

An 'unsuccessful' one-week trip to find the fishing cat in Sri Lanka in February 2012

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Introduction

The trip reports on the web-pages of mammal-watching have belonged to my favorite readings for years, especially prior to our visits to some exotic places. I am a passionate traveler and mammal-watcher. I usually travel independently together with my wife Anneli. We have been lucky to be able to carry out tens of trips to the most interesting natural areas in different parts of the world. Since I have been running the Finnish parks and wildlife agency (Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services) for 17 years, there have also been plenty of occasional opportunities to see interesting national parks teeming with wildlife during my numerous business trips. For conservationists like us, the greenhouse emissions of travelling are surely an issue, but compensated by the benefits of to the local communities and wildlife.

Usually, I have not been motivated to write trip reports, but this time I make an exception for two reasons. First, we had a really wonderful local guide who may benefit from the publicity. Second, while we missed our key target species, it did not spoil our trip at all. I have found it a bit sad that many naturalists are so obsessed to see just and only their self-selected "target species" that they close their eyes to the other creatures around, still providing most rewarding experiences.

In winter 2011-2012, we first spent the Christmas time in Gambia, but since I still had some vacation left in the winter, we planned to go to Chilean Patagonia for the second time. However, I had a very hectic time at my job; and the time was too short, so that a trip to Patagonia proved to be unrealistic. Finally, we had to take the decision whether to go or not to go anywhere at all since my calendar was quickly filling in. Fortunately, there was a relatively cheap package tour available to Sri Lanka with only one week warning, and we bought the package.

We had been in Sri Lanka about twenty years ago, and we felt that we had already 'done' it. During the superb first trip we visited also the rainforest of Sinharaja and trekked on the frosty highlands of Horton Plains. There we saw 'bear monkeys', and many of the endemic bird and butterfly species of the highlands and wet forests. So we decided not to go there this time.

We have seen several leopards and sloth bears during our previous trips to India and elsewhere so that we invented a new target species. I had seen the inspiring trip reports by Richard Webb (2007), Steve Morgan (2008) and Ann Lawson & Andrew Duff (2009). Since we had been unsuccessful with the fishing cat in Thailand and India, we decided to try it again. In Sri Lanka, there is at least a modest opportunity to finally see it even during such a short trip, especially around Yala and Sigiriya. And if not (which proved to be the case, once again), there would still be much to be seen, we concluded.

There was not enough time for detailed planning so that we decided to check the availability of local guides knowing the localities. We were very lucky indeed, when we succeeded to get Uditha

Hettige of Bird and Wildlife Team (Pvt.) Ltd. as our guide for the first week of our trip. He is one of the best guides, if not the best, we have ever used. He is most professional, enthusiastic and wonderful company. From our point of view, the best thing was that in addition to the fact that he is amazing at spotting nocturnal mammals, he is just as fluent with birds, frogs, snakes, butterflies and dragonflies. He was without doubt 'our man', widely interested in all kinds of wildlife, just what we needed, and highly recommended for anyone else with similar interests. Also our driver Christy was excellent and experienced in animal-spotting and safe driving.

The itinerary

We left Helsinki on 11th February and arrived at Colombo on 12th February just before noon. We continued straight to Sigiriya where we stayed two nights. We did nocturnal animal-spotting on both nights, both by jeep and on foot. Walking in the forest and at old temple areas at night was wonderful, though driving was good, as well. We also visited Sigiriya Nature Sanctuary and Minneriya National Park (NP). Since Uditha had a meeting at Colombo 15th February, we dropped him there in the mid-way when driving from Sigiriya to Mirissa to do a whale-watching trip and to have a bit beach luxury. We continued from Mirissa to Tissa, again with Uditha, on 16th February. There we investigated the areas in and around Yala NP both in the day and night time on 16-17th February. In addition to Yala NP, we briefly visited Bundala NP, Lunugamwehera NP and Udawalawa NP. We returned to Colombo and ended up our trip on 18th February.

It was easy to agree on the itinerary with Bird and Wildlife Team, and everything went smoothly and efficiently without a slightest hassle. Taking into account what the services of the one-week trip included, the price was very reasonable. In spite of the short preparation time, we stayed in convenient hotels and ate well, although the hotels the company usually uses were fully booked. I had a deal with my wife: there would be one week of animal-spotting; and another week on the beach at Negombo with some cultural activities. Consequently, we didn't do any further nature-related activities, except some leisure boat trips at Muthurajawela marshes and Kalpitiya, both with some potential also for serious mammal and bird-watching.

