

Trip Report Sri Lanka

Including

Bodhinagala, Sinharaja, Uda Walawe, Tissa, (Runhuna) Yala NP,
Nuwara Eliya, Kandy, Sigiriya and Nilaveli.

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Birding Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka proved to be a top birding destination. All different types of birdwatchers will be able to find their likings here. The island has 27 endemic species, 15 of these with an endangered status. Over 15 species are shared only with the southern parts of India. For the specialist, over 60 subspecies are endemic, of which several might be split in the near future. These numbers are, in relation to the size of the island and the accessibility, among the highest of any single island in the world. In comparison: the Galapagos archipelago has only about 25 endemic species, scattered over several islands. And it doesn't stop with the (near)endemics. Specialties that can be hard to find anywhere else, like **Spot-billed Pelican** (*Pelecanus philippensis*, Grijze Pelikaan), **White-naped Woodpecker** (*Chrysocolaptes festivus tantus*, Witnekspecht), **Pied Thrush** (*Zoothera wardii*, Eksterlijster), and last but certainly not least **Kashmir Flycatcher** (*Ficedula subrubra*, Kasjmirvliegenvanger) are all possibilities. So the genuine world twitcher will sooner or later have to visit Sri Lanka.

But there's more. The small size and great infrastructure make it easy to cover all relevant spots within one or two weeks. Some areas are teeming with birds, some are hardly even explored (illustrated by the recently discovered **Serendib Scops Owl** (*Otus pending publication*) in 2001). The island is beautiful, lush green, very diverse in terms of habitat and significantly cleaner and better organised than its neighbour India. Another great advantage is that hybrid vacations; combinations between birding and culture or twitching endangered birds while on a relaxed beach vacation are easily arranged. Locations like Sigiriya are a must, even for birders who found all the relevant birds elsewhere.

Recent political stabilisation make it possible to travel the whole country since mid 2003. Almost all regions are safe now, though you should always check the most recent information. A month after our departure in March 2003 the large Wilpattu National Park in the north reopened after being closed for years.

These developments had another consequence: in 2002, when we planned our trip it was hard to get a good and cheap ticket to Sri Lanka from the Netherlands. Half a year later several tour operators offered cheap charter flights and packages to Sri Lanka. By now it should be easy to find a (direct) flight from anywhere in Europe.

Over 460 bird species are recorded at this moment. About half of these are breeding residents. Apart from seabirds, with a peak season in the northern summer (May-October), most migratory birds visit Sri Lanka in northern winter (October-April). Consequently this is also the best time to visit Sri Lanka. Within this period the best time probably is February – March when a lot of local birds are starting their breeding season, being significantly more active.

Sri Lanka has a tropical climate with a wet and dry period, which differs significantly on various locations. The south-western part is the wettest. This is also where the restricted-ranges endemics are found. However the dry parts certainly offer good birding, including species that are only shared with southern India, like **Blue-faced Malkoha** (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*, Kleine Groensnavelmalkoha). The rains will rarely restrict you from birding (except of course in extreme situations like the summer of 2003).

Strategy

While reading the available trip reports it appears easy to find all the endemics within a two weeks visit. Almost all of these birders hire local guides. Finding the endemics without local help is possible but a lot harder, especially when time is a limiting factor. So deciding whether or not to get local help is the first choice to make. Local guiding can be very expensive, especially when birding alone or with a small group. The following companies have the most experienced professional guides:

Baurs (www.baurs.com – tourism@baurs.com)
Jetwing Travel (www.jetwingeco.com)

It appears that only the Baurs guides know where to find the in 2001 discovered **Serendib Scops Owl**, but due to it's uncertain (probably very rare) status I'm not sure if it is possible or allowed to twitch it.

There's one alternative and that's the one we took, along with a lot of other birders before and after us. Baurs also has 'bird watching drivers'. These drivers know a lot about birds and are determined to help you find the endemics and other targets. We had the (by now famous) driver Sunil Alwis and the fact that we not only found all the endemics (except for the new owl) but also a great number of other specialties prove the fact that Sunil is a good match for the professional guides, though a lot cheaper. There's one small disadvantages that you might consider, when travelling with non-birding partners: Sunil is willing to interfere with your itinerary when it's better for the birds! We had some small disagreements over our goals and places to visit, resulting in skipping a tourist destination with no bird potential, more or less against our will.

So for anybody deciding not to go totally on low budget I would advise to hire a car with driver and while you're at it with Baurs, ask specifically for Sunil Alwis. For those who like to try it on there own, I added a page specifically about finding the endemics and other targets.

Books and readings

We used the following books and bird guides:

Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent by Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp (1999). Also covering Sri Lanka. Texts are limited and the order in which the birds are presented makes it hard to find the groups you're looking for (I made my own index to groups). It also feels a bit overdone carrying over 1200 species when only ¼ can possibly be found. [ISBN: 0-7136-6304-9]

A field guide to the birds of Sri Lanka by John Harrison and Tim Worfolk (1999). Really the only bird guide you need, I bought it in Sri Lanka (cheap!).

Lonely Planet travel survival kit Sri Lanka – 6th edition (1996). We used the lonely planet during preparation and chose to take the Footprints (see below) with us. We came to the conclusion that the LP holds more information than the Footprints.

Footprint - Sri Lanka Handbook – 3rd edition (2000). The information is more accessible than the LP but it didn't prove as valuable to us as the LP did in earlier travels.

I also used the following information:

A checklist of the birds of Sri Lanka by Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne and Deepal Warakagoda. Interesting but certainly not essential since most checklists can be downloaded from the internet. This checklist can be obtained from the Oriental Bird Club (www.orientalbirdclub.org) and probably also through Jetwing Eco Holidays (eco@jetwing.lk).

Oriental Bird Club Bulletin 26– Special Sri Lanka Issue (November 1997). Interesting for some background information on birds and birding in Sri Lanka but nothing that is essential to prepare a successful trip. This issue can be obtained from the Oriental Bird (www.orientalbirdclub.org).

A birdwatcher's guide to Sri Lanka by Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne et al. I'm not sure whether this came as an appendix to the OBC bulletin no 26 or separately. But this is a must have. A lot of good birding spots (mostly in the southern part of the island) are explained and an itinerary is proposed for finding the endemics. Also relevant information on how to get there and accommodation. Probably also for sale at the Oriental Bird (www.orientalbirdclub.org).

Prices

Prices change constantly but for a global idea I added the prices we paid for several different services. In Sri Lanka the currency is Rupees. During our stay Rs100/- was equal to about € 1,- (easy calculating).

Sri Lanka is in between the real cheap Asian countries like Thailand and the expensive western oriented countries like Kenya. A lot depends on how you like to travel around in luxury. We mostly let Sunil Alwis arrange our hotels, being somewhat in the midrange. Food is generally cheap. Only the entrances to some of the National Parks are pretty expensive. And the 4WD drive to Martins Place (about 3,5 km) is extremely expensive: \$ 35,- one way.

To get an idea here are some of the prices we paid:

- Hotels: in between Rs800/- and Rs2400/-. See Itinerary for more info on specific hotels.
- Food: a meal was mostly between Rs100/- en Rs500/- per person.
- Entrances to parks differ greatly between Rs1000/- and Rs4500/-, excluding the price of the obliged 4WD. Specific prices are mentioned at the site descriptions.
- Embarkation fee: Rs1000/- per person

- Car hire: we had a deal with Bours for a car with driver. In total this cost US \$ 635,-: \$ 0.35 for each mile driven (we drove 1100 miles in total) and \$ 12,- per day for the driver.

