

Capacity Building in Biodiversity & Tourism

**With special mention of a volunteering & internship
visa**

**A tool for bringing in know-how and building networks for people working
in any discipline including Climate Risk and Bio-diversity**

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne

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- Part 2** A few simple to do things on bio-diversity & wildlife tourism enhancement
- Part 3** How international engagement has helped with discovering our biodiversity



Part 0: Setting the scene

Background



Using a City of London Background for **economic growth in Sri Lanka** with skills development and biodiversity conservation

Last Big Idea

Brand Sri Lanka as top international wildlife destination. Possibly the best all-round destination. The Best for Big Game outside Africa.

Simple idea but took time and a lot of work to implement

Successful because **no red tape**. Tourists who want to visit for wildlife, did not need a special visa.

Next big idea

Requires a special visa but is easier to implement.



Training people who are on the field at the client interface

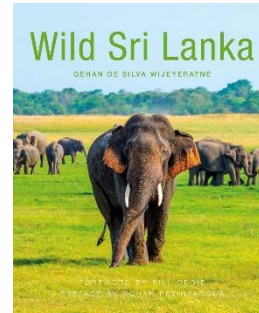
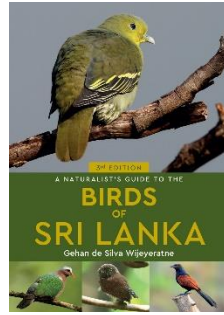
Embedding the idea that Sri Lanka is good for wildlife

Last Idea

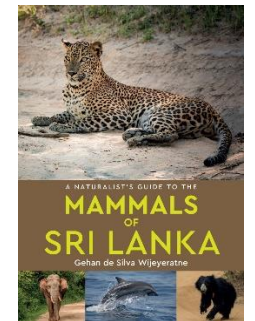
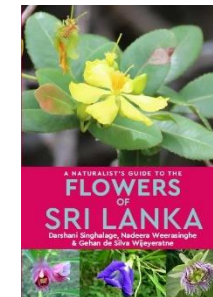
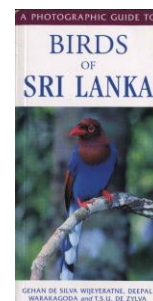
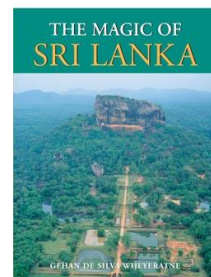
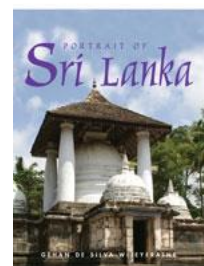
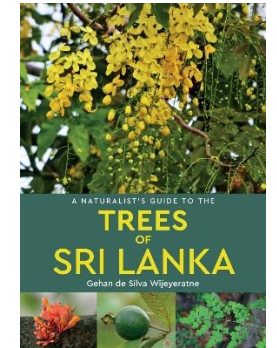
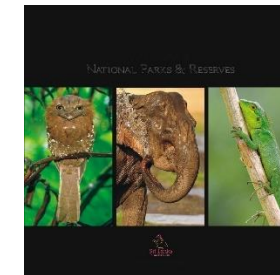
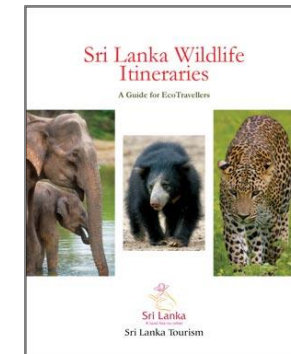
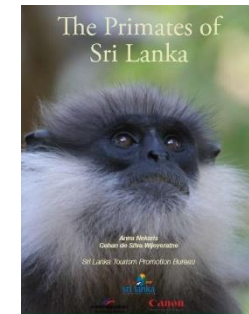
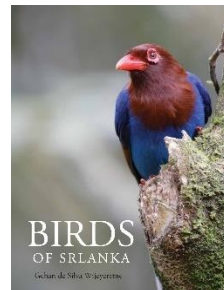
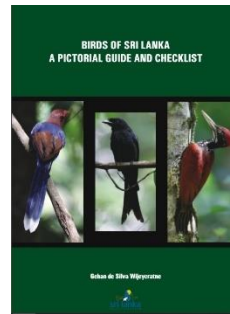
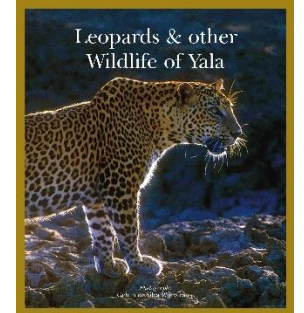
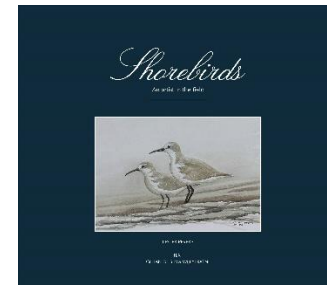
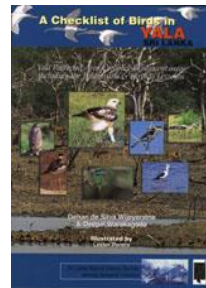
Required work with many individuals, corporates and state agencies to achieve a huge mind shift and economic value from Sri Lanka's biodiversity