The sites have been abbreviated in the lists below as follows: S – Sigiriya and its surroundings (12-14th Feb.); M – Mirissa (14-16th Feb.); Y – Yala NP and its surroundings (16-17th Feb.); L – Lunugamwehera NP park (18th Feb.); U – Udawalawa NP (18th Feb.); N – Negombo (18th Feb.).

Mammals

For us the trip was very enjoyable and rewarding, although in spite of all our efforts we were not able to find our key target, the fishing cat. The time was just too short. However, we found twelve wild cats altogether, including nine jungle cats, two rusty-spotted cats and a leopard. We were also very happy to see the grey lori and the seldom seen, though common, Indian crested

porcupine. We were satisfied to see so many bat species, thanks to Uditha who knows some roosting sites. Surely, the blue whales were also a highlight of the trip though I had seen one in Victoria, Australia, a couple of years before; but seeing up to eleven at close quarters was a bit better.

Since we had seen the mountain subspecies of the purple-faced monkey ('bear monkey', *Trachypithecus vetulus*) previously on Horton Plains, we didn't go to see it again. In addition, the Horton Plains we had seen a small cat on which was probably the rusty-spotted cat, though at that time I believed it was the jungle cat. It was sad to hear that the population of the sambar had decreased, probably partly due to tourism. When we were hiking there on the Horton Plains in the early 1990's, we still saw tens if not hundreds of sambars.

This time, we ended up with a list of 41 mammal species, when completing our trip very properly by a house rat when arriving at Negombo. Thus, our mammal list of the week was far more than satisfactory, though we missed the fishing cat, which was indeed almost the only one we missed. In addition, we were able to see a lot of birds, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies and dragonflies with a relatively small effort as kind of convenient 'side products' of our tour. We can happily conclude that the search of the fishing cat was a good excuse to see plenty of other species, far more than we expected of a single week, and to give a narrative to the whole trip. While still keeping its secrets from us, the fishing cat can be used yet another time as a reason to return to Sri Lanka. But there are so many other reasons!

List of the mammal species observed

Indian hare (*Lepus nigricollis*): More than 50 individuals at S and Y.

Sri Lankan giant squirrel (*Ratufa macroura*): Just two at the hotel garden in S.

Indian palm squirrel (*Funambulus palmarum*): Common in S, Y and N.

Indian giant flying squirrel (*Petaurista philippensis*): One at S.

Blanford's rat (*Cremnomys blanfordi*): One at S.

Little Indian field mouse (*Mus booduga*): One at S, while seeking snakes at a temple without success.

House mouse (*Mus musculus*): One at Y.

House rat (*Rattus rattus*): Two at N, one a road and another in a palm tree.

Indian gerbil (*Tatera indica*): More than 50 at Y.

Indian crested porcupine (*Hystrix indica*): One at Y at night giving a full show. Just great!

Small Indian civet (*Viverricula indica*): Two in S and 1 at Y.

Jungle cat (*Felis chaus*): Nine at Y on fields, near water bodies and in the bush.

Rusty-spotted cat (*Felis rubiginosa*): One at Sigirya at very close distance, another at Y in a tree hunting short-nosed fruit bats. Surely, one of the highlights of the trip.

Leopard (*Panthera pardus*): What an exceptional experience! While we have seen leopards alone in the wilderness, this time at Y it came with a traffic jam of fifty or more jeeps. Still, it was nice to see it sleeping and walking on a thick branch of a tree not so far from the crowded road.

Indian grey mongoose (*Herpestes edwardsii*): One at Y.

Ruddy mongoose (*Herpestes smithii*): One at Y.

Golden jackal (*Canis aureus*): Four at Y.

Indian flying fox (*Pteropus giganteus*): Hundreds roosting and flying at M and Y.

Short-nosed fruit bat (*Cynopterus brachyotis*): A few flying at Y.

Kelaart's pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus ceylonicus*): One flying in the early evening at S.

Indian pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus coromandra*): One flying in the early evening at S.

Black-bearded tomb bat (*Taphozous malanopogon*): Several roosting at S.

Theobald's tomb bat (*Tapnozous theobaldi*): Several roosting at S.

Woolly horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus luctus*): Several roosting at S, also at Y.

Rufous horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus rouxii*): Several roosting at S, also at Y.

Dusky roundleaf bat (*Hipposideros ater*): Several roosting at S, also at Y.

Indian roundleaf bat (*Hipposideros lankadiva*): Several roosting at S, also at Y.

