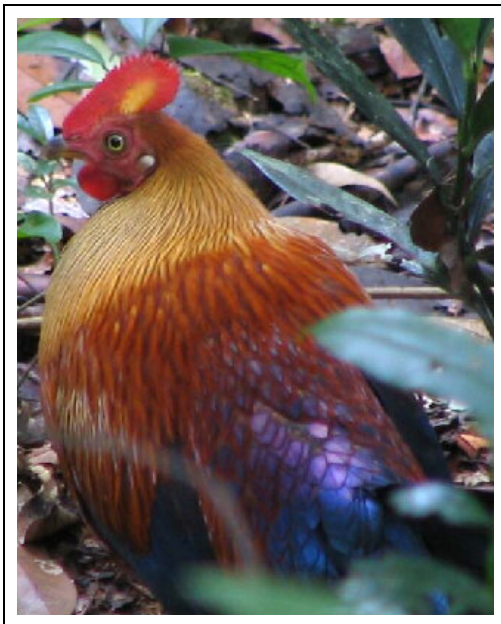


# Unseasonally rainy birding in Sri Lanka

(10 December 2008 to 20 December 2008)



Sri Lanka Junglefowl Photo ©Yong Ding Li

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## Introduction

Sri Lanka has always been high on my "want-to-go" places, due to its ease of accessibility and birding with almost all of the current 33 endemic species being relatively easy to see. Finally, in December this year, Ding Li and I managed to work out a relatively short 10 day birding tour with former JetWings guide Amila Salgado. Along the way, we would pick up another 5 Singaporean birders, all of whom shared a similar desire to explore both the avian and cultural marvels of this beautiful country and its friendly inhabitants. Overall, the tour was successful with 31 of the current 33 recognised endemics seen, with Seren-DIP Scops-owl and **Crimson-backed Flameback**

(inexplicably) registering as heard-onlys. This was no mean feat given the circumstances. As luck would have had it it rained everyday during the trip with the exception of the 1st full day in the field, despite December being known as a transition season of sorts. Eventually, we found out first-hand that some sort of climate-change was going on, with November (usually a rainy month) being unusually dry this year. Nevertheless, it was a great trip overall and in general most of the participants enjoyed themselves.

## Itinerary

Kithugala / Kelani Valley- 1 Morning  
Sinharaja NP- 2 Full Days & 1 Morning  
Udawalawe National Park- 1 Afternoon & 1 Morning  
Lunugamwehera NP & Environs (Near Tissa)- 1 Afternoon & 1 Morning  
Nuwara Eliya / Victoria Park- 1 Full Day & 1 Morning  
Wetlands Day Excursion (Albert Only)- 1 Full Day

As you can see from the above itinerary, it is a bit unorthodox compared to typical birding tour itineraries. There were several reasons for this, the first being time. The tour itself was restricted to 9 days, as opposed to the usual 2 weeks or so which most birders spend here. As such, the schedule was very tight and in most cases re-tries for missed targets was not possible as we spent almost 1/3 of all the 9 days or so travelling, usually arriving at destinations after dark on several occasions. Another consideration was budget and security. During our time there, Yala National Park was closed indefinitely due to LTTE incursions. In addition, due to the rather expensive entrance tickets to most of the bigger National Parks, to keep the cost down Amila arranged for us to bird in numerous "local patches" which required no payment but were no less productive, hence the unfamiliar locales.

## Logistics & Guiding

Our whole group flew by Mihin Lanka Airlines from Singapore to Colombo. Although relatively pricey at SGD400 for a return ticket, it was still cheaper compared to the prices some of the bigger carriers were charging, no thanks to the tariffs imposed on foreign carriers by the government.

Our ground agent and tour guide was Amila Salgado, a former JetWings Guide. He now manages his own tour company Birdwing Nature Holidays and can be reached at [amila@birdwingnature.com](mailto:amila@birdwingnature.com).

## Environment & People

Although Reuters & other leading news agencies tend to jump on stories out of Sri Lanka, the reality was a far cry from the publications. Even though there was a decidedly well-covered bombing incident a fortnight before our arrival, we encountered nothing of that nature during our time there. Security was expectedly tight in Colombo & at the various entry-points & economic infrastructure, such as power generators & the airport. Aside from that, the only security presence we encountered was a couple of APCs in Udawalawe NP, who functioned more as a deterrent in light of the problems in Yala.

