flowerpecker*Dicaeum vincens*

First pair were at the stop before Sinharaja; Sinharaja - ~8, 2; 1 Martin's Lodge from the restaurant; 2, 2 Kitungala village

Pale-billed Flowerpecker*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*

1 at the stop before Sinharaja; Sinharaja - 2, 2; 1 Nuwaraeliya forest

Purple-rumped Sunbird*Leptocoma zeylonica*

Pair at the stop before Sinharaja; 1 and a pair in Sinharaja forest; 2 Sinharaja village; 2, 4 Kitungala village

Purple Sunbird*Cinnyris asiaticus*

What was probably this species was seen all too briefly in the grounds of the Alpine Hotel, Nuwaraeliya. A definite male was seen singing from the top of one of the tallest trees in Victoria Park

Loten's Sunbird*Cinnyris lotenius*

1 feeding (and catching a large spider) amongst the tea plantations on the journey from Nuwaraeliya to Kitungala

House Sparrow*Passer domesticus*

Common in towns

White-rumped Munia

Lonchura striata

~15, 4 Kitungala village

Scaly-breasted Mannikin

Lonchura punctulata

~20 Victoria Park



Forest Wagtail

Dendronanthus indicus

2, 2 at Hakgala where they were feeding in leaf litter, but would fly into the trees if disturbed; 2 Victoria Park, feeding beside the stream

Grey Wagtail

Motacilla cinerea

1 rice paddies on journey from Sinharaja to Nuwaraeliya; 1, 1 Hakgala; ~6 Victoria Park; 1 Kitungala village

Total Bird Species= 118

MAMMALS SEEN

Toque Monkey

Macaca sinica

A small group was walking through Hakgala on the first visit, with what looked like a single animal amongst the troop of Leaf-Monkeys



Purple-faced Langur

Trachypithecus vetulus

1 at Sinharaja; troop of ~15 at Hakgala, feeding and moving slowly in the trees above

Sambar Deer

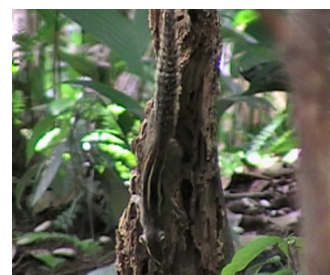
Cervus unicolor

A stag was disturbed close to us as we were about to enter Nuwaraeliya forest

Indian Palm Squirrel

Funambulus palmarum

Quite common in the Kitungala area: 2, 4 River Lounge; 3 Kitungala village; 2 Kitungala forest



Dusky Palm Squirrel

Funambulus sublineatus

Common Nuwaraeliya forest

Grizzled Giant Squirrel

Ratufa macroura

2 separate sightings at Hakgala



REPTILES SEEN

Sri Lankan Keelback Water Snake

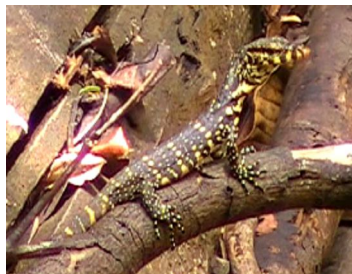
Xenochrophis asperrimus

1 was positioned nicely next to a small pool and a banquet of fish along the track in Sinharaja forest

Water Monitor

Varanus salvator

1 small individual in a stream, and a much larger one nearby, both next to Sinharaja research station



Green Forest Lizard

Calotes calote

1 Sinha

Rat Snake

Ptyas mucosa

1 slithered across the road in front of the car and into the tea plantations on the journey from Nuwaraeliya to Kitungala; another crossed the track in front of us just up from the River Lounge

Green Vine Snake

Ahaetulla nasuta

This was a treat I had been waiting for some time, of probably one of the most attractive and unusual of the snakes. Despite being on a birding trip, instructions had been given to look out for one of these. Tandula obliged, finding one next to the track at Sinharaja, not too distant from the pool where the Keelback was stationed