Hotel advise

We had great experiences with some of the hotels we stayed in. Here's more information on the hotels we definitely advise to future visitors:

Martin's place: near the entrance of Sinharaja Man and Biosphere Reserve. Arrangements and bookings can be made by Bours or by sending a telegram to the Veddagala Post Office on 045-5256. Advanced booking is advised. Price: Rs1100,-, food and water has to be taken by the visitor.

Vikum Lodge: Kataragama Road, Tissamaharama. T:P: 047-37585. Proprietor: Anura Kankanange. Price: Rs1500/- A/C.

Mc Leod Inn - Tourist Guest House: 65A, Rajapihilla Mawatha, Kandy. Proprietor: Ashan Senaratne. Price: Rs1250/- including breakfast.

The other hotels are mentioned in the itinerary.

Relevant internet sites

Trip reports and web portals

< www.Eurobirding.com > Great portal to a huge amount of birding trip reports all over the world. Updated frequently with new reports.

< www.camacdonald.com/birding > Links do not always work but this site is a good start.

< www.birdtours.co.uk > This is a great site with a huge amount of trip reports. Certainly good to check while preparing the trip.

< www.fatbirder.com > Covering almost all countries of the world. Lot of information, lot of links.

< www.bsc-eoc.org/links/links.jsp > Over 18000 links to about all the worlds regions. Including information on numbers of species and endemics.

< www.crosswinds.net/~birdtrips/tripreports > This used to be one of the greatest sites to find trip reports. Still a lot of trip reports but no recent reports are added any more.

Background info

< www.joho.nl > Dutch site including good and relevant tips concerning safety and travelling in foreign countries. Worth checking and reading the tips on any country visiting.

< www.buza.nl > Dutch governmental site with recent information on safety issues, it is advised to check this site before arranging a trip.

Other sites

< www.orientalbirdclub.org > Might prove useful for general information. You can also buy trip reports and a special issue of their bulletin from the Oriental Bird Club.

< worldtwitch.virtualave.net > The gate to finding rare birds all around the world, including recent information.

<www.bours.com – tourism@bours.com> Bours: provider of specialist bird trips and car rental including birdwatching drivers.
 <www.jetwingeco.com> Jetwing Travel: the other large provider of specialist bird trips and professional bird guides.

Map



Finding the Endemics and other targets

The following is based on my own experience. All sightings are my own in March 2003. Birds with an * are endemic species. Birds with an ^s are endemic subspecies.

Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*, Grijze Pelikaan - Vulnerable): Easily found at several spots, most obvious in Ruhunu (Yala) NP, with a breeding colony. A single bird was resident and tame at the lake in Kandy. Should pose no problems

Malayan Night-Heron (*Gorsachius melanolophus*, Indische Kwak): not the target to specifically visit Sri Lanka for, but apparently hard to get your eyes on worldwide. We were lucky with a juvenile bird in Sinharaha.

Grey-headed Fish-Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*, Grote Rivierarend - Near-threatened): not too hard to find in Sri Lanka. I've seen about five birds on several locations (see checklist).

***Ceylon Spurfowl** (*Galloperdix bicalcarata*/Ceylondwergfasant): one of the hardest to get, especially if you want to see it. Not very rare but extremely secretive. I saw this species only in Bodhinagala. Another good spot in Sinharaya appears to be near the village, down the hill. Best strategy: patience at a good spot.

***Ceylon Junglefowl** (*Gallus lafayetii*/Ceylonhoen): very common and tame in Sinharaja. Also seen in Uda Walawe, Ruhunu (Yala) NP, Arrenga Pool en Sigirya. There should be problem to find this one

***Ceylon Woodpigeon** (*Columba torringtoni*/Sri Lanka-houtduif – Vulnerable): best found in Sinharaja and at the Arrenga Pool. Only with limited time this might be a tricky one. Best found by its call, sometimes hard to see.

^s**Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon** (*Treron bicincta leggei*, Orangeborstpapegaaiduif): Can be found in the dryer parts of the island where it is the most common 'green' pigeon. Common in Uda Walawe and around Nilaveli.

***Ceylon Hanging Parrot** (*Loriculus beryllinus*/Ceylonese Vleermuisparkiet): my first endemic to be found, only a few hours after our arrival. Pretty common in the wet region, south west of the island. Active and focal, thus easily found.

***Layard's Parakeet** (*Psittacula calthropae*/Smaragdparakeet): local in the wet region but in large numbers. Very common in Sinharaja with flocks of up to 20 individuals flying past Martin's place. Also a group of 10 noisy birds in Uda Wattakele.

***Green-billed Coucal** (*Centropus chlororhynchus*/Ceylonspoorboekoe – Vulnerable): this is a tricky bird to find. The best spot is Bodhinagala, near the monastery. If you walk back from the monastery, you'll pass a concrete stairs at about 100 m. We found two birds down those stairs, near a water basin. In Sinharaja two birds were very vocal along the path, about 200-400 meters from the entrance. These were hard to get visually.

***Red-faced Malkoha** (*Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*/Roodwangmalkoha – Vulnerable): proved not hard to find in Sinharaja with several birds in almost all large feeding flocks. Though there are more spots to find this great bird, I advise not to leave Sinharaja before finding this one.

Blue-faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*, Kleine Groensnavelmalkoha): best changes in the dryer south eastern parts of the island. I found two birds just outside our hotel in Tissamaharama and another three birds in Ruhunu (Yala) NP.

***Chestnut-backed Owlet** (*Glaucidium castanonotum*/Kastanjerugdweruil – Near-threatened): this charming but tricky owl is pretty active during the day. Best spots are Bodhinagala and Sinharaja, at the latter especially near the research station. I had great views of a mating pair from the wooden platform near a monumental tree.

***Serendib Scops Owl** (*Otus* pending publication): this owl has only been discovered in 2001 and is not easy to twitch. Your best changes are with the professional guides from Bours. Our driver Sunil did not know where to find this species. Consequently we missed it.

^S**Brown Wood-Owl** (*Strix leptogrammica ochrogenys*, Bruine Bosuil): there's a stakeout at Sures Tea Estate near Welinada but your chances are slim without a guide since it is very secretive. We had good views of a bird after skulking through a lot of shrubs.

Ceylon Frogmouth (*Batrachostomus moniliger*, Ceylonkikkerbek): Best areas are (again) Bodhinagala and Sinharaja. We found a calling bird near the visitors centre at Sinharaja.

^S**Malabar Trogon** (*Harpactes fasciatus fasciatus*, Malabartrogon): a most charming bird, not uncommon in Sinharaja, where it joins feeding flocks.

Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithacus*, Jungle-dwergijsvogel): we had a very short meeting with a flying bird at Sigiriya.

Malabar Pied-Hornbill (*Anthracoceros coronatus*, Malabarneushoornvogel - Near-threatened): rather common in the large nature parks in the south east. We saw 4 birds in Uda Walawe (2x2) and 2 birds in Ruhunu (Yala) NP.

***Ceylon Grey Hornbill** (*Ocyrceros gingalensis*/Ceylontok): easy to find all over the island. Largest numbers were in Sinharaja. Don't worry about this one until you're about to catch your plane within three hours.