Schneider's leaf-nosed bat (*Hipposideros speoris*): Several roosting at S.

Painted bat (*Kerivoula picta*): One was seen flying at night at S.

Grey slender lori (*Loris lydekkerianus*): Only one at S. We missed the classic site, but found one at a thicket not so close to the road during a night drive. Great spotting by Uditha!

Toque macaque (*Macaca sinica*): Common at S and Y.

Tufted grey langur (*Semnopithecus priam*): Common at S and Y.

Eurasian wild boar (*Sus scrofa*): More than 50 at Y.

Sri Lankan white-spotted chevrotain (*Moschiola meminna*): Twelve at S. It was nice to see it at close distance when walking.

Sambar (*Cervus unicolor*): More than ten at Y.

Chital (*Axis axis*): More than ten at S and more than hundred at Y.

Indian muntjac (*Muntiacus muntjak*): Just one at Y crossing the road.

Wild buffalo (*Bubalus arnee*): Common at Y (only in Yala NP).

Feral water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*): Common at Y.

Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*): A few at Y and tens at U, especially near the fence of the park, where people are unfortunately feeding them. At S, we didn't see any wild elephants this time, but their presence was evident setting limits to our activities on foot.

Blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*): We counted eleven in the ocean near M in a relatively large area, but we may have seen some of them twice.

Birds

We are not serious bird-watchers, although we have spent quite a lot of time doing it just for fun. Since we had previously seen the Ceylon blue magpie (*Urocissa ornate*) and other endemics, we did not try to seek any particular bird species. Most of the 163 species we encountered were quite common and familiar to us. The black-backed dwarf kingfisher was a tick, but a poor one, because unlike Uditha we didn't see it well sitting in a wet thicket, but just for a second flying away. The night-trips resulted in good numbers of owls and nightjars. The night trips were also great to see sleeping birds at close quarters, including two Indian pittas, Tickell's blue flycatcher, sunbirds, bulbuls, and a whole tree full of bee-eaters like in a fairy tale.

Little grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis capensis*): Y.

Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*): Y.

Little cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*): S, Y, N.

Indian shag (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*): S, Y.

Great cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*): S.

Oriental darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*): S, Y.

Little egret (*Egretta garzetta*): S, Y, N.

Great egret (*Egretta alba*): S, Y.

Intermediate egret (*Egretta intermedia*): S, Y, N.

Grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*): S, Y, N.

Purple heron (*Ardea purpurea*): S, Y, N.

Eastern cattle egret (*Bubulcus coromandus*): S, M, Y, N.

Indian pond heron (*Ardeola grayii*): S, M, Y, N.

Striated heron (*Butorides striatus*): One at N (Mutjurawela marshes).

Black-crowned night-heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*): Y.

Yellow bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*): One in S (at M Debarawewa tank), another at N (Muthurajawela marshes).

Black bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*): One at S (near M Debarawewa tank).

Painted stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*): S, Y.

Asian openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*): S, Y.

Woolly-necked stork (*Ciconia episcopus*): S.

Black-headed ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*): S, Y.

Eurasian spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*): Y.

Lesser whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*): S, Y, N.

Cotton teal (*Nettapus coromandelianus*): S.

Garganey (*Anas querquedula*): Y.

Oriental honey-buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*): Y.

Black-winged kite (*Elanus caeruleus*): Y.

Brahminy kite (*Haliastur indus*): S, Y, N.

White-bellied sea-eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*): U.

Grey-headed fish-eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*): One at S.

Crested serpent-eagle (*Spilornis cheela*): S.

Crested goshawk (*Accipiter trivirgatus*): Y.

Shikra (*Accipiter badius*): One between Colombo and S.

Crested hawk-eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*): S, Y.

Common kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*): S, Y.

Ceylon junglefowl (*Gallus lafayetii*): S, Y.

Indian peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*): S, Y.

Barred buttonquail (*Turnix suscitator*): Y.

White-breasted waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*): S, Y, N.

Watercock (*Gallixrex cinerea*): Y.

Purple swamphen (*Porphurio poliocephalus*): S, Y.

Pheasant-tailed jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*): S, Y.

Pacific golden plover (*Pluvialis fulva*): Y.

Lesser sand plover (*Charadrius mongolus*): Y.

Yellow-wattled lapwing (*Vanellus malabaricus*): Y.

Red-wattled lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*): S, Y.

Pintail snipe (*Gallinago stenura*): Y.

Black-tailed godwit (*Limosa limosa*): Y.