Next big idea

Requires a special visa but is easier to implement.



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PART 1: The VIXS Visa that will bring in money and know-how

The best ideas are the simplest



In this talk I want to introduce an idea which is:

1. Simple and Powerful
2. Easy to implement
3. Brings in know-how, the tech and tens of thousands of skilled man-hours
 - And brings money into a country at the same time.

The country makes money for receiving benefits. Seriously?

Can't be. Sounds too good to be true?

What's the catch?

Hmmm. No catch.

Oh well

Maybe it requires a mind set change to be smart and seize opportunity.

Learn to play offense rather than defense.

What is a VIXS visa?

- V Volunteering
- I Internships
- X Exchange Programs
- S Study



Call it a V&I Visa is that is easier.

Why is a special visa needed?

A **key and necessary component** of a framework to grow four areas in tourism and education which can become significant revenue streams.

A visa like this creates a clear signal that people who arrive for these purposes are **welcomed into the country and their visit is recognised as being useful and for a legitimate purpose.**

The benefits that can arise from a transparent and easy VIXS visa will not happen if people are asked to come in on a tourist visa.

What are the benefits?



Money – These are forms of tourism and education. Both of which are big businesses anywhere in the world. Voluntourism is already a £1.25bn industry per the latest NatGeo Traveller (April 2024).

Know-how and Tech - Helps to bring in the latest thinking and hardware in ways that have a sense of first hand experience. Not learning off online videos.

Future Business Opportunities – Today's foreign intern may be tomorrow's global star

International networks – Opens doors to academia and business for international linkages

Cultural contact – Fresh thinking and positive behavioural traits (This point may be not to everyone's liking, but that's another story)

What is needed for it to work?



Zero hassle. Must be **simple and easy** as getting an online tourist visa, for those nationals who can obtain such a visa very easily. At most an extra box to fill in the local partner(s) name and contact details.

Not the role of the visa issuing offer/officer to determine the suitability of the applicant and or local partner.

By analogy, a tourist is not asked to provide details that a hotel they are staying at is properly registered, ha obtained the necessary permissions to operate as a hotel, has filed its tax returns and accounts, etc, etc.

What is excluded

- **Not for employment.**
- **Does not exempt** the candidates from needing **permits and permits** where needed. If required, local partner must obtain necessary permissions.
- **Not a residents visa.** Holders have to buy tourist tickets where applicable to tourist sites (e.g. Sigiriya, Yala)

A look at the different strands



Volunteering

- The **more developed** a country is the **more visible** is the part played by volunteering.
- **Motivations differ.** Some what to **give something back**, some want an experience, some want to **gain skills** for their own satisfaction, some hope it may lead to paid employment.
- In developed countries it has developed into a **big business** with platforms matching volunteers with those seeking volunteers.
 - Some corporates have built in volunteering into their internal CSR programs.
- **Voluntourism** is a huge business and one that countries like Sri Lanka can tap into. A myriad of opportunities in the environmental sector from beach clean ups to tree planting.

Internships

- Undergraduate students can come and work with Sri Lankan corporates or the academia on projects.
- Imagine a university student comes on an internship working for a local IT company that writes code. It may pave the way for that university to send a stream of students annually. When they get into work, they may influence their employers to outsource work to Sri Lanka. They may even start their own companies with Sri Lankan partners.

It may be a way to connect into the Sri Lankan diaspora whose children do not have Sri Lankan passports. A long term revenue stream in itself for tourism and local charities.

Applies to every discipline. An undergraduate could study contemporary art and open the way for Sri Lankan artists and art academics to be invited for conferences and exhibitions.

Volunteers can bring decades of experience



Field Meeting Leaders from the London Bird Club

A look at the different strands... cont.



