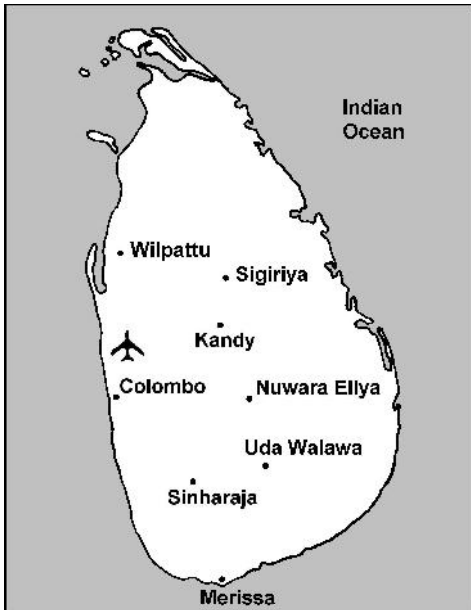


SRI LANKA

the best sites and best birds of the island



Sri Lanka is famous for the endemism of its plants, birds and other animals. Some 33 bird species have been given full endemic status, including the wonderful Red-faced Malkoha, Ceylon Blue Magpie, Layard's Parakeet, Ceylon Swallow and Yellow-eared Bulbul. Many others have island forms, such as the local Black-rumped Flameback which has deep crimson upperparts. We have a good chance of seeing all the endemics. The island also attracts some very special wintering birds, and is home to an array of fabulous butterflies, making it one of the world's biodiversity hotspots.

For many years we have wanted to run a tour to this verdant, beautiful island, since the birds are special and most are easily seen. But we had been put off by a lack of good accommodation near some of the birdwatching sites. Now, after a comprehensive recce, we offer an innovative itinerary which includes the less well known but wonderful Wilpattu National Park, and a high level of comfort throughout including short transfer journey times on good roads. The lower elevations are hot and humid all year so good hotels make a real difference. For instance, Sinharaja is a fabulous rainforest experience which is made all the better for staying at a nearby lodge with lovely rooms and a pool in a beautiful hillside setting.

Despite its turbulent history this island nation is now peaceful and quiet. On our tour we will encounter sacred temples, the welcoming Buddhist culture, outstanding landscapes and architecture from the European colonial periods. All in all Sri Lanka promises a holiday full of spectacular, unique wildlife on a sun-blessed, tropical island with a varied cultural backdrop.

ITINERARY

WILPATTU

After an overnight flight, we will arrive in the morning and head straight for Wilpattu for a two night stay. After lunch we will birdwatch in the lodge grounds and immediate area for our first endemics and commoner birds, including Southern Coucal, the deep red Ceylon Swallow, Green Imperial Pigeon, Blue-faced Malkoha, Coppersmith and Ceylon Small Barbets, Jungle Owlet, Green Warbler and Purple-rumped Sunbird. Indian Pitta is common here.

Wilpattu is the country's largest national park; located in a dry zone but with many wetlands. We have chosen to include Wilpattu, over the more frequently visited Yala, since the park is much quieter. This allows for a more intimate experience with the birds and mammals that we come across. Our first full day will include a game drive, with chances to see White-

bellied Sea-eagle, Lesser Adjutant, Lesser Whistling Duck, Painted Stork, Asian Openbill and more. Mammals possible include Asian Elephant, Sloth Bear, Ruddy Mongoose, Indian Wild Boar, Sambar and Chital Deer. There is also a good chance to encounter Leopard. On our last morning we will take another safari drive, then transfer to Sigiriya after lunch.

SIGIRIYA

Here there is more good birding right on our doorstep, so we will explore the various local habitats during our three night stay. Some of the forest and edge birds we expect are Crested Hawk Eagle, Shaheen Falcon, Ceylon Grey Hornbill, Jerdon's Nightjar, Crested Tree Swift, Indian Swiftlet, Ceylon Woodshrike, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Dark-fronted and Brown-capped Babblers, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Ceylon Green-pigeon, Orange-headed Ground-thrush and White-naped Flameback. Along the way we may

well find Toque Macaques, Tufted Grey Langurs and Sri Lanka Giant Squirrels, plus huge Land and Water Monitors. This area has, like all the sites, good paths in areas that our local guide knows well. The birding is consequently very enjoyable without being especially challenging.

KANDY AND NUWARA ELIYA

On day seven we will leave for the highlands, breaking the journey with a night in the World Heritage city of Kandy. Here we will visit the Buddhist Temple of the Sacred Tooth. This famous site is especially worth a quiet evening visit. Nearby there is some fine birding where we will try for Brown Fish-owl, Crimson-backed Flameback, Ceylon Scimitar Babbler and Common Hawk-cuckoo, amongst other birds.

The following day will find us taking a relaxed, scenic route to the Nuwara Eliya hill station and checking into the impressive, colonial-style Grand Hotel for two nights. The town's formal gardens at Victoria Park attract Yellow-eared Bulbuls and Ceylon White-eyes. It is also a regular winter site for the striking Pied Thrush, Kashmir Flycatcher and Forest Wagtail.

From Nuwara Eliya we will also visit the scenic Horton Plains, a protected plateau at 2000m. We know of sites in the cloudforest and grassland that do not require the usual hiking. We will search for Ceylon Junglefowl, Indian Blue Robin, Ceylon Whistling Thrush, Ceylon Bush Warbler, Tri-coloured Munia, Dusky Blue Flycatcher, Ceylon Woodpigeon and Hill Swallow, with a chance of raptors such as Jerdon's Baza. Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys are often seen too.

SINHARAJA

After our time in the highlands we will drive through some of the island's most scenic countryside down to our lodge at 240m. Three nights here will give us ample time to discover the delights that Sinharaja has to offer.

Sinharaja Forest Reserve is the last tract of primary lowland tropical rainforest left in Sri Lanka. Ceylon Rufous Babbler lead the colourful bird waves of Malabar Trogon, Red-faced Malkoha, Ceylon Crested Drongo, Orange and Small Minivets and more. Dazzling butterflies include Ceylon Tree Nymph, Blue Mormon and Ceylon Birdwing. Ceylon Blue Magpies often betray their presence with a loud call before they appear. Gangs of Ashy-headed Laughingthrushes pass by, whilst Spot-winged Ground-thrush and Ceylon Scaly Thrush rustle the leaf litter. We will search for Serendip Scops Owl (which was only described in 2004), Chestnut-backed Owlet, Green-billed Coucal, Legge's Flowerpecker, White-faced Starling, Ceylon Frogmouth and Ceylon Hill-myna. Huge Sri Lanka Giant Squirrels crash through the branches, whilst Kangaroo Lizards jump across the paths.

UDA WALAWA

On day 13 we will head to the southern dry zone. With two nights at Uda Walawa, we will visit the national park as well as having time to explore the environs of our lovely lodge. In the park we hope to watch beautiful Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Grey-headed Fish-eagle, Indian Roller, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Blyth's Pipit, Yellow-eyed Babbler, and Jerdon's and Golden-fronted Leafbirds.

Barred Buttonquails are common. Gender roles are reversed and the females can often be heard singing in the late afternoon. Asian Elephants are numerous here as are Golden Jackals and mongooses. Nearby are sites for Marshall's Iora, Great Thick-knee, Indian Stone Curlew, Watercock, Indian Reed Warbler, Indian Little Nightjar, Indian Scops Owl, Jerdon's Bushlark and Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark.

On day 15, after a full morning's birding we will head back to Colombo, staying overnight in the smart Gateway Hotel by the airport, before our flight home the next morning.

BLUE WHALE EXTENSION

There is the option of a two night extension in Mirissa. Two boat trips out of this south coast town will give you the chance to see the largest creature that has ever lived, the Blue Whale, as well as four or five other species of cetacean.

CLIMATE AND PACE

The lower elevations are hot and humid, but it is cooler in the highlands, where rain is also possible. Early to bed and early to rise is the comfortable way to see the wildlife. When the birds rest in the early afternoons so will we. Most breakfasts will be at around 6.30am. Mornings and late afternoons will be spent in the field, involving short walks. There are a few slopes, which will be taken at a sensible pace. There will be some free time to enjoy the lodges' facilities, whilst the keener members of the group will waste no time since there is birding on our doorstep throughout.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD

Full board accommodation is provided, with two nights at Palm Garden Village Hotel, Wilpattu, three nights at Sigiriya Village Hotel, one night at Suisse Hotel, Kandy, two nights at The Grand Hotel, Nuwara Eliya, three nights at Rain Forest Edge Lodge, Sinharaja, two nights at Kalu's Hideaway, Uda Walawa and one night at the Gateway Airport Garden Hotel. All accommodation is of a high/very high standard and all rooms have private facilities en suite. The food is good, with regional dishes and western choices. Most lunches will be taken at the hotels, with occasional packed lunches.

PRICE INCLUDES

All birdwatching excursions with expert leader and local guide, full-board accommodation (starting with lunch on 23rd, ending with breakfast on 8th), soft drinks at meal times, bottled water throughout, local transport by mini-coach, jungle activities, reserve entrance fees and international flights.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Travel insurance. Cost of visa - obtained by a simple online registration and payment of £18 (we can help if you do not have access to the internet). Items of a personal nature, alcoholic drinks, laundry, tips.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Return flight to Colombo from either Heathrow, Manchester, Birmingham or Glasgow (all via Dubai) using the scheduled services of Emirates Airlines. Outbound flight departs early afternoon, return flight arrives back late afternoon.

15 nights including one overnight flight:	22nd Feb. to 8th March 2016
Principal leader:	Roger Barnes
Local guide:	Chinthaka de Silva
Maximum group size:	10 clients with one leader and a local guide
Cost with discount (if you book before 9th November 2015):	£3190 per person sharing (£280 single supplement)
Full Cost:	£3340 per person sharing
Extension to 10th Mar:	£500 (£90 single supp.)
Deposit:	£600 per person