The Sri Lankan people are as friendly as birders in previous reports made them out to be, and it was particularly hard-warming to be invited into a house on a rainy day in the field for a cup of tea or a coconut drink. Everywhere we went we were greeted with friendly smiles and waves from villagers, who even managed to find us some of our target birds! Needless to say, we returned the courtesies, either through a smile and a wave or an offering of sweets and chocolates, which was particularly well-received by the younger generations.

## Site Summaries

### Kithugala/Kelani Valley:

#### Introduction

Kithugala was an excellent place to get our Sri Lankan birding adventure rolling. We stayed in Sisira Lodge on our first night there and the secondary growth and well-wooded gardens in the resort grounds and adjacent to the nearby Rafter's Retreat provided excellent birding. The view of the Kelani River, where the classic "Bridge on the River Kwai" was filmed was superb and the riverine habitat also proved to be of great interest. Ironically, our time here was spent in largely fine weather, a luxury we would learn to treasure for the remainder of our trip. We only crossed the river in darkness to reach the forest reserve on the other side on our first night, and even then the elusive *Otus* got off lightly as a heard-only. Nevertheless, we scored on the primary targets within 1 morning, namely **Green-billed Coucal** & **Chestnut-backed Owlet** (the latter with some help from the locals!). All in all, an excellent area which we would certainly have had no qualms with spending more time in, as it was the epitome of "armchair birding"!

#### Highlights

**Green-billed Coucal:** 1 of the main targets at this site, 1 was kind enough to get our trip off to a flying start! While sipping tea at dawn in the dining area, a series of calls from the entrance road sent us scrambling for the source. The bird gave us the run-around for long periods, gliding laboriously from the canopy of 1 tree to another but always keeping to the shadows. Eventually, as the light improved and the bird became more than a "black blob", details started emerging but finally it gave in and flew to the crown of a coconut tree where it perched in full view for all to admire that green bill which makes it more than the ubiquitous **Greater Coucal**.

A great start to the day! **Chestnut-backed Owlet**: A real cracker although one which made us sweat for most of the day. We ignored a calling individual by the lodge's dining area believing it would be much easier to see in the daytime. Thereafter, we had to work for this one until some kind village children stepped in to assist. Following a frustrating morning listening out for its distinctive call, we were taken to a woodland patch near Rafter's Retreat where we stopped to offer sweets to some village children who came out to greet us. On the way back, the family saw us and beckoned us over to their laundry area. There, to our shock and awe, we saw an Owlet perched below eye-level just 20m from where we were standing and no more than 5m above the ground. Talk about "What Goes Around Comes Around"! The guide and the photographers had a field day for the next hour or so as the rather bemused bird just stared at this group of humans looking at it. We also observed a smaller bird with a much richer chestnut back for short periods while admiring his larger partner, leading to speculation that they were nesting nearby. This was not surprising given that other locals in the area had taken us to former nesting trees when we were looking hard for them earlier.

**Indian Pitta**: For some birders, this isn't really a highlight given the ease in which most people see them here but nothing could prepare me for my 1st encounter with this jewel. Having worked my socks off to see 18 pittas prior to this it came as a huge shock when 1 was spotted foraging silently in a small gully just next to Sisira Lodge's restaurant. The encounter was unique because the bird was remarkably approachable and tolerant for a pitta. I had heard stories from friends and contacts regarding the ease of seeing this species but all in all it was a beautiful bird in itself and having the opportunity to observe 1 in a garden setting is special enough to warrant a short paragraph on this trip target. 1 more to go to sweet 20!

### Other Notables

Ceylon Grey Hornbill  
Dark-fronted Babbler  
Brown-breasted Flycatcher  
Ceylon Small Barbet  
Brown-headed Barbet  
Yellow-fronted Barbet  
Black-rumped Flameback  
Spot-winged Thrush  
Ceylon Junglefowl  
Southern (Lesser) Hill Myna  
Layard's Parakeet  
Ceylon Hanging Parrot