X - Exchange

- Aimed at mature people, experienced professionals and academics.
 - For example would allow a university lecturer in biology or from the management science faculty to work with local counterparts in an academic institution or professional institution. Provided a desk and work space. May be invited to interact with local students and even teach a course module.
 - Not for paid work. Salary to be borne by their overseas employer.
- Advantages to local partner academics are obvious. Opens doors for long term collaboration, perhaps a steady stream of university students who will work with local students to produce papers. Invitations to be a visiting lecturer overseas, jointly present papers. The possibilities are endless.
- For academic engagements which don't need research permits, the **private sector may come in as a partner**. For example to work with local hotels to study the impacts of re-wilding. To set up camera traps and study nocturnal mammals. To conduct baseline surveys of fauna and flora on their hotel properties. They can work with the in-house naturalists. Some of these students will return in the future as tourists who are on good incomes.

Study

- Sri Lanka already teaches the degree requirements for top international universities (e.g. You can study in Sri Lanka for a degree from The London School of Economics).
- It would be easy for local institutions to develop a summer-time business of running accredited field courses for academic credits. In the natural sciences, **Sri Lanka would be one of the most exciting places to engage** in field work that counts for university credits.

Is this idea public?



Is this idea public?

Yes it is now. Any developing or middle income country can use the idea.

What if another country runs away with the idea?

Yes they can.

But few countries have the set up Sri Lanka has. It is a **stunningly beautiful place**, but with surprisingly good **infrastructure**, skilled **people** who are nice and fun and share **western values**.

May not be a bad thing if a few countries in Asia do this and there is a cross fertilisation of ideas and VIXS visas become a core offering to develop tourism and know-how.

Any problems?



- The most important point to re-iterate is that obtaining a VIXS visa should be as easy as getting an online tourist visa for normal tourism. Otherwise the idea will never fly.
- The usual principle applies that **buyers and sellers must perform their own due diligence**. They should vet each other and make sure that they are a good fit and the other side can walk the talk.

Vetting is easier now as CVs can be exchanged, people can speak on zoom or WhatsApp to improve the chances of things work out.

But still, a few engagements may be disappointing for one or both parties. But the good things that can happen should not be blocked because a few don't work out.

- Both the VIXS visa holders and local partners are governed by the usual laws and regulations, and good business principles and ethics should apply. If at the host-country end people don't deliver, the VIXS visa holders can also share their views on social media, which brings in an added element of **market discipline**.



PART 2: A few simple ideas

A few simple ideas



Idea	Can VIXS visa holders help?
<p>Turn down the air conditioning – Should office wear for men become shorts and short-sleeved shirts?</p>	n/a
<p>Plant a Jambu Tree – Plant fruiting shrubs suitable for native wildlife to provide structural cover and floor for insectivores and frugivores.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carbon capture - Shade and soil conservation - Habitat enhancement <p>- If you plant big trees, have a pollarding regime. i.e. regularly trim to maintain a low height.</p>	n/a
<p>Diversify the biodiversity tourism product</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Look at invertebrates - Improved use of social media - Biodiversity surveys, studies and monitoring in privately owned property - In public areas citizen science which does not require special permissions 	Yes
<p>Improve quality of interpretation Look at what’s around with fresh eyes. Tell better stories</p>	Yes
<p>Dipterocarp forest pockets for city dwellers Re-wild urban areas where practicable with small pockets of dipterocarp trees, the tallest tropical rainforest trees.</p>	n/a



PART 3: International eyes on Sri Lanka's bio-diversity

Did foreigners open our eyes to our bio-diversity?

Yes.

The foundation of our wildlife tourism industry and the deep interest in wildlife leads back to many foreign nationals who had extended stays in Sri Lanka.

