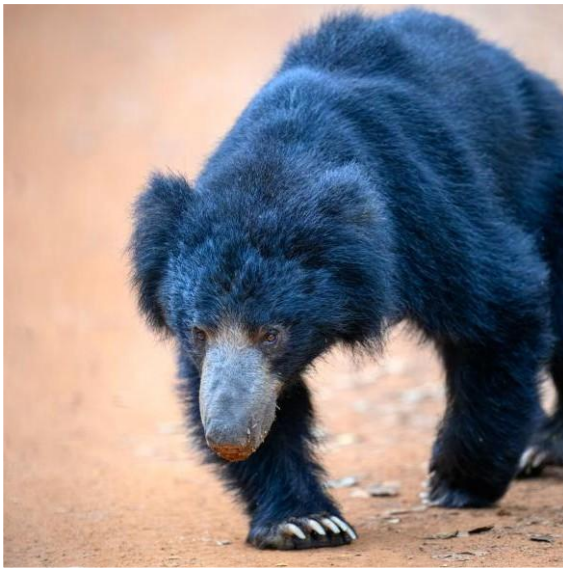


Tour Report Sri Lanka's Rare Mammals in Style 26 March – 6 April 2025

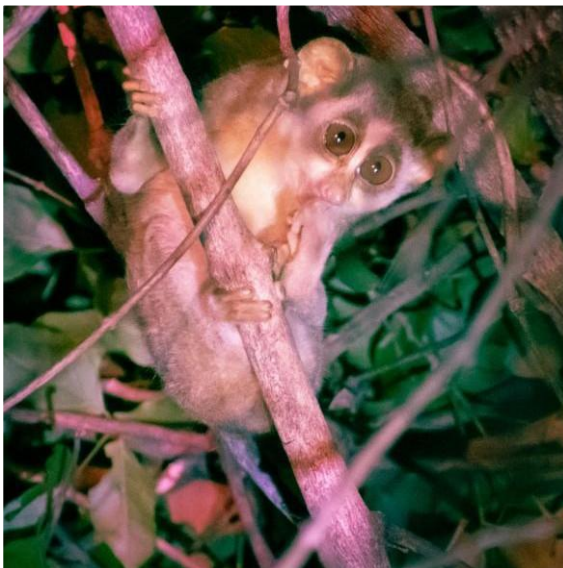
Sloth bear by Ted Smith



Fishing cat by Ted Smith



Grey slender loris by David Ashcroft



Jungle cat by David Ashcroft



Compiled by Ian Loyd and Chandika Jayarante

The Sri Lanka's Rare Mammals in Style tour was designed to unveil the wonderful world of lesser-known wildlife on this beautiful island. With time spent exploring after dark, we hoped to find some of Sri Lanka's most unique mammals, some of which are seldom seen and little known in the wild.

The tour focused on two excellent locations within the dry climatic zones of the island, which together offered the best opportunity to see some of the island's most charismatic mammals. Our first base, Sigiriya, is a highlight for many visitors with its UNESCO heritage rock fortress, but is perhaps less well known for its rich biodiversity. Sri Lanka's largest protected area, Wilpattu National Park, is an ideal location for the larger mammals and marine life on the nearby Kalpitiya peninsula.

Throughout the tour, we enjoyed excellent accommodation, hospitality and superb food, as colourful and diverse as the birdlife.

Thursday 27 March 2025

Day 1:

Airport to Sigiriya

Clear evening with spots of clouds on the route. High humidity and temperatures around 28°C

The group arrived at the airport in Katunayake, Sri Lanka, in the late afternoon, and we were soon on our way to Sigiriya. Stepping out of the airport and heading to the coach park, we had our first species marked down on the list: a cattle egret on a patch of grass in the coach park. With everyone on the coach, we started our 3-and-a-half-hour journey to Jetwing Vil Uyana.

En route, we had our first taste of typical Sri Lankan countryside; as we passed the many paddy fields, the group began to spot Asian openbill stork, black-headed ibis, Indian pond herons, great and little egrets, spot-billed pelicans, red-vented bulbuls and plenty of house crows.

