

Sri Lanka Mammal and Bird Tour Report
Fiona Reid's Wildlife Encounters, Nov 28 to Dec 10, 2012

My first trip to Sri Lanka was inspired by reports from Jon Hall and others, who seemed to have found an amazing number of rare and/or hard to see mammals in a short space of time. They credited much of their success to Uditha Hettige, who guided me and a group of ten participants on this tour. We were lucky to have the additional assistance from Dulan Vidanapathirana, an eagle-eyed trainee guide. The trip far exceeded my expectations, not only for mammals (which were outstanding) but also for herps and birds. It is, furthermore, a land of nice people, great food, and good beer. I can't wait to go back!

Participants: John and Cissy Mitchell, Vernon and Julia Shibla, Andy Jones and Michele Sanda-Jones, Gene Trapp and Jo Ellen Ryan, John Puckett and Hazel Ryan.

Some locations are not disclosed in detail as they are sites that Uditha has special access to and he would prefer to keep confidential.



Asian Palm Squirrel, not only very common but also looks and acts like a chipmunk, FAR

Our Itinerary and Trip Highlights (mostly mammalian)

Nov 28. We all assembled early at the Gateway Hotel, near the international airport. This is a great place to start, as it is easy to see many common birds such as Brown-headed Barbet and Yellow-billed Babbler, as well as a few water birds. We saw our first mammal, Asian Palm Squirrel, (left) and early arrivals had seen Indian Flying Foxes the previous night. We took off after breakfast and crawled slowly through the outskirts of Colombo, stopping at Pilikuttuwa Cave, where remnants of Balangoda Man (*Homo sapiens balangodensis*) had been discovered. We found a large group of Lesser False Vampires (*Megaderma spasma*) in a rock crevice, and a lone Rufous Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus rouxi*). On our way out Uditha spotted a brilliant black and orange Giant Squirrel, this particular race being the most colorful one we encountered. We had a hard time getting going, due to the appearance of a large mixed species flock of birds (including endemic Sri Lanka Small Barbets), Bronze-green Little Skink, and Land Monitor Lizard, and even a group of Toque Macaques. Eventually we continued on to Mirissa, arriving for a late lunch. We went out later in search of Jungle Owlet which was not seen by all. We also had good views of Greater Yellow House Bat, *Scotophilus heathii*, very distinct in color and of large size, flying around lights.



Spinner Dolphins, Jo Ellen Ryan

Nov 29. We took off early with packed breakfasts for the first of two whale-watching excursions. We saw one **Bryde's Whale**, a group of about 400 Spinner Dolphins, and 8 species of terns. A few of us also saw a Dwarf Sperm Whale, which slipped quietly away under water, unlike the arching dolphins. This was the best sighting for me. There were a number of nautical Crimson Rose butterflies. I don't know where they were heading as there is no land for a long way southward! It was great to see two different flying fish, one smaller and in groups, and a larger, more solitary species that glides an amazingly long distance. In the late afternoon we drove to a wetland and saw Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Cinnamon Bittern, and other water and land birds. At 6 p.m. Indian Flying Foxes started to move overhead, a lovely sight.

Nov 30. We had a second whale-watching trip, and this time saw Indo-Pacific Bottle-nose Dolphins as well as several groups of Spinners, but no whales. After lunch we drove to Yala. On the way we saw many water birds and a troop of Tufted Gray Langurs. We had our first night drive on roads outside the national park, starting quite late. This was one of the best of the entire trip. We saw many Black-naped or Indian Hares and Indian Gerbils, a pair of Golden Jackals and 2 Small Indian Civets. Uditha and some of his passengers saw a **Blandford's Rat**. Later we noted strong eye shine and when we approached, found a Rusty-spotted Cat partway up a tree. Great views were had by most of the group, and as we watched, a Jungle Cat strolled by! We later saw the Rusty-spotted Cat (most likely the same individual) running across a dry pond, moving stealthily, very low to ground, incredible! We found a second Jungle Cat but at a distance. I found a lone Dusky Roundleaf Bat *Hipposideros ater* in a culvert. We also recorded Jerdon's and Indian Nightjars. We returned to our lodge after 1 a.m. tired but happy.