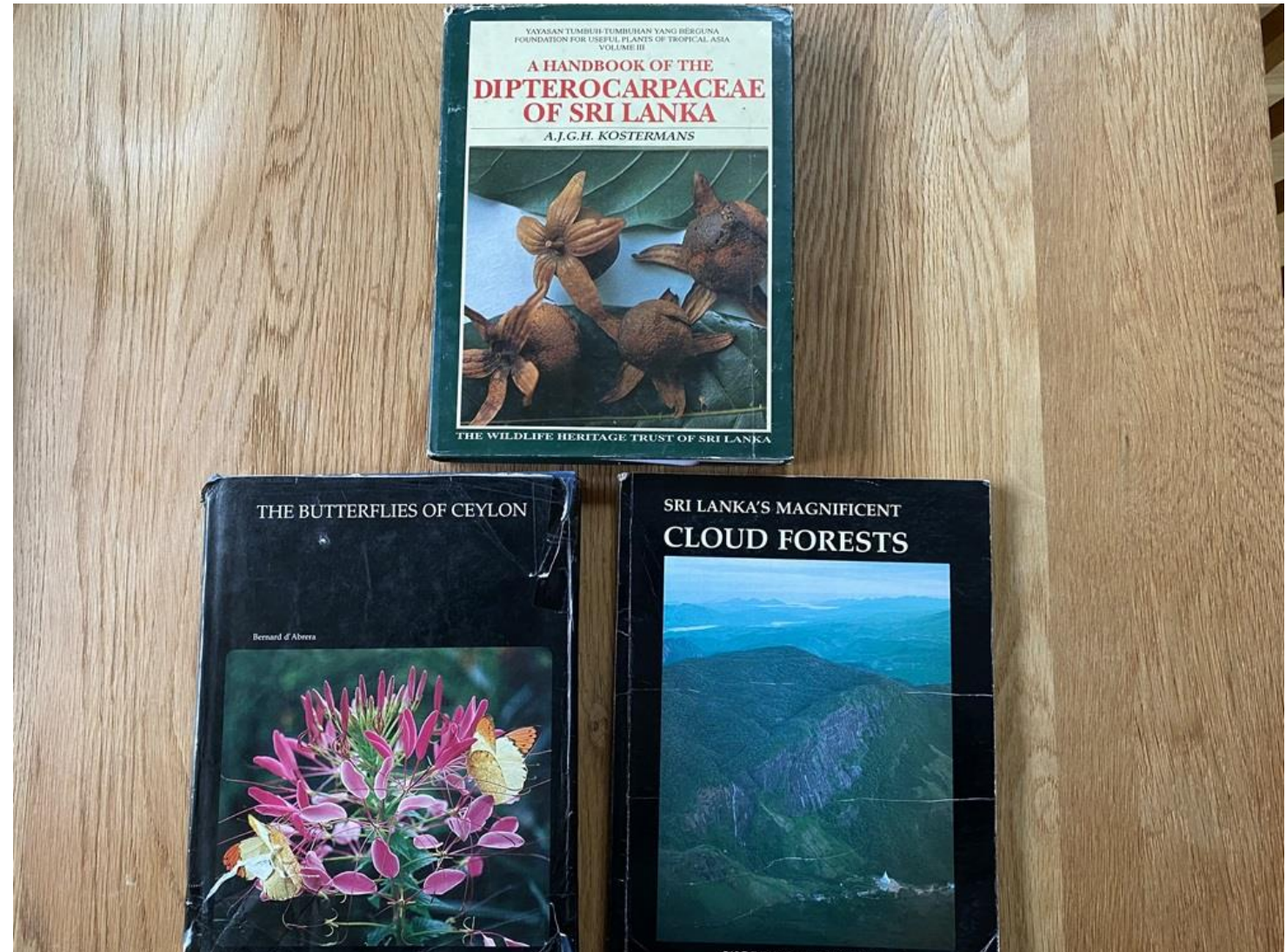


Smart people in Sri Lanka have continued to tap foreign resources



I would have found it very difficult to popularise butterflies for example if smart people like Rohan Pethiyagoda / Wildlife Heritage Trust had not persuaded Bernard D 'Abrera to produce his butterfly book.

Rohan P. & WHT overturned the notion that Sri Lanka was biologically fully explored and used international collaboration effectively.



How local is local?

You can't judge the genesis of a book by the nationality of the cover author(s).

Often even seemingly home-grown Sri Lankan authors are people who have benefitted from working or studying abroad or regularly travel for in-person interaction with overseas collaborators.



