

Tour Report Sri Lanka's Rare Mammals 16 – 28 March 2026

Fishing cat



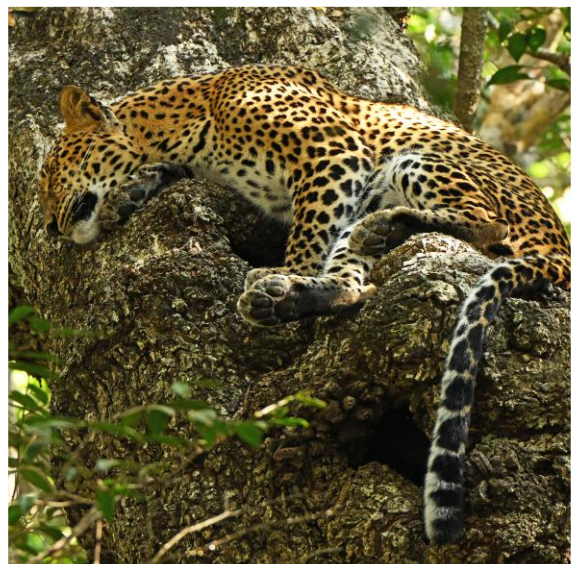
Sloth bear



Spinner dolphin



Leopard



Compiled by Ian Loyd

Monday 16 March 2026

Day 1:

Depart UK

Today, the group met at London Heathrow and set off on an overnight flight to Delhi. Unfortunately, we left Heathrow later than planned because of delays, so we had a rather quick connection in Delhi. However, our onward flight to Colombo made up time in the air, and we landed in Colombo the next day, a little ahead of schedule.

Tuesday 17 March 2026

Day 2:

Arrive Colombo and transfer to Sigirya

Having landed in the early morning, we disembarked quickly and reunited in the arrivals hall, where we met our local guides, Chandika and Hetti, along with our drivers. After exchanging some money for Sri Lankan rupees, we made our way to the minibus, spotting our first mammal of the trip, an Indian palm squirrel, darting about just outside the terminal. Once the luggage was loaded, we set off on the journey north to our base in Sigirya.

As we travelled, Sri Lanka began to reveal itself: colourful tuk-tuks weaving through traffic, small roadside shops, and, a little later, stretches of countryside with rice paddies and palm plantations. With everyone feeling the effects of the long flight, we paused at Café Maki halfway into the journey for tea and coffee. The remainder of the drive passed quietly as most people took the opportunity to catch up on sleep.

Approaching Sigirya, we enjoyed our first sightings of toque macaques and a variety of birdlife, including great, little, and cattle egrets. Just before reaching Vil Uyana, we stopped by a stream where a young water monitor was resting on a branch above the water. It was an especially striking individual with vivid yellow ring markings. A few toque macaques were also seen climbing the nearby trees.

After arriving at Jetwing Vil Uyana, we settled into our comfortable rooms before meeting for lunch. The grounds of the reception offered a wonderful introduction to the local wildlife: snakehead fish in the wetlands, crimson dropwing dragonflies, little cormorants, and Indian pond herons. The afternoon was then spent resting and enjoying the lodge's facilities, as everyone was still catching up on sleep.

We gathered again in the evening for a delicious dinner and to discuss plans for the coming days. During the meal, we experienced one of the most powerful lightning strikes any of us could remember, followed almost instantly by an immense crack of thunder. Tiny Indian pipistrelle bats occasionally swooped under the restaurant roof, hawking for insects drawn to the lights and adding even more interest to the evening. After dinner, it was time to retire for a restful night.

Wednesday 18 March 2026

Day 3:

Kaludiya Pokuna Forest and night drive

We began the morning with an early breakfast before travelling a short distance to the Kaludiya Pokuna Archaeological forest site. The short drive took us through a mosaic of small-scale farms, rice paddies, wetlands, and patches of native forest. Along the way, we enjoyed brief sightings of several bird species, including blue-tailed bee-eaters perched on overhead wires, a distant white-bellied sea eagle, Brahminy kites, Sri Lankan swallows, Asian palm swifts, and spotted doves.

Upon entering the forest, we learned about the site's long history as a Buddhist monastery complex dating back to the 2nd century BC. After leaving the jeeps, we followed a forest track a short distance to meet with

one of the researchers studying the purple-faced leaf monkeys that inhabit this mostly pristine old growth forest.

We soon located the first troop of leaf monkeys, though our attention was initially distracted by a grizzled giant squirrel. Moving slowly and quietly, we gradually approached until we could observe the monkeys right above us. Dense foliage often obscured them, but occasional clear views allowed us to appreciate their behaviour. The research team explained how they monitor all the individuals within the troop, revealing fascinating insights into personality differences, family dynamics, and feeding preferences.

After about an hour, the troop settled down to rest. One female remained awake just long enough to peer down at us from the crown of a tall tree. It was a lovely moment to end our observation. Back at the jeeps, we enjoyed fruit juice and spent some time searching for hump-nosed lizards. Although the lizards eluded us, we did spot a pair of black-capped bulbuls and an exceptionally beautiful two-tone Indian paradise flycatcher. Most individuals are either rufous or white, but this male was in a rare intermediate plumage phase, transitioning between the two as they mature. A Tickell's blue flycatcher was also feeding nearby, and we heard both a crimson-fronted barbet and a square-tailed drongo-cuckoo calling from the canopy.



We then set out to find a second troop of leaf monkeys, known to include a rare hybrid individual. The walk took us deeper into the forest and uphill through rocky terrain. Eventually, we reached a stand of mature trees where the troop was feeding. Here we had excellent views of the hybrid male, known to the researchers as Coco. Born from a pairing between a grey langur and a purple-faced leaf monkey, he is one of the very few documented hybrids of this kind. We were all keen to learn whether, in time, he will eventually produce offspring of his own, an intriguing example of evolution unfolding in real time.