Common redshank (*Tringa tetanus*): Y.

Common greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*): Y.

Marsh sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*): Y.

Green sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*): Y.

Wood sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*): Y.

Common sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*): Y.

Little stint (*Calidris minuta*): Y.

Black-winged stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*): Y.

Indian stone-curlew (*Burhinus indicus*): Y.

Great thick-knee (*Esacus recurvirostris*): Y.

Gull-billed tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*): S, Y.

Great crested tern (*Thalasseus bergii velox*): M.

Little tern (*Sterna albifrons*): M, Y.

Whiskered tern (*Chlidonias hybrid*): S, M, Y, N.

White-winged tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*): Y.

Rock pigeon (*Columba livia*): S, Y, N.

Spotted dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*): S, Y.

Emerald dove (*Chalcophaps indica*): S.

Orange-breasted green-pigeon (*Treron bicincta*): Y.

Ceylon green-pigeon (*Treron pompadora*): S.

Green Imperial-pigeon (*Ducula aenea*): Y.

Alexandrine parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*): S, Y, N.

Rose-ringed parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*): Y.

'Southern' coucal (*Centropus parroti*): S, Y, N.

Chestnut-winged cuckoo (*Clamator coromandus*): One at L.

Asian koel (*Eudynamus scolopaceus*): Y.

Oriental scops-owl (*Otus sunia*): One at S.

Indian scops-owl (*Otus bakkamoena*): One at S.

Forest eagle-owl (*Bubo nipalensis*): One at S.

Brown fish-owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*): One at S, another at Y.

Brown wood-owl (*Strix leptogrammica*): One at S.

Jungle owlet (*Glaucidium radiatum*): One at L.

Jerdon's nightjar (*Caprimulgus atripennis*): S, N.

Indian little nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*): S, N.

Indian swiftlet (*Aerodramus unicolor*): S.

Asian palm-swift (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*): S, Y.

Little swift (*Apus affinis*): S, Y.

Crested tree-swift (*Hemiprocne coronate*): S, Y.

Common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*): S, Y.

Black-backed dwarf kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*): One at S.

Stork-billed kingfisher (*Pelargopsis capensis*): Y (at M Debarawewa tank).

White-throated kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*): S, Y, N.

Little Green bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*): Y.

Blue-tailed bee-eater (*Merops philippinus*): S, Y, N.

Chestnut-headed bee-eater (*Merops leschenaultia*): Y.

Indian roller (*Coracias benghalensis*): Y.

Common hoopoe (*Upupa epops*): Y.

Ceylon grey hornbill (*Ocyceros gingalensis*): S.

Malabar pied hornbill (*Anthracoceros coronatus*): S, Y.

Brown-headed barbet (*Megalaima zeylanica*): S, Y.

Ceylon small barbet (*Megalaima rubricapillus*): One at S. A really beautiful endemic species.

Coppersmith barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*): S, Y.

Black-rumped flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*): S, Y, N.

White-naped flameback (*Chrysocolaptes festivus*): S.

Indian pitta (*Pitta brachyura*): Two sleeping birds at S, one flying at L. Though we had seen the species at Thattekad and in Periyar in Kerala, the sleeping birds were a memorable experience.

Jerdon's bush-lark (*Mirafna affinis*): Y.

Ashy-crowned finch-lark (*Eremopterix griseus*): U.

Oriental skylark (*Alauda gulgula*): Y.

Barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*): S, Y, N.

Ceylon swallow (*Hirundo hyperythra*): S, Y.

Western yellow wagtail (*Motacilla flava*): U.

Richard's pipit (*Anthus richardi*): Y.

Paddyfield pipit (*Anthus rufulus*): Y.

Large cuckooshrike (*Coracina macei*): L.

Black-headed cuckooshrike (*Coracina melanoptera*): S, Y.

Small minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*): Y, L.

Pied flycatcher-shrike (*Hemipus picatus*): S.

Ceylon woodshrike (*Tephrodornis affinis*): S, Y.

Asian paradise flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradise*): S, Y, L.

Black-naped blue monarch (*Hypothymis azurea*): S.

White-browed fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*): Y.

Red-vented bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*): S, Y, N.

White-browed bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*): S, Y.