***Yellow-fronted Barbet** (*Megalaima flavifrons*/Ceylonese Baardvogel): common in Bodhinagala en Sinharaja. No problem but best to tick off in one of those two parks.

***Crimson-fronted (Ceylon Small) Barbet** (*Megalaima rubricapilla*/Roodkeelbaardvogel): this recent split is not rare. Can be found almost anywhere on the island except in the highlands.

^S**White-naped Woodpecker** (*Chrysocolaptes festivus tantus*, Witnekspecht): best spot for this bird are the palm plantations around Tissa Wewa Tank. We found a bird at about 500 meter before the lake, on the right hand (seen when driving to the lake from the main road).

Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*, Negenkleurige Pitta): this great bird proved very easy with several sightings throughout the island. Pretty obtrusive and actively calling. This bird was promoted to Bird Of The Trip!

***Black-capped Bulbul** (*Pycnonotus melanicterus*/Goudborstbuulbuul): another recent split. Should be possible on the whole island but I only found it in Sinharaja, where common.

***Yellow-eared Bulbul** (*Pycnonotus penicillatus*/Geelpluimbuulbuul – Near-threatened): one of the highland endemics. Can be found in Victoria Park in Nuwara Elya and around Arrenga Pond where it was rather common.

Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*, Indisch Paapje): another beautiful migrant. I only found two birds, one in Victoria Park in Nuwara Elya and one in Uda Wattedkale in Kandy, both males.

***Ceylon Whistling Thrush** (*Myiophonus blighi*/Ceylonfluitlijster – Endangered): certainly the most special of the endemics, mostly because of its secretive behaviour. It hides during the day in thickets near streams and your only chance is at dawn (before sunrise) or dusk. Best spot is at Arrenga Pond, named after the bird. The pond can be found when driving to Horton Plains National Park, before entering the park, just before a big sign with “Have you seen a leopard yet?”. Keep in mind that this is one that might need a second or third try!

^SScaly Thrush (*Zoothera dauma imbricata*, Goudlijster): a highly distinctive subspecies that might be split in the near future. We found one bird with great effort of the two accompanying bird watching guides, just behind the research station, along the stream in Sinharaja NP.

***Spot-winged Thrush** (*Zoothera spiloptera*/Vlekvleugellijster – Near-threatened): not at all hard to find in Sinharaja. In the morning often beside the path. Sinharaja certainly is the best spot on the island to find this bird.

Pied Thrush (*Zoothera wardii*, Eksterlijster): this is another treat for the eye. Best spot is Victoria Park in Nuwara Elya where I found 8 male birds along the stream. A bird flying by in a forest near Kandy was a surprise.

***Ashy-headed Laughingthrush** (*Garrulax cinereifrons*/Grijskoplijstergaai – Vulnerable): best found in Sinharaja. Here this species is rather common, working the lower storey in active and vocal groups.

***Brown-capped Babbler** (*Pellorneum fuscicapillum*/Bruinkapjungletimalia): can be found in forests all over the island. Rather secretive but not too hard to find, especially by the sound.

***Orange-billed Babbler** (*Turdoides rufescens*/Ceylonese Babbelaar – Near-threatened): by far the best spot is Sinharaja, where it is very common with good numbers in almost every feeding flock.

***Ceylon Bush-Warbler** (*Bradypterus palliseri*/Ceylonese Struikzanger – Near-threatened): like most bradypterus species a good skulker. We found one bird along the road to Arrenga Pond, about 200-300 meter before the pool.

***Dull-blue Flycatcher** (*Eumyias sordida*/Ceylonvliegenvanger – Near-threatened): easily found in almost all forests in the highlands. We saw this bird only around Arrenga Pond.

Kashmir Flycatcher (*Ficedula subrubra*, Kasjmirvliegenvanger): don't forget to target this charming little flycatcher. Sri Lanka is the best area in the world to find it. A

consistent spot is Victoria Park in Nuwara Eliya, with two birds wintering in 2003 of which I saw one.

***White-throated (Legge's) Flowerpecker** (*Dicaeum vincens*/Ceylonese Honingvogel – Near-threatened): this bird might prove difficult. Again Sinharaja is by far the best park. We found several birds a day here.

***Ceylon White-eye** (*Zosterops ceylonensis*/Ceylonese Brilvogel): pretty common all over the highlands. Among other areas Victoria Park in Nuwara Eliya and Arrenga Pond are good enough to find them.

***Ceylon Hill Munia** (*Lonchura kelaarti*, Zwartkeelbronzemannetje): a highland species that might prove difficult. We found a group of 4 individuals near the town of Patipola.

***Ceylon Myna** (*Gracula ptilogenys*/Ceylonbeo – Near-threatened): only with certainty seen in Sinharaja, but possible at other spots on the island.

***White-faced Starling** (*Sturnus senex*/Maskerspreeuw - Vulnerable): the only spot in the world where you can find this bird is Sinharaja. During our stay we had several meetings with this bird, including a pair in a feeding flock showing extremely well and a group of 5 birds in a small tree, seen from Martin's Place. You need a bit of luck to get a good sighting of this one.

^S**Greater Racket-tailed (Crested) Drongo** (*Dicrurus paradiseus lophorhinus*, Vlaggendrongo): watch out for this distinctive subspecies with its deeply forked tail instead of the rackets. I only saw two birds in Sinharaja, near the research station, but it can be found almost anywhere on the island.

***Ceylon Magpie** (*Urocissa ornata*/Blauwe Kitta – Vulnerable): you can find this great bird even from the balcony of Martin's Place in Sinharaja. The high trees, a bit right of the balcony early in the morning are a good spot to find them. They can also be found in the park.

Itinerary

24-02-2003: We arrived after a good but long flight (Amsterdam-London-Abu Dhabi-Colombo) at the international Airport. It took us no time from touch down to the back of Sunil's car (great and good organised arrival). All luggages arrived in good state. We arrived early in the day so we still had the good part of the day to start working on our list. Sunil first took us to a swamp called Bellanwila-Attidiya Sanctuary, but not before he showed us a group of 5 **Eurasian Thick-knees** (*Burhinus oedicephalus*, Griel), resting under some trees. It was only in the sanctuary that we realised the hot and humid climate but that was soon forgotten when the first birds arrived, notably **Black Bittern** (*Dupetor flavicollis*, Zwarte Roerdomp) and the more common **Yellow Bittern** (*Ixobrychus sinensis*, Chinese Woudaap). Bellanwila-Attidiya Sanctuary is not essential but certainly a good starter.

Colombo and surroundings

Location: best spot around Colombo is called Bellanwila-Attidiya Sanctuary, a marshy area on the outskirts of the city.

Costs: -

Date(s): 24-02-2003 (2 birding hours)

Notes: The list is the combination of the drive to Bellanwila and the marsh itself. The marsh can be hard to find and appears to be poorly protected and consequently probably under change. This area is not a must (I've seen all the birds that I found here also at other spots). But it is a good starter or when you have spare time before departure.

Highlights: Black Bittern (2), Pheasant-tailed Jacana (3), Black-rumped (red-backed) Flameback (1), White-bellied Drongo (1).