Ruddy Mongoose, FAR

Dec 1. We had two daytime safari drives in Yala. Highlights in the morning were a rather distant Leopard up a tree, and good views of Ruddy and Gray Mongoose. Some Golden Jackals were also seen, and a very different race of Giant Squirrel. We had close encounters with Indian Elephant, including a lone male that searched the interior of both jeeps. We also recorded numerous birds including Woolly-necked and Painted Storks and Lesser Adjutant, and had good views of Crested Hawk-eagle. In the afternoon drive, the second jeep almost missed Sloth Bear, which had been found by other visitors



and was moving among dense vegetation. Fortunately, we were all able to see the bear as it eventually climbed up a nearby tree and fell asleep on a branch, a wonderful sight. Most of the group went out for a late night safari as well, which was not as productive as the previous day, but was well worthwhile, as we had very close views of Jungle Cat in an open field, both on the way out and again on our way back.

Close view of Indian Elephant, FAR

Dec 2. Another full day in Yala. On our morning safari we saw many Spotted Deer, European Wild Boar, Wild Buffalo and Feral Water Buffalo and Sambar, also Muggier Crocodiles as well as birds such as White-bellied Sea-eagle, Oriental Honey-buzzard and endemic Sri Lanka Woodshrike and Sri Lanka Jungle Fowl. We caught up on a bit of sleep in the afternoon and headed out for a night safari in a different direction. Early on we saw a Green Vine Snake and a Soft-shell Turtle. Later, around midnight, we saw Asian Palm Civet in a palm outside someone's house, and Uditha saw an Indian Crested Porcupine slip through a fence, but this wasn't seen by anyone else. The real highlight of the night was a Fishing

Cat hunting at the edge of a rice paddy. Although it wasn't as close as we would have liked, it could be seen well enough to identify and was seen by all. John P recorded calls of Lesser Large-footed Myotis, *Myotis hasseltii*, seen flying over the paddies. As this is the only *Myotis* in Sri Lanka it can be identified on basis of its calls. We also observed a Lesser Yellow House Bat, *Scotophilus kuhlii*, in flight, its size and color clear enough for identification.



Dec 3. We headed north, stopping near Tissa to see a colony of about 2,000 Indian Flying Foxes (left) and nearby a pair of Indian Scops Owls.

Heading on toward Nuwara Eliya, we made another stop to look for Brown Wood Owl which Uditha successfully located, and also found endemic Sri Lanka Woodpigeon. We got to Nuwara Eliya for our customary late lunch, about 3 p.m. In the afternoon we went to Victoria Park for birding, and saw our first Dusky-striped Squirrel as well as a Norway Rat in a drainage ditch. We saw some highland birds including Pied Ground-Thrush, Sri Lanka White-eye, Kashmir Flycatcher and Indian Blue Robin.

Dec 4. We left at 4:30 a.m. to drive to Horton Plains, a bizarre habitat of gnarled elfin forest and open fields. On the way, Uditha and some people in his van saw a Nillu Rat (*Rattus montanus*) crossing the road. This is a critically endangered species found only in this region (central hills) and the Knuckles Range. On arrival, we saw many endemic birds in the forest, including Ceylon Scimitar-babbler, Ceylon Bush-warbler and Ceylon Whistling-thrush. Dulan located a Pygmy Lizard that was

barely distinguishable from the stick on which it was perched. We saw a Dusky-striped Squirrel that was darker than the ones seen in Victoria Park. Our best mammal of the morning was the Brown Mongoose seen well by all at the visitor center. A very friendly Sambar Deer stuck its head in our van! We returned to our hotel for lunch, stopping en route to explore some fields where we saw Lesser Bandicoot Rat (*Bandicota bengalensis*). It had a relatively short tail, blunt nose, and very fuzzy fur. In the afternoon we went to Hakgala Botanical Garden Here we had excellent views of two troops of Purple-faced leaf Monkeys, as well as the highland race of Toque Macaque.