Brown-breasted  
Flycatcher

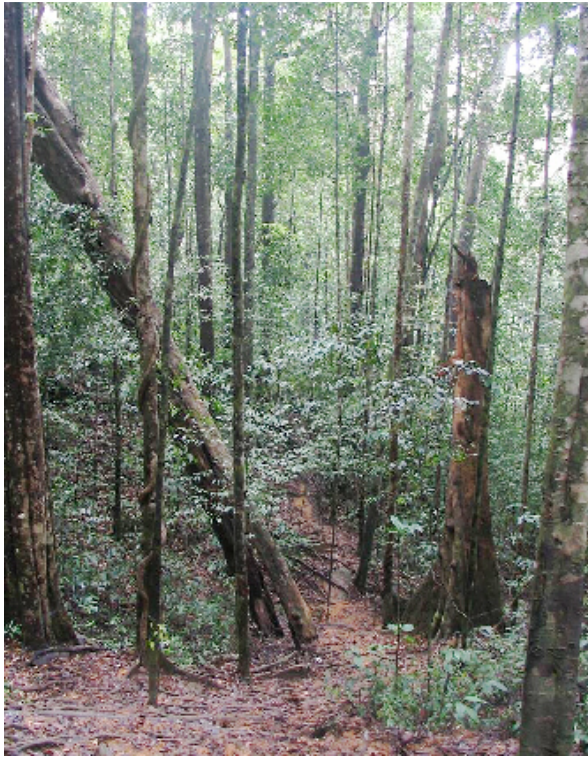
*Photo ©Yong Ding Li*

### **Sinharaja/Morapitiya**

#### Introduction

A must-visit site for any self-respecting birder due to the high number of wet-zone specialities it harbours, this site is usually well-covered on most tours. We were no exception, focussing almost 1/3 of our trip time exploring this rainforest. Personally, I didn't particularly enjoy birding in this forest. It just felt weird, walking through a forest which is almost totally silent until a mixed flock is nearby. Having been used to walking in forests where the songs of babblers and assorted vocalists can be heard, it just felt strange to walk for hours and see and hear absolutely nothing and then all of a sudden have birds everywhere as a mixed flock passed by. Take nothing away from our feathered friends though, they were some of the most visually stunning and charming species we would see on this tour.





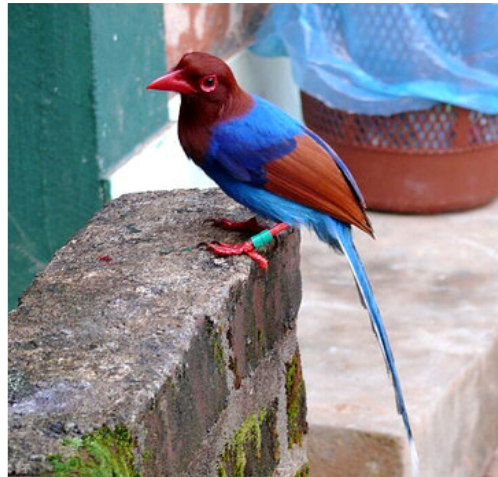
Sinharaja Reserve

Photo ©Yong Ding Li

Another obstacle was the leeches. I could write a whole paragraph about these buggers. In terms of annoyance factor, they are in a league of their own, well above even the potent Tiger Leeches of Danum Valley. Some can be barely made out with the naked eye, yet their bites could be felt easily, especially when they often choose the extremities to sink their needles into. The worst part is, when it rains, it seems to rain leeches too. Birding in the rain in Sinharaja and Morapitiya was one of the most uncomfortable experiences ever. A typical scenario for us was to have both hands on our umbrella and binos, only to see a leech creeping along your forehead or inside your clothes. Eventually, we speculated they fell from the canopy onto our umbrellas and initiated death from above! In truth, they were absolutely everywhere, even standing in the centre of the relatively wide vehicular road, I would somehow feel or grab hold of 1 of them. It was an overwhelming experience to say the least.

### Highlights

Martin's Simple Lodge- Surprising choice eh? The lodge itself, while decidedly very basic, is a birding highlight in itself. Everyday at dawn, a group of 6 or so stunningly beautiful **Ceylon Blue Magpies** come to survey and gobble up the unlucky critters hanging around the lights. Joining them is usually at least a **Spot-winged Thrush** or 2. Mixed flocks passing through the area add an even greater dimension to the birding experience, with specialities like **Malabar Trogon**, **White-faced Starling**, the otherworldly **Red-faced Malkoha** & **Ceylon Scimitar-babbler** to name a few all seen and scoped well from the comfort of the dining area. Night-time forays along the access road yielded a brief **Ceylon Frogmouth** & a rather tame **Yellow-striped Mousedeer**. To top it all off, our group came very close to a pair of **Ceylon Spurfowl** just behind the lodge, although in the end only our guide saw them. The list goes on. Essentially, almost every possible Sinharaja speciality can be seen in the forest around the lodge, without even having to enter the park proper!