On our walk back to the jeeps, we spotted a common skink basking on a log and paused to admire some beautifully patterned fungi along the forest floor, appreciating the important role they play in the ecosystem. During the drive back, we stopped at the research project office to look through some of the species recorded on the reserve's camera traps and to visit the small laboratory where DNA and gut-microbe samples are processed.

After returning to the lodge for lunch, everyone enjoyed a relaxed afternoon to rest and recharge.

In the early evening, we gathered for a short talk about the wildlife we hoped to encounter after dark, before setting off on a walk to find freshwater crabs. Unfortunately, a heavy thunderstorm forced us to cut the walk short. After dinner, the weather had eased enough for us to begin our first night drive.



We had barely travelled any distance when we spotted our first animal, which was a jungle cat moving stealthily through a recently harvested paddy field. Although it was some distance away, we could see it weaving through the furrows left behind by the cut rice.

It was an excellent start. Only a minute later, another scan of the track revealed a second animal preparing to cross the road. Incredibly, it was another cat, this time, a female fishing cat, just a hundred metres further along the same road. She paused briefly on a rock before slipping into the undergrowth. We relocated her soon

after, sitting low in dense vegetation beside a small stream. Using the thermal scope, we followed her movements as she shifted position and eventually made her way along the edge of a tank before disappearing from view.

Later, we moved into an area of forest bordering several small villages. Here, our search revealed an impressive brown fish owl perched quietly in the darkness, followed shortly after by another that had caught a rat, and then by an Indian crested porcupine that slipped away into cover quickly. A little further along, we found a common palm civet resting in a tree, and we caught our first glimpse of a white-striped chevrotain (mouse deer) moving discreetly through the undergrowth. We also enjoyed a much better view of Indian flying foxes feeding in a fruiting tree beside the roadside.

Not long after, we encountered another nocturnal species, this time a reptile. A Sri Lankan bark gecko was clinging vertically to a tree trunk, its remarkable camouflage allowing it to blend almost perfectly with the mottled bark. On the edge of the paddy fields, just after our tea break, we had our first sighting of an Asiatic long-tailed climbing mouse. It was a treat to watch this highly arboreal little rodent using its long prehensile tail like a fifth limb, gripping even the thinnest grass stems with ease.

As we made our way back toward the lodge, we were treated to one final standout sighting: another fishing cat, this time a male crouched at the edge of a stream. Although he slipped away fairly quickly, he moved at a slow pace that allowed everyone to take in his beautifully patterned coat and powerful, stocky build. It was a superb finale to our first night drive.

Thursday 19 March 2026

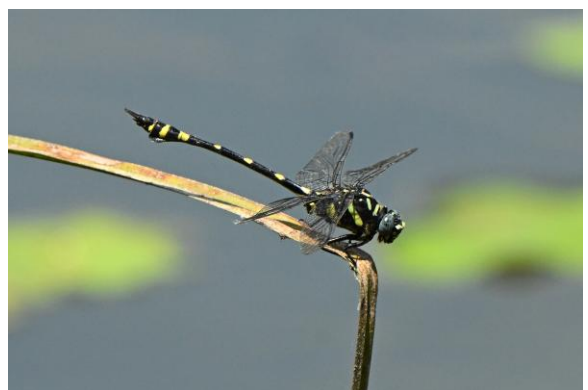
Day 4:

Sigirya Rock and Night Drive

Our morning was kept free to allow everyone time to rest after the late-night drive and enjoy the wildlife-rich grounds. Most met for breakfast and enjoyed watching the birds and insects around the lodge wetlands, while a lively troop of grey langurs provided additional entertainment with their acrobatic movements.

At lunchtime, we focused on some of the smaller wildlife around the grounds, including several striking insects such as the endemic orange-faced sprite damselfly, the rapacious flanneltail dragonfly, and the delicate pied parasol.

After lunch, we set off for Sigiriya Rock. Even as we entered the car park, we encountered our first wildlife of the afternoon: a Sri Lankan softshell turtle basking on a log in the middle of one of the many ponds. Our walk began in the ancient water gardens, where we learned how the remarkably sophisticated hydraulic system, engineered more than a thousand years ago, still functions today. The pools and channels were alive with birdlife, including cattle egrets, Indian pond herons, red wattled lapwings and a variety of other wetland species, with a common kingfisher adding a splash of colour as it darted between perches.



Overhead, large flocks of house (little) swifts could be heard screaming as they sped through the sky in tight, fast-moving formations, while purple sunbirds flitted among the flowering shrubs. As we approached the base of Sigiriya, a stunning orange morph of the local race of peregrine falcon flew with remarkable agility along the rock face. A Bengal monitor lizard was also seen climbing an almost vertical section of the rock, using its long claws to grip the grooves in the stone.

We then divided into smaller groups so everyone could explore different aspects of the awe-inspiring Lion Rock at their own pace. During the descent, we encountered several troops of grey langurs and toque

macaques, including some noticeably red-faced individuals - a look that matched how many of us felt in the afternoon heat.

Further down the path, the repetitive call of a brown-headed barbet drew our attention, and we eventually located the bird through a gap in the trees. Moments later, a Sri Lankan grey hornbill landed atop a tall tree, giving us an excellent view of its pale grey plumage.

Soon after, a crimson-fronted barbet appeared, delivering its distinctive, almost mechanical call from high in the canopy. Indian palm squirrels scampered along the fence lines, and at the base of the rock, we spotted a third barbet species, the colourful Coppersmith barbet calling from another high perch. Those who descended earlier were also rewarded with good views of a purple-faced leaf monkey. After the walk, we enjoyed a refreshing break with freshly cut pineapple and cool drinks.

Later, back at the lodge, we met again for dinner before attempting another night walk, though once again rain brought it to an early end. The sight of an Indian flying fox passing overhead against a backdrop of lightning was, however, wonderfully atmospheric.