We stayed a few hours and left for Bodhinagala for the serious start. Sunil brought us to a hotel he knew (Citizen Rest in Ingiriya: Rs1200/- per night, lunch and dinner Rs900/- for two persons, breakfast Rs500/-), basic but good, with nice food and nicely located for an hour 'garden birding'. This produced my first endemic: **Ceylon Hanging-Parrot** (*Loriculus beryllinus*, Ceylonese Vleermuisparkiet) and great views of a perched **Indian Pitta** (*Pitta brachyura*, Negenkleurige Pitta) showing off to a Squirrel. Sunil arranged with the owner of the hotel to buy us three days food for our visit to Sinharaja (Rs3411/- for a three days load of food).

We arrived around noon and had a good lunch first. In the evening we had our first visit to Bodhinagala forest. We walked the trail to the monastery and stalked a calling **Chestnut-backed Owlet** (*Glaucidium castanonotum*, Bruinrugdwerguil) without success. Stayed until dark for Frogmouths (not advisable), but no success.

Bodhinagala (Ingiriya Forest Reserve)

Location: Ingiriya Forest Reserve is close to the town Ingiriya (Ungiriya) on the road from Panadura to Ratnapura, about 80 south east of Colombo (2 hours drive).

Costs: -

Date(s): 24 and 25-02-2003 (7 birding hours)

Notes: The forest is small but pretty. Apparently this is the best spot for the endemic Green-billed Coucal. The spot where we found this bird is described in detail in the Endemic section of this trip report. The birds that I found around Citizen Rest are also included in the bird list. The area around Citizen Rest can be worth a visit.

Highlights: **Ceylon Spurfowl** (V - only one seen), **Ceylon Hanging Parrot** (V - near Citizen Rest), **Green-billed Coucal** (2), **Chestnut-backed Owlet** (1 - heard only), **Ceylon Frogmouth** (1 - heard only), **Ceylon Grey Hornbill** (2), **Yellow-fronted Barbet** (2), **Indian Pitta** (1 - near Citizen Rest), **Black-headed Cuckooshrike** (1 - near Citizen Rest), **Brown-capped Babbler** (2), **Dark-fronted Babbler** (V), **Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher** (2), **Brown-breasted Flycatcher** (2).

25-02-2003: We started the morning in the Bodhinagala forest. Again no success with a calling **Chestnut-backed Owlet**. Brief sightings of a **Ceylon Spurfowl** (*Galloperdix bicalcarata*, Ceylondwergfasant) sitting in the shoulder of the road and immediately flying off. Several birds were calling. Sunil traced a calling **Green-billed Coucal** (*Centropus chlororhynchus*, Ceylonspoorkoekoek) just below the temple (see Finding the endemics and other targets). After some frustrating views two birds showed very well, while calling to each other. We decided to skip the Owlet since there's another change at Sinharaja.

We drove to the Sinharaja region. A few kilometres before the park we changed cars: a 4-wheel car with driver was waiting to take us to Martin's place, close to the entrance of Sinharaja National Park. There are two options to get to the park (about 3-3,5 km uphill): walking (2 km) and by 4WD. Since you have to take all essentials

(including water) with you, we decided to take the second and more pricy option. A one-way ticket with a jeep costs R3500,-!

Sinharaja Man and Biosphere Reserve

Location: The entrance to the park and Martin's Place are near the town of Kudawa, close to the larger Weddagala, south of Ratnapura, about 150 km south east of Colombo (4-5 hours drive). The last 3,5 km to Martin's place can only be taken with a high clearance 4-WD, or by foot.

Costs: Entrance fee: Rs575/- per person, a one-way ticket to Martin's Place with a jeep costs R3500,-. Stay at Martin's Place: R1100,- per night, bring your own food and water.

Date(s): 25, 26 and 27-02-2003 (20 birding hours).

Notes: Sinharaja is THE place to go in Sri Lanka. It holds not only almost all the endemics, there's a lot more to get. And it is a beautiful area. Make sure you're able to stay at Martin's Place, only a few 100 m walk from the entrance of the park. This can be arranged by your tour operator (Bours did it for us), or by sending a telegram to the Veddagala Post Office on 045-5256. Stay for at least two days. There are however some rules. First rule is that a local guide is compulsory. It's no problem to arrange one but you best get one that likes to help you find the targets. Sunil found us a guide named K.D. Thandula Jayarathna (Thandula) who knows the area very good and is a keen birder. He found me Chestnut-backed Owlet, Ceylon Frogmouth and Scaly Thrush. We paid Thandula Rs1000,- for his help during our stay. Second rule is a weird one: you need entrance tickets, that's no problem of course but they told us that you can only buy those at the day of entrance and you can only buy them at the headquarters back in Kudawa..., opening at 8:00 o'clock in the morning! Actually we heard different stories from different visitors. But in our case Thandula bought us our tickets before getting up to the entrance. We only birded the logging trail between the entrance and the research station, good enough to find all the targets. But there are several hiking options in the park.

Highlights (endemics in bold): Malayan Night-Heron (1- juv), Black Eagle (2), **Ceylon Junglefowl** (V), **Ceylon Wood-Pigeon** (2), **Ceylon Hanging-Parrot** (V), **Layard's Parakeet** (XX), **Green-billed Coucal** (3), **Red-faced Malkoha** (V), **Chestnut-backed Owlet** (2 - mating, see Itinerary for the full story), Ceylon Frogmouth (1), Brown-backed Needletail (2), Malabar Trogon (5), **Yellow-fronted Barbet** (V), Lesser Yellownape (3), Black Bulbul (XX), **Black-capped Bulbul** (V), Scaly Thrush (1), **Spot-winged Thrush** (V), **Ashy-headed Laughingthrush** (XX), **Orange-billed Babbler** (XX), Large-billed Leaf-Warbler (1), **Legge's (White-throated) Flowerpecker** (V), **Ceylon Myna** (3), **White-faced Starling** (8), Greater Racket-tailed (Crested) Drongo (2), **Ceylon Magpie** (V).

Martin's place is the closest option to the entrance of Sinharaja (only a few hundred m). It is a rather primitive but great place where you can stay overnight (R1100,- per night, bring your own food and water, Martin is willing to cook you a dinner with your own food). Birding starts at Martin's, since a good number of specialties can be seen just from the balcony!

We arrived in the afternoon and had our next endemic **Layard's Parakeet** (*Psittacula calthropae*, Smaragdparaket) flying in groups past the balcony. During the rest of the afternoon Layard's kept coming in small groups of up to 20 birds. Another endemic

White-throated Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum vincens*, Ceylonese Honingvogel) was found in between some showers during a short walk in the surroundings. The first evening meal, cooked by Martin and family was a real treat, great food! Did we buy all that stuff? After that we thought to have the rest of the evening off, but Sunil didn't agree; he came to show me a **Ceylon Frogmouth** (*Batrachostomus moniliger*, Ceylonkikkerbek) that was just discovered by his friend Thandula, who was also our bird guide the next few days. It only took a few minutes to relocate the bird, just behind the headquarters and we all had great views of a spotlighted perched bird while raining gently. A great end of only our second day in Ceylon.