Ceylon Blue Magpie

Photo ©Alfred Chia

**Ceylon Spurfowl** – One of the main reasons to go back. Ding Li and I were decidedly unhappy with our encounter with Sri Lanka's most difficult endemic. Having endured a early pre-dawn start to nab the **Ceylon Frogmouth** which after much effort we encountered at the entrance to Moullawella Nature Trail at first light, we had to endure a strenuous hike deep into the forested slopes of the trail where after climbing steeply we went off the trail and to the guide's stakeout. Here we sat uncomfortably on a rocky outcrop that obviously could not

accommodate all of us and allowed very limited movement. Over the course of the next 2 hours, we endured hugely frustrating moments as we heard a vocal pair circle us repeatedly. In the end, Ding Li & I only had brief views of a female to show for it while only 1 of the group had decent views of the male. Better luck next time I guess!

**Ashy-headed Laughingthrush** – Decidedly thin on the ground during our time there, we only encountered a large group of 8 once in a mixed flock near Moullawella Nature Trail and only briefly. No other sightings during our stay in Sinharaja.

### **Other Notables**

Brown-capped Babbler  
Legge's & Plain-billed Flowerpecker  
Green-billed Coucal (Near Moullawella)  
Layard's Parakeet  
Ceylon Crested Drongo  
Orange-billed Babbler

### **Dips**

**Serendib Scops-owl** – Trip Reports generally don't make a habit of listing dipped species but sometimes the process is just as memorable, if not more so, than the result. This was a classic example.

Having endured a very uncomfortable 2 hour drive from Martin's Lodge to Moropitiya in overcast conditions, our fate seemed destined to be sealed when the floodgates opened just as we arrived at the stake-out for the species. We had no choice but to take shelter in the house of a family of tea-farmers nearby. There, our group huddled together in the pitch-dark living room sipping tea while waiting for the rain to subside. 2 hours later, the rain had subsided somewhat and our guide, perhaps in desperation, beckoned us back out. Bearing in mind he had wrote in our itinerary that he has a 85% success rate with the owl here, with 6 out of 7 previous attempts being successful, we headed back out to face more than the rain.

Our adversaries here were the critters we were getting used to in Sinharaja. However here, they seemed to drop from nowhere. With hands occupied on torches and brollies, they entered the extremities. In the end, we consigned ourselves to our fate and strained our ears to listen against hope for that monosyllabic "Hoot" which would justify our ordeal. It never came.

The next thing we knew, we arrived at the place where Amila had earlier mentioned we may need to cross a shallow 3m wide stream. Looking at it from where we were, it was now a raging torrent, probably a class 1 rapid or more at the crossing point. The rocks were all 6 feet under, the water was now more than knee deep, and we all stood there looking at each other, unsure of what to make of it. Amila then chose this point to mention that most of his sightings had been made beyond the river, a fact left out until then. After some silent debate, he "volunteered" to show that the river was still crossable. Even in his wellies, it was clear the current was extremely strong and after much effort he gave in, and the merry band of us carried on waiting where we were, all the while feeling the leeches grow exponentially within our clothes. Finally, we gave up and trudged back to the vehicle for the solemn 2 hour drive back.

The story did not end there though. On our return, half of us looked like a scene out of "Saving Private Ryan". It was just incredible how many blood stains there were on most of us. The bite itself was no more than a pin prick, but the bloodstain looked more like we had just been shot by machine guns. It was rather funny to say the least, and the best part came when upon removal of our clothes, as the bloated leeches all fell out onto the floor in bundles, totally unable to move having gorged themselves on the hapless souls who had gone seeking a tangible prize, but instead came back with a memorable experience, 1 way or another.

As 1 of our team put it in a trip-worthy quote:  
It is late. . .  
I am tired. . .  
I am hungry. . .  
I am drenched. . .  
My feet are soggy. . .  
Leeches are biting my extremities. . .  
Now Remind Me. . . What Am I Doing Here Again?

P. S.: The quote was not thought up by me but I have edited it as in its raw form it was a tad more crude than this. Heh!

## Udawalawe National Park

### Introduction

Dry Zone?!?! More like Very Wet Zone! We arrived at Safari Village Hotel hoping for a change of weather and a change of birdlife but expectedly it just kept raining during our 1 day stay here. It rained on our 1st afternoon safari and then in a dramatic change of weather again the following morning. my first true Safari experience wasn't particularly memorable as we sat under some canvas in a jeep struggling to spot birds on the move. We didn't do particularly well here, with few specialities of note and even then most seen under very depressing field conditions. At least there were no leeches!