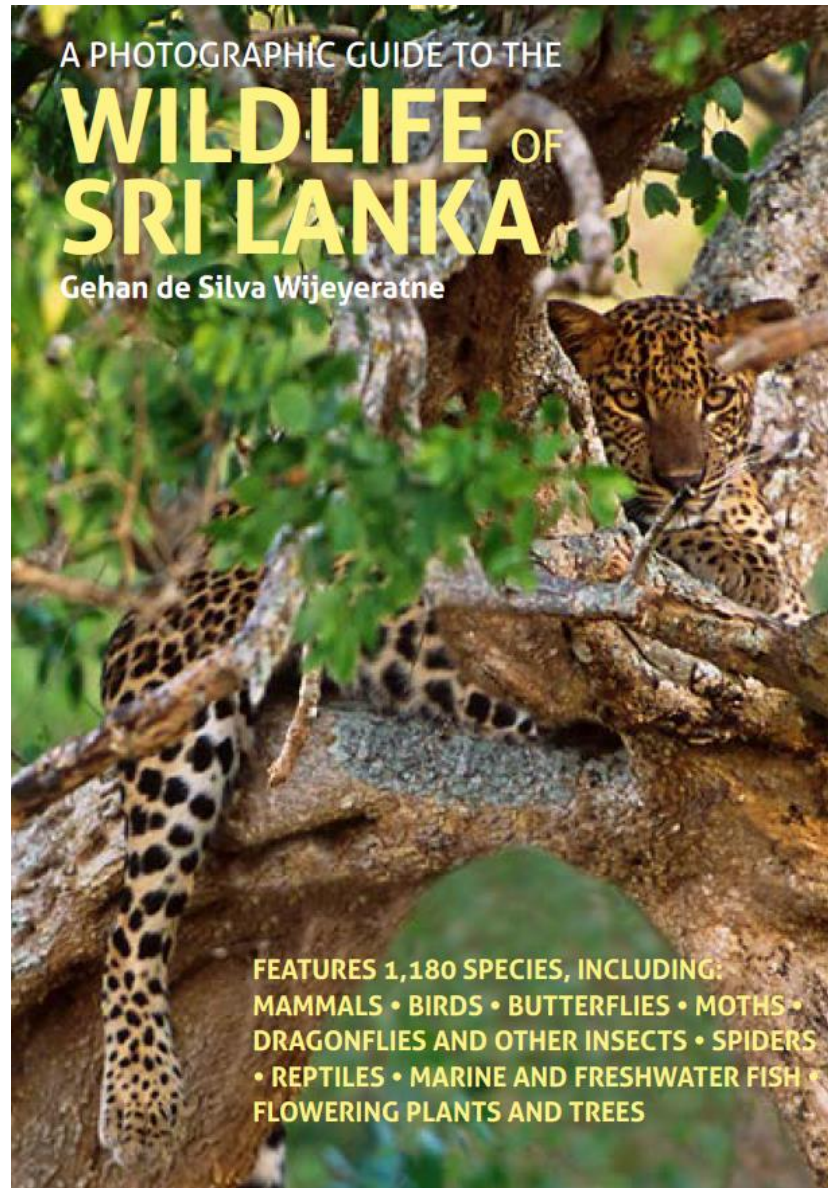
International collaboration is key with wildlife publishing to brand Sri Lanka



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The
Ceylon
Chamber of
Commerce



A PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE TO THE

WILDLIFE OF SRI LANKA

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne

FEATURES 1,180 SPECIES, INCLUDING:
MAMMALS • BIRDS • BUTTERFLIES • MOTHS •
DRAGONFLIES AND OTHER INSECTS • SPIDERS
• REPTILES • MARINE AND FRESHWATER FISH •
FLOWERING PLANTS AND TREES

Orange-breasted Green-pigeon *Treron bictinctus leggei* Size 29cm

Both sexes have grey hindnecks (greenish in the Sri Lanka Green-pigeon, below). Terminal half of upper tail grey. Undertail-coverts of latter heavily marked in green. **HABITAT** Dry-zone scrub forests. **DISTRIBUTION** Forested areas in lowlands. **VOICE** Similarly to the Sri Lanka Green-pigeon, sings with theme of a whistled 000 ue 000 ue 0000, but vocalization is sharper and has quivering notes at the end of the whistle reminiscent of a motorbike that has been kick-started. **STATUS** Resident.

Sri Lanka Green-pigeon *Treron pompadora* Size 28cm

Male has conspicuous purple-maroon mantle that female lacks. Female similar to the Orange-breasted Green-pigeon (above). Most easily told apart by having a greenish, rather than grey nape. Also, upper tail lacks grey of Orange-breasted. Undertail-coverts also help separate females; yellow in Sri Lanka and cinnamon-red on inner webs of Orange-breasted. **HABITAT** Forested areas in lowlands. **DISTRIBUTION** Widespread. **VOICE** Call a whistled 000 ue 000 ue 0000 repeated with variations. **STATUS** Endemic.

Yellow-footed Green-pigeon *Treron phoenicopterus* Size 33cm

Completely grey head and yellow feet distinguish this species from the similar female Orange-breasted Green-pigeon (above). Latter has grey hindneck, but no grey on crown. Sexes similar, but female duller than male. **HABITAT** Tall forests in dry lowlands. **DISTRIBUTION** Bibile-Nilgala area. **VOICE** Complex, undulating sequence of whistles. **STATUS** Race *philippis* Scarce Resident. Race *chlorogaster* Highly Scarce Migrant.

Green Imperial-pigeon *Ducula aenea pusilla* Size 43cm

Largest pigeon resident in Sri Lanka. Green undersparts. Grey head, neck and undersparts. **HABITAT** Favours canopy of tall trees. **DIS** north. **VOICE** Deep, throaty room room too into an oop oop oop call. **STATUS** Resident.