26-02-2003: After a short but good breakfast we entered the Sinharaja park at around 7:00 o'clock (entrance fee: Rs575/- per person). There's only one track leading to a research station and the surroundings of that track is full of birds. Feeding flocks are easy to find and with the help of Sunil and later also Thandula we managed to find ALL target endemics in the first morning, including great views of **Ceylon Magpie** (*Urocissa ornata*, Blauwe Kitta), just near Martins Place, several **Red-faced Malkoha** (*Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*, Roodwangmalkoha) also showing very well, another 3 **Green-billed Coucals** and our only **Large-billed Leaf-Warbler** (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*, Diksnavelfitis). **White-faced Starling** (*Sturnus senex*, Maskerspreeuw) was also very cooperative with two birds low in the canopy (actually below the path) showing very well. Probably the best bird was a juvenile **Malayan Night-Heron** (*Gorsachius melanolophus*, Indische Kwak) foraging the forest floor just beside the path.

You can imagine we had a very comfortable siesta! During the afternoon rest a **Black Eagle** (*Ictinaetus malayensis*, Indische Zwarte Arend) soared the hills in front of Martin's place, and again **Layard's Parakeets**.

We had another excursion in the evening with mostly the same birds. A serious shower made us flee the area for a moment but after that activity was up again. If it was not for the great birding skills of Sunil and persistence of Sunil and Thandula, I would never have got my eyes on the **Scaly Thrush** (*Zoothera dauma imbricata*, Goudlijster). It took an hour of scanning and searching a small area behind the research station before it made it's appearance for only a split second. During our walk back, wet but satisfied, the **Malayan Night Heron** stood in the middle of the path showing extremely well. We had to chase it away to pursue our way home. Another successful day on the island.

27-02-2003: Our second day in the park. Again the same birds, but some made better appearances like **Ceylon Wood-Pigeon** (*Columba torringtoni*, Sri Lanka-houtduif). By far the greatest experience of that day and even of the whole trip was provided by a **Chestnut-backed Owlet**, calling close to the research station, along the path to the giant tree (signposted). Since I still hadn't got my eyes on one we decided to give this one another try, this time without backpack and camera in order to be able to move somewhat quicker and gentler through the forest interior. Regret! Thandula found a beautifully perched calling bird, visible from the platform along the giant tree. It was basking in sunlight. Since it just kept sitting and calling we decided to try for some photographs. Thandula sprinted back to the main road to get my camera and stuff. He had just left when a second bird flew in and sat alongside the first, both calling. Only a minute later they decided to give us a real show by mating just in front of us, still in basking sunlight (in time you start to forget the 30 meter that separated us!). After that both birds flew of to another perch, about invisible in the canopy, when Thandula arrived with my camera! I keep wondering whether the pictures I didn't make would have been the first of mating **Chestnut-backed Owlet**....

Since we were shaking on our legs and we ran out of targets (what a delight!) we headed back to Martin's place to start the afternoon rest. Again lots of birds during the heat of day, including 5 (!) **White-faced Starlings** in a small tree just below the balcony. In the afternoon I took the liberty of a lone walk in the park, counting a feeding flock with up to 16 species, including several endemics, two species of Woodpecker and the beautiful **Malabar Trogon** (*Harpactes fasciatus fasciatus*, Malabartrogon). Sinharaja surely is a superb place for birding!

28-02-2003: Early in the morning we left Sinharaja with the good feeling of already 19 of the 26 endemics in the pocket and a good range of other goodies. While changing the 4-WD back to Sunils van, a **Green Leaf Warbler** (*Phylloscopus nitidus*, Groene Fitis) was foraging nearby. We headed to the dryer eastern range of the island, with a visit to Uda Walawe. The route was great with lush green landscape and lots of tea plantations. We stayed in Walawe Park View Hotel in Uda Walawe (thanamalwila road, Rs1300/- per night, Rs1600/- with A/C, in total Rs3245/- including breakfast and diner). There's nothing relevant to mention about the hotel and surroundings, but it is a short walk to the dam that forms an artificial lake in the park. Here we had our largest group of Indian Elephants (about 40) including nice babies. It is possible to bird from the dam with **Spot-billed Pelican** and lots of herons, waders and terns on the lake.

1-03-2003: Early morning start towards the entrance of the Uda Walawe. Here we had our first confrontation with the complex billing structure of some Sri Lankan National Parks. After quite some arrangements we had to pay Rs4190/- to get into the park. This price is comprised of: 2x entrée: Rs2650/-, entrée for Sunil: Rs46/-, obligatory guide: Rs576/-, car entrance: Rs100/-, Rs120/- for something we never found out what it was and finally some kind of tax: Rs698/-. This is excluding the car (4-WD) that cost us an additional Rs1600/-. Quite a price for a few hours in a not too inspiring park. Unfortunately the driver was not a birder and drove pretty fast, chasing a dozen unidentified Quails, and the guide was more a mammal kind of guy (preferably Elephants). We found **Malabar Pied-Hornbill** (*Anthracoceros coronatus*, Malabarneushoornvogel) and **Sirkeer Malkoha** (*Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii*, Indische Malkoha) among some more common birds.

Uda Walawe National Park

Location: Uda Walawe NP lies in the dry south easter part of the island, about 4-5 hours drive from Colombo.

Costs: The entrance to the park cost us Rs4190/-, including guide, excluding a 4-WD with driver. This 4-WD cost us an additional Rs1600/-.

Date(s): 28-02 (town) and 01-03-2004 (park) (8 birding hours)

Notes: Uda Walawe NP was the least interesting park we visited. We did find a few good birds here but that was about it. The environment is not very inspiring (lots of Indian Peafowl though) and the rules are rather tight. The driver was not interested in wildlife at all, making phonecalls with his cellphone most of the time. The guide was determent to show us elephants and other large mammals, and Sunil was sick that day. I can't get used to birding from a car, not being allowed to get out.

You can also watch birds from the road, leading out of Uda Walawe town to the dam that forms the artificial lake. This is about 2 km walk from our hotel (see itinerary).

Highlights: Grey-headed Fish-Eagle (2), Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon (V), Grey-bellied Cuckoo (2), **Sirkeer Malkoha** (2), **Malabar Pied-Hornbill** (4),

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker (1), Rufous-winged Lark (V), Yellow-eyed Babbler (V), Black-headed Munia (XX).