Rhino-horn Lizard, FAR



Staggering up a steep hill at one end of the garden, Uditha and Dulan led us to an area where they located several Rhino-horn Lizards, *Ceratophora stoddartii*, a spectacular animal, well worth the climb to see.

On the way out we narrowly missed a tree falling on us! After dark we headed to a patch of forest near Nuwara Eliya where we spotlighted along a dirt road. This was a great area for herps in the



early evening, and a bit later we had short but good views of a Sri Lankan Brown Palm Civet dashing down a tree. This was very exciting, but for many upstaged by a Giant Flying Squirrel which froze in the light and allowed the whole group to get great looks.

Giant Flying Squirrel, John Mitchell

Dec 5. We saw Ceylon Highland Rats, *Rattus rattus kelaarti* in another farmland. This is a small, reddish subspecies of House Rat. After that we headed to Kitulgala with a stop at a tea factory en route. After our usual very late lunch, we headed over to the forest by outrigger canoe at dusk. We were hoping to find the Red Slender Loris, but we first encountered many herps including Hump-nosed, Whistling and Kangaroo Lizards and a Reed-like Kukri Snake. Dulan and Uditha went ahead, searching for mammals, and we were waiting in an open field when we were called, so all rushed across a rocky stream to see the rare Travancore Flying Squirrel that Dulan had located. It stayed in the same spot allowing everyone great looks, and appearing very chubby due to its thick fur and folds of skin. A great end to a long day!



Travancore Flying Squirrel, John Mitchell

Dec 6. We started with a pre-breakfast birding trip in Kitulgala area, which was very productive. Two endemic babblers, the Ceylon Rufous and Brown-capped, and the endemic Spot-winged Ground Thrush were seen, along with Chestnut-backed Owlet and many other species. We had nice views of Giant Squirrel as well. After breakfast we crossed the river into the park again, hoping to find our last Sri Lanka squirrel, the Flame-back, but failed. I spotted two Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bats (*Cynopterus sphinx*) roosting under a coconut palm and we added a few birds and reptiles to our list. In the late afternoon, with light rain falling, a small group headed back to the park to try again for Loris. We spent a long time out walking fairly steep trails in an area where Uditha had noted pangolin digging during our morning walk, and although we heard a couple of Loris and saw eyeshine of one, they were not seen well enough to record. No pangolins either, unfortunately. Uditha found a small Hump-nosed Pit Viper, a Bird-eating Spider, and many sleeping lizards and a few frogs, so it was a good evening. On our way out of the park we saw an Asian Palm Civet.

Dec 7. We left after breakfast for the long drive to Sigiriya, stopping in Kandy for batik and wood-carvings. We saw a colony of Indian Flying Foxes north of Kandy, as well as many hanging dead on electrical wires. We arrived for a late lunch at the very nice Sigiriya Hotel, and set out at 5 p.m. to drive to a patch of forest in the surrounding area. After much slogging on muddy trails, I spotted a mouse clambering about in a shrub. It was seen well by all and we later identified it as a Little Indian Field Mouse, *Mus booduga*. A bit later, Uditha located a Gray Slender Loris, but it quickly disappeared, viewed only by me and John P. Exciting though this was, I was starting to worry that the group would not get to see one. Fortunately we located a second individual which stayed around long enough for nearly everyone to see its face and form – it was fantastic! As we made our way back to the bus we saw several Sri Lankan White-spotted Chevrotains, another unique mammal for our list. During a late dinner at the hotel, we watched Indian and Least Pipistrelles (*Pipistrellus coromandra* and *P. tenuis*) flying about and entering crevices in the rock wall of the restaurant, and Uditha even located a House Mouse in the same wall!