Halfway through the journey, we stopped in Kurunegala to stretch our legs and enjoy some renowned Sri Lankan tea and coffee. During this stop, as the light was beginning to fade, we came across our first mammal species of the tour, the Indian flying fox. With more than a metre wingspan, we were enthralled to see them gliding effortlessly overhead as they set out for a night of foraging on nearby fruit trees.

We reached the luxurious Jetwing Vil Uyana at around 9 pm, having already given our dinner order on route. The group went in straight for dinner, which was a treat; this gave us time to get to know each other well and prepare for the upcoming days.

Friday 28 March 2025

Day 2:

Sigiriya Sanctuary

Clear sunny morning with some clouds. High humidity and temperatures around 28°C

Our first full day in Sri Lanka started with an early breakfast, and a few bird species such as pale-billed flowerpecker and small minivet were spotted around the lush grounds of the lodge. Today's morning activity was a trip to the iconic Sigiriya Rock Fortress and its surrounding sanctuary.

Our arrival at Sigiriya was graced with a serenading call from one of the many Indian peacocks we would go on to see throughout the tour. As we entered the sanctuary, an Asian openbill stork was demonstrating its perfectly evolved bill as it feasted on freshwater snails, and a pair of Sri Lanka woodshrikes treated us to a brief view.

Some of the group enjoyed the walk to the top of the incredible Lion's Rock for a sensational view, learning about the remarkable architecture and history of this incredible UNESCO World Heritage site.

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The rest of the group took a walk along the moat that borders the fortress and soon spotted our first Bengal land monitor lizard, common skink and butterflies such as baron and common leopard. Among the first birds we saw were woolly-necked stork, Indian pond heron and eastern cattle egret, while a little further on, a nocturnal black-crowned night heron was discovered roosting amongst the foliage. Next, a great egret gave us a fine display by perching on a dead tree out in the open.

Overhead was another flurry of activity, with Asian palm swifts, house (little) swift, green bee-eaters, distant crested serpent eagles and a few of the aptly named variegated flutterer dragonflies. Further into the forest, a common iora and both male and female orange minivet showed off their vivid colourations. Both groups then enjoyed some close views of toque macaques, our first endemic primate. It was great fun to watch the inquisitive youngsters playing, with one bold group swinging acrobatically into a small stream to cool off.

We then returned to the lodge, where we quickly stopped again to admire a huge water monitor lizard as it climbed down the bank and swam peacefully across one of the lakes. After enjoying a tasty lunch and plenty of cool drinks, we enjoyed the plethora of butterflies that were drawn to the flowering plants close to the restaurant. These included striking blue glassy tigers, dark blue tigers, common tigers and common crow, joker, chocolate soldier and common sailor.

After some time to rest and learn about the development of Vil Uyana and its wildlife, we began our first walk in the Loris conservation area of Jetwing Vil Uyana. Just before darkness fell, we observed freshwater crabs, tufted grey langurs, chalky percher dragonflies, common tailorbirds and kingfishers. Just as we were moving on, a skulking white-breasted waterhen revealed itself at the edge of the water, giving a good view of this shy species.

We started our first night walk around 6:30 pm, armed with red lights to search for the elusive grey slender loris. It didn't take long before we had success. Nothing prepares you for seeing your first slender loris, and the group enjoyed observing two of these gremlin-like primates. Initially, this nimble insectivorous primate only gave us a fleeting glimpse, but once settled, its large saucer-shaped eyes, short snout, thin hairless ears and little limbs were revealed.

We watched as one climbed through a tangle of vines and down a larger branch, beginning its nightly foraging. Also, during the walk, we had a close sighting of a small Indian civet searching for prey on the ground.

After dinner, we set off for our first night drive, exploring a network of forest patches where we found several Indian black-naped hares, spotted deer, and small Indian civets, and we had our first views of the endemic white-spotted chevrotain or mouse deer. One individual treated us to a good view as it crossed the open area between two areas of forest. After being up till 2:30 am, we headed back to the hotel for a good night's sleep.

