



## Sri Lanka: Endemics and Wildlife (11 days)



Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrot Photo Stephan Lorenz

The island nation of Sri Lanka harbors verdant and diverse habitats in a relatively small area. Despite being close to the southeastern tip of India, Sri Lanka contains a large set of endemic species, with 34 endemic birds currently recognized and several endemic subspecies. This comprehensive itinerary visits the main birding sites and all major

habitats including the Kithulgala Rainforest, the higher elevations of Horton Plains National Park, and the savanna of Yala National Park and wetlands in between, while finishing in the primary lowland forest of the Sinharaja Reserve, a UNESCO world heritage site. This comprehensive route covers all endemic bird species and a wide variety of near-endemics that are restricted to Sri Lanka and southern India. Some of the endemic highlights include the rare Serendib Scops-Owl, beautiful Sri Lanka Whistling-Thrush, canopy-dwelling White-faced Starling, Chestnut-backed Owlet, large Green-billed Coucal, shy Sri Lanka Spurfowl, and the cartoon-colored Sri Lanka Blue-Magpie. Some near-endemics and speciality species that are possibilities include Kashmir Flycatcher, Pied Thrush, Lesser Adjutant, Legge's Hawk-Eagle, Small Pratincole, Sri Lanka Bay Owl, and many more. This is also a fantastic tour for nocturnal bird species with no less than 10 species of owls possible, two species of nightjars, and the near-endemic Sri Lanka Frogmouth. Sri Lanka is one of the top destinations in the world for general wildlife viewing with good chances for Leopard in Yala National Park plus Asian Elephant, Sloth Bear, Toque Macaque, Tufted Grey Langur, Purple-faced Langur, Grizzled Giant Squirrel, Indian Brown Mongoose, Ruddy Mongoose, Golden Jackal, Wild Boar, Chital, and Sambar to list a few of the possibilities. Add to that the friendly demeanor of Sri Lankan culture, excellent food, and ancient history, making this a world destination for wildlife observation and travel.



Gray-headed Canary-Flycatcher Photo Stephan Lorenz



## **Tour at a Glance:**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Itinerary</b>	<b>Night</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Arrival in Colombo, transfer to Kithulgala</b>	<b>Kithulgala</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Kithulgala Rainforest</b>	<b>Kithulgala</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Kithulgala to Nuwara Eliya</b>	<b>Nuwara Eliya</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Nuwara Eliya and Horton Plains</b>	<b>Nuwara Eliya</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Nuwara Eliya to Yala via Tissamaharama</b>	<b>Yala area</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Yala National Park</b>	<b>Yala area</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Yala to Embilipitiya and Uda Walawe NP via Bundala NP</b>	<b>Yala area</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Embilipitiya to Sinharaja Rainforest</b>	<b>Sinharaja</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Sinharaja Rainforest</b>	<b>Sinharaja</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Sinharaja Rainforest</b>	<b>Sinharaja</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Sinharaja to Colombo, final departure</b>	

## **Tour in Detail**

After meeting in Colombo, the tour will head east toward the Kithulgala Rainforest, exploring various wetlands along the route. It will quickly become apparent that Sri Lanka is full of birds with Lesser Whistling-Duck, Gray-headed Swamphen, White-breasted Waterhen, Red-wattled Lapwing, Whiskered Tern, Asian Openbill, Painted Stork, Oriental Darter, Little Cormorant, Spot-billed Pelican, Yellow Bittern, Indian Pond-Heron, and Black-headed Ibis all common. We will note the expected White-throated Kingfisher, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Brown-headed Barbet, Rose-ringed Parakeet, House Crow, Red-vented Bulbul, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Common Tailorbird, Plain Prinia, Yellow-billed Babbler, Common Myna, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, and Purple-rumped Sunbird. We also start the endemic tally with beautiful Sri Lanka Swallows coursing overhead.

