

SRI LANKA DEC 2012 – JAN 2013

1. Overview

- 1.2 In December 2010, Tim Sykes, Micky Maher, Stuart Thomas and I spent the best part of two weeks birding in Sri Lanka. It was a brilliant trip. We saw all the endemic birds, a lot of great mammals, herpetofauna and invertebrates and had a lot of fun doing it.
- 1.3 After two weeks, I returned to the UK. Bad weather had curtailed initial offshore trips, so no blue whales for me in 2010, we had missed Kashmir flycatcher at Victoria Park due to prolonged heavy rain, and, due to high water levels, could not find leopard at Yala. The other guys stayed on for a couple of weeks, seeing blue whales off Mirissa and then travelling back to Nuwara Eliya to search for and find the flycatcher once the weather had improved.
- 1.4 In late December 2012 I returned to Sri Lanka. This was more of a recreational than a birding trip, but the itinerary nevertheless included days at Yala and on Horton Plains, a boat trip off Mirissa (looking for whales), have a half day at Udawalawe, and shorter periods at Victoria Park (Nuwara Eliya) and the Botanical Gardens in Kandy. In 2010 our stay in the highlands had been blighted by poor weather, and in particular I was keen to walk on Horton Plains, which looked to be a beautiful area, and return to Yala, which is a fantastic lowland reserve.
- 1.5 The rest of the itinerary included a trip up Adam's Peak (on the Hatton Road), visits to Buddhist temples in the Kandy area, shopping in Kandy and Galle and beach time on the south coast.
- 1.6 The lack of time at Sinharaja and Kithugala, or in other tracts or high quality forest away from the highest ground, and the limited birding time in the itinerary meant that a massive list was always unlikely. However, the early morning birding around gardens and villages that complemented the visits to the nature reserves and other well-known sites probably increased my insight into the level of abundance and habitat preferences of Sri Lankan birds. I recorded 17 new birds for my Sri Lankan list (11 of which were completely new to me), as well as new land and marine mammals and invertebrates. Watching the bats was incredible, and I enjoyed the country just as much as in 2010. A bird list is found in Appendix 1 of this report. New birds for me for Sri Lanka are highlighted in yellow, and endemics in red type.
- 1.7 Hopefully, this short report, intended as an addendum to the more comprehensive report produced to cover our 2010 trip and found at <http://www.surfbirds.com/mb/trips/sri-lanka-report-gabb-2010.pdf> contains supplementary useful information that can help aid planning a trip. It includes some general logistical information, and updates the 2010 report in this respect, a daily summary of bird and other wildlife sightings, and a short section on the hotels we stayed in.
- 1.8 Photos can be seen on my Facebook site, and a variety are included in the appendices.

2 Logistics

Booking

- 2.1 I booked through A. Baur & Co (Travel) Ltd (www.bours.com). Due to my previous experience of the country, we were able to work up an itinerary quite quickly. The contact at Bours is now Malinda Ekanayake (who has replaced Perry Viswalingam). Malinda is contactable at tourism@bours.com.
- 2.2 Our guide was Sunil de Alwis. Sunil proved to be a very pleasant man, who made the logistics of the tour tick, and who had a deep interest and considerable expertise with regard to Sri Lankan birds. A driver (Charmara) was also provided by Bours. They met us at the airport, which is relatively small, if busy. The vehicle provided was a reasonably new van with space for about 6 in the back and loads of luggage room.
- 2.3 The cost of a tour will depend on what you want to do, the standard of accommodation you want, the duration of your stay, number of participants etc. It is therefore advisable to contact Bours or another experienced operator and make enquiries if you are interested in getting a ballpark cost. Half-board in all accommodation is standard and included in the fee.
- 2.4 Direct flights from London Heathrow to Bandaranayake, Negombo, are available through Sri Lanka Airlines, and prices can be checked on their website.
- 2.5 The trip was paid for, in advance, by bank transfer. Sri Lankan rupees are a controlled currency. They can be withdrawn at the airport. At the time of the trip £1 was equal to around 200 SL rupees. Dollars are not accepted in many places, and the exchange rates at hotels are poor.

Sources of Information

- 2.6 A list of relevant books and other publications is contained in the 2010 report. The only change is that the Harrison guide (the previous country-specific field guide) has now been superseded by a new field guide. The full reference is as follows:
- Warakagoda, D., Inskipp, C., Inskipp, T & Grimmett, R. (2012). Birds of Sri Lanka. Helm, London.*
- 2.7 The Helm guide is better illustrated (in my opinion) than its predecessor, but does treat a number of species split by Rasmussen & Anderton (the Ripley Guide) as conspecifics. This results in 27 rather than 33 species being considered endemic.
- 2.8 The bird list appended to this report follows Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) for simplicity and consistency with the 2010 report.
- 2.9 In addition to the butterfly book noted in the 2010 report, the websites <http://srilankabutterflies.net/> and <http://www.slbutterflies.lk/> are very useful for identification purposes. Note that the book does not cover skippers, which you will record regularly.