Saturday 29 March 2025

Day 3:

Kaludiya Pokuna Forest Reserve and Sigiriya area

Sunny morning with clouds and overcast in the afternoon. High humidity and temperatures around 28°C

The morning was kept at leisure for the group to rest and enjoy the excellent facilities and wildlife-rich grounds of the lodge.

After our delicious lunch, we took a short drive to the primate research centre at the Kaludiya Pokuna Forest Reserve. We first stopped at the research centre headquarters, where we were given a brief on the project that is investigating the ecology, threats and taxonomy of both purple-faced leaf monkeys and tufted grey langurs. It was fascinating to learn that the two species are hybridising in one area, and in some cases, both species were living within the same troop.

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We then set off to the forest, and the group enjoyed a spot of birding en route. The paddy fields were alive with egrets, herons and ibises.

We drove in jeeps up to the archaeology office at Kaludiya Pokuna, where the study site for the monkeys is also located. After a fairly steep walk up through the mature forest, we joined with the researchers to observe a troop of ten monkeys. This particular troop consisted of some purple-faced leaf monkeys, one grey langur and several hybrids between the two species.

It was wonderful to see and learn about each different individual member of the troop and how each had its characteristics and behavioural patterns identified by the research team. After a walk at Popham's Arboretum, we returned to the lodge for dinner.

This evening we set off for the thrill of another night drive around 9:30 pm. We started off the night with a sighting of a small Indian civet in open woodland. As we moved into an area of rice paddies bordered by forest, we came across a beautiful jungle cat. The first didn't stick around for long, but we soon came across a second jungle cat that allowed us to watch it stalking the edge of a field for 30 minutes.

This was an enchanting sighting as the cat remained still and razor-focused on its rodent quarry, hidden in the long grass. After an enjoyable time watching this jungle cat, we moved a little further up the track, where our spotlighting revealed an Indian giant flying squirrel. This was another fantastic and prolonged sighting as we could observe the squirrel's large size and extraordinary long tail as it explored a tall tree.

Full of excitement, we continued our search, heading into an area of forest with several pools and tanks. As we approached a small pool, eyeshine from the forest got our hearts racing. After a short wait, a graceful female fishing cat emerged from the shadows. We kept our distance and let her get used to our presence and the soft red lights, and she treated us to a wonderful hour-long sighting as she thoughtfully made her way silently through prime habitat. For a time, she paused by the side of the water, keeping mostly concealed within cover while she surveyed the water for fish or other aquatic prey.

We then left her to hunt and continued up the road for a celebratory tea and biscuits. We concluded the night with a few sightings of white-spotted chevrotains, a stunning green forest lizard and a pair of green vine snakes.

Sunday 30 March 2025

Day 4:

Minneriya National Park and Sigiriya area

Clear sunny day throughout. High humidity and temperatures around 28°C

Continuing our usual pattern, our morning was at leisure to catch up on sleep and enjoy the lodge. After another sumptuous lunch, we headed out in search of the largest land mammal on the island, the Sri Lankan elephant. After a 30-minute drive, we found ourselves at the entrance to Minneriya National Park, where we were entertained by a troop of toque macaques and a few grey langurs as we waited to enter the park.

With significant and unseasonal rains in the recent weeks, not all of the park was accessible today, but we entered in anticipation of seeing what we could find. We were in for a treat, as after only a short drive, we came across an elephant ambling along the dirt road towards us. The safari vehicle stopped and backed up to allow the elephant the right of way, but what we didn't see was the 30 other elephants that were following behind.

Elephants rely on salt licks for minerals as their diet of plant matter doesn't contain enough quantity of it. We had stopped very close to one, and the herd made their way to the lick, next to us and started to feed, a mere ten metres away. They appeared to follow some protocol as individuals waited their turn at the lick. This herd was special as it contained at least three individual adolescent tuskers, which are sadly a rare occurrence within the Sri Lankan population. We were also treated to the sight of an endearing baby, which

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was probably only a few weeks old.

In addition to memorable elephant encounters, we also came across spotted deer, and a ruddy mongoose patrolling the road, and some of the group saw purple-faced leaf monkeys and a star tortoise.