The lack of mammals was also surprising, at least on a personal level. I had expected to see good numbers of herbivores like Sambar but apart from a few rather sorry-looking **Golden Jackals** and Elephants, there was not much on show here. A personal highlight was a very close encounter with a **Asian Elephant** herd, where we observed the vulnerable looking calves being shoved and then literally sandwiched in the centre of a tight ball as the rest of the herd closed in around them. It was an experience to have observed this first-hand.



Asian Elephants

*Photo ©Yong Ding Li*

### Highlights

**White-naped Woodpecker** – 1 of the few high points of our visit here. We rushed to the stake-out on our first afternoon and despite the inclement weather a pair of them showed well, if rather distant from our allowed viewpoint. A beautiful Flameback, probably 1 of the prettiest I have seen, and well worth the effort and the bumpy ride needed to reach the spot.

**Spot-billed Pelican** – Common in the dry zone but it was after all a trip target so deserves mention. 1 of the few places with bird activity in the rain were the water bodies and this species appears to be doing well in Sri Lanka with dozens observed at the places we visited.



**Other Notables**

Malabar Pied Hornbill  
Yellow-wattled Lapwing  
Grey-bellied Cuckoo  
Asian Lesser Cuckoo  
White-browed Bulbul  
Alexandrine Parakeet  
Rosy Starling  
Orange-breasted Green-pigeon  
Eurasian Spoonbill  
Painted Stork  
Crested (Changeable) Hawk-eagle  
Loten's Sunbird  
Indian Nightjar  
Indian Scops-owl



Malabar Pied Hornbills



Eurasian Spoonbill

*Photos ©Yong Ding Li*



Painted Storks & a Great Egret (2<sup>nd</sup> from the left)

*Photo ©Yong Ding Li*

## Tissa/Lunugamwehera National Park



A paddyfield near Tissa

*Photo ©Yong Ding Li*

### Introduction

Another dry-zone stop-point for birders, usually enroute to either Yala or Bundala. In our case, with Yala out-of-bounds and Bundala requiring some rather expensive entry tickets, we opted to explore the dry-zone woodlands and well-wooded gardens bordering Lungamwehera. Despite the usual inclement weather (although it was slightly kinder here. . . with short periods of sunshine), we did very well here, clawing back most of the species we missed at the preceding site and even managing a few extras along the way. We spent our night here in the cosy Sunsinda Hotel.

The famous wetlands, although awe-inspiring in terms of size and bird density, were of little interest to us due to our lack of time and the fact that most species can also be found in other parts of the Orient. As such, we only spent an evening strolling through them, picking up a few interesting birds along the way like **Black Bittern**, **Woolly-necked Stork**, **Black-headed Ibis** & the newly split **Indian Stone-curlew**. Most of the highlights mentioned below are from 1 morning of birding the scrub jungle bordering Lungamwehera National Park.

### Highlights

**Blue-faced Malkoha** – Finally, after days of work in the rain, our efforts paid dividends as a last-minute stop in a small area of thorn scrub produced this much-wanted trip target. Having seen most Orient Malkohas in verdant rainforests, it was a fresh experience looking for 1 in a maze of thorn scrub and eventually seeing it at an eye-level, and a pretty one to boot with those charming blue "spectacles".

**Jungle Owlet** – Another local special. We managed to see one just by the side of a trail hunting at eye-level.

**Brown Fish-owl** – A surprise encounter with 1 in the daytime. Presumably flushed from its day roost by a passing mixed flock, it allowed brief views to some of us but the mobbing eventually grew too much for it and it departed almost as silently and quickly as it came.



**Marshall's lora** – A species we knew was here, but never expected to actually encounter. Most of the mixed flocks in the scrub jungle here contained loras, and careful scanning eventually paid off when a breeding male showed nicely, feeding in a flowering tree. Our guide mentioned that the 2 species overlapped in the scrub jungle here, which was later confirmed by some others from FOGSL, who mentioned they were present although not as common as the significantly more numerous **Common lora**. With this unexpected find, our group managed to apply the finishing touches to the loras Of The World.