Ceylon Frogmouth *Barrachoson*

Female always rufous. Male occurs in grey; by pale, 'lichen-like' patches on lower scap. **DISTRIBUTION** Widespread in lowlands & occupy degraded habitats adjoining good-q Western Ghats. **VOICE** Harsh, explosive w

Jungle Nightjar *Caprimulgus indii*

As in Jerdon's and Indian Nightjars (p.42), at terminal sides of tail, but white patch or throat and pale moustachial stripe. In fema First-year male similar to female with pale, and grassland. **DISTRIBUTION** Dry zone it Rapidly repeated, resonant, double-note ch



Orange-breasted Green-pigeon



Sri Lanka Green-pigeon



MAMMALS Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne

Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus* Length 6.4m

Distinguished from the two African species by having a rounder, smaller body, tip of trunk having one protuberance or 'finger', not two, and absence of triangular ears. **DISTRIBUTION** Mainly dry lowlands, a few remain in wet-zone hills and at higher elevations. **BEHAVIOUR** Basic unit of elephant society is the mother and calf. Bulls periodically undergo a biochemical change known as musth. **DIET** Grasses, leaves from shrubs and trees. **STATUS** Endangered.

Dugong *Dugong dugon* Length 3-4m

Greyish. Blow not conspicuous, as in whales. 'Fish tail' easily distinguishes it from the extralimital manatees, which have rounded, fan-shaped tails. Dorsal fin absent. **DISTRIBUTION** Seagrass beds in warm, shallow waters, mainly in Mannar Basin from Kalpitiya Peninsula to Adam's Bridge stretch of islands. **BEHAVIOUR** Occasionally forms small, transient herds. **DIET** Mainly seagrasses, algae and seabed invertebrates, including clams and worms. **STATUS** Vulnerable.

Grey Slender Loris *Loris lydekkerianus* Length 21-24cm

Dark shapes around eye oval-like or teardrop shaped. Bigger than Red Slender Loris (below). Two subspecies. *L. l. nordicus*, found throughout dry lowlands, has yellow pigmentation on ears, eyelids and muzzle. *L. l. grandis* has woollier coat and shows little yellow pigmentation. **DISTRIBUTION** Central mountains extending from Kandy to Knuckles Wilderness and dry lowlands. **BEHAVIOUR** Prefers wooded scrub forest with closed canopy in dry lowlands. **DIET** Primarily insectivorous but also eats snails and lizards. **STATUS** Near Threatened.

Red Slender Loris *Loris tardigradus* Length 12-17cm

Smaller than Grey Slender Loris (above) with relatively small ears and longer muzzle. Fur reddish. Dark markings around eyes more circular (or semicircular) in shape compared to oval or teardrop-shaped markings in Grey. Two subspecies: *L. t. tardigradus* in lowland wet zone, and *L. t. nycitoboides* confined to cloud forests in and around Horton Plains National Park. Woollier coat. **DISTRIBUTION** Forests and home gardens mixed with wooded patches in wet zone. **BEHAVIOUR** Home range varies from 1.5ha to 15ha. **DIET** Similar to that of Grey. **STATUS** Vulnerable.

Toque Macaque *Macaca sinica* Length 95-109cm

The only macaque in Sri Lanka; confusion unlikely with any other primate. **DISTRIBUTION** The three subspecies occupy forested habitats all over the island. **BEHAVIOUR** Toques like forest cover near waterbodies. Complex social organizations. Dominant (alpha) males monopolize matings with receptive females. Females form stable matrilineal. **DIET** Omnivorous. Three subspecies. Colour and length of hairs radiating from cap (toque) used to distinguish the subspecies. **STATUS** Least Concern.

Tufted Grey Langur *Semnopithecus priam* Length 129-160cm

(Hanuman Langur)
Graceful, with sinuous long tail. May be mistaken for Purple-faced Langur (p. 182), which also has dark face. Tufted Grey easily told apart by pointed 'bonnet' on head. **DISTRIBUTION** Scrub and riverine forests in dry lowlands. **BEHAVIOUR** Can form large troops exceeding 50 individuals. Often found in company of Spotted Deer (p. 214). **DIET** Herbivorous. Narrow diet confined to tender leaves, fruits, and so on. **STATUS** Vulnerable.