Birdlife was ever present, and highlights included close views of a pair of grey-headed fish eagles and several majestic white-bellied sea eagles circling overhead. At a small wetland in the “golden hour” of last light, with the sun dipping behind the distant trees, we enjoyed a flurry of last bird activity. Small flocks of Alexandrine parakeets were zig-zagging down from the sky to land on their roosting tree, while a colourful coppersmith barbet called away from its perch. Finally, a pair of Malabar pied hornbills engaged in gentle beak-touching courtship behaviour.

We were back at the hotel by sunset, and took a break from the night walks this evening to have an early dinner and rest before our night drive.

Our night drive took us back to the paddy field habitats of the jungle cat, where we had sightings of at least two different cats, quite likely the same individuals seen previously. With the paddy fields having been freshly cut, exposing rodent burrows, both the jungle cats and small Indian civets were making the most of the productive hunting opportunity. Further into the drive, we came across several small Indian civets also stalking the field margins in search of rodents.

Further on in a more densely wooded habitat, we found several white-spotted chevrotains, a grey slender loris, golden jackals, a northern common palm civet, and some of the group had a brief view of an Indian crested porcupine close to the road. A small mammal was seen running down the road, which then disappeared into the forest. It may have been a rusty-spotted cat, but unfortunately, it didn't give us a close enough view.

We then returned to the lodge, finding another green vine snake by the roadside on the way.

Monday 31 March 2025

Day 5:

Hurulu Eco Park and Sigiriya area

Clear sunny morning with clouds forming in the afternoon. High humidity and temperatures around 28°C

Today we visited the nearby Hurulu Eco Park in the afternoon. We first stopped en route at the Pidurangala Monastery, an ancient Buddhist cave temple constructed on an enormous rock. Here we observed a colony of Schneider's leaf-nosed bats and also encountered a common skink and some impressive giant blue-eyed carpenter bees, while an oriental honey buzzard flew right overhead just as we were leaving.

It was then time for us to explore the Hurulu Eco Park, where the landscape was quite contrasting with Minneriya. Here we found small herds of elephants browsing amongst the towering elephant grass. At times, we were treated to elephant-eye-level views of these intelligent and social mammals as they foraged in the tall grasses alongside us.

Adding to the adventure, one of the jeeps even managed to get stuck in the mud while locating a small flock of the tiny barred button quails that continuously darted in and out of the undergrowth. Among the other avian highlights today was a juvenile changeable hawk eagle still in its nest, a crested treeswift chick being fed by its parents, and a pair of peregrine falcons soaring overhead, while a flock of Sri Lankan swallows whizzed past.

In quieter parts of the park, yellow-crowned woodpecker, white-browed fantail and shikra gave good views, while the long grass provided a good opportunity to see ashy prinia and compare the differences between three species of munia.

Just before leaving the park, some of the group were fortunate enough to see several endemic Sri Lankan keelbacks swimming across a small stream.

We returned to the lodge for sunset, and after a quick freshen-up, commenced our final night walk in the Loris Reserve. This time, we were treated to an even better sighting of an adult loris, rewarding us with a prolonged and clear view in the short canopy overhead. It continued with its nightly foraging, and we were able to even observe it catch a small insect, showcasing how quickly they can move.

Dinner was served at 7:30 pm, and by 9 pm the group was on the road heading on the last night drive in Sigiriya. This night drive was a little shorter to take into account the early start the next day.

However, it was still a super successful last drive and became known as the “night of the jackal”, as we came across several pairs of golden jackals that each gave excellent views. Early into the drive, we also found a huge marsh mugger crocodile resting at the side of a tank, and later a common bronzeback snake.

Both small Indian civet and white-spotted chevrotain were seen again, and near the Pidurangala temple, we found a small herd of wild boar foraging and disturbed by the local domestic dogs. The highlight of the drive came right at the end when our second fishing cat of the trip was spotted walking along the edge of a wetland. This cat then moved into dense undergrowth, where it remained concealed, so we returned to the lodge for the night.

Tuesday 1 April 2025

Day 6:

Anuradhapura and Wilpattu National Park

Warm sunny weather with some overcast clouds in the afternoon.