During the first afternoon in Kithulgala, we will add many endemics, including Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Sri Lanka Green-Pigeon, Sri Lanka Gray Hornbill, scarce Crimson-fronted and Yellow-fronted Barbets, Red-backed Flameback, Layard's Parakeet, tiny Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrot, and Orange-billed Babblers. Other highlights may include Indian Pitta, uncommon Lesser Yellownape of the *wellsi* subspecies, colorful Black-hooded Orioles, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Jerdon's Leafbird, Long-billed Sunbird, and White-rumped

Munia. We will settle into our peaceful accommodations on the banks of the Kelani River.



Indian Pitta Photo Stephan Lorenz

Our first full day in Kithulgala will start early among the nearby gardens and tea plantations. The first target of the morning will be the endemic Chestnut-backed Owlet. Other species in the area include endemic Brown-capped Babblers. Among the tall trees flanking the Kelani River, we can spot Green Imperial-Pigeon, Crested Treeswift, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Indian Paradise-Flycatcher, the endemic Black-capped Bulbul, and Brown-breasted Flycatcher. While Rufous-bellied Eagle and other raptors (Oriental Honey-buzzard, Crested Serpent-Eagle, Crested Hawk-Eagle, Shikra, and Brahminy Kite) may soar above. The edge of the forest holds Crimson-backed Flameback – a large, endemic woodpecker that can sometimes be tricky to locate – in addition to Alexandrine Parakeet, White-bellied Drongo, Yellow-browed and Square-tailed Bulbuls, Southern Hill Myna, Gray Wagtail, and Scaly-breasted Munia. Kithulgala will also give us opportunities for the first nocturnal birds like the Sri Lanka Frogmouth and Brown Hawk-Owl.



From here, we aim towards Nuwara Eliya and the highlands, where an entirely new set of birds awaits. The climate in the highlands is pleasant with cooler mornings and warm days. We make a stop at a tea plantation and have the opportunity to learn about the various teas grown and prepared in Sri Lanka, plus it is an excellent opportunity to buy some samples. The forested valleys around Nuwara Eliya hold several highland endemics, including Dull-blue Flycatcher, Yellow-eared Bulbul, Sri Lanka White-eye, Sri Lanka Bush Warbler, and the difficult Sri Lanka Wood-Pigeon, plus more widespread species like Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike and Cinereous Tit will be new. We will have our first chances for the Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush here, one of the trickiest endemics.



Yellow-browed Bulbul Photo Stephan Lorenz

We start very early to make the most of our day in Horton Plains NP, a stunning highland landscape of grasslands and mountain forests with views of the famous Adam's Peak. This montane forest will offer another chance for the Sri Lanka Bush Warbler and Sri Lanka Whistling-Thrush. Other species present here include Cinereous Tit, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, the near-endemic Dark-fronted Babbler of the distinctive *nigrifrons* subspecies, Sri Lanka Scimitar-Babblers, Pied Bushchat, Zitting Cisticola, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, uncommon Black-throated Munia, and the localized Indian Blackbird. In the skies above the rare Legge's Hawk-Eagle is possible and Black Eagle may soar along the steep slopes. In the afternoon, we will visit the small Victoria Park in

the middle of town where we search for Forest Wagtail, Pied Thrush, and the range-restricted Kashmir Flycatcher.



Kashmir Flycatcher Photo Stephan Lorenz

Leaving Nuwara Eliya, we descend towards the southern lowlands through breathtaking scenery of rugged mountains and massive waterfalls. We will make some stops along the way for any species we still need to see. Upon reaching Tissamaharama, we continue to Debarawewa Lake where a wide variety of wetland species can easily be scoped including Eurasian Moorhen, Gray-headed Swamphen, Watercock, White-breasted Waterhen, Black-winged Stilt, Red-wattled Lapwing, Pheasant-tailed Jacana in full breeding regalia, Little, Gull-billed, White-winged and Whiskered Terns, Little, Great and Indian Cormorants, Spot-billed Pelican, Yellow and Black Bitterns, Gray and Purple Herons, and Great, Intermediate, and Little Egrets. This area is also excellent for several owl species with diurnal Jungle Owlets and day roosting Indian Scops and Brown Fish Owls. Other possible specialties include Streaked Weaver and White-naped Woodpecker.