Our night drive took us through a mixture of paddy fields, lakes, villages and farmland. Here we encountered two Indian crested porcupines that briefly appeared before hurrying across a small forest track. An Indian black-naped hare kept mostly hidden in the long grass; it was "hare one minute and gone the next." Later, we had a distant sighting of a small cat, though it was too far away to identify with certainty.

We also had brief views of a mouse deer and a small Indian civet close to the road, though not everyone managed to see them clearly. More obliging was a juvenile Indian pitta roosting in roadside vegetation. It was a real treat to see this spectacular and normally very shy, ground-dwelling species so well, especially as it would soon begin its return journey to its breeding grounds in the foothills of India. A grey slender loris was then briefly spotted but remained elusive, and after some troubles with one of the jeep's engines, we concluded the night drive.

Friday 20 March 2026

Day 5:

Minneriya National Park

We began our day with a leisurely morning before meeting for a special lunch to celebrate Sue's birthday. Later, we set off for Minneriya National Park, one of Sri Lanka's oldest protected areas. On the drive, we admired the scenes of freshly harvested rice being dried on the asphalt roads and had a brief sighting of an Indian grey mongoose dashing across the road.

Almost immediately after entering the park, we were greeted by an obliging Tickell's blue flycatcher perched close to the road. Even in the shade of the forest, its vibrant blue colour was clear to see.

Not long after, we encountered our first spotted deer of the trip, calmly chewing grass in the shade beneath



the trees. As we continued into the park, green bee-eaters were busy hawking insects, returning repeatedly to their favourite perches to wipe the venom from their catches before feeding.

A little further on, we came across a troop of purple-faced leaf monkeys feeding in a mostly bare tree above the road. The group was relaxed and entirely focused on picking the young leaves from the tree, which are more nutritious and higher in protein; it must have been an important resource for these folivorous primates.

We then stopped for a leg stretch and a drink at the edge of the vast Minneriya Lake. It was a beautiful, open vista with whiskered terns skimming the water, Alexandrine parakeets flying overhead, and Brahminy kites circling overhead. Barn swallows, crested treeswifts and palm swifts added to the activity above the lake.

On the return drive, we had to make steady progress to exit the park, but even so, some of the group managed to see their first elephant of the trip at a distance, while others spotted a grey-headed fish eagle and an Indian star tortoise.

Back at the lodge, the rain held off long enough for us to begin a night walk. We started in the lodge's loris reserve, where we found a common palm civet moving through the canopy and what was most likely a rufous horseshoe bat roosting on an overhanging branch. However, the presence of an elephant in the area meant we could not explore further inside the reserve that night.

We continued our walk along the main trail around the lodge and found a sleeping oriental white-eye. After considerable searching, we eventually located a grey slender loris, though it remained high in a dense stand of bamboo, giving only limited views.

After dinner, we set off on a night drive. In the denser forest, we found a brown fish owl and had our best views yet of a white-striped chevrotain (mouse deer) as it briefly crossed an open patch of woodland. We also had a good view of Jerdon's nightjar and saw some distant elephants moving through farmland. Travelling deeper into the Sigiya sanctuary forests, we found a small animal hidden deep in the undergrowth, which was extremely well concealed. After much manoeuvring to get the right position, it was identified as a rusty-spotted cat, although it offered only a very limited glimpse to a few. A Sri Lankan frogmouth was also calling in the nearby trees, but remained elusive. A little further on, we came across an Indian field mouse climbing on a log above a stream and a large mugger crocodile swimming in a lake below the road.

Reaching an area of paddy fields, we soon found a small Indian civet at the field edge, though it didn't linger. A pair of Asiatic long-tailed climbing mice were far more obliging, showing well as they moved through the grasses. Next came a collared scops owl keeping watch from a fence line that treated us to a good, prolonged view and a green vine snake was found coiled around a roadside bush.

We then encountered a large male jungle cat crossing the road ahead of us. He disappeared briefly into the field before reappearing, allowing us excellent views as we followed him through the paddy fields. He paused several times to scent-mark and investigate scents on the ground, suggesting he may have been tracking another animal.



Returning to the paddy fields we had visited a few nights earlier, we found another jungle cat, this time a young individual, likely not much over a year old. The contrast in size between the two cats was striking. After enjoying more good views of this youngster, as it sat and watched us from the recently harvested paddy field, we decided to call it a night.



Saturday 21 March 2026

Day 6:

Hurulu Eco Park

We again enjoyed a leisurely morning to rest after our late-night drive and enjoyed some of the butterflies, blue-eyed carpenter bees and other insects around the lodge. Our afternoon safari today took us to Hurulu Eco Park, where, amongst the tall stands of elephant grass, our first herd of Sri Lankan elephants were found grazing peacefully. Among them was a young tusker, a rare sight in Sri Lanka today, as only around 7% of males develop tusks due to historical hunting pressures that disproportionately targeted tusked individuals.

Not long after, we spotted a pale morph immature changeable hawk-eagle perched on a horizontal branch. It was scanning the landscape for prey and then launched into flight, passing so close to one of the jeeps that everyone enjoyed an exceptional view of this impressive raptor. A crested tree swift also treated us to a great view from underneath.

As we continued our exploration, white-breasted munias were seen feeding on the seed heads of the grasses, while an oriental white-eye shared a tree with a large cuckooshrike, offering a nice comparison of size and behaviour between the two species.

As we continued exploring the park, we encountered more elephants, including a family group with a very young calf that crossed the road directly in front of us, an unforgettable moment. Further along, a young male elephant was grazing near a waterhole, giving us a wonderful close-range sighting as he calmly fed. Although Sri Lankan elephants are generalist foragers, here they act mostly as grazers and this individual gave us a great demonstration of their thrashing of clumps of grass to remove the soil before consuming.

Our final wildlife encounter of the afternoon was a Sri Lankan green pigeon perched high in the canopy, its soft green plumage looking stunning against the blue sky behind. As we exited the park, we were treated to

a lovely sunset over the nearby hills, a fitting end to the safari.