Common iora (*Aegithina tiphia*): S, Y.
Jerdon's leafbird (*Chloropsis jerdoni*): S.
Brown shrike (*Lanius cristatus*): S, Y.
Brown-breasted flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui*): One at L.
Tickell's blue flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*): S.
Indian blue robin (*Luscinia brunnea*): S.
Oriental magpie-robin (*Copsychus saularis*): S, Y, L.
White-rumped shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*): S.
Indian black robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*): S, Y, L.
Tawny-bellied babbler (*Dumetia hyperythra*): Y.
Dark-fronted babbler (*Rhopocichla atriceps*): S.
Yellow-billed babbler (*Turdoides affinis*): S, Y, L.
Zitting cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*): Y (at M Debarawewa tank).
Grey-breasted prinia (*Prinia hodgsonii*): S, Y.
Ashy prinia (*Prinia socialis*): S.
Jungle prinia (*Prinia sylvatica*): S, Y.
Plain prinia (*Prinia inornata*): S, Y, L.
Common tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*): S, Y.
Blyth's reed-warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*): S.
Indian reed-warbler (*Acrocephalus brunnescens*): Y.
Bright-green warbler (*Phylloscopus nitidus*): S.
Large-billed leaf-warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*): S, Y.
Southern great tit (*Parus cinereus*): L.
Thick-billed flowerpecker (*Dicaeum agile*): S.
Pale-billed flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*): S, Y.
Purple-rumped sunbird (*Leptocoma zeylonica*): S, Y, L, N.
Purple sunbird (*Cynnyris asiaticus*): S, Y, L.
Loten's sunbird (*Cynnyris lotenius*): S, Y.

Oriental white-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*): L.
Indian silverbill (*Euodice malabarica*): Y.
White-rumped munia (*Lonchura striata*): Y.
Scaly-breasted munia (*Lonchura punctulata*): S, Y, L, M.
Tricolored munia (*Lonchura malacca*): Y.
House sparrow (*Passer domesticus indicus*): S, Y, N.
Streaked weaver (*Ploceus manyar*): Y.
Baya weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*): Y.
Brahminy starling (*Temenuchus pagodarum*): Y.
Rosy starling (*Sturnus roseus*): Y.
Common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*): S, M, Y, L, U, N.
Black-hooded oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*): S, Y, L, N.
White-bellied drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*): S, Y, L.
House crow (*Corvus splendens*): S, M, Y, U, N.
Indian jungle crow (*Corvus culminates*): S, Y, N.

Reptiles

We were very successful with the geckoes and terrestrial turtles/tortoises being able to see all but one species. Frankly, we were not that sad for not seeing more snakes during our walking trips in the jungle and ruins. However, we (i.e. Uditha) literally saved two desiccated small snakes and a star tortoise from the very crowded road to Yala National Park. Altogether we saw 20 reptile species.

Barred wolf snake (*Lycodon striatus*): One at Y.
Banded kukri snake (*Oligodon arnensis*): One at Y.
Common rat snake (*Ptyas mucosa*): One at hotel garden at S.
Green forest lizard (*Calotes calotes*): One at hotel garden at Tissa.
Common garden lizard (*Calotes versicolor*): M, Y, N.
Spotted ground gecko (*Geckoella triedrus*): S.
Four-clawed gecko (*Gehyra mutilata*): Tissa.

Brooke's house gecko (*Hemidactylus brookii*): One at M.

Kandian gecko (*Hemidactylus depressus*): S.

Asian house gecko (*Hemidactylus frenatus*): S, M, Y, N.

Spotted rock gecko (*Hemidactylus maculates*): S.

Termite-hill gecko (*Hemidactylus triedrus*): S.

Oceanic worm gecko (*Hemiphyllodactylus typus*): One at Tissa.

Land monitor (*Varanus bengalensis*): Several at Y.

Water monitor (*Varanus salvator*): One between Colombo and Sigiria, one at Y.

Marsh crocodile (*Crocodylus paluster*): S, Y.

Saltwater crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*): One near Y, one at Muthurajawela marshes.

Black turtle (*Melanochelys trijuga*): S, Y.

Flapshell turtle (*Lissemys punctata*): One at Y.

Star tortoise (*Geochelone elegans*): One at Y.

Amphibians

The frogs were also high-light of our trip, especially the tiny narrow-headed ones.

Common toad (*Duttaphrynus melanostictus*): S, M, Y.

Sri Lankan painted frog (*Kaloula taprobanica*): S.

Ornate narrow-headed frog (*Microhyla ornate*): S.

Red narrow-mouthed frog (*Microhyla rubra*): S.

Variegated ramanella (termite nest frog) (*Ramanella variegata*): S.

Indian skipper frog (*Euphlyctis cyanophlyctis*): S, Y.