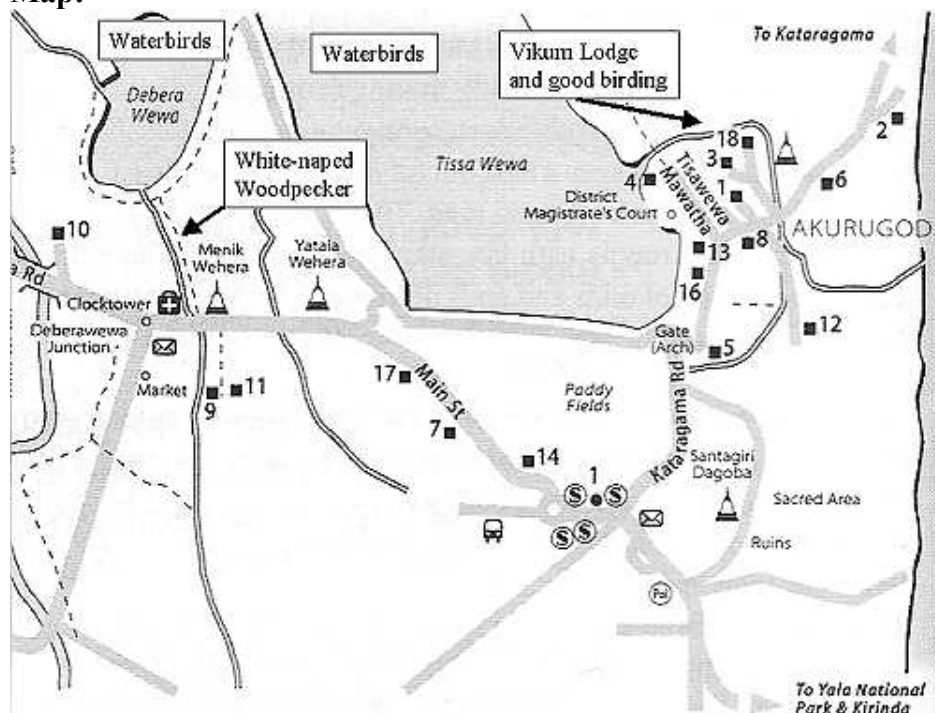
After lunch we headed to Tissamaharama where Sunil directed us to a very nice hotel, some 2 km from town. The hotel is called Vikum Lodge (Rs1500/- A/C, great food Rs250/-, breakfast Rs225/-), with a relaxed atmosphere, a friendly hostess and a breeding pair of **Purple-rumped Sunbird** (*Nectarinia zeylonica*, Purperstuithoningzuiger) on the inner court of the hotel in a potted plant. The direct vicinity of the hotel is also good for birding with **Blue-faced Malkoha**, **Common Woodshrike** (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*, Kleine Rupsklauwier) and **Jungle Bush-Quail** (*Perdica asiatica*, Jungle-dwergpatrijs) among more common birds.

2-03-2003: We started relatively late today (6:45), with a visit to the Tissa Wewa Tanks. These water bodies are relatively overgrown and consequently they hold a large amount of water birds, including breeding colonies of **Indian Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*, Indische Aalscholver) and **Little Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax niger*, Indische Dwergaalscholver), at least 8 species of heron and a surprising large amount of **Pheasant-tailed Jacana** (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*, Waterfazant), including stunning breeding plumages. A **White-bellied Fish-Eagle** (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*, Witbuikzeearend) tried an attack on the cormorant colony and a **Grey-headed Fish-Eagle** (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*, Grote Rivierarend) was also present.

Tissamaharama and surroundings

Location: Tissa is one of the larger towns in the far south easter part of the island. It is about a day drive from Colombo, depending on the route you take and the stops you make. Tissa is the centre of the safari business and consequently the best area to arrange a safari into Ruhunu and Bundala National Parks.

Map:



Costs: -

Date(s): 1, 2 and 3-03-2003 (10 birding hours)

Notes: Tissa is a charming township, being an old royal city. There's good birding around Vikum Lodge and other spots at walking distance from Tissa. We birded the very bird rich Debera Wewa Tank, but Tissa Wewa Tank, just next to Vikum can be good for waterbirds too, although it is more crowded with people. Tissa is the port to safaris in Ruhunu (Yala) NP and other parks in the area. From Tissa we made excursions to Bundala, Ruhunu NP (both have their own section) and to the south coast near Tangalle for a turtle excursion.

Highlights: Grey-headed Fish-Eagle (1), Pheasant-tailed Jacana (impressing numbers in Debera Wewa Tank), Blue-faced Malkoha (2 just outside Vikum Lodge), Stork-billed Kingfisher (1 - Debera Wewa Tank), **White-naped Woodpecker** (1 - Debera Wewa Tank), Small Minivet (2 - en route to Tissa), Common Woodshrike (V - around Vikum Lodge), Rosy Starling (tens of thousands flying to their night roost during our drive to the turtle excursion, between Hambantota and Tangalle)

In an attempt to get a grip on our finance we decided to skip a visit to Bundala National Park. Instead we visited Bundala Lewaya, being free from entrance costs. It's waders to look at here, including **Yellow-wattled Lapwing** (*Vanellus malabaricus*, Malabarkievit) and **Great Thick-knee** (*Esacus recurvirostris*, Grote Griel). It can get pretty hot around that area around noon!

Bundala Lewaya

Location: Bundala Lewaya can be found near Hambantota on the south coast. The wetlands are a few kilometers before the entrance of Bundala NP near the town of Weligatta, about 1 hour drive from Tissamaharama.

Costs: -

Date(s): 2-03-2003 (2 birding hours)

Notes: Bundala Lewaya is a good wetland site for finding waders and terns. It is a good and cheap alternative to Bundala NP, especially when Ruhunu NP is on the itinerary. While driving to Bundala Lewaya, you'll pass Embilikala Kalapuwa, which is also worth a stop.

Highlights: Great-Thick-knee (4), Yellow-wattled Lapwing (3), Green Imperial Pigeon (V)

At the end of the day we visited the Tissa Wewa Tank again for **White-naped Woodpecker** in the surrounding palm plantations, successfully!

3-03-2003: In the morning we visited Ruhunu NP (Yala West), but before that we tried for nightjars near the entrance. **Indian Nightjar** (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*, Hindoe-nachtzwaluw) showed well but **Jerdon's Nighthjar** (*Caprimulgus atripennis*) was not cooperative at all! The park is rather expensive: entrance Rs4000/-, 4-WD with driver Rs1900/-. It is not allowed to leave the car in these parks and in Ruhunu it is not even allowed to drive with the roof off. Since both me and Maaïke are of typically Dutch length, this is not a comfortable way of birding! Biggest dip without any doubt was Leopard! We found only a few good birds, most notably three **Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark** (*Eremopterix grisea*, Grijskruinvinkleuwerik) flying over the beach where we were allowed to exit the vehicle.

Ruhunu National Park (Yala West)

Location: Ruhunu NP (Yala West) is a large park in the south eastern corner of Sri Lanka. The entrance is on the western side, some 20 km (1 hour) from Tissamaharama.

Costs: Entrance costs were about Rs4000/- for the two of us and Sunil, but excluding the obligatory 4-WD with driver that cost us Rs1900/-. 4-WD can be hired in Tissa but also at the entrance of the park.

Date(s): 3-03-2003

Notes: Ruhunu NP is a huge and great park in terms of landscape and wildlife. It is arguable the best place in the world to find Leopard (not for us though). It's also the best park in Sri Lanka for viewing wildlife. Birding is also pretty good but again only allowed from the car. Despite the size of the park, most visits are restricted to the western part. So you might end up driving the same tracks with a dozen other cars.

Highlights: Spot-billed Pelican (XX), Eurasian Spoonbill (V), Great Thick-knee (5), Yellow-wattled Lapwing (V), **Long-toed Stint** (1), **Pompadour Green Pigeon** (1), Pied Cuckoo (5), Blue-faced Malkoha (3), Indian Nightjar (3 - outside the park, near the entrance), Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (V), Malabar Pied Hornbill (2), Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark (3), **Southern Grey Shrike** (1), Long-tailed Shrike (1).

In the afternoon Sunil took us to a turtle beach somewhere near Tangalla. We had a few stops for waders with two **Pintail Snipe** (*Gallinago stenura*, Stekelstaartsnip) along the road and large groups of **Rosy Starlings** (*Sturnus roseus*, Roze Spreeuw), probably flying to their roosting area's. We must have seen far over 10.000 individuals flying by! And we got our egg laying turtle, a Green Turtle, including about 25 Turtle spotting tourists gathering around the poor mother.