Back at the lodge, we attempted another night walk in search of the slender loris. However, with an elephant roaming around the lodge grounds, we again had to restrict our efforts to the main walkway rather than entering the loris reserve. After a patient search, we eventually located the same individual as the previous night, once more high in the bamboo, offering only brief and partial views.

After dinner, we gathered near the reception, where some of the group were treated to an unexpected sighting: the male elephant calmly walking past along the raised walkway. Watching such a large animal move so quietly and confidently through the darkness was exhilarating, and it made for a memorable finale to our time at Vil Uyana.

Sunday 22 March 2026

Day 7:

Anuradhapura and Wilpattu National Park

Today, we set off early with a packed breakfast for our journey toward the ancient city of Anuradhapura. Along the way, we learned more about Sri Lanka's long history, passing a large tank (a traditional man-made reservoir) that was teeming with wetland birdlife. Spot-billed pelicans, purple gallinules, and numerous species of storks, herons, and egrets were all feeding or resting along the water's edge.

Our next stop was the ancient Isurumuniya Temple, renowned for its intricate stone carvings that offer a fascinating insight into Sri Lankan Buddhism and the artistic traditions of the Anuradhapura era. We visited the temple, the small museum, and the sacred Bodhi tree, gaining a deeper appreciation of the site's cultural and spiritual significance. Another highlight was the large colony of Leschenault's rousette fruit bats roosting in the cave beside the temple. This species favours stable, sheltered roost sites like this, which offer protection from predators. Seeing such a substantial colony living alongside an active place of worship provided a lovely example of how wildlife and cultural heritage coexist so well in Sri Lanka.



We also enjoyed watching the tufted grey langurs around the temple grounds. The youngsters were particularly entertaining, chasing one another and leaping between branches in energetic play. Additional sightings included a Sri Lankan softshell turtle near the water, a large cuckooshrike, a black-hooded oriole, and an Asian koel.

We then continued our drive to reach our next base at Claughton Wild. After unpacking, we set off for our first safari drive in Wilpattu National Park. We headed directly to a bungalow inside the park with an idyllic view over one of the lakes, where we enjoyed a traditional Sri Lankan curry lunch and cold drinks. Mugger crocodiles were seen basking at the water's edge, and a small colony of long-winged tomb bats was found roosting on the side of the building.

After lunch, we began our afternoon drive and had barely set off when we heard that a leopard had been sighted nearby. We headed straight to the location and were thrilled to find a stunning female leopard resting on a large tree just a short distance from the track. It was a superb encounter with Sri Lanka's apex

predator.

We spent the remainder of the afternoon exploring the area around the bungalow, where we observed a variety of birdlife, a ruddy mongoose, and small herds of spotted deer grazing in the more open areas of forest.



Monday 23 March 2026

Day 8:

Wilpattu National Park

We spent a full day exploring Wilpattu National Park, focusing much of our search around the bungalow area and the locations where a pair of leopard cubs had recently been seen and a sloth bear was also regularly appearing. Despite our best efforts, the cubs and bear remained elusive. However, the day still offered several excellent wildlife encounters.

We had superb views of oriental dwarf kingfishers, with their vivid colours glowing even in the shade. This was a very special sighting of a rarely seen species. Unusually for a kingfisher, this species has a primarily terrestrial diet, feeding on grasshoppers, spiders, crabs, frogs, lizards and occasionally fish and they favour dense shaded forest.

Later on, we enjoyed even more birdlife with great views of Sri Lanka shama and a blue-naped monarch nest delicately suspended between branches. A chestnut-headed bee-eater also provided wonderful viewing as it perched in the open. At one of Wilpattu's villus (natural lakes), we enjoyed the plethora of waterbirds, including Pacific golden and lesser sand plovers, wood sandpipers, black-winged stilts and great thick-kneed waders, among others.

The diversity of birdlife and the quiet beauty of Wilpattu's forest and lake systems made for a rewarding day in the park.

Tuesday 24 March 2026

Day 9:

Wilpattu National Park and night drive

Today we started early so we could be first in line as Wilpattu National Park opened at 6:15. In the dim light of dawn, we had an unexpected and very rare sighting, a dry-zone golden palm civet climbing in a tree close to the entrance. Sadly, we later learned that this individual did not survive once some dogs found it.

We continued into the park, enjoying the forest and lakes shrouded in early-morning mist, which made the landscape feel especially atmospheric. Our next sighting was a small Indian civet dashing across the track ahead of us. We then focused much of our search on areas where sloth bears had been seen recently, but despite our best efforts, none appeared. We did, however, find fresh leopard tracks and enjoyed sightings of sambar deer, ruddy mongoose, black-naped hare, Bengal monitor lizards, and a wide variety of birdlife, including a brown fish owl still roosting in the cool morning shade.

We returned to the lodge for a rest in the afternoon in preparation for an evening night drive. Before dinner, we took a gentle stroll around the lodge grounds, where we saw Asian koel, small minivet, scaly-breasted munia, plain prinia, and common tailorbird, among others. The highlights were the close views of Indian rollers nesting in the nearby fields and a black-hooded oriole wrestling with an enormous caterpillar nearly half its length.

After dinner, we set off for our night drive. We had barely reached the first track bordering the large tank near the park entrance when, alongside a couple of other vehicles, we spotted a female fishing cat. At first, she was mostly obscured in the vegetation, but she eventually stepped out onto the track, giving us a clearer, if mostly rear-facing view of her beautiful markings. It was a superb start to the evening.



Further along, we found several roosting birds, including white-browed bulbuls, and then a painted bat roosting delicately on a single grass stem. This tiny species is strikingly coloured, with bright orange fur and black wings, an adaptation thought to help them blend into dried banana leaves, their preferred roosting sites.