With a packed breakfast, we said our goodbyes to new friends at Jetwing Vil Uyana and set off for the journey to the ancient city of Anuradhapura and subsequently Wilpattu National Park. On route, we stopped at a tank (man-made reservoir) which was full of wetland birdlife and provided us with views of several pheasant-tailed jacanas in their dapper breeding plumage.

Our next stop was the ancient Isurumuniya Temple, where we could learn more about Buddhism and the ancient temples and history of the Anuradhapura era. The cave temple is also home to a large roost of the Leschenault's rousette fruit bat, and it was special to see a large colony of these bats living next to the temple.

Surprisingly, the toilet block here was something of a wildlife hotspot too. Here we found a giant squirrel, Indian palm squirrel, black-rumped flameback, black-hooded oriole, yellow-billed babblers and best of all, a cinnamon bittern which was seen in flight over a paddy field.

We then continued our journey to Wilpattu, where we checked into our accommodation at Claughton Wild, where a lunch of traditional Sri Lankan rice and curry was then served.

After a small break to settle into our rooms, we then set off by jeep at 2:30 pm towards the Wilpattu Park entrance. Shortly after entering this vast forested park, we passed a lake where kingfishers and oriental darters were perched, two enormous mugger crocodiles were basking, and a large male water buffalo was wallowing. It was a picturesque scene and a lovely welcome to the park.

Continuing deeper into the park, there were sightings of a mother sambar deer and her fawn, and plenty of birdlife at the roadside. The charming green bee-eaters were almost asking to be photographed as they continually perched up on branches next to the road to wipe the venom off the bees they had just caught. Eventually, everyone also enjoyed catching up with the exquisite and endemic Sri Lankan white-rumped shama. Its song is as beautiful as its appearance.

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We then reached a more open area that had a patchwork of small woodlands and grasslands, where herds of spotted deer were grazing. Following this, we found one of our highlights of the trip, as a shaggy sloth bear emerged from the undergrowth, slowly ambling along in typical bear fashion, but with its head to the ground, constantly sniffing for termites. We enjoyed close views of this most specialist of bears before we had to return to the park entrance before closing time.

A few managed a very brief glimpse of a leopard high in the trees just before we exited the park. We returned to the lodge for a well-earned rest and a lovely dinner.

Wednesday 2 April 2025

Day 7:

Wilpattu National Park

Warm sunny morning and significant rain in the late afternoon and light rain overnight.

The day had come for our full day exploring the wild heart of Wilpattu National Park, where we planned to explore a core area known for its leopard territories. We set off early with packed meals and headed straight to an area of villus (natural water bodies found only in Wilpattu National Park) within the centre of the park. Our first distraction came in the form of a magnificent brown fish owl perched in a tree and occasionally turning its head to look at us.

Upon reaching one of these villus, known as Kuda Pattassa, a leopard was visible on the opposite bank, although at quite a distance. This leopard gave us a short view before it spotted something in the undergrowth and moved away to investigate. This leopard was identified as one of the young adult cubs born to a female leopard known as the Kuruttupandi female.

Moving on, we continued our search, finding both ruddy and Indian grey mongooses, plentiful spotted deer, a glimpse of wild boar, and abundant birdlife. At lunch, we stopped at the park's rest area and were greeted by numerous Sri Lankan junglefowl and toque macaques. The team had to keep a watchful eye over the jeeps during lunch to ensure the macaques didn't climb into them. Just as we were finishing lunch, news came in that a leopard had been spotted nearby, so it was all systems go. A few minutes later, we were all ecstatic as our eyes, cameras, and binoculars admired a stunning and well-built male leopard lying on the track ahead of us.

This impressive, thick-necked male leopard is known as Neluma (as he was born near the Neluma Villu) and holds a large territory, being one of the largest males in the area. While watching the leopard, a Malabar red muntjac crossed the track behind, putting the two species in the same field of view for a few seconds.