### Other Notables

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker  
Ceylon Woodshrike  
Indian Pygmy Woodpecker  
Small Minivet  
Tawny-bellied Babbler  
Jungle Prinia  
White-browed Fantail  
Jerdon's Leafbird

### **Nuwara Eliya**



Nuwara Eliya – Montane Forest

*Photo @Yong Ding Li*

### Introduction

In my opinion, the guide deliberately saved the best for the last. I never tire of visiting former colonial hill stations not only because of the extremely pleasant temperatures but also because they tend to be so full of character. From the well-maintained Victoria Park (except for all the rubbish strategically hidden amidst the shrubs), which although only as big as my neighbourhood park but chocked full of rare and beautiful migrants, to the pristine "cloud-forest" of Bomurella, which in turned produced all the endemics, You could say I fell in love with the whole area. Our choice of accommodation, the homely Alpine Hotel, ensured we were in for an early Christmas as the frequent rewinds of Christmas Carols blended superbly with the temperature to create the perfect Christmas Spirit, not forgetting watching English Premier League action with some UK tourists around a fire-place! Some things just never get old.

## Site Highlights

**Ceylon Whistling-thrush** – As 1 of Sri Lanka's only 2 globally endangered endemics (the other being an infamous *Otus*), it was always going to be a tough customer. Fortunately, our guide's roadside stakeout worked wonders as we observed at least 2 birds feeding on a trail by a waterfall at last night. As with most Whistling-thrushes, not particularly glamorous, especially when you see them only either at dawn or dusk.

**Pied Thrush** – The whole reason I went to Sri Lanka was to see this lavishly patterned *Zoothera* thrush. I was eventually stumped as I would never have imagined having to crane my neck as I tried to get decent views of them on a roosting tree at last light in Victoria Park as they streamed in from their daytime feeding grounds. In the end, I counted at least 6 of them in there and got decent views of several of them although the light never did them the justice their plumage so richly deserved. Nevertheless, a personal "bird of the trip" and the experience of stalking the normally ground-dwelling *Zoothera* thrushes around a tall tree. The gardeners there certainly wouldn't have approved of my boot prints in their flower plots!

**Ceylon Wood-Pigeon** – A Bomurella special, after a entire morning of canvassing the area for endemics in inclement weather the weather finally eased up and with it the sight of a handful of these birds feeding in a fruit-tree before settling in to shelter from the incoming rain. Great Views for all concerned.

**Ceylon Bush-warbler & Dull-blue Flycatcher** – A phenomenal last minute save! On our final morning and with 2 endemics to go, our guide's last throw of the dice was to take us back to Bomurella. Thankfully, for the 1st hour after Dawn the weather held and incredibly as we reach a bend along the trail he suddenly rather excitedly beckoned us over and just downslope was a silent Bush-warbler foraging briefly in the open. As we were revelling in the moment, a mixed flock passed us at eye-level and the first bird we picked out in unison was a

**Dull-blue Flycatcher.** It was nothing short of a avian miracle!



Ceylon Scaly-thrush Photo ©Yong Ding Li

**Ceylon Scaly-thrush** – I did not expect to find this species here but they are present. I came close to a calling pair in Bomurella and I had stalked them to a relatively open area of slope and I raised my bins just in time to hear the loud crash of a fellow birder as he haphazardly bashed down the slope, flushing both the birds down the valley. That evening, Ding Li showed me a picture of a point-and-shoot instance he had with another individual at Victoria Park's Slaty-legged Crake stake-out which didn't help although eventual good views of Pied Thrush for people like me who stayed to hunt for them was decent consolation. For future birders, don't fret if you miss them in Sinharaja, they are certainly here as well!

**Kashmir Flycatcher** – Another speciality more easily seen in its wintering grounds. After searching extensively in Victoria Park, we found a 1st-winter male by a pile of rubbish near the playground and more spectacularly a full-fledged male as we were on our way to see Pied Thrushes. We saw 1 briefly in Bomurella as well.

**Slaty-legged Crake** – 1 showed very briefly at the stake-out, seen well only by yours truly, although thanks must be given to Alan who fortuitously moved 10m to my right and flushed the bird which came scampering towards me so fast that I had initially thought it was a rat (rather apt considering we were trotting around rubbish) before stopping briefly behind a tree and walking down an embankment. As Ashley Banwell's pictures show, it certainly was still hanging around.