A little further on, we had brief sightings of a golden jackal and an Indian gerbil, followed by a herd of elephants crossing the track ahead of us. They moved surprisingly quietly until one gave a single trumpet call after becoming startled.

We continued through a mixture of scrub and small-scale farmland, where we saw more black-naped hares. A grey slender loris was then found asleep on a branch deep in the undergrowth, an unusual sighting, as they typically forage actively for insects for most of the night. However, they are known to take short naps after their main feeding period at dusk. Although it was challenging to see, everyone managed to view this loris when it briefly stirred.

A little further on, excitement rose again when we spotted a cat on the roadside, which we believe may have been a hybrid between a jungle cat and a domestic cat.

Just minutes later, we encountered a large male fishing cat walking along the track ahead of us. We followed him for some distance as he paused occasionally to investigate the ground and his surroundings. He eventually made his way to a small stream, which looked like an ideal hunting spot for this specialist wetland predator. It was another superb sighting of this elusive species.

We returned to the lodge for a well-earned sleep after a long but rewarding day.

Wednesday 25 March 2026

Day 10:

Wilpattu National Park

Today we had a later start, giving everyone time to sleep in and enjoy a relaxed breakfast at the lodge before heading out for another safari in Wilpattu. We explored a range of habitats and saw a good variety of wildlife throughout the day. One of the first highlights was a large gathering of wild water buffalo resting in a dried-out lakebed, and then later resting in perfect reflection of a lake.

We then followed up on a report of a leopard seen in a dense forested area. Unfortunately, many of the tracks in this part of the park remained inaccessible due to flooding from the previous year, making it difficult to follow up on the sighting. Even so, the alarm calls of nearby sambar deer suggested the leopard was still close. Although we didn't see it, the tension and excitement of knowing it was nearby added to the experience of the day.

In this same area, we had a brief view of a huge male wild boar and a red muntjac, along with a nice selection of birdlife. We also spotted our first lime (swallowtail) butterfly of the trip, fluttering among the thousands of albatross butterflies that filled the air.

Later, we explored a large villu, alive with birdlife. To our delight, two elephants were also feeding on the submerged grasses, thrashing the vegetation to clean it and sending beautiful sprays of water droplets into the air. It was a wonderfully peaceful moment to watch.

Our next adventure was attempting to help another jeep that had become stuck in soft mud. Despite our efforts, we couldn't help but pull it free, and one of our own jeeps even became briefly stuck in the process. It was a reminder of how unpredictable Wilpattu's terrain can be.

Just as we were preparing to move on, a message came through that a sloth bear had been seen near the

bungalow area we had searched a few days earlier. We raced to the location, dust swirling behind us, and arrived at the perfect moment. The bear crossed the road at exceptionally close range, giving everyone a breathtaking view. Everyone fell silent, allowing us to hear the soft snuffling sounds the bear made as it foraged. We watched its head often sweep low to the ground, using its powerful sense of smell to detect food hidden beneath the soil. Its long claws and distinctive shaggy appearance were also clearly visible and it was an unforgettable encounter with this charismatic species.



With time running short, we had to make a prompt exit from the park before closing, all of us smiling after such a remarkable sighting. As we left, we were treated to a final moment of beauty: as we arrived in time to watch the sun setting over the tank.

Thursday 26 March 2026

Day 11:

Kalpitiya Lagoon and coast

We had an early start today, driving to a nature lodge situated on the edge of a wide coastal lagoon. Soon after boarding the boats, we enjoyed our first highlight: a magnificent white-bellied sea eagle perched on a lone stick at the mouth of the Kalpitiya lagoon.

On a nearby sandbar, we found a good mix of waders, lesser sand plovers, Pacific golden plovers, and a couple of little stints, alongside a single whimbrel and a few striking Caspian terns resting among them.

As we explored deeper into the lagoon, in our search for the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins, we passed a mangrove island that serves as a roost for large numbers of Indian cormorants, grey herons, little and great egrets, and a few Eurasian spoonbills and spot-billed pelicans were also seen here. Overhead, brown-headed gulls and both greater and lesser crested terns patrolled the skies, occasionally diving for fish in front of us. Even here, we were still seeing butterflies, with albatross and crimson rose butterflies drifting across the water.

We learnt that the humpback dolphin population in the lagoon had dropped further in recent months and sadly, we couldn't locate them this year. We then changed boats to head out to sea. When we came ashore to purchase our tickets, we spotted two Terek sandpipers feeding along the shoreline, along with a hermit crab and several small fish moving in the shallows.

We then headed out to sea, and after a short search, we found what we had hoped for, a large, active pod of around 500 spinner dolphins. The pod seemed to stretch for at least half a kilometre, with adults and calves actively hunting. We watched tail-slapping, backflips, side-flips, and even full 720-degree spins. It was a breathtaking display, and although hard to capture with photographs, it was a wonderful, unforgettable experience.



After returning to land, we enjoyed lunch at the Kite Surfing Lanka lodge, where we had a tasty vegetarian curry buffet accompanied by fresh juices, before heading back to Wilpattu for a rest.

Friday 27 March 2026

Day 10:

Wilpattu National Park and travel to Negombo

We began early with a final morning drive into Wilpattu, heading straight for the area where a pair of leopard cubs had recently been seen. We waited quietly at a waterhole where a pair of little ringed plovers ran back and forth across the dry earth, and later at the rocky outcrop the cubs had been favouring, but despite our patience, there was no sign of them. Occasional alarm calls from Sri Lankan junglefowl kept our hopes up, but the forest remained still.



We did, however, enjoy excellent views of a crimson-fronted barbet excavating a nest hole in a broken tree trunk. Its tail bobbed rhythmically as it chiselled away at the wood, which was a wonderful snippet of behaviour to watch at close range.