Dugong



Asian Elephant



Grey Slender Loris



Toque Macaque



Red Slender Loris



Tufted Grey Langur

Looking for key take
Ask AI Assistant

mammals

John Beaufoy's next big wildlife book on Sri Lanka



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Grey Pansy *Junonia alites* Wingspan 55–60mm

Pale grey with a row of 'eye-spots' on forewings and hindwings. Underwings even paler. Rear hindwing has thin diagonal line going across it. Sexes similar. Flight fast. **DISTRIBUTION** Widespread to 1,100m. Common in disturbed habitats. **LARVAL FOOD PLANTS** *Hygophila auriculata* (family Acanthaceae), and *Lindernia anapoda* and *Limnophila indica* (family Scrophulariaceae). **ADULT FOOD PLANT** Often visits flowers of invasive *Lantana* (family Verbenaceae). **STATUS** Least Concern.

Chocolate Soldier *Junonia iphita pluvialis* Wingspan 55–80 mm

Chocolate-brown, medium-sized butterfly. Three diffuse darker brown bars on upper-forewing meeting costal edge at right angles. On under-hindwing, indistinct small spots parallel to termen. Spots distinct on upper-hindwing parallel to termen. Sexes similar. Stiff-winged flight. Does not fly far. Allows close approach. **DISTRIBUTION** Widespread. Sometimes mud puddles. Basks with wings open. **LARVAL FOOD PLANTS** *Barleria prionitis*, *Dipteracanthus prostratus* and *Dyschoriste erecta* (family Acanthaceae). **STATUS** Least Concern.

Lemon Pansy *Junonia lemonias vaiya* Wingspan 45–60mm

Red-rimmed eye on each wing and brown forewings with clear white flecks quite distinctive. Sexes similar. Flight swift. **DISTRIBUTION** Widespread to 700m. Often in abandoned chenais and other degraded habitats. **LARVAL FOOD PLANTS** *Dyschoriste erecta*, *D. littoralis* and *Rungia repens* (family Acanthaceae). **STATUS** Least Concern.

Blue Pansy *Junonia orithya swinhoei* Wingspan 40–50mm

Upperwings diagnostic, a deep blue (except at apices) with red circles. Underwings pale with some marbling, vaguely similar to other pansies such as Grey, Lemon (above and p. 304). However, under-forewing has two distinctive dark bands, one bordered with black, and a broad, diffuse white band bordered with more restricted in females. Flight swift and short. Seems to leap away. **DISTRIBUTION** Widespread but rare. **LARVAL FOOD PLANTS** *Justicia repens* (family Acanthaceae), and *Centranthera indica* (family Scrophulariaceae). **STATUS** Threatened.

Blue Oakleaf *Kallima philarchus* Wingspan 80–90mm

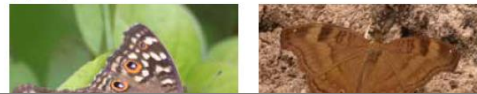
Forewings and hindwings gracefully curve into a point. Upperwings blue in hindwings, to bright blue on basal and discal half of forewings distal area. Pale band in middle of upper-forewing. Female more brown. **DISTRIBUTION** Up to 1,200m. Occurs locally in forests where *Sirodo* found. **LARVAL FOOD PLANTS** *Sirodo* and *S. hirtella* (family Simarubaceae). **ADULT FOOD PLANT** Rotting fruits and fermenting sap of *Caryota* trees. **STATUS** Threatened.

Blue Admiral *Kaniska canace haronica* Wingspan 60–70mm

Medium-sized with contrasting, broad light blue band in middle of wings. Tarsus a little pointed. Underwing cryptic, offering perfect camouflage. Will fly out and even buzz people who walk past its territory. Sexes straight with only a hint of zigzagging. **DISTRIBUTION** Mid-hills to lowlands with dense forest cover adjoining fast-flowing streams. **LARVAL FOOD PLANTS** *S. hirtella* and *S. zeylanica* (family Simarubaceae). **STATUS** Least Concern.



Grey Pansy



Butterflies

Red-striped Threadtail *Elatoneura tenax* Abdomen 35–39mm

Both sexes have red eyes. Male has bright reddish-orange dorsal stripe on thorax and another two lateral stripes. Female duller. Female's red eyes distinguish it from female Two-spotted Threadtail (p. 336). **DISTRIBUTION** Fast-flowing streams in wet zone, from lowlands to highlands. Mainly mid-elevations. Endemic. **STATUS** Vulnerable.

Stripe-headed Threadtail *Prodasineura sita* Abdomen 29–32mm

'Stripe head' is on top of head connecting eyes, which also often have pale equatorial stripe. Thin dorsal stripe on thorax and pair of lateral stripes. Male's 'stripe head' visible on close view. Older males black, but no metallic purple sheen as in Dark-glistening Threadtail (p. 326). Female's stripes on head and thorax paler and more conspicuous. **DISTRIBUTION** Densely vegetated waterways, even in city suburbs, in lowlands to lower mid-hills. Most common in wet zone. Endemic. **STATUS** Least Concern.