4-03-2003: One of the major advantages of Sri Lanka is that you never have to travel far to the next spot. This morning we headed for the mountains: Nuwara Eliya with a successful pit stop at the Surres Tea Estate near Welinada. This is a consistent spot for finding **Brown Wood-Owl** (*Strix leptogrammica*, Bruine Bosuil). We had great close distance views before it left to another roosting spot. Here I had also my first and only group of **Tawny-bellied Babbler** (*Dumetia hyperythra phillipsi*, Roodbuiktimalia). We arrived at our hotel at noon (hotel Eden Hill: Rs1250/- per night – actually the worst hotel we had and a huge difference to our hotel in Tissa). It was cloudy and exceptionally cold at 2000 meter above sea level. In the afternoon we decided to go for a stroll into town, this time without Sunil. The best birding spot of Nuwara Eliya is the park in the middle of town called Victoria Park. Very small but lots of good birds. We had another very successful moment with 8 stunning males **Pied Thrush** in and around the stream, an **Indian Blue Robin** (*Luscinia brunnea*, Orange Nachtegaal), two **Yellow-eared Bulbuls** (*Pycnonotus penicillatus*, Geelpluimbuulbuul), a **Ceylon White-eye** (*Zosterops ceylonensis*, Ceylonese Brilvogel) and last but certainly not least a **Kashmir Flycatcher**, first year male. The next day a bird watching gardener told me that two **Kashmir Flycatchers** were present in the park that year.

5-03-2003: A very early start (4:45) to get to Arrenga Pond, the best spot for finding **Ceylon Whistling-Thrush** (*Myiophonus blighi*, Ceylonfluitlijster). The only chance is at dawn, before sunrise and at dusk. The Arrenga Pond is about 45 minutes drive from Nuwara Eliya. We (even Sunil) were surprised that we weren't allowed to enter the area before 6 o'clock. So, despite Sunil's attempts, we had to wait for half an hour.

Nuwara Eliya and Arrenga Pond

Location: Nuwara Eliya is located in the central Highlands, about 5 hours west of Colombo and about 3-4 north of Tissamaharama. Victoria Park is easily found in the centre of town. To get to Arrenga Pond, follow the signs to Pattipola and Horton Plains from Nuwara Eliya (about 45 minutes drive). The pond is on the right side of the road just before a big sign "Have you seen a Leopard yet?". The Pattipola area is also good for birding.

Costs: There's a small entrance fee for Victoria Park. Arrenga Pond was (still) just before the entrance to Horton Plains and consequently free of charge (but see Itinerary).

Date(s): 4 and 5-03-2003 (6 birding hours)

Notes: Nuwara Eliya is a British style Hill Station at an altitude of almost 200 m. It can be pretty cold in Nuwara Eliya, especially at nights. Victoria Park is small but there's great birding along the stream. We slept in a hotel near Lake Gregory (see Itinerary), about 2 km from town centre. The lake was not very interesting for birds. We didn't visit Horton Plains, since all high altitude endemics can be found near Arrenga Pond. On the way to Nuwara Eliya we had a short stop at the Surres Tea Estate near Welinada, a good spot for Brown Wood-Owl.

Highlights (endemics in bold): **Ceylon Wood-Pigeon** (1 - at Arrenga Pond), Brown Wood-Owl (1 - at Surres Tea Estate), Alpine Swift (V), **Yellow-eared Bulbul** (V - Victoria Park and Arrenga Pond), Philippine Shrike (1), Indian Blue Robin (1), **Ceylon Whistling-Thrush** (1 - Arrenga Pond), Pied Bushchat (V), Eurasian Blackbird (2 - ssp *kinnisii* - Arrenga Pond), Pied Thrush (9 - Victoria Park), Tawny-bellied Babbler (V - Surres Tea Estate), **Ceylon Bush-Warbler** (1 - Arrenga Pond), **Dull-blue Flycatcher** (2 - Arrenga Pond), Kashmir Flycatcher (1 - Victoria Park), Great Tit (V), **Ceylon White-eye** (V - Victoria Park and Arrenga Pond), **Ceylon Hill Munia** (4 - Pattipola).

While waiting Sunil was told that the authorities of Horton Plains National Park were thinking of replacing the entrance to the park to a spot before the Arrenga Pond. At the moment of our visit the entrance was a few kilometres behind Arrenga Pond. Apparently a large number of birdwatchers (including us) only visit Arrenga Pond, skipping Horton Plains because the pond offers all the highland endemics, leaving no reason to continue to Horton Plains. The authorities got somewhat frustrated by the fact that they miss the income of these visiting birders (the entrance to Horton Plains is about € 20,- per person).

It was still pretty dark when we arrived at the Arrenga Pond. Soon the show started with a singing Whistling-thrush for a split second in the open. But the next 30 minutes was among the greatest of my birding experience: the Whistling-thrush known for its extremely secretive behaviour showed remarkably well, singing from several exposed branches around the pool, sometimes over a minute on the same spot! Even for Sunil this was a unique experience, telling me that this was the first time he was able to see the bright blue shoulders so well. Suddenly I realised that finding all the endemics during this trip was within reach, since this one definitely is the most tricky one. In the same area we found **Dull-blue Flycatcher** (*Eumyias sordida*, Ceylonvliegenvanger) and most of the birds I saw in Victoria Park the day before. Next target was **Ceylon Bush-Warbler** (*Bradypterus palliseri*, Ceylonese Struikzanger), it took about 45 minutes to locate a bird beside the road about 500m back from the Arrenga Pond. This completed our target list of this area, so off we went!

On the way back we tried several spots for **Ceylon Hill Munia** (*Lonchura kelaarti*, Zwartkeelbronzemannetje). We succeeded with 4 birds a few kilometres from the town Patipola. After just 10 days (half) of vacation I had only one endemic to go, and that was not even the hardest...

6-03-2003: We decided to make good use of our success and leave the Nuwara Eliya area day earlier than planned. This day also was our birding-break-point: from now on birding was set to a second plan, with the comfortable idea of the fact that we found almost all the targets. Let's have a look at the country now!

We visited a tea-plant on our way to Kandy. In Kandy Sunil led us to another great hotel, McLeod hotel (Rs1250/- including breakfast, lunch Rs250/-, dinner Rs375/-). This hotel is about 2 kilometre from the city centre, beautifully situated in the hills. Our room and the balcony had a great view over the town, the Temple of the Tooth and the lake. Highly recommended. A shrubby area in the garden held a pair of **Collared Scops-Owl** (*Otus bakkamoena*, Indische Dwergooruil), the owner knows where to find them. Small groups of **Alexandrine Parakeet** (*Psittacula eupatria*, Grote Alexanderparkiet) and **Southern Hill Myna** (*Gracula indica/religiosa*, Zuidelijke Grote Beo) flew around the hotel.

Kandy and Udawattakele Sanctuary

Location: Kandy is situated in the northern parts of the central highlands, being one of the most touristical of all cities in Sri Lanka, primarily because of the presence of the Temple of the Tooth. It is about 4 hours drive east of Colombo. Udawattakele is situated alongside the town just north of the Temple of the Tooth. The Royal Botanical Gardens are a bit further: about 7 kilometer west of Kandy on the road to Kegalla.

Costs: Entrance to Udawattakele is Rs575/- per person. Entrance to the Royal Botanical Gardens was Rs300/- per person.