As the light strengthened, green bee-eaters hunted from exposed perches, a black-naped monarch gathered nesting material, purple-rumped sunbirds flitted between flowering trees, and a ruddy mongoose trotted across the track. Further along, we saw a female red muntjac and later a pair of ruddy mongooses moving together through the undergrowth. Our final sighting of the morning for some was a well-hidden young mouse deer tucked deep into the vegetation. It was exceptionally well camouflaged and a rare daytime sighting.

We left the park and returned to the lodge to freshen up and check out. Then it was time to say farewell to

Amanda and Alison as they set off for the next stage of their Sri Lankan adventure.

The rest of us began the journey south toward Negombo, stopping for lunch near Chilaw. The food packed quite a spicy punch, but thankfully, the ice cream provided a welcome cooldown.

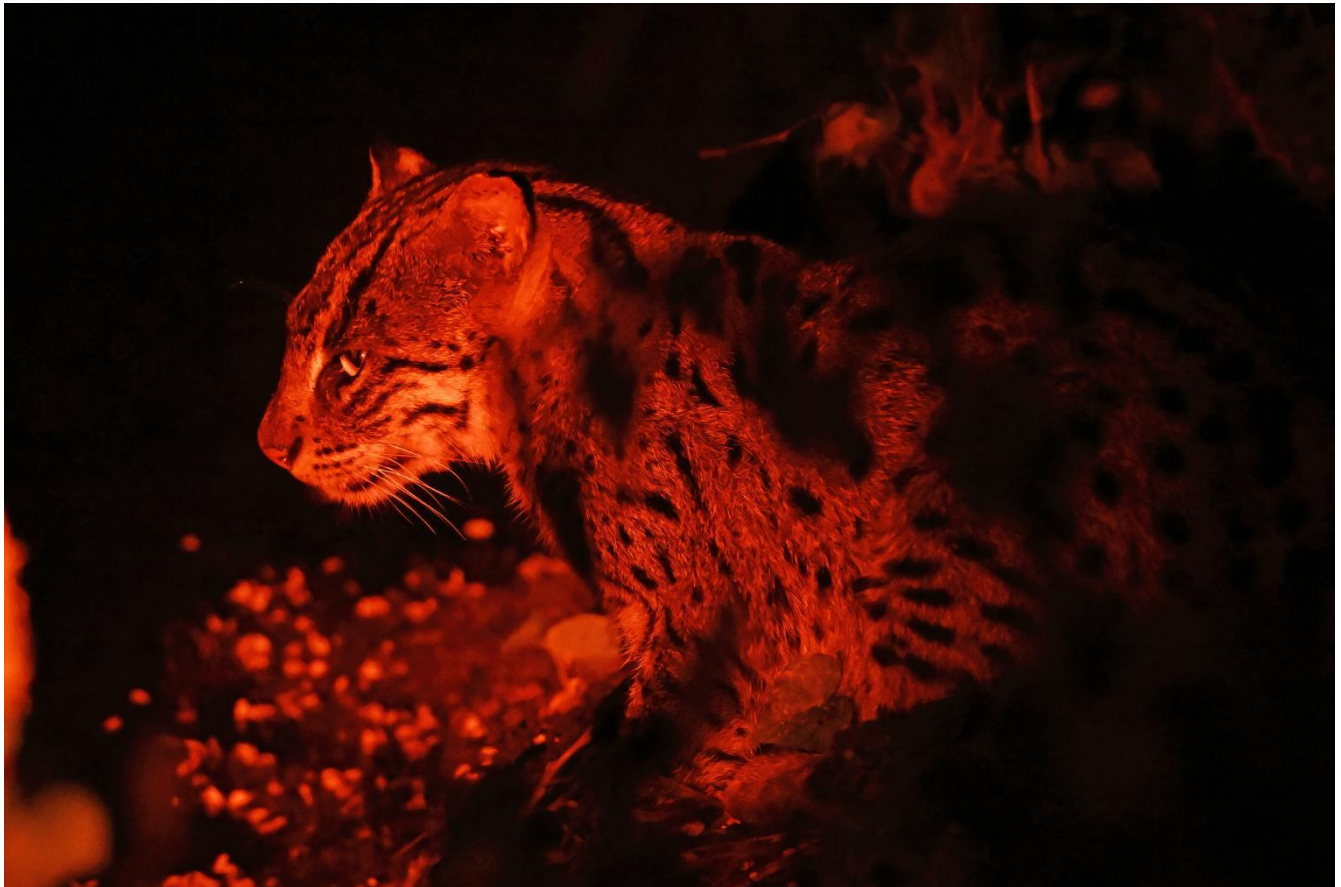
We reached Jetwing Lagoon in the afternoon, and after a quick orientation, everyone settled in to relax and enjoy the hotel's facilities. In the evening, we gathered for a final dinner, overlooking the Negombo Lagoon as we reflected on the highlights of our trip.

Saturday 28 March 2026

Day 10:

Return to the UK

For those not staying, today we had a final early transfer to Colombo airport to check in for our flight to Delhi, which was all on time. It was then a rather quick onward connection in Delhi to catch our next flight back to London. It was then a smooth but slightly delayed flight back into London Heathrow.



Sign up to our e-news

Sign up to our e-news to find out more about our tours, events, late availability, offers and tour reports at <https://www.wildlifeworldwide.com/subscribe>

Checklist for Sri Lanka's Rare Mammals

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12
	BIRDS													
1	Sri Lanka junglefowl	<i>Gallus lafayettii</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
2	Indian peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
3	Lesser whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓			
4	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>							✓					
5	Painted stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
6	Asian openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	
7	Woolly-necked stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓				
8	Lesser adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>						✓						
9	Black-headed ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
10	Eurasian spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>										✓		
11	Black-crowned night heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			✓				✓				✓	
12	Indian pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
13	Eastern cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
15	Purple heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
16	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
17	Intermediate egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>					✓		✓	✓	✓			
18	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
19	Spot-billed pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>				✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
20	Little cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
21	Indian cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>										✓		
22	Oriental darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>						✓		✓	✓			
23	Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓									
24	Black-winged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>								✓	✓			
25	Crested (Oriental) honey buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>							✓					
26	Crested serpent eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	