## Other Notables

Ceylon White-eye  
Yellow-eared Bulbul  
Common Hawk-cuckoo (heard only)  
Hill Swallow (Tea Factory nearer Kandy)  
Ceylon Scimitar-babbler (Pair in Victoria Park apparently a new site record)



Tea plantation on the road to Kandy

*Photo ©Yong Ding Li*

## **Wetland Day Tour**

### Introduction

With Colombo on high alert after the forementioned bombing and with 2 days to kill, I opted to spend a day extra out in the field with Amila. We decided to do a Waterbird Tour, given a target-list which comprised more of waterbirds than terrestrial ones and the close proximity of the sites in question to 1 another. All the sites were about 2-3 hours north of Colombo and overall were a great way to end the trip, allowing me to pick up a few lifers and a lot of trip birds to boot. The sites covered were Chilaw Sandspits, Annaiwilundawa Ramsar Wetland, Palawi Saltpans and finally the massive Nawadamkulama tank.

### The sites and their respective highlights

Chilaw Sandspits – A small Catholic fishing community dominates this stretch of sandy coastline, which also seems to act like a local dump of sorts. The areas around the dump held good numbers of **Brown-headed Gulls** and numerous tern species including **Whiskered, Little, Caspian, White-winged, Common** & both **Great & Lesser Crested Terns**. The sandy shores held the biggest concentration of **Sanderlings** I have ever seen and it was amusing to watch the big flocks numbering in the 20-30s as they scampered up the beach to avoid the pounding surf only to rush back into the breach as the waves receded to forage on the exposed organic matter. Avian highlights here for me were a pair of very smart-looking **Eurasian Oystercatchers** which incidentally was also only the 2nd time Amila had seen them locally & a pair of **Great Thick-knees**, which I was grateful to Amila for picking out in the tidal lagoons at the last minute. Wader diversity was otherwise rather low with only typical sandy shore specialists like **Snowy** & both **Lesser & Greater Sand-plovers** present.

Annaiwilundawa Ramsar Wetland – A part of me wishes Singapore could afford the luxury of wetlands as large & visually stunning as those here in Sri Lanka. 4 equally large "tanks" dominate this landscape of seasonally submerged woodland where you could barely see the other end of the "tanks" from any 1 spot. Bird density was high although the lack of dabbling ducks was surprising. The local attraction for me were **Indian Cormorants** which were common here as well as **Eurasian Coot**, a species which up to this point I had yet to encounter in the Orient. Other interesting birds seen here included **Watercock** (apparently a good record), **Black Bittern, Pied Kingfisher, Cotton Pygmy-goose & Spot-billed Pelican** to name a few.

Palawi Saltpans – Essentially a variation to Samut Sakhon, the famous salt-pans of Thailand, although far less interesting (at least in my time here!). Most of the waders were unremarkable, even the Little Stints which although new, were impossible to tell apart from **Red-necked Stints** in winter plumage although geographical variation meant that the former were more numerous here. The salt-marsh and surrounding dry scrub did not hold the much hoped-for **Sirkeer Malkoha & Grey Francolin** either, although the latter was heard briefly. For the record, some of the waders seen here include **Black-tailed Godwit, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Redshanks & Greenshanks, Mongolian Plover, Grey Plover & Ruddy Turnstone**. A single **Indian Reed-warbler** was observed here as well, an exception to the hordes of **Blyth's Reed-warbler** we had observed over the course of the previous week.



Nawadamkulama tank –Another variation on the "tank" theme, the birdlife and scenery around this one was similar to the preceding habitat although there were significantly more coots here and for some reason, there were more "patches" of open water which had not been colonised by Water Hyacinth and this resulted in the sighting of a handful of **Garganey**. At the end of the day, the mystery of the lack of *Anas* still hadn't been resolved, although Amila noted that he recorded them in better numbers at the beginning of the year and theorised they may arrive late in Sri Lanka.

## Conclusion

Overall, it was a great trip with over 200 species of birds recorded & 31 of the 33 currently accepted endemics seen well by most of the group. The trip would have been perfect if not for the inclement weather and if a certain *Otus* had been more cooperative. We owe Amila thanks for planning the trip on such short notice and executing it so smoothly. Special thanks also goes out to all the report-writers of previous trip reports, of which there are too many to name. Finally, I would be more than happy to answer any queries relating to the trip, just drop me an email.



Yellow-browed Bulbul



Black-hooded Oriole

*Photos ©Yong Ding Li*



Jacobin Cuckoo



Indian Peafowl

*Photos ©Yong Ding Li*