After this thrilling sighting, the heavens opened, so we sheltered from a torrential rainstorm before continuing to explore the edges of several villus, which were now a hive of bird activity following the rain. Prehistoric-looking great thick knees, devastatingly handsome Pacific golden plovers in their fine breeding plumage, pin-tailed snipe and dapper lesser sand plovers vied for our attention. An Indian black-naped hare also emerged into the open, showing off its black nape and unbelievably long ears much more clearly than in our previous sightings.

Another rainstorm loomed, bringing our safari to an end as it rained throughout our journey back to the lodge. Due to the rain, we decided against a night drive tonight. Some of the group did join a short night walk around the grounds of the lodge, which, due to rain, proved very productive for amphibians. We soon found the first of many juvenile common paddy-field frogs and freshwater crabs lurking in the shallows of the ponds. Next up, we found an ornate narrow-mouthed frog and a huge Jerdon's bullfrog, before locating two Indian spotted treefrogs hiding amongst one of the pond's aquatic vegetation.

As we walked past the edge of the swimming pool, something large caught our attention. It soon revealed

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itself as the Sri Lankan endemic subspecies of the Asian giant forest scorpion. This was a monster specimen, being at least five inches long, with a room key carefully used for size comparison. This heavily built species has powerful pincers used for catching most of its prey. Our final sighting of the evening was of the small Rohan's globular or pug-snouted frog, another endemic species.

Thursday 3 April 2025

Day 8:

Wilpattu National Park

Sunny in the morning with scattered showers in the afternoon

As with the previous day, we headed out early in the morning with a packed breakfast and lunch. With the weather forecast to rain again in the afternoon, we planned to make the most of the sunny morning.

As we entered the park, an atmospheric mist hugged the forest, adding to the transformation of the scenery after the rains the night before. A Malabar red muntjac momentarily crossed the track ahead of us before disappearing back into the shades of the forest. Further on, a shikra posed obligingly on a dead tree, and a crested serpent eagle was doing what it says on the tin, eating a recently caught Schneider's earth snake. Passing through denser forest, a couple of sambar deer browsed amongst the trees.

Rather more unexpectedly, we then came across an endemic Sri Lankan flapshell turtle far from land, making its way along a track deep in the forest. This soft-shelled turtle is rarely found far from water, so it may have been displaced by the heavy rains overnight. At one of the villus we then came across a large bull elephant that entertained us by wading out in the water to feed on submerged aquatic vegetation.

Later in the morning, we heard news of a leopard being seen in the Thambioluwa area of the park, so we concentrated our efforts in this area. We eventually found another male leopard here, moving carefully within the edge of the forest. It paused to rest briefly on a boulder, giving us a slightly better view before continuing its path into denser forest and vanishing, showcasing just how elusive these cats can be.

On our way to the rest area for lunch, we experienced a rare sighting of a pair of golden jackals that had predated a spotted deer fawn and were feeding on it. After lunch, we watched the jackals successfully move their kill to safety before a large crocodile found it. Just as we had finished savouring the serenity of the lake at the rest stop, we heard the call of the stork-billed kingfisher, so we rushed back to catch this monster-billed kingfisher flying over the water.

The rain held out a little better than we had hoped after lunch, so we continued our searching. A few alarm calls from both muntjac and spotted deer didn't produce any further excitement at stakeouts, but the birdlife kept us company with the regular cast of Jerdon's bushlarks, chestnut-headed bee-eaters, and Indian robins singing away. A rather bedraggled changeable hawk eagle was also dive-bombed by red-wattled lapwings on high alert.

We slowly made our way towards the park exit, finding a star reptile, a young and vividly patterned Indian star tortoise feeding in the open grass. Further on, both ruddy and Indian grey mongooses made appearances along the side of the track. After further searching, we then decided to head back to the lodge for some rest before dinner. With a very early start planned for the following day, everyone retired after dinner.

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Friday 4 April 2025

Day 9:

Kalpitiya Peninsula

Clear sunny morning with some clouds and localised showers in the afternoon. High humidity and temperatures around 28°C

Today offered us a whole new experience as we left land and headed out to the Kalpitiya Lagoon and the Indian Ocean. We had an early morning wake-up and left the hotel by 5 am to reach the boat dock in Gangae Wadiya by 6 am. By 6:30, we were in two boats heading out into the Kalpitiya Lagoon, in search of the ultra-rare and highly endangered Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin. As we headed out of the Kalaoya River mouth, we were greeted by grey and purple herons watching on from the mangroves.