27	Changeable hawk-eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>					✓				✓			
28	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>		✓				✓			✓			
29	Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
30	White-bellied sea eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>		✓		✓			✓			✓		
31	Grey-headed fish eagle	<i>Haliaeetus ichthyaeus</i>				✓		✓	✓		✓			
32	White-breasted waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>		✓				✓		✓				
33	Western swamphen	<i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>						✓						
34	Great stone-curlew	<i>Esacus recurvirostris</i>							✓	✓				
35	Black-winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
36	Red-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
37	Pacific golden plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓		
38	Little ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>											✓	
39	Lesser sand plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓		
40	Pin-tailed snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>								✓	✓			
41	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>							✓					
42	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>								✓				
43	Marsh sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>							✓	✓	✓		✓	
44	Common greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>							✓					
45	Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>							✓	✓	✓			
46	Terek sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>										✓		
47	Common sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>						✓					✓	
48	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>										✓		
49	Little stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>										✓		
50	Curlew sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>								✓				
51	Brown-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus</i>										✓		
52	Gull-billed tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>							✓					
53	Caspian tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>										✓		
54	Lesser crested tern	<i>Thalasseus bengalensis</i>										✓		
55	Greater crested tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii</i>										✓		
56	Little tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>										✓		
57	Whiskered tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>		✓		✓		✓		✓	✓			
58	Rock dove	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓	✓		✓		✓				
59	Spotted dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
60	Common emerald dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>							✓	✓				
61	Orange-breasted green pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>					✓	✓		✓	✓			

Find out more about our [Sri Lanka's Rare Mammals trip](#) or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

62	Sri Lanka green pigeon	<i>Treron pompadora</i>					✓		✓				
63	Green imperial pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>					✓	✓		✓			✓
64	Alexandrine parakeet	<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>				✓							
65	Rose-ringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
66	Square-tailed drongo-cuckoo	<i>Surniculus lugubris</i>		H									
67	Indian cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>											✓
68	Asian koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>						✓		✓			
69	Greater coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>		✓			✓			✓			
70	Jerdon's nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus atripennis</i>		✓		✓							
71	Indian nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>									H		
72	Collared scops owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>			✓	✓							
73	Brown fish owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>		✓		✓				✓			
74	Crested treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
75	Asian palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>		✓				✓		✓		✓	
76	House swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
77	Indian roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
78	Green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
79	Blue-tailed bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>		✓					✓				
80	Chestnut-headed bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>							✓	✓	✓		
81	European bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>										✓	
82	Stork-billed kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>										✓	
83	White-throated kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
84	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			✓			✓	✓				
85	Oriental dwarf kingfisher	<i>Ceyx erithaca</i>							✓				
86	Brown-headed barbet	<i>Psilopogon zeylanicus</i>			✓								
87	Crimson-fronted barbet	<i>Psilopogon rubricapillus</i>			✓						✓		✓
88	Coppersmith barbet	<i>Psilopogon haemacephalus</i>			✓		✓			✓			
89	Malabar pied hornbill	<i>Anthraceroceros coronatus</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
90	Sri Lanka grey hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros gingalensis</i>			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		
91	Crimson-backed flameback	<i>Chrysocolaptes stricklandi</i>				✓			✓				
92	Indian pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>			✓								
93	Large cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>						✓					
94	Black-headed cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>		✓			✓						
95	Brown shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>					✓				✓		✓
96	Small minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>						✓	✓	✓			

97	Common iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>				✓								
98	Jerdon's leafbird	<i>Chloropsis jerdoni</i>				✓								
99	Black-hooded oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>						✓		✓		✓	✓	
100	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓								
101	Large-billed crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>						✓	✓	✓				
102	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>				✓								
103	Sri Lanka swallow	<i>Cecropis hyperythra</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			
104	Ashy woodswallow	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>							✓	✓				
105	White-bellied drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>			✓			✓					✓	
106	Forest wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>							✓	✓	✓			
107	Richard's pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>				✓			✓	✓	✓			
108	Jerdon's bush lark	<i>Mirafra affinis</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
109	Red-vented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
110	White-browed bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus luteolus</i>				✓			✓	✓	✓			
111	Black-capped bulbul	<i>Rubigula melanictera</i>		✓							✓			
112	Grey-breasted prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>			✓									
113	Plain prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>					✓			✓				
114	Common tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>								✓				
115	Blyth's reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>								✓				
116	White-browed fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>											✓	
117	Black-naped monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>							✓		✓		✓	
118	Indian paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>		✓		✓			✓		✓		✓	
119	Yellow-billed babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>						✓		✓				
120	Brown-capped babbler	<i>Pellorneum fuscicapillus</i>							✓					
121	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
122	Orange-headed thrush	<i>Geokichla citrina</i>											✓	
123	Indian robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>		✓			✓			✓	✓		✓	
124	Oriental magpie-robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
125	Sri Lankan Shama	<i>Copsychus leggei</i>		✓					✓	✓	✓		✓	
126	Asian brown flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>							✓					
127	Tickell's blue flycatcher	<i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>		✓		✓			✓					
128	Thick-billed flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>					✓							
129	Pale-billed flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>		✓										
130	Purple-rumped sunbird	<i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				
131	Purple sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>							✓				✓	

Find out more about our [Sri Lanka's Rare Mammals](#) trip or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