Other Requirements

- 2.10 Travel sickness (including sea sickness) pills and something for upset stomachs / rehydration are well worth taking.
- 2.11 In the southern part of the country anti-malarials are not required (advice for trips to the north of the country should be sought from a nurse or checked on line). Mosquitoes were only at all common around dusk during the trip. Leech socks are advisable in all forest areas (unless you are happy to get bitten – a lot).
- 2.12 You will need a few jabs prior to travel, but nothing too intrusive.
- 2.13 I managed to order a Sri Lanka-friendly adaptor plug for charging cameras and phones on the internet prior to going. This cost around £3. Due to uncertainty caused by on-line reviews (some

of which said it wouldn't work), I asked Baur to provide one as well (I arranged to reimburse the guide). In the event, the one purchased on line worked everywhere, and some of the larger hotels had a UK-type plug socket in the room.

- 2.14 The guides will not have more than basic kit. Taking a pointing laser is a good idea. The guides tend to be very sharp, particularly in forest (where the birding is difficult), and loaning / giving them the laser will help you get on more stuff. This is particularly relevant if you are after cryptic species such as scaly thrush.

Weather

- 2.15 The weather was relatively good during our stay, with temperatures in the mid to high 20's in the lowlands during the day. You will always get some rain in December and January, often in the late afternoon and at night. It is pretty humid, so either be prepared to get wet or take lightweight waterproofs.
- 2.16 On hot days in the lowlands it is advisable to take a couple of hours off in the early afternoon and take it easy.
- 2.17 Upland areas like Horton Plains and Adam's Peak can be cold, even in UK terms, if the weather is poor. It is worth taking at least one fleece.

Rip offs

- 2.18 So much of Sri Lanka is great value for money, and the people are so friendly, that when you come across someone who tries to rip you off it is notable.
- 2.19 The hotels along the beach in Negombo can offer very little for a high cost, and have disinterested and sometimes rude staff. Unawatuna is pretty and the shops can be interesting, but it is rapidly losing a lot of what makes Sri Lanka great – including good value food and pleasant service, while the glass-bottomed boat rides from the beach involve paying a minimum of £12 to go to a knackered reef with a few fish over it.

3 Daily Summary

Day 1 (25 December 2012)

- 3.1 During the transfer from the airport common species including yellow-billed babbler, house crow, common myna and green imperial pigeon were seen, and palm squirrels were present at a roadside café where we stopped for a quick break en route to Tissamaharama (Tissa).
- 3.2 At Tissa, a quick walk around the minor roads and tracks near the hotel in the afternoon resulted in a range of common waterfowl being seen in flight. These included Asian openbill, purple heron and spot-billed pelican. Chestnut-headed bee-eaters were on the nearby phone lines, and an area of open water behind the hotel (but not reached directly from it) had lesser whistling ducks, pheasant-tailed jacanas and black-winged stilts. Two white-bellied sea-eagles were overhead.
- 3.3 The butterflies along the lanes included diadem, crimson rose, jezebel, dark wanderer and tawny coster.
- 3.4 Black-headed munia, present in the hotel grounds, was apparently a new species for me, although may have been an omission from the 2010 list. A nice little bird.
- 3.5 An afternoon visit to a wetland near Tissa, likely to have been Deberawewa Tank (based on my recollection of its shape and study of Google Earth) proved productive. Cotton pygmy goose was present on the open water (3 birds), and yellow-eyed babbler and tawny-bellied babbler, together in scrub close to the path were also new for me. A further new species was a stunning white-naped woodpecker. A variety of commoner species included brown shrike, thick-billed flowerpecker, Loten's sunbird, stork-billed kingfisher, common iora and ashy-headed wood-swallow, as well as storks, ibises and egrets.

Day 2 (26 December 2012)

- 3.6 The first full day was spent at Yala. It is about a 45 minute journey from Tissa, where much of the local tourist accommodation is to the park. You are picked up by safari vehicle. This means an early start (around 05:30).
- 3.7 Indian nightjar was seen foraging over the road as we came towards the park, and while waiting to enter, a variety of other locally common species were noted. These included orange-breasted green pigeon, crested tree swift, paddyfield pipit and wild pig.
- 3.8 Shallow water pools held the usual wader species, the most impressive being greater thick-knees, which were present in small groups. Pintail snipe, marsh and wood sandpiper and garganey were among other species noted, and there were Pacific golden plover with the more abundant Kentish plovers. There was a little rush of mammal sightings: a golden jackal, a herd of spotted deer a few sambar deer and a distant Asian elephant. The highlight of the morning, however, was a black-necked stork. The bird was standing next to a water buffalo in a shallow pool. A rare bird in Sri Lanka and a first for me.
- 3.9 Along the tracks through the scrub and in areas of open grassland, black robin, hoopoe, the endemic Ceylon junglefowl, Indian peafowl, ashy-crowned sparrowlark, Jerdon's bushlark, a male streaked weaver, grey-bellied cuckoo and a ruddy mongoose were seen.
- 3.10 We stopped briefly on the beach for breakfast. A fan-throated lizard pretended to be invisible and ghost crabs proved too fast to catch. An elephant walked over one of the larger rock exposures, making for good photographs of it silhouetted against the sky.
- 3.11 By lunchtime we had had no joy with leopard – we would continue to look but the chances were diminishing. Leopard had been seen by a few people over the morning, but as in 2010, high water-levels had resulted in sightings becoming less predictable, and the park is vast. In settled weather, your chances in Yala should be about 50:50, as animals habitually use the same areas to rest. The lowland race of toque macaques were causing havoc around vehicles stopped for lunch – running into trucks to steal food which they would then fight over.