Yellow Featherleg *Copera marginipes* Abdomen 30–34mm

Yellow or orange legs diagnostic. Also, clear pale 'stripe' joining top of eyes. Striking facial pattern. Juveniles very pale, starting with white and darkening with age. In adults, abdomen black with last two segments pale blue. Sexes similar; adult females paler. **DISTRIBUTION** Stagnant or slow-moving water in lowlands to mid-elevations. Very common and tolerant of disturbed habitats. **STATUS** Least Concern.

White-backed Wisp *Agriocnemis femina femina* Abdomen 16–18mm

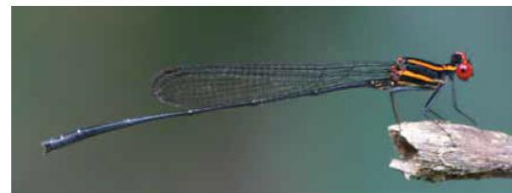
Tiny; male has apple-green on sides of segments 1–2. Segments 7–10 dark on top with bright red rings on segment joints. Blue postocular spots. Male can be heavily pruinosed in blue on thorax. In anal appendages, superior slightly shorter than inferior (Wandering Wisp, below, has longer superior than inferior). Female has three colour forms. Sub-adult has bright red thorax and abdomen, adult browner red, teneral female similar to male. **DISTRIBUTION** Grassy edges of ponds, lakes and marshes. Scattered records from lowlands. **STATUS** Critically Endangered.

Wandering Wisp *Agriocnemis pygmaea* Abdomen 16–18mm

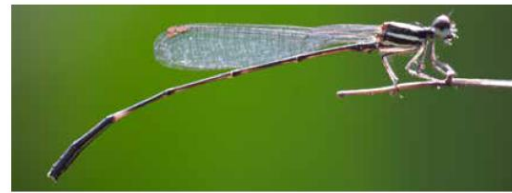
Small and easily overlooked. Male distinguished from male of White-backed Wisp (above) by latter's very different anal appendages. Females of these two related species have different colour forms and are not easy to tell apart. Isochrome form similar to male; another form has less black and is similar to juvenile male. Also red form. **DISTRIBUTION** Grassy edges by ponds, lakes, ditches and canals, in lowlands, ascending to mid-hills. **STATUS** Least Concern.

Sri Lanka Midget *Mortonagrion ceylonicum* Abdomen 19mm

Tiny; both sexes have tear-shaped blue postocular spot. Female has clear blue spot on top of prothorax. Male has blackish dorsum with thin blue stripe on humeral suture stripe and thicker lateral stripe. Female has lighter blue stripes against reddish-brown dorsum. Thoracic colours in female look luminescent and blue dorsal patches on abdominal segments are vivid. Both sexes have dark abdomen. **DISTRIBUTION** Densely shaded rainforest streams. Known only from a few localities in wet zone. Endemic. **STATUS** Endangered.



Red-striped Threadtail



Stripe-headed Threadtail



Yellow Featherleg



White-backed Wisp



Wandering Wisp



Sri Lanka Midget

Dragonflies

Ceylon Rhododendron *Rhododendron arboreum zeylanicum* Height 10m

Small to medium-sized tree or shrub, depending on location. Spongy bark dark and cracked. **FLOWERS** Clusters of red flowers densely packed together. **LEAVES** Upside dark green, underside silvery. Bristly hairs underneath. **FRUITS** Hard, woody capsules. **HABITAT & DISTRIBUTION** Highlands at about 2,000m. **STATUS** Vulnerable.

Walnut *Cerbera odollam* Height 8m

Small, neat and compact in appearance. When cut, exudes poisonous milky sap. **FLOWERS** Small, fragrant white flowers with five petals and five sepals. **LEAVES** Terminally clustered. Long and narrow, ending in a point. **FRUITS** Spherical, smooth, green fruits. **HABITAT & DISTRIBUTION** Common in lowlands adjoining water and swamps. **STATUS** Least Concern.

Low Oleander *Thevetia peruviana* Height 8m

Small tree or large bush. Branches close to the ground; dense foliage. Similar to the common plant Oleander. Contains poisonous, milky white sap. Bark brown. **FLOWERS** Bright red. **HABITAT & DISTRIBUTION** Common in lowlands adjoining water and swamps. **STATUS** Least Concern.



Poison Nut



Ceylon Rhododendron

Trees

433

339