Fishing Cat, FAR

After dinner some of us went out by jeep to spotlight. We visited a bat roost with 6 species of bats, five of which were new for us: **Schneider's, Indian** and **Cantor's** Roundleaf Bats (*Hipposideros speoris*, *H. lankadiva* and *H. galeritus*), and Long-fingered and Black-bearded Tomb Bats (*Taphozous longimanus* and *T. melanopogon*), plus Rufous Horseshoes that we had seen before. We saw Asian Palm Civet and Spotted Deer, but best sighting of the night was a Fishing Cat seen walking away from a large puddle. I spotted the cat on a side track on our way out, and as we headed back we came via that track and amazingly the cat was still there, waiting close by the puddle at forest edge. It stayed and allowed us to take pictures, remaining in the same place until we left – a brilliant end to our night.

Dec 8. We had an early bird walk from the hotel to a nearby marsh. We recorded a few new birds and the more common mammals. After breakfast some of the group went to see the archaeological site, others birded slowly along the roadside. In the afternoon we went out to look for White-naped Goldenback, which was seen well, along with other birds. After dinner we headed out in two jeeps at 9 p.m. We saw Small Indian Civet, Asian Palm Civet, Indian Hare and had great views of Indian Scops-owl, Brown Fish-owl and Brown Wood-owl. Near a rice-paddy Uditha located an Asiatic Long-tailed Climbing Mouse (right) in a patch of tall grass.



The mouse obligingly stayed in the grass for everyone in both jeeps to see well. We passed a hotel in the middle of the forest that was enjoying a very loud, vibrant disco! Nearby we watched a variety of bats feeding at lights in a soccer field. We headed on into forest on a rough road, and most of us were very happy to get short but good views of two Indian Crested Porcupines that raced across the road in front of us.

Mayor's Mouse, an endemic species, FAR



Brown Fish Owl, FAR



Our next sighting was a Ceylon Spiny Mouse (called **Mayor's Mouse** by recent authorities) *Mus mayori*. It was sitting near a fallen log and allowed us all to see it well. Uditha and I crept closer and it moved under the log but did not disappear from view. One of the jeeps headed back, but the driver lost his way and they did not get back to the hotel until 2 a.m. John P, Hazel, Uditha and I took a walk in the forest. We saw a White-spotted Chevrotain and a small group of Indian Roundleaf Bats night-roosting. On our way back to the hotel, a Painted Bat flew across in front of the jeep, easily recognised by its bold orange and black coloration.

Dec 9. We went out in the morning after breakfast to visit some bat roosts in empty buildings. An Indian Gray Mongoose was seen by some. In one of the buildings we saw several species of roundleaf bats and added one new species for the trip, Lesser Woolly Horseshoe Bat, *Rhinolophus beddomei*, a larger and darker species than the Rufous Horseshoe Bat which was also present. In the later

afternoon we went to look for Purple-faced leaf Monkeys coming to their night tree roost. We did see a few in the distance, but unfortunately they chose to sleep elsewhere. We had great views of Tufted Gray Langurs and also saw Chital as well as some good birds. We spent a bit of time looking at the Indian and Least Pipistrelles at the lodge before dinner.

Tufted Gray Langurs, FAR

Dec 10. We left soon after breakfast for the drive back to the Gateway Hotel, and for once we managed to arrive for lunch before 2 p.m.! We had a chance to rest up before leaving at intervals in the afternoon and night for our long flights home.