- 3.12 We left Yala in the late afternoon. A further new bird for my Sri Lankan list, rosy starling, was present in a small flock near one of the larger pools; Brahminy starling, woolly-necked stork, crested serpent eagle, the lowland race of giant squirrel and watching land monitors and mugger crocodiles had all provided good value, and grey hanumans were around the entrance. The chances of leopard during the trip had realistically gone as we left Yala, as they do not occur at Udawalawe, and are present but very rarely seen at other sites including Horton Plains. Another visit needed!

Day 3 (27 December 2012)

- 3.13 We didn't have time to go into the reserve at Udawalawe during the 2010 visit, although we had done some birding from the roadside next to it and picked up some nice stuff.
- 3.14 I thought Udawalawe was a great place. The reserve is far smaller, and the network of tracks much more limited than at Yala, but the birding is easy among the broken scrub and grassland. I did not get there until mid-morning. On a proper birding trip I would be knocking on the gate at dawn! We were again taken round by safari jeep (the reserve is famous for its elephant herds).
- 3.15 Species present included crested (changeable) hawk-eagle, one of which had taken a myna, coppersmith barbets, black-shouldered kites, ashy and plain prinias, Jacobin cuckoos, barred buttonquail, garden lizard and soft-shell turtle. There was no large elephant herd near the track, but a mother with a young calf and a male elephant taking a mud bath allowed some close photos to be taken.
- 3.16 The ornithological highlight was lesser adjutant. A bird was seen soaring, then soon after a sub-adult was recorded walking through broken scrub. A really charismatic bird.
- 3.17 After lunch, we made the four hour drive to Nuwara Eliya, stopping at Rawana Falls (Ella) for photos and a tea room (briefly) en route.

Day 4 (28 December 2012)

- 3.18 We left Nuwara at about 05:30 to travel to Horton Plains. The road varies between very badly surfaced (resulting in the van crawling along), to slow, to tortuously windy, but they appear to be resurfacing part of it. It currently takes at least an hour to get to the gate of the park, but this could be halved if the road was better.
- 3.19 En route we saw a ring-tailed civet, meaning I had now seen the three civets found in Sri Lanka. I recounted this boring fact to the rest of the people in the van. At 05:45 in the morning no-one had the energy to respond.
- 3.20 As dawn came, it was clear that the morning at least was likely to be bright, but ultimately it turned out to be better than that – warm and sunny. During 2010 we had had just about enough time to find Sri Lanka bush warbler and whistling thrush before the weather set in. Driving rain and high wind led to us abandoning ship and going back to the hotel in Nuwara for the rest of the day.
- 3.21 This time, following a half-hearted attempt to find the bush warbler and whistling thrush, which did result in the endemics dull blue flycatcher and Legge's flowerpecker, Indian blackbird, and a new species for me, dark-fronted babbler, being recorded, we headed on to walk some the trails. Most people do a circular route that takes you to Little World's End, World's End and Bakers Falls – I am not sure if there are other options – we did it too.
- 3.22 The walk takes you through some great grassland, open scrub and cloud forest with panoramic views from some areas. The endemic yellow-eared bulbul is common, as is dusky-striped squirrel, and with a bit of patience, both can be quite confiding. Other species noted were pied (bar-winged) flycatcher-shrike, grey-headed canary-flycatcher, velvet-fronted nuthatch, orange (scarlet) minivet (which I couldn't remember seeing in 2010 despite the fact that we recorded it and it is stunning), and pied bushchat. The endemic Sri Lanka woodpigeon was common, and I got far better views of a bird than I had managed in 2010, and giant squirrel and purple faced leaf-monkey were seen on a few occasions. A common mormon butterfly posed for photos on a track – most of the large butterflies in Sri Lanka seem to be in perpetual motion so this was a bonus.

- 3.23 The scenery at Little World's End and World's End is amazing, and I am not a views person. The mist usually descends (or ascends in this case) by late morning, however, and some of the tracks would be difficult for anyone who is not steady on their feet. We left by early afternoon and returned to Nuwara for lunch. A small black shrew was seen on the path, and an oriental honey-buzzard was soaring over the plain as we went.
- 3.24 During late afternoon an hour in Victoria Park produced forest and grey wagtail, a massive rat snake, more canary-flycatchers, Indian blue robin and velvet-fronted nuthatch. Suni picked up Kashmir flycatcher on call. A stunning male was foraging around the compost heap near the toilet – the best bird of the trip (not just because of its appearance and rarity but also the amount of unsuccessful time spent in 2010 looking for it in the rain). Two pied thrushes were noted on the bank of the stream. These flew into a conifer on approach, but showed reasonably well. There was no sign of slaty-legged crane, which is often noted here, or Indian pitta, which is also usually present – but I didn't try that hard for either.
- 3.25 On return to the Tea Bush Hotel yellow-eared bulbuls, pied bushchats and scaly-breasted munias were noted, the latter breeding in climbing shrubs on the hotel walls.
- 3.26 The birding during the rest of the trip was now going to be fitted in around other plans.