As we travelled around the lagoon looking for any sign of the dolphins, we had to keep looking overhead as greater and lesser crested, Caspian, gull-billed and white-winged terns all kept us busy. A few brown-headed gulls also passed by, and we then found a small flock of spot-billed pelicans that gave us quite a show as they pursued shoals of fish.

As the morning started to warm up, we decided to head closer to the Kalpitiya shore; at around 9 am, we saw our first water blow and the strange-looking humpback of the dolphin breaking the surface of the water. Cheers abounded! We were lucky enough to spot a pod of four or five individuals.

This species is not known to breach like the spinner dolphin, but our luck was in today, and we had one individual breach as well. We spent a very enjoyable 30 minutes following them through the lagoon. We could see why they are sometimes also locally called pink lagoon dolphins, as their light pink colouration was visible on some dorsal fins, snouts and tails.

We then headed towards Kalpitiya beach, stopping for breakfast at a fishing hut on the beach before changing into a 10-seater boat for our excursion out to sea. It was not long into the trip before we were greeted by a small pod of spinner dolphins that we followed for a little while before we saw a large blow of water further ahead. Whales, we all gasped! We quickly made our way in that direction, and within a few minutes, we were all watching a Bryde's whale continually feeding. On one occasion, it made a dramatic lunge feed which was quickly received by many oohs and ahs of excitement and admiration.

We were fairly sure that we were in the company of at least two Bryde's whales feeding in this area, but then Chandika spotted a much larger blow further out, which could have potentially been a blue whale.

As we were watching the last of the whale sightings, we saw dolphins coming our way. What the group experienced next was truly awe-inspiring.

Within a few minutes, we were surrounded by spinner dolphins in what is known as a superpod, which could have easily numbered 1000 individuals. We spent over an hour immersed in the antics and joy of this pod. The dolphins leapt, spun, and rode the boat's wake with several putting on sensational acrobatic displays to the delight of all. There were many cheers, wows, oohs and ahs as we observed everything from barrel rolls and bellyflops to backflips from adults and youngsters alike.

It was particularly special to be in the presence of so many animals, something rare in today's world, and all the dolphins were continuing with their daily behaviour around us. Adding to the spectacle were diving little terns dropping into the sea like miniature torpedoes after the fish fleeing the dolphins. As the saying goes, "one good tern deserves another", and they were soon joined by the much larger, greater crested and elegant lesser crested terns.

Our heads then "turned" to the shore as we made our way back to the beach where we could admire the roosting flocks of terns, lesser sand plovers and sanderlings along the tideline. A final surprise treat came in the form of a terek sandpiper spotted on the beach just as we docked.

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With smiles on our faces, we then made our way to lunch at the lovely Kitesurfing Lanka, where a fresh seafood platter was available. After lunch, we made a quick visit to the edge of the mangroves to see the hermit and Western calling fiddler crabs that thrive in these sheltered mangroves. A great eggfly butterfly and chalky percher dragonflies were also seen before we set off for the journey back to Claughton Wild.

The remainder of the afternoon was time to rest before we met up for dinner and set off for our final night drive. Our route tonight took us through a mosaic of agricultural land, small wetlands and forest scrub. Soon into the drive, we came across an unidentified small cat, but while trying to relocate this animal, we also picked up several Asiatic long-tailed climbing mice in the roadside grasses. This tiny species is well adapted to a life spent mostly above the ground, with a tail almost twice as long as its body, which we were able to see, being used for both balance and clinging to grass stems.

Later into the night, we found a small Indian civet foraging surprisingly close to a house, and had limited views of a grey slender loris in dense undergrowth. We decided to explore one final track that passes through a wet grassland habitat. This was a great decision as this track produced the sighting of the night when a magnificent male fishing cat was found close to the track. This large male treated us to a fantastic sighting as he sat amongst the grassland and then made his way close by and up onto the track behind us. It was a superb finale to our nocturnal activities.

