



Sri Lanka Birding and Wildlife Tour with Whale Watching Extension Trip Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Colombo, Kandy & Peradeniya

You will arrive in the morning and be picked up at the airport. You will quickly leave the airport area (already outside of Colombo) and head to the heart of Sri Lanka to the island's ancient capital, Kandy. Kandy is about 3 hours away, and this drive will take most of the morning.

You will spend the afternoon exploring Peradeniya botanical gardens whose 147-acre landscaped grounds, dating back to 1371, are productive for a host of birds. You can expect your first island endemics here, possibly including Layard's Parakeet, Ceylon Small Barbet and Brown-capped Babbler. You should also find overwintering Kashmir Flycatcher, plus Yellow-billed Babbler and Emerald Dove.

You will wrap up the day at about 5 PM/6 PM, about one hour before the evening meal. In the evening, the guide will take some time to complete the bird checklist with the group, and will also confirm morning plans (breakfast time and time to load the vehicle) and review the birding plans for the day.



Yellow-eared Bulbul

Day 2: Udawattekele, Kandy to Nuwara Eliya

This morning you will have an early start, though the first birding site is only a short drive from your Kandy hotel.

You will spend the early hours of the morning at Udawattekele sanctuary, a densely forested historical reserve attached to Kandy's famed Temple of the Tooth. Here you hope to find the endemic Crimson-backed Flameback and Red-faced Malkoha, the stunning (but secretive) Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher, Stork-billed Kingfisher and Brown Fish-Owl.

After breakfast, you will experience a dramatic change in landscape and habitat as you head into the highlands to the Raj-era hill station of Nuwara Eliya at an elevation of 1868 meters atop the Uva Plateau. You will drive about 2 hours through this spectacular area. The journey will take you through some spectacular vistas past rolling hills carpeted with some of the world's finest Orange Pekoe Tea, and past the picturesque Rawana Ella Falls.



At Nuwara Eliya you will focus on Sri Lanka's upland specialties, visiting the botanical gardens of Victoria Park, whose dense undergrowth provides shelter to skulking Ceylon Scaly Thrush. This Park also is a stop for some much sought after migrants from the subcontinent, in particular Indian Pitta, Pied Thrush, Indian Blue Robin and Kashmir Flycatcher.

You will again end the day at about 5 PM/6PM. Your guide will take some time this evening to complete the bird checklist with the group, and will also confirm morning plans (breakfast time and time to load the vehicle) and review the birding plans for the day.

You will spend the night at the Rock Hotel in Nuwara Eliya.

Day 3: Horton Plains National Park

The morning will be spent exploring the grasslands and sub-tropical montane cloud forests of the atmospheric Horton Plains National Park. This Park is an isolated plateau 2100-2300 meters above sea level, which preserves a unique high altitude habitat, likened to similar sites in southern India's Western Ghats, where the influence of altitude results in a distinctly temperate environment despite the tropical latitude.



Ceylon White-eye

The mosaic of montane grassland and stunted cloud forest, restrained by the cool climate, mist and limited sunlight, is home to all of Sri Lanka's highland endemics. You will spend the rest of the day looking for the skulking Ceylon Bush-Warbler, Ceylon White-eye, Ceylon Wood-Pigeon, and the crepuscular 'Arrenga' or Ceylon Whistling-Thrush. You will also hope to find Yellow-eared Bulbul, Dull Blue Flycatcher, Indian Blackbird, Pied Bushchat, Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher, and Mountain Hawk-Eagle. You should also see all three of the island's endemic primates.

You will again hope to wrap up about one hour before supper. Your guide will take some time this evening to complete the bird checklist with the group, and will also confirm morning plans (breakfast time and time to load the vehicle) and review the birding plans for the day.

You will spend your second night in a comfortable hotel (the Rock Hotel) in Nuwara Eliya.

Day 4 and 5: Kithulgala & Kelani Valley Forest Reserve

On February 1, you will have another early start, as you journey back down into the foothills of Sri Lanka's lowland region to Kitulgala. It will take you about 2 hours to reach Kithulgala.

You will spend both February 1 (most of the day) and February 2 birding in the productive and easily accessible rainforest of the Kelani Valley Forest Reserve. The sanctuary preserves an important remnant of the low altitude forest of Sri Lanka's



Serendib Scops Owl

wet zone, now largely cleared for plantations. This reality is starkly illustrated by the dominance of rainforest along the sanctuary side of the Kelani River, with intensive plantations on the other. This is an area of forested, undulating terrain intersected by water courses, and a stronghold of the island's lowland endemics. Among your primary targets here are the endemic and secretive Green-billed Coucal and recently described Serendib Scops-Owl. Other key endemics at Kitulgala include Ceylon Grey Hornbill, Ceylon Green-Pigeon, Ceylon Hanging-Parrot, Yellow-fronted Barbet, Brown-capped Babbler, Spot-winged Ground-Thrush, Ceylon Junglefowl and Chestnut-backed Owlet. You will also find a nice complement of other species, such as Stork-billed Kingfisher, Emerald Dove, Alexandrine Parakeet, Lesser Yellownape, Malabar Trogon, Jerdon's Leafbird, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Pied Flycatcher-shrike, Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher, Brown-breasted Flycatcher, Black-naped Monarch, Rufous-bellied Eagle, Black Eagle, and Oriental Honey-buzzard.