For our trip as a whole we saw 202 bird species, 24 species of reptiles and 14 amphibians as well as 61 species of mammals. Mammals are listed below. For more information on this trip and future Sri Lanka adventures (next one provisionally scheduled for November 2014) please contact:

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List of Mammals Seen

- 01 Indian Hare *Lepus nigricollis*
- 02 Sri Lankan Giant Squirrel *Ratufa macroura*
- 03 Indian Palm Squirrel *Funambulus palmarum*
- 04 Sri Lankan Dusky-Striped Jungle Squirrel *Funambulus obscurus* E
- 05 Indian Giant Flying Squirrel *Ptaurista philippensis*
- 06 Travancore Flying Squirrel *Petinomys fuscocapillus*
- 07 Lesser Bandicoot Rat *Bandicota bengalensis*
- 08 Blanford's Rat *Madromys* (was *Cremnomys*) *blanfordi*
- 09 Little Indian Field Mouse *Mus booduga*
- 10 Mayor's Mouse (Spiny Mouse) *Mus mayori* E
- 11 Eastern House Mouse *Mus musculus*
- 12 Asiatic Long-tailed Climbing Mouse *Vandeleuria oleracea*
- 13 Nillu Rat *Rattus montanus* E
- 14 House Rat (Ceylon Highland subsp.) *Rattus rattus kelaarti*
- 15 Brown Rat *Rattus norvegicus*
- 16 Indian Gerbil *Tatera indica*
- 17 Indian Crested Porcupine *Hystrix indica*
- 18 Small Indian Civet *Viverricula indica*
- 19 Sri Lankan Brown Palm Civet *Paradoxurus montanus* E
- 20 Asian Palm Civet *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*
- 21 Jungle Cat *Felis chaus*
- 22 Rusty-spotted Cat *Felis rubiginosa*
- 23 Fishing Cat *Felis viverrina*
- 24 Leopard *Panthera pardus*
- 25 Indian Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii*
- 26 Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii*
- 27 Short-tailed (Brown) Mongoose *Herpestes brachyurus*
- 28 Golden Jackal *Canis aureus*
- 29 Sloth Bear *Melursus ursinus*
- 30 Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus*
- 31 Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat *Cynopterus sphinx*
- 32 Least Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus tenuis*
- 33 Indian Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus coromandra*
- 34 Lesser Large-footed Myotis *Myotis hasseltii*
- 35 Painted Bat *Kerivoula picta*
- 36 Lesser Yellow House Bat *Scotophilus kuhlii*
- 37 Greater Yellow House Bat *Scotophilus heathii*
- 38 Long-fingered Tomb Bat *Taphozous longimanus*
- 39 Black-bearded Tomb Bat *Taphozous melanopogon*
- 40 Lesser False Vampire Bat *Megaderma spasma*
- 41 Rufous Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus rouxii*
- 42 Lesser Woolly Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus beddomei*
- 43 Dusky Roundleaf Bat *Hipposideros ater*

44	Cantor's Roundleaf Bat <i>Hipposideros galeritus</i>	
45	Indian Roundleaf Bat <i>Hipposideros lankadiva</i>	
46	Schneider's Leaf-nosed Bat <i>Hipposideros speoris</i>	
47	Grey Slender Loris <i>Loris lydekkerianus</i>	
48	Toque Macaque <i>Macaca sinica</i>	E
49	Tufted Grey Langur <i>Semnopithecus priam</i>	
50	Purple-Faced Leaf Monkey <i>Trachypithecus vetulus</i>	E
51	Eurasian Wild Boar <i>Sus scrofa</i>	
52	Sri Lankan White-spotted Chevrotain <i>Moschiola meminna</i>	E
53	Sambar <i>Cervus unicolor</i>	
54	Chital <i>Axis axis</i>	
55	Wild Buffalo <i>Bubalus arnee</i>	
56	Feral Water Buffalo <i>Bubalus bubalis</i>	
57	Asian Elephant <i>Elephas maximus</i>	
58	Bryde's Whale <i>Balaenoptera edeni</i>	
59	Dwarf Sperm Whale <i>Kogia sima (simus)</i>	
60	Spinner Dolphin <i>Stenella longirostris</i>	
61	Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin <i>Tursiops aduncus</i>	