The full day in Yala NP will be a highlight of the tour, and it is usually the most species-rich outing of the trip encountering more than 100 species of birds and plenty of mammals. This large national park harbors a variety of habitats, including freshwater



ponds, lagoons, beaches, humid woodland, dry scrub, and open grasslands. Foremost among the endemics is the Sri Lanka Woodshrike which is restricted to drier forests of the island. Some of the other species we will find include Garganey, Orange-breasted Green-Pigeons, Blue-faced Malkoha, Gray-bellied Cuckoo, Great Stone-curlew, near-endemic Yellow-wattled Lapwing, rare Black-necked Stork, uncommon Lesser Adjutant, Gray-headed Fish-Eagle, migrant Eurasian Hoopoe, massive Malabar Pied Hornbill, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Small Minivet, Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Larks, Jerdon's Bushlark, and Oriental Skylark. A wonderful picnic lunch in the park will add Gray-breasted and Jungle Prinias, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Rosy Starlings, Brahminy Starling, and Purple Sunbirds. The other much-wanted specialty of the park is the White-tailed Iora and localized Indian Silverbill. Large mammals are a feature of Yala NP including Leopard, Sloth Bear, Asian Elephant, Sambar, Chital, Wild Boar, and Ruddy Mongoose. During the evening we will search for Jerdon's and Indian Nightjars just outside the park.



Sri Lanka Whistling-Thrush Photo Stephan Lorenz

We will spend a morning in the coastal Bundala NP and then transfer for an afternoon safari to the Uda Walawe NP. Bundala is a small national park, but it packs a lot of different habitats and birds into a small area – a morning here is always exciting. New species may include Pied Cuckoo, Small Pratincoles, Cinnamon Bittern, singing Clamorous Reed Warbler, Western Yellow Wagtail, and Greater Painted-snipe. Bundala

NP is a fantastic location for shorebirds and the species include Black-bellied Plover, Pacific Golden-Plover, Siberian and Greater Sand-Plovers, Kentish and Little Ringed Plovers, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Ruff, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Pin-tailed Snipe, Common and Green Sandpipers, Common Greenshank, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers, and Common Redshank. The loafing gulls and terns, contain Brown-headed Gull and Little, Gull-billed, Caspian, White-winged, Whiskered, Great Crested, and Lesser Crested Terns. In Uda Walawe NP we will transfer into safari jeeps and observe the large population of Asian Elephants. The majority of the park is composed of scrubby forest with some larger fig trees, grasslands, lakes, and ponds. We will focus on dry zone species: Indian Peafowl is particularly abundant in this park and Barred Buttonquail, Sirkeer Malkoha, and diminutive Thick-billed Flowerpecker will be high on our list – although dozens of Malabar Pied Hornbills will be more impressive.



A longer drive to the Sinharaja area follows a winding road into the steep forested valley that protects one of the largest swathes of wet forest in Sri Lanka. After arriving at our beautiful lodge for lunch, we will enjoy a delicious meal overlooking the valley. In the afternoon, birding the edge of the village and tea plantations will result in good views of



Asian Emerald Dove, highflying Brown-backed Needletails, Green-billed Coucal, stunning Orange Minivets, and other species. In the early evening, we will stake out the main entrance area where the beautiful Sri Lanka Blue Magpies may visit feeders.

The first full day in the Sinharaja rain forest, a UNESCO World Heritage site, begins before first light as we make our way up a rough road in a large jeep to reach the ridgetop overlooking the pristine forest. This area is a good location for the scarce, endemic White-faced Starling. The forest interior along the trails holds Sri Lanka Hill Myna, Legge's Flowerpecker, Black-naped Monarch, Sri Lanka Thrush, Malabar Trogon, Orange-billed Babblers, sought-after Red-faced Malkoha, and we will also search for Serendib Scops-Owl on a day roost. The second full day in Sinharaja begins even earlier to be in position at a local garden to stake out a feeding area that is sometimes visited by the tricky Sri Lanka Spurfowl. This area attracts Spot-winged Thrush, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Slaty-legged Crake, Sri Lanka Blue Magpies, Orange-billed Babblers, and Ashy-headed Laughingthrush. After a final morning in Sinharaja, we will make a return to Colombo for flights home.



Asian Elephant Photo Stephan Lorenz