Day 5 (29 December 2012)

- 3.27 An early morning visit to Galway Forest and some other forest compartments around Nuwara ahead of breakfast preceded the long journey to Hatton (the road was being dug up along its entire length turning a 2 hour journey into a 6 hour one).
- 3.28 The primary aim was to try and track down bush warbler. This didn't happen. There were no calling birds present, despite our visiting suitable habitat known to support territories each year. A Blyth's reed warbler, numerous Ceylon white-eyes, pied flycatcher-shrike and whistling thrush at Bombu Ella Forest were the more notable sightings.
- 3.29 The journey to Hatton features some nice waterfalls (Clair's and Devon Falls), but we saw no notable wildlife. On arrival at Hatton two hours on the veranda of the hotel drinking beer allowed lengthy study of a small warbler. The plumage features, combined with the disyllabic call determined it to be a greenish. I remain unconvinced whether greenish is as scarce as indicated by the books in Sri Lanka (and conversely whether green warbler is as common) – but more technical ornithologists than me will wrestle with conclusive identification.

Day 6 (30 December 2012)

- 3.30 The small hours of the night were spent trekking up Adam's Peak ahead of dawn. It was worth it, even for a heathen like me (people of various faiths make the pilgrimage up Adam's Peak [referred to as the Sri Pada or holy mountain]), as the dawn was incredible. The final climb is very steep. It took about 2.5 hours to get up from Hatton, but the path was not as jammed as it can (reportedly) often be. The most spectacular skies were at least 30 minutes before sunrise proper.
- 3.31 On the way down, yellow-eared bulbul was common, great tit, Indian blackbird and Blyth's reed warbler, and numerous Ceylon white-eyes were noted on the upper parts of the mountain. Some of the forest appears to be of high quality as you descend, and white-bellied drongo, (square-tailed) black bulbul and yellow-browed bulbul were all new for the trip. These birds were seen in an area behind a circular (white) Buddhist temple. Toque macaques were present on the path.
- 3.32 During the long transfer to Kandy a black eagle was seen from the van. We arrived at the Hotel Suisse in time to have a drink in the evening sunshine.

Days 7 & 8 (31 December 2012 & 1 January 2013)

- 3.33 There are lots of things I feel uncomfortable about in the Hotel Suisse in Kandy. It is big and showy, nothing comes cheap (you are always having bills waved under your nose for signing) and a lot of the people staying have money but lack class (and are often unnecessary rude to the staff and others) – aren't I pompous! This results in a feeling that the staff while superficially pleasant would like to see most of the residents painfully killed or at least flogged – a feeling I share to some degree.

- 3.34 The good things about the hotel, however, are the food, its position next to Lake Kandy and the trees in the garden, which have a variety of good birds moving through them as well as an Indian flying fox colony. The bar is also very diverse in Sri Lankan terms.
- 3.35 During the early morning and early evening between our arrival on 30 December and our departure on the morning of 2 January, I was able to spend a good number of hours in the Hotel Suisse garden. This resulted in a new species for me, banded bay cuckoo, plus several records of the endemic Ceylon small barbet. More commonly recorded species include greater coucal, Alexandrine parakeet (which once you know the call is easy to pick from rose-ringed in flight – and other characteristics become more obvious), Asian brown flycatcher, brown-headed barbet, black-headed oriole and Ceylon white-eye.
- 3.36 White-bellied fish eagle sometimes occurs over Kandy Lake, but sightings of spotted black turtle, water monitor, toque macaques, large numbers of flying foxes, herons and at least two species of cormorant are more assured. Dusk movements of egrets, mynas, parakeets and cormorants can be spectacular, and then the flying foxes start to get going!
- 3.37 Birding around the fringes of Buddhist temples on the outskirts of Kandy resulted in Jerdon's leafbird being added to the trip list.
- 3.38 There was a late afternoon visit to the Botanical Gardens in Kandy on the 7th. I wanted to go principally because we had been 'monsooned' out of them in 2010. The gardens are large, with many ornamental trees, lawns and flower beds – as you might expect. The trees are used by large numbers of flying foxes, with the total roost appearing to be many hundreds or even thousands of animals. The birding is also good, with lesser hill-myna, small minivet, Asian paradise flycatchers, Asian koel, Ceylon small barbet and green warbler among the species Suni and I recorded. I had assumed that great tit was very much confined to the highest parts of the country – wrongly – they were here as well.

Days 9 – 14 (2 – 7 January 2013)

- 3.39 Day 9 saw the end of the organised tour, and the departure of Suni, Charmara and the van. The rest of the holiday was spent at the coast. The drive from Kandy to Weligama took most of Day 9, and the remainder of time was spent whale watching off Mirissa (2 days), shopping in Galle and Negombo and taking it easy in Unawatuna.
- 3.40 The trips offshore were organised through the Paradise Beach Hotel in Mirissa. Virtually anyone will offer to take you out looking for whales – there is clearly a lot of money to be made from it and the number of boats had increased hugely since my trip in 2010. Paradise Beach at least have a crew that observes a good code of conduct around marine mammals, a boat that is capable of going 15km offshore and which is safe in fairly interesting sea conditions, and life jackets. Booking at the hotel costs approximately £32.50 (6,500 rupees) per person, and includes early morning coffee and a packed breakfast. This is about par in terms of cost, although some operators charge considerably more.