132	Loten's sunbird	<i>Cinnyris lotenius</i>			✓					✓				
133	Oriental white-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>				✓	✓							
134	White-rumped munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>							✓					
135	Scaly-breasted munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>								✓				
136	Black-headed munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>					✓							
	MAMMALS													
1	Grey slender loris	<i>Loris lydekkerianus</i>			✓	✓	✓			✓				
2	Toque macaque	<i>Macaca sinica</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
3	Grey langur	<i>Semnopithecus priam</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
4	Purple-faced leaf monkey	<i>Semnopithecus vetulus</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓				
5	Indian gerbil	<i>Tatera indica</i>		✓		✓								
6	Golden jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>								✓				
7	Sloth bear	<i>Melursus ursinus</i>									✓			
8	Small Indian civet	<i>Veerricula indica</i>			✓	✓				✓				
9	Golden palm civet	<i>Paradoxurus zeylonensis</i>								✓				
10	Common palm civet	<i>Paradoxurus hermaphroitus</i>		✓	✓									
11	Indian grey mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>				✓		✓						
12	Ruddy mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
13	Jungle cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>		✓		✓								
14	Rusty-spotted cat	<i>Prionailurus rubiginosus</i>				✓								
15	Fishing cat	<i>Prionailurus viverrinus</i>		✓						✓				
16	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus kotiya</i>						✓						
17	Asian elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			
18	Eurasian wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>			✓			✓			✓			
19	White-spotted chevrotain	<i>Tragulus meminna</i>		✓	✓	✓							✓	
20	Southern red muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjac</i>							✓		✓		✓	
21	Spotted deer	<i>Cervus axis</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
22	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>								✓				
23	Wild water buffalo	<i>Bubalus arnee</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
24	Indian palm squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	
25	Grizzled giant squirrel	<i>Ratufa macroura</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓						
26	Giant flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista philippensis</i>												
27	Indian black-naped hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			
28	Indian crested porcupine	<i>Hystrix indica</i>		✓	✓	✓								

29	Asiatic long-tailed climbing mouse	<i>Vandeleuria oleracea</i>			✓	✓								
30	Indian flying fox	<i>Pteropus gigantea</i>		✓	✓									
31	Indian pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus coromandra</i>		✓			✓							
32	Little Indian field mouse	<i>Mus booduga</i>				✓								
33	Spinner dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>										✓		
34	Long-winged tomb bat	<i>Taphozous longimanus</i>					✓	✓	✓					
35	Painted bat	<i>Kerivoula picta</i>								✓				
36	Leschenault's rousette	<i>Rousettus leschenaultii</i>						✓						
37	Rufous horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus rouxii</i>				✓								
	REPTILES													
1	Mugger crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>				✓			✓	✓				
2	Common green forest lizard	<i>Calotes calotes</i>		✓										
3	Common garden lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>					✓							
4	Common skink	<i>Eutropis carinata</i>		✓	✓									
5	Water monitor	<i>Varanus salvator</i>	✓											
6	Bengal monitor	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			
7	Common house gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				
8	Bark gecko	<i>Hemidactylus leschenaultii</i>		✓	✓									
9	Green vine snake	<i>Ahaetulla nasuta</i>				✓								
10	Sri Lankan star tortoise	<i>Geochelone elegans</i>				✓								
11	Sri Lankan flapshell turtle	<i>Lissemys ceylonensis</i>			✓			✓	✓		✓			
12	Sri Lankan black terrapin	<i>Melanochelys trijuga</i>							✓	✓				
13	Common reed snake	<i>Gongylosoma calamaria</i>					✓							
	AMPHIBIANS & OTHER													
1	Asian common toad	<i>Duttaphrynus melanostictus</i>									✓			
2	Indian green pond frog	<i>Euphlyctis hexadactylus</i>				✓			✓					
3	Indian skipper frog	<i>Euphlyctis cyanophlyctis</i>		✓						✓	✓			
4	Indian Burrowing frog	<i>Sphaerotheca breviceps</i>		✓										
5	Sri Lanka wood frog	<i>Hydrophylax gracillis</i>		✓	✓									
6	Indian spotted tree frog	<i>Polypedates maculatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓								

	OTHER													
1	Freshwater crab		✓											
2	Western calling fiddler crab	<i>Gelasimus hesperiae</i>									✓			
3	Hermit crab										✓			
4	Praying mantis		✓	✓										
5	Blue-eyed carpenter bee	<i>Xylocopa caerulea</i>	✓	✓	✓									
6	Golden orb weaver spider	<i>Nephila pilipes</i>	✓											
7	Lesser-banded hornet	<i>Vespa affinis</i>				✓								
	BUTTERFLIES													
1	Crimson rose	<i>Pachliopta hector</i>	✓		✓				✓		✓	✓		
2	Lime butterfly	<i>Papilio demoleus</i>								✓				
3	Blue Mormon	<i>Papilio polymnestor</i>				✓		✓	✓					
4	Common albatross	<i>Appias albino</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓		
5	Great orange tip	<i>Hebomoia glaucippe</i>							✓					
6	Mottled emigrant	<i>Catopsilia pyranthe</i>			✓									
7	Blue tiger	<i>Tirumala limniace</i>									✓			
8	Glassy tiger	<i>Parantica aglea</i>							✓					
9	Common tiger	<i>Danaus genutia</i>	✓	✓					✓	✓				
10	Common crow	<i>Euploea core</i>	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓		
11	Common sailor	<i>Neptis hylas</i>	✓											
12	Baron	<i>Euthalia aconthea</i>		✓										
	DRAGONFLIES													
1	Pied parasol	<i>Neurothemis tullia</i>	✓		✓									
2	Variegated Flutterer	<i>Rhyothemis variegata variegata</i>	✓			✓	✓							
3	Asian Groundling	<i>Brachythemis contaminata</i>	✓	✓										
4	Blue (Chalky) Percher	<i>Diplacodes trivialis</i>	✓	✓				✓	✓		✓			
5	Orange-faced sprite	<i>Pseudagrion rubriceps</i>	✓	✓										
6	Crimson dropwing	<i>Trithemis aurora</i>	✓	✓										
7	Rapacious flanneltail	<i>Ictinogomphus rapax</i>	✓	✓										