Saturday 5 April 2025

Day 10:

Travel to Negombo

Clear sunny day with occasional clouds. High humidity and temperatures around 28°C

This morning, we opted for a leisurely start following our late-night drive. Many of the group enjoyed the birdlife, butterflies and dragonflies that could be found on the grounds of the lodge. Throughout our stay, we became well acquainted with the resident pairs of Indian rollers here that would allow outstanding views.

There were also plenty of Indian robins and oriental magpie-robins, plain prinia, paddyfield pipit, green imperial pigeon, orang-breasted green pigeon, black-hooded oriole and white-browed bulbul in the grounds. A large garden lizard also gave fine views just after breakfast, and a fluffy newly born white-breasted waterhen chick was thankfully seen reunited with its mother.

We departed Claughton Wild for lunch at a nearby restaurant. An Indian grey mongoose nipped across the road en route, and while waiting for lunch to be served, we enjoyed the local birdlife that included scaly-breasted and black-headed munia, brown-headed barbet, a shikra and crested treeswifts. One member of the group then found a young trinket snake being mobbed by a bold flock of yellow-billed babblers. It was then time for our lunch, which included a fine buffet selection of traditional Sri Lankan cuisine.

It was then time to begin the journey south to Negombo. We broke the journey with a leg stretch and a short birding outing at Tinapitiya Tank. During our short walk, we observed numerous lesser whistling ducks, Indian and little cormorants, spot-billed pelicans, a few purple herons, and heard the call of a rufous woodpecker.

We then arrived in Negombo as the light was fading, and squadrons of Indian flying foxes glided over the town as they set off foraging. Arriving at our hotel, we enjoyed a final dinner together, thanked our fantastic guides Chandika and Guyan, and shared our favourite moments from the trip. The spectacle of the spinner dolphins, and views of sloth bear, leopard and fishing cat all featured fondly.

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Sunday 6 April 2025

Day 11:

Today we departed on our flights home or onward journeys, while some stayed on to enjoy the 100-metre-long swimming pool of Jetwing Lagoon.

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Checklist for Sri Lanka's Rare Mammals in Style



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
	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	Golden jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
6	Sloth bear	<i>Melursus ursinus</i>						✓				
7	Small Indian civet	<i>Viverricula indica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	
8	Northern common palm civet	<i>Paradoxurus hermaphroitus</i>				✓						
9	Indian grey mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>							✓			✓
10	Ruddy mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>				✓			✓	✓		
11	Jungle cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>			✓	✓						
12	Fishing cat	<i>Prionailurus viverrinus</i>			✓		✓				✓	
13	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus kotiya</i>							✓	✓		
14	Asian elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>				✓	✓			✓		
15	Eurasian wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>					✓		✓			
16	White-spotted chevrotain	<i>Tragulus meminna</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓					
17	Southern red muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjac</i>							✓	✓		
18	Spotted deer	<i>Cervus axis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
19	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>						✓	✓	✓		
20	Wild water buffalo	<i>Bubalus arnee</i>						✓	✓	✓		
21	Indian palm squirrel	<i>Funambulus palmarum</i>				✓		✓			✓	
22	Grizzled giant squirrel	<i>Ratufa macroura</i>			✓			✓	✓	✓		
23	Giant flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista philippensis</i>				✓						
24	Indian black-naped hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
25	Indian crested porcupine	<i>Hystrix indica</i>				✓						
26	Asiatic long-tailed climbing mouse	<i>Vandeleuria oleracea</i>									✓	

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27	Indian flying fox	<i>Pteropus gigantea</i>	✓									✓
28	Indian pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus coromandra</i>				✓						
29	Indo-pacific humpback dolphin	<i>Sousa chinensis</i>									✓	
30	Long-snouted spinner dolphin	<i>Stenella longirostris</i>									✓	
31	Bryde's whale	<i>Balaenoptera brydei</i>									✓	
32	Schneider's leaf-nosed bat	<i>Hipposideros speoris</i>					✓					
33	Leschenault's rousette	<i>Rousettus leschenaultii</i>						✓				

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