Whale Watching

- 3.41 During the whale watching trips I saw some terrible driving, particularly by the skipper of www.whale-watching-mirissa.com, who almost steamed straight over a blue whale. Charging towards whales in boats tends to disturb them and make them dive, so this guy and several others like him don't do the whales, their punters or others any favours.
- 3.42 Please don't take the above as an advert (I couldn't get the name of the boat which would have been preferable – the website was far more prominently advertised) – if you want to make enquiries in advance with a better outfit, contact www.paradise.mirissa.com. However, I have always been able to book the day before from the hotel.
- 3.43 During the first trip I had distant views of apparently mating turtles, which I was unable to determine to species level. There were pods of 4 and 5 sperm whales, which fluked impressively when approached by boats, and a further lone animal was seen logging at the surface. The best sighting was of a Bryde's whale however. The animal was not as far offshore as the sperm whales, and showed very well. The crews tend to look for blows to track whales down, and as we were going

back inshore, no-one else was looking. The shape of the dorsal fin made the animal instantly recognisable, and it rolled several times fairly close to the boat.

- 3.44 During the second visit, two days after the first, blue whales were present in some numbers. It is impossible to say how many were present, but we had about 20 sightings of animals, of which around 5 or 6 were close to the boat. Animals were seen blowing, rolling and diving, which sometimes just resulted in an arch of the back or more occasionally raising the tail completely out of the water. It is difficult to describe just how good this was. I won't try – it is just worth doing. However, I would note that many of the animals are likely to have dived as a result of the way the boats were handled around them – this is really counter-productive both in terms of a wildlife experience and in terms of whale conservation.
- 3.45 Long-snouted spinner dolphin was noted on both trips. On both occasions 80-100 animals were probably present, and despite harassment by overenthusiastic skippers, they did at times bow ride and do some aerobatics. Other species seen were tuna and flying fish.
- 3.46 The boats tend to roll a fair bit, which makes identifying birds, many of which are distant terns, challenging. Gull-billed terns are present around the harbour, but further out greater crested and bridled terns are commoner. On our previous trip in 2010 (we managed to get out of the harbour once before I left but had to turn round due to rough seas) we recorded pomarine skua and noddies, assumedly pushed into the area by low pressure. Striated heron is usually easy to find in the harbour.

Weligama and Unawatuna

- 3.47 The hotel at Weligama was out in the sticks and very dull. The only avian interest was birds sitting on the fishing platforms just offshore. These included greater crested tern, common tern and the ubiquitous white-throated (Smyrna) kingfisher.
- 3.48 Transferring to Unawatuna and into the Hotel Nooit Gedacht was a very good idea for numerous reasons. The large garden was great for birding, with lots of trees, pools, scrub and compost heaps, and the hotel backs onto a hill that has remnant primary or well established secondary lowland forest.
- 3.49 During early mornings and late afternoons spent wandering the grounds I recorded a wide range of bird species, most of which are common and relatively ubiquitous in Sri Lanka, but also colourful and novel for the non-resident. It felt like local patch birding. New species for the trip that were found in the garden were oriental white-eye and white browed bulbul, but more interesting were the nests of purple-rumped sunbirds, white-rumped and scaly-breasted munias, the latter in lights outside the rooms. Red-backed woodpecker, Asian paradise-flycatcher, brown shrike, Ceylon swallow, crested treeswift, the endemic Ceylon (pompadour) green pigeon, black-headed oriole and red-wattled lapwing were among the other species present.
- 3.50 The non-avian fauna was more impressive. The large pool at the back of the hotel is amazing for bats. Flying foxes, smaller (but still very large) fruit bats and still smaller bats (ranging between a much larger version of a noctule and a tiny pipistrelle-like bat) all team around within half an hour of dusk. Common skink is present around the pool, and the grounds have great potential for snakes (including some of the more lethal species such as kraits), the butterfly fauna is good and at least two species of frog are present. I was surprised, which I probably should not have been, to find purple-faced leaf monkeys in trees within the complex. I was less surprised to see Indian brown mongoose in one of the many compost heaps.
- 3.51 It was with some regret that we left for Negombo on the morning of 7th January, before the flight out on the 8th.

Negombo

- 3.52 Apart from a tropic dart (skipper butterfly) in the grounds of the hotel, the only notable wildlife event was the evening commuting of Indian (house) crows. Thousands of birds stream south along the coastal strip in the evening. Nevertheless, a bit of a damp squib of an end to a great trip.

4 Accommodation

The short 'reviews' below do not take huge account of price, as some were booked on our behalf. Baur will have got preferred rates. The final three places were booked privately.

Priyankara Hotel, Tissa

The best hotel of the trip. Great food (including good Sri Lankan meals and an excellent breakfast), a good range of drinks at the bar, nice clean rooms and pleasant staff. Well located for Yala, excellent for the tanks around Tissa, and good immediate vicinity for birding as well. Clean, small swimming pool. 9/10.

<http://www.priyankarahotel.com/>

Tea Bush Hotel, Nuwara Eliya

An all-singing all-dancing website, and a favourable write up in the lonely planet guide hides the fact that this place, while not bad, has shortcomings. The rooms are damp and smell strongly of mould. This is relatively typical of Nuwara (with its very high rainfall), but isn't great. The food is average (dinner and breakfast) and the music during dinner (which sounded like Sri Lankan covers of Bing Crosby) is bloody awful. The staff are friendly, but it is no more than a 4/10.

<http://www.teabush-hotel.com/home.php>

White Elephant Hotel, Delhousie, Hatton

I liked this place. A bit of a back-packers hotel given its location near to Adam's Peak. Nice veranda overlooking the Kelani River, clean rooms with good en-suites, good evening buffet and hard-working and pleasant staff. Breakfast a bit limited and the hotel should be a relatively budget option. Beer only – which is ok for me. 7.5/10.

<http://hotelwhiteelephant.com/index.htm>

Hotel Suisse, Kandy

The food can be superb, the grounds and the bar are great, there is a large outdoor pool, it is well situated for Kandy, but the feeling you get from the Hotel Suisse is that they will squeeze every last rupee out of you and that the days of the Raj live on. It leaves me with very mixed feelings. 6/10

Villa Tissa, Weligama

A quiet boutique hotel, with a small pool, good (simple) food and pleasant staff. Next to the sea. However, if it rains you are miles from anywhere, the rooms are pretty unexceptional (albeit clean) and the price (if booked in advance on the net) is about three times more than you should pay. 3/10.

<http://www.villatissa.net/index.html>

Hotel Nooit Gedacht, Unawatuna

A great garden for birding and other wildlife. Good dinner and an excellent breakfast, a pool, pleasant staff, clean rooms with good en suites. No alcohol on premises is a bit painful, but you can pick it up in Unawatuna. 8/10

Info available at: http://www.go-lanka.com/Unawatuna/nooit-gedacht-hotel/nooit-gedacht-hotel_unawatuna.html

Golden Star Beach Hotel, Negombo.

You always stand a chance of getting fleeced by hotels located near to airports. This place was utterly terrible. Some of the staff were rude. Service was shockingly slow. They don't even clean the litter from the beach adjacent to the hotel, which given their pricing and the emphasis on the beach in their name is both shocking and short-sighted. Grounds manicured and very dull. Pool present, but crowded. Good range of drinks, but expensive. Breakfast good. 1/10.

<http://www.goldenstarbeachhotel.com/>

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 I enjoyed my second trip to Sri Lanka as much as my first. When the weather is good, the scenery in the Highlands is amazing. Bours did a good job with the itinerary, and Suni and Charmara looked after us very well. I felt, having spent a bit more time visiting sites of cultural and/or religious importance, and walking through the towns, that I had got more of a feel for the country than in 2010, when we had to work pretty hard to see the endemic birds.
- 5.2 From a personal perspective, I enjoyed seeing the birds and becoming a more competent Sri Lankan birder. The avian highlights were lesser adjutant, black-necked stork and Kashmir flycatcher, but I also got a lot of pleasure out of wandering around without having the specific targets I did in 2010. The views of blue whale were brilliant, and the encounters with Bryde's whale and sperm whale were great, being less expected. Missing leopard was not the end of the world, and gives me a good excuse to go back to a great country.

Appendix 1. Bird List.

	Vernacular name	Latin Name	Notes
1	Spot-billed pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>	Common: large waterbodies inc Colombo
2	Little cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	Common
3	Indian shag	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>	Common
4	Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis</i>	off Mirissa
5	Oriental darter	<i>Anhingha melanogaster</i>	Lowland waterbodies partic Yala
6	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta garzetta</i>	Very common
7	Great egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	Common
8	Intermediate egret	<i>Egretta intermedia intermedia</i>	Very common
9	Purple heron	<i>Ardea purpurea manilensis</i>	Common
10	Eastern cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>	Abundant
11	Indian pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii grayii</i>	Abundant
12	Striated heron	<i>Butorides striata javanicus</i>	Mirissa Harbour
13	Black-crowned night heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Tissa, Kandy Lake
14	Yellow bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>	Briefly at Tissa
15	Painted stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	Common
16	Asian openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	Common: paddies and waterbodies
17	Woolly-necked stork	<i>Ciconia epsicopus episcopus</i>	Yala. Several in flight
18	Black-necked stork	<i>Ephippiorynchus asiaticus</i>	Good views of a bird in Yala
19	Lesser adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>	Excellent views of soaring and walking birds at Udawalawe
20	Black-headed ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	Common
21	Eurasian spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia leucorodia</i>	Several at Yala
22	Lesser whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	Common
23	Cotton pygmy goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>	Three birds on a tank near Tissa (poss Deberawewa Tank)
24	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	Yala
25	Oriental honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	One at Horton Plains
26	Black-winged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus vociferus</i>	Particularly common at Udawalawe
27	Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus indus</i>	Common throughout lowland areas
28	White-bellied sea-eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	Large lowland waterbodies
29	Booted eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	One near Adam's Peak
30	Crested serpent-eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela spilogaster</i>	Yala, Udawalawe
31	Black eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malayensis perniger</i>	One en route between Nuwara and Hatton
32	Crested hawk-eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus ceylonensis</i>	Very common in lowlands
33	Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Udawalawe, Horton Plains
34	Ceylon junglefowl	<i>Gallus lafayetii</i>	Yala
35	Indian peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	Yala, Udawalawe
36	Barred buttonquail	<i>Turnix suscitator leggei</i>	Two crossed track at Udawalawe
37	White-breasted waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	Very common
38	Purple swampphen	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>	Tissa, Yala etc

39	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus indica</i>	One at Tissa
40	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Several at Tissa
41	Pheasant-tailed jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	Commonest at Tissa during this trip
42	Pacific golden plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	Frequently recorded at Yala
43	Little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius curonicus</i>	Common at Yala
44	Kentish plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Abundant at Yala
45	Yellow-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>	Frequent at Yala
46	Red-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus lankae</i>	Very common
47	Pintail snipe	<i>Gallinago tenura</i>	One at Yala
48	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	A flock of c.80 at Yala
49	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Common at Yala
50	Common greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Several at Yala
51	Marsh sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	Common at Yala
52	Green sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	A single at Yala
53	Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	Several at Yala
54	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Common
55	Little stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	Common at Yala
56	Curlew sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	Abundant at Yala
57	Black-winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Common
58	Great thick-knee	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>	Small groups at Yala
59	Gull-billed tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica nilotica</i>	Common
60	Great crested tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>	Good views on coast (e.g. Weligama)
61	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Present on coast (e.g. Weligama)
62	Bridled tern	<i>Sterna anaethetus</i>	Common offshore
63	Whiskered tern	<i>Chilodnius hybrida</i>	Common at Tissa
64	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	
65	Ceylon woodpigeon	<i>Columba torringtonii</i>	Seen very well at Horton Plains. Heard on numerous occasions there.
66	Spotted dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis ceylonensis</i>	Abundant
67	Orange-breasted green pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus leggei</i>	Very common at Yala
68	Ceylon green pigeon	<i>Treron pompadora</i>	Several at Yala, also 2 over Nooit Gedacht, Unawatuna
69	Green imperial-pigeon	<i>Ducilla aenea pusilla</i>	Common
70	Alexandrine parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria eupatria</i>	Several locations in Kandy inc Botanical Gardens, Hotel Suisse
71	Rose-ringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri millanensis</i>	Common
72	Greater (southern) coucal	<i>Centropus (sinensis) paroti</i>	Common. More often heard than seen
73	Jacobin cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus jacobinus</i>	Good views at Udawalawe
74	Asian koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopacea scolopacea</i>	Botanical Gardens, Kandy
75	Banded bay cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sonneratii</i>	One at the Hotel Suisse, Kandy
76	Grey-bellied cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis passerinus</i>	Common at Yala, Udawalawe
77	Indian nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>	Early morning at Yala
78	Indian swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus unicolor</i>	Common

	Vernacular name	Latin Name	Notes
79	Asian palm-swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis balasiensis</i>	Common, particularly on coast
80	Crested treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>	Yala, one over Nooit Gedacht, Unawatuna
81	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis taprobana</i>	Frequent
82	Stork-billed kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis capensis</i>	Only noted at Tissa
83	White-throated kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis fusca</i>	Throughout lowlands, mid hills
84	Lesser pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis leucomelanura</i>	Udawalawe
85	Little green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis orientalis</i>	Common in lowlands
86	Blue-tailed bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus philippinus</i>	Common
87	Chestnut-headed bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti leschenaulti</i>	Better views than 2010 at Yala
88	Indian roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis indica</i>	Open country
89	Common hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops ceylonensis</i>	Common at Yala
90	Malabar hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>	Large numbers at Yala. Much display and flocking
91	Brown-headed barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica zeylanica</i>	Very common
92	Ceylon small barbet	<i>Megalaima rubricapillus</i>	Hotel Suisse (2), Botanical Gardens (Kandy), Nooit Gedacht, Unawatuna (2)
93	Coppersmith barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala indica</i>	Commonest at Udawalawe
94	Red-backed woodpecker	<i>Dinopium benghalense psarodes</i>	Frequent
95	White-naped woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>	One at Tissa
96	Jerdon's bushlark	<i>Mirafra affinis ceylonensis</i>	Common Yala
97	Ashy-crowned finch-lark	<i>Eremopterix griseus</i>	Common Yala
98	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica rustica</i>	Abundant
99	Ceylon swallow	<i>Hirundo hyperythra</i>	Frequent. Yala, Nooit Gedacht (Unawatuna) etc
100	Forest wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>	Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya
101	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea melanope</i>	Victoria Park, Horton Plains etc
102	Paddyfield pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus mayanensis</i>	Yala
103	Small minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus cinnamomeus</i>	A group of birds (c.5-6) in the Botanical Gardens, Kandy
104	Orange minivet	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus flammeus</i>	Cloud forest on Horton Plains
105	Pied-flycatcher shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus leggei</i>	Nuwara Eliya, Horton Plains
106	Asian paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	Both the ceylonensis and paradisi races were regularly recorded
107	White-browed fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola compressirostris</i>	One at Yala
108	Red-vented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer haemorrhousus</i>	Abundant
109	Yellow-eared bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus penicillatus</i>	Very common Horton Plains, Adam's Peak, Nuwara Eliya
110	White-browed bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus insulae</i>	Several in garden of Nooit Gedacht
111	Yellow-browed bulbul	<i>Iole indica</i>	Adam's Peak
112	Square-tailed black bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes ganeesa</i>	Adam's Peak
113	Common iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia multicolor</i>	Tissa
114	Gold-fronted leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons insularis</i>	Botanical Gardens, Kandy
115	Jerdon's leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>	Buddhist Temple near Kandy

	Vernacular name	Latin Name	Notes
116	Brown shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	Common
117	Pied ground-thrush	<i>Zoothera wardii</i>	Two birds near stream at Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya
118	Indian blackbird	<i>Turdus simillimus kinnisii</i>	Horton Plains, Adam's Peak
119	Ceylon whistling thrush	<i>Myophonus blighi</i>	Bombu Ella Forest (?) Nuwara Eliya
120	Asian brown flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	Hotel Nooit Gedacht, Unawatuna, Botanical Gardens, Kandy
121	Kashmir flycatcher	<i>Ficedula subrubra</i>	Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya
122	Dusky blue flycatcher	<i>Eumyias sordidus</i>	Horton Plains
123	Grey-headed canary-flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis ceylonensis</i>	Horton Plains, Victoria Park
124	Indian blue robin	<i>Luscinia brunnea</i>	Botanical Gardens (Kandy), Victoria Park (Nuwara)
125	Oriental magpie-robin	<i>Copsychus saularis ceylonensis</i>	Common
126	Indian black robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicatus leucoptera</i>	Frequent in lowlands
127	Pied bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata atrata</i>	Common in upland areas: Nuwara, Horton Plains etc
128	Tawny-bellied babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>	With yellow-eyed babbler in low scrub near Tissa
129	Dark-fronted babbler	<i>Rhopocichla apriceps</i>	Cloud forest on Horton Plains
130	Yellow-eyed babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>	With tawny-bellied babbler in low scrub near Tissa
131	Yellow-billed babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis taprobanus</i>	Common
132	Zitting cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Common. Very common on Horton Plains
133	Ashy prinia	<i>Prinia socialis brevicauda</i>	Udawalawe. Several birds.
134	Plain prinia	<i>Prinia inornata insularis</i>	Frequent. E.g. Yala, Tissa, Udawalawe
135	Common tailor-bird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	Common
136	Blyth's reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	Galway Forest (Nuwara), Victoria Park (Nuwara) etc
137	Greenish warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	near Nuwara Eliya and at Hatton
138	Bright-green warbler	<i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i>	e.g. Botanical Gardens, Kandy
139	Great tit	<i>Parus major mahrattarum</i>	Common in upland areas: Nuwara, Horton Plains, Adam's Peak
140	Velvet-fronted nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis frontalis</i>	Horton Plains (2), Victoria Park (2)
141	Thick-billed flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile zeylonicum</i>	e.g. Udawalawe (during lunch), Tissa
142	Legge's flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum vincens</i>	Horton Plains
143	Pale-billed flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos ceylonense</i>	Fairly common
144	Purple-rumped sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica zeylonica</i>	Common. Nest found.
145	Purple sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus asiatica</i>	Frequent
146	Loten's sunbird	<i>Cinnyris lotenius lotenia</i>	More commonly recorded than in 2010 - probably due to garden birding!
147	Ceylon white-eye	<i>Zosterops ceylonensis</i>	Common in highlands

	Vernacular name	Latin Name	Notes
148	Oriental white-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus egregia</i>	Only noted at Nooit Gedacht, Unawatuna
149	White-rumped munia	<i>Lonchura striata striata</i>	Nesting in lights at Nooit Gedacht, Unawatuna
150	Scaly-breasted munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata punctulata</i>	Common. Nests found at Nuwara Eliya and Unawatuna
151	Black-headed munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>	Tissa
152	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus indicus</i>	Common
153	Streaked weaver	<i>Ploceus manyar</i>	One at Yala (male)
154	Brahminy starling	<i>Temenuchus pagodarum</i>	Yala
155	Rosy starling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>	Flock of 8-10 at Yala
156	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis melanosternus</i>	Abundant
157	Lesser hill-myna	<i>Gracula indica</i>	Good views at the Botanical Gardens, Kandy
158	Black-hooded oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus ceylonensis</i>	Common in lowlands. Gardens etc.
159	Ashy drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus longicaudatus</i>	A few in the lowlands e.g. Unawatuna
160	White-bellied drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>	Both races noted. Leucopygialis similar to Ashy drongo
161	Ashy woodswallow	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>	Tissa
162	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens protegatus</i>	Abundant in lowland cities, common elsewhere. Seems absent from highlands.
163	Indian jungle crow	<i>Corvus [macrorhynchus] culminatus</i>	Common in Kandy and at higher altitudes. Also seen at Udawalawe.

Appendix 2: Photographs

Photo 1

Flying foxes from the garden of the Hotel Nooit Gedacht



Photo 2.

Crested hawk-eagle at Udawalawe.



Photo 3. Pied bushchat, Little World's End, Horton Plains.



Photo 4. Nesting purple-rumped sunbird in garden of Hotel Nooit Gedacht