Indian green frog (green pond frog) (*Euphlyctis hexadactylus*): S, Y.

Common paddyfield frog (cricket frog) (*Fejervarya limnocharis*): Y.

Jerdon's bullfrog (*Hoplobatrachus crassus*): S, Y.

Sri Lankan wood frog (Gravenhorst's frog) (*Hylarana gracilis*): S.

Butterflies and moths

We had seen plenty of Ceylon tigers (*Parantica taprobana*) on the Horton Plains and the tree nymph (*Idea jasonia*) and other endemics in Sinharaja. This time the list consists of common species of butterflies only. While butterflies abounded everywhere, we did not see so many moths (we did not have any traps or baits). However, we found a beautiful 'Raffles' striped hawk-moth' (*Hippotion rafflesii*) at Mirissa. The real highlight of the Lepidopteran list for us was the huge atlas moth (*Attacus atlas*) near Sigirya during the early hours on 14th February. It was the first one for me. I didn't expect to see it in February.

Crimson rose (*Pachlioptera hector*): S, Y, L, N.

Common rose (*Pachlioptera aristolochiae*): S.

Lime butterfly (*Papilio demoleus*): S, Y, L, N.

Common mormon (*Papilio polytes*): S, Y, L.

Blue mormon (*Papilio polymnestor*): S.

Bluebottle (*Graphium sarpedon*): Y.

Common jay (*Graphium doson*): S.

Psyche (*Leptosia nina*): S, Y, L.

Common jezebel (*Delias eucharis*): S, Y, L, N.

Painted saw-tooth (*Prioneris sita*): Y.

Pioneer (*Belenois aurota*): Y, L.

Common gull (*Cepora nerissa*): Y.

Lesser gull (*Cepora nadina*): Y.

Chocolate albatross (*Appias lyncida*): Y.

Common albatross (*Appias albina*): Y.

Lesser albatross (*Appias paulina*): Y, L.

Yellow orange-tip (*Ixias pyrene*): L.

Great orange-tip (*Hebomoia glaucippe*): Y.

Dark wanderer (*Pareronia ceylanica*): Y.

Mottled immigrant (*Catopsilia pyranthe*): S, Y, L.

Lemon migrant (*Catopsilia pomona*): S, Y, L, N.

Small grass yellow (*Eurema brigitta*): Y.

Common grass yellow (*Eurema hecabe*): S, Y.

Three-spotted grass yellow (*Eurema blanda*): Y.

Blue glassy tiger (*Ideopsis similis*): S.

Blue tiger (*Tirumala limniaca*): Y.

Plain tiger (*Danaus chrysippus*): Y, N.

Common tiger (*Danaus genutia*): L.

Common crow (*Euploe core*): S, M, Y, L, N

Common castor (*Ariadne merione*): Y.

Blue pansy (*Junonia orithya*): Y.

Lemon pansy (*Junonia lemonias*): Y.

Grey pansy (*Junonia atlites*): S, Y, U.

Chocolate soldier (*Junonia iphita*): Y.

Peacock pansy (*Junonia almanac*): Y.

Common sailor (*Neptis hylas*): S, Y, L.

Tawny coster (*Acraea violae*): Y.

Common evening brown (*Melanitis leda*): M, N.

Common bushbrown (*Mycalesis perseus*): S, Y.

Common palmfly (*Elymnias hypermnestra*): S, Y.

White four-ring (*Ypthima ceylonica*): S, Y, L.

Common cerulean (*Jamides celeno*): S, Y.

Grass jewel (*Freyeria trochilus*): Y.

Tiny grass jewel (*Zizula hylax*): S.

Indian cupid (*Everes lacturnus*): Y, L.

Dragonflies

Like the butterflies dragonflies abounded, especially near any freshwater bodies. The following species were mostly encountered during a short walk along the water tanks near Sigiriya and Tissa.

Agriocnemis pygmaea

Ischnura aurora

Ceriagrion coromandelianum

Orthetrum pruinatum

Orthetrum sabina

Acisoma panorpoides

Brachythemis contaminata

Crocothemis servillia

Diplacodes nebulosa

Diplacodes trivialis

Neurothemis tullia

Trichemis pallidinervis

Rhyothemis variegata

Pantala flavescens

Iramea limbata

Others

We also saw several species of freshwater fish including the dwarf snake-headed fish (*Channa orientalis*). Spiders included different color forms of the ant mimic jumping spider (*Myrmarachne plateloides*). We were also happy to see whip scorpions, large harvestmen and unusual pill millipeds.