Date(s): 6, 7 and 8-03-2003 (12 birding hours)

Notes: In Kandy there was only one endemic to go, so we loosened up with the birding activity. The town is a major touristical attraction, but the surroundings of our hotel (McLeod hotel, see Itinerary) were green en pretty good for birdind. I was told that a Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl holds its residence on the hills near McLeod hotel but I couldn't find it. Udawattakele is a good and charming forest. We visited the Royal Botanical Gardens for Crimson-fronted (Ceylon Small) Barbet and found it relatively easily. Remember that this park will get crowded during the day.

Highlights: Spot-billed Pelican (1), **Layard's Parakeet** (V - Udawattakele), Alexandrine Parakeet (V - from the hotel), Collared Scops-Owl (2 - at a roost in the garden of the hotel), **Crimson-fronted (Ceylon Small) Barbet** (V - Royal Botanical Gardens), Greater Flameback (1 - Udawattakele), White-rumped Shama (2 - Udawattakele), Indian Blue Robin (1 - Udawattakele), Pied Thrush (1 - forest near the hotel), (Southern) Hill Myna (V - Udawattakele).

In the afternoon we visited the lake and the town. A **Spot-billed Pelican** was a resident of the lake and a **White-bellied Sea-eagle** hunted the lake.

7-03-2003: One of the better spots for birding around Kandy is the small park called Uda Wattedkale (entrance: Rs575/-), adjacent to the town. The forest certainly is worth a visit, though it held no new endemics for me. Highlight was an **Indian Blue Robin** fouraging on the track. A **Stork-billed Kingfisher** (*Pelargopsis capensis*, Ooievaarsbekijsvogel) did not show well around the ponds in the park. The endemic

subspecies of **Greater Flameback** (*Chrysocolaptes lucidus stricklandi*, Grote Goudrugspecht) was also present. We also got our only sighting of **White-rumped Shama** (*Copsychus malabaricus leggei*, Shamalijster), another endemic subspecies in the park.

The rest of the day was reserved for a visit to the town. In the afternoon we enjoyed some thunderstorms.

8-03-2003: Since we came so far in finding the endemics it would be a shame to forget about the last: **Crimson-fronted (Ceylon Small) Barbet** (*Megalaima rubricapilla*, Roodkeelbaardvogel). The Botanical Gardens near Kandy (entrance: Rs300/- for foreigners, Rs20/- for residents) are a good spot for finding it, and that proved true when we found two foraging birds. Most of this park is covered by Fruit Bats and their shit. Watch it: slippery. This park can get rather crowded during the day.

We visited another, even more crowded place the Temple of Tooth and the city centre again. The rest of the day we hung around the hotel, reading books, drinking coffee and enjoying the view.

9-03-2003: The owner woke us for telling that the **Collared Scops Owls** were present at their regular roost near the hotel. After that we had a good breakfast and left to Sigiriya. We had a nice excursion to a spice and herb plantation. In Sigiriya we checked in to a hotel with old but nice cabanas in a lush garden (with **Indian Pitta** present): Ancient Villa (Rs1500/- including breakfast, dinner Rs250/-). The gardens are worth a look, with **Blue-winged Leafbird** (*Chloropsis cochinchinensis*, Blauwvleugelbladvogel) and **Thick-billed Flowerpecker** (*Dicaeum agile*, Dikbekhoningvogel) among more common birds.

In the afternoon we did a birding trip to the Sigiriya Rock. We had only a glimpse of a flying **Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher** (*Ceyx erithacus*, Jungle-dwergijsvogel) but had good views of a **Orange-headed Thrush** (*Zoothera citrina*, Dama-lijster).

Sigiriya

Location: Sigiriya is in the northern half of the island, just off the road from Kandy to Trincomalee, about 150 km north of Kandy. Sigiriya is signposted well. There are some ponds near the hotel Ancient Villa, but they are hard to find.

Costs: entrance to the Sigiriya park is Rs1440/- per person, but birding in the surroundings is free.

Date(s): 9 and 10-03-03 (6 birding hours)

Notes: Sigiriya is a great place to visit, even if all your targets dried out. The whole area offers good birding opportunities and visiting (climbing) the rock is just great.

Highlights: Woolly-necked Stork (V), Cotton Pigmy-Goose (V), Peregrine Falcon (Shaheen - 2 on the rock), Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (1 - in the swampy forests near the rock), Blue Rock-Thrush (1), Orange-headed Thrush (1 - in the swampy forests near the rock), Grey-breasted Prinia (1), Jungle Prinia (1), Thick-billed Flowerpecker (1).

10-03-2003: A good day for a climb up the 200 meter stairs to the top of Sigiriya (entrance Rs1440/- per person). We started early, being the first to get on top. Two resident **Peregrine Falcons** (*Falco peregrinus peregrinator*, Slechtvalk), of the subspecies called **Shaheen** showed well and a **Blue Rock-Thrush** (*Monticola solitarius*, Blauwe Rotslijster) was present at the top. The ruins and the view on top of

this rock are great and certainly worth a visit! It was only that we went down again when it got crowded with tourists, so an early start is a good advise.

In the afternoon we tried for a lake that should be close to our residence. Nevertheless it took quite some searching before we found it. The only mentionable birds were a group of **Cotton Pygmy-geese** (*Nettapus coromandelianus*, Coromandeleend) on the lake.

11-03-2003: After breakfast we visited the caves of Dhambulla. Nice to see and again no tourists around until we left. After that we decided to leave the area to a good beach area. We had the Negombo area in mind but Sunil advised us to visit the beaches of the Trincomalee area, the area that had just been reopened. Quite a drive, a bit boring, and the surroundings of Trincomalee are rather depressing with a lot of deserted and ruined villages and military activity everywhere. We stayed in a hotel that reopened this year, Nilaveli Beach Hotel near Nilaveli (Rs1700/- for a room, Rs2400/- including breakfast, lunch buffet Rs500/-). The hotel is clean and well organised. The rooms are spacy and clean, only 100 meter from the beach. Nice area to end a great birding trip.

Nilaveli

Location: Nilaveli is a beach town on the north eastern part of the island a few kilometers north of Trincomalee.

Costs: -

Date(s): 12 and 13-03-03 (6 birding hours)

Notes: This area was closed for years due to the civil war. Since it is reopened the beach hotels start to open again. This is a not much visited area with potential surprises in the coastal areas. Hotels are still relatively cheap.

Highlights: Black Bittern (1), Brown-headed Gull (3), **Streaked Weaver** (V).

12-03-2003: Our last excursion was a try at the beach and lagoon area north of Nilaveli. Again a lot of prove of the recent war. The area is pretty good for terns and waders and when taking more time this might hold a good birding potency. We found no special birds but still a hand full of birds new to the list, including the only **Brown-headed Gull** (*Larus brunnicephalus*, Bruinkopmeeuw) of the trip.

The rest of the day we spend reading, swimming and getting a sunburn.

12-03-2003: Our last day was a travel day, back to the other side of the island, but not before we found my last new species of the trip: **Streaked Weaver** (*Ploceus manyar*, Manyarwever), a group of about 10 birds in a swampy area between Nilaveli and Trincomalee. Our last hotel was near the airport, Sirisevana Hotel (Rs800/- for a room with fan). The next day we left early in the morning for a big sit in several airplanes.