Both nights will be spent at the Kitulgala Rest House along the Kelani River. Your guide will take some time this evening to complete the bird checklist with the group, and will also confirm morning plans (breakfast time and time to load the vehicle) and review the birding plans for the day.

Day 6: Kitulgala to Sinharaja Rainforest Reserve

On February 3, just after breakfast, you will undertake an early start to Sinharaja. The trip from Kitulgala to Sinharaja will take 4.5 to 5 hours.

You should arrive with some time for some late afternoon birding, getting a start on your birding at Sinharaja.

You will likely again wrap up your day at about 5 PM/6 PM. Your guide will take some time this evening to complete the bird checklist with the group, and will also confirm morning plans (breakfast time and time to load the vehicle) and review the birding plans for the day.

Everyone will enjoy this three day stay at Martin's Forest View Lodge.

Days 7 and 8: Kitulgala to Sinharaja Rainforest Reserve

Sinharaja is the largest and most important remaining patch of lowland rainforest in Sri Lanka, and you will spend two full days birding here. Saved from extensive logging by inaccessibility, Sinharaja is now a National Heritage Wilderness Area and UNESCO World Heritage Site. The old logging trails facilitate access to a continuous stretch of primary forest in the foothills, at altitudes of 300-1500 meters.

- This region experiences some of the heaviest rainfall during the island's monsoon periods, making the rainforest spectacularly lush with exotic flora. The trees are hung with creepers, orchids and pitcher plants.
- Everyone will enjoy the plentiful butterflies, including Common Birdwing, Common Banded Peacock and the endemic Ceylon Hedge Blue, Ceylon Snow Flat, Ceylon Palmfly and delicate Ceylon Tree Nymph.
- Almost 150 species of birds have been recorded at Sinharaja, and the sanctuary is home to virtually all of the island's endemics, including many of those previously thought to be confined to the hill zone.
- Sinharaja is particularly famed for its characteristic itinerant bird waves, the longest studied and largest in the world. Almost 60 species are known to associate with these mixed feeding flocks, which can comprise up to 100 individual birds sweeping noisily through the various levels of the forest ecosystem from ground to canopy. This aggregation of birds increases feeding efficiency and provides protection from predators. On average, each flock contains 42 individual birds of 12 species. 90% of the flocks contain Ceylon Drongo and Ceylon Rufous Babbler, both of which are active in forming and coercing the group. Other endemic species commonly found within these waves include Red-faced Malkoha, Ceylon Blue-Magpie, White-faced Starling, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, Ceylon Hill-myna, Layard's Parakeet and Legge's Flowerpecker. Alongside can be found Asian Paradise-Flycatcher, White-bellied Drongo, Common Iora, Dark-fronted Babbler, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch and Purple-rumped Sunbird. These flocks are regularly accompanied by Ceylon Giant Squirrel, Purple-faced Leaf-monkey and Mouse



Ceylon Blue Magpie

Deer. Here you also have the chance of Ceylon Spurfowl and Ceylon Scaly Thrush. With some luck, you should find Ceylon Bay-Owl, a secretive and poorly-known species restricted to Sri Lanka and southern India.

After each full day of birding, you will continue your stay these additional two nights in the simple forest lodge (Martin's Forest View Lodge) on the edge of the sanctuary.

Your guide will take some time this evening to complete the bird checklist with the group, and will also confirm morning plans (breakfast time and time to load the vehicle) and review the birding plans for the day.

Day 9: Udawalawe National Park

You will depart Sinharaja in the morning, travelling out of the island's wet zone to Embilipitiya in the dry zone of the southeast.

Travelling through rice paddies and plantations, your next port of call is Udawalawe National Park. The Park's open plains land against a backdrop of the central mountain range. The sanctuary was established to protect its 250+ Asian Elephants, and the Park hosts a variety of other mammals, including Chital (Spotted Deer), Wild Boar, Toque Macaque, Tufted Grey Langur and Ceylon Giant Squirrel.



Birdlife is diverse in the mosaic of habitats represented here, and during your afternoon jeep drive through the park you may come across Woolly-necked Stork, Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon, Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker, White-browed Bulbul, Ashy-crowned Finch-lark, Indian Silverbill, Scaly-breasted Munia, Black-headed Munia, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Baya Weaver, Blyth's Pipit and Barred Buttonquail. You should also find numerous raptors, including White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Grey-headed Fish-Eagle, and Crested Hawk-Eagle. You will also focus a bit on your key targets here - the endemic Ceylon Swallow and Ceylon Woodshrike.

Your guide will take some time this evening to complete the bird checklist with the group, and will also confirm morning plans (breakfast time and time to load the vehicle) and review the birding plans for the day.



Days 10, 11, and 12: Bundala & Yala National Parks and the wetlands of Tissa

After a further morning game drive at Udawalawe you will depart for Tissa.

Tissa will be your base for exploring the town's wetlands, the coastal lagoons and salt pans of Bundala National Park, and scrub jungle of Yala National Park over this final three days of the main trip.

The afternoon will take you on your first game drive in open jeeps into Yala, perhaps the best site in Asia to come across its most secretive big cat, Leopard. The Leopard thrives here with one of the highest densities of this species in the world. Yala is also home to Sloth Bear, Chital, Sambar, Wild Boar, and Asian Elephant.

The area also has a nice selection of birds, including Blue-faced Malkoha, Malabar Pied-Hornbill, Painted Stork and Lesser Adjutant.

Over the following two days (February 7 and 8), you will continue to bird in the area, making the best use of your time to find new trip birds and focusing on any species you may have missed.

- You will visit the 'tanks' or reservoirs of Tissa. These wetland areas host a selection of species, most notably Indian Stone-curlew, Yellow Bittern, the scarcer Black Bittern, Purple Heron, Asian Openbill, Watercock, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, White-naped Woodpecker and Brown Fish-Owl.
- You will enjoy further game drives into Bundala National Park. Cut off from the Indian Ocean by a wide beach and sand dunes, Bundala is perhaps the most important wetland in Sri Lanka for both resident and migratory species. Here you can expect to see a great selection of water birds and shorebirds

with some additional species in adjacent scrub. Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Great Thick-knee, Small Pratincole, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Lesser Sand-Plover, Gull-billed Tern, Caspian Tern, Great Crested Tern, Lesser Crested Tern and Brown-headed Gull can all be seen here.

- You will also have a chance at finding Indian Nightjar and Jerdon's Nightjar in the scrub at dawn.

Each evening your guide will complete the bird checklist with the group, and review the next day's birding plans.

Day 13: AM Birding at Tissa, then Transfer to Colombo

The whole group will spend a final morning birding around Tissa, departing after lunch. Those not continuing on the extension will then head for Colombo, about 6 hours away.

Day 14: Flights Home Today

After a final breakfast at the hotel you will check out and be transferred to the airport for your flight home.



Whale-Watching Extension

Day 13: AM Birding at Tissa, then Transfer to Mirissa

After a final morning birding around Tissa with the group, you will be transferred to Mirissa for the whale watching extension. You may have time bird around the hotel grounds in the evening, depending on travel time.

Day 14: AM Whale Watching Pelagic; PM at Leisure or Birding Locally



Each morning you will need to arise early for breakfast, before meeting the driver. The driver will take you over to meet the boat for the whale-watching tours. You will want to be prepared for being out in the ocean all morning. A sun hat, sunblock, a jacket and other suitable clothing and shoes (tennis shoes with good soles and closed toes) will be a plus.

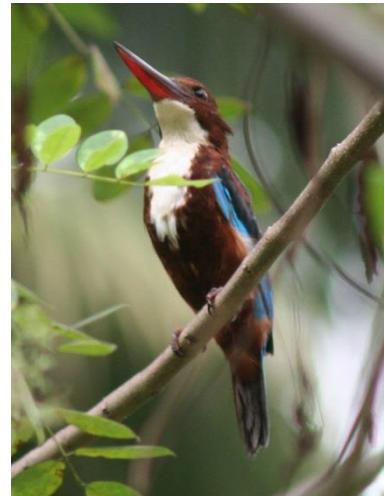
Mirissa is just a few kilometers west of Sri Lanka's southernmost point. Here, the continental shelf is at its narrowest, with depths of 1 kilometer and deeper found just 6 kilometers or 40 minutes away from the shore.

The next two mornings will involve a three to five hour morning pelagic excursion out beyond the continental shelf.

- Blue Whale, the largest mammal ever to have lived (averaging 25 meters and weighing in excess of 100 tons), is the highlight of whale-watching here. Blue Whales occur regularly from November to April in concentrations not seen anywhere else in the world.
- The relative calm of the sea in the mornings makes the blows and splashes of marine mammals visible at a distance. While concentrating on Blue Whale, a host of other cetaceans are likely to be seen, possibly including Sperm Whale, Bryde's Whale and Short-finned Pilot Whale.
- Large pods of Long-snouted Spinner Dolphins will also be seen. And these groups often include other species, such as Indo-Pacific Bottlenosed Dolphin, Pantropical Spotted Dolphin, and Striped Dolphin.

You will return to the hotel for lunch.

Afternoon will be free time to relax and enjoy the stunning coastal location. Reading and enjoying the beach is a great option. You can also spend time birding locally around the hotel grounds.



Day 15: AM Whale Watching Pelagic; PM Transfer to Colombo

You will wake up early for another whale watching tour, after which you will return to the hotel and have lunch. You will then be picked up by your driver. From Mirissa to Colombo is a 3 to 4 hour drive (accounting for an extra hour with traffic).

Day 16: Flights Home Today

After a final breakfast at the hotel you will check out and be transferred to the